# 多尺度视角下解读中国城市：以术语城市主义为研究工具

# A Multiscalar Approach to Investigating the Chinese City Using Terminological Urbanism as a Tool

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培 养 单 位： 建筑学院

学　　科： 城乡规划学

研 究 生： Federico Madaro

指 导 教 师： 刘健　　教　授

De Pieri Filippo　　教　授


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# 多尺度视角下解读中国城市：以术语城市主义为研究工具

马智飞

# A Multiscalar Approach to Investigating the Chinese City Using Terminological Urbanism as a Tool

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# 摘　要

本论文以中国城市研究中的跨语际知识生产为核心问题，聚焦一个长期被视为写作与表达细节、却在结构层面影响研究对象、研究方法与理论可比性的关键环节：当英语作为全球学术通用语主导国际城市研究与规划交流时，中国城市必须通过翻译进入对话；然而翻译并非中性的“信息转运”，而会在概念层面重塑城市现实，使中国城市以更便于英语读者理解、却更不忠实于本土制度与经验的方式被呈现。论文将这种在翻译与比较中持续出现的偏差概括为“概念扭曲”，并进一步界定为一种“认识不正义”：在跨语言、跨学科的知识流通中，主导性的解释资源不足以容纳中国城市术语所承载的历史层累、制度嵌入与生活语义，研究者遂常以英语既有范畴替换本土概念，削弱地方术语的分析张力、治理功能与经验密度，并影响我们如何理解、比较中国城市及将其纳入城市理论。为回应这一问题，论文提出“术语城市主义”作为替代性的解释基础设施与研究框架，将术语视为经验对象、方法装置与伦理议题，并以“语言款待”为规范取向，主张在跨语际写作中公开等值假设、标注不可通约性、揭示“虚假透明性”，把翻译决策转化为可论证、可复核的研究操作。论文进一步强调术语的施为性：术语不仅描述对象，也在制度运行中生成对象，进入规划规范与治理程序后，便会直接影响空间边界、责任链条与资源流向。理论上，论文联结语义学、翻译与解释学、城市形态与制度研究、语言人类学等资源；方法上，采用“离心式尺度逻辑”，以“居住—移动—关联”为支架，构建房屋、街道、邻里三大语义场，追踪术语在制度文本、学术文献与日常口语中的不同意义层级，并提出“翻译梯度”，依据术语的制度嵌入、历史层累与语域差异采用直译、释译、拼音借词与注释性翻译，使翻译从隐形前提转化为可审计方法。经验上，论文通过视觉诱发词汇征询建立包含 1077 个不重复词项的俗语语料库，并结合归纳式语义聚类与“微阅读”分析，显示术语生态本身即是城市证据。研究表明，中国城市术语具有强烈的历史层累性与制度嵌入性，概念扭曲并非偶发误译，而是跨语际知识生产中的结构性风险。因此，中国城市词汇不应仅被视为地方性材料，而应被理解为能够挑战、补充并重塑全球城市研究概念库的创新资源，从而推动更公正的跨语际城市知识生产。

关键词：术语城市主义；概念扭曲；多尺度研究；语义场；视觉诱发词汇语料库。

# ABSTRACT

This dissertation takes cross-lingual knowledge production in Chinese urban studies as its central concern and focuses on a key issue that has long been treated as a matter of writing and expression, yet in fact shapes research objects, research methods, and theoretical comparability at a structural level. As English, functioning as the global academic lingua franca, dominates international exchanges in urban studies and planning, Chinese cities must enter this dialogue through translation. Translation, however, is not a neutral transfer of information; rather, it reshapes urban reality at the conceptual level, presenting Chinese cities in ways that are more readily intelligible to English-language readers but less faithful to local institutions and lived experience. The dissertation terms this recurring bias in translation and comparison conceptual distortion and further defines it as a form of epistemic injustice. In the circulation of knowledge across languages and disciplines, dominant interpretive resources are often unable to accommodate the historical sedimentation, institutional embeddedness, and everyday meanings carried by Chinese urban terminology. Researchers therefore frequently replace local concepts with pre-existing English categories, weakening the analytical tension, governing functions, and experiential density of local terms, and affecting how we understand Chinese cities, compare them, and incorporate them into urban theory.

To address this problem, the dissertation proposes Terminological Urbanism as an alternative interpretive infrastructure and research framework. It treats terminology simultaneously as an empirical object, a methodological device, and an ethical issue, and adopts linguistic hospitality as its normative orientation. It argues that cross-lingual writing should make assumptions of equivalence explicit, mark points of incommensurability, and reveal false transparency, thereby turning translation decisions into research operations that are open to justification and review. The dissertation further emphasizes the performative character of terminology: terms do not merely describe objects, but also produce them within institutional processes. Once incorporated into planning regulations and governance procedures, they directly shape spatial boundaries, chains of responsibility, and flows of resources.

Theoretically, the dissertation brings together semantics, translation studies and hermeneutics, urban morphology and institutional research, and linguistic anthropology.

Methodologically, it adopts a scalar centrifugal perspective, using the anthropological triad of dwelling–mobility–relation as its framework to construct three semantic fields—house, street, and neighborhood—through which to investigate Chinese cities across scales. It traces the different layers of meaning urban terms acquire in policy documents, academic literature, and everyday speech, and proposes a translational gradient, combining literal translation, explanatory translation, pinyin borrowing, and annotated translation according to the degree of institutional embeddedness, historical sedimentation, and register variation of each term. In this way, translation is transformed from an invisible premise into an auditable method.

Empirically, the dissertation establishes a vernacular lexical corpus of 1,077 unique items through visual-elicitation surveys and, through inductive semantic clustering and "micro-readings," demonstrates that terminological ecologies themselves constitute urban evidence. The study shows that Chinese urban terminology is characterized by strong historical sedimentation and institutional embeddedness, and that conceptual distortion is not an occasional mistranslation but a structural risk in cross-lingual knowledge production. Chinese urban vocabulary should therefore not be treated merely as local material, but as an innovative conceptual resource capable of challenging, supplementing, and reshaping the global conceptual repertoire of urban studies, thereby advancing more just forms of cross-lingual urban knowledge production.

Keywords: Terminological Urbanism; conceptual distortion; multiscalar research; semantic fields; visual-elicitation lexical corpus.

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# NOTE ON ROMANIZATION, CHINESE CHARACTERS, AND NAMES

This dissertation adopts *Hanyu Pinyin* as the standard system for the romanization of Chinese. For analytically significant lexical items, pinyin is given with tone marks, normally together with the Chinese characters at first mention and, where necessary, with an English gloss. This choice reflects the view that priority should always be given to the Chinese characters. The dissertation does not pursue rigid terminological uniformity, but rather conceptual consistency. Where English renderings vary according to context, the Chinese term is retained as a stable semantic anchor. Unless otherwise specified, translations from Chinese are my own.

Chinese characters are presented in the simplified form adopted in the PRC. Where necessary, the traditional form is added in brackets at its first occurrence.

Chinese personal names are generally given in pinyin without tone marks, followed by Chinese characters at first mention where identification or bibliographic precision requires it. The same principle applies, where relevant, to institutional names and historically significant place names.

The titles of Chinese institutional and literary sources are given in English for the convenience of Anglophone readers. The original Chinese titles are provided in the References.

# PART 1 THE DECODING TOOLS

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the central problem that motivates the dissertation: the conceptual and epistemic consequences of linguistic asymmetry in contemporary urban studies. It argues that the global circulation of urban knowledge, largely mediated through English, does not merely translate local concepts, but often reshapes, flattens, or displaces them. As a result, key urban categories travel unevenly across contexts, generating interpretive distortions that affect both academic analysis and planning practice.

By framing this issue through the lens of epistemic injustice, the chapter situates translation not as a neutral technical operation, but as a site where power, knowledge, and disciplinary norms intersect. The discussion moves from broader debates on globalization and English as a lingua franca to the specific implications for urban theory, highlighting how linguistic dominance can obscure locally grounded ways of naming, perceiving, and organizing urban space.

This opening chapter thus establishes the ethical and analytical stakes of the dissertation. It prepares the ground for a rethinking of terminology as a critical infrastructure of urban knowledge, a move that will be developed theoretically and methodologically in the chapters that follow.

### 1.1 Background of the Study: Conceptual Distortion as Epistemic Injustice

Understanding the Chinese city requires more than analytical tools drawn from morphology, sociology, or planning theory. It requires attention to the language through which urban life in China becomes intelligible to different audiences. When Anglophone terminology is uncritically taken as a transparent medium, the conceptual world embedded in Chinese urban terms becomes flattened, mistranslated, or rendered invisible. This phenomenon (conceptual distortion) is not simply a matter of semantic imprecision. It constitutes a form of epistemic injustice, in the specific sense developed by Miranda Fricker, whereby the interpretive resources available to scholars and practitioners fail to accommodate the categories that structure Chinese urban experience (Ficker, 2007).

There are mainly three mechanisms through which this distortion occurs: (1) the uncritical use of English terms as if they were neutral equivalents; (2) the domestication of Chinese terms into English that effaces institutional, cultural, and historical nuance; (3) the persistent use of "plaqued," externally derived categories that obscure the internal logic of Chinese spatial practices. Together, these mechanisms produce systematic misalignments between Chinese realities and the predominantly Anglophone discourse that seeks to interpret them.

English has become the global *lingua franca* of urban studies, planning, and architecture. This diffusion is highly pragmatic: it facilitates transnational scholarship, professional mobility, and international policy dialogue. Yet this very pragmatism cultivates the illusion that English terms are semantically transparent and universally applicable. Words such as 'street', 'neighborhood', or 'community' stabilize quickly in scholarly discourse, but their apparent stability hides deep divergences.

When a Chinese term is rendered in English through an approximate equivalent (小区 *xiǎoqū* as 'residential compound', 社区 *shèqū* as 'community', 街道 *jiēdào* as 'subdistrict', 胡同 *hútòng* as 'alley'), the translation gives the false impression that the referent is already known. The effect is an epistemic domestication: the foreign concept is absorbed into familiar Anglophone categories, thus neutralizing its capacity to challenge established frameworks of thought. Venuti (1995) warns against such domestication in translation studies, noting that fluent, naturalized translations erase the foreignness of the source and with it the interpretive shock that alternative conceptual schemes may carry.

In the case of Chinese urbanism, domestication does not merely smooth linguistic difference; it reorders conceptual hierarchies. Terms with specific institutional, historical, or morphological functions within the Chinese urban system appear as analogues of Western notions, even when no such equivalence exists. The result is not benign misunderstanding but structural distortion.

Fricker's notion of hermeneutical injustice is particularly apt: it occurs when collective interpretive resources are insufficient for a subject group to make sense of its experiences. In urban studies, hermeneutical injustice arises when analytic vocabularies (dominated by Anglophone paradigms) lack conceptual space for terms like 单位 *dānwèi* 'work unit', 城中村 *chéngzhōngcūn* 'urban village', 社区 *shèqū* 'community', 小区 *xiǎoqū* 'residential compound'. Without acknowledging the linguistic and institutional specificity of these terms, global discourse cannot accurately register the experiences of residents, planners, or local

officials operating within these systems. This is not a simple mistranslation; it is a misframing that shapes how Chinese urbanism is read, governed, and compared internationally.

The gap between institutional nomenclature and vernacular practice demonstrates that hermeneutical injustice occurs not only in cross-cultural translation but also within China, between expert planning terminology and everyday urban experience. This makes conceptual distortion a multilayered phenomenon: institutions misrecognize local practices, and global scholarship misrecognizes institutional categories.

Urban studies often applies general theoretical categories (district, block, neighborhood, street, public space) as though they were universally valid. Following Topalov (2010), my dissertation warns against the error of "plaquing" foreign categories onto Chinese contexts, thereby foreclosing the possibility of understanding their internal logics.

In China, the problem is intensified by the speed of urban transformation and by the prominent role of the state in shaping planning language. Terms such as 社区 *shèqū* 'community', 街道 *jiēdào* 'subdistrict; street-level administrative unit', 片区 *piànqū* 'area; sub-area', 小区 *xiǎoqū* 'residential compound' are not only descriptive labels; they are administrative and performative operators. They encode governance functions, legal status, and policy intentions. To replace them with supposedly equivalent English labels is to erase their operative force. This erasure is a form of epistemic violence, insofar as it suppresses alternative modes of sense-making and replaces them with a dominant interpretive grid.

Translation is a site of power. As the dissertation discusses in its theoretical chapters on Babel, linguistic finitude, and hermeneutic hospitality, translation is never neutral: it negotiates authority, hierarchy, and cultural legitimacy. When English becomes the default medium for Chinese urban studies, translation choices implicitly determine what counts as legitimate knowledge.

This hierarchical configuration has ethical consequences. If global research communities and planning institutions operate with impoverished interpretive resources, they reproduce epistemic injustice in at least three ways: (1) by misrepresenting Chinese urban phenomena, thus compromising comparative scholarship and policymaking; (2) by legitimizing Anglo-European conceptual frameworks as universal benchmarks of urbanity; (3) by marginalizing linguistic worlds that carry alternative spatial rationalities, thereby reducing the diversity of global urban epistemologies.

A central aim of my project, therefore, is to articulate an ethics of knowledge production—what Ricœur (2006) calls linguistic hospitality—that allows concepts to travel without erasing their embeddedness in local histories, institutions, and lived practices.

## 1.2 Research Questions: Terminology, Translation and the Conditions of Urban Knowledge

The present research emerges from a tension that recurs throughout contemporary urban studies: while the built forms of cities increasingly circulate as global referents, the languages through which they are conceptualized remain deeply situated, unevenly translated, and asymmetrically valued. In the Chinese context, this tension acquires heightened significance: China's urban transformation has produced a dense terminological landscape, one in which institutional categories, historical residues, and vernacular expressions continually shape urban governance and everyday life. Yet this landscape is routinely filtered through Anglophone interpretive grids that domesticate Chinese terms into familiar categories, generating conceptual distortions with epistemic consequence.

It is within this epistemic predicament that the central questions of the dissertation take shape. They do not arise from a mere desire for lexical precision, nor from a philological curiosity about the evolution of particular words. Instead, they respond to a deeper methodological concern: **if much of global urban scholarship relies on English as its lingua franca, how can the specificities of Chinese urban life be articulated without being absorbed—and thereby dissolved—into the dominant conceptual idioms of the field?** This challenge is at once semantic and political, descriptive and normative, empirical and hermeneutic. The research questions therefore articulate three interconnected lines of inquiry, each addressing a distinct facet of the relationship between terminology, translation, and urban knowledge.

*How Do Chinese Urban Terms Function Within Spatial Governance, and What Happens When They Are Translated?*

The first research question arises from the observation that Chinese urban terms are not passive descriptors but active operators in the governmental ordering of space. They do not simply label pre-existing urban objects. They constitute the categories through which administrative authority is exercised, property relations structured, and social practices organized. These terms are historically layered, morphologically encoded, and institutionally operative.

However, when rendered into English, their material and institutional force is often neutralized. The translation replaces the situated logic of Chinese categories with an apparently transparent equivalence, as if the Chinese term were merely a local variant of a globally recognized phenomenon. The movement from an "undefined reality" to a "defined reality" is mediated not simply by translation but by the selective stabilization of meaning through terminology.

This raises a profound question: **How does translation intervene in the conceptual architecture of Chinese urbanism, and to what extent does it reshape (not merely communicate) the realities it purports to describe?**

This question directs the dissertation toward an analysis of terminology as a performative infrastructure. It compels an examination of the semantic density of Chinese terms, the institutional practices they animate, and the conceptual erasures introduced by their domesticated translation. In doing so, it positions terminological analysis not as a linguistic supplement to urban theory, but as a necessary condition for understanding how urban reality is produced, governed, and rendered intelligible.

*What Hermeneutic Principles Should Guide the Translation of Chinese Urban Terminology?*

If the first research question exposes the structural problem (conceptual distortion through translation), the second turns toward its hermeneutic and ethical implications. Translation reveals a fundamental tension between domestication and foreignization: the former translates the foreign concept into the idioms of the target language, while the latter preserves its semantic alterity and resists assimilation.

In the context of Chinese urban terminology, neither strategy is sufficient. A purely domesticating translation, such as calling 社区 *shèqū* a 'community', risks imposing Anglo-American sociological assumptions onto a Chinese administrative category. A purely foreignizing approach, retaining 社区 *shèqū* untranslated without explanations, risks obscurity or fetishization, especially for readers lacking contextual grounding. What is needed instead is a principled hermeneutic orientation that acknowledges linguistic incommensurability while remaining committed to communicability.

Thus emerges the second research question: **Which hermeneutic principles allow translators and scholars to navigate between domestication and foreignization in ways that reduce epistemic injustice rather than amplify it?**

This question invites engagement with the hermeneutic traditions explored earlier in the dissertation. Gadamer (2004)'s notion of understanding as a "fusion of horizons" suggests that translation requires active negotiation between conceptual worlds rather than unilateral assimilation. Ricœur's idea of linguistic hospitality emphasizes the ethical dimension of welcoming the foreign concept without absorbing it into the host language. Venuti's critique of translator invisibility cautions against the false fluency that effaces difference. Fricker's account of hermeneutical injustice sharpens the stakes: translation is not just a technical operation but a site where entire experiences risk becoming conceptually unintelligible.

The second research question thus moves beyond descriptive semantics to pose a normative challenge: **How might translation protocols be articulated so that Chinese institutional terms enter global discourse without being stripped of their conceptual specificity?** Addressing this question is essential for establishing the methodological foundations of what the dissertation calls *Terminological Urbanism*.

*How Do Visual Elicitation Methods Reveal Gaps Between Institutional Terminology and Vernacular Urban Experience?*

While the first two research questions operate at the conceptual and hermeneutic levels, the third introduces an empirical dimension. In my research I assume that the analysis of the official terminology needs a strong counterpart (vernacular terminology) that must be investigated with an ethographic approach. An ethnographic approach begins from the premise that the city is not only built but narrated, inhabited, and made legible through everyday acts of naming. The observer does not assume that the categories formalized in planning documents or scholarly discourse correspond to the categories operational in ordinary speech. Instead, they approach linguistic practice as emergent, situated, and heterogeneously distributed across social groups. This implies a series of methodological commitments: (1) attending to language-in-use rather than to language-as-system; (2) observing spatial practice (dwelling, walking, navigating, negotiating access) as the contextual matrix in which terms gain meaning; (3) tracing discrepancies between official nomenclature and vernacular lexicons; (4) understanding naming as a social action, often carrying evaluative, moral, or classificatory weight. The ethnographic mode therefore complements the semantic and historical study of terms by positioning language within the rhythms and routines of urban life.

In the context of the present research, that visual elicitation—through sketch-based image prompts—can make visible the ways in which residents name and categorize the urban environments they inhabit.

This technique aims to reveal something that neither institutional documents nor traditional interviews can capture with sufficient clarity: the spontaneous, non-reflexive terminology through which ordinary city dwellers apprehend their surroundings. The contrast between "institutional terminology" and "vernacular terminology" shown in the slide underscores the possibility of systematic discrepancy between these linguistic registers. Such gaps are not trivial: they represent divergent conceptualizations of the same spatial forms, which in turn affect how those forms are governed, experienced, and translated.

The third research question can therefore be stated as follows: **To what extent do visual elicitation methods reveal structural divergences between official nomenclature and everyday linguistic practice, and how should these divergences inform the development of responsible translation protocols?**

This question is crucial for two reasons. First, it acknowledges that institutional terminology alone is insufficient for translation, because official categories often reflect administrative rationalities rather than lived experience. Second, it suggests that vernacular naming practices may challenge or nuance institutional definitions, thereby enriching the semantic mapping required for accurate translation. In this sense, the empirical investigation operates not merely as a supplement to the conceptual inquiry but as a corrective to it: it tests whether the categories used in scholarly and planning discourse align with those mobilized in everyday urban life.

Taken together, the three research questions form a coherent epistemic framework. The first reveals how terminology functions as a mechanism of governance and meaning-making; the second establishes the hermeneutic principles required to translate such terms without epistemic violence; the third investigates whether empirical linguistic practices reinforce or challenge institutional categorizations. Collectively, they define the scope and purpose of the dissertation: to articulate a methodological and ethical foundation for studying the Chinese city through its own terminological architectures.

In bringing these questions into dialogue, the research advances a simple but consequential proposition: that the Chinese city cannot be understood, let alone translated, without a rigorous engagement with the linguistic infrastructures through which it is conceptualized and enacted. Terminology is not ancillary to urban analysis; it is constitutive of it. And translation is not a peripheral technical task but a central epistemological challenge. The research questions thus orient the dissertation toward a rethinking of urban knowledge production, one that recognizes

language not as a transparent medium but as a site where spatial realities are shaped, contested, and made intelligible.

## 1.3 Research objectives: Toward an Epistemically Just Urban Lexicon

### 1.3.1 *Terminological Urbanism* as urban infrastructure

Addressing conceptual distortion as epistemic injustice requires more than warning against mistranslation. It requires constructing alternative interpretive infrastructures capable of hosting Chinese urban terms on their own terms.

My dissertation proposes *Terminological Urbanism* as this infrastructure: a framework that treats terminology as both analytical object and methodological tool. It responds directly to the distortions identified above by (1) foregrounding local semantic fields instead of imported categories; (2) examining how terms function as performative operators of governance; (3) integrating translation theory, urban morphology, and linguistic anthropology; (4) mapping divergences between institutional nomenclature and vernacular practice; (5) establishing hermeneutic principles for responsible translation; (6) clarifying the epistemic risks of domestication. The result is not an argument for linguistic purism or a rejection of translation, but a call for reflexive multilingualism in urban studies: a mode of scholarship that resists conceptual flattening and recognizes the epistemic dignity of local terminologies.

By identifying conceptual distortion as a form of epistemic injustice, the study asserts that the lexicon of the Chinese city must be approached not as a field of local particularities, but as a domain of conceptual innovation with global relevance. The aim is thus not simply to translate better, but to enlarge the conceptual repertoire of urban studies, enabling Chinese terms to challenge, supplement, or reshape the categories through which urban scholarship interprets contemporary urbanization.

### 1.3.2 Expected contributions

Positioning *Terminological Urbanism* not only as a site of theoretical innovation but also as a practical intervention in the ethics of global knowledge production, the four major contributions this dissertation aims to make in response to this epistemic problem can be summarized in the next four interdependent domains: (1) the creation of a renewed hermeneutic framework for understanding urban terminology; (2) an epistemological intervention aimed at

reducing conceptual injustice in global urban studies; (3) the development of guidelines for responsible translation within the domain of urban scholarship and planning practice; (4) the construction of a lexicographic corpus and digital platform.

Taken together, these contributions aim to recalibrate the conceptual and methodological foundations through which Chinese cities—and, by extension, non-Western urban contexts—are analyzed, compared, and translated.

The first expected contribution lies in the elaboration of a **hermeneutic framework** capable of accounting for the situated, historically layered, and institutionally embedded nature of Chinese urban terms. The project argues that the words used to describe urban life cannot be treated as neutral containers of meaning. Instead, they participate in the very constitution of the urban world they describe. As such, their translation across linguistic and conceptual boundaries is both an interpretive and an ethical act.

Drawing on the hermeneutic traditions of Gadamer and Ricœur, the dissertation develops an approach that foregrounds *linguistic hospitality*—the willingness to accommodate the conceptual strangeness of foreign terms without reducing them to familiar categories. This framework illuminates how Chinese terms operate as carriers of institutional and communal logics that have no straightforward English equivalents.

The hermeneutic contribution, therefore, does not merely describe how terms function within the Chinese urban system; it also reshapes the epistemic stance through which they are studied. It challenges scholars and practitioners to move beyond the ease of domesticated equivalence and to engage with terminology as a site of semantic negotiation, institutional memory, and socio-spatial meaning. In doing so, the dissertation opens new pathways for cross-linguistic and cross-cultural understanding in the field of urban studies.

The second contribution is **epistemological and ethical**: the reduction of *epistemic injustice* in global scholarly discourse. Urban studies, when operating primarily in English, often assumes the universality of its categories. This procedural universality obscures the conceptual worlds embedded in non-Western terminologies and results in what Miranda Fricker terms *hermeneutical injustice*: the inability of shared interpretive resources to adequately capture certain experiences. By foregrounding Chinese terms rather than their English substitutes, this dissertation intervenes in the structural inequalities of knowledge production. Its aim is to reshape the interpretive resources available to the global academic community so that Chinese urban realities do not need to be "translated away" in order to become legible.

This contribution situates Chinese urbanism not merely as an empirical case but as a generator of theoretical insight. It challenges the gravitational pull of Anglophone conceptual dominance and proposes a model where conceptual innovation can flow from China to global theory, rather than the other way around. In doing so, it contributes to a more pluralistic, dialogic, and reflexive global urban epistemology.

The third contribution is methodological and normative: the development of **guidelines for responsible translation** of urban terminology. Such guidelines are necessary because translation is not only linguistic but conceptual and institutional. A mistranslated term risks misrepresenting the governance logic, morphological structure, or everyday function of the space it describes. The guidelines proposed in the dissertation address:

i. When to borrow terms in *pinyin* (e.g., *danwei*, *chengzhongcun*) rather than translating;
ii. When partial equivalence is acceptable and how to frame its limitations;
iii. How to account for discrepancies between institutional and vernacular usage;
iv. How to embed reflexivity in the translation process to avoid conceptual flattening;
v. How to ensure terminological fidelity without sacrificing readability or accessibility.

Through these guidelines, the dissertation seeks to establish translation as an ethical practice grounded in hermeneutic sensitivity and epistemic responsibility. Such a framework not only benefits academics but also informs international planning collaborations, bilingual policy documents, architectural competitions, and the interdisciplinary communication of urban knowledge.

The fourth major contribution is empirical and infrastructural: the creation of a **lexicographic corpus** of Chinese urban terminology that integrates textual sources, institutional documents, lexical histories, and vernacular usages collected through the survey and ethnographic fieldwork. This corpus serves not only as the empirical backbone of the analysis but also as a tool for future research. This corpus will be accessible through a **digital platform**, enabling scholars, planners, and translators to navigate key terms, their semantic genealogies, etymological strata, morphological referents, and usage contexts. The platform thus becomes a form of *terminological infrastructure*: a shared repository of knowledge designed to support more accurate, context-sensitive interpretation of Chinese urban concepts.

Its contribution is threefold: **documentary** (it consolidates dispersed lexical materials—classical texts, modern dictionaries, planning regulations, and common speech—into a single coherent system); **comparative** (it juxtaposes institutional terminology with vernacular terms, revealing semantic gaps and conceptual tensions); **pedagogical** (it provides an educational tool

for students, scholars, and practitioners navigating Chinese planning vocabulary for the first time). By making visible the semantic architectures of Chinese urbanism, the corpus materially advances the field and establishes the groundwork for future comparative research.

Beyond these four domains, the dissertation's overarching contribution is the establishment of *Terminological Urbanism* as a transdisciplinary research framework. This framework integrates hermeneutics, linguistics, anthropology, and urban theory to assert that: cities are constituted through terminology; translation shapes urban knowledge as much as design or policy; and conceptual justice requires attending to the words through which space is produced. *Terminological Urbanism* thus positions language as the infrastructure of urban thought. It reimagines the study of the city as a multilingual, culturally situated, and ethically informed endeavor, capable of challenging existing epistemic hierarchies and proposing new models for comparative urban analysis.

## 1.4 Research methods

### 1.4.1 The scope of the research I: from micro to macro

The scope of this dissertation is defined not by a top-down abstraction of "the Chinese city" as an analytical totality, but by a methodologically deliberate movement from the micro to the macro. This centrifugal trajectory—beginning with the most intimate spatial units and expanding outward—reflects the anthropological conviction that the city can be understood only by tracing its emergence from the practices of everyday life. In my view, studying Chinese urban terminology requires beginning with the experiential foundations of urbanity rather than with its institutional or conceptual superstructures.

Urban studies traditionally oscillates between macro-level analyses, concerned with planning regimes, infrastructural systems, administrative boundaries, and micro-level studies that focus on lived experience, social networks, or architectural typologies. In the Chinese context, the macro level is especially prominent: national policies, spatial masterplans, and hierarchical territorial divisions have long shaped the analytical imagination of scholars and practitioners. Yet, beginning from the macro introduces a methodological risk: the reification of "the city" as an abstract, unified object, which in turn encourages the imposition of external, often Eurocentric, categories onto spatial realities that respond to wholly different logics.

The dissertation therefore adopts an inverse movement. It begins from the micro-scale: (1) the meanings of dwelling units; (2) the everyday practices of circulation; (3) the forms of sociability and governance emergent at the neighborhood scale.

From here, the analysis expands outward, uncovering how macro-structures become intelligible only insofar as they are embedded in these micro-level experiences. This *centrifugal* methodology not only avoids the analytical pitfalls of premature generalization, but also aligns with anthropological perspectives—from Ingold (2000)'s dwelling theory to Lefebvre (1991)'s concept of spatial practice—that emphasize the primacy of everyday life as the ground of spatial meaning.

In this sense, the micro-to-macro movement is not merely a matter of research design; it is a theoretical stance. It affirms that Chinese urban terminology is not primarily a technical apparatus created by institutions, but a semantic ecology emerging from lived relations, spatial practices, and social rhythms.

### 1.4.2 The scope of the research II: The Triad of Semantic Fields

The core of this research scope is articulated through a triadic structure: **house (staying) – street (moving) – neighborhood (relating)**. This triad is not an arbitrary thematic subdivision, nor a disciplinary taxonomy imposed from outside. It reflects the elemental ways in which urban residents inhabit, navigate, and make sense of the city.

The house represents the most intimate and existential dimension of urban existence. In the Chinese context, dwelling terminology is both semantically dense and historically layered. These terms reveal not only morphological types but also moral conceptions of family, identity, and privacy. The house forms the starting point of the research scope because it is the primary site where individuals anchor their urban experience; it condenses linguistic traces of lineage, migration, class, and policy regimes; it provides the spatial grammar from which larger urban structures derive meaning.

The street is the connective tissue of the city, the arena where mobility, encounter, and public life intersect. Chinese street terminologyconstitutes a rich semantic constellation reflecting political authority, morphological heritage, and regional variation. Studying the street as a semantic field serves two purposes: revealing how people conceptualize movement and orientation in the urban landscape; and allowing analysis of how governance is inscribed into circulation, from functional classifications to the procedural naming of intersections and segments. The street mediates between the intimacy of the dwelling and the collectivities of the

neighborhood. It is therefore the intermediate scale through which the centrifugal structure of the research gains coherence.

The neighborhood represents the most complex domain of the triad, where spatial, administrative, and relational categories intersect. Chinese terminology for neighborhood is deeply entangled with state governance, community formation, and everyday sociability. Analyzing this semantic field allows the research to trace the genealogies of territorial division in China, illuminate how administrative categories shape urban identity and social relations, and expose the tensions between institutional nomenclature and vernacular spatial experience, a key focus of the dissertation's empirical work. The neighborhood thus operates as the macro-limit of the research scope, while remaining grounded in the micro-level practices from which neighborhood life is constituted.

### 1.4.3. Scalar Centrifugal Perspective: A Methodological Logic

The centrifugal progression—house → street → neighborhood—is not simply linear. It is scalar in the sense that each layer retains the semantic residue of the smaller scale: (1) the vocabulary of housing informs the semantics of street life; (2) street terminology shapes the lived experience of neighborhood boundaries and identities; (3) neighborhood categories retroactively define the meaning of dwelling and circulation.

Thus, the triad is cyclical and relational rather than hierarchical. It mirrors the iterative process through which urban meaning is produced: from lived experience to institutional category and back again. This scalar method also allows the dissertation to address the city structurally without succumbing to abstraction. Instead of imposing an external macro-framework, the macro emerges inductively from the micro-semantics of everyday life.

### 1.4.4 A Transdisciplinary Terminological Method

The final component of the research scope concerns the methodological innovation at the heart of the dissertation: **the application of terminological studies to urban studies through anthropological categories**. Terminological analysis historically belongs to linguistics, lexicography, and translation studies. Yet its relevance to urban studies becomes apparent once we recognize that cities are always already conceptualized through words (planning documents, policy categories, everyday speech, and morphological descriptors). Terminology acts as both a cognitive and a political instrument; it shapes how spaces are envisioned, regulated, contested, and inhabited.

The dissertation proposes a truly **transdisciplinary method**, integrating urban studies and planning (for linking terminology to morphology, governance, and policy), linguistics (for semantic mapping, etymology, and conceptual fields), anthropology (for grounding meaning in lived practice, embodied routines, and social relations) and translation theory (for examining ethical and epistemic consequences of rendering terms into English). Anthropological categories—staying, moving, relating—provide the conceptual scaffolding through which terminological analysis becomes spatially and socially grounded. They ensure that terminology remains tethered to lived experience, rather than treated as disembodied abstraction.

This integrated method allows the dissertation to identify the conceptual worlds embedded in Chinese terms, demonstrating how these terms operate as performative operators of governance and revealing the epistemic distortions produced through domesticated translation. The solution propsed is a new model—*Terminological Urbanism*—for cross-linguistic, cross-cultural urban analysis.

## 1.5 Institutional, Academic, Vernacular Data Sources

Understanding Chinese urban terminology requires the construction of a data corpus capable of capturing not only the semantic evolution of key terms but also their circulation across heterogeneous linguistic ecologies. Terminologies emerge from multiple sources—state institutions, academic discourse, planning regulations, media narratives, everyday speech—and each source carries distinct conceptual logics and sociopolitical functions. Because this dissertation investigates both the semantic fields structuring urban life (house–street–neighborhood) and the epistemic consequences of translating these terms across linguistic regimes, its data sources must reflect the full diversity of contexts in which terminology is produced, operationalized, and inhabited (institutional terminology, academic terminology, and popular/vernacular terminology). The resulting corpus is not merely a collection of words; it is a multi-scalar and multi-register semantic archive, enabling the comparative and hermeneutic analysis central to the framework of terminological urbanism. Institutional terminology constitutes one of the foundational strata of the data corpus. These terms arise from the apparatus of the state and therefore reflect the official conceptualization of space as an object of governance. The dataset includes national planning standards; regulatory documents defining housing, street hierarchies, and administrative divisions; policy terminologies and slogans; administrative unit nomenclature. These sources provide insights into how the state

names, categorizes, and operationalizes spatial phenomena. They reveal the lexicon through which urban governance is enacted.

Institutional terminology is central for three reasons: **performative force** (institutional terms do not merely describe the city; they produce the administrative and legal realities within which urban life unfolds); **translation challenges** (these terms are frequently translated into English for international reports, bilateral projects, or scholarly communication, making them susceptible to conceptual domestication); **interplay with everyday life** (although formalized at the bureaucratic level, these categories often fail to align with residents' lived experiences, making them productive sites for hermeneutic tension).

The second layer of the corpus consists of terminology circulating in academic discourse—urban studies, planning theory, anthropology, architecture, geography, and sinology. This discourse includes both Chinese academic production and Anglophone scholarship on China. The academic terminology dataset draws from scholarly monographs and articles in Chinese and English; Chinese university textbooks; disciplinary dictionaries and encyclopedias; conceptual frameworks imported from abroad, such as 'public space', 'community', 'gentrification', 'urban regeneration', and their Chinese adaptations; interdisciplinary theorization, including work on urban sociology, anthropology of the city, and spatial theory. Academic terminology is analytically significant because: (1) it mediates between institutional and vernacular lexicons (scholars often formalize or reinterpret terms used in governance or popular contexts); (2) it introduces foreign conceptual frameworks (academic discourse is a primary conduit through which Western categories enter China, often through translation); (3) it produces its own distortions (academic glosses such as 'urban village' or 'community' often naturalize problematic equivalences). Examining academic terminology helps identify where conceptual mismatches originate and how they are stabilized within global scholarly communication.

The third and most dynamic category of the corpus encompasses the terminology used in everyday life. This is the domain of **vernacular categorization**, where spatial meaning emerges through lived practice rather than formal definition. Vernacular terminology covers a wide spectrum, from colloquial expressions to regional dialect forms. It is collected through ethnographic field observation; informal conversations and interviews; online discourse (WeChat groups, forums, local media); on-site signage, advertisements, and real estate language; the survey instrument (detailed below), which elicits spontaneous naming practices. Vernacular terminology is crucial because it reveals how residents actually conceptualize space,

rather than how institutions define it, highlighting mismatches between lived experience and planning categories, a central concern of my research questions and capturing semantic change in real time (as cities transform, so does everyday language). Thus, it serves as a corrective lens for translation: understanding vernacular categories is essential for avoiding conceptual distortions in English.

The survey represents the core empirical method for systematically capturing vernacular terminology. It is designed to counterbalance the textual and institutional bias of traditional terminological research; provide direct access to spontaneous lexical practices rather than reflective or institutionally shaped speech; allow comparison between official nomenclature and popular naming conventions for the same spatial phenomena. In this sense, the survey functions as *methodological counterweight*: it anchors semantic analysis in lived reality.

By outlining the mechanisms through which linguistic dominance shapes urban knowledge, this chapter clarifies why problems of translation cannot be treated as secondary or merely representational. Instead, they emerge as structural conditions that influence how cities are described, compared, and ultimately governed. Recognizing this allows the dissertation to move beyond critique toward the construction of an alternative analytical framework.

The next chapter takes up this task by examining how terminology itself can be re-conceptualized as an object of inquiry. Building on the epistemic concerns introduced here, it shifts the focus from the effects of linguistic asymmetry to the tools needed to address them. In doing so, it lays the theoretical foundations for a methodological approach that treats urban terms not as fixed labels, but as historically situated, culturally embedded, and operational elements of urban understanding.

# CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Building on the problem outlined in the opening chapter, this chapter develops the theoretical framework necessary to address linguistic asymmetry in urban studies in a systematic way. Rather than treating terminology as a neutral vehicle for pre-existing concepts, it reframes urban terms as active operators in the production of knowledge. Words are understood here not only as descriptive tools, but as historically sedimented, culturally situated, and disciplinarily regulated forms of interpretation. The chapter draws on insights from hermeneutics, translation studies, anthropology, and planning theory to articulate a conception of terminology that is sensitive to context, power, and practice. By doing so, it challenges universalist assumptions embedded in much comparative urban research and proposes a shift toward a more reflexive engagement with language. This move does not reject comparison, but seeks to recalibrate it by foregrounding the conditions under which urban concepts emerge and circulate. In establishing these foundations, the chapter positions terminology as a critical interface between lived urban experience and analytical abstraction. This conceptual reorientation is essential for the methodological steps that follow.

At the heart of this research lies a simple but profound question: what can the words of urban life tell us about the social and spatial transformations of modern China? Building upon Christian Topalov's insight that urban words are clues to social processes, the dissertation examines how terms used to describe the house, the street, and the neighborhood encapsulate the shifting relationship between individuals, the state, and collective life. In this sense, language functions as both archive and agent, carrying the traces of past policies and negotiations, while also shaping contemporary imaginaries of dwelling, mobility, and relating.

The project's transdisciplinary orientation arises from the very nature of its object. The Chinese city cannot be adequately approached through a single disciplinary lens: it is simultaneously an architectural artifact, a linguistic system, a social organism, and a moral field. The dissertation therefore draws from architecture, urban studies, linguistics, anthropology, and sinology, embracing the *Charter of Transdisciplinarity*'s call for a synthesis "across and beyond" disciplinary boundaries (Lima de Freitas, Morin and Nicolescu, 1994). Rather than simplifying knowledge into unified categories, this approach acknowledges complexity, positioning the space between disciplines as fertile terrain for understanding the urban condition.

The literature review will be divided in four sections:

1. Urban studies sources;

2. Lexicographic typology and terminological references;
3. Translatological background and ELF (English Lingua Franca) critique;
4. Anthropological framework.

## 2.1 Urban studies sources: language, concepts, and the problem of urban knowledge

Urban studies has long acknowledged that cities are not only material assemblages of buildings, infrastructures, and populations, but also conceptual and discursive constructions. From early sociological and geographical traditions to contemporary critical urban theory, scholars have repeatedly shown that the ways cities are named, classified, and described play a decisive role in how urban realities are understood, governed, and transformed. Yet despite this awareness, the systematic role of terminology itself—as a structured field of concepts embedded in language—has remained marginal in urban theory, often treated as secondary to spatial form, political economy, or institutional analysis.

This chapter positions itself at the intersection of several strands of scholarship: (1) critical urban theory on the social production of space; (2) anthropological approaches to everyday urban experience; (3) comparative and postcolonial critiques of universal urban vocabularies; and (4) translation and terminology studies concerned with conceptual non-equivalence across languages. Together, these literatures provide the conditions for articulating a theory of terminology in urban studies.

### 2.1.1 Language and the Social Production of Urban Space

A foundational reference for linking language and urban form is Henri Lefebvre (1991)'s theory of the **production of space**, which conceptualizes space as a social product generated through the interaction of spatial practices, representations of space, and representational spaces. Although Lefebvre does not develop a theory of terminology as such, his insistence that representations of space—plans, maps, classifications, expert vocabularies—mediate between lived practice and institutional power establishes language as a key operator in urban production.

Subsequent urban theorists have extended this insight. David Harvey (2003) and Neil Brenner (2013), for example, emphasize that urban categories are historically contingent and politically charged, shaped by regimes of accumulation and governance. Yet in much of this literature, language functions implicitly: categories such as "city," "neighborhood," or "urban region" are mobilized analytically without sustained reflection on their linguistic and

translational conditions. The conceptual vocabulary of urban theory is often treated as portable, implicitly universal, and readily applicable across contexts.

### 2.1.2 Urban Categories, Comparative Urbanism, and the Critique of Universals

A growing body of work has challenged this assumption. Comparative and postcolonial urban studies have foregrounded the problem of **conceptual transfer**, warning against the uncritical application of Euro-American categories to non-Western urban contexts. Jennifer Robinson (2006)'s call to "provincialize" urban theory argues that dominant vocabularies function as implicit norms, positioning cities outside Europe and North America as deviations rather than as sources of theory in their own right.

This critique has been reinforced by scholars working specifically on China, who emphasize the instability and historical specificity of core urban categories. Skinner (1977)'s regional systems theory and Fei Xiaotong (1948)'s sociological anthropology demonstrate that distinctions such as urban/rural, city/countryside, or center/periphery in China have long been moral, administrative, and civilizational constructs rather than purely spatial ones. More recent scholarship highlights how socialist institutions (e.g. 单位 *dānwèi* 'work-unit', 户口 *hùkǒu* 'household registration') and reform-era transformations have repeatedly redefined what "urban" means in practice (Anagnost, 2008; Chan, 2009; Oakes, 2019).

While these studies critically interrogate urban categories, they rarely address *terminology as such*—that is, the specific words through which these categories are named, translated, and stabilized in global academic discourse. The problem is often framed at the level of theory transfer or comparative method, rather than at the level of lexicon and translation.

Parallel to critical urban theory, sociological and philosophical work on **discourse and symbolic power** provides tools for understanding why terminology matters. Foucault (1972)'s analysis of discourse emphasizes that naming and classification are not descriptive acts but techniques of power that produce regimes of truth. Bourdieu (1991) further demonstrates that linguistic categories acquire authority through institutional recognition, becoming instruments of symbolic domination.

In urban contexts, this insight has been applied to planning language, zoning categories, and policy discourse. Scholars have shown how terms such as 'renewal', 'regeneration', or 'informality' operate performatively, legitimizing particular interventions while marginalizing

others. Yet here again, the focus tends to be on discourse as ideology rather than on **terminology as a structured semantic field** whose internal distinctions, translations, and historical sediments shape urban knowledge.

### 2.1.3 Everyday Urbanism, Anthropology, and the Vernacular Lexicon

Anthropological approaches to the city redirect attention to **everyday language and practice**. Works by de Certeau (1984) and Hannerz (1980) emphasize that urban life is produced through mundane acts of dwelling, movement, and social interaction. In this tradition, the city is known from within, through vernacular categories and lived meanings rather than through expert abstractions.

Chinese urban anthropology reinforces this perspective by documenting how residents navigate cities using locally meaningful terms that do not map neatly onto planning vocabularies. Studies of neighborhoods, work units, and urban villages show that everyday terminology often preserves historical layers of meaning that institutional language seeks to overwrite. However, while anthropology takes vernacular language seriously as data, it seldom translates this concern into a **systematic theory of terminology** capable of intervening in architectural and urban-theoretical debates.

### 2.1.4 From Language Critique to a Theory of Terminology in Urban Studies

Taken together, these literatures converge on a shared insight: **urban knowledge is inseparable from the linguistic categories through which it is produced**. Yet they stop short of articulating terminology itself as a central object and method of urban analysis. Urban theory critiques universals but rarely examines lexicons; anthropology documents vernacular meanings but does not systematize them terminologically; translation studies diagnose distortion but remain external to urban research.

This gap motivates the need for a theory of terminology in urban studies. Such a theory would treat urban terms not as neutral labels or mere translations, but as **conceptual operators** situated at the intersection of space, power, history, and everyday practice. It would acknowledge that terms circulate across scales—from policy to planning, from academic discourse to vernacular speech—and across languages, acquiring sedimented meanings that shape how cities are imagined and governed.

The concept of *Terminological Urbanism* proposed in this dissertation responds to this gap. By foregrounding terminology as both object and method, it brings together insights from urban

theory, anthropology, and translation studies to reconstruct urban knowledge from within the language of the city itself. The following sections develop this framework by showing how Chinese urban terminology, particularly in the domains of housing, streets, and neighborhoods, offers a privileged entry point for understanding urban life beyond the distortions induced by imported categories.

## 2.2 Lexicographic typology and terminological references

### 2.2.1 Lexicographic typology

Lexicographic reflection has developed at the intersection of philology, linguistics, and knowledge organisation, progressively evolving from ancillary scholarly practice into an autonomous field of inquiry. Early historical analyses locate the origins of lexicographic activity in medieval glossing practices, particularly those associated with Roman law and theological exegesis, where glosses functioned as interpretive tools aimed at clarifying technical vocabulary for readers with different levels of expertise. This practical orientation toward mediation and accessibility has remained a defining feature of lexicographic work, even as its theoretical foundations have become increasingly formalised.

A decisive shift in the modern understanding of lexicography is associated with scholars such as H.E. Wiegand, who articulated lexicography as an object of scientific investigation in its own right (Wiegand, 1983). Wiegand's work on metalexicography established analytical distinctions between dictionary structures, user access, and dictionary use, laying the groundwork for treating dictionaries as complex textual and epistemic artefacts rather than mere word lists. This perspective was further developed in comprehensive reference works such as Svensén's *A Handbook of Lexicography* (2009) and Atkins and Rundell's *Oxford Guide to Practical Lexicography* (2008), which systematised the methodological stages of dictionary compilation and clarified the relationship between theory and practice.

Within this broader lexicographic framework, specialised lexicography—often discussed under the label of Language for Special Purposes (LSP)—has emerged as a distinct research area. Central contributions by Bergenholtz, Tarp, and Nielsen have been instrumental in redefining specialised dictionaries as function-driven tools, designed to satisfy specific user needs in concrete situations such as reading, writing, translating, or learning within a specialised domain. Their functional theory of lexicography explicitly rejects the idea that dictionaries should aim at exhaustive lexical coverage, arguing instead that lexicographic decisions must be

guided by user profiles and usage contexts (Bergenholtz and Tarp, 1995; Bergenholtz, Nielsen, and Tarp, 2009).

This body of literature provides the theoretical basis for classifying specialised dictionaries according to criteria such as monolingual versus bilingual orientation, maximising versus minimising scope, and multi-field versus sub-field focus. Importantly, it also legitimises lexicographic projects that are deliberately selective and analytically oriented, rather than comprehensive reference works.

Parallel to lexicography, terminology science has developed its own theoretical trajectory, historically shaped by the ambition to standardise technical vocabularies. The classical model associated with Eugen Wüster (1979) and the Vienna School conceptualised terminology work as concept-oriented: terms were to be assigned to clearly delimited concepts organised within coherent systems, ideally ensuring unambiguous communication among experts. This approach found institutional expression in international standards for terminology work, such as those codified by ISO (e.g. ISO 704, 2022).

However, from the late twentieth century onward, this prescriptive model has been increasingly criticised. Maria Teresa Cabré (1999) challenged the reduction of terminology to standardisation, arguing for a more inclusive theoretical framework that recognises the interaction between linguistic, cognitive, and social dimensions of specialised language. Rita Temmerman (2000)'s sociocognitive approach further destabilised the classical concept–term relation by emphasising categorisation, prototype effects, and diachronic change, particularly in domains where knowledge is evolving or contested. These critiques converge on the insight that many specialised domains do not exhibit stable, universally agreed concept systems, but rather dynamic semantic fields shaped by discourse and practice.

A particularly influential contribution to specialised lexicography and terminology is the distinction between culture-dependent and culture-independent knowledge domains, articulated most clearly by Bergenholtz, Nielsen, and Tarp (2009). In culture-independent fields—typically associated with natural sciences—the subject matter is assumed to remain stable across linguistic communities, making terminological equivalence relatively straightforward. In culture-dependent fields—such as law, economics, or governance—concepts are embedded in specific institutional arrangements and historical trajectories, rendering simple equivalence misleading. In these cases, lexicographic practice must extend beyond the selection of equivalents and provide contextual and explanatory information to avoid conceptual distortion.

This distinction is crucial for urban studies, a field that occupies an intermediate position between technical-scientific knowledge and socially embedded practice. While urbanism draws on engineering, architecture, and planning standards, its key categories—city, neighbourhood, housing, public space—are deeply shaped by local governance systems and cultural norms. Lexicographic and terminological scholarship on culture-dependent domains therefore offers a direct theoretical justification for treating urban terminology as requiring contextualised explanation rather than direct translation.

The intersection between lexicography and translation studies further reinforces this position. Scholars such as Sue Ellen Wright, Gerhard Budin, Juan Sager, and Lynne Bowker have shown that bilingual specialised dictionaries function as sites of epistemic mediation, where translation choices shape how knowledge is transferred across linguistic communities. Translation-oriented critiques—most notably Lawrence Venuti's analysis of domestication and translator invisibility—highlight the risks inherent in prioritising fluency and apparent equivalence, particularly in Anglophone-dominated academic contexts. These critiques resonate strongly with lexicographic concerns in culture-dependent fields, where terminological domestication can erase institutional specificity (Sager, 1990; Wright and Budin, 1997; Bowker, 1997).

Finally, discussions of transdisciplinarity, particularly as articulated by Lima de Freitas, Morin, and Nicolescu and codified in the *Charter of Transdisciplinarity* (1994), provide an epistemological horizon for integrating lexicographic method into a broader research architecture. Transdisciplinarity does not negate disciplinary knowledge, but insists that complex objects—such as the city—operate across multiple levels of reality and cannot be adequately captured within a single disciplinary framework. Lexicography, in this context, offers a disciplined mode of engagement with language that can interface productively with anthropology, sociology, geography, and urban studies without dissolving into methodological eclecticism.

Taken together, these bodies of literature establish the conditions under which a research project can legitimately position itself lexicographically without aiming to produce a dictionary. They support an approach that is bilingual, minimising, sub-field oriented, and culture-dependent, while remaining theoretically grounded in contemporary lexicography, terminology studies, and transdisciplinary epistemology. Within this framework, lexical analysis becomes a methodological lens through which urban realities are examined, rather than a purely auxiliary technical task.

### 2.2.2 Chinese reference works on architecture and urban studies

In order to contextualize my research about the lexicon of the Chinese city, in this chapter I will shortly outline the editorial history of the Chinese glossaries, dictionaries and encyclopedias about architecture and urban studies. For the sake of brevity, I will only distinguish two macro-areas: architecture and urban studies. This outline will not include the dictionaries specifically devoted to the architects and the dictionaries or encyclopedias about landscape history and/or planning and civil engineering, topics not related to the matter of my research.

The publication of lexicographic works on architecture in China started right after the foundation of the People's Republic in 1949. The need to enhance the process of modernization led China to resort to the Soviet Union's help, that at the time seemed an obvious choice for the creation of an advanced socialist state. The collaboration between the two countries, beyond the industrial and financial projects, contemplated also the resort to the so-called 'experts' (专家 *zhuānjiā*), an army of engineers, professors and specialized workers that imparted, not without difficulties, their teachings in many technical fields (included architecture and urban planning) to the Chinese counterparts during the starting stages of the construction of the new-born PRC. The translation in Chinese of the Soviet technical texts that could aid the Soviet experts during their missions was a by-product of this cooperation and part of this endeavor consisted of bilingual dictionaries (Mikhailov, 1955; Zhao and Tian, 1959), mainly dedicated to the history of architecture. From this period, I could only find one more technical dictionary translated from English (Terminology Office, Compilation and Translation Publishing Committee, Chinese Academy of Sciences, 1958).

With the period of Reform and Opening Up a renovated interest in the translation of foreign texts led to the publication of several bilingual and multilingual dictionaries from English (Li, 1976; Xiong, 1980; Gu, 1981; Shi, 1984), with a strong interest toward the technical aspects. It is notable that, along with the translation of English lexicon, a strong interest grew in the Japanese lexicographic and encyclopedic works (Gao, 1981–1982; Hashiba, 1992), giving credit to the growing success of Japanese technical achievements of that period. Of the same period, I could only find one bilingual dictionary in French (Compiling Group for the French–Chinese Dictionary of Construction Engineering, 1986) and an illustrated English-German Lexicon with the Chinese translation of the terms (Killer, 1983).

The publication of bilingual and multilingual dictionaries has been going on at a quick pace until the present days. Personally, I could find more than twenty one-way dictionaries only for

the English language. The increased interest toward the Chinese architectural lexicon is proved by a new trend of the years two-thousands, the two-ways English-Chinese Chinese-English dictionaries, clear evidence of the needs of the foreign and Chinese professionals involved in international (Hu, 2004; Yu, 2006; Liu and Yang, 2012). Among these dictionaries, I point out the *Chinese-English and English-Chinese Classified Vocabulary in Building Construction* (Yang et al., 2011), that, for the Chinese-English section, presents the lexicon divided by topics, from 建筑材料 *Jiànzhù cáiliào* 'building materials' to 建筑经济与管理 *Jiànzhù jīngjì yǔ guǎnlǐ* 'building economics and management'.

Most of the above-mentioned dictionaries feel the effect of their practical use, ignoring, in most of the cases, any analysis of the origin and of the logic of translation, ending up being a cold list of technical terms. Similarly, the English-Chinese section of the two-ways dictionaries is simply the cross-reference of the Chinese-English section.

In the last twenty-five years, the increased attention to the world editorial market, due not only to economic reasons, but also to the increased interest of the general public, has favored the publication of numerous translations of American dictionaries, such as Ching (1998), Burden (2007), and Harris (2012). I define them the "new generation" of translated dictionaries of architecture, mostly illustrated, mainly devoted to the popularization of Western architecture.

In the face of so many bilingual and plurilingual dictionaries, it is strange to see that the first original encyclopedia about architecture, garden landscape and urban planning in Chinese was not published until 1988 as a monographic volume (Editorial Committee for This Volume, Encyclopaedia of China Editorial Board, 1993) of the 中国大百科全书 *Zhongguo Da Baike Quanshu* (Great Encyclopedia of China), the first modern Chinese encyclopedia with entries in alphabetical order, published from 1978 to 1993 in 73 volumes arranged by subject, with more than 80000 entries. The lemmi are listed in alphabetical order of *pinyin*, but a practical classified index by discipline and subject makes this encyclopedia a useful tool of lexicographic research and a reference for the general definitions of the architectural and urban objects.

The first encyclopedic dictionary exclusively dedicated to architecture was published four years later (Ye and Wu, 1992). This massive volume of more than fourteen hundred pages presents more than nine thousand lemmi, organized not in alphabetical order of *pinyin*, but according to the traditional Chinese system based on the stroke number of the first character of the term. The dictionary contains terms of several technical and not-technical sub-fields, with particular attention to the history of architecture and to the Chinese and non-Chinese buildings, including numerous American and European architects as well.

In the same year the publication of the first thematic dictionary of Chinese ancient architecture (Lu, 1992) represents the first attempt of systematization of the matter, strongly neglected at academic level in the previous thirty years. The order of entries is strictly organized by subject (buildings, city, gardens, bridges, pagodas stone objects, tombs, architectural tools, famous ancient architectures, famous architects). The same model will be adopted in Li (2011), with a different classification of the lemmi. In this case, the first part is, in fact, organized by the material characteristics of the architectural objects (wooden, color painted, oil painted, tiled, stone, bricked, earthen, clay, metal) while the second part is more miscellaneous with sections dedicated to the architectural functions and shapes, Chinese classics of architecture, construction officials etc.

A different approach had been adopted by Wang (2007), whose dictionary, dedicated to the technical terms of Chinese ancient architecture, is organized according to the stroke number of the first character of the lemma. In the Foreword of this dictionary there is an explicit reference to the publication of the sixth list of Major Cultural Heritages under State Protection (*sic*) in 2005, that proves, along with similar initiatives at provincial and district levels, the definitive awareness of the authorities of the huge Chinese architectural heritage and the need to preserve it. In this context, a more conscious and educated public urged the editorial market to publish an increasing number of non-academic illustrated dictionaries dedicated to the Chinese ancient architecture, with an increased focus on graphic design.

So far, the most complete encyclopedia of architecture and civil engineering was published from 1999 to 2005 under the general name of 中国土木建筑百科辞典 *Zhongguo Tumu Jianzhu Baike Cidian* (Encyclopedic Dictionary of Chinese Civil Engineering and Architecture), with the general editing supervision of Li Guohao 李国豪, professor at the Tongji University (Li, 1999-2005). This monumental editorial endeavor of nearly ten thousand pages is divided in 15 volumes, dedicated to 14 different disciplines. The first volume 建筑 *Jiànzhù* (Architecture) is devoted to the objects, the theories and the styles of Chinese and foreign architecture (only for the Chinese lemmi referring to foreign objects or concepts, the Chinese lemma is followed by the English translation of the term). Each lemma is explained by synthetical definitions with occasional drawings.

In the field of urban studies and urban planning, the scarcity of specialized dictionaries or encyclopedias reflects the relative disregard of the Chinese editorial market toward an area of knowledge probably considered only for specialists, or strictly connected to the discipline of

architecture. The first bilingual English-Chinese dictionary was actually published in Washington, D.C., as co-edition of the USA Department of Housing and Urban Development and the PRC Ministry of Urban and Rural Construction and Environmental Protection in a cooperation project started in 1983 (Geraghty and Lin, 1987; Housing, Urban Planning and Construction Management Vocabulary Project Group, 2016). Despite of the relatively small number of entries and the specialization of most of the terms included in the work (American housing), in the Editors' Introduction we can find a one-of-a-kind mention to the linguistic problems encountered by the translators' team:

> Production of a specialized bilingual glossary by two groups working on opposite sides of the world entailed a variety of formidable challenges. On the broadest level, the working groups were faced with the complex problem of trying to define differences in the meanings of terms that reflect rapid changes in two dynamic cultures, and to match terms in one language to adequately comparable ones in the other. Frequently, misunderstandings and mismatches became apparent only during lively face-to-face discussions. […] Many difficult and humorous problems were encountered in translating American jargon into Chinese. For example, the term 'balloon mortgage' was rendered in Chinese as 'special big tail mortgage,' which conveys the intended meaning of the term. A literal translation of the term in Chinese, 'mortgage in the form of an air balloon', would bring the reader's mind to a standstill. 'Brainstorming' was translated into Chinese as 'squeezing-the-brain-juices-session'. One literal translation into Chinese resulted in 'brain concussion'. Certain commonly used American terms selected for inclusion by the Chinese working group proved especially difficult to translate, for example, 'amenity,' 'neighborhood,' and 'community,' because they have a broad range of meanings. Other American terms, such as 'bottom line,' 'underwriting,' and 'sale leaseback' were included because they are difficult to understand in the Chinese context. Terms were also offered for the glossary that are special to China, such as 'squeeze-in development' and 'only-child family.' The suggestions offered by the 250 organizations and individuals throughout China asked to comment on this glossary proved very useful. An additional linguistic problem is the confusing number of English and Chinese language variants in use and in print throughout the world today. To reduce the problems of usage, we have taken American English as our standard. The Chinese in the glossary is that used in the People's Republic of China. (Geraghty and Lin 1987, xx-xxiv)

What I find interesting here is the reference to the practical problems of the rendition of American English specialized terms into Chinese and the mention of the different cultural context as the main reason of this hardship. A technical (and not so technical) term doesn't contain the key to translatability only because it refers to a technical concept. The relation between signifier and signified needs to be questioned both in the source language and in the target language not out of bias, but because the comprehension of a phenomenon may be compromised by the simplistic understanding of the relative translated term.

As far as I could find in libraries and online catalogues, the first Chinese dictionary on the city, published in China, is quite recent (Liu, 1991). The title itself—中外城市知识辞典 *Zhōngwài Chéngshì Zhīshí Cídiǎn* (Dictionary of Chinese and Foreign Urban Knowledge)—refers to a general concept that transcends the specialization of the disciplines, and consider the city as comprehensive object of investigation. The nearly one-thousand-pages long dictionary is divided into ten sections and an appendix of relative academic or research institutions. In the first section, the most useful for my research, we can find the definitions of the general terms in the first part, followed by the terms about urbanization, urban typology, urban system, urban strategy and the future of the city.

To my knowledge, apart from two concise English-Chinese bilingual dictionaries on urban planning (Zuo, 1993; Zhao, 1994) and the translation in Chinese of the monumental encyclopedia about the problems of the city by the Japanese sociologist Isomura Eiichi (Isomura, 1988), no other Chinese dictionaries or encyclopedia on the city were published after Liu's seminal work until 2007 (Wang, 2007). This encyclopedic work even from the title—城市科学小百科 *Chéngshì Kēxué Xiǎo Bǎikē* (Small Encyclopedia of Urban Sciences)—traces the editorial thematic structure of Liu's *Dictionary*, from the "General Ideas of the City" (Chapter 1) to the presentation of some Chinese and foreign cities (Chapter 17 and 18), with a specific focus on the classification of the disciplines of the city (in Chapter 3 we can find a list of eighteen different disciplines or sub-disciplines related to the city and the relative area of study in the definitions).

A different kind of monolingual dictionary (用语 *yòngyǔ* in the title refers to the phraseology used in a limited area of practice) is the one published in New Taipei City in 2011 as a project initiated in 1995 by MOST (Modes of social transformation) program of UNESCO and by the French CNRS (National Center for Scientific Research), presided over by the French sinologist Christian Henriot, edited and written by Chinese scholars (Shi and Liu, 2011). The inspiration of the project came from a group of social scientists of different nationalities and cultures, studying the city and the urban issues, whose original purpose was "to question the concepts, words, expressions that they used among themselves and that they found in scholarly publications, in particular the issue of using a 'common language' (p. I-II). The points Henriot makes in the following paragraphs are not only shareable in the context of the study of the city, but represent, in my opinion, a basis for any cross-cultural discourse:

> In their view, this apparently 'common language' tended to blur or gloss over important differences in the actual meaning of words in each language. […] This idea of a universal glossary goes along with the belief that, in each linguistic area and among all of them, there exists a common technical or scientific

> language that reflects some shared sense of what a city is. We contend that the use of words is a serious stake that social scientists, but also decision-makers cannot overlook. For the former, the necessary critical stand in the use of words is often toned down as quite naturally words are taken for granted, especially when they come from written documents. Yet, this can be highly misleading. For the latter, both within one single country or cultural entity or across cultures, the assumption of the existence common code words, at least at the level of elites, may lead to difficulties when it comes to carrying out actual policies among the common people who do not share the same body of meanings. In fact, words are not neutral tools of language. They serve to express reality as it is perceived by individuals and institutions as much as they participate to the construction of reality. Seen in this light, words are more than a woven tissue of signs that represent an external reality. They are simultaneously a means to manufacture and traverse places. In texts that seek to write space, the text performs a transformative operation on space and the lived experience of a place. […] Underlying the whole project was the idea that while we could not simply challenge the idea of a "common language" and argue on the impossibility of communication across cultures and languages, we sought to question the fact that the equivalence of words—here specifically the vocabulary related to the city—could not be taken for granted. Behind each individual word, there is a history that translation may—and actually often does—betray, causing sometimes misunderstandings, biased or deformed perceptions of reality, and eventually misconceptions or misapplications of policies (pages II-III).

What I find here particularly effective is the characterization of words as instruments of transformation, or even of manufacture of places, and not only a neutral tool of communication. Words are never neutral, even if they belong to a specialized or technical language. As I will claim in the following chapter with Topalov's powerful statement: "Words are ways of understanding each other, but they are also weapons" (Topalov 2010, XVIII).

Under these premises, the work of the authors of the *Dictionary* focuses on the social changes in China, seen through the lens of the language. The words examined, contextualized by the Authors through the analysis of relevant published materials, are tracked along the historical periods of the last two centuries, with particular attention to their change of meaning or use. Many were the difficulties encountered by the editorial team, shared by those who intend to study the language of a country in which the national idiom 普通话 *pǔtōnghuà* (common language) was elaborated not much earlier than a century ago and had to compete in the daily communication with unnumerable dialects and linguistic variants, such as registers, social settings and communicative contexts.

The choice of the terms was inspired by the interest into urban processes and urban phenomena, rather than urban objects, with the preference for those words that could "offer broadly an insight in some sort of social use or interaction." (p. XII). The number of the selected

lemmi is relatively small (260 main entries with more than 500 terms), all taken from written documents that could help the authors track their histories through time.

The organization of the entries, strictly in the alphabetical order of the *pinyin* transcriptions, is, in my opinion, not completely satisfactory, since it lacks thematic clarity. Furthermore, the prevalence of the sociological instances in the choice of the terms leaves the urban artifacts in the background and in many cases, completely neglected. Nonetheless, the *Dictionary* is an interesting attempt of looking at the Chinese city through a coherent portion of the vocabulary used to represent it.

### 2.2.3 Topalov's *L'aventure des mots de la ville* as research palimpsest

Christian Topalov and collaborators (notably Laurent Coudroy de Lille, Jean-Charles Depaule, and Brigitte Marin) assembled a large, comparative lexicon of urban terms across languages and historical periods. Rather than offering a neutral glossary, the book treats urban vocabulary as evidence: words are historical artifacts that condense institutions, forms, practices, and imaginaries. The central wager is that the city is legible as a palimpsest of words, each term layered with prior uses, borrowings, political struggles, and technical redefinitions that continue to shape contemporary meaning.

The project advances three tightly linked claims:

**Words do urban work**: terms like banlieue, suburb, slum, quartier, boulevard, medina, plaza, or downtown are not passive labels. They structure perception, policy, and practice, guiding how actors classify spaces, justify interventions, and narrate urban life. As one of the cornerstones of *L'aventure des mots de la ville* maintains: "Urban words not only describe the urban world, but they also help to shape it" (Topalov 2010, XVII). Taking this bold statement to the extreme consequences, I could say that, if the objects of a city were described with other words, the city would be different. The words not only have the main task of denotating things, but they are also imbued with connotations, the cultural and emotional surplus that puts words in a vaster horizon of values, rather than keeping them restrained in the suffocating boundaries of meaning. The words differentiate, polarize, organize, classify, grade, hierarchize, qualify, evaluate. They give form to the experience of things.

**Meanings travel and transform**: urban words migrate across time, languages, and fields (law, planning, real estate, journalism), accumulating new connotations and losing others. Translation is never one-to-one; it is a sequence of adaptations that reflects

unequal exchanges between linguistic and political worlds. “Words are a social given, an inheritance that pre-exists the speakers, they are also the result of initiatives by historical actors, they are tools for knowledge and action. Words are ways of understanding each other, but they are also weapons. So, for us, writing histories of words is a way —unusual, no doubt, but effective, we believe—of approaching the social and material history of cities” (Topalov 2010, XVIII).

**Categories are not universal**: treating English (or French) categories as if they were universal blinds researchers to locally operative distinctions. Accurate comparison requires working from indigenous terms outward, not from a ready-made Anglophone template inward.

Topalov proposes a historical-comparative lexicography oriented to social science. Each headword is a dossier: etymology and first attestations; semantic drifts; disciplinary appropriations; legal codification; popular re-significations; and present contested uses. Rather than hunting for “equivalents,” the entries chart families of near-neighbors across languages, showing where meanings overlap, diverge, or only partially intersect. The analysis draws on dictionaries, codes and decrees, planning/police manuals, real-estate advertising, newspapers, and literature—tracking the same term across expert and vernacular arenas. When source terms resist domestication, the authors keep the original word and explicate it, insisting that foreignization (retaining the source term) sometimes preserves more analytic truth than a fluent but misleading substitute.

In short, the book treats each word as a site where governance, morphology, and everyday practice converge—and where disciplinary vocabularies both reflect and reshape the city.

Topalov’s contribution is less a single model of “the city” than a method for making urban theory comparative. It provincializes universal claims by demonstrating that many basic urban categories are historically situated and language-dependent. It equips comparative research to handle non-equivalence without flattening difference. Rather than force terms into one grid, it seeks relational translation: What problems does this word solve in its home context? What institutions does it presuppose? It ethically recenters local knowledge. By refusing to dissolve source terms into fluent glosses, the method acknowledges epistemic asymmetries and keeps interpretive labor visible.

Topalov’s lexicographical approach to urban terminology presents several notable strengths. First, it offers a replicable research design: by structuring inquiry through individual

term entries, the method can be applied in any city or language to generate grounded, comparative insights. Second, it bridges linguistics, history, and urbanism, treating vocabulary not merely as descriptive labels but as a driver of theoretical reflection about how cities are perceived, organized, and transformed. Third, it maintains a critical sensitivity to power, continually asking who names, codifies, and circulates urban terms and how these linguistic operations mediate governance, social hierarchy, and spatial legitimacy. At the same time, the method involves certain limitations. Because it pivots around discrete entries, it risks fragmenting the analysis unless supported by a synthesizing framework—one that, in this dissertation, emerges through the triad of staying, moving between places, and relating (→ 3.4.2). Moreover, the approach's selective coverage may leave some dialects, sociolects, or marginalized vernaculars underrepresented, despite the breadth of its global ambition. Finally, its success depends on deep archival and textual excavation, and not all terms possess equally documentable histories, which can result in asymmetries of evidence and analytic weight across the lexicon.

In sum, *L'aventure des mots de la ville* turns the city's vocabulary into an analytic instrument. Bringing that instrument to Chinese urban life—through the triad of staying, moving between places, relating—lets you move beyond the cliché "learn the language to know the culture" to a sharper, discipline-specific dissertation: to theorize cities comparatively, we must theorize their words.

## 2.3 Translatological background and English Lingua Franca critique

### 2.3.1 Translatological background

The problem of translation has long occupied a central position in Western reflections on language, meaning, and human finitude. Far from being a merely technical concern, translation has been repeatedly theorized as a privileged site for interrogating the limits of understanding, the conditions of dialogue, and the ethical stakes of engaging with alterity. The present chapter situates its translatological approach within this broad intellectual tradition, drawing in particular on philosophical hermeneutics and modern translation theory to conceptualize translation as an epistemic and ethical practice rather than a neutral linguistic operation.

A recurring symbolic reference across this literature is the biblical narrative of the Tower of Babel, which has functioned as a foundational metaphor for linguistic plurality, communicative rupture, and the end of semantic transparency. From early theological exegesis

to modern philosophical reinterpretations, Babel has been read as marking the transition from an imagined condition of linguistic immediacy—often associated with an Adamitic or Ursprache—to a world structured by difference, mediation, and interpretive labor. Contemporary scholarship increasingly treats Babel not as a mythical explanation of linguistic diversity, but as an allegory for the structural condition of human communication: a condition defined by non-coincidence between languages, cultures, and horizons of meaning.

Within this post-Babel framework, hermeneutics has provided some of the most influential tools for rethinking understanding under conditions of plurality. Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics constitutes a foundational reference point. Rejecting both positivist objectivism and relativist skepticism, Gadamer reconceptualizes understanding as a historically effected process grounded in dialogue rather than method. His notion of *Horizontverschmelzung* (fusion of horizons) proposes that understanding does not consist in the annihilation of difference, but in the emergence of shared meaning through the encounter between historically situated perspectives. Language, in this account, is not an instrument external to understanding but its very medium: meaning arises in and through linguistic interaction.

Gadamer's position has, however, been the object of sustained critique. Jacques Derrida (2005) challenges what he sees as a residual metaphysical aspiration in hermeneutics—namely, the idea that dialogue might culminate in agreement or shared truth. From a deconstructive perspective, meaning is always deferred, and ethical relation depends on preserving the irreducibility of the other rather than seeking reconciliation. Jürgen Habermas (1990: 213–245), by contrast, criticizes Gadamer from a critical-theoretical standpoint, warning that appeals to tradition and shared horizons may obscure relations of power and domination. For Habermas, hermeneutic understanding must be supplemented by reflection capable of distinguishing communicative consensus from ideological submission.

These debates frame a crucial tension that remains central to contemporary translation theory: whether understanding across difference should aim at agreement, mutual recognition, or the respectful maintenance of non-identity. Charles Taylor extends this discussion into the field of intercultural and political theory, explicitly addressing the legacy of Western universalism. Taylor (2011) criticizes the historical tendency of Western scholarship to treat its own conceptual vocabulary as normative, interpreting other cultures through categories that covertly impose evaluative hierarchies. Genuine understanding, he argues, requires abandoning

the assumption of conceptual sufficiency and accepting the possibility that one's own categories may be challenged or transformed through encounter with the other.

Taylor's contribution is particularly significant for translation studies insofar as it highlights the asymmetrical costs of understanding. Dominant cultures have historically assumed that translation into their own conceptual frameworks entails no loss, whereas subaltern or marginal cultures are required to bear the burden of adaptation. This insight anticipates later critiques of English as a global lingua franca and informs contemporary concerns with epistemic injustice. Taylor nevertheless insists on the necessity of some form of shared or "richer" language capable of mediating intercultural dialogue without collapsing into relativism—a problem that translation theory must confront directly.

It is within this philosophical landscape that Paul Ricœur's work on translation occupies a distinctive position (Ricœur, 2006). Ricœur explicitly thematizes translation as a practice situated between the extremes of untranslatability and total equivalence. Rejecting both the despairing conclusion that translation is impossible and the illusion of perfect adequacy, Ricœur introduces the notion of "equivalence without adequacy," emphasizing that translation is always provisional, revisable, and exposed to loss. His concept of *linguistic hospitality* reframes translation as an ethical relation: the willingness to welcome the foreign word into one's own language while accepting that this welcome inevitably transforms both host and guest.

Ricœur's approach has been widely discussed in contemporary translation studies because it provides a normative orientation without denying conflict or asymmetry. Translation, in this view, is neither a transparent transfer of meaning nor a purely strategic act of domestication. It is a strenuous confrontation with difference that demands both interpretive competence and ethical restraint. Subsequent commentators, such as Kearney, have emphasized that linguistic hospitality does not eliminate violence from translation but renders it visible and accountable, acknowledging the persistence of an untranslatable remainder as a condition of genuine encounter (Kearney, 2007: 147–159; Kearney, 2019: 1–8).

Alongside philosophical hermeneutics, modern translation studies has developed a complementary body of scholarship focused on the agency of translators, the cultural embeddedness of meaning, and the political consequences of translation choices. The so-called "cultural turn" in translation studies—associated with scholars such as Bassnett, Lefevere, and Simon—shifted attention away from formal equivalence toward functional, contextual, and ideological dimensions of translation (Bassnett and Lefevere, 1990; Simon, 1996). Translation

is increasingly understood as a form of rewriting that participates in broader systems of power, canon formation, and knowledge circulation.

Within this framework, Lawrence Venuti's critique of translator "invisibility" has been particularly influential. Venuti argues that dominant Anglo-American norms privilege fluent, domesticated translations that efface foreignness and conceal the labor and interpretive violence inherent in translation. His advocacy of "foreignizing" strategies aims not at exoticism, but at disrupting the illusion of transparency that sustains cultural hegemony. Although Venuti's position has been debated, it has decisively reframed translation as an ethical and political practice rather than a neutral service.

Earlier linguistic and philosophical contributions further complicate the picture. Sapir (1956)'s insistence that languages embody distinct social realities undermines the assumption that translation merely transfers pre-existing meanings. Benveniste's analysis of the relationship between linguistic categories and modes of thought demonstrates that even fundamental philosophical concepts are historically and linguistically situated, making full conceptual equivalence unlikely (Benveniste, 1971: 55–64). Quine (2013) radicalizes this insight through the thesis of indeterminacy of translation, arguing that multiple incompatible translation manuals may be equally compatible with observable behavior, thereby undermining any notion of uniquely correct translation.

Despite their differences, these approaches converge on a shared conclusion: translation operates under conditions of structural finitude. Absolute equivalence is unattainable, but communication remains possible through negotiation, approximation, and critical reflexivity. Translation thus becomes a paradigmatic site for examining how knowledge travels across linguistic and cultural boundaries, and how meanings are stabilized—or distorted—in the process.

This literature provides the conceptual foundation for the present chapter's translatological approach to terminology. By framing translation as a hermeneutic and ethical practice shaped by finitude, asymmetry, and agency, it becomes possible to analyze terminological translation not as a secondary technical step, but as a primary site of epistemic production. The subsequent sections build on this theoretical groundwork to explore Babel as an anthropological condition, to examine the demands of dwelling within linguistic plurality, and to articulate a methodological stance that navigates—rather than resolves—the tension between translatability and untranslatability.

### 2.3.2 English Lingua Franca Critique

The rise of English as the default medium of international scholarship is frequently justified in pragmatic terms: it is assumed to enable communication across national research communities and to maximize the circulation of results. Yet a substantial body of literature argues that English as a lingua franca (ELF) is not a neutral conduit. Rather, it operates as a socio-institutional regime that structures what can be said, how it can be said, and whose knowledge becomes legitimate, citable, and "global." This critique is particularly salient for research fields such as urban studies, planning, and anthropology, in which concepts are not merely referential labels but embedded interpretive categories tied to specific histories, institutions, and practices.

Scholars critical of ELF stress that the costs of a shared language are not distributed evenly. English dominance entails asymmetries in access to publication, in the distribution of symbolic capital, and in the power to define conceptual vocabularies. Moreover, it tends to standardize epistemic forms: argument styles, genre conventions, modes of evidence, and evaluative norms associated with Anglophone academic cultures. These dynamics are not ancillary to the production of knowledge; they are constitutive of it.

One of the most influential critiques is associated with Robert Phillipson (1992)'s theory of **linguistic imperialism**, which frames the global dominance of English as historically rooted in colonialism and reproduced through institutional structures that systematically privilege English and English-speaking centers. Phillipson argues that English dominance is sustained by "structural and cultural inequalities" that allocate resources and prestige to English at the expense of other languages.

This line of critique is valuable not only as a macro-political diagnosis but also as an analytic lens for understanding how academic fields become linguistically stratified. When English is treated as the default scholarly language, other languages are pushed into secondary status: they may remain acceptable for local dissemination, but are increasingly excluded from "international" prestige circuits, citation economies, and career evaluation systems.

For fields dealing with culturally embedded categories, such as the vocabulary of urban life, linguistic imperialism does not merely displace languages; it displaces conceptual worlds. The risk is that the epistemic center becomes the site where "general" theory is produced, while peripheral contexts become sources of data that must be rendered in center-compatible terms.

A second major critical strand focuses not simply on inequality, but on epistemic loss. Karen Bennett has characterized the dominance of English in academia as producing forms of

**epistemicide** (Bennett, 2013:169–193): the gradual curtailment or erosion of scholarly discourses in other languages, including their specialized registers, rhetorical forms, and conceptual traditions. In Bennett's account, the problem is not only that scholars must write in English; it is that they increasingly must write **as English**, conforming to Anglophone genre expectations about structure, style, and what counts as a legitimate argument. Translation, in this context, becomes an epistemic filter: terms, arguments, and modes of reasoning that do not travel smoothly into English are either simplified or discarded. What is lost is not "ornament," but conceptual nuance and alternative epistemic architectures.

This critique directly supports a terminological and hermeneutic approach: it frames translation not as an ancillary operation performed after knowledge is produced, but as one of the mechanisms through which knowledge is shaped, standardized, and sometimes impoverished.

A large empirical literature documents how English functions as a gatekeeping mechanism in academic publishing and evaluation. Lillis and Curry (2010)'s longitudinal research on multilingual scholars' publishing trajectories shows how the global status attributed to English reorganizes the labor of writing, revising, and "brokering" texts for publication, with systematic disadvantages for scholars outside Anglophone centers.

Canagarajah (2013)'s work similarly frames academic writing in English as a geopolitically situated practice: dominant textual conventions and publishing infrastructures can marginalize or appropriate knowledge from the "periphery," not necessarily by rejecting it outright, but by forcing it into communicative and rhetorical forms that alter its epistemic integrity.

For my dissertation's purposes, these works are important because they help justify why terminological precision is not simply "better translation," but part of a broader struggle over epistemic recognition. If access to "global discourse" requires conceptual domestication into English, then certain local categories—precisely those most embedded in institutions and practice—are structurally disincentivized.

Translation studies provides a further critical vocabulary for analyzing ELF. Venuti's influential critique of **domestication** and **translator invisibility** argues that fluency-oriented translation practices can erase foreignness and produce an illusion of transparency, thereby assimilating texts into the receiving culture's values and interpretive frameworks.

When applied to English-dominant academic discourse, Venuti's framework helps diagnose how "smooth" English equivalents—especially for key analytical terms—can conceal conceptual incompatibilities. The key issue is not whether a translation is readable; it is whether readability has been purchased through epistemic substitution. In urban studies, this is especially acute: terms such as 'neighborhood,' 'community,' 'district,' 'public space,' or 'informality' arrive with dense theoretical genealogies. If Chinese categories are mapped onto these terms too quickly, English becomes not only the medium of communication but the mechanism of conceptual capture.

This is precisely where ELF critiques connect to the ethical language of epistemic injustice: the interpretive resources of English-centered discourse can become insufficient to host foreign conceptual worlds without distortion. In effect, the lingua franca is not merely shared language, it becomes shared ontology.

The critiques reviewed above converge on several implications that are directly relevant to my dissertation:

**English is an epistemic infrastructure**, not merely a tool. It shapes what circulates as theory and what is relegated to local context.

**Translation under ELF conditions tends to privilege domestication**, because fluency and immediate intelligibility are rewarded in publication systems.

**The dominance of English distributes epistemic goods unevenly**, creating systematic disadvantages for scholars working from non-Anglophone conceptual traditions.

**Concepts are among the primary casualties of ELF**, because conceptual categories often resist smooth equivalence; they require hermeneutic labor, contextualization, and sometimes the deliberate retention of foreign terms.

For terminological urbanism, these arguments provide the meta-theoretical justification for treating translation as an epistemic problem and for constructing protocols that resist conceptual flattening. An anthropological stance strengthens this further: it insists that terms must be studied as practices embedded in lived worlds and institutional arrangements, not as abstract labels that can be freely swapped across languages.

## 2.4 The anthropological stance toward the city: lived experience and urban meaning

The anthropological approach to the city has emerged as a critical response to traditions of urban analysis that privilege abstraction, formal structure, and top-down models of spatial order.

Rather than treating the city as a bounded object defined by administrative limits, infrastructural systems, or morphological typologies, anthropological urbanism approaches the city as a lived condition, produced through everyday practices, social relations, and symbolic systems. This stance is foundational to the methodological orientation of the present dissertation, which understands urban terminology not only as a technical vocabulary imposed upon space, but also as an emergent semantic field rooted in experience.

This chapter reviews the principal anthropological contributions that inform this stance, focusing on three interrelated dimensions: (1) the city as lived and practiced space; (2) the primacy of everyday experience and meaning-making; (3) the methodological implications of adopting an experiential, bottom-up perspective in urban research. Together, these strands provide the conceptual foundation for the micro-to-macro, centrifugal approach developed in this dissertation.

### 2.4.1 From the City as Object to the City as Practice

A defining feature of anthropological approaches to the city is the rejection of the city as a purely formal or technical object. Instead, the city is understood as a process continuously produced through social action. This perspective resonates strongly with Henri Lefebvre (1971)'s critique of urban analysis that privileges *conceived space* over *lived space*. Lefebvre's insistence on beginning from *spatial practice* rather than abstract representation has profoundly shaped anthropological engagements with urban environments. In this view, streets, houses, and neighborhoods do not acquire meaning solely through planning categories or architectural design; they become meaningful through use, repetition, and social interaction. Anthropological urbanism therefore directs attention toward the mundane routines of dwelling, movement, and encounter—precisely the dimensions captured in this dissertation's triad of staying, moving, and relating. This shift from object to practice also entails a methodological repositioning. The city is no longer approached as a static entity to be classified, but as a dynamic field of relations. Such a perspective aligns with the dissertation's rejection of "plaqued" categories imposed from outside and its insistence on reconstructing urban meaning from within the linguistic and experiential world of city dwellers.

Geertz's concept of *thick description* provides a crucial epistemological foundation for anthropological studies of the city. Geertz argues that social analysis must move beyond surface behavior to interpret the webs of meaning within which actions are embedded (Geertz, 1973:

3–30). Applied to urban contexts, this implies that the physical form of the city—buildings, streets, neighborhoods—cannot be understood independently of the symbolic and linguistic frameworks through which they are interpreted.

Urban terminology, in this sense, is not a secondary representational layer but a primary medium through which meaning is constructed. The words residents use to describe their dwellings or neighborhoods encode moral judgments, social distinctions, and historical memory. An anthropological stance therefore requires close attention to language as a cultural practice, rather than treating it as a neutral descriptive tool.

This orientation directly informs the methodological choices of the dissertation. By analyzing Chinese urban terminology through ethnographic observation and elicitation, the research seeks to produce a "thick" account of urban categories, one that captures not only formal definitions but also the lived meanings attached to them.

### 2.4.2 Dwelling, Wayfaring, and the Experiential City as a Network of Relations

Ingold (2000)'s *dwelling perspective* further deepens the anthropological understanding of urban space by foregrounding embodied experience and movement. Ingold challenges representational models of space that treat environments as pre-existing containers. Instead, he conceptualizes space as something that comes into being through dwelling and wayfaring—through the act of living in, moving through, and engaging with the environment.

This perspective is particularly relevant for a terminological study of the city. If space is produced through practice, then the terms used to name space emerge from these practices rather than preceding them. The semantic fields of house, street, and neighborhood are not abstract categories imposed upon experience; they are crystallizations of repeated actions—staying, moving, and relating—that give shape to urban life.

Ingold's work thus supports the dissertation centrifugal method. Beginning from the house as the primary site of dwelling, extending to the street as the domain of wayfaring, and culminating in the neighborhood as a field of social relations, the research mirrors the experiential expansion through which urban meaning is constituted.

Hannerz (1980)'s conception of the city as a network of social relations rather than a territorially bounded unit further reinforces the anthropological stance adopted here. For Hannerz, urban life is defined by flows—of people, information, and practices—that exceed

formal boundaries. The city is not a container but a relational configuration continually reshaped by interaction.

This relational understanding aligns closely with the dissertation treatment of neighborhood terminology. Terms such as 社区 *shèqū* or 小区 *xiǎoqū* do not merely denote spatial units; they encode relational expectations, modes of governance, and forms of belonging. An anthropological approach reveals how such terms mediate between institutional frameworks and everyday social life. By foregrounding relations over forms, Hannerz's work also provides a corrective to urban analyses that rely excessively on morphological or administrative definitions. It supports the dissertation's argument that terminological analysis must account for how categories operate in practice, rather than assuming their meanings are fixed by official definition.

Michel de Certeau (1984)'s analysis of everyday practices introduces a further dimension to the anthropological study of the city: the distinction between strategies and tactics. Strategies belong to institutions and systems of power; tactics belong to everyday users who appropriate, reinterpret, and subvert imposed structures through practice.

In linguistic terms, this distinction illuminates the gap between institutional terminology and vernacular usage. While planning documents deploy standardized categories, residents often adapt, abbreviate, or resemanticize these terms in everyday speech. The dissertation's survey methodology, which elicits spontaneous naming practices, is explicitly designed to capture this tactical dimension of language. De Certeau's work thus underpins the dissertation's concern with epistemic justice. By attending to vernacular terminology, the research recognizes everyday linguistic practices as legitimate forms of urban knowledge, rather than treating them as deviations from official norms.

Contemporary anthropological work on the city, including that of Setha Low, further emphasizes the importance of affect, memory, and social meaning in the production of urban space. Low (2017)'s research demonstrates how places are emotionally and symbolically invested through everyday use, and how these investments shape both spatial behavior and political claims. This focus on experience reinforces the dissertation's decision to approach urban terminology through lived practice rather than through abstract classification alone. Terms related to housing, streets, and neighborhoods often carry affective dimensions—

nostalgia, stigma, pride—that cannot be captured through institutional definitions. An anthropological stance makes these dimensions analytically visible.

### 2.4.3 Implications for Terminological Urbanism

The anthropological literature reviewed in this chapter converges on a shared methodological insight: the city must be understood from within the practices that produce it. This insight provides the epistemological foundation for *Terminological Urbanism*. If urban space is constituted through dwelling, movement, and social relations, then the terms used to name these practices are not peripheral but central to urban analysis.

By grounding terminological study in anthropological perspectives, the dissertation positions language as a mediator between lived experience and institutional order. It also legitimizes vernacular terminology as a source of urban knowledge, thereby challenging translation practices that privilege formal categories at the expense of lived meaning.

In this sense, the anthropological stance does not merely supplement the dissertation's theoretical framework; it structures its entire research design. It justifies the micro-to-macro approach, the triadic organization of semantic fields, and the integration of ethnographic and elicitation-based methods. Most importantly, it anchors the ethical commitment of the dissertation: to reduce epistemic injustice by allowing the city to be understood through the words of those who inhabit it.

The theoretical background developed in this chapter provides the conceptual tools needed to treat urban terminology as an empirical object rather than a transparent medium. By redefining terms as historically and socially embedded constructs, it opens the possibility of studying how urban knowledge is organized, stabilized, and contested through language.

The next chapter translates this theoretical position into a concrete methodological strategy. Moving from conceptual reflection to operational design, it outlines how terminological analysis can be conducted systematically, combining corpus construction, semantic categorization, and comparative interpretation. In this transition, terminology becomes not only a topic of critique, but a methodological entry point for engaging urban realities across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

# CHAPTER 3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: RECLAIMING THE WORDS OF THE CHINESE CITY

Having established both the epistemic problem and the theoretical reframing of terminology, this chapter turns explicitly to methodology. Its purpose is to translate the conceptual insights developed so far into a structured and replicable research design. Rather than proposing a general method for urban analysis, the chapter focuses on the specific conditions under which terminological data can be collected, organized, and interpreted in a way that remains sensitive to linguistic and cultural difference.

The chapter introduces *Terminological Urbanism* as an operational framework, detailing the principles that guide corpus construction, term selection, and semantic categorization. Particular attention is paid to the distinction between official and vernacular language, understood not as opposing registers but as complementary domains through which urban knowledge is produced and circulated. By articulating the criteria, parameters, and limits of the approach, the chapter makes explicit the analytical choices that structure the empirical work.

In doing so, this chapter functions as a hinge between theory and analysis. It establishes the methodological infrastructure that enables the subsequent empirical chapters to move across scales, sources, and linguistic registers in a controlled and transparent manner.

## 3.1 A theory of terminology in urban studies

Understanding the realities of Chinese urban life requires speaking the city in its own words. Too often, researchers rely on English terms—'street,' 'neighborhood,' 'courtyard house,' etc.—as if they were transparent equivalents of Chinese concepts. This uncritical use of English as a scholarly *lingua franca* risks serious conceptual distortions. Words are not neutral labels shared across cultures; rather, "they serve to express reality as it is perceived […] as much as they participate in the construction of reality" (Shi and Liu, 2011). In other words, language does not merely describe the urban world—it actively makes that world, shaping how space is perceived and practiced. If we wish to truly grasp Chinese urban phenomena, we must delve into local terminology, attending to the nuances that get lost in translation. Indeed, even seemingly basic urban terms defy easy equivalence between Chinese and English. The 1987 bilingual glossary project by American and Chinese urban planners *Vocabulary of Housing, Urban Planning and Construction Management* (Geraghty and Lin, 1987) found that many common planning terms were "especially difficult to translate", including "amenity,"

"neighborhood," and "community," precisely because their meanings diverged so greatly between contexts. The translators recount both humorous and telling examples: "balloon mortgage" was rendered as "special big tail mortgage" (大尾巴贷款 *dà wěiba dàikuǎn*) to convey its actual effect, since a literal translation would bewilder Chinese readers. Similarly, "brainstorming" became "squeezing-the-brain-juices session" (绞尽脑汁会议 *jiǎo jìn nǎozhī huìyì*) – capturing the image if not the idiom. These anecdotes underscore a serious point: direct translations may be technically correct yet culturally nonsensical, masking differences in how concepts are understood. If terms as basic as "neighborhood" cannot be assumed equivalent, how much more caution should we exercise with deeper, culturally embedded words of city life?

This dissertation responds to this concern by developing what I call *Terminological Urbanism* (TU), an approach that treats the vocabulary of the city as a critical arena for understanding urban reality. Rather than importing ready-made English categories, I start with Chinese words themselves. Such an approach is inherently transdisciplinary. It draws on translation theory to interrogate how meanings shift (or fail to) across languages; on urban morphology to link those meanings to spatial forms; and on the politics of knowledge to ask who gets to define urban experience (top-down definitions from policy-makers through urban planners or grassroots colloquialisms). The goal is not simply to compile a lexicon, but to show how that lexicon is alive—evolving through social practice and power relations. As Topalov demonstrated, the language of urban life is a historical palimpsest, a multi-layered text written and rewritten over time. Words and spaces co-produce each other in this palimpsest. Accordingly, we must be alert to the sediments of meaning within each term. Only by peeling back those layers can we avoid what Topalov calls the error of "plaquing, a priori, categories foreign to [a given] space" and thereby "forbidding oneself to understand its inner logic". In short, to know the Chinese city, we must learn to think in Chinese terms—to reconstruct its conceptual world from the ground up, rather than imposing external frameworks from above.

Such an endeavor also aligns with a broader critical impulse in urban studies to "provincialize" dominant theories and vocabularies. Scholars of postcolonial and comparative urbanism have cautioned against using Euro-American models as universal yardsticks (Robinson, 2006). In the Chinese context, this caution is especially apt. The very definition of "the city" (城市 *chéngshì*) in China is unsettled and contested, making top-down generalizations problematic. Historically, Chinese discourse distinguished 城 *chéng* (walled city) from 乡 *xiāng* (countryside) not just as spatial categories but as civilizational ones—a

divide of cultural identity and political order dating back to classical times. During imperial eras, 城 *chéng* often meant a walled administrative city, and beyond the walls was 野 *yě* (wilderness), a binary laden with moral weight. Yet these boundaries were never purely geographic: they also indexed who belonged to the urban polity and who did not. In contemporary China, such lines have been repeatedly redrawn. The Mao-era 户口 *hùkǒu* system instituted a rigid urban/rural split (urban residents vs. rural peasants), but the post-1980s reforms blurred it once again (Chan, 2009). One can live in a place that looks urban without holding official urban status, and vice versa. Massive phenomena like 城中村 *chéngzhōngcūn* (villages-in-the-city) embody this ambiguity: rural enclaves nestled inside metropolises, challenging any simple urban/rural dichotomy (Oakes, 2019: 481–504). As Anagnost (2008: 497–519) observes, "the urban-rural distinction in China is both administratively enforced and experientially unstable". All this means that "the city" is a moving target in China, a composite of administrative decrees, historical memory, and lived experience. To begin analysis with a grand notion of "Chinese urbanity" would be to step into a hall of mirrors, chasing an abstraction that constantly changes.

This study therefore takes the opposite tack: it begins at the *micro* scale of everyday life and works outward. In particular, it centers on three fundamental domains of experience—staying, moving between places, and relating—corresponding, on a semantic level, to the house, the street, and the neighborhood. These are the elemental 'words of the city' in a literal and figurative sense: the arenas where urban dwellers ground their lives, move through space, and knit themselves into communities. By analyzing the terminology of each domain, we build an inductive understanding of Chinese urbanism from the ground up. This mirrors what Lefebvre (1991) urged—starting from 'spatial practice' rather than from abstract "representations of space". Likewise, anthropologist Tim Ingold's "dwelling perspective" argues that we come to know space by dwelling and wayfaring within it, tracing paths and relationships. My approach follows those paths: from the doorstep, along the alley, to the community. In doing so, it treats the Chinese city not as a pre-defined container but as an emergent totality that grows from these intimate interactions. The macro (the city at large) is understood as arising out of the micro: countless acts of dwelling, moving, and relating that, together, produce what we call "urban China". This bottom-up ethos is also a subtle critique of the technocratic 'view from above' that has dominated much urban planning (Scott, 1998). Instead of gazing at the city as a planner's map or statistical abstraction, we approach it as its inhabitants do: from within the house, along the street, in the midst of neighbors. By privileging this ground-level view, I affirm an ethics of

proximity in urban knowledge—a commitment to understanding the city through its own lexicon of everyday life.

### 3.1.1 Reading the city through its words: terminology as urban method in contemporary China

Urban studies trains us to see cities as assemblages of spaces, infrastructures, regulations, and practices. Yet before we model networks or trace morphologies, we name things. Naming is not a neutral preface to analysis; it is analysis. In China's cities, the words most residents use to orient daily life—小区 *xiǎoqū* 'residential compound', 社区 *shèqū* 'community', 街道 *jiēdào* 'subdistrict; street-level administrative unit', 里弄 *lǐlòng* 'lane neighborhood (esp. Shanghai)', 胡同 *hútòng* 'alley; traditional lane', 城中村 *chéngzhōngcūn* 'urban village', 单位 *dānwèi* 'work unit', 居民委员会 *jūmín wěiyuánhuì* 'residents' committee'—carry layers of institutional history and social meaning that do not line up neatly with the English glosses 'residential compound,' 'community,' 'street/subdistrict,' 'lane neighborhood,' 'alley,' 'urban village,' 'work unit,' or 'residents' committee.' These English "equivalents" stabilize quickly in scholarship and policy documents, but their stability is deceptive. They domesticate what counts as relevant difference, making unfamiliar urban forms legible to Anglophone readers while flattening the semantic and political tensions that animate Chinese urban life. In a field—architecture and urban studies—where English has become the *lingua franca* of publication and pedagogy across international cohorts, this domestication is not a mere lexical inconvenience: it risks mis-specifying our object of study.

This dissertation argues that the vocabulary of the Chinese city is not ancillary data but an analytic instrument. I propose a *Terminological Urbanism* that treats key Chinese terms as sites where governance, morphology, history, anthropology and everyday practice converge. Rather than a general injunction to "know the language," I make a discipline-specific claim: precise, situated analysis of Chinese urban terms—especially across three everyday terrains of *housing*, *streets*, and *neighborhood*—is necessary to produce correct urban concepts. The aim is not to police translations but to show how particular translations (or their erasures) pre-configure our models of urban life and space.

Methodologically, I take inspiration from classic urban theory—Lefebvre's production of space, Lynch's imageability, de Certeau's walking—as well as from translation studies and the ethics of knowledge production. These bodies of work converge on a simple proposition: by the time an object of study becomes legible, it has already been shaped by techniques of

simplification and selection. In linguistic terms, English-dominant scholarship selects certain meanings as "transparent," translating away institutional nuance; in planning terms, behind terminology there are institutional choices that write or re-write the urban logics. Reading the Chinese city through its words foregrounds those choices, making visible where urban form and institutional language co-produce each other.

Urbanists already accept that space is made—socially produced, governed, and practiced. Lefebvre's argument that space is a social product invites us to track the triad of spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces; terminology lives at the hinge of these categories, translating lived practice into expert discourse and back. When an analyst labels a 城中村 *chéngzhōngcūn* 'urban village', that phrase summons an Anglophone genealogy of "slums," "favelas," or "informal settlements," and with it, a policy repertoire and moral economy. But the Chinese term indexes specific land institutions, 户口 *hùkǒu* dynamics, and village shareholding companies, none of which the phrase 'village in the city' guarantees. A terminological audit is thus not semantic fastidiousness; it is a safeguard against conceptual drift.

Similarly, Kevin Lynch (1960)'s five elements—paths, edges, districts, nodes, landmarks—are often taught as universal categories of urban legibility. Yet in Beijing or Shanghai, a "path" bifurcates into 道 *dào* 'avenue, road (often major thoroughfare)', 街 *jiē* 'street', 路 *lù* 'road', 巷 *xiàng* 'lane, alley', 弄 *lòng* 'lane (esp. Shanghai usage)', 胡同 *hútòng* 'alley (Beijing-style lane)', each historically sedimented in ways that shape both morphology and memory. A "district" may be a planning 片区 *piànqū* 'area, sub-area', a lived 社区 *shèqū* 'community', or a colloquial 板块 *bǎnkuài* 'sector, area block'; these are not nested synonyms. Lynch's framework helps us ask what kinds of elements compose the image of the city, but the elements themselves are named locally. Treating those names as trivial labels, rather than as analytical units, risks swapping a universalist template for comparative method.

Translation studies gives us language to diagnose this risk. Venuti (1995) describes the "invisibility" of the translator cultivated by domesticating norms: a translation reads so fluently in the target language that its foreignness disappears along with its intellectual provocation. In Anglophone urban studies, we routinely read fluent English about Chinese spaces without registering where 'residential community' effaces 小区 *xiǎoqū* 'residential compound' or where 'neighborhood committee' misleads about the 居委会 *jūwěihuì* 'neighborhood committee' 's legal status and functions. The danger is double: conceptual misalignment (we

think we are studying a familiar object) and epistemic injustice (we sideline the categories urban residents and Chinese institutions use to make sense of their world).

Fricker (2007)'s notion of hermeneutical injustice—the unfair disadvantage that arises when shared interpretive resources are inadequate—applies directly: if the Anglophone repertoire lacks concepts for 社区 *shèqū* or 单位 *dānwèi*, then residents' experiences in those formations are harder to render intelligible in global discourse. My project addresses this deficit by treating Chinese urban terms as contributions to the global analytic lexicon, rather than as local color to be dissolved into English near-equivalents.

The purpose of insisting on Chinese terms is not purism. It is to counter the gravitational pull of English as the academic default, which otherwise domesticates urban difference into familiar categories. Scholarship on English as a lingua franca (ELF) reminds us that English now functions less as a national language than as a pragmatic medium among non-native users. This practicality, however, entices us to treat English terms as "transparent"—a property Venuti warns against. In a global field like urban studies, the result is not just the invisibility of the translator but the invisibility of alternative conceptual schemes.

Two complementary critiques focus the stakes. Phillipson's "linguistic imperialism" names the structural inequalities that naturalize English dominance in knowledge production. Philipson argues that language is a *local practice*, co-produced with space and everyday action. When we translate 社区 *shèqū* to 'community' and move on, we reproduce an Anglophone lexicon as if it were neutral, and we detach language from the local urban practices it organizes. A *Terminological Urbanism* pushes back by treating Chinese terms as active, local practices that deserve conceptual export, not only import.

Finally, framing the issue as epistemic justice clarifies the ethics: if our shared interpretive resources lack the categories to articulate residents' experiences of 小区 *xiǎoqū* governance or 城中村 *chéngzhōngcūn* redevelopment, then those experiences are harder to make legible in global debates. Improving our terminological repertoire is thus both an analytic and an ethical obligation.

### 3.1.2 *Terminological Urbanism*: Language, Power, and Production of Space

The concept of *Terminological Urbanism* (TU) proposes that the city is not only built through concrete, policy, and labor, but also constructed through language—through the terms, categories, and conceptual frameworks that give form to the urban imagination. It recognizes

that the naming of space, the circulation of planning vocabularies, and the translation of global urban concepts constitute an infrastructure of meaning that organizes urban life as effectively as any physical system.

Whereas Henri Lefebvre (1991) argued that space is socially produced, *Terminological Urbanism* extends this claim into the linguistic and epistemological register: it is through terminologies—such as modernization, community, smart city, cultural heritage, civilization—that states, planners, architects, and residents negotiate what "the city" is, what it ought to be, and who belongs within it. These words are not neutral descriptors but active operators in the production of spatial and political reality.

In the context of China's rapid urban transformation, the stakes of terminological production are particularly high. Over the past four decades, Chinese cities have become sites of both material experimentation and discursive innovation. Urban policy terms like 城中村改造 *chéngzhōngcūn gǎizào* 'urban village transformation', 社区建设 *shèqū jiànshè* 'community construction', 创新 *chuàngxīn* 'innovation', 文明 *wénmíng* 'civilization' not only guide policy but also embody ideological programs. These terms mediate between global urban discourses and Chinese sociopolitical vocabularies, generating a unique lexicon through which the urban future is imagined and legitimized.

*Terminological Urbanism* thus operates as a transdisciplinary framework, at the intersection of architecture, urban studies, anthropology, and linguistics. It invites us to read the city as a semantic field—a terrain of competing definitions, translations, and enunciations—where meaning is material and discourse is infrastructural.

To understand *Terminological Urbanism*, we must first consider how language participates in the production of space. From Michel Foucault's notion of discourse (1972) to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power (1991), scholars have demonstrated that words shape social worlds by authorizing certain forms of knowledge and excluding others. In urban contexts, this dynamic manifests in the taxonomies of planning—zoning categories, statistical classifications, slogans—which define not only how space is described, but how it is governed and inhabited.

Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1991) famously distinguishes between perceived, conceived, and lived space. *Terminological Urbanism* operates in the middle register—conceived space—where urbanists, architects, and policymakers articulate the abstract representations that structure spatial practice. Yet this linguistic register does not merely reflect

practice; it preconditions it. When a neighborhood is designated as a 棚户区 *pénghùqū* 'shantytown', 文化遗产区 *wénhuà yíchǎnqū* 'heritage zone', or a 创意园区 *chuàngyì yuánqū* 'creative cluster', the term itself exerts performative force: it reclassifies the area, alters its legal and moral status, and mobilizes resources for its transformation.

Drawing on Judith Butler's theory of performativity (1997), we can say that urban terminology performs the city into being. The naming of a district as gentrifying or innovative does not merely describe a process; it instantiates it. In China, the semantic operations of state language are particularly powerful, as terms circulate through bureaucratic hierarchies, media networks, and everyday speech. Slogans such as 建设和谐社会 *jiànshè héxié shèhuì* 'Constructing a Harmonious Society' or 建设文明城市 *jiànshè wénmíng chéngshì* 'Building a Civilized City' act as speech acts in the Foucauldian sense: they produce a moral and spatial order in which certain behaviors and designs are naturalized.

From a linguistic anthropological perspective, Michael Silverstein's (1979) concept of metapragmatics helps clarify this process. Urban terms are metapragmatic signs—they comment on and organize the very language practices that constitute urban governance. A master plan, for instance, is not only a technical document but a discursive genre that enacts authority through terminological precision. Similarly, the translation of global planning idioms—such as 'smart city', 'sustainability', or 'creative industries'—into Chinese policy vocabularies reconfigures their meaning and function.

**Terminology as Infrastructure**

To call terminology an infrastructure is to emphasize its materiality and its capacity to sustain social operations. Scholars of infrastructure studies, such as Bowker and Star (1999), describe infrastructures as relational, often invisible systems that shape the conditions of possibility for action. Terminologies function in a similar way: they are the semantic infrastructures through which actors coordinate knowledge, authority, and imagination.

In architectural and planning practice, terminological infrastructures enable interdisciplinary translation. Engineers, policymakers, and residents operate with different linguistic repertoires; the creation of shared terminologies (e.g., ecological civilization, green building, smart governance) allows these heterogeneous actors to converge on a common project, even when their understandings differ. The resulting consensus is often fragile, as the same term can carry divergent connotations across disciplines and scales.

In the Chinese context, terminological infrastructure has been central to the state's modernization project. The notion of 生态文明 *shēngtài wénmíng* 'ecological civilization', for example, institutionalized under the leadership of Hu Jintao and later Xi Jinping, operates simultaneously as an environmental policy, a moral discourse, and an urban design framework (Geall and Ely, 2018). It exemplifies how a term can condense political ideology, spatial imagination, and technological aspiration into a single operative concept.

Similarly, the widespread deployment of 智慧城市 *zhìhuì chéngshì* 'smart city' vocabulary since the 2010s illustrates how imported terms acquire local specificity. In Western discourse, the smart city often evokes neoliberal governance, digital surveillance, and corporate urbanism. In China, however, the same term articulates a state-centered vision of digital sovereignty and infrastructural integration (Caprotti and Liu, 2020). The terminological translation thus reorients global concepts within a distinct political economy.

Terminological infrastructures are also temporal. They sediment over time, becoming habitual categories through which new phenomena are perceived. Terms like 社区 *shèqū* 'community' or 城中村 *chéngzhōngcūn* 'urban village' have evolved alongside China's urbanization, carrying traces of earlier socialist and developmentalist projects. As such, *Terminological Urbanism* involves an archaeology of discourse: uncovering how past linguistic formations continue to structure present urban realities.

China offers a particularly fertile terrain for studying *Terminological Urbanism* because its urban vocabulary is deeply translational. The modernization process has required not only new infrastructures and institutions but also new words to describe them. Since the late 19th century, Chinese intellectuals and reformers have engaged in what Lydia Liu (1995) calls the translingual practice—the translation and domestication of foreign concepts into the Chinese lexicon. Terms like 社会 *shèhuì* 'society', 政治 *zhèngzhì* 'politics', and 文明 *wénmíng* 'civilization' emerged through this process of conceptual importation and adaptation.

In the reform era, the introduction of global planning paradigms—sustainable development, creative city, urban regeneration—has continued this linguistic negotiation. Yet translation is never neutral: it entails semantic struggle. When 'community' became 社区, it carried the socialist residue of 单位 *dānwèi* 'work-unit' collectivism, as well as the neoliberal overtones of self-governance (Bray, 2005). When 文明 *wénmíng* 'civilization' is invoked in campaigns for 'civilized cities', it simultaneously references Enlightenment progress, Confucian moral order, and hygienic urban aesthetics.

This polysemy makes Chinese urban terminology a site of ideological condensation. The state's capacity to define and circulate key terms constitutes a form of discursive sovereignty (Callahan, 2010). Yet these terms are also reinterpreted from below. Residents, NGOs, and online publics appropriate and parody official terms, generating counter-discourses that expose the gap between linguistic ideals and lived realities. For example, the slogan 美丽中国 *Měilì Zhōngguó* 'Beautiful China' may be reworked in online discourse to critique environmental degradation, revealing how *Terminological Urbanism* is also a field of contestation.

At the same time, the Chinese case challenges Eurocentric theories of discourse. In the Western academy, critical urban theory has long been grounded in Marxist and poststructuralist traditions (Harvey, 2013). But Chinese urbanism operates through a different semiotic economy, where linguistic performativity is entwined with state ritual, Confucian moral discourse, and socialist bureaucratic practice. The power of a term like 文明 *wénmíng* derives not only from policy but from its embeddedness in centuries-old moral cosmologies.

Thus, *Terminological Urbanism* in China requires a comparative semiotics of modernity: a framework that acknowledges the global circulation of urban concepts while attending to their local linguistic embodiments. This means tracing how a term like 创新 *chuàngxīn* 'innovation' travels from Silicon Valley to Shenzhen, acquiring meanings shaped by nationalism, developmentalism, and technocratic rationality. The resulting hybrid lexicon reveals how global urbanism is not a uniform process but a polyglot negotiation of meaning.

To think *Terminological Urbanism* is to recognize that the city is, in part, a lexical machine—a site where vocabularies generate realities. Every urban plan, slogan, and design proposal participates in this machine, translating the fluidity of social life into legible categories. In China, where the scale and speed of urban change demand continuous naming, this process is intensified. The proliferation of new terms reflects an ongoing struggle to define the meaning of modernity itself.

By bringing together insights from architecture, urban theory, anthropology, and linguistics, *Terminological Urbanism* offers a lens through which to analyze this struggle. It shows that urban transformation is always also a semantic transformation: a reorganization of the words through which people imagine, inhabit, and contest the city.

In the end, to study *Terminological Urbanism* is to ask not only what cities are made of, but what they are made of *linguistically*. It is to approach the city as a discursive terrain where meaning, power, and matter are inseparable. By foregrounding terminology as both object and method, this approach opens new pathways for transdisciplinary inquiry. It allows to study the

mutual translation between global urban theory and Chinese governance, between policy language and everyday speech, between spatial design and political rhetoric. In doing so, it contributes to a broader understanding of how words build worlds—how the city is continually redefined at the intersection of discourse, power, and material form.

If *Terminological Urbanism* is to function as a transdisciplinary research framework, it must combine the analytical tools of linguistics, anthropology, architecture, and urban studies. Methodologically, this implies three key moves:

**Semantic Mapping**. Researcher must trace the genealogy, translation, and circulation of key urban terms across documents, media, and policy texts. This involves reading planning blueprints, government speeches, and academic debates as discursive artifacts, mapping how certain words gain prominence, mutate, or disappear.

**Ethnography of Language in Practice**. Anthropological methods can capture how terminologies are used, contested, or reinterpreted by different actors. Fieldwork in Chinese planning bureaus and university urban planning departments, design firms, or neighborhood committees can reveal how abstract terms are negotiated in everyday bureaucratic and spatial practices.

**Reflexive Design Analysis**. For architects and urban designers, *Terminological Urbanism* demands reflexivity about the language embedded in their own tools—the project brief, the master plan, the competition entry. Each of these genres imposes its own semantic architecture, shaping how space is imagined and communicated.

Ultimately, *Terminological Urbanism* encourages scholars and practitioners to view language not as a supplement to materiality but as constitutive of the urban condition itself. In the Chinese city, this condition is characterized by a high degree of semantic density: layers of translation, ideology, and aspiration inscribed into the very terms of planning.

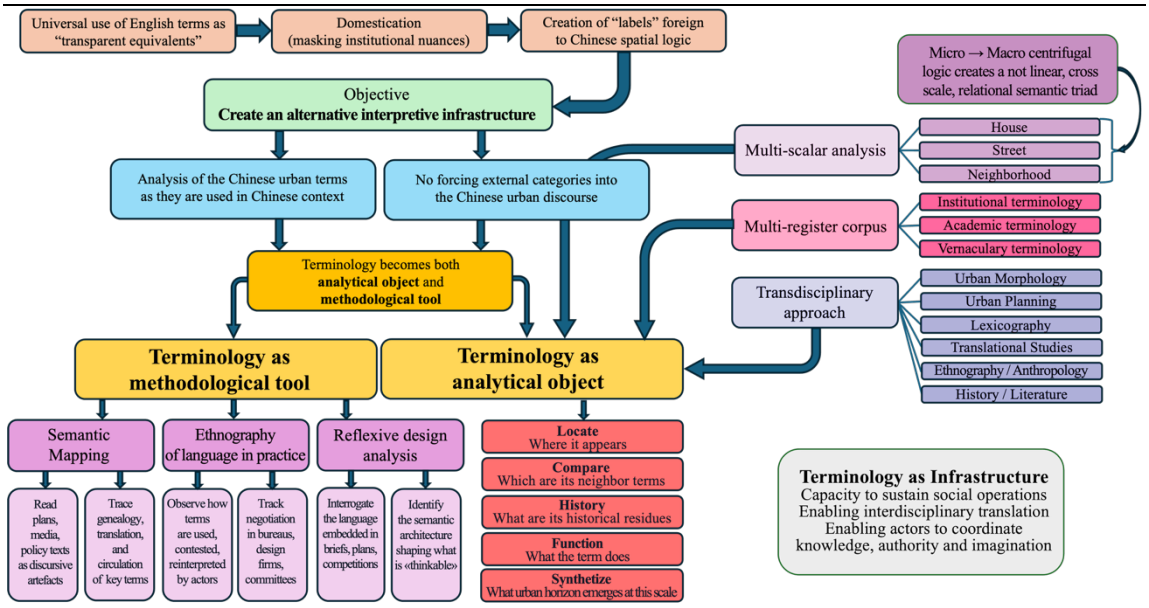



Figure 3.1 Terminological Urbanism – Theoretical Framework

**Possible applications of TU methodology to other linguistic contexts**

TU is designed to be replicable because it is not a China-only vocabulary project but an interpretive infrastructure—a portable way of producing urban knowledge under conditions of linguistic asymmetry, partial equivalence, and institutional specificity. In my dissertation, TU is explicitly formulated as an approach that "shifts from reading the city through translated categories to reading translation through the city's categories," and it does so by combining (i) a multiscalar logic (house → street → neighborhood), (ii) a multi-register corpus architecture (institutional / academic / vernacular), and (iii) a translation protocol that treats equivalence as a hypothesis to be demonstrated rather than a default assumption.

This package is what makes TU transferable beyond Chinese: it can be redeployed wherever urban research or planning operates through a dominant lingua franca (often English) that stabilizes categories "too quickly," creating legibility while mis-specifying the object. Replicability does not mean producing the same "three semantic fields" everywhere; it means applying the same methodological logic to reconstruct local semantic architectures and to discipline translation as a research operation. At the level of procedure, TU can be exported as a sequence of steps that can be applied to any language pair: (1) identify a limited set of elemental semantic fields anchored in everyday urban practice (in my case: staying / moving / relating), and use them as a controlled gateway to scale; (2) build a triangulated corpus that separates (but relates) institutional terminology (legal/administrative and policy categories),

academic terminology (scholarly mediation and imported conceptual scaffolding), and vernacular terminology (everyday naming and evaluative descriptors), treating the corpus "not as a glossary" but as an analytical device for comparison and hermeneutic diagnosis; (3) map the internal structure of each semantic field through semantic clustering, genealogies, and category relations, in order to make visible where governance, morphology, history, and lived practice intersect; (4) apply a translation protocol that explicitly diagnoses degrees of transparency and risk—what my dissertation formalizes as partial transparency, false transparency, and radical non-transparency—and that allows the researcher to choose, justify, and revise translation strategies (glossing, qualification, transliteration, annotation) rather than forcing uniform English equivalents; (5) produce outputs oriented to use, not only argument, namely parallel representations where official and vernacular designations coexist, and where synthesis is achieved at the level of analysis and planning judgment rather than by unifying vocabularies.

Because this workflow is modular, the method can be adapted to diverse contexts: Japanese, Korean, Arabic, Hindi, Persian, Russian, Spanish, or multilingual African urban settings—any case where key urban terms are embedded in legal regimes, planning standards, property classifications, or everyday moral geographies that do not map neatly onto Anglophone categories. The point of export is therefore not "to translate local terms into English," but to let the local lexicon function as a theory-generating resource capable of reshaping the Anglophone conceptual repertoire—what I describe in the conclusion as a need to "de-provincialize" the English lexicon of urbanism by building a broader comparative repertoire of semantic infrastructures. Concretely, the replicability of TU is strongest in three application scenarios. First, it can be used in comparative urbanism across non-English languages: TU offers a disciplined way to compare cities without forcing equivalence too early, by treating translation friction as a diagnostic indicator of institutional divergence and by preserving asymmetries of authority and function between registers (for example, the legal operability of official categories versus the evaluative flexibility of vernacular descriptors). Second, TU can be applied as a method for English-language academic writing by non-Anglophone scholars, including Chinese scholars who must publish in English. In this scenario, TU functions as an anti-domestication toolkit: rather than encouraging authors to "find the English word," it trains them to show their work—stating translation choices, stabilizing reference through strategic repetition of the source term, and accepting non-uniform renderings when conceptual consistency requires it. My "translational gradient" model—developed through terms that vary

in materiality, governance embedding, and social intentionality—generalizes as a writing discipline: different terms will require stabilization, contextual flexibility, or deliberate destabilization of English norms depending on what kind of object they are and what kind of institutional work they do. Third, TU can be translated into planning pedagogy and professional training, precisely because it reframes planning as a linguistic discipline where "categories do work." In the dissertation, I formalize TU as a set of classroom practices that are immediately portable: terminological audits (identify where English terms mis-specify local objects and propose annotated strategies), semantic field mapping (move from micro-practices to macro-governance without premature abstraction), translation-as-method assignments (document interpretive decisions, sources, and semantic loss/gain), and platform-based learning (trace a term across scales and source types so that interpretation remains auditable). These pedagogical practices are not China-specific; they can be used wherever cohorts are trained through "ready-made translated categories" that reproduce conceptual injustice through habitual vocabularies. Importantly, TU's replicability does not depend on achieving comprehensive convergence between registers. On the contrary, a central methodological principle is that planning requires stable categories for legal operability, while urban life generates flexible and relational descriptors; enforced convergence erases asymmetries and turns lived categories into "noise." TU instead proposes a dual-layer model that retains official categories as operative governance systems while documenting socially meaningful descriptors as analytical evidence that can improve diagnosis, communication, and implementation monitoring; and it introduces a decision rule of conditional stabilization—vernacular terms can be treated as recognized descriptors when they show consistent usage, stable spatial reference, and sustained circulation, not as legal reclassifications but as interpretive resources that bridge expert and everyday understandings. This dual-layer + conditional-stabilization logic is highly transferable because it can be applied to any planning system that must balance statutory clarity and social intelligibility. Finally, TU's replicability is enhanced by the dissertation's proposed infrastructural outputs: a digital platform and a pedagogy. The platform is conceived explicitly as a collectively usable tool "beyond individual expertise," allowing users to navigate from a term to spatial referents, relevant cartographic layers, and linked sources so that interpretive claims remain transparent rather than asserted; critically, it is "not a glossary on a map," but a cartographic interface to semantic infrastructures that stages translation as a chain of references. This model can be redeployed in other linguistic contexts by swapping the term sets and sources while preserving the interface logic: term ↔ scale ↔ place ↔ institution ↔ source ↔

translation note. In doing so, TU becomes not only a method for research but also a public-facing infrastructure for multilingual urban literacy—especially valuable for scholars and practitioners who operate between local languages and English.

The method's replicability lies in its architecture: a controlled multiscalar entry point, a multi-register corpus, an explicit translation protocol, and outputs designed for reuse. Because these components can be implemented independently and recombined, TU can travel across languages and regions as a practical way to resist conceptual flattening, to keep institutional specificity and vernacular counter-meanings in view, and to enlarge urban studies' conceptual repertoire by letting non-Anglophone terminologies act as sources of theory rather than as local residues to be translated away.

## 3.2 Lexicographic positioning of the research

Any research that addresses a specialised subject field within a specific cultural context necessarily confronts a preliminary but decisive problem: the language through which that subject field is articulated. Concepts do not precede words in any neutral or transparent way; rather, they are stabilised, transmitted, and contested through terminological choices that reflect disciplinary traditions, institutional frameworks, and everyday practices. For this reason, scholarship dealing with culturally situated domains has long recognised the strategic importance of lexical work, whether in the form of glossaries, vocabularies, or dictionaries, as an enabling infrastructure for both research and interpretation.

The compilation of lexical resources has historically served a mediating function. From the earliest glosses produced by medieval scholars to clarify technical terms in Roman law and theological texts, lexicographic activity has been oriented toward aligning interpretation across heterogeneous audiences—experts, semi-experts, and lay readers—who do not share the same linguistic or conceptual competences. Modern lexicographic theory has systematised this intuition by conceptualising dictionary making as a user-oriented practice, whose legitimacy depends on its capacity to support specific acts of understanding under conditions of partial knowledge.

Although the present research does not aim at producing a dictionary in the strict sense, words and definitions occupy a central methodological position throughout the dissertation. Treating key terms as *lemmas* and their explanations as *glosses*—independently of the final structure of the work—provides a disciplinary framework that supports methodological rigour without reducing the research to a lexicographic product. This positioning requires engaging

explicitly with the theoretical foundations of contemporary lexicography and terminology studies, particularly as they apply to specialised, culturally embedded domains.

### 3.2.1 Practical Lexicography and the Status of Specialised Dictionaries

Modern lexicography distinguishes between lexicography as a practical activity and lexicography as a theoretical discipline. Over the last decades, a substantial body of scholarship has argued that lexicography should no longer be treated as a sub-branch of applied linguistics, but as an autonomous field concerned with the design, structure, and evaluation of lexical tools. Within this perspective, dictionary making is not derivative linguistic work but a form of knowledge engineering aimed at facilitating access to meaning in concrete usage situations (Bergenholz, Nielsen, and Tarp, 2009).

This reconceptualisation has been particularly influential in the field of specialised lexicography, often discussed under the label of Language for Special Purposes (LSP). Research in this area emphasises that specialised dictionaries cannot be evaluated according to general linguistic completeness, but must instead be assessed in relation to the functions they serve: assisting users in understanding texts, producing specialised discourse, translating between languages, or acquiring conceptual knowledge. The functional approach to lexicography foregrounds the *user situation* as the primary criterion guiding lemma selection, definitional depth, and access structures.

From this standpoint, the lexicographic dimension of the present research can be described as *practical* rather than exhaustive. The objective is not to map the entire vocabulary of urban studies, but to provide a controlled and theoretically informed treatment of a limited set of terms that play a strategic role in structuring urban understanding. This aligns the project with what lexicographic theory describes as a **minimising** and **sub-field-oriented** approach, privileging analytical depth over lexical coverage.

### 3.2.2 Terminology, Concepts, and the Limits of Equivalence

A second body of relevant literature comes from terminology science and terminography, which historically developed in close relation to technical standardisation. Classical terminology theory, associated with the Vienna School, conceptualised terminology work as concept-driven: terms are assigned to clearly delimited concepts organised within a system, and the primary goal of terminography is to ensure unambiguous communication within expert communities.

While this model has proven effective in highly formalised technical and scientific domains, it has been widely criticised for its limited applicability to fields in which concepts are contested, historically layered, or institutionally embedded. Subsequent theoretical developments in terminology studies have therefore challenged the assumption of stable concept systems, emphasising instead the variability of meaning across contexts, genres, and user groups. Sociocognitive and corpus-based approaches have shown that specialised terms often exhibit polysemy, prototype effects, and semantic drift, particularly when they circulate beyond narrowly defined expert communities.

This critique is especially relevant for urban studies, where many key terms—such as those referring to housing, neighbourhoods, administrative units, or spatial practices—operate simultaneously as technical categories, governance instruments, and elements of everyday language. In such contexts, the mere selection of lexical equivalents across languages risks producing false synonymy, masking differences in institutional function or lived meaning. Terminological equivalence, in other words, may be only apparent.

### 3.2.3 Culture-Dependent Knowledge and Lexicographic Implications

Lexicographic scholarship has addressed this problem through the distinction between **culture-dependent** and **culture-independent** knowledge domains (Bergenholtz and Tarp, 1995: 61-62). In culture-independent fields—typically associated with natural sciences or certain branches of technology—the subject matter is assumed to remain stable across linguistic communities, making equivalence-based translation relatively unproblematic. In culture-dependent fields, by contrast, concepts are shaped by local legal systems, administrative practices, social norms, and historical trajectories.

Urban studies occupies an ambiguous position within this typology. While it incorporates technical and scientific elements (e.g. construction technologies, infrastructural standards), its core categories are deeply entangled with culturally specific forms of governance, social organisation, and spatial experience. Architecture provides a paradigmatic example: although grounded in technical principles, it becomes culture-dependent once it acquires symbolic, ritual, and institutional meanings.

In such domains, lexicographic practice cannot rely solely on bilingual equivalence or term substitution. Definitions must instead incorporate contextual explanation, usage notes, and references to institutional frameworks in order to avoid conceptual distortion. From a lexicographic perspective, this implies that explanatory depth is not an optional enrichment but

a methodological necessity. The present research adopts this stance explicitly, focusing less on how terms are normatively prescribed by experts and more on how they are perceived, used, and negotiated by culturally situated actors.

### 3.2.4 Bilingualism, Minimisation, and Sub-Field Orientation

Nowadays practical lexicography has reached clear definitions that are unavoidable in the preparation of any research concerning a specialized language. According to Nielsen's definitions (Nielsen, 1994: 34-42), the LSP dictionaries can be classified in: (a) monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual (according to the number of languages they cover); (b) maximizing or minimizing (according to number of terms they cover within a subject field); (c) multi-field, single-field or sub-field (according to the extension of the matter they cover).

On the basis of these classifications, the lexicographic positioning of the research can be specified along four axes. First, the project is **bilingual**, insofar as Chinese terms are analysed and defined through English. This bilingualism is not conceived as a search for perfect equivalence, but as a structured encounter between distinct semantic and institutional worlds. Second, the research is **minimising**: it deliberately restricts its lexical scope to a limited number of terms that are analytically central to the understanding of the city. Third, it is **sub-field oriented**, focusing on specific semantic domains within the broader lexicon of urban studies rather than attempting comprehensive coverage. Fourth, it is explicitly **culture-dependent**, acknowledging that the meanings under investigation cannot be detached from their social and institutional contexts.

These characteristics collectively define the project as lexicographically rigorous without being lexicographically exhaustive. The aim is not to stabilise a normative vocabulary, but to render visible the semantic structures through which urban reality is conceptualised and communicated.

### 3.2.5 Lexicography, Urban Studies, and Transdisciplinarity

The need for such a positioning is reinforced by the epistemological status of urban studies itself. As a field, urban studies is inherently multi-disciplinary, encompassing planning, architecture, geography, sociology, anthropology, and history. This diversity generates persistent problems of conceptual definition, methodological coherence, and terminological consistency. Rather than treating these problems as obstacles, the present research approaches them as an opportunity for transdisciplinary inquiry.

Transdisciplinarity is not only a research strategy across disciplinary boundaries, basically a holistic method of problem-solving, but, according to the *Charter of Transdisciplinarity* (1994), a space for synthesis across and beyond disciplines:

> The transdisciplinary vision is resolutely open insofar as it goes beyond the field of the exact sciences and demands their dialogue and their reconciliation with the humanities and the social sciences as well as with art, literature, poetry and spiritual experience (Article 5).

with a transcultural approach toward the Otherness:

> No single culture is privileged over any other culture. The transdisciplinary approach is inherently transcultural (Article 10).

and a rigorous, open and tolerant attitude toward the object of research:

> Rigor, opening and tolerance are the fundamental characteristics of the transdisciplinary attitude and vision. Rigor in argument, taking into account of all existing data, is the best defense against possible distortions. Opening involves an acceptance of the unknown, the unexpected and the unpredictable. Tolerance implies acknowledging the right to ideas and truths opposed to our own. (Article 14).

The ongoing division and compartmentalization of knowledge in increasingly numerous sub-disciplines implies the existence of numerous realities to which an object of study may pertain. Interdisciplinarity, that seeks coherence between the different forms of knowledge and works at the level of their intersections, has the goal of reaching a single form of knowledge through the synthesis of their overlapping aspects, with a tendency toward the simplification of the knowledge itself. Transdisciplinarity, on the other hand, asserts that the space between and beyond disciplines is as fertile as the one inside the disciplinary boundaries and the one within their intersections, and refers to the dynamics of interaction between the different levels of reality, whereas disciplinary research concerns one single level or portions of it. Therefore, transdisciplinarity, not having any ambition of creating a new (super)-discipline, cannot disregard disciplinary knowledge, being constantly nourished by the disciplinary research. The risk of considering transdisciplinarity a new super-discipline, a sort of closed system in contradiction with its instance of permeability between disciplinary boundaries, was inherent, according to Nicolescu, to the same definition of Jean Piaget, who coined the term in 1970 in the conference "*L'interdisciplinarité – Problèmes d'enseignement et de recherche*", organized by OCSE in collaboration with the French Ministry of National Education and the University of Nice:

> Finally, at the stage of interdisciplinary relations, one may hope to see the emergence of a higher stage that would be "transdisciplinary," one that would not merely achieve interactions or reciprocal exchanges

> among specialized fields of research, but would locate these connections within a total system without stable boundaries between disciplines. (Piaget, 1972: 170; my trans.).

Lima de Freitas, Morin, and Nicolescu introduced, instead, the concept of 'beyond the disciplines' that he developed from his experience as a quantum physicist. In Piaget's definition, though, it is clearly stated for the first time the principle of 'instability of boundaries', fundamental for the future developments of the concept.In brief, transdisciplinarity refuses to deny complexity in favor of a simplified/unified form of knowledge, but, through a methodological coherence, tends to include in the research also the margins of knowledge, neglected in the interdisciplinary approach.

I find this approach extremely useful for my work, since my research spans different subjects, connected to the typical disciplines of the urban environment (urbanism, urban planning, urban form) and the urban objects (architecture), to other collateral disciplines describing and representing the landscape, such as geography and topography, and other marginal disciplines, related to a more humanistic interpretation of the city environment and activities, such as anthropology and sociology, both in synchronic and diachronic perspectives and all under the magnifying lens of the linguistic methods of investigation. What I want to pursue, though, is not the idealization of the city as the resultant of a macroscopic operation of overlapping the relevant portions of these disciplines, but the comprehension of a **concrete, factual, historic and describable phenomenon, by means of the linguistic representation of the people who experience it**.

### 3.2.6 Concluding Positioning

In conclusion, the lexicographic positioning of this research can be summarised through a set of interrelated characteristics: it is **bilingual**, **minimising**, **sub-field oriented**, **culture-dependent**, and **transdisciplinary**. These features reflect both methodological choices and theoretical commitments. By situating itself at the intersection of lexicography, terminology studies, and urban research, the project treats language not as a secondary representational layer but as a primary analytical site. Lexicography, in this sense, becomes not an ancillary tool but a critical framework for investigating how urban realities are named, structured, and rendered intelligible across cultural and linguistic boundaries.

## 3.3 The translatological approach to terminology

In this chapter, I address the theoretical and practical problem of translation after Babel, taking the Genesis narrative as a symbolic moment of awareness: an awakening to both the limits and the opportunities that emerge when interpersonal communication shifts from the presumed transparency of an Adamitic language to the laborious negotiation of meaning after the confusion of tongues and the dispersion of peoples. The post-Babel world is a world in which people do not automatically understand each other and are tempted to see the Other primarily as foreign. Against this temptation, I locate possible answers in hermeneutics: beginning with Gadamer's notion of a "fusion of horizons" (together with major critiques by Derrida and Habermas), moving through Taylor's call to abandon the Western habit of "understanding" the other as a covert imposition of norms, and arriving at Ricœur's account of translation as a strenuous confrontation between languages and cultures that nevertheless aims at recognition and reciprocity. Ricœur's "linguistic hospitality" offers a compelling point of departure for exploring other cultures beyond the nightmare of untranslatability that haunts translators even before they begin. Only by accepting the impossibility of a perfect translation can the translator—understood here also as an interpreter of alterity—find a sober form of happiness in the practice itself.

### 3.3.1 Babel and the finitude of the human condition

The Tower of Babel is among the most symbolically dense episodes in Genesis and has long generated archaeological, philosophical, and linguistic readings. Its enduring appeal rests above all on the way it frames linguistic diversification as a source of confusion and fracture. Before Babel, humanity shares "one lip" and "the same words": a condition that enables large-scale coordination, technological development, and collective projects. The plan to build a city and a tower "reaching the heavens" expresses technical mastery and a desire to preserve unity by "making a name," preventing dispersion. The divine response interrupts that desire for unity. Importantly, the narrative presents this intervention less as punishment for intrinsic evil than as a correction to a distorted order: the builders become absorbed in their own project and forget the task of inhabiting the earth, prioritizing self-consolidation over the broader mandate of life in the world.

A key (and sometimes underestimated) element is that YHWH's intervention targets the conditions of cooperation. The tower is possible because mutual intelligibility makes

coordinated action frictionless: shared language supports not only social organization but also technological "breakthroughs" (brickmaking and mortar). Genesis implies a causal link between linguistic unity and seemingly unlimited collective capacity. The *adam*, unified by language and culture, becomes an *am*—a people with collective identity and political agency. Faced with that unchecked potential, dispersion alone would be insufficient: as long as one language persists, unity could be reconstituted and the project resumed. Hence the divine act strikes language itself first.

The drama of this rupture is captured in Unamuno's image of Babelian masons who, while exchanging instructions as usual, suddenly find each other incomprehensible: work halts, cooperation collapses, and social cohesion dissolves (Unamuno, 1995). As Wenham (1987) emphasizes, when language fractures, community life and technical cooperation are imperiled because trust and coordinated labor become fragile or impossible.

The Hebrew verb *balal*, typically rendered 'to confuse,' also means 'to mix' or 'to blend,' a term used for preparing offerings (mixing flour and oil). The semantic nuance suggests not merely chaotic noise but a loss of homogeneity: language becomes heterogeneous, 'diluted' rather than simply destroyed. The narrative does not identify the builders' language, but the tradition of an *Ursprache*—a language in which signifier and signified are fused without ambiguity—helps clarify the symbolic stakes. In such a tongue, words function with near-mechanical efficiency: will is translated into action with minimal interpretive residue. Neher (1981) describes this as an "economic unity" of language, optimized for efficacy rather than expression, debate, or reflection.

Why would such linguistic efficiency become problematic? The early chapters of Genesis can be read as repeatedly revealing the inadequacy of the word (*devar*) for genuine dialogue, between humans and between humans and God. A self-referential, tautological language may excel at orders and technical tasks, but it cannot sustain confrontation with alterity, cultivate affect, or enable self-questioning. It risks producing uniformity of action and thought, making otherness unintelligible and transcendence unnecessary. In Neher's account, the divine act breaks the insulation of the word, reopening language to plurality: meanings diversify; the word detaches from the thing; and interpretation becomes unavoidable.

This reframes Babel as more than the scattering of peoples. It is also the scattering of persons into non-transparent communicative worlds. The anthropological shock is immediate: the speaker who is no longer understood discovers that shared references, values, and assumptions cannot be taken for granted. Meaning now depends on negotiation, on what is

intended, what can be heard, and what can be situated within distinct horizons. Humanity loses "communicative innocence." Where utterance once seemed frictionless—dangerously close to creation itself—speech now requires selection, weighing, and interpretive labor.

The second component of the intervention—dispersion (*puts*)—shifts the focus from individuals to collectives. Dispersion is both fragmentation and the condition for the emergence of new peoples and new environments of meaning, each destined to develop autonomous linguistic forms. The builders' fear is realized: unity is undone. Yet this is not only loss. As Jervolino (2008) suggests, Babel can be read as a "blessing" insofar as it sacrifices the fantasy of one language that refuses difference and also rejects the myth of translation without remainder. Diversity becomes an intrinsic, irreversible condition of human life.

This condition raises the central question for any post-Babel anthropology of translation: how can people understand those whose language and culture are distant? How can one endure the finitude of one's own language once plurality becomes visible? The awareness of linguistic finitude generates a productive tension: the intuition that other languages might disclose other possibilities of knowledge, alongside the recognition that such knowledge will remain partial. Rather than paralyzing, this incompleteness can propel hermeneutic labor—comparison, critique, and self-revision. Translation thus becomes not merely a technical operation but a basic dimension of human existence in a world structured by difference.

### 3.3.2 Dwelling in the Babel of tongues

The post-Babel awakening is a hermeneutic shift of epochal scale. The *homo Babelicus* cannot pretend not to know dispersion and confusion; they become constitutive traits of *Dasein*. From this new perspective, the subject must engage in a process of working-through (*Durcharbeitung*): moving from a monologuing subject—self-sufficient but immobilized in self-referentiality—toward a dialoguing subject, whose path is slower, more tiring, and often painful. Dialogue here is a route of approach to the Other that inevitably returns the subject to themselves, changed.

In the pre-Babel condition, dialogue is unnecessary because the presumed correspondence between sign and reality makes interpretation superfluous. The other is not encountered as other; communication is predictable and mirror-like. After Babel, the subject confronts divergence. Even when the subject "recognizes" themselves in the other, they do not recognize themselves as before, because alterity is reciprocal: the other communicates otherness back, producing a transformed self-relation—Rimbaud's "Je est un autre." This encounter with alterity can

produce two opposite reactions: (1) negation of the other, through dissimulation or non-recognition, an attempted retreat to monologue that is now weakened by the loss of linguistic transparency; or (2) the desire to understand the other, recognizing that interpreting difference is also a condition of understanding oneself. The second path is the one hermeneutics attempts to theorize and discipline.

Gadamer (2006) rejects absolute knowledge and denies that universal history can be grasped from a single horizon. Meaning is generated through intersubjective communication, not by an interpreter's attempt to annihilate their situatedness in pursuit of objectivity. Understanding is historically effected: it begins from stratified pre-understandings (*Vorverständnisse*), and the interpreter's concrete hermeneutic situation—culture, language, education, and so on—is not a removable obstacle but the enabling condition of interpretation.

For intercultural dialogue, Gadamer's "fusion of horizons" proposes that understanding arises when interlocutors establish a broader context in which shared meaning becomes possible. The first confrontation is with one's own tradition: the interpreter must test prejudices and allow the tension between past and present to appear, rather than cover it with naive assimilation. The goal is not simply to assert a standpoint but to be transformed through a dialogical process whose end is agreement, not domination.

Two influential critiques clarify what is at stake. Derrida accuses Gadamer of retaining a residual aspiration to ultimate meaning or truth, inadequate after the critique of metaphysics that replaces truth with play and interpretation. For Derrida, there are no final truths, only perspectives; attempts to "overcome" the other's difference risk becoming violence, precisely because ethical relation depends on the other remaining other. Habermas, by contrast, worries less about erasing difference than about uncritical deference to tradition: while he accepts that understanding begins with prejudices, he emphasizes reflection's capacity to challenge prejudices rooted in force rather than reason. *Fusion of horizons* can become subjugation if it naturalizes inherited authority and masks domination.

Despite these objections, Gadamer's emphasis on good-faith dialogue remains productive: understanding requires openness to the other's claim to truth and willingness to be displaced by it. This is where Taylor (2011) extends the Gadamerian impulse into an explicitly political and cross-cultural register. In Taylor's account, "understanding the other" becomes a central challenge for contemporary politics and social science because the old Western model treated its own culture as a norm and interpreted other cultures as immature deviations. The contemporary challenge is different: to acknowledge the humanity of other ways of life while

continuing to inhabit one's own. Taylor insists on a crucial distinction: knowledge of an object is typically one-sided and oriented toward control, whereas understanding another culture is two-sided, involving listening and accepting the other's possible critique of the conceptual schemes used to interpret them. Understanding is "party-dependent": it changes as the goals, conditions, and relations between parties change. Genuine understanding may require redefining one's aims; otherwise "dialogue" becomes manipulation.

At the level of language, Taylor argues that interlocutors need some "richer language" or bridge vocabulary that can prevent intercultural encounter from collapsing into cacophony. Such a shared medium can function as a tool of critique, mitigating ethnocentric distortion without falling into relativism (Jonkers, 2018: 3–22). Yet Taylor also highlights the asymmetry of "identity cost": dominant groups have historically assumed they already possessed the vocabulary required to interpret the ruled or conquered, sustaining a fiction that real encounter would "brutally refute." Genuine understanding demands allowing oneself to be "interpellated" by the other—recognizing difference as a viable alternative rather than an error.

A practical difficulty remains: a culturally neutral bridge-language is rarely available in any robust sense. The more distant the cultures, or the less one side has adopted the other's vocabulary under subaltern conditions, the more the shared lexicon frays and the process risks returning to zero. In such situations, the temptation is to introduce shortcuts: a "puppet lexicon" that looks neutral but imports one side's categories, reviving control, appropriation, or distortion under the banner of mutuality. This is precisely where translation becomes unavoidable—not merely as a vehicle for exchanging terms, but as a disciplined confrontation with the absence of an impartial semantic third.

If understanding requires language, then translation becomes a primary hermeneutic instrument: it mediates not only between source and target languages but between cultural worlds. Translation, in its basic sense of "carrying across," confronts a barrier whose "height" depends on both interpretive competence and ethical posture. The hermeneutic tool operates in two complementary phases: an active phase of interpretation (linguistic competence, cultural knowledge, contextual reconstruction) and a passive phase of receptivity (the interpreter's readiness to accept critique by the interpreted other and to revise interpretive choices accordingly). In this second phase, the interpreted "object" is treated as a subject capable of judging the translator's criteria and decisions, even if it cannot evaluate the target text as native

speech. Without such confrontation, the translator may unconsciously (or strategically) produce a cultural "puppet," molding the other to fit predetermined narratives.

Ricœur (2006) argues that the translator's first fear—before beginning—is the presumption of non-translatability: the anticipation that adequacy is impossible. Perfect translation is unattainable because no third language or semantic original stands above both source and target, guaranteeing identity of meaning. What exists instead is critical reading and retranslation, ongoing attempts at "equivalence without adequacy". Hence the translator must mourn the fantasy of perfect equivalence. Only by processing this loss can translation become a "source of happiness": not triumph over difference, but a reasonable horizon of dialogical striving.

Ricœur's most distinctive concept here is "linguistic hospitality": the pleasure of dwelling in the other's language balanced by the pleasure of receiving the foreign word at home. Linguistic hospitality displaces both absolutist adequacy and the loyalty/infidelity obsession, replacing them with an ethic of welcoming otherness without allowing one side to erase the other. The barrier becomes a threshold: host and guest enter relation without becoming identical. This posture also relativizes the "sacredness" of the mother tongue, enabling distance from one's own language and de-provincializing it.

This is not an irenic fantasy. Translation is a site of confrontation where every choice entails some degree of violence: toward the text, the author, the translator, and the reader whose trust is at stake. Hospitality itself contains violation, because to host is to frame the guest within one's space. As Kearney (2019) observes in a Ricœurian spirit, an "untranslatable kernel" persists in every transaction; host and guest languages are never the same—and should not be. The question that follows is epistemological and political: if language is the medium of understanding, what does the untranslatable remainder imply for scientific and intercultural dialogue? Can cross-cultural understanding be grounded merely in shared membership in humankind?

### 3.3.3 Straddling translatability and untranslatability

To move from general hermeneutics to method, a minimal definition helps: translation is a communicative activity that transfers information across linguistic boundaries (Bassnett, 2011). Three terms matter: activity, information, and boundary.

**Translation as activity and agency**

Treating translation as an activity means treating the translator as a social actor with agency: a temporally constructed engagement that reproduces and transforms structures through habit, imagination, and judgment within changing contexts (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 962–1023). The translator's agency appears in at least three dimensions:

**Social role and responsibility**: the translator mediates between source and target languages, but also between author and users, practicing a techne that cannot be reduced to impulse or ad hoc demand. Translation becomes an instrument of knowledge production on which users' understanding depends.

**Strategic reconstruction**: the translator cannot merely apply fixed schemes. Each situation demands renewed operational and interpretive strategy.

**Choice under constraints**: translation requires selecting solutions to technical problems (what and how) and to cultural/political problems (why and for whom). These phases overlap in practice.

Modern debates about the translator's "invisibility" clarify the stakes. The ideal of transparency—translation as a pane of glass—is summarized by Shapiro (as quoted by Venuti, 1995) as the production of a text that does not appear translated. Venuti criticizes this norm in Anglo-American publishing as a domestication that erases foreignness for the sake of fluency, masking cultural domination and economic exploitation while selecting texts that can be smoothly assimilated. In response, Venuti advances "foreignizing" translation as a strategic disruption of receiving cultural codes: not because foreignness is metaphysically good, but because it can function as critique against homogeneity and ethnocentrism.

**Translation and the nature of "information"**

If translation transfers information, what counts as "information" is inseparable from culture. Sapir (1956)'s classic claim is that no two languages represent the same social reality; language habits predispose choices of interpretation and thus guide experience, making cross-cultural understanding dependent on grasping communal life as mirrored in words. Benveniste (1971) similarly examines how categories of thought relate to categories of language, arguing that what can be said delimits what can be thought. His discussion of "being" in Greek philosophy suggests that metaphysical conceptualization is enabled by specific linguistic affordances that cannot be presumed universal; his Ewe example underscores how translation may confront conceptual non-equivalence. Crucially, Benveniste also warns that such

comparisons are easily "egocentric": they reveal as much about the analyst's language as about the other's, and risk distorting the other unless undertaken with methodological caution.

Nida (1964) stresses that language cannot be understood outside the cultural framework of which it is an integral part, shifting attention from word-level "faithfulness" toward contextual adequacy. Bassnett and Lefevere (1990) describe the broader shift in translation studies from sameness/equivalence to "equivalent effects" and functional considerations: the target text should function in the target culture as the source text functioned in the source culture, even if that requires adaptation; and "faithfulness" may end up referring as much to commissioners' demands as to texts. This reorientation fuels the "cultural turn" of translation studies, treating texts as embedded in networks of source and target cultural signs rather than as isolated linguistic objects (Bassnett and Lefevere, 1998). It also intersects with a redefinition of cultural studies that challenges supposed universals as historically tied to specific power positions, recognizing translation as a political act whose choices shape value and power relations (Simon, 1996).

**Translation and boundaries**

Translation presupposes boundaries—linguistic, cultural, epistemic. "Boundary" can mean barrier or threshold, protection or interface, limit or point of contact. In linguistic terms, boundaries include intralinguistic and interlinguistic limits; co-text/text relations; the translatable / untranslatable divide; register and discourse constraints; domestication / foreignization tensions; and ethnocentric limits. Translation always works on these boundaries, producing provisional answers under constraint. Surrender—renouncing agency—is the alternative.

The boundary most central to translation theory is that between translatability and untranslatability. From Cicero and Jerome through Dryden and du Bellay, the dilemma is formalized by German Romanticism. Humboldt (1977) frames translation as an "impossible task," doomed either to cling to the original at the expense of the target language or to cling to national taste at the expense of the original, with no stable medium between. In the twentieth century, the debate becomes philosophical and political. Gramsci (1975) proposes a "dual-track" translatability: perfect translatability is impossible, but civilizations can be mutually translated in their basic essentials through attention to cultural functions, even if literal equivalence fails.

Catford (1965) distinguishes linguistic untranslatability (lack of formal equivalents) from cultural untranslatability (lack of situational feature equivalents), illustrating how terms like

*sauna* resist translation not merely because of words, but because of institutional differences; translators often respond via borrowing, co-textual support, or notes. Quine (2013) radicalizes the issue: translation, meaning, and reference are indeterminate, because no fact decisively fixes the "right" translation. His "radical translator" and the famous '*gavagai*' scenario show how multiple incompatible translation manuals can fit the same behavioral evidence, producing inscrutability of reference and ontological relativity. Yet Quine also insists that translation is practically indispensable: indeterminacy means not that translation is impossible, but that many acceptable translations exist, and selection proceeds pragmatically, often by maximizing the plausibility of the interlocutor rather than attributing absurdity, since "bad translation" is likelier than extreme silliness (Quine, 1960; Quine, 1974; Quine, 1987: 5–10; Henderson, 1988: 355–369).

From these positions, one can accept Berman (1992)'s conclusion that translatability and untranslatability are relative notions.

Four forms of relativity are especially relevant for method:

*Quantitative relativity*. Most texts are largely translatable, and localized difficulties can be managed through compensation and substitution. Yet substitution risks cultural loss when idioms, puns, or allusions are replaced; it can both promote and compromise translatability (Sun, 2018: 101–114).

*Qualitative relativity*. (Un)translatability depends on textual genre and properties (literary, philosophical, technical) and on the translator's competence, including sensitivity to genre-specific connotations and pragmatic effects. Even strong expertise does not eliminate interpretive error or the temptation to erase difficult elements.

*Contextual relativity*. Missing contextual knowledge—cultural, historical, disciplinary—can make translatability only apparent. Decontextualization may increase readability while producing semantic approximation or false synonymy. Appiah's warning applies here: getting "meaning" right in a narrow philosophy-of-language sense is often not even the first step toward understanding (Appiah, 1993: 808–819).

*Functional relativity*. Translation's adequacy depends on for whom it is produced. Special languages and domain-specific discourse shape what counts as economy, precision, and appropriateness. Translating specialized texts requires reproducing pragmatic and sociolinguistic features as well as terminological economy in the target language; communicative asymmetries between experts, inter-specialists, and lay audiences make intention and function decisive (Sager, Dungworth and McDonalds, 1980).

Babel, hermeneutically, marks the end of communicative innocence and the beginning of humanity's structural condition of plurality. Post-Babel life is defined by negotiation, partiality, and the irreducible remainder that resists translation. Gadamer and Taylor show why genuine understanding demands dialogue, openness, and the willingness to bear identity costs rather than impose conceptual norms (Gadamer 2006; Taylor 2011). Derrida and Habermas clarify the risks: understanding can become violence through assimilation or through uncritical submission to tradition and power (Derrida 1967/2005; Habermas 1990). Ricœur reframes translation as a strenuous yet potentially "happy" practice once the fantasy of perfect adequacy is mourned; "linguistic hospitality" becomes a disciplined ethic of hosting and being hosted by foreignness without erasing its untranslatable kernel (Ricœur 2006; Kearney 2019). Methodologically, the translator's agency, the cultural thickness of "information," and the shifting nature of boundaries require treating translatability and untranslatability as relative—quantitatively, qualitatively, contextually, and functionally—so that translation can remain a credible tool of cross-cultural knowledge rather than a mechanism of domestication or control (Bassnett, 2011; Bassnett and Lefevere, 1990; Venuti, 1995; Berman, 1992).

### 3.3.4 Liang Sicheng as a Terminological Mediator

Liang Sicheng's architectural writings occupy a pivotal position in the twentieth-century reconfiguration of Chinese architectural knowledge. His work does not simply document or historicize traditional buildings, nor does it merely introduce Western architectural historiography into the Chinese context. Rather, it operates as a sustained project of terminological mediation, through which heterogeneous epistemic systems—premodern construction knowledge, modern architectural analysis, and later socialist state discourse—are rendered partially commensurable without being fully assimilated.

This mediating function is most clearly visible in Liang's engagement with classical architectural treatises, particularly the *Yingzao Fashi* 营造法式. This work, compiled in 1103 under the supervision of Li Jie 李诫 during the Northern Song dynasty, is the earliest extant Chinese state-issued architectural manual. It systematizes building techniques, materials, labor norms, and modular proportions, providing a standardized framework for official construction and offering a key source for the study of premodern Chinese architecture and statecraft. Rather than treating such texts as historical curiosities or repositories of obsolete techniques, Liang reconstructs their technical vocabulary as an internally coherent system that can be analyzed,

compared, and taught. Terms such as 斗拱 *dǒugǒng* 'bracketing' and 铺作 *pùzuò* 'layered bracket sets' are stabilized as analytical units and repositioned within a modern discourse of structure, proportion, and typology. This operation is neither a simple act of translation nor a neutral modernization; it involves the deliberate reformulation of craft-based knowledge into a conceptual language compatible with architectural history as an academic discipline.

A decisive aspect of this mediation lies in Liang's choice to write primarily in modern vernacular Chinese. By abandoning classical prose while retaining the conceptual density of premodern terminology, Liang effectively shifts architectural knowledge into a new regime of intelligibility. Traditional architectural concepts become legible within universities, research institutes, and heritage administrations, while remaining anchored in historically specific building logic. Language here functions not as a transparent medium but as an infrastructural condition for disciplinary recognition.

The mediating ambition of Liang's work becomes even more explicit through his adoption of a linguistic model for architecture. As reconstructed by Wei-Cheng Lin (2013: 219–250), Liang repeatedly frames architectural systems in terms of "vocabulary" and "grammar," treating buildings as structured ensembles governed by internal rules rather than as collections of stylistic motifs. This linguistic analogy allows architecture to be conceptualized as a system that can be analyzed relationally and comparatively, without presupposing equivalence at the level of individual forms or symbols. Architecture, in this view, becomes translatable not because its elements are universal, but because its internal logic can be rendered intelligible through an abstract metalanguage.

This conceptualization reaches a critical articulation in Liang's notion of architectural 建筑可译性 *jiànzhù kěyìxìng* 'architectural translatability', formulated in the mid-1950s (Liang, 1954: 36–39). Translatability here does not imply the easy transfer of visual features across cultural boundaries. Instead, it presupposes that different architectural traditions, while historically and materially distinct, participate in a shared analytical space in which structural relations, compositional principles, and formal hierarchies can be compared. Liang's well-known juxtaposition of the Hall of Qinian and Bramante's *Tempietto* exemplifies this logic: the comparison does not assert stylistic similarity, but proposes that both buildings can be read as articulations of a comparable architectural argument within their respective systems.

However, Lin's analysis demonstrates that this mediating apparatus contains an internal tension that becomes increasingly pronounced in the political context of the early People's Republic. While Liang's earlier work emphasizes structural logic and constructional order as

the basis of architectural vocabulary, later formulations shift attention toward visual legibility and ensemble composition. Following Liang's exposure to Soviet architectural discourse, the translation of "Chineseness" in architecture increasingly operates at the level of façades, roof profiles, and cityscapes. Traditional elements are rendered transferable through visual abstraction, allowing them to be recombined with modern materials and building technologies.

This shift has significant consequences. As architectural translation becomes increasingly visual, the relationship between form and structure loosens, and architectural vocabulary becomes more susceptible to ideological reclassification. The political demand for a "national form" within socialist construction transforms translated architectural elements into signs that must perform symbolic work. In this context, the so-called 大屋顶 *dà wūdǐng* 'big roof' style emerges as both an application and a distortion of Liang's mediating framework. Elements originally justified through structural and historical analysis are recoded as decorative excess and denounced during the anti-waste campaigns of the mid-1950s.

Lin characterizes the outcome of this process as "untranslatable iconicity." Through repeated translation and institutional circulation, certain architectural forms acquire heightened recognizability and ideological charge. They come to function as icons of national identity, whose meaning appears self-evident but whose analytical mobility is severely constrained. The paradox is that successful translation at the level of visual recognition produces resistance to further translation: once an element has been fixed as an icon, it becomes difficult to reinterpret, adapt, or redeploy without triggering ideological conflict.

Read in this light, Liang Sicheng's work exemplifies both the necessity and the risk of terminological mediation. His linguistic model enables Chinese architecture to enter modern disciplinary discourse without surrendering its internal logic, yet the same model can be appropriated in ways that harden meaning and foreclose interpretation. Mediation thus appears not as a neutral bridge between traditions, but as a historically contingent operation whose effects depend on institutional context, political regime, and evaluative frameworks.

The relevance of this case extends beyond architectural history. It demonstrates that translation does not only involve semantic loss or gain, but can also produce semiotic fixation, whereby terms or forms become overdetermined and analytically inert. For any inquiry concerned with the translation of urban and planning terminology, Liang's work offers a methodological precedent and a cautionary example. Terminological mediation is indispensable for cross-contextual understanding, yet it must be designed to preserve interpretive openness and resist premature closure. Otherwise, translation risks transforming

analytical categories into icons, highly visible, politically potent, and increasingly untranslatable.

## 3.4 The scope of the research: the anthropological stance

### 3.4.1 The question of fields: Macro vs. micro

In conceiving a research project on the terminology of the Chinese city, one faces an immediate question of scale: from where should the investigation begin? Should it start from the broad and abstract level of the city as a concept—asking what constitutes urbanity in China—and only later descend into concrete spatial forms? Or should it start from the micro-level of lived experience and work outward toward larger urban formations?

This research adopts the latter course: a centrifugal movement from micro to macro, beginning with the most concrete and familiar urban element, the house, and progressively expanding to the street and the neighborhood. The rationale for this methodological choice is both theoretical and pragmatic. Theoretically, it stems from an anthropological and phenomenological orientation that privileges lived experience and embodied practice as the foundation for understanding abstract structures. Pragmatically, it arises from the recognition that defining the 'city' in China is itself a deeply contested and speculative enterprise—one that could easily lead the research away from its main concern: how urban life is named, conceptualized, and inhabited in everyday language.

The argument of this chapter, therefore, is that starting from the micro-elements of the city allows for a grounded, inductive understanding of terminology and meaning, whereas beginning from the macro—from the notion of "the city" or "urbanity"—would risk dissolving the project into theoretical speculation. This scalar decision is not simply procedural; it reflects a philosophical stance on how knowledge of space, society, and language should be constructed. To start from the macro would entail first defining what a *city* is in the Chinese context. Yet, as numerous scholars have shown, the concept of 城市 *chéngshì* in China is historically contingent and semantically unstable (Wu, 2015). It intertwines administrative designation, population density, economic function, and symbolic status. Since the late imperial period, distinctions between 城 *chéng* 'walled city' and 乡 *xiāng* 'countryside' structured governance and imagination, but these terms were never purely spatial—they referred to hierarchies of civilization, morality, and political order (Fei, 1947; Skinner, 1977).

In the socialist and postsocialist eras, the meaning of *city* has continually shifted with state policy. The 户口 *hùkǒu* 'household registration' system institutionalized a boundary between urban and rural status (Chan 2009), while the rapid urbanization of the reform era blurred it again. As Wu Fulong (2015) notes, in China the 'urban' is both a physical form and a policy category—one can live in a place that looks urban but is not officially urban, or vice versa. To ask "what is the city?" in China thus leads immediately into a thicket of historical, political, and administrative complexity.

Engaging this question directly would require a theoretical detour through debates on urban definition, typology, and morphology—an inquiry valuable in itself, but one that would divert the research from its linguistic and ethnographic focus. The attempt to define 'the Chinese city' at the outset would impose an abstract framework onto the very phenomena the project seeks to understand inductively. It would position the research within macro-discourses of urbanism, rather than within the everyday practices through which city dwellers make sense of their surroundings.

This methodological caution echoes Henri Lefebvre's critique of 'representations of space' detached from lived practice. In *The Production of Space* (1991), Lefebvre warns that when space is approached through conceptual abstraction—through maps, plans, or theoretical definitions—it becomes reified, reduced to what he calls the 'conceived' space of planners and scientists. To counter this, he insists on beginning from spatial practice—the routines, gestures, and uses that produce space from below. Starting from the micro-level is therefore a way to begin from lived space rather than conceived space.

A similar sentiment underlies Tim Ingold's (2011) "dwelling perspective", which rejects the view of environments as pre-given containers for human activity. Instead, places and spaces emerge through the continuous movement and habitation of their occupants. To define 'the city' in advance would be to treat it as a container; to start from the micro, conversely, is to trace how it comes into being through dwelling, movement, and relation.

In the Chinese context, this methodological problem is especially acute because the boundary between urban and rural has been in flux for decades. Scholars such as Zhang Li (2020), Xiang Biao (2017) and many others have shown that Chinese urbanization is not a simple process of expansion but one of hybridization—of rural enclaves urbanizing within cities, and urban lifestyles emerging in villages. The proliferation of 城中村 *chéngzhōngcūn* 'villages in the city' and 新城 *xīnchéng* 'new cities' exemplifies this ambiguity. The institutional bifurcation between "urban" and "rural" status in the People's Republic of China is a

foundational element of the country's social and spatial order. Central to this bifurcation was the household-registration system, which granted citizens either agricultural (rural) or non-agricultural (urban) status, thereby creating two distinct sets of rights and entitlements. This dual categorisation is administratively enforced—that is, rendered meaningful by law, regulation and bureaucratic practice—and yet, in the lived experience of individuals and communities, it is in many respects unstable, mediated by mobility, economic transformation, and incomplete incorporation into the urban milieu.

The 户口 *hùkǒu* system was formalised in 1958 to regulate internal migration, allocate resources, and structure the labour force under the socialist model (Chan and Zhang, 1999: 818–855). Legal status of rural vs. urban 户口 *hùkǒu* holds profound consequences for access to education, health care, housing, and social welfare. For example, children born in cities to parents with rural-户口 *hùkǒu* often remain classified as rural, retaining limited access to urban educational provision (Montgomery, 2012: 591–622). This creates a durable spatial-social stratification in which 'urban' status confers significant institutional advantages while 'rural' status systematically restricts access. Thus, the urban–rural boundary is not merely descriptive but enforced: it is embedded in regulation, rights, and resource allocation.

At the same time, however, the formal divide cannot fully capture the realities of mobility, informal settlement, and hybrid identities that characterise contemporary Chinese urbanisation. Scholars emphasise that migration, commuting, peri-urban expansion and mixed land regimes erode the neatness of the legal rural/urban divide. For instance, many rural-户口 *hùkǒu* individuals migrate to cities, live and work there long-term, yet remain formally rural in status (to retain land rights in the countryside, for example). Chen & Fan (2016, 9–39) identify this as a '*hukou* puzzle"': many migrants choose to retain rural 户口 *hùkǒu* despite long-term urban residence, signalling the complexity of status, identity and lifetime strategy. Moreover, educational stratification studies show that actual schooling experiences may cross 户口 *hùkǒu* categories and rural/urban geography: children with urban 户口 *hùkǒu* may attend rural schools, and rural-户口 *hùkǒu* children may attend city schools. This mismatch highlights the porous nature of the boundary in everyday life (Zhou, Murphy and Tao, 2014: 273–292). The result is an experience in which the urban–rural distinction is simultaneously operational (via 户口 *hùkǒu*) yet unstable or contested in lived geography, mobility, identity and rights.

To begin from the macro level, then, would be to attempt to define a moving target. It would require historical, political, and policy analysis of such breadth that it would overwhelm a terminological study. By contrast, beginning from the micro—from the *house*, the *street*, and

the *neighborhood*—allows the researcher to observe how people themselves navigate and name these ambiguities in practice.

The choice to proceed from micro to macro follows an inductive logic grounded in ethnographic observation. As Clifford Geertz (1973) argued, the anthropologist's task is to render "thick description"—to interpret the webs of meaning that people themselves have spun. Such interpretation must begin from the smallest observable acts and only later ascend to conceptual generalization. The centrifugal movement from the concrete to the abstract mirrors the hermeneutic movement from lived detail to theoretical insight.

In this sense, starting from the micro is not merely methodological but epistemological: it enacts a form of knowledge-making consistent with anthropology's emphasis on the local as entry point to the global. As Low (2017) observes, the ethnography of space must start from the body and its spatial practices, because "spatialized culture" is constituted through everyday actions. From house to street to neighborhood, the scale of observation expands while remaining tethered to lived experience.

Beginning from the house is particularly apt, both empirically and conceptually. The house is the primary locus of staying—the most tangible manifestation of dwelling. Gaston Bachelard (1958) in *The Poetics of Space* describes the house as the "corner of the world" that shelters daydreaming and memory. For anthropologists, it is also the nucleus of kinship, gender roles, and domestic economy (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995). Studying how the houses are named and conceptualized reveals the intersection of linguistic, material, and affective dimensions of urban life.

In the Chinese case, the house carries particular moral and symbolic weight. Fei (1992) describes Chinese social structure as differentially ordered circles radiating from the household outward. This traditional centripetal model resonates with the centrifugal methodology adopted here: by beginning at the household and expanding outward, one retraces the layers of social and spatial relations that compose Chinese urban life.

From the house, one moves naturally to the street, the quintessential site of movement and encounter. The street mediates between the private and the public, between dwelling and collectivity. As Michel de Certeau (1984) puts it, walking the street is an "enunciation" of space; through movement, the urban fabric is continuously rewritten.

In Chinese cities, streets and alleys have long been semi-public arenas of sociability and commerce. Such micro-spaces host forms of life that defy official zoning logics. Examining the terminology of streets thus extends the investigation from the intimate to the communal, from staying to moving, while remaining within the realm of lived experience.

The neighborhood represents the next step outward: a move toward the abstract, but one still grounded in interaction. It is the scale at which individuals encounter the collective, where relating and governance intersect. In Chinese cities, 社区 *shèqū* or 小区 *xiǎoqū* designate both spatial units and administrative entities (Read, 2012). They are also moral categories, signifying community and order. Studying how these terms are used by residents and officials illuminates the relationship between language, governance, and identity.

Thus, the micro-to-macro progression mirrors the lived experience of urban scale: one inhabits a house, traverses a street, and identifies with a neighborhood. By following this trajectory, the research maintains empirical continuity while gradually opening onto larger conceptual horizons.

The scalar movement from micro to macro can also be understood as a spatial praxis consistent with the theories of Lefebvre and Doreen Massey. Lefebvre (1991) conceives space as a totality produced through differential relations between levels—body, dwelling, neighborhood, city, nation. Each scale contains and transforms the others. A centrifugal method echoes this relational structure: starting from the micro allows the researcher to trace how higher-order forms emerge from everyday practice. Doreen Massey (2005) similarly argues for a "progressive sense of place" that recognizes places as open, relational, and constituted through connections. To begin from the micro is to acknowledge that even the smallest spatial units—houses, courtyards, lanes—are nodes in wider networks. The centrifugal movement thus embodies the relational ontology of space itself: from local action radiate broader formations of meaning and structure.

Tim Ingold's (2011) notion of "wayfaring" provides another resonance. For Ingold, understanding space requires following the paths of movement and dwelling that people trace; knowledge grows outward, along lines of engagement. The methodological "movement" from house to neighborhood parallels this wayfaring epistemology.

Focusing first on the micro-level allows the project to produce tangible, documentable findings early on: ethnographic observations, lexical data, and survey results. From these, one can infer upward toward patterns and abstractions. This stepwise expansion ensures that each level of analysis is empirically grounded, avoiding the pitfalls of over-theorization.

The decision to move from micro to macro reflects a particular understanding of the city as an emergent totality rather than a predefined entity. The city is not an object to be defined once and for all but a configuration of practices that coalesce at different scales. This view aligns with anthropological treatments of the city as "process" (Hannerz, 1980) and with Chinese ethnographic work that treats urbanity as a lived and contested formation (Zhang and Ong, 2008).

From this perspective, the macro is not prior to the micro; it emerges from it. The neighborhood, the district, and ultimately the city come into focus as the cumulative outcome of countless acts of dwelling, moving, and relating. The centrifugal method mirrors this ontological sequence, reconstructing the city from the ground up. Starting from the macro would also risk reproducing what James Scott, 1998 calls the "view from above"—the state's schematic vision of society, which simplifies and standardizes local complexities. By contrast, starting from the micro resists this abstraction. It embodies an ethics of proximity: the researcher approaches the city as its inhabitants do, from within, not from above. The decision to begin from the micro and move toward the macro is therefore not a matter of convenience but of coherence. It reflects a commitment to grounding linguistic and spatial analysis in lived practice, to letting abstraction emerge from experience rather than precede it. By moving outward from the micro to the macro, the research remains faithful to its anthropological foundation and its terminological focus. It reconstructs the city as it is experienced: not as a top-down totality but as a world built, walked, and spoken from within.

### 3.4.2 The anthropological needs of the city-dwellers

In seeking to define the field of investigation for my doctoral research—the terminology of the Chinese city—I have chosen to adopt an anthropological stance. This decision arises from the conviction that to understand the language of urban life, one must first understand the life that gives rise to language. I began with a deceptively simple question: **What do city dwellers commonly do, and why do they do those things?** My initial answer was equally simple: they stay, they move, and they relate. They stay—in homes, in neighborhoods, in spaces they consider their own; they move—through streets, across thresholds, along routes and flows; and they relate—to others and to the wider assemblage of the city. These three activities—staying, moving between places, relating—form the empirical and conceptual triad through which I propose to approach Chinese urban terminology.

An anthropological approach begins from the assumption that meaning is situated—that words, concepts, and categories emerge from and circulate within the patterned practices of social life. As Clifford Geertz (1973) argued, culture is not an abstract code but a "web of significance" spun by human beings themselves. Language participates in those webs; it is both a means of description and a medium of world-making. When applied to the city, this perspective encourages us to see urban terminology not as a fixed lexical inventory but as a dynamic repertoire embedded in everyday action.

Urban anthropology has long emphasized the need to attend to practice rather than mere morphology. The city, from this view, is not a static built environment but a dense ecology of doing—of inhabiting, moving, exchanging, naming, and representing. The anthropological stance thus complements linguistic inquiry by insisting that the terminology of the city must be studied in relation to what people do with and in space. Words for 'street', 'alley', or 'neighborhood' are not neutral descriptors: they are saturated with the social relations, temporal rhythms, and affective investments that give them meaning.

This perspective resonates with broader anthropological and philosophical currents that foreground the embodied and relational nature of spatial experience. Tim Ingold (2011) contrasts the idea of "building" with that of "dwelling," arguing that humans do not simply construct environments but continually inhabit and reconstitute them through movement and attention. Edward Casey (1996) similarly conceives place as an event of being, constituted by staying and returning. From this standpoint, to study the lexicon of the city is to study the ways in which people articulate their being-in-place.

The anthropological view is deeply rooted in the theoretical tradition of urban studies, particularly in the work of Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau. In *The Production of Space* (1991 [1974]), Lefebvre argues that space is not a neutral container but a social product—a composite of physical form, representation, and lived practice. His now-canonical triad—(spatial practices, representations of space and spaces of representation or, alternatively, the perceived, conceived and lived space) maps the interaction between everyday routines, institutional discourses, and symbolic imaginaries. Spatial practice corresponds to what people do in space—their routes, rhythms, and habits; representations of space are the maps, plans, and technical vocabularies of planners and administrators; representational spaces are the affective and symbolic dimensions through which space is lived and imagined. This Lefebvrian

framework suggests that terminology—the words, categories, and names through which people and institutions represent urban form—is an integral component of the production of space.

Michel de Certeau, in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), shifts attention to the tactical creativity of ordinary users. His famous discussion of "walking in the city" proposes that pedestrians write their own text across the imposed grid of urban order: "The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language" (De Certeau, 1984, 97). This analogy between movement and speech is precisely what invites a terminological lens. If walking is a form of enunciation, then the city's lexicon is both spoken and walked; words and paths co-produce meaning.

Later theorists expanded these insights into what Sheller and Urry (2006) call the "new mobilities paradigm," emphasizing the co-constitution of social life through movement, networks, and flows. Nigel Thrift (2004) and Ash Amin (2002) articulate a relational urbanism that views the city as a dynamic mesh of interactions rather than a static mosaic of zones. Together, these thinkers provide the theoretical scaffolding for conceiving of staying, moving between places, and relating as interlinked modalities of urban being.

The triad I propose—staying, moving between places, relating—distills from these traditions what I consider the three most fundamental dimensions of everyday urban life. It offers a phenomenological and empirical lens through which to observe and categorize practices, and by extension, the terminologies that accompany them: staying concerns the ways people dwell, inhabit, and anchor themselves within urban space; moving between places concerns the routes, rhythms, and mobilities that connect those anchor points; relating concerns the social, affective, and spatial relations that bind dwellers and movements into neighborhoods, districts, and publics.

This schema is not meant to replace Lefebvre's or de Certeau's triads but to rearticulate them in terms that are both ethnographically tractable and terminologically generative. Each axis corresponds to a field of vocabulary and practice: the lexicon of dwelling (house, home, apartment, courtyard), the lexicon of movement (street, alley, lane, path), and the lexicon of relation (neighborhood, block, community, boundary).

The strength of the triad lies in its minimalism. It identifies a set of universal human-urban engagements—dwelling, movement, relation—while remaining flexible enough to accommodate cultural variation. It thus provides a coherent framework for exploring how Chinese urban actors conceptualize and name their spatial worlds.

#### 3.4.2.1 Staying

What does it mean to "stay" in the city? On the surface, staying simply implies dwelling, being in one place. But as a concept, it encapsulates a profound human experience: the creation of home in an urban world. In philosophical terms, to dwell is to belong somewhere in space. Heidegger (1971) famously argued that "building" is inseparable from "dwelling"—that human existence is fundamentally about dwelling on the earth, cultivating a meaningful place. Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) insists that 'to dwell' is not merely to occupy but to 'exist' in relation to space. Place becomes meaningful through repetition, memory, and care; it is where human life takes root.

Gaston Bachelard (1964), in *The Poetics of Space*, went so far as to call the house "the corner of the world" for our daydreams and memories. The home is where intimate life is nurtured; it roots personal identity. Anthropologists Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995) likewise remind us that the house is a microcosm of society—the locus of kinship, gender roles, and economic life. All these insights underscore why dwelling is a vital analytic starting point: how people conceive of 'home' and 'house' tells us how they anchor themselves in the city.

In Chinese, the semantic field of dwelling is remarkably rich and layered by history. Multiple characters and words map onto the English idea of 'house' or 'home,' each with its own nuance. For instance, 宅 *zhái* denotes a residence or estate—as in 住宅 *zhùzhái*, a formal term for a dwelling or residence—often carrying connotations of a family's domain or even a grand house. By contrast, 屋 *wū* refers to a house in the sense of a physical building or shelter; it appears in common compounds like 房屋 *fángwū* lit. 'house-room', meaning a house or housing unit. Another term, 家 *jiā*, straddles the line between place and people: it means 'home' but also 'family,' reflecting the traditional Chinese view that a home is fundamentally a familial unit (the character 家 itself depicts a roof under which a pig is kept—an ancient image of domesticity and livelihood). Each of these is distinct from 舍 *shè*, a character that today is rarely used alone but survives in words for lodging or temporary residence (宿舍 *sùshè* 'dormitory'; 旅社 *lǚshè* 'inn'). Historically, 舍 *shè* had intriguing social meanings: during the Han dynasty, imperial regulations used 舍 *shè* to designate the lesser residences of nobles (as opposed to 第 *dì* 'grand mansion'). Over time, 舍 *shè* also came to imply relinquishment—the verb 舍 *shě* 'to abandon' shares the same character—perhaps echoing the idea of leaving a temporary shelter behind. These layers of meaning within a single graph illustrate how Chinese 'house-words' carry embedded cultural histories. A term like 舍 *shè* cannot be neatly translated as just "house" or "hut"; it is a palimpsest of meanings from *guesthouse* to *forsake*.

Crucially, Chinese also distinguishes 'house' from 'home' in ways English does not. The word 房子 *fángzi* is an everyday term for a physical house or apartment—a shelter of wood, brick, or concrete. 家 *jiā*, however, evokes *home* in the sense of family dwelling and the warmth or belonging associated with it. One might *have* a 房子 *fángzi* but yearn for a 家 *jiā*. This distinction becomes salient in translation: describing someone as 'homeless' in Chinese might use 无家可归 *wújiākěguī* lit. 'no home to return to', emphasizing the loss of familial refuge, not just lack of shelter. Such examples hint at the conceptual misalignments that terminological analysis brings to light. English tends to separate the material (house) from the affective (home); Chinese intertwines them (家 *jiā* encompasses both dwelling and family). If a researcher blithely translates 家 *jiā* as 'house' or 'home' without context, they might miss the word's dual significance, including its moral and emotional resonances in Chinese culture.

Beyond individual words, entire lexical fields around dwelling reveal China's urban evolution. Consider the variety of dwelling types that urban Chinese talk about: 胡同四合院 *hútòng sìhéyuàn* '*hutong* courtyard houses', 洋楼 *yánglóu* 'Western-style houses', 筒子楼 *tǒngzilóu* 'tube-shaped buildings' of the Mao era, modern 单元房 *dānyuánfáng* 'apartment units', 商品房 *shāngpǐnfáng* 'commodity housing', and so on. Each term is tied to a particular period and socio-spatial order. A 胡同四合院 *hútòng sìhéyuàn* instantly evokes the world of imperial Beijing: narrow alleyways of one-story courtyard compounds where neighbors know each other. 里弄 *lǐlòng* summons early 20th-century Shanghai, where 石库门 *shíkùmén* 'lane houses' with stone gate facades created a unique blend of communal alley life and private family space. By contrast, a term like 小区 *xiǎoqū* lit. 'small district' marks the gated apartment complexes of the reform era—multi-building housing estates with controlled entrances, parking garages, and landscaped grounds. And 社区 *shèqū* 'community' often refers to the bureaucratic notion of community in post-Mao urban governance (e.g. 社区 *shèqū* as an administrative unit with a Residents' Committee). We see, then, a layering of dwelling terminology: 胡同 *hútòng* and 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* anchor older forms of urban life, 单位大院 *dānwèi dàyuàn* 'work-unit compounds' and 筒子楼 *tǒngzilóu* echo the socialist era, while 小区 *xiǎoqū* and high-rise 公寓 *gōngyù* 'apartments' represent contemporary living. These layers coexist in today's cities—linguistically and physically—like geological strata. Residents may still affectionately use 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* or 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* lit. 'big messy courtyard' to refer to their old neighborhood, even as they are relocated to new estates. By tracing how people talk about where they live, we thus gain a diagnostic tool for urban change. The terminological field of staying is a sensitive

index of transformation, registering shifts in material housing and social attitudes simultaneously.

Ethnographic studies reinforce this point. In her study of migrant life in Beijing, Zhang (2001) documents how rural migrants carve out homes in 城中村 *chéngzhōngcūn* 'urban villages' that the state labels 流动人口 *liúdòng rénkǒu* 'floating population' enclaves. The migrants, however, often refer to these dwellings in homier terms, investing meaning in shanty apartments that outsiders dismiss as 再见棚 *zàijiànpéng* lit. 'good-bye shacks'. The clash of terminology—official vs. vernacular—reveals a contest over whether these spaces are seen as legitimate homes or transient camps.

For the researcher, these cases underscore a crucial lesson: Translation is not just linguistic but conceptual. We must translate experiences, not just words. Adopting what Kwame Anthony Appiah (1993) calls a "thick translation" approach, we strive to carry over context, connotation, and cultural weight—the web of significance—along with the literal meaning.

#### 3.4.2.2 Moving between places

If staying is one half of urban life, **moving between places** is the other. City life is as much about flows as about moorings, to use John Urry's (2007) influential distinction. The past two decades have seen what has been termed a "mobilities turn" in urban and social theory, a shift away from understanding cities as static containers of social life toward viewing them as dynamic assemblages of movements, rhythms, and circulations. From this perspective, mobility is not merely a background condition of urban existence, but a constitutive force that shapes spatial order, social relations, and everyday experience.

Transport networks, pedestrian infrastructures, delivery chains, and communication systems are the arteries through which the life of a city pulses. But mobility also extends beyond literal movement: it encompasses potential movement, constraints on movement, and the symbolic value attached to movement. As Cresswell (2006) argues, mobility is always socially produced. A walk, for instance, is not just a walk. It may be a privilege (a leisurely promenade in a well-off district), an act of necessity (a long commute due to lack of transit access), or even one of transgression (loitering, wandering, occupying space unexpectedly). The same physical act acquires different meanings depending on who moves, where, how, and under what conditions.

Thinking of cities through mobility also sheds light on the inequalities embedded in urban space. Freedom of movement is unevenly distributed. Migrant workers, delivery riders, and

domestic workers may be constantly mobile, yet their mobility is constrained—defined by schedules, surveillance, and infrastructural marginalization. By contrast, the mobility of the wealthy is often frictionless, routed through taxis, private cars, and gated residential compounds. Mobility therefore carries power: it can enable participation in the life of the city, or mark one as peripheral to it.

Furthermore, mobility interacts with the built environment, shaping and being shaped by architectural form. Streets, courtyards, corridors, stairways, elevators—all are spatial technologies of movement, planned or improvised, formal or informal. Henri Lefebvre (2004)'s notion of rhythmanalysis is useful here: cities are structured by repeating patterns of movement across different temporal scales—daily commutes, seasonal migrations, weekend markets, nighttime economies. These rhythms produce urban atmospheres, affective textures that are experienced but not always verbalized: the anxious rush-hour crowd, the relaxed evening stroll, the silent early-morning delivery routes.

Understanding mobility, then, is not only about documenting how people get from one place to another. It involves recognizing how movement produces meaning, how it is embedded in systems of value and power, how it shapes the very experience of dwelling in the city. To live in a city is to stay and to move, to inhabit both place and path.

In Chinese there is a whole lexicon of pathways, each term fine-tuned to scale, function, and context. The character 街 *jiē* typically denotes a commercial street or thoroughfare—a relatively broad, active street, often lined with shops. 路 *lù* is a road, a more general term that can apply to anything from a country road to a city avenue (and appears in countless road names). By contrast, 巷 *xiàng* refers to a lane or alley—a narrower passage often nested within neighborhoods. A related term, 弄 *lòng*, is used in the south (as in 里弄 *lǐlòng*, the Shanghai lanes) for similar narrow lanes. And then there is the famous 胡同 *hútòng* of North China, particularly Beijing, which in dictionaries translates to 'alley' but in local usage means far more: it evokes an entire way of life in the capital's old neighborhoods. According to the most attested etymology, 胡同 *hútòng* comes from a Mongolian word for 'water well', hinting at their Yuan-dynasty origins, but over centuries 胡同 *hútòng* have become the beloved backstreets that form the social fabric of Beijing (→ 5.2.4). A single English word 'alley' would flatten these distinctions. In Chinese discourse, each term indexes a distinct spatial experience. Chinese urban environments are dense with micro-topographies of motion. Each term encodes not only physical scale and orientation but historical and cultural nuance. To map a neighborhood in

Chinese is thus to deploy an entire vocabulary of spatial nuance, not only to convey the texture of the environment.

Additionally, new modes of movement spawn new terms, enriching (or complicating) the lexicon. The advent of modern infrastructure in China introduced words like 公路 *gōnglù* 'public road' and specifically 高速公路 *gāosù gōnglù* 'highway' or lit. 'high-speed road'. Elevated pedestrian bridges in cities are called 天桥 *tiānqiáo* lit. 'sky-bridge'. Yet, alongside them, vernacular terms persist. A delivery courier weaving on his electric scooter might talk about taking a 小路 *xiǎolù* 'small road', meaning a shortcut or cutting through a 背巷 *bèixiàng* 'back alley'. These informal descriptors often do not appear on official maps– they are part of what James Scotto would call the "vernacular knowledge" of the city, resisting the standardized, numbered road grids of the state. The coexistence of all these terms in Chinese speech illustrates how old and new mobilities overlap in language. As cities modernize, the lexicon expands rather than simply replacing old terms. The result is a linguistic landscape as variegated as the physical one—a living map of meanings that urban residents navigate daily.

Analyzing the 'words of moving between places' also uncovers the social dimensions of mobility in China. Movement is never just about urban design; it is also about who gets to move where, under what conditions. Terms like 暂住人口 *zànzhù rénkǒu* 'transient population' or 流动人口 *liúdòng rénkǒu* 'floating population' became prominent in late 20th-century China to describe migrants who were on the move and lacked urban 户口 *hùkǒu* status. These bureaucratic labels carry a whiff of otherness—a suggestion that those who *move* in (from the countryside to the city) don't quite belong. In everyday language, one hears of 进城 *jìnchéng* 'entering the city' versus 回老家 *huí lǎojiā* 'returning to one's old home' to describe migrant workers' oscillation between urban work and rural home. Such phrases encode the politics of mobility: movement can be aspirational (seeking opportunity) but also stigmatized (outsiders 'floating without roots). In Chinese, even the word 跑 *pǎo* 'to run' is used in certain contexts to imply striving: e.g. 跑城里 *pǎo chéngli* 'run to the city' can imply hustling in the big city. The language of streets and movement thus doubles as a language of social navigation. Urban mobility is also stratified by class and status, and this too shows up in terminology. For example, in the Mao era, long-distance 盲流 *mángliú* lit. 'blind flow' was a derogatory term for unauthorized migrants wandering into cities. Today, concepts like 通勤族 *tōngqín zú* 'commuting tribe' describe white-collar workers who endure long daily commutes from affordable suburban housing to city-center jobs—a growing phenomenon that carries its own subculture and jargon. Meanwhile, urban planning imports terms like TOD (transit-oriented

development) or 步行街 *bùxíngjiē* 'pedestrian street', reflecting globalized concepts of mobility and urban space. Each of these terms—official, colloquial, imported—marks a particular facet of how movement is structured or perceived.

Ultimately, examining how Chinese speakers talk about moving through the city reveals a constant interplay of infrastructure, culture, and power. A street is never just a street; it might be a 马路 *mǎlù* lit. 'horse road', implying a major road) or a 便道 *biàndào* 'convenient path', often a sidewalk or unofficial shortcut. The choice of word signals what the space means to the person using it. By attending to those choices, we gain insight into the lived experience of China's urban transformation.

In sum, the words of moving around demonstrate that mobility in Chinese cities is a deeply cultural phenomenon. Just as Kevin Lynch (1960) spoke of the "image of the city" in terms of paths, edges, and districts, we find in Chinese a linguistic image of the city made of 街 *jiē*, 巷 *xiàng*, 路 *lù*, 胡同 *hútòng* and more. This image carries historical depth—echoes of caravan trails and city walls—and contemporary tensions—between the planned grid and the lived maze. Analyzing this lexicon side-by-side with Western mobility theories creates a dialogue between Chinese realities and global urban thought. It shows, for example, how everyday practices like walking or cycling in Beijing might confirm, complicate, or contradict theoretical ideas about public space or automobility. In doing so, I try to avoid mis-framing Chinese urban phenomena in reductive Western terms and open up fresh perspectives on how mobility and space are mutually constituted.

#### 3.4.2.3 Relating

The third pillar of the triad is **relating**– the domain of neighborhood, community, and local identity. Cities are not just collections of houses and streets; they are also aggregations of relationships. As early as 1903, Georg Simmel wrote about the peculiar sociology of the city: how urban living generates both anonymity and new forms of social bonding (Simmel, 2010 [1903]). Urban anthropologists like Ulf Hannerz (1980) similarly emphasize that a city is an 'organism' of networks—kinship, friendship, rivalry, governance. More recently, Amin and Thrift (2002) have described cities as 'relational assemblages', stressing that what holds a city together is the myriad interactions among people, institutions, and infrastructures. In this view, *place* is not a static container but a dynamic web of relations. If we apply this insight to Chinese cities, we must ask: how are those webs conceptualized in Chinese terms? What are the words that Chinese urbanites use to talk about their local social worlds—their blocks, neighborhoods,

districts, and communities? And how do those words carry the imprint of China's unique urban history and social fabric?

Chinese has an especially rich vocabulary for community and locality, reflecting a long tradition of organized neighborliness. A key term is 邻里 *línlǐ*, which literally links 'neighbor' (邻 *lín*) and 'neighborhood' (里 *lǐ*) to mean 'neighborhood relations' or simply 'the neighborhood' in all its complexity, being used in phrases like 邻里情 *línlǐqíng* 'neighborly affection' or 邻里纠纷 *línlǐ jiūfēn* 'neighborhood dispute'. Another common word, 街坊 *jiēfang*, refers to 'the people of one's neighborhood' or the neighborhood itself, implying longstanding familiarity. These terms encode a sense of proximity and reciprocity—in traditional neighborhoods, neighbors were often an extended support network beyond kin, and 邻里 *línlǐ* implied a moral duty of mutual aid.

Historically, the Chinese neighborhood was also an administrative unit and a cosmological metaphor. The character 里 *lǐ* originally meant a unit of distance and by extension a hamlet or neighborhood of a few hundred families. Early imperial governance (as far back as the Zhou dynasty) had concepts like 五家为邻、五邻为里 *wǔ jiā wéi lín, wǔ lín wéi lǐ* 'five households make a neighborhood [邻 *lín*]; five neighborhoods [邻 *lín*] make a ward [里 *lǐ*]', indicating a system of collective responsibility and tax organization. Later, in the Tang dynasty and after, the 里坊 *lǐfāng* system in cities like Chang'an and Luoyang created walled wards. Each 坊 *fāng* 'ward' was a gated residential block, and a 里 *lǐ* could refer to a neighborhood cluster within or across wards. This ward system was not merely bureaucratic; it shaped how people conceptualized urban space—a city was a patchwork of 坊 *fāng*, each a world unto itself with markets and temples, separated by walls and curfews at night. The vestiges of these terms remain. For example, 坊 *fāng* is still seen in some place names or traditional expressions. When one hears the term 坊间 *fāngjiān* lit. 'among the wards', it means "out on the street" or "in town rumor," a semantic relic of when 坊 *fāng* were the building blocks of the city.

Moving to the 20th century, massive social changes altered the landscape of local community in China, and language reflects those shifts. The Republican era saw the growth of more fluid, commercial neighborhoods—often called 街区 *jiēqū* 'street blocks'—that didn't fit the old 坊 *fāng* model. In popular literature of early 20th century, one reads about 胡同 *hútòng* life in Beijing (e.g. in Lao She 老舍's writings) or 里弄 *lǐlòng* life in Shanghai (e.g. in Zhang Ailing 张爱玲's stories), where 街坊 *jiēfāng* gather and gossip. After 1949 came the 单位 *dānwèi* system, the work-unit compounds that became self-contained communities for millions of urban dwellers. In Mao-era cities, one's identity was tied to their 单位 *dānwèi* (factory,

school, government office, etc.), each of which often provided housing, dining halls, clinics—a true 'unit' of society. The traditional idea of neighborhood transformed: many urban Chinese from the 1950s–1980s would identify more with their 单位 *dānwèi* or 大院儿 *dàyuànr* 'residential compound' than with a free-form 'neighborhood' per se. Still, the Party-state maintained grassroots governance through 居民委员会 *jūmín wěiyuánhuì* 'Residents' Committees' which were essentially neighborhood councils set up from the 1950s onward. The term 居民区 '*jūmínqū*, residential zone' and later 社区 '*shèqū*, community' became official nomenclature for urban neighborhoods in the post-Mao era, especially from the 1980s–1990s when the state tried to formalize local administration in cities. 社区 *shèqū* in particular has a strong bureaucratic ring—city governments rolled out 社区建设 *shèqū jiànshè* 'community construction' programs to foster urban community building and service provision at the neighborhood level in the 1990s. Thus, 社区 *shèqū* is only an approximate equivalent of 'community' and often implies an entity with a committee office, volunteers, and activities, somewhat akin to a parish or ward council in other contexts.

Meanwhile, the market reforms and privatization of housing in the 1990s led to the proliferation of 小区 *xiǎoqū*. A 小区 *xiǎoqū* is typically a gated residential complex developed commercially –a cluster of apartment buildings enclosed by a fence or wall, with security guards at the gate. It's a physical community but one defined by real estate developers and later managed by homeowner associations or property management companies. The rise of 小区 *xiǎoqū* living introduced new notions of neighborhood: terms like 业主 *yèzhǔ* 'property owner', 物业 *wùyè* 'property management', and 小区业主委员会 *xiǎoqū yèzhǔ wěiyuánhuì* 'homeowners' committee' became part of the urban vocabulary. Socially, many Chinese started distinguishing between 老城区 *lǎo chéngqū* 'old city neighborhoods', often more organic street communities, and 小区 *xiǎoqū*, new gated staying might seem compounds where neighbors might be more strangers prior to organized events. Notably, people seldom refer to their 小区 *xiǎoqū* as their 社区 *shèqū* in daily life, even though officially the 小区 *xiǎoqū* is within a 社区 *shèqū*. Instead, 社区 *shèqū* is used in contexts like 社去服务中心 *shèqū fúwù zhōngxīn* (社区 *shèqū* service center) or 社区卫生服务中心 *shèqū wèishēng fúwù zhōngxīn* 'clinic-level public health facility', lit. '社区 *shèqū* hygiene service center'.

All these layers—里坊 *lǐfāng* 'ward-based urban blocks', 胡同 *hútòng* 'alley', 单位大院 *dānwèi dàyuàn* 'work-unit compound', 社区 *shèqū* 'community', 小区 *xiǎoqū* 'residential estate'—constitute the semantic field of "relating" in the Chinese city. They show how the idea of a "neighborhood" in China is multidimensional: at once a physical space, a social network,

and an administrative category. And each dimension has its own lexicon. Physically, one might talk about 社区绿地 *shèqū lǜdì* 'community green space', 巷子 *xiàngzi* 'laneways', 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* 'big mixed courtyard', each conjuring a different neighborhood form (the last term is specific to old Beijing where multiple families shared one courtyard). Socially, one speaks of 街坊邻里 *jiēfāng línlǐ* 'neighbors and neighborhood folks' doing something together, or 邻里守望 *línlǐ shǒuwàng* 'neighbors watching out for each other'. Administratively, one might refer to the 社区办 *shèqūbàn* 'community office' or 居委会 *jūwěihuì* 'residents' committee' of an area. Importantly, these are not interchangeable: translating all as 'neighborhood' would lose crucial detail. For instance, an English-language study might state that "local committees play an important role in Chinese neighborhoods." Yet the referent of "neighborhood" in this context is not self-evident. If the intended term is 社区 *shèqū*, the analysis points toward the administrative governance unit embedded in the state's urban management apparatus. By contrast, if the author intends 邻里 *línlǐ* or 街坊 *jiēfāng*, the emphasis shifts to interpersonal relationships and everyday sociality. Conflating these terms collapses the distinction between bureaucratic institutions and social networks, thereby obscuring the level at which power, interaction, and belonging are being examined. Terminological precision here is not a matter of pedantry, but a prerequisite for analytical clarity.

From a knowledge-politics standpoint, the Chinese case of neighborhood and community is a fascinating example of conceptual transfer and friction. The word 社区 *shèqū* itself was imported and popularized partly via influence from Western discourse on community building in the 1980s (the term existed earlier but became prominent later). Chinese planners and scholars engaged with ideas of *community management* and *urban governance* that had global currency, translating them into the Chinese context as 社区 *shèqū* work. However, 社区 *shèqū* did not carry the exact connotations of the English "community" for residents—it quickly became associated with the local governing apparatus (some residents even today say 找社区 *zhǎo shèqū* 'go seek help from the community office', a metonym for local government). On the other hand, genuinely bottom-up community sentiments are often expressed through the older vocabulary: e.g. 邻里 *línlǐ* relations, 街坊 *jiēfāng* networks, etc. This gap between official parlance and popular experience is itself politically significant. It suggests that language can be an index of power: whose terms prevail in public discourse, and whose remain subaltern? In recent years, critical geographers have argued that naming urban space is a political act that can either empower or erase local voices (Rose-Redwood, Alderman and Azaryahu, 2010: 453-

470). In China, one might say the state's nomenclature (社区 *shèqū*, 居委会 *jūwěihuì*) overlays the folk nomenclature (邻里 *línlǐ*, 街坊 *jiēfāng*)—sometimes harmoniously, sometimes tensely.

By explicitly integrating the Chinese terminology of 'relating', this research hopes to illuminate these nuances. It also examines how state media and local residents might use the term 社区 *shèqū* in subtly different ways, revealing a contest over the meaning of *community*. In doing so, the dissertation aligns with Christian Topalov's methodological insight that urban words are like clues to social processes—they carry the sediment of past policies, fights, and accords over what a neighborhood should be A neighborhood is never just a neutral space; it's imagined and narrated through terms that emphasize certain values (order, intimacy, modernity, tradition) over others. For instance, calling a place a 小区 *xiǎoqū* highlights its privatized, enclosed nature, whereas calling it a 社区 *shèqū* might highlight its integration into state administrative care. These choices in terminology can signal, subtly, one's attitude toward the place—whether one views it more as a commodity or as a community.

Finally, reflecting on 'relating' brings us back to the larger questions of knowledge and power in urban studies. Who has the right to define what a neighborhood is? Historically, as noted, Chinese inhabitants had their own rich vocabularies for local life, but scholars (both Chinese and foreign) have at times imposed external frameworks. In the mid-20th century, for example, American sociologists studying Chinese cities often used the Chicago School notions of "community" and "ghetto" without fully parsing local terms (Whyte and Parish, 1984). Conversely, contemporary Chinese scholars writing in English may feel obliged to map 邻里 *línlǐ* or 单位 *dānwèi* onto concepts like 'community network' or 'work-unit enclave', potentially losing the indigenous texture. This dissertation argues for a bidirectional enrichment: let the Chinese terms challenge Western theoretical categories, and let Western theory be used strategically to illuminate (but not overwrite) the Chinese material.

In conclusion, reorienting our gaze to the *words of staying, moving, and relating* provides a powerful lens on Chinese urbanism. By framing the inquiry around dwelling (house/home), mobility (streets/pathways), and community (neighborhood), we ground our analysis in the fundamental human experiences of city life—experiences that are at once universal and highly localized. This structure echoes enduring spatial triads in theory (private–public–collective, or home–work–community), but it recasts them in terms that are culturally specific and linguistically precise. It allows us to draw from Western scholarship while also engaging deeply with Chinese scholarship and history, and Chinese urban planning and Chinese governance principles. In doing so, the introduction and the dissertation as a whole aim to bridge

conversations across the East-West divide, showing how examining native terms can refine or challenge classifications. Simultaneously, we contribute to international urban studies by offering a nuanced case study of how global concepts get translated—and sometimes mistranslated—in a non-Western context.

This introduction has argued that language matters profoundly in understanding cities. The Chinese city speaks in its own myriad idioms and each is a key to a rich vault of social meaning. If we listen carefully to these words, analyzing their usage and history, we gain access to local knowledge that conventional analyses might miss. In sum, to study the terminology of the Chinese city is to study the city itself—as an ongoing conversation among dwellers, movers, neighbors on one side, and urban planners and policy-makers on the other. This perspective, which treats the lexicon of urban life as a living system rather than a static glossary, opens up new avenues for research. It calls for an ethnographic sensitivity to language-in-use, a historical sensibility to shifting meanings, and a political awareness of how naming can empower or silence. The chapters that follow will enact this approach, each delving into one dimension of urban experience through both conceptual analysis and concrete case studies of Chinese terminology. By the end, we hope to demonstrate that examining the Chinese city *on its own terminological terms* not only yields a more faithful understanding of China, but also enriches the global theory of urbanism with insights that only such a cross-linguistic, cross-cultural inquiry can provide.

### 3.4.3 From triad to method

To operationalize the triad, the research design must combine discourse and textual analysis, ethnographic observation, and lexical corpus building:

**Discourse and textual analysis**. Parallel analysis of literary and lexicographic materials sources, planning documents and national standards, street signs, property listings, and online maps will reveal the ‘official language of space’ and trace the evolution of urban terms across time.

**Ethnography of the triad**. Surveys to specialists and laymen will elicit spatial language in motion. Comparing the survey’s results exposes tensions between top-down and vernacular terminologies.

**Lexical corpus building**. A database of terms—collected from field notes, transcripts, signage, and archives—will allow for the systematic study of synonymy, polysemy,

and semantic shift. This corpus will be coded according to the triad's categories, enabling both qualitative interpretation and quantitative visualization.

By integrating these methods, the project seeks not only to catalogue terminology but to uncover the social processes that produce it. The ethnographic lens ensures that words are always tied to lived practice, while corpus analysis provides empirical depth.

This approach aligns with the ethnolinguistic turn in anthropology, which views vocabulary as part of cultural practice rather than as an external code (Duranti, 1997). Words for urban features are not merely denotative but performative: they stake claims, mark identities, and materialize relationships. In the Chinese context, where state and market constantly reshape the urban lexicon, such grounding is essential. The Chinese city is a contested field of naming. Official maps, real-estate advertisements, and residents' speech all compete to define what counts as a neighborhood, an alley, or even a home. The anthropological triad provides a lens through which to navigate this complexity.

By formalizing a methodological approach to urban terminology, this chapter demonstrates how linguistic sensitivity can be integrated into empirical urban research without sacrificing analytical rigor. The procedures outlined here transform terminology from an abstract concern into a concrete research object, making it possible to trace patterns, tensions, and gaps between different modes of urban naming.

The next chapters apply this methodology to a set of foundational urban categories. Beginning with the domestic scale, the following chapter examines how the concept of the house is articulated across official planning discourse and everyday language. This shift from methodological design to empirical investigation marks the first step in testing the analytical potential of *Terminological Urbanism* through concrete urban objects.

# PART 2 THE DECODING PRACTICE

In the next three chapters I will conduct a comprehensive analysis of the Chinese city terminology pertinent to the three semantic areas of the house (Chapter 4), the street (Chapter 5) and the neighborhood (Chapter 6). Each chapter will follow the same structure:

1. Historical introduction about the object addressed in each chapter.
2. Presentation of the main characters of the semantic area including etymology, first attestations in ancient literature, uses in pre-dynastic and dynastic China, and analysis of the main compounds of the semantic area, useful for understanding modern and contemporary China's urban phenomena; each term will be analyzed according to its use in urban studies, urban planning, real estate market and/or in vernacular language practices, on the base of its specificity and peculiarity.
3. Terminological tensions in English translation.

By "vernacular language," I refer to locally grounded, everyday linguistic practices as opposed to classical, official or standardized written forms, without implying evaluative hierarchy.

**Why prioritize the historical evolution of the analyzed object**

Any analysis of Chinese urban terminology that limits itself to contemporary usage risks mistaking stability of form for stability of meaning. Urban terms in Chinese are not neutral descriptors of space, nor are they timeless categories that can be understood synchronically. They are historically produced linguistic objects whose meanings have been shaped, revised, and redeployed across successive political, administrative, and social regimes. For this reason, prioritizing the historical evolution of the analyzed object is not an optional enrichment of analysis, but a methodological necessity.

Chinese urban terminology emerges within concrete historical contexts: imperial governance, late Qing reforms, socialist planning, and post-reform urbanization. Each of these phases introduces new spatial practices and institutional logics, while often retaining earlier lexical forms. As a result, many urban terms exhibit a striking continuity at the level of language that masks profound transformations in the realities they designate. Without reconstructing these historical trajectories, contemporary meanings appear deceptively self-evident, and the

analytical framework risks naturalizing what is in fact the outcome of long-term institutional and discursive negotiation.

A historically grounded approach is particularly important for avoiding anachronism. When terms are examined only in their present configuration, there is a strong tendency—especially for non-Chinese readers—to project current urban categories backward in time or to align them uncritically with Western urban concepts. Historical analysis interrupts this tendency by showing that the same term may have referred to different spatial entities, administrative functions, or social practices at different moments. What appears today as a coherent urban category often turns out to be the sedimentation of multiple, sometimes incompatible, historical meanings.

At the same time, diachronic analysis reveals the persistence of semantic residues. Even when the referent of a term has changed, earlier meanings often continue to shape connotation, register, and rhetorical force. These residues are not merely linguistic curiosities; they play an active role in contemporary discourse, particularly in policy documents and planning narratives, where historical continuity is frequently mobilized to legitimize new forms of intervention. Attending to historical evolution thus allows the analysis to explain why certain terms carry authority, normativity, or emotional weight beyond their apparent descriptive function.

Prioritizing historical evolution also makes it possible to distinguish changes in language from changes in the urban object itself. In many cases, administrative units, planning categories, and spatial practices undergo significant transformation while retaining the same name. Conversely, new terms may be introduced to designate practices that already existed under different conceptual frames. Without a diachronic perspective, such discrepancies remain invisible, and the analyst risks conflating lexical continuity with institutional stability.

This historical sensitivity is particularly crucial in the Chinese context, where urban terminology is closely tied to governance. Terms are not only shaped by usage but are also actively standardized, redefined, or strategically deployed by state institutions. Tracing their historical evolution reveals how language functions as an instrument of spatial ordering and political rationality. Urban terminology, in this sense, is not simply reflective but performative: it participates in the production of urban reality itself.

Finally, prioritizing historical evolution strengthens the comparative dimension of urban analysis. Rather than assuming that Chinese terms correspond neatly to global urban categories, a diachronic approach allows comparison to be situated in time and context. It becomes possible to ask not whether two terms are equivalent in the abstract, but under what historical conditions

and for which analytical purposes such equivalence might hold. This avoids both forced alignment and cultural exceptionalism, replacing them with historically grounded comparison.

In sum, foregrounding the historical evolution of the analyzed object allows Chinese urban terminology to be approached as a dynamic archive rather than a static lexicon. It reveals how meanings are layered, how power is inscribed in language, and how urban concepts travel across time while continuously being reconfigured. Only by adopting this perspective can the analysis do justice to the complexity of Chinese urban terminology and to the urban realities it seeks to describe.

**Why Etymology and Early Usage Must Precede the Study of Modern Compounds**

Any serious analysis of modern Chinese vocabulary must begin not with contemporary compounds, but with the Chinese character itself. Unlike alphabetic writing systems, where words are the primary semantic units, the Chinese writing system is logographic and morphosyllabic: each character encapsulates phonetic, semantic, historical, and cultural layers that long predate its modern lexical combinations. For this reason, an analysis that proceeds directly to modern compounds without first examining the character's etymology, earliest attestations, and usage in Old Chinese risks flattening meaning, obscuring semantic continuities, and misinterpreting conceptual frameworks embedded in the language.

The philological analysis of individual characters—focusing on their graphic origins, early textual appearances, and functions in pre-Qin and early imperial sources—is an indispensable methodological step before addressing their role in modern Chinese compounds.

In Chinese, the character (字 *zì*) is not merely a visual representation of sound but a historically accumulated semantic node. Many modern disyllabic words are composed of characters whose original meanings were concrete, ritual, or cosmological, and whose semantic scope has shifted over millennia. Without reconstructing these earlier layers, modern usage appears arbitrary or purely conventional, when in fact it is often constrained by inherited semantic tendencies.

For example, characters that originally denoted spatial orientation, bodily posture, or ritual action frequently become abstract markers of social relations, morality, or epistemic stance in later periods. These shifts are not random; they follow historically traceable paths. Treating the character as the primary unit of analysis allows scholars to identify these paths and to understand why certain compounds emerged while others did not.

Etymological analysis—drawing on palaeographic materials such as oracle bone inscriptions (甲骨文 *jiǎgǔwén*), bronze inscriptions (金文 *jīnwén*), and early script forms—reveals the original conceptual domain of a character. This includes **graphic motivation**—whether the character originated as a pictograph, ideograph, compound ideograph, or phonetic-semantic compound—and **semantic core**—the concrete action, object, or relation encoded in early forms. A modern compound may appear semantically transparent today, but its plausibility and productivity are often grounded in the ancient semantic affordances of its constituent characters.

Identifying the first attestation of a character in transmitted or excavated texts is crucial for understanding its original function. A character appearing initially in ritual inscriptions, legal texts, or philosophical discourse enters the lexicon with specific pragmatic and ideological constraints. Early attestations allow scholars to determine **register**—ritual, administrative, moral, cosmological, or everyday usage; **grammatical role**—noun, verb, adjective; **conceptual field**—whether the character is embedded in kinship systems, spatial metaphors, governance, or cosmology. For instance, a character later used in neutral bureaucratic compounds may have originated in sacrificial or divinatory contexts, carrying implications of authority, hierarchy, or mediation between realms. These implications often continue to shape its collocational behavior in modern Chinese, even if speakers are no longer consciously aware of them.

In Old Chinese, characters frequently exhibited a broader semantic and grammatical range than in modern Mandarin. Verbal, nominal, and adjectival uses often coexisted, and meaning was heavily context-dependent. Analyzing these early uses clarifies which semantic components are primary and which are secondary developments. This is particularly important because modern compounds often crystallize one strand of an older semantic network while suppressing others. Without examining Old Chinese usage, you may mistakenly assume that modern meanings exhaust the character's semantic potential.

Moreover, early usage reveals patterns of metaphorization—such as the extension from physical space to social relations, or from bodily action to moral judgment—that recur throughout Chinese intellectual history. These patterns inform not only lexicology but also broader cultural and philosophical analysis.

By first reconstructing the character's etymology and early usage, you can: (1) explain why certain compounds feel "natural" or productive; (2) account for semantic asymmetries within

compounds; (3) identify latent meanings that resurface in technical, literary, or political discourse; (4) avoid projecting modern meanings backward onto classical texts.

In this sense, philological analysis is not antiquarian but diagnostic: it reveals the deep structure underlying modern lexical usage. Analyzing modern Chinese compounds without first examining the historical life of their constituent characters is methodologically insufficient. Etymology, first attestation, and Old Chinese usage provide the semantic groundwork upon which modern meanings are built. They illuminate continuity beneath apparent change and reveal the cultural logic that governs lexical formation. The character must therefore be treated not as a mere building block of words, but as a historically situated unit of meaning. Only by respecting this philological primacy can modern Chinese vocabulary be analyzed with precision, depth, and cultural fidelity.

**Why modern words are mostly compound-based**

Modern Chinese vocabulary is overwhelmingly compound-based. While individual characters remain the minimal graphic and etymological units of the writing system, the primary lexical unit in contemporary Chinese is the compound word, most commonly disyllabic. Understanding how Chinese compound terms function is therefore essential for any analysis of meaning, conceptual structure, and linguistic change.

Unlike many Indo-European languages, Chinese relies minimally on inflection and derivation. Compounding thus becomes the dominant strategy for lexical expansion and semantic specification. Compounds serve not merely to create new words, but to regulate ambiguity, stabilize meaning, and encode conceptual relations.

Historically, Classical Chinese allowed a high degree of monosyllabic polysemy. As spoken varieties evolved and homophony increased, particularly from the late medieval period onward, compounding became a functional response to phonological erosion. Disyllabic compounds reduced ambiguity while simultaneously enabling finer semantic distinctions. In this sense, compounding is not an accidental feature of modern Chinese, but a systemic solution to structural pressures within the language. Chinese compounds are not semantically symmetrical. In most cases, one element functions as the semantic head, while the other modifies, restricts, or specifies it. Although Chinese lacks overt morphological markers of headedness, semantic hierarchy can often be inferred from usage patterns and substitutability. For example, in modifier–head compounds, the second character typically determines the core category; in verb–object compounds, the verbal element encodes action while the object

delimits scope; in coordinative compounds, both elements contribute jointly but not always equally.

The choice of which character occupies which position has semantic consequences. Reversing the order of characters often yields a different meaning or an unacceptable form, indicating that compounds encode relational logic rather than mere juxtaposition. Compounding frequently results in semantic narrowing, whereby one sense of a character becomes privileged while others recede. At the same time, compounds can enable semantic broadening by abstracting a concrete meaning into a general concept. Once established, compounds often exhibit semantic fixation. This process explains why some modern compounds resist literal translation despite being analyzable at the character level. Even in fully modern compounds, characters retain traces of earlier semantic fields. These residues may resurface in literary usage, political rhetoric, or technical terminology. Compounds thus function as sites of semantic sedimentation, where multiple historical layers coexist. Ignoring this diachronic depth risks misreading both emphasis and connotation. Conversely, attending to it allows to explain why certain compounds are rhetorically powerful, morally charged, or resistant to reformulation.

**Why it is important to define the translation strategies in the study of Chinese urban terminology**

In a dissertation devoted to Chinese urban terminology, translation cannot be treated as a neutral or secondary operation. For non-Chinese readers, translation is the primary interface through which Chinese urban concepts become intelligible. As such, translation strategies do not merely transmit meaning; they actively shape interpretation, theoretical alignment, and analytical outcomes. A systematic analysis of translation strategies for each key term is essential to any rigorous study of Chinese urban terminology, as it reveals semantic constraints, conceptual asymmetries, and ideological positioning embedded in both source and target languages.

In much urban scholarship, translation is implicitly presented as a transparent conduit between languages. This assumption is particularly problematic in the case of Chinese urban terminology, where lexical items are historically layered, administratively loaded, and semantically non-equivalent with their English counterparts.

Each act of translation involves a series of strategic decisions: whether to privilege literal structure, functional equivalence, conceptual familiarity, or disciplinary convention. By

analyzing these decisions explicitly, the dissertation treats translation as an additional analytical layer rather than a mechanical prerequisite. This approach acknowledges that translation participates in meaning production and therefore must be subject to the same critical scrutiny as the terms themselves.

Chinese urban terminology often encodes conceptual distinctions that have no direct equivalent in English or other European languages. Conversely, English urban theory carries its own historically situated categories that may distort Chinese concepts when uncritically applied.

Analyzing translation strategies makes visible where equivalence is approximate rather than exact, which semantic components are foregrounded or suppressed, how conceptual hierarchies are reshaped in translation

For example, a term translated as *district*, *urban area*, or *neighborhood* may carry administrative, spatial, or social meanings in Chinese that exceed or diverge from these English categories. A strategic analysis of translation choices exposes these divergences rather than masking them under apparent fluency.

Different translation strategies carry distinct analytical consequences. Identifying and justifying the chosen strategy for each term allows readers to understand both the strengths and limitations of the translation.

Common strategies include: (1) **literal or morphemic translation**, which preserves internal structure but may obscure function; (2) **functional translation**, which emphasizes usage over form; (3) **conceptual approximation**, which aligns the term with established theoretical categories; (4) **transliteration**, which foregrounds alterity and resists premature equivalence. Each strategy implicitly answers the question of what aspect of meaning is considered primary. An explicit discussion of these choices prevents the naturalization of any single strategy as self-evident.

One of the principal risks in translating Chinese urban terminology is **conceptual flattening**: the reduction of semantically rich and internally differentiated terms to a single, seemingly transparent English equivalent. This flattening can lead to misinterpretation, especially for non-Chinese readers who lack access to the source-language nuances.

By analyzing translation strategies term by term, the dissertation retains semantic multiplicity rather than erasing it, signals ambiguity where it exists, and encourages interpretive caution rather than false certainty.

This approach replaces the illusion of transparency with a controlled and reflexive form of opacity, which is methodologically preferable in scholarly work.

Urban terminology in Chinese is frequently embedded in state planning discourse, legal frameworks, and policy narratives. Translation choices can either reproduce or critically distance these discourses. Using institutional English equivalents may align the term with global planning norms; retaining Chinese terminology may highlight its embeddedness in local governance logic; hybrid strategies may reveal tensions between local practice and global theory. Analyzing translation strategies thus becomes a way to interrogate how power, governance, and ideology travel across languages. This is particularly important in a dissertation concerned with urban terminology, where language often functions as an instrument of spatial and political ordering. Explicitly documenting translation strategies enhances the transparency and reproducibility of the research. It allows readers to evaluate the analytical choices made by the author and compare alternative translations. For non-Chinese readers, this transparency is essential. It transforms translation from an invisible background process into an accountable scholarly practice, strengthening the credibility of the dissertation as a whole.

A dissertation on Chinese urban terminology is likely to engage with urban studies, anthropology, geography, and planning theory. Each of these fields brings its own terminological conventions. By analyzing translation strategies, the dissertation clarifies how Chinese terms are positioned relative to these disciplinary vocabularies.

Rather than forcing Chinese concepts into pre-existing theoretical molds, this approach allows comparison to proceed on explicitly negotiated terms. It signals where alignment is provisional, where divergence is significant, and where new conceptual tools may be required.

# CHAPTER 4 TERMS OF STAYING: THE HOUSE

This chapter opens the empirical part of the dissertation by focusing on the domestic scale of the city. The house is examined as a foundational urban category through which planning norms, architectural typologies, and regulatory frameworks converge. Rather than treating housing as a purely physical object, the chapter approaches it as a structured field of classification, where social functions, spatial standards, and policy instruments are articulated through terminology.

The analysis concentrates on the ways in which housing is defined, organized, and differentiated within planning and institutional discourse. Attention is given to typological distinctions, density-related categories, and regulatory parameters that shape how residential space is conceptualized and governed. Through this lens, housing terminology is understood as a key mediator between abstract planning principles and concrete spatial forms.

By beginning with the house, the chapter establishes a controlled analytical baseline. It anchors the broader investigation in a domain where urban terminology is relatively stabilized, allowing subsequent chapters to expand the analysis toward more dynamic and relational spatial categories.

## 4.1 The Chinese house: Historical background

The Chinese house is more than a utilitarian shelter; it is a locus where kinship, cosmology, social hierarchy, and everyday practice intersect. In traditional Chinese culture, domestic architecture embodies a world-view in which the built environment reflects and produces social relations. The house is a structured microcosm—an ordered domain that simultaneously expresses the family's continuity, moral propriety, and ritual identity. To examine the Chinese dwelling is therefore to engage with the foundational principles of Chinese social life: lineage organization, patrilineal inheritance, ancestor reverence, and the negotiation of public and private space. While the spatial practices and architectural forms of dwelling vary significantly across regions and historical periods, systematic continuities reveal how the house functions as a social institution rather than merely a physical container of inhabitants (Knapp, 2005; Steinhardt, 2019).

Scholars have long emphasized that the spatial logic of Chinese domestic architecture cannot be separated from broader principles of cosmological order. The orientation and layout of traditional residences are classically governed by 风/風水 *fēngshuǐ*, which integrates geomancy, environmental orientation, and cosmological symbolism. The placement of the house, the alignment of its gates, its relationship to water and hills, and its internal progression

of rooms and courtyards are all understood to contribute to the well-being of the lineage that inhabits it. This cosmological orientation positions the dwelling as a mediator between the human world and larger cosmic forces. In this sense, the Chinese house is a spatial articulation of moral and metaphysical principles, situating the family within the rhythms and harmonies of the natural world.

The house is also a social structure in a concrete sense. It is deeply embedded in systems of kinship. Fei Xiaotong (1948) famously described Chinese society as organized through a 差序格局 *chāxù géjú* 'differential mode of association', in which social relations radiate outward in gradated circles from the family and lineage (Fei, 1948: 23-26). The home is the innermost sphere of this social model. It is here that gender roles, generational hierarchy, and familial obligations are learned, enacted, and reproduced. Domestic architecture traditionally materializes these relationships through spatial stratification: seniority and status determine who sleeps where, who enters which parts of the house, and who participates in particular household rituals (Freedman, 1958: 19–32). The physical organization of domestic space thus reinforces the normative order of the family.

One of the most iconic forms associated with Chinese dwelling is the 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* 'courtyard house', particularly prevalent in North China. Characterized by a rectangular courtyard enclosed by one-story buildings on four sides, the courtyard house organizes space hierarchically along north-south and east-west axes. The main building, typically located on the north side facing south, is the most prestigious position, occupied by the senior generation. Subsidiary buildings accommodate junior kin or secondary functions. Privacy and enclosure are key spatial values: walls define boundaries that separate domestic life from the street, while doors and corridors mediate degrees of access (Steinhardt, 2019). In such layouts, spatial hierarchy parallels genealogical hierarchy; to move toward the center or the north is to move toward authority and seniority.

Yet to equate the Chinese house solely with the courtyard model would be reductive. Across the vast geographic and cultural expanse of China, diverse dwelling typologies emerge in response to climate, ecology, and social organization. The rammed earth 土楼 *tǔlóu* complexes of Fujian—large, inward-facing, communal residences constructed for Hakka lineages—represent a distinctive residential morphology in which dozens of households share defensive walls, central courtyards, and ancestral halls. In the humid south, 吊脚楼 *diàojiǎolóu* 'stilt houses', lit. 'hanging feet building', respond to environmental conditions. In the arid northwest, 窯洞 *yáodòng* 'cave dwellings' utilize the thermal stability of loess cliffs. Despite

structural variation, many of these dwelling types preserve fundamental principles: enclosure, inward orientation, and the spatial expression of lineage solidarity.

The dwelling also participates in the everyday production of domestic ritual life. Ancestral altars, whether in the central hall of a courtyard house or a modest shelf in a modern apartment, mark the home as a site of communication with the lineage past. Ritual offerings, seasonal observances, and life-cycle ceremonies reinforce the connection between the living and the dead, grounding identity in continuity rather than individuality. Domestic altars not only anchor moral and cosmological meaning, but they shape the orientation of interior space. The arrangement of furniture, the placement of thresholds, and the alignment of doorways often reflect the spatial priority of ritual practice.

At the same time, the house mediates relations between interiority and exteriority. In contrast to the Western architectural tradition that often emphasizes openness and street engagement, the Chinese dwelling historically prioritizes enclosure and introversion. The courtyard is the primary space of communal life, while the street is frequently conceived as a transient zone of circulation or exchange rather than personal identification. The boundary between public and private space is therefore sharply drawn. This inward orientation contributes to the sense that home is a protective moral center, bounded against disorder and contingency (Knapp, 2005).

Modernization and urban transformation have significantly reshaped Chinese domestic spaces. Beginning in the mid-twentieth century, collectivization and state housing policies introduced apartment blocks modeled on Soviet principles of rational planning and standardized living. These residential units often disrupted the spatial relationships of traditional dwellings, decreasing the space available for extended family cohabitation and ritual activity. However, patterns of domestic sociability frequently adapted rather than disappeared. Even within limited floor plans, residents continued to distinguish between front and back spaces, formal and informal rooms, and areas associated with elders and juniors. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, rapid urbanization and market-driven housing development further transformed the material landscape of domesticity, yet many cultural expectations surrounding home—privacy, spatial hierarchy, and the symbolic centrality of family—persist.

Understanding the Chinese house requires attention to the lived experience of domestic space. While architectural plans convey formal layout, the phenomenological dimension of dwelling—movement, memory, sound, smell, routine—reveals how people inhabit and shape their environments. The courtyard's seasonal transitions, the rhythms of cooking and cleaning,

the negotiation of shared space, and the production of intimacy and conflict are all integral to how the house becomes meaningful (Knapp, 2005). A dwelling is not only constructed but continually re-constructed (and re-told) through daily use, social interactions, and emotional attachments.

The Chinese house is not static; it is historically contingent and socially dynamic. Yet its enduring significance lies in its capacity to mediate between past and present, individual and collective, earthly and celestial. To dwell in a Chinese house is to inhabit a space that is profoundly relational—shaped by lineage memory, ritual practice, regional environment, and the rhythms of everyday life. The study of the house therefore offers a foundational entry point into broader understandings of Chinese cultural life, revealing how architecture serves not merely as shelter but as a primary medium of social meaning.

## 4.2 The main terms of the 'house'

The Chinese language exhibits a striking abundance of terms referring to houses, dwellings, and residential buildings. This lexical richness extends across historical periods and persists, in transformed ways, in contemporary usage. Rather than constituting a set of simple synonyms, these terms encode distinctions of social status, institutional function, spatial form, and moral order. The proliferation of dwelling terminology is therefore not accidental, nor merely stylistic; it reflects the deep entanglement of domestic space with social hierarchy, governance, and lived experience in Chinese society.

The multiplicity of "house" terms in Chinese emerges from the convergence of three long-term structural factors: (1) the historical centrality of residence as a marker of social position; (2) the institutional embedding of dwelling within political and administrative systems; (3) the linguistic tendency to lexicalize social distinctions rather than subsume them under abstract general categories. Together, these factors have produced a dwelling lexicon that is both historically stratified and synchronically differentiated.

In premodern China, the house was not merely a shelter but a primary institution of social order. Kinship, property, ritual, and governance converged in residential space. As a result, different forms of dwelling were not interchangeable: they indexed rank, occupation, moral standing, and proximity to power.

Classical and imperial Chinese society developed a finely graded hierarchy of residences. Terms such as 宫 *gōng* 'palace', 府 *fǔ* 'official residence', 邸 *dǐ* 'noble or high-ranking residence', 宅 *zhái* 'residence', 舍 *shè* 'modest dwelling', 屋 *wū* 'building, roofed structure',

家 *jiā* ‘household, lineage unit’ did not merely describe architectural form; they articulated position within the social and political order. Linguistic differentiation mirrored legal and ritual differentiation: who was allowed to live where, in what kind of structure, and under what symbolic markers was strictly regulated.

Crucially, the Chinese lexicon did not collapse these distinctions into a generic term equivalent to the modern English ‘house’. Instead, it preserved and refined them lexically, allowing language to function as a social classificatory system. To name a dwelling was already to situate its inhabitant within a moral and political landscape.

One reason for the abundance of dwelling terms in Chinese lies in the relative absence, historically, of a fully neutral, abstract category of “house” detached from social function. While 屋 *wū* or 房 *fáng* may appear generic, their usage is always contextually constrained and semantically lighter rather than conceptually universal. Unlike modern Western languages shaped by legal abstraction and commodified property regimes, Chinese historically conceptualized residence as relational and situated: a house existed as someone’s house, for some purpose, within some hierarchy. Language therefore privileged differentiation over generalization.

This tendency persists into modern Chinese. Even today, speakers rarely rely on a single, socially neutral term to describe all residential forms. Instead, they choose among 住宅 *zhùzhái* ‘residence’, 房子 *fángzi* ‘house’, 房屋 *fángwū* ‘building; house’, 商品房 *shāngpǐn fáng* ‘commercial housing’, 别墅 *biéshù* ‘villa’, 自建房 *zìjiàn fáng* ‘self-built house’, 小区住房 *xiǎoqū zhùfáng* ‘residential unit in a housing compound’, 公房 *gōngfáng* ‘public housing’, 老宅 *lǎozhái* ‘old residence; ancestral house’, 民居 *mínjū* ‘vernacular dwelling; civilian residence’, each of which encodes assumptions about ownership, legality, status, and urban context. The lexicon continues to function as a classificatory device.

A key driver of lexical proliferation is the persistent importance of status differentiation in residential space. In Chinese society, where social mobility has historically been both constrained and symbolically mediated, the dwelling has long served as a visible index of one’s position. Language registers these distinctions with remarkable precision. Elite dwellings are not merely “large houses” but are named differently: 别墅 *biéshù* ‘villa’, 府邸 *fǔdǐ* ‘official or aristocratic residence’, 官邸 *guāndǐ* ‘official residence of a government official’, 豪宅 *háozhái* ‘luxury mansion’. These terms signal exclusivity, privilege, and separation from ordinary residential life. Their semantics are evaluative as much as descriptive. At the other end of the spectrum, modest or marginal dwellings are likewise lexicalized: 舍 *shè* ‘modest dwelling’, 瓦

房 *wǎfáng* ‘tile-roofed house’, 平房 *píngfáng* ‘single-storey house’, 简屋 *jiǎnwū* ‘simple hut; rudimentary house’, 棚户 *pénghù* ‘shack; makeshift dwelling’. These terms carry connotations of temporariness, insufficiency, or social vulnerability. Importantly, such distinctions are not only historical; they remain active in contemporary discourse, especially in discussions of inequality, redevelopment, and displacement.

The Chinese language thus resists flattening residential space into a homogeneous category. Instead, it continuously re-inscribes social stratification through dwelling terminology. Modern Chinese urbanization has not reduced lexical diversity; on the contrary, it has generated new layers of dwelling terminology. Socialist and post-socialist housing regimes introduced institutional categories that demanded precise naming. Terms such as 单位住房 *dānwèi zhùfáng* ‘work-unit housing’, 公房 *gōngfáng* ‘public housing’, 集资房 *jízī fáng* ‘funded housing (collectively financed housing)’, 商品房 *shāngpǐn fáng* ‘commercial housing’, 经济适用房 *jīngjì shìyòng fáng* ‘economically affordable housing’, 回迁房 *huíqiān fáng* ‘resettlement housing’, 保障房 *bǎozhàng fáng* ‘government-subsidized housing’ reflect not architectural differences but administrative, legal, and economic distinctions. These terms arose because access to housing was mediated by institutions rather than markets alone. Language had to encode eligibility, rights, and obligations. The result is a housing lexicon dense with bureaucratic and policy-laden terms, each anchoring a specific relationship between residents and the state.

Even in the marketized era, housing terminology continues to differentiate status: 商品房 *shāngpǐn fáng* ‘commercial housing’ versus 保障房 *bǎozhàng fáng* ‘government-subsidized housing’, 普通住宅 *pǔtōng zhùzhái* ‘standard residential housing’ versus 别墅 *biéshù* ‘villa’, 学区房 *xuéqū fáng* ‘school-district housing’ versus 老小区 *lǎo xiǎoqū* ‘older residential compound’. Dwelling terms function as social signals, indexing wealth, security, future prospects, and symbolic capital.

Alongside institutional terminology, vernacular language further multiplies dwelling categories. Residents name their living spaces according to experience, memory, and social perception rather than official classification. Terms such as 老房子 *lǎo fángzi* ‘old house’, 老宅 *lǎozhái* ‘old residence; ancestral house’, 新房 *xīnfáng* ‘new house’, 回迁房 *huíqiān fáng* ‘resettlement housing’, 群租房 *qúnzū fáng* ‘shared rental housing’, 黑房子 *hēi fángzi* ‘illegal or unregistered housing’ emerge from everyday practice and circulate widely despite lacking formal definition. This vernacular creativity reflects the fact that dwelling is one of the most emotionally and socially charged domains of urban life. People invest houses with narratives

of migration, success, failure, and belonging. Language responds by producing fine-grained distinctions that allow speakers to situate themselves and others within the urban landscape. From an anthropological perspective, this confirms that the dwelling lexicon is not merely technical. It is a lived semantic field, continuously reshaped by social experience.

Compared to languages such as modern English, where "house" operates as a broad umbrella term supplemented by adjectives, Chinese tends to lexicalize difference directly. Rather than modifying a generic noun, Chinese often selects a different noun altogether. This is consistent with a broader typological tendency in Chinese to encode social and functional distinctions lexically rather than syntactically. The result is not redundancy but semantic precision. What appears as an abundance of synonyms is, in fact, a structured lexicon in which each term occupies a distinct position within a social and institutional matrix.

For research on the contemporary Chinese city, this abundance of dwelling terms has significant implications. It cautions against treating "house" or "housing" as a stable analytical category that can be translated without loss. Each Chinese term carries sedimented assumptions about status, ownership, legitimacy, and social value. From a terminological and translatological perspective, this means that translation choices are never innocent. Rendering multiple Chinese dwelling terms as "house," "residence," or "housing" risks erasing precisely the distinctions through which urban life is organized and experienced. The richness of the dwelling lexicon should therefore be understood not as lexical excess, but as evidence of the central role of residential space in the moral, social, and political imagination of Chinese society. In both historical and contemporary contexts, dwelling terminology functions as a social grammar of the city. To study it is not merely to catalogue words, but to access the deep structures through which Chinese urban life is conceptualized and lived.

The characters that can be ascribed to this semantic area are numerous, used in the ancient sources as free morphemes, that can stand alone as independent words, but also combined with each other with slightly different semantic traits. Yin (2016: 60–70), in her investigation on the terms of this semantic field, conducted on the texts in the *Textbook of Medieval Chinese* (Fang and Wang, 2006), extrapolates twelve monosyllabic words 宫 *gōng* 'palace', 殿 *diàn* 'hall; palace hall', 阁 *gé* 'pavilion; chamber', 楼 lóu 'multi-storey building', 宅 *zhái* 'residence', 舍 *shè* 'modest dwelling', 府 fǔ 'official residence', 家 *jiā* 'household, family', 屋 *wū* 'house; roofed structure', 庐 *lú* 'hut, thatched dwelling', 庵 *ān* 'small Buddhist nunnery, hermitage', 房 *fáng* 'house, room' and five polysyllabic words (东宫 *dōnggōng* 'Eastern Palace', 屋宇

*wūyǔ* ‘buildings; house structures’, 草庵 *cǎoān* ‘thatched hut; simple hermitage’, 房室 *fángshì* ‘rooms; living quarters’, 房舍 *fángshè* ‘houses; dwellings’) from literary and philosophical works from Eastern Han to the Southern and Northern Dynasties. Because of the chronological limitedness of the source, the author doesn’t take into consideration a vast number of later synonyms. Nonetheless, the investigation of the origin and use of each term and the comparative investigation of semantic traits, register, grammatical use and semantic typology give a comprehensive picture of the semantic area in question during the historical period under consideration.

In modern Chinese most of the nouns are disyllabic, comprising the semantic traits of both characters. For this reason, over time the number of synonyms increased dramatically, making it necessary to carefully analyze their semantic traits and contexts of use.

An exception to this real disyllabism is the relatively limited group of terms composed of the base morpheme and the noun suffix *-zi* -子, deprived of its original meaning ‘son, child, seed, egg’ when used in these compounds: 房子 *fángzi* ‘house’, 屋子 *wūzi* ‘house; room’, 宅子 *zháizi* ‘residence; dwelling’. These terms are relatively recent and mostly used in the spoken language.

## 4.2.0 家 *jiā* the pre-architectural home




The Chinese character 家 *jiā*—commonly translated as ‘home,’ ‘family,’ or ‘household,’ originally signifying the interior of a house or dwelling—, widely attested in the Shang Dynasty oracle bone inscriptions of the late second millennium BCE, embodies a remarkable synthesis of material culture, social structure, and linguistic evolution.

In Shang Dynasty oracle bone inscriptions, the character appears in two forms. In one form, the component 豕 *shǐ* ‘pig’ under the 宀 *mián* ‘roof’, a pictograph of a house, is depicted as a *male* pig, with a clearly emphasized protruding male genital organ. In the other, simpler form, the pig is drawn without indicating gender. The version that emphasizes the male organ is an early pictographic prototype of 豭 *jiā* ‘boar’, and in this context it also functions as a phonetic element. The gender-neutral 豕 *shǐ* form is a simplified variant. Even though the association “family=pig under the roof” was only a form of folk etymology, driven by popular belief or analogy, not by the actual etymological history of the word, it would still reveal how visual elements in early Chinese writing encoded both physical and cultural realities. Its form and

meaning together reveal how ancient Chinese society conceived of domestic life as the foundation of civilization. The roof radical 宀 *mián* foregrounds the architectural nature of 家 *jiā*. Traditional Chinese dwellings were not mere shelters but spatial representations of familial hierarchy. This physical organization reflected and reinforced the Confucian ethics of order and harmony. Thus, architecture served as a spatial metaphor for the social institution of the family (Knapp, 2005).

Archaeological findings from the Shang and Zhou dynasties (c. 1600–256 BCE) reveal that pigs were often kept within or adjacent to the family compound. In subsistence farming societies, livestock—particularly pigs—symbolized wealth and stability. To keep a pig "under one's roof" was to possess food security and economic means. Hence, 家 *jiā* did not merely denote a house but a prosperous, self-sufficient household. The earliest meaning of "home" in Chinese thus joined the architectural (shelter) and economic (livelihood) dimensions into a unified concept.

By the Zhou Dynasty, in bronze inscriptions, the non-gendered form became dominant, and the later standard form of the character evolved from this version. The "Biography of Yue Yi" from the *Shiji* reports one of the early use of the character: "After Yue Yang's death, he was buried at Lingshou, where his descendants later settled and made their home" (Sima, 1959; my trans.). 家 *jiā* further extended to refer to one's family residence, the interior of a dwelling, or the quarters of units such as government agencies and military units. In the *Zhuangzi* we find one of the earliest attestation with this meaning: "The Master emerged from the mountains and lodged at an old friend's home [家 *jiā*]."

Over time, 家 *jiā* came to signify more than the physical dwelling. It evolved into the social unit that inhabited the space, mirroring the Confucian view of the family as the microcosm of moral and political order. In the section "Daxue" of the *Liji*, 家 *jiā* is an essential step which connects the cultivation of the self to the ruling of the country:

> The ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the kingdom, first ordered well their own states. Wishing to order well their states, they first regulated their families [households]. Wishing to regulate their families [housoholds], they first cultivated their persons. Wishing to cultivate their persons, they first rectified their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts. Wishing to be sincere in their thoughts, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things. Things being investigated, knowledge became complete. Their knowledge being complete, their thoughts were sincere. Their thoughts being sincere, their hearts were then rectified. Their hearts being rectified, their persons were cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their families [households] were regulated. Their families [households] being regulated,

> their states were rightly governed. Their states being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy. (Legge, 1865).

The semantic range of 家 *jiā* further expanded: it could denote physical dwelling, kinship unit, or emotional belonging. Its flexibility captures how Chinese thought interweaves space, social relations, and emotion within a single linguistic form. In essence, it is far more than a linguistic symbol for "home." It is a living cultural artifact encoding the ancient Chinese ideal of security, harmony, and continuity under one roof.

Table 4.1 The main characters of the "house"

| | FIRST ATTESTATION | USE CONTEXT | DIFFUSION IN MODERN CHINESE | COMPOUND PRODUCTIVITY | MAIN COMPOUNDS | ETYMOLOGY |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 楼 *lóu* | Han–Six Dynasties (upper floor, elevated structure) | Architectural / morphological | Very high (modern urban housing typol.) | Very high | 板楼，塔楼，简子楼 |  |
| 房 *fáng* | Pre-Qin (room, enclosed space) | Architectural / functional | Very high (core housing term) | Very high | 住房，公房，平房，楼房，工房，用房 |  |
| 宅 *zhái* | Zhou–Han (residence, dwelling plot) | Legal / residential | High (formal & administrative) | Medium | 住宅 |  |
| 屋 *wū* | Oracle bone / early classical (roofed space) | Morphological / descriptive | High (generic, non-technical) | Low–medium | 房屋 |  |
| 院 *yuàn* | Han (enclosed courtyard) | Spatial / compound-based | Medium–high (trad. + inst.) | Medium | 宅院，合院，大杂院 |  |
| 寓 *yù* | Han (temporary lodging, sojourn) | Functional / institutional | Medium (modern housing import) | Low | 公寓 |  |
| 舍 *shè* | Pre-Qin (temporary shelter, humble dwelling) | Institutional / collective | Medium (work-unit legacy) | Low | 宿舍 |  |
| 居 *jū* | Classical (to reside, dwelling as condition) | Anthropological / relational | Medium | Medium | 民居，家居 |  |
| 墅 *shù* | Classical (rural villa, estate) | Elite residential | Low–medium (real-estate driven) | Very low | 别墅 |  |

### 4.2.1 楼(樓) lóu and its compounds

#### 楼 (樓) *lóu*: the tower house

The pictophonetic character 楼 (樓) *lóu* storied building, tower' consists of the radical 木 *mù* 'wood' and the phonetic element 娄 *lóu*. The concept of "building" emerged relatively late. From the perspective of China's architectural history, residents during the Shang and Western Zhou dynasties typically constructed houses on elevated foundations, lacking the technology to build two-story or multi-story structures. Consequently, no records of the character for "building" have been found in oracle bone inscriptions or bronze inscriptions. After a long evolution from the Warring States–period scripts found on bamboo slips, the character modern form is attested in the *Shuowen Jiezi* (Xu, 1963), where it is defined "a building of more than one story."

The prevalence of wood as building material is attested by the radical 木 *mù*. Kroll (2015) defines it as "multi-storeyd building (2 storeys or more), loft-building, tiered pavillion; the common translation 'tower' wrongly gives the impression of narrow verticality but is often hard to replace."

A Eastern Han through Western Jin terracotta sculpture of a three-story building brings the inscription 高樓 *gāolóu* 'tall *lou*', giving the name to this quite common funerary object (CMW S21, 2023). Liang Sicheng 梁思成 translated 重樓 (重楼) *chònglóu* (on a Han Dynasty engraved relief) the 'two-storied building' (Liang, 1984: 30; CMW S21, 2023).

The original meaning of 楼 (樓) *lóu* is not directly linked to the semantic field of "house" or "dwelling". In the "Eighth Year of Duke Ai" of the *Zuozhuan*, a prisoner is held captive in a "tower [樓 *lóu*] and terrace, barred with thorns" (Kong, 1980; my trans.) This text suggests that the multi-storied buildings originated in the late Warring States, even though some scholars trace the earliest tower to the reign of King Kang 康 of Western Zhou (c. 1020-996 BCE). It is said that Yin Xi 尹喜, the governor of Hangu Pass 函谷关, built a thatched tower on the northern slopes of Mount Zhongnan 终南山 to welcome the descent of immortals, marking the origin of later tower structures. Gao Cheng 高承's Song Dynasty work *Records of the Origins of Things* (Gao, 1989), quotes the *Shiji* to date back the origin of the multi-storied buildng to the semi-legendary times of the Yellow Emperor: "A Taoist scholar told Emperor Wu of Han: 'The Yellow Emperor built five cities and twelve towers (樓 *lóu*) to await divine beings.' The emperor then erected the Jinggan Tower." In pre-Qin literature, there are countless examples of the use of 樓 *lóu* as a watchtower, even on ships.

One of the first attestation related to the "house" is in the "Biographies of Lord Pingyuan and Yu Qing" of the *Shiji*: "The tower of Lord Pingyuan's residence overlooked a commoner's home. In that home lived a lame man who shuffled about to fetch water. Lord Pingyuan's beautiful concubine, gazing down from the tower, saw him and burst into laughter." (Sima, 1959; my trans.)

Architectura Sinica argues that the meaning of 樓 *lóu* remained ambiguous both in terms of morphology and function through the Tang dynasty (CMW S21, 2023). In the Song dynasty *Yingzao Fashi* (Li, 2021), 樓 *lóu* is combined to the character ge 閣(阁) *gé* 'pavillion', usually two-storied with a balustrade or railing, into the term 樓閣 *gélóu*.

### 板楼 *bǎnlóu* vs. 塔楼 *tǎlóu*

In contemporary Chinese residential design, 板楼 *bǎnlóu* 'slab building', modern planning term indicating rectangular, slab-shaped apartment block, usually mid-rise, and 塔楼 *tǎlóu* 'tower building': high-rise, tower-shaped apartments, common in 1990s–2000s, denote two distinct building types whose spatial logics produce different environmental performances, densities, and everyday experiences.

板楼 *bǎnlóu* typically feature shallower floor plates, long façades, and single—or double-loaded corridors, which make unit orientation comparatively easy to optimize (e.g., the prized south-facing living rooms and cross-ventilation). Because of the smaller depth and larger façade surface per unit, slab blocks generally achieve better daylighting and natural ventilation at the unit scale, albeit at the cost of lower plot ratios and more linear site coverage. By contrast, 塔楼 *tǎlóu* excel at land-use efficiency and higher floor-area ratios, freeing up ground plane for open space and landscaping (an important planning objective in large estates), but often entail deeper floor plates with more varied orientations and a larger share of interior or partial-orientation units whose daylighting and cross-ventilation can be less robust without careful design (*Standard for Design of Residential Buildings* [GB 50096-2011]; *Standard for planning and design of urban residential areas* [GB 50180-2018]).

Functionally, slab blocks historically dominated mid-rise walk-up or small-elevator developments (e.g., 6–11 stories), aligning with comfort goals such as daylight standards, inter-building spacing, and wind access that Chinese codes have long emphasized. Towers, in turn, became the workhorse of post-1990s high-density estates, where elevator cores, stacked services, and compact footprints support mass housing production and skyline intensification.

At the neighborhood morphology scale, slabs tend to structure space laterally—defining street walls and semi-open courtyards—whereas towers punctuate the site, shaping point-block

ensembles around green voids and podiums. Socially, both types have been mobilized by the marketization of housing since the late 1990s, yet they map differently onto middle-class aspirations and branding: tower compounds often market skyline, amenities, and gated landscapes; slab-based products stress unit livability and traditional orientation preferences (Zhang, 2008). In practice, hybrid estates frequently mix 板楼 *bǎnlóu* and 塔楼 *tǎlóu* to balance density targets with unit quality, a strategy consistent with human-settlement principles that prioritize environmental performance alongside land efficiency (Wu, 2001: 1741–1764).

### 筒子楼 *tǒngzilóu*: the tube-shaped building

The 筒子楼 *tǒngzilóu*, often translated as 'tube-shaped apartment building', represents one of the most distinctive residential typologies in socialist China. Emerging in the 1950s and 1970s, this form of mass housing was a pragmatic response to severe urban housing shortages in the early years of the People's Republic. Characterized by long corridors lined with single rooms on either side, and by the collective use of kitchens, toilets, and other public facilities, the 筒子楼 *tǒngzilóu* was both an architectural solution and a social experiment. The name itself is descriptive: the internal layout, with a central corridor and rooms branching off like cells in a tube, gives the impression of living inside a long pipe. Beyond its physical form, however, the 筒子楼 *tǒngzilóu* came to symbolize an entire way of life: one defined by collectivism, scarcity, and shared everyday experience.

Architecturally, the 筒子楼 *tǒngzilóu* drew heavily on the Soviet *Khrushchëvka* model—standardized apartment blocks introduced under Nikita Khrushchev to address postwar housing shortages. The *Khrushchëvka* (Russian: Хрущёвка) refers to low-cost, prefabricated apartment buildings constructed en masse in the Soviet Union during Nikita Khrushchev's tenure (late 1950s–1960s). In Chinese these are called 赫鲁晓夫楼 *Hèlǔxiǎofū lóu*, lit. 'Khrushchev building', or 赫鲁晓夫式住宅 *Hèlǔxiǎofū shì zhùzhái*, lit. 'residences in Khushchev style'. These blocky structures were designed to address a severe postwar housing shortage by using industrialized panel construction of standardized 3–5 story walk-up units. Khrushchevka construction was politically driven: Khrushchev's goal was to provide a home for every family, sacrificing architectural polish for speed and equality.

As imported to China, the model was simplified and localized. The result was a 3–4-story brick-concrete structure, typically without elevators, with 10–30 m² rooms lining a central corridor. The corridor, often at a 42° slope for ventilation, connected living spaces to shared staircases, toilets, and kitchens.

In the 1950s, China's new Communist regime was heavily influenced by Soviet models in economics, politics, and architecture. The 单位 *dānwèi* system—where each citizen was tied to a state work unit for employment and welfare—was modeled closely on Soviet industry. Chinese planners and architects explicitly studied Soviet housing techniques. The People's Republic embraced standardized housing: in official rhetoric they "learned from the Soviet model" (学习苏联模式 *xuéxí Sūlián móshì*) and used uniform building standards for entire blocks. Large industrial works (steel mills, rail yards, factories) constructed entire apartment complexes using designs that often mirrored Soviet slab blocks.

The Chinese 筒子楼 *tǒngzilóu* was a visible legacy of this exchange. These were long, narrow apartment blocks with a central shared corridor and staircases at the ends. Early 筒子楼 *tǒngzilóu* often housed students and single workers, since their needs were simpler. Over time, they became common worker housing too, as demand outstripped supply. Structurally, many 筒子楼 *tǒngzilóu* were built as Soviet-style panel blocks in that era: entire floor plans were standardized, and construction materials included concrete panels or simple brick. Floors were arranged so that all units could be built from repeating elements.

The typical 筒子楼 *tǒngzilóu* consisted of three or four floors, each containing 10–20 single rooms arranged symmetrically along a central passageway. The ends of the corridor were open or ventilated, allowing airflow and limited natural light. Each family occupied a single room (10–30 $m^2$). The room served simultaneously as bedroom, living room, and dining area. Kitchens, toilets, and washing rooms were located at either end of the corridor. Residents often cooked on small coal stoves or gas canisters placed outside their doors, turning corridors into smoky, vibrant public kitchens. The hallway was both a traffic artery and a living space—a semi-public domain where daily life unfolded. It was not merely an architectural feature—it was the social heart of the building. Here residents cooked, washed, argued, played cards, and exchanged gossip. It was a hybrid space—part street, part kitchen, part living room. For children, it was a playground; for adults, a marketplace of favors and information. This spatial configuration blurred the boundary between public and private. Privacy was nearly impossible: thin walls and open cooking spaces meant everyone could hear their neighbors' lives. Yet, this closeness fostered intense community bonds. Shared hardship and proximity created strong social networks.

In cultural memory and media, the 筒子楼 *tǒngzilóu* is often romanticized as a site of collective warmth amid hardship. Television dramas like *Golden Marriage* (金婚 *Jīnhūn*, 2007)

and memoirs of 1960s–80s urban life often evoke the nostalgic rhythms of these corridors—the clanging of pots, the sound of radios, the laughter of children.

Ironically, in the 1980s, when housing remained scarce, owning a single room in a 筒子楼 *tǒngzilóu* was considered a privilege. In cities like Jinan, residents recalled that such units represented upward mobility: to have one's own door and key—even within a shared corridor—signified success. At the same time, the buildings embodied the egalitarian ideals of the planned economy: everyone, from engineers to janitors, lived under similar conditions. They were physical manifestations of social parity, if not equality.

After the housing reform of 1978, China gradually transitioned from state-allocated welfare housing to a market-based housing system, effectively halting the construction of new 筒子楼 *tǒngzilóu*. The typology's deficiencies—poor ventilation, high density, lack of privacy, and inefficient layouts—became increasingly apparent. The long corridors, once lively social arteries, came to symbolize backwardness and poverty.

In the context of China's rapid urbanisation and housing reform, the retro-fitting and renovation of dilapidated 筒子楼 *tǒngzilóu* become a salient policy and planning priority. These long, narrow buildings with common corridors and shared sanitary facilities were erected in large numbers during the early socialist era and gradually deteriorated over time, presenting both structural safety risks and poor living conditions. Specifically, 筒子楼 *tǒngzilóu* renovation initiatives over the last two decades have aimed to transform shared-facility blocks into self-contained households, upgrade infrastructure, and integrate ageing stock into the wider urban renewal agenda.

One important dimension of the renovation process is the shift from demolition-and-reconstruction to in-situ upgrading. In Beijing, for example, studies show housing renewal of former socialist public-housing areas often took the form of refurbishment rather than wholesale redevelopment, preserving the built fabric while enhancing quality of life (Hui, 2013). This approach is especially relevant for 筒子楼 *tǒngzilóu* buildings located in dense historic inner-city neighbourhoods where total demolition would displace communities and erase urban form. The renewal strategy emphasises improving plumbing, utilities, elevators, façade insulation, and unit facilities (kitchen and bathroom) to modern standards.

Policy support has intensified in the last five years: national data indicate that between 2019 and 2024, China renovated some 280 000 old residential communities, benefiting over 120 million people (Xinhua, 2025). While this figure covers the entire spectrum of aging housing stock, 筒子楼 *tǒngzilóu* buildings form a significant sub-category, particularly in

north-eastern and central Chinese cities. The upgrade of these buildings often involves complexity: obtaining homeowner consent, securing maintenance funds, coordinating with multiple government agencies and property management firms. The corridor typology poses unique challenges: narrow access, absence of elevators, shared toilets and kitchens, which must be replaced or reconfigured within a functioning community.

Socially, the renovation of 筒子楼 *tǒngzilóu* buildings has implications for residents' welfare and urban equity. These buildings frequently house older, lower-income households. Upgrading them aligns with the "livable city" agenda and improves accessibility (e.g., elevator retrofits) and sanitation. However, the cost-sharing arrangements and risk of gentrification remain issues: homeowners must often vote to approve the works and co-finance them, raising questions about fairness and displacement. Studies of Beijing's socialist housing renewal emphasise socio-spatial integration as a key outcome (Hui, 2013).

Architecturally, the retention of 筒子楼 *tǒngzilóu* blocks allows for continuity of built heritage while accommodating necessary modernisation. Preservation enhances community identity and often avoids the social fragmentation caused by large resettlement projects. At the same time, retro-fitting must meet new regulatory demands (fire-safety, structural reinforcement, seismic resilience) and upgrade performance (energy, plumbing) to current urban standards.

**Other 楼 *lóu* compounds**

The character 楼 *lóu* is very productive in forming words for residential buildings, reflecting China's diverse architectural landscape, from ancient vernacular styles to the modern high-rise cities of today. 楼房 *lóufáng* is the most general term for any multi-story building used as a residence (→ 4.2.2). In other cases the 楼 *lóu* compounds carry strong social and historical connotations:

安置楼 *ānzhìlóu* 'resettlement building': housing provided by the government or developers for residents who have been relocated due to urban redevelopment. Often implies lower construction quality and cheaper materials compared to commercial housing.

墩子楼 *dūnzilóu* lit. 'block, pier building; stumpy building': refers to old residential blocks made of squat, block-like low-rise buildings, often 3–5 stories tall, built of brick and concrete. Common in Beijing colloquial speech with nostalgic or pejorative tone,

depending on context. Typical of 单位宿舍 *dānwèi sùshè* work-unit dormitories built in Beijing and other northern cities after 1949 (→ 4.2.7)

公寓楼 *gōngyùlóu* 'apartment building': often used post-1980s for modern apartments (sometimes with services); earlier (1950s–70s) could refer to multi-story residential blocks, often work-unit assigned (→ 4.2.6).

居民楼 *jūmínlóu* 'residential building' or 'apartment block for 居民 *jūmín* [residents]': standard, neutral term for a building containing many residential households.

骑楼 *qílóu* 'arcade house': a quintessential architectural style in historical port cities like Guangzhou, Xiamen, and Haikou. The building has a covered walkway (arcade) on the ground floor for pedestrians, while the upper floors overhang the sidewalk.

商住楼 *shāngzhùlóu* lit. 'commercial and residential building; mixed-use building': a building where the lower floors are designated for commercial use (shops, offices) and the upper floors are for residential apartments. Typical of this type of buildings is the 门面房 *ménmiànfáng* lit. 'house facing a street', that in colloquial Chinese indicates the street-level store facing the street, also called in technical term 底层商铺 *dǐcéng shāngpù* 'ground floor store'.

宿舍楼 *sùshèlóu* 'dormitory building': it provides accommodation for students at a school or university, or for employees within a 单位 *dānwèi* 'work unit'.

住宅楼 *zhùzháilóu* 'residential building': it is a formal term, often used in urban planning documents.

## 4.2.2 房 *fáng* and its compounds

### 房 *fáng*: the architectural house

The original meaning of 房 *fáng*, attested in the *Shuowen Jiezi*, is 'side room' in the traditional Chinese house setting. The first attestation is in the *Zhoushu*:

> The dancing habits of Yin, the large tortoise-shell, and the large drum, all in the Western apartment; in the western apartment; and the spear of Tuy, the bow of Ho, and the bamboo arrows of Suy,—all in the eastern apartment." (Legge 1865: 554-555).

Gui Fu 桂馥 (1736-1805), in his *Commentary to the* Shuowen (Gui, 1987), glosses:

> Once upon time there the house was regulated according to the principle of the main room [堂 *táng*] in front and the room [室 *shì*] in the back. On the two extremities of the 堂 *táng* there were the squeezing rooms [夾室 *jiāshì*]. On the two sides of the 室 *shì*, there were the eastern rooms [東房 *dōngfáng*] and the western rooms [西房 *xīfáng*] (my trans.).

Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877-1927), in the essay 明堂庙寢通考 (A comprehensive study of bedchambers and courtyard), included in his most famous collection of historical and philological essays *Collected Essays of Guantang* (Wang, 1961, 58), writes:

> Formerly, the room [室 *shì*] was the origin of the house [宫室 *gōngshì*]. Later, for the abundance of rhetorical language, the extension outward was called 'main hall' [堂 *tang*], the extensions at its sides were called 'side rooms' [房 *fáng*] and the further extensions at the right and left of the main hall were called 箱 [*xiāng*], 夹 [*jiā*] or 个 [*gè*] (the three definitions refer to the same thing). (My trans.)

The meaning of 房 *fáng* very soon went through a metonymical shift from 'side room' to 'room' and a synecdochical shift from 'room' to 'house'. It is attested in 招魂 (*Zhaohun*) [*Chuci*, "Summons of the Soul"][A] // Hong, 1983: "They of the lovely faces and adorned forms / crowd your bedchamber." (Sukhu, 2017: 174) The term 洞房 *dòngfáng* 'bedchamber', lit. 'hole room' is very popular in the Chinese poetry of any time, since it refers to the secret inner room of the house where the brides or the newly married women live (bridal or nuptial room). The connection between 房 *fáng* and the sexual activity is well attested, for example in the metonymical use in 房室 *fángshì* 'sexual intercourse [between a married couple], lit. 'the affairs of the room'. The meaning of 'house' is already attested in the *Guangya* (Wang, 1983).

房子 *fángzi* (房 + noun suffix) can be considered the most general term for 'house (building)', but in many literary sources is undistinguishable from 'room' in terms of meaning. The definition in *Modern Chinese Dictionary* (2016) is very generic, but, at the same time, underlines the material connotation of the word: "A building with walls, roof, doors and windows for human habitation or other purposes" (Dictionary Editorial Office of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Linguistics , 2016: 370).

The first attestation is quite recent, since it appears for the first time in Ling Mengchu 凌濛初's *Two Beats: Second Collection of "Amazing Tales to Strike the Table"* (Ling, 2014): "Filled with delight, Lady Wang asked her name and ordered that a room be prepared." (Ling, 2018: 430). The use is very frequent in the Ming and Qing literature in vernacular Chinese and is the most common word for 'house (building)' in the modern and contemporary spoken language.

### 住房 *zhùfáng*: the "housing" house

住房 *zhùfáng* is a compound referring to the houses built for the purpose of habitation (住 *zhù*—to live, to reside, to dwell), used in the technical terminology of the urban planning, the public housing and the real estate market. It can be considered a neologism, shortened form of 住宅房屋 *zhùzhái fángwū* 'residential housing'; 住居房屋 *zhùjū fángwū* 'dwelling housing;

residential dwellings', created in order to respond to the need of translating in Chinese the name of the relatively recent discipline of housing. As far as I could find in the sources, the first attestation in a technical dictionary, which assumes a usage already widely accepted by the scientific community, was in the first technical bilingual English dictionary published in China (Terminology Office, Compilation and Translation Publishing Committee, Chinese Academy of Sciences), with several reprints and new editions in Mainland China and Taiwan. In this dictionary, 住房 *zhùfáng* is used as the Chinese definition of 'habitable (room)', and in the definitions of longer phrases (namely, 住房供暖 *zhùfáng gōngnuǎn* 'house heating', 住房卫生设备 *zhùfáng wèishēng shèbèi* 'house plumbing', 住房区域 *zhùfáng qūyù* 'housing area', 住房村 *zhùfáng cūn* 'housing estate' and 城镇住房 *chéngzhèn zhùfáng* 'town house'. In this dictionary, the word 'housing' is translated in other three different ways, according to the nouns it modifies: 住宅 *zhùzhái*, for the facilities of the residential building; 家庭 *jiātíng* 'household', for the disposal objects and facilities of the household; 房屋 *fángwū* 'house', with a sociological connotation). In the specialized bilingual dictionaries on architecture and construction until the end of the 80s, 住房 *zhùfáng* often appears beside 住宅 *zhùzhái*, 住所 *zhùsuǒ*, 房屋 *fángwū* in the definitions of the lemmi in foreign languages, with a criterion that I could not always clearly detect. In Xiong (1980) it appears only once as the translation of 'townhouse' (城镇住房 *chéngzhèn zhùfáng*). In Gao (Gao, 1981–1982), dictionary translated from Japanese, 住房 *zhùfáng* is randomly used in the Chinese definitions of Japanese lemmi, for example in the definition of じゅうきょ 住居: "dwelling 住房, 住所". In Killer (1983), illustrated lexicon translated from German, the term is not present. In Kucherenko and Karavaev (1983), dictionary translated from Russian, the lemma Жилищное Строительство 'housing construction' is translated 住房建设 *zhùfáng jiànshè*. In Shi (1984), 住房 *zhùfáng* is used in the translation of a series of phrases apparently unrelated from a morphological point of view (namely, 两层一套的公寓住房 *liǎng céng yī tào de gōngyù zhùfáng* 'duplex'; 住房卫生设备 *zhùfáng wèishēng shèbèi* 'house plumbing'; 住房区域 *zhùfáng qūyù* 'housing area'; 住房建筑计划 *zhùfáng jiànzhù jìhuà* 'housing project'; 成套住房 *chéngtào zhùfáng* 'separate flat'; 城镇住房 *chéngzhèn zhùfáng* 'townhouse'). In Lin and Zhu (1985) (Chinese-English dictionary), 住房 *zhùfáng* is an independent lemma, translated in English 'habitable room', and is used in phrases related to housing forms. In the French–Chinese Dictionary of Construction (Compiling Group for the French–Chinese Dictionary of Construction, 1986) the term is used to translate the French word 'habitaton'. It appears in the definitions of terms related to subsidized housing (namely, 成套住房 *chéngtào zhùfáng* 'separate flat'; 独户住房 *dúhù*

*zhùfáng* ‘single-family house’; 多户住房 *duōhù zhùfáng* ‘multifamily housing’; 住房区域 *zhùfáng qūyù* ‘housing area’).

### 平房 *píngfáng* vs. 楼房 *lóufáng*

The terms 平房 *píngfáng* ‘single-storey house; lit. flat house’ and 楼房 *lóufáng* ‘building of two or more storeys; lit. building house’ are commonly used in the Northern variant of spoken Chinese, denoting two different types of building, regardless of their functions. Generally speaking, they refer to residential buildings, especially in the Beijing area. 平房 *píngfáng* is a recent term, attested for the first time in a novel of the end of the Qing dynasty and later commonly used in modern literature: “For five or six *li* to the Southeast the houses were thick as bamboo shoots, you could count hundreds of one-storey houses [平房 *píngfáng*].” (Cheng, 1984).

In the Beijing area it may refer both to the courtyard houses, typical of the historical districts inside the second ring, and to the modest rural houses of the 城中村 *chéngzhōngcūn* ‘villages within the city’ in the outskirts. In the real estate market the term (小)平房 (*xiǎo*)*píngfáng* ‘(small) single-storey house’ refers to an one-storey independent house, typical of the suburban areas.

楼房 *lóufáng* indicates a generic multi-storey building (it is attested for the first time in the *Jin Ping Mei*). In contemporary Chinese it is generally used in the spoken language.

In Chinese architectural and urban vocabulary, the contrast between 平房 *píngfáng* and 楼房 *lóufáng* constitutes one of the most fundamental categorical distinctions used to describe the built environment, and its implications extend far beyond morphology into issues of social stratification, urbanization, and housing policy. 平房 *píngfáng* refers to ‘single-story dwellings’, including courtyard houses, row houses, and other low-lying forms that emphasize horizontal spatial organization and ground-level access. 楼房 *lóufáng*, by contrast, lit. ‘storied houses’, denotes multi-storey residential buildings, ranging from modest walk-ups to large apartment blocks. In Chinese discourse, this binary operates as a basic classificatory device: it delineates architectural typologies, indexes degrees of urban density, and encodes sociohistorical transitions from traditional, ground-oriented dwelling to vertical, modernist or socialist forms of mass housing.

### 公房 *gōngfáng*: the public housing

The general term for the houses built and sold by central, local or city government or state-owned enterprises or public institutions is 公房 *gōngfáng* 'public housing'. Alternative definitions are 公有住宅 *gōngyǒu zhùzhái* 'public-owned residential building', 国有住宅 *gōngyǒu zhùzhái* 'state-owned residential building', 公产住房 *gōngchǎn zhùfáng* 'public housing'. The definition 使用权房 *shǐyòngquán fáng* 'right-of-use house' refers to the fact that the property right of the house belongs to the state or the collective, however and the right of use is an independent property right separated from the ownership right. The public housing tenant is permitted to transfer or exchange the right of use of the house within a certain range and in a certain way, and the profit gained, after deducting the taxes and fees, is owned by the right of use house tenant. The public houses directly managed by the housing authorities are defined 直管公房 *zhíguǎn gōngfáng* 'direct-management public housing'; the public houses autonomously managed by the community (全民 *quánmín* lit. 'whole people') owned organizations and enterprises are defined 自管公房 *zìguǎn gōngfáng* 'self-management public housing'.

After 1976, throughout the reform era and the following years of economic growth, the state adopted several measures in the sector of the public housing to tackle the problem of the expansion of the city population, in order to guarantee decent housing conditions to the low-income residents. Under the general name of 保障房 *bǎozhàngfáng*, shortened form for 保障性住房 *bǎozhàng fángxìng zhùfáng* 'guaranteed housing', we can include different types of intervention: privatization policies aimed to subsidize the middle-class citizens unable to buy a new house in the real estate market to have access to already built houses (房改房 *fánggǎi fáng* lit. 'housing reform house' or 福利房 *fúlìfáng* 'welfare housing' given from the 单位 *dānwèi* with rent for redemption condition); social welfare policies to provide low-rent houses 廉租房 *liánzūfáng*, usually old public buildings, to low-income citizens at cost-price or capped price; anti-poverty policies to provide houses (政策性租赁住房 *zhèngcèxìng zūlìn zhùfáng* 'policy rental housing', at prices lower than the market prices, to the citizens not eligible for the two previous forms of assistance; and other forms of assistance aimed to solve the housing problems for those families that suffered the negative effects of the economic and social reforms, such as the 公共租赁房 *gōnggòng zūlìnfáng* 'public rental housing', for those whose income was higher than the one requested for the 廉租房 *liánzūfáng*, but unable to have access to the commercial housing market; the 安居房 *ānjūfáng* 'peaceful living house' or 安置房 *ānzhìfáng* 'settling down house', for those who lived in a 拆迁房 *chāiqiānfáng* 'house to be demolished [for urban renovation or construction plans]' etc. The definition 安居房 *ānjūfáng* comes from

the 安居(康居)工程 *Ānjū* (*kāngjū*) *gōngchéng* 'Secure Housing [or Decent Housing] Project', a national subsidized housing project for low-income urban residents.The program draws its origin from the *Notice on Issuing the "Implementation Outline for the National Kangju Demonstration Project"* (1999) and the *Notice on Forwarding the "Several Opinions on Promoting Housing Industrial Modernization and Improving Housing Quality"* (1999), and was implemented in the *Management Methods of the National Kangju Demonstration Project* (2000) and in the *Guiding Opinions of the General Office of the State Council on the Construction and Management of Guaranteed Housing Projects* (2011).

After the reform of 1998, that ended the era of the guaranteed house for the low-income city residents by their 单位 *dānwèi* 'work unit', the government, in order to solve the consequent housing problem for millions of families in difficulty, launched a nation-wide program of construction of 解困房 *jiěkùnfáng* 'problem-solving housing', promoting the access to 经适房 *jīngshìfáng* (short form for 经济适用房 *jīngjì shìyòng fáng* 'economically affordable housing'), new houses built by the central, provincial or local government, or by other public institutions, to be sold at favorable conditions to those middle income families that could not afford to buy a house from the real estate market, but were not eligible for any other form of assistance. The land use right for affordable housing development is acquired through administrative allocation. Affordable housing is mainly a policy whereby the state and government give preferential treatment in terms of land transfer fees, municipal support costs, etc. to solve the housing problems of low—and middle-income earners. The sales price of affordable housing is government-guided or government-priced.

A recent form of 经济适用房 *jīngjì shìyòng fáng* is the 集资房 *jízīfáng* 'house of collective fund, short for 集资合作住房 *jízī hézuò zhùfáng* 'residential house [built in] cooperation with collective funds', whose construction is undertaken by the State and by the 单位 *dānwèi*, with the implementation of a three-way system of responsibility sharing and funds collecting among the Government, the 单位 *dānwèi* and individuals. Individual employees may make full or partial contributions to the price of the house, and are given partial exemptions from credit, building materials supply, taxes and fees. The title of the housing constructed by pooling funds is determined according to the proportion of the capital invested.

**商品房 *shāngpǐnfáng*: the real estate area**

The residential buildings that are developed and managed by licensed real estate development companies (including foreign investment companies) are called 商品房

*shāngpǐnfáng* ‘commercial or marketable housing’. 商品房 *shāngpǐnfáng* is a new term that emerged after the mid-1980s. Before the 1980s, the 住宅房 *zhùzháifáng* ‘residential house’, was part of the government’s welfare system 供给制 *gōngjǐzhì* lit. ‘supply system’ and was not considered a commodity. Urban residents rented their housing from the government at low cost, and there was no private rental or trading market for housing, only exchange of housing on a reciprocal basis. With the beginning of the reform of the land use system and housing, the Chinese government began to implement land transfer and assignment with compensation in the 1980s under the principle of state ownership of land. At the same time, the housing reform aimed at the commercialization of housing was proposed, and since 1987, the state has been selling or renting out the residential or commercial buildings invested in as commodities to residents or enterprises, gradually replacing in-kind distribution during the socialist market economy with monetary distribution. Therefore, in the market economy, commercial housing is developed and constructed by acquiring land use rights through a land grant and then sold at market prices. The consequence of this policy has been a progressive increase of the 私房 *sīfáng* ‘privately-owned house’ or 民房 *mínfáng* ‘house owned by citizens’. In the rural areas, houses are usually 集体产权房 *jítǐ chǎnquán fáng* ‘collective property rights houses’, built on collective land. They cannot belong to private property or be listed for trading. The construction of such houses is directly approved by the district government, not registered with the Housing Authority. The occupants do not have full independent property rights to the house. The only property right is the so called 乡产权 *xiāngchǎnquán* ‘township property right), which is the rural collective property right.

On the base of the sale typology, we can distinguish: 期房 *qīfáng* ‘forward delivery apartment’, 现房 *xiànfáng* ‘completed apartment’, 新房 *xīnfáng* ‘newly built house’, 旧房 *jiùfáng* ‘old house’, 二手房 *èrshǒufáng* ‘second-hand house’ (home acquired through a middleman) or 存量房 *cúnliàngfáng* ‘stock house’.

On the base of the condition of the house, we can distinguish: 毛坯房 *máopīfáng* ‘roughcast house’, lit. semi-finished house’, 粗装修房 *cū zhuāngxiū fáng* ‘roughly decorated house’, 精装修房 *jīng zhuāngxiū fáng* ‘fully-furnished house’.

### 工房 *gōngfáng*: the workers’ house

Since the first years after the foundation of the PRC, the massive construction of production sites for the implementation of the industrial modernization of the country and, later, of residential housing for the increasing urban population made it necessary to build residential

buildings for workers near the working places. This collective residential houses are generically called 工房 *gōngfáng*, short form for 工人住房 *gōngrén zhùfáng* 'house for the workers'. Recently, the term 工房 refers prevalently to a workshop (building), as a synonym of 工场 *gōngchǎng*. The term 工人房 *gōngrénfáng* can also be used for the room attached to the main house, where the staff of the household management or of the housekeeping can rest or sleep. This residential temporary solution often consist of a simple collective room inside a workers' dormitory with shared kitchen and toilets.

In more recent times, especially near the construction sites, a pre-fabricated version of 工房, the 箱式房 *xiàngshìfáng* 'box house' or 集装箱房 *jízhuāngxiàng fáng* 'container house' or 打包箱房 *dǎbǎo xiàngfáng* 'packing room' is preferred for its lower cost, mobility and relatively better privacy. Another solution for temporary pre-fabricated housing is the 板房 *bǎnfáng* 'pallett house', with a steel structure and laminated sideboards.

### 4.2.3 宅 *zhái* and its compound

**宅 *zhái*: the residential house**

One of the earliest characters in this semantic field, 宅 *zhái* dates to the Shang Dynasty (c. 1600 BC–c. 1046 BC), being found already in the oracle bone script and largely attested in the later lexicographic sources. In the first graphic occurrences, it presents the component 乇 (毛 *tuō*), 'to support with one's palm' (representation of a stalk supporting a bud), under the roof 宀 (宀 *mián*). The original meaning attested by the *Shuowen Jiezi*, is 'to entrust', 'to find sustenance in'. Consequently, in the pre-Qin era (before 221 BC), the meaning extended to 'the place entrusted to give shelter', thus 'the building of permanent residence' in the "Duke Zhao" of the *Zuozhuan*: "Your residence, sir, is near the marketplace." (Durrant, Li and Schaberg, 2016: 1351). In the pre-Qin sources it is recurrently used both as a verb and as a noun. Yin (2016, 63-64) points out that it may refer also to the land in front of or behind the house, as attested in the "King Hui of Liang I" of the *Mengzi*: "If the mulberry is planted in every homestead of five *mu* of land, then hose who are fifty can wear silk." (Mencius 1970, 62). In several classic sources, the character refers to the burial land or tomb pit, as a metaphorical extension.

In Middle Chinese, 宅 *zhái* started referring to the residence of a wealthy family, usually of merchants or public official, especially in the compound words 宅院 *zháiyuàn* 'residence with a courtyard' (→ 4.2.5).

The term 宅子 *zháizi* (宅 *zhái* + noun suffix) generally refers to an independent house suitable for habitation, regardless of its morphological characteristics. It is attested for the first time in the Tang Dynasty, e.g. in Feng Yan 封演, *Record of Information by Feng*, ch. 9: "This mansion is pretty good, but there isn't any place to discharge the waters." (Feng, 1958; my trans.). It is still used in modern spoken language. A famous proverb reads: 宅子现四喜家中出能人 *Zháizi xiàn sìxǐ, jiāzhōng chū néngrén* 'If the four cheerful objects are present in a house, a very capable man will comes out from that family'. The four cheerful objects are a magpie's nest, a swallow's nest, a gecko and a spring flower on a withered tree.

### 住宅 *zhùzhái*: the residential building

In contemporary Chinese the most important compound noun of 宅 *zhái* is 住宅 *zhùzhái*. The term is relatively recent, since it is attested for the first time in the *Shuihuzhuan*, ch. 33 (mid-14th century): "There's a compound on the south which is the residence of the civil chief, Mr. Liu." (Shi and Luo, 1996: 119).

The definition of 住宅 *zhùzhái* as 'residential building' given by the Article 2.0.1 of the *Standard for the Design of Residential Building* (2011 – GB 50096-2011) reads: "Building provided to families [家庭 *jiātíng*] for residential use." The use of the term 家庭 *jiātíng* 'family' as the main beneficiary/user of the 住宅 *zhùzhái* is questionable, since it seems to characterize the term according to sociological parameters, whereas it is normally used also in the case of residences for other social communities, such as 职工单身宿舍 *zhígōng dānshēn sùshè* 'dormitories for single workers', 学生宿舍 *xuésheng sùshè* 'dormitories for students', 集体宿舍 *jítǐ sùshè* 'collective dormitories' etc. (the term 家宅 *jiāzhái* 'homestead, family abode' could refer more properly to the definition of the *Code*, but, in reality, this word, already attested during the Song Dynasty, has a very limited use in contemporary Chinese). The term that more generally refers to the collective social entity that occupies a single dwelling unit is 户 *hù*. This character is already attested as a pictograph on oracle bones: it corresponds to the left half of the character 門 *mén* 'door'. The original meaning was 'one-panelled door', typical of the small buildings or cabins inside the residence, while 門 *mén* indicated the outside door. The metonymic use as 'household' or 'family' traces back to the 周易·讼 (*Zhouyi·Song*) [*Zhouyi*, "Lawsuit/Conflict"][A] // Wang, 1980: "The inhabitants of his city are (only) three hundred families" (Legge, 1882: 69) In modern Chinese the term refers to the household as registered in the 户籍 *hùjí* 'census register or household register) and possessing the 户口 *hùkǒu* 'registered permanent residence) with no reference to its social composition.

The term 住宅 *zhùzhái* is also used in the 39th article of the *Constitution of the People's Republic of China* (1982 and later revisions): "The homes [住宅 *zhùzhái*] of citizens of the People's Republic of China are inviolable. The unlawful search of or unlawful intrusion into a citizen's home is prohibited." The choice of the term 'home', instead of a more general 'house', in the official English translation by the Institute of Party History and Literature of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China indicates the attempt to render the semantic trait of the first character 住 *zhù* (to reside, to dwell). In spite of their official origin, these translation do not seem completely appropriate.

The term 住宅 *zhùzhái* occupies a complex semantic field in Chinese urban discourse, bridging the domains of function, form, and social meaning. Etymologically, it combines 住 *zhù* and 宅 *zhái* 'residence, house', thus literally signifying 'a place where one lives'. This etymology already foregrounds the act of dwelling as the central referent of the term. In contemporary Chinese, 住宅 *zhùzhái* is used widely in architecture, planning, sociology, and real estate, yet across these contexts it consistently retains a sense of functionality—that is, its essence lies not merely in the built object, but in the activity and purpose of inhabitation it enables.

In the language of urban planning and land use, 住宅 *zhùzhái* refers to a category of space or land designated for residential functions (住宅用地, *zhùzhái yòngdì*), distinguishing it from commercial or industrial uses. In this sense, it denotes a functional classification—the way space is inscribed into regulatory and economic systems. However, in architectural typology, the compound expands to 住宅楼 *zhùzhái lóu* 'residential building' or 住宅区 *zhùzhái qū* 'residential district, where the emphasis shifts toward physical form and spatial configuration. Thus, 住宅 *zhùzhái* is neither purely functional nor purely formal—it is a hybrid term linking the lived, the designed, and the governed aspects of urban space.

Translating 住宅 *zhùzhái* as 'building' therefore risks flattening its conceptual richness. The English building refers primarily to a physical structure, stripped of the cultural, functional, and affective dimensions that animate 住宅 *zhùzhái* in Chinese discourse. Moreover, building lacks the moral and historical resonance embedded in 宅 *zhái*. In traditional Chinese thought, 宅 *zhái* carried implications of moral order and cosmic harmony, such as in 安宅 *ānzhái* 'peaceful dwelling', being tied to Confucian ideals of family stability and propriety. This moralized sense of habitation persists subtly in modern language, where 住宅 *zhùzhái* continues to connote not only a structure but a socially situated mode of living.

From a phenomenological or anthropological standpoint, therefore, 'dwelling' might serve as a more adequate translation, as it foregrounds inhabitation as a process rather than a static object. It captures the lived, embodied engagement with space that the Chinese term implies. In policy or planning contexts, however, 'residence' may be more suitable, aligning with administrative language and the notion of residential function. Meanwhile, when discussing architectural typologies, 'residential building' offers precision without sacrificing semantic coherence. Yet in all cases, nuance is lost if 住宅 *zhùzhái* is entirely subsumed under any single English term.

Given these layers, a productive strategy is to retain 住宅 *zhùzhái* in *pinyin* upon first introduction, followed by a brief gloss: *dwelling or residential building; lit. 'place of dwelling', connoting both function (to live) and form (built space designed for residence).*

This approach preserves the term's semantic elasticity, allowing the reader to appreciate its embeddedness in Chinese urban discourse. It also reflects a methodological stance: to resist premature equivalence and instead explore how terms like 住宅 *zhùzhái* articulate specific relationships between space, use, and social life within the Chinese city.

As scholars such as Zhu 2009, Li 2018, and Zhang 2020 have shown, the translation of such terms is never neutral—it reflects epistemological frameworks that shape how urbanity itself is conceptualized. By treating 住宅 *zhùzhái* not simply as a label but as a cultural and typological concept, we can better understand how language mediates between built form, lived experience, and institutional definition in Chinese urban modernity.

Understanding the term 住宅 *zhùzhái* requires more than lexical interpretation; it demands a taxonomy that situates the term within the architectural, social, and ideological frameworks of Chinese housing traditions. Taxonomical thinking helps resist the temptation to homogenize Chinese housing under a single image; instead, it highlights the plurality of dwelling types that coexist within the category of 住宅 *zhùzhái*. In this sense, 住宅 *zhùzhái* is not a static label but a conceptual node. By analyzing its features, we gain insight into how the Chinese language and urban practice mutually construct notions of home, identity, and belonging—a dynamic process at the heart of China's urban experience.

## *Classifications related to urban planning*

### Classification according to the number of households

独户住宅 *dúhù zhùzhái* 'single-family house': it has three main characteristics: (a) it is inhabited only by one household; (b) the entrance to the building is not shared with any other family; (c) the house has an attached garden or courtyard.

多户住宅 *duōhù zhùzhái* 'multi-family house): it is inhabited by more than one household. It is divided in residential units. Each residential unit shares the same staircase and/or elevator.

The contrast between 独户住宅 *dúhù zhùzhái* and *duohu zhzhai* is not merely about building form; it reflects different visions of how households are meant to relate to land, community, and the state. The 独户住宅 *dúhù zhùzhái*, with its private entrance and attached garden, embodies a spatial imaginary in which the household is self-contained, self-defined, and sovereign within its own small territory. This model resonates strongly with Western ideals of property, privacy, and individual autonomy. In the Chinese context, however, it is ideologically exceptional rather than typical. Because land is collectively owned and urban development is tightly planned, single-family houses tend to be associated with high status, privilege, and access to resources, and they subtly carry the symbolism of separation: separation from neighbors, from collective living norms, and from the standardized forms of state-planned urban life. To choose 独户住宅 *dúhù zhùzhái* is, intentionally or not, to participate in a spatial expression of individualism and exclusivity.

By contrast, the 多户住宅 *duōhù zhùzhái* reflects the logic of collective urban modernity in China. It is the spatial form most aligned with national projects of urbanization, land efficiency, population management, and the creation of socially legible communities. Living in a multi-family building means sharing walls, circulation spaces, elevators, neighborhood committees, and property management structures; daily life is structured through proximity and collective governance. The household here is embedded within a larger framework of neighbors, shared infrastructure, and municipal services, which echoes the long-standing emphasis in Chinese political culture on community, social integration, and the primacy of collective order over individual autonomy. In this sense, 多户住宅 *duōhù zhùzhái* is not only a practical solution to density, but also the normative spatial expression of Chinese urban citizenship: to live in the city is to live among and with others, visibly and administratively.

The ideological difference, therefore, lies not in comfort or aesthetics, but in the social meanings of space. 多户住宅 *duōhù zhùzhái* evokes privacy, separation, and the household as a bounded world unto itself; it embodies a communal form of urban belonging, in which the household is one unit among many, coordinated within the state's project of planned urban life.

In short, the two housing types express two different imaginaries of how individuals should inhabit the city: one oriented toward private territory, and the other toward shared urbanity.

Following the notice of the state council *Notice of the General Office of the State Council on Further Improving Work Related to Real Estate Market Regulation* (2011), the Ministry of Territory and Resources issued the *Notice on Prioritizing Key Tasks for Real Estate Land Management and Regulation in 2012* (2012), in which it is stated that in the future it will be no longer permitted to build low-density building lower than 18m. For this reason, the relevance of 独户住宅 *dúhù zhùzhái* in the real estate market is progressively decreasing.

**Classification according to the urban land use and planning standards of land development**

According to the *Code for Classification of Urban Land Use and Planning Standards of Development Land* (GBJ 137-90), we can have the following classification:

一类住宅用地 *yīlèi zhùzhái yòngdì* 'class I residential land': it refers to sites with a high concentration of detached dwellings, a full range of supporting facilities, a complete layout, with detached dwellings of three floors or less, low building density and high green space rate (according to the trend of increasingly tight land supply and the principle of intensive land use, the possibility of constructing unit-type residences with less than three floors in the future basically does not exist.).

二类住宅用地 *èrlèi zhùzhái yòngdì* 'class II residential land': it refers to sites with a wide distribution of multi-storey, medium-high and high-rise residential buildings with complete supporting facilities and a complete layout, which are widely distributed in the cities and dominate the residential land use.

三类住宅用地 *sānlèi zhùzhái yòngdì* 'class III residential land': it refers to sites of municipal public utilities with an incomplete layout, an average environment quality, both residential and industrial. This kind of 住宅 *zhùzhái* are ancillary residential buildings in functional areas such as industrial zones, warehousing areas and schools (especially universities), which mainly accommodate single employees of enterprises or single teachers and students.Since the residents of the dormitory areas are mainly singles, there is no need to build kindergartens, nurseries and other facilities, but other community sports facilities, cultural activities, health care, community management, commercial services and other facilities need to be built accordingly.

**Ordinary and not-ordinary residential buildings**

The difference between 普通住宅 *pǔtōng zhùzhái* 'ordinary residential building' and 非普通住宅 *fēi pǔtōng zhùzhái* 'not-ordinary residential building' aims to establish more rigid fiscal conditions for larger and more costly 住宅 *zhùzhái* (mainly, higher tax rate and transfer fees). It is based on three criteria: (a) plot ratio of the 住宅小区 *zhùzhái xiǎoqū* 'residential quarter' (±1); (b) area of the single dwelling unit (±144 $m^2$); (c) price ratio of the real concluded price on the base of the average trade price of the houses in the same area, that benefit from preferential policies (±1.2).

It is worth noting that the term 普通 *pǔtōng* is not simply 'ordinary' in the neutral sense. In the context of Chinese housing classification and policy language, it carries an administrative and ideological implication. In everyday language it means 'common, nothing fancy,' but in policy language, 普通住宅 *pǔtōng zhùzhái* does not mean 'cheap' or 'low-quality' homes. It means the type of housing considered the norm, the baseline unit that aligns with the state's idea of appropriate, reasonable living conditions for the general population. By labeling a home 普通 *pǔtōng*, the state says this is the kind of home most households should be able to access, it fits within public interest goals, not speculative or luxury interests, therefore, it deserves preferential fiscal treatment (lower taxes, lower transaction costs, eligibility for subsidies). When Beijing abolished the standard, it did not just stop distinguishing bigger vs. smaller homes, it symbolically loosened the ideological boundary between (housing as public livelihood / housing as commodity). This suggests a shift toward stimulating demand, reducing barriers, and softening the political framing of larger dwellings as excessive consumption.

On July 22, 2024, the Central Committee of the CPC, in order to implement and accelerate the reforms and promote a modernization with Chinese characteristics, issued the document *Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Further Deepening Reform Comprehensively and Advancing Chinese Modernization,* stating: "The present decision fully grants the governments of cities the autonomy to regulate the real estate market, applying policies on a city-by-city basis, and allowing the cities concerned to abolish or reduce the policy of restricting the purchase of housing, and to abolish the standards for ordinary and not-ordinary residences." The first city to implement this decision on the 11th of November 2024 was Beijing with the Notice on matters relating to the abolition of the general housing standard jointly issued by the Beijing Municipal Commission of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, the Municipal Finance Bureau and the Municipal Taxation Bureau.

**Classification according to the function of the building**

The function of the building depends on to the plans of the local Town Planning Administration Department (城市规划管理部门 *Chéngshì Guīhuà Guǎnlǐ Bùmén*). The acquisition of the Right of Land Usage by the developers and the effective usage of the land are regulated on the base of the *Standard for Classification of Urban Land Use and Planning Standards of Development Land* (GB 50137-2011). According to the function, we can distinguish:

纯住宅 *chún zhùzhái* lit. 'pure residential housing; fully residential': living in a 纯住宅 *chún zhùzhái* generally feels more stable. Because the property is classified as fully residential, it benefits from lower utility tariffs for water, gas, and electricity, so daily living costs are lower. The property also carries longer land-use rights (70 years), which contributes to a feeling of permanence and makes banks more willing to provide standard mortgages. When one sells or transfers the unit, the associated taxes and transaction fees are also lower, which improves both affordability and resale liquidity. Perhaps most importantly, a 纯住宅 *chún zhùzhái* typically allows 户口 *hùkǒu* registration (落户 *luòhù*), provided one meets the city's conditions. This has strong consequences: access to public schooling, eligibility for local welfare programs, and integration into the urban administrative system depend on 户口 *hùkǒu*. Thus, for households planning long-term settlement and family life, especially those with children, a 纯住宅 *chún zhùzhái* offers broader access to city-based social rights.

商业住宅 *shàngyè zhùzhái* 'commercial residential housing' (because of this mixed use, also called 商混住宅 *shānghún zhùzhái* 'commercial mixed residential building' or simply 商住宅 *shāng zhùzhái* 'commercial building'): living in 商业住宅 *shàngyè zhùzhái*, by contrast, often involves higher everyday costs and a less stable regulatory identity. Because the property is treated as partly commercial, utilities are billed at commercial rates, which are noticeably higher over time. Land-use rights are shorter (40–50 years), and both purchase and resale are subject to higher taxes and fees, making the total cost of ownership significantly greater. In many cities, commercial-residential housing does not permit 户口 *hùkǒu* registration, meaning that even though one lives in the city physically, one may remain administratively external to it. This can limit access to public schools, increase reliance on private education or schooling tied to one's original 户口 *hùkǒu* location, and restrict access to some public welfare programs. Financing may also be less favorable: banks sometimes require higher down payments or shorter loan terms, which affects affordability and resale potential. As a result, living in 商业住宅 *shàngyè zhùzhái* can create a sense of being in the city but not fully of the city, especially for families seeking stable incorporation

into the local welfare system. In everyday terms, a 纯住宅 *chún zhùzhái* tends to form neighborhoods with clearer residential routines, schools, and community committees, while a 商业住宅 *shàngyè zhùzhái* developments often have a more transient or mixed population, combining office workers, short-term renters, and long-term residents, with patterns of use that may feel more fragmented. Noise, foot traffic, and shared common areas may reflect this mixed-use identity.

商办 s*hāngbàn* 'commercial-office' (short for 商业办公物业 *shāngyè bàngōng wùyè*): 商办 *shāngbàn* refers to properties built on commercial land and intended mainly for business or office use, though many people use them as living spaces because they are cheaper and easier to buy than regular residential housing. 商办 *shāngbàn* often has no purchase restrictions, making it accessible to non-local buyers and young people with limited budgets. These units are usually located in central or convenient areas, offering good transportation and amenities at a lower cost. Their small sizes also make them affordable and practical for singles or couples. In addition, 商办 *shāngbàn* properties offer flexible use, allowing owners to live, work, or rent them out. Despite their drawbacks, this combination of affordability, convenience, and flexibility attracts many residents.They usually have 40–50 years of property rights, higher commercial utility rates, and often lack natural gas. Because they are not residential housing, 商办 *shāngbàn* units generally cannot support household registration and may limit access to public schools. Their environment is often more crowded, with mixed office and living functions. While they are flexible for investment or rental, they are usually less suitable for long-term living compared with standard residential housing.

Table 4.2 Comparative table of the buildings classified by function

| ITEM | PURE RESIDENTIAL (纯住宅 *chún zhùzhái*) | COMMERCIAL RESIDENTIAL (商业住宅 *shàngyè zhùzhái*) | COMMERCIAL-OFFICE (商办 *shāngbàn*) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Land type | Residential land | Usually commercial land | Commercial land |
| Property years | 70 years | 40–50 years | 40–50 years |
| Primary purpose | Living only | Living-oriented but still commercial | Office, studio, business use |
| Water/electricity rates | Residential rates (cheap) | Often commercial rates (higher) | Commercial rates (higher) |
| Household registration (户口 *hùkǒu*) | Usually allowed | Often not allowed | Almost never allowed |
| School eligibility | Usually eligible for school district | Often not counted as school district housing | Not eligible |
| Loan policy | Residential loan (low down payment & interest) | Often commercial loan (higher down payment & interest) | Commercial loan |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Living comfort | High | Medium (small units, higher density) | Low–medium (office + living mixed) |
| Investment value | Stable | Higher rental yield potential | More for office / short-term rental |
| Building environment | Family-oriented | Mixed residents, sometimes high density | Mixed office + residential |

## *Classifications related to design*

### Classification according to the morphological composition of the building

单元式住宅 *dānyuán shì zhùzhái* 'unit type residential building' (also called 板式住宅 *bǎnshì zhùzhái* 'residential building' or 板楼 *bǎnlóu* 'slab building' [→ 4.2.1]): in the spoken language. The building is composed of more than one 单元 *dānyuán* (residential unit). Each entrance to the *danyuan* is usually marked with a progressive number (Arabic numbers, Chinese numerals or Chinese ordinal numbers). 2-4 dwelling units per floor per residential units (the images of house plans are taken from the real estate platform www.fang.com).




Figure 4.1 Unit type residential building plan

通廊式住宅 *tōngláng shì zhùzhái* 'corridor type residential building': the building is composed of one single *danyuan* with common staircase and elevator shaft. Each floor has several du, whose entrances face a common corridor. According to the location of the corridor, we can distinguish: 外廊式住宅 *wàiláng shì zhùzhái* 'external corridor type residential building'; the corridor runs outside the building, the dwelling units have a double exposition with a better air circulation, but a worse insulation' and 内廊式住宅 *nèiláng shì zhùzhái* 'internal corridor type residential building; the corridor runs inside the building; the dwelling units have a single exposure with a worse air circulation, but a better thermal and acoustic insulation).

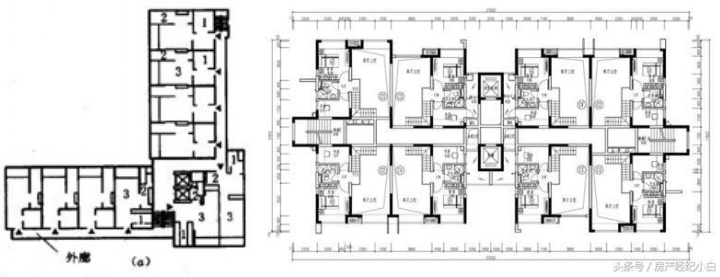


Figure 4.2 Corridor type residential building plans

塔式住宅 *tǎ shì zhùzhái* 'tower type residential building' (us. 塔楼 *tǎlóu* in the spoken language [→ 4.2.1]): the building is composed of one single 单元 *dānyuán* with a common staircase and a common elevator shaft. It has 12-35 floors and each floor has 2-4 dwelling units whose entrances face a common landing. Since the building has a central fulcrum (staircase and elevator shaft), it is also defined as 点式住宅 *diǎn shì zhùzhái* 'point type residential building'; the dwelling units are arranged around the central fulcrum and all have a good day lighting and view.

板塔结合住宅 *bǎntǎ jiéhé zhùzhái* 'slab/tower combined residential building': the building is a combination of 板楼 *bǎnlóu* and 塔楼 *tǎlóu* (usually at the corners of the building).

Although 塔式 *tǎ shì* is usually translated as 'tower-type residential building', the choice of the character 塔 *tǎ* resonates with a deeper cultural association. Technically, 塔 *tǎ* refers to a tall and compact vertical structure organized around a single circulation core, which aligns with contemporary planning terminology. However, the term also carries a residual visual memory of the traditional pagoda: a centralized, vertically stacked form that rises in repeating layers. While there is no historical or structural continuity between pagodas and modern residential towers, the shared logic of centralized ascent, serial repetition, and vertical prominence within the urban skyline makes the metaphor intuitively meaningful. In this sense, the 塔 *tǎ* in 塔楼 *tǎlóu* is not merely descriptive of height, but subtly evokes a cultural image of ordered verticality, linking modern high-rise living to long-standing spatial imaginaries in Chinese architectural tradition.

In order to optimize the day lighting, the building design might adapt to the different climatic, geographical and topographical conditions. The most common design solutions are: 一蝶型 *diéxíng* 'butterfly type'; 工字型 *gōngzìxíng* '工 character type'; 十字型 *shízìxíng* '十 character type' and 丁字型 *dīzìxíng* '丁 character type'.




Figure 4.3 House plans i-iv (morphological composition of the building)

**Classification according to the number of storeys**

In the building industry and in the real estate market, the residential buildings can be classified according to the number of storeys. The number of storeys refers to the 自然层数 *zìrán céngshù* lit. 'number of natural floors', calculated from the ±0 floors above the indoor ground level, including the semi basement, whose internal height is no lower than 2.20 m and the internal ground level is lower than the external ground level for no more than 1/3 and no less than 1/2 of the average internal net height (*Standard for Design of Fire Protection in Buildings* [GB 50016-2014]; *Standard for the Calculation of Floor Area of Building Works* [GB/T 50353-2013]). The total number of floors is the combination between the above ground floors and underground floors. The number of storeys, relevant for the safety regulations, is regulated by the following codes: *Standard for Design of Fire Protection in Buildings* (GB 50016-2014); *Standard for Design of Residential Buildings* (GB 50096-2011); *Standard for Fire Protection Design of Tall Buildings* (GB 50045-95). The following storeys are not included in the total number of storeys:

*In-between storeys*: 假层 *jiǎcéng* lit. 'fake storey' (unofficial floor original planned and built above the last official storey, whose height is more than 1.70 m. and the surface is no more than 1/2 of the surface of the natural storeys); 附层 *fùcéng* 'added storey', such as 夹层 *jiācéng* 'mezzanine'; 插层 *chācéng* lit. 'inserted storey' (floor between two 自然层 *zìrán céng* 'natural layer', unrelated to the main structure of the building).

*Extra storeys* (*exceeding the storey level*): 阁楼 *gélóu* 'attic'; 暗楼 *ànlóu* 'attic storeroom' (accessible by ladder through an opening in the ceiling); 装饰性塔楼 *zhuāngshìxìng tǎlóu* 'ornamental tower building'; 楼梯间 *lóutījiān* 'staircase room'; 水箱间 *shuǐxiāngjiān* 'water tank room'.

The definitions in the classification include the following variables: (a) number of storeys; (b) number of dwelling units per storey; (c) number of residential units (the residential unitcorresponds to one entrance and to the relative staircase and elevator shaft); (d) presence of elevator; (e) presence of fire prevention system.

'Dwelling unit' is my English translation of 套型 *tàoxíng* lit. 'set + shape', present in the *Design Code for Residential Building* (GB 50096-2011 2.0.2). The definition reads as follows: "The basic dwelling unit (单位 *dānwèi*) composed of the habitable space [bedrooms and living room], the kitchen and the toilet room." It may also be referred to as 户型 *hùxíng* lit. 'household + shape'. The number of dwelling units per storey is defined by the expression 一梯 n 户 *yì tī* n *hù* lit. 'n households per staircase'. This feature is very important in the real estate market,

since it refers to the density of the building and represents a critical variable of the value of the dwelling unit.

According to the abovementioned variables, we can distinguish:

单层住宅 *dāngcéng zhùzhái* 'single storeyed residental building': 1 storey / no fire alarm system.

低层住宅 *dīcéng zhùzhái* 'low-rise residential building': 2-3 storeys / 1 residential unit / no elevator / no fire alarm system.

多层住宅 *duōcéng zhùzhái* 'multi-storey residential building': 4-6 storeys / 2+ dwelling units per storey / 1 residential unit / no elevator / no fire alarm system.

中高层住宅 *zhōnggāocéng zhùzhái* 'middle-high-rise residential building': 7-9 storeys / 2+ dwelling units per storey / 1 residential unit / elevator / no fire alarm system.

高层住宅 *gāocéng zhùzhái* 'high-rise residential building': 10-30 storeys / 1+ residential units / elevator / fire alarm system.

The *Uniform standard for design of civil building* (GB 50352-2019) proposes a simplified classification of the 民用建筑 *mínjū jiànzhù* 'civil buildings' that refers to the height of the building, rather than to the number of storeys: buildings no taller than 27 m.; buildings taller than 27 m. and no taller than 100 m.; buildings taller than 100 m.

**Classification according to the arrangement of storeys**

平层住宅 *píngcéng zhùzhái* lit. 'flat layer residential building': all the rooms of the dwelling unit are on the same floor.

跃层住宅 *yuècéng zhùzhái* 'two storey residential building'; lit. 'leaping floor residential building': the rooms are distributed on two (or more) levels (lower floor + mezzanine) connected by an internal staircase.

复式住宅 *fùshì zhùzhái* 'duplex residential building': the rooms are distributed on two different floors, connected by an internal staircase.

**Classification according to the number of dwelling units per residential unit**

The number of dwelling units corresponds to the number of households (户 *hù*).

一梯两户单元 *yītī liǎnghù dānyuán* '2 households per residential unit'.

一梯三户单元 *yītī sānhù dānyuán* '3 households per residential unit'.

一梯四户单元 *yītī sìhù dānyuán* '4 households per residential unit'.

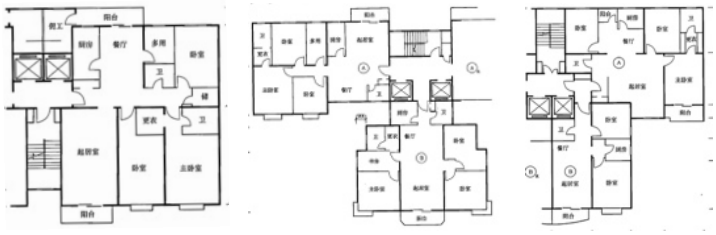


Figure 4.4 2/3/4 households per residential unit plans (Sun, 2007)

**Classification according to the floor plan**

In the following figures, the first plan refers to 无电梯单元式住宅 *wúdiàntī dānyuán shì zhùzhái* 'residential building without elevator', the second plan refers to 有电梯单元式住宅 *yǒudiàntī dānyuán shì zhùzhái* 'residential building with elevator'.

中间单元、一梯两户、对称 *zhōngjiān dānyuán, yītī liǎnghù, duìchèn* 'Middle residential unit, 2 households per staircase, symmetrical

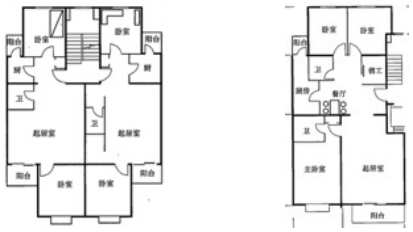


Figure 4.5 Middle r.u. 2 households per staircase symmetrical plans (Sun, 2007)

尽端户型 *jìnduān hùxíng* 'end household unit'

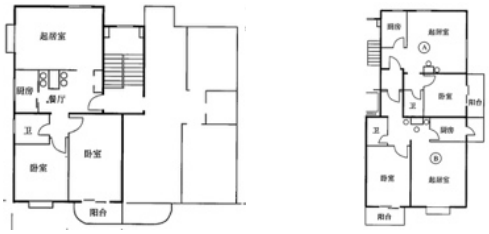


Figure 4.6 End household unit plans (Sun, 2007)

中间单元、一梯两户、不对称 *zhōngjiān dānyuán, yītī liǎnghù, bù duìchèn* 'middle residential unit, 2 households per staircase, asymmetrical'

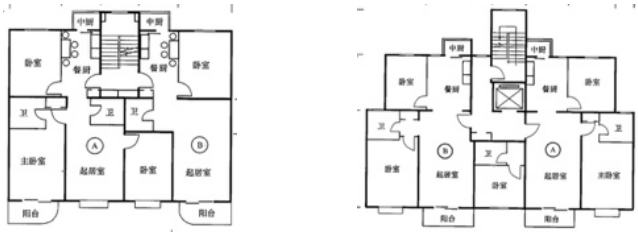


Figure 4.7 Middle r.u. 2 household per staircase, asymmettrical plans (Sun, 2007)

尽端单元、一梯两户 *jìnduān dānyuán, yītī liǎnghù* ‘end residential unit, 2 households per staircase’

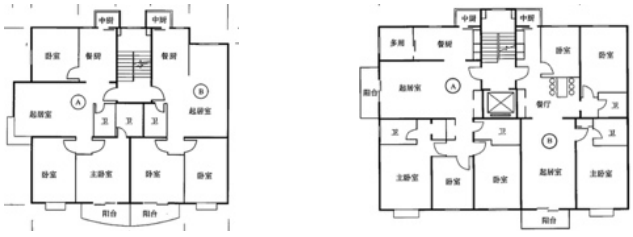


Figure 4.8 End r.u. 2 households per staircase plans (Sun, 2007)

转角单元 *zhuǎnjiǎo dānyuán* ‘corner residential unit’

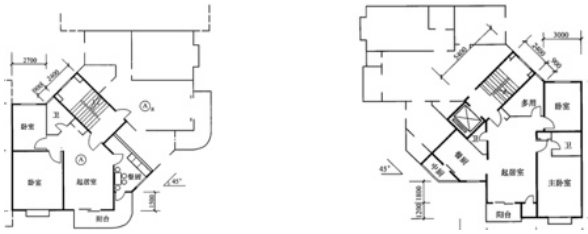


Figure 4.9 Corner r.u. plans (Sun, 2007)

顶部跃层式户型 *dǐngbù yuècéng hùxíng* ‘roof top duplex household unit’

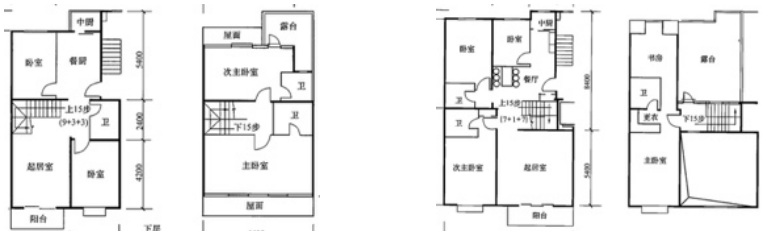


Figure 4.10 Roof top duplex household unit plans (Sun, 2007)

一梯三户式单元 *yītī sānhù shì dānyuán* ‘3 households per staircase type resdiential unit’

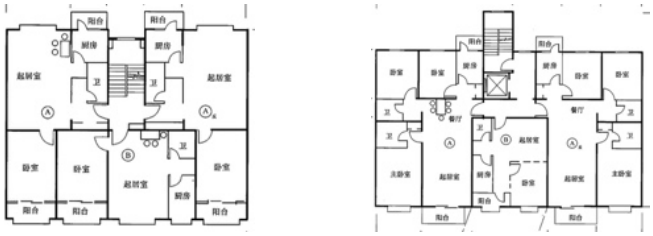


Figure 4.11 3 households per staircase type resdiential unit (Sun, 2007)

电梯入户式 *diàntī rùhù shì* ‘in-house elevator type’



Figure 4.12 In-house elevator type plan (Sun, 2007)

**Classification according to the configuration of the dwelling unit**

The dwelling unit is composed at least by: 卧室 *wòshì* 'bedroom', 起居室 *qǐjūshì* 'living room', lit. 'room of the daily life', 厨房 *chúfáng* 'kitchen', 卫生间 *wèishēngjiān* 'toilet room', lit. 'sanitary room', 室内走道 *shìnèi zǒudào* 'indoor corridor'. According to its configuration, it can be classified as:

成套住宅 *chèngtào zhùzhái* 'residential building with complete dwelling units': residential building with complete set dwelling units for one single household (一户 *yīhù*). In the case of more than one household in a single dwelling unit, or in the case of one household in more than one dwelling unit, the number of units (套 *tào*) prevails on the number of households (户 *hù*) in the count of dwelling units.

非成套住宅 *fēi chèngtào zhùzhái* 'residential building with incomplete dwelling units': a residential building with incomplete dwelling units (usually with toilet room and/or kitchen outside the dwelling unit and shared with other dwelling units).

集体宿舍 *jítǐ sùshè* 'collective dormitory': residential building with collective rooms or dormitory, usually provided to a single person (worker or student) by schools, working units (单位 *dānwèi*) or institutions.

## *Classification related to real estate market*

**Classification according to the quality of infrastructure and services**

According to the typology of facilities and services, the buildings can be informally classified, especially in the real estate market, in 代 *dài* 'generations' (because of the extreme variability of geographical, social and economic conditions, this classification is purely indicative, nonetheless, it has an important impact on the real estate market and on the pricing policies of the commercial houses):

第一代住宅 *dì yī dài zhùzhái* '1st generation residential building' (1940s-1950s): Mainly low-rise residential building; low building and materials quality; no elevator; outdoor wall painting. Mainly located in the central district of the city, this kind of residential building

suffers from the limitations due to the poor quality of urban planning; no green view. The functions are very basic, often limited to the satisfaction of the only need of shelter; it often lacks modern infrastructures and convenient living facilities; no basement or parking space; the property management is poor or non-existent; no residential community association.

第二代住宅 *dì èr dài zhùzhái* '2nd generation residential building' (1950s to 2000): Mainly mid-high rise residential building; better construction quality and comfort for the residents; mainly equipped with one elevator per residential unit; outdoor pink or brown wall painting or cuff. More rational layout of the surrounding environment; complete public services and infrastructures; the living environment satisfies the daily needs of the residents. Beside the basic residential functions, it provides storing spaces and entertainment areas; it has more convenient living conditions and better level of comfort; still difficult split-flow traffic; it benefits from a more efficient, but not ideal, property management.

第三代住宅 *dì sān dài zhùzhái* '3rd generation residential building' (2000-2020): Same typology of residential building, but increased quality of technology and materials; better durability, safety and overall building quality; more rational layout of the dwelling unit; differentiation of the coating and decorative materials of the outside walls. The environmental layout is more people-oriented and smart, inspired by ecological ideas, such as energy-saving and reduction of emissions, sustainable development, creation of a more livable environment. The functions of this kind of residential buildings are diversified and smart; it may integrate advanced furnishing systems and smart safety and prevention facilities; the dwelling unit may include a dining room, an open-space kitchen and a walkable balcony or terrace; it provides a convenient, cozy and safe living experience; better traffic split-flow; convenient basement location, near the elevator shaft. At the ground floor it is equipped with gym facilities, children facilities and relax areas.

第四代住宅 *dì sì dài zhùzhái* '4th generation residential building' (after 2020): Residential building of new conception with one or two households per ru; high quality of internal and external materials; attention to the aesthetic aspects of the design. Vertical greening, sky courtyard, focusing on green ecology and environmental protection concept. Equipped with an exclusive AI butler to cover everything from property management to daily life scenarios; customized floor plans with large area; more space for expansion, no common area.

**Classification according to appraisal ranking**

The appraisal criteria include several variables, such as geographical features, location and landscape features, density rate, outdoor and indoor facilities, quality of construction materials, size of the dwelling unit, quality of interior materials etc. Despite the objectivity of some of the criteria, it is difficult to provide a clear-cut categorization, because it varies from city to city, is subjected to the local real estate market criteria and depends on the enhancement of some features at the expense of others. The ranking according to appraisal criteria is usually divided in levels (档 *dàng* or 级 *jí*):

高 *gāo* 'high': 高档住宅 *gāodàng zhùzhái* 'high-grade residential building'; 高级住宅 *gāodàng zhùzhái* 'high level residential building'; 高端住宅 *gāoduān zhùzhái* 'high-end residential building'; 高尚住宅 *gāoshàng zhùzhái* 'refined residential building): 豪宅 *háozhái* 'luxurious house, mansion'.

中 *zhōng* 'medium': 中档住宅 *zhōngdàng zhùzhái* 'middle-grade residential building'.

低 *dī* 'low': 低挡住宅 *dīdàng zhùzhái* 'low-grade residential building'.

### 4.2.4 屋 *wū* and its compound

#### 屋 *wū*: the "room" house

The character 屋 *wū*, not present in the *jiaguwen* and *jinwen*, is largely attested in the Western Zhou era, especially in the *Yijing* and *Shijing*. Its original meaning is 'tent' (*alt*. 幄 *wò*), then cover of the house (roof), but very soon it denotes the house by synecdoche, in a broad sense. It can refer to one-storeyed simple houses or to taller buildings (Yi 2016, 60-1) and also to a single room.

In modern Chinese it is rarely used as an independent morpheme. More often, it occurs in combination with verbs, such as in the phrase 回屋 *huí wū* 'go back to (one's) room' or in *chengyu* and proverbs, such as 爱屋及乌 *ài wū jí wū* 'The love for somebody extends to the crows on their roof', lit. 'love the house and the crows (on its roof)'.

The term 屋子 *wūzi* (屋 + noun suffix) is attested for the first time during the Song Dynasty in Zhu Xi 朱熹 (*Zhuzi Yulei*, Chapter 70): "Gui Shan disse: 'Non si deve abbattere la casa dell'uomo cattivo.'" (Zhu, 1986; my trans.).

It is largely used in the Ming Qing vernacular literature, e.g. Jin Ping Mei, ch. 13: "My fifth wife, Jinlian, lives in the garden where she has a little house all to herself." (Egerton, 2011: 178). In modern Chinese it is mostly used in the Southern variants of colloquial Chinese with the meaning of '(detached) house'. In the Northern variants it is used as synonym of 房间 *fángjiān* 'room' with a relative low frequency.

### 房屋 *fángwū*: the "house" house

The most common compound of 屋 *wū*, it is a general term for 'house (building)', attested for the first time during the Eastern Jin dynasty in the *Collated and Annotated* Shenxian zhuan – Li Shaojun: "They arrived to death without getting sick, with no hunchback, no wrinkles, no fallen teeth, no white hair, neither is the house abandoned" (Ge, 2010; my trans.). It was then extensively used from the Ming dynasty in the vernacular literature. In modern Chinese, 房屋 *fángwū* is used as a synonym of 房子 *fángzi* in the written language. Since the Republican era, it mainly refers to the house as a building, regardless of its function, but the prevailing context of use is in the real estate market and in the construction industry. In the *Late Qing and Republican-Era Chinese Newspapers (1910-1949)* database of the Center for Research Libraries (East View Information Services), the term is attested 51,951 times in 101 different newspapers, mostly used in reference to this context. In an article of *The China Times* (時事新報 *Shíshì Xīnbào*), 1931.06.20, reporting on the entry of Hankou 汉口 mayor Liu Wendao 刘文岛, in the 國際房屋建設協會 *Guójì fángwū jiànshè xiéhuì* (International Housing and Construction Association ['Associatus' in the article]), the term 房屋 *fángwū* is specifically used for the first time to translate the English term 'housing'. The Association was founded in Frankfurt in 1928 by former members of the International Garden Cities and Town Planning Association (later the International Garden Cities and Town Planning Federation and then the International Federation for Housing and Town Planning), dissatisfied with the British domination of its executive organs (Saunier, 2001: 380–403). Nonetheless, one noteworthy achievement of the IFHTP was the publication in 1934 of a multilanguage glossary of housing and town planning, the first attempt ever to define the objects of the city and the phenomena of city planning from a technical point of view.

In *Dictionary of Chinese Real Estate*, the definition of 房屋 *fángwū* draws the difference with 住宅 *zhùzhái* and 建筑物 *jiànzhùwù* 'edifice':

> 房屋 *fángwū*, i.e. 房子 *fángzi*, indicates a building with walls, roof, doors, windows, for human habitation or other uses. 房屋 *fángwū*, 住宅 *zhùzhái* and 建筑物 *jiànzhùwù* are different concepts: 住宅 *zhùzhái* indicates a house for living use, is one type of 房屋 *fángwū*; 房屋 *fángwū* not only includes a house for living use, but also factory buildings, warehouses, commercial buildings, school buildings, office buildings, medical buildings, sport buildings. The scope of 建筑物 *jiànzhùwù* is even broader, it includes other buildings beside 房屋 *fángwū*, such as piers, docks, oil depots, reservoirs, chimneys, perimeter walls etc. 房屋 *fángwū*, 住宅 *zhùzhái* and 建筑物 *jiànzhùwù* are all architectural products, the difference lies in their respective functions of use. (Fan, 2003: 14–15).

On the base of the *Standard for Rating the Condition/Damage Level of Buildings* (1984), the 房屋 *fángwū* can be classified in five levels:

完好房(屋) *wánhǎo fáng(wū)* 'intact house'.

基本完好房(屋) *jīběn wánhǎo fáng(wū)* 'basically intact houses' (damages due to lack of maintenance).

一般损坏房(屋) *yībān sǔnhuài fáng(wū)* 'generally damaged houses' (damages, also structural, and leakages due to aging; also equipments and piping are malfunctioning).

严重损坏房(屋) *yánzhòng sǔnhuài fáng(wū)* 'seriously damaged houses' (structure evidently deformed, seriously damaged equipments and piping).

危房 (危险房屋) *wēifáng* (*wēixiǎn fángwū*) 'unsafe house' (dangerous house, structure has lost its stability and load-bearing capacity; it must be timely demolished or thouroughly renovated).

When purchasing an older house, the buyer can use the above criteria to gauge whether the price the seller is asking for is reasonable. Consumers can also use the newness of the old house purchased to calculate the approximate value of the house purchased, the specific method is to compare the price of the old house with the price of the new commercial houses with the same location and typology, and then to multiply this price by the CNR. This calculation is very rough and can be used only as a general reference.

### 4.2.5 院 *yuàn* and its compounds

#### 院 *yuàn*: the courtyard house

The picto-phonetic character 院 *yuàn*, composed of the radical 阝 (←阜) *fù* 'mound, mountain' and the phonetic component 完 *wán*, is present in the *Shuowen Jiezi* with the meaning of 'fortification', 'stronghold'. It is attested for the first time in the *Bamboo Slips from the Qin Tomb at Shuihudi*: "When you cross the boundary wall between a lane and another lane, that wall is '院 *yuàn*'? If there two opposing lanes, the wall in between is '院 *yuàn*'; if there are two opposing houses, the wall in between is not '院 *yuàn*'" (Collation Group for the Shuihudi Qin Tomb Bamboo Slips, 1978, 232; my trans.).

The original meaning of the character 院 *yuàn* is, thus, 'perimeter wall', but it is only since the Tang era that the term clearly refers to a courtyard house surrounded by walls, as in Wei Zhuang 韋莊's poem "Echoing 'Song of Everlasting Sorrow'": "Secluded courtyard empty this spring day noon." (Yates, 1988). By extension, it referred to the courtyard itself, e.g. in Guang

Xuan 廣宣's poem "On the Fifteenth Day of the Ninth Lunar Month, Staying at Minister Zheng's Yandong Pavilion, Gazing at the Moon and Presented to Du Sheren": "The courtyard is full of the grace emanated by the light of the moon" (Guang, 2005; my trans.).

### 宅院 *zháiyuàn*: the 'mansion'

From the Song Dynasty, the term refers to a dwelling, integrated with a courtyard enclosure, usually composed of two or more rows of buildings, called 进 *jìn*, arranged on the axis north-south, and connected by lateral buildings (wings) on the western and eastern sides of the compound. In the case of larger mansions, on both sides of the central compound there could be gardens or smaller replicas of the residence, intended for collateral branches of the family. All the compounds were connected by an external passageway accessible through the main entrance of the complex. 宅院 *zháiyuàn* functions as a morphology + social space term: the "home" is not just a building, but a courtyard compound that indexes privacy, status, and enclosure.

In modern Chinese, 宅院 *zháiyuàn* is not a technical term. It retains the core meaning 'courtyard residence/compound,' frequently carrying a heritage or traditional register and evoking elite domesticity, enclosure/privacy and a traditional social world contrasted with the modern apartments.

### 合院 *héyuàn*: closed courtyard

The term refers to a traditional gated courtyard house. The central court may be surrounded by three or four detached buildings. The former case (三合院 *sānhéyuàn* lit. 'courtyard closed on three sides') is a southern U-shape rural type, more simple and modest than the northern urban type, usually closed on four sides (四合院 *sìhéyuán* lit. 'courtyard closed on four sides'). The 四合院 *sìhéyuàn*, the traditional courtyard house of North China, constitutes one of the most enduring models of Chinese urban and architectural order. Its spatial logic, social symbolism, and political afterlives reveal not only the continuity of Chinese domestic architectural forms but also the profound transformations of urban life from the imperial period through the modern era and into contemporary heritage-based redevelopment. Within architectural history, the 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* is understood not merely as a residential typology but as a spatial expression of cosmology, kinship hierarchy, and social governance (Wu, 2001). Its importance in contemporary architectural discourse arises from its dual position as both a historical artifact and a contested resource in urban regeneration and heritage conservation.

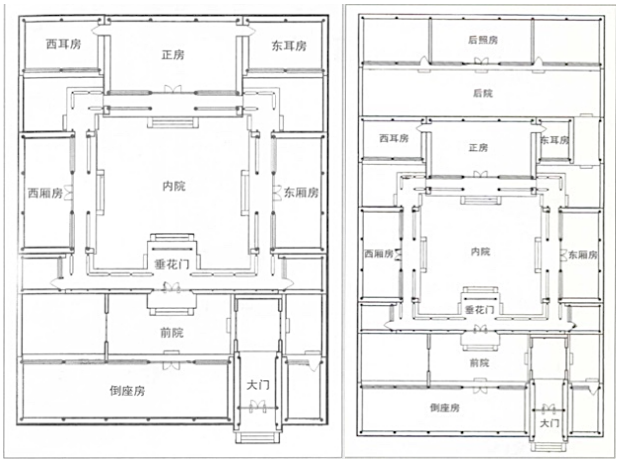



Figure 4.13 The courtyard house (Jia, 2009)

In the traditional close courtyard house, the most important room at the back of the compound, facing south and occupied by the part of the family with highest hierarchical ranking, usually the members of the oldest generation, was called 正房 *zhèngfáng* (正 *zhèng* 'straight, correct, precise'), or 上房 *shàngfáng* (上 *shàng* 'superior'), while the two lateral rooms, or wing-rooms, occupied by the narrow families of the younger generations (children, grandchildren etc.), were called 廂房 *xiāngfáng* and designated by the geographical position: 东厢房 *dōngxiāngfáng* 'east wing-room', intended for the eldest son and 西厢房 *xīxiāngfáng* 'west wing-room', intended for the second son. The 正房 *zhèngfáng* and the 廂房 *xiāngfáng* were connected by smaller rooms on both sides, called 耳房 *ěrfáng* 'ear rooms', generally used as stockrooms, kitchens or maiden's rooms. The room across the inner courtyard atrium, facing north and sharing the windowless south wall with the street, was called 倒座房 *dàozuòfáng* lit. 'opposite-seated room'. It was usually inhabited by servants or, occasionally, by guests. The servant's room was generally called 下房 *xiàfáng* 'inferior room'. In the case of larger houses, a second courtyard can be found behind the 正房 *zhèngfáng*, with a smaller room, sharing the same south-north axis, on the north extremity of the complex (后罩房 / 后照房 *hòuzhàofáng* lit. 'back-covering room or back-illuminated room').

This configuration encodes social hierarchy and Confucian kinship ethics into built form. The inward-facing composition generates privacy, regulates microclimate, and fosters an introverted domestic environment typical of North Chinese urban culture.

One of the most interesting description of the 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* typology in English can be found in Wilma C. Fairbank's book dedicated to the life of Liang Sicheng and Lin Huiyin. John

K. Fairbank's wife was a personal friend of the couple and used to meet Lin Huyin in her house near the eastern section of the city walls (Fairbank, 1994: 45):

> Within its high walls was a secluded but ample courtyard planted with several flowering trees. Along each of its four sides stretched long, one-story dwelling units. Pitched roofs of gray tiles covered these and the paved walkways that linked them. The façades that faced the courtyard had large windows and doors in which were set wooden lattices of elaborate design. Sheets of white rice-paper were pasted or furled against the interior of these lattices, to let in the light while protecting privacy. A central doorway at the north end of the courtyard led into the living room, which was larger than the other rooms and faced directly south. The Liangs replaced the paper in the wide lower sashes of some windows with glass to afford them a view of the trees and flowers in the courtyard and let in a flood of warm sunshine during the chilly Peking winter. But above each glass was a roll of paper that could be unfurled down in the evenings for privacy and insulation. Rooms along a smaller courtyard near the front entrance housed the servants and the household work areas.

In January 2012 the Liang Sicheng and Lin Huiyin's former residence, designated as a cultural relic at a national level, was bulldozed to leave space for a modern residential complex. Despite the huge debate and controversy that the implementation of the developers' plans created, the local government couldn't stop the demolition of the 四合院 *sìhéyuàn*. Xinhua. Famous traditional courtyard home bulldozed in Beijing[EB/OL]. *China Daily*, 2012-01-29. https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-01/29/content_14498677.htm. [2026-02-21].

The architectural vocabulary of timber frames, grey bricks, and tile roofs, along with modulated courtyard proportions, produced a flexible and expandable prototype. A single household 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* could be joined to others to form an entire urban blocks in Beijing, Xi'an, and other northern cities once consisted almost entirely of linked courtyard compounds. Thus, the 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* contributed to the morphological identity of the Chinese capital and other regional centers and shaped traditional urban life by structuring both family interactions and neighborhood relations. Northern Chinese neighborhoods emerged as linear pedestrian networks connecting clusters of courtyard houses. These micro-urban environments facilitated a thick social fabric supported by proximity, ritual practice, and a shared semi-private public realm. Because 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* space is simultaneously enclosed and porous, it enabled the coexistence of household autonomy and community surveillance long before the advent of modern planning.

Following 1949, however, the socio-political meaning of the 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* underwent a dramatic shift. The socialist allocation of housing converted many single-family compounds into multi-household units, fragmenting internal courtyards and densifying the urban core. This

collectivization of private space produced what is now termed 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* living, wherein traditional spatial order was disrupted yet remained legible as cultural memory (→ next paragraph).

Since the 1990s, 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* heritage has become a central issue in Chinese urban conservation, especially in Beijing. The rapid redevelopment associated with market reforms placed immense pressure on inner-city neighborhoods, resulting in widespread demolition of courtyard housing in favor of high-rise residential, commercial, and infrastructural projects. Early policies, such as the *Beijing Historic and Cultural City Protection Plan during the 10th Five-Year Plan Period* (2001), recognized the value of 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* but suffered from limited enforcement. Large-scale transformations continued through the 1990s and early 2000s.

Heritage conservation efforts intensified alongside the maturation of UNESCO's cultural landscape framework (adopted in 1992) and culminated, in Beijing's case, in the UNESCO inscription of the Beijing Central Axis in 2024 (World Heritage List ID 1714). Scholars such as Wu Liangyong 吴良镛 promoted the concept of 整体保护 *zhěngtǐ bǎohù* 'integrated conservation', emphasizing not only architectural preservation but also the protection of 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* as living social environments (Wu 1999). More recent regulations, including the *Beijing City Master Plan* (2016–2035), call for stricter preservation of 胡同 *hútòng* morphology and courtyard typologies, although redevelopment pressures remain strong.

Some contemporary projects adopt a hybrid model: restoration combined with adaptive reuse. Renovated 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* often house boutique hotels, cultural institutions, or creative offices, contributing to a new urban economy based on heritage consumption. Critics argue that these projects commodify tradition and displace long-term residents, raising questions about authenticity, social justice, and the meaning of 活态文化遗产 *huótài wénhuà yíchǎn* 'living heritage' (Zhang, 2008).

### 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn*: 'big mixed courtyard'

The term 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* refers to a specific residential condition common in Beijing and other northern Chinese cities from the mid-20th century onward. Referring to the translation of the term, Evans (2020) states:

> 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* is variously translated as 'compound courtyard,' 'big messy courtyard,' 'big, mixed courtyard,' 'tenements,' or 'slums'. I use Wu Liangyong [Wu, 1999]'s 'big cluttered courtyard,' from his *Rehabilitating the Old City of Beijing*, out of respect for an architect who designed a model for the conversion of Beijing's 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* into modernized structures that retained a feel of the traditional courtyard.

The phrase is not an official architectural category but an urban vernacular label. It describes large traditional courtyard compounds that were subdivided and progressively infilled to accommodate many unrelated households, often twenty or more families, each occupying only a single former room or an improvised extension. The most typical morphological changes were division of rooms with makeshift walls; enclosure of verandas to create new rooms; and addition of illegally constructed shacks in the central courtyard to serve as kitchens and storage sheds for the new residents.

These compounds are characterized by extreme residential density, shared infrastructure (communal taps, collective toilets), and a high degree of spatial improvisation. Over time, 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* came to index not only a built form but also a particular social world: crowded, conflictual, and intimate. Because it is rooted in historical contingency rather than formal planning, the 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* is best understood as a socio-spatial formation produced by migration, socialist housing policy, and scarcity.

Historically, 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* emerged through the transformation of traditional courtyard houses. The classical Beijing 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* was designed as a single-family residence organized around an internal courtyard, with a clear spatial hierarchy reflecting Confucian kinship order. After 1949, and especially from the 1950s through the 1970s, rapid urbanization, nationalization of private housing, and limited investment in new residential construction pushed municipal authorities to subdivide these compounds and reassign rooms to workers, cadres, and newly arrived urban residents. In many cases, entire former mansions, temples, or institutional courtyards were broken up in this way. This process both accommodated population growth and marked the ideological shift from elite, lineage-based domestic space to collectivized, state-managed shelter.

Spatially, the 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* is defined by accretion. The original 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* geometry—an inward-facing set of single-story buildings around a central void—is still perceptible, but the void is progressively colonized. Residents add lean-tos, brick sheds, sheet-metal kitchens, and improvised bathrooms in whatever interstitial space remains, frequently without formal approval. Over time, this results in a micro-labyrinth of narrow passageways, semi-private thresholds, and micro-courtyards. This piecemeal densification explains why 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* regularly appears in municipal policy discourse as an object of "rectification," "renewal," or "shantytown transformation," rather than as a legitimate housing typology in its own right.

From a sociological perspective, this intimacy is inseparable from exposure. The 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* erodes privacy. Domestic life spills into the courtyard, and quarrels, childcare, cooking, and even washing become audibly and visibly collective. This aligns with anthropological arguments that domestic space is not a container for pre-existing households but a field in which relations are produced and negotiated through everyday practice. In the 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn*, a resident's social identity is partly constructed through spatial claims—where one can leave a bicycle, hang laundry, boil water—rather than through formal property rights. Elderly neighbors often serve as moral arbiters and informal conflict mediators, while children's circulation through all units builds horizontal solidarities that cut across class and work-unit affiliation. These dynamics substantiate the frequent nostalgic framing of 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* life in post-socialist media as "warm," "human," and "authentically Beijing," even as they acknowledge the environmental and psychological stress of constant co-presence.The lived experience of the 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* has been extensively documented in Beijing literature of the twentieth century, particularly in Lao She's work. In *Rickshaw Boy* (1936), Lao She depicts courtyards densely packed with seven or eight households per yard, sometimes with "seven or eight mouths" squeezed into a single heated *kang*-room. He emphasizes material hardship—winter drafts, leaking roofs, coal smoke, and unsanitary shared spaces—as well as the emotional toll of poverty, violence, and overexposure. Yet even in these harsh depictions, the 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* is a site of mutual care: women cook for sick neighbors, children are collectively supervised, and gossip operates as an informal governance mechanism (Lao, 1962).

Later "Beijing-flavor" (京味 *Jīngwèi*) fiction continued this trope: the 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* was remembered as morally ambiguous space—simultaneously protective and suffocating, communal and surveillant (Liu, 1985). In other words, the 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* helped produce a specifically urban form of intimacy that exceeded kinship and blurred the boundary between household and neighborhood.

At the policy level, 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* have long been treated as both a governance problem and a heritage problem. On one hand, they are framed as substandard housing: overcrowded, structurally aging, dangerous in terms of fire safety, and environmentally unsanitary. On the other hand, they are embedded within Beijing's historic 胡同 *hútòng* districts, which municipal authorities are under pressure to conserve as part of the capital's "Old City" identity and cultural brand. Since the 1990s, Beijing has experimented with multiple strategies to handle this contradiction. Large-scale demolition and relocation (拆迁 *chāiqiān*) clears residents and replaces the compound with higher-value development, often apartments or commercial uses.

A different strategy, exemplified by Ju'er Hutong in the 1990s under architect Wu Liangyong, attempts to modernize courtyard living by integrating kitchens, bathrooms, and multi-story housing into a renewed courtyard fabric, in order to preserve spatial typology while meeting contemporary standards (Wu, 1999). These two approaches—erasure versus adaptive renewal—continue to coexist.

A third, more recent model is targeted 微更新 *wēi gēngxīn* 'micro-renovation'. Rather than demolish illegal extensions and displace residents, some architects and district governments have experimented with upgrading those very accretions into formalized, collectively beneficial spaces. It refers to a model of incremental and small-scale urban regeneration, aimed at improving spatial, infrastructural, and social conditions without large-scale demolition or reconstruction. Furthermore, it encourages community participation among residents, architects, and local officials. At the architectural level, 微改造 *wēi gǎizào* 'micro-transformation' refers to targeted architectural or physical interventions on existing buildings or clusters of buildings, aimed at improving functionality, safety, or adapting to new uses. It involves light renovation or adaptive reuse rather than full reconstruction.

Yet it would be naïve to treat micro-renovation as a neutral, purely community-driven act. These interventions often produce highly aestheticized, internationally celebrated architecture. While the rhetoric emphasizes "community life," the resulting spaces can also become showcases of curated authenticity that attract tourists, design media, and cultural capital. This dynamic echoes critiques in urban studies that "regeneration" frequently converts working-class social worlds into symbolic resources for urban branding and middle-class consumption. In other words, the 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* becomes an aesthetic and political object: a stage on which the city negotiates between memory, livability, and market value.

Culturally, the 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* has become a powerful narrative device in contemporary representations of Beijing. It embodies moral ideas of authenticity and resilience: residents are portrayed as straightforward, resourceful, emotionally expressive, and embedded in thick neighborly obligations. This figure of the 大院里的人 *dàyuàn lǐ de rén* 'courtyard person' is central to Beijing's self-mythologizing as a city of plainspoken warmth and social intelligence, in contrast to the perceived alienation of gated high-rises on the urban periphery. At the same time, the 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* also indexes humiliation: leaking roofs, collective toilets, and the indignity of adults fighting in public for access to a single tap recur as stock images of urban hardship in film, television drama, and memoir. This ambivalence—pride in community versus shame at poverty—allows 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* to operate as an emotionally loaded touchstone in

debates over urban renewal. Demolishing a 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* is never just about clearing unsafe housing; it is framed as either erasing memory or finally delivering dignity.

Many of these compounds are located within historic 历史街区 *lìshǐ jiēqū* 'conservation districts', where the legal and policy emphasis has progressively shifted from maintaining them as lived-in, high-density residential spaces to preserving their historical and architectural integrity. This shift reflects the city's broader dual agenda of heritage protection and urban modernization.

The *Beijing Historic and Cultural City Protection Regulations* (2021) provide the foundational legal basis for the conservation of traditional neighborhoods. Under these regulations, municipal authorities are tasked with safeguarding the spatial patterns, street networks, and architectural styles that characterize Beijing's historic urban core. Within this framework, the preservation of a 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* is typically articulated through two key policy instruments: 院落腾退 *yuànluò téngtuì* 'courtyard evacuation' and 恢复性修建 *huīfùxìng xiūjiàn* 'restorative reconstruction'.

The process of 院落腾退 *yuànluò téngtuì* involves relocating the multiple households inhabiting the same courtyard, effectively depopulating the compound to enable restorative reconstruction. The subsequent phase, 恢复性修建 *huīfùxìng xiūjiàn*, entails rebuilding and repairing the structure according to its original historical layout, materials, and typology, as stipulated by heritage preservation standards. While these measures serve conservation objectives, they also implicitly advance population reduction in the old city, reflecting the planning logic of 人口疏解 'population decongestion' embedded in the *Beijing City Master Plan (2016–2035).*

From an urban management perspective, many 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* are administratively categorized as part of 棚户区 *pénghùqū* 'shantytown' or 'dilapidated housing' areas. National and municipal 棚户区改造 *pénghùqū gǎizào* 'shantytown renovation' policies have been central to the city's redevelopment strategies. These policies target zones characterized by unsafe structures, overcrowding, and lack of amenities, mandating interventions to align them with contemporary urban and housing standards.

Legally, 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* redevelopment under this framework intersects with three major areas of concern: (1) dangerous housing (危房 *wēifáng*) (many 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* contain 危房 *wēifáng*, subject to inspection and demolition orders under the *Regulations on the Safety Management of Urban Housing* [2025]): (2) substandard living conditions (the absence of private sanitation and the prevalence of shared kitchens violate municipal housing and

hygiene codes, rendering these compounds high-priority targets for renewal); (3) Demolition and Relocation (拆迁 *chāiqiān*) (the legal outcome of these processes often involves clearing the site and relocating residents to new apartment complexes, aligning with the urban master plan's redevelopment and land-use objectives).

The *Fire Protection Law of the People's Republic of China* (1998 and later modifications) and local public health regulations further justify interventions in 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* compounds. Narrow passageways, unauthorized extensions, and tangled wiring breach fire safety codes, while shared sanitation and waste accumulation violate hygiene regulations under the *Provisions on the Environmental Sanitation Management of Urban Roads and Public Places in Beijing* (1989 and later modifications).

The *Regulatory Detailed Plan for the Core Zone of the Capital's Function 2018-2035* (2019) institutionalizes these considerations within a planning framework emphasizing the 老城保护 *lǎochéng bǎohù* 'old city protection'. It introduces mechanisms such as the 申请式退租 *shēnqǐngshì tuìzū* 'application-based lease surrender' and restorative reconstruction, signaling a transition from demolition-centered redevelopment toward a legally codified balance between heritage conservation and residential improvement.

In sum, the governance of Beijing's 大杂院 *dàzáyuàn* reveals a complex legal landscape where heritage preservation, urban safety, and population management intersect. Through this framework, the city seeks not merely to conserve architectural relics but to re-engineer the lived environment of the historic core in line with its evolving vision of modernity and cultural continuity.

### 4.2.6 寓 *yù* and its compound

**寓 *yù*: the lodging house**

The picto-phonetic character 寓 *yù*, composed of the radical 宀 *mián* 'roof' and the phonetic component 禺 *yú*, is present in the *Shuowen Jiezi* with the meaning of 'entrust, depend on'. It is attested in *Mengzi* with the verbal meaning of 'to lodge, to live away from home': "'Do not let anyone,' said Tseng Tzu, 'live in my house or do damage to my trees.'" (Lau, 1970). Since the Ming dynasty the term is also used as a noun, with the general meaning of 'residence'.

**公寓 *gōngyù*: '(modern) apartment'**

Abbreviation of the phrase 公共寓所 *gōnggòng yùsuǒ* 'public residence' that originally refers to a long-stay public lodging in which the guests (mainly students) pay their rents on a

monthly basis. At the end of the Qing dynasty the term refers to a place where a traveler can rent a room and is still interchangeable with the older term 客栈 *kèzhàn* 'inn'. This usage reflects the term's earlier meaning, closer to a 'lodging house' or 'boarding house', before it became firmly associated with the Western-style urban apartment building. It highlights the transitional nature of the late Qing period, where old and new meanings coexisted, e.g. in Liu E 刘鹗's 老残游记 *Lǎo Cán Yóujì* (The Travels of Lao Can,1903-1907) (Liu, 1998).

The term 公寓 *gōngyù* during the late Qing and the early Republican period carried a distinctly modern, often Westernized connotation. It did not refer to large-scale residential complexes as it often does today, but rather to a new type of urban housing: the modern apartment building or 'mansion', typically equipped with modern amenities and catering to a burgeoning middle class, intellectuals, officials, and foreigners. Its appearance in literature reflects the social transformation and the complexities of modern urban life, as evidenced by the new-born literature in vernacular language. One typical example can be found in Mao Dun 矛盾's novel 子夜 *Zǐyè* (Midnight, 1933) in which the author depicts the financial world of 1930s Shanghai. The protagonist, Wu Sunfu 吴荪甫, sets up his secret lover, Liu Yuying 刘玉英, in a modern apartment. This apartment becomes a space for clandestine meetings, political intrigue, and personal indulgence. It is described as a place of modernity and moral ambiguity, contrasting with the traditional Wu family compound. The apartment in *Midnight* symbolizes the new, fast-paced, and often corrupting influence of capitalist modernity. It is a space detached from traditional family structures, where new (and sometimes decadent) social relations can form. It represents the "new woman" and the complex interplay of money, power, and desire in Republican Shanghai (Mao, 1952).

In Lao She 老舍' *Rickshaw Boy* (1936), the rickshaw puller Xiangzi 祥子 lives in crowded tenements (大杂院 *dàzáyuàn*; → 4.2.5), while the world of apartments exists around him as a symbol of an unattainable life. Mr. Cao 曹, the progressive intellectual who briefly employs Xiangzi, lives in a 公寓 *gōngyù*. It is described as a clean, orderly, and modern space, a stark contrast to Xiangzi's squalid and chaotic living conditions. The apartment in this novel represents the social divide. It is the dwelling of the enlightened, educated class—a world of stability and comfort that is completely out of reach for the urban poor like Xiangzi. It underscores the sharp class stratification in cities like Beijing (Lao, 1962).

In the early 1940s Eileen Chang (Zhang Ailing 张爱玲) is the chronicler of big city's life (Shanghai and Hong Kong). Her works are filled with vivid descriptions of urban dwellings,

and 公寓 *gōngyù* appears frequently as one of the symbols of the modern city life. In the essay "Notes on apartment life" (Zhang, 2012) she writes:

> An apartment is an ideal retreat from the world outside. Often, people who are weary of metropolitan life yearn for the quiet harmony of the countryside, longing for the day when they might retire to their old country home, keep bees, plant a few crops, and enjoy a well-earned rest. Little do they know that in the countryside the mere purchase of a half pound of smoked meat elicits storms of idle gossip, whereas in an apartment on the top floor, you can change clothes right in front of the window without anyone knowing the difference!

Chang captures the essence of apartment living as a form of modern anonymity and individual freedom. It offered a liberating escape from the stifling social surveillance of traditional communities ("the countryside" or the crowded 弄堂 *lòngtáng*). The apartment was a private realm where one could live eccentrically, independently, and free from gossip.

After the foundation of the PRC, housing was reorganized under work units (单位, *dānwèi*). The dominant terms in everyday discourse became 宿舍 *sùshè* (dormitory, collective housing provided by work units) or 职工住宅 *zhígōng zhùzhái* (worker housing). Urban planning documents from the 1950s sometimes used 公寓 *gōngyù* to translate the Soviet concept of 'apartment block'. The connotation was not luxurious but functional and collective. In the university context, the term 公寓 *gōngyù* was used quite regularly to indicate the collective residences for unmarried faculty staff. In Tsinghua University, for example, the residential buildings located in the South-Western part of the campus, with a linear structure of a corridor with a row of rooms on both sides, were named N号公寓 N *hào gōngyù* 'apartment n°xx'.

Before 1976, while the word was not banned, it was marginal compared to other terms. Its rehabilitation and re-popularization came only after the late 1970s, when market housing and private apartments returned.

In contemporary Chinese 公寓 *gōngyù* is a broad marketing and colloquial term, and does not refer to a precise legal category in Chinese property law. It indicates public housing complexes designed to accommodate multiple households or individuals (students, workers etc.). Although the term does not have a clear legal definition, the building it usually refers to has the following features: (a) more than four storeys; (b) each storey is divided in several dwelling units per storey; (c) the dwelling units have similar configuration and are fully furnished; (d) each dwelling units is occupied by one single household or by a designated number of individuals; (e) the building has relatively well-equipped facilities; (f) the facilities are commonly used and do not belong to any specific dwelling unit. The size of the dwelling

units is regulated by the local governments according to the specific residential needs of the area.

The term 公寓 *gōngyù* seems to be connected more to its function (collective long-term housing) than to its architectural features. In Liu, 1991, the lemma is considered an equivalent of the phrase 公寓式住宅 *gōngyù shì zhùzhái* 'public accomodation style residential building', confirming that the term refers to a modality of accomodation (Liu, 1991). In the colloquial language 公寓 *gōngyù* is generally understood as 商办公寓 *shāngbàn gōngyù* 'commercial-office apartment', as opposed to 住宅(公寓) 'residential apartment'. These are units built on 商业或办公用地 *shāngyè huò bàngōng yòngdì* 'land designated for commercial or office use' and often converted by developers into small, apartment-style units for sale.

In recent years the 服务式公寓 *fúwùshì gōngyù* 'serviced apartment' have spread throughout China in response to the needs of high-end customers (expatriates, mid-to-long-term business travelers, families with temporary relocation needs, project teams etc.) for hotel-style service combined with apartment-style space and amenities. These structures are typically operated by hotel groups or specialized companies.

Because of the blurry semantic boundaries of the term, it may refer either to the building or to the single dwelling unit. When it is used in reference to a building, it may be combined with more concrete words, such as in 公寓大楼 *gōngyù dàlóu* 'apartment building', 公寓楼房 *gōngyù lóufáng* 'apartment building', 公寓大厦 *gōngyù dàshà* 'apartment building/tower', 公寓建筑 *gōngyù jiànzhù* 'apartment building'. When it refers to the single dwelling unit, it may be called 公寓房 *gōngyù fáng* or 公寓套房 *gōngyù tàofáng*. In this phrase, the noun 套 means "complete set" and can be use also as a quantifier in the colloquial language, as in 一套公寓 'one "set" apartment' or 一套(公寓)房间 'a set of [apartment] rooms'.

Table 4.3 Compartive table of 公寓 *gōngyù* and 住宅 *zhùzhái*

| FEATURE | 公寓 *gōngyù* | 住宅 *zhùzhái* |
|---|---|---|
| Land Use Type & Property Rights | Built on commercial/office land; property rights typically 40–50 years. Policies for renewal remain uncertain, lacking explicit legal guarantees. | Built on residential land; property rights 70 years, with clear legal basis for renewal upon expiration. |
| Purchase Regulations & Financial Costs | Not subject to purchase restrictions; no need for homebuyer qualification. However: minimum 50% down payment, short loan terms (≈10 years), and commercial loan interest rates, which are significantly higher. | Strict purchase restrictions in major cities; requires qualification. Loans are more favorable: lower down payments, longer loan terms, and lower mortgage interest rates. |
| Utility Costs & Community Amenities | Utilities billed at commercial rates—generally 1.5–2× higher than residential. Typically no gas connection. Fewer community amenities. | Utilities charged at residential rates (water, electricity, gas, heating). Communities usually offer gardens, sports areas, and comprehensive public facilities. |
| Residency Registration (户口 *hùkǒu*) & School Eligibility | Usually not eligible for household registration (*luohu*); no school district rights. | Eligible for residency registration, granting access to public school districts based on zoning. |
| Spatial Design & Living Quality | Often converted from commercial/office floorplates. Common issues include: high elevator-to-unit ratio, long waiting times, narrow corridors, poor natural lighting, dark bathrooms, no balconies. | Purpose-built for living. Emphasis on rational layout, north–south orientation, cross-ventilation, natural lighting, and functional spatial organization. |

## 4.2.7 舍 *shè* and its compound

### 舍 *shè*: the temporary house

The character 舍 *shè* dates back to the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 1046-771 BC) and is largely attested as bronze inscription. The character is explained by numerous sources as a 'place for habitation'. See for example the Book of Rites – Summary od the Rules of Propriety I"When he intends to go to a lodging-house, let it not be with the feeling that he must get whatever he asks for." (Legge 1967, 70). The pictogram represents a primitive roof supported by a column and a truss (  ).

The lower component 𠙵 (口 *kǒu*) may refer to the entrance of the house (Gu 2008, 785) or to a room outside the main body of the house, possibly for guests. This second interpretation could explain the alternative meaning of the character, 'temporary residence, guesthouse', attested in the *Shuowen Jiezi*. In the *Commentary on the Shuowen Jiezi* (Duan, 1981), the definition of 舍 *shè* is 市居 *shìjū* 'market + residence', that is explained by the commentator in a cross reference of the term 馆 *guǎn* 'guesthouse': "The term 市 *shì* doesn't refer to a place for trading, but to a place for guests." (my trans.).

The fact that a temporary residence is eventually abandoned lead to the secondary meaning of 'to give up, to abandon, to reject', still used in contemporary Chinese (in this case 舍 takes the second tone). In Gu Yewang 顾野王's *Jade Chapters* (a later lexicographic work of the Liang Dynasty 502-557), the character is defined as 宫 *gōng* 'palace', but this meaning is less attested (Gu, 2019).

During the Han era, it was established that the residences belonging to dukes and marquises controlling more than ten thousand households, and whose main door faced the main road, would be called 第 *dì*, while the ones belonging to dukes and marquises controlling less than thousand households, and living in areas near the city walls , would be called 舍 *shè* (Encyclopaedia of China Editorial Board, 1999).

### 宿舍 *sùshè*: 'dormitory'

The term occupies a distinctive position in the Chinese lexicon of dwelling. Unlike 住宅 *zhùzhái*, which denotes private dwelling space oriented toward family life, 宿舍 *sùshè* refers to an institutionalized form of collective living, historically shaped by militarized organization, state governance, socialist planning, and modern urbanization. Its evolution offers a revealing window into Chinese conceptions of housing, social organization, and the relationship between individuals and institutions.

The origins of 宿舍 *sùshè* can be traced to imperial military and administrative systems, where the character 宿 *su* 'to lodge temporarily' signified temporary stays, overnight quarters, or lodging attached to official duty. In imperial China,营房 *yíngfáng* 'barracks', 驿站 *yìzhàn* 'courier stations', and 僧舍 *sēngshè* 'monastic quarters' all expressed early forms of regulated communal lodging. These environments were less about domestic life and more about collective discipline, hierarchy, and functional proximity to work or duty. The term 宿舍 *sùshè* gradually stabilized in the late imperial and Republican periods to denote shared living quarters attached to institutions—schools, factories, government agencies, and military units.

This transformation reflects a broader cultural pattern. Traditional Chinese society privileged the household (家 *jiā*) as the core unit of social reproduction, often viewing non-family communal residence as exceptional, transitional, or utilitarian. Thus, the emergence of 宿舍 *sùshè* as a normalized form of residence in the 20th century marks a significant shift toward modern institutional rationality, in which living space is subordinated to organizational needs.

The socialist revolution profoundly reshaped the meaning of 宿舍 *sùshè*. In the 单位 *dānwèi* system of the 1950s–1980s, work units controlled most aspects of urban life, including housing allocation. While 家属楼 *jiāshǔlóu* 'family apartments' were provided to married workers, 宿舍 *sùshè* became the primary dwelling for unmarried workers, young recruits, and newly assigned employees. These dormitories—often segregated by gender—were highly standardized, with multiple residents per room, shared facilities, and rigid rules regulating sleeping hours, visitors, and even romantic relationships.

From a sociological and anthropological perspective, 单位 *dānwèi*-era 宿舍 *sùshè* played a crucial role in shaping collective subjectivity. They fostered solidarity through shared routines, political study sessions, and communal labor. At the same time, they enforced surveillance and discipline, reflecting Foucaultian modes of biopolitical governance. Living in a dormitory meant being constantly embedded in work-unit networks of obligation, morality, and mutual visibility. The boundaries between work and home blurred, as the 单位 *dānwèi* functioned simultaneously as employer, landlord, welfare provider, and ideological educator.

Architecturally, socialist-era dormitories were built according to functionalist modernist principles, prioritizing cost efficiency and collective utility. Buildings featured long, double-loaded corridors, communal bathrooms, and minimal private space. The architectural typology embodied the socialist ideal of collectivism while also materializing urban hierarchies: high-ranking cadres enjoyed private suites, while workers shared cramped rooms.

With economic reforms and massive rural-to-urban migration, the meaning of 宿舍 *sùshè* transformed again. The rise of export-oriented manufacturing and construction industries created a new population of migrant laborers who, lacking urban 户口 *hùkǒu*, were excluded from conventional urban housing. Factories, construction sites, and industrial parks developed extensive worker dormitory systems, often housing thousands of workers in high-density compounds.

These reform-era dormitories differ substantially from 单位 *dānwèi* housing. They are not mechanisms of socialist redistribution but tools of capitalist labor management. Researchers have shown that modern worker dormitories function simultaneously as labor discipline, cost minimization, and spatial segregation. Workers live in proximity to production lines, enabling flexible scheduling and overtime. At the same time, the dormitory isolates migrants from urban society, limiting their ability to form stable communities or claim urban citizenship.

Anthropologically, migrant-worker 宿舍 *sùshè* form unique social worlds. They are spaces of intense mobility, ephemeral relationships, and fragmented temporalities. For many workers,

the dormitory is not 'home' but a transitory space in a life oriented around work and migration. The emotional experience of dormitory life is ambivalent: companionship and collective resilience coexist with overcrowding, alienation, and the absence of privacy.

Another major domain of 宿舍 *sùshè* is the university campus, where the term denotes student dormitories. Chinese university dorms are highly standardized, typically housing 4–8 students per room, often with shared or communal bathrooms. From the perspective of youth sociology, campus 宿舍 *sùshè* are crucibles of identity formation, friendship networks, and political socialization. They structure daily life through curfews, security controls, and collective routines.

Unlike Western universities, where dormitory life often signals independence, Chinese student dorms foster collective interdependence and the cultivation of group identity. They also reveal generational changes: newer dorms include air conditioning, private bathrooms, and smaller room sizes, reflecting shifting expectations of privacy among middle-class youth.

From an architectural standpoint, 宿舍 *sùshè* constitutes a distinct typology defined by repetitive modular units, high density per room, shared infrastructure and spatial hierarchy reinforcing institutional authority. The typology adapts flexibly to different institutional contexts: factory dormitories, military barracks, student dorms, and corporate housing all follow similar spatial logics with meaningful variations.

From an urban-planning perspective, large-scale dormitory districts are significant components of China's urban morphology. Technology parks, university towns, and logistics hubs rely heavily on dormitory populations to function. These zones challenge conventional models of community building because residents lack long-term tenure, property rights, and stable neighborhood identities.

Ultimately, 宿舍 *sùshè* is not only a dwelling type but a lens into Chinese modernity that reflects China's important values revealing how Chinese cities organize populations, manage labor, distribute opportunities, and reproduce social hierarchies. It is a spatial and social form where governance, economy, and everyday life intersect.

Table 4.4 Comparative table of the main single-unit dwelling forms

| FEATURE | 成套住宅/住房<br>*chéngtào zhùzhái / zhùfáng*<br>Self-Contained Unit | 公寓<br>*gōngyù*<br>Apartment | 单元式宿舍<br>*dānyuánshì sùshè*<br>Unit-Style Dormitory |
|---|---|---|---|
| Core Nature | Standard, complete, functional 住宅 *zhùzhái* | Residence with potentially incomplete functions | Collective dormitory designed in units |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Facility Independence | Kitchen/Bath are fully independent | Kitchen/Bath may not be independent (shared) | Kitchen/Bath/Living room shared within the unit |
| Privacy Level | High | Lower | Medium |
| Target Users | Families, long-term residents | Individual tenants, short-term stays | Company employees, university students, etc. (1-4 people per room) |
| Analogy | Ordinary residential housing | Youth 公寓 *gōngyù*, shared apartments | Faculty housing on campus, company employee compounds |

## 4.2.8 居 *jū* and its compounds

### 居 *jū*: the residing house

The character 居 *jū* is attested in the bronze of the Western Zhou with the original meaning of 'squat' or 'sit on the floor with one's leg stretched out' (Li, 2012, 744). In the *Lunyu*, it is used with the general meaning of 'sit'. See *The Analects* – "Yang Huo": "Be seated! Let me explain to you." (Huang, 1997: 167).

The first attestation with the meaning of 'occupy a certain place' and 'reside' is in the *Zhouyi* – "Appended Phrases": "[…] a superior man stays indoors [in his apartment, …]." (Rutt, 1996: 413). However, the meaning of 'residence' appears for the first time in the *Shangshu* "Pan Geng": "Seek every one long continuance in this (new city), which is to be your abode." (Legge 1865, 107).

Apart from some other sporadic appearances as a noun in the Old Chinese sources, 居 *jū* is normally used as a verb throughout the Middle Chinese era until the modern times.

### 民居 *mínjū*: 'residence of the people'

The character 民 *mín* can be interpreted as 'common people' (short for 平民 *píngmín*, opposed to 'noble'). A possible translation of 民居 *mínjū* in this acceptation could be 'house for the common people', opposed to 宫殿 *gōngdiàn* 'palace' or 官署 *guānshǔ* 'government office'. The first attestation of 民居 *mínjū* is in the 周禮註疏·地官·司徒 (*Zhouli zhushu·Diguan·Situ*) [*Zhouli*, Annotated & Subcommentary: "Diguan: Situ"][A] // Zheng, 1980.: "[…] in order to compare the people's abodes […]" (my trans.); and also in 管子·小匡 (*Guanzi·Xiao Kuang*) ["Lesser Rectification"][A] // Guanzi, 2004: "What should I do about fixing the dwelling places of the people / and arranging their work?" (Ryckett A, 1985: 325).

Other interpretation is of 民 *mín* are 'civilian,' short for 民用 *mínyòng* (for civilian use, opposed to 'military') or 'folk,' 'popular,' short for 民间 *mínjiān* lit. 'among the people'. Less common synonyms of 民居 *mínjū* with this acceptation are 民家 *mínjiā*, 民房 *mínfáng* and 民

宅 *mínzhái*. The first term is commonly used in Japan with the same meaning of 民居 *mínjū* (Japanese transcription: *minka*).

The semantic boundaries of 民居 *mínjū* are hard to define, since it refers to a large number of diverse architectural objects, result of the country's enormous geographical and ethnic diversity spanning at least fifty centuries of history. A very general definition encompasses the following traits of function (for human habitation), material (local, easy to source, economic), location (close to the daily life and work activities), and shape (apt to the needs of the traditional family). By contrast, we can add the two negative traits of use (not inhabited by kings or emperors, nobles, officials) and purpose (not exclusively intended for military, commercial, manufacturing purposes).

In the context of my research, it is important to observe that the term 民居 *mínjū* refers also to residences in urban settings, and not only to those located in rural areas or in remote regions. In fact, since the beginning of the academic research activities on this topic in the 50s, one of the most studied typology of 民居 *mínjū* has been the 四合院 *sìhéyuán*, Beijing's typical courtyard quadrangle.

In fact, the term 民居 *mínjū* can be considered a semantically overlapping rendering of the phrase 'vernacular architecture', because of the blurriness of its concrete reference. Upton and Vlach, 1986, xv underlined this question very clearly:

> This issue of definition, apparently so simple, has proven to be one of the most serious problems for advocates of vernacular architecture and landscapes research. A straightforward, convincing, authoritative definition has not yet been offered. Vernacular architecture is a phenomenon that many understand intuitively but that few are able to define. The literature on the subject is thus filled with what might be called non-definitions. Vernacular architecture is non-high style building, it is those structures not designed by professionals; it is not monumental; it is un-sophisticated; it is mere building; it is, according to the distinguished historian Nikolaus Pevsner, not architecture. Those who take a more positive approach rely on adjectives like ordinary, everyday, and commonplace. While these terms are not as pejorative as other descriptive phrases that are sometimes applied to the vernacular, neither are they very precise.

Similar conceptual instances were summarized by Paul Oliver summarized in the Introduction to the *Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World* (Oliver, 1997, xxiii):

> Vernacular architecture comprises the dwellings and all other buildings of the people. Related to their environmental contexts and available resources they are customarily owner—or community-built, utilizing traditional technologies. All forms of vernacular architecture are built to meet specific needs, accommodating the values, economies and ways of life of the cultures that produce them.

Nonetheless, the adjective 'vernacular', associated to architecture for the first time in England in 1836, includes also religious buildings and civil facilities, while the term 民居 *mínjū*, already attested in the classics of the pre-Qin era, has never included, *per se*, the idea of any religious practice whatsoever, but refers exclusively to the semantic area of "dwelling". This does not detract from the fact that 民居 *mínjū* might be soaked of religious and irrational elements, from the phase of the choice of the land, to the correct layout according to the principles of 风水 *fēngshuǐ*; from the dedication of a specific space inside the building to the altar of the ancestors, to the design of some apotropaic elements or the decoration with good luck charms (for the religious implication of the house-building, see Li, 2022 and Knapp, 2005: 99–137.) However, the semantic trait of the dwelling remains prominent.

In fact, the Chinese academic and editorial market, wherever there was an occasion to provide the English translation of 民居 *mínjū*, the term 'vernacular' has encountered some resistance, being used very seldom and only in co-editions or bilingual publications. In 2010 民居 *mínjū* was translated as 'vernacular house' in the English title of the five volume monolingual *Series on the Popularization and Transmission of Knowledge of Ancient Chinese Architecture – Chinese Vernacular House: Five-Book Set* (Li and Luo, 2010). In the bilingual dictionaries of architecture and urban studies, the adjective "vernacular" is present only two times. In the *English–Chinese Vocabulary of Housing, Urban Planning, and Architectural Management* (Ministry of Urban and Rural Construction and Environmental Protection of the People's Republic of China, 1996: 658–660). 民居 *mínjū* is translated as 'vernacular house', in the *Concise English–Chinese / Chinese–English Vocabulary Handbook of Architecture and Urban Planning* (Bao and Ji, 2007), 民居 *mínjū* is translated both folk house' and 'vernacular housing' and vice versa.

In the three series of stamp collection 中国民居 *Zhōngguó mínjū*, issued by the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications from 1986 to 1991, with a total of twenty-one stamps, report both on the leaflet and on the relative Chinese-English bilingual booklet, the translation "Chinese Civilian Dwelling" (Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, 1991; Geng and Yang, 1998: 1075-78; 1081-82).




Figure 4.14 Chinese Civilian Dwelling (1986-91). Ministry of PT of the PRC

In the Chinese monolingual architecture dictionaries and encyclopedias published from the beginning of the 80s, we can find the following translations of 民居 *mínjū*, when provided: domestic house (Editorial Committee for This Volume, Encyclopaedia of China Editorial Board, 1993: 327); domestic house/traditional dwelling (Li, 1999–2005: 238); folk houses (Gao, 2008: 30 and passim).

In the specialized literature 民居 *mínjū* is translated in various ways (in the Chinese editorial market, it is quite common practice to add an English translation of the book title): residences (Wang, 2013; Zhan, 2012; Liu, 2018), local-style dwelling houses (Wu, 2007); dwellings (Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of China, 2014); homes (Liu, 2010); courtyard houses (the English title refers to Beijing typical 民居 *mínjū* typology) (Zheng, 2012).

The attestations of 民居 *mínjū* in the last acceptation are rare throughout Chinese history. According to the *Great Chinese Dictionary* (Editorial Committee of the Great Chinese Dictionary, 1986–1994, 6: 1425), the first appearance of the term with this acceptation is during the Northern Wei dynasty in the *Commentary on the Water Classic* by Li Daoyuan: "There are houses both on the left and on the right" (my trans.).

The term acquired huge popularity in the 80s of last century, when the interest toward the indigenous form of folk architecture increased rapidly at academic level. Ronald Knapp, in a recent article (2024: 44), summarizes the stages of this growth of interest in traditional architecture, since the foundation of the 中国营造学社 *Zhōngguó yíngzào xuéshè* (Society for Research in Chinese Architecture) (1929) by Zhu Qiqian 朱启钤, who appointed Liang Sicheng 梁思成 and Liu Dunzhen 刘敦桢 as deputy directors. After Liang Sicheng and Lin Huiyin 林徽因's adventurous trip of documentation through fifteen provinces in the 30s, a long period of neglection followed, due to circumstances of the war. In the early 50s only a few articles were dedicated to the subject. In 1957, though, three books drew attention to the subject: Liu Dunzhen's *Introduction to Chinese Dwellings* (1957), in which he gave account of his trip

to south-western China during the Anti-Japanese War; Liu Zhiping 刘致平's *Types and Structures of Chinese Architecture* (1957) and Zhang Zhongyi 张仲一's *Ming Dynasty Houses in Huizhou* (). All these books were later largely ransacked by Western scholars that used their drawings and pictures without any attribution (see for instance Boyd, 1962).

It is worth noting that in these early publications the Chinese scholars didn't use the term 民居 *mínjū* yet, referring to the residential buildings with a more general 住宅 *zhùzhái*.

Because of historical reasons, at the end of the 50s the research in China halted again until the end of the 70s, when the resurgence of the academic activities gave new impetus to the studies of traditional architecture. It is in the beginning of the 80s that the term 民居 *mínjū* was used for the first time in the book *Folk Houses* [民居 *mínjū*] *of Zhejiang* (Institute of Architectural History, Chinese Academy of Building Research, 1984), that can be defined the first title of an informal series of books, whose fieldwork had been conducted, in many cases, several decades earlier. Most of these publications followed the "province-specific pattern" (Knapp 2024, 4): Institute of Architectural History, China Architecture Technology Development Center, 1984; Zhang, 1985; Compiling Group for *Yunnan minju*, Yunnan Provincial Design Institute, 1986; Gao, Wang and Chen, 1987; Hou, 1989; Lu and Wei, 1990; Xu and Zhan, 1991.

The term 民居 *mínjū*, successfully established in this period and largely used until now in hundreds of publications at all levels (Knapp, 2024), can be considered, at all effects, an academic jargon, referring not to a kind of building in a denotative perspective, but to a connotated generic idea of local architectural folk artifact that testifies the genius, the strength and the capacity of adaption of the Chinese people (both Han and not-Han). In some cases, the term had also a sociological connotation, being connected to the division of the society in classes. In the *Dictionary of Ancient Chinese* (Compiling Group for the Dictionary of Ancient Chinese, 2002: 12–13), definition of 民居 *mínjū*, it is clearly stated that: "[民居 *mínjū*] is different from the palaces, the official residences, the altars and temples, the mausoleums, the gardens and architecture of the ruling class."

### 祖居 *zǔjū*: 'the ancestral residence'

The term indicates the house where the ancestors lived generation after generation and the genealogical register of the patriarchal clan (家谱 *jiāpǔ*) was preserved.

The compounds 旧居 *jiùjū* 'old residence' and 故居 *gùjū* 'old, former residence' are synonyms, but the former refers to a house where one passed part of their life in the past years

(possibly even more than one), the latter denotes the abode where one is born and has possibly passed their childhood.

In modern China, the term 故居 *gùjū* and, less often, 旧居 *jiùjū* indicate also the former residence of a historical, artistic or literary figure, preserved by local or, less often, national authorities as a unit of cultural heritage protection (文物保护单位 *wénwù bǎohù dānwèi*).

One of the most interesting cases concerns Lu Xun, the most prominent literary figure of the Chinese twentieth century. The most important protected former residence is in the Xicheng District in Beijing, where it is also possible to visit today a museum dedicated to his life and literary work, located just outside the house. Lu Xun's Beijing former residence has been listed as a unit of cultural heritage protection in 2006, but it has been possible to visit the house since 1956, year that marked the twentieth anniversary of his death. The official name of the unit in Beijing is 北京鲁迅旧居 *Běijīng Lǔ Xùn Jiùjū* (Lu Xun Beijing Old Residence). Lu Xun's three other residences are protected as cultural heritage at lower rankings (their official names include the word 故居 *gùjū*, and not 旧居 *jiùjū*, like the one in Beijing): 绍兴鲁迅故居 *Shàoxīng Lǔ Xùn Gùjū* (Lu Xun Shaoxing Former Residence' in the hometown Shaoxing (Zhejiang Province), 白云楼鲁迅故居 *Báiyún Lóu Lǔ Xùn Gùjū* (Lu Xun Former Residence of the Building of the White Cloud) in Guangzhou (Guangdong Province) and 鲁迅故居 *Lǔ Xùn Gùjū* (Lu Xun Former Residence) in Shanghai.

**家居 *jiājū*: house as identity marker**

家居 *jiājū* is attested since the Old Chinese with the meaning of both "family residence" and "to stay at home (without a job or official position)", but rarely used with these meanings in contemporary Chinese. In spite of its morphemic similarity to the previous terms (家 *jiā* 'family' + 居 *jū* 'residence'), today it is mainly used as a general term for 'home' in reference to house space arrangement, furnishing and decoration activities.

The rapid improvement of economic conditions of the Chinese families in the first decade of this century, especially in the urban context, laid the foundation for the development of the market sector of home furnishing and interior design, with the opening of numerous national and international retail companies and stores, both physical and online. If the house had been for decades a merely functional space in which to perform the fundamental functions of daily life for as long as strictly necessary, the new lifestyle of the well-off middle and upper classes started to include an increased attention to home comfort and affirmation of social identity, with the creation of a 家居派 *jiājūpài* 'home lifestyle group' of home living enthusiasts with a

greater spending capacity. The creation of a thriving home and furniture market was the direct consequence of the adoption of this lifestyle. Thus, the term *jiaju* is often associated to home furnishings brands, including the global brand Ikea (宜家家居 *Yíjiā jiājū* lit. 'easy house home furnishings').

### 4.2.9 墅 *shù* and its compound

**野(墅) *shù*: the other residence**

The character 墅 *shù* is composed of the radical 土 *tǔ* 'earth, soil) on the bottom and the component 野 *yě* 'wild, uncultivated land' on the top. One of his earliest variant of the *Shuowen Jiezi* was 墅 *shù* itself and meant 'rural hut, cottage, field-house' and later 'a detached residence outside the main house, built for recreation'. The character may originally have been used interchangeably or in association with 野 *shù* and later distinguished by adding 土 *tǔ* underneath, yielding 墅 *shù* and thus specifying a dwelling on the land.

One of the first attestations was in Cao Zhi 曹植 (192-232) 's poem "Ballad of Liangfu on Mount Tai": "Wretched! the people by the sea, Entrusting their bodies to grass huts." (Cutter and Kroll, 2021). In this usage 墅 *shù* refers to a humble dwelling in the countryside. Later, authors such as Shen Yue 沈约 (441-513) used phrases like 出田墅 *chū tiánshù* 'to come out of a farmer's cottage' to evoke a rural residence (Shen, 1974).

By the Sui and Tang dynasties, the meaning extended to 别馆 *biéguǎn*, a retreat or villa-type residence outside the main home. Another specialised study argues that 别墅 *biéshù* is attested from the Tang dynasty onwards, in usage parallel to 别野 *biéyě* meaning 'separate from the wild/fields'. In this way, the term 墅 *shù* gradually acquired an architecture-oriented sense: a secondary residence for leisure or retreat, set in garden or rural surroundings.

In modern Chinese dictionaries, 墅 *shù* is listed as a relatively rare individual character meaning 'villa; country house; detached house', although everyday Chinese uses it in compounds, most notably 别墅 *biéshù*, and in real-estate terminology.

From a morphological perspective, the shift of meaning from simple 'field hut' to 'villa/retreat residence' reflects broader social and land-use changes: from agrarian cottages to suburban or scenic leisure residences.

**别墅 *biéshù*: the modern villa**

The compound 别墅 *biéshù* is composed of the character 别 *bié* separate, apart, special' and 墅 *shù* 'villa, country house'. Combined, 别墅 *biéshù* literally means 'separate villa' or

'detached retreat'. The word was used historically to designate out-of-town homes or garden residences, distinct from the main house, a rural resort-house rather than simply a dwelling.

In the course of Chinese architectural history, the villa or garden-residence typology gradually appears in literati culture and among elites. The term 别墅 *biéshù* captures this shift: from the simple rural building of 墅 *shù* to a purpose-built leisure residence of the elite class. Chronicles suggest that notable figures built 墅 *shù* or garden houses in scenic locations as early as the Jin and Tang periods, e.g., in the *Book of Jin*, Vol. 79 "Biography of Xie An: "He also built a villa on a hill of earth, where pavilions, towers, groves, and bamboo flourished in great profusion" (Fang, 1974; my trans.).

With the advent of foreign influence and modern real-estate development in late Qing and Republican China, the English term 'villa' (from Latin villa, through Italian, meaning 'country house' or 'estate residence' in the Roman era) entered the Chinese property lexicon via 别墅 *biéshù*. Early 20th-century colonial-era housing in cities like Shanghai and Tianjin included villa estates for foreign and local elites, and in Chinese they came to be called 别墅 *biéshù*.

In today's Chinese real-estate market, 别墅 *biéshù* is widely used to denote a housing segment characterised by: stand-alone or semi-detached houses, garden or yard space, luxury amenities, located often in suburban or scenic zones. The lexical shift thus reflects socio-economic mobility, consumption of housing as status symbol, and spatial dispersion of residences beyond high-density apartments. In colloquial usage, the term 别墅 *biéshù* may even extend beyond its premium sense to mean any detached single-family house in a gated community, regardless of size or location.

Architecturally, the term 别墅 *biéshù* evokes a low-density, horizontally oriented housing type, typically with a plot of land, garden or yard, detached walls, sometimes auxiliary buildings, and a landscaped setting. The villa form often sits at the suburban fringe, sometimes separated from the urban grid, with vehicular access, landscaped driveways, and a sense of retreat.

From a socio-spatial perspective, the proliferation of 别墅 *biéshù* housing in China raises multiple planning concerns: land consumption, suburban sprawl, infrastructure cost, segregation of affluent enclaves, car-dependence, and challenges to sustainable, compact urban form. Thus the term 别墅 *biéshù* carries more than lexical meaning: it denotes a housing typology deeply implicated in urban transformation. For this reason the Ministry of Land and Resources in 2012 issued the *Notice on Prioritizing Key Tasks for Real Estate Land Management and Regulation in 2012* (2012), in which it is clearly prescribed: "Ensure land supply for affordable housing projects. Based on local conditions, reasonably increase land for

ordinary commercial housing while strictly controlling land for high-end residential projects. Land for villa-style housing shall not be allocated in any form."

The lexical history of 墅 *shù* and 别墅 *biéshù* also intersects with heritage conservation. Many early villas, garden houses and countryside retreats (e.g., colonial-era mansions) are now subject to preservation, adaptive reuse, or redevelopment pressure. The concept of 别墅 *biéshù* as 'detached luxury residence' raises questions about how such typologies adapt to changing urban contexts: can they be retained as heritage assets? Can they be integrated into the urban fabric rather than isolated enclaves?

From a planning perspective, urban conservation zones may include villa estates or garden houses as part of the historical built environment. Planning strategies might assign them new functions (boutique hotels, cultural centres, co-working spaces) or retrofit them for mixed uses, thereby avoiding demolition or in-fill redevelopment that destroys typological integrity.

The semantic evolution of 别墅 *biéshù*, reflecting a lifestyle of separation and exclusivity, is instructive for urban policy. When large numbers of high-income households concentrate in villa enclaves, separated from mass housing, the spatial segregation of housing types may reinforce socio-economic divides. Urban planning frameworks in China increasingly emphasise inclusive housing, mixed income communities, transit-oriented development (TOD) and compact growth. In such frameworks, the villa typology can be in tension with densification goals, but may also be reimagined: for example, as clusters of smaller villa-type units embedded in mixed-use districts, rather than isolated gated communities.

In many Chinese megacities, urban-edge villa developments are reaching maturity and facing new pressures: rising land costs, evolving lifestyle preferences, sustainability concerns and policy shifts favouring denser, transit-oriented development. Planning authorities may need to guide the transition of villa zones: converting large-plot villas into higher-density housing clusters, mixed-use developments, co-housing, or hybrid typologies. In doing so, the villa typology must be recalibrated within the broader urban system.

The 别墅 *biéshù* can be classified as follows:

独栋别墅 *dúdòng biéshù* lit. 'single ridgepole villa' (also called 独幢别墅 *dúzhàng biéshù*, lit. 'single boat or carriage window curtain villa'): it corresponds to the 'detached villa'.

联排别墅 *liánpái biéshù* lit. 'connected rows villa': it is the morphological equivalent of the English 'townhouse'.

双拼别墅 *shuāngpīn biéshù* lit. 'joined in couple villa': it corresponds to the semi-detached villa: the two residential units have a wall in common.

叠拼别墅 *diépīn biéshù* ‘joined in pile villa’: this type is divided in 下叠 *xiàdié* lit. ‘lower piled’ and 上叠 *shàngdié* lit. ‘upper piled’. The former usually occupies the 1-2 floors; the latter usually occupies the 3-5 floors. Also named 叠加式别墅 *diéjià shì biéshù* ‘stacked villas’.

While 联排别墅 *liánpái biéshù* is morphologically comparable to the townhouse/row house—attached units with party walls, separate entrances, and small private outdoor space—the Chinese term carries distinct market and cultural semantics. In China, 别墅 *biéshù* historically signals elite, villa-like living, and developers extended this prestige to linked products during the 1990s–2000s housing commercialization, positioning 联排别墅 *liánpái biéshù* as a status commodity within gated, master-planned estates. Thus the type occupies a hybrid position: formally akin to Western townhouses yet discursively aligned with the villa’s aspirations to privacy, exclusivity, and lifestyle branding (Pow, 2009; Zhang, 2010). By contrast, ‘townhouse’ in Anglophone contexts functions mainly as a neutral housing category embedded in fine-grained urban fabrics and middle-class tenure, where prestige stems more from location and urban amenity than from villa symbolism (Curl, 2015). In short, form travels more easily than meaning: 联排别墅 *liánpái biéshù* is equivalent to townhouse at the level of built morphology, but it indexes a different economy of status and suburbanization in China’s post-reform property regime (Wu and Shen, 2015: 301–324.). Recognizing this divergence clarifies why one-to-one lexical translations can obscure how type (a generative social-formal model) differs from category (a taxonomic label), even when the buildings look the same.

## 4.3 Terminological tensions in English translation (the ‘house’ semantic field)

### 4.3.1 Housing / 住房 *zhùfáng*

The adoption in Chinese of 住房 *zhùfáng* as an equivalent of the English term ‘housing’, was sanctioned by the publication of the *English-Chinese Glossary of Terms in Housing, Urban Planning, and Construction Management* in 1987 as one of the projects in an exchange program between the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Chinese Ministry for Urban and Rural Construction and Environmental Protection (MURCEP). The framework for the project was the bilateral Protocol on Cooperation in the Field of Building Construction and Urban Planning. The dictionary has been reprinted in 1996 and 2016 by the Commercial Press (Beijing). In this last edition, the text is accompanied by an appendix, in

which Zhang Long 张珑, one of the member of the Editorial Board, recollects the events that led to the writing of the dictionary (Geraghty and Lin, 1987: 312-5). The definition of the term 'housing' in the dictionary reads as follows: "住房 *zhùfáng* Housing: Shelter or lodging for individuals and families, in the form of a house or dwelling unit in a multiunit building, or the provision of such shelter or lodging. Housing may be offered for purchase or rent, may be constructed by or for an individual family, or may be provided by the State at a nominal cost. In the United States, about two-thirds of all housing is owner-occupied."

However, still in 1994, in *The English-Chinese Dictionary of Urban Planning and Landscape* (Zhao, 1994), a far larger editorial endeavour (17000 lemmi), started in 1987, the translations in Chinese reveal a certain level of ambiguity and blurriness. The lemma 'housing' is translated in five different ways: 建筑建设 *jiànzhù jiànshè* 'building construction; architectural construction', 住房 *zhùfáng* housing; residential housing, 住宅群 *zhùzhái qún* 'housing complex; residential cluster', 住宅供给 *zhùzhái gōngjǐ* 'housing supply', 住房建筑 *zhùfáng jiànzhù* 'housing architecture'.

In several cases, the noun phrases including the word 'housing', present other Chinese nouns not included in the definition: 房屋 *fángwū* 'house', 居住 *jūzhù* 'residence, living, inhabiting', 居民 *jūmín* 'resident, inhabitant', 住所 *zhùsuǒ* 'dwelling place, residence'.

I report here the definition of 'housing' in a more recent monolingual encyclopedia of architecture (Li, 1999–2005), in which the author of the definition tries to explain the difference between 住房 *zhùfáng* and 住宅 *zhùzhái*:

> 住房 *zhùfáng* housing
>
> An expanse of buildings and accessory infrastructures built by the government, enterprises or social funds. After the industrial revolution, the shortage of urban houses became a serious social problem, whose solution was no longer a responsibility only of families and individuals. Therefore, since more than one hundred years, the governments of every country and every aspect of society at various levels, through various methods, were involved in the construction of buildings expanses. The connotation of this term is broad; in comparison with 住宅 *zhùzhái*, it includes more macroscopic and social traits. It is often used in phrases, such as 住房制度 *zhùfáng zhìdù* 'housing system', 住房政策 *zhùfáng zhèngcè* 'housing policy', 住房金融 *zhùfáng jīnróng* 'housing finance'. (Zhang Shouyi)

Two characteristics of the term stand out from this definition: (a) the meaning has implications related to the organization of the urban and the social space; (b) it is often used as a modifier of other nouns, delimitating their boundaries of applicability.

In 2008 the term 住房 *zhùfáng* entered for the first time in the name of a ministry: 中华人民共和国住房和城乡建设部 'Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of the People's Republic of China'(former 建设部 *Jiànshèbù* 'Ministry of Construction').

Taken together, the lexicographic evidence illustrates that the Chinese reception of the English term 'housing' did not result in a single, stable semantic equivalent, but instead activated a broad lexical field whose boundaries remain porous. 住房 *zhùfáng*, although progressively institutionalized through bilingual dictionaries, technical glossaries, and ultimately ministerial nomenclature, constitutes only one possible instantiation within a larger network of near-synonyms (住宅 *zhùzhái* 'dwelling; residential house'; 住所 *zhùsuǒ* 'residence; address'; 房屋 *fángwū* 'house; building'; 居住 *jūzhù* 'to reside; to live'; 居民 *jūmín* 'resident; inhabitant'), each of which inherits older layers of meaning tied to dwelling, residence, or built form. The coexistence of these terms reflects two parallel processes: on the one hand, the need to designate the abstract, policy-oriented dimension introduced by the modern discipline of housing; on the other, the persistence of concrete and often highly local categories of habitation embedded in earlier linguistic usage.

The resulting semantic instability is not merely a lexicographic inconvenience but a structural feature of how the Chinese language integrates foreign conceptual categories. Whereas English mobilizes a single lexeme, *housing*, to cover an extensive continuum from policy to built structure, Chinese distributes these meanings across several partially overlapping nouns. The adoption of 住房 *zhùfáng* as the default technical counterpart answers the need for an abstract, overarching category, yet the simultaneous activation of traditional terms in compound formations suggests that the concrete dimension continues to rely on pre-existing lexical resources. This duality contributes to a certain degree of semantic indeterminacy, particularly in compound forms where *housing* is rendered with nouns that diverge etymologically or conceptually from 住房 *zhùfáng*.

In this sense, the evolution of 住房 *zhùfáng* exemplifies a broader pattern in the modernization of Chinese technical vocabulary: new terms introduced to accommodate imported disciplines tend to coexist with older lexical strata rather than replacing them. The result is a lexicon that is rich but stratified, flexible but sometimes ambiguous, and where semantic precision often depends on contextual framing rather than on fixed dictionary definitions.

### 4.3.2 Residential / 住宅 *zhùzhái*

In the translation of urban and architectural terminology from Chinese into English, some terms immediately present themselves as problematic, visibly resist equivalence, forcing translators and researchers to pause, explain, or retain the original expression. Other terms, by contrast, appear to translate effortlessly. 住宅 *zhùzhái* belongs to this second category. It is routinely rendered as *residential*, *housing*, or *residence* in English-language scholarship, planning documents, and policy reports, often without comment or qualification. Precisely because of this apparent ease, 住宅 *zhùzhái* constitutes one of the most conceptually treacherous terms in the Chinese urban lexicon.

From the perspective of terminological urbanism, the key question is not whether 住宅 *zhùzhái* can be translated, but whether its translation is transparent, that is, whether English equivalents reproduce its semantic, institutional, and epistemic content without distortion. I argue that they do not. On the contrary, the routine translation of 住宅 *zhùzhái* as 'residential' produces a powerful illusion of equivalence that conceals profound differences in how living space is categorized, governed, and made legible in Chinese cities. By masking these differences, translation participates in a broader process of conceptual smoothing, whereby English functions as a *lingua franca* not only of communication but of normalization.

In fact, 住宅 *zhùzhái* can be considered as an institutional abstraction rather than a descriptive term. It situates the concept within Chinese planning, legal, and governance frameworks, contrasts it with its closest English counterparts, and shows how translation obscures the role of 住宅 *zhùzhái* as a technology of state legibility. In doing so, it demonstrates that *Terminological Urbanism* must attend not only to vernacular expressions but also to bureaucratic abstractions, which are often more consequential precisely because they appear neutral.

In contemporary Chinese usage, 住宅 *zhùzhái* does not primarily function as a phenomenological or experiential term. It does not describe how space is lived, perceived, or appropriated. Nor does it identify a specific architectural form. Instead, 住宅 *zhùzhái* operates as a functional and institutional category, defining a legally recognized use of space within a broader system of urban governance.

In planning and regulatory contexts, the term classifies space according to its authorized function rather than its morphology or social meaning. A space designated as 住宅 *zhùzhái* is legible to the state as a legitimate site of living, subject to specific codes, standards, and regimes of control. It names a category of administrative recognition. It is a term through which the state

defines what counts as legitimate living space, how it should be designed, and how it should be quantified.

The difficulty of translating 住宅 *zhùzhái* arises from the fact that English offers several partial equivalents, none of which fully capture its institutional specificity. Each candidate translation foregrounds certain aspects of the term while erasing others, producing distortions that are often invisible to Anglophone readers.

The most common translation is 'residential'. In English, 'residential' functions primarily as an adjective, modifying land use, zoning categories, or building types. It describes a function—living—as opposed to commercial or industrial use. However, it lacks the strong nominal and institutional force of 住宅 *zhùzhái*. Translating, for example, 住宅用地 *zhùzhái yòngdì* as 'residential land' suggests a neutral functional designation, obscuring the historical and regulatory processes through which such land is defined and governed in China.

Moreover, *residential* in English carries relatively weak normative content. It does not, by itself, encode assumptions about welfare provision, state responsibility, or modes of allocation. By contrast, 住宅 *zhùzhái* is deeply entangled with Chinese housing policy, property regimes, and social governance. Its meaning has evolved alongside shifts from 单位 *dānwèi*-based allocation to marketized commodity housing, and from socialist welfare provision to mixed systems of state and market control. None of this history is visible in the English adjective *residential*.

From this perspective, the term 'housing" appears closer, particularly in social policy discourse. Yet 'housing' in English often emphasizes provision, affordability, and market dynamics, reflecting a welfare-oriented or economic framing. While Chinese discourse certainly includes concepts of 住房保障 *zhùfáng bǎozhàng* 'housing provision', 住宅 *zhùzhái* itself is not inherently a welfare term. It encompasses luxury condominiums, subsidized housing, and state-provided units alike. Translating 住宅 *zhùzhái* as 'housing' risks conflating an administrative category with a specific policy orientation.

Finally, terms such as 'dwelling' or 'residence' capture the individual scale of living but lack institutional reach. They are ill-suited to zoning regulations, statistical classifications, or planning codes. As such, they fail to convey the role of 住宅 *zhùzhái* as a macro-level organizing concept within urban governance.

What these failed equivalences reveal is that the problem is not lexical insufficiency but conceptual asymmetry. English terms appear universal because they abstract away institutional

specificity, whereas 住宅 *zhùzhái* derives much of its meaning precisely from its embeddedness in a particular governance regime.

From the perspective of terminological urbanism, 住宅 *zhùzhái* should be understood as a technology of legibility. It is a category through which the state renders urban space knowable, comparable, and governable. By classifying certain buildings and parcels of land as 住宅 *zhùzhái*, planners and administrators establish a framework for regulation, taxation, population management, and infrastructural provision.

This legibility has exclusionary effects. Spaces that do not conform to the criteria of 住宅 *zhùzhái*—informal housing, unauthorized subdivisions, mixed-use adaptations—may exist physically and socially, but remain institutionally invisible or illegitimate. The distinction between what is and is not 住宅 *zhùzhái* thus shapes urban inequality, determining who is entitled to services, protections, and recognition. In this sense, the term is not merely a neutral descriptor but a normative boundary-drawing device. It defines acceptable forms of living and marginalizes others. Translating it as 'residential' effaces this boundary-making function, presenting urban living space as a naturally occurring category rather than a politically constructed one.

This invisibility is exacerbated by the dominance of English as a lingua franca in global urban studies. When Chinese planning terms are rendered into familiar English vocabulary, they appear to slot seamlessly into existing analytical frameworks. The institutional work performed by categories like 住宅 *zhùzhái* disappears, and with it the possibility of critically interrogating how urban life is organized through language.

One of the central insights of *Terminological Urbanism* is that the most abstract terms are often the least transparent. Vernacular expressions signal their cultural specificity and demand explanation. Bureaucratic abstractions, by contrast, travel easily across languages because they resemble one another at a superficial level. This resemblance creates a false sense of universality.

住宅 *zhùzhái* exemplifies this phenomenon. Its translation into English rarely triggers reflection because it appears to correspond to an already familiar category. Yet this familiarity is precisely what conceals difference. By accepting 'residential' as an adequate equivalent, scholars risk projecting Anglo-American assumptions about land use, property, and governance onto Chinese urban contexts.

This projection has analytical consequences. It encourages comparative studies that assume commensurability where none exists, and it supports policy discussions that overlook

the specific institutional arrangements underlying Chinese housing systems. In this way, translation participates in a subtle form of epistemic injustice, privileging dominant conceptual frameworks at the expense of local categories.

Recognizing the non-transparency of 住宅 *zhùzhái* does not entail abandoning translation altogether. Rather, it calls for a reflexive and context-sensitive approach. In some cases, it may be appropriate to retain the term in transliteration—*zhuzhai*—and treat it as an analytical object rather than an interchangeable label. In other contexts, compound expressions such as *state-designated residential category* or *official residential classification* can foreground its institutional character.

More broadly, *Terminological Urbanism* suggests that translation should be understood as a methodological choice rather than a technical necessity. Decisions about whether and how to translate should be guided by analytical aims, not by assumptions of equivalence. Where a term plays a central role in structuring urban reality, its semantic and institutional load should be preserved rather than smoothed away.

### 4.3.3 Courtyard house / 四合院 *sìhéyuàn*

Among Chinese architectural terms that circulate in Anglophone scholarship, 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* occupies a privileged and seemingly unproblematic position. It is most often translated as *Chinese courtyard house,* a rendering that appears intuitive, descriptively adequate, and pedagogically effective. The image it evokes—a residential building organized around a central courtyard—is immediately legible to an international audience familiar with comparable typologies across the Mediterranean, Middle East, and Asia. Precisely because of this apparent transparency, however, the translation deserves closer scrutiny.

From the perspective of terminological urbanism, the problem is not whether 'Chinese courtyard house' is *wrong*, but whether it is conceptually innocent. Translation here does not merely transfer meaning; it reorganizes the conceptual field within which the object is understood. By stabilizing 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* as a "house type," the English translation silently aligns it with a universal typological discourse in architecture, one that privileges formal similarity over cultural specificity and abstracts spatial configurations from their social, institutional, and historical conditions of use.

四合院 *sìhéyuàn* provides a paradigmatic case for examining how translation can flatten semantic structure and reframe urban knowledge. It shows that 'Chinese courtyard house' functions less as an equivalent than as a terminological domestication, transforming a relational

spatial concept into a typological object. In doing so, it exemplifies the epistemic risks that *Terminological Urbanism* seeks to address.

A first step toward a more adequate translation strategy requires a close examination of what 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* actually denotes in Chinese. The semantic core of the term lies not in "household," but in enclosure and relational order. 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* does not describe a building as an isolated object, but a spatial configuration in which multiple built volumes collectively define an interior void.

The operative unit here is 院 *yuàn*, a term with a broad semantic range in Chinese. It can refer to residential courtyards, institutional compounds, monastic enclosures, or administrative precincts. What unites these uses is not function, but a logic of spatial containment and internal organization. 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* specifies one particular realization of this logic: an enclosure completed on all four sides.

Crucially, nothing in the term itself restricts it to a single-family dwelling, to residential use alone, or to a static architectural form. Historically, 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* accommodated extended families, servants, workshops, storage, ritual activities, and sometimes commercial functions. It could expand or contract over time, be subdivided, recombined, or repurposed. The term therefore encodes a processual and relational understanding of space, rather than a fixed typological identity.

This semantic structure matters because it reveals what is lost when 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* is translated as a 'house.' The English term presupposes a bounded object defined by function (dwelling) and ownership (domestic unit), whereas 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* foregrounds spatial configuration and social ordering. The translation thus performs a conceptual narrowing that is not mandated by the source language.

The reduction becomes clearer when 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* is situated within the Anglophone discourse of architectural typology. The *courtyard house* is a well-established category in Western architectural history and theory, used to group together spatially similar forms across cultures and periods: the Roman domus, the Islamic riad, the Spanish patio house, the Chinese 四合院 *sìhéyuàn*. This comparative framework has proven productive for morphological analysis, climatic reasoning, and design pedagogy.

Yet typology operates through abstraction. It isolates form from context in order to enable comparison. In doing so, it necessarily suppresses differences that are not immediately legible at the level of geometry or layout. When 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* is subsumed under the category of "courtyard house," it is inserted into a global morphological family whose defining feature is

the presence of a central void, rather than the specific social, ritual, and institutional logics that structure Chinese courtyard space.

From the standpoint of terminological urbanism, this move is not neutral. It privileges a Western analytical grid as the default framework for understanding spatial forms, while relegating indigenous categories to the status of local variants. The adjective 'Chinese' in 'Chinese courtyard house' does not restore balance; it merely marks cultural difference within a pre-established typological hierarchy. The underlying concept remains the English *courtyard house*, not 四合院 *sìhéyuàn*.

In this sense, the translation performs what could be called a reverse translation: rather than allowing the Chinese term to challenge or reshape the analytical vocabulary of urban studies, it is made to conform to an existing English category. The result is a form of conceptual assimilation that appears benign precisely because it is so familiar.

The translation problem is further complicated by the frequent association of 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* with vernacular architecture. In many English-language texts, 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* is described as a paradigmatic example of "traditional Chinese vernacular housing." While this characterization resonates with certain historical realities, it also imports a dense theoretical baggage.

As discussed in earlier chapters, *vernacular architecture* emerged in Western theory as a counterpoint to professional, academic, and modernist architecture. It valorized anonymous building practices, local knowledge, and cultural continuity. While this framework opened important critical perspectives, it also produced a series of problematic binaries: vernacular versus modern, local versus global, tradition versus innovation.

Applying the label 'vernacular' to 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* risks reinforcing these binaries. It situates the form firmly in the past, aligns it with tradition rather than transformation, and frames it as external to modern urban processes. This is particularly problematic in the Chinese context, where 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* have been continuously adapted, subdivided, demolished, reconstructed, and reprogrammed throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Treating them as static vernacular artifacts obscures their role in contemporary urban life.

Moreover, the vernacular framework is itself a Western intellectual construct. To translate 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* as a vernacular house is to subject it to a theoretical lens that was not generated from within Chinese architectural discourse. This does not invalidate the comparison, but it requires explicit acknowledgment. Without such reflexivity, the translation risks reproducing an epistemic hierarchy in which Western categories define the terms of understanding.

The central insight of *Terminological Urbanism* is that translation is a form of urban theory. It determines which distinctions matter, which similarities are foregrounded, and which differences are erased. In the case of 四合院 *sìhéyuàn*, translating it as 'Chinese courtyard house' reframes a relational spatial concept as a typological object and a cultural exemplar.

This reframing has concrete consequences. It shapes how 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* are represented in textbooks, compared in design studios, and mobilized in heritage discourse. It encourages a view of the form as a completed type rather than as an evolving spatial system. It also facilitates its extraction from the urban fabric, allowing it to be treated as an isolated architectural artifact rather than as a component of a larger morphological and social assemblage.

From a translational point of view, the problem is not that English lacks the resources to describe it, but that existing translations rely too heavily on approximation through familiar categories. This strategy maximizes immediate intelligibility at the cost of conceptual precision. Terminological urbanism, by contrast, advocates a slower, more reflexive approach that preserves semantic friction.

What, then, are the alternatives? One possibility is to abandon translation altogether and retain 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* as a loanword, accompanied by explanation. This strategy is common in anthropology and increasingly accepted in urban studies. It acknowledges that certain concepts resist full equivalence and that preserving the original term can be analytically productive.

Another option is to employ descriptive glosses that foreground spatial logic rather than typology, such as 'four-sided courtyard enclosure' or 'courtyard-based residential compound.' While less elegant, these formulations more accurately reflect the compositional logic of 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* and avoid the implicit typological assumptions of "house."

A third approach involves context-sensitive translation, in which different English renderings are used depending on analytical focus. When discussing morphology, one might speak of a 'four-sided courtyard configuration'; when addressing social organization, a 'courtyard-based compound'; when referring to historical housing patterns, '四合院 *sìhéyuàn* dwellings.' Such variability resists the illusion of a single, stable equivalent.

What unites these strategies is not terminological purity, but epistemic transparency. They make visible the gap between languages rather than concealing it behind apparently smooth translations.

Seen through this lens, 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* becomes more than a specific architectural form; it becomes a test case for how urban knowledge travels across languages. The ease with which it is rendered as 'Chinese courtyard house' reveals how deeply typological abstraction is embedded in architectural discourse, and how readily it overrides local semantic structures.

*Terminological Urbanism* does not reject typology or translation. Instead, it insists on treating them as historically situated practices with epistemic consequences. In this framework, the task is not to find the "correct" translation of 四合院 *sìhéyuàn*, but to manage its untranslatability productively. This involves recognizing that every translation foregrounds certain aspects while backgrounding others, and making those choices explicit.

By retaining 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* as a conceptually active term, rather than dissolving it into a generic typology, researchers can allow it to challenge existing categories and enrich comparative urban analysis. In this sense, untranslatability is not an obstacle, but a resource.

### 4.3.4 Apartment / 公寓 *gōngyù*

Since the first bilingual English-Chinese dictionary of architecture that I could find (Terminology Office, Compilation and Translation Publishing Committee, Chinese Academy of Sciences, 1958), 公寓 *gōngyù* is commonly used as the equivalent of 'apartment' and, later (Editorial Committee of This Dictionary, Hohai University, 1989) 'condominium'. It is worth noting that the Chinese term emphasizes the commonality of the residing experience, while the English terms refer to the nature of the space configuration ('apartment' from the latin '*partīmentum*', partition or division), with usually rented dwelling units, or to the nature of the ownership ('condominium' is originally a Latin term which means 'joint ownership', referring to a building or complex where units are individually owned but common spaces are collectively owned and managed). Thus, the translation is not straightforward because the English terms 'apartment' and 'condominium' are based on a legal distinction of ownership that doesn't perfectly align with the Chinese term 公寓 *gōngyù*, which is often a description of the physical property type.

Nonetheless, in the case of residential apartments 住宅公寓 *zhùzhái gōngyù*, if you are simply describing the building or unit as a place to live and the ownership is unknown or irrelevant, 'apartment' is perfectly correct. Conversely, if the legal aspect of ownership is involved, 'condominium' (abbreviated in 'condo') is preferable. In order to clarify the nature of the word 'condominum', in several context the Chinese equivalent, that traditionally does not exist, is more a descriptive phrase: 住户自有公寓 *zhùhù zìyǒu gōngyù* lit. '公寓 *gōngyù*

possessed by the household that lives in it' (Ye, Qi and Lv, 2010) or 私有公寓 *sīyǒu gōngyù* 'privately-owned 公寓 *gōngyù*' (Tong and Chen, 2012).

In the case of 商办公寓 *shāngbàn gōngyù* 'commercial-office apartments', the direct translation 'apartment' can be misleading because they are legally non-residential. It's often better to use more descriptive terms, such as 'commercial apartments' and 'office-style apartments'. These terms immediately signal to an English speaker that this is not a standard residential property.

The difference between 'apartment' (usually rented) and 'condo(minium)' or 'flat' (owned) in English has no specific equivalents in colloquial Chinese. The general term for any rental property is 出租房 *chūzūfáng*, with no reference to its morphology. The technical term for an owned dwelling unit is 单元 *dānyuán* 'unit' within a 住宅楼 *zhùzhái lóu* 'residential building', but its use is limited to the real estate market or to other technical contexts. In colloquial Chinese, the generic term 一套房 *yì tào fáng* is used for both renting and buying.

In English, 'apartment' is a default, catch-all term. It covers everything from a basic rental unit in a modest building to a luxurious owned unit in a high-rise. The specific characteristics (luxury, ownership, etc.) are described by adjectives, not the word 'apartment' itself (e.g. a studio apartment, a luxury apartment, a rent-controlled apartment, a penthouse apartment). The connotations are neutral. It's simply a description of a type of dwelling. It doesn't inherently imply a lifestyle, though adjectives can add that context (e.g., a trendy apartment in the city). The term 'apartment' has no strict legal definition regarding the building's purpose. An 'apartment building' is zoned for residential use. Whether you own it (as a condominium/condo) or rent it, it's still legally an apartment unit in a residential building.

In Chinese, 公寓 *gōngyù* is not a default term. It specifically implies a commercially developed, multi-unit building that is more modern and often better-equipped than standard residential housing (住宅 *zhùzhái*). It carries connotations of being for single people, young couples, or as an investment property, and is often contrasted with other types of housing. This immediately conjures a specific image: a modern building, likely with an elevator, maybe with some management services, as opposed to 小区 *xiǎoqū* 'residential community' (→ 6.3.1), which implies a more family-oriented environment. The term is loaded with specific connotations, largely shaped by the real estate market. Apartments are marketed as modern, stylish, and convenient. They are often seen as suitable for young professionals, singles, or temporary stays, rather than for raising a family permanently. The strongest connotation is that it is a commercial property. This is the most critical distinction from 住宅 *zhùzhái*, which is for

standard residential use. The land use rights are legally defined, and this directly impacts the classification of the dwelling unit.

### 4.3.5 Vernacular house / 民居 *mínjū*

The translational relationship between 民居 *mínjū* and *vernacular architecture* should be analysed from a critical and historical perspective. Translating 民居 *mínjū* as 'vernacular house' is not merely a lexical choice, but a theoretical intervention that imports a Western architectural category into the Chinese context. Such an intervention can be productive if handled reflexively, but risks conceptual distortion if treated as a transparent equivalence.

Situating this discussion within the broader framework of terminological urbanism, the chapter interrogates how architectural concepts travel across languages, how they acquire authority, and how translation mediates power relations in global urban knowledge production.

As seen in paragraph 4.2.8, the term 民居 *mínjū* denotes the 'dwellings of the people,' as opposed to palaces, temples, official buildings, or monumental architecture. In this sense, it functions as a descriptive and classificatory term, rather than a theoretical one. It appears in surveys of traditional architecture, regional building studies, and ethnographic descriptions of housing forms across China's diverse geographic and cultural landscapes. Importantly, however, 民居 *mínjū* does not intrinsically encode a temporal, technological, or ideological stance. It does not necessarily imply pre-modernity, tradition, or resistance to professional architecture. Contemporary apartment buildings, self-built housing, and informal dwellings can all, under certain classificatory schemes, fall under the broad umbrella of 民居 *mínjū*.

This semantic openness is significant. Unlike the English term *vernacular*, which has developed as a concept laden with theoretical oppositions—professional versus non-professional, modern versus traditional, elite versus popular—民居 *mínjū* remains comparatively agnostic. It identifies a category of use and social attribution rather than a mode of production or a cultural logic. As such, translating 民居 *mínjū* as 'vernacular house' introduces a level of theoretical specificity that is not necessarily present in the source term.

From a translational point of view, this asymmetry raises a fundamental question: should translation aim to preserve semantic openness, or should it align terms with established theoretical frameworks in the target language? The widespread rendering of 民居 *mínjū* as *vernacular architecture* suggests that Anglophone scholarship has often opted for the latter strategy, with consequences that merit closer scrutiny.

To understand what is at stake in this translational choice, it is necessary to reconstruct the genealogy of *vernacular architecture* in Western architectural discourse. The term 'vernacular' derives from the Latin *vernaculus*, meaning 'native,' 'domestic,' or 'home-born.' In linguistic theory, it was historically opposed to learned or classical languages; in architecture, it came to denote building practices that existed outside formal academic or professional systems.

The modern architectural concept of vernacular architecture gained prominence in the mid-twentieth century, particularly through the work of Bernard Rudofsky. His influential exhibition and book *Architecture Without Architects* (1964) challenged the discipline's fixation on monumental and authored works by foregrounding anonymous, everyday buildings from around the world. Rudofsky's framing was deliberately polemical: vernacular architecture was presented as intuitive, adaptive, and harmonious, in contrast to what he saw as the alienation and abstraction of modernist design.

Subsequent scholars sought to systematize and contextualize this intuition. Amos Rapoport's *House Form and Culture* (1969) proposed that vernacular housing forms could be understood as cultural responses to social organization, climate, and worldview. Paul Oliver later consolidated this approach through extensive comparative work, culminating in the *Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World* (1997), which positioned the vernacular as a global phenomenon worthy of scholarly classification.

Across these works, vernacular architecture came to be defined by several recurring characteristics: non-professional authorship, reliance on local materials and techniques, incremental construction, and deep embedding in social practice. Crucially, vernacular architecture was constructed as extra-disciplinary, that is, as architecture produced outside the institutional boundaries of the architectural profession.

This conceptualization endowed the vernacular with a powerful critical function. It allowed architects and scholars to question modernist universalism, to valorize local knowledge, and to explore alternative models of spatial production. However, it also established a set of binaries—modern versus vernacular, professional versus popular—that would later come under sustained critique.

From the late twentieth century onward, the concept of vernacular architecture was subjected to a series of critiques that fundamentally reshaped its meaning and scope. One major line of critique concerned romanticization. Early celebrations of vernacular architecture often portrayed it as timeless, harmonious, and environmentally attuned, obscuring the social conflicts, inequalities, and power relations embedded in everyday building practices. Scholars

pointed out that many so-called vernacular forms were shaped by necessity, coercion, or marginalization rather than by cultural choice. A second critique targeted the colonial and Eurocentric framing of the vernacular. Non-Western architectures were frequently labeled 'vernacular,' while Western architectures were described as 'architecture' tout court. This asymmetry reinforced a hierarchy in which Western forms were seen as universal and theoretical, while others were cast as local, empirical, or pre-modern. As architectural theory engaged more deeply with postcolonial critique, the vernacular came to be recognized as a category produced within Western epistemological frameworks rather than a neutral descriptor. A third line of critique focused on the static conception of tradition. Vernacular architecture was often treated as a fossilized inheritance, resistant to change and modernization. This view failed to account for the dynamism, hybridity, and innovation present in everyday building practices, especially in rapidly urbanizing contexts. Finally, the binary opposition between professional and non-professional architecture was increasingly questioned. In contemporary cities, many forms of housing involve complex interactions between residents, engineers, developers, regulations, and markets. The notion of a pure vernacular, untouched by institutional frameworks, became increasingly untenable.

As a result of these critiques, the term 'vernacular architecture' did not disappear from Western academia, but it underwent significant transformation. Contemporary scholarship tends to speak of *urban vernaculars*, *everyday architecture*, or *informal urbanism*, emphasizing process, hybridity, and context rather than static typologies (Habraken, 2004).

The complexities surrounding the term *vernacular* are mirrored—and amplified—when it is translated into Chinese. There is no single, stable equivalent, and different translations foreground different aspects of the concept.

The most common rendering is 民居, especially in architectural history. This choice emphasizes the social attribution of dwellings to "the people," but downplays the theoretical oppositions central to the Western notion of the vernacular. It is often used retrospectively, to classify traditional residential forms, without necessarily invoking a critical stance toward modern architecture.

Another frequent translation is 乡土建筑 *xiāngtǔ jiànzhù* lit. 'native-soil architecture'. This term aligns more closely with early Western notions of the vernacular, emphasizing locality, tradition, and rural contexts. However, it risks ruralizing the concept and marginalizing urban everyday architecture. Terms such as 本土建筑 *běntǔ jiànzhù* 'indigenous or local architecture' and 地方性建筑 *dìfāngxìng jiànzhù* 'place-based architecture' foreground

locality and cultural specificity, often in postcolonial or regionalist discourse. More recently, 日常建筑 *rìcháng jiànzhù* 'everyday architecture' has gained traction as a way to avoid romanticization and to emphasize lived practice over typological purity. Each of these translations represents not just a linguistic choice, but a theoretical positioning. None of these choices is neutral, and each shapes how architectural phenomena are interpreted and valued.

Returning to the initial question—whether 民居 *mínjū* can be translated as 'vernacular house'—I can now offer a nuanced answer. Such a translation is possible, but only if accompanied by explicit theoretical framing. Without this framing, the translation risks imposing a Western conceptual apparatus onto Chinese urban realities, thereby flattening semantic differences and obscuring local classificatory logics.

From the perspective of terminological urbanism, this case illustrates a broader principle: translation is a site where urban knowledge is negotiated, contested, and sometimes distorted. Terms do not simply move between languages; they are recontextualized within different disciplinary traditions, power structures, and epistemic regimes.

A reflexive translation strategy might therefore involve retaining the Chinese term 民居 *mínjū* in transliteration, accompanied by contextual explanation, or using more neutral English renderings such as 'dwelling' or 'residential building' where theoretical precision is required. Where *vernacular* is employed, it should be clearly defined as an analytical category rather than assumed as a self-evident equivalent.

The examination of housing terminology highlights how urban knowledge is structured through classificatory systems that organize dwelling according to form, density, and function. These terminological frameworks do not merely describe residential space; they actively participate in shaping planning decisions and spatial outcomes.

At the same time, the domestic scale represents only one dimension of urban organization. Housing units gain meaning through their relation to circulation networks, public space, and patterns of movement. The next chapter therefore shifts the analytical focus outward, from the space of dwelling to the space of circulation, by examining the street as a central organizing element of the urban environment.

# CHAPTER 5 TERMS OF MOVING BETWEEN PLACES: THE STREET

Building on the housing-focused analysis of the previous chapter, this chapter turns to the street as a primary component of urban structure. Streets play a critical role in organizing movement, accessibility, and spatial hierarchy, and they occupy a central position in planning discourse as sites of regulation, infrastructure, and design intervention.

The chapter examines street-related terminology as it appears in planning, engineering, and regulatory contexts. Concepts such as hierarchy, connectivity, circulation, and functional differentiation are analyzed to show how streets are framed as technical systems within broader urban networks. Particular attention is paid to how these terms encode assumptions about mobility, efficiency, and spatial order.

By focusing on the street, the chapter introduces a more dynamic spatial category into the analysis. It marks a transition from relatively contained residential units to linear and networked spaces, setting the stage for a further expansion of scale.

## 5.1 Genealogy of the Chinese Street

The ancient Chinese street was far more than a mere thoroughfare for transit; it served as the essential locus where imperial authority intersected with common life, where economic vibrancy was cultivated, and where the fundamental principles of cosmological urban planning found their tangible, day-to-day expression.

In high antiquity, the earliest Chinese conception of the road appears under the term 康衢 *kāngqú* 'broad, four-way thoroughfare'. The *Liezi* recounts that during the reigns of the sage-kings Yao 尧 and Shun 舜, children sang the 康衢謠 *Kāng qú yáo* (Ballad of the Thoroughfare) at an open crossroads, symbolizing an era of peace, prosperity, and unhindered movement (Liezi, 1979). The 康衢 *kāngqú* thus functioned both as a literal image of infrastructural openness and a metaphor for moral transparency in early Chinese political thought.

By the Western Zhou and Warring States periods, road terminology and measurement had become increasingly codified. The earliest and most impactful iteration of the ancient Chinese street was rooted not in convenience, but in cosmology. Urban planning, particularly for the imperial capitals, was governed by textual precedents, most notably 考工记 *Kǎogōngjì* (The Record of Artisans) (Zheng, 1980), which decreed a nine-by-nine grid system. The *Record of Artisans* is an ancient Chinese technical treatise compiled in the Warring States period (roughly

5th–3rd century BCE) and later attached to the ritual/bureaucratic corpus traditionally associated with the *Rites of Zhou*, it describes craft procedures, measurements, standards, and the organization of artisans for many trades (bronze-working, carriage-making, carpentry, city planning, etc.), but includes a number of passages that speak directly to spatial organization and the practical aspects of building and organizing urban space:

> The artisans lay out the state capital: a square nine 里 *lǐ* (on each side), with three gates (on each side). In the capital there are nine 经 *jīng* [north–south street] and nine 纬 *wěi* [east–west street]. Each 经 *jīng* is nine 轨 *guǐ* 'tracks' in width. To the left is the Ancestral Temple, to the right the Altar of Soil-and-Grain. Facing forward is the Court, to the rear the market; each market and each court is one 夫 *fū* [one hundred 亩 *mù* in area] (my trans.).

The text contains a prescriptive plan for a capital: a square layout divided into regular blocks, with gates on each side and principal streets aligned to the cardinal directions. This is not a casual remark—the treatment reads like an official blueprint (dimensions and grid logic are given in schematic form). The plan provides a canonical image of a planned capital, with explicit concern for symmetry, hierarchy and circulation.

Much of the text is a catalogue of crafts, workshops and their official organization—who makes what, where the workshops are sited relative to palaces/markets, and which crafts are public (state workshops) versus private. That is essentially a zoning regime: production functions are laid out and tied to administrative offices and standards. It provides also dimensional rules and standard measures for things like carriage parts, wheel sizes, timber joinery, bronze vessel classes, etc. These are modular, repeatable units that make standardized street-facing elements, gates, and building components easier to plan and maintain.

The work includes practical knowledge about roads, bridges, carriage-building, and drainage approaches used in craft and construction. Those prescriptions affect street cross-sections, bridge sitings and the technical feasibility of particular street geometries. The wider the road, the higher its ceremonial or administrative status—a tangible expression of the relationship between infrastructure, ritual, and governance. From the concrete prescriptions above, the *Record of Artisans* embodies several organizing planning principles that shaped ancient Chinese city-making and that later planners and theorists invoked: (1) modularity and standardization (the repeated use of fixed measures and component sizes implies a modular urban fabric: streets, gates and buildings could be repeated and scaled with predictable proportions; this makes large-scale, rapid, and bureaucratically controlled construction possible); (2) axiality and symmetry (the ideal city is strictly axial and symmetric—primary north–south and east–west axes, central ceremonial spaces, and mirrored quarters. That

produces a formal, legible city plan focused on central authority and ritual processions); (3) functional separation (proto-zoning) (crafts, workshops, storage, ritual spaces, and administrative offices are listed and situated in the scheme—an early form of separating production, administrative and ritual functions within urban space); (4) hierarchy of streets (the text implies a road hierarchy: major arteries for ceremonial movement and official traffic, smaller streets for market and local movement—a concept that later urban regulations make explicit); (5) emphasis on ritual/administrative order (urban design is treated as part of statecraft; city layout supports ritual processions, official visibility and administrative control, such as in palace position, market placement, gate control; urban form is therefore a political instrument).

In the the *Rites of Zhou*, the description of the administrative tasks of the Director of Communication in the feudal bureaucratic State of Zhou, distinguish five kinds of canal and roads. In Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200 CE)'s commentary, their technical terms are used for the first time:

> He studies the maps of the nine provinces in order to obtain a perfect knowledge of the mountains, forests, lakes, rivers and marshes, and to understand the [natural] routes of communication.
> *Comm.*: When mountains and forests present obstacles, he cuts through them. When rivers and lakes offer impediment, he bridges them.
> He lays out the five kinds of canal and the 五沟五涂 *wǔgǒu wǔtú* 'five kinds of road', planting trees and hedges along them for defence. All [special points, passes and junctions] have guard-posts, and he knows the ways and roads that lead to them.
> *Comm.*: The five kinds of 沟 *gǒu* 'canal' are 遂 *suì* 'ditches', 沟 *gǒu* 'conduits', 洫 *xù* 'small canals', 浍 *kuài* 'medium canals', and 川 *chuān* 'great canals'. The five kinds of 涂 *tú* 'roads' are 径 *jìng* 'paths or ways', 畛 *zhěn* 'larger paved, ways', 涂 *tú* 'one-width roads', 道 *dào* 'two-width roads', and 路 *lù* 'three-width roads'. (Zheng, 1980; my trans.)

The later description of the hierarchy of roads in the *Liji* – "Royal Regulations" ("The Son of Heaven's 路 *lù* 'road' has nine 轨 *guǐ* 'tracks'; the feudal lords' seven; ministers' five; officials' three; commoners' one") demonstrates that early Chinese thought classified roads not primarily by ownership or destination, but by physical width, structural capacity, and social rank—a conceptual precursor to later administrative engineering. They reveal an early awareness of what Joseph Needham (1971) termed "the technological rationality of the ritual state," in which spatial order and technical specification mutually reinforced political legitimacy (Needham, 1971).

Other early terms specify form and function: 衢 *qú* denotes a broad, multi-approach crossing (hence later idioms like 四通八达之衢 *sì tōng bā dá zhī qú* 'a crossroads connected in all directions'); 陌 *mò*—originally a ridge between agricultural plots—comes to mean a

market road or numbered strip along which stalls align; 途 *tú* highlights the experiential route rather than the built section (Heng, 1999). In settled neighborhoods, 巷 *xiàng* names narrow lanes whose etymology evokes narrowness and adjacency (Steinhardt1990: 30-33).

The most dramatic example of this adherence to ritualistic geometry was Tang Dynasty Chang'an 长安. The streets of Chang'an were monumental in scale, serving the practical function of accommodating imperial processions and the symbolic one of reinforcing the Emperor's place at the center of the universe. The main north-south axis, running from the Mingde Gate to the Imperial City, was a vast spectacle of order. Historian Nancy Steinhardt notes, "The city plan dictated wide avenues for the movement of imperial troops and ritual parades, signifying the centralized, hierarchical nature of the state" (Steinhardt 1990). Philosophically, the design of the Tang street aligned perfectly with Confucian ideals of cosmic and social order. The cardinal directions, the perfect grid, and the wide, straight avenues embodied the principles of 礼 *Lǐ* 'ritual' and centralized bureaucratic management. The ideal city, as dictated by texts like the Kaogongji, was a moral diagram where the straightness of the street symbolized the moral rectitude of the ruler and the stability of the realm. Tang and early Song poetry often celebrated this grandeur, depicting the main street during processions as a pristine, awe-inspiring scene—a reflection of a well-governed society.

This structure imposed a highly controlled lifestyle through the 坊 *fāng* system. The streets themselves did not host daily commerce; they merely divided the city into 108 residential wards, or 坊 *fāng*, each walled and gated. Curfew was strictly enforced, and the gates were locked at night, effectively sterilizing the public streets after dark. The street, in this context, was a tool of imperial surveillance and control.

The grandeur of the Tang capital's streets was inversely proportional to the freedom of movement for its citizens. The street was the exclusive domain of the state, used for grand spectacle by day, and ceded to absolute silence by night. Its width and straightness represented the unshakable order of the empire.

The legal morphology is explicit: by day the 街 *jiē* 'avenue' convey movement and public processions; by night the 坊门 *fángmén* 'ward gates' close, and circulation retracts within the lanes. In other words, the Tang produces the "street" as a public–ceremonial category by opposing it to the domestic–enclosed categories.

This terminological partition—街 *jiē* 'avenue' vs. 坊 *fāng*/里 *lǐ* 'ward' vs. 巷 *xiàng* 'lane'—was not merely semantic. It organized rights, surveillance, and sociability. 街 *jiē* were wide, straight, and state-policed; 坊 *fāng* / 里 *lǐ* were cellular and self-contained; 巷 *xiàng*

carried the textures of everyday life but were juridically interior to the ward (Xiong, 2000). The Tang code's curfew and gate regimen enforced the difference: to be "on the street" was to be in a realm of visibility and imperial order; to be "in the lane" was to be within the neighborhood's moral economy. In later centuries, as the ward walls dissolve and the urban fabric opens, 街 *jiē*/巷 *xiàng* survive as paired categories that continue to signal scale, publicity, and authority—a semantic legacy that still inflects modern Chinese usage.

The rigid, walled-off structure of the Tang capital began to crumble with the commercial revolution of the Song Dynasty (960–1279). As cities like Kaifeng 开封 became centers of unprecedented economic activity, the restrictive 坊 *fāng* system was gradually abandoned. This shift fundamentally redefined the street from a political space to an economic space. From the rigidly structured, gated avenues of the Tang capital of Chang'an to the bustling, open-air markets of Song dynasty Kaifeng, the street acted as a dynamic barometer of Chinese civilization, reflecting shifts in political control, social stratification, and commercial dynamism over two millennia.

The Song street was characterized by the absence of walls and curfews, allowing commerce to spill directly onto the thoroughfare and continue late into the night. This dramatic change facilitated the rise of specialized retail and consumer culture. Street vendors, tea houses, theaters, and taverns lined the avenues, transforming the sterile space into a thriving, multi-sensory environment.

The seminal artistic record of this era, the 清明上河图 *Qīngmíng Shànghé Tú* (Along the River During the Qingming Festival), offers the most detailed visual evidence of this new street life. In the painting, shops are shown opening directly onto the street, displaying goods, and integrating seamlessly with pedestrian traffic. The streets were no longer designed merely for imperial display but were shaped organically by mercantile need.

This opening of the street allowed for greater social mixing and upward mobility. The street became a space where a merchant might accumulate wealth and status that transcended the old bureaucratic hierarchy, marking a critical turning point in the social history of China. The streets hosted the fixed shops (铺 *pù*), which organized themselves into specialized districts known as 行 háng or 街 *jiē*. These specialized streets—e.g. Silk Street, Gold and Silver Street, or Rice Street—reduced transaction costs and facilitated regulatory oversight. In addition to these formal structures, the street was also the domain of the mobile vendor (小贩 *xiǎofàn*). These peddlers, using baskets, shoulder poles, or small carts, provided essential daily goods and

services to the local populace, particularly within the smaller, winding lanes that branched off the main avenues. Their presence extended the market's reach into residential areas and ensured that commerce was truly continuous. The street also served as the primary nexus for all forms of physical labor. Porters moved goods from the canals and river docks through the dense urban grid. Water carriers, wood sellers, and night-soil collectors plied the lanes, providing critical infrastructure services that were essential for the city's hygiene and function. The street defined their labor: their routes, their speed, and their interactions with customers. The sheer density of economic activity forced strict regulations regarding traffic and space management.

With the advent of the open street in the Song and subsequent dynasties, the thoroughfare itself became the primary workshop and marketplace, moving beyond its function as a mere transit corridor. This transformation cemented the street's role as the central economic engine of the city, supporting a vast ecosystem of fixed establishments, mobile vendors, and specialized laborers.

The openness of the Song-era street, while promoting economic mobility, simultaneously laid bare the vast social stratification of ancient Chinese society. The thoroughfare acted as a social canvas where class distinctions were constantly visible through dress, transport, and the very paths people were permitted to tread. In imperial cities, the main avenues were typically reserved for the elite and official business. Dignitaries and wealthy merchants traveled in covered sedan chairs or on horseback, attended by servants, their passage often demanding the clearing of the path. These imperial roads stood in stark contrast to the common commercial lanes and narrow residential alleys, where the great mass of urban dwellers—the artisans, small shopkeepers, and laborers—lived and worked.

This spatial segregation was further enforced by the nature of traffic. The elite traveled primarily in a North-South axis, linking bureaucratic centers, while the poor were relegated to the East-West commercial and residential flow. Their daily movements involved navigating crowded pedestrian traffic, dodging porters carrying heavy loads, and negotiating space with mobile vendors. The women and children of the city, largely confined to the inner courtyards during the restrictive Tang era, gained new visibility on the open Song streets. Women became active participants in the economic life of the street, not only as shop assistants and restaurant staff but also as mobile vendors selling handicrafts, flowers, and food items, reflecting an overall increase in urban female autonomy. Children, meanwhile, used the streets for play, often serving as critical labor (fetching water, scavenging coal ash, or assisting in small-scale family businesses).

Finally, the street was the central nervous system for information dissemination. Official imperial decrees were still posted on the main city gates and major intersections. However, the street environment also fostered an informal network of rumors and gossip exchanged in tea houses, taverns, and the public square. The peddlers and porters, constantly moving between districts, acted as human conduits, carrying news—both factual and fictional—across the city. Thus, the street was not just a stage for physical movement and commerce, but a living, breathing forum of public opinion and cultural exchange, offering both official narratives and the unfiltered voice of the common person.

The street served also as the foremost stage for the public performance of imperial authority. This performative function was twofold: it reinforced the grandeur of the state through elaborate ceremony, and it maintained social order through spectacular displays of control and punishment. The principal, wide avenues were the exclusive domain of imperial processions, such as the ceremonial movement of the emperor or the triumphant return of armies. These events, documented extensively in historical records, were carefully orchestrated to convey absolute power and divine mandate. The geometric perfection of the main street in Tang Chang'an and later Beijing was the ideal backdrop, turning the parade route into a literal demonstration of state order marching over the populace. Military mobilization and troop movements, crucial for defending the empire, also depended entirely on the street's logistical capacity, showcasing the street's direct relationship to national security.

The ancient Chinese street's dramatic evolution from a controlled imperial space to a chaotic mercantile center made it a compelling subject across art, literature, and philosophical discourse. In these cultural domains, the street often functioned less as a literal place and more as a symbolic arena for debating the efficacy of imperial control versus the reality of human existence.

The Mongol Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) inherited a tradition of long-distance communication but revolutionized it to suit the needs of a vast, continent-spanning empire. The primary roads of state importance were those integrated into the 驿站 *yìzhàn* system, a network of courier stations (Farquhar, 1990). The physical paths themselves were often pre-existing; their novel significance lay in their official designation as links between these strategic nodes. The Yuan state's priority was velocity and control, enabling the transmission of military intelligence, imperial edicts, and the movement of officials across immense distances (Rossabi, 1988).

The 驿站 *yìzhàn* system was characterized by its scale and military efficiency. Stations were equipped with horses, fodder, lodging, and sometimes specialized conveyances like boats in riverine regions. The road connecting them, often referred to functionally as a 驿路 *yìlù* 'courier route', was thus defined by its utility to the state. Its quality and security were maintained to ensure that official couriers, bearing tallies or passports, could travel at unprecedented speeds. As such, the most significant roads of the Yuan period were not public amenities but state-controlled channels, vital for suppressing rebellion, coordinating military campaigns, and binding the khanate's disparate territories to the capital, Dadu (Dardess, 1994). The road, in this context, was an artery of command and extraction, reflecting the Mongol empire's pragmatic and centralized authority.

The Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), following the collapse of Mongol rule, retained the 驿站 *yìzhàn* system but imbued it with a new ideological and bureaucratic character. The Ming state sought to project an image of stable, native Han Chinese governance, and its management of infrastructure was central to this project (Brook, 1998). During this period, the term 官道 *guāndào* 'official road' became the predominant nomenclature for major trunk routes. This term signified a shift in perception: these were not only paths for urgent dispatches but the formal, maintained highways that facilitated the entire machinery of civil administration (Harris, 2015).

The 官道 *guāndào* represented the physical manifestation of the bureaucratic state. Officials traveled these roads to assume provincial posts, tax goods were transported to granaries and treasuries, and imperial inspections were conducted along their length. The state produced detailed itineraries and postal maps, meticulously documenting the distances between stations and the resources available at each station. This formalization turned the road into a measured, regulated, and known entity within the imperial geography. The Southern 官道 *guāndào*, linking Beijing to the commercial wealth of the south, exemplified this dual role as both a channel of control and a catalyst for economic activity. While the 驿站 *yìzhàn* system remained its operational core, the 官道 *guāndào* represented the Ming's success in creating a permanent, institutionalized infrastructure that served to integrate the empire under a Confucian framework of orderly governance.

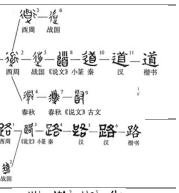
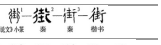
The Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) represents the apogee of traditional Chinese road systems, synthesizing the operational model of the Yuan with the bureaucratic formalization of the Ming and expanding it to an unprecedented scale. The Qing meticulously cataloged and managed the

驿站 *yìzhàn* network, which grew to over 2,000 stations at its peak, and maintained the 官道 *guāndào* as the empire's primary transportation skeleton. The Qing administration's most significant achievement was the deliberate extension of this network deep into frontier regions, including Xinjiang, Tibet, and Yunnan, using roads as tools for colonization, military pacification, and cultural integration (Perdue, 2005).

Under the Qing, the hierarchy of roads became explicit. The 官路 *guǎnlù* or 官道 *guāndào* formed the main trunk lines, while secondary branched out to connect prefectural and county seats. The movement on these roads was a visible performance of imperial power: tribute missions from vassal states, provincial officials journeying for imperial audiences, and military columns all traversed the same well-defined routes (Mann, 1987). Furthermore, the Qing state recognized the economic vitality fostered by these arteries and actively policed them to protect the merchant caravans whose commerce enriched the state through taxation. Thus, the Qing road system became a truly multi-functional infrastructure, simultaneously serving military, administrative, economic, and symbolic purposes, effectively binding the diverse components of the empire into a cohesive whole.

## 5.2 The main terms of the ‘street’

Table 5.1 The main characters of the "street"

| | FIRST ATTESTATION | USE CONTEXT | DIFFUSION IN MODERN CHINESE | COMPOUND PRODUCTIVITY | MAIN COMPOUNDS | ETYMOLOGY |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 道 *dào* | Pre-Qin (Way, path, cosmological principle) | Philosophical → administrative / infrastructural | Medium–high (formal, technical) | Medium | 国道，大道，行车道，通道 |  |
| 路 *lù* | Qin–Han (route, path under state control) | Infrastructural / planning | Very high (core planning term) | Very high | 道路，公路马路 |  |
| 街 *jiē* | Han (urban commercial street) | Commercial / social | High (everyday urban reference) | Medium | 大街，小街 |  |
| 巷 *xiàng* | Han–Tang (lane, side passage) | Vernacular / residential | Medium (non-institutional) | Low | — |  |
| 弄 *lòng* | Song–Ming (southern urban fabric) | Regional / vernacular (Jiangnan, Shanghai) | Low–medium (regionally bounded) | Very low | 里弄 | |
| 胡同 *hútòng* | Yuan (Mongol-period Beijing) | Vernacular / historical | Medium (culturally iconic, non-generic) | Very low | — | |

### 5.2.1 道 *dào* and its compounds

#### 道 *dào*: between philosophy and urban planning

The associative compound 道 *dào* is composed of the two components 辶 (辵) *chuò* ‘to walk’ and 首 *shǒu* ‘head’ with the meaning of “place provided to people for walking” and “route to follow”. In its ancient variant it is already attested in the bronze script (Western Zhou). It could refer to any road, from a small path to a major highway. For example, in the *Shiji*, we find sentences like “出道而行” *chū dào ér xíng* ‘set out on the road and traveled’ (Kong, 1959: 1739). Because of its broad sense of ‘path to follow’, it was extensivly used with an extended philosophical meaning of cosmic principle or natural order (the “Way” by which the cosmos or nature functions), human or social norm (the proper path, conduct, or ethics that human beings ought to follow in society) or even ineffable ontological source (the origin of all things that underlies phenomena). This dual meaning—concrete (street/road) and abstract (Way, principle, cosmic order)—is typical of Chinese philosophy, where physical imagery grounds metaphysical thought.

In Imperial China, the term referred to roads for passengers, horses, or vehicles. In particular, the term 驰道 *chídào* lit. ‘to speed + road’ was used since the Qin dynasty for the national expressways used by the emperor for his tours or by the armies. They were divided into three lanes, with the middle lane exclusively used by the emperor. The 驰道 *chídào* near the imperial palace were associated with the emperor’s authority, while the ones connecting cities and counties were mainly associated to military and transportation. The term has been regualarly used until the beginning of the 20th century (Sun, 2023).

In modern urban planning 道 *dào* is used both at a regulatory level and at a topographical level.

**The administrative classification of the public road network**

The term 道 *dào* is used in the transportation terminology in reference to the public-road network. The sixth article of the *Highway Law of the People's Republic of China* (1997 and later revisions) places public roads into administrative classes:

国道 *Guódào* 'National Road', G-prefix: they constitute the backbone of the national road network, connecting major cities, economic centers, ports, border crossings and strategic sites. National planning elements are approved at the national level (国务院 国务院 *Guówùyuàn* 'State Council'). Major adjustments require approval by relevant national authorities. Construction and major projects usually involve multi-level funding (central + provincial + local) depending on the project. It is not a 高速公路 *gāosù gōnglù*, or fully-controlled access expressway, though many sections of 国道 *Guódào* have been upgraded to expressway standards. According to the *National Highway Network Plan* (2022), issued by the National Development and Reform Commission and the Ministry of Transport, there are three series of 国道 *Guódào*:

a. G1XX Series: radiating from Beijing northbound (e.g. G101, running from Beijing to Shenyang, Lianing Province);
b. G2XX Series: North-South Arteries, vertical highways running north-to-south, with odd numbers generally increasing from east to west (e.g. G204, a massive route from Beijing, running through Tianjin, Jinan, Nanjing, Hangzhou, and all the way to Fuzhou in Fujian province).
c. G3XX Series: East-West arteries, horizontal highways running east-to-west. They have even numbers, generally increasing from north to south (e.g. G318, running from Shanghai to the Zhanggu-Mu border in Tibet, near Nepal).

Most of the 国道 *Guódào*, albeit wide, often with two or more lanes in each direction, have a mixed nature, with long stretches of at-grade intersections with traffic lights, pedestrian crossings, and direct access to shops and homes lining the road, especially as it passes through towns and cities. To increase speed and capacity, many critical sections of 国道 *Guódào* have been rebuilt as controlled-access expressways, but they retain their "G" number. The signage is the most direct way to identify a 国道

*Guódào*. They are marked by the letter G and the number in white on a red background (*Road Traffic Signs and Markings, Part 2: Road Traffic Signs* [GB 5768.2-2022]).

省道 *Shěngdào* 'Provincial Road', S-prefix: they are the main routes within a province (or autonomous region/municipality). They link prefectural and important county seats, and form the provincial trunk network. They are organized and principally funded/managed by the 省级公路主管部门 *Shěngjí gōnglù zhǔguǎn bùmén* 'provincial transport authorities'. 省道 *Shěngdào* may have segments built to expressway/first-class standards or lower grades depending on traffic demand, topography and funding. Design, cross-section, geometric parameters and safety requirements for provincial roads follow the national highway engineering standards (JTG series), notably *Design specification for highway alignment* (JTG D20-2017) (Route Design) and the *Technical standard of highway engineering* (JTG B01-2014); *Design specification for highway alignment* (JTG D20-2017) and related documents (*Announcement of the Ministry of Transport on the Issuance of the* Technical Standard of Highway Engineering [2014]). Those standards define design speeds, lane widths, curvature, sight distances and other elements used when 省道 *Shěngdào* segments are designed or upgraded. Some 省道 *Shěngdào* are multi-lane high-standard highways in wealthier eastern provinces; in mountainous or poorer areas they may be narrow, winding two-lane roads with lower design speeds. Upgrading priority typically follows economic value, traffic demand and strategic planning. In the signage they are marked by the letter S and the number is in black on a yellow background.

县道 *Xiàndào* 'County Road', X-prefix: they connect county seats with towns, townships, important production or market centers inside the county; inter-county roads not classified as national/provincial may be county roads. They are built and maintained by county (or county-level city) road authorities; county governments carry primary responsibility. County roads are often indicated by an X-prefix followed by digits (e.g., X101, X301), though specific numbering schemes vary by province/county and local planning documents set exact rules. County roads are administered by the county transport (or highway) department; the national route admin rules set the principle of 统一管理、分级负责 *tǒngyī guǎnlǐ, fēnjí fùzé* 'unified management, graded responsibility' with county agencies responsible for county-level route protection, maintenance planning and enforcement. Recent reforms and the 2024–25 policy push emphasize clearer fiscal responsibilities: provinces/municipalities/counties have

defined co-funding roles for day-to-day maintenance; central transfers (vehicle purchase tax, special transport funds) subsidize rural road construction and maintenance; counties are expected to set up long-term maintenance regimes (and can use public procurement or contracting for maintenance). The *Regulations on Rural Roads* (2025) specifically requires counties to organize inspections, maintenance and to set up financing mechanisms (including government procurement, local subsidies, or revenue from integrated development). Many counties are upgrading strategic county-road links to 2nd/1st-class technical standards (or absorbing them into provincial expressway plans) to support regional logistics and tourism; financing innovation (e.g., "road + tourism" integrated projects, public-private options) is being used in some provinces. Examples include provincial pilot programs to package road projects with nearby tourism/industrial development. In the signage they are marked by the letter X and the number is in black on a white background.

乡道 *Xiāngdào* 'Township Road', Y-prefix: they are local rural routes mainly serving villages, townships and local economic/cultural needs; the lowest administrative trunk in the public road system (villages have below this). They connect township seats to nearby villages, connect adjacent townships, and link local production sites (farms, factories, markets) to county roads and higher-level trunk roads. They are usually organized and maintained by 乡镇 *xiāngzhèn* 'township' governments (or by county agencies on behalf of townships). Rural road funding is often a county/township responsibility with higher-level subsidies where applicable. Design and construction of 乡道 *Xiāngdào* follow national rural-road technical standards (the Ministry of Transport's rural-road engineering technical standard and related JTG standards). These documents recommend that county and township rural roads generally meet grade-4 (or above) road technical requirements, with specific sub-types for low-traffic (single-lane) situations. Rural network planning guidance recommends mesh/grid patterns in plains and tree/branch structures in mountains; township roads should provide multiple connections to larger roads so villages have reliable access to township centres. For example, planning guidelines suggest target accessibility times (e.g., 15–30 minutes to township centres for different settlement sizes) and require that large villages be served by two or more township roads for redundancy. China has been emphasising upgrades, network completion and maintenance of rural roads (improving surface quality, safety, and all-season access), with new regulation and funding efforts since 2023–2025 to

reduce deferred maintenance and improve asset management. Standards for small-traffic rural roads and targeted design guidance (single-lane tunnel rules, slope protection, etc.) support practical construction in difficult terrain. In the signage they are marked by the letter Y and the number is in black on a white background.

Below this, villages have 村道 *cūndào* 'Village Road', not belonging to the main road network (C-prefix).

### 大道 *dàdào*: the major thoroughfares

大道 *dàdào* 'main road', lit. 'big road' is used in the naming of major thoroughfares (four-lane boulevards or multi-lane arterial thoroughfares). These are not ordinary streets; they are the backbone of a city's transportation network. The term refers both to scale and function (wide, multi-lane, high-capacity road designed for significant vehicular traffic, often featuring central dividers, dedicated lanes for buses or bicycles, and landscaped medians) and to connective role, designed to facilitate the efficient movement of people and goods across vast urban expanses. Typical examples are the 世纪大道 *Shìjì dàdào* 'Century Avenue' in Shanghai's Pudong district (grand, ceremonial boulevard that cuts through the heart of the financial district, symbolizing Shanghai's modern, global ambitions) and the 深南大道 *Shēnnán Dàdào* 'South Shenzhen Avenue' in Shenzhen, one of the longest and most important arterial roads in China, that traverses the entire city from east to west.

In the planning of entirely new cities or districts, 大道 *dàdào* often serves as the central spine around which the entire urban fabric is organized. Major 大道 *dàdào* are frequently integrated with public transport lines, especially metro systems. Development is then concentrated along this corridor, creating a dense, mixed-use urban belt that is more efficient and less car-dependent than sprawling development. The areas flanking a 大道 *dàdào* are typically zoned for high-density commercial, office, and residential use. The road itself becomes a prestige address, attracting corporate headquarters, luxury hotels, and high-end retail. In new areas like Chengdu's 天府新区 *Tiānfǔ Xīnqū* (Tianfu New Area) or Guangzhou's 南沙大道 *Nánshā Xīnqū* 'Nansha New District', the primary 大道 *dàdào* is more than infrastructure; it is a statement of intent—a clean, wide, and orderly path away from the perceived congestion and chaos of older urban cores, representing a modern, planned, and prosperous future.

### The traffic lane: 车(行)道 *chē(xíng)dào*

A 车道 *chēdào* 'lane', lit. 'vehicle road', is a designated longitudinal strip of pavement that organizes traffic into parallel streams so vehicles can travel, overtake and change lanes in an orderly way. Lanes define where vehicles should drive (lane discipline), how turning or through movements are separated, and help determine capacity, speed and safety.

A technical synonym is 行车道 *xíngchēdào* (or 车行道 *chēxíngdào*) lit. 'road for movement of vehicles', that can be translated in English as 'carriageway' (one side of a dual carriageway). It is the whole portion of the street devoted to vehicle movement (between curbs or between the edges of the pavement). In American English *roadway* is common; in British English *carriageway* is used for separated-direction portions.

The expressway terminology include several 道 *dào* terms, such as: 内侧车道 *nèicè chēdào* 'inner traffic lane' (the leftmost lane in a multi-lane roadway, adjacent to the centerline); 外侧车道 *wàicè chēdào* 'outer traffic lane' (the lane closest to the curb on a multi-lane roadway); 辅助车道 *fǔzhù chēdào* lit. 'auxiliary lane': it is an extra lane provided adjacent to the main travel lanes to help vehicles change speed, change lanes, merge/diverge, queue for turns, or allow slow/heavy vehicles to be overtaken. Its purpose is to protect the free flow and safety of the mainline by giving transitional space for special manoeuvres. The 辅助车道 *fǔzhù chēdào* include: 加速车道 *jiāsù chēdào* 'acceleration lane' (used for accelerating before merging into the main flow of traffic on the highway); 减速车道 *jiǎnsù chēdào* 'deceleration lane' (used for decelerating vehicles after exiting the highway traffic flow); 爬坡车道 *pápō chēdào* / 重车辅助车道 *zhòngchē fǔzhù chēdào* 'climbing / truck lanes' (extra lane on long upgrades to allow slow heavy vehicles to be overtaken safely); 集散车道 *jísàn chēdào* 'collector distributor lane', lit. 'collect and scatter lane' (auxiliary lane designed to separate ramp traffic from the mainline through traffic between acceleration and deceleration lanes at both ends of an interchange, ensuring the smooth flow of mainline vehicles); 储备车道 *chǔbèi chēdào* 'pocket lanes' (curbside or near-curb lanes that hold queued turning traffic so the through lanes are not impeded); 匝道 *zādào* 'highway ramp' (*Code for design of urban road engineering* [CJJ 37—2012 and 2016 modification]). The definitions are taken from the *Specifications for design of urban road engineering* (DGJ08-2106-2012/J12100-2012).

In China the formal concept of a dedicated "overtaking lane" (超车道 *chāochēdào*) was removed from the rule-book in 2004. The old *Highway Traffic Management Measures* (1994), which had explicitly called the far-left lane the "overtaking lane," was abolished in the mid-2000s and the new Road Traffic Safety Law of the People's Republic of China (2003) the following implemetations *Regulations on the Implementation of the Road Traffic Safety Law of*

*the People's Republic of China* (2004) replaced the old language with the more neutral categories 快速车道 *kuàisù chēdào* (fast lane).

The *Road Traffic Safety Law of the People's Republic of China* (2003 and following modifications) says that when a lane is marked as 专用 *zhuānyòng* 'special-use', only the specified vehicles may use it and others are forbidden (it also requires vehicles/pedestrians to follow signal and police directions). Only the vehicles named by sign/marking/regulation may use the lane during the times specified; others are prohibited and subject to enforcement. Enforcement (fines, camera capture, police direction) follows traffic law and local regulations. In practice, the technical rules and detailed setting methods come from a sequence of national and local standards and technical specifications, e.g. *Road Traffic Signs and Markings, Part 2: Road Traffic Signs* (GB 5768.2-2022); Ro*ad Traffic Signs and Markings, Part 3: Road Traffic Markings* (GB 5768.3-2025). *Code for Layout of Urban Road Traffic Signs and Markings* (GB 51038-2015). *Setting for Bus Lanes* (GA/T 507-2004); *Requirements for Setting Dedicated Lanes for Major Events* (GA/T 1786-2021); *Technical Specification for Onboard Capture Equipment for Illegal Occupation of Bus Lanes* (JT/T 1252-2019); *Code for Design of Bus Rapid Transit Syste*m (CJJ 136-2010); *Bus Rapid Transit System, Part 1: Technology Regulation of Engineering Construction* (DB11/T 651.1-2009); *Specification for Setting Bus-only Lanes* (DB11/T 1163-20229; *Setting Specification for Bus Lanes* (DB37/T 3541-20199); *Specification for Setting Bus Lanes* (DB12/T 1032-2021); *Specification for Setting Bus Lanes* (DB45/T 2719-2023). These documents define terms, permitted exceptions, marking, signage, lane types and recommended operational modes. The main types of 专用车道 *zhuānyòng chēdào* are: 公交专用车道 / BRT 专用道 'bus-only lane / bus rapid transit [BRT] lane', 拼车/高乘载专用道 'HOV / carpool lane' (reserved for vehicles meeting a minimum occupancy threshold, e.g., 2+ or 3+ persons, to encourage car-pooling and improve person-throughput), 出租车/专用行驶车道 'taxi / dedicated service lanes', 应急/救援车道 'emergency/breakdown lanes on highways'; 货运/重载专用道、非机动车专用道 'freight/heavy-duty vehicle lane, non-motorized vehicle lane'.

The *National Sign/Marking Standards* specify the pictograms and auxiliary plaques (e.g., time periods, allowed vehicle types, occupancy numbers). Cities add local supplementary plaques where needed. Clear signage at lane entry and at intersections is mandatory. It can be simple painted lane + signs, painted + raised separators, or fully segregated with kerbs/barriers (typical for high-quality BRT). Physical separation reduces intrusion but costs more and affects intersection design.

### 通道 *tōngdào* and other passages

通道 *tōngdào* is the general term for passage, passageway, thoroughfare', used both in classical and modern Chinese. Its meaning encompasses both concrete and abstract dimensions: concretely, it denotes physical pathways such as mountain passes, building corridors, or barrier-free access routes; abstractly, it extends to societal ethical norms, like the Five Constant Virtues described in the *Shiji* - "Treatise on the Calendar", that govern ruler-minister and father-son relationships.

The term's original emphasis on passage functionality is evident in Western Zhou *Shangshu* - "Hounds of Lü" mentioning "opening channels to the Nine Yi and Eight Man tribes," signifying the development of external transportation routes (Kong, 1980; my trans.). During the Qin and Han dynasties, it was frequently used in military and geographical contexts. After the Tang and Song dynasties, its meaning expanded to include architectural structures.

Its semantic evolution mirrors ancient transportation development and social structural shifts, gradually evolving from pioneering pathways to encompassing normative order. Usage in texts like the *Shangshu*, *Zuozhuan*, and *Commentary on the Waterways Classic* corroborates the term's trajectory from geographical concepts to ethical and architectural domains (Kong, 1980; Kong, 1980[2]; Li, 2007).

In modern Chinese architectural terminology, 通道 *tōngdào* broadly denotes passageways through public spaces while retaining its action-oriented meaning of 'opening roads'. It mainly refers to a passage toward the outdoor, such as in theater, hospital, safety exit, or in construction sites.

道 *dào* is also used as the root morpheme for various forms of passages, such as underground passages (隧道 *suìdào* 'tunnel', 地道 *dìdào* 'tunnel; subway; underpass; gallery', 坑道 *kēngdào* 'mine shaft; mining gallery; also military') and pedestrian passages (人行道 *rénxíngdào* 'sidewalk', 人行横道 *rénxíng héngdào* 'pedestrian crosswalk', 走道 *zóudào* 'sidewalk').

## 5.2.2 路 *lù* and its compounds

### 路 *lù*: from imperial routes to modern roads

The associative compound 路 *lù* is composed of the radical 足 *zú* 'foot' and 各 *gè* orig. 'to arrive'. Since the bronze script its basic meaning is 'road, path', which passed in modern

Chinese into the dysyllabic word 道路 *dàolù*, and then 'journey, route, course (of events)' (路程 *lùchéng* in Modern Chinese). Since the Middle Chinese it extended to 'way', 'means' and then to 'proper way to do something, rule, order, principle'.

During the Song and Yuan dynasties, 路 *lù* was a crucial administrative division, first established in the Northern Song period and evolving from the Tang dynasty's 道 *dào* system. Its administrative level was equivalent to the 省 *shěng* 'province' of the Ming and Qing dynasties. The Jin dynasty continued the 路 *lù* system, while during the Yuan dynasty the 路 *lù* level was downgraded to a subordinate unit under provinces, comparable to the contemporary 地区 *dìqū* 'district'.

In general, 路 *lù* can be considered a path of connection and passage, rather than an urban organ. In the past, they connected different regions of the country, being more a network of routes, rather than single streets (e.g. 丝绸之路 *Sīchóu zhī Lù* 'Silk Road'). They often referred to roads that led to cities, between districts, or through the countryside, indicating function and direction more than the social and commercial life that happened on them. From a morphological point of view, they could indifferently be small trails or major highways.

In modern Chinese 路 *lù* is also used as 'route (for public transportation)' (e.g 三路公共汽车 *sān lù gōnggòng qìchē* 'bus no. 3').

### 道路 *dàolù*: the road and the Way

In contemporary Chinese, 道路 *dàolù* functions as the most general and inclusive term for 'road,' covering a wide range of physical infrastructures, from highways and urban arterials to local streets and rural paths. In administrative, technical, and everyday language alike, 道路 *dàolù* operates as a superordinate category that subsumes more specific terms. Yet to treat 道路 *dàolù* merely as a neutral generic label would be to overlook its exceptional semantic density and philosophical resonance. Unlike many infrastructural terms that refer primarily to physical form or function, 道路 *dàolù* articulates a conceptual overlap between material circulation, social organization, and normative orientation.

At the lexical level, 道路 *dàolù* is a compound composed of 道 *dào* and 路 *lù*. While 路 *lù* denotes a physical path or road in a relatively concrete sense, 道 *dào* carries a much broader semantic range. In classical Chinese philosophy, 道 *dào* signifies 'the Way': an ordering principle of the cosmos, a mode of conduct, and a process through which beings come into relation. This philosophical lineage continues to resonate in modern usage, even when 道路 *dàolù* is deployed in technical or administrative contexts. As a result, 道路 *dàolù* is not simply

a physical connector between points in space; it is implicitly understood as a structured trajectory, a channel through which movement acquires direction, legitimacy, and meaning.

This dual register helps explain why 道路 *dàolù* has become the preferred general term in official discourse. In urban planning documents, traffic regulations, and legal frameworks, 道路 *dàolù* denotes infrastructure that is not only built and maintained but also governed. A 道路 *dàolù* is a space of regulated circulation, subject to norms, rights, and obligations. The philosophical undertone of 道 *dào* as a correct or proper way aligns with this regulatory dimension. To speak of 道路 *dàolù* is therefore to invoke not only spatial connectivity but also an implicit order of conduct: how movement should occur, who may circulate, and under what conditions.

From an urban perspective, this makes 道路 *dàolù* a particularly powerful term. It abstracts from the heterogeneity of street forms and social uses, allowing planners and institutions to conceptualize the city as a coherent system of circulation. In this sense, 道路 *dàolù* functions as an epistemic bridge between lived urban space and technical representation. Whereas terms like 街 *jiē* or 胡同 *hútòng* evoke specific spatial typologies and social atmospheres, 道路 *dàolù* flattens these differences into a unified infrastructural category. This abstraction is not accidental; it is a prerequisite for large-scale planning, statistical measurement, and legal codification.

However, the generality of 道路 *dàolù* does not erase its philosophical depth. On the contrary, its abstraction is precisely what allows the term to operate across domains. In political discourse, 道路 *dàolù* is frequently mobilized metaphorically, as in expressions such as 中国道路 'the Chinese path/road', where it signifies a model of development rather than a physical infrastructure. The ease with which the term shifts between material and metaphorical registers reflects a conceptual continuity deeply rooted in Chinese thought: the idea that movement through space and movement through history are structurally analogous.

Anthropologically, this continuity has important implications. When urban residents refer to a space as 道路 *dàolù*, they are not merely identifying it as a road in the physical sense; they are situating it within a broader moral and functional order. A 道路 *dàolù* is expected to be passable, legitimate, and oriented toward collective use. This contrasts with more localized or vernacular terms, which may emphasize intimacy, informality, or historical specificity. In everyday speech, calling a path 道路 *dàolù* can elevate its status, framing it as part of a recognized network rather than as an improvised or marginal route.

At the same time, the generality of 道路 *dàolù* can obscure social differentiation. By subsuming diverse street types under a single label, the term tends to neutralize distinctions of scale, function, and lived experience. A bustling commercial avenue and a quiet residential street may both be described as 道路 *dàolù* in administrative language, even though their social meanings differ profoundly. From the perspective of terminological urbanism, this neutralization is analytically significant: it reveals how language participates in the production of an abstract, governable city, often at the expense of vernacular nuance.

The philosophical dimension of 道路 *dàolù* also invites reflection on temporality. Roads are not static objects; they are processes of movement, maintenance, and transformation. The character 道 *dào*, with its connotations of unfolding and becoming, reinforces this dynamic understanding. A 道路 *dàolù* is something that is continually enacted through use, regulation, and repair. Its existence depends as much on social practice as on material construction. In this sense, it exemplifies a conception of infrastructure as ongoing practice, rather than as a finished artifact.

**The compounds of 路 *lù* in modern road classification**

In modern urban planning, 路 *lù* is used as the root morpheme for the official denominations of the road functional classification. The *Code for design of urban road engineering* (2012 – CJJ 37-2012) in the paragraph about the terminology distinguishes 主路 *zhǔlù* 'main road' and 辅路 *fǔlù* 'auxiliary road'. The former is defined as "a roadway separated from the service roads on expressways or arterial roads, designed for the rapid passage of motor vehicles." (p. 2), while the latter is defined as "a collector road or arterial road that distributes traffic, located on both sides or one side of the main road, accommodating one-way or two-way traffic, and may be intermittently or continuously constructed." (p. 2). In the Paragraph 3.1 道路分级 *Dàolù fēnjí* (Road Classification), the roads are classified into four grades based on their traffic functions and service functions:

快速路 *kuàisùlù* 'expressway'; lit. 'high speed road': "[They] should feature central dividers, fully controlled access points, regulated entrance/exit spacing and configurations, and ensure continuous traffic flow. Unidirectional lanes shall consist of no fewer than two lanes and be equipped with supporting traffic safety and management facilities. Entrances/exits of public buildings attracting significant vehicle or pedestrian traffic shall not be located along expressways."

主干路 *zhǔgànlù* ‘arterial road’; lit. ‘main trunk road’: “[They] should connect major urban districts, prioritizing transportation functions. Entrances/exits of public buildings attracting significant vehicle or pedestrian traffic shall not be located along arterial roads.

次干路 *cìgànlù* ‘collector road’; lit. ‘secondary trunk road’: “[They] should form the collector network in conjunction with arterial roads, primarily serving traffic distribution functions while also providing service functions.”

支路 *zhīlù* ‘byroad, side road’; lit. ‘branch road’: “[They] should connect to secondary arterial roads and internal roads within residential areas, industrial zones, and transportation facilities. They should primarily serve local traffic needs and provide service functions.

In the expressway terminology we can distinguish between:

主路 *zhǔlù* ‘main road’: a roadway within an expressway or arterial road separated from the service roads, designed for the rapid passage of motor vehicles.

辅路 *fǔlù* ‘service road’: a roadway located on one or both sides of the main road, designed to collect and disperse traffic from the expressway or arterial road. It may accommodate one-way or two-way traffic and can be intermittently or continuously configured.

### 公路 *gōnglù*: connecting roads

In Chinese transport policy and law, 公路 *gōnglù* is a category covering roads in the national/provincial/county/township highway systems (e.g., national highways, provincial roads, county roads, township roads). It connect cities, towns and regions and is designed for motor vehicles; may include freight and passenger transport (buses, trucks, cars). It is often built and maintained according to national/provincial engineering standards (design speed, lane width, pavement structure). It can be toll-free or tolled (收费公路 *shōufèi gōnglù*).

In the first chapter of the *Technical Standard of Highway Engineering* (JTG B01-2003), the 公路 *gōnglù* are classified in four grades, integrating concepts such as service levels and traffic capacity into road network planning and traffic volume analysis:

一级公路 (grade-1 highways): “[They] are defined as roads designed for separate lanes of motor vehicle traffic in distinct directions. Given China’s current conditions, they serve two primary functions: when functioning as collector/distributor roads (集散公路 *jísàn gōnglù*), they experience significant cross-flow interference (to ensure separate lanes for motor vehicles, slow lanes may be provided for non-motorized traffic); when serving as trunk roads (干线公路 *gànxiàn gōnglù*), measures to control

access should be implemented as needed to ensure operating speed, traffic safety, and service levels."

二级公路 (grade II highways): "[They] are dual-lane roads (双车道公路 *shuāngchēdào gōnglù*) designed for motor vehicle travel. To ensure vehicle speed and traffic safety, slow lanes may be provided for non-motorized traffic on sections with high mixed traffic volumes."

三级公路/四级公路 (Grade III / IV highways):"[They] are dual-lane roads primarily designed for motor vehicle travel. This refers to roads whose primary technical specifications are designed to meet motor vehicle travel requirements. However, they also permit the use of lanes by tractors, animal-drawn vehicles, and human-powered vehicles, exhibiting distinct characteristics of mixed traffic. The design speed should be 40 km/h or below."

**马路 *mǎlù*: not only "road for horses"**

马路 *mǎlù* lit. 'road for horses' refers to a wide, level roadway for people or vehicles to travel on. In ancient times, it denoted a thoroughfare suitable for horses to gallop along. The earliest recorded use appears in the *Zuozhuan* – "Twentieth Year of Duke Zhao": "Chu Shizi met the Duke at the crossroads of the thoroughfare and followed him." (Kong, 1980; my trans.) The scarcity of attestations in the written sources suggests limited use that never influenced the common road terminology.

The term entered common usage in the late 19th century coastal ports where Western powers established concessions. One of the one of the hypotheses for the spread of this term is the introduction in China of the Western macadam road construction method. The term 'macadam road' derives from the 19th-century Scottish engineer John Loudon McAdam, who used crushed stone to create a slightly elevated surface for drainage, resulting in a flat, wide roadway and covered it with a binding layer of stone dust or a cement/bituminous binder to hold the stones together. This innovation became soon very popular because the growth of industry placed increasingly higher demands on transportation, making the old stone-paved roads obsolete. The Chinese transcription of the term (马卡丹 *mǎkǎdān* or 马克丹 *mǎkèdān* [Mathews, 1972: 609]) was soon abbreviated in 马 *mǎ*, hence the modern term 马路 *mǎlù* (Xie 2024, 134).

Another theory suggests that when the first foreigners arrived in Shanghai and sought a place to race horses, the riverbank proved too narrow for their galloping needs. They then turned

their attention to the vast mudflats behind the foreign trading houses, leading to the creation of a 500-meter horse-racing track stretching from the Bund along East Nanjing Road to Middle Henan Road. To facilitate access to the racecourse, the concession authorities constructed a road running parallel to the southern horse track, stretching directly from the Bund to the racecourse. Shanghai locals dubbed it the 大马路 *Dà Mălù* 'Big *Malu'*, which is present-day Nanjing Road. South of the 大马路 *Dà Mălù*, the concession authorities constructed a series of east-west roads running parallel to it. Locals in Shanghai colloquially named these roads according to their order of construction: 二马路 *Èr Mălù* 'Malu n° 2', 三马路 *Sān Mălù* 'Malu n° 3', and so on (Huangpu District Media Center, Shanghai, 2022).

In short, the origin of 马路 *mălù* is a combination of ancient association (the long-standing historical use of horses on important roads in China), Western innovation (the introduction of modern Macadam roads by Westerners in the 19th century) and folk etymology (the Chinese public's logical interpretation of these new roads as being for horse-drawn vehicles).

In contemporary Chinese, the term is mainly used in the colloquial language and is not related to urban planning. However, it is used in the phrase 过马路 *guò mălù* (cross the street), also in official contexts, such as in the Beijing Municipality website page about the correct way to cross the street (Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau Traffic Management Administration, 2026).

### 5.2.3 街 *jiē* and its compounds

#### 街 *jiē*: the ancient artery of life and commerce

The pictophonetic character 街 *jiē*, already present in the oracle bone script of the Shang dynasty, is composed of the radical 行 *xíng*, originally depicting a four roads extending in all directions, and the phonetic component 圭, pronounced *guī* in modern Chinese. It originally depicted a crossroads where people and goods converged. Its core meaning has always been a public, bustling thoroughfare within a settlement, primarily designed for people, evolving by time into a relatively wide road flanked by houses and shops. In the chapter "Orders and commands" 号令 of the *Mozi* (c.470 BCE—c. 391BCE), where 街 *jiē* is attested for the first time, it is stated: "If an urgent situation suddenly arises, the centre army rapidly strikes the drum three times. [Then] in the road (道路 *dàolù*) on the wall and in the lanes (巷 *xiàng*) and streets (街 *jiē*) in the neighbourhoods, all people must refrain from moving about." (Johnston 2010, 861). In this early attestation, there is a clear distinction between the large roads around the city walls and the lanes and streets inside the 里 *lǐ*. This ancient character (田 *tián* 'farmland' + 土

*tǔ* 'soil'), already present in the bronze script, originally referred to the rural village. With the development of society and the emergence of 城镇 *chéngzhèn* 'towns', the meaning of 里 *lǐ* expanded to refer to neighborhoods within towns, denoting areas where people gathered to live.

After the Han dynasty, 街 *jiē* continued as the generic term for city thoroughfares and was used in road names. In traditional Chinese cities, laid out in a strict grid pattern (like the ancient capitals of Chang'an or Luoyang), the 街 *jiē* were the major, broad avenues that ran between city blocks and gates, intrinsecally linked to commerce. A 街 *jiē* was where shops, teahouses, restaurants, and stalls would naturally congregate. It was a space for social interaction, gossip, and public life.

The evolution from 'street' to 'market' was driven by urban planning and economic practices in ancient China. This is a classic case of metonymy, where the name of one thing (the street) is used for something closely associated with it (the market that takes place on that street). In ancient Chinese cities, especially from the Tang Dynasty onwards, urban planning was highly regimented in the 里坊制 *lǐfāng zhì*, the primary composite unit of ancient Chinese urban and rural planning, integrating basic spatial organization with residential management. In this system, cities were divided into walled residential wards (坊 *fāng*), and commercial activities were strictly confined to official markets (市 *shì*), which were often closed and gated. However, as commerce flourished, especially during the Song Dynasty, this rigid system broke down. Shops and vendors began to spill out from the designated marketplaces onto the main streets and thoroughfares. The main streets (街 *jiē*) became the new, vibrant centers of commerce. A street known for a particular type of good would naturally become associated with that trade (e.g. 丝绸街 *Sīchóu Jiē*).

A vivid description of the bustle of the city streets/markets can be found in Meng Yuanlao 孟元老 (c. 1090-1150)'s *Dream of Splendors Past in the Eastern Capital* (published after his death in 1189) (Meng and Deng, 1982). The author, a refugee from Bianliang (today's Kaifeng), the Northern capital of the Northern Song dynasty after Jin dynasty conquered northern China and forced the withdrawal of the Song court to the temporary capital Lin'an (today's Hangzhou) in the south, nostalgically describes the old capital's urban life, seasonal products, and festivals, as well as foods, customs, and traditions. The following excerpt is taken from the chapter 东角楼街巷 *Dōngjiǎolóu jiēxiàng* (Avenues and Alleys at the Southeastern Tower):

> Eastward from the Tower of Proclaiming Virtue is the Southeastern (lit. 'South Corner') Tower, which is at the southeast corner of the Imperial City. Crossroads Avenue runs southward from here through the ginger guild; Highhead Avenue runs north, following the silk guild to the Gate of Eastern Florescence, the Gate of Morning's Radiance, to the Palace of the Precious Phylactery, and straight through to the Old

Sour Jujube Gate. This is where shops and vendors' displays are most bustling and boisterous. During the Xuanhe reign (1119–1125), they expanded the official roadway that lined the wall of the Forbidden City on both sides.

East from the Southeastern Tower is the Avenue of Pan's Loft. South of the avenue is an area called "Raptor Inn," which is reserved as a place where traders in eagles and hawks lodge. The rest of this area south of the street is occupied by stores and displays of true pearls, of bolts of cloth and silk, and of incense. One alleyway runs directly through to the south: it is called "Alley of the Altar for Restricting the Self." This is where gold, silver, and colored silks are traded or bartered. The buildings and their grounds are overwhelmingly impressive, and the faces of the gates are deep and broad. They appear to the eye as a dense forest. Each transaction involves thousands or even tens of thousands of strings of cash. It dazzles a person's perception.

Further to the east and north of the avenue is a site called the Wineshop of Pan's Loft. Beneath it, at the fifth watch every morning, a market forms for buying and selling clothing, books, paintings, valuable baubles, rhinoceros horn, and jade. At dawn appear sheeps' heads, entrails, liver, kidney and sweetbreads, udders, plain and honeycombed tripe, quail, rabbit, rock dove, pigeons, wild game, crabs, clams, and the like. Only after this session has ended do the various craftsmen come to market to buy and sell a motley of small materials. After the breakfast period, food and drink appear at the market—for instance, honey-crisp, jujube-stuffed steamed dumplings, balls of finely ground sweet bean paste, fruit cooked in scented honey, and flowered designs soaked and cooked in honey. Toward evening, hair ornaments, caps, combs, scarves and bodices, valuable baubles, tools, and the like, all of inferior quality, are put out for sale. (West, 2005).

Wu Zimu 吴自牧's *Record of Mengliang* by is a description of the capital Lin'an 臨安 (modern Hangzhou 杭州, Zhejiang) during the Southern Song period (1127-1279). The work, modeled on the *Dream of Splendors Past in the Eastern Capital*, is of special interest for the study of society and economy, and especially the urbanisation during the Southern Song period, documenting how the commercial culture and the use of streets as markets continued and intensified after the court moved south (Wu, 1985).

The city markets are called 团行 *tuánháng* 'guilds'. This name was established because the government would sometimes make official purchases through them. Regardless of the size of the goods traded, all were organized into guilds. Even physicians, fortune-tellers, and hired laborers had official appointments, making them much like other professional associations. Although they performed official duties, when the government hired them and paid them in grain or money, their wages often surpassed what they could earn in private employment—so laborers gladly went to take part.

Some trades, though not true guilds, borrowed the name—such as the "wine guild" or "rice guild." Those that truly bore the title 团 *tuán* 'guild' included: the Western Flower Guild, the Mud Road Fruit Guild, the Back Market Tangerine Guild, and the Murky Gate Dried Fish Guild. Those named 行 *háng* 'trade' included: the Fang Comb Trade in Guan Alley, the Gold Embroidery Trade, the Crown Trade, the North City Fish Trade, the East City Crab Trade, the Ginger Trade, the Water Chestnut Trade, the North Pig

> Trade, the South Pig Trade outside Houchao Gate, the Vegetable Trades at South and North Earth Gates, the Fresh Fish Trade at Baziqiao, the Cloth Trade at Henghetou, and the Chicken and Goose Trade.
> There were also those called 市 *shì* 'markets': the Charcoal Bridge Medicine Market, the Flower Market in Guan Alley, the Bead Market in Ronghe West Ward, the Meat Market in Xiuyi Ward, and the North City Rice Market. Moreover, there were places such as the Orange Garden Study, the Salt Bridge Silk Shop, the Five-Storied Building "Spring Fortune" Sugar and Honey Shop, and the "Lychee and Longan Syrup" shop.
> As for craftsmen and artisans, they were sometimes organized into 作分 *zuòfēn* 'work divisions', such as jade polishers, scroll drillers, comb-makers, belt-makers, gold—and silver-beaters, gilders, jewel-mounters, mounters of paintings, metal ornament fitters, oil workers, carpenters, brick and tile workers, plasterers, stone workers, bamboo workers, lacquerers, nail and hinge makers, coopers, tailors, candle-makers, papermakers, and makers of funerary objects.
> Some trades also bore unique names: sellers of precious curios were called the Antique Trade; pearl drillers were in the Scatter Trade; shoemakers formed the Double Thread Trade; and bathhouse operators formed the Perfume Water Trade.
> In general, Hangzhou was the capital of trades and guilds, a place where all goods under Heaven converged. From outside the Hening Gate all the way to Guan Bridge, there was not a single household that did not engage in trade. The number of guilds was immense. To mention just one or two: the Flower Trade in Guan Alley was the most famous—gathering strange and exquisite ornaments of gold, silver, pearls, jade, and embroidered silks; hairpins, combs, jeweled crowns, painted collars, and brocaded garments—all crafted with the utmost skill, containing every marvel once rare and unseen.
> There were also toys for children to play with, sold in the upper-market shops. Every day the streets bustled—one could not even count how many goods changed hands.

What is evident in these memoirs is the pervasiveness of the trade activities that occupied most of the street space. The word 街市 *jiēshì* 'street market', attested for the first time in this period, is the linguistic realization of this urban and social phenomenon. Even in modern Chinese, the alternation of meaning between 'street' and 'market' is still showed by phrases like 赶街 *gǎnjiē* 'go to the market' and 逛街 *guàngjiē* 'strolling around the streets; go window-shopping'.

### 大街 *dàjiē* vs. 小街 *xiǎojiē*

The most common compounds of 街 *jiē* as root morpheme are 大街 *dàjiē* 'main street; lit. 'big street' and 小街 *xiǎojiē* 'side street', lit. 'small street'. In everyday language, these expressions are widely used to distinguish between, on the one hand, wide, highly trafficked commercial streets or avenues, and, on the other, narrower, quieter streets that are often predominantly residential. As vernacular descriptors, 大街 *dàjiē* and 小街 *xiǎojiē* operate as intuitive spatial classifiers, allowing urban dwellers to orient themselves within the city without

recourse to technical planning terminology. The former is also extensively institutionalized in urban toponymy, as in well-known cases such as 王府井大街 *Wángfǔjǐng Dàjiē* in Beijing, where the compound functions simultaneously as a spatial descriptor, a symbolic label, and a commercial brand.

At first glance, the semantic distinction between 大街 *dàjiē* and 小街 *xiǎojiē* appears straightforward and largely commensurable with functional hierarchies of roads in modern urban planning and transportation engineering. In this reading, 大街 *dàjiē* corresponds to arterial roads or primary streets designed to accommodate high traffic volumes, public transport, and commercial flows, while 小街 *xiǎojiē* aligns with local or secondary streets serving residential access and lower mobility demands. However, such a correspondence, while not incorrect, risks overlooking the deeper cultural and anthropological dimensions embedded in these vernacular terms. From the perspective of terminological urbanism, 大街 *dàjiē* and 小街 *xiǎojiē* should not be treated merely as informal equivalents of technical classifications, but as socially grounded categories through which urban space is perceived, narrated, and lived.

Crucially, the distinction between big and small in these compounds is not purely metric. While width and traffic volume certainly play a role, the opposition between 大 *dà* and 小 *xiǎo* encodes a broader set of social meanings related to visibility, centrality, and publicness. 大街 *dàjiē* is not simply wider than 小街 *xiǎojiē*; it is also more exposed, more regulated, and more symbolically charged. It is the space where the city presents itself—where commerce, signage, surveillance, and circulation converge. In contrast, 小街 *xiǎojiē* evokes proximity, familiarity, and relative informality. It is the space of everyday routines, neighborly encounters, and semi-private life that unfolds within the interstices of the urban grid.

This vernacular opposition is deeply intertwined with the logic of the urban grid. In many Chinese cities, particularly those shaped by successive layers of planned development, the grid establishes a hierarchical ordering of space in which certain axes are designated as primary carriers of movement and representation, while others recede into the background as supporting elements. 大街 *dàjiē* tends to align with the major grid lines—streets that structure long-distance movement, connect key nodes, and anchor commercial and administrative functions. 小街 x*iǎojiē*, by contrast, often occupies the finer grain of the grid, threading through residential blocks and mediating access to housing, courtyards, and neighborhood-level services.

Yet the relationship between these terms and the grid is not merely descriptive; it is performative. By naming a street 大街 *dàjiē*, urban authorities and residents alike reinforce its status as a principal urban corridor, legitimizing certain uses—commercial intensification,

heavy traffic, public events—while discouraging others. Conversely, calling a street 小街 *xiǎojiē* signals expectations of lower intensity, slower movement, and a different mode of social interaction. In this sense, vernacular terminology participates in the production of the urban grid as a lived structure, translating abstract spatial order into everyday categories that guide behavior.

Anthropologically, this distinction resonates with long-standing Chinese conceptions of public and private space. 大街 *dàjiē* is the realm of outward-facing activity: trade, display, encounter with strangers. It is where one is seen and where one performs urban identity. 小街 x*iǎojiē*, by contrast, is closer to the domestic sphere, even when it remains formally public. It is a transitional space where the boundaries between street and home, between public circulation and private life, become porous. Children play, neighbors linger, informal economies take root. The reduced scale of 小街 *xiǎojiē* fosters a different social tempo, one less oriented toward throughput and more toward dwelling.

The institutionalization of *dàjiē* in urban toponymy further underscores its symbolic weight. Names such as 王府井大街 *Wángfǔjǐng Dàjiē* do more than identify a location; they elevate the street to the status of an urban landmark. The compound 大街 *dàjiē* becomes part of a narrative of importance, centrality, and modern urban life. In this context, the term functions as a bridge between vernacular perception and official discourse, translating everyday spatial hierarchies into administratively sanctioned identities. 小街 *xiǎojiē*, by contrast, rarely appears in formal toponymy. Its relative absence from official naming practices reflects its lower symbolic capital, even as it remains central to everyday urban experience.

This asymmetry highlights a broader tension between top-down planning classifications and bottom-up spatial language. While planners and engineers categorize streets according to design standards, capacity, and regulatory function, urban residents rely on terms like 大街 大街 *dàjiē* and 小街 *xiǎojiē* to articulate how space is actually used and felt. These vernacular categories do not always map neatly onto technical ones. A street that is formally classified as a secondary road may be experienced as a 大街 *dàjiē* if it becomes a focal point of commercial activity; conversely, a formally wide street may function socially as a 小街 *xiǎojiē* if traffic is low and local life predominates. The terms thus encode experiential hierarchies that coexist with, and sometimes contradict, planned ones.

From the standpoint of terminological urbanism, this coexistence is analytically significant. It demonstrates that the urban grid is not a neutral infrastructural framework, but a semantic field continuously reinterpreted through language. 大街 *dàjiē* and 小街 *xiǎojiē* are not merely

labels attached to pre-existing spatial facts; they are interpretive tools through which residents negotiate the meaning of scale, importance, and social intensity within the grid. By using these terms, speakers implicitly position themselves within the city, aligning their own practices and expectations with particular kinds of streets.

**The types of 街 *jiē* as functional zoning signs**

An important classification of terms using 街 *jiē* as a root morpheme is related to the function of the street, specified by the preceding noun. Chinese planners treat streets as function-specific "urban organs" that organize the city's spatial hierarchy and serve distinct social, economic and cultural roles. The most common typology is the 步行街 *bùxíngjiē* 'pedestrian street', a vehicle-free corridor where retail, dining, entertainment and public-space facilities are densely packed. Its underground analogue, 地下街 *dìxiàjiē* 'underground street', is a multi-level mall or subway station that shelters shoppers while concentrating shops, restaurants and services .

Other purpose-driven streets include: 金融街 *jīnróngjiē* 'financial district' concentrating banks, securities and insurance firms; 美食街 *měishíjiē* 'food street', focused on eateries and snack stalls, defined as a subtype of 步行街 *bùxíngjiē*; 商业街 *shāngyèjiē* 'commercial street integrating retail, wholesale, dining, entertainment, banking and postal services; 文化街 *wénhuàjiē* 'culture street', street scale venue for exhibitions, performances, museums and heritage displays; 小吃街 *xiǎochījiē* 'snack street', a snack-oriented street with many small portion food vendors; 样板街 *yàngbǎnjiē* 'model street', used as a pilot for urban design or retail concepts.

These specialized streets embody a functional zoning strategy that improves legibility, concentrates related land uses, and enhances walkability and vitality. Design guidelines (e.g., Chengdu's 2025 pedestrian-street design guide) prescribe width, accessibility and "human-first" standards for each street class, reinforcing the idea that streets should be planned for their primary users rather than for uniform vehicular flow. By aligning street typology with land-use, transport and cultural objectives, Chinese urban planning seeks a more livable, resilient and economically vibrant city fabric.

**街 *jiē* in Beijing's urban toponymy**

The character 街 *jiē* is a cornerstone of Beijing's toponymy, and its importance cannot be overstated. It is far more than just a word for 'street'; it is a fundamental structural element that

reveals the historical administration, economic logic, social hierarchy, and spatial organization of the city. To understand the importance of 街 *jiē* is to understand the public skeleton of Beijing, in contrast to the private, residential flesh of the 胡同 *hútòng* (→ 5.2.4). The most critical role of 街 *jiē* is to denote a primary thoroughfare. These were the widest, most important streets designed for significant traffic—both human and commercial. They connected major nodes like city gates, markets, and administrative centers. Major markets were always located on or at the intersections of 街 *jiē*, not deep within 胡同 *hútòng*. Names like 猪市街 *Zhūshì Jiē* (Pig Market Street) or 米市大街 *Mǐshì Dàjiē* (Rice Market Main Street) indicate that the street itself was the marketplace. The width of the 街 *jiē* could accommodate shops, stalls, and the flow of customers.

Furthermore, 街 *jiē* can be considered an orientation tool in reference to the city's chessboard-like layout (Wang, 2016). The fundamental pattern is: [Gate Name] + [Direction] + [街 *jiē*]. This formula creates a name that precisely describes the street's location and function relative to the city's defensive gates. The major 街 *jiē* formed the primary east-west and north-south grid of the city. The 胡同 *hútòng* then filled in the smaller blocks within this grid.

The most important and widest streets in old Beijing were those that led directly to and from the massive gate-towers in the city wall. These were the primary conduits for traffic, commerce, and imperial processions. 街 *jiē* can be preceded by: 内 *nèi* 'inside' (it refers to the section of the street within the city walls); 外 *wài* 'outside': (it refers to the section of the street outside the city walls); 东 *dōng* 'east' (used when a gate had a major eastward street running along walls); 西 *xī* 'west (used when a gate had a major westward street running along the wall); 南 *nán* 'south' (used when a gate had a major northward street running along walls); 北 *běi* 'north' (used when a gate had a major southward street running along walls). The area around 东直门 *Dōngzhímén* is selected as an example: 东直门内大街 *Dōngzhímén Nèi Dàjiē* 'the east-west street running *inside* the city wall'; 东直门北大街 *Dōngzhímén Běi Dàjiē* 'the north-south street on the *northern* side of the gate'; 东直门外大街 *Dōngzhímén Wài Dàjiē* 'the east-west street running *outside* the city wall'; 东直门南大街 *Dōngzhímén Nán Dàjiē* (the north-south street on the *southern* side of the gate).

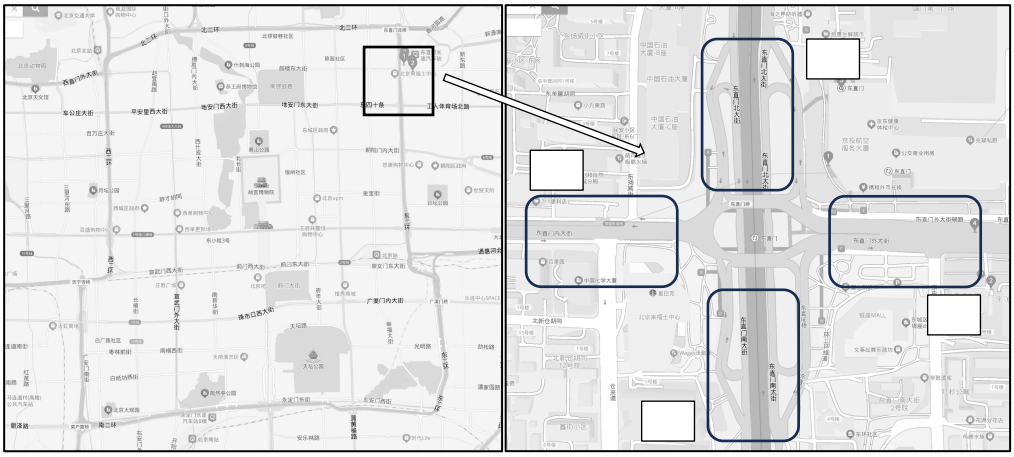


Figure 5.1 Beijing Map: Dongzhimen area © Baidu Maps

## 5.2.4 巷 *xiàng* and other alleys

### 巷 *xiàng*: the intimate scale of urban fabric

The phosemantic character 巷 *xiàng* (衖 in the seal script) is attested since the Warring States and refers to a narrow pathway between walls or buildings, primarily residential. Already attested in the *Yijing* and *Shijing*, it is quite a common character in the pre-Qin texts, often associate to the adjectives 'narrow', 'secluded', 'quite'. In Confucian texts can also indicate a humble residence. In later sources, 巷 *xiàng* (often preceded by 小 *xiǎo* 'small') is used in opposition to major thoroughfares (街 *jiē*). Also in modern Chinese we find the same opposition in the collective word 街巷 *jiēxiàng* 'streets and alleys', indicating all major and minor streets of a neighborhood. Several stock phrases of four characters are used as expansions of the word, referring literally to the total grid of the urban road system and meaning metaphorically 'everywhere', 'at every corner': 街头巷尾 *jiētóu xiàngwěi* 'streets and lanes', lit. 'at the beginning of roads and at the end of lanes'; 前街后巷 *qiánjiē hòuxiàng* lit. 'front streets and back alleys'; 大街小巷 *dàjiē xiǎoxiàng* 'big streets and small alleys'.

### 巷 *xiàng* in modern Chinese

In modern Chinese, 巷 *xiàng* and relative compounds are more colloquial denomination rather than a formal typological class. However cities use 巷 *xiàng* in street names to mean a lane/alley—narrower than 路 *lù* / 街 *jiē*. In addresses, it usually follows a larger road to which it is directly connected (e.g., N 路 N 巷 8 号 *N lù N xiàng 8 hào* 'No. 8, N Road, N Lane').

While national road codes classify larger urban roads, very small passages often fall below those classes. Practitioners still use 巷 *xiàng* (or 巷道 *xiàngdào*) for narrow, typically low-speed, service or pedestrian-priority access between blocks / courtyards. In historic districts, 巷 *xiàng* appears in protection scopes and guidelines alongside local terms. It's used to map fine-grain urban fabric (plot access, courtyard networks, and pedestrian permeability). Many cities brand pedestrianized historic 巷 *xiàng* as cultural / tourism streets (e.g., food alleys, craft lanes).

In planning and governance documents, 巷 *xiàng* here is a catch-all for sub-neighborhood passages targeted for micro-renewal (微更新 *wēi gēngxīn*), community life-circle upgrades, and accessibility fixes.

Beijing's 2017 "Street and Alley Chief" (街巷长 *jiēxiàngzhǎng*) system assigned subdistrict and community leaders to patrol, coordinate, and 督办整改 in backstreets and lanes (背街小巷 *bèijiē xiǎoxiàng*), explicitly targeting long-standing "urban ailments" (城市病 *chéngshì bìng*) through routine inspection and cross-department coordination. Residents were mobilized into co-governance through the "My Neighborhood Looks Best" (我家街巷最好看 *wǒjiā jiēxiàng zuì hǎokàn*) initiative—such as weekend cleanups and planting/greening—alongside neighborhood co-building mechanisms and volunteering as "Alley Stewards" (小巷管家 *xiǎoxiàng guǎnjiā*), who reported problems (e.g., littering, illegal construction, and other recurrent violations) and escalated unresolved cases via the street/alley chief mechanism (https://www.beijing.gov.cn/zhengce/zcjd/zcwd/bjxx/ [2026-02-21]). The program was guided by a three-year action plan for 2017–2019 in the capital's core area: *Three-year action plan for environmental rectification and upgrading of backstreets and lanes in the capital core area* (https://www.bjwmb.gov.cn/xxgk/xgzl/ggl/t20170410_819373.htm [2026-02-21]). Within that framework, renovations prioritized removing illegal structures (私搭乱建 *sīdā luànjiàn* 'illegal additions/builds') and unauthorized openings (开墙打洞 *kāiqiáng dǎdòng* 'wall-breaking openings'), curbing disorderly parking (乱停车 *luàn tíngchē* 'disorderly parking') and road occupation (乱占道 *luàn zhàndào* 'road occupation'), tidying or rectifying chaotic wiring (乱搭电线 *luàn dā diànxiàn* 'messy/illegal wiring'), shutting down unlicensed or irregular business operations (违规经营 *wéiguī jīngyíng* 'irregular business operations'), and clearing debris/clutter (乱堆放杂物 *luàn duīfàng záwù* 'random piling of debris'), while also adopting strict operational requirements such as 垃圾滞留不超 1 小时 *lājī zhìliú bù chāo yī xiǎoshí* 'garbage retention not exceeding one hour'. By the end of the three-year cycle, the municipal government reported renovation and upgrading of over 3,000 backstreets and lanes, alongside the deployment of more than 16,000 street/alley chiefs and the recruitment of nearly 36,000

"Alley Stewards," framing the outcome as a shift from "dirty and disorderly" off-arterial conditions toward cleaner, safer, better-managed lanes (https://www.beijing.gov.cn/ywdt/gzdt/201911/t20191129_1828063.html. [2026-02-21]).

Table 5.2 Comparative table of the street typology

| CRITERION | 道 *dào* | 路 *lù* | 街 *jiē* | 巷 *xiàng* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Core semantic domain | Way, principle, ordering path | Physical road, route | Street as social–commercial space | Alley, narrow passage |
| Degree of abstraction | Very high | Medium | Low–medium | Low |
| Philosophical resonance | Strong (Daoist, cosmological, ethical) | Weak–pragmatic | Minimal | None |
| Relation to movement | Normative direction, proper course | Circulation, connectivity | Movement + lingering | Local access, slow movement |
| Material reference | Indirect / symbolic | Explicit | Explicit | Explicit |
| Function as general term | No | Yes (often via 道路) | No | No |
| Scale (urban grid) | Macro-structural (conceptual) | Macro–meso | Meso | Micro |
| Position in urban hierarchy | Above typology (meta-category) | Primary / secondary infrastructure | Intermediate public space | Marginal / interstitial |
| Typical width | Not applicable | Variable (often wide) | Medium | Narrow |
| Traffic intensity | Conceptual | Medium–high | Medium | Low |
| Commercial activity | Abstract | Possible but not defining | Central feature | Rare / informal |
| Residential association | None | Secondary | Mixed | Strong |
| Social interaction | Symbolic | Instrumental | High | Intimate |
| Everyday life density | None | Low–medium | High | Very high |
| Relation to dwelling | Metaphorical | Functional | Interface | Extension of domestic space |
| Visibility / representational role | Ideological | Administrative | Urban identity | Invisible / background |
| Use in toponymy | Rare | Common | Very common | Less common |
| Use in official planning language | Ideological discourse | Central | Secondary | Marginal |
| Use in vernacular speech | Limited | Common | Very common | Common |
| Historical depth of term | Classical, pre-imperial | Classical | Medieval–modern | Medieval–modern |
| Semantic stability | High (conceptual) | High | Medium | Medium–low |
| Susceptibility to metaphor | Very high | Medium | Low | Very low |
| Relation to power | Normative/ideological | Regulatory | Social–economic | Informal |
| Relation to governance | Abstract legitimation | Infrastructure control | Urban management | Often unmanaged |
| Temporal perception | Timeless | Present-oriented | Layered | Memory-laden |
| Typical English gloss | Way / Dao | Road | Street | Alley / Lane |
| Translation transparency | Very low | High | Medium | Medium |
| Risk of mistranslation | Philosophical reduction | Minimal | Functional flattening | Social erasure |
| Analytical role in terminological urbanism | Meta-conceptual anchor | Generic infrastructural category | Socially saturated urban term | Vernacular micro-spatial unit |

**Regional terminology I: 胡同 *hútòng***

Few urban forms concentrate as much historical memory, spatial intelligence, and quotidian sociability as the 胡同 *hútòng*, the alley-based tissue that once structured the entirety of inner Beijing. More than picturesque lanes or tourist itineraries, 胡同 *hútòng* constitute a grammar of urban life—a plot system, micro-infrastructure, and public realm rolled into one—linking courtyard compounds (四合院 *sìhéyuàn*), neighborhood services, and citywide axial logics into a fine-grained whole. While post-1978 redevelopment, road widening, and superblock construction fragmented this tissue, 胡同 *hútòng* remain central to the capital's identity, to contemporary preservation strategies, and to emergent "micro-regeneration" approaches that attempt to reconcile heritage, livability, and climate-sensitive urbanism.

Since the late twentieth century, scholarly discussion has crystallized around two broad explanatory orientations. The first, externalist in nature, interprets 胡同 *hútòng* as a loanword acquired from Mongolian during the Yuan dynasty, reflecting intense language contact in North China under Mongol rule. The second, internalist, argues that the term can be fully explained through internal developments within Chinese, without recourse to borrowing. More recently, an intermediate position has emerged, seeking to preserve insights from contact linguistics while revising the specific semantic and phonological assumptions of earlier loanword hypotheses.

The externalist approach was most influentially articulated by Zhang Qingchang 张清常 in a series of foundational studies beginning in the late 1970s (Zhang, 1990). Zhang proposed that 胡同 *hútòng* derives from the Mongolian word *hudag* 'water well', introduced into Chinese during the Yuan period. According to this view, the term underwent a metonymic semantic shift: from 'well' as a focal point of daily life, to 'the area around the well', and ultimately to 'lane' or 'neighborhood'. This hypothesis appeared attractive for several reasons. It aligned with the sociopolitical context of a multilingual imperial capital, resonated with the documented prominence of wells in Beijing's urban infrastructure, and offered a coherent narrative linking linguistic borrowing to urban morphology.

Junast (1991: 30-35) further strengthened this account by adducing phonological and toponymic evidence. He argued that the adaptation of Mongolian final stops into Chinese nasal codas was consistent with known patterns of Yuan–Ming transcription, and pointed to place names in Inner Mongolia where forms derived from *hudag* are written with characters such as 忽洞 or 胡同. These data suggested a stable phonetic correspondence and lent additional plausibility to the 'well' hypothesis.

Despite its influence, the loanword explanation has been increasingly challenged. The most systematic critique is advanced by Wang Yue 王越, who rejects not only the derivation from 'well' but the necessity of borrowing altogether (Wang, 2008). Through detailed textual criticism and quantitative analysis of historical gazetteers, Wáng demonstrates that wells were not a defining or structurally salient feature of 胡同 *hútòng*. In Ming-period Beijing, only a very small proportion of lane names contain the character 井 *jǐng* 'well', while the majority are derived from temples, markets, administrative institutions, or family names. Moreover, spatial analysis of Qing-period data shows that wells tended to cluster in open areas, major streets, or gardens, rather than within narrow residential lanes.

On linguistic grounds, Wang advances an internal reconstruction that traces 胡同 *hútòng* back to earlier Chinese lexical items meaning 'lane' or 'passage'. Central to his argument is the attestation of the form *húdòng* 胡洞 in Yuan–Ming vernacular sources, most notably the bilingual instructional manual 老乞大 *Lǎo Qǐdà*. In this text, *húdòng* clearly denotes a narrow urban alley, and later editions normalize the spelling as 衚衕 or 胡同 without any corresponding semantic shift. Wang links this form to 后衕 *hòutòng* 'back lane', attested already in Song-dynasty literature, and explains the phonological transition through regular vowel and consonant changes documented in northern Chinese dialect history. From this perspective, *hútòng* represents the orthographic stabilization of a pre-existing vernacular term rather than a foreign borrowing.

Between these two positions stands the intermediate proposal advanced by Lin Yi 林毅. While explicitly rejecting the 'well'-based semantic chain, Lin maintains an externalist orientation grounded in comparative Altaic linguistics (Lin, 2009). His key insight derives from examining how 胡同 *hútòng* is translated in multilingual versions of the *Old Qida*. In Korean, Manchu, and Mongolian glosses, the term consistently corresponds to words meaning 'valley', 'ravine', or 'narrow hollow passage', rather than 'well'. These correspondences point to a shared areal semantic field centered on constricted, channel-like spaces.

On this basis, Lin proposes Mongolian *gudum* 'narrow passage, alley' as a more plausible etymon. Unlike *hudag*, *ɣudum* aligns closely with the spatial and functional semantics of 胡同 *hútòng*, and its phonological shape can be reasonably adapted to Chinese. Importantly, this account does not posit the introduction of a novel concept into Chinese, but rather a contact-induced lexical reinforcement within an already existing semantic domain.

Taken together, these competing explanations reveal that the 胡同 *hútòng* debate is not merely about the origin of a single word, but about methodological priorities in Chinese

historical linguistics. Externalist accounts emphasize historical plausibility and sociolinguistic context, while internalist reconstructions foreground philological continuity and phonological regularity. The persistence of the controversy reflects not only unresolved empirical questions, but also differing conceptions of what constitutes an adequate etymological explanation. In this sense, 胡同 *hútòng* serves as a revealing case study in the tension between contact-based explanation and internal reconstruction, illustrating how linguistic history is shaped as much by methodological commitments as by the available evidence.

Historically, 胡同 *hútòng* consolidate as urban form with the founding of 大都 *Dàdū* (present-day Beijing) under the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368). The new capital was laid out on a strict orthogonal grid with cardinal orientation and a monumental north–south Central Axis, establishing a rational framework within which blocks, lanes, and courtyard plots were inscribed. Recent planning history scholarship situates Dadu's plan within a Eurasian horizon, showing how nomadic camp order and Yuan measurement conventions inflected the grid and block system that later dynasties recoded (Zhao, 2018; Shuji et al., 2017) The Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) rebuilt and extended the city on Dadu's foundations, thickening 胡同 *hútòng* networks and codifying the 四合院 *sìhéyuàn*-胡同 *hútòng* pairing as the default urban fabric of the inner city, always keyed to the capital's axial cosmology (Oxford Bibliographies, 2022; Zhang, 2021).

According to Xiong Mengxiang 熊梦祥's *Gazetteer of Xijin* (Yuan Dynasty), only 29 胡同 *hútòng* existed in Dadu—their names lost to history as the text is incomplete (Xiong, 1983). Another Yuan-era figure, Li Haogu 李好古 penned the drama *Zhang Sheng Boils the Sea*, recounting how a young man named Zhang Yu 张羽 met Qionglian 琼莲, daughter of the Dragon King of the East Sea, in Dadu. The play includes this line: "Go to the Brick Tower Hutong at the corner of the sheep market, near the general store, and look for me there" (Yinhong Studio of the Lu Family of Jinling, 1936.). This 胡同 *hútòng* still exists today, located at the intersection of Xisi 西四, and is considered the origin of Beijing's 胡同 *hútòng*.

Compared to Dadu, Ming-era Beijing saw the proliferation of 胡同 *hútòng*, neatly arranged around major thoroughfares. To maximize sunlight and shield against the biting north winds of winter, most 胡同 *hútòng* oriented east-west, with north-south alignments occupying a secondary role. During the Jiajing 嘉靖 reign, a man named Zhang Jue 张爵 compiled Beijing's street names into a book titled *Collection of Lanes and Hutongs in the Five Wards of the Capital* (Zhang, 1982). According to Zhang Jue's statistics, his era saw 1,170 streets and

alleys in Beijing, including 459 胡同 *hútòng*—approximately 40% of the total, nearly sixteen times the number found in Dadu. From then on, 胡同 *hútòng* became an integral part of the daily lives of Beijing's common people, forming a structured and organized network within the city. By the late Qing Dynasty, Zhu Yixin 朱一新's *Draft Gazetteer of the Capital's Lanes and Alleys* (Zhu, 1982) recorded a total of 2,211 streets and alleys in Beijing, with 1,121 being 胡同 *hútòng*, accounting for about 50% of the total.

Around 1949, the number of streets and alleys in Beijing reached its peak, with 3,216 streets and alleys in total, including 1,039 胡同 *hútòng*, accounting for about 32% of the total. In the 1980s, the four urban districts of 东城 *Dōngchéng*; 西城 *Xīchéng*; 崇文 *Chóngwén*; 宣武 *Xuānwǔ* collectively had 2,352 streets and alleys, including 1,204 胡同 *hútòng*, representing about 51% of the total. While the overall number of streets and alleys decreased, the number of 胡同 *hútòng* increased. The reason lies in the Beijing municipal government's 1965 campaign to standardize place names. Many iconic locations were formalized by adding 胡同 *hútòng* to their names, such as Jingtu Temple becoming Jingtu Hutong. Following the 1990s, due to dilapidated housing renovations and urban development, by 2003, according to my statistics, 891 streets and alleys in Beijing's old city districts had been demolished, including 362 designated as 胡同 *hútòng*.

From the outset, then, 胡同 *hútòng* were not merely residual spaces between houses: they were the primary urban armature, distributing light, air, access, neighborhood facilities, and ritual movement at a resolutely walkable scale.

Spatially, a 胡同 *hútòng* is a public lane that mediates between city and courtyard. The 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* opens to the 胡同 *hútòng* via a decorated entrance (影壁 *yǐngbì* '[interior] screen wall', 照壁 *zhàobì* '[exterior] screen wall; facing wall', 牌坊 *páifāng* 'ceremonial archway'), layering thresholds between public thoroughfare and domestic interior. This porosity makes 胡同 *hútòng* simultaneously street, square, and doorway. Morphologically, the network is grainy and permeable, optimizing short walking distances to shared sanitation, wells (historically), markets, and temples—an urban metabolism quite different from the later superblock model (Akers, 2015; Zacharias et al., 2015).

This alley-courtyard ecology historically supported face-to-face communities, dense mutual aid, and informal governance. The toponyms often encoded occupations, landmarks, or lineages. In short, the 胡同 *hútòng* network is simultaneously infrastructure (access, drainage, airflow), semiotics (naming, signage, ritual markers), and social stage (markets, games,

neighborhood compacts). These functions help explain the intense attachment that residents express and the durability of the form despite cycles of neglect and renewal.

The Republican era entertained boulevardization and partial widening but left the inner pattern largely intact. After 1949, the socialist state's priorities—industrialization, work-unit welfare, and traffic modernization—sat in tension with the low-rise, fine-grain 胡同 *hútòng* tissue. While 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* subdivisions increased residential density, the fabric endured, albeit with infrastructural deficits and crowding. Systematic demolition, however, accelerated in the 1990s–2000s, as land-lease finance, road building, and the 2008 Olympics reoriented central Beijing toward showcase projects and arterial throughput. Empirical syntheses record large losses of 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* area between 1990 and 2005 and associate these with 胡同 *hútòng* attrition and social displacement (Tan, 1998; Zhang, 2016). Other studies quantify 胡同 *hútòng* declines across the reform era, with caution about inconsistent municipal counts and definitional drift (e.g., numbers reported for 1949 vs. early 2000s in secondary literature). The upshot is clear even when exact figures vary: road widening, real-estate redevelopment, and municipal rescaling fragmented the 胡同 *hútòng* fabric, converting the capital's inner neighborhoods into partial superblocks, touristized corridors, and gated enclaves.

Counter-pressures emerged from scholars, architects, and communities, most prominently the Wu Liangyong 吴良镛–led experiments at 菊儿胡同 Ju'er Hutong (late 1980s–1990s). Wu's "rehabilitation" thesis insisted that human-scaled infill, incremental upgrading, and plot-based renewal could reconcile livability with heritage, avoiding wholesale clearance (Wu, 1999).

A critical pivot was the designation of 25 Historic and Cultural Conservation Areas in the Old City (initially recognized around 1990, with plans published/updated in 2002), shifting preservation from individual monuments to street—and district-scale protection (*Conservation planning of 25 historic areas in Beijing old city* (2002); Chen, 2003; Shin, 2010: 385–395; Acharya, 2004). This area-based conservation introduced height controls, façade guidelines, and demolition restrictions in key 胡同 *hútòng* districts (e.g., 东四 *Dōngsì*, 什刹海 *Shíchàhǎi*, 南锣鼓巷 *Nánluógǔxiàng*), even as enforcement and scope remained uneven (Abramson, 2007: 129–166; Bell, 2014).

The conservation turn intersected with a renewed valorization of the Central Axis, the 7.8-km north–south spine structuring the city from the Drum and Bell Towers to Yongdingmen. In July 2024, UNESCO inscribed the "Beijing Central Axis: A Building Ensemble Exhibiting the Ideal Order of the Chinese Capital" on the World Heritage List—recognition that, while

centered on ceremonial ensembles, also reinforces the value of surrounding 胡同 *hútòng* tissues as the living setting of the axis (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2024). Subsequent policy statements, suche as the *Beijing Central Axis to open more heritage spaces to public* (2025) and the *Report on the Work of the Government 2025 (Part II)* (2025), emphasize extending public access and coordinating urban renewal around the axis with heritage protection.

The unresolved planning question is how to scale 胡同 *hútòng*-compatible renewal beyond showcase streets, ensuring that infrastructure upgrading, housing affordability, resident rights, and environmental performance are addressed alongside aesthetics.

Into this debate enters micro-regeneration (微更新 *wēigēngxīn*), small-scale, participatory upgrading of public space, services, and housing in existing neighborhoods. A growing literature treats Beijing's micro-regeneration as both policy innovation and governmentality: mobilizing community participation to deliver state objectives of order, livability, and heritage branding (Wang, Wu and Zhang, 2022). Case work in Qinghe and other inner-city sites documents street-level interventions—pocket parks, shared courtyards, sanitation retrofits, façade maintenance—paired with rules-of-use that maintain "tidiness" and tourist appeal while trying to accommodate residents' informal economies (Wang, Wu and Zhang, 2024). The Nanluoguxiang literature similarly tracks how conservation guidelines, stakeholder negotiations, and commercialization pressures rewire 胡同 *hútòng* for visitor economies, with mixed outcomes for residential tenure and authenticity.

Planners here confront a triple bind: (1) the need to upgrade aging infrastructures; (2) the risk of gentrification and touristification that price out long-time residents; and (3) the challenge of preserving use-value—the everyday social life that gives 胡同 *hútòng* meaning. The best micro-regeneration practice (whether state-led or collaborative) proceeds incrementally, plot-by-plot, and street-by-street, preserving parcel rhythms and access patterns while improving services—an approach anticipated in Ju'er Hutong and echoed in new courtyard housing prototypes that attempt contemporary standards within traditional envelopes (Wu, 1999; Zhang, 2006).

Debates often hinge on numbers—how many 胡同 *hútòng* exist, how many were lost. Municipal tallies and secondary sources diverge due to changing definitions (what counts as a 胡同 *hútòng* vs. 巷 *xiàng*), boundary shifts, and administrative reclassification. Reported figures range from several thousand in mid-century to roughly 1,300–2,000 remaining in recent government and media estimates, though care is required when comparing across years. The key analytical point is not the exact number, but the spatial distribution and continuity of 胡同

*hútòng* networks: isolated heritage alleys without network permeability lose much of their functional value. Planning should therefore prioritize network integrity—protecting continuous corridors, junction nodes, and interfaces with markets, schools, clinics, and transit.

In Beijing, 胡同 *hútòng* are not relics; they are a living urban technology forged at the intersection of imperial cosmology, courtyard domesticity, and alley sociability, later tested by socialist mass housing and postsocialist redevelopment. Their enduring importance lies less in nostalgia than in performance: 胡同 *hútòng* enable low-carbon mobility, social cohesion, and fine-grained adaptation. The challenge for planners is to translate heritage into policy that safeguards network continuity, resident tenure, and everyday economies while upgrading infrastructures and environmental performance. If Beijing's future is to remain legible as Beijing—anchored by its Central Axis yet alive in its side streets—the 胡同 *hútòng* syntax must be sustained not only as an image but as an operating system for a humane metropolis.

**Regional terminology II: 弄 *lòng*, 里弄 *lǐlòng* and 弄堂 *lòngtáng***

The meaning of 弄 *lòng* as 'lane' in Chinese urban toponymy has long attracted philological debate. Although today it is widely associated with the Wu dialect area—especially in Suzhou, Hangzhou, and Shanghai—its historical origin remains complex, combining phonological evolution, regional lexical substitution, and, in some peripheral cases, borrowing or graphic conflation.

The most widely accepted explanation (Hu and Wu, 2023) is that *long* developed within the Sinitic lexicon through phonological derivation from the older words 巷 *xiàng*, 衖 *lòng*, all referrable to the concept of 'alley'. In premodern Chinese, these graphs referred to the narrow passages connecting wards (里 *lǐ*) in the gridded cities of the Tang and Song dynasties. In the Wu dialects, the local pronunciation of 巷 *xiàng* was close to *nòng* or *long*, and by the Southern Song, local gazetteers from Hangzhou recorded both 巷 and 衖, distinguishing the Mandarin and Wu readings. The substitution of 弄 *lòng* as the written form of this Wu reading occurred gradually: the graph first appeared sporadically in Jiangnan toponyms during the Ming–Qing period and became fully institutionalized in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with the codification of 里弄 *lǐlòng* addresses in Shanghai (→ next paragraph). Thus, the 'lane' meaning of 弄 *lòng* is not a new semantic invention but the stabilization of a regional pronunciation and orthography that replaced 巷 *xiàng*. As Hu and Wu, 2023's toponymic map shows, the term's spatial distribution is overwhelmingly concentrated in the Wu-speaking region, evidencing an endogenous evolution rather than an external borrowing.

A second, less central hypothesis attributes 弄 *lòng* to a Bai-Yue substratum (a hypothesized linguistic substrate layer in Sinitic varieties of southern China, attributed to the languages of the ancient 百越 *Bǎiyuè* 'Hundred Yue' populations who inhabited the region before large-scale Sinitic expansion), linking it to forms of Southern dialects such as *luengq* or *rungh*, which denote valleys or corridors. It may be argued that as Han settlers expanded southward, these indigenous words were absorbed and reinterpreted within Sinitic toponymy as denoting narrow spaces. However, this explanation encounters serious difficulties. Most lane-sense occurrences of 弄 *lòng* are in Jiangnan, a region with continuous Han settlement and no strong record of Bai–Yue linguistic substrate. Moreover, as Hu and Wu note, true substratum toponyms are typically restricted to Guangxi, Guizhou, and Yunnan, where 弄 *lòng* functions as a transliteration for non-Sinitic place names. Therefore, while the substratum theory may explain the presence of 弄 *lòng* in minority toponyms of southern China, it cannot account for the urban 'lane' sense prevalent in Wu cities.

A third interpretation involves graphic and semantic confusion with older characters such as 巃 or 豅 *lóng*, which in classical sources meant 'long valley'. In mountainous southeastern regions, these graphs were sometimes written erroneously as 弄, producing place names where long denotes a valley rather than a lane. The phonetic proximity and the visual similarity of their graphs, encouraged this conflation in handwritten and printed forms. Yet this pathway represents a parallel development rather than the origin of the urban sense. It explains why some 弄 *lòng* toponyms in Fujian or Hunan refer to valleys rather than streets, but not why 弄 *lòng* dominates city addresses in the lower Yangtze plain.

Under treaty-port modernity, especially in Shanghai from the mid-19th century onward, *long* was not only preserved but institutionalized through the typology of the 里弄 *lǐlòng*. The hybrid 里弄 *lǐlòng* houses fused Western row-house construction with Chinese courtyard principles, organized along narrow internal lanes that retained the term 弄 *lòng*. Archival materials, maps, and property records reveal how *long* became a formal unit in cadastral and postal systems: addresses were indexed by 弄 *lòng* numbers. 弄 *lòng* thus moved from vernacular to bureaucratic language, acquiring a measurable, administrative identity, yet retaining its social intimacy of semi-public interactions.

The colonial encounter generated new building codes and property logics, but the inherited word 弄 *lòng* domesticated these novelties within a Chinese semantic frame. Translation here

occurred inwardly—Western urbanism was "Sinicized" through the resilience of local terminology.

After 1949, socialist planning sought to rationalize the irregular lane fabric, promoting super-blocks and broad roads. The 里弄 *lǐlòng* was reclassified as 'old residential area' (旧住宅区 *jiù zhùzháiqū*), and 弄 *lòng* gradually disappeared from official planning documents. Nonetheless, the term persisted in daily language and addressing systems, marking a divergence between bureaucratic and popular vocabularies.

弄 *lòng* names continued to appear in postal directories and oral reference, maintaining memory of pre-revolutionary space. The persistence of the word indicates that linguistic continuity can outlast spatial transformation. Even when the morphology changes, the toponymic layer of the city retains traces of previous dwelling forms.

Since the 1990s, redevelopment and heritage branding have given 弄 *lòng* a new life. In Shanghai, restored districts such as Tianzifang Long 田子坊弄 and Xintiandi Lilong 新天地里弄 capitalize on nostalgic associations of intimacy, authenticity, and "Old Shanghai." This can be interpreted as a semantic recycling: a word once associated with working-class domesticity becomes a symbol of urban chic and cultural heritage.

The process parallels the global commodification of "the historic quarter" or "lane culture," but again filtered through a Chinese linguistic lens. Developers use 弄 *lòng* as a brand element (*Long House*, *Long Gallery*), translating spatial memory into marketable affect. This re-semanticization risks detaching the term from its social grounding, turning it into an aesthetic signifier detached from lived practice.

The term 弄 *lòng* is a meaningful example of how translating a Chinese city term with its immediate equivalent erases its institutional, affective, and historical layers; retaining the Chinese term and explicating its genealogy, preserves analytical accuracy and expands the comparative lexicon of global urbanism. The 里弄 *lǐlòng* is Shanghai's distinctive low-rise lane or lane neighborhood bridging traditional community life and Western modernist urban forms. Emerged in late 19th century Treaty Port, it is a symbol of Shanghai transformation to contemporary urban redevelopment. Arkaraprasertkul, 2009 argues that the 里弄 *lǐlòng,* both an architectural form and a socio-spatial system, embodies an "abstract concept" of neighborhood and social space that remains relevant for designing sustainable, community-oriented housing in modern cities. The word, as a compound of 里 *lǐ* 'neighborhood' and 弄 *lòng* 'lane', expressing a spatial logic centered on narrow lanes that connect dwelling units and

structure everyday social interaction, thus represents more than a housing typology—it is a "mediating agency between Chinese locality and Western modernity" (Arkaraprasertkul, 2009).

Like its Western counterparts—the terraced and row houses of London, Amsterdam, or Paris—it was a response to the crisis of space inherent to industrial modernity. The typology was introduced by foreign developers aiming to maximize land use and minimize construction costs. The early 里弄 *lǐlòng* combined Chinese spatial hierarchies with Western construction efficiency: party walls, private entrances, and a sequence of spaces leading from public to private. Over time, the typology evolved from family-based courtyard living to compact, lane-centered communities emphasizing functional convenience rather than symbolic representation (Zhao, 2004). Activities such as cooking, exercising, and chatting spill into the lanes, transforming them into communal extensions of the home (Lu, 1999). The resulting blurring of public and private boundaries generates what Guan (1996) calls "spatial fluidity," enabling communication and mutual care within the neighborhood.

Yet, while its physical form reflected modern efficiency, its use and meaning were reshaped by local culture. Residents appropriated lanes as extensions of domestic space, turning circulation areas into social spaces for cooking, washing, and leisure and inscribing Chinese patterns of everyday life onto a Western-derived housing form.

Initially conceived around the 1870s as wooden row houses for foreign factory workers, 里弄 *lǐlòng* were soon rebuilt in brick due to safety regulations. The most celebrated variant, the 石库门里弄 *shíkùmén lǐlòng*, emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, identifiable by its stone-framed gateways (石 库 门 *shíkùmén*). These houses featured courtyards that provided light, ventilation, and communal space, combining Chinese domestic traditions with Western façade aesthetics.

As Shanghai's population surged, 里 弄 *lǐlòng* design became denser and more standardized. The 广式里弄 *Guǎngshì Lǐlòng* (Guangdong-style 里弄 *lǐlòng*, 1910s-1920s) and the 新式里弄 *Xīnshì Lǐlòng* (New Style 里弄 *lǐlòng*, 1920s-1930s) later reduced courtyard size and widened lanes for vehicles, shifting communal life outward into the lane itself (Lü et al. 2001). By the 1930s, the 花园里弄 *Huāyuán Lǐlòng* 'garden 里弄 *lǐlòng*' introduced semi-detached homes for elites, while war and postwar times 公寓里弄 *gōngyù lǐlòng* 'apartment 里弄 *lǐlòng*' evolved into mid-rise blocks with shared facilities—marking the transition toward modernist slab housing.

The socialist period further transformed the typology. State housing policies emphasized collective ownership and affordability, leading to overcrowding and subdivision of units.

Despite deterioration, the 里弄 *lǐlòng* retained strong neighborhood cohesion and became symbolic of Shanghai's urban identity. However, rapid post-1980s redevelopment has endangered their survival, as high-rise apartments increasingly replace these low-rise communities.

The term 弄堂 *lòngtáng* referred more specifically to the spatial and social corridor within a 里弄 *lǐlòng* neighborhood: a narrow alley where residents interacted, cooked, and traded. While 里弄 *lǐlòng* designated the entire compound, 弄堂 *lòngtáng* referred to its in-between space—the connective tissue of daily life. In local usage, however, the two terms overlapped, and 弄堂 *lòngtáng* increasingly came to evoke both the physical lane and the lifestyle associated with it: neighborly intimacy, collective surveillance, and a porous boundary between private and public spheres.

The distinction between 弄堂 *lòngtáng* and 里弄 *lǐlòng* thus mirrors the dual logic of Shanghai's urban modernity. 里弄 *lǐlòng* is a compound word formed from 里 *lǐ* 'ward' and 弄 *lòng* 'lane', institutionalizing an administrative and morphological category of housing, while 弄堂 *lòngtáng* retains its vernacular affect. Urban planners and sociologists tend to prefer 里弄 *lǐlòng* when referring to architectural form, whereas residents and literary representations favor 弄堂 *lòngtáng* for its connotation of intimacy and quotidian life. The coexistence of the two terms reveals the bilingualism of Shanghai's modernity: an official language of planning and a vernacular of memory.

Today, 弄堂 *lòngtáng* survives not only as an urban typology but as a cultural emblem. In the gentrified districts of Tianzifang and Xintiandi, developers capitalize on the nostalgic aura of 弄堂 *lòngtáng* culture (弄堂文化 *lòngtáng wénhuà*), repackaging collective life into aesthetic heritage. Yet the word still carries the palimpsest of its origins—the Wu phonology, the treaty-port modernity, and the social texture of dense dwelling.

### 5.2.5 口 *kǒu* and other intersections

Most of the Chinese terms indicating any kind of intersection have the character 口 *kǒu* 'mouth' as root morpheme. The character 口 *kǒu* 'mouth' is commonly used as a root morpheme to indicate metaphorically any kind of opening, both physical and abstract (e.g. 入口 *rùkǒu* 'entry'; 出口 *chūkǒu* 'exit'; 窗口 *chuāngkǒu* '*fig*. window'). The general technical term is 交叉口 *jiāochākǒu* 'intersection', lit. 'mouth of crossing fork'. In the spoken language the most common type of intersection, the crossroad, is defined 路口 *lùkǒu* / 街口 *jiēkǒu* / 巷

口 *xiàngkǒu* according to the type of road. The crossroad classification by shape utilises the shapes of the characters (字 *zì*): 十字路口 *shízì lùkǒu* (cross, X-shaped in English sense; i.e., four-way); 丁字路口 *dīngzì lùkǒu* 'T-junction)'; T 字路口 *T[tì]-zì lùkǒu* 'T-junction'(*common in Taiwan*); Y 路口 *Y[wài]lùkǒu* / 丫字路口 *yāzì lùkǒu* 'Y-junction'. It may also utilise the number of intersecting ways: 三岔路口 *sānchà lùkǒu* '3-way fork intersection', 四岔路口 *sìchà lùkǒu* '4-way fork intersection', 五岔路口/多岔路口 *wǔchà / duōchà lùkǒu* '5-way / multi-leg intersection'.

Other forms of intersection are: 交汇处 *jiāohuìchù* 'junction/confluence', 环形交叉口 *huánxíng jiāochākǒu* 'roundabout', lit. 'ring-shaped intersection', 转盘路口 *zhuànpán lùkǒu* coll. 'rotary/traffic circle', 环岛 *huándǎo* 'roundabout/traffic circle', lit. 'ring island' (common in Taiwan).

By grade or structure, we can distinguish: 平面交叉口 *píngmiàn jiāochākǒu* 'at-grade intersection', 立体交叉/立交 *lìtǐ jiāochā / lìjiāo* 'grade-separated interchange', 互通立交 *hùtōng lìjiāo* 'system/connecting interchange.

In colloquial language a road bifurcation is called 叉路 *chālù*, a branch road is called 岔路(口) *chàlù*(*kǒu*).

## 5.3 Terminological tensions in English translation (the 'street' semantic field)

Words such as 道 *dào*, 路 *lù*, 街 *jiē*, and 巷 *xiàng* are routinely rendered as *way*, *road*, *street*, and *alley* respectively, and these equivalents circulate with little comment in academic writing, planning documents, and architectural discourse. Because these English words are familiar and widely used, their equivalence to the Chinese terms is often assumed to be transparent, that is, unproblematic, neutral, and conceptually sufficient.

Before turning to the individual terms, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by transparency. In translation studies, a translation is often called "transparent" when it reads fluently and does not draw attention to itself as a translation. In urban studies, however, transparency has a deeper implication: it suggests that the translated term refers to the *same conceptual object* as the original. In the case of urban terminology, this is a strong and often unjustified assumption. Urban terms are not merely labels for physical objects; they encode relations between space and social practice, hierarchies of governance and visibility, cultural expectations about publicness, movement, and dwelling. A translation can therefore be linguistically fluent while remaining conceptually opaque. The analysis that follows treats

transparency as a graded condition, not a binary one, and evaluates each English equivalent according to what it reveals and what it conceals. This gradient demonstrates that the availability of an English equivalent does not guarantee transparency. On the contrary, habitual equivalents often conceal the deepest conceptual differences. Recognizing non-transparency does not imply abandoning English or retreating into linguistic relativism. Instead, it calls for translation as method. Translation becomes a site where urban theory is actively constructed, not merely transmitted. For *Terminological Urbanism*, this means: (a) treating key terms as analytical objects; (b) making translation choices explicit; (c) allowing friction between languages to inform theory. Rather than smoothing over differences, translation should stage them.

From the perspective of terminological urbanism, this assumption must be critically examined. Transparency in translation is never merely a linguistic matter; it is an epistemic claim. To treat an equivalent as transparent is to assume that it allows the object of study to appear unchanged across languages. This chapter argues that, despite the availability of habitual English equivalents, the translation of these terms is structurally non-transparent. Each term carries layers of semantic, social, and philosophical meaning that are only partially captured—or in some cases actively distorted—by its English counterpart.

The goal of this chapter is not to reject translation, but to recalibrate it. By analyzing each term individually, the chapter demonstrates why apparent equivalence fails and proposes translation strategies that preserve analytical precision without abandoning communicability.

### 5.3.1 路 *lù*→'road': partial transparency

Among the four terms, 路 *lù* appears to have the most straightforward English equivalent. Translating 路 *lù* as 'road' is common practice, and at a basic infrastructural level the equivalence is defensible. Both terms refer to linear spaces designed primarily for movement and connectivity. Both can be classified, measured, and regulated within planning systems.

However, this apparent transparency is only partial. In Chinese, 路 *lù* rarely operates in isolation. Its most authoritative and institutionalized usage is within the compound 道路 *dàolù*, where *lu* is inseparable from 道 *dào*. This compound embeds physical infrastructure within a normative framework of order, legitimacy, and proper circulation. English *road*, by contrast, is conceptually thinner. Normativity is not intrinsic to the term but imposed externally through legal or planning language.

As a result, translating 路 *lù* simply as 'road' risks stripping it of its embeddedness in a moral–institutional order. The translation becomes transparent only at the level of physical function, not at the level of conceptual structure.

Translation strategy for 路 *lù*:

i. Use *road* in descriptive and infrastructural contexts.
ii. When 路 *lù* appears as part of 道路 *dàolù*, consider explicating the normative dimension in surrounding text.
iii. Avoid treating *road* as a neutral equivalent in theoretical discussion; acknowledge the conceptual narrowing involved.

### 5.3.2 街 *jiē*→'street': false transparency

The translation of 街 *jiē* as 'street' is perhaps the most widespread and the most deceptively transparent. On the surface, the equivalence appears strong: both terms denote linear urban spaces lined with buildings, associated with commerce, address, and public life. Yet the comparative analysis shows that this equivalence masks significant differences.

In Chinese urban discourse, 街 *jiē* is not merely a morphological category. It is a socially saturated space. A 街 *jiē* is where urban life becomes visible: where commerce, signage, surveillance, and pedestrian presence converge. The term is deeply embedded in vernacular speech, urban toponymy, and administrative organization. It functions simultaneously as a spatial unit, a social stage and an economic interface.

English 'street' oscillates between a technical designation and a romanticized abstraction ("street life," "the street"). While Anglophone urban theory often elevates the street as a site of sociality, this elevation is theoretical rather than lexical. The word *street* itself does not encode social intensity in the way 街 *jiē* does; it acquires that meaning through discourse, not through its semantic core. Thus, the translation *street* appears transparent but is in fact conceptually unstable. It invites readers to import Anglophone debates about public space into a context where the social logic of the street is organized differently.

Translation strategy for 街 *jiē*:

i. Use *street* as a baseline translation for readability.
ii. Add contextual specification (e.g. commercial street, socially intensive street).
iii. In analytical sections, foreground 街 *jiē* as a category of social practice, not just a street type.
iv. Where necessary, retain 街 *jiē* in transliteration to avoid conceptual flattening.

### 5.3.3 巷 *xiàng*→'alley'/'lane': non-transparency and social loss

The case of 巷 *xiàng* demonstrates most clearly how English equivalents fail to be transparent. Common translations include 'alley' and 'lane', yet neither captures the anthropological and spatial specificity of 巷 *xiàng*.

In Chinese cities, 巷 *xiàng* occupies the micro-scale of the urban grid. It is closely associated with residential life, everyday routines, and intimate social interaction. As shown in the comparative table, 巷 *xiàng* functions as a space of slow movement, an extension of domestic life, a site of informal social regulation.English 'alley', however, often carries negative connotations of marginality, neglect, or danger. Even 'lane', while more neutral, lacks the dense association with everyday urban dwelling. Translating 巷 *xiàng* using either term therefore risks erasing the social centrality of these spaces.

This is a case of structural non-transparency. No single English word occupies the same position within the urban semantic system. The loss is not merely semantic but epistemic: it obscures how urban life is organized at the micro level.

Translation strategy for 巷 *xiàng*:

i. Avoid unreflective use of 'alley'.

ii. Use 'lane' cautiously, with explanatory framing.

iii. Consider retaining 巷 *xiàng* as a transliterated term (*xiang*) in analytical contexts.

iv. Emphasize the lived, domestic dimension in accompanying description.

### 5.3.4 道 *dào*→'way': radical non-transparency

The common translation of 道 *dào* as 'way' is radically non-transparent, since it fails to capture the philosophical, ethical, and cosmological dimensions of the term.

In Chinese thought, 道 *dào* signifies not only a path but an ordering principle—a way of being, governing, and moving correctly. This philosophical weight persists even in modern compounds such as 道路 *dàolù*. English *way* is polysemous but weakly structured. It lacks the coherence and authority of 道 *dào* as a conceptual anchor.

Translating 道 *dào* as *way* therefore produces a conceptual collapse. The philosophical substrate disappears, and the term is reduced to a vague spatial metaphor. This is not a minor loss; it undermines the understanding of how infrastructure, order, and legitimacy are conceptually linked in Chinese urban discourse.

Translation strategy for 道 *dào*:

i. Avoid translating 道 *dào* in isolation where possible.

ii. Retain *dao* in transliteration in theoretical discussion.

iii. When translating 道路 *dàolù*, acknowledge internally differentiated meanings.

iv. Treat 道 *dào* as an analytic concept, not a mere lexical item.

The analysis of street terminology demonstrates how circulation spaces are conceptualized through functional and hierarchical logics that structure urban movement. Streets emerge not only as physical connectors, but as key instruments through which planning rationalities organize access, flow, and separation within the city.

However, streets do not operate in isolation. They acquire meaning through their integration with residential areas, services, and collective spaces. This interdependence points toward a broader spatial unit that exceeds individual buildings or linear infrastructures. The next chapter therefore moves to the neighborhood scale, where housing and streets are assembled into more complex spatial and administrative configurations.

# CHAPTER 6 TERMS OF RELATING: NEIGHBORHOOD

This chapter advances the empirical analysis to the neighborhood scale, where individual buildings and circulation networks are integrated into larger spatial systems. Unlike housing or streets, the neighborhood functions as a composite category, simultaneously spatial, administrative, and social, making it a crucial unit for planning and governance.

The chapter examines neighborhood-related terminology as it appears in planning documents, policy frameworks, and urban classification systems. Concepts such as boundaries, zoning, service provision, and density are analyzed to show how neighborhoods are defined, measured, and managed within institutional discourse. Through this analysis, the neighborhood emerges as a key intermediary scale linking local spatial arrangements to city-wide planning strategies.

By consolidating the previous analyses of housing and streets, this chapter completes the examination of core urban categories that structure planning knowledge. It provides a comprehensive picture of how urban space is conceptually organized across scales prior to the introduction of experiential data.

## 6.1 The systems of territorial division and control

Since the pre-dynastic times, the Chinese city has known several systems of urban territory control based on regular (and regulated) street-bounded blocks. In order to comprehend whether these original planning systems can be consider the ancestors of modern urban blocks in China, we must go back to a time when the rural territory occupied the majority of the land and a system of regulating the land use was necessary.

### 6.1.1 Pre-dynastic and dynastic China

The 闾里制 *lúlǐzhì* 'neighborhood-ward system', was the lowest level of administrative and social organization in early imperial China. It originated in the late Zhou period and was systematized under the Qin and Han dynasties as part of the empire's hierarchical order: 县 *xiàn* 'county' → 乡 *xiāng* 'township' → 里 *lǐ* 'ward' → 闾 *lǘ* neighborhood'**.** Each level combined territorial, demographic, and administrative functions, linking local households directly to the imperial bureaucracy.

A 里 *lǐ* typically comprised several 闾 *lǘ*, each containing around 25–100 households, managed by a headman responsible for census registration, tax and labor collection, and local order. The 闾里制 *lúlǐzhì* thus represented the micro-infrastructure of imperial governance, binding space, people, and regulation into a single operative grid.

The roots of the 闾里制 *lǘlǐzhì* can be traced to pre-Qin population registration and mutual responsibility networks. The Qin dynasty (3rd century BCE) unified these practices through the Shang Yang 商鞅 (390-338 b.C.) reforms, instituting the 连坐制 *liánzuòzhì*, a mutual surveillance and collective punishment system where groups of five or ten households were jointly accountable for offenses. This linkage of population control, taxation, and policing formed the functional backbone of the 闾里制 *lǘlǐzhì*.

Two complementary logics sustained the system: administrative surveillance (household clustering allowed for taxation, military conscription, and legal accountability to be efficiently enforced) and moral governance (the system doubled as a vehicle for state ideology and Confucian moral education, promoting filial piety and obedience through local social networks). Excavated Qin and Han bamboo manuscripts, such as those from Shuihudi 睡虎地, Zhangjiashan 张家山 and Liye 里耶, record administrative documents and legal registers at the 里 *lǐ* and 闾 *lǘ* level, revealing how deeply the system permeated daily governance (Ma T W. Qin and Han Evidence 12.B Excavated Texts[A]//von Reden, 2020: 529–555.).

During the Western Han, the 闾里制 *lǘlǐzhì* effectively organized population and production at the village and urban levels. By the Eastern Han, however, social and economic diversification, land privatization, and the rise of lineage networks eroded its administrative precision. Local gentry increasingly replaced the headman authority, and the system gradually lost its fiscal and disciplinary efficiency.

From the Tang to Song periods, the 闾里制 *lǘlǐzhì* was replaced by successor models such as the 保甲制 *bàojiǎzhì* (*baojia* system) and 里甲制 *lǐjiǎzhì* (*lijia* system), which retained its mutual-responsibility and registration principles but adapted them to different fiscal and military contexts.

The 闾里制 *lǘlǐzhì* can be understood as an early form of grid-based local governance, a proto-territorial system linking population management with spatial control. Spatially, it mapped communities as measurable cells, ensuring state visibility and accessibility. Administratively, it bundled census registration, taxation, labor service, policing, and moral supervision into a single framework. Sociologically, it shaped communal identity through proximity and mutual accountability, prefiguring later neighborhood and street-block institutions in Chinese urban history.

The 井田制 *jǐngtiánzhì* (well-field system**)** is a classical model of land organization traditionally associated with the Western Zhou (1046–771 BCE). In its canonical description, farmland was divided into a tic-tac-toe (#) pattern of nine equal plots (井 *jǐng*): eight private

plots (私田 *sītián*) cultivated by individual households encircling one public/communal plot (公田 *gōngtián*) in the center. Households farmed their own plots but were obliged to jointly cultivate the central field as a form of rent/tax or corvée to support the state or local lord.

The *Mencius* in the section "The Duke of Teng" states:

> Each square 里 *li* [approximately equivalent 0,5 km] contained a well-field, comprising nine hundred 亩 *mu* [approximately equivalent to 6.667 ares or 0.165 acre]. The central portion was communal land. Eight 家 *jiā* households each owned one hundred *mu* of private land, collectively maintaining the communal fields. Only after completing communal duties could they attend to their private affairs. (Yang, 1960).

Essentially, a square *li* of land constituted one well-field. Each well-field was square, totaling nine hundred *mu*, divided into nine sections. Each section was one hundred *mu*, with the central section designated as communal land and the remaining eight sections as private fields. Each farming household owned one hundred *mu* of private land, but they were required to cultivate the communal field first before tending to their own plots. The line from the *Shjing* – "Xiaoya. Beishan zhi shi; Datian" reflects this economic system of the era in poetic form: "Rain [first] on our public fields, / And then on our private" (Ctext, https://ctext.org/book-of-poetry/da-tian/zhs). Dividing nine hundred *mu* of land into nine equal parts would logically manifest as the character 井 *jǐng* 'well' in Chinese script.

Modern scholarship is divided over the extent and literal implementation of the 井田制 *jǐngtiánzhì*. Because the clearest descriptions come from late Zhou and Warring States textual sources—normative and often retrospective—many historians regard the 'well-field' chiefly as an ideological ideal invoked by Confucian thinkers to argue for just taxation and benevolent rule.

Archaeological and textual work suggests that by the Warring States, evolving private land rights, marketization, and Legalist reforms were dissolving older tenure regimes in favor of systems better suited to individual ownership, taxation in grain/cash, and state mobilization—a long transition that makes a rigid, empire-wide 'well-field' an unlikely historical reality. 法家变法 *Fǎjiā biànfǎ* 'legalist reform' in the pre-imperial period refers to a cluster of state-building programs—most paradigmatically the Qin reforms attributed to Shang Yang 商鞅, that replaced aristocratic privilege and customary governance with codified law (法 *fǎ* 'law'), uniform administrative rules, household registration, fiscal extraction, and merit-based reward-and-punishment (赏罚 *shǎngfá* 'rewards and punishments'), in order to concentrate authority in the ruler's office and mobilize population and land for war and production; these reforms are

synthesized in modern scholarship as a decisive shift toward bureaucratic territorial rule before unification (Shang, 2011; Pines, 2009: ch. 3–4; Lewis, 2007: 17–31).

The 井田制 *jǐngtiánzhì* endures because it condenses big themes in early Chinese governance: the junction of land, labor, and legitimacy; the idea that fair, predictable obligations could stabilize society; and the role of spatial design (grids, shared plots) as moral economy. Whether or not it ever prevailed as described, its normative force shaped debates about land, tax, and justice for centuries.

Corresponding to the 井田制 *jǐngtiánzhì* was the residential 里 *lǐ*. The *li*, also square in shape and covering 900 *mu*, was similarly divided into nine equal parts: eight sections for residential dwellings and one section for communal land—a place for ancestral worship, divine offerings, and public gatherings. The 里 *lǐ* evolved into the city at a certain stage of development. As seen above, the royal city where the Zhou emperor resided was also square in shape. At its center stood the palace city, surrounded by residential 里 *lǐ* for the common people. Each side of the royal city had three gates, totaling twelve gates. The three roads running north-south and connecting the corresponding gates were called 径 *jìng* while the three east-west roads were called 纬 *wěi*. In consideration of the excessive distance between the roads, six additional roads were constructed parallel to the main thoroughfares—between the gates, between gates and city walls, and along the inner sides of the walls. Thus, the royal city contained nine north-south and nine east-west main roads, known as the 九径九纬 *jiǔ jìng jiǔ wěi* 'Nine Longitudinal and Nine Latitudinal Roads'. These roads were called 涂 *tú* during the Western Zhou dynasty and later referred to as 街 *jiē*.

The square 里 *lǐ*-structure resulting from the crossing of the roads, beyond the 皇宫 *huánggōng* 'imperial palace' formed the chessboard-like residential quarters for commoners, known as *li*. These 里 *lǐ* were enclosed by high walls with gates on all four sides, each gate opening onto a main thoroughfare. At the center of each 里 *lǐ* stood a sacrificial altar to the earth god, called the 里社 *lǐshè*. Residential dwellings were built around this altar. The roads within the *li* were described in ancient texts as 巷 *xiàng*. Beyond these main lanes were smaller alleys, later referred to as 衢 *qú*. This layout with alleys branching from the central lanes and residences lining their sides was preserved in later generations, evolving into charming living spaces and becoming subjects of poetic praise. When the poet Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846) traveled to Chang'an during the Tang Dynasty, he stayed at Huayang Temple in Yongchong Li 永崇里. In his verse, he described the surroundings: "In Yongchong Lane, quiet and still,

Huayang Temple's courtyard, serene and deep. Where carriages never tread, Autumn locust blossoms carpet the ground" (*Yongchong li guanju* 永崇里观居 [Dwelling at Huayang Monastery in Yongchong Ward][A] // *Bai*, 1979.).

In traditional Chinese urbanism, the *li*-system evolved to the 坊制 *fāngzhì* 'ward system' through the Tang dynasty to facilitate policing, tax collection, crowd control, and functional segregation. The term 坊 *fāng* commonly refers to a gated ward or precinct within a city. In classic sources, 里坊 *lǐfāng*, or simply 坊 *fāng*, functioned as a residential quarter bounded by walls or fences, often with regulated access. Over time, 坊 *fāng* acquired regulatory, policing, and social functions in addition to spatial ones. The ward system reached its apex in the Sui–Tang period, when capitals like Chang'an were laid out as orthogonal grids of wards, each walled, gated, and enclosed at night. Access to and from a ward was controlled, and curfews or boundary closures were common.

The design of 坊 *fāng* was not just a matter of geometrical partitioning; it had embedded institutional logic: (1) curfew and boundary control (wards were locked or guarded at night to prevent undesired movement, thus, the boundary of a 坊 *fāng* was not purely symbolic but operational); (2) function segregation (markets, workshops, craft areas, or more noisy trades were often placed in separate wards or in dedicated precincts, rather than mixed into every ward; this separation reinforced public order and ritual zoning); (3) legibility and administration (the ward grid made the capital legible to bureaucratic control, e.g. census-taking, policing, surveillance, tax assessment, and lines of authority, such as ward heads, neighborhood officers); (4) gatekeeping and social closure (the ward boundaries often were not fully porous, offering a degree of enclosure; this fosters internal cohesion, internal order, and control of ingress/egress); (5) internal hierarchy of lanes (within a 坊 *fāng*, smaller lanes, alleys, and courtyards structured movement at finer scale—some major internal roads, many secondary alleys).

The area of a 坊 *fāng* in Tang capitals could be quite large—comparable to, or larger than, a modern urban district in some cases. For example, the city of Chang'an was subdivided into a large grid, with each ward of dimension roughly one 里 *lǐ* by one 里 *lǐ* in the inner city.

Because the external boundaries were strong, internal roads often did not penetrate the walls; internal paths served only internal circulation. The ward thus functioned like an enclosed cell with limited permeability to the outer network. In later periods, after the Tang, the rigidity of the ward system relaxed; walls were removed, gate closure fell out of use, and functional segregation dispersed. The "ward identity" survived as names and conceptual units, but the strict spatial boundary faded.

Among the great transformations of Chinese urban history, few are as emblematic as the shift from the 里坊制 *lǐfāng zhì*, the regimented ward-based system of the Tang capitals, to the 街巷制 *jiēxiàngzhì*, the open, street-based urban form that characterized the Song dynasty. The 里坊制 *lǐfāng zhì* organized the city through strict enclosure, curfew, and state surveillance; the 街巷制 *jiēxiàngzhì* reoriented urban life toward circulation, commerce, and social interaction along public streets and alleys. Historians regard this transformation not merely as a morphological evolution but as a profound reconfiguration of governance, economy, and everyday life.

As described in the previous paragraph, the 里坊制 *lǐfāng zhì*, perfected in the Sui–Tang period, divided the capital into a regular grid of rectangular wards separated by wide avenues. Each ward was walled and gated, its entrances closed at night under night curfew. The system reflected imperial ideals of ritual order and administrative control: the city was a mirror of the cosmic hierarchy, with the imperial palace at the north center, markets confined to the east and west, and commoners' residences strictly segregated (Steinhardt, 1990).

In this model, space was moralized and policed. Residential and commercial activities were spatially separated; trade could occur only in designated market wards during regulated hours. The daily rhythm of the city thus followed the alternation of curfew and release, of closed wards and open markets, all under bureaucratic supervision.

By the late Tang, the ward system's rigidity was increasingly at odds with the changing socio-economic reality. Several processes undermined its operation. Commercial expansion (especially the rise of long-distance trade and money economy) created pressure for continuous markets beyond the confines of walled wards. Population growth and urban densification filled vacant spaces within and between wards, producing informal alleys and extra-legal stalls. The centralized market model and enclosed 坊 *fāng* walls could no longer meet societal needs. From the mid-to-late Tang Dynasty, phenomena like encroaching on streets for construction, opening shops within 坊 *fāng* quarters, and violating night curfews became increasingly common. Rulers attempted to reinstate the closed 里坊制 *lǐfāng zhì*, sparking intense conflict between officials and private citizens. By the late Tang and Northern Song periods, rulers tacitly acknowledged this reality. After the mid-Northern Song era, authorities abolished the urban night curfew and gradually dismantled the 坊 *fāng* walls. Administrative weakening after the An Lushan 安禄山 rebellion (755-763), a large-scale military uprising against the Tang dynasty, reduced the state's capacity to enforce nightly closures and market restrictions. As a result, the

walls that once symbolized control became porous; curfew regulations lapsed; and streets that had been mere boundaries between wards turned into active corridors of urban life.

The 街巷制 *jiēxiàngzhì* lit. 'system of streets and alleys', arose from this erosion of enclosure. Under the new order, 街 *jiē* 'streets' became the organizing spine of urban structure, while 巷 *xiàng* 'alleys' penetrated residential areas to form a fine-grained network. The city was no longer composed of gated cells but of open blocks fronting public ways.

This transformation was first visible in Bianliang 汴梁 (today's Kaifeng 开封), the Northern Song capital. Archaeological and textual evidence show that Kaifeng's governance structure replaced the 'ward-market' order with street and alley offices charged with maintenance, policing, and fire control.

The street network thus became both spatial skeleton and administrative framework. Streets defined property boundaries, guided the distribution of shops and workshops, and served as channels for movement and communication. In contrast to the rigid geometry of Tang Chang'an, Song Kaifeng's plan was organic and adaptive, shaped by hydrology, commerce, and incremental development.

Several spatial traits distinguish the 街巷制 *jiēxiàngzhì*: (a) open street frontage (buildings faced public roads rather than internal courtyards, ground-floor shops lined major arteries, forming linear markets 街市 *jiēshì*); (b) mixed use (residential, artisanal, and commercial functions coexisted, often within the same parcel); (c) dense alley webs (narrow lanes connected main streets to inner courtyards, producing high permeability and multiple circulation options); (d) temporal extension (the abolition of curfew enabled night markets and entertainment districts, expanding public life into the evening hours).

The transformation redefined urban governance. Under the ward system, control depended on physical enclosure and centralized surveillance; under the street system, it relied on distributed administration and mutual regulation. Street offices oversaw cleanliness, fire prevention, and taxation on shops. Guilds and neighborhood associations emerged to manage street-level order and collective interests, anticipating later community organizations. The visibility of activity along streets created new forms of social monitoring and commercial competition, replacing state surveillance with public observation.

This reconfiguration also altered urban subjectivity: citizens became visible actors in shared spaces, and the street became a stage for sociability and public expression. The 街巷制 *jiēxiàngzhì* thus marked the birth of an urban commons, albeit one still under imperial jurisdiction.

Economically, the street-and-alley order enabled the rise of a monetized service economy. Unlike Tang markets that operated under state licensing, Song streets hosted privately run shops, stalls, and itinerant peddlers. The spatial continuity of streets allowed the formation of specialized commercial corridors for silk, books, or tea, while the proximity of residences maintained dense customer bases. The pattern resonates with later urban traditions of 前店后坊 *qiándiàn hòufāng* 'front-shop, back-house' spatial organization.

Culturally, the shift to open streets supported new forms of urban spectacle and sociability. Literary sources celebrate bustling night scenes, temple fairs, and processions. Streets became sites for theatrical performances and religious parades, integrating commerce with ritual and entertainment. The 街巷制 *jiēxiàngzhì*, in short, produced the urban modernity of the Song—a city alive with flow, noise, and negotiation.

Urban theorists emphasize that this change was not merely functional but ideological. The 里坊制 *lǐfāng zhì* expressed the cosmological and moral geometry of the classical state: separation, hierarchy, and closure. The 街巷制 *jiēxiàngzhì* embodied openness, exchange, and individual mobility—values resonant with a commercialized and literate society.

Yet this openness also posed challenges. The loss of enclosure complicated taxation and policing; the proliferation of small streets strained maintenance. The Song state responded by codifying street widths, fire regulations, and property lines, marking the emergence of urban planning as technical governance rather than moral geometry (Liang 2018).

The 街巷制 *jiēxiàngzhì* established a durable urban template that persisted through later dynasties. Ming and Qing cities, though walled, were organized primarily by streets and lanes, not wards. The morphology of 胡同 *hútòng* in Beijing and 里弄 *lǐlòng* in Shanghai ultimately descends from this Song-period reorientation. The principle that public streets form the primary structure of urban life—as opposed to state-enclosed cells—became foundational for Chinese urbanism thereafter.

In modern planning discourse, the contrast between 里坊制 *lǐfāngzhì* and 街巷制 *jiēxiàngzhì* often serves as a historical analogue for debates between superblock enclosures and open street networks. Contemporary advocates of 街区 *jiēqū* 'block system' reform cite the Song model as an indigenous precedent for walkable, fine-grain connectivity, an echo of the millennium-old transformation analyzed here.

When the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) established its capital at Dadu 大都 (now Beijing), it sought to reimpose imperial order through orthogonal planning—a conscious return to the classical ideals of the 里坊 *lǐfāng* city. Yet this geometry was overlaid on a street-based logic

inherited from the Song and Jin. Dadu's plan, drawn by Liu Bingzhong 刘秉忠 (1216-1274), a Yuan-dynasty statesman and close advisor to Kublai Khan, consisted of a strict grid of avenues and lanes, but these were open, not gated: 坊 *fāng* 'ward' no longer meant enclosed compounds, but urban blocks defined by streets (街坊 *jiēfāng*). The Yuan thus institutionalized a state-controlled but permeable street system, combining imperial axiality with everyday circulation.

Street and alley offices persisted under different names. The Yuan 巡坊司 *xúnfāng sī* 'ward patrol office' patrolled streets, monitored fires, and collected taxes, showing continuity in 街巷 *jiēxiàng* governance. The Mongol regime, valuing efficiency in communication and trade, embraced rather than reversed the Song model's openness.

The Ming dynasty (1368–1644) consolidated the street-based urban order into a stable and hierarchical administrative system. The Ming founder Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328-1398), emperor name Hongwu 洪武, suspicious of urban disorder, initially sought to restore discipline through ward divisions, but quickly recognized the practicality of the 街巷制 *jiēxiàng zhì* model for managing populous cities. Cities like Nanjing, Suzhou, and Beijing were organized through 大街 *dàjiē* 'major streets' and intersecting alleys (胡同 *hútòng*/巷 *xiàng*), forming an intricate hierarchy of routes. The Beijing 胡同 *hútòng* system is the Ming–Qing evolution of this logic: a street-and-alley framework that structured both social hierarchy and daily mobility.

The Ming legal code formally recognized street and alley jurisdictions, integrating them into the apparatus of local policing, taxation, and labor corvée. Each 里 *lǐ* was composed of a cluster of alleys, each with a headman responsible for census, sanitation, and order.

Where the Song 街巷 *jiēxiàng* order was a product of commercial dynamism, the Ming infused it with Confucian moralism. Streets and alleys were seen as spaces of ethical regulation—venues for festivals, rituals, and communal instruction. The 街巷制 *jiēxiàng zhì* thus became both a spatial and moral infrastructure linking household, neighborhood, and state.

Under the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), the 街巷制 *jiēxiàng zhì* reached full maturity, both in Beijing's 胡同 *hútòng* order and in the southern 里弄 *lǐlòng* typology. Beijing, rebuilt on the Yuan grid, was organized as a hierarchical street network radiating from the palace city. Wide avenues served official processions; smaller 胡同 *hútòng* provided residential access. Each 胡同 *hútòng* functioned as a social microcosm, with lineage compounds, temples, and communal wells. The Qing state maintained detailed 胡同 *hútòng* registers for census and policing, illustrating how the 街巷制 *jiēxiàng zhì* became an instrument of bureaucratic visibility (Naquin and Rawski, 1987).

In southern cities like Suzhou, Yangzhou, and Guangzhou, street networks were more organic, shaped by waterways and markets. Here, the 街巷制 *jiēxiàng zhì* produced fine-grained fabrics of mixed-use streets and alleys. Suzhou's *Pingjiang Map* (平江图 *Píngjiāng tú*, 1229, but still relevant in Ming–Qing use) already showed an interlocking web of streets and canals—a form that persisted for centuries.

By the late Qing, Shanghai's 里弄 *lǐlòng* neighborhoods represented a hybrid evolution of the 街巷 *jiēxiàng* logic, blending Chinese alley-house traditions with Western row-house grids introduced in the treaty-port era (Lu, 1999). Thus, even as colonial forces transformed Chinese cities, they did so upon the enduring substratum of the 街巷制 *jiēxiàng zhì*.

From the Song's commercial explosion to the Qing's administrative consolidation, the 街巷制 *jiēxiàng zhì* remained the underlying spatial logic of Chinese urbanism. It evolved from a spontaneous adaptation to economic circulation into an institutionalized framework for governance, moral regulation, and social reproduction. By the late Qing, this system had generated regional variants, yet all shared the same DNA: streets and alleys as the medium of life, governance, and identity.

In a long historical arc, the 街巷制 *jiēxiàng zhì* represents a distinctively Chinese synthesis of order and porosity, where the state's spatial rationality coexisted with the everyday agency of residents. Its endurance—from the Song's Kaifeng to the Qing's Beijing and Shanghai—testifies to its adaptability as both an urban form and a social technology.

Even the 20th-century shift to modern municipal planning and cadastral mapping did not erase its legacy; rather, it layered new forms of control upon an ancient street-based matrix. In this sense, the 街巷制 *jiēxiàng zhì* is less a historical phase than the enduring grammar of Chinese urban space.

### 6.1.2 From concession grids to municipal streets: 1842–1949

The century between the Treaty of Nanking (1842) and the founding of the People's Republic of China (1949) witnessed the most radical transformation of Chinese urban space since the Tang–Song transition. Two interlinked processes drove this metamorphosis: the insertion of Western colonial enclaves into treaty-port cities, and the rise of municipal, cadastral, and street-based planning during the late Qing and Republican eras. These changes fractured and then reassembled the spatial order of Chinese cities. In particular, the ward—and precinct-based logics of imperial urbanism were gradually displaced by parcelized, street-oriented, and cartographic rationalities rooted in Western property regimes.

Following the Treaty of Nanking (1842) and subsequent unequal treaties, foreign powers established treaty ports along the Chinese coast and Yangtze River. These ports—Shanghai, Tianjin, Hankou, Xiamen, Guangzhou, Qingdao, and others—were not mere trading stations but extraterritorial enclaves, each governed by its own municipal authority, legal system, and police. The International Settlement (joint British–American) and the French Concession in Shanghai became paradigmatic examples.

Spatially, these concessions introduced an alien morphology: straight, gridded streets, lined with mixed-use shophouses, warehouses, consulates, and villas, cutting through or replacing the irregular lanes and walled compounds of the late imperial city. The 外滩 *Wàitān* 'outer bank/outer beach' (often rendered in English as the 'Bund', from the Anglo-Indian/Hindustani term for an embanked quay) and the North–South and East–West grids of the International Settlement imposed a geometry derived from Western surveying practices and cadastral mapping. The resulting dual urbanism—colonial order beside Chinese chaos, orthogonal streets abutting winding alleys—symbolized the asymmetry of power.

Yet the treaty-port city was not simply bifurcated. The Western grid and the Chinese fabric quickly interpenetrated. Chinese merchants, artisans, and migrants moved into the foreign concessions, while Western companies established factories and offices beyond their boundaries. The Settlement Roads extended deep into the Chinese city, and boundary lines became porous corridors of exchange rather than fixed borders (Wakeman, 1996).

This overlapping urbanism produced hybrid typologies: 弄堂 *lòngtáng* 'lane [with shophouses]' in Shanghai blended Chinese courtyard patterns with Western terraced housing; mixed-use streets combined residence, commerce, and light industry; public infrastructures—waterworks, tramways, and lighting—were introduced by concession municipalities and later emulated by Chinese administrations. The concession became both colonial enclave and modernizing catalyst. Its grid and municipal rationality penetrated surrounding Chinese precincts, reconfiguring the logic of governance and property.

The street grid functioned not only as infrastructure but as spatial ideology. Its regularity signified progress, hygiene, and order, contrasting with the perceived disorder of Chinese lanes. Western municipal authorities used road layouts to demarcate zones of race, class, and function—European residential quarters, Chinese commercial strips, and industrial peripheries—thus translating imperial hierarchies into urban form. Concession boundaries, surveyed and policed, embodied the cartographic sovereignty of foreign powers. At the same time, the new urban infrastructure—electric trams, telegraph lines, and sewage systems—

created a shared modern environment that transcended jurisdictional lines. Shanghai, by the 1920s, was no longer a mere colonial port but a polycentric metropolis where multiple sovereignties coexisted, each articulated through spatial and technical means (Lu, 1999; Yeh, 1990).

The late Qing and early Republican periods (1900–1937) saw the Chinese response to the concession city. Confronted with Western municipal administrations that levied taxes, maintained roads, and regulated building, Chinese reformers and officials began to establish 市政 *shìzhèng* '[modern] municipal governments' in native districts. In Shanghai, the Shanghai Chinese Municipality (founded 1927) explicitly sought to reclaim urban sovereignty through modern planning, policing, and taxation.

The language of reform shifted from 里坊 *lǐfāng* 'neighborhood' to 街道 *jiēdào* 'street' and 街区 *jiēqū* 'block'. The street became the basic administrative and infrastructural unit: an axis for tram lines, utilities, and property access. This shift mirrored the earlier transition from the enclosed ward to the open street system, but now institutionalized through modern bureaucracy and cartography.

Central to Republican planning was the rise of cadastral surveying—a new visual and legal technology that transformed the city into a grid of numbered parcels. Surveying bureaus in Shanghai, Tianjin, Nanjing, and Guangzhou produced 地籍图 *dìjítú* 'parcel maps' that replaced the descriptive 'ward' or 'lane' with measurable, saleable plots. Each lot could be owned, taxed, mortgaged, or expropriated under new land laws influenced by Western property codes.

This 'cadastral turn' redefined the relationship between land, governance, and citizenship. Under the imperial order, rights and obligations were tied to 户籍 *hùjí* 'household registration' and neighborhood association. Under the new municipal regime, they were tied to property lines and street addresses. The street frontage became a determinant of value, accessibility, and jurisdiction. In this sense, modern Chinese urbanism shifted from a social-territorial to a legal-geometric order (Esherick, 1999).

Republican-era planning integrated cadastral mapping into larger master plans (市区规划 *shìqū guīhuà*), often inspired by Beaux-Arts and Garden City models. Municipal engineers and foreign consultants designed radial and concentric road systems, new boulevards, and zoning codes. The 大上海计划 *Dà Shànghǎi jìhuà* (Greater Shanghai Plan, 1929–37), led by architect Dong Dayou 董大酉 (1899-1973), envisioned a monumental new civic center, surrounded by wide roads and green belts—directly influenced by European planning ideals.

Although interrupted by war, such plans marked the rise of municipal technocracy: a belief that spatial order could generate moral and economic progress. Urban governance shifted from policing precincts to managing flows—of traffic, water, electricity, and capital. The street grid became both technical infrastructure and instrument of visibility, rendering the city legible to administrators and investors alike. This street-based, cadastral logic redefined citizenship and control. On one hand, it empowered new urban subjects—property owners, taxpayers, and municipal voters—whose participation in city politics depended on legal address and property registration. On the other hand, it enabled state surveillance and regulation through standardized addresses, police patrol routes, and zoning enforcement.

The replacement of the 街道主任 *jiēdào zhǔrèn* 'neighborhood headman' by the 城管 *chéngguǎn* 'municipal inspector' (short for 城市管理行政执法人员 *chéngshì guǎnlǐ xíngzhèng zhífǎ rényuán*, 'urban management enforcement officer') epitomized this transition: governance became less personal, more bureaucratic; space became abstract and quantifiable. As historian Yeh Wen-hsin (1990) observes, the modern Shanghai municipality translated sovereignty into urban management.

Despite their different origins, colonial concessions and Republican municipalities converged in their spatial logic. Both relied on surveying, mapping, and infrastructure to produce governable urban space. Both privileged street-based property access over traditional precinct organization. And both viewed the city through the lens of efficiency, circulation, and hygiene, echoing global modernist paradigms.

Yet the Chinese adoption of these techniques was not mere imitation. Local planners blended Western instruments with indigenous spatial traditions—里弄 *lǐlòng* housing, courtyard typologies, and market-street continuity—to create a hybrid modernity. The result was a syncretic city, neither fully colonial nor fully traditional, but a new urban organism whose DNA mixed cadastral rationality with vernacular texture.

By the late 1930s, the treaty-port grid and the municipal street plan had fused into a single metropolitan fabric. When the People's Republic later embarked on socialist reconstruction, it inherited a spatial skeleton shaped by this dual legacy: Western surveying, Chinese adaptability, and the enduring primacy of the street as both infrastructural and social space.

### 6.1.3 The urban territorial divisions after the foundation of the PRC

The founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 marked not only a political revolution but also a spatial one. The Communist state inherited cities deeply marked by

colonial fragmentation and capitalist property regimes, yet it sought to rebuild them as territorial embodiments of socialist governance and production. Between the 1950s and 1960s, China's urban form was reorganized through a profound transformation of its territorial divisions (城市行政区划 *chéngshì xíngzhèng qūhuà* 'urban administrative divisions'), neighborhood structures, and production–residence relations. Urban space became a political instrument: re-divided, planned, and managed to reflect Marxist-Leninist principles of centralization, egalitarianism, and industrial cont rol. These decades produced the 单位制 *dānwèizhì*, the 街道 *jiēdào*–社区 *shèqū* framework, and a bureaucratic hierarchy that continues to underpin Chinese urban governance today.

In 1949, Chinese cities were heterogeneous and fragmented. Concession zones, colonial grids, and capitalist suburbs coexisted with older 街巷 *jiēxiàng* neighborhoods and traditional marketplaces. Property ownership was dispersed among landlords, corporations, and municipal governments. The new Communist government, guided by Soviet planning models and Leninist territorial management, viewed this patchwork as both a technical problem and a class issue. Cities were to be remade as spaces of production, not consumption; of collective identity, not private property. Thus, early PRC urban policy focused on territorial unification and administrative simplification: merging former foreign concessions, abolishing municipal councils, and standardizing administrative hierarchies under direct party leadership.

The 1950s saw the establishment of a national standard for urban administrative division, codified in the *Regulations on Urban-Rural Classification Standards* (1955) and refined through the First Five-Year Plan (1953–1957). Urban China was organized into a three-tier territorial hierarchy: 市 *shì* 'city', the main unit of municipal government, under the provincial or directly central level; 区 *qū* 'district', the administrative subdivisions of the city, responsible for economic management, housing, and policing and 街道 *jiēdào* 'subdistrict', the lowest urban administrative unit, tasked with day-to-day governance, welfare, and social control. This structure replaced older neighborhood associations, guild systems, and colonial ward divisions, creating a uniform bureaucratic grid across all cities.

The 街道办事处 *jiēdào bànshìchù* '街道 *jiēdào* office', established nationwide by the mid-1950s, became the core of grassroots urban governance. It coordinated 居民委员会 *jūmín wěiyuánhuì* 'neighborhood committees', usually shortened in 居委会 *jūwěihuì*, voluntary but Party-supervised organizations responsible for hygiene, security, rationing, and ideological education. The 街道 *jiēdào*–居委会 *jūwěihuì* nexus embodied the socialist ideal of mass participation under Party leadership (Bray, 2005). The "street" thus ceased to be a purely

morphological or commercial entity and became a governance unit, integrating administrative, social, and political functions.

If the 街道 *jiēdào* represented the administrative face of socialist urbanism, the 单位 *dānwèi* lit. 'unit' represented its territorial heart. The 单位 *dānwèi* was the work unit (factory, bureau, or institution) that combined production, housing, and welfare within a bounded spatial domain. Each 单位 *dānwèi* functioned as a self-contained enclave: residential dormitories, canteens, clinics, schools, and recreational facilities surrounded the core production site. These compounds often occupied entire city blocks, enclosed by walls and gates, reproducing a cellular morphology reminiscent of the old 里坊 *lǐfāng* city but with a new socialist rationale.

The 单位 *dānwèi* landscape created a 'cellular city': thousands of semi-autonomous units linked through Party and industrial hierarchies rather than open markets or streets. The public realm was minimized; circulation occurred mainly within and between 单位 *dānwèi* compounds through controlled corridors. Each 单位 *dānwèi* exercised quasi-municipal authority over its members—distributing housing, food, healthcare, and education—thus territorializing the work–life nexus. In this sense, the 单位 *dānwèi* was both economic institution and spatial governance device, ensuring political supervision through physical proximity. This structure fragmented urban society along occupational lines but unified it ideologically under the Party-state. The result was a dual urban system: administrative 街道 *jiēdào* districts overlaid by functional 单位 *dānwèi* territories.

The 1950s–60s witnessed the importation of Soviet urban planning principles, particularly through the 1956–1957 Planning Training Program and the establishment of the Beijing Institute of Urban Construction. Following Soviet precedents, Chinese planners applied a functional zoning scheme dividing cities into 工业区 *gōngyèqū* 'industrial zones' near transport infrastructure; 居住区 *jūzhùqū* 'residential zones' near workplaces; 行政文化中心 *xíngzhèng wénhuà zhōngxīn* 'administrative and cultural centers' and 绿带 *lǜdài* 'greenbelts'. This model was formalized in the *Urban Construction General Plan* (1959), emphasizing rational land use, proximity between home and work, and collective facilities. The plan's goal was not urban beauty but industrial productivity and social control.

Cities were further subdivided into 居住组团 *jūzhù zǔtuán* 'residential groups', each containing 3,000–5,000 residents, echoing Soviet microdistricts (микрорайон *mikrorayon*). These groups formed the planning basis for housing and services—schools, shops, and clinics—integrated into the 单位 *dānwèi* system. The scalar logic 城市 *chéngshì* 'city' → 区 *qū* 'district' → 街道 *jiēdào* 'subdistrict' → 单位 *dānwèi* 'work unit' → 居住组团 *jūzhù zǔtuán*

'residential cluster' produced a nested hierarchy of socialist territoriality, balancing centralization with local embeddedness.

Spatial division after 1949 was never neutral. It was conceived as part of 群众路线治理 *qúnzhòng lùxiàn zhìlǐ* 'mass-line governance' a Maoist principle of connecting the Party with the people through dense territorial organization: neighborhood committees mobilized residents for campaigns (hygiene drives, ration distribution, and political study); work units mobilized workers for ideological campaigns and production quotas; streets became sites of both administration and surveillance, the spatial infrastructure of mass politics.

During the 1950s anti-rightist movement and the 1966–76 Cultural Revolution, these territorial units became instruments of mobilization and control. The 街道 *jiēdào* and 单位 *dānwèi* networks enabled capillary political penetration, the grid through which Maoist mass campaigns were executed at the neighborhood level.

The early 1960s brought economic hardship after the Great Leap Forward (1958–61). Many large-scale urban projects were halted, and local governments adopted pragmatic approaches to territorial management. The 城市人民公社 *chéngshì rénmín gōngshè* urban people's communes' experiment briefly sought to merge 单位 *dānwèi*, 街道 *jiēdào*, and administrative districts into comprehensive socio-political units, but this proved unworkable. Nevertheless, the 1960s reinforced the collectivization of space: urban land remained state-owned; private property was abolished; and every resident belonged to an identifiable unit, either a 单位 *dānwèi* or a 街道 *jiēdào*. By the end of the decade, the socialist city had become completely territorialized, its population mapped, registered, and governed through overlapping administrative and institutional grids.

Table 6.1 The main characters of the "neighborhood

| | FIRST ATTESTATION | USE CONTEXT | DIFFUSION IN MODERN CHINESE | COMPOUND PRODUCTIVITY | MAIN COMPOUNDS | ETYMOLOGY |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 区(區) *qū* | Shang–Zhou (bounded territory, division) | Administrative / jurisdictional | Very high (core governance unit) | High | 小区 *xiǎoqū*, 街区 *jiēqū*, 社区 *shèqū* |  |
| 坊 *fāng* | Warring States (enclosed ward, urban unit) | Historical → relational / vernacular | Low–medium (residual, social) | Low | 街坊 *jiēfāng* |  |
| 里 *lǐ* | Zhou–Han (unit of settlement, inner space) | Relational / proximity-based | Medium (everyday relational scale) | Low–medium | 邻里 *línlǐ* |  |
| 邻 *lín* | Han (neighbor, adjacent relation) | Social / relational | Medium (non-administrative) | Very low | — |  |

## 6.2 The main terms of the 'neighborhood'

### 6.2.1 区 *qū* and its compound

**区 *qū*: boundaries, jurisdiction, and the production of urban space**

The contemporary Chinese concept of the 区 *qū*, today typically rendered as 'urban district' is the consequence of an extraordinarily complex historical, administrative, and conceptual evolution. Although the character 区/區 *qū* originates in the Shang and Zhou periods with meanings related to enclosure, containment, and internal subdivision, the modern district is not a survival of ancient practice but a thoroughly modern institution. In the twenty-first century, the district has become the fundamental scale at which urban governance is enacted, urban boundaries are defined, urban space is produced, and urban society is managed.

The character itself is ancient. Bronze inscriptions from the late Western Zhou provide early variants of the traditional 區 *qū*, composed of an enclosing 匚 *xì* component surrounding multiple internal elements representing 'mouths' or 'items.' In the *Shuowen Jiezi*, where the character is explained as 'to hide' or 'contain,' it reflects a conceptual logic of enclosure rather than of territorial administration. Yet this ancient etymology offers an unexpected conceptual insight into the modern district: even today, the 区 *qū* functions as a spatial container, an administrative vessel within which people, institutions, and regulations are aggregated and governed. However, for most of imperial history, the district did not exist as a formal administrative unit. Instead, territorial governance centered on 县 *xiàn* 'counties', 郡 *jùn* 'commandaries', 州 *zhōu* 'prefectures', 道 *dào* 'circuits', 路 *lù* 'Song-era provinces', and later 府 *fǔ* 'prefectures'. This system, extensively documented in the works of Tan Qixiang 谭其骧 (Tan, 1982–1988) and the multi-volume General history of Chinese administrative divisions (Zhou, 2007-2016), did not include the 区 *qū* as a bureaucratic level. Instead, it remained a lexical term for 'region', 'part', or 'division', not an institutional entity.

The transformation occurred in the twentieth century, under the combined influences of foreign models of municipal governance, state modernization, infrastructural expansion, and population mobility. The Qing reforms after 1901 and the Republican municipal experiments of the 1920s–1930s introduced the first urban "districts," inspired partly by Japanese ward systems and partly by Western municipalism. The People's Republic of China, founded in 1949, institutionalized the district on a national scale and endowed it with political authority, administrative functions, and spatial jurisdiction.

From that point forward, the 区 *qū* became a central component of the Chinese urban administrative hierarchy, situated directly beneath the municipal government and above the subdistrict offices (街道 *jiēdào*). Its responsibilities include planning implementation, public service provision, land management, infrastructure coordination, school district administration, environmental enforcement, economic development, and increasingly, digital governance. In the language of modern governance theory, the 区 *qū* is the primary operational arm of the municipal state.

The Chinese city, especially the 地级市 *dìjíshì* 'prefecture-level city', is an administrative entity, a political-jurisdictional object constructed through state decisions rather than demographic thresholds. The administrative boundary of a prefecture-level city often spans thousands of square kilometers, typically encompassing not only dense urban cores but also farmland, forests, rivers, villages, mountains, and sometimes entire counties whose built form remains overwhelmingly rural. Within this vast territorial container, the 区 *qū*—not the 县 *xiàn*—defines the actual urban portion of the city. The districts are the spaces of high-density 生活圈 *shēnghuó quān* 'living circles', intensive infrastructure, multi-modal transportation, administrative concentration, and governance complexity. This is why, in statistical yearbooks, "urban population" is usually defined in reference to 市辖区人口 *shìxiáqū rénkǒu* 'population living in districts under the municipality jurisdiction'. Thus, in contemporary China, to become a district is to become urban.

This logic has profound implications for understanding city boundaries. When a county is converted into a district through the administrative reform known as 撤县设区 *chè xiàn shè qū* 'to abolish a county and establish an urban district', the population, land, and institutions of that county are reclassified from rural to urban jurisdiction. This process can occur even when much of the area remains rural in form (administrative designation precedes morphological transformation). The conversion alters governance structures, planning authority, 户口 *hùkǒu* administration, land requisition procedures, fiscal transfers, and statistical classification. In other words, the district creates the city by defining what parts of territory are subjected to the municipal system of urban governance. These boundary modifications reflect the state's evolving conception of urban space and its priorities for urban development, functioning as an architectural scaffold upon which the city grows. In contrast to cities in many other countries—where municipal boundaries are often stable for decades—Chinese cities continually adjust their internal districts to accommodate shifting planning strategies, economic priorities, and

metropolitan integration. This distinguishes the Chinese district from the ward systems of Japan (区 *ku*) and Korea (구 *gu*), or Western municipal models. The East Asian ward is usually a relatively static electoral or sub-municipal unit. In contrast, the Chinese 区 *qū* is an instrumentalized administrative technology, intentionally engineered to facilitate land development, social governance, and state capacity.

In China's planning system, the district occupies a crucial position between the 城市总体规划 *chéngshì zǒngtǐ guīhuà* 'city master plan' and the subdistrict-level community plans. The 控制性详细规划 *kòngzhìxìng xiángxì guīhuà* 'regulatory detailed plan', the most powerful legal instrument for urban land use, is almost always implemented at the district level. District planning bureaus allocate land parcels, assign zoning categories, determine building heights, authorize development intensities, and coordinate major public facilities.

Moreover, because the Chinese land system distinguishes sharply between 城镇国有土地 *chéngzhèn guóyǒu tǔdì* 'state-owned urban land' and 农村集体土地 *nóngcūn jítǐ tǔdì* 'collectively owned rural land', the conversion of a county into a district triggers a significant shift in land governance. State-owned urban land refers to land located within cities and towns that is owned by the state according to law. Its use rights may be obtained by organizations or individuals through transfer, allocation, leasing, or other legally defined methods. Rural collectively owned land refers to land owned by rural collective economic organizations according to law, including farmland, homestead plots, forest land, pastureland, and other rural land categories. Its use rights belong to collective members, and the land's intended use cannot be changed without legal approval. District status enables the municipal government to requisition rural land as state-owned land, thereby enabling urban construction. This establishes the district as a mechanism for orchestrating large-scale land transformation.

District-level governments also negotiate with developers, enforce building codes, manage transportation corridors, conduct environmental assessments, and coordinate with police, education, healthcare, and emergency services. Thus, the 区 *qū* emerges as the scale at which urban planning becomes urban government.

If planning law situates the district as the key operational scale of land governance, then population management situates the district as the core of China's system of socio-territorial classification. Since the 1950s, the 户口 *hùkǒu* 'household registration' system has divided China's population into agricultural and non-agricultural categories, and even after major reforms in the 2010s the distribution of rights and services remains anchored in district jurisdiction. A resident's access to education, healthcare, subsidized housing, social security,

employment services, and various welfare programs often depends on the location of district registration rather than citywide entitlement. Even when cities adopt points-based resident permit systems, the thresholds and benefits are frequently calibrated by district-level authorities.

Thus, the district functions as a filter through which urban citizenship is conferred or restricted. As Dorothy Solinger has emphasized, contemporary Chinese cities remain spatially stratified by institutional mechanisms that assign different degrees of belonging to different populations. This stratification becomes geographically materialized when district governments designate school districts, medical catchment areas, and neighborhood management zones (社区 *shèqū*). In effect, each district becomes a micro-polity within the city, with its own demographic composition, welfare regime, and socio-economic profile (Solinger, 1999).

This socio-political function has spatial consequences. Districts with stronger fiscal capacity and higher levels of urbanization provide more comprehensive public services, while newly converted districts—especially those created through county-to-district reforms—often face transitional challenges, including inadequate infrastructure and mismatches between rural institutions and urban governance requirements (Wu and Zhang, 2025). In these cases, the designation of district status precedes the formation of urban morphology; that is, the administrative city expands faster than the material city (Wu, 2015).

This sequencing is a distinctive feature of Chinese urbanization: administrative reclassification often initiates urbanization, rather than simply reflecting it. Because the Chinese city is jurisdictionally defined, modifications to district boundaries routinely redefine the city's extent. municipal boundaries expand when peripheral counties are converted into districts, merged into existing districts, or subdivided to form new districts more closely aligned with urban development patterns (Xie, 2009). These processes have reshaped the political geography of dozens of major Chinese cities since the 1990s.

A particularly illustrative case is Beijing. The capital's administrative territory covers over 16,000 square kilometers, but urbanization is concentrated in an inner ring of districts—东城 *Dōngchéng*, 西城 *Xīchéng*, 朝阳 *Cháoyáng*, 海淀 *Hǎidiàn*, 丰台 *Fēngtái*—and in a second ring of districts that were formerly counties: 通州 *Tōngzhōu*, 昌平 *Chāngpíng*, 顺义 *Shùnyì*, 房山 *Fángshān*, 门头沟 *Méntóugōu*, 大兴 *Dàxīng*, 平谷 *Pínggǔ*, 怀柔 *Huáiróu*, 密云 *Mìyún*, 延庆 *Yánqìng*. Many of these peripheral jurisdictions remained rural for decades after being incorporated into Beijing's administrative map, but their district status created the institutional conditions for later urban expansion.

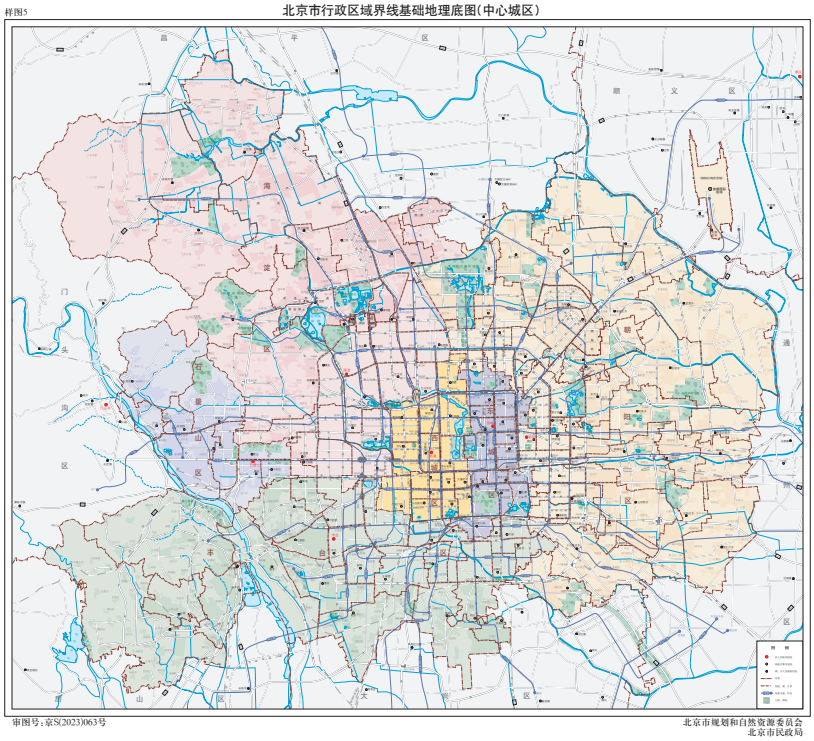



Figure 6.1 Beijing inner ring of districts
https://mzj.beijing.gov.cn/attach/0/d59a90f352b14a8ea5ee97b4735eb420.pdf.

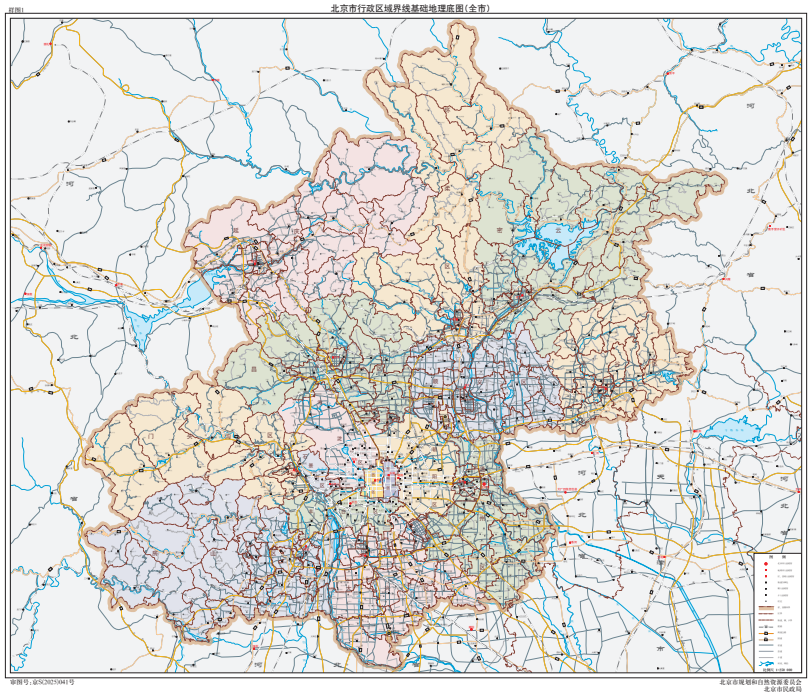



Figure 6.2 Beijing Municipality
https://mzj.beijing.gov.cn/attach/0/175f600e821245afa49982c3624257a2.pdf.

For example, the designation of Tongzhou as the 城市副中心 *chéngshì fù zhōngxīn* 'city sub-center' of Beijing is inseparable from its status as a district directly under the municipality. Without this institutional position, the large-scale infrastructural reallocations—metro extensions, government building relocations, housing projects—would not be technically possible.

Shanghai offers another revealing example. The city's present district structure reflects both historical legacies and contemporary state strategies. The establishment of 浦东新区 *Pǔdōng Xīnqū* in 1992 required the extraction and consolidation of land from several pre-existing districts to form a unified governance unit for financial, trade, and technological development. By granting Pudong district-level authority, the central and municipal governments ensured that the territory could be planned, developed, and regulated as a coherent platform for reform and opening. Similarly, Shanghai's recent merging of 静安区 *Jìng'ān Qū* and 闸北区 *Zháběi Qū* illustrates how district consolidation can reflect governance rationalization and urban integration goals.

Nowhere is this production more dramatic than in the city of Shenzhen. Originally consisting of only three municipal districts—罗湖区 *Luóhú Qū*; 福田区 *Fútián Qū*; 南山区 *Nánshān Qū*—the city incorporated the counties of 宝安区 *Bǎo'ān Qū* and 龙岗区 *Lónggǎng Qū* in the 1990s, turning them into districts and constructing vast new urban areas on what had been agricultural land. Subsequently, both Bao'an and Longgang were subdivided to create new districts (龙华区 *Lónghuá Qū*, 光明区 *Guāngmíng Qū*, 坪山区 *Píngshān Qū*, 大鹏新区 *Dàpéng Xīnqū*). Each new district was assigned a distinct developmental mandate, such as high-tech innovation, ecological preservation, advanced manufacturing, or administrative decentralization. The district, in Shenzhen's case, is not merely a governance unit but a planning instrument, a developmental platform, and a symbolic articulation of state intentions. The result is a dynamic district structure that encodes the city's economic strategy: Nanshan for high technology (centered around Tencent and Shenzhen University), Futian for finance and governance, Luohu for commerce and border trade, Longgang and Bao'an for manufacturing and logistics, Dapeng for ecology and tourism, and Pingshan and Guangming for emerging industries. District boundaries in Shenzhen are thus developmental instruments; they are not fixed containers but adaptive frameworks for spatializing growth.

In governance theory, the state deploys administrative scales to articulate authority and implement policy. The Chinese 区 *qū* is a paradigmatic example of a scalar device—an institution that transforms abstract state objectives into spatially differentiated governance

practices. Municipal governments rely on their districts to carry out social management, environmental monitoring, education administration, policing, local fiscal management, and the coordination of street-level institutions such as residents' committees (居民委员会 *Jūmín Wěiyuánhuì*).

The 区 *qū* thus functions as the intermediary scale that enables the 'seeing like a state' effect described by James Scott, wherein the state simplifies and standardizes complex local realities in order to administer them (Scott, 1998). The district provides the municipal state with a manageable spatial container in which to implement regulatory controls, produce statistical knowledge, and coordinate infrastructural systems. This managerial role is especially important because Chinese municipal governments often govern territories far larger—and more diverse—than typical cities elsewhere in the world. Districts offer a way to govern these heterogeneous territories by subdividing them into spatial units aligned with developmental, demographic, and infrastructural conditions.

Moreover, district governments hold significant political authority. District party secretaries and district mayors are key figures in municipal politics, often rising to citywide or provincial leadership. The district level is thus an important arena for cadre evaluation, political experimentation, and administrative innovation. This political significance underscores the structural position of the 区 *qū* as both an administrative unit and a political node within China's multi-level governance hierarchy.

One cannot understand the contemporary district without acknowledging the central role of 土地财政 *tǔdì cáizhèng* 'land finance' in Chinese urban governance. Because municipal governments rely heavily on land conveyance fees for revenue, the conversion of rural land into urban construction land is a critical component of fiscal capacity. District governments play a direct role in this conversion. When a county becomes a district, its rural land becomes subject to municipal requisition and redistribution mechanisms, enabling large-scale development.

The district's planning bureau coordinates land-use changes; its finance bureau manages revenue-sharing between district and municipal government; and its construction bureau supervises infrastructure delivery (Lin, 2009). This machinery of land conversion provides municipal governments with both revenue and leverage in shaping district development trajectories.

Because different districts vary dramatically in land reserves, location, and desirability, land finance reinforces spatial inequality between districts. Districts rich in valuable land—coastal areas, central business districts, high-tech parks—can generate substantial revenues,

while peripheral districts struggle to finance public services. This fiscal-geographic differentiation creates divergent urban experiences across districts and fuels competition for development projects, industrial zones, and infrastructure investment.

The result is a multi-scalar fiscal geography: municipal governments seek to balance district disparities, while district governments seek to enhance their own fiscal bases. The 区 *qū* thus becomes a competitive actor in the broader urban-regional economy.

Beyond administration and economics, districts have become important sites of urban identity formation. In large cities such as Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou, and Chengdu, residents often identify strongly with their district. District names evoke distinct socio-cultural atmospheres: 海淀 *Hǎidiàn* in Beijing evokes universities, tech firms, and academic prestige; 朝阳 *Cháoyáng* evokes embassies, cosmopolitanism, and modern finance; 徐汇 *Xúhuì* in Shanghai evokes historic villas and cultural institutions; 成华 *Chénghuá* in Chengdu evokes working-class neighborhoods and a traditional food scene.

District branding is now a central part of municipal and district government strategy. Districts compete to attract talent, investment, universities, and headquarters. District-level propaganda departments produce promotional videos, social media campaigns, and cultural events. Urban planners explicitly mobilize district identities to shape urban form and land use—for example, the designation of "creative districts," "historic districts," and "innovation districts."

District identity also shapes social life. The 学区 *xuéqū* 'school districts' follow district boundaries, influencing housing markets and migration patterns within cities. Neighborhood identities (街区认同 *jiēqū rèntóng*) are often nested within broader district identities, with residents perceiving themselves as belonging simultaneously to a community and to a district. This sense of identity refers to the emotional, cognitive, and social attachment residents develop toward their immediate neighborhood environment. In Chinese urban sociology, the term captures how local historical memory, social networks, everyday practices, and built form together produce a sense of belonging at the neighborhood scale. Unlike administrative identity—tied to formal units such as districts (区 *qū*) or subdistricts (街道 *jiēdào*)—街区认同 *jiēqū rèntóng* emerges from lived experience and is shaped by the material qualities of the neighborhood, including housing typologies, public spaces, street patterns, and commercial life. In rapidly urbanizing Chinese cities, strong neighborhood identity can act as a stabilizing force, fostering social cohesion amid demographic turnover and redevelopment pressures. At the same time, uneven urban renewal, gentrification, and the expansion of gated communities can

fragment or weaken existing neighborhood identities, generating tensions between historical communities and state-led modernization agendas. As such, 街区认同 *jiēqū rèntóng* has become an important conceptual tool for understanding how residents negotiate place-based belonging within the broader framework of district-level governance and metropolitan transformation. Districts therefore function not only as administrative instruments but as cultural geographies—spatial containers of memory, lifestyle, aspiration, and social difference.

### 社区 *shèqū*: the neighborhood as 'community'

In contemporary China, few terms circulate as widely and yet remain as conceptually misunderstood outside their native linguistic environment as 社区 *shèqū*. The seemingly simple translation of 社区 *shèqū* into the English word 'community' obscures profound differences in historical lineage, semantic architecture, spatial embodiment, and institutional function.

The emergence of the term 社区 *shèqū* in Chinese can be traced to the early 1930s, a period when Chinese sociology was actively engaging with Western social science and searching for terminological equivalents capable of expressing new analytical categories. Before 社区 *shèqū* came into use, early Republican sociologists commonly translated community as 地方社会 *difang shèhuì* 'local society' or 聚落社会 *jùluò shèhuì* 'settlement society', reflecting attempts to capture the spatial and social dimensions of local organization. However, these translations remained semantically cumbersome, and, as Fei Xiaotong 费孝通 later recalled, they failed to convey the conceptual subtlety of the Western idea of community (Fei, 1948). It was within the 燕京大学社会学系 *Yānjīng Dàxué Shèhuìxué Xì* (School of Sociology of the Yenching University), under the leadership of scholars such as Wu Wenzao 吴文藻, that systematic efforts were made to refine sociological vocabulary (Wu, 1935; Wu, 1935[2]). During this process, Fei and his colleagues began to use 社区 *shèqū* as a more concise and flexible translation, capable of denoting both a territorially bounded social unit and a field of sociological inquiry. Fei's retrospective account describes how the term gradually replaced earlier formulations and, by the late 1930s, had become the preferred rendering in sociological publications and field reports.

Recent conceptual histories confirm this trajectory. Chen Xinxiang (2025) demonstrates that 社区 *shèqū* first appeared in the 1930s as part of a broader project of indigenizing Western concepts, emerging precisely at the intersection of linguistic innovation and the institutional consolidation of modern Chinese sociology. Li Xiaozhuang's genealogy of 社区研究 *shèqū yánjiū* 'community studies' (2023: 60-74) further shows that the term gained theoretical traction

because it provided Chinese scholars with a compact way to discuss local society during a period of intense social transformation. He and Chen (2022: 14-17) argue that the adoption of 社区 *shèqū* also reflects a shift in methodological priorities: from the earlier model of 社会调查 *shèhuì diàochá* 'social survey', heavily descriptive and empiricist, to the more interpretive and theoretically anchored 社区研究 *shèqū yánjiū*, which linked local social structures to broader questions of governance and modernization. By the 1940s, the term had become fully normalized in academic discourse and appeared in journals such as 社会研究 *Shèhuì Yánjiū* (Social Research).

After 1949, although academic sociology was interrupted, the term survived in policy and administrative contexts and later re-entered academic discourse during the reform era. Liu Haitao (2021: 11-18) notes that the adoption of 社区 *shèqū* constitutes one of the earliest and most successful examples of conceptual naturalization in Chinese sociology, demonstrating how a transplanted Western concept was reshaped through local intellectual traditions and, eventually, institutionalized as a foundational category in China's grassroots governance. Thus, the term 社区 *shèqū* not only reflects a moment of linguistic innovation in the 1930s but also marks the beginning of a long conceptual evolution that culminates in its central role within the administrative, sociological, and spatial vocabulary of contemporary urban China.

In contemporary China, 社区 *shèqū* belongs to a conceptual universe grounded in Chinese governance, urban morphology, and everyday sociality, while 'community' in English emerges from a Western intellectual and social history concerned with identity, affect, and voluntary association. To read one through the other is to flatten distinctions that are essential to understanding how cities, and the social worlds they sustain, are imagined and made.

A trans-disciplinary perspective—linguistic, anthropological, sociological, ethnographic, and urban-planning based—is necessary to grasp what 社区 *shèqū* is and does. But even more importantly, it requires an attentiveness to the performative power of language, to the way words shape practice, expectation, and spatial experience. Following the perspective of terminological urbanism, which views urban terms as active operators rather than neutral descriptors, 社区 *shèqū* emerges as a conceptual category that organizes governance, spatial infrastructures, and the everyday moral order of urban life. It is both a sign and a system, both a linguistic artifact and a lived institution. And crucially, it is not equivalent to 'community'.

The term is modern, but its constituent characters evoke layers of older meanings. The character 社 *shè* originally denoted the altar of the earth deity, the sacred site of the territorially rooted social collective. Over centuries, it came to signify a variety of associations, from

agricultural units to administrative groupings. 区 *qu*, by contrast, is overtly spatial: a zone, a sector, a delimited area. Combined, the two characters generate a compound whose semantic gravity leans toward territorialized social organization rather than emotional or identitarian affinity. Already in its morphology, 社区 *shèqū* signals a social-spatial formation grounded in territory, responsibility, and administrative presence.

This makes 社区 *shèqū* very different from the English 'community', a term shaped by Western sociological debates on industrialization, social cohesion, and modernity. When Ferdinand Tönnies (2001) contrasted *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, he set the stage for decades of theorizing about community as the locus of tradition, intimacy, and shared identity. The semantic field of 'community' embraces emotional belonging, voluntary association, and shared interests. But 社区 *shèqū's* semantic field is anchored elsewhere: not in affinity but in organized locality, not in identity but in governance.

The gap widens further when one considers the historical trajectory through which 社区 *shèqū* rose to prominence in post-reform China. In the socialist period, everyday life in urban China was organized through the 单位 *dānwèi* system, a comprehensive institutional structure that provided housing, employment, welfare, and identity. As Bray describes, the 单位 *dānwèi* was not merely a workplace but a "total social institution" (Bray, 2005: 41), structuring social relations and spatial belonging. When economic reforms eroded the 单位 *dānwèi* system's centrality, Chinese cities faced an urgent challenge: how to reorganize grassroots governance in an era of marketized housing, labor mobility, and growing social differentiation. It was at this historical juncture that the term 社区 *shèqū* was institutionalized. No longer a minor academic borrowing, it became the primary unit of urban governance, tasked with reorganizing social services, coordinating welfare distribution, mediating disputes, and embodying the state at the most immediate spatial scale. As Read and Pekkanen (2009: 65) note, community workers became the "street-level bureaucrats" of the post-单位 *dānwèi* order, mediating between macro-level policy and the fine-grained realities of everyday life.

This anthropological shift gave new experiential depth to the word 社区 *shèqū*. Older residents, shaped by the paternalistic care of the 单位 *dānwèi* era, frequently approached the community office as a place of assistance, expecting both bureaucratic support and emotional reassurance. Younger residents, more mobile and more individualistic, often engaged with the 社区 *shèqū* only when necessary, renewing documents, accessing public services, or settling disputes. Migrants, depending on local policy and 户口 *hùkǒu* regulations, occupied more ambiguous positions, sometimes integrated into community life, often positioned at its margins.

Zhang describes how migrants in Beijing "live within the community but not of it," their presence visible yet their belonging circumscribed (Zhang, 2020: 103).

Such ethnographic complexity reveals that 社区 *shèqū* is experienced not as a bounded social unit but as a landscape of differentiated belonging, shaped by institutional histories and personal expectations. The term itself participates in shaping these experiences: it evokes a space where responsibility is shared yet structured, where governance is intimate, and where everyday moral order is negotiated through both formal rules and informal norms.

Yet the sociological dimension of 社区 *shèqū* adds another layer of meaning. As the lowest administrative unit under the subdistrict office, it has a clearly defined institutional architecture. It is a bureaucratic entity with a physical office, salaried staff, defined territorial boundaries, a set of formal responsibilities, performance indicators, reporting obligations.

This institutional life is inseparable from the physical space of the 社区服务中心 *shèqū fúwù zhōngxīn* '社区 *shèqū* service center', which is typically located in a highly accessible part of the neighborhood: near the entrance of a residential compound, on a small commercial street, or on the ground floor of a mixed-use building. The building's layout is itself a spatial expression of governance: bulletin boards announcing policy, windows for administrative services, mediation rooms, elderly activity spaces, digital control rooms with surveillance monitors, and makeshift cultural areas. This is not a 'community center' in the Western sense, an optional public facility dedicated to civic engagement or leisure. It is the everyday embodiment of the state. It draws residents in not because they identify with one another but because it is the place where the practicalities of daily life in urban China are processed.

The spatiality of 社区 *shèqū* extends beyond the office. The development of 网格化管理 *wǎnggéhuà guǎnlǐ* 'grid-based governance' transforms community territory into a mosaic of micro-zones, each monitored by a grid worker. These workers are assigned not only administrative tasks but spatial responsibilities: checking stairwells for safety hazards, visiting elderly residents living alone, ensuring compliance with new public health directives, cataloging micro-infrastructural defects. The physical landscape of the 社区 *shèqū*—its apartment buildings, alleyways, courtyards, small parks—becomes an operational field of governance, where territory is tracked, cared for, and regulated.

Here, the term 社区 *shèqū* reveals its territorial logic. While 'community' may evoke shared identity, 社区 *shèqū* encodes a spatially distributed system of governance rooted in physical infrastructures. In many neighborhoods, one can walk the actual borders of the 社区

*shèqū*, passing from one jurisdictional unit to another. The boundaries are not symbolic; they have operational consequences.

At the same time, everyday life in the 社区 *shèqū* produces its own rhythms and sociabilities. In the evenings, groups of women gather to dance in public squares; elderly men arrange folding chairs into impromptu chess tournaments; schoolchildren chase each other under trees; vendors assemble informal markets in the gaps between buildings; neighbors argue about noise, sanitation, or parking; disputes arise over the placement of e-scooters or the use of community gardens. In these scenes, the community office and its staff hover in the background, sometimes stepping in to mediate conflicts, sometimes allowing informal order to take its course.

These small dramas of everyday life are central to understanding how the community functions as a moral world. As Fong (2022, p. 240) describes, residents evaluate one another through the lens of "good citizenship," constructing moral hierarchies based on expected community behavior. These ethical evaluations are part of the grammar of the 社区 *shèqū*: the term invites residents to imagine themselves as part of a collective governed not only by rules but by shared expectations of civility, responsibility, and propriety.

Urban planners, meanwhile, use 社区 *shèqū* as a foundational unit for distributing resources and designing public services. Policies such as the 十五分钟生活圈 *shíwǔ fēnzhōng shēnghuó quān* '15-minute living circle' rely on community boundaries to define service radii for healthcare, education, elderly care, cultural facilities, and green space. Planners imagine the 社区 *shèqū* as a micro-city within the city, capable of meeting residents' daily needs within a short walk. In contemporary Chinese planning and governance discourse, it is often conceived not simply as a residential area or social community, but as a comprehensive or integrated service platform through which welfare provision, grassroots governance, and everyday public services are organized, not merely a residential area (14th Five-Year Plan for the Urban and Rural Community Service System, 2021). This planning logic is deeply spatial but also profoundly conceptual: it treats the community as a unit of everyday life that must be thickened with infrastructure to reduce inequality and enhance urban livability.

The physical spaces that constitute a Chinese 社区 *shèqū* differ strikingly from those associated with "communities" in Western contexts. A 社区 *shèqū* may include multiple gated residential compounds (小区 *xiǎoqū*), informal alleys, commercial strips, public squares, and hybrid spaces where the line between public and private is constantly renegotiated. The community office may be flanked by a small clinic, a seniors' activity room, a service station

for disability support, and a modest library. None of these facilities are optional; they are designed into the structure of governance itself. They represent a materialization of responsibilities, turning abstract policy mandates into specific rooms, desks, screens, and human interactions. These differences matter. They illustrate how the Chinese city is conceptualized through a vocabulary that cannot simply be mapped onto Western categories. 社区 *shèqū* is not a community in the Western sense; it is a governed locality, a spatialized institution, and a lived world in which governance and everyday life are inseparable.

From the perspective of terminological urbanism, this non-equivalence is not an accidental translation problem but a structural feature of how language shapes urban reality. The term 社区 *shèqū* organizes expectations, behaviors, and spatial practices. It tells residents what they can expect from local authorities, how they should behave in shared spaces, where to go for help, and how to understand their own belonging. It tells planners how to distribute resources and policymakers how to structure governance. The word itself is part of the infrastructure of the city. In this sense, 社区 *shèqū* is a linguistic-institutional phenomenon: a word whose semantic history intersects with administrative reforms, a concept whose institutional life permeates everyday urban experience, and a spatial form whose physical infrastructures anchor the presence of the state in everyday life. It organizes moral expectations, shapes affective worlds, and structures social interactions. It is not reducible to its administrative definition, nor to its sociological significance, nor to the lived practices that unfold within its spaces. It is all of these at once—and more importantly, it is a window into a broader epistemology of urban life in contemporary China.

Seen through this lens, 社区 *shèqū* becomes emblematic of a broader phenomenon: the way language, governance, and everyday life co-produce the conceptual foundations of urban modernity. The term reveals how urban China is structured not only by buildings and policies but by words—words that define categories, shape spatial orders, and embed governance into the mundane rhythms of life.

### The hierarchical triad: 街区 *jiēqū*, 小区 *xiǎoqū*, 居住组团 *jūzhù zǔtuán*

In modern Chinese urban planning, a common hierarchical triad is used to organize residential space: 街区 *jiēqū* 'block' → 小区 *xiǎoqū* 'neighborhood' → 居住组团 *jūzhù zǔtuán* 'residential cluster'. Each scale carries different functional and regulatory logics: the street network and land-parcel geometry at the 街区 *jiēqū* level; the estate or development parcel at the 小区 *xiǎoqū* level; and the walkable daily-life cell at the 组团 *zǔtuán* level. At the

same time, these scales interact with older traditions of enclosure (e.g., gated compounds) and newer rolls of cadastral mapping and parcelization.

**街区 *jiēqū*: the (street) block**

Unlike the 组团 *zǔtuán* and 小区 *xiǎoqū*, defined in the *Standard for planning and design of urban residential areas* (2018 – GB 50180-2018), 街区 *jiēqū* 'block' is not rigidly defined in the older standard, because the earlier planning paradigm focused on neighborhood parcels rather than street-block networks. In recent years, however, Chinese planning discourse has embraced the concept of 街区制 *jiēqūzhì* 'block system': the idea that urban fabric should be organized by public streets and rights-of-way (ROWs), creating blocks bounded by streets, enabling finer grain connectivity and walkability, rather than large gated estates with internal roads only.

The street network establishes the external skeleton of urban fabric; blocks are the land parcels bounded by streets, and inside blocks may be one or more 小区 *xiǎoqū*, 组团 *zǔtuán*, or other uses. The block logic emphasizes permeability, connectivity, smaller block sizes, many intersections, and the notion that circulation (vehicular, pedestrian) is public and regular. The morphology thus is shaped by street-grid geometry rather than by large isolated compounds.

While older codes give little for 街区 *jiēqū* per se, newer guidance suggests 窄马路、密路网 *zhǎi mǎlù, mì lùwǎng* 'narrow roads, dense road networks' as part of encouraging block-based layouts. Also, the alignment of parcelization with streets means cadastral boundaries are increasingly co-extensive with blocks.

The 街区 *jiēqū* is the urban skeleton, the connection between macro city planning (major roads, trunk networks) and micro neighborhood layouts. It is also a land-use and zoning unit: blocks delimit plot boundaries, open space and road edges, and define rights of way, communal space, infrastructure frontage.

In urban settings, a 街区 *jiēqū* typically refers to an area bounded by roads and natural elements, serving as the fundamental building block of the city's structure. Its main characteristics are: (1) iCirculation and infrastructure (streets bounding a block are public right-of-way, carrying traffic, utilities, pedestrian movement; the block is carved out by that network); (2) parcelization (within a block, land is subdivided into building parcels, each with frontage, depth, plot ratio, setback, etc.); (3) permeability aim (the block grid encourages internal connectivity—smaller blocks, many intersections, mitigating dead ends, long corridors, and poor legibility); (4) mixed use and interface (blocks are designed to accommodate mixed

functions—residential, commercial, public—with transitions via street frontage); (5) open boundaries (ideally) (in principle, blocks are open and porous—open to public streets and pedestrian access; even where gated, reforms push for streets-internalization or opening internal lanes).

Currently, China lacks precedents for block planning and design guidelines, with limited attention paid to block planning and design in the urban planning field and no consensus yet reached. The matter is made more thorny not only by the application of definitions to the existing urban fabric (modern blocks vary widely depending on urban density, road planning, and land value; in dense Chinese cities, block fronts might edge 100–250 m or less; in modern redevelopment zones, blocks may be much larger), but also by morphological issues, such as the shift from large superblocks (common in mid–20th-century planned housing) toward finer-grain block networks in contemporary redevelopment, or the shift from gated enclaves toward block opening. Many Chinese residential compounds have been gated neighborhoods. Reform efforts seek to retrofit these into block systems, but face legal, social, security, and governance obstacles. Thus, the modern block is both a structural and regulatory ideal—but its implementation in Chinese cities is full of tensions, particularly between enclosure and openness.

Nonetheless, the concept of "block" is central in contemporary urban planning discourse, because the Chinese national and municipal policy has explicitly pushed a shift from superblocks and inward-facing compounds toward small blocks and a fine street grid. In recent years, Chinese planning policy (post-2010s) has emphasized 街区制改革 *jiēqūzhì gǎigé* 'block system reform' to reduce gated compounds, open internal streets, and integrate neighborhoods into more permeable block grids (Chen and Nai, 2016: [n.p.]).

The turning-point document is the *State Council Several Opinions on Further Strengthening Urban Planning, Construction, and Management* (CPC Central Committee; State Council, 2016) which, among other targets, states at the point 6.16:

> Optimize neighborhood (街区 *jiēqū*) road network structures. Strengthen neighborhood (街区 *jiēqū*) planning and construction, establish tiered standards for new neighborhood (街区 *jiēqū*) surface area, and promote the development of open, accessible, appropriately scaled, well-equipped, and harmonious living neighborhoods (街区 *jiēqū*). New residential developments should adopt the block system (街区制 *jiēqūzhì*), and in principle, no new gated residential communities should be built. Existing residential communities and institutional compounds should be gradually opened up, converting internal roads to public use to address traffic network layout issues and promote land conservation. Adopt the urban road layout concept of "narrow streets, dense networks," (窄马路，密路网 *zhǎi mǎlù, mì lùwǎng*) constructing a rational road network system with expressways, main/secondary roads, and feeder roads.

> Connect all types of 断头路 *duàntóulù* 'dead-end roads' to form a complete network and enhance road accessibility. Scientifically and standardly install road traffic safety facilities and traffic management equipment to improve road safety.

In the practice, "block" is not merely descriptive—it's now a lever in street-network performance and neighborhood life, with explicit state targets and strong design consequences. However, as highlighted in the translation, the exact referent of 街区 *jiēqū* is still blurry.

Taiwan commonly uses 街廓 *jiēkuò* as the formal term for block, with the legal definitions: "Land bounded on all sides by planned roads" in urban planning and urban renewal regulations (都市更新條例 *Dūshì Gēngxīn Tiáolì* Urban Renewal Act, 1998). Municipal documents clarify how natural features and permanent open spaces may count as 街廓 *jiēkuò* boundaries when planned roads aren't present.

The *Guidelines for Urban Block Planning and Design in Yunnan Province* (2017) gives one of the earliest definitons of 街区 *jiēqū* under the existing urban road network planning system: (a) it possesses relatively clear boundaries and perimeters, it is preferably enclosed by urban roads (in rare cases, artificial or natural boundaries are permitted), and no internal urban roads crossing through; (b) it functions as a relatively independent functional and spatial unit, ensuring the relative integrity of its plan texture and building functions, and possessing a certain scale.

The typical population served by a city block planning area is 1,000–5,000 people, with a service radius generally set at 300 meters. Its land area is comparable to that of a 居住组团 *jūzhù zǔtuán*. Nevertheless, there is no single national dimension mandated for blocks. Instead, national policy sets network-level targets (density and area ratio) and expects local plans/design guides to fit block sizes to context. The 2016 *Opinions* give the numeric 8 km of streets per km² and 15% road area ratio as near-term benchmarks to raise connectivity and reduce superblocks—using permeability at network scale rather than a one-size block length limit.

The superblock (超大街区 *chāodà jiēqù*) pattern—large, walled, internally serviced plots connected only by widely spaced arterials—spread across Chinese cities during rapid growth for reasons of infrastructure efficiency, parking/storage, security management, and project finance. But as high-density living matured, its limits for walkability, local traffic distribution, and street vitality became stark. Municipal "micro-renewal" and open-up programs create new public links across former compounds, align mid-block passages with transit lines, and re-parcel large 地块 *dìkuài* to match street-bounded 街区 *jiēqū* structures. Policy platforms and

technical papers frame these as 街区尺度 *jiēqū chǐdù* (block scale) interventions—precisely the level at which walking experience, frontage density, and everyday amenities are determined.

It is worth noting that the term 街区 *jiēqū* is not used in the *Standard for urban residential area planning and design* (GB 50180—2018). In the section 2 术语 *Shùyǔ* (Terminology), the article 2.0.5 reports the term 居住街坊 *jūzhù jiēfang*, translatable as 'residential neighborhood', while the official English translation in the same article is 'neighborhood block'. In fact, the term 街坊 *jiēfāng*, today mainly used in colloquial Chinese, is one possible equivalent of 'neighborhood', rather than 'block', lacking a modern urban planning or administrative specificity. Modern blocks are movement—and property-driven cells—very different from the policing-driven 坊 *fāng*—but they share the concept of a legible, bounded neighborhood unit in the urban fabric. One can see modern block doctrine as a descendant—or successor paradigm—to the precinct logic, but refashioned in the language of traffic, parcelization, and infrastructural systems, conceptualizing a historical trajectory in which the ward-type enclosure gradually morphs into the block logic. While the 坊 *fāng* / block parallel is compelling as a heuristic, the differences prevail over the similarities: (1) overemphasis on form over function (purely cartographic comparison—focusing on the boundaries of wards and blocks—risks obscuring their fundamentally different regulatory logics: one rooted in social control, the other in circulation and infrastructure); (2) scale mismatch (ancient 坊 *fāng* operated at a much larger territorial and administrative scale than contemporary blocks, and equating them risks erasing the finer, human-scale dimensions of modern urban life); (3) temporal discontinuities: the ward system evolved, eroded, and in many cities vanished well before modern block logic became dominant—thus there is no pure continuity; (4) cultural/ideational differences (the cosmological logic behind ward grids—imperial, ritual symmetry—has no counterpart in block planning, which is often technocratic, traffic-driven, and market-based); (5) internal openness (modern block logic anticipates street network permeability and public rights-of-way; in contrast, 坊 *fāng* logic prized closure and controlled access).

### 小区 *xiǎoqū*: residential neighborhood / estate

Also in the *Standard for planning and design of urban residential areas* (1993 – GB 50180-93) one finds the 小区 *xiǎoqū* lit. 'smaller administrative division' scale: typical household number 3,000–5,000 or population 10,000–15,000. The smaller neighborhood (estate) is described as: "Bounded by urban roads or natural boundaries and corresponding to a residential

population of 7,000 to 15,000 people, the area is equipped with a set of facilities designed to meet the basic material and cultural needs of its residents".

The 小区 *xiǎoqū* is often a discrete development parcel or estate: in market housing contexts, developers treat it as one gated or managed compound, often fenced or with controlled access. In older planned economy eras, a 小区 *xiǎoqū* might map to a unit compound or neighborhood block with shared services. The design logic for a 小区 *xiǎoqū* involves internal roads (小区路 *xiǎoqū lù*) connecting to the 组团 *zǔtuán* roads and linking to the outer street system; allocation of neighborhood-level facilities such as community centers, primary schools, convenience commerce; internal green space; parking; and peripheral frontage to major streets.

According to GB50180-93, public green land at the 小区 *xiǎoqū* level (including its constituent 组团 *zǔtuán*) must not be less than 1.0 m² per person. For 小区 *xiǎoqū* roads in heating region not less than 14 m. if heating pipelines are present; otherwise not less than 10 m. Road surface width is 6–9 m.

The 小区 *xiǎoqū* is the development parcel: the level at which land is sold, reserved, managed, often by a property management company. It is the scale of management, property rights, community affairs.

Fabienne Wallenwein's dissertation (2013) argues that 小区 *xiǎoqū* should not be treated as a simple synonym for "gated community" or "housing estate," because the Chinese term carries a more specific planning history, institutional logic, and social meaning. Her core claim is that 小区 *xiǎoqū* became the dominant urban residential form in post-reform China, but that it is not a single homogeneous type: it is a flexible housing model that emerged from earlier planning traditions, was reshaped by housing commodification, and now expresses increasing social differentiation in Chinese cities.

A key contribution of the thesis is terminological. She argues that the usual translations are inadequate because they convey only the basic denotative meaning, while losing the functional sense that 小区 *xiǎoqū* operates as a kind of "microcosm" within the city. In her reading, the Chinese term implies not just a bounded residential area, but a relatively self-contained social and service environment organized around everyday life. For this reason, she insists on retaining the Chinese term rather than collapsing it into Western categories such as "gated community," which may resemble xiaoqu morphologically but do not capture its Chinese planning genealogy or social diversity.

The dissertation locates the deeper origin of the concept in the global circulation of twentieth-century planning ideas. Wallenwein traces two main antecedents: the Western

neighborhood unit and the Soviet microdistrict. The first emerged in response to the social crisis of industrial urbanization in Europe and the United States. In this tradition, Clarence Perry's neighborhood unit emphasized the elementary school as the core institution, together with local parks, shops, and a protected internal street system. It was conceived as an organic social unit whose spatial arrangement would support safe circulation, community life, and the orderly distribution of services. Wallenwein also notes that the authorship of the neighborhood unit is contested, since Donald Leslie Johnson attributes an early formulation of the concept to William E. Drummond rather than to Perry alone. In either version, however, the crucial point is that the neighborhood unit combined boundedness, service provision, and social organization.

The second major antecedent is the Soviet microdistrict, which Wallenwein treats as even more important for the Chinese case. She argues that the term 小区 *xiǎoqū* was directly translated from Russian planning vocabulary, and that in this sense it inherited the idea of a residential unit enclosed by arterial roads and equipped with relatively complete cultural and welfare facilities. In the Soviet version, the microdistrict was larger and more hierarchical than the neighborhood unit, designed for several thousand residents and organized around centrally distributed institutions and services. When Chinese planners engaged with these models in the 1950s and early 1960s, they did not simply import one or the other. Instead, they produced a synthesized form, combining the Western neighborhood unit's concern with community services and the Soviet microdistrict's emphasis on hierarchical scale and efficient organization.

What changed in the reform era was not the disappearance of this planning logic, but its recombination with market-oriented housing production. Wallenwein stresses that the housing model was tested as "pilot housing estates" (试点小区 *shìdiǎn xiǎoqū*) from the second half of the 1980s onward, in parallel with broader experiments in urban reform. As housing became commodified, the model diversified and expanded. At the same time, official and scholarly definitions attempted to formalize what counted as a 小区 *xiǎoqū*. Wallenwein reviews several such definitions: Zhu Changzhong 朱畅中's planning-based definition from 1988; the Ministry of Construction's national standard, which set numerical thresholds for households and population; Wang Meihan 王美涵, Li Ruxun 李儒训, and Geng Hanbin 耿汉斌's definition, which added land area; and Liu Shibai 刘诗白 and Zou Guangyan 邹广严's broader account, which recognized different levels and types of 小区 *xiǎoqū*. Her conclusion is that purely numerical definitions are too narrow, because actual estates vary too much in size and context. Instead, she proposes a synthetic definition: a xiaoqu is an enclosed inhabited area, bounded by roads or natural edges, furnished with living facilities and services, internally organized by

circulation and management structures, typically developed by real-estate actors, and marked by a degree of shared lifestyle or "group specificity."

The second major focus of the dissertation is classification. Wallenwein argues that 小区 *xiǎoqū* cannot be treated as a single social type, because the commercialization of housing has produced significant socio-spatial differentiation. Therefore, she does not classify them by fixed price bands, because real-estate prices vary too greatly across regions and over time. Instead, she classifies them by the social status of residents, the way housing is obtained, the quality of services and facilities, and the type of shared spatial culture they sustain. She explicitly notes that the boundaries between these groups are not rigid, but the typology is still useful because it captures real differences in access, status, and daily life. She proposes three broad categories:

工薪阶层小区 *gōngxīn jiēcéng xiǎoqū* 'housing estate for wage-earning strata': it refers to "lower-income" or wage-based neighborhoods. Wallenwein is careful not to call them *didang xiaoqu* 'low-level neighborhoods', because their defining feature is not necessarily poor living quality but rather the residents' more fixed incomes and limited access routes to property. These estates may include low-end commercial housing, resettlement housing, 单位 *dānwèi*-related housing, or affordable housing sold under state-supported schemes. Their residents are typically households with relatively stable but modest incomes. Socially and spatially, these xiaoqu provide the most basic form of privately owned housing, with fewer exclusive facilities and weaker forms of homeowner self-organization.

中档小区 *zhōngdàng xiǎoqū* 'mid-range housing estate': it consists of mid-level neighborhoods. These are commercially developed but often still include more than one access route to housing, such as direct market purchase or bulk acquisition via work units. They are enclosed and generally gated, provide basic living facilities, green space, and everyday public spaces, and place some emphasis on privacy and security, though not at the high standard of elite communities. Wallenwein treats this group as socially more mixed than the high-end group, but more clearly middle-status than the wage-based group. What distinguishes it most is a moderate combination of commodified housing, everyday services, and a recognizable but not highly exclusive residential lifestyle.

高档小区 *gāodàng xiǎoqū* 'high-end housing estate': it comprises high-level or elite neighborhoods. This is the most socially homogeneous group, because housing is acquired almost exclusively through unsubsidized market purchase and requires

substantial financial resources. Residents may be professionals, public servants, or business owners, but they share relatively high status and purchasing power. These xiaoqu can take several forms: downtown "gardens," suburban villas or townhouses, and Western-style "new towns." Their key characteristics are high security, strong physical enclosure, spacious housing, exclusive facilities, and more segregated forms of lifestyle cultivation. Wallenwein also notes the importance of symbolic distinction, including fashionable or foreign-sounding names, the imitation of European or American styles, and the presence of specialized amenities such as clubhouses, libraries, tennis courts, and swimming pools. In her reading, this group most clearly expresses the new social polarization of Chinese urban housing.

In sum, Wallenwein's dissertation is valuable because it links language, planning history, and social stratification. It shows that 小区 *xiǎoqū* originated through the Chinese adaptation of international residential planning ideas—especially the neighborhood unit and the Soviet microdistrict—but evolved into a specifically Chinese housing model under reform-era commercialization. At the same time, the dissertation demonstrates that xiaoqu should not be understood as a uniform form. Its contemporary classifications—wage-based, mid-level, and high-level—reflect different access regimes, service levels, spatial cultures, and degrees of social exclusivity. The result is a convincing argument that xiaoqu is both a planning concept and a social form: a built expression of how post-socialist Chinese cities organize everyday life, hierarchy, and belonging.

### 居住组团 *jūzhù zǔtuán*: the residential cluster

According to the *Standard for planning and design of urban residential areas* (1993 – GB 50180-93), residential areas can be classified into three tiers based on the number of households or population size: residential districts, neighborhoods, and clusters. The specification gives a control scale: for a 组团 *zǔtuán*, typically 300–1,000 households or 1,000–3,000 persons. The definition notes: "A residential cluster typically refers to a living community separated by neighborhood roads, corresponding to a population scale of 1,000 to 3,000 residents, and equipped with the basic public service facilities required by its inhabitants". In the updated GB 50180-2018 version, the terminology shifts somewhat: the 生活圈 *shēnghuóquān* lit. 'lifecircle' concept is introduced, but the hierarchical scaling logic remains implicit (Construction Times, 2026).

A 组团 *zǔtuán* is designed to serve as a walkable living cell: the size is intended to enable daily trips on foot (to kindergartens, convenience shops, pocket parks) within the cluster. Its internal roads and connections support internal circulation. According to the 1993 standard, roads within a residential district are divided into four levels: 居住区道路 *jūzhùqū dàolù* 'residential district roads'; 小区路 x*iǎoqū lù* 'neighborhood roads; estate roads'; 组团路 *zǔtuán lù* 'cluster roads; group-unit roads'; 宅间小路 *zháijiān xiǎolù* 'laneways between housing units; inter-dwelling paths'.

The width guidelines in GB 50180-93 for 组团路 *zǔtuán lù* are road surface width 3–5 m; building control line spacing in heating zone not less than 10 m; in non-heating zone not less than 8 m. The standard requires green space at the 组团 *zǔtuán* level of at least 0.5 m² per person in the 组团 *zǔtuán* portion. Functionally, a 组团 *zǔtuán* typically anchors a creche and kindergarten reachable within about 300 m.; convenience retail/shops; internal green/play space; internal pedestrian routing. In practice, in many Chinese residential estates, developers divide the site into several 组团 *zǔtuán*, each with its own internal layout and amenity cluster, though all under one overall 小区 *xiǎoqū* management.

The 组团 *zǔtuán* is the operational unit for many planning tasks: facility siting, pedestrian radius, green-land quotas, internal path networks, and small-scale livability. Because its scale is modest, it bridges between the large parcel and individual buildings.

## 6.2.2 坊 *fāng* and its compound

### 坊 *fāng*: the urban ward

坊 *fāng* is a phono-semantic compound character from 土 tǔ 'earth' with the phonetic element 方 *fāng*. The graphic form has not undergone major changes from the Warring States period, when it was attested for the first time, to the present days. The *Shuowen Jiezi* defines it "urban ward or neighborhood." The *History of the Northern Dynasties* (Li, 1974) records: "People of Huainan who mutually attached themselves, numbering more than one thousand households, were settled to the east of the city along the Fen River; it was named Guiyi 坊 *fāng*."

The term also refers to shops and workplaces of craftsmen and small-scale industrial workers (also pronounced *fáng* in this sense). In earlier periods it could also refer to workshop wards such as dyeing wards.

### 街坊 *jiēfāng*: the neighbors

The term 街坊 *jiēfāng* occupies a distinctive place in the conceptual landscape of Chinese urbanism. In contemporary Chinese, the word circulates widely as an expression of local familiarity and neighborhood-based sociality, evoking an affective world of shared everyday life. Yet historically, 街坊 *jiēfāng* referred to something more concrete: a spatial and administrative unit embedded in the gridded urban form of imperial cities. The contrast between the imperial and contemporary meanings of 街坊 *jiēfāng* reveals profound transformations in Chinese urban morphology and the social life of neighborhoods. It also highlights the extent to which older spatial imaginaries persist in cultural memory even as the administrative structures that once supported them have disappeared.

In imperial Chinese cities—especially during the Sui and Tang dynasties, the concept of 街坊 *jiēfāng*, emerging from this spatial logic, referred simultaneously to the street-ward complex and to the moral community inhabiting it. Historians have shown how these spatial divisions were not simply architectural but deeply political, forming part of the state's vision of a moralized and orderly urban society. The city street (街 *jiē*) was integrated into a larger system of gates, curfews, temporal regulation, and collective responsibility, while 坊 *fāng* formed the internal space of urban residence, guild activity, and local surveillance.

By the Song and Ming–Qing periods, however, the rigidity of the Tang grid weakened. The walls surrounding wards often vanished, marketplaces spilled into streets, and the once-strict separation of residential and commercial zones gave way to more fluid spatial arrangements. Yet 街坊 *jiēfāng* survived as a descriptive term in local gazetteers, denoting clusters of streets, shops, temples, and domestic compounds that formed the basic fabric of everyday urban life. Gazetteer writers described 街坊 *jiēfāng* as both a physical micro-unit of the city and a moral community, one governed by customs, lineage networks, and informal leadership rather than walled boundaries.

Importantly, the imperial 街坊 *jiēfāng* was embedded within a broader Confucian conception of urban governance in which moral order and spatial order mutually reinforced each other. The ward was not merely a residential zone, it was a site at which moral obligations, kinship networks, and collective rituals coalesced.

The transformation of 街坊 *jiēfāng* in modern China begins in the late Qing and early Republican periods, when imported municipal ideas, particularly from Japan and Western cities, challenged the residual ward system. Modern municipal governments introduced police precincts, street administrations, and urban districts, partly inspired by foreign concessions in Shanghai and Tianjin (Escherick, 2000). The term remained in use, but it began to lose its

administrative connotation and instead became a vernacular reference to neighborhood life outside the formal institutions of the new municipal state.

After 1949, the People's Republic reorganized urban grassroots governance around *banshichu* and *jumin weiyuanhui* replacing older structures of ward-based governance. 街坊 *jiēfāng* no longer corresponded to any formal unit of administration. Instead, 单位 *dānwèi* compounds took over many functions of community governance, welfare distribution, and social surveillance. Yet 街坊 *jiēfāng* survived as a cultural term describing the intimate sociality that residents associated with pre-reform neighborhoods or with traditional urban districts.

With the dismantling of the 单位 *dānwèi* system in the 1980s and the onset of large-scale housing reforms, Chinese cities experienced dramatic spatial and social restructuring. Migrant influxes, urban redevelopment, and the rise of gated communities reshaped everyday life (Zhang, 2020). In this context, 街坊 *jiēfāng* took on a new sociological meaning as a counterpoint to the anonymity of modern residential compounds and the formalism of community management.

I can observe that 街坊 *jiēfāng* today functions primarily as a social imaginary, one that expresses modes of reciprocity, trust, and moral expectation that no longer align neatly with formal planning categories or administrative boundaries. In many working-class neighborhoods of Beijing, Shanghai, or Guangzhou, residents continue to describe themselves as "people of the same 街坊 *jiēfāng*" (一个街坊的人 *yí gè jiēfāng de rén*), emphasizing shared routines, mutual support, and locally embedded identities (Read, 2012). This sense of belonging is not produced by official community institutions but by everyday encounters, informal communication, and shared vulnerability.

Interestingly, the modern state has begun to reclaim 街坊 *jiēfāng* as a tool of cultural branding and urban renewal. Urban planners and municipal governments often promote traditional commercial streets, alleyways, or renovated 里弄 *lǐlòng* as 街坊 *jiēfāng* space, emphasizing walkability, sociability, and local heritage. This appropriation is partly instrumental: 街坊 *jiēfāng* becomes a symbol of 'authentic urban life' that can be monetized in cultural tourism, heritage-led redevelopment, or lifestyle urbanism. Yet it also reflects a broader ideological shift toward recognizing the value of human-scale environments within mega-city development.

In parallel, 街坊 *jiēfāng* has become a key concept in community-building initiatives. Government programs designed to strengthen grassroots governance often mobilize 街坊

*jiēfāng* as a narrative to encourage residents to engage more actively in community activities, dispute mediation, and volunteer programs.

However, the contemporary use of 街坊 *jiēfāng* is not limited to nostalgic or community-oriented discourse. It can also serve as a vector for political mobilization. During conflicts over urban redevelopment, such as the demolition of traditional markets, relocation of migrant workers, or redevelopment of inner-city neighborhoods, residents often invoke 街坊感 *jiēfānggǎn* 'a sense of neighborhood belonging' to articulate claims to place, memory, and collective identity. Anthropological studies of resistance in Shanghai's 里弄 *lǐlòng* neighborhoods and Guangzhou's old towns reveal how residents deploy 街坊 *jiēfāng* as a moral argument against displacement, seeking to legitimize their ties to local land and social networks (Hsing, 2010).

In conclusion, the evolution of 街坊 *jiēfāng* from a spatial-administrative unit of imperial Chinese cities to a culturally resonant concept of neighborhood sociability reveals the complex interplay of urban form, state power, and everyday life. While the term no longer corresponds to a formal administrative category, it retains a powerful anthropological presence, shaping how residents imagine community, negotiate urban change, and construct local identities within environments of immense dynamism. 街坊 *jiēfāng* today is a living concept: historically rooted, socially adaptive, and deeply expressive of the changing nature of urban belonging in contemporary China.

### 6.2.3 邻 (鄰) *lín*, 里 *lǐ* and their compound

#### 邻 (鄰) *lín*: the residential organization

The phono-semantic compound character 鄰 *lín* is attested in the Warring States texts as 旻, but later substited buy the homophone 鄰 composed of the semantic component 邑 *yì* 'settlement' and the phonetic component 粦 *lín*. The *Shuowen Jiezi* states: "Five households constitute a 鄰 *lín*. From 邑 *yì*, with 粦 *lín* as the phonetic". The character 邻 *lín* is the simplified form of 鄰. However, the phonetic element 令 *líng* in the simplified character is not completely homophonous with 鄰 *lín* in historical pronunciation. 邻 *lín* originally referred to a form of residential organization in ancient China. The modern term 邻居 *línjū* 'neighbor' developed directly from this type of residential grouping. In antiquity, the number of households under the jurisdiction of a 鄰(邻) *lín* was not fixed; three main accounts are recorded: one holds that five households constituted a 鄰(邻) *lín*, another that eight households formed a 鄰(邻) *lín*, and a third that four households made up a 鄰(邻) *lín*.

### 里 *lǐ*: the place of dwelling

里 *lǐ* is a compound character, composed of 田 *tián* 'field' and 土 *tǔ* 'earth'. The component 土 *tǔ*, originally a short horizontal stroke in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, later elongated and evolved into the modern form of 里.

The characters 里 *lǐ* and 裏 *lǐ* are originally two distinct characters. 裏 *lǐ* is a phono-semantic compound whose original meaning is 'the inner layer of clothing'. Because of phonetic similarity, 裏 *lǐ* was later simplified and merged with 里 *lǐ*, and in modern usage 裏 *lǐ* is often written as 里 *lǐ*. The original meaning of 里 *lǐ* is 'place where people reside.' *Shuowen Jiezi* defines it "a place of dwelling." One the first attestations is in the *Shijing* – "Airs of Zheng: 'Jiang Zhongzi'": "Jiang Zhongzi says: do not trample my 里 *lǐ*." From this, 里 is extended to mean 'neighborhood' or 'village', and by further extension 'hometown.'

### 邻里 *línlǐ*: neighborhood as proximity marker

The term 邻里 *línlǐ* carries a deep semantic and cultural resonance within the Chinese language, expressing not only physical adjacency but also a moral, social, and affective proximity that has persisted across centuries of urban and rural life. In contemporary China, 邻里 *línlǐ* forms the conceptual foundation of community-building initiatives, grassroots governance, and social planning; yet its roots lie in an ancient vocabulary that predates modern administrative divisions and is embedded in classical ideas of human relations. Understanding the evolution of 邻里 *línlǐ*—from its etymological origins to its role in modern neighborhood theory—offers crucial insight into how Chinese urbanism conceptualizes space, community, and the everyday practices that bind residents together.

Etymologically, the compound brings together two characters with overlapping connotations. The earliest forms of 邻 *lín* in bronze inscriptions refer to 'nearby households', evoking solidity, adjacency, and mutual dependence. 里 *lǐ*, meanwhile, historically indicated both a unit of distance and a unit of settlement—a cluster of families grouped for registration, taxation, and mutual responsibility in early Chinese administrative systems. Through the Zhou, Qin, and Han dynasties, 里 *lǐ* served as an organizing unit of rural and urban governance, often comprising around a hundred households, and its governance structure was entangled with moral obligations of collective surveillance and mutual aid. When paired, 邻里 *línlǐ* expressed both spatial closeness and social embeddedness, implying that proximity naturally generated ethical responsibilities among residents.

In the classical tradition of social thought, particularly in Confucian philosophy, the relationship between neighbors was framed within a moral hierarchy. Texts such as the *Liji* emphasize the idea that the harmony of a polity depends on the civility and reciprocity cultivated at the smallest scale, between neighbors, families, and kin groups. In this sense, 邻里 *línlǐ* was never merely a neutral spatial designation; it implied a field of ethical practice where trust, obligation, and reciprocity formed the basis of social order.

As Chinese cities developed more complex structures during the Tang, Song, and Ming–Qing periods, the term 邻里 *línlǐ* increasingly referred to the smallest functional social unit of urban life, often overlapping with 街坊 *jiēfāng*, 里坊 *lǐfāng*, or local guild-based communities. In these dense urban configurations, proximity was reinforced by shared occupations, temple associations, market dependencies, or collective rituals. The spatial form of traditional Chinese neighborhoods—narrow alleys, courtyard compounds, and marketplace clusters—encouraged frequent encounters and interhousehold mutuality. Neighbors did not merely coexist; they collectively maintained wells, waste disposal, street upkeep, and small-scale dispute resolution. In this world, the concept of 邻里 *línlǐ* served as a lens through which residents understood themselves as part of a micro-society embedded within the broader fabric of the city.

The twentieth century brought profound shifts in the meaning and spatial organization of 邻里 *línlǐ*. The fall of the imperial system, the introduction of modern municipalities, and the influence of Japanese and European urban models disrupted the older, organically formed neighborhood systems. Yet the moral and social connotations of 邻里 *línlǐ* persisted. The word thus retained its cultural force even when no longer tied to a formal governance unit.

After 1949, the socialist reorganization of urban China transformed neighborhoods into administrative spaces. The 单位 *dānwèi* system produced a new version of urban proximity. Neighbors were co-workers, and workplace affiliation often substituted for traditional neighborhood ties. Yet even within 单位 *dānwèi*, the term 邻里 *línlǐ* continued to describe a form of everyday sociability built around proximity, shared routines, and mutual care. Sociologists studying the Maoist era noted that while formal administration became highly centralized, the texture of neighborhood life—borrowing household items, sharing water taps, collective childcare—still depended on informal neighborly networks that mirrored older traditions.

The reform era introduced massive transformations. With the commodification of housing, the rapid expansion of cities, and the influx of migrant populations, Chinese urban neighborhoods became more diverse, fragmented, and fluid. Gated commercial compounds

replaced 单位 *dānwèi* enclaves, and new residential communities often lacked the depth of social ties that characterized traditional neighborhoods. It was in this context that the term resurfaced as both a policy ideal and a social aspiration. Urban planners and policymakers increasingly spoke of 邻里文化 *línlǐ wénhuà* 'neighborhood culture', 邻里中心 *línlǐ zhōngxīn* 'neighborhood center', or 邻里关系 *línlǐ guānxì* 'neighborhood relations', seeking to reintroduce forms of proximity-based trust within the anonymity of modern megacities. 邻里文化 *línlǐ wénhuà* refers to the shared norms, everyday practices, values, and informal social codes that shape life within a neighborhood. In the Chinese context, it often evokes traditional modes of sociability, such as mutual assistance, public familiarity, small-scale reciprocity, and the moral expectations embedded in proximity. Contemporary urban theory uses the term to describe how cultural patterns emerge from local interaction, and how such patterns influence governance, public behavior, community-building, and the sense of belonging within rapidly transforming urban environments. A 邻里中心 *línlǐ zhōngxīn* is a neighborhood service hub designed to provide residents with accessible public amenities such as social service counters, cultural activities, elderly care, small clinics, and community rooms. It is a core concept in modern Chinese community planning, inspired partly by Western neighborhood-unit theory but adapted to local governance structures. These centers function as infrastructures of social cohesion, aiming to cultivate social participation, enhance public welfare, and support community-level governance by concentrating essential services within walking distance. 邻里关系 *línlǐ guānxì* describes the web of social relationships formed among residents living in spatial proximity. It includes emotional ties, everyday interactions, informal support networks, and mechanisms of conflict resolution. In Chinese sociology, 邻里关系 *línlǐ guānxì* is a key indicator of community vitality and social capital. It is also a focus of governance reforms seeking to rebuild trust and social cohesion in urban neighborhoods affected by migration, commodified housing, and spatial fragmentation. Strong neighborly relations are seen as essential for stability, mutual aid, and effective grassroots governance.

Contemporary urban planning theory in China integrates 邻里 *línlǐ* within broader frameworks of community governance and spatial design. Inspired partly by Western neighborhood unit theories such as Clarence Perry's "neighborhood unit" (1929), Chinese planners adapted the concept to local urban realities, emphasizing walkability, shared public spaces, and the spatial clustering of services. Modern 社区规划 *shèqū guīhuà* 'community planning' embeds 邻里 *línlǐ* principles by designing residential blocks that encourage spontaneous encounters: public squares, pocket parks, elderly-friendly paths, and community

service centers. This reflects a recognition that built form can influence the density and quality of social interactions, and that the physical design of neighborhoods can support, hinder, or reshape neighborly dynamics.

At the same time, Chinese sociologists and anthropologists note that modern 邻里 *línlǐ* relations are complicated by new forms of mobility, digital communication, and governance. Migrant neighborhoods, for example, often experience high turnover, weakening the long-term stability that traditional neighbor relations rely upon. In contrast, older urban districts retain strong forms of 邻里 *línlǐ* intimacy, though they face pressures from redevelopment and gentrification. The concept thus sits at the intersection of memory and modernity, serving as a symbolic shorthand for a way of life perceived as threatened by the speed of urban change.

Moreover, in China's current governance agenda, 邻里 *línlǐ* has acquired a strategic importance. Policies aimed at strengthening community-level governance, improving social welfare, or promoting conflict mediation increasingly rely on the idea that effective governance must be rooted in neighbor-to-neighbor communication. Initiatives such as community volunteer programs, resident councils, and grassroots mediation hinge on the assumption that robust neighborly ties form the backbone of social stability. In this context, 邻里 *línlǐ* becomes both a sociological reality and a governance instrument, a form of "soft infrastructure" that supports administrative aims. Yet the revival of 邻里 *línlǐ* is not merely administrative. Many urban residents, particularly the elderly, invoke the word with a strong sense of nostalgia. It represents a moral geography in which neighbors care for one another, watch over children or the sick, and collectively manage the boundaries between public and private life. For younger residents, the term may denote a yearning for more meaningful social connections within increasingly isolated urban apartments. This emotional dimension underscores the continuing cultural power of 邻里 *línlǐ* in shaping how urban Chinese imagine community.

In sum, the evolution of 邻里 *línlǐ* from a classical concept of moral proximity to a modern pillar of urban planning and community governance mirrors the profound transformation of Chinese cities themselves. While its institutional context has changed dramatically, its core meaning—proximity that generates social obligation—remains deeply embedded in the Chinese imagination. As China continues to urbanize and experiment with community-based governance, 邻里 *línlǐ* will likely remain a central discourse through which both planners and residents negotiate the relationship between space, society, and urban belonging.

### 6.2.4 街道 *jiēdào*: from street to administrative unit

Although today 街道 *jiēdào* refers primarily to the 'subdistrict' as an administrative organ located between the district (区 *qū*) and the community (社区 *shèqū*), its contemporary institutional form cannot be understood without considering the deep historical trajectory of the word itself, nor without appreciating how 街道 *jiēdào* continues to mediate the relationship between the state and daily urban life.

By the Han dynasty, 街道 *jiēdào* appears regularly in historiographical works such as the *Shiji* and *Hanshu*, predominantly to describe the street network of imperial capitals and regional administrative towns. In these early sources, 街道 *jiēdào* connotes not simply a physical route but a patterned space where political authority, commerce, and community life intersect. Gazetteers from the Sui through the Qing dynasties repeatedly use 街道 *jiēdào* to delineate the structure of markets, temple fairs, guild halls, and official quarters. In other words, 街道 *jiēdào* was an essential element of the morphology and social rhythm of Chinese cities long before it acquired modern bureaucratic definition.

It was not until the early twentieth century that 街道 *jiēdào* began its transformation into an administrative category. The late Qing and early Republican reforms, influenced by Japanese municipal organization and Western models of precinct management, sought to modernize the governance of increasingly dense and complex urban areas. In cities such as Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Hankou, local governments experimented with new administrative subdivisions to manage sanitation, policing, registration, and taxation. Although these experiments varied in scale and design, many employed the intermediate administrative offices as the spatial units closest to ordinary residents. The modern 街道 *jiēdào*, therefore, emerged in response to pressures of urban modernization and the need for governance structures capable of mediating between the municipal state and neighborhood realities.

After 1949, the establishment of the People's Republic of China institutionalized it as a formal component of the national administrative hierarchy. This new 街道办事处 *jiēdào bànshìchù* (abbr. 街道办 *jiēdàobàn*) 'subdistrict office' sat below the 区 *qū* and above the 居民委员会 *Jūmín Wěiyuánhuì* 'Residents' Committee'. In the early decades of the socialist era, 街道办 *jiēdàobàn* functioned as an instrument for social management: enforcing household registration (户口 *hùkǒu*), distributing ration coupons, mobilizing political campaigns, coordinating public security, and managing work units' residential compounds.[6] It served as a node of the socialist welfare state, mediating between local residents and state agencies and

acting as the organizational nexus through which urban society could be monitored, mobilized, and governed.

In the reform era beginning in 1978, the 街道 *jiēdào* underwent another transformation as China's cities expanded rapidly, industrial structures shifted, and urban governance became more multilayered. The dismantling of the 单位 *dānwèi*-based welfare system meant that many functions previously handled by work units—housing allocation, community services, social welfare, dispute mediation—were increasingly absorbed by street offices and their subordinate residents' committees.[7] At the same time, decentralization reforms strengthened district-level governments and expanded their responsibilities over planning, land management, and social services. The 街道办 *jiēdàobàn*, positioned between district authorities and local communities, became the essential intermediary responsible for translating district plans into neighborhood-level implementation.

From an urban planning perspective, 街道 *jiēdào* is now the smallest administrative scale at which detailed plans and zoning regulations can be effectively operationalized. Cities across China rely on the 街道 *jiēdào* to implement elements of the Regulatory Detailed Plan, including building-height controls, land-use designations, street network adjustments, heritage preservation, and environmental management.[9] Although municipal governments design master plans and district governments coordinate regulatory plans, the practical enforcement of planning rules—issuing construction permits, monitoring illegal structures, allocating public-space functions—depends on the administrative reach of 街道办事处 *jiēdào bànshìchù*. In this sense, the 街道 *jiēdào* is not merely a jurisdictional unit but a spatial technology, a governance tool through which urban form is produced, modified, and controlled.

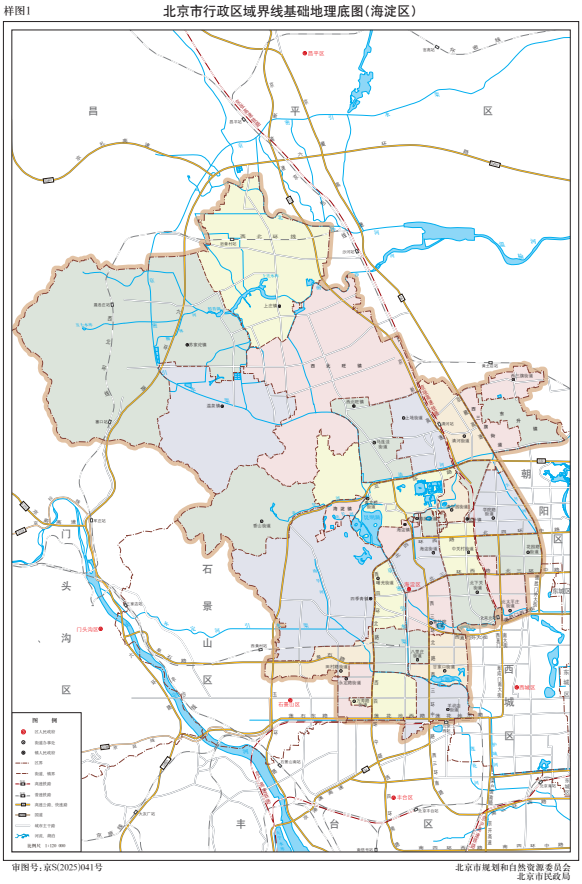



Figure 6.3 Official map of Beijing Haidian District
https://mzj.beijing.gov.cn/art/2025/8/26/art_11012_689368.html.

However, to depict 街道 *jiēdào* only in institutional terms would obscure the rich anthropological dimensions inherent in its practice. The 街道办 *jiēdàobàn*'s authority is deeply intertwined with the social fabric of urban neighborhoods. Anthropologists such as Dorothy Solinger and Li Zhang have documented how street-level governance interacts with migration, informal economies, welfare entitlements, and everyday surveillance. 街道 *jiēdào* workers, residents' committees, and neighborhood volunteers form a multilayered web of relationships through which the state becomes embedded in the ordinary routines of residents' lives.

The COVID-19 pandemic offered a vivid demonstration of this embeddedness. During lockdowns and mass testing campaigns, 街道办 *jiēdàobàn* and their subordinate 居委会 *jūwěihuì* became the central logistical units responsible for enforcing quarantines, distributing food, coordinating nucleic-acid testing, and managing digital health codes. The extraordinary centrality of street offices during this period made visible what had long been the case: the 街道 *jiēdào* serves as the micro-political frontier of the Chinese state, where governance becomes intimate and daily life becomes administratively structured. Urban residents experienced the 街

道 *jiēdào* not as a distant bureaucracy but as a force woven into the rhythms of cooking, commuting, childcare, and social interaction.

At the same time, street governance is also a site of tension. Redevelopment projects, demolition of informal markets, relocation of migrant workers, and enforcement of environmental regulations have all brought the 街道 *jiēdào* into direct negotiation with the interests of local residents and business owners. Street offices must balance district-level development goals with social stability, public demands, and local histories. This sometimes positions the 街道 *jiēdào* as a mediator between competing visions of urban modernity—between preservation and redevelopment, informality and formality, mobility and control.

The rise of smart-city governance has added new layers to this relationship. Districts and street offices now manage digitally integrated 网格化治理 *wǎnggéhuà zhìlǐ* 'grid-management systems', enabling fine-grained oversight of households, sanitation, environmental indicators, and public safety. While citywide data centers aggregate information, 街道办 *jiēdàobàn* serves as the on-the-ground executor of digital directives, sending grid workers to verify data, respond to incidents, or ensure compliance. The 街道 *jiēdào* thus becomes both a data-driven unit of analysis and a site of human mediation, where the abstractions of digital governance encounter the practicalities of neighborhood life.

From a broader historical perspective, 街道 *jiēdào* exemplifies the dynamic adaptability of Chinese administrative institutions. It carries with it traces of ancient urban imaginaries, the spatial logic of imperial capitals, the bureaucratic reforms of the Republican era, and the socialist legacy of grassroots administration. Yet the 街道 *jiēdào* also embodies the contemporary demands of urban planning, social welfare, public health, and digital governance. Its boundaries are shaped not only by official maps but by everyday interactions, collective memories, and informal spatial practices.

## 6.3 Terminological tensions in English translation (the 'neighborhood' semantic field)

In English-language scholarship on Chinese cities, the terms 小区 *xiǎoqū*, 街区 *jiēqū* and 社区 *shèqū* are frequently treated as minor terminological details, resolved through seemingly straightforward translation choices: 'residential compound', 'urban block' or 'district', and 'community'. These translations circulate widely in academic writing, planning documents, and comparative urban analyses, often without reflection on their epistemic consequences.

Their familiarity encourages the assumption that translation here is largely transparent, that English equivalents provide neutral access to Chinese urban realities.

From the perspective of *terminological urbanism*, this assumption is deeply problematic. Translation is not a secondary operation that merely follows empirical observation; it is a constitutive moment in the production of urban knowledge. The choice of an English equivalent does not simply name an object; it situates that object within a particular conceptual tradition, activates specific theoretical expectations, and suppresses alternative readings. In the case of 小区 *xiǎoqū*, 街区 *jiēqū*, and 社区 *shèqū*, habitual translations risk collapsing three distinct urban logics—morphological, spatial-functional, and institutional-relational—into a homogenized Anglophone vocabulary.

The translational tensions surrounding these three terms cannot be resolved by selecting better English words alone. Instead, they require differentiated translation strategies, embedded within English academic writing itself.

### 6.3.1 小区 *xiǎoqū*: translating enclosure without inventing community

小区 *xiǎoqū* is a product of post-reform Chinese urbanization and is among the most ubiquitous terms in everyday urban discourse. It designates a bounded residential entity, typically composed of multiple housing blocks, internal circulation systems, and clearly demarcated access points. Its defining characteristics are enclosure, spatial coherence, and residential function.

The most common English translation, 'residential compound', captures certain morphological aspects of 小区 *xiǎoqū*, particularly enclosure and residential exclusivity. Yet this equivalence is only partially transparent. In English, 'compound' often evokes exceptional or institutionalized spaces—military compounds, diplomatic compounds, or highly securitized enclaves—whereas many 小区 *xiǎoqū* are ordinary, mass-produced residential environments. At the same time, alternative translations such as 'residential community' or 'housing estate' introduce more severe distortions. 'Residential community' imputes a level of social cohesion and collective identity that 小区 *xiǎoqū* does not inherently possess, while 'housing estate' draws on a European genealogy of public housing that does not map neatly onto China's privatized, property-driven housing system.

The translational tension here stems from a mismatch between high materiality and low social intentionality. Anthropologically, 小区 *xiǎoqū* functions primarily as a domestic extension, organizing everyday life through proximity, management, and shared infrastructure

rather than through strong social bonds. Governance is typically exercised by property management companies (物业 *wùyè*), whose authority is contractual and commercial rather than political or communal. Social identity production within a 小区 *xiǎoqū* is often pragmatic and weak, oriented toward maintenance and consumption rather than collective belonging.

In English academic writing, this tension can be addressed through a strategy of controlled literalism with functional specification. The term 'residential compound' may be retained, but it should be consistently framed as a spatial and managerial unit, not as a social one. English usage must resist the temptation to naturalize sociality where the Chinese term does not guarantee it. Phrases such as "a gated residential compound governed by a property management company" keep the translation anchored to morphology and governance, rather than allowing English to invent a community that may not exist in practice.

### 6.3.2 街区 *jiēqū*: translating spatial continuity without fixing form

If 小区 *xiǎoqū* poses the risk of over-socialization in translation, 街区 *jiēqū* presents the opposite challenge: the risk of over-formalization. It refers to a street-based spatial aggregation, an area defined not by enclosure but by the continuity of streets, façades, and urban activities. It occupies an intermediate position within the urban semantic system, situated between architectural form and social practice.

English translations such as 'urban block' or 'district' appear reasonable, yet they subtly reframe the term within Western planning ontologies. The concept of the urban block in Anglophone urbanism is historically tied to grid-based cities, where blocks are discrete, measurable units bounded by streets. Many Chinese 街区 *jiēqū*, however, especially in historic or organically developed areas, do not conform to this geometry. Their coherence derives less from formal boundaries than from lived continuity—pedestrian flows, commercial rhythms, and visual permeability.

At the same time, translating 街区 *jiēqū* as 'district' risks inflating its administrative or symbolic status, suggesting a level of institutional definition that the term does not necessarily possess. 街区 *jiēqū* often lacks clear governance structures and formal authority; it is neither a legally robust unit like 社区 *shèqū* nor a tightly bounded entity like 小区 *xiǎoqū*.

The translational tension surrounding 街区 *jiēqū* reflects its intermediate ontology. It is a spatial-functional category whose meaning shifts depending on analytical focus: urban design, commercial activity, heritage preservation, or everyday mobility. No single English equivalent can stabilize this multiplicity without loss.

Accordingly, the most appropriate strategy is one of contextual translation with morphological anchoring. English usage should remain flexible, allowing urban block, street-based district, or similar formulations to appear depending on context, while maintaining 街区 *jiēqū* as the semantic reference point. In theoretically sensitive passages, retaining the term in transliteration (街区 *jiēqū*) may be preferable, signaling to the reader that the category does not map cleanly onto Western spatial units. Rather than resolving ambiguity, translation here should preserve it as an analytical resource.

### 6.3.3 社区 *shèqū*: translating governance without naturalizing belonging

Among the three terms, 社区 *shèqū* generates the most acute translational tension. Its habitual translation as community is also its most misleading. Lexically combining "association" or "society" (社 *shè*) with "zone" (区 *qū*), 社区 *shèqū* appears to promise social cohesion and collective identity. In practice, however, it functions primarily as a social–administrative unit, embedded within the Chinese state's system of grassroots governance.

Historically emerging during the Maoist period as part of the reorganization of urban society after the decline of the 单位 *dānwèi* system, 社区 *shèqū* is managed by residents' committees and linked to a dense apparatus of policy implementation, surveillance, and social management. While policy discourse emphasizes participation, harmony, and service provision, the existence of a 社区 *shèqū* does not presuppose strong interpersonal ties or voluntary association among residents.

Translating 社区 *shèqū* as 'community' imports a dense cluster of Anglophone assumptions: bottom-up formation, affective bonds, moral solidarity, and shared identity. These assumptions are not inherent to 社区 *shèqū* and, in many cases, obscure the gap between normative discourse and lived experience. This is a classic case of false transparency, where a familiar English term conceals institutional specificity and ideological work.

Addressing this tension requires a strategy of de-naturalization through explicit qualification. If community is used, it must be consistently marked as administrative: 'administrative community', 'state-defined community', or 'neighborhood governance unit'. Such formulations may feel awkward in English, but that awkwardness is analytically productive: it disrupts the smooth importation of Western communitarian ideals and forces attention to governance structures and power relations.

From a terminological-urbanist perspective, 社区 *shèqū* should be treated as an ideological category, one that organizes urban populations through discourse as much as through space. English translation must therefore expose, rather than conceal, its function as a technology of governance.

### 6.3.4 A Translational Gradient and the Reflexive Use of English

Taken together, 小区 *xiǎoqū*, 街区 *jiēqū* and 社区 *shèqū* form a translational gradient, rather than a set of parallel equivalents. Their degrees of translation transparency vary significantly, reflecting differences in materiality, governance, and social intentionality. 小区 *xiǎoqū* demands stabilization around spatial specificity; 街区 *jiēqū* requires contextual flexibility; 社区 *shèqū* calls for critical destabilization of English norms.

Integrating these strategies into English academic writing means abandoning the ideal of terminological uniformity in favor of conceptual consistency. Rather than forcing all three terms into a single semantic register, the researcher allows English itself to register difference through qualification, transliteration, and strategic repetition of the Chinese terms. Translation becomes an ongoing methodological operation, not a preliminary technical step.

This approach also requires explicit reflexivity. Translation choices should be stated, justified, and revisited as the analysis moves between morphology, social practice, and governance. By doing so, English ceases to function as a neutral container and becomes a theoretical medium, capable of expressing friction, asymmetry, and partiality.

Table 6.2 Comparative table of the 区 *qū* compounds

| CRITERION | 小区 *xiǎoqū* | 街区 *jiēqū* | 社区 *shèqū* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Basic English gloss | Residential compound | Urban block / district | Community |
| Core semantic logic | Enclosed residential unit | Street-based spatial aggregation | Social–administrative unit |
| Primary reference | Built form | Urban morphology | Social organization |
| Ontological status | Physical–spatial | Spatial–functional | Institutional–relational |
| Degree of materiality | Very high | High | Low–medium |
| Relation to housing | Direct (housing-first) | Indirect | Indirect |
| Relation to streets | Often inward-facing | Constitutive element | Secondary |
| Relation to dwelling (anthropological) | Domestic extension | Interface between public and private | Collective belonging |
| Typical scale | Micro–meso | Meso | Meso–macro |
| Spatial boundaries | Clear, often gated | Porous, street-defined | Fuzzy, administrative |
| Access logic | Controlled / semi-private | Public | Public (institutional) |
| Governance logic | Property management | Urban design / planning | Grassroots governance |
| Key managing actor | Property management company | Municipal planning bodies | Residents' committee (居委会 *jūwěihuì*) |
| Legal / administrative status | Weak / indirect | Weak | Strong |
| Historical emergence | Post-reform era (1990s–) | Republican to contemporary | 1950s– |
| Relation to单位 *dānwèi* legacy | Successor / replacement | Spatial residue | Institutional transformation |
| Everyday usage (vernacular) | Very common | Moderately common | Common but formal |
| Policy usage | Common | Increasing (urban renewal) | Very common |
| Planning discourse | Functional–residential | Morphological–design | Governance–social |
| Social identity production | Weak–moderate | Weak | Strong |
| Sense of belonging | Often pragmatic | Limited | Normatively emphasized |
| Economic function | Residential consumption | Mixed-use | None (indirect) |
| Commercial activity | Internal or peripheral | Central | Incidental |
| Symbolic visibility | Low | Medium | High (policy discourse) |
| Flexibility over time | Medium | High | Low |
| Translation transparency | Low | Medium | Very low |
| Analytical role in terminological urbanism | Morphological baseline | Interface category | Ideological and governance category |

The neighborhood-level analysis brings together the terminological structures identified at the scales of housing and streets, revealing how urban categories are assembled into coherent planning units. This synthesis highlights both the internal consistency of institutional classifications and their limits in accounting for the full complexity of urban life.

At this point, the dissertation has established a structured representation of the city as it is formally conceptualized through planning terminology. This provides the necessary foundation for the next analytical step: the introduction of empirical data that captures how these categories are perceived,

interpreted, and rearticulated beyond institutional frameworks. The following chapter therefore presents the design and implementation of a survey aimed at exploring alternative semantic mappings of urban space, opening the analysis to a comparative examination of terminological meaning.

# PART 3 THE SURVEY

## CHAPTER 7 QUESTIONNAIRE

This chapter marks a methodological transition in the dissertation by introducing an empirical investigation designed to complement the terminological analysis developed in the previous chapters. Having established how core urban categories are formally constructed within planning and institutional discourse, the study now turns to the collection of data that allows these categories to be examined from a different semantic angle.

The chapter presents the rationale, structure, and implementation of a survey aimed at eliciting interpretations of urban terminology from a non-institutional perspective. Particular attention is given to the selection of terms, the construction of semantic parameters, and the logic underlying the questionnaire design. Rather than treating the survey as a representational tool, it is framed as a methodological device for testing the analytical robustness of planning terminology when confronted with alternative modes of meaning-making.

By detailing the survey design with transparency and precision, the chapter establishes the empirical conditions necessary for the analyses that follow. It functions as a bridge between the structured terminological framework developed earlier and the inductive exploration of semantic variation introduced in the next chapter.

### 7.1 A two-phase procedure: observe and define

The construction of a terminological corpus of the city through a two-phase procedure—observation followed by definition—engages with several distinct theoretical traditions in linguistics, anthropology, human geography, and cognitive semantics. At its core, this method recognizes that urban terminology does not simply label pre-existing objects but reflects culturally embedded perceptual frameworks, practices of inhabiting, and socially negotiated categories through which urban life is experienced and conceptualized.

The first phase, *observation*, aligns with linguistic theories of perceptual salience and categorization. When participants are encouraged to freely identify and name urban features as they encounter them, they reveal which elements of the built environment are cognitively foregrounded within a specific cultural context (Rosch, 1978). The terms they spontaneously

produce reflect folk urban categories—emic classifications that may differ significantly from expert or bureaucratic taxonomies. This process highlights how the city is 'segmented' by its users into meaningful units long before any formal definition is imposed.

Urban terminology is not neutral: it is shaped by institutional discourses, planning regimes, real estate markets, and long-standing cultural models. Allowing participants to generate their own terms in the define phase foregrounds the social nature of naming. The negotiation of what counts as a right term demonstrates how linguistic labels become tools of power, inclusion, and social ordering in the city.

The two-phase approach is particularly effective for identifying the semantic fields through which urban space is structured. This method echoes urban semiotics in treating the city as a system of signs, where physical forms generate and are generated by linguistic labels (Gottdiner and Lagopoulos, 1986). By mapping these emergent clusters, the researcher can understand how ordinary speakers "parse" the city into meaningful parts.

The contrast between terms derived from direct observation and terms extracted from textual sources is analytically productive. Textual corpora (policy documents, planning codes, academic works) tend to normalize technical categories and official conceptual frameworks, whereas participant-generated terminology reveals everyday conceptualizations and colloquial distinctions. Comparing both layers exposes lexical gaps, semantic overlaps, and terminological grey zones, helping the researcher identify which concepts are institutionally imposed and which emerge organically from lived urban experience.

The *define* phase is crucial. When participants attempt to articulate what a term they just used means, they engage in situated metalinguistic activity. Such negotiation is theoretically interesting for several reasons: it shows the prototype structure of urban categories (some attributes are central, others peripheral); it reveals the semantic boundaries between closely related terms; it highlights variation across socio-economic groups, generations, or regions; it exposes implicit cultural models regarding order, hierarchy, privacy, neighborhood, and modernity. Participants often define terms relationally ("this is not X, because X usually has Y"), offering valuable insight into contrastive structures and taxonomic logics.

Compiling an urban terminological corpus through *observe–define* acknowledges that knowledge is situated (Haraway, 1988: 575–599). Rather than assuming that urban concepts are universal or transferrable, the corpus foregrounds the local epistemologies tied to specific

urban histories, regulatory frameworks, and sensory experiences. The city is not merely described but co-produced through the interaction between the observer and the observed.

By allowing participants to use "as many terms as they want," the method resists prescriptive or prematurely systematized vocabularies. This openness is methodologically valuable because it captures terminological polysemy, acknowledging that many urban words have layered meanings; it documents lexical innovation, slang, and emergent terms shaped by contemporary urban transformations; it prevents the imposition of external analytical categories, allowing the corpus to remain responsive to lived reality. A corpus generated this way becomes not only a linguistic instrument but a tool for urban interpretation, revealing how residents perceive, classify, and inhabit the built environment.

## 7.2 The Questionnaire

Politecnico di Torino | ScuDo Scuola di Dottorato – Doctoral School WHAT YOU ARE, TAKES YOU FAR

清華大學 Tsinghua University

# 调查

**通过城市词汇解读中国城市：**
**“术语城市主义”作为解读工具的实践**

1. 引言

本项研究是我对中国城市术语及其作为解读中国城市结构与逻辑的工具这一课题更广泛探索的一部分。过去两年间，我围绕“House · Street · Neighborhood”三大语义领域（对应人类学三大维度：居所、空间流动性、社会关系）展开了中国城市词汇的系统性研究。研究涵盖多领域文本分析，包括中文术语资料与文学文本、建筑与城市研究学术文献、中国监管文件等。
在都灵理工大学与清华大学双学位项目框架下驻留北京期间，我结合街头观察与居民非正式访谈开展了城市田野调查。该调查收集了大量摄影素材，后通过 ChatGPT 5.1 技术转化为素描风格的图像。这些素描既作为论文插图，亦为本调查提供样本图像。
本调查的核心目标是构建中国城市重要物象的术语语料库，以便与前期研究中基于纯文本资料建立的既有语料库进行对照分析。

2. 城市术语调查操作指南

感谢您参与本次调查。本研究旨在探究人们如何通过视觉材料描述与分类城市物象。您的反馈将为城市词汇、感知及语言分类研究提供重要依据。您将看到一系列展现城市环境元素的图像。针对每幅图像，您的任务是：

i. 识别所观察到的物体、特征或空间元素。
ii. 为每个对象提供 4 到 8 个术语，使用您认为自然的任何词语或表达。

您可以使用任何语言层级：专业术语、日常用语、俚语、方言表达或描述性短语。不存在正确或错误答案。我关注的是您描述城市时自然使用的词汇。请自由发挥采用您偏好的任何风格、语气或细节程度进行书写。本次调查完全匿名。不会收集任何个人信息，您的回答无法追溯至个人身份。所有数据仅用于学术研究。您将有 20 分钟完成整个问卷。请合理安排时间以确保所有图片均能作答。请直接在指定区域填写答案。请勿参考外部资料，仅使用您自身的感知与词汇。您的参与完全基于自愿。继续进行问卷即表示您同意匿名化后的回答可用于学术研究与分析。

**Reading the Chinese city through its terms:**
***Terminological Urbanism* as tool of interpretation**

**1. Introduction**

The present survey forms part of my broader research on Chinese urban terminology and its role as an interpretive tool for understanding the structure and logic of the Chinese city. Over the past two years, I have conducted a comprehensive investigation of Chinese urban vocabulary across three semantic fields (house, street, neighborhood), which correspond to three major anthropological dimensions: dwelling, mobility between spaces, and social relating. This work has involved the analysis of textual sources from multiple domains, including Chinese terminological materials and literary texts, scholarly publications in architecture and urban studies, and Chinese regulatory documents.

During my stay in Beijing within the framework of the double-degree program between Politecnico di Torino and Tsinghua University, I also carried out urban fieldwork combining street-level observation with informal interviews with local residents. This fieldwork resulted in the collection of extensive photographic material, which was subsequently converted into drawing-style sketches through ChatGPT 5.1. These sketches serve both as illustrations in my thesis and as sample images in the present survey.

The primary objective of this survey is to compile a terminological corpus concerning significant objects and elements of the Chinese city, in order to compare it with the pre-existing corpus—based entirely on textual sources—that I developed and analyzed in the earlier stages of my research.

**2. Operating instructions for the urban terminology survey**

Thank you for participating in this survey. The purpose of this study is to understand how people describe and classify the objects of the city as they appear in visual materials. Your responses will contribute to research on urban vocabulary, perception, and linguistic categorization.

You will be shown a series of images depicting elements of the urban environment. For each image, your task is to:

i. Identify the objects, features, or spatial elements you observe.
ii. Provide 4 to 8 terms for each object, using any words or expressions that feel natural to you.

You may use any linguistic register: technical terms, everyday words, slang, dialectal expressions, or descriptive phrases. There are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in the vocabulary you naturally use to describe the city. Please feel free to write in whichever style, tone, or level of detail you prefer. This survey is completely anonymous. No personal information will be collected, and your responses cannot be traced back to you. All data will be used solely for academic research. You will have 20 minutes to complete the entire survey. Please manage your time so that you can respond to all images. Write your answers directly in the spaces provided. Do not consult external sources. Use only your own perception and vocabulary. Your participation is entirely voluntary. By continuing with the survey, you agree that your anonymized responses may be used for academic research and analysis.

**Federico Madaro**
Politecnico di Torino (Italy) – DAD (Department of Architecture and Design)
Tsinghua University, Beijing – School of Architecture

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Figure 7.1 Questionnaire (frontispiece)




Figure 7.2 Questionnaire (AI generated sketches from author's photographs)

The survey serves as a methodological counterweight to several biases inherent in the textual sources on which the study relies. While dictionaries, classical texts, scholarly literature, and planning documents overwhelmingly represent codified, institutionalized, and elite-driven terminology, the survey generates an alternative layer of evidence grounded in individual

perception and vernacular linguistic practice. It thereby opens a complementary pathway for understanding how urban space is named, categorized, and imagined outside the discursive frameworks of state governance, scholarship, and lexicographic normativity. By allowing participants to produce any lexical item they consider natural—including dialectal forms, colloquialisms, borrowings, and hybrid expressions—the questionnaire introduces forms of urban vocabulary that remain invisible or marginalized in formal lexicographical and administrative registers. This helps recover non-standard, regionally grounded, and socially marked naming practices that written sources tend to suppress.

Secondly, the survey counters the elite-filter bias embedded in classical and scholarly texts. Whereas written materials reflect the perspectives of literate, institutionally empowered actors, the survey elicits terminology from a broader range of speakers whose linguistic intuitions and spatial experiences may diverge significantly from top-down conceptualizations of the city. In doing so, it incorporates voices that are structurally underrepresented in the textual record.

The image-based format mitigates the prescriptivism of planning terminology. Planning documents articulate how space ought to be named and organized; the survey reveals how people actually recognize and label everyday urban objects and configurations. This contrast exposes mismatches between lived spatial practices and formal categories, revealing the gaps, frictions, and ambiguities that characterize contemporary Chinese urbanism.

By relying on visual stimuli, the survey softens the text-dependence bias of the corpus. Images bypass the influence of written definitions and category boundaries, prompting participants to produce terms based on perception, salience, and experiential heuristics. This helps identify aspects of the built environment that users find meaningful, even when such aspects are lexically under-represented in textual traditions.

Finally, the survey contributes to epistemic triangulation. When vernacular responses are compared with classical meanings, scholarly interpretations, and planning nomenclature, the resulting analysis exposes both continuities and discontinuities across regimes of naming. This triangulation does not eliminate the structural limitations of textual sources, but it reduces the risk of drawing conclusions solely from top-down, historically filtered evidence.

By eliciting terms directly from participants in response to images of urban objects and spatial configurations, the survey reveals how residents actually perceive, categorize, and linguistically label elements of the Chinese city. This offers access to naming strategies and semantic distinctions that do not appear in official nomenclature. In many cases, everyday terminology diverges significantly from planning terminology in terms of granularity,

evaluative connotations, metaphorical extensions, and sociocultural associations. These divergences provide essential evidence for understanding the coexistence of multiple linguistic regimes within the Chinese urban context.

Moreover, the survey produces a comparative corpus that can be systematically evaluated against the textual corpus I previously compiled. This comparison allows me to identify patterns of alignment or disjunction between institutionalized language and lived linguistic practice. In doing so, the survey helps illuminate: (a) which aspects of the built environment are salient to ordinary speakers; (b) how people spontaneously classify and differentiate urban forms; (c) which semantic fields are stable across registers; and (d) where official terminology fails to reflect experiential categories embedded in everyday urban life.

The survey is based on a questionnaire that adopts a **picture-naming elicitation** format, widely used in psycholinguistics to investigate lexical access and naming (Snodgrass and Vanderwart, 1980; Glaser, 1992; Székely A, Jacoby M, D'amico S, et al., 2004; Bonin P, Peerman R, Malardier N, et al., 2003). In this task, participants are presented with images and asked to provide the terms they would naturally use to name the depicted urban objects or scenes. The questionnaire format is also akin to photo-elicitation and other visual elicitation methods in qualitative research, where images serve as prompts for participants' own categorizations and terminology (Harper, 2002; Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Kyololo, Murphy, and Stevens, 2023).

The questionnaire seeks to capture spontaneous lexical choices by presenting participants with a curated series of photographs converted into sketch-style drawings depicting characteristic objects and spatial configurations associated with three key semantic fields of the city: houses, streets, and neighborhoods. These fields correspond to fundamental anthropological dimensions—dwelling, spatial mobility, and social relating—and reflect the conceptual architecture established in the earlier phases of the research.

The participants are shown visual stimuli without any accompanying text. For each image, respondents are asked to identify the salient objects or features they observe and to provide between four and eight terms that they would naturally use to describe them. The instructions explicitly allow the use of any linguistic register, including technical vocabulary, everyday expressions, slang, dialectal forms, and descriptive phrases. This openness is intended to minimize language constraints and to elicit a broad range of lexical items reflecting the diversity of natural urban terminology.

The questionnaire is administered individually and anonymously. No personal information is collected, and participants are instructed not to consult external sources, ensuring that the resulting data represent their own perceptions and linguistic intuitions. The survey is designed to be completed within approximately forty minutes, encouraging concise yet spontaneous responses. The final dataset generated by the questionnaire will be compared with the previously established textual corpus, thereby enabling a systematic analysis of the divergences and convergences between vernacular naming practices and planning nomenclature in the Chinese city.

The validity of the questionnaire is grounded in its capacity to elicit spontaneous, ecologically meaningful lexical responses to visual representations of urban objects and spaces. Because the instrument employs images rather than verbal prompts, it minimizes researcher-induced bias and enhances content validity, ensuring that participants' terms arise from their own perceptual and conceptual interpretation of the built environment. Reliability is supported by the internal consistency of the elicited responses: recurring lexical patterns across participants indicate that the instrument consistently activates comparable naming strategies. Although visual elicitation does not require large samples for validation, administering the questionnaire to multiple participants allows for the identification of ambiguous items and ensures stability of responses across different speakers. The instructions were kept uniform, the images presented in a fixed order, and no external sources were allowed, thereby supporting procedural reliability. Taken together, these measures ensure that the questionnaire is both a valid and reliable tool for examining the relationship between natural naming practices and planning nomenclature in the Chinese city.

## 7.3 Methodology of data extraction: from survey to corpus

### 7.3.1 Language as data in urban research

Urban studies has long relied on a heterogeneous set of empirical materials: maps, plans, statistics, interviews, ethnographies, and visual documentation. Language, however, is often treated as a secondary layer, either as a vehicle for reporting findings or as a source of quotations illustrating pre-existing analytical categories. This chapter departs from that tradition by treating language itself as primary empirical data, and more specifically, by treating vernacular lexical production as a privileged entry point into the lived experience of the city.

The methodological approach adopted in this research is based on a survey-based lexical elicitation conducted among Chinese-speaking respondents, using images of urban environments as visual stimuli. The outcome of this process is a corpus of 1,077 unique lexical descriptors, produced in response to urban scenes and spaces. Rather than approaching these descriptors as imperfect approximations of standardized terminology, this research treats them as situated acts of naming, embedded in specific perceptual, cultural, and institutional contexts.

The purpose of this chapter is to explain in detail how this dataset was produced, extracted, and delimited, and to justify its epistemic validity within a transdisciplinary framework that combines urban studies, anthropology, linguistics, and translation studies. The chapter argues that lexical elicitation through visual stimuli offers a methodologically robust way to access the semantic infrastructures through which urban space is perceived, evaluated, and made intelligible by its inhabitants.

### 7.3.2 Survey-based lexical elicitation: rationale and precedents

Lexical elicitation is a well-established technique in linguistics and linguistic anthropology, commonly used to investigate semantic fields, categorization practices, and culturally salient distinctions. Traditionally, such methods have relied on interviews, questionnaires, or prompted definitions. In urban research, however, these techniques are less frequently employed, and when they are, they tend to focus on narratives or opinions rather than on lexical choice itself.

The approach adopted here draws inspiration from multiple traditions. From linguistic anthropology, it borrows the assumption that naming practices are socially situated and culturally meaningful (Silverstein, 1979: 193–247; Agha, 2007). From urban anthropology, it adopts the premise that urban knowledge is produced through everyday engagement with space rather than solely through expert abstractions (Hannerz, 1980; Low, 2019). From visual methods in social research, it takes the use of images as elicitation devices capable of triggering embodied and affective responses that precede formalized discourse (Pink, 2013).

The specific methodological choice to use images of urban environments as prompts is grounded in the recognition that urban experience is fundamentally visual and spatial. Images allow respondents to bypass abstract definitions and instead engage directly with recognizable spatial situations. This minimizes the imposition of researcher-defined categories and encourages respondents to mobilize their own lexical repertoires.

The survey was structured around a curated set of images depicting different urban situations. Originally the images were photographs taken by me during the on-field research in

Beijing and Nanjing from September 2024 to November 2025, then reworked with Chat GPT 5.1 using the preliminary prompt: “Transform the photo into a pencil sketch, maintaining thin, clean, precise lines, a completely white background, and controlled architectural hatching.” Depending on the type of subject depicted in the photo, the color, the exposure, and the type of framing, the initial sketch may have required further adjustments in order to make the image suitable for the intended purpose.These images were selected to represent a range of spatial configurations commonly encountered in contemporary Chinese cities, including residential environments, streets and circulation spaces, and areas of collective or neighborhood interaction. The images were not intended to be exhaustive representations of Chinese urbanism, but rather semiotic triggers designed to elicit descriptive language. Crucially, respondents were not asked to define concepts or to choose from predefined lists. Instead, they were invited to describe what they saw, using their own words. This open-ended instruction is methodologically significant. It frames the task not as a test of knowledge, but as an act of perception and interpretation. The resulting descriptors therefore reflect what respondents considered salient, meaningful, or worthy of mention in each image.

This design choice aligns with a bottom-up epistemology: rather than beginning with a theory of what the city is, the method allows urban categories to emerge from language use. In this sense, the survey functions as a form of lexical ethnography, capturing fragments of urban knowledge as they are articulated in everyday language.

The respondents were Chinese-speaking university affiliates, participating in the survey within an academic context. This context is not neutral and must be acknowledged explicitly. Respondents are not representative of the entire urban population; they are more likely to possess higher levels of formal education, familiarity with institutional discourse, and exposure to academic or policy-related vocabularies. However, this positionality should not be seen as a limitation to be corrected, but as a defining feature of the dataset. The language produced by respondents occupies a space between everyday vernacular and semi-institutional discourse. It reflects how urban environments are described by individuals who are both inhabitants of the city and participants in its discursive production through education, planning, or professional training. In this sense, the dataset captures a transitional register of urban language—neither fully technical nor purely colloquial—which is particularly relevant for the study of terminological urbanism. It is precisely within this register that many conceptual distortions and translations occur when urban knowledge circulates between local and global contexts.

The extraction of lexical data followed a conservative and transparent procedure. All descriptors produced by respondents were collected as they appeared in the survey responses. Each distinct string of Chinese characters was treated as a lexical unit. No attempt was made at this stage to normalize synonyms, merge near-equivalents, or interpret semantic intent.

This decision reflects a methodological commitment: lexical plurality is treated as data, not as noise. The objective of the extraction phase was not to produce a clean or optimized lexicon, but to preserve the diversity of naming practices as they emerged from the survey. Where multiple descriptors appeared within a single response, they were separated only when clearly demarcated by punctuation or separators. No segmentation was performed at the character level; compounds and multi-character expressions were preserved intact. This is particularly important in Chinese, where meaning is often distributed across compounds rather than contained in individual characters.

After extraction, the dataset consisted of 1,077 unique lexical items, once exact duplicates were removed. This number is not presented as statistically significant in itself, but as an indicator of the semantic richness generated by a relatively simple elicitation task.

It is important to clarify what this corpus represents, in order to avoid methodological misunderstandings. First, the dataset is not a dictionary, nor is it intended to function as a comprehensive glossary of Chinese urban terminology. The descriptors were not produced under lexicographic constraints, nor were respondents instructed to provide definitions or standardized terms. Second, the dataset is not a controlled vocabulary. There is no assumption that the items are mutually exclusive, hierarchically organized, or conceptually stable. Overlap, ambiguity, and redundancy are expected and analytically meaningful. Third, the dataset is not a frequency-based representation of urban language. While frequency information could be derived, the primary analytical focus lies on presence and diversity, not on statistical dominance.

What the dataset is, rather, is a vernacular lexical corpus generated under controlled elicitation conditions, suitable for qualitative and interpretive analysis. Its value lies in revealing how urban space is spontaneously described when respondents are not constrained by expert frameworks or translation imperatives.

### 7.3.3 Epistemological positioning: from data collection to knowledge production

The methodological choices outlined above reflect a broader epistemological stance. By treating lexical descriptors as primary data, this research challenges the implicit hierarchy that

privileges expert terminology over everyday language. It aligns with critiques of epistemic injustice that emphasize how certain forms of knowledge are marginalized when shared interpretive resources are inadequate.

In the context of urban studies, English-language concepts often function as default interpretive frames, even when the phenomena under investigation are embedded in non-English-speaking environments. The method adopted here deliberately postpones translation and conceptual alignment, allowing Chinese lexical categories to emerge on their own terms. This postponement is not a rejection of theory, but a reordering of analytical steps. Theory enters not as a filter imposed on the data, but as a lens through which the emergent lexical field can later be interpreted. This sequence—elicitation, extraction, clustering, interpretation—ensures that the analytical framework remains accountable to the linguistic material from which it arises.

No method is without limitations, and this approach is no exception. The use of images inevitably frames perception in specific ways, privileging visual aspects of urban experience over others. The academic context of the survey may influence lexical choices, introducing semi-technical vocabulary that might not emerge in other settings. Rather than attempting to eliminate these effects, this research incorporates them into its analytical framework. The dataset is understood as a situated corpus, shaped by the conditions of its production. A reflexive acknowledgment of these conditions strengthens, rather than weakens, the methodological rigor of the study.

## 7.4 The value of the 1,077 vernacular descriptors for *terminological urbanism*




Figure 2 Filled-in questionnaires 1-3

### 7.4.1 From lexical output to theoretical object

The corpus of 1,077 unique lexical descriptors generated through the survey does not merely constitute a collection of words; it represents a theoretically charged empirical object. These descriptors are the linguistic residue of a situated encounter between Chinese-speaking respondents and urban space, mediated by visual stimuli and institutional context. Their value lies not in their conformity to established terminologies, but precisely in their distance from standardization.

Within the framework of this dissertation, these descriptors are approached as the empirical foundation of what is here termed *terminological urbanism*: an analytical perspective that treats the vocabulary of the city as a constitutive dimension of urban reality. Rather than assuming that urban phenomena pre-exist their linguistic articulation, *Terminological Urbanism* starts from the premise that urban concepts emerge, stabilize, and circulate through language, and that the lexicon mobilized by urban dwellers is a privileged site for observing this process.

The sheer number of distinct descriptors—1,077—produced in response to a limited set of images already signals an important insight: urban space is not perceived through a small, closed set of categories, but through a wide and internally differentiated semantic field. This plurality is not accidental. It reflects the fact that the city is simultaneously experienced as material environment, social setting, institutional arrangement, affective landscape, and moral order. Each descriptor captures a fragment of this complexity.

A central claim of this chapter is that the descriptors collected through the survey should be understood as acts of naming, rather than as isolated lexical items. Naming is a performative act: to name is to select, foreground, and render intelligible certain aspects of reality while backgrounding others. In the context of urban perception, naming is one of the primary means through which space is cognitively and socially organized. These acts of naming are situated in at least three senses. First, they are situated perceptually: respondents describe what they see, but what they see is already shaped by cultural expectations, previous experience, and habitual forms of attention. Second, they are situated socially: respondents occupy specific positions as educated, Chinese-speaking subjects embedded in contemporary urban China. Third, they are situated linguistically: the resources available to them are those of modern Chinese, with its particular patterns of compounding, evaluative morphology, and semantic flexibility.

Treating descriptors as situated acts of naming allows us to avoid two common pitfalls. On the one hand, it avoids reifying the lexicon as a static inventory of meanings. On the other hand,

it avoids reducing language to a mere reflection of pre-existing spatial forms. Instead, it foregrounds the co-productive relationship between language and urban experience.

### 7.4.2 The epistemic significance of lexical plurality

The presence of 1,077 unique descriptors challenges any assumption that there exists a "natural" or self-evident vocabulary of the city. Even within a relatively homogeneous respondent group and under controlled elicitation conditions, urban space generates a remarkable diversity of linguistic responses. This diversity is epistemically significant.

First, lexical plurality indicates that urban perception is multi-dimensional. Respondents do not rely on a single descriptive axis (such as function or form), but mobilize terms referring to morphology, use, atmosphere, social relations, maintenance, temporality, and value judgments. This confirms that urban knowledge cannot be reduced to technical descriptors without loss.

Second, plurality exposes the limits of expert-driven terminology. Planning and architectural vocabularies typically seek to minimize ambiguity and redundancy, favoring standardized terms that can be operationalized. The vernacular descriptors in the corpus resist such minimization. They reveal aspects of urban life—such as perceived crowding, emotional tone, or social warmth—that are often peripheral or invisible in institutional discourse.

Third, plurality functions as a safeguard against conceptual flattening, particularly in cross-linguistic contexts. When urban phenomena are translated prematurely into English, many of these distinctions collapse into a small set of familiar categories ("street," "neighborhood," "residential area"). The dataset demonstrates empirically that such categories are insufficient to account for the semantic richness of urban experience in Chinese cities.

One of the most striking features of the corpus is the prevalence of compounds, reflecting the high degree of compound productivity in modern Chinese. Rather than selecting from a fixed list of lexical items, respondents actively assemble meaning through the combination of morphemes. This has important implications for terminological urbanism. Compound productivity allows speakers to fine-tune descriptions by modulating emphasis, evaluation, and scope. For example, the addition of evaluative morphemes such as 老 *lǎo* 'old', 新 *xīn* 'new', 小 *xiǎo* 'small', 大 *dà* 'big', 旧 *jiù* 'old, worn / former' or relational elements such as 中 *zhōng* 'middle', 边 *biān* 'side', 内 *nèi* 'inside', 外 *wài* 'outside' generates nuanced distinctions that resist direct equivalence in English. These compounds are often immediately interpretable to Chinese speakers, even when they are not fully lexicalized.

From a terminological perspective, this means that urban concepts in Chinese are open-ended and generative, rather than closed and enumerated. The lexicon functions less like a dictionary and more like a toolkit for semantic assembly. This dynamic quality is difficult to capture in English, where urban terminology often relies on nominalized abstractions and fixed collocations. The corpus thus provides empirical support for the argument that Chinese urban terminology operates through semantic fields rather than isolated terms, and that understanding these fields requires attention to internal combinatory logic, not just to headwords.

A further value of the 1,077 descriptors lies in their implicit contrast with institutional and expert vocabularies. Many descriptors that appear frequently in everyday language are absent or marginal in planning documents, policy texts, or academic discourse. Conversely, many institutional terms do not emerge spontaneously in the survey responses. This asymmetry highlights a lexical gap between how cities are governed and how they are experienced. Institutional language tends to prioritize categories that are administratively legible—zones, functions, densities—while vernacular language foregrounds experiential qualities such as liveliness, congestion, comfort, or neglect. Neither register is inherently more "true," but each produces a different urban reality.

*Terminological Urbanism* insists that this gap is not merely descriptive, but epistemic. When urban studies relies exclusively on institutional terminology, it risks reproducing a partial and skewed representation of urban life. The vernacular descriptors collected in this survey function as a counter-archive, making visible dimensions of the city that would otherwise remain conceptually underarticulated.

The relevance of the dataset becomes particularly acute when considered in relation to English as the dominant language of international urban scholarship. English operates as a *lingua franca* that facilitates communication, but it also exerts a normalizing force on conceptual vocabularies.

When Chinese urban descriptors are translated into English, compound structures are often flattened, evaluative nuances are softened, and culturally specific distinctions are subsumed under broader categories. The corpus illustrates how much semantic information is at risk of being lost in this process. From the perspective of terminological urbanism, the solution is not to reject English, but to discipline its use. The vernacular descriptors provide a benchmark against which translations can be evaluated, revealing where English categories misalign with Chinese semantic realities. In this sense, the dataset supports a reflexive approach to translation that acknowledges untranslatability as a structural condition rather than as a failure.

The survey design outlined in this chapter provides a controlled yet flexible instrument for investigating how urban terms operate beyond formal planning contexts. By defining parameters, scales, and interpretive categories in advance, it ensures that the resulting data can be analyzed systematically while remaining sensitive to semantic nuance.

With the methodological framework now in place, the dissertation moves to the examination of the survey results themselves. The next chapter analyzes the collected data to identify patterns, clusters, and tensions in the semantic interpretation of urban terminology. This step shifts the focus from methodological construction to empirical interpretation, allowing the study to assess how urban meaning circulates across different conceptual registers.

# 8. THE CLASSIFICATION STRATEGY OF THE SURVEY RESULTS

This chapter presents the analysis of the survey data introduced in the previous chapter. Its aim is to examine how urban terms are interpreted, associated, and evaluated across the parameters defined in the research design. Through quantitative aggregation and qualitative interpretation, the chapter identifies recurring semantic patterns as well as points of divergence.

The analysis focuses on the distribution of responses, the formation of semantic clusters, and the relationships between different urban categories. Rather than privileging individual terms in isolation, the chapter adopts a relational perspective, examining how meanings are structured across sets of terms and spatial scales. This approach allows underlying logics of interpretation to emerge without imposing predefined hierarchies.

By systematically unpacking the survey results, the chapter provides empirical evidence that can be placed in dialogue with the terminological structures outlined earlier in the dissertation. It constitutes the empirical core of the study, where methodological design and conceptual inquiry converge.

It is important to distinguish analytically between two distinct classificatory operations applied to the questionnaire results. The first consists in a centripetal classification, in which vernacular terms are grouped according to internal semantic affinities in order to reveal recurrent dimensions of urban perception (clustering). This operation is descriptive and exploratory: it moves inward from lexical dispersion toward semantic coherence, allowing patterns of morphology, function, affect, sociality, governance, and temporality to emerge from the data itself. The centripetal logic is oriented toward understanding the structure of vernacular urban language as such, without reference to external conceptual frameworks.

By contrast, the second classificatory operation (Chapter 9) is finalized and integrative, oriented toward the selective incorporation of vernacular terminology into an analytical dialogue with official and expert vocabularies. Here, categories are not formed to exhaust the semantic field of the questionnaire, but to identify those vernacular terms that perform complementary analytical functions vis-à-vis institutional terminology. This integrative classification is therefore explicitly strategic and relational. While the centripetal classification maps the internal organization of vernacular meaning, the integrative classification mobilizes vernacular language as an interface through which official urban concepts are rendered experientially intelligible and analytically contestable.

## 8.1 Inductive Semantic Clustering of Vernacular Urban Descriptors

Once the corpus of 1,077 vernacular descriptors is acknowledged as an epistemically meaningful object, the next methodological challenge concerns organization. A lexical corpus of this size cannot remain an undifferentiated list without losing analytical traction. At the same time, imposing a predefined classificatory grid—derived from planning theory, architectural typologies, or Anglophone urban categories—would contradict the bottom-up epistemology that motivated the data collection in the first place.

The solution adopted in this research is *inductive semantic clustering*. It is important to distinguish clustering from taxonomy. A taxonomy implies stable hierarchies, mutually exclusive classes, and definitional closure. Clustering, by contrast, accepts overlap, ambiguity, and gradience as intrinsic features of semantic organization. Urban experience itself is not taxonomic. The same space can be simultaneously perceived as narrow, lively, inconvenient, familiar, and informal. A clustering approach allows a descriptor to resonate with multiple semantic domains without forcing a single classificatory identity. Methodologically, this choice resists the epistemic violence that can occur when complex lived realities are compressed into rigid analytical boxes. Instead, clustering functions as a cartographic tool, mapping regions of semantic density and zones of overlap within the lexical field. Rather than sorting descriptors into a priori categories, clustering proceeds from observed semantic affinities, recurrent patterns, and shared pragmatic orientations within the corpus itself. Categories are treated as emergent, provisional, and porous. Their purpose is not to exhaustively classify urban language, but to make visible the internal organization of vernacular urban meaning.

This approach aligns with qualitative traditions in anthropology and grounded theory, where analytical categories are generated through iterative engagement with data rather than imposed externally. It also reflects a key assumption of terminological urbanism: that urban concepts are not given in advance, but coalesce through repeated acts of naming and use.

The clustering process was guided by several criteria, applied iteratively rather than mechanically:

**Semantic orientation**: What aspect of urban experience does the descriptor primarily target?

**Pragmatic function**: Is the descriptor descriptive, evaluative, relational, or classificatory?

**Morphological patterning**: Does the descriptor belong to a family of compounds sharing a core morpheme?

**Contextual implication**: Does the term imply institutional, social, or affective dimensions?

Descriptors were allowed to inform multiple clusters where appropriate. The goal was not to assign each item a single "correct" place, but to observe patterns of co-occurrence and semantic gravity. Through this process, six major clusters emerged. These clusters are not presented as exhaustive or universal, but as analytically useful lenses through which the vernacular lexicon of the city can be interpreted.

1. **Morphological and Spatial Descriptors (M)**

   The first cluster comprises descriptors that foreground physical form and spatial configuration. These terms refer to dimensions such as size, density, height, enclosure, and layout. Examples include descriptors related to narrowness or openness, compactness or sprawl, verticality or horizontality. This cluster reflects a fundamental aspect of urban perception: before space is understood socially or institutionally, it is encountered bodily and visually. Morphological descriptors articulate how space constrains or enables movement, visibility, and orientation. Notably, many of these descriptors are evaluatively neutral on the surface, yet they often carry implicit judgments when situated in context. The clustering thus reveals how morphology and value are intertwined, even when not explicitly marked.

2. **Functional and Practical Descriptors (F)**

   A second cluster centers on function and use. These descriptors articulate what spaces are for, how they are used, or what activities they support. They refer to dwelling, circulation, commerce, leisure, or mixed uses. This functional cluster resonates with planning discourse, yet it differs in emphasis. While institutional language often abstracts function into zoning categories, vernacular descriptors tend to reference practical affordances: ease of movement, availability of services, suitability for everyday routines. The presence of this cluster confirms that respondents engage with the city pragmatically, evaluating spaces in terms of what they allow one to do. At the same time, the lack of technical precision in many descriptors underscores the distance between lived function and planned function, a gap central to terminological urbanism.

3. **Evaluative and Emotional Descriptors (E)**

   One of the most semantically dense clusters consists of evaluative and affective descriptors. These terms explicitly encode judgment, emotion, or atmosphere: liveliness, calmness, disorder, comfort, neglect, familiarity. This cluster is particularly significant because it captures dimensions of urban experience that are systematically marginalized

in expert vocabularies. While planners may speak of "amenities" or "quality of life," vernacular descriptors articulate affect directly and often bluntly. The prominence of this cluster underscores that urban spaces are not neutral backdrops but emotionally charged environments. The city is felt before it is theorized. *Terminological Urbanism* must therefore account for affect not as an add-on, but as a core component of urban meaning.

4. **Social and Relational Descriptors (S)**

A fourth cluster focuses on social relations and presence. These descriptors reference people rather than space alone: crowding, anonymity, familiarity, interaction, isolation. They describe the city as a social field populated by others, not merely as built form. This cluster reveals that urban perception is relational. Respondents do not simply describe spaces; they describe being-with-others in space. Terms in this cluster often blur the boundary between spatial description and social commentary, illustrating how urban form and social life are mutually constitutive. Importantly, many of these descriptors resist easy translation into English without loss. They often encode culturally specific assumptions about proximity, collectivity, and appropriate social distance. Their presence reinforces the argument that vernacular language is indispensable for understanding urban sociality.

5. **Institutional and Governance-Related Descriptors (I)**

A fifth cluster comprises descriptors that reference institutional presence, management, or regulation. These terms point to governance structures, maintenance regimes, administrative boundaries, or forms of control. Unlike formal policy language, vernacular institutional descriptors often surface implicitly, through references to orderliness, surveillance, restriction, or neglect. They reflect how governance is experienced rather than how it is articulated officially. This cluster is particularly revealing for terminological urbanism, as it shows how institutional concepts circulate beyond their formal definitions. Words associated with governance are reinterpreted, condensed, or reframed in everyday language, acquiring meanings that may diverge significantly from official intent.

6. **Temporal and Processual Descriptors (T)**

The final major cluster includes descriptors that encode time, change, and process. These terms reference aging, transformation, decay, renewal, or transition. They position the city not as a static object, but as an evolving entity. Temporal descriptors

are crucial for understanding urban China, where rapid transformation has made change itself a defining feature of urban experience. The presence of this cluster indicates that respondents perceive and articulate the city historically, even in the absence of explicit temporal prompts. From a terminological perspective, this cluster complicates static definitions. Urban terms acquire meaning not only through spatial reference, but through their placement within narratives of before and after, loss and emergence.

A key finding of the clustering process is the extent of overlap between clusters. Many descriptors simultaneously belong to multiple semantic domains. For example, a term may be morphological, evaluative, and social at once. Rather than treating this as a problem, the analysis treats overlap as a feature of urban meaning. The city is experienced holistically; language reflects this by refusing clean separations. Semantic tension between function and affect or between form and sociality is not noise but signal. This insight challenges reductionist models of urban terminology that seek one-to-one correspondences between terms and concepts. *Terminological Urbanism* must instead accommodate polysemy and semantic layering.

## 8.2 Epistemic Value of an Inductively Clustered Urban Corpus

The preceding paragraphs have established the methodological foundations of the research, articulated the theoretical value of the 1,077 vernacular descriptors, and demonstrated how inductive semantic clustering allows urban meaning to emerge from within the lexical corpus itself. This chapter takes a further step: it examines the epistemic value of such a corpus once it has been structured through inductive clustering, and reflects on what this approach contributes to urban studies, architectural research, and cross-cultural knowledge production more broadly.

The central claim advanced here is that a vernacular urban corpus, when treated as an organized yet non-reductive semantic field, constitutes a distinct form of urban evidence. It does not replace institutional data, expert terminology, or spatial analysis, but complements and critiques them by making visible dimensions of urban experience that are otherwise flattened or excluded. In doing so, it offers both an empirical contribution to the understanding of Chinese urban life and a methodological intervention into how cities are studied across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Urban knowledge is traditionally produced through institutional channels: planning documents, statistical classifications, zoning regulations, architectural drawings, and policy

reports. These forms of knowledge are indispensable, yet they are also selective. They privilege what can be measured, regulated, and operationalized, often at the expense of lived experience, affective perception, and informal social relations. A vernacular urban corpus operates according to a different logic. It records how urban space is named and evaluated by its users, not how it is administratively defined. When structured through inductive clustering, such a corpus does not simply accumulate impressions; it reveals patterned ways of seeing and speaking that cut across individual responses.

The epistemic value of this lies in its capacity to expose systematic blind spots in institutional language. For example, the prominence of evaluative and affective descriptors highlights the extent to which emotional and atmospheric qualities are central to urban experience, yet marginal in planning discourse. Similarly, the clustering of social and relational descriptors reveals how urban space is perceived primarily as a field of interaction, rather than as a neutral container of functions. This does not imply that institutional knowledge is wrong, but that it is partial. A vernacular corpus functions as a corrective lens, allowing researchers to interrogate what institutional vocabularies leave unsaid.

One of the distinctive features of the corpus analyzed in this research is that its organization resists conceptual closure. The inductive clusters identified are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive. They overlap, blur, and shift depending on context. This openness is not a methodological weakness; it is an epistemic strength.

Urban life itself is characterized by semantic overdetermination. Spaces are simultaneously physical, social, symbolic, and political. Attempts to force this complexity into rigid conceptual frameworks often result in analytical reductionism. By contrast, a clustered vernacular corpus preserves ambiguity as data. This has important implications for urban theory. Rather than seeking definitive definitions of concepts such as “neighborhood,” “street,” or “residential area,” the corpus shows how these notions are distributed across multiple semantic dimensions. Meaning emerges not from isolated terms, but from constellations of descriptors that shift according to situation and perspective.

In this sense, the corpus operates as a semantic topology rather than a taxonomy. It maps zones of meaning without fixing their boundaries. This aligns with contemporary critiques of essentialist urban categories and supports a relational, process-oriented understanding of the city. Once clustered, the vernacular descriptors reveal themselves as more than expressive labels; they function as a form of conceptual infrastructure. Just as physical infrastructures enable

movement and coordination, linguistic infrastructures enable shared understanding and social navigation.

Urban dwellers rely on vernacular terminology to orient themselves, to communicate expectations, to evaluate environments, and to negotiate belonging. The corpus captures this infrastructure in action. It shows how certain descriptors recur across different images and contexts, indicating shared interpretive resources within the respondent group. From an epistemological standpoint, this challenges the assumption that theory must precede language. Instead, it suggests that conceptual frameworks are sedimented in everyday speech, and that systematic analysis of vernacular language can recover these frameworks without imposing them from above.

This insight is particularly relevant for architecture and urban design, disciplines that often operate with abstract concepts disconnected from everyday language. A vernacular corpus offers a way to reconnect design thinking with the semantic worlds of users, without reducing design to opinion surveys or post-hoc justification.

The epistemic significance of the corpus becomes even more pronounced when considered in a cross-linguistic context. Urban studies is an increasingly global field, yet it remains heavily mediated by English as a lingua franca. As discussed in earlier chapters, this creates a structural risk of conceptual distortion when non-English urban realities are described through Anglophone categories.

A vernacular corpus structured in Chinese resists this distortion by anchoring analysis in the source language. It allows urban concepts to be reconstructed from within the linguistic system in which they are lived and articulated. Translation, when it occurs, becomes a secondary and reflexive operation rather than an unexamined default.

Importantly, the clustered corpus also provides a diagnostic tool for translation. By revealing the internal semantic organization of Chinese urban descriptors, it becomes possible to identify where English equivalents fail, where multiple Chinese terms collapse into a single English word, or where English introduces distinctions absent in the source language. In this way, the corpus contributes to a more responsible practice of comparative urbanism—one that treats translation as an epistemic problem rather than a technical convenience.

The value of a vernacular urban corpus can also be articulated in ethical terms. Drawing on the concept of epistemic justice, one can argue that excluding vernacular categories from urban analysis constitutes a form of hermeneutical marginalization. When shared interpretive

resources lack the concepts needed to articulate certain experiences, those experiences become harder to recognize and address.

By systematically incorporating vernacular descriptors into urban research, this approach expands the pool of available interpretive resources. It acknowledges that urban knowledge is not produced solely by experts, but also by those who inhabit and interpret urban space in their daily lives. This does not romanticize vernacular language or elevate it above other forms of knowledge. Rather, it insists on epistemic pluralism: the recognition that different forms of knowing coexist and that their interaction can enrich understanding. A clustered vernacular corpus provides a concrete mechanism for operationalizing this pluralism within academic research.

At the same time, this approach has clear limits. It does not claim representativeness in a statistical sense, nor does it replace quantitative methods or spatial analysis. Its strength lies in conceptual exploration, not in prediction or generalization. Recognizing these limits is part of its epistemic rigor. A vernacular corpus is one lens among many, but it is a lens that has been underutilized in urban studies and deserves a more central place. Taken together, the clustered vernacular corpus substantiates the core claims of terminological urbanism. It demonstrates that urban terminology is not a peripheral concern, but a site where spatial experience, social relations, institutional power, and cultural history converge.

Terminological urbanism, as articulated in this dissertation, is not a call to replace existing urban theory with linguistic analysis. It is a call to reorder priorities: to recognize that the words through which cities are named and described actively shape what can be known about them. The vernacular corpus shows how urban meaning is assembled from below, through compound productivity, evaluative nuance, and relational language. It reveals the city as a semantic field in motion, constantly reconfigured through use. By treating vernacular descriptors as evidence rather than anecdote, this research contributes to a more reflexive and inclusive urban studies. It shows that to understand the city, one must attend not only to its buildings and policies, but also to the words through which it is lived, judged, and remembered.

Ultimately, the clustered vernacular corpus invites us to rethink the city itself—not as a fixed object awaiting analysis, but as a living archive of language, continually rewritten through everyday acts of naming.

## 8.3 The clustered vernacular corpus

The survey corpus consists of a large set of terms that respondents used to describe urban environments in their own language. To interpret this heterogeneous lexical field without reducing it to anecdote, the terms were clustered into six semantic groups:

Table 8.1 Semantic clustering of the vernacular corpus

| **Morphological and Spatial (M)** | **Functional and Practical (F)** | **Evaluative and Emotional (E)** | **Social and Relational (S)** | **Institutional and Governance-Related (I)** | **Temporal and Processual (T)** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Scale and the "Body Test" of Urban Space | 1. Everyday Convenience and Service Proximity | 1. Comfort, Calm, and Habitability | 1. Warmth, Familiarity, and "Social Texture" | 1. Planning, Order, and Legibility | 1. Aging, Obsolescence, and Material Wear |
| 2. Density, Compactness, and Ambivalence | 2. Mobility, Walkability, and Everyday Circulation | 2. Liveliness vs. Noise: Ambivalent Affect | 2. Indifference, Isolation, and Social Coldness | 2. Management and Property Regimes | 2. Transformation, Redevelopment, and Suspended Futures |
| 3. Enclosure, Boundaries, and Permeability | 3. Commerce and Mixed-Use as Vernacular Value | 3. Oppression, Coldness, and Alienation | 3. Crowding as Social Experience | 3. Security and Regulation as Atmosphere | 3. Historical Periodization as Urban Meaning |
| 4. Street and Network Form as Morphological Cognition | | | | | |

The purpose of this chapter is not merely to "describe the clusters," but to identify the main tendencies expressed by the data: what respondents repeatedly foreground, what they treat as salient, what kinds of oppositions they encode, and how different semantic dimensions co-occur.

A key premise of this analysis is that these clusters are not "pure types." Many terms are polysemous and would be legitimate candidates for multiple clusters depending on context. However, the point of clustering here is to track dominant tendencies and to show how vernacular terms distribute attention across the urban experience. The most important result is not the existence of six neat categories, but the discovery that respondents move through them in patterned ways. In what follows, I first examine each cluster as its own semantic center of gravity, then intensify the analysis by tracing systematic cross-cluster trajectories (e.g., morphology → affect → sociality; temporality → evaluation → governance), and finally interpret what these patterns imply for terminological urbanism.

**Morphological and Spatial Descriptors (M): The City as Form Before Anything Else**

The most prominent tendency in the survey is that respondents encounter the city first as form, as spatial configuration, scale, enclosure, height, and continuity. This is evident in the sheer range of spatial descriptors that do not require institutional knowledge or technical vocabulary to be meaningful. Respondents repeatedly name spatial relations and bodily experience: streets that feel too wide or too narrow, buildings that loom or sit low, blocks that enclose or expose, and networks that connect or fragment.

*Scale and the "Body Test" of Urban Space*

A recurring semantic axis is scale measured against the body. Respondents use a vocabulary that implicitly runs a bodily "test" on the city (does it fit human movement and perception?): 人性尺度 *rénxìng chǐdù* 'human scale; body-fitting scale', 非人尺度 *fēi rén chǐdù* 'non-human scale; hostile-to-the-body scale', 尺度宜人 *chǐdù yí rén* 'pleasant scale; comfortable proportions', 尺度失衡 *chǐdù shīhéng* 'scale imbalance; disproportion'. This axis is not merely descriptive; it is evaluative, yet the evaluation is embedded in the morphology itself. For instance, 巨大尺度道路 *jùdà chǐdù dàolù* 'giant-scale roads' (roads experienced as overwhelming) expresses a morphological perception that is inseparable from affective consequence (stress, danger, alienation). Similarly, 狭窄人行道 *xiázhǎi rénxíngdào* 'narrow sidewalk; constrained pedestrian movement' is a spatial description that implicitly encodes a critique of pedestrian marginalization.

*Density, Compactness, and Ambivalence*

Density is one of the most semantically ambivalent morphological themes. Terms point to compactness and intensity: 密集 *mìjí* 'dense', 高密度 *gāo mìdù* 'high density', 紧凑 *jǐncòu* 'compact', 房间密集 *fángjiān mìjí* 'rooms packed; compressed dwelling', 握手楼 *wòshǒu lóu* 'handshake buildings; extremely close buildings'. But density can be felt as oppressive or as lively. The corpus includes explicit density-as-discomfort terms: 拥挤 *yōngjǐ* 'crowded; congested', 压迫感 *yāpògǎn* 'pressure feeling; spatial oppression', 暗无天日 *ànwútiānrì* 'no light, no sky; extreme enclosure'. At the same time, density can be connected indirectly to vitality through terms that appear more affective, e.g., 热闹 *rènao* 'lively', or social, e.g. 人来人往 *rén lái rén wǎng* 'people coming and going'. This is the first strong sign that morphological descriptors in the dataset are not neutral "objects," but nodes in a semantic system that anticipates functional, affective, and social outcomes.

*Enclosure, Boundaries, and Permeability*

Respondents repeatedly describe spatial enclosure and separation: 围合感 *wéihégǎn* 'sense of enclosure', 围合感强 *wéihégǎn qiáng* 'strong enclosure, 围合感差 *wéihégǎn*

*chà* ‘weak enclosure; exposed’, 封闭 *fēngbì* ‘closed-off’, 开放式 *kāifàngshì* ‘open-type; open-plan’. They also describe fragmentation and barriers: 割裂 *gēliè* ‘fragmented; torn apart’, 阻隔 *zǔgé* ‘blocked; separated’, 分割 *fēngē* ‘split; partitioned’, 不连续城市界面 *bù liánxù chéngshì jièmiàn* ‘discontinuous urban frontage’. These terms matter because they show that respondents are attuned to the city as a field of visibility and access. “Enclosure” is not only a geometric property; it shapes whether a street feels walkable, whether a courtyard feels intimate, and whether a neighborhood feels navigable. Importantly, enclosure can support comfort or create oppression. The same morphological property can be read positively (coziness, legibility) or negatively (confinement, darkness), depending on its degree and context.

*Street and Network Form as Morphological Cognition*

The lexicon includes many references to street form, hierarchy, and layout: 网格道路 *wǎnggé dàolù* ‘grid roads’, 网格化 *wǎnggé huà* ‘grid-ification; gridded organization’, 道路清晰 *dàolù qīngxī* ‘clear roads; legible network’, 道路错杂 *dàolù cuòzá* ‘roads messy; tangled layout’, 七拐八拐 *qī guǎi bā guǎi* ‘seven turns eight bends; labyrinthine’. Here the city appears as a cognitive environment. Clear networks support orientation, while labyrinthine routes produce a different experiential quality, sometimes charming, sometimes frustrating. Terms like 无方向感 *wú fāngxiànggǎn* ‘no sense of direction; disorientation’ sit at the boundary between morphology and affect, showing how physical layout translates into cognitive experience.

**Functional and Practical Descriptors (F): The City as an Affordance System**

If the M cluster shows how the city is first perceived as form, the F cluster shows how it is judged as an environment of use, what it enables, supports, or obstructs in daily life. Crucially, respondents do not use planning jargon; they describe function in terms of routines and practical outcomes.

*Everyday Convenience and Service Proximity*

Many terms index convenience: 生活便利 *shēnghuó biànlì* ‘life convenient; daily convenience’, 生活不便 *shēnghuó bùbiàn* ‘life inconvenient; daily difficulty’, 生活配套 *shēnghuó pèitào* ‘life supporting facilities; daily amenities’, 社区配套 *shèqū pèitào* ‘community support; neighborhood amenities’, 设施完善 *shèshī wánshàn* ‘facilities complete; well-provisioned’. Unlike zoning categories, these terms evaluate urban environments through their capacity to support routine life, carrying a strong pragmatic valuation of urban quality.

*Mobility, Walkability, and Everyday Circulation*

A major functional theme is circulation: 通勤 *tōngqín* 'commuting', 步行友好 *bùxíng yǒuhǎo* 'walk-friendly; pedestrian-oriented', 便于车行 *biànyú chēxíng* 'convenient for cars; car-easy', 人车分流 *rén chē fēnliú* 'people–car separation; safer circulation', 人车混流 *rén chē hùnliú* 'people–car mixing; conflictual circulation'. These terms reveal a vernacular mobility critique: respondents do not simply note "roads," they identify whether circulation regimes protect pedestrians or prioritize vehicles. This functional perception is tightly coupled to morphological form (road width, block permeability) and to affect (safety, comfort).

*Commerce and Mixed-Use as Vernacular Value*

A striking tendency is the strong presence of mixed-use and street commerce: 底层商业 *dǐcéng shāngyè* 'ground-floor commerce; active street base', 沿街底层商铺 *yánjiē dǐcéng shāngpù* 'street-front ground shops; active frontage), 上住下店 *shàng zhù xià diàn* 'live above, shop below', 商住混合 *shāngzhù hùnhé* 'commercial–residential mix; mixed-use living', 商业步行街 *shāngyè bùxíngjiē* 'commercial pedestrian street'. These are functional terms, but they often carry implied affective and social evaluations: commercial activity indicates vitality, everyday convenience, and "human presence." The function cluster therefore serves as a bridge between the physical street and the social atmosphere.

**Evaluative and Emotional Descriptors (E): Atmosphere as a Primary Urban Datum**

The E cluster reveals that respondents do not merely "use" or "see" the city; they feel it, and they name those feelings directly. In fact, affective descriptors often function as semantic summaries of multiple conditions at once.

*Comfort, Calm, and Habitability*

Comfort and calm appear repeatedly: 安静 *ānjing* 'quiet', 舒适 *shūshì* 'comfortable', 宜居 *yíjū* 'livable; suitable for living', 宁静 *níngjìng* 'tranquil', 安逸 *ānyì* 'easy and comfortable; relaxed ease', 僻静 *pìjìng* 'remote + quiet; secluded' (neutral to positive connotation). These terms do more than express preference; they indicate that respondents treat "habitability" as an experiential quality, not only a housing standard.

*Liveliness vs. Noise: Ambivalent Affect*

A major affective opposition is liveliness versus disturbance: 热闹 *rènao* 'lively; bustling', 充满活力 *chōngmǎn huólì* 'full of vitality; energetic', 嘈杂 *cáozá* 'noisy; clamorous', 吵闹 *chǎonào* 'loud and rowdy; disruptive noise'. This semantic pair is

crucial: liveliness is not unequivocally positive, and quiet is not unequivocally positive. The same urban condition—high intensity of activity—can be read as desirable "vibrancy" or undesirable "noise." This ambivalence is a signature of vernacular evaluation: it remains context-sensitive rather than technically standardized.

*Oppression, Coldness, and Alienation*

Respondents also use strong negative affect: 压抑 *yāyì* 'oppressive; emotionally stifling', 压迫 *yāpò* 'pressure; oppression', 冰冷 *bīnglěng* 'ice-cold; emotionally cold', 荒凉 *huāngliáng* 'desolate; bleak'. In many cases the negative affect points back to morphology and function. 冰冷城市尺度 *bīnglěng chéngshì chǐdù* 'ice-cold city scale; emotionally alienating urban scale' explicitly fuses spatial form with affect. Likewise, 暗无天日 *ànwútiānrì* 'no light, no sky; extreme enclosure' is morphological in content but emotional in force.

**Social and Relational Descriptors (S): The City as a Social Medium**

The S cluster shows that respondents often describe the city as a social field—presence and absence, warmth and indifference, familiarity and anonymity.

*Warmth, Familiarity, and "Social Texture"*

A foundational social value in the corpus is "warmth" as relational texture: 人情味 *rénqíngwèi* 'human sentiment; social warmth / human presence', 熟人社会 *shúrén shèhuì* 'acquaintance society; dense familiarity network', 邻里关系 *línlǐ guānxì* 'neighborhood relations', 邻里街坊 *línlǐ jiēfāng* 'neighbors; neighborhood folks'. These terms do not merely indicate social density. They encode normative expectations about appropriate social distance and reciprocity. 人情味 *rénqíngwèi* is especially important because it is not fully equivalent to any single English term; it conveys an evaluative sense that a place "has people in it" in a morally desirable way (→ 8.4).

*Indifference, Isolation, and Social Coldness*

Social negativity also appears: 冷漠 *lěngmò* 'indifference; coldness', 冷漠的人际交往 *lěngmò de rénjì jiāowǎng* 'cold interpersonal interaction', 孤独 *gūdú* 'lonely; isolation'. These terms often co-occur conceptually with morphological cues (high-rise environments, large scale, gatedness) and with affective descriptors (冰冷 *bīnglěng* 'ice-cold; emotionally cold'). The lexicon suggests that respondents experience certain built forms not just as spatial arrangements but as social atmospheres.

*Crowding as Social Experience*

Crowding terms straddle morphology and sociality: 拥挤 *yōngjǐ* 'crowded; congested', 摩肩接踵 *mójiān jiēzhǒng* 'shoulder-to-shoulder; extreme crowding', 人流量大 *rénliú liàng dà* 'large pedestrian flow; high foot traffic'. These terms indicate that density is experienced socially: crowding is not only about bodies in space, but about encounter, friction, visibility, and vulnerability. This provides an explicit bridge between M and S.

**Institutional and Governance-Related Descriptors (I): Governance as Lived Effect**

The I cluster is smaller but analytically pivotal because it captures how governance is perceived from below. Respondents rarely use bureaucratic language; instead, governance appears as management, safety regimes, planning legibility, and the presence or absence of services.

*Planning, Order, and Legibility*

Respondents name planning and order: 规划 *guīhuà* 'planning', 统一规划 *tǒngyī guīhuà* 'unified planning; coherent planning', 无规划 *wú guīhuà* 'no planning; unplanned', 规范 *guīfàn* 'standardized; regulated', 秩序 *zhìxù* 'order; orderly condition', 秩序感 *zhìxù gǎn* 'sense of order; felt orderliness'. These terms are important because they show that governance is often encountered as environmental legibility. "Order" here can be positive (clarity, safety) or negative (control, sterility), depending on how it interacts with affect and sociality.

*Management and Property Regimes*

The corpus includes direct references to management: 物业管理 *wùyè guǎnlǐ* 'property management), 无物业 *wú wùyè* 'no property management; unmanaged', 缺乏管理 *quēfá guǎnlǐ* 'lack of management; neglected'. These terms locate governance not at the level of abstract policy but at the level of day-to-day maintenance and control. 'No property management' is not a technical category; it is an experiential diagnosis that often connects to disorder, insecurity, and deteriorating environment.

*Security and Regulation as Atmosphere*

Security terms such as 安保 *ānbǎo* 'security' can be read in two ways: as a comfort-providing feature or as a sign of surveillance. The dataset's strength is that it allows this ambiguity to be recognized rather than resolved prematurely. Governance is perceived not only in explicit institutional terms but also as a diffuse atmosphere of control or neglect.

**Temporal and Processual Descriptors (T): The City as Change, Aging, and Transition**

The T cluster indicates that respondents perceive the city historically. Space is not only where life happens; it is what has been transformed, what is aging, and what is in transition.

*Aging, Obsolescence, and Material Wear*

Terms encode aging explicitly: 老旧 *lǎojiù* 'old and worn; aging and obsolete', 破旧 *pòjiù* 'shabby; worn-out', 陈旧 *chénjiù* 'old-fashioned; outdated', 破败 *pòbài* 'dilapidated; decayed'. These terms are temporal, but also evaluative. 'Old' may imply charm in some contexts, but in many terms the semantic weight leans toward deterioration and infrastructural insufficiency (e.g., 老旧基础设施 *lǎojiù jīchǔ shèshī* 'old infrastructure; outdated basic services').

*Transformation, Redevelopment, and Suspended Futures*

Urban change appears through redevelopment vocabulary: 改造 *gǎizào* 'transform; retrofit', 更新 *gēngxīn* 'renew; upgrade), 拆迁 *chāiqiān* 'demolish and relocate; clearance), 待拆迁 *dài chāiqiān* 'waiting for demolition; suspended redevelopment'. These terms reveal time as lived uncertainty. 待拆迁 *dài chāiqiān* is especially processual: it indicates a present shaped by anticipated transformation, where the future organizes the experience of the now.

*Historical Periodization as Urban Meaning*

Respondents use decades as interpretive anchors: 90 年代 *90 nián dài* 'the 1990s', 上世纪末 *shàng shìjì mò* 'end of the last century; late 20th century', 二十一世纪初 *èrshíyī shìjì chū* 'early 21st century'. This periodization is not merely chronological; it functions as a shorthand for architectural typologies, governance regimes, and memories. Time becomes a semiotic resource that allows respondents to categorize the city through recognized eras of development.

**Cross-Analysis: Systematic Intersections and "Semantic Trajectories"**

The most important analytical payoff comes from cross-analysis. The clusters are useful because they reveal how respondents build urban meaning through patterned movement across semantic domains. Below I identify several recurring trajectories.

*Morphology → Affect: When Form Becomes Feeling*

Many terms show that spatial form is experienced as atmosphere. The dataset provides explicit bridges: 冰冷城市尺度 *bīnglěng chéngshì chǐdù* 'ice-cold city scale', 非人尺度 *fēi rén chǐdù* 'non-human scale; hostile scale', 暗无天日 *ànwútiānrì* 'no light, no sky; suffocating enclosure'. These terms indicate that respondents do not separate spatial attributes from emotional consequence. In expert discourse, "scale" is often treated as a

design parameter; here it becomes a moral and affective judgment. Similarly, enclosure terms (围合感 *wéihégǎn* 'sense of enclosure') can drift into comfort, e.g 温馨 *wēnxīn* 'warm; cozy', or into oppression, e.g. 压抑 *yāyì* 'oppressive; stifling'. Morphological descriptors therefore behave like "triggers" that activate affective interpretation.

*Morphology → Function: Spatial Configuration as Practical Outcome*

Road and street terms connect morphology to daily usability: 道路清晰 *dàolù qīngxī* 'clear roads; legible circulation' supports walkability and orientation; 道路错杂 *dàolù cuòzá* 'roads tangled; confusing layout' aligns with 无方向感 *wú fāngxiànggǎn* 'no sense of direction; disorientation'; 人车分流 *rén chē fēnliú* 'people–car separation; safer circulation' expresses functional evaluation rooted in circulation design. In these cases, function is not an overlay on form; it is the lived expression of form. This supports a key claim: vernacular urban perception often performs an "implicit urban analysis" without formal technical vocabulary.

*Function → Sociality: Mixed-Use as Social Warmth*

Mixed-use descriptors often imply social presence: 底层商业 *dǐcéng shāngyè* 'ground-floor commerce; active street base' tends to align with perceived vitality, e.g. 活力 *huólì* 'vitality', and the sense that a place "has people", e.g. 人来人往 *rén lái rén wǎng* 'people coming and going', 生活气息 *shēnghuó qìxī* 'life atmosphere; everyday liveliness' sits at the boundary of function and affect. When respondents mention commercial/residential hybridity, they are often describing not only an economic function but a social ecology: a street that sustains routine encounters, visibility, and informal sociability.

*Governance → Affect: Order and Neglect as Emotional Atmospheres*

Institutional terms frequently carry affective consequences: 秩序 *zhìxù* 'order; orderly condition' can support comfort, e.g. 舒适 *shūshì* 'comfortable', by producing predictability and safety; 缺乏管理 *quēfá guǎnlǐ* 'lack of management; neglected' tends to align conceptually with disorder terms, e.g. 脏乱差 *zāng luàn chà* 'dirty, messy, bad; degraded environment', and with negative affect, e.g. 不舒适 *bù shūshì* 'uncomfortable'. This indicates that governance is experienced as atmosphere: "order" can feel reassuring or oppressive; "neglect" can feel unsafe or abandoned. In vernacular terms, governance is not only a system; it is a felt condition.

*Temporality → Evaluation: "Old" as Both Loss and Meaning*

Temporal terms are rarely neutral. 老旧 *lǎojiù* 'old and worn; obsolete' and 破败 *pòbài* 'dilapidated; decayed' are temporal descriptors that carry negative evaluation. Yet temporal anchoring also supports memory and attachment: 记忆 *jìyì* 'memory', 童年回忆 *tóngnián huíyì* 'childhood memories'. These terms indicate that urban meaning is narrative. Respondents do not only say "this is old," they often imply "this is part of my remembered city." This is crucial for terminological urbanism: temporal descriptors connect the built environment to biographical and collective time.

*Sociality ↔ Affect: Warmth, Indifference, and the Moral City*

Social descriptors frequently operate as moral evaluations: 人情味 *rénqíngwèi* 'human sentiment; social warmth / human presence' implies positive moral texture, 冷漠 *lěngmò* 'indifference; social coldness' implies moral deficit. These are not just "social" observations; they are judgments about what urban life should feel like. In this sense, vernacular descriptors function as normative urban theory, expressed through everyday terms rather than abstract concepts.

Here, clustering does not claim to reconstruct respondents' full meanings in context; rather, it identifies the dominant semantic tendencies that recur across the corpus. Because terms were collected as lexical items rather than as full narratives, some context is inevitably missing. That limitation is not a weakness if treated explicitly: it means the analysis is strongest when interpreting patterns of salience and co-presence, not when claiming precise individual intentions.

Two methodological implications follow. First, the dominance of morphology indicates that urban experience is initially processed through embodied spatial cues. Second, the density of affective and social terms shows that respondents are not simply describing; they are evaluating and moralizing space. In other words, the survey corpus is not only a lexicon of urban objects, but a lexicon of urban judgments. At the same time, polysemy remains a central issue. Many terms can be read morphologically, socially, and affectively. Treating them as belonging to one cluster does not deny their multiple meanings; it highlights the dominant semantic "pull" that makes them recurring nodes in the dataset. This is precisely why cross-analysis is essential: the richest findings appear not in the isolated clusters, but in the patterned intersections between them.

## 8.4 Micro-Readings of Vernacular Urban Terms

To further intensify the analysis and demonstrate how vernacular descriptors operate across semantic domains, this section presents a series of micro-readings of selected terms from the corpus. Each micro-reading focuses on a single term and traces how it mobilizes multiple dimensions of urban meaning—morphological, functional, affective, social, institutional, and temporal. These readings are not intended as exhaustive semantic definitions, but as analytical illustrations of how vernacular language condenses complex urban experiences into compact lexical forms.

**拥挤 *yongji* 'crowded; congested'**

At first glance, it appears to be a straightforward morphological descriptor referring to high density. However, in the survey corpus, the term rarely functions as a neutral spatial measurement. Instead, it frequently encodes a social and affective experience of forced proximity. Crowding here is not simply "many people in a small space," but a condition in which bodily movement, personal boundaries, and social comfort are compromised. As such, 拥挤 *yōngjǐ* moves from the M cluster into the S cluster, describing a social condition, and further into the E cluster, where it often aligns with discomfort, irritation, or stress. The term thus illustrates how density becomes meaningful only through lived, embodied encounter.

**人情味 *renqingwei* 'human sentiment; social warmth / sense of human presence'**

One of the clearest examples of a term that resists reduction to a single analytical category. Literally referring to the 'flavor of human feelings', it operates primarily within the S cluster as a descriptor of relational warmth and familiarity. At the same time, it carries a strong evaluative charge, positioning it firmly within the E cluster as a marker of positive urban experience. Importantly, 人情味 *rénqíngwèi* is often implicitly linked to spatial and functional conditions, such as street-level commerce, small-scale environments, or frequent informal encounters, without explicitly naming them. This makes the term a powerful example of how vernacular language encodes social theory indirectly, through affective shorthand rather than explicit causal explanation.

**非人尺度 *feiren chidu* 'non-human scale; scale hostile to the body'**

On the surface, to morphological descriptor concerning scale. Yet its semantic force lies in its evaluative dimension. By explicitly contrasting the city with the human body, the term frames scale as a moral and experiential issue rather than a neutral design parameter.

The phrase implies that certain urban forms are not merely large, but actively incompatible with everyday bodily experience. As a result, 非人尺度 *fēi rén chǐdù* bridges the M and E clusters, while also gesturing toward institutional critique, since such scales are often associated with top-down planning decisions. The term thus condenses a critique of modernist urbanism into a single vernacular expression.

**围合感 *weihe gan* 'sense of enclosure'**

Morphologically grounded term that explicitly names a perceptual experience rather than a physical object. It refers to how space feels enclosed by surrounding structures, foregrounding the relationship between built form and bodily perception. Importantly, 围合感 *wéihégǎn* can be evaluated positively or negatively depending on degree and context. Moderate enclosure may support comfort, intimacy, or orientation, aligning the term with positive affect. Excessive enclosure, however, may slide toward 压抑 *yāyì* 'oppression', shifting the term into the E cluster. This mobility illustrates how spatial configuration becomes meaningful through affective thresholds rather than fixed metrics.

**底层商业 *diceng shangye* 'ground-floor commerce; active street base)**

Formally a functional descriptor, referring to the presence of commercial activity at street level. Yet its significance in the corpus extends beyond function. Respondents often implicitly associate ground-floor commerce with liveliness, safety, and social visibility. As such, the term operates at the intersection of the F, E, and S clusters. It suggests that certain functional arrangements generate affective atmospheres and social conditions, even when these are not explicitly named. 底层商业 *dǐcéng shāngyè* thus exemplifies how vernacular terms encode causal assumptions about urban life without formal theorization.

**秩序感 *zhixu gan* 'sense of order; felt orderliness'**

It refers not to order as a formal system, but to order as it is perceived and felt. The addition of 感 *gǎn* 'sense, feeling' shifts the term from an institutional category to an experiential one. While the concept originates in governance and regulation, its vernacular usage places it squarely at the intersection of the I and E clusters. A strong 秩序感 *zhìxù gǎn* may produce comfort and predictability, but it may also imply excessive control or rigidity. The term thus captures how governance is translated into atmosphere, reinforcing the idea that power is experienced affectively rather than abstractly.

**待拆迁 *dai chaiqian* 'waiting for demolition; suspended redevelopment'**

Paradigmatic processual term that encodes temporality as lived uncertainty. It does not describe a completed action, but a prolonged state of anticipation. As such, it belongs

primarily to the T cluster, yet its implications extend into the E and S clusters. Spaces labeled as 待拆迁 *dài chāiqiān* are often experienced as neglected, unstable, or socially fragile. The term reveals how future-oriented governance decisions reshape present experience, turning time itself into an organizing force of urban perception.

**冷清 *lengqing* 'cold and quiet; deserted'**

Affective descriptor that also functions socially and spatially. While it denotes low activity levels, its emotional resonance goes beyond emptiness. 冷清 *lěngqīng* often implies a lack of human presence, vitality, or care, positioning the term at the intersection of the E and S clusters. In some contexts, it may align with tranquility; in others, with abandonment. This semantic flexibility underscores how absence itself becomes meaningful in urban perception.

**人车分流 *ren che fenliu* 'separation of people and cars; safer circulation'**

Functional descriptor that implicitly encodes normative assumptions about safety, comfort, and priority. While it refers to circulation design, its repeated appearance suggests that respondents experience such separation as a qualitative improvement to everyday life. The term thus bridges F and E clusters, while also hinting at governance, since separation regimes are usually institutionally implemented. It exemplifies how technical planning concepts are resemanticized in vernacular language as experiential benefits.

## 8.5 Urban terms as urban buzzwords: three examples

The analysis of the survey results suggests that a subset of urban descriptors circulates as popular buzzwords rather than as stable descriptive terms. These expressions are widely recognizable, frequently repeated, and semantically flexible, often functioning as shorthand for broader aspirations, anxieties, or policy imaginaries. In the Chinese urban context, such buzzwords typically emerge at the intersection of planning discourse, media narratives, and everyday speech: they appear meaningful without requiring precise definition. Their popularity lies precisely in this openness, which allows them to be mobilized across different contexts—official documents, real estate advertising, social media, and vernacular descriptions—while maintaining a surface coherence.

However, the survey data indicate that when respondents employ these buzzwords, they rarely use them in a strictly technical or policy-driven sense. Instead, the terms are re-embedded in lived experience and acquire localized meanings. A buzzword that circulates in planning discourse as a normative goal may be redeployed by respondents to express affective judgments,

social expectations, or moral evaluations of urban space. In this sense, buzzwords function less as analytical categories and more as semantic condensers: they compress complex and sometimes contradictory experiences into a single, socially legible label. Their repeated appearance in the survey does not necessarily signal conceptual clarity; rather, it reveals how urban language in contemporary China absorbs institutional vocabularies and transforms them into everyday evaluative tools.

The prominence of such buzzwords also reflects broader dynamics of rapid urban transformation. In a context where cities are continuously rebranded, redeveloped, and narrated through slogans, certain terms acquire heightened visibility and symbolic power. They circulate quickly, lose specificity, and become detached from the material conditions they originally referred to. Yet this semantic dilution does not render them meaningless. On the contrary, their vagueness enables them to function as shared reference points through which respondents articulate alignment, critique, or ambivalence toward dominant urban narratives. From the perspective of terminological urbanism, these buzzwords are analytically valuable not despite their imprecision, but because of it: they expose how expert language, market rhetoric, and vernacular perception overlap and blur, revealing the unstable boundary between official urban imaginaries and everyday urban experience.

**传统 *chuantong* 'tradition; traditional'**

In architectural history and urban studies, "tradition" is often treated as a relatively stable referent. Buildings are classified as traditional or non-traditional based on chronology, construction techniques, stylistic features, or cultural origin. Such classifications presuppose that "tradition" corresponds to identifiable formal or historical characteristics. However, the results of the survey complicate this assumption in fundamental ways. Respondents applied it to buildings of radically different ages, forms, and socio-political contexts. This variability raises an immediate question: *what does* chuantong *actually mean when used to describe architecture in contemporary China?*

The controversy surrounding *chuantong* is not a methodological problem but a theoretical opportunity. The term's semantic instability reveals how architectural meaning is produced not through formal classification alone, but through lived experience, cultural memory, and institutional discourse. Rather than denoting a specific architectural type. *Chuantong* operates as a relational category that positions buildings within a shifting landscape of modernity, globalization, and heritage-making.

To understand the survey results, it is necessary to examine the semantic structure of *chuantong* itself. The term is composed of two characters: 传 *chuàn* 'to transmit, to pass down' and 统 *tǒng* 'continuity, lineage, system'. This composition foregrounds the idea of transmission over time, rather than age or origin.

Unlike terms such as 古代 *gǔdài* 'ancient', 老 *lǎo* 'old', or 历史 *lìshǐ* 'historical', *chuantong* does not inherently specify a temporal depth. A building is not *chuantong* simply because it is old, nor is it disqualified from being *chuantong* because it is recent. What matters is whether it is perceived as participating in a continuity of cultural meaning.

This semantic orientation helps explain why respondents in the survey applied *chuantong* to both pre-modern courtyard houses and socialist-era residential blocks. In both cases, the buildings were perceived as belonging to an earlier stage of the city, or as embodying a way of life understood as no longer dominant. The term thus functions less as a chronological marker than as a relational temporal operator, situating architecture within a perceived sequence of urban change.

One of the most striking features of the survey results is the breadth of architectural objects labeled *chuantong*. From a typological standpoint, this appears contradictory. How can a Qing-era 四合院 *sìhéyuàn*, a 1950s slab block, and a 1990s low-rise neighborhood all be "traditional"?

The answer lies in the relational nature of the term. *Chuantong* acquires meaning only in contrast to something else—typically 现代 *xiandai* 'modern', 新 *xin* 'new', or 国际化 *guójìhuà* 'internationalized; globalized'. In cities undergoing rapid transformation, this contrast is constantly shifting. Buildings that were once symbols of modernity become markers of tradition as newer forms emerge. In this sense, *chuantong* functions as a moving boundary rather than a fixed category. It marks what belongs to an earlier configuration of urban life, regardless of that configuration's historical depth. This helps explain why relatively recent buildings can be described as *chuantong* in cities that have undergone radical redevelopment within a single generation. The survey responses thus reflect a lived experience of urban change in which tradition is continually redefined. Rather than anchoring meaning in architectural history, respondents anchor it in experiential discontinuity.

At this point, one should ask not only *What does it mean?*, but rather *Why is it so extensively used?* I propose five different hypotheses on the base of the survey results.

*Hypothesis 1:* Chuantong *as a category of perception and affect*

The first interpretive hypothesis suggested by the survey data is that *chuantong* operates as a perceptual and affective category. Respondents use the term not to classify architecture

according to formal criteria, but to express familiarity, cultural resonance, or emotional recognition. Buildings labeled *chuantong* often share a capacity to evoke memories of earlier urban life, associations with "Chinese-ness," a sense of rootedness or continuity. These associations do not depend on architectural purity or historical authenticity. A building may be structurally modern yet visually reminiscent of an imagined past, and thus perceived as *chuantong*. Conversely, a genuinely old building may not be described as *chuantong* if it is framed as obsolete, dilapidated, or disconnected from contemporary life. From this perspective, *chuantong* is less a descriptive adjective than an index of cultural legibility.

*Hypothesis 2:* Chuantong *as opposition to globalized urban form*

A second hypothesis emerging from the survey is that *chuantong* functions as a negative classifier, defining architecture by what it is not. In many responses, *chuantong* appears to stand in implicit opposition to glass towers, gated high-rise compounds, and international-style developments.

Under this logic, *chuantong* does not necessarily celebrate the past; it marks a refusal of architectural homogenization. Buildings described as *chuantong* are those that resist being read as generic, global, or placeless. This resistance may be material, stylistic, or symbolic. In this sense, *chuantong* becomes a tool for articulating difference in the present, rather than continuity with the past. It allows respondents to position certain urban environments as culturally specific within a landscape increasingly shaped by global capital and standardized design.

*Hypothesis 3: The influence of heritage discourse*

The survey results also reflect the impact of institutional heritage discourse on vernacular language. Over the past two decades, Chinese urban policy has increasingly emphasized historic preservation, cultural branding, and tourism-oriented redevelopment. Terms such as 历史文化街区 *lìshǐ wénhuà jiēqū* 'historic and cultural district' and 仿古建筑 *fǎnggǔ jiànzhù* 'pseudo-historic architecture' have entered both official and popular vocabularies. As a result, *chuantong* has become entangled with heritage performance. Respondents may label newly built, stylistically "traditional" developments as *chuantong* because they align with officially sanctioned narratives of the past. In such cases, *chuantong* refers not to historical continuity but to symbolic staging. This institutionalization of tradition complicates vernacular usage. The term becomes detached from material authenticity and reattached to visual cues, narratives, and policy frameworks. The survey data captures this shift, showing that respondents draw on a hybrid vocabulary shaped by both lived experience and top-down discourse.

*Hypothesis 4:* Chuantong *as a Vernacular Temporal Shortcut*

Another key insight from the survey is that *chuantong* functions as a temporal shortcut in everyday language. In cities where urban change is compressed into decades rather than centuries, distinctions between "old," "earlier," and "traditional" blur. Respondents may use *chuantong* to refer simply to what existed before major redevelopment, regardless of historical period. In this vernacular temporal logic, a 1980s neighborhood can be as "traditional" as a Qing-era courtyard, insofar as both belong to a pre-redevelopment city. This usage challenges academic notions of historical periodization. It suggests that urban temporality is experienced not as a linear sequence of eras, but as a series of ruptures that redefine what counts as "before."

*Hypothesis 5:* Chuantong *as an Umbrella Term in Non-Expert Discourse*

Finally, the survey indicates that *chuantong* often operates as an umbrella term, absorbing multiple more precise but less accessible categories. When respondents lack specialized architectural vocabulary—or when such vocabulary is irrelevant to their purpose—they rely on *chuantong* as a flexible placeholder. This does not indicate ignorance or imprecision. On the contrary, it reflects a pragmatic strategy for navigating complex urban realities. By using *chuantong*, respondents can position buildings within a meaningful cultural frame without committing to technical distinctions that may not matter in everyday perception.

From a *Terminological Urbanism* perspective, this highlights the epistemic value of vernacular generalization. Broad terms like *chuantong* reveal how meaning is organized at the level of lived experience, rather than how it is codified in expert discourse. The findings of this study suggest that terms like *chuantong* cannot be treated as stable descriptors of form or period. Instead, they should be understood as semantic operators that mediate between architecture, memory, and identity.

For researchers, this means that survey data should not be "corrected" to fit typological frameworks. Instead, the variability of vernacular terms should be analyzed as data in its own right. The controversy surrounding *chuantong* is not noise; it is a signal of how urban meaning is produced in context.

**老破小 *lǎopòxiǎo* 'old, broken, small'**

Among the terms that recur most frequently in the questionnaire results, this expression stands out for both its frequency and its semantic density. At first glance, the expression appears deceptively simple. Composed of three characters—老 *lǎo* 'old', 破 *pò* 'broken', and 小 *xiǎo* 'small'—it seems to function as a purely descriptive label for substandard housing. Yet a closer examination reveals that *laopoxiao* operates as a highly compressed vernacular category that

condenses multiple dimensions of urban experience into a single, immediately recognizable term. Individually, none of these terms is particularly specialized or technical. Their power lies in their combination and in the order in which they appear. 老 *lǎo* 'old' introduces a temporal dimension. It situates the housing unit within a historical trajectory of urban development, implicitly contrasting it with newer construction. 破 *pò* 'broken; dilapidated' adds a material and evaluative layer. It signals physical deterioration, poor maintenance, and infrastructural inadequacy. 小 *xiǎo* 'small' foregrounds scale and spatial constraint, directly referencing everyday bodily experience within the dwelling. Taken together, these three elements form a fixed expression whose meaning is not reducible to the sum of its parts. The phrase does not simply describe a dwelling that happens to be old, broken, and small. Instead, it designates a recognizable housing type within the Chinese urban imaginary. When respondents use the term, they assume that its meaning is already shared and does not require further elaboration.

Building on the earlier schematic analysis of vernacular urban terminology, this chapter focuses exclusively on *laopoxiao* as a paradigmatic case. By tracing its semantic structure, contextual usage, and circulation across different discursive arenas, the chapter demonstrates how vernacular buzzwords function as semantic condensers in contemporary Chinese urbanism. In doing so, it highlights how everyday language provides a powerful lens for understanding housing precarity, inequality, and the lived consequences of rapid urban transformation.

This assumption of shared understanding is a defining feature of buzzwords. *Laopoxiao* works because it activates a set of expectations: cramped interiors, outdated facilities, lack of elevators, poor insulation, inefficient layouts, and limited comfort. Importantly, these expectations are rarely spelled out explicitly. The term functions as a shorthand that allows speakers to bypass detailed description while still communicating a rich evaluative judgment.

In the survey responses, the use of *laopoxiao* often appears in proximity to other spatial descriptors such as 狭窄 *xiázhǎi* 'narrow', 采光差 *cǎiguāng chà* 'poor lighting', or 布局不合理 *bùjú bù hélǐ* 'unreasonable layout'. However, when *laopoxiao* is used, these additional descriptors become redundant. The term itself already implies them. This morphological compression is significant. It shows that respondents are not merely listing spatial attributes, but categorizing space through typified forms. *Laopoxiao* functions as a morphological category that is socially legible even without technical precision. In this sense, it reflects a vernacular spatial knowledge that prioritizes lived experience over formal classification.

The temporal dimension introduced by *lao* is central to the meaning. The term situates housing units within a broader narrative of urban development, implicitly referencing earlier

phases of construction, often from the planned economy period or the early stages of market reform. Unlike neutral temporal descriptors, *lao* rarely denotes age alone. It is closely intertwined with *po*, producing a temporal judgment: age is associated with decline, obsolescence, and neglect. This contrasts with other uses of *lao* in urban discourse, where "old" may carry connotations of heritage, memory, or authenticity. In *laopoxiao*, the temporal dimension is predominantly negative.

At the same time, the temporal positioning of *laopoxiao* is ambivalent. In many large Chinese cities, such housing units are located in inner-city areas with access to jobs, schools, and public services. As a result, they occupy a paradoxical position: temporally outdated, yet spatially central. This tension is often implicit in how the term is used, especially in discussions of trade-offs between location and living quality.

*Laopoxiao* encodes not only past development trajectories but also uncertain futures. It implicitly raises questions of redevelopment, demolition, or renovation, even when these processes are not explicitly mentioned. The term thus positions housing within a temporal field of anticipation and potential transformation.

However, perhaps the most salient aspect of *laopoxiao* is its evaluative force. The term is almost always used with a negative or self-deprecating tone. It signals dissatisfaction with living conditions, but this dissatisfaction is often tempered by pragmatism. Rather than expressing outright rejection, it frequently appears as a label for compromise. In everyday and social media usage, *laopoxiao* is often embedded in narratives that frame housing choice as a forced trade-off. Typical formulations include statements such as choosing a *laopoxiao* "for the location," "for the school district," or "because there is no other option." In these contexts, the term conveys resignation rather than outrage.

Although *laopoxiao* does not explicitly name social groups, it carries strong social implications. The term implicitly indexes a particular urban subject position: residents who cannot access larger, newer, or better-quality housing, but who remain tied to central locations for work, education, or family reasons. In this sense, *laopoxiao* functions as a socially coded category. It allows speakers to situate themselves within the urban housing hierarchy without directly invoking income, class, or inequality. This indirectness is part of its appeal. The term offers a way to talk about structural constraints through spatial description rather than explicit socioeconomic labels.

Media discourse reinforces this social positioning. In newspaper articles discussing housing affordability, *laopoxiao* is often contrasted with "improved housing" or "upgraded

living conditions," implicitly constructing a ladder of residential aspiration. On social platforms, the term is frequently used with humor or irony, allowing users to express dissatisfaction without overt complaint. This social coding further explains why *laopoxiao* circulates so widely. It provides a shared language for discussing housing precarity in a context where direct political critique may be sensitive or undesirable. The term thus functions as a vernacular proxy for inequality.

Although *laopoxiao* is not an institutional term, it implicitly references the outcomes of past planning regimes. Many housing units labeled as *laopoxiao* originate from periods characterized by different standards, priorities, and resource constraints. Their current condition reflects not only age, but also the uneven implementation of maintenance, renovation, and redevelopment policies. *Laopoxiao* indirectly points to governance issues without naming them explicitly. When respondents use the term, they are often commenting on the results of institutional decisions (what was built, what was maintained, and what was left to deteriorate). Yet the term translates these structural processes into an everyday evaluative label. This indirectness is significant. It shows how governance is experienced not through policy language, but through its material and spatial consequences. *Laopoxiao* thus serves as a vernacular register of institutional failure or neglect, even when no explicit critique is voiced.

The widespread circulation of the term across media, real-estate platforms, and social networks confirms its status as a buzzword. Its repeated appearance in headlines, listings, and online discussions reinforces its recognizability and stabilizes its core meaning, even as specific connotations shift across contexts. In contrast, social media users often reclaim the term, using it ironically or humorously to narrate their housing choices. What unites these uses is the term's semantic flexibility. *Laopoxiao* can function as a warning, a confession, a critique, or a badge of pragmatic survival. Its meaning is never fully fixed, yet it remains immediately intelligible. This is precisely what allows it to circulate so effectively.

**烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* 'cooking smells; lively atmosphere'**

In recent years, this expression has emerged as one of the most prominent buzzwords in Chinese urban discourse. In 2022, it was selected as one of the *Top Ten Buzzwords* by *Yaowen Jiaozi* (咬文嚼字), a well-known Chinese language magazine devoted to the standardization, correct usage, and cultural interpretation of Chinese, and in 2023 it was included among the *Top Ten Internet Catchphrases* by the National Language Resources Monitoring and Research Center (Editorial Department of Yaowen Jiaozi, 2022; Editorial Department of Yaowen Jiaozi, 2023. It appears with striking frequency across social media platforms, newspaper articles,

policy-adjacent commentary, and everyday conversations about neighborhoods, streets, and cities. Its rise is not accidental. Rather, it reflects a broader transformation in how urban life is evaluated and narrated in a context marked by rapid redevelopment, intensifying regulation, and growing concern over the loss of everyday social vitality.

At a literal level, 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* combines 烟火 *yānhuǒ* 'smoke and fire', commonly associated with cooking and 气 *qì* 'air, atmosphere', or 'aura'. Together, the expression evokes the sensory presence of cooking smoke, food smells, noise, and human activity. The term can already be found in Northern Song–dynasty sources. In Wen Tianxiang's poem *"Ode to the Watermelon"* (西瓜吟), the line "after swallowing, the smell of smoke and fire is immediately dispelled" preserves the original meaning referring to the odor of cooked food. In the Ming dynasty text *Ma Shi's History of the Southern Tang* (马氏南唐书), the phrase "having much of the world's 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì*" is used metaphorically to denote vulgarity. Likewise, in Yang Wanli's Song-dynasty poem *"Plum Blossoms Preserved in Honey"* (蜜渍梅花), the line "there is hardly any 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* in the verses" employs the term to signify refined transcendence. Yet in contemporary usage, 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* rarely refers directly to smoke or fire. Instead, it has become a metaphorical term designating a particular quality of urban life, one characterized by visibility of everyday practices, informal interactions, and human presence in public space.

烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* functions as a paradigmatic urban buzzword: a semantically condensed, widely circulating expression that compresses multiple dimensions of urban experience into a single, affectively charged label. Far from being a vague or superficial term, it performs important analytical work in vernacular urban language. It articulates values, critiques, and aspirations that are difficult to express within formal planning or policy vocabularies. By examining the semantic structure, discursive circulation, and evaluative function of 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì*, this chapter shows how the term operates as a key site where everyday urban experience, moral judgment, and institutional discourse intersect.

The literal meaning of 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* is rooted in domestic and everyday practices. *yanhuo* traditionally refers to the smoke and fire produced by cooking, symbolizing the basic acts of preparing food and sustaining life. In classical and colloquial Chinese, 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* has long carried connotations of ordinary, worldly existence, as opposed to transcendence, refinement, or withdrawal from society. To have 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* is to be embedded in daily life rather than detached from it.

In contemporary urban discourse, this older semantic layer has been reactivated and expanded. 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* no longer refers primarily to household cooking, but to the visible

presence of everyday urban practices: street food vendors, small shops, open kitchens, people sitting outside, informal conversations, children playing, and the general sense that life is unfolding in public view. The term thus undergoes a process of semantic expansion, moving from the domestic interior to the urban exterior, from individual households to collective street life. This expansion is crucial for understanding the term's popularity. 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* does not describe a specific spatial form, activity, or policy outcome. Instead, it names an atmospheric quality that emerges from the interaction of multiple elements: spatial scale, functional mix, social presence, sensory stimulation, and temporal repetition. Its semantic openness allows it to function as a shared reference point across different contexts, even as its precise meaning remains fluid.

One of the defining features of 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* is that it refers to atmosphere, not to discrete objects or infrastructures. Unlike terms that name buildings, facilities, or functions, it describes how a place feels when it is inhabited and animated by everyday life. This atmospheric quality is inherently relational and emergent; it cannot be reduced to any single component. The atmosphere of 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* is thus cumulative and processual, generated through repetition and density rather than through spectacle. Importantly, 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* is frequently contrasted with spaces perceived as overly planned, sanitized, or empty. Large plazas without activity, gated residential compounds, or overly regulated commercial streets may be described as lacking 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì*, even if they are technically well-designed or newly built. This contrast reveals that the term functions as a critique of urban environments that prioritize visual order, efficiency, or control at the expense of lived social presence.

Although 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* may be presented only as a descriptive term, it carries a strong evaluative and moral charge. To say that a place "has 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì*" is almost always to praise it. Conversely, to lament the loss of 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* is to express dissatisfaction with urban change. The term thus operates as a value judgment disguised as an atmospheric description. This evaluative dimension is particularly evident in media discourse. Newspaper articles and opinion pieces frequently frame 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* as something that cities should preserve or restore. Headlines about urban renewal, street vending, or post-pandemic recovery often invoke the need to "bring back 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì*," suggesting that vitality, not merely economic growth, is a key measure of urban success.

The moral undertone of 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* becomes clearer when the term is used in opposition to abstract ideals such as "modernization," "high-end development," or "orderly management." In these contexts, 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* stands for a moral claim: that cities should

accommodate ordinary life, not just showcase ambition or efficiency. The term thus articulates a normative vision of the city that privileges everyday practices and social presence over aesthetic uniformity or administrative convenience. At its core, 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* is about people. The presence or absence of 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* is determined not by architectural form alone, but by whether people are visible, audible, and engaged in ordinary activities. The term foregrounds social interaction as a defining component of urban quality.

In everyday speech and online commentary, 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* is often associated with scenes of informal sociability: neighbors greeting one another, customers chatting with shopkeepers, families eating outdoors, or groups lingering on the street. These scenes are not necessarily intimate or deep; they are often fleeting and routine. Yet it is precisely this ordinariness that gives 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* its meaning. The term values the mundane over the exceptional, repetition over novelty. This emphasis on social presence also explains why the term is frequently invoked in discussions of urban regulation. Measures that restrict street vending, outdoor seating, or informal gatherings are often criticized for "killing 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì*" (Lianyungang Municipal Urban Management Bureau, 2025). In such critiques, the term becomes a shorthand for the social costs of excessive control, translating regulatory decisions into experiential consequences.

Despite its vernacular roots, 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* has increasingly entered institutional and semi-official discourse. Policy statements, urban management guidelines, and official media sometimes adopt the term, especially when signaling a more "people-centered" approach. This institutional uptake is significant, as it demonstrates how buzzwords can travel upward from everyday language into governance discourse.

However, this upward circulation introduces ambivalence. When 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* is adopted by official narratives, it risks being abstracted from the very practices that give it meaning. Invoking 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* in policy language does not automatically guarantee tolerance for informal activities or acceptance of disorder. In some cases, the term is used rhetorically to soften the image of regulation without fundamentally altering regulatory practices. This tension highlights a key feature of buzzwords: their capacity to be mobilized by different actors for different ends. 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* can function as a grassroots critique of over-regulation, but it can also be appropriated as a vague symbol of benevolent governance. Its semantic flexibility allows it to circulate widely, but also makes it vulnerable to depoliticization.

Another important dimension of 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* is its temporal orientation. The term is often used nostalgically, evoking a sense of continuity with past forms of urban life. This nostalgic aspect does not necessarily imply a rejection of change. Rather, it reflects concern over the speed and direction of urban transformation. *Yanhuo qi* becomes a way of articulating what is perceived to be endangered by redevelopment: small-scale practices, informal economies, and everyday rhythms that are difficult to reproduce once displaced.

From an analytical perspective, 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* exemplifies how urban buzzwords operate as semantic condensers. Within a single expression, the term compresses multiple dimensions of urban experience: spatial scale and permeability; functional mix and informal use; social interaction and visibility; affective warmth and comfort; moral judgment about urban priorities; temporal narratives of loss and recovery. Rather than articulating these dimensions separately, *yanhuo qi* fuses them into a holistic impression. This fusion allows speakers to communicate complex evaluations efficiently, relying on shared cultural understanding rather than explicit explanation.

The patterns identified in the survey analysis reveal both continuities and fractures in the semantic organization of urban terminology. These findings demonstrate that urban meaning is not evenly distributed across categories, but shaped by clusters of association, affective weight, and spatial reference.

While the chapter focuses on describing and interpreting these patterns, their significance extends beyond the data itself. The next chapter therefore steps back from empirical detail to reflect on the broader implications of the findings. By synthesizing insights from the terminological framework, the empirical analyses, and the survey results, it addresses what these semantic dynamics mean for urban theory, comparative research, and planning practice.

# 9. A STRATEGY FOR INTEGRATING VERNACULAR TERMS INTO CHINESE URBAN TERMINOLOGY

This final chapter synthesizes the results of the dissertation and reflects on their theoretical and practical implications. Drawing together the conceptual framework, methodological approach, and empirical findings, it revisits the initial problem of linguistic asymmetry in urban studies from a consolidated analytical perspective.

The chapter examines how the comparison between formal urban terminology and empirically derived semantic patterns challenges conventional assumptions about universality, neutrality, and transferability in urban knowledge. It considers the implications of these findings for comparative urban research, emphasizing the role of terminology as an active component of planning thought rather than a passive descriptive layer.

By situating the results within broader disciplinary debates, the chapter articulates the contribution of the dissertation to urban studies and planning. It also reflects on the limits of the study and the possibilities for future research grounded in terminological sensitivity.

The previous chapter approached vernacular urban terms as an object of semantic analysis. By clustering questionnaire responses into recurrent semantic groups and tracing their internal trajectories, Chapter 8 demonstrated that vernacular language is not a random or merely descriptive register, but a structured mode of urban knowledge production. That analysis established the internal coherence, analytical density, and epistemic legitimacy of vernacular terms as data.

This chapter shifts the analytical perspective. Rather than continuing to analyze vernacular language as such, it addresses a different and subsequent question: how vernacular terms can be selectively and systematically integrated into an existing framework of official and expert urban terminology. The focus here is therefore not on semantic discovery, but on methodological articulation and conceptual alignment.

The need for this shift arises from a fundamental asymmetry between institutional urban language and vernacular expression. Official terminology—planning categories, regulatory concepts, and policy vocabularies—is characterized by abstraction, standardization, and procedural neutrality. Vernacular language, by contrast, is situated, affective, evaluative, and relational. These two registers operate according to different epistemic logics and cannot be merged through simple equivalence or translation. Treating vernacular terms as informal

synonyms of official concepts would flatten their semantic specificity, while incorporating them indiscriminately would risk anecdotalism and analytical dilution.

The purpose of this chapter is therefore to define a selection and integration strategy that preserves the epistemic difference of vernacular language while making it analytically usable within a terminological framework. Vernacular terms are not introduced here as illustrative embellishments or stylistic color, but as conceptual complements: linguistic forms that articulate dimensions of urban experience—embodied, affective, moral, and temporal—that remain underdetermined or absent in institutional vocabularies.

Methodologically, this chapter builds on the results of the centripetal analysis developed in Chapter 8 but does not replicate it. The clustering of vernacular terms into semantic groups functioned as an exploratory and diagnostic phase, revealing dominant tendencies in how urban environments are perceived and evaluated from below. In contrast, the present chapter adopts a relational and projective logic. **Vernacular terms are selected, organized, and positioned in direct dialogue with the analytical structure of the dissertation itself, particularly the conceptual frameworks developed in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.**

This shift entails a change in organizing principle. Instead of grouping terms according to their internal semantic affinities alone, vernacular expressions are here curated according to their capacity to engage with specific domains of official terminology. The resulting corpus is therefore deliberately partial and selective. Exclusion is treated not as a methodological limitation, but as a necessary condition for analytical clarity and conceptual coherence.

The chapter proceeds as follows. Section 9.1 outlines the criteria used to select vernacular terms from the questionnaire corpus, emphasizing recurrence, semantic density, analytical mobility, and broader discursive circulation. Section 9.2 discusses the rationale for structuring the complementary vernacular corpus in alignment with the architecture of the dissertation, rather than as an autonomous lexicon. Sections 9.3 and following then apply this strategy to specific urban domains, showing how vernacular terms related to housing, streets, and neighborhoods operate as complementary semantic resources in relation to official urban concepts.

By articulating a strategy for integration rather than compilation, this chapter advances a central claim of the dissertation: that vernacular language constitutes a form of urban knowledge that is neither reducible to expert terminology nor external to it, but structurally complementary. Understanding the contemporary Chinese city therefore requires not only analyzing institutional vocabularies, but also defining rigorous methods for incorporating

everyday evaluative language into urban theory and terminology. Official terminology, as analyzed in earlier chapters, is characterized by abstraction and generalization, procedural and administrative rationality, normative neutrality or depersonalization, emphasis on measurable indicators and formal categories. Vernacular language, by contrast, is situated and experiential, affectively and morally charged, relational rather than categorical, embedded in everyday practice and perception.

The selection strategy therefore begins from the recognition that these two registers operate according to different epistemic logics. Vernacular terms are not selected because they correspond neatly to official concepts, but because they reveal how those concepts are lived, judged, and reinterpreted in everyday contexts.

## 9.1 Selection strategy

The questionnaire results contain a large number of vernacular descriptors, many of which are partially redundant, context-dependent, or weakly articulated. A key challenge is therefore to move from lexical abundance to analytical selection. The strategy adopted here follows three guiding principles: **recurrence over uniqueness** (terms are selected based on patterned recurrence across responses, not on singular or striking formulations; recurrence indicates shared social recognition and communicative stability); **semantic density over descriptive simplicity** (preference is given to terms that compress multiple dimensions of urban experience into a single expression, rather than those that describe isolated attributes); **analytical mobility over categorical purity** (selected terms typically operate across several semantic domains—spatial, affective, social, temporal—rather than remaining confined to one analytical category).

Another key selection criterion is **discursive circulation** beyond the questionnaire itself. Vernacular terms are prioritized when there is evidence that they circulate across everyday speech, media discourse, social platforms, and semi-official or policy-adjacent language. Such circulation indicates that a term functions as a shared reference point rather than as an idiosyncratic expression. This does not mean that the term is ideologically neutral or semantically stable. On the contrary, many widely circulating terms are ambiguous, contested, or strategically appropriated. It is precisely this instability that makes them analytically valuable. By selecting terms with broader circulation, the strategy ensures that vernacular additions are socially anchored and analytically defensible.

A defining feature of the selected vernacular terms is their normative force. Unlike official terminology, which often claims neutrality, vernacular language openly evaluates urban

conditions. It expresses approval, dissatisfaction, resignation, nostalgia, or critique. The selection strategy explicitly embraces this normativity rather than attempting to filter it out. Vernacular evaluation is treated not as subjective noise, but as a key dimension of urban meaning. The question guiding selection is therefore not whether a term is "objective," but whether it reveals how urban environments are morally and affectively judged. This approach aligns with one of the broader arguments of the dissertation: that understanding cities requires attention not only to formal structures and policies, but also to the evaluative languages through which people make sense of their urban lives.

Equally important to inclusion is exclusion. The selection strategy deliberately avoids purely descriptive adjectives lacking evaluative content; technical terms already fully captured in official vocabularies; highly localized slang with limited circulation; one-off metaphors without broader resonance. This selective restraint is crucial to maintaining analytical clarity. Vernacular terms are included only when they add conceptual value, not merely lexical variety. The aim is to construct a focused complementary lexicon, not an encyclopedic list.

Taken together, the selection strategy positions **vernacular terminology as an interface between institutional language and lived experience**. Selected terms do not merely illustrate official concepts; they interrogate them by revealing how abstract goals are experienced on the ground, how policies translate into everyday constraints or affordances, and how urban change is morally and emotionally processed.

By foregrounding categories rather than isolated words, the strategy ensures that vernacular additions contribute structurally to the dissertation argument. They become tools for analysis, comparison, and critique, rather than supplementary anecdotes.

## 9.2 The complementary vernacular corpus: the need for structural alignment

The construction of a complementary vernacular corpus raises not only questions of selection, but also questions of organization and integration. While the questionnaire produced a rich and heterogeneous set of vernacular descriptors, it quickly became evident that a purely semantic or bottom-up classification of these terms was insufficient for the purposes of this dissertation. The challenge was not merely one of scale, but of analytical alignment: how to organize vernacular terminology in a way that meaningfully interfaces with the conceptual structure of the dissertation.

This chapter argues that the complementary vernacular corpus must be structured according to the architecture of the dissertation itself, specifically the analytical frameworks developed in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. Rather than reproducing the internal organization of vernacular language, the corpus is designed to function as a relational and interpretive layer, positioned explicitly in dialogue with official and expert urban terminology. The resulting strategy prioritizes analytical usability, conceptual coherence, and epistemic transparency.

An initial approach to organizing the questionnaire results involved classifying vernacular terms into broad semantic categories, such as material conditions, affective atmosphere, social relations, or temporal positioning. While this centripetal classification proved valuable as an exploratory tool, it also revealed clear limitations when applied to the task of corpus integration. A comprehensive semantic classification produced an unmanageable volume of data. Even after filtering out weak or redundant descriptors, the resulting lists remained too extensive to be meaningfully mobilized within the dissertation. More importantly, such an approach risked shifting the analytical focus away from the core object of inquiry. **The dissertation does not aim to produce a complete taxonomy of vernacular urban language, but to understand how vernacular terms complement, translate, and interrogate official urban terminology**. A semantic-first organization foregrounds the internal logic of vernacular language rather than the analytical structure of the dissertation. This creates a mismatch: the reader is presented with categories that do not correspond directly to the conceptual progression of the argument. As a result, vernacular terminology risks becoming an autonomous object of analysis, rather than an integrated component of the broader theoretical framework. These limitations made clear that a different organizational principle was required—one that privileges analytical function over semantic exhaustiveness.

Therefore, after a first centripetal analysis (→ 8.1), in which vernacular terms are grouped according to internal semantic affinities in order to reveal recurring dimensions of urban perception, in the second phase, integrative and finalized, the organizing principle is the conceptual architecture of the dissertation. Vernacular terms are selected and grouped according to their capacity to engage with, supplement, or problematize the official terminology analyzed in specific chapters. This shift marks a move from analysis of vernacular language to analysis with vernacular language. The complementary corpus is not intended to mirror the questionnaire results in their entirety, but to function as an analytical interface between institutional discourse and lived urban experience. This chapter-based organization reflects the fact that official terminology itself is already structured thematically. Chapters 4–6 each analyze

a distinct but interconnected dimension of the Chinese city—such as urban form and housing, governance and regulation, and everyday urban experience. To be analytically effective, vernacular terminology must be positioned within these same conceptual fields, rather than alongside them in a parallel semantic system.

In practical terms, this means that each chapter is associated with a focused vernacular sub-corpus, composed of a limited number of strategically selected terms. These terms are chosen not to represent the full range of vernacular expression, but to illuminate how the specific concepts discussed in that chapter are experienced, evaluated, or contested in everyday language. The chapter-based strategy reframes selection as a process of conceptual curation rather than data reduction. Vernacular terms are not included because they are frequent in the questionnaire alone, but because they perform specific analytical functions in relation to the chapter's argument. This approach accepts that exclusion is not a methodological weakness but a necessity. Many vernacular descriptors—while linguistically interesting—do not add conceptual value to the integration with official terminology. By deliberately limiting the corpus to terms that clearly engage with the analytical concerns of each chapter, the complementary vernacular corpus remains both manageable and theoretically meaningful.

Organizing the complementary vernacular corpus according to the structure of the dissertation also has important implications for how it is read. The corpus is not meant to be consulted as an independent glossary or lexicon. Rather, it is designed to be read in parallel with the analytical chapters, supporting and deepening the interpretation of official terminology at specific moments in the argument.

This positioning reinforces the status of vernacular language as an integral component of the analytical apparatus, rather than as illustrative background material. It also ensures that vernacular terms remain contextually grounded, their meaning emerging through engagement with the concepts and debates developed in each chapter. This strategy affirms a central claim of the dissertation: that understanding the contemporary Chinese city requires attention not only to institutional vocabularies and policy frameworks, but also to the evaluative languages through which urban life is made sense of in everyday practice. Structuring vernacular terminology in accordance with the dissertation itself ensures that this insight is operationalized, rather than merely asserted.

## 9.3 Semantic Analysis of the Category “House”

This chapter presents a semantic analysis of the survey results related to the category “house”. The dataset consists of eight visual stimuli depicting different residential environments, each followed by participants’ lexical responses. Rather than interpreting these responses as straightforward descriptions of architectural objects, the chapter approaches them as evidence of semantic operations: recurrent ways in which respondents interpret, frame, and evaluate residential space.

The chapter integrates methodological exposition and empirical analysis in a controlled manner. It proceeds through four analytically distinct but internally connected steps. First, **it defines twelve analytical categories that describe how meaning is produced**. Second, **it operationalizes these categories through a coding framework**. Third, **it groups the categories into three higher-order semantic regimes that capture broader interpretive logics**. Finally, **it visualizes the distribution of these operations across images through diagrammatic tables**. Throughout, empirical data are inserted within the analytical categories following a layered approach that preserves conceptual primacy while grounding interpretation in linguistic evidence.

A central premise of this analysis is that *house* does not function, for participants, as a neutral architectural object. Instead, it operates as a relational, temporal, and normative construct. Participants rarely focus on formal or compositional attributes alone; rather, they mobilize spatial context, memory, social relations, and evaluative judgments to make sense of residential environments. The images therefore function less as objects of depiction than as *semantic triggers* that activate culturally and experientially grounded interpretive frameworks.

To capture this process systematically, the analysis identifies twelve analytical categories. These categories do not correspond to architectural types or visual features, but to *semantic operations*—that is, to recurrent ways in which meaning is produced in language.

1. CONTEXTUAL EMBEDDING: It refers to the tendency to interpret the house through its immediate surroundings rather than as an isolated object. Empirically, this operation is visible in the frequent use of terms such as 巷子 *xiàngzi* ‘lane / alley’, 胡同 *hútòng* ‘traditional alley’, 街道 *jiēdào* ‘street / subdistrict’, 老城 *lǎochéng* ‘old city’, and 城市 *chéngshì* (city) across multiple images. Even when the building itself is visually prominent, participants foreground circulation spaces and urban fabric. This indicates that residential meaning is produced relationally, through adjacency and spatial continuity.

2. BACKGROUNDING (NORMALITY FRAMING): it refers to the framing of housing as ordinary, banal, or infrastructural. Participants repeatedly describe residential environments as 普通 *pǔtōng* 'ordinary', 常见 *chángjiàn* 'common, 日常 *rìcháng* 'everyday', or 无特色 *wú tèsè* 'lacking distinctive features,' particularly in modern or mid-rise housing images. Meaning here emerges through repetition rather than exceptionality, positioning housing as the taken-for-granted background of everyday life.
3. MNEMONIC ACTIVATION: it describes the triggering of autobiographical or collective memory through images of housing. Terms such as 童年回忆 *tóngnián huíyì* 'childhood memories', 儿时记忆 *érshí jìyì* 'early-life memories', 熟悉 *shúxī* 'familiar' recur in responses to older housing types. Housing thus functions as a mnemonic device that links spatial perception to lived experience.
4. MATERIAL MORALISM: it refers to the moral and affective values attached to construction materials. Brick, stone, and tile (砖瓦 *zhuānwǎ* 'brick and tile', 石板路 *shíbǎn lù* 'stone-paved path') more associated with authenticity and warmth, while concrete and steel (水泥 *shuǐní* 'cement', 钢筋混凝土 *gāngjīn hùnníngtǔ* 'reinforced concrete') are linked to coldness, standardization, and alienation.
5. SCALAR SLIPPAGE: it describes the instability of the spatial scale at which the house is apprehended. Participants routinely move between references to domestic units, buildings, neighborhoods, and the city within a single response. Terms such as 小院 *xiǎoyuàn* 'small courtyard', 小区 *xiǎoqū* 'planned residential compound', 住区 *zhùqū* 'residential district, planning term', and 城市 *chéngshì* 'city' appear interchangeably, particularly in images depicting apartment blocks and dense residential environments. The house thus fails to stabilize as a bounded spatial unit.
6. TEMPORAL ANCHORING: it denotes the explicit positioning of housing within a historical timeframe. Participants frequently reference periods such as 上世纪 *shàng shìjì* 'last century', 八九十年代 *bā jiǔ shí niándài* '1980s–1990s', 千禧年 qiānxǐ nián 'millennium period', or 2010 年代 *èr líng yī líng niándài* '2010s'. This operation is particularly strong in images depicting traditional housing and late-twentieth-century residential blocks, where form is read as the product of specific historical conditions.
7. SOCIAL INFERENCE: it involves deducing social relations from architectural form. Courtyard houses and alley-based environments are associated with 邻里关系 línlǐ guānxì 'neighbor relations' and 其乐融融 *qílè róngróng* 'harmonious social atmosphere', while high-density

developments are linked to 拥挤 *yōngjǐ* 'crowded' and 缺乏邻里关系 *quēfá línlǐ guānxì* 'lack of neighbor relations'. Architecture is thus treated as an indicator of social life.

8. GOVERNANCE READING: it interprets housing as the outcome of planning systems and institutional logic. Participants reference policy-related categories such as 保障房 bǎozhàngfáng 'subsidized housing', 安置房 *ānzhìfáng* 'resettlement housing', 单位房 *dānwèi fáng* 'work-unit housing', 商品房 *shāngpǐn fáng* 'commodity housing', as well as processes of 改造 *gǎizào* 'redevelopment' and 管理 *guǎnlǐ* 'management'. Residential form is thus decoded as a spatial manifestation of governance.
9. FUNCTIONAL REDUCTION: it occurs when housing is interpreted primarily through use, circulation, and everyday routines. Linguistic evidence includes references to movement '通道 *tōngdào* 'passage / circulation corridor', 走廊 *zǒuláng* 'corridor', access systems (电梯 *diàntī* 'elevator,' 一梯两户 *yī tī liǎng hù* 'one elevator serving two households'), and daily practices (归家之路 *guījiā zhī lù* 'route home', 上班 *shàngbān* 'going to work'). This operation is especially salient in responses to dormitories and standardized residential buildings, where architectural form is subordinated to function.
10. AFFECTIVE PROJECTION: it refers to the attribution of emotional qualities to residential environments. Traditional and low-rise housing elicits terms such as 温馨 *wēnxīn* 'warm / cozy' and 平静 *píngjìng* 'calm', while dense or high-rise housing attracts descriptors such as 压迫 *yāpò* 'oppressive', 冰冷 *bīnglěng* 'cold / alienating', and 疏离 *shūlí* 'detached / alienated'. These affective readings often exceed what is visually depicted, indicating projection rather than observation.
11. TYPOLOGICAL LABELING: it occurs when images are immediately subsumed under known housing categories, such as 平房 *píngfáng* 'single-story house', 板楼 *bǎnlóu* 'slab-type apartment block', 筒子楼 *tǒngzǐlóu* 'corridor-style dormitory housing', or 高层住宅 *gāocéng zhùzhái* 'high-rise residential building'. In these cases, recognition replaces detailed visual description, indicating the presence of strong, culturally shared housing schemas.
12. AESTHETIC SUSPENSION: it denotes the relative absence of purely formal or compositional language. Compared to social, emotional, and political descriptors, aesthetic terms are rare, suggesting that housing is rarely granted aesthetic autonomy and is instead understood primarily as social infrastructure.

To ensure analytical transparency, the twelve categories were operationalized into a coding framework that guided the interpretation of the data. Each category corresponds to a semantic

operation rather than a visual feature, allowing multiple codes to co-occur within a single response.

Table 9.1 Semantic operations of the "house" field

| CODE | SEMANTIC OPERATION | ANALYTICAL QUESTION | TYPICAL LEXICAL TRIGGERS |
|---|---|---|---|
| R1 | Contextual embedding | Is the house defined via its surroundings? | 街道 *jiēdào* 'street / subdistrict<br>巷子 *xiàngzi* 'lane / alley'<br>胡同 *hútòng* 'traditional alley'<br>城市 *chéngshì* 'city' |
| R2 | Scalar slippage | Does the description shift between scales? | 房间 *fángjiān* 'room' → 小区 *xiǎoqū* 'planned residential compound' → 城市 *chéngshì* 'city' |
| R3 | Functional reduction | Is use privileged over form? | 上班 *shàngbān* 'going to work'<br>通道 *tōngdào* 'passage / circulation corridor'<br>动线 *dòngxiàn* 'movement path / circulation logic' |
| R4 | Backgrounding | Is housing framed as ordinary or banal? | 普通 *pǔtōng* 'ordinary<br>日常 *rìcháng* 'everyday'<br>常见 *chángjiàn* 'common' |
| T1 | Temporal anchoring | Is time explicitly invoked? | 上世纪 *shàng shìjì* 'last century'<br>80/90 年代 *bā líng / jiǔ líng niándài* '1980s / 1990s' |
| T2 | Affective projection | Are emotions projected onto space? | 温馨 *wēnxīn* 'warm / cozy'<br>压迫 *yāpò* 'oppressive'<br>冷清 *lěngqīng* 'deserted / lacking vitality' |
| T3 | Mnemonic activation | Is autobiographical memory activated? | 童年 *tóngnián* 'childhood'<br>熟悉 *shúxī* 'familiar' |
| N1 | Social inference | Are social relations inferred from form? | 邻里 *línlǐ* 'neighbor relations'<br>疏离 *shūlí* 'detached / alienated' |
| N2 | Typological overwriting | Is recognition replacing description? | 板楼 *bǎnlóu* 'slab-type apartment block'<br>筒子楼 *tǒngzǐlóu* 'corridor-style dormitory housing' |
| N3 | Material moralism | Are materials value-coded? | 水泥 *shuǐní* 'cement'<br>砖瓦 *zhuānwǎ* 'brick and tile' |
| N4 | Governance reading | Is housing read as policy outcome? | 保障房 *bǎozhàngfáng* 'subsidized housing'<br>单位 *dānwèi* 'work unit' |

To complement the discursive analysis, Table X presents a diagrammatic matrix showing the relative activation of the twelve semantic categories across the eight images (questionnaire in Appendix E). The matrix does not quantify responses, but visualizes patterns of dominance and suppression, enabling immediate comparison.

Table 9.2 Semantic activation matrix of the “house” images

| SEMANTIC CATEGORY ↓ / IMAGE → | IMG 1 | IMG 2 | IMG 3 | IMG 4 | IMG 5 | IMG 6 | IMG 7 | IMG 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Contextual embedding | ●●● | ●●● | ● | | ●●● | ●● | | |
| Scalar slippage | | ●● | ●●● | ●●● | | ●●● | ●●● | ●●● |
| Functional reduction | | | ●●● | ●●● | ●● | ●●● | ●●● | ●●● |
| Backgrounding | | | ●● | ●● | | ●●● | ●●● | ●●● |
| Temporal anchoring | ●●● | ●●● | ●●● | ●● | ●●● | | | |
| Affective projection | ●●● | ●●● | ●● | | ●●● | | ●● | |
| Mnemonic activation | ●●● | ●●● | ●● | | ●●● | | | |
| Social inference | ●●● | ●●● | ●● | ●● | ●●● | | ●● | ●● |
| Typological overwriting | | | ●●● | ●●● | ●● | ●●● | ●●● | ●●● |
| Material moralism | ●●● | ●●● | ●● | ●● | ●●● | | ●● | ●● |
| Governance reading | | | ●●● | ●●● | ●● | ●●● | ●●● | ●●● |
| Aesthetic suspension | | | ●●● | ●●● | ●● | ●●● | ●●● | ●●● |

●●● = strong activation ●● = moderate activation ● = weak activation blank = absent or marginal

A third table provides representative lexical examples for each category–image pairing, grounding the analytical framework in concrete linguistic material.

Table 7 Representative lexical examples of the “house” category

| SEMANTIC CATEGORY | IMG 1 | IMG 2 | IMG 3 | IMG 4 | IMG 5 | IMG 6 | IMG 7 | IMG 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Contextual embedding | 巷子 *xiàngzi* lane / alley | 胡同 *hútòng* traditional alley | 街道 *jiēdào* street / subdistrict | 主干道 *zhǔgàndào* arterial road | 老城 *lǎochéng* old city | 小区内 *xiǎoqū nèi* inside a res. compound | 城市 *chéngshì* city | 闹市 *nàoshì* bustling urban area |
| Scalar slippage | 小院 *xiǎoyuàn* small courtyard | 街区 *jiēqū* urban block | 小区 *xiǎoqū* planned res. compound | 城市 *chéngshì* city | 村落 *cūnluò* village | 住区 *zhùqū* res. district | 城市 *chéngshì* city | 市中心 *shì zhōngxīn* city center |
| Functional reduction | 归家之路 *guījiā zhī lù* route home | 出行 *chūxíng* mobility / going out | 单元 *dānyuán* housing unit | 通道 *tōngdào* passage / circulation corridor | 步行 *bùxíng* walking | 走廊 *zǒuláng* corridor | 电梯 *diàntī* elevator | 一梯两户 *yī tī liǎng hù* one elevator serving two households |
| Back-grounding normality | 日常 *rìcháng* everyday | 普通 *pǔtōng* ordinary | 常见 *chángjiàn* common | 常规 *chángguī* standard / routine | 熟悉 *shúxī* familiar | 普通住宅 *pǔtōng zhùzhái* ordinary housing | 无特色 *wú tèsè* lacking distinctive features | 常见 *chángjiàn* common |
| Temporal anchoring | 旧时代 *jiù shídài* old era | 上世纪 *shàng shìjì* last century | 八九十年代 *bā jiǔ shí niándài* 1980s–90s | 千禧年 *qiānxǐ nián* millennium period | 童年时期 *tóngnián shíqī* childhood period | 现代 *xiàndài* modern | 2010 年代 *èr líng yī líng niándài* 2010s | 当代 *dāngdài* contemporary |
| Affective projection | 温馨 *wēnxīn* warm / cozy | 平静 *píngjìng* calm | 压抑 *yāyì* oppressive / stifling | 吵 *chǎo* noisy | 舒适 *shūshì* comfortable | 冰冷 *bīnglěng* cold / alienating | 压迫感 *yāpò gǎn* sense of oppression | 疏离 *shūlí* detached / alienated |
| Mnemonic activation | 童年回忆 *tóngnián huíyì* childhood memories | 儿时记忆 *érshí jìyì* early-life memories | 熟悉 *shúxī* familiar | 记忆 *jìyì* memory | 小时候 *xiǎoshíhou* when young | 学生时代 *xuéshēng shídài* student years | 上班记忆 *shàngbān jìyì* work-related memories | 生活片段 *shēnghuó piànduàn* fragments of everyday life |
| Social inference | 邻里关系 *línlǐ guānxì* neighbor relations | 其乐融融 *qílèróngróng* harmonious social atmosphere | 拥挤 *yōngjǐ* crowded | 人来人往 *rén lái rén wǎng* constant pedestrian flow | 亲密 *qīnmì* intimate | 集体生活 *jítǐ shēnghuó* collective living | 缺乏邻里 *quēfá línlǐ* lack of neighbor relations | 陌生 *mòshēng* strange / unfamiliar |
| Typological overwriting | 平房 *píngfáng* single-story house | 传统民居 *chuántǒng mínjū* traditional dwelling | 板楼 *bǎnlóu* slab-type apartment block | 筒子楼 *tǒngzilóu* corridor-style dormitory housing | 老小区 *lǎo xiǎoqū* old residential compound | 宿舍 *sùshè* dormitory | 高层住宅 *gāocéng zhùzhái* high-rise residential building | 公寓楼 *gōngyù lóu* apartment building |
| Material moralism | 砖瓦 *zhuānwǎ* brick and tile | 石板路 *shíbǎn lù* stone-paved path | 水泥 *shuǐní* cement | 钢筋混凝土 *gāngjīn hùnníngtǔ* reinforced concrete | 瓦房 *wǎfáng* tile-roofed house | 粉刷墙 *fěnshuā qiáng* plastered wall | 混凝土 *hùnníngtǔ* concrete | 玻璃 *bōlí* glass |

| SEMANTIC CATEGORY | IMG 1 | IMG 2 | IMG 3 | IMG 4 | IMG 5 | IMG 6 | IMG 7 | IMG 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Governance reading | 待改造 *dài gǎizào* pending redevelopment | 老城保护 *lǎochéng bǎohù* old-city preservation | 单位房 *dānwèi fáng* work-unit housing | 安置房 *ānzhìfáng* resettlement housing | 城中村 *chéngzhōngcūn* urban village | 保障房 *bǎozhàngfáng* subsidized housing | 商品房 *shāngpǐn fáng* commodity housing | 高端住宅 *gāoduān zhùzhái* high-end residential housing |
| Aesthetic suspension | 质朴 *zhìpǔ* plain / unadorned | 老旧 *lǎojiù* aged / run-down | 单调 *dāndiào* monotonous | 规整 *guīzhěng* orderly / regular | 普通 *pǔtōng* ordinary | 无特色 *wú tèsè* lacking distinctive features | 千篇一律 *qiānpiān yīlǜ* uniform / repetitive | 冷漠 *lěngmò* cold / indifferent |

**Methodological note:**

The lexical items reported in Table X are representative examples selected from the survey responses to illustrate how each analytical category is linguistically instantiated in relation to each image. The examples are not intended to be exhaustive or statistically representative, but to provide concrete evidence of semantic activation. When multiple terms were available, selection favored clarity, semantic salience, and consistency with the analytical definition of the category.

## 9.4 Semantic Analysis of the Category "Street"

This chapter presents a semantic analysis of the survey results related to the category *street*. The dataset consists of eight visual stimuli depicting different street environments, each followed by participants' lexical responses. As in the previous chapter on *house*, the analysis does not treat these responses as neutral descriptions of urban form, but as evidence of semantic operations: recurrent ways in which participants interpret, frame, and evaluate public space.

To ensure internal coherence and comparability across semantic domains, this chapter reproduces the same analytical structure developed for the category *house*. At the same time, it allows the analytical categories to adapt to the specificity of the *street* data when required. The chapter proceeds through four analytically distinct but interconnected steps: (1) identification of analytical categories; (2) operationalization through a coding framework; (3) grouping of categories into higher-order semantic regimes; and (4) diagrammatic visualization of semantic activation across images.

In the survey data, *street* does not emerge as a purely infrastructural or geometrical entity. Rather, it is consistently interpreted as a relational, experiential, and normative space, where movement, encounter, exposure, and regulation intersect. Participants rarely describe streets solely in terms of physical form; instead, they mobilize vocabulary related to mobility, social life, memory, safety, scale, and governance.

As in the *house* chapter, the images function less as objects of depiction than as semantic triggers. They activate culturally shared understandings of what streets are for, whom they serve, and how they structure everyday urban experience.

1. CONTEXTUAL EMBEDDING: it refers to the interpretation of the street through its surrounding urban context. Empirically, this operation is visible in frequent references to districts, land uses, and adjacent environments, such as 文教区 *wénjiào qū* 'education and culture district', 行政区 *xíngzhèng qū* 'administrative district', 别墅区 *biéshù qū* 'villa residential area', 老城区 *lǎo chéngqū* 'old urban district', 城市中心 *chéngshì zhōngxīn* 'city center', and CBD *CBD* 'central business district'. Streets are thus rarely described in isolation, but as components of broader urban systems.
2. BACKGROUNDING (INFRASTRUCTURAL NORMALITY): as with housing, many streets are framed as ordinary or unremarkable. Terms such as 普通街道 *pǔtōng jiēdào* 'ordinary street', 随处可见 *suíchù kějiàn* 'seen everywhere', 标准 *biāozhǔn* 'standard', 平平无奇 *píngpíng wúqí* 'unremarkable / plain' appear frequently, especially in responses to secondary roads and generic urban streets. Here, backgrounding emphasizes infrastructural normality rather than domestic familiarity.
3. MNEMONIC ACTIVATION: streets frequently trigger personal and collective memory. Terms such as 老家 *lǎojiā* 'hometown', 记忆点 *jìyì diǎn* 'memory point', 印象深刻 *yìnxiàng shēnkè* 'deeply impressed', 古早 *gǔzǎo* 'old-fashioned', 年代感 *niándài gǎn* 'sense of historical period' appear across images depicting older or distinctive environments. Unlike housing, street-based memory often relates to movement and encounter, rather than dwelling.
4. MATERIAL MORALISM: materiality remains morally coded, but shifts toward infrastructure. Asphalt, concrete, wide carriageways, and separation barriers are associated with 冷漠 *lěngmò* 'indifferent / alienating' and 割裂 *gēliè* 'fragmentation', while trees, 绿化带 *lǜhuà dài* 'green belt', 行道树 *xíngdào shù* 'street trees', 林荫道 *línyīn dào* 'tree-lined avenue' are associated with friendliness and comfort.
5. SCALAR TENSION: while scalar instability remains relevant, the street data suggests a more specific operation of scalar tension. Participants repeatedly contrast human-scale streets with non-human or automotive scales, using terms such as 宜人尺度 *yírén chǐdù* 'human-friendly scale', 非人尺度 *fēi rén chǐdù* 'non-human scale', 大尺度道路 *dà chǐdù dàolù* 'large-scale roadway', and 汽车尺度 *qìchē chǐdù* 'automobile scale'. Rather than fluid movement across scales, the emphasis here is on conflict between scales.

6. TEMPORAL ANCHORING: it remains a strong semantic operation. Participants locate streets within historical periods using expressions such as 上世纪末 *shàng shìjì mò* 'late last century', 二十世纪 *èrshí shìjì* 'twentieth century', 老街 *lǎo jiē* 'old street', 新城 *xīnchéng* 'new town', 当代 *dāngdài* 'contemporary'. Streets are thus read as traces of urban development phases and planning ideologies.
7. SOCIAL INFERENCE: it is a dominant operation in the street data. Participants infer levels of social interaction, vitality, or isolation using terms such as 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* 'lived-in urban vitality', 人来人往 *rén lái rén wǎng* 'constant pedestrian flow', 冷清 *lěngqīng* 'deserted / lacking vitality', 缺乏活力 *quēfá huólì* 'lack of vitality', 排外 *páiwài* 'exclusive / exclusionary'. Streets are read as indicators of social intensity and inclusion.
8. GOVERNANCE READING: streets are strongly interpreted through governance and regulation. Participants reference 人车分流 *rén chē fēnliú* 'pedestrian–vehicle separation', 交通效率 *jiāotōng xiàolǜ* 'traffic efficiency", 规划 *guīhuà* 'planning", 分割 *fēngē* 'spatial division", 安全岛 *ānquán dǎo* 'traffic refuge island', 斑马线 *bānmǎ xiàn* 'zebra crossing', indicating that streets are read as outcomes of planning decisions and regulatory regimes.
9. FUNCTIONAL INTENSIFICATION: unlike housing, streets are not semantically reduced to a single function, but rather interpreted through functional overload or intensification. Participants highlight movement, commerce, leisure, and encounter simultaneously, using terms such as 通勤 *tōngqín* 'commuting', 散步 *sànbù* 'strolling', 商业街 *shāngyè jiē* 'commercial street', 生活性 *shēnghuó xìng* 'everyday-life oriented', 交通动脉 *jiāotōng dòngmài* 'traffic artery'. The street is thus understood as a space of overlapping functions.
10. AFFECTIVE PROJECTION: participants project strong emotional qualities onto street environments. Quiet, green streets are associated with 安静 *ānjìng* 'quiet', 宜人 *yírén* 'pleasant', 舒适 *shūshì* 'comfortable', while large arterial roads are described as 冰冷 *bīnglěng* 'cold / alienating', 压抑 *yāyì* 'oppressive', 恐怖 *kǒngbù* 'frightening', or 冷漠 *lěngmò* 'indifferent'. Affective projection is particularly intense for streets, reflecting their role as lived public spaces.
11. TYPOLOGICAL LABELING: instead of housing typologies, participants rely on street typologies, such as 胡同 *hútòng* 'traditional alley', 商业街 *shāngyè jiē* 'commercial street', 步行街 *bùxíng jiē* 'pedestrian street', 城市主干道 *chéngshì zhǔgàndào* 'urban arterial road', 快速路 *kuàisù lù* 'expressway', 次干道 *cì gàndào* 'secondary arterial road'. These labels often replace detailed description, indicating strong shared schemas of street types.

12. DIRECTIONALITY AND MOVEMENT LOGIC: distinct from housing, the street data activates a specific concern with direction, flow, and orientation. Terms such as 向心性 *xiàngxīn xìng* 'centripetal orientation', 方向感 *fāngxiàng gǎn* 'sense of direction', 延伸 *yánshēn* 'extension', 笔直 *bǐzhí* 'straight', 无方向感 *wú fāngxiàng gǎn* 'lack of orientation' recur across responses, highlighting the street as a spatial vector rather than a static place.

Following the logic established in the *house* chapter, the analytical categories were operationalized into a coding framework guiding the interpretation of the street data. While several codes are retained, others are adapted or added to reflect the specificity of street semantics.

Table 9.4 Semantic operations of the "street" field

| CODE | SEMANTIC OPERATION | ANALYTICAL QUESTION | TYPICAL LEXICAL TRIGGERS |
|---|---|---|---|
| R1 | Contextual embedding | Is the street defined via its surrounding urban context? | 文教区 *wénjiào qū* 'education and culture district'<br>行政区 *xíngzhèng qū* 'administrative district'<br>老城区 *lǎo chéngqū* 'old urban district'<br>CBD *CBD* 'central business district' |
| R2 | Scalar tension | Is there an explicit contrast between human and non-human scale? | 宜人尺度 *yírén chǐdù* 'human-friendly scale'<br>非人尺度 *fēi rén chǐdù* 'non-human scale'<br>大尺度 *dà chǐdù* 'large scale' |
| R3 | Functional intensification | Are multiple functions attributed simultaneously? | 通勤 *tōngqín* 'commuting'<br>商业街 *shāngyè jiē* 'commercial street'<br>生活性 *shēnghuó xìng* 'everyday-life oriented' |
| R4 | Backgrounding | Is the street framed as ordinary or generic infrastructure? | 普通街道 *pǔtōng jiēdào* 'ordinary street'<br>常见 *chángjiàn* 'common'<br>标准 *biāozhǔn* 'standard' |
| T1 | Temporal anchoring | Is the street located in a historical period? | 上世纪末 *shàng shìjì mò* 'late last century'<br>老街 *lǎo jiē* 'old street'<br>新城 *xīnchéng* 'new town' |
| T2 | Affective projection | Are emotions attributed to the street environment? | 安静 *ānjìng* 'quiet'<br>冰冷 *bīnglěng* 'cold / alienating'<br>压抑 *yāyì* 'oppressive' |
| T3 | Mnemonic activation | Is personal or collective memory activated? | 老家 *lǎojiā* 'hometown'<br>记忆点 *jìyì diǎn* 'memory point'<br>年代感 *niándài gǎn* 'sense of historical period' |
| N1 | Social inference | Are social dynamics inferred from the street? | 烟火气 *yānhuǒ qì* 'lived-in urban vitality'<br>冷清 *lěngqīng* 'deserted / lacking vitality'<br>人来人往 *rén lái rén wǎng* 'constant pedestrian flow' |
| N2 | Typological labeling | Is the street classified through known types? | 胡同 *hútòng* 'traditional alley'<br>商业街 *shāngyè jiē* 'commercial street'<br>主干道 *zhǔgàndào* 'arterial road' |
| N3 | Material–infrastructural moralism | Are materials/infrastructure morally coded? | 行道树 *xíngdào shù* 'street trees'<br>绿化带 *lǜhuà dài* 'green belt'<br>隔离带 *gélí dài* 'separation barrier' |
| N4 | Governance reading | Is the street read as a product of planning/regulation? | 人车分流 *rén chē fēnliú* 'pedestrian–vehicle separation'<br>规划 *guīhuà* 'planning'<br>安全岛 *ānquán dǎo* 'traffic refuge island' |

| CODE | SEMANTIC OPERATION | ANALYTICAL QUESTION | TYPICAL LEXICAL TRIGGERS |
|---|---|---|---|
| R5 | Directionality & movement logic | Is orientation, flow, or direction emphasized? | 延伸 *yánshēn* 'extension'<br>笔直 *bǐzhí* 'straight'<br>无方向感 *wú fāngxiàng gǎn* 'lack of orientation' |

As in the *house* chapter, the distribution of semantic operations across the eight street images is visualized through a semantic activation matrix (Table 13). The diagram follows the same visual logic introduced previously (relative dominance rather than quantification), allowing direct comparison between the two semantic domains.

Table 9.5 Semantic activation matrix of the "street" images

| SEMANTIC CATEGORY ↓ / IMAGE → | IMG 1 | IMG 2 | IMG 3 | IMG 4 | IMG 5 | IMG 6 | IMG 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Contextual embedding | ●●● | ●●● | ●● | ●● | ●●● | ●● | ●●● |
| Scalar tension | ●● | ●● | ●●● | ●●● | ●● | ●●● | ●●● |
| Functional intensification | ●● | ●● | ●●● | ●●● | ●●● | ●●● | ●●● |
| Backgrounding | | ●● | ●● | ●● | ●● | ●●● | ●● |
| Temporal anchoring | ●●● | ●●● | ●● | ●● | ●●● | ●● | ● |
| Affective projection | ●●● | ●● | ●● | ●●● | ●●● | ●● | ●●● |
| Mnemonic activation | ●● | ●●● | ●● | ● | ●●● | ● | ● |
| Social inference | ●● | ●●● | ●●● | ●●● | ●●● | ●● | ●●● |
| Typological labeling | ●●● | ●●● | ●●● | ●●● | ●● | ●●● | ●●● |
| Material–infra moralism | ●● | ●● | ●●● | ●●● | ●● | ●●● | ●●● |
| Governance reading | ●● | ●● | ●●● | ●●● | ●● | ●●● | ●●● |
| Directionality & movement | ●● | ●● | ●●● | ●●● | ●● | ●●● | ●●● |

●●● = strong activation ●● = moderate activation ● = weak activation blank = absent or marginal

A third table provides representative lexical examples for each category–image pairing, grounding the analytical categories in concrete linguistic material. The selection criteria and methodological note are identical to those used in the *house* chapter.

Table 9.6 Representative lexical examples of the “street” category

| SEMANTIC CATEGORY | IMG 1 | IMG 2 | IMG 3 | IMG 4 | IMG 5 | IMG 6 | IMG 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Contextual embedding | 文教区 *wénjiào qū* education and culture district | 老城区 *lǎo chéngqū* old urban district | 商业区 *shāngyè qū* commercial district | 城市中心 *chéngshì zhōngxīn* city center | 村落 *cūnluò* village | 新区 *xīnqū* new district | 闹市区 *nàoshì qū* bustling urban area |
| Scalar tension | 宜人尺度 *yírén chǐdù* human-friendly scale | 小尺度 *xiǎo chǐdù* small scale | 非人尺度 *fēi rén chǐdù* non-human scale | 大尺度 *dà chǐdù* large scale | 亲切 *qīnqiè* intimate / approachable | 汽车尺度 *qìchē chǐdù* automobile scale | 巨大尺度 *jùdà chǐdù* gigantic scale |
| Functional intensification | 宜步行 *yí bùxíng* walkable | 遛弯 *liùwān* strolling | 通勤 *tōngqín* commuting | 交通动脉 *jiāotōng dòngmài* traffic artery | 休闲 *xiūxián* leisure | 通勤 *tōngqín* commuting | 商业+生活 *shāngyè* + *shēnghuó* commerce + everyday life |
| Backgrounding | 干净整洁 *gānjìng zhěngjié* clean and tidy | 常见 *chángjiàn* common | 普通街道 *pǔtōng jiēdào* ordinary street | 标准 *biāozhǔn* standard | 熟悉 *shúxī* familiar | 随处可见 *suíchù kějiàn* seen everywhere | 无记忆点 *wú jìyì diǎn* lacking memorable features |
| Temporal anchoring | 传统 *chuántǒng* traditional | 老街 *lǎo jiē* old street | 上世纪末 *shàng shìjì mò* late last century | 二十世纪 *èrshí shìjì* twentieth century | 古城 *gǔchéng* ancient city | 新城 *xīnchéng* new town | 当代 *dāngdài* contemporary |
| Affective projection | 安静 *ānjìng* quiet | 幽静 *yōujìng* secluded / tranquil | 压抑 *yāyì* oppressive | 冰冷 *bīnglěng* cold / alienating | 舒适 *shūshì* comfortable | 冷漠 *lěngmò* indifferent | 繁忙 *fánmáng* busy |
| Mnemonic activation | 老家 *lǎojiā* hometown | 记忆点 *jìyì diǎn* memory point | 印象深刻 *yìnxiàng shēnkè* deeply impressed | 年代感 *niándài gǎn* sense of historical period | 古早 *gǔzǎo* old-fashioned | 上班记忆 *shàngbān jìyì* work-related memories | 城市生活 *chéngshì shēnghuó* urban life |
| Social inference | 邻里 *línlǐ* neighbor relations | 人情味 *rénqíng wèi* human warmth | 拥挤 *yōngjǐ* crowded | 人来人往 *rén lái rén wǎng* constant pedestrian flow | 树下唠嗑 *shù xià làokē* chatting under the trees | 冷清 *lěngqīng* deserted / lacking vitality | 热闹 *rènào* lively |
| Typological labeling | 胡同 *hútòng* traditional alley | 小巷 *xiǎoxiàng* small alley | 城市干道 *chéngshì gàndào* urban arterial road | 主干道 *zhǔgàndào* arterial road | 老街 *lǎo jiē* old street | 快速路 *kuàisù lù* expressway | 商业街 *shāngyè jiē* commercial street |
| Material–infra moralism | 行道树 *xíngdào shù* street trees | 砖墙 *zhuān qiáng* brick wall | 水泥路 *shuǐní lù* cement road | 隔离带 *gélí dài* separation barrier | 土路 *tǔlù* dirt road | 高架 *gāojià* elevated roadway | 斑马线 *bānmǎ xiàn* zebra crossing |
| Governance reading | 人车分流 *rén chē fēnliú* pedestrian–vehicle separation | 文保单位 *wénbǎo dānwèi* heritage-protected unit | 城市更新 *chéngshì gēngxīn* urban renewal | 规划道路 *guīhuà dàolù* planned road | 保护区 *bǎohù qū* protected area | 快速通行 *kuàisù tōngxíng* fast-through traffic | 商业规划 *shāngyè guīhuà* commercial planning |
| Directionality and movement | 向心性 *xiàngxīn xìng* centripetal orientation | 曲折 *qūzhé* winding | 笔直 *bǐzhí* straight | 延伸 *yánshēn* extension | 缓慢 *huǎnmàn* slow | 高速 *gāosù* high-speed | 流动 *liúdòng* flow / circulation |

**Methodological note:**
The lexical items reported in Table X are representative examples selected from the survey responses to illustrate how each analytical category is linguistically instantiated in relation to each image. The examples are not intended to be exhaustive or statistically representative, but to provide concrete evidence of semantic activation. When multiple terms were available, selection favored clarity, semantic salience, and consistency with the analytical definition of the category.

## 9.5 Semantic Analysis of the Category "Neighborhood"

This chapter presents a semantic analysis of the survey results related to the category *neighborhood*. The dataset consists of seven visual stimuli depicting different neighborhood environments, each followed by participants' lexical responses. As in the chapters dedicated to *house* and *street*, the analysis does not treat these responses as descriptive labels of spatial form, but as evidence of semantic operations: recurrent ways in which participants interpret, evaluate, and position themselves in relation to collective living environments.

To maintain internal coherence across the dissertation, this chapter reproduces the same analytical structure adopted for the previous semantic domains. At the same time, the analytical categories are allowed to adapt to the specificity of the neighborhood data when required. The chapter proceeds through four analytically distinct but interconnected steps: identification of analytical categories, operationalization through a coding framework, grouping into higher-order semantic regimes, and diagrammatic visualization of semantic activation across images.

In the survey data, *neighborhood* emerges as a meso-scale semantic object, positioned between the intimacy of the house and the mobility of the street. Participants rarely describe neighborhoods in purely morphological terms; instead, they mobilize vocabulary related to social composition, governance, access, maintenance, atmosphere, and historical layering. The neighborhood is consistently interpreted as a socially thick space, where spatial form, collective identity, and political regulation intersect.

As in the previous chapters, the images function as semantic triggers rather than as neutral representations. They activate shared assumptions about who lives in a place, how life unfolds there, and what kinds of values or exclusions the neighborhood embodies.

1. INTRA-URBAN POSITIONING: neighborhoods are frequently interpreted through their position within the broader urban structure. Participants reference centrality, peripherality, proximity to services, and urban hierarchy using terms such as 市中心 *shì zhōngxīn* 'city center', 城郊 *chéngjiāo* 'urban periphery / suburban fringe', 边缘地带 *biānyuán dìdài* 'marginal zone / edge area', 成熟片区 *chéngshú piànqū* 'mature urban area'. Meaning is thus produced through relative positioning rather than absolute form.

2. BACKGROUNDING (RESIDENTIAL ORDINARINESS): neighborhoods are often framed as 普通 *pǔtōng* 'ordinary', 平凡 *píngfán* 'mundane', 常规 *chángguī* 'routine / standard', especially in large residential areas. This backgrounding emphasizes stability and repetition, positioning the neighborhood as the everyday container of life rather than as a distinctive destination.
3. MNEMONIC ACTIVATION: mnemonic activation in neighborhoods tends to be collective or generational rather than purely autobiographical. Terms such as 熟人社会 *shúrén shèhuì* 'acquaintance-based society', 老社区记忆 *lǎo shèqū jìyì* 'memory of old communities', 生活痕迹 *shēnghuó hénjì* 'traces of everyday life' suggest memory embedded in social continuity.
4. MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE MORALISM: judgments about cleanliness, upkeep, and management recur frequently. Lexical items such as 物业管理好 *wùyè guǎnlǐ hǎo* 'well-managed property services', 脏乱差 *zāng luàn chà* 'dirty, chaotic, and poorly maintained', 维护不足 *wéihù bùzú* 'insufficient maintenance' indicate moral evaluations attached to maintenance regimes rather than materials alone.
5. BOUNDARY AND ENCLOSURE LOGIC: a strong and specific operation in the neighborhood data concerns boundaries, enclosure, and controlled access. Lexical items such as 围墙 *wéiqiáng* 'perimeter wall', 门禁 *ménjìn* 'access control / gated entry', 封闭式小区 *fēngbì shì xiǎoqū* 'gated residential compound', 出入口 *chūrùkǒu* 'entrance/exit' clearly indicate that neighborhoods are interpreted through degrees of openness and closure. This operation has no equivalent intensity in the house or street datasets.
6. TEMPORAL ANCHORING: temporal anchoring in the neighborhood data takes the form of layering rather than simple dating. Participants refer to 新旧混合 *xīn jiù hùnhé* 'mixture of new and old', 老小区 *lǎo xiǎoqū* 'old residential compound', 八九十年代社区 *bā jiǔ shí niándài shèqū* '1980s–1990s neighborhood', 更新片区 *gēngxīn piànqū* 'redevelopment area', indicating that neighborhoods are read as palimpsests of different historical phases.
7. SOCIAL STRATIFICATION: participants strongly infer class composition and social hierarchy from neighborhood form, using expressions such as 中产社区 *zhōngchǎn shèqū* 'middle-class neighborhood, 低收入社区 *dī shōurù shèqū* 'low-income neighborhood', 城中村 *chéngzhōngcūn* 'urban village', 高端小区 *gāoduān xiǎoqū* 'high-end residential compound'. Architecture is read as an indicator of social differentiation.
8. GOVERNANCE AND PLANNING READING: neighborhoods are interpreted as outcomes of planning decisions and governance models. Participants reference 城市更新 *chéngshì*

*gēngxīn* ‘urban renewal’, 改造 *gǎizào* ‘redevelopment’, 规划 *guīhuà* ‘planning’, 政策导向 *zhèngcè dǎoxiàng* ‘policy orientation’, highlighting the political dimension of residential aggregation.

9. FUNCTIONAL COMPOSITION: participants frequently describe neighborhoods through the mix or separation of functions, referencing 居住功能 *jūzhù gōngnéng* ‘residential function’, 商业配套 *shāngyè pèitào* ‘commercial amenities’, 学校 *xuéxiào* ‘schools’, 生活设施 *shēnghuó shèshī* ‘everyday facilities’. Unlike streets, where functions intensify dynamically, neighborhoods are evaluated through the balance and completeness of functions.
10. AFFECTIVE ATMOSPHERE: rather than projecting discrete emotions, participants describe neighborhoods through atmospheric qualities such as 安静 *ānjìng* ‘quiet’, 压抑 *yāyì* ‘oppressive’, 舒适 *shūshì* ‘comfortable’, 混乱 *hùnluàn* ‘chaotic’. Affect is diffused across the environment and tied to collective living conditions.
11. TYPOLOGICAL CLASSIFICATION: neighborhoods are readily classified into known types, such as 单位大院 *dānwèi dàyuàn* ‘work-unit compound’, 城中村 *chéngzhōngcūn* ‘urban village’, 商品房小区 *shāngpǐn fáng xiǎoqū* ‘commodity-housing compound’, 老社区 *lǎo shèqū* ‘old neighborhood’. As with previous domains, typological recognition often replaces detailed description.
12. BELONGING AND EXCLUSION: a distinct neighborhood-specific operation concerns belonging, inclusion, and exclusion. Terms such as 排他性强 *páitā xìng qiáng* ‘strongly exclusionary’, 社区认同 *shèqū rèntóng* ‘community identification’, 融入感 *róngrù gǎn* ‘sense of integration’, 陌生感 *mòshēng gǎn* ‘sense of unfamiliarity’ reveal how neighborhoods are read as social filters.

Following the logic established in the *house* and in the *street* chapter, the analytical categories were operationalized into a coding framework guiding the interpretation of the street data. While several codes are retained, others are adapted or added to reflect the specificity of street semantics.

Table 9.7 Semantic operations of the "neighborhood" field

| CODE | SEMANTIC OPERATION | ANALYTICAL QUESTION | TYPICAL LEXICAL TRIGGERS |
|---|---|---|---|
| R1 | Intra-urban positioning | Is the neighborhood defined by urban position? | 市中心 *shì zhōngxīn* 'city center'<br>城郊 *chéngjiāo* 'urban periphery/suburban fringe' |
| R2 | Boundary & enclosure | Are openness and access emphasized? | 围墙 *wéiqiáng* 'perimeter wall'<br>门禁 *ménjìn* 'access control / gated entry' |
| R3 | Functional composition | Are functions evaluated as a mix/system? | 配套 *pèitào* 'supporting facilities / amenities'<br>学校 *xuéxiào* 'schools' |
| R4 | Back-grounding | Is the neighborhood framed as ordinary? | 普通 *pǔtōng* 'ordinary'<br>常规 *chángguī* 'routine / standard' |
| T1 | Temporal layering | Are multiple historical phases invoked? | 新旧混合 *xīn jiù hùnhé* 'mixture of new and old' |
| T2 | Affective atmosphere | Is a collective mood described? | 安静 *ānjìng* 'quiet'<br>压抑 *yāyì* 'oppressive' |
| T3 | Collective memory | Is shared or generational memory activated? | 熟人社会 *shúrén shèhuì* 'acquaintance-based society' |
| N1 | Social stratification | Is class or hierarchy inferred? | 中产 *zhōngchǎn* 'middle class'<br>低收入 *dī shōurù* 'low income' |
| N2 | Typological classification | Is a known neighborhood type used? | 城中村 *chéngzhōngcūn* 'urban village' |
| N3 | Management moralism | Is maintenance morally evaluated? | 脏乱差 *zāng luàn chà* 'dirty, chaotic, and poorly maintained' |
| N4 | Governance reading | Is planning/policy referenced? | 城市更新 *chéngshì gēngxīn* 'urban renewal' |
| N5 | Belonging & exclusion | Are inclusion/exclusion dynamics named? | 排他性 *páitā xìng* 'exclusionary character' |

As in the *house* and *street* chapters, the distribution of semantic operations across the eight street images is visualized through a semantic activation matrix. The diagram follows the same visual logic introduced previously (relative dominance rather than quantification), allowing direct comparison between the two semantic domains.

Table 9.8 Semantic activation matrix of the "neighborhood" images

| SEMANTIC CATEGORY ↓ / IMAGE → | IMG 1 | IMG 2 | IMG 3 | IMG 4 | IMG 5 | IMG 6 | IMG 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Intra-urban positioning | ●●● | ●● | ●●● | ●● | ●●● | ●● | ●● |
| Boundary & enclosure | ●● | ●●● | ●● | ●●● | ● | ●●● | ●● |
| Functional composition | ●●● | ●● | ●● | ●●● | ●●● | ●● | ●● |
| Backgrounding | ● | ●● | ●●● | ●● | ● | ●●● | ●● |
| Temporal layering | ●●● | ●● | ●● | ●●● | ●● | ● | ●● |
| Affective atmosphere | ●● | ●●● | ●● | ● | ●●● | ●● | ● |
| Collective memory | ●● | ●●● | ● | ● | ●● | ● | ● |
| Social stratification | ● | ●●● | ●● | ●● | ●●● | ●● | ●● |
| Typological classification | ●●● | ●●● | ●● | ●● | ●● | ●●● | ●● |
| Management moralism | ●● | ●● | ●●● | ● | ●● | ●●● | ● |
| Governance reading | ●● | ●● | ●● | ●●● | ●● | ●● | ●● |
| Belonging & exclusion | ● | ●●● | ● | ●● | ●●● | ● | ●● |

●●● = strong activation ●● = moderate activation ● = weak activation blank = absent or marginal

A second table provides representative lexical examples for each category–image pairing, grounding the analytical categories in concrete linguistic material. The selection criteria and methodological note are identical to those used in the *house* and *street* chapters.

Table 9.9 Representative lexical examples of the "neighborhood" category

| SEMANTIC CATEGORY | IMG 1 | IMG 2 | IMG 3 | IMG 4 | IMG 5 | IMG 6 | IMG 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Intra-urban positioning | 市中心 *shì zhōngxīn* city center | 城郊 *chéngjiāo* urban periphery / suburban fringe | 核心区 *héxīn qū* core area | 边缘 *biānyuán* edge / periphery | 成熟片区 *chéngshú piànqū* mature urban area | 新区 *xīnqū* new district | 次中心 *cì zhōngxīn* secondary center |
| Boundary & enclosure | 围墙 *wéiqiáng* perimeter wall | 门禁 *ménjìn* access control / gated entry | 半封闭 *bàn fēngbì* semi-enclosed | 封闭式 *fēngbì shì* fully enclosed | 开放 *kāifàng* open | 高围栏 *gāo wéilán* high fencing | 出入口 *chūrùkǒu* entrance/exit |
| Functional composition | 配套齐全 *pèitào qíquán* well-equipped / complete amenities | 单一居住 *dānyī jūzhù* single residential function | 商住混合 *shāng zhù hùnhé* mixed commercial–residential | 完整体系 *wánzhěng tǐxì* complete system | 生活便利 *shēnghuó biànlì* convenient for daily life | 功能单调 *gōngnéng dāndiào* functionally monotonous | 多功能 *duō gōngnéng* multifunctional |
| Backgrounding | 普通 *pǔtōng* ordinary | 常见 *chángjiàn* common | 日常 *rìcháng* everyday | 常规 *chángguī* routine / standard | 熟悉 *shúxī* familiar | 千篇一律 *qiānpiān yīlǜ* uniform / repetitive | 普通 *pǔtōng* ordinary |
| Temporal layering | 新旧融合 *xīn jiù rónghé* fusion of new and old | 老社区 *lǎo shèqū* old neighborhood | 八九十年代 *bā jiǔ shí niándài* 1980s–90s | 更新中 *gēngxīn zhōng* under redevelopment | 混合形态 *hùnhé xíngtài* hybrid form | 新建 *xīnjiàn* newly built | 延续 *yánxù* continuity |
| Affective atmosphere | 安静 *ānjìng* quiet | 压抑 *yāyì* oppressive | 平稳 *píngwěn* stable / calm | 紧张 *jǐnzhāng* tense | 舒适 *shūshì* comfortable | 冷清 *lěngqīng* deserted / lacking vitality | 嘈杂 *cáozá* noisy / chaotic |
| Collective memory | 生活痕迹 *shēnghuó hénjì* traces of everyday life | 熟人社会 *shúrén shèhuì* acquaintance-based society | 回忆 *huíyì* memory | 历史感 *lìshǐ gǎn* sense of history | 老邻居 *lǎo línjū* long-term neighbors | 无记忆 *wú jìyì* lacking memory | 社区记忆 *shèqū jìyì* community memory |
| Social stratification | 中产 *zhōngchǎn* middle class | 低收入 *dī shōurù* low income | 普通居民 *pǔtōng jūmín* ordinary residents | 混合阶层 *hùnhé jiēcéng* mixed social strata | 高端 *gāoduān* high-end | 租户为主 *zūhù wéi zhǔ* predominantly renters | 分化明显 *fēnhuà míngxiǎn* clearly differentiated |
| Typological classification | 商品房 *shāngpǐn fáng* commodity housing | 城中村 *chéngzhōngcūn* urban village | 老小区 *lǎo xiǎoqū* old residential compound | 单位大院 *dānwèi dàyuàn* work-unit compound | 高档社区 *gāodàng shèqū* high-end neighborhood | 新社区 *xīn shèqū* new neighborhood | 混合社区 *hùnhé shèqū* mixed neighborhood |

| SEMANTIC CATEGORY | IMG 1 | IMG 2 | IMG 3 | IMG 4 | IMG 5 | IMG 6 | IMG 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Management moralism | 管理有序 *guǎnlǐ yǒuxù* orderly management | 脏乱差 *zāng luàn chà* dirty, chaotic, poorly maintained | 维护一般 *wéihù yībān* average maintenance | 改善中 *gǎishàn zhōng* under improvement | 管理完善 *guǎnlǐ wánshàn* well-managed | 管理缺失 *guǎnlǐ quēshī* lack of management | 参差不齐 *cēncī bù qí* uneven / inconsistent |
| Governance reading | 规划明确 *guīhuà míngquè* clearly planned | 待改造 *dài gǎizào* pending redevelopment | 政策遗留 *zhèngcè yíliú* policy legacy | 更新项目 *gēngxīn xiàngmù* redevelopment project | 示范区 *shìfàn qū* demonstration zone | 新规划 *xīn guīhuà* new planning | 调控中 *tiáokòng zhōng* under regulation |
| Belonging & exclusion | 认同感 *rèntóng gǎn* sense of identification | 排他性强 *páitā xìng qiáng* strongly exclusionary | 中性 *zhōngxìng* neutral | 半开放 *bàn kāifàng* semi-open | 强归属 *qiáng guīshǔ* strong sense of belonging | 陌生感 *mòshēng gǎn* sense of unfamiliarity | 边缘感 *biānyuán gǎn* sense of marginality |

**Methodological note:**

The lexical items reported in Table X are representative examples selected from the survey responses to illustrate how each analytical category is linguistically instantiated in relation to each image. The examples are not intended to be exhaustive or statistically representative, but to provide concrete evidence of semantic activation. When multiple terms were available, selection favored clarity, semantic salience, and consistency with the analytical definition of the category.

## 9.6 Insights for Urban Planning from the Comparison of Official and Vernacular Language

This research adopts a qualitative and comparative methodological approach to examine the relationship between official urban terminology and urban vernacular terminology, with a specific focus on their implications for urban planning practice. The two corpora are treated as distinct yet interrelated linguistic systems that actively shape how urban space is conceptualized, regulated, and transformed. In the context of urban planning, terminology is not merely descriptive but performative: it structures regulatory frameworks, legitimizes interventions, and mediates the relationship between planning institutions and urban residents. The methodological aim of this chapter is therefore not to reconcile these terminological systems into a single unified language, but to develop a framework through which their interaction can inform more socially attuned, effective, and reflexive planning processes.

The construction of the two corpora reflects the institutional asymmetries inherent to planning practice. Official urban terminology is drawn from planning instruments such as zoning codes, master plans, land-use regulations, environmental impact assessments, and policy reports. These texts prioritize stability, internal coherence, and legal operability, as they must support decision-making, enforcement, and inter-institutional coordination. Vernacular urban terminology, by contrast, emerges from everyday spatial practices through which residents identify, navigate, and evaluate the city. It includes informal place names, relational

descriptions, and evaluative expressions that encode social meaning, reputation, memory, and affect. From a planning perspective, these vernacular terms often circulate outside formal channels of participation and therefore remain largely invisible within institutional datasets.

Methodologically, this asymmetry is not treated as a problem to be corrected but as a defining condition of contemporary planning. Differences in authority, precision, and durability between the two corpora are preserved throughout the analysis in order to avoid conflating administrative power with epistemic validity. The methodology explicitly resists treating vernacular terminology as a preliminary or incomplete form of planning language, just as it avoids assuming that official terminology exhaustively represents urban reality. Instead, **both corpora are analyzed as complementary forms of urban knowledge that operate at different scales and with different consequences for planning action.**

The comparative strategy adopted in this study is relational rather than integrative. Rather than aligning terms in search of semantic equivalence, the analysis examines how different terminologies organize space, define boundaries, and attribute meaning. Particular attention is paid to cases in which officially designated areas lack recognition in everyday discourse, as well as to vernacularly identified spaces that remain absent from planning documents. **These discrepancies are especially relevant for urban planning, as they often correspond to areas where policies encounter resistance, where service provision is misaligned with actual use, or where redevelopment initiatives fail to engage local communities.** Zones of partial overlap are also examined, especially where official and vernacular terms refer to the same spatial entities while framing them through divergent social, functional, or moral logics.

Within this framework, synthesis is operationalized as a process of translation oriented toward planning interpretation rather than terminological unification. Translation is understood as an interpretive operation through which planners can render vernacular spatial meanings intelligible within institutional decision-making processes without stripping them of their contextual grounding. Vernacular terminology is thus treated as a diagnostic resource that reveals how planning categories are received, reinterpreted, or contested in practice. At the same time, official terminology is critically re-examined in light of vernacular usage, allowing planners to identify where regulatory classifications obscure socially salient distinctions or produce unintended effects. In this sense, synthesis occurs at the level of planning analysis and judgment, rather than through the incorporation of informal language into regulatory texts.

Although the methodology does not aim for comprehensive terminological convergence, it allows for limited forms of stabilization that may be relevant to planning practice. In cases

where vernacular terms demonstrate consistent usage across social groups, stable spatial reference, and sustained circulation over time, they may be incorporated into planning analysis as recognized spatial descriptors. Such incorporation remains conditional and contextual, functioning as an analytical aid rather than as a formal reclassification of space. This approach enables planners to acknowledge socially meaningful spatial units—such as widely recognized neighborhood names or informal districts—without compromising the legal clarity of planning instruments. The analytical outputs generated through this methodology are designed to support planning interpretation and decision-making while preserving linguistic plurality. Rather than producing a single integrated terminology, the research develops parallel representations in which official and vernacular designations coexist. For urban planners, such representations provide a means of anticipating implementation challenges, tailoring communication strategies, and identifying areas where participatory processes require greater sensitivity to local spatial understandings.

Reflexivity is treated as a core methodological principle, particularly in relation to the power dynamics embedded in planning language. The methodology explicitly addresses the risk that vernacular terminology may be selectively appropriated to legitimize predetermined planning outcomes, especially in participatory or consultative contexts. Throughout the analysis, attention is paid to how vernacular terms are extracted from everyday discourse, translated into planning-relevant knowledge, and recontextualized within institutional frameworks. This reflexive stance acknowledges that the inclusion of vernacular language does not automatically democratize planning processes and that linguistic recognition must be accompanied by substantive responsiveness in planning decisions.

Finally, synthesis is conceptualized as an iterative and ongoing methodological process that mirrors the temporal dynamics of urban planning itself. As cities evolve and planning priorities shift, both official and vernacular terminologies are subject to change. The relationship between them must therefore be periodically reassessed, particularly in contexts of redevelopment, regeneration, or social transformation. By treating synthesis as provisional and revisable, the methodology aligns with contemporary planning approaches that emphasize adaptability, learning, and responsiveness over static master-planning models.

By framing the comparison and conditional synthesis of urban terminological corpora as a methodological resource for planning analysis, this approach contributes to a more reflexive understanding of how language shapes planning knowledge and practice. It offers urban planners a structured way to engage with linguistic plurality without undermining institutional

functionality, enabling planning interventions that are not only technically sound but also socially intelligible and contextually grounded.

The dissertation has shown that urban terminology operates as a critical interface between spatial reality, analytical abstraction, and planning practice. By tracing how urban categories are constructed, stabilized, and reinterpreted across different contexts, the study demonstrates that attention to language is not ancillary to urban analysis, but fundamental to it. The methodological framework proposed here offers a way to engage with linguistic diversity without abandoning comparative ambition. Instead, it reframes comparison as a reflexive process grounded in semantic awareness and contextual specificity. In doing so, the dissertation contributes to ongoing efforts to develop more inclusive, transparent, and critically grounded approaches to urban knowledge production.

# CHAPTER 10 CONCLUSION

## 10.1 Points of innovations

My thesis starts from a simple but consequential observation: Chinese cities have become central reference points for contemporary urban futures, yet much of the international debate still approaches them through conceptual and descriptive tools that were not developed for the linguistic, administrative, and everyday categories through which Chinese urban space is actually organized. This creates a persistent gap between what is observed on the ground and what can be meaningfully compared, interpreted, or operationalized in international scholarship and planning practice.

To reduce this gap, I propose that a better understanding of Chinese cities must begin with urbanism "with Chinese characters", that is, with the terminological infrastructures through which urban objects are named, stabilized, governed, and contested. Rather than treating Chinese terms as simple equivalents to pre-existing Euro-American categories, my work mobilizes linguistic and terminological tools to read urban vocabulary as an analytical field in its own right: a site where policy rationalities, spatial taxonomies, and lived urban experience intersect.

On this basis, the significance of my research lies in offering both a conceptual reframing and a transferable method. Conceptually, it demonstrates how terminology participates in producing the city as an object of knowledge and action. Methodologically, it develops a structured approach—combining decoding practice, corpus-based comparison, and vernacular elicitation—to make Chinese urban categories legible without domesticating them into externally imposed definitions.

Conceptually and theoretically, my main innovation is to define and develop "Terminological Urbanism" as an interpretive infrastructure. I use this term to name an approach that connects four domains that are often kept apart: semantic/lexicographic analysis, translation theory and hermeneutics, institutional and planning rationalities, and vernacular urban experience. My argument is that urban terms are not merely labels attached to pre-existing objects; they are condensed theories of those objects. To choose a term is to choose a framework of relevance: an implicit boundary, a scale, a set of assumed social relations, and a

set of expectations about governance and everyday life. This is why I insist that translation is always theoretical. When a Chinese term is rendered into an English near-equivalent, it may appear to increase clarity while, in practice, it reorganizes the city's conceptual scaffolding. I name this problem "conceptual distortion" and interpret it as a form of epistemic injustice: the shared interpretive resources available in global urban studies are sometimes insufficient to host the conceptual worlds embedded in Chinese urban terms. In my work, I do not propose linguistic purism; I do not argue that Chinese terms should simply be left untranslated. Instead, I propose a reparative stance: I treat the friction between languages as an analytical resource. Where an English term looks transparent, I ask whether it produces "false transparency" by hiding divergence. Where a translation seems smooth, I ask what institutional and historical specificity is being erased. In this way, my conceptual contribution is also ethical: I articulate a practice of "linguistic hospitality," where I try to host Chinese concepts within English without domesticating them into familiar categories that neutralize their capacity to reshape urban theory. My goal is therefore not only to translate "better" but to enlarge the conceptual repertoire of urban studies, allowing Chinese terms to generate theoretical insight rather than being translated away for convenience.

Methodologically, my innovation lies in turning that conceptual stance into a replicable research design and a set of explicit translation protocols. I organize the dissertation through a centrifugal, multi-scalar logic—house, street, neighborhood—anchored in an anthropological triad of staying, moving, and relating, while also aligning with core planning concerns about urban functionalism, spatial elements, and governance at different scales. I do this because I want the macro-scale of "the city" to emerge inductively from the micro-semantics of everyday life, rather than being imposed through a ready-made urban model. In planning terms, these three fields correspond to fundamental components of urban systems: housing as the primary unit of land-use and welfare provision (where dwelling is typologized, moralized, and regulated); streets as the key spatial element of circulation and accessibility (where movement, encounter, and control are organized through infrastructure and standards); and neighborhoods as the intermediate scale where territorial subdivision, service delivery, community governance, and identity-making are institutionalized and contested. In practice, treating each semantic field as a structured entry point into urban reality allows the analysis to show how Chinese urbanism is assembled through the interaction of functional categories, spatial hierarchies, and lived classifications, and how these interact with institutional planning rationalities rather than merely reflecting them.

The method is not only multiscalar but also multi-register: I consistently track terms across institutional, academic, and vernacular habitats. I consider this crucial because Chinese urban terms are frequently performative operators rather than passive descriptors—especially at the neighborhood level—so the same word can carry administrative force in one context and relational meaning in another. Methodologically, I therefore refuse to treat institutional documents, scholarly texts, and everyday speech as separate "types of data" that are later compared in a loose way. I treat them as different sites in which urban categories acquire authority, travel, and sometimes fracture. This design also supports the translation protocols I develop. I specify when I borrow in *pinyin* because English proxies are misleading, when partial equivalence is acceptable but must be flagged as partial, how I handle discrepancies between institutional and vernacular usage, and how I keep translation decisions visible so that they remain contestable rather than silently stabilizing conceptual slippage. The methodological innovation, in other words, is "auditability": I aim to make translation into an explicit series of interpretive operations that can be evaluated, challenged, and replicated by other scholars. This shifts translation from the status of "cleanup" to the status of method, and it produces a disciplined pathway for comparative research that does not rely on the false comfort of universal categories.

Empirically, my innovation is to treat vernacular urban language as structured evidence, not as anecdotal texture, and to build an original dataset that allows me to test, rather than merely assert, the gap between institutional nomenclature and lived experience. Using a visual-elicitation survey designed to bypass professional definitions and pre-structured prompts, I collect spontaneous lexical descriptors and construct a corpus of 1,077 unique descriptors. The value of this corpus is not "frequency" in a statistical sense, but semantic plurality as data: overlap, ambiguity, evaluation, and affect are precisely what make it possible to reconstruct how urban environments become meaningful when speakers are not constrained by planning vocabularies or by scholarly translations. A key empirical discovery is that the corpus consistently occupies a transitional zone between everyday speech and semi-institutional usage, a zone where planning concepts, media framings, and academic categories are practically negotiated and stabilized. Through inductive semantic clustering, I transform dispersed lexical outputs into an analytical object and show that vernacular naming recurrently encodes dimensions that are weakly visible in institutional texts: forms of enclosure/openness, degrees of order/disorder, atmospheres of safety/risk, comfort/inconvenience, and relational density

(how proximity, crowding, and social exposure are experienced). This produces a second discovery that is central to my argument: official and vernacular terms are not competing "opinions," but coexisting semantic systems that organize different urban realities. Where institutional language tends to privilege legibility, management, and standardized spatial elements, vernacular language preserves micro-differences, moral judgments, and experiential cues that structure everyday navigation and attachment. By integrating this vernacular evidence into my terminological framework, I make conceptual distortion empirically demonstrable: reading the city only through institutional categories, and then translating them into English, risks reproducing the state's conceptual grid and its blind spots, whereas a vernacular corpus functions as a corrective lens that reveals systematic mismatches between how space is governed and how it is lived.

In sum, I can state my innovations in a way that speaks directly to why they matter for an international understanding of Chinese cities and Chinese urbanism. Conceptually and theoretically, I propose *Terminological Urbanism* as an interpretive infrastructure that treats translation not as a secondary technical step but as a locus of theory-making and ethics: by reading urban terms as operators of knowledge, governance, and lived meaning, it makes visible the conceptual architecture through which Chinese cities are planned, administered, and inhabited. Methodologically, I offer a multiscalar, transdisciplinary research logic and explicit translation protocols that enable more rigorous comparison across contexts by keeping equivalence partial, contextual, and auditable, rather than assumed. Empirically, I contribute a structured vernacular dataset and an inductive semantic strategy that expands what counts as evidence in urban research and clarifies where—and why—institutional classifications diverge from everyday conceptualizations of housing, streets, and neighborhoods. Taken together, these innovations do not simply refine vocabulary: they provide the international community with a concrete way to engage Chinese urban categories on their own terms, diagnose misunderstandings generated by imported analytic templates, and treat linguistic friction as an analytical resource through which Chinese terminologies can actively reshape comparative urban theory rather than being domesticated into pre-existing Anglophone frames.

## 10.2 What the dissertation has demonstrated

Across the three semantic domains—staying (house), moving (street), and relating (neighborhood)—the dissertation has shown, first, that Chinese urban terms exhibit historically

layered meanings that do not map cleanly onto English glosses; second, that "transparent" translations often erase the institutional specificity that makes these terms operative; and third, that vernacular naming practices reveal dimensions of urban experience that remain poorly captured by official nomenclature and its translated proxies.

The analysis of housing terms demonstrated how seemingly straightforward building labels encode social histories, governance regimes, and shifting imaginaries of privacy, collectivity, and modernity. These are not only "types" in a morphological sense, but concept-laden objects that reorganize how dwelling is conceived and judged. Similarly, street terminology illuminated how the circulation of categories between philosophy, planning classification, and everyday orientation produces a semantic terrain where movement is at once infrastructural and moral. Finally, the neighborhood domain made particularly clear the tight coupling between language and governance: administrative units and planning categories are not simply described by terms; rather, terms instantiate jurisdictions, consolidate scalar mechanisms, and shape the social imagination of belonging and community.

These findings support a broader argument about translation and global urban knowledge. When key Chinese terms are domesticated into English, the result is not only semantic imprecision. It is what this dissertation has framed as conceptual distortion with epistemic consequences, because the translated object is often assimilated into pre-existing Anglophone genealogies of meaning and policy repertoires. *Terminological Urbanism* responds to this problem not by advocating linguistic purism, but by proposing an ethics and method of *linguistic hospitality*: **hosting Chinese concepts in English in ways that preserve their analytical provocation rather than neutralizing it**.

## 10.3 The contribution: *Terminological Urbanism* as interpretive infrastructure

The dissertation's main contribution is thus the establishment of *Terminological Urbanism* as an interpretive infrastructure that links four domains which are too often separated in urban research: (1) semantic and lexicographic analysis, (2) translation theory and hermeneutics, (3) institutional and planning rationalities, and (4) vernacular urban experience. Within this infrastructure, urban terminology becomes simultaneously: an empirical object (what people and institutions say), a methodological device (how the city is read), and an ethical problem (how knowledge travels across linguistic hierarchies).

A second contribution lies in the dissertation's empirical method for capturing vernacular urban language. The visual elicitation survey produced a corpus of 1,077 unique lexical descriptors, and the dissertation has argued that the value of this corpus is not frequency, standardization, or "dictionary completeness," but rather semantic plurality as data, a controlled window into how urban space is described when respondents are not constrained by expert frameworks or translation imperatives. The corpus also revealed a transitional register between everyday vernacular and semi-institutional speech, that is particularly relevant to how urban knowledge is produced and circulated in academic and professional settings.

A third contribution is methodological and normative: the dissertation has articulated guidelines for responsible translation in urban studies, emphasizing the limits of equivalence, the risks of "false transparency," and the need to register institutional divergence and vernacular counter-meanings when transporting Chinese terms into English discourse. **In practical terms, this shifts translation from a secondary editorial step to a reflexive research practice: a structured intervention that makes its own compromises visible.**

## 10.4 Why Terminological Urbanism matters for Urban Planning

Urban planning is frequently framed as a technical discipline concerned with land, infrastructure, and design. Yet many of its most consequential instruments are linguistic: standards, plans, zoning categories, administrative units, consultation procedures, and policy labels. These terms do not simply describe the city; they classify it, allocate it to regimes of responsibility, and render it actionable within administrative and professional practice. Planning therefore operates through a continual conversion of complex urban realities into stabilized categories. When those categories are treated as transparent—especially in cross-linguistic contexts—analysis can conflate labels with equivalents and equivalence with accuracy, generating subtle but durable distortions in diagnosis, comparison, and intervention.

*Terminological Urbanism* proceeds from the premise that, in planning, naming is already a mode of theorizing. Terms do not merely denote; they authorize, delimit, and connect scalar mechanisms across law, governance, design, and everyday life. A category such as "district," "community," or "renewal" embeds assumptions about how space is partitioned, how rights and obligations are distributed, what forms of value are recognized, and which outcomes count as improvement. Accordingly, terminological choices have epistemic and operational consequences: they shape what becomes legible as an object of planning, which problems can be articulated, and what solutions appear plausible or legitimate. Treating terminology as an

interpretive infrastructure foregrounds the fact that planning knowledge is mediated by semantic architectures that are historically sedimented, institutionally maintained, and unevenly shared across actors.

This perspective becomes particularly important where planning categories circulate through hierarchically organized bureaucracies and dense media ecologies, and where the same terms must function simultaneously as instruments of governance, devices of professional coordination, and cues for public understanding. In such contexts, terminological operations acquire administrative force: they stabilize targets, align evaluation criteria, and regulate participation by defining who can speak meaningfully about what. The problem is not that concepts are incommensurable across languages, but that translation often occurs too quickly, collapsing institutionally specific categories into familiar Anglophone equivalents. This produces a distinctive form of false comparability in which fluent translation masks divergent legal bases, administrative competencies, and practical referents. Terminological Urbanism addresses this risk by insisting that equivalence be treated as a hypothesis to be demonstrated, not a default assumption.

Methodologically, the approach rejects the expectation of a single, unified vocabulary that seamlessly integrates official nomenclature, expert discourse, and everyday language. Planning requires stable categories for legal operability and resource allocation; urban life generates flexible, evaluative, and relational descriptors that rarely map neatly onto administrative partitions. Enforced convergence tends to erase asymmetries of authority and function, reducing vernacular categories to "noise" or treating institutional categories as self-evident. Terminological Urbanism instead proposes a dual-layer model: retain official categories as the operative system of governance while systematically documenting socially meaningful descriptors as analytical evidence that can improve diagnosis, communication, and implementation monitoring. It also advances a principle of conditional stabilization: vernacular terms can be treated as recognized descriptors when they display consistent usage across groups, relatively stable spatial reference, and sustained circulation over time—not as legal reclassifications, but as interpretive resources that bridge expert and everyday understandings.

Operationally, terminological analysis yields concrete gains in four domains. First, it strengthens diagnosis by reducing conceptual drift: rather than assuming translated near-equivalents refer to identical objects, it reconstructs categories as co-produced by institutions, historical residues, and lived practices. Second, it enhances participatory efficacy by making residents' spatial references and evaluative vocabularies legible, thereby improving the

alignment between consultation formats and the lived units through which people experience the city. Third, it increases implementation realism: divergences between institutional and vernacular naming are not incidental frictions but signals of governance coupling, revealing where jurisdictions, service boundaries, and regimes of belonging are practically instantiated. Fourth, it improves comparative work and policy transfer by mitigating category risk—preventing the silent importation of external conceptual genealogies and using translation friction as a diagnostic indicator of institutional specificity.

In sum, *Terminological Urbanism* matters for urban planning because it targets a structural vulnerability of the field: the tendency to treat the semantic conditions of planning categories as neutral background. By foregrounding terminology as an interpretive infrastructure, it provides a rigorous basis for assessing equivalence, tracing institutional meaning, and integrating vernacular spatial knowledge without destabilizing statutory frameworks. The result is a more precise, accountable, and socially attuned planning practice, as well as a more defensible comparative urbanism that remains sensitive to the governance architectures through which cities are actually produced and lived.

## 10.5 Two concrete outcomes: platform and pedagogy

If *Terminological Urbanism* is an infrastructure, it should be able to *support uses* beyond the dissertation itself. Two outcomes follow directly from the project's internal logic and stated objectives.

### 10.5.1 Digital platform grounded in cartographic materials

A first outcome is the creation of a **digital research and teaching platform** based on cartographic materials, designed to make visible the city-objects as constructed in the dissertation: not the city as an abstract container, but as a set of semantic fields where terms, places, institutions, and practices intersect.

Conceptually, the platform would operationalize the dissertation's centrifugal method (house → street → neighborhood) and its commitment to transdisciplinarity. It would allow a reader to navigate from a term (or a cluster of terms) to its spatial referents, to the relevant cartographic layer, and then to linked original sources (regulatory documents, lexicographic references, scholarly texts, archival traces, and selected vernacular evidence) so that interpretation remains auditable rather than merely asserted. In other words, the platform would not be a "glossary on a map." It would be a **cartographic interface to semantic**

**infrastructures**, staging translation as a transparent chain of references rather than as a final domesticated label.

Methodologically, such a platform would formalize the dissertation's most consequential move: shifting from "reading the city through translated categories" to "reading translation through the city's categories." It would also provide a durable public output aligned with the dissertation's lexicographic orientation: a function-driven tool that supports concrete user situations—reading, learning, translating, comparing—under conditions of partial knowledge.

### 10.5.2 *Terminological Urbanism* as teaching practice

A second outcome is pedagogical: the application of *Terminological Urbanism* to teaching practice in planning, architecture, and urban studies. The dissertation's critique of conceptual distortion is not only about scholarly publication; it is also about how cohorts are trained to see the city through "ready-made" translated categories. If epistemic injustice is partly reproduced through habitual vocabularies, then a reparative response must include **terminological literacy as a professional competence**.

In teaching terms, *Terminological Urbanism* can be operationalized as a set of classroom practices: (1) **terminological audits** (students identify where English terms mis-specify Chinese objects and propose annotated translation strategies rather than single-word equivalences); (2) **semantic field mapping** (as a structured method for moving from micro-practices to macro-governance); (3) **translation-as-method assignments** (students document interpretive decisions, institutional references, and semantic loss/gain); (4) **platform-based learning** (students use the digital cartographic tool to trace a term across scales, sources, and governance contexts).

The didactic objective is not simply "better vocabulary." It is a transferable capability: training students to recognize that planning is a linguistic discipline, that categories do work, and that translation is a design decision within knowledge production. This, in turn, supports a more rigorous comparative urbanism, one that uses difference as an analytical resource rather than as a problem to be domesticated.

## 10.6 Limitations and scope conditions

No interpretive infrastructure is complete, and the dissertation is explicit about its scope conditions.

First, the semantic domains selected—house, street, neighborhood—are elemental, but they do not exhaust the city's terminological ecology. They were chosen because they align with fundamental acts of urban life and allow a controlled centrifugal method; future work can extend this logic to other semantic fields (e.g., publicness, property, heritage, informality, ecological governance).

Second, the survey corpus is situated. Respondents were university affiliates, producing language that occupies a transitional register between vernacular and semi-institutional speech. This is a limitation for representativeness, but also a strength for the dissertation's actual object: precisely the zone where urban knowledge is produced, formalized, and translated in academic and professional contexts.

Third, translation guidelines cannot remove the politics of knowledge; they can only make it explicit and contestable. The aspiration here is not a final "correct translation," but a defensible practice that keeps institutional specificity, historical layering, and vernacular counter-meanings within view.

## 10.7 Future research: from dissertation to shared infrastructure

The most immediate trajectory for future work is the platform itself: the transformation of the dissertation's corpus, semantic mappings, and translation protocols into a publicly accessible, cartographically grounded infrastructure. This entails design choices (data modeling, reference architecture, interface logic, and editorial governance) that are fully consistent with the dissertation's theoretical commitments. If *Terminological Urbanism* is to reduce conceptual distortion, it must be able to survive beyond individual expertise and become collectively usable: for scholars, translators, designers, planners, and students.

A second trajectory concerns comparative transfer. The dissertation is anchored in Chinese urbanism, but its core proposition generalizes: urban studies should treat local terminologies as conceptual resources capable of reshaping global theory, rather than as local noise to be translated away. Extending the method to other linguistic contexts would test, refine, and de-provincialize the Anglophone lexicon of urbanism by building a broader comparative repertoire of semantic infrastructures.

## 10.8 Closing statement

The Chinese city cannot be "decoded" by importing categories and translating away friction. The friction is the point: it is where institutions, histories, and lived practices become visible as conceptual architectures. This dissertation has argued that the words of the city are not merely descriptive residues of urban life, but infrastructures that organize what urban life can become. To study them carefully is therefore not to retreat into language, but to make urban analysis more exacting, more accountable, and more just. If the platform proposed here makes the city-object navigable through sources and scales, and if the pedagogical applications train future urbanists to treat terminology and translation as methodological responsibilities, then *Terminological Urbanism* will have achieved its practical ambition: not only to interpret the Chinese city more faithfully, but to expand the conceptual capacities through which global urban studies understands cities at all.

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# APPENDIX A INSTITUTIONAL GLOSSARY

**LEGEND:**

**POS** = Part of Speech
- **N** = Noun
- **CN** = Compound Noun
- **PN** = Proper Noun
- **V** = Verb
- **ADJ** = Adjective / Adjectival
- **ADJ PH** = adjectival phrase

**H/M** = Historical / Modern
**I** = Institutional

| TERM | *PINYIN* | ENGLISH RENDERING | POS | H / M | I |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 安居房 | *ānjū fáng* | secure housing | CN | M | Y |
| 安置房 | *ānzhì fáng* | resettlement housing | CN | M | Y |
| 安置楼 | *ānzhì lóu* | resettlement building | CN | M | Y |
| 庵 | *ān* | hermitage | N | H | N |
| 板房 | *bǎn fáng* | prefabricated house | CN | M | N |
| 板楼 | *bǎn lóu* | slab apartment block | CN | M | Y |
| 板式住宅 | *bǎnshì zhùzhái* | slab-type housing | CN | M | Y |
| 板塔结合住宅 | *bǎn–tǎ jiéhé zhùzhái* | slab–tower hybrid housing | CN | M | Y |
| 办公用房 | *bàngōng yòngfáng* | office-use building | CN | M | Y |
| 保甲制 | *bǎojiǎ zhì* | *baojia* system | N | H | Y |
| 保障房 | *bǎozhàng fáng* | guaranteed housing | CN | M | Y |
| 保障性住房 | *bǎozhàngxìng zhùfáng* | subsidized housing | CN | M | Y |
| 本土建筑 | *běntǔ jiànzhù* | indigenous architecture | CN | H/M | N |
| 别馆 | *biéguǎn* | secondary residence | N | H | N |
| 别墅 | *biéshù* | villa | N | M | N |
| 步行街 | *bùxíng jiē* | pedestrian street | CN | M | Y |
| 仓储用房 | *cāngchǔ yòngfáng* | warehouse building | CN | M | Y |
| 叉路 | *chā lù* | forked road | CN | M | N |
| 岔路 | *chà lù* | branching road | CN | M | N |
| 差序格局 | *chāxù géjú* | differential mode of association | CN | H | N |
| 拆迁 | *chāiqiān* | demolition and relocation | V | M | Y |
| 拆迁房 | *chāiqiān fáng* | relocation housing | CN | M | Y |
| 超车道 | *chāochē dào* | overtaking lane | CN | M | Y |
| 超高层建筑 | *chāo gāocéng jiànzhù* | super high-rise building | CN | M | Y |
| 车道 | *chēdào* | traffic lane | N | M | Y |
| 车行道 | *chēxíngdào* | vehicular roadway | CN | M | Y |
| 撤县设区 | *chè xiàn shè qū* | county-to-district conversion | V | M | Y |
| 成套住宅 | *chéngtào zhùzhái* | self-contained housing | CN | M | Y |
| 城 | *chéng* | city (walled) | N | H | Y |
| 城市副中心 | *chéngshì fu zhōngxīn* | secondary urban center | CN | M | Y |
| 城市人民公社 | *chéngshì rénmín gōngshè* | urban people's commune | CN | H | Y |
| 城镇 | *chéngzhèn* | town / city | N | H/M | Y |
| 城镇国有土地 | *chéngzhèn guóyǒu tǔdì* | state-owned urban land | CN | M | Y |
| 城镇住房 | *chéngzhèn zhùfáng* | urban housing | CN | M | Y |
| 城中村 | *chéngzhōngcūn* | urban village | CN | M | Y |
| 驰道 | *chídào* | imperial highway | N | H | Y |
| 尺度适宜 | *chǐdù shìyí* | scale-appropriate | ADJ | M | N |
| 出租车 | *chūzū chē* | taxi | N | M | N |
| 出租房 | *chūzū fáng* | rental housing | CN | M | Y |
| 厨房 | *chúfáng* | kitchen | N | H/M | N |
| 储备车道 | *chǔbèi chēdào* | reserved traffic lane | CN | M | Y |
| 窗 | *chuāng* | window | N | H/M | N |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 纯住宅 | *chún zhùzhái* | purely residential building | CN | M | Y |
| 次干路 | *cì gànlù* | secondary arterial road | CN | M | Y |
| 粗装修房 | *cū zhuāngxiū fáng* | rough-finished apartment | CN | M | Y |
| 村 | *cūn* | village | N | H/M | Y |
| 村道 | *cūndào* | village road | CN | M | Y |
| 村舍 | *cūnshè* | village dwelling | CN | H/M | N |
| 存量房 | *cúnliàng fáng* | existing housing stock | CN | M | Y |
| 打包箱房 | *dǎbāo xiāng fáng* | container house | CN | M | N |
| 大道 | *dàdào* | avenue | N | H/M | Y |
| 大街 | *dàjiē* | main street | CN | H/M | Y |
| 大街小巷 | *dàjiē xiǎoxiàng* | streets and alleys | CN | H/M | N |
| 大杂院 | *dà záyuàn* | mixed courtyard compound | CN | H | N |
| 单层住宅 | *dāncéng zhùzhái* | single-storey housing | CN | M | Y |
| 单位 | *dānwèi* | work unit | N | M | Y |
| 单位宿舍 | *dānwèi sùshè* | work-unit dormitory | CN | M | Y |
| 单位制 | *dānwèi zhì* | work-unit system | N | M | Y |
| 单位住房 | *dānwèi zhùfáng* | work-unit housing | CN | M | Y |
| 单元 | *dānyuán* | housing unit | N | M | N |
| 单元式住宅 | *dānyuánshì zhùzhái* | unit-type housing | CN | M | Y |
| 倒座房 | *dàozuò fáng* | rear-facing room | CN | H | N |
| 道 | *dào* | road / way | N | H/M | Y |
| 道路 | *dàolù* | road | N | H/M | Y |
| 道路分级 | *dàolù fēnjí* | road hierarchy | CN | M | Y |
| 低层住宅 | *dīcéng zhùzhái* | low-rise housing | CN | M | Y |
| 低挡住宅 | *dīdǎng zhùzhái* | low-grade housing | CN | M | Y |
| 邸 | *dǐ* | official residence | N | H | Y |
| 底层商铺 | *dǐcéng shāngpù* | ground-floor shop | CN | M | N |
| 地方性建筑 | *dìfāngxìng jiànzhù* | local architecture | CN | H/M | N |
| 地级市 | *dìjí shì* | prefecture-level city | CN | M | Y |
| 地籍图 | *dìjí tú* | cadastral map | CN | M | Y |
| 地区 | *dìqū* | region | N | H/M | Y |
| 地下街 | *dìxià jiē* | underground street | CN | M | Y |
| 第 | *dì* | mansion (classical) | N | H | N |
| 第N代住宅 | *dì n dài zhùzhái* | nth-generation housing | CN | M | N |
| 点式住宅 | *diǎnshì zhùzhái* | point-block housing | CN | M | Y |
| 吊脚楼 | *diàojiǎolóu* | stilt house | CN | H/M | N |
| 叠加式别墅 | *diéjiāshì biéshù* | stacked villa | CN | M | N |
| 叠拼别墅 | *dié pīn biéshù* | stacked duplex villa | CN | M | N |
| 丁字路口 | *dīngzì lùkǒu* | T-junction | CN | H/M | Y |
| 丁字型 | *dīngzìxíng* | T-shaped | ADJ | H/M | N |
| 洞 | *dòng* | cave | N | H | N |
| 独栋别墅 | *dúdòng biéshù* | detached villa | CN | M | N |
| 独户住宅 | *dúhù zhùzhái* | single-household dwelling | CN | M | N |
| 独幢别墅 | *dúzhuàng biéshù* | single-block villa | CN | M | N |
| 断头路 | *duàntóu lù* | dead-end road | CN | M | Y |
| 墩子楼 | *dūnzi lóu* | block-type residential building | CN | M | N |
| 多层住宅 | *duōcéng zhùzhái* | multi-storey housing | CN | M | Y |
| 多岔路口 | *duō chà lùkǒu* | multi-branch intersection | CN | M | Y |
| 多户住宅 | *duōhù zhùzhái* | multi-household housing | CN | M | Y |
| 耳房 | *ěrfáng* | side room | N | H | N |
| 二手房 | *èrshǒu fáng* | second-hand housing | CN | M | Y |
| 坊 | *fāng* | ward / neighborhood | N | H | Y |
| 坊门 | *fāngmén* | ward gate | CN | H | Y |
| 坊巷志 | *fāngxiàng zhì* | gazetteer of wards and lanes | CN | H | Y |
| 坊制 | *fāng zhì* | ward system | N | H | Y |
| 房 | *fáng* | room / house | N | H/M | N |
| 房改房 | *fánggǎi fáng* | housing reform housing | CN | M | Y |
| 房间 | *fángjiān* | room | N | H/M | N |
| 房舍 | *fángshè* | dwelling | N | H/M | N |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 房屋 | *fángwū* | house | N | H/M | N |
| 房子 | *fángzi* | house | N | H/M | N |
| 非成套住宅 | *fēi chéngtào zhùzhái* | non-self-contained housing | CN | M | Y |
| 非机动车专用道 | *fēi jīdòngchē zhuānyòng dào* | non-motorized vehicle lane | CN | M | Y |
| 非普通住宅 | *fēi pǔtōng zhùzhái* | non-standard housing | CN | M | Y |
| 服务式公寓 | *fúwùshì gōngyù* | serviced apartment | CN | M | N |
| 福利房 | *fúlì fáng* | welfare housing | CN | M | Y |
| 府 | *fǔ* | official residence | N | H | Y |
| 府邸 | *fǔdǐ* | official mansion | N | H | Y |
| 辅路 | *fǔlù* | service road | N | M | Y |
| 辅助车道 | *fǔzhù chēdào* | auxiliary lane | CN | M | Y |
| 复式住宅 | *fùshì zhùzhái* | duplex apartment | CN | M | Y |
| 干线公路 | *gànxiàn gōnglù* | arterial highway | CN | M | Y |
| 高层民用建筑 | *gāocéng mínyòng jiànzhù* | high-rise civil building | CN | M | Y |
| 高层住宅 | *gāocéng zhùzhái* | high-rise housing | CN | M | Y |
| 高乘载专用道 | *gāo chéngzài zhuānyòng dào* | high-occupancy vehicle lane | CN | M | Y |
| 高档住宅 | *gāodàng zhùzhái* | high-end housing | CN | M | N |
| 高端住宅 | *gāoduān zhùzhái* | premium housing | CN | M | N |
| 高级住宅 | *gāojí zhùzhái* | upscale housing | CN | M | N |
| 高楼 | *gāolóu* | tall building | N | H/M | N |
| 高尚住宅 | *gāoshàng zhùzhái* | luxury residential housing | CN | M | N |
| 高速公路 | *gāosù gōnglù* | expressway | N | M | Y |
| 阁 | *gé* | pavilion / upper room | N | H | N |
| 工程 | *gōngchéng* | engineering project | N | M | Y |
| 工房 | *gōngfáng* | workshop housing | N | M | Y |
| 工人住房 | *gōngrén zhùfáng* | workers' housing | CN | M | Y |
| 工业区 | *gōngyè qū* | industrial zone | N | M | Y |
| 工业用房 | *gōngyè yòngfáng* | industrial-use building | CN | M | Y |
| 工字型 | *gōngzìxíng* | I-shaped | ADJ | H/M | N |
| 公产住房 | *gōngchǎn zhùfáng* | publicly owned housing | CN | M | Y |
| 公房 | *gōngfáng* | public housing | N | M | Y |
| 公共设施用房 | *gōnggòng shèshī yòngfáng* | public facilities building | CN | M | Y |
| 公共寓所 | *gōnggòng yùsuǒ* | public lodging | N | M | Y |
| 公共租赁房 | *gōnggòng zūlìn fáng* | public rental housing | CN | M | Y |
| 公交运输用房 | *gōngjiāo yùnshū yòngfáng* | public transport facility | CN | M | Y |
| 公交专用车道 | *gōngjiāo zhuānyòng chēdào* | bus-only lane | CN | M | Y |
| 公路 | *gōnglù* | highway | N | H/M | Y |
| 公田 | *gōngtián* | communal land | N | H | Y |
| 公有住宅 | *gōngyǒu zhùzhái* | publicly owned housing | CN | M | Y |
| 公寓 | *gōngyù* | apartment | N | H/M | N |
| 公寓大楼 | *gōngyù dàlóu* | apartment building | CN | M | N |
| 公寓大厦 | *gōngyù dàshà* | apartment tower | CN | M | N |
| 公寓房 | *gōngyù fáng* | apartment unit | CN | M | N |
| 公寓建筑 | *gōngyù jiànzhù* | apartment architecture | CN | M | N |
| 公寓里弄 | *gōngyù lǐnòng* | Apartment 里弄 *lǐlòng* | CN | M | N |
| 公寓楼 | *gōngyù lóu* | apartment block | CN | M | N |
| 公寓楼房 | *gōngyù lóufáng* | apartment building | CN | M | N |
| 公寓式住宅 | *gōngyùshì zhùzhái* | apartment-style housing | CN | M | Y |
| 公寓套房 | *gōngyù tàofáng* | apartment suite | CN | M | N |
| 宫 | *gōng* | palace | N | H | Y |
| 宫城 | *gōngchéng* | palace city | N | H | Y |
| 宫舍 | *gōngshè* | palace quarters | N | H | Y |
| 宫室 | *gōngshì* | palace chambers | N | H | Y |
| 宫署 | *gōngshǔ* | palace offices | N | H | Y |
| 宫室 | *gōngshì* | palace chambers | N | H | Y |
| 供给制 | *gōngjǐ zhì* | supply-based system | N | H | Y |
| 沟 | *gōu* | ditch | N | H/M | N |
| 古都 | *gǔdū* | ancient capital | N | H | Y |
| 故居 | *gùjū* | former residence | N | H | N |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 官道 | *guāndào* | official road | N | H | Y |
| 官邸 | *guāndǐ* | official residence | N | H | Y |
| 官路 | *guānlù* | official route | N | H | Y |
| 官舍 | *guānshè* | official lodging | N | H | Y |
| 馆 | *guǎn* | hall / building | N | H/M | N |
| 馆舍 | *guǎnshè* | institutional building | N | H | Y |
| 轨 | *guǐ* | track / axis | N | H/M | N |
| 国道 | *guódào* | national highway | N | M | Y |
| 国务院 | *Guówùyuàn* | State Council (PRC) | PN | M | Y |
| 国有住宅 | *guóyǒu zhùzhái* | state-owned housing | CN | M | Y |
| 豪宅 | *háozhái* | luxury residence | N | M | N |
| 合院 | *héyuàn* | courtyard compound | N | H/M | N |
| 赫鲁晓夫楼 | *Hèlǔxiǎofū lóu* | Khrushchev-era apartment block | CN | H | Y |
| 赫鲁晓夫式住宅 | *Hèlǔxiǎofū shì zhùzhái* | Khrushchev-style housing | CN | H | Y |
| 黑房子 | *hēi fángzi* | black house (informal dwelling) | N | M | N |
| 后照房 / 后罩房 | *hòuzhào fáng / hòuzhào fáng* | rear auxiliary room | CN | H | N |
| 胡同 | *hútòng* | alley | N | H/M | N |
| 互通立交 | *hùtōng lìjiāo* | full cloverleaf interchange | CN | M | Y |
| 户 | *hù* | household | N | H/M | Y |
| 户籍 | *hùjí* | household registration | N | M | Y |
| 环岛 | *huándǎo* | traffic roundabout | N | M | Y |
| 环形交叉口 | *huánxíng jiāochākǒu* | circular intersection | CN | M | Y |
| 寰宇 | *huányǔ* | the world; cosmos | N | H | N |
| 皇宫 | *huánggōng* | imperial palace | N | H | Y |
| 回迁房 | *huíqiān fáng* | return resettlement housing | CN | M | Y |
| 回屋 | *huíwū* | rear dwelling | N | H | N |
| 货运 | *huòyùn* | freight transport | N | M | Y |
| 基本完好房 | *jīběn wánhǎo fáng* | basically sound housing | CN | M | Y |
| 集散车道 | *jísàn chēdào* | distributor lane | CN | M | Y |
| 集散公路 | *jísàn gōnglù* | distributor road | CN | M | Y |
| 集体宿舍 | *jítǐ sùshè* | collective dormitory | CN | M | Y |
| 集装箱房 | *jízhuāngxiāng fáng* | container house | CN | M | N |
| 集资房 | *jízī fáng* | collectively funded housing | CN | M | Y |
| 集资合作住房 | *jízī hézuò zhùfáng* | cooperative funded housing | CN | M | Y |
| 加速车道 | *jiāsù chēdào* | acceleration lane | CN | M | Y |
| 家 | *jiā* | household; home | N | H/M | N |
| 家居 | *jiājū* | domestic living | N | H/M | N |
| 家居派 | *jiājū pài* | home-oriented school | N | M | N |
| 家谱 | *jiāpǔ* | genealogy | N | H | N |
| 家属楼 | *jiāshǔ lóu* | family housing block | CN | M | Y |
| 监狱用房 | *jiānyù yòngfáng* | prison facilities | CN | M | Y |
| 减速车道 | *jiǎnsù chēdào* | deceleration lane | CN | M | Y |
| 简屋 | *jiǎnwū* | simple dwelling | N | M | N |
| 建筑建设 | *jiànzhù jiànshè* | building construction | N | M | Y |
| 建筑物 | *jiànzhùwù* | building | N | H/M | N |
| 交叉口 | *jiāochākǒu* | intersection | N | M | Y |
| 交汇处 | *jiāohuì chù* | junction | N | M | Y |
| 教育用房 | *jiàoyù yòngfáng* | educational facilities | CN | M | Y |
| 街 | *jiē* | street | N | H/M | Y |
| 街道 | *jiēdào* | subdistrict / street | N | M | Y |
| 街道办 | *jiēdào bàn* | subdistrict office | N | M | Y |
| 街道办事处 | *jiēdào bànshìchù* | subdistrict administrative office | N | M | Y |
| 街坊 | *jiēfāng* | neighborhood | N | H/M | N |
| 街坊感 | *jiēfāng gǎn* | sense of neighborhood | N | M | N |
| 街口 | *jiēkǒu* | street corner | N | H/M | N |
| 街区 | *jiēqū* | urban block | N | M | Y |
| 街区认同 | *jiēqū rèntóng* | block identity | N | M | N |
| 街区制 | *jiēqū zhì* | block system | N | M | Y |
| 街区制改革 | *jiēqū zhì gǎigé* | block-system reform | N | M | Y |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 街市 | *jiēshì* | street market | N | H/M | N |
| 街头巷尾 | *jiētóu xiàngwěi* | streets and alleys | N | H/M | N |
| 街巷 | *jiēxiàng* | streets and lanes | N | H/M | N |
| 街巷制 | *jiēxiàng zhì* | street–lane system | N | H | Y |
| 解困房 | *jiěkùn fáng* | hardship-relief housing | CN | M | Y |
| 金融保险用房 | *jīnróng bǎoxiǎn yòngfáng* | finance and insurance facilities | CN | M | Y |
| 金融街 | *jīnróng jiē* | financial street | N | M | Y |
| 经济适用房 | *jīngjì shìyòng fáng* | affordable housing | CN | M | Y |
| 经适房 | *jīngshì fáng* | affordable housing (abbr.) | CN | M | Y |
| 精装修房 | *jīng zhuāngxiū fáng* | fully-finished apartment | CN | M | Y |
| 井田制 | *jǐngtián zhì* | well-field system | N | H | Y |
| 径 | *jìng* | path | N | H | N |
| 九经九纬 | *jiǔ jīng jiǔ wěi* | nine longitudinal<br>nine latitudinal avenues | N | H | Y |
| 旧房 | *jiùfáng* | old housing | N | M | N |
| 旧居 | *jiùjū* | former dwelling | N | H/M | N |
| 旧住宅区 | *jiù zhùzhái qū* | old residential district | CN | M | Y |
| 救援车道 | *jiùyuán chēdào* | emergency lane | CN | M | Y |
| 居 | *jū* | dwelling; residence | N | H/M | N |
| 居民 | *jūmín* | resident | N | H/M | Y |
| 居民楼 | *jūmín lóu* | residential building | CN | M | Y |
| 居民委员会 | *jūmín wěiyuánhuì* | residents' committee | N | M | Y |
| 居委会 | *jūwěihuì* | residents' committee (abbr.) | N | M | Y |
| 居住 | *jūzhù* | to reside | V | H/M | N |
| 居住街坊 | *jūzhù jiēfāng* | residential neighborhood | CN | M | Y |
| 居住区 | *jūzhù qū* | residential district | CN | M | Y |
| 居住区道路 | *jūzhù qū dàolù* | residential roads | CN | M | Y |
| 居住小区 | *jūzhù xiǎoqū* | residential compound | CN | M | Y |
| 居住组团 | *jūzhù zǔtuán* | residential cluster | CN | M | Y |
| 聚落社会 | *jùluò shèhuì* | settlement society | CN | H/M | N |
| 军事用房 | *jūnshì yòngfáng* | military facilities | CN | M | Y |
| 郡 | *jùn* | commandery | N | H | Y |
| 康居 | *kāngjū* | healthy dwelling | N | M | N |
| 康衢 | *kāngqú* | main thoroughfare | N | H | Y |
| 客舍 | *kèshè* | guesthouse | N | H | N |
| 客栈 | *kèzhàn* | inn | N | H | N |
| 口 | *kǒu* | entrance; mouth | N | H/M | N |
| 快速车道 | *kuàisù chēdào* | express lane | CN | M | Y |
| 快速路 | *kuàisù lù* | express road | N | M | Y |
| 老城保护 | *lǎochéng bǎohù* | old city preservation | CN | M | Y |
| 老房子 | *lǎo fángzi* | old house | N | H/M | N |
| 老小区 | *lǎo xiǎoqū* | old residential compound | CN | M | Y |
| 老宅 | *lǎo zhái* | old residence | N | H/M | N |
| 里 | *lǐ* | neighborhood unit | N | H | Y |
| 里坊 | *lǐfāng* | ward system | N | H | Y |
| 里坊制 | *lǐfāng zhì* | ward system | N | H | Y |
| 里甲制 | *lǐjiǎ zhì* | lijia system | N | H | Y |
| 里弄 | *lǐnòng* | alleyway neighborhood | N | H/M | N |
| 里社 | *lǐshè* | neighborhood association | N | H | Y |
| 里巷 | *lǐxiàng* | lanes | N | H | N |
| 历史街区 | *lìshǐ jiēqū* | historic district | CN | M | Y |
| 立交 | *lìjiāo* | grade-separated interchange | N | M | Y |
| 立体交叉 | *lìtǐ jiāochā* | grade-separated intersection | CN | M | Y |
| 连坐制 | *liánzuò zhì* | collective punishment system | N | H | Y |
| 联排别墅 | *liánpái biéshù* | row villa | CN | M | N |
| 廉租房 | *liánzū fáng* | low-rent housing | CN | M | Y |
| 邻 | *lín* | neighbor | N | H/M | N |
| 邻居 | *línjū* | neighbor | N | H/M | N |
| 邻里 | *línlǐ* | neighborhood | N | H/M | N |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 邻里关系 | *línlǐ guānxì* | neighborhood relations | CN | H/M | N |
| 衖 | *xiàng* | alley (dialectal/variant) | N | H | N |
| 楼 | *lóu* | building; storey | N | H/M | N |
| 楼房 | *lóufáng* | multi-storey building | N | H/M | N |
| 楼阁 | *lóugé* | pavilion building | N | H | N |
| 楼钥 | *lóuyuè* | building registry key | N | M | Y |
| 庐 | *lú* | hut; cottage | N | H | N |
| 路 | *lù* | road | N | H/M | Y |
| 路程 | *lùchéng* | distance | N | H/M | N |
| 路口 | *lùkǒu* | road intersection | N | H/M | Y |
| 落户 | *luòhù* | to register residence | V | M | Y |
| 闾 | *lǘ* | neighborhood unit | N | H | Y |
| 闾里制 | *lǘlǐ zhì* | *lüli* system | N | H | Y |
| 旅社 | *lǚshè* | hostel | N | M | N |
| 绿带 | *lǜdài* | green belt | N | M | Y |
| 马路 | *mǎlù* | street | N | M | Y |
| 毛坯房 | *máopī fáng* | unfinished apartment | CN | M | Y |
| 美食街 | *měishí jiē* | food street | CN | M | N |
| 门 | *mén* | gate | N | H/M | N |
| 门面房 | *ménmiàn fáng* | street-front shop | CN | M | N |
| 密路网 | *mì lùwǎng* | dense road network | CN | M | Y |
| 面朝后市 | *miàn cháo hòu shì* | facing rear market | ADJ | H | N |
| 民房 | *mínfáng* | private house | N | H/M | N |
| 民间 | *mínjiān* | folk; non-official | N | H/M | N |
| 民居 | *mínjū* | folk dwelling | N | H/M | N |
| 民用 | *mínyòng* | civilian-use | ADJ | H/M | N |
| 民用建筑 | *mínyòng jiànzhù* | civil building | CN | M | Y |
| 陌 | *mò* | path between fields | N | H | N |
| 亩 | *mǔ* | mu (area unit) | N | H/M | Y |
| 内侧车道 | *nèicè chēdào* | inner lane | CN | M | Y |
| 内廊式住宅 | *nèi lángshì zhùzhái* | internal-corridor housing | CN | M | Y |
| 牛舍 | *niúshè* | cattle shed | N | H/M | N |
| 农村集体土地 | *nóngcūn jítǐ tǔdì* | rural collective land | CN | M | Y |
| 农舍 | *nóngshè* | farmhouse | N | H/M | N |
| 弄 | *nòng* | lane | N | H/M | N |
| 弄堂 | *nòngtáng* | lane (Shanghai) | N | M | N |
| 爬坡车道 | *pápō chēdào* | climbing lane | CN | M | Y |
| 棚 | *péng* | shed | N | H/M | N |
| 棚户 | *pénghù* | shack household | N | M | N |
| 棚户区 | *pénghùqū* | shantytown | N | M | Y |
| 棚户区改造 | *pénghùqū gǎizào* | shantytown redevelopment | CN | M | Y |
| 棚舍 | *péngshè* | shack | N | H/M | N |
| 拼车 | *pīnchē* | carpooling | N | M | N |
| 平层住宅 | *píngcéng zhùzhái* | flat-level housing | CN | M | Y |
| 平房 | *píngfáng* | single-storey house | N | H/M | N |
| 平面交叉口 | *píngmiàn jiāochākǒu* | at-grade intersection | CN | M | Y |
| 普通住宅 | *pǔtōng zhùzhái* | ordinary housing | CN | M | Y |
| 期房 | *qīfáng* | pre-sale housing | N | M | Y |
| 骑楼 | *qílóu* | arcade building | N | H/M | N |
| 起居室 | *qǐjūshì* | living room | N | H/M | N |
| 前店后坊 | *qián diàn hòu fāng* | shop-front dwelling | CN | H | N |
| 前街后巷 | *qián jiē hòu xiàng* | front street, rear lane | CN | H | N |
| 区 / 區 | *qū* | district | N | H/M | Y |
| 衢 | *qú* | major thoroughfare | N | H | Y |
| 群租房 | *qúnzū fáng* | group-rented housing | CN | M | Y |
| 人口疏解 | *rénkǒu shūjiě* | population deconcentration | CN | M | Y |
| 日常建筑 | *rìcháng jiànzhù* | everyday architecture | CN | H/M | N |
| 三岔路口 | *sān chà lùkǒu* | three-way intersection | CN | H/M | Y |
| 三合院 | *sānhéyuàn* | three-sided courtyard | CN | H | N |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 僧舍 | *sēngshè* | monks' quarters | N | H | N |
| 商办 | *shāngbàn* | commercial–office | N | M | Y |
| 商办公寓 | *shāngbàn gōngyù* | mixed-use apartment | CN | M | Y |
| 商品房 | *shāngpǐn fáng* | commercial housing | CN | M | Y |
| 商业或办公用地 | *shāngyè huò bàngōng yòngdì* | commercial or office land | CN | M | Y |
| 商业街 | *shāngyè jiē* | commercial street | CN | M | Y |
| 商业用房 | *shāngyè yòngfáng* | commercial-use building | CN | M | Y |
| 商业住宅 | *shāngyè zhùzhái* | commercial residential housing | CN | M | Y |
| 商住楼 | *shāngzhù lóu* | mixed-use residential building | CN | M | Y |
| 上叠别墅 | *shàng dié biéshù* | upper stacked villa | CN | M | N |
| 上房 | *shàngfáng* | main room | N | H | N |
| 舍 | *shè* | dwelling | N | H/M | N |
| 社区 | *shèqū* | community | N | M | Y |
| 社区服务中心 | *shèqū fúwù zhōngxīn* | community service center | CN | M | Y |
| 涉外用房 | *shèwài yòngfáng* | foreign-related facilities | CN | M | Y |
| 生活圈 | *shēnghuó quān* | living circle | N | M | N |
| 省 | *shěng* | province | N | H/M | Y |
| 省道 | *shěngdào* | provincial highway | N | M | Y |
| 十五分钟生活圈 | *shíwǔ fēnzhōng shēnghuó quān* | 15-minute living circle | CN | M | Y |
| 十字路口 | *shízì lùkǒu* | cross intersection | CN | H/M | Y |
| 十字型 | *shízìxíng* | cross-shaped | ADJ | H/M | N |
| 石库门里弄 | *shíkùmén lǐnòng* | Shikumen 里弄 *lǐlòng* | N | H | N |
| 使用权房 | *shǐyòngquán fáng* | use-right housing | CN | M | Y |
| 市 | *shì* | city | N | H/M | Y |
| 市辖区人口 | *shìxiáqū rénkǒu* | district population | CN | M | Y |
| 市政 | *shìzhèng* | municipal | N | M | Y |
| 室 | *shì* | room | N | H/M | N |
| 室内走道 | *shìnèi zǒudào* | indoor corridor | CN | M | N |
| 收费公路 | *shōufèi gōnglù* | toll road | N | M | Y |
| 墅 | *shù* | villa | N | H/M | N |
| 双车道公路 | *shuāng chēdào gōnglù* | dual-carriageway road | CN | M | Y |
| 双拼别墅 | *shuāngpīn biéshù* | semi-detached villa | CN | M | N |
| 水井 | *shuǐjǐng* | water well | N | H/M | N |
| 私房 | *sīfáng* | privately owned house | N | M | N |
| 私田 | *sītián* | privately owned land | N | H | N |
| 私有公寓 | *sīyǒu gōngyù* | privately owned apartment | CN | M | N |
| 四岔路口 | *sì chà lùkǒu* | four-way intersection | CN | H/M | Y |
| 四合院 | *sìhéyuàn* | courtyard house | N | H | N |
| 宿 | *sù* | lodging | N | H | N |
| 宿舍 | *sùshè* | dormitory | N | H/M | Y |
| 宿舍楼 | *sùshè lóu* | dormitory building | CN | M | Y |
| 遂 | *suì* | passage | N | H | N |
| 塔 | *tǎ* | tower | N | H/M | N |
| 塔楼 | *tǎlóu* | tower apartment | N | M | Y |
| 塔式住宅 | *tǎshì zhùzhái* | tower-type housing | CN | M | Y |
| 堂 | *táng* | hall | N | H/M | N |
| 特色商业街 | *tèsè shāngyè jiē* | themed commercial street | CN | M | Y |
| 体育用房 | *tǐyù yòngfáng* | sports facilities | CN | M | Y |
| 田舍 | *tiánshè* | farmhouse | N | H | N |
| 通 | *tōng* | passage | N | H | N |
| 通道 | *tōngdào* | passageway | N | M | Y |
| 通街 | *tōngjiē* | through street | N | H | N |
| 通廊式住宅 | *tōnglángshì zhùzhái* | gallery-access housing | CN | M | Y |
| 衕 | *tòng* | alley (variant) | N | H | N |
| 筒子楼 | *tǒngzilóu* | corridor-style apartment | N | M | Y |
| 途 | *tú* | route | N | H | N |
| 涂 | *tú* | coating | N | H | N |
| 土地财政 | *tǔdì cáizhèng* | land-based finance | CN | M | Y |
| 土楼 | *tǔlóu* | rammed-earth building | N | H | N |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 团行 | *tuánháng* | organized procession | N | H | N |
| 瓦房 | *wǎfáng* | tiled house | N | H | N |
| 外侧车道 | *wàicè chēdào* | outer lane | CN | M | Y |
| 外廊式住宅 | *wài lángshì zhùzhái* | external-corridor housing | CN | M | Y |
| 完好房 | *wánhǎo fáng* | intact housing | N | M | Y |
| 网格化管理 | *wǎnggéhuà guǎnlǐ* | grid-based management | CN | M | Y |
| 网格化治理 | *wǎnggéhuà zhìlǐ* | grid-based governance | CN | M | Y |
| 危房 | *wēifáng* | dangerous housing | N | M | Y |
| 危险房屋 | *wēixiǎn fángwū* | dangerous buildings | CN | M | Y |
| 微更新 | *wēi gēngxīn* | micro-renewal | CN | M | Y |
| 纬 | *wěi* | latitude | N | H | N |
| 卫生间 | *wèishēngjiān* | bathroom | N | H/M | N |
| 文化街 | *wénhuà jiē* | cultural street | CN | M | Y |
| 文化用房 | *wénhuà yòngfáng* | cultural facilities | CN | M | Y |
| 文物保护单位 | *wénwù bǎohù dānwèi* | protected cultural relic unit | CN | M | Y |
| 卧室 | *wòshì* | bedroom | N | H/M | N |
| 幄 | *wò* | tent curtain | N | H | N |
| 屋 | *wū* | house | N | H/M | N |
| 屋舍 | *wūshè* | dwelling | N | H/M | N |
| 屋宇 | *wūyǔ* | buildings | N | H/M | N |
| 屋子 | *wūzi* | house | N | H/M | N |
| 五岔路口 | *wǔ chà lùkǒu* | five-way intersection | CN | M | Y |
| 五沟 | *wǔ gōu* | five ditches | N | H | N |
| 五沟五涂 | *wǔ gōu wǔ tú* | five ditches, five roads | N | H | Y |
| 物业 | *wùyè* | property management | N | M | Y |
| 下叠别墅 | *xià dié biéshù* | lower stacked villa | CN | M | N |
| 下房 | *xiàfáng* | subsidiary room | N | H | N |
| 县 | *xiàn* | county | N | H/M | Y |
| 县道 | *xiàndào* | county road | N | M | Y |
| 现房 | *xiànfáng* | completed housing | N | M | Y |
| 乡 | *xiāng* | township | N | H/M | Y |
| 乡道 | *xiāngdào* | township road | N | M | Y |
| 乡土建筑 | *xiāngtǔ jiànzhù* | vernacular architecture | CN | H/M | N |
| 乡镇 | *xiāngzhèn* | town | N | M | Y |
| 相对应 | *xiāng duìyìng* | corresponding | ADJ | M | N |
| 厢房 | *xiāngfáng* | side room | N | H | N |
| 廂房 | *xiāngfáng* | side room | N | H | N |
| 箱式房 | *xiāngshì fáng* | box-type house | CN | M | N |
| 巷 | *xiàng* | alley | N | H/M | N |
| 巷道 | *xiàngdào* | alleyway | N | H/M | N |
| 巷口 | *xiàngkǒu* | alley entrance | N | H/M | N |
| 消防通道 | *xiāofáng tōngdào* | fire access lane | CN | M | Y |
| 小吃街 | *xiǎochī jiē* | snack street | CN | M | N |
| 小街 | *xiǎojiē* | small street | N | H/M | N |
| 小区 | *xiǎoqū* | residential compound | N | M | Y |
| 小区路 | *xiǎoqū lù* | residential compound road | CN | M | Y |
| 小区住房 | *xiǎoqū zhùfáng* | compound housing | CN | M | Y |
| 校舍 | *xiàoshè* | school buildings | N | M | Y |
| 新房 | *xīnfáng* | new house | N | M | N |
| 新式里弄 | *xīnshì lìnòng* | new-style里弄 *lǐlòng* | N | M | N |
| 新闻用房 | *xīnwén yòngfáng* | press facilities | CN | M | Y |
| 洫 | *xù* | ditch | N | H | N |
| 学区 | *xuéqū* | school district | N | M | Y |
| 学区房 | *xuéqū fáng* | school-district housing | CN | M | Y |
| 学舍 | *xuéshè* | school building | N | H | N |
| 巡坊司 | *xúnfāng sī* | ward patrol office | N | H | Y |
| 丫字路口 | *yāzì lùkǒu* | Y-shaped intersection | CN | M | Y |
| 烟囱 | *yāncōng* | chimney | N | H/M | N |
| 严重损坏房 | *yánzhòng sǔnhuài fáng* | severely damaged housing | CN | M | Y |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 羊 | *yáng* | sheep | N | H/M | N |
| 羊舍 | *yángshè* | sheepfold | N | H/M | N |
| 样板街 | *yàngbǎn jiē* | model street | CN | M | Y |
| 窯洞 | *yáodòng* | cave dwelling | N | H | N |
| 野 | *yě* | wild; open | ADJ | H | N |
| 一般损坏房 | *yìbān sǔnhuài fáng* | generally damaged housing | CN | M | Y |
| 一蝶型 | *yì dié xíng* | butterfly-shaped | ADJ | M | N |
| 一户 | *yì hù* | one household | N | H/M | N |
| 一类住宅用地 | *yī lèi zhùzhái yòngdì* | first-class residential land | CN | M | Y |
| 一套房 | *yí tào fáng* | one housing unit | N | M | N |
| 一梯n户单元 | *yì tī n hù dānyuán* | one-stair–n-unit layout | CN | M | Y |
| 医疗 | *yīliáo* | medical care | N | H/M | Y |
| 医疗用房 | *yīliáo yòngfáng* | medical facilities | CN | M | Y |
| 邑 | *yì* | settlement | N | H | Y |
| 驿路 | *yìlù* | post road | N | H | Y |
| 驿站 | *yìzhàn* | post station | N | H | Y |
| 营 | *yíng* | camp | N | H | Y |
| 营房 | *yíngfáng* | barracks | N | H | Y |
| 营舍 | *yíngshè* | military lodging | N | H | Y |
| 用房 | *yòngfáng* | functional building | N | M | Y |
| 娱乐用房 | *yúlè yòngfáng* | entertainment facilities | CN | M | Y |
| 宇 | *yǔ* | house; eaves | N | H | N |
| 宇宙 | *yǔzhòu* | universe | N | H/M | N |
| 寓 | *yù* | dwelling | N | H/M | N |
| 寓舍 | *yùshè* | lodging | N | H | N |
| 院 | *yuàn* | courtyard | N | H/M | N |
| 院落腾退 | *yuànluò téngtuì* | courtyard clearance | CN | M | Y |
| 跃层住宅 | *yuècéng zhùzhái* | split-level housing | CN | M | Y |
| 匝道 | *zādào* | ramp | N | M | Y |
| 宅 | *zhái* | residence | N | H/M | N |
| 宅间小路 | *zháijiān xiǎolù* | internal residential path | CN | M | Y |
| 宅舍 | *zháishè* | dwelling | N | H | N |
| 宅院 | *zháiyuàn* | residential courtyard | N | H/M | N |
| 宅子 | *zháizi* | house | N | H/M | N |
| 畛 | *zhěn* | boundary ridge | N | H | N |
| 正房 | *zhèngfáng* | main room | N | H | N |
| 政策性租赁住房 | *zhèngcèxìng zūlìn zhùfáng* | policy-based rental housing | CN | M | Y |
| 支路 | *zhīlù* | branch road | N | M | Y |
| 直管公房 | *zhíguǎn gōngfáng* | directly managed public housing | CN | M | Y |
| 职工住宅 | *zhígōng zhùzhái* | workers' housing | CN | M | Y |
| 中档住宅 | *zhōngdǎng zhùzhái* | mid-range housing | CN | M | N |
| 中高层住宅 | *zhōng gāocéng zhùzhái* | mid–high-rise housing | CN | M | Y |
| 重车辅助车道 | *zhòngchē fǔzhù chēdào* | heavy-vehicle auxiliary lane | CN | M | Y |
| 重楼 | *chónglóu* | multi-storey tower | N | H | N |
| 重载专用道 | *zhòngzài zhuānyòng dào* | heavy-load exclusive lane | CN | M | Y |
| 州 | *zhōu* | prefecture | N | H | Y |
| 猪舍 | *zhūshè* | pigsty | N | H/M | N |
| 主干路 | *zhǔgàn lù* | arterial road | N | M | Y |
| 主路 | *zhǔlù* | main road | N | M | Y |
| 住 | *zhù* | to reside | V | H/M | N |
| 住房 | *zhùfáng* | housing | N | H/M | Y |
| 住房保障 | *zhùfáng bǎozhàng* | housing security | CN | M | Y |
| 住房建设 | *zhùfáng jiànshè* | housing construction | CN | M | Y |
| 住房建筑 | *zhùfáng jiànzhù* | residential building | CN | M | Y |
| 住房金融 | *zhùfáng jīnróng* | housing finance | CN | M | Y |
| 住户自有公寓 | *zhùhù zìyǒu gōngyù* | owner-occupied apartment | CN | M | N |
| 住居房屋 | *zhùjū fángwū* | dwelling house | CN | H/M | N |
| 住所 | *zhùsuǒ* | residence | N | H/M | N |
| 住宅 | *zhùzhái* | residence | N | H/M | Y |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 住宅房 | *zhùzhái fáng* | residential unit | CN | M | Y |
| 住宅房屋 | *zhùzhái fángwū* | residential housing | CN | M | Y |
| 住宅公寓 | *zhùzhái gōngyù* | residential apartment | CN | M | Y |
| 住宅供给 | *zhùzhái gōngjǐ* | housing supply | CN | M | Y |
| 住宅楼 | *zhùzhái lóu* | residential building | CN | M | Y |
| 住宅区 | *zhùzhái qū* | residential district | CN | M | Y |
| 住宅群 | *zhùzhái qún* | residential cluster | CN | M | Y |
| 住宅小区 | *zhùzhái xiǎoqū* | residential compound | CN | M | Y |
| 住宅用地 | *zhùzhái yòngdì* | residential land | CN | M | Y |
| 专用道 | *zhuānyòng dào* | exclusive lane | N | M | Y |
| 专用行驶车道 | *zhuānyòng xíngshǐ chēdào* | exclusive traffic lane | CN | M | Y |
| 转盘路口 | *zhuànpán lùkǒu* | roundabout intersection | CN | M | Y |
| 自管公房 | *zìguǎn gōngfáng* | self-managed public housing | CN | M | Y |
| 自建房 | *zìjiàn fáng* | self-built house | CN | M | N |
| 自然层数 | *zìrán céngshù* | natural floor count | CN | M | Y |
| 字路口 | *zì lùkǒu* | crossroad (variant) | N | H | N |
| 宗教用房 | *zōngjiào yòngfáng* | religious facilities | CN | H/M | Y |
| 组团 | *zǔtuán* | cluster | N | M | Y |
| 组团路 | *zǔtuán lù* | cluster road | CN | M | Y |
| 祖居 | *zǔjū* | ancestral residence | N | H | N |

# APPENDIX B VERNACULAR GLOSSARY

**LEGEND:**

**POS** = Part of Speech
- **N** = Noun
- **CN** = Compound Noun
- **PN** = Proper Noun
- **V** = Verb
- **ADJ** = Adjective / Adjectival
- **ADJ PH** = adjectival phrase

**R = Register**
- LL = Literary Language
- SL = Slang
- SP = Spoken Language
- TJ = Technical Jargon

**SC = Semantic Cluster**
- D = Discursive / Evalutative
- E = Experiential / Affective
- F = Functional
- I = Institutional / Planning Related
- M = Morphological / Physical

| TERM | PINYIN | ENGLISH RENDERING | POS | R | SC | MAIN COMPOUNDS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Block | | urban block | N | TJ | M | |
| CBD | | central business district | NC | TJ | I | |
| Y 型 | *Y xíng* | Y-shaped | ADJ | TJ | M | Y 型平面 *Y xíng píngmiàn* 'Y-shaped layout'<br>Y 型塔楼 *Y xíng tǎlóu* 'Y-shaped tower' |
| 矮 | *ǎi* | low 'in height' | ADJ | SP | M | |
| 矮楼 | *ǎi lóu* | low-rise building | NC | SP | M | |
| 安保 | *ānbǎo* | security services | N | TJ | I | |
| 安静 | *ānjìng* | quiet | ADJ | SP | E | |
| 安全岛 | *ānquán dǎo* | traffic safety island | NC | TJ | F | |
| 安全性 | *ānquán xìng* | safety level | N | TJ | I | |
| 安全隐患 | *ānquán yǐnhuàn* | safety hazard | NC | TJ | I | |
| 安逸 | *ānyì* | comfortable, leisurely | ADJ | LL | E | |
| 安置房 | *ānzhì fáng* | resettlement housing | NC | TJ | I | |
| 安置新村 | *ānzhì xīncūn* | resettlement housing estate | NC | TJ | I | |
| 暗无天日 | *ànwútiānrì* | dark and airless | ID | LL | E | |
| 斑马线 | *bānmǎxiàn* | zebra crossing | N | TJ | F | |
| 板楼 | *bǎn lóu* | slab block | NC | TJ | M | |
| 板片楼 | *bǎnpiàn lóu* | slab-type block | NC | TJ | M | |
| 板式建筑 | *bǎnshì jiànzhù* | slab-type building | NC | TJ | M | 板式建筑 *bǎnshì jiànzhù* 'slab-type building'<br>板式住房 *bǎnshì zhùfáng* 'slab-type housing'<br>板式住宅 *bǎnshì zhùzhái* 'slab-type resid. building' |
| 办公建筑 | *bàngōng jiànzhù* | office building | NC | TJ | I | |
| 办公楼 | *bàngōng lóu* | office building | NC | TJ | I | |
| 办事大楼 | *bànshì dàlóu* | administrative building | NC | TJ | I | |
| 包容性强 | *bāoróngxìng qiáng* | highly inclusive | ADJ | LL | S | |
| 保护价值 | *bǎohù jiàzhí* | conservation value | NC | TJ | I | |
| 保护建筑群 | *bǎohù jiànzhù qún* | protected building cluster | NC | TJ | I | |
| 保障房 | *bǎozhàng fáng* | subsidized housing | NC | TJ | I | |
| 保障房 | *bǎozhàng fáng* | subsidized housing | NC | TJ | I | |
| 笔直 | *bǐzhí* | straight | ADJ | SP | M | |
| 笔直道路 | *bǐzhí dàolù* | straight road | NC | TJ | M | |
| 边界 | *biānjiè* | boundary | N | TJ | M | |
| 边缘 | *biānyuán* | periphery | N | TJ | M | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 便利 | *biànlì* | convenient | ADJ | SP | F | |
| 便于车行 | *biànyú chēxíng* | car-oriented | ADJ PH | TJ | F | |
| 标准 | *biāozhǔn* | standard | N | TJ | I | 标准化 *biāozhǔn huà* ‘standardized’ |
| 别墅 | *biéshù* | villa | N | TJ | M | 别墅区 *biéshù qū* ‘villa district’<br>别墅群 *biéshù qún* ‘villa compound’ |
| 不了冰冷 | *bīnglěng* | cold / impersonal | ADJ | LL | E | |
| 不便 | *bùbiàn* | inconvenient | ADJ | SP | F | |
| 不接地气 | *bù jiē dìqì* | disconnected from everyday life | ID | SL | D | |
| 布局 | *bùjú* | spatial layout | N | TJ | M | 布局明晰 *bùjú míngxī* ‘clear layout’<br>布局有序 *bùjú yǒuxù* ‘ordered layout’<br>布局整齐 *bùjú zhěngqí* ‘neat layout’ |
| 步行街 | *bùxíng jiē* | pedestrian street | NC | TJ | F | |
| 嘈杂 | *cáozá* | noisy | ADJ | SP | E | |
| 层次分明 | *céngcì fēnmíng* | clearly articulated (hierarchical) | ADJ PH | TJ | M | |
| 岔路口 | *chàlùkǒu* | road intersection/fork | N | SP | F | |
| 拆迁 | *chāiqiān* | demolition and relocation | N | TJ | I | |
| 常规 | *chángguī* | standard/conventional | ADJ | TJ | I | |
| 常见 | *chángjiàn* | common | ADJ | SP | D | |
| 厂房附属 | *chǎngfáng fushǔ* | factory-affiliated structure | NC | TJ | I | |
| 场景化 | *chǎngjǐng huà* | scenographic / scenarized | ADJ | TJ | D | |
| 场所感 | *chǎngsuǒ gǎn* | sense of place | NC | TJ | E | |
| 超高层 | *chāo gāocéng* | super high-rise | ADJ / N | TJ | M | |
| 潮湿阴暗 | *cháoshī yīn'àn* | damp and gloomy | ADJ PH | LL | E | |
| 潮汐道路 | *cháoxī dàolù* | tidal / reversible roadway | NC | TJ | F | |
| 吵 | *chǎo* | noisy | ADJ | SP | E | |
| 吵闹 | *chǎonào* | noisy and chaotic | ADJ | SP | E | |
| 车道 | *chēdào* | traffic lane | N | TJ | F | |
| 车行道 | *chēxíng dào* | vehicular roadway | NC | TJ | F | |
| 车行路线 | *chēxíng lùxiàn* | vehicular route | NC | TJ | F | |
| 陈旧 | *chénjiù* | outdated / worn | ADJ | SP | D | |
| 成片绿化 | *chéngpiàn lǜhuà* | large-scale greenery | NC | TJ | M | |
| 城郊 | *chéngjiāo* | urban fringe | N | TJ | M | |
| 城市边缘 | *chéngshì biānyuán* | urban edge | NC | TJ | M | |
| 城市干道 | *chéngshì gàndào* | urban arterial road | NC | TJ | F | |
| 城市更新 | *chéngshì gēngxīn* | urban regeneration | NC | TJ | I | |
| 城市化 | *chéngshì huà* | urbanization | N | TJ | I | |
| 城市街景 | *chéngshì jiējǐng* | urban streetscape | NC | TJ | M | |
| 城市界面 | *chéngshì jièmiàn* | urban interface / frontage | NC | TJ | M | |
| 城市密度 | *chéngshì mìdù* | urban density | NC | TJ | I | |
| 城市生活 | *chéngshì shēnghuó* | urban life | NC | SP | S | |
| 城市形态 | *chéngshì xíngtài* | urban form | NC | TJ | M | |
| 城乡结合部 | *chéngxiāng jiéhébù* | urban–rural fringe | NC | TJ | I | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 城镇 | *chéngzhèn* | town | N | TJ | I | |
| 城中村 | *chéngzhōngcūn* | urban village | N | TJ | I | |
| 尺度 | *chǐdù* | scale | N | TJ | M | 尺度良好 *chǐdù liánghǎo* ‘good scale’<br>尺度失衡 *chǐdù shīhéng* ‘scale imbalance’<br>尺度宜人 *chǐdù yírén* ‘pleasant scale’<br>尺度适宜 *chǐdù shìyí* ‘appropriate scale’<br>非人尺度 *fēi rén chǐdù* ‘non-human scale’<br>冰冷城市尺度 *bīnglěng chéngshì chǐdù* ‘cold urban scale’<br>汽车尺度 *qìchē chǐdù* ‘automobile scale’<br>人性尺度 *rénxìng chǐdù* ‘human scale’<br>宜人尺度 *yírén chǐdù* ‘human-friendly scale’ |
| 充满活力 | *chōngmǎn huólì* | vibrant | ADJ PH | SP | E | |
| 丑陋 | *chǒulòu* | ugly | ADJ | SP | D | |
| 出片约拍 | *chūpiàn yuēpāi* | photo-shoot spot | NC | SL | D | |
| 出租屋 | *chūzū wū* | rental housing | NC | SP | S | |
| 传统 | *chuántǒng* | traditional | ADJ | TJ | D | 传统村落 *chuántǒng cūnluò* ‘traditional village’<br>传统肌理 *chuántǒng jīlǐ* ‘traditional urban fabric’<br>传统建筑 *chuántǒng jiànzhù* ‘traditional architecture’<br>传统街区 *chuántǒng jiēqū* ‘traditional district’<br>传统街巷 *chuántǒng jiēxiàng* ‘traditional lanes’<br>传统民居 *chuántǒng mínjū* ‘traditional dwellings’<br>传统民宅 *chuántǒng mínzhái* ‘traditional houses’<br>传统因素 *chuántǒng yīnsù* ‘traditional elements’<br>传统住宅 *chuántǒng zhùzhái* ‘traditional housing’ |
| 次干道 | *cì gàndào* | secondary arterial road | NC | TJ | F | |
| 次级干道 | *cìjí gàndào* | secondary arterial road | NC | TJ | F | |
| 村落 | *cūnluò* | village settlement | N | TJ | M | |
| 村子 | *cūnzi* | village | N | SP | S | |
| 打卡点 | *dǎkǎ diǎn* | check-in spot | N | SL | D | |
| 大道 | *dàdào* | boulevard / avenue | N | TJ | F | |
| 大楼 | *dàlóu* | large building | N | SP | M | |
| 大路 | *dàlù* | main road | N | SP | F | |
| 大马路 | *dàmǎlù* | wide main road | N | SP | F | |
| 大院 | *dàyuàn* | compound courtyard | N | SP | S | |
| 呆板 | *dāibǎn* | rigid / inflexible | ADJ | LL | D | |
| 待拆迁 | *dài chāiqiān* | pending demolition | ADJ PH | TJ | I | |
| 待更新 | *dài gēngxīn* | pending regeneration | ADJ PH | TJ | I | |
| 单层 | *dāncéng* | single-storey | ADJ | TJ | M | |
| 单车道 | *dān chēdào* | single-lane roadway | NC | TJ | F | |
| 单行道 | *dānxíngdào* | one-way street | NC | TJ | F | |
| 单廊 | *dān láng* | single-corridor | NC | TJ | M | |
| 单调 | *dāndiào* | monotonous | ADJ | SP | D | |
| 单位 | *dānwèi* | work unit | N | TJ | I | 单位大院 *dānwèi dàyuàn* ‘work-unit compound’<br>单位房 *dānwèi fáng* ‘work-unit housing’<br>单位楼 *dānwèi lóu* ‘work-unit building’ |
| 单向车道 | *dānxiàng chēdào* | one-way traffic lane | NC | TJ | F | |
| 单向排列 | *dānxiàng páiliè* | one-directional arrangement | NC | TJ | M | |
| 单元 | *dānyuán* | housing unit | N | TJ | M | |
| 单元式 | *dānyuánshì* | unit-based | ADJ | TJ | M | |
| 道路 | *dàolù* | roadway | N | TJ | F | 道路错杂 *dàolù cuòzá* ‘chaotic road layout’<br>道路等级 *dàolù děngjí* ‘road hierarchy’<br>道路合理 *dàolù hélǐ* ‘reasonable road layout’<br>同方向道路 *tóng fāngxiàng dàolù* ‘same-direction roads’ |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 低矮 | *dī'ǎi* | low and squat | ADJ | SP | M | 低矮房屋 *dī'ǎi fángwū* 'low-rise houses'<br>低矮住宅 *dī'ǎi zhùzhái* 'low-rise housing' |
| 低层 | *dīcéng* | low-rise | ADJ | TJ | M | 低层住宅 *dīcéng zhùzhái* 'low-rise housing' |
| 低密度 | *dī mìdù* | low density | ADJ+N | TJ | I | |
| 低容积率 | *dī róngjīlǜ* | low floor-area ratio | NC | TJ | I | |
| 低收入人群 | *dī shōurù rénqún* | low-income groups | NC | TJ | S | |
| 低调沉稳 | *dīdiào chénwěn* | understated and restrained | ADJ PH | LL | D | |
| 底层 | *dǐcéng* | ground floor | N | TJ | M | 底层商店 *dǐcéng shāngdiàn* 'ground-floor shops'<br>底层商业 *dǐcéng shāngyè* 'ground-floor commerce' |
| 底商 | *dǐshāng* | ground-floor retail | N | TJ | F | |
| 地方感 | *dìfāng gǎn* | sense of place | NC | TJ | E | |
| 地块 | *dìkuài* | land parcel | N | TJ | I | |
| 地块产权 | *dìkuài chǎnquán* | land ownership rights | NC | TJ | I | |
| 地域文化 | *dìyù wénhuà* | regional culture | NC | TJ | S | |
| 点式住宅 | *diǎnshì zhùzhái* | point-block housing | NC | TJ | M | |
| 电梯房 | *diàntī fáng* | elevator-equipped housing | NC | SP | F | |
| 丁字路口 | *dīngzì lùkǒu* | T-junction | N | TJ | F | |
| 东西厢房 | *dōngxī xiāngfáng* | east–west side rooms | NC | TJ | M | |
| 动线 | *dòngxiàn* | circulation path | N | TJ | F | |
| 独栋 | *dúdòng* | detached | ADJ | TJ | M | 独栋住宅 *dúdòng zhùzhái* 'detached house' |
| 断头路 | *duàntóu lù* | dead-end street | N | SP | F | |
| 对比 | *duìbǐ* | contrast | N | TJ | D | |
| 对称 | *duìchèn* | symmetrical | ADJ | TJ | M | 对称建筑 *duìchèn jiànzhù* 'symmetrical building' |
| 多层 | *duōcéng* | multi-storey | ADJ | TJ | M | 多层建筑 *duōcéng jiànzhù* 'multi-storey buildings'<br>多层住宅 *duōcéng zhùzhái* 'multi-storey housing' |
| 多车道 | *duō chēdào* | multi-lane | ADJ | TJ | F | |
| 多样 | *duōyàng* | diverse | ADJ | TJ | D | |
| 繁华 | *fánhuá* | prosperous / bustling | ADJ | SP | E | |
| 繁忙 | *fánmáng* | busy | ADJ | SP | E | |
| 方盒子 | *fāng hézi* | box-like form | N | SL | D | |
| 方向 | *fāngxiàng* | direction | N | TJ | F | |
| 方向感 | *fāngxiàng gǎn* | sense of direction | NC | TJ | E | |
| 方正 | *fāngzhèng* | orthogonal / regular | ADJ | TJ | M | |
| 房间密集 | *fángjiān mìjí* | densely packed rooms | ADJ PH | TJ | M | |
| 房屋无序 | *fángwū wúxù* | disorderly housing | ADJ PH | TJ | D | |
| 仿古 | *fǎnggǔ* | pseudo-traditional | ADJ | TJ | D | |
| 非机动车道 | *fēi jīdòngchē dào* | non-motorized lane | NC | TJ | F | |
| 废弃 | *fèiqì* | abandoned | ADJ | TJ | D | 废弃小区 *fèiqì xiǎoqū* 'abandoned housing estate' |
| 分割 | *fēngē* | division / separation | N | TJ | M | |
| 分流 | *fēnliú* | traffic separation | N | TJ | F | |
| 分区明确 | *fēnqū míngquè* | clearly zoned | ADJ PH | TJ | I | |
| 风车楼 | *fēngchē lóu* | windmill-plan building | NC | TJ | M | |
| 风格固化 | *fēnggé gùhuà* | stylistically rigid | ADJ PH | TJ | D | |
| 封闭 | *fēngbì* | enclosed | ADJ | TJ | M | 封闭围墙 *fēngbì wéiqiáng* 'enclosing walls' |
| 福利保障住宅 | *fúlì bǎozhàng zhùzhái* | welfare housing | NC | TJ | I | |
| 复古 | *fùgǔ* | retro | ADJ | LL | D | |
| 复杂 | *fùzá* | complex | ADJ | TJ | D | |

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| 复制 | *fùzhì* | replication | N | TJ | D | |
| 改造 | *gǎizào* | renovation | N | TJ | I | |
| 改造更新 | *gǎizào gēngxīn* | redevelopment | NC | TJ | I | |
| 干部楼 | *gànbù lóu* | cadre housing | NC | TJ | I | |
| 干道 | *gàndào* | arterial road | N | TJ | F | |
| 干净 | *gānjìng* | clean | ADJ | SP | E | |
| 干净整洁 | *gānjìng zhěngjié* | clean and orderly | ADJ PH | SP | E | |
| 刚需楼盘 | *gāngxū lóupán* | essential-demand housing project | NC | TJ | I | |
| 钢筋混凝土 | *gāngjīn hùnníngtǔ* | reinforced concrete | N | TJ | M | |
| 高层 | *gāocéng* | high-rise | N | TJ | M | 高层公寓 *gāocéng gōngyù* 'high-rise apartment'<br>高层建筑 *gāocéng jiànzhù* 'high-rise building'<br>高层居民楼 *gāocéng jūmínlóu* 'high-rise resid. building'<br>高层小区 *gāocéng xiǎoqū* 'high-rise housing estate'<br>高层住宅 *gāocéng zhùzhái* 'high-rise housing' |
| 高档 | *gāodàng* | upscale | ADJ | TJ | D | 高档小区 *gāodàng xiǎoqū* 'upscale resid. community' |
| 高低错落 | *gāodī cuòluò* | varied in height | ADJ PH | TJ | M | |
| 高端 | *gāoduān* | high-end | ADJ | TJ | D | 高端住宅 *gāoduān zhùzhái* 'high-end housing' |
| 高级 | *gāojí* | high-grade | ADJ | TJ | D | 高级小区 *gāojí xiǎoqū* 'high-grade residential community' |
| 高价 | *gāojià* | high-priced | ADJ | TJ | D | |
| 高架 | *gāojià* | elevated | ADJ | TJ | M | |
| 高架桥 | *gāojià qiáo* | overpass | N | TJ | F | |
| 高楼 | *gāolóu* | tall building | N | SP | M | |
| 高楼大厦 | *gāolóu dàshà* | skyscrapers | NC | LL | M | |
| 高楼林立 | *gāolóu línlì* | forest of high-rises | ID | LL | D | |
| 高绿化率 | *gāo lǜhuàlǜ* | high green ratio | NC | TJ | I | |
| 高密度 | *gāo mìdù* | high density | ADJ+N | TJ | I | |
| 高密度社区 | *gāo mìdù shèqū* | high-density community | NC | TJ | I | |
| 高品质 | *gāo pǐnzhì* | high-quality | ADJ | TJ | D | 高品质环境道路 *gāo pǐnzhì huánjìng dàolù* 'high-quality environmental road'<br>高品质商品房 *gāo pǐnzhì shāngpǐn fáng* 'high-quality commercial housing' |
| 高容积率 | *gāo róngjīlǜ* | high floor-area ratio | NC | TJ | I | 高容积率小区 *gāo róngjīlǜ xiǎoqū* 'high-FAR residential area' |
| 高速路 | *gāosù lù* | expressway | N | TJ | F | |
| 高效 | *gāoxiào* | efficient | ADJ | TJ | F | |
| 鸽子笼 | *gēzi lóng* | cage-like housing | NC | SL | D | |
| 割裂 | *gēliè* | fragmentation | N | TJ | D | |
| 割裂感 | *gēliè gǎn* | sense of fragmentation | NC | TJ | E | |
| 格子 | *gézi* | grid | N | TJ | M | |
| 格子间 | *gézi jiān* | cubicle | N | TJ | M | |
| 隔离带 | *gélí dài* | median strip | NC | TJ | F | |
| 更新 | *gēngxīn* | renewal | N | TJ | I | |
| 工厂办公楼 | *gōngchǎng bàngōnglóu* | factory office building | NC | TJ | I | |
| 工人新村 | *gōngrén xīncūn* | workers' housing estate | NC | TJ | I | |
| 工业 | *gōngyè* | industrial | ADJ/N | TJ | I | |
| 工业化 | *gōngyè huà* | industrialization | N | TJ | I | |
| 工整 | *gōngzhěng* | neat and regular | ADJ | TJ | M | |
| 公共建筑 | *gōnggòng jiànzhù* | public building | NC | TJ | I | |
| 公共空间 | *gōnggòng kōngjiān* | public space | NC | TJ | S | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 公共设施 | *gōnggòng shèshī* | public facilities | NC | TJ | I | |
| 公路 | *gōnglù* | highway | N | TJ | F | |
| 公卫 | *gōngwèi* | shared toilet | N | SP | S | |
| 公寓 | *gōngyù* | apartment | N | TJ | M | 单身公寓 *dānshēn gōngyù* ‘studio apartment’<br>学生公寓 *xuéshēng gōngyù* ‘student dormitory’<br>公寓楼 *gōngyù lóu* ‘apartment building’ |
| 功能 | *gōngnéng* | function | N | TJ | F | 功能布局 *gōngnéng bùjú* ‘functional layout’<br>功能混合 *gōngnéng hùnhé* ‘mixed use’<br>功能齐全 *gōngnéng qíquán* ‘fully functional’<br>功能生活 *gōngnéng shēnghuó* ‘functional living’ |
| 构成单一 | *gòuchéng dānyī* | monotonous composition | ADJ PH | TJ | D | |
| 孤独 | *gūdú* | lonely | ADJ | LL | E | |
| 孤立 | *gūlì* | isolated | ADJ | TJ | M | |
| 古 | *gǔ* | ancient | ADJ | TJ | D | 古城 *gǔchéng* ‘ancient city’<br>古镇 *gǔzhèn* ‘ancient town’ |
| 古旧 | *gǔjiù* | old and worn | ADJ | LL | D | |
| 古老 | *gǔlǎo* | ancient | ADJ | LL | D | |
| 古朴 | *gǔpǔ* | rustic | ADJ | LL | D | |
| 古色古香 | *gǔsè gǔxiāng* | quaint and antique | ID | LL | D | |
| 古早 | *gǔzǎo* | old-school | ADJ | SL | D | |
| 怪兽 | *guàishòu* | monster-like | N | SL | D | |
| 广场 | *guǎngchǎng* | public square | N | TJ | S | 中心广场 *zhōngxīn guǎngchǎng* ‘central square’ |
| 规范 | *guīfàn* | standardized / regulated | ADJ | TJ | I | |
| 规划 | *guīhuà* | planning | N | TJ | I | |
| 规律 | *guīlǜ* | regular pattern | N | TJ | M | |
| 规模 | *guīmó* | scale | N | TJ | M | 规模大 *guīmó dà* ‘large scale’ |
| 规整 | *guīzhěng* | orderly | ADJ | TJ | M | |
| 鬼城 | *guǐchéng* | ghost city | NC | SL | D | |
| 行道树 | *hángdào shù* | street trees | NC | TJ | M | |
| 行人驻停点 | *xíngrén zhùtíng diǎn* | pedestrian stopping point | NC | TJ | F | |
| 行政 | *xíngzhèng* | administrative | ADJ | TJ | I | 行政楼 *xíngzhèng lóu* ‘administrative building’<br>行政区 *xíngzhèng qū* ‘administrative district’ |
| 合院 | *héyuàn* | courtyard compound | N | TJ | M | |
| 赫鲁晓夫楼 | *hèlǔxiǎofū lóu* | Khrushchyovka-style housing | NC | TJ | M | |
| 横向对比 | *héngxiàng duìbǐ* | horizontal comparison | NC | TJ | D | |
| 红灯区 | *hóngdēng qū* | red-light district | NC | TJ | S | |
| 后街 | *hòujiē* | back street | N | SP | M | |
| 后院 | *hòuyuàn* | backyard | N | SP | M | |
| 胡同 | *hútòng* | *hutong* alley | N | TJ | M | 胡同保护区 *hútòng bǎohù qū* ‘*hutong* conservation area’ |
| 欢聚一堂 | *huānjù yītáng* | gathering joyfully | ID | LL | S | |
| 环岛 | *huándǎo* | roundabout | N | TJ | F | |
| 环境差 | *huánjìng chà* | poor environment | ADJ PH | SP | E | |
| 环境较好 | *huánjìng jiào hǎo* | relatively good environment | ADJ PH | SP | E | |
| 环境品质高 | *huánjìng pǐnzhì gāo* | high environmental quality | ADJ PH | TJ | D | |
| 环境品质较差 | *huánjìng pǐnzhì jiào chà* | low environmental quality | ADJ PH | TJ | D | |
| 环境一般 | *huánjìng yībān* | average environment | ADJ PH | SP | D | |
| 环境优良 | *huánjìng yōuliáng* | excellent environment | ADJ PH | TJ | D | |

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| 环路 | *huánlù* | ring road | N | TJ | F | |
| 环线 | *huánxiàn* | ring line | N | TJ | F | |
| 荒废 | *huāngfèi* | derelict | ADJ | SP | D | |
| 荒凉 | *huāngliáng* | desolate | ADJ | LL | E | |
| 混合 | *hùnhé* | mixed | ADJ | TJ | F | |
| 混住 | *hùnzhù* | mixed residence | N / V | TJ | S | |
| 活力 | *huólì* | vitality | N | SP | E | |
| 机动车道 | *jīdòngchē dào* | motor-vehicle lane | NC | TJ | F | |
| 机非混行 | *jī fēi hùn xíng* | mixed motorized/ non-motorized traffic | NC | TJ | F | |
| 机关单位 | *jīguān dānwèi* | government work unit | NC | TJ | I | |
| 肌理 | *jīlǐ* | urban fabric | N | TJ | M | 城市肌理 *chéngshì jīlǐ* ‘urban fabric’<br>肌理重复 *jīlǐ chóngfù* ‘repetitive fabric’<br>简直肌理 *jiǎnzhí jīlǐ* ‘simplified fabric’<br>小肌理 *xiǎo jīlǐ* ‘fine-grain fabric’ |
| 基础设施 | *jīchǔ shèshī* | infrastructure | NC | TJ | I | 老旧基础设施 *lǎojiù jīchǔ shèshī* ‘aging infrastructure’ |
| 集聚 | *jíjù* | agglomeration | N | TJ | I | |
| 集体 | *jítǐ* | collective | N | TJ | S | 集体生活 *jítǐ shēnghuó* ‘collective life’<br>集体宿舍 *jítǐ sùshè* ‘dormitory’<br>集体住宅 *jítǐ zhùzhái* ‘collective housing’ |
| 集中住宅 | *jízhōng zhùzhái* | centralized housing | NC | TJ | I | |
| 几何 | *jǐhé* | geometric | ADJ | TJ | M | 几何化 *jǐhé huà* ‘geometrized’<br>几何元素 *jǐhé yuánsù* ‘geometric elements’ |
| 挤 | *jǐ* | crowded | ADJ | SP | E | |
| 挤占 | *jǐzhàn* | encroach | V | TJ | D | |
| 家属楼 | *jiāshǔ lóu* | family housing block | NC | TJ | I | |
| 家属院 | *jiāshǔ yuàn* | family compound | NC | TJ | I | |
| 简洁 | *jiǎnjié* | concise / clean | ADJ | TJ | M | |
| 简约 | *jiǎnyuē* | minimalist | ADJ | TJ | D | |
| 建筑 | *jiànzhù* | building / architecture | N | TJ | I | 建筑开放 *jiànzhù kāifàng* ‘open building’<br>建筑遗产 *jiànzhù yíchǎn* ‘architectural heritage’ |
| 交叉口 | *jiāochākǒu* | intersection | N | TJ | F | |
| 交通 | *jiāotōng* | traffic | N | TJ | F | 交通不便 *jiāotōng bùbiàn* ‘poor accessibility’<br>交通动脉 *jiāotōng dòngmài* ‘traffic artery’<br>交通繁忙 *jiāotōng fánmáng* ‘busy traffic’<br>交通复杂 *jiāotōng fùzá* ‘complex traffic’<br>交通中心 *jiāotōng zhōngxīn* ‘transport hub’<br>立体交通 *lìtǐ jiāotōng* ‘multi-level traffic’ |
| 郊区 | *jiāoqū* | suburb | N | TJ | M | |
| 街边 | *jiēbiān* | street-side | N | SP | M | |
| 街道 | *jiēdào* | street | N | TJ | F | |
| 街贩 | *jiēfàn* | street vendor | N | SP | S | |
| 街角 | *jiējiǎo* | street corner | N | SP | M | 街角商业 *jiējiǎo shāngyè* ‘corner retail’ |
| 街景 | *jiējǐng* | streetscape | N | TJ | M | |
| 街口 | *jiēkǒu* | street entrance | N | SP | M | |
| 街区 | *jiēqū* | urban block / district | N | TJ | M | 文化街区 *wénhuà jiēqū* ‘cultural district’ |
| 街头 | *jiētóu* | streetside | N | SP | M | |
| 街巷 | *jiēxiàng* | lanes and alleys | N | TJ | M | 街巷道路 *jiēxiàng dàolù* ‘lane roadways’<br>街巷网络 *jiēxiàng wǎngluò* ‘lane network’ |
| 节奏缓慢 | *jiézòu huǎnmàn* | slow-paced | ADJ PH | LL | E | |
| 界面 | *jièmiàn* | interface / frontage | N | TJ | M | |
| 紧凑 | *jǐncòu* | compact | ADJ | TJ | M | |
| 经济房 | *jīngjì fáng* | affordable housing | NC | TJ | I | |
| 精致利己 | *jīngzhì lìjǐ* | refined individualism | ID | LL | D | |
| 井井有条 | *jǐngjǐng yǒutiáo* | well-ordered | ID | LL | D | |
| 径深 | *jìngshēn* | depth of access | N | TJ | M | |
| 旧 | *jiù* | old | ADJ | SP | D | 旧居 *jiùjū* ‘old residence’ |

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| | | | | | | 旧商场 *jiù shāngchǎng* ‘old mall’<br>旧小区 *jiù xiǎoqū* ‘old residential compound’ |
| 旧城 | *jiùchéng* | old city | N | TJ | M | 旧城改造 *jiùchéng gǎizào* ‘old city renewal’<br>旧城区 *jiù chéngqū* ‘old urban area’ |
| 旧核心区 | *jiù héxīn qū* | former core area | NC | TJ | M | |
| 居民 | *jūmín* | residents | N | TJ | S | 居民楼 *jūmínlóu* ‘residential building’<br>居民区 *jūmín qū* ‘residential area’<br>居民友好 *jūmín yǒuhǎo* ‘resident-friendly’ |
| 居住 | *jūzhù* | residential | V / N | TJ | I | 居住建筑 *jūzhù jiànzhù* ‘residential building’<br>居住区 *jūzhù qū* ‘residential district’ |
| 矩形 | *jǔxíng* | rectangular | ADJ | TJ | M | |
| 均等 | *jūnděng* | equal | ADJ | TJ | D | |
| 均质 | *jūnzhì* | homogeneous | ADJ | TJ | M | |
| 均质化立面 | *jūnzhì huà lìmiàn* | homogenized façade | NC | TJ | M | |
| 开发 | *kāifā* | development | N | TJ | I | 开发区 *kāifā qū* ‘development zone’<br>开发小区 *kāifā xiǎoqū* ‘developed residential area’ |
| 开放 | *kāifàng* | open | ADJ | TJ | M | 开放式 *kāifàngshì* ‘open-plan’ |
| 开阔 | *kāikuò* | open and spacious | ADJ | SP | E | |
| 空城 | *kōngchéng* | empty city | N | SL | D | |
| 空间 | *kōngjiān* | space | N | TJ | M | 空间布局 *kōngjiān bùjú* ‘spatial layout’<br>空间感 *kōngjiān gǎn* ‘sense of space’<br>空间骨架 *kōngjiān gǔjià* ‘spatial framework’<br>空间划分 *kōngjiān huàfēn* ‘spatial division’ |
| 空旷 | *kōngkuàng* | empty and vast | ADJ | LL | E | |
| 空置 | *kōngzhì* | vacant | ADJ | TJ | I | 空置率 *kōngzhì lǜ* ‘vacancy rate’ |
| 恐怖 | *kǒngbù* | scary | ADJ | SP | E | |
| 控制天际线 | *kòngzhì tiānjìxiàn* | skyline control | NC | TJ | I | |
| 块状分布 | *kuàizhuàng fēnbù* | block-like distribution | NC | TJ | M | |
| 快速路 | *kuàisù lù* | expressway | N | TJ | F | |
| 宽敞 | *kuānchǎng* | spacious | ADJ | SP | E | |
| 宽阔 | *kuānkuò* | wide | ADJ | SP | M | 宽阔道路 *kuānkuò dàolù* ‘wide road’ |
| 框架 | *kuàngjià* | framework | N | TJ | M | 框架结构 *kuàngjià jiégòu* ‘frame structure’<br>框架体系 *kuàngjià tǐxì* ‘framework system’ |
| 扩张 | *kuòzhāng* | expansion | N | TJ | I | |
| 老 | *lǎo* | old | ADJ | SP | D | 老城 *lǎochéng* ‘old city’<br>老房子 *lǎo fángzi* ‘old house’<br>老公寓 *lǎo gōngyù* ‘old apartment’<br>老家 *lǎojiā* ‘hometown’<br>老街 *lǎojiē* ‘old street’<br>老路 *lǎolù* ‘old road’<br>老平房 *lǎo píngfáng* ‘old single-storey house’<br>老小区 *lǎo xiǎoqū* ‘old residential compound’ |
| 老城厢 | *lǎo chéngxiāng* | old inner city | N | TJ | M | |
| 老旧 | *lǎojiù* | aging | ADJ | TJ | D | 老旧建筑 *lǎojiù jiànzhù* ‘aging buildings’<br>老旧街区 *lǎojiù jiēqū* ‘aging district’<br>老旧领域 *lǎojiù lǐngyù* ‘obsolete sector’<br>老旧小区 *lǎojiù xiǎoqū* ‘aging housing estate’ |
| 老龄化 | *lǎolíng huà* | aging ‘population’ | N | TJ | S | |
| 老牌商业区 | *lǎopái shāngyè qū* | established commercial district | NC | TJ | S | |
| 老破小 | *lǎo pò xiǎo* | old, shabby small | ADJ PH | SL | D | |
| 老式 | *lǎoshì* | old-style | ADJ | TJ | D | 老式楼房 *lǎoshì lóufáng* ‘old-style apartment block’<br>老式住宅 *lǎoshì zhùzhái* ‘old-style housing’ |
| 老头老太太 | *lǎotóu lǎotàitai* | elderly people | NC | SP | S | |
| 老砖房 | *lǎo zhuānfáng* | old brick house | N | SP | M | |

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| 冷漠 | *lěngmò* | indifferent | ADJ | LL | E | |
| 冷清 | *lěngqīng* | desolate / quiet | ADJ | LL | E | |
| 理性 | *lǐxìng* | rational | ADJ | TJ | D | |
| 历史 | *lìshǐ* | H | N | TJ | I | 历史保护区 *lìshǐ bǎohù qū* ‘historic preservation area’<br>历史感 *lìshǐ gǎn* ‘sense of history’<br>历史建筑 *lìshǐ jiànzhù* ‘historic building’<br>历史街道 *lìshǐ jiēdào* ‘historic street’<br>历史街区 *lìshǐ jiēqū* ‘historic district’<br>历史空间 *lìshǐ kōngjiān* ‘historic space’<br>历史文化街区 *lìshǐ wénhuà jiēqū* ‘historic cultural district’<br>历史小镇 *lìshǐ xiǎozhèn* ‘historic town’<br>历史遗存 *lìshǐ yícún* ‘historic remains’<br>历史悠久 *lìshǐ yōujiǔ* ‘long history’ |
| 立方体 | *lìfāngtǐ* | cube | N | TJ | M | |
| 立面 | *lìmiàn* | façade | N | TJ | M | 立面规整 *lìmiàn guīzhěng* ‘orderly façade’<br>立面修缮 *lìmiàn xiūshàn* ‘façade refurbishment’ |
| 连接 | *liánjiē* | connection | N | TJ | F | |
| 连续性强 | *liánxùxìng qiáng* | high continuity | ADJ PH | TJ | M | |
| 联排 | *liánpái* | row housing | ADJ | TJ | M | 联排建筑 *liánpái jiànzhù* ‘row buildings’ |
| 廉租房 | *liánzū fáng* | low-rent housing | NC | TJ | I | |
| 邻里 | *línlǐ* | neighborhood relations | N | TJ | S | 邻里关系 *línlǐ guānxì* ‘neighborhood relations’<br>邻里街坊 *línlǐ jiēfāng* ‘neighbors’<br>邻里空间 *línlǐ kōngjiān* ‘neighborhood space’ |
| 林道 | *líndào* | forest path | N | TJ | M | |
| 林荫道 | *línyīn dào* | tree-lined avenue | NC | TJ | M | |
| 临街 | *línjiē* | street-facing | ADJ | TJ | M | 临街大楼 *línjiē dàlóu* ‘street-facing building’<br>临街商业 *línjiē shāngyè* ‘street-front retail’<br>临街住宅 *línjiē zhùzhái* ‘street-facing housing’ |
| 鳞次栉比 | *líncì zhìbǐ* | densely packed | ID | LL | M | |
| 留改拆 | *liú gǎi chāi* | retain–renovate–demolish | V PH | TJ | I | |
| 流线 | *liúxiàn* | circulation flow | N | TJ | F | 流线清晰 *liúxiàn qīngxī* ‘clear circulation’ |
| 遛弯 | *liùwānr* | taking a stroll | V | SP | S | |
| 楼房 | *lóufáng* | building | N | SP | M | |
| 楼盘 | *lóupán* | housing development | N | TJ | I | 新区楼盘 *xīnqū lóupán* ‘new-district housing project’ |
| 楼王 | *lóuwáng* | flagship building | N | SL | D | |
| 路口 | *lùkǒu* | intersection | N | TJ | F | |
| 路网密度 | *lùwǎng mìdù* | road network density | NC | TJ | I | |
| 路中央 | *lù zhōngyāng* | middle of the road | NC | SP | M | |
| 乱停乱放 | *luàn tíng luàn fàng* | illegal parking | ID | SP | D | |
| 绿化 | *lǜhuà* | greenery | N | TJ | M | 绿化带 *lǜhuà dài* ‘green belt’<br>绿化景观 *lǜhuà jǐngguān* ‘green landscape’ |
| 马路 | *mǎlù* | road | N | SP | F | |
| 蔓延 | *mànyán* | sprawl | V | TJ | I | |
| 没落 | *mòluò* | decline | N | LL | D | |
| 美食街 | *měishí jiē* | food street | NC | SP | S | |
| 门口 | *ménkǒu* | entrance | N | SP | M | |
| 门市房 | *ménshì fáng* | street-front shop | NC | TJ | F | |
| 梦中情房 | *mèngzhōng qíng fáng* | dream home | NC | SL | D | |
| 密集 | *mìjí* | dense | ADJ | TJ | M | |
| 密集建筑群 | *mìjí jiànzhù qún* | dense building cluster | NC | TJ | M | |
| 民房 | *mínfáng* | private house | N | SP | M | |
| 民居 | *mínjū* | vernacular dwelling | N | TJ | M | 民居村落 *mínjū cūnluò* ‘vernacular village’<br>民居空间 mínjū kōngjiān ‘vernacular living space’ |

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| | | | | | | 民居区 *mínjū qū* ‘vernacular residential area’ |
| 模块 | *mókuài* | module | N | TJ | M | |
| 模式化 | *móshì huà* | standardized / templated | ADJ | TJ | D | |
| 摩登 | *módēng* | modern | ADJ | LL | D | |
| 摩肩接踵 | *mójiān jiēzhǒng* | shoulder-to-shoulder crowding | ID | LL | E | |
| 闹市 | *nàoshì* | bustling downtown | N | SP | E | 闹市区 *nàoshì qū* ‘busy urban center’ |
| 内廊 | *nèiláng* | internal corridor | N | TJ | M | |
| 内廊式 | *nèilángshì* | internal-corridor type | ADJ | TJ | M | 内廊式布局 *nèilángshì bùjú* ‘internal-corridor layout’<br>内廊式住宅 *nèilángshì zhùzhái* ‘internal-corridor housing’ |
| 内向 | *nèixiàng* | inward-oriented | ADJ | TJ | M | |
| 内院 | *nèiyuàn* | inner courtyard | N | TJ | M | |
| 年代感 | *niándài gǎn* | sense of era | NC | LL | E | |
| 宁静 | *níngjìng* | tranquil | ADJ | LL | E | |
| 弄堂 | *nòngtáng* | alleyway ‘Shanghai’ | N | TJ | M | |
| 排外 | *páiwài* | exclusionary | ADJ | TJ | S | |
| 棚户区 | *pénghù qū* | shantytown | NC | TJ | I | |
| 僻静 | *pìjìng* | secluded | ADJ | LL | E | |
| 偏房 | *piānfáng* | side room | N | SP | M | |
| 偏僻 | *piānpì* | remote | ADJ | SP | M | |
| 片区 | *piànqū* | area / zone | N | TJ | I | |
| 拼贴 | *pīntiē* | collage-like | ADJ | TJ | D | |
| 贫民窟 | *pínmín kū* | slum | N | TJ | I | |
| 品质 | *pǐnzhì* | quality | N | TJ | D | |
| 平房 | *píngfáng* | single-storey house | N | TJ | M | |
| 平静 | *píngjìng* | calm | ADJ | LL | E | |
| 平面楼 | *píngmiàn lóu* | flat-plan building | NC | TJ | M | |
| 平平无奇 | *píngpíng wúqí* | utterly ordinary | ID | SL | D | |
| 破败 | *pòbài* | dilapidated | ADJ | LL | D | |
| 破旧 | *pòjiù* | run-down | ADJ | SP | D | |
| 铺地改造 | *pūdì gǎizào* | ground-surface renovation | NC | TJ | I | |
| 朴素 | *pǔsù* | plain | ADJ | LL | D | |
| 朴素实用 | *pǔsù shíyòng* | plain and practical | ADJ PH | TJ | D | |
| 普通 | *pǔtōng* | ordinary | ADJ | SP | D | 普通街道 *pǔtōng jiēdào* ‘ordinary street’<br>普通生活品质 *pǔtōng shēnghuó pǐnzhì* ‘ordinary quality of life’<br>普通住宅 *pǔtōng zhùzhái* ‘ordinary housing’ |
| 七拐八拐 | *qī guǎi bā guǎi* | winding and convoluted | ID | LL | M | |
| 其乐融融 | *qílè róngróng* | harmonious and joyful | ID | LL | S | |
| 骑楼 | *qílóu* | arcade building | N | TJ | M | |
| 气息 | *qìxī* | atmosphere | N | LL | E | |
| 千城一面 | *qiān chéng yī miàn* | cookie-cutter urbanism | ID | SL | D | |
| 亲近自然 | *qīnjìn zìrán* | close to nature | ADJ PH | LL | E | |
| 亲密 | *qīnmì* | intimate | ADJ | LL | S | 亲密关系 *qīnmì guānxì* ‘intimate relationships’ |
| 亲切 | *qīnqiè* | friendly | ADJ | LL | E | |
| 亲人人居环境 | *qīn rén rén jū huánjìng* | people-oriented living environment | NC | TJ | S | |
| 青石板 | *qīngshí bǎn* | bluestone paving | N | TJ | M | |
| 清冷 | *qīnglěng* | chilly and quiet | ADJ | LL | E | |
| 清晰 | *qīngxī* | clear | ADJ | TJ | D | |
| 区块 | *qūkuài* | block | N | TJ | M | |
| 曲折 | *qūzhé* | winding | ADJ | TJ | M | |

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| 去中心化 | *qù zhōngxīn huà* | decentralization | N | TJ | I | |
| 裙房 | *qúnfáng* | podium building | N | TJ | M | |
| 裙楼 | *qúnlóu* | podium structure | N | TJ | M | |
| 热闹 | *rènào* | lively | ADJ | SP | E | |
| 人车分流 | *rén chē fēnliú* | separation of pedestrians and vehicles | NC | TJ | F | |
| 人车混行 | *rén chē hùn xíng* | mixed pedestrian–vehicle traffic | NC | TJ | F | |
| 人车混流 | *rén chē hùnliú* | mixed traffic flow | NC | TJ | F | |
| 人行道 | *rénxíngdào* | sidewalk | N | TJ | F | |
| 人行横道 | *rénxíng héngdào* | pedestrian crossing | NC | TJ | F | |
| 人际关系 | *rénjì guānxì* | interpersonal relations | NC | TJ | S | |
| 人迹罕至 | *rénjì hǎnzhì* | rarely visited | ID | LL | E | |
| 人口稠密 | *rénkǒu chóumì* | densely populated | ADJ PH | TJ | I | |
| 人来人往 | *rénlái rénwǎng* | bustling with people | ID | LL | E | |
| 人流量大 | *rénliúliàng dà* | high pedestrian flow | ADJ PH | TJ | F | |
| 人情味 | *rénqíngwèi* | human warmth | N | LL | S | |
| 人视角 | *rén shìjiǎo* | human-scale perspective | NC | TJ | E | |
| 人味 | *rénwèi* | “human feel” | N | SL | D | 没有人味 *méiyǒu rénwèi* ‘lacking human feel’ |
| 人烟稀少 | *rényān xīshǎo* | sparsely inhabited | ID | LL | E | |
| 日常 | *rìcháng* | everyday | N ADJ | SP | E | 日常感 *rìcháng gǎn* ‘everyday feel’<br>日常生活 *rìcháng shēnghuó* ‘everyday life’ |
| 日照间距 | *rìzhào jiānjù* | sunlight spacing | NC | TJ | I | |
| 容积率 | *róngjīlǜ* | floor-area ratio ‘FAR’ | N | TJ | I | |
| 融合 | *rónghé* | integration | N | TJ | I | |
| 入户大厅 | *rùhù dàtīng* | entrance lobby | NC | TJ | F | |
| 入口 | *rùkǒu* | entrance | N | SP | F | |
| 三教九流 | *sānjiào jiǔliú* | all sorts of people | ID | LL | S | |
| 商办 | *shāngbàn* | commercial–office ‘mixed’ | N | TJ | I | 商办区 *shāngbàn qū* ‘commercial–office zone’ |
| 商品房 | *shāngpǐn fáng* | commodity housing | NC | TJ | I | |
| 商厦 | *shāngshà* | commercial building | N | TJ | I | |
| 商务 | *shāngwù* | business ‘commercial’ | N | TJ | I | |
| 商业 | *shāngyè* | commerce / commercial | N | TJ | I | 商业街 *shāngyè jiē* ‘commercial street’<br>商业区 *shāngyè qū* ‘commercial district’<br>商业圈 *shāngyè quān* ‘commercial zone’ |
| 商住 | *shāngzhù* | commercial–residential ‘mixed’ | N | TJ | I | 商住混合 *shāngzhù hùnhé* ‘mixed comm.–resid.’<br>商住结合 *shāngzhù jiéhé* ‘combined comm.–resid.’<br>商住一体 *shāngzhù yītǐ* ‘integrated comm.–resid.’ |
| 上宅下店 | *shàngzhái xiàdiàn* | housing above, shops below | ID | TJ | F | |
| 上住下店 | *shàngzhù xiàdiàn* | living above, shops below | ID | TJ | F | |
| 设计 | *shèjì* | design | N | TJ | I | 设计景观 *shèjì jǐngguān* ‘designed landscape’<br>设计轴线 *shèjì zhóuxiàn* ‘design axis’ |
| 设施完善 | *shèshī wánshàn* | well-equipped facilities | ADJ PH | TJ | I | |
| 社区 | *shèqū* | community | N | TJ | S | 社区道路 *shèqū dàolù* ‘community roads’<br>社区配套 *shèqū pèitào* ‘community amenities’ |
| 绅士化 | *shēnshì huà* | gentrification | N | TJ | I | |
| 深漂 | *shēnpiāo* | Shenzhen migrant | CN | SL | S | |
| 神秘 | *shénmì* | mysterious | ADJ | LL | E | |

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| 渗透 | *shèntòu* | permeability | N | TJ | F | |
| 生活 | *shēnghuó* | everyday life | N | SP | S | 老城生活 *lǎochéng shēnghuó* ‘old-city life’<br>生活便利 *shēnghuó biànlì* ‘convenient daily life’<br>生活不便 *shēnghuó bùbiàn* ‘inconvenient daily life’<br>生活感 *shēnghuó gǎn* ‘lived feel’<br>生活节奏 *shēnghuó jiézòu* ‘rhythm of life’<br>生活痕迹 *shēnghuó hénjì* ‘traces of everyday life’<br>生活化 *shēnghuó huà* ‘everyday-ized’<br>生活配套 *shēnghuó pèitào* ‘daily-life amenities’<br>生活品质 *shēnghuó pǐnzhì* ‘quality of life’<br>生活气息 *shēnghuó qìxī* ‘everyday atmosphere’<br>生活区 *shēnghuó qū* ‘living area’<br>生活圈 *shēnghuó quān* ‘daily-life catchment’<br>生活条件 *shēnghuó tiáojiàn* ‘living conditions’<br>生活小区 *shēnghuó xiǎoqū* ‘life-oriented compound’<br>生活性 *shēnghuó xìng* ‘everydayness’<br>生活宜人 *shēnghuó yírén* ‘pleasant for living’<br>生活质量 *shēnghuó zhìliàng* ‘living quality’ |
| 生态友好 | *shēngtài yǒuhǎo* | eco-friendly | ADJ PH | TJ | I | |
| 十字路口 | *shízì lùkǒu* | four-way intersection | N | TJ | F | |
| 石板路 | *shíbǎn lù* | stone-paved road | NC | TJ | M | |
| 石砖地 | *shízhuān dì* | brick paving | NC | TJ | M | |
| 市郊 | *shìjiāo* | urban outskirts | N | TJ | M | |
| 市井 | *shìjǐng* | grassroots / street-level life | N | LL | S | 市井生活 *shìjǐng shēnghuó* ‘street-level life’ |
| 市中心 | *shìzhōngxīn* | city center | N | TJ | M | 市中心区 *shìzhōngxīn qū* ‘city center district’ |
| 适宜人居 | *shìyí rénjū* | suitable for living | ADJ PH | TJ | I | |
| 首层 | *shǒucéng* | ground floor | N | TJ | M | |
| 舒适 | *shūshì* | comfortable | ADJ | SP | E | 不舒适 *bù shūshì* ‘uncomfortable’ |
| 疏离 | *shūlí* | alienated | ADJ | LL | E | |
| 疏散 | *shūsàn* | evacuation / dispersal | N | TJ | F | |
| 熟人社会 | *shúrén shèhuì* | acquaintance-based society | NC | TJ | S | |
| 熟悉 | *shúxī* | familiar | ADJ | SP | E | |
| 竖向立面 | *shùxiàng lìmiàn* | vertical façade | NC | TJ | M | |
| 双车道 | *shuāng chēdào* | two-lane road | NC | TJ | F | |
| 双廊 | *shuāng láng* | double corridor | NC | TJ | M | |
| 双向’n’车道 | *shuāngxiàng chēdào* | two-way traffic lane | NC | TJ | F | |
| 水泥 | *shuǐní* | cement | N | TJ | M | 水泥路 *shuǐní lù* ‘cement road’ |
| 水平向 | *shuǐpíng xiàng* | horizontal orientation | NC | TJ | M | |
| 水网密布 | *shuǐwǎng mìbù* | dense water network | ID | TJ | M | |
| 顺应道路 | *shùnyìng dàolù* | aligned with road network | ADJ PH | TJ | M | |
| 私自加建 | *sīzì jiājiàn* | illegal extension | NC | TJ | I | |
| 四合院 | *sìhéyuàn* | *siheyuan* courtyard | N | TJ | M | |
| 随处可见 | *suíchù kějiàn* | seen everywhere | ID | SP | D | |
| 随意 | *suíyì* | casual / arbitrary | ADJ | SP | D | |
| 塔 | *tǎ* | tower | N | TJ | M | |
| 塔楼 | *tǎlóu* | tower block | N | TJ | M | |
| 体块咬合 | *tǐkuài yǎohé* | interlocking masses | NC | TJ | M | |
| 体验区 | *tǐyàn qū* | experience zone | NC | TJ | D | |
| 天际线 | *tiānjìxiàn* | skyline | N | TJ | M | |
| 条理 | *tiáolǐ* | orderliness | N | LL | D | |
| 挺拔 | *tǐngbá* | slender and upright | ADJ | LL | M | |
| 通道 | *tōngdào* | passageway | N | TJ | F | |
| 通勤 | *tōngqín* | commuting | N | TJ | F | |

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| 同质化 | *tóngzhì huà* | homogenization | N | TJ | D | |
| 统一 | *tǒngyī* | unified | ADJ | TJ | I | 统一规划 *tǒngyī guīhuà* ‘unified planning’ |
| 筒子楼 | *tǒngzi lóu* | corridor-type housing | N | TJ | M | |
| 突兀 | *tūwù* | abrupt / jarring | ADJ | LL | D | |
| 土路 | *tǔlù* | dirt road | N | SP | M | |
| 瓦房 | *wǎfáng* | tiled-roof house | N | SP | M | |
| 外地人廉租房 | *wàidìrén liánzū fáng* | low-rent housing for migrants | NC | TJ | S | |
| 外阳台 | *wài yángtái* | external balcony | N | TJ | M | |
| 网格 | *wǎnggé* | grid | N | TJ | M | 网络道路 *wǎnggé dàolù* ‘grid road network’<br>网络规划 *wǎnggé guīhuà* ‘grid planning’<br>网络化 *wǎnggé huà* ‘grid-based’ |
| 违章建造 | *wéizhāng jiànzào* | illegal construction | NC | TJ | I | |
| 围合 | *wéihé* | enclosure | N | TJ | M | 围合感 *wéihé gǎn* ‘sense of enclosure’<br>围合性 *wéihé xìng* ‘enclosure quality’ |
| 围栏 | *wéilán* | fence | N | TJ | M | |
| 围墙 | *wéiqiáng* | wall | N | TJ | M | |
| 卫生间 | *wèishēngjiān* | restroom | N | SP | F | |
| 温暖 | *wēnnuǎn* | warm | ADJ | LL | E | |
| 温馨 | *wēnxīn* | cozy | ADJ | LL | E | |
| 文保单位 | *wénbǎo dānwèi* | protected cultural heritage unit | NC | TJ | I | |
| 文化底蕴 | *wénhuà dǐyùn* | cultural depth | NC | LL | S | |
| 文教区 | *wénjiào qū* | education & culture district | NC | TJ | I | |
| 握手楼 | *wòshǒu lóu* | “handshake building” | NC | SL | M | |
| 无电梯 | *wú diàntī* | no elevator | ADJ phrase | SP | F | |
| 无方向感 | *wú fāngxiàng gǎn* | lack of orientation | NC | TJ | E | |
| 无分级道路 | *wú fēnjí dàolù* | no road hierarchy | NC | TJ | I | |
| 无规划 | *wú guīhuà* | unplanned | ADJ | TJ | I | |
| 无记忆点 | *wú jìyì diǎn* | lacking landmarks | NC | SL | D | |
| 无尽城市 | *wújìn chéngshì* | endless city | ADJ+N | LL | D | |
| 无聊 | *wúliáo* | boring | ADJ | SP | D | |
| 无趣 | *wúqù* | uninteresting | ADJ | SP | D | |
| 无特色 | *wú tèsè* | characterless | ADJ PH | TJ | D | |
| 无物业 | *wú wùyè* | no property management | NC | TJ | I | |
| 无序 | *wúxù* | disorderly | ADJ | TJ | D | |
| 无主次 | *wú zhǔcì* | no hierarchy | NC | TJ | D | |
| 五彩斑斓 | *wǔcǎi bānlán* | colorful | ID | LL | E | |
| 物业管理 | *wùyè guǎnlǐ* | property management | NC | TJ | I | |
| 细碎 | *xìsuì* | fine-grained / fragmented | ADJ | TJ | M | |
| 狭窄 | *xiázhǎi* | narrow | ADJ | TJ | M | 狭窄街道 *xiázhǎi jiēdào* ‘narrow street’<br>狭窄人行道 *xiázhǎi rénxíngdào* ‘narrow sidewalk’<br>狭窄走道 *xiázhǎi zǒudào* ‘narrow passage’ |
| 县城 | *xiànchéng* | county town | N | TJ | I | |
| 现代 | *xiàndài* | modern | ADJ | TJ | D | 现代城区 *xiàndài chéngqū* ‘modern urban area’<br>现代城市肌理 *xiàndài chéngshì jīlǐ* ‘modern urban fabric’<br>现代建筑 *xiàndài jiànzhù* ‘modern architecture’<br>现代小区 *xiàndài xiǎoqū* ‘modern housing estate’<br>现代住宅 *xiàndài zhùzhái* ‘modern housing’ |
| 现代化 | *xiàndài huà* | modernization | N | TJ | I | |

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| 现代主义 | *xiàndài zhǔyì* | modernism | N | TJ | D | |
| 线条感 | *xiàntiáo gǎn* | sense of linearity | NC | TJ | M | |
| 线性 | *xiànxìng* | linear | ADJ | TJ | M | 线性空间 *xiànxìng kōngjiān* ‘linear space’ |
| 乡愁 | *xiāngchóu* | nostalgia for homeland | N | LL | E | |
| 乡村 | *xiāngcūn* | countryside | N | TJ | I | 乡村改造 *xiāngcūn gǎizào* ‘rural redevelopment’<br>美丽乡村 *měilì xiāngcūn* ‘beautiful countryside program’ |
| 乡间小路 | *xiāngjiān xiǎolù* | rural path | NC | LL | M | |
| 乡土 | *xiāngtǔ* | vernacular / local | ADJ | TJ | D | |
| 乡镇 | *xiāngzhèn* | township | N | TJ | I | |
| 相似 | *xiāngsì* | similar | ADJ | TJ | D | |
| 向心性 | *xiàngxīn xìng* | centripetal | NC | TJ | M | |
| 向远处延伸 | *xiàng yuǎnchù yánshēn* | extending outward | ADJ PH | TJ | M | |
| 巷道 | *xiàngdào* | alleyway | N | TJ | M | |
| 巷子 | *xiàngzi* | alley | N | SP | M | 巷子口 *xiàngzi kǒu* ‘alley entrance’ |
| 消防隐患 | *xiāofáng yǐnhuàn* | fire safety hazard | NC | TJ | I | |
| 萧瑟 | *xiāosè* | bleak | ADJ | LL | E | |
| 萧条 | *xiāotiáo* | depressed / declining | ADJ | LL | D | |
| 小 | *xiǎo* | small | ADJ | SP | M | 小别墅 *xiǎo biéshù* ‘small villa’<br>小房子 *xiǎo fángzi* ‘small house’<br>小高层 *xiǎo gāocéng* ‘mid-rise’<br>小空间 *xiǎo kōngjiān* ‘small space’<br>小路 *xiǎo lù* ‘small road’<br>小洋房 *xiǎo yángfáng* ‘small Western-style house’<br>小住区 *xiǎo zhùqū* ‘small residential area’ |
| 小吃街 | *xiǎochī jiē* | snack street | NC | SP | S | |
| 小尺度 | *xiǎo chǐdù* | small scale | NC | TJ | M | 小尺度肌理 *xiǎo chǐdù jīlǐ* ‘fine-grain fabric’<br>小尺度街道 *xiǎo chǐdù jiēdào* ‘small-scale street’<br>小尺度街区 *xiǎo chǐdù jiēqū* ‘small-scale block’<br>小尺度街巷 *xiǎo chǐdù jiēxiàng* ‘small-scale lanes’ |
| 小而美 | *xiǎo ér měi* | small but refined | ID | SL | D | |
| 小径 | *xiǎojìng* | path | N | SP | M | |
| 小区 | *xiǎoqū* | residential compound | N | TJ | I | 小区规划 *xiǎoqū guīhuà* ‘compound planning’<br>小区绿化 *xiǎoqū lǜhuà* ‘compound greenery’<br>小区入口 *xiǎoqū rùkǒu* ‘compound entrance’ |
| 小巷 | *xiǎoxiàng* | small alley | N | SP | M | 小巷人家 *xiǎoxiàng rénjiā* ‘alley households’ |
| 小镇 | *xiǎozhèn* | small town | N | TJ | I | 小镇风貌 *xiǎozhèn fēngmào* ‘small-town character’ |
| 效率 | *xiàolǜ* | efficiency | N | TJ | F | |
| 写字楼 | *xiězìlóu* | office tower | N | TJ | I | |
| 新 | *xīn* | new | ADJ | SP | D | 新村 *xīncūn* ‘new village’<br>新街区 *xīnjiēqū* ‘new district’<br>新式 *xīnshì* ‘new-style’<br>新小区 *xīn xiǎoqū* ‘new housing estate’ |
| 新城 | *xīnchéng* | new town | N | TJ | I | 新城道路 *xīnchéng dàolù* ‘new-town roads’<br>新城区 *xīnchéngqū* ‘new urban district’ |
| 新建 | *xīnjiàn* | newly built | ADJ | TJ | I | 新建道路 *xīnjiàn dàolù* ‘newly built road’ |
| 新旧 | *xīnjiù* | old–new | N | TJ | D | 新旧城交界 *xīnjiù chéng jiāojiè* ‘old–new city interface’<br>新旧对比 *xīnjiù duìbǐ* ‘old–new contrast’<br>新旧关系 *xīnjiù guānxì* ‘old–new relationship’<br>新旧交替 *xīnjiù jiāotì* ‘old–new transition’<br>新旧融合 xīnjiù rónghé ‘old–new integration’ |
| 形式 | *xíngshì* | form | N | TJ | M | |
| 幸福平凡 | *xìngfú píngfán* | ordinary happiness | ADJ PH | LL | E | |
| 休闲 | *xiūxián* | leisure | N | SP | E | |
| 修缮 | *xiūshàn* | repair / restoration | N | TJ | I | |
| 宿舍 | *sùshè* | dormitory | N | TJ | S | 单位宿舍 *dānwèi sùshè* ‘work-unit dormitory’ |

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| | | | | | | 集体宿舍 *jítǐ sùshè* ‘collective dormitory’<br>学生宿舍 *xuéshēng sùshè* ‘student dormitory’<br>员工宿舍 *yuángōng sùshè* ‘staff dormitory’ |
| 喧嚣 | *xuānxiāo* | hustle and bustle | N | LL | E | |
| 学区房 | *xuéqū fáng* | school-district housing | NC | TJ | I | |
| 压迫感 | *yāpò gǎn* | sense of oppression | NC | LL | E | |
| 压抑 | *yāyì* | oppressive | ADJ | LL | E | |
| 压制 | *yāzhì* | suppress | V | TJ | D | |
| 烟火气 | *yānhuǒ qì* | everyday vibrancy | N | SL | E | |
| 延伸 | *yánshēn* | extension | N | TJ | M | |
| 延续性 | *yánxùxìng* | continuity | N | TJ | M | |
| 严肃 | *yánsù* | solemn | ADJ | LL | D | |
| 沿街 | *yánjiē* | street-facing | ADJ | TJ | M | 沿街底层商铺 *yánjiē dǐcéng shāngpù* ‘street-front ground-floor shops’<br>沿街店铺 *yánjiē diànpù* ‘street-front shops’ |
| 氧吧 | *yǎngbā* | “oxygen bar” ‘green area’ | N | SL | E | |
| 摇摇欲坠 | *yáoyáo yùzhuì* | on the verge of collapse | ID | LL | D | |
| 业态 | *yè tài* | business format | N | TJ | I | 业态丰富 *yè tài fēngfù* ‘diverse business formats’<br>业态混杂 *yè tài hùnzá* ‘mixed business formats’ |
| 一家一户 | *yījiā yīhù* | one household per unit | NC | TJ | S | |
| 一梯两/三户 | *yī tī liǎng/sān hù* | one elevator serving 2–3 units | NC | TJ | M | |
| 仪式感 | *yíshì gǎn* | sense of ritual | NC | LL | E | |
| 怡人 | *yírén* | pleasant | ADJ | LL | E | |
| 宜居 | *yíjū* | livable | ADJ | TJ | I | |
| 倚靠 | *yǐkào* | leaning against | V | SP | M | |
| 拥挤 | *yōngjǐ* | crowded | ADJ | SP | E | |
| 幽静 | *yōujìng* | quiet and secluded | ADJ | LL | E | |
| 有机 | *yǒujī* | organic | ADJ | TJ | D | 有机生活 *yǒujī shēnghuó* ‘organic lifestyle’ |
| 有趣 | *yǒuqù* | interesting | ADJ | SP | E | |
| 有序 | *yǒuxù* | orderly | ADJ | TJ | D | 有序立面 *yǒuxù lìmiàn* ‘orderly façade’ |
| 远离喧嚣 | *yuǎnlí xuānxiāo* | away from the hustle | ADJ PH | LL | E | |
| 院落 | *yuànluò* | courtyard | N | TJ | M | |
| 杂居 | *zájū* | mixed habitation | N | TJ | S | |
| 杂乱 | *záluàn* | messy | ADJ | SP | D | |
| 杂乱无章 | *záluàn wúzhāng* | chaotic | ID | LL | D | |
| 杂院 | *záyuàn* | mixed courtyard | N | SP | S | |
| 脏乱 | *zāngluàn* | dirty and messy | ADJ | SP | D | |
| 噪音 | *zàoyīn* | noise | N | TJ | E | |
| 栅栏 | *zhàlán* | fence | N | TJ | M | |
| 窄 | *zhǎi* | narrow | ADJ | SP | M | 窄路 *zhǎi lù* ‘narrow road’<br>窄巷 *zhǎi xiàng* ‘narrow alley’ |
| 遮阳 | *zhēyáng* | shading | N | TJ | F | |
| 整洁 | *zhěngjié* | tidy | ADJ | SP | D | |
| 整洁有序 | *zhěngjié yǒuxù* | tidy and orderly | ADJ PH | TJ | D | |
| 整齐 | *zhěngqí* | neat | ADJ | TJ | M | |
| 整体规整 | *zhěngtǐ guīzhěng* | overall regularity | NC | TJ | M | |
| 正立面 | *zhèng lìmiàn* | main façade | NC | TJ | M | |
| 正式 | *zhèngshì* | formal | ADJ | TJ | D | |
| 政府用地 | *zhèngfǔ yòngdì* | government land use | NC | TJ | I | |
| 植物稀少 | *zhíwù xīshǎo* | sparse vegetation | ADJ PH | TJ | M | |

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| 质朴 | *zhìpǔ* | plain and honest | ADJ | LL | D | |
| 秩序 | *zhìxù* | order | N | TJ | D | |
| 秩序感 | *zhìxù gǎn* | sense of order | NC | TJ | E | |
| 中产 | *zhōngchǎn* | middle class | N | TJ | S | |
| 中等收入 | *zhōngděng shōurù* | middle income | NC | TJ | S | |
| 中低层住房 | *zhōng dīcéng zhùfáng* | mid–low-rise housing | NC | TJ | I | |
| 中高层 | *zhōng gāocéng* | mid–high-rise | ADJ / N | TJ | M | 中高层混合 *zhōng gāocéng hùnhé* ‘mixed mid–high-rise’ |
| 中心节点明确 | *zhōngxīn jiédiǎn míngquè* | clear central node | ADJ PH | TJ | M | |
| 中型道路 | *zhōngxíng dàolù* | medium-scale road | NC | TJ | F | |
| 中央 | *zhōngyāng* | central | ADJ | TJ | M | 中央分隔带 *zhōngyāng fēngédài* ‘central median’ |
| 中轴线 | *zhōngzhóuxiàn* | central axis | N | TJ | M | |
| 重复 | *chóngfù* | repetitive | ADJ | TJ | D | |
| 主次 | *zhǔcì* | primary–secondary | N | TJ | I | 主次交通 *zhǔcì jiāotōng* ‘primary/secondary traffic’<br>主次有序 *zhǔcì yǒuxù* ‘clear hierarchy’ |
| 主干路 | *zhǔgàn lù* | main arterial road | NC | TJ | F | |
| 住区 | *zhùqū* | residential area | N | TJ | I | 职工住区 *zhígōng zhùqū* ‘workers’ residential area’<br>住区规划 *zhùqū guīhuà* ‘residential planning’ |
| 住宅 | *zhùzhái* | housing / residence | N | TJ | I | 板式住宅 *bǎnshì zhùzhái* ‘slab housing’<br>集合式住宅 *jíhéshì zhùzhái* ‘cluster housing’<br>集体住宅 *jítǐ zhùzhái* ‘collective housing’<br>集中住宅 *jízhōng zhùzhái* ‘centralized housing’<br>高密度住宅 *gāo mìdù zhùzhái* ‘high-density housing’<br>外来务工人员住宅 *wàilái wùgōng rényuán zhùzhái* ‘migrant-worker housing’<br>外廊住宅 *wàiláng zhùzhái* ‘external-corridor housing’<br>沿街住宅 *yánjiē zhùzhái* ‘street-facing housing’<br>中高层住宅 *zhōng gāocéng zhùzhái* ‘mid–high-rise housing’<br>住宅楼 *zhùzhái lóu* ‘residential building’<br>住宅片区 *zhùzhái piànqū* ‘residential zone’<br>住宅区景观 *zhùzhái qū jǐngguān* ‘residential landscape’<br>住宅小区 *zhùzhái xiǎoqū* ‘housing estate’ |
| 砖房 | *zhuānfáng* | brick house | N | SP | M | |
| 砖混结构 | *zhuān hùn jiégòu* | brick–concrete structure | NC | TJ | M | |
| 砖瓦房 | *zhuānwǎ fáng* | brick-and-tile house | N | SP | M | |
| 自建房 | *zìjiàn fáng* | self-built housing | NC | TJ | I | |
| 自然 | *zìrán* | natural | ADJ | TJ | E | 自然生长 *zìrán shēngzhǎng* ‘organic growth’<br>自然形成 *zìrán xíngchéng* ‘naturally formed’<br>自然宜人 *zìrán yírén* ‘naturally pleasant’ |
| 自上而下 | *zì shàng ér xià* | top-down | ADJ PH | TJ | I | |
| 自下而上 | *zì xià ér shàng* | bottom-up | ADJ PH | TJ | I | |
| 纵深 | *zòngshēn* | depth | N | TJ | M | |
| 走廊 | *zǒuláng* | corridor | N | TJ | M | |
| 阻隔 | *zǔgé* | barrier / separation | N | TJ | F | |
| 组团 | *zǔtuán* | cluster | N | TJ | M | |

# APPENDIX C A TRANSLATION PROTOCOL FOR CHINESE URBAN TERMINOLOGY

## 1. Rationale: why a protocol is required

Translation in urban studies is often treated as a secondary editorial operation: terms are rendered into fluent English once the "real" analysis is complete. This approach is methodologically risky when the research object is the Chinese city, because many Chinese urban terms encode institutional, moral, and governance structures that do not survive habitual Anglophone "equivalents." The central problem is conceptual domestication: English words that look close enough can silently import foreign ontologies (planning genealogies, typological traditions, civic imaginaries), thereby stabilizing the object too quickly and mis-specifying what is being described.

The protocol proposed here repositions translation as a theory-building operation rather than a neutral transmission device. Its key claim is that translation transparency is graded (not binary): even a fluent translation can remain conceptually opaque if it makes a Chinese category appear naturally equivalent to an English one. Consequently, translation is treated as an auditable methodological process in which interpretive choices are stated, justified, and revisited.

The protocol operationalizes four commitments:

Key terms are analytical objects, not mere labels.

Translation choices are made explicit and linked to the analytic stakes of the term.

Linguistic "friction" is treated as an analytic signal, not noise.

The study prioritizes conceptual consistency over terminological uniformity: stable reference points matter more than producing a single clean English lexicon.

## 2. Protocol inputs: what must be "on the table" before translating

Before selecting any English rendering, the protocol requires a minimal input set. Each item prevents a common failure mode where translation is made without reconstructing the semantic ecology of the term.

**Input 1 —The Chinese term "as used"**

The unit of translation is not the dictionary headword but the term in use, including:

compounds and collocations,

co-text (surrounding wording),

genre/register (planning standard, policy text, academic prose, market discourse, everyday speech).

This is crucial because apparently simple morphemes can shift meaning when embedded in authoritative compounds. For example, a bare gloss like "road" may capture the surface referent of 路 lù, but a compound such as 道路 *dàolù* can encode legitimacy and normativity that a bare English gloss does not signal.

**Input 2 —Semantic field and scale logic**

Each term is positioned within the dissertation's semantic-field triad (House / Street / Neighborhood) and its scalar role is stated. The protocol asks whether the term is primarily:

morphological,

infrastructural,

social,

administrative,

ideological,

and whether it operates as a governance/legibility category (classification, jurisdiction, service entitlement).

This input can be adapted to different context and different semantic fields.

**Input 3 —Institutional embedding vs vernacular life-world**

The protocol requires identifying whether the term's dominant function in the given context is:

embedded in planning/engineering standards,

embedded in governance/service provision,

circulating in market discourse (real estate, branding),

anchored in everyday navigation and evaluation.

**Input 4 —The English discourse being entered**

Finally, the translator specifies the target English discourse:

planning ontology (typologies, design standards),

policy/governance language,

urban theory and academic argumentation,

everyday English description.

This matters because English renderings can silently align a Chinese term with an Anglophone genealogy (e.g., the typological discourse around "courtyard house"), thereby narrowing the concept and re-framing the object.

## 3. The protocol: step-by-step operations

The protocol is executed in eight steps. Each step produces an intermediate output that constrains the next, making translation decisions traceable.

**Step 1 —Locate (semantic field + scalar position)**

Operation. Locate the term within the House/Street/Neighborhood triad and state its scalar role (morphological / infrastructural / administrative / ideological; governance legibility function).

Output 1: Term Profile (pre-translation).

A short structured record containing:

field assignment (House / Street / Neighborhood),

scale logic (micro–meso–macro role),

dominant domain (institutional / vernacular / academic / market),

functional role (typology / hierarchy / boundary / service unit / ideological operator).

**Step 2 —Reconstruct the semantic core (close reading in Chinese)**

Operation. Reconstruct what the term denotes in Chinese (not what an English reader expects):

identify the semantic core,

check range and non-restrictions (use, function, social organization),

identify what the usual English gloss presupposes (ownership, bounded object, voluntarism, etc.).

Example logic (illustrative case). 四合院 sìhéyuàn: the issue is not the "wrongness" of Chinese courtyard house but its conceptual innocence. The semantic core is enclosure and relational configuration (院 yuàn as containment logic), not "household." Therefore "house" narrows the concept and inserts it into typological abstraction.

Output 2: Semantic-Core Statement.

A concise statement that becomes the benchmark for evaluating English renderings:

"Core = X; it organizes Y; it presupposes Z; typical English gloss imports A/B."

**Step 3 —Diagnose transparency risk (classify the translation problem)**

Decision question. Does the available English gloss preserve only physical function, or also the term's moral–institutional, social, and governance structure?

Transparency categories.

Partial transparency: English works for basic description but strips embedded structure (e.g., 路 lù → road).

False transparency: a familiar English term invites conceptual importation and hides institutional specificity (e.g., 街 *jiē* → street; 社区 *shèqū* → community).

Non / radical non-transparency: no single English word occupies the same position in the semantic system; any single-word equivalence collapses conceptual anchors (e.g., 巷 xiàng; 道 dào).

Output 3: Transparency Diagnosis + Rationale.

A short label plus one or two sentences stating why the default gloss misleads (what it imports or erases).

**Step 4 —Select a rendering strategy (strategy matrix)**

Operation. Map the diagnosis to a concrete move-set.

Table C.1 Strategy matrix for rendering choices

| Transparency diagnosis | Primary risk | Rendering strategy (move-set) | When to add Chinese / transliteration |
|---|---|---|---|
| Partial transparency | Loss of embedded structure | Baseline translation + explicit statement of what is lost in surrounding text | If institutional normativity or hierarchy is analytically central |
| False transparency | Imported Anglophone ontology (conceptual domestication) | Baseline for readability + contextual specification + (when needed) transliteration to block flattening | When "natural" English hides governance/ideology |
| Non / radical non-transparency | No stable one-word equivalent | Avoid single-word equivalence; transliteration + explanation; treat term as analytic concept | Default option |
| Cross-cutting principle | Over-stabilization | Allow context-sensitive variability; preserve ambiguity when analytically productive | Use Chinese as stable reference point across variants |

The matrix formalizes a key principle: the goal is not a single "correct" word, but a defensible translation practice that preserves institutional specificity and keeps conceptual loss visible.

Output 4: Rendering Plan. A statement such as: "In descriptive prose I will use X; in analytic passages I will keep the Chinese term; when governance is central I will add qualifiers Y."

**Step 5 —Implementation: three standard strategies (A–C)**

After Step 4 selects the strategy, the protocol provides implementation templates used across the dissertation's semantic fields.

**Strategy A —Controlled literalism + functional specification (小区 *xiǎoqū*)**

Risk addressed. Over-socialization in English: translation can "invent community" by default.

Move-set: Keep a literal baseline such as "residential compound." Specify function/governance to anchor meaning (management, enclosure, infrastructure). Resist naturalizing social intentionality not guaranteed by the term. Example framing: "gated residential compound governed by a property management company."

**Strategy B —Contextual translation + morphological anchoring (街区 *jiēqū*)**

Risk addressed. Over-formalization: "urban block" / "district" may import Western planning ontologies or inflate administrative status.

Move-set: Allow flexible renderings depending on analytic focus (e.g., "urban block," "street-based district"). Keep the Chinese term as the stable reference point in the analysis. Use transliteration (街区 *jiēqū*) in theoretically sensitive passages to signal non-equivalence. Treat ambiguity as an analytic resource rather than a defect.

**Strategy C —De-naturalize English norms (社区 *shèqū*)**

Risk addressed. "Community" is false transparency: it imports Anglophone assumptions (bottom-up formation, affective bonds, moral solidarity) that can obscure governance and ideology.

Move-set: If "community" is used, mark it explicitly as administrative: "administrative community," "state-defined community," "neighborhood governance unit." Accept controlled awkwardness as analytically productive: it interrupts smooth conceptual importation. Treat 社区 *shèqū* as an ideological/governance category; translation must expose—not conceal—its function.

**Loanword policy: when to keep Chinese terms (Step 6)**

Some terms should be retained in Chinese (with explanation) because the translation pressure itself is part of the analytic problem. The protocol's criteria for retaining Chinese are:

The English gloss produces conceptual narrowing by importing foreign ontology (e.g., 四合院 *sìhéyuàn* → "courtyard house").

The term functions as a governance/legibility technology whose boundary-drawing work disappears in English (e.g., 住宅 *zhùzhái*).

The English gloss collapses a conceptual anchor (e.g., 道 *dào* → "way").

Implementation options: transliteration + contextual explanation; descriptive gloss foregrounding spatial/institutional logic; context-sensitive variability while keeping the Chinese term as a stable reference point.

**Composition rules: conceptual consistency over uniformity (Step 7)**

The protocol explicitly rejects the ideal of a single uniform English lexicon. Instead, it imposes writing rules that preserve conceptual stability while allowing context-sensitive renderings:

Do not force all terms into one semantic register.

Let English register difference via qualification, transliteration, and strategic repetition of Chinese terms.

Use surrounding text to expose what baseline translation conceals.

Keep the semantic reference point stable even when English renderings vary by context.

The objective is that English ceases to operate as a neutral container; it becomes a medium capable of expressing friction, asymmetry, and partiality—making translation auditable inside the argument.

**Reflexive loop: state, justify, revisit (Step 8)**

Translation choices must be iteratively revisited as analysis shifts between morphology, social practice, and governance. The protocol therefore requires each key choice to be:

stated (what rendering is used and where),

justified (what conceptual risk it manages),

revisited as the analytic frame changes.

This ensures translation remains methodological rather than cosmetic.

**Protocol deliverables: what the method outputs**

The protocol produces deliverables beyond a translated glossary. Specifically, it outputs:

Term profile (field + scale + institutional embedding).

Transparency diagnosis (partial / false / non / radical).

Rendering choice + rationale (strategy and what it protects).

Writing implementation plan (qualification / transliteration / repetition / variability rules).

Audit trail (sources consulted; conceptual loss/gain explicitly accepted).

The method's aim is not "correct translation," but a defensible practice that preserves institutional specificity and keeps conceptual distortion in view.

Table C.2 Worked Examples (fully step-by-step)

| Term | 小区 ***xiǎoqū*** | 社区 ***shèqū*** | 街区 ***jiēqū*** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Step 1 Locate** | Field assignment: Neighborhood / relation (intermediary scale)<br>Scale logic: meso-scale spatial unit linking dwelling patterns to governance and everyday management<br>Dominant domain (in most analytic uses): institutional + market + everyday (hybrid)<br>Function: legibility unit for spatial management; enclosure and residential organization; frequently tied to management regimes (property management, access control). | Field assignment: Neighborhood / relation (governance-and-belonging lexicon)<br>Scale logic: meso-scale unit that mediates between the state's territorial administration and everyday residential life<br>Dominant domain (typical analytic use): institutional / governance (often with ideological framing)<br>Function: administrative and organizational unit; produces legibility, allocates responsibility, and organizes population management and service delivery (as opposed to merely describing social togetherness). | Field assignment: Street ↔ Neighborhood interface (spatial morphology + relational organization)<br>Scale logic: meso-scale unit; often denotes an area structured around streets and blocks, but its exact scope can drift across design, planning, and everyday usage<br>Dominant domain (typical analytic use): hybrid (planning/urban design + everyday spatial referencing)<br>Function: organizes spatial coherence via street structure; can work as a descriptive morphological unit or as a planning category, depending on context. |
| **Step 2 Reconstruct semantic core** | Semantic core (Chinese-side): a bounded residential spatial unit; often implies compound-like organization and an internal order of buildings/paths/facilities.<br>Range/non-restrictions: may vary in size and design; does not necessarily imply "community" as affective solidarity.<br>Default English presuppositions to avoid: "community" tends to presuppose voluntarism, affective bonds, and bottom-up formation; these are not guaranteed by xiǎoqū. | Semantic core (Chinese-side): a territorially defined "community" as an administratively constituted space, often intertwined with governance infrastructures, service provision, and state presence.<br>Range/non-restrictions: may contain multiple residential morphologies (including *xiǎoqū*), varying social cohesion, and multiple identity registers; its existence does not depend on bottom-up formation.<br>Default English presuppositions to avoid: "community" in Anglophone urban discourse commonly implies voluntarism, affective bonds, solidarity, moral warmth, and bottom-up civic life. Those assumptions can erase the administrative/ideological dimension of shèqū. | Semantic core (Chinese-side): a "street-area / street-based area" whose coherence is produced through street layout and the clustering of buildings/activities around that network.<br>Range/non-restrictions: does not map cleanly onto any single Anglophone unit (block/district/neighborhood) in a stable way; can vary by city, policy regime, and analytic frame.<br>Default English presuppositions to avoid: "block" can over-privilege cadastral/rectilinear assumptions; "district" can overstate administrative formality and scalar weight; "neighborhood" can over-socialize the unit. |

| Term | 小区 *xiǎoqū* | 社区 *shèqū* | 街区 *jiēqū* |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Step 3 Diagnose transparency risk** | Diagnosis: False transparency risk if rendered as community; partial transparency if rendered as residential area without governance anchoring.<br>Rationale: English "community" imports Anglophone assumptions about social solidarity; the Chinese term often functions more as a bounded residential unit whose coherence may be infrastructural/managerial rather than social. | Diagnosis: False transparency if rendered simply as community.<br>Rationale: the English equivalent feels "obvious" and therefore imports an Anglophone civic ontology, hiding the degree to which shèqū is a state-defined governance unit and ideological object. | Diagnosis: typically non-transparency (or "borderline false transparency" depending on which English gloss is chosen).<br>Rationale: any single English equivalent stabilizes jiēqū too quickly and forces it into an Anglophone typological ladder (block/district/neighborhood) that does not reliably match the Chinese term's shifting scope and function. |
| **Step 4 Select strategy** | Strategy selected: Strategy A —controlled literalism + functional specification. | Strategy selected: Strategy C —de-naturalize English norms (controlled awkwardness + explicit administrative marking). | Strategy selected: Strategy B —contextual translation + morphological anchoring, with Chinese as the stable reference point. |
| **Step 5 Implement strategy (A)** | Baseline translation: "residential compound"<br>Required specification (when analytically relevant): "gated residential compound governed by a property management company."<br>Anti-error rule: do not claim community sociality unless supported by empirical evidence; avoid using "community" unqualified. | Baseline option (only when readability requires it): "community"<br>Mandatory specification when used: "administrative community," or "state-defined community," or "neighborhood governance unit."<br>Anti-error rule: never allow unqualified "community" to carry the analytic load in passages where governance/ideology is central. If the passage is about administrative responsibility, territorial management, or institutional interfaces, the English must force those dimensions into visibility. | Use context-dependent renderings, but keep jiēqū as the anchor.<br>Possible renderings (choose by analytic emphasis):<br>If emphasizing morphology: "street-based urban block/area"<br>If emphasizing the street network: "street-structured area"<br>If emphasizing an intermediate spatial unit without over-formalizing: "street district" (use cautiously; qualify).<br>Anti-error rule: avoid using "district" unqualified in contexts where administrative status is not the point; avoid "neighborhood" if the unit is being mobilized morphologically rather than socially. |
| **Step 6 Decide on Chinese retention** | If the argument hinges on governance mechanisms (access control, management regime, enclosure as a spatial technology), retain xiǎoqū as a stable anchor term, especially when multiple English renderings would otherwise flatten differences. | Retain shèqū (transliteration) when:<br>the text is theoretically sensitive (e.g., you are arguing about governance, ideology, or legibility), or<br>English "community" would cause your reader to interpret the unit as primarily social/voluntary.<br>Use first mention as: shèqū (administrative community), then shèqū as the stable anchor. | Prefer jiēqū when:<br>the chapter's argument depends on the unit's ambiguity (morphology vs governance vs everyday reference), or you need to compare multiple jiēqū types without forcing them into a single English typology.<br>First mention: *jiēqū* (street-structured area); later: *jiēqū* + occasional re-glossing when the analytic emphasis changes. |

| Term | 小区 *xiǎoqū* | 社区 *shèqū* | 街区 *jiēqū* |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Step 7 Composition rule in practice** | In narrative passages: "residential compound." In analytic passages: "xiǎoqū (residential compound)" on first use, then xiǎoqū as an anchor; add qualifiers when governance is foregrounded. | Descriptive/narrative passages: "administrative community" can work if you are explaining basic structure. Analytic passages: prefer "shèqū" as anchor + an explicit functional gloss (governance unit / administrative grid / service interface) depending on the argument. Avoid: "the community decided…" unless you can empirically support agency, decision-making mechanisms, and actors. | Establish a stable anchor early: "I use *jiēqū* to denote a street-structured meso-scale unit; English renderings vary by analytic emphasis." In figure captions or empirically dense passages, allow a more descriptive gloss ("street-structured area") to reduce cognitive load. In theory passages, keep jiēqū untranslated more often to prevent false equivalence. |
| **Step 8 Reflexive revisit** | If later chapters shift focus from management regimes to lived relational life inside the compound, revisit whether the English rendering should foreground social practice (without defaulting to "community") and document why the shift is justified. Below are two additional worked examples, executed end-to-end with the same eight-step protocol, plus a compact writing checklist you can drop into your methods chapter. | If later chapters analyze lived belonging, informal mutual aid, or affective ties, revisit whether your phrasing should foreground social practice—without erasing the administrative constitution of shèqū. Document the shift: "Here I foreground lived sociality; elsewhere I foreground administrative legibility." | If later you shift from street morphology to governance dispositifs (e.g., policing/service distribution through street-based units), revisit whether you must add explicit qualifiers (e.g., "street-based governance unit") and document why the re-glossing is necessary. |

**"How to use this in writing" checklist (drop-in)**

First mention rule: Chinese term + transliteration + controlled gloss + one-line function statement.

Anchor rule: when a term is analytically central or risky, keep Chinese as the stable reference point across chapters.

Qualification rule: if an English word is false transparency (e.g., community), it must be qualified every time it matters.

Context-variation rule: allow multiple English renderings only if you explicitly state that variation is controlled and tied to analytic emphasis.

Anti-inference rule: never attribute social cohesion, agency, or voluntarism unless empirically demonstrated (especially with *shèqū* / *xiǎoqū*).

Audit trail rule: for each key term, store (i) term profile, (ii) transparency diagnosis, (iii) rendering plan, (iv) a note on what is lost/kept.

Table C.3 Mini-glossary (protocol-facing)

| **Chinese** | ***Pinyin*** | **Field / scale role** | **Transparency diagnosis** | **Preferred rendering(s) in English prose** | **Avoid / warning** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 小区 | *xiǎoqū* | Neighborhood (meso): bounded residential unit; often tied to enclosure + management regimes | False / partial (context-dependent) | residential compound; when needed: gated residential compound / managed residential compound; optionally xiǎoqū (residential compound) as anchor | Avoid unqualified community (over-socializes; imports voluntarism/solidarity assumptions). |
| 社区 | *shèqū* | Neighborhood (meso): state-defined governance-and-service unit (often ideological/administrative) | False transparency | *shèqū* (administrative community) on first use; then shèqū; or neighborhood governance unit / administrative community | Avoid plain community when governance/ideology is analytically central (it reads as bottom-up civic sociality). |
| 街区 | *jiēqū* | Street ↔ Neighborhood interface (meso): street-structured area/unit; scope can drift by context | Non-transparency / borderline false (depending on gloss) | *jiēqū* (street-structured area) as anchor; context glosses: street-based area, street-structured block/area | Avoid unqualified district (over-formalizes) or neighborhood (over-socializes) unless you explicitly justify the frame. |
| 四合院 | *sìhéyuàn* | House (micro): enclosure/configuration logic; typology is also cultural-historical | False transparency (via typological domestication) | *sìhéyuàn* (retain) + controlled gloss: "courtyard-centered enclosed dwelling compound" (as needed) | Avoid treating courtyard house as a fully equivalent typological match; "house" can narrow the semantic core (enclosure/configuration). |
| 巷 | *xiàng* | Street lexicon (micro/meso): fine-grained passageway with strong local semantic texture | Non / radical non-transparency | *xiàng* (retain) + descriptive gloss by context: "alley-lane / lane-like passage" | Avoid locking it to alley as if equivalence were stable; preserve flexibility + local specificity. |
| 道 | *dào* | Street lexicon (cross-scale): conceptual anchor with semantic range that exceeds "road/way" | Radical non-transparency | *dào* (retain) + short functional explanation in context (e.g., "a 'route/way' category with broader semantic scope") | Avoid way as a default one-word solution; it collapses the term's conceptual anchoring and range. |

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# 声 明

本人郑重声明：所呈交的学位论文，是本人在导师指导下，独立进行研究工作所取得的成果。尽我所知，除文中已经注明引用的内容外，本学位论文的研究成果不包含任何他人享有著作权的内容。对本论文所涉及的研究工作做出贡献的其他个人和集体，均已在文中以明确方式标明。

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# RESUME

## RESEARCH GROUPS

- COST Action EUROGLOSS – A Glossary of Technical Construction Vocabulary in 17th–18th Century European Court Residences
- Joint Research Unit "Transitional Morphologies" (Southeast University of Nanjing / Politecnico di Torino, 2018)

## WORK EXPERIENCE – TEACHING ACTIVITIES

2025-2026

- University of Turin - Department of Modern Languages and Literatures
- Contract Professor of Chinese Language and Literature

2022-2024

- University of Turin - Department of Cultures, Politics and Society
- Contract Professor of Chinese Language

2013-2024

- University of Turin - Department of Modern Languages and Literatures
- Contract Professor of Chinese Language and Literature

2019-2023

- Politecnico di Torino - Department of Architecture and Design
- Teaching contract
- Chinese language

2003-2023

- Centroriente (Italian-Chinese Institute - Turin)
- Teacher
- Chinese language (Elementary - Intermediate - Advanced)

2003-2015

- Mangetsu Service Snc - Mangetsu Service di Federico Madaro
- Owner
- Chinese language and China training in industrial corporations

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING

2022-2026

- PhD Candidate “Architecture. History and Project”, Politecnico di Torino / Tsinghua University Beijing

MUR DM 351 - Urban Heritage and Urban Legacy between Asia and Europe

1990-1997

- University of Turin - Bachelor of Arts in Oriental Foreign Languages and Literatures (equivalent to master’s degree – Italian Interministerial Decree 02/07/2009)
- Chinese language and literature; Linguistics
- Degree in Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures 110/110 cum laude

1996-1997

- People's Republic of China Scholarship - Jilin University (PRC)
- Research title: "Transgressive Language in Modern Chinese"

1996

- SETL (European School of Literary Translation) Master in Literary Translation
- Principal subjects/occupational skills covered Literary Translation from Chinese
- SETL Diploma

1990-1993

- CESMEO (Center for Middle and Far Eastern Studies)
- Principal subjects/occupational skills covered Chinese language and culture
- ISMEO Diploma (Middle and Far Eastern Institute - Rome)

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS

### Published

MADARO F. La parola. Lingua cinese moderna standard[M]. Torino: SEB27, 2015.

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MONTANARO G, MADARO F. Publicness e politiche di rivitalizzazione rurale in Cina: il caso studio di Zhaoshancun[M]//Publicness: le sfide della dimensione pubblica nelle città e nei territori. [出版地不详]: Società Italiana degli Urbanisti, 待刊.

# COMMENTS FROM THESIS SUPERVISOR

# RESOLUTION OF THESIS DEFENSE COMMITTEE