

# CHINA TRANSFORMING: THE EYES OF PHOTOGRAPHERS AND CINEMA DIRECTORS

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## **Abstract**

*The transformations occurred in Chinese society from the end of 90's correspond with the fisonomy of its cities. Old buildings have given way to unending skyscrapers. A wide highway network joins renovated cities that photographers and film directors have known to capture with their cameras. Those images show the disorder generated by this transition process towards a new stage in a country where the weight of tradition is deeply rooted in the demolished houses' foundations.*

*The occidental and oriental vision through the camera converges rendering evident the loss of notion of city as it was understood until a decade ago.*

*The film's director Jennifer Baichwal and the photographer Edward Burtynsky join efforts on Manufactured Landscapes film production. In the meantime, young filmmakers like Han Jie, show the city of Shanghai in all fullness in the short film Being and Nothingless. All of them develop their works oscillating between art and document.*

**Keywords:** China, Cinema, Photography, History, City.

## **1. Introduction**

Travelling and man's own register are two closely linked parameters that prove his longing to get to know alien territories, away from his habitat, as well as his interest to show them to his kind. Throughout History, there different destinations and supports have been used to convey and document what travellers have seen. Although initially it was extensive documents that would describe the explored territories in detail, paintings took over this passion to discover the world. As Carmelo Vega points out (2007): 'The paintings and literature of that time were full of landscapes with ruins and gave shape, in all manners, to a new Romantic sensitivity and iconography that recalled the past' (p.125).

The clarity of photographs to capture even the finest detail, which sometimes photographers are not able to perceive, caused that it became the unavoidable successor. This gave rise to the fact that many traveller photographers started expeditions around the world. Indeed European photographers travelled to the most

diverse places to export images of the main cities and towns to the West.

The three most sought after destinations were: Rome, as the Classicism pattern that has been visited since the 18th century by people who wanted to rediscover the sources of Ancient art; the East, and the actual past of the photographer's environment. With the passing of time, as the European cities grew during the second half of the 19th century, a part of their buildings were doomed to destruction. This situation brought about their immortalization by photographers before they actually disappeared and were replaced by more modern constructions.

What interests here the most about the places mentioned in this article is the fascination for exoticism, which at that historic time then was the East. That is: a territory as vast as imprecise, a place of dreaming that started in Spain (in its Arab imprint), went across the African and Asian countries of the coal-mining area (Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Turkey), then along ancient Mesopotamia all the way until the Far East (India, China and Japan). (Vega, 2007, pp. 117-152)

### **1.1. Photography in China: origins**

The arrival of photography in China did not follow a singular pattern but rather the patterns of other places, whereby travellers would impose their customs. One must not forget that this new prototype of travellers spent around two years to cover such distance and portray it in depth. Moreover they were not the first ones to arrive there, as traders had already started the path of the Age of Discovery, though without the power a photography camera had for a document, as it was convincing evidence.

However Eastern culture set two differences. The first one lied in the long tradition the locals had with regard to printing images. In addition to this, text and image were indissoluble in China. From a more technical approach, the second difference is related to the camera obscura, whose use was perfectly mastered in Europe since Leonardo da Vinci's time but did not arrive to the East until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This unavoidably implies a different way of gazing. However at that time then the number of autochthonous photographers was very limited. The 60 Western photographers who were recorded in the census of China between 1846 and 1912 were three times the number of the indigenous ones, who were mostly in Hong-Kong, according to the book *Imperial China* (Sougez y Pérez Gallardo, 2007, p.665).

Some of the travellers who went to China at that time include Felice Beato in 1860, and particularly, the Englishman John Thomson, as one must not forget the colonial relevance of the United Kingdom in this area. The latter immortalized imperial palaces, the monuments of ancient civilizations, the ruralest areas and most populous streets, as well as their inhabitants. When he went back to his country, he published four books titled *Illustrations of China and Its People* (1873) and *Foochow and the River Min* (1873), which were very successful indeed.

The remaining production of the 19th and part of the 20th centuries focused on China's exoticism and photography as a graphical document. The single exception was Ellen Thorbecke, the wife of the Dutch Ambassador in Peking in 1932, who exported to China some experimental techniques that were fashionable at that time in Europe.

### **1.2. Photography after Mao**

In October 1949 the Communists proclaimed the foundation of the People's Republic of China, a political project led by Mao Zedong. This resulted in the country giving its back to the West and becoming devoted to its own peasantry, which was prioritized over the urban population.

In order to achieve his objectives, that is to make his country a great power, Mao did not need intellectuals nor artists, who were forced to move to remote rural areas to be re-educated according to his ideology (Chang and Halliday, 2006, pp.514-516). Artistic works had no place in it. According to these authors, 'He

prohibited reading everything but the *Little Red Book* of the Communist Party's propaganda, as well as opera, theatre, music, fine arts, dance, cinema... (2006, p. 598). These re-education and prohibitions are perfectly reflected in the film *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, directed by Dai Sijie in 2002. The film is about two teenagers who are sent for a Maoist re-education in the mountains in contact with local peasants who work really hard. The main characters combine the work with reading forbidden books at night.

After Mao's death in 1976 there was a period of political openness led by Deng Xiaoping, which was not without difficulties for photographic images, as Susana Iturrioz (2007) says: 'At the beginning of the 1980's, photography was only known as an artistic means of expression'. According to her, the reasons are based on the shortage of photographic material and the fact that citizens were in the wake of a still partially controlled artistic freedom: 'It was hard enough trying to evolve artistically beyond realist Socialism to think of photography as something that was more than purely documentary or propagandistic' (p. 39).

The laws on artistic issues softened since 1985, and the Chinese Modern Photography Exhibition opened. Participants' statements revealed what the past lacked of: 'As we are young and inexperienced, there still a lot to learn' (Sougez y Pérez Gallardo, 2007, p.666).

The commodating attitude inherent to Den Xiaoping's rule had its ups and downs. Indeed on June 4, 1989, the protests of Chinese students in Tiananmen Square demanding for more freedom of expression were violently silenced. This aggression favoured many artists' volunteer exile mainly to the United States, Europe and Japan. In Susana Iturrioz's words (2007), 'when they came back, many artists found new cities which, at the beginning, they disliked' (p.35). Surprisingly this is not due to the fast changes Chinese cities were undergoing.

### 1.3. Chinese cities

Before continuing, it is necessary to analyse the concept of city and its changes in order to analyse further ahead how they have been captured by both cinema and photography cameras.

Generally speaking, and according to town-planning and public territorial policy expert Jordi Borja (2005), 'Building a town consists of planning a relationship space, building significant places of common life' (p.128). It is therefore creating spaces where architecture, culture and community become a whole. That is, places where the first decision is their location. The motivations that have become the most representative ones in the election of a place or another have not always been the same. Initially it was gods that undertook this mission, as Rosa Olivares points out (2005): 'The ideal town was the one that gods built for man to live' (p.16); later on it was economic or military reasons put forward by men that became consolidated.

In the case of China, it was the so called 'Founder' who decided the specific place where a construction should be built. He did so 'dressed up in his sacred habits, and then would carry out an inspection of the locations, followed by guessing operations: this inspection is considered a yin and yang check. The tenth month of the year is that when, according to the rites, a construction had to be accomplished; the first few days of spring were those when the constructions had to be completed, and of course, inaugurated' (Granet, 1988, quoted in Gouvion Saint-Cyr, 2007, p.8).

This millennial tradition, which perfectly combined balance and harmony, contrasts with the new cities of a continent with 1300 million inhabitants and where the space layout does not response to criteria based on historic references, but it comes out of nothing; towns that are created with a clear vertical linearity forming immense blocks that lay on a past culture. This culture has been swept away in the last few decades under still valid Chinese precepts. In this respect, Agnès de Gouvion Saint-Cyr (2007) points out: 'When Wang Qingsong made his *One hundred sings of the demolition*, he denounced this massive demolition campaign, but reminded us that when a dynasty had lost the 'mandate of heaven', its achievements were systematically

destroyed and it was considered as an indispensable prior condition to establish a new order' (p.9).

Under this prism, the current reform, which lacks precedents with regard to its magnitude, has replaced strict Communism by a liberal Socialism that is defined by José Reinoso (2008) as: 'A Western-style capitalism under a strong Government intervention and a one-party system' (p.58).

We are undergoing a reinvention of a system whose origins are found in the 1990's, when the market openness became obvious and Western capital was introduced in China. In addition to this, there is the local business-making enterprising spirit which with there was a solution for the new economic structure in sight regarding its shadowed vigour towards trading.

Economic success has been related to dramatic transformations in the town-planning field, which has resulted in large cities changing their aspect. Zhu Qi (2007) explained this situation in a graphical way: 'The length of the highway network exceeded that of the USA. Shanghai has 3000 skyscrapers, more than the whole West American coast. The old buildings and its dwellings started to disappear from the cities and their residents were taken to cheap flats in the outskirts' (p.17).

Figures reveal there was an increasing agglomeration around the cities which was unknown till then. In twenty years, from 1980 to 2010, the population of Peking raised from 6,448,000 to 11,741,000. The boom of Shanghai is even greater than this as it almost triplicated its inhabitants in that same period of time (raising from 7,608,000 to 19,000,000) (Gil, 2008); in that year the authorities changed the one-child policy to avoid fast-ageing population and approved a law that allowed having two children. This new situation is expected to increase the population in three more millions in the next decade.

According to Frédéric Edelman (2008), 'Never before in the history of Humanity has a country undergone such an important change in such a short period of time' (p.15). The reasons have to be particularly found in the geographic and social mobility of Chinese people who moved to the city to work and left the countryside, causing an inland migration movement unknown till then. They are Chinese, most of them young, who immigrated to the cities attracted by the images shown by the television where the possibilities of succeeding and becoming rich are not in their places of origin but in these macro cities. This way, Mao's betting on the peasantry was frustrated by this new trend which ended in increasingly populated Chinese metropolis.

Needless to say that this avalanche of labour implied a radical change of the cities layout, where bulldozers became the main protagonists. Indeed the cities were immersed in parallel construction and deconstruction processes where the word *chengshi*, city in Chinese, did not seem to have lost its meaning. We must not forget that this is a word composed by two words: *Cheng*, wall, and *Shi*, market. Both are not present in the current planning of the new large cities.

In these metropolis the *hutong*, the old traditional alleyways and courtyard homes with low density, where all the rooms overlooked the courtyard and which consolidated family and neighbour relationships and thus communications, were demolished and replaced by impersonal apartment blocks built in their place.

The statistics of the Shanghai and Peking local offices reveal that the level of buildings built can only but confirm this rising trend<sup>1</sup>. According to the director of the French institute of architecture, Francis Rambert (2008): 'Economic growth and architecture go hand in had (...) In 2003 over 40% of the Chinese population lived in the city compared to 13.6%, in 1954' (p.12).

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<sup>1</sup> The book *Shanghai Transforming* offers in detail all the relevant quantitative data about economic, social and equipment changes in this city, as well as a comparison with Peking, among other Chinese metropolis. For example, the graphics about the construction of buildings are in pages 34-36.

#### 1.4. The new Chinese cities before a camera

From here on, we are going to look into how city artists interpreted the city. This topic is not unknown to photographers and cinema directors who have researched into it right from the beginning. Eugene Atget, Andr  Kert sz, Margaret Bourke White, Berenice Abbott, Brassai, William Klein, Gabriele Basilico, Philip Lorca diCorcia, among many others, are part of a list of artists who have chosen the city as an excuse to keep on researching into concepts like territory, landscape, architecture and society. However, this article focuses on how the new Chinese cities mentioned in previous pages have been seen through the camera, together with their transformations; how, after the political openness, hundreds of artists focused on the changes and expressed so in their work.

As it has been said before, a generation of artists who left China and got an education in American and European cities, did not recognise their habitat when they returned and felt a sensation of strangeness. This situation did not purely imply satisfaction but in many cases it was perceived as a conflict since economic growth brought about environmental degradation, corruption and lack of order.

The crystallization of this renovation process of the cities in images caused at the end of the 1990's the so called *hot image* or intensive image. Zh  Qi (2008) says that it is about 'works that have spaces full of untidiness, high buildings, cars and wiggly crowd. These are usually images full of imagination and instable energy' (p.19).

##### 1.4.1. Photographic approaches

From a purely photographic viewpoint, we must firstly point out the approaches of Chinese authors to their own environment. That is, the work of a series of artists who express throughout their images their reactions to the transformations taking place. They are artists who choose photography to convey with irony, criticism and concern a cultural social changing reality. According to Barbara Pollack, these authors find in this support a means that provides 'the immediacy that allows them showing the changes that are taking place in China as they occur' (Pollack, 2008, quoted in Iturrioz, 2007).

These photographers share some features, ranging from the *performance*, deeply rooted in Chinese artistic movements, to the influence of international photography works, easily accessible on the Internet. We must add to this the use of self-portrait as a formula to contribute with their forms of expression in the ongoing reforms.

Some of the photographers attracted by the performance include Rong Rong, which started to document these ephemeral actions. Zhang Huan, Ma Liuming, Zu Zhou, and many others of the Peking artistic group, were captured by their camera's objective. However, more recently with his series *Liulitun* (2002-03) it would be he himself, together with Japanese artist Inri, who showed their concern regarding the landscapes with ruins and the town-planning pressure over the cities. The presence of both in images portraying demolished places proves the denunciation that, according to Elena Vozmediano (2009), 'is expressed through an imaginary associable to Japanese terror stories, and the use of photographic sequences following a presence/absence hiding dynamic'.

Following this trend, where spaces in process of demolishing are interesting for taking, there are Zhang Dali and his *Demolition* and *Dialogue* collections, and Liu Jin with *Hanging Angel*. The former portrays his head profiled which he has previously drawn with a spray on the walls to be demolished in Peking. Sometimes there are modern buildings standing out from these ruins, whereas some other times you can see heads with holes in them on the walls of old constructions. This way, the author rebels himself against the annihilation of the town-planning past. In addition to this Liu Jin halfway, through the *performance*, young people photos and experimenting, makes his self-portrays in urban landscapes that combine perfectly well nature, skyscrapers and the remains of past demolished constructions. With bloody wings as single clothing, he

expresses his opposition to the transformation Chinese cities are undergoing.

The schoolgirls that are protagonists of Weng Peijun's photos in *On the Wall Haikou*, 2002, have also their back to us. They are students looking at the future, the modern city, sit on a wall that becomes the dividing line between the old and the modern city. The wall is the watchtower from where the new city's changes and excessive growth can be observed.

From a more developed perspective there is Miao Xiachu's proposal who, like his colleagues, captures the coexistence of the past and the present. In his photos there is a character dressed in traditional clothes going along different spaces with impassivity. This sort of Chinese scholar contrasts with the remaining elements of the shot. In *Another Time*, 2002, his statism clashes with the speed suggested by a moped; or like in *Ferry*, 2002 where his image and that of a tourist are face to face under a huge bridge. There is no doubt that this author conveys his nostalgia for a regime where the quietness and elegance of a past in the process of vanishing prevail; and he also expresses his contempt for a current system where communication is becoming increasingly problematic.

Together with the two previously mentioned authors, and without making references to the past in the framing, there are several photographers who wonder about the new constructions. This is the case of Xu Zheng, who titles ??????????????, that is, thirteen question marks, one of his 2004 series, which is apparently a documentary and the main topic are a few skyscrapers.

There are others like Shi Gourui and Yang Zhenzhong who photographed the new Shanghai. The former, with a camera obscure who reproduces inverted tones and in black and white to convey yearning; whereas the latter is in the opposite side, that is, he uses the most modern digital technology and defies the law of gravity and registers several characters who support the weight of constructions. In these impossible compositions the photographer calls *Light as Fuck*, 2002, he tries to denounce how deceptive the dramatic transformations of Chinese cities can be.

Other contributions, in this case from the West, are the shots by Angel Marcos and Edward Burtynsky. The former photographs Hong Kong, Peking and Shanghai with a common factor: the dialogue that comes from the publicity between the ruling power in the city and population. Like the previous photographers, he combines perfectly well a civilization in ruins on the forefront and the vertical masses of its new constructions at the background. Marcos offers the possibility of travelling through the *hutongs* that he shots with his camera, just like cinema director Jon Avnet did in 1997 in his film *El laberinto rojo*. In it, an American lawyer, played by Richard Gere, is chased along narrow alleys, communal courtyards and tiled roofs that Marcos' shots show.

Whereas Marcos photographs capture in detail and closeness this World in the process of extinguishing, Edward Burtynsky focuses more on the immensity of skyscrapers, which invade the past cities non stop. In the same framing he captures the different scales between old and modern construction shapes. He selects a point of view and a perspective until superposing ten flats over an old house in ruins, like in *Urban Renewal#8*. According to Ramón Esparza (2007), these photos portray: 'the inexorable advance of a new (ideological) town-planning order that rides roughshod over traditional cities, and with them history' (p. 28). The reasons that lead these foreign photographers to photograph Chinese cities are totally opposed to those of their predecessors, the first expeditionary members who looked with nostalgia what their civilizations had lost. They would leave their cities in the search for genuine, exotic and wild ones.

The concept of beauty in the city has changed and Gaucheraud would with difficulty encourage his compatriots, as he did in 1839, to immortalize the most beautiful places in the whole world and take them to France, having the Chinese new cities in mind. There is little left of the past in metropolis like Shanghai or Peking. However photographer Maxime Du Camp's words still make sense when he criticises the 1855 photography exhibition and refers to the East as 'an inexhaustible mine'. Indeed it is endless because these

cities have become the new pattern of the future the remaining cities of the world are watching. Whereas last century it was New York that became the focus of town-planning attention due to its skyscrapers, it is Chinese cities that stand out today not only because of their construction height but also the contrasts of old fashioned ones that can still be seen today. Moreover these contemporary photographers are direct successors of those who moved to Paris and London, among other cities, in the 19th century to perpetuate the architectonic legacy in process of disappearing. This would be replaced by a new model whose singularity regarding the past is the loss of the always longed-for identity. Therefore, an ahistoric point of reference.

#### 1.4.2. Cinematographic approaches

With regard to cinematographic treatment, the first aspect to bear in mind is the contrast between the formulas used in classic and current cinema. As José Luis Sánchez Noriega said (2004): 'There are cinematographic productions of cities (Shanghai) that are due to a mythological legacy rather than reality and in fact, many of them lack of a description of their streets or hot spots (*The Shanghai gesture*) or the title is but a simple evocation (*The Lady of Shanghai*)' (p.108).

Indeed, in that last film, there is just one moment at the beginning, when Michael O'Hara (Orson Welles) saves Elsa Bannister (Rita Hayworth) from a robbery and they introduced to each other, when she tells him that she is from a place he does not know; then she immediately mentions several Chinese cities, such as Shanghai. The film shows real settings like Acapulco, New York and California. It is only in one of the final scenes that the sign *Shanghai Low* appears which takes spectators into a theatre mounted in the sets of *Columbia Studios*, a reference to this city. In short, the name is used to reinforce the exoticism of the film and its main character.

Moreover, *The Shanghai gesture*, 1941, directed by Josef Von Sternberg, tells the story of *Mother Gin Sling's* who is informed by the governor of decadent cosmopolitan Shanghai that her popular casino is going to be demolished because of the district is going to be remodelled. After receiving that information, she designs a strategy to avoid such destruction. In this film there are no visual references to Shanghai. However on several occasions, the characters tell that the current problems the city has were used in the past as a bargaining chip. *Mother Gin Sling's* herself said that 'from time to time, Shanghai decides to clean itself like a swan in a muddy lake' or later on her Chinese companion would express a situation that is repeated in the last decade in contemporary Shanghai: 'they want to speculate with the land and they want to get rid of us'. Therefore this film -whose storyline starts with the clear intention of making Shanghai's oldest headquarter disappear to eliminate certain vices of the city-, does not show urban architecture and spectators have to imagine it with the dialogues.

Spanish director Fernando Trueba shot a film with the same title in 2002 where Shanghai, as photograph director José Luis López Linares explains, 'is the territory of imagination. In fact, it is an excuse (...) we have been able to build it new. And now, I must refer to the magnificent work by Salvador Parra and Emilio Ruiz'. They also explain in detail how the sceneries that had to take spectators to the most genuine city atmosphere were built: 'the street of Shanghai that appears in the film and is 150 metres long was built in the slaughterhouse of Legazpi, Madrid. The opium den and the interiors of *Yellow Sky* were also built in Madrid. The location shots and Shanghai harbour were made in the old Barcelona harbour...' (labutaca.net, 2009).

In this same line there is the city that appears in *55 days at Peking* (1963) directed by Nicholas Ray. This film takes us back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Forbidden City - Peking, where neither foreigners nor Chinese people had access under the ruling of the Ming and Qing dynasties. This space is but a scenery built in Madrid under Gil Parraondo's supervision and carried out by important Fallas artists.

It would not be until 1987 that Bertolucci really showed the Forbidden City in *The Last Emperor*. From now

on sceneries were replaced by real spaces, as the Director of the Contemporary Culture Centre of Barcelona, Josep Ramoneda (2009), points out: 'As the 20<sup>th</sup> century was coming to an end, the places of films were no longer the fictitious territories made of papier-mâché. Streets, villages, cities (...) were the new places, which ploughed by the hand of film makers, became fiction territories'. Indeed they were real territories reinvented so that the cinema can tell different stories: 'a sort of common territory –the city of film makers- (...), where directors, scriptwriters and architects meet and dialogue from the distance as a result of the different ways to see reality'.

This superimposition of cinematographic actions over the same urban space represent the city and relate it to the idea of *post-it-city*. That is, these are films that 'stand out the reality of urban territories as the place where different uses and situations overlap' (Ramoneda, 2008); films that take over the city spaces and subjugate them to their interpretations and which finally, according to Kluge (quoted in Yingjin Zhang, 2007), succeed in that 'cinema provides a spatial link between "nowhere" and "everywhere"'.

This appropriation of city places, that is but a variant of the classic documentary cinema and can entail proposals that are totally away from this genre, is the basis of *In the Chinese city. Perspectives on the transmutations of an Empire*. This exhibition, whose commissioner is Frédéric Edelman, is inspired by a sentence of the book *The Chinaman of Pain*, by Austrian author Peter Handke: 'Close your eyes and the blackness of characters will make the lights of the city appear'. Five Chinese cinema directors, Han Jie, Chen Tao, Peng Tao, Li Hongqi, and Jia Zhangke give their point of view about Shanghai, Xi'an, Chongqing, Canton and Suzhou respectively in this exhibition.

The result is adapted to what the expert on this subject, Zhang Zhen (mentioned in Miranda, 2007), includes in what she calls 'Urban Generation'; according to it, 'the one and most important feature that is shared by recent films made by young innovative film makers is a strong sensitiveness to the housing development-related problems'. In this respect, director Chen Tao shows the choices of a young man according to the changes that are taking place in the industrial city of Xi'an, whereas Peng Tao critically describes the transformations of the economic capital of China, Chongqing. One must not forget that this city is the greatest exporter of labour. From here, people are sent to any other place to build new megalopolis across the country.

As for Han Jie, who titles his 1943 novel *L'être et le Neant*, like Jean Paul Sartre, filmed a young city, Shanghai. Based on the French writer's existentialist theory, he shows a city transformed by the dreams of these young people who come from everywhere and defend freedom in order to take their own decisions and see in Shanghai the ideal place to discover what they really want.

In any case, this 'experimental urban cinema' complies with the common premises that Zhang Zhen underlines (quoted in Miranda, 2007): 'The interest for the drastic process of urbanization (...), taking the point of view of a witness who 'critically reveals the violent aspects of a society in transformation ...'.

Film director Jennifer Baitchwall and photographer Edward Burtynsky are witnesses of the changes that are taking place in China. Indeed they show such transformations in the film *Manufactured Landscapes*, 2008. Throughout it, fixed and moving images alternate to show different mutant landscapes. Moving shots where the image stops and fixed images where the zoom goes through the framing to view the disappearance of 13 cities and over one thousand villages under the Three Gorges Dam or the growth of 'the new fastest city in the world', Shanghai. Pans of old and recent constructions have place for their inhabitants' contradictory comments. The youngest ones consider that: 'Generally speaking, the quality of life has improved. People feel happy in a new surrounding'. Moreover they think that 'the old generations are not happy because they believe their hearts belong to old places'. Old people talk with nostalgia about their grandparents' and their parents' house, and the place where they have lived their whole life.

The film has also place for those who say that violence and deception are part of this new city: 'They would

come in through the door (...) They would deceive the people to make them leave, sometimes forcing them, and some other times they would hit the people'. Many decades before, 67 years to be exact, Charter, a character of *The Shanghai gesture* who tried to destroy a district in Shanghai, said similar things and, from fiction, was ahead of this city's reality 'It's only a matter of pressing the others until they end up selling (...) Some will like that this district disappears'.

As one can remember, in this film the city was present only in its actors' dialogues. Now in *Manufactured Landscapes* and the films made by the new Chinese filmmakers, 'cinema is the art of space, of the place ...' It is the art of shooting in real locations. And this is precisely the great difference when it comes to build these new Chinese cities through images.

### 1.5. Conclusions

China's recent history is the history of a series of political and economic transformations that have a clear repercussion in the town-planning structure of Chinese cities, beyond the cultural level. Whereas Maoist ruling annulled the cultural legacy and consigned it to the rural areas, under new ruler Deng Xiaoping this process is reversed.

This new openness scenario brings about new unprecedented migratory currents to the main Chinese cities. These population movements implied a fast destruction and reconstruction of the cities depending on their growth. Artists, photographers and filmmakers did not keep out of this situation and take over spaces to turn them into their works' protagonists.

These new metropolis and the changes they are undergoing have enough power so as to become themselves the main motif of the store to tell, without needing the old elaborated sets of the past.

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