THE IMPORTANCE OF CHINESE VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE IN EXPLAINING THE DECLINE OF RUJIASIXIANG IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

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ABSTRACT

An overlooked factor that explains for China’s widening moral vacuum and waning rujiasixiang (Confucian-Mencian thought) is the destruction of Chinese vernacular architecture, for architectural space not only shapes social behavior but reflects and embodies specific morals and values. This paper uses Beijing as a case study in order to explore how the rapid demolition of siheyuan (traditional quadrangle courtyards) has contributed to China’s changing moral landscape. There is existing literature regarding how space provides a fundamental physical framework in which traditions, values, and culture are both reflected and reinforced. However, while there is documentation of and resistance against the bulldozing of Chinese vernacular architecture, few studies connect space with China’s widening moral vacuum. Examination of space offers a new and unconventional approach to this traditional political science question. The research procedure for this paper involves detailed analysis of the three dominant paradigms used to account for China’s vanishing rujiasixiang, and shows how they contain credence but are inadequate for presenting the whole picture. In the spirit of Peter Katzenstein, in which eclecticism can greatly contribute to problem solving, this paper seeks to prove that an understudied explanation for the rujiasixiang problem lies in space and vernacular architecture. It uses Beijing as an example to highlight the consequences associated with
the erosion of environments that are culturally rooted and locally produced, and draws on a wide breadth of secondary reading to convey the significance of space, and emphasizes how it comprises physical, mental, and social dimensions, and is constituted through concrete human practices. The methodology also includes researching specific, detailed architectural components of siheyuan, assessing the principles its structure espouses, and tracing how the very social rules built into the quadrangle courtyard’s configuration is uprooted by urbanization, ultimately resulting in a dramatic value shift.
Written in loving memory of Liang Sicheng and Lin Huiyin
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHINA’S MORAL VACUUM</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARADIGMS</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE IMPORTANCE OF VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHINA’S MORAL VACUUM

Much anxiety exists over the moral vacuum that is currently widening in China and the correlating degradation of *rujiasixiang*, also known as Confucian-Mencian thought. These teachings are deeply embedded in Chinese tradition, yet their influence is declining quickly in urban spaces. The dominant paradigms that explain for this change include: China’s transition from empire to nation-state; the devastating chaos of the Cultural Revolution; and the post-Maoist economic reforms. All three are plausible but unsuccessful in fully answering why Confucianism is fading from Chinese cities.

Following Peter Katzenstein’s logic of eclecticism,¹ an often overlooked but significant cause for China’s moral vacuum and waning *rujiasixiang* is the destruction of vernacular architecture, which not only reflects but promotes said ideals. After two decades of sweeping destruction of *hutong* neighborhoods, less than a thousand *siheyuan* have been designated for preservation and saved from summary destruction.² This has led to the uprooting of traditional values like Confucian-Mencian thought, drastically altering China’s moral landscape.

Since the early 2000s there has been talk among Chinese politicians and scholars of a growing moral vacuum within the country. The phrase is interchangeable with moral crisis and moral void, but lacks a set definition and is tossed around rather loosely. It has been adopted by both the Chinese and Western press to describe a troubling phenomenon of declining ethics in the People’s Republic of China (PRC). News reports in October 2011, for instance, detail a tragedy that sent shockwaves around China and the rest of the

international community. A two-year-old girl Yueyue was run over twice; as she lay on the ground, writhing in pain, before being hit by the second vehicle, eighteen people – on their bicycles, in cars or on foot – passed by but chose to ignore her. Finally, a 58-year-old female garbage collector came to the girl's rescue, but it was too late. By the time Yueyue was brought to the hospital, she was already brain dead.³

Closely aligned with this deepening moral vacuum is the degradation of rujiasixiang. The ethical-sociopolitical teachings of Confucius and Mencius have dominated China’s moral landscape for centuries, though it has undergone periods of attack and manipulation since the founding of the 1912 Republic.⁴ Despite rujiasixiang being deeply embedded in Chinese history in addition to the CCP’s active promotion of it,⁵ the Chinese people’s adherence to its moral lessons is diminishing. These include benevolence (as well as benevolent governance), harmony (with nature, within the family, and within society), filial piety, self-cultivation, and humans’ innate goodness.

In order to better grasp such concepts it is useful to turn to the original texts themselves. Meng-Tzu VI.A.2, a brief recording of a conversation between Kao-tzu and Mencius, serves as a quintessential example. The former says, “Human nature is like rushing water, open it to the direction of the east and it will flow east, open it to the direction of the west and it will flow west. Human nature’s not being divided into good

⁴ Vera Schwarcz writes in “A Curse on the Great Wall: The Problem of Enlightenment in Modern China” that enlightenment oriented intellectuals in China sought to awaken the Chinese people from prolonged self-enslavement to the values of Confucianism. Such traditional concepts prevented them from taking advantage of the opportunity for the individual and social autonomy made possible by the demise of the imperial bureaucratic state in 1911.
and bad is like water not distinguishing between east and west.” At that point, Mencius responds, “It may be true that water does not distinguish between east and west, but does it not distinguish between up and down? Human nature is innately good just as water naturally flows downwards. People not harboring badness is like water not flowing downwards. If you take water and strike it, it can jump over one’s forehead; if you dam it and make it go, it has the potential to flow up a mountain. But is this water’s innate nature? Its circumstances cause it to be like this. The capability of humans to not be good is also like this.”

Mencius’s answer implies that outside factors are to blame for people’s transgressions. It is the fault of the system, institutions, or some other deeper reason that badness exists. For a philosopher who idealized Confucianism and espoused that the young ought to plant mulberry trees so the old can enjoy clothes of fine silk, China’s current moral landscape may seem like a nightmare. People too ambivalent to lend a helping hand and the widespread little emperor syndrome caused by the one-child policy hardly match the kind of social harmony Mencius envisioned. At the same time, the philosopher would argue that this degradation of morality is not the fault of the people, but is linked to state failure.

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6 Translated by author from Classical Chinese. Taken from A.D. Syrokomla-Stefanowska’s *A Classical Chinese Reader*.

7 Meng-tzu I.A.3

8 Ironically, and also quite sadly, in Meng-tzu II.A.6 the philosopher makes another assertion as to why human nature is innately good. He uses the example of a child tottering on the edge of the well who suddenly loses balance and, letting out a scream, is about to fall in – everyone’s first reaction is one of fear. According to Mencius, anyone witnessing such a sight would immediately rush over in order to save the child, not because they want to win favors from the child’s parents or that they want the child to stop screaming, but because human nature is kind and benevolent. When we compare this to Yueyue’s case, wherein nobody bothered to save her after she was run over by a van, it is quite clear that many people in China have since forgotten Mencius’s lessons.
In what sense the state has failed to provide an adequate moral framework in addition to what accounts for the degradation of traditional values such as *rujiasixiang* is debated by myriad academics. Joseph R. Levenson attributes this to the transition from T’ian-hsia (tianxia: all under heaven) to Kuo (nation-state). He argues that the growing influence of Western-style modernity led the Chinese to revaluate existing traditional philosophies. He writes:

Confucian reformers found a great deal wrong with China in the seventeenth century... In the early twentieth century, anti-Confucian reformers... traced disaster... not to the flouting of fixed ideals but to blind and slavish respect for them, to the fixity itself. A seventeenth-century world, a t’ien-hsia 天下, in which traditional values claimed authority, had become a twentieth century nation, a kuo 国, in which traditional values were impugned as tyranny.9

This opening highlights the continuity of dissatisfaction in Chinese state-builders, which can be traced over the generations. More importantly, it points to the disparate history and philosophies imbued in t’ien-hsia and kuo. The former is a concept commonly mentioned by both Confucius and Mencius, and is tied to t’ien-tzu 天子, son of heaven, mandate of heaven, and benevolent rule. More importantly, it signifies empire – specifically the Chinese empire – and alternately the world. It implies that China is the world. In contrast, kuo is a local political unit. It is seen as a part of the empire in classical times, and in the modern world, the nation. The late nineteenth century and early twentieth century witnessed a series of shameful defeats such as the Opium Wars and Boxer Rebellion, which led the people to question Qing legitimacy and t’ien-hsia. The world was changing drastically and revolutionaries feared that if China did not also

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modernize it would not be able to keep up. This led to the adoption of *kuo*, which not only connotes land and people but protection by military force.\(^{10}\)

Levenson concludes that the relinquishment of *t’ien-hsia* sparked a revaluation of Chinese identity and values that in turn led to the destruction of traditional ideals in exchange for political power.\(^{11}\) To him, *kuo* is concerned with power and lacks the same moral depth that *t’ien-hsia* encapsulates. The latter desires to broaden people’s lives and straighten their virtues. Levenson quotes Mencius as having said, “…no one without benevolence has ever attained the *t’ien-hsia*…there have been men without benevolence who have attained a *kuo*.”\(^{12}\) *T’ien-hsia*, commonly identified with the Confucian way, has been discarded by modern China, which shuns tradition and is fixated on foreign ways. Regrettably, this exaltation of nation over culture is representative of the loss of *t’ien-hsia* and all that it meant, including *rujiasixiang*.

Levenson’s article, while groundbreaking at the time, was written in the 1950s and encompasses too short of a temporal framework for assessing the decline of Confucianism. His periodization considers for the May Fourth Movement but not the Cultural Revolution (CR). This is significant, for the attacks on Confucianism in 1966 seem to suggest that such thinking prevailed even after the loss of *t’ien-hsia*.

Furthermore, Madeleine Yue Dong, author of *Republican Beijing: The City and its*...
Histories, would argue that Levenson’s description of tradition versus modernity is too black-and-white. The modernization theory creates a binary that does not account for the nuances in China’s evolving culture. Dong uses the motif of recycling to show that when one shifts attention away from the city planners of Republican Beijing and zooms in on the individual level, it is easy to see the reshaping of old and new as a flourishing method for appropriating ideas and things from outside. In this way, local values were only ever expanded upon and never entirely destroyed. She uses numerous examples, including the storytelling groups that became highly popular during the Republican era. She writes “The organization stressed membership in the profession. All story-tellers had to worship three gods, King Zhuang of the Zhou dynasty, Confucius, and Sage Wencang.”

While Dong’s thesis challenges Levenson’s notion of the breakdown in traditional values, one can make the argument that her own timeline is too short as well because her book also fails to examine the CR decade, wherein the war against old culture was even fiercer than the May Fourth-style politics of 1919. A close reading of Chinese scar literature provides plenty of examples of the widespread breakdown of rujiasixiang during the CR. The genre is filled with harrowing violence and senseless chaos. The writers describe society as coming apart at the seams and depict a complete degeneration of morality. In her autobiography, Nien Cheng laments the Red Guards’ ruination of Confucian texts, age-old cultural artifacts, and temples. She recounts being subject to torture, such as being handcuffed to the point that both of her hands became “swollen to enormous size” and her nails turned “purple in color.” The mass violence that ransacked the CR years is a stark divergence from what is valued in the Analects. In addition, the

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author of *Wild Swans* Jung Chang recalls children in condemned families drawing a line between themselves and their parents and one of President Liu Shaoqi’s daughters writing wall posters to expose her father. Chang knew of children who changed their surnames to demonstrate disowning their fathers, others who never visited their parents in detention, and some who even took part in denunciation meetings against their parents.\textsuperscript{15} Before the CR, it would be unthinkable for children to treat their parents this way. That such unfilial behavior became accepted, even valorized, during this time might lead one to blame Mao for the decline of Confucianism in China.

On the other hand, more recent scholars analyzing post-Maoist conditions have begun to dispel the claim that the CR led to the downfall of Confucianism. Tong Zhang and Barry Schwartz point out that much has been said about the CR’s anti-Confucius crusade, but little has been said about its failure. They rely on CCP newspapers, public speeches by Chinese officials, and interviews to show that the memory and representation of Confucius is manipulated before and after the Revolution to serve the Party’s interests. Furthermore, Chinese consciousness, while not inflexible, is highly stable, meaning it is not so easy to eradicate *rujiasixiang*.\textsuperscript{16} Other academics such as Rana Mitter echo this view. He points out that “During the Mao period, Confucius was criticized heavily, in line with the radical May Fourth influence on the CCP regime, culminating in the ‘Criticize Confucius, Criticize Lin Biao’ campaign of 1973-4…But in the 1980s, in line with the new emphasis on education, Confucius was now portrayed as a great teacher who thought about moral issues, and was a suitable exemplar for the young. In the 1990s, as China’s reforms made the enterprise culture into a political fixture, Confucius was


turned, through an extraordinary sleight of hand, into an advocate of profit and economic
growth.”17 These examples show that rujiasixiang was merely attacked, not eradicated,
during the Revolution. Later, it was even resurrected by the Party in order to push for
economic reform.

The growing fascination with China’s economic boom has led contemporary
scholars to adopt it as the reason for China’s moral vacuum. In “The Post-Communist
Spectre of China’s Capitalist Market Reforms” Xiaoying Wang argues that China’s
rapidly expanding economy and rising capitalist class has caused the communist moral
order of the Maoist era (and the personality structure that was an integral part of that
order) to collapse.18 Quite alarmingly, two decades have passed and no new moral order
has been created to fill the gap. At the beginning of the CR, many were genuine believers
of Maoism and embraced the revolutionary spirit wholeheartedly. The devotion was akin
to faith, and the moral structure was clearly one of egalitarianism.19 However, today there
is almost a total lack of a new type of person whose values and motivations can help
sustain China’s emerging capitalist society as the Maoist type of person did during the
old communist order. According to Wang, the advent of the free market without the
simultaneous emergence of a sustaining moral order is a recipe for social problems of
dire proportions. Nothing better represents such problems than the sheer scale of
corruption and the ineffectiveness of measures to keep it in check. Wang furthermore

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University Press, p.295.
19 Jan Wong’s red China blues depicts the fervor in which Chinese and overseas youth assumed Mao’s
utopian ideas. She recalls, “In 1972, China was radical-chic. Beijing was a beacon of hope. Maoism was
mesmerizing. Growing up in the rebellious sixties at the height of the Vietnam War protests, I had scant
faith in the West…Eurasian novelist Han Suyin (Love Is a Many Splendored Thing) and American
journalist Edgar Snow (Red Star Over China) reported that the Chinese were happy as clams (14).”
says that those in charge of reforms have a vested interest in pushing a moral and ideological program that is often at odds with the market reform agenda. The state of affairs is, therefore, not so much a vacuum as a disjunction.20 China’s current moral culture is border-line schizophrenic, resulting in a mismatch between the official moral code, which continues to invoke communist and collectivistic values such as “serving the people” and on the other side a new socio-economic reality in which individuals pursue their own interests in competition with others in an increasingly capitalistic economic order. This is a great contrast to Mao’s time, when the moral injunction to serve the people used to correlate with practices of elaborate self-improvement ranging from concrete displays of self-denial in matters of dress and diet to almost daily rituals of avowals of faith in communism embodied in devotion to collective work. These practices of self-actualization and self-improvement no longer operate in China’s new market order, and thus the continuing invocation to “serve the people” fails to find moral agents capable of acting on it. The result, Wang ominously concludes, is a deep crisis of society and of self.

While “The Post-Communist Spectre of China’s Capitalist Market Reforms” laid the groundwork for new scholarship examining capitalism and identity in China, critics like Ruiping Fan have deemphasized the significance Wang attaches to the collapse of Maoist ideology. While Fan also finds culpability in the Chinese economy’s accelerated growth, he regards China’s current state as a post-communist personality disorder, rather than a brand new type of personality as Wang argues. He refutes part of Wang’s argument that the moral vacuum is caused by dissidence between the formally announced

morality and the actual operative morality – which is hedonist. Rather than hedonist, Fan asserts the operative morality has been a distorted form of Confucianism while the announced morality has remained communist since 1949.\textsuperscript{21} This disconnect afflicts what is at root a remarkably powerful, underlying, Confucian personality. Fan’s evidence that Confucianism has survived despite three decades of reform centers on the following factors: continued motivation for the well-being of the family, an affirmation of the goodness of material wealth and an appreciation of the market for producing material wealth, a non-egalitarian commitment to the obligations of altruism, and an attention to the harmonious interpersonal relationships needed to build up market networks and peaceful cooperation via compromise and mediation. At the same time, Fan recognizes that the absence of constraints has caused Confucian virtues to turn to vice. While each author presents a different outlook on China’s identity crisis, both seem to blame this on the rapid expansion of markets. The allure of corruption has increased, as market success has increased the riches for which one can sell one’s integrity. Fan concludes that the post-communist personality disorder must be addressed through reconstructing the Confucian personality, for it can provide a framework to fill the moral vacuum in China.\textsuperscript{22}

The three alternate explanations presented above all contain a degree of credibility, but do not fully account for why \textit{rujiasixiang} is declining in urban China. The transition from \textit{t’ien-hsia} to nation-state may have led to fundamental changes in values, but the Chinese people still turned to Confucius and Mencius for moral guidance after the

fact. Similarly, although the Cultural Revolution heavily attacked Confucianism, it is thought to have failed in rooting out old culture and is perceived by many to be a glib in China’s modernization narrative. Finally, the rapid ushering of capitalism seems logical at first, but loses luster when compared with the high-growth economies of the Four Asian Tigers (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan) and their relatively moral societies.
THE IMPORTANCE OF VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE

In the spirit of Peter Katzenstein, in which eclecticism can greatly contribute to problem solving, an understudied explanation for the *rujiasixiang* problem lies in space and vernacular architecture. This is not to say that space is the sole causal reason for declining traditional values in Chinese society, but it is a significant basic component that adds a new dimension to the existing paradigms and thus cannot be ignored.

Space is essential because it provides a fundamental physical framework in which traditions, values, and culture are not only reflected but also reinforced. It comprises physical, mental, and social dimensions, and is constituted through concrete human practices. Twentieth century theorists already recognized the dangerous influences of capitalism and neocapitalism on space, for they promote a world of commodities in which banks, business centers, and skyscrapers serve as unconscious reminders of the power of money. These neocapitalist structures are now rapidly arising in China’s cities. Take Beijing for example, a great number of its *hutong* and courtyard houses were demolished in the 1990s when inner-city land became highly profitable for real estate speculation; the demolition of historical buildings accelerated after Beijing won the Olympic bid in 2001, and even within preservation zones, demolition of landmarked

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23 Katzenstein points out that while paradigms can be helpful, they risk producing an excessive compartmentalization in scholarship and obscure conceptual and empirical points of connection between analyses constructed in competing research traditions and presented in different theoretical vocabularies. This is why analytic eclecticism is essentially a countervailing effort to overcome these limitations inherent in paradigm-bound research. Eclectic scholarship is designed to highlight the substantive intersections and practical relevance of theories (35).

24 See Friederike Fleischer’s *Suburban Beijing: Housing and Consumption in Contemporary China*.

buildings was common.\footnote{Ren, Xuefei. “Olympic Beijing: Reflections on Urban Space and Global Connectivity” in The Beijing Olympics: Promoting China Soft and Hard Power in Global Politics, edited by Kevin Caffrey. New York: Routledge, pp.10-11.} As more vernacular architecture is replaced with these neocapitalist structures, it is only logical that there will be value shift. When urbanites buy a house, they are also choosing the real or perceived lifestyle associated with different residential complexes and locations,\footnote{See again Friederike Fleischer’s Suburban Beijing: Housing and Consumption in Contemporary China.} and when the state tears down entire villages or communities, local culture is disrupted, dislocated, and uprooted.\footnote{Villages in the City: “total demolition, the default of the state, is problematic because of the lack of proper substitutes. Not only does it erase the unique historical and cultural traces of the village, the redevelopment can put pressure on the surrounding infrastructure…” p.5.}

This notion that architecture frames social behavior is also agreed upon by twenty-first century scholars, who have been paying careful attention to the way societies undergo transformation due to the globalization of architectural styles and impact of urban space. They warn about the negative outcomes associated with this phenomenon, including the erosion of environments that are culturally rooted and locally produced. These uniquely built environments are being removed from their context and replaced by global forms and designs, which are often poorly adapted to local needs and conditions. These changes also result in the commodification of the identity of historic spaces, at once detaching them from their continuity with locality, while at the same time repackaging them as uniquely preserved ‘authentic’ artifacts for global cultural consumption. The problem of doing so causes a rift in the way the identity of places is created, recreated and sustained.\footnote{Watson, Georgia Butina, and Roger Zetter. 2006. Designing Sustainable Cities In The Developing World. Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.}

This is evident in Beijing’s hutong and siheyuan (courtyard houses), which embody essential elements of rujiasixiang. Today, most courtyard houses are either being
gentrified or “museumified” into tourist attractions. When they used to outnumber apartment complexes during the Ming and Qing dynasties, they promoted a certain way of living, which is now fading. To understand this lifestyle, it is significant to analyze the courtyard house’s physical components. The quadrangle courtyards in Beijing have internal links with a grid arrangement of chessboard-shaped streets. With a symmetrical central axis, the balanced left and right sides of a quadrangle courtyard are closed to the outside, internally centripetal and square-shaped. One first enters through a heavy wooden gate and is then confronted with a wall. Turning to one side, he or she will see a moon-shaped door that enables a small peek of the courtyard but not its entirety. Only through entering this moon-shaped door can the full layout of the residence be revealed. The reason for this gradual entrance is to give visitors a sense of mystery, but also convey humility by not displaying everything at once.\textsuperscript{30} They consist of the principal rooms, corridors, wing rooms, back buildings, and north-facing rooms. The rooms facing the sun are considered the best and are thus the principal rooms, where memorial tablets of the family’s ancestors are placed. According to Confucian etiquette, the larger eastern side of the principal rooms typically is where the grandparents reside, and the western side is the living room of the father and mother. Wings are usually composed of three rooms where the younger generations live. In a siheyuan, the size and quality of the rooms clearly delineate hierarchy in the family, with the grandparents occupying the highest stratum and the children occupying the lowest.\textsuperscript{31} Servants stay in the house farthest back, and men and women are kept separate. The individual buildings offer privacy, while the open space in the middle of the courtyard encourages a communal lifestyle (most quadrangles

\textsuperscript{30} Author’s field research.
are connected in order to form a larger compound, kindling a sense of community between residents\(^3\) and this also enables residents to always be able to view the sky, fostering a close affinity with the natural world. It is common for families to plant fruit trees, plants, and flowers in the middle of the courtyard – usually perpendicular to one another – to better establish this desired spiritual harmony between man and nature. In fact, the entire architectural structure of the quadrangle courtyard is built in harmony with nature. The east and west houses are angled in a way that when the sun rises, the shadow of the east house will keep the west house cool, and when the sun sets the shadow of the west house will keep the east house cool. A curved brick wall situated south of the complex would block cold, humid winds from blowing through the courtyard, while the lattice windows of the buildings usher in cool breezes. These windows never face outward to the public, only inward to the open space of the central courtyard so one can take in the changing colors of the sky. It was thought that the squareness of the courtyard represents the earth while the roundness of the sky symbolizes heaven, and the sloped roofs were to assist “bringing heaven down into the courtyard.”\(^3\) In this way, one’s living space reflected the patterns of the cosmos.

Such principles – reverence for one’s ancestors and the elderly, respect for parents, harmony between neighbors and nature, and solidarity – are all essential elements of *rujiasixiang*. The spaciousness of the courtyard allows for three or multiple generations of the same family to live together. Today’s block-style apartment complexes counter the traditional Confucian ideal of family by promoting the existence of nuclear

\(^3\) My own father recalls playing with the other children in the compound when he was younger. At night, they could smell neighbors’ delicious cooking and would go and ask for something to eat.

families. They do not provide easy access to nature and envelop units in a sense of anonymity that prevents social interaction among neighbors. One could say that the modern-day apartment complex in China encourages all of the opposite culture and values that vernacular *siheyuan* do.

A micro-social research project primarily employing the ethnographic technique of participant observation, Qingqing Yang’s study of *hutong* dwellers and China’s rapid urbanization sheds light on the strikingly different lifestyles of those living in *siheyuan* and those living in high rises. She shows how social rules are built into the architectural space of these winding alleyways and quadrangle courtyards, which comprise a peaceful interior versus a dynamic exterior, and the nostalgia residents feel for this old way of life. A beautiful analogy Yang uses to distinguish the two lifestyles is:

…each of the windows in the high-rise is like a small TV screen. The owner of that room is playing his own life story behind the screen, and the whole building is like a multiscreen television…They never interfere with each other. One’s story has nothing to do with the one living next to him. All their stories are isolated from one another, even though they are physically close to each other….I would describe Hutong life in this way: a TV series playing with almost a hundred characters involving one big screen. All of the households form one screen, and each of these families plays different orles in the story.34

The juxtaposition between the loneliness and coldness of the high-rises with the bustling liveliness of the *hutong* is a telling example of the way space controls social behavior. Yang describes the sadness she feels when she relocates into one of these high-rises. When she had moved into the *hutong*, all of the neighbors greeted her. In contrast, in the high-rise “no one cares who is moving in.”35 Yang ties the lack of social interaction in the high-rises with he lack of public space for mingling. She recalls that the courtyard

dwellers share many different public facilities, for instance, toilets and spaces for playing chess. Every morning when she went to the squat toilet, there was always a long queue there and during the waiting time, people group up and chat.\textsuperscript{36} The omission of anything shared in the high-rises does not give residents an opportunity to inquire or care about one another.

Now, if we take the aforementioned example and apply it to Yueyue’s case, it can help us better understand why passersby did not bother to stop and help the two-year-old, who lay dying on the street. When the very physical structures that foster communal spirit and neighborliness disappear only to be replaced with disaffected apartment complexes, it is unsurprising that Chinese urbanites have become re-socialized to interact with one another noncommittally. Beijing’s quadrangle courtyard is one case study that shows the way in which vernacular architecture reflects the very rujiashixiang principles now disappearing from Chinese society. Part of it is China’s transition from \textit{t’ien-hsia} to nation-state. Part of it is the CR, since the 1966-76 time period resulted in disenchantment and pushed China to embrace the very ideology that Maoism refuted – capitalism. And of course, part of it is the notion that China’s economic boom destroyed an older moral framework, creating a gap that has yet to be filled. However, at the root of all three arguments is space, which has been re-shaped by state-builders to reflect new prioritizations of modernity and capitalism. In the end, the significance of space cannot be overemphasized, for the destruction of vernacular architecture – like siheyuan – not only exacerbates a widening moral vacuum, but is a direct cause of China’s fading rujiashixiang.

Figure 1: A typical view when one first enters a *siheyuan*. The result is delayed gratification of the spectator viewing the grandness of the courtyard all at once.

Figure 2: The moon-shaped second entrance only allows for a slight glimpse of the interior.
Figure 3: View of the entire courtyard.


