

What Are We Talking About When We Talk About Public Space?

ChinaGSD Virtual Symposium

Harvard University ChinaGSD is proud to introduce the virtual symposium “What Are We Talking About When We Talk Public Space?”. The event, featuring practitioners and professors at the forefront of the discipline, will dive into how China’s rapid development since its opening up reforms had led to a significant change in attitudes toward public space. As the advent of the decade is overturned by a global pandemic that disrupts our behavior in the public sphere, the time is ripe to reflect, recognize, and reconsider attitudes towards public space.

Ideally, public space is where people from all sectors of society communicate and interact on an equal footing, the place where they exchange ideas, and recognize themselves and each other as a valuable member to society. It is the birthplace of creativity and innovation, and the cornerstone towards an equal society. In 1958, Hannah Arendt wrote that public space that makes our “actions” possible constitutes the necessary precondition for a fulfilled human existence. With the advent of modernity, the utopia of public spaces has often been labelled as under threat. As Richard Sennett argues in the book, “The Fall of Public Man,” the formation of “a new capitalist, secular, urban culture” since the fall of the Ancien Régime has reduced our ability to relate to each other. As alienation grew, he argues, our public life has shrunk to mere formality.

In today’s China, the threat of modernity on public space is met with adjoining forces that produce further complexities worth investigating. As traditional residences, such as Lijiang or Shanghai’s Li Long, are transformed into public cultural districts that are intended to inform our so-called “collective memory”, what is the role of history and culture in the creation of public spaces? How does occupying these public spaces foster a sense of belonging and how does this change over time? As Hong Kong’s enormous shopping malls and Beijing’s planned parks dominate public life, what can we learn from Chéng Zhōng Cūn (Urban Villages) and informal spaces that have sprouted spontaneously in the fissure between our glass giants? How do we ensure public space functions as willful nodes of social centrality that

become places of interaction regardless of public or private ownership? More recently, in the age of social distancing, how might our definitions change?

As these conditions overlap, we as designers must re-examine this age-old spatial typology. What are the roles of designers in the making of public spaces? How can we contribute to shaping public life? How might we guarantee this space withholds the genuine rights of its citizens? Can we balance the demands of our powerful clientele while advocating for the benefit of the public? With these questions in hand, we invite you to join us in questioning: What Are We Talking About When We Talk About Public Space?

The symposium is a part of ChinaGSD’s new online event and publication series “PIN-UP”, that celebrates, and facilitates the exchange between Harvard University and those tackling issues at the forefront of the design profession in China. Each issue will address a specific and pressing theme, featuring architect interviews, public lectures, symposiums, exhibitions, and student works. The publication is bilingual and will be updated on our website, Instagram, and WeChat.

DATE AND TIME

Saturday October 3rd 9:00am - 11:10am EST

Saturday October 3rd 9:00pm - 11:10pm CST

AGENDA

9:00 – 9:10	Opening Remarks
9:10 – 9:30	Panelist Presentation
9:30 – 9:50	Panelist Presentation
9:50 – 10:10	Panelist Presentation
10:10 – 10:50	Round Table Discussion
10:50 – 11:10	Q&A



JEROLD S. KAYDEN
Panelist

Jerold S. Kayden is the Frank Backus Williams Professor of Urban Planning and Design at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design, where he previously served as co-chair of the Department of Urban Planning and Design and director of the Urban Planning Program. His teaching and scholarship address issues of land use and environmental law, public and private development in cities, public space, urban disasters and climate change, and design competitions. His books include *Privately Owned Public Space: The New York City Experience*, *Urban Disaster Resilience: New Dimensions from International Practice in the Built Environment*, *Landmark Justice: The Influence of William J. Brennan on America's Communities*, and *Zoning and the American Dream: Promises Still To Keep*.



TAO ZHU
Panelist

Zhu Tao is Associate Professor and Co-director of the Center for Chinese Architecture and Urbanism at The University of Hong Kong. He received his Master of Architecture and PhD in Architecture History and Theory at Columbia University.

He writes on contemporary Chinese architecture and urbanism and practices in China. He has published essays in AA Files, AD, a+u, Bauwelt, Domus, and Time+Architecture. His writings include the book *Liang Sicheng and His Times* (Imaginist, 2014) and a chapter "Architecture in China in the Reform Era 1978-2010" for the book *A Critical History of Contemporary Architecture 1960-2010* (Ashgate, 2014). In 2010, he received the first Architectural Critics Award from the China Architecture Media Awards organized by China's mass media Southern Metropolis Daily in collaboration with eight major Chinese architectural magazines. His design works are mainly public projects with a wide range, including school, library, bus terminal, street, park, and reservoir. Recently he also leads his HKU team and office to collaborate with the governments of Shenzhen and Dongguan to assist in their development in public spaces through both academic research and design practice.



DOREEN HENG LIU
Panelist



GEORGE E. THOMAS
Moderator



SUSAN NIGRA SNYDER
Moderator

A Chinese architect born in Guangzhou. She received her MArch from UC Berkeley in 1994 and Doctor of Design at Harvard Graduate School of Design in 2008. In 2008-2020, Doreen taught at the School of Architecture, the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) as Adjunct Associate Professor. In academic year 2015-16, Doreen was appointed as Guest Professor at D-ARCH, ETH in 2015-16, and as Friedman Visiting Professor of Practice at University of California – Berkeley in fall 2019; Starting in Fall 2020, Doreen is appointed as Distinguished Professor in Architecture at Shenzhen University.

In 2004, Doreen established her own design practice NODE in Nansha and Hong Kong, and relocated in Shenzhen since 2009. Her design works have been awarded and published in many international and domestic professional magazines including Architectural Record, Domus, Volume, Abitare and etc.; and exhibited in various architectural and art exhibitions internationally including Venice, Berlin, Rotterdam, Vienna, etc. In 2012, Doreen with her firm NODE was shortlisted as one of five international emerging architects for Audi Urban Future Initiative (AUF) awards; in 2014, Doreen was nominated as Curator for Hong Kong Pavilion for the 14th International Architecture Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia. In 2015, the Entrance Building of Shekou Fufa Glass Factory renovation won Excellent Award for Creative Design Award in China; In 2016, the built project of Shekou Dachan Flour Mill Renovation was shortlisted for International Archmarathon Awards and WA City Regeneration Award; in 2018, the Renovation of Dameisha Village, Yantian, Shenzhen (2017 UABB) was shortlisted for WA Social Equality Award and Nominating Award for Architectural Design Category of Shenzhen Global Design Award 2019.

George E. Thomas, an architectural and cultural historian and Susan Nigra Snyder, a registered architect are co-directors of the Critical Conservation Program in the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University. Their practice, CivicVisions, merges knowledge of a place's history with the ability to see how this may be used to create a future that responds to contemporary lifestyle forces. CivicVisions' work includes extensive work in Manhattan for REBNY, community groups and developers; the Arts District and Fremont Street downtown initiative in Las Vegas; an economic/identity initiative for Pennsylvania's colleges; a Getty Grant exhibit about Haverford's campus identity and projects for developers and institutions nationwide.