The Challenge of Place Identity in the Making and Experience of New Chinese Urban Square

By:

Qin Xu

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Faculty of Social Science

Department of Landscape

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Abstract

This research investigates the evolution and identity of Chinese urban square, and how people use and perceive the urban squares in Chongqing. It aims to fill the potential gaps of the theoretical understanding of place identity in Chinese academic field, through an exploration of existing western literature regarding the place-related identity. The physical environment, social interaction and personal experience are identified as essential aspects that contribute greatly to the formation of place identity. A mix method approach is adopted to examine the relevance of theses theoretical findings with Chinese context in order to develop recommendations for future urban square design with an emphasis on improving its place identity. The historic review of the urban development of Chinese cities recognizes the impact of traditional legacy on the current understanding and space making strategies of urban squares. It is suggested that the representational design approach of urban squares that has largely focused on the physical environment is not only derived from ancient city making rules, but also associated with the political and economic incentives nowadays. Upon the awareness of the social values of urban square in terms of delivering a sense of identity, three case studies of three urban squares in Chongqing are conducted to examine how people use and perceive the urban square in their everyday life. The findings of case study confirm that 'place' is essentially a social product that acquires its meaning largely from human interpretation and experience. Despite the discontinuity between the contemporary urban square and traditional Chinese urban form, the emerging public activities are found to contribute significantly to the establishment of place identity by creating a bond of experience

that incorporates both cultural and physical impacts. The research also demonstrates that the production of urban square in Chinese city cannot be regarded as merely technical issue dealing with physical dimension, rather, the social interaction that entails could shape the people-place relationship and the identity of it. The institutional changes and innovations in design strategy, as well the public engagement is recommended for future development of Chinese urban square that aims to deliver a sense of place identity.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

The urban development in Chinese cities within recent decades has seen an increasing emphasis on the construction of urban squares. However, the concept of the urban square is fairly new to Chinese cities, and their role has experienced a series of changes along with the urban transformation. After decades of massive construction, the prevalence of the urban square and its built form are becoming criticized for diminishing the local characteristics of each city. At the same time, the failure to establish a distinct identity through the development of urban spaces is becoming a matter of increasing concern. The current urban design strategies that used to be driven by economic growth and dominated by iconographic representations are becoming less suitable for the current urban environment in terms of fulfilling people's social needs and delivering a sense of uniqueness.

Under these circumstances, the identity of place has been considered not only as an essential quality of the urban environment, but, most importantly, as a means of making a specific place unique and recognizable through the embodiment of the local cultural and social assets. The establishment of place identity became especially essential for those Chinese cities that rely mostly on their urban appearance as a major attribute to attract investment and achieve future growth. As this thesis will show, the previous design approaches to the urban square have been largely determined by political and economic objectives and are insufficient to express the complexity of the local assets in this sense. In other words, the

predominant design strategies have resulted in similar urban appearances and required innovations to adapt them to the changing social needs.

In a market-oriented society after China's economic and political reform in the late 20th century, urban space development has been promoted as the engine of urban growth in order to transform the urban environment and attract investment (Friedman, 2007; Chen, 2010). The rapid urban development of the past decades has seen the rise of urban squares in many Chinese cities attempting to represent political achievements and ambitions. The space-making strategy of urban squares are mainly characterized by symbolic representation, while is challenged by the changing lifestyle and leisure pattern of urban residents that follow the socio-political reforms for a lack of consideration of the increasing social needs. The conflicts between user groups and the inefficient use of space are the major concerns. Many professionals and scholars, as well as government officials, have realized the importance of the urban square in accommodating the variety of public life other than the mere image construction.

The possibility of linking the social dimension of the urban square with the formation of place identity is the initial concern of this research. With today's increasing social uses and changing roles of urban squares, it is suggested that the emphasis of Chinese urban square development should shift from merely spatial representation to the social values that have largely influenced the formation of a broader sense of place identity (Friedman, 2007; Deng, 2008). The western academic field offers a rich body of research dedicating to the people-place relationship during the last decades, the broad aim of this research is to examine this existing knowledge

and the possibilities for applying it to Chinese urban square development regarding the establishment of place identity in urban squares. The research required a holistic examination of place related identity and ways of delivering it through the urban squares in Chinese cities, both in terms of contributing to the theoretical discourse and design practices. The research will propose a set of recommendations based on this theoretical exploration and case studies in order to establish a sense of place identity in Chinese urban squares that is grounded in the locality whilst featuring a distinctive and vibrant social life.

1.2   Theory and practice

This research explores the identity of place and the issues connected with the identification process, representation and individual perceptions. The place-related identity is difficult to define because of its variations within different disciplines. The discussion regarding the people-place relationship addresses many aspects of identity and ranges from the field of environmental psychology, through geography to those of architecture and urban planning. The related definition of place identity did not rely on a single perspective, rather, the whole body of research offered insights into every aspect by illustrating its key components which allow the bridging between theory and practice.

Place identity is often viewed in relation to the definition of space. It is suggested that 'place' implies some mix of memory, sensory experience and interpretations. A place is a geographical space that is defined by meaning, and it is this interpretation and narrative that transforms 'space' into 'place' by giving it an identity (Cresswell,

2004; Sepe, 2013). To some of the geographers, the underlying assumption is that the identity of the place lies in the inherent sameness and unity which allows things to be different from others (Relph, 1976). Norberg-Schulz's (1980) concept of *genius loci* implies place identity as the sum of all the physical and symbolic values of a given environment that identify the place.

Based on these underpinning assumptions, there are various approaches dedicated to the exploration of both an individual's perception and the symbolic meaning of the physical environment. Many cultural geographers considered individuals' subjective feelings as central to their understanding of the place and the underlying meaning it carries. Place identity from this perspective is a set of meanings associated with particular cultural backgrounds in which any particular person or group of people are able to draw on their own interpretations (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977, Seamon, 2000). While the physical aspects of the identity were much explored by urban planners and architects, a focus on the functioning and human experience in relation to the spatial configuration developed. The identity of place has been associated with human experience, the 'image', and a combination of perceptions of the place by individuals with their own feelings about, and impressions of, the location (Lynch, 1960, 1984; Alexander, 1977; Carmona *et al*., 2003).

The interaction between people and place indicates that the meaning and identity imputed to places are products of a continuous evolutionary process. As suggested by Proshansky (1983), place identity is the result of a constant, and often subconscious negotiation between individuals and the potpourri of experience, objects and even idealized places they encounter during their lives. Our capacity to

identify a place is shaped by what others tell us about the place, and filtered by our own socialization (Hague & Jenkins, 2005).

Place identity therefore is not a static image, but is rather the result of a continuous development over time. However, the dynamic nature of place identity has not been fully realized by many Chinese professions. The review of Chinese literature regarding the identity of place presented an emphasis on the representational and symbolic meaning of the physical environment rather than the process of social interaction between people and place. The focus on the physical aspects of urban squares has resulted in their similar appearance as well as the potential conflicts between social uses. People started to realize that the local culture and distinct characteristics were at risk due to the lack of social connections and continuity in the spatial form (Miao, 2011).

Nevertheless, the identity crisis caused by current space-making strategies in China cannot be fully understood without the recognition of the socio-political context in the decision-making process. In responding to the current problems of urban square development in delivering a sense of place identity, the limitations should be discussed in the light of political power and institutional structure. On the other hand, the western, academic, place-related research provides opportunities to decode the complexity of the concept by identifying the key components and the possibilities of linking them with special design strategies in the Chinese context.

Upon the awareness of the changing social context and public activities, many Chinese scholars have noticed the problems of urban square development in Chinese

cities, and started to discuss the phenomenon from various perspectives with reference to western approaches (Cao, 2005; Miao, 2011; Ye & Cai, 2012). Among these emerging discussions, there is still a lack of continuity and an incomplete understanding of place identity, especially its relevance in the Chinese context. The overall theoretical background of place identity as shaped in western academic studies has helped to define the scope of this research wherein 'place identity' refers to the various dimensions of people-place relations whilst its formation is understood as the process of receiving, selectively reconstructing and re-communicating the narrative that constitutes identity.

Regarding the existing interpretation of place identity, the focus of this study is to explore the social dimension of Chinese urban square, as well as its construction in Chinese cities in order to understand how a sense of place identity was established and how people perceive it through daily uses. Over times, the definition of urban square varies according to its different cultural context. The earliest civic squares in medieval Europe were usually regarded as open places that acted as settings for prominent buildings (Xu, 2000). However due to the lacking of historic roots of urban square and specific socio-political context in China, the nature of Chinese urban square differs from its origin in European cities while remained similar spatial characters. The official definition of urban square used in current Chinese planning system is from the national planning code – the Classification of Urban Land Use and Planning Standards of Development Land (GB 50137-2011). The spatial type of 'urban square' was briefly defined as urban public space that was mainly used for recreation, memorials and gathering event. This definition of urban square has been consulted and used as one of the criteria of site selection for case studies in this

research. The urban square under investigation thus refers to the urban public space that was planned and built for such purposes, they are accessible to the general public with designated green and open space. The spatial form and roles of these urban squares reflect the influence of political power and socio-economic incentives during the design process, which provide further evidence for the exploration of evolving place identity at these places.

This research combines the theoretical insights with specific case studies and is expected to fill the theoretical gaps in the Chinese academic field and contribute to the improvement of design practice by examining the evolution and production of urban squares in Chinese cities.

1.3   Research aims and objectives

The research question to be answered in this research is - **how urban squares are perceived and used in current Chinese cities**. The research investigates the use pattern and perception of urban squares in Chongqing in relation to the concept of place identity, in order to gain a better understanding of how the meaning of place is developed through the social interactions. In addition, the specific cultural and social context of Chinese city is important in terms of understanding the spatial typology and social activities. Regarding the above research question, the three research aims are addressed through a set of research objectives as below:

Research Aims	Research Objectives

Research Aims	Research Objectives
1. To explore the evolution and identity of urban squares in China.	To explore the origin and evolution of urban square typologies in Chinese cities
	To understand how the notion of place identity can be used to analyze the changing urban development in China
	To examine how the planned ambition for new urban square reflect the changing social, economic and political context
2. To understand the public life and perception of place identity in urban squares of Chongqing.	To examine the way people use urban squares in Chongqing
	To explore people's perception of urban square and place identity
	Through case studies to test the interrelationship between perception, social function and physical forms of urban square in generating a sense of place identity
3. To examine how the findings from this research could inform future urban design practice.	To explore the opportunities and limitations of current design strategies for urban square development
	To provide recommendations for future development or re-development of Chinese urban squares

1.4 Thesis structure

Based on the research objectives, this thesis will start with a discussion on a range of

multi-disciplinary literature on place identity and relevant concepts in Chapter 2. The

discourses will be drawn from geography, through environmental psychology to architecture and urban design with the emphasis on people-place relations and urban public space. They will show an interrelationship between the physical environment and people's activities and perceptions, identifying the key aspects of the environment that contribute to facilitating people's behaviours and their understanding of places. Among the various research approaches, the qualitative methods are considered as the most appropriate in this research in terms of providing in-depth information on the emotional bonds people developed with a place.

Chapter 3 further explains the mix method approach adopted in this research and elaborates on the main methods of data collection and analysis. The connections between each method and the corresponding research objectives are outlined. The site selection of the case studies is also detailed in this chapter. According to the scope of the research, the literature approach, site surveys and interviews (with square users, practitioners and academic) are considered as the major ways of exploring how people develop a sense of identity about a place and how this was shaped in Chinese urban squares.

The following Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are dedicated to the fieldwork results and findings. Chapter 4 firstly introduces the urban development trajectory of Chongqing from the perspective of social, political and spatial development. The role and characteristics of the urban square and the recent social political reforms are highlighted with an emphasis on their influence on space production. The traditional legacy, overall planning ideology and changing social life, as well as their continuing impact on existing urban squares, will be discussed.

Chapter 5 will draw on the details of the site surveys of the three case study squares. It introduces the history and context of each site and describes the findings from the observations. This site survey will largely focus on the use patterns and the physical settings in terms of their representational and affective meanings. Chapter 6 mainly examines the responses from on-site interviews regarding their experience and perception of place identity. The interview questions have been developed according to the key aspects of place identity theory with a focus on the emotional bonds and perceptions that people have developed towards the place.

Chapter 7 will reflect on the previous findings and integrate them with the theories summarized in Chapter 2 in order to respond to the research aims and objectives set out at the beginning of the thesis. The discussion highlights how the place identity of Chinese urban squares has been built and shaped through their development and actual uses. Each aspect of place identity - including the social, cultural and physical environments that have contributed to the understanding of 'place' - will be discussed. It also provides insights and implications for future development. Chapter 8 reviews the structure of the thesis by demonstrating the key findings and recommendations that incorporate both theoretical and practical insights. It will refer back to the literature and methodological approaches with reference to the limitations this research may have and its contributions to the place identity discourse, in particular its future application in the Chinese context.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2 Literature Review

2.1 Overview

This chapter will discuss some of the key concepts relevant to this research. Various aspects of both place identity and urban space have been widely explored, primarily in western literature. The first part of this chapter will discuss the theoretical discourses on urban public space, as well as the various dimension of place identity, to provide a sound understanding of its definition and relationship with other place-related concepts. This will lay the foundation for further analysis and discussion of current place identity in Chinese urban squares. A framework summarizing the relevant identity theories with relevance to urban space design will be generated, which will guide methodological development and findings.

In order to further understand the context of delivering a sense of place identity for Chinese urban squares, the controversial phenomenon of identity crisis and rising concerns about the production of urban squares will be discussed in the second part. This chapter also explores the institutional background and changes in the political-economic environment in China, and their impact in the delivery of place identity through urban squares.

By identifying the important aspects and elements of the concept of place identity, the literature review will explore the potential gaps between established western research and emerging Chinese urban design literature in regard to the understanding of urban squares and place identity.

2.2   Related Concepts

2.2.1   Theoretical discourse on urban public space

- **Publicness of urban public space**

The purpose of this section is to discover the theoretical roots in the definition of urban public space in urban discipline. The essential value of urban public space that makes it distinct from 'urban space' is considered as 'public' as opposed to 'private'. Therefore, the meaning of 'publicness' are to be explored in this section in order to build the theoretical rationale of the investigation of Chinese urban public space especially urban square.

For years concerns of the changing nature of public space has attracted observers from diverse disciplines. The first usage of the term 'public space' was in the 1950s by sociologist Charles Madge (1950) and Hannah Arendt (1958), and it was not until the early 1960s that the terms was introduced into the fields of architecture, urban design and planning. In the evolving discourse over the meaning of public space, theoretical ideas from the domain of philosophy, sociology, and political science were integrated with the exploration of urban space from the perspectives of urban studies.

The political-philosophical 'public realm' or 'public sphere' debates played central role in the theoretical discourses on public space. A consensus has been established in academic literature that urban public space is an important physical representation

of the public sphere; in other words, urban public space plays an important role in the physical setting for people's participation in public/political life. In this respect, Habermas (1989) defines public sphere as a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed. Western liberal democracies root the conception of public sphere in political economy. They take a general functional view that a public sphere for free speech and discourse over political issues is crucial to a liberal society. Although not necessarily in the form of physical space, the concept of public sphere implies a setting with physical proximity for human contact. Habermas traced the rise of public sphere from the rational political discourse that grew in the salons, libraries, museums, clubs, and coffee houses among the bourgeois. A typical example is the public square, which is sometimes referred to as the 'concrete phase' of public space, and the events in public squares have often been observed as a representation of democratic development (Light & Smith, 1998). After all, the notion of public sphere suggests a neutral and democratic physical environment, where members of the society come together to engage in free and rational expressions and debates over the diverse individual interests. In this sense, urban space is the concrete place where urban life is presented and where the social-political history can be facilitated, witnessed and remembered.

In addition to the political meaning as a representation of public sphere in urban environment, public space possesses a significant role in terms of the socio-spatial relations of the society. Promotion of urban public space has been seen as one of the vehicles of confronting social problems, most significantly, the problems of socio-spatial fragmentation and segregation that have risen with the development of Western industrial cities. The notion of public space in Western literature is

established on a basic recognition of the heterogeneity of modern society. In this respect, a number of scholars have stressed the importance of the 'collective life' (Gans, 1968). Lofland (1973) states the significant role of urban public space in cities as site for 'contact between strangers', a place where social interaction can take place. To Young (1990), the meaning of public space is defined in the issue of social inclusion and social justice. In particular, Young stresses the positive role of urban public space as a stage for integrating differences. The basic common ground of above notions lies in their embrace of the social differences and their coexistence in urban space. In accommodating the exchange and interaction of social differences, urban public spaces are regarded as a stage for social integration of differences.

The term 'publicness' refers to essential 'public' attribute of urban public space, which distinguishes it from the general notion of 'urban space', it is the core dimension that relates to the definition of public space. Although the use of it in many occasions has usually been based on the consideration of ownership, Kohn (2004) noticed the hybridization of public and private, and a blurring boundaries and flexible definition of public space. The burgeoning public literature has indicated diverse attitudes towards public space (Mitchell, 2003; Madanipour, 2003; Varna & Tiesdell, 2010). The comments range from the observed declining significance of public space and of the public realm in general (Sennett, 1977; Jacob, 1998), to the more optimistic opinion that the relationship between public space and public life is reciprocal and the new forms of public life require new spaces (Loukaitou-Sideris & Banerjee, 1998; Carmona et al., 2003). Varna & Tiesdell (2010) argues that the

weakness of the discourse on public space is the absent of rigorous definition of publicness and the tools for in-depth analysis.

To Varna & Tiesdell (2010), the publicness of space can be understood at two levels, one conceptual and the other practical. The conceptual level is concerned with the different individual understandings of publicness and the academic disciplines documenting them. Each discipline views public space differently with particular interests and focus. The practical level involves the actual production of public places, which, in turn, become sources of perception and interpretation by the individuals. Individuals often take a deductive approach towards publicness, which views 'reality' as socially constructed and constantly reconstructed in people's mind through interaction. From this perspective, 'publicness' is defined by the beholders rather than the rights, physical settings and ownership etc. On the other hand, many scholars take inductive approaches which view public space as external to people. An inductive approach seeks overarching themes central to the definition of what makes a place public. Academic discourse about the publicness of public space tends to conceptualize it.

Nemeth & Schmidt (2010) argues that publicness is a multi-dimensional concept, any attempt to conceptualize it must involve interrelated definitions. Kohn (2004) suggests the only way to approach such a concept is to outline a range of possible meanings or criteria in order to decide whether a site can be qualified as public space. Kohn's (2004) definition of public space was based on three dimensions: 'ownership', 'accessibility' and 'intersubjectivity'. Carmona (2010) expands it to include 'function' and 'perception'. Madanipour (1999) highlights three dimensions:

'access' (access to place as well as the activity in it); 'agency' (the locus of control and decision-making present); and 'interest' (the targeted beneficiaries of actions or decisions impacting on a place). Nemeth & Schmidt (2010) developed a tri-axial model based on 'ownership' (from 'public/government' to 'private/corporate'), 'management' (from 'inclusive/open' to 'exclusive/closed') and use/user (from 'divers/collective' to 'homogeneous/individual') in order to illustrate publicness. Similar with Nemeth & Schmidt (2010), Varna & Tiesdell (2010) concludes with five dimensions of publicness: ownership (a place's legal status), control (an explicit control presence), civility (how a place is managed and maintained, the cultivation of a positive and welcoming ambience), physical configuration (the designed routes into a place and its connection with surroundings) and animation (the degree to which the design of the place supports and meets human needs and whether it is actively used and shared). Each of them ranges from 'more public' to 'less public', and promote publicness in different ways. The operational model proposed by Varna & Tiesdell (2010) identifies indicators for each dimension so that to be combined into a single rating that will assess the publicness of particular public space.

From above theoretical discourse, the term 'urban public space' can be recognized as a notion that is defined by its essential values. It largely centers on the 'publicness', which distinguishes it from the general notion of urban space. Urban public space is considered as a significant representation of the 'public realm' in urban space. It functions as a forum for political representation and participation. Thus defined, the value of public space is justified in the opportunities it provides for open and free self-expression, mutual communication, and negotiation among individuals and groups. Thus, public space contributes to achieving a balance of the public and

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private realm for a healthy democratic society. On the other hand, urban public space is also considered as a terrain for social contact and integration in providing a physical setting for the coexistence and communication of social differences.

In this respect, the emergence of the concept of urban public space in urban disciplines can be seen as a response to the sociospatial problems, particularly in the social transformational period. Promotion of urban public space has been seen as one of the vehicles to confront the sociospatial segregation and fragmentation, in terms of reflecting the social/political ideals on physical environment.

- **Public space as a site for social integration**

In western urban design studies, the issue of urban public space has played as a medium for interdisciplinary discussions on the relationship between physical space and social values, between the physical form of the city and the social forces behind it. The process of how urban space was produced influences its identity, because the understanding of urban public space essentially requires the integration of social and ideological notions. An awareness of the particular cultural and socio-economic context is necessary for understanding the identity of place. Lefebvre's 'production of space' theory enriches the understanding of urban space by regarding it as fundamentally driven by social, political and cultural factors. It is suggested that the observation of urban space cannot be separated from the social context that produces it. This socio-spatial perspective enables the investigation of the production process of urban squares in China and has the potential of generating implications for future design practice.

The study of place identity often faces the problem of whether empirical findings are valid in different contexts because urban space is a social product that involves a range of issues including the economic base, the political and institutional setting and the cultural environment (Chen, 2010; Madanipour, 1996). The central discourse of place identity research also suggests that social and physical aspects have equally important roles (Speller, 2000). It could be seen that the relationship established between the observer and a place are reciprocal, which can be understood as some kind of coming together of physical experiences and imaginative constructions (giving meanings and values) produced through individual activity and socially formed appreciation (Healey, 2010).

Following Henri Lefebvre (1991b), the small realities of everyday life hold the forces that may reshape the social tapestry from the bottom up (Lu, 2006). Places are often embedded with a particular pattern of social relations for their inhabitants. Lefebvre (1991) referred to such spaces as 'lived spaces', suggesting that the experienced spaces of a city acquire their character as a place by virtue of being lived in.

A majority of the relevant discourse on public space has been based on the rationale that the value of public space in social life is defined (Chen, 2010). With the development of modern industrial society, the multiplicities of public space (from social/economic strata, race) increase, Sennett argues that the notion of 'culture of cities' is 'a matter of experiencing differences' (Sennett, 1990, p.126), and that public space is the essential intersection of people and diverse activities, where the

city culture can be cultivated through public life. Young (1986) embraces the social and cultural diversity of modern society and stresses the positive role of urban public space as a stage for integrating such differences.

As such, the rising problems of socio-spatial segregation and fragmentation brought by the development of the western industrial cities received much academic attention in the field of urban planning and design during 1950s-60s. In Jacob's (1961) view, the decay of public space in post-war American cities led to the decline of urban public life; she highlighted the essential role of urban public space as the site for social contact and for maintaining the diversity of city life. Within this subject, the importance of both the physical and social dimensions of public space as key aspects of urban design discipline was favoured by many scholars. For example, Carr (1992) centres the meaning of public space on public life that is carried out in that space. In his view, the public life can bind people together, giving them meaning and power. Carmona (2003), on the other hand, considers the activities and events occurring in public spaces to be an unimportant sociocultural dimension of public space, together with its physical settings that facilitate public integration.

- **Space production and power**

If, as Lefebvre argues, '(social) space is a (social) product' (Lefebvre, 1991, p.26), then transitions in the form of social relations 'must entail the production of a new space' (Lefebvre, 1991, p.46). From a socio-spatial perspective, urban space is not merely an artefact created by designers and planners, but is also driven by spatial development and interactions with socio-cultural factors. Urban sociologist M.

Gottdiener (1994) offered some critical comments on the contemporary development of urban space and pattern. He argues that the spatial forms are more than containers of economic and political processes. The study of Chinese urban squares is an example that is closely associated with the urbanization process, with its definition deeply rooted in the socio-political dimension of the society.

There is a complex and dialectical relationship between space and power (Hershkovitz, 1993). As social relations form one of the important dimensions of urban space, the hierarchy of power and ideological interests play significant roles in the production process. A sound examination of the production of urban space reveals the nature of space and helps to understand the embedded social meanings through everyday lives. Lefebvre's (1991) *The Production of Space* introduced a theory of space that has had a substantial influence on the academic interpretation of space. He articulates the nature of space through three elements: 'spatial practice', which refers to the way space is organized and used, 'representation of space', which refers to the space conceptualized by the planners and urbanists, and, lastly, 'representational space', which refers to the space as experienced by the users and is associated with images and symbols. This triad constructs the multiple properties of the nature of space and provides a comprehensive perspective of the concept of place identity with a basic recognition of its multidimensionality.

Most significantly, Lefebvre's theory constitutes a structural framework for the interactive relationship of space, mode of economic production and social relations. Thus, space is 'at once result and cause, product and producer', and integrates with social relations at all levels (Lefebvre, 1979, p.142). Social organizations play a

significant role in participating in the producing process through the hierarchy of power in order to further their respective interests. Lefebvre's theory realizes the roles of different actors involved in the creation process, introducing the influence of space producers in terms of determining the true identity of urban space.

2.2.2 Place identity: an evolving concept

- **Place and people relationships**

This research explores the interrelationship between people and place, which has also been the centre of much place-related research. The process of how people understand places is essential in terms of transforming mere space into a meaningful place. This implication has a significant influence on place identity because it is also associated with people's perceptions towards place. Places are termed 'places' and not just 'spaces' when they are endowed with identity (Hague & Jenkins, 2005). In other words, people invest meaning in a portion of space and then become attached to it in some way, which makes it become a place (Cresswell, 2004). This understanding of place indicates that it is a way of understanding the world of connections and experience, and not only a quality of things in the world, but an aspect of the way we choose to think about it (Creswell, 2004).

In the mid-20th century, some of the urban planners and architects expressed an interest in, and conducted research focusing on, the relationship between human experiences and functioning within the public realm. The term 'image' was first used by Kenneth Boulding (1956), whose work laid the theoretical foundations of city

image theory. According to Boulding, image was seen as a coherent and sensory schemata people draw upon that imitates some assumed reality perceived by people. It guides behaviour and enables us to interpret the information we receive from our surroundings. However, the concept remained vague and abstract to Boulding at that stage, but was instrumental in developing his critical approach to relating people and their physical environment.

Based on Boulding's idea of 'image', Lynch (1960) explored the relations between spatial configuration and people's perception. By undertaking further empirical research, Lynch observed that some cities are more 'imageable' than others as they are more easily represented through sketch maps. He thus pointed out that the both the legibility and imageability of the urban environment contribute to its identification; because the city's spatial and physical arrangement helps people orientate within the space. The five components (path, edge, node, landmark and focal point) proposed by Lynch represent certain spatial configurations that can be detected by people and influence the perception and experience of the environment. Lynch's work formulated a vocabulary for understanding urban settings, which not only concerns the physical fabric, but also relates to people's awareness of their surroundings and location. Moreover, in Lynch's later work, he recognized the importance of 'a sense of occasion', which could be related to a city's periodic festivals, events and other sensory inputs such as smell and sound (Lynch, 1984; Landry, 2006). After Lynch, it became more possible to understand urban space and objects in relation to human psychological functioning rather than simply as an assembly of buildings and space.

The concept of image indicates the spatial continuity of the environment and this sequential nature of human involvement in urban settings also informs Gorden Cullen's (1971) notion of townscape. Cullen considers townscape as sequential connected locations, which as a whole gives a unique identity to the place through serial vision. As with Lynch, Cullen's conception of townscape relates to a series of urban features such as focal points, narrow corridors, entrances and arcades that encourage people to explore and move through the urban environment.

Despite the investigation into the visual perception of the physical environment, the psychological process which enables people to understand a place is also explored. In particular, Canter's (1977) work indicates that a meaningful place is the result of relationships between actions, conceptions and physical attributes. It is suggested that people have not fully identified the place until they know what behaviour is associated with a given locus, what the physical parameters of that setting are and the descriptions or conceptions that people hold of that behaviour in that physical environment (Canter, D. 1977, pp.158-159).

The relationships between people and their spatial settings are further explored by Christopher Alexander (1977, 1979). His work contributes to the understanding of place by moving away from the features and objects, while concentrating on how people interact with the buildings and spaces. He conceptualizes such relationships as a range of patterns that facilitate the experience and generate identity and complexity. Alexander has also adopted the concept of spatial hierarchy to suggest a degree of public-ness and private-ness for people to distinguish between their surroundings because this has an important bearing on the way people behave.

Alexander's work expresses how spatial scale and proximity could have an effect on people's experience and provides the theoretical foundations for further human-oriented approaches to facilitating behaviours.

From a practical perspective, Ian Bentley and colleagues in their influential work *Responsive Environments* identify particular properties and characteristics associated with urban settings that are responsive to human functioning (Bentley *et al.*, 1985). This socially responsive approach takes human behaviour as a direct representation reflecting the quality of the environment. It thus became a manual for urban designers to use in practice. Following this socially-responsive tradition, Hillier and Hanson (1989) put the human and social logic of an environment in a more geometrical way. They provide comprehensive evidence to argue that the spatial configuration was directly related to the social interaction through the movement and behaviour analysis.

Concerns about the way that the urban realm shapes human functions continue, especially within the urban design and planning field. The emphasis on enhancing the human experience of public spaces implies that social interaction is essential to public spaces in terms of engendering meanings. The decay of public spaces in American cities was depicted by some observers as a lack of vitality and social uses (Jacob, 1961). Urban public spaces such as streets and squares have been discussed in regards to people's daily uses in this sense. Gehl's (1996) most influential book *Life Between Buildings* presented more qualitative indications to measure the quality of human experience in urban settings, providing useful insights into a more human-oriented urban design approach. This aspect of urban design has further implications

for the social dimension of place identity and is especially relevant to design practices for future work.

With the expanded meaning of place and its related design and planning concerns, it became more complex and particular challenging for environmental designers to treat place as a more collective entity beyond the traditional manipulation of physical forms and spaces. Nowadays, many studies are centred on the meaning of place suggesting that it is necessary to promote a full appreciation of place that is not just related to physical and spatial considerations, but also to the dimensions of human experiential and behavioural functioning (Thwaites & Simkins, 2007).

All these place-related researches are examples of contributors that have pioneered a way of reading and understanding urban space in terms of people's behavioural and psychological functioning. They define components and vocabularies through which it is possible to discuss the quality of the urban environment in direct relation to people's experience and to reflect the essential nature of a place.

- **The definition of place identity and relevant concepts**

The exploration of the people-place relationship provides insights into how people interact with their surroundings, and most of them have a focus on spatial configurations in relation to human experience. Place identity is closely interrelated to the life within a space and its inhabitants, and also to the perception the latter have of that place. The investigation into this interpretative process has led to a number of concepts regarding the subjective feelings people develop towards a place, and are

mostly discussed within geography and environmental psychology. These concepts are theoretically related and empirically difficult to separate but not necessarily mutually exclusive and are usually chosen according to the interests of a particular research endeavour. This section attempts to bring some order to this complicated, conceptual and multidisciplinary discourse by drawing on the key conceptualizations and findings. This review does not seek to obtain a single definition of place identity. Rather, the related concepts regarding the understanding of place will all be discussed in order to identify the key elements that contribute to the various identifications with place.

The term 'place identity' was firstly introduced by Proshansky in 1978, it was seen as a substructure of self-concept theory that concerned the identification process people developed with their surroundings. According to Proshansky (1978), place identity is defined as those dimensions of self that constitute the individual's personal identity by means of conscious and unconscious ideas, beliefs, feelings and values relevant to the physical environment. After Proshansky's introduction of the concept, it has been widely discussed and developed, the interchangeable use of 'place' in different disciplines and the complex nature of 'identity' interconnect various research topics within the areas of the built environment, geography and anthropology. Researchers from different disciplines tried to capture the relationship between human beings and their environment by using a number of concepts such as place attachment and sense of place (Speller, 2000). Although most of them are not the direct consequence of 'place identity' theory as it appeared in late 1970s, they all contribute to the understanding of place-related identification.

The concept of place identity received great interest after Proshansky's profound work, and had its roots in the field of social psychology and anthropology. From a social psychological perspective, Proshansky (1983) describes place identity as the individual's incorporation of place into the larger concept of self, defined as a 'potpourri of memories, conceptions, interpretations, ideas and related feelings about specific physical settings, as well as types of settings' (1983, p.60). Researchers from this tradition viewed place identity as a physical referent, and part of self-identity, comparable to gender, political or ethnic identities.

In the time since the term 'place-identity' was introduced, the theory has been the model for identity that concerns the physical environment within the field of environmental psychology. Due to the complexity of 'place' itself, there has been a tendency to discuss the term regarding its variations. 'Place attachment', for example, was used to describe the feelings we develop towards places that are highly familiar to us (Altman & Low. 1992; Gifford, 2002; Manzo & Devine, 2013). When attachment to a place grows, we start to identify ourselves with these places, both at a larger scale (nation, city etc.) and at a smaller scale (neighbourhood, workplace, home) (Giuliani, 2003). Giuliani (2003) also stressed the difficulty of deciding exactly when place attachment becomes strong enough to be defined as identity or place-identity.

From a phenomenological perspective, the concept of 'place identity' and its associated meaning with 'place' has been explored by many researchers from the field of cultural geography. This phenomenological approach was initiated by Husserl at the end of the twentieth century, focusing on the subjective experience

and perception of a person's life world (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2004; Husserl, 1970). The underlying epistemological assumption is that objective reality does not exist independently; the experience of reality is an experience of meanings (Lalli, M. 1992). This notion has largely influenced later researchers, especially from the field of environmental psychology and geography.

The phenomenological approach to place-related research firstly gained prominence through Norberg-Schulz's work on '*genius loci*' (1971, 1980). Currently translated as 'spirit of place', this Latin term refers to the belief that a 'locality derived much of its unique quality from the presence or guardianship of a supernatural spirit' (Jackson, 1994, p.157). Norberg-Schulz (1980) argues that *genius loci* represents the sum of all the physical and symbolic values of a given environment. This implies a deeper and more complex level of integration between people and their surroundings than Lynch perhaps envisaged, suggesting that, not only do people learn to read the environment and so form mental images of their surroundings, but that there are significant spatial dimensions to human existence. Norberg-Schulz's (1971) schemata emphasizes the role of the physical environment in fostering the symbolic meaning that distinguishes a place from elsewhere, and implies that there must be opportunities available in the routinely-used environment for people to be able to identify and attach personal significance to preferred locations, distinguish these from elsewhere and sense one's own territory.

Tuan (1974, 1977) developed a humanistic understanding of 'place' by shifting the focus of the conception to the emotional attachment to the environment. Tuan used the terms 'insideness' and 'outsideness' to describe people's feelings of being part of

a place. Tuan (1980) separated 'a sense of place' from 'rooted-ness', where 'sense of place' is described as an awareness of a positive feeling for a place, and 'rootedness' as a feeling of being home.

On the other hand, Relph (1976) considers the identity of place as a persistent sameness, and recognizes the three interrelated components contributing to this intangible spatial experience: physical features, observed activities and functions, and meanings or symbols. Place identity in this sense allows things to be differentiated from others, while retaining their continuity in time and a certain context (Relph, 1976).

Up to this point, this earlier literature indicates the way people perceive place as a theoretically rich but vaguely understood concept due to the complexity of human reality. This type of theoretical approach was largely based upon first-person phenomenological inquiry, which examined the author's first-hand experience to reveal the phenomenon's characteristics and qualities within a specific location (Chaffin, 1989; Meinig, 1979; Ryden, 1993; Seamon, 1990).

Following this, other authors working within this framework began to employ an existential-phenomenological approach, which investigates specific experiences of individuals and groups involved in an actual situation (Seamon, 2000). Nogué i Font's (1993) investigation of landscape experience and Seamon's (1979) geographic interpretation of the 'life world' are examples of this type of approach that no longer centres on the experience of the researcher within the studied situation but seeks to balance the researcher's own interpretation with that of the participants.

Eyles (1985) thus concludes that sense of place was manifested by an individual, and that an individual's sense of place varies according to different personal characteristics and social experiences.

Place identity has also been associated with the history of a place; it is therefore the product of a continuous evolutionary process, rather than a static image of its state (Sepe, 2013). Southworth and Ruggeri (2010) relate it with the concept of authenticity, which they define as the quality of place being unique, distinctive and rooted in the local. However, the identity of place is not a simple tag that can be summarized and presented in a brief description; it has several dimensions and often depends on the purpose of an analysis. Hague and Jenkins (2005) confirm that in an increasingly complex society, overlapping definitions of place identity exist, and are often based on people's perception and activities, described using physical attributes. Watson and Bentley (2007) observes that place identity matters to a wide range of people, it is 'the set of meanings associated with any particular cultural landscape which any particular person or group of people draws on in the construction of their own personal or social identities'.

- **Methodological approaches from various perspective**

Quantitative and qualitative approaches have been used to investigate place attachment. The early research traditions have their roots in geographical analyses of 'sense of place' (Patterson & Williams, 2005). However, the quantitative methods became increasingly developed during the last decades (Lewicka, 2011).

Within the place-related research, quantitative measurements are usually created to investigate the factors and levels of identification with place. This has been common in the place attachment research because the concept is used to describe the emotional bonds people develop with place. A variety of scales is designed and extensively used to measure the level of attachment. The most frequently-used tool was elaborated by Williams and Vaske (2003) based on the distinction between place attachment (affective bonds) and place dependence (instrumental bonds with place). Brehm *et al.* (2006) used two scales referring to the distinction between the physical and social dimensions of place attachment. They require participants to rate the relative importance of environmental and social factors for their attachment to the community. Unidimensional scales can also be found and operationalized as a continuum of seven phases of place attachment (Shamai, 1991; Relph, 1976).

The quantitative measurements developed within place-related studies add more complexity to the distinction between concepts such as place attachment and place identity. Qualitative methods such as interviews, site surveys and mapping offer more insights into the links between a place's physical properties and emotional bonds (Stedman, 2003a, 2003b). Some would combine drawings, maps or photographs to invite participants' comments during interviews (Bogac, 2009; Brown, 2005; Stedman *et al.*, 2004). These methods are able to generate important data regarding the meaning of physical places because it is essentially acquired through social interactions, memories, symbols and multi-sensory feelings. In this sense, the quantitative research methods are criticized for focusing on grasping more differentiation among people's subjective emotions *vis-à-vis* places, rather than the meaning of place itself (Stedman, 2003b).

The visual methods concerning the physical environment are widely used within the field of urban design and architectural study. Lynch (1960) adopted a mental map to link the visual form with people's perception, and combined it with interviews. The choice of a map as a way to describe areas illustrates the five elements that constitute the symbolic meaning of places. Cullen (1961) further developed the idea of a city image by interpreting people's views about their experiences within the urban environment. Such information regarding movement and behaviour is usually collected and presented through visual tools. Bill Hillier and his Space Syntax Laboratory treat the built environment as a system of space in order to find spatial structures and relate them to people's movements (Hillier, 1996). Gehl (1987, 2010) observes people's activities and behaviours in a public space to identify problems and the potential for improving public space. These methods provide implications for this research in terms of gaining qualitative data that combines both physical referents with human experiences.

- **Summary of place identity literature**

Over the last four decades, the discussion on the people-place relationship above has produced diverse perspectives and all started with similar concerns but ended in different viewpoints. By the nature of epistemological foundations, none of them provide a final theoretical model, rather, an understanding from the process of research itself, which reveals the complexity of the topic.

The initial concern over the people-place relationship stems from human psychological processes, which are believed to be embodied in the behaviours people exhibit in relation to the characteristics of their environment. From a more objective and scientific perspective, the aim of this type of research is to identify components and properties of the physical environment which impede or facilitate people's behaviour and actions. The approach thus highlights the role of architects and urban planners in terms of the positive intervention they could make to better fulfil people's needs.

On the other hand, the phenomenological perspective explores people's inner world by seeking the indications and reasons why people arrive at these behaviours, examining the feelings that are driving people to act in a certain way. The phenomenological approach is more subjective in the way that the result varies according to people, location, residency time and so on. It is more abstract, uncertain and reflects individual experience. However, as the problems of subjectivity become evident there are scholars proposing more objective ways of analysis by including participants' views. Between these two perspectives, Lynch's conception of city image seems to be almost equally concerning to both sides, initiating the debate by first combining the cognitive side of human experience with the physical environment. Similar with city image, '*genius loci*' overlaps with the first approach to some extent by emphasizing the role of the environment's symbolic meaning. The same situation could also be found in some views from a social and self-concept perspective that believes identity arises from a place's symbolic meaning.

A cluster of scholars from environmental psychology have built the concept of place identity on self and social interaction. Although developed within another area it still has a wide relevance. They believe that place exerts its impact on people in terms of evoking a feeling of attachment which contributes to, or forms a part of, personal identity and self-esteem. The physical character and personal experience still influence the place identity in this way, but is no longer the central concern. Instead, place identity is considered as a more socially-interactive, dynamic and multidimensional construct. As the concept is widely understood and predominantly used to explain the identification with place, the place identity theory was criticized for not providing a detailed structure and process (Twigger-Ross, Bonaiuto & Breakwell, 2003), as well as failing to specify the spatial extension of the term 'place' (Lalli, 1992). Nevertheless, there are attempts at proposing a quantitative methodology to evaluate place-identity by subdividing it into place-attachment and place-satisfaction (Stedman, 2001, 2003). However, the validity of the means of quantification in positivistic environmental-behaviour methodology remains to be justified.

Another distinction to be drawn from these theoretical thoughts is between subjective identity and the identity of a place itself. Although there is an interactive, reciprocal relationship between these two identities, developments in psychological theory have emphasized the subjective element (i.e. the viewpoint of the individual and identification with place). In general, the term 'place identity' has been used with respect to the relationship of the individual with a place and not to the identity of a location itself. With the latter being largely neglected, the possibility of developing it lies most likely within the spatial approach where the physical

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environment plays an active role both in terms of symbolic meaning and orientating people's responses. The imageability and legibility discussed by Lynch (1961) could be further developed to represent the identity of a place, which generates meaning to distinguish itself from mere space.

The conceptual map below highlights the important concepts appearing within the discussion. Each direction of the axis represents a tendency of research focus, thus the location of a specific concept reflects its major concerns, and the degree of these concerns. However, the classification of these concepts is not exclusive but aims to reveal the main differences and the interrelationships between them. By grouping adjacent dots, three broad perspectives could be defined with common concerns. The bigger the dots are, the more recently the idea was raised, and *vice versa*. It appears that the concepts raised at an earlier time tend to be located in the central area reflecting a more vague focus as well as possibilities. As the idea develops, new concepts tend to have a more explicit and strong point of view, thus they are moving towards the edge of the map. The three broad camps constitute the main parts of place-related concepts based on the major concerns emerging from the literature review regardless of possible cultural differences. The identified key aspects of place-related research that investigate the people-place relationship could be summarized as personal experience, social interaction and physical settings. They help to shape the identity of places, whereas the nature and form of a place itself has to be determined by the specific socio-cultural context. Therefore, this research will combine both the theoretical insights with a specific Chinese context to explore how a sense of identity could be established through the built environment in Chinese cities. The production of space theory is the lens through which the phenomenon

could be explained, and enables the application of various dimensions of place

identity to Chinese urban squares.

Social interaction

Meaning-mediated model

(Stedman, 2001, 2003)

Social logic of space (Hillier & Hanson, 1984)

Sense of place

(Relph, 1970)

Pattern language (Alexander, 1977)

Personal

Rootedness

City image (Lynch)

Human oriented design (Gehl, 1996)

Physical setting

Genius loci (Norberg-

Schulz, 1970)

Place identity

(Proshansky, 1978)

Self-concept
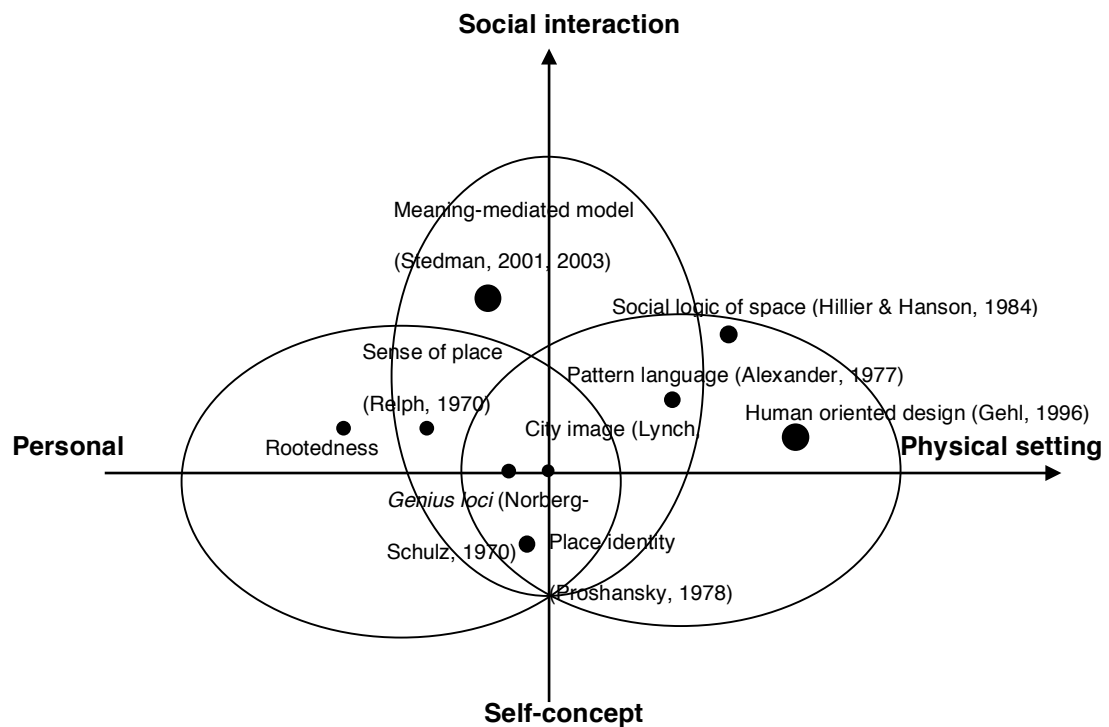
Figure 2-1 Conceptual map of place-related research

2.3   Spatial form in Chinese cities

2.3.1   The evolution and development of urban squares

The historic legacy is an important source of local identity and it needs to be

comprehensively understood in the process of contemporary urban development

(Chen & Thwaites, 2013). The notion of the public urban square is fairly new in

Chinese society and only came into use in the awakening of modernity. Traditional

Chinese urban form followed strict rules, and was mostly in rectangular form

arranged in blocks. The common public space was in the form of streets and markets.

Large empty spaces similar to today's urban square usually existed in imperial palaces or official buildings, but were inaccessible to the public. The dramatic spatial reconfiguration occurred following the transition period in the 20th century. The Chinese attempts to reshape the built environment, accompanied by modernist projects elsewhere, were driven by place branding or promotion in pursuit of an identity that would aid international competitiveness. The traditional identity of Chinese space and its connection with the past were somehow lost in the urbanization process.

- **Traditional urban form and public space**

In the feudal society of China, the aboriginal understanding of the human-environment relationship was developed through people's attachment to, and fear of, nature into a system of cosmological understanding, which had a fundamental influence in later periods. One of the earliest Chinese cities - Erlitou - was an example embodying this understanding. It was built about 1900-1500 BC during the Xia Dynasty (2070-1600BC) and located in today's Henan province (Zhuang & Zhang, 2002). Zhengzhou in the same area was built three hundred years later as the capital of Shang (1600-1046 BC). Sit (2010) stated that the construction of Zhengzhou became the basis of Chinese imperial cities. Many archaeological sites and inscriptions revealed that the successive kings of Shang commonly practised divination to make important decisions such as the relocation of capital, wars and large-scale construction work (Wang, 2005). This connection between natural and social phenomena was believed to have continued during Zhou (1046-221 BC) and

was recorded in the divinatory book Zhouyi (Classic of change) (De Bary & Bloom, 2000).

It was from *Zhouyi* that traditional cosmology and philosophy was systematically developed during more than two thousand years of feudal society and gave order to the form of Chinese imperial cities. The earliest understanding of human-environmental relationship as recorded in *Zhouyi* was the close connection between nature or the universe, form (physical appearance), symbols (abstraction) and meaning (natural rules and principles) (Chen, 2013). The ultimate goal of form-making and human activity was to coordinate with the universe. Mainly beginning in the late Zhou, this concept was interpreted in different principles and moral codes in Chinese philosophies such as Confucianism, the Guanzi and Taoism which aimed to produce practical principles for living based on the classic thoughts.

Following this tradition, the city construction rules were carefully documented in *Kaogong Ji* (The records of works), one of the chapters in *Zhouli* (The Ritual of the Zhou Empire). It was a written code, which specified a set of rules for an idealized Zhou Empire (1046-221 BC). The contents not only included ritual procedures and standards of behaviour, but also the layout of palaces and cities as related to different social classes. Unlike medieval cities in Europe where urban forms were shaped primarily by a combination of commercial, religious and defensive needs, Chinese cities were primarily built to support efficient administration, because agriculture was the foundation of the society (Gaubatz, 1998; Xu, 2000). Since Chinese cities served as political symbols under the absolute power of emperors, the diagram in the

Zhouli placed the palaces in the centre of a square city with an orthogonal grid to honour the emperor's power in a strong geometrical language.
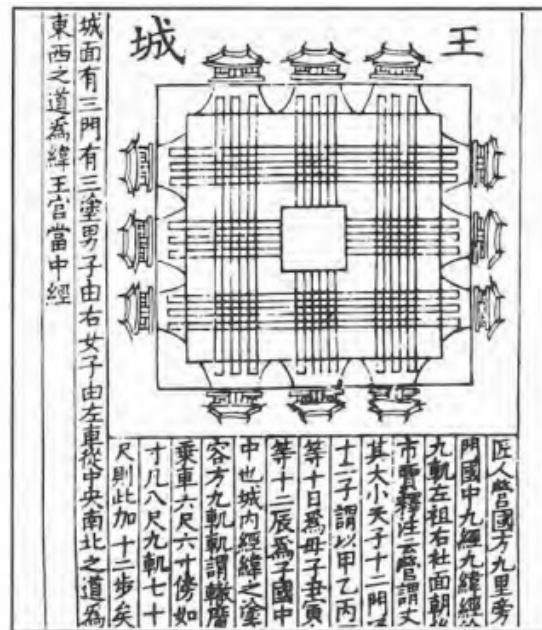
Figure 2-2 The city model as documented in Kaogong Ji

(Source: Miao, 1990)

After 500 years of wars among various states during the late Zhou, the first emperor of Qin unified China in 221BC. Centralization was the core policy of the new Qin dynasty as a means of integrating the diverse and newly conquered states. Although this dynasty only lasted 15 years, the succeeding Han dynasty inherited and strengthened the new nation. Confucian doctrines that advocated a centralized monarchy became the dominant and most enduring ideology in Chinese society from the Han dynasty (206BC – 220AD).

Confucianism proclaimed rationality and authority established by the state, it stated that, in descending order, the world consists of heaven, the earth, emperors, ancestors, masters and common people (Chen *et al.*, 2013). Emperors regarded

themselves as the Son of Heaven, with cities as the medium to convey the power of heaven to consolidate their governance on earth. Confucian doctrine played important roles in Chinese society, in terms of determining what the beliefs and rites should be, and the rules were regarded as symbols of social order that did not involve supernatural beliefs such as *Fengshui* (Wright, 1977). The city building rules recorded in *Zhouli* materialized this ideology of urban form, and became the primary criteria for Confucianism.

Every emperor of a succeeding dynasty in China tried to make the physical form of their capital as similar as possible to the ideal model in the *Zhouli*, in order to present their legitimacy and power. The most influential city embedding the political symbolism was the capital city Chang'an in the Tang (618-907), when Confucian doctrine was most strongly promoted by the emperors. As a pre-planned city, the walled rectangular area of Chang'an was divided by the street grid into 109 walled and controlled residential wards. The walled palace contained the emperor's Audience Hall and his residence occupied the most strategic ground in the north quarter, forming the central core and axis of the city (Sit, 2010). A similar form was also found in other cities, where local governors followed the same ideology and copied the form of the dynastic capital in the construction of their governing cities. Although the cities often had irregular boundaries, their internal organization still followed the orthogonal model (Miao, 1990).
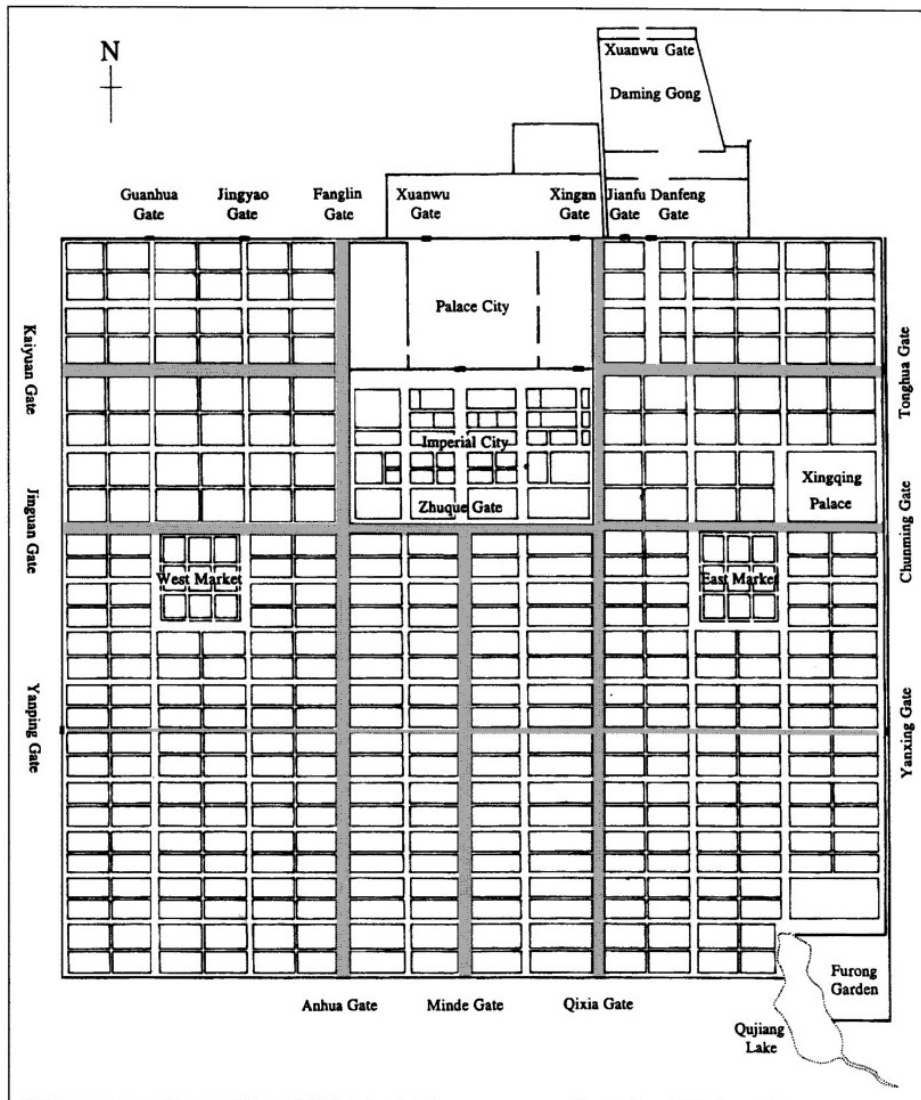
Figure 2-3 The plan of Chang'an of the Tang

(Source: Sit, 2010)

The similarity and several distinct characteristics could be noticed in many Chinese

cities according to this predominant orthogonal model of city building. The first was

that the major circulation routes and streets tended to be arranged in an orthogonal

and symmetrical network, forming the cross or 'T' grid. The administrative centre

was usually located in the north, facing in a southerly direction, suggesting that the

south is the most important side of the city. Other residential and public institutions

in the rest of the city were coordinated and oriented within the rectangular blocks

created by streets. Due to the nature of this city-making model, the traditional spatial

form of Chinese cities developed so that any irregular leftover space was largely

eliminated. As the administrative centre of a region, cities were largely occupied by

palaces, ritual temples and government buildings as well as the residences of the

social elite. Commercial activities, which were suppressed following Confucianism,

took place only within designated markets, and residents were strictly controlled in

their residential wards (Liang and Sun, 2003). As suggested in the ideal city model,

design elements such as the shape of the city walls, the orientation, location of

palaces and the central axis were the most important, while social or public spaces

were neglected and considered unnecessary in the city (Chen *et al.*, 2013).

Figure 2-4 Nanhui (14c.)

(Source: Miao, 1990)

However, the impact of socio-economic factors on urban forms became evident from

the Song (960-1279) when trade, manufacturing and entertainments began to

develop during the 10th and 13th centuries (Sit, 2010; Chen, 2013). The designated markets in previous dynasties were no longer sufficient; shops were soon built to replace the walls along streets (Li, 2007). In these cities, the public realm usually took the linear form along streets with open access to ordinary people. Public activities such as vendors and street performances happened at the nodes of a street or in front of a temple, where people could gather to bargain or socialize. The Temple courtyard served most public activities such as temple fairs and religious festivals that often represented traditional Chinese public life (Gaubatz, 2008).

Apart from a few commercial streets with shops and vendors, most streets within residential blocks were narrow and windy alleys defined by high walls on the two sides to separate private family life from the outside. As David Strand (1989) remarked: 'The fifteenth-century Ming plan of the capital decreed boxes within boxes and cities within cities. The habits of vernacular architecture extended this principle into neighbourhoods and residences.' The family unit of Chinese society tended to develop private open space within the walls, such as courtyards and private gardens. The inward pattern relating house to street not only resulted from the city constructions rules, but also reflected the need to maintain family privacy and independence, which could be related to the self-contained agricultural economy of traditional Chinese society.

- **The emergence of the urban square**

As noted by many scholars, the large outdoor urban spaces were largely cut off from the traditional Chinese urban environment (Miao, 1990; Kostov, 1992; Xu, 2000;

Gaubatz, 2008). The public open spaces tended to be linear, with some sections expanded into small nodes, and the public activities were limited due to the constraints of the city boundary. The high walls that surrounded and organized the space of China's traditional cities precluded the existence of true public spaces.

On the other hand, the evolution of urban squares in European cities has presented a quite different path. City squares in medieval Europe were usually regarded as open 'places' that acted as settings for churches, guildhalls, town halls, or other prominent buildings (Xu, 2000). Gerald Burke (1976) offers an explanation for the square, that the word 'place' is taken to correspond with the French 'place', German 'platz' and Italian 'piazza' referring to an open space in a city or town usually surrounded by buildings. The English word 'square' is nearest in meaning though a 'place' is not necessarily four sided or right angled. From a phenomenological point of view, Norberg-Schulz (1980, pp.60-61) insists that the square 'often condenses what is spread out along the street into one complex but comprehensive image, [it] appears as a complementary form to the 'exterior' of the settlement. The sense of arrival is here fulfilled'. French (1983) considered the street, parks and squares to be the three broad categories of urban space, because they are open to all and maintained with pride, representing the reality of urban life at its best.

These statements to some extent interpreted the nature of the urban square in pre-modern Europe. Temple courtyards in imperial China had been serving most social functions and may have included the most distinct element or basic phenomena of European squares. However, despite their unroofed spaces, multiple functions and the central locations, Xu (2000) argues that this should not be a simplistic

comparison and a more nuanced analysis of the differences is needed. They are purposely built neither as a marketplace nor as a religious centre; the events and public activities that took place there were mostly spontaneous and temporary only reflecting a section of the whole spectrum of social life. The only larger and well-defined open spaces were the ones in front of an official building or a Confucian temple. Although these spaces resembled the spatial form of European civic squares, they were not allowed to be used by the public and use for commercial activities was banned. The neglect of markets and public spaces had much to do with the structure of Chinese traditional society, where a centralized political system was based on bureaucratic position and the majority of residents were prevented from sharing local power or even a piece of officially designated open space.

Over 2,500 years, the historic Chinese urban form experienced dramatic changes with a fundamental influence from the west in the late 19th century. After China's defeat in the first Opium War in 1840, the Qing government signed a number of conventions with Western colonizers and Japan to open up trade, to allow the establishment of foreign concessions governed directly under foreign authorities in treaty port cities. After the second Opium War in 1857, 27 concessions were established in 10 Chinese cities and most of them were along the coastline and major rivers (Deng, 2009). During this period, western concepts began to influence urban planning and the construction work carried out in the concessions, accompanied by a significant decline in traditional urban structures and landscape (Gaubatz, 1998). The nature of the traditional Chinese city as the agent and representative of the central government was at risk, colonizers intended to bring order and progress into cities

through infrastructure renewal, such as building a new street system and introducing western style architecture (Sit, 2010; Chen, 2013).

The social, economic and political modernity developed in China was accompanied by the development of the public sphere. Following the western Beaux-Art tradition, the radial street system emphasizing a centrally-located plaza and classic buildings to showcase imperialism was commonly found in the foreign concessions in Qingdao, Harbin and Dalian. However, the constructions in concessions were mostly infrastructure renewal. The systematic urban planning was started only after 1928 when the Nationalist Party of the Republic of China (founded in 1912) established its power over the country. The new government launched a series of master plans in big cities such as Shanghai and Nanjing. These plans were heavily influenced by western planning concepts such as the Garden City Movement, the City Beautiful Movement and Modernism, focusing on the hierarchy of the street system and functional zoning (Wang, 2003). Although the implementation of these plans was mostly obstructed due to the political instability and lack of funds within the Nationalist government, the early modernization of Chinese cities led by westerners changed the urban form, especially of the treaty ports, as well as people's perception of modernity.

After the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the socialist urban practice in China followed the Soviet model. The massive changes in urban planning brought by many Soviet advisors included the construction of wider roads, large public squares, grand public monuments and new city centres which dominated the monumental landscape (Schinz, 1989; Xie and Costa, 1991). The vast scale of these

squares was for mass gatherings and denoted the grandeur and superiority of socialism whilst usually benefitting from political privilege and investment (Gaubatz, 2008; Chen & Thwaites, 2013).

The construction of Tiananmen Square in the 1950s was a typical example of the emerging urban square in China, and resembled Moscow's Red Square showcasing a distinct socialist ideology. The area occupied by Tiananmen Square comprised the avenue leading up to the imperial palace within the Forbidden City, the gate that separated the palace from the less-informal outer space was known as Tiananmen (Chang, 1977; Wright, 1977). As an intermediate zone between the imperial palace and the outside world, the space outside Tiananmen traditionally served as the location for rituals and military reviews, which only involved certain groups of people. The new square replaced the 'forbidden' centre just in front of Tiananmen gate with an open space where the common people could gather. The square was first expanded to 54,000m^2 for a gathering of 70,000 people marking the declaration of a new China, and gradually expanded to encompass 400,000m^2 being able to hold 400,000 people by 1959 (Wu, 2005; Gaubatz, 2008).

The making of Tiananmen Square was a profound event in the history of Chinese urban public space development. Chinese cities in the 1950s and 1960s saw a nationwide upsurge of development of urban squares; examples of these squares include People's Square in Shanghai, Dongfeng Square in Kunming and Zhongshan Squares in Dalian (Zhou, 2005). Many of them followed Beijing's example by creating massive paved squares either within the existing urban fabric or on its outskirts (Gaubatz, 1999). However, these urban squares created during the Maoist

era did not necessarily constitute public space in terms of social activities, they

mainly served as the space of exclusion, meant for official events and the staging of

mass demonstrations, they are more 'political' than 'public' (Huang, 2005;

Hassenpflug, 2004; Chen, 2010).
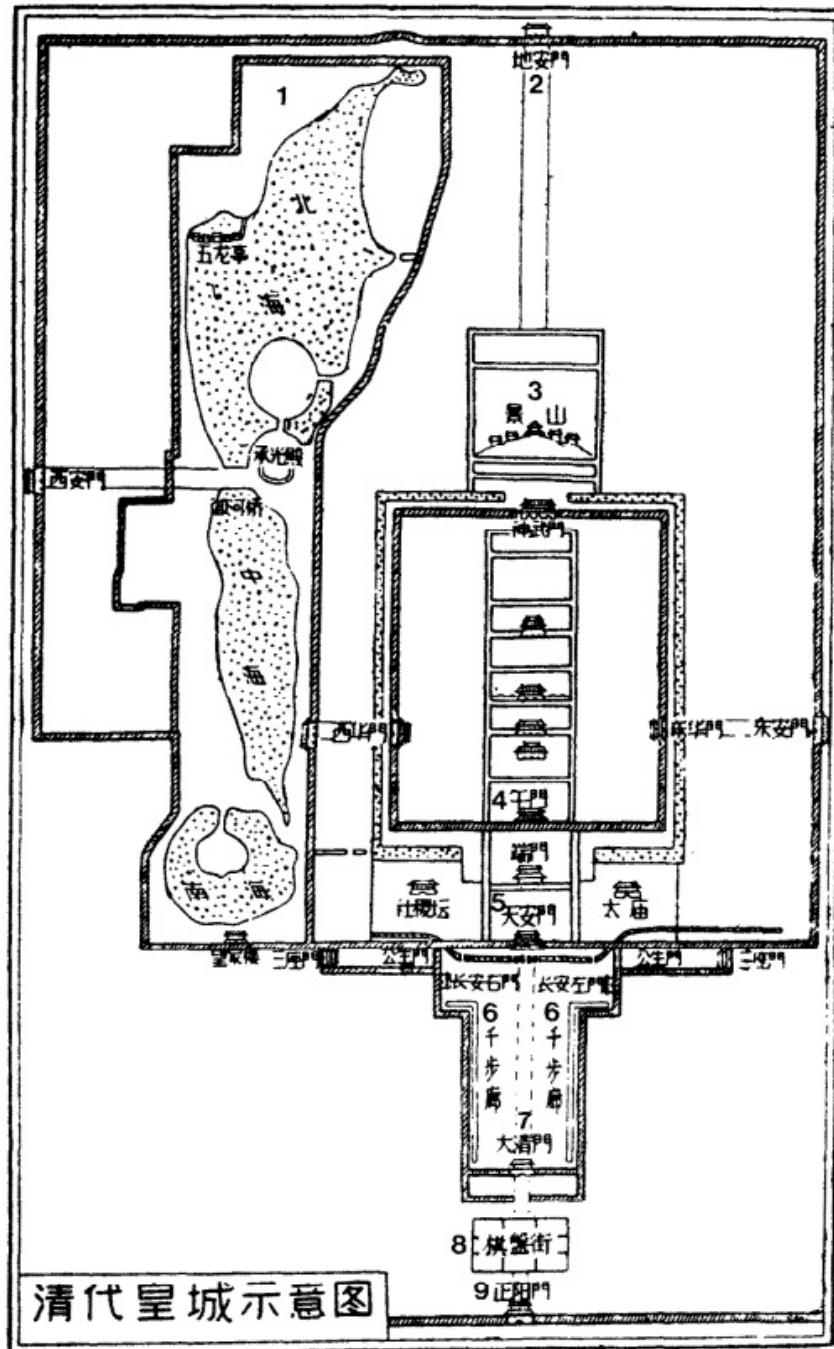
Figure 2-5 The Forbidden City and the 'T' shape square outside Tiananmen of Qing.

1. Northern Sea, Middle Sea and Southern Sea; 2. Di'anmen; 3. Coal Hill; 4.

Wumen; 5. Tiananmen; 6. Qianbulang; 7. Daqingmen; 8. Qibanjie; 9.

Zhengyangmen

(Source: Hershkovitz, 1993)

Figure 2-6 Shanghai People's Square in the 1960s

(Source: Zhou, 2005)

During the first half of the 20th century, unrest and civil wars had left Chinese cities

with poverty and destroyed urban patterns. The newly established government had to

seize the opportunity to rebuild the cities as models of socialist organization and

ideology. From 1950 to 1976, one of the primary goals of Chinese urban planning

was to create a self-sufficient urban form; cities were to become production centres

emphasizing industrial development. However, after a short period of city

reconstruction in the early '50s that mostly focused on Beijing and a few major cities,

professional planning and urban space development were to a great extent

subordinated to a series of political catastrophes and economic disasters such as the Great Leap Forward (1958-1959), the Readjustment of Policies (1961-1965) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) that occurred during this period. It was not until 1978, when Mao's successor, Deng Xiaoping, initiated the economic reform or the Open Door Policy, that China entered a new era of urban development. The successive reforms of economic, social and political structures introduced a market element such as the commercialization of housing, and brought a series of dramatic transformations to Chinese urban space; globalization was also a driving force for the changes in Chinese cities (Chen, 2013). With the revitalization of large-scale urban development programmes, the importance of systematic city planning was recognized (Xie and Costa, 1993). The changing planning principles regarded urban planning as an instrument for implementing the nation's economic development goals. As a consequence, the emergence of central business districts, changes of house form and the construction of image-enhancing landmark buildings and squares became the major characteristics of this rapid urbanization whose aim was to attract foreign investment (Wu & Ma, 2005; Friedmann, 2007; Chen, 2013).

- **Understanding Chinese urban public space**

Although there have been substantial discussions on the issue of urban public space, academic works have basically focused on Western industrial (or post industrial) capitalist countries, little attention has been given to countries outside the Western context. The social-economic developments and transitions that are taking place in China have brought significant challenges to the present urban space development in Chinese cities. Urban public space is becoming a pressing issue under the market

economic reform. Concerns include the questioning on 'publicness' – the essential public attribute of space – that whether the public space under discussion is really 'public'.

The wide controversies over the 'publicness' of public space indicate that an articulated definition on the 'publicness' of urban public space is absent especially from the definition of 'urban public space' in Chinese urban planning. In facing the unprecedented socioeconomic transitions, a substantial amount of public space has been built in many Chinese cities during the last two decades. It seems that the interest over the issue of public space is rising in recent years. It is found that the notion of urban 'public space' in Chinese literature is regarded largely equivalent to the term urban 'open space'. Some scholars describe public space as a category of urban open space that is dominated by artificial elements (Zhao & Zhang, 2001; Zhao, 2000). From the perspective of physical or functional dimensions, Wang (2002) defines urban public space as the urban space that exists between buildings, and states that it is the space that serves as open space for the public activities of urban residents. The most frequently referred definition comes from Urban Planning Principles, which is used as a textbook for urban planning students in many universities and colleges.

> 'The narrow sense of urban public space means the outdoor space
> for daily activities and public uses of the urban residents, including
> streets, squares, outdoor playing grounds, parking lots, residential
> green spaces, parks etc. … The broad sense of public space

involves urban spaces for public facilities, such as the CBD,

commercial street and urban green land etc.'

The meaning of Chinese urban public space can be further understood through its definition in normative planning standards or codes in spatial practice. The most relevant contents were found in two important national planning codes: the *code for classification of urban land use and planning standards of development land (GB 50137-2011)* and the *code for Urban Residential District Planning (GB 50180-93)*. However, the conception of 'urban public space' is not explicitly defined in both codes except for the normative guidelines implying how 'urban public space' is conceived and implemented in conventional Chinese planning systems. According to the former code, which is the fundamental national guideline for professional urban planning practice in China, the spatial type that constitute urban public space are involved in type G – Green space and square. The type G land use is generally described as urban public open space and further divided into three major types including G1 - urban parks, G2 – protective green space and G3 – urban square.

According to the review on current literature, Chen (2010) identifies a significant theoretical gap from these definitions of urban public space in current Chinese planning for lacking of systematical examination of the nature of Chinese urban public space. It is found that the term remains technical and the meaning of 'publicness' is basically buried under the technocratic quality of planning. Because of the absence of an explicit

definition of urban public space, Chinese analysts have made a number of attempts to identify and categorize public space in China today. An analysis of residents' perception of urban public space in a newly developed district of Tianjin identified eight types of urban public space: commercial retail space, service space, local markets, auditoriums/performance space, recreational space, clubhouses, formal urban public space (landscape plaza etc.) and parks (Long et al., 2008). Wu (2001) answers the question 'what is urban public space' with two emphases: meeting the daily needs of local residents with streets, open squares, the outdoor spaces in housing areas, and parks and recreational facilities; and meeting the larger-scale needs of the city as a whole through the development of civic centres, commercial districts and green space.

Gaubatz (2008) argues that it is the existence of a public sphere that enables the 'public' aspect of urban space – the spaces where the public sphere can be built, experienced and performed. And as many have observed, it is only in the 20th century that there has been a profusion of different types of public and quasi-public spaces within Chinese cities (Hassenpflug, 2004; Gaubatz, 2008). From a historical view, Xu (2009) categorizes the evolution of Chinese urban form into three stages: the lengthy pre-1949 feudal monarchy when walled residential quarters and introspective courtyard were sustained; the socialist period from 1949 to 1978 when gated work-compound (*danwei*) came to dominate the urban landscape; and the post-socialist era after 1978 when the contemporary gated community became prevalence in the commodity housing market. The following types of public space are

identified as the typical representations of Chinese urban public space according to the review, the understanding of the nature and publicness of each type requires an understanding of the economic/social/political context in which the space is produced.

o **Street**

As discussed in previous section, the streets were the most dominant public space in the long feudal society. However, its uses and nature differed in terms of 'publicness' through the history. Before 1949, the traditional urban form was mostly determined by the city building rules and philosophy, the strictly controlled urban pattern was initially shaped in the ancient slave soceity of Shang Dynasty and reached its height in Tang Chang'an (Dong, 2004). During the highly centralized Feudal era, this urban form has gradually evolved and subjected to social hierarchy (Gaubatz, 1999; Kiang, 1994; Stockman, 2000). However, the streets connecting residential wards were not really 'public' in the sense that public sphere cannot be established and experience due to the strict social control at the time. It is not until late Sui dynasty did the commercial activities prospered along the streets, which required the demolition of walls for trading (Kiang, 1994). The residential pattern thus gradually evolved into rectangular residential sites divided by main streets with free movement and mixed land-use. The streets connecting dwelling units became communal linear public space, as they were entirely accessible to the passer-by and shops usually gathered around joint points serving the needs of local residents (Dong, 2004). This pattern (also called *hutong* in northern China or *fang xiang* in the south) ran through the

following thousands years until today. Xu (2009) argues that this urban transformation was by and large a self-evolving process based on a traditional agricultural economy. It progressed very slowly until 1840 when the foreign concessions were built in over 30 treaty ports. The traditional residential pattern was modified in these cities with the impact of western structures and lifestyles. However, except the increasing open space and diverse activities, the introverted housing tradition and territorial control were retained (Xu, 2009).

- o **Courtyard**

Another evident character of traditional urban form that can be observed is the *enclosed open space*. It usually existed in traditional Chinese cities in the form of introverted courtyard within the residential compounds. Compared to the openness and accessibility of a typical western house, the Chinese tradition inclines to internalize the open space with walls and buildings around it (Xu, 2009). It seems to be seen as a claim to territory and privacy. This type of inward looking open space is named *courtyard* in northern China or *sky well* in the south. This spatial organization is widely found not only in traditional housing compound but also in palaces, temples and gardens in ancient China. It reflects the main tenets of Chinese understanding of people-place relationship.

- o *Danwei* **/ gated community**

Ever since the foundation of People's Republic of China in 1949, Chinese society experienced dramatic transformation both economically and

politically. Before the economic reform in 1980s, the nature of Chinese

urban development was based on the socialist ideology of universal

publicness. During the pre-reform period from 1949 to the late 1970s,

responsibility for producing and allocating urban space in cities was largely

distributed between two major institutions: the municipal government and

work unit (*danwei*). Urban space, as an outcome of socialist production, had

no exchange value but was basically regarded as necessity for working and

living of socialist workers. For the majority of city residents, *danwei* was the

source of employment, the provider of residences and other material support.

It was not only the housing unit but also the most used space for the

everyday life of the residents (Bray & Wu, 1995). Huang (1993) describes it

as 'an intellectual space comprising state generated public space, society-

originated, officially-backed public space, societal public space and

dissident public space'.

2.3.2   Delivery and understanding of place identity

The economic and political reforms of the late 20th century had a significant

influence on the development of urban public space in China. The shift from a

socialist planned economy to a market-oriented economy recognized the value of

urban land, with urban space development being promoted as the engine of urban

growth. Urban squares became the major component of urban public space by

embodying representational meanings and city marketing strategies. The political

goal of creating an ideal city image was demonstrated in part through the

construction of large urban squares.

- **The impact of urbanization on space production**

Between the year 1949 and the late 1970s, Chinese urban development was characterized by the socialist planned economy and the pursuit of the Soviet model. The goal of the newly-formed Chinese government under Mao was to industrialize the country without incurring the heavy costs of urbanization (Friedmann, 2007). Mao's ideology of self-sufficiency and self-reliance adopted the form of *danwei* (huge residential blocks containing state-owned work units) as the core for a socialist city of production. A work unit attempted to integrate working and living spaces in close territorial proximity and combined workplaces, houses and public services in a single compound (Xu & Yang, 2009). Under the highly centralized socialist planned economy, all urban land belonged to the people as a whole, and the state administered land on behalf of the people (Tang, 1994). Each work unit was under the control of the state while individual enterprises retained greater autonomy; a large work unit usually contained a complete set of facilities ranging from shops and canteens to hospitals and schools because of the idea of equality. These mixed-use work units aimed to minimize travel between home and workplace, helped to increase production efficiency while reducing costs during the recovery period (Demko & Regulska, 1987). By providing necessary facilities within each work unit, these compounds were isolated from urban settings and became socialist miniatures where individuals' needs would be met collectively. The 'public-ness' of the urban square for everyday social life remained largely unfulfilled due to the single socio-spatial pattern, instead, its political representational meaning was emphasized by the municipal government to represent socialist solidarity under the leadership of the

Communist Party. This symbolic space-making strategy of urban public space was also inherited and embedded in the planning principles during the post-reform era.

After the economic reforms in 1978, the conventional settings of the Chinese urban space production mechanism formed before the 1980s has evolved and persists in present Chinese cities. The socialist ideology of universal state ownership of land remained, and urban planning principles still have a profound influence and overall control of space production, and play a decisive role in the allocation of resources, as well as assisting in achieving national needs and goals (Xie and Costa, 1993). Urban land and space development are no longer considered as merely socialist welfare benefits as in a socialist planned economy, instead, physical development of urban space is promoted as the engine of growth in a new export-oriented economy (Chen, 2010).

Because of the growth of private and foreign enterprises in China after 1978, the provision and form of housing has been under dramatic transition and turned over to the market (Kim, 1987; Wu, 2001). The state maintained the ownership of urban land, while the land usage rights could be sold to developers by local authorities to raise revenue. The introduction of commodity housing thus broke down the *danwei* system that dominated the socialist planned economy with tens and hundreds of residential buildings being built on the periphery of a city. The fast-growing real estate industry is taking shape from those economic reforms; dense construction of urban housing was driven by developers' interests and municipal governments eager for urban expansion (Zhou & Logan, 2002).

The rapid transition in the housing form inevitably created challenges for housing management within the existing economic and institutional structure. As a result, the enclosed gated community that allows estate management companies to take over the maintenance of commodity housing were soon seen in China (Xu & Yang, 2009). These gated residential developments reproduced the exclusive characteristics of the work units, and usually came with the necessary recreational facilities and shared internal open spaces.

The social role of urban squares in Chinese cities has not yet been fully established at this time, because the rather enclosed housing form restricted much of the social activities within each residential community. The production of urban squares can be highly politically-motivated along with the rapid urbanization; the idea of attracting investment and attention is represented by the efforts to enhance a city's image through landmark projects such as iconic architecture and urban squares. The Third National Planning Conference held by the State Council in 1978 re-established the role of urban planning with the re-construction of the urban environment and public infrastructure becoming increasingly involved and emphasized as part of the political task (Han & Zhang, 2001; Chen, 2010).

- **The emphasis on the place identity of the urban square**

Post-1978 saw a fundamental shift in economic strategies, and establishing an ideal city image was an extremely important mission for a municipal government. The construction of iconic buildings and urban space projects is often employed as a means of place-branding or place-promotion to enhance the image of cities and their

competitiveness in the world market (Ward, 1998). As noticed by many scholars, cities in a globalized world are more than ever concerned with their identity, image and brand value (Jansson & Power, 2006; Hospers, 2010). A poor image of a place can devalue its attractiveness and thus local economic performance in the long run (Ashworth & Voogd, 1990; Anholt, 2007; Hospers, 2010). Especially for Chinese cities that are eager to boost economic growth, the identity of their urban space is considered by many planners to be an important urban element to establish a distinct city image that would attract outsiders.

From Chen's (2010) observation on the production process of the Civic Plaza in Shenzhen, China, she discovered that the politics of creating urban space as a means of city-marketing and political representation was established as the major incentive. In this sense, the visual and aesthetic value seems to be the main concern of space development. Such space-making policy can be defined as a 'political-oriented iconographic' guideline, in which the physical space is not the only essential aspect of the success of the space, indeed iconic meanings can add value by presenting appealing images (Sternberg, 1996). The space-making strategies inherited from the pre-reform era that emphasize the symbolic attributes of urban space continued and were regarded as the major expression of the identity of these spaces.

During the 1980s and 1990s, even though most of the urban squares were not built primarily for political events, as had been the case in the pre-reform era, the extraordinary scale and monumental spatial form were still the main characteristics. They were regarded as examples of local government's ambition to improve the urban environment and establish the image of a modern international city that had

left the past behind. Typical examples include Luxun cultural square in Shaoxing, the Bund square in Shanghai and Xinghai square in Dalian (Wang, 1999; Yuan, 2012; Ye, 2013). The city of Dalian has been highly praised by the central government for its intensive development of urban squares that significantly improved the urban environment in the 1990s, the experience of which has been promoted and frequently reported in the newspapers (Zhou, 2005; Ye, 2013). As can be seen from the making of these squares, the iconographic image construction was largely centred on the spatial elements that would integrate the core value of modernity. The notion of modernity has been characterized by the political expression on these occasions, in contrast to the traditional social orders that were related to people's routine life patterns. The 'open', 'public' and 'democratic' identity of a modern city was represented through spatial representations of enormous scale and the axial symmetry of urban squares, whereas the previous relationship between humans and physical form as an expression of social processes has been gradually changed over time.

Figure 2-7 Dalian Xinghai Square

(Source: Wang, 1999)

2.3.3   Identity crisis of the urban square

The space-making ideologies in China inherited from Soviet society have remained, yet the social value of the urban square has not been fully explored. Urban squares in China were subsequently developed as the symbol of modernism and are currently and repeatedly utilized to produce a global metropolitan image. However, this design approach has resulted in the loss of local identity in many Chinese cities. Recent years have seen the rise of a variety of social activities that have also reflected the fundamental changes in people's leisure patterns and social lives (Ye & Cai, 2012). The increasing social activities at public spaces indicated the changing role of urban public space, as well as the potential for delivering a sense of identity through the urban square.

With the rapid urban development in China after the economic reforms, the political ideology still played a dominant role in terms of urban planning and design strategies. The state-centred political economy perspective is the key to understanding Chinese urban transformation (Ma, 2002). Chen's (2010) study on Shenzhen civic square elaborated on how the politically-oriented city marketing ideology was translated into a set of symbolic space-making strategies that, ultimately, resulted in the effects most represented by extraordinary scale and space. Wu (1994) and Ma (2002) both argue that Chinese urbanization experience indicates that the consideration of the social functions of urban space was never a primary objective during the process.

In the pursuit of economic growth and attracting foreign capital during recent decades, central business districts emerged in Chinese cities as a result of capital

accumulation (Yin *et al.*, 2005). These financial districts featured highly profitable land use and new urban landscapes characterized by skyscrapers which shaped an internationalized city form to serve multinational companies and social elites. The phenomenon was regarded as the consequence of globalization and 'urbanization from outside' (Fan, 1995; Gaubatz, 2005). Following the extensive introduction of western architectural and urban design theories to Chinese professions from the 1980s, not only labour and investment capital, but also design professionals and concepts are becoming highly mobile (Yuan, 2012; Chen & Thwaites, 2013). Chinese cities followed this trend to transform themselves according to the western metropolitan image, many international architectural firms and designers were brought into the Chinese market and played important roles in changing the urban landscape (Huang, 2006). Ren (2008) argues that choosing foreign architects for those iconic urban projects reveals the ambition of Chinese elites and local government to showcase the nation as a new emerging economic power on the world stage.

As Chinese cities became larger and more cosmopolitan, the attempt to re-establish the national and urban identity for international audiences inevitably brought a new set of problems. It is noticed that most buildings, streets and squares created according to this ideology had similar designs, giving little personality to Chinese cities (Huang, 2006). Wu (2007) also argued that many new spatial elements were introduced into the Chinese urban landscape, such as skyscrapers and large-scale public space, while the vibrant street social life with mixed private and public space in traditional Asian cities is disappearing. According to Ma (2002), Chinese cities have over-emphasized the symbolic meaning of large public squares ever since the

pre-reform era, approaches that focus more on the tangible and cultural interpretation of the urban landscape have not been applied to socialist Chinese urban space. Gaubatz (2005) criticized the urbanization process of Chinese cities saying that it does little to preserve the local character of cities and facilitates social polarization.

The dramatic changes to city centre, urban space, skylines, housing and landmarks in Chinese cities may be seen as a serious threat to traditional or cultural identity, which diminished regional differences and resulted in a similar urban appearance across the country. Many Chinese scholars have also been aware of and discussed the identity crisis created by Chinese urban squares from various perspectives, the urge to create a modern city image and the influence of globalization are considered as major drives for current urban space development (Zhang, 2001; Jiang, 2009). Miao (2011) suggests that window-dressing is one of the major problems of Chinese urban space because of the inappropriate design concepts adopted from western styles that ignored the differences in local cultural contexts. Most researchers have realized the important cultural role of urban squares and suggested design strategies emphasizing distinct local cultural and topographical elements instead of a universal design ideology in the design of the physical environment (Yang, 2006; Deng, 2008; Cao, 2011). Upon the awareness of the loss of the traditional urban fabric and identity during the rapid urbanization, a few pioneer urban regeneration projects were conducted in historic cities such as Beijing, Xi'an and Suzhou from the early 1990s. However, due to the lack of a solid theoretical foundation, most of the conservation plans and regeneration projects focus only on preserving traditional cultural symbols for place promotion and tourism, and pay little attention to social

sustainability and place-making for local citizens (Li *et al.*, 2006; Shin, 2010; Chen, 2011).

On the other hand, the changing urban landscape has significantly transformed residents' urban lifestyle. The privatization and marketization of housing decreased the shared spaces within housing structures, yet the separation of housing from the 'workplace' increased the leisure time that urban citizens spend away from their neighbourhood. Gaubatz (2008) noticed the increasing diversity of recreational activities after the reforms, new activities such as dancing and opera singing are commonly performed in urban squares and parks. The inappropriate scale and privileged locations of most urban squares prevent local residents from using them in their daily life, in addition they also lack amenities and are less accessible (Miao, 2011; Chen, 2010). Under this circumstance, the efforts of western researchers dedicated to the development of design criteria that centred on people's behaviour and functioning within the urban environment have become especially relevant to the Chinese urban spaces. Gehl and Lynch's work received great attention from Chinese urban designers and a number of research projects were conducted to explore the possibilities of design in order to encourage people's use of space based on the spatial configuration identified in their work (Ren, 2003). Yuan (2007) explores the potentials of applying Lynch's mental map to the urban space in Shanghai in order to describe the key spatial elements influencing the city image. The need for embedding human-oriented design approaches into the way that urban realms are shaped continues with the increasing social activities and shift in people's urban life in recent years (Ye, 2012; Zhang, 2003; Zhou, 2005). Comprehensive design guidance aiming at improving the quality of place, such as providing more

recreational facilities and resting space at more appropriate scales, are suggested by many scholars (Zhang, 2003; Cheng & Chen, 2006; Chu *et al*., 2009). The possibilities of creating diverse urban spaces to accommodate increasing social activities such as square dancing are also explored (Tong, 2013; Zhao, 2012).

Upon the awareness of urban space's social roles in the changes to urban life, the previous space-making strategies are challenged by the rising conflicts brought about by the different user groups in their daily activities (Ye & Cai, 2012). The commercialization of many urban spaces and the revitalization of street life are seen as the re-invented public experience in transitional China (Gaubatz, 2008). Following this, the focus has been gradually shifted to the socially responsive design approaches within the overarching political ideology. The nature and meaning of place that reveal the dynamic relationship between humans and the environment have become popular topics within the Chinese academic field. After a closer look at the urban public space in the financial district of Shanghai, Sun (2006) argues that the gentrification of central urban space resulted in the loss of the traditional sense of space and decreased urban liveability, thus suggesting that urban design should pay more attention to the quality of public space rather than the arrangement of buildings and function zones.

Apart from the concerns about the loss of sense of place and place making in Chinese urban space, there is still a lack of empirical studies focusing on the people's perception and identification with the space. The discussions on the current identity crisis of the Chinese urban square tend to be design-oriented and functioning-based, improvement in the physical form was considered as a major

response not only to address practical issues, but also to deliver a sense of uniqueness. The progress that fundamentally relates people's understanding of place with its identity is, to some extent, far from adequate. This research thus fills the need to combine socially-focused research with the design approach in order to provide useful insights into the potential ways of enhancing place identity through the built environment.

There is also potential scope to explore the need to incorporate the newly-revived social role of the urban square with its impact on establishing a city image, not only through changes in the physical environment but also the possibilities of presenting a more vibrant urban public social life. The discussion and critiques on the design dimension of Chinese urban squares are raised not only by the increasing concerns regarding their similar urban appearance, but also the social interactions within the urban space that have been largely ignored in the previous urban design ideology inherited from the pre-reform socialist era. Within the present Chinese academic discourse on the subject, the extent and understanding of urban space has been considerably enriched and broadened during recent decades. However, the translation and application of western humanistic design principles to Chinese urban development requires further work, and the social dimension of urban squares has not been fully established.

2.4   Conclusion

This chapter examines a range of literature on urban public space and place-related identity research, as well as the development of Chinese urban form and squares.

The chapter finds the links and the possibilities to discuss place identity in the Chinese context by exploring the important roles of economic and political impact. The transition period of Chinese society reveals that the reordering of space is really a reordering of social relations, and the changing urban space created a visual representation of power and social life (Lu, 2006). Upon the recognition of Chinese economic and political reforms, and the rising identity crisis as well as the social activities brought about by the changing urban environment, broad issues need to be considered in order to establish the identity of Chinese urban squares apart from the thematic image-making. The various dimensions of the concept of place identity that range from human experience to self-identification provide a comprehensive framework within which the essence of place and the delivery of a sense of identity could be discussed regarding Chinese urban design practice.

The following chapter will explain the methodological approach adopted in this research, with reference to the key aspects of place identity drawn from this chapter. The three broad dimensions of the concept of place identity are further developed into three major themes that will guide the fieldwork and interviews and form the basic structure of findings related to the place-identity of Chinese urban squares.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

As described in Chapter 1, this thesis aims to investigate the formation of place identity in contemporary Chinese urban squares, by exploring the inter-relationship between people and place during the interactive process. The discussions in the previous chapter highlighted the key dimensions of the place identity concept, and its relevance to Chinese space production. This chapter will introduce a range of methodological techniques that were required to explore the nature of place identity and the role of public life in its evolution and development.

Due to the complex nature of the place identity concept, the review of relevant literature demonstrates the breadth of qualitative and quantitative research methods used by researchers from different disciplines. It is especially important to situate the specific research subject within the proper context so that the appropriate methods could be decided. In this research, the objective is to investigate the evolving place identity of current Chinese urban squares through an exploration of the people-place relations. It not only involves the representational and affective dimension of the place, but also recognizes the essential role of the socio-economic background of Chinese cities that has largely influenced the space production process and the identity of urban squares.

This study considered a mixed method approach that uses multiple sites for a case study in a single Chinese city. Three research techniques were used to achieve the research objectives: the literature and document approach, site survey and interview.

This chapter is divided into two broad parts. It firstly explains why these methods were selected in order to address the research aims and understand the research approach. The following part will interpret each research method in terms of how it has contributed to the data collection and analysis. The types and sources of literature and documents will be discussed. The aspects of the case study and the rationale behind the site selection will be explained, as well as the detailed process of interviewing.

3.2 Methodological approach

The methodological approach of this research is informed by the methodological approaches and theoretical ideas from the literature review, as well as the research aims and objectives. The following sections will explain how the methodological approach of this research was framed and structured in order to achieve the aims and contribute to the data collection. It is important to justify the methods used in this research and ensure they are effective in addressing the aims and objectives. As discussed in Chapter 2, the place-related research is often associated with physical settings and people's experience within the place, which would further relate to a wide range of emotional bonds and perceptions. The qualitative method in this sense is able to provide more informative and rich data regarding the use and perception of places. It could be used to record details and be interpreted from various perspectives so as to decode its complexity and inform decision-makers for future developments.

For many reasons the attempt to build a distinct place identity for urban squares in Chinese cities has confronted a series of problems including an identity crisis. This has prevented people from recognizing their strong sense of uniqueness and developing positive attachments to them. The possible solution lies in an in-depth exploration of how people think of, and how they are using, the current urban squares in order to understand the nature of place identity in these cases and inform the design practices. Because place identity is not a fixed notion, but rather a dynamic construct being constantly shaped during the interaction between people and place, the comprehensive analysis of place identity should incorporate both the physical and intangible aspects of the space. Also, it is especially necessary to situate the case study in a particular cultural context so that the conceptual ideas could be tested in terms of whether they could explain the evidence. The case study method has been useful in much landscape architectural research because it explains phenomena and evaluates projects, so that the future practices can build on existing cases by understanding their given context and how they worked (Francis, 2001). This research chose three urban squares in Chongqing for in-depth examination through careful survey work on-site and interviews with users to ensure that the findings are embedded in the specific local context and provide reflections on the design practices aiming to establishing a sense of place identity.

3.2.1   Defining key concepts

The purpose of this study is to explore the underlying place identity in Chinese urban squares from their symbolic representational meaning to the added social values. The methodological approaches for this study are drawn from the findings of the

literature review and especially the research aims and objectives. As discussed in Chapter 2, even though the notion of both place identity and urban squares has been developed and widely discussed in various fields, their advent in Chinese society is relatively new and needs further clarification. It is important to recognize the essential characters and definitions of both concepts in order to discuss them in another cultural context. Therefore, the literature review regarding the research approaches on western urban squares and place identity is necessary. The survey on a range of relevant articles, books and other sources pertaining to the research topic enables us to define the research scope that should be well situated within the specific cultural context. The limitations and potential of previous research traditions, on the other hand, helped to identify and develop the methodological approach for this study.

The various branches of place identity research have relied upon qualitative and quantitative perspectives. However, it is evident that the physical and social aspects of place identity are mostly expressed using qualitative data, which provide more detailed insights into how people experience the space (see Chapter 2). Especially in this study, which is mostly centred on the social interaction between people and space, qualitative research methods are used as major ways to explore the inter-relationship by observing actual situations. Within the broad qualitative approach, the findings from the literature review on key concepts address the first research aim of testing the theoretical foundations and various research approaches in order to define the research subject clearly during future analysis of qualitative data.

3.2.2 Establishing the cultural context

According to the literature review, the theoretical discourses on urban squares and place identity have shifted the focus from spatial representation to the observations of the social and political processes that have shaped the physical urban environment in recent years. Especially in Chinese cities, the significant transition featuring the economic and political reform has resulted in a more diverse environment for space-production. The rise of urban squares that helped to shape the physical environment is accompanied by the changing planning ideology and the involvement of the private sector. The core nature of place identity has also been re-interpreted and illustrated under this circumstance, which raises the need to establish a socio-economic background to the space production before discussing the consequent implications in delivering place identity.

Due to the dramatic transformations of Chinese cities during the last century, it is important to identify the traditional legacies that have influenced people's current perception and use of space. The understanding of human action itself is an interpretation that cannot be separated from the social and historical nature of human beings (Beidler, 2007). This stage requires the review of a range of archives and historical works, such as policy documents and maps, which relate to urban development and especially that of urban public space. The examination of the socio-economic changes covers both national and regional levels.

The last aim of the research intends to provide insights into the future development of Chinese urban squares in terms of delivering a strong sense of place identity. The

investigation into the cultural context would firmly link theoretical insights with practical concerns, to understand potential constraints or limits, and therefore generate feasible suggestions. This research adopted the case study method as it is especially efficient for research on urban environments because the 'bounded system' (Stake, 1995) of the case study area often has an implicit or explicit spatial focus, and its emphasis on context enables the examination of 'a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context' (Yin, 2003, p.13).

3.2.3 Qualitative data collection and the phenomenological approach

The selection of the methodological approach has to be based on the perspective of the research, addressing the research aims and objectives. The investigation of Chinese urban squares in this research deals with the meaning of place identity by exploring how people have developed their perceptions of urban squares through social interactions. The literature review in the previous chapter indicates that there are two broad camps in place-identity research, divided into quantitative and qualitative research approaches. The quantitative camp developed measurement tools to determine the scale of bonds with place, however it was critiqued for being less efficient in measuring the meaning of place (Lewicka, M., 2011). On the other hand, qualitative methods offer more insights into the meaning that place has entailed through the interaction between people and place, which is argued to be a qualitative phenomenon that cannot be described by means of analytic and 'scientific' concepts (Norberg-Schultz, 1979).

This research used a qualitative methodology because it aims to explore people's in-depth feelings, while the qualitative data is more efficient and flexible in terms of interpreting the inter-connection among the physical properties, socioeconomic status and cultural influences that constitute the identity of the place under investigation. As discussed in Chapter 2, phenomenology has remained the conceptual background for many researchers into 'place' over the last 30 years and much of the research on people's emotional relationships to places has roots in phenomenology (Seamon, 2000; Manzo, 2005). The phenomenological approach was also adopted in this research as it is particularly useful in place-based research when studying an individual's reactions and responses and 'help[s] identify universal properties of places that give rise to aesthetic appreciation, meaning and place-related emotion' (Lewicka, 2011, p.233).

The last aim of this research is to develop recommendations for future design practice in Chinese cities. It requires an in-depth exploration of how the urban square was built, used and perceived by people, which mostly centres on their social interactions. The qualitative methods used are able to record the actual activities and conditions on-site, as well as providing rich information about people's experiences and perceptions. Qualitative data collected through the site survey and interviews reflect both physical attributes and subjective experiences in this sense. These methods address the third research aim by exploring people's public life and the roles of urban squares in certain contexts.

Referring to the grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) that focuses on the nuances of people's experiences, this research firstly identifies the

phenomenon to be studied and then develops interpretations of the interview data. Brown (2008) suggests that the qualitative methodological approach grounded in interpretivism is especially helpful to encapsulate the inherent complexities which exist when individuals from different contexts and locations traverse common urban environments and situations.

3.2.4   Site selection

The research aims to investigate the evolution and identity of Chinese urban squares, and the people-place interactions and social uses. The research needs to be situated in a specific cultural context in order to generate adaptive suggestions for future development regarding the current identity crisis identified in Chinese cities. The objective was approached by conducting site surveys and interviews in selected urban squares in Chongqing to provide evidence on how a sense of place-identity has been perceived and understood by the users through their on-site experience.

According to the overall objectives, each site should be well established and associated with evident place identity issues resulting from the space production process in Chinese cities. However, sites with different backgrounds will be treated and understood individually in order to provide pertinent outcomes and establish a full account of the case (De Vaus, 2001). Stake (1995) suggests that the most important factor to consider when choosing case study sites is whether they have the potential to produce data that will answer the research questions. The identification of common topics and themes at an early stage in a case study is useful in terms of collecting descriptive information and undertaking cross-case analysis (Stake, 1995).

As discussed in previous chapters, urban square in China has largely been regarded as technical tools for government to improve the urban environment and a sense of local distinctiveness, in order to increase the city's competitiveness in the global market. The increasing social uses of square and its perceived identity have been the central of the issues discussed in this research. Due to the important roles of institutional and social political forces in shaping people's uses and perceptions of urban square, the selected Chinese city should reflect these impact in its urban development especially within the recent decades. Chongqing serves as a typical city for case study based on several reasons. Firstly, it is a historical city with rich cultural and social assets. The review of the evolution of its urban form is to indicate the impact of traditional legacy on current design strategies. The city was also a national capital during the Anti-Japanese war in the 1940s, the introduction of western lifestyle has significant influenced the urban transformation in the following period. The city has witnessed the urban transition and developed upon its traditional urban form. Especially after the 1997 when Chongqing became the fourth municipality of the country, much effort has been made to improve its urban environment. The challenges and contrast confronting the city are mininatures of many other Chinese cities. The investigation of the urban square in Chongqing is hoped to provide an overall picture of current uses and perceptions, as well as the potential conflicts raised by the previous design strategy and ideology.

As a resident of Chongqing, the researcher has acquired common knowledge about the urban environment of the city which is especially helpful in identifying the potential sites for case study. The primary criteria for site selection are based on

several main principles. Firstly, the type of urban square chosen should be typically

defined and developed; the creation of the urban square is endowed with

predominant meanings through its production process; and the well-established

physical environment and facilities are able to attract a wide range of users, which is

essential to ensure the data gathered on the site are informative and reflective. The

sites are not only the spatial representation of urban square typology, but also the

product of socio-economic development built during recent decades, representing the

space production patterns of Chinese society revealed in Chapter 2. Social

interactions observed or gained on these sites are important data to be analysed along

with key attributes identified in place-identity theories, in order to understand the

remaking of place identity in current Chinese cities. It is to ensure that the

investigation of these sites would reflect the actual spatial uses and their relation

with particular physical features.

According to the previous discussion on urban public space in China, there is a

lacking of articulated definition of urban public space in current planning system.

However, the most frequently adopted definition can be found in the official design

codes used by professions (*code for classification of urban land use and planning*

standards of development land). The type G land use attempts to include the most of

the urban public space and can be further divided into subtypes based on each

function (Zhou, 2005).

Figure 3-1 Green space and urban square classification

G – Green space and urban square		
Urban square	**Public park**	**Protective green space**
Memorial	Comprehensive	Urban green space that

Traffic	Residential	is for segregation and protection purposes.
Commercial	Children	
Recreational		

The urban square referred in this research is defined as the public space that is purposely built with large area of hard paving space, mainly for the purpose of recreation, memorial and gathering. Urban square is usually surrounded and defined by buildings and roads. The selected urban squares are not only the spatial representation of urban square typology, but also the product of socio-economic development built during recent decades, representing the space production patterns of Chinese society revealed in Chapter 2. The strong political implication helps to identify the potential contrast between social uses and symbolic representation.

According to the above principles, Chaotianmen Square, People's Square and Jinyun Square were selected for further investigation. The details and development histories of each square will be discussed along with the site survey findings in Chapter 5. The three urban squares share common characteristics while they are different in size, use pattern and identity.

Figure 3-2 List of the case study urban squares

	Chaotianmen Square	People's Square	Jinyun Square
Location	Yuzhong District	Yuzhou District	Beibei District
Built Year	1997	1997	2004
Area(ha)	1.7	4.0	4.0

Description	Located northeast of city centre where the Yangtze and Jialing Rivers join together. The historical city dates back to 314BC, built as a landmark sight and busy harbour.	In front of a historical building – the Great Hall of the People, the square was built as a combination of local life style and tourist destination.	In front of Beibei Administrative Centre, surrounded by a local residential community.

3.3 Archival and literature approach

The archival and literature study is playing a very important role in this research, as a valuable means of gathering comprehensive evidence on a particular question. The critical review of the literature not only provides researchers and readers with a picture of the state of knowledge and major questions in the study subject (Bell, 2005), but also a key source of evidence-based information to support and develop practices (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006).

Central to the method undertaken in this study is the understanding of the place identity concept and its application in Chinese urban squares. The main queries raised in the literature review include:

- How have research approaches on place identity in different disciplines developed and what is their relevance to urban squares?

- The evolution, transformation and production of the urban square in the case study city.

As a systematic documental study, the selected literature covers a range of outputs in the relevant area including the general background, peer reviewed studies and relevant policies, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of both the theoretical and developmental background in the case study city. In the process of literature collection, the selected literature has been divided into two parts. The first part is academic literature ranging from the reports, books and academic papers on relevant research studies. Meanwhile, the second part relates to the municipal context and background, policies and implementation for urban squares in the case study areas.

The academic literature study was based on work to establish a theoretical framework indicating the development trajectory of place identity research and its relevance with urban spaces. The data gathered through this process will be organized into discrete categories according to their properties and dimensions. Strauss (1990) suggested it is important not to be constrained by a previously developed theory, rather to pay attention to the interplay between reading the literature and evolving a hypothesis. Therefore, the academic literature research is aimed at identifying the relevant dimensions and elements of place-related concepts and developing an analytical framework for further discussions on the case study areas.

Although the analytical framework will be drawn from western scholarly work, which laid the foundations of the theory and the various branches of original ideas, a relevant city context and policies could be collected and reviewed to understand the process of urban square development in the case study city, Chongqing, and its identity problems. The archival documents within this practice-based study mainly focus on government publications, policy statements, statistical bulletins and private consultancy reports. These can be obtained from ministry and departmental libraries, archives, institutions and newspapers. They will be grouped and analysed in chronological order to reflect the development trajectory of urban squares in China and enable the researcher to investigate the limitations and problems in the design approaches through each stage in terms of delivering place identity.

Most of the archives and documents can be collected using online databases and libraries both in Chinese and English. Google scholar engine was also consulted as it supplies a large amount of academic information including peer-reviewed articles and books. Further, some professional public and governmental websites were also used to search related policies and strategies. (Figure 3-3 Types *of literature and related sources*)

Figure 3-3 Types of literature and related sources

Types of literature considered	Related Sources
Journal articles	ISI Web of Knowledge (WoK)
Conference papers	Scopus
Thesis	Springer Link

Book reviews	Google Scholar
	CNKI database (Chinese)
	Wanfang database (Chinese)
Books	Libraries
Planning and Policies documents	Chongqing Planning Bureau (www.cqupb.gov.cn)
Archive records	Chongqing Urban Planning and Design Institute (www.cqadi.com.cn)

3.4   Site Survey

The site survey addresses the physical aspect of an urban square especially its
relevance with people's activities. It aims to explore how people respond to certain
spatial configurations and develop activities according to different environments.
People's behaviours reflect their understanding and perception of the place, and *vice
versa*, which is essential to the place-identity under investigation.

3.4.1   Dimensions of the site survey

The case study method is used to investigate a wide range of qualities represented by
the different sites. The dimensions of a site survey should incorporate these qualities,
in order to relate them with the users' personal experiences. The range of aspects to

be examined was initially developed from the body of previous research on people-place relationships, however, the relevance and effects will be tested and discussed together with the interview results in the following chapters.

Place identity has become increasingly concerned with the relationship between human experience and functioning from a design and spatial perspective by urban planners and architects. It is argued that the certain spatial configuration can be detected by people and influences their perception of, and experience in, the environment (Lynch, 1960). Concerning the awareness of the impact of spatial configuration, this research carries out three case studies of urban squares in Chongqing in order to gain comprehensive information on current use patterns and identify the environmental attributes that have influenced people's behaviours and perceptions so that the potential of the physical environment in terms of re-shaping the place-identity in the Chinese context can be realized.

As acknowledged by Deming and Swaffield (2011), landscape architecture disciplines respond to the constant changes of the real world, and it is these changes that provide opportunities for forming understanding and interventions. The site survey conducted in this research aims at capturing people's dynamic activities and behaviour at each site to explore the role of the physical environment in facilitating these behaviours. As discussed in the previous section, the case study sites are chosen according to the scope and objectives of the research. The case study method is particularly relevant in this research because it is a well-documented and systematic examination of the process, decision-making and outcomes of a project, which can provide practical information on potential solutions in order to inform

future practice, policy and theories (Francis, 2001). The site surveys in this research enable researchers to examine the outcome of the projects in regard to the impact of the physical environment on people's activities.

Unlike the ecological survey frequently used in most landscape design and planning processes, the site survey in this research is primarily based on the examination of particular phenomena on-site rather than the evaluation of the project; it consists of mapping and observations focusing on people's activities with reference to the relevant spatial features at the three case study squares.

The importance of observation in environmental research has been acknowledged and used by many researchers. According to Zeisel (1981), observing physical traces is highly illustrative and provides rich impressions. It offers the opportunity to visualize on-site the various types of information and attributes identified through the literature review for further interpretation. The objective of observation is determined and framed by the research aims and the theoretical background set at the beginning of the research. It aims at determining three aspects of spatial performance: physical construct, functions and behaviours to explore their relationship with the underlying place-identity.

The key to observing the physical environment is to remain unobtrusive so that the observation does not influence the behaviours. It aims at recording and extracting underlying information about the surroundings and people's reactions. However, at the time of the survey, the site situation will be observed and recorded without further judgement. In order to obtain a wide range of information about how people

use the space, a number of visits at different times of the day and week are required. Figure 3-4 Physical *mapping checklist* below lists the types of physical data to be recorded during the site survey. Since what you look for depends on what you want to do with the data, the data covers three broad categories especially for observations in environmental research, which are adaptation for use, display of the environment and any public messages. The purposes of the site survey are closely associated with the activities, even though much of the site information could be gained from the layout and plans, the adaptation and changes in actual uses are important aspects to be examined as the outcome of the projects may differ. Display of environment refers to the physical constructs and connections the place may have with the outside, as physical referents to the use patterns. The public messages include the official and unofficial messages that could be found at the square. The official messages are usually designed for certain purposes and deliver the rules or regulations that the designers or governors think are the most appropriate for the place. On the other hand, unofficial signs contain the messages from individuals and groups regarding the temporary events or spontaneous activities. These messages reflect the cultural context of the specific places and are usually understood in various ways by the users according to their own experience, which provide diverse perspectives on the gaps between design strategy and the outcomes, as well as insights into the future improvement and development of the urban square. The methods for recording the observation results include photography, counting, drawing and mapping. The annotated diagrams are produced to capture the identified data at the site.

Figure 3-4 Physical mapping checklist

	Types of data

Display of environment	Spatial shape	
	Dimension	
	Boundary	
	Access (Circulation, pathway, parking space)	
Adaptation for use	Steps and levels	
	Water (shape, dimension, level etc.)	
	Surface material	
	Buildings (on-site and surrounding)	
	Flower and tree beds (shape, material, plantings)	
	Fixtures (Benches, rubbish bins, kiosks etc.)	
Public messages	Signage	
	Posts	

During the site survey, another important aspect is to observe and record people's behaviours for individuals, couples and groups. It addresses how people and different groups use the space, how they interact with each other and how the spatial relations affect their participations. Behaviour mapping is used as a main observation technique to track people's behaviour in relation to features of the physical environment (Cosco, Moore and Islam, 2010). The recording methods required are taking notes, photographing and notation diagrams. The components of behaviour observation include the actor, the act, relationships between actors, the context and

their surrounding settings. It is essential to record the dynamics of activities, especially when a series of events are taking place at a single space for a certain period of time. The durations of activities also contribute to the use patterns that would set the order of the space. The behaviour observations should be conducted at different times of the day and week in accordance with the survey of the physical settings.

Figure 3-5 Behaviour mapping checklist

	Types of data
Actor	User groups (Age, gender etc.)
Act	Types and location of activities
	Scale of activities
Relationship	With whom
Context	Behaviour settings (Weather, date, time etc,)
	Circulations

Figure 3-6 Summary of the methods for site survey

Time scale	Jan - Feb 2014, Jul –Aug, 2014
Times of the week	Weekday, weekend
Times of the day	8:00-12:00, 13:00-15:00, 17:00-21:00

Locations	Chaotianmen Square, People's Square, Jinyun Square
Data collected	Notes, drawings, photographs (video)

Over the two fieldwork periods, the researcher made a number of visits to the three sites to record the spatial characteristics and activities. The visits were all arranged within the four months' time, making sure that each square is visited at the three time slots and both at weekday and weekend. The detailed schedule was set out prior to the fieldwork, and the actual visiting time has been subjected to the weather and traffic conditions. The expected times of visits to each site was minimum six according to the initial schedule. However, the number has been slightly changed regarding the progress of site survey and any unexpected situations.

During each visit, the physical mapping usually took place ahead of the behaviour mapping, but not necessarily, so as to set out the overall physical referent for the following observation of people's activities. Drawing and photograph are used as main tools to record the spatial characteristics and physical installations. Along with brief notes, they help to record the types, locations of activities and user groups. Short videos are also taken at some occasions when the site is too crowded to record the accurate information on site especially the number of users and their demographic characters. The numerous site visits provide valuable information on how the social activities are related to the physical form, as well as the details and atmosphere of these sites when the activities are taking place.

3.4.2 Analysing survey data
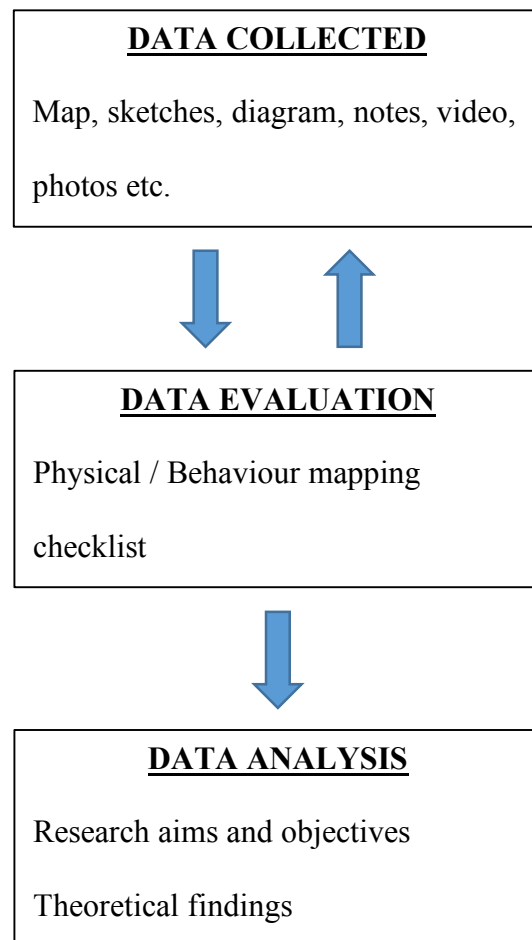
As shown in the diagram above, all the data collected through the site surveys are illustrated in sketches, diagrams, photos and notes. During each site visit, the types, locations and scale of activities can be marked down on the plan directly, with photographs and notes taken for future reference. In this way the social activities are effectively positioned within physical background, which enables researcher to analyse the inter-relationship between the two. On the other hand, the diagram and sketches are especially useful in illustrating dynamic movement such as circulation, access point and changes in activities. Other static physical data as street furniture, signage post and building dimensions can be recorded through quick sketch and annotation as well. However, photographing has been used throughout the site

survey to capture the on site situation, and most importantly, the general social

profile of users that can hardly be identified on site within the limited time. These

visual methods allow the researcher to further evaluate possible correlations between

the studied environment settings and physical activity levels as well as the

motivations mentioned in the on-site interviews. The data is then grouped and

discussed according to the research aims and objectives of the research.

As the choice of time is fundamental to the behaviour mapping because of its impact

on activities, the site survey is taken both on weekdays and weekends in the daytime

and evening on each site to provide a full account of the study areas. The use pattern

of urban squares in the case study city changes greatly according to different times of

the day and the year. Due to climate conditions and the variation of activities, two

periods of fieldwork were carried out: in winter and summer time. It provides the full

reality of the sites in order to identify the role of physical settings under different

environmental conditions. The analytical approach of the site survey is a deductive

process which allows the researcher to interpret the information gained on-site with

regards to the theoretical foundations explored in the literature.

3.5   Interviews

The interview research method is especially useful in this research because it

explores people's personal experience and perception of a place and allows the

researcher to link them with the identified environmental attributes. The on-site

interview is used as part of the phenomenological approach adopted in this research

that explores multiple experiences within a defined spatial and social context. The

detailed process of interviewing, including the pilot interview at an initial stage and the revision of questions as well as the choices of professional interview participants and the relevant topics, will also be explained.

The previous section explains how the site survey is used to explore the physical environment and people's responses regarding various dimensions of the urban square by conducting observations and behaviour mappings. As discussed in Chapter 2, the phenomenological approach is preferred to investigate people's experience in a specific social context, and the interpretation of these experiences requires interviews with actual users at the urban square.

There are two types of interview conducted in this research addressing different objectives. The first is on-site interviews with urban square users in order to obtain the views, experiences and motivations of individuals regarding their activities on each site. The result of on-site interviews will be interpreted in the light of the site survey of the physical environment to understand the inter-relationship between people and the place. The on-site interviews address the limitation of first-person approaches by involving the understanding of others. It provides informative data on how people perceive their surrounding environment and understand the affective representations regarding their personal experiences. The data will be further interpreted with reference to an individual's background as well as the given social and cultural context of the places.

The other type of interview is with professionals in the landscape and urban design field in Chongqing regarding the planning and design process of urban square

development. It aims to understand the production process of urban squares and reveals the limitations and constraints of the current design strategies from a practical perspective, which enables the researcher to provide feasible suggestions for future development in terms of delivering a sense of place identity. Both types of interview are semi-structured consisting of key questions that help to define the areas to be explored, but also allow the interviewees to digress in order to explore particular details. This section will set out how these interviews are designed and used to achieve the goal and contribute to the corresponding research aims.

Interviewing has been a frequently-used method in place-related research, because qualitative interviews are believed to provide a more profound understanding of social phenomena than purely quantitative methods (Bryman, 2004). The phenomenological approaches in place-related research are widely adopted because they focus on the specific social context within which the perceptions and interactions are taking place. The affective dimension of place identity developed through this process is particularly important given the increasing concerns with the social activities associated with Chinese urban squares.

3.5.1 On-site interviews

This section explains how the on-site interviews are devised to address the research questions, and how the interview questions are developed and revised according to the results of pilot interviews and the literature review.

The aim of on-site interviews is to understand the impact of public life and activities on people's perception of the urban square and the re-definition of the relationship between people and place. In order to achieve the aims, the on-site interviews with users set out to address the following questions:

- What are users' personal experiences regarding the physical environment and the activities they are participating in at the site?
- How do they perceive the place and develop the emotional connection with regard to the experience they had?
- How do users interpret the place identity and a sense of uniqueness of the urban square and how did their experiences contribute to this interpretation?

Following Seamon's (2000) four broad sets of procedures of phenomenological approaches: identifying the phenomenon, gathering descriptive accounts, identifying the underlying commonalities and patterns, and presenting the results, this research firstly examines the spatial features and use patterns of each urban square to collect the descriptive information about the phenomenon. The on-site interviews are then devised to examine an individual's perceptions of place identity with reference to the physical settings and their personal experiences. From a phenomenological perspective, this research is not aimed at developing universal models of forming a certain place identity nor how an expert understands or experiences the places, rather, the specific set of investigations are to help the researcher to develop a holistic understanding of how people use and perceive the urban square in Chinese cities so as to generate suggestions for establishing place identity in future developments.

Several pilot interviews were carried out in early 2014 using a draft interview schedule. Because the production of interview data has always been a meaning-making process, the pilot interview is to make sure that the interviewees are able to understand the premises and respond in the same manner (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). The on-site interviews are all semi-structured with three main topics and follow-up questions. The purpose of on-site interviews is to stimulate a spontaneous conversation between the researcher and the participant to secure their initial reflections about the site. Thus, the sequence of the questions incorporates the general flow of a conversation in order to create a relaxing environment.

The interview protocol was initially developed according to the primary findings of the literature review on the people-place relationship including a wide range of factors that may have influenced people's experiences and perceptions of the place (see details in Chapter 2). The questions are then organized into three groups: the personal background of the participant, their on-site experiences and their individual understanding and interpretation of the identity of urban squares. However, the initial questions and approaches have been refined and revised depending on the users' feedback throughout the pilot stage to achieve a better result focusing on the aim of the research. The following section will discuss the detailed process of on-site interviews including the outcome of the pilot interviews, the selection of participants and the subsequent process of coding and analysis.

The aim is to add to the understanding of the nature of place identity in a modern Chinese context. The thorough theoretical study and site survey aim to provide primary data and evidence of the current situation and roles of urban squares in terms

of delivering a sense of place identity. Both types of interviews were semi-structured so that it is possible for the researcher to explore those areas where the interviewees perceive gaps and difficulties (Banister *et al.*, 1994).

- **The pilot interviews**

The three case study urban squares - Chaotianmen Square, People's Square and Jinyun Square - in Chongqing were initially selected according to the scope of this research and the criteria for a case study identified in the relevant literature review (the details of the three squares will be discussed in Chapter 5). The pilot interviews were conducted during the first fieldwork in Jan 2014 at three urban squares in Chongqing. A series of simple topics was devised in order to collect basic information about the participants and an overall impression of the potential responses.

The initial interview protocol used for the pilot interviews is a simple group of topics consisting of interviewees' personal experience, their perceptions of the place and factors relating to place identity. The actual questions to be asked under each group differed with the progress of the conversation and the answers. The aim of this rather flexible approach was to explore as widely as possible the reactions from the interviewees with a focus on the topics that are most relevant to the research objectives.

During the interviews, the researcher encouraged the participants to elaborate or clarify their answers, as a way of exploring potential dimensions that may have been

overlooked but which concerned the participants. The researcher took notes to record reflective feedback and the necessary background information. Photographing and diagram maps were used as supplementary methods to record the situation surrounding where the interview was taking place. After several visits to the three urban squares and interviews with random users, a few concerns arose and a series of implications for the revision and framing of the following on-site interviews were identified.

The first of these was the significant differences in the use patterns and distribution of users. During the several visits conducted at the three urban squares during the pilot stage, it was noticed that most of the public activities took place at night while some of the regulars and the majority of tourists visit the square during the day. This influenced the future interview process in terms of making schedules and the selection of participants. The different focus of responses from local residents and tourists are more evident than expected, which required the preparation of two separate sets of question sheets aiming at different groups of interviewees in order to gain optimal answers.

The initial idea of carrying the list of topics and making notes with the progress of the interview is regarded as a way to test whether the spontaneous conversation will be able to develop into potential questions and gain positive feedback from the users. However, the result turned out to be slightly different to that expected because people sometimes gave unexpected answers and would jump into another topic that does not follow the sequence as planned by the researcher. On the other hand, due to the fact that most Chinese people do not tend to talk much to strangers in public

spaces, special attention needs to be paid to the way of raising questions that would make them comfortable to talk about own feelings and experiences. Therefore, the open questions should not imply compulsion as people will become reluctant and cautious if forced into some topics of conversation thus affecting the result of the interview. This lead to the further development of subsequent interview questions by listing a range of relevant follow-up questions under each topic, thereby allowing the researcher to consider the replies and direct the conversation towards the next appropriate question.

The complexity of place-identity itself adds difficulties to the interview process as well, because of its different interpretations in certain contexts. Although the previous literature work had enabled the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the people-place relationship, the core value of place identity was not obvious to most members of the public. In order to avoid possible misunderstandings and confusions about the concept under investigation, the interview questions needed to be carefully phrased to reflect the underlying meaning and dimensions of place-identity that are of most interest to this research. The role of the researcher is to decode the abstract concept, extract and present it in simple questions and focus on the current circumstances that are more easily understood by the interviewees to enable them to provide their own interpretations based on their specific experiences.

The content and sequence of the interview questions were revised after the pilot interviews, and all translated into Chinese. Throughout the interviews, no foreign

visitors were encountered, but there was a wide range of visitors from different parts of China and all provided valuable insights on the questions.

- **The process and selection of interviewees**

Figure 3-7 Summary of on-site interview process

Participant	On-site users (local residents and tourists)
Type of interview	Semi-structured interview
Time scale	Jan –Feb 2014, Jul –Sep 2014
Time of the week	Weekday and weekend
Time of the day	8:00-12:00, 13:00-15:00, 17:00-21:00
Locations	Chaotianmen Square, People's Square, Jinyun Square
Data collected	Notes, transcripts

The on-site interviews were conducted from July to September in 2014 along with the site survey to retain a consistency of use patterns. Each site was visited both during the day and evening. The interview was conceptualized as a guided conversation that allowed each participant to reflect on the experiences which they felt were important to their understanding of place. Interviews took 20-30 minutes on average.

Rubin and Rubin (1995) suggest three levels of questions to achieve a desirable level of depth during an interview. First, the main questions are developed prior to the interview to guide the conversation in an open-ended format. The goal of these questions is to encourage the participant to express individual opinions and

experiences related to the subject matter. Second, potential "probes" were also outlined in the interview protocol to generate further discussion regarding the main topics. Finally, "follow-up" questions are developed during the interview based on the interviewee's responses. The aim of this type of question is to pursue any themes that are discovered and to explore their implications.

As discussed in the previous section, the interview questions were further developed and refined according to the reflections from the pilot study. The initial three topics - personal experience, perception of place and the related place identity - remained to guide the conversation in order to provide a level of consistency throughout the process of data collection. A series of follow-up questions was devised under each topic in open-ended format, encouraging the interviewees to share their own internal experience they felt were important to their understanding and the use of place. The topics were arranged into three phases in accordance with the progress of spontaneous conversation. The aim of the three-phase protocol was to help participants reconstruct individual interpretations, experiences, and understandings of their lived-experience in the defined context (Seidman, 1998).

Phase 1: Personal experience identifies participant's background information and habitual use of the square. It is to situate the interviewee within a certain social and cultural context. The questions varied with an individual's background as a local resident or tourist at this stage.

Phase 1: Personal experience (Local)

1. What do you usually do in the square?
2. Where and how long do you usually stay?
3. Why did you choose here?
4. How often do you use this square?
5. What's the impact of coming to this square on your daily life?
6. Have there been pleasures and difficulties using this square?
7. Is there other place/square you used to go for the same purpose other than this square?
   - Why did you choose it and what did you do?
   - How much time did you spend there?

Phase 1: Personal experience (Tourist)

1. Where are you from and how long have you been in Chongqing?
2. Why did you choose here?
3. Have there been pleasures and difficulties using this square?

The questions in Phase 2 (Perception of the place) attempt to reveal the interviewee's emotional feelings and attitudes towards the urban square. The roles of the spatial features and social activities are essential to this stage because the responses would reflect how these two aspects have affected people's use of the space and generated their unique feelings about the place. The questions for local residents and tourists are combined at this stage due to the similarity in their purpose. The on-site interviews in this sense situate the interviewees within the environment where they are able to give direct feedback and details regarding the activities and the surroundings while expressing their feelings. The researcher will pay more attention to the answers and it is especially important for the researcher to guide the

conversation in order to cover all the topics focusing on the interviewees' current experience while avoiding any repetition of issues that may have been discussed in the previous phase.

Phase 2: Perception of the place (Local/Tourist)

1. What do you like most / least about this square?
2. Have you been to other squares in Chongqing and how do you describe the difference?
3. Can you describe specific events or activities that are unique to this square?
   - Are there physical characteristics of this square that facilitate it happening here?
4. Could the design of this square be improved to encourage people to gather and use the square?
5. Do you feel any connection with the square and how would you describe this connection?
   - Is this connection based on any experience you have had in this square?

After exploring the participants' personal perception of the urban square, Phase 3 intends to address place-identity issues by asking about people's specific understanding of the particular urban square they are visiting. As identified in Chapter 2, the physical settings, social activities and personal perception are the three main components of the place-related research that have contributed to the formation of place identity. It is the sum of the experiences and feelings people have at the place that generate the understandings. Given that the concept of place identity is relatively vague and complex to the ordinary interviewees, the plan is not to ask directly but break it down into sub-questions focusing on what they consider are the most distinctive elements of the place that deliver a sense of identity and being

situated in this specific city. Supplementary explanations are provided if people get confused with the purpose of the questions. The aim of Phase 3 interview questions is to see how they understand both the cognitive and representational meaning of the place based on their own experience. The underlying links between their interpretation and the spatial environment, as well as their personal background, will be cross-analysed afterwards to evaluate the impact of cultural context.

Phase 3: Relating place identity (Local/Tourist)

1. How would you describe this square to a friend who has never been here?
2. What are all the important features of this square that would help them understand the place where you've been?
3. Do you think this square is different than the ones in another city and why?
   - If so, which characters (physical or social) make it different?
   - Do these features lead to a certain experience you had in this square?
4. Would you identify this square as one in Chongqing?
   - If so, what are the main attributes of the square that make it unique to the city?
   - Are they related to any of your personal experience with the square?
   - If not, where would you identify it?
5. Which square do you think is the most typical for Chongqing?

The interview questions are mostly tailored to avoid simple 'Yes' or 'No' answers. However, if some of the less responsive interviewees provide simple answers, the researcher added further questions to redirect the conversation and offer opportunities for them to talk about the subject from another perspective if possible. In order to obtain a variety of individuals, the potential interviewees were identified

on-site through a rough sampling process to ensure an appropriate combination of local residents and tourists. According to the results from the pilot interview, the overall use pattern of each urban square changes significantly with the weather and time of day. Due to the fact that the urban squares are usually intensively used during the night, especially in the summer when the on-site interview took place, the visiting time for each site was longer in the evening than the daytime.

Because the goal of this research is to investigate people's perception of place with regards to the activities and surrounding environment, the sampling of potential interviewees on-site is closely associated with the diversity of activities rather than merely a range of demographic groups. The interviewees were identified with the initial assumption that they are conducting a certain activity on-site, and the selection of interviewees was adjusted to the progress of interviews in order to cover a varied range of people with different purposes for visiting the place. Meanwhile, the researcher kept a balance between genders and ages depending on the situation on-site. As a result, 38 people were interviewed at People's Square, 35 interviews at Chaotianmen Square and 32 interviews at Jinyun Square. The ratio of local residents to tourists was kept around half and half at both People's Square and Chaotianmen Square because they are famous attractions of the city, while only a few tourists were interviewed at Jinyun Square as it is a much less centrally located place.

One of the challenges of conducting on-site interviews in Chinese cities is to initiate and lead the conversation in the way in which the interviewees feel more comfortable and secure to talk about their own experiences, which is not easy for most Chinese people. Due to the fact that Chinese people usually do not talk to

strangers in public, the researcher would approach the potential participants politely and clarify the purpose first. The informal conversation is preferably started when the interviewees are free from any distractions and willing to commit to a certain amount of time.

In order to establish a relaxing relation between the researcher and the interviewee, the recording of conversations was not required and the researcher took notes of what was most relevant to the topic. During the fieldwork, there were occasions when a friend of the researcher was present when doing on-site interviews to help ask questions, allowing the researcher to focus more on taking notes and reflecting on the responses because of the intervals when the other two were talking. In some cases, the companions of the interviewee would join the conversation where they felt interested and provided their own thoughts on the issue. This has generated the idea of involving more than one interviewee at a time by talking to a small group of people, which has turned out well in terms of carrying out the conversations and inspiring each other.

The spatial feature of Chinese urban squares has facilitated the on-site interviews in the way that most of the sitting areas were set along the edge of the square (Finney & Rishbeth, 2006). When interviewing the users resting at the side, both the interviewee and the researcher were able to overlook the space and have a direct sense of being part of the place. Even when the interviewees were at the middle of the square they were likely to be watching other activities or people, therefore they were able to provide their spontaneous reactions.

The common language spoken in the case study city is Chinese hence the on-site interviews had to be taken in the local language with all the prepared questions translated. Some of the terms or phrases may be slightly different after translation, alternative words were used and further clarification was allowed where it was necessary to make sure the interviewee had an accurate understanding of the topics. With the progress of interviews, there was a point during the data collection at each site when the data no longer generate new insights, which meant the process had reached the theoretical saturation. Therefore there was no need for further sampling (Morse & Richards, 2002).

3.5.2   Professional interviews with urban development professionals

Interviews with professionals from the disciplines of urban design and landscape were conducted in order to understand the design and management concerns and to explore the legal, social and physical boundaries of urban square design practice. The participants were chosen from local urban design professions and the academic field in Chongqing, who were working in key positions and had first-hand knowledge of urban square design, especially the case study areas.

The potential participants are selected and approached prior to the fieldwork and the interviews were all conducted during August 2014. The professions are selected according to their expertise and background that are most relevant to the research subject and preferably representative from each practice field. Among the four professions, the urban planner from the Chongqing Urban Design and Planning Institute has extensive experience in major leading urban projects in Chongqing. And

most importantly, she was the key urban designer behind People's Square and one of the important members of Chaotianmen Square project. Given the fact that these two projects are nearly twenty years old, and most of the original maps and documents became difficult to retrieve. The experience of the related personnel could reveal rich information on the background and implementation of the projects. The chief designer of Jinyun Square was also approched for the same reason, however was unable to get reach of due to his personal reason. The other practitioner was an officer from Chongqing Landscape Bureau, who is particular experienced in the management of urban landscape. The government officer provided oppinion on the implementation and management of urban landscape and the potential for future policy changes, which are particularly useful for the study of social political context of Chongqing urban square. The landscape architect from a private landscape design firm was selected as potential interviewee because of his experience in some commercial landscape and experience of dealing with private developers. One of the academic members from Landscape department in Southwest University, expressed his views from theoretical perspective regarding the current problems and limitations of urban public space. Each professional interview lasts $1 - 2$ hours and yielded rich information on the research topic regarding their different roles in the urban development.

As a result, four professional interviews were conducted with 1) an urban planner from the Chongqing Urban Design and Planning Institute, 2) an officer from the Chongqing Landscape Bureau, 3) a landscape architect from a private landscape design firm and 4) an academic staff member from the Landscape Department of Southwest University in Chongqing. They were contacted by email or telephone in

advance to discuss the possibility and intentions, the interviews were then organized at an agreed time and at their places of work.

The interviews followed a thematic structure with a series of questions lasting 1-2 hours. Each theme had specific topics depending on different interviewee's background and expertise. Each interviewee was contacted by an invitation letter explaining the purpose of the interview and followed by the theme topics and a consent form to be signed before the interview. The professional interview has a particular focus on the design practice of Chinese urban space development which aims to provide implications for the possible suggestions to be drawn from the research.

Figure 3-8 Summary of professional interviews

Participant	People who have professional interest and expertise
Type of interview	Semi-structured interview
Time scale	Aug 2014
Locations	Interviewees' places of work
Data collected	Transcripts

3.5.3 Interpretation of interview data

The analysis of data is the process of moving from raw interviews to evidence-based interpretations. This research followed two phases to analyse the interview response data according to Rubin (1995). The first was the preparation of the transcripts, and becoming familiar with the contents of each interview to identify the relevant

concepts and themes. The second phase involves the coding of the interview data so that it is possible to retrieve what the interviewees have said about the identified concepts and themes. The analytical process of the research focuses on combining all descriptive narratives together and seeks to answer the research questions and draw broader theoretical conclusions from the raw data.

Following each interview, the notes and memos were typed up with any emerging issues and comments regarding the interview process and possible concerns. Because the interviews are all carried out in Chinese, the data were recorded and analysed in Chinese first to retain the novelty of the feedback from interviewees. During the first phase, all the interview notes and memos were reviewed to identify the descriptive accounts that contain the experiences necessary for understanding the phenomenon; they are defined as qualities that stood out during the analysis (Moustakas, 1994). The similar descriptions are then grouped together to describe how a certain group of individuals experience or understand the phenomenon in a similar manner, which include the activities concerned, social contexts and personal feelings. The next step of the phenomenological interpretation explored the underlying structures and relationships within various groups of descriptive accounts. Throughout this phase, the similar descriptions were coded as 'meaning units' under clustered themes. Finally, the structural meanings of the clustered themes were interpreted as the essence of place identity as perceived and experienced by the selected interviewees within the given context.

From a phenomenological perspective, the essence of a phenomenon is defined as the unified description of an experience, which is interpreted as threads of coherence

among the multiple descriptive accounts (Moustakas, 1994). The process of interpreting the experiences is presented as a contextual understanding. The 'meaning' to be extracted from the interviews is conceptualized as relative to the context of interpretation and is concealed within the realm of everyday experiences. This inductive process identified the collective themes and enabled the researcher to reveal the significant factors from the raw data.

The interpretive strategies used for unstructured and open interviews seek to provide an account of some cultural or social phenomenon, which 'requires the researcher to engage with the research as a feeling person rather than as a detached observer' (Deming & Swaffield, 2011, p.153). Because the way a question is asked and the context in which it was situated can influence the responses from the interviewees, in addition the interpretation of the data are personal (Hollway & Jefferson, 2007). The researcher paid extra attention to the phrasing of questions and responses so as to encourage the interviewees to speak in their own words and deploy subjectivity. The active interpretation strategy ensured the diversity of people's reflections on the place while allowing the researcher to explore the underlying relationships and motivations influencing the actions.

During the interpretation process, the spatial features and material qualities as observed from the site survey were examined with reference to the findings of the on-site interviews. Even though the analysis process presented here is generally linear, the actual interpretation was cyclical and iterative in which new findings kept generating further review and refinements throughout the earlier stages. The aim of the data analysis was to seek meanings from descriptive contents in a given context

with regard to theoretical insights, so as to achieve a comprehensive understanding

of all the environmental attributes and people's perceptions of place in the light of

the cultural, social and historical contexts of the case study sites. The findings

reflected back on the literature and contribute to the multi-disciplinary discourses on

the subject of place-identity, in particular its relevance and meanings within the

Chinese context.

3.5.4 Ethics and data protection

The research gained the ethical approval from the Department of Landscape Ethics

Review Committee on behalf of the University of Sheffield prior to conducting

interviews. In the on-site interviews, the participants were informed of the purpose of

the conversation and how it would progress. No audio recording and photographs of

the interviewees were taken on-site. For the professional interviews, the interviewees

were asked if there are any instances in which their personal identity, or specific

information they might give should be kept confidential. If so, appropriate means of

making this anonymous were to be discussed and agreed. All personal data and

interview notes were to be stored and password protected in a computer and would

only be accessed by the researcher and kept within this research project.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter explains the methodological approaches and research methods adopted

in this research. They were informed by the previous literature study and specifically

selected to address the research aims and questions. The qualitative methodology

contributed to the shaping of the research methods that are relevant to understand the use patterns and people's perception of urban squares in Chinese cities. Archive study and a literature review helped to establish the social and cultural context of the case studies, so that people's activities and responses could be understood. Site survey and on-site interviews enabled the researcher to interpret the data in the light of the relevant attributes of place identity. The phenomenological and inductive interpretation process adopted in this research extract underlying themes from people's everyday experience of the place. The next chapter will elaborate on the findings from the literature and document study of the urban space development of Chongqing to identify the traditional legacies and socio-political reforms that have largely influenced the making of the current identity of Chinese urban squares.

Chapter 4: Urban Identity Over Time

4   Urban Identity Over Time

4.1   Introduction

This chapter seeks to explore the main characteristics of public space development in Chongqing through different stages, from the beginning of modernization (1898-1937) to its rapid urbanization in the 20th century. The key plans and important decisions will be identified to understand the institutional reasons behind the current development of urban squares.

According to the discussions on place identity in Chapter 2, the nature of urban space involves multifaceted interpretations. Lefebvre's 'production of space' theory has had a substantial influence on this subject and provides the theoretical underpinning for this chapter. It indicates potential ways to decode the complexity in space analysis from different angles: the actors in the production processes and its social order function. A comprehensive analysis of the nature of space cannot be separated from an analysis of the position of actors as well as the economic and ideological interests involved, especially for Chinese urban squares, the definition of which is deeply rooted in the socio-political dimension of the society in which they exist. In other words, an understanding of the place identity of Chinese urban squares involves a range of issues including the space production process and the associated social relations embedded in it, as well as its meaning as an experienced and perceived entity within people's social lives.

After decades of economic hardship and political chaos, Chinese society has been through dramatic transitions since its exposure to the global market and new forms of consumption, technology and ideologies. In this revolutionary process, the highly centralized regime claimed its commitment to socialism while embraced privatization in almost every socio-economic aspect. Such transitions have brought significant challenges to urban space development in Chinese cities. If, as Lefebvre argues, 'social space is a social product' (Lefebvre, 1991, p.26), then transitions in the form of social relations 'must entail the production of a new space' (Lefebvre, 1991). Urban squares are not artefacts that are created only according to the ideological principles of planners, but their development is also driven by economic forces and influenced by other social, political and cultural factors. It is important to understand the changes in the way in which urban squares have been produced in China, and the relevant economic reform policies and their socio-spatial consequences, so as to set the stage for the analysis of the social aspects of the newly-formed place identity of Chinese urban squares.

The history of Chongqing urban development features distinct characteristics and represents the transition and reform trajectory of Chinese cities. Although the major concern of this study is the place identity of urban squares in current Chinese society, the discussion of the city's early modernization and the recent reforms is significant. They shaped the conventional settings of the Chinese urban space production mechanism that was formed and evolved before the 1980s. The social spatial template inherited from the previous era continues to shape post-reform urban development (Logan, 2002; Ma & Wu, 2005; Friedman, 2005). But some of the features may be reproduced and developed; in particular, the ways in which people

use and organize the space have been fundamentally changed and transformed with the social and economic transitions. By drawing on planning history, urban studies and cultural legacies, this chapter will explore the dialectic relationship between the built environment and the institutions that produce it.

4.2 Chongqing urban square development - The beginning of modernization (1876-1937)

4.2.1 Traditional urban form and its historic evolution

This section examines the historical past of the city of Chongqing, from its first achieving city status to its expanded urban form. It is noticed that the traditional urban form that followed the city-making rules in ancient China has been retained. The later urban development in Chongqing is largely based on this physical structure. The street pattern was one of the main characteristics of the city form.

The origin of Chongqing as a settlement is shrouded in the long unrecorded past of western China. It became part of the pre-Chinese 'Kingdom of Pa' in about 375 B.C., and was a small, un-walled trading village at that time. The current city centre of Chongqing was then named Jiangzhou (River Prefecture), and was the capital of the 'Kingdom of Pa'. The first wall around Chongqing was built in about 320 B.C., to mark its gaining city status (Kui, 1991). The ancient Jiangzhou was built very much for strategic reasons due to the constant wars between different empires in surrounding areas. The peninsula that was surrounded by rivers on three sides made it an ideal defensive position (Wu, 2006). The city has long been a strategic place and three out of four large expansions and construction work of the city throughout its history were for the purpose of political and military defence (Xie, 2011).

In 316 B.C, after the empire of Qin occupied the area and replaced the Kingdom of Pa, General ZhANG Yi conducted the first large-scale expansion work and rebuilt the city. The urban area of the city consisted of two parts located on both sides of the river. The privileged land on the north side of the river was considered as the location for most of the administration and official residences, called 'Beifu' (North government), while the south side, called 'Nancheng' (South town), was mainly for common citizens and transportation to and from the city. The establishment of these early towns laid out the physical structure of the city, and it was later built and developed upon these original settlements. The second significant expansion of the city took place about 226 A.D. during the Three Kingdoms period and was focused on the peninsula, the southern part of the city, to reinforce its defence capabilities in wartime. Since then, the distinction between the north and south side of the river has decreased. The administration centre of the city was incorporated into the southern side for security and defensive concerns. Thus the city walls of the southern town at the peninsula were further expanded along the river to achieve a more compact and enclosed urban form in order to accommodate the increasing population and integrated functions (Bao, 1999; Xie, 2011).

The city walls were extensively repaired and extended from time to time afterwards. Ever since the late Tang dynasty (618 - 907), as the development focus had been gradually shifted from the west to the east of Sichuan, the location of Chongqing became even more crucial as the gateway and the strategic pass to the whole region. The name Chongqing, meaning 'repeated good luck', dates from the Song dynasty in 1189, to celebrate the Prince Zhao Dun who used to be the governor of Chongqing

becoming the emperor of China. During the Southern Song dynasty (1127 - 1274), the city gained considerable development in terms of agriculture, manufacture and trading business, and became the commercial, financial and political centre within the Sichuan region.

After the succeeding wars against the Mongols in the late Southern Song dynasty (about 1235 - 1258), when the city served as the defensive and command centre in the upper Yangtze river, the first significant signs of the planning and construction of the city took place during the Ming dynasty (about 1370 AD) to restore the damage caused by the wars. General Dai Ding rebuilt the city walls and gates with solid stones and re-established the spatial structure of the city, which was characterized by traditional 'Jiu Gong Ba Gua' featuring nine city gates and eight wharfs. 'Jiu Gong Ba Gua' was a famous rule in organizing buildings and constructions derived from ancient Chinese city-making regulations, it was a cosmology adopted by Fengshui practitioners to represent the ideal relation between the people and the universe. The seventeen entrances, including nine gates and eight wharfs, were arranged along the city boundary, providing accesses both from the land and the river. This urban structure has been retained for over 600 years ever since the Ming dynasty. Even though many of the old gates and wharfs were destroyed or abandoned at a later time, Chaotianmen dock still remained as the largest transportation hub throughout the city's history. However, unlike the plans of capital cities such as Chang'an in the Tang dynasty and Beijing in the Ming, whose urban area is mostly divided into orthogonal grids with careful allocations for the emperor's palace, the residential blocks and other public facilities, the urban textures within Chongqing's city walls

were more organic and developed into an irregular mosaic due to the hilly nature of the site.
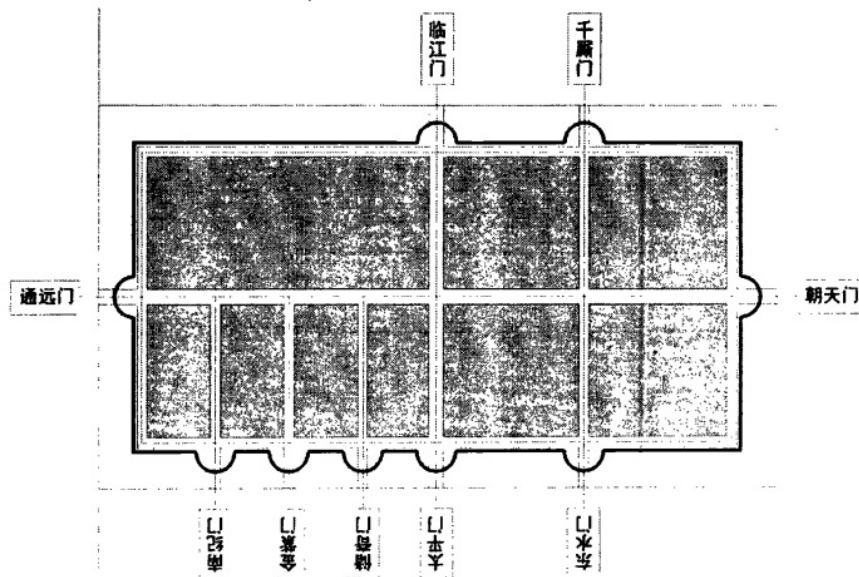
Figure 4-1Diagram of the spatial structure of Chongqing.

(Source: Wang, 1999)

The massive urbanization of Chongqing started in the Song dynasty and was accompanied by rapid economic development. The original city centre on the peninsula prospered along the riverfront and docks, especially near the city gates for convenient connection and exchange with the outside world. The city has become the regional centre within the east Sichuan area since the Ming dynasty, with its most convenient connection with the outside and the rise in commercial and trading businesses (Lan, 1995).

Early in the Qing dynasty in about 1664, the city walls were again extended and rebuilt slightly. The last serious rebuilding of the walls and gates before the 20th century took place in 1760-1761, all the gates are single except that at the stream

confluence. Chaotianmen Gate has long been the most important and main entrance welcoming the visitors from the outside (Wu, 1940; Yang, 2011).
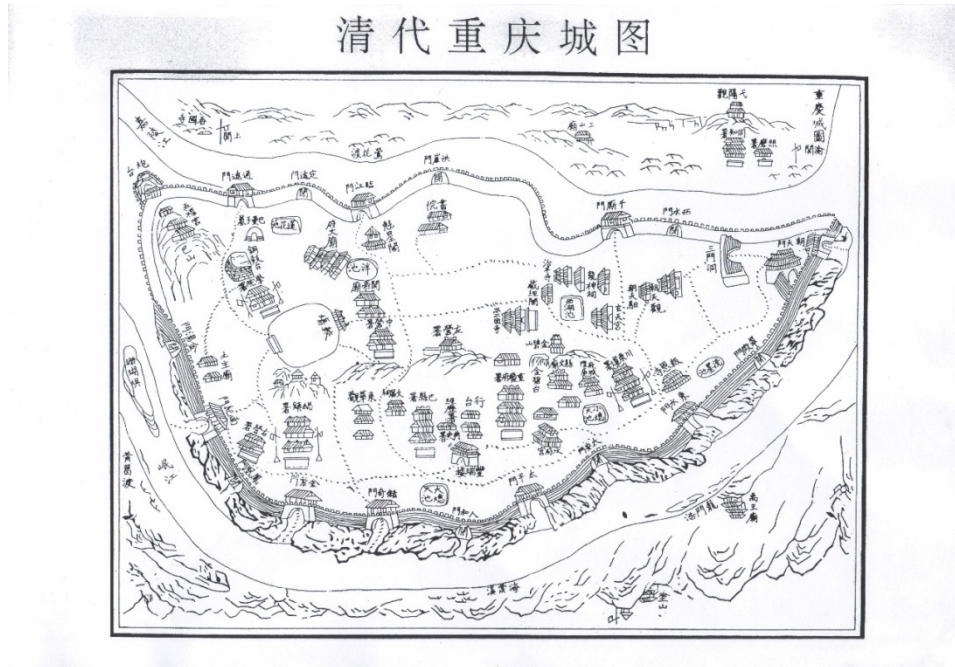
Figure 4-2 Chongqing city map in Qing Dynasty

(Source: Chongqing Library)

The peninsula (as show in Figure 4-2), where the city was built up, is essentially a hill with various changes in the level. Chaotianmen gate, located at the river confluence, is the lowest, while the Tongyuan gate at the far west stands at the top of the hill. There was a street running all the way from Chaotianmen gate to Tongyuan gate to link the two ends of the city, and at the same time separating it into two parts – namely the 'Upper town' to the north and 'Lower town' to the south. Even though the area of the 'Lower town' was narrower and smaller than the 'Upper town', it occupied the higher location of the two. The major administrative buildings and institutes, as well as the residence for officials are laid in the 'Lower town'; the 'Upper town' to the north was filled with warehouses and dwellings for the poorer

people. The distinction and separation between the 'Upper town' and 'Lower town' remained as one of the major characteristics of the urban form that has persisted over the years, indeed, the use of these informal names for these two general areas has continued to this day.
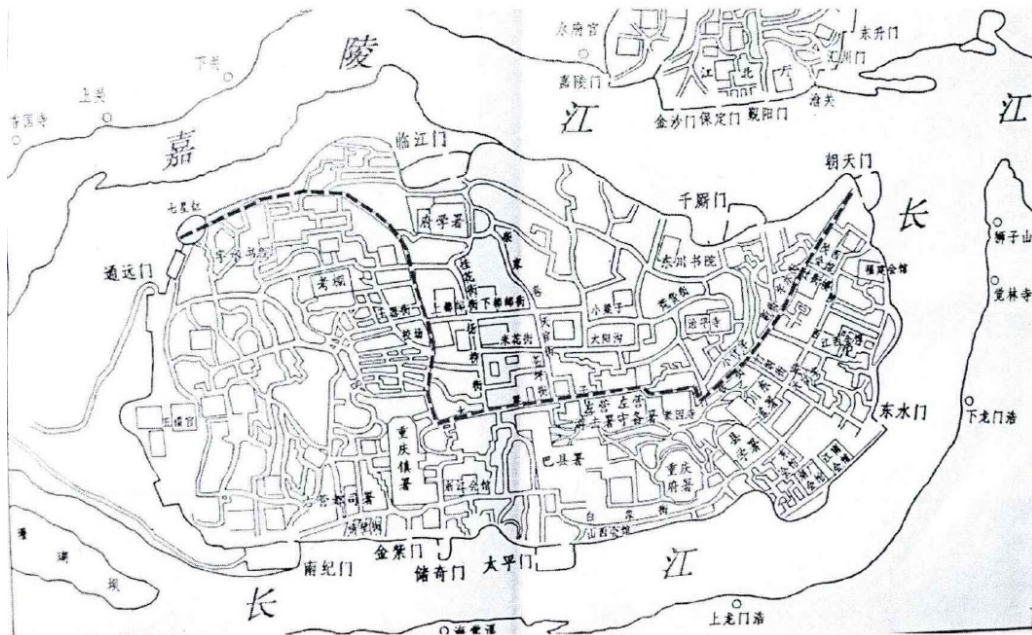
Figure 4-3 'Upper town' and 'Lower town' of Chongqing (1891)
(Source: Chongqing library; Xie, 2011)

As can be seen from the old maps of Chongqing, most of the streets were scattered and extended irregularly within city area, which is in contrast to many well-planned Chinese cities in a more rigid urban form. This is mainly because of the various levels on the site require the streets to grow along the topography even with the aid of numerous steps in many circumstances. Also, being developed on a site with almost fixed limits, the city has fully occupied its available space long ago and become even more densely crowded than most Chinese cities. Many Chinese walled

cities would have grown beyond the city walls, but in the case of Chongqing, it tended to expand itself towards the north and south of the riverside rather than the inland. The land outside the city's west gates is usually used as a cemetery.

Businesses and markets grew along the streets and docks, with the prosperous traders in the many shops and outdoor stalls starting to open more doors to the street thus transforming the limited pedestrian areas into multifunctional social ones. Unlike other northern cities in China which featured walled courtyards, Chongqing was a more humid and warm southern city, which allows street shops built of wood or bamboo to open more doors to the street.

Rivers on three sides of the city made it difficult to integrate fully Jiangbei and Nan'an, the satellite communities that had developed on the banks of the Jialing and Yangtze Rivers opposite to the peninsula. Further growth inevitably meant denser buildings and increasingly narrower streets at the peninsula. According to no previously fixed plan, the streets grew to fit the topography with the numerous long flights of steps. It has been mentioned that within the wall there has been no free space for a long time, which was unusual for a Chinese city. Because many cities have grown beyond the walls, Chongqing seems not to have grown much inland due to the constraints of the surrounding rivers. At this time, the form and structure of the city, as shown in the early maps, seldom remain fixed due to the building materials as well. The major building materials of bamboo, wood and thatch not only made it easy to rebuild, but also more dangerous from fire. Each year sees some sections of Chongqing obliterated by a serious fire, and many places are replaced afterwards.

In the final quarter of the 19th century many travellers passed through and a few businessmen and missionaries took up residence in the city (Spencer, 1939). Upon the awareness of the strategic role of Chongqing, the British government forced the Qing to set Chongqing as one of the treaty ports to open up to western countries in 1891 after the Opium War in 1840, in order to facilitate the trading business and expand their influence to the potential markets in inland China. The Qing government designated a street not far from the Tongyuan gate for the buildings of foreign embassies. Ever since then, the city has experienced continuous influence brought by the westerners. Both British and Japanese governments had tried to establish their concessions in Chongqing after it became a treaty port. The limited urban space and complex landform within the city walls made site selection difficult. The proposal for building the British concession just next to the embassies cluster was rejected by the Qing government, as there is no precedent for building foreign concessions within the old city area. However, the Japanese government was finally allowed to build their concession on Nan'an (the south side of the Yangtze River), its remote location and less convenient transportation links with the city centre prevented it from further development and it was eventually taken back by the Qing government in 1931.

4.2.2 The transformation of urban landscape and social life

Throughout its history, Chongqing has been a much overlooked part of the country. Its relative autonomy from central government enabled it to develop at its own pace in a somewhat primitive way. Located on a narrow promontory at the confluence of the Yangtze and Jialing Rivers, Chongqing has often been called the 'Mountain Town' because of the extreme hilliness of its terrain. With a large influx of refugees

during wartime, there were 261,000 people living and working in the central area of approximately 2.5 square miles in 1937 (McIsaac, 2000). Chongqing must have been one of the world's most crowded cities with a population density of 104,400 people per square mile. However, the poverty and backwardness were still the main concerns for foreign visitors and downriver refugees, who mostly came from much modernized central and eastern China.

Among the problems of urban sanitation and poverty etc., Chongqing's transportation and infrastructure seemed primitive to outsiders. The absence of wide roads or vehicular traffic in the city was as much a result of its hilly terrain, as of its relatively late start in the 'modernist project' that had been underway in other cities since the late Qing. Before its first initiatives of modernization, Chongqing was a relatively remote city even with its regional position as the major trading centre. The traditional urban form still existed in the city; however, the lack of a modern infrastructure became a major concern for later refugees and officials. From 1926-1937, the Sichuan militarist LIU Xiang and his subordinate PAN Wenhua helped to undertaken a series of movements to expand and transform the city in a modern way.

The poor situation of urban environment has been depicted in much literature, that Chongqing has long been a crowded city with no room for vegetation, regardless of private gardens (*Baxianzhi*). The cityscape was dominated by the continuous rooftops with narrow lanes that were barely recognized underneath. As recorded in *Nine years of Chongqing Municipal Administration*, 'there is no trees in the city except the area surrounding Wufu Temple (Wufu gong), no water ponds except the two dirty pools of Fuzi Chi and Lianhua Chi (reservoirs used to put out fire in

ancient time)'. It is not until 1929 when the first public park in Chongqing was built by the municipal government (Kui, 1991). In the following years, the city saw a series of public parks and private gardens been built within the city centre, however the scale and amount of them are small due to the limited available urban land. From 1920s- 1940s, several parks at a larger scale were established on the suburb of Chongqing with more green space. For a long time, the parks and gardens in Chongqing have been mainly used by the upper class, while the general residents can hardly afford the cost and lifestyle.

In 1926, militarist LIU Xiang took control of Chongqing and initiated a series of plans to modernize and expand the city. The first is to widen the existing streets and build new roads to connect the original city centre with new towns on the suburb (Kui, 1991). It aims to transform the old town by improving its transportation and urban infrastructure. By the late 1930s, rickshaws and sedan chairs gradually reduced, and were replaced by limited bus services. The urban area has expanded westwards and reached twice as it was before. However, the process faced great pressures and progressed quite slow because most of the citizens are unwilling to give up own interests for public facilities. In most areas the lanes and alleys were still too narrow for cars and buses, the stairways provided the only route between places at different levels (McIsaac, 2000; Kui, 1991).

In the efforts to transform Chongqing, local military and business elites played important roles by promoting an energetic programme of modernization under the leadership of LIU Xiang, the militarist who controlled Chongqing from 1926 until his death in early 1938. LIU Xiang's association with modernizing Chongqing was

limited but he started from scratch, and most importantly, opened up the way for expansion westward and established a solid base upon which the wartime modernization programmes were built.

4.3 Chongqing urban development - national capital during the anti-Japanese war (1937-1949)

Throughout most of the republican era, many local militarists controlled Sichuan province and much of its land. After the announcement by the national government in late 1937 that Chongqing would serve as the alternative capital during the War of Resistance against the Japanese, municipal officials appointed by the national government and social reformers worked to extend the central government's influence and power in Chongqing (and the Sichuan area in general) by modernizing and nationalizing the new wartime capital. The planned changes included widened streets and new improved buildings. By the 1930s a movement was well under way from Chinese sources to rebuild the city on modern lines. Since then, changes and real growth came with increasing rapidity. An image of Chongqing as a symbol of the nation was projected.

Chongqing was chosen as the wartime capital for strategic reasons; its inland location and the high mountains separated it from Sichuan and protected it from land attacks by Japanese armies. Also, Chongqing was connected by rivers to transport goods and raw materials, which made it self-sufficient during wartime. As it was not intended to be a permanent national capital, the national government did not aim to create a copy in Chongqing of the capital they had left behind in Nanjing (McIsaac,

2000), even though there were similarities between the cities. In both Nanjing and Chongqing, the national government sought to create cities that were both modern and nationalistic. The reforms in these two cities were to impress foreign investors and governments in the hope that they would provide support for Guomindang projects. Whereas in Nanjing modernity was closely identified with modern technology, infrastructure and materials, in Chongqing it was more closely associated with the urban culture of the coastal treaty ports like Shanghai. In Nanjing the architecture of government buildings was used to project state power, in Chongqing the city was based on the strength of a unified population as a living community with shared experience to resist the foreign aggression.

Chongqing was depicted as a microcosm of a richly diverse nation. However, the 'downriver' refugees from cities outside Sichuan were exclusively representative of modernity and held the dominant positions both within the city and the nation, the native Sichuanese were subordinated and marginalized. As the municipal government was dominated by downriver refugees appointed by the national government after July 1938, they soon embarked on a number of programmes aimed at modernizing Chongqing's appearance, sanitation and services (McIsaac. 2000).

During the late 20th century, the 'Shanghai mode' has largely influenced the urban development of Chongqing (Zhang, 2005; Jin, 1932), the governors were trying to build the identity of a modern metropolis like Shanghai by introducing new streets and buildings. The notion has also affected the natural evolution as a traditional society. In 1934, famous architectural engineer QIAN Shaoping from Shanghai visited Chongqing, and suggested a similar planning concept to that of Shanghai and

Nanjing in terms of the future development of the city centre, transportation and the harbour (Zhang, 2005). He predicted that Chongqing would become a second Shanghai or New York following this plan. In the following years, the urban landscape in Chongqing changed dramatically, with the introduction of cafés, skyscrapers and theatres. When new buildings completely replaced old structures, they followed the best modern architectural design. Buildings in the main part of the city were growing taller in the meantime. As a national capital during wartime, there was an influx of government employees and thousands of families from the lower Yangtze Valley from 1937 to early 1938. Many city residents scattered to nearby small towns and villages, which gave added force to a great building boom all through the suburbs.

4.3.1 Spatial transformation and urban expansion

After the Anti-Japanese war started in 1937, Chongqing has faced more serious need of urban regeneration due to the damages brought by the air raids. Being the national capital since then, Chongqing was the main target of Japanese air raids and received the most serious damages. One of the most important aims was to rebuild the road system, which includes further widening the streets and improving the connections with surrounding towns.

The municipal officials brought substantial changes to Chongqing's streets during the war. In 1938, the municipal government established a survey and plan and spent the next year and a half surveying Chongqing's roads and drawing up plans for their improvement. The reforms that followed ultimately played a crucial role in altering the spatial layout of the city. The widening of narrow lanes continued during the war

years with the preliminary demolition work being aided in part by air raids and

frequent fires. A road system was constructed outside Tongyuan Gate that linked the

main part of the city with the universities and industrial districts emerging in the

areas of Shapingba and Ciqikou to the west (Figure 4-4). The creation of these roads,

together with the movement of the population outside of the old city to avoid air

raids, helped to expand Greater Chongqing to ten well-defined districts. The

ambition of the modernizing projects has shifted the city centre away from the

riverfront toward the modern enclave that has been created in the Upper city and new

districts outside the old city.
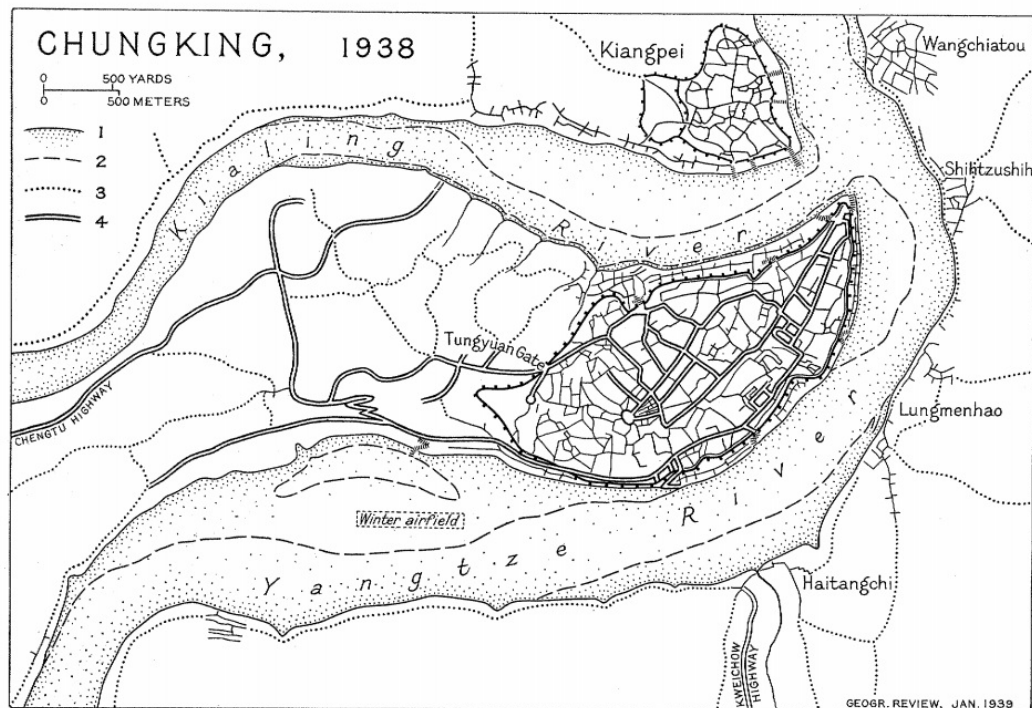
Figure 4-4 Chongqing in 1938

(Spencer, 1939)

Another reason driving the large scale expansion was the urgent need for evacuation

during the war. The bombings in the dense city centre are causing huge casualties. A

statistical result shows that from September to December 1939, about 4/5 of the air

raids targeted at urban area while only 1/5 at the rural area (Huang, 1940). In

addition, the old city centre and the newly developed area on the west can hardly accommodate the increasing population. For safety and practical concerns, the national government required most of the municipal institutions, schools, factories and citizens to move to the vast rural areas of Chongqing. A lot of satellite towns on the suburb gained extensive development with the evacuation movement.

As can be seen from Figure 4-5, the urban area of Chongqing has expanded significantly throughout the history. According to the *Ten Year Development Programme*, this process of urban expansion can be divided into six phases up until 1940s. The Phase 1 period refers to the origin of the city at the confluence of two rivers; during the Phase 2, the population of the city slightly moved inland due to the convenience of transport; in 1926, the boundary of the city extended westwards significantly and the total urban area reached 8 square kilometres at Phase 3; the Phase 4 started when Chongqing municipal government was established in 1929, Jiangbei and Nanan on the other sides of the river were included as part of Chongqing administration areas since then; the Phase 5 refers to the period after Chongqing became the national capital in 1937, the urban area further expanded to accommodate the influx of population; during the Phase 6, with the establishment of several relocation towns on the suburb, the city expanded to cover an area of 1940 square kilometres. It is evident that the expansion of Chongqing in recent eras was mostly resulted from the emerging need of relocating its increasing populations during the war.
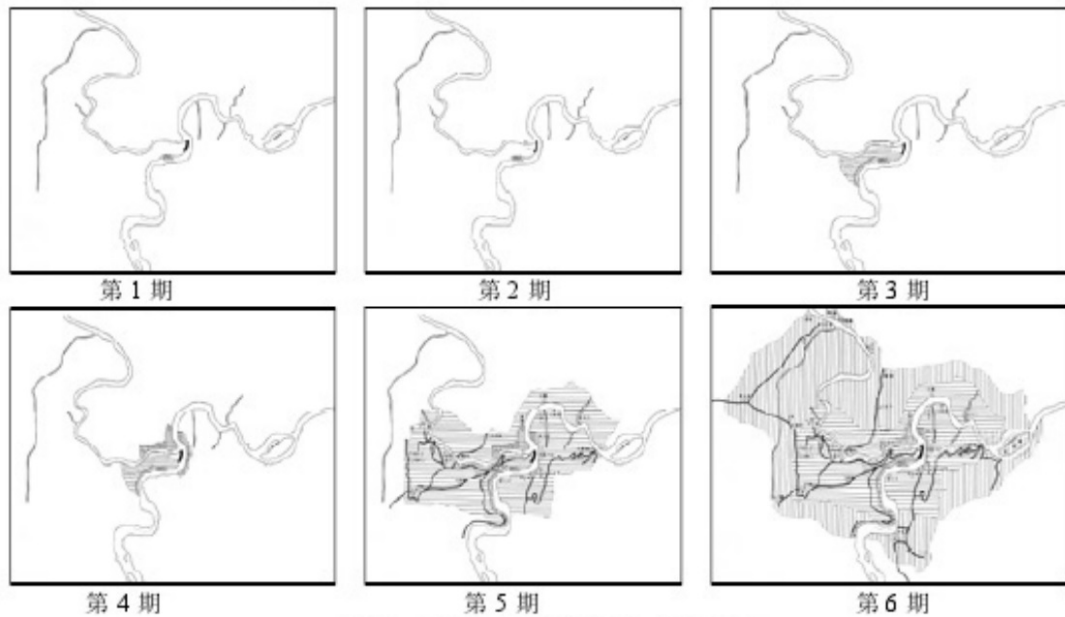
Figure 4-5 Chongqing urban expansion map

(Xie, 2011; Ten Year Development Programme, 1946)

Among the satellite towns that have prospered outside Chongqing city centre, Beibei has been the most famous and typical example in terms of applying modern urban planning principles. The town was previously a small village along Jialing River, and gained extensive development since 1927 after the appointment of famous entrepreneur LU Zuofu as local governor. A number of modern organizations such as museums, library, schools, factories and hospital were introduced to the town. Previous streets were widened and renovated, new highways and railways were built to connect with central Chongqing. By the 1940s, there was one public park and eight street gardens in Beibei. The town has become the model of modern urban planning with relatively sufficient public facilities and infrastructure that distinguished itself from other part of the city.
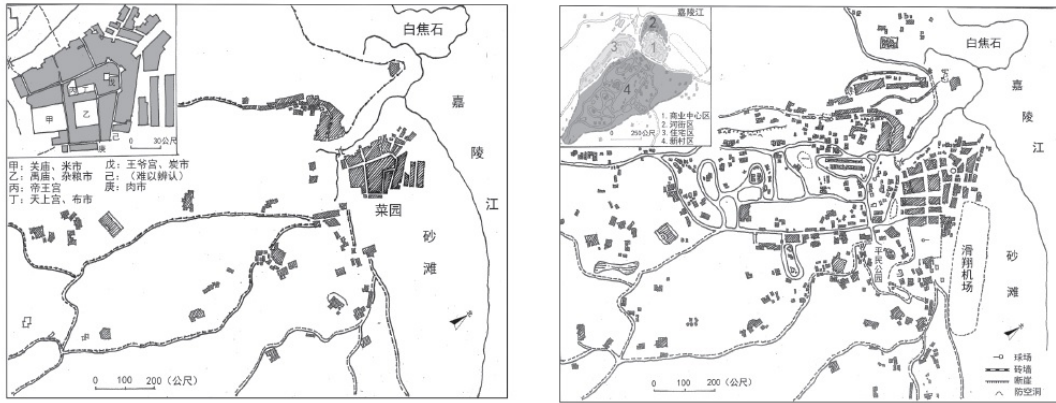
Figure 4-6 Transformation of Beibei from 1927 to 1943

(Mao, 2014)

4.3.2 Urban life and public space

During the war, municipal officials drew up at least two relatively comprehensive plans for the modernization of Chongqing's infrastructure and economy. However, for a number of reasons, most of these plans remained on paper until the end of the war. Examination of the actual modernizing reforms undertaken by municipal officials indicates that their primary concern was to establish the authority and legitimacy of the national government and to impress the foreign governments to which it looked for aid. Consequently, 'window-dressing' projects that aimed to create the sense of cleanliness, order and prosperity associated with modernity in the eyes of wartime refugees and foreign visitors received a high profile.

The municipal officials did bring more substantial changes to Chongqing's streets during the war as well. In 1938, the municipal government established a survey and plan and spent the next year and a half surveying Chongqing's roads and drawing up plans for their improvement. The reforms that followed ultimately played a crucial role in altering the spatial layout of the city. The widening of narrow lanes continued

during the war years with the preliminary demolition work being aided in part by air raids and frequent fires.

A road system was constructed outside Tongyuan Gate that linked the main part of the city with the universities and industrial districts emerging in the areas of Shapingba and Ciqikou to the west. The creation of these roads, together with the movement of the population outside of the old city to avoid air raids, helped to expand Greater Chongqing to ten well-defined districts. The ambition of the modernizing projects has shifted the city centre away from the riverfront toward the modern enclave that has been created in the Upper city and new districts outside the old city.

Despite the practical concerns that the riverfront cliffs were physically unsuited to building a modern city based on wide avenues and multistoried concrete buildings, refugee municipal officials' objective was not fundamentally to transform the city through reforms. Rather, the purpose was to establish the notion of modernity and its association with the Guomindang government. This superficial approach to modernization reflected the national government's limited commitment to creating anything more than a façade of modernity for the purpose of impressing foreign visitors (Peck, 1950). Within the city, the government worked to create a national presence by overlaying the modernized downtown area with national symbols. The new street names used a lot of political vocabulary, which clearly indicated the political agenda underlying the national government's modernizing efforts. The construction of monuments was another way to create a national presence in Chongqing, However, local inhabitants never expressed much interest in the

monuments, which later decayed and collapsed, but were reconstructed in 1947 to celebrate the end of the war and remain standing at the centre of the commercial district in downtown Chongqing today.

On the other hand, the national government became aware of the need for public open space while reconstructing urban streets. The lacking of public open space in Chongqing city centre adds difficulties to the evacuation during the wartime. The previous commercial centre - Duyoujie junction - was chosen to be developed into a new public square after it was destroyed in an air attack in 1939. The primary aim of building Duyoujie square at this time was to provide open space for people to gather, as well as reducing the fire spread during the air raids. After the completion of Duyoujie square, the area soon attracted a great number of shops and residents and became the commercial and financial centre of Chongqing until today.

The modernization process begun by the city's elite before the war and continued by the national government and downriver reformers during the war shifted the centre of the city and established a new modernized downtown area. New offices of the national government, parks, public squares, and monuments dominated the landscape and projected the power of modernity. The national government also succeeded in projecting itself as the dominant power in China through these movements. For many observers, wartime Chongqing seemed to be a microcosm of the nation; China's diversity was always on display on the streets of wartime Chongqing.

The urban planning of Chongqing during the early 20th century mirrored that of many cities in China that went through their transformation period during wartime. Because of the demolition and the chaos the war brought to the city, most civic plans

prioritized physically rebuilding the city, improving insufficient urban infrastructure and thereby providing accommodation for numerous refugees. Plans at that time were all focused on engineering and construction works, However, after the war finished, the 'Ten Year development programme' was the first to consider the city's future growth from a more scientific, geographic and evolutionary perspective and made efforts to make appropriate plans and goals.

Despite the several plans proposed during wartime that mostly remained on paper, this programme only started in 1946, after the war was over and the national capital had been moved back to Nanjing. This programme was the first comprehensive master plan of the city, and the third formal one in the country's history after the implementation of the '*Big Shanghai plan*' and the *'Chongqing Metropolitan plan'*. The national government initiated this plan to restart the modernization movements abandoned in Chongqing, the wartime capital. The planning committee was organized in a short time with a number of officials and specialists in various fields. From 6th February to 28th April 1946, the planning committee drew up the 'Ten Year Development Plan of Chongqing'. Although the drafting period was short, an ambitious plan was drawn up to address a series of problems the city had suffered from during the war.

This development plan covered 14 subjects in total, ranging from population distribution and land use to the urban infrastructure and social education. Two American planning consultants were involved in the plan (Arthur B. Morrill and Norman. J. Gorden) and western planning concepts such as zoning were introduced, which played important roles in the early Chinese city plans (Figure 4-7). At this

time, the development plan was mostly presented in data and figures, and the conclusions were based on the available budget and future development. The focus of the plan was to deal with the future expansion and the improvement of the urban appearance. The influence of western planning ideas became quite evident throughout each detailed plan. In line with the predicted increase in population after the war, the land surrounding the original peninsula was considered for future growth, and different function zones were assigned to it. It was in this context that the terms 'green space' and 'urban park' had been first mentioned.
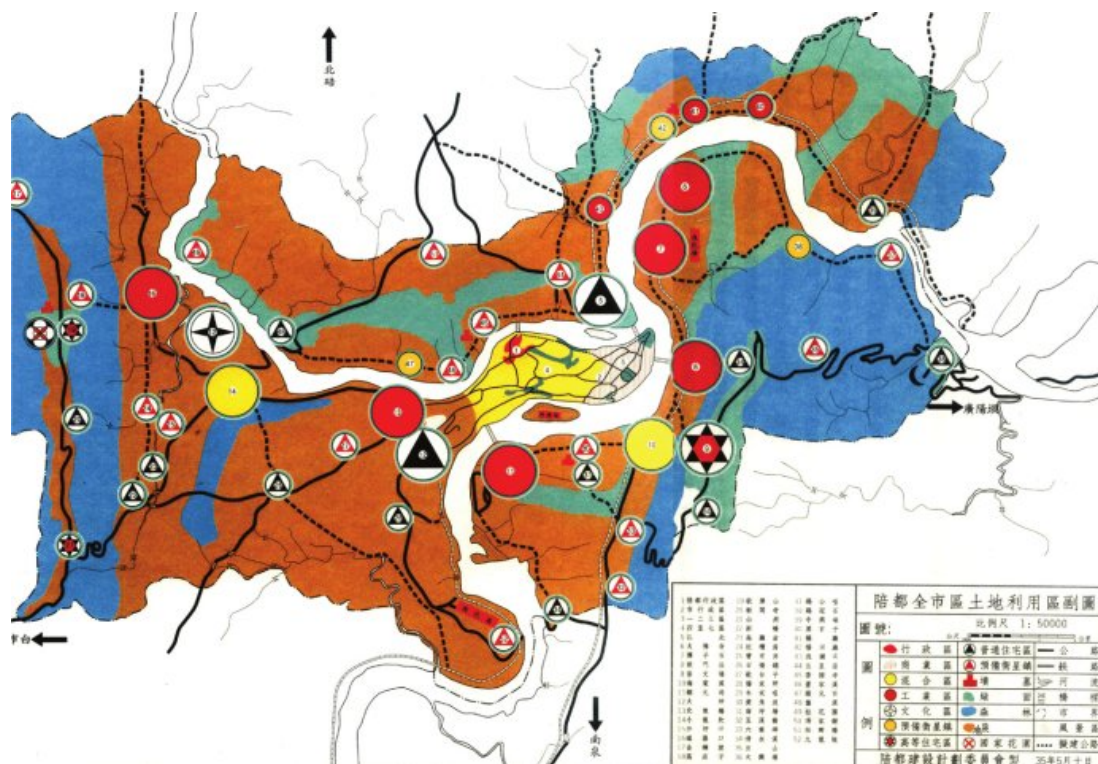
Figure 4-7 Land use plan of Chongqing in 1946

(Chongqing Library)

The plan was made in accordance with the national *Metropolitan Planning Regulation* issued in 1939, which proposed 32 rules for future urban planning. At this time, the concept of the urban public park had been introduced and regarded as one of the important aspects of urban development and a symbol of modernism.

Regulations required that the urban park should be appropriately located and planned within the urban planning, and accounted for at least 10% of the total urban area in the *Metropolitan Planning Regulation*. This has also been considered and illustrated in the *Ten Year Development Programme,* which proposed a comprehensive city-wide greenspace master plan. The proposed urban parks were to be equipped with other public facilities and adapted to the existing topography in order to accommodate the increasing urban population and their social needs, which had not been considered in feudal times. Apart from this, the urban square, at this time, remained rather functional and did not realize its social roles for most of Chinese society. Even within the *Metropolitan Planning Regulation*, the urban square is considered to be built adjacent to a road junction and/or monumental constructions, providing space for traffic to circulate (Xie, 2011).

However, the programme was not fully implemented due to the civil war in the following five years. Compared to another two important plans – *Nanjing Capital Plan* and *Big Shanghai Plan* - during this time, which all carried great political implications to establish the first Chinese modern metropolis with grand architecture; the *Ten Year Development Plan* of Chongqing put more emphasis on addressing practical issues and improving the urban infrastructure, as well as public facilities.

4.4   Urbanization after the foundation of People's Republic of China (1949-2010)

4.4.1   The space production under the Chinese socialist planned economy (1949-1978)

Chinese society went through dramatic changes during this period, which inevitably was reflected in the changing urban form of the major cities. The country needed to recover from the stagnation of development during the civil war (1946-49). In the post-war period, the communist party brought profound changes and socialist ideologies to the country's urban development, most significantly by establishing a socialist system and a centrally planned economy.

The years from 1949 to the late 1970s are referred to as the 'pre-reform' or 'planned economy' era, to be differentiated from the market-oriented economy, which remains an ongoing transformation process in China. This period is fundamental in terms of changes in ideologies and regulations due to the continuous political movements. The space-production mechanisms and practices in the present economic reforms show that Chinese cities are the result of the long-term evolution from the era of the planned economy. The overwhelming public ownership and the highly-centralized planned economy are the main characteristics of the 'planned economy era', and they have formed the basic institutional conditions for the subsequent development of urban squares.

Urban planning during this period was dominated by the socialist ideology of universal public-ness. A typical representation of this 'public' ideology was the universal state ownership of land in the pre-reform era (Tang, 1994). In principal, all urban land belonged to the people as a whole, and the state administered land on behalf of the people. Urban land was administratively 'allocated' without payment, tax or rent (Nan and Xiao, 1992). Therefore, the development of urban space was conducted merely by public institutions. Scholars have indicated that the

mechanisms in state socialism fundamentally involve or rely on a multilevel

bureaucratic hierarchy which allocates resources and redistributes income (Koman,

1989).

Due to the socialist nature of the land in China, urban space was shared by all and

had no exchange value but was regarded as a necessity for working and living during

this period. The two major institutions that were responsible for producing and

allocating urban space in cities were the municipal government and the work unit

(*danwei*). The industrialization rather than urbanization has been the driving force of

urban development in China, or more appropriately, industrialization with controlled

urbanization (Lin, 1998). As a result of the restricted urban expansion, new urban

land can only be converted from rural land and used by work units themselves after

obtaining a nominal approval from the municipal planning bureau (Wu, 1994).

During the First Five-Year Plan (1952-57), the socialist state of China followed the

Russian model of socialist economic growth. However, The Great Leap Forward

(1958-60) that followed has rendered China's trajectory of urbanization different

from other socialist nations. During this economically chaotic period, the entire

nation was enthusiastic to reach production goals, however unrealistic. Hundreds of

thousands of peasants flooded the cities to work in factories. Another unique period

that had a great influence on China's urban development, as well as ideologies, was

the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), during which 26 million rural migrants were sent

back to the countryside, and some 17 million urban youths were forced to go to

undeveloped western areas to be re-educated (Ma, 1971). These politically and

ideologically motivated events resulted in stagnation and in some cases reversed

urban development. It was not until 1978, when the more pragmatic Deng Xiaoping gained power that the Chinese government began to shift its focus away from the class struggle and social and spatial equality to economic growth.

Traditional Chinese cities, as discussed before, often had a rectangular, symmetrical layout with an elaborate structure of city walls and gates symbolizing authority and security, providing protection, and representing Chinese cosmology (Chang, 1977; Ma 1971; Wright 1977; Huang, 2006). Most Chinese cities originally served as administrative centres, with government buildings and facilities that were devoted to large, public squares for political gatherings in order to glorify the socialist state (Sit, 1995). The rise of urban squares could be dated back to the construction of Tiananmen Square in the 1950s, with its resemblance to Soviet public squares. The urban planning and city building in China during the Maoist era, was largely functionalist (Gaubatz, 1998), with the exception of monumental structures such as public squares, which retained strong political implications.

The emphasis on industry and the concept of the 'producer city' were central to socialist planning (Ma. 1976; Sit, 1995). China's government was determined to convert 'consumer cities' into 'producer cities' by developing a large industrial sector. The emphasis on production resulted in a pattern of land use devoted mainly to industrial facilities, with much less for infrastructure, housing, services and recreation (Huang, 2006). The form of work unit (*danwei*) was unique to China, especially to the pre-reform socialist era. It not only encouraged industrial productivity by allowing people to work and live together within a small area, but also reduced the need for urban expansion (See discussions in Chapter 2).

Following this development trajectory, the urban development in Chongqing has featured these major characteristics influenced by the political and economic context during this period, which resulted in a heavy emphasis on industrial development. After the end of the anti-Japanese war in 1945, Chongqing lost its title as a wartime capital. The privileged connection with the central government no longer existed, and a great number of previous factories and investments moved out and returned to their original places, leaving behind many abandoned industrial buildings. In 1944, there were 451 factories in Chongqing with nearly half of them having moved to the city from elsewhere during the war (Kui, 1991; Fu, 1945). According to the record, 122 factories were closed or moved in 1946, and just within the first 10 months, over 500,000 people left Chongqing. Many urban projects which were highly praised just a few years previously were stopped and, in addition, the city had suffered significant damage left by the Japanese bombing during the war. After the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Chongqing served as the seat of both the Southwest Bureau and the Southwest Military and Political Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, and, for a short period of time, as a municipality directly under the central government. In 1954, Chongqing was downgraded to a city under the jurisdiction of Sichuan province. The development of Chongqing was accelerated in the 1960s when the policy of the 'Third Front' construction was carried out by the central government. The policy was formed following the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960) and influenced by the increasingly tense relationship between China and the Soviet Union, which caused the central government to prepare for a potential conflict. It aimed to reinforce the national defence power through extensive industrial and urban infrastructure constructions. The mountainous areas of western China were categorized as the 'Third Front' cities, which were

considered as strategic places for the development of heavy industries. During 1964 to 1965, more than 60 state-owned enterprises moved their factories to Chongqing from over 12 cities around the country, with an increased number of 46,000 migrant workers (Han and Wang, 2001). The 'Third Front' construction policy helped Chongqing build up its infrastructure and economic structure and develop into the largest industrial base in west China. Most of these factories and industries did not last long due to the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

During the 1960s, the urban planning in Chongqing encouraged the spread of small and medium sized urban centres followed by the decentralization of many industrial plants into the suburbs. The clusters of these factories had been planned as satellite towns such as Nan'an and Jiangbei, which were also the original places for the early enterprises that settled in Chongqing during the war. The development of urban public space was featured mainly by political squares and green space such as small public gardens and urban parks. The construction of the Great Hall in 1954 was to signify the city's important role within the country, as well as the local political leadership. A hard-paved square was also built at the entrance of the Great Hall, which was rebuilt in 1997 into today's People's Square.

4.4.2 The creation of urban squares under the socialist-market economy (1978-present)

In 1978, the Third Plenary Session of the 11th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party launched a series of reforms and opened China to the outside world. The economic reform introduced markets to China. Ever since, the political economy has been in transition from a centrally planned economy to a socialist

market economy. This not only brought about a breath-taking urban growth but also an incredible change in urban place-making. The socialist ideology of collectivism and egalitarianism in the planned economy era has been changed to an ideology of pragmatism. Urban land and space development are no longer considered as merely socialist welfare goods and the representation of egalitarianism, instead, physical development of urban land and space is promoted as the engine of growth in a new socialist market-oriented economy (Chen, 2010).

The ideological transformation has been implemented through a series of institutional changes, most significantly, the marketization and commodification of urban land through land policy reform. The commodification of housing, as well as the establishment of a real estate market has increased the number of individual private developers. This has weakened the role of the *danwei,* which used to be the major provider of public housing. The rapid expansion of the private realm led to the overall collapse of universal public ownership, and the dramatic changes in the production, management and use of the urban public space.

The most significant change brought by Chinese urban land policy reform, is that the nature of urban land has changed from a free, allocated, social resource to an exchangeable commodity in the market. The release of the exchange value of land immediately benefited the primary landowner - the government. Urban land development became a major means of accumulating capital for different levels of developers - whoever was able to obtain the right to develop land.

The economic reform was initiated in Chongqing in 1983, and it became one of the cities to be developed with the purpose of testing the feasibility of a rather market-

oriented economy. The land development inevitably played an important role within the rapid urban growth and the interrelationship between land development and urbanization has been well demonstrated in academic studies. However, the government still maintained a dominant role in leading the way on economic and urban space development, by regulating land allocation in favour of market operation. This distinct character has been noticed by many scholars, that Chinese market economic reform has an inherent connection to the bureaucracy with capital at every level of the transitional society - from the economy, urban space production to the social dimension, and it is largely rooted in, and inherited from, the planned economy era.

As a result of the economic reform, the rapid urbanization and urban expansion required further institutional changes in the urban planning system to regulate the spatial development of urban land in Chinese cities. The central government enacted the City Planning Act of China in 1989, which marked the commencement of the 'legalized planning system' era of urban planning in China (Zhao, 2005). According to the Act, there are no substantial changes in terms of the basic principles and institutional framework, the planning convention has been largely maintained.

After 1946, Chongqing lost its title as a national capital, and was downgraded to a sub-provincial city under the jurisdiction of Sichuan province in 1954. The notion of 'urban public space' in Chinese urban planning maintained its conventional meaning in the pre-reform era, which is basically a functional and technical term largely equating to 'urban open space' (Chen, 2010). This can be considered as a legacy of

the planned economy – when the spatial ideology, actors, and interests operated against the background of universal public ownership.

4.5   Conclusion

The opening of a public sphere and related intellectual and cultural public space provides a social context for the physical development of 'public spaces'. Indeed, it is the existence of the public sphere that enables the 'public' aspect of urban space – the space where the public sphere can be built, experienced and performed (Gaubatz, 2008).

This chapter has reviewed the evolution and urban development of Chongqing from its early modernization to the present day. The economic and political reforms had a profound impact both on the space production mechanism and the public social life of Chinese cities. It sheds light on the discussions of selected urban squares regarding their particular form and uses. The legacy of the past had long influenced the physical form and space-making strategies. The next chapter will analyse the findings from the site survey in order to understand how the urban squares have been produced with invested meaning and how they are interpreted and perceived by the users.

Chapter 5: Identity in Contemporary

Urban Squares

5 Identity in Contemporary Urban Squares

5.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates the physical characteristics and the social uses of the selected urban squares in Chongqing. According to the previous discussion on urban development and the socio-economic context of Chinese cities, the urban square in China has been mainly serving political objectives. The spatial form of the urban square is largely dominated by symbolic representations, while people's social uses and perception of space are usually not the primary concern. However, the increasing public activities during recent years have reshaped the people-place relationship, as well as the conventional role of urban squares. The site survey attempts to explore the interrelation between the spatial configuration and human behaviours by observing the physical environment with regard to activities to enable a discussion of their influence on people's perception of a place.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the site survey adopted mapping and observation as major methods to record and illustrate the essential information obtained on-site including spatial settings and social uses. The survey was conducted in January and July 2014 by the researcher with each urban square being visited at different times of the day on both weekdays and weekends in order to gain full information on the use patterns. The potential conflicts among the social uses and the problems of the physical environment in facilitating human experience were noticed and provide valuable insights into the improvement of future design practice. The historical context of each case study site was also described in order to understand the continuity in their

spatial form and the impact of traditional legacies on the current sites. The specific history and previous physical characteristics help to explain how the symbolic meaning was embodied and reflected in the spatial design.

The findings from this chapter address the research aim of understanding the public life at urban squares and newly-formed people-place relationships because the social use and physical attributes of public space contribute greatly to the establishment of place identity. The result of the site survey will be further explored and discussed in relation to their relevance with place identity in Chapter 7.

5.2   Local context of case study sites
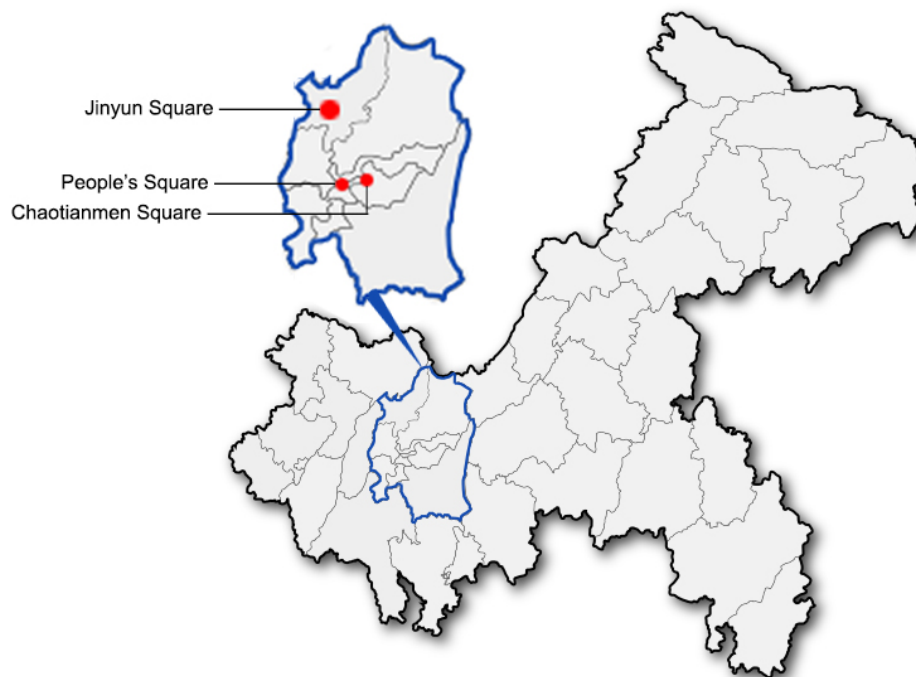
Figure 5-1 Case study locations in Chongqing

5.2.1   Chaotianmen Square

As shown in Figure 5-1 Chaotianmen square is located at the heart of the city centre, where the Yangtze River and the one of its branches, the Jialing River, join together. The history of Chaotianmen as one of the city gates dates back to 314 BC, when the Empire of Qin occupied the Kingdom of Ba in the area. General ZHANG Yi initially built the city gate - Chaotianmen gate - to reinforce the city's defences. Over one thousand years later in the Ming dynasty, another general, DAI Ding, expanded the urban area by establishing 17 city gates according to the ancient city making rules 'Jiu Gong Ba Gua' (Nine-palace and Eight-trigram theory) in about 1370. The theory was developed from ancient Chinese philosophy, geography and astronomy to guide decision-making in terms of the site selection of important constructions and the organization of spaces. The construction of city gates and walls laid the foundation of ancient Chongqing and defined its main urban area. Chaotianmen has long been the gateway to the city and even the southeast area of China. Four Chinese characters, 'Guyu Xiongguan (the strategic pass of ancient Chongqing) were written on the gate at the time to indicate its importance. Due to its strategical location, Chaotianmen gate was the main entrance where the envoys sent by the Emperor arrived at Chongqing by boat. It is also the place where officials received the imperial decrees in the feudal society of China. The origin of the name, which means 'worshiping the emperor', also came from those stories (Zhou, 2001).

During the war in 1891, Chongqing was turned into a treaty port and custom duty was levied at the Chaotianmen gate. However, the old city gate with a history of 550 years was demolished and removed in order to build an adjacent wharf in 1927. The surrounding area of Chaotianmen wharf has been expanded many times and stretches along the banks of the Yangtze and Jialing Rivers. Due to a fire in 1949, the wharf

and the nearby areas were burnt into ruins and only broken walls and foundations remain. The name 'Chaotianmen' was retained and used by local people to refer to the surrounding area long after the demolition of the city gate. In 1997 after the city's upgrade to the fourth municipality of the country, the municipal government decided to build Chaotianmen square at the site to mark the event. The challenge facing the design of Chaotianmen square at the time was that it had to organize the circulation of people coming from both the river and the existing city roads surrounding it. Several sightseeing platforms were created to connect different levels, and provide space for visitors to enjoy the view of the two rivers.

Figure 5-2 Chaotianmen wharf before the square was built

In 2012, a new commercial development project - Raffle City - at the back of the previous Chaotianmen square was launched. It is the biggest single investment of developer Capitaland's projects in China and is expected to cost 21.1 billion RMB. Raffle City Chongqing is designed by Moshe Safdie who is the architect behind world-class icons like Marina Bay Sands in Singapore. The new commercial complex includes a five-story shopping mall and six towers comprising luxury residences offering waterfront living, Grade A office towers, serviced residences and a hotel with a conservatory hall with a total construction floor area of over 1.03 million m^2. The development will be integrated with a transport hub including a metro station, bus interchange, ferry terminal and cruise centre. In addition, it will be connected to the key districts of Jiangbei and Nan'an, and is expected to complete in 2017.
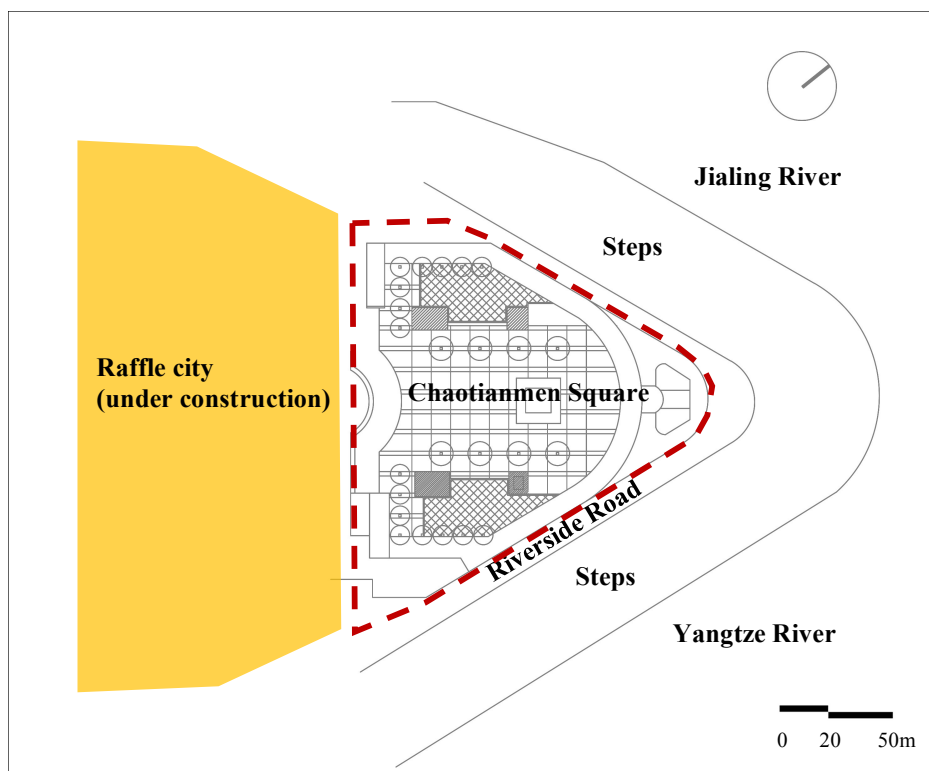
Figure 5-3 Plan of Chaotianmen Square

According to the planning proposal of Raffle City, the previous Chaotianmen square has been partly preserved and remains accessible during the construction work. However, the surrounding area and roads are mostly blocked or diverted throughout this period. After its completion, the new Raffle City will serve as the backdrop of Chaotianmen square. The high-rise towers complete the image of Chaotianmen as a sailing boat facing the confluence of two rivers. The improved accessibility of the place with more transportation links aims to bring vitality to the Chaotianmen area, which also implies the ambition of the municipal government to create a brand new landmark for the city.

Figure 5-5 View of Raffle City Chongqing

Figure 5-4 Arial view of Chaotianmen Square

5.2.2   People's Square

The history of Chongqing dates back over 3,000 years to the Shang dynasty. At the beginning of the Zhou dynasty in the 11th century BC, which had replaced the Shang dynasty, the state of Ba was formed by the population of eastern Sichuan with present-day Chongqing as its capital. At different times throughout its history, Chongqing has been known by several different names including Jiangzhou, Ba

Prefecture, Chu Prefecture, Yu Prefecture, Gong Prefecture and Chongqing Fu in 1189. However, during the period of the Chu Prefecture, the focal area of Chongqing was gradually moved to the southeast of the peninsula, which was the birthplace of modern Chongqing city. Especially after 1891, when the city's port was opened to the outside world and a customs house was set up, the main area of the peninsula became the most important gateway to the city.

Figure 5-6 Location of People's Square in Yuzhong Penisula

People's Square was situated right at the centre of river peninsula, which was known as Yuzhong district or Yuzhong peninsula. Sitting at the confluence of Jialing and Yangtze Rivers, Yuzhong peninsula saw the rapid economic growth of the city during the Ming and Qing dynasties. With the rise of the shipping dock, the Yuzhong district has become the administration, financial and transportation hub of Chongqing. Nevertheless, after the chaos of the Cultural Revolution in the 1970s, the first City Master Plan of Chongqing, produced in 1983, decided to release the pressure of Yuzhong district as the sole city centre by expanding further urban development into the south and north across the river. The production of the

Chongqing Urban and Rural Master plan in 1998 developed the idea with extensive changes at administrative level. When Chongqing became the fourth municipality of China in 1997, the new master plan proposed a polycentric developmental strategy that aimed to divide the city by using natural rivers and mountains into groups of focal districts. Based on the planning and vision of the urban townscape, the design guidance on the spatial system, function zones, morphological design, landscape and dimension control of urban public space has been produced.

As one of the most important focal groups, a comprehensive urban image design of the Yuzhong peninsula was conducted in 2003 following the implantation of the city master plan. The design area was bounded by Fotuguan to the west, Chaotianmen to the east and the Jialing and Yangtze Rivers to the north and south respectively, covering a total area of $9.47km^2$. The project aims at establishing and promoting a distinct image of the Yuzhong peninsula by reducing the architectural density and strengthening its commercial and financial functions, while increasing green public open space to deliver the geographical and cultural identity. The urban design was carried out through the design of nine important focal areas, among which the Great Hall of the People area was to demonstrate the modern metropolitan side of Chongqing in the future development.

The Great Hall of the People in Yuzhong district was built in the 1950s, initiated by the Southwest Bureau at the time. The Hall was built on the side of Ma'an Hill by digging up half of the hill to fill up the trench and swale in front of it. The building was completed at the end of 1953, including a large auditorium, an archway and three adjoining parts to the east, south and north. The auditorium is 65m high

covering 18,500m^2 with the glazed tile dome, white marble railings and red columns, which mirrors those of China's ancient classical dynasties, resembling an enlarged version of the Temple of Heaven in Beijing. The architecture soon became the symbol of Chongqing and an important venue for events and ceremonies.

Figure 5-7 The Great Hall in 1987

Chinese cities experienced dramatic changes in the late 1970s after the market-oriented economic reform, which had a profound impact on the production of urban public space. The typical example was the construction of People's Square in 1997 after Chongqing was promoted to the national municipality. The People's Square was designed by the Chongqing Urban Planning and Design Institute with a total investment of 14.5 million RMB from the municipal government. The project has been widely supported by the society as the city's landmark project and was completed within 3 months. With the Great Hall of the People as its backdrop, People's Square was to highlight the role of the Hall and also provide an important outdoor arena for ceremonies and performances.

Sitting in front of the Great Hall of the People, People's Square is enclosed by Renmin Road and Xuetianwan Main Street, covering an area of 28,200m². The central part of the square consists of several big trees preserved from previous sites and green space on the two sides to form the main axis and activity area, several small gardens and woodland on the edge of the square form the boundary and create quieter green spaces.
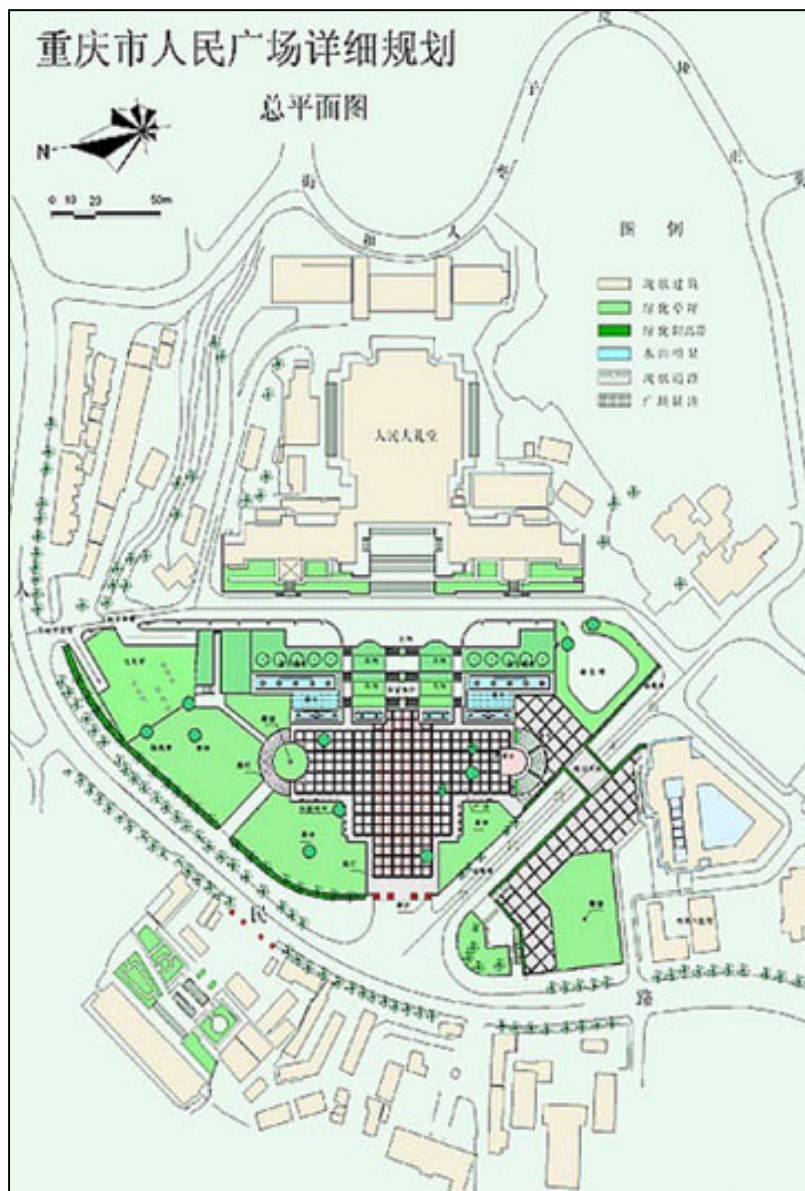
Figure 5-8 Plan of People's Square in 1997

Despite the Great Hall of the People, the construction of another landmark building -

the Three Gorges Museum - on the other side of the square has added more

dynamics to the site and further completed the image of the area. The Three Gorges

Museum project was first proposed in the early 1950s, and suspended when

Chongqing was downgraded as a provincial city in 1954. However, with the

completion of the Three Gorges Dam, a large museum was needed to house over

200,000 historic relics excavated from the flooded area. Therefore, the Three Gorges

Museum was proposed and approved by the State Council in September 2000. The

museum was completed and opened in 2005, replacing the former Chongqing

Museum. It aims to undertake education, preservation and scientific research with

respect to cultural heritage and the natural environment in Chongqing and the Three

Gorges region of the Yangtze River. The main building of the Three Gorges

Museum is huge and magnificent in appearance and rich in connotation. It was built

complying with the landform and integrated with the mountain, presenting a garden

landscape with the theme of hills and water. The modern curve form of the museum

has formed a distinct contrast with the Great Hall's traditional style but together they

reflect the transition and changes of the city throughout history. The People's Square

lies between them and so becomes place for visitors to appreciate the two landmarks,

as well as an essential public space which reflects the underlying social and cultural

interactions through the actual use of, and the people on, the site.
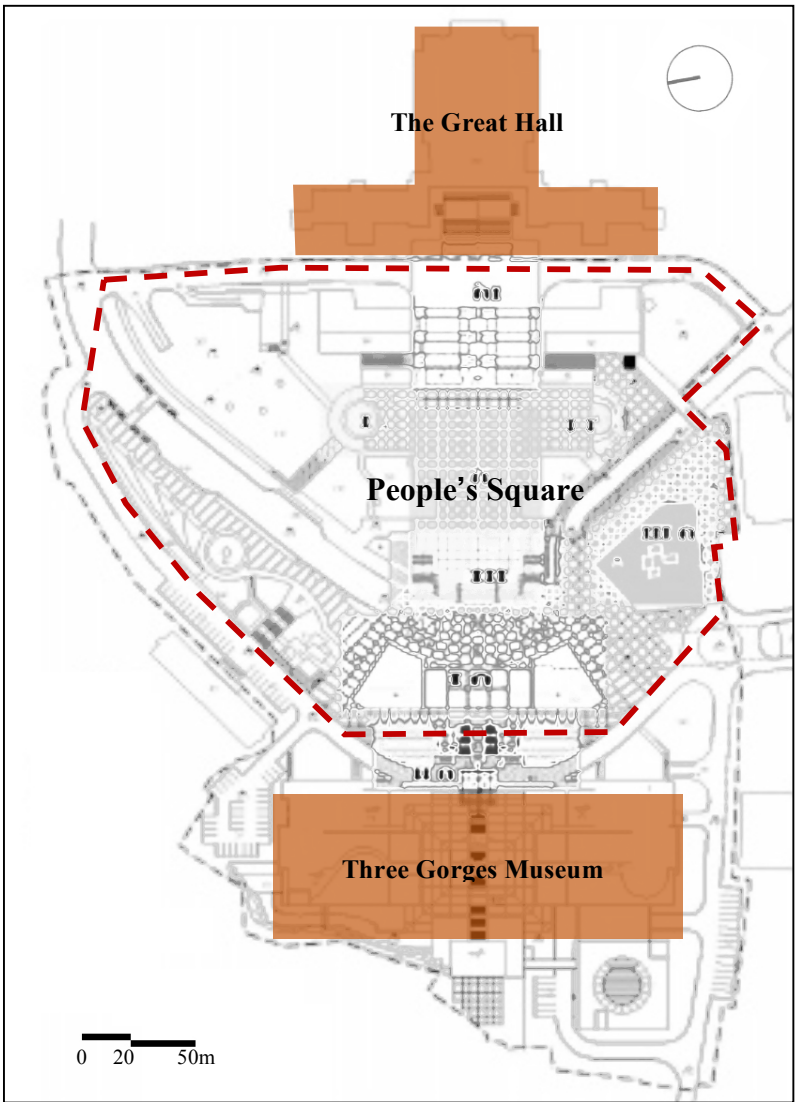
Figure 5-9 Plan of People's Square in 2005 (with the Three Gorges Museum)

Figure 5-10 The Three Gorges Museum

5.2.3   Jinyun Square

As one of the most important districts in Chongqing, Beibei was first officially planned and built by the famous industrialist and social activist LU Zuofu in the 1940s. The old town of Beibei has been a good example of, and advocate for, urban planning in China. However, with a half-century's development and urbanization, the town has expanded to accommodate the increasing population and housing. The new town was well-planned and placed at the south of the Beibei district, just next to the new national highway under construction. With its proximity to the famous attraction - Jinyun Mountain - and future convenient transportation links, the new town was built into a south gateway of Beibei. The master plan of Beibei New Town was finished in 2000. It covered an area of 402 hectares with an expected population of 35,000. In the development plan of the area, the new administration centre and its adjacent Jinyun square occupied the central location of the new town with its close connection to the new pedestrian street. Sitting just in front of the Jinyun Mountain, the administration centre is the landmark building in Beibei, overlooking the middle axis of the whole area.
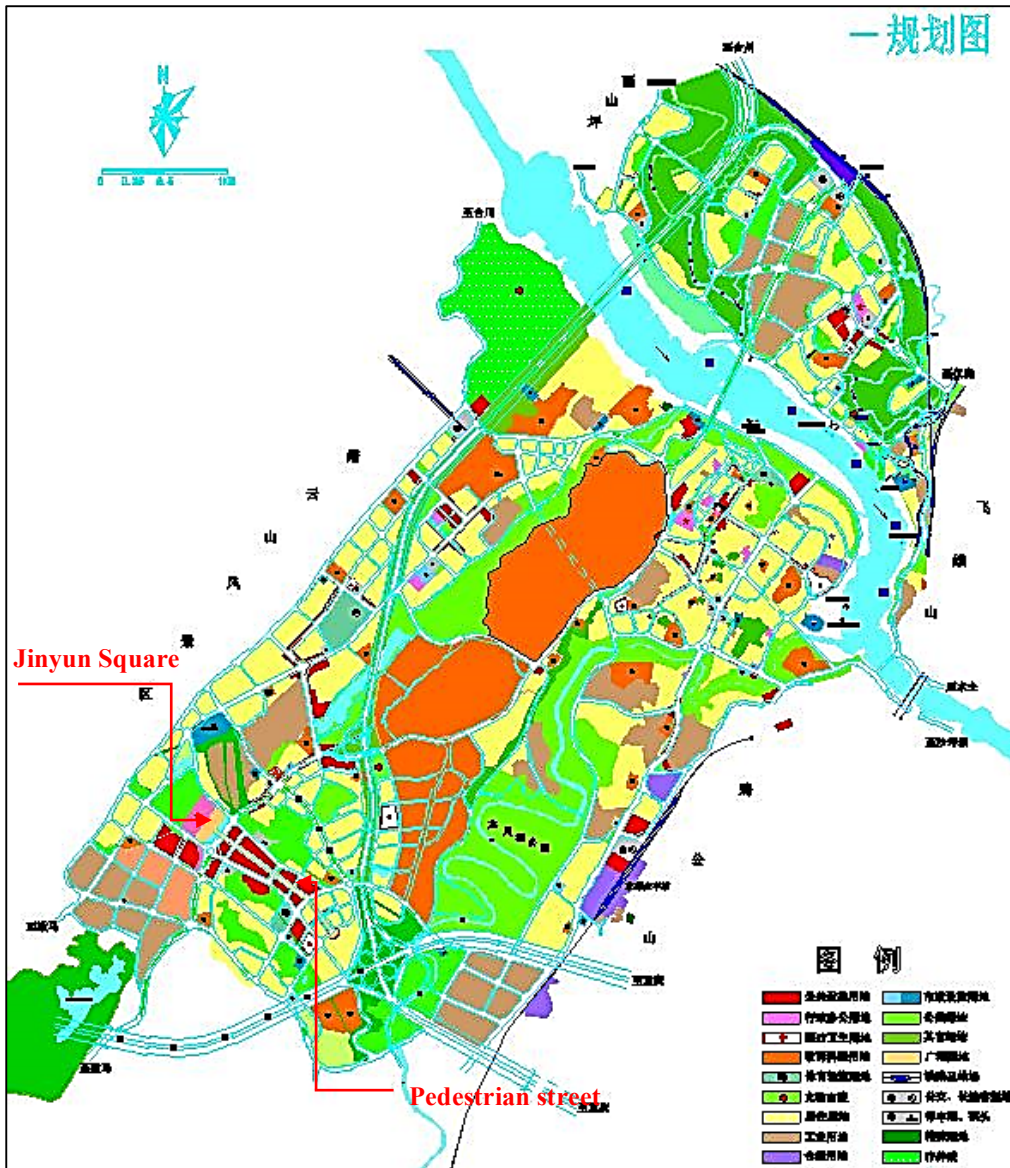
Figure 5-11 Land use plan of Beibei

According to the master plan of Beibei New Town, which established the town's general spatial structure, the construction of the central landscape avenue was the major image project of the area. It lies in the middle, acting as the main axis that consists of the new administration building, Jinyun square and the pedestrian street. The distinctions between these three main nodes represent and convey the role of the area as a political, commercial and recreational centre.

Jinyun square was designed in conjunction with the new administration building of Beibei and finished in 2004. It comes in a total area of 67,000m^2, with 27,000m^2 of green space, which gives a 40% green space coverage rate. There is a river and a planned highway running in front of the square, separating it from the pedestrian street on the other end. However, the hard paving area of the square extends as a bridge running across the road and the river, to be connected with the street, and together they form the spatial axis of the town. The linear axis links the major components that are central to the whole district, including the administration building, the square, the pedestrian street and a group of new residential communities in the surrounding area. The completion of the square and residential communities aims to attract people from the old town by providing a range of amenities and public spaces, which are also essential for the further development of the new town.
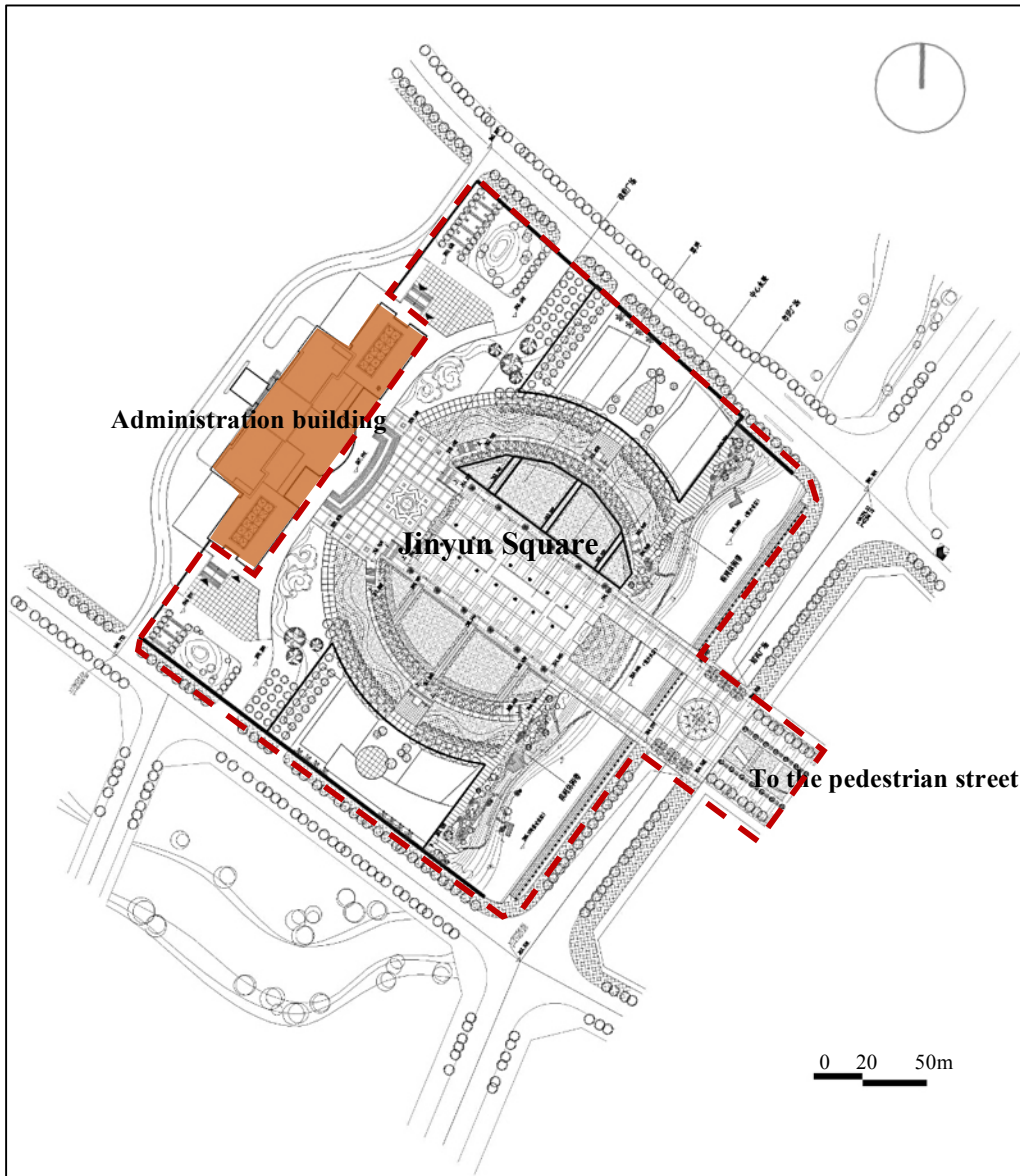
Figure 5-12 Plan of Jinyun Square

5.3   Physical settings

5.3.1   Display of environment

- **Spatial shape**

Chongqing has been a mountainous city famous for its hilly landforms. The geographical location on the Yuzhong peninsula naturally grows into the river and is bounded by sharp cliffs on the three sides, which adds distinct characteristics to the physical form of Chaotianmen square. The cliffs at the waterfront were turned into steps connecting the riverfront with the sightseeing platform at a higher level. The square is divided into three platforms gradually ascending from the lower waterfront to the upper level. There are interconnected routes and steps linking all the open space, while the underground space of these platforms has been transformed and built into the first urban planning museum of Chongqing. The whole project is regarded as one of the typical examples of architecture and urban design in Chongqing that have been dedicated to fully incorporating manmade structures in response to the original landform.

In the meantime, a vivid image of Chaotianmen square as a sailing ship is established by adapting the shape of the square to the original landform. With the skyscrapers in the backdrop as the foresail, Chaotianmen square acts as the prow of the ship that is ready to sail. At the time when Chaotianmen square was built in 1997, this visual image and the implication it carries were especially relevant and important for the city. The shaped form of a ship is so symbolic that it indicates the determination of Chongqing to overcome difficulties in the further development after being promoted as the first municipality in western China. It also makes Chaotianmen square an iconic place and the most famous landmark of the city. More recently, as the media industry has become highly developed, Chaotianmen square has become one of the most frequent places that appear in TV shows, on the internet

and the postcards of Chongqing, thereby making it a popular tourist attraction, especially for photography.

As in most Chinese urban squares and architectural designs, the symmetry has been a constant theme inherited from the ancient Chinese culture. A major axis is usually decided at the beginning and used as the reference for the further arrangement of spaces. In the case of Chaotianmen square, especial at the upper platform, the major axis is oriented through the central axis from the entrance to the edge of the square. It is achieved by the arrangement of the plantings, the street lamps and the pattern of the paving. They are all oriented towards the same direction to guide people's movement and views to the front sidewalk. The irregular boundaries of the platform are hidden behind the planting beds positioned just at the two sides of the central axis, in order to keep the formal shape of the space.

The space along the central axis is usually kept empty to achieve a sense of formality and grandness, and, in Chaotianmen square, this also highlights the river view by fully presenting it to the visitors without any obstruction to block the view. Besides, many efforts are made to attract people's attention to the river, the long distance between the entrance and the front edge still makes it difficult to see the confluence initially. The potential views to be seen from the front edge of the square then become the focal point and the main incentive that encourages people to walk onwards. The panoramic view can only be seen when getting closer to the front along the sidewalks. The platforms at the lower levels are also created to allow a complete experience of sightseeing from different perspectives.

The unique scene of two rivers joining together is often considered as a typical and exclusive view of Chongqing, which is one of the reasons that make Chaotianmen square the most popular attraction representing the main assets of the city. The site of Chaotianmen square carries rich meanings not only because of its location as the original birthplace of the city but the skyscrapers presented on the other side of the river are also a sign of the city's current prosperity. Recent years have seen the rise of a series of iconic architectures in Chongqing designed by famous designers with worldwide reputations, one of which is the Grand Theatre situated just off the riverfront of the Jiangbei district opposite to Chaotianmen square. The distinctive appearance of the building stands out as another attraction of the city contributing to its skylines. Over the years, with the rapid urban development, the identity of Chaotianmen Square has been gradually shifted from an iconic landmark symbolizing the new era of Chongqing in the 1990s, to a viewpoint exhibiting other significant transformations of the urban appearance.

In the construction and design of People's Square, the creation of a central axis is the constant theme in order to establish a strong sense of focus and formality, especially when it is associated with the Great Hall carrying political implications. A sense of order was achieved by emphasizing important nodes along the central line, which constitutes the Great Hall, People's Square and the Three Gorges Museum. Situated in the middle of two major buildings, the main central area of People's Square remains empty to allow the direct visual connections between the three nodes. The existing archway preserved in the square is not only the symbol of the square but also acts as the midpoint of the axis linking the other two ends.

Apart from the central axis, the use of other parallel linear patterns is commonly found within the square, such as aligned vertical columns at the front façade of the Great Hall, ground paving in a linear pattern and the steps leading up to the Great Hall and the museum at the two ends. They all contribute to the continuity of the main axis and emphasize the symmetrical theme. The curved shape of the Three Gorges Museum helps to create a certain degree of enclosure in front of it; therefore, it has a strong implication to direct the views towards the central axis, which again highlights the effect of the axis. In other words, the two buildings at the ends are the main focal points and entrances attracting people's attention in the first place, while the open space in between enables people to become visually aware of the other focal point and provides possible routes for their movement in the meantime. Although it could still be argued that creating the central axis is one of the important design strategies inherited from the space-making practices in ancient Chinese cities to symbolize the highly centralized power and the order of the society, the meaning of the axis used in contemporary squares has been enriched and become more diverse in terms of organizing spaces in a way that facilitates people's functioning within it.

Similar with many traditional Chinese cities, the symmetrical layout of the urban space has been the underlying rule of organizing spaces and major constructions, especially when they come with political implications. The layout of both the building and the square imitates that of the Forbidden City in Beijing, which is the most typical example of Chinese urban form. This inherited pattern not only represents the ideal relationship between people and the universe according to

Fengshui theories, but also symbolizes the highly centralized power of the ruling class.

Being part of the administration centre, Jinyun square conveys an extremely formal image attached to the administration building. The most noticeable characteristic of its design is the strong emphasis on axial symmetry, reflected in the physical settings in various senses, especially the central circle and axial paving area. This rigid symmetrical feature starts with the central axis and dominates the landscape design of the open space on the side of it.

The central circle pattern was mainly formed by the curved footpaths on the two sides running from the entrance of the square to the stairs in front of the building. This space is not only the central axis of the square itself, but also constitutes the greater axis of the new town when it further extends to the south, joining with the pedestrian street at the other end. The orientation of the square has strong implications for directing people's movement and sight view along the major axis. On the other hand, the emptiness of the square in contrast to the surrounding environment highlights the position of the building and its importance as a grand background. The frontal image of the building should thus remain intact without any high constructions in front to destroy its leading role within the area.

The emphasis on the axis and symmetry has been given greatest priority throughout the whole landscape design, which could be found in most of the urban square designs in China. The political implication behind such a form transcends other design principles, and becomes almost the only rule in terms of the shaping of the

space. Different from the other two case study squares, Jinyun square is the one that has been planned and built from scratch, the constraints brought by the site itself, the surrounding environment and previous uses are relatively less than for the other two. Even though the existing river and planned highway at the edge of the square have separated it from the pedestrian street at the other side, efforts were made to create pathway bridges at a different level in order to link them together to maintain the greater axis. The persistence in pursuing the symmetrical design in many senses can seem unnecessary from the perspective of users, because its extremely large scale makes it less noticeable to the people on the square. It is more of a strong design language used by the designers to deliver the governor's message about their ambitions to create a new order in the future.

- **Dimension**

Facing the confluence of the Yangtze and Jialing rivers, Chaotianmen square is surrounded by water on three sides. The top platform, which is also the largest one among the three, constitutes the main body of the square with the major entrance. It is 153m long from north to south and 95m wide from east to west, and divided into three areas including the entrance, the central area and the sidewalk on the edge by planted areas. It can be seen from the section (Figure 5-13) that the relative long distance between the top platform and the riverfront makes it difficult to see the river at the centre of top level. The famous view of the two rivers can only be seen from the front edge of the square. The sense of emptiness became evident especially at the central area of the square due to the low h/w ratio.
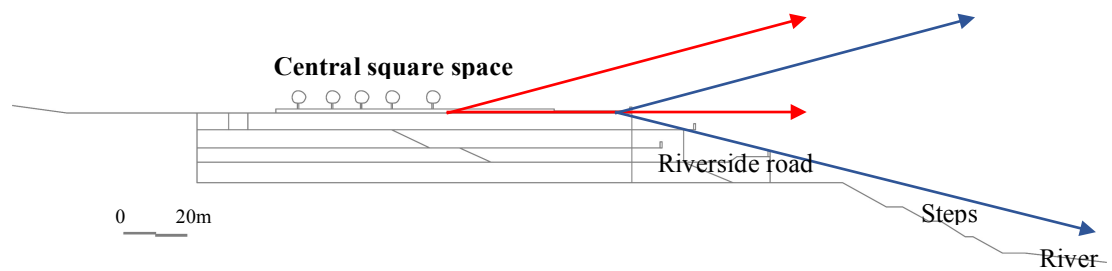
Figure 5-13 Section of Chaotianmen Square

The way of organizing the spaces at People's Square appears slightly different from that is at Chaotianmen Square. The preserved trees and structures divided the square into several smaller areas. Therefore, one of the aims of the design strategy is to reorganize them to achieve a sense of orderness and allocate functions to each subsection. And at the same time, the reorganized spaces are expected to form an axis so that to highlight the Grand Hall. This strategy is commonly used in the arrangement of ancient architectural groups in royal palaces. The axial theme signifies the status of the subject and separates it from other private space at a smaller scale.

The way of organizing different spaces along the main axis is a reflection of the traditional character of arranging ancient Chinese architectural groups. The varieties created through certain arrangements of space between architectural features therefore reinforced the sequence of direction, rhythm and proportion. Due to the unique topological characteristics of the site, the sequence is clearly embodied even from a vertical perspective by keeping the sight views in accordance with the main axis.

Despite the prominent middle axis in the centre, another secondary axis in a different direction can also complete a network of geometric forms by creating an intersection at the centre. The axis formed by the Municipal Government Building to the north of

the square and the archway meet the main axis in the middle of the square, which

successfully highlights a sense of open space in People's Square. Throughout the

whole building process of the square, the dynamic development of each axis is

accompanied by the completion of each building at different stages, by gradually

connecting each key node around the space, a strong sense of sequential order as

well as the identity of the space is established. As an important node contributing to

the main axial theme, the central square area remains hard-paved with little green

space to allow the direct line-of-sight view between the Museum and the Great Hall.

Building a large square area in front of the main administrative building provides

spaces for political events and gatherings. Therefore, the scale of the square has to be

taken into account in terms of both representational and functional uses. If seen from

a bird's eye view, the whole administration centre is imperially positioned looking

down on the whole area with a high degree of enclosure and solemnity to

differentiate it from the surrounding environment.

Situated just off the foot of Jinyun Mountain, the new administration building is built

at the highest level and overlooking the rest of the square. The layout of Jinyun

Sqaure is similar with that of People's Square by containing a grand building as the

focal point of the space. The area of open space is dominant and mainly divided by

the surfacing and vegetation. The lacking of architectural construct contributes to a

low h/w ratio and sense of enclosure.

Major walking routes on the two sides. are arranged in a radial curved pattern, and

define different function zones. The degree of enclosure thus increases from the

central to the edges. The vegetation structure changes from transition grass lawn to

the combination of trees and shrubs respectively. Walking routes come in different widths in terms of their priority, but all in a curved line. The symmetrical feature is not only embodied through the overall layout, but also from the pavement pattern and its arrangement of lights and plants.

- **Boundary**

The boundary is an abstract but essential concept in landscape design. The physical boundary is usually used to distinguish private and public space. If the boundary is rigidly guarded by walls, gates and guards, it is no longer considered as public space in this sense. Whereas within the space, there are also symbolic boundaries created between intimate and shared space. The degree of publicness depends on the types of activities taking place.

Although the original gate of Chaotianmen no longer exists after hundreds of years, the name of Chaotianmen is used to refer to the surrounding area as a whole. The current Chaotianmen Square consists of three platforms and the surrounding embankment. The boundary of the square was decided to integrate the multiple functions of the area. With the growing urban needs, the new development on the site reshaped the boundary and adds more diversity to Chaotianmen area. The square is facing unprecedented transformation in the near future with a large-scale upgrade in its infrastructure. However, the limits on three sides of the square restricted the further expansion of space.

People's Square was built on an irregular site and largely restricted by the landforms and the previous surrounding environment. Despite the potential constraints brought by the site, the effort was made to create a symmetrical form within the space. Regardless of the overall layout of the square, a strong sense of axis is visually created through the arranging of important elements. The treatment on the edges of the square where they are adjacent with the Great Hall and the museum follows the symmetrical layout by constructing steps and planting beds in regular forms parallel with the central axis. However, the landscape design on the edge of the square does not follow the symmetrical theme, instead, most of it consists of small, irregularly shaped gardens that follow the original space and soften the boundaries while keeping the form of the central square area symmetrical.

Jinyun Square presents many similarities with People's Square in terms of its physical forms. Green space in smaller size is created at the edge as transitional area between the busy urban roads and the inner public open space. To many users, the boundary of the square is much depended on their activity zones. People who use the central open space most tend to define the boundary of the square as the edge of hard paving area. The more enclosed pathways at the edges are usually identified as separated areas from the square. The vegetation and surfacing materials are used to distinguish the function zones and therefore indicates a variety degree of publicness.

- **Accessibility and organization of people's movement**

The accessibility of public space is often associated with its connection with the outside. The more accessible a public space is, the more benefits it will provide for the residents.

The main entrance of Chaotianmen Square faces a busy motorway, and is mainly designed for visitors coming by cars and buses, while people arriving from the waterway can reach the square via the steps from the lower waterfront level and there are also roads along the river for them to leave the area without going up to the square. The separation of the upper square area and the lower dock is one of the strategies to address the potential traffic congestion caused by the large amount of people arriving in Chaotianmen square. Because Chaotianmen is traditionally used as a busy dock and the transportation hub of Chongqing, it has been a challenge for the design of the square to organize the flow of people's movement both within and around the space.
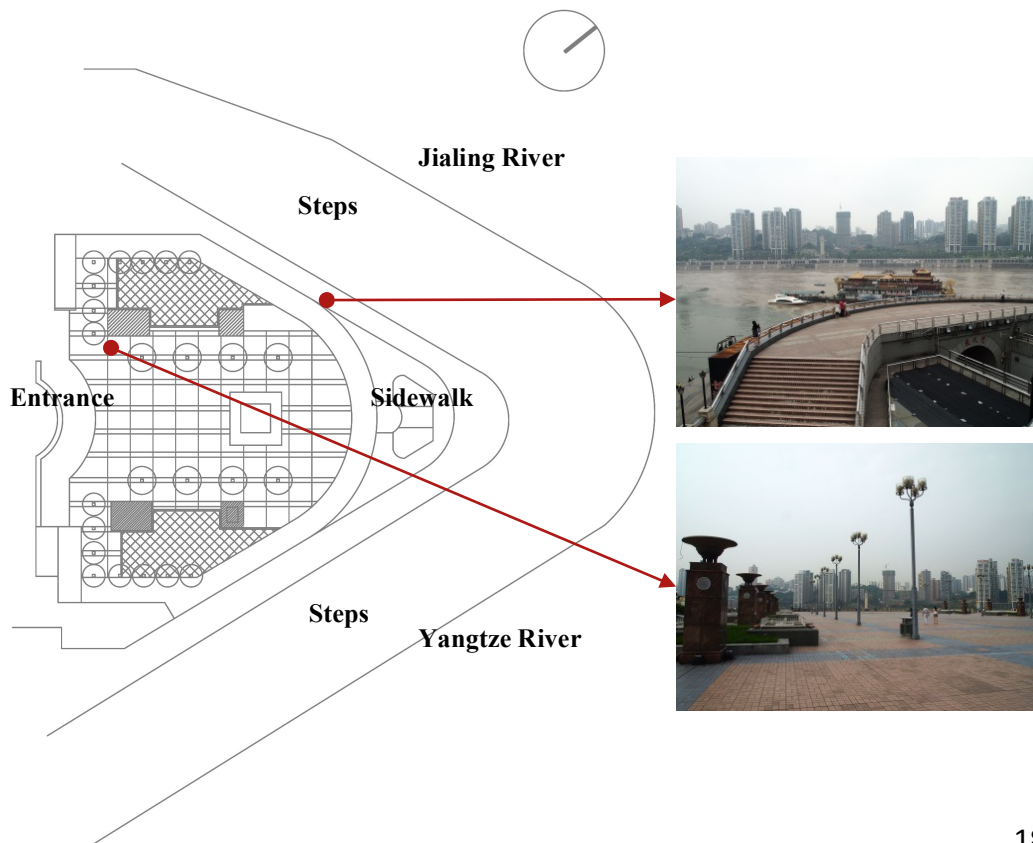
Figure 5-14 Access to Chaotianmen Square

However, the lacking of parking space has been one of the problems facing Chaotianmen Square nowadays. At the time when it was built, the urban residents rarely possess private cars and public transportation was the dominant way of travelling to the square. After decades of rapid urban development, the lifestyle of urban residents has changed dramatically and they usually travel to other places in their own cars. During the site survey, it can be seen that most of the cars find it difficult to park at a convenient space close to the square. People either choose to park their cars in a relatively remote area, or at the roads along the riverfront which can easily cause traffic congestions. There is no designated parking space around the square and the roads are designed as major traffic routes rather than street parking.

Situations are expected to be changed after the completion of Raffle City project at the backdrop of Chaotianmen Square. Although the access and surrounding environment of the square have been hugely influenced and restricted during the site survey in August 2014, the new development would integrate a metro station and much more open space to accommodate the increasing visitors. Even though the impact of such a large-scale project may be uncertain and hard to predict, it is indeed an opportunity for Chaotianmen square to adjust and explore its new identity in a changing social and economic environment.

People's Square has been facing the similar problem with Chaotianmen Square since they were almost built at the same time. The difficulties in finding available parking space are the major concerns for many visitors traveling by car. There is only limited street parking along the road in front of the Great Hall and mainly occupied by tour buses. Although the new metro station that is close to the square addresses the

problem to some extent by encouraging people to travel by public transport, the continuing tour buses can still cause congestions and block the views to the Great Hall as well.

Despite the major axis formed by two grand buildings and central open space, there are smaller green space with pathways on the sides of People's Square. The stairs in front of the Grand Hall acts as the main entrance to the square while people can still enter from the pathways on the side. There are no evident circulation routes for visiting the square, most tourists just linger around the central space to take pictures of the building before they left. Local residents prefer to stay longer and they usually choose the seating area in surrounding green space overlooking the central square.
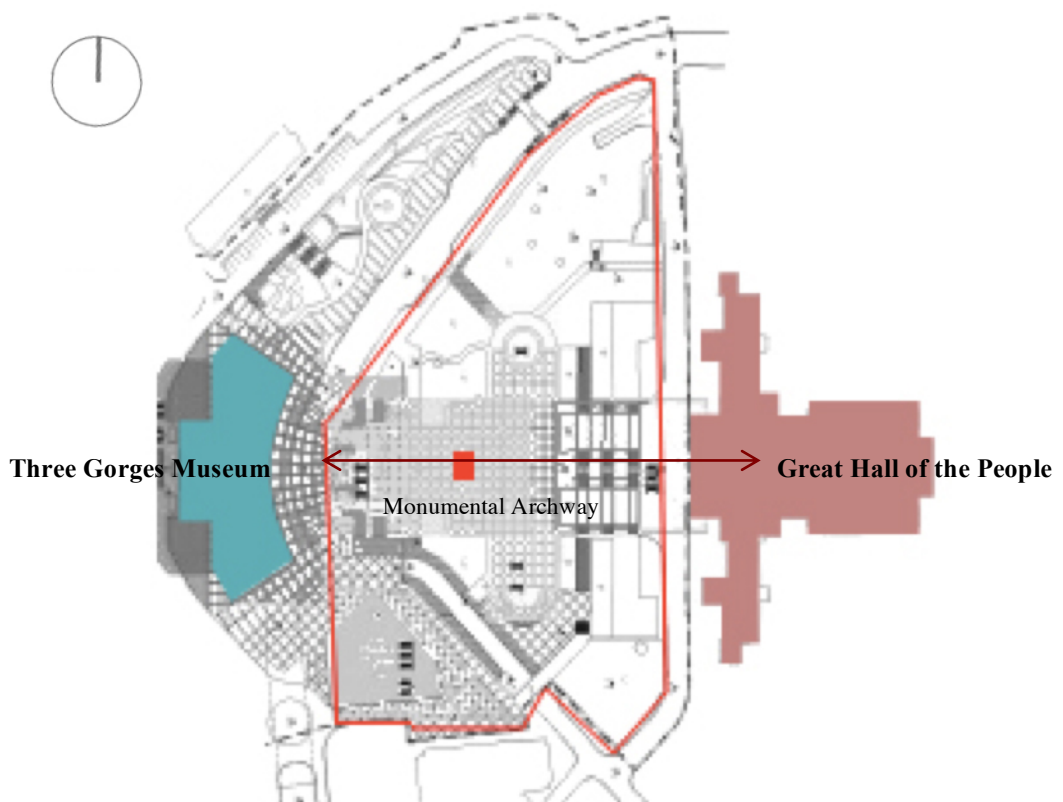
Figure 5-15 The main axis of People's Square
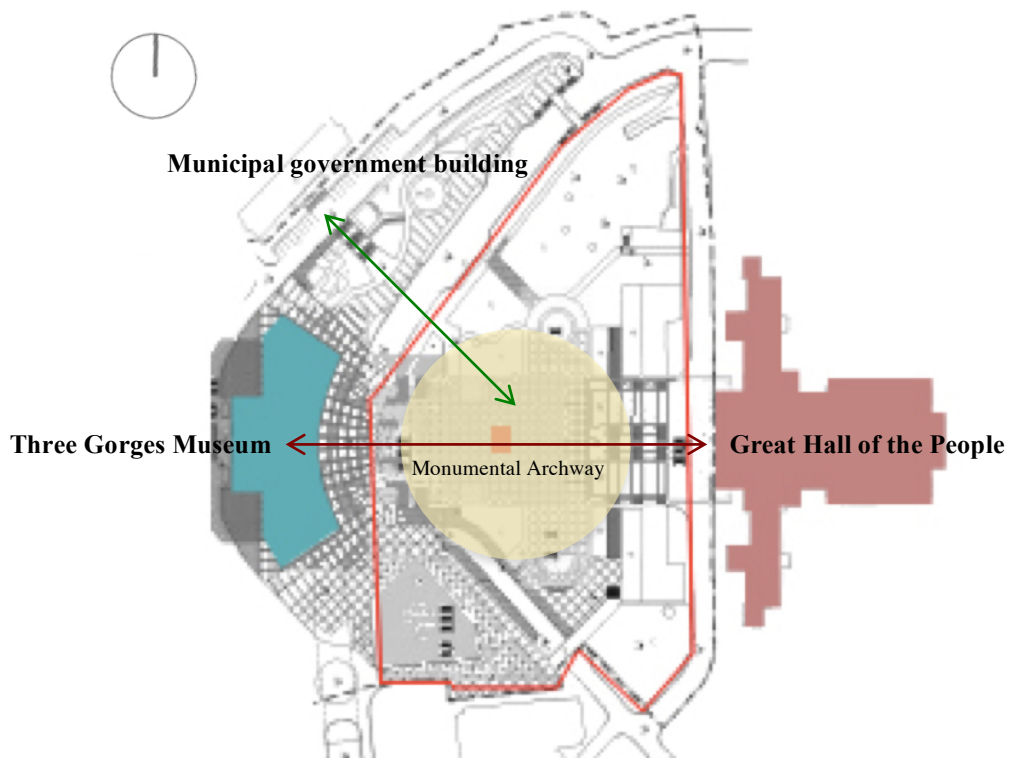
Figure 5-16 Diagram of axes at People's Square

Figure 5-18 Monumental Archway

Figure 5-17 View of the Great Hall
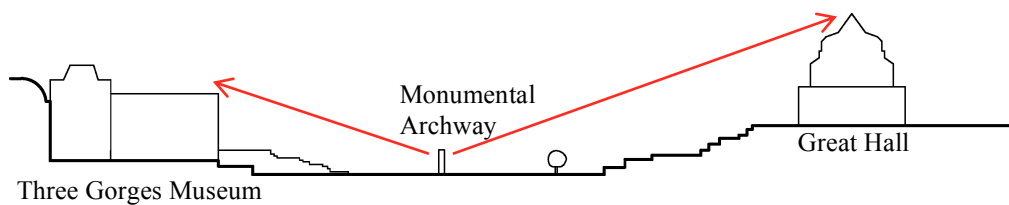
Figure 5-19 Section of People's Square

The parking issue is not so evident at Jinyun Square than it is at other two squares. One of the reasons could be that Jinyun Square is a much locally based public space serving surrounding residents within walking distance, while the other two sites have been built and recognized as major tourist attractions in Chongqing. People who travel across the city to visit Chaotianmen and People's Square would bring more traffic than Jinyun Square.

Figure 5-20 View of Jinyun Square

The main entrance of Jinyun Square is designed at the connection point between the square and the pedestrian street. It consists of two bridges and a large platform parallel to the major axis. Even though the square is public with various entering points and no boundary, the hierarchy of different routes is evident. The entrances of several footpaths located at the west and east sides of the square are hidden behind the trees with no evident signs of leading to Jinyun square. On many occasions, people visit the green space on the edges separately without being aware that it is part of the square. Only the main axis has the strong implication as the major

entrance to the square, by effectively directing people's views to the space and encouraging their movement. By linking to the pedestrian street, it attracts a large number of people living at the far end to reach the square by just walking along the street.

Jinyun square could be seen as a distinct example of the grand squares sitting in front of administration buildings. Being a relatively new square that has recently been upgraded, it could be noticed that the hard paving area is considerably decreased compared to others. It is largely restricted to the major axis, which is still the dominant form of the square. The role of the major axis in Jinyun square is no longer merely symbolic; efforts are made to incorporate the symmetrical form with various functions by creating different types of small space. The strategy of building an overarching platform to address the constraints of the site facilitates people's flow and attracts potential users by creating direct access between the two nodes. The physical appearance of Jinyun square may still be similar to many others; the potential and the awareness of encouraging social uses arise from the slightly shifted design strategies.

Figure 5-22 Bridges at the entrance of the square

Figure 5-21 Paths at the edge of the square

5.3.2 Adaptation for uses

Chaotianmen is one of the typical examples to transform the site in accordance to its original topological features. The three platform squares not only complete the ship shape of Chaotianmen, but also connect the riverfront with urban road at a higher level to provide a variety of open space. The site of People's Square was also situated at an abandoned ground in front of the Great Hall at a lower level. The stairs thus are built to connect the two levels and important points of interest. On the other hand, the master plan of Beibei new town has given much freedom to the landscape design of Jinyun Square. Despite the dominant symmetrical form of the square, many design elements are used to reflect a sense of the cultural and geographical characteristics of Beibei. Topographically, the administration building has taken advantage of the original site by occupying the highest position, with grand steps leading to it so as to highlight its important role. This design strategy has been constantly used and favoured in Chongqing due to its mountainous landform, which makes it more natural and effective to put significant buildings at the highest position to indicate their importance.

From the site survey to the three squares, it can be noticed that the pursuit of a complete symmetrical form has been the priority of design from almost every aspect. This is most evident in the design of vegetation and hard paving materials. At both Chaotianmen Square and People's Square where most of its area is covered with hard paving, a sense of axis is created through the arrangement of surfacing pattern in different shades and materials. Physical structures such as tree beds and water

fountains also follow the overall symmetrical form and at the same time divide separate areas. Water fountains in Chaotianmen and Jinyun Square are all situated in the middle contributing to the completion of the symmetrical axis, and also important features to be presented during special events, together with the designed lighting effects.

However, the role of vegetation differs a lot in each square. At the time when Chaotianmen and People's Square were built, the major concern of design was to reorganize the space to create the physical form that is symbolic and able to address the existing problems surrounding the sites. The vegetation in Chaotianmen Square remains much decrorative along with the use of planting beds to complete the spatial form. The limited green space at the edge of People's Square is also mainly regarded as left over space apart from the central hard paving square area. While the strategy of designing Jinyun Square not only emphsizes its representative value, but also the social benefits the square can provide for the local residents. This is reflected in its significantly larger green space than the other two squares. Jinyun Square's landscape has been upgraded twice, in 2009 and 2010, after its completion, in order to improve its appearance as a new landscape attraction in the area and amplify its influence. The new plantings feature a more vivid combination of shrubs and trees especially within its surrounding green space. However, the layout of the green space still complies with the symmetrical theme by centring at the middle of the main axis. Being a more local and social space, the elements used along the axis in Jinyun square have been more diverse. Various plantings and benches are introduced along the axis to create a rhythm between spaces, ranging from planting pots to the carefully trimmed shrubs in different heights and colours. The series of small spaces

created is visually separated, but physically connected. They provide opportunities for people with different needs as supplements to the large empty space in the middle. The increased green space favors the people especially during the summer for extra shading space.

Local history and culture are always important elements to be interpreted through design as attempt to establish a sense of local identity. This is typical representational strategy that is widely used in Chinese urban designs. However, the ways of illustrating the history and culture are usually too representative and simple such as displaying the history of the site directly. As the traditional gateway of the city, Chaotianmen Square's past has been detailed on a stone tablet at the entrance of the square to show the historic significance of the site. Similar approach can also be found at Jinyun Square. A series of sculptures of historic cultural celebrities are erected in the green space on the two sides of the square decorating the green space and the footpaths as interesting attractions, and at the same time introduce the local history. However, it has little influence on the physical form of the space. Moreover, the use of sculptures has also been increasingly criticized as being less efficient in terms of changing the user-experience, whilst being merely a gesture to incorporate the cultural elements within the design. On the other hand, by simply keeping the original trees and buildings on the site, People's Square has given visitors a stronger sense of the past in a subtle but effective way.

5.3.3 Public messages

The public facilities on the squares are provided for potential users and indicate how the designer and developers expected the square to be used. As famous tourist attractions in Chongqing, Chaotianmen and People's Square are equipped with a full range of facilities such as public toilet, souvenir store and resting areas. Each of them are carefully allocated and usually at the edge of the square to provide additional support for the tour. At People's Square, a complete tour map including all the facilities on and surrounding the site is presented at one of its entrances. Although only general locations of them are marked on the map, it is expressive in terms of illustrating a whole picture of the square to give visitors a sense of orientation. As a popular tourist attraction in Chongqing, there is a range of souvenir shops located at the outer side of the square, however, there are only four authorized vendors set within the square providing photographic services. All of them have been designed in the similar traditional style with Great Hall and the Archway especially in colours to keep the appearance consistant throughout the square. The only convenience store at Chaotianmen Square was also built into the ground level of the square to take advantage of the landform, without destroying the spatial symmetry at the upper platform level. However, the increasing tourists and local visitors have attracted a wide variety of street peddlers at both Chaotianmen and People's Square regardless the regulation of forbidding unauthorized commercial activities on site. In this sense, Jinyun Square is less commercialized than the other two squares although they are all built in the similar form and scale. Jinyun Square aims at serving local residents rather than nationwide tourists, there are no souvenir shops and tourist map as can be found at the other two squares. Necessary facilities and street furniture, such as benches and street lamps, are designed along the footpaths at Jinyun Square. Most of them are designed in traditional forms with stones and wood to respond to the

cultural theme of the square. For example, all the benches are designed in the form of a classic book volume to symbolize knowledge. Several rubbish bins and phone booths can be found along the road but are in poor condition due to the lack of maintenance. There are antique shops at the edge of the circle used to sell wooden furniture but these are now all closed. No space for vendors is provided or allowed on the square but it is still convenient to get drinks or other things with the square's proximity to the commercial street where shops close late in the evening.

Figure 5-23 Shop at People's Square

Figure 5-24 Sculpture and bench at Jinyun Square

5.4 Variation in uses and social interaction

Multiple site visits were conducted on both weekdays and weekends during daytime and evenings to investigate the use pattern at three squares during August 2014. Distinctions on both intensively used areas and types of activities at different times of the day are noticed. The use patterns are largely dependent on the different user groups and their purposes of visiting, which have reflected unique characteristics underlying the particular local and cultural identity of the space.

5.4.1 Pattern of use

- **Chaotianmen Square**

Due to the large construction site at the back of Chaotianmen square at the time of the survey work for this research, the surrounding traffic routes have been subject to diversions. For this period, people can only access the square from the road along the river instead of at the upper square level. Therefore, the steps and riverfront area have become more popular and heavily used than the square itself, the upper sightseeing platforms hidden behind are less crowded due to the restricted access.

During the site survey in August 2014, the road along the river was used as main access to the square and the pick-up points for ferry passengers. There are vendors and food stalls along the road, most of them open all day, with customers ranging from locals and visitors to construction workers and staff. They usually sell souvenirs, local food or seasonal fruit. Even though the road is designed and planned as part of the Chaotianmen area, vendors are not strictly regulated and prohibited. Especially during the construction period, all the accesses including those for pedestrians and cars arrive here and the potential business has brought more vendors. Retailing seems to be one of the most dominant uses.

The space has turned into both a large open market area and a commercial street, but with slow traffic and on-site parking. People are drawn by the attractive views, which are then followed by businesses. Typical examples are the numerous information desks run by different cruise and tour companies. With the convenience of being close to the dock, they could reach more potential costumers than elsewhere. However, there are many fewer vendors in the main square area, due to its isolated

location from the major flow of people. At the upper square area, a few people are still walking around with little toys or souvenirs trying to sell to passing visitors. Two convenience stores are located at the edge of the square serving grocery and drinks. They were initially designed and built with the square but became less popular afterwards compared to other spontaneous vendors due to the relative lack of variety in the products. During both the day and night, street performances can be commonly seen at the road along the square. The steps at the riverfront provide a natural sitting area for people to enjoy the show. These performances bring vitality to the space and help to transform it into an open-air market that contributes to a sense of a busy environment with a local lifestyle. The use of space as a market and for retailing is a spontaneous process, people are drawn here not only because it is a tourist attraction but also a transportation hub. These commercial activities developed and adapted themselves to the physical environment in ways that the designer did not envision. The identity of Chaotianmen square was primarily built for sightseeing and the flow of people has diversified itself over time. The increasing social activities present the authentic local life to the tourists by enabling them to interact with the locals and get involved, which will contribute greatly to the enhanced experience. The comparison between the busy road and the rather empty square at the upper platform indicates the significant effect of social activities in forming a rather complex sense of place identity.

①Upper platform in the daytime

②Riverside road in the daytime

③Square dancing at upper platform at night

④Riverside steps at night

Figure 5-25 Activities at Chaotianmen Square

As one of the most important public spaces in the urban area, urban squares provide choices for outdoor activities. Chaotianmen square benefits from its proximity to the water. Especially during summer, water activities are very popular along the river. For safety concerns, swimming in the river is prohibited, however, people are still allowed to play within a designated area of water. Most children and local people come here in the daytime to enjoy the view while it is convenient to buy some food and drinks. The place usually gets more crowded at night. It is common for people to come out to take a walk and enjoy some social life in places like this. The street performance and various food stalls provide choices of things to see and consume. However, given that most vendors are not allowed on the square, fewer people choose to stay at the square for a long time, especially in the daytime. Like many other squares in China, the main square area is usually used for group dancing every night starting from 19:00 to 21:00. The dancing is voluntary and everyone can drop in anytime. However, some of the regular dancers have more responsibilities such as choreography and providing the necessary equipment. It attracts more middle-aged women than men, and they see it as a healthy and interesting way to keep fit and socialize.

Despite the road closures and diversions around Chaotianmen square due to the construction work, the ways of using the square remain little changed. Tourists keep coming to Chaotianmen square most of them travelling on cruises or in groups organized by tour companies, therefore there are always groups of people arriving together at different times. Meanwhile, other individual travellers could come at any time of the day. The original design of Chaotianmen Square intended to resolve the pedestrian circulation by separating various groups arriving at the square from

different directions. Before the Raffle City project started, the majority of the visitors firstly arrived at Chaotianmen square from the upper platform, which is connected with a city road and provides the best viewpoint for people to see the rivers. The riverfront road welcomes people arriving from the waterway with a range of stalls and ticket offices. However, with the closure of the road access to the upper platform, all the visitors have to get to Chaotianmen square from lower riverfront road. The unique river view provided by the upper platform is replaced by a closer interaction with the water at a lower level. People are satisfied with the view and experience with local stalls on their way to the square, therefore most of them would not bother to climb up the stairs to the upper platform. The lack of activities has become an evident weakness for Chaotianmen square. Visitors who used to enter and linger around the upper square area before the construction started now tend to stay around the riverside due to the limited access. The people that go up to the square are mainly tourists with expectations for better views.

By boasting of its rapid urbanization, development and reputation as a second 'Hong Kong' in inner China, buildings on the Yuzhong peninsula play important roles in providing the distinct night scene and skyline of Chongqing. Sitting at the front of the Yuzhong peninsula, the design of Chaotianmen square is integrated with the whole area within the concept of a sailing boat. Lighting facilities are essential at the square to imitate the ship image as well as to add a finishing touch to the night scene. This is to be presented to the viewers on the other side of the river, where the famous observation tower, the Nanshan Tree, sits.

Nanshan observation tower is another famous attraction in Chongqing opened in 1997. Situated at the top of Nan Mountain and just opposite to the Yuzhong peninsula and Chaotianmen, the observation tower is the best place to view the rivers and panorama of the whole city featuring the Yuzhong peninsula. The night view from the Nanshan observation tower is one of the most well-known scenes of Chongqing. Besides the lights from skyscrapers behind Chaotianmen and the streetlights along the riverfront road, there are large spotlights at the square to produce beams of light to complete the view. Other street lamps at the edge of the square are not only necessary lighting facilities, but also supplementary elements to complete the ship shape of Chaotianmen square at night. In this sense, Chaotianmen square is not only an icon itself but also contributes to another image identified with Chongqing.

Figure 5-26 Night scene of Chaotianmen Square

- **People's Square**

The square is built within a historic centre of the city surrounded by many traditional settlements. The two broad groups of users are the local residents and the tourists, and they feature quite different use patterns in terms of their visiting time, frequencies and activities.

As important tourist attractions in Chongqing, People's Square, the Great Hall and the Three Gorges Museum attract a considerable number of tourists in the daytime. The road with parking spaces in front of the Great Hall is the major stopping point for most of the travel buses. After visiting the Great Hall in groups, tourists from the organized tours usually have a few hours of free time for them to visit People's Square and the Museum on their own. According to the observations, most of them would stay or walk around to take pictures of the square and the Great Hall before heading to the Three Gorges Museum at the other side of the square. After visiting the Museum, visitors are able to take advantage of the platform in front of it to appreciate the complete view of the square and the Great Hall at the far end. The three nodes along the central axis – the Great Hall, the monumental archway at the square and the Museum - inevitably become the primary stopping points for pictures during their visit.

① Platform in front of museum ② Tourists coming into square ③ Travel bus parking in front of the Hall

④ People gathering in the green space on the edge ⑤ People sitting under trees in the square ⑥ People sitting under trees in the square
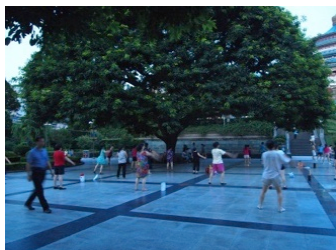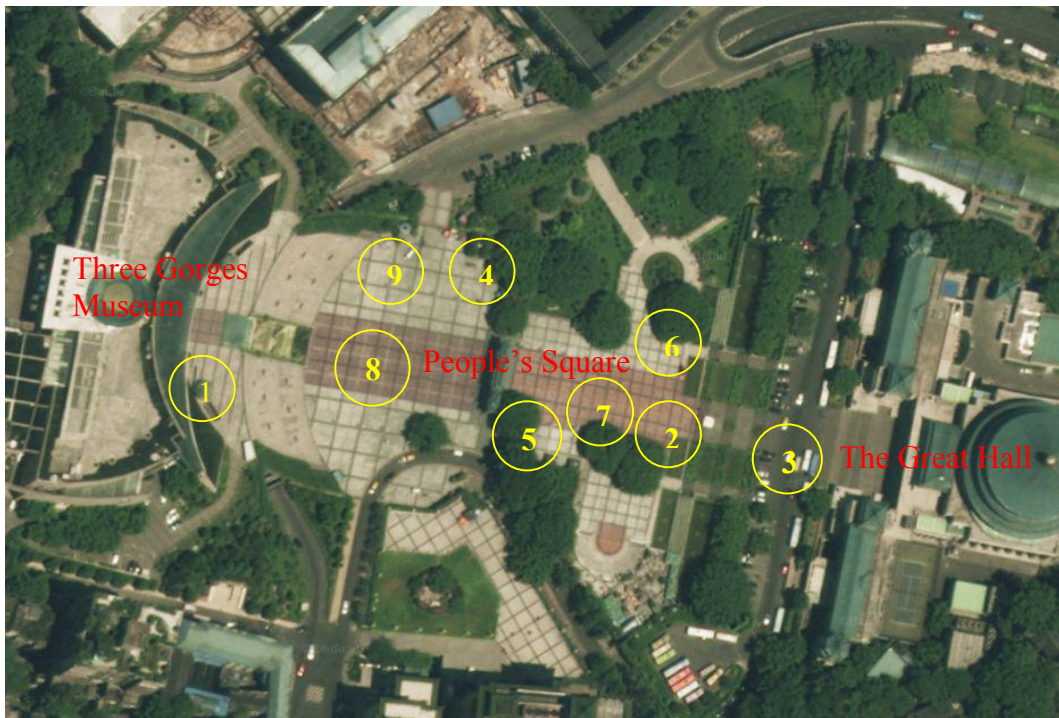
⑦ Square dancing in the evening ⑧ Square dancing by night ⑨ Children playing together

Figure 5-27 Activities at People's Square

For the relatively short visiting time, the appearance of the buildings is the important element determining the first impression that would quickly attract people's attention. The distinct contrast posed by the Great Hall in traditional style and the modern glass façade of the museum has impressed most of the tourists at first sight. However, People's Square in the middle acts more as a passage for them to move between the other two destinations rather than a separate space to be fully explored. Only a few of the tourists would linger around the square or sit under the trees in the square after visiting the Museum to spend the extra time before their travel buses are ready. Others usually choose to stay in front of either the Museum or the Great Hall with less interest in a detailed visit to the square. The primary axis connecting the three attractions successfully directs people's movement within the square, even though the square itself has not been much explored by tourists, it still plays an important role in terms of providing a resting area within a pedestrian-friendly environment.

Apart from tourists, most of the other users at the square are local residents. Unlike the tourists who mainly focus their visit on the two important buildings, regular users tend to gather around the small green space and trees in the central area and usually stay for a longer time. Due to the hot weather during the summer, people usually choose to avoid direct sunlight in the hard-paved square area, especially in the daytime. Older people from nearby neighbourhoods are the most common users during the daytime; most of them stay in the northwest corner of the square where extra chairs and drinks are provided with sufficient shady trees. Some of them who are paying for drinks and seats are either playing cards or chess, or talking with

friends. There are also people bringing their own speakers and microphones to enjoy the singing with music.

Children with parents are another common user group, who often occupy seats and the nearby area around the trees. The children's activity area is relatively larger than the older people's, however. due to the ample open space in the square, parents are able to keep an eye on their child while sitting under the trees talking with others. Small groups of older people doing light exercise can also be found in this area. Most regular users in the daytime have their own preferences and purposes for coming to the square, and usually leave after a few hours' stay.

However, the situation on the square changes significantly in the evening. Groups of tourists are not usually present during this time; instead, local residents keep coming to the square after dark, which makes it the most crowded time of the day. With little or no lighting provided in the surrounding green space, the more spacious and brighter area in the central square attracts the majority of users - square dancers. Square dancing has been the most common activity in most Chinese cities in recent years with the prevalence of large urban squares. Most regular dancers are middle-aged or retired women who not only take up square dancing as a way of exercising but also of having fun and socializing.

Figure 5-28 Intensively used area in the daytime
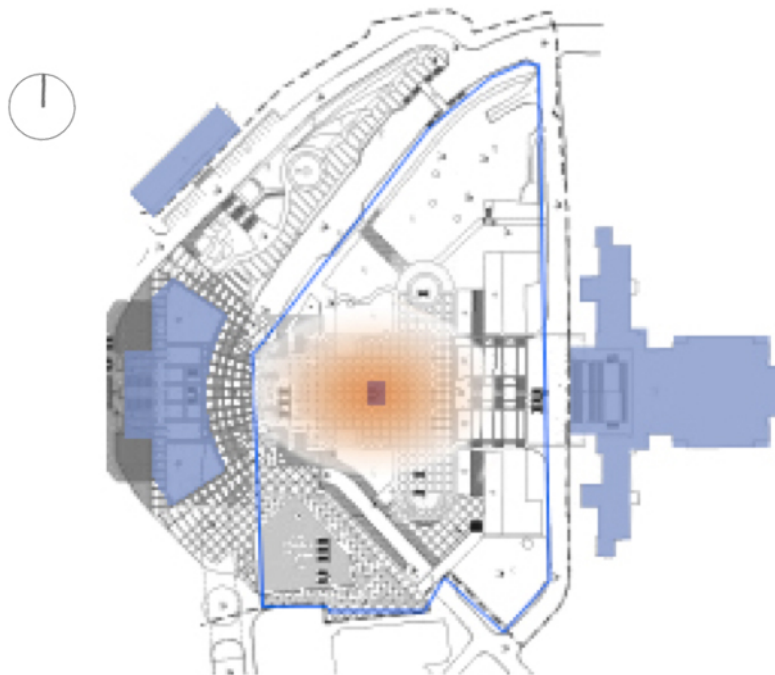
Figure 5-29 Intensively used area in the evening

Each group of square dancers comes with a different dancing style and scale, as well as their common spot in the square. Even though the dancers are all voluntary, there are key roles in each group responsible for organizing, choreography and the necessary equipment to keep it running on a daily basis. The experience of dancers ranges from half a year to over twenty years, while the leading dancers are usually more experienced and passionate about dancing. It is also observed that groups with easier steps combining fitness with dancing are more likely to attract more people and occupy a larger space, which has generated competition among different groups who are endeavouring to attract more followers.

Despite square dancing, there are other users trying to take advantage of the space, especially children and their families, some of them take their own toys and small sports equipment to play on the ground with others. Soon after that, skating courses started to emerge in most squares by gathering small groups of children to learn roller-skating in the square. Similar to square dancing, these groups of activities are attracting more people to the square as audiences who enjoy the crowd and people-watching.

A few peddlers could be spotted in the square during peak times when there are most tourists to buy drinks, fresh fruit and souvenirs. However, they have to be very alert to the security, as they are not allowed in the square. While the management and security service have received most positive reviews from the interviewees, the parking issue has been the biggest problem around the square, especially in the afternoon when the street parking spaces are almost fully occupied by travel buses in

front of the Great Hall. Even though it is becoming more convenient with the completion of the nearby metro station, the lack of public bus access and parking space still make things difficult for the individual traveller.

- **Jinyun Square**

Following the completion of Beibei new town and Jinyun square, a group of residential communities were firstly built around the central area, which has brought substantial numbers of users to the square. Unlike many traditional settlements, most of the new residential communities burgeoning in China are gated communities with designated green space. However, these green spaces are usually considered insufficient and limited compared to the number of residents in each community, therefore, most of the residents tend to go outside their communities for various activities, especially in the evening.

The use pattern of Jinyun square features distinct characteristics due to the relatively simple compositions of the potential users. Being a new centre of the Beibei district, most of the people having moved here are middle class families that can afford new homes and they usually prefer high-quality housing in areas with development potential. The difference is especially evident when it is compared with the other two squares with their long history in traditional city centres, the range of users and activities observed in Jinyun square is much narrower due to its relatively fixed user group.

Figure 5-30 Jinyun Square in the daytime   Figure 5-31 Jinyun Square at night

During the fieldwork conducted in August 2014, the most distinct characteristic to be noticed regarding the use pattern of Jinyun square is that it remains almost empty in the daytime while becoming fairly crowded in the evening. One of the main reasons is that most of the people who would go to the square within the area are at work during the daytime, thus the square could be empty without further influence to attract other visitors from elsewhere. This situation in return deters many occasional or single visitors from coming to the square as there are no other amenities during the daytime. Another reason is the weather, which could be the determinant, especially in the summer. Because the weather in Chongqing can be extremely hot in the summer with a temperature as high as 40^0 Celsius for most of the time, people are less willing to go outside and usually avoid outdoor activities even when they are on a summer holiday. However, the situation is completely changed after sunset around 19:00, when the weather becomes cooler and more comfortable. People start to come to the square after work and dinner, most of them are nearby residents including families with children, young couples or the older people. Many regulars usually organize certain activities such as dancing and walking, the square seems to become the main social space allowing various public activities in Chinese society. Indeed, the square can be filled with people until as late as 22:00 every day.

Similar to most squares in Chongqing nowadays, group dancing is still the dominant activity on Jinyun square and occupies the major paved areas. According to the observation, there are five major groups of dancers to be found in the square every night. Each of them occupies a regular spot and has several fixed members responsible for the equipment, choreography and costumes.

①People sitting and walking dogs at the steps in front of the building

②Group dancing in front of administration building

③Group dancing at the central area

④People walking at the edge of square in the evening

Figure 5-32 Activities at Jinyun Square

The largest group is the one in front of the administration building, which can attract over 100 people at its peak time and occupies the whole area. Sometimes it gets too

crowded to take in any more people so that the rest can only stand on the side to watch. The track of this group is quite simple with very basic moves to exercise the different parts of the body, which is probably the reason that it attracts a wider range of participants from children to older citizens. Even the ones without dancing experience can follow the moves easily. Another two less-popular groups are at the two sides of the central water fountains, each of them consists of 20-30 people. It is noticed that these two groups are more likely run by the people with a passion for dancing. The dancing steps and the music are carefully chosen in trendy styles, and most of the regulars would wear the same clothes to identify themselves as part of the dancing group. These groups usually have the most complete equipment including speakers and lighting. Some first time dancers may find it difficult to follow the moves but they will still be able to pick up some moves and do their best to get the exercise. There are also two groups dancing in a more professional manner, one is just under the stairs of the administration building consisting of no more than 10 people. Although this is a relatively small group, its members are doing quite serious classical dancing which attracts more audience than participants. Another group occupies the large platform at the square entrance. Unlike the other groups, the organizers just bring the music and the speaker so that people can drop in anytime to do the ball dance in various styles. It is the most free and entertaining one that does not require people to dance using the same steps and moves, the size of this group could range from 20 to 40 people.

Square dancing groups have been the most attractive phenomenon on Jinyun square in terms of providing pleasant performances to the public. Although the purpose of dancing is mostly for entertainment within some dancing lovers at first, it gradually

turns into a fashionable way of exercising, especially among middle-aged women who are willing to seek a healthier lifestyle. The styles of these dancers become more diverse in order to meet people with different needs, while dancing groups in similar styles will eventually merge together to occupy a larger space. They are usually started by a few fixed members and then grow on their own by attracting people with similar interests. However, the number of dancing groups at a certain square is limited according to the size of the space and the scale of the groups. Sometimes a group will consider moving to another square due to the scarcity of space but it rarely happens because the selection of the place is closely associated with the proximity to their homes. The dancing is completely voluntary and anyone is welcome to drop in at any time. The dancing routines and schedules are decided by key members; however, it usually takes place on a daily basis apart from some of days when the weather is extreme.

Except for the dancing, there are also a considerable number of people coming to the square to walk and rest. In Jinyun square, the vast steps in front of the administration building provide a natural seating area that is favoured by users that are not taking part in the group dancing. The lighting from the buildings and the streets in the distance form the distinct skyline and night scene of the area. The steps, together with the spacious platform at the building entrance, are the place not only with the best view overlooking the whole square but are relatively private from other parts of the square. A group of dog lovers usually gather here with their pets at night, because of previous complaints about the large dogs scaring children at the main square area. Hence, this corner has become their exclusive space for animals. Children can be found at various spaces at the square with their parents or

grandparents, some of them bring their own toys and can quickly become familiar with other children and tend to play together, while the parents get the chance to chat and socialise with each other at the side. There are also small groups of people coming to the square with friends and sitting on the steps or benches, and sometimes standing to watch the dancing and the others. At the entrance platform of the square, where the ball dancing takes place, the relatively smaller and enclosed space attracts more people to sit at the edges to relax while watching the dancing. Hawkers are found here to provide cold drinks and snacks in the summer, even though they are usually considered illegal and will be stopped when caught by the patrols.

Apart from group dancing, walking has been considered as another popular exercise for many Chinese people, especially after dinner. The footpaths along the green space at the outer ring of the square provide quieter and cooler spaces for a nice walk. A considerable number of people are found walking along the footpaths in the evening. Some of them were walking at a quite relaxed pace while talking to their companions. There are people walking really fast and take it as serious exercise. However, it can be seen that the footpaths are not designed as walkways to be heavily used especially for exercises. There are only a few street lamps with very weak light along the path and the whole space gets really dark after sunset, regardless of any exercise equipment as expected by some of the users.

5.4.2   Summary of findings

- **User groups**

The observation of the three urban squares discovered a wide range of activities and similarities among the three sites. Tourists and local residents are the major two user groups, except that fewer tourists visit Jinyun Square than the other two. Tourists visiting Chaotianmen and People's Square are mainly domestic and came from different parts of the country. Most of the tourists came in groups organized by tour companies, while some younger travellers prefer to travel by themselves. Tourists are from a variety of backgrounds and age groups including families and young students.

Local residents show slightly different characters of uses, according to the specific features of the urban square they are visiting. For example, Chaotianmen and People's Square are both situated in the traditional city centre and surrounded by a number of old residential settlements, there are significantly more old people in these sites than Jinyun Square. On the other hand, being located in a newly developed town centre, Jinyun Square attracted more younger residents that have just moved to the area within the decade. As a result, Jinyun Square appears to be quite empty during the day while there are retired old residents visiting the other two squares.

Residents that visit the square are usually from nearby neighbourhood within walking distance. They see urban squares as public space to spend time and relax in their spare times. One of the distinctions between daytime and evening users is that there are mainly the old and children during the day, while more young and middle-aged people join the square in the evening. This pattern reflects one of the characteristics of Chinese families that many old people look after their grandchildren during the day when the parents are out for work. And for most of the

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working class, going to urban square is one of their main activities after work. It provides opportunities for them to socialize with others, exercising, playing with children or enjoying some time with family members.

- **Types of activity**

The types of activities observed from site survey present quite different features between daytime and evening. During the day, the squares are mainly occupied by groups of tourists and local residents especially at Chaotianmen and People's Square. Tourists tend to enjoy the landmark views such as grand buildings and the riverfront. They are most likely to be attracted to these sites for pictures without staying longer for other activities. Local residents are more familiar with the sites and most of the regulars have developed own routines over the years. The older visitors usually gather around the edge of the square where there are most seats and green space to have a cup of tea, play chess, chat with others, sing for own entertainment and so on. Some of them make friends with each other after regular visits and a sense of attachment gradually developed between them and the place during the process. The central empty area of the square is left for tourists taking pictures during the day, and is mainly occupied by the locals in the evening. Group dancing has been the most dominant activity across the three sites, the increasing need for entertainment and socializing could be the potential reasons and a catalyst for the emergence of square dancing. However, the unexpected influence of square dancing has brought arguments and discussions, of which noise issues are the most controversial in the wider society.

Apart from the group dancing, there is a range of other activities as skating and walking being most frequently observed at the night. The major reasons for local residents to come to the square are spending time with family members and doing exercises. However, there are also people coming to the square for no particular reasons but people watching, as well as a place to stop by occasionally.

- **Time and duration**

The number of people at the square differs significantly according to different times of the day. It can be observed from the site survey that all of the three squares are quite packed with users in the evening and much quieter during the day. However, the difference between daytime and evening users at Chaotianmen and People's Square is not that evident as it is at Jinyun Square. The former two squares attract a great number of tourists in the daytime when the locals are relatively less. While Jinyun Square is a much locally located square and few tourists come to the place during the day, which has made it almost empty in the daytime.

Weather has also played important role in affecting people's preference of using squares. Spring and autumn are peak seasons for tourism and most suitable weathers for outdoor activities, the numbers of both tourists and local users increase during these times of the year. However, the winter and summer in Chongqing are quite extreme and people are less willing to go outside during these times. Except for the nights in summer when the temperature drops significantly during this time and people prefer to go to squares for the fresh air and cooler weather. However, the

change in the number of visitors on weekdays and weekends is quite subtle compared to that between daytime and evening.

Different user groups show various patterns of uses, in particular the time they spend at the square. Tourists at Chaotianmen and People's Square are usually given 1 to 2 hours of visiting time by the tour operators, mainly for taking pictures and sight seeing. The site survey discovered that due to the lacking of activities, most of them found the visiting time more than sufficient. The local users' patterns are more diverse depending on whether it is a regular or occasional user. Local regulars have mostly developed their own habit and preferred activities. They usually spend hours at the square and see it as an important part of daily life. Occasional users are drawn to the place by other duties and tend not to stay longer. The time of their visit is more random and flexible compared to other local regulars.

5.5 **Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the findings from the site survey conducted on the three case study urban squares in Chongqing regarding their use patterns and their relation with the physical form. The form of most urban squares in China carries strong political implications, which have been extensively discussed in previous chapters regarding the impact of history and the socio-economic reforms in the 1980s. Recent years have also seen changes in the use pattern of the urban squares because of the increasing social activities. The three selected squares share common features in many senses, while the use patterns differed due to their locations, built purposes and historic background.

The observational survey of the case study squares reveals a lack of activity choices, especially at the central area of each square. The grand scale of these spaces is usually to fulfil the symmetrical form and a sense of formality and grandeur, which is closely associated with the image the government aims to achieve. However, their connection with social uses and human scale is sacrificed to the pursuit of this symbolic representation. This phenomenon has also echoed the findings from the traditional urban space development in ancient Chinese cities, which was also mostly political-oriented. As a result, people, especially the tourists, can hardly become engaged with the place through social interactions apart from appreciating the views it provides. Nevertheless, the spontaneous activities observed at all the squares suggest people's increasing social needs and adaptation of uses. The social activities, on the other hand, enriched the identity of the squares with more diversity and vitality. Although the role of physical settings in delivering the representational meaning is essential, their constraints on developing a wider range of activities are also evident from the survey results.

The impact of the potential conflicts and concerns aroused through current social uses will be examined in the following chapter. It will be discussed with relation to people's personal experience, emotional attachment and understanding of identity regarding the result of the on-site interviews. The next chapter helps to understand the influence of social uses as well as the physical environment in terms of contributing to people's interpretation of the place identity of urban squares.

Chapter 6: The Perception of Place Identity

6   The Perception of Place Identity

6.1   Introduction

This chapter reports and analyses the findings of the on-site interviews conducted on the three selected squares. It aims to investigate people's personal experience and perception of the space as it relates to their daily use and social emotional bonds developed with the squares. The analysis of interview data can be generally defined as an inductive investigation of the participants' description. Specifically, it is an attempt to interpret the essential experience of the interviewees of the study. As discussed in Chapter 2, part of the confusion about place identity is due to the fact that it does not lend itself to a definite interpretation. Rather, its meaning gradually developed throughout time, and was conceptualized as the experiences and interpretation through which people are able to endow identity to the place.

The discussion will be structured in accordance with the three essential dimensions of place identity as identified in Chapter 2, which are personal experience and use pattern, perceptions and social value and related place identity. The interview questions were also framed by these key themes and organized in the order that would facilitate the conversation. The discussion in this chapter will follow the sequences of these emerging themes to keep a sense of consistency as well as to demonstrate their interrelations through the conversation. The findings reflect on the responses from interviewees and enabled the researcher to link the identified factors with their impact on people's interpretation. The result also contributed to the redefinition of the people-place relationship in the Chinese context by recognizing a

more comprehensive understanding of place identity as a socially dynamic construct constantly shaped by the interaction between people and their physical environment through uses.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the on site interviewees were approached and identified with the initial assumption that they are conducting a certain activity on-site. The selection of interviewees was adjusted to the progress for interviews in order to cover a varied range of people with different purposes for visiting the place. The researcher decided to cease interviews at a point when experiences suggested repetition and similar information obtained from participants. As a result, 105 participants were interviewed at three urban squares in total.

Figure 6-1 Interview number at each site
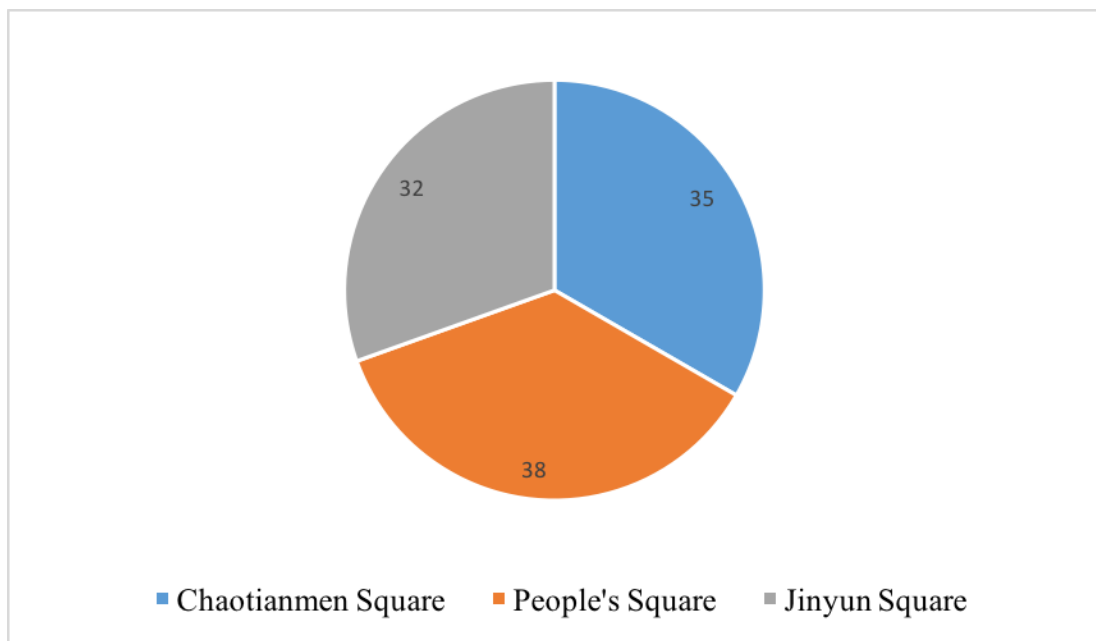
Figure 6-2 Interviewees' gender
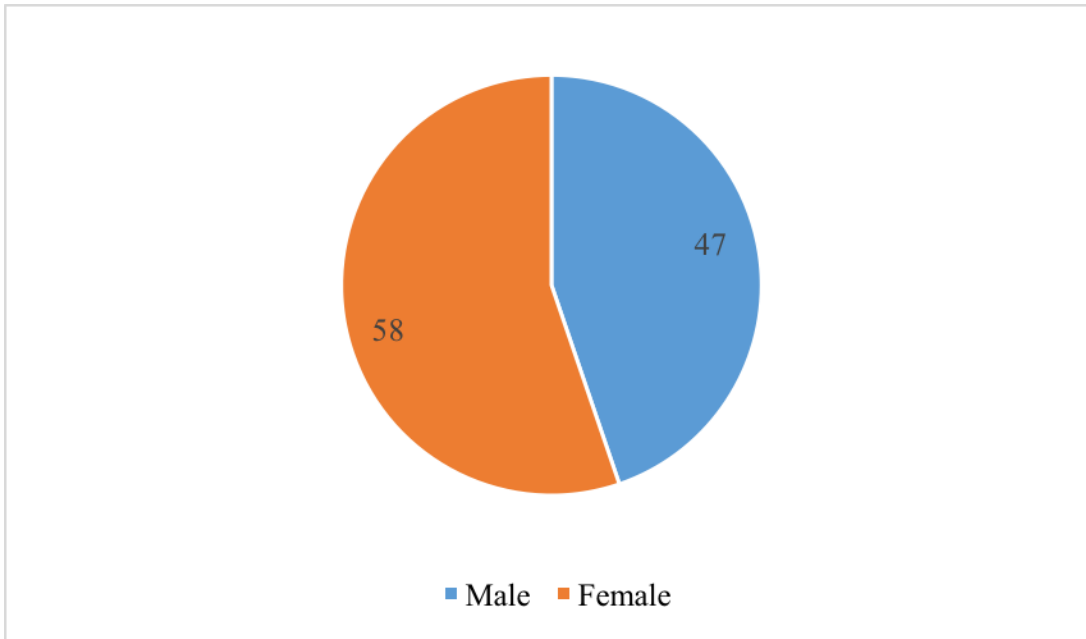
Figure 6-3 Interviewees' age
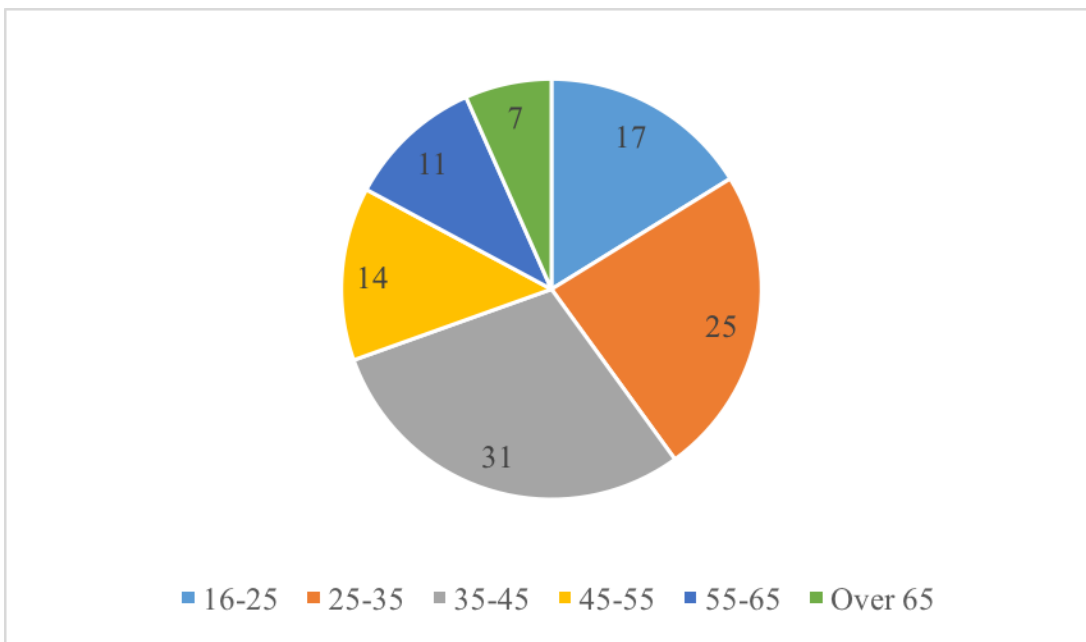
Figure 6-4 Interviewees' origin
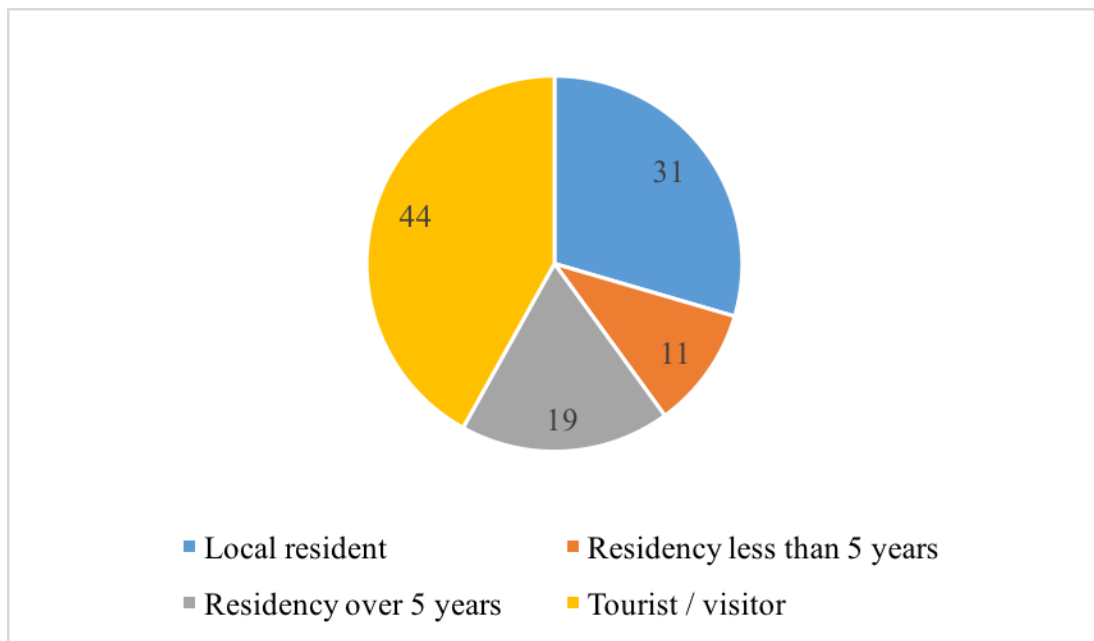
After the initial coding throughout all transcripts, there are several issues emerged from the result in relation to the perception of place. The codes have been divided into three parts in accordance to the themes identified from literature review for analysis.

6.2 Personal experience and use pattern

The first part of the on-site interview questions aimed to explore individual's use patterns from various user groups. It is suggested that their everyday use of the place could contribute to the establishment of emotional bonds. It also indicates the underlying connections between their patterns of use with the physical settings. As explained in Chapter 3, the significance in the responses between tourists and local users were expected at the beginning of the research design. Thus, two sets of

questions were devised in order to signify the difference as well as to better guide the direction of conversations.

6.2.1   Motivation and expectation

This section addresses why people come to the particular square and how they tend to use the space. The findings show a significant difference between the tourists and local users. In particular at Chaotianmen Square and People's Square, whose reputation as the representation of Chongqing has long been established, they are able to attract visitors from across the country for sightseeing.

The representational value of Chaotianmen Square and People's Square was the most evident and obviously the main reason attracting visitors from other cities. Both squares were purposely built and intended to demonstrate the best part of the city, however, these were usually not considered as the major concern for local users. For Chaotianmen Square, the promoted identity of its famous scene of two rivers joining together attracts most tourists here. The night scene on both sides of the river, as well as ferries on the river are also regarded as attractive elements. Chaotianmen square acts as a transition space providing opportunities to appreciate the natural assets of the city in some senses. Tourists are usually recommended either by friends or travel guides to the square for pictures and the views, some of them would take the ferry to enjoy a short journey on the river as well.

'I was recommended by an *online tour guide, the river here is impressive*

and a *good place to take photos.' – Female visitor from Shanxi province,*

28 years old (CTM).

The similar responses were found at People's Square, especially from the tourists; either they are travelling by themselves or on organized tours. Many tourists were impressed by the views at both squares, and admitted they were good spots for taking pictures. The iconic images demonstrated by these two places successfully caught the attention of tourists.

The responses from interviewees showed that most of the tourists followed recommendations from online travel guides; the impact of the internet in the globalized world was evident in influencing people's decision-making. Online resources provided rich information about the place, especially the images and views that one can expect from the attraction. The presented picture may bring potential tourists; however, there is also the possibility of disappointment caused by expectations.

'It is quite normal actually, nothing much special except the water.' –
Female visitor from Shandong province, 26 years old (CTM).

According to the responses, the tourists are usually more likely to have higher expectation for the attractions when they were travelling. Especially as the main attractions of the city, these two urban squares were supposed to deliver a sense of the locality by presenting the most distinct features to the visitors. However, there are different views on the first sight impressions from the tourists. Some of the

visitors felt that the appearance of the urban square did not meet their expectations or failed to offer extra attributes they may have expected. This could be ascribed to the difference in individual's interpretation of the information they obtained in order to envisage the landscape.

The water feature turned out to be the favourable element to many visitors by contributing to an open and calming environment. However, different perspectives of appreciating the river view were noticed at Chaotianmen Square between tourists and local users. Tourists were mostly found at the top platform facing the confluence of the two rivers, while locals preferred to linger around the riverfront footpath to get closer to the water and overlook the cityscape on the other side. They usually take a walk along the river, sit at the stairs or stand next to the railings at the edge of the square to enjoy the views. It indicated the different needs of the two user groups and the representational value of the place was mostly recognized if the users were seeking it.

Compared with Chaotianmen and People's Square, interviewees at Jinyun Square provided quite different perspectives regarding the representational value of the square. As discussed in the previous Chapter, Jinyun Square is situated in Beibei - a less central but cultural quarter of Chongqing. Although it was not built and promoted as the major attraction in Chongqing but the regional administration centre, the square was still designed in the way that largely emphasizes the symbolic representation with the symmetric axis and the grand architectural backdrop. However, the similar landscape elements and physical appearance with the other two squares did not become the major reasons for people to come. There is not only

hardly any tourists, but the local users do not consider the symbolic views as a reason for coming to the square. Most of the interviewees at Jinyun Square enjoyed walking and exercising at the square and appreciated it for providing enough open space to undertake various activities.

> *'There is enough open space for me to do some exercise and relax, plus it*
> *is convenient and many of my friends like to come here as well.' –*
> *Female, local, 50 years old (JYS).*

The reasons that drew most of the local residents to the squares varied greatly according to the background of individuals and the characteristics of the space. The local residents were mainly divided into regular and occasional users. For many regular visitors, the aesthetic value of the place is still the main characteristic that drew them to the place. However, the image created by the symbolic space-making was not the major concern and its value seems to decrease with the increasing familiarity of the local users. The locals tend to appreciate the place for the atmosphere it created as a relaxing environment for them to enjoy the view and their spare time rather than the merely picturesque image it presented. After the visual stimulation, people will seek to develop emotional and in-depth experience with the place. This is confirmed by the responses from most of the local users, who have expressed their reasons for coming to the square by relating the feeling and experience they had at the place.

> *'I've got used to coming here every day to see the river. It feels really*
> *relaxing and no other place has this kind of view. I feel that the quality of*

life increases by coming here regularly.' – Female, local, 21 years old
(CTM).

Apart from the physical settings, the social activities taking place at the space attracted many regular users and this was most common at People's Square and Jinyun Square. In the rather large and empty location, the social interactions between pairs or groups of people can easily take place. To see and hear each other, to meet or merely being present, are in themselves a form of social activity that attracts people in terms of both passive and active engagement according to Gehl (1987). Urban squares offer opportunities for people to be involved in an active social environment. The expectation of being involved and potentially exchanging valuable information and inspirations drew most of the local users to the urban square. In particular, the elderly who have retired from work tend to go outdoors looking for places or opportunities to socialize with others and get involved in activities. Without having specific purposes, the square is usually their preferred choice for potential social activities.

'I come here every day, because it's close to my home. There're a lot of
people here, nearby residents all enjoy coming, so that everybody can get
together and talk with each other.' – Female, local, 52 years old (PS).

'I bring my daughter here for a walk every day. There's no other place
big enough for her to play. It's convenient to come out and get some
fresh air.' – Female, local, 31 years old (PS).

'I usually take a walk around or sit; it is a large square with different

people. I've kind of got used to coming here, for exercising and catching

up with old friends.' – Male, local, 45 years old (PS).

'I don't have anything particular to do, just because it's close and I

usually come to sit for some time, and talk to others if I meet anyone I

know.' – Male, local, 48 years old (JYS).

The nature of the space as open to the outside views encourages passive engagement with theplace in a relaxing way. Sitting and watching are the primary forms of such engagement. People's attention is usually drawn to what was happening within the space rather than the physical settings. The findings indicated the social dimension of place identity and suggested that living in an environment does not only mean structuring experience with respect to its physical reality (Bonne & Secchiaroli, 1995).

Based on these results, it is suggested that human activities - being able to see other people in action - constitute the area's main attraction that draws regular users. This group of users use the square intensively and already has developed a comprehensive understanding of the place in terms of their own habits and the physical settings.

The distinction between Jinyun Square and the other two also indicated that the social and public activities were largely decided by the local context in terms of attracting potential users. Almost every interviewee at Jinyun Square was a local

resident of Beibei, with most of them living in the area surrounding the New Town. Only a few come from the old town, which is about ten minutes' drive away. Without added attractions and a citywide reputation, Jinyun Square mainly serves local residents and in particular the people living within walking distance. Family activities such as walking dogs and playing with children were the top reasons for them to come. Proximity to the home is one of the important factors in this sense.

> *'I'm living very close to the square, it's very convenient and I bring my daughter here almost every afternoon.' – Female, local, 29 years old (JYS).*

> *'This place is spacious and free, not much restriction for the dogs so that I can take it here every day for a walk.' – Male, local, 58 years old (JYS).*

> *'It is a really nice place and* near *the centre of the town, it's great to have a break here after shopping.' – Female, local, 25 years old (JYS).*

Another group of regular users were not necessarily coming to the square for particular activities, but just stop by because of its convenient connection with other frequently-visited places such as shops and supermarkets. By repeating their daily routines, many people come to the square regularly and it has become part of their everyday life, either on their way to other places or just a nearby public space they would like to explore. This is very evident at Jinyun Square because it has a direct connection with the pedestrian street and the urban square was the ideal place to relax after shopping.

'I'd usually stop by here because it's on my regular walking route.' –
Female, local, 60 years old (JYS).

'I come here every morning because it's close and convenient, I can stop
by to do some exercise on my way to the supermarket.' – Female, local,
65 years old (JYS).

Among the local users, there is a small group of people who only come to the square
for certain purposes occasionally. For example, some of the visitors interviewed at
People's Square only came for temporary events or exhibitions at the Three Gorges
Museum. The adjacent square does not necessarily provide much attraction and
reason for them to stay for a longer time. The occasional users tend to have more
neutral attitudes towards the square due to their limited experience and interest in the
place. Among them, there are also people just passing through the square or who
have other duties here without being interested in visiting the square itself.

'I had other things to do nearby; I just come here for a short rest.
There's nothing special here and it seems lacking in entertainment.' –
Male, local, 28 years old (JYS).

'I went to the museum for exhibitions once in a while, and then linger
around for ten minutes. There are not many choices for recreation or
shopping so I won't stay for long.' – Female, local, 36 years old (PS).

6.2.2   Patterns of use

The interviews have identified that the tourists shared the lowest frequency of use because most of them were coming on tours and were unlikely to pay a second visit after leaving. As outsiders, the absence of emotional ties with the place enables them to view the square more as a sequence of locations such as The Three Gorges museum and The Great Hall at People's Square. Their experience thus usually focuses on the appreciation of the landscape and whether it has met their expectations, instead of developing potential activities.

> *'I was recommended by friends, it is a must-see attraction in Chongqing but I won't have* the *chance to come here again.' – Female visitor from Henan province (CTM).*

> *'Here was recommended by* an *online travel guide, so I come to take pictures. The Great Hall is quite grand and impressive indeed.' – Mr. Zhou from Hubei province (PS).*

For tourists, their experience and behaviour on the square is largely influenced by others and the media, and is predetermined for carrying out certain activities. It indicates the transformation of the meaning of place from shared values accumulated over time to a set of instructions and codes delivering symbolic meanings. Their limited engagement with the place prevented the development of extensive feelings.

The frequency of use varies significantly by different groups. The most extensive

users found from the interviewees came to the square every day and stayed for hours. Apart from the people that came to participate in specific activities, some of the interviewees have got used to coming to the place regularly without any particular purpose. For these people, the potential opportunities for socializing and the feeling of being at the site were attractive.

> *'I usually come here to take a walk or just spend some time next to the river, it is quiet and I will be able to think about other things.' Female, local, 25 years old (JYS).*

For the visitors that pass through the place or come for other purposes, these activities could be summarized as necessary activity - which is more or less compulsory and usually involves everyday tasks - according to Gehl's (1987) work on activity typologies. Their incidence is only influenced slightly by the physical settings of the place, thus is more or less independent of the exterior environment. The frequency of this type of activity is relatively lower and reflects users' tendency to be detached from the place, other people on the square are no longer a main attraction to them as they are to the regular users. Rather, the quality of the outdoor environment appears poor to this user group, as they are not likely to stay for a longer time to allow more optional activities.

> *'I come here for a commercial promotion event nearby, I like the trees here so just takea short break. The square seems spacious but I don't think I would have much to do here.' Male, local, 28 years old (PS).*

The investigation suggested that the composition of the user groups at Jinyun Square was the simplest as most of the people were nearby residents. The relatively fewer visitors at the square presented a rather different scene from the other two touristy urban squares. Coming to the square has become part of their daily life for most regular users. They appreciated the square for being large and quiet enough for them to enjoy some private time whenever they needed within an appealing environment. The symbolic space-making strategy was mostly perceived as a way of providing the area for locals' leisure activities rather than signifying political power.

The contrast between the conventional 'invested identity' and recreational public social life was most evident at Jinyun Square as the local users can hardly appreciate the formality of the space or consider it as an important factor for uses. The spatial characteristics of the square were interpreted and understood in the light of whether they have facilitated the activities.

> 'It is clean and orderly here. I like to walk around as it is much quieter
> than Tianqi Square and has more green space (another square in the old
> town).' Male, local, 70 years old (JYS).

On the other hand, Chaotianmen Square presented the most impressive views and attracted many more visitors than the other two squares. However, the social interaction among users was much less according to the fieldwork, which has led to the lower frequency of uses than the other two squares.

6.3   Perception and social value

The analysis relating to this theme mainly explored users' own knowledge about the square, and their interpretation based on personal experiences. It aimed to investigate and understand the interrelations between people and the square. Carmona (2010) believes that people and their environment are interactively related and affect each other, what people are able to do is usually constrained by opportunities offered by the environment provided for them. According to Canter (1977), the understanding of a place includes activities and experiences, one should not only consider the purpose of a place in terms of what it is for, but also what people think about it.

The interview questions in this section encouraged people to express their experiences and concerns regarding the actual uses, in particular the associated memories about the past that have influenced their current feelings.

6.3.1   Concerns and conflicts among users

The regular users usually developed relatively fixed patterns of using the space according to the specific activities. Family activities were the most common, such as walking dog and playing with children. Many of the interviewees expressed their interest in having family time at the square, however, there were rising concerns regarding the different using habits. With the increasing trend of having dogs in Chinese families within recent years, urban squares became the preferable place for walking them as they provide a pedestrian-friendly environment and sufficient open space. However, people coming with children thought some of the large dogs were

dangerous to be near the small kids in the same square. Some interviewees at Jinyun Square have mentioned the serious discussions between the two groups of people to address this issue. In the end, most of the dog owners agreed to restrict their dogs within a certain area to avoid any unexpected accidents. As a result, people were satisfied with the outcome and always willing to address the potential issues within the groups without further conflict.

'This place is spacious and free, not much restriction for the dogs so that I can take it here every day for a walk.' – Male, 58 years old (JYS).

'I usually take my daughter here to play; the square is a clean and safe place, but sometime it will get annoying with too many dogs around and I have to keep an eye on the kid all the time' – Female, 31 years old (JYS).

The urban square has not been clearly defined or designed for certain activities. Even though the spontaneous social activities are gradually developing and becoming the main attractions that draw local users together, the results still reveal the dissatisfactions from a significant number of people seeking a variety of recreational activities in the public space. The single form of the square provides opportunities for developing possible connections with others, but could also generate undesired situations between different groups with its unclear boundaries. The form and meaning of People's Square is largely attached to the two landmark architectural features, however, the popularity of the square itself also contributes to the formation of its sense of identity.

Another concern regarding the use of space was discovered at Jinyun Square. Although many urban squares in China have adopted a large-scale lawn as an important design element in order to form a symmetrical layout or geometrically meaningful patterns, most visitors are banned from entering due to the management concerns. However, the lawns in Jinyun square are accessible and the public is allowed to use them, indeed, it soon turned out to be one of the popular characteristics of the square that was mentioned by many users. The chaos and damage caused by the intensive use were a concern to users who mentioned the inefficient management and maintenance of the green space at Jinyun Square.

> *'I like the lawn so much that we can sit on it and have picnics with friends when the weather is good.' - Female, 43 years old (JYS).*

> *'It is a really nice place and the centre of the town; it's great to have a break here after shopping.' - Female, 25 years old (JYS).*

> *'I like to sit* on *the lawn but sometimes it will get too crowded and I can hardly find space there.' Female, 27 years old (JYS).*

Similar to the other two squares, the different activities and user groups inevitably caused a series of problems and conflicts regarding their various requirements and using habits. Many people see the cleanliness and overall quality of the environment as important aspects for them to enjoy the square. Therefore, they have expressed

their concerns about the litter and dog mess at the square, as well as the damage to the lawns due to the extensive use.

A lack of trees and shady spaces, as well as benches and other recreational facilities, has been the constant problems in Chongqing urban squares. Although the vast area of squares provide great pedestrian places for walking and dancing, which have become the most popular activities for a wide range of users, people are still looking for more opportunities and a variety of exercise activities.

The lack of a variety of recreational activities and other facilities has been identified mostly by regular users. While tourists and occasional users can hardly realize the effect of physical settings in terms of facilitating social activities, the most obvious feature of the square is as a large empty space. This has been noticed by most of the users; however, it was interpreted differently based on various needs.

> *'The square is large enough for children to play, and I can easily keep an eye on them, which is quite safe.' – Male, 33 years old (PS).*

> *'I like it to come in a large space, so that people can enjoy their own activities without interrupting each other.' – Female, 29 years old (PS).*

> *'It could be chaos when everything happens at one place. For example, group dancing is everywhere at night and all play different music, which makes it even more noisy.' – Female, 38 years old (PS).*

Outdoor exercise has become popular within Chinese cities, the responses showed a significant number of regular users who have developed the habit and come to the square on a daily or regular basis. Taking exercise became one of the most important parts of their lives, which is also considered as a great improvement in the quality of life. Most Chinese people have become aware of, and started to pursue, a healthier lifestyle. Doing regular exercise after work is especially popular with middle class Chinese families. Regular users would like the activities on the square to be more regulated and provide more space and facilities for them to do the exercises apart from walking. Being close to nature and getting fresh air are also essential for them to relax and recover from the pressures experienced during the day.

> *'I got the chance to meet different people at the square, and it feel good to do some exercises, but there should be more exercising equipment and facilities.' – Female, 55 years old (PS).*

> *'I like the green space; it makes me feel calm just staying here.' – Male, 28 years old (JYS).*

A famous attraction is usually not enough for a successful public place, it could draw people together. However, opportunities for more activities are needed to meet people's expectations. While in a public space, most people are seeking for chances to be more engaged either with others or the activities provided by the space. Therefore, the need for more facilities and activities is suggested by most of the visitors.

Both the local users and tourists recognized Chaotianmen Square as a great place for river views. However, the physical environment of the square itself in terms of facilitating various activities has been criticized by most of the visitors. The lack of trees and sitting areas come as evident disadvantages while using the space. Due to the hot summer weather in Chongqing, sufficient shading and seating are necessary factors of a public open space. However, the design of Chaotianmen Square has prevented many visitors from staying for a longer time to enjoy the view.

Being a busy place with ferries, vendors and people coming and going, Chaotianmen Square appears chaos to many users. On the one hand, the spontaneous activities attract potential users and bring vitality to the place, however, the rather unregulated activities could disrupt the development of positive social interactions, which usually happens when people feel safe and relaxed within the environment.

6.3.2 Emotional connection and memories

In terms of emotional attachment, Rapport (1977) distinguished between two groups of people who viewed the built environment differently. While 'insiders' developed emotional ties with their setting and saw it positively, 'outsiders' viewed it negatively in the absence of those ties. This is especially evident among the regular and occasional users and tourists. The first group expressed their experience with a broader context and were more likely to develop an emotional attachment towards the square.

'I play with my grandchild here every day. There are great memories of us spending time together.' – Female, 32 years old (PS).

'I've been living in this area for decades, and used to come here every day. Even though I haven't come here for a long time after moving home, I still have a *feeling for this place and it's good to stop by for old memories.' – Female, 51 years old (PS).*

'Seeing this great square in our city reminds me of the rapid development of Chongqing. It made me feel very proud.' – Female, 42 years old (PS).

Lacking emotional ties with the environment, the outsiders' perception of the place tends to be developed based upon the physical features of the space. However, the activities or the people on the square could also contribute to developing a sense of place by recalling similar scenes or memories, which is usually regarded as a self-conscious state of creating meaning by establishing ties with the outside.

'I like it here. It feels warm and comfortable seeing these old people lingering around here.' – Female visitor from Henan province (PS).

'The Great Hall is very grand and suitable for taking pictures. The unique architecture can make people remember the place.' – Male visitor from Changsha (PS).

As the long-established icon and an area with a long history, local users' emotional attachment to the place is stronger than that found in People's Square. People are more likely to realize their ties with the environment. Most local users, even those who do not come to the square very frequently, admitted emotional ties by witnessing the changes over decades or memories from old times.

'The square attracts many people here, but most of them are the elder ones. The place is not vital enough; there should be more recreational activities for young people.' – Male, 24 years old (PS).

'It would be better if there were more children's' play facilities.' – Female, 27 years old (PS).

'The sitting area is not enough, sometimes it could be quite hard to find any with too many people, especially in the summer.' – Male, 26 years old (PS).

The results of the interviews showed the significant role of water at the squares. The river and fountains at Chaotianmen Square and Jinyun Square were mentioned frequently by many users at both sites. Some regard the water fountain along the central axis as the most impressive characteristic of the square. The river running in front of it is also seen as a distinct feature to differentiate it from other sites. Regardless of its function or form, the use of water could always be seen as a finishing touch that revitalizes the space with a hint of motion. Most people would

find a place more attractive and lively with some water in it. Even though there is a sign suggesting the regular operating times of the fountains, it currently can only be turned on for special occasions or events due to the lack of maintenance.

'The water fountain is the most impressive feature about this square; it should be turned on more often to create a great scene, especially at night.' – Female, 52 years old (JYS).

'I like to stay at the bridge just staring at the river, thinking about something else, it's really relaxing to walk along the river.' – Female, 25 years old (CTM).

Green space is another important aspect of the space that attracts people for creating an appealing environment that is both psychologically and physically beneficial for the users. To many users the high green space coverage in Jinyun square is one of the most attractive factors. The footpaths on either side of the hard paving square area are lined by
many trees and combinations of shrubs which are considered to be a favourite place for many users to go for a walk. Although dominated by a large area of hard paving spaces, people are always tending to seek for a more natural environment with vegetation and water, the better quality of green space with plenty of planting usually means a better environment and fresh air.

'I like the green space and planting here the most, there are a wide range

of species and they produce more fresh air that makes here more

comfortable.' – Female, 61 years old (JYS).

Attachment developed with increasing usage. By coming to the square regularly during their daily life, people would naturally develop an attachment to the place that they will never notice until they are asked about how they think about the place. However, Jinyun square is quite a new place compared to the other two squares, and was only built ten years ago and became popular in recent years after more people moved there. A few people that come to the square very frequently still found themselves emotionally connected with the place, especially when they have spent time there with the children or family members.

'I came here every day because it's very close to my home, I usually just

take a walk and I have been quite used to it. I feel like I care about the

place for no other reasons but it's just like home, makes me feel warm.' –

Male, 48 years old (JYS).

'I like to come here with my son; he can meet other children to play

together. It is good for the children and here is a meaningful place where

I have seen him grew up.' – Female, 29 years old (JYS).

According to Cox (1968), the meaning and memory of place endure long after the place itself may have been physically altered. The memories and multi-senses people acquired when they were at the square sometimes exist longer than the specific events or activities associated with that experience. When asked about the emotional

connection with the place, most interviewees would recall memories of when they spent time with their close ones.

6.4   Related place identity

With the major changes in social relations, the fixed notion of place as viewed in pre-modern communities no longer holds. The fixed relationship used to define identity according to social meanings was based on a long-term, continuous interaction with place. In a globalized and modern society the meaning of place is usually 'manufactured' or 'invented', which could disrupt the development of an emotional attachment to the place.

In order to understand the diversity of the underlying place identity, the Phase 3 interview questions mainly investigated the essential features of the square that contributed to the formation of its sense of identity. The questions are thus phrased to explore the uniqueness relating to a certain locality, as symbolizing a regional place identity.

6.4.1   Cultural representation and symbolism

The interviews with square users have suggested that the geographic identity of a place can be strongly demonstrated by the natural landscape and wider context as long as they contain adequate information indicating the locality. In the case of Chaotianmen Square, few people would identify it as somewhere else because of the typical view of the river confluence. Not only is the view not common in other

places, it was also associated specifically with Chongqing which adds a strong sense of identity to the square as well.

> *'I would definitely see this as the square in Chongqing and it is the most typical, because of the culture and history it carried with the city.'- Male, 46 years old (CTM).*

One of the important dimensions of place identity is ascribed to the history and culture that the place has represented. The sense of place identity usually manifests itself in historic preservation projects glorifying national, regional or local identity. In the case of People's Square, even though both the Great Hall of the People and the Three Gorges Museum are noticeable architectural landmarks, almost all of the interviewees identified the Great Hall rather than the museum as the most important element that makes the place different from others. The architecture featured distinct characters from the Ming Dynasty and its history of over half a century represents the place and the city even when the square was actually constructed long after that.

> *'The Great Hall is so typical with historic cultural elements. Unlike other newly built urban squares that look more modern. This is simple and decent.' – Female, 48 years old (PS).*

> *'I would describe this place as the most typical and the symbol of Chongqing, especially with the Great Hall and those trees dating from the 1950s.' – Female, 33 years old (PS).*

Apart from the architecture, the trees and cultural sculptures that signify the city are widely adopted as an effort to 'invent' and reinforce the identity of the square as one located in Chongqing. These elements could be easily noticed by most of the local users due to their existing knowledge of the city. On the other hand, tourists tend to pay more attention to the visual qualities such as the topographical feature that was the most evident element standing out from the environment and distinguishing it from another place. As a process of making sense of the subject, people will usually link the present information with their existing knowledge for interpretation. The more contradiction with their previous experience, the more impressed they will be. The identity of the place was found to vary significantly according to the observers' background and points of view.

> *'The style of Great Hall is different from other cities; the city trees here are also typical for Chongqing.' – Male, 32 years old (PS).*

> *'The trees, sculpture of Zhang Jiade (Designer of the Great Hall) and the Hall of course, all make it different and embodied Chongqing identity.' – Female, 40 years old (PS).*

> *'There are a lot of stairs and slopes, which are quite typical in Chongqing.' – Female visitor from Jilin province (PS).*

> *'This square is much smaller than others in my hometown. And there are*

more topographical changes.' – Male visitor from Shandong province

(PS).

A similar phenomenon was observed at Jinyun Square regarding the use of celebrity sculptures and cultural elements in benches and other street furniture. The responses provided positive feedback from the interviewees that these features are able to draw people's attention and most of the users would remember the place by those features and felt impressed with a sense of culture in the surrounding environment.

Another approach of using a local element found at Jinyun Square was the creation of a themed landscape in bamboos. It was a more subtle approach compared to the other cultural elements established around the square. Beibei was branded as an 'Ecological town of Bamboo' according to recent political propaganda and the local bamboos have been widely used in the urban landscape ever since. A line of bamboos planted at the sides of the square have been mentioned by a few interviewees as a sign of local identity, the fairly new image of Beibei has been gradually established and delivered through the urban landscape.

> *'Building at the foot of the mountain is definitely a local feature of*
> *Chongqing. The variation in levels and steps are also quite unique.' –*
> *Female, 45 years old (JYS).*

> *'The bamboos over there are very memorable characteristic of this*
> *square; it's a symbol of local culture and Beibei.' – Female, 30 years old*
> *(JYS.)*

The tourists however, provided quite different opinions regarding the cultural elements used in the square. The understanding and appreciation of these symbols required background information about the locale, and possibly an established attachment and familiarity so that the positive perception can be developed upon the awareness of cultural elements. Nevertheless, this attempt was usually not as efficient as it appeared to the local users. Tourists tend to consider the shape and overall form of the square as unique elements of Chongqing. The use of stairs, changes in levels and the ship shape of the square are more

evident to them.

Another finding emerging from the interviews was that part of the identity of the place was built upon a significant structure that was attached to it. Jinyun Square presented the example in the sense that many interviewees would describe it as a space in front of the administration building when asked about how they would describe the square to others. The location of Jinyun Square as sitting in front of the administration building has been seen as an important characteristic of the place. In fact, the name of Jinyun Square is hardly used nowadays as people often use *Beibei Administration Centre* to refer to the area as a whole rather than the square particularly. Some people will even get confused by the name of Jinyun Square, and do not realize that it is the official name of the square.

Green space, as well as the river and fountains are other memorable elements worth mentioning and introducing according to many interviewees. Sitting at the foot of Jinyun Mountain is also a strong characteristic to be recognized as a local identity of

the square. The distinct topographical features, such as changes in levels and use of steps, are evident for putting the square in the context of Chongqing.

> *'I will describe it by the location, such as a big square in front of the administration building, great environment with a lot people.' Male, 57 years old (JYS).*

6.4.2   Social interaction as identity

Apart from the physical attributes, social activities taking place at the squares were one of the significant assets of the place. The range of activities and the interaction between them imply the nature of the place and the expected experiences. At Chaotianmen Square, there is a number of food stalls and vendors prosper along the riverfront footpath, which have been regarded as another typical scene of Chongqing to local users. It illustrated the unique lifestyle by presenting the local street food and souvenirs of Chongqing. These stalls were gradually formed and cater for the large number of visitors coming to Chaotianmen, and at the same time they provided them with a sense of local life in a most natural way. Most of the responses were positive views regarding the existence of various stalls because they provide a vital atmosphere and attractions.

By indulging in the public life presented at the urban squares, the interaction and experience with local people also helped tourists to get to know the distinct characteristics of the city. Different personalities of local residents offered fresh insights for tourists and it usually turned out to be valuable travel memories that can

enrich the experience of merely sightseeing. However, the characters expressed by local people can influence their impression of the city in two opposite ways depending on the specific event and whether the communication went well. Fortunately, the responses have shown generally positive feedback from visitors regarding their experience with local people.

'I have very pleasant experiences at this square as people I met here are so warm and welcoming. That is a *quite different and memorable experience.' Female visitor from Henan Province (CTM).*

The responses from some of the interviewees suggested that the function of a place or how it is used could help them to identify the place, therefore it is easy to remember the place by its role. For example, one of the most unique features of Chaotianmen Square as noticed by both local users and tourists was its dual role as a busy pier and sight-seeing platform. Its function also indicated the historic importance in a broader context, which adds an extra dimension to the meaning of the place.

'Chaotianmen Square is unique as it is still used as a pier at present, that is a good tradition of Chongqing.' – Female, 28 years old from Shanxi Province (CTM).

Although the process of space production nowadays reinforces a set of fixed identities through the use of physical features, the growing social relations also expanded the notion of place identity to a more flexible one. Places are constantly in

tension between what they are and what they ought to become. The more people get involved with the place, the more likely they will identify it with the locality as being the same as themselves. The constant identity-building process suggested the possibility of increasing the opportunities for more visitors and tourists to participate in the social activities and interact with the physical environment, in order to allow the natural fostering of a positive attachment with the place.

> *'This square is definitely different from others. I have deep feelings for this as it is in my hometown Chongqing, while I won't have feeling for squares in another city.' – Male, 36 years old (PS).*

> *'The group dancing and people that come here for exercising and leisure make here different to other squares. It reflects local life of most ordinary people in Chongqing.' – Female, 40 years old (JYS).*

Among the crisis of whether the place identity of contemporary Chinese urban squares has been largely ignored under the influence of globalization and modernization, it was noticed that the process of social interaction would not be stopped in many senses. Even though much attention has been given to emphasizing the symbolic identity through physical design, this has generated problems in terms of facilitating activities. The place still plays an important role of providing opportunities for social activities, which contributes a lot to the development of emotional ties.

6.5   Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the findings from the interview responses in relation to the underlying place identity as constructed through the interviewees' social interactions. The current uses as observed at the square present quite different characteristics to those of a few decades ago. This is ascribed to the dramatic changes in people's leisure life during the past years due to the political movement. The political and economic hardship had put great pressure and restrictions on Chinese people's leisure life. During the first half of the 20th century, due to the communist ideology of establishing 'producer cities', Chinese people were pushed to work harder in order to achieve a self-sufficient society, and the life of all people remained as simple as possible and were restricted within each work unit (*danwei*) with limited facilities.

After the liberation of the market, the work units were gradually replaced by residential communities built by the private developers. People thus are free from work and are able to go outside seeking a more diverse social life and activities during their leisure time. Although the transition has been slow during the first few years, the following years after the economic reform had taken place in the 1980s have seen a dramatic improvement in the quality of life due to the increase in disposable incomes and the level of modernization.

The most evident shift would be people's increasing interest in taking exercise and the attention they paid to their health. The largest group of users is the middle-aged people, and one of the important reasons for them to walk and dance in the square is

to keep healthy and take exercise. Another benefit they are seeking from the square is to be engaged and to socialize with people. Activities such as walking dogs and playing with children can also bring people with similar interests together so that they can get the chance to meet new people. There is also a considerable number of people that are attracted to the square by the opportunities to catch up with friends who also go the square regularly. Urban squares at a large scale enable different people to gather and various activities to take place. However, this trend of going out to urban squares does not seem as popular as it is in the younger generation, which has been mostly brought up in the post-reform era and developed their own interests in their leisure time instead of going to the squares.

As per the discussion on site survey and observations, the physical forms and layout of the selected urban squares remained very much the same as the space-making strategy derived from the early 20th century, which was mainly politically-oriented and inherited from the Soviet Union. The dominant form of urban squares did not change with the dramatic transformation in people's life in the late 1990s. The spontaneous social activities took the advantages of existing form of the sites, and inevitably brought conflicts and problems within the various activities through the uses. An increasing number of people are becoming aware of their requirements and needs regarding the use of public open spaces, common concerns such as a lack of recreational facilities and shady sitting areas have been noticed and raised in all the selected urban squares.

The purpose-built landmark attractions such as Chaotianmen Square and People's Square are still able to draw a lot of attention and tourists from all over the country.

Their image and identity as the symbol of the city have been undoubted and realized by many tourists. Apart from the representational meanings delivered through the physical form and attached building or views, the public life of local residents on the square can also express a sense of locality to the visitors by reminding them of familiar scenes or memories. The lively atmosphere of local life delivered positive messages to the outsiders through various senses. To local residents, the symbolic meanings would sometimes have different meanings to them because they are more emotionally attached to the city or the place, therefore they can more easily add personal feelings to the identity of place as an important part of their lives.

The next chapter will look into the issues and concerns arising from the previous findings regarding the use and design of urban squares in Chongqing, in terms of delivering a distinct sense of place identity by integrating theoretical attributions, in order to discuss the potential and understanding of the place identity in Chinese urban squares.

Chapter 7: Discussion

7   Discussion

7.1   Introduction

This chapter aims to integrate the findings from previous chapters with the theories summarized in the literature review in order to respond to the research aims and objectives set out at the beginning of the thesis. The discussion highlights the key findings to support the research objectives of this research, and in particular how the theories could be embedded in Chinese context. The investigation of urban square in Chongqing presented valuable results. Although there is commonality with other Chinese cities, Chongqing serves as unique case study because of its significance throughout the history and distinct urban features. The investigation of uses and perception of urban square in Chongqing discovers how the notion of place identity is understood and challenged in Chinese context and its implications for future urban square development in China.

The discussion in this chapter is divided into three sections according to the research aims and objectives. The first section of this chapter addresses the research aim of **exploring the evolution and identity of urban squares in China.** It explains how the evolution of urban form has historically been influenced by political and economic reforms, in particular contributing to the meaning of the urban square that has emerged from the Chinese urbanization process. It highlights the Chinese government's need to establish an ideal city image through the construction of urban squares in the post-reform era, and how the design strategies derived from pre-reform times are challenged by the unprecedented social changes.

The second section of the discussion provides insights into the second research aim: **to understand the public life and perception of place identity in urban squares in Chongqing**. It highlights the findings from case studies on how people use urban squares in Chongqing and their perception of place identity. This section is structured based on the framework developed upon the review of previous academic studies on place identity. The framework is also used to develop the dimensions of the site survey and interviews, and primarily summarized as physical attributes, social interaction and personal experience. These interconnected components provide a sound theoretical framework to understand the essential aspects of place identity in regard to each of their roles in redefining the people-place relationship.

The last aim of this research**: to examine how the findings from this research could inform future urban design practice** is to be discussed in the third section. The conflict between the conventional political ideology and the increasing social needs will be discussed in regard to the previous theoretical and empirical findings. Insights from both urban square users and professional interviews shed light on the design practice in terms of recognizing practical concerns and limitations. The potential design strategies are to be discussed as responses to the emerging identity crisis and the accommodation of social activities.

7.2   Spatial design and cultural representation in Chinese urban squares

The review of the urban development history of Chinese cities in Chapters 2 and 4 provides the foundations for a broad understanding of Chinese urban form. It

indicates that the evolution of Chinese urban space is essentially politically-oriented, thus, ways of understanding the nature of Chinese urban squares lie in the discussion of the continuity and changes within the Chinese context. The key finding of this section is that the urban square has been long-eliminated from the Chinese urban environment, wherein the urban space and objects are arranged according to Chinese cosmology in a very different way to most western cities. Spatial form and its cultural representation are considered as essential aspects of understanding the current design strategy of Chinese urban squares. Both of them are mostly derived from traditional urban forms and ancient space-making principles, reflecting the influence of a traditional legacy in terms of constructing the identity of place in current Chinese cities.

The emergence of urban squares and their prevalence in Chinese cities arise from a series of social transitions, including the effort to establish a distinct national and local identity by imitating the ancient Chinese empire and examples from the Soviet Union. This section concludes that urban form should be seen as the product of social changes, which involve various factors including political power, economic development, technological advancement and cultural preferences. Most recently, the pursuit of place-promotion and city-branding became evident in a market-oriented society driven by economic incentives. The space-making strategies throughout this period remained iconographic with an emphasis on the manipulation of the physical environment. The following discussion attempts to understand the sense of local distinctiveness embodied in these space-making strategies with regard to the changing Chinese context and its associated political and economic motivations.

7.2.1 Politically-oriented space-production of urban squares

- **Provision and production process**

Ever since the economic and political reforms in the late 20th century, Chinese cities have been urged to revive from the long-term political chaos and the retreat that it caused. The initiatives are usually made to improve the urban environment and infrastructure, which was also evident from the urban development history of both China and Chongqing. When Chongqing was appointed as the wartime capital in the 1930s, the municipal government undertook a series of movements to rebuild the city and projected an image of Chongqing as a symbol of the nation. The city grew significantly during that time by trying to build a modern metropolitan identity like Shanghai. The economic and political transitions are often followed by a series of urban constructions, as the governor makes efforts to consolidate his/her legitimacy and establish a clear vision for future development.

The investigation into the production process of each case study square reveals a similar phenomenon in which the creation of urban squares is usually a means of image construction to enhance the urban appearance while promoting the local economy to attract investment. This becomes even clearer from the interviews with planners and government officials that have been involved in the projects. For example, one of the planners from the Chongqing Urban Planning and Design Institute suggests that both Chaotianmen Square and People's Square were built in 1997 when Chongqing was upgraded to be the fourth municipality in the country.

Due to the political significance of the projects in terms of commemorating the event, both squares were expected to establish a distinct image of the city envisioning a promising future. The sites of the two squares were transformed from the most privileged sites - the traditional city gate and the space next to the landmark architecture - in order to signify the citywide importance of the projects. The projects were required to be finished within the same year regardless of the difficulties they may confront within the short period of construction time, which has put great pressure on the planning department. A similar requirement could also be found in the creation of Jinyun Square, which was built in conjunction with the new administration building of Beibei New Town to symbolize the establishment of the new town centre.

The interviews show that the importance of creating political significance through urban squares is well recognized by many planners and designers. The phenomenon has become common in many Chinese cities; examples include People's Square in Shanghai and Xinghai Square in Dalian. The political objective of the construction of urban squares is usually explicitly stated in the planning guidelines and city master plan, and they are usually expected to finish within a relatively short period of time because the local leaders prefer to complete the project within their tenure so that they can use the projects for propaganda. The emphasis on building enormous urban squares has been shifted from the celebration of socialist totalitarianism in the pre-reform era to a spatial instrument serving political objectives in the post-reform era. However, it seems that the process of space-making has not fundamentally changed, and political ideology remains important (if not the dominant) in determining the nature of urban public space (Chen, 2010).

The reason that political symbolism has retained its significant position in the production of urban space in the market-oriented economic era lies in the institutional background of space-making ideology. According to the Urban and Rural Planning Law of the People's Republic of China (1990, 2008), all the municipal governments are required to develop master plans to guide their physical development. The higher-level master plans, such as the ones at provincial level, must be coordinated with the 5-year economic development plan, the lower/small-scale plans tend to focus on spatial planning by setting normative goals for physical development. The more detailed plans are thus more tightly integrated with the development process, through which the municipal government would have more power in the decision-making and the allocation of public resources. This planning system has resulted in the phenomenon whereby local leaders usually depend on symbolic projects to showcase urban development and their achievement in a relatively short time in order to impress the officers above them and gain promotions.

Interviews with professionals and the investigation of the space-development process in China suggest that the primary meanings and objectives of the urban square are usually established through a systematic planning and consultation process, including a master planning process and a number of extensive urban design consultations between the planning institute and government officers leading to the refinement and implementation of the urban design consultations. During the process, the top authorities and planning experts are the key players and regulators to make sure the political intentions were carried out through the project. Due to its strong

political implications, the social planning of urban public space is not necessarily coordinated with the physical development at this level.

- **City marketing and its influence on place identity**

With the influence of globalization, the Chinese government's need to establish a distinct city image arises along with the need to improve the urban environment in order to attract attention and investment. City marketing is adopted and referred to as an advanced way in which the Chinese government can effectively help to promote the economic status of a city by enhancing the physical environment. In the view of the professionals and government officers interviewed in this research, and stressed many times, it is 'necessary' for Chongqing to create a collective image of the city as a new rising municipality after its upgrade in 1997. It is not a coincidence that this era was when most of the landmark urban square projects were launched, since they were an explicit goal to deliver the vision for the future.

Although not as explicit as the image-construction goal, the production of urban squares was also expected to promote the public good by delivering an appealing urban environment and city assets. As echoed by some commentators, city marketing usually goes hand-in-hand with the reconstruction of the city image (Short, 1993). It has become more important to the accumulation of social and political power than traditional material concerns (Hall, 1995; Zukin, 1991). City marketing and image construction are dual political imperatives to be met at all costs leading to an overwhelming emphasis on the symbolic meaning of the urban square.

Ever since its advent in Chinese cities, the urban square has been regarded as a symbol of the modern city adopted from western countries and demonstrating the economic and political ambitions of the local government. Due to the communist nature of Chinese cities, most of the urban square projects are government-led with a pre-determined identity, they are meant to deliver a sense of political ideology and carry out the governmental objective of creating an ideal city image of a prosperous and modernized metropolis. Such political incentives were expressed and emphasized on many occasions through government statements, official speeches and reports. The words such as 'modern' and 'international' are frequently used to represent the city's ideal image and investment-friendly environment in order to promote the local economy, and they also became the important symbolic attributes of urban squares. Even though this predetermined identity of the urban square has been widely acknowledged by most of the users as symbols of prosperity and the modernity of the city, the representation of this notion is still argued to be less connected with the local context. It is a shared expression recognized by every Chinese city rather than a specific uniqueness rooted in the locality.

7.2.2 The creation of an 'ideal' city image through urban squares

The role of urban square has gradually changed with the urban development, its significance in modern society in terms of improving human well being and providing appealing urban environment was realized. However, the value of urban square is still regarded as attributes to the city promotion, such as symbol of ideal city image.

- **The emergence of the urban square as a modern notion**

The previous findings on Chinese urban development suggest that urban squares have been long-neglected throughout Chinese history. They were first introduced by western advisors as the symbol of modern society in order to improve the urban environment of Chinese cities, which was much detached from the local context. The pre-determined role of the urban square has influenced future development as well as people's perceptions for decades.

The review of the urban evolution indicates that the origin of Chinese cities is mainly as administrative centres serving as political symbols, rather than as an organic entity gradually shaped by religious or commercial and defensive needs aa in many western cities. Large empty spaces can only be discovered within imperial palaces or in front of official buildings for ritual events and are not accessible to the general public. Despite their physical similarity to western squares, the social function and purposes of these spaces in China are much different from those in western societies.

The modern urban square did not appear in Chinese cities until the early 20^(th) century following the establishment of foreign concessions. The construction of urban squares in the early concessions was part of the urban regenerations initiated by imperial countries to showcase their power over the concession areas through the implementation of western planning ideas. These initiatives are inevitably regarded as the first symbol and expression of modernity brought to Chinese cities, shaping the understanding of modernity for the Chinese people just emerging from a long feudal era.

The construction of the urban square has been accompanied by urban transformations ever since its advent in Chinese cities. The role of the urban square is grounded in the recognition of it being one of the indispensable elements associated with a modern urban environment. In particular, after the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the widespread Soviet model of city construction brought political implications to the large-scale squares as denoted by the mass gatherings to proclaim the superiority of socialism. The significant dual meanings of the urban square have persisted to the present, and become the underlying identity that is deeply rooted in the understanding of almost every Chinese. This can be affirmed not only from the literature dedicated to the nature of Chinese urban space, but also the interviews with professionals and ordinary users who have expressed their perception of urban squares. Being relatively lacking in social consideration at the beginning of their development, urban squares stood for modernity and political power during the first few decades of the early 20th century. Meanwhile, the rising changes in the socio-economic structure and urban public life are gradually shaping their identity and roles because of the changing ways of people doing things at different times and spaces. Unlike other landmark objects whose identity largely relies on the representation, the meaning of urban space can be enriched and diversified according to the interactions and interpretations that people have with the place. People are able to generate affection towards a place through their daily uses, and this is much separated from the political implication they noticed from the physical settings. It is concluded from the investigations that the identity of a place cannot be seen as static and solely determined by the socio-

political power, rather, it is the ever-changing notion that keeps diversifying itself over time with constant social changes.

- **Traditional legacy and cultural representation**

In the pursuit of creating an ideal city image urban square has been regarded as one of the most important elements of modern urban environment, local authorities still try to incorporate Chinese culture to emphasize own identity as distinguished from western countries. A series of difference is noticed from the site survey of three case studies especially in their physical forms. Despite the similarity in the use of axis, the main architectural objects are kept in traditional Chinese styles. The hybration between the massive scale of urban square and Chinese traditional characteristics inevitably generates unique identity of the space, and this is vividly observed by local users which then develops stronger attachment to the space because of the features. This is also widely acknowledged by on-site interviewees and their attitudes towards the use of Chinese symbols are mostly positive.

The physical representation of a place is closely associated with the meaning and function it carries. Physical attributes, behaviours and conceptions are the interconnected components that contribute to the identity of a place, because the spatial configuration of a space enables people to distinguish it from other places by knowing what kind of behaviour is associated with a given *locus* (Canter, 1977). The importance of spatial form is that it allows people to accept and appreciate the design and make *places* out of it. In other words, making reference to the past patterns and

rules facilitates people's understanding of a new form of design by realizing its inherent continuity and familiarity.

Particularly in Chinese cities, the long standing rules of organizing spaces and buildings in ancient cities are expressed by a set of design language dedicated to the worship of political power and the universe. The rules that emphasize the symmetric form and main axis can still be found in contemporary urban squares in order to signify the power. The assigned meaning of certain spatial orders enables people to interpret the space in an expected way. This overarching philosophy is embedded in the traditional Chinese culture and people's basic understanding of the relationship between people and their surrounding environment. Every part of the city is endowed with certain meanings in political and cosmological senses in order to achieve an ideal relationship between humans and the universe. The philosophy that has been interpreted and translated into design language has persisted over many years during the history of Chinese urban development, and extends its influence into almost every design aspect ranging from urban form to the individual buildings.

Its connection with local context largely rests upon its physical representation reflecting the ancient city construction rules. The carefully recorded rules dating from the Zhou dynasty (1046-221BC) specified the proper arrangement of urban spaces and buildings according to their functions and hierarchy (See Chapter 2), and were applied across the country in successive dynasties. The essence of this remains and continues to influence Chinese space-making strategies as one of the distinct characteristics of Chinese urban form. As discussed in the previous chapter, the

construction of the national identity of places is in relation to the memory of people who are experiencing the space and generating meanings through the interaction.

The spatial design of urban squares is grounded in the traditional Chinese urban form, which has its roots in Chinese philosophy relating to the understanding of the universe. The prevalent uses of the scale and hierarchy of the space to signify the importance of local governance suggests a sense of familiarity and links to the past to many people, and is able to reflect cultural collectiveness and a personal consciousness of local culture. It can be seen as one of the reasons why representational design methods are favoured by many designers, because of their efficiency in capturing the essence of Chinese urban space. The design strategy and dominant form of the urban square form is not only a traditional legacy from the past, but also, inevitably, a result of the current transitional period.

- **Place promotion**

Chinese governors in the post-reform era were eager to show their ability to establish a brand new and powerful political social order leading to a promising future represented by the modernized and appealing urban environment. A brand new city image is the first impression that showcases the governor's determination and ability. The several large-scale urban constructions in the history of Chongqing also imply that, to many government officials, the most efficient way to deliver the message and establish global influence is to copy from existing examples, especially famous metropolitan features from western countries that represent improvements to the built environment. In today's more globalized world, the urban space development in

Chinese cities still largely centres on the integration of the core symbolic values of 'modern' and 'international', indicating that they are willing to be opened up to the rest of the world in contrast to the previous closed-door policies.

Because of the implication of city marketing in current planning ideology, applying western planning and design concepts is regarded as a way, and sometimes a gimmick, to attract attention and promote the place. Modern planning ideology that features an emphasis on geometric simplicity, aesthetic formality and functional segregation, is reflected in the spatial planning of many Chinese cities. Along with the transformation of urban spaces, the construction of landmark architecture helps contribute to the changing skyline. Examples include the Great Hall in People's Square and the Administration Building in Jinyun Square.

It is argued that the construction of urban squares harks back to China's imperial history of planning practice that favoured symbolic structures and spaces at the expense of small-scale commercial activity and gathering places (Abramson, 2006). The symbolic representation of space - such as the visual order, axial symmetry, large-scale and symbolic formality - can overwhelm all other meanings of urban public space, such as amenities for social communication. The production of space is becoming an instrument of place-promotion under the entrepreneurial aspirations of many local governments (Chen, 2010).

As discussed in Chapter 2, many post-industrial societies have been challenged for erasing local identities and causing cultural homogenization because of the impact of globalization in the later 20th century, (Giddens, 1990; Jameson, 1991). The similar

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phenomenon has also been criticized by Chinese scholars in recent years, as the rapid urban development following the western models has resulted in a lack of distinctiveness and a loss of local character. Both planners and the popular press frequently criticize 'political showcase projects' as tasteless and wasteful of resources (Abramson, 2006). However, with the increasing awareness of the potential for similarity caused by design practice, it is expected that this ideal 'city image' should not only be seen as simple scenes copied from western cities, but should reflect the essential characteristics that would differentiate a specific location from elsewhere. The dual imperatives resulted in an increasing emphasis on traditional Chinese cultural elements being considered as important as western ideology.

Following the politically-oriented guidelines, the combination of western concepts with Chinese characteristics is demonstrated through the symbolic space-making strategies that not only echo the ancient city construction rules, but also reflect the image of a modern urban society featuring formality and orderliness. Although it has persisted as a tradition for Chinese urban designers after decades of urban design practice, and continued to symbolize the highly centralized political system through the design of urban squares, the efforts of inserting more traditional cultural elements start to be found in recent urban squares. The previous understanding of Chinese characteristics represented by the traditional spatial form is not enough to distinguish the vast cities across the country, each city is trying to stand out and differentiate itself from others. However, the attempts are made by keeping the symmetrical and axial form intact and, at the same time, adding new elements such as sculptures and

monuments on the theme of local history and culture to deliver a sense of distinctiveness.

The main characteristics of Chinese urban squares include the emphasis on monumental spatial form and symbolic representations. The urban square becomes the symbol of the city and is usually attached to the administration centre or architectural landmark. It is on an extraordinary scale and occupies the most privileged location to signify its political importance. Other than the spatial form, there is a tendency that the notion of building a distinct urban identity involves imitating other successful cities by adopting certain urban elements, such as sculptures, lighting and water fountains. As discussed in previous sections, the dominant spatial design strategies in addition to tremendous scale and symmetrical form are much driven by the political will to establish a sense of identity. However, the investigation into the space-making process indicates that without the fundamental changes in the design ideology and overarching political influence, it is especially difficult to see a variety of design approaches that are able to embody the local distinctiveness. The particular Chongqing experience provides an example of how the city was influenced by the social transitions and adapted itself to urban construction. The ancient history and geographical features of Chongqing played significant roles in the evolution of urban form in terms of restricting its physical expansion. On the other hand, this limitation itself suggests a sense of geographical uniqueness that is exclusive to the city, as well as the opportunity of interpreting cultural legacy as something other than merely thematic image-making.

7.3   People-place relations and perceived meanings

Place is not only depicted as a 'bounded' location, but also a space that is open to variable external social, political and economic influences, a locale defined through people's subjective feelings. The review of literature has presented findings of study from western countries, where the use pattern and understanding of open space have been well documented. The key finding of this section is that people's use and perception of urban square in Chongqing are different in many aspects from other locations. The discussion attempts to fill this gap in knowledge by recording the patterns of uses and perceptions of place identity developed through the uses.

The following section discusses that the transformation and remaking of urban form not only creates a visual identity for the physical environment, but, more importantly, also provides the sites where social life and activities occur. The result of such social transformations endows Chinese urban squares with a sense of identity from a social perspective, which generates itself from the constant uses of the space and changing perceptions. During the interaction process, the physical environment and cultural background of individuals are important factors contributing to the making of place-identity and adding complexities to the concept in various senses.

7.3.1   Physical attributes and everyday uses of urban square

- **Spatial form**

As discussed in previous sections, the purpose of each case study square has been closely associated with political wills. In order to be built as landmark project within the city and effectively contribute to the image construction, these three squares occupy the most privilege space within its surrounding areas. Due to the much central location and historical significance, People's Square and Chaotianmen Square successfully drew much attention both locally and nationally. The tourists constitute majority of their users. However, few tourists are found at Jinyun Square because of its relatively remote location and lack of symbolic significance compared to the other two. Despite the similar scale and spatial form with Chaotianmen and People's Square, Jinyun Square mainly serves surrounding residential communities and its political influence is much limited to accommodating the local administration centre. It is evident that nowadays the symbolic representation of urban square is not necessarily associated with its ability of attracting tourists. The design strategies of squares like Jinyun Square could be more considerate to local residents other than presenting grand views to visitors, who might not be the main users of the place.

The success of Chaotianmen and People's Square becoming the symbol of Chongqing and most sought after places of interest, is much ascribed to their role in the city's history rather than the grand design and spatial representation. It can also be concluded that the potential users and the social activities happened at the square is even important for newly built urban squares in terms of shaping their identity. The universal design strategies for large scale urban square could be reviewed and adjusted following a more comprehensive analysis of surrounding environment.

According to the definition of urban square in China, urban square refers to the public space that is mainly built for gathering, memorial and recreational events. However, the findings indicate that the recreational function of urban square is usually sacrificed to the use of gathering and memorial events in terms of dimension and provision of facilities. However, people tend to develop their preferred activities according the space available. The responses from many users suggested that a lack of recreational facilities have prevented them from coming and using the urban square. And on the other side, most of the activities observed on site, such as square dancing and roller skating, are not designed or expected at the time of design. These activities have taken advantages of the large flat space at the square and are popular among users. The responses from on-site interviews also confirm that people are more than willing to take part in more outdoor activities at public urban squares, however the range of activities are often restricted due to lack of facilities. At Chaotianmen Square, the spontaneous street market has prospered along the access to the place, which not only attracts visitors but also provides vivid atmosphere to the tourists with an authentic sense of local life.

- **Connectivity and accessibility**

The analysis of the findings suggests that the distance between a place and people's daily routine is crucial in terms of determining its role and how people use and perceive it. Although the connections between different localities and nations have intensified dramatically over recent years, most of the people still lead intensely local lives. Geographers have suggested that people tend to have a fairly restricted

activity space and do not venture far from home as a result of their day-to-day activities (Golledge & Stimson, 1997).

It is noted that an individual's activity space is dominated by movement to and from regular activity locations such as the journey to work, to the shops and so on. In this sense, the difference is significant among the three squares, especially Chaotianmen Square, since the other two - People's Square and Jinyun Square - are sitting in the centre of the area and close to residential neighbourhoods. Thus they inevitably became the transit spots for the people passing by and living in the area. Most of the regular users confirm that they have taken advantage of the proximity to come to the square frequently, the repeated activity of coming to a particular space resulted in an increased attachment, thus, a few of them still keep coming to the square after they have moved to other areas. There is also a considerable number of people regularly stopping in the square for lunch and to take a break during the day. Chaotianmen Square, however, is relatively isolated from the residential centres. Its location at the confluence of two rivers makes it more like a destination rather than a transition place given that the journey will stop at the square. Chaotianmen Square lacks the possibility for people to visit without a particular reason and develop potential activities. Apart from its background, Chaotianmen Square is the most famous among the three, thus it is able to attract visitors from a wider range of areas across the country.

- **Motivation**

The construction of symbolic images of the urban square has attracted great attention, along with other city branding strategies, such as tourism promotion. In a modern society with a high level of mobility and the prevalence of the internet, the picturesque image of landmark projects such as Chaotianmen Square gains its reputation as a symbol of the city more easily. Many visitors coming to Chaotianmen Square and People's Square are recommended by online tour guides or friends to see the most typical view of Chongqing at these squares. The spatial form impresses visitors with the grand views and most of them would appreciate the physical environment in terms of the clear image it establishes. Nevertheless, it is more likely for them to discover a lack of uniqueness as compared with the squares in other cities. Only a few of the characteristics - such as differences in the planting species, levels and topography - would be noticed by tourists to identify the place as being in Chongqing.

As can be seen from the production process of urban squares, the Chinese government has made great efforts to achieve a distinct city image through the construction of urban spaces. The ideal city image which projects an attractive and promising vision in terms of both the social and economic environment is to be delivered. As Friedman (2007) argues, although the representational meaning of landmark architecture stands as a symbol of the city as a whole, it is more of a way of branding the city rather than a demonstration of place identity. Unlike landmarks, places cannot be designed. Visitors are usually attracted to the square with expectations already developed, which requires their imagination to picture what it will be like to live there when they arrive at the place. Genuine urban places usually

have a distinctive characteristic that is unique and shaped by being lived in because the meaning of a place is acquired by developing its own pattern and rhythm of life.

The same image that has been purposely built by the local government can also be noticed by local users, and they usually share the similar comments with visitors regarding their impression of the square. However, local residents tend to develop emotional feelings such as 'proud' towards the place at the same time, which is more associated with their personal life and emotional attachment to the city rather than the symbolic form itself. Tourists' lack of opportunity for diverse activities and the relatively short time they spend at the sites prevent them from developing emotional bonds with the space. The subjective aspect of place identity is usually related to the degree of engagement people may have experienced with the space.

The planning system in China indicates that the government played decisive roles in determining the physical form of the city - its layout and most of the infrastructure projects - by providing final approval for the city master plan. Once the urban square was built, the local landscape department would regulate and manage the uses through which the activities and life on the space are largely affected. During the fieldwork, notice boards could be found at the squares indicating the rules and suggestions for using the space. An interview with one of the officials confirmed that these notices are not usually fixed and change with time in accordance to the actual use situation and specific concerns regarding certain events and public opinions. As a result, these regulations not only influenced the use patterns on the square but also reflected a sense of continuity in social uses.

The activities on the square varied over time, and usually took the form of group activities which can also be traced to the pre-reform era when people's leisure life was largely restricted by the political movement and only organized group activities were encouraged. During the early years of the socialist era, the country embraced socialism in almost every aspect - especially collectivism - by encouraging formality and group activities. After the revitalization of public social life, people are able to perceive and evaluate the place according to the activities and whether the environment has met their needs, which is usually influenced by an individual's experience and background. Coming to squares becomes part of many local residents' daily routine which fosters more positive attitudes towards the space regardless of the problems that may have occurred during their daily visits.

With the increasing use of urban squares, people have developed their own patterns and habits within their everyday life. Spontaneous activities that are found along the road around Chaotianmen Square are examples of people taking advantage of the location. They have transformed the place into a temporary market with stalls and street performers. The relatively quieter area of the sightseeing platform in Chaotianmen Square, as compared to the busy waterfront, implies that the spatial form is essential in facilitating the activities. This is because the inappropriate scale sometimes prevented people from gathering and reduced the vitality of the place. The adaptation of uses could happen where it is possible and largely relies on the scale and form of the urban square. The flexibility and possibilities for spontaneous activities, as well as the continuous social changes, add great variety to the identity of a place. This indicates that place-identity can hardly be regarded as merely a static

notion; rather, it is a dynamic social construct that keeps diversifying itself over time and emerging social interactions.

7.3.2 Effects of social interaction

- **Social background in developing perceptions**

The results from the interviews and observation indicate that people's own experience and history with each site can largely influence their perception of the place identity. In this sense, the physical features that reflect individual's specific memory and meaning can help to strengthen this emotional bonds.

The finding show that the view of the Great Hall and the rivers in front Chaotiamen Square usually mean more to local residents than tourists. The locals tend to feel proud in facing the views of the city, while the emotion of tourists can hardly be triggered due to their lack of experience with the city. Tourists tend to focus on their current feeling on site and the aesthetic value of the views. They use more neutral words to describe their perception, the locals are more emotional involved especially when they have long history and experience with the site. However, the exceptions are found when the tourist is from other part of the country where the urban landscape differs a lot from Chongqing. For instance, one of the interviewees coming from Qingdao was much impressed by the ways people use urban square because people in Qingdao usually go to seaside during their leisure time and the defined square space in city centre locations like Chongqing is rarely seen.

There is also a noticeable tendency that women and children are generally more active in the activities at urban square. The majority of people in group dancing is women, and children are mainly accompanied by their mother and grandparents. Young visitors can also been found at square, however they are rarely engaged in any activities rather than sitting and watching. This suggests the potential of providing a wider range of facilities such as sports and entertainment for younger user and the male visitors.

Another form of user interaction is migrant from other cities who has been resident in Chongqing for a certain period of time. They have been working in the city and usually developed quite positive perceptions and attachment to the place. As one of the largest cities in China, Chongqing has witnessed a significant rise in migrant workers with its rapid urban development within recent decades. Public space provides opportunities for social interaction and social inclusion in this sense, the interview results also shown that migrants prefer to socialize with other migrant users in public space. Urban square helps them to develop and sustain the social bonds, the opportunity to interact with people from similar background represent social inclusion and improve their sense of belonging to the place.

- **Everyday life**

People's everyday movements in or between places differ according to social and physical characteristics. In this regard, different people would experience the same place in different ways according to their knowledge of that place. This leads to the argument advanced by Lefebvre that it was in the realm of 'the everyday' that the

pervasive effects of capitalism could be observed (Lefebvre, 1991b). The role of the place is embedded in the everyday life that is routinely experienced by people, and determined by their social backgrounds.

From the use pattern observed at the three urban squares, it can be concluded that the frequency and routine uses of the space contribute most to the accumulation of people's attachment with the place regardless of the length of time they spend on each visit. This is better illustrated by the People's Square where a wider range of visitors gathered and provided various examples of their use-habits and how these have affected their perception of the place. The visitors who have been coming to People's Square regularly over the past years tend to spend hours in the square and it has become part of their daily life by fulfilling their specific needs. There are also people coming to the square because it is close to their workplace, and they usually stop for lunch or a break. Although the time they spent at the square is relatively shorter than other regulars, the place is also important to them because it is associated with a particular period of time. The common ground among these users is that they usually follow a regular pattern, which allows the attachment to be developed over repeated uses. However, there are still subtle differences between these two groups in terms of the degree of attachment they developed. The experience of the former group of regular users depends on the level of satisfaction and whether the place has met their needs. Meanwhile, the emotional ties between the latter groups of users and the place are much determined by the repeated uses which make the place special and meaningful to them rather than the specific function it provided.

Everyday life usually refers to the activities occurring at the place, for the travellers who come to the square for the attraction, the lifestyle and activities presented by other users become 'part of the scene' indicating the identity of the place. According to the interviewees on People's Square, the lively atmosphere created by local users impresses many tourists for delivering a sense of 'real life'. They believe it to be more authentic and pervasive than any man-made construction. For tourists who are new to an environment, the need for them to understand the local culture usually arises immediately because it will provide a context for them to identify themselves according to the behaviours and interpretations they developed. People-watching is a quick and sometimes subconscious way for them to get involved and gather information in order to be socially responsive. For the tourists who are not aware of the local residents gathering in the corner of People's Square, the place merely remains the site of attractions such as museums and locations. The interviews with them reveal that they develop fewer emotional bonds with the place than the other tourists who have observed and been impressed by the local life around the square.

There are various types of stations that exist in a person's daily life path and they are not just merely locations but are places which are occupied, experienced and changed by human beings. In short, their identities are negotiated amidst the complex personal and social interactions that occur there. The social activities presented in the square enabled tourists to develop a sense of engagement with the environment even though they do not necessarily have a social interaction with the place.

Conceptualization of space as a simple container for human action, and as static and abstract, leads to the notion of place as being predetermined and unchanging, and the whole identity can be altered by external forces. But in fact, if space is conceptualized as a social process, 'an ever changing geometry of power and significance' (Massey, 1994) constantly produced and transformed through everyday practices, the impossibility of places becoming uniform and losing their uniqueness becomes obvious (Lefebvre, 1991). The impact of globalization can be seen as stimulating the revalidation and reconstitution of place, identity and differences.

From a phenomenological perspective, the concept of place identity is associated with the subjective feelings people develop towards a place. The experience of reality is an experience of meanings (Lalli, 1992). Most frequent-users not only see the urban square as a symbol of the city, but also an important part of their daily life. The activities and social interactions on the urban square redefine the identity of the place. The attachment to the place increases when people spend more time at the place and more positive experiences and memories are developed. However, when people identify themselves as citizens of Chongqing, it is easier for them to realize the underlying connection between themselves and the square. And in this case, the development of attachment does not necessarily require the frequent uses needed by visitors from other cities. The interview results in this research also reveal that the regular users living in the neighbourhood tend to identify themselves both at the larger level of the city and the smaller level of the neighbourhood. During this process, the symbolic meaning of the physical form is usually not the most important concern for local regular users, rather, the experience and involvement with the environment makes the greater contribution to establishing the emotional bonds. For

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many residents, the regular pattern of rituals of life would generate a sense of comfort, security and stability. The encounters with friends and neighbours fulfilled their social needs and, along with the associated memories, contribute greatly to their attachment to the place.

The conflicts between the physical form and emerging activities were noticed from the fieldwork in the three case-study squares. It is suggested that, with the increasing public activities, the previous typology of urban squares is challenged for not being able to meet a variety of needs. Upon becoming aware of the diversified social needs, planners and users started to reconsider the functions and roles of urban squares and seek for possible solutions. The issue was brought up by one of the urban planners during the interview, who suggested that the extraordinary scale of the current urban square seems problematic in terms of accommodating various activities. The changing lifestyle of urban residents requires the public space to be on a smaller scale while being located within densely residential neighbourhoods in order to increase the accessibility and opportunities for a wider range of activities.

7.4   Recommendations for developing place identity

7.4.1   The reconstitution of the concepts in the Chinese context

The theoretical exploration of the place-related research and the identified gaps in the Chinese literature suggest the need for Chinese academics to broaden the idea of place-identity by introducing its various dimensions, especially the social

significance of affecting people's perception, ways of living and experiences of the city.

- **Theoretical understanding**

Urban design is a form of socio-spatial knowledge that links the sciences of probability, adaptation and complexity (Dovey & Pafka, 2016). It is based on the detailed observation of city life and form. The unfolding definition of place identity, especially the more inclusive understanding referred in this research, is a sum of all the affective and representative meanings of the place as experienced and perceived by the people. As discussed in the previous chapters, there is a myriad of theories explaining how the identity of place was constructed. Nevertheless, the high level of consensus found in the literature is that the notion always has two facets, namely, the tangible and intangible aspects of the place, which indicates that its meaning rests on more than just physical settings.

Current practice of creating place identity in Chinese urban squares has been seen as the process of creating symbolic physical forms and constructs; the identity of a place was primarily delivered through the urban images it created. The intangible elements of the place that involve public activities and the emotional bonds people may have developed through their uses have been less considered. The in-depth investigation of three urban squares in this research revealed that the participants were developing a unique sense of place and interpretations out of their own experience, which was responsive and unpredictable, as opposed to the

representational meanings and political ambitions that have been purposely delivered by the designers and planners.

The investigation of the urban development in Chinese cities has suggested that the similar urban appearance and loss of identity in current Chinese cities could be ascribed to the dominant spatial design principles derived from an ancient imperial society and the overarching planning ideology. However, observation of the social transition also implies that the diversified role of the urban square as serving both social needs and political objectives is being reshaped, as well as the people-place relationship. The social value of the urban square, which has its roots in the local culture and everyday life, is to be emphasized and encouraged as an alternative way of embodying a sense of locality and uniqueness.

The establishment of place identity should not be seen as merely political goals for building an ideal urban environment, the broader understanding of place identity that is closely associated with the people's experience and emotional feelings should receive more emphasis by urban planners, designers and government officials in China. There is also the need to enrich the notion of the urban square as perceived in the past; it can be rendered more inclusive, engaging and open through the use of social activities. This is most evident according to the findings of the case studies which show that the lack of attractions and activities has distracted people from using and appreciating the space. As a result, people tend to develop fewer positive feelings and emotional connections that will constitute the meaning and identity of the place.

Given an awareness of the affective dimension of the urban square, it is necessary to reconsider the design principles conventionally adopted in practice that were mainly focused on symbolism. The comprehensive plan for urban square development at the city and regional level could be produced with regards to its emerging social needs. Since many of the urban squares built previously were isolated from the rest of the urban context, seemingly detached from its surroundings, the future distribution of urban squares is suggested to be decentralized and built on much smaller scales while being located within the densely urban realm to allow easy access by the residents. The important spatial configurations that facilitate people's movement could be referred in terms of encouraging public activities, which will foster positive feelings towards the space. Even though much of the human-oriented design guidance learnt from western urban designers was widely recognized by Chinese designers, the links between human behaviour and the psychological process that generates the identity of the place are not well understood. The primary way of delivering a sense of identity has been largely built upon the construction of the urban square on a grand scale to achieve the thematic image. However, such a scale was considered less appropriate for human activities and criticized by many users and designers for preventing a variety of uses according to the findings of this research.

The interactions between people contribute significantly to the participants' sense of place and understanding of identity, the appropriate social distance should be created in order to facilitate the communication between different groups. In this sense, the various spatial forms could also be encouraged in terms of increasing the opportunities for social interactions at different levels and scales. It ensures the

separate area for different types of activities thus reducing the potential conflicts between groups which can currently be found in urban squares.

The exploration of the use patterns on current urban squares discovered that there is great potential for the development of a wider range of activities. One of the most-mentioned disadvantages of using the square is that the place offered few opportunities for activities, while people were enjoying coming to the outdoor space. The leisure life of urban residents has experienced dramatic changes during the last decades, thus required more public space for private activities. The previous design approaches towards urban squares can hardly meet the increasing needs, the form did not follow the function as the role of the urban square has been altered and extended.

The traditional urban form of ancient Chongqing remained influential in the current city; however, it was much neglected in the previous design practices which merely sought an iconic statement. The possibility of re-creating urban spaces that not only reflect the impact of the past, but also the current social environment lies in a closer observation of people's use habits and their changes over time. The links between social interaction and the evolution of place identity were demonstrated through space and time. People tend to develop a higher level of attachment to the place over time and the degree of involvement they have with the place. Meanwhile, how people use the space and the time they spend in it gradually developed over time defined by the specific social and cultural context. As observed from the fieldwork, the emotional feelings that people developed towards place are incremental and can grow rapidly through intensive use and interactions.

Physical attributes of environmental design that focus on the dimensions and human behaviour, have an extensive impact on the way people use and perceive space. The tangible elements of the place-identity influence the intangible elements, which establish themselves through experience. People's interpretation of place constitutes the meaning of it, which is not solely determined by the physical setting and activities, but also by the personal background that sets the context of a given understanding.

The study of the social activities in urban squares indicates that the identity of a place was fostered both on an interpretative and existential level. The identity of the place could be embedded in the interaction between people and place rather than merely delivered through the representation of physical objects. According to the interviews with users, the insertion of cultural elements such as sculpture and memorials has proved to be an efficient way of stimulating people's memories and associated experiences of the past. It would be more impressive by evoking multiple sensations to engender continuing and intensive effects on people. People usually seek to make sense of the outside environment based on their past experience (Rishbeth & Powell, 2013). It is suggested that the use of a mixed combination of vegetation and materials that come from the local area would enhance people's attachment to the familiar environment. The construction of identity is a multi-dimensional task involving a series of landscape elements derived from traditions.

7.4.2   Corresponding changes in ideology and space development

- **Institutional changes**

The ideology of space production has transformed from a socialist collectivism to a market-oriented mentality. The fundamental changes in space development are required after the revitalization of public life. The production of urban public space is no longer a technical issue dealing with physical qualities of space; it represents and delivers the locality through the way people use it. The production of urban squares can no longer been regarded as the construction of a physical object but as the creation of socially responsive spaces. As discussed in the previous section, the social value of an urban square is to be incorporated into a broader understanding of place identity as a central part in the development of an urban square. In order to reinforce the connection between the two and inform future practice with an emphasis on social uses, a framework of planning control regarding urban-square development should be reconsidered and developed. Its aim should be to adjust the role of the urban square from simply being a high profile project pursued by the government into an essential part of the urban environment built to improve people's everyday lives.

In the current process of urban square design, the government's role in the manipulation of the symbolic meaning of place is dominant, as most of these squares are primary incentives to increase economic growth through the concentration of the majority of public resources. However, the overarching power of the local government is suggested to gradually decline in terms of controlling the representation of the urban square after the social transition. The meaning of place can be diversified and realized with less control and political intervention. The

'spontaneous' usage and spatial meanings that are stimulated by everyday life and social practice constitute a significant part of the identity of a place according to the fieldwork on three case-study squares. It indicates the possible departure from the previous conventional space-making to a more flexible approach that involves the active interaction between the diversified interests (Chen, 2010). The investigation into the case study squares shows that although the planners and designers played an active role in the conceiving stage, they were constrained by the institutional role of the government. Key government officials retain the right to make suggestions and the final decision. The planners are sometimes put in a difficult position but have the potential to make the intellectual efforts to achieve the plan that will accommodate various needs whilst recognising spatial design principles.

The creation of the identity of an urban square is a continuing process which develops over time with increasing interactions. The political convention that regards grand urban projects as the government's achievement is being challenged and the practice of treating urban squares as static displays of an idealized image is being questioned. Without the awareness of this continuing process, it is more likely that governors will reshape and recreate the space according to their different visions within a relatively short period of time. Many Chinese cities have seen frequent changeovers of urban squares when their appearances are considered less suitable for the political vision proposed by a new leadership. The interruption in the continuity of urban space usually resulted in disconnections between people and their surroundings by preventing the development of emotional ties.

It is suggested that the urban square projects should receive much more attention and strict planning controls as permanent urban infrastructure that is to serve the urban residents for a long time, rather than one-time beautification projects aiming to attract attention from investors. The neglect of social uses can also lead to many concerns in management and maintenance after its completion, which is most likely to sacrifice the public benefits to the will of the government.

Even though the effort to establish Chinese characteristics and an appreciation of traditional urban form can be found in many urban square designs, the common belief of the professionals is that the traditional monumental space form is based on a superficial understanding of spatial symbolism. However, the over-emphasis on the imperial power derived from ancient Chinese capitals can hardly represent the identity of current Chinese cities. The traditional uses and evolution of urban space in different regions across the country vary within and between the significant topographical and climate zones. The universal spatial order adopted in current urban squares ignores the regional variations and, to some extent, accounts for the failure in delivering a sense of uniqueness to most of the tourists from other cities. The interviews from both People's Square and Chaotianmen Square have confirmed that, for the visitors who have little experience of Chongqing, the identity of the square is mainly expressed through the surrounding architecture or landscape views rather than the spatial form. The formality of the space is no longer seen as a unique local element as it has been a common form that can be seen in other Chinese cities.

The predominant use of a monumental spatial order and grand scales in urban square design brought challenges to the delivery of authentic public space that could be

identified with a particular locale. This research explored the rationale and roles of such spatial principles which have their roots in traditional Chinese culture. The phenomenon was the result of the decades' socio-political transformations, reflecting the collective cultural image of urban public space in China that differentiates itself from its western origins. Further to this general expression of Chinese cultural spaces derived from imperial ideology, the demonstration of locality and the vernacular becomes the key to the future development of urban squares by aiming to deliver distinctiveness. The detailed investigations into local culture and history are essential for discovering the elements that would be considered to regenerate the sense of identity with its meaning embedded in the specific locale rather than general Chinese traditions.

The previous chapters have explained the roots of the iconographic city-marketing strategies from a cultural and political perspective, the 'authentic' public space in traditional Chinese cities can be found by tracking the changes in public life. To establish the identity of a place, broad issues need to be considered apart from thematic image making. These issues are limited neither to form nor natural setting but could have an underlying meaning such as cultural projects, power apparatuses, religious revelations, collective memories and personal fantasies (Castells, 1997; Chen & Thwaites, 2013).

Places are always constructed out of articulations of social relations, which means they are not only inherent to a particular locale but are linked to elsewhere (Massey, 1995). The place and its identity are conceived as elements that are not bounded in a certain locality, but created through social intersections. This perspective for

understanding place implies that not only has the overall planning ideology of space development been adjusted according to the role of the urban square, but that it is possible to produce a sense of identity that has its roots in social life rather than as an external construct detached from the locale. Also, the establishment of place identity has to be an on-going process, requiring continuing commitment and input due to its dynamic nature.

7.4.3   Participation of the general public

The identity of an urban square cannot be totally manipulated by an institutional space-production mechanism. The government's power in controlling the representation of the urban square needs to be adjusted. Although the majority of the users are able to realize the meaning of the symbolic representation and visual orders, it is the everyday social life that has contributed the most to the development of a sense of attachment and identity. The possibility of building a more inclusive and dynamic identity for a space lies in a more lively interaction between the public and government authorities.

The investigation into the process of Chinese urban development has revealed that the urban public space projects in China are directly conducted and participated in by the local government because it has the power to mobilize space and public resources on behalf of the general public. The pre-assumed image of the urban square as conceived by the planners and government officers was produced without reference to public opinion. Although there is a 'public participation' process during the creation of these urban squares by holding public exhibitions and consultations, it

is much different from its western counterparts where the public consultation is regarded as the process of negotiation between various interests.

The social functions have been largely removed from the emphasis on image-making, while the planners' knowledge of space-making and the pursuit of a better environment are not sufficient for them to fully realize the social value of urban space and defining the public interest. Space design has been changed to pay more attention to aesthetic visual quality. The procedure of public consultation has emerged in China but is usually initiated and controlled by the planning department. The public could only access the general information and visual outcomes of the projects after the decision was made. They neither had the opportunity to meet the authorities nor to express their opinions in public. The current public participation process is more like 'informing' rather than 'consulting' the public. In a society where non-governmental organizations and free expression are tightly constrained, it seems quite reasonable that public participation had to be conducted in a more flexible manner.

It is suggested that wider discussions on the issue of representation and urban governance, in which the values of the elite and the dominant power could be reviewed and challenged by an idealized approach to urban space-development should be encouraged. The Chinese planning system should also embrace the procedure of public participation to provide the opportunity for the public to participate in the decision-making of the plan and the space development in a statutory and regular manner. Questionnaires and interviews with the public users

turned out to be a useful means of gaining valuable opinions from individuals, especially regarding the subjective feelings and the perceived space.

7.5   Conclusion

Chinese cities have become similar to cities in advanced capitalist societies. However, they continue to generate urban spaces that differ greatly from those of other societies (Ma and Wu, 2005). This chapter discussed the findings in relation to the research aims and objectives. It explained the distinct use pattern and form of Chinese urban squares, and the remaking of its place identity from the social interaction and traditional legacies.

The rationale behind current space-making strategies for Chinese urban squares has been discussed. These findings explain the persistent role of the state and the dominant planning ideologies that have been influential in space development. The investigations of the social activities and spatial configurations at the case study squares provide insights into the evolving place identity as generated through the interaction between people and place. The distinction between the conceived and perceived space is discussed with regards to the specific social context and changes in public life. It concludes with several recommendations for developing place identity in the future with the recognition of the constraints and challenges facing the practitioners. The following chapter will identify the possible gaps and limitations of this research and how it can make a contribution to both the theoretical and practical fields.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8   Conclusion

8.1   Introduction

This research began with an interest in Chinese urban squares, in particular the pursuit of place identity through the urban space development in Chinese cities. It looks into the evolution and identity of Chinese urban squares under the changing social economic and political context, to understand how the traditional legacy and various factors have influenced the space making strategies. The research conducted case studies at urban squares in Chongqing to investigated people's use of urban square and relevant perception of place identity through the interaction process. It examines the contemporary public life and people-place relationship at urban squares, explores the opportunities for future urban square development that not only accommodates the increasing social needs but also enhances a sense of place identity in Chinese cities.

The key findings will be summarized in relation to the following research aims:

- To explore the evolution and identity of urban square in China;
- To understand the public life and perception of place identity in urban squares of Chongqing;
- To develop recommendations for future urban square development in Chinese cities.

The following sections will discuss the key findings from the perspective of the research aims and explain how these outcomes can be taken forward to provide directions for future work. Upon addressing the research aims of this thesis, this chapter will conclude with the potential gaps and limitations of this research resulting from its methodological approach and theoretical framework.

8.2   Overview of the findings

8.2.1   The nature and production of the Chinese urban square

The development of urban squares in Chinese cities has presented a quite different trajectory from their western counterparts. The most significant characteristic is that it has been mainly driven by political and economic incentives, as well as the social transformation of Chinese society. This helps to understand the production process and underlying meaning of the urban square throughout the urbanization process. Despite its rapid development within recent years, the review of Chinese urban development indicated that the urban square has long been an element that is absent from the urban form. The large area of enclosed space within royal residences and official institutions that resembled the spatial form of the current urban square was much different in its nature since it was inaccessible to the public. The traditional urban space of Chinese society used by the commoners tended to be linear and was usually defined by the streets with family units developed inwards. The walled feature was also significant in helping to create a grid urban form by organizing and dividing spaces into separate units (Miao, 1990; Xu, 2000; Gaubatz, 2008).

The absence of large empty spaces such as urban squares from traditional Chinese cities was mainly considered to be the result of planning ideology widely applied in the construction of ancient cities. Most of the purpose-built cities in ancient China were regional administration centres largely occupied by palaces, ritual temples and government buildings as well as the residences of the social elite. The space-making rules and the philosophy behind them were conceived to enhance the elites' social class and honour the emperor's power over the commoners. As suggested in the ideal city model described in Chapter 2, the orthogonal form was so important that the provision of social or public spaces was neglected or sacrificed to this ultimate goal (Lu, 2006). The political symbolism delivered through the ordering of space and buildings represented the emperor's legitimacy and power. It has shown that the city-making principles of traditional Chinese cities precluded the existence of true public spaces by prioritizing the ruler's status whilst allocating less space for its urban residents. The urban form in China has always been largely determined by the political will rather than being naturally evolved to accommodate the increasing needs of urban dwellers (Broudehoux, 2004). The social or public space was considered unnecessary according to these principles, which explains the absence of urban public space in ancient Chinese cities.

The study of Chinese urban development demonstrates that the space-making strategy strengthened the symmetric and axial form maintained as the main characteristic of Chinese cities. This influence has extended from within the royal residence and general city form in the feudal society to the design of urban space in a highly-centralized socialist society in the early 20th century. The persistent pursuit of political symbolism through urban form suggests that the production of urban public

space was never an issue as important as reinforcing the power of the state. The implication of such space-making rules was to signify the sovereign power whilst simultaneously being adopted as a tool for social control (Chen, 2010).

The role and emphasis of the urban square varies with the transformations in social context and overall political ideology. In a planned socialist society, the urban square was adopted largely as a political instrument to showcase the socialist ideology. After the economic and political reforms, the urban square was used to exalt the government's achievements in improving the urban environment and increasing the city's competitiveness in a market-oriented economic society. Throughout the transitional social changes, the unchanging role of the urban square is that of as a technical tool to guide the development of urban space. Therefore, the representational design approach was favoured in this sense for its efficiency in illustrating political intentions.

The strong connection between urban space and political orientation lies in the powerful hierarchical administrative structure of Chinese cities, which controls the development of urban land and space (Ma, 2002). The Chinese planning system allows the state to manipulate the urban space and facilitates its role as a technical tool. In a society with a market-oriented economy, the urban square has been largely promoted as part of a city's marketing strategy aimed at beautifying the urban environment. The visual and aesthetic value became the main concern for urban square development at this time. This politically-oriented strategy has led to the iconographic guideline which intends to create iconic meanings and appealing images through the urban square. The envisioned image of the urban square signifies

the improved urban environment as a sign of modernization which is believed to deliver an investment-friendly environment (Feuchtwang, 2004; Gaubatz, 2005; Friedman, 2007).

This review of Chinese urban development consistently shows the urban square as the instrumental tool of the government, rather than as a social product that enhances residents' everyday lives. This unchanged ideology of space production led to the unvaried attributes in the development of the urban square (Miao, 2011). Given that the urban public space was not considered necessary in ancient Chinese society, both the space-making principles and institutional structure did not prioritize the development of public space as a feature of social welfare. Even in the late 20th century when the urban square was adopted and promoted as an important element of the urban environment, it lacked any connection with local tradition, which caused difficulties when seeking to understand the meaning of place, possibly because the people's perception of space requires time to allow an incremental development of feelings.

Throughout the space production process, urban planning maintained its role as an instrument through which the government could carry out its political and economic objectives. The planning regulations in China mainly acted to guide the urban space development in terms of controlling the specific features of each type of urban space. The standards for urban planning rely on the requirements set in the planning regulations. The technical quality of the environment has led to a tendency whereby the space development was required to meet the standard therefore the creation of

large-scale urban squares was favoured (Sun, 2006). The diversity and complexity of the urban space can hardly be reflected in the setting of regulations.

An examination of the archives showing the historic development of Chongqing has presented case studies illustrating the contradiction between the spatial form of the urban square and local geographical features. The mountains in the area have traditionally restricted the construction of large areas of space even in ancient times. Similar to other ancient cities in China, Chongqing was characterized from the beginning by the ancient city-making rules with an emphasis on the arrangement of official institutions and residences. Meanwhile, the rest of the city was basically formed and defined by the street network that was running through the hilly landform. Rivers surrounding the peninsula also restricted the expansion of the urban area. The introduction of the urban square in the modern era did not necessarily consider the practical issues of construction work on this scale under quite different topographical conditions. In Chongqing, the current design approach of the urban square often requires the elimination of existing hills to create sufficient flat space, which has then brought a significant transformation to the previous urban landscape.

The review of the recent Chinese academic work discovered that the iconographic space-making strategies have been challenged due to the similar urban appearance they have produced in many Chinese cities. An innovation in the design strategies is demanded to allow the local municipal government to deliver a sense of uniqueness and identity. Although the overarching political ideology and institutional structure still play decisive roles, there are attempts at possible improvements proposed by professionals regarding the delivering of place identity through physical designs. The

cultural symbols featured in the design of sculptures and street furniture were widely found in current urban squares in order to embody the local culture and history. Most recently, the social interactions between people and place are becoming a matter of increasing concern that requires encouragement since they are believed to bring vitality to the space. The findings of the fieldwork in this research confirmed that the satisfaction of users is important in terms of encouraging positive experiences and feelings, which are essential to the construction of the meaning of place. The proper scale and allocation of urban squares and public facilities start to transcend the symbolic representation in the design process by beginning to fulfil a variety of needs.

8.2.2   Public life and the people-place relationship

The historical research has suggested that the people-place relationship in ancient China has been interpreted with reference to Chinese philosophy; the place was created according to the ideal model and written principles to symbolize this relationship (Chen *et al.*, 2013). Unlike western approaches to place-related research that have a focus on the scientific process of the perception construction, traditional Chinese culture perceived this interaction in a rather symbolic and abstract way. The people-place relationship was pre-determined with endowed meaning and identity rather than something that gradually developed over time, and this tradition has significantly influenced the later understanding of urban space.

The discussion on the urban form of traditional Chinese cities suggested that the city construction was initiated by the government while the absence of urban squares did

not mean the loss of public life at that time (Wu, 2005). A series of public activities could still be found in the confined and designated area within the urban space. One could argue that it is the institutional structure that prohibited the diversity of social life by limiting the physical form of urban space. In particular Chinese cities where the urban space development was strictly controlled and determined by the government, spontaneous activities were less likely to manifest themselves under the restrictions. The main urban open space that was accessible to the ordinary people was the street network.

The archive and literature study on the transitions of Chinese public space identified several characteristics of Chinese public life and its evolution throughout history. The first is the separation between political and public uses. The only large and well-defined open spaces in imperial China were the ones in front of official buildings or temple courtyards that mostly resembled European civic squares in terms of spatial form (Xu, 2000). However, they were mainly built for religious or political events with public social activities being excluded. Their 'publicness' was also questioned as they were inaccessible to ordinary people or restricted in terms of the activities that could take place therein. Due to the centralized political system, the urban residents were prevented from sharing local power and even a piece of designated open space (Zhou, 2005). The public activities that were considered necessary for the society, such as commercial and trading business, were only allowed in a designated marketplace, while being forbidden elsewhere. The social interactions between people in their daily life mostly happened within individual residential blocks in family units or in teahouses as opposed to public open space. It is evident that the large open space in traditional Chinese society was much different in nature from the

western urban square; its social value has not been fully established until recent decades. The public social activities were restricted and limited within most of the urban realm. The political implication of a large open space remained dominant for quite a long time.

Public life has experienced dramatic changes with the transitions in the social and political ideology. Social activities usually flourish when the space becomes sufficient or people are freed from the restrictions of using the space (Ye, 2012). Even though the urban space created by the rulers was not necessarily for social uses most of the time, the spontaneous activities could adapt themselves to try to fit into the pre-determined space. This is not only evident from the historical investigation of the evolution of urban form, but also the findings concerning the current uses of urban squares from the fieldwork. The urban squares that were largely built for political purposes are transformed into the place where people can fulfil their social needs of gathering and socializing, when the residents gained free access and use of the space. However, the adaptation of uses is still closely associated with the socio-political environment, which exerts social control over the types of activities. In other words, the historical evolution has shaped people's understanding and leisure patterns, as well as contributed to their perception of the public space.

The use patterns of current urban squares reflect a traditional legacy as highlighted by the historical investigation. The limited range of activities found in urban squares and the lack of use of many urban squares in China suggested that people can find it difficult to develop any activities before they become familiar with the spatial form and the scale of the space. The tendency of using the edge of the square implies the

relevance with the traditional Chinese cities where the urban space was dominated by the street network and the linear form. The meeting and social interactions mainly happened in the teahouse or restaurant (Sit, 1995). Communication between strangers and group activities in a confined public space were not common. Some of the most common activities such as sitting and chatting with each other resembled what was normally found in teahouses in traditional societies. It is not until recent years that group dancing and exercising became popular within urban squares and this could be ascribed to the improvement in the quality of life and the pursuit of a healthier lifestyle.

The spontaneous usages and spatial meaning can be stimulated by, and arise from, everyday social practices. The findings confirmed that 'place' is essentially a social product that acquires its meaning largely from human interpretation and experience. The local residents perceive the square in a more positive way because of their emotional connection with the city. Tourists' opinions varied according to the individual's experience and whether the square they visited had met their expectations. The distinctions in the physical settings and cultural representations as compared to their hometown were the most evident thing for tourists to notice. Meanwhile, the local residents tend to associate their perception of the square with the overall experience, which largely depended on the time and degree of involvement they have with the space.

Physical attributes facilitate the behaviour and are able to generate positive attachment to the space through repeated uses. The memories and associations the place evokes permanently change the face of the place in which they occur. The

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importance of the physical environment not only lies in the representational meaning it embodies, but, more importantly, in the positive experience and memories with which it is associated. This research revealed the importance of human experience in the process of meaning construction and identity establishment.

The gap between the emergence of the urban square and the continuity in traditional urban form created confusion in the interpretation and the perception of the place. It is the adaptation of uses and the time for this to evolve in everyday life that reconstructs this connection between people and place. Public life contributes greatly to the establishment of place identity by creating a bond of experience that incorporates both cultural and physical impacts. The findings of the research bring out the importance of social interaction, something that has been largely neglected by the previous design practices.

8.2.3   Recommendations for future development

The findings from this research contribute to the theoretical reconstitution of the place identity concept in China, essentially the people-place relation through which people endow value to the place. The results of the case studies confirmed the importance of the key components of place identity as identified in the literature review. There is a need for Chinese designers and planners to recognize these attributes and enhance their theoretical knowledge in order to better address the social concerns encountered. This could be improved by introducing more research programmes with a focus on the social value, meaning and perception of public open space to university and other landscape institutes. The new generation of landscape

architects and urban designers should be aware of the newly-formed use patterns in current urban squares, especially their relevance with the traditional lifestyle of local residents, so that they can deliver better quality public spaces through their awareness of enhanced experience. The creation of space should not be treated as the creation of representations, but as a social container that is responsive to the ever changing social environment and human perception.

Regarding the increasing interest in the identity crisis, the discourse on the subject has encouraged Chinese scholars to incorporate a comprehensive understanding of place in order to provide diverse and flexible space-making strategies that would generate a wider range of public social experience. In particular, the social and personal dimensions, which have greatly influenced the meaning-construction process, should receive more attention throughout the decision-making process.

The changing role of the urban square should be reconsidered with regards to the emerging use pattern and perceptions. It is also important for both governors and developers to enrich the rather superficial understanding of the urban square as merely a physical object symbolizing their intentions. The theoretical exploration and observation from the actual sites have confirmed that social interaction and experience are both significant factors that help generate a sense of identity. It is suggested that the identity of the place was dissolved once introduced into the urban landscape by human perception and uses, the envisaged identity would be re-created with the time.

The findings established the predominant role of the state in the politically-orientated space development. The persistent power structure challenges the innovative and creative work of designers and planners who are seeking to accommodate a variety of needs. It is suggested that the traditional legacies should be preserved, not only in terms of cultural symbols and conventional rules, but also the everyday use patterns. Because the emotional bonds manifested themselves based on the intensive interaction between people and place, the activities that are related with the cultural attributes can facilitate the establishment of emotional bonds which people develop with place by recalling memories and generating positive interpretations.

The future policy and strategic decision-making at local and national levels regarding the urban square development could be improved according to some of the findings in this research. There is the need for a better collaboration between different sectors within the government and planning institutions in order to improve the social benefits. The systematic plan of urban square development covering its scale, distribution and typology from the city level could be introduced as a supplement to the city master plans. The plan will take into consideration the local social needs and use patterns as suggested in this research or further research in this area. The design of the space should also integrate the surrounding environment, which not only fulfils social needs but also preserves the urban form.

This research could contribute to improved decision making by the municipal governments by encouraging the users to share their opinions and experiences. Although the overarching influence of the government in determining the form of the space can hardly be changed in the near future, the users' responses could provide

valuable information to designers and planners in order to identify the social needs. The provision of a variety of facilities, separation of spaces are possible solutions for current large scale urban squares without the thorough changes to its overall spatial form. Urban squares at smaller scales could also be introduced more to the urban environment apart from the ones with strong political representation, to meet different needs of urban residents.

8.3   Final reflection for future work

8.3.1   Contribution of this research

This research was informed by a number of previous studies on 'place' from a western context, and explored its relevance to the understanding of the urban square in China. It drew upon a wider range of place-related research from various disciplines and identified essential components throughout the process of identity establishment. The relatively systematic review work on 'place identity' brought new ideas and perspectives to the Chinese academic field regarding the people-place relationship, and filled the theoretical gap within the discourse of place identity. It explored the feasibility and relevance of previous research within a Chinese context, by examining the historical development of urban form and the institutional structure underpinning space-production in China.

This research provided theoretical foundations for the development of the idea of place identity in Chinese academic studies and raised the need to reconstitute the concept. The findings from case studies also contribute to the knowledge of the use

patterns and people's perception of place identity in the specific Chinese context. This is important for the future design practice and space development strategies in responding to the increasing social needs. It provides potential areas to explore the alternative approaches in terms of delivering a sense of identity through the urban square.

This research also provided valuable insights into space production in the Chinese context by integrating historical and archive work to investigate the influence of China's traditional legacy as well as its socio-political transitions. The investigation into the development trajectory of Chinese urban form recognized the 'changed' and 'unchanged' aspects of the Chinese urban square. It recognized the impact of the state-led urban development and the economic and political incentives in influencing the spatial form of the urban square. The site survey and interviews conducted on site provided useful information on how people in Chongqing use and perceive the space. The findings identified the impact and interrelations of the three essential components - physical environment, personal experience and social interactions - in the process of generating a sense of identity within the Chinese context. The fieldwork provided rich evidence, especially in the latter two aspects, in terms of their significant roles in redefining people-place relationships.

8.3.2   Methodological limitations

The methodological approach in this research was informed by the phenomenological studies in place-related research, which proved to be efficient in terms of accessing the actual experiences of users. The methods of mapping and

sketches are used to record and illustrate the result of on-site observation, with reference to relevant spatial features. These visual methods are widely used in the field of landscape design and research, as they can provide a deeper understanding of a space's recreational potential and qualities by interpreting the result according to background information (Lindholst et al.; 2015). Archive and historical document review adopted in this research helped to explore the socio-political motivation as well as the links between traditional legacy and current perceptions.

However, the sites chosen for the case study are limited and only represent a spectrum of opinions or activities. A wider range of phenomenological research could be conducted in order to provide in-depth data. The pattern of uses is largely depended on the specific local cultural and geographical context, the findings from the observation in Chongqing urban square may not be totally applied to other Chinese cities. The difference between the responses from local residents and tourists also suggested potential gaps between the perception of place due to various social background. On the other side, the quantitative methods could be further explored and conducted in the Chinese context to evaluate the subjective feelings, as opposed to the qualitative data of descriptive accounts linking to the social and cultural rationale of interpretation. However, the results will provide valuable insights regarding the similarities in general Chinese context and possibilities for improved methodological approaches.

Although the on-site interview used in this research has provided valuable responses and contributed to the thoughts on place identity, the clarity of questions and interview purpose still encountered difficulties throughout the process due to the

complexity of the concept under investigation. It is worth exploring other approaches that would achieve better communication with interviewees. The interviews with practitioners in this research are mainly used to provide additional information on the case study sites, their experience in the design process is also consulted. However, their insights into wider issues of urban environment design not been fully explored due to the limitation of time. With further adjustment of interview questions, some of the practical issues raised during the professional interview could be elaborated and contribute to the recommendations for future urban square development. In particular, how these recommendations could be implemented through design process with regards to the changing social political environment in Chinese cities.

8.3.3   Future direction for research

Upon the awareness of the social roles of the Chinese urban square, future research might explore the area of people-place relationship from multiple perspectives, especially within the Chinese context. Because public social life is never static but keeps changing with the transformation of the urban socio-political environment, the dynamic use patterns of urban space bring the need for both academics and professionals to reconsider the previous interpretation of place identity. A rather comprehensive theoretical framework regarding the people-place relations would help to inform the design approaches in order to establish a sense of identity while accommodating the increasing needs of social uses.

The urban squares chosen for this research were mostly built in the late 20th century, representing the planning and political ideology at that time. The previous

approaches have led to a series of problems and conflicts among users, and these concerns have been noticed by many practitioners and scholars according to the professional interviews. Although there are attempts at a subtle improvement in recent years in order to address the rising concerns, their efficiency remains to be examined, which offers opportunities for future case-study-based research programmes. Although this research has mainly focused on how the political oriented urban squares are adapted to the increasing social uses, similar changes could occur in other types of urban public space due to the rapid urban development in recent years. The findings from this research could benefit future research with regards to the changing social roles of urban public space in other Chinese cities as well. Furthermore, there is potential scope to explore the role of urban square by developing a typological mapping of urban squares in case study city. This could provide further insights into how the identity and use of urban square vary with their location, size and form from a citywide perspective, which has not been fully addressed in this research within the given time frame.

This research has provided a great opportunity for the researcher to explore an interesting field and yielded a great amount of information. Through the process, the research questions have been refined and better understood. The on-site field survey has identified several dominant activities and groups of users, as well as people's increasing needs for public space in relation to their various social background. The specific recommendations for improving urban square regarding different social groups is not fully discussed in this research, this could be addressed in future research with a focus of space design in order to explore the potential of providing a wider range of public facilities to meet the diverse needs.

Appendices

Appendices

Appendix A: On-site interview questions (Local)

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<u>On-site interview (Local)</u>

<u>Phase 1: Personal experience</u>

1. What do you usually do in the square?

2. Where and how long do you usually stay?

3. Why did you choose here?

4. How often do you use this square?

5. What's the impact of coming to this square on your daily life?

6. Have there been pleasures and difficulties using this square?

7. Is there other place/square you used to go for the same purpose other than this square?

    - Why did you choose it and what did you do?
    - How much time did you spend there?

<u>Phase 2: Perception on the place</u>

1. What do you like most / least about this square?

2. Can you describe specific events or activities that are unique to this square?

    - Are there physical characteristics of this square that facilitate it happening here?

3. Could the design of this square be improved to encourage people to gather and use the square?

4. Do you feel any connection with the square and how would you describe this connection?

    - Is this connection based on any experience you have had in this square?

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Phase 3: Relating place identity

1. How would you describe this square to a friend who has never been here?

2. What are all the important features of this square that would help them understand the place where you've been?

3. Do you think this square is different than the ones in another city and why?

   • If so, which characters (physical or social) make it different?
   • Do these features lead to a certain experience you had in this square?

4. Would you identify this square as one in Chongqing?
   • If so, what are the main attributes of the square that make it unique to the city?
   • Are they related to any of your personal experience with the square?
   • If not, where would you identify it?

5. Which square do you think is the most typical for the city Chongqing?

Appendix B: On-site interview questions (Tourist)

<u>**On-site interview (Tourist)**</u>

<u>Phase 1: Personal experience</u>

1. Where are you from and how long have you been in Chongqing?

2. Why did you choose here?

3. Have there been pleasures and difficulties using this square?

<u>Phase 2: Perception on the place</u>

1. What do you like most / least about this square?

2. Have you been to other square in Chongqing and how do you describe the difference?

3. Can you describe specific events or activities that are unique to this square?

   • Are there physical characteristics of this square that facilitate it happening here?

4. Could the design of this square be improved to encourage people to gather and use the square?

5. Do you feel any connection with the square and how would you describe this connection?

   • Is this connection based on any experience you have had in this square?

Phase 3: Relating place identity

1. How would you describe this square to a friend who has never been here?

2. What are all the important features of this square that would help them understand the place where you've been?

3. Do you think this square is different than the ones in another city and why?

   - If so, which characters (physical or social) make it different?
   - Do these features lead to a certain experience you had in this square?

4. Would you identify this square as one in Chongqing?

   - If so, what are the main attributes of the square that make it unique to the city?
   - Are they related to any of your personal experience with the square?
   - If not, where would you identify it?

5. Which square do you think is the most typical for the city Chongqing?

Appendix C: Professional interview questions

Theme 1: Understanding towards the concept of place identity

- How do you understand the term?

- How do you think the importance and roles of place identity?

- What elements within public open space do you think constitute place identity?

Theme 2: Understanding of the role and quality of urban square

- What do you think are the functions or roles of urban square?

- How do you think of the needs and perception of urban square users?

Theme 3: Thoughts on the place identity crisis related to urban square

- Do you think the current Chinese urban square is detached from local context?

- How do you think of the actual use and perception of urban squares?

- How do you understand the relationship between place identity and urban square?

Theme 4: Local authorities' roles in urban square design and goals

- Which organizations are involved in the urban square design?

- What are your department's responsibilities in the process?

- What is the relationship between your role with other organization?

- In what way does your authority work with other organization?

- What are the key roles during the whole process?

- Is there a place identity been decided through the process? Could you identify any examples?

Theme 5: Problems and limitations

- How do you think of the policies promoting urban squares?
- What do you think of the gaps between intention and reality?
- What do you think are the problems of current urban square in terms of place identity crisis?
- What do you think are the causes of this phenomenon?

Theme 6: Future and solutions

- In what way could the situation be improved?
- Are there good examples?
- Has the problem been recognised in your department?
- Is there any policies or plans focus on place identity of urban square?
- How do you think of the development and transformation of place identity of urban square in the future?

Appendix D: Information sheet (For professional interviews)

1.   Research Project Title:
The challenge of place identity in the making and experience of new Chinese urban squares

2.   Invitation paragraph
You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

3.   What is the project's purpose?
The aim of the project is to address how urban square in China has been shaped through time, and developed to accommodate growing urban needs whilst generating a sense of distinctiveness as an outcome of the interplay between government encroachment, local commoner and other factors.

4. Why have I been chosen?
You have been chosen to participate because your experience and opinions will provide useful information and insights into the roles of urban square and the development of its place identity through design practice in a Chinese context.

5.   Do I have to take part?
It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to in any way. You do not have to give a reason.

6.   What will happen to me if I take part?
You will be asked questions about your practice or academic experience regarding the design and management concerns, social and physical boundaries of urban square design practice regarding the place identity issues. Your participation will take about 30-60 minutes.

7.   Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?
You will not be recorded however the notes will be taken during the interview and all personal data will be stored and password protected in computer within the research project.

8. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
We don't anticipate any disadvantages to taking part.

9. What are the possible benefits of taking part?
Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, your participation will be the important data to this research.

10. What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?
If this is the case, all the data that you provided will not be used. Data will not be accessed by others if the research study stops.

11. What if something goes wrong?
If you have any complaints or concerns please contact the project researcher or supervisor using the contact details given at the end.

12. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?
All your personal data will be safely stored and only accessed by research and kept within this research project.

13. What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this

information relevant for achieving the research project's objectives?
Your experience and insights into the urban square development will adds to the understanding of the nature of place identity in a modern Chinese context. Together with other research methods, it is to provide primary data and evidence of the current situation and roles of urban square in terms of delivering a sense of place identity, which will add more dimensions to the identity crisis issues under investigation.

14. What will happen to the results of the research project?
The results of this project will be analyzed and discussed in the researcher's PhD thesis at the University of Sheffield. Part of the thesis may be used in subsequent research publications, research talks. Participants will not be identified in any report or publication.

15. Who is organising and funding the research?
The research is a self-funded PhD research project by Qin Xu, student of Landscape Department, the University of Sheffield.

16. Who has ethically reviewed the project?
This project has been ethically approved via the Landscape department's ethics review procedure. The University's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

17. Contact for further information
If you require any further information please contact:

Qin Xu, PhD Student, Department of Landscape, University of Sheffield, Floor 9, The Arts Tower, Western Bank, Sheffield, S10 2TN
Email: arp12qx@sheffield.ac.uk
Telephone: 0044(0)7749402830

Finally …
You will be given a copy of the information sheet and, if required, a signed consent form to keep.

<p style="text-align:center;color:#1CA8DD;">- Thank you for your participation in this project -</p>

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