

Tianyuan Dushi (田園都市): The Garden City, Urban Planning, and Visions of Modernization in Early-Twentieth-Century China

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This article examines how the garden city idea was introduced to China in the early twentieth century and subsequently promoted by Chinese intellectuals and urban administrators as a means to promote urban improvement, economic development, and nation-building. While the grand planning visions conceptualized in this period remained largely on paper, many aspects of the garden city were selectively adapted by philanthropic organizations and real estate developers as “model settlements” that exemplified the norms of a “civilized society.” By examining the multiple interpretations of the garden city and its limited realization on Chinese soil, the article illustrates how a foreign planning concept was disseminated in a non-Western context. It also explores the specific ways in which this concept interacted with existing discourses about the city, the countryside, and the roles of the state and citizens in the construction of competing visions of the urban future.

The depressed states of Chinese cities and countryside today have become a national disease. The only salvation lies in the development of garden cities.

— Butao (1934)¹

The building of garden cities must begin in earnest in order to make our cities more perfect. This will help advance our cultural development and increase our national strength.

— Yu Jinhong (1937)²

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The endless urban expansion and polarization of the city and the countryside today have pushed individuals to become more selfish. . . . The common good cannot be protected without a balanced “town-country system” that enables real social progress.

— Jin Jingyuan (1998)³

In an article entitled “Research on the Garden City” that appeared in the architectural journal *Xinjianzhu* in 1937, the author Yu Jinhong made a forceful call for China to follow in the footsteps of Europe and America by building hundreds of garden cities, or *tianyuan dushi*. It was a step he saw as necessary both to resolve growing problems in Chinese cities and bring much-needed reform to the countryside.⁴ Addressing these twin measures, Yu argued, would help redirect China toward a more productive economy and advance its cultural development, as in the West.

Yu advanced his thesis by referring to England, where the garden city idea had originated, and asserted that the emergence of the concept there and its subsequent development into a worldwide planning movement was by no means an accident, but rather a historical necessity. As the first industrial nation in the world, Yu noted, England was also the first to experience unprecedented population growth, leading both to urban malaise in its cities and the decline of its rural agricultural economy. In this context, the garden city had emerged as a compelling solution because it combined the best aspects of the city and the countryside. Thus could the immorality of city life and backwardness of village life in China be cancelled out, bringing nature into the city and modern conveniences into the countryside and enabling real progress and lasting happiness for all.⁵

Yu’s article was one among many touching on similar themes published in Republican China beginning in the late 1900s, when the idea of the garden city as conceptualized by Ebenezer Howard was first introduced to China via news articles and translated texts.⁶ In the decades that followed numerous studies, manifestos, and policy initiatives, framed as “garden city developments,” appeared in academic and professional journals, advocating the urgent adoption of the garden city as a planning model to modernize the Chinese nation (FIG. 1). While the grand utopian visions proposed in the period remained mostly on paper, aspects of the garden city were selectively adapted in a number of “model settlements” initiated by philanthropic organizations and real estate developers. And, despite the disuse of the term under Communist rule because of its association with the pro-Western urban reform of the Republican era, many physical features of the garden city, such as the provision of a healthy environment, the organization of communal living, and the design of collective public spaces, were carried over in “new village” developments that began to appear in China in the 1950s.

This article, which belongs to a longer-term research effort exploring the production of knowledge in built-environ-

ment disciplines in twentieth-century China, examines how the garden city was promoted in the Republican period as a model for economic development and nation-building. While the advent of the garden city movement in other parts of the world has been well documented in planning literature, there has been no systematic inquiry to date on its trajectories in China, despite the widespread interest in it there and debates over its application. It is argued here that an effort to revisit the Chinese writings during this period will improve understanding not only of the dissemination of a key foreign planning concept in the Chinese context, but also the specific ways in which it interacted with existing discourses about the city, the countryside, and the roles of the state and citizens in development. As elsewhere, the persuasive power of the garden city lay not only in addressing potent issues of urbanization, but also in its openness to appropriation, enabling disparate adherents to project their desired, and often highly varied, forms of settlement into its future without diluting a stated commitment to modernization and social betterment.⁷ This inherent flexibility enabled the garden city concept to adapt to different geopolitical contexts, and is one of the reasons for its ongoing appeal. This study is thus also intended to prompt critical reflection on contemporary reappraisals of the theory in China and how particular assumptions about the role of cities and the urban-rural relationship have been reformulated to support ongoing nationalist development.

The following sections examine these dynamics by tracing how garden city theory was rearticulated by Chinese writers in academic and popular texts between the 1910s and 1930s. Social commentators at this time tended to frame the problems of Chinese cities as part of larger changes to an urban-rural system that accelerated after the Opium War.⁸ These critiques were dominated by concerns of “national salvation,” with the central question being how to overcome the “Western imposition” and engage with development as a transitive process through which China could speed up its development and rise to the status of an advanced modern nation.⁹ A preoccupation with the problems of urbanization also led intellectuals to adopt particular perspectives based on their own urban experiences. This ranged from those who urged that modernity and urban civilization be brought to the provincial towns and villages that, for them, epitomized China’s backwardness, to others who decried the concentration of wealth and power in cities and contrasted this to uncorrupted “village life” in the countryside.¹⁰ These presuppositions and their associated moral claims played a significant role in the conception of specific social visions and planning strategies for achieving them. Despite their divergent political views, intellectuals, government officials, and other development agents invariably embraced the garden city’s technical rationality and polemical views about the need to create a better future. In the process, they also created new sets of cultural vocabularies and aesthetic standards that would become attractive to middle-class urbanites aspiring to live a more comfortable life away from the congested city.

FIGURE 1. A Partial List of Chinese Publications on the Garden City (1908–1939).

Year	Title of Article / Text	Author	Journal / Publisher
1908	田園都市制度 Tianyuan Dushi Zhidu [The Garden City System]	劉石蓀 Liu Shisun	時報 <i>Shibao</i>
1912	貧民之住宅 Pinmin Zhi Zhuzhai [Housing for the Poor]		申報 <i>Shun Pao</i>
1913	田園都市之元祖 Tianyuan Dushi Zhi Yuanzu [The Origins of the Garden City]	日本農業世界 Riben Nongye Shijie	湖北省農會農報 Hubei Sheng Nonghui Nongbao
	改良城市之理想 Gailiang Chengshi Zhi Lixiang [The Ideal of Urban Improvement]	天翼 Tianyi	進步 <i>Jinbu</i>
1914	歐美改良都市農村說 Oumei Gailiang Dushi Nongcun Shuo [Theories of Urban and Rural Reform in Europe and America]	陳玉潤 Chen Yurui	東方雜誌 <i>Dongfang Zazhi</i>
1919	都市規劃論 Dushi Guihua Lun [A Theory of Urban Planning]	孫科 Sun Ke	建設 <i>Jianshe</i>
1921	英國之住宅政策與都市規劃 Yingguo Zhi Zhuzhai Zhengce Yu Dushi Guihua [Housing Policy and Urban Planning in Britain]	義農 Xinong	銀行周刊 <i>Yinhang Zhoukan</i>
	改革城市觀 Gaige Chengshi Guan [Perspectives on Urban Reform]	沈怡 Shen Yi	同濟雜誌 <i>Tongji Zazhi</i>
1922	文明生活與造園 Wenming Shenghuo Yu Zaoyuan [Civilised Living and Landscape Gardening]	童玉民 Tong Yumin	中華農學會報 <i>Zhonghua Nongxuehui Bao</i>
1923	俄國之花園都市 Eguo Zhi Huayuan Dushi [The Garden Cities of Russia]		東方雜誌 <i>Dongfang Zazhi</i>
	園城芻議 Yuancheng Chuyi [A Preliminary Discussion of the Garden City]	陳萱 Chen Xuan	東方雜誌 <i>Dongfang Zazhi</i>
1925	田園新市與我國市政 Tianyuan Xinshi Yu Woguo Shizheng [The Garden City and Urban Administration in China]	董修甲 Dong Xiujia	東方雜誌 <i>Dongfang Zazhi</i>
	英國的新村市 Yingguo De Xincunshi [Garden Villages in Britain]	潘公展 Pan Gongzhan	東方雜誌 <i>Dongfang Zazhi</i>
1927	英國田園市 Yingguo Tianyuanshi [British Garden City]	Yuge Shichiro, trans. Zhang Weihan	商業印書館 <i>Commercial Press</i>
	美的市政 Meide Shizheng [Aesthetic Urban Administration]	楊哲明 Yang Zheming	世界書局 <i>Shijie Shuju</i>
1929	英國住宅政策 Yingguo Zhuzhai Zhengce [British Housing Policies]	Tokyo Institute of Municipal Research, trans. Liu Guanghua	華通書局 <i>Huatong Shuju</i>
1930	田園都市 Tianyuan Dushu [The Garden City]	丁明 Ding Ming	時政月刊 <i>Shizheng Yuekan</i>
	田園都市論 Tianyuan Dushi Lun [Theory of the Garden City]	梁漢奇 Liang Hanqi	廣州市政公報 <i>Guangzhou Shi Shizheng Gongbao</i>
	田園都市 Tianyuan Dushi [The Garden City]	張維翰 Zhang Weihan	華通書局 <i>Huatong Shuju</i>

continued

FIGURE I (CONTINUED). A Partial List of Chinese Publications on the Garden City (1908–1939).

Year	Title of Article / Text	Author	Journal / Publisher
1931	市政概論 Shizheng Gailun [A Brief Introduction to Urban Administration]	楊哲明 Yang Zheming	道路月刊 <i>Daolu Yuekan</i>
	幽靜舒適的田園市 Youjing Shushi De Tianyuanshi [The Garden City of Comfort and Tranquillity]	徵言 Zhengyan	生活 <i>Shenghuo</i>
	田園都市計劃 Tianyuan Dushi Jihua [The Planning of Garden Cities]	楊哲明 Yang Zheming	復旦理工專號 <i>Fudan Ligong Zhanhao</i>
	田園都市制度之研究 Tianyuan Dushi Zidu Zhi Yanjiu [A Study of the Garden City System]	王雍 Wang Yong	社會雜誌 <i>Shehui Zazhi</i>
	英國之花園村 Yingguo Zhi Huayuancun [Garden Villages of Britain]	費福熊 Fei Fuxiong	生活 <i>Shenghuo</i>
1933	田園新市之趨勢 Tianyuan Xinshi Zhi Qushi [Recent Trends in the Development of Garden Cities]	翟宗心 Zhai Zongxin	汕頭時政公報 <i>Shantou Shi Shizheng Gongbao</i>
1934	田園都市的理想與實施 Tianyuan Dushi De Lixiang Yu Shishi [The Ideal of the Garden City and Its Application]	體揚 Tiyang	時政評論 <i>Shizheng Pinglun</i>
	田園都市為今日救國之一方案 Tianyuan Dushi Wei Jinri Jiuguo Zhiyi Fangan [The Garden City as a Means for National Salvation]	步陶 Butao	拓荒 <i>Tuohuang</i>
1935	田園都市之討論 Tianyuan Dushi Zhi Taolun [The Discussion of the Garden City]	琴心 Qinxin	錢業月報 <i>Qianye Yuebao</i>
1937	田園都市之研究 Tianyuan Dushi Zhi Yanjiu [Research on the Garden City]	庾錦洪 Yu Jinhong	新建築 <i>Xin Jianzhu</i>
	公營住宅區計劃之研究 Gongying Zhuzhaiqu Jihua Zhi yanjiu [A Study of the Planning of Public Housing Estates]	李楚白 Li Chubai	新建築 <i>Xin Jianzhu</i>
1939	戰時田園市計劃 Zhanshi Tianyuanshi Jihua [Wartime Garden City Planning]	張國瑞 Zhang Guorui	閔政月刊 <i>Minzheng Yuekan</i>

THE GARDEN CITY AND ITS TRANSNATIONAL CIRCULATION

Recent scholarship in planning history has significantly expanded understanding of the international dissemination of the garden city idea in the twentieth century. Although it originated in late-nineteenth-century Britain, Howard's conception was inspired by ideas that came from other places and times, including earlier writings by socialist utopians as well as efforts to design model industrial villages in America.¹¹ What distinguished the garden city was its seeming practicality: it would be built in the countryside where agricultural land could be cheaply acquired. Each "city" would have a fixed limit of 32,000 people, be provided with a wide range of jobs and urban services, and be connected with an efficient transport system. The ultimate goal was to create a "third socioeconomic system" based on land reform, cooperative

effort, and self-government, which would in turn enable a fairer and more equal society. Within a decade after the publication of Howard's two books, *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (1898) and *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (1902), the garden city concept was quickly disseminated to many countries. But, in the process, it also went through significant conceptual shifts, as its original emphasis on cooperative socialism was largely eclipsed by more practical concerns related to the planning and design of the environment. These concerns would be incorporated into emergent practices of town planning in the early twentieth century.

The spread of the garden city idea to colonial territories further diversified the garden city "tradition." Robert Home's study of garden city developments proposed by British planners in Lusaka and Nigeria, for example, has shown how Howard's ideal of providing harmonious communal living for all could be modified to suit existing segregation policies

that protected white privilege under colonial governance.¹² Similar trajectories can be observed in the French colonies in Africa and Asia, where the term *cité-jardin* was used with reference to the creation of expatriate residential quarters featuring private gardens and tree-lined streets.¹³ Meanwhile, other studies have illustrated that the garden city was embraced by indigenous developers in non-Western countries. Like their counterparts in Europe and America, they actively sponsored the construction of garden city projects to attract real estate investment.¹⁴

In his research on garden cities in Japan, Shunichi Watanabe has pointed out that, to gain a fuller understanding of the rationales behind these developments, it is important to trace the ways in which the garden city concept was translated into local languages and reinterpreted by various agents, who then applied them to specific projects on their own terms.¹⁵ Crucial to these processes were also the types of resources available to translators with different training and exposure. As will be discussed later, these factors played an important role in shaping how the garden city was rearticulated and elaborated by Chinese writers, including many who gained their initial understanding of the subject from translated texts. Before discussing these ideas, it is therefore useful to contextualize the Japanese translation of the garden city and its perceived roles in that country's modernization.

Watanabe's study reveals that the idea of the garden city was first introduced to Japan not through Howard's original book, but through one written by Alfred Richard Sennett. A British engineer, Sennett reinterpreted Howard's thesis in a

two-volume text of over 1,400 pages, *Garden Cities in Theory and Practice: Principles of a New Urban Planning*, which was first published in 1905 and arrived at Japan's Local Bureau of the Home Ministry in the same year (FIG. 2).¹⁶ Captivated by the book's rich visual illustrations and technical details, the bureau immediately embarked on producing a Japanese version of it. The hope was to create a set of practical guidelines to facilitate a "local improvement movement" that would help modernize rural village communities and strengthen their support for national development in an emerging Japanese Empire.¹⁷ The Japanese text, entitled *Den-en Toshi*, was completed in 1907 and was republished several times over the next five years.¹⁸ As Watanabe has contended, this text was not a proper introduction to Howard's garden city theory, nor was it a direct translation of Sennett — even though a closer reading suggests that its content and organization followed those in Sennett's text. Like the latter, the book consisted of many illustrations and descriptive details that were easily comprehensible. However, the title of the book, *Den-en Toshi*, conveyed a stronger connection with the term "rural village" or "farmland" than "city." In hindsight this seems to reflect the Japanese government's priority at the time to encourage agricultural reform nationwide.¹⁹ But discussion in the book also related garden cities to "industrial villages," and referred to the examples of Port Sunlight, Bournville, and other company towns that had gained renown in Europe and America. These discussions thus also suggest a sustained interest by state administrators in these towns as models of industrial development that could be adapted in Japan.²⁰

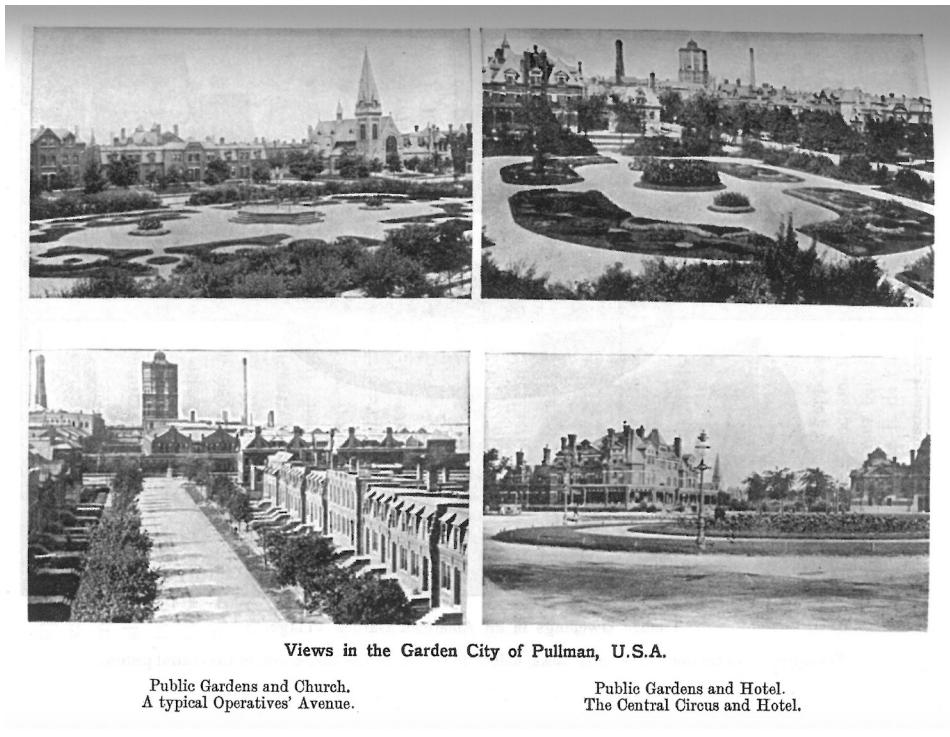
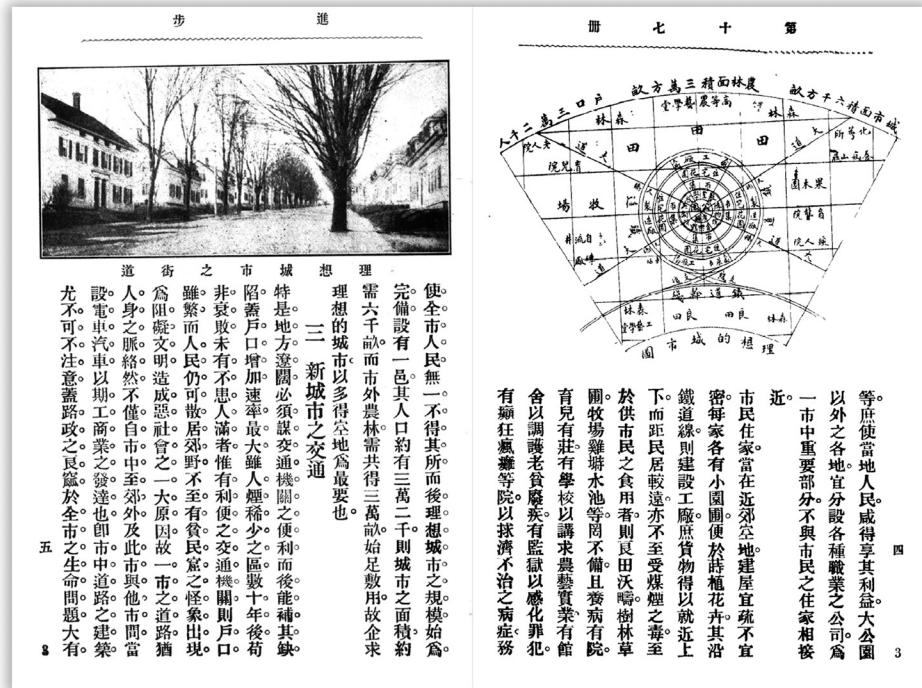


FIGURE 2. *Images of the Pullman Car Company's planned town in the U.S.A. appeared in Sennett's *Garden Cities in Theory and Practice*. Sennett included many other examples of industrial villages in Britain, most notably Bournville and Port Sunlight. All of these projects were referred to as "garden cities" or "garden villages."*
Source: A.R. Sennett, *Garden Cities in Theory and Practice*, 1905.

FIGURE 3. Pages of an illustrated article on the garden city that appeared in a Chinese journal in 1913. This is possibly the earliest reproduction of Howard's diagrams in a Chinese publication. Source: Jinbu, 1913.



It is important to note here that, like *Garden Cities in Theory of Practice*, Den-en Toshi did not discuss the garden city as a means for radical social reform based on the voluntary cooperation and associative democracy advocated by Howard. Rather, it emphasized improving the life of the laboring class through the provision of a healthy, well-planned environment as a way to solicit their support for the state within a capitalist order.²¹ The paternalistic undertone of Sennett, who repeatedly warned against the danger of trade unionism and labor power, seemed to fit well with the perspectives of Japanese officials seeking to legitimize state policies and minimize social discontent, as well as industrialists eager to secure the loyalty and trust of their workers. To the Japanese, Sennett's garden city model — which followed the general planning schemes sketched out by Howard but whose rationality aligned more with that of a company town — thus presented a workable blueprint of modernization within a highly conservative social milieu.²² And, later on, the garden city idea would also be utilized by real estate developers in the creation of “garden suburbs” aimed at providing secluded residential enclaves for the upper class.²³

These kinds of development trajectories could also be found in China. But, as the following section illustrates, a closer examination of how the garden city idea was elaborated upon in Chinese writings of the period indicates divergences that reflected competing approaches to modernization and the adaptation of foreign models. In the process, notions of history, culture and civilization also became entangled with the conception of different versions of “garden cities of the future.”

The earliest known publication on the garden city in China was a short essay that appeared in the newspaper

Shibao in 1908.²⁴ The subject was further elaborated on in a number of articles published in the early 1910s, including a substantial piece translated from a Japanese specialist journal in agriculture.²⁵ The following years saw an increasing number of writings that engaged with both Howard and Sennett's works. Like their Japanese counterparts, the content of these articles was typically comprised of detailed descriptions of the physical organization of the garden city, as sketched out by Howard (with some reinterpretation by Sennett). Most notably, these included an urban core for 30,000 inhabitants, surrounded by “green belts” along with farmlands and parks, and equipped with a full range of commercial, industrial and cultural amenities (FIG. 3).

There were also discussions of the acquisition of farmland, the forms of houses and gardens, the design of public spaces, and arrangements of cooperative land ownership. These aspects were most fully discussed in two full-length books translated from Japanese to Chinese by Zhang Weihan, who had studied urban administration in Japan in the 1910s and later assumed significant positions in the Guomindang government.²⁶ The first book, *Yingguo Tianyuanshi* [The British Garden City], was published as part of a new series on urban administration by the Commercial Press in 1927.²⁷ The second, *Tianyuan Dushi* [The Garden City] was a direct translation of the 1907 Japanese text *Den-en Toshi* and was published in 1931.²⁸ Another book, *Yingguo Zhuzhai Zhengce* [British Housing Policy], which was authored by the Tokyo Institute of Urban Administration, was translated and published in 1929 (FIG. 4).²⁹ In addition to these texts, many Chinese authors sought to reinterpret the garden city concept in specialist journals focusing on urban planning and admin-

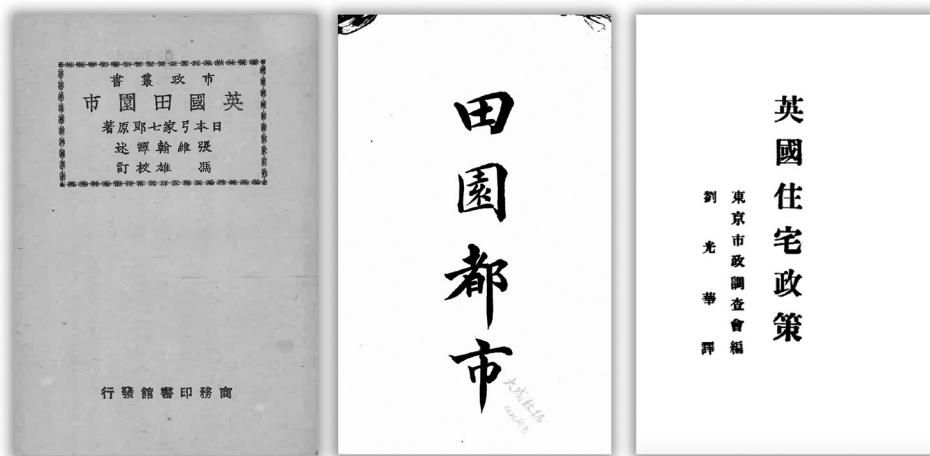


FIGURE 4. *Covers of three Chinese texts on the garden city. From left to right: Yingguo Tianyuanshi [British Garden City] (1927), Tianyuan Dushi [The Garden City] (1931), and Yingguo Zhuzhai Zhengce [British Housing Policy] (1929).*

istration, such as *Shizheng Pinglun* [Review of Urban Administration], *Shizheng Jianshe* [Civic Administration Periodicals], and *Good Road Monthly* (REFER TO FIG. I).³⁰ But, curiously, Howard's original 1898 book, *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, was never translated. And his 1902 edition, *Garden Cities for To-morrow*, was only translated into Chinese for the first time in 2010.³¹

Closely following the content of the foreign texts, most of the articles in Chinese journals of the time posited the garden city as a desirable model of development that involved the formation of hundreds of newly planned settlements across the nation connected by modern transportation networks, which could more easily be managed than existing metropolises. But to highlight the urgency of implementing a superior foreign planning model, these articles also contained strong criticisms of the backwardness of China's development, which their authors claimed lagged behind the West and Japan. These critiques resonated with other contemporary writings by Chinese intellectuals who blamed

China's national weakness on entrenched cultural traditions and Confucianist thinking that paralyzed any incentives for innovation.³² The perspective was grounded on a growing faith that modern planning based on scientific principles could provide solutions to all urban problems and help revive the declining rural economy.

What the garden city thus offered was a technological, utopian vision of a future in which all Chinese citizens would enjoy good health and modern material comfort in a productive and well-ordered society. The desire to elevate China to a modern industrial nation on par with the West and Japan partially explained the enthusiastic reception of writings such as those of Sennett, who believed that social betterment could be enabled through technological knowhow and industrial paternalism. The means to achieve this was planning, which could put in place a new system of spatial organization without necessarily having to revolutionize existing social organizations (FIG. 5).³³



FIGURE 5. *Pages of Yingguo Tianyuanshi* [British Garden City] (1927), translated by Zhang Weihan.

THE RISE OF URBAN ADMINISTRATION AND THE "AESTHETICIZED CITY" AS A BLUEPRINT OF MODERNIZATION

Authors of articles in these specialist journals were mostly young Chinese men who had received their education in urban administration in America and Japan. And their careers were closely tied to the rise of the new professional field of municipal administration, or *shizheng*, in the 1920s.³⁴ As noted by Jeffrey Cody and others, such development was strongly influenced by emergent ideas of urban planning and municipal progress in America, which emphasized the importance of zoning, municipal annexation, improvements to housing and infrastructure, and better design of public spaces.³⁵ Yet, ironically, many of these ideas had themselves been developed through a transnational exchange of knowledge by which the garden city had evolved into a new "tradition" in America. These transnational influences were strengthened in China by the active role of foreign-trained graduates in municipal administrations, the setting up of professional institutes, and the appointment of American advisors in the implementation of major planning schemes, including those in Guangzhou, Nanjing and Shanghai.³⁶

Keen to apply their modern planning knowledge in China, young Chinese municipal specialists shared the belief that better-designed environments were essential for enabling Chinese citizens to become healthier and more "civilized." This would enable the cultivation of a stronger sense of civic duty, which the specialists saw as an essential characteristic of a national population. As public officials, these specialists also saw the limits of private enterprise in spreading industrialism, and believed that local governments should play a greater role in directing development and urban reform. It was in this context that the garden city was rigorously promoted as a state-led planning model through a systematic assessment of its applicability in the Chinese context.

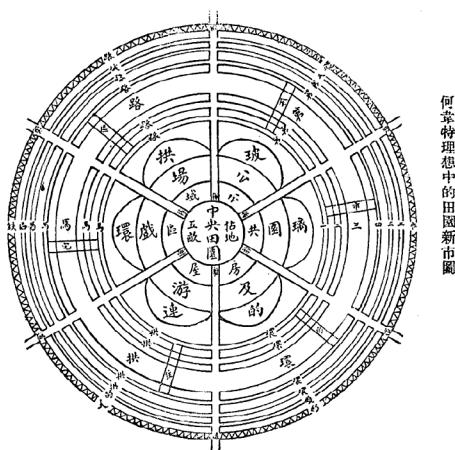


FIGURE 6. Dong Xuijia's reinterpretation of the organization of Howard's garden city. Source: Dongfang Zazhi, 1925.

These discussions were encapsulated in the writings of Sun Ke, the three-time mayor of Guangzhou and son of the founder of the Chinese Republic, Sun Yat-San. Trained in city planning and administration at the University of California and Columbia University in the United States, Sun played a key role in the introduction of comprehensive planning legislation and the construction of "model garden suburbs" in Guangzhou.³⁷ In his article "Dushi Guihua Lun" [A Theory of Urban Planning], published in 1919 in the journal *Jianshe*, Sun discussed the advent of modern town planning and presented case studies of garden city development in Europe and America.³⁸ He also highlighted the importance of scientific research in these projects — an example being social and economic surveys carried out by municipal government officials that helped to devise more effective development and housing strategies.

Another important promoter of modern planning was Dong Xuijia, founder of the Chinese Association for the Study of Urban Administration, who had worked for the municipal governments of Hankow and Shanghai.³⁹ Like Sun, Dong also received his education in the United States, where he had studied urban economics at the University of Michigan and city administration at the University of California. In his 1925 article "Garden City and China's Urban Administration," published in the journal *Dongfang Zazhi*, Dong sketched out what he conceived of as an ideal municipal governing structure for the garden city that could be applied in China.⁴⁰ Included in the article was a diagram illustrating the organization of an ideal city that was carefully modified from one of Howard's original drawings, and indicating the arrangement of a variety of civic spaces and residential areas (FIG. 6). Dong's diagram generated enthusiastic discussions and was subsequently reinterpreted by several Chinese writers who sought to further elucidate Howard's idea based on Dong's work and to popularize the garden city as a blueprint for development for future China (FIG. 7).⁴¹

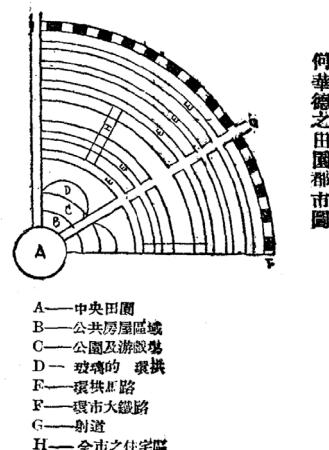


FIGURE 7. An example of the reinterpretation of Howard's garden city diagram in a Chinese journal. Source: Shehui Zazhi, 1931.

Although all of these articles claimed that the garden city would combine the best aspects of the city and the countryside, a closer examination shows that their priority was on maximizing the *urban potential* of the proposed new settlements to help deliver economic and social benefits to residents. This city-centric view could be seen in Dong's numerous writings, in which he consistently posited that cities were centers of the national economy and that China's future would lie on moving beyond the "traditional agriculture-based state."⁴² His conviction that cities were ultimately places where new aesthetic and functional standards would be set for the nation also made clear that his envisioned garden city leaned toward the visual character and positive qualities of the modern metropolis.⁴³

The subjects of urban aesthetics and urban order were addressed in greater detail by other writers who focused their discussions on architecture and urban design. These articles made frequent references to European and American cities that had successfully elevated their international image by implementing meticulous control over every aspect of urban development.⁴⁴ A key advocate here was Yang Zheming, who was the editor of the mass-market magazine *Shijie Zazhi* and the author of several popular "handbooks" on urban planning and design.⁴⁵ In his book *Meide Shizheng* [Aesthetic Municipal Administration], Yang argued that the most important function of urban aesthetics was not just to make cities more beautiful, but to foster a modern subjectivity capable of supporting effective urban governance.⁴⁶ This argument was tied to emergent calls from other Chinese intellectuals to integrate humanistic and artistic aspects with scientific thinking in China's modernization project. It was through such efforts that citizens would learn to appreciate the "social dimensions of beauty" that could be found in the public domain of a modern city.⁴⁷ Resembling both Sennett's treatise on the garden city and those of his Japanese interpolators, *Meide Shizheng* also provided detailed guidelines for the construction of a variety of urban fabrics ranging from boulevards to riverbanks to public parks to transportation infrastructure, as well as settings for civic institutions such as museums, theaters and libraries, which were key components of a "civilized" modern society.⁴⁸

Posed as a blueprint for modernization, Yang's "aestheticized city" was based on a cosmopolitan vision emerging from successful urban reform efforts in the great metropolises in Europe and America. It was predicated on the belief that it was possible by appealing to human emotion and appreciation of beauty to establish a new social relationship between the private and public realms.⁴⁹ However, this humanistic vision of advanced civil society enabled by physical planning tended to disregard the historical conditions that continued to shape urban China. It likewise largely ignored the intensifying social disparities and class conflicts in the urbanization process in the country. Indeed, the ongoing fiscal crisis of the Guomindang government and its inability

to address growing housing problems significantly weakened administrators' claims for the need to use aesthetic means to achieve social ends in urban improvement projects. And it was in this context that the idea of the "aestheticized city" appeared regressive in the eyes of those disillusioned with Republican politics.

COMPETING UTOPIAS: NEW VILLAGES, MODEL DWELLINGS, AND GARDEN SUBURBS

Although the radical social vision of Howard was deemphasized in the state-led garden city models proposed by Republican urban administrators, it was embraced by a number of Chinese anarchist groups seeking to experiment with alternative social organizations in the form of "new village communities."⁵⁰ Like other utopian communes that emerged elsewhere, proponents of these communities hoped to create within an insulated "village" environment a miniaturized ideal society based on the principles of mutual aid, common property, and physical labor.⁵¹ The idea was strongly influenced by the Chinese novelist Zhou Zuoren, who was an ardent supporter of the "new village" movement initiated by the Japanese anarchist Mushanokoji Saneatsu.⁵² Although most of these experimental communities were short lived, and had dissipated by the late 1920s, their supporters continued to promote their cause through publications. And it was in this context that the term "new village" became increasingly popularized, not just by way of reference to its original connotation as a radical social organization for replacing the capitalist system, but also as "a new form of dwelling," "a new aesthetic environment," and "a new civilized community," etc. Later on, the term was also deployed in the slogans of different types of development schemes with more moderate agendas, including model workers' housing initiated by municipal governments, philanthropic organizations, as well as in private residential estates built by real estate developers.⁵³

By the late 1920s the terms "garden city" and "new village" had both become entrenched cultural concepts in the popular press, often being used interchangeably, along with such other terms as "garden cities," "garden villages" and "model villages."⁵⁴ Regardless of their orientations, authors of these articles typically began by critiquing the social ills of large cities, and followed by calling for the development of new settlements in the countryside that could offer a better quality of life and help create harmonious communities that were happier, healthier, and more "civilized."⁵⁵ Features of the garden city were most widely adopted in the promotion of suburban development schemes targeted at middle-class families. These projects were sometimes published in the "lifestyle sections" of illustrated magazines, which introduced the latest trends in architecture and domestic living to the population. Here, imagery of idyllic life, associated with the countryside, was coupled with that of modern urban living in



FIGURE 8 (ABOVE). An image that appeared in a 1935 magazine article that sought to promote the Rose Villa as a model village and a perfect environment for raising children. Source: Meishu Shenghuo, 1935.

FIGURE 9. (RIGHT) Image of a child enjoying the spacious green space in the Rose Villa. Source: Meishu Shenghuo, 1935.

an effort to attract urbanites to seek better and more affordable places to live away from city centers (FIGS. 8, 9).⁵⁶

One project whose forms in some ways came closest to those of the first British garden cities such as Letchworth and Welwyn was the Rose Villa, a cooperative housing scheme consisting of fifty detached bungalows on more than 100 acres of land on Ningguo Xiang Xijiatang, on the outskirts of Shanghai.⁵⁷ The project was initiated in 1933 by a Chinese syndicate led by Zhang Yongnian, a businessman who established the Chinese New Village Construction Society as a cooperative agency responsible for its planning and construction. According to the project brief, the conception of the Rose Villa was based primarily on "the form of the British garden city and essence of the Japanese new village."⁵⁸ It was also significantly influenced by the cooperative housing movement in Britain and Europe, which encouraged subscribers with moderate incomes to become owners of a small landed property by contributing a limited initial payment and monthly rent.⁵⁹ From the beginning, the project was presented as an alternative to other profit-oriented real estate projects by underscoring its commitment to "community development" and the provision of a wide range of social benefits to residents.

These provisions focused on three aspects which were the scheme's main selling points: 1) a healthy environment for children, who would enjoy full access to nature and good educational facilities; 2) creation of opportunities for women to contribute to the community through the setup of communal workshops for clothes-making, silk-weaving, beekeeping, etc.; and 3) the establishment of cooperative enterprises to



ensure the availability of daily necessities at low cost.⁶⁰ In addition, residents would enjoy the use of communal facilities including parks and gardens, libraries, tennis courts, playing fields, health centers, and nurseries. Like cooperative housing schemes elsewhere, all facilities would be managed by the Construction Society, whose decisions were made collectively by residents, and who assumed full control of its operation.



FIGURE 10. Image of a residence in the Rose Villa. Source: Meishu Shenghuo, 1935.

Although the Rose Villa was marketed as an affordable housing project, its planning and design were comparable to those of fashionable “garden suburbs” near Shanghai.⁶¹ The stated goal was to create “a grand and beautiful new village,” in which each house would enjoy the best possible orientation in terms of natural light and ventilation.⁶² The project was designed by the well-known architectural firm East Asia Architects. Following the residential schemes in other upscale expatriate neighborhoods, the houses were categorized into “English,” “California,” and “Spanish” styles, with each equipped with private gardens and a full range of modern conveniences (FIGS. 10, 11). Residential areas throughout the premises were surrounded by landscape gardens with a variety of plants carefully selected by a landscape architect, and with resting places strategically located along tree-lined avenues and river walks (FIG. 12). Notwithstanding its idyllic environment, the Rose Villa was also conveniently connected to Shanghai via a new highway, and it was situated only ten kilometers from the French Concession, apparently a major selling point for attracting potential residents from the city (FIG. 13).⁶³

The inception of the Rose Villa generated immediate interest amongst potential investors and won praise from many social commenters for Zhang’s farsighted vision. However, it also prompted some skeptics to point out that, despite

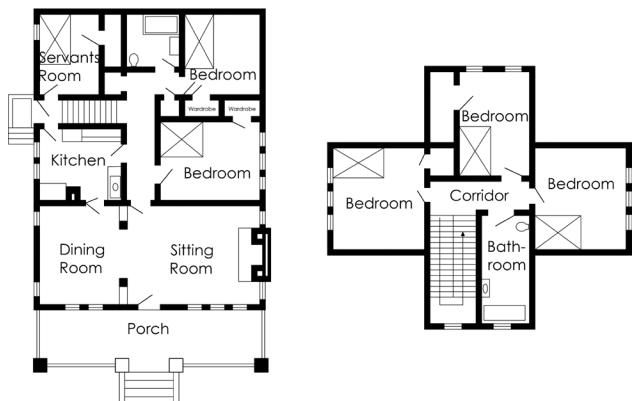


FIGURE 11. Floor plan of a residence in the Rose Villa.

its claim of bringing benefits to the “common people,” the properties were in reality out of reach of a majority of the Chinese population. Some went further to accuse the Rose Villa of having hijacked the original egalitarian vision of the garden city to promote a scheme with little regard for the peasants living in the “old villages” around the site. It was also criticized for not addressing the problems of the declining agricultural economy and increasing land prices as a result of urbanization.⁶⁴ These criticisms in turn led supporters of the Rose Villa to take to the press to assert that Zhang’s initiative should in fact be appreciated as “an incremental but realistic effort in resolving the housing problem of China.” More importantly, it provided a means for “reforming Chinese society” through the creation of a model village settlement that embodied all the norms of a “healthy community needed for China’s ongoing modernization.”⁶⁵

These aspects were articulated, for example, in an article entitled “The Ideal of New Village” published in the journal *Nanfang Zazhi* by Xiao Bai in 1933.⁶⁶ Xiao sought to clarify the true nature of “model settlements” such as the Rose Villa according to three criteria. First, he argued, it was a cooperative enterprise formed by volunteering individuals aspired to advance social progress without any political agendas. Second, he noted it was an integral part of the Chinese nation and not an anarchist commune. And third, he described it

Planning and Architecture

- Site formation
- Residential house design
- Police station and market
- Streets and bridges
- Drainage and nullahs
- Community hall

Landscape Design

- Parks
- Residential gardens
- Streets
- River banks and paths

Public Amenities

- Water supplies
- Electric lights and telephone lines
- Transportation
- Security
- Domestic amenities
- Sporting grounds

Community Management

- Education
- Production
- Cooperative enterprises
- Social facilities
- Community service

FIGURE 12. The planning and design parameters of the Rose Villa as outlined in the project brief, 1937. Source: Hengshe Yuekan, 1937.



FIGURE 13. A model of the Rose Villa showing the arrangement of houses. Source: Meishu Shenghuo, 1935.

as a place defined by care and mutual respect, qualities that were diametrically opposite to the destructive inclination of the “socialists.” Xiao further argued that the success of these model settlements and the actualization of “new living” within them would be the best means for building the nation and delegitimizing the agendas of the radical socialists who sought to destroy such efforts.

Xiao’s statements reflected the emerging anxieties among intellectual elites and Republican administrators over the growing influence of Communist thought, which was attracting many young Chinese who were frustrated with the entrenched social inequality and widespread corruption under the Guomindang regime. To Xiao and supporters of the government the call to strengthen the norms of a healthy, law-abiding society was seen to be essential — not only for resisting the negative impacts of urbanization, but also to counter rising support for socialism and the danger of revolution. Here, the development of garden cities such as the Rose Villa served as a necessary spatial setting for the creation of a miniaturized “model society” for future China.⁶⁷ This conception, which resonated strongly with the conservative New Life Movement that appeared in the mid-1930s, was built upon the humanistic vision of urban administrators who aspired to advance modernization via well-planned, “aestheticized environments” like those they had seen in the West.⁶⁸ However, the continual failure of the government to address worsening social conflicts made these proposals and their stated ideals appear increasingly regressive in the eyes of radical socialists, who came to see them merely as a means to preserve the bourgeois capitalist urban order.

It should be noted that despite the fact that the Rose Villa fell far short of realizing Howard’s egalitarian ideal, its promoters were not unaware of its limitations (FIG. 14). In a 1939 essay, Zhang Guorui, an investment partner of Zhang Yongnian and co-founder of the Chinese New Village Construction Society, acknowledged that, given their scales and scopes, model villages such as the Rose Villa were unable to achieve the mission of resolving the larger problem of urbanization and reforming social norms.⁶⁹ That said, Zhang strongly believed that the garden city model remained a potent

source for creating a better future China. The essay, titled “War Time Garden City Planning,” was written at the height of the Sino-Japanese military conflict, at a time when there was also growing interest in decentralizing large urban settlements to protect cities from air raids. In addition to protecting the health and safety of citizens, however, Zhang argued that the war had created a rare opportunity to rethink the essence of the garden city. Most importantly, the adoption of decentralized planning would help to reconfigure the urban-rural relationship and create a new network of “social cities” that would lead to a more productive and harmonious Chinese society.

RESILIENCE AND MALLEABILITY OF THE GARDEN CITY CONCEPT

Given the tremendous interest in applying the garden city as a planning model in China in the early twentieth century, it might seem surprising that there have been few systematic investigations of this history until recently. This article has attempted to begin to rectify this gap within existing literature and illustrate some of the changing trajectories of the garden city ideal within the Chinese context. Once posited as a key term associated with urban improvement, economic development, and nation-building, the term “garden city” ceased to be referred to in academic and popular writings in the 1950s. This disuse was possibly a result of changed priorities in national development under Communist rule and the attempt to disassociate its agenda from that of pro-Western and pro-capitalist municipal administrators in the Republican period. Nevertheless, many physical dimensions of the garden city, such as the provision of a healthy environment with good access to nature, the organization of communal living and design of collective public spaces, were incorporated in the design of state-led “new villages” in the 1950s.

As the preceding sections have shown, the adoption of the garden city idea, as with other transnational planning concepts, involved a process of translation through which the original formulation was appropriated to address local contexts and the agendas of local promoters. In the 1920s and 30s, Republican administrators encouraged garden city development with the goal of developing the urban potential of towns and villages across the nation by constructing an aestheticized urban order in the face of new transportation technologies. The idea was also taken up by anarchist groups who wanted to create utopian communities in the form of “new villages” with alternative social organizations.⁷⁰ While most of these ambitious initiatives remained on paper, some aspects of the garden city were realized in the cooperative housing schemes of Chinese businessmen and philanthropic organizations, who sought to develop “model settlements” that exemplified the positive norms of a “civilized” society. These projects were critiqued by some observers on account of their paternalistic nature and inability to address real

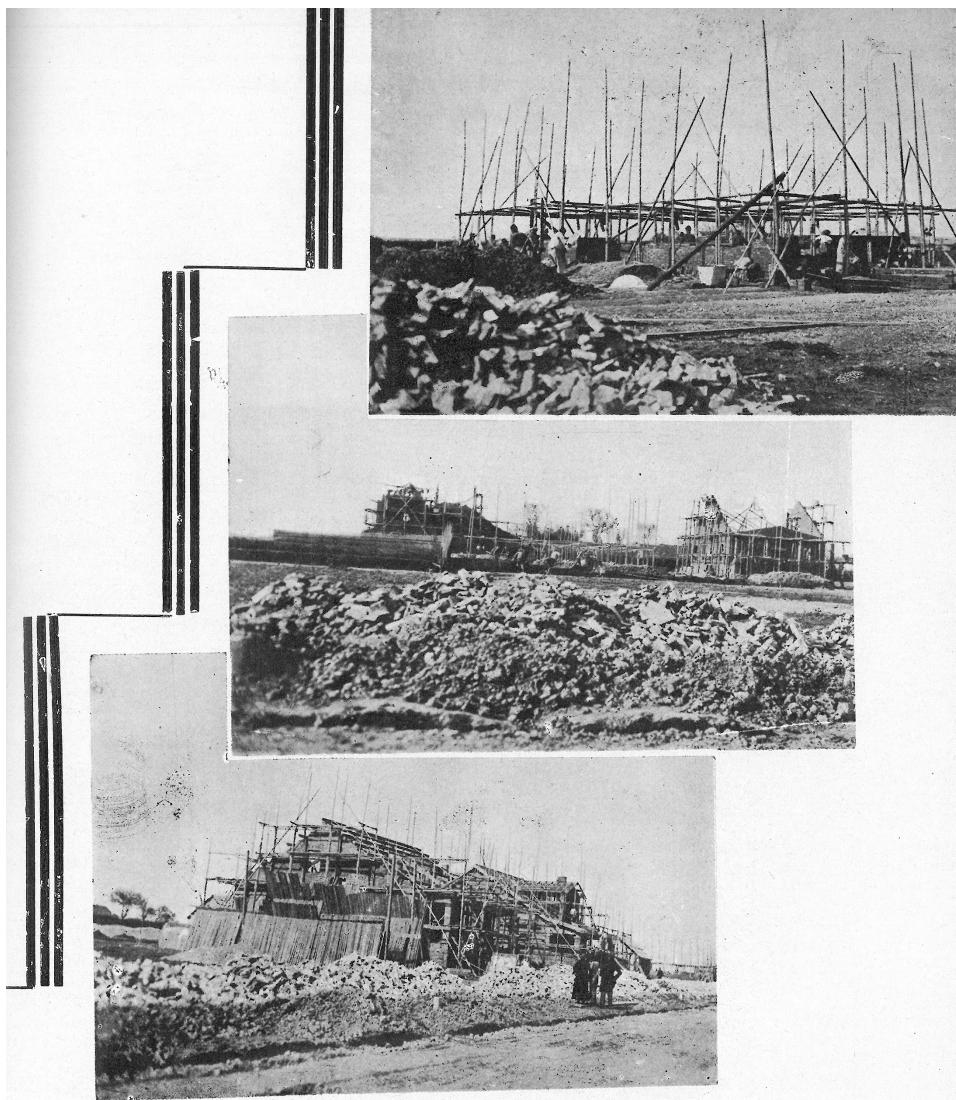


FIGURE 14. *The Rose Villa in the process of construction in 1935.*
Source: *The Builder*, 1935.

housing problems arising from the urbanization process. Nevertheless, they became highly desirable places to live in the eyes of many middle-class families seeking to escape the unhealthy environments of city centers.

Although Howard's original vision, which was predicated on voluntary cooperation and associative democracy, was not the central tenet in the proposals of Republican administrators, the underlying polemics of creating a more perfect city and harmonious society retained lasting appeal among supporters of the garden city concept. These included not only intellectuals and educated elites, but also many ordinary urbanites who looked to the garden city not so much as an ideological instrument for nation building, but more as an idealistic image that fostered their aspirations to live a better life by becoming owners of a suburban property in a safe and healthy environment. These multiple, and sometimes conflicting interpretations and motivations, point to both the resilience and malleability of the garden city concept, which

continued to serve as a powerful source for different social actors to construct imaginaries of their desired urban futures.

The historic importance and subsequent disuse of the term "garden city" for many decades also raises questions regarding recent, renewed interest in Howard's work among planners in China, which seems to have been precipitated by the onset of economic reform and accelerating urbanization beginning in the early 1980s. What is the intellectual and moral basis behind the new calls to reconsider the garden city as a development model for China in the twenty-first century?

While a fuller answer to such questions will require more research on development practices over the past decades, some early reflections can be discerned in the writings of Jin Jingyuan, the planning scholar who provided the first full Chinese translation of Howard's *Garden City of To-morrow*.⁷⁰ In an article entitled "Garden City of Tomorrow — An Emblem of New Age for Urban Planning" published in *Urban Planning Forum* in 1998, Jin argued that despite it having been conceived over

a century ago, Howard's proposed "town-country-system" is more relevant in China today than ever, as the nation confronts increased pressures to control urban sprawl and address other environmental and social problems associated with rapid urbanization.⁷¹ In his opinion, these problems must be understood not only from a technical point of view, but also a moral one. Central to his claim is that the polarization of the city and the countryside associated with urban growth led individuals to become self-seeking and increasingly disinterested in protecting the common good. The only solution, Jin contended, is to create a different urban-rural order, such as that outlined in Howard's garden city, where citizens may live in a humanistic and harmonious environment defined by mutual respect. Jin further pointed out that China is finally poised to fulfill what Howard could not fully achieve at his time, as its socialist system makes it a perfect place to push forward such new planning experiments aided by a strong state.

It is not without some irony that Jin's complaints about urban malaise and insistence on the important role of the state echo those of reformers in the Republican period, since the latter also believed that, if proven successful, garden city projects would be the best remedies for preserving the capitalist state and delegitimizing socialism. Notwithstanding their divergent political positions, both looked to the garden city as a means to project their visions of an ideal society in which current urban problems and social crisis would be eradicated. As this article has shown, a revisiting of the narratives of those implicated could help illuminate the historical processes that shaped these ideas, and by doing so shed light on changing moral assumptions and collective aspirations about urban living and the role of the state in mediating imagined futures such as those represented by the garden city past and future.

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65. For an example that promoted Rose Villa as a model village with positive social norms, see “Ertong Yu Xincun” [“Children and the New Village”], *Meishu Shenghuo*, No.7 (1935).
66. B. Xiao, “Xincun Zhi Lixiang” [“The Ideal of New Village”], *Nanshang Zazhi*, Vol.2 No.3 (1933), pp.1–13.
67. G. Pan, “Yingguo De Xincunshi” [Garden Village in Britain], *Dongfang Zazhi*, Vol.17 No.11–14 (1925).
68. The New Life Movement (1934–1937) was a cultural reform movement initiated in 1934 by China’s Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek (1887–1975). Its goal was to reform the habits of Chinese citizens by means of the relearning of traditional Chinese moral values through mass education and everyday practice. For a critical discussion of the movement, see A. Dirlik, “The Ideological Foundations of the New Life Movement: A Study in Counterrevolution,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol.34 No.4 (August 1975), pp.945–80.
69. G. Zhang, “Zhanshi Tianyuanshi Jihua” [“War-Time Garden City Planning”], *Minzheng Yuekan*, Vol.5 No.2 (1939), pp.66–94.
70. Jin, trans., *Mingri De Tianyuan Chengshi* [Garden Cities of To-morrow], 2010.
71. Ibid., pp.3–4.