

Acknowledgment

This project began from my naïve expectations of learning from an exciting pool of theoretical knowledge developed in Europe, and bringing them back to understand how the urban phenomena form and transform in where I grew up in China. I was born in the late 1980s and the Chinese cities I know have always been fast-growing. They not only grow incessantly in size but introduce new pieces of material, and technological infrastructures, building forms, symbols, rules, textures, flavors, sounds into their urban fabric. These elements seem to be drawn from disparate times and places with or without a shared vision, superimposed into existing social-spatial systems, or imposed in tabula rasa territories. In the latter cases, old material fabrics, along with the underpinning social organization and meaning systems, are discarded suddenly, disappear from people's sights. Yet, the inherent and familiar would reclaim their visibility in people's memories and practices, clash with the new in unexpected ways. How to take account of and explain the urban transformations in the condition of 'compressed modernity'? I found no ready answer to this question. Hence, the endeavors in this work are dedicated to answering it.

As many researchers from the sociology of knowledge, science and technology study disciplines have revealed, all forms of scientific knowledge are, to a certain extent, rooted in particular social-material conditions at particular times. Facing the ongoing processes and variegated manifestations under compressed modernity, researchers from late-developing regions are generally challenged with evaluating and recontextualizing the traveling scientific knowledge. Leaving the entangled power relations aside, epistemic gaps can be uncovered between the original and learned scientific knowledge, between the academically legitimated scientific knowledge, the local institutional norms, and common senses lived by the research subjects in concrete cases. In this work, I position myself as a late-learner researching social-spatial change embedded in late-developing societal contexts. This book is thus to demonstrate the ways in which traveling social-spatial theories (scientific knowledge) could be learned and employed constructively in describing and understanding particular and complex spatial phenomenon (e.g., the artworld in Beijing) of our time.

Apart from my naïve-ness, I have opened many doors in this research but was able to close very few tightly, if at all. My research topic is very profound, and I genuinely know, it is far from being systematically answered. Regardless, this research has taken enormous amounts of time and energy from me and many people from different places. I want to acknowledge my deepest debt of gratitude to these individuals and the places that made it possible.

In all my thinking on my chosen field, I owe an immense debt of gratitude to my supervisor Martina Löw. It has been a genuine piece of pleasure and privilege for me to have her as my mentor. I can count on her invaluable insights into social-spatial theoretical reflections and research experiences. While reviewing my drafts, I suspect that my problematic formulations, unsystematic analysis, and weak arguments make her raise eyebrows. However, as a dedicated holistic educator, she patiently allows me to explore freely, to fail, to reflect and grow from my own mistakes. When I get lost, she miraculously offers me the most relatable and elegant guidances. She empowers everyone around her not only through conferring knowledge needed. Most importantly, I learn that such persons exist to be looked up to, who has an enormous capacity for thinking and taking delight in other people's progress. Equally, I sincerely thank my second supervisor, Bettina Gransow, who kindly agreed to instruct my dissertation when it was still in raw shape and when her scholastic engagements were especially busy. Her supervision and remarks are amazingly wholehearted, sharp, and thought-provoking. They allow and encourage me to ruminate on, for more than the scale of this book. I am inspired by her courage and approach of being a sinologist, pursuing real inter-cultural understanding.

I have benefited enormously from the inspiring, supportive, and encouraging research environment from the chairs at the Institute of Sociology, TU Berlin. My dearest colleagues and friends, Lea Rothmann, Emily Kelling, Martin Fuller, Gunter Weidenhaus, Mitsuhiro Tada, Rim Aouini, and many others, you are heroes and role models to me in one way or another. Thank you for your generosity, inspiration, and care in our day-to-day encounters. I am also very grateful for the critical comments and feedback from Lisa Melcher and Kimiko Sudan – my working group companions – whose ideas are partly integrated into the fabric of this research. I'd also like to thank Ava Lynam and Ziwei Li for their meticulous proofreading, fixing the ambiguity in my thinking and words.

Furthermore, I am very grateful to the old and new friends I met in the field, including Zhang Sirui, Li Jia, Wu Jianru, Lv Jingjing, Sang Tian, He Chi, Zeng Jiahui, Huang Jingyuan, Chen Wei, Guo Junjun, Liu Guannan, Liu Yu, Bai Xiaohui, and many others. You have supported me significantly in one way or another during my field trips in the past years. For all my interviewees, without your generous sharing about your experience at your home, in your offices, studios, dinner ta-

bles; tagging me along in your professional trips in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Kassel, Lion, Berlin... there will not be this book.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents for being exceptionally open-minded and supportive to my unusual choices at all times. My dear friend Chompunuch Vanichayanguranon, thanks for always cheering me when I have shattering souls. Marvin Bartels, thanks for being there with me, offering me care, encouragements, warmth, humor, and daily dose of sweetness.

