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## Preface

This is a book about understanding and analysing real-world issues surrounding the current urbanisation of China. The five authors from China and Singapore bring with them multiple perspectives and experiences relating to the education, practice, research and administration of urban planning and design. This book has also benefitted from the two important Asian cities, cues and inspiration from Shanghai and Singapore, and two important universities – resources from the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Tongji University.

The ideas and framework for this book were formed between August 2010 and July 2012. In these 2 years, I had taught urban design at NUS School of Design and Environment as a Visiting Associate Professor. I was continuously shuttling back and forth between Shanghai and Singapore as I was involved in teaching and practice in Shanghai as well. Hence, during this period of time, I had to constantly switch mindsets and perspectives between being an insider and outsider to China, as I held discussions with students and colleagues from both sides about Shanghai's urban planning and design. In this way, the framework and thinking behind this book took shape.

The three design studies selected for this publication (Shanghai EXPO's Puxi site, Xuhui District's waterfront area and Lingang New City) are all the best representations of Shanghai's large-scale urban regeneration and new city building. The city bears high hopes for these projects but also suffers from a lack of experiences in these areas. At the same time, these are also the projects which famous international design firms hope to participate in, due to their high level of complexity and great significance. However, in reality, many of the planning and design schemes in this kind of projects tend to be controversial, as many design firms, international and local alike, propose form-driven or personal concept-based schemes, so the unusual plans and designs become problematic. Thus, the attitude with which globalised yet not quite fully developed cities undergo large-scale planning and design is a crucial issue.

As I taught on this subject outside of China, one of the recurring challenges I faced was how to guide students to understand the city of Shanghai. For example, what should they be looking out for on a weeklong trip to the city? What professional methods of observation would be really helpful to their planning and design task? As I attempted to introduce Shanghai to these 'outsiders', I came to realise that as an 'insider', I did not understand my own city enough

either. This may be true for my colleagues who are busy at the forefront of Shanghai's urban planning, design and administration as well. Too often we are caught up in the whirlwind – in China's nearly chaotic state of urbanisation process, China's professionals, technical officers and researchers are tied up with facing the daily onslaught of wave upon wave of emerging deadlines. Although we are familiar with the city and each fragment of change that is taking place, we lack a consolidated, holistic and systematic study of the city's spatial model transformation and current status. This is one of the reasons why there is no specific implementation plan for the city's transition. This sense was only reinforced over time with my continuous switching of perspectives arising from the shuttling in and out of Shanghai.

My thinking resonated with Professor Jiang Wu, and Yan Ji from a professional practice viewpoint also agreed that there was value in researching for this purpose. Their support and involvement was a great impetus to the writing of this book. Our combination brought together several viewpoints including research, professional practice, planning administration and education. Each of us possessed experience studying and working abroad and also a deep involvement with Shanghai's planning practice. We hoped to work together to sort out this 'understanding' of the city, to create a useful, easily understood guide for people doing research, professional practice, administration and education that would provide a way of navigating and making sense of the information about Shanghai's urban spatial characteristics and the larger backdrop of China's urbanisation. Sara Li Ting Chan and Wei Qi Lim were students from one of the studios I conducted in Singapore. They were interested in this research and thinking, so over a span of 2 years, they repeatedly visited Shanghai to examine the city, using Tongji University as a base for study and research. They had discussions with the three mentors, conducted a closer analysis of the three design studies and participated in the interviews – without them, this book might not have materialised. Chapter 7 is the culmination of our studies and discussions at Shanghai, offered through their own eyes, in their own words.

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The authors would like to highlight this book's multiplicity of viewpoints, its 'academic' yet easy reading nature and its focus on current real-world issues, in hope that this book will have practical value and prove to be helpful, to both Chinese and foreigners in related fields of urban planning, design and city building, in understanding the real Shanghai.

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