Introduction

In the twilight of the Qing dynasty, the hoary cultural capital of Suzhou saw itself remade as a modern city. This book explores the experiences of various groups—the landless poor and business elites, Chinese and foreigners, locals and outsiders—as they helped effect the interrelated transformations of space and time involved in this project. Despite the self-conscious newness with which people in China and elsewhere proclaimed modern cities to be a fundamental break with existing and previous patterns of commerce, architecture, state power, and social organization, the disjunctive modern city inevitably continued to contain the material, intellectual, and experiential bequest of the past. This inheritance played an essential but ambiguous role in the distillation of modernity. Under the onslaught of imperialism and rise of nationalism, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the local was seen as a site of enduring value on the basis of its particularity, yet it was also viewed as a storehouse of national values.[1] Similarly, economic development would ideally bring mutual benefits to the locality and nation, yet at times the two were in conflict. The scope of urban reconstruction provoked concerns regarding the integrity of "Chinese" or Suzhou local cultural identity in light of the transformation of the economic, social, and physical cityscape under the influence of foreign-origined urbanist technologies and practices. The drama of this process was tied to the singular beauty and historic richness of what Suzhou was—and, to some extent, remains. The human builtscape of walled courtyard compounds with one- or two-storied buildings, low white-washed Ming-style houses sitting on the quays of the canals that cross-cut the entire city, "renowned scenes and ancient monuments" (*mingsheng guji*), narrow unimproved streets, scholar gardens, temples, outdoor markets, and squatters shacks, not to mention

FIG. 1. Map of late Qing Suzhou. 1. Pan Gate 2. Japanese Concession, Horse-road 3. Xu Gate 4. Chang Gate 5. New Chang/Jin Gate 6. Railroad Station 7. Southern Garden 8. Old/New Ping Gate 9. *Hulong jie* (Attend/Protective Dragon Street) 10. Suzhou Prefectural Confucian Temple 11. Guanqian Street 12. Xuanmiao guan Daoist Temple. *Source:* Cao Yunyuan, Li Genyuan et al., eds., *Wuxian zhi*, tu: n.p.

the accumulated centuries of human experience, both promoted and hindered state- and business-led urban modernization.

Starting in the 1890s, concern for national and local political and economic vitality led businessmen and state officials to appropriate and deploy Western urban planning in Suzhou. This process led to the revision and transformation of intellectual and physical urban spaces, which in turn reshaped urban social and economic relations. Under this nascent regime of city planning, both Suzhou as a whole and individual components of the cityscape—notably, roads, temples, and ancient sites—were assigned new significance according to a burgeoning modernist calculus of commerce and nationalism. These symbolic readings of the city amounted to more than pure intellection and affected more than

discourse. They took on physical form, as in the construction of the first improved street or the rebuilding of the noted Hanshan Temple (first built in the sixth century CE), to help shape the course of the city's reconstruction and determine Suzhou's standing as a modern place.

The course of urban reconstruction proved contentious. Various actors, ranging from the powerful official Zhang Zhidong, civic improvement groups, and municipal planners, to street vendors, tourists, and Japanese Buddhist monks, supported radically different visions of individual and communal interest. Urban modernity in Suzhou was not the simple product of accommodation between the centralized state and local business. It was constructed out of conflict over notions of local self-interest, national civilization, and local history.

The Symbolism of the City and its Sites

The symbolic resonance of Suzhou and its initial modern rebuilding during the late Qing and Republic was an outcome of its 2,400-year history. The city, or rather its earliest iteration, was established in 514 BCE as the capital of the Warring States kingdom of Wu. Laid out according to the dictates of classical ritual and historical texts, the square walled city emulated the shape of the universe, in order that the movement of people and goods might mirror the natural flow of primal energies and ensure accord with the cosmos.[2] Whether due to its cosmologic form or more profane attributes, the city flourished. Suzhou lies in a region of fertile soil and plentiful water. With its temperate, humid climate, the land is well suited for rice cultivation and other agriculture. From an early time, Suzhou emerged as one of the main grain baskets of the Imperial period. Navigable waterways facilitated commerce and the city became a regional trade center.

By the Southern Song period (1127–1276), the city had a population of approximately 300,000 and had become a favored retreat for scholar-officials and their entourages from the Imperial Court in Hangzhou. Populous and bountiful, Suzhou's status as an exemplar of urban life was enshrined in the still universally known saying, "Above is Heaven, Below are Suzhou and Hangzhou" (*Shang you tiantang, xia you Su Hang*).[3] Through the end of the Imperial period—and beyond—the city was celebrated for its rarified elite society: literati painters, poets, and scholars mingled with active and retired officials, and merchant princes rich from the production and trade of silk or handicrafts, as well as those with fortunes built on shipping, commerce, and agricultural landholding.

The city continued to thrive, with the population reaching its apogee of 700,000 to 1 million, in either case one of the world's largest, in the early nineteenth century. Suzhou and its environs suffered wholesale devastation

from the 1860 Taiping siege and the 1863 Qing recapture during the Taiping Uprising (1851–65), a cataclysm in which perhaps some 20 million perished nationally and in which the city lost half to two-thirds of its inhabitants.[4] By the beginning of the third decade of the Guangxu reign (1895), when this study begins, much of the city had been rebuilt (though large swaths of land within the city wall still lay empty) and the initial surviving population of 300,000 had risen to 500,000.[5]

As a dominant (sometimes *the* dominant) commercial, manufacturing, and cultural urban center during the last thousand years of the Imperial period, Suzhou's fame extended far beyond China. The city was (and remains) a paragon of urban sophistication and elite classical culture for many throughout East Asia, Europe, and the Americas. Despite the unlikely truth of Marco Polo's account of his fantastic travels in China, the factual richness and verisimilitude of his late-thirteenth-century description of "Sugiu," a city of "trade and industry" with merchants "of great wealth and consequence" that made "much silken cloth for their clothing," inspired centuries of European imaginings of Suzhou as a metropolis of dazzling wealth and size—"[a]bout forty miles in circumference" with "fully 6,000 stone bridges" and "so many inhabitants that no one could reckon their number."[6] During the eighteenth century, when Jesuit mission reports inspired widespread admiration of Chinese politics, society, and arts among Enlightenment thinkers and their followers, the European image of the city as the Chinese epitome of material plenty and cultivated sophistication was burnished by descriptions such as Abbé Jean-Baptiste Grosier's encomium from his influential *General Description of China*:

> Europeans who have seen it compare it to Venice, with the difference that the latter sits amidst the sea, while Suzhou is cross-cut by canals of fresh water.... There is perhaps no other region in the universe as pleasing, whether in the agreeableness of its location or the mildness of its climate; the air is so temperate, necessities of life so abundant, land so fecund, and manners so gentle that this city is seen as the Paradise of China. "Above," Chinese writers say, "is Heaven; below is Suzhou." [sic] To see the continual movement of the immense population of inhabitants and the hindrance caused by the hilly terrain and those selling and buying, one has reason to think that people from all provinces come to conduct business here.[7]

No matter how ardent, the strength of European admiration was outstripped by the longevity and intimacy of Japanese familiarity with the city and its historicity.

While Europeans and people from the Americas often perceived Suzhou through comparison with Venice, Japanese and other East Asians drew upon their own centuries-old heritage of elite Sinic cultural traditions to appreciate Suzhou on its own terms—or rather, in terms of its preeminence in scholarly Chinese culture and the authority this legacy commanded in their own lands. Due to its relative proximity, Jiangnan was likely the earliest point of contact with

Japan. Trade and other connections quite likely predate the historical record, which attests to first-century CE relations between the kingdoms and rulers of Wa (an early name for Japan that also means "dwarf," a long-standing Chinese epithet for the Japanese) and the Han dynasty (207 BCE–220 CE). (Present-day Fukuoka and Shanghai lie only 535 miles apart.) The region remained the central point of contact throughout successive centuries, as demonstrated by the widespread influence of Jiangnan elite culture and rice cultivation in ancient and medieval Japan.[8] Japanese cultural borrowing reached its high point during the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE). Yet again, Jiangnan served as the main gateway through which travelers, monks, and scholars acquired and exported the riches of Chinese technology, Buddhist scholarship, literature, and Confucian statecraft back to Heian Japan, where they had a profound impact on elite cultural traditions. Japanese trade in Suzhou luxury goods and general manufactures helped spread knowledge of the city's burgeoning economy and the refined tastes of its elite classes. At the same time, Japanese scholars appropriated the entire classical Chinese literary tradition, which they esteemed and mastered as their own. Literary writings, particularly Tang poetry, which is replete with vivid images of Suzhou scenes, significantly contributed to the city's reputation within Japan as an exemplar of urban sophistication and richness.

For Japan, the city's already considerable allure was augmented by two centuries of Tokugawa isolation, during which China became a semimythic, unreachable storied land, and Suzhou became one of its most fantastic attractions. Under the threat of Admiral Perry's expeditionary force, the Shogunate suspended the policy of national seclusion in 1854, yet the borders remained firmly closed to Japanese subjects as they had been since 1635. The Tokugawa *bakufu* government started to relax its interdict of foreign travel in 1860, when it began sending official missions abroad to acquire foreign knowledge useful for reasserting Japanese sovereignty. Given the dual convenience of geographic and linguistic proximity, the *bakufu* initially seized upon China as an accessible venue for observing and learning about the technology, mores, and habits of the modern West. It dispatched a mission to China in 1862 and initiated an era of increasingly regular and free contact.[9]

Despite the Tokugawa regime's emphasis on foreign travel as a means of encountering modernity, many voyagers contrarily set out for China in order to seek the past and learn its present fate. Inspired by centuries of imaginative intimacy and eager to experience the physical sites they had visited in poetry and prose, small numbers of intrepid Japanese travelers began to arrive in Suzhou. By the late nineteenth century, these few adventurers were joined by leisure tourists, some even organized in tour groups, who traveled in ever-increasing numbers to visit Suzhou's sights. As a result of Japan's fealty to Chinese classical culture, educated Japanese travelers unable to speak Chinese could still communicate

through the medium of written classical Chinese. This excerpt from a 1910 "brush conversation" conducted at the Suzhou Prefectural Confucian Temple reveals the excitement and anticipation that motivated many Japanese to visit the city:

> I look at the monuments of your esteemed country's rise and fall and examine the places mentioned by Confucius. Since I have always admired your esteemed country's history and Confucius's teaching, now that I tread here myself it is just as if I were encountering my parent country. I feel great happiness.[10]

This construction of East Asia as a family was a hallmark of the various strains of Pan-Asian thought pervasive in Japan and China alike during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While the metaphor was intended to evoke the existence of a natural familial harmony and sympathy, more often than not it evinced the historical intimacy and resultant contemporary tensions between China and Japan. The far-reaching state-directed industrial, military, and educational reforms begun under the aegis of the Meiji "Restoration" (*revolution* being the more apposite word) were shifting the balance of power between "parent" China and "child" Japan. Japan's rising power was reflected in Japanese travelers' accounts, which posited an inexorable and growing gulf between China's historical florescence, its contemporary enervation, and Japan's own boundless prospects. This critical knowledge, in turn, helped establish the truth of China's backwardness and Japan's modernity. With a mixture of enlightened condescension, eager expectation, and protestations of resignation, Japan assumed the burdensome mantle of imperialist power and became the self-appointed vigorous guardian-nation for its infirm "parent country"—along with the entirety of East and, later, Southeast Asia. In a key episode of this transition, Japan's centuries-long intellectual familiarity with Suzhou produced a pointed realpolitik legacy: Suzhou was one of the cities that Japan demanded be "opened" to it (and, hence, all other nations as well) as a treaty port after its resounding 1895 victory over the Qing. Throughout the late Qing and Republic, Suzhou was one of the places where the fantasies of Japanese imaginings of China confronted—and were often disappointed by—the realities of contemporary Chinese urban life. In the roiling military, diplomatic, and cultural confrontation with imperialist Japan, particular Suzhou locations, sometimes even individual buildings, became sites of struggle in the contest between foreign conquest and national defense.

Suzhou and Societal Change

Lauded for centuries, Suzhou has often been privileged by Chinese and foreigners alike as a true, revelatory symbol of Chinese society and culture. Though they may seem mutually exclusive, the city's particularity and its representative

nature have been understood as one and the same. As such, Suzhou has been both exalted and denigrated as something more than a particular place. Likewise, the faults and merits of individual buildings often denoted more than the aesthetics or physical state of a particular structure. Whether Chinese or foreign, Suzhou denizens, sojourners, and travelers were all wont to read the city symbolically. The layout, material culture, and bustling social life of the city were perceived as unmediated symbols that revealed trenchant social truths: the essence of Suzhou as a place, the vigor of the Chinese state, the role of the city within the empire and later Republic, and the relative global level of traditional or modern civilization of China.

Neither a modern by-product of foreign imperialism like Shanghai, nor a Manchu-inflected Imperial political and cosmological capital like Beijing, Suzhou has long been viewed as the most purely Chinese of all cities and the quintessence of domestic urban development. For centuries Chinese intellectuals have promoted Suzhou as an exemplar of Chinese urban experience. The city's history, cityscape, and social life are lovingly chronicled in literati jottings (*biji*), recorded more formally in some thirty-five local gazetteers (*difangzhi*) dating from the sixth century CE to the present, and celebrated in numerous literary works. During the Qing, Suzhou was a base for important scholarly and political networks and often praised as the most urbane city in all of China: when awarding superlatives among the Great Qing's metropolises, the late-eighteenth-century epicure Li Dou declared that Suzhou ranked first in the quality of its lively urban scenes.[11] The patchwork of canals, grand and humble gardens enclosed by courtyard walls, teahouses, opera stages, restaurants, brothels and "painted" pleasure boats, famed ancient temples, pavilions, and other historical sites bespoke a centuries-long accumulation of particularly urban pleasures. In the "sprouts of capitalism" debates of the 1950s and 1960s, PRC historians extolled Suzhou's past as one of China's most advanced late Imperial commercial and manufacturing centers, which, they concluded, had served as a nursery for indigenous strains of capitalism and class consciousness.

For all these observers, Suzhou's atypical social, economic, and cultural life made it a prototypical "traditional" city insofar as it embodied the most progressive aspects of late Imperial social, economic, and cultural change. According to this Marxist evolutionary narrative, Suzhou's role as a crucible of social progress abruptly ceased with the advent of the modern period. At that point, foreign intervention changed the endogenous path of development by coercively bringing Shanghai, other treaty ports, and thus the entire Qing Empire into the network of global mercantilism and capitalism. Perhaps more significantly, force of foreign arms shielded Shanghai from the Taiping Uprising, while Suzhou and other advanced cities were lain waste. Spared the destruction of the Taiping conquest

and later recapture by Qing forces, Shanghai and a few other cities became leading strongholds of modernity, while Suzhou and other former metropolises became relative backwaters. In light of this narrative, it is understandable that many of the Chinese and Taiwanese with whom I have spoken could not fathom why I would study Suzhou during the late Qing and early Republic (*Qingmo Minchu*), let alone think that it could exemplify modern urban trends. Most assume that I have misspoken and graciously attempt to correct me, "Don't you mean late Ming and early Qing (*Mingmo Qingchu*)," when Suzhou was the uncontested harbinger of social progress?

No, for this historiographic truism has been definitively overturned in Chinese-language scholarship during the past decade, as Suzhou has emerged as a favored case study on late Qing and Republican modernization. In several significant monographs and articles already exalted as classics, Zhang Kaiyuan, Ma Min, and Zhu Ying have examined the Suzhou Chamber of Commerce (established in 1905), one of China's earliest and most active, and the allied city area development group, the Suzhou Citizens' League (established in 1909), as models of institutional and economic modernization.[12] Their work actively engages the critical theoretical interest within the U.S. academy during the late 1980s and early 1990s in Jürgen Habermas's interpretive history of the public sphere. In particular, Zhang, Ma, and Zhu have drawn from the "public sphere" debate within American and European Chinese studies of the early 1990s and clearly recast it in terms of class and civil society. They have proposed that through commercial organizations, businessmen mediated with officials and charted a new course away from "tradition" toward modernity. Their creative scholarship has alerted a generation of scholars to the possibilities of nuanced local studies in elucidating systemic societal change. Similarly, Zhang Hailin's omnibus study *Suzhou zaoqi chengshi xiandaihua yanjiu* [Research on the early period of urban modernization in Suzhou] (1999) examines crucial topics related to urban modernization such as the development of factories, police, public schools, and local administration.[13] While extraordinarily rich in detail and replete with insight, these studies examine modern transformation exclusively through commercial and state institutions. They do not examine greater cultural or social formations, nor do they necessarily trace the varied effects of the institutions they study. Furthermore, this scholarship fails to interrogate the meanings or aims of modernizing changes, which are taken to be self-evident.

However, as anyone who has grappled to define modernity will appreciate, its meanings are legion and forever multiplying. And necessarily so, for modernity, to echo Peter Osborne, has been and continues to be "a different time." Without a clear beginning and, as yet, no end, modernity is an indistinct yet nonetheless dominant temporal marker. Moreover, it is a hegemonic project

that seeks to promote a triumphalist temporal structure and self-conscious mode of thought in which the modern vanquishes all rivals as antiquated and therefore inferior. Connected to market capitalism and, since the nineteenth century, largely inextricable from the frame of the nation-state, it changes with time.[14] As a multivalent phenomenon, modernity encompasses a bewildering array of avatars: science and technology, nationalism, popular culture, fine arts, music, and commerce, to name a few. In this book, I will examine particular ways that the cityscape became a field for inscribing and reading Suzhou's relative modernity through the use of urban planning for economic development, historic preservation, and the creation of public national monuments. These activities often dominated the workings of state and civic institutions; they also provoked a series of conflicts that reshaped social relations and propelled the reconstruction of the city. They were thus not only integral aspects of modern experience; they also helped to shape the very form and meaning of modern Suzhou. In other words, these processes demonstrate how modernity was (and continues to be) made on the ground in a particular place. Despite the totalizing logic of a cultural formation such as modernity or the hubris of its propagators, "universal" modern processes such as urbanist economic or national political development can only be realized in their specific local iterations.

To the extent that modernity in China was both the constituent material and largely the exclusive product of cities such as Suzhou, urban space and the material and social particularities of place effectively defined its contemporary instantiation. The modern Chinese city was thus postulated as encompassing three related disjunctures. Domestically, there was a temporal and territorial rupture between contemporary society and an advanced urban sector that ostensibly previewed the future of the general province and nation. In addition, the city embodied a fracture between the particularities of local society, with its many constituencies and visions of urban development, and provincial and national ideals. In a comparative international frame, the city also contained the gap between itself and the purported achievements of foreign cities and nations. The meaning and aim of modernist change was contingent, produced in accordance with local society and history, and variously interpreted by Chinese, Japanese, and American observers as a symbolic revelation of the essential state of Suzhou and greater China's civilization.

Spatial and Social Transformation

The multitude of disagreements over the absence or presence of significant social change in Suzhou begs several methodological questions regarding the perception and analysis of urban social change. Might alternate criteria or

methods of identifying urban transformation lead to different results? Could one locate modernity in or at different sites? In Chinese and foreign language scholarship and reportage, the Suzhou builtscape, its social life, and urban institutions are often presented as the very archetypes of "tradition." Moreover, they are cited as evidence of continuity (or, more negatively, stasis) in the social, material, and intellectual structure of Chinese cities over the *longue durée*. Xu Yinong's recent study, *The Chinese City in Space and Time: The Development of Urban Form in Suzhou* (2000), details Suzhou's development as a paradigmatic representation of Imperial urban ideals from the sixth century BCE to the mid-nineteenth century CE. While Xu spotlights and imaginatively analyzes shifts in the city's morphology, he finds no substantive breaks in the structure or significance of the built environment. Rather, he strikingly demonstrates the physical and discursive integrity of the classical urban paradigm through the late nineteenth century, that is, when foreign urbanist notions began to transform the physical and intellectual configurations of the city. This longevity was vividly symbolized by the city's forty-five-*li*-long (approximately fourteen miles) city wall, which had been repeatedly rebuilt on the same foundations since the thirteenth century—if not several centuries earlier.[15] The symbolic identity between city and wall is particularly apt for it echoes a fundamental linguistic one: in Chinese, the term *city* (*chengshi*) is a compound of the words *city wall* (*cheng*) and *market* (*shi*), denoting a city's fundamental identity as a preserve of state power and commerce.

Xu's macrolevel focus on city form is predisposed toward emphasizing continuities, while slighting shifts within Chinese urban thought and city planning. However, as Craig Clunas demonstrates in his book on Suzhou's celebrated urban gardens, a rather different picture emerges by more fully considering the meanings and uses that urban space acquired through social practice. During the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries, many gardens were radically remade in an attempt to "re-create" ancient models. This pursuit of "authentic" primordial forms partly masked anxieties about the moral consequences of consuming gardens and other extravagances within the rapidly developing urban world of Ming Jiangnan.[16] By pointing to such fundamental shifts in the political-economic conception and valuation of urban land within the seeming continuity of tradition, Clunas underscores the analytic significance of considering the fine details of social practice.

The most widely cited exposition of Suzhou as an exemplar of material continuity is a lyrical 1973 lecture by the cultural historian Frederick Mote. Mote eloquently emphasized the stability of Suzhou's urban space by pointing to the astonishing continuity of the city's fundamental form: the outlines of the 1229 CE *Pingjiang tu* (Map of Pingjiang, the city's official name during the

Song dynasty) stele closely matched up with those of a 1945 U.S. Air Force reconnaissance photograph when the two images were superimposed. Mote, concluded,

> Actual land use changes may have occurred, but within an enduring shell of physical forms, and a continuing pattern of open and occupied space. . . . In the remarkable continuity of Soochow [Suzhou] as a city, the impermanence of the city's individual parts and the stability of its form and physical presence, as well as the permanence of its past in the minds of the living, are typical of Chinese cities, and of Chinese civilization.[17]

Framing his argument in terms of Chinese civilization, Mote drew on the cultural holism implicit in much twentieth-century civilizational discourse to propel his analysis to an elegant and profound totalizing conclusion. Citing the undeniable persistence in the basic physical pattern of Suzhou's streets and walls, he argued that there was a homologous stability, if not stasis, in overall "concepts of time, space, and form." Not only within Suzhou, but among Chinese cities as a genus and throughout Chinese civilization as a whole.

Physical artifacts of the past and their historicity did remain important components of the city. Indeed, through the basic retention of its medieval form, a large number of celebrated scenic and historic sites, aged housing stock, and several hundred memorial arches to virtuous widows and other worthies, the city was essentially a living city of antiquities. In fact, this material endurance does not support Mote's contention that the city's urban space remained stable. In their attention to the endurance of Suzhou's historic morphology, Mote and many other commentators have slighted "actual land use changes" as epiphenomenal. However, certain land use changes, such as the creation of modern improved streets, revolutionized the function and meaning of space without fundamentally altering the city's basic plan. Finally, the understanding of particular city sites and the significance with which people imbued them changed fundamentally, provoking significant shifts in their uses. Even ancient monuments and other structures, seemingly unchanged over the course of centuries, were continually endowed with novel meanings and functions, demonstrating the essential fluidity of the urban environment.

These shifts have gone unmarked and unstudied. This situation has much to do with our historical appreciation of modernity, which is usually understood comparatively, whether internationally or domestically. In the hierarchy of Chinese national modernity, Suzhou has been a symbol of continuity. Suzhou's permanency is rooted in the fact that local changes in the streets, transportation, architecture, industry, clothing, and other material artifacts by which urban modernity is usually judged appear slight in comparison to neighboring Shanghai, the paradigmatic modern Chinese city. However, such an exclusive

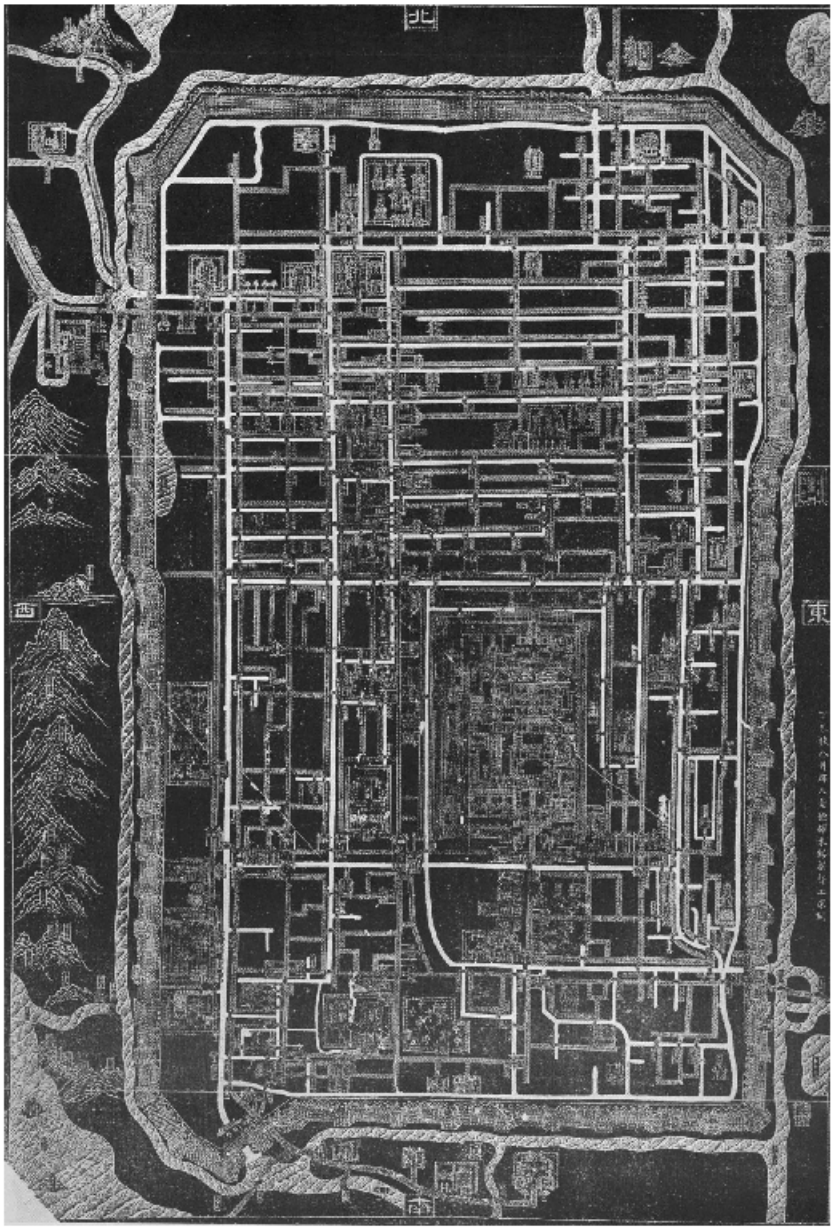

FIG. 2. *Pingjiangtu* stele: Map of Song dynasty Suzhou, 1229 CE. *Source:* Liu Dunzhen, *Suzhou gu jianzhu diaocha ji* (Beiping: Zhongguo yingzao xueshe, 1936), image 21.

FIG. 3. U.S. Air Force aerial reconnaissance photo of Suzhou, 1945. *Source:* Photograph RG 373, Can ON 23143, Exp TV-104, Apr. 28, 1945, 1:58,000, Department of Defense, Department of the Navy, Photograph Record Group 373, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

vision of modernity, in which only the leading archetype qualifies as significantly or fully modern, fails to represent accurately the modernist transformation of urban space in Suzhou or other cities. It overlooks the fact that changes which that in hindsight appear negligible in comparison to contemporary Shanghai and other places were appreciated by late Qing and early Republic denizens of Suzhou as momentous. To focus on the transformation of urban space is to recapture the lost history of late Qing and Republican businessmen, government officials, local denizens, and tourists: people who saw the changes in the physical and social landscapes of Suzhou as, for better or for worse, fundamental components of a new, indisputably modern era in which the entire city was revalued and reshaped according to a burgeoning calculus of nationalism and economic development.

Considering Urban Space and Place

To excavate past human use and perceptions of the city builtscape, it is useful to make urban "space" a primary object of analysis. Here I am not proposing a grand theoretical pronouncement, but merely acknowledging that space is no passive container. Rather, it is a social product and human practice that, in Henri Lefebvre's evocative phrase, "implies, contains, and dissimulates social relationships." At the same time, it can be analyzed in terms of its material as well as social, intellectual, and cultural components to reveal the workings of social power relations that often lie unacknowledged and obscured by the common belief in the transparency and natural "realness" of the built and natural environments.[18]

The implications of Lefebvre's theoretical model are clarified by geographer Doreen Massey's useful gloss of "place" as a relational product that forms out of the intersection of social relations and their effects at a particular location. This unique confluence, in turn, produces other novel social effects.[19] Massey's open-ended and dynamic conception of place helps capture the interplay of influences, Chinese and foreign, local and distant, that contributed to the modernist recreation of Suzhou. The elements that collectively produce a notion of place are not bound by set political or geographic boundaries. As place is both a demarcated physical space and clusters of interaction, its identity emerges through its intersections with other hierarchically organized spaces. While focusing on linkages may seem poised to make the bounds and significances of place hopelessly indeterminate, this analytic approach actually highlights the mechanisms by which notions of place achieve coherence. In particular, one can observe how under the onslaught of modern urban development, nationalism, and imperialism, the use of memory and other essentialist notions of difference

have become ever more salient in the attempt to negotiate local identity.[20] Indeed, the various conceptions and subject positions of China and Suzhou were created, revised, and maintained through hierarchical interconnections with Shanghai, the central Qing state, Japan, and the "West."

Since Marx, social analysts have described how the increasingly abstract frame of capitalism has led to the erasure of difference in the modern era. Reconstructing Suzhou as modern produced a maelstrom of creative destruction. The cityscape morphed as roads and buildings appeared, disappeared, or transformed through renovation and reuse. Alternate forms of value, whether cultural, historic, or familial, were challenged, though not effaced, by ascendant economistic ideals. Instead, the physical layout, significance, and function of the city bore the marks of past history.

Suzhou was a palimpsest, or to draw on Pierre Nora and others working in the vital field of historical memory, a site of memory.[21] The entire city, "modern" and "ancient," was an integrated site of memory, as well as an assortment of discrete ones. New construction occurred on the site of previous usage; historicity could be enfolded into new structures or put to new use. Innovative structures such as the horse-road to the south of the city road were created from long-settled human areas. Novel constructions, in turn, produced their own histories: ambitious schemes for industrial and economic growth, real estate development, or the establishment of a precociously modernist culture, whether successful or not, soon passed into the realm of contemporary memory to infiltrate and react with the course of everyday life. These strands of sited memory, whether historical or contemporary, were more than antiquarian or intellectual curiosities. In the ongoing reconstruction of the city, they became reagents and helped to determine Suzhou's relative modernity in the eyes of local denizens, people from throughout the empire and later Republic, foreign sojourners, and travelers, as well as those who only voyaged there via newspapers, books, or their own fancy.

Changing Intellectual Notions of the City

Suzhou's late Qing and Republican-era reconstruction involved and, perhaps more significantly, was understood as encompassing interconnected changes in the physical, social, and intellectual forms of the city. By locating the beginnings of this shift in the 1890s, I would revise the findings of Kristin Stapleton's important book on late Qing and Republican urban reform in Chengdu. Stapleton notes that from 1895 onward the management of cities emerged as a main focus of administrative activism under the particular influence of the Qing New Policies during the first decade of the twentieth century, the early Republican city administrative movement, and the Nanjing decade of centralized Guomindang

(GMD) control. In Chengdu (and Suzhou, as well), lack of funds and instances of overt elite and popular opposition to city reconstruction projects hampered the ambitions of late Qing and Republican urban reformers. Nonetheless, support for urban planning was particularly strong in provincial capitals, such as Chengdu and Suzhou. These cities were privileged by the state and their own business and gentry communities as laboratories for the creation of modern urban institutions. Convinced that their city, as a provincial capital and a cultural center merited especial attention as a cradle of economic, political, and social change, state and commercial elites, not to mention common folk, effected a wide array of progressive urban initiatives during the first decades of the twentieth century. While local pride played a part, it did not constitute the main motivation. Rather, the breadth of support for city reconstruction and reform stemmed from the fact that people of all backgrounds anticipated that urban modernization would generate a host of economic, political, cultural, and entertainment benefits.

Despite these changes, Stapleton qualifies her argument, "Even after 1895, cities were not immediately seen as distinct or particularly important arenas for social change."[22] It is true that cities were not distinct, integrated administrative units. During the Imperial period, large Chinese cities were often divided into separate political units, each governed by a different county (*xian*) administration, for which the city (or rather, one corner of it) served as the county seat. Individual cities could also serve as the capital for larger, overlapping political units. Thus, late-nineteenth-century Suzhou was simultaneously the seat of Wu, Changzhou, and Yuanhe *xian*, and Suzhou Prefecture (which contained nine counties), while also serving as the capital of Jiangsu province. After the 1911 Xinhai Revolution, the three urban counties were unified in 1912 as Wu *xian*. The city proper was briefly (1927–30) granted the boon of a municipal government that attempted to carry out many infrastructural and social reforms before reverting back to the previous form of county administration, Wu *xian*.[23]

Though important, the state's administrative divisions did not necessarily correspond to popular cultural categories; nor did they prescriptively structure people's experience. During the late nineteenth century, Chinese cities were seen as important arenas for societal change. Stapleton's engaging study actually presents much evidence to this effect. True, the cosmological principles of capital cities aside, "the city" did not serve as a central analytical subject or metaphor in Chinese philosophy as it did in the "Western" tradition exemplified by Plato, St. Augustine, and Condorcet, among others. Yet by looking to state administration as the main index of change in the conception, organization, and function of cities, Stapleton and others grant the Qing (or any state) too much power. Haphazard and episodic changes on the ground would be easily

overlooked in her model. In Suzhou at least, significant urban change more often proceeded through contingency and happenstance, than the mythic "rational" plan of bureaucrats.[24]

The promotion of "the city" as a discrete political and administrative entity stemmed from the modernist transformation already underway in cities such as Suzhou, but also, as discussed in Chapter 2, from a growing appreciation for foreign cities as economic engines propelling the general commercial, social, political, and cultural development of Japan, Europe, and the United States. This appropriation of nineteenth-century scientific urbanist ideology constituted a fundamental philosophical shift in the conception of cities and provoked manifold changes in the structure of Suzhou urban space. Under modernist urbanism, cities were reconceived as economic engines that would transform the entire nation. This political-economic vision meant that cities like Suzhou bore a particular burden as national symbols and vehicles of national development.

The Nationalization of Place and the Location of Place within the Nation

Nationalist narratives generally present nationality as an undifferentiated, natural expression of a primordial identity evenly imprinted throughout a national territory. These hegemonic claims mask the fact that nationality is more typically experienced through local articulations individually enacted in different locations. Notions of a nation are grounded in particularities of place, the symbolism of which is then expanded and applied to the nation as a whole. The discursive reflex of generating nationality through synecdoches transcends the cultural variation, geographic spread, and unevenness of material modernity within national borders to create an image of national coherence and uniformity. In addition to masking various aporia within China, the process of creating nationality through local culture obscures differences in national time between China and foreign centers of normative modernity in Europe, North America, and Japan.

The shifting formations of Suzhou as a place illustrate the formative role of "the city" in modernity and the particular influence of national prerogatives upon the structure of place. As Partha Chatterjee, Prasenjit Duara, and others have argued, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the fantastic project/projection of the nation-state became so dominant as to almost constitute the sole licit form of large-scale political organization, while also becoming a prime locus of social imagination. In addition, in China and other semi- or fully colonized nations, the searing trauma of "Western" imperialist

domination heightened local imperatives toward nation building and the inculcation of ethnonational consciousness. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this violent induction into modernity served as a touchstone in the creation of nationalist narratives, contemporary politics, and formations of place—and has continued to do so, up to the present.

State- and business-sponsored planning and development profoundly altered the spatial, social, and intellectual maps of the city. Elites and common people alike initiated protests and debates regarding the form and meaning of their increasingly alien city environment. To some, the reliance on foreign technologies to augment Chinese national subjectivity through modernization created a troubling dissonance between nationalist goals and the methods for achieving them. Could the city remain "Chinese" if all traces of its past were gone? Or, more parochially, would specific neighborhoods and streets retain their distinctive "atmosphere" if characteristic markers such as markets, walls, or buildings were removed to facilitate modern planning? The changing physical cityscape not only transformed the experience and conception of Suzhou culture and identity, it also altered corollary constructs of the nation. Focused debates over the value and place of historic monuments in Republican Suzhou served as forums for more general discussions regarding the nature of the modern urban economy, community morality, and the contemporary relevance of China's cultural patrimony.

The Plan of this Book

This book is organized into three two-chapter sections, each of which examines a key physical and conceptual site in the late Qing and Republican-era reconstruction of Suzhou as a modern city: the improved road, the Suzhou Prefectural Confucian Temple, and historic monuments. Chapter 1 provides a close case study of the city's first macadamized street, the foreign concession horse-road. Begun as a joint official-merchant enterprise to expedite industrial development and forestall Japanese territorial expansion, this horse-road provoked a series of unforeseen and often controversial economic and social effects antithetical to its original purpose. Chapter 2 explores the political significance of street and social conflict over their use as the local government and business elites attempted to stimulate commerce and social progress by building horse-roads within the walled city.

Chapters 3 and 4 detail the political, architectural, and social transformations of the city's most influential and venerable state institution, the Suzhou Prefectural Confucian Temple. The site of official sacrifices to Confucius and a government school, the temple was viewed as the brain of a hidden geomantic

dragon, the influence of which underlay the unparalleled success of local Suzhou men on the Imperial civil service exams. This communal scholarly achievement, in turn, had long served as a key source of the city's wealth and power. Chapter 3 focuses on the late Qing revitalization of the temple as a political institution through its leading role in the dissemination of modern educational reform and the recreation of Confucius as a modern national hero. Chapter 4 examines how with the demise of the Imperial state, the temple and its historicity were variously rejected as antithetical or embraced and/or essential to modern Republican progress.

Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the emergence of state preservation of historical sites as a touchstone of modern urban reconstruction and nationalism. Chapter 5 focuses on the reconstruction of the celebrated Hanshan Temple and traces the late Qing transformation of historic monuments from local cultural treasures to national properties symbolizing China's antiimperialist struggle and primordial "National Essence." Chapter 6 presents two case studies that examine the revaluation of the city's cultural identity and its historic monuments in light of Nationalist-era economic growth and commercial activism. The first traces the quixotic efforts of a local grave protection and historic preservation society to preserve the sanctity of graves amid burgeoning urban development; the second analyzes the prolonged 1927–31 conflict over the renovation of the grand Xuanmiao guan Daoist Temple for purposes of business development.

The conclusion and epilogue assess Suzhou's late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century reconstruction in light of recent attempts to remake the city as modern through the application of contemporary political-economic ideals. Two decades of market-oriented reforms and foreign investment by multinational corporations have arguably altered the city more fundamentally than at any time in its history. The radical (and arguably much needed) modern reconstruction of Suzhou has been accompanied by similarly unprecedented state pledges, some almost bordering on protestations of faith in their fervent piety, to preserve the ancient fabric of the city. Whether viewed as cynical political posturing or evidence of the chronologic dialectic lying at the heart of modernity, or perhaps both, the simultaneity of state commitments to rebuild and preserve the city have proceeded apace. In light of the fundamental needs of city residents living in dank and aged, albeit picturesque, housing without sewage or other amenities, demolition and reconstruction have necessarily commanded greater influence than preservation. Though undeniably transformed, Suzhou continues to be seen as one of China's "ancient" places. As the 2003 controversy over the construction of an I. M. Pei–designed modernist Suzhou Museum building that required the partial demolition of a nationally protected relic, the palace of the Taiping Prince Li Xiucheng, demonstrates, the disposition of

modern and historical sites within the city reveals much about the particular valuation of the past by the market economy and the expansive role of the ancient in China's contemporary modernity.

One of the arguments of this book is that the myriad changes in the city and its spaces were largely unanticipated and contingent. Nonetheless, I hope that the following chapters convey both the happenstance and the logic of political-economic and historical change. The book begins and ends on two very different roads that lay less than two miles apart. Though they did not intersect, these streets were very much interconnected through the process of urban modernization. It is no mere coincidence that a book exploring modern Suzhou begins and ends on the urban road, for few other spaces as clearly manifested the attempt to realize a new intellectual conception of the city through the reconstruction of its physical form and social life. The late Qing and Republican transformation of urban space was epitomized by the shift in the conception of the city from a preternatural landscape richly endowed with propitious veins of earthly dragon energies, to a space dedicated to generating maximal commercial and industrial profit, in which concepts of *fengshui* (geomancy), cultural longevity, and even the moral obligations to the dead were refracted through the lens of modernist national development. The violent collision of different spatialities precipitated and sustained the drama of Suzhou's transformation from heaven on earth to that phantasmal, ultimately elusive location, modernity.