

From Ideals to Reality:

The Evolution of Public Housing in Nanjing, 1928-1937

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Abstract

During the rapid urbanization of the early 20th century, Western policies and forms of public housing provided a significant model for the development of modern public housing in China. In the face of severe national conditions, Chinese scholars and the Nationalist government worked together to develop public housing as a symbol of societal reform and architectural innovation. This thesis focuses on the initial period of establishing the public housing system from 1928 to 1937. It first explores the social background of public housing through historical research and literature review. It then examines primary sources such as periodicals and mass media to understand how scholars introduced the concept into China. Additionally, through case studies in architecture including plans for four different types of social housing and the planning of a new village, this thesis provides a comprehensive and interdisciplinary understanding of the development of public housing during this period, demonstrating how the ideals of social reform were transformed into practical solutions for improving people's welfare.

Keywords: Public housing; civilian housing; new village; modern Nanjing; societal reform

Introduction

In recent years, MAD Architects completed the Baiziwan public housing project in Beijing's Chaoyang district and launched a New Housing initiative that champions being close to nature, open urban communities, diverse spaces, the right to sunlight, attention to individuality, and simple aesthetics as the contemporary goals for social housing. Leveraging their influence in architecture and media, MAD Architects has brought the often-overlooked topic of public housing into public discourse, sparking widespread discussion (**Figure 1**).¹ In the Western context, social housing, typically welfare-oriented and provided for low-income groups, remains a prime example of architects using design to transform human lifestyles and achieve the societal ideal of sheltering the less fortunate. In China, after the 1998 housing system reform shifted from a government-led welfare system to a market-driven commodification system, social housing faded from public view and is still in a phase of mechanism design and transformation.² However, with China in a rapid urbanization phase, the dramatic increase in urban populations highlights acute housing issues, with the housing rent-to-sale ratio reaching one of the lowest globally. Buying a new home is a significant burden for ordinary people, let alone for the low-income urban populace. Terms like affordable housing, subsidized housing, and economically suitable housing are gradually entering public and academic discussions. Indeed, public housing is not a product of modern society³; as early as the 20th century, with urbanization, industrialization, and radical modernization in China, the first public housing emerged and became an ideal form for municipal innovation and social reform.



(Left) Figure 1: The New Housing initiative resembles the cover of LA JEUNESSE which promotes new ideas during the New Cultural Movement in the early 20th century in China.

(Right) Figure 2: Photograph shows the mall-scale neighborhoods and rich community amenities within the Baiziwan public housing. Source: MAD Architects, “Baiziwan Public Housing”, *Architectural Journal*, No. 6(2022): 35.

¹ MAD Architects, “Baiziwan Public Housing”, *Architectural Journal*, No. 6(2022): 32-39.

² Xiangning Li and Ziyue Zhang, “Three Agendas of Baiziwan Public Rental Housing and Social Housing”, *Architectural Journal*, No.6(2022): 26-31.

³Junhua Lü and Peter G. Rowe, *Modern Urban Housing in China 1840-2000* (Munich, London and New York: Prestel Verlag, 2001), 190.

During the Republic of China era, public housing emerged as a sign of innovation both in architectural typology and social transformation, developed through collaborative efforts of scholars and the Nationalist government under the influence of Western ideas. Nanjing, as the capital, played a crucial role in the development of public housing in China. After becoming the capital, the government initiated extensive urban renovation and modernization to symbolize national unity and progress. With rapid urban population growth, Nanjing faced various modern urban challenges, including a severe housing shortage. Starting in 1928, the Nanjing government implemented public housing projects to address the housing needs of the low-income population, aiming to improve living conditions for the lower strata. This thesis focuses on Nanjing's public housing from 1928 to 1937, placing it within the context of China's modern transformation, and explores how public housing evolved from concept to practice to address the housing needs of the low-income population.

What is the social background of the emergence of public housing? Is it a product of social development or an imported concept within a cultural context? How did scholars and the government of the time introduce policies and forms of public housing from the West? How did public housing in Nanjing evolve from an ideal to a practical implementation, improving the lives of the general public and thus influencing today's public housing models? This thesis aims to comprehensively explore the interaction of these factors, providing a thorough historical interpretation of the history from the inception to the implementation of public housing during this period, offering historical reference value for the construction of public housing in today's urban development.

There is extensive research on the development history of public housing in Nanjing. Social surveys conducted by scholars and public officials on housing issues in Nanjing during the period from 1928 to 1937 provide a government perspective on the city's housing shortage and the outcomes of constructions. The most direct accounts of the poor living conditions of the populace are found in Jianxin Zhang's "Problems of Regional Utilization in Nanjing Area,"⁴ Yuelin Chen's "Housing issues in Nanjing,"⁵ and "Practical Survey Diary in Nanjing."⁶ These three articles vividly illustrate the dire residential situations faced by the citizens. Additionally, publications compiled by the Nanjing municipal government, such as the "Nanjing Municipal Official Report," provide primary sources such as blueprints and photographs of public housing construction. However, these documents are summary government reports and lack corresponding analysis of the content. The book *Modern Urban Housing in China: 1840-2000*,⁷ authored by Junhua Lü and others, approaches the development of housing in modern China from the dual perspectives of important historical stages and the factors influencing changes in housing types. It provides an analysis of political, economic, and social influences, establishing a comprehensive framework for the evolution of modern and contemporary Chinese residential architecture. Although it mentions the construction of public housing in modern Nanjing, it primarily showcases the diversity of housing types at the time through various case studies. Xiangqian Xing⁸ and Yang Wang⁹ organized the residential construction events of the decade in chronological order from historical and sociological perspectives,

⁴ Jianxin Zhang, "Problems of Regional Utilization in Nanjing Area", *Information on land issues in mainland China in the 1920s of the Republic of China*, eds. by Xiao Zheng (Taipei: Cheng Wen Publishing House, 1977).

⁵ Yuelin Chen, "Housing issues in Nanjing", *Information on land issues in mainland China in the 1920s of the Republic of China*, eds. by Xiao Zheng (Taipei: Cheng Wen Publishing House, 1977).

⁶ Yuelin Chen, "Practical Survey Diary in Nanjing", *Information on land issues in mainland China in the 1920s of the Republic of China*, eds. by Xiao Zheng (Taipei: Cheng Wen Publishing House, 1977).

⁷ Lü and Rowe, *Modern Urban Housing in China 1840-2000*, 20-22,190.

⁸ Xiangqian Xing, *Research on residential construction issues in Nanjing from 1927 to 1937*(Nanjing: Nanjing Normal University,2012).

⁹ Yang Wang, *Study on Nanjing Shantytowns from 1927 to 1937* (Nanjing: Nanjing Normal University,2014).

attempting to explore the political objectives behind this top-down construction approach. Yunxi Chen explores the issues of hierarchy in the construction of public housing in Nanjing from the perspectives of state power and social stratification,¹⁰ which provides a different perspective of interpreting public housing.

In summary, these research achievements have studied the historical materials of public housing construction in Nanjing from 1928 to 1937, but they primarily focused on outlining the development trajectory and focused on a specific aspect. There is a lack of horizontal research that integrate the socio-political context and the essence of architecture. Moreover, there is no systematic exploration of how the concept of social housing was introduced into China by scholars and how it transitioned from an ideal to practice.

To fill this research gap, this thesis builds on existing studies and further excavates historical materials, exploring the practice of public housing in this period from the intersecting perspectives of social background, international context, cultural context, and the essence of architecture. Through the collection of historical documents and literature review, this thesis examines government archives, newspapers, and magazines as primary sources to construct a comprehensive historical perspective on public housing. By analyzing the design blueprints for public housing found in the Nanjing Municipality Archives, this research interprets the imagination and practical realization of public housing during this period, including its spatial changes and how it evolved into today's public housing models.

This thesis is divided into four parts in response to the research questions. The first part introduces the socio-historical context of the period when public housing emerged, exploring the reasons for its inception. The second part places public housing within a global context, examining contemporaneous social housing developments in the West to better understand the essence of public housing. The third part investigates how Western public housing policies and forms were disseminated through newspapers and magazines, laying the groundwork for public housing practices. The final part studies the specific architectural practices of social housing during the 1928-1937 period, understanding how theoretical ideals were translated into practical realities.

¹⁰ Yunxi Chen, "National Power, Urban Housing, and Social Stratification: A Focus on Residential Construction in Nanjing during the Republic of China." *Jiangsu Social Science*, No.06 (2011): 223-230.

population growth of Nanjing was over 640,000 people. By the eve of the outbreak of the War of Resistance against Japan in 1937, the number of urban residents in Nanjing had exceeded one million (**Table 1**). This massive increase in population led to a significant increase in housing demand and a shortage of housing supply, resulting in housing tension and “making the housing issue particularly severe in urban areas”.¹³

Year	Population	Year	Population	Year	Population	Year	Population	Year	Population	Year	Population
1901	225000	1914	377120	1919	392100	1924	395500	1929	540120	1934	795955
1902	230000	1915	368800	1920		1925		1930	577093	1935	1013320
1903	267000	1916	378200	1921	380200	1926		1931	653948	1936	1006968
1904	269000	1917	377549	1922	380900	1927	360500	1932	659617		
1905		1918	376291	1923	401500	1928	497526	1933	726131		

Table 1: Nanjing City Demographic Table (1901-1936)

Sources: compiled by author based on Wang, *Regional Studies*, 495; Chuban Ye and Yizheng Liu, *Capital Annals* (Taiwan: Zhengzhong Bookstore, 1935), 500-501; Qin, *Revolutionary Documents, Series 93, Historical Materials of the Anti-Japanese War and the Founding of the Nation: Capital Construction* (Taipei: Zhonghua Publishing House, 1982), 226; Nanjing Municipal Social Affairs Bureau, *Nanjing Society* (1937), 29

Before 1927, seventy percent of the urban area was undeveloped land. Apart from the northern part of the city, which housed government offices, consulates, and Western-style mansions, the majority of the land was covered with thatched cottages, with very few large residential areas available for the general population to inhabit.¹⁴ The civilian housing, where the average person in society lived, continued to face a supply shortage, leading to soaring house prices and rents, severely affecting the quality of their urban life. A large number of low-income residents paid expensive rents to live collectively in cramped and poor-condition houses, primarily in the south of the city. According to Yuelin Chen’s research, one-third of the population lived in half-room dwellings, while only 20% had the luxury of living in a room of their own.¹⁵ Reports also indicated that housing costs accounted for more than 20% of urban residents’ incomes, a proportion that was the highest among major cities nationwide.¹⁶ To save on rent, more farmers, workers, and unemployed residents built makeshift shanties in the suburbs or on vacant city land (**Figure 4**). By 1928, there were 18,300 shanty households in Nanjing, primarily located in the southern, western, and Xiaguan districts. By 1934, the total number of shanties in Nanjing had increased to 29,572, accounting for 45.1% of all residential units in the city.¹⁷ These shanties were generally “crude, low, and filthy, resembling a life in dark hell, truly inhuman living conditions”.¹⁸

¹³ Chen, “Housing issues in Nanjing”.

¹⁴ Chuban Ye and Yizheng Liu, *Capital Annals*, (Taiwan: Zhengzhong Bookstore, 1935).

¹⁵ Chen, “Housing issues in Nanjing.”

¹⁶ Xiuqing Liu, “Research on land expropriation in Nanjing City,” in *Information on land issues in mainland China in the 1920s of the Republic of China*, eds. by Zheng Xiao (Taipei: Taipei Chengwen Publishing House and American Chinese Language Center, 1977)

¹⁷ Wenhui Wu, “A brief summary of the survey on shantytowns in Nanjing,” *Central Daily News*, November 12, 1934.

¹⁸ Meng Ruo, “Improving and banning shantytowns,” *Shen Bao*, May 27, 1936.

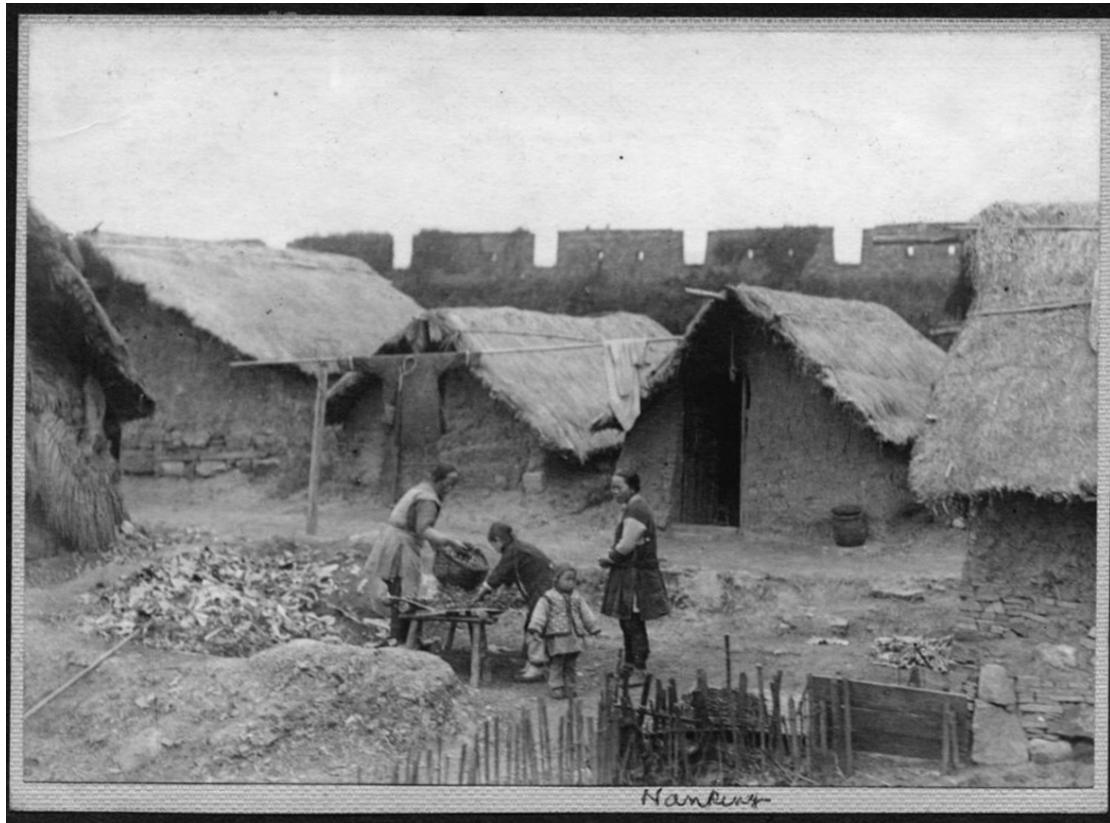


Figure 4: "Nanking" Women and children working in yard of stone and mud thatched huts. Stone city walls in background. Source: Unknown photographer, *Street scene in Nanjing, China, ca. 1920-1930*, photographic prints, International Mission Photography Archive, <https://doi.org/10.25549/impa-m2693>.

This situation illustrates how social differentiation brought by capital accumulation, labor division spurred by industrialization, rapid urbanization, and the changing relationship between the state and society within a specific socio-cultural context, all converge on the residential issues faced by ordinary urban dwellers. These issues included a shortage of civilian housing, poor living conditions for the masses, unsanitary environments, and rising crime rates. These conflicts severely impacted social stability and the construction of the new regime, and they contradicted the Nationalist Government's ideals of nationalism, civil rights, and the people's livelihood. In 1924, Sun Yat-sen, the great leader of the Chinese democratic revolution and the founding father of the Republic of China, emphasized in *Guidelines for National Reconstruction* that the foremost task in building a nation was to improve people's livelihood. The government should collaborate with the public in constructing various types of housing to ensure comfortable living conditions.¹⁹ He also proposed a housing plan in the *Strategies for National Construction*, advocating for the government to build affordable housing for the people.²⁰ Although it was not yet implemented, it reflected the government's determination and urgency to solve the housing issues and address the civilians' living conditions.

¹⁹ Historical Research Institute of the Guangdong Academy of Sciences, *The Complete Works of Sun Yat-sen* (Shanghai: Zhonghua Book Company, 1985), 126.

²⁰ Yat-sen Sun, *Strategies for National Construction* (Beijing: Huaxia Publishing House, 2002), 268.

Public housing in comparative perspectives

The residential issues faced by ordinary people are not a unique phenomenon, but rather a common problem resulting from capital accumulation, industrialization, and the rapid transformation of urban-rural relations. China's social housing system, which operates publicly and widely adopts the new village model, is primarily influenced by Western government-funded social housing and the concept of workers' villages; analyzing contemporary cases and considering the issue of civilian housing within the global context of social development helps us better understand the nature of social housing and its unique aspects in the Chinese context.

Unlike China's passive yet radical modernization, Western societies underwent the Industrial Revolution, which liberated modes of production, production relations, and productive forces, thereby triggering rapid urbanization and class differentiation. From the perspective of capitalist development, British historian Eric Hobsbawm elaborated in detail how the combined effects of capital, power, society and the everyday life in the period 1789-1914 gradually elevated the problem of housing to an acute social contradiction, resulting in a series of reforms in land reform, community organisation and the construction of mass housing.^{21,22,23} In *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Friedrich Engels vividly describes the dire living conditions of the industrial working class: overcrowded and unsanitary housing, poor health, hazardous work environments, inadequate nutrition, and profound social and psychological strain, all exacerbated by the exploitative nature of capitalist industrialization.²⁴ Owen's "New Harmony,"²⁵ Fourier's "Phalanstery,"²⁶ and Howard's "Garden City"²⁷ concept were all early attempts to ensure the basic right of low-income individuals to live in cities.

Owen's New Harmony Village concept was a prototype of early model workers' villages (**Figure 5**), utilizing the medieval English courtyard house style, and through closed management and central shared facilities, created a well-equipped, convenient community. This reflected social reformers' desire to change the living conditions of the working class, thereby mitigating the social contradictions caused by capitalism. This idealistic early attempt inspired the practice of model workers' villages in British suburbs and garden villages that considered the quality of human habitation. The Garden City concept proposed creating self-contained communities surrounded by "greenbelts," managed through trust funds that control land, housing construction, and rentals, effectively eliminating commercial development to stabilize housing prices at a low level and create low-density, healthy living environments.²⁸ Port Sunlight Village and Bournville Village are classic examples of integrating workers' housing villages with the garden city concept, both aimed at achieving social reform by improving the living conditions of the working class to ensure productivity.²⁹ Both utilized trust funds for the construction and maintenance of

²¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *1789-1848: The Age of Revolution*, (Beijing: Zhongxin Publishing House, 2014).

²² Eric Hobsbawm, *1848-1914: The Age of Capital*, (Beijing: Zhongxin Publishing House, 2014).

²³ Eric Hobsbawm, *1914-1991: The Age of Empire*, (Beijing: Zhongxin Publishing House, 2014).

²⁴ Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, (Oxford; New York :Oxford University Press, 1993).

²⁵ George Browning Lockwood, *The New Harmony Communities*. (Augustana Book Concern, 1902).

²⁶ Jonathan Beecher, "Fourier and his Phalanstery," in *Charles Fourier: The Visionary and His World*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 182-204.

²⁷ Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (London: S. Sonnenschein & Co., Ltd., 1902)

²⁸ Howard, *Garden Cities of To-morrow*.

²⁹ Yishi Liu, "Outsiders: English Non-Conformist Entrepreneurs at the Turn of the Twentieth Century and the Impact of Their Industrial Model Villages on Modern City Planning", *Journal of Architectural History*, No.02 (2021):131-144.

residential areas, renting them at low costs to factory workers as a form of social welfare. In their overall planning, public and private areas were distinctly separated, presenting a pastoral landscape characteristic and focusing on the physical and mental health of residents, emphasizing the importance of gardens for residents' well-being and community life.

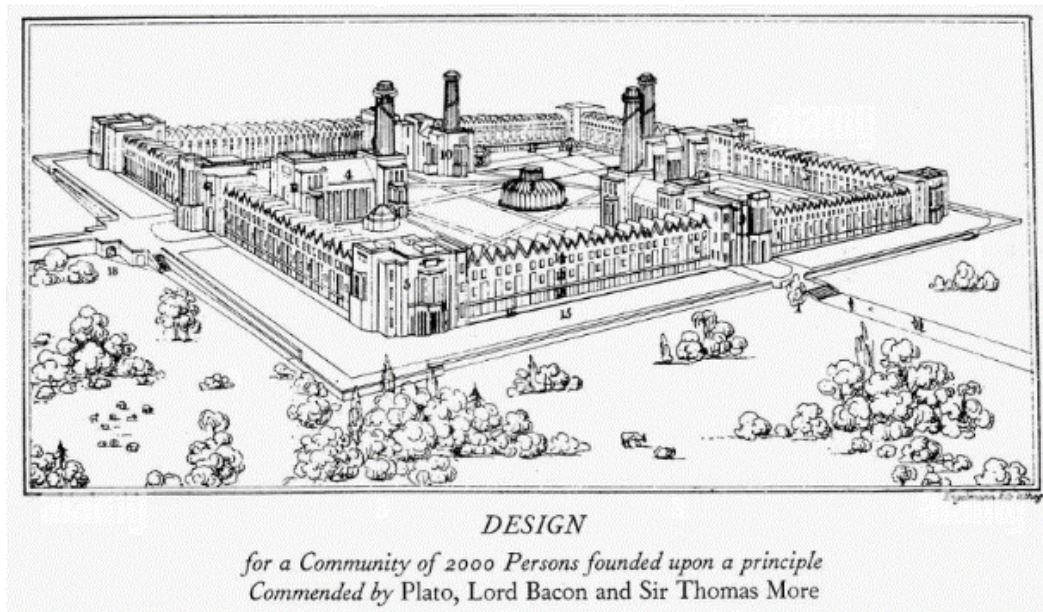


Figure 5: Owen's New Harmony Ideal Model. Source: Granger, NYC, *Communauté OWENIENNES*, 1824, photographic prints, <https://www.alamyimages.fr/photo-image-communaute-oweniennes-1824-ndesign-pour-une-communaute-oweniennes-par-stedman-whitwell-l-architecte-qui-a-accompagne-robert-owen-a-new-harmony-indiana-en-1824-95477966.html>.

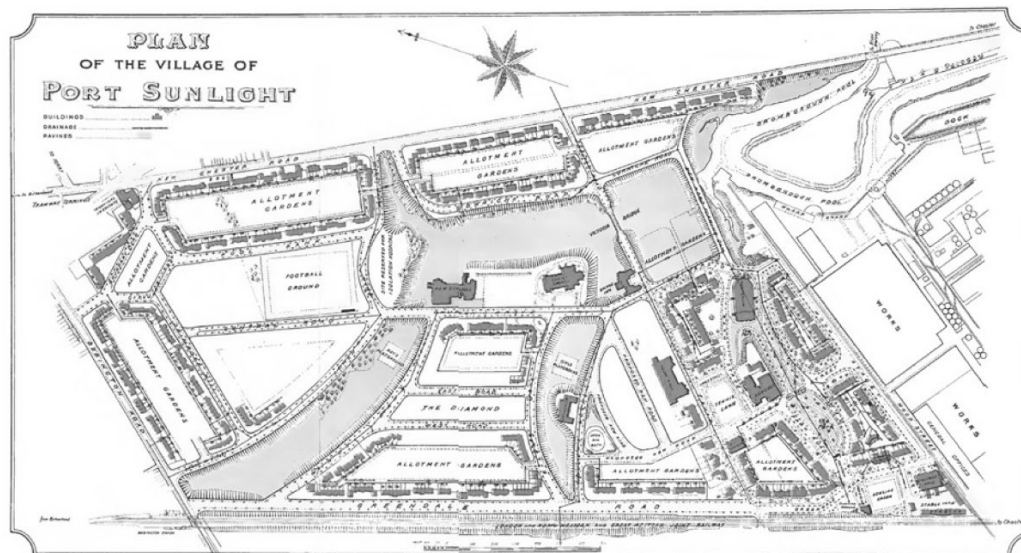
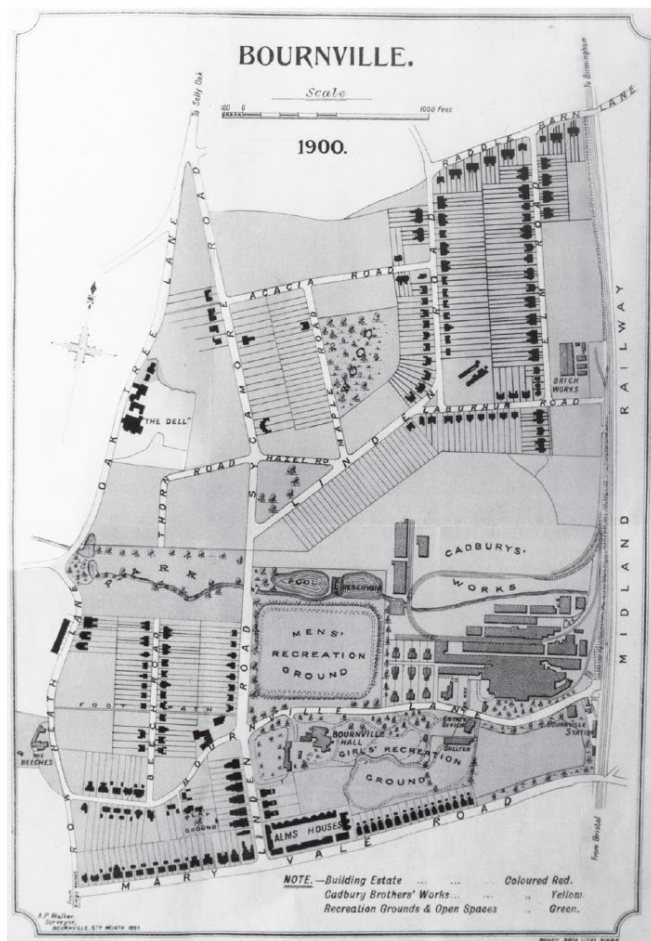
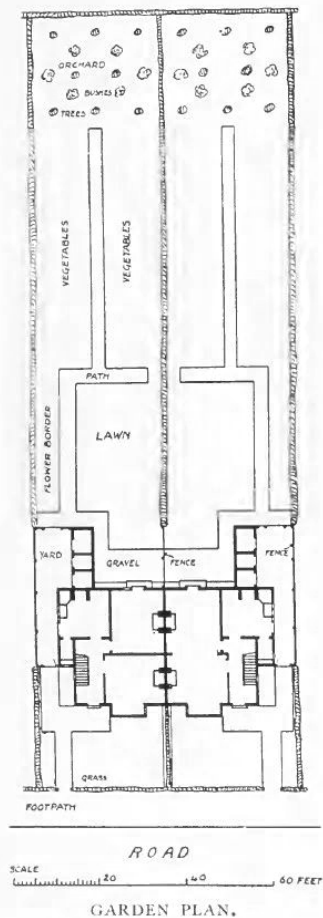


Figure 6: The plan of Port Sunlight Village. Source: LEVER W H, *Buildings Erected at Port Sunlight and Hornton Hough*.



(Left) Figure 7: The plan of Bournville Village. Source: Reekes A., *Two Titans, One City*.



(Right) Figure 8: The floor plan of a housing unit. Each unit has a big garden for relaxation and social needs. Source: Harvey W A., *The Model Village and Its Cottages: Bournville*.

This idea profoundly influenced urban planning during the modernization efforts of the Nationalist Government in Nanjing, seen in the *City Plan of Nanking* and related initiatives from 1927 to 1937. However, at that time, city planners mostly understood the Garden City as a low-density residential area with park-like features.

In Germany, large-scale industrialized housing was built for low-income residents in suburban areas under the guidance of Ernst May, who drew from garden city and industrialization principles. May advocated for reducing rental costs and ensuring quality by manufacturing houses on an industrial scale, similar to mass-produced goods. Built in 1929, the Westhausen Siedlung utilized bar-type houses (Figure 9), a row arrangement, and a grid structure, all designed to optimize sunlight exposure (Figure 10). This approach included standardized, modular unit design, as well as prefabrication and assembly-line construction techniques, which lowered building costs. These homes were equipped with the Frankfurt Kitchen, emblematic of a "new living" philosophy, redefining the social and aesthetic values of residential architecture and demonstrating a commitment to improving the quality of life for the general populace

(Figure 11).³⁰



(Left) Figure 9: Aerial view of Westhausen

(Right) Figure 10: Terraced houses Zillestraße 30+32. Source: <https://ernst-may-gesellschaft.de/wohnsiedlungen/siedlung-westhausen>.

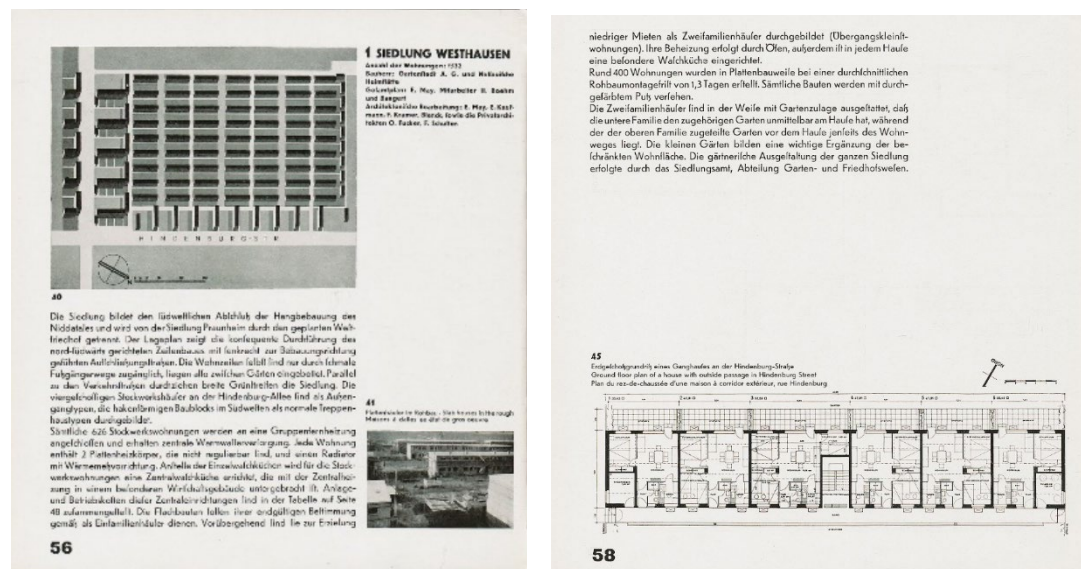


Figure 11: The masterplan and floor plan of Westhausen Siedlung. Source: *Das neue Frankfurt: internationale Monatsschrift für die Probleme kultureller Neugestaltung* (1930),59,58, https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/neue_frankfurt1930/0089/image,info,thumbs

It is evident that Western societies had been engaging in ongoing reflection and practice since the early 20th century on how to guarantee the basic right of people to live in cities. These efforts reflect the government's and architects' hopes to achieve social equity by using housing to address social conflicts, enhance the living quality of the masses, and provide a healthy and accessible living environment. This vision of public housing policy and the associated movements entered the view of Chinese government, scholars and the public through journals, books, and mass media, providing effective experience and methods for China to address the housing issues.

³⁰ Jingmin Zhou, Shuyuan Wang and Guang He, "The Development Characteristics of Social Housing and the Trend of Thoughts in Foreign Countries," *Journal of Architecture*, No. 06 (2022): 3. <https://doi:10.19819/j.cnki.ISSN0529-1399.202206001>.

Introducing public housing to China through journals, newspapers and model village

At the beginning of the 20th century, China faced an unprecedented national crisis. As a developing nation, it was urgently striving to catch up with the developed countries. Simultaneously, the new government sought legitimacy and public approval to consolidate its power. During this period, the explosion of the New Culture Movement and the May Fourth Movement catalyzed the spread of new ideas and ideologies, heavily influenced by progressive Western thought, epitomized by the slogan: "Build a new nation in the Western style; organize a new society in the Western style."³¹ The approach of the Nationalist Government to social issues involved adopting Western modernization, as noted by American historian John King Fairbank, who remarked,

The modernization plans formulated by the Nanjing government were almost entirely Westernization. The officials, educated in the West, also embraced the idea of 'applying learning to practical problems,' but their policies reflected the administrative systems, technology, and lifestyles of Western industrialized countries.³²

The severe housing crisis led Chinese scholars and reformers to seek inspiration from the West, recognizing the importance of integrating housing issues within broader social and economic reforms. Publications from the 1920s on Western social housing policies and practices demonstrate how actively Chinese scholars disseminated Western concepts, systems, and practices of social housing, urban planning. These publications served as channels for transmitting these ideas to the Chinese public and policymakers, further solidifying government-led public housing policies and the concept of collective living in New Village forms.

In 1919, Chinese writer and thinker Zuoren Zhou visited the Atarashiki-mura (New Village) in Japan and subsequently published a series of articles praising the socialist utopian commune established by the Japanese idealist writer Saneatsu Mushanokōji. This experimental community was based on the principles of equal responsibility among all members and the construction of a new order through collective labor, essentially advocating a collective way of life.^{33 34} During this period, Chinese intellectuals were keen to learn from the West about methods of social reform, hoping to restructure societal relationships and reorganize social structures through a non-violent transformation—changing living arrangements and modes of production, akin to the utopian practices of Owen and Fourier. Although Zuoren Zhou's advocacy for the new village movement did not lead to widespread practical implementation, as it was a backward-looking theory of communalism, it inspired subsequent explorations of various forms of social housing, such as workers' new villages and people's communes.

³¹ Duxiu Chen, "Constitution and Confucian Rites," *LA JEUNESSE*, 1916.

³² John King Fairbank, *China: Tradition and Transformation*, (Beijing: World Culture Publishing House, 2002), 544.

³³ Zuoren Zhou, "Japan's New Village." *LA JEUNESSE*, March, 1919, 229-300.

³⁴ Zuoren Zhou, "The Spirit of New Village." *LA JEUNESSE*, February, 1920, 136-141.

年青新

LA JEUNESSE



誌 星 年 青 名 眾

號 三 第 卷 六 第

行 印 社 書 益 羣 海 上



(Left) Figure 12: Cover of the LA JEUNESSE Magazine where Zuoren Zhou promoted the new village ideas. Source: "The Spirit of New Village." LA JEUNESSE.

(Right) Figure 13: The plan of Moroyama New Village, Saitama, Japan (Photo by Calvin Liang)

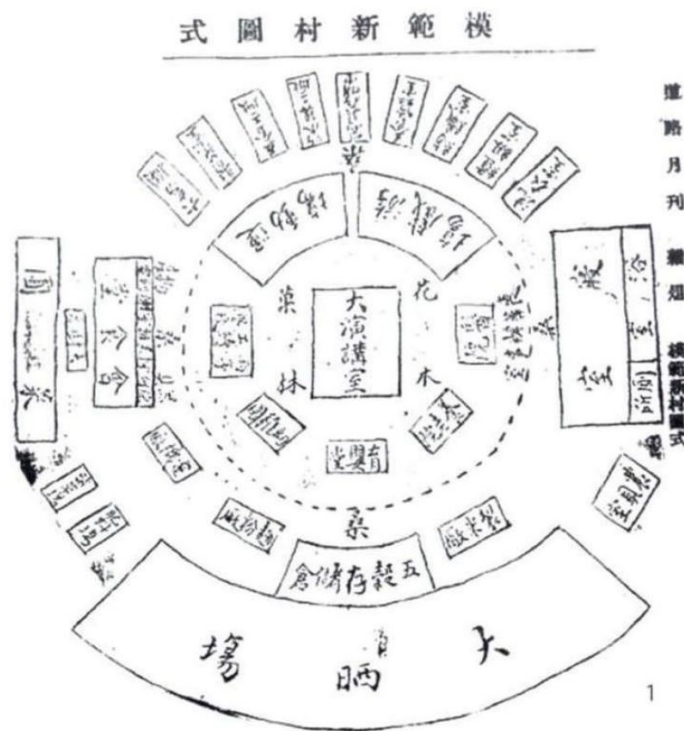


Figure 14: The Model New Village Proposal

Source: Shan Wu, "Preface and Illustrations for the Establishment of a Model New Village," *The Road Monthly*. March, 1922,3.

In 1922, *The Road Monthly* magazine introduced a Model New Village Proposal (**Figure 14**), which clearly articulated a self-sufficient, integrated work-life collective living model. The grand auditorium, as the most crucial space for collective life, was positioned at the center of the village. The first circle around it included public services such as hospitals, nursing homes, infant care centers, and kindergartens; the second circle was dedicated to production and learning spaces like factories and farms. Green belts separated the buildings.³⁵ The Model New Village aimed to re-educate traditional labor forces into modern workers equipped with knowledge and skills.

During the same period, many ideal models of New Villages emerged in China, sharing common features such as including public service facilities for educating the residents, residential areas, and production zones. However, when these ideals confronted the harsh realities, discussions about individual and collective lifestyles, as well as expectations for social productivity reforms, pivoted towards addressing the housing issues of the lower classes.³⁶ By this time, the new village had shed its utopian social reform ideals and was instead viewed as a pragmatic approach to improving the living conditions of ordinary residents, characterized by a distinct welfare orientation. This period saw the widespread construction of government-built housing, not only New Village but also civilian housing, labor housing, and public housing.

In addition to exploring spatial models for public housing in new villages, scholars also actively studied Western government-led public social housing laws and policies. In 1921, *The Banking Weekly* published a series of articles focused on housing policy in Britain, which highlighted the similar challenges faced by the Nanjing municipal government, such as insufficient housing, high rents and the bad living environments of working class. In 1928, *The Road Monthly* featured an article titled "The Urban Civilian Housing Problem," which specifically mentioned the movements in Japan, the USA, and the UK to improve and construct civilian housing.³⁷ It proposed that the construction of civilian housing should have a public nature and tend towards the garden city trend, linking housing reform and construction to governmental capabilities.

These publications served as channels for disseminating information to the Chinese public and policymakers, primarily aimed at introducing advanced Western ideas and practices. The articles often expressed admiration for the methods used in western countries, where governments directly engaged in constructing public housing and rented them out at low rates to the people. During this period, the majority of publications focused on discussing Western social housing policies and broader spatial models, with less attention given to the interior layouts or forms of social housing. However, discussions on Western-style houses and decorations in modern homes were common in architectural journals such as *Architectural Monthly* and *Chinese Architecture*. Thus, it is evident that the construction of social housing at that time was primarily considered a government measure to improve people's livelihoods, and detailed professional discussions about the specific living experiences of individuals in these spaces had not yet entered the mainstream debate.

³⁵ Shan Wu, "Preface and Illustrations for the Establishment of a Model New Village," *The Road Monthly*, March, 1922, 3.

³⁶ Yuzhen Yang, "Space and Anxiety: New Village in the 1920s-1950s of China." *Time Architecture*, No.02 (2017) 27.

³⁷ Zanzi Xu, "The Urban Civilian Housing Problem." *The Road Monthly*, 1928, 9-10.

For the Nationalist Government and architects in China at the time, an important practical inspiration was the Workers' Model Village located in Pudong, Shanghai. The village was funded through donations organized by the Shanghai YMCA from various sectors of society. The project covered approximately 0.4 hectares and was designed and constructed by Maocheng Zhu, an engineer who had studied in Europe. He incorporated the results of his field research and drew on European social housing concepts to build about 30 single-story houses between 1926 and 1928, which provided housing for Shanghai's laborers.³⁸



Figure 15: The public housings and the central communal hall in the Model Village. Source: Zhang, “Tenth Anniversary Speech,” 35.

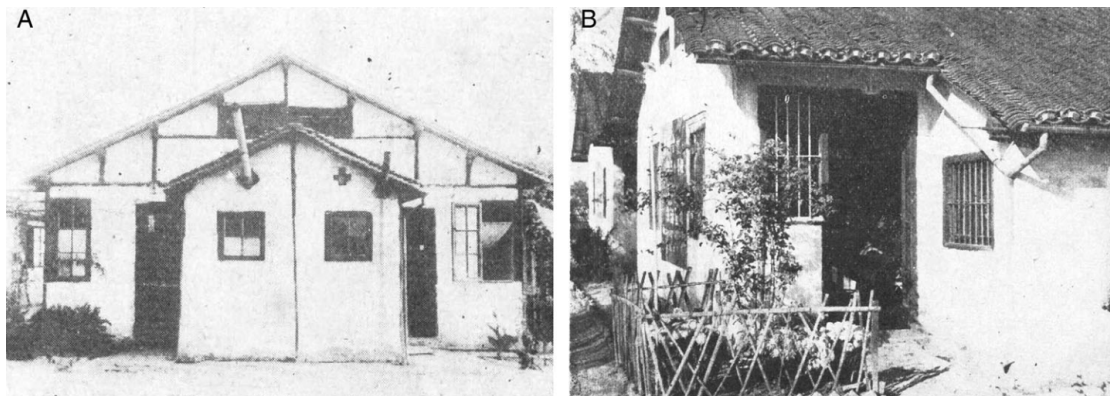


Figure 16: Two types of public housing in Model Village. Source: Zhang, “Tenth Anniversary Speech,” 16.

In 1925, Zhu conducted a field survey of workers' living conditions in Pudong, where he observed the dilapidated state of shantytowns and the poor living conditions of the people. Inspired by the New Village concept, he advocated for the construction of a new workers' village to enhance their living environment, providing educational opportunities for workers and sharing social rights.³⁹ Completed in 1928, the Workers' Model Village not only featured new-style residences suitable for ventilation and natural light but also offered two different types of housing with varying sizes and rents. Each unit included a living room, bedroom, kitchen, and bathroom. The village also housed communal spaces such as school, sports facilities and green spaces, which provided workers with educational, medical, recreational services,

³⁸ Maocheng Zhu, “Labor Issues and Their Solutions.” *Minsheng Daily*, 1926:43-51.

³⁹ Maocheng Zhu, “YMCA and the Labours New Village Movement.” *The Fiftieth Anniversary Album of Chinese YMCA*, 1935: 62-65.

promoting cooperation and self-governance among the laborers.⁴⁰ Similar to the new village concept, the Model Village aimed to promote the idea of self-governance and educate the public to improve people's welfare. Influenced by the Model Village, the Housing Committee decided that civilian residences must meet health standards for ventilation and drainage and considered an economical and simple design for future large-scale implementation,⁴¹ which deeply influenced subsequent civilian housing plans by the Nationalist Government in Nanjing.

1928-1935: The imagination and reality of public housing

Influenced by the Workers' Model Village, the Nationalist Government in Nanjing began addressing civilian housing issues in 1928. Following the completion of the Northern Expedition, as the domestic situation gradually stabilized, the Nationalist Government prioritized the construction of the capital, Nanjing, as a key project. The government initiated a series of public housing construction activities. These included the planning of public housing areas, the implementation of various public housing projects labeled as A, B, C, and D, the Public Housing Improvement Movement, and the planning of labor housing districts.

Constructing public housing: A city planning perspective

The City Plan of Nanking was the first systematic urban planning document of the Republic of China, and it was also the first time to discuss the construction of public housing from the perspective of urban planning. The planning concept was "based on the principles of European and American science, while also preserving the advantages of our country's art,"⁴² which meant adopting the scientific principles of western planning models while retaining traditional Chinese elements in its form. After a comprehensive analysis of public housing policies in Europe and America, public housing was integrated into the city's overall planning system.

The plan outlined a public housing strategy for the Nanjing, focusing on the target residents, management models, and architectural construction principles of public housing. *The City Plan of Nanking* defined public housing as intended to provide for the general population experiencing housing issues, helping them to enjoy adequate living conditions, and proposed that Nanjing's public housing should be constructed under a government-led initiative. The plan also identified the target demographic for public housing, serving four types of residents: low-income workers, residents displaced by road construction and demolition, government employees, and factory workers. Planners from the Capital Office categorized public housing into four types based on these different resident profiles.⁴³

The plan further highlighted that the style of the housing would be designed to enhance sanitary conditions, thereby benefiting the physical and mental health of the inhabitants and improving their work efficiency. The facilities, such as bathrooms, would be streamlined through integration, and the construction would be on a large scale to achieve cost savings.⁴⁴ This approach underscores the

⁴⁰ Zhu, "YMCA and the Labours New Village Movement," 62-65.

⁴¹ Shanghai Special Municipal Works Bureau. *Shanghai Special Municipal Works Bureau Business Report 1928*: 147-148.

⁴² Capital Design Technical Commission Office. *The City Plan Of Nanking*, (Nanjing: Nanjing Publishing House, 2006),150.

⁴³ Capital Design Technical Commission Office. *The City Plan Of Nanking*,197-202.

⁴⁴ Capital Design Technical Commission Office. *The City Plan Of Nanking*, 200-202.

comprehensive strategy of the Nationalist Government to integrate practical, health-oriented, and cost-effective solutions in its urban planning efforts, particularly for the public housing sector.

Government employee housing is also a type of public housing, although the target group is not the low-income people. According to the "Aerial Sketch of Government Employee Housing" (**Figure 17**), unlike the row-style civilian housing (**Figure 18**), these homes are standalone houses with front and back gardens, organically situated in a scenic residential area.

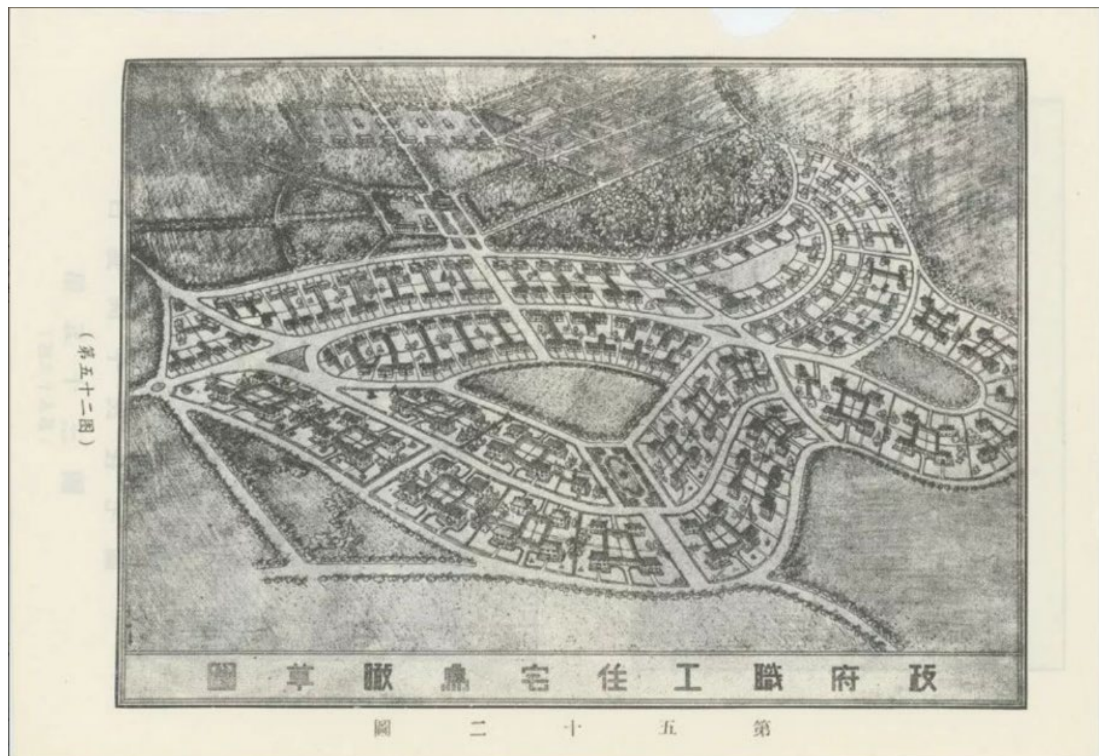


Figure 17: Aerial Sketch of Government Employee Housing. Source: Capital Design Technical Commission Office. *The City Plan Of Nanking*, 203.



Figure 18: Different from the garden-style layout of employee housing, civilian housing adopts a row-type layout, and the living units are simpler. Source: Capital Design Technical Commission Office. *The City Plan Of Nanking*, 204.

The City Plan of Nanking provided a systematic construction strategy for public housing in Nanjing, encompassing aspects such as the target demographic, management models, and building principles. This guided the planning and design of other civilian housing areas. Key themes in the construction of public housing included sanitation, cost-effectiveness, and urban beautification—designing and building civilian housing was not merely about addressing pressing livelihood issues but also encapsulated the government's vision for modern living and aspirations for urban tidiness. Simply put, it involved shaping modern citizens and further pursuing modern urban development.

The construction of housing type A, B and C

In 1928, the municipal government announced in the *Minsbeng Daily* that:

Given the shortage of housing in Nanjing and the considerable number of houses demolished along the construction of Zhongshan Avenue, causing significant inconvenience to the citizens regarding their living conditions, it has been planned to construct three types of public housing, A, B, and C, to alleviate the hardships of the people.⁴⁵

Subsequently, the Nationalist Government issued an order to all provincial municipal offices,

⁴⁵ "The completion of affordable housing." *Minsbeng Daily*, November 14, 1928.

instructing them to build public housing or residential villages in the suburbs or vacant areas. The directive highlighted the public and relief nature of public housing and noted the absence of a unified reference design, reflecting the government's initial intent to prioritize solving livelihood issues over controlling housing forms. The directive also explicitly outlined the management model for public housing, stating, "cooperative self-governance," where "education, health, and recreational facilities are to be managed by the residents, while housing maintenance and rent collection are the responsibility of the government."⁴⁶ This not only helped alleviate some of the government staff's burdens but also enhanced the sense of responsibility and belonging among the residents, reflecting the profound influence of the cooperative housing movement.

Following the issuance of the directive, the Nanjing Municipal Government promptly initiated the A, B, and C Public Housing Construction Plan. The residences were classified into three categories based on construction standards and size, reflecting the municipal government and architects' consideration for diversity in housing, rather than offering a single style to low-income groups. According to the government's announcement, Class A housing consisted of Western-style houses with gardens, and Class B included three-room, two-wing Chinese-style houses.⁴⁷ Class A and B housing targeted the broad populace who were displaced due to municipal engineering projects, while Class C housing was aimed at the urban low-income population who lacked permanent homes.

The grade system of Class A, B, and C housing not only reflected differences in architectural styles but also in their spatial relationships with the city (**Figure 19**). In 1929, one Class A building and three bungalows were completed. Class A public housing was located near North Gulou Street in the city center, an area noted for its beautiful scenery and convenient transportation. In contrast, Class B and C housing were located in the southern suburbs near the city gates, in more remote and spacious areas, allowing for larger construction scales with 100 and 200 bungalows built respectively.⁴⁸ This tiered system, while offering diverse housing options, also exacerbated social stratification driven by residential segregation. Social stratification is often expressed through the spatial "center-periphery" relationship. In modern urbanization processes, the political elite and the wealthy tend to reside in city centers, while lower-income populations are pushed to the urban periphery. This zoning corresponds with certain social relationships and structures. Residents originally living in the city center who were displaced to the outskirts or the periphery reflect the marginalization of the common people within the urban framework.⁴⁹ The decision to locate Class B and C housing in the suburbs stems partly from the scarcity of available land in the city center and the high cost of urban land. The municipal government, aiming to maximize its profits and reduce rents, opted to build social housing in these less expensive peripheral areas.⁵⁰ Although this approach might seem necessary, the spatial strategy it employs results in social stratification by effectively marginalizing the poorer segments of the population through their spatial placement.

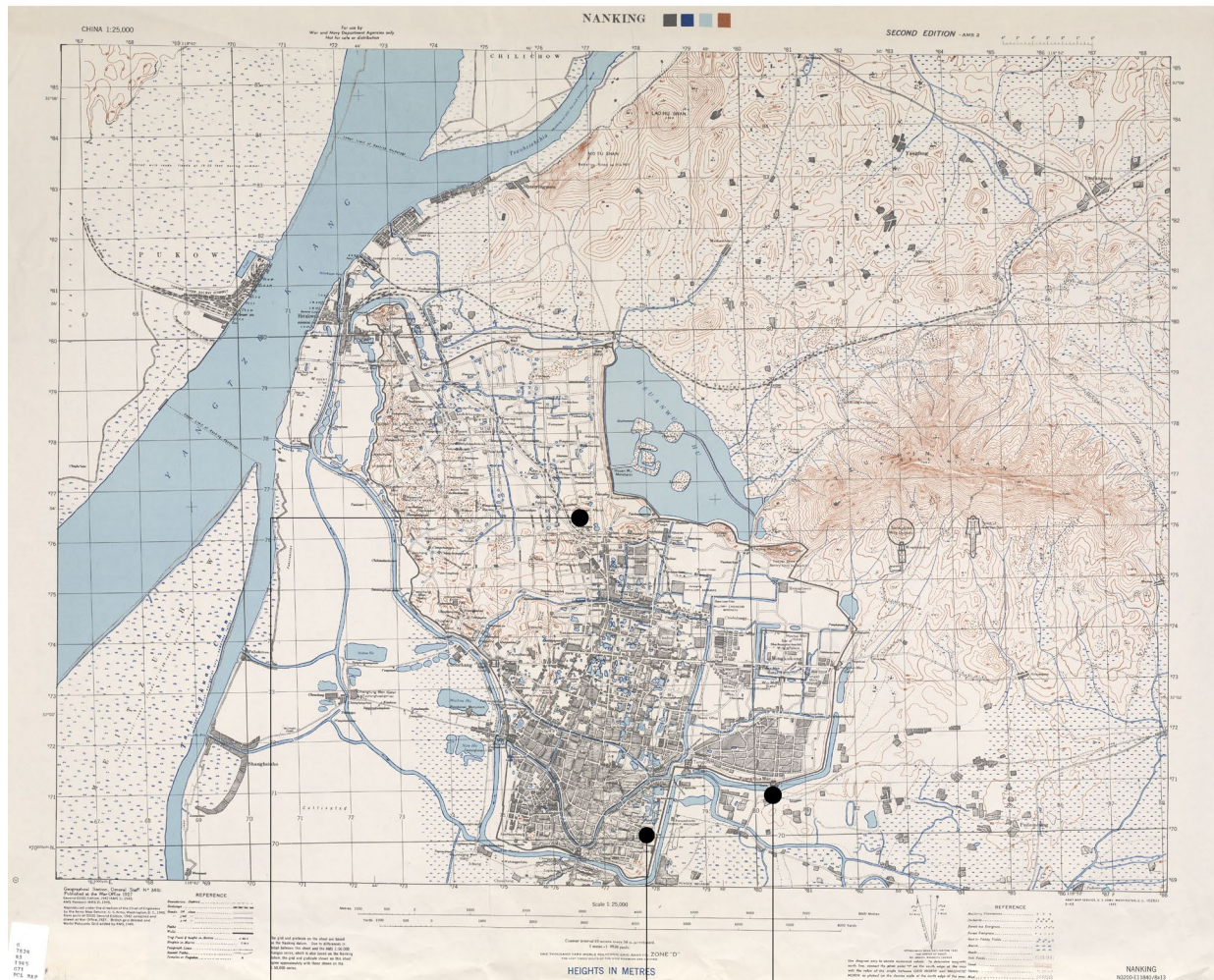
⁴⁶ Ministry of the Interior, *Instructing the Civil Affairs Departments of All Provinces to Forward the Construction of civilian Dwellings or Civilian Villages in Each County and City*, 1928.

⁴⁷ Ministry of the Interior, *Instructing the Civil Affairs Departments of All Provinces to Forward the Construction of civilian Dwellings or Civilian Villages in Each County and City*, 1928.

⁴⁸ Nanjing Municipal Government Secretariat, "Nanjing Municipal Government Gazette (Issues 91-178)", *Complete Works of Jinling* (Nanjing: Nanjing Publishing House, 2011).

⁴⁹ Yunxi Chen, "National Power, Urban Housing, and Social Stratification: A Focus on Residential Construction in Nanjing during the Republic of China." *Jiangsu Social Science*, No.06 (2011): 223-230. <https://doi:10.13858/j.cnki.cn32-1312/c.2011.06.030>.

⁵⁰ Chen, "National Power, Urban Housing, and Social Stratification" 225



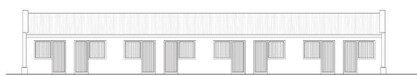
Class A Public Housing

Number of residential units: 5
 Construction fee: 14500 yuan
 Construction fee(per building): 2941 yuan
 Rent: -



Class C Public Housing

Number of residential units: 200
 Construction fee: 539000 yuan
 Construction fee(per building): 270 yuan
 Rent: 1.5 yuan/month



Class B Public Housing

Number of residential units: 100
 Construction fee: 56000 yuan
 Construction fee(per building): 560 yuan
 Rent: 4 yuan/month



Figure 19: The construction of three types of public housing and their locations in the city. Source: Drawn by the author based on *the geographical map of Nanjing in 1927*, Capital Design Technical Commission Office. *The City Plan Of Nanking*, 203.

In architectural terms, Class A housing is designed as semi-detached Western-style homes, with two units combined into one group (**Figure 21**). The main building has two stories and includes an attached side building. The roof is a four-pitched design using a brick-and-wood structure, and each unit covers approximately 80 square meters. Due to the smaller size and high cost of construction, the cost of a single unit is five times higher than that of Type C housing, which does not meet the low rent requirements needed for civilian housing. Therefore, these types of units mainly appeared later in government-led upscale residential areas.

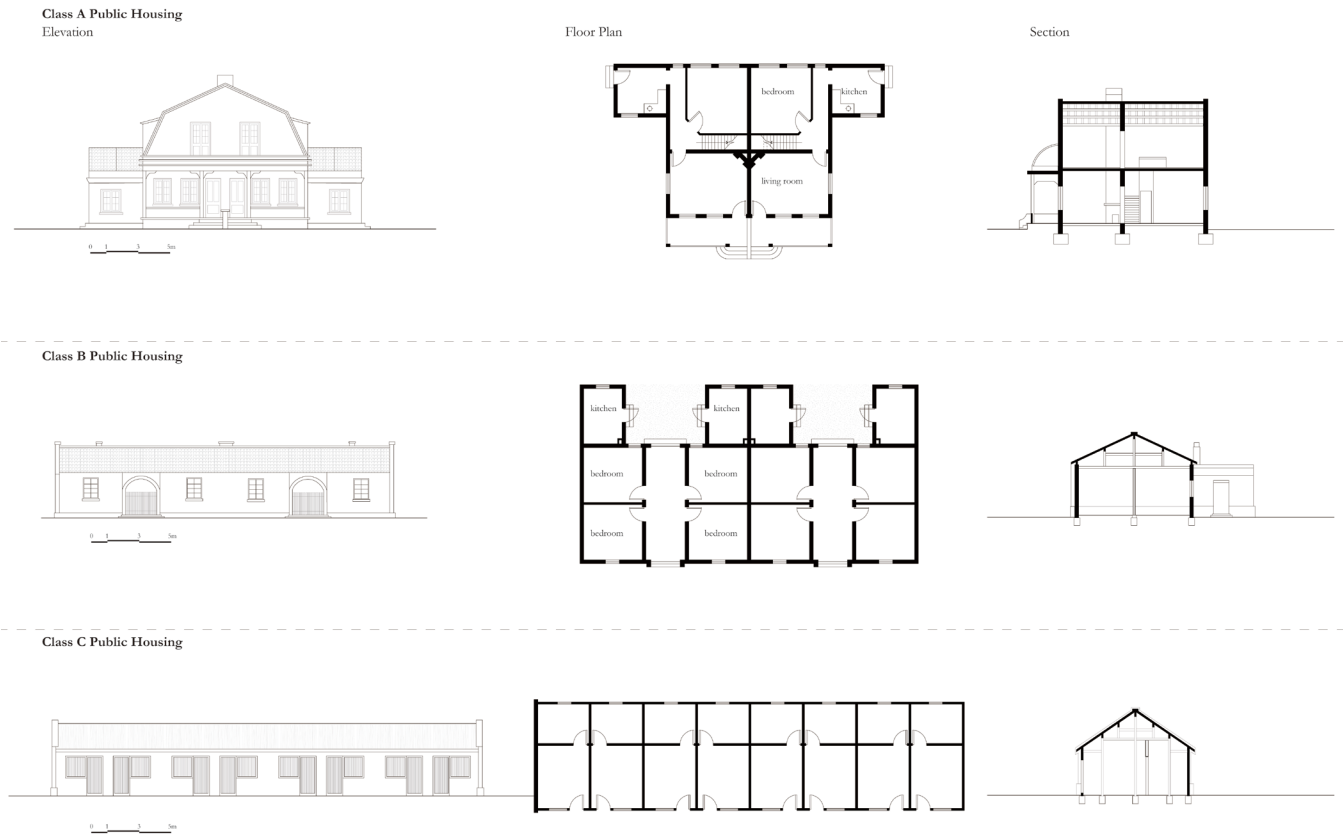


Figure 20: The technical drawings of class A, B and C public housing. Source: Redrawn by the author based on Nanjing Municipal Archives, *Design drawing of Class A, B and C public housing*.

Class B housing (**Figure 22**) consists of row houses combining four units, single-story high, with a shed roof and traditional through-mortise wood frame. Every two housing units share a common corridor and an entrance courtyard, forming a larger residential unit, with each unit covering about 40 square meters.

Class C housing (**Figure 23**) comprises row houses with eight units combined, also single-story with a sloped roof and through-mortise wood frame. Each living unit is divided longitudinally by lightweight partitions into two rooms of varying sizes, without specifying the room functions, merely meeting the most basic living needs. Each Class C housing unit covers about 20 square meters, and there are no shared common spaces between households.

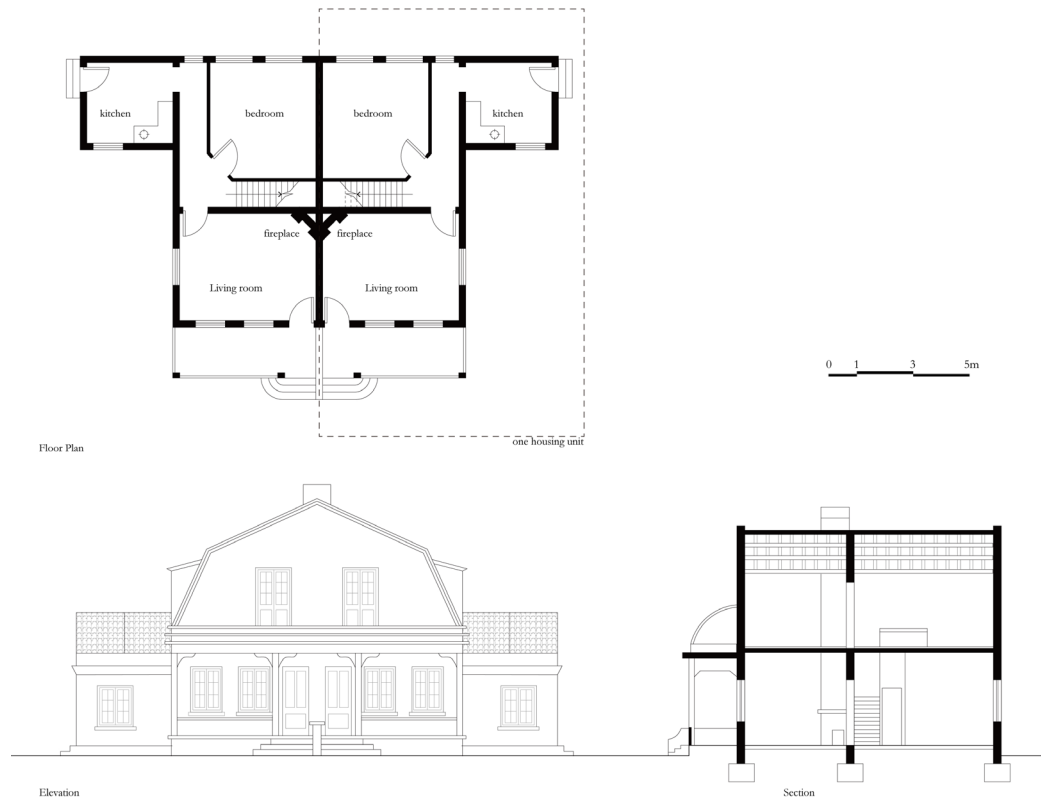


Figure 21: The technical drawings of class A public housing. Source: Redrawn by the author based on Nanjing Municipal Archives, *Design drawing of Class A public housing*, 10010011738(00)0331.

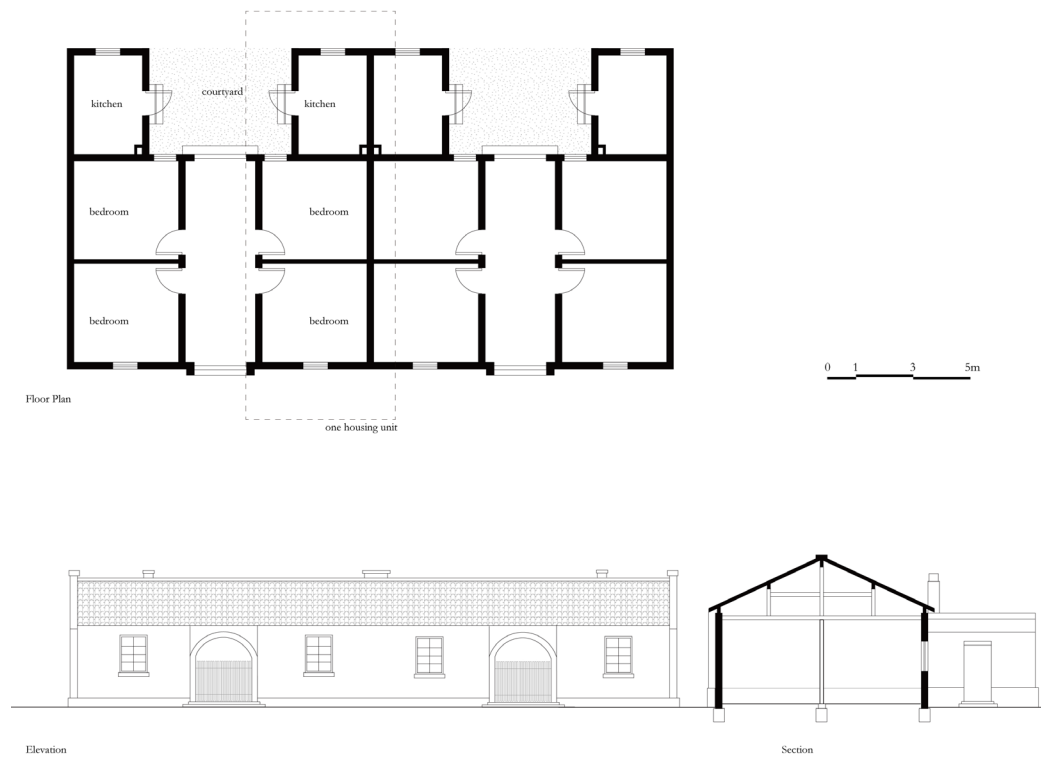


Figure 22: The technical drawings of class B public housing. Source: Redrawn by the author based on Nanjing Municipal Archives, *Design drawing of Class B public housing*, 10010011738(00)0333.

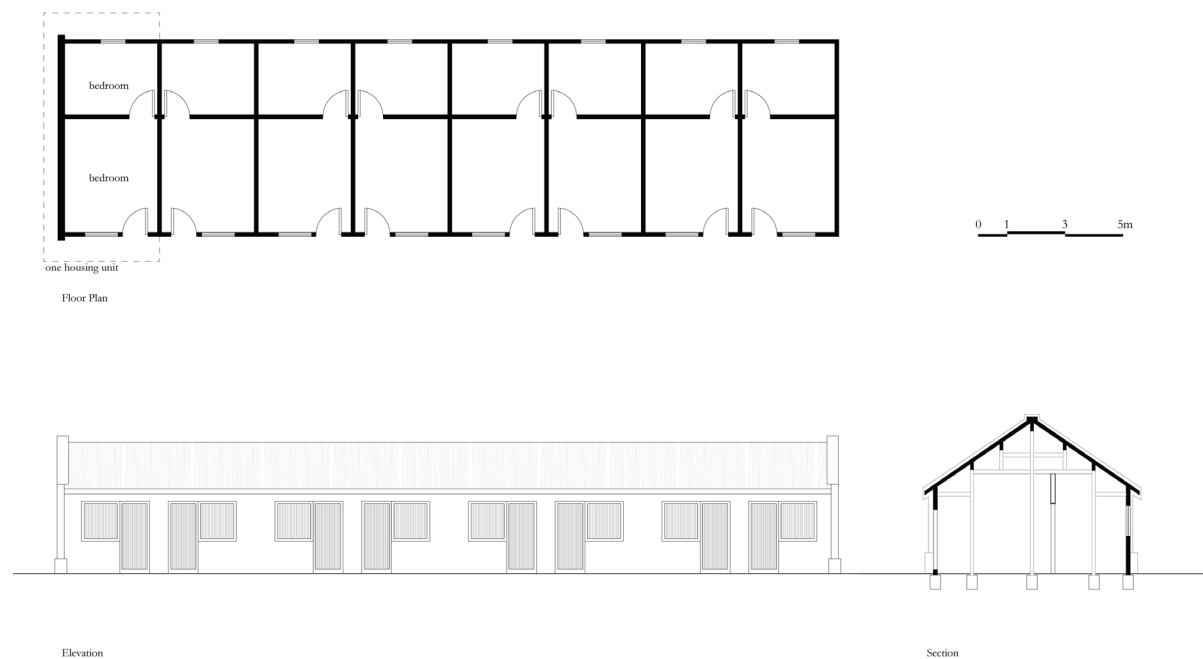


Figure 23: The technical drawings of class C public housing. Source: Redrawn by the author based on Nanjing Municipal Archives, *Design drawing of Class C public housing*, 10010011738(00)0334.

The municipal government and architects also made improvements to the design of public housing in terms of quality and safety. The walls surrounding Class A housing and the gable walls of Class B and C housing are constructed from new bricks with a hollow dovetail fire wall, while the partitions use wooden grilles. Due to the reduced use of brick walls, the number of columns per roof frame is also increased to ensure the stability of the houses. These measures reflect the municipal government's attempt to reduce construction costs and thereby lower rent. Both Class A and B houses use tiled roofs, while Class C houses use thatched roofs. Overall, as the building grade decreases, the size of the houses gradually diminishes, the building materials and construction techniques become rougher, and accordingly, the rent also decreases.

The stratification of public housing is reflected not only in its usable area and construction materials but also in its floor plan design. In architecture, the part that most richly allows for the imagination of its social attributes is not its most obvious external features, but its internal construction structure—how the residential floor plan is designed, which is closely related to the inhabitants' "living" conditions. Adequate sunlight, good ventilation, and hygienic environments were among the standards for public housing design at the time and part of the contemporary vision for modern housing (**Figure 25**). Chengyan Sheng, an architect who returned from studies in Japan, discussed the significant shortcomings of traditional Chinese housing in his article on "Housing Improvement." He proposed referring to the evolution of residential floor plans in Europe and America, suggesting the use of a hall to replace the traditional hall as the core of the residence.⁵¹

⁵¹ Chengyan Sheng, "Housing Improvement" *Wissen and Wissenschaft Journal*, 1921: 4.

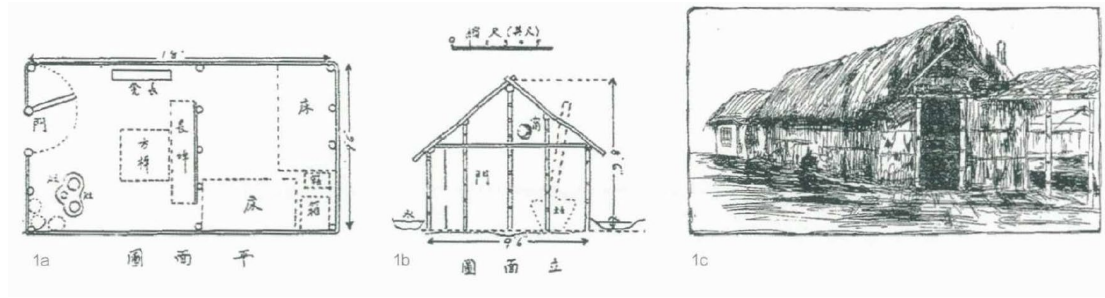


Figure 24: The workers' houses in 1926 were built with thatch and had almost no lighting and ventilation. Source: Zhu, "Labor Issues and Their Solutions".

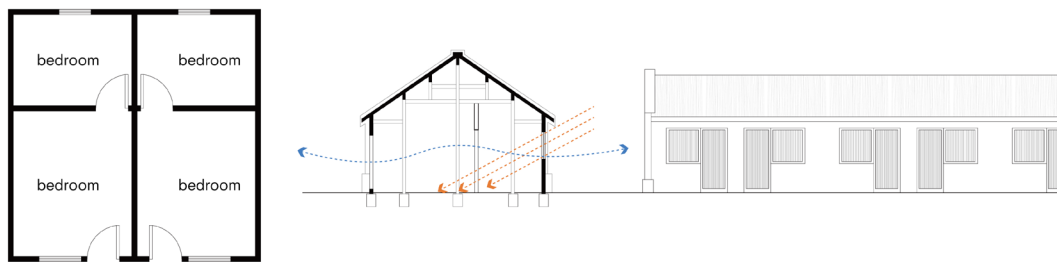


Figure 25: The public housing introduced adequate sunlight and good ventilation compared to the workers' houses. Source: Drawn by author based on Nanjing Municipal Archives, *Design drawing of Class C public housing*, 10010011738(00)0334.

Traditional residences in Nanjing typically featured a three-bay layout, with the central hall flanked by bedrooms, kitchens, and other private spaces or utility rooms. The hall was the core space of the home, used for daily family public activities and living rituals (**Figure 26**). It also served as the venue for family ceremonies, celebrations, and gatherings, embodying etiquette and symbolism. The three-bay building structure and the enclosed courtyard formed by the wing rooms were central to the residence, with all life and circulation centered around the courtyard.

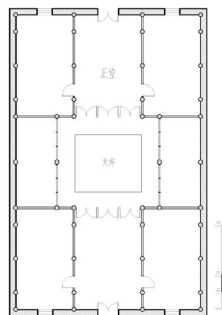


Figure 26: The traditional houses in Nanjing. Source: Yang, "The typological mapping study of halls construction-culture system in Chinese dwelling buildings".

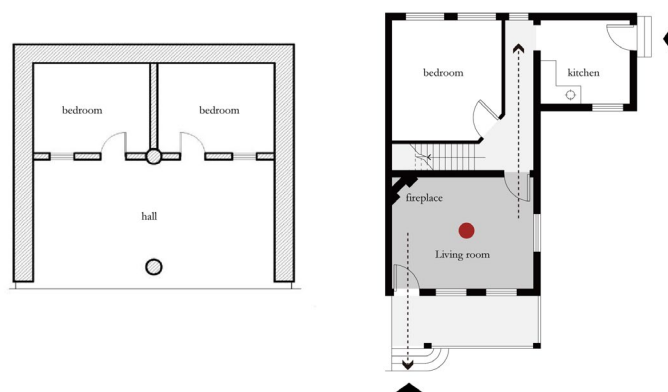
However, public housing did not adopt this traditional courtyard format. Instead, according to *The City Plan of Nanking*,⁵² it utilized Western-style detached or row-house arrangements. The depth of

⁵² Capital Design Technical Commission Office. *The City Plan Of Nanking*.

public housing was kept under 10 meters, with windows on both sides to avoid the dark rooms which are common in traditional dwellings, ensuring adequate sunlight and ventilation. Beyond these basic living requirements, the floor plan design of Classes A, B, and C housing also reflected the government's pursuit of modern residential concepts at the time.

Class A housing includes a living room, a kitchen, and three bedrooms, one of which is located on the first floor and the remaining two on the second floor, connected by a concealed staircase. The central space of Class A housing is the living room, which measures approximately 17.6 square meters and features a fireplace that extends through both floors at the center of the living area. All spaces are organized around this living room. This spatial organization demonstrates that economic efficiency was not the sole pursuit in the design of social housing; the modernization (or Westernization) of housing was also a crucial consideration. The designers aimed to emulate the Western lifestyle centered around the fireplace and the concept of family. The modernization plans devised by the Nanjing government at that time were almost entirely Westernized,⁵³ and the popular media published a series of articles introducing the term "living room," translated as a guest room or sitting room, clearly defining its function as a place "where the family gathers to talk leisurely, and especially before and after meals, to discuss familial joys," replacing the traditional hall and promoting a living room conducive to family interactions in daily life.

Although the introduction of the fireplace can also be interpreted from another perspective: Gottfried Semper, from an anthropological and family history standpoint, considers the hearth as one of the four fundamental motifs in architecture in his work "The Four Elements of Architecture," linking it to the basic human motive for gathering.⁵⁴ Similar to the Western fireplace, the "fire pit" served as a central spiritual space in traditional Chinese family life, providing warmth and a place for social interaction. Over time, the "hall" as a physical space replaced the fire pit's spiritual function, carrying complex family culture and becoming the central point of the household. Although Class A housing incorporates a Western-style fireplace, it can be seen as a modern interpretation and adaptation of traditional communal spaces, representing a deeper level of cultural adaptation and symbolic reconstruction. Comparing the layout of Western Han dynastic one-hall-two-room structures with that of Class A housing (**Figure 27**), one finds many similarities, with the hall or living room occupying the central position, linking the private spaces. From this perspective, the spiritual core of traditional Chinese residences is preserved, albeit in a Western form.



⁵³ Fairbank, *China: Tradition and Transformation*

⁵⁴ Yang, *The typological mapping study of halls construction-culture system in Chinese dwelling buildings* (Nanjing: Southeast University, 2022).

Figure 27: The left image is typical layout of traditional one-hall-two-room housing. Similarly, Class A housing adopts a layout where the living room is connected to other spaces.

Source: Drawn by author based on Yang, “The typological mapping study of halls construction-culture system in Chinese dwelling buildings”; Nanjing Municipal Archives, *Design drawing of Class A public housing*.

Class B housing includes two bedrooms and an external kitchen, as well as a shared 2.4-meter-wide corridor and a shared courtyard that connects two families. This corridor serves as a communal space, functioning as a shared living room that organizes the joint living activities of the two families. The bedrooms open onto the corridor but are not directly connected to each other. Although the floor plan is modeled on modern residential design, the functional layout of the rooms—due to land use, funding, or so-called grading arrangements—resembles that of traditional dwellings. Each household lacks a true living room; thus, living, dining, and hosting functions are combined with the bedrooms, only meeting the basic residential needs of the time.

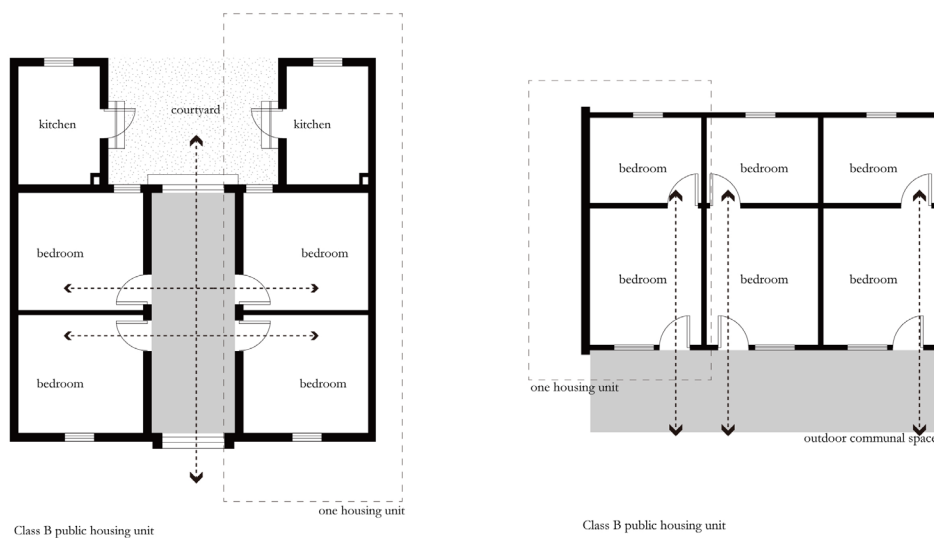


Figure 28: Plan analysis of class B and C public housing. Source: Drawn by author based Nanjing Municipal Archives, *Design drawing of Class B public housing*; *Design drawing of Class C public housing*.

Class C housing consists of only two interconnecting bedrooms that must be shared by the entire family. There is also a lack of communal spaces between individual residences; the only area available for social interaction is an 8-meter gap between rows of houses. In terms of room types and organization, Class C public housing is far removed from the design aspirations of modern living or the shaping of modern individuals seen in Class A and B housing. From the perspective of insufficient government funding, the primary purpose of civilian housing is merely to provide shelter for the impoverished, which explains the trend towards minimal interior functionality. Moreover, the municipal government's so-called "grading" system is based on different income levels among the civilians, categorizing people and housing differently, not necessarily treating all civilians equally with the same relief intentions.

Housing type E and a new village

The remote urban location of type B and C public housing and the issues of construction quality due to cost-cutting measures resulted in an occupancy rate of only one-quarter for these homes. Residents described their living conditions with the saying, "Tin roofs overhead, walls of dirt on all sides; oppressive in the summer sun and bitterly cold in the north winds of winter. Even the rickshaw pullers' straw huts are cooler in summer and warmer in winter, and cost much less."⁵⁵ In an effort to address these livelihood issues, the government continued its research into public housing. Influenced by the success of the Pudong Workers' Model Village, the government constructed the New Village in Xiaguan Jinchuanmen in 1930, aiming to provide better living conditions for its citizens.

In the planning, the residences are arranged in rows, with multiple type E units combined into one building, presenting a linear layout (**Figure 29**). The entire residential area is roughly enclosed by four major urban roads, with another city road passing directly through, making it an open area directly connected to the rest of the city.

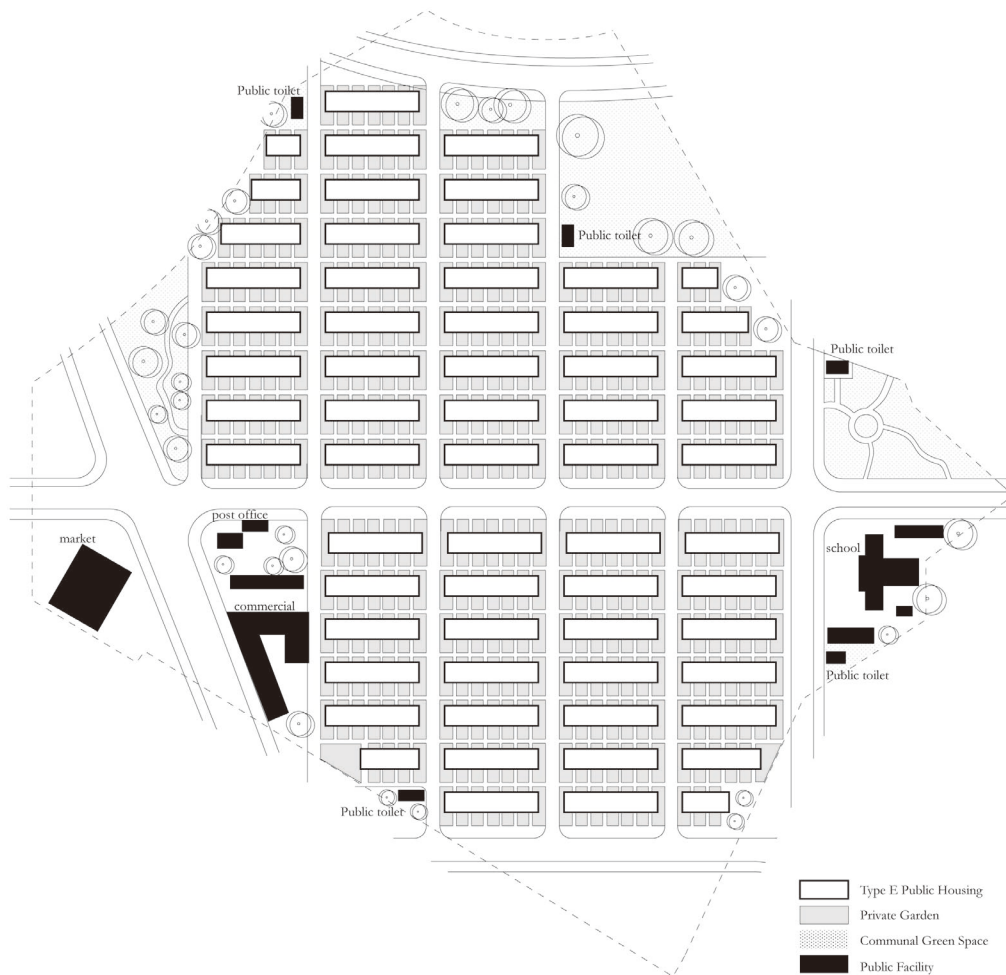


Figure 29: The plan of Jinchuanmen New Village with Class E public housing unit. Source: Redrawn by the author based on Nanjing Municipal Archives, *Plan of Jinchuanmen Public Housing in Nanjing*, 10030082918(00)0001.

⁵⁵ *Nanjing City Road Construction and House Demolition (1929-1948)*, China Second Historical Archives, 1-1605-16J2303.

Within the new village, in addition to 62 buildings, there are public toilets, a post office, a shopping center, a school, a market, administrative buildings, and several auxiliary buildings, as well as two distinctively planned green spaces. Jinchuanmen New Village adopts an "open" urban residential area planning approach, while also taking into account the impact of public facilities comprehensively. Similar to the model village concept, this residential area aims to improve public welfare through educating residents. This approach not only enhances the living environment but also integrates the residential area seamlessly into the urban fabric, fostering a sense of community and ensuring easy access to essential services and green spaces.

Although planners aimed to improve residents' living environments through community facilities such as establishing schools to educate people, planning green spaces for physical and mental health, and constructing commercial facilities for convenient civic services, these buildings occupied only a small part of the new village and were clearly secondary to the construction of residential units, all located on the periphery of the village. The residential sections, with their harsh row formations, dominated most of the new village space. It is evident that the idealistic design had to yield to social realities, that is, building as many social housing units as possible to solve the housing problems of the citizens. Although the residential units filled the entire new village in row formations and each unit was minimized to meet only the most basic living needs of the people, designers still tried to enhance their living quality. For example, each household had its own private garden, conducive to residents' health and fostering harmonious neighborhood relations, reflecting the concept of the garden city.

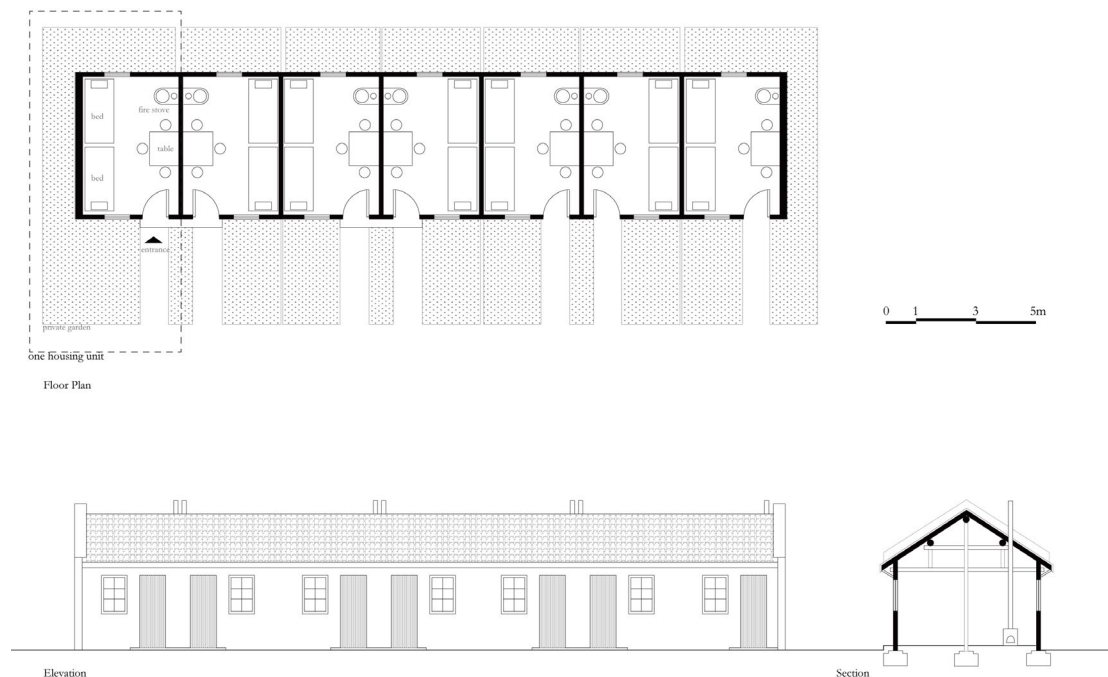


Figure 30: Type E public housing unit. Source: Redrawn by the author based on Nanjing Municipal Archives, *Plan of Type E Public Housing*, 1001-001-0988(00)0004.

Class E housing consists of row houses made up of three, four, five, or seven units each, featuring a single-story sloped roof with a through-mortise timber frame (**Figure 30**). Each unit comprises a single

room serving as living space, kitchen, and bedroom. Compared to Type C housing, each Type E unit is smaller and is flanked by two small gardens at the front and back, connected to residential area roads via small paths between houses. Notably, although traditional spatial systems and forms no longer exist, there is a small living space that includes a traditional stove, reminiscent of the fireplace introduced in Type A housing. This stove not only provides warmth and cooking facilities but also represents a piece of traditional life, showing the government and designers' humanitarian concern for low-income residents. In traditional Chinese culture, owning a "stove" signifies having a home, and family life centered around the stove constitutes the reality and richness of the lives of the Chinese people.

Thus, the municipal government moved beyond focusing merely on the diversity and modernity of individual buildings or implementing diverse housing policies for different social groups. Instead, it considered the economic capabilities of low-income groups, government budget constraints, and limitations in interior design to adopt a unified, cost-effective, easily replicable spatial model for housing these groups. By improving municipal and public facilities at the community level, the government promoted a collective lifestyle emphasizing modern public life. This collective model, cost-effective and easier to manage, is similar to the Westhausen Settlement built for low-income groups in the suburbs of Germany, aiming for economy and efficiency by mass-producing houses like industrial products. Although China's economic level and productivity were far from Germany's at the time, making it impossible to truly industrialize housing production, when everything pivoted on collectivity and efficiency, the individual became secondary.

From then on, Type E housing was extensively built in Nanjing after 1930 at affordable prices under the form of new civilian villages, including the Zhongshan Gate Class E Civilian Housing, Gonghou Mountain Type A and B Civilian Housing, etc., receiving positive social response. In subsequent civilian village constructions, municipal authorities placed greater emphasis on education within residential areas and actively developed educational and cultural facilities. As highlighted in the 1922 Model Village blueprint, by focusing on re-education within residential areas, the aim was to enhance human well-being, thereby achieving social justice. After a series of practices, the construction of new villages matured, evolving from merely solving people's housing issues to improving their quality of life through education and public facilities.

During the period of 1930-1935, the construction of public housing slowed down due to natural disasters and the instability caused by the Japanese invasion of China. From the development history of public housing construction, in terms of housing style design, there was initially a diversity of explorations, which gradually shifted towards a trend of uniform styles—from the varied explorations of Class A, B and C housing to a more unified Class E housing style. In terms of residential area planning, the concept of "districts", initially as the form of village, has been increasingly emphasized, with more hierarchical planning of residential areas and gradual improvement of public facilities. In terms of shaping living patterns, the collective living model has been established and strengthened, reflecting the government's gradual push towards collectivism and community integration in social management and housing policy.

Conclusion

This thesis comprehensively explores the interaction of different factors, providing a thorough historical interpretation of the history from the inception to the implementation of public housing from 1928-1937, offering historical reference value for the construction of public housing in today's urban development.

Public housing in China emerged in the early 20th century, a time marked by rapid population growth driven by capital accumulation, industrialization, and urbanization. The radical phase of industrialization and the forced opening of China's markets led to the breakdown of traditional economic models, the emergence of new social classes, and increasing class differentiation, which sharpened social conflicts. As the capital of the Republic of China, Nanjing had a large influx of immigrants and displaced rural residents due to urban development. The country's underdeveloped state and the mismatched housing situation made the residential issues of the common people particularly severe. At that time, addressing the housing needs of the populace was a necessary condition for the Nationalist government to stabilize the new regime.

Public housing emerged as a response to the inherent development challenges within societies, a common issue worldwide, but the models and forms of public housing were crafted by scholars and the government through the study of Western practices. Influenced by the New Culture Movement in China, which advocated for the adoption of Western social systems and methods to build a modernized nation, there was a radical and urgent shift away from traditional ideas. The Nationalist government embraced a fully Westernized approach to modern planning. Consequently, the media of the time promoted Western government-led public housing policies and the idyllic concepts of new villages, laying the groundwork for addressing the housing needs of the public through public housing and new village initiatives.

From 1928 to 1937, the construction of public housing in Nanjing transitioned from an initial exploration of diverse styles to a more uniform style: from a variety of housing styles categorized as A, B, C, to a more standardized and simpler Type E. The design reflected the designers' introduction to Western modern housing concepts, prioritizing natural lighting, ventilation, and sanitary conditions, followed by a modern exploration of architectural forms. Traditional courtyard layouts and halls were abandoned in favor of gardens and public spaces, though financial constraints from the government often resulted in simpler forms.

In terms of residential area planning, the utopian concept of the new village influenced the planning of residential areas, as seen in the emergence of numerous new villages. These combined living and public spaces, particularly educational spaces, reflecting the government's ideal of improving people's welfare. The concept of "zones" became more pronounced, with residential planning becoming more stratified and public facilities within residential areas gradually improving. This collective living model evolved into the worker's new villages and today's residential districts in China, where traces of the original new village concept can still be seen.

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