



## Peer Reviewed

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Trash Receptacles for Public Places in China [Dispatches]

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**TRASH RECEPTACLES  
FOR PUBLIC  
PLACES IN CHINA**



While traveling through several of the most popular scenic areas of the People's Republic of China, we could not help noticing the enormous crowds of people who were using these public places. It is the custom in China (more so than in the U.S.) to consume food, drink, cigarettes and other packaged comestibles while sitting or strolling in gardens, parks and scenic areas, and a common result is an enormous production of trash. Some of this public space trash settles on the ground. Much of it, however, is placed in the trash receptacles that are frequently present in these public places.

Although these receptacles are generally smaller than in the U.S., they give the impression that our Chinese colleagues have thought much more than we have about the design of trash containers. Certainly the Chinese design approach is different.

Each city (and in some cases, each public area) has its own design for waste receptacles. At times these reflect a theme or symbol associated with the city or region, or a vivid image from the general culture, such as the panda. These receptacles are almost all relatively inexpensive, being made from easily available materials such as tile, concrete, plastic, or fiberglass. They are decorated to attract attention and are usually conveniently located. Their smaller size, on the other hand, makes them seem less obtrusive than ours. Sometimes there is an accompanying ceramic or plastic pot, typically filled partially with water and used as a spittoon and also for the disposal of cigarettes.

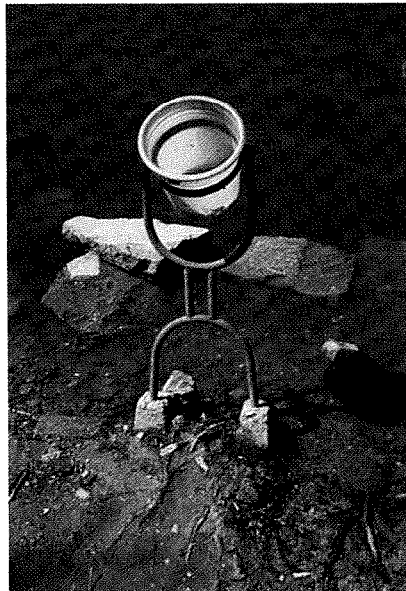
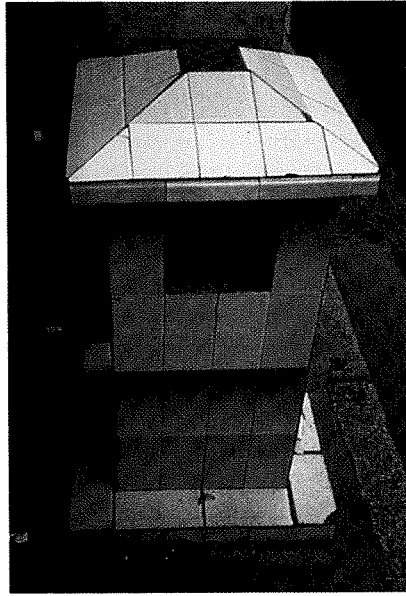
The trash collection procedure is simple and straightforward. Each container is emptied by hand, often with the aid of a long-handled pan and a brush. There is invariably a small trap door in the bottom of the receptacle for this purpose. The trash is usually

carried off in cloth bags or bamboo baskets across the shoulders of the collector, a widespread method of transporting materials in this labor-intensive society. We were informed that the person who empties the container is then owner of the trash and derives a meager living from the recycling or disposal of the materials. From our observations the system seems to work well in general,

although there were some areas where more receptacles or more frequent emptying seemed necessary.

The accompanying photographs show some examples of the varied and colorful waste receptacles that we saw. Note the absence of the standardized, cylindrical, wide-opening containers, which seem to be used ubiquitously in U.S. public spaces.

—Irene Fairley and Carl Steinitz



Photos courtesy Irene Fairley and Carl Steinitz.