



The ChinaMade NEWSLETTER

what's new?

brief #5

[Infrastructuring the Central Plains | 3](#)

project

[Landscapes of Development | 8](#)

keywords for infrastructure and media

[qu 区, area, region, zone | 11](#)

call for proposals

[The Third China Made Workshop | 17](#)

events

[Fall 2020 at China Made | 18](#)





About the China Made Project

Over the past decade, China has invested tremendously in infrastructure development, resulting in dramatic social and cultural changes in both rural and urban regions. It has also promoted an infrastructural development model beyond its borders as part of a newly aggressive foreign policy.

China Made is a partnership between the Center for Asian Studies (CAS) at the University of Colorado Boulder, the Hong Kong Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Hong Kong (HKIHSS), and the Asian Research Institute at the National University of Singapore (ARI). China Made is supported by The Henry Luce Foundation. The project explores both domestic and international dimensions of China's infrastructure development. We seek to shift the academic focus from broader geopolitical and international relations perspectives to a finer grained analysis of the infrastructures themselves and the on-the-ground social and cultural dimensions of their construction.

Project Leaders:

Tim Oakes is Professor of Geography and Director of the Center for Asian Studies at the University of Colorado Boulder.

Emily T. Yeh is Professor of Geography at the University of Colorado Boulder.

Max Hirsh is Managing Director of the Airport City Academy and Research Fellow at the University of Hong Kong

Dorothy Tang is a doctoral student at MIT's Department of Urban Studies and Planning and an adjunct assistant professor at the Division of Landscape Architecture at the University of Hong Kong.

Alessandro Rippa is Associate Professor of Chinese Studies at Tallinn University.

Darren Byler is a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for Asian Studies at the University of Colorado Boulder.

Cover Image. Road under construction in Zhongmu County (Source: © Leonardo Ramondetti 2019)

ChinaMade Brief #5

New Grounds

Infrastructuring the Central Plains of China

Leonardo Ramondetti, Politecnico di Torino and Università di Torino

Since 2016, my research has focused on the process of urbanization occurring in the Central Plains of China, in Henan province. My study starts from the premise that understanding urbanization requires investigating how physical spaces, especially infrastructure, are designed, built, practiced and used there. It sets out to provide a synthetic interpretation of this process based on detailed descriptions of the relationships between the current policies, economies and societies, and transformations affecting the physical space and the infrastructural systems. This interpretation seeks to instigate a debate regarding what Chinese urbanization reveals about building and living in contemporary cities both in and beyond the Chinese context.

To achieve this, I consider the past urban conditions of the area, their current state and ongoing transformations. This investigation has been conducted by examining official data and current literature on the process of urbanization in China and, more specifically, in Henan province. At the same time, between January 2016 and May 2019, I carried out an empirical study over three periods of field research in China. Drawing on the data collected in these investigations, I developed an analytic that builds on theoretical frameworks in fields such as architecture, urban studies, and geography to consider contemporary physical spaces and urbanization processes occurring worldwide. In particular, I focus on: the processes of suburbanization in North America (Phelps, 2015; Rowe, 1991; Thün et al., 2015), urban diffusion in Europe (De Geyter, 2002; Sieverts, 2003; Viganò et al., 2016) and studies of contemporary infrastructure and logistic spaces (Brenner, 2014; Easterling, 2016; Koolhaas et al., 1995). As with the present urbanization of the Central Plains of China, the ‘city’ resulting from these three processes appears to be elusive at first glance. However, the resulting landscape interpretations have established a shared language through which to understand how different spatial systems work in terms of relations between physical spaces and socio-economic and political conditions (Duncan & Duncan, 2010). The adoption of such a methodological strategy is twofold: on the one hand I try to move beyond the exceptionality of Chinese urbanization (Governa & Sampieri, 2019), and on the other I seek to re-

Understanding how new infrastructure organizes and structures the landscape can open up to new imaginaries for designing the living environment.

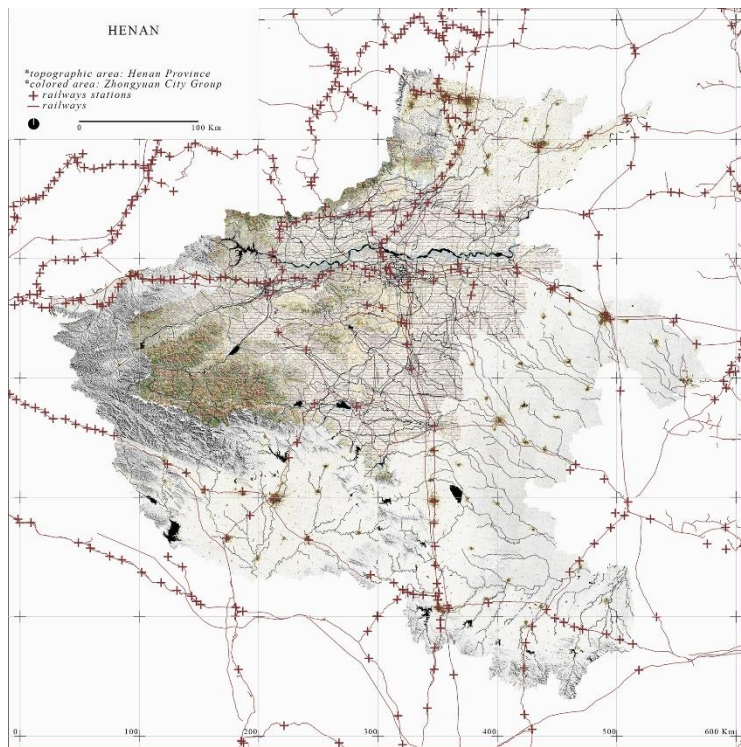


Figure 1. Map of Henan province and the Central Plains Urban Agglomeration (Source: © Leonardo Ramondetti 2017)

process of urbanization in the making. Furthermore, the new infrastructural systems have constitutive technical dimensions that can be engaged regardless of the cultural perspective (Lyster, 2016). Of course, this does not mean regarding infrastructure as a sort of ‘neutral network’ capable of obliterating all local specificities thought standardization (Ben-Joseph, 2005). On the contrary, these ‘sociotechnical mediums’ reflect socio-economic contingencies, political ambitions and cultural values while shaping new modes of living, constructing, occupying and consuming the land (Corner, 2014; Graham & Marvin, 2001).

I focused my study on the Central Plains of China because of the radical transformations in progress which are dramatically changing this space. Although this is still a little-studied region, it is now one of the main test beds for local governments, urban planners and developers to experiment with new urban policies and new ways of organizing the land. Like most of the territory of inland China, the Central Plains used to be largely characterized by minor agglomerations built over a long period of time and made up of small-scale infrastructures that supported a diffuse urbanization. Due to the process of large-scale territorial infrastructuralization, that is the construction of transport, ecological and energy infrastructure as drivers of a process of urbanization and landscape restructuring, in the last three decades this area has been drastically transformed: high-speed railways, highways, canals, parks, airports and grids have been built. As a result, the Central Plains is now a regional-level urban agglomeration, the so-called Zhongyuan City Group, one of the most densely populated areas in the world: an area of 58,400 square kilometers made up of nine prefecture-level cities, 23 cities and 413 townships. The space produces 3.06 percent of China’s GDP and is home to 45.5 million

materialize the subject of study (Amin & Thrift, 2002). While most of the literature on Chinese urbanization primarily focuses on demography, economy and policies, I argue that this process cannot be regarded merely as an ‘above ground’ phenomenon impacting the socio-economic sphere (Armstrong & McGee, 1985). On the contrary, the ground of Chinese cities is a densely constructed new space hosting novel artefacts and infrastructure that need to be investigated: new economies are closely linked to new infrastructures, logistic platforms, industrial areas, tourist sites, new housing, and areas for leisure, wellbeing and cultural activities; and new policies address the need to preserve farmland, curb pollution, and capitalize on specific sites (Bonino et al., 2019; Oakes, 2019). In light of this, the current infrastructuralization of Chinese cities offers a unique opportunity to investigate a

**The current
infrastructuralization of
Chinese cities offers a
unique opportunity to
investigate a process of
urbanization in the making.**

inhabitants (3.39 percent of the population of China) of which 30 percent (13.7 million) are considered ‘urban population’ (Fang & Yu, 2016). Today, inside this area, a great process of spatial restructuring is gaining momentum. The current policies aim to urbanize 4,902 square kilometers (an area four times the size of New York City) to host new inhabitants, new economies and to promote new ways of living and social constructions. This process is supported by an ever denser and diversified network of infrastructure which is radically changing the way in which spaces are designed, constructed, inhabited and perceived.

This is particularly evident when investigating the area of the Zhengbian New District: a new urban development promoted by Henan province and the municipalities of Zhengzhou and Kaifeng to unify the two cities (Wu, 2015). The plan, drafted in 2010 by the international firm ARUP, envisages a linear city along the main infrastructural axes and ecological corridors (ARUP Engineering Consulting Company et al.,

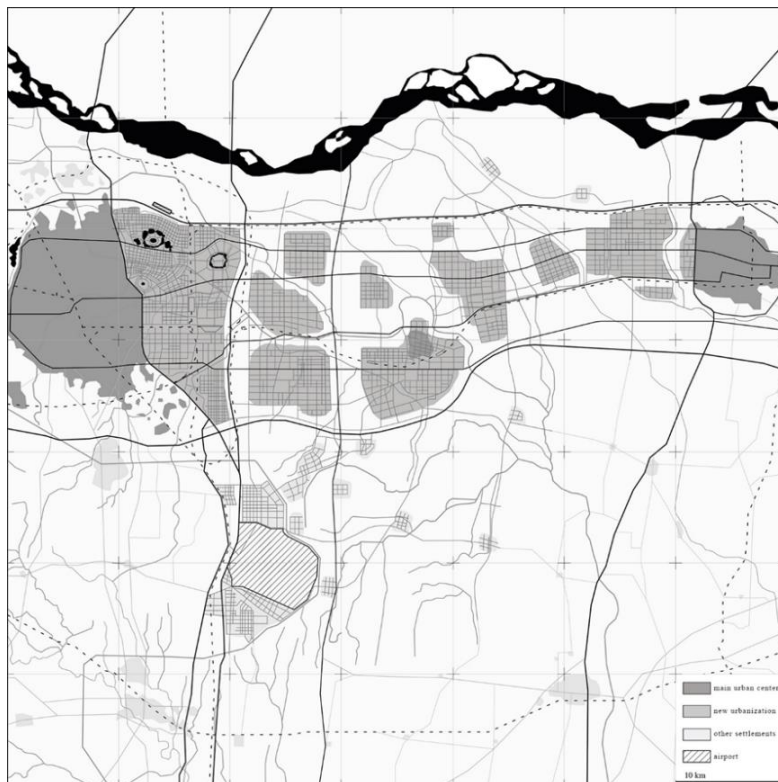


Figure 2. Redraw of the masterplan per Zhengbian New District by ARUP (Source: © Leonardo Ramondetti 2017)

2010). This wide-area system aims to distribute a large variety of urban materials and land-uses over a linear distance of 80 kilometers and to reorganize a total area of 40 square kilometers, which is currently populated by 4.5 million inhabitants (Zhengzhou Municipality, 2009). In the last decade, the plan has been progressively implemented, driven mainly by the construction of new infrastructure. As an example, in the area of the Zhengzhou municipality, the total kilometers of roadway built per year has increased from 1,272 kilometers in 2010 to 2,101 kilometers in 2018; consequently, the overall paved area for infrastructural uses has risen from 29,220 to 58,210 thousand square meters. Over the same time period, the water supply system has also been expanded, passing from 2,360 to 4,420 kilometers (Zhengzhou Municipal Statistics Bureau, 2018). Most of this improvement occurred in the area of Zhengbian New District.

The result of this infrastructure-driven urbanization is an extremely dense landscape composed of heterogeneous urban materials positioned next to each other. This loose, deformable space is capable of containing anything and everything: airport cities, university towns, Economic Technology Development Zones, logistics hubs, technical spaces for agricultural production, Central Business Districts, and leisure areas. However, due to the novel conditions of this landscape, these cannot be considered merely technical spaces for production, as they play host to a myriad of diverse functions; for instance, 300,000 people both work and live in the Foxconn Science Park, producing 500,000 mobile phones a day at a rate of 350 phones a minute (China Labor Watch, 2019). Similarly, the university town in the Zhengdong New District contains more than twelve campuses to accommodate about 200,000 people that work and live in an area of more than 13 square kilometers (Li et al., 2010).



Figure 3. Research center in Zhengdong New District
(Source: © Leonardo Ramondetti 2019)



Figure 4. Open-air theatre in Zihuan Road, north of Zhongmu County
(Source: © Leonardo Ramondetti 2019)

In the same way, the new infrastructure is radically altering how spaces are inhabited. New housing is being built everywhere, promoting new practices and ways of occupying the land. This is particularly evident when investigating the fringes of the Zhengbian New District. In these agricultural areas, which are to be preserved as an ecological corridor for agrarian production, there are not just ancient and modern agricultural villages, but also newly-built agricultural towns developed by the New Socialist Countryside program, and compounds built by real estate companies. These settlements manifest a shift in imagining how people inhabit rural areas. This is clearly visible not only in the new housing typologies adopted, but also new the facilities and welfare spaces, such as schools, hospitals, parks and areas for sport activities (Lee, 2016).

This brief description highlights the complexity and contradictions of the landscape transformations occurring in the Central Plains of China. This upheaval leads to further questions and conflicts that can reveal a great deal regarding the contemporary city, and have, still, largely to be explored. Above all, the relationships this new infrastructure-driven urbanity establishes with pre-existing settlements, national and international trading routes, Chinese and global labor systems may shed light on the multi-scalar logics that characterize the urban realm. Hence, it is possible to reconceptualize the Chinese city, not as unique, but as just one of the multiple spaces that compose today's urban realm. Similarly, understanding how new infrastructure organizes and structures the landscape can help us to build new discourses and projects on the city, and open up to new imaginaries for designing the living environment.

Leonardo Ramondetti is an architect and urbanist working at the intersection of urbanisation theory, design and geospatial analysis. He received his Ph.D. in Urban and Regional Development from Politecnico di Torino and Università di Torino in June 2020. His recent work includes contributions in the research CeNTO (Chinese New Town) and the publication *The City after Chinese New Towns* (M. Bonino et al., Birkhäuser, 2019). He holds a master's degree in Architecture Construction City at Politecnico di Torino with highest distinction in 2014.

References

- Amin, A., & Thrift, N. (2002). *Cities: Reimagining the urban*. Polity Press.
- Armstrong, W., & McGee, T. G. (1985). *Theatres of Accumulation: Studies in Asian and Latin American Urbanization*. Routledge Kegan & Paul.
- ARUP Engineering Consulting Company, Zhengzhou City Planning and Design Institute, & Kaifeng City Planning and Design Institute. (2010). *Master Planning of Zhengbian New District (2009-2020)*. Atlas.
- Ben-Joseph, E. (2005). *The Code of the City: Standards And the Hidden Language of Place Making*. Mit Pr.
- Bonino, M., Governa, F., Repellino, M. P., & Sampieri, A. (2019). *The City After Chinese New Towns. Spaces and imaginaries from contemporary urban China* (1st ed.). Birkhäuser Architecture.
- Brenner, N. (Ed.). (2014). *Implosions/Explosions: Towards a Study of Planetary Urbanization*. Jovis.
- China Labor Watch. (2019). *iPhone 11 Illegally Produced in China. Apple allows supplier factory Foxconn to violate labor laws* (p. 51). China Labor Watch. chinalaborwatch.org/upfile/2019_09_06/Zhengzhou%20Foxconn%20English%2009.06.pdf
- Corner, J. (2014). *The Landscape Imagination: Collected Essays of James Corner 1990-2010*. Princeton Architectural Press.
- De Geyter, X. (Ed.). (2002). *After-Sprawl: Research On The Contemporary City*. NAI Publishers/Rotterdam & deSingel International Arts Centre, Antwerp.
- Duncan, N., & Duncan, J. (2010). Doing landscape interpretation. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Geography*, 225–247.
- Easterling, K. (2016). *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space*. Verso.
- Fang, C., & Yu, D. (2016). *China's New Urbanization: Developmental Paths, Blueprints and Patterns*. Springer.
- Governa, F., & Sampieri, A. (2019). Urbanisation processes and new towns in contemporary China: A critical understanding from a decentred view. *Urban Studies*, 2–17.
- Graham, S., & Marvin, S. (2001). *Splintering Urbanism: Networked Infrastructures, Technological Mobilities and the Urban Condition*. Routledge.
- Koolhaas, R., O.M.A, & Mau, B. (1995). *S, M, L, XL*. Monacelli Pr.
- Lee, C. C. M. (2016). *Common Frameworks: Rethinking the Developmental City in China*. Harvard University Graduate School of Design.
- Li, K., Administrative Committee of Zhengdong New District, & Zhengzhou Urban Planning Bureau. (2010). *The Urban & Architectural Design of Zhengdong New District* (Vol. 4). China Construction Industry Press.
- Lyster, C. (2016). *Learning from Logistics*. Birkhäuser.
- Oakes, T. S. (2019). China's urban ideology: New towns, creation cities, and contested landscapes of memory. *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 1–22.
- Phelps, N. A. (2015). *Sequel to Suburbia: Glimpses of America's Post-Suburban Future*. MIT Press.
- Rowe, P. G. (1991). *Making a Middle Landscape*. Mit Press.
- Sieverts, T. (2003). *Cities without cities: An interpretation of the Zwischenstadt*. Routledge.
- Thün, G., Velikov, K., McTavish, D., Ripley, C., McMorrough, J., & Fishman, R. (2015). *Infra-Eco-Logi Urbanism: A Project for the Great Lakes Megaregion*. Park Books.
- Viganò, P., Fabian, L., & Secchi, B. (Eds.). (2016). *Water and asphalt: The project of isotropy*. Park Books.
- Wu, F. (2015). *Planning for Growth: Urban and Regional Planning in China*. Routledge.
- Zhengzhou Municipal Statistics Bureau. (2018). *Zhengzhou Statistic Data*. <http://tjj.zhengzhou.gov.cn/>
- Zhengzhou Municipality. (2009). *Solicitation for Spatial Development Strategic Planning Scheme of Zhengbian New District*. Zhengzhou Municipality.

ChinaMade Project

Landscapes of Development

Infrastructure and Chinese Investment in the Mekong Region

Dorothy Tang, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) seeks to reinforce transnational trade routes with infrastructure, resource extraction, and economic cooperation across Asia, Europe, and Africa. Since the early 2000s, Chinese Overseas Cooperation Zones have played a major role in solidifying bilateral cooperation and incubating Chinese overseas investment. As a result, there are 182 Chinese-financed zones that have been developed in 52 countries. The Mekong Region is currently an important destination for Chinese investment due to its proximity to China and diasporic connections. However, the geopolitics of the long 20th century has also produced a fractured region with complex bilateral and multilateral interventions, and varied affinities with China. My project is a transnational comparison of two Chinese overseas cooperation zones in Cambodia and Thailand to understand whether Chinese overseas projects have varying outcomes in different host nations, and how power-relations between states inform spatial practices. Recent scholarship of Chinese overseas investments, especially in infrastructural and industrial development, have largely focused on international relations and economic policies rather than their urban and environmental implications. An infrastructural approach grounds the research in the physical and material realities of the landscape while attending to the multiple scales of politics, economics, and social impacts inside and outside of these zones. By starting with the physical landscape in its regional context, I avoid the common tendency of viewing zones as abstract enclaves, but rather an integral component in economic development and urban change. In addition, it recognizes conflicting geopolitical interests of other international actors and the agency of local communities.

The Landscapes and Infrastructure of Chinese Overseas Corporation Zones

Special Economic Zones (SEZ) are typically discussed as critical components of economic policy and associated with the rise of Asian economies such as Taiwan, South Korea, and China. Despite the many terms used to describe these zones—free-trade zones, export-processing zones, industrial estates, or science parks—they share common characteristics of clearly demarcated boundaries, regulatory exemptions from the rest of the economy, and dedicated infrastructural provision. My project foregrounds the landscapes of Chinese overseas cooperation zones in the Mekong Region to map the concomitant infrastructural development, urbanization processes, and environmental change. An infrastructural approach foregrounds the material landscape to understand the rationales embedded within. As opposed to conceptualizing SEZs themselves as infrastructure, I approach SEZs through the infrastructures that support it, such as energy, transportation, water, communications, and waste. SEZs are critical spaces of infrastructural convergence, and an analysis of their infrastructural regions yields insight into the political,



Figure 1. The Thai-Chinese Rayong Industrial Zone is one of the first official Chinese Overseas Cooperation Zones in Southeast Asia. This model shows how the industrial zone is integrated with regional infrastructure in southeast Thailand. (Source: © Dorothy Tang, 2019)



Figure 2. The Thai-Chinese Rayong Industrial Zone is an incubator for Chinese enterprises in Thailand. This rubber factory is one of the key tenants of the zone. (Source: © Dorothy Tang, 2020).

social, and economic processes at play. Most empirical work in infrastructural studies focus on one type of infrastructural systems, but the SEZ provides an opportunity to study how the technopolitics of multiple types of infrastructure intersect in one site, and the overlooked connections between institutions, communities, and landscapes.

“Landscapes of Development” is informed by the political and material lens of infrastructure studies (Larkin 2013) and the spatial lens of landscape studies (Jackson 1997). The infrastructures of the zone are indicative of the operations on both sides of its boundaries—a reflection of the resource demands from within and an index of the natural systems beyond. Its extended spatial reach displaces human and ecological communities while resettling or cultivating other forms of settlements. The research complements the existing literature on infrastructure through a spatial analysis of these extended spaces of infrastructure, and moves fluidly between conventional scales—from the spaces of the zone itself to the supra-national scale—to examine the politics of scale-making and their spatial outcomes (Brenner 2019). By starting with the physical space of the zone, the project confronts the difficulties of studying “globalization” (Tsing 2005) or a “global China” (Lee 2018) and contributes to the discipline of urban design and planning through studying “ordinary” spaces of industrial development—from prefabricated factory buildings to water supply facilities—rather than exemplary projects or heroic figures.

Case Studies: Cambodia & Thailand

One of the overarching questions is to understand the variations of Chinese overseas SEZs in the development trajectories of their hosts countries and the forms of improvisations necessary to adapt to local political structure, property regimes, spatial practices and environmental conditions. A subset of this inquiry relates to how varied geopolitical competition impacts the spatial configuration of SEZs on the ground. If we assume that host countries play an important role in shaping Chinese overseas SEZs, it is necessary for the unit of analysis to expand beyond the physical boundaries of the zone itself to the infrastructural region it is embedded in. This “infrastructural region” is defined by the functional territory that supports the zone, including physical infrastructural systems, policy environments, and social networks. Given this objective, the case studies selected represent two of the 20 Chinese state-sanctioned

zones: Thai-Chinese Rayong Industrial Zone in Thailand and Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone in Cambodia. These two zones are privately managed with capital investment primarily from the Yangtze River Delta and were part of the first wave of competitive bids to China's Ministry of Finance in 2006. As a state-sanctioned development zone, the zones are eligible for centrally allocated subsidies and low interest loans from China. Both zones are located on the urban peripheries of their host countries and are key nodes for major transportation infrastructure investments such as ports, highways, and rail. In addition, they are in sensitive coastal landscapes, and are susceptible to multiple environmental risks due to climate change. These similarities enable planners, urban designers, landscape architects, and geographers to ask whether national industrial policies contribute to differentiated spatial outcomes. My research uses the industrial zone as a spatial typology to study the technopolitics between economic development, infrastructure, and space. Three activities—spatial-historic analysis, mapping infrastructural regions, and spatial ethnographies—hybridize spatial analysis with humanistic research methods. It aims to trace the spatial genealogy of the zone, map its infrastructural reach, identify spillover effects, and finally to conclude with policy recommendations.

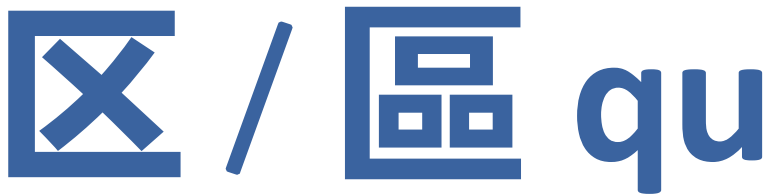
The SEZ provides an opportunity to study how the technopolitics of multiple types of infrastructure intersect in one site, and the overlooked connections between institutions, communities, and landscapes.

Dorothy Tang, RLA, is currently a doctoral student at MIT's Department of Urban Studies and Planning and an adjunct assistant professor at the Division of Landscape Architecture at the University of Hong Kong. She is a landscape architect interested in the intersections of infrastructure and everyday life. Her work engages with urban and rural communities situated in landscapes confronting large-scale environmental change. Current research projects are concerned with the role of eco-imaginaries in shaping green infrastructure in Chinese Cities, and Chinese engagement with Zambian urban development. She holds a Master of Landscape Architecture with Distinction from Harvard University, and is a registered landscape architect in the State of New York.

References

- Brenner, Neil. 2019. *New Urban Spaces : Urban Theory and the Scale Question*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Jackson, J.B. 1997. "The Word Itself." In *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America*, edited by Helen Horowitz, 299–306. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Larkin, Brian. 2013. "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42 (1): 327–43. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-092412-155522>.
- Lee, Ching Kwan. 2018. *The Specter of Global China: Politics, Labor, and Foreign Investment in Africa*. Kindle Edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tsing, Anna. 2005. *Friction : An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Kindle Edition. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

keywords for infrastructure and media



area, region, zone

Carolyn Cartier, University of Technology Sydney

In “36 Calendars,” a conceptual art project covering thirty-six years in China, the Beijing artist Song Dong 宋冬 records his perspectives in drawings on blank pages of the generic wire-bound household wall calendar. His sketches depict emerging issues or events for each of 432 months over more than three decades from 1978–2013. The third month of 1980 features the term *jingji tequ* 经济特区 or “economic special area.” The Publicity Department (Xuanchuan bu 宣传部) translated it as “special economic zone” for international circulation. Song recorded his memory about it on the March 1980 calendar page: “A new expression (*xin ci* 新词) arose: ‘*jingji tequ*’. My teacher said it was a new idea [sic] thing (*xin shiwu* 新事物). I neither understood it nor had any interest in it. ... Our senior schoolmates told us that it was a place for making fortunes.” In China, and beyond, the special economic zone (SEZ) suggests a place of economic distinction and exception, a spatial infrastructure with outsize signage and positive charge: global capital this way! An internationalized discourse about it, comingling Chinese Communist Party narratives, China scholarship, and mediatized business interests, has promoted the SEZ as a concept and policy. For instance, Ezra Vogel recounts that the inception of his 1989 book project, *One Step Ahead in China: Guangdong Under Reform*, was at the invitation of the Guangdong Province Economic Commission which hosted Vogel at the provincial Party guesthouse to facilitate the project (Vogel 1989, 5). *One Step Ahead*, on special zones and new cities in the Pearl River Delta, and a leading statement on the development of the region, appeared like an early adopter in trendsetting, translating the SEZ for international scholarship and legitimating its potential for transnational capital. But the problem for the word zone—and the word *qu*—is that zone is only one of many translations of *qu* and a minority among them at that.

Even English language translations of statements by Deng Xiaoping have trouble with *qu* terms. In the early 1980s the special zones on the south China coast were the only areas open to the world economy. It was as if they were “walking one step ahead” (*xian zou yibu* 先走一步), inspiring the title of Vogel’s book. They were geographical analogs of Deng’s statement, “let some people get rich first.” Any online search of this statement returns millions of hits. But this common

The problem for the word zone—and the word *qu*—is that zone is only one of many translations of *qu* and a minority among them at that.

portrayal of Deng's statement is only partly correct. What Deng actually said is “allow some regions and some people to get rich first” (rang yi bufen diqu, yi bufen ren keyi fuqilai 让一部分地区, 一部分人可以先富起来) (Deng 1997). Deng referred to regional change, because only through governance of the administrative divisions could state-led development take place. The more common portrayal of Deng's slogan, however, omits the word “region” (diqu 地区) just as zone works around what it cannot see in the administrative divisions.



Figure 1: “1980.03” in Song Dong: 36 Calendars (2012-13) (Source Asian Art Archive, Hong Kong)

Kong manufacturing apparatus into Shenzhen and the larger Pearl River delta region would ground unprecedented rapid growth. Imbued with what came to be called “Shenzhen speed” (Shenzhen tekuai 深圳特快), the special zone would travel as a leading idea in the era's world of flows. Based on international uptake of the official Chinese discourse, the special zone would evolve into a quasi-policy approach with spectacular characteristics—a rhetorically seductive, mediated phenomenon. The discourse about SEZs, affiliated to mobilities of labor and capital, fueled the ideology of globalizing neoliberalism, casting zones into high relief in relation to surrounding areas which would be left behind.

The growth of the zone fanbase reflects the polyvalence of zone across the political-economic spectrum. From subject of multiple turn-of-the-century popular magazine cover stories to leading postcolonial scholarship, it is difficult to exaggerate the extent of the international popularization of the Shenzhen zone.

From qu to the administrative divisions

This essay examines the keyword qu 区 in jingji tequ 经济特区 and shequ 社区 and interrelated words under the umbrella of xingzheng quhua 行政区划 or the “administrative divisions” for its potential to reveal dynamics of spatial governance, Chinese ideas about bounding and bordering space, and state territorialization where subnational territory, marked out nationwide, edge to edge, is ever subject to change.

In what ways do meanings of the Chinese terms and the English-language “zone” diverge? In its transformation from the simple word qu, why has zone garnered an international fanbase? The idea of special zones is inseparable from the history of export-processing zones in Asian regional development and China's reconceptualization of the concept. In 1978 Deng Xiaoping toured Singapore and came away with plans that would surpass the Singapore model zones while attracting global capital. China's approach would establish much larger territories, providing expansive space for simultaneous industrialization and new city development. The party-state would strategically locate the largest of the first ones, Shenzhen, on the Hong Kong boundary. The transfer of the Hong

A major misconception about zones, that SEZs are discrete spaces free from bureaucratic Communist Party authority, propelled market excitement. Anthropologist Aihwa Ong paradoxically established the free space notion in her 2006 book, *Neoliberalism as Exception*. Ong writes, “In short, the coastal zone authorities and open cities are spaces of exception to the centrally planned socialist economy. They enjoy autonomy in all economic and administrative matters” (Ong 2006, 108). Little could be further from the truth in China’s party-state structure, but the illusion circulated as a subject of common talk without accuracy.

The zone phenomenon moved through Asian cross currents and raised particular interest in India, for instance. A 2007 report of the Department of Commerce of India “Special Economic Zones are the dream projects of the Government...launched by the Government of India, with great fanfare, on the model of the Special Economic Zones in China, in the fond hope that they would help India replicate the Chinese success story of rapid industrialization” (Parliament of India, 2007). In this utopian discourse zones inspire economic desire and the potential for material results. India began to establish SEZs only to realize the size of the Chinese special zones—large state administrative divisions—could not be matched. Unlike India, China could establish new territorial areas because it maintained state land ownership and authoritarian power over land use decisions.

Where the English-language idea of a zone connotes difference from some unspecified surrounding area, all zones in China are areas within the system of administrative divisions. All territorial areas are types of *qu*. Shenzhen’s primary status is as a “prefectural city” (*diji shi* 地及市) at the “sub-provincial level” (*fusheng ji* 副省级) of government. These are not appealing and memorable terms. Nevertheless, they demonstrate the reality of the Chinese state spatial structure. The prefecture in contemporary China is a bounded territory at the level of government between the province and the county. It is also Deng’s region word: *diqu* 地区. Based on its two characters, *di* 地 and *qu* 区, *diqu* appears to mean “local district” or “local lands,” and the word descends from the imperial history of administration when a prefecture was a field office or “dispatch office” (*paichu jigou* 派出机构) of the province for large rural areas between the levels of the province and the county. Consequently, *diqu* can mean an area in the general sense of a large rural area, or a bounded area in the contemporary hierarchy of the administrative divisions.

As the world economy invested in China’s special zones, excited narratives about their growth failed to grasp the fundamental *tiaozheng xingzheng quhua* 调整行政区划 or “adjustments to the administrative divisions” that made them. Administrative and territorial changes to the administrative divisions defined and established the areas of zones, just as changes to the prefectures made them into expansive cities-in-information at the prefecture level. The four special economic zones established in the early 1980s, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Xiamen, and Shantou, share names with the large territorial cities that contain them. Shenzhen the special zone was for three decades only one-fifth the size of Shenzhen the city, until the State Council made them coterminous in 2010. Clever term: *jingji tequ* had become simultaneously a metonym of the reform

Clever term: *jingji tequ* had become simultaneously a metonym of the reform era, a metaphor for rapid growth, and a synecdoche of the part and the whole—the zone and the subnational territory—that masks the project of reconfiguring China’s territory for party-state-led industrialization.

era, a metaphor for rapid growth, and a synecdoche of the part and the whole—the zone and the subnational territory—that masks the project of reconfiguring China’s territory for party-state-led industrialization. Analysis of *qu* 区 and its fundamental meaning in the administrative divisions sheds light on this process.

One version of *qu*

Zone is the geographical keyword in English talk about the reform era in China. Yet there is no Chinese word that means zone uniquely or is a direct translation of zone. Zone is just one among several translations of the word *qu*. Its more common translations are area, district, and region. *Qu* appears in numerous compound words as the final character in which it means the territory of whatever precedes it. A *chengqu* 城区 is a district of a city. A *juqu* 居区 is a residential area or residential district. A *zizhiqu* 自治区 is a so-called autonomous region, the equivalent of a province in the system of administrative divisions. A *jiaqu* 郊区 is a suburban area. A *gongye yuanku* 工业园区 is the Chinese translation of industrial park. All have administrative boundaries. Among these translations and terms, the word district, as in city district, usually denotes the governing jurisdiction. The same word, *qu*, that is translated in English as zone, means in Chinese an administrative district or a government territory. Official areas of all kinds in China, including zones, are territorial governing spaces in the state structure under the authority of the party-state bureaucracy.

All types of *qu* and their meanings exist within and are defined by this system of administrative divisions. Its basic categories are province, prefecture, county, and town with corresponding hierarchy of government. In the administrative divisions (行政区划) the compound word *qu hua* 区划 means the noun “area divisions” and the verb “to delimit” or “draw a line” as well as “to plan, transfer, and assign.” It indicates how the state actively determines, delimits, and nominates subnational territory including special variations. The Constitution of the People’s Republic of China defines the power of the state to change the administrative divisions—the power to change any area (*qu*) at any scale or size. A *qu* is state-demarcated administrative territory with prescribed functions which the party-state may periodically adjust.

All types of *qu* and their meanings exist within and are defined by this system of administrative divisions. Its basic categories are province, prefecture, county, and town with corresponding hierarchy of government. In the administrative divisions (行政区划) the compound word *qu hua* 区划 means the noun “area divisions” and the verb “to delimit” or “draw a line” as well as “to plan, transfer, and assign.” It indicates how the state actively determines, delimits, and nominates subnational territory including special variations. The Constitution of the People’s Republic of China defines the power of the state to change the administrative divisions—the power to change any area (*qu*) at any scale or size. A *qu* is state-demarcated administrative territory with prescribed functions which the party-state may periodically adjust.

Qu’s character itself has a centuries-long history. The traditional version, 區, reveals meanings about organizing things in space. Its internal component, *pin* 品, means a variety of commodities or objects of some type as well as to sample or to judge, which indicates the interests and actions of an arbiter evaluating within and among categories. The external component is the semantic radical *xi* 匚, which indicates enclosure. In these combined meanings the character conveys notions about differentiation, delineating, and bordering for spatial organization. Given that the contemporary character indicates types of state-defined territorial space, the language conveys the origins of a worldview of the power to organize – whether populations, resources, or the economy – through state spatial practices. The compound word *shequ* 社区, typically translated as community or neighborhood, also looks different from the perspective of the administrative divisions. *Shequ* have become ubiquitous with urbanization in contemporary China, and research in cities has tended to focus on this local scale of society, including residential areas in new property developments and gated communities. *Shequ* also encompasses the *xiaoqu* 小区 or “small areas,” the so-called sub-neighborhoods of private commercial housing developments where residential

The *shequ* is, as the words read, the territorialized area *qu* 区 of local society *she* 社. Perhaps words like *shequ* should never be harnessed into translation.

committees have some measures of self-governance. Though shequ has established meanings, the word qu reveals the community and neighbourhood translations to be false friends. These sociological terms, community and neighborhood, descending from the traditions of western sociology, differ from the spatial governance intrinsic to China's state structure. The shequ is governed space. The shequ is, as the words read, the territorialized area qu 区 of local society she 社. Perhaps words like shequ should never be



Figure 2. Badiucao 巴丢草: 自贸区 – free trade zone 上海自贸区的设立, 说明了一点, 那就是当局暂时无意推行全局性的经济自由化和信息自由化, 这是一个昭彰的保守信 / The establishment of the Shanghai FTZ illustrates the point that the authorities have no intention of implementing general economic liberalization and freedom

the reality of qu is the context of the organization of state power. These contexts vary. When the government of Shanghai announced a new “free trade zone” (zimao qu 自贸区) in 2013 it seemed to signal to the fanbase another round of zone magic. The cartoonist Badiucao 巴丢草 registered a different perspective—the final brick in the wall—that symbolizes the power relations of governing by administrative divisions (Badiucao 2013).

Then let us review the nature of qu. What is Hong Kong? By appearances, Hong Kong is a global city. In China, Hong Kong is a special administrative region (tebie xingzhengqu 特别行政区). Its formal name is the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. The region in “special

harnessed into translation. In daily life, the shequ is typically equated with the shequ residents' committee. The shequ committee has staff, receives complaints, and undertakes tasks. It disseminates government information. It is a people-to-people station. While a shequ will have governing institutions—the interrelated shequ Party branch and shequ residents' committee—the shequ is the governing space. The process of establishing shequ in the reform era began in the 1990s based on the merger of territories of the historic residents' committees, which were also territorialized areas. Established in 1954, at the spatial scale of 100 to 600 households, they were based on the subdivision of the area of the local police station as a “dispatch unit” of the public security apparatus (National People's Congress 1954). In the reform era the shequ maintains local security functions while the governing bureaucracy in charge of shequ has shifted to the Ministry of Civil Affairs, which administers the system of administrative divisions. In the Chinese literature the concept of the “administrative division-shequ” (xingzhengqu-shequ 行政区–社区) defines the shequ as the grassroots extension of the administrative divisions at the local level (Liu and Zhang 1995).

New qu

Translating zone into Chinese yields qu. Where the ideology of zone implies notions about globalizing neoliberalization and mobile capital,

administrative region” is a basic translation of qu. The special administrative region, a category in the system of administrative divisions, is a province-level territory. That Hong Kong is not a city in China's official territorial-administrative system is another story. But it is special because, in the worldview from Beijing, the Chinese central government allows Hong Kong to do different things in different ways. In 2019, for instance, the Hong Kong electorate voted for democrats in local district elections. The central government did not like the direction of change and in 2020 unilaterally implemented in Hong Kong a form of protection for the party-state called the National Security Law (Pepper 2020). Its implementation abrogates a treaty and infringes-upon Hong Kong law. But this is a routine matter in the history of qu.

Bordered and bounded, yet mutable; locally administered and yet subject to unilateral authoritarian change—in whole or in part—varieties of qu represent the state on the ground. They are not locations. They are the contexts of the spatial organization of the party-state that seeks to govern all territory nationwide at all levels down to the shequ, or “horizontal to the edge, vertical to the end” (hengxiang daodi, zongxiang daobian 横向到边, 纵向到底). The spatial governing concept cannot tolerate gaps. There is no free space.

Carolyn Cartier, is Professor of Human Geography and China Studies. She was a founding member of the UTS China Research Centre in 2009 when she joined the Australian academy. She is the chief investigator of the Australian Research Council Discovery Project ‘Governing the City in China: The Territorial Imperative’ (2017-2020) and ‘The Geography of Power in China: Urban Expansion and Administrative Empire (2012-2015)’. Her work in progress is a monograph ‘City Space: Theory, Reality and the Administrative Divisions in China’, and an edited collection ‘The Urban Process in China: State Power, Territorial Economy, and the Future of the City’.

References

- Badiucao, “Free Trade Zone,” China Digital Times, Sept. 24, 2013. Online: <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/chinese/2013/09/>
【图说天朝】一周网络漫画选摘-9-30/巴丢草：自贸区； and @badiucao, “Badiucao 巴丢草,” Twitter, Sept. 25, 2013, 12:17 a.m. twitter.com/badiucao/status/382509001612599296?s=20
- Deng Xiaoping. 1997. “让一部分人先富起来 (Let Some People Get Rich First),” 国共产党新闻(Chinese Communist Party News), Feb. 19, 1997. cpc.people.com.cn/GB/34136/2569304.html.
- Liu Junde 刘军德 and Zhang Yuzhi 张玉枝. 1995. “上海浦东新区行政区—社区体系及其发展研究 (1 & 2) (Shanghai Pudong New Administrative Division-Community System and Its Development), 城乡建设 (Urban and Rural Construction) 9: 13–15; and 10: 23–24.
- National People's Congress. 1954. “城市居民委员会组织条例 (Organization Regulations of City Residents' Committees),” Fourth Meeting of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, Dec. 31, 1954. www.npc.gov.cn/wxzl/wxzl/2000-12/10/content_4275.htm.
- Ong, Aihwa. 2006. *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham, NC, Duke U. Press).
- Parliament of India, “Eighty Third Report on the Function of Special Economic Zones” (Parliament of India: Parliamentary Standing Committee on Commerce, 2007). 164.100.47.5/newcommittee/reports/EnglishCommittees/Committee%20on%20Commerce/Report%20SEZ1.htm.
- Pepper, Suzanne. 2020. “National Security Law: A Second ‘Handover’ for Hong Kong?” Hong Kong Free Press, June 25. hongkongfp.com/2020/06/25/national-security-law-a-second-handover-for-hong-kong/
- Vogel, Ezra. 1989. *One Step Ahead in China: Guangdong Under Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

Third China Made Workshop

The Social Life of Chinese Infrastructures in Southeast Asia

May 19 2021 – May 21 2021 at the National University of Singapore

Call for Proposals Deadline, October 9, 2020 | Visit the following webpage for more details:

<https://chinamadeproject.net/call-for-participants/>

The workshop will bring together scholars from different fields in the social sciences and humanities to discuss contemporary Chinese infrastructure development in Southeast Asia. By placing empirically grounded research projects in conversation with theoretical work on materiality and techno-politics, the workshop will center on the lived experience of infrastructure built through public and private Chinese development initiatives and investments. The workshop starts from the assumption that the domestic “China Model” of economic and political development centers on infrastructure: the construction of roads, dams, electric grids, pipelines, airports and cities. Over the past two decades this has been extended further into social life through digital infrastructures, surveillance and media systems, transportation platforms, logistics systems, and the commercial infrastructures of brands and franchises. Taken together these infrastructural systems extend particular logics and shape life experience in deeply felt ways. The goal of this workshop is thus to examine how Chinese infrastructures transform the social worlds and natural landscapes that they encounter as they move beyond China into Southeast Asia—often framed as the first segment of the Belt and Road Initiative—and how these infrastructures, are in turn, transformed.

The workshop will focus on fine-grained investigations of Chinese infrastructures in Southeast Asia, including the political, social, cultural, spatial, and environmental dimensions of infrastructure planning, construction, and use. By way of such an approach, the workshop aims to provide rich ethnographic studies and empirically rigorous projects that problematize the China model of development as well as assumptions regarding its effects. In doing this the workshop will seek to show that Chinese infrastructure development is shaped by more than China’s geopolitical ambitions, desires for market expansion, and the need for a spatial fix for Chinese surplus capital. It may, for example, demonstrate that infrastructures, thought of as a complex assemblages with particular dispositions, can also produce their own logics, propulsions and power over life. The workshop strives to produce new synergies across disciplines and areas of research, while intervening in critical theoretical discussions of infrastructure in social science and humanities scholarship in and outside of China and Southeast Asian Studies.

We invite paper proposals that focus on the lived experience of infrastructures in Southeast Asia, particularly in the fields of geography, anthropology, science technology and society studies, history of technology, and urban studies. We seek papers that take seriously the agentive role of material systems while at the same time highlighting the role of human experience within them. We are particularly interested in papers that foreground the way power relations are shaped by techno-political systems in specific research contexts. Who benefits from China-made infrastructure systems? How is power distributed or consolidated by them? What types of circulation do they promote and restrict? How are forms of labor, movement and social organization transformed by them? And finally, what happens to the China model of development when it moves into both liberal and illiberal spaces?

Fall 2020 Events

Hong Kong: Global China's Restive Frontier

Ching Kwan Lee

Wednesday, September 16, 2020 at 7pm MDT via ZOOM

Post-1997 Hong Kong has become the restive frontier of global China. It is the place where the major strategies of global Chinese power are in full display, and where these have provoked the strongest popular resistance yet to Chinese domination. In this talk, I will analyze (1) how global China's generic playbook -- economic statecraft, patron-clientelism and symbolic violence -- has been applied to Hong Kong over the past two decades, and (2) how this process of internal colonization has spurred and radicalized a momentous popular movement for self-determination. The politics of infrastructure is a key element in this historic struggle between Hong Kong and China.

Ching Kwan Lee is Dr. Chung Sze-yuen Professor of Social Science at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and Professor of Sociology at UCLA. She is the author of three multiple award-winning monographs on contemporary China: *Gender and the South China Miracle: Two Worlds of Factory Women* (1998), *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt* (2007), and *The Specter of Global China: Politics, Labor and Foreign Investment in Africa* (2017). She is the founding chair of the Society for Hong Kong Studies, and her latest book on Hong Kong is *Take Back Our Future: an Eventful Political Sociology of the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement* (coedited with Ming Sing, 2019).

This webinar is part of the China Made Project made possible by a grant from The Henry Luce Foundation.

Visit the following webpage for more information:

<https://www.colorado.edu/cas/hong-kong-global-chinas-restive-frontier-20200916>

City in a box? Rethinking the Special Economic Zone as the 'China Model' of development

Tim Oakes

October 2020

This lecture is part of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Global China Center's "Virtual Engagements on Global China" series

Visit the following webpage for more information:

<https://globalchinacenter.shss.ust.hk/events/virtual-engagements-global-china>