



# The ChinaMade NEWSLETTER

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## ChinaMade Brief #6

# Infrastructural Power

## HONG KONG & GLOBAL CHINA

*Darren Byler, Center for Asian Studies, University of Colorado Boulder*

**O**n September 23, 2018 the Guangzhou–Shenzhen–Hong Kong Express Rail Link officially opened—linking Mainland China to downtown Hong Kong by high-speed rail. This \$11 billion project, built over nearly 9 years, did more than facilitate travel. It also brought Chinese territorial sovereignty right into Kowloon. Now, there is a new Chinese border inside the wave-like steel folds of the gleaming station, where travelers are subject to Chinese laws.

As the sociologist Ching Kwan Lee argued in a September 2020 China Made lecture titled “Hong Kong: Global China’s Restive Frontier,” the past decade of Chinese infrastructure projects, such as the high speed rail station, are part of the colonial project to remake Hong Kong in China’s image.<sup>1</sup> “They wanted direct access to downtown Hong Kong,” Lee noted, “As soon as you enter the custom areas inside train station you are under Chinese law. It was the extraterritoriality of the project that caused popular outrage and protests.” Both sides of this project—Hong Kong protestors and Chinese authorities—understood something about the way power was carried by the built environment.

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**Infrastructure power—a materialist reframing of what Foucault might refer to as biopower—announces the priorities of a state: who and what is authorized to move and act, whose lives and what materials are valued.**

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Listening to Lee’s discussion of the imposition of new infrastructure systems brought to mind conceptualizations of infrastructural power: the way the dispositions of built systems can enhance a state’s influence over a society (Mann 1984; Easterling 2016). By building itself into the lives of citizens and introducing a new regime of costs and benefits through this imposition, an infrastructural state begins to shape the right to the city, the right to transport, the right to work and so on. Infrastructure power—a materialist reframing of what Foucault might refer to as biopower (Foucault 2007)—announces the priorities of a state: who and what is authorized to move and act, whose lives and what materials are valued.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: The impetus for this essay was a recent China Made lecture by the sociologist Ching Kwan Lee, the ideas expressed, however, are those of the author.



Paying attention to infrastructural power adds another dimension to recent discussions of Hong Kong which focus on human rights, legal reform, democracy and protest (Davis 2020; Wasserstrom 2020). It opens up a sociotechnical analytic of China's colonial territorialization of Hong Kong.

The highspeed rail line that announced China's intention to transform Hong Kong was also at the center of Hong Kong's decolonial movement. Back in 2009, when the new express rail-line was proposed, thousands of pro-democracy demonstrators took to the streets. It was clear to them that the project was producing redundant railway capacity, and dumping extra infrastructure from Mainland companies into Hong Kong at the expense of Hong Kong taxpayers. The protestors used many of the tactics typical of democratic protest—petitions, marches, hunger-strikes, rallies—but they also began to innovate.

Over several weekends in January 2010, they adapted a Tibetan votive practice, prostrating every 26 steps to protest each kilometer of the proposed rail line. Their protests began to mirror the built environment in other ways too. Using social media they organized a coordinated blockade of the Hong Kong Legislative Council Building trapping pro-Beijing lawmakers inside for over a day. They drew and published online maps of the locations of police and protesters. They carried plastic wrap to cover their faces against pepper spray. They chanted “shame” when the police escorted the lawmakers out and began beating protestors.



Figure 1. The Hong Kong section of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge under construction in 2015 off the coast of Lantau Island. (Image Credit: Wikicommons)

This protest, over ten years ago, inspired Joshua Wong and many other high school students 2 years later to protest the introduction of propaganda materials into Hong Kong high-school text books. This in turn inspired the 2014 Umbrella Movement which in turn inspired the Anti-Extradition protests of 2019. Each successive protest has grown in scale and become more sophisticated in its tactics. It has produced a generation of young Hong Kongers who have come

of age in the midst of radical political action. Protest is now mainstream in Hong Kong—though now dangerous due to a 2020 National Security Law. Lee argues that this history is important not only because it shows us how social movements take form, but also because it speaks to the role of infrastructural power in activating decolonial politics. It also demonstrates the limits and strategies of global China.

### Global China

As Lee (2017a) has shown in a recent monograph, global China should not be thought of primarily as a geographic or regional phenomenon but as a field of power. The forms of investment and governance strategies deployed within the magnetic pull of the sphere of influence outside of China are very closely connected to systems inside China. This is not to say that Chinese state and corporate actors are attempting to replicate the systems they use in China in non-Chinese places exactly, but rather domestic strategies inform and shape Chinese power strategies in other places (Oakes 2019).

It is important to understand that Chinese domestic development over the past three decades has been fueled by an anarchic system of local competition. Provincial, city and prefectural governments have competed with each other to lead in economic growth and for central state investment in infrastructural development. As Lee demonstrated in her 2007 monograph on labor struggle and the rebirth of Chinese capitalism following the decline of state socialism, the cutthroat competition between localities has led to many redundancies, or forms of overaccumulation, in a wide variety of sectors (see also Lee 2017b). When the domestic market for real estate, energy, and other products is saturated and profit rates are falling, provincial authorities, ministries, state owned enterprises and private companies all have an interest in lobbying the central government to promote outbound investment around the globe. Since cadre promotion in local divisions of the Communist Party are now always tied to growth, the outward propulsion of Chinese state and private capital has built in momentum.

As Lee noted in her talk, reiterating some of the conceptual analytic of her 2018 book, around 2008 as a recession took hold of North America and Western Europe, central leaders in China began to realize that they needed to build technological capacity in order to reposition themselves in the value chain of global capitalism. This meant that they needed to begin to position themselves to set global standards; and they saw that they had a key strategic advantage in infrastructure development—something that they had been developing throughout China over the past decade. The force of global China then is driven by a top-down need for economic growth, and an implicit drive to legitimate the Chinese political system, but it is also driven by locally positioned private and state owned companies who lobby for this outward expansion.

Hong Kong, Lee argues, has become a key site in this field of capital-driven political power. As in many locations where the global China field of power is being deployed—from Southeast Asia

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to Africa, a pattern of a loose set of practices is beginning to emerge. This tool box or playbook is comprised of three primary domains: economic investment, patron-clientelism, and institution building.

First Chinese state capital is invested in infrastructure projects ranging from roads and dams to “safe city” surveillance systems and internet access. This form of economic state-craft and multinational corporate development both releases an overaccumulation of capital from the sending location in China and builds a material basis from which additional relations of power or influence are solidified and, potentially, can be institutionalized.

The second aspect of the toolbox is the development of interpersonal relationships with key leaders in positions of power in the receiving locality; or in some cases with diaspora Chinese who are positioned at the grassroots of society. These relationships are cultivated in a variety of ways, but financial incentives in the form of gifts, lucrative jobs and personal investments appear to dominate this aspect of global China expansion. The third aspect is deployed largely through discourse and institutions that disseminate that discourse. Through newspapers and television, social media and films, changes to text books, and reshaping of official discourse, Chinese authorities attempt to unify thought in a way that further cements power relations.

In Hong Kong these practices can be seen more clearly than in other locations, because the Chinese state has ultimate sovereignty over the territory. As Lee noted in her talk, “exporting overcapacity to Hong Kong is much easier than to other states where they have to deal with another sovereign political system.”

The world’s longest bridge, which connects a key Hong Kong transportation infrastructure—the Hong Kong airport—to the Mainland via Macao, is another example of the way infrastructural power is used to assert symbolic material dominance into Hong Kong. The 55 kilometer bridge was built by a consortium led by the China Highway Planning and Design Institute at a cost of nearly \$18 billion to Hong Kong taxpayers. As Lee noted the bridge does multiple types of global China work: first, at the level of formal politics, it symbolizes the integration of Hong Kong and Macao with the Chinese city of Zhuhai. But it also builds capacity for further development. Even before the bridge was completed the state-owned enterprises which were given contracts to build it had turned their production lines to the construction of similar bridges in Norway and elsewhere. “Now this new generation of bridges will be built to Chinese standards,” Lee said, “This is the key.”

### **When Does Global China Become Colonial?**

On July 1, 2020 a barge appeared in Hong Kong’s Victoria Harbor. On the sides of shipping containers stacked four high, government officials draped red banners with the giant yellow characters “Celebrate the National Security Law” (贺国安立法). Overnight, on the twenty-third anniversary of the British handover of Hong Kong to China, unharmonious political views and symbols became illegal, including support for Hong Kong, Taiwan, Uyghur and Tibetan autonomy. The announcement, projected though infrastructural power at the scale of the population, instantiated the reorientation of Hong Kong institutions and authorities away from democratic values and toward global China.

Throughout her scholarship Lee has been careful to differentiate between the Chinese model of development characterized by global China and colonial or imperial projects. Since colonial systems imply a process of occupation, dispossession and domination, many global China

projects do not rise to the level of colonization. Instead, Chinese infrastructure projects may begin to build forms of economic influence, and may bring groups of Chinese citizens to build

and maintain them, but the forms of power they exert in the local politics and institutions of other nations are often limited. As Ivan Franceschini (2020) has shown in a recent case study of construction workers in Cambodia, both Chinese and Cambodian workers employed by Chinese companies are exploited by their employers, though Cambodian workers are paid far less than their Chinese counterparts. Yet while Chinese media, financing and corporations have begun to shape Cambodian society, they have yet to produce a feeling of occupation, domination, or even widespread dispossession. Most Cambodian social institutions—language, education, religion, police, civil service—remain intact though underfunded and often failing. Furthermore, as Miriam Driessen (2019) has shown, in still other cases, in places like Ethiopia, local workers can use local legal systems to protect themselves from Chinese labor regimes.

The case of Hong Kong is different. Here global China takes on the shape of an internal colonial project. This, Lee argues, is shown through institutional transplant and capture. This process of norms and personnel replacement is a key element of colonization by a sovereign power. Because Chinese authorities are ultimately accountable to no countervailing power, they have found ways to capture key institutions such as the police, the media, the education system, civil service sector, and election systems. “Looking at institutional transplant and capture is the key to diagnosing a colonial project,” Lee remarked.

A primary way they have done this is through a combination of first and second aspects of the global China toolbox: economic statecraft and patron-clientelism. The infrastructure of Hong Kong is increasingly oriented toward the Mainland. As Carolyn Cartier (2020) has shown, by building “cultural facilities” that sponsor investment in Hong Kong’s West Kowloon Arts District, Chinese state planners are using creative industries as a tool of knowledge production which “produce[s] reality by aestheticizing it.” A quintessential example of this, Cartier suggests, is the late-stage inclusion of a branch of the National Palace Museum—placing material culture curated in Beijing on display in Hong Kong as a way of indexing center-periphery power. Similarly, as Lee noted in her talk (see also Toland 2020), an estimated \$63 billion project to create an artificial island for prime real estate in Hong Kong will have the effect not of reducing housing cost pressure, but rather open up new space for Mainland investors to decenter the urban core of Hong Kong.

To summarize, over the past decade major private institutions and development projects throughout the city have been bought by Mainland investors. Furthermore, Hong Kong elites who maintain positions of power have also been bought off by offers too good to refuse. Those that refuse have been pushed to the side. Increasingly, those in command in Hong Kong today—

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Carrie Lam and her supporters—now mimic the behavior and power relation of those who control them (see Bhabha 1994). Weaponized with the new National Security Law, the state has also begun to limit freedom of expression and assembly. It has also further transformed curriculum in primary and secondary schools.



Figure 3. A barge and shipping containers support the banners “Celebrate the National Security Law” in Victoria Harbor on July 1, 2020. (Image Credit: Chinese Embassy of Canada)

### Social Institutions of Anti-Politics

Yet, at the same time that all of this has been established, paradoxically Hong Kong has become the epicenter of resistance to global China. Because an entire generation of Hong Kongers have come of age in a time of protest over time they have increased their personal political capacity and their demands have been radicalized. “Hong Kong has come into itself,” Lee noted. “The idea of an independent Hong Kong has moved from the fringe to the mainstream of people’s political imagination, especially among the younger generation.”

In addition the reflexivity that is fostered by these cascading protests leads to a capacity to correct past mistakes. While, following the passage of the 2020 National Security Law the Hong Kong protest has shifted to anti-politics and reducing casualties, under the surface in neighborhoods and behind closed-doors a radical politics is simmering. “Hong Kong is the most restive frontier of global China, because they have built the most capacity to push back,” Lee remarked. “This is in part because it is a global city. It is a structural central in global capitalism, so there are many powerful stakeholders.”

Hong Kong has information infrastructure at a level that is at the cutting edge of global capacity. As a financial center, the world’s wealthiest people, including Chinese billionaires, are forced to care about protest. As a result Hong Kong remains a key site for the way the contradictions of global private capital meet Chinese state capital. These fissures create an opening. For instance they make it difficult for Hong Kongers to be replaced. This is a marked difference from sites of Chinese internal settler colonialism, Tibet and Xinjiang.

The colonization of those locations began too with economic investment in infrastructure. As Emily Yeh (2013) has shown, in Tibet the largely unwanted gift of infrastructure development is what began the process. Similarly, in Xinjiang, the hard infrastructures of roads, rail and pipelines is what first bought settlers from other parts of China into Uyghur majority areas in the 1990s

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**In Hong Kong, communities at the grassroots level remain intact. It is in these sites that the logics of infrastructural power—geared toward extraction and efficiency—can be turned against themselves as long as families and communities remain intact.**

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and 2000s (Byler 2018). Yet it was the replacement of indigenous political leaders and educators at the grassroots level with loyal Chinese citizens from elsewhere in China, coupled with the dislocation of hundreds of thousands of native peoples from their families, that has pushed Tibetans and Uyghurs toward forms of what Patrick Wolfe (2006) refers to as social elimination. With new leaders in place at the level of neighborhood watch units or work brigades, a system of human and technical surveillance is able to enact a new regime of truth (Byler 2018).

In Hong Kong however communities at the grassroots level remain intact even as they are targeted through patron to client relations, and those in higher levels of command are often

coopted. Drawing on his work in Jakarta the scholar AbdouMaliq Simone (2016) argues that intersubjective relations are what make human communities resilient in midst of dramatic changes in infrastructural power. He found that although changes to urban space and livelihoods can narrow the possibilities for community organizing, “processes of taking care” can still survive through forms of strategic invisibility, or anti-politics as Lee put it. Such acts can refuse colonial and capitalist frontier making because they operate out of an interpersonal ethnics of care that is at least partially outside of the gaze of the state. The colder logics of infrastructural power—geared toward extraction and efficiency—can be turned against themselves as long as families and communities remain intact.

At its core Hong Kong is a cosmopolitan international city. Transforming it may come only at the cost of destroying this ethos. Even coopted authorities such as Carrie Lam must understand this. In order to understand the future of Hong Kong and the future of global China, it is important to develop careful analytics that see relations of power and strategies of adaptation of resistance. This means thinking deeply about global China, not as a homogenous colonial project but one that deploys particular strategies with uneven results. Moving to the scale of global internationalist movements of solidarity, it also means developing a critical awareness of the strategies of other global states in deploying infrastructural power, replacing institutions, and projecting symbolic dominance onto less powerful states. There is a lesson to be learned about infrastructural power—whether projected by global China or global United States—in the communities of Hong Kong.

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## ChinaMade Brief #7

### Exporting the

# CHINESE INSTANT CITY?

## A Lefebvrian New Town in Central Peru

*Lin Zhu, Independent Scholar*

This Brief is an excerpt of an MA thesis that aims to contribute to the theoretical debate on “Global China” using qualitative data gathered through four months of ethnographic research in Peru and China. Specifically, it studies the resettlement of Nueva Morococha as part of Chinalco’s Toromocho mining project in Central Peru. Applying critical tools offered by China scholars, this Brief challenges the view that Nueva Morococha is an export of a Chinese urban development model by demonstrating how such resettlements are one of the global mining industry’s common responses to dispossession. Moreover, it argues that resettlement has become a standardized process carried out by a handful of corporations and experts, producing almost indistinguishable resettlement plans underpinned by conventional understandings of modernity and development. This realization is illuminating because it guides researchers to approach “Global China” differently. Specifically, it shows that analyses fixated on the nationality of capital might obscure what Chinese capital actually does on the ground, thus providing a less productive tool for scholars who are interested in the material reconfigurations of capital. This means de-centering China from Chinese foreign investments and prioritizing them for what they are, namely capitalist projects. Finally, I draw from Lefevre’s seminal writing on Mourenx in France to examine the material consequences of the new town, which I argue offers a more productive analytical framework to understand Nueva Morococha.

### Introduction

Aluminum Corporation of China (Chinalco) is a Chinese State-owned Enterprise (SOE) founded in 2001 and supervised directly by the Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council (SASAC). Chinalco is now the world’s largest alumina producer and China’s largest nonferrous metals enterprise, playing a strategic role in securing natural resources for national development. In August 2007, Chinalco bought Vancouver-based Peru Copper Inc. with \$860 million thereby acquiring ownership of the Toromocho copper mine in Peru. This acquisition was driven by a logic of “encompassing accumulation,” or an “entrepreneurial statehood rationale,” that pursues both geopolitical and geoeconomical

interests (Gonzalez-Vicente 2011; Yeh 2016; Lee 2017). Copper is considered a strategic resource for Chinese development. China's copper reserves are relatively scarce, and its demand has intensified, growing from 20% of the world's total in 2003 to 39% in 2010. However, its reserves only increased from 1% to 4% of the world's total during the same period, creating an enormous supply-demand gap of 35% (Humphries 2015). Due to China's limited domestic reserves of copper ore and its relative low quality, the Chinese government has strategically promoted investment in copper production abroad to secure its domestic demand. Chinalco's acquisition will promise the Chinese state steady and cost-efficient access to copper supplies. Meanwhile, this transaction also helps Chinalco diversify its investment portfolio and become internationally competitive.

The Toromocho mine went into production in 2013 and an expansion phase framed under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was proposed and approved in 2017 to enhance its production output by 45% in 2020 (Chinalco News 2018). Instead of emphasizing the mine, which has been the focus of many studies, this Brief directs its attention to the less examined resettlement of Nueva Morococha where Chinalco's practices have "exceeded local standards and outperformed their peers" (Ray et al 2015).

### **Nueva Morococha, a Chinese Model of Urban Development?**

Nestled in the expansive Mantaro Valley in Central Peru, Nueva Morococha stands out as a geographically contained urban project with identical single-story houses, defined administrative boundaries and structured functional zones. Its planned landscape distinguishes itself from traditional Andean towns that usually develop incrementally and organically over time in relation to their surrounding geographies and in response to practical communal needs. In fact, the town



Figure 1. Overlook of Nueva Morococha, July 2019 (Image credit: Lin Zhu)



resembles Chinese domestic resettlement projects that have radically transformed rural communities with central top-down spatial planning. With an increasing normalization of resettlement as a development project in its own right, in China the government has mobilized the discourse of relocation to achieve state agendas such as poverty alleviation, rural-urban integration and farmland consolidation (Zhang et al 2018; Rogers and Wilmsen 2019, 3). Hence, “China has developed a particular set of institutions, policies, finance instruments, and networks of expertise that allow resettlement projects to be implemented at scale and for shifting justifications” (Rogers and Wilmsen 2019, 3).

The scale and speed of the Chinese government’s application of resettlement, when coupled with the fact that Nueva Morococha was financed entirely by Chinalco, have fueled a popular narrative which connects the new town with the Chinese urban development model. Castagnola (2013, 66), for example, considers Nueva Morococha a “Chinese urban product for export” and an instant city resulting from “Chinese capitalism in their expansive regime, in which cities are not socio-cultural entities but corporative by-products.” Similarly, Nyíri (2017, 66) sees new towns like Nueva Morococha as a “low end version” of “new export products of Chinese urbanism.” In addition, he warns researchers to not treat instant cities merely as “prestige projects to whitewash extractive exploitation” but to pay attention to their historical development and future trajectories because they are “modelled on cities that sprung up in China’s remote areas as a result of a sudden trade, commodity, or tourist boom” (p. 66). This hypothetical paring of Nueva Morococha with the Chinese export of instant cities seems further plausible in the context of the BRI when the Chinese government has promised to build model cities for other countries. While the connection seems exciting and appears potent at a superficial glance, it quickly becomes untenable when interrogated closely with the critical tools offered by scholars studying “Global China.” By disaggregating actors involved in the resettlement planning and implementation and situating the project in both local history and global mining practices,

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I argue that instead of a city modelled on Chinese urban development, Nueva Morococha as a resettlement project exemplifies the global mining industry’s standard solution to problems of dispossession. Equally important is that mining-induced resettlements have become an established industry that relies on the same expertise and corporations on a global scale.

The generic use of “Chinese investment” conjures up an image of a single-minded, monolithic China, obscuring the interest, variety, capacity, and hierarchy of different forms of Chinese capital (Mawdsley 2008; Gonzalez-Vicente 2011; Lee 2014; Yeh 2016; Lee 2017; Klinger and Muldavin 2019). For example, there is a wide range of Chinese investors including SOEs at different levels (central, provincial, and local), transnational corporations of Chinese origin (Huawei or Lenovo), private firms, and entrepreneurial

migrants (Mawdsley 2008; Lee 2014; Yeh 2016). These entities might sometimes compete for markets or resources, or at other times collaborate to challenge other established foreign conglomerates. Meanwhile, Chinese foreign investments aim to achieve different goals such as geopolitical interests in “One China” recognition and extra-territorial control (Murton et al.

2016, Stallings 2016, Erikson and Chen 2007, Taylor 2002), or economic pursuits in profit maximization, investment diversification or market expansion (Gonzalez-Vicente 2012, Hofman 2016). Consequently, it is imperative to disaggregate Chinese actors and specify their motivations for going global (Mawdsley 2008; Gonzalez-Vicente 2011; Yeh 2016; Murton et al

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## Resettlement planning and implementation have become an established industry catering to the inevitable dispossessions of the global mining industry.

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2016; Lee 2017; Klinger and Muldavin 2019). Adopting this approach to examine the resettlement of Nueva Morococha proves to be constructive. Although a direct outcome of Chinalco's exploration of the Toromocho mountain, it would be misleading to label the new town a Chinese export project without examining its development closely. Not only were the companies involved in the process Peruvian, but they also specialize in providing professional services in resettlement planning and implementation to the global mining industry.<sup>2</sup>

The becoming of Nueva Morococha relied on a group of corporations experienced in urban planning, project evaluation, resettlement consultation, construction, and management. The underpinning logic is that a clear division of labor not only improves efficiency and productivity but also reduces the total cost. As Castagnola (2013) himself points out, JP Planning S.A.C., a private planning company, carried out the overall city planning of Nueva Morococha, diagnosed land ownership and rights, negotiated land purchase and titling, prepared technical documents to carry out adverse possession procedures and calculated property tax. Meanwhile, CESEL S.A., a private Peruvian engineering consulting company, was in charge of project management, including design revisions, procurements, construction bidding processes, on-site supervision, and commissioning. JJC Contratistas Generales S.A, a Peruvian business group, was responsible for the construction of 685 houses and urban infrastructure in Nueva Morococha, and Social Capital Group, a private international professional services firm, played an indispensable role in facilitating the whole process. In Antigua Morococha, it conducted 6 censuses since 2006, evaluated housing conditions to calculate compensation, and organized community workshops. In Nueva Morococha, it arranged open house visits, helped families move and settle down in the new town. Today, the consulting firm is still active by helping Chinalco's Community Relations office manage local affairs.

Writing about the resettlement induced by the La Granja project of Rio Tinto in Peru, Flynn and Vergarav (2015) pointed out the significance and prevalence of using external resettlement experts by mining corporations. Thus, it is unsurprising that these companies have built other resettlements in addition to Nueva Morococha. JP Planning S.A.C., for example, participated in the Las Bambas project of MMG in Cusco, which resulted in the resettlement of the Fuerabamba farming community to Nueva Fuerabamba. The company offered similar services such as negotiation and purchase of existing livestock in the area of project expansion, commercial appraisal of properties, and diagnostics on ownership and land rights. Social Capital Group too

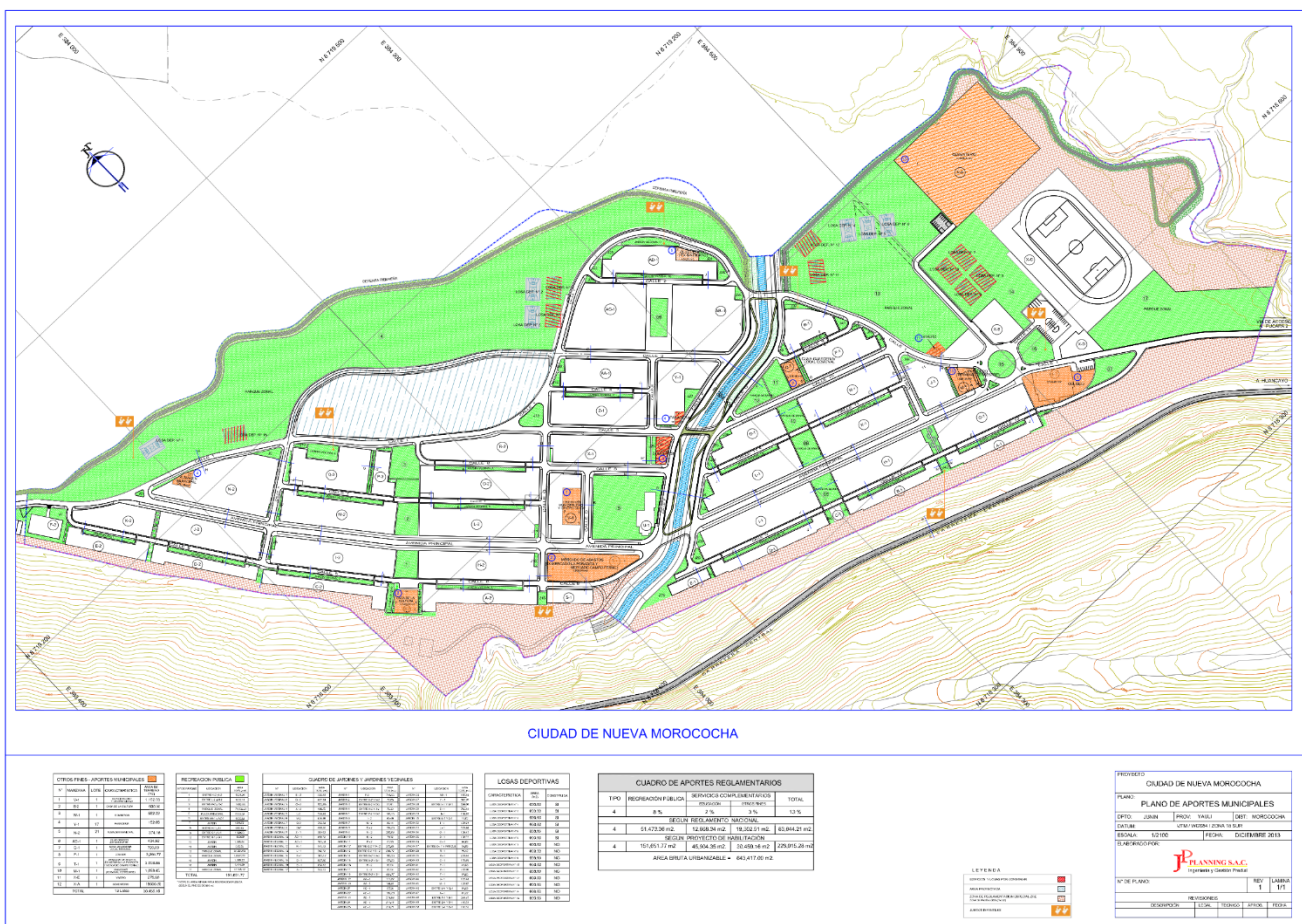
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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that while none of the contracted firms building Nueva Morococha are Chinese or use Chinese laborer/materials, it would be equally misleading to label the project "Peruvian" given my argument challenging the impulse to label capital in terms of nationality.

has extensive experience in mining-related resettlement planning and implementation.<sup>3</sup> In Peru, besides Nueva Morococha in Junín, it helped the private Argentinian Lumina Copper Corporation and the private Canadian firm Hudbay Minerals to design, negotiate and implement resettlement projects to acquire land for mine development in Cusco and Cajamarca respectively. Beyond Peru, Social Capital Group also partook in resettlement projects in Nicaragua (1), Colombia (5), Panama (1) and Madagascar (1). As Flynn and Vergarav (2015) noted:

External resettlement experts contributed to the development of the land access strategy and played an important role in up-skilling...resettlement definitions, issues and risks. In the industry at the time, outsourcing the execution of resettlement to third party consultants appeared to be the typical mechanism used by mining companies.

Hence, to some extent, resettlement planning and implementation has become an established industry catering to the inevitable disposessions of the global mining industry. In this sense, the production of Nueva Morococha does not reflect any unique traits of Chinese urban



<sup>3</sup> Social Capital Group specializes in analysis and management of “the social risks and opportunities associated with large-scale investment projects in both the public and private sectors” (Social Capital Group Website). In addition to resettlement planning, other SCG projects range from social management consultation for gold mining in Côte d’Ivoire to hydroelectric project evaluation in Costa Rica; from community relations advising in Guatemala to stakeholder analysis for carbon projects in Colombia; from technical advising for Indigenous issues of hydrocarbon development in Honduras to environmental and social feasibility analysis in Chile. The company provides social assessment, management planning and alignment, and implementation and outsourcing services for five sectors including mining, energy, oil and gas, transportation and infrastructure, as well as agriculture and forest.



development but rather is one example of capitalism attempting to ameliorate destruction, gain legitimacy and manage dispossession.

Figure 2. A planning map of Nueva Morococha

This argument can be further substantiated by historicizing the development of Nueva Morococha. Rather than initiating the idea of resettlement, Chinalco inherited the commitment from Peru Copper Inc., whose then founder J. David Lowell (2014, 364-367) was concerned about “the problem of owners of primitive houses among the 5,000-population Morococho [sic], who had to be bought out in a deal in which they would get a free, modern house in a new town site.”<sup>4</sup> According to Sanborn and Chonn (2015), the Peruvian government was expected to build a new town for the residents in advance of Chinalco’s purchase. However, when Chinalco acquired this project, the company not only had to incorporate the resettlement as part of its investment but also become the sole financier instead of co-sponsoring it with the Peruvian government. According to Bill John Flores Rosas, resettlement project manager of Social Capital Group, this financial responsibility was assumed by Chinalco to be voluntary, in order to expedite the project’s operation because early resettlement of Antigua Morococha was necessary to begin the mine’s exploration.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, it is not in the company’s best interest to work with a foreign state bureaucracy even if it lessens the overall financial burden. However, this is less a Chinese way of doing business than a capitalist one: perhaps the amount of profit that will be generated by advancing the project is greater than its expenditure on the whole resettlement. Hence, the decision was made based primarily on capitalist calculation of profit and return on investment. Consequently, Nueva Morococha cannot be linked directly to China’s domestic use of resettlement projects nor should it be treated as an exported model.

In sum, no matter who owns and explores the Toromocho project, Nueva Morococha as a resettlement materializes a common story of capitalist accumulation by dispossession rather than representing something that is unique to Chinese foreign investment. Moreover, regardless of capital’s nationality, a similar blueprint, if not identical, has been developed for Nueva Morococha by experts specializing in urban planning, project evaluation and resettlement construction. In other words, Nueva Morococha can be found not only in Central Peru but everywhere as a mining by-product that can be inserted regardless of time and space.

### A Lefebvrian “New Town”

Exactly six decades ago in France, Lefebvre stood on a hilltop gazing down upon the newly built industrial complex of Mourenx (Lefebvre 1995). He described the town as a “social text” in which “the nature of capitalist modernity can be deciphered with unusual clarity” (Wilson 2011, 993). Mourenx was built to accommodate workers of a natural gas processing plant after discoveries of abundant deposits in 1951. Its rigid spatial formation with identical rows of buildings conveyed a dreadful sense of “abstract homogeneity,” erasing the historical and cultural foundation upon which the town was produced (Lefebvre 1991, 370). The production of space Lefebvre referred to is not just the mere making and assembling of objects such as houses and roads, but also the materially created conditions on which everyday life is organized

<sup>4</sup> Interviewees of this study even traced the idea of resettlement back to the 1980’s when the mine was under the state-owned Centromin.

<sup>5</sup> A resettlement is a prerequisite without which Chinalco could not pass its Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) and other essential permits.

and social relations are altered. In Mourenx, Lefebvre identified a transition from a precapitalist peasant community to an industrial urbanization, a process in which people were separated from the means of production and forced to become wage laborers.<sup>6</sup> His *Notes on the new town* (1995) is a direct critique of a capitalist production of space that privileges abstract homogeneity over differences and transforms everyday experience of precapitalist communities.

In this section, I borrow Lefebvre's writing on Mourenx and his theory of the social production of space to understand the material transformation in Nueva Morococha, which I argue is a more productive tool than the discursive framing of the resettlement as a Chinese urban development model. Different from Antigua Morococha where history is legible in its material landscape, Nueva Morococha is a place where history (time) and sense of belonging (space) become obscure if not nonexistent. Lefebvre (2000, 59) would condemn Nueva Morococha as "the negation of traditional towns" and an "irruption of the urban" (quoted in Soja 1996, 49) that is strictly structured to colonize everyday life. Indeed, Nueva Morococha's spatial layout points to the technocratic rationality in urban planning which unfortunately results in feelings of alienation and transformations of everyday life. Embedded in the ostensible splendor and glory of the newly built town are profound feelings of suffering and sorrow.



Figure 3. The new town of Nueva Morococha (Image credit: Lin Zhu)

Looking down at Nueva Morococha from the Central Highway, what comes into view are infrastructures arranged in rigid spatial layouts: rows of identical houses in a grid, zones of commercial activities and education blocks. For Lefebvre, the new town is the epitome of

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<sup>6</sup> Antigua Morococha has been a mining town for centuries and the process of proletarianization had already been completed by the mid twentieth century. Thus, the transition to Nueva Morococha does not fundamentally alter the ways in which locals are tied to capitalist relations of production.

capitalist modernity materialized as “quantitative growth and qualitative alienation” (Wilson 2011, 996). He considers the production of space disruptive and devastating because the process is filled with contradictions inherent in a planned landscape, especially under capitalism (Lefebvre 1991; Gordillo 2014). It is precisely the materiality of lived experiences of alienation and the transformation of everyday life that interest Lefebvre. And these matters could not be more pronounced in Nueva Morococha.

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**Instead of a project that accommodates the displaced, Nueva Morococha is a capitalist production of space that attempts to rationalize dispossession and justify extractive industry in the name of development.**

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One of the apparent contradictions is between the modernist pursuit of efficiently planned urban space and the lived experience of an increasingly difficult life under technocratic planning. Residents in the new town now live a spatially fragmented life with concentrated zones of commercial activities, administrative services and residential areas. This spatial division not only disrupts the fluid and semiautonomous life back in Antigua Morococha by imposing hierarchical spatial relations but also renders local people legible and controllable. Many residents interviewed for this study expressed fears of being monitored or surveilled by Chinalco or its employees. The grid design is particularly crucial in restructuring everyday experience in Nueva Morococha (see Figure 3). Feelings of alienation are present among the resettled because family visits no longer happen organically within the

highly individualized units and limited space, and there is a sense of disorientation that emerges from walking around a neighborhood of identical looking houses. Studying a state-planned resettlement in Chiapas, Mexico, Wilson (2011) provides a similar observation in which quasi-private and quasi-public communal space between streets and houses have disappeared in the new town. Whereas traditionally built houses usually have porches open towards streets, providing pedestrians shelter from sun, rain or for conversations, newly built housing complexes are surrounded by high-wire fences with porches facing inward, creating a highly individualistic and alienating feeling. Therefore, different from the dynamically interwoven social relations embedded in Antigua Morococha's landscape, the rigid spatial planning of Nueva Morococha conveys a sense of isolation through disembodied abstraction and clear-cut separation between private and public space.

A spatial restructuring of Nueva Morococha also resulted in waves of out-migration. Whereas the majority out-migrated due to dim economic prospects, a handful of residents, knowing Antigua Morococha was forever gone, left simply because they felt culturally and socially alienated in a segregated town. Some businesses in Nueva Morococha mainly cater to Chinalco and its mining operations, leaving locals' needs unattended if not ignored. This unfortunately transformed certain spaces into socially segregated areas, reinforcing the stringent structures imposed by the town's original spatial design. For example, most restaurants in town have contracts with Chinalco and its contractors, so their daily operations are structured around the mine's operation. They only open from 6 am to 8 am for breakfast, 11:30 am to 1:30 pm for lunch, and 6 pm to 8 pm for dinner. Similarly, hotels and hostels in Nueva Morococha are mostly filled with temporary subcontractors and migrants looking for jobs.

In order to efficiently manage their employees, some of Chinalco's direct contractors rent empty houses to turn them into dormitories. Internet cafés were popular gathering spots for workers



to either print receipts for reimbursement or use computers for games. Hence, although Nueva Morococha was built to accommodate those displaced by the Toromocho project, a modern, urban and business-oriented town further marginalized local residents by rendering them as outsiders in certain spaces of consumption.

Contemporary Nueva Morococha is one of the many “new towns” that have emerged under rapid global transformations of capitalist modernity and neoliberal reform.<sup>7</sup> Instead of a project that accommodates the displaced, Nueva Morococha is a capitalist production of space that attempts to rationalize dispossession and justify extractive industry in the name of development. Consequently, the resettlement becomes an abstract space of capitalist modernity where accumulation is the primary imperative, and where feelings of alienation and transformation of everyday life are ubiquitous (Lefebvre 1995). Moreover, conceived and built as a technocratic and corporate project, its functionalist spatial layout bears little similarity to the heterogeneous and semiautonomous villages its residents used to inhabit. As summarized by Wilson (2011, 998), the new town is where “the symbolic richness and creative autonomy of daily life are progressively eviscerated and replaced by the homogenization and fragmentation of a technocratic rationality projected onto reality through the planned production of space.”

## Conclusion

Manifestations of global China are manifold on the ground as local encounters with Chinese capital are neither universal nor homogenous. Therefore, a focus on case studies helps avoid misleading generalizations. Achieving this means disaggregating a “monolithic China,” differentiating “varieties of capital” and sectors of investment, contextualizing Chinese investment in host countries as well as at the community level, and attending to China’s domestic development. In a nutshell, global China is contextual, relational, processual and contingent, requiring an ethnographic approach to generate rigorous and trustworthy analyses that attend to spatiality, scale and time.

Generally speaking, Chinese SOE investments abroad carry both geoeconomic and geopolitical interests and this duality distinguishes Chinese state capital from many private forms. Depending on where the investment is going and in which sector it is taking place, geopolitical considerations might outweigh those of geoeconomic ones, or the other way around. However, large public corporations such as Lenovo or Huawei might also engage in market activity with state interests in mind because they participate in strategic sectors such as mining and cutting-edge technology developments that are considered highly relevant for national security and state economic planning (such as Huawei’s 5G technology). Nevertheless, the history of the internationalization of American corporations and others tells a similar story of entanglements between private and public, and state and non-state interests. Thus, singling out Chinese foreign investments, both private and state, as a culturally specific form of national

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**The phenomenon of global China should be taken as a provocative entry point and a productive analytical tool, grounded in empirical studies, rather than a discourse found in abstract debate.**

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<sup>7</sup> Nueva Morococha is a *neoliberal* “new town” because it is a “privately funded public project” (Stauffer 2012) rather than a “technology of power” for state control (Wilson 2011), and its creation is a direct result of Peru’s neoliberal reform which opened the country’s minerals for privatization by transnational corporations. In other words, Nueva Morococha is configured by capitalist social relations and *corporate* power.

capital is counterproductive. This means de-centering China from Chinese foreign investments and prioritizing them for what they are, namely capitalist projects.

Situating the case of Nueva Morococha in the broader context of the global mining industry helps correct the view that it is “an export of Chinese urbanism” (Castagnola 2013; Nyíri (2017). With China’s transformation into a global force, Lee (2017) argues that “global China” should be a subject of inquiry that pushes China Studies beyond China’s territorial borders. However, the phenomenon of global China should be taken as a provocative entry point and a productive analytical tool, grounded in empirical studies, rather than a discourse found in abstract debate. In the case of Nueva Morococha, it is clear that Lefevre’s production of space offers a more grounded tool to approach the resettlement as a capitalist production of space, allowing us to study its material consequences of “Global China” on the ground than the discursive framing based on capital’s nationality.

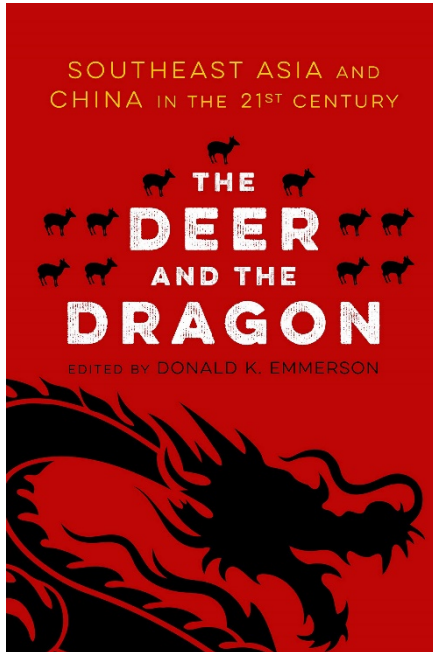
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## ChinaMade Review

**Emmerson, Donald K. (ed.). 2020. *The Deer and the Dragon: Southeast Asia and China in the 21st Century*. (Stanford: Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center)**

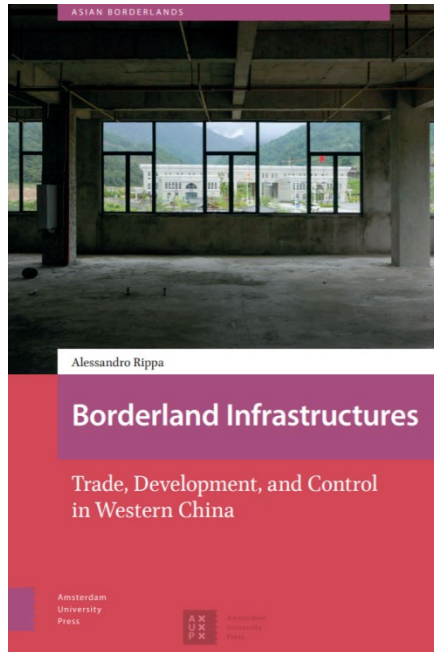
*Tim Oakes, December 2020*

As Tritto (2020) has argued regarding Indonesia’s Jakarta-Bandung high speed railroad, China’s overseas infrastructure projects must be understood as “embedded” (in the Polanyian sense). That is, they are subject to the social relations, politics, and cultural movements of the places in which they’re being built. This would seemingly go without saying when considering project developments *within* China, where regional competition, local negotiation, and an incremental and experimental policy framework has always shaped project outcomes. That such factors would also be at play in shaping China’s international projects

should not be surprising. And yet, China’s “going out” efforts – most spectacularly manifest in the Belt & Road Initiative – continue to inspire narratives of a monolithic, steamrolling Chinese infrastructure machine, a “China model” of development capable of building anything anywhere as quickly and cheaply as possible. The collective picture we get from *The Deer and the Dragon* – a comprehensive exploration of China’s relations with Southeast Asia – suggests something quite different, less a single China model than many different models conditioned by the bilateral nature through which China engages its partner states. While this is not a book about infrastructure development itself, the volume helps us appreciate all of the factors – the “agency” of Southeast Asian societies – that embed these projects in ways that make their outcomes always impossible to predict.

2020 was a banner year for policy-oriented books about China and Southeast Asia. In addition to the volume being reviewed here, at least three other major books were recently published: Lampton, Ho and Kuik’s *Rivers of Iron*, Hiebert’s *Under Beijing’s Shadow*, and Shambaugh’s *Where Great Powers Meet*. This may just be a coincidence of several distinct research projects emerging around the same time, projects that were perhaps seeded by the Obama Administration’s ‘pivot to Asia’ in which US-Southeast Asian relations figured prominently. As critics in China were quick to point out, Obama’s ‘rebalancing’ policy seemed aimed primarily at containing China’s rise within the region, rather than simply bolstering US diplomacy in Southeast Asia. China’s increasing presence in the region is probably more significant than Obama’s short-lived pivot in explaining all of this emerging interest in Southeast Asia. At any rate, these books all came to print at the tail-end of an incoherent but nevertheless unmistakable reversal of US engagement in the region at the behest of the Trump Administration and its gutting of the US diplomatic mission. The US withdrawal from the region – most notably in Trump’s rejection of the Trans-Pacific Partnership – offered China a unique opportunity, seemingly at just the right time, and in many ways Beijing capitalized. And yet for all the advantages China has enjoyed, things have not gone smoothly in Southeast Asia. China’s ambitions have been confronted by the social, political and cultural complexities of one of the world’s most diverse regions. As *The Deer and the Dragon* makes clear, Southeast Asians have been quite resourceful in managing, and at times benefitting from, relations with their huge northern neighbor.

For the rest of this review please visit the China Made website [at this link](#).



## ChinaMade Review

**Rippa, Alessandro. 2020. *Borderland Infrastructures: Trade, Development, and Control in Western China* (Amsterdam University Press).**

*Geoffrey Aung, January 2021*

In recent decades, major infrastructure projects have proliferated across China's borderlands, from highways and economic zones to rail projects and pipelines. Although only some of these projects trace to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), first announced by President Xi Jinping in 2013, BRI looms large in discussions of these projects. In popular discourse and policy research, BRI analysis tends towards epochal claims about a new world order, generalized "rise of China" themes, or schematic appraisals of heightened connectivity against the backdrop of China's expansive regional ambitions (Hillman 2020; Mações 2018; Miller 2019; Yong 2016). Scholarly literature, meanwhile, has often

emphasized the cultural dimensions of BRI, conceptualizing BRI in terms of geocultural power, as a geopolitical culture itself, or through the cultural politics of infrastructure in China (Bach 2017; Lin, Sidaway, and Chih 2019; Winter 2019). Yet amid heightened interest in the cultural logics of BRI, sustained ethnographic research has been largely absent—and so too the roads and railways themselves, the actual economic zones and pipelines, all that which stand to materialize the connectivity BRI so dramatically promises.

Alessandro Rippa's (2020) *Borderland Infrastructures: Trade, Development, and Control in Western China* addresses this gap. Bringing infrastructures themselves back into the discussions of China's changing borderlands, Rippa argues that the highways and economic zones of China's peripheries cannot be understood separately from the Chinese state's attempts to exert control in these areas, not least over minorities that include Uyghur Muslims. BRI, in fact, is only one of three tasks the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has set for itself to transform China's borderlands. The others are rural modernization and tourism development, both of which include programs and policies that precede BRI. Rippa emphasizes that while BRI is not to be underestimated, it would be a mistake to ignore the histories that come before it in these areas, especially histories of trade, exchange, and cross-border inter-connection that new economic development projects aim to over-write through novel claims to transnational connectivity. Excavating such histories, Rippa finds that once-flourishing small-scale traders now struggle to survive, while ethnic minorities in China's west and south—in Xinjiang and Yunnan—face heightened state surveillance, securitization, and repression with new development projects.

For the rest of this review please visit the China Made website [at this link](#).

# Third China Made Workshop

## The Social Life of Chinese Infrastructures in Southeast Asia

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

This 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.

### Participants

#### Conveners:

Darren Byler, Postdoctoral Fellow, Center for Asian Studies, University of Colorado Boulder

Tim Oakes, Professor of Geography, University of Colorado Boulder

Yang Yang, Postdoctoral Fellow, Asia Research Institute, National University Singapore

Tim Bunnell, Professor of Geography, Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore

Rachel Silvey, Professor of Geography, University of Toronto

#### Keynote Speaker

AbdouMaliq Simone, Senior Professorial Fellow at the Urban Institute, University of Sheffield

#### Invited Participants

Geoffrey Aung (Soe Lin Aung), Columbia University

Wanjing Kelly Chen, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

Karin Dean, Tallinn University

Jessica DiCarlo, University of Colorado Boulder

Michael Dwyer, Indiana University

Solène Gautron, Heidelberg University

Sam Geall, China Dialogue & University of Sussex

W. Nathan Green & Yi Rosa, National University of Singapore



Tyler Harlan & Juliet Lu, Marymount University & Cornell University

Angela Min Yi Hou, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies

Kesone Kanhalikham, Chiang Mai University

Ting Hui Lau, Yale-NUS College, Singapore

Zixian Liu, University of Toronto

Simon Rowedder, National University of Singapore

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Elena Shih, Brown University

Angela Tritto & Alvin Camba, Hong Kong University of Science & Technology & John Hopkins University

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