China’s urban revolution: globalization and urban development in transitional markets

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1. China’s urban revolution
Construction near Shanghai’s Xingtiandi (‘New Heaven and Earth’)

Poverty neighbourhoods, high-rises and failed office building in Kunming
Arts-led regeneration:
Great Tang Dynasty Garden, Xi’an

Sports-led property development,
Olympic Sport Centre, Nanjing

Leisure-led property development
Nostalgia and Nightlife, “1912”, Nanjing

Arts-led regeneration:
Great Tang Dynasty Garden, Xi’an
Xintiandi (“New Heaven on Earth”) in Shanghai
Some generic elements

- CBDs or financial streets
- Bar streets and night-time entertainment place
- Boulevard and magnificent city squares
- High-tech parks or development zones
- Migrant enclaves (‘villages in the city’)
- Gated communities in exotic styles
2. The factor of globalization
A driving force

- Open door policy since 1978
- Phenomenal growth of FDI
- Special Economic Zones (SEZs), Economic and Technological Development Zones (ETDZs), open cities, ...
- WTO membership 2001
...mediated by the state

- Globalizing Shanghai: the state project
- China-Singapore Suzhou Industrial Park
Western architectural motifs

- Globalization, post-modern urbanism, ‘McDonaldization’?
- “The Orange County, Beijing!”
- Foreign gated communities
- New urbanism neighbourhoods
foreign gated communities
美国DPZ建筑设计事务所

国际知名的建筑大师伊丽莎白女士创建，每年在全球仅着力推出少量的作品，多次获得美国建筑师大奖和优秀城市设计大奖，其首创并领导的“新城市主义运动”，被纽约时报评价为“美国近50年来最重要、最具规模的建筑运动”，DPZ事务所亦曾被该报称为“20世纪领先的建筑设计公司”，代表作品——佛罗里达海滨城，被时代周刊列为“十大设计成就之一”。“麦卡伦地”规划主笔人：伊丽莎白女士，美国迈阿密大学国际建筑学院院长。

重塑“麦卡伦地”无异于研究一门独特的综合艺术,将建筑与自然,美学与艺术全部吸纳,在这里，你能够享受到一个人的私密、独属,一个家庭的和谐、恬静，与邻居的融洽、沟通......一切进行得如此自然、美妙，于是，我们感到了生长于这里的快乐与优越。

——伊丽莎白女士
The origin of the project name

I name this project as ‘McAllen’

---Elizabeth

[Note: The text in the image is a translation of the text to English. The original text is in Chinese.]
VENICE WATER TOWNHOUSE

威 尼 斯 花 园
Globalization provides possibility...

- e.g. transplanting landscapes
- To turn this into reality (construction of the Orange County) depends on local politics
  - Real estate market
  - Product innovation
Globalization acts as a catalyst factor

- The way in which the space is treated: the city reconceptualised:
  - at the right time,
  - a large pool of low-cost labour, maintained by the social order.

- A change in politics: boosterism
3. Space as ‘fix’

From state-led industrialization to urban based accumulation
Space as capital outlet

- High saving rates, high investment rates
- Over-accumulation
- High pressure for capital outlet
- The city is at the centre of accumulation strategy
- …leading to space competition, or land enclosure: development zones, university towns
Social implication

- Landless farmers
- Land related corruptions
- Marginalization

Mr. Ren Zhiqiang, the CEO of Huayuan Corporation:

“I only build for the rich.”

“The poor should be segregated from the rich.”
4. Relevance of China’s urban revolution: theories and implications
Theories related to China’s urban transition

- Modernization: economic structure, urbanization
- Dependent theory: the world system
- The developmental state: NIEs, export-oriented growth
- Post-socialist transition: marketization / power persistence
Their strength and weakness

- Modernization: the change in economic structure (urbanization); ‘naturalise’ the division
- Dependency: the global economy; historical root (semi-periphery); migrant enclaves beyond rural and urban inequalities
- Developmental state: the role of state but in an economic view; entrepreneurial rather than ‘developmental’
- Post-socialist transition: history of socialism but not post-; path-dependent, path-breaking
What’s new in China’s urban revolution

‘[pulling all these threads together], we see a picture of ‘advanced’ market-oriented urban growth in transitional China. Such a mode of regulation is profound shift from the ‘developmental’ state, which emphasizes the use of industrial policies to guide national economic growth in late industrializing countries, to the ‘entrepreneurial’ city, which commodifies ‘place’ as a space commodity. Along with such a shift is the changing role of the state itself, from resource manager to market actor. The ‘legacies’ of state socialism define many of the parameters of market engineering, and the development of a fully-fledged market society is facilitated by the high capacity of ‘political mobilization’. It is the distinctive combination of ‘path-dependent’ politics and a vibrant market economy that demands future scholarship.’ (Wu, F., Xu, J. and Yeh, A.G.O., 2007) Urban Development in Post-Reform China: State, Market, and Space. London: Routledge.
China becoming the test ground for global ‘urbanism’

- Urbanism, globalism (Neil Smith 2002)
- The creative city
- The eco-city
- New-urbanism
Implications for the world

- Reshaping the regulatory regime: capital-labour relationship worldwide
- Environmental challenges: e.g. global search for energy
- Potential pool of labour and transnational migration
- Value-added goods and products
- Emerging consumer market