

Materializing Urbanisms in thinking Indian-Chinese Globalization beyond the Nation State

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The conference note usefully provides various intersects of circumstances and driving forces shaping a stronger configuration of 'Asian' Urbanisms. This presentation explores an argument that one useful way to think these is by via multisited ethnography of the material processes whose constructions suggests an open-ended spaces, and to take into account their particular genealogies. I point to how such Urbanisms are constructions are globalized at multiple levels, and necessarily remain contesting and highly politicized. Thus, thinking about the emerging 'Asia' is not a vivid dream posed by multiculturalism, or set within the confines of a globalized city disciplined within positivist policy frames. Instead, an ethnographic focus on land, economy and recognizing the diverse levels of administrations engaging these reveal open ended political spaces.

Here, I take some illustrations from transnational traders engaged in co-producing and rework space and its materiality. Working as individuals rather than large conglomerates these may seem 'small'. But of importance here is their systemic world connecting practices of business, modes of travel and it's associated bureaucracy of 'touts' that contribute porosity to how we conceptualize the borders of the Nation State. For instance, is urbanism's space from the point of view of a 'small' transnational trader dealing in electronics one that interconnects Delhi's 'Gaffar Market'

(<http://www.delhihelp.com/gaffar-market-delhi-delhi-wholesale-markets-article-175.aspx>), Bombay's Lamington Road, Chennai's Parry's to Hong Kong's Wan Chai

(<http://www.mccullagh.org/photo/hong-kong/wanchai-market-electronic-gear>), Shenzhen's life around and within it's SEG electronics market – an account at:

<http://www.evilmadscientist.com/article.php/shenzhen> , and Guangzhou numerous listings

given at: <http://www.zhongguolu.com/guangdong/guangzhou-markets.html>). There are others, in Singapore (<http://www.etour-singapore.com/electronics-in-singapore.html>) or

Zhongguancun in Beijing (an account at

http://www.pseudolocal.com/wiki/Zhongguancun_Electronics_Shopping_Guide). These sites

of retail seem at first sight, places of consumption. On closer inspection are where products

are re-engineered to disrupt singular regimes of property. The move to 'urbanisms' is

intended to point to a world un-tempered by the nation state frame of policy analysis. And

unlike the toothpaste effects of 'new urbanisms', the intent here is to explore necessarily

uneven and inherently dynamic and lived spaces. If so, than the essay on Shenzhen's SEG

market that includes a noting on children doing homework or people eating at their

worktables, locate the everyday character of this politics – very different from Manual

Castells's social movements framed as a procession through Madrid's streets. Were they pushing for, 'better policy' or inspired by Rachiere's 'Disagreements' (2007:13) that this was a recognition of 'policy as police' where politics comes through interruption in the 'natural' logic of properties? Similarly in discussing the politicized land settings where these economies happen, the emphasis is on the construction of this political and its particular genealogy that interfaces local administrations but also over the last decade, large consulting and policy firms that draw on GATT and large donor policy funding to facilitate mega territory re-organized into IT Parks. In the Indian case, much of this show of power by large capital lies symbolic and confronts persistent ground occupancies.

My emphasis via underlying focus on the politics of land tenure is to suggest the disruption of singular forms of real estate accumulation. In effect, as Haila has usefully noted while property regimes in the North have been settled, these in the 'unruly' places of India and China remain open ended and deeply threatening to big capital seeking the emerging markets of 'The elephants of India', the 'Tigers of South East Asia', and the 'Dragons of China' and with this, ways and means to regulate 'migration' into an uncontested multi-culturalism. In this effort to re-work the 'givens' of Northern European and American Urbanism across diverse ideological beliefs, my intent is to explore what it means to be 'urban' and what it means to be 'globalized'. A close look at these genealogies of what Steve Pile and others, and Alan Smart usefully explore as the 'unruly' is essentially a task to re-define conceptual categories. For instance, Michael Keith and John Lash's work on 'social externality' and trans-national movement. Another realm draws on early anthropological exploration by Lisa Peattie on Ciudad de Guyana, David Epstein on Brazilia, and more recent work by AbdouMaliq Simone on African and Chinese urbanism. After exploring the open-ended ness of such places as political spaces, in the final part of my presentation, I turn attention more specifically to another material realm. This is the realm of policy and its associated representation of the global city set in oppositional terms to its binary of 'the ordinary' one. Here my argument is two fold. First, many of the recent national level Indian 'policy' prescriptions – that seek to make Bombay into a Shanghai, and Bangalore into a Singapore. This imagination of 'Asia', set in an oppositional one of the 'Elephant against the Dragon' is not just policy directed but in its economic essentialization, reduces urbanism to cities and in particular competitive cities, or more accurately, the competitive parts of cities: IT and Bio-Tech corridors, Special Economic Zones, and interconnecting these, expressways. Not surprising, in addressing economy, the KPMG led report on India's global retail potential the intent is to promote 'organized' hawking zones and the sponsorship of USAid for India's first ever 'National Hawking Policy'(see: http://www.in.kpmg.com/TL_Files/Pictures/Indian_Retail_Mar09.pdf) that can be read as a spatio-political closure. Such an anxiety around land gets reflected more seriously in corporate sponsored Platinum project (see:

<http://indiausp.org/events/IUSF-PLATINUM-and-Land-title.pdf>). In these vision statements, lies quite centrally the National State to clear the ground for the globally productive. The rest of the city becomes a non-zone: an ‘unproductive’ population to be shifted out to the urban periphery via urban renewal, and be quantified within the logic of planning gain under the new policy regimes promoting public private partnerships (PPP). Progressive positions lie disciplined into accepting gains framed under Rehabilitation and Resettlement (R &R) of a master planning logic whose genealogy lies in (Haila’s) property neutered western urban theory. In contrast to the transnational traders expansive and fluid urbanisms, the urban is reduced to the city where politics, including by.

The second part of this concluding argument is to reject an oppositional view of cities. Instead, the materiality of land, of economy, of politics to rework categories. Following Taussig’s (2010) metaphor of a cocaine museum, the construction the urban come out as a glimpse made possible via ethnographic methods. This is necessarily an uncertain terrain, fluid, and a pointer to completely different logics. Many of these are opaque, subtle, and invisible. Our accounts of thinking about cities, does not begin with a Master Plan whose trajectory history is implicated in the big moves. Instead, we enter in more discordant ways, in the emergent lived spaces where contestations over boundaries lie unresolved. “Plans and Policy” in this perspective, just as those of borders and political party and representational structures, are hardly absolutes but remain mediated appropriated, bypassed by a range of groups. This includes the very powerful elite who find it easier to mobilize the instrumentation of policy and plans – showing these to be hardly the normative structures but one of the several instruments that construct one of the arenas. Asian reconfiguration then, is necessarily a complicated one, a set of intersecting realms that demand metaphors rather than absolutes.