Transnational Urbanism in the Reform-era Chinese City: Landscapes from Shenzhen

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Summary. While the conventions of area studies scholarship have historically limited landscape analysis in China, the globalisation of scholarship and the new built environments of the reform-era Chinese city invite contemporary assessment. In Shenzhen, China’s leading Special Economic Zone, the planning and construction of a new city centre complex are designed to symbolise the city’s transformation from a manufacturing zone to a ‘world city’ and to function as its service-sector core. This landscape analysis applies the perspective of transnational urbanism to assess how the effort to instantiate ‘world city’ status in the built environment works through plans, ideologies and representations of domestic and transnational elites to establish legitimacy. The continuing strong role of the state in China makes the production of a new city centre a state-dominated enterprise; contesting meanings of these new landscapes takes place indirectly and symbolically in the arena of the state’s spiritual civilisation campaign.

Introduction

In November 2000, on top of Lianhua Mountain in the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone, a 6-metre bronze statue of Deng Xiaoping was unveiled on the 20th anniversary of the city. China’s president Jiang Zemin arrived to preside over the ceremony, but Hong Kong journalists who attempted to cover the event were detained and their film was confiscated (Cheung, 2000). Speculation had ensued since at least 1997 about whether the statue, ordered by Shenzhen municipal authorities, would ever be erected (Lee-Young, 1997). Executed by one of China’s leading sculptors, it lay in a warehouse, its fate unclear. Debate about the statue arose over how to interpret appropriately Deng Xiaoping’s own directives about representations of his legacy as the chief architect of China’s reform programme. In reaction to the problems of the personality cult surrounding Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping maintained that no personality cult should emerge subsequent to his death. No memorial halls, no deathscape iconography like Mao’s mausoleum in the centre of Tiananmen Square. Deng was cremated according to his wishes and his ashes scattered at sea, so even these spatial practices alternative to traditional burials paralleled the visions of modernity he sought for China at large. Should Deng’s stance have been sufficient to prevent the erection of a statue in his likeness in Shenzhen? Mao statues have dotted China’s urban landscape and so the national leadership was mindful of the symbolic resonance any new statue would generate. Nevertheless, Shenzhen is Deng

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Xiaoping’s city, envisioned by him and, at precarious economic moments, promoted and defended by him. Shenzhen is also a different kind of city, a new city without history, without Mao statues and few reminders of any era other than Deng’s. Shenzhen is a city of the future and the world economy, where ideas about Deng are as economically pragmatic as Deng’s own goals were for Shenzhen. On the other hand, the new Deng Xiaoping statue overlooks Shenzhen’s new city centre, whose plan is a rectilinear site gridded to the cardinal directions, in the form of Chinese imperial capitals. The statue is centrally aligned with the new city space, not unlike the central axis in imperial compounds reserved for the emperor, or the location of Mao’s mausoleum just south of Tiananmen. It would seem that, whereas prevailing economic ideologies have changed in China under reform, the symbolic space of power is maintained in more than just gestures to the past.

In the discussion that follows, we examine the production of new urban landscapes in Shenzhen through the planning and design of Shenzhen’s new city centre. The focus of the paper is economic and, in turn, cultural and political, in the ways that transformative globalising processes combine conditions and events from these diverse spheres (Appadurai, 1996; Waters, 1995; Jameson and Miyoshi, 1998). The regional setting of Shenzhen in the Pearl River delta of southern China has been the leading centre of rapid development in China under reform. The political sphere of interest concerns the role of élites and their domestic and transnational relations in planning new cities and urban forms. Ideas about internationalisation in these cities and the production of their representative landscapes reflect the globalising visions of urban élites and invoke transnational social formations, in activities of what Leslie Sklair (2001) has called the transnational capitalist class (executives of transnational corporations, bureaucrats, politicians and professionals who work transationally, and merchants and the media). By contrast to the Maoist era, cultural amenities and their urban forms are being foregrounded in the new Chinese city and exemplify shifting state ideologies about acceptable cultural symbolisms and activities. This mix of priorities takes shape in the urban built environment, in landscapes that represent evolving processes of urban formation and how cultural and economic spheres intersect with transnational forces in the construction of the new city. A blend of design styles characterises many of the signature development projects in these cities, designs that are emblematic of international post-modern urbanism combined with renewed emphasis on elements of traditional Chinese design styles. These projects also exist as a material basis for the rearticulation of regional identities in south China and their scaled interrelations with the capital, and serve as both representations of national legitimacy and internationalised economic leadership associated with contemporary Chinese transnationalism.

The New Chinese City

Cities have experienced extraordinary transformations in China under reform. By comparison with the previous Maoist era (1949–76), when the state emphasised agricultural production and heavy industry in the interior of the country, reform policies beginning in 1978 rearranged the national space economy in favour of rapid development in the coastal cities and provinces (see Fan, 1995). After at least three decades of substantially diminished infrastructural improvement, especially in the urban areas of the coastal south, urban areas have been subject to widespread rapid redevelopment. By the late 1980s and into the 1990s, many of the major cities, particularly Shanghai, erupted into centres of high-rise construction, replacing traditional low-rise buildings and the typical six-storey concrete blocks of the socialist city. The resulting reform-era city reflects concentrated capital investment in real estate development promoted by the urban land reforms, which have encouraged commercial redevelopment in the central city and large-scale greenfield development
projects on the urban fringe. As a result, the built environment of the Chinese city has changed dramatically and urban areas have substantially enlarged.

The processes of urbanisation and the scale of land development in China have resulted in the construction of entirely new urban districts and, in some cases, entirely new cities. In existing cities, the general trend is for residential housing to be relocated from the urban core to outlying areas, resulting in new suburban high-rise housing districts and forcing many long-term city residents to relocate (Wang and Murie, 1996, 2000). The urban land reforms, which created a market in long-term land leases, have propelled this trend: land in central business districts now commands higher rents and urban land uses have correspondingly shifted to high-value commercial service industries, especially business services and hotels (Zhang, 1997). New large-scale development projects, such as industrial and high-technology zones, have also generally been located in the suburbs of major cities and often on adjacent low-cost agricultural land that municipalities have transferred from rural to urban land-use classification status in order to expand the municipality and obtain additional rents (Cartier, 2001b). The creation of the Special Economic Zones exemplified this strategy and Shenzhen was the city in which the urban land-use lease system was pioneered.

The geographical basis of the export-oriented reform policies, in the establishment of Special Economic Zones (SEZs), prompted widespread large-scale infrastructural construction for industrial development and led to rapid urban growth. The first and largest of the four original SEZs, Shenzhen, in Guangdong province on the boundary of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, is China’s newest major city. Originally, Shenzhen was an industrial manufacturing zone, but with the rapid transformation of the regional economy, Shenzhen is becoming a centre of business services industry supporting the surrounding manufacturing economy of the larger Pearl River delta economic region. In the process, Shenzhen’s built environment has also transformed and the municipality is developing a new city centre that will anchor its planned functions and importance. The city-centre project has been the subject of diverse consultancies from international architecture and planning firms and is designed to symbolise the city’s transformation from a border town manufacturing zone into a ‘world city’ (Friedmann, 1986; Knox and Taylor, 1995).

**Placing Landscape Studies in China**

The conceptual goal of this work is to bring to the analysis of landscape in the Chinese city some of the more recent theoretical perspectives from cultural geography and human geography more broadly. Theoretically innovative studies of landscape have largely concerned landscapes in the West or the ‘contact zone’ (Pratt, 1992) of colonial encounters. This state of affairs cannot reflect an absence of ideas about the importance of landscape formation in China: from the forms of imperial cities and tombs (Wright, 1977; Steinhardt, 1990) to the architecture of common houses, local temples and graves (Knapp, 1986, 1989, 1999), the built environments of diverse Chinese landscapes have represented discerning placements in particular concerns about site, situatedness and spatial arrangement. Diverse historical Chinese sources and modern interpretations of them have widely commented on regional landscapes, especially the landscapes of the Jiangnan region, the north China plain and the far west (see, for example, Cressey, 1955; Schafer, 1967; Ren et al., 1985).

What can we say about how China’s rich geographical traditions inflect the formation of contemporary landscapes? Especially in south China under reform, for example, the activities of place-based institutions, including local temple associations and transnational provincial associations have become invigorated in new ways and have correspondingly reinscribed representative cultural landscapes (see, for example, Dean,
1993, 1998; Wolf, 1996; Liu, 1998; Tsai, 2000). The popular expression of human-environment relations in the practice of feng-shui has re-entered southern China through transnational connections with dispersed Chinese, especially from Hong Kong where feng-shui is “extremely popular” (Ong, 1999, p. 92), and now élites and bureaucrats are concerned with feng-shui in ways the same people would have once attributed (at least officially) to feudal peasant notions. How are such traditional practices merging with contemporary values generated in the commodity economy under reform to produce new cultural economic landscapes?

We are not able to answer these questions directly from the literature of the new cultural geography, but we can say something about why this is the case. The theoretical invigoration of cultural geography that began in the late 1970s resulted in profitable analyses of landscape that emphasise its representational qualities, how people and institutions, in the production of texts and discursive formations, socially construct landscape meaning, the ways in which states and élites inscribe political and economic ideologies in the landscape, and how local social institutions and cultural groups often embody and resist the spatial strategies of higher-scale orders, reinscribing their own ideas about place in the process (see, for example, Cosgrove, 1984; Cosgrove and Jackson, 1987; Gregory and Ley, 1988; Anderson and Gale, 1992; Barnes and Duncan, 1992; Duncan and Ley, 1993; Kong, 1997; Cook, 2000; Adams et al., 2001). The greater body of this literature, however, did not cross Anglo-American bounds, with the exception, in the case of Asia, of significant historical research on the colonial built environment (for example, Yeoh, 1996; Kenny, 1995) and textual studies of historical landscapes (for example, Duncan, 1990; Forêt, 2000). Significantly, around the same time, China scholars had been calling for a ‘China-centred’ approach to scholarship (Esherick, 1972; Cohen, 1984) and were actively turning away from applications of Western theoretical approaches. This divide between theoretical approaches and Asian studies has represented a legacy of conventions in the academy about how spheres of intellectual practice have been divided up towards different ends. To what do such divisions owe and how might they be transcended?

In its reflection of the modern world of nation-states, area studies research has served to organise knowledge based on countries and continents for political economic and international security analysis and as a basis for specialist cultural knowledge (Cumings, 1997a, 1997b). Political economic research tended to advance theoretical applications from Western models, while cultural specialists tended to avoid such models to pursue area studies subjects on locally appropriate terms. Similarly, scholars based solidly in disciplinary perspectives have tended to emphasise prevailing disciplinary paradigms over complex area analysis.

In addition to the area studies–theory divide and the ‘West and the rest’ divide, area studies has also been plagued by the epistemological separation of classical from modern research fields, which have focused, respectively, on cultural or economic subjects (Rafael, 1994). This observation holds true for the majority of economic analyses of China’s reform era, which regularly do not consider the cultural contexts of economic subjects, or the importance of historical conditions or events dating from before 1978. This temporal divide in China studies is arguably undergirded by the legacy of modernisation theory, which proposed a linear trajectory of societal evolution from traditional to modern stages, based on the experience of the industrialised West. However, applications of modernisation theory tended to divide China studies into a traditional era before Western contact and a modern era of significant contact with the West. All these kinds of division—prominently between theory and area studies—are constructed and artificial, and so we can transcend such divides and pursue alternative combinations of subjects and methods of analysis.

Where should we go from here? In ad-
dition to the theoretical advances driven by the new cultural geography, the field of economic geography has taken a 'cultural turn', which has emerged from a rethinking of political economy so that it

must employ cultural terms like symbol, imaginary, and rationality if it is to understand crucial economic processes such as commodification, industrialisation, and development (Peet, 2000, p. 1215).

In China studies, especially in studies of rapid development in China under reform, divisions between cultural and economic fields of analysis have left us with partial and often ideological accounts of local and regional processes. A cultural economy perspective is one step towards bridging such divides. In addition, as in previous work (Cartier, 1997, 1998, 1999), I propose that by bringing a landscape perspective to bear on places of rapid development—the scenes of planning and construction (and destruction) that have so distinctively marked the zones of rapid development in Asia—we may be able to assess how processes of landscape formation reveal scaled transformations—that is, articulations between local priorities, regional economic development, national ideologies and transnational cultural economic processes. Thus transformations in rapidly developing regions, as much as they are economic issues, might well be investigated as dynamic place-based processes where landscape formation reveals political economic forces and processes of social and cultural change. Under such circumstances, at the interstices of contending economic, political and cultural forces, the practices of diverse agents reveal how people create landscape and ways in which they construct place-based meanings, identities and expressions of broader scale ties to national and transnational arenas.

While contemporary transnational processes and research on them have broken down the territorial biases of area studies, no single field of research has dependably bridged divides between nationally circumscribed and transnational geographies. The multidisciplinary arena of scholarship on globalisation has yielded promising directions, yet has also provided platforms for deterritorialised perspectives on society and economy as well as new Western-centric positions. In the former case, treatments of space, place and landscape have been more metaphorical than material. Arjun Appadurai (1990, 1996), for example, has used 'scapes' (for example, mediascape, ethnoscape, ideoscape) to formulate the idea of globalised cultural and economic flows, yet the 'flows' vocabulary regularly elides questions about material landscapes and their formative processes, and actual landscapes are not the focus of such analysis (but see Olds, 2001). In the case of new Western-centric perspectives, especially in the US, so-called normative ideas about globalisation have also been an arena for the re-emergence of Western political economic hegemonies and a promotional base for the neo-liberal regime and financial globalisation, as in the WTO (see Smith, 1997).

Taking seriously globalisation's cultural sphere as well as its material geographies means working to situate complex causal processes. In an era of globalisation, Edward Said’s (1983) discussion about 'travelling theory' explains how Western theoretical perspectives have been adopted and reinterpreted in different contexts outside the West, which suggests that avoiding Western theory cannot simply lead to more culturally appropriate scholarly approaches and may result in missing entirely important debates. Similarly, Arif Dirlik (1996) has pointed out that the China-centred approach has denied the significance of methods originating in the West and appropriately applied or adapted in the Chinese context. For example, modernisation theory has taken on new contexts and meanings as deployed by the state and the intelligentsia in China. While China scholars once rallied against applications of Western social theory, such views have been in part swamped by forces of intellectual globalisation, in which the flow of ideas represents not one point of origin and singular interpretation but mutual influences from geographi-
cally diverse centres of thought, and reinterpretations to suit specific cultural, temporal and regional circumstances.

**Transnational Urbanism**

This assessment of new urban landscapes in south China depends on bringing to the literature of the new cultural geography an interpretation of transnational urbanism to conceptualise how contemporary landscapes of urban development demonstrate an array of articulations with transboundary and transnational spheres of economic activity and cultural forms. In its material conditions, I see transnational urbanism also as the set of processes, ideological and material, that underpin the production of the new built environments in China. The built environments of transnational urbanism are the spaces where the state and local elites are inscribing new cultural forms in the landscape of the reform-era city, interpreted through particular kinds of transnational social and economic transactions, and in architectural forms of international (post-)modernity. By contrast, Michael Peter Smith has used transnational urbanism, in a monograph of the same name, in metaphorical terms:

I have chosen to use the metaphor transnational urbanism rather than transnational localism or glocalisation ... It captures a sense of the wide range of possibilities for social change that we usually associate with urban life, even though some of those changes are taking place in Mexican villages, Chinese factory towns, or in the countryside, as well as in urban centers throughout the world (Smith, 2001, p. 5).

Smith explains that his concept depends on the idea that transnational agents are associated with cities and that their communications strategies depend on practices and technologies associated with cities. My interpretation instead focuses on the material environments and transnational spatial processes of urban formation, and takes inspiration from the work of Henri Lefebvre (1991) on the production of space, and ideas generated by the cultural turn in economic geography. Geographical processes of transnational urbanism produce material landscapes in contemporary China, which in turn signify cultural and economic ideas about transformations in society under reform.

Lefebvre’s contribution to conceptualising the formation of cities and the space of the built environment has been widely assessed (see, for example, Merrifeld, 1993; Stewart, 1995; Brenner, 1997, 2000). My concern with his work is to bring forward the ‘conceptual triad’ of conceived or planned space, representational or lived space and spatial practices, in order to maintain a frame for considering simultaneously how the state may engage in spatial practices to plan or ‘abstract’ space from local lived environments. These dynamic aspects of the production of space are especially suited to framing landscape formation in contemporary China where the state engages in a range of spatial practices in order to appropriate space for industrial modernisation projects. Many of these projects are central elements of the reform-era Chinese city.

Forms of urbanism, as sets of institutions, practices and ideologies that constitute urban society and settlement, have broad reach in an era of globalisation. What this means too is that urbanisms are locally and materially constituted, yet formed in the context of multiple and scaled globalising processes scales (see, for example, Swyngedouw, 1997a, 1997b; Brenner, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000; Marston, 2000; Jessop, 1999). Similarly, the reach of urban institutions is trans-scalar. So my concern with transnational urbanism is as a set of processes that are locally constituted—in this case, in the regional cultural economy of southern coastal China, and through scaled relations with the national capital, and the global arena of the transnational capitalist class. This scale issue is particularly important in China where the state continues to differentiate among cities in the administrative hierarchy, based on different decision-making powers at different levels in the hierarchy. SEZs, for example, have pos-
sessed greater institutional powers to plan their economies than other cities, even provincial capitals, including the ability to contract large-scale joint-venture development projects with foreign investors and to promulgate locally specific legislation. Thus, in China, the state—and the local state in particular cities—has continued to articulate urban growth and urban form through active scale strategies that manage, direct and intervene in, but are not synonymous with, transnational processes.

**Regional Restructuring in South China under Reform**

Landscape formation in southern coastal China has important regional contexts (Cartier, 2001a). The geographical foundation of the export-oriented sector of reform—the ‘open policy’—established a system of special zones, open cities and open development regions, to concentrate foreign investment and export-oriented manufacturing in coastal China. Thus the impacts of economic reform have been uneven and regionally specific to the coastal provinces, which in turn have been the primary beneficiaries of foreign direct investment, infrastructural development and high economic growth. Guangdong and Fujian, the two southernmost coastal provinces, received special privileges beginning in 1980. The four original SEZs were located in Guangdong and Fujian, which were historically less important in China’s existing administrative system, but possessed significant linkages with Chinese overseas communities. Two of the SEZs, Shantou and Xiamen, are centres of historical trade and emigration and had also been open ports under the treaty system (ports opened by treaties between China and the West during the ‘semi-colonial’ period in Chinese history from 1842 to the Second World War). The other two, Shenzhen and Zhuhai, were border frontiers along Hong Kong and Macao, respectively. In 1988, Hainan Island was later declared a SEZ and made a province, separate from Guangdong.

Then, in 1990, the Pudong New Zone in Shanghai was also given special zone privileges. As a result of the open policy, economic relations between Hong Kong, Taiwan and the coastal zones of Guangdong and Fujian, became so closely tied that the greater part of Hong Kong’s former manufacturing industry relocated to Guangdong through Shenzhen, and the majority of external investment in Fujian, first via Xiamen, had come from Taiwan. By 1997, Hong Kong had already served as the major source and conduit of capital and manufacturing expertise for southern China. In the process, the south coast transformed from its relatively peripheral status during the Maoist period into a region of internationalised cities increasingly interconnected with the world economy. The geographical specificity of reform put the south China coast at the centre of domestic economic planning for the first time in Chinese history (see Yabuki, 1995, p. 117).

The national leadership established the Shenzhen SEZ on the Guangdong border frontier with the Hong Kong New Territories as the leading special zone. It was an agricultural area distant from major cities, strategically selected to keep what was then a radical experiment with market economic activity away from centres of real economic and political power. In the face of opponents of reform, Deng Xiaoping introduced Shenzhen and the other SEZs as “experimental special economic zones” (Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, 1984, p. 416, n. 113), a notion which faded quickly with the rise of new economic power generated in the SEZs. Deng Xiaoping himself promoted their success through highly publicised site visits, encouraging the use of international capital and expertise and the participation of Chinese overseas investment. In 1992, after a period of high inflation following the Tiananmen crisis, Deng purposefully conducted another tour of the SEZs to urge intensification of rapid growth. The SEZs were sanctioned at the highest levels and they became geographical centres and symbols of reform practice and ideology (Crane, 1996).
Shenzhen continues to be an exceptional city in several respects. In the country with the world’s longest unbroken urban tradition, where many cities claim centuries if not millennia of history, Shenzhen is a new city. Its national legitimacy has been based on rapid economic growth: from 1980 to 2000, Shenzhen experienced an average annual growth rate of 31.2 per cent. In the 1980s, the average annual growth rate was 46.5 per cent and the city led the nation in economic performance (STXN, 2000). Economic growth originates in surplus value—the profits gained based on the difference between the cost of a product and the wages that produced it—which makes labour cost a central determinant of growth. The majority of low-wage workers in Shenzhen are young women migrants who, in the mid 1990s, worked a 12-hour day for US$1.10 (Yi, 1998, pp. 28–29). In its population composition, more than any other city in China, besides mid-century Hong Kong and historic Shanghai, Shenzhen is a city of migrants. The migrant phenomenon propelled Shenzhen’s population from an original rural base of 50 000 into a city of just over 4 million people by 2000 (Xinhua, 2000). The rapidity of economic growth in Shenzhen is called ‘Shenzhen speed’, as if no other place or time has experienced the transformations that have characterised this city. In the context of the Chinese past, a city without history lacks cultural distinction and Shenzhen’s reputation on the national scene is “a city on the make with the new and brash everywhere” (Abbas, 2000, p. 780). The rapidity of economic growth is widely evident in the built environment, whose construction, as the Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas has observed, depends on

record design speeds: … 5 designers × 1 night + computers = 300-unit single family housing development; … 1 architect × 7 days = 30-story concrete residential highrise. … [Based on this kind of productivity] the Chinese architect designs the largest volume in the shortest time (Koolhaas and Bau, 1997, pp. 562–563).

Rapid economic growth in south China equals rapid production of the built environment and the virtual manufacture of vast tracts of urban space.

Shenzhen: The New World City

Shenzhen’s short history as an unprecedented city of migrants and economic fortune belies its current plans to become a contender among China’s world cities. As the city has grown beyond its manufacturing zone function, the city’s leadership has planned its transformation into a world city of business services and high-technology industries distinguished by international standard architecture and urban cultural amenities. In the ways that ideas about places are socially constructed, Shenzhen’s reputation, as a high-growth industrial zone, arguably does not match these goals and so this most recent planned transformation raises questions about the remaking of the reform-era city. What is the basis of Shenzhen’s world city transformation? How is the local state representing Shenzhen’s international profile? How do the processes of transnational urbanism inform Shenzhen’s current transformation? What are the state’s spatial strategies and how do limited interventions and resistances impinge on these practices and their production of landscape meaning? Can a “city on the make with the new and brash everywhere” gain a world city profile?

What has evolved in other cities over a hundred years and more, Shenzhen plans to develop in a fraction of the time. The idea of translating Shenzhen speed into an urban environment of international significance has meant close adherence to plans for developing world city infrastructure, including high-rise office buildings, cultural centres such as libraries, theatres and concert halls, and an efficient transport system. While the rapid production of the built environment is physically possible, the state is challenged to maintain its designs over societal transformation under reform. But it is attempting to do so: the local state in Shenzhen has marshalled a set of ideologies exhorting societal
improvement’ under the national spiritual civilisation campaign. The spiritual civilisation campaign, discussed further below, promotes ideologies of ideal ‘civilised’ citizens, invoking age-old notions about the role of cities as centres of civilisation. In the ways that the state in China continues to wield extraordinary power over its citizenry, such explicit political campaigns are imbued with tensions over the production of social meaning. As James Scott (1990, p. 45) has theorised about power relations, “Relations of domination are, at the same time, relations of resistance”. State domination is set in a dialectic with subtle and fleeting forms of citizen resistance, which are often ‘hidden transcripts’ (Scott, 1990)—local people’s critical discourses, typically maintained in spaces just beyond the state’s surveillance gaze. In the built environment, the state’s high-profile megaprojects are the material evidence of its power, whereas the informal spaces of daily life are the potential landscapes of dissent.

The centrepiece of the planned transformation of Shenzhen into a world city is the new city-centre project in Futian district (see Figure 1). The new city-centre project, located west of the original central business district at the centre of Shenzhen, is planned to become a concentration of services industries, the city’s centre of government, finance, trade, information and the arts. The larger surrounding district is designated for high-technology development, in attempt to strengthen Shenzhen’s economic position in the larger Pearl River delta region and nation-wide. Planning Futian reflects the more ambitious rationale of SEZs as not only centres of economic experimentation, export-orientation and rapid economic growth, but also as new cities whose superior infrastructural quality and environment will continue to attract international investment and propel rapid modernisation. Shenzhen planners recognise a fundamental relationship between the quality of the built environment and continued growth and transformation of the city: “the basic point of running well the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone is identical with the efforts to construct the city in accordance with modern standards” (SUPB, 1990, p. 40). The planned construction of a modern urban environment in Shenzhen has become the larger project to build a new world city from the ground upwards in 30–40 years.

City planners and municipal authorities increasingly portray images of Shenzhen in the symbolic language of transnational urbanism: Shenzhen will become a ‘world city’, an ‘international city’, a ‘global city’, and also an ‘ecological city’ (Zhang and Qiao, 1997; SUPB, 1990). Planning consultations sought from major international architecture and planning firms reiterate these representations. The master plan for Shenzhen city centre produced by the US-based Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, a leading international architectural and engineering firm, lays out the principles of the plan based on building Shenzhen into a ‘world class city’ (Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, 1999). The report indicates a 10–20 year time-horizon for reaching this goal and compares the future Shenzhen with Shanghai and Hong Kong, as well as with Chicago, New York, Amsterdam, London and Paris. This consultancy unequivocally represents the importance of the city-centre project at Futian as “the basis for Shenzhen’s evolution and emergence as the first, new world class city of the new millennium” (Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, 1999, p. 8). The idea of the ecological city is also in step with discursive representations of transnationalism and globalisation, and has been popularised in international planning circles by Kishio Kurokawa (1998, p. 2) as the “eco-media city”, “a more highly developed version of the eco-city”. Kurokawa consulted on the design for the central green area of the Futian city-centre plan and proposed an eco-media city park, a park concept for the information age, largely in the form of a sculpture garden, to symbolise ideas about environmental sustainability associated with visionary globality. As Sklair (2001, p. 6) has emphasised, rising concerns about environmental sustainability have become a prominent issue for the transnational
Figure 1. Futian district and the site of the new city centre.
capitalist class, who are consciously working to redefine the 'ecological crisis' in terms of capitalist development and consumer ideology on the world scale. The meaning of the ecological city in China is embedded in this transnational discourse of industrial development. What ecological city actually means in Shenzhen is not a more sustainable form of economic development but greening the city by establishing parks and maintaining the high-quality appearance of landscaping along major roadways.

The history of the Futian project indicates how the planning process defines the production of the built environment and ways in which the process has become internationalised. The Shenzhen Urban Planning Bureau identified the new city-centre site at Futian in the 1980s, in anticipation of continued industrial growth in the SEZ. The bureau mapped the rectangular site in its present form, oriented to the cardinal directions and distinguished by a central axis (SUPB, 1990, p. 29). In 1989, the municipal government initiated planning consultations for the overall spatial design, features of the axis, the transport system and other major infrastructure. Two domestic firms and one from Hong Kong and one from Singapore participated in this process (Nan, 1997). Ideas about Shenzhen's increasingly important regional role emerged in the context of planning for enhanced relations with Hong Kong after its repatriation in 1997. The Shenzhen government prioritised plans for the development of Futian city centre in 1995 and, in 1996, invited international submissions for the city-centre design, focused on plans for the central axis and a new municipal government building. Firms in Hong Kong, Singapore, France and the US submitted proposals and models, and an international jury recommended the design by John M. Y. Lee/Michael Timchula Architects, the New York-based firm, as the best proposal (see Figure 2). This design distinctively interprets the significance of the natural environment by maintaining open space in the central axis both north and south from the prominent municipal government building. The spectacular design of the raised roof on the building, designed by John Lee, widely captured the imagination of officials and planners. It was approved in Beijing by central government leaders and is under construction in Shenzhen. This incremental planning and design process, involving numerous international consultancies, has characterised planning in China's major reform-era cities (see Olds, 2001).

The distinction of the site for the new city centre is its self-consciously historical plan and its situatedness in relation to the natural environment. The 4 square kilometre site is located at the centre of Shenzhen and its perimeter is defined by four main roadways running north–south and east–west. Oriented to the cardinal directions, it is inscribed lengthwise on a gradual slope from the low-lying coast at Shenzhen Bay to Lianhua Mountain, north of the site. Its basic form is traceable to the classical plan of capital cities: among different types of cities in the historical Chinese administrative hierarchy, only the morphology of imperial capitals reliably maintained concern for a location at the city's administrative centre with a rectangular plan and a longer central north–south axis (see Wright, 1977; Wheatley, 1971; Steinhardt, 1990; Xu, 2000). In the morphology of imperial capitals, the central axis was the symbolic and privileged space of imperial leadership. The installation of the Deng Xiaoping statue on Lianhua Mountain directly north of the site overlooking the central axis monumentalises Deng in the tradition of great state leaders.

To return to the opening epigraph, the location of Mao's mausoleum in Beijing, directly south of the Tiananmen Gate and the Forbidden City in Tiananmen Square, has appeared to honour Mao with the legacy of the imperial state. (The tombs of the emperors are located outside the city, so not even emperors were buried in the centre of the capital.) If we understand Mao as a revolutionary hero, such a landscape placement must be read as an irony or an error; as a supreme leader or dictator, the location of the mausoleum lends Mao the inheritance of the
Chinese imperial past. The symbolic problems of the mausoleum’s location were hotly debated subsequent to Mao’s death in 1976: the arrangement of Mao’s funeral and entombment became events central to the succession crisis within the Communist Party leadership, as Hua Guofeng, then secretary of the party, gained control over the funeral committee, which prevailed to have the mausoleum constructed in its present location (Wakeman, 1988). That, combined with miscalculated plans for China’s economic reform, eroded Hua’s credibility and paved the way for the ascendance of Deng. But Deng himself, keenly aware of the abuses of power caused by the personality cult built around Mao, would probably not have authorised the statue. The authoritarian gesture of confiscating the film of the Hong Kong press photographers underscores the state’s tensions over monumentalising Deng’s legacy and the controversy over the statue and the national leadership’s role in ultimately sanctioning it.

Figure 2. Site plan for the Shenzhen city centre: birdseye view. Source: Anton Kisselgoff, John Lee/Timchula Architects.
The central building of the Futian project is designed to function as the centre of local government. It is a complex of several buildings joined by a stunning winged roof, a symmetrical mathematical curve with a low-arched centre and uplifted eaves (see Figure 3). The shape of the roof takes its inspiration from traditional Chinese building form in the upturned eves of pagoda-style roofs. The roof is raised above the main structure and preserves an open line of sight from the southern vantage, looking north through the front of the structure to Lianhua Mountain. Large rectangular openings in the roof itself flood with light the five-storey buildings on both sides of the structure. The single large east building will house offices of the municipal government. Of two smaller buildings to the west, the building nearest the centre is likely to become the offices of the local People’s Congress, and an arts museum is planned for the adjacent building (interview, 2000). Two dramatically large pillars, one round and yellow, the other square and red, pierce the roof’s central arch. The pillars are buildings with glass exteriors covered with painted metal exoskeletons. Both pillars function as exhibition spaces and are transparent from the inside, yielding views north and south over the central green zone. The colours of the pillars code trans-historical symbols of Chinese political leadership: red and yellow are the colours of imperial space as well as the two colours of the contemporary national flag designed by the communist leadership. Such design elements, in combination with the pagoda roof and the character of the overall site, bring contemporary interpretations to traditional Chinese symbolisms. This central building and the larger city centre, modernist in architectural style, open up postmodern interpretations of this built environment in the way that

postmodernism abandons the modernist search for inner meaning in the midst of present turmoil, and asserts a broader base of the eternal in a constructed vision of historical continuity in collective memory (Harvey, 1989, p. 83).

Shenzhen’s new city centre has no integral connection to the landscapes of the imperial past, yet its planners have constructed the symbolic space of historic leadership at the centre of the once-chaotic industrial zone. The design of the municipal government building, produced in the sphere of Chinese transnationalism, has brought Chinese cultural forms back to China on new terms.

Figure 3. The Shenzhen Municipal Centre, designed by John M. Y. Lee. Source: Advanced Media Design Inc. and Lee/Timchula Architects.
Internationally produced and legitimated, Shenzhen officials are designing the new world city, like the regional economy, with Chinese characteristics.

‘Civilising’ Shenzhen

What is not part of the official plan for the city centre is an account of the historical cultural landscape of Futian district. Narratives about rapid growth in the coastal provinces in China under reform treat the sites of large-scale development projects simply as agricultural land with little if any sense of local inhabitants or established histories of place. Yet as inhabited places, such agricultural landscapes are often the sites of struggles between farmers or villagers and the local state. In Shenzhen, state power over land use has remained largely unchallenged since the inception of the SEZ and open dissent over the transformation of agricultural land has not characterised the development process. Instead, tensions between inhabitants of agricultural and undeveloped land and local government are represented in the state’s spiritual civilisation campaign and the spaces it seeks to control, redefine and transform.

The spiritual civilisation campaign began after the onset of reform as the human counterpart to economic reform (Su and Ding, 1984). It has never been pursued with the necessity or vigour of economic reform and in itself is typically regarded, especially by intellectuals, as so much propaganda. Ostensibly, the goals of the spiritual civilisation campaign are to reign in the excesses of popular culture and new lifestyles generated in the commodity economy and to balance the goals of materialist consumption with staunch reminders of appropriate social development, in the interests of the Communist Party. The state widely publicises this campaign, on billboards and other signage, with slogans like “Build a civilised citizenry; build a civilised city”. Publications that chronicle the evolution of China’s special economic zones, especially Theory and Practice of Special Economic Zones (Tequ Liyun yu Shilu) praise the transformation of special-zone districts like Futian and other centres of development in a dedicated section, “Construction of spiritual civilisation”. Yet, in more recent national applications of the campaign, the state has bound ‘civilised activities’ to leisure consumption, from promoting such activities as going out to see movies to learning how to use computers (Wang, 2001, p. 77).

In Shenzhen, the spiritual civilisation campaign regularly plays out through ‘civilising’ projects for local neighbourhood and community development, in which the built environment and the local population in remaining villages are targeted for improvements. Such projects emphasise upgrading the quality and appearance of streets and buildings, as well as the conduct and outlook of the local people. The campaign binds directives to improve the built environment with goals of human development by urging local communities to improve themselves through the construction of parks, cultural or sports facilities, youth centres, libraries, health centres and the like (Li, 2000). More critically, such public amenities also serve the state by imposing organisational logics on society and by helping to negate forms of resistance to rapid urban transformation. We find support for this perspective among Lefebvre’s (1991, p. 227) ideas about the production of social space and the role of the state and capital interests in transforming space toward desired ends. Lefebvre noted the “condensation” effects of the predominance of ‘amenities’… which are a mechanism for the localization and ‘punctualization’ of activities including leisure pursuits, sports and games. These are thus concentrated in specially equipped ‘spaces’ which are as clearly demarcated as factories in the world of work (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 227).

This observation notes how the production of leisure spaces also enhances the meaning of work spaces—thereby foregrounding the priority of industry and employment—and gains the complicity of the populace in the indus-
trialisation project by providing apparent alternatives to work.

Local newspapers in Shenzhen regularly carry stories about these civilising projects and, as one more analytical article introduced the issue, “the development of spiritual civilisation in the countryside cannot match the development of material civilisation” generated under reform (Huang, 1997). Official promotion of spiritual civilisation urges increased education to “to improve the comprehensive quality of the villagers” (Huang, 1997). Moral education should instruct villagers to establish correct values … a sense of time, efficiency, talent, fairness, openness and competition, and overcome the close-minded, conservative, cowardly and selfish psychological orientations caused by petty commodity production (Huang, 1997).

The ideology embedded in these exhortations ostensibly promotes modernisation through the preparation of former rural area and small-town inhabitants for rapid transition to urban life, yet more critically it would mould the populace to live daily life under a kind of Chinese Fordism, in which daily activities are hinged to the temporal and spatial conditions of mass production and consumption, thereby promoting both.

To reward respondents to the spiritual civilisation campaign in Futian, the local state names “civilized citizens, civilized households, civilized streets, and civilized communities,” on a scaled basis, to enhance Futian’s transformation into a “civilized district” (Ling, 1997; Zhang and Li, 1999). This naming of so-called civilised spheres of activity, from the scale of the individual to streets and communities, demonstrates how the state’s political campaigns are also spatial strategies in which individuals or households and so on are named, marked, emplaced and bound into a multiscaled operative strategy to demonstrate the power and principles of the state. These kinds of ‘model’ areas are scaled up to the national level and the central state selects leading ‘civilized communities’ to be awarded the title ‘national model communities’ (Li and Zhou, 1997). The scaled quality of these strategies seeks to create widespread participation and unifying social vision, thereby insistently working to eliminate formation of local resistance.

However, reports of construction violations indicate how the campaign’s influence has its limits. Only streets without informal buildings and shops merit the designation ‘civilised’ and officials commonly report having to demolish illegal housing, widely attributed to migrants, and also migrant schools (see, for example, Li, 1997, 1998, 1999; Jin, 1998). Multiple efforts to destroy a temple in Futian, repeatedly rebuilt, suggest the tenacity of local efforts to maintain informal structures in the face of state dictums (Liao, 1997). Official accounts of these cases demonstrate how the local built environment can also be an arena of resistance and a space of protest, even as these resistances may be subtle and ultimately fleeting in the face of state power. As Scott (1990, pp. 118–119) has assessed, such “spaces of relative autonomy … serve to discipline as well as to formulate patterns of resistance”. They are the sites where people are most able to act out and advance the hidden transcript. Rather than indicating the apparent weakness of local efforts to contest the power of the state.

The strongest evidence for the vital importance of autonomous social sites in generating a hidden transcript is the strenuous effort made by dominant groups to abolish or control such sites (Scott, 1990, p. 124).

That the destruction of the informal built environment is so commonplace underscores the dialectic between forms of domination and strategies of resistance. Informal land use and development by locals and migrants makes the landscapes of ‘Shenzhen speed’ appear vulnerable and haphazard, thereby threatening the state’s visions of world city development.
Conclusions

Landscapes of transnational urbanism in Shenzhen simultaneously reflect the city’s local and regional goals, its aspirations on the national scene and ideas about globality circulating in the sphere of the transnational capitalist class. In this brief assessment, we have sought to use the idea of transnational urbanism to frame the complexities of urban forms and ideologies in an internationalising city which simultaneously maintains a nationally sanctioned role as privileged centre of urban planning and development. The mix of styles in the Futian city-centre project demonstrates how the local state in Shenzhen interprets symbolic meaning in the built environment through scaled interrelations with the spheres of nation and transnational urbanism to construct both historical and global significance. The plan for the new city centre demonstrates how Shenzhen would claim legitimacy in the national urban order through the symbolic political-cultural legacy of China’s landed imperial cities, combined with the internationalism and vibrancy of the south China coastal cities, to evolve a new transnational urban form with Chinese characteristics. The successful design for the project’s central government building depended on the vision of an architect who could read traditional Chinese architectural forms and cultural symbolisms through a language of modernism and could then code the design in ways that would satisfy the national historical imagination about what is a great city in China and also represent the city’s leading edge in the regional and world economies. Participation of Chinese overseas professionals and capitalists in helping to build Shenzhen has been one important source of internationalisation for the city, and John Lee has other major projects under construction in Shenzhen.

Reading Shenzhen’s landscapes depends on knowing about China’s history and traditions as well as processes of economic restructuring in China under reform. These knowledges, though, have not been commonly combined in either the area studies or the disciplinary literature about China. Humanistic perspectives about culture and social science perspectives about economic growth, have remained largely distinct fields of inquiry, in the same way that theoretical projects have tended to remain, with important exceptions, in the realm of post-colonial and Western area studies. Scholarship on the contemporary Chinese city is an interesting context in which to transcend these traditional divides, since, especially in the second decade of reform, the new Chinese city has become a setting for the reinstitutionalisation of cultural forms. Analysis of landscapes also as products of spatial economic processes brings greater focus to landscape formation and how landscape represents knowledge and decisions of diverse agents made in the context of economic events. This is critical in the case of China where state planning treats cities as leading centres of economic modernisation. In contrast with conventional notions in China studies, theoretical assessments of the Chinese landscape need not paper over suitably Chinese interpretations of China. Contemporary perspectives generated in the new cultural geography and economic geography, more than particularly Westernised ideas, are critical perspectives that may be used to intervene in the biases of ideological world-views, of whatever origin. This landscape analysis of Shenzhen has depended on these perspectives, as well as the reality that Shenzhen is simultaneously a city of China and the world economy where territorial boundaries cannot possibly circumscribe the city’s processes of urban formation or the ideas on which those processes have been based. In the way that intellectual globalisation recognises diverse centres of thought and reinterpretations of theory to suit specific cultural and regional circumstances, reading the landscapes of Shenzhen challenges our geographical imaginations to think through scale, recover what is important about the Chinese past and work to understand why such extraordinary landscapes are being inscribed in a former manufacturing zone on China’s southern frontier.
Note
1. Interviews for this research were conducted in Hong Kong, New York City and Shenzhen; the anonymity of individuals granting interviews is maintained.

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