

THINK TANK

A.R.T.T Research Forum #540 The Urban Form of the Contemporary Chinese City: Challenges and Opportunities

Dr Stefan Al
Associate Professor of Urban Design,
Department of City and Regional Planning
University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia

Triggered by economic changes, technological innovations, and population pressures, cities evolve and new urban forms emerge around the world. China, because of its rapid growth in the past 35 years, has seen many new forms of urban development that have fundamentally changed the everyday lives of millions of people.

In this lecture, I will focus on key forms that trace the economic history of modern China, including factory towns, urban villages, mall-tower developments, and superblocks. In places like the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone, large factory towns accommodated millions of manufacturing workers. As the industry attracted migrants looking for affordable housing, local villagers built rental-apartment buildings so close to another they are dubbed as “handshake houses” — you can literally reach out from one building and shake hands with your neighbor. China’s recent shift to domestic consumerism is evident from the rise of Hong Kong’s podium-mall tower developments, which appear all over the Mainland and are even being exported worldwide.

However, as successful as China has been in urbanizing quickly and promoting economic growth, the emphasis lay on building infrastructure, with little attention to places. Many parts of the cities were built in car-oriented superblocks, built with limited consideration for nature, pedestrians, and human scale. Nevertheless, I will show efforts to remediate these challenges, including through green infrastructure, urban regeneration, transit-oriented development, and urban design guideline reform. To allow for more sustainable urban growth in China, I claim that infrastructure needs to be balanced with place-making.

I will draw from my edited books on Asian urbanism, including on South China’s informal settlements and Hong Kong’s compact urban form, such as Villages in the City, Factory Towns of South China, and Mall City. In addition, I will show images from my new co-authored book on transit-oriented development, Beyond Mobility: Planning Cities for People and Places, and my forthcoming sole-authored book on promoting climate change resilience in coastal areas, Adapting Cities to Sea Level Rise: Green and Gray Strategies.

Convenor:
Professor Heng Chye Kiang

Open to all faculty members and graduate candidates at the School of Design and Environment

Date and Time——
22 Aug 2017
1415 to 1515

Venue——
School Conference Room
School of Design &
Environment,
National University
of Singapore

Contact——
Ms Tan Chay Hoon
+6516 7628