

ASIAN CITIES



Edited by Henco Bekkering, Adèle Esposito, and Charles Goldblum

Ideas of the City in Asian Settings

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Ideas of the City in Asian Settings



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About the Three UKNA Volumes

This book is part of a series of three edited volumes published in the Asian Cities series of Amsterdam University Press and the International Institute for Asian Studies, and coordinated by editors from the Urban Knowledge Network Asia (UKNA):

- Volume 1: Ideas of the City in Asian Settings
- Volume 2: Cities in Asia by and for the People
- Volume 3: Future Challenges of Cities in Asia

The UKNA was established in 2012 with a grant from the European Union's Marie Curie Actions International Research Staff Exchange Scheme (IRSES) mobility scheme to bring together scholars from thirteen universities and planning institutions in greater China, India, Europe and the United States around collaborative research on urbanization in Asia¹. Since then the network has expanded to include also other partners in Northeast Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia, and today represents a broad coalition of scholars and practitioners united by a common objective of promoting "human flourishing and the creative production of urban space". The focus is on cities across Asia, as well as cities beyond Asia in comparative perspective.

UKNA seeks to influence scholarship on cities as well as on policy by contributing insights that put people at the center of urban governance and development strategies. The emphasis is on immediate problem solving as well as the identification of long term, transformative processes that increase

¹ The original UKNA partners that participated in the research staff exchanges covered by the IRSES grant comprised: Ambedkar University Delhi (India); College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Beijing University of Technology (China); China Academy of Urban Planning and Design (China); CEPT University (India); Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (China); Development Planning Unit, University College London (UK); Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Paris-Belleville (France); Department of Architecture, Hong Kong University (Hong Kong SAR); International Institute for Asian Studies, Leiden (the Netherlands); Indian Institute for Human Settlements (India); School of Architecture, Tianjin University (China); Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment, Delft University of Technology (the Netherlands); and Sol Price School of Public Policy, University of Southern California (USA).

the scope for the active engagement of people in the creative production and shaping of their cities—particularly in the realm of knowledge. UKNA seeks to develop a new, multi-disciplinary body of knowledge on cities, one that goes beyond the ‘scientific’ approaches transmitted in the curricula of classic urban studies programs. It seeks to encompass alternative epistemologies of the city rooted in everyday urban life. These epistemologies seek to embrace non-Western knowledge and traditions and the contributions of a wide range of methods of investigation in the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences.

These three edited volumes represent the output of urban scholars who participated in the UKNA mobility schemes from 2012 to 2016, as well as other scholars who were invited to contribute to the series through separate calls for papers.

The diversity of essays in these volumes represents the diversity of the UKNA itself, which brings together young scholars, including PhD candidates and post-doctoral researchers, as well as established contributors from over twenty countries and from a multiplicity of backgrounds and interests. The wide range of topics covered in these three volumes, reflecting cross-disciplinary perspectives and different kinds of expertise, embodies the “diversity of ways to read the city” that UKNA propagates.

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Paul Rabé, D.P.P.D.

UKNA Coordinator and Editor, Asian Cities book series

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1 Introduction

Adèle Esposito, Henco Bekkering and Charles Goldblum

Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else. (Calvino 1974: 44)

In 2015, the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) organised the exhibition *After Utopia: Revisiting the Ideal in Asian Contemporary Art*, which featured a collection of contemporary artworks reflecting upon humanity's quest for 'the ideal'. The curators, Tan Siuli and Louis Ho, referred to Thomas More's fictional island Utopia, which in Greek designates an ideal place... but also, the absence of that place. On these etymological bases, the curators explained that utopia contains the impetus of human endeavours for the achievement of a better world and, conversely, the seeds of a bitter deception vis-à-vis the impossibility of creating such a world. 'The City and its Discontents' was one of the themes through which the artists expressed this problematic quest. Is there still space for a 'utopian thought' in the context of the 'bankruptcy of our urban milieus'? Are 'cities—and the hope for a new world—still relevant' in 'an age when even human interaction has retreated into the non-space of the cyber universe?' (Siuli and Ho 2015: 27) The exhibition questioned the contemporary role of cities as both physical entities that concentrate people and human activities, and objects of desire and imagination that people project their idealistic aspirations upon. The works of art gave voices to those people who have reasons to be discontented with these processes—evicted artists; city dwellers suffering from disfranchisement and pollution—and whose daily life, needs, and aspirations have been forgotten or overlooked by political and economic rationales. They shared the purpose of giving visibility to Asian cities' pullulating social life and painful secrets. Seen together, these works of art raise a host of intriguing questions: Which human and social realities do the new residential estates of Asia's developing cities conceal? What does

the city mean and represent for the people who live there? How do citizens perceive the social and environmental problems caused by intense urbanisation? How are they affected by the loss of inherited forms, buildings, and landscapes? How does the State react to the attempts of social movements to shape places and meanings? Who selects and transfers urban memories, how, and for what purposes? An excerpt from Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* is quoted in the exhibition's brochure. It evocatively suggests that answers to these questions are far from obvious, as cities keep a lot of secrets that will not be revealed to the uninitiated eye.

Asian cities can be considered crucial places for questioning the aspirations that are projected onto urban environments, as well as the evolution of the role of cities in globalisation. Asian cities have indeed experienced unprecedented dynamics of urban development during the last fifty years, triggered by 'programs of economic development and reform that are profoundly transforming the lives of tens or hundreds of millions of people and creating enormous societal upheaval' (Winter and Daly 2012: 6). In recent years, Asia has shown the world's highest urbanisation growth rates: the United Nations (2014) expects that 64 percent of the Asian population will live in an urban environment by 2050. This intense pace of urbanisation has 'been influenced by a number of interrelated economic trends' (Ho and Hsiao 2006: 3), which have taken place in three subsequent waves of investment: first, the East Asian Miracle (1960s-1970s); then, flows of foreign capital converging in Southeast Asian cities (1980s and the 1990s); and finally, the development of cities in China and the former Indochina since the mid-1990s (*ibid.*). Idealistic narratives and confident political discourses have sustained these dynamics. Conversely, political discourses have drawn on the rapidity and intensity of these phenomena to provide evidence of the progress made by Asian countries, as driven by their ever-expanding urban economies. Asian cities are more and more dematerialised, as they come to be perceived as the backdrop for economic activities and a fulcrum where flows of people and resources converge. At the same time, urban sprawl into greater territories and extended urban regions (McGee 1991) call us to question the very idea of the city as a recognizable spatial entity embedded with cultural, political, and social values. Such radical changes have created uneasiness for several categories of actors: professionals, politicians, and academics have all warned against the dangers of losing Asian societies' historical roots, homogenizing urban landscapes, resulting in increases in social injustice, and generating unsustainable growth. At a time when the dynamics of urban development puzzle and disorient a majority of people, we believe it is useful to produce knowledge of the concepts, representations,

ideas, and aspirations that underpin the contemporary production of Asian cities. The objective of this book is to look into what Italo Calvino designates as the 'everything that conceals something else' (1974) in order to shed more light on the vast array of rules and perspectives that make cities into complex objects that are continuously 'in the making'.

We are mindful that the geographical boundary of this book—'Asia'—includes a great variety of different realities. As Tim Winter and Patrick Daly remarked, 'Asia is a fluid and complex concept as well as a region of immense cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity, often within individual countries' (2012: 6). Historically, Asia is a site of great ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity. Pluralism has characterised the making of the cities in this continent. Asia is also home to 'plural societies' that comprise distinct social orders living parallel to each other under one political entity, which have few opportunities to associate into common programs and activities with the exception of the market (Furnivall 1980). In contemporary times, the pluralism of Asian cities has been renewed and has taken new shapes. Whilst claims from ethnic and religious communities rooted in historically layered plural societies have strengthened the segmented organisation of Asian urban populations (Evers and Korff 2000), new forms of political, economic, and cultural association have also been aroused through 'civil society' organisations (Daniere and Douglass 2009), epistemic communities (Haas 1992), and social movements. Moreover, the opening of socialist countries to countries with market economies and the strengthening of supranational networks of political and economic cooperation has brought a great diversity of actors into Asian cities, including investors, developers, consultants, communities of expatriates, and international companies. Generalised economic growth has sustained the rise of the middle classes, which are presently constructing their own tastes, styles, and standards of comfort. The production of images and discourses circulating at the global and regional scales transform symbolic orders and introduce new ideas of social status that find expression in the materiality of the city (Harvey 1989; Guillot 2007; Fauveaud 2015). Further, recent processes of urban development have amplified social injustices and inequalities, with the formation of slums and social enclaves suffering from poverty and disfranchisement as a result.

Asia also has a long tradition of maritime and commercial exchanges that have flourished since the fifteenth century (Reid 1988; Ravi, Rutten, and Goh 2004). In colonial times, connections between Asia and Europe prevailed, with intense cultural, professional, and economic exchanges between the colonial powers and the colonised (Herbelin 2016) that strongly influenced urban planning, architecture, and heritage conservation (Rabinow 1995;

Mangin 2006). Later, in postcolonial times, Asian cities, especially the metropolises, connected to networks of transnational, regional, and international cooperation. The transfer of knowledge through international development assistance, flagship projects promoted by national authorities (Olds 2001), the dissemination of architectural types and styles, and regional and international companies investing in the real estate sectors (Douglass and Huang 2007) are some of the main forms of supranational connection that have influenced the shaping of the ideas of the city. In these contexts, ideas assemble (Ong and Collier 2005) at a particular time and place into a 'skein' made of explicit and unconscious references that different actors project onto the urban environment. While we resist any temptation to essentialise 'Asian urbanism' in a way that would consider urban development in the region as fundamentally specific and different from that in other parts of the world, we recognise processes, changes, and pressures that are now faced by many (if not most) Asian cities (Danieri and Douglass 2009). These commonalities justify our consideration of the cities of Asia under a common theoretical and conceptual umbrella while, at the same time, questioning the dialectics between shared dynamics and striking diversities in different cities in this continent. The eleven chapters that compose this book show that the ideas of the city are constructed by linking localities to places beyond (Massey 1993, quoted in Olds 2001). This means that the producers and users of the city capture and make use of diverse arrays of cultural content and urban references that circulate through multi-layered and multiscale networks.

In this respect, one of the objectives of this book is to follow the threads of the ideas of the city back through their historical trajectories and origins. In doing this, the authors engage with the long cultural exchanges between Asian and Western powers, as well as with the recent history of internationalisation in urban politics. The focus on the historical and multiscale circulation of the ideas of the city is advantageous for two main reasons. On the one hand, it helps in moving beyond the traditional dichotomy that has opposed 'the European' to 'the Asian' city. On the other hand, it questions the relevance of Western urban patterns and models for understanding the historical evolution of Asian cities (Evers and Korff 2000; Olds 2001; Goh and Yeoh 2003). As a response to these debates, the chapters that compose this book unpack the fluidity and the abrupt shocks between diverse meanings of space and place, through the perceptions and different forms of production of Asian urban societies in colonial and postcolonial times.

While we make no claims of completeness and are mindful of the gaps that we will inevitably leave unexplored in addressing such a broad theme

as ideas of the city, we hope that the geographical and methodological diversity of the chapters that compose this volume will be able to address the ‘rich terrain of complexities’ (Goh and Yeoh 2003: 3) that coproduce contemporary Asian cities.

1.1 The Dialectics Between Past and Present Urban Narratives

Two main thematic and methodological specificities define the approach to this volume. First, the editors analyse the ideas that shape contemporary Asian cities in their relation to the urban past and, in particular, to the pivotal historical moments that marked their evolution. Great stories and founding myths run throughout Asian urban history. Ideas and ideals of the city emerged with these narratives of cosmogenesis, in which the principles of cosmic order dictate the precepts shaping ancient urban settlements (Wheatley 1969). Angkor, the capital site of the Khmer Kingdom between the ninth and the fifteenth centuries, is one of the most emblematic realisations of the ‘galactic polity’¹ (Tambiah 2013). The seven capital cities built by successive kings materialised the cosmic order on earth through spatial orientation and symbolisms embedded in both architectural and urban space (O’Naghten 2000). Later, the European colonial powers introduced principles of modern and rational planning into Asian countries (Rabinow 1995; Sundaram 2010). Cosmic and religious symbolisms progressively lost their role as leading principles in urban planning, with the few exceptions in Southeast Asia being new national capitals founded in modern and contemporary times that sought to revitalise religious traditions through their architectural and urban shapes (Mandalay and Naypyidaw in Burma/Myanmar; Putrajaya in Malaysia).

Different ‘concatenations of meaning’ gained increased influence in the processes of urban planning and shaping. Especially in postcolonial contexts, these involved political ideologies that young Asian nations and authoritarian national and local powers projected onto the urban environment through planning. One example is Chandigarh, founded as the capital of Punjab following the independence of India from British rule in 1947,

1 Tambiah (2013: 503) ‘coined the label galactic polity to represent the design of traditional Southeast Asian kingdoms, a design that coded in a composite way cosmological, topographical, and politico-economic features. The label itself is derived from the concept of the mandala, which according to a common Indo-Tibetan tradition is composed of two elements—a core (manda) and a container or enclosing element (la)’.

and planned by Le Corbusier on the basis of a previous plan by Albert Mayer. In more recent times and across different contexts, urban planning has increasingly stated the pragmatic objective of rectifying the defects of the urban environment and improving the functioning of the 'urban machine', especially in emerging Asian countries that have been targeted by international development assistance (Musil 2013).

Following the global 'external shocks' that, since the 1990s, have had political, economic, and social consequences in Asian countries,² a number of cities, especially in Southeast Asia, have started to implement urban projects rather than the overarching urban plans that had largely depended on national authorities' support and approval. While they have increased their independence from the national and federal states, municipalities and urban authorities have been competing with each other to increase their international attractiveness, with coalitions of private and public actors implementing ambitious projects branding the city by renewed urban images (Pinson 2009). However, in several under-regulated contexts in Asia, such as Vietnam and Cambodia, the failure of overarching urban plans has also facilitated an increase in disconnected urban projects (Esposito 2012; Fanchette 2015; Fauveaud 2015). The *urbanisme de projets* ('urbanism of projects', Goldblum 2013) has indeed produced fragmented and dysfunctional urban environments that are shaped and transformed by the rationality of private, and sometimes volatile and speculative, capital.

In the face of an increasing fragmentation of the urban fabric, have the ideal visions of the city been suspended and the great narratives exhausted? Have planning and urban design abandoned the objective to provide not only spatial layouts, but also 'plans' for society? Have new narratives and utopias emerged that target the rising middle classes and the competitive rush of Asian municipalities? Tracking urban history as a source of urban ideas and ideals that have been revived, dismissed, neglected, or even rejected in contemporary times, this book questions the dialectic, and sometimes controversial, relationship between past and present narratives and imaginations in the construction of contemporary visions of the city in Asia, and their consequences for urban planning, urban design, and urban transformations.

The second specificity of this book is that it investigates the ideas of the city by looking at the relation between urban concepts and techniques of representation. The term 'urban concepts' includes the vast array of

2 These external shocks concerned deep transformations of production systems, the end of 'spatial Keynesianism', and changes in the socio-economic structure of the population (Pinson 2009).

knowledge, models, and doctrines that shape urban planning and design. By 'technique', we refer to the tools and means of expression and representation of architectural and urban space. Beyond the complex relationship between 'content' and 'form', it is possible to unpack the reciprocal influences between concepts and techniques throughout history. In Europe, the Quattrocento is a key moment in this historical process, as the invention of perspective durably restructured the interplay between content and form. The invention of perspective established a complex link between the city and the art of painting. The city, or parts of it, has been considered a privileged object for practicing perspective through painting. Since then, perspective has become one of the main constitutive elements of modern urban design, as Erwin Panofsky's *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (1991 [1927]) has insightfully shown. The invention of photography introduced new elements of complexity in the relation between the city and its representation, as Walter Benjamin (quoted by Gilloch 1996) has thoroughly theorised. Images capture the changing visage of the metropolis at a specific moment in time: they are 'dialectics at a standstill' (Benjamin 1999: 10 [1935]) fixing a continuously vanishing past that can only be brought back into light through remembrance. Therefore, images are 'historical' because they allow the extrapolation of the past into the present. While the relationship between the past and the present is linear in a temporal sense, the historical image and the present gaze establish a figurative relation in which the old and the new are intertwined. The dialectical image arrests the moment in which the forgotten past can be remembered (Gilloch 1996). The meaning of the past depends, then, on the particular constellation it enters into and forms with the present.

In this volume, this reflection frames the understanding of the role and interpretation of the urban past in present times that is made possible by an analysis of iconographic elements. More broadly, the dialectical relation between the 'there' and 'then' and the 'here' and 'now' that Benjamin conceptualised, provides insight into the multiple resurgences of the past into the present treatment of urban space. Some chapters in this book deal with the politics of heritage, the mental images of the city, feelings of nostalgia face to the disappearing of the historic fabric, and religious traditions and their revival. In contrast, other authors show that, modern urban planning makes explicit its relation to the urban past only in terms of denial and produces new imaginations of the ideal city that draw on political and economic ideologies. Although featuring in very different—and sometimes diametrically opposite—solutions, the past appears to be an inevitable and recurrent resource and reference contemporary cities have to come to terms with.

1.2 Producers of cities and urban productions

Common people, associations, experts, writers, professional elites, developers and investors, state authorities, and supranational entities are all important actors that animate the theatre of alliances and conflicts underpinning the physical making of contemporary Asian cities. To give an account of this social diversity, we see urban development as a human enterprise that takes place at various entwined levels of human connectivity and association.

Taken together, the chapters that compose this book show a clear distinction between the producers of cities and urban productions. Far from being limited to the traditional opposition between the professional and the vernacular, this distinction concerns, on one side, architects and urban designers and, on the other side, political, economic, and religious powers. As such, foreign architects, planners, and urban thinkers have not played the role of unilateral cultural brokers in Asia. Just to cite a few remarkable examples: Patrick Geddes and Daniel Burnham have respectively imported the English-based Town Planning Movement and the American-based City Beautiful Movement into Southeast Asia; Ebenezer Howard invented the urban model of the garden city, the principles of which later inspired urban planning in different non-Western contexts such as Japan, South Africa, and Hong Kong; Bruno Taut extensively studied Japanese architecture, which he appreciated for its minimalist simplicity; and more generally speaking, the work of famous architects like Le Corbusier, Louis Kahn, or Kenzo Tange, and the international expertise of well-known urban planners like Charles Abrams have facilitated Asian cities' access to the reference universe of international urbanism in a time when architects and planners are conceptualising ideas of 'the modern city'. (For the emblematic case of Dhaka, see Habib and De Meulder 2015: 230.)

Designers' approach to the city sharply distinguishes itself from the aforementioned forms of political, economic, and religious power that operate in contemporary Asian cities. In some cases, these refer to discourses of modernity; in others, their *modus operandi* resorts to 'classical' religious, political, and economic narratives that crystallise national identities around a set of common values and objectives for the development of a great nation. More broadly, religious, political, and economic powers generally fall outside the realm of professional and innovative thinking in the field of architecture and urbanism. Instead, they draw on inherited architectural and urban vocabularies that correspond most with their visions, intentions, and expectations. Under these circumstances, urban planning and design appear as fields of specific assemblages for these vocabularies that are put at the service of the narratives sustaining these forms of power.

Other chapters in this book focus on different forms of urban production that develop through the relationships that multiple actors establish with the inherited city. While they do not explicitly request the power to build, demolish, and reconfigure urban landscapes, they are based on the common people's ability to assign meaning and embed the architectural space (monuments, sculptures, and, more broadly, architectural and urban signs) with narrative content expressed through literary writing or iconography, or with the occupation and ordinary practice of urban space. Extensively drawing on Michel de Certeau (1980), contributions to this book deal with micro actions and tactics that negotiate pre-established orders and rationalities 'in the midst of the field of power relations that link localities to a wider world' (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 5). These contributions question the distinction between the city as an ideological construct and the city of everyday life (Evers and Korff 2000). The approach of this book consists, then, of looking at the great variety of concepts, representations, and memories that these actors project onto the built environment, at their appearance and disappearance over time, or, on the contrary, at the ways and processes through which they come to be entrenched in the urban fabric through heritage, topographies, and specific objects that are heavily charged with cultural and political meaning.

The aporetic character of the ideas of the city³ (Goh and Yeoh 2003) emerges once the plurality—and the pluralism—of the urban society of Asian cities is taken into account. Asian cities concentrate cosmopolitan populations, activities, and cultural influences and, for this reason, offer the conditions for the development of a diverse urbanity and social life. It is our purpose to question how Asian cities make and produce sense, and how meaning comes to be associated with various patterns of desirability that express the aspirations of the specific actors who have put them forward. Nevertheless, what 'desirable' means depends on a wide range of individual and collective aspirations that include wealth, comfort, innovation, economic development, memories and sense of belonging, order and rationality, social inclusion and justice, aesthetics, and amenities. In all its complexity, the authors of this edited volume analyse how the power to shape and bring ideas onto the stage may influence the power to act in the urban space (Mosse 2011), and how conflicts do not only concern the power to build,

3 Goh and Yeoh have insightfully argued that 'the meaning of the city is constituted in a variety of ways and perspectives, each of whose value and persuasiveness will depend upon the context of engagement; and that city sites are indeed aporetic, if the totality of these competing significations is taken into account' (2003: 6).

but also the power to impose a prevailing sense. We conceive of ideas, then, not as theoretical reflections disconnected from the physical and spatial dimensions of the city, but as political constructs and ‘embodied practices that shape identities and enable resistances’ (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 6).

1.3 Taking Ground in the Academic Field

This approach to the study of cities is grounded in a longstanding research tradition that has looked at human perceptions and practices in urban environments (Lynch 1977 [1960]) and has investigated the relationship between society and the production of urban space (Lefebvre 1974). It also draws on poststructuralist approaches to place-making that, since Michel Foucault (1980), have endorsed the ‘idea that power relations permeate all levels of society, with a field of resistances that is coextensive with them’ (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 6). Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977 [1972]) and Michel de Certeau’s (1980) works are particularly valuable, as they accent the practices of social agents, showing how human beings reinterpret and appropriate culture ‘in the midst of the field of power relations that links localities to a wider world’ (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 5). These contributions have laid the groundwork for understanding the production of urban space as a collective endeavour that constantly negotiates the political power and ideologies of the state.

Acknowledging the plurality of meaning that shapes the city, research in urban studies has looked at urban cultures as sites of difference and contestation. Culture is not seen as a coherent and stable body of knowledge, but rather as a dynamic and controversial process that gives the account of a particular moment in the evolution of a human society or group (Featherstone and Lash 1999; Herzfeld 2005). In the wake of this understanding, Hans-Dieter Evers and Rüdiger Korff (2000) have claimed the need for an ‘emic’ approach to the city that would retrieve the many-faceted meanings that the city has for its inhabitants. Urban studies have developed multiple pathways that address the relationship between ‘cultures’ and ‘cities’ in specific sectors (e.g. heritage, political ideologies, semiology of the built space, and literary and artistic perceptions of cities) and take root in different disciplinary backgrounds, such as anthropology, geography, urbanism, sociology, and cultural studies. More particularly, two edited volumes entitled *Imagining the City*—which mainly focused on Western contexts—have investigated ‘the active role of human imagination in organising discrete perceptions into constellations of meaning’ (Emden, Keen, and Midgley

2006, vol. 1: 1) as well as 'the ways in which urban spaces have been defined historically, on the function of cities as places of cultural interaction and demarcation, and on the role that cities can be seen to play in the preservation and transmission of cultural memories' (*ibid.*: 19). References to Asian cities seldom appear in these cultural approaches toward urban modernity. In the large and well-documented first part of Gary Bridge's and Sophie Watson's *A Companion to the City* (2000) entitled 'Imagining cities', Patrick Guinness's article 'Contesting imaginings of the city: City as locus of status, capitalist accumulation, and community. Competing cultures of Southeast Asian societies' (*ibid.*: 87-98) is the only one that deals explicitly with Asian cities. Based on Terry McGee's *Theaters of Accumulation* (Armstrong and McGee 1985), Guinness's account shows how 'religious or spiritual images as a key locus of identity comes into conflict with the dominant urban imaginary imported from the West that of capital accumulation challenges conventional Western views of modernity and the City' (Bridge and Watson *ibid.*: 8). Wishing to depart from the reference to McGee's approach, Robbie Goh's and Brenda Yeoh's *Theorizing the Southeast Asian City as Text* (2003) has tried to fill this gap. Presenting itself as a tentative 'exploration of the textual dynamics of the Southeast Asian City' (*ibid.*: 6) in the framework of postcolonial urban studies, the book assumes a critical position regarding the ways of reading the city. Based on case studies of a limited number of cities (and mostly referring to the Singaporean context), it focuses on the ideologies at work in urban discourses and city symbols rather than on the underlying ideas of the city.

Drawing on this theoretical background, our volume aims to bring together the complexity and interconnectedness of the ideas of the city through eleven chapters that, from different perspectives, ask how cultural and political backgrounds shape the production and practice of contemporary Asian cities. To give an account of the commonalities and diversities across Asia, we have felt it particularly important to expand the scope of this book to case studies located in East Asia (Chengdu in P.R. China; New Songdo City in South Korea; Macao); Southeast Asia (Naypyidaw in Myanmar; Manila and Baguio in the Philippines; Hanoi in Vietnam; Jakarta in Indonesia); and South Asia (Delhi and Calcutta/Kolkata in India). In all their diversity, the chapters engage with the diverse modes of expression and interpretation of contemporary Asian cities. They examine these modes from a technical angle, or from other relevant approaches that help decode the ideas, imaginaries, and ideologies of the city at a particular moment in time. Hence, they reveal the reciprocal relationship between representations and the urban fabric: the first is based on the latter, but also contributes to its shaping.

The authors have used different sources and looked at different objects to analyse the ideas of the city in Asia. These are simultaneously used as both the means and objects of investigation: iconography and other visual materials, interviews, field notes, literary writings, historical archives, architectural projects and urban plans, and urban policies and discourses. Coming from various backgrounds, their contributions define the city as the object of an interdisciplinary inquiry that includes not only the traditional tools of architecture, urbanism, and geography, but also ethnographic methods, textual and discourse analysis, semiology, and conversational analysis.

1.4 Content and Structure of the Book

The book has three parts:

Part 1 Images and Symbols

Part 2 Tales of the City

Part 3 Political and Urban Discourses.

The following pages have a twofold objective: on the one hand, we present the content of each of these parts on the basis of the content of the individual contributions; on the other, we problematise the research themes that emerge from putting together diverse research perspectives, case studies, and analytical methods under a common thematic umbrella.

1.4.1 Images and Symbols

'Images' and 'symbols' are very broad concepts. For this reason, we feel it is necessary, in the first instance, to narrow their definitions in reference to the content and theoretical orientations of the chapters that compose this edited volume. 'Images' are mental representations: impressions that have often been deliberately created and can be used to legitimise local and national authorities (Nas 1993), to foster tourism (Selwyn 1996), or to attract investors, companies, and new residents. A symbol has been defined as 'something' (e.g. an object or other form of expression), 'that stands for something else' (Schneider 1980 [1968]: 1): generally, an idea of a rather abstract nature (Nas 1993). According to Roland Barthes (1994 [1985]), a symbol is a syntagmatic or paradigmatic organisation, which means that there is no regular correspondence between the signifier and the signified. Rather, their connection is approximate or ambiguous and may change over

time: 'the signified are like mythical beings, of an extreme imprecision, and because at a certain moment they always become the signifiers of something else: the signified pass, the signifiers remain' (*ibid.*: 416).

The analysis of urban symbolisms and images is based on the assumption that all human space is a 'signifying space' (Barthes 1986). This assumption was given evidence by Kevin Lynch's pioneer work, *The Image of the City* (1977 [1960]), which conceived of the city as a readable object composed of discrete units that have specific meanings. According to Lynch, every city is made of the alternation and juxtaposition of marked and non-marked elements; that is to say, of units that have or are deprived of meaning. Further studies on cities have tried to 'excavate this jungle of symbolism' (Nas and De Giosa 2011: 286). They have dealt with the objects—urban spaces—but also with the city as a whole, both of which reflect symbolic configurations and shifting images that reveal tensions, conflicts, and social changes (Erdentug and Burçak 1998).

Part 1 provides fresh perspectives on the study of symbols and images.

Sayandeep Chowdhury (Chapter 2) introduces us to the volatile nature of urban symbolism. His chapter focuses on Calcutta's Ochterlony Monument. This early nineteenth century edifice (1828) was a triumphant British war memorial, later replete with stories of colonial engagements around it, until it trespassed into the period of post-coloniality as the chief site of Calcutta's political spectacles and multitudinous congresses. Built of mixed architectural traditions, this unique, erect form is a most pregnant repository of both a cultural and a visual imaginary. It was a foundational symbol of metropolitan Calcutta as part of the British Empire that was repeatedly photographed, mined, and cited in endless visual reproductions. Later, an act of symbolic purging of its legacy rebaptised it as an Indian war memorial co-opted as a tourist site. The author argues that the Ochterlony Monument's unique trajectory as a colonial and postcolonial site of transformational power and meaning provides us with a critical vantage point enabling a reading of cultural heritage that can radically reimagine the history of the transformation of an ambivalent colonial past into an equally ambivalent post-coloniality. The complex series of associations between the built object and symbolic meanings are made possible thanks to the consensus of a group—the colonial elite—and, later, the broader endorsement of postcolonial Indian society, which accepts that the Ochterlony's meaning is reformed.

Chowdhury's chapter shows how emblematic built objects are entitled to express values that hierarchically prevail within a given society, once they are legitimated by a powerful group or by wide social consensus.

However, the ‘world of correlations’ between the signified and the signifiers cannot be imprisoned in a full or final signification, as they may be the object of further change and recomposition, as Roland Barthes insightfully argued (1986). In the same line of thought, Peter Nas (1993) argued that urban symbolism is established by a stable power structure or by a strong elite. This is evident not just in the ancient Asian urban foundations that determined the structure and morphology of the city through cosmological principles (Tambiah 2013[1976]; Wheatley 1983; O’Naghten 2000), but also in colonial and postcolonial settings such as Calcutta where foreign and national elites have successively enjoyed strong power over the field of urban planning and design. The city appears as a ‘unitary power structure’ (Nas 1993) whose overall image derives from its prominent parts that are extensively represented through iconography.

Ian Morley (Chapter 4) provides an insightful understanding of the circulation of images of colonial Manila that conveyed an encompassing idea of the city. The American colonial government implemented in the Filipino capital the principles of the City Beautiful Movement, as modelled on the ideas of Daniel Burnham. The implementation of these principles in Southeast Asia produced new types of urban spaces, healthy living environments, and grand civic districts. The mediatisation of images representing the emblematic urban spaces crafted in line with this urban movement created a new ‘perceptive space’ that aimed to foster the assembly of nationhood. Morley argues that, while city planning was utilised to articulate the superiority of American civilisation—partly because the Americans viewed the Philippines in 1898 as being ‘backward’ in nature—it was also a vital element in the manufacture of Philippine nationhood. Given this historical backdrop, Morley offers a treatise on the spatial and cultural concept of the American city in the Philippines, and how the form of the ‘new city’ illuminated the contrast between the modern age and a unified Filipino population on the one hand, and the ‘uncivilised’, that is to say tribal, condition of society during the Spanish era (1521-1898) before the advent of the American colonisation, on the other. The circulation of images therefore corresponds to the branding of a new identity that breaks with the urban past and engages with the path of progress and modernity—not only for the city, but for all society.

In a postcolonial environment, Donald Seekins (Chapter 3) gives an account of the emblematic role of the Upattasanti Pagoda, which distils the overall symbolic meaning of Naypyidaw, a city founded by the military regime as the new capital of Myanmar. As a spiritual fulcrum that expresses the religious conservatism of the leading power’s ideology, the

pagoda represents the new political and spiritual centre of the nation. The urban composition is indeed articulated around the pagoda; its spaces and buildings express and reinforce the same symbolic organisation. In these controlled urban landscapes, no space is left for individuals to negotiate other forms of symbolic organisation that may compete with the official one (Nas 1993). On the contrary, the sanctuary is aimed at building up and fostering social cohesion around this strong symbol established by the Burmese government, or even its absolute leader at the time of building the new capital from scratch: Than Shwe. The cases of Calcutta, Manila, and Naypyidaw, as these are presented in this volume, show how political power imposes an overarching 'symbolic regime' (Leeuwen 2011) and image of the city, which it aims to disseminate worldwide through iconography and photography. Specific parts of the city stand for the whole, and through these emblematic parts the whole city is gathered around a unitary—but simplistic—idea that avoids counternarratives as well as dissent.

From a different standpoint, Sheyla Zandonai (Chapter 5) provides an insightful analysis of how the contemporary image of the city of Macao is concomitantly constructed as both a UNESCO World Heritage site and a gambling city. This twofold image takes ground in a complex set of social and political practices that draw on different parts of the city, which are alternatively promoted as heritage or gambling spaces. Both aspects contribute to define the identity of a 'fantasy city' where culture is commoditised for tourists looking for mild cultural experiences as well as for the excitement and entertainment of the gambling environments. Zandonai's definition of Macao as a 'fantasy city' echoes the 'hypercity' (Nas and Samuels 2006) that is based on the concept of 'hyperreality' (Baudrillard 1994; Eco 1986). The hypercity 'encompasses the totality of the urban signifiers or symbol carriers that combine in a dynamic process of signification to represent the city, both to its inhabitants and to the rest of the nation-state, the region and the world' (Nas, Jaffe and Samuels 2006: 8). The symbolic side of the city is so compelling that it can eventually be seen as detached from reality. Coherence is then achieved when the production of signifiers conforms to the overall urban symbolism, and moreover coincides with the one the consumers of the signifiers agree on. Consistently, the commodification of Macao for tourism does not integrate social meanings or experiences of history and place, but on the contrary flattens the meaning of the city to the overall consumerist symbolism that strengthens the city's vocation as an international tourist destination. The case of Macao is representative of a broader tendency of contemporary cities to use urban image branding to attract national and international capital in order to improve their

positioning in global economic and diplomatic networks (Vanolo 2008). City branding has major impacts on urban economies, especially in the field of tourism (Paddison 1993). More particularly, urban labels such as World Heritage status play a major role in these strategies by improving the visibility and reputation of cities in the global scenario and, for these reasons, they become key components of urban policies (Fournier 2014). Urban labels are closely associated with the production of images and the reshuffling of symbolic regimes. In Macao, as in other urban contexts (Eizenberg and Cohen 2015), images celebrate entertainment, pleasure, and festivity, and its symbolism stands for the consumerist values of an international public of tourists and city users.

1.4.2 Tales of the City

Si la ville est là, c'est qu'elle fonctionne. Pour et par ceux qui l'habitent, y travaillent, la vivent, en vivent, la visitent, mais aussi en rêvent, la bénissent ou la haïssent. Et la disent. Car plus que tout autre objet, la ville fait parler les gens. Peut-être même en tant que telle, elle parle elle-même, à travers l'ensemble de signes qu'elle porte et qui la portent jusqu'au cœur des hommes. Elle fait parler, et davantage peut-être encore, elle les fait être. Au travers d'une géographie secrète, de multiples visages, que seuls révèlent les écrivains. (Racine 2004: 77)

In English: The city exists because it functions well. For those and by those that inhabit the city, work and live there, visit it and dream of it, bless it or hate it. And for those who tell about the city. Because people speak about the city more than any other object. The city speaks for itself, through the signs that lay within it, and that bring it into the heart of people. It makes people talk, and maybe even more, it allows people to exist. Only writers are able to uncover its secret geography and its multiple faces. (Translation by author)

In this text, Jean-Bernard Racine echoes Italo Calvino and mentions the secret geography of the city, suggesting that only writers may be able to disclose its multiple faces. Following a similar line of thought, Mary Ann Caws (1991) draws a parallel between cities and poetry, based on the fact that the two are subject to their readers' (and users') multiple emotional experiences and interpretations. Through literature, cities can therefore be recounted as 'objects of experience' (Scheen 2016), as literary writings are able to express such emotional and intellectual variety. The real and

the imagined, the factual and the experienced, 'transform each other in a multidimensional discursive praxis' (*ibid.*: 15).

Imagination can be used not only for broadly conveying feelings and experiences, but also for projecting people's hopes and existential aspirations onto the urban environment that becomes their scenery. Especially in the context of the intense urban transformations of colonial and postcolonial Asian cities, the rapid reshuffling of urban systems puzzles and disorients. Literature is used as a tool that gives voice to these discomforts, and as an alternative, virtual space of representation for people that have been marginalised in the framework of new urban orders.

In this book, Anindita Ghosh (Chapter 6) deals with nineteenth-century Calcutta, which was in the midst of fundamental change. From a constellation of three trading and farming villages, it was being transformed into the centre of the British Empire in India. Its rapid growth, stretching longitudinally along the banks of the Hooghly, also saw segregation in the residential settlement pattern—between the White Town with largely European inhabitants populating the area around the fort, and the teeming Black Town peopled by Indians squeezed into the northern part of the city. The infrastructural layout also mimicked the racially distinct habitations, as metalled roads, gas and later electric lights, and updated sewage disposal mechanisms, ubiquitous within the borders of the European parts of the city, were either virtually non-existent or painfully slow to reach the northern indigenous quarters. Ghosh questions how this divided city was represented in contemporary writings and what this tells us about the ways in which the urban sphere was made by its people, and not just by the material and administrative infrastructure that was part and package of the colonial city. Gleaning materials from contemporary Bengali memoirs, songs, dramas, and street literature, her chapter presents the city as shaped by the everyday experiences of its people. It investigates how the residents responded to the technologisation of the city and to its infrastructural changes, and what their conception was of the new urban space and work time regularity. Ghosh also shows in what ways their sensibilities were shaped by, and how they in turn impacted, the city's municipal vision. In all of this, the author argues that each social constituency that composed Calcutta's human landscape claimed a distinct sense of ownership. Multiple histories of colonial Calcutta can then be written that encompass such diversity and deal with the complex entanglements between the 'factual and historical city' and the 'literary imaginings' of it (Scheen 2016).

Ownership claims reflect the fundamental quest 'for happiness, or simply' for 'some place to dwell securely' (Caws 1991: 10). This quest for 'ontological

security', which Anthony Giddens (1991: 35-69) defined as a sense of order and continuity in regard to individual experiences, has been endangered by the contemporary urban development of Asian cities that often occurs at the expense of the weakest layers of the urban societies. As Johanna Hahn shows in her chapter on contemporary Delhi (Chapter 8), literature can be used as a way to give visibility to marginalised experiences of the city. The author asks how young slum dwellers imagine the Indian city, and why they needed to transfer their written experiences from blog entries into a published book. She explores strategies of inscribing deviant vernacular ideas of the Indian capital into mainstream memory discourses, which are dominated by Anglophone city biographies and memoirs that celebrate Delhi's 'glorious past'. Hahn focuses on everyday life, semi-fictional accounts of the experience of eviction from the Nangla Manchi neighbourhood. This informal settlement was previously located on the banks of the Yamuna River in central Delhi and was bulldozed in a 'beautification action' in 2006. The story collections *By Lanes* ('*Galiyom se*'), and *Trickster City* and its Hindi original *bahurūpiyā śahar* constitute a counterbalance to the dominant narratives and images feeding into collective memory. The publication has literalised vernacular texts, as it has transposed them into a proper book—a medium that is still considered to be the most appropriate channel to inscribe alternative images into a dominant memory discourse.

Stories serve as a medium of collective memory and self-immortalisation. They inscribe symbolic marks on the collective lieux de mémoire—'sites of memory'—(Nora 1996 [1992]) that become meaningful not only for the writer but also for the reader. They also fulfil a semi-official function as documents by which the authors stake their claim as city dwellers who have rights on the urban space from where they were evicted. As Nepveu and Marcotte (1992) argued, drawing on literary writings on Montreal, the city exists in literature when 'it becomes a question' and when it 'asks questions' (*ibid.*: 8). In this respect, both Delhi and Calcutta represent valuable literary cities, as they pose the problems of social segregation, memory making, and ownership of urban space across colonial and postcolonial times. The two chapters reflect which critical answers are provided by and through literature to the questions that define urban ethos: 'how to be "at home" in a world where our identity is not given, our being together in question, our destiny contingent and uncertain' (Raichman 1991: 144).

The political role of literary writings can also go hand in hand with the creation of 'urban mythology': 'a symbolic grid' that characterises and make possible an intimate contact with the city through literary writing (Lévy 2006: 41). This dimension predominates in Kenny Ng's chapter (Chapter 7) on Chengdu, which

looks with critical eyes at its contemporary urban transformations driven by the slogan 'World Modern Garden City'. In this framework, historical preservation is used as a strategic economic project to increase the city's cultural capital and boost tourism. In a time of 'global urbanism', the chapter interrogates the interplay of physical urban space with the literary representation of the city in the historical novels written by Li Jieren (1890-1962). The author of the chapter takes on the role of the 'flâneur' (aimless stroller) and walks in Li Jieren's novels' footsteps to highlight the affective bond of 'topophilia' that literature facilitates between people and places. The writer holds the interpretative keys to the city (Nepveu and Marcotte 1992) and participates in the 'mythification' of places by associating them with images and symbols. The evidence of this power lies in the Ng's fidelity to the places described in Li Jieren's novels. By walking the city, he re-inscribes those meanings into the urban space and gives them an additional visibility through his photographs that could not be provided by historical novels. The originality of Ng's chapter lies precisely in his twofold perspective: on the one hand, he writes the 'pessimistic story' of the transformation of the historical landscape introduced by global urbanism (Finnegan 1998); on the other, he provides a contemporary reinterpretation of literary memories that contributes to giving them a new life.

Taken together, the three chapters of this section pose questions about the existence of communities in the urban space that self-recognise themselves—and are recognised as such—because they share claims, memories, and affects that are celebrated in the literature on them. Thus, literary writings witness the existence of these communities. They also reinforce their power, as they express and reproduce their values and the 'sense of beyond' (Young 1986: 21) that comes from the perception of the positive inexhaustibility of human relations in the city that one cannot grasp as a whole, but can only experience through variegated literary productions. As David Jarraway (2002) showed in the case of Wallace Thurman's uncomfortable identity as a gay and a Black in early twentieth century America, literary writings recount the city's openness—or lack thereof—to the coexistence of strangers in all their unassimilated otherness and multiple subjectivities.

1.4.3 Political and Urban Discourses

The four chapters that compose Part 3 develop an entwined, twofold perspective on the analysis of urban planning: on the one hand, they examine the discourses that underpin and accompany the elaboration and implementation of planning and projects; on the other hand, they look at planning and, more broadly, at the form of the city, as discourses.

The first approach is informed by Michel Foucault's theory on discourse (1969).⁴ Foucault defined discourse as a 'normally unacknowledged substrate of human communication that crosses disciplinary boundaries and determines which statements are considered as generative and truthful at a given time' (Tett and Wolfe 1991: 196). Within this conceptual framework, plans can be considered as visual representations of discourses, and models, spatial patterns, and architectural objects as integral parts of discursive strategies. Planning reinforces discourse by transposing it into a material form that becomes the environment of everyday life. Foucault also argued that discourses are based on knowledge claims. However, their rationality is only superficial, as they hide deeper dynamics of power that play out within and between competing discourses (Richardson 1996).

The second approach is based on Roland Barthes' argument (1994) that the city has constituted a discourse since Greek antiquity: 'the city is a discourse, and this discourse is actually a language: the city speaks to its inhabitants, we speak to our city, the city where we are, simply by inhabiting it, by traversing it, by looking at it' (*ibid.*: 415). In this discussion, Barthes drew on the ground-breaking contribution of Lynch (1977 [1960]), who investigated the readability of the city. Analysing the discrete units that compose urban space and the way they are experienced and interpreted by urban dwellers, Lynch associated the city, its symmetries, opposition of sites, and spatial layouts, with a text whose grammar and syntax could be analysed through the 'laws' organising the process of sensory perception provided by the Gestalt.

Following these two connected research approaches, the chapters that compose Part 3 question the social and political processes that embed architectural and urban forms with ideologies, beliefs, and values. They show how different forms of power appropriate knowledge and weave it into urban discourses that, through planning, argue the beneficial value of political, religious, and economic ideologies, and question the various forms of materiality that urban discourses help generate.

Two chapters deal with political ideologies and their materialisation in the urban space. Hans Schenk retraces the idea of the modern socialist city in Hanoi, which finds expression in neighbourhoods of social housing (Chapter 12). The author highlights the tension between the attempts to plan the city and shape the society in line with Soviet models and ideas (Kopp 1970),

4 Unlike Michel Foucault (1969, 1971, 1980), Jürgen Habermas (1987: 294-326) conceived of discourse as a type of communicative and critical rationality that is constructed and discussed by equal actors.

and the modest realisations of the collective housing complexes associated with industrial facilities that created self-contained communities. Other ideas of modernity have replaced the socialist one since the 1980s, when the economy was restructured and the role of the state in providing welfare programs such as subsidised housing was minimised. Private small-scale construction activities consequently emerged. In the era of economic opening, semi-legal—locally branded as ‘popular’—private building activities of all kinds mushroomed, in which all categories and classes of the local population were involved, while planners and public authorities seemed paralysed. From the 1990s onwards, the state developed new options with regard to urban development and housing. Market orientations have come to the fore: development corporations and policy makers designed and implemented large-scale housing estates, mainly catering to the urban middle and upper classes. Multiple real estate developments—sometimes inappropriately designed as ‘projects’—replaced the idea of an overall plan for the city.

In contrast, drawing on the case of Jakarta between 1966 and 1977, Pawda Tjoa shows how urban planning can be a consistent materialisation of a political ideology (Chapter 9). The period of research coincides with the governorship of Ali Sadikin, a towering figure to whom all subsequent governors of Jakarta have been compared and have tried to equal. Utilising a main artery that stretches from the northern historic colonial town of *Kota Tua* (‘Old Town’) and passes through the present commercial centre into one of the first satellite towns in the south, called *Kebayoran Baru* (New Kebayoran), Tjoa traces how the political ideology became physically manifest during the transition from the end of Soekarno’s Guided Democracy to the first decade of Suharto’s New Order. She shows that even though the ideology of development was presented as a tool to create order, it became a powerful means of distancing and differentiating between ethnic groups and social classes. Thus, ideology continued to be used as a catalyst to create difference. In fact, the successful execution of the urban plans during this time has been in part attributed to the development of categories and ‘heterotopias’ of deviance, which in the longer term cultivated a mind-set of fear that would define the continued growth of Jakarta for at least the subsequent twenty years.

The Indonesian case reveals that urban and political discourses are closely intertwined with a dialectics of inclusion and exclusion (Karsten 2009). It is aimed at inventing a desirable representation of place that legitimates power, creates value for a property, and shapes a preferred identity. Hew Wai Weng (Chapter 10) shows how these two latter aspects are interconnected in the

making of contemporary Malaysian and Indonesian cities underpinned by a revival of religious values. Using Depok (Indonesia) and Bangi (Malaysia) as case studies, the author examines how and under what conditions middle-class Muslim identities and aspirations are being materialised in urban settings through processes of place-making. By proposing the term 'religious gentrification', the author argues that urban renewal and religious revival are co-articulated processes. On the one hand, urban places are redefined to accomplish Islamic principles; on the other hand, Islamic practices are adapted to modernised urban patterns. Both the Malaysian and Indonesian suburbs embody an idea of desirability that appeals to the rising middle classes and associates religious identity with the attractiveness of a new type urban environment. In a country where Muslims represent a majority, but not the totality, of the national population, urban design becomes part of a hegemonic project that serves a specific group and strives to impose Islamic ethics as a dominant interpretative frame (Giddens 1979).

A complementary perspective is offered by Chamee Yang (Chapter 11), who deals with economic ideologies in the context of global neoliberalism that fosters competition between cities. Taking a close look at the case of the 'smart city' project in New Songdo City (on the outskirts of Seoul, South Korea), Yang elucidates the political economy of contemporary urban redevelopment and the discursive practices strategically employed to justify certain (dis)investments. Yang conducts a 'discursive analysis' of the various local media sources that allows the deconstruction of the dominant narrative of the smart city into its three prominent themes: the 'growth' of the city as an imperative in the age of global competition; the building of an 'international' and 'multicultural' city; and the utopian vision that believes in technological innovation as the solution to modern—urban—problems. The futuristic urban narrative nourishes the attractiveness of the city based, on the one hand, on new ways of imagining and, on the other, on a moral order that uses technical parameters to identify a 'good city' (Vanolo 2013). While the focus on technical parameters tends to depoliticise the meaning of the city and to instead demonstrate the rationality of the urban discourse that allows the hyper-technologisation of the urban environment, the production of well-performing urban environments implicitly argues for the beneficial nature of the political power that has made them possible. Nevertheless, the 'smart city' limits the opportunities for urban dwellers and users to counteract. Not only do its controlled spatial patterns leave little opportunity for inhabitants to appropriate and transform the urban space, but Songdo urban management also closely monitors spatial practices and the use of public and collective services, resulting in far-reaching threats to

individual privacy. The apparently depoliticised urban discourse conceals mechanisms of oppression of the possible alternative ways of occupying and shaping the urban space. The smart city discourse thus achieves the creation of 'docile' and 'disciplined' urban environments (*ibid.*). At the same time, it introduces new forms of governmentality where urban attractiveness, based on the argument of well-performing functionality and extreme security, conceptualise the city as an autonomous engine of economic growth that, eventually disconnected from the state, manufactures its own development.

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