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Mary Ann O'Donnell, Winnie Wong, and Jonathan Bach (eds.), *Learning from Shenzhen: China's Post-Mao Experiment from Special Zone to Model City*,

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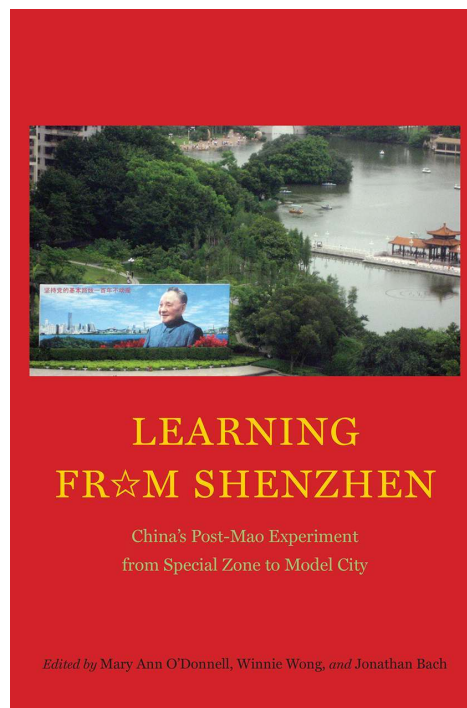
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- 1 Naming the volume “Learning from Shenzhen,” Mary Ann O'Donnell, Winnie Wong and Jonathan Bach make a topological reference to slogans in various political and economic contexts, namely, the Chinese advocacy of “learning from Dazhai” during the Cultural Revolution and the American “Learning from Las Vegas” of the post-modernist era. Shenzhen, a city demarcated as one of the pioneering special economic zones in the early 1980s, has served as “the” laboratory to various experiments that “play capitalism with communist pieces.”¹ The collection provides a cross-disciplinary examination of a frontier where capitalist logics are mobilised and situated in the former socialist land, resulting in a striated landscape of city and villages rich in model



politicians, model industries, model workers, model villages, and model events.

- 2 Dividing the city's 30 years of practices into three stages, the collection reviews the transformation in three parts: experiments (1979-92), exceptions (1992-2004), and extensions (2004- present). The first section deals with the institutional reforms unleashed by Deng Xiaoping through the ideological separation of socialist governance from capitalist capital accumulation. The governing tactic of "zone" is investigated to unravel its utility in mobilising and normalising market forces, daring politicians, and workers as self-responsible individuals in demarcated areas, and controlling the speed and geography of transformation that allows experiments of political leverage in an increasingly liberal market economy. The second section follows the zoning logic to explore exceptional rules, economies, and modalities of living in urban areas, and more importantly, the frictional interactions between smooth and striate surfaces. These interactions refer to cities and villages and the "gradation of licit and illicit, formal and informal, success and failure, and rural and urban." Writings in this section examine the physical technology of governance, such as mapping and demarcating, in drawing the first and second lines for forming a controllable frontier. Thus, national territory is divided and demarcated to impose various social, political, and economic rules for a fragmented land and population. As Bach argues, urban villages or villages-in-the-city are the most intriguing striates, offering affordable housing and labour to the instant creation of the city and utilising their rural vestiges to coproduce the city. The last section explores the deliberate effort of modelling to project Shenzhen as a global city through cases in creative industries, public health, and transportation. Unlike the first stage, when Shenzhen was the chosen one and thus was promoted by the central government, the extension stage after 2004 is filled with situated endeavours to model the city to other places in the country. These practices are usually in constrained situations because of their relative weakness in culture and creativity or in the administrative hierarchy of their aviation system. In his study of the Hong Kong-to-Shenzhen Airport collaboration through dispersed check-in locations and cross-border bus service, Hirsch observed that the modelling effort of Shenzhen through megastructure is somehow filled with frustration. Instead, pragmatism, improvisation, and entrepreneurialism give the experiments features of the conflicts of "a planned national economy (...) rigid geographic hierarchies (...) and the multipolar global capitalism that fetishize unfettered point-to-point mobility across national frontiers" (p. 13).
- 3 This collection is likely to become one of the few examples of concrete cross-disciplinary research straddling both area studies and urban studies. Scholars in area studies (in particular politics in China Studies) and urban studies (human geography, urban planning, urban sociology, and anthropology) seldom review each other's works. The call for cross-fertilisation of both disciplines remains unanswered, even though both disciplines seem to recognise the necessity of untangling China's transition along the two threads of capitalism and authoritarian governance. Most studies are still largely confined within their traditional wisdom: area studies care more about the polity, the party-state, and authoritarian governance, whereas urban studies focus more on capitalism. This volume, particularly the first section, testifies to a major step toward mingling the thinking and approaches of the two disciplines. Similarly, Mary Ann O'Donnell's chapter convincingly illustrates how personal mobility in the cadre-management system serves as the platform on which political elites mobilise capitalist

ideas in Shenzhen and on which the liberal concept in the political and economic senses was divided in the practices of land-oriented economy.

- 4 The other distinctive features of this collection may be attributed to its field site, namely Shenzhen, which is a frontier between China's hinterland and the outside world. The city illustrates the paradoxical character of all borders, as argued by Emma Xin Ma and Adrian Blackwell, to "function as a barrier [to] (...) preserve differences between adjacent territories," but concomitantly to "function as a machine to generate movement" (p. 124). This is globalisation. Borders are delineated in order to be crossed. The mobility of ideas, ideology, population, and capital are evident in all chapters, from the foreword by Ezra F. Vogel, who starts his chapter with his personal trip from Hong Kong to Shenzhen by walking across the Luohu Bridge, to the last chapter by Max Hirsh, who traces the cross-border mobility of passengers across the Shenzhen Bay Bridge, the structure of which is anchored in the seabed of Shenzhen and therefore is governed by PRC law, whilst the deck of which is an extension of Hong Kong territory and therefore is governed by the other system under the "One Country Two Systems" concept.
- 5 In "learning from Shenzhen," one must be wary of the issue of generality and particularity. China's transition cannot be reduced to being synonymous with Shenzhen. Even the Shenzhen model itself has had its ups and downs in the post-Mao era, subject to changing ideological priorities in different political regimes. Whereas the first section of this volume has fittingly situated Shenzhen in the political regime of Deng, who with his southern tour in 1992 set the main task as "preventing Leftism from slowing down reform," the following two sections of this volume are not as closely linked to the respective regimes of their times. For instance, the regime of Jiang Zemin, who cited Mao's words to call for "one hundred flowers to bloom," is characterised by the decentralisation of power and mushrooming of local growth coalitions and city-regions. This was a time when Shenzhen was challenged by its rivals, as exemplified by the Zhuhai-Hong Kong-Macau Bridge that deliberately bypasses Shenzhen. Thus, the degree to which the future can be modelled by learning from Shenzhen remains unknown.

NOTES

1. David Stark, *The Sense of Dissonance: Accounts of Worth in Economic Life*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2009.

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