

REPORT

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Chinese New Towns

CHINESE NEW TOWNS

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Chinese New Towns

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What is a new town? Looking from Chinese new towns, this question is unanswerable. The misunderstandings and opaqueness of the Chinese urbanisation process make both the new towns and our sight ambiguous. Entering the new towns force us to rediscuss simple narrations and old models. Walking through Tongzhou, Zhaoqing and Zhengdong, three new towns - designed, under construction and built - located in an old industrial district of the eastern suburban expansion of Beijing, on the edge of Guangdong Province in the Pearl River Delta global city-region and near Zhengzhou, the capital of Henan, allows to understand in which strong way the huge urbanisation process affecting contemporary China is at the same time complex and simplex, global and local, fascinating and astonishing.

Chinese new towns are neither very exemplary nor new. When viewed from the point of view of the relationships they create with their environment, new towns do however appear more interesting than when observed within their boundaries. Not due to any original traits they may have when compared to the external environment, but rather to the way in which their contradictory assertion pries open a world, and with it the language to describe it. Considered thus, yes, Chinese new towns are new. They oblige us to radically rethink how to say and to make the city, whether in China or elsewhere.

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