



## *Conceiving Infrastructures in a Chinese Register*

### Workshop Overview

This will be the first of three workshops for a Henry Luce Foundation-funded initiative titled “China Made: Asian Infrastructures and the ‘China Model’ of Development.” We seek to develop a theoretical and methodological agenda for bringing infrastructure studies into conversation with China’s domestic and export infrastructures. Building on Harvey et al’s (2017, 6,) argument that: “The question ‘what is infrastructure’ must be addressed and experimented with, in registers at once conceptual and empirical”, this workshop will focus on how to conceive, theorize, and research China’s infrastructural developments within and beyond its borders. The goal of this workshop is to bring together participants who focus on China with those who have studied infrastructures in other Asian contexts, to sharpen questions and methods of analysis for further investigations of the conceptual-empirical registers of China’s infrastructural development.

### *The China Made Project*

China’s focus on infrastructure as the centerpiece of its foreign policy and development aid initiatives has garnered significant media and academic attention. China’s investments in Africa, Latin America, and in neighboring Asian regions have, in particular, been the subject of much focus and have generated the idea of a ‘China Model’ of export investment and development. For some, this model is a pragmatic, non-ideological form of investment in much needed modernization. For others, it’s a recipe for authoritarian capitalism and neo-colonialism. Regardless, the model suggests a newfound assertiveness in China’s foreign policy, one which overturns an earlier paradigm established under Deng Xiaoping that China focus on “biding time and building capabilities.” Academic work on China’s export infrastructures has largely focused on the geopolitical implications of the Belt & Road Initiative, and on the political-economic dimensions of infrastructure investment as a ‘spatial fix’ for China’s chronic overproduction crises.

With three workshops, *China Made* seeks to shift our focus away from geopolitical, international relations, and economic analyses of the ‘China Model’ to a finer-grained examination of the material properties of infrastructures themselves, how these relate to on-the-ground social, political, and cultural formations, and how such a grounded focus can in turn encourage a rethinking of conventional understandings of China’s domestic and Asian export infrastructures. This first workshop is comparative in scope, and is designed to lay the groundwork for more specific inquiries into China’s domestic and export infrastructures.

We view infrastructure as a significant theoretical orientation and methodological tool for better understanding social, cultural, and political change within China and within China’s involvement in neighboring states. As Harvey et al note (2017, 6), “a focus on infrastructure can cut across the tensions between surface and depth that mark social theory.” These tensions are, we believe, precisely what current scholarship on China’s foreign push is challenged to overcome. The study of infrastructure can help link abstract processes and ideas to on-the-ground material conditions in important new ways.

We seek to draw our attention to the often-unnoticed political work of infrastructure, particularly at the scale of everyday life. At the same time, we anticipate that the study of the

political effects of infrastructure in China and in Chinese-influenced projects in Asian countries may upend assumptions formed in more liberal governing contexts. Finally, we seek to problematize the popular narrative of the 'China Model,' which tends to misunderstand the contexts within which infrastructures emerge, which are often highly local and enmeshed in the everyday lives of many different actors.

### *Workshop Objectives*

In the broadest sense, the goal of the workshop is to develop a theoretical and methodological agenda for bringing infrastructure studies into conversation with China's domestic and export infrastructures. We intend to distill the conversation into a published paper that addresses this important gap in both the infrastructure and China studies fields. In preparation for the workshop, we ask each participant to respond in writing to two key questions (see below); some of these we would like to eventually post on the China Made website after the workshop. We also would like to interview some of the participants, and post edited versions of these interviews on the site as well.

### *Questions for Participants*

**Please respond in writing (maximum 3,000 words) by September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018.** Broadly, the workshop aims to address the question: how do we conceive of infrastructure in a Chinese register? The following two questions hope to allow us to move the conversation in that direction.

1. How do you define/approach/conceptualize infrastructure? What are the key sources and/or intellectual genealogies that have informed your approach?
2. How does this definition/approach/conceptualization, in turn, inform your work? Discuss one or two empirical cases from your work that reflect this (feel free to consider how such an approach informs work that you are only beginning, are currently in the midst of, or are just hoping to do in the future; in other words, preliminary and experimental discussions are welcome). *We are particularly interested in empirical discussions that help us think through broader issues of theorizing and conceptualizing infrastructure.*

### *Workshop Panels*

Instead of the typical 'presentation and discussion' format, this workshop will consist mostly of **panel discussions organized around the major themes** that emerge from the response papers. For each panel session, we ask that the participants be prepared to comment on the response papers for that session. The goal is to have participants draw out key conceptual, analytical, and methodological issues revolving around each theme. While we have made choices about who belongs in what panel, we recognize that most of you are doing work that would easily fit into any of these panel session themes, so please do not feel that your work is being narrowly interpreted due to where you've been placed.

Each panelist will be asked to speak for **5-10 minutes** to open things up; we ask that each panelist **bring at least one image** to display. The reason for the image(s) is to try and avoid the panel discussions becoming too abstract. If anything, infrastructures are about 'grounding' and substrata, and we hope the discussions will remain grounded as much as possible. We're hoping that panelists can, in their comments, pull out compelling points of comparison and contrast

among the papers in the panel, as well as help us think about what they may tell us about ‘conceiving infrastructure in a Chinese register.’

The panel themes are as follows:

1. Temporalities: rehabilitation, maintenance, decay – many of the papers address questions of durability, accretion and other changes over time, fragility, breakdown, the provisional nature of some infrastructures, the need for maintenance, the ways infrastructures are rebuilt or rehabilitated after times of war or instability, and the nature of ruins and ruination.
2. Spatialities: zones, networks, exceptions – this is a theme that is particularly emphasized in China or in projects emanating from China. Many of the papers raised related questions of infrastructural space, urbanism and urban planning, zones as spatial technologies of government, but also as spaces of exception and as ‘parallel’ spaces to the state.
3. States: government, modernity, spectacle – many papers explored the infrastructural imaginations of the state, aspirations of modernity, the role of desire, visible infrastructures as spectacles of state (and other forms of) power, territorialization via infrastructure development, development and aid, and the importance of the state vis-à-vis the neoliberal focus on unfettered markets, as well as questions of ethics and responsibility.
4. The everyday: embodiment, scale, socio-materialities – a key tension running through most of the papers involves scale: everyday infrastructures accessible through ethnography compared with meso-scale (or larger) systems and technologies that are scaled beyond the human. Many papers thus explore themes of embodiment, of people-as-infrastructure, of everyday practice and appropriation.

### Workshop Program

We are planning to video and audio record the workshop; an edited transcript will be made available to all participants.

Day 1 (Wednesday October 17<sup>th</sup>)

- Arrivals
- 6:00 Informal dinner at Robert and Lauri McNown’s house

Day 2 (Thursday October 18<sup>th</sup>)

Time	Panel / Session	Chair / Moderator
9:00-9:30	Welcome and Introductions Tim Oakes, Director, Center for Asian Studies Helena Kolanda, Program Director for Asia, The Henry Luce Foundation	
9:30-10:30	Opening Session: Infrastructures in Process; Infrastructures in Ruins Andrew Barry and Tong Lam	Tim Oakes
10:30-10:45	Coffee Break	
10:45-12:30	Panel Session 1 Temporalities: rehabilitation, maintenance, decay Gökçe Günel, Suzanne Moon, Alessandro Rippa, Christina Schwenkel	Yaffa Truelove

12:30-1:30	Lunch	
1:30-3:00	Panel Session 2 Spatialities: zones, networks, exceptions Jonathan Bach, Andrew Grant, Pál Nyíri, Ximin Zhou	Tim Oakes
3:00-3:15	Coffee Break	
3:15-5:00	Panel Session 3 States: government, modernity, spectacle Mike Dwyer, Galen Murton, Edward Simpson, Amy Zhang, Yongming Zhou	Andrew Grant
5:00-6:30	Break (return to hotel)	
6:30	Van leaves for dinner (Gold Hill Inn, for workshop presenters)	

#### Day 3 (Friday October 19<sup>th</sup>)

9:00-10:45	Panel Session 4 The everyday: embodiment, scale, socio-materialities Katharine Rankin, Rachel Silvey, Hallam Stevens, Yaffa Truelove	Mike Dwyer
10:45-11:00	Coffee Break	
11:00-12:30	Closing Session: conceptions, translations, methodologies Max Hirsh, Tim Oakes, Dorothy Tang	Alessandro Rippa
12:30-1:30	Lunch	
1:30-3:00	Break (return to hotel)	
3:00-6:30	Walk at Chautauqua Park	
6:30	Dinner at Chautauqua Dining Hall (for workshop presenters)	

#### Day 4 (Saturday October 20<sup>th</sup>)

- Departures

#### Venue

Flatirons Room, Center For Community on the CU Boulder campus:  
<https://www.colorado.edu/map/?id=336&mrklid=193820>.

#### Lodging

CAS will cover your lodging for the nights of October 17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup>. Traveling participants will stay at the Hilton Garden Inn in Boulder (<http://hiltongardeninn3.hilton.com/en/hotels/colorado/hilton-garden-inn-boulder-WBUBOGI/index.html>); transportation to the workshop venue will be arranged. Please let us know if you wish to extend your stay, or if you will be making alternative lodging arrangements.

#### Travel

The nearest airport to Boulder is Denver International (DEN).

**US and Canada based participants** can book directly with CU's official travel provider, **Christopherson Business Travel**; please contact them at **855 462 8885** or [cutravel@cbtravel.com](mailto:cutravel@cbtravel.com). Tell them that **Liza Williams** is the authorizing CU Boulder employee. They have a list of workshop participants and will charge CAS directly. They can only charge CAS for the basic economy round trip fare from your home airport; any additional travel

arrangements you wish to make as part of your trip to Boulder (i.e multiple destinations) can be paid with a personal card.

**Europe and Asia based participants** can either have CAS event coordinator Liza Williams arrange their travel, or you can purchase your own ticket and get reimbursed after the workshop. Please note that we can only reimburse up to the equivalent economy fare between Denver and your home airport. Liza can be reached at [Liza.Williams@colorado.edu](mailto:Liza.Williams@colorado.edu) **303 735 5122**.

## Participant List

### *Conveners*

**Tim Oakes** – Professor of Geography, University of Colorado Boulder ([toakes@colorado.edu](mailto:toakes@colorado.edu))

**Max Hirsh** – Assistant Professor of Geography, University of Hong Kong ([hirsh@hku.hk](mailto:hirsh@hku.hk))

**Dorothy Tang** – Adjunct Assistant Professor of Architecture, University of Hong Kong and Doctoral Student, Urban Studies and Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology ([dstang@mit.edu](mailto:dstang@mit.edu))

**Emily Yeh** – Professor of Geography, University of Colorado Boulder ([emily.yeh@colorado.edu](mailto:emily.yeh@colorado.edu))

### *Invited Participants*

1. **Jonathan Bach** – Associate Professor of Global Studies, The New School ([bachj@newschool.edu](mailto:bachj@newschool.edu))
2. **Andrew Barry** – Professor of Geography, University College London ([a.barry@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:a.barry@ucl.ac.uk))
3. **Mike Dwyer** – Instructor, Geography, University of Colorado Boulder ([mike.dwyer@Colorado.EDU](mailto:mike.dwyer@Colorado.EDU))
4. **Andrew Grant** – Visiting Scholar, Center for Asian Studies, University of Colorado Boulder ([angr2662@colorado.edu](mailto:angr2662@colorado.edu))
5. **Gökçe Günel** – Assistant Professor of Middle Eastern and North African Studies, University of Arizona ([ggunel@email.arizona.edu](mailto:ggunel@email.arizona.edu))
6. **Tong Lam** – Associate Professor of Historical Studies, University of Toronto Mississauga ([tong.lam@utoronto.ca](mailto:tong.lam@utoronto.ca))
7. **Suzanne Moon** – Associate Professor of History of Science, University of Oklahoma ([suzannemoon@ou.edu](mailto:suzannemoon@ou.edu))
8. **Galen Murton** – Assistant Professor of Geographic Science, James Madison University ([murtongb@jmu.edu](mailto:murtongb@jmu.edu))
9. **Pal Nyiri** – Professor, Faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences, Vrije University ([p.d.nyiri@vu.nl](mailto:p.d.nyiri@vu.nl))
10. **Katharine Rankin** – Professor of Geography and Planning, University of Toronto ([rankin@geog.utoronto.ca](mailto:rankin@geog.utoronto.ca))
11. **Alessandro Rippa** – Postdoctoral Associate, Center for Asian Studies, University of Colorado Boulder ([alessandro.rippa@gmail.com](mailto:alessandro.rippa@gmail.com))
12. **Christina Schwenkel** – Associate Professor of Anthropology, University of California Riverside ([cschwenk@ucr.edu](mailto:cschwenk@ucr.edu))
13. **Rachel Silvey** – Professor of Geography and Planning, University of Toronto ([ai.director@utoronto.ca](mailto:ai.director@utoronto.ca))
14. **Edward Simpson** – Professor of Social Anthropology, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London ([es7@soas.ac.uk](mailto:es7@soas.ac.uk))

15. **Hallam Stevens** – Associate Professor of History, Nanyang Technological University ([hstevens@ntu.edu.sg](mailto:hstevens@ntu.edu.sg))
16. **Yaffa Truelove** – Assistant Professor of Geography, University of Colorado Boulder ([truelove@colorado.edu](mailto:truelove@colorado.edu))
17. **Amy Zhang** – Assistant Professor of Anthropology, New York University ([amyzhang@nyu.edu](mailto:amyzhang@nyu.edu))
18. **Yongming Zhou** – Professor of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin Madison ([yongmingzhou@wisc.edu](mailto:yongmingzhou@wisc.edu))
19. **Ximin Zhou** – Researcher, Brandnographer, Shanghai ([ximinzhou@qq.com](mailto:ximinzhou@qq.com))