

# Domesticating East Asian Cities

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The impetuous development that has marked the history of several East Asian cities during the last few years is often presented as a process that defies the ability of both urban dwellers and external observers to grasp it completely. The sheer scale and speed of the transformations at work is so overwhelming that these may appear to only be describable with superlatives. It is therefore not surprising that an important part of the international debate on East Asian cities has contributed to injecting new life into a well-established genre of post-World War II urban literature: the study of megalopolises, of which it has also perpetuated some hard-to-challenge stereotypes (Burdett, Sudjic, 2008).

Contemporary Asian metropolises have been described by some Western authors as essentially replicating, at a gigantic scale, patterns of urban change that had previously been experienced by European or North American cities, especially during their most intense phases of growth in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries (Davis, 2006; Campanella, 2008). From this perspective, East Asian cities, with their powerful growth, increasing inequalities and impending sense of crisis, may appear as the ultimate expression of neo-liberal capitalism (Harvey, 2008). Other observers have put a stronger accent on the original traits of East Asian cities: these are to be found in the multiple roots that connect territorial patterns to previous forms of social and spatial organisation and to the cultural specificities of each place, still deeply felt despite the globalising forces at work (Thun-Hohenstein *et al.*, 2013). A growing number of studies and many written and visual explorations have in fact, in recent times, defended the idea that the most relevant characters of these cities can be better grasped by observing them from the inside. The essays collected in this section of *Territorio* follow such a path, albeit in a plurality of declinations. They investigate the ways in which the ongoing transformation of East Asian cities and the policies that contribute to shaping them are connected to the everyday life of old and new citizens. They originate from an interest in the ordinary practices of urban life and they explore the ways in which urban change, no matter how spectacular, is ultimately rooted in the urban experience of individuals and groups.

The thematic section is articulated in five papers, respectively centred on Tokyo, Singapore, Guangzhou, Beijing and Shanghai, and in six micro-essays, returning to some of these cities or exploring additional case studies such as Hong Kong or Seoul. The texts are written in either English or Italian and are organised following a thematic order that privileges three broad – and mutually interconnected – topics: scale of observation; housing and the city; urban communities and spatial forms.

*L'impetuoso sviluppo urbano dell'Asia orientale è spesso descritto, per velocità e dimensione delle trasformazioni, attraverso la retorica dei superlativi o dei grandi numeri. Ma non tutto è gigantesco a Tokyo, Singapore, Pechino, Seul, Guangzhou o Hong Kong. Sebbene sia importante osservare queste città da più vaste prospettive geografiche, economiche e politiche, gli stessi luoghi possono essere studiati con efficacia anche da vicino: analizzando micro forme di abitare, riconoscendo esperienze urbane specifiche, seguendo il consolidarsi o il dissolversi delle comunità*

Parole chiave: città asiatiche; forme e scale dell'abitare; comunità urbane