

New Towns along the Belt and Road. Lanzhou

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Politecnico di Torino **China Room** **REPORT** **2021**

Edited by Edoardo Bruno, Camilla Forina, Marta Mancini

POLITECNICO DI TORINO

China Room

REPORT 2021

Edited by: Edoardo Bruno, Camilla Forina, Marta Mancini

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Cover: Shougang Capital Steel Plant in Shijingshan District, Beijing, 2019 (credit: Francesco Merlini - Prospekt Photographers).

China Room is a research center whose scholars belong to DAD - Department of Architecture and Design and DIST - Interuniversity Department of Regional and Urban Studies and Planning'

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Department of Architecture and Design



Interuniversity Department of Regional and Urban Studies and Planning
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The publication collects the outputs of the research activities of the China Room of the Politecnico di Torino referring to the period 2017 - 2020. Texts, images and graphics are the result of the work of professors, researchers and PhD students of the China Room or of collaborations with students, institutions and external research groups.

The aim is to present and disseminate the China Room's research themes and methods to the academic world. The information provided is intended as a general guide throughout a selection of a wider material production.

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Greetings from Directors of the Departments

by Andrea Bocco and Paolo Mellano

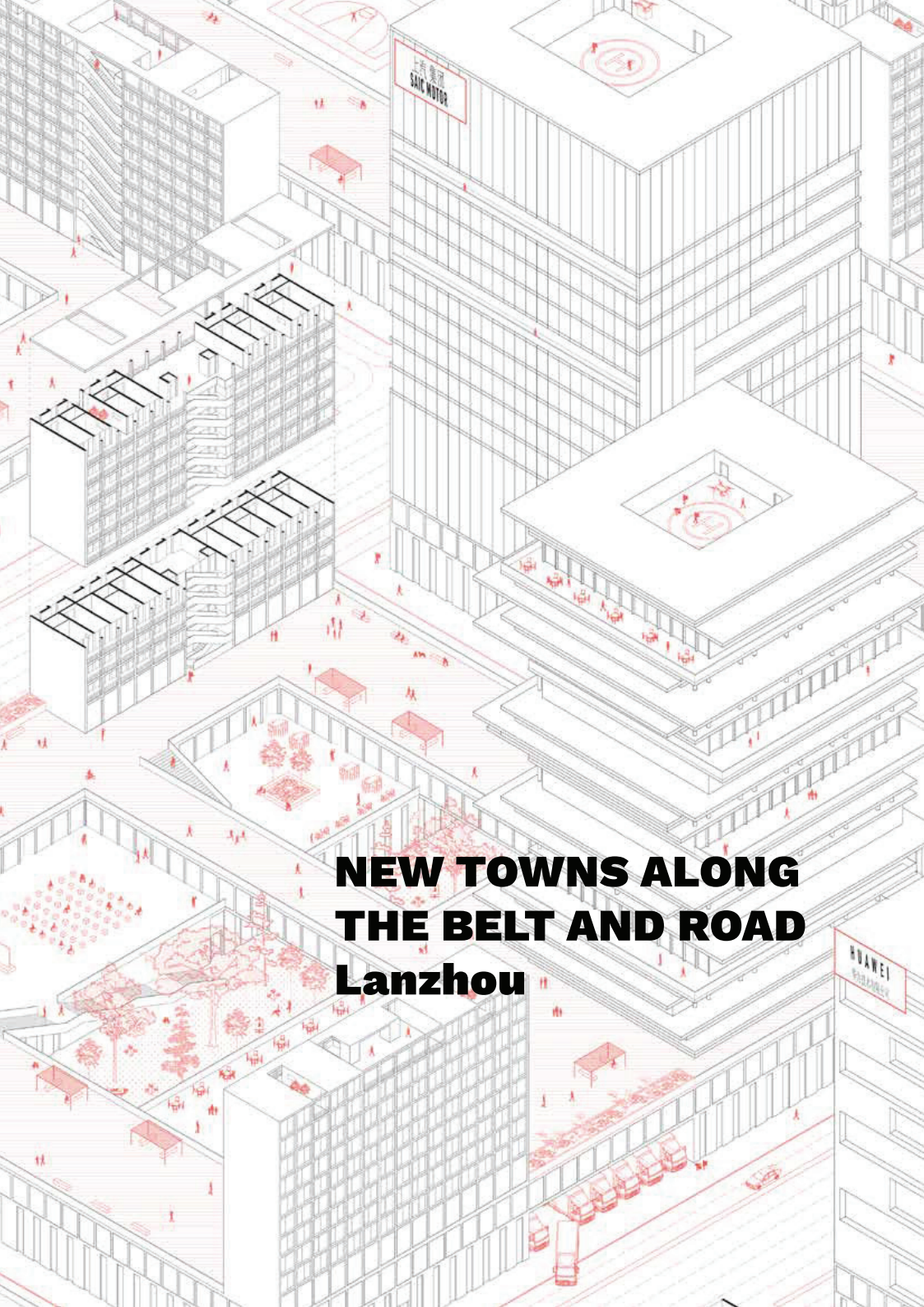
This first edition of the Report elaborated by China Room research group has been a significant opportunity to reflect on interrelations among research strands, geographies and disciplines. In the past five years, China Room has played a strategic role at the crossroads of Politecnico di Torino's DAD and DIST Departments, which promote the "science of project" as crucial to measure the impact of contemporary scientific challenges.

In this frame, China has offered a unique research occasion of methodological progress. Moreover, it has enabled to grasp phenomena whose intensity can no longer be neglected within an interconnected global world.

The research projects presented in this volume give substance to places and processes that — due to physical and cultural distance — are often only evoked and even misrepresented in the West. In this first Report, China emerges — in the unprecedented geopolitical chessboard of the third millennium — as the locus for the scientific community to verify and challenge methods and tools of investigation.

China's new transport infrastructures, for instance, as well as its stratified metropolises, provide 'accelerated' testing grounds where phenomena in transition tell a great deal about what the notions of territory, urbanity and living could transform into in the upcoming decades.

China Room has contributed to the international debate enriching the scientific literature through on-site design activities and processes, meetings and exchanges with authoritative figures of the academic and architectural scenes, set up of educational courses aimed at non-EU students, and the construction of an archive collecting maps, photographs and voices. In times when physical distance among nations is amplified by the pandemic, the projects developed by China Room enhance the importance of fieldwork research as a privileged point of view and source of data. They tell about the Chinese society at the very moment when it is realizing its own idea of modernity. China Room's



NEW TOWNS ALONG THE BELT AND ROAD Lanzhou

DESIGN UNIT

Timeline:

A.Y. 2019-2020, second semester

A.Y. 2018-2019, second semester

A project by Politecnico di Torino (DAD + DIST) / China Room

In collaboration with EPFL (College of Humanities and at the School of Architecture) and Università di Torino (Dipartimento di Culture, Politica e Società)

TEACHING TEAM

Michele Bonino - architectural design
Alberto Bologna - architectural design
Angelo Sampieri - urban planning and design
Francesco Silvestri (University of Turin) - governance of urban space (A.Y. 2018-2019)
Arianna Ponzini (University of Turin) - governance of urban space (A.Y. 2019-2020)
Florence Graezer Bideau (EPFL) - sociology of territory and environment

TEACHING ASSISTANTS

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Leonardo Ramondetti - urban planning and design

Text: Leonardo Ramondetti

The Design Units Architecture and Urban Space (A.Y.s 2018-2020) were part of the master's degree program Architectural Construction City of Politecnico di Torino. Both Design Units centered on Chinese urbanisation, a topic investigated with the contribution of four disciplines: architectural design, urban planning and design, governance of urban space, and sociology of territory and environment. Particularly, the courses addressed the urban development of Lanzhou New Area: a new town for 300,000 inhabitants to be constructed over 821 square kilometers, located 80 kilometers north of the consolidate city of Lanzhou.

As for most of Chinese new towns, Lanzhou New Area is organized on a grid layout of four-lane roads defining plots of 500x500 metres. The Design Unit *Breaking the Grid* (A.Y. 2018-2019) investigated how to overcome the rigidity of such infrastructural pattern, rethinking the relations with the surrounding, and envisaging various ways of occupying the land in relation to multiple programs. Such exploration was centered on eleven areas located along the main east-west axis that crosses the new town, which was intended as the main strip of Lanzhou New Area.

Differently, the Design Unit *Five Infrastructural Nodes* (A.Y. 2018-2019) explored the relations between the new town of Lanzhou and the major infrastructures which are currently under construction to spatialize the Belt and Road Initiative: the airport, the high-speed railway

Cover | 'Living the Infrastructure'
(credit: Ilaria Di Pietra, Chiara Di Presa, Esther Candela Fernandez, Maria Soriano Ortega).

system, the new infrastructures for agricultural production, the new ecological areas, and the spaces for research and cultural activities. Within this framework the students had to envisage new ways of inhabiting such spaces, not considering them as technical zones, but parts of the city, that is, spaces open to different uses and functions.

The design activities carried on in the Design Units adopted an interdisciplinarity multi-scalar approach. Students were asked to engage with both the urban scale (30x30 km, 3x3 km and 500x500 meters), and the architectural one (1:200 and 1:100). Moreover, they were required to envision the possible dynamics of social integration, as well as the mechanisms of appropriation of new urban spaces and artifacts. The outcomes of the students' research and design activities were collected into several panels, maquettes, and videos to be exhibited in the Final Review of the master's degree program Architectural Construction City hold at Lingotto, Politecnico di Torino, on June 19th-20th, 2019, and, virtually, on zoom.us and telearchitettura.polito.it on June 10th-11th 2020. Furthermore, four projects of the Design Unit 2019-2020 were exposed at MAO – Museum of Oriental Art of Turin, in parallel with the exhibition *China Goes Urban. The city to come* (October 16th, 2020 – October 10th, 2021).

Finally, during these two years, the courses also promoted a large number of side activities. Above all, a series of lectures given by international scholars, including: *A History of Design Institutes in China. From Mao to Market* by Guanghui Ding (April 4th, 2019), *Poetry Reconnecting Time* by James Wei Ke-Chiasmus Partners (May 2nd, 2019), *Harmony in space, a book on Chinese Architecture* by Paolo Genovese (April 30th, 2020), and *Projects and Ideas in China, from kilometers to millimeters* Haohao Xu (May 14th, 2020).



Lanzhou New Area is a new town for 300,000 inhabitants to be constructed over 821 square kilometers, located 80 kilometers north of the old city of Lanzhou. This urban development is intended as the gateway of the Belt and Road Initiative: a sort of living infrastructure to connect China to the rest of the world. The Design Units (A.Y.s 2018-2020) addressed this topic by investigating the relations between new infrastructures and new settlements in terms of urban and architectural design, social integration and urban policies.

Fig. 1 | 'Opus Mixtum' (credit: Nicolò Marola, Lorenzo Rabagliati, Andrea Sanguedolce, Milda Urbonavičiute, Yang Yuqi).

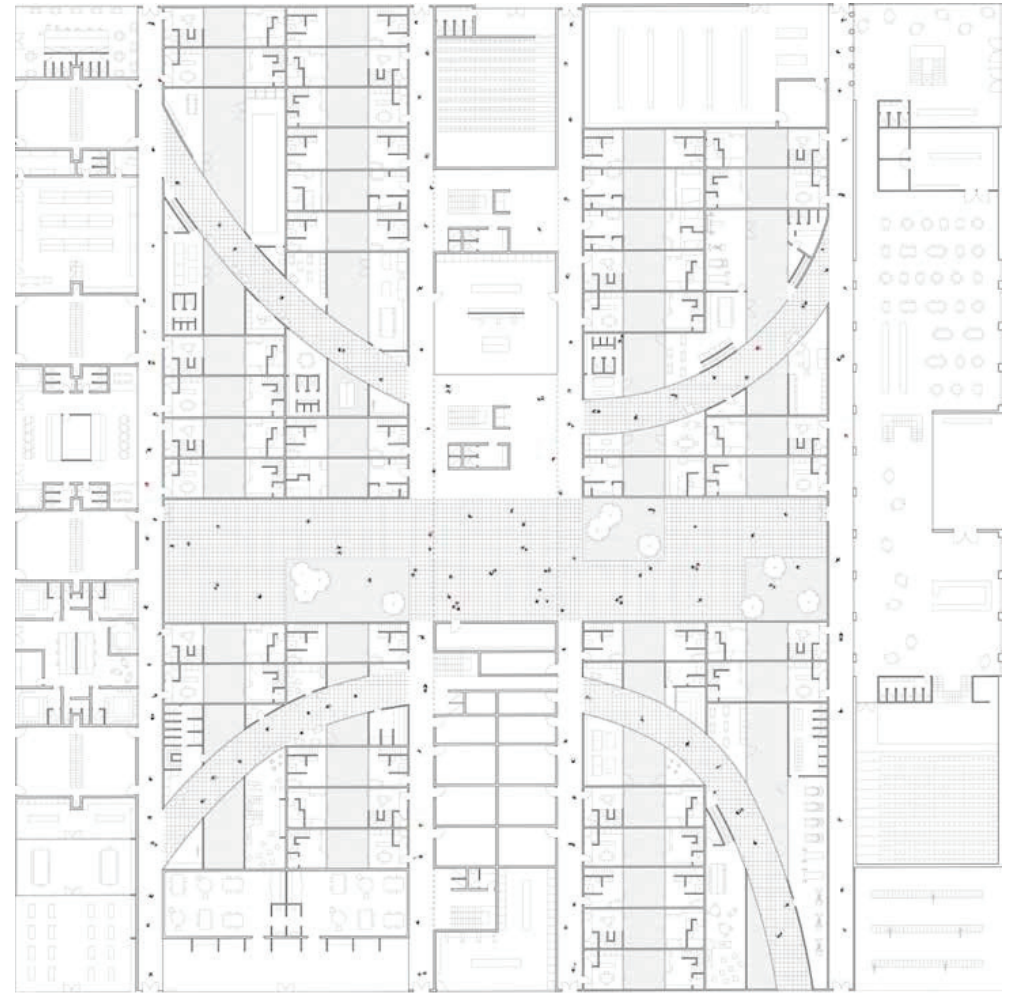


Fig. 3 | 'Of Enoughness: Islands' (credit: Simona Belluscio, Ahmed Mansouri, Riccardo Masala).



Fig. 5-6-7 | 'Peach Blossom Spring'
(credit: Elisa Alzapiedi, David Dietrich,
Martina Ponzio, Giulia Ravera).

