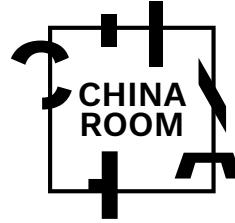




**Politecnico
di Torino**



China Room

REPORT

2021

POLITECNICO DI TORINO
China Room

REPORT 2021

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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
Excellence MIUR 2018-2022



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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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ISBN 978-88-85745-57-5

December 2021.

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

activities investigate the horizons of such modernity from within a “research laboratory”: this means acknowledging the irreplaceable value of places in the construction of knowledge.

The results of the research presented in this volume are the outcomes of the close collaboration among different disciplines: scrolling through the pages, it emerges that contact with the complexity of Chinese metropolises was possible mainly thanks to the intersection of scientific fields. A multidisciplinary approach put into practice, among other things, through the comparison among various scales of observation, and the different skills of China Room’s members, in the full spirit of polytechnic research.

Furthermore, this Report is an opportunity to show the results of the increasingly frequent exchanges that our Departments have had with China and other countries in the Far East. For almost a decade, China Room has been developing solid and durable relationships with eminent universities, such as Tsinghua University in Beijing, Tongji University in Shanghai and the South China University of Technology in Guangzhou, in the form of research, teaching and consultancy activities. China Room’s work merit consists of having evolved from working ‘for’ to working ‘with’ Chinese experts. This is an important change of perspective that has provided concrete feedback on the internationalisation of the research in our university.

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Foreword

China Room 2016 - 2021: China's opportunity to measure changes in city and architecture

by Edoardo Bruno and Camilla Forina

The China Room Report 2021 gathers the researches developed by the group since its constitution in 2016. The emergence of COVID-19 has profoundly affected the possibility of conducting on-site research after about a decade of intense exchanges with China. Although research projects, design explorations, doctoral theses and educational programs with partner institutions have not come to a halt, the necessity of systematisation of a long period of cooperation with China has gradually emerged. The report aims thus at identifying, through an archival operation, both continuities and discontinuities between different research outcomes, not only to define a “state of the art” of the group’s activities but also - and foremost - to set up new directions for future researches.

China Room observes urban phenomena and architecture in contemporary China - privileging on-site observation and applied experimentation. As a specific context of investigation, China is intended as an opportunity to observe, often at an accelerated speed, phenomena that emphasise global behaviours: in this framework, the group’s mission interprets thus China as an expanding laboratory where to question and test scientific positions.

As suggested by sinologist François Jullien, the encounter with China is an opportunity to unleash a “disruption of thought”. He invites to set aside western methodological paradigms in favour of external observation of the so-called “reality”. If on one hand, China cannot be considered a place to be “discovered”, on the other, today it represents a privileged locus to observe contemporary processes. According to this perspective, the Report’s investigations on different places, themes

and methods become the pretext to better understand the transferability of the collected theses; thus, the outputs of the research take on the character of valuable lessons, straightened through continuous refutations to not simplify their interpretations.

With the aim of sharing with a wider public the archive gathered over the years, the volume considers different research outputs as products constituting a sufficient critical mass to become generalisable research objects. Furthermore, they define a clear and transferable positioning within the scientific community. The contents are organised according to various interpretative lines that proceed simultaneously. In this sense, the book retraces the modalities through which the research group was constituted, privileging the programming of research as a method in itself capable of bringing innovation by alternating parallel experimentations. The map on pages 6-7 summarises this approach, depicting the trajectories of the single outputs inserted within the Report in the broader perspective of the research group’s practice: the attempt is to understand the relapse of each specific theoretical, applied, or didactic activity in the research sphere to highlighting the incremental and multidisciplinary pattern adopted so far.

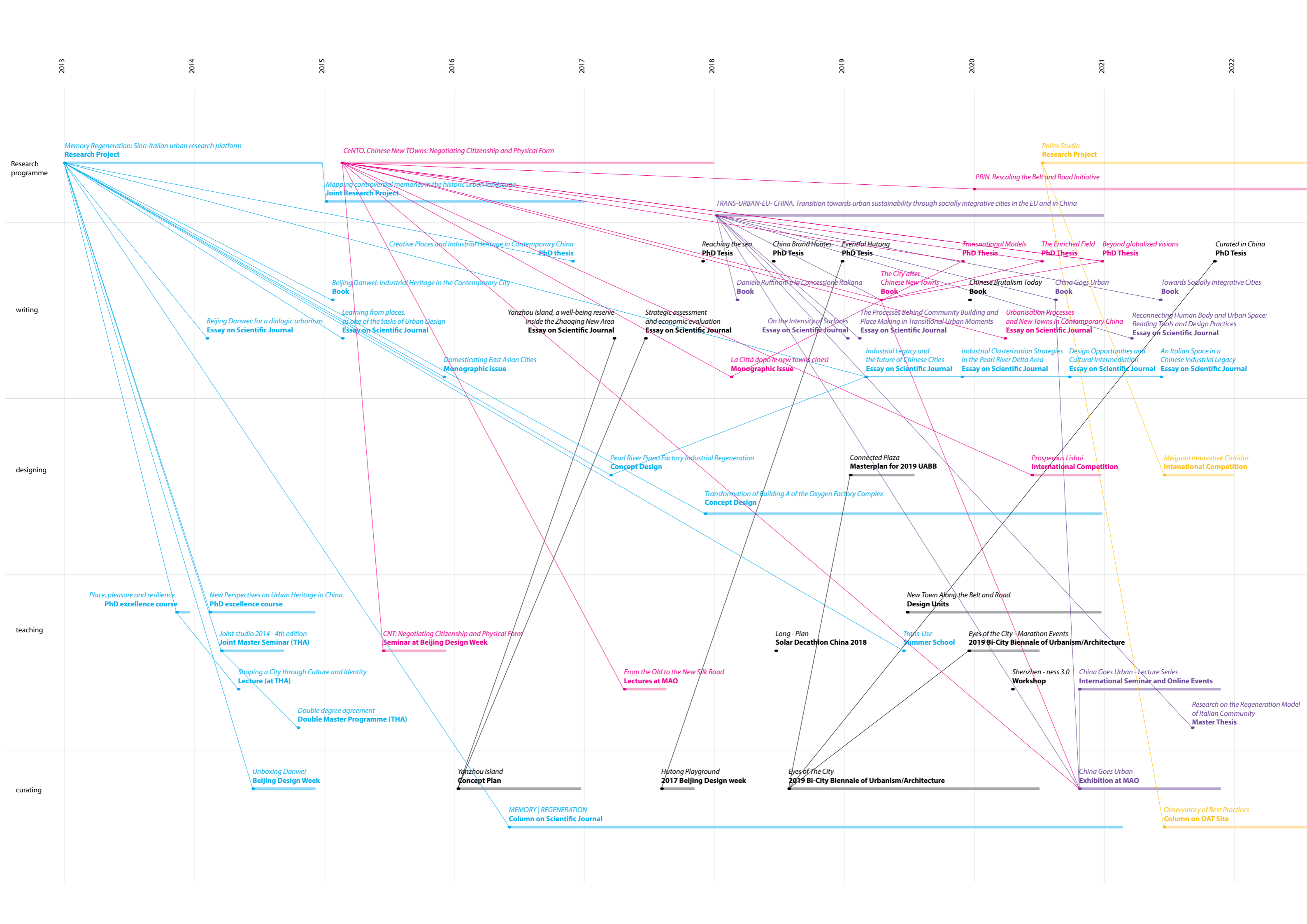
The chapters of the Report describe the research of China Room moving from the collective to the individual results carried out by the various researchers involved. The first chapter - Research Programs - shows the programs that mainly address the four research branches and various subsequent projects developed in China. These are thus to be considered as extended containers with international funding, developed through the consolidation of new institutional alliances that allow the China Room to increase its number of researchers and interests.

The subsequent four chapters - Writing, Designing, Teaching, Curating - explore the different activities through which the research was carried out. This preliminary taxonomy emphasises the heterogeneity of approaches that have allowed access to new sources and knowledge production. While writing and teaching are

¹ Francois Jullien has been invited on 28 September 2018 by FULL – the Future Urban Legacy Lab (Politecnico di Torino) to give the lecture “Comment être efficace? Entre modélisation et maturation (entre pensée européenne et pensée chinoise)”.

Next pages:

Fig. 1 | Map of the main research projects developed within the China Room research group, 2013-2022 (credit: Camilla Forina - China Room).



actions commonly associated with academia, designing and curating define a broader practice that depicts an emerging modality in approaching scientific investigations in a multi competencies - design-oriented mode.

Through a chronological and categorised series, the sixth chapter organises all the outcomes of the research team: from the first contacts with China, through the institutionalisation of the team since 2016, up to the results achieved over the last years. The total amount of 187 products collected in about a decade perimeter the margins of a modest library depicting the main activities deepen so far.

The Report outlines some recurring themes in the research branches. What emerges is a particular attention to the phenomenon of Chinese urban expansion as a vast field of research capable of encapsulating the spatial contradictions derived from its rapid development. Research projects such as *TRANS-URBAN-EU-CHINA* supported by the European program Horizon 2020 and *CeNTO. Chinese New Towns: Negotiating Citizenship and Physical Form* or *HIGH-SPEED CHINA* have provided the methodological basis for the subsequent publication of *The City after Chinese New Towns. Spaces and Imaginaries from Contemporary Urban China* (Birkhauser, 2019) and the curatorship of the exhibition *China Goes Urban* at the MAO Museum in Turin, through a series of educational workshops on the *New Town of Lanzhou* and the development of design proposals such as those for *Yanzhou Island* or *PROSPEROUS LISHUI* - which have recently won the third place in 2020 at the “Future Shan Shui City International Urban Design Competition”.

The attention to the Chinese city and architecture as a stratified system crossed by changes, demolitions and innovations is the theme that - stemming from the program *MEMORY | REGENERATION* - has led to the curatorship of a specific section of the Chinese magazine *SHIJIE JIANZHU - World Architecture*, the publication of the volume *Beijing Danwei. Industrial Heritage in the Contemporary City* (Jovis, 2015), and international workshops such as *SHENZHEN-ness 3.0* or the *TRANS-USE SUMMER SCHOOL* - capable of suggesting operative

strategies for realising the *PEARL RIVER PIANO Factory-Industrial Regeneration* project.

Another relevant theme concerns Chinese architecture as an open platform facilitating the interaction between man and the built environment, defining a field where the direct experience of space defines its development. In this sense, the project *OLYMPIC EXPERIENCE. Building A of the Oxygen Factory Complex Big Air Venue* realised for the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics, the housing prototype *Long Plan* winner of the 2018 edition of Solar Decathlon China and the proposal *CONNECTED PLAZA for the transformation of Futian Railway Station* in Shenzhen represent cues that have allowed the critical positioning of the group as academic curator in *Eyes of the City* exhibition during the 2019 Edition of the Bi-city Shenzhen Biennale of Urbanism\Architecture.

Urban transformations, regeneration strategies, architecture as a human experience are some of the prompts that allowed China Room to continuously calibrate the observation of the Chinese context as an open field in which “unity and specificity” alternate, as the journalist Alberto Jacoviello recalls in his 1972 book *Capire la Cina*. The continuous movement between the general to the particular, the central and the peripheral, the recurrent and the exceptional, has emphasised the importance of transcalarity and transversality of research in architecture and urban studies. This first Report aims at underlining the strategic role of research both as a discovery and a systematisation of practices which allows to carry out scientific knowledge land design practices - and where the referred geography becomes the occasion to test instruments of investigation.