



SMITH, Nick R. 2021.
The End of the Village: Planning the Urbanization of Rural China.
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New apartment blocks all over China's countryside bear witness to the rapid, and in many ways extreme, transformation processes that China's villages have experienced over the last decades. Nick R. Smith delves into one of these processes in his in-depth study of the demise of a village close to the municipality of Chongqing. Rich in both empirical data and reviews of secondary literature, his book provides a meticulous account of how a place can lose some of the core socio-spatial features that make it a village. During the period of Smith's field visits between 2011 and 2015, a series of events transformed the village of Hailong first into a "model site" for village modernisation and then into an urbanised outpost of municipal development. His multilayered account of these events adds vital insights into the processes and effects of China's state-led urbanisation.

The investigation of Hailong's transformation is laid out in six chapters that focus on three groups of actors, namely municipal officials and planners, village cadres, and residents. The multiplicity of perspectives is impressive and mostly enriching. However, the attempt to separate analytically the positions and visions of these groups of actors (Chapters One to Three) from their role in the transformation processes (Chapters Four to Six) comes at some expense to overall comprehensibility. Chapter One provides an excellent overview of planning in China, including the ambiguous position of planners caught between science and politics, and the political exploitation of the idea of scientific rationality by policymakers. Based on the case of Chongqing, the chapter traces how the rural was integrated into the rationale of hitherto urban planning. Later on, in Chapter Four, it becomes clear how this phase of changing conceptions and power relations opened up a battleground for different actors, including village planners and different bureaus in the municipal administration, to compete over the authority to plan the village's future and extract its resources. Backed by important patronage, even up to the then-Party secretary

of Chongqing, Bo Xilai 薄熙来, different plans contested the urban-rural boundary within the village's territory.

Chapters Two and Five focus on the village leaders. Smith assigns a prominent role in the village's transformation to the charismatic Party secretary. Once a migrant entrepreneur, he persuaded villagers to decollectivise land resources and founded several shareholding companies to finance his own visions of village development. This village-led urbanisation started by promoting industrialisation, but soon focused on real estate strategies, thereby presenting a kind of microcosm of China's urbanisation. Interestingly, the village's Party organisation was reinvigorated by regaining control over collective land and capital assets. Chapter Five goes into detail about the changing land market regulations in the early 2000s, which gradually legitimised the ongoing commodification of rural construction land and strongly contributed to village leaders' motivation to flesh out their own strategies of development. However, the chapter also shows that these strategies are based on a perceived ideal of urbanity, and on urban perspectives on ideal rural environments, respectively. The village becomes "Hailong City" on billboards, and a feasibility study imagines a commodified version of rural utopia. Accordingly, the end of the story, as Smith tells it, already shines through here. What started as an attempt to save the village from municipal expropriation in the course of urban expansion ultimately leads to the village's demise.

This fate is mapped out most clearly in Chapters Three and Six, which juxtapose a village community system based on mutual support against the loss of this world after village reconstruction. The inclusion of residents' perspectives is important for understanding the effects and obstacles of planning and strategies, and Smith provides a suspenseful glimpse into the complexities of rural life at the urban fringe. The adoption of another, mostly anthropological, approach in these chapters inevitably makes one wonder why the behaviour of "normal" villagers is treated differently to that of the officials and planners in the other chapters. Having said that, the investigation of villagers' life choices and survival strategies still convincingly shows that urbanisation plans from above threatened more than just economic resources: they took away the freedom and flexibility associated with control over land use. As demolition and reconstruction continued, villagers' opinions in Hailong shifted towards opposition and nostalgia for the past. The focus on ghost talks in Chapter Six is a fascinating account of villagers' ways of dealing with their powerlessness and resignation towards losing their social world.

Are we currently witnessing the end of China's villages, as the book's title suggests? Without a doubt, Smith's study provides important insights into how the urbanisation of a village in peri-urban China can play out on the ground. The book is highly recommended to anyone interested in the processes, competing ideas, and strategies that accompany the expansion of China's cities into the rural hinterland. Historically speaking, the period of Smith's investigation is, of course, a specific one. It was a phase of political experimentation with state-led urbanisation, when the testing of alternative pathways, such as the ones in Hailong, was possible. In some ways, the story of Hailong is thus a story of the past, and the demise of Hailong in the book may well represent the end of opportunities for village-led urbanisation. However, it

remains crucial to study such cases even for researchers of China's current urbanisation, as many of these local experiences have found their way into subsequent policy initiatives. Despite the current centralisation of urbanisation and urban-rural planning, the diversity of urban categories and processes has not completely vanished and continues to inform urban and rural change.



SUMMERS, Tim. 2021.
China's Hong Kong:
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There has been a growing tendency to frame the discussion of developments in Hong Kong almost *by default* within a framework of “Beijing vis-à-vis Hong Kong” – or indeed of Beijing's unilateral tightening of its grip on the city. Such a simplification, as Tim Summers points out, is “a misleading or at least partial interpretation of what is going on in Hong Kong” (p. 97). From this perspective, therefore, in his timely and concise monograph, Summers suggests that the ways to approach, conduct research on, and write about past, present, and future developments in Hong Kong need a rethink. He begins by laying out the book's title – *China's Hong Kong: The Politics of a Global City* – which perfectly reflects his proposition that the Hong Kong story is a negotiation between the local, the national, and the global.

The book consists of a carefully presented introduction and seven main chapters. After setting out the overall argument of the book – that insightful analysis of Hong Kong from 1997 to mid-2020 should locate the development of the city's mutually involved politics and economics within the rapidly changing political and economic realm of China, which, in turn, has been “infused by the influence of global developments” (p. 6) – in the introductory chapter, Summers zeroes in on a historical reconstruction of pre-handover Hong Kong in Chapter One, where he makes a convincing point that Hong Kong's history has always been shaped by the complex confluence of global, Chinese, and local forces, each of which has changed dramatically across time in terms of nature and salience. Chapters Two and Three deal with the increasing interweaving of Hong Kong politics and economics, in which Summers presents Hong Kong's burgeoning

economic symbiosis with China as a double-edged sword. While it has somehow compensated for the city's vulnerability to “the vagaries of the global economy” (p. 74) and raised its competitiveness as an international financial centre, the concomitant massive flows of people and capital from mainland China have sharpened Hong Kong's latent socioeconomic disparities and have further brought to the surface the contradictions and ambiguities of the “one country, two systems” (OCTS) principle concerning the question of democracy. The result is an increasingly fragmented and polarised city that has created concern in Beijing over national territorial integrity, resulting in breaches of the promise of “Hong Kong people governing Hong Kong.” However, Summers argues, these should be seen as responses to rising political challenges in Hong Kong rather than as a change in the fundamental goals Beijing has for Hong Kong, which have consistently been in the order of sovereignty, stability, and prosperity.

Chapter Four details the Umbrella Movement, which, according to Summers, led to a grand-scale political awakening of Hongkongers, strengthened commitment to democracy, and gave rise to radical “localism” that further polarised the political parties and politicalised the wider society. Chapter Five then goes on to point out that global interest in Hong Kong's politics has been increasingly dominated by accusations of Beijing being the culprit behind Hong Kong's ills. One practical result of this is the exemption of Hong Kong actors themselves from contributing to the problems facing the city and the deepening of Beijing's paranoia in seeing Hong Kong as the pawn of “black hands” (p. 124) seeking to undermine China's national security and integrity. Summers therefore suggests that foreign forces should focus on “what might actually happen and what is possible” (p. 126) in Hong Kong, and that one possible starting point is to recognise the fact that OCTS might be the best possible option for the city today.

In the two final chapters, Summers answers the question of whether Hong Kong is doomed. He contends that the key lies in Hong Kong itself. The city should start by reducing the pernicious fragmentation and polarisation of its politics to make room for compromise, interaction, and tolerance between the populace and ruling authorities. This, however, requires “a realistic, nuanced and open-minded response” (p. 168) from Hongkongers toward the growing complexity and diversity of China. They need to accept the fact that Hong Kong is now – on every level – part of China, and that the city's future is closely intertwined with that of China, whose trajectory is even more unpredictable and shaped by global developments. Certainly, Hong Kong is expected to increasingly extend its engagement with China on all fronts, and this should not simply be translated into the assumption that Hong Kong will become “just another Chinese city” (p. 170). As Summers himself firmly believes, Hong Kong is more than that, with its own distinctive features – “history, institutional strengths, global linkages and the dynamism of its people” (p. 145) – on which a bright future can be built.

As can be seen, the book convincingly spells out the situation in Hong Kong from the handover to mid-2020. One limitation of the book is a deficiency in novel theoretical and empirical data development. Indeed, the proposal of interpreting developments in Hong Kong as a complicated interplay between localism, nationalism, and globalism is also nothing new. But recently this has been played down by an increasing fascination with framing almost