

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MEGAPROJECTS IN ASIA

State Power, Land Control, Financial
Flows, and Dispossession

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SITUATING MEGAPROJECTS IN ASIA'S POLITICAL ECONOMY OF URBANIZATION

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The rise of Asian economies has led to the proliferation of megaprojects through large-scale mobilization of resources, necessitating state intervention of various natures. Despite the pressures of neoliberalization, Asia's megaprojects have continued to be associated, to varying degrees, with a country's developmental aspirations. These projects are driven by domestic, transnational, or combined pro-growth interests and serve multiple political purposes. While it is challenging to associate megaprojects with specific state–capital relations or stages of development, understanding them requires scrutinizing the multiscalar politics of state and non-state actors embedded in the shifting relationship between developmentalist orientation and neoliberalization (Doucette and Park, 2018; Park *et al.*, 2012).

Analyzing megaprojects also requires situating them within the geographical contexts of, in our case, Asia and its historical conjunctural spaces, considering both national-territorial and transnational politics that mutually reinforce each other (Glassman, 2016; Peck, 2023). The developmentalist approaches, which prioritize economic growth over social policies and bolstering state legitimacy, are deeply ingrained in Asian economies (Beeson, 2009; Holliday, 2000; Kwon, 2005). These approaches are evident in state-led megaprojects that create iconic landmarks, new towns, central business districts, and new infrastructure to support production and mobility of people and goods, showcasing intertwined political and economic interests.

We contend that while avoiding the danger of falling into Asian exceptionalism (see the next section), contemporary megaprojects in Asia manifest the complexity of urbanizing forces behind their promotion, particularly their multiscalar nature to shape and restructure the built environment, as evidenced by various case studies in this volume. The perspective that has guided us in producing this volume is that each national economy retains aspects of developmentalism as a fundamental

characteristic of state functions. East and Southeast Asia, including the former tiger economies (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan), experienced the rise of developmentalism during periods of condensed urbanization, industrialization, and global economic integration, as state actions aimed to fulfill multiple purposes of economic development, nurture the growth of national capital, and maintain state legitimacy to meet the expectations of their populace (Glassman, 2016; Park *et al.*, 2012).

The developmentalist orientation of the state persisted and reconfigured during times of intensifying neoliberal pressure, as observed in the 1990s and 2000s (Beeson, 2009; Chu, 2009; Heo, 2015; Kim, 2021). This volume explores how the developmental orientation of state functions interacts with or opposes the neoliberalizing tendencies of state transformation and shapes the rise of a particularist mode of state intervention in facilitating investment in the built environment. Megaprojects are taken as a lens to observe and explain these phenomena.

The contributions in this volume examine varied practices observed in China, South Korea, and Taiwan, which exhibit condensed urbanization and industrialization, and India, Malaysia, and Turkey,¹ which display aspirational urbanisms and strive to emulate former Asian tiger economies through “worlding” practices (Roy and Ong, 2011). In this introduction, we cover various themes prominent in the contributed chapters, including the state’s role in pursuing megaprojects, the significance of megaprojects in sustaining state legitimacy, state strategies for realizing megaprojects, the role of land as a strategic asset, and the sociopolitical implications of megaprojects. Each discussion illustrates how the contributed chapters engage with and elucidate these themes.

Approaching the Study of Megaprojects

Defining megaprojects can be challenging, and studies often resort to various operational definitions, depending on where authors’ focus lies. For instance, Rizzo (2020, p. 1522) describes megaprojects as “large, government-backed master planned developments”. Focusing on urban megaprojects, del Cerro Santamaria (2013) defines them as

large-scale urban development projects that sometimes have an iconic design component, that usually aim at transforming or have the potential to transform a city’s or parts of a city’s image, and are often promoted and perceived by the urban elite as crucial catalysts for growth and even as linkages to the larger world economy.

(pp. xxiv)

For Gellert and Lynch (2003, pp. 15–16), they are “projects which transform landscapes rapidly, intentionally, and profoundly in very visible ways, and require coordinated applications of capital and state power”.

As illustrated in this volume, megaprojects are diverse, pursued by multiscale actors from both the private and public sectors, serving multiple purposes in areas that encompass not only the urban but also peripheral areas. As Reboredo (2019) describes, megaprojects embody “accumulative, legitimizing, and developmental strategies” (p. 1249; see also Williams *et al.*, 2023). In this volume, we adopt a broad definition of megaprojects as *large-scale developments pursued by economic and political elites, entailing significant investments in the built environment to achieve capital accumulation, state legitimacy, and domestic/global prestige while profoundly changing social and physical landscape.*

One defining feature of megaprojects is their large scale. The prefix, mega, implies developments much larger than ordinary projects (Altshuler and Luberoff, 2003). As Follmann (2015, p. 214) notes, “what makes urban megaproject developments complex are their size and the need for large tracts of land”. Consequently, megaprojects are financially demanding, often taking years to execute (Fainstein, 2008). Flyvbjerg (2014, p. 6) defines megaprojects as “large-scale, complex ventures that typically cost US\$1 billion or more, take many years to develop and build, involve multiple public and private stakeholders, are transformational, and impact millions of people”. However, affixing a specific price tag can be misleading, as being large is relative to the project context. Altshuler and Luberoff (2003) consider megaprojects to “cost at least \$250 million in inflation-adjusted year 2002 dollars”, lower than Flyvbjerg’s estimate. What is deemed significantly large for a small economy may not be for a larger one.

Megaprojects are analyzed from diverse perspectives, emphasizing various domestic and transnational actors. Scholars have examined, for example, state-led regulatory planning for megaproject delivery (Grubbauer and Čamprag, 2019), the instrumentalization of megaprojects by authoritarian state capitalism (Kinossian and Morgan, 2023), the politicization of megaprojects by the state, including manufacturing consent for the ruling regime (Tuğal, 2023), state legitimacy (Reboredo, 2019; Williams *et al.*, 2023), and how megaprojects serve as both a state development strategy and a governance experimentation site (Shen *et al.*, 2020; Qian, 2011).

What is increasingly evident behind the pursuit of megaevents in the contemporary capitalism is the formation of multiscale growth alliances between the state and the private sector, including global finance, domestic and transnational business interests, local and central governments, and international aid agencies (Kennedy, 2015; Paling, 2012). Recent studies highlight how developmental experiences have been subject to “worlding” practices within Asia (Roy and Ong, 2011; Bunnell *et al.*, 2012), producing intra-Asian urbanisms (Percival and Waley, 2012) and replicating state-led urban and industrial development practices in Africa and South Asia through China’s Belt and Road Initiatives (Goodfellow and Huang, 2015; Shin *et al.*, 2022).

In this volume, we situate megaprojects in Asia, considering how they are embedded in (aspirational) urbanization and industrialization by restructuring

the built environment as the site of the secondary circuit of capital accumulation (Harvey, 2018) and how they contribute to the realization of the legitimacy of the state and its developmental vision of economic growth (Bunnell and Goh, 2018; Shin, 2019). In contrast with megaprojects in post-industrial Global North, which are arguably pursued in brownfield sites and depoliticized (e.g., Diaz Orueta and Fainstein, 2008), Asian megaprojects are often interspersed across urban regions or situated in peripheral or rural hinterlands aspiring to urbanize. While the private sector is frequently perceived to have greater capacity to deliver megaprojects (e.g., Metro Manila; Shatkin, 2008), the role of the state in Asia continues to have significant presence, extending its reach beyond regulation to remodel the urbanizing landscape for capital accumulation and address state legitimacy.

The Role of the State: Architect and Facilitator of Megaprojects

Within Lefebvre's conceptual framework, the fundamental role of the state in the production, regulation, and maintenance of a vast array of capitalist spaces is discernible (Lefebvre, 2009). These spaces include, but are not limited to, industrial establishments, agrarian collectives, residential districts, trading zones, suburban clusters, expansive urban agglomerations, and transportation infrastructures (comprising roads, waterways, subterranean passages, ports, bridge systems, railway networks, highway matrices, and aviation terminals and corridors), as well as an array of techno-institutional infrastructure devoted to communication and surveillance. As Lefebvre emphasized, "only the State is capable of taking charge of the management of space 'on a grand scale' – highways, air traffic routes – because only the State has at its disposal the appropriate resources, techniques, and 'conceptual' capacity" (Lefebvre, 2009, p. 238). In other words, the state's unrivalled capacity to channel large-scale, long-term investments into the built environment for purposes, such as industrial production, collective consumption, commodity distribution, transportation, and communication, coupled with its sovereign legal capacity to design and regulate the societal utilization of these investments, affords it a privileged institutional position in the production of capitalist spatiality.

In this context, drawing qualitative distinctions between the state interventions in megaprojects in Asia and those elsewhere becomes challenging. The salience of "Asia as method" (Chen, 2010; see also Shin *et al.*, 2022) does not rest merely on state intervention, as is popularly suggested. Intriguingly, nations like the United States, which might seem relatively non-interventionist, could present a genuine exception. Therefore, we refrain from declaring how Asian states are involved in megaprojects as distinctly Asian, avoiding the danger of falling into the trap of Asian exceptionalism (c.f. Shin, 2021). Perhaps, the position occupied by each nation state within global capitalism, the degree of construction of national industrial bases, and singular political events – coincidental but sometimes decisive – might serve as adequate substitutes for the term "Asian". Importantly, as numerous chapters in this volume demonstrate, the focus should be on analyzing

the multiscalar and historical contexts and conditions that shape and give meaning to each project. Instead of seeking insights from the descriptor “Asian”, it is necessary to illuminate from within the history of actually existing capitalist states in Asia.

We note that the state's role in megaprojects could be bifurcated into two primary dimensions. First, the state acts as an architect and curator of these projects. While minor discrepancies may exist depending on the individual nation, the state predominantly spearheads the design and implementation of these megaprojects. This role is substantiated in studies on the rise of Gangnam as a national megaproject (Chapter 2) and Songdo International City (Chapter 3) in South Korea, the emergence of zoned cities such as Taoyuan Aerotropolis in Taiwan (Chapter 4), and the execution of Istanbul's Third Airport in Turkey (Chapter 6). In these studies, the (local or central) state is depicted as a strategic designer and overseer, leveraging its authority and assets to navigate urban development. The state's role in strategizing and curating is instrumental in delineating the trajectory of urban development and restructuring cities to boost their international competitiveness. The state's capacity to mold urban landscapes and shape urban evolution is underscored, bringing its role as a strategic designer and curator to the forefront.

Second, as evidenced in the chapters contributed to this volume, the state also assumes the role of mediator and facilitator, drawing in private capital by allocating public land or easing regulations. For example, this role of the state is exemplified in Penang, Malaysia (Chapter 8), where the state is recognized as a critical catalyst in urban development, specifically through land-for-infrastructure agreements. The state's role is vital for enabling urban infrastructure development and integrating land into urban developmental frameworks. In projects such as the IT Corridor in Chennai, India (Chapter 5) and Gurgaon's DLF Cybercity project (Chapter 9), the state leveraged land to attract private capital and advanced the development plans of private developers.

Nonetheless, these roles of the state are not mutually exclusive. The state concurrently devises and implements strategies while performing specialized facilitation and mediation to stimulate private investment. In understanding these roles of the state in the process of city (re-)making and megaproject implementation, it is important to overcome methodological statism (see Hwang, 2016), which pertains state-centric perspectives, and adopt a strategic relational approach that pays attention to inter-scalar dynamics and multiscalar politics (Doucette and Park, 2018; Gimm, 2013; Koh *et al.*, 2022; Park, 2008; Shin, 2014). The domination of developmental states in East Asia does not necessarily mean that the developmental ethos and visions held in a particular time and space were uniform across factions of the state and capital. Such ethos and visions that led to the production of new towns and special development zones would have been subject to geopolitical and domestic state–society and state–capital relations (c.f. Hsu *et al.*, 2018).

In summary, while the state's involvement in the conception and execution of megaprojects is evident and deemed crucial (Lefebvre, 2009), the state's sole

production of space faces practical and inherent difficulties. Variations in the form of state intervention are notable, and these variations are contingent upon the forms of the state, the onsite conditions of megaprojects, the mode of capitalist organizations, and societal struggles.

Megaprojects and State Hegemony

Just as the state's role is critical in shaping megaprojects, the role of megaprojects in the general production of state space is significant. During the transition from the Western Keynesian welfare state to the neoliberal competitive state, megaprojects have been pivotal in advancing neoliberal urbanization (Diaz Orueta and Fainstein, 2008; Swyngedouw, 2005). It is important to remember that attempts to construct and bolster neoliberal hegemony manifested in megaprojects offered new opportunities for capital accumulation by constructing large-scale infrastructure in cities (Jessop, 2002; Swyngedouw *et al.*, 2002).

Megaprojects as state (hegemony) projects are an attractive means of legitimizing state strategies. This can be understood as a general characteristic of megaprojects as hegemonic projects rather than being unique to neoliberal states *per se*. As examined in this volume, many megaprojects espouse future-oriented developmentalist discourses. Multiple case studies depict how the state secures political legitimacy by proposing a new urban model – varied depending on the era and state but different from existing cities and aiming for global competitiveness – created through megaprojects that are branded using vocabularies that range from “modernization”, “globalization”, and “advanced technology” to “smart” and “sustainable” (Sonn and Park, 2023). The discourses of competitiveness, future-oriented technologism, and economic territorialism are often deployed as mechanisms to secure state legitimacy, and these narratives are woven throughout megaprojects in their role as hegemonic projects.

This character of megaprojects as a hegemonic project is visible in Taiwan's Taoyuan Aerotropolis Project (Chapter 4). The Taiwanese government introduced the concepts of “smart city” and “sustainable city” as defining characteristics that distinguished this project from existing urban models. This ideology served as a mechanism for legitimizing the state's strategy of selectively liberalizing specific regions to address the global mobility of capital, technology, and labor while promoting the Aerotropolis as a technologically advanced city equipped with smart city technologies and a sustainable city with global competitiveness contributing to national interests.

The aspect of megaprojects as hegemonic projects directly tied to the regime's political legitimacy becomes prominent in the case of Istanbul's Third Airport project (Chapter 6) and, to some extent, Penang Transport Master Plan case in Malaysia (Chapter 8). Erdoğan, who succeeded in his reelection as President in 2023, undertook various projects in preparation for the presidential election, one of which was Istanbul's Third Airport project. This megaproject, along with other rapidly

increasing instances of urban regeneration, infrastructural projects, and housing projects, was associated with the government's long-term vision for the hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 2023. These projects appear to have contributed to the reproduction of the Erdoğan administration and the domination of the ruling party. In Penang, to a varying degree, a similar influence of megaprojects on elections can be seen. The implementation process of the Penang Transport Master Plan provided political support for the government. The project was favored by those who supported Penang's economic strengthening, gaining voter support and bringing significant political benefits to the government.

Conversely, there are cases where economic goals such as job creation and industrial structural reform are actively proposed through proactive industrial policies. The IT Corridor megaproject in Chennai, India (Chapter 5) exemplifies mega-urbanization promoted by the state government and the government's publicity strategy to claim the creation of many jobs in the emergent advanced IT industry. Similarly, in India's Delhi–Mumbai Industrial Corridor project (Chapter 10), the state proposed an export-oriented industrialization model to integrate various societal interests. This model referenced the successful examples of other East Asian countries like China and South Korea (see also Goodburn and Knoerich, 2022; Park *et al.*, 2021). It includes the development of specific regions to promote export-oriented industrialization, focusing on the development of new cities centered around Special Economic Zones, National Investment and Manufacturing Zones, and specific types of industrial and economic activities.

State as a Non-homogeneous Entity

Early on, Jessop (1990) advanced his strategic relational state theory and argued against the perception of the state as a monolithic entity. He contends that the state transforms, modifying its morphological characteristics within the strategic relations of various factions. The state that we observe and identify, although appearing homogeneous and uniform as an organization of laws and institutions, is, in reality, a dynamic interplay of strategic relations among diverse forces. In this context, the notion of the state as a non-homogeneous entity presents a crucial lens through which we can explore megaproject dynamics. This perspective acknowledges the state not as a monolithic, unified actor but as a sophisticated network of actors operating at various scales, each with unique interests, agendas, and power dynamics. This complexity becomes particularly apparent in megaprojects, where different levels of government, from local to national, interact with each other and private entities in planning, financing, and executing these projects. Initially, the role of subnational governments in megaprojects is notable and multifaceted. These entities often possess a degree of autonomy and wield considerable influence over the planning and execution of projects.

This heterogeneity of the state can easily be discerned in numerous chapters of this volume. For instance, during the Gangnam district development in Seoul, the

Seoul municipality as the local state was more than just a passive implementer of the policies from the central government (Chapter 2). Instead, its strategies and initiatives actively influenced the project's outcomes embodying the local state's developmental aspirations. Similarly, in the Taoyuan Aerotropolis Project in Taiwan (Chapter 4), the local government was a crucial actor, collaborating with the central government and private sector partners and utilizing the project to boost its political and economic standing. In both instances, the local and central governments established and executed their substantive rationality within their respective scales.

The state's non-homogeneity is further accentuated by varying degrees of power and influence wielded by different tiers of government. For instance, in developing the IT Corridor in Chennai, India (Chapter 5), the state government of Tamil Nadu took a pivotal role, leveraging the project to attract investment, create jobs, and stimulate economic development in the state. Conversely, in the Third Airport project in Istanbul, Turkey (Chapter 6), the local government's role was somewhat limited, with the central government assuming a dominant role. However, even in this context, the local government endeavored to assert its influence and protect its interests through various means, including legal challenges and public advocacy.

The heterogeneity of the state also entails "the functional division of authority among various bureaucracies", a characteristic also observed in an authoritarian political context (Lieberthal, 1992, p. 10). Discord can occur between governmental organizations within the state. The Penang Transport Master Plan case in Penang, Malaysia (Chapter 8), portrays a scenario where the central government's refusal to approve large-scale land sales for the megaproject hampers the project's momentum led by the local state. This case serves as a reminder that the central government does not automatically approve nor support megaprojects led by local governments. The cohesion of intergovernmental relations is not given but acquired through complex political processes. Another related case is the Delhi–Mumbai Industrial Corridor project in India (Chapter 10). The Ministry of Commerce and Industry and its agencies handled the entire corridor development process, with minimal involvement from the Ministry of Urban Development or its agencies. As a result, urban production was treated as a by-product of industrialization, creating urban areas disconnected from existing cities. The separation and competition between industrial and urban strategies within a state manifest as power struggles and conflicts between departments, a tendency from which megaprojects are not exempt.

Land as a Strategic Asset in Megaprojects

Conceptualizing land as a strategic asset is a central theme in the dialogue on urban development and megaprojects (e.g., Bon, 2015; Park *et al.*, 2021; Shen *et al.*, 2020; Williams *et al.*, 2023). This perspective expands beyond the tangible aspects of land, encompassing its socioeconomic and political dimensions. The nuanced

relationship between megaprojects and land mobilization recurrently surfaces in the contributions to this volume. Consequently, the interpretation of land as a strategic asset is multifaceted, encapsulating multiple roles: land as a propellant for urban development, land as an instrument for state control, and land as a source of socio-spatial disparities.

The first aspect of land as a strategic asset pertains to its role as a catalyst for economic advancement. Particularly in urban locales, land is a scarce and prized resource. Its strategic deployment can incite economic progression, attract investment, and galvanize urban development. This dynamic is typified by the development of the Gangnam district in Seoul (Chapter 2), where the state deftly utilized land to foster Seoul's emergence as a global city. Similarly, in the development of Songdo International City, South Korea (Chapter 3), land reclamation was pursued by the local entrepreneurial state of Incheon, using land resources to attract businesses and finance its development needs. In Taiwan's Taoyuan Aerotropolis Project (Chapter 4), land was harnessed to establish an industrial and commercial nucleus. These instances demonstrate how the judicious use of land can revolutionize urban landscapes and invigorate economic growth, albeit entailing risks, and render cities appealing for investment.

Land also acts as an instrument for state control. The state can manage urban developmental procedures, sculpt urban landscapes, and govern social and spatial relations through land assembly, expropriation, and rent capture (Haila, 2016). This dynamic is evident in the case of the IT Corridor in Chennai, India (Chapter 5), where the state government seized land from local communities and leased it to IT corporations, thereby capturing the land rent. A similar scenario unfolded in the Third Airport development in Istanbul, Turkey (Chapter 6), where the state confiscated land from local communities and sold it to private developers, capitalizing on the land rent. These cases underscore how the state can exert control over urban development, lure investment, and regulate social and spatial relations through its command over land.

Land may also become a source of social and spatial disparities. The strategic utilization of land often results in local community displacement, gentrification, and exacerbating social and spatial inequalities (Lees *et al.*, 2016). This dynamic is exemplified by the Penang Transport Master Plan in Malaysia (Chapter 8), where the state's expropriation of land from local communities and subsequent lease to private developers led to community displacement and gentrification. A parallel situation emerged in the case of the Gangnam district in Seoul, where the state's strategy of land expropriation and rent capture culminated in the displacement of farmers. These instances underscore how the strategic utilization of land can amplify social and spatial disparities, necessitating an earnest consideration of the social justice implications of megaprojects.

In summation, the understanding of land as a strategic asset within the context of megaprojects is multifaceted, encompassing its function as a catalyst for economic growth, an instrument for state control, and a source of social and spatial

disparities. This perspective illuminates the complex and frequently contested dynamics of land use in urban development and highlights the need for equitable and sustainable approaches to land use planning and management.

Funding Megaprojects

Financing megaprojects is a complex endeavor, deeply intertwined with the socio-political and economic contexts of the regions they encompass. Experiences suggest that megaprojects are prone to cost overrun, thus posing risks to the state and its legitimacy (Flyvbjerg *et al.*, 2003). The funding mechanisms exhibit significant variations, reflecting the specific circumstances and strategic importance of megaprojects to national and local development agendas. Public-private partnerships (PPP) are often advocated for their prominent role in the financing mechanism of megaprojects, enabling the sharing of responsibilities between government and private entities for project costs, risks, and benefits (e.g., Little, 2011). Typically, the government provides the land or initial capital, while private entities handle the onus of construction, operation, and maintenance. This symbiotic relationship allows for the sharing of financial burdens and risks while also leveraging the assumed technical expertise and efficiency of the private sector.

Explicitly mentioning PPP, Taiwan's Taoyuan Aerotropolis megaproject (Chapter 4), with an estimated total cost of TWD 600 billion (US\$20 billion), secured its funding through a blend of public and private resources. While the state pursues economic globalization, businesses aim to commodify extensive parts of urban land and realize substantial profits through real estate investments. The Taoyuan Aerotropolis Corporation (TACo), a local government-owned entity, serves as a prototypical model for PPP-based urban development. Consequently, the consortium of government and private investors played a pivotal role in project development, operation, and management.

A similar case is the IT Corridor megaproject in Chennai, India (Chapter 5). The Tamil Nadu state government expanded its scope to access capital markets, establish partnerships with private companies for infrastructure development, and pursue an economic growth strategy. They also competed for domestic and foreign capital while driving economic development in their territories. Consequently, the state government leveraged their metropolitan areas as growth engines, enacting business-friendly policies and legislation to facilitate land acquisition and business establishment for investors. This intervention enabled the state government to acquire land, develop real estate, and generate profits. Real estate developers made substantial investments in the area, dramatically transforming the landscape and societal composition of Chennai's southern outskirts. Similar instances of PPP are found in India's Gurgaon megaproject (Chapter 9) and the Delhi–Mumbai Industrial Corridor megaproject (Chapter 10).

On the other hand, Istanbul's Third Airport megaproject in Turkey played an active role in sourcing funds from the central government. Primarily facilitated as

a PPP project, it was the country's most significant project, accounting for 38% of all Turkish PPP investments with a total investment of US\$14 billion. The central government made three commitments regarding the PPP system. First, it contributed common goods and public assets such as forests and water resources. Second, it offered a demand guarantee for the project consortium to mitigate risks and promised to purchase the output services when the BOT (Build-Operate-Transfer) period (usually 25–30 years) ends. Finally, it assured funding for the PPP consortium, especially guaranteeing participating international banks that project debts would be jointly covered during the project period.

Land has typically been the foundational source of financing for these projects, enabling PPPs and fundamentally driving project progress. Notably, state-owned or state-managed lands have formed the bedrock of such financial sourcing. One common approach involves creating land by filling suitable locations along rivers or coasts. Examples include the development of Gangnam district in Seoul (Chapter 2), Songdo International City, South Korea (Chapter 3), and the transport infrastructure project in Penang, Malaysia (Chapter 8), where filling along the Han River, coastal areas west of Seoul, and nearby Penang Island, respectively, has provided new land for the formation of fixed assets (real estate and infrastructure) and secured private capital investments. Taiwan's Taoyuan Aerotropolis megaproject (Chapter 4) was also notable for its separation of central development areas known as "egg yolk" from more peripheral areas of "egg white" and its collaboration with real estate developers for the construction and management of the "egg white".

Thus, through various innovative means and strategies, the complex interplay between the public and private sectors provides the financial backbone for these megaprojects. This demonstrates the diverse range of PPP models and land-based financing mechanisms that facilitate urban development on a grand scale.

Megaprojects Through Zoning Strategies

The Taoyuan Aerotropolis Project in Taiwan (Chapter 4) and, to some extent, Songdo International City in the Incheon Free Economic Zone (Chapter 3) serve as compelling examples of the strategic use of zoning within urban megaprojects, which differ from traditional manufacturing-centered zoned cities. The state's spatial selectivity, embodied in this zoning practice, acts as a strategic socioeconomic intervention favoring certain socio-spatial relations, interests, and actors. This selective liberalization of specific areas from national regulations exemplifies the state's adaptability to the global mobility of capital, technology, and talent (see Ong, 2006, pp. 97–118). Zoning of the Taoyuan Aerotropolis Project site is not merely a physical demarcation of space but an economic tool directing the project's trajectory and outcomes, thereby managing the complexities of urban development.

This transformative role of zoning technologies – establishing exceptional areas – serves as an attractor, harnessing the global mobility of capital, technology, and talent. Beyond Taiwan, the Delhi–Mumbai Industrial Corridor project, with

its solid industrial policy, emphasizes attracting industries to specific zones such as Special Economic Zones and National Investment and Manufacturing Zones. These zones, part of the broader industrial corridor development policy, exemplify the Indian government's effort to tightly interlink economic and industrial development with urbanization while alleviating urban congestion. Similarly, as presented in Chapter 7, the Guangzhou megaproject introduces zones laid out on the master plan for new city development axes designed to propel urban development and stimulate investments.

Nevertheless, zoning can function as a fundamental mechanism to enable "accumulation by dispossession". Instances of zoning, legitimizing state-led dispossession legally and institutionally, epitomize its use in facilitating land regulation modifications amenable to privatization and easing sale restrictions. The apartment district in Gangnam's development, as discussed in Chapter 2, is a typical case where the state, by designating this district, not only eases the participation of construction capital in urban development projects but also secures the institutional impetus to propel land readjustment projects vigorously (see also Sonn and Shin, 2020). Additionally, it provides the authority to mandate housing supply in a specific format – apartments institutionally. A similar, and in some sense more potent, zoning is discernible in the Third Airport megaproject in Istanbul (Chapter 6). Through zoning, the Turkish government could impose stringent emergency possession and land use regulations on specific districts. The zoning enabled the state to appropriate private lands, commoditize them, and secure the political and institutional legitimacy necessary for the project's progress. A comparable function of zoning appears in the Penang Transport Master Plan, facilitating the large-scale land reclamation necessary for project financing.

Although exceptional, there are instances like the Gurgaon megaproject (Chapter 9) where zoning and the creation of exceptional spaces circumvent democratic control, as seen in the Maruti megaproject. In this context, elites created spaces that bypassed democratic processes through closed circuits based on their relationships. This process relied on traditional tools of land expropriation and forced migration. Zoning was used for the nondemocratic progression of the project, disregarding land use planning, announcements, and public notifications, and instead relying on an elite network. While this spatial arrangement ultimately delayed the project's construction, it also concentrated wealth among entrenched landowners, revealing the intricate and, at times, contentious dynamics.

Megaprojects as Accumulation by Dispossession

Given the spatial situatedness of megaprojects, they are "inherently displacing", that is, "displacement is intrinsic to mega-project development" (Gellert and Lynch, 2003, p. 15). Displacement further accompanies what Harvey (2003) conceptualized as "accumulation by dispossession", which can be a potent analytical tool to interrogate the socioeconomic dynamics underpinning megaprojects.

Accumulation by dispossession emerges as a recurring theme across various geographical contexts in this volume, unveiling the social realities produced by megaprojects and exposing the outcomes of spatial production veiled by the ideological constructs and truth regimes that legitimate such projects.

Dispossession entails both economic and extra economic means, frequently accompanying the use of explicit and symbolic violence (see Lesutis, 2024 on symbolic violence manifest in megaprojects). The type of dispossession adopted is contingent on the state–society dynamics, the legal and institutional framework of land development, and the property relations of the development site. Various contributions to this volume highlight the disparate moments of unequal capital accumulation engendered by megaprojects. Three critical themes surface from this volume.

First, state-led accumulation by dispossession features the state's proactive role in facilitating this process through land expropriation, land readjustment schemes, or legal mechanisms that enable dispossession. This kind of state intervention is particularly pronounced in the Asian context due to the inherent nature of these states and their pursuit of condensed urbanization (Shin *et al.*, 2022). For instance, in Seoul's Gangnam district (Chapter 2), a state-led development project resulted in the dispossession of agricultural land from local farmers and the waterfront enjoyed by Seoul's citizens. Similar patterns of dispossession and accumulation are visible in the development of the IT Corridor in Chennai (Chapter 5) and the Gurgaon megaproject (Chapter 9) in India, where agricultural land was expropriated in the name of national development and economic growth, with benefits disproportionately accruing to the state and private corporations, and local farmers becoming dispossessed.

Dispossession often involves forceful land acquisition driven by the state or capital. For instance, Taiwan's Taoyuan Aerotropolis Project (Chapter 4) involved the expropriation of over 3,000 hectares of predominantly privately owned land through a series of undemocratic land acquisitions, exemplifying the dispossession plight endured by small-scale farmers and landowners. Dispossessed landowners and farmers held the local state accountable for their predicament, mounting significant resistance. Similarly, Istanbul's Third Airport project in Turkey (Chapter 6) resonated with the theme of dispossession through "urgent expropriation", which involved converting forests and agricultural land into commodities for profit, catalyzing socioeconomic and environmental concerns, and igniting land speculation.

Second, megaprojects rewrite nature by expanding new urban frontiers. Smith (1996) characterizes dilapidated urban areas experiencing gentrification as new urban frontiers in his book on gentrification. These frontiers embody a dualistic theme – romantic, evoking images of vast wilderness and simultaneously targets for conquest in the pursuit of prosperity and progress – poignantly capturing the predicament of contemporary dispossession victims. The offerings in the accumulation process by dispossession include nature or deprecated lands defined as such. This volume starkly documents the obliteration of various natures through the grandiose slogans of megaprojects.

Waterfront spaces are easily exploitable urban frontiers in capitalist cities, as the state exclusively holds reclamation rights, which can readily finance developments by selling or leasing these rights to appealing locations. Participating private actors can accumulate capital and generate profit by privatizing public urban assets. Legal instruments on agricultural land can also be used to create land for urbanization – a common dispossession practice. In Seoul, the waterfront of the Han River was reshaped to make way for the construction of condominium estates for emergent middle-class families or motorways to enhance traffic circulation, resulting in the disappearance of the river's sandbanks and beaches once enjoyed by Seoul citizens (see Chapter 2). A similar scenario was observed during the execution of Penang's Transport Master Plan, which utilized the waterfront spaces of the island's southern and eastern coasts (Chapter 8). The Penang state government adopted land-for-infrastructure swap deals, exchanging land suitable for reclamation or existing land for necessary infrastructure development projects. Rewriting nature was central to the reclamation of coastal areas to construct Songdo International City (Chapter 3).

Whether the state directly expropriates rural land on the urban outskirts to sell or lease to developers (Chapters 5 and 6) or provides institutional support that eases land purchases by private developers (Chapter 9), the modality of dispossession depends on the nature of the state involved and the historical conditions of the project. Regardless, the crucial aspect is that, unlike waterfront spaces, farmlands are already used for livelihoods by specific communities whose existence is tied to this land, necessitating more robust state intervention. The intensity of state intervention often results in the forced displacement of residents who lack the means to assert land ownership rights.

Third, indigenous populations subjected to displacement are frequently the victims of accumulation by dispossession. Depending on the circumstances, landowners can also suffer partial losses. As the term "mega" implies, the existing urban and rural fabric is inevitably dismantled as the projects come to fruition. Even without direct damage, the case studies in this volume underline a stark contrast between the narrow scope of beneficiaries and the broader range of those affected by megaprojects. Forms of direct displacement can be observed among the farmers and landowners in the Third Airport project in Istanbul (Chapter 6), who were displaced from their land due to the Turkish government's excessive use of the Expropriation Law in the ambiguous name of "public interest" to expropriate land for the airport project. Similarly, illegal immigrants affected by Chennai's IT Corridor development project faced the same fate (Chapter 5). Comparable cases are found with the farmers who lost their land in the Gurgaon megaproject and some residents of the urban project areas (Chapter 9). In Penang, the livelihoods of more than 1,500 fishermen were threatened by the pursuit of the Penang Transport Master Plan and the consequential development of Penang's waterfront (Chapter 8).

Overall, there seems to be a lack of detailed exposure of residents and civil society's resistance against megaprojects in the chapters. The absence of this issue could be due to the focus of each chapter not being centered on residents' resistance

but also due to the symbolic and discursive power of megaprojects. The reactions of civil society to the transport plan in Penang illustrate this (Chapter 8). Many civil society organizations in Penang raised issues with this project, criticizing the plan's decision-making process as closed and elitist, pointing to a lack of substantive rationality. In contrast, business organizations supported this project, while residents' reactions were mixed. In contrast, in Guangzhou, China (Chapter 7), intense pro-government protests supporting the Party State emerged, manifesting a different national character. Conflicts between residents and the government ended at the stage of offering compensation.

The reasons for the lack of conspicuous resistance to megaprojects are diverse, as evidenced in various cases, including the antagonism between residents benefiting from development and those who do not, the immaturity of local civil society, and the state's coercive power. However, simultaneously, we should consider the nature of megaprojects as state (hegemony) projects. That is, we can reflect on how national visions and images of the future are projected onto megaprojects, thereby acquiring political legitimacy.

Sociopolitical Processes and Megaprojects: Social Injustice and Resistance

Unsurprisingly, megaprojects are known to have engendered creative destruction to facilitate capital accumulation and the fulfillment of political ambitions of the ruling elites while producing social injustice and discontents (Olajide and Lawanson, 2022). The social injustices arising from megaprojects, as explored throughout the chapters of this volume, can be grouped into three principal themes: (1) nondemocratic processes or the exclusion of civil society during development; (2) changes in land use or rent hikes after development, leading to shifts in community composition and the exclusion of low-income groups; and (3) resistance against these injustices.

One recurring theme in the volume is the nondemocratic nature of development processes and the exclusion of civil society. This issue is evident in the Taoyuan Aerotropolis Project in Taiwan (Chapter 4), where project implementation marginalized civil society, revealing an undemocratic approach. This absence of democratic engagement further amplified the injustices linked to the project, highlighting potential hazards arising from the exclusion of civil society in urban development. This trend of civic exclusion was also prominent in the Penang Transportation Master Plan megaproject in Malaysia (Chapter 8), marked by a post-politicized approach to urban governance, with expert-led decision-making and policy processes taking precedence. This approach limited public engagement in significant matters. Such instances stress the need for a more democratic, inclusive approach to urban development and underscore the urgent need to address these social injustices. The closed operation of planning processes was also distinctly noticeable in Seoul (Chapter 2) and Istanbul (Chapter 6).

Furthermore, post-development changes in land use or rent increases were identified as notable social injustices associated with megaprojects. The IT Corridor project in Chennai (Chapter 5) provides an illustrative example where increasing job qualification requirements effectively excluded a large portion of the local workforce. This form of exclusion, arising from the project's aftermath, brought about substantial shifts in the city's social composition and heightened economic disparities. The Penang Transportation Master Plan project in Penang (Chapter 8) similarly presaged urban transformation by commodifying the urban fabric. This approach, aligned with economic growth objectives, was not inclusive and led to a societal divide. Guangzhou's redevelopment project (Chapter 7) further underscored this trend, where the project disregarded the preferences of migrants as temporary tenants who had significantly contributed to the village's prosperity by renting extra spaces prior to redevelopment. These instances underscore the substantial socioeconomic shifts that megaprojects can instigate, affecting community compositions and exacerbating social disparities.

Implementing megaprojects often sparks resistance and contestation, indicating the potential for social struggle against perceived injustices. This can be either because of the detrimental socioeconomic impact and symbolic violence it generates or because they are much more vulnerable to the economic and financial crises, thus heightening the possibility of re-politicization of people (see also Tarazona-Vento, 2024). This is particularly salient in the case of the IT Corridor megaproject in Chennai (Chapter 5), where some civic groups opposed the project on environmental sustainability grounds, with their voices becoming increasingly louder after the 2015 floods. Residents displaced from their homes and those whose livelihoods were threatened also resisted, but these efforts did not evolve to a level that could challenge the development discourse. It is essential to recognize that megaprojects often entail political mobilization to garner public support and suppress dissent by invoking visions of a technologically advanced, globally competitive future, even as they may entrench existing power structures and exacerbate socio-spatial inequalities.

Structure of the volume

This volume aims to compare and scrutinize how the developmental aspirations of Asian states have been reflected during the (re-)writing of their territorial landscape and, at the same time, how such aspirations were subject to multiscalar politics involving a range of economic, political, and societal agents rooted in various geographical scales. This volume notes a range of megaprojects as the most apparent practices based on hegemonic state strategies but limited by the very form of the state itself. This volume considers megaprojects to be at the top of the observation lists, which helps us elucidate the dynamics of multiscalar strategic relations that determine the process and outcome of urbanization.

Megaprojects deliver “the material interests of powerful actors in the process: notably capital accumulation, especially for financial institutions and construction firms, and moderation and territorialization ambitions for states” (Gellert and Lynch, 2003, p. 20). The collection critically examines how particular political and economic interests were represented, how they mobilized megaprojects and shaped cities ultimately in their own image, and what roles local communities, nascent advocacy groups, or popular struggles played in contesting state-led megaprojects. Nine carefully selected case studies are brought together to examine a range of megaprojects from South Korea, Taiwan, India, Turkey, China, and Malaysia (in the order of their appearance).

Rather than producing a coherent, one-size-fits-all conclusion, we have brought together a range of urbanization experiences across Asia to explore how megaprojects come to be seen as the crystallization of the state's contested urbanization efforts to address both economic (macroeconomic growth and fixed assets accumulation) and political (state legitimacy) aims. Gellert and Lynch (2003) identify four typologies of megaprojects that include (1) infrastructure, (2) extraction, (3) production, and (4) consumption. This volume brings together megaprojects that are infrastructural, production-oriented, and consumption-based, but it would be a stretch to clearly fit them into any one typology, as they are often a combination of multiple typologies.

In Chapter 2, Dong-Wan Gimm examines the connection between state power and megaprojects via the deployment of circulatory infrastructure. The case study of the Gangnam development in Seoul, South Korea, underlines the process's intricate and multifaceted nature, involving national and local players. The development of Gangnam resulted in shifting geographical and symbolic boundaries shaped by territorial circulatory infrastructures. The analysis provides an understanding of the potential advantages and defects of using megaprojects as a strategy for a developmental state, encompassing issues such as the removal of nature, mobilization of private resources, generation of profits, and promotion of development ideology.

In Chapter 3, Hyun Bang Shin and Do Young Oh explore the making of Songdo International City, South Korea, which is often branded as the first smart city in the world. By discussing the political economy of megaproject promotion in times of pre-crisis, between crises, and post-crisis recovery, they highlight the importance of understanding megaprojects as multiscalar and conjunctural processes that entail an interplay between domestic and foreign actors pursuing their material goals. For their discussions, two economic crises that hit South Korea in 1997 and 2008 were identified as providing significant impetus that led to shifts in the dynamics between different scalar actors.

In Chapter 4, Shu-wei Chang and Jinn-yuh Hsu explore the concept of the “zone-city” by studying the Taoyuan Aerotropolis project. They posit that East Asian states adopt discourses of spatial selectivity to explore institutional models and showcase technological advancements instead of relinquishing sovereignty to

establish free-economy urban areas. The Taoyuan Aerotropolis Project represents a collaboration between local governments, land developers, technology providers, and social groups. The “zone-city” notion symbolizes industrial progression and urban sophistication, reflecting East Asia’s state-led urbanization efforts to reconcile congested city centers with socio-technological aspirations. The instability arising from the combination of planned and unplanned components in the zone-city is counterbalanced through smart city discourses.

Loraine Kennedy, in Chapter 5, claims that speculative urbanism is propelled by actors at diverse scales, from global capital driven by profit to local government and private stakeholders. She demonstrates how political elites use megaprojects as part of the regional economic growth strategy. The urbanization model emphasizes infrastructure and real estate development funded by private capital. The connection between infrastructure investment and growth is questionable due to flawed cost–benefit estimates. Chennai’s IT Corridor embodies this process, leading to low-paying, insecure jobs and limited local growth. Despite opposition, the dominant development strategy remains unchallenged.

In Chapter 6, Çağrı Çarıkçı’s analysis of Istanbul’s Third Airport project underlines the changing roles of the state and crucial actors involved in this PPP project. The construction capital exerted pressure on the government, while the financial system of PPP played a critical role in financing the project. A favoritism mechanism also biases the interests of the construction capital. Turkey’s experience with urbanization can provide lessons for other late-industrialized countries, where the construction sector is a consequential contributor to economic development. The case emphasizes the close connection between the construction capital behind megaprojects and statehood.

Chapter 7 by Francesca Frassoldati and Alessandro Armando investigates the development of Zhujiang New Town as Guangzhou’s new central business district and central axis. The authors discuss how the creation of this megaproject reveals the tension between grand narratives and the practical construction processes. The effectiveness of the central axis lies in its ability to bring about tangible transformation despite unexpected events. The materiality of megaprojects also connects material elements and shapes aspirations and expectations through social practices. The discussion highlights the experimental process of megaprojects linking China’s leading global and nationwide cities through design and construction practices.

Creighton Connolly critiques, in Chapter 8, the idea that transportation infrastructure supports economic growth and world city formation, as espoused by supporters of the Penang Transportation Master Plan. This rhetoric, he argues, echoes the broader objectives of entrepreneurial governance and overlooks the desirability, validity, and impacts of such development. He cautions that such capital-intensive programs can devastate most city residents and can be executed only through PPPs since governments lack the budgets to finance these projects. Moreover, the emergence of neoliberal governance setups has contributed to post-politicization in Asian city regions like Penang.

In Chapter 9, Shoshana R. Goldstein explores the case of Gurgaon, India, in her study of megaprojects. She argues that an intricate web of actors steered this project, including policy changes and investments from the private sector. Gurgaon's transformation from a rural region to a city was primarily due to its proximity to Delhi and road accessibility. Despite India's liberalized political economy, procedural democracy does not secure favorable consequences for the government or those impacted by projects. According to her analysis, the history of Gurgaon's earlier land conversion and megaprojects is convoluted and cannot be solely attributed to economic development or ideology.

Neha Sami and Shriya Anand, in Chapter 10, scrutinize the governance and planning arrangements for the Delhi–Mumbai Industrial Corridor. The study discovered inadequate coordination between the central and municipal governments, with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry controlling the entire process instead of the Ministry of Urban Development. The new industrial centers developed in the Delhi–Mumbai Industrial Corridor are located away from existing cities and established by a development authority without an elected local government. According to the authors, the megaproject's implementation has ramifications for sectors, scales, and governance, bypassing representative democracy.

Note

- 1 Some readers of this volume may be curious about the inclusion of Turkey in a volume on Asian experiences of megaprojects. This inclusion stems from two main reasons. First, the chapter was originally part of conference sessions titled “(Re-)making Cities: The Politics of Scale in Megaprojects in Asia and Beyond”. Second, it was a proactive gesture to challenge the existing Global North–South divisions in the critical urban scholarship (see Shin, 2021, which conceptualizes the global East as an extension of this gesture) and consider the conjunctural development of global histories. These histories have led to Turkey's transition from being categorized as part of West Asia to becoming a bridge between Asia and Europe while aspiring to join the European Union. We believe that Turkey's politics and economy exhibit greater resemblance to those of East and Southeast Asia.

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