Overview: Contemporary urbanization and the transportation revolution of Asia are fundamentally challenging our inherited knowledge-models about Asia. Asia is shifting from rural to urban, the Himalayan barrier between China and India is rapidly becoming part of the past with accelerating bilateral trade, while Japan, which was the first to become a largely urban society, is rapidly strengthening its ties with South Asia. This is an exciting moment for us to be engaging in the study of post-Cold War Asia and the post-Area studies world, to generate cross regional conversations and research, while opening up new avenues for exploring the study of Asia in interdisciplinary trans-regional and global perspectives. Two workshops are planned for 2013-2014 as part of the Duke-UNC Global History-Asian Studies Initiative.
Abstract: This talk outlines a conceptual approach to the comparative study of urbanization that focuses on the creative destruction of governance modes and institutions, and the widely varied development trajectories that result. One starting point is the work of Terry McGee on extended metropolitan regions, which showed that in the high-density rural areas surrounding many Asian cities, urban development processes extend far from core areas, and can be profoundly transformative in their impacts on the peri-urban areas surrounding cities. The argument here is that a major focus of comparative research should be on such processes of peri-urbanization, rather than on an examination of the particular urban areas that are created.

I argue for comparative study of the institutions that structure processes of land-use change and land development in periurban areas, and the sets of rules that shape the outcomes of periurbanization processes. Key institutions include land and property registration systems, land subdivision rules, inheritance regimes, village and municipal governance rules including local self-governance and citizen participation practices, traditions of local dispute resolution, institutions for the management of common lands and infrastructure, municipal finance systems, regulations for municipal incorporation and/or annexation of new urban lands, relations to senior levels of government, and rules governing the provision of infrastructure for new urban land, among others.

During processes of periurbanization, these existing governance systems are routinely displaced as new governance institutions are deployed to cope with new demands. Some of these may be fleeting, while others become institutionalized. All are likely to privilege some actors and outcomes rather than others, and are therefore contested. This overlay of new governance structures onto existing places works quite differently in different places, and produces contingent sets of opportunities and highly unequal distributions of the costs and benefits of periurbanization that have long-term consequences for the future urbanity that develops.

The case of Japan is used as an example of one way in which an evolving set of institutions shaped periurbanization through the period of modernization and the period of rapid industrial urban growth. This is contrasted briefly with examples from the US, China and India.
Abstract: This presentation discusses the links between infrastructure provision and urban expansion, the relation between level of infrastructure and land prices, and the mechanisms used to finance infrastructure. Data and case studies from developed and developing cities in China are used to provide empirical evidence about the extent to which infrastructure service provision affects urban development and shapes development patterns. The case of China provides sufficient dynamics and variation within the country, enabling the investigation of the above mentioned research questions. In three decades of market-oriented reforms, China has been one of the world’s fastest-growing economies with per capita real incomes more than quadrupling since 1978. In this period, China has made substantial investments in infrastructure and improved access to services such as safe water, sanitation, electric power, telecommunications, and transport. More recently, China is to accelerate construction of urban public infrastructure by investing as much as seven trillion Yuan ($1.03 trillion) during its 12th Five-Year Plan from 2011 to 2015. One may marvel at the scale of infrastructure investment and the extent to which infrastructure has transformed the urban landscape in China. However, improving the infrastructure provision in many Chinese cities is a challenge as problems persist in the form of insufficient provision of infrastructure, discrepancies in the level of infrastructure across regions, deficiencies in cost recovery, inadequate sources of financing, and the lack of incorporation of sustainable principles in shaping urban growth. This presentation will describe the aforementioned challenges in infrastructure provision in China and explore the causes of some of the existing problems.

Abstract: Emblematic of the rapid urbanization of many secondary cities in emerging economies such as India, Surat is a rapidly growing industrial city in South Gujarat, on India’s Western coast. It is the state’s second most prosperous city and also widely cited as one of the better managed, having turned around the city’s fortunes dramatically after a flood-induced crisis in the mid-1990s. The city, which is prone to periodic flooding, given its location downstream from a major dam, has invested significant resources to adapt to and mitigate
these risks, which have intensified over time. In this paper I explore the city’s turnaround, through a confluence of three histories that undergird its urban structure: its municipal history, a history of its deeply embedded production networks – textiles and diamond cutting that are the heart of the city’s economic life, and a history of the (uneven and variegated) incorporation of waves of in-migrants into the city over time. Migrants make up over fifty-five percent of the city’s population, and are the core workforce in the city’s textile industry. By contrasting the city’s textile and diamond industries the paper sheds light on the uneven outcomes of the city’s adaptation efforts for different populations and spaces in the city, at different times and how citizens in turn push back.

2:15-3:00 Robin Visser, (UNC-Chapel Hill, Asian Studies)
“The Chinese Eco-City and Urbanization Planning: Case Studies of Tongzhou (Beijing), Lingang (Shanghai), and Dujiangyan (Chengdu)”
Comment and Discussion: Carlos Rojas (Duke, AMES)

Abstract: China has promoted sustainable urban development since 2005, particularly new urbanism ideals of TOD (transit-oriented development) of satellite towns. Yet most experts indicate that these new cities ultimately fail to meet their sustainability goals. Instead, entrepreneurial local governments and institutions skilfully utilize their power to convert farmlands to constructed lands for various kinds of industrial and commercial development. In this paper I analyze case studies of Chinese “new city” (xincheng) development aimed at integrating vast metropolitan regions, identifying rural land conversion mechanisms in order to elucidate China’s rapidly evolving urbanization strategies. I pay particular attention to how the rhetoric of eco-city development rationalizes rural land transfers. I conclude that the primary value of most of these projects (better termed xiangmu hua or “projectization,”) may lie in their position within a speculative economy rather than their contribution to the social or ecological good.

3:00-3:15 Coffee Break

3:15-4:00 Iqbal Sevea, (UNC-Chapel Hill, History)
“‘Waheguru Naam Jahaz Hain’ (‘God’s Name is a Steamship’): Religion, Urban Milieus and Modern Technologies of Circulation in North India
Comment and Discussion: Sucheta Mazumdar (Duke, History)

Abstract: This talk will explore how religious movements in urban milieus in north India, particularly Lahore and Amritsar, competed to demonstrate their ability to adapt to the urban socio-economic and intellectual context. It will be stressed that in doing so, these movements transformed established traditions of religious transmission and notions of spiritual authority.
An important part of the talk will examine religious discourses that reflected urban settings and used metaphors of modern transportation like trains, steamships, aeroplanes and clocks.

4:00-4:45  Mustafa Tuna, (Duke, History and Slavic Studies)
“Kazan: A Cosmopolitan City and Russian Muslim Intellectuals between East and West”
Comment and Discussion: Eren Tasar, (UNC-Chapel Hill, History)

Abstract: Muslims inhabited the city of Kazan at the imaginary border of Europe and Asia approximately since the early tenth century. Once incorporated into the Russian empire in the mid-sixteenth century, the city also evolved as a cosmopolitan hub between the cultural realm of Islamicate Asia and pan-European influences filtered through the Russian imperial experience. My paper examines Kazan’s role as a touch point between various cultural realms, which became particularly pronounced in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, when European Russia transformed radically and the Russian lands to the east of the Ural Mountains, where many of Russia’s Muslims lived, received only a minimal share from this transformation.

An emerging network of Russian Muslim intellectuals promoted European ideas and manners among their co-religionists in this period. They were primarily influenced by the Ottoman Westernists and the overall impact of pan-European modernity in the Russian empire. They were dispersed throughout the Muslim-inhabited territories of Russia, and many of them earned their lives as elementary school teachers in Muslim villages. In most cases, this was a deliberate choice, for the intellectuals imagined themselves as heralds to awake a sleeping nation to enlightenment. However, being dependent on the financial support of Muslim villagers, while deeply alienated from those villagers, significantly limited their ability to fulfill this mission. Cosmopolitan cities like Kazan, on the other hand, and especially Kazan, accorded them an environment of freedom where they could live beyond the cultural confines of local Muslim communities. Here, they experimented with new ideas, forms of expression, and ways of life, which they promoted through periodicals such as the artistic journal Añ, the nationalist Yuldız, or the socialist revolutionary Tan Yuldızı. These came to symbolize the new urban and, in their words, “progressive” culture of the hybrid world that the Muslim intellectuals sought to create. Given their alienation, these intellectuals were unlikely to generate meaningful transformation among the broader Muslim population, but when the Bolsheviks came to power, they served as agents of the new regime – not as blind collaborators, but as believers of the promises of early Bolshevik experimentalism.

Announcements:  Details of Next Meeting