

## Shanghai, London, and Paris through the Looking Glass

Carlos López Galviz, School of Advanced Study, University of London

[carlos.galviz@sas.ac.uk](mailto:carlos.galviz@sas.ac.uk)

In the sequel to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1871), Lewis Carroll showed us the limits but also the possibilities of mirroring worlds. By stepping into a mirror, Alice discovers a distinct reflection of her own world, filled with new characters, notable among them the White Queen, who remembers future events. The mirror and the White Queen will help to locate the reflection that I wish to propose here. Images of the future of cities, to which imagined transport and mobility infrastructures are key, function like mirrors: they project worlds that are both a distortion and a promise of alternative realities, in the past and today. One of our tasks as historians is to remember things, events, people, an important part of which concerns remembering how the future has been envisioned before us, and the effects that these visions might have on our own futures: who envisioned what and in whose interest, for example, using what vehicles, under which circumstances and in response to what motivations. These are the questions that will serve as referents for this contribution, which, I must add, is as brief as it is speculative.

My aim is to draw connections rather than providing an exhaustive survey of the fields to which this reflection might speak. I will show the pertinence of drawing parallels between contexts that are as different as they are distant. Connections between cities in Europe, North America, and Asia have been explored by reference to a range of issues, notably, through the lenses of the global city, citizenship, and the experience of modernity, revealing the drawbacks and opportunities of understanding the realities and transformation of every city through one specific lens.<sup>1</sup>

Imagining the future of cities is often an exercise that is based upon the imagining of future transport infrastructure. Roads, railways, canals, and airports have been and remain at the center of visions of a future that, in most cases, is increasingly urbanized. This is an opportunity that we, as urban and planning historians and transport and mobilities scholars, should be able to exploit in a way that resonates with the notion of “mobile urbanism,” though with a historically inflected lens.<sup>2</sup> Drawing on the work of Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin, Gijs Mom made a similar point in his editorial note to the first issue of *Transfers*: “We want to understand how in the ‘splintered cities’ of the new century, the ‘scapes’ of ‘electropolis,’ ‘autocity’ and ‘cybercity’ are interconnected, co-evolving in ways that neither mobility histories nor urban histories have so far been able to reconstruct.”<sup>3</sup> Part of the challenge and significant potential relates to making historical research relevant to policy making and industry contexts, important steps into which have been taken by Colin Divall, Hans L. Dienel, Gijs Mom, the P2M (Passé, Présent, Mobilité) in France, the Forum Vies Mobiles, and others. Historical thinking is of great assistance when identifying the broad connections between, for example, different modes of transport, civil societies, and democracy, but also for tracing the path dependencies, obduracies, and failures as well as the processes through which transport and mobility choices are shaped, refined, and made.<sup>4</sup> In this light, connections across space and over time that use cities as a comparative transnational lens can be profitable and conducive to richer analytic frameworks. In what follows, I concentrate on one aspect of the intersection between transport and urbanization in the histories of London, Paris, and Shanghai, namely, the ways in which their future has been envisioned in the past and how it continues to be envisioned today. This is a process that is riddled with notions such as modernity and progress, an important part of which is based upon symbols and mythmaking; or, to go back to Alice’s world, mirrors and White Queens.

## **The Symbols and Myths of Futurity**

Whether it is because of size, population, diversity, financial and industrial output, contribution to the national economy, international outlook, a cosmopolitan culture, or more, London, Paris, and Shanghai occupy a unique and distinct position in Britain, France, and China, respectively. Their future, including that of their transport infrastructure, is intertwined with the future of the nations of which they are a part. The authorities of Chinese cities have used transport infrastructure, among other things, as a means of attracting foreign direct investment, supplementing but also connecting to the world's most extensive national network of high-speed railways. To Debin and Li, this is a strategy that has prompted expansion and competition for financial resources between Chinese cities rather than coordination between them, including the cities in and around the Yangtze River delta, the most prominent of which is Shanghai.<sup>5</sup>

Whatever superlatives we use or whichever angle one takes, Shanghai is a city undergoing a transformation that is both alien and familiar. Scholarship in a broad range of fields has taken good notice.<sup>6</sup> Shanghai's population has gone from over thirteen million in 1990 to over twenty-three million in 2012. Yes, there is urbanization. Yes, there is wealth circulating: literally, should one choose to take the express lifts of one of the Pudong towers: the Shanghai Financial Center, say, or the Jinmao Tower. Yes, inequality has grown, as has air pollution, reported in 2013 as being over twenty times the levels that the World Health Organization deems safe. Some of this resembles the kind of transformation that London and Paris experienced during the nineteenth century, not least air pollution, which, in the case of London, would be solved only—and partly—after the passing of the Clean Air Act of 1956.

But there is also something akin to the unprecedented as well as something distinctly Chinese in the story. Arguably, China continues to experiment without recourse to a model, but by “crossing the river by feeling the stones,” prompting critics and advocates alike to

raise questions about market socialism, a state-governed capitalism, and a market closely monitored and periodically in check.<sup>7</sup> Recent scholarship has reminded us of the importance of understanding the precise relationship between modernization and tradition in the different planning cultures of China's recent history, not least in the province-level municipalities of Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Chongqing.<sup>8</sup> Not surprisingly, and as Har Ye Kan has shown, the relationship between transport and urbanization is one of the thriving areas in Chinese transport history.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, we know the influence that Europeans had on the planning and building of nineteenth-century Shanghai, especially the foreign settlements (largely French and Anglo-American), as well as the developments in the larger Chinese area prior to the Japanese occupation in 1937, and the building of mass housing during the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup>

We should not forget, however, that Shanghai was a city of over five hundred thousand inhabitants by the fourteenth century, having been an important center of silk production since at least the eighth century (Huating), and a city that was walled in during the mid-1500s to protect it from the intrusion of pirates and marauders that came by sea.<sup>11</sup> This is the kind of history and context that the myth of a “small rural fishing village,” mostly promoted by foreign traders following the forced opening of Shanghai as one of the treaty ports after the Opium Wars in the 1840s, has obscured.<sup>12</sup> This is a myth that remains pervasive today, especially when the future of Shanghai is not only depicted through ever higher towers, but also through the planning of a city that is to be “smart,” “better,” and “more harmonious.”

Nineteenth-century London and Paris were no strangers to the politics of mythmaking. Take the creative destruction that Haussmann inflicted on Paris, documented through the photographs of Charles Marville, Eugène Atget, and others. Their work would contribute to inserting the powerful dyad of “before” and “after” into the narrative of

nineteenth-century Paris. Old streets became new, airy, safer, and modern thoroughfares (see figures 1 and 2). Where dark alleys and dilapidated houses stood, Parisians now encountered wide boulevards, handsome façades, and inviting cafes. This was the dream of modern Paris, a dream that also displaced around 350,000 people, largely the poor, who would remain entangled in a crisis of public health and affordable housing well into the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup> The contrast between the dream and the reality could not have been any starker. At the same time, this was a story that the Marville photographs exhibited at the Exposition Universelle of 1878, for example, would not and could not show.<sup>14</sup> The boulevard invited new means of transport, experiments with tramways, bicycles, and later the Métro. Plans for affordable transport and new transport infrastructure were central to the large number of visions that proposed to transform Paris since at least the 1840s. Several of these proposals were both comprehensive and inclusive. Railways were often seen as vehicles of the reform that was needed. But the boulevard and the uniform façade won.<sup>15</sup>

<Insert Fig. 1 here>

Figure 1. Rue Tirechape prior to its demolition c. 1865 when it gave way to the Rue du Pont Neuf in the area affected by the works of the Rue de Rivoli and the Rue Saint-Honoré.

Photograph by Charles Marville, public domain.

<Insert Fig. 2 here>

Figure 2. Boulevard Saint Germain c. 1870. Note the landscape orientation of the photograph, compared to the portrait image of the Rue Tirechape (see figure 1), which better captures the ample width of the new boulevard. Photograph by Charles Marville, public domain.

Images of the skyline of Pudong, and the Lujiazui Financial Center more specifically, use a similar strategy to that of old and new Paris, and old and new London (see figure 3).<sup>16</sup> They depict the epitome of Chinese modernity and the symbol of the rise of Shanghai as the dominant urban center in East Asia. These are the photographs that media around the world have used to show the powerhouse that the Chinese economy appears to have become. They are eloquent, a sign and signifier of modernity, if you wish: a myth of sorts.

<Insert Fig. 3 here>

Figure 3. Lujiazui, Shanghai, 1990, 2000, and 2012. Shanghai Urban Planning Exhibition Center. Photograph by the author, 2014.

As in mid-nineteenth-century Paris and London, an important part of the reality that these photographs hide is the nonresident population of Shanghai, which has risen from over three million in 2000 (nearly 20 percent of the city's population) to nearly nine million in 2010 (nearly 40 percent of the city's population).<sup>17</sup> Where do they live and if and how they travel are questions for which we have limited answers.

Green transport and consolidating the metro network constitute an essential part of Shanghai's 2012 plan. It also includes the building of nearly one million new housing units, seventy-five thousand of which will be for low-income families.<sup>18</sup> The renewed and revised emphasis of the plan is based largely upon innovation and a new transition. Central to these, in turn, are brands such as "Smart City," "Harmonious Society," "Better City," "Better Life," and the like, a good number of them coined for the 2010 Expo, which Shanghai hosted. The city's urban planning exhibition center has an entire floor dedicated to these visions, drawing on examples from around the world while, at the same time, giving Shanghai a firm place in green developments. One striking if failed example is Dongtan: the eco-island with a zero-

emission transport zone that has not quite taken off yet, despite bringing on Arup, one of the largest engineering firms in the world, as contractor. Part of the exhibit includes an impressive rendering projected onto a circular room with an elevated platform that tilts while displaying a 360-degree bird's-eye journey through the planned buildings, open spaces, new transport, and related developments of future Shanghai.<sup>19</sup>

The exhibit draws on the long-standing narrative of futurity inherent in the very function of world fairs. The 1851 Great Exhibition in London was an occasion during which Britain would reassert its role as an imperial power, but also as a cradle of industry, innovation, and forward-looking drive. Interestingly, renderings of London of the future at the time were mostly connected with communications that, by 1850, were largely “railway” communications. Joseph Paxton’s iconic Great Victorian Way (1855) springs to mind. Paris hosted five world exhibitions throughout the nineteenth century in 1855, 1867, 1878, 1889, and 1900. Connecting the building of the Métro to the event was a concern of municipal and national authorities, especially in 1889 and 1900. Line 1 of the Métro opened for passenger services in July 1900, three months after the opening of the exhibition, in time to provide a much-needed shelter from the Parisian heat that summer.

Symbols and connections to grand ideas such as those that characterize world exhibitions, the place of one’s city in an increasingly urbanized and unsustainable world, have been and are important to decision makers, whether we look for them in the past or in the newspapers and reports that we read today. Symbols and mythmaking contribute to mobilizing political discourses and practices around public transport: the building of the Métro in Paris and the Underground in London in the nineteenth century is a good illustration of this. Symbolism is as important to envisioning the future of transport in Shanghai as it is to the future of the city itself, whether it concerns new metro lines (with plans to expand to twenty-two lines covering a total route length of 877 kilometers by 2020) or shared shuttles

that connect residential areas across and around the city to places of work, entertainment, and shopping.<sup>20</sup>

Questions around symbols and myths are important, not only because we might recognize their value and use today, but, perhaps more importantly, because through a careful analysis of what the symbols stand for we can reveal the realities and contrasts that they hide: the housing crises that affected the poor and working classes of London and Paris from the 1860s onward were never quite resolved before World War I, despite ambitious and sound proposals that used railways as a means of alleviating the problem.<sup>21</sup> Unsurprisingly, the crises are back: in Paris, we witnessed the creation of the Ministère de la Crise du Logement in 2007, while more recent reports in London put the shortage of housing at sixty-three thousand units, which contrasts with the eighty thousand homes that remain empty in the English capital every year.<sup>22</sup> The building of Crossrail in London (due for completion in 2018) and the firmer steps taken toward the Nouveau Grand Paris are inroads to solving part of the problem: transport infrastructure serving the future of housing in London and Paris, or so we are told.

Liu Renshan's rendering of the new Line 9 (see figure 4) shows just how intertwined transport, architecture, and nature in Shanghai might be. The first section of Line 9 opened in December 2007, connecting to the "Prosperity Area," presumably Pudong (the extension to Century Avenue opened in December 2009), but also to the Bund, Old Shanghai, and the area in and around Songjiang University Town, further west. Songjiang is the site of the ancient settlement of Huating and also of Thames Town, one of the satellite new towns built since 2000 around Shanghai. All the icons are in Renhan's rendering: the metallic bridge, Western architecture, traditional Chinese temples, the entry to a new metro station, traditional and high-rise housing, an elevated motorway, flowers and tree branches. Might this be the symbol of a myth in the making? If so, whose lives are the symbol and the myth obscuring?



<Insert Fig. 4 here>

Figure 4. *Line 9 Connects to the Prosperity Area* by Liu Renshan, n.d. Shanghai Urban Planning Exhibition Center. Photograph by the author, 2014.

Using images of the past futures of cities allows us to draw parallels between contexts that are different but nevertheless reveal a similar transformation. Skylines such as that of Lujiazui are evocative of the mobility that the towers concentrate, which the metro lines connecting to the area support and enhance. Using skylines as representations might help us articulate “alternative voices and imagin[e] possible futures” through a “more experimental ethos,” as Koch and Latham advocate.<sup>23</sup> Examining the role that symbols and myths play in how cities and mobilities interact also enables us to identify important continuities across space and over time. Mythmaking is, after all, as fundamental as storytelling. The question for us is whether and how to engage with past myths and symbols that continue to distort our futures, urban and mobile as they increasingly are. Holding a mirror up to them might be a critical vehicle to avoid false reflections and reveal what they tend to exclude, obscure, and ignore.

**Carlos López Galviz** is a lecturer and research fellow at the School of Advanced Study, University of London, where he teaches human rights research methods and leads an AHRC-funded project on the materialities, processes, and mediations of ruins. His most recent book is the coedited volume *Global Undergrounds: Exploring Cities Within*, forthcoming with Reaktion Books (2016).

## Notes

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1 The now classic study of the global city is Saskia Sassen's *The Global City: New York*,

2 Eugene McCann and Kevin Ward, eds., *Mobile Urbanism: Cities and Policymaking in the Global Age* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

3 Gijs Mom, "Hop on the Bus, Gus," *Transfers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Mobility Studies* 1, no. 1 (2011): 8.

4 Mathieu Flonneau, Arnaud Passalacqua, and Leonard Laborie, eds., *Les transports de la démocratie: Approche historique des enjeux politiques de la mobilité* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2014); Colin Divall, "To Encourage Such as Would Travel a Little, to Travel More: Trains, Planes, Cars, History and the Future of Mobility," in *Rail-Ways As An Innovative Regional Factor*, ed. Heli Maki and Jenni Korjus (University of Helsinki, 2009), 16–29.

5 Du Debin and Huang Li, "Urbanisation in China: Regional Development and Co-operation among Cities," UrbaChina working paper series 3, July 2014. See also Fulong Wu, "Sociospatial Differentiation in Urban China: Evidence from Shanghai's Real Estate Markets," *Environment and Planning A* 34 (2002): 1591–1615; Gregory Bracken, ed., *Aspects of Urbanization in China Shanghai, Hong Kong, Guangzhou* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012).

6 Joshua A. Fogel, "The Recent Boom in Shanghai Studies," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 71, no. 2 (2010): 313–333.

7 The expression is a quote from Thomas B. Gold, "Introduction One: Models in an Uncertain World," in *Society Building: A China Model of Social Development*, ed. Xiangqun Chang (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 2. For a lucid account of the relationship between capital, globalization, and the Chinese government, see George C. S.

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Lin, "State, Capital, and Space in China in an Age of Volatile Globalization," *Environment and Planning A* 32 (2000): 455–471.

8 Michael Leaf, "Modernity Confronts Tradition: The Professional Planner and Local Corporatism in the Rebuilding of China's Cities," in *Comparative Planning Cultures*, ed. Bishwapriya Sanyal (Routledge: New York and London, 2005), 91–111.

9 Har Ye Kan, "From Transport to Mobility in Modern China: A Survey of the Field," *Mobility in History: The Yearbook of the International Association for the History of Transport, Traffic and Mobility* 5 (2014): 150–160; see also Nanny Kim, "Transport in China before the Industrial Age: Comparative Research Issues," in *Mobility in History: The State of the Art in the History of Transport, Traffic and Mobility (T<sup>2</sup>M Yearbook 2009)*, ed. Gijs Mom, Gordon Pirie, and Laurent Tissot (Neuchâtel: Alphil, 2009); Yajun Mo, "Boundaries and Crossings Mobility, Travel, and Society in China, 1500–1954: A Survey of the Field," *Mobility in History: The Yearbook of the International Association for the History of Transport, Traffic and Mobility* 6 (2015): 150–157.

10 The important work of Christian Henriot is key here; see, for example, Christian Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality in Shanghai: A Social History (1849–1949)* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Christian Henriot, *Shanghai, 1927–1937: Municipal Power, Locality, and Modernization*, trans. Noël Castelino (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1993); see also Kerrie L. MacPherson, "Designing China's Urban Future: The Greater Shanghai Plan, 1927–1937," *Planning Perspectives* 5, no. 1 (1990): 39–62; José A. Remón Esteban, "Vivienda Masiva en Shanghai (1840–2012): La supervivencia del Movimiento Moderno en la China contemporánea" (Ph.D. diss., Universidad Politécnica de Cataluña, 2012). For a wonderful repository of historical sources, see <http://www.virtualshanghai.net> (accessed 28 January 2015).

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11 See, for example, the Shanghai Encyclopedia, p. xxvii,

<http://zhuanti.shanghai.gov.cn/encyclopedia/en/Default2.aspx#p15> (accessed 18 August 2014).

12 On the long history of Shanghai see, for example, Linda Cooke Johnson, *Shanghai, From Market Town to Treaty Port, 1074–1858* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995); see also Marie-Claire Bergère, *Shanghai: China's Gateway to Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

13 See, for example, David Harvey, *Paris: Capital of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Anne-Louise Shapiro, *Housing the Poor of Paris, 1850–1902* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985). On the role of images and image making in the modern city, see James Donald, *Imagining the Modern City* (London: Athlone Press, 1999).

14 This is due in part to the nature of the commissions behind and the practicalities of Marville's work. See, for example, Sarah Kennel, *Charles Marville: Photographer of Paris* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 28–30.

15 I explore this in Carlos López Galviz, "Metropolitan Railways: Urban Form and the Public Benefit in London and Paris c.1850–1880," *The London Journal* 38, no. 3 (2013): 184–202.

16 The work of Henry Dixon for the Society for Photographing Relics of Old London, founded in 1873, is comparable to that of Marville. Due to limitations of space, I have left the discussion of Dixon's work for a future contribution.

17 See the Shanghai Statistical Yearbook 2011, <http://www.stats-sh.gov.cn/tjnj/zgsh/nj2011.html> (accessed 18 August 2014).

18 I would like to thank Professor Qiyu Tu for sharing his views on Shanghai's Twelfth Five-Year Plan; thanks also to Dr. Ning Su for sharing his work on thirty years of urban renewal in Shanghai.

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19 See <http://www.supec.org/index.html> (accessed 24 January 2015).

20 Two interventions from the Séminaire Métropoles d'Asie, *Les Idées de la Ville en Asie* at the École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture Paris Belleville, 23 May 2014, are particularly relevant here: Carine Henriot, "Imaginer, nommer et labelliser la ville chinoise: Analyse des discours sur la planification urbaine et ses référents depuis 1949"; Sun Ting, "Services de mobilité communautaires à Shanghai: Une solution complémentaire dans un contexte de demande explosion de la mobilité?" See also Non Arkaraprasertkul, "Shanghai Contemporary: The Politics of Built Form" (M.Sc. thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007).

21 Carlos López Galviz, "Converging Lines Dissecting Circles: Railways and the Socialist Ideal in London and Paris at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," in *London and Beyond: Essays in Honour of Derek Keene*, ed. Matthew Davies and James Galloway (London: Institute of Historical Research Series), 317–337.

22 See, for example, Andy Dangerfield, "London's Housing Crisis: Five Controversial Solutions," BBC News London, 22 July 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-28377740> (accessed 9 May 2015); "En direct du ministère de la Crise du logement," Libération blog, 17 April 2008, <http://ministeredelacrise.blogs.liberation.fr/2008/04/17/debout-les-loc/> (accessed 9 May 2015).

23 Regan Koch and Alan Latham, "Representing and Imagining the City," in *Cities and Social Change: Encounters with Contemporary Urbanism*, ed. Ronan Paddison and Eugene McCann (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014).



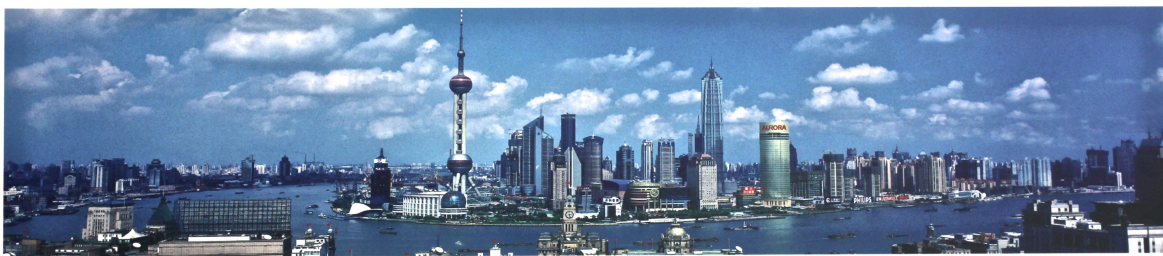
Figure 1



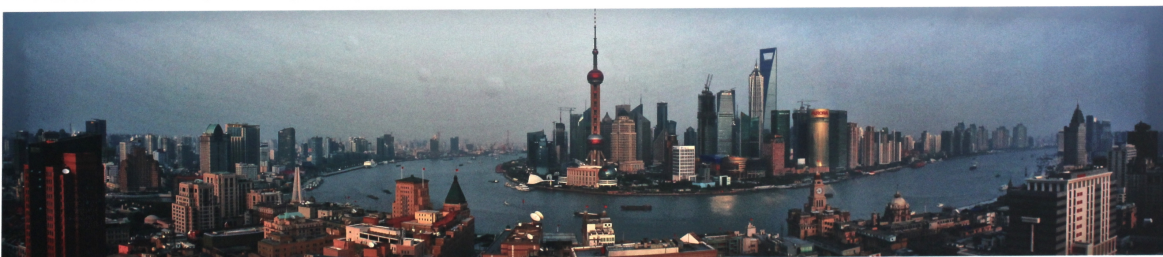
Figure 2



1990年代陆家嘴建设初期 The initial construction of Lujiazui in the 1990s



2000年代的初具规模的陆家嘴地区 Lujiazui area which began to take shape in the 2000s



2012年，功能日趋成熟的陆家嘴地区 Lujiazui area with increasingly better developed functions in 2012

Figure 3



Figure 4