



A Tale of Two Global City-Regions:

Immigration and Innovation in Greater Shanghai and Shenzhen

A SUMMER FIELD STUDY COURSE IN SHANGHAI, SHENZHEN, AND THEIR NEIGHBORING CITIES

In 1979, China established its first Special Economic Zone in the small fishing village of Shenzhen, bordering Hong Kong. Over four decades Shenzhen has grown into China's "Silicon Valley," known for its widespread immigrant entrepreneurship and leading industrial innovation. Despite being overshadowed by Shenzhen's miraculous rise, Shanghai, China's historical world city and largest economic center, got a new lease on life in 1992 when the Pudong New Area, similar to Shenzhen's SEZ designation, set Shanghai on course to be China's premier global city of the 21st century. Today, both Shanghai and Shenzhen are approaching 25 million people and have surpassed Hong Kong in GDP.

While Shenzhen has risen as a historically unprecedented "instant city" and "miracle city" that can compete with San Francisco as a global innovation center, Shanghai has experienced an unparalleled renaissance from its glorious past to rival New York and London as a new global financial center.

Shenzhen's miraculous development has benefited heavily from being China's most popular destination for rural and urban migrants from all corners of the country. As many successful migrants have become new wealthy Shenzhen residents living in luxury high-rise buildings, others eke out a living in Shenzhen's many urban villages. The villages, though, are disappearing due to large-scale urban redevelopment.

Like Silicon Valley and other cities dominated by immigrants, Shenzhen has become China's most innovative city. Around 90% of Shenzhen's companies are privately owned and have been started and run by risk-taking immigrant entrepreneurs. Shenzhen has led all Chinese cities in the number of international patents applied for and granted, and consistently accounted for about half of China's applied patents. This innovative prowess stems primarily from R&D by major technology companies such as BYD, Huawei, and Tencent. The combination of immigrant entrepreneurship and innovation has turned Shenzhen into China's Silicon Valley and a global leader in local innovation.

Already China's most populous city with 13 million people around 1990, Shanghai has almost doubled its population over the last three decades through large in-migration.

This in-migration, however, has not had the same local effect on entrepreneurial innovation as in Shenzhen. While Shanghai was China's dominant industrial powerhouse before and after 1949 through 1990, it has ironically fallen behind Shenzhen in industrial innovation primarily because Shanghai's economy has been dominated by state-owned enterprises that are inherently more conservative and risk-averse than private firms in Shenzhen.

Shanghai's more restrictive policies on immigration have also been less conducive to entrepreneurship and innovation than Shenzhen's more inclusive and welcoming immigration policies. Having recognized its lost competitive edge to Shenzhen in this regard, the Shanghai government has recently elevated innovation to one of the highest priorities together with trade, finance, and shipping in its master plan for 2035.

In summer 2020, under the aegis of the Center for Urban and Global Studies (CUGS), in collaboration with Fudan University in Shanghai and Shenzhen University, and with financial support from the China Urban Studies Summer Program Fund, Trinity College will launch a new field study course in Shanghai and Shenzhen. The course will focus on the dual and coupled themes of immigration and innovation.

We will examine migrant life in Shanghai and Shenzhen from both cultural and spatial perspectives. To understand the city's prevalent immigrant culture, we will read academic and popular writings and interview both young and older migrants. We will use a couple of immigrant communities in Shanghai and urban villages in Shenzhen as micro sites to probe the residential experience of migrants in relation to their work locations, commuting times, and access to other urban resources such as consumption and entertainment outlets. For the focus on innovation, we will visit a number of large and small firms and factories, either established or starting out, located in government-designated, dense high-tech districts in both cities.



Since immigration and innovation in both Shenzhen and Shanghai have spilled into the surrounding lower-tier cities and peri-urban places, we will include Chongming Island near Shanghai and Dongguan and Shunde near Shenzhen as comparative cases for studying immigrant and innovation connections between two global mega-cities and their fully linked regional hinterlands.

We have secured the participation of a complementary team of professors in urban planning, sociology, and cultural studies at Fudan University and Shenzhen University, and urban planners, business executives, and community activists who will help us teach locally.

They will give guest lectures, serve as field visit guides, help guide Trinity students' course projects, and potentially participate in collaborative research with Trinity's course instructors. This will set up a new and more integrated approach to urban-global studies through field-based experiential learning and acquisition of local knowledge. The course will carry 1.0 credit through classroom instruction at Fudan University and Shenzhen University and field visits in Shanghai and Shenzhen and three nearby cities.

Immigration and innovation are the twin drivers of dynamic and sustainable cities. Immigration creates diverse and vibrant entrepreneurial spirit and activities that lead to new and innovative ideas, organizations, and products, which in turn enrich and improve cities.

During China's rapid urbanization, Shanghai and Shenzhen are a pair of the most dramatic and illustrative cities where in-migration and innovation have interacted differently in driving growth and transformation.

To gain an invaluable regional perspective, we will include Chongming Island off Shanghai in our investigation to study its innovative agricultural activities and long-term ecologically sustainable development relative to Shanghai's highly urbanized mode of city-building. Shenzhen's neighboring cities of Dongguan to the north and Shunde to the northwest will also serve as linked case studies. As a traditional low-end manufacturing city, Dongguan, a Sister City with Hartford, has recently become the host of Huawei's R&D center and will serve as both a comparative and reference case for understanding Shenzhen's innovation. While lower ranked administratively than Shenzhen and Dongguan, Shunde's innovative companies, traditional embroidery, and ecological preservation add complementary areas of study. Through primary study in Shanghai and Shenzhen with short field trips to three other cities, the course aims to help students obtain a grounded understanding of how in-migration and innovation interact to generate and sustain Shanghai and Shenzhen's dynamism and growing connections with surrounding cities forming the core of China's Yangtze River and Pearl River Delta regions.



Shenzhen



Chongming Island



Shunde