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## The Opposite of a Ghost City -- A Postcard from China

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While Americans chide China for limiting access to information on the internet, our understanding of China is hopelessly skewed by an overabundance of selective and reductive reporting. China is too vast and complex to be understood from a tweet –or a few tweets. Energy in China? #coal. Real estate development in China? #ghostcities. It's like following America through headlines about threatened government shutdowns or Kim Kardashian's Instagram posts. Case in point: Longgang.

Longgang is not a household name in the United States, as are the names of most major European cities, but it should be: your children may attend university there. Specifically, the Longgang district of the city of Shenzhen, itself much less well known than its size and significance merit. Shenzhen is home to about 17 million people (officially 10 million), a gleaming new city built from a town of about 300,000 in 1980 and soon to be the site of the tallest building in China, designed by Kohn Pedersen Fox, the second tallest in the world. Shenzhen is sometimes called the Silicon Valley of China.

Westerners can be forgiven for preferring Shenzhen's next-door neighbor, English-speaking, historically British Hong Kong, which is the West's idea of Asia. However the only thing about Shenzhen, with its many luxury malls, Starbucks on almost every corner and gleaming new Four Seasons Hotel, that Americans would find objectionable is the poor air quality. Meanwhile China just announced that it is closing all coal-fired power plants around Beijing this year and it has been building solar power capacity at a rate not previously thought possible, so that, too, will be improving soon. Shenzhen, not Hong Kong, is the real present and future of Asia. But enough about central Shenzhen.

Longgang is a district of Shenzhen which was merely farmland just a very few years ago. My New York centric worldview places it as the Queens of Shenzhen. (Queens is an "Outer Borough" of New York City for my non-New York readers. "Outer" as in not Manhattan.) Longgang's population is about the same as Queens, about two million (officially), but that's just for now. The population of Queens will surely swell a bit, but expect Longgang to surpass Queens very soon and shoot way past it.

Longgang is the home of Huawei, the largest telecommunications equipment

maker in the world. But that's just the beginning. While New York City has its PlaNYC to prepare for about a million more New Yorkers by 2030, including more infrastructure such as public parks, Longgang has already implemented its growth plan and it's not waiting for 2030 for it to happen.

Much like the visionary leaders of late 19<sup>th</sup> Century New York who built a massive urban park in the middle of Manhattan island long before the city advanced that far north, Longgang has already built a massive urban park—think of it as the Central Park of Longgang or, for New York readers, the Flushing Meadows-Corona Park of Metropolitan Shenzhen. Around this park, the government is building a university cluster to house ten new international universities that it has planned to attract, with new full size campuses for major universities from Australia and Russia already under construction. An American university can't be far behind.

Around this university center, major luxury housing developments that would fit right into any American city are fast being built to accommodate the faculty and staff and the expected major influx of residents who will flock to what will be a vibrant new part of the city, much more affordable than central Shenzhen where standard one bedroom apartments start at US\$1 million. Current projects are selling out prior to completion. These are no ghost cities. Longgang's population will very soon be a multiple of the current headcount.

As a son of New York taught to admire the foresight of the city planners who came up with the “grid plan” for the streets of Manhattan when it was mostly just forest, I see the same vision and determination in the leaders of Longgang. As our leaders in Washington struggle to refill the bankrupt Highway Trust Fund and continue to debate the merits of a National Infrastructure Bank, Longgang's leaders are building the future today.