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Planetary Urbanization at the Crossroads: Globopolis Versus Cosmopolis and the Rise of Progressive Cities in Asia

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From 2015 to 2050 an estimated 1.3 billion people will be added to Asia's urban population, reaching more than two-thirds of the region's population by the latter year and making this a period of profound transformations and opportunity to re-track cities in support of human flourishing. The dominant path of urbanization in Asia today is toward "Globopolis", a highly unequal city characterized by corporatization of government and urban space that subordinates social and political life to perceived imperatives of endless global economic competition. At the same time, civil society is rising and giving social momentum to realizing aspirations for political reforms along four key dimensions of progressive governance: inclusion, distributive justice, conviviality, environmental well-being. Even within the same national setting, however, cities differ substantially in their capacities and commitments to these reforms. The discussion focuses on case studies to inquire into the origins of the rise of progressive cities and the question of whether these cities can gain momentum.

Mike Douglass is Professor and Leader of the Asian Urbanisms Cluster at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. He is Emeritus Professor and former Chair of the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Hawaii (also the Director of the Globalization Research Center). He holds a Ph.D. in urban planning from UCLA. He previously held positions in the United Nations and taught at the University of East Anglia, the Institute of Social Studies in the Hague, Stanford University and UCLA. With a focus on urban and regional planning in Asia, for many years he has lived, carried out research, taught graduate courses, and engaged in professional practice in several Asian countries. His research covers progressive cities for human flourishing; disaster governance; globalization and the city; creative communities and spaces of hope. His recent and forthcoming books include: The Rise of Progressive Cities East and West; Disaster Justice in Urbanising Asia-Pacific; Hard State, Soft City – Urban Imaginative Representations of Singapore; Globalization, the Rise of Civil Society and Civic Spaces in Pacific Asia Cities.

