



Polycentric city-regions in the state-scalar politics of land development: The case of China



Xianjin Huang^a, Yi Li^{a,*}, Iain Hay^b

^a School of Geographic and Oceanographic Science, Research Centre of Human Geography, Nanjing University, Nanjing 210023, China

^b School of the Environment, Flinders University, GPO Box 2100, Adelaide, SA 5001, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 22 March 2016

Received in revised form 6 July 2016

Accepted 30 August 2016

Available online 5 September 2016

Keywords:

Multi-scalar

City-region

Land development

Politics of scale

China

ABSTRACT

China's recent rapid urban growth has embraced city peripheries, with such great expansion occurring that polycentric city-regions have been created. Recognizing that multiple levels of government are entangled in this process our paper attends to multi-scalar state interactions in the process of city-region formation. Using two cases from Jiangsu province in China's east, we demonstrate that as a consequence of urban expansion the scale of urban politics is shifting from the intra-urban to the metropolitan, involving processes such as annexation and the selective mapping of governance under a city-administering-county system. Additionally, the scalar relations between the different levels of government, which centre on land interests and the corresponding redistribution of fiscal revenue and social provisions, play an important part in the formation of city-regions. We argue that the state-scalar politics involved in peri-urban development demand more attention and theorization in future studies of Chinese urbanization.

© 2016 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

1. Introduction: emerging Chinese polycentric city-regions, neoliberal urban politics, and beyond

City-regionalism is considered to be a distinct form of spatial development in the post-Keynesian era, emerging as a result of rescaled urban-regional governmental interventions (Brenner, 2004). Large cities expand into larger agglomerations such as global city-regions or mega-city regions as part of accelerated globalization and economic integration (Hall and Pain, 2006; Scott, 2001). In addition to geo-economic driving forces, spatial agglomeration is also shaped by governance strategies and policies (Jonas et al., 2010; While et al., 2013). "Centrally orchestrated regionalism" (Harrison, 2008: 924) is rolled out by the neoliberal state within discourses of city-region competitiveness, with the character, construction, and consequences of city-regionalism depending on the specific national context (Jonas, 2013). The city-region agenda is more than simply a state-orchestrated neoliberal project (Harding, 2007). Some city-region projects have been active for a long time, emerging as a response to locally rooted demands rather than as part of an imposed national programme (Deas, 2014; Jonas and Pincetl, 2006; McCann, 2007).

In China, while the development of polycentric city-regions has attracted academic attention, many studies have adopted restricted economic geography approaches (Liu et al., 2015; Yeh et al., 2015; Zhao and Zhang, 2007). However, several studies have examined these spatial agglomerations from a governance perspective (Li and Wu, 2012; Zhang, 2006; Wu and Phelps, 2008). The dominant role of the state and its entrepreneurial thrust are highlighted in some of this literature (Wu and Phelps, 2011). With rapid urban sprawl towards and beyond the outer suburbs, spatial polycentricity is extending from the intra-urban to the city-region level (Shen and Wu, 2012). The dynamics of this and other aspects of Chinese urbanization are increasingly interpreted from the theoretical perspective of neoliberalism (He and Wu, 2005, 2009; Lin and Zhang, 2015). Urban spaces are no longer regarded as mere outgrowths of agglomeration but are strongly affected and shaped by political and governance strategies (Lin, 2014). The well-rehearsed thesis of this city-based regional development describes administrative annexation and land commodification at the urban fringe, which transforms extensive rural land for urban functions (Lin, 2009). The resulting land income windfall has, in turn, financed large-scale urbanization across the country (Liu and Lin, 2014), yielding city-based regional development that increases intra-regional discrepancies (Lin et al., 2015). Of course, the planning and building of regional infrastructure such as bridges, high-speed railways, inter-city light rail, and cooperative industrial parks have also con-

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: emilyiyi@hotmail.com (Y. Li).

tributed to the development and reshaping of regions (Li et al., 2014; Luo and Shen, 2007; Xu and Yeh, 2013; Yang, 2006; Ye, 2014).

Chinese neoliberalism shows persistently strong state intervention (Ma, 2009), which is far from the orthodox theory of neoliberal urbanism that suggests state retreat to make room for the market (Wu, 2010). To address this seemingly odd contradiction, it has been proposed that neoliberalization in China is not at all engaged with liberal ideology but is instead a practical and pragmatic response to a crisis of economic growth and state legitimacy (Wu, 2008). Strong state control is not a legacy or path dependency inherited from a planned economy but is instead a powerful instrument to legitimize and facilitate marketization and to maintain social order throughout the process (He and Wu, 2009; Wu, 2008, 2010). With the focus on state-market relations, relatively little attention has been accorded to the internal dynamics of the state in Chinese neoliberalization (except for He and Wu, 2005, 2009; Shin, 2015). Hidden in the analysis is the state administrative hierarchy and China's complex urban system. Consideration of both is pivotal to theorization given that the territorial structure of the state associated with China's system of administrative divisions creates the fundamental conditions for the nation's urban political economy (Cartier, 2005, 2015; Ma, 2005). However, other than some initial work on inter-scalar state relations and the contested process of state rescaling based on the Pearl River Delta (Li et al., 2014; Xu and Yeh, 2013), the structure of the state and the sophisticated interactions between its different levels remain under-examined in the study of the formation of city-regions.

So, contemporary examinations of China's rapid urbanization tend to conceptualize the state and urban space as unitary and pay little attention to the multi-scalar state relations involved in the development of city-regions, which generate scalar politics within specific geopolitical contexts (Cox, 2010). Within the Chinese literature, there is a conventional discussion about central-local relations, particularly regarding fiscal affairs (Chung, 1995). The state's reshuffling of liabilities and responsibilities sets the fundamental background for the emerging neoliberal urbanism (Lin, 2014; Lin et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2007). However, the process for producing the new spaces of city-regions, in which multiple government agencies at diverse levels are involved, remains unclear.

In attending to this lacuna, this paper explores two emerging polycentric city-regions in Jiangsu province to identify and illuminate the sophisticated inter-governmental relationships involved in urban and land development at the edge of the city. The coastal province Jiangsu is one of the fastest growing and urbanizing areas in China, with phenomenal land development taking place in its urban periphery (Lin and Yi, 2011). Two municipalities in Jiangsu, Nanjing and Xuzhou, have been selected for this study to represent different governance structures within city-regions. By mid-2016, Xuzhou governed 5 urban districts, 3 counties and 2 county-level cities. By contrast, Nanjing annexed its last 2 counties in 2013 and so governed 11 urban districts. On the basis of these two archetypal local governance structures, the comparative case studies promise insights into the multi-scalar state interactions in the process of city-region formation.

This study draws on qualitative data obtained through research involving 19 semi-structured interviews with local government officers, planners, and officials at new town development corporations and industrial parks in Jiangsu province (Table 1). Through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling interviewees were selected carefully on the basis of their role and expertise in urban and regional development. Respondent selection was also intended to maximize the range of perspectives possible. Open-ended interview questions were focused to explore the role and involvement of different levels of government as well as interactions and contradictions between them. The thematic areas that the questions covered included the administrative apparatus, land

use governance, and financing in the peripheral development. The interviews were supplemented by careful analysis of urban planning documents, development strategies, and other related reports collected during visits to the study area.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. We begin with a discussion of the need to approach city-regional development from the perspective of 'politics of scale' (Cox, 2010). After a brief overview of state rescaling and inter-scalar state relations in post-reform China, we discuss the complex spatial system of the Chinese urban administration and its implications for producing spaces in city-regions. In subsequent sections, we examine the development of peripheral areas of two municipalities in Jiangsu province. These examples are reviewed in relation to multi-scalar state relations and their effects upon city-region formation. In the final section, we offer conclusions and point to implications for future studies.

2. State rescaling, city-regions and politics of scale

Within the general context of global production and new economic agglomeration, global city-regions have been recognized as having prominence in the organization of future global and national economies (Scott, 2001). With the main city continuing as the node of the economy, the dispersal of urban functions from there to the wider city-region is observed (Hall and Pain, 2006; Lang and Knox, 2009). In addition to the relational linkages and networked clusters that feature in post-Fordist knowledge economies, the formation of city-regions is reflective and constitutive of extra-economic dimensions, including political mobilization, cultural performances, and institutional accomplishments (Jones and MacLeod, 2004). That is, city-region development is socially and politically, as well as economically, constructed (Jonas and Ward, 2007; Jonas et al., 2010; While et al., 2013).

Influential work on the rescaling of statehood (Brenner, 2004) has shown the city-region to represent a new form of 'spatial selectivity' by the state (e.g., Jones, 1997, 2001). The material or discursive 'new state space' of the city-region is created through rearticulated governance strategies within discourses of competitiveness (Bristow, 2010). New state spatialities are remapped against functional economic spaces in ways that favour the free flow of capital and markets (Bristow, 2013; Harrison, 2012). Although insightful, the theoretical framework of state rescaling has been challenged because of its generality and the precedence it ostensibly gives to economic regulation (MacLeavy and Harrison, 2010). From the perspective of state rescaling, city-region analysis also demonstrates at least a hint of political-economic functionalism (Jonas, 2012a). Increased emphases are in turn placed on decoding the spatiality of the state in association with its context-specific territorial politics (Cox, 2009; Jonas, 2012b; Park, 2008) to determine the processes and nature of scale building (Klink, 2013).

The concept of 'politics of scale' offers an analytical protocol for deciphering agents and tensions in the processes of state rescaling and city-region development (MacKinnon, 2011). The socio-economic and political dependence of state and non-state actors at different geographical scales has created place-based politics in the restructuring of state and space (Cox, 1998). The 'politics of scale' perspective has long been deployed in research on political ecology and environmental governance (McCauley and Murphy, 2013). Locally-rooted regional challenges such as urban sprawl, fiscal disparities, and the provision of collective goods such as water services and large-scale infrastructure constitute major political issues in city-regions dealing with increasingly fragmented and networked post-neoliberalization urban governance (Cox, 2011; MacLeod and Jones, 2011). However, the employment of politics of scale in the study of city-regionalism in general begins with a more

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6461497>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6461497>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)