



China's hybrid global city region pathway: Evidence from the Yangtze River Delta

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Shanghai
Yangtze River Delta
Mega-city region
City network
Multi-scalar connectivity

ABSTRACT

As the number of global cities grows and the extent of their city region hinterlands expands it is increasingly important to understand connectivity of cities within global city regions to the core city as well as connectivity of both the core city and the entire city region to other cities in the world city network. By investigating multi-scalar network connectivity of Shanghai both to cities in its hinterland and the world city network from 2000 to 2013, this article concludes that Shanghai's status as a global city is based both on connections to cities within the region and connections of Shanghai municipality to other cities in the world city network. Based on measures of connectivity such as connectedness of advanced producer service firms, airport arrivals and departures, and container TEUs, since 2000 Shanghai has become one of the most connected cities in the world. However, Shanghai's global connectivity is not the same as its importance in the world economy. The market value of firms listed on the Shanghai stock exchange, foreign exchange turnover, and international transshipments from the Port of Shanghai are modest compared to other leading global cities. City network analysis within the Shanghai mega-city region provides a novel explanation for this apparent paradox. Shanghai's global connectivity is strongly influenced by its close connection with its hinterland, the Yangtze River Delta, and elsewhere in China. Shanghai's rapidly growing global connectivity is largely a result of the emergence of the Yangtze River Delta as a global city region. Shanghai, as the core city in the city region, is both a hub connecting flows of goods, capital, people, and information within the Yangtze River Delta region and a gateway through which other cities in the city region connect to the world city network. Scholars worldwide can apply the methods used in this article to illuminate the hybrid global city pathway.

1. Introduction

Beginning with experiments in reform and opening up in 1978, accelerating from the mid-1980s, and further expanding after China's admission to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, the economy of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has developed with a speed and on a scale unprecedented in human history (Chow, 2015; Guthrie, 2012; Perkins, 2015). Recognizing that development worldwide is largely driven by cities that are most connected to the world economy, scholars have studied Chinese “world” or “global” cities and their role in the world city network in order to better understand how globalization has contributed to the rise of the Chinese economy (Chubarov & Brooker, 2013; Liu, Derudder, & Wu, 2015; Ma & Timberlake, 2008).

Indices of global city connectivity developed by Taylor, Hoyler, Walker, and Szegner (2001) and by Taylor and Derudder (2016) found Shanghai in 2012 to be the 7th most connected global city in the world

after London, New York, Hong Kong, Paris, and Singapore. The rankings of the five cities Taylor and Derudder (2016) rank higher than Shanghai were unchanged between 2000 and 2012. In sharp contrast, Shanghai's connectivity ranking jumped from 31st in 2000 to 7th in 2012—the fastest increase of any of the top 25 global cities in the world except for Dubai. Some academics and policy makers have interpreted this as showing that Shanghai is rapidly becoming one of the top global command and control centers in the world city network with an economy based on its function as a hub for foreign imports and exports and a global financial and advanced producer services center (Ma & Timberlake, 2008; Shanghai Municipality, 2015; Wu, 2000; Zhang, 2014). This article critically re-assesses this position. In the absence of analysis at the city-regional scale some world city network research may overstate Shanghai's global position as a single city. Especially in emerging economies where domestic markets are growing rapidly, connectivity of one city alone does not give a true picture of the relationship between the core city in a mega-city region and other cities

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in the world.

Our analysis, factoring in this information, critically reassesses the existing literature. It concludes that Shanghai is following a hybrid city region pathway to globalization. Though Shanghai has high global connectivity, its economy is still closely related to other cities within its hinterland and the domestic Chinese economy. More precisely, Shanghai's rapidly growing global connectivity is a result of the emergence of the Yangtze River Delta as a globally influenced mega-city region. This is the first study to systematically examine the relationship between a core megacity, its region, and other cities in the world city network.

The structure of this paper is as follows. The first section reviews world city network research at different scales. The next section provides background on Shanghai Municipality and the Yangtze River Delta mega-city region. It also describes the apparent paradox of Shanghai's rapid rise in global city connectivity ranking at the same time that its economy is largely based on activity within the Yangtze River Delta region. The next two sections describe the data sources, network analysis measures, and methods we used to explore this apparent paradox. The fifth section presents our finding. We describe how the connectivity between Shanghai and other cities in the Yangtze River Delta have evolved, as well as the new hybrid global city region pathway they represent. The sixth section discusses the significance, limitations and policy implications of our findings, and useful avenues for further research scholars in China, the U.S., and other countries may pursue. The conclusion summarizes our findings.

2. Multi-scalar world city network research

In the last 25 years a tsunami of studies of world and global cities and the world city network have been published (Cheng, Zhang, & Zhao, 2016; Savitch, Gross, & Ye, 2014; Tang, Li, Xiao, Li, & Li, 2015; Tang & Zhao, 2010; Taylor & Derudder, 2016; Timberlake, Wei, Ma, & Hao, 2014; Zhao, Li, & Xu, 2014). Important concepts from global cities and world city network theory are that there is a “world city system” in which cities' economic functions depend significantly on their connections to other cities worldwide. Cities can be conceptualized as nodes from which goods, people, capital, and information flow through networks—what Manuel Castells (1996, 2010) calls “the space of flows” and should be viewed as centers where processes occur instead of merely geographically defined places.

Empirical research on the world city network has elaborated Castells' theories. Scholars such as Sassen (1991) and Taylor, Catalano, and Walker (2002) describe a global network of relationships among cities organized largely by advanced producer services (APS) firms. A small number of cities, where APS firms are highly concentrated, have disproportionate command and control influence on the world city network. Other empirical studies of flows and connectivity use indicators such as the presence of multinational corporations, airplane arrivals and departures, the presence of foreign bank branches, and throughput of cargo containers to rank world or global cities (Jacobs, Ducruet, & Langen, 2010; Mahutga, Ma, Smith, & Timberlake, 2010; Taylor & Derudder, 2016). While New York and London have been consistently ranked as the most globally connected cities respectively, cities in emerging economies, such as Shanghai, Beijing, Dubai and São Paulo frequently appear in more recent lists of top world cities.

World city network research is built upon the theory that cities' global positions and powers are mainly based on their connections to other cities worldwide. Therefore, cities may become nodes in the network detached from their nation states, regions, and hinterlands. However, there is an increasing understanding that the world city network is subject to social, economic and political territorial factors that govern how cities actually globalize and connect to one other (Coe, Hess, Yeung, Dicken, & Henderson, 2004; Dicken, Kelly, Olds, & Yeung, 2001; Hill & Fujita, 2003; Ma & Timberlake, 2013). This has important scalar implications: the world city network is a comprehensive yet

inter-dependent system comprised of multiple scales and specific sub-systems (Bohan & Gautier, 2013; Martinus, Sigler, Searle, & Tonts, 2015). Accordingly, some recent studies do not assume a uniform process whereby all world cities will end up resembling the few top hyper global cities. Rather, researchers using the regional context approach seek to understand alternative globalization pathways that emerge under unique territorial contexts.

There is a growing literature on the way in which regional global cities, not located in Europe or North America serve as hubs of capital and information flows that connect national and supra-national regional systems to globalized circuits. Hill and Kim (2000) and Olds and Yeung (2013) respectively researched how cities in strong developmental states—Tokyo, Seoul and Singapore—consciously shape their globalization pathways. Martinus et al. (2015) analyzed corporate energy networks to explore the convergence of Australian and global networks, and identified cities that are instrumental in the globalization of Australian industry sub-networks. Good, Derudder, and Witlox (2011) used airline connections to construct a hierarchical urban network in order to understand regionalization of Africa based on interaction spaces. Schmitt and Smas (2012) used place-based information on financial and market service firms and information and communication technology service firms to analyze the position of Northern European metropolitan areas in national, Nordic, European and global networks. While this research investigates not only global urban networks, but also regional, and sub-regional city networks, the terms “regional” and “sub-regional” in these studies, refer to the relationship of cities to their nation state (Australia), or world city region (Northern Europe; Africa). They do not attempt to describe the relationship of cities to both their city regions and the world city network as our research does. This article critically examines and extends the emerging regional place-based literature.

Influenced by Castells' (1996) theory of the “space of flow”, most world network research conceptualizes cities as nodes channeling all kinds of flows, while their embedded city regions are not important or even vanish in the network system. This research often overlooks subtleties of networks within city regions that are usually functional hinterlands of one or more central cities. In this article, however, we extend the world cities research agenda from the city node to the city region. It is not an entirely new agenda to extend world cities' range of meaning to incorporate the notion of the wider region as an emerging globalizing political-economic unit. Scott (2001) refers to this type of region as a “global city-region” that is comprised of a metropolitan area or contiguous set of metropolitan areas together with a surrounding hinterland of variable extent. Hall and Pain (2006:3) use the term “mega-city region” to describe an emerging city region form that includes “a series of anything between 10 and 50 cities and towns, physically separate but functionally networked, clustered around one or more larger central cities, and drawing enormous economic strength from a new functional division of labour”. This article validates Hall and Pain's findings and adapts and extends the approach they applied to Northwestern Europe to a major Asian region for the first time. Zhao, Derudder, and Huang (2017) have analyzed integration and polycentricity within the Pearl River Delta city region. Their research explores how the inter-connections have evolved in the city region. However, they did not attempt to explain why the changes happened or the globalizing pathway of the core cities as our research does.

City regions should be defined in terms of the city-region's internal linkages (Hall & Pain, 2006) as well as intercity connections. These linkages, accordingly, are the main research focus of this paper. We analyze the network within the Yangtze River Delta in China to explore the importance of networks at the city regional scale, and their contribution to Shanghai between 2000 and 2013 when the city was rapidly emerging as a world city.

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