

China's City Hierarchy, Urban Policy and Spatial Development in the 1980s

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Summary. Cities play an important role in population distribution and economic development. Policies which alter city systems can create new patterns of spatial economic development. This paper, using the most recent data, examines changes in China's city hierarchy, urban policy and spatial development in the 1980s in international, national and local contexts. The time series data show that the process of urbanisation had been gradual between 1949 and the late 1970s but accelerated rapidly in the 1980s. The growth of cities and towns in various size categories reflects the influence of urban policy in reshaping China's urban hierarchy. Using multiple measures of urban primacy, the analysis suggests that China has distinctive city systems at the regional level varying along demographic, industrial and infrastructural dimensions. Moreover, there is a growing discrepancy in socioeconomic development between inland and coastal cities that is consistent with the recent policy of favouring the coastal economy. The study provides perspectives and evidence on the extent to which economic efficiency and spatial equality are balanced under a changing model of socialist urban development.

1. Introduction

In 1980 the People's Republic of China created four Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in its south-eastern coastal cities to attract foreign investment and advanced technology. In 1984 China targeted another 14 cities on its eastern seaboard as 'open' cities for foreign investment and economic development. The favouring of the development of selected cities, coupled with a policy of channelling the growth of cities of varying sizes, has ushered in a new model of urban development in China. With the onset of the 1990s, this study examines retrospectively the changes that have taken place in the structural and spatial dimensions of China's urban land-

scape during the 1980s. It integrates analysis of both the general city structure and a sample of Chinese cities in international, national and local contexts.

Section 2 traces the growth of Chinese cities in the 1980s in the light of China's urbanisation process and changing definitions of urban places, identifying how administrative and economic factors have contributed to the increase and redistribution of cities by size. Section 3 focuses on China's urban primacy, or lack of it, through a twofold analysis of: (a) the annual national primacy index through the 1980s; and (b) changes in the various primacy indexes of 33 cities (included in

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