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Giant Cities and the Urban Hierarchy in China

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With over a billion citizens, China is the largest nation in the world, but only 20.8 percent of her people live in cities and towns of 3,000 or more. Interestingly, half of China's total urban population resides in 38 cities of a million people or more. What problems are associated with a relatively low level of overall urbanization and concentrations of urban people in a substantial number of very large cities? In this chapter I consider this issue by (1) examining the structure and integration of the Chinese urban system, (2) identifying some major problems associated with growth of very large cities that analysis reveals lack integrated urban development, (3) assessing the potential of China's policy responses to these problems, and (4) presenting a prospective view of the largest Chinese cities.

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The 1981-82 data on the 16 cities used in this chapter have been updated for 1984-85 and expanded to cover 33 Chinese cities. These newer and more comprehensive data, currently being analyzed in my dissertation and related research, will let one draw more general conclusions about the giant cities and the urban hierarchy in China.