Original Research Article

City-regional governance under state entrepreneurialism in China

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Abstract

Facing de-globalisation, changing international politics, climate changes and new smart technologies in the post-pandemic era, city-regions become important spaces for economic, social and environmental governance. In China, this new city-regional form of governance is created under state entrepreneurialism, which means the state uses entrepreneurial endeavours to achieve its strategic vision and intention. The processes of city-region building include centralising the spatial planning system, inventing new spatial discourses, representing regional imaginaries and restructuring the state towards ecological goals. Instead of market-driven regional dynamics or redistributive politics, China's city-regional governance demonstrates the role of the multi-scalar state in constructing and implementing economic, social and environmental policies at a regional scale.

Keywords

City-regions, extended urbanisation, geopolitics, governance, the state, planning, China

Introduction

Extended urbanisation has become a key feature of 21st-century capitalism (Brenner, 2019; Keil, 2018; Keil and Wu, 2022), suggesting that the form of territories has shifted to the city- regions and beyond. This new spatial form of urban development is arguably driven by economic globalisation, urban agglomerations, and neoliberal governance (Scott, 2001, 2019). But city-regional governance also reveals multi-scalar geopolitics to secure the social reproduction of capital accumulation at the sub-national scale (Jonas, 2012; Jonas and Moisio, 2018). City-regionalism could be regarded as contingent geopolitical projects for diverse political objectives (Jonas, 2012).

Similarly, as China becomes the 'workshop of the world', Chinese mega-city regions are the powerhouses of its economy. To promote the competitive city-region, the local state adopts the 'planning for growth'

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strategy by building so-called 'city clusters' (Wu, 2015). City-regional planning and building thus show the characteristics of 'developmentalist spatial planning' like other East Asian countries (Sonn and Choi, 2022). Recently, China has seen a new wave of mega-city region development (Yeh et al., 2021). The development of major mega-city regions such as the Greater Bay Area of Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macau (GBA) and Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region inevitably reconfigures China's political and economic landscapes.

The role of the state in regional governance is a salient feature in China (Li and Wu, 2020; Wu and Zhang, 2022). Under the specific political and cultural context, the Chinese party-state promotes regional building and governance, known as 'state-led/guide city regionalism' (Yang et al., 2021; Ye, 2014). The Chinese city-regionalism represents the state's effort to remedy the crisis of urban entrepreneurialism at the regional scale and to advance national development strategies (Wu, 2016). Facing uncertainties and new challenges in globalisation, changing geopolitics and new smart technologies in the post-pandemic era, China has seen city-regionalism deployment as a new coping strategy. Although much debate has already been about regionalisation and state reconfiguration in China, city-regionalism is far from well understood at the current political-economic moment. First, the Chinese state focuses on new approaches to managing urbanisation and spatial territories, manifested by recent central government initiatives, planning actions, discursive changes, and institutional reform (Wu et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022b). Second, because city-region building happens in a spatially selective fashion, most attention has been paid to a relatively small number of large mega-city regions and cities within major regions. More studies should focus on city-regionalism's variegated geography and multi-scalar political systems (Jonas, 2020). Third, on-the-ground examinations of the implications of city-regionalism are essential to explore what is at stake for metropolitan and city-regional governance beyond understanding institutional changes and power mechanisms (Galland and Harrison, 2020).

Against this background, this special issue examines recent new trends in city-regional development and related governance issues in China. The studies related to an overall framework of state entrepreneurialism, which refers to "a series of state entrepreneurial actions to fulfil its strategic intention to maintain economic growth, stability and capital accumulation and in turn its governance capacity, which is achieved through creating a market-like environment, using external market actors, and inventing its own agencies operating in the market" (Wu, 2023: 2). Related to this city-regionalism under state entrepreneurialism, nine papers cover a variety of cases and topics to answer the following questions.

- What are the new changes in the planning system and urban policies? What are their implications for city-regional development and governance?
- What is the role of the multi-scalar state under state entrepreneurialism? How do they (re)shape city-regional institutions, politics and governance?
- How is city-regionalism constructed in environmentalism and social sustainability?

The rest of this paper is organised as follows. The next section briefly introduces an understanding of city-regionalism regarding city-region development and its governance. Then, the new features and implications of city-regionalism in China are discussed in three sections of papers included in this collection in the third section. Finally, we rethink the theoretical and empirical contributions of these new observations.

The dynamics and governance of city-regions

This section provides an overview of the emergent city-regions and approaches to understanding city-regionalism in the literature. City-regions have emerged and proliferated as the ideal spatial entities for policy intervention in the twenty-first century. This concept, particularly the global city-region, has become popularised since the 1980s in policy discourses. The literature provides a basis for understanding the spatially extended and urbanised region comprising a traditional urban core, (post)suburban landscapes and vast rural areas. Various alternative terms have been invented to describe this spatial form, such as polycentric

metropolis (Hall and Pain, 2006), polycentric urban region (Derudder et al., 2022; Parr, 2004), and megaregions (Harrison and Hoyler, 2015, Yeh et al., 2021).

The evolution of city-regions

The literature on city-regions has mainly (not exclusively) paid attention to economic geography and geopolitics. The first strand is focused on the economic forces with special reference to the logic of agglomeration economies and spatial integration (e.g. Scott, 2001). The rise of (global) city-regions is largely driven by multiple forces, for example, the advances in transport and telecommunication, the shift of economic organisation, and demographic transitions (Champion, 2001). The crisis of Fordism and Keynesian welfare in the 1970s and the advent of post-Fordist economic development have fostered a new economy dominated by a new informational economy or cognitive-cultural economy (Scott, 2019), characterised by the diffusion of new production systems. These changes have been translated into spatial restructuring and enabled novel territorial expression of urbanisation in an increasingly global economy. A certain number of cities with social and political significance have evolved into global city-regions functioning as the powerhouse of global and national development.

Another body of work in the literature concerns the geopolitical constitution of city-regions and the reconfigured role of the state in its political construction process (e.g. Jonas, 2012; Jonas and Moisio, 2018; Jonas and Ward, 2007). In line with a deepening process of neoliberalism and transition to the post-Fordist economic organisation, city-regions are regarded as a more competitive form of territorial governance structure than the national state. The prevalence of neoliberal governance is associated with the arguable demise of the national state. However, the state's role is not diminishing but just reconfigured in three different directions: scaling up to form multi-level governance, scaling down to incorporate local actors and scaling out to empower non-state actors (Reed and Bruyneel, 2010).

From a geopolitical perspective, city-regionalism represents the national state's endeavours to correct regulatory deficits associated with neoliberalism regarding both domestic politics of distribution and international competitiveness through a variety of governmental technologies (Jonas and Moisio, 2018; Jonas and Ward, 2007). The political construction of city-regions is claimed as a 'new state space' through state rescaling to manage the crises of capitalism (Brenner, 2004). The rescaling process is in line with the three axes of state reconfiguration. The rescaling theory provides a broader conceptual and analytical framework for explaining city-regionalism in different national contexts (for example, in China, see Wu, 2016). However, as a geopolitical constructed project, city-regionalism is not a necessary territorial outcome of state rescaling. Instead, the state produces and reproduces city-regionalism, which brings together countervailing geopolitical forces and non-state actors in economic and spatial restructuring (Jonas and Moisio, 2018; Li and Jonas, 2019; Wachsmuth, 2017).

In short, emergent city-region dynamics result from the intertwined effects of economic geography and geopolitics (Jonas, 2012). In turn, the city-regions are increasingly important spaces and the political and economic institutions within and beyond the national state (Scott, 2019). Various forms of city-regionalism can be developed associated with political, cultural and economic contexts.

City-regional governance

The rise of city-regions, often in the groups of municipalities, posed questions on how to govern the fragmented but interdependent jurisdictions. City-regional governance often crosses jurisdictional borders and involves multiple actors to achieve designated goals (Foster and Barnes, 2012). Efforts have been made to build an effective framework of governance to manage regional development agendas. Regional governance comprises vertical, intergovernmental, intersectoral and intraregional relationships between various actors, including the central and local governments, civic and private sector and regional institutions and agencies with multiple interests (Miller and Lee, 2011). Moreover, other economic and political actors such as consultants, transnational firms, public-private partnerships and property developers, also known as 'transnational

bridging agencies' or an 'assemblage of actors', also have resources and the ability to alter or transform the state-orchestrated city-regionalism (Allen and Cochrane, 2007; Jonas and Moisio, 2018; Li and Jonas, 2019).

Different schools of thought have been developed to decipher the ideal governance arrangements. Savitch and Vogel (2009) defined four theoretical schools for regional governance: metropolitan government school (1900–1960s), public choice school (1950s–1990s), new regionalism (since 1990) and rescaling and reterritorialisation approach (since 2006). The shared feature of these paradigms is a search for an overarching mechanism for regional cooperation and coordination.

First, the reform school regards the governance of metropolitan regions as the issues of territorial reform focusing on improving the performance of governments through institutional reform (the creation of metropolitan government) and consolidation (administrative annexation) to achieve political alignment with the extended functional territory (Lefèvre, 1998). The metropolitan governance problems are essentially a large-scale principal-agent mismatch problem, caused by the bundling of urban land nexus and fragmented political geographies (Storper, 2014).

Second, the competition-based 'public choice perspective' (Tiebout, 1956) is proposed to improve the efficiency in allocating public resources. This school stresses the role of individuals. In response to the failure of jurisdictional consolidation, task-specific and function-oriented governance should be developed to meet the choice of local businesses and people (Hooghe and Marks, 2003).

Third, the 'new regionalism' discourse emphasises the region-spanning coalitions building up on a non-hierarchy and voluntary cooperative public-private partnership (Kantor, 2008; Savitch and Vogel, 2009). This school regards city-regional governance as a form to enhance territorial competitiveness by articulating a range of public and private actors around economic interests (d'Albergo and Lefèvre, 2018). This is a regional version of 'urban entrepreneurialism' coined by Harvey (1989).

Fourth, the state rescaling approach interprets the city-region governance as a dynamic multi-scalar process in a broader process of state restructuring (Brenner, 2004). Although relatively broad actors participate in the governance network, the role of the state is central in shaping regional governance modalities and development (Nelles et al., 2018). This school regards city-regions as a result of state reterritorialisation beyond individual cities.

Of all these schools of thought, state rescaling is particularly relevant to China (Wu, 2016), because all previous three schools are very specific about Western market economies and their democratic and electoral politics. The theory of state rescaling offers a theoretical perspective that helps understand the role of the state in city-region building. China does not replicate the 'new regionalism' discourse, although economic competitiveness is one of the motivations. Such a competitiveness discourse needs to be understood in the context of 'national prosperity'. As will be seen later, city-region building is compounded with creating a multi-scalar governance, socio-ecological fix and the discourse of a harmonious society. We now turn to China's city-regional governance in the next section.

City-regional governance in China

China has also seen the rising of city-regions and emerging city-regional governance due to market reform, the rise of urban entrepreneurialism and the reinvention of regional policies (Li and Wu, 2012; Wu, 2016). Similar to the counterparts in the Western context, the development of city-regional governance is manifested through two processes: economic regionalisation and state rescaling (Wu and Zhang, 2022). Regional economic development in China has been strongly influenced by the development of the world's factory. China's major city-regions, especially in the coastal area, have been linked with the global production network (Yeh et al., 2021). These regional economic developments have been largely based on individual cities even smaller towns, which created vicious inter-city competition. To fix this rather uncoordinated and even chaotic regional development, the Chinese central government initiated various coordination spatial plans such as the Yangtze River Delta Regional Plan (Li and Wu, 2013). Although these plans take a polycentric

region form, the purpose is to impose spatial structural coherence (Harrison and Gu, 2023; Wu, 2015). This process is best seen as state rescaling, creating a multi-scalar governance to tackle social and ecological problems (Wu and Zhang, 2022). For example, this city-region building is associated with the socio-ecological fix (Wang et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2022b). Although city-region building in China also involves bilateral negotiation between different jurisdictions (e.g., infrastructure coordination, Yang et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2023a, 2023b), the overarching guidance from the central government through a multi-scalar state system is clear (Wu and Zhang, 2022). In short, different from neoliberal city-regionalism, China's state entrepreneurialism emerges from the political economy of post-reform development (Wu, 2018, 2023). Regional development, similar to urban regeneration, is subject to state politics and national political mandates in China (Wu et al., 2022).

In the Pearl River Delta, three waves of economic development, namely rural industrialisation, land-centred urban development and tertiarisation, have steered individual cities through the pathways of 'cities – city regions – mega city regions – super mega city regions' (Yeh and Chen, 2020). Economic integration and regional infrastructure development require inter-city collaboration (Li et al., 2014; Zhang, 2006). However, more attention should be paid to geopolitical construction in China as the role of the state and its geopolitical rationalities are far more transparent in city-regional building (Li and Wu, 2020). Wu (2016) interprets the development of city-region governance through state rescaling, which involves three major instruments: regional planning, administrative annexation and the development of soft regional institutions. Moreover, scholarship highlighted the 'politics of scale' in urban and regional planning and cross-border infrastructure coordination (Yang, 2006; Yang, et al., 2021; Yeh and Xu, 2008) and extended urbanisation under financialization and spatial fixes (Shen et al., 2020; Theurillat and Bideau, 2022).

Despite the planetary era of urbanisation, differences in the national political contexts are crucial for explaining the diversity of city-regional development processes and outcomes (Li and Jonas, 2022; Wu and Zhang, 2022). Facing the crises in urban entrepreneurialism, the Chinese state has reformed the planning system and adopted new urban and regional development approaches. Building on existing literature, this special issue further extends the understanding of the new politics around city-regional building and explores the diverse forms of extended urbanisation and city-regionalism. The papers in this special issue are more rooted in geopolitical and governance approaches. This special issue divides the papers into three groups, focusing on city-regional planning, the rationale of city-regionalism under state entrepreneurialism and the environmental and societal issues of city-regions.

Planning device deployed by the state

An extensive body of literature discusses the regional planning practices at metropolitan or mega-city regional scales in China (e.g. Li and Wu, 2012, 2013; Luo and Shen, 2008). However, there needs to be an investigation into recent new planning reforms and practices. The profession of city and regional planning tends to narrowly understand the issue of regional governance as a problem of a need for coordination between different governments and cities. Studies in this special issue reveal the politics of spatial plans and examine the continuities and discontinuities of regional plans and policies in China.

A new territorial spatial planning system emphasising natural resources management and enhanced central state control has been established to solve the political fragmentation and conflicting interests within the fragmented political system. Hu et al. (2023, in this issue) focus on the evolution of spatial planning systems through a comparative gesture between other developed countries (United States, United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany, France and Japan) and China. Manifested by the launch of *The Guidance on Establishing the Territorial Spatial Planning* in 2019, China's spatial planning system has been reformed, aiming to enhance spatial governance capacity by establishing a unified territorial spatial planning system. He finds that Chinese spatial planning has gone through a process from the co-existence of 'multiple planning', for example, major functional zone planning, regional planning, and urban and rural planning to

'multiple planning integration'. Consequently, a new territorial spatial planning system characterised by 'five levels and three categories' was established in line with the administrative reform in 2018. Against the top-down planning framework, territorial spatial planning at different administrative levels has different focuses. More specifically, the central government level focuses on the development strategy; the provincial level focuses on coordination, and the local or municipal level focuses on implementation. Through international comparison, Hu et al argue that the evolution of the spatial planning system is essentially a coping strategy influenced by the factors such as spatial resources, social issues, international events, environmental crises and urban problems. After decades of development, China has formed its own territorial spatial planning system featured by integrated management of natural resources and solid centralised control by governments at various levels. However, the reform still faces challenges in practices regarding integrating multiple types of plans, the lack of flexibility in spatial governance and weak legal support.

The shift in urban policies at the central state level has reshaped urban planning activities and urbanisation processes at lower levels, which are increasingly integrating different territorial units into a city-region. Ramondetti (2023, in this issue) explores the changing planning activities and emerging extended urbanisation phenomenon in Zhengzhou metropolitan region. The plan of Zhengdong (later Zhengbian) New Area shows the alignment with the overall changes in urban policies in China. By investigating the changes in urban development policies and plans at the central state level, the paper finds that these changes have redirected local planning from developing the major cities through mega projects within its jurisdiction to supporting regional integration through projects in a wider region. This transition is very evident in Zhengzhou. Initially, Zhengdong New District was a bottom-up development project driven by the entrepreneurial municipal government. Later, echoing the city cluster policies of the central government, the Zhengzhou Municipal government and Henan Provincial government adopted new development strategies to foster 'coordinated' regional development involving three neighbouring cities. Unlike past peri-urban growth, this regional urbanisation process has transformed the urban-rural relationships and shown the complexity of urbanisation beyond the city. Thus, the emerging interlocking metropolitan regions become unstable, and the city-region is in constant flux rather than fixed territory.

The plan-making process is a political activity; therefore, analysing reproduced discourses and illustrating spatial policy can help uncover the hidden politics of city-regionalism (Dühr, 2007; Wang et al., 2020). Harrison and Gu (2023, in this issue) focus on the changing planning visions and spatial representations of mega regions in China since the 11th Five-Year Plan. They adopt a spatial and temporal approach. Maps are the object of their research and are used for analysing city-regionalism politics. Instead of presenting a single static spatial representation of city-regionalism, they trace how these spatial imaginaries evolve. By comparing the current map in the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021–25) with previous versions of maps, the difference in maps has reflected several aspects of politics. For example, the new maps are designed to blur the administration boundary. They find continuities and discontinuities of regional planning in China (see also, Ramondetti, 2023, in this issue).

Entrepreneurial endeavours under state entrepreneurialism

Chinese urban development is dominated by state entrepreneurialism, featured by the 'planning centrality and market instruments' (Wu, 2018). In this respect, the formation of city-regional governance is explained as a state response to the crisis of market reform through rescaling processes (Wu, 2016). The processes of rescaling are participated by the multi-scalar state and non-state actors. Besides serving the national development goals and geopolitical imaginaries, the local government has its motivations. In addition, non-state actors facilitate bottom-up city-regionalism (Li and Yuan, 2022; Zhang et al., 2023a). The second group of papers in this special issue show that city-regional governance in China still uses entrepreneurial approaches. The city-regions are formed through the diverse entrepreneurial endeavours of multiple actors.

The central government strives to enhance its governance capacity over cities through regional plans. The regional plans are implemented without fundamental reform of government structure. Chen et al. (2023, in this issue) reviewed the evolution of regional planning in the Yangtze River Delta (YRD) region. They identified two dominant features of the most recently updated regional plan: the upscaling of the plan to a national strategy and implementation through a multi-scalar state. The latest regional plan attaches specific attention to the functional positioning in the national and international context, and second, policy delivery is achieved through multi-level governments. By reviewing the changing political, and economic context, the paper shows that the new plan represents the continuous efforts of the central government to promote economic governance and intervene in urban governance through plan-making (Li and Wu, 2013; Wu and Zhang, 2010). The paper reveals that city-regionalism is the new initiative of the central government under state entrepreneurialism in China. In contrast to city-regional power devolution in Western societies, Chinese city-regionalism involves no substantial restructuring of state power.

From the 'bottom-up' perspective, the entrepreneurialism of local states during city-regionalism is not fixed but rather dynamic. Municipal government development agendas and practices are constrained and reshaped by the government at the higher levels. However, municipal governments still have the agency to implement experimental practices for their own intentions. Zhang et al. (2023b, in this issue) examine a cross-boundary development project, Quzhou Inno-industrial Park (QIIP), across two municipal governments in Zhejiang Province. The case reveals cross-border entrepreneurial statecraft under state entrepreneurialism. Rather than fixed urban entrepreneurialism, Zhang, X et al. find that the cross-boundary statecraft is a stepwise change from local entrepreneurialism to state actions through 'city diplomacy' and 'intrapreneurialism', which transforms the government through business management. The provincial government set up the development goals and regulations (land quota) and built the inter-city cooperation schemes (Mountainside and Seaside Cooperation Initiatives) for municipal governments to fulfil the central government development strategies. Against this background, municipal governments formed a coalition partnership. Also, municipal governments, based on the established inter-city cooperation, developed speculative and experimental practices to fulfil their development intentions. The city-regionalism through cross-border partnership demonstrates trans-scalar and inter-scalar politics and entrepreneurial endeavour under state entrepreneurialism.

Li and Jonas (2023, in this issue) also investigate city-regionalism in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, but from the perspective of territorial distributional politics. Similar to the emergent city-regionalism triggered by the ecological crisis of Beijing observed by Wang et al. (2023), they argue that the city-regional integrated development in the capital region is a substantially global city (Beijing) centred regionalism at the expense of surrounding smaller cities and towns. By scrutinising the implications of recent Beijing-centred city-regional policies on surrounding small towns and cities (e.g. Yanjiao), Li and Jonas examine the income distribution and housing market dynamics to reflect uneven power structure and inequalities of distributional politics in such a major city-centred region. The production of the 'poverty belt' and 'property belt' around Beijing shows that secondary cities and small towns are essentially marginalised as peripheral, and the unevenly distributed benefits of city-regionalism are indeed widened across the city-region because of new political and economic discourses and practices. They claim that the distributional politics and long-term tensions in territorial-political developments may expose the countervailing societal forces and geopolitical interests from the bottom (Li and Jonas, 2019), operating within the national state-orchestrated city-regionalism from the top.

The contribution by Geng et al. (2023, in this issue) focuses on the governance of the Optics Valley in Wuhan. The Optics Valley has developed from an enclave industrial zone into a new city with mixed land use and functions over 30 years. It reflects the changing priorities from industrial development to land-based accumulation. Recently, the development priority has shifted towards an ecologically friendly and liveable urban environment. Unlike mega urban projects supported by the central government, the Optics Valley is promoted by the local government. The planning and development of new cities and new areas projects in

China is regarded as a spatial model to promote economic growth and a temporal strategy to use land resources from the perspective of entrepreneurial and modular urbanism (Chien and Woodworth, 2022). City planning is crucial in shaping the functions of the development zone throughout the development process (Wu, 2015). However, the content of urban planning has been adjusted to fulfil the state's strategic aspiration. This is similar to the changing approach to urban redevelopment with a new growth machine (Li, 2023) or the development of Zhangjiang Science City in Shanghai, showing the state's indigenous innovation strategy (Zhu et al., 2022). Echoing the framework of state entrepreneurialism, which highlights planning centrality, the paper shows that a highly diverse set of planning practices contribute to city-regional development.

City-regionalism in environmental governance and societal development

The political construction of city-regions is often examined through the lens of environmental politics and sustainable development (Jonas, 2012). In China, the central state introduces city-regions to address the urban question that emerged in infrastructure development, environmental problems, social inequalities, and citizen participation in urban governance (Li and Jonas, 2022). In this context, current research needs to explore how environmental politics and societal interests promote city-regionalism and how they may present in a new space of city-region. The papers in this special issue go beyond the economic domain to explore how city-regional development is tied to environmentalism and social sustainability.

Wang et al. (2023, in this issue) focus on environmental governance and city-regionalism in China. Using the air pollution management in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region as a case study, the paper shows that the war against air pollution – the eco-scalar fix, has contributed to city-regional building. Through the analysis of the key parameters of the eco-state, the paper identifies three phases of the air pollution governance in the region, namely pollutants emission control (the 1990s–2005), campaign-style regional governance (2006–2012) and city-regionalism in air quality governance (2013 onwards). Through eco-state restructuring, the city-regional has become the key scale at which environmental regulations are targeted. Recent environmental city-regionalism is a scale building and an environmental scalar fix process. The central government enhances its control and capacity in policy implementation, environmental monitoring and reconciling conflicting interests. Ecological considerations in environmental governance drive the city-regionalism.

Yang and Ma (2023, in this issue) investigates how mobile apps have facilitated the integration of ageing cross-border migrants from Hong Kong into everyday lives in Shenzhen. Thanks to the increasing cross-border interactions in GBA, cross-border migrants, especially older migrants, have resurged, facing opportunities and challenges in the digitalisation of everyday life. The paper compares the app use patterns and purposes of Hong Kong older migrants and local older adults in Shenzhen. The investigation demonstrates a digital gap between them, and older migrants can adopt the apps to catch up with the digital gap between Shenzhen and Hong Kong. They use mobile apps for cross-border travelling and communication, facilitating their adaptation to local daily life. The paper shows that societal changes occur as a response under the state strategy of the Greater Bay Area of Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao (GBA). The development of digital and smart governance facilitated city-regional governance.

Conclusion

This special issue examines recent trends in city-regional development and related governance issues in China. The cases range from super mega city-regions such as the Yangtze River Delta to metropolitan regions. They reveal the rise of city-regional governance through various pathways. This special issue provides a grounded interpretation of Chinese city-regional governance, as called by the first editorial in this journal (Zhang et al., 2022a). The papers all pay attention to the particularity of Chinese institutions under state entrepreneurialism and demonstrate the role of multi-scalar states (Wu et al., 2022). They reveal how

city-regionalism is constructed, deployed, and implemented along with economic, environmental and social governance.

The papers in this collection provide multiple angles to see city-regional governance. Some stress the reform of the planning system (Chen et al, 2023; Harrison and Gu, 2023; Hu et al, 2023), while others pay attention to bottom-up local entrepreneurialism (Geng et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2023b). Despite this different emphasis, they all demonstrate that city-regional governance involves more strategic motivations of the multi-scalar state (Li and Jonas, 2023; Wang et al., 2023). These region-building activities all represent an effort to enhance coordination (Geng et al., 2023; Ramondetti, 2023). Although the state strategy is visible, this does not mean everything is well planned or achieved according to plan. The development of the city-region includes other actors, such as the business sector and cross-border migrants, to act upon their perception and their agencies (Yang and Ma, 2023). The city-region strategy produces an impact on public service distribution. The state-centred strategy tends to support the central city for some 'strategic' consideration, such as the environmental quality of Beijing (Li and Jonas, 2023; Wu and Zhang, 2022). The 'coordinated' city-regional development, as the phenomenon of extended urbanisation (Keil and Wu, 2022), goes beyond suburbanisation or urban sprawl. It does not equalise the spatial distribution of public services or economic productivity. The central city in the mega-city region often occupies a key position to enjoy more support from the state (Li and Jonas, 2023; Ramondetti, 2023).

These studies make several contributions. First, they demonstrate the state's dominant role in regional governance in China. The central government deploys city-regionalism as a form of governance technology to achieve economic competitiveness internationally and social and environmental sustainability (Li and Jonas, 2022; Wu, 2016; Wu and Zhang, 2022). The state functions differently, such as reforming the spatial planning system, new regional discourses and spatial representations in regional plans, and the formation and restructuring eco-state.

Second, these studies show that state entrepreneurialism is the rationale behind city-regional governance. There are diverse entrepreneurial endeavours which implement city-regionalism in China. City-regionalism includes regionalism in the globalisation of economic production and consumption (Scott, 2019) and the state's rescaling strategies to cope with various crises and challenges in this globalisation and regulatory deficit (Brenner, 2004; Wu, 2016). State entrepreneurialism captures the tension between market development and state territorial governance. The framework of state entrepreneurialism indicates that the state maintains its governance centrality while using various governance techniques and instruments. In China, city-regionalism still represents the entrepreneurial endeavours of multi-scalar states. While in the earlier stage, local entrepreneurialism shows strong city-based interests, entrepreneurial endeavour for city-regionalism increasingly demonstrates the multi-scalar processes which subject these endeavours under the rationality and strategies of the central government. For example, environmental governance, which contributes to city-regionalism, is embedded into the ecological considerations of the state (Wu and Zhang, 2022; Zhang and Wu, 2022; Zhang et al., 2022b). China has now seen a new style of growth machine (Li, 2023), a new development coalition (Zhang and Gao, 2022), or governance beyond the local growth machine, which is subject to strong state mandates (Wu et al., 2022).

Third, the studies explore the environmental and social processes of city-regionalisation and show that city-regionalism is facilitated and constructed by environmental governance and societal actions. The empirical studies reflect the variegated city-regionalism in the environmental governance realm and in everyday lives and practices. The environmental city-regionalism in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region is attributed to the control of 'oversized' capital and redistribution of non-essential functions into a wide capital region (Wu and Zhang, 2022). That is, the spatial restructuring of Beijing's capital city-region is closely associated with a spatial fix and crisis management (Zou, 2022). The discourse of GBA aims to facilitate mobility between Hong Kong, Macao and other cities in mainland China. In turn, in the case of ageing migrants, digitalisation, cross-border mobility and city-regionalism impact their quality of life.

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