

Gipouloux, François (Hrsg.): *China's Urban Century. Governance, Environment and Socio-Economic Imperatives*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar 2015. ISBN: 978-1-78471-508-3; 322 p.

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Since the 1980s, China has been undergoing rapid urban change: its cities have been growing, and mega-urban areas have formed. Towns and villages are either incorporated into cities' territories, or they form independent urban centers, and 70 percent of China's population are forecast to be urbanites by the year 2030 (p. xvii). Public policy has always channeled, moderated, and in many ways tried to control these trends: the previously iron-cast separation between urban and rural labor markets and socioeconomic policy, between urban and rural populations, and between urban and rural land has been softened and perforated, but was never dismantled. Only in the year 2014 has Central Government passed an encompassing urbanization strategy. This strategy provides measures and directions of how to cope with the challenges of large-scale rural-urban migration for policy fields as diverse as social security, construction, education, environmental protection, and public finance. Current scholarship accompanies this process by tracing the ways in which policies are implemented and by assessing concrete local policies against both national policy and more international trends in urban development. Scholars also discuss which directions future urban policy should take.

In this context, „China's Urban Century“ provides insights into the complexities and varieties of issues involved in controlling, facilitating, and managing urbanization in China. This volume is product of a large collaborative research project of Chinese and European scholars, funded by the European Union in the years 2011-2015. It covers large variety of topics around urbanization and urban development in China: land administration, social security, public finance and central-local relationships; migration and housing; protection of the environment, ur-

ban renewal and development policies. Contributors come from disciplines as diverse as business and economy, law, environmental policy, geography, anthropology, and architecture and planning. Cohesion to this international and interdisciplinary endeavor is provided by a common focus on urban governance. Together, they portrait a wide variety of issue areas with which cities in China are struggling as well as how these problems might be framed. The contributions to this volume demonstrate how legal prescriptions and institutions structure the path of urbanization in China, which policy objectives local governments need to meet, and how policy programs and projects in various fields are devised and implemented.

The 15 chapters of the volume are structured into five sections: in the beginning, the Foreword by Dwight H. Perkins and the Introduction by François Gipouloux present context and background information on urbanization in China. In Part I, five chapters explore the rules which have structured present-day urbanization outcomes; in Part II, local programs in the policy fields of environmental protection and social security, their variations, challenges, and outcomes are analyzed. Part III takes a planning perspective on the management of urban space, while Part IV broadens the perspective to point out the financial entanglements and the broader policy contexts and how they condition and shape the growth of the case-study cities. Most Chapters in parts II-IV are based on original data from one or two of the case study cities Shanghai, Chongqing, Kunming, and Huangshan, while the chapters in Part I are mostly based on national data.

The general storylines are familiar and reflect the state of the field: Collective and state ownership of land as well as the system of population registration (*hukou*) produce a differential land market and a social chasm between the holders of urban and of rural registration documents. Central government provides regulation for local urbanization policy, but this is implemented often rather creatively by local governments. Often, as demonstrated by Balula / Bina and by Chen / Wang with the example of implementation of environmental protection mea-

asures in urban planning, standards and prescriptions may be implemented to the comma, but as they also fulfill business and lifestyle imaginations, projects do not end up achieving their original purpose at all. The fiscal situation of local governments remains dire, and integration of migrants into local security schemes will put a further strain on local finances. In this context, Yuan / Tan put out the argument that despite of the costs, and with adequate restrictive measures in place, extending the social security system to migrants will – in the medium term – benefit the age structure and the supply of human capital for the city. Spatial planning and urban (re)development projects are interesting for their complex constellation of actors, which often involve local and international planning companies, local governments, as well as state-owned and private construction and investment companies. The chapters by Ged / Shao and by Ai / Pillet trace the historical learning curve and the actor constellations of inner-city restoration projects. Feuchtwang / Zhang / Morais then present thoughts on gentrification and segregation and on counter measures from a planning perspective. The empirical insights into the mechanisms of the construction of cities in these chapters are among the most valuable contributions this book makes.

Especially in those chapters on urban planning, the volume contains a wealth of – often new – empirical detail, such as minor property rights in the real estate market (Ai / Elosua / Goulard), details on administrative processes in planning (Ai / Pillet; Feuchtwang / Zhang / Morais), or on social fabrics in social housing programs (Elosua / Ni). In combination with the multitude of disciplinary perspectives employed, the book provides a broad overview of the trends and topics of urban research in China, coupled with original research. It therefore would be a good choice as an entrance to the field of urban studies in China or to familiarize oneself with other disciplines' discourses on urban China.

In contrast to most publications on the issue, this book manages to uncover the complexity inherent in urban policy. This volume juxtaposes financing squeezes of local policy with policy measures in the policy fields of so-

cial security, housing, environmental and heritage protection, as well as the issues involved in urbanizing both people and land. This approach limits the depth of enquiry and does not cover all policy areas involved. For example, education and industrial development have not been excluded from the range of issue areas.

As an overview on different policy-areas and different fields of research connected to urban China, this book would have profited from the addition of an introduction to case-study locations, their respective commonalities and characteristics. The economic, social and political profiles of these four cities are vastly different: the amount of political influence they can marshal, the financial and technical resources at the disposal of their governments, local economic power, as well as the attraction these cities hold to both international and national migrants are barely comparable. Without a sense for such disparities and what they mean for local policy, it is difficult for readers to grasp the phenomena described.

Additionally, representativeness is limited by the fact that research took place only in the cities of Shanghai, Kunming, Huangshan and Chongqing, the overwhelming majority of case studies are located in Shanghai and/or Chongqing. These two cities are among the highest-ranking cities in China, as well as among the best-covered by research. Both cities are well-known for their cutting-edge urban planning, construction and social policy. Therefore, generalizability of results will probably be rather low.

Current urbanization policy prioritizes the growth and development of lower-ranking towns and cities, so as to reduce spatial polarization. In this light, the selection of case study locations and especially the empirical focus on Shanghai and Chongqing is unfortunate, since social, spatial, and economic situations and challenges are certain to differ from those locations where the implementation of urbanization policy will take place.

In a nutshell, „China's urban century“ provides a good entry into the field of urban studies in China. It introduces the relevant arguments and mechanisms, and it gives an overview of the institutional arrangements structuring urban policy and urban develop-

ment in China. The volume also manages to convey an impression of the breadth and complexity of the issues involved in urbanization.

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