Province-Leading-County as a Scaling-Up Strategy in China: The Case of Jiangsu*

Xiaolong Luo, Yeqing Cheng, Jie Yin, and Ying Wang

Abstract
Scalar relations have been restructured in the contemporary capitalism. In post-reform China, many scalars are transformed and constructed with the transition from state socialism to market economy. This article examines the process of rescaling state power from the perspective of politics of scale, using a case of province-leading-city reform in Jiangsu province. By examining the role of government at various levels in the province-leading-city reform, it is argued that the province-leading-city reform is a rescaling of state power, involving

Xiaolong LUO is Professor in the Department of Urban Planning and Design at Nanjing University. His current research interests lie in urban and regional development policies and governance.

Yeqing CHENG is Associate Professor in Northeast Institute of Geography and Agroecology, Chinese Academy of Sciences. His research interests include regional planning and rural development.

Jie YIN is Associate Professor in the Department of Urban Planning and Design, Nanjing Forestry University. Her research interests are urban and regional planning and governance.

Ying WANG is a master’s student in the Department of Urban Planning and Design, Nanjing University. Her research focuses on urban and regional planning.

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up-scaling and down-scaling of powers. Due to power reshuffling in the rescaling process, there are intense power struggles among scalars in both vertical and horizontal dimensions.

With the deepening process of globalization, marketization, and decentralization, China’s cities and regions have undergone dramatic economic and political restructuring since the late 1970s. There emerges considerable academic and policy interests in China’s changing urban and regional governance after the launch of economic reforms and open-door policy, especially after 2000. On the urban scale, China’s changing governance has been the focus of previous studies. By cautiously borrowing Western urban theories, such as urban regime, growth coalition, and entrepreneurial city, scholars have argued that transitional China shares some similarities with Western societies, but there are still differences in urban governance due to a strong government or tight social control.

On the regional scale, various institutional realignments and political adjustments have been unfolding in transitional China, especially in developed regions. These have been intensively documented in recent literature. In the great Pearl River Delta Region (PRDR), with the ongoing market-led regionalization, institution-led regionalization is emerging, giving rise to a multilevel regional governance. Although local states, especially the Hong Kong government, have become active in promoting regionalization in the great PRDR, there is a long journey for social cohesion due to different cultural and social setting between Hong Kong and the mainland. In the Yangtze River Delta Region (YRDR), intercity cooperation and regionalization have been investigated, by summarizing its processes, mechanism, and topology. Different from regionalization in great PRDR, state has played a dominant role in YRDR’s regionalization. Apart from above understanding of regionalization, city-region governance has also received scholarly attention, especially focusing on the role of state in city-region building. These existing literatures have improved our understanding of China’s changing urban and regional governance.

Along with the above urban and regional governance restructuring, the urban space in China has been expanded/reorganized tremendously with the designation of new cities and the constant adjustment of city boundaries since 1990. The urban administrative restructuring (行政區劃改革 xingzheng quhua gaige), which is also a realignment of urban