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Four Theses in the Study of China's Urbanization[1]

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Urbanization in China, particularly along the eastern seaboard regions from Guangzhou in the South to Dalian in the North, has become a "hot" topic. Western social scientists have rushed in to study phenomena as diverse as Beijing's rock music scene, rural villages in the Pearl River delta transmuting into urban districts, gated housing estates for an emerging middle class in peri-urban areas, the explosive rise of Shenzen rivaling Hong Kong, massive investments in interurban transport, ethnic enclaves on the peripheries of Beijing and Shanghai, the condition of migrant workers in coastal cities, new gender and family relations, and a myriad other subjects that have caught their attention. Some of these studies have been made by an older generation of China specialists, but in increasing numbers young American, British, Australian, and Singaporean students are mastering the necessary language skills to do urban research in China. They are a new research cohort that sees itself not primarily as sinologists but as scholars within particular disciplines who also happen to be interested in some aspect of China's urbanization.

Few among this cohort, however, have bothered to think about the process of urbanization in its multiple dimensions and what it implies either for the future of China's development overall or for its broader significance in the context of world urbanization. On the one hand, urbanization is the outcome of multiple socio-spatial processes that together constitute China's modernization, a process that in fact began not just since Deng Xiaoping's reforms in the 1980s but in the final decades of the Qing dynasty a hundred and fifty years earlier. As many have observed, there is something quite unique in what is happening in today's China, though how that uniqueness is constituted is often difficult to say. Despite superficial similarities, China's modernization is not simply replicating what has already occurred in other countries, whether Japan or the United States. It is rather a process with distinctive characteristics and results on the ground that the closer you study them, the more you realize their

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uniqueness. But how are these specificities to be identified and even more, interpreted? We have yet to undertake comparative research that looks at Russia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Indonesia, India, or Brazil, comparisons that would help us better to understand the specific differences in a modernization that in the current perspective is too often amalgamated with the homogenization of global markets.

My own efforts to synthesize China's urban transition have forced me to think explicitly about how to make sense of the enormous accumulation of data, insights, and interpretations that have been gathering over the past thirty or forty years (Friedmann 2005). In the course of writing this small book, I have arrived at a number of tentative conclusions that I would like to share. I will formulate them as a series of four theses.

To begin with, on any historical measure, urbanization in China can be said to be a very recent phenomenon. Although a still ongoing process, it is likely to draw to a conclusion well before the turn of this century, when eighty percent or more of China's entire population may well be considered at least to some extent urban. But in studying Chinese cities, there is another aspect that must be considered, for many of these cities are among the oldest in the world. As the geographer Paul Wheatley put it, the North China Plain is one of a handful of regions of primary urbanization in the world.[2] This dual aspect of Chinese urbanization—its relative newness *and* its ancient pedigree—needs to inform our work (Wheatley 1971).

My second thesis concerns the nature of the phenomenon we call the process of urbanization. Urbanization, I will argue, is a dynamic, multi-dimensional socio-spatial process. As I will elaborate later on, we need to consider at least seven interacting dimensions. The study of each of these has its own particular jargon, research methodology, and theoretical underpinnings; at the same time, for a complete understanding, we need to see these dimensions in relation to each other rather than in isolation, each looked at by its appropriate discipline. By its very nature, research on urbanization should thus be viewed as a trans-disciplinary undertaking.

The third thesis argues that we need to look at urbanization through bi-focal lenses that simultaneously encompass both rural and urban phenomena. Nevertheless, it is the urban that has to take priority now and move into the foreground of our thinking. China is urbanizing at a rapid pace and by doing so, is profoundly altering the way we have to

[2] These regions include, in addition, Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley, the lower Nile Valley, Meso-America, the central Andes, and the Yoruba territories in western Africa.

think about its rural economy and rural way of life, which are themselves undergoing major transformations. I call this "the view from the city."

Finally, and perhaps most contentiously, I will argue that China's urbanization is a result of forces that in their origins are essentially endogenous. Global forces—economic, technological, cultural influences—certainly have a role to play in China's development, but for the most part, they are accepted and managed on Chinese terms. China has begun to engage the rest of the world and is acting as a responsible member of the "world community." But Chinese cities are evolving in their own ways, and will end up as cities embodying a *Chinese form of modernity*, regardless of how many office towers and luxury hotels built in Shanghai are designed by western architects.

I will now take up each of these four theses in turn.

The dual aspect of Chinese urbanization. The facts at our disposal clearly support both propositions: China's hyperurbanization began only a short while ago; nevertheless, Chinese cities are of ancient origin. At the beginning of the 20th century, urban population amounted to about ten percent of the total: at the time, China was still a predominantly rural society. The statistics were about the same at the start of the Maoist era in 1949 and rose, with some ups and downs, until stabilizing at around seventeen percent. Fifty years later, newly revised data by Kam Wing Chan and Ying Hu (2003) suggest an urban population of more than 36 percent that is continuing to rise at 4 to 5 percent a year. Accordingly, by 2050, when the People's Republic will celebrate its 100th anniversary, the projected level of urbanization may reach 60 percent, or nearly double of what it is at present. On this indicator alone, then, and with all the usual reservations about future projections, China can be said to be a "newly urbanizing" country.

A quick comparison with some West European countries can be instructive. Towards the end of the 18th century, the urban proportion of total population in Holland (which held the European record) was on the order of 50 percent, or four to five times China's level a century and a half later while the urban proportion for western and central Europe ranged between 20 and 25 percent (Braudel 1973, 376). Absent reliable statistics, my guess is that China's urban population has fluctuated between five and ten percent since at least the Tang Dynasty (618-907). The sudden take-off into the urban stratosphere in the 1980s, fuelled by massive rural-urban migration, is thus a very recent phenomenon, lagging 150 to 200 years behind the explosive growth of cities in Europe and North America. Nevertheless, China's urbanization level is beginning to converge with current levels in Western Europe, North America, and Japan.

Accelerated urbanization may be a new phenomenon for China, but it is merely the most recent phase in an urban tradition that reaches back to antiquity. Historically, we know mostly about capital cities, and names such as Chang'an, Keifeng, Hangzhou, and Nanjing, conjure up images of great splendor.[3] In their time, some of them were among the largest urban centers in the world. But even in pre-modern times, Chinese urbanism reached beyond capital cities all the way down to the mundane wards and streets of county seats that were the relay stations of imperial power, and still further down the hierarchy of central places to the market towns scattered throughout the countryside (Skinner 1977). The fortunes of particular cities waxed and waned. Still, we can confidently assert that throughout its history, China maintained a distinctive urban tradition that set cities apart from their rural surrounds, visually and above all symbolically, especially since the Ming, by imposing city walls and gate towers, and functionally as centers of imperial administration.

What I call China's urban tradition refers, of course, only to certain continuities that appear to assert themselves despite ongoing changes. From an urban perspective, and starting with the Tang Dynasty, major ruptures with the past occurred during at least five periods. The first was the long transition from Tang cities, which I would call the "city of wards" and Heng Chye Kiang (1999) calls cities of aristocrats, to the cities of the Northern Song (960-1127AD), symbolized respectively by the militarized fortress city of Chang'an and the open, bureaucratic city of Keifeng. The next far-reaching change occurred during the late Ming (1368-1644AD), with the rise of the flourishing cities of merchant guilds described in F.W. Mote's magisterial study of imperial China (1999). With their vivid street life, Ming cities continued the "openness" of the Northern Song, gradually filling out an interconnected imperial network of urban places that completed the pre-modern system of cities at different size levels and with interlocking political and economic functions.

The next major rupture occurred with the arrival of western powers in China, the treaty port system of cities, and the beginnings of modern industrialization along the eastern seaboard in the latter part of the 19th century. City walls were no longer maintained and would eventually be torn down to make way for the modern industrial city. Shanghai was the epicenter of this movement, but its promise was brutally interrupted by the War of Resistance against the Japanese and the civil war that followed, concluding with the

[3] For Han Chang'an, the great imperial capital, see Wu 1995; for the Song capital Keifeng, see Heng 1999; for Ming dynasty Nanjing, see Mote 1977.

proclamation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. We have excellent city studies for this period such as David Strand's on the politics of 1920s Beijing (1989), the edited collection by Joseph Esherick on Republican urbanism (1999), and monographs on urban reforms in Canton and Chengdu respectively by Michael Tsin (1999) and Kristin Stapleton (2000) with both studies covering the first few decades of the twentieth century.

Mao Ze Dong's vision of the city was a reaction to the bourgeois city of consumption during the Republican era. Socialism, he thought, demanded a city of production. The difficulty was how to make this possible. Capital accumulation had to take place, but in the absence of large-scale foreign aid, this would have to be squeezed out of the peasantry. The means for this, he decided, would be the reorganization of both city and countryside. Agricultural production would be managed through collectivization (communes) and industrial production carried out in so-called work units or *danwei* that would provide a living/working environment under close Party supervision (Perry and Lü, 1997). In this way, Mao hoped, a basic asceticism in living habits would be enforced and large-scale investments in urban infrastructure and housing avoided.

The city of *danwei,* composed of walled compounds, set a new direction for the country that was austere, egalitarian, and stubbornly self-reliant. Thus China's gaze was turning inward towards the construction of a socialist society. Following the Soviet example, industrialization continued apace with an emphasis on heavy industry, albeit much of it located deep in China's interior (the so-called Third Front strategy). With Mao's death in 1976 and Deng Xiaoping's ascent to supreme power two years later, China returned to engage the world. The new reform-era embrace of "market socialism" also marked the beginning of the current phase of accelerated urbanization and unlimited accumulation.

My periodization is sketchy. But bridging all of these changes, some enduring, others abrupt and short-lived, is China's millennial urban tradition. Amidst continuing change, certain patterns persist, ruptures or no, right down to the present. Although I am unable to elaborate on all of them here, I want to mention at least three such patterns that have survived.

The first and probably the most important is the governance pattern of the administrative city.[4] As in imperial times, cities today are first and foremost

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[4] China's complex city system refers increasingly to administrative designations rather than to the urban functions of a locale (Chung and Lam 2004, 946).

hierarchically ordered administrative centers even though their primary function is often economic (Chung and Lam 2004).[5] Their governors and staff are directly or indirectly appointed by the central government. Although People's Congresses are (indirectly) elected at municipal and urban district levels, their influence on local policy has so far been quite limited. Within this hierarchical system of administrative cities, four city-provinces are directly subordinated to the State Council and thus have substantial autonomy, although their rulers are also appointed and ultimately accountable to Beijing rather than to local citizens. Moreover, since 1984, so-called leading cities have gained authority over rural counties assigned to them by the centre, so that, in one form or another, over seventy percent of China's population falls under the political control of one or another of these cities (op. cit. 948).

Closely related to the administrative tradition is the lack of strong urban identities in China. This question arises largely because of our familiarity with western cities, with their strong urban traditions, many of which go back, like Siena's colorful *Il Palio* horse race around the city square or the running of the bulls in Pamplona, to the late middle ages. West European and American cities both North and South are self-governing cities with active civic involvement. We pay our taxes, we vote, we form voluntary organizations that engage the local political community both politically and in the provision of social services: we are local as well as national citizens. The inhabitants of China's cities, on the other hand, do none of these things; they are simply citizens, more accurately subjects, of the PRC but not of Kunming, Wuhan, or Yantai.[6] They work in cities, lately they are also learning to become avid consumers, but despite their urban *hukou*, their primary identity is still defined (as it has always been) by lineage, native place, and language (Ma and Jiang 1998; Friedmann 2005a) Latterly, for some, professional identities may well be added.[7]

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[5] Four hierarchical levels are distinguished: province, deputy province, prefecture, and county.

[6] Howell (2004) revisits the extensive debates about a "civil society" in China and in particular the question of citizenship. But her conclusions are at best ambiguous. A typical statement runs as follows: "The emergence of a public sphere…remains embryonic, tentative, and precarious. What we have is a proto-public sphere whose contours and features are evolving in a context of uncertain boundaries (161). A resident of Xiamen, the middle-aged manager of a medium-sized Taiwanese factory producing electric motors for export put it to me more bluntly: "I didn't put those guys [meaning Xiamen's leaders] into their jobs. I don't care what they do." Actually, he was critical of what "those guys" were doing, but frustrated because unable to express his opinions. What he thought was, for all practical purposes, irrelevant.

[7] *Hukou* are identity cards and are issued separately for rural (agricultural) and urban (non-agricultural) residents. This system, which is still operative, was intended to control migration to cities. It also provided access to urban privileges for those lucky enough to have an urban *hukou*.

This is nowhere more true than in China's newly urbanizing fringe areas, the peri-urban districts that surround rapidly expanding central cities. Here a small number of native villagers suddenly find themselves deluged by rural migrants from distant regions who come to work in local industries and by a newly emerging middle class of newcomers who are moving out of the central city into high-rise condominiums that rise from what was once productive agricultural land. The aging villagers, their lives disrupted for good, become rentiers on their own land, while sojourner workers, many of them speaking a different dialect-- the much maligned "floating population"-- work long hours in local factories, accumulating experience and small sums of capital with which they hope to return some day to their native villages and towns. None of them, except perhaps the aging ex-peasants who are now whiling away their time in parks playing mahjong, are local citizens in any of the ways of this contested notion.

The third continuity with China's past is what I shall call the pattern of the governance of everyday life. Wang (2003) describes the tradition of local autonomy:

> The lack of an urban administration before the early twentieth century in China led to a local autonomy that made urban public space equally accessible to the members of all social classes. Commoners freely conducted all sorts of recreational and commercial activities on the street and in other shared spaces such as public squares, temple fronts, ends of bridges, and teahouses. The streets were controlled primarily through the neighborhood-organized *baojia* system. *Baojia* leaders were selected from local residents, but they were not formal officials in the city, though sometimes they represented the government to carry out 'official' duties, such as security. The Qing government had little direct involvement in control of the street. This pattern of management had a profound impact on urban life; the activities organized by the residents of a street or neighborhood clearly reflected a degree of community cohesion and control. (Op. cit., 23)

High officials had little interest in urban affairs (Stapleton 2000, 45). Life in urban neighborhoods and on the street was regulated by custom. In Qing dynasty Chengdu, for example, the street was the glue that created neighborhood cohesion (Wang 2003, 59). Gates were installed at both ends of each street and were closed at night and guarded by a gatekeeper (*zhafu*) or night watchman hired by the street head. According to Wang, "[p]eople who lived on the same gated street had a 'street bond,' regarded each other as '*jiefang linju'* (close neighbors), and often had mutual aid relationships. They became so close in everyday life that, as the saying went, 'neighbors are dearer than distant relatives'" (ibid.).

This mixture of custom, neighborliness, intrusive surveillance through the *baojia* system,[8] gated communities or wards that were locked at night, and autonomy of neighborhood life from direct control by the state--a form of local governance whose origins date back to at least the Northern Song--seems, to have survived, albeit with some changes, into the present. The lowest level of urban government is now at the district level, equivalent to a borough in New York; but neighborhoods have resurfaced to play an important role in the delivery of a wide range of services through so-called Street Offices (neighborhood committees) which operate as the interface between government and society. Below them are the so-called Residents' Committees that are more or less self-organized and charged by the authorities with the maintenance of public order, basic welfare provisioning, and mobilizing the population when required to do so by the government. In Shanghai, Residents' Committees (that remind one of the lowest level of *baojia*) are typically in charge of 100 to 600 households (Wu 2002, 1084). Neither Street Office nor Residents' Committee are adequately funded to carry out their responsibilities, and many are becoming largely self-financed through fees-for-service and the operation of small- to medium-scale businesses of one sort or another.[9] An additional form of autonomous local organization are the new Property Owners Associations in high-rise apartments that are struggling to assert their rights of ownership in places like Beijing and Shanghai (Zhang 2004). Except for this last, the governance of everyday life in cities today is not very different in substance from what it was under the Qing and earlier dynasties in places like Chengdu and Hankou. Only its form has changed.

I turn now to the second of my four theses, which asserts that *urbanization is a dynamic, multi-dimensional socio-spatial process*. The characterization of urbanization as a socio-spatial process perhaps requires a moment's reflection. Urbanization is a real-world process that perforce takes place on the ground. It produces the artificial world of settlements that we call cities or, more accurately, the urban domain, and so it is a process that occurs not only in time (that is, as an historical process) but also in

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[8] The *baojia* system was originally conceived by Wang Anshi, a statesman of the Northern Song, who invented this system of mutual surveillance between 1060 and 1070 as a means of social control, particularly in village China. Mutually responsible households were organized in groups of ten (*bao*) and hundred (jia), to maintain order and report crimes. The system was adapted during the Ming for the purpose of tax collection, and during the Qing was reactivated. But it wasn't until Mao's time that it was perfected (though under a different name) and extended to the country as a whole.

[9] Since the 1990s, Street business has become the second largest local fiscal income generator in Shanghai (Wu 2002, 1086). With so much money at their disposal, Street Offices are likely to assume more authority than has been formally granted them. The extent to which they are responsive to the wishes of local citizens is not apparent from the literature.

geographic space and therefore as a spatial process as well. That much is fairly obvious, but its implications are not always fully understood.

Take, for example, rural-urban migration that impacts not only the receiving areas (thus representing a subsidy of urban production by the sending rural areas which have borne the costs of social reproduction) but the sending areas as well. New trans-territorial relations are thus set up between city and countryside. Migrants send back substantial amounts of money to families left behind, some of which may raise the level of household consumption but may also lead to the construction of homes in the "modern," urban style, and serve as start-up capital for small enterprises. Returning migrants may bring back new skills, a new outlook on what is possible, new customs, new ways of talking, all of which influence the patterns of local culture. Some will set up small businesses, further strengthening relations with the city as potential market outlets. Rural-urban relations are an understudied area in Chinese urbanization, but the recent book by Rachel Murphy (2002) tells these and other stories for at least one case.

At the urban pole of migration, we must distinguish different scales of analysis, from the most intimate—an alley, a street, perhaps a city block—to broader patterns, such as the built-up area of the central city, ethnic neighborhoods, peri-urban areas, and the urbanizing rural counties beyond them. And lots of different things happen there, depending on what we look for. The redevelopment of central areas, the exodus of young professionals to the periphery of cities, the clash between newcomers and established residents, growing uncertainties and fears among both older residents and new, the emerging patterns of social stratification, the growth in the number of unemployed workers, the new personal freedoms, the intensification of generational tensions…and on and on.

Bearing in mind then that I will be referring to a series of socio-spatial processes, urbanization must be studied along a number of different dimensions. I will mention seven of them, though how you choose to classify them is a bit arbitrary, and different scholars are likely to come up with different arrays of what should be considered "urban."

The best known dimension is the *demographic* that deals with numbers of people and their general characteristics, with urban growth rates and their components, with the different forms of migration, and similar phenomena that are usually of primary interest to the state.

The *social* is the second dimension of the urbanization process and concerns matters of social stratification, urban ethnic enclaves, new gender relations, the formation of new forms of social association from *qigong* practitioners[10] to SUV clubs and home owner associations, the breakdown of traditional social bonds and social norms, the growing incidence of street crime, social tensions and protest movements, the survival strategies of the floating population and other groups in extreme poverty, and similar topics of interest.

Closely related is the *cultural* dimension of everyday life. Here the urbanist is likely to look for the emerging patterns of youth culture, changing fashions in popular music, new forms of leisure activity such as skateboarding, gender relations, novel forms of behavior such as showing affection in public, radio hotlines from suicides to sex, and new forms of consumer behavior, all of them, in one form or another, displaying the hybridity of the contemporary city, its mix of traditional China and the heady new cultural arrivals from already modernized Hong Kong, Japan, and western countries.

Economic urbanization is the fourth dimension and is concerned with the shifts in the proportions of primary, secondary, tertiary, and quaternary (information-intensive service) sectors as they extend over the municipal territory and beyond. Economic matters, of course, also include the measurement of formal and informal employment, un- and under-employment, the formation and operation of land and housing markets, wage levels and rentier income, the incidence of poverty, household spending patterns, illicit business operations, and so forth.

The *ecological* dimension, which is fifth, concerns the different aspects of a city's embeddedness in the natural environment—its dependence on different sources of water supply (underground, reservoir, etc.), the management of by-products and wastes, the health-threatening pollution of air, water, and soil, and the ecological "footprint" of the city that is a measure of its burden on the natural environment.

The *physical* dimension is next and has to do with the layout and architectonics of cities and other settlements as well as the patterns of movement and circulation (of people, water, energy, commodities, waste products, and information) within the urbanizing domain.

[10] *Qigong* is a form of spiritual practice, such as what we know in the West as *tai-chi*.

The seventh dimension, finally, is concerned with the *governance* of urban ensembles, the institutions and processes for decision-making in the urban domain, both formal and informal, and the ability of institutions to carry out their mandates. Governance at the level of city-regions is no longer a single thing but an complex, variable pattern involving multiple actors not only from within the state sector at different hierarchical levels but also from increasingly autonomous private, semi-private, or quasi-private firms able to negotiate effectively with powerholders in state agencies. China's governance system at the urban/regional level is a loose ensemble of institutions and organizations that are mutually adaptive in Charles Lindblom's sense and are increasingly driven by diverging interests (Lindblom 1965). Except when it really matters to Beijing, the national state has relatively little leverage at the urban level, leaving local power centers remarkably unconstrained to shape the future of their urban domains or, as the Chinese saying goes, there may only be one meal, but there are many stoves.

Each of these dimensions can of course be studied in relative isolation of the others, because their study tends to draw on different knowledges and skills. Still, the whole must eventually be brought together, because they are interdependent dimensions, and none exists without simultaneously affecting and being affected by all of the others. To be sure, this is a difficult challenge that calls for a concerted, trans-disciplinary effort. At the same time, the multi-dimensionality of the urban at widely different scales also tells us that *we can have urbanization even in the absence of cities*. Chinese cities are nothing more than an artifact of administrative decisions to establish boundaries or, alternatively, constructs that arise out of particular research programs. Max Weber, for one, declared that traditional China was an empire without true cities, that is, without what he called "complete communities," but his normative template was set to the self-governing western European city with its local citizenry down to about the sixteenth century (Weber 1958). In any ontological sense, then, cities are never "real." Economic, social, cultural, even physical facets of urbanization extend far into traditionally non-urban areas, transforming both their appearance and mode of life. The city has become a metaphor for the urban.[11]

My third thesis concerns what I have called *the view from the city.* The traditional approach to the study of China has been from the vantage point of the rural village. But this view no longer yields relevant insights, and our perspective needs to be reversed.

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[11] Much of China's urban growth is, in fact, a result of successive incorporations of rural areas into the urban, of an outward shift of urban boundaries.

This is not to say that the hundreds of million of rural Chinese should be ignored, that public policy should have an urban bias. Rural-urban income inequalities as well as food security are certainly among the leading policy issues of the day. But in most parts of the country, rural folk now live in the shadow of a middle-sized or large city; they are governed from the city; their livelihood is increasingly geared to urban life. Farmers clearly need the city to survive. The 200 or so million farmers, both men and women, who are said to be "surplus" to agriculture, will eventually show up in peri-urban areas looking for work. National forecasts project an urban population of 60 percent within less than 50 years, and the urban transition as a whole is likely to taper off well before the end of this century. The 21st is therefore also the century when Chinese agriculture will be transformed into a modern industrial sector, a process that is already ongoing in coastal regions and that will gradually spread to other parts of the country. The rapid modernization of transport and communications is shrinking national space, creating an integrated space economy that is articulated through a network of cities.

The continuation of accelerated urbanization over the rest of this century, albeit at a declining pace, is creating internal pressures for further societal transformation along our seven dimensions of urbanization. But the role of the central state in this unruly transformation will no longer be decisive; the devolution of fiscal power to the provinces is already a *fait accompli.* In the decades to come, the role of the central state will rather be to intervene only to maintain the delicate balance between anarchy and stasis, as the socio-spatial system as a whole is stressed to the breaking point.

This new view from the city inevitably poses a challenge to historians to reinterpret the past (once again!) in the light of the present and so to come up with new insights and questions about China's surge as a player in a globalizing world. Not the least of these is the question of why urbanization was held up for 200 years, when the preconditions for it were as favorable and possibly more so in China than they were in 18th century Europe.

I turn now to my fourth thesis, which can be phrased as follows: *China's modernization is best viewed as an endogenous process.* After China's opening to the world in the eighties, it would be easy to jump to the conclusion that external forces, subsumed under the code word of "globalization," are the main cause of the ongoing processes of urbanization and modernization, or more pointedly, that it's the West that is responsible for China's headlong leap into modernity. This might not be the way that many historians would see it, but social scientists not steeped in and often indifferent to history are inclined to

put on globalization spectacles to account for China's second and this time unquestionably successful "great leap forward."[12]

My argument is contrary to this tempting interpretation. I base it partly on a reading of the empirical evidence of rural industrialization (and urbanization) during the past two decades. By the late 90s, township and village enterprises accounted for perhaps a third of China's industrial product. That in itself is an astounding fact for which there is virtually no precedent anywhere in the so-called developing world, with the possible exception of Vietnam. Although more recently there has been a decline in the employment of rural industries, the impact of collective industrialization on urbanization in the countryside, particularly in the peri-urban coastal areas, is patently visible and still ongoing. What accounts for this radical transformation of rural life?

In my review of the literature, I came upon the following possible explanations (Friedmann 2005, ch. 3). (1) Rural population densities in coastal China are equal to and even exceed metropolitan densities in western countries resulting in a land base that can no longer adequately provide for peasant livelihoods; (2) the resulting excess of labor can be more productively employed in non-agricultural work; (3) historical antecedents, such as ancient craft traditions, favor industrialization; (4) resourceful local leadership in both entrepreneurial (risk-taking) and broader developmental roles played a major role in the industrialization process; (5) widespread entrepreneurial talent and promotional savvy on the part of local households seized new opportunities for moving out of poverty and underemployment; and (6) high rates of both collective and household savings made possible investments in both productive facilities and social infrastructure, including housing. These are not the only causal factors—there were also substantial transfers of capital and know-how, especially from Hong Kong and Taiwan—but the plot of the primary story is surely endogenous. China's leap into modernity is of her own making.

Rural urbanization is, of course, only part of the story, even though it played a major role during the early phases of the ongoing modernization process. China is now

[12] Some books that take the globalization perspective on China and cities include: Lo and Marcotullio 2001; Logan 2002; Nolan 2004; and Wu 2005.

irreversibly linked into what Manuel Castells (1996) has called the "global space of flows." But China has always, if intermittently, been "open" to the world, giving as well as receiving, and in receiving has transformed and appropriated cultural novelties, whether Indian Buddhism or western Marxism. The gist of my thesis is that Chinese urbanization must be studied from within rather than as an epiphenomenon of some vague dynamics bundled together and marketed under the brand name of globalization. Whether it's technological innovations, finance capital, franchise merchandizing, human rights, or membership in the World Trade Organization, these new circuits of the global system are undeniably present. But China is not passively linked into them. The adage of "a market economy with Chinese characteristics" still holds. There is a Chinese way of doing things, just as there is a Korean or Japanese way, and the multiplex processes of urbanization are part of that.

I've come to the end of my story and so allow me to sum up. Thesis 1 argues for an historical perspective on the urban transition. China is urbanizing at breakneck speed, compressing into one century what will have taken the world three centuries to accomplish. But it doesn't need to invent urbanism *ex nihilo,* or borrow a congeries of ill-digested notions from abroad. China has its own urban traditions from which it is fashioning the hybrid cities of the present generation.

Thesis 2 states that urbanization is a multi-layered, interactive and dynamic set of distinct socio-spatial processes that are best studied in a trans-disciplinary perspective. The spatial is no longer the special competence of geographers, but has become an important dimension of all human sciences. This thesis allows us to view urbanization as a process that can take place outside of the built-up areas of cities and can turn the countryside into "cities in the field."

Thesis 3 proposes that the city or, more accurately, the expanded city-region has risen to prominence in the present phase of China's modernization. This suggests a new perspective on development. Rural and urban should be taken not as separate, independent categories but as reciprocally related. Rural areas can be transformed under their own power but the process is not independent of the city. Moreover, China's urban system is developing apace, time-distances are shrinking, and the national space economy, rural as well as urban, is becoming ever more closely integrated. Perhaps the

time has come to rethink China's re/emergence as a world power from an urban perspective.[13]

Thesis 4 asserts that today's urbanization processes are largely endogenous, a form of development that is best understood as having its source and origin within China. Globalizing forces—economic, political, and cultural—are accordingly viewed not as the prime mover but as complementary to and intersecting with an endogenous dynamic. This thesis is thus a counterpart to the first, which argues broadly for the historicity of the Chinese city.

An anonymous reviewer of an earlier draft of this paper raised the question of whether any of my theses are transferable to the study of urban phenomena in other "developing" parts of the world. My answer is a qualified yes. China's history is longer than that of most countries; it is also the largest country in population and commands a huge area. Its urban legacy is ancient. For these reasons, most countries cannot claim equivalent status. Nevertheless, at least the first three theses are, I believe, directly transferable as a basis for research, and the fourth thesis is transferable with some limitations. An example of how modernity can be fruitfully viewed as endogenous especially in the perspective of those who, having no power, are struggling to adapt to an urbanization driven by powerful neo-colonial interests is the recent book by AbduMaliq Simone, *For the City yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities* (2004). Simone's may not be the whole story of African urbanization, but it tells an important part.

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[13] At the beginning of the Ming dynasty, as China's fleets under Admiral Zheng He (1371-1433) ruled the seas from South and Southeast Asia to East Africa, China made a brief historical appearance as a "world power." By the mid-15th century, it withdrew from these journeys of exploration to resume its more familiar role as a continental power: the Middle Kingdom. See Mote 1999, 613-617.

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