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JAPANESE CITIES IN CHINESE PERSPECTIVE: TOWARDS A CONTEXTUAL, REGIONAL APPROACH TO COMPARATIVE URBANISM

Abstract: The paper uses an introduction to the comparative study of Japanese and Chinese cities to make a case for a regional approach to thinking about cities in East Asia. In so doing it argues for contextually sensitive comparative urbanism as a platform for a broader understanding of trends towards global convergence. It outlines three different types of comparative urbanism and sets out a basic framework for the study of urban change in the larger cities of China and Japan. Its central argument is that the close relationship between the state and capital in the two countries has conditioned the rapid and dynamic nature of urban change. [Key words: comparative urbanism; Japanese cities; Chinese cities; developmental state; region.]

JAPANESE CITIES, CHINESE CITIES AND THE EAST ASIAN REGION

This paper is a call for a regional approach to urban studies, one that is theoretically grounded and contextually rich.¹ My starting point lies in what I perceive as a failure to integrate the study of urban change in Japan into a regional and an international comparative context. The questions I raise here connect Japanese to Chinese cities and anchor them in the East Asian region. They relate not only to Japanese and Chinese cities and their regional context but also to wider questions of convergence and difference—the extent to which claims can be made for an urban convergence orchestrated by global capital. My principal argument is that a comparative study of urban change in Japan and China is mutually beneficial, and enhances the study of urban spaces in the East Asian region and beyond. China, with its Communist polity and its market economy, has its cities more often bundled into a conceptual basket alongside those of post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe, but nearly always with a caveat: generalizations that might make sense in the European context apply with difficulty to China (Wu et al., 2010). If it can be argued, however, that there is a common pattern to urban change in Central and Eastern Europe, why might the same not be possible for East Asia, that is to say China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan, territories bound together not only by a shared culture (political culture, culture of writing, religious culture), but more importantly in this context by patterns of influence, empire, and investment? This regional context offers a sounder comparative focus for the understanding of urban change in China and lifts the study of Japanese cities out of the trap of uniqueness into which it sometimes falls. At the same time, it offers the chance to draw on lessons from work on CEE cities in establishing the salience of path-dependent approaches within a broader neoliberal urban canvas (Stanilov, 2007). What follows is very much an invitation to further study and one that focuses on the two leading countries in the region, while conscious of the need to consider Korea and Taiwan and their cities in the same regional picture. As I hope to show, there is much to be gained from a specific comparative focus on Japanese and Chinese urbanism.

These are issues with a strong resonance in recent literature that links debates in urban studies and develops the idea of ordinary cities (Robinson, 2002) to encompass postcolonial concepts of cosmopolitan urbanism (Legg and McFarlane, 2008). The literature is animated by a sense that urban studies is innately comparative and that this needs to be recognized, but

¹ I would like to thank Jennifer Robinson for encouragement, support and fruitful suggestions and my anonymous referees for their help in shaping these ideas.

that comparative urbanism needs to be informed by a cosmopolitan sensitivity, sensitive to context and built on an understanding of relevant historical threads. A strong case has been made for this approach to comparative urbanism in a European context (Bodnár, 2001; Le Galès, 2002). But any such comparative work needs to be both highly sensitive to difference and bold enough to contemplate generalization (Ma, 2002).

One of the aims of this paper is to suggest ways in which comparative study of Chinese and Japanese cities within an East Asian regional context can help resolve the tension between sensitivity to difference and the need to generalize in order to transcend specificities and tell stories that have wider meaning. This is predicated on a rich understanding of the regional context, and indeed it is the regional focus that opens up possibilities for a more sensitive understanding of convergence and difference. In other words, I am advocating here a reassessment of the conceptual mileage that can be gained from area studies, in line with arguments recently advanced by Pollard et al. (2009). An area—or regional—focus (I am treating the terms as interchangeable) recognizes the historical weight that proximity has brought to bear in terms of human ties over a long period of time (Legg and McFarlane, 2008). It also facilitates a reading of links to global flows and trends that is more sensitive to local difference, and provides theoretical sustenance for a contextually sensitive understanding of region and difference within regions.

In this paper, I argue that a number of different types of comparative urbanism can be identified, each of which can be effective, but that it is work growing out of an understanding of regional context which has most to offer. I argue that comparative urbanism is sometimes systemic and convergent, making a case for global convergence brought on by networks for the support and transfer of capital. Or it is strategic, comparing cities or aspects of social life in different settings in order to make specific points, about governance, perhaps, or social segregation. Or it grows out of a reading of regional context and is designed to draw out difference as well as commonality within the regional context. It is precisely this sort of comparative urbanism that is being advocated here, not least because it affords the most robust basis for an understanding of the path-dependent nature of neoliberal urbanization (He and Wu, 2009). I go on to suggest that developmental state theory brings an invaluable regional perspective, out of which a contextually sensitive comparative urbanism can grow. I then sketch out a temporal framework for comparative research. From there, I examine the possibilities for work comparing cities in contemporary Japan and China in terms of the changing urban landscape and impacts on urban life-spaces. Finally, the argument is brought into the broader context of the East Asian region.

CONVERGENT, STRATEGIC, AND CONTEXTUAL COMPARISON

My personal interest in a comparative approach to urban change in East Asia was sparked by Terry McGee's use of the term *desakota* (village-town in Malay/Indonesian) to signify areas of mixed urban and rural activities around and between large East and Southeast Asian cities and the debate this engendered (McGee, 1991). His intentionally extra-Western conceptualization was criticized by Dick and Rimmer (1998) for its disregard for the global flows of urban development capital and for its privileging of an Orientalist vision of area studies. Amongst many subsequent contributions to the debate, Ma and Wu (2005) have been critical of what they see as Dick and Rimmer's implicit alignment of globalization with homogenization. McGee's conceptualization of *desakota* does indeed raise issues, in terms of breadth of application and distinctiveness, for example, but the attempt to establish an idiom for regional urbanism was surely a laudable one. For, as I argue here, it is on the basis of an understanding of regional patterns that arguments about the role of global capital and the nature of neoliberal urbanization can best be advanced.

Comparative urbanism raises problems of scale, and indeed of time/ scale but both elements are essential structural ingredients in comparative study. These have been raised, discussed, dropped, and then raised and discussed all over again. Much of the discussion has been engendered by the work of Janet Abu-Lughod, and in particular her reflections on North African cities (1976) and her more recent, seminal volume on New York, Chicago, Los Angeles: *America's Global Cities*. Central to Abu-Lughod's comparative approach is a structured concern for time and scale and an emphasis on the importance of historical detail. It is an emphasis that is not static, but one that seeks out "common mechanisms of process", looking for generalizations "on the level of 'becoming' rather than on the level of 'being'" (1976, 22) and counteracting appeals to unique status or sense of unidirectional trajectory.

Comparative urbanism lends itself to calls for a structured approach and ease of classification. Charles Tilly proposed four types of comparison: individualizing, encompassing, universalizing, and variation-finding (1984, 81). These are interpreted in terms of recent works in the field of urban studies by Neil Brenner (2001) in his review of Abu-Lughod's 1999 volume. The typology that I advance here is broadly similar to Tilly's but with an underpinning that relates more directly to the urban comparative framework: my strategic comparison corresponds to Tilly's individualizing; the point is to compare cities and social trends in cities in order to make specific points about both. Systemic-convergent comparison dovetails with Tilly's universalizing category, the aim being to forefront the role of global capital in shrinking space. But for these two comparative modes to be successful they are reliant on the insights derived from an understanding of regional context. This is where the third category comes into play. Contextually sensitive-regional comparison subsumes Tilly's encompassing and variation-finding categories; it enables regional space to help build a clearer picture both of points of variation and areas of commonality (admittedly not quite the same as Tilly's "plac[ing] different instances at various locations within the same system" [1984, 83] to form an "encompassing" purpose of comparison).

To state this is neither to deny that convergent comparative work is of value nor to suggest that only regional and contextual comparison should be undertaken. Indeed, some of the most rewarding comparative work involving Japanese cities has been strategic in its scope, contrasting developments in Japan and in the West to advance a specific argument (Forrest and Hirayama, 2009; Fielding, 2004; Jacobs, 2003). The same is true of some recent work on Chinese cities (Logan, 2008; Chen, 2009; Wu and Webster, 2010). There is surely much to be gained from this sort of strategic comparison. Issues of expertise, which all too easily become a real barrier to contextually rich urban comparison (Ma, 2002; Pollard et al., 2009), can be overcome through the combined use of expert knowledge in the two different geographical areas or through recourse to local "home-based" accretions of understanding.

Systemic-convergent urban comparative work has focused on Tokyo. Japan's capital city has been inserted prominently into discussion about global convergence, most notably by Friedmann (1986), Sassen (1991), and Taylor (2000) in their work on world and global cities. And yet the Japanese capital sits uneasily in the set of hypotheses elaborated by these writers. It is particularly relevant to the argument being advanced here that, in their critique of Friedmann's and Sassen's conceptual positions, Hill and Kim emphasized the nature of the developmental state as a key determinant of urban change in Tokyo, and with it Seoul. Tokyo, they argued, is not like New York "market-centred and bourgeois [but] state-centred and political-bureaucratic" (2000, 2168). The bureaucracy occupies centre stage; risk-takers on the markets are secondary players. Manufacturing is a key motor driving the economy of these cities, as much as finance and other high order service industries. In social terms, both Tokyo and Seoul, as well as Shanghai, have a much less heterogeneously composed population than either New York or London. The regional arena, they are saying, is much more fruitful for comparative urbanism than is the global, systemic one.

Hill and Kim's approach, clearly, is sensitive to regional context. For them, the "developmental" nature of the Japanese state, is central to an understanding of why Tokyo and Seoul sit with difficulty alongside New York and London. It is in the context of developmental state theory that the comparative study of Japanese cities should be placed. Developmental state theory is comparative by its very nature, and regional in its compass, and the region it encompasses is generally seen to consist of the territories that concern us here, Japan, Taiwan, and Korea, with the addition of Singapore. China today meets many of the relevant criteria of a developmental state (Stubbs, 2009). The set of assumptions behind developmental state theory are well-known and do not need a full recapitulation here (Wade, 1990; Woo-Cummings, 1999). They are built around a set of institutions and policy approaches that create a close and productive relationship between the state and capital. But what has been little studied and discussed in this literature is the way in which the role of the state and capital and their close relationship has conditioned the nature, speed and shape of urban change. This is the crucial issue: exploring the path-dependent relationship between global neoliberal urban change and the Chinese and Japanese developmental states, and it is to this theme that the paper now turns.

A HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK FOR SINO-JAPANESE COMPARATIVE URBANISM

Any engagement with the comparative study of Japanese and Chinese cities needs to be grounded in a historical framework set alongside a sense of geographical juxtaposition. The strength of a comparative engagement with the study of urban change in Japan and China hinges on this shared historical framework, facilitating a study of the commonalities and differences in patterns of urban change. The periods are as follows: the first covers the decades of introduction and implementation of modern (largely Western) techniques of city building and urban planning. The second is the high-water mark of state-organized, production-oriented re-modeling of the urban terrain. The third is the contemporary period of increasingly permissive capital-driven urban restructuring. Such a periodization inevitably comes with numerous caveats, even if several of these serve to reinforce the usefulness of the approach.

Any commentary on the first period, however brief, should start with an acknowledgement of the influence of Japan on Chinese urban modernization both as 'benign' educator of intellectuals and incubator of concepts and as 'malign' imperial force. This indicates a slightly later timing in the process of urban modernization in China than in Japan; and it suggests a different experience of Western imperialism. Treaty ports, for example, formed a far more significant and longstanding presence in Chinese history. At the same time, the reaction to imperialist pressures shared common features: In both countries, attempts were made to restructure the capital cities—Beijing and Tokyo—in order to impress foreign powers (Esherick, 2000; Waley, 2005) in a sort of process of auto-colonization. Many young Chinese scientists, doctors, reformers and intellectuals studied in Japan at this time (Rogaski, 2000). They returned with ideas about how to implement the infrastructure of modern urbanism, as for example with the concept of the public park (Shi, 1998). Dominating this period, however, and shaping modern East Asian urbanism is Japanese imperial conquest, first in Korea and Taiwan, where Japan was builder, industrializer, exploiter, and planner, and then in China, starting with the colonization of Manchuria and the construction of a new capital at Shenyang.

The second of the three periods outlined above might be identified as high modernist, marked in particular by a powerful (not to say authoritarian) state and a hegemonic ideology (whether overt or covert), thus fulfilling the key requirements as set out in James Scott's analysis of "high modernism" as a state-run political and ideological construct (Scott, 1998).

Because of China's relative isolation during much of this period, and because of the different political and social systems in place at the time, little attention has been paid to commonalities in urban development during this second period. Both China and Japan were increasingly wrapped up in an approach to development that favored the logic of production and a massive emphasis on funding the construction of an infrastructure to support industrial production. In Communist China this was known as "production first, life second" (*xian shengchan, hou shenghuo*). The work unit (*danwei*) was both organizing principal for industrial production and also the physical compound within which production and daily life occurred. In the cities of developmental Japan, the state-directed channeling of energies to work and the provision of a welfare system that reinforced this conspired to create cities in which the interests of industrial production prevailed, even though the sites of production themselves and the housing provided for employees (known as *shataku*) was generally in corporate hands. Indeed, so single-minded was this emphasis on production that a number of severe and dramatic cases of industrial pollution ensued, and became a disturbing icon of the period.

Clearly, the period of "production first, life second" encompasses many differences in the political and social dynamics of the two countries. To take but one of the most obvious examples, in China movement into cities was all but completely blocked for much of this period, while in Japan there were massive influxes into the main urban areas. This should not, however, obscure commonalities in the social forces at play. These were, for example, years during which neighborhood organizations reached a peak of influence as agents of social control and/or harmony (depending on how one looks at it). Both the residents committees (*jumin weiyuanhui*) of Chinese cities and the neighborhood associations (*chōnaikai* and *jichikai*) in urban areas in Japan bridged the gap between the household and the lowest tier of local government. The political and social role they played in Chinese cities was clear, but one should not underestimate their importance in Japan as agents of social stability. To some extent they retain this strength today in both countries (Pekkanen, 2006; Read and Chen, 2008).

The third period takes us from the early 1980s and covers the decades up to the present. In both countries, during the contemporary period, the state has allied itself with capital to engineer a restructuring of large cities. It has engineered changes—in property ownership rights in the case of China and zoning regulations in the case of Japan—to create propitious conditions for the exploitation of the urban terrain. In both countries, urban development capital has created highly dynamic, plastic urban environments. And in both countries, loose planning regulations have greatly facilitated the restructuring of urban space, with master planning being little more than indicative (Yeh, 2005). Nevertheless, there have been, and remain, some significant, if better understood, differences, relating, for example, to the more transnational nature of Chinese urban capital and to the more overt role played by the Chinese state. Common patterns of neoliberal urban restructuring are, therefore, apparent in both countries, but their nature and consequences differ, as we will see in the section that follows.

PUTTING SINO-JAPANESE COMPARATIVE URBANISM TO WORK

The common story of restructuring of the urban landscape over the last 30 years or so provides a central spine, as it were, to which comparative work can be attached. With this shared central spine in place, it becomes possible to develop a contextually rich comparative perspective. The paragraphs that follow elaborate on the comparative approach. They start by identifying regulatory reforms that have accelerated urban change in both countries. This is followed by an overview of the interlocking roles of capital and state, and how these have shaped the urban landscape. The section concludes with an outline of some of the ways in which the changing urban landscape affects the life-spaces of those who live in large Chinese

and Japanese cities. The focus is on the largest cities in Japan and China; while some of the points made here would apply at lower levels on the urban scale; others would need qualification.

The urban landscapes of Chinese and Japanese cities have been shaped as a result of their penetration by extractive capital—by large corporations, investment companies, private developers, specialist property companies, all involved in extracting profit from the urban terrain. Urban landscapes have experienced their period of most radical change in both countries from about the same time, the early 1980s, although the process took off a few years later in China. In both countries, huge pressures have forced an outward spread and an even more remarkable upward thrust in the urban fabric. In both countries the surge in extractive urban development that occurred reflected decisions taken by central governments and enthusiastically endorsed by city governments to make land a basis for capital accumulation through the release of land onto the market and re-regulation to favor vertical construction in cities that had until recently been largely horizontal.

Japan has experienced three turbulent decades during which property prices quadrupled, fell to their original level, and then tentatively rose again (Waley, 2007). During this period the urban landscape of its major cities has been altered beyond recognition through an explosion of high-rise buildings. Two intense spates of profit extraction from the urban terrain can be discerned. The first was in the 1980s, when the then prime minister Nakasone Yasuhiro ordered a loosening of planning controls to stimulate urban growth. The second started in 2002, with the promulgation of statutory measures designed principally to spur high-rise office construction. The Japanese state, national and metropolitan (in Tokyo's case), has made a pitch for global status, albeit a somewhat uncoordinated one (Saitō and Thornley, 2003; Tsukamoto, 2011). The state is therefore undoubtedly an important player, but while an instigator and champion of urban restructuring, it is not (or is no longer) the prime mover as the Chinese state can arguably be seen to be. Japan's urban development capital is stubbornly national, even if it has global outreach. Japan's largest cities can be seen as a terrain for competitive development involving the country's major conglomerates. Despite longstanding American political pressure, foreign developers (construction companies, etc.) have made few inroads into this important aspect of Japanese economic activity. In summary, it is important to underline the close bonds that exist between the state and urban development capital in Japan, even as one acknowledges the recent partial repositioning of the state.

If Japan has experienced tumultuous urban change in the last few decades, this is all the more so in China. Here, the state, both national and local, has guided the marketization of land and the commodification of property, using a dual system to place land on the market, through leasing and allocation. The leasing of urban land has been of prime importance in generating the necessary capital to improve infrastructure and thus help generate more capital accumulation from land (Wu, 2009; Hsing, 2010). Municipal and district governments in a city like Shanghai have reached out to global companies, in effect offering them contracts to rebuild their cities. This is part of what Gaubatz has called the "reconceptualization of large cities from local to global entities" (2005, 115). The (local) state has forged what have been referred to as "Chinese-style 'interest coalitions' [with] international capital" (Fu, 2002, p. 118) to build the country's new CBDs, especially in China's coastal cities (Yin et al., 2005). Much of this capital, including investments from overseas Chinese and Taiwanese interests, has funded urban development projects. In recent years, the central state, having released energies at the local municipal level, has been attempting to re-assert control through measures designed to re-establish a greater degree of control over the urban restructuring process (Xu et al., 2009).

The increasing number and territorial spread of skyscraper clusters with their associated high-order service functions and low-order service requirements has occasioned a massive

restructuring of Chinese city centers as well as a less spectacular but nevertheless significant upheaval amongst inner city communities in large Japanese cities. As the skyscrapers have shot upwards, the global office functions and elite production and consumption services that fill them have spread outwards. In Guangzhou, Shanghai and Beijing, as in Tokyo, distinct CBDs (or sub-centers, in the case of Tokyo) have appeared in different parts of the city which, with time, have put pressure on encircled low-lying residential districts.

The expansion into these areas of global business and related functions alongside new and expensive high-rise housing has created social tensions in both Chinese and Japanese cities. In the former case, while city centers such as that of Shanghai have been largely cleared of their poorer residents, the otherwise rather brutal process has been mitigated by improved housing conditions in suburban and fringe parts of the city. In Japan, the tensions caused by city-center urban restructuring have been muted. The relaxation of a number of rules affecting the height of buildings passed unnoticed—unnoticed, that is, until the announcement of plans for the imminent construction of high-rise buildings in residential areas. Where these plans have been opposed by local residents, the courts have tended to accept relatively minor compromises from developers and allowed the construction to go ahead (Sorensen et al, 2010; Igarashi and Ogawa, 2006).

On both sides of the East China Sea, distinctive forms of gentrification have emerged. In the centre of Tokyo, new apartments have been targeted by high-income small-household Japanese, keen to take advantage of “competitive” property prices and the convenience of city centre life (Lützel, 2008). In Shanghai, the new domestic affluent class has shown an aspiration for city centre living (Wang and Lau, 2009) -- and for gated complexes in the suburbs (Wu, 2010), a phenomenon yet to be seen at a significant scale in Japan. In both countries, as we have already seen, the state has played an important role, setting the ground rules and forming the appropriate alliances to aid this process. Sino-Japanese new-build gentrification thus shares a number of characteristics even as displacement has been more sharply etched into the Chinese urban scene than it has been in Japan.

In Japan the rapid pace of change in the urban landscape has not resulted in social unrest. In China, where the extent of social dislocation has been significantly greater, the situation is less clear-cut, and there have been many outbursts of local protest, but the tightly policed nature of the urban terrain has prevented coordinated and widespread manifestations of anger. The absence of large geographical concentrations of poverty has arguably eased pressures and restricted the possibilities for a coordination of expressions of resentment, although recent research on both sides of the East China Sea suggests that the situation is deteriorating. In Japanese cities, pockets of poverty exist in districts where day laborers and the elderly homeless congregate, and poverty and isolation, especially among the elderly, can be found concentrated in post-war social housing estates (McCurry, 2007). At a more general level, disparities in wealth are demarcated on the urban terrain, but there is some disagreement about their extent and nature (Fujita and Hills, 1997; Fielding, 2004; Jacobs, 2005). Where poverty exists in Japanese cities, it has until now tended to be spatially dispersed, hidden away at the household or individual level, or in distant, suburban housing estates. However, recent research supported by OECD figures indicates that it is on the increase (Nagata and Kiyokawa, 2009; Chiavacci, 2008) and suggests that the move away from lifelong employment structures to part-time, short-term jobs in the Japanese economy might soon start to be reflected in a measure of residential segregation in large Japanese cities (Slater 2010; Jacobs, forthcoming).

In China’s case, recent research has revised understandings of urban poverty in China and revealed a growing incidence of spatially differentiated hardship in large cities throughout the country, identifying three urban zones of poverty: “inner-city dilapidated neighbourhoods, degraded workers’ villages (danwei compounds developed by employers), and rural migrant

enclaves formed in the so-called ‘urban villages’, i.e. areas of collectively owned village territory engulfed by an expanding city” (He et al., 2010, p. 329; Wu, et al., 2010). This growing polarization on the urban terrain is a consequence of institutional mechanisms such as the hukou system of residence permits, which denies rural residents access to welfare, housing and other services in an attempt to control migration to cities. It also represents the social fallout from the marketization of China’s state-owned enterprises, as well as the results of housing commodification and a growing, affluent middle class.

There are, then, some notable differences between the extent and spatiality of poverty in Chinese and Japanese cities. In both, however, there remain relatively low levels of social tension, and therefore, we may assume, higher levels of social integration. This is despite the growing incidence of poverty set against the extremely dynamic and plastic nature of the urban landscape, which is being transformed rapidly from a horizontal to a vertical environment as a result of the vigorous flow of capital operating on the urban terrain, incentivized by supportive state policies. Indeed, one might well argue that it is the strength of the developmental state, regardless of political coloration, that has exercised the required authority to suppress unrest, subtly perhaps in the Japanese case, but nonetheless powerfully.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: WHAT EAST ASIAN URBANISM CAN TELL US ABOUT CONVERGENCE AND DIFFERENCE

In both China and Japan, the state has initiated and directed policy changes that have promoted the commodification of urban space, as well as choreographing its globalization. Japanese capital has been well placed to take advantage of the new regulatory climate created by the state, while in China, overseas Chinese and other global interests have been drawn in.

Long-term historical influences over city-building and the way cities are conceptualized spread eastwards from China encompassing Korea and Japan and adapting to local conditions as they spread. In the period of modernity waves of influence have swept back from Japan engulfing Korea, Taiwan, and China. By definition, a comparative urbanism of the East Asian region needs to include Korea and Taiwan. The general thrust of the arguments advanced here apply in some significant measure to the cities of Taiwan and Korea. For example, neighborhood organizations have played an important part in urban life in Korea and Taiwan, not least as a consequence of Japanese colonial policy (Read and Chen, 2008). And on a broader level, loose regulatory frameworks have been accompanied by a sense of symbiosis between capital and the state. The coherence of a regional approach is reinforced by the activities of Japanese, Chinese, Taiwanese, and Korean capital as a driver of urban change in Southeast Asia. And yet, urban development capital and the social changes it engenders both in the “classic” East Asian region and beyond it in Southeast Asia are factors largely absent from developmental state theorizing. This is despite the voluminous, wider literature on developmental state theory (summarized in Stubbs, 2008) and a growing sense of the importance of a regional conceptualization of welfare regimes in East Asia (Peng, et al., 2010).

As I suggested earlier in this paper, it is on the sound base that a contextually rich, regional comparative urbanism provides that generalizations can best be made—generalizations, for example, about the differentiated impact of neoliberal urbanization, and about the networks and interactions that define it. The nature and extent of difference, and of convergence, at a global level is best appreciated on the strength of an understanding of difference and commonalities at a regional scale and the forging of regional networks. In this paper, I have proposed urban China and Japan as a starting point in thinking about the possible meanings of an East Asian regional urbanism. But even without considering the cases of Korea and Taiwan, it is clear that the nature of urban development capital varies, and

the links to global capital vary too. The conclusion that I wish to draw from this brief study of urban change in China and Japan is that the urban commodification and profit extraction that define neoliberal urbanization can usefully be understood at the regional level (Ching, 2000). And if we see the technologies of construction and the cultures of the transnational classes as ever stronger harbingers of convergence, then we must add that this convergence is deeply inflected by regional characteristics and colored by regional responses.

Where should we look for these regional characteristics? We should look in the dynamic, indeed volatile, nature of Sino-Japanese urban change, driven by the close relationship between the state and capital (as proposed by developmental state theory) and manifested in particular through the rapid conversion of central and inner districts from a horizontal to a vertical landscape. We should look in the tendency for social tensions resulting from this rapidly changing urban landscape to be underplayed. But we should also look at growing residential segregation in China (and potentially in Japan) set against the continued existence of a number of local-based institutions of community governance. The regional scale is the most appropriate starting point for reflecting on the many possibilities for both convergence and difference.

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