



The Complexity of Urban Transformation in China: New Trends in Current Transitional Era

Yuheng Li, PhD Student
Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden
yuheng@infra.kth.se

China has been a country of great changes, especially in its post-reform era. The shift from planned economy to a market-oriented economy has triggered substantial improvement in the fields of politics and administration to meet the needs for new economic structure. The reality is that events and reforms occur so quickly that much complexity has been generated to its urban transformation. Recently, the emerging knowledge economy and worldwide financial crisis present new challenges to China which is adjusting to new transition period.

The aim of this paper is to through literature review, analyze the complexity of urban transformation in China in the post-reform era and investigate the transformational trends toward knowledge-based society and economic shift in this global financial crisis. The paper identifies three transitional processes in China: from state-controlled economy to market economy; decentralization which placed greater responsibilities on local governments; globalization which links China with the world. Characters of urban transformation in these processes are explored. It reveals that the patterns like “exo-urbanization”, “externally driven urban development”, urbanization from below (flourish of small towns) and city-regions relates much to the political and economic reforms. In the facet toward knowledge-based society and shift from export-dominated pattern to domestic-oriented economic growth, tendencies of urban transformation in this transition period are analyzed. The paper argues that metropolitan regions would dominate China’s development while the flourishing towns would contribute to the major urbanization development. At the same time, clear division among cities at different levels (provincial, vice provincial, prefectural and county levels) would emerge.

The paper’s analysis can provide important advice for future urban policy making in China.

KEY WORDS: Urban transformation, China, financial crisis, knowledge economy.