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The challenges of China–India comparative urban studies

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Abstract

Scholarship on urban China and urban India has been prolific. Studies have separately addressed urban processes of migration, spatial transformation, governance, infrastructure, land conflicts, policing, and more. However, research on these areas has rarely intersected. This article discusses the challenges of comparison in China–India urban studies, and examines recent works through an analysis of "styles and scales of comparison." Some seek to explain national-level variations by studying selected cities in each country. Others identify convergence and divergence in the context of broader global processes, and some incorporate historical trajectories to structure a temporal comparison. Because the most rapid periods of urbanization in the first half of the twenty-first century will take place in India and China and will soon account almost half of the planet's urban population, studies of urbanization in India and China are of great importance. Careful reflection on the study of urbanization in China–India studies can also re-center urban studies away from the historically dominant American/Eurocentric perspectives.

Key words: Comparative urbanism; encompassing comparisons; urban China; urban India; urban studies

Scholarship on urban China and urban India has been prolific, including studies of migration, spatial transformation, governance, infrastructure, land conflicts, policing, housing, and much else. But rarely have these studies intersected to compare similar phenomena in the cities of India and China, or to develop new concepts and theoretical frameworks. Pressing questions related to migration and citizenship, inequalities and justice, governance and public goods provision, climate change and its consequences, among others, are being worked out within the urban geographies of the two Asian giants. In a review essay published in 2017, Xuefei Ren observed that the separate fields on urban China and urban India had published a great deal in terms of quantity, but had less to show in terms of theoretical innovation. More often than not, scholars working on urban China and India uncritically applied concepts that were developed from the study of a handful of European and American cities. She called for scholars from the two fields to engage in explicitly comparative work that might develop new concepts and vocabularies to capture urban processes under way in the two rapidly urbanizing societies (Ren 2017, p. 196). In the past few years, Ren and others have taken up that call, publishing books and articles that have analyzed differences and similarities in urban China and India (Frazier 2019a; Gao *et al.* 2011; Ho 2019; Ren 2020; Shatkin 2014; Wan and Lu 2019; Wang, Wang, and He 2013; Wu 2020; Yuan 2015).[1]

The central challenge in comparative China–India urban studies lies in selecting the object of comparison and specifying the aims of comparison. Is the comparison designed to pay closer attention to

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[1]Liza Weinstein and Xuefei Ren published co-authored articles and book chapters focusing on Shanghai and Mumbai (Ren and Weinstein 2013; Weinstein and Ren 2009). A special issue of *City & Community* in which their 2009 article appeared also included a comparative article on new towns in the peripheries of Shanghai and Kolkata (Chen, Wang, and Kundu 2009). A volume of urban China-India comparative reflections and conversations based on a project of the India China Institute was published in 2010 (Gurung, McGrath, and Zha 2010).

connections and flows between urban China and India, historically or in the present? Or is the point of comparison to generate new conceptual frameworks based on shared urban processes, concepts that could contribute to the broader field of global urban studies? For much of the emerging field of comparative China–India urban studies, the goal of comparison has been directed at neither of these objectives, but rather to reach explanations for how urban processes and outcomes in China contrast with those of India, through cross-national comparisons based on research in the largest cities of each country.

What might be termed "methodological nationalism" places central explanatory priority within national-level variables to explain observed contrasts between urban India and urban China.[2] The problem with this approach is that with only two national cases, and a many more potential explanatory variables, it is difficult to arrive at convincing explanations for divergent outcomes or contrasts between "urban China" versus "urban India." This method of using paired or "small-n" comparisons to explain an observed difference, an exercise found frequently in the social sciences, generally requires that the cases under examination share a large number of similar traits that would be regarded as "control variables." This method of comparison has limited use in the field of China–India studies, and arguably limited use in other comparative area studies (Ahram, Köllner, and Sil 2018). As this article will point out, recent publications in the field of comparative China–India urban studies have encountered the hazards of methodological nationalism, and have developed different ways of working through it.

Another shortcoming in this emerging field has been the general tendency to limit research sites to only the largest of cities in China and India. These cities – Beijing, Kolkata, Mumbai, New Delhi, Shanghai, Shenzhen, and others – practically have their own city-specific "fields," as scholars across many disciplines publish widely on contemporary and historical urban processes in a given city. But the question of representativeness always arises when one of these mega-cities stands in for "urban China" or "urban India." Beijing and Shanghai are in no way representative of urban China, if the term refers to all Chinese cities. But in terms of urbanization patterns, governance, and urban infrastructure, they are highly influential as reference points in discussions of "urban China." They even serve as models of rapid urbanization for urban officials in smaller cities in China. The same could be said of Delhi and Mumbai in discussions of urban India. Moreover, the largest and most researched cities in China and India are also densely connected with international flows of capital, people, ideas, arts and culture, supply chains, and commodities. Is there some justification to compare these not as "urban China" and "urban India" but as sites for the production of Asian cities or global cities?

In this article, I will outline strategies of comparison found in recent publications in the emerging field of China–India urban studies. I first discuss a now well-established turn in the field of global urban studies to move away from the foundational concepts rooted in the experience of Western cities. I then turn to four types of comparisons and their respective strengths and weaknesses in contributing to China–India studies as well as urban studies more generally: variation-seeking comparisons, encompassing comparisons, convergent comparisons, and temporal comparisons. Each form of comparison has distinctive styles and scales at which comparisons are made between urban China and India, and each also has tradeoffs in terms of the ability to explain differences and similarities on two dimensions: the "national" axis (i.e., urban China vs. urban India); and the "local" axis (i.e., particular cities in China and their analytical counterparts in India).

Global urban studies: from Weberian to neoliberalism

We can perhaps thank Max Weber (or fault him, as the case might be) for the meticulous distinctions that he made in his writings on ancient cities of the Middle East, India, China, Greece, and Europe, which he grouped broadly as either "occidental" and "oriental" cities. Weber's central intellectual

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[2]The word choice itself – "urban India and urban China" – raises the problem of methodological nationalism. I use it as a shorthand for cities that fall under the jurisdiction of the governments of India and China, though one can clearly find urban areas outside the borders of India and China that have substantial populations of culturally Chinese and/or Indian residents.

project, to explain why capitalism and modernity arose in the West, relied heavily on his understanding of an urban formation that he believed was unique to Europe. In his comparative work on ancient and early modern cities (Weber 1978, pp. 1212–265), the main distinction that he identified in Europe was the formation of autonomous cities governed by mercantile and craft guilds, which conferred membership in the city as a "confraternity." This confraternity replaced older forms of clan and tribal loyalties. Based in part on this civic identity, cities emerged as political and economic power centers to rival the landed aristocracy, and became key nodes in capitalist development. By contrast, as Weber showed, Indian and Chinese cities also had craft and mercantile guilds, but these remained attached to kinship and religious identities linked to ruling and cultural elites, and did not gain autonomy from kingdoms and empires in the way that some European urban centers did during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. By identifying the distinctive traits of religion, urbanization, and capitalism in Western Europe, Weber was engaging in what Tilly (1984) termed an "individualizing comparison." In this exercise, the distinctiveness of the case (Occidental cities) is established by comparing it with the larger class in which the case is situated (ancient and early modern cities).

While Weber's theoretical construct avoided any presumption that the non-western, non-capitalist civilizations, cultures, and cities were on some teleological trajectory to converge with the West, post-Second World War modernization theorists (including some who translated Weber's work into English, such as Talcott Parsons) took Weber's individualizing comparative project and turned it into a "universalizing comparison." In this form of comparison, the exploration of different cases results in a discovery of a shared phenomenon occurring across all cases (Tilly 1984, p. 82). Under the rubric of modernization theory, with its "stages of growth" concept, all countries were seen as passing through different stages of development, with the West having reached the imagined terminal point of modernity and the "developing societies" were simply in earlier stages through which the West had already passed. In this sequence of stages, urbanization was a crucial process in which "traditional" societies characterized by social relations embedded in ascriptive traits transformed into "modern" societies, as the status and identities found in traditional society were diluted and displaced by autonomous individuals who inhabited cities. Under the problematic logic of modernization theory, urbanization, usually measured as a proportion of the population living in cities, became both an indicator and a cause of the thing it was attempting to explain: modernization.

Critics of modernization theory on both the left and the right by the 1960s could point to the high degree of uneven development found across different cities as well as the fact that cities were often sites of sustained unrest, as political institutions in the "Third World" failed to absorb the demands for expanded participation from new urban social classes (Huntington 1968). If uneven development and what Huntington called political decay undermined the universalizing assumptions that nation-states were converging toward an industrial-urban terminus point in modernity, the Marxist-inspired notion of a global capitalist system offered possibilities to explain connections among cities situated at different points in the capitalist world system. Neo-Marxist urbanists such as Manuel Castells (1977, 1983) called for disentangling the study of urban processes from national scales. This created the possibility for comparisons that explained variation in urban processes – including public services provision, employment patterns, spatial features, environmental degradation, etc. – as the result of a city's position and function in a world of global capitalism.

The concept of the "global city" emerged from this assumption of densely connected transnational flows, in which a small group of cities at the apex of an urban hierarchy were the core of the global economy and served as the nodes in multinational corporate networks and professions such as finance and accounting, legal services, and creative industries (Sassen 1991). By the 1990s, neoliberalism as both a policy and an ideology was seen as the underlying force for urban transformations in the field of global urban studies (Harvey 2005). It was also at this time that Asian urbanism came into sharp view with the emergence of Singapore, Hong Kong, Taipei, and Seoul as regional and global hubs to rival Tokyo's status as a global city. Were urban processes in these cities variations on the global theme of neoliberal urban development, or did they reflect a distinctive East Asian regional trajectory, embedded in regional connections, as well as national histories?

This question set the stage for a twenty-first-century debate in which urban India and urban China studies seemed well situated to offer some insights. One divide commonly noted in global urban studies is between those who privilege neoliberalism as an underlying driver of urban changes globally, and those who seek postcolonial approaches to the study of urban processes through the study of lived and culturally embedded understandings of the urban. As Ren (2018) has noted, both urban China studies and urban India studies have offered some important qualifications and challenges for both sides of this debate. Urban China studies, in which the Chinese state is a crucial actor, have questioned the relevance of neoliberalism in China's urban development (Wu 2010). The postcolonial critique found in much of urban India studies has highlighted the importance of local contexts and understandings, suggesting that the research methods and approaches used for urban India can be adopted in global urban studies (Roy 2016). If urban China studies have questioned the neoliberalism paradigm in global urban studies, and urban India studies have shown how local context and meanings can challenge or subvert global urban processes, it might still be said that neither has produced the hoped-for innovations in concepts and theories that could "travel" outside their respective territories of research.

Fulong Wu's article (2020) on comparative urbanisms of China and India argues that one need not produce entirely new concepts when existing ones can be usefully analyzed for divergences from standard reference points. For example, "gentrification" and "suburbanization" first occurred in older industrial cities of the West, but something similar to them is occurring in urban China and India. The meanings imputed to them by urban residents have to be closely analyzed and compared. As he shows in citing numerous studies including his own in urban China, older low-income urban districts in some cities of China and India have become sites of rapid investment and redevelopment, but not in the same process or with the same actors that led to gentrification in the typical cases in North America and Europe. The same is true for the development of peri-urban peripheries or "suburbs," which have starkly different trajectories from those found in the West. Does this leave us with a familiar exercise in attaching "with Chinese (or Indian) characteristics" to familiar terms from Western experiences, i.e., "suburbanization with Chinese characteristics?" Wu avoids this turn of phrase and its assumption of national traits, arguing instead that comparative engagement with cities in China and India can highlight connections and local divergences in global urban processes.

In recent years, numerous publications have attempted to transcend the divide between urban India and urban China studies by engaging in comparative work that seeks to contribute to broader global fields and academic disciplines. At its early stages, comparative China–India urban studies have encountered some of the analytical challenges associated with a scale that were noted above in the introduction. In the sections that follow, I will assess these recent publications through competing "styles and scales of comparison." Much of the differences noted boil down to assumptions about the status of national-level institutions in the study of city-level outcomes and processes.

Urban China–India: variation-seeking comparisons

Several recent works in comparative urban studies of China and India have followed the call to move "beyond regime type" (Duara and Perry 2018), seeking more nuanced accounts for variations in urban processes and outcomes that go deeper than the obvious contrasts between China's authoritarian and India's democratic institutions. Rather than finding explanations for urban differences in *formal* institutions at the national level, these studies explore either informal institutions or subnational institutions. In this regard, they retain a focus on institutions, and to some extent, national scales. In their analytical framing, they are "variation-seeking" comparisons (Tilly 1984, p. 82), in which the purpose is to explain variation across two cases with reference to some causal variable present in one and absent in the other. Such variation-seeking comparisons in China–India urban studies have sought to explain national-level differences by investigations of selected cities in China and India.

In *Thirsty Cities*, Selina Ho's (2019) comparison of water provision in urban India and China, the variation-seeking comparison is centered on the marked contrasts in the plentiful provision of piped water to households in urban China and the relative scarcity in urban India (where groundwater is the

main source of supply). Why can't a democracy with institutions of accountability and representation deliver public goods such as piped water more readily to urban households? Why does an authoritarian regime lacking such institutions for holding officials to account nonetheless provide piped water to urban residents at much greater levels?

Ho argues that the answer lies not with the respective formal institutions of governance in India and China but with the concept of the "social contract," which she describes as an informal institution, an unwritten but powerful norm for which violations are publicly sanctioned (Helmke and Levitsky 2004). Ho defines the social contract as "an *agreement* between state and society, in which citizens *consent* to give up certain rights to their governments so that they can rule in exchange for the governments' *obligation* to provide for the people, whether in material or normative forms" (Ho 2019, p. 32. Emphasis in original). Since 1980, the Chinese social contract is said to be "performance-oriented," in which the central government assesses and promotes (and sanctions) local officials in part based on their distribution of public goods. In India, by contrast, the post-1947 social contract is anchored in a commitment to populist and socialist norms, whose importance supersedes that of actual performance. Thus, public–private partnerships (PPPs), often crucial actors in urban services delivery worldwide, are surprisingly more accepted in urban China than they are in urban India. Through a study of Beijing, Hyderabad, New Delhi, and Shenzhen, Ho traces the opposition to PPPs in water utilities in Hyderabad and New Delhi, and the relative success in injecting foreign and domestic capital into state-run water utilities in Beijing and Shenzhen. To paraphrase Deng Xiaoping's invocation of the Sichuan folk saying, "it doesn't matter if the cat is white or black, as long as it provides public services, it's a good cat." But Beijing and Shenzhen are cases in which one would most expect to find high levels of public goods provision, including water. The stronger test of the durability of the Chinese social contract could come in examinations of cities with far lesser fiscal capacity – if the Chinese social contract were seen to be operating there, one would have stronger grounds for confirming the validity of the proposed connections between the informal institution of the social contract and the outcome in public goods provision.

Yet in proposing the existence of unwritten yet sanctionable norms of governance operating in state–society relations at the national level, the selection of city cases is less relevant. If the Chinese social contract adheres more or less across all urban areas of China, and the same is true for the Indian social contract, then within-country case selection matters less. This is a variation-seeking comparison that comes up with a new explanation for a well-known contrast between urban India and China, but is anchored firmly in the national scale by proposing a coherent informal norm for governance that applies across state–society relations in the two countries (presumably also including the rural sectors).

The national scale also remains the level of explanation for contrasting patterns of urban governance in Xuefei Ren's *Governing the Urban in China and India* (2020). Ren, a sociologist whose work has focused on urban China, argues that one central aim of comparison has been to conduct research that "defamiliarizes the Chinese city by juxtaposing urban development in China with India" (Ren 2020, p. 8). She also pushes against the widely accepted but less convincingly demonstrated arguments that the contrasts in several dimensions of urban development and governance in the two countries arise from national-level institutions associated with regime type and/or state capacity. The urban development process in both India and China has produced inequality and exclusion. But Ren argues that this shared outcome arises not from a global neoliberalism or other universalist phenomena found in much of the literature on the urban Global South. The key to understanding urban governance and local resistance lies at neither the global nor national scale but at the subnational or local level. The patterns of conflict over land management, affordable housing scarcities, and air pollution can be explained by the contrasts in local institutions found at the city level.

In urban China, institutions such as the collective ownership of rural land, the household registration system, and the promotion system for local officials are essentially based on a jurisdictional framework that Ren terms as "territorial governance," in which public goods provision and other resources, as well as eligibility for them, are highly dependent on location. In urban India, the dominant

institutions of governance are network-based rather than territorial. Shifting and *ad hoc* alliances among state, civil society, and private sector organizations exert the dominant pull in what she terms "associational governance," while the power of the local urban government remains relatively weak.

In a similar case selection strategy as that found in Ho's study of water provision, Ren pairs Indian and Chinese cities to explain variation in how they address a common governance problem. For land disputes, the 2012 uprising in Wukan (Guangdong) is compared with the land dispute in Singur (West Bengal) in 2006. Informal settlements and evictions are discussed in a comparison between Mumbai and Guangzhou, while environmental politics of air pollution are analyzed in the pairing of Beijing and New Delhi. From this method, the point is not to demonstrate the greater effectiveness of either territorial or associational governance in resolving the same types of conflicts, but to show that the types of political actors and forms of political action differ substantially: municipal and other local government entities exert power over contentious issues related to land, informal housing, and air pollution in China, while networks of officials, NGOs, and private sector actors are engaged in these disputes in India. Ren traces the origins of territorial governance in urban China to the Song dynasty (960–1276) and associational governance in urban India to the Mughal state of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The claim is that in both instances, states relied on local non-state elites to carry out governance functions, and that territorial-jurisdictional forms took hold in China while network alliances predominated in India.

Other studies have centered their analysis more directly on formal governance institutions, while supplementing or clarifying what it is about China's authoritarian institutions and India's democratic institutions that explain variation in the performance of urban governments. Gavin Shatkin's (2014) concluding chapter in his co-edited volume on urban India offers an insightful example of a strategy that identifies precise variations in formal political institutions governing cities. Democratic institutions matter in the greater degree of contestation that accompanies efforts at urban development in India, but Shatkin's primary contrast is that between China as a "highly centralized state that has effectively fostered governance and political reform in the direction of entrepreneurial municipal governments" and India as a "highly democratic and plural state in which efforts at state re-scaling have been much more intensely contested and subverted" (Shatkin 2014, p. 295). He identifies two variables that best explain contrasts in urban development as: (1) the high degree of authority given to municipal governments in China; and (2) the crucial issue of which level of government has the power to manage urban land markets through regulation or outright ownership. In the case of India, state-level governments rather than municipalities have such power, while in China the urban governments act as land owner-agents on behalf of the Chinese state. Control over land markets turns out to be a crucial source of state capacity in China. In India, where private sector actors are central in land ownership, state capacity is compromised. In this sense, if put in Ren's (2020) terms, China's territorial governance provides advantages to pursue crucial transformations of land that come with urban development projects.

Each of these works develops novel insights to explain the observed variations across urban governance in China and India by showing that informal and formal institutions underlying government structures provide deeper, historically rooted explanations than those that draw solely on regime type or simplistic notions of high versus low state capacity. But as with regime type or state capacity arguments, the explanations lie at the national scale – a contrast in national social contracts for Ho, and a contrast in patterns of subnational institutions for Ren and Shatkin.

In the strict logic of small-n comparisons, as critics of the method often point out, for an explanation or cause to be valid, the units under comparison are assumed to be autonomous from each other. The explanatory variable operates "inside" the case (the country case, most often) and not outside it. In a simple example, economic growth and the rise of a new middle class is said to be a cause of democratization in country X, and the lack of growth and no middle class is attributed to the non-occurrence of democratization in country Y. This method for inducing causation through preconditions is more complicated or even wrong in its causal inference if it turns out that country

Y's leaders witnessed what happened in country X and mounted repressive measures to thwart democracy. Or, if some external or global force is influencing both the economic development and the democratization (or blocking both) in X and Y. Cross-scalar or multi-scalar accounts can complicate simple national-level explanations; and scale is an issue commonly found in urban studies, where many cities are situated within a regional and national jurisdiction but are also embedded in transnational and global networks by flows of capital, professionals, corporate hierarchies, and much else. Variations within the systemic or global scale, including a city or region's location within these networks, can serve as the basis for a different form of comparison.

Urban India and China: encompassing comparisons

The confusingly labeled "encompassing comparison" (Tilly 1984, pp. 124–43; Robinson 2011) can take two general forms. In one, the units (cities) selected for comparison are assumed to vary because of their contrasting positions in some large systemic (global) process. Tilly (1984, p. 83) cites the world systems scholarship of Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) and others whose project it was to explain how the global capitalist system produced marked contrasts in the political and social formations found at the core, semi-periphery, and periphery of the system. These states were connected through the capitalist world system, but because of their contrasting functions and locations within that system, possessed divergent patterns of economic development and political power. The impoverishment and deprivation of the periphery were directly attributable to the prosperity and abundance of the core.

A second form that encompassing comparisons can take is less structurally determined by the idea of an overarching global system and more accepting of local contexts and conditions to explain variation across the units of comparison. This form of comparison is found quite often in the urban studies literature, in which a set of city cases is analyzed for their differing responses to a general regional or global process, event, or ideological current. Most typically in urban studies, neoliberal development policies are viewed as a global current, and a set of cities are examined for differences and similarities in how they respond or adapt to neoliberalism. City-level variations might be explained by local contexts, or even national institutions, while similarities are attributed more commonly to the convergent properties of neoliberal development patterns (Brenner and Theodore 2002).

A vivid example of an encompassing comparison (in its less structuralist form) can be found in the discussion of "rescaling" in urban China and India. The concept comes from the urban studies literature in the post-industrial, post-Fordist cities of the West, where the need for capital accumulation is said to transform cities from manufacturing to globally connected services. As the site of new forms of capital accumulation, nation-states transfer new forms of authority from central to municipal scales, hence the label for this concept (Brenner 2004; Harvey 1989). As a number of studies have shown (Kennedy 2017; Ren and Weinstein 2013; Shatkin 2014), the devolution of authority from the central government to more local scales has occurred throughout India and China as a strategy for furthering economic development and urban-centered growth. Yet these studies challenge the idea that state rescaling arises from a post-industrial transition. Since China and India never passed through a Fordist (mass production, mass consumption society) phase of industrialism, rescaling must arise from a different set of sources and concerns.

Rescaling can work both from center to city, and from urban periphery to the city level. In the example of the latter, the municipal government of Shanghai during the 1990s and early 2000s reclassified thousands of square kilometers of rural towns as urban districts, expanding urban administration from 375 to 3,900 km^2 (out of a total territory of 6,300 km^2). This "scaling up" gave the Shanghai government (which has been designated as a provincial-level city since 1954 and was given several rural counties carved out from Jiangsu province in 1958) far broader urban governance capacities, in terms of authority of land use and much else, than a typical Chinese city under a provincial government. Ren and Weinstein (2013) termed the strategy in which central governments use large, globally-connected cities for capital accumulation as "metropolitanization." They observed a similar strategy at work in the treatment of Mumbai by the Government of India, but the effects of rescaling

operated in a different way – rescaling and devolution to city governments in China created a mix of inducements and fiscal resources to build, and build quickly. In India, despite a Constitutional amendment in the early 1990s to devolve greater authority to cities, India's state governments have resisted devolution successfully, and they rather than municipalities remain major actors in urban development projects. Ren and Weinstein (2013) compared urban "mega-projects" such as the 2010 Shanghai World Expo and the attempt to transform the large, centrally-located informal settlement of Dharavi into a central business district as examples of state-led metropolitanization. The key distinction is the influence of state-level governments in India, which retain authority over municipal administrations and policies. Rescaling thus varies across China and India because of the specific institutional and historical patterns of inter-governmental relations and power-sharing among center, state, and city.

Kennedy (2017) also shows how the effects of rescaling play out in contrasting forms in China and India. Special economic zones (SEZs) are a vivid example of the spatial dimensions of rescaling, whereby a new jurisdiction is created and exempted from national and local laws and governed under terms more favorable to investors whose capital is being sought for building new factories and infrastructure within the zone. While SEZs diffused rapidly in China as local governments were urged on by the center to convert rural land in order to attract investment capital, in India such strategies have encountered far more resistance (Jenkins, Kennedy, and Mukhopadhyay 2014).

These applications of state rescaling to local levels in China and India are encompassing comparisons. Rescaling is assumed to be a global phenomenon or system-level occurrence, and the variation between how rescaling unfolds and its effects vary by national institutional legacies and vertical hierarchies from center to local. Yet once again in this encompassing form of comparison, the main focus remains on the national level, as central governments pursue rescaling strategies to attract global capital. National leaders permit subnational governments to pursue a range of entrepreneurial strategies for attracting investment flows. The primary "subnational" actors are not urban governments but provincial governments – 31 provincial-level governments in China and 29 state governments in India – who exert a decisive influence on the patterns of urbanization and city-making within their respective territories. A study of Chinese provinces by Kyle Jaros (2019) shows that provincial-level governments vary considerably in their approach to rescaling. Some attempt through fiscal policy and urban planning to create metropolitan cores within the province, while others favor a more widely dispersed urban configuration that favors smaller but more numerous urban clusters around the province. Jaros shows how Hunan province in the late 1990s and early 2000s attempted to "metropolitanize" the capital city of Changsha (at one point intending to build the world's tallest skyscraper there). Other provinces such as Jiangsu have more dispersed urban strategies, bringing more evenly distributed social and economic benefits across the province. Jaros also shows in a comparative concluding chapter that something like this state-level rescaling also has occurred in the cases of Andhra Pradesh in India and Minas Gerais in Brazil. In this style and scale of comparison, states and provinces are the encompassing or system-level container in which city units vary in terms of socio-economic outcomes based on their location and status within the province/state.

Convergent comparisons

As is clear from the global cities literature, as well as the substantial literature on Asian urbanism, many globally connected port cities and national capitals have high degrees of connection with regional and international networks. Global circulations of professionals, organizations, ideas, and much else can be found in greater concentrations in such cosmopolitan cities. For these cities, the logic of comparison might proceed from what is usually termed a "most-different" design, in which cities that seem entirely different in terms of their national institutions, histories, and cultures turn out to have similarities and other surprising convergences. The reason for this convergence has much less to do with structural variables such as location within a hierarchy of global cities and more to do with the transport of ideas, policies, governance forms, corporate practices, and other flows to and from certain cities.

Prasenjit Duara (2020) has termed the study of circulatory flows of ideas, practices, policies, art, and much else from region to region a "convergent comparison." The locations at which these circulatory flows interact are termed "zones of convergence." The exercise of comparison is carried out by observing how the object of circulation (idea, art form, policy) is adapted to suit local contexts, preferences, and practices. Duara vividly demonstrates an example of circulatory flows with his discussion of the transmission of Marxism to China, its transformation into Maoism, and the latter's circulation back to the West as Maoist movements in the 1960s and 1970s. Such interactions within zones of convergence could exist at any geographic scale, but it seems that they could be commonly found in cities with transnational or transcultural histories. A central difference between convergent comparisons and encompassing comparisons is that the latter establishes the primary direction of influence from the global system to the local domain, and rarely if ever the reverse. In a convergent comparison, the zone of convergence or unit that takes in the global flow can also reshape and refine, and then "export" the idea or policy in a revised form to another location.

One insightful empirical observation using the logic of the convergent comparison is the way in which urbanization in China, particularly in Shanghai, has been "inter-referenced" (Ong 2011) commonly in China and globally. Many ambitious urban officials in China have sought to replicate the Shanghai model of rapid urban development undertaken in the 1990s – which itself was inspired as Deng Xiaoping and his proteges witnessed the urban planning and development patterns in Singapore, Hong Kong, and elsewhere in East Asia in the 1980s. In the twenty-first century, the Shanghai model has inspired officials outside of China, perhaps most powerfully in Mumbai, where a McKinsey study ardently advocated for Mumbai to learn from the Shanghai example. The study's conclusions were soon seized on by the Indian Prime Minister and popularized in the local media. "To Shanghai" became a verb for rapid, top-down, state-led urban transformation – using coercion of local residents when needed. In 2004–2005, proponents and critics of a mass eviction campaign in Mumbai against informal settlements labeled it as "Operation Shanghai." An estimated 400,000–450,000 residents of these informal settlements were evicted by Maharashtra State authorities on the grounds that they did not possess the proper documentation showing settlement before 1995, the cutoff date at the time (Frazier 2019a, pp. 227–28; Weinstein and Ren 2009, pp. 423–24). In this "worlding practice" (Ong 2011), "Shanghai" serves as a metonym for the "slum-free" city, made so through coercive measures to remove populations with little if any due process or compensation.

What remains less clearly explained with encompassing or convergent comparisons are the actual mechanisms by which flows happen from site to site. In the case of Marxism and Maoism, we do have many accounts (thanks in part to various national security agencies concerned with this particular diffusion process) that show precisely who arrived when and where and spoke and wrote to which audiences (Lovell 2019). Yet comparisons involving common processes or flows from one city to another, the agents, carriers, and diffusion mechanisms are much less clear. This may at times reflect the methodological choice to investigate something like demolition and eviction processes in Indian and Chinese cities from (literally) the "ground level," where the actors and contestations are readily observed. But it is less common for researchers to examine (or to gain access to) venues in which flows of ideas and practices arrive, where they are discussed and debated. Meetings of urban planners and property development corporations, global conferences at which planners gather and exchange ideas, and the institutions where they are trained, could be fruitful sites at which the mechanisms of connection and diffusion that constitute encompassing and convergent comparisons in urban studies could be investigated.

With convergent comparisons, which by definition involve the transmission of ideas, policies, and cultural forms from one place to another, the timing at which such ideas arrive at a zone of convergence is crucial. The conception of state-directed, high-speed urbanization derived from the example of Singapore and other East Asian cities "arrived" in China in the late 1980s, just at the moment that Shanghai was being permitted to gain access to foreign capital flows (including from Hong Kong and Taiwan) that Shenzhen had enjoyed for nearly a decade. New revisions to the Land Management Law

in 1988 quickly gave urban governments the power to lease out land-use rights. The Chinese Communist Party was recovering from mass protests in Beijing, Shanghai, and some 300 other cities in China in 1989, and addressing the poor state of urban employment, housing, infrastructure, and livelihoods were clearly on the reform agenda. The rapid adoption and recirculation of one or more global flows of the sort involved in convergent comparisons would seem then to depend on the temporal context, both globally and domestically. The convergence of China's precarious political conditions, the availability of Singapore and Hong Kong as models of prosperity through urban development, and the example of Shenzhen's success in urbanizing through an SEZ together produced the "Shanghai model," followed by a subsequent wave of urban officials around China who sought to follow the same trajectory in their own urban regions.

Temporal comparisons

As comparative social scientists have long noted, the conflicts and transformations that one observes in the present often reflect causal processes whose origins lie in the distant past. But much political science research assumes very little lag time between a proposed cause and its effect (Pierson 2004). In the urban studies field, most of the scholarship is intently focused on contemporary observations and processes, with explanations rooted in recent occurrences such as the vaguely specified "neoliberal turn." Postcolonial approaches, by polar contrast, assume that colonial practices and subjectivities have never substantially receded, and explain contemporary power relations and inequities in terms of colonial legacies. How might systematic comparisons be made that can stake out some terrain in the middle ground between these two vastly different approaches to global urban studies, including Asian urban studies?

If almost every city is a palimpsest, with past forms of social relations, political domination, and economic power reflected in multiple layers of physical and spatial forms produced over time, then investigating past urban socio-spatial transformations can provide insights into the identities, claims, and conflicts over contemporary transformations (Diener and Hagen 2018). For example, to understand present racial inequities in a given city, it can be illuminating to explore the earlier conditions (political, social, economic) under which the first housing and zoning ordinances were drawn up that established racial exclusion, by whom and against which groups. The conditions under which such exclusionary policies originated may have receded entirely, but the practices and deprivations are reproduced in the present through less visible institutions, as well as socio-spatial formations (such as infrastructure) that limit access to public space, schools, etc. In the case of urban China and India, rather than anchoring contemporary urban conflicts over mega-projects and land-grabbing in the deep past of colonial legacies, or the recent past of neoliberalism, it could be productive to study longer-term sequences in which urban socio-spatial forms and conflicts they produce are connected across specific periods of urban transformation, including the mid-twentieth century attempts at socialist state-led urbanization.

This temporal sequencing of urban transformations is the focus of *The Power of Place*, my study of popular protest in Bombay and Shanghai across the twentieth century (Frazier 2019a). I analyzed housing scarcities and tenement housing forms, de-industrialization, domestic migration, and popular protest from the perspective of long-term historical sequences within each city. The strategy combines elements of an encompassing comparison with a temporal comparison. The two cities share a history of connections during the late nineteenth century, when they were enmeshed in colonial trading networks, especially for opium and cotton (Chen 2017; Thampi and Saksena 2009). The rise of Shanghai's textile industry in the late nineteenth century owed much of its success to the textile mills of Bombay, where the Sassoon company in particular played a large role in jump-starting Shanghai's mills through the export of cotton and yarn (Frazier 2019b).

In contemporary Shanghai and Mumbai, what appeared to be another instance of global neoliberal urban policies and practices associated with the relocation of inner-city residents and textile workers was situated in the context of a recurring century-long spatial conflict over housing, jobs, and urban

citizenship that long predated neoliberalism. But the social forces and groups organizing to make claims on the city varied substantially across time. Nationalism – a powerful global current during the first decades of the twentieth century – generated a conception of citizenship-based claims to urban public goods such as housing and labor protections in Shanghai and Bombay. In the middle of the twentieth century, a strand of socialism linked closely with state-led industrialization efforts reproduced older deprivations in terms of housing, employment, and urban services, and created a new group of urban insurgents in the mid-1960s (e.g., the Shiv Sena in Bombay and numerous "revolutionary rebels" factions during the Cultural Revolution in Shanghai). Neoliberalism at century's end, with its transformation of housing into financial assets, its de-industrialization of manufacturing zones, and its elevation of showcase infrastructure as a strategy to attract global capital, did not transpire in an institutional, ideological, or spatial vacuum. The legacies of socialism influenced the choices and strategies of urban officials and residents who fought over housing, jobs, and services during the neoliberal period.

As an example, in the textile mills of Shanghai and Mumbai, which had been the leading employment sector in each city as well as the locus of socialist labor and housing policies and political mobilization, late twentieth century de-industrialization policies dismantled the mills and transformed mill lands into valuable commercial real estate. Urban officials in both cities sought to compensate textile workers and their families by transferring to them ownership of basic housing units. In both cities, despite the substantial differences in political institutions and governance styles, among much else, a similar set of disputes arose over the conditions found in "relocation housing" and delays in transferring home ownership to mill workers and their families. Neoliberalism in practice produced not "accumulation by dispossession," but what I termed the "politics of compensation" in which individual households sought out justice through ownership of small apartments whose property value was the equivalent of several years of earned income. But their claims to compensation drew upon their former positions of status in the socialist past: while textile workers in both cities received some form of compensation with their evictions, migrant workers in urban villages in Shanghai and recent migrants in informal settlements ("slums") in Mumbai received no compensation. An earlier study of demolition and relocation politics in Shanghai and Mumbai (Weinstein and Ren 2009) showed how this pattern of relocation, compensation, and outright eviction with no recourse created fragmented forms of urban citizenship claims – a process commonly found in urban centers of the Global South (Holston 2009; Holston and Appadurai 1999).

The Power of Place identifies temporal connections across twentieth century Shanghai and Mumbai, and the locally specific mechanisms that produced changes in the claims and actors involved in urban conflicts, but it clearly put aside any national-level generalizations. I did not extend the temporal comparison to other Chinese and Indian cities, but one implication is that the pattern of urban geography and popular protest would vary considerably if one were to put Shanghai in comparison with other Chinese cities, and Mumbai in comparison with other Indian cities. Clearly, the fiscal resources, political status, and rapid absorption of their surrounding rural counties and towns have made Shanghai and Mumbai quite distinctive compared with other cities within their respective countries. But temporal sequences linking earlier urban transformations with the present could be usefully applied to understand contemporary forms of power and protest within any city. The meanings that urban residents attach to old socio-spatial urban forms, how some residents mobilize to make claims to the city based on their lost or newly regained status, and the patterns of conflict induced (or repressed) by urban redevelopment projects would seem especially relevant in the rapidly transforming cities of China and India.

Conclusion

As always, the types of questions one asks in comparison should guide the strategy of comparison. This is particularly true of urban studies, where differences in scale are so crucial, and in China–India studies, where national-level generalizations, about cities or anything else, have to be made

with caution. Thus, if one is most interested in explaining why infrastructure provision in urban China as a whole is more extensive than infrastructure provision in urban India, the intra-country variation is assumed away and it may make sense to deploy a variation-finding comparison that seeks out an explanation that lies at the national scale. Yet, as noted above, when it comes to cities, which are by definition sites of constant flows and network interactions, the logic of small-n national comparisons may not be the best approach for explaining regional and local variations within states as large and diverse, even in the urban sector, as China and India.

Recent work in the area of global urban studies suggests a more fruitful approach to comparison, one that is driven less by a search for specific causes than by the formation of new concepts or the tracing of urban processes and flows (including origins of specific urban forms and practices). As Jennifer Robinson points out, a "reformatted urban comparativism insists on keeping open the possibility to draw any urban places, experiences and events into sometimes overlapping, sometimes disjunct, but always revisable conversations about the nature and future of the urban" (2016, p. 23). Any cities can be compared along any dimension through "generative" (concept-producing) comparisons or "genetic" (tracing origins and evolution) comparisons. Nijman (2007) has also proposed that comparative urbanism should seek to pursue not law-like regularities but rather understandings and interpretations of urban processes. One recent example, derived from postcolonial theory and Robinson's call to explore the "urban ordinary," is the concept of "subaltern urbanization," developed from studies of small towns in the urban periphery of large Indian metropolitan areas but with the potential to illuminate comparable sites in urban peripheries of China (Mukhopadhyay, Zérah, and Denis 2020).

An important gap in comparative China–India urban studies lies in the near absence of cross-national comparative studies of cities outside the handful noted in this article: Beijing, Guangzhou, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai, New Delhi, Shanghai, Shenzhen, and as well as a few others. In this respect, the field of China–India urban studies would do well to follow Robinson's (2006) caution against privileging the experiences of a few large, over-studied cities at the expense of insights that could be gleaned from an approach that treats all cities as "ordinary" rather than ranked into an implicit or explicit hierarchy for theorizing. For the comparative field of China–India urban studies, a far greater array of cities could be drawn upon for comparisons. Accepting the premise that no city is "representative" of the larger class of "urban China" and "urban India," one could still draw up rewarding research designs to examine similarities and differences in the many urban processes that occur in the cities of China and India: informal housing, eviction and relocation, informal employment, migrant workers, and in a post-Covid world, the crucial question of urban public health administration.

Another promising area for future research in China–India urban studies lies with the concepts of "Global China" and "Global India." These terms refer to the presence of Chinese and Indian companies, officials, and migrant workers in various nodes of infrastructural development taking place in Central Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and elsewhere. The concepts of Global India and Global China represent in many respects a challenge to the presumption that cities have a coherent set of "national" characteristics. By that I mean, if we take a city in Tanzania with a new business district that is financed and built with Chinese capital and construction companies, and is digitally securitized and surveilled with equipment and software provided by Indian and Chinese information technology companies, the city falls within the scope of China-India urban studies even though it lies outside the formal boundaries of India and China. Exploring the urbanisms and politics within Global China and Global India offers promising opportunities for conceptual innovation and reorientation of China–India urban studies away from its current focus on national institutions as the source of contrasts in urban outcomes. What is true in this example of a Tanzanian city infused with infrastructure and technology provided by Chinese and Indian corporations is also true for any of the "Indian" and "Chinese" cities that have been the focus of comparative urban research reviewed in this article – national labels can lead to an excessive focus on national institutions, when the observed outcomes at the city level might be better explained or interpreted from the perspective of intersecting global and local institutions, norms, and practices.

Part of the important work in developing a field of inquiry under the label of "China–India urban studies" is thus to de-nationalize the objects of study.

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