

Beijing City Lab

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Mushrooming Jiedaos, growing cities: an alternative perspective on urbanizing China

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With more than 15 million new urban residents entering its cities every year, China is witnessing one of the greatest socioeconomic and environmental transformations in human history. In addition to these ongoing changes, urbanization in China often involves a significant political dimension, as the government would purposely accord city status to settlements, regardless of their developmental level: Largely rural settlements could be turned into “cities” overnight by administrative power. Nevertheless, city status would often translate into real urban growth, as it is closely linked to the land use quota, provision of public services, as well as local governments’ power in China. While socioeconomic and environmental aspects of Chinese cities have been analyzed extensively with aggregated statistics and remote sensing data (Deng et al, 2012; Liu et al, 2012), little is known about the shifting political geography of Chinese cities, i.e., where new city status are being granted. It is this lacuna that our project aims to fill.

We focus on the basic building block of a city proper in China: *Jiedao* (sub-districts). *Jiedao*’s counterparts in the rural area are *Xiang* (township) and *Zhen* (town), and all three are termed as township-level administrative units. We geocoded the 41,871 township-level units based the Population Census of China, and estimated the spatial extent of individual units with Voronoi diagrams for the years of 2000 and 2010.

The end product is the first ever map of “mushrooming” *Jiedaos* in China. The total number of *Jiedaos* has grown from 5,510 to 6,923 – a 25% increase – during 2000-2010. Most new city-proper are created around major urban regions along the economically more developed eastern coast (e.g., Yangtze River Delta, Pearl River Delta, Shandong Peninsula, and Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei (BTH)). Other regions with noticeable growth are Central Henan in Central China, as well as the Chengdu-Chongqing corridor in West China. As *Zhens* are often turned into *Jiedaos* and considered as “next in pipeline” for city status, we also map out the distribution of *Zhens*. Again, regions in East and Central China (e.g., Shandong and Henan) feature predominantly, revealing the potential for future urban expansion.

As city status often translates into real urban growth, we conjecture that the uneven geography of mushrooming *Jiedaos* would entrench the already huge East-West divide in China.

References

Deng X, Huang J, Rozelle S, Uchida E, 2010, "Economic growth and the expansion of urban land in China" *Urban Studies* **47** 813-843

Liu Z, He C, Zhang Q, Huang Q, Yang Y, 2012, "Extracting the dynamics of urban expansion in China using DMSP-OLS nighttime light data from 1992 to 2008" *Landscape and Urban Planning* **106** 62-72

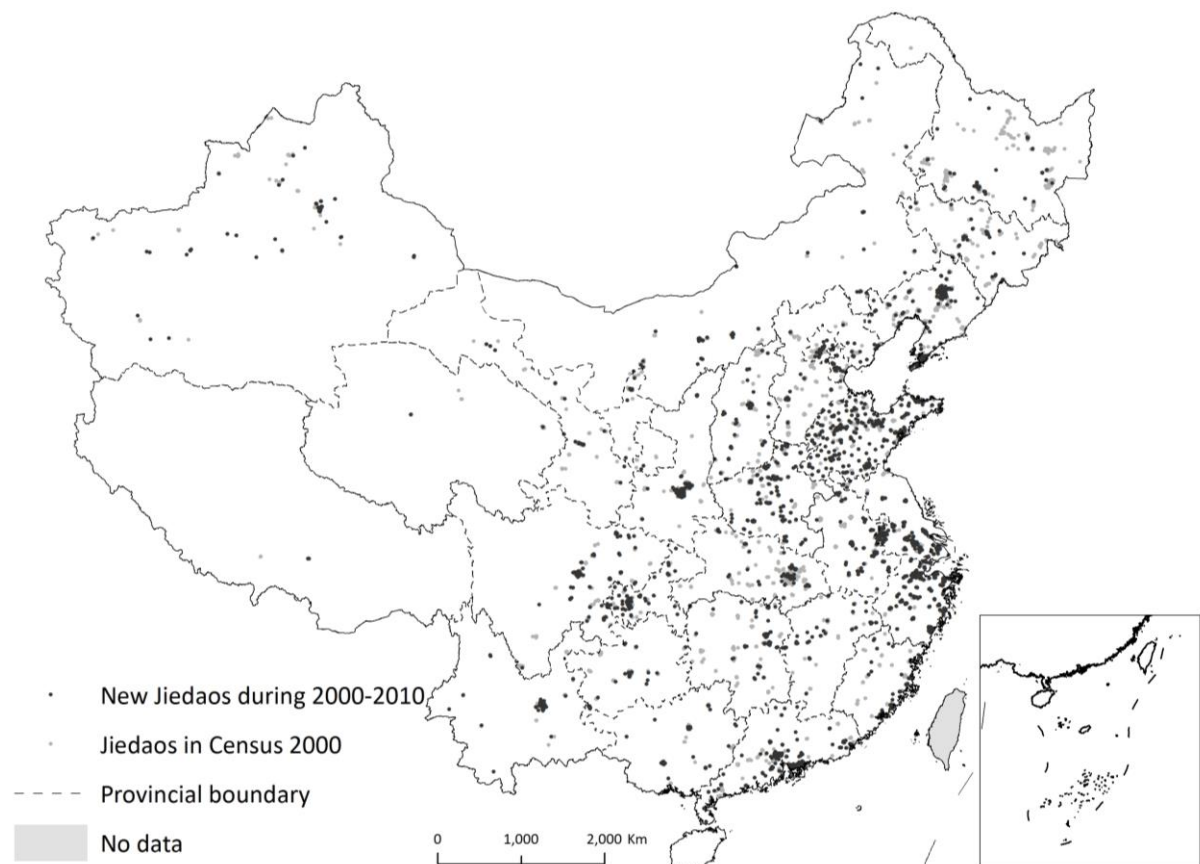


Figure 1 New Jiedaos of China during 2000-2010

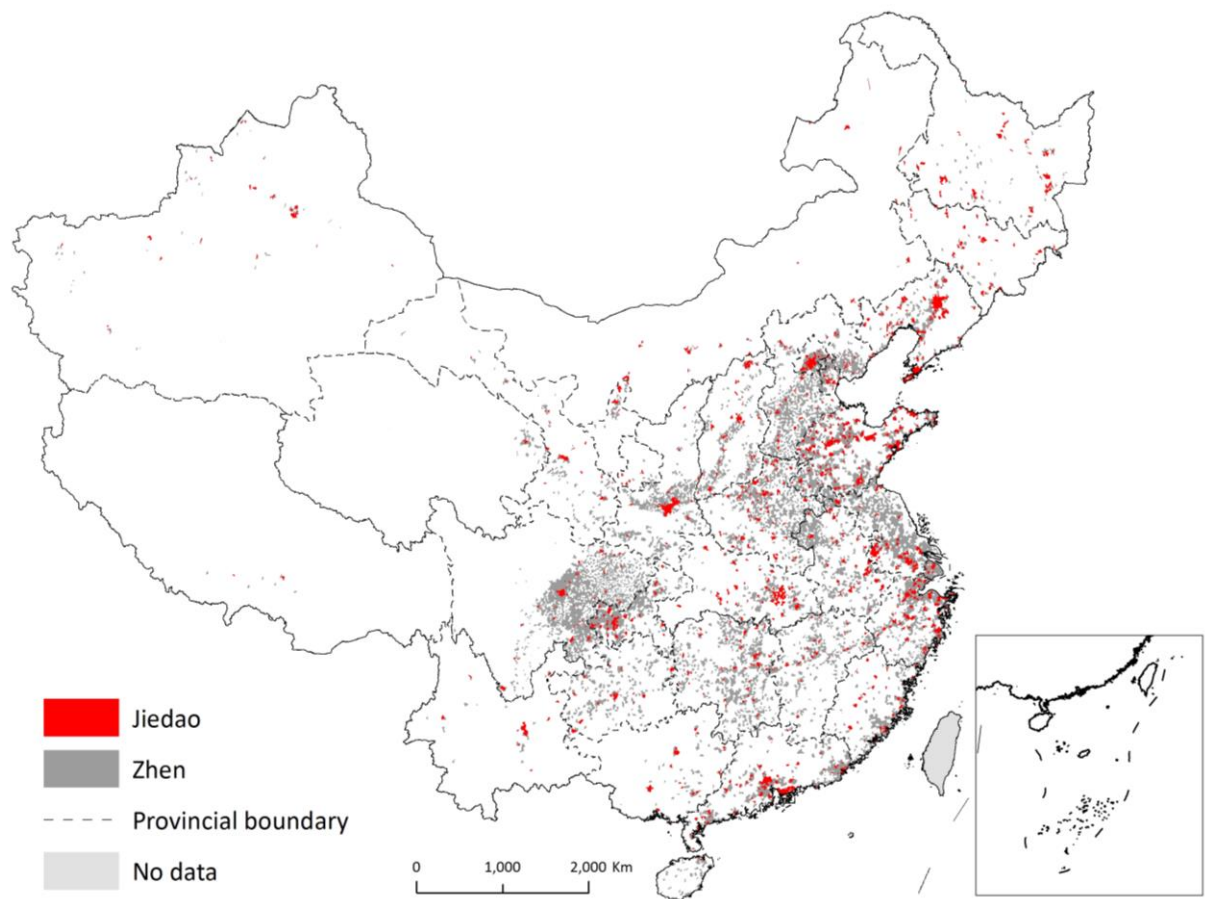


Figure 2 Approximated administrative area of Jiedaos and Zhens of China in 2010