
Featured graphic. Mushrooming *Jiedaos*, growing cities: an alternative perspective on urbanizing China

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 (eg, *Zhen*) could be accorded with the city status (eg, *Jiedao*) overnight by administrative power.

Such redesignation is nontrivial as city status often translates into real socioeconomic changes; city status is closely linked to the land-use quota, provision of public services, local governments' legislature power, as well as residents' *hukou*. While socioeconomic and environmental aspects of Chinese cities have been analyzed extensively with aggregated statistics and/or remote sensing data (Deng et al, 2012), little is known about the shifting political geography of Chinese cities: that is, where new city status is 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* (subdistricts). China has three township-level administrative units: *Jiedao* in the urban area and its counterparts in the rural side (*Xiang*, townships; and *Zhen*, towns). The re-designation of city status often involves *Zhen* and *Jiedao*: *Zhens* are considered as 'next in the pipeline' for city status and turned into *Jiedaos* when there is a political and/or economic need.

We geocoded the 41 871 township-level units based on 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 a first map of 'mushrooming' *Jiedaos* in China. The total number of *Jiedaos* has grown from 5510 to 6923—a 25% increase—during the period 2000–10. Most new cities-proper have been created around major urban regions along the economically more developed eastern coast [eg, 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. We also mapped out the distribution of *Zhens*: regions in East and Central China (eg, 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.

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Reference

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

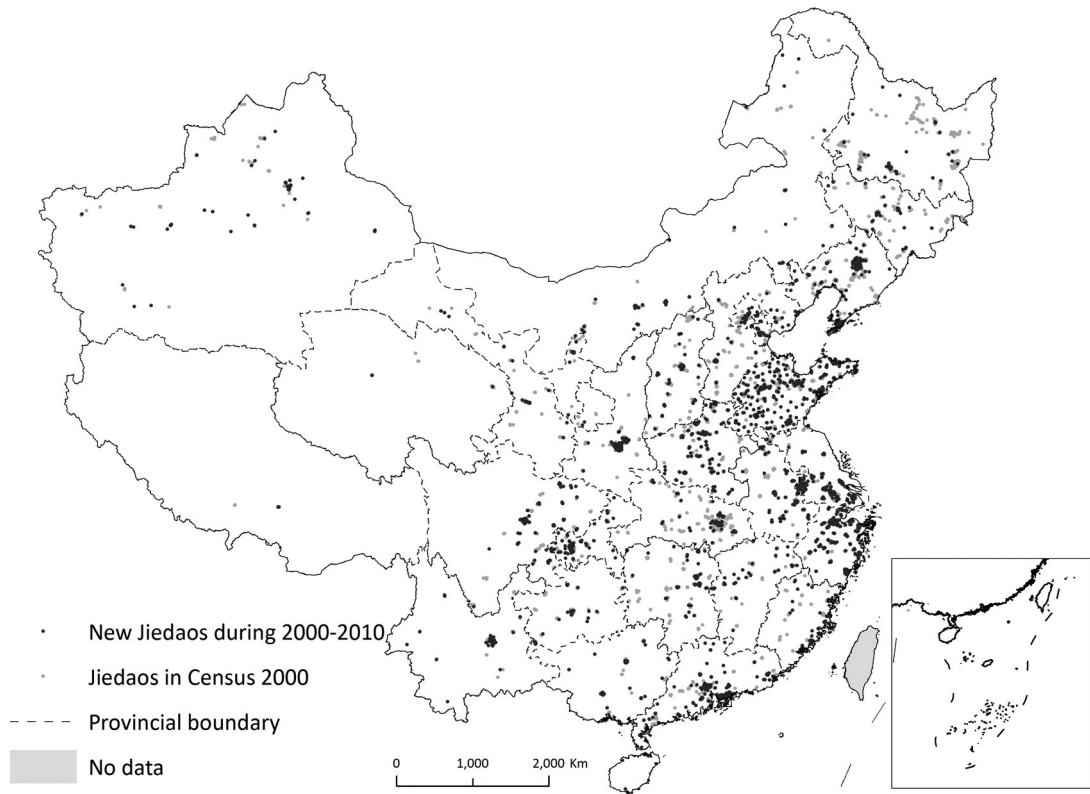


Figure 1. New *Jiedaos* of China during the period 2000–10.

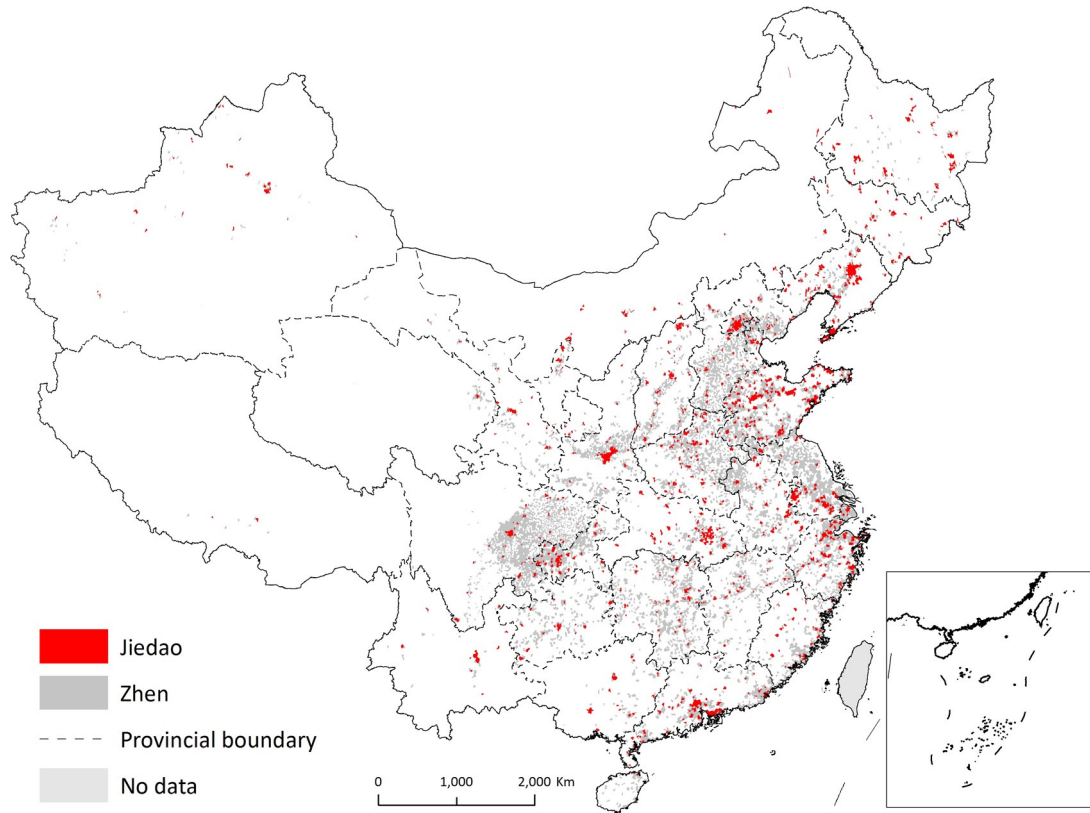


Figure 2. Approximate administrative areas of *Jiedaos* and *Zhens* in China in 2010.