

Hierarchization of urban spaces and disease control – a case study in current China

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Urban spaces classified in different tiers as politically motivated hierarchization

With ever-growing density both in terms of population and buildings, urban-space is becoming more and more vulnerable to epidemical harm, all the more when such epidemics come out of control and evolve into a global pandemic. Human lives are endangered, economical and societal stability crumbles. How to politically handle such a daunting challenge means often directly how to distribute resources at disposal to a) as soon as possible detect the origin of strongly contagious disease, especially among economically neglected groups of people, b) as far as possible to contain the spread of these disease by containing the infections within urban spaces which are not too complex to be kept under control, and last but not least c) to make it possible to conduct tests to prevent ensuing waves of epidemics after the first shock.

However, urban developments, particularly those under political manipulation, shows in current China that the resources as needed to achieve the fundamental goals of fighting epidemics are being exactly directed in highly counterproductive ways. With all cities classified into four or five tiers, due density to population, degrees of education and industrialization, capability of consumption, and especially according to the political bearings of the cities for the country, the needed resources such like qualified hospitals, physicians and well trained nurses are being concentrated in centers with the greatest density of population and buildings. In other words: They are concentrated in regions where an epidemic, all the more if evolved into a pandemic, will prove to hardly be kept in check as soon, as far and as sustainable as possible.

Because almost every one of these centers in China is inevitably connected with a wide variety of peripheries, and because between peripheries and centers, various symbioses such as the supply of material, of daily services, and of manpower for industrial production exist and evolve, mobility increases ever faster, diversifying ever-faster ways of spreading diseases, and thus making ever more difficult to monitor, report and take necessary containment measures quickly. At the same time, due to the hierarchy of the cities according to their tiers, peripheries are much more insufficiently provided with resources to conduct basic tests, initial diagnosis, let alone the first-help, to be added with lacking capability to report based on ceaseless documentation. The consequence is often that epidemics cannot be detected soon and effectively enough, enabling them to gain momentum of spreading.

About the case study

In my case study referring to the City Wuhan, classified as a second-tier-city, and to 16 further cities around Wuhan, serving as her peripheries and all classified into less important tiers, the focus is on the description and brief analysis regarding the distribution of resources as mentioned above. The distribution involves both the already existing resources as well as those which were rushed into the region from all other regions of China, based on political instruction from the very top. The case study furthermore refers to the current Covid-19 Pandemic as whose origin the city Wuhan has been being reported. The time of observation and analysis covers the first phase of the pandemic from January 23th. 2020 as Wuhan, one day later all 16 cities as her peripheries, was put under quarantine until mid of May 2020, as the Chinese leadership proclaimed the battle against the disease as "won".

Aiming at lining out causal relationships between the disposal of resources between hierarchized cities in the context of fighting dangerous and highly hazardous epidemics like Covid-19 disease, the study extends her focus briefly to a few examples beyond the chosen region around Wuhan in order to underline the politically motivated hierarchization of cities as a general approach for urban development which must be critically reflected on, this particularly before the background of the increasing symbiosis between the traditional pattern favoring centers and neglecting peripheries. In order to deliver as far as possible first-hand sources for further research and discussions, all data and statistics used for the study are 100% taken from Chinese reports, either in the media there or included in governmental documents which can only be authenticated as "Chinese source", yet not sufficiently identified as "reliable".

Literaturverzeichnis

Chinese media (People's Daily, CCTV, Xinhua Agency, etc.)

Governmental documents (Wuhan city government; Government of Province Wuhan,
Central Government of People's Republic of China)