Assessment

Using Cities to Control the Countryside: An Alternative Assessment of the *China National Human Development Report 2013*

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INTRODUCTION

The numbers involved in China's urban transformation are daunting. Today, China has 160 cities of over one million people, as compared, for example with the United States, which has nine. Since the reforms of 1978, China's urban population has grown from one-fifth to just over half of the population, 700 million people. Twenty million more are added to urban areas every year.

In 2014 the leadership in China announced the speed-up of what has already been one of the most rapid urbanization processes in history. President Xi Jinping formally presented the state's goal of not only continuing the transformation of China from a rural to majority urban country, a threshold passed in 2011 according to official statistics, but also of achieving this

goal through the application of what the Chinese leadership calls 'ecological civilization' — allegedly exemplified by 'green', 'circular', 'low-carbon' development that balances industrialization and sustainability. By the year 2030, 70 per cent of China's population will be living in urban areas if all goes according to plan (see State Council of China, 2014). Such predictions cannot be taken lightly given China's history and capacity for achieving great social transformations, and turning rhetorical flourish into reality.

The *China National Human Development Report 2013. Sustainable and Liveable Cities: Toward Ecological Civilization* (hereafter referred to as the Report) offers a contribution to debates over China's rapidly growing cities, and the importance of this process to the world. The Report argues that China must balance growth with social and environmental needs, while broadening inclusionary processes, particularly of the most marginal urban population — migrant labour from rural areas. Above all, the Report prescribes improved governance and planning as the means to achieve this, along with substantial new multi-sectoral investments within existing urban areas and across the country to combat inequality in access to social services. Additionally, the Report suggests that China must not only educate decision makers and society about environmental and social goals, but also enhance cultural awareness. In essence it calls for a humanizing and rationalizing of China's extraordinary economic growth so as to avoid the evolving environmental disaster of increasingly unsustainable and unliveable urban spaces. As a means of achieving 'ecological civilization', the Report integrates the UNDP's Human Development Index to guide China's urbanization processes. Ultimately, the Report reminds us that due to China's influence, what happens to its peoples, both rural and urban, impacts everyone in the world.

As I will discuss in this Assessment, however, the Report is based on a theoretical approach, ecological modernization, with highly problematic assumptions. As a result, it recommends a set of prescriptions that reproduce the very problems the Report hopes to help resolve. This is particularly true as they relate to how China's urbanization is built upon unsustainable primitive accumulation and its attendant forms of violence — the mining of peoples and places in China's rural areas, the destruction of much of the social ecology of its cities (the country's deadly air pollution being just one example), and the Chinese state's destructive resource-grabbing activities at home and abroad.

SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

The current (2013) Report builds upon previous UNDP Human Development Reports (HDRs) for China, raising similar issues and policy suggestions that UNDP China has emphasized since the first report was issued in 1997. Each prior report points to the evolution of China's major challenges, though

through different lenses. The 2009/10 HDR, while also focused on sustainable development, placed its emphasis on a low carbon society, China's role in global climate change, and how best to mitigate the impacts within the country (UNDP, 2010). The 2007/08 HDR saw provision of basic public services in an equitable manner as a key challenge (UNDP, 2008). The 2005 HDR used inequality as its framing mechanism, therefore making equitable development the goal. Similar to the current Report, it repeatedly engaged the rural–urban divide, the plight of the migrant labour population, as well as growing inequalities within any given locale (UNDP, 2005). The 2002 HDR used an environmental analytic to raise identical questions and conclusions as the 2013 Report. The authors asserted 'the world has never witnessed such a fast pace of urban modernization that we see today in China. The challenges of fulfilling a vision of green development in China are monumental, requiring a complex orchestration of policies and activities at a scale of operation the world has never seen' (UNDP, 2002: iii). This begs the important unasked question of why these earlier calls for improved management have not been realized. The first HDR in 1997, somewhat in contrast, focused more critically and structurally upon the development outcomes of inequality, environmental degradation, and lack of sufficient government investment in provision of key services and infrastructure — results of the particular development path China had embarked upon in the first two decades of reform. The 2013 Report, though, echoes the tone of more recent reports.[1] This is important as it constrains its potential contributions.

In the 2013 Report's Introduction, Luis Gomez-Echeverri, the primary contributor and editor, argues that a compromise between speed and quality of urbanization is the most desirable and viable option for China's future. He discusses at length the vision of an increasingly urban China, and provides useful insights into the magnitude of current challenges and possibilities inherent in that path. He identifies vulnerable migrants as a special focus, given their 'critical roles in the future success or failure of China's urbanization process' (p. 14). He defines the Report's key terms — an important exercise given the contested nature of many of the ideas. He walks us through definitions for human development, sustainability, the liveable and sustainable city, urban, governance, migrant population, and ecological civilization. In so doing he reveals the dominant framework and assumptions of the Report. The Introduction concludes by urging 'a closer examination of rural–urban links'. Gomez-Echeverri confidently asserts that the problem is management, and the Report will provide managers 'some recommendations of criteria for determining the "livability" of a city and the well being of its citizens' (p. 12).

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1. The 2013 Report corresponds closely with the World Bank's most recent recommendations (World Bank, 2013, 2014a, 2014b). As the source of authoritative knowledge on urbanization and the environment (Goldman, 2005), the Bank's analysis is integral to the Report through multiple avenues.

Chapter One by Li Xuefeng, 'A Historical Transformation', traces the evolution of China's urbanization processes post-Revolution. He argues there are many drivers in China's urban transformation, from government policies to demographic pressures and the economic changes brought by the reforms (p. 31). Li presents industrialization as the engine of rapid urbanization in the Reform Era, bringing a large rural migrant population to the burgeoning cities. These workers are not yet fully integrated into urban life, he concludes, but will play a key role in the success of China's urban clusters, the large agglomerations that will take the lead in promoting urban development and necessary economic diversification in China going forward.

Chapter Two, 'Challenges to Livability and Sustainability', by Li Meng, builds on the previous chapter's version of history and its conclusion by focusing on current challenges. He argues that the foundational problem is 'unbalanced, uncoordinated and unsustainable development', and that the answer is the opposite: 'cities should contribute to sustainable development, involving a balancing of economic, social and environmental priorities' (p. 33). Heavy industry, he argues, is still too dominant and services are under-developed. Li agrees with the Report's other authors that the speed and scale of China's urban transformation magnifies challenges. The same issues of widening income inequality and environmental 'burdens' dominate the narrative here. Limited financing of municipalities curtails service provision, while migration creates more unmet demands. He suggests that given the state's fiscal constraints, market answers and corporations must play an increasing role in resolving all of these issues, but under the careful and 'scientific' guidance of state institutions. Listed under economic challenges are inequality, inadequate consumption and skewed sources of public revenue. Social challenges identified include population pressure, a lack of innovative city management, threats to health and public safety, and unsafe food. Environmental challenges described include severe land and water shortages, widespread pollution and uncertainties in addressing climate change. Public education and involvement are needed, Li asserts. He closes by urging stimulation of consumption, a somewhat contradictory position shared by other authors in the Report, and discussed further below.

In Chapter Three, 'Scenarios for the Urban Future', Zhang Ying takes the previous discussions of historical urbanization and contemporary problems, and lays out a range of potential pathways for the future. He argues that 'the most realistic pathway may entail a compromise between the quality and scale of urbanization' (p. 78), as echoed in the Introduction and Conclusion of the Report. The focus here is on 'getting urbanization right' which 'requires addressing some core challenges and opportunities' (p. 60). Equity, efficiency, sustainability, innovation and safety are the guiding themes, he posits. To make cities work, Zhang rightly points to issues that must be overcome including land scarcity, unemployment for migrants, severe resource constraints, environmental degradation and negative public health

impacts, unequal access to public services, and an immense investment demand. To confront these problems, he first builds an econometric baseline model of current trends, and then provides three alternative scenarios for China's future (p. 67): 'high, medium, and low' urbanization models. The first rapid-growth route, he argues, would widen regional gaps and put major pressures on the environment, while the state would have the least responsibility for public housing and overall investment. The second 'moderate pace' model would increase state investment in public housing and environmental protection. Zhang asserts that the third, and least likely scenario — 'moving more slowly' — 'maximizes livability' but would cost the state nearly twice as much to integrate the migrant population compared to the first scenario, with public housing reaching 50 per cent of new construction. Thus, he concludes, the first scenario will magnify current problems and the third, while attractive, is not financially feasible, thereby reinforcing the favoured path of the Report overall — the second scenario of medium urbanization. Clarifying the meaning of this is a goal of the Report, taken up directly in the following chapter.

Chapter Four, 'Pathways to Better Cities, Better Lives', by Zhou Yamin, builds on domestic and international case studies, models and best practices to offer specific recommendations to improve cities and better the lives of urban residents. Zhou argues for new policies that can 'discourage high consumption for a small number of people in favour of consumption for all citizens, with an emphasis on environmental constraints and social justice' (p. 94). This call to reign in excessive elite consumption and redistribute it to the majority invokes the Report's real social justice concerns. It identifies, beyond Malthusian norms, the inordinate portion of the country's resources and assets of all kinds concentrating in the hands of the top few per cent of the population. Zhou follows with a call for consumption, this time 'green consumption', to drive change,[2] thereby supporting the state's plan for 'rebalancing' from an export-led, capital investment-heavy economy to one reliant on consumption-driven development — a key overall goal of China's state council (State Council of China, 2014).

In the Conclusion, 'Urbanization: Towards a Future Balanced Development and an Ecological Civilization', Gomez-Echeverri returns to argue that China can achieve the win–win of sustainable growth and development through a middle path. Bringing together themes of the previous chapters, he states again that 'compromising between the speed and quality of urbanization appears to be the most desirable and viable option' (p. 97). By 'taking decisive action to improve China's human development', he argues, the opportunities can be maximized and challenges scientifically managed. He goes on to assert that the Report demonstrates the most important challenge —

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2. The exact *how* of these changes is not elaborated beyond the vague 'specific initiatives could aim to boost consumption of green products, and minimize the use of environmentally harmful goods' (p. 94).

improving and strengthening governance and policy implementation capacity. This can be achieved, he says, by China's integration of 'new perspectives' so as to understand 'the interrelationships between economic, social and environmental costs and benefits' (p. 97) on the path to an 'ecological civilization'.[3] The huge investments needed, Gomez-Echeverri concludes, 'must be based on some objective criteria', and 'the right decisions will require careful assessment of costs and benefits to account for both positive and negative consequences' (p. 103). Gomez-Echeverri's analysis and recommendations further clarify the Report's theoretical and substantive commitments, as well as its limitations, to which we now turn.

ANALYSIS

As each UNDP report is a collaboration with China's leading policy think tanks, it is perhaps to be expected that much of what we find here is a derivative summation of previous work. As I discuss below, the Report represents a depoliticized, top-down, technocrat-led vision of urbanization as a positive and natural development trajectory *mostly* in line with global neoliberal orthodoxy. As such, it provides a window into official consensus on the range of ideas under consideration, the ways in which problems are analysed and understood, and the best hopes of these actors and institutions for a sustainable pathway. It does not fully represent the needs and aspirations of China's most vulnerable peoples, nor, I would argue, does it attend to the structural roots of many of the most pressing problems in the country — severe environmental degradation, socio-economic inequality and deep-seated discontent of marginalized poor peasants, workers and indigenous or ethnic minorities.

The most interesting moments in the Report are when clearer statements of problems and solutions outside a narrow analysis momentarily supersede the prevalent pabulum of official policy-ese. But these moments unfortunately are rare, and we are predominantly treated to well-worn orthodox conclusions with what I would call a 'UNDP twist' — a slightly more humanized look at development processes than the World Bank and other international financial institutions (IFIs) produce on the subject. But this twist is slight and does not stray far outside highly orthodox bounds.

In what follows, I analyse two key interlocking issues to explore some of the Report's contradictions and silences. I first provide a critical take on the role of ecological modernization (EM) theory in guiding China's technocratic approach to urbanization in the Report. Second, I redefine urban development, not as a natural positive step in linear development, but as a violent process of dispossession, with accompanying resistance (Escobar,

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3. Left out of the Report are more pessimistic trajectories — for example, the rapid 'slumification' of global cities that Mike Davis describes in his book, *Planet of Slums* (2006).

2004; Scott, 1998). In contrast to the urban bias of the Report, I will invoke as much as possible a *rural* viewpoint, as this, I believe, provides an informative alternative framework for understanding China's urbanization processes and their impacts locally, nationally and internationally. I conclude by discussing how China's urbanization has served the rise of neoliberal hegemony over the last thirty-five years inside and outside of China, and thus the interests of the state and capital to maintain a highly profitable regime of accumulation (Harvey, 2005; Wang, 2003).[4]

(1) **The Report is dominated by an 'ecological modernization' approach that privileges a technocratic, market-driven development process. This approach narrowly shapes the possible sources of problems, and therefore tightly confines available solutions.**

The Report's sub-title, 'Toward Ecological Civilization', reflects the now dominant response to the environmental challenges of development: the ecological modernization approach. This approach, which guides China's development agencies (Ministry of Environmental Protection of China, 2008; State Council of China, 1994) and this Report, assumes a 'win–win' of providing continued rapid development and growth, on the one hand, and environmental clean-up through technological fixes and innovation on the other hand, as well as increases in efficiency of production, distribution and consumption processes (p. 77).[5] There are immense 'opportunities' discussed throughout the Report for expansion of markets and investment in environmental clean-up technology, upgrading energy efficiency throughout industry and society, and doubling urban infrastructure and housing.[6] Each of these, the Report asserts, provides ample profit potential thus making domestic and international investment highly attractive. This central emphasis of the Report upon market-led strategies reflects the Chinese state's adoption of ecological modernization theory. However, it also reflects the influence of multilateral donors, IFIs, the McKinsey Global Institute and similar international business-oriented 'think tanks' whose China reports shape this Report's analysis and conclusions.[7] That this reflects the dominant ideology

4. Contrary to much literature that misunderstands former centrally planned 'Communist' states' roles in development, contemporary China's global integration is in line with global capital needs (Arsel and Dasgupta, 2013; Muldavin, 2013), not in contradiction to neoliberal hegemony. The contradiction arises in the vast gulf between the anti-state rhetoric of neoliberalism, and its state-interventionist reality in practice (e.g. Harvey, 2005).

5. In addition to references to ecological civilization pathways throughout the Report, see the Report Appendices for details on efficiency improvements achieved and planned.

6. The state plans to invest US$ 160 billion, for example, in demolition of poor urban neighbourhoods and shanty-towns (Friedman, 2014; State Council of China, 2014).

7. McKinsey & Company's various analyses infuse the Report; see McKinsey and Company (2014); Woetzel et al. (2009). As self-appointed trainers of business venturing into China including 'one-hour seminars on the key six trends you need to know about' to take full advantage of China's win–win opportunities, Towson and Woetzel (2014), McKinsey consultants, can barely suppress their enthusiasm about the opportunities in China.

of the IFIs and global overseas development agencies points to the ongoing
neoliberal hegemony of market answers to the greatest societal challenges,
without seriously questioning the foundational and contested assumption of
'growth equals development'.

The Report's use of 'ecological civilization' is what I term 'EM with
Chinese characteristics'. EM, at its best, has many problems as a guiding
development theory, which I have highlighted elsewhere (Muldavin, 2013).
But in its Chinese version, put forward in the Report, EM is particularly
problematic. Ecological modernization theory's dominance in the Report
and in China's urbanization plans requires critique for numerous reasons,
three of which I will highlight here.

First, the Report relies upon EM theory's technocratic top-down guidance
by the state and corporate sector with limited 'participation' by civil soci-
ety (pp. 55, 93). In EM theory a free media and well-organized and active
civil society are important counters to state and capital malfeasance (Ho,
2006). Social peace is achieved through the green growth that provides jobs
while improving the environment through 'super industrialization' (Mul-
davin, 2013: 7). Unfortunately EM in practice has been a failure in China in
this regard despite arguments to the contrary.[8] The state's EM with Chinese
characteristics does not tolerate more militant forms of struggle, through
strikes and violent clashes with security forces, to counter environmental
pollution and social injustice, to say nothing of socioeconomic inequality
(Shi and Zhang, 2006). Social stability and harmony are paramount — cen-
tral to maintaining the development path and regime of accumulation that the
state is dependent upon, and through which it hopes to maintain legitimacy
— a contradiction of massive proportions.[9]

Second, decades of EM policies in China have failed to stop the jugger-
naut of environmental destruction. Simultaneous with state commitments
to increase energy efficiency and renewable energy along EM lines (Liu
et al., 2009), has been a parallel and expanding commitment to coal for

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8. For a detailed assessment of EM theory applied to China, see the special issue of *Devel-
   opment and Change* (Ho, 2006). While space does not allow further discussion here, for a
   comprehensive critical assessment of ecological modernization theory, and an alternative
   analytical approach — critical political ecology — see Muldavin (2008, 2013).
9. A recent example of both the state's inability to allow for broader participation by civil
   society, and the non-monolithic character of the state itself, was the rapid reversal of fortune
   of a TED talk-style documentary on air pollution entitled 'Under the Dome'. Addressed to
   China's urban middle class by well-known journalist Chai Jing, it was quickly censored and
   removed from the Internet a week after going viral across the country and world. Initially
   officially sanctioned by the new environment minister, Chen Jining, and posted on the *Peo-
   ple's Daily* website, the quick removal of this relatively moderate critique (of the oil and gas
   industry in particular), points clearly to EM's limitations in greening China's urbanization,
   as well as the fractures within the state and party over China's chosen development path
   (Wong, 2015). Chai Jing had originally argued that China must change its development
   model, but she revised the final version of the documentary to focus more along personal
   lines, and to highlight particular bad corporate and state actors.

power generation,[10] along with car-led industrial growth and associated urban form. China is now the world's largest and fastest-growing car market (Young, 2014), following the Western model. Additionally, China's active shift of its most environmentally destructive resource extraction and industries away from its top-tier cities does not lessen their overall impact. The geographic shift to China's hinterlands and other world regions transfers the burden (Muldavin, 2008; Yeh, 2009), while its industrial platform continues as a key node in global production and extractive resource flows (Muldavin, 2012, 2013).

Third, and finally, the Report's appeal to a green consumption-led urban expansion fails to fundamentally challenge the dominant paradigm (pp. 36–7), despite being 'necessarily implicated in broader normative debates' on development (Pow and Neo, 2014: 132). Instead, it primarily places citizen participation to improve the environment into the safe act of consumption (p. 95).

(2) **The Report neglects the flipside of urbanization: its foundations in violent rural dispossession and landlessness.**

A major flaw in this Report is the excessive focus on cities. This may sound odd given that it is a report on China's urbanization, but the focus on current urban areas and relatively small space given to the rural is misleading. The urbanization of the past three decades, let alone in the post-Revolutionary period, has been built on the backs of the peasantry. Urban transformation is deeply implicated in agrarian change. The important question is not just one of urban–rural linkages, as the Report argues, but of the constitutive violent dispossession rooted in rural transformation since 1978.

The Report focuses on the challenges and opportunities inherent in China's rapid urbanization process, arguing it should be widely embraced as the positive liberation of hundreds of millions of peasants from the toils of the land into urbanized 'civilization'. However, this 'liberation' also involves the mass movement of rural peasants to expanding urban areas. The Report therefore rightly gives significant attention to the floating migratory population of 270 million people in China. It identifies the household registration (or *hukou*) system as an important tool of policy makers to control and manage population movements and therefore urbanization — historically, at present, and in the future.

In contrast to the Report, I wish to recast urban development not as a natural positive step in a linear development process, but rather as a process enabled by violent rural dispossession and growing landlessness.[11] This politicized materialist vision is lacking in the Report, and yet it provides a

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10. China's rapid increase in coal production and consumption is well-documented in national and international discourse on climate change, air pollution and industrial efficiency, and is also discussed in the Report (p. 72).
11. I draw here upon Escobar's (2004) particular redefinition of development as violence.

nuanced understanding of contemporary urbanization processes in China. Highlighting the violence of the current development approach, direct and indirect, short and long term, reveals limits of the Report's urbanization plans to address, for example, social injustice. That violent development process has been built on three interrelated components: rural taxation and surplus extraction; rapid unregulated development of township, village and private enterprises (TVPEs) that have been environmentally destructive and created vast social inequality; and land expropriation and resource dispossession through a variety of means — the focus of my discussion here (Muldavin, 2012, 2013).[12]

Since the 1978 reforms, the lack of central government finance for local governments led to the utilization of the three components mentioned above as means to fund most local government services and infrastructure. From 1990 onwards, local governments expropriated over 4 million hectares of previously classified rural land for urban development (Li and Zhang, 2011; Tang et al., 2012: 391). By 2012 proceeds from these expropriations made up 60 per cent of local government revenue (Wang and Xing, 2013), and were much higher in many locales (Sargeson, 2013: 1068). While direct taxation and profits from TVPEs were dominant in the 1980s and 1990s, land-based financing is now the primary form of local government revenue (pp. 36–7 of the Report), creating vast socioeconomic inequality through primitive accumulation of privatized state and collective assets. Much of the capital accumulation has been achieved through speculative real estate and industrial development subsequently concentrated in private hands (Muldavin, 2012; Rong, 2010: 120). As Arsel and Dasgupta (2013) point out, dominant theoretical analyses miss the highly-contested and non-linear processes of land-use change that are central to China's growth, structural transformation and global integration, as well as global 'land grabs' (Muldavin, 2012). Land is an under-theorized component in the complex set of intertwining processes that make up urbanization.

Loss of rural land frees up labour for urban industries, while enabling concentration of land in larger plots to achieve economies of scale. These economies of scale are important in both real estate and industrial development.[13] But perhaps more important, in terms of the state's plans for

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12. While rural taxation was formally banned in 2006, indirect forms continue to provide means of surplus extraction for local governments, through fees for services (Wang and Zhao, 2010), loans from rural savings institutions that cannot be repaid to peasant households (Ong, 2006: 398), and so forth. TVPEs' unregulated expansion, in which local communities bear all risks (Li, 2002: 118), has also been an important and under-emphasized means of integrating China's rural hinterlands and labour into international circuits of capital, production and consumption — key in enabling the rise of global neoliberal hegemony (Arsel and Dasgupta, 2013; Day, 2008: 50; Muldavin, 2013).

13. Additionally, rural landlessness has contributed to a rapid rise in food insecurity as payments for lost land to displaced peasants are far below anything approaching the value that subsistence land provides on a permanent basis (Li, 2011; Muldavin, 2009; Wen, 2007).

'modernization of agriculture', large parcels allow the greatest potential for agribusiness development on the consolidated former small plots (Gürel, 2014; Song, 2014). For liberal proponents of modernization and privatization as means to drive China's rural development, landless peasants, now 'free labour', will also be the primary source of workers for agribusiness concerns in the future (Song, 2011: 103; Zhang and Donaldson, 2010), as they have been for the highly exploitative TVPEs since the 1980s.[14]

The violence of this process creates major social unrest as peoples and communities, generally poorer peasants and workers, struggle to retain their productive assets and homes. In this context, peasant migrant workers now face a Faustian bargain. To gain urban status they must relinquish their last hold on state-guaranteed collective property and subsistence lands back in their home villages. There will be no place for them to return to if things don't turn out as planned or promised. Those unwilling to 'voluntarily' move to the newly-created cities of limited entitlements and uncertain economic prospects, will be forced to do so by the state. There is a large budget for associated resettlement costs included in the state's current urbanization plan (State Council of China, 2014). Peasant landlessness has already risen to over 70 million (Muldavin, 2012; Wu, 2008). The roles of 'the rural' and 'the land question' are thus central to any coherent analysis of urbanization (Arsel and Dasgupta, 2013).[15]

If current practices continue, tens of millions will be housed in poorly constructed, high-rise apartments on sterile grids in new small and medium-sized cities far from China's dynamic centres. Registered and legible to the state (Scott, 1998), they will have gained a right to the city, but one that disempowers as much as it achieves. These 'ghost cities' (Barboza, 2010; the Report, pp. 35) threaten to become China's 'homeland' slums of the future (Davis, 2006; Johnson, 2013).

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14. I have documented in my research the rise of contract farming without formal dispossession. Combined with monopolistic purchase pricing, this puts all risks of production onto the poorest strata. In this case, dispossession is not necessary to force outmigration of the majority from rural villages to small towns and cities. Rising food insecurity and impoverishment from exploitative contracts reflecting highly skewed power relations efficiently do the job (Muldavin, Baoshan Fieldnotes, 2008).

15. Arsel and Dasgupta (2013) provide a detailed and highly informative analysis of three important processes of land-use change in rural China — industrialization, the Sloping Land Conversion Program (SCLP), and wasteland reclamation. They argue that the Chinese state actively manages the process in ways that 'defy the natural, linear and unidirectional narrative espoused by the structural change literature' (ibid.: 106). These state-led processes, and their massive scale and impacts, are not holistically understood. This, they argue, limits our understanding of how they are implicated in China and globally in terms of land grabs, dispossession through 'green grabs' that displace millions of peasants in the name of the environment (e.g. Blaikie and Muldavin, 2004) and in countering climate change. Furthermore, they assert that giving changing land use a more central role in analysis provides important insights for the contested debate over the future of the peasantry itself, too often presented as on a pre-determined one-way path to becoming urban workers despite evidence to the contrary (ibid.: 107).

Built on rural dispossession, 'urbanization' has been used to fund the un-funded central government mandates. This provides new forms of wealth accumulation as collective property has been transferred to a small elite, and has created infrastructure to further subsidize opportunities for low-cost global subcontracting by capital in rural areas. Despite the goal of reducing land-financed governments in rural and urban areas, noted in the Report (pp. 35–7), the means to replace or remove this current regime of accumu-lation are exhortative as opposed to practical or realistic given the size of needed and planned investments (State Council of China, 2014). For ex-ample, in my research in rural Baoshan County in southwest China, local government officials have used unfunded mandates to legitimate specula-tive investment in construction of apartment buildings on former agricultural lands. Most of these remain unoccupied as they are well beyond the means of local peasants to purchase.[16] Thus peasants have been simultaneously dispossessed of their agricultural lands and of homes in the newly urbanized landscape.

Rural dispossession is a major challenge to state legitimacy that was founded on land reform and provision of subsistence plots to peasants, and the right to housing and other benefits for workers. Despite persistent crises of social unrest that result, there is little in the Report concerning alternatives to dispossession for much-needed local government revenue to fund social welfare and infrastructure, and counter a more dystopic vision for the future.

CONCLUSION

The Report's plans for China's urbanization draw heavily upon ecologi-cal modernization theory, utilizing its assumptions, problem framing and recommended win–win solution of continued growth with environmental improvements. The Report offers little to counter unsustainable primitive accumulation through land dispossession, and its attendant forms of vio-lence — the mining of peoples and places in China's rural and urban areas. The Report's approach ultimately reproduces many of the most pressing problems it rhetorically aims to resolve — environmentally destructive, so-cially unjust development, heavily reliant upon the ongoing exploitation of current and former peasants, whose second-class citizenship is maintained to benefit a domestic and international elite.

Similar to most reports by international institutions with their conflict-avoiding jargon (Swyngedouw, 2013), a resounding silence in the Report, therefore, is the question of politics. The Report de-politicizes the substan-tive problems it rightly raises, turning them into technical questions with expert managerial solutions by state and non-state actors. The Report's use of terms like 'sustainability', 'governance' and 'ecological civilization'

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16. Muldavin, Baoshan Fieldnotes, 2008.

diverts attention from the profoundly uneven power relations that are the primary determinants of evolving urban form. Re-politicizing the analysis of urbanization acknowledges the fundamental political and material struggles that it represents. These are struggles widely understood throughout Chinese society and easily seen in the rapidly changing built environment. Incorporating agrarian change and shifts in land use into this politicized analysis is also key to understanding the dynamics of China's growth and structural transformation as it further integrates into the global economy (Arsel and Dasgupta, 2013). A re-politicization allows for the foregrounding of the contested nature of urbanization as a fundamentally violent and indeterminant development process (Escobar, 2004). Rather than viewing 'social stability' and 'safety' as problems to be solved, as in the Report, re-politicization writes a different history of urban unrest upon the landscape. This history is perpetually reconstituted as the state, market actors, and various sectors of society fight for their interests — political, social, cultural and economic. Contemporary urbanization in this reading materializes and embodies privatization of profit and socialization of risk and costs.

Finally, the Report rightly claims that China's urbanization is important for the world. But it misses the larger picture of how China's urbanization has served the global rise of neoliberal hegemony over the last thirty-five years, and thus the interests of the state and capital to maintain this regime of accumulation (Harvey, 2005; Wang, 2003). Fundamentally, through a violent development process of rural taxation, industrialization and dispossession, and drawing heavily upon the win–win ideas of EM theory, China's new urbanization plans can better be understood, not as a possible change in development path, but rather as the state's attempt to achieve social stability while increasing its legitimacy and control over both urban *and* rural development. Privatization of public and collective assets, and land and resource dispossession, together represent primitive accumulation on a broad scale. This primitive accumulation in rural China is central to the country's role in the rise of global neoliberal hegemony, enabling integration of China's rural labour force, land and resources into production decisions of seemingly distant national and international capital.

Using a critical modernist lens (Muldavin, 2008; Peet and Hartwick, 2009), I argue that the Report's primary vision of scientific planning and proper management of urbanization reveals its support for state goals of making legible and controllable the restive, angry, mobile labour force that (paradoxically) will build the new cities.[17] Critical modernism is not simply a discursive theoretical stance, but inherently material and explicitly political, sympathetic to post-structural critiques of modernity, yet not anti-modern

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17. Given space limitations here, see Peet and Hartwick (2009: 275–6) for a detailed discussion of critical modernism as an alternative politicized analytical framework. For a comparison of critical modernism/critical political ecology with orthodox frameworks in terms of understanding China's development and environment, see Muldavin (2008, 2013).

per se. Representing this post-structural perspective, Escobar argues that 'development essentially involves the displacement of people from places or prior ways of living in order to "improve" them . . . [and] the level of violence entailed by development [is] not secondary and temporary but actually long lasting and structural . . . Violence is not only endemic but also constitutive of development' (Escobar, 2004: 16). While a critical modernist perspective would not completely dismiss development, this idea properly challenges us to re-think who development is for, who is doing the developing, the specific processes, and the long-term goals of the various actors.

Breaking the Report's silence on politics sheds important light upon different challenges posed by China's rapid urbanization, not only for the state and capital (domestic and international), but also for social movements and progressive actors inside and outside of China. The struggle over the right to the city will continue and intensify. The immense and growing inequalities in life outcomes and opportunities between those in the most dynamic urban cores such as Beijing and Shanghai, and those in China's hinterlands will increase. This growth in inequality will magnify the contradictions inherent in the state's chosen development path, and continuously require vast resources dedicated to managing the social injustice and environmental destruction foundational to China's much-lauded 'success' and global integration.

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