

**Agendas, imaginaries and institutions:
Assembling the political-economic matrix of the city-region building
process in China**

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Abstract

The development of city-centred regional economies has become one of the key themes of state-led political practices around the world during the last three decades. Diverse actors – within, associated with, or beyond the state system – are mobilised and interact with each other to pursue their respective interests through building city-regions. This condition not only challenges the economically derived definition of city-regions by injecting contested politics into the construction of discursive and material products, but also opens a window through which to observe the complex political mechanisms rooted in state spatial selectivity. In this context, this thesis aims at assembling a political-economic matrix to understand the nature of state-led city-region building with a particular focus on contemporary China.

Employing qualitative strategies and a case-study approach, this thesis investigates how different state-led city-region building programmes were initiated, formulated, and implemented in an understudied area of China - Anhui Province. This empirical investigation, firstly, refines the conceptualisation of Chinese city-regions by elaborating on the intersection between functional-economic rationalities and political-administrative realities in constituting city-regional imaginaries and institutions. Secondly, it delineates the relations of power and capital arising out of the production of city-regional imaginaries and the shaping of city-regional institutions in China. It argues that various techniques and mechanisms are developed for accentuating, reconciling, and balancing the divergent interests of state agencies, think tanks, enterprises, and other actors. Thirdly, it enriches our understanding of the political nature of state spatial selectivity in China. The thesis argues that the path dependence of state spatial selectivity involved in city-region building is heavily dependent on the intervention of policy elites who serve scalar-sensitive interests by selectively (re)articulating political-economic contexts; city-region building is seen to be endowed with the tensions inherited from entrenched state spatial configurations.

This thesis redefines city-regions in China and draws a new map that integrates the political and economic dynamics behind their emergence, formation, and development. Further, the research deepens the study of political mechanisms involved in state spatial theories and broadens existing investigation around state-led practices in city-region building.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research background

1.1.1 The political-economic puzzles in the state-led city-region building

Following the ‘rediscovery of urban centrality’ (Amin and Graham, 1997, p.431) which accompanied the new regionalism of the 1990s, the city-region has become one of the most widely discussed geographical concepts in academic discourse and policy practice over the past three decades. The conceptualisation of the city-region and the interpretation of the dynamics behind its formation and development, accordingly, have become vitally important tasks in contemporary geographical research. Our understanding of the city-region can be traced back to the observation of a geographical phenomenon with a long history: the socioeconomic relations traditionally confined to the boundaries of an administrative city have expanded to cover a larger region, and formed a kind of spatial projection centred on a single or multiple cities and with the region as their hinterland (Geddes, 1915; Dickinson, 1947; 1967). This phenomenon has been found to have grown and evolved with the intensification of globalisation since the 1990s. Around the world, the key sectors that have driven the growth of the post-Fordist economy (such as advanced service activities) have been found to exhibit a tendency to be concentrated in urban agglomerations which develop around one or more large cities, and which contain functional networks consisting of commuting, business linkages between firms, and other elements (Scott, 2001; Parr, 2005; Hall and Pain, 2006; Yeh et al., 2015). These city-centred regional economies are further deemed to be the core driver of local development and to radiate ‘potent developmental impulses’ (Scott, 2019, p.560) to whole nations.

On this basis, since the 2000s an ‘economic- and city-centric’ (Davoudi and Brooks, 2020, p.1) imaginary of regional space has arisen in political practices involving the intervention of the state. The city-region has become, or is becoming, a new scale of state spatial regulation in Western Europe, North America, Eastern Asia, and beyond. This new scale of state spatial regulation serves to promote the growth of the local economy and/or manage the crises pervading capitalist (or market-oriented socialist) development (Brenner, 2004; Harrison, 2010; Wu, 2016; Wachsmuth, 2017; Cheruiyot, 2018). The entrenched configurations of state powers and budgets distributed at central and local levels are restructured through devolution and/or recentralisation, and then reconsolidated in the meso-level authorities in charge of city-regional jurisdictions (such as the Greater London Authority in UK or the governments of prefecture-level cities in China) or fixed into ad hoc institutions for operating various governance activities targeted at city-regional development (for example the planning for mega-city regions in China and countries of the European Union).

However, these state-led political practices of city-region building are not smooth and seamless in reality, but rather are typically assembled through a contested process. The interaction (and even formation of coalitions) between diverse actors (who lie within or beyond the state system) in these practices are revealed to be instead suffused with tensions, conflicts, and negotiations in different national and local contexts (Ward and Jonas, 2004; Xu, 2008; Li and Wu, 2013; Granqvist et al., 2020). This contested process results in a ‘compromised city-regionalism’ (Harrison, 2010, p.21); the economically-derived imaginaries of city-regions are modified by the considerations of policy elites in order to avoid political deadlocks.

In this research, the term ‘city-regional imaginaries’ is used chiefly to refer to the embodiment and construction of particular understandings of city-regions through the discourse and images appearing in academic and policy materials (a point which will be further clarified in Chapter 2). The shaping of the city-regional imaginaries in the policy process usually begins with the estimation or assumption of functional-economic spaces measured by commuting time, business linkages, and/or other indicators but soon involves negotiation based on political realities such as which administrative units will be incorporated or excluded in a given space (González, 2006; Harrison, 2010; Davoudi and Brooks, 2020). These politically-driven negotiations will lead to the modification of economically-derived imaginaries of city-regions, or in other words the imaginaries of city-regions constructed through this process will ‘develop in part as a result of politics’ (Storper, 2013, p.10).

These conditions not only demonstrate that the city-region and its building process must be understood in the context-sensitive frameworks of geopolitics with a special concern on the role of the state as recent studies have advocated (Jonas and Moisio, 2018; Li and Jonas, 2019). Moreover, they also imply an urgent need to look into how this geopolitical process is intertwined with economic rationalities – which are believed to act as important drivers of those practices – to reshape the discursive and material formations of city-regions. More specifically, if there is indeed a ‘compromise’ between economic logics and political realities during the state-led city-region building process, then research ought to be further concerned with questions such as: what do the city-regions that result from this compromise look like? What realities emerge from the historical and extant configurations of power and capital within or associated with the prior condition of the state system? How do these preconditions vary or change the economically-derived imaginaries of city-regions and further act on the conversion of these ‘compromised’ imaginaries into material outcomes? And why and in what ways are actors beyond the state system mobilised to take part in these political practices, and does their participation redraw the relational maps of power and capital involved in the state-led building of the city-region?

The investigation of these research concerns will contribute to understandings of the nature of state-led city-region building through the development of an updated political-economic matrix. This term refers to a set of political and economic conditions that provides a system in which the city-region emerges, takes on a form, and further develops. By looking into this matrix, the conceptualisation of the city-region and the interpretation of the dynamics behind its formation and development will be deepened and broadened through the integration of functional-economic and political-administrative perspectives, and the remapping of the relations between power and capital. These concerns will be embedded into the specific aims of the research questions this thesis explores (see Section 1.2) through an empirical focus on the state-led city-region building in Anhui Province, China.

1.1.2 A vital but understudied area in the city-regional China: Anhui Province

In the contemporary world China stands out as a country with an exceptionally long history of diverse forms of state-led city-region building. This history can be traced back to 1980s when the state territorial system was restructured by the central government to establish prefecture-level cities – a kind of city-region in an administrative sense that includes an urban core and its rural hinterland – throughout the country (Honey and Lou, 1992). A series of economic reforms, including the transformation of land, housing, and tax institutions, was initiated by the central government in the 1980s and 1990s to stimulate the growth of these administrative city-regions (Yeh and Chen, 2020). In the wake of this process, localism has become increasingly prevalent since the 2000s (Xu, 2008), and has been accompanied by fierce competition among local governments for global and domestic investment (Chien and Gordon, 2008). Toxic problems, for example waste of land and environmental damage, resulting from these trends have triggered a new round of state spatial restructuring in China during which coordinated development between administrative city-regions has become the new policy focus (Wu, 2016). In this context, various strategies, especially planning and institution building, have been utilised by Chinese governments to promote the development of mega-city regions since the middle of the 2000s. A review of these practices and more specific political-economic dynamics will be presented in Chapter 3 in order to show why China is an important context from which to respond the concerns of this thesis.

In this section, I will introduce the main considerations behind my choice of Anhui Province (rather than any other area in China) as the empirical focus of this thesis. Due to its special location within Chinese political-economic geographies, Anhui Province provides a rare window from which to observe the transformation of state-led city-region building process at the intersection between the two macro-economic regions of ‘coastal’ and ‘inland’ China (see Chapter 3 for discussion of macro-economic regions in China).

Anhui Province is located in central China and bounded by one of most densely populated and economically prosperous mega-city region in the world: the Yangtze River Delta (YRD) (see Figure 1.1 and Section 3.2 for details). However, the economic performance of Anhui Province has fallen far behind its rich neighbours in the post-reform period since the 1980s (see Chapter 5 for details) and is generally ranked low in tables of provincial economic performance. For example, as of 2016, the per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of Anhui province was just 39,561 thousand CNY which was over 30% below nationwide averages, and ranked 24th out of 31 Chinese provinces (National Bureau of Statistics of China 1986-2016). This situation makes Anhui Province a pioneer area for the central state to seek to promote the more balanced development of Chinese regional economies since the 2000s, and this specially has led to the province being prominent in a series of state policies targeted at promoting the economic spill-over from coastal China to inland China.



Figure 1.1 Location of Anhui Province in China

Source: Compiled by the author according to the map No.GS(2019)1682 made by the Ministry of Natural Resources.

For instance, the *Plan for Wanjiang City Belt Demonstration Zone for Accepting Industrial Relocation* (*Wanjiang chengshi dai chengjie chanye zhuan yi shifanqu gui hua*) (2010-2015) was promulgated by National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) as the first nation-level plan to promote industrialisation and urbanisation of a delineated city-region in an inland province with the purpose of attracting and developing industries relocated from the coastal areas of

People's Republic of China (PRC). The area of the Wanjiang City Belt is wholly within the territory of Anhui Province (see Chapter 4 for details). Subsequently, the territory of Anhui Province has been gradually incorporated into the city-regional plans for the extension of YRD in 2016 and 2019 (see Chapter 3 for details) in order to strengthen Anhui's functional-economic connections with coastal provinces in the YRD.

These practices in Anhui Province introduce a cross-macro-economic-regional vision (spanning 'coastal' YRD and 'inland' Anhui) into the state-led construction of a Chinese city-region which is rarely revealed in studies. This vision, meanwhile, implies more complex imaginaries of the city-regions which not only reflect the central state's desire to restructure the functional-economic relations between the inland and coastal regions of China, but also reflect the need to balance the interests of provincial and local authorities in their own jurisdictions. This example thus provides abundant materials to analyse city-region building led by the central state and with the involvement of diverse sub-national actors in contemporary China.

In addition to these practices showing the strong intervention of the central state, on the other hand, Anhui Province also allows for investigation of the varieties of city-region building practices dominated by provincial-level and local-level state agencies. There are sixteen prefecture-level cities in current Anhui Province (see Figure 1.2) and each of them can be viewed as a city-region in the administrative sense (See Chapter 3 for details about different definitions of city-regions in contemporary China).



Figure 1.2 Prefecture-level cities in Anhui Province
Source: Compiled by the author.

Emerging from this configuration, there have been a series of governance activities operated by provincial and/or local governments in Anhui Province which have served to promote the formation and development of city-centred regional economies covering several administrative cities. This is exemplified, for instance, by the practices around building the so-called Hefei Metropolitan Ring since the mid-2000s. The investigation of these practices provides a more locally-grounded perspective on the experiences of city-region building in contemporary China as a complement and contrast to those led by the central state. Based on these considerations, Anhui Province offers a good basis for the empirical investigation of this thesis. Chapter 4 will introduce the specific cases selected from a wide range of state-led city-region building practices in Anhui which will be subject to sustained analysis in this thesis.

1.2 Research aims and questions

The overarching aim of this research is to assemble a political-economic matrix necessary for an understanding of the nature of state-led city-region building in contemporary China. In practice, this mainly refers to:

Research Aim 1: Conceptualising the city-regions constructed by political practices, with special attention on the interactions between political-administrative elements and functional-economic pursuits;

Research Aim 2: Revealing the diverse actors (within, associated with, or beyond the state system) and the relations of power and capital involved in the political practices around city-region building;

Research Aim 3: Reflecting on the political practices of city-region building as a form of state spatial selectivity which is built upon two theoretical hypotheses illustrated in Chapter 2.

These research aims will be accomplished through addressing the following research questions, which look into different policy phases of state-led city-region building in Anhui Province:

Research Question 1: Why did state-led city-region building emerge in Anhui Province in the first decade of the twenty-first century?

This question investigates the agenda setting and preliminary consideration of policy options behind Anhui's state-led city-region building. I examine the political-economic contexts and agendas that preconditioned the regional and urban policies associated with Anhui Province in the second half of the 2000s and reveal the actors and actions that contributed to the proposal of city-region building as a policy option in response to these contexts and agendas.

Research Question 2: What planning imaginaries of city-regions in Anhui Province were constructed, and how?

This question examines the policy formulation and decision making involved in state-led city-region building. I uncover the imaginaries of city-regions in Anhui Province as embodied in the planning discourse from the mid 2000s to the mid 2010s, discover the institutional structures that were developed to coordinate different actors in formulating these plans, and disclose the techniques and mechanisms that were utilised to fix divergent interests into the final imaginaries of city-regions in these plans.

Research Question 3: In what ways were planning imaginaries of city-regions in Anhui Province converted into material outcomes?

This question interrogates the policy implementation in the state-led city-region building with a focus on specific projects identified in the plans and conducted ‘on the ground’. I examine how these projects were envisaged as important strategies to realise the planning imaginaries of city-regions in Anhui Province, uncover the coalitions between power and capital that were formed to promote the development of these projects, and discover how these coalitions underwent transformation when the expected outcomes of these developments were jeopardised.

1.3 Thesis outline

This thesis consists of eight chapters. After Chapter 1 with an overall introduction of my research, the following chapters can be divided into four parts. The first part consists of Chapters 2 and 3 which will explain in detail the conceptual concerns of this thesis (which have been briefly addressed in the research aims and questions above) and will be elaborated through a critical review of existing literature grounded in the western and the Chinese contexts respectively. The second part of the thesis consists of Chapter 4 which will illustrate main methods employed by this research to select, collect, and analyse empirical data for examining the research aims and questions. The third part of the thesis refers to Chapters 5, 6, and 7 which will present main findings of this research got from the empirical investigation, and each chapter will respond to a research question. The last part consists of Chapter 8 which will summarise this thesis, identify its main contributions and limitations, and indicate its implications for future research.

In Chapter 2 I introduce how the city-region is defined in the English-language literature that focuses primarily on Western Europe and North America and scrutinise the political-economic dynamics behind its emergence and development. A ‘political turn’ in the economically-centred conceptualisation of city-regions is identified in the literature, with special attention to the

significance of state spatial selectivity in city-region building. On this basis, I further review how the city-region is created and legitimised through the state-led production of city-regional imaginaries and institutions, and foreground important but understudied issues emerging from the investigation of power relations involved in this process.

In Chapter 3 I explain why contemporary China is an important context in response to the conceptual concerns elaborated in Chapter 2 and simultaneously introduce essential background information to interpret the empirical investigation. This chapter starts by identifying three perspectives in the literature on conceptualising Chinese city-regions and sets the focus of my research on the ‘institutional city-region’ as an intersection between functional-economic and political-administrative standpoints. Furthermore, I present the functional-economic environment and territorial-administrative basis for building the ‘institutional city-region’ in post-reform China and illustrate their complementary significance to the aforementioned conceptual concerns set in the western context. Finally, I critically review literature about the motives, strategies, and power relations involved in the state-led building of institutional city-regions in China and highlight as-yet understudied issues that are closely linked with my research aims and questions.

Chapter 4 describes how I utilised qualitative strategies in a case-study approach to collect the empirical evidence necessary to accomplish the research aims and answer the research questions. I explain the reasons for selecting two state-led city-region building programmes in Anhui Province – the Wanjiang City Belt (WCB) and the Hefei Metropolitan Ring (HMR) – as the empirical cases for this research and show how semi-structured interviews and document analysis were employed as main strategies to collect data around these cases. I also illustrate how different approaches were applied to analyse the textual, numerical, and visual data which was collected through these two strategies.

Chapter 5 responds to Research Question 1 by examining the political-economic rationalities behind the initiation of the WCB and the HMR in the second half of the 2000s. The legacies of regional spatial regulation and the particular features of regional and urban economies associated with Anhui Province are established as essential ‘layers’ that preconditioned a new round of state spatial selectivity since the middle of 2000s. I examine how the combination of these ‘layers’ with emerging agendas set at national, provincial, and local scales – and facilitated by diverse actors such as state agencies, think tanks, mass media, etc. – made the WCB and the HMR new foci of state spatial selectivity. This analysis reveals that the ‘path-dependent layering process’ (Brenner, 2004, p.111) involved in the state spatial selectivity did not occur ‘naturally’. Instead, this process was highly reliant on interventions by policy elites to serve scalar-sensitive interests

through selectively (re)articulating the political-economic contexts behind the building of the city-region.

Chapter 6 responds to Research Question 2 by scrutinising the production of planning imaginaries for the WCB and the HMR since the middle of 2000s. I first examine how imaginaries of these two city-regions were presented in planning discourse. Similar patterns of state administrative territories are found to be superimposed on different visions of functional-economic agglomerations and networks. I then investigate the institutional settings for formulating planning imaginaries for the WCB and the HMR. This process uncovered more complex and variegated configurations of scalar, sectoral, and territorial relations, beyond the central-local dichotomy and with the involvement of quasi-state actors (i.e., government-affiliated think tanks). Finally, I develop research about ‘compromised city-regionalism’ (Harrison, 2010, p.21) a step further by giving specific examples of the techniques and mechanisms that worked to accentuate, reconcile, or balance interests of different actors involved in the institutions for producing planning imaginaries for the WCB and the HMR.

Chapter 7 responds to Research Question 3 by investigating the implementation of two new town projects – the Jiangbei Industrial Cluster (JBIC) and the Shouxian-Shushan Modern Industrial Park (SSMIP) – which were vital strategies involved in the building of the WCB and the HMR respectively. I first reveal the correlations between the development of suburban new towns and the state-led building of mega-city regions shown in the planning imaginaries of the WCB and the HMR and scrutinise how later plans showed subsequent changes due to the involvement of more local considerations. On this basis, I then contribute to studies on city-regional institutions from a more ‘on-the-ground’ perspective by unveiling the variegated composition and flexible operation of power and capital (within, associated with, or beyond state system) which emerged from the process of converting the changing visions of the JBIC and the SSMIP into material outcomes. Different types of growth-oriented coalitions between state agencies and between state agencies and enterprises are presented, and I examine the driving forces behind their formation and the transformations which occurred when their growth was jeopardised.

In Chapter 8 I review the main findings of this thesis and synthesise them to reflect on how I accomplish the overall aims of this research. This is followed by considerations of the limitations of this thesis and its implication for future studies.

Chapter 2: Conceptualisation of the city-region and the political-economic mechanisms of city-region building: review and critique

2.1 Introduction

This chapter builds a basic framework to understand key concepts in this research and identifies research gaps in the literature. It commences by reviewing the literature on the conceptualisation of the city-region in Section 2.2 by illustrating the potential to explore the political-administrative attributes in the economics-derived understanding of city-regions. In Section 2.3, I identify the diverse functional-economic dynamics that are viewed as drivers of the formation and development of city-regions and that lay an intellectual foundation for how city-regions are imagined in political practices. In Section 2.4, I focus on the politics of the state-led city-region building, which refers to the regulatory capacity of the nation state over sub-national regions (Section 2.4.1), the motivations and purposes of state agencies behind city-region building (Section 2.4.2), and the power relations involved in two strategies with the full engagement of the state – the production of city-regional imaginaries and the shaping of city-regional institutions (Section 2.4.3). In this section, I particularly highlight the significance of state spatial selectivity on city-region building – a key theoretical standpoint of this thesis – and propose a series of important but under-studied issues. These issues are summarised in Section 2.5, contextualised in Chapter 3 and further investigated in the empirical Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

2.2 Conceptualisation of the city-region

This section critically reviews different strands of literature on conceptualising city-regions, and the kinds of logic behind their transformation. Firstly, an evolving understanding of the term ‘region’ is reviewed, highlighting the dominance of socially-constructed cognition since 1980s and the controversy between territorial and relational thinking in recent years. The conceptualisation of the city-region, as an emerging type of region, is then reviewed. Much of the literature on this concept inherits the spirit of social construction while stressing the city-region’s functional-economic nature. By contrast, academic attention to the political-administrative attributes of the city-region is still limited, although studies have shown significant potential to enrich the understanding of city-regions. One of the main aims of this study responds to this potential: discovering the political-administrative attributes shaping city-regions, and looking into their interactions with functional-economic rationales for defining city-regions.

2.2.1 Towards a multidimensional understanding of the region

As Rogers et al. (2013) argue, the meanings of the term ‘region’ are very diverse in the discipline of human geography. They usually refer to three pairs of standpoints on understanding the

different properties of regions, i.e., ontological versus epistemological, natural versus socially constructed, and bounded versus discontinuous. In the traditional view, the region is defined as ‘a relatively bounded area regarded as meaningful for geographic analysis’ (Rogers et al., 2013, n.p.). Homogenous natural attributes, such as climate and biological features, are usually identified by geographers to delimit a particular region for creating an analytical unit of space on, or out of, the earth (Mill et al., 1905; Church, 2015).

However, with the strong influence of constructivism and relational theory on the social science since the 1980s, the conceptualisation of the region in human geography has challenged these supposedly natural and bounded properties. The region is viewed as a kind of human and social category and interpreted as a product of social reproduction. Social structures and human agency interact and clash with each other to shape the territory, symbols, and institutions of the region (Thrift, 1983; Pred, 1984; Paasi, 1986). Further, the relational approach understands the region as a form of spatialised social relationship fixed in an unbounded manner (Massey, 2007; Varró and Lagendijk, 2013). This means that regions are not necessarily continuous territories with clear boundaries, because social relations can be stretched across various borders in a networked way. The region, therefore, is endowed with heterogeneous and fluid spatial attributes (Allen and Cochrane, 2007; Cochrane, 2012).

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that this relational approach to conceptualising the region has also been criticised since the 2010s. The relational approach is deemed to neglect the effect of territory-associated social relationships, such as territorial organisations and territorial politics, in shaping regions, with an overemphasis on the flows and networks of functional-economic activities (Jonas, 2012; Harrison, 2013). Jonas (2012) asserts that some key concepts developed by the relational approach around regions – e.g., competitive regionalism and regional resilience – are de facto premised on the nature of the territory and its territorial politics, but that these attributes are widely overlooked in discussions. Harrison (2013) further proposes to build a multidimensional understanding of socio-spatial relations in which territory, network, place, and scale come together to shape the region. The relative privilege or dominance of these dimensions is changeable in the given moment and in specific contexts. It is in this sense that the conceptualisation of the region in human geography goes towards a new stage which contends the multidimensional nature of the region and the changing dynamics in the process of building it.

2.2.2 Unfolding definitions of the city-region: functional-economic bias versus political-administrative potential

Although there are diverse interpretations of the city-region in academic discourse, both territorial and relational understandings of region are embedded into its conceptualisation. The common concerns in this literature are rapid urban expansion and its associated changes on spatial structures of economic, social, and political relations towards a regional scale. The conceptual origins of the city-region can be traced back to the early twentieth century when some geographical concepts were developed to describe urbanisation beyond the jurisdictional area of a city both in territorial and functional ways, such as through conurbation (Geddes, 1915). In this context, Robert Dickinson proposed the term ‘city-region’ in his *City Region and Regionalism* (1947), and he further developed it in his following works (Dickinson, 1964; 1967) from a perspective of human ecology. The city-region is created as a conceptual tool to describe a spatial structure of social relations that does not match the boundaries of existing administrative units in countries like the UK, the US, and France (Dickinson, 1947). In Dickinson’s view, the city should be understood in terms of the regional relations which are the functional centre – primarily for services and industries – of a larger region. In turn, these functional relations are crucial to delimiting city-regions in planning and administrative geographies. In other words, the forms and areas of city-regions are varied, depending on what social relations are identified and how they are measured in their spatial dimension, although the city is always positioned at the centre of this relational space.

The extent of the area they [city-regions] need will depend on the specific purpose for which it is required. The concept of the city-region can only be made specific and definable, as a geographic entity, by reference to the precise and areal extent of particular associations with the city. (Dickinson, 1967, p.227)

This definition of city-region – a city-centred unit shaped by functional-economic relations between its centre and hinterland – has been inherited by a substantial amount of literature in human geography. Since the 1980s, the growing discussion of the influence of globalisation on the nature of the nation state and the region has extended the definition of city-regions from the subnational scale to the global scale. The ‘global city-region’ (p.814) is proposed by Allen Scott (2001), injecting principles of new regionalism into some concepts – like world city (Friedmann and Wolff, 1982) and global city (Sassen, 1991) – related to the command roles of some metropolises in the global hierarchies of functional-economic activities.

From a geographic point of view, global city-regions constitute dense polarised [or multi-polarised, as shown in later text] masses of capital, labour, and social life that are bound up in intricate ways in intensifying and far-flung extra-national relationships. As such, they represent an outgrowth of large metropolitan areas – or contiguous sets of metropolitan areas – together with surrounding hinterlands of

variable extent which may themselves be sites of scattered urban settlements.
(Scott, 2001, p.814)

Meanwhile, the city-region is also understood as a functional-economic network consisting of 'space[s] of flows' (Castells, 1991, p.14). The flows of capital, people, information, and other elements are deemed to play important roles in shaping the city-region as a polycentric network with functional-economic linkages both internal to its space and external to the global market (Hall and Pain, 2006; Hall, 2009).

However, this conceptualisation of city-regions dominated by functional-economic concerns has been challenged by a few cultural and political geographers since the 2000s. They criticise the monotone logic in interpreting the city-region based only on the exchange relations in capital production (Ward and Jonas, 2004; Jonas and Moisio, 2018). By contrast, they contend that the practices and struggles around the redistribution of social products also have substantial power to shape city-regions, and that these can be intertwined with political purposes and actions. In fact, although the political-administrative attributes of city-regions are seriously under-studied in the process of conceptualisation mentioned above, they are not totally denied by economic geographers. For example, Scott (2001) also mentions that the emerging autonomy of the global city-region shows that it is indeed a political unit produced by collaboration among local governments. Accordingly, he contends that there are two foundations for defining any city-region: one of them is its 'objective condition' (p.820), i.e., an agglomeration of economic and social resources; and the other is its 'political practices' (p.820), i.e., constructing territorial coalitions among geographical entities, especially local governments (Scott, 2001). Even though functional-economic activities are still viewed as an 'objective' or essential basis to define the city-region, the importance of political-administrative practices to city-region building is also confirmed.

More significantly, when these academic concepts of city-regions are absorbed and reflected in the policy arena, the political-administrative attributes become more prominent. Harrison (2015) proposes three models to interpret how the city-region is understood in the policy discourse of the contemporary world, especially in Western European countries such as the UK and Germany. These are the agglomeration model, the hub-and-spoke model, and the scale model. The first two models show more of the functional-economic concerns, while the last stresses political-administrative organisation. The agglomeration model contends that it is the agglomeration of capital, labour, and other socioeconomic factors that stimulates the resurgence and development of a city-region. The hub-and-spoke model regards the city-region as a networked functional area with a core city and its interrelated urban and rural areas. The scale model considers the city-region as 'a strategic and political level of administration and policy-making' (Tewdwr-Jones and

McNeill, 2000, p.131) with spatial range beyond the jurisdiction of a single urban authority, and with the incorporation of its hinterland.

These three models for understanding the city-region are reflected in state policies individually or simultaneously, and guide selectivity for specific strategies. Harrison (2015) asserts that there has been a transformation of the UK's city-regional policies, from prioritising agglomeration model in the early stages of the Northern Way regional development partnership in the early 2000s, to stressing the scale model in later initiatives in the late 2000s. This has led to the distinction of many economic and spatial strategies but is most apparently embodied in the delineation of city-regional boundaries – the city-regional boundaries in the Northern Way experienced a change from an ambiguous area implying potential functional-economic agglomeration to clear borders highly consistent with local jurisdictions (Harrison, 2010). It is not hard to conclude from this case that the geographies of state administration *de facto* replaced the functional-economic visions – at least partly – in shaping the morphologies of city-regions in policies. The rationales behind this transformation can be different based on contested geopolitics in policymaking, as reviewed in Section 2.4, but they undoubtedly reflect the importance of political-administrative configurations in shaping the definition of city-regions in policy discourse. Harrison (2010) argues that, accordingly, there is a 'compromised city-regionalism' (p.21) involved in the policy process:

While city-regions are designated and initially defined according to economic logic...the challenge to define, delimit and mark out these city-regions was constrained, first, by the political and administrative boundaries of the region, and second, by historically embedded and politically charged claims to territory. (Harrison, 2010, p.25)

Although city-regions are designated according to their economic competitiveness...policy elites are acutely aware of the need, where possible, to avoid the politically thorny issue of areas falling in the gaps, particularly when it comes to institutionalizing structures and practices of city-region governance and/or planning. The result is what we might call 'compromised city-regionalism'. (Harrison, 2015, p.49)

These studies show the necessity to conduct a context-sensitive conceptualisation of city-regions beyond the unified submission to the so-called 'principles' of the global economy. Definitions of the city-region can probably show distinct characteristics in different political-administrative institutions and policy backgrounds, which can in turn enrich and refine the academic discussion of city-regions. This implies a significant potential in the conceptualisation of city-regions - to discover the political-administrative attributes of shaping the city-region in the real world, and their interactions with functional-economic thoughts.

To summarise, the meanings of ‘city-region’ are various in academic and policy discussion, with a common concern in the expansion of cities towards regional areas. In this thesis, the term ‘city-region’ refers to both a metropolitan area including an urban centre and its functional hinterland, and a polycentric mega-city region consisting of multiple interconnected metropolitan areas. These city-regions, from a functional-economic view, are understood as agglomerations or networks of economic and social elements with internal and external linkages to production and the circulation of global capital. However, if we keep an eye on the political-administrative attributes of city-regions, they can also be understood as having the territory and scale to carry contested interactions between social actors beyond the boundaries of administrative cities and reaching a farther region. There is still much space for deeper interpretation from this perspective. In this sense, this study will be concerned with the political-administrative elements and their interactions with functional-economic rationality in the conceptualisation of city-regions, especially in terms of policy practices.

2.3 Functional-economic dynamics in city-region building

Based on the definition summarised above, the city-region as a product of social construction has already become a consensus in current human geography. More specifically, its building process can be understood as the interaction between human agencies and social structures which involves various actors, and their practices and strategies as mediating components (Paasi, 1986; 2010).

As mentioned in Section 2.2, however, the identification of the agencies and structures behind the city-region building is varied, and depends on the perspectives of scholars and policymakers. In a strand of literature, this process is closely linked to the functional-economic dynamics behind the formation and development of the sub-national regions in the capitalism. For instance, in the Marxist approach, the subnational region is understood as the ‘geographical expression of the division of labour’ (Smith, 2010, p.192) in the uneven development of capitalism. This means that the expansion and devaluation of particular sectors are usually localised in specific regions, and in turn the development and decline of regions is closely associated with the rise and fall of sectors following the ‘accumulation and devaluation on fixed capital’ (Smith, 2010, p.195). In this sense, capital accumulation, or in other words the spatial fix of capital (Harvey, 1982; 1985), is viewed as ‘the key agency in the construction of regions’ (Paasi, 2010, p.2297).

This perspective is embedded, if not explicitly stated, in some studies interpreting and justifying the resurgence of sub-national regions since 1980s in the context of intensified globalisation. In this literature, capital, labour, information, and other fluid elements crucial to the circuit of production in capitalism, are examined moving across the borders of nation states (Castell, 1989; Keating, 1998; Scott, 2017). This phenomenon is influenced by the transformation of economic

structures, for example the collapse of Fordism and new trade relations with the end of Cold War, on one hand, and the improvement of information technology on the other hand (Castell, 1989; Keating, 1998; Scott, 2017). Correspondingly, it has further led to the territorial specialisation of industrial production among nations and their subsets, especially around subnational regions (Storper, 1995).

Different schools of thought are engaged in interpreting specific dynamics to promote this regionalisation of economic development, for example, flexible specialisation (Piore and Sable, 1984), division of labour and agglomeration (Scott and Storper, 1986; Scott, 1988), and high technology and innovation (Breheny and McQuaid, 1988). They depict a new profile of capitalist economy at the end of the twentieth century, with features like a more flexible production process and labour market, the agglomeration of economic activities to minimise transaction costs induced by the disintegration of production, and the emergence of clustering high-tech industries. These features, accompanied by local pathways and conditions, cause territorial specialisation of global production to emerge in subnational regions, and in turn promote the region as a key geographical scale to accommodate the accumulation of capital in accelerated globalisation (Storper, 1995; Scott, 1998; Scott and Storper, 2007).

In this context, city-centred regional economies have been paid extra attention following the ‘rediscovery of urban centrality’ (Amin and Graham, 1997, p.431). One of the most representative ideas concerns the role of a particular cluster of metropolitan areas in the global system of production, which usually appeals to studies on world cities (Friedmann and Wolff, 1982) and global cities (Sassen, 1994; 2001). In this research, the headquarter functions of transnational corporations are found to exhibit territorial concentration in some large metropolises. This phenomenon is deemed to be a response to the dispersal of corporations’ productive capacity over global distances, and meanwhile it stimulates the agglomeration of service economies, such as high-level financial services and some producer services, in metropolises in order to support headquarter functions. It turns these large metropolises into global cities, or, in other words, global city-regions (Scott, 2001), and enables them to play the roles of command and control centres in the global networks of production. The morphologies of these global city-regions can be metropolitan areas with only one core city, but their polycentricity in spatial structures has also been widely examined over last two decades in different country contexts (Scott, 2001; Hall and Pain, 2006; Hui et al., 2020).

It is noteworthy that global city-region only refers to a particular type of city-regions at the top of the hierarchy of the global economy, but there is also literature trying to find the functional-economic dynamics behind the building of all city-regions. For example, Parr (2005) proposes a model to interpret the generalised spatial economies of city-regions, which is based on the

relationship between two zones: the C zone (the city) and the S zone (the territory surrounding the city). Parr (2005) contends that there is a zonal interdependence between the C zone and the S zone in any city-region, based around the relationships of supply and demand which are shown in the flows of trade, labour, capital, and property payment. Meanwhile, Parr (2005) builds a ‘primitive hierarchy’ (p.562) to understand the city-region as a spatial system in which a primary city-region can contain one or more secondary city-regions, and a single city-region can include more than one C zone. It is not hard to notice that this model of city-regional morphologies is also adapted to the observations of global city-regions mentioned above (Hall and Pain, 2006; Scott, 2019).

In summary, this literature has interpreted how functional-economic dynamics shape the meanings and morphologies of city-regions, and in turn has highlighted the rising and important roles of city-regions in the global economy. A common standpoint for this literature is understanding the city-region as the spatial projection of functional-economic structures. Its formation and development reflect the diverse spatialisation of labour division, production networks, relationships between supply and demand, and other functional-economic elements. In fact, this standpoint constitutes a philosophical basis for a lot of academic discussion of city-region building. However, as illustrated in Section 2.2, the meanings of city-regions in real-life contexts, especially in the policy arena, are not limited to the reflection of functional-economic structures. The reasons behind this phenomenon, based on the approach of Paasi (2010) towards understanding region-building, are related to the *actors* and their *power relations* in the practice of making and articulating the meanings of city-regions. The literature around these issues will be reviewed in the next section.

2.4 The state and the politics of city-region building

When the city-region is examined as an important space driving the accumulation and circulation of global capital, subsequent questions are raised about who is involved in the formation and the development of the city-regions, for what purpose, and in which ways. This section reviews the literature on these issues with a special focus on the roles of the state in city-region building and the associated power relations – unfolding within the state system or between the state and other actors – in this process.

2.4.1 Regulatory capacity of the nation state over subnational regions

Along with the intensive discussion of the resurgence of regional economies since the 1980s, there is also another strand of literature focusing on the role of the state in the formation and the development of these subnational regions. This section identifies two camps of research with

opposing views on the regulatory capacity of the nation state over these regions and city-regions in the increasingly global capitalism, and illustrates the standpoint of this thesis.

One camp of viewpoints (the ‘post-national’ camp) contends that it is out of date to insist that the running of the world economy is still controlled by nation states, because the economic power of the latter is being captured by interactions between capital, transnational corporations, consumers, and communication technologies (Ohmae, 1996; 2001). As one of most proactive scholars asserting the decline of the nation state, Kenichi Ohmae (1996) argues that the capacity of the nation state to regulate key economic elements, such as exchange rates and real economic activities, is being lost alongside the rise of a set of affluent natural economic regions, which he calls ‘region states’ (p.79), in the global circulation of capital. These ‘region states’ are probably within the territory of a nation state but ‘their primary orientation is toward – and their primary linkage is with – the global economy’ (Ohmae, 1996, p.89). They engage in solving localised problems by harnessing global, rather than national, resources (Ohmae, 2001). In this sense, the autonomy of these subnational regions in economic affairs is much stronger, which weakens the regulatory capacity of the nation state over them. This view is also partly confirmed by Scott (2001) in his study on global city-regions. He contends that the political autonomy of the nation state is diminished by the debordering of national economies. It means that the central state has less capacity and willingness to safeguard the interests of subnational regions and shift its regulatory capacities to higher or lower spatial scales, such as supranational regions and subnational cities (Scott, 2001).

On the contrary, another camp of research focuses on ‘state spatial selectivity’, and believes that nation states still retain regulatory supervision over domestic regions in the era of intensified globalisation, and have even played commanders in the formation and development of subnational city-regions since the 1990s (Brenner, 2004; Jonas, 2013; Harrison, 2015). In contrast to those who maintain that it is being passively dismantled by globalisation, Brenner (2004) contends that the nation state is an active participant in the socioeconomic restructuring of capitalism. It adaptively rescales itself and reterritorialises its space to achieve new objectives set in both domestic and international arenas. In this sense, the transfer of regulatory functions to supranational or subnational scales is not a ‘hollowing out’ of the nation state. Instead, it is a reconfiguration of state power to better serve these objectives. In this context, the rise of the city-region is a process of spatial restructuring orchestrated by the state (Brenner, 2004; Harrison, 2015). This process is promoted to enhance the competitiveness and regulatory positions of the nation state in the global economy (Harrison, 2015). In addition, the nation state keeps its regulatory capacity over the redistribution of social products among and within subnational arenas,

and shows a tilt towards city-regions in the accelerated globalisation of capital circulation (Ward and Jonas, 2004; Jonas, 2013).

This thesis will be developed from the standpoints of the ‘state spatial selectivity’ camp of research but with a reference to the views of the ‘post-national’ camp. Specifically, this thesis insists that the emergence and development of city-regions in the contemporary world are significantly influenced by state spatial selectivity – to a process of (re)shaping of the spatial form of statehood through interactions between different social forces (Brenner, 2004). This standpoint provides two theoretical hypotheses for this research. The first is that city-region building involves a ‘path-dependent layering process’ (Brenner, 2004, p.111). This means that city-region building has to be built upon and finally act on ‘entrenched morphologies of state spatial organisations’ (Brenner, 2004, p.107) which are deemed as ‘layers’ that form and implement new strategies and projects included in state spatial selectivity. I will examine this assumption in the Chinese context through looking into what and how the specific ‘layers’ preconditioned city-region building in Anhui Province.

The second hypothesis is related to the strategic-relational interpretation of state space in which the capitalist state is deemed to be an institutional ensemble of social relations (Jessop, 1990). The state does not have power but can mediate the power of contested social forces operating through its configuration. It implies that there is no natural coherence and unity within the state system between these social forces. Rather, the coherence of the state can only be temporarily reached through a series of strategic decisions around ‘a set of common, coherently articulated agendas’ (Brenner, 2004, p.85). In this sense, I assume that the city-region building process is endowed with the contestation between different social powers mediated by the state system. This theoretical assumption will be further examined in the Chinese context through reviewing existing studies (see Chapter 3) and with an empirical focus on Anhui Province (see Chapters 5, 6, and 7). In these empirical chapters, I will also investigate what and how the coherence around social powers is achieved in city-region building – this coherence will be shown not to be confined within the state administrative system but also to involve actors beyond. This investigation of contestation and coherence in city-region building will meanwhile articulate the composition and roles of Chinese regional autonomy at sub-national scales.

2.4.2 Motivations and purposes of the state in building city-regions

Having confirmed the regulatory supervision and capacities of the nation state on building subnational city-regions, the next question is why and for what purpose states actively engage in the formation and development of city-regions. This section critically reviews the literature around this question and summarises the answers as follows.

Firstly, as introduced in Section 2.4.1, an important objective of restructuring the state configuration towards a city-regional scale and territory is enhancing the competitiveness of the nation state in the global economy (Brenner, 2004; Harrison, 2015). This objective is widely observed in city-regional programmes around the world, with a common emphasis on the significance of regional competitiveness to both the development of localities and of whole countries (Ward and Jonas, 2004; González, 2006; Harrison, 2010; Wachsmuth, 2017; Granqvist et al., 2020). However, there is no uniform definition of regional competitiveness in this literature. Instead, this concept is usually vaguely interpreted in two distinctive but intertwined ways:

firstly, in the relatively narrow sense of competing over market share and resources, and secondly, in the much broader respect of the determinants and dynamics of a region's long-run prosperity. One of the major difficulties in understanding regional competitiveness is that these different conceptions typically tend to get muddled together and confused. (Bristow, 2010, p.14)

This means that, on the one hand, the analysis of city-region building programmes in the name of enhancing competitiveness should be concerned with more specific objectives behind the umbrella concept, rather than accepting competitiveness itself as a ready-made target. On the other hand, it is necessary to inquire whether there are crucial objectives being covered up by the indiscriminate application of competitiveness in the policies around city-region building.

Secondly, city-region building is also intertwined with the visions of the nation state for dealing with problems around the redistribution of economic resources and the reordering of societal regulation (Jonas and Moisio, 2018). For example, the Northern Powerhouse in the UK is normally deemed to be driven by the agenda of the central government to rebalance regional economies (Etherington and Jones, 2016; Mackinnon, 2020). Meanwhile, Jonas and Moisio (2018) also argue that the devolution of state power included in this programme is also a political reflection of national parties' fear of a call for the independence of Scotland. In addition, they also find a relationship between city-region building programmes in Israel and the state's agenda on enhancing national control of Palestinian minorities (Jonas and Moisio, 2018). It is not hard to conclude from this literature that the involvement of nation states' political and social agendas in city-region building needs more context-sensitive investigation compared to the globally popular objectives of enhancing economic competitiveness.

Thirdly, beyond the focus on the nation state as a whole, it is necessary to consider the motivations and purposes of state agencies in different positions, such as at different scales, and in different territories and departments, in building city-regions. The literature more frequently discusses state agencies at supranational or subnational scales. For instance, some supranational organisations,

such as the United Nations and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, are found to actively engage in city-regional development to manage crises and prevent the risks associated with a possible threat to global security.

Here supranational organisations can and do play a crucial role in assisting states in identifying those city-region territories that are deemed to be ‘safe bets’ from the standpoint of financial risk, geopolitical security, climate change, sustainability, and so forth. (Jonas and Moio, 2018, p.362)

For subnational state authorities, the pursuit of city-regionalism is usually associated with striving for redistribution from the central state (Ward and Jonas, 2004), and enhancing the economic competitiveness of localities (Wachsmuth, 2017). In addition, Waite and Bristow (2019) further examine the policy pluralism around the city-region arrangement in Wales. The purposes of state actors at multiple scales can go beyond the traditional focus on economic or political issues and involve more diverse interests such as wellbeing agendas involved in social and environmental issues. They argue that although city-region policies in Wales are still endowed with a main target of economic competitiveness, the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act enacted by the Welsh government in 2015 also fixes its aims on health, equality, and some other issues and brings this into the policymaking of local authorities constituting the institutional settings for the Cardiff city-region. This policy framework implies a potential to embed wellbeing agendas into city-regional policies. However, the actual outcomes remain to be observed.

2.4.3 Strategies and power relations in building city-regions with the involvement of the state

This section reviews the literature around two strategies with full engagement of the state in building city-regions - the production of city-regional imaginaries and the construction of city-regional institutions - and the power relations involved in conducting these strategies. As predicted in the theoretical hypothesis of this thesis (see Section 2.4.1), contested interactions between actors are also found in the development of each strategy, as asserted by Jonas and Moio:

The territorialisation of the state around city regions is bound up with quite broad and yet also competing and conflicting visions and ideas, which are conveyed by all sorts of political and economic actors having different capacities to act. (Jonas and Moio, 2018, p.363)

These actors are not limited to agencies in different positions within the state system, but also include actors beyond the system such as those from the academic and business sectors. Their

power relations, accordingly, refer to more complex political mechanisms involved in the state-led city-region building. These features are reviewed in this section and will be further examined in the Chinese context with the empirical investigation of Anhui Province shown in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

2.4.3.1 The ‘nexus of knowledge, power, and geography’ in producing city-regional imaginaries

Davoudi and Brooks (2020) introduce the concept of the city-regional imaginary in their research on city-regionalisation in England. They contend that the spatial imaginary is not only ‘the representational discourses about places and spaces’ (Watkins, 2015, p.508) but also ‘a performative act through which socio-spatial relations are reproduced and contested, and political projects are consolidated’ (p.508). From this perspective, the imaginary of city-regions is both a result and a process in which the idea of the city-region as an appropriate scale and territory for economic development is produced by the ‘nexus of power, knowledge, and geography’ (Davoudi and Brooks, 2020, p.3) and embodied by the discourse and images in academic and policy illustration.

More specifically, they identify two main strategies utilised to create and legitimise the ‘economic and city-centric’ imaginary of city-regions in England. The first is rationalising the city-region in the vertical, or the so-called scalar, ordering of the state power, and the second is ‘the demarcation of the horizontal bounds of city-regional space’ (Davoudi and Brooks, 2020, p.4). I summarise these two strategies as the production of the scalar imaginary and the territorial imaginary of city-regions respectively. In Davoudi & Brooks (2020)’s research, producing the scalar imaginary of city-regions in England started from the discursive practice of scholars, especially economic geographers, in building the ‘epistemic rationality’ (p.5) of new regionalism in the 1990s, and the advocacy of the advantages of a city-centric regional economy since the 2000s. It is not hard to see that this process is generally consistent with the transformation of functional-economic analysis of regions and city-regions illustrated in Section 2.3. Then, this scalar imaginary of city-regions, having been produced by scholars, is subsequently captured by political elites and reiterated in the policies and practices of the state, with an announcement of the consistency between political projects and academic knowledge (Davoudi and Brooks, 2020).

The path of producing a territorial imaginary of city-regions in England is similar to that for a scalar imaginary, but with a distinctive focus on the spatial morphology. Davoudi and Brooks contend that the territorial imaginary of city-regions in England derives from the academic approach to functional-economic areas and is embodied in policy documents through delineation and mapping. The core cities and their hinterlands are identified as two essential components of

a city-regional imaginary, while the selection of these components in policies has a lot of room for manipulation by policymakers. For example, the thresholds for being identified as a core city usually refer to its population and economic size, and the delineation of its hinterlands usually depends on the population and distance of commuting (Davoudi and Brooks, 2020). But there is no absolute standard for these criteria, which can always be adjusted in policymaking according to whose and which interests are expressed.

The key point is that what appears to be an arbitrary, technical exercise of selecting thresholds and cut-off points is a contested social process in which the infusions of ideas (methods and ways of knowing), discourses (naming and narrating), and materials (maps and images) into performative spatial imaginaries are constitutive of the politics of scalar fixing. (Davoudi and Brooks, 2020, p.7)

Based on this analysis, Davoudi and Brooks provide a very helpful framework to observe why and how the city-region is articulated in state-led policy practice, and they spotlight the importance of looking into the roles of and interactions between different actors in this process. Based on this framework, the production of city-regional imaginaries can not only be investigated in different contexts with a similar focus on scalar and territorial aspects, but can also require the discussion of elements which are equally crucial to the institutionalisation of regions, such as naming, the creation of territorial symbols, and so on (Paasi, 1986).

More importantly, it is vital to undertake deeper analysis of the power relations involved in the production of these city-regional imaginaries. For instance, who mediates the academic and policy realms in this process? Or, in other words, who is endowed with the power to introduce academic knowledge of city-regions into the policy discussion? Further, after the academic knowledge is introduced, how is it absorbed and adjusted until it achieves its final look in the text and images of policy discourse? In this process, the distribution and transfer of power between different actors in relation to the production of city-regional imaginaries should be given special attention. It is accompanied by concerns about the struggle for this power and the mechanisms to settle associated disputes. These issues will be further explored in the following chapters of this thesis. The review of more specific literature relevant to the production of city-regional imaginaries, such as distinctive ways of delineating and mapping city-regions, will be conducted in the corresponding empirical chapters, for example, Chapter 6.

2.4.3.2 Rescaling, coalition, and conflicts in the institutional shaping of city-regions

The creation of institutions for the development and governance of city-regions is another important strategy in state-led city-region building. Generally speaking, the institutional shaping of city-regions should be analysed case-by-case based on government systems, party politics,

socioeconomic conditions, and so on, varying across different spatial-temporal contexts. Nevertheless, in the literature, this process is usually examined in connection with the interplay between the devolution of the central state, the centralisation of local authorities, and the involvement of non-state actors in the practices of Western Europe and the US (Brenner, 2004; Harrison, 2015; Wachsmuth, 2017).

Harrison (2008) contends that the institutional shaping of city-regions in the UK is an orchestration of the national state involving both ‘centrally orchestrated regionalism’ (p.36) and ‘regionally orchestrated centralism’ (p.36).

‘Centrally orchestrated regionalism’ derives from a well-rehearsed debate about the rescaling of authority from nation-states to regions and the degree to which the central state is prepared to devolve power, while ‘regionally orchestrated centralism’ documents the rescaling of authority between the region and its subregions. (Harrison, 2008, p.36)

For example, the City-Region Development Programmes (CRDPs) included in the Northern Way initiative were initiated as a part of New Labour’s regional devolution projects (González, 2006; Harrison, 2010). The development of identified city-regions in this programme was de jure led by three regional development agencies (RDAs) with devolved power and funding, such as those used for economic development and spatial planning, from central offices. However, the de facto operation of city-regional issues was conducted by an alliance of subregional authorities, for instance, the South Yorkshire Partnership, and local authorities – city councils, district councils, etc. (González, 2006; Harrison, 2008; 2010; 2015). In addition, actors beyond the state system such as water companies and universities were also affected by this state configuration and incorporated into the governance structures of city-regions to engage in specific development priorities (González, 2006). However, this city-regional institution in England was quickly dismantled:

The failure of [scalar] fixing became clear as the opportunities for creating statutory governance structures were lost in 2010 (except in Manchester and Leeds) when a new government not only abolished all regional institutions, but also shifted the political emphasis towards localism and the instalment of Local Enterprise Partnerships. (Davoudi and Brooks, 2020, p.7)

This demise of the Northern Way and the ensuing establishment of Local Enterprise Partnerships for the Northern Powerhouse is largely attributed to the changing control of the UK government from the Labour Party to the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition (Harrison, 2010; Mackinnon, 2020).

In contrast with these centrally initiated practices in the UK, the institutional shaping of city-regions in the US shows stronger bottom-up characteristics with significant roles for business actors and their distinctive interactions with the state. Wachsmuth (2017) finds three types of paths in institutional building at multi-city regional scales in the US. The first is the ‘ground-up regionalism’ (p.645) organised by the collaboration between local economic development agencies in Arizona. The second is the coordinated governance between a partnership of local chambers of commerce and the state government in Ohio. The third is the conflict-ridden coexistence of local economic development collaborations and the institutional settings of the state government in Florida. All three paths start with the leadership of local growth coalitions, mainly consisting of business actors, promoting economic coordination and development at city-regional scales from the late 2000s. This forms the initial institutional settings for city-regional development in these states.

Following these initial institutional settings, government organisations take part in or interact with the institutions in different ways to produce new institutional landscapes. In this ‘ground-up regionalism’ (Wachsmuth, 2017, p.645), institutional structures shaped by the local growth coalition still dominate the economic collaborations of city-regions in Arizona. However, the government organisations, such as the Arizona Sun Corridor Joint Planning Advisory Council, are further established to address more abundant governance issues at a multi-city regional scale. In the coordinated governance, the state government of Ohio ‘has embarked on regionalising economic development reforms which build on the perceived effectiveness of local growth coalition efforts at CMCR’ (Wachsmuth, 2017, p.650). In other words, the state government hires or works with the local growth coalition in the governance of city-regions rather than building its own institutions. The most conflictual institution is in the third path, in which the state government of Florida proposes new city-regional initiatives that are different from, or even contrary to, the pursuit of local economic development collaborations. This results in a chaotic mode of city-regional governance.

These observations illustrate the diverse institutional settings for city-regions which not only involve the rescaling of state configurations but also involve actors beyond the state system, whether from universities or business sectors. Analogous to the production of the city-regional imaginary, the institutional shaping of city-regions is even more sensitive to political and economic contexts. If the institutions of city-regions are developed in a country where neoliberal governance is less prevalent or the scalar configuration of the state is more complex than in Western Europe and the US, the roles of actors and their interactions in shaping this institution are probably very different from what has been reviewed above. This assumption further guides the investigation of this research in the context of contemporary China.

Three main points emerge from the literature reviewed in Section 2.4 about the role of the state as an indispensable agency in contemporary practices of city-region building, and the power relations – within or associated with the state system – involved in such practices. Firstly, there are two strands of literature with opposing views on the regulatory capacity of the nation state over subnational regions in the context of intensified globalisation since the 1980s. This thesis is built upon the assertions of state spatial theory on the formation and development of city-regions, in which the nation state not only retains regulatory capacity over its subnational territory, but also actively responds to the transformation of the global economy through the rescaling and re-territorialisation of state spatial configurations, giving priority to city-regions. Meanwhile, this research will also take the rise of regional autonomy into account, and consider its interaction with the spatial selectivity of the nation state towards city-regions.

Secondly, as we have seen, the state has various motivations and purposes in building city-regions. Enhancing regional competitiveness is examined as one of most widespread objectives in state-led city-region programmes. However, the meanings of regional competitiveness in these practices are still very vague, and await the investigation of more detailed aims under this umbrella concept. In addition, city-regional initiatives are also related to the political agendas of the nation state for dealing with social redistribution and orderings, and the distinctive aims of state agencies distributed at supranational and local scales, with their own specific interests. These findings have inspired this research to untangle the complex configurations of the state in the process of city-region building, which not only concern different interests of state actors in the scalar dimension, but also extend to the territorial, functional, and other dimensions.

Thirdly, two strategies are commonly deployed by the state in the practices of city-region building with complex power relations involved in their shaping. A ‘nexus of knowledge, power, and geography’ is found driving the production of the spatial imaginaries of city-regions in England. This provides a helpful framework for my research to look into how the ideas, discourse, and images of city-regions are achieved in the policy realm, and in turn pushes me to explore the interactive mechanism between different actors in the production of city-regional imaginaries. The other strategy is about the institutional shaping of city-regions, which is usually achieved through the rescaling of the state and the coalition (or conflicting interactions) between the state and actors beyond the state system. This institutional setting of city-regions is sensitive to the political and economic contexts, and arouses my interest to conduct an investigation in countries with more complex arrangements of state scalar configuration beyond the central-local dichotomy, and with fewer neoliberal characteristics in their regional and urban governance.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have critically reviewed the literature about the conceptualisation of city-regions, and the economic and political mechanisms that drive the emergence and development of city-regions. The reviewed literature is mainly written in English, with an empirical focus on Western Europe and North America. This review has constituted the basic framework of concepts for this thesis and shaped the main directions for further investigation in the following chapters.

With the evolving understanding of regions since the 1980s, the city-region – as an emerging type of region – has been positioned as a product of social construction and has reflected the territorial projection of social relations, as shown in Section 2.2. Its conceptualisation, correspondingly, began with an emphasis on functional-economic relations that were deemed to reshape the space and create city-centred regions which broke through administrative boundaries. However, this economy-centred conceptualisation of city-regions has been criticised in recent years because it looks down on the force of political-administrative attributes in spatial shaping, especially those shown in the policy realm. This literature shows the necessity of and potential to refine the conceptualisation of city-regions beyond a unified submission to economic principles, paying more attention to their interactions with political-administrative elements.

Consistently with the conceptualisation of city-regions, functional-economic dynamics have been viewed by much of the literature as the key, and even the one driving force behind the emergence and development of city-regions in intensified globalisation (Section 2.3). The city-region has been understood as the spatial projection of functional-economic relations and its building process is believed to reflect the accumulation and circulation of capital in some studies. Correspondingly, it is the agglomeration or networking of functional-economic activities that has been deemed to shape the morphologies of city-regions, no matter whether the latter is a global city-region positioned at the top of a global production network or an ‘ordinary’ city-region of the kind widespread in every corner of the world.

However, this dominance of functional-economic ideas is challenged by another strand of the literature, reviewed in Section 2.4, which highlights the active roles of the state and its associated geopolitical mechanisms in building city-regions. It contends that the nation state still maintains regulatory capacity over its subnational regions in the era of intensified globalisation. The emergence and development of city-regions since the 2000s is indeed the result of state spatial selectivity (Section 2.4.1). This view constitutes a key theoretical standpoint of this thesis and leads to the proposal of two hypotheses: that state-led city-region building is a ‘path-dependent layering process’ (Brenner, 2004, p.111) and that it is endowed with contestation between different social powers mediated by the state system. I meanwhile give a reference to some ‘post-national’ views in this theoretical discussion showing the potential to articulate the composition

and roles of regional autonomy at sub-national scales in the state spatial selectivity towards city-regions.

Based on this theoretical standpoint, I have further scrutinised diverse motivations and purposes of the state in building city-regions, which are mostly set around enhancing the economic competitiveness but also involve the political and even social and environmental aims in the international and domestic governance (Section 2.4.2). During this process, the production of city-regional imaginaries and the shaping of city-regional institutions are widely utilised in the discursive and material practices of city-region building, with the deep involvement of the state (Section 2.4.3). These strategies are created and legitimised in the power interactions within the state system or between state agencies and actors beyond the state system. The interests of the involved actors are often different and even contradictory. Accordingly, the imaginaries and institutions of city-regions are usually produced in a contested way, with negotiation, compromise, or even ongoing conflicts between actors.

This literature has spurred me to conduct an in-depth and context-sensitive analysis of city-region building with the involvement of the state. Focus will be given to, on the one hand, the formation of city-regional imaginaries in policy discourse – especially around the economic and political attributes presented in discursive imaginaries of city-regions, and the power relations involved in the production of discursive imaginaries of city-regions. On the other hand, I will explore diverse institutions – within or associated with the state – that have been shaped to convert the discursive imaginaries of city-regions into material outcomes. These foci will be studied in a context of the strong involvement of the state in the spatial governance of socioeconomic issues, and the complex arrangement of state spatial configurations beyond the simple dichotomy of central and local. Guided by the directions identified in this chapter, I have selected city-region building programmes in China as a subject of further investigation. The next chapter will provide contextual information for these cases.

Chapter 3: Contextualising city-region building in contemporary China

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the importance of contemporary China to the debates about city-regions discussed in the last chapter, and introduces the essential background for understanding the political-economic mechanisms of city-region building in contemporary China which subsequent chapters will utilise. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 is mainly grounded in the Anglophone sphere and refers to experiences of city-region building in the North Atlantic area. This chapter sets these concerns in the context of contemporary China and seeks to show the commonalities and differences between the political-economic construction of Chinese city-regions and their counterparts in the West. In the pages that follow, the conceptualisation and naming of Chinese city-regions in existing academic and policy literature is reviewed (Section 3.2), pinning my research to the focus on the political-economic mechanisms involved in building institutional city-regions. This is followed by an introduction to the functional-economic context (Section 3.3), and the territorial-administrative basis (Section 3.4) that are preconditions for the emergence and development of institutional city-regions in China. Finally, the motives, strategies, and power relations involved in the state-orchestrated building of institutional city-regions are reviewed in Section 3.5. The chapter sets basic targets for the following empirical chapters, screening for more valuable and under-studied questions from the research directions identified in Chapter 2.

3.2 Conceptualising the city-region in contemporary China

This section first reviews how Chinese city-regions are conceptualised in the existing academic literature from three perspectives, and clarifies the focus of this thesis on institutional city-regions at the intersection between economic and political perspectives (Section 3.2.1). On this basis, Section 3.2.2 further introduces two types of institutional city-regions named in the discourse of Chinese state policies, and thus builds a terminological foundation for the empirical investigation of this thesis.

3.2.1 Three perspectives on defining Chinese city-regions

As reviewed in Chapter 2, the academic concerns about political-administrative attributes challenge the economics-derived understanding of city-regions in Western contexts (Ward and Jonas, 2004; Harrison, 2015; Jonas and Moio, 2018). This has triggered my interest into looking at the interactions between political-administrative elements and functional-economic pursuits in shaping the definitions of city-regions. In this sense, the conceptualisation of Chinese city-regions provides an excellent entry point. Based on a similar focus on functional-economic agglomeration and networks (Section 3.2.1.1), the literature with a Chinese focus gives more attention to how

the city-region can be understood as an established form of territorial jurisdiction (Section 3.2.1.2) or an institutional space for ongoing political practices (Section 3.2.1.3). These perspectives provide a basis to refine the conceptualisation of city-region at the intersection between economic, territorial, and institutional dimensions (Section 3.2.1.4).

3.2.1.1 The city-region as a functional-economic agglomeration and network

Firstly, linked to the theories of global city-regions and the relational understanding of regions reviewed in Chapter 2, one strand of research conceptualises Chinese city-regions from a functional-economic perspective (Zhao and Zhang, 2007; Bie et al., 2015; Yeh et al., 2015; Mu and Yeh, 2016; Wen and Thill, 2016; Zhao et al., 2017a; Cheng and LeGates, 2018; Cao et al., 2018; Li et al., 2020; Yeh and Chen, 2020; Chong and Pan, 2020; Hui et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020; Chen and Yeh, 2022). In this literature, the city-region is generally viewed as a spatial projection of functional-economic relations in the form of an agglomeration and (or) network, which covers single or multiple core cities and their closely connected hinterlands.

More specifically, different indicators are used to measure whether a city-centred area can be identified as a city-region in China, as well as the extent and structures of recognised city-regions. These indicators include but are not limited to: first, population-related parameters, such as the population sizes of core cities and/or the whole city-region (Mu and Yeh, 2016; Yeh and Chen, 2020; Zhang et al., 2020), the distribution of population density (Wen and Thill, 2016; Li et al., 2020), and the flows of population based on commuting (Wen and Thill, 2016; Chen and Yeh, 2022) and short-distance movement not confined to commuting purposes (Mu and Yeh, 2016; Hui et al., 2020). A second cluster pays particular attention to industry-based parameters, for example, the agglomeration of Fordist-style manufacturing and its linkage to global capital (Zhao and Zhang, 2007), the spatial distribution and business linkages between advanced producer service firms (Yeh et al., 2015; Wen and Thill, 2016; Cheng and LeGates, 2018; Chong and Pan, 2020), and the ownership-based network consisting of all kinds of corporate bodies (Zhao et al., 2017a; Cao et al., 2018). Third, infrastructure-based parameters are selected, for instance, the routes and frequencies of trains (Hui et al., 2020) and long-distance buses (Cao et al., 2018), and the travel time through existing rail lines (Wen and Thill, 2016). In addition to these indicators, other spatial elements of functional-economic activities, such as the size of urban built-up areas (Yeh and Chen, 2020) and knowledge collaboration networks (Cao et al., 2018), are also applied to help define Chinese city-regions.

It is not hard to imagine that the identification and delineation of city-regions in this literature are highly dependent on which indicators the researchers choose and what thresholds are set for these indicators. For example, although many studies agree that the existence of a densely populated

core city (or cities) is essential to define a city-region, the thresholds set for the number and population sizes of core cities can be very different. In the identification of Chinese mega-city regions – clusters of metropolitan areas with geographical proximity and functional interconnection between each other – Mu and Yeh (2016) contend that they should contain ‘at least three cities, [and] the urban population of the core city should be above one million’ (p.277). By contrast, Zhang et al. (2020) propose that a mega-city region is ‘combined of two large metropolitan areas with the minimum population of 1 million, or by a single metropolitan area with a minimum population of 2 million’ (p.4). This difference, together with the distinctive selection of other indicators of functional connection, leads to a different mapping of Chinese mega-city regions in academic discussion (see Figure 3.1).



Figure 3.1 Spatial distribution of mega-city regions in China

Source: Figure (a) is from Zhang et al. (2020); and Figure (b) is from Mu and Yeh (2016).

While there are some differences between the two maps shown in Figure 3.1, their significant commonalities are more noteworthy. On the one hand, these mega-city regions, identified from a functional-economic perspective, are found to be mostly spread across coastal China, and decrease in number moving inland to the west. According to Yeh and Chen (2020)'s definition of the 'super mega city-region' (p.636) in China – a region with at least one core city with 'at least 10 million inhabitants'¹ (p.637) – three of the four Chinese super mega city-regions are located in coastal China: namely, the well-known Pearl River Delta (PRD), Yangtze River Delta (YRD), and Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei (BTH).² There is only one super mega city-region in inland China, i.e., the Chengdu-Chongqing city-region. This disparity is caused by and has implications for the uneven development of Chinese regional and urban economies which will be introduced in Section 3.3.

However, on the other hand, some mega-city regions in inland areas show strong spatial links, such as connection by high-speed railways and geographical bordering, to mega-city regions, especially super mega city-regions, located in coastal areas. They are also linked to other mega-city regions in areas further inland. For example, Mu and Yeh (2016) recognise a mega-city region located within Anhui Province (the area studied in this thesis) which is bordered by the YRD on its east and is next to two other mega-city regions in provinces located further inland. Although this mega-city region in Anhui Province is not identified by Zhang et al. (2020), we can deduce that it is located at a railway node which connects mega-city regions in the coastal area and areas further inland respectively. This emerging feature of Chinese city-regions is highly associated with the functional-economic restructuring and evolution simultaneously occurring in coastal and inland areas (see Section 3.3 for details).

3.2.1.2 The city-region as an established form of territorial jurisdiction

Secondly, from the perspective of state territorial administration, one strand of literature uses the term 'city-region' to refer to the spatial morphology of province-level, sub-provincial, and prefecture-level cities in China (Honey and Hong Lou, 1992; Ma, 2005; Wu and Zhang, 2007). These administrative cities are meso-level territorial jurisdictions in the five-tier state territorial system, under the central state (Table 3.1) (see Section 3.4 for details). Their territories usually

¹ These inhabitants in the Chinese context mean the permanent population living in the urban districts of the administrative cities – the related concepts in Chinese administrative geography will be introduced in the Sections 3.2.1.2 and 3.4.

² There are some different names for this super mega city-region in the existing literature, for example, Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei (BTH) (see Figure 3.1b), Beijing-Tianjin-Tangshan (BTT) (see Figure 3.1a), and Jing-Jin-Ji (JJJ). The last one of these uses Chinese abbreviations for three province-level units in the city-region: Jing refers to Beijing, Jin refers to Tianjin, and Ji refers to Hebei. These abbreviations are widely used in state policies.

contain relatively contiguous urbanised areas and surrounding rural landscape. Accordingly, the governments of these administrative cities can simultaneously rule over the subordinate jurisdictions dominated by the urban economy (e.g., urban districts) and related to the rural economy (e.g., counties). Although there is no official standard for which areas can be designated as administrative cities, no matter which level they are at, the massive agglomeration of population in urban areas is a salient feature to all of them. The population living in the urban districts of any province-level city – Beijing City, Shanghai City, Tianjin City, and Chongqing City – exceeds 10 million (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). As of 2019, there were 297 prefecture-level cities in China, of which more than 84% had a population of over 500 thousand living in urban districts (CEIC, 2019). The data for sub-provincial cities usually falls in between.

Table 3.1 Structure of China’s administrative divisions

Tier	Variety
Province-level	Province; centrally administered municipalities; ethnic minority autonomous regions; special administrative regions
Sub-provincial	Sub-provincial cities
Prefecture-level	Prefecture-level cities; prefectures; autonomous prefectures
County-level	Counties; autonomous counties and Inner Mongolia banner; county-level cities; urban districts
Township-level	Townships; towns; street communities

Source: Compiled by the author based on Chung and Lam (2010).

Honey and Hong (1992) contend that the establishment of prefecture-level cities in the state territorial system of China since the early 1980s is the result of the creation of administrative city-regions. It ‘brings the rural counties into the jurisdiction of a central city so that the whole city region can be internalised and the regional economy can be better coordinated’ (Honey and Hong, 1992, p.29). Further, Ma (2005) argues that the designation of various administrative cities in post-reform China legitimised cities as ‘central places to organise and manage economic activities and to stimulate rural economic growth’ (p.486). It shaped the transformation of the Chinese state territorial system away from the prior strict separation of urban and rural territories and towards the integration of city-centred regions (Ma, 2005). In this sense, the city-region as a territorial form of organising administrative jurisdictions is widely found in contemporary China, with references to administrative cities at multiple levels.

3.2.1.3 The city-region as the institutional space for ongoing political practices

In addition to the relatively stable configurations of territorial jurisdictions, there is a third strand of literature, which understands Chinese city-regions as the changing institutional spaces to carry and project the ongoing practices led by the state to restructure itself and intervene into the market and society (Ng and Tang, 1999; Shen, 2004; Xu, 2008; Luo and Shen, 2009; Luo et al., 2010; Ma, 2012; Li and Wu, 2013; Yang and Li, 2013; Ye, 2014; Xu and Chen, 2014; Li et al., 2015; Wu, 2016; Sun and Chan, 2017; Li and Wu, 2018; Zhang and Sun, 2019; Li and Jonas, 2019; Harrison and Gu, 2019; Jonas, 2020; Lu et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2022). From this perspective, the city-region can be first presented as a planning imaginary made up of discourse and graphics. The city-region in this sense refers to the integration of functional-economic and territorial-administrative understandings of city-regions in shaping the institutional space.

Although all plans for city-regions with a spatial focus stress the coordinated arrangement of city-centred regional economies - similar to the observations of Davoudi and Brooks (2020) in England (see Chapter 2) - the planning morphologies of these functional-economic areas can be very different, with differentiated selection and combination of the jurisdictions of administrative cities (Wu and Zhang, 2022). The planning areas of city-regions can be wholly consistent with the jurisdiction of an administrative city, such as in the strategic development plans for Guangzhou City and Hangzhou City (Wu and Zhang, 2007), or cover the jurisdictions of a pair of administrative cities such as in the *Development Plan for the Guangzhou-Foshan Integrated Metropolitan Area* (Ye, 2014), or include a cluster of administrative cities, such as in a series of strategic plans for the PRD (Xu, 2008; Ma, 2012; Sun and Chan, 2017) and the YRD (Li and Wu, 2013; Li and Jonas, 2019). This literature implies a high degree of consistency between the planning boundaries of city-regions and state territorial jurisdictions, but the questions it does not answer are: why does this consistency happen, and how is it mixed with functional-economic ideas to produce Chinese city-regions as a planning imaginary? These issues will be investigated in Chapter 6, through looking into the outcomes and planning processes for different morphologies of city-regions in Anhui Province.

Meanwhile, another noteworthy issue is that the city-region as a planning imaginary is not a one-time product but an ongoing process. This point is reflected in the constant changes in the spatial boundaries and relations of certain city-regions in different plans. For example, Li and Jonas (2019) find that the boundaries of the YRD vary between the two plans promulgated by the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) in 2010 and 2016 respectively (see Figure 3.2). The YRD delineated by the former plan covers the whole territories of Shanghai City, Zhejiang Province and Jiangsu Province, while the latter plan only contains the territories of 18

administrative cities included in these three province-level units, and additional eight administrative cities in the newly-included Anhui Province. In fact, the planning area of the YRD has been further broadened in *the Outline of the Regional Integrated Development Plan for the Yangtze River Delta (Changjiang sanjiaozhou quyu yitihua fazhan guihua gangyao)*, published by the State Council in December 2019. In this new plan, all territories of the four province-level units mentioned above are included in the YRD.

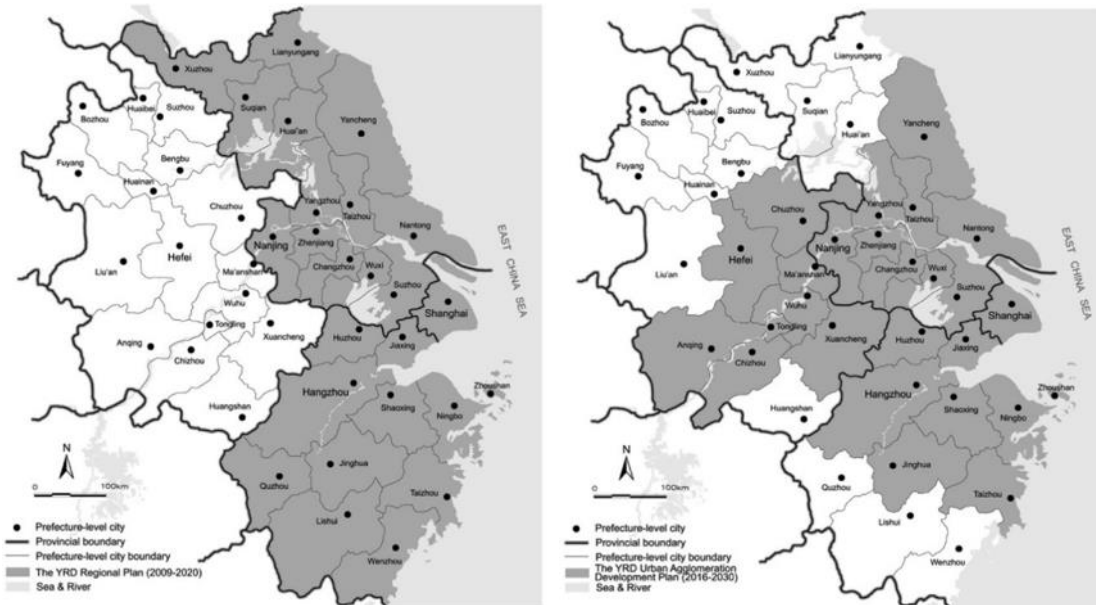


Figure 3.2 Different boundaries of the YRD in the city-regional plans of the NDRC

Source: Li and Jonas (2019, p.76).

We can find from this case that the research area of this thesis (Anhui Province) has been viewed as a part of a Chinese super mega city-region (the YRD) from this institutional perspective which is embodied in texts and graphics in state policies. This sparked my interest in exploring the dynamics driving the changing position of Anhui Province in the state spatial selectivity of contemporary China, and the relationship of this dynamic to state-led city-region building in Anhui Province (see Chapter 5).

In addition to boundary delineation, Harrison and Gu (2019) also find changing spatial relations in planning city-regions in China. More specifically, they contend that planning imaginaries of mega-city regions, shown in the maps contained in four plans published by central ministries from 2005 to 2016, reflect characteristics which are ‘less hierarchical’ (p.8) and ‘much more balanced’ (p.9). This is evident not only in a narrowing of the size gaps between different mega-city regions, but also in the inclusion of smaller cities, which ‘are not globally-nationally-regionally important’ (p.9), into the mapping of mega-city regions. As a step to refine the conceptualisation of city-regions and to look into the economic and political attributes presented in the discursive imaginaries of city-regions, two of the directions for this thesis set in Chapter 2 (the similar focuses on boundary and spatial relations involved in the planning imaginaries of city-regions in

Anhui Province) will be stressed in Chapters 6 and 7. Further, these chapters will provide more in-depth analysis of the power relations driving their formations and changes.

Beyond the planning imaginaries, the Chinese city-region is also conceptualised as a new scale of state spatial regulation (Li and Wu, 2013; Wu, 2016; Sun and Chan, 2017) and a new territorial form of cross-boundary governance on socioeconomic issues (Shen, 2004; Luo and Shen, 2009; Yang and Li, 2013; Ye, 2014; Li et al., 2015; Li and Wu, 2018; Zhang and Sun, 2019). In the scalar dimension, the city-region is first deemed as a space, selected by the central state or provincial government, in which to centralise power and articulate authority on local development, while responding to the risks caused by excessive competition and the fragmentation of governance (Wu, 2016). This scale can be fixed and presented in state spatial configuration in a very ‘solid’ way, such as through the establishment of prefecture-level cities since the 1980s. Otherwise, it can also be confirmed through relatively flexible and ‘soft’ channels, for instance, making a central ministry take the lead on planning for the city-region, e.g., the YRD (Li and Wu, 2013). Meanwhile, based on the centralisation of state power, Sun and Chan (2017) find that capital-labour relationships are also considered and intervened in by the state on a city-regional scale (e.g., the PRD in their study), which further implies a potential to fix the city-region as an appropriate scale in socioeconomic configurations.

In the territorial dimension, the city-region is understood as a new platform to carry the governance of socioeconomic issues which spread across existing jurisdictional boundaries. In other words, it can be viewed as the territorial projection of institutional relations stretching over more than one administrative city. These relations are usually consolidated between state actors in the form of new organisations and institutional frameworks, which can be relatively ad hoc for a specific issue, such as the making and implementation of city-regional plans, as in Xu (2008) and Ye (2014a)’s observations in the PRD. Otherwise, they can also be more long-term partnerships focusing on collaborative governance on broader socioeconomic issues, for example, the Forum for the Coordination of the Urban Economy of the Yangtze River Delta Region (Luo and Shen, 2009). More detailed structures of city-regional institutions in China and the politics involved in their operation will be further reviewed in Section 3.5. Further, the scalar and territorial relations involved in producing the planning imaginaries of city-regions, and converting them into material outcomes in Anhui, will be investigated in Chapters 6 and 7 as a response to all three research directions identified in Chapter 2. This investigation will be enriched by a consideration of actors beyond the government in shaping the scalar and territorial dimensions of city-regions, such as the involvement of think tanks and enterprises, and by uncovering more complex power structures of the Chinese state system including but not limited to scalar and

territorial configurations, such as concerns about interdepartmental or inter-ministry relations in building city-regions.

3.2.1.4 Looking into the intersection between economic, territorial, and institutional city-regions

In fact, these three perspectives on the conceptualisation of Chinese city-regions are not mutually exclusive. The territorial-administrative definition of city-regions implies a more stable and solid form of city-region which can be understood from an institutional perspective. Meanwhile, the functional-economic conceptualisation of city-regions indeed lays some of the foundations for interpreting why territorial-administrative and institutional city-regions are, or can be, formed in contemporary China. A mixture of these definitions of city-region are used in many studies which blur the boundaries of the different perspectives. For instance, although some literature focuses on how city-regions are shaped or structured by functional-economic forces, the research area they name as a ‘city-region’ is delineated according to state policies (Zhang and Kloosterman, 2016; Zhao et al., 2017b; Cheng and LeGates, 2018).

Let us examine a specific case: Zhao et al. (2017b) use the linkages between the headquarters of corporations and their branches as an indicator to measure different levels of polycentricity in Chinese mega-city regions. In this sense, their research seems to understand Chinese city-regions from a more functional-economic perspective. However, the delineation of mega-city regions in their article is not based on any geo-economic approach but uses the planning areas of the YRD and the PRD as defined in state policies. This means that their interpretation of city-regions as a functional-economic unit inevitably involves planning imaginaries, which is justified by the researchers on the basis that administrative geographies and planning realities are usually preconditions for the development of a spatial economy in the Chinese context (Zhao et al., 2017b).

In turn, those city-regions which are interpreted from different perspectives do indeed prove to have similarities in their spatial projections. For example, based on a case study in the PRD, Zhang et al. (2020) examine a high positive correlation between the functional networks formed by the flows of capital and population, and the institutional networks built upon inter-city cooperation between state agencies, which refers to these two networks sharing similar spatial areas and morphologies. According to Davoudi and Brooks (2020)’s observations in England, as reviewed in Chapter 2, this overlap or consistency between the functional-economic city-region and the institutional city-region is probably an outcome of knowledge production with the involvement of academics, technicians, and government bureaucrats. The state inherits the functional-economic definition of city-regions produced by the intellectual community, and selectively

consolidates it into state policies and institutions. But this process, as Harrison (2010) asserted, is inevitably disrupted or influenced by the territorial politics of the state, and leads to the fact that the presentation of institutional city-regions does not fully follow functional-economic rationalities.

These interpretations provide a good entry point to investigating how institutional city-regions are presented and shaped in contemporary China, with the entanglement of functional-economic rationalities, the mechanisms of knowledge production, and territorial politics. In turn, these interpretations of the mechanisms behind building institutional city-regions, derived from observations in Western countries, will also be enriched by looking into Chinese practices. This thesis will focus on this issue – the conceptualisation and concretisation of institutional city-regions in contemporary China and their relations to both functional-economic ideas and territorial-administrative configurations – which will be illustrated in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 through an empirical investigation of Anhui Province.

3.2.2 The naming of institutional city-regions by the state in contemporary China: the urban cluster and the metropolitan ring

As introduced in Section 3.2.1, the institutional city-region in contemporary China is the focus of this thesis, accompanied by looking into how its formation and development are influenced by functional-economic and political-administrative rationalities. However, due to linguistic barriers, a precondition of this research is to find out the Chinese equivalent of the English term ‘city-region’. Given the great involvement of the state in building institutional city-regions in contemporary China, as reviewed above, this section introduces two names for city-regions found in the discourse of Chinese state policy: *chengshi qun* (translated as ‘urban cluster’ in this thesis) and *dushi quan* (translated as ‘metropolitan ring’ in this thesis). These terms have been widely presented and spread through various plans, policies, initiatives, and other programmes led by the state since the 2000s.

Literally speaking, *chengshi qun* consists of two Chinese terms – *chengshi* (城市) and *qun* (群) – where *chengshi* means city while *qun* refers to a group, crowd, cluster, or similar concept. Following these literal meanings, *chengshi qun* is usually translated into English with terms like ‘urban cluster’ (Wu, 2016) and ‘urban agglomeration’ (Fang, 2014; Fang and Yu, 2017). In this thesis, *chengshi qun* is translated as an urban cluster. The first appearance of the urban cluster as a proper noun in the policy of the central state can be dated back to the *Outline of the 11th Five-Year Plan for the National Economic and Social Development of the People’s Republic of China (PRC)* (*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo guomin jingji he shehui fazhan di shiyi ge wunian guihua gangyao*) which was published in 2006.

The urban cluster should be taken as the main spatial form to promote urbanisation...Areas that meet the conditions for the development of an urban cluster should strengthen overall planning, take megacities and large cities as the leaders, play the role of core cities, and form a number of new urban clusters with less land, more employment, strong capacity in agglomerating elements, and reasonable distribution of population.(State Council, 2006, 'Chapter 21', paragraphs 5, 7)

In this plan, the urban clusters replace single cities to become new spatial units for expanding and upgrading state-led urbanisation. Although there is no clear definition of the urban cluster in this plan, it is not hard to observe that the urban cluster, as a policy term, contains more than one mega or large city in its area as a core to lead regional development, stresses the agglomeration of functional-economic elements in its area, and advocates associated linkages between cities (State Council, 2006). In this sense, the morphology of the urban cluster is analogous to a 'polycentric mega-city region' (Hall and Pain, 2006, p.1). Three super mega city-regions – the BTH, the YRD, and the PRD – which are widely recognised from a functional-economic perspective (see Section 3.2.1), are identified in this plan as having already formed urban clusters.

Following this plan, the urban cluster has been highlighted frequently in a series of national plans with more specific mapping of its area and different positionings. For example, in the *Plan for the National Urban System (2006-2020)*, there are 17 urban clusters identified as engines to lead regional development in China (Ministry of Construction, 2010). In Figure 3.3, the three big red circles are 'important urban clusters', which refers to the three super mega city-regions mentioned above, while the other 14 smaller orange circles are designated as 'urban clusters'. The red and green dots are core cities at national and regional levels, and the red and purple dotted lines refer to 'belts' and 'corridors', relying on transport infrastructure to link the urban clusters and core cities. Meanwhile, this plan especially accentuates the cultivation of urban clusters and core cities in Central China – one of the macro-economic regions identified in state policies (see Section 3.3), and including Anhui Province (Ministry of Construction, 2010). The provincial capital of Anhui – Hefei City – is identified as a regional core city in this plan and incorporated into the YRD Key Urban Cluster.

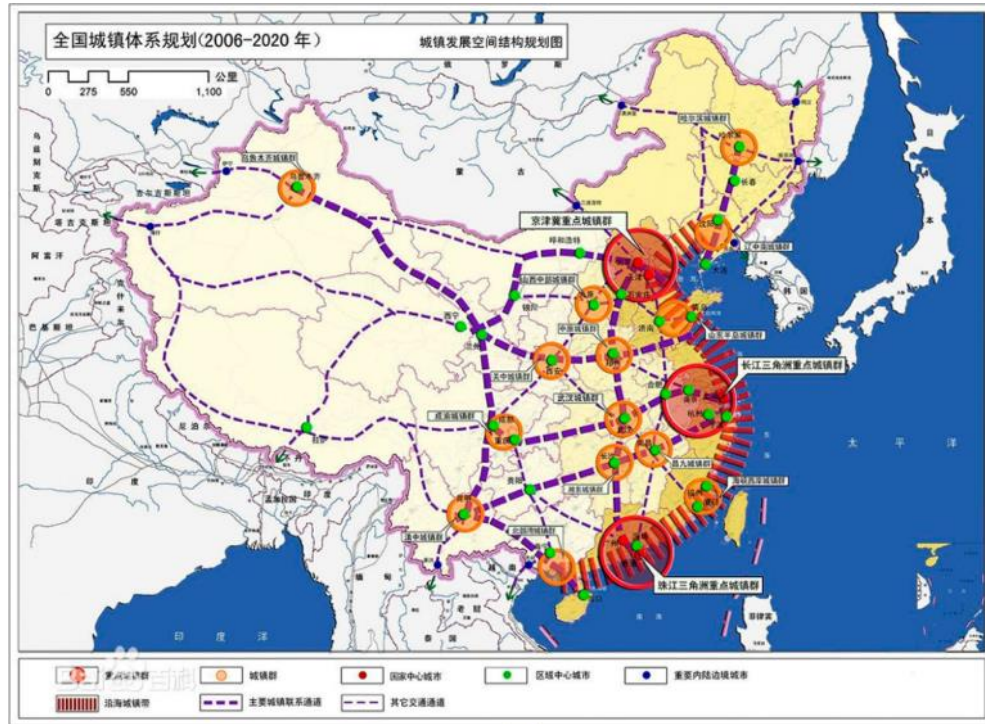


Figure 3.3 Urban clusters in the Plan for the National Urban System (2006-2020)

Source: Harrison and Gu (2019, p.6).

The numbers, locations, areas, and positions of these urban clusters have been constantly changing in national plans since then, which confirms that institutional city-region building in contemporary China is indeed a dynamic process. In the *Outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan for the National Economic and Social Development of the PRC and the Long-term Goals for 2035* (*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo guominjJingji he shehui fazhan di shisi ge wunian guihua gangyao*), there are 19 urban clusters identified, without clear distinction between ‘key’ and ‘general’ (see Figure 3.4). In this plan, the whole area of Anhui Province is incorporated into the YRD urban cluster. It is noteworthy that, in addition to these national plans, ‘urban cluster’ as a policy term also frequently occurs in the plans promulgated by provincial and local governments. For instance, the *Outline of the 11th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the Urban Cluster along the River* (*Yanjiang chengshi qun ‘shiyi wu’ jingji shehui fazhan guihua gangyao*) was published by the Anhui provincial government in 2006 to promote city-centred regional development in the territory of Anhui Province and along the Yangtze River. This urban cluster, the *Urban Cluster along the (Yangtze) River* in Anhui Province, can be viewed as a predecessor to the Wanjiang City Belt - the official name of an urban cluster in Anhui identified in both national and provincial plans since 2010 and will be introduced in Chapter 4 as one of the empirical cases for this study.

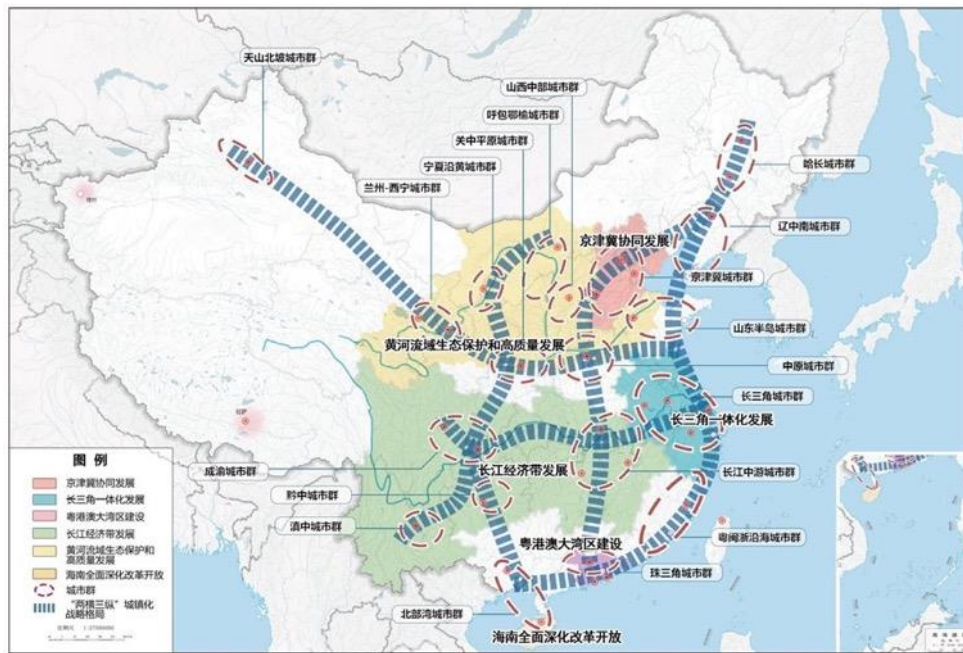


Figure 3.4 Urban clusters in the National 14th Five-Year Plan

Source: *Outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan for the National Economic and Social Development of the PRC and the Long-term Goals for 2035* (State Council, 2021).

Beyond the urban cluster, another widely used term to represent institutional city-regions in contemporary China is *dushi quan* (都市圈). In Chinese, *dushi* means metropolis while *quan* means ring, circle, or sphere, so *dushi quan* is translated as metropolitan ring in this thesis. In contrast with the urban cluster, the metropolitan ring refers to a more monocentric morphology of mega-city region in which the leading roles of a (super) mega city or a large city in regional development is emphasised. The first proposal for a metropolitan ring in the national plan was in the *National Plan for New Urbanisation (2014-2020)* (*Guojian xinxing chengzhenhua guihua 2014-2020*), published by the State Council in March 2014. In this plan, building the metropolitan ring was deemed a strategy to enhance the influence of core cities, especially super mega cities, on regional development, stressing the linkages of industries, infrastructure, public services, and commuting between the core city and its hinterland (State Council, 2014).

In 2019, a clear definition of the metropolitan ring was given by the NDRC in the *Guiding Opinion on Cultivating and Developing a Modern Metropolitan Ring* (*Guanyu peiyu he fazhan xiandaihua dushiquan de zhidao yijian*):

The metropolitan ring is a spatial form of urbanisation inside the urban cluster; it is centred on a super mega city or mega city or a large city with a strong leading role, and has a basic spatial scope measured by one-hour commuting distance. (NDRC, 2019, p.1)

This definition describes two essential components of the metropolitan ring: a core city with a population over one million, and a spatial scope limited by a one-hour commuting time centred on the city. The monocentric characteristic is not hard to infer from this definition. However, in the policy practices of localities, especially those prior to the proposal of this definition, the usage of the metropolitan ring is more causal. Generally speaking, a delineated metropolitan ring usually includes several administrative cities. In some cases, following the definition above, this metropolitan ring contains a city whose population size and functional-economic level are much bigger or higher than other member cities, such as the Nanjing Metropolitan Ring (Luo et al., 2010). But in other cases, several core cities may coexist with similar (or fewer gaps in) population sizes and functional-economic levels, for instance, the Su(zhou)-(Wu)Xi-Chang(zhou) Metropolitan Ring (Luo and Shen, 2008), the Chang(sha)-Zhu(zhou)-(Xiang)Tan Metropolitan Ring (Dai et al., 2014), and the Shan(tou)-Chao(zhou)-Jie(yang) Metropolitan Ring (Li et al., 2015). This thesis focuses on the first type of metropolitan ring - a more monocentric morphology – while the second type to some extent overlaps with the polycentric urban cluster. The Hefei Metropolitan Ring in Anhui Province, as another empirical case, will be investigated in comparison with the Wanjiang City Belt to show in what context and through what strategies institutional city-regions with different morphologies are concretised in contemporary China. More specific reasons for choosing these two cases will be illustrated in Chapter 4.

In summary, Section 3.2 has illustrated how, in the context of contemporary China, city-regions are conceptualised in academic literature and named by policy discourse. Three perspectives on conceptualising Chinese city-regions – functional-economic, territorial-jurisdictional, and institutional-political – have been reviewed, highlighting the necessity and value of looking into the intersections between the three perspectives. Further, two main types of city-regions named by the Chinese state in national and local plans since mid-2000s – the urban cluster and the metropolitan ring – have been introduced, which has provided a terminological basis for investigating city-regions in contemporary China from an institutional perspective. On this basis, Section 3.2 has clarified the conceptual focus of this thesis on institutional city-regions, which are mainly presented through planning imaginaries and institutional frameworks. In particular, this thesis will accentuate the relationships between functional-economic rationalities, political-administrative configurations, and mechanisms of knowledge production in shaping the planning imaginaries and institutional frameworks of the urban cluster and the metropolitan ring in contemporary China.

3.3 The functional-economic context for building institutional city-regions in China

This section introduces three important functional-economic background elements that have been preconditions for the emergence and the evolution of institutional city-regions in China, named

after urban clusters and metropolitan rings, since the 2000s. The uneven development of regional economies is presented first (Section 3.3.1), and this is followed by further background around the growth and transformation of urban economies nationwide (Section 3.3.2). Section 3.3.3 introduces the conditions for and trends of industrial relocation, influenced by the two background elements mentioned above and further accelerated by the clash of the global financial crisis. This contextual information is essential to understanding the functional-economic rationalities involved in the motives and strategies of the Chinese state for building institutional city-regions, which will be initially reviewed in Section 3.5 and further explored through the empirical investigation of Anhui in Chapters 5 to 7.

3.3.1 Uneven development of Chinese regional economies

In order to use foreign capital to promote the economic growth of China, the open-door policy was initiated by the central state in 1978, granting privileges to some cities and regions in coastal China so that they could develop an export-oriented economy in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1980, three cities in Guangdong Province (Shenzhen, Zhuhai, and Shantou) and one city in Fujian Province (Xiamen) were designated as the first batch of Special Economic Zones, followed by the announcement of 14 cities as Coastal Open Cities in 1984, and the establishment of Hainan Special Economic Zone in 1988 and Pudong New Area in 1992. Meanwhile, in 1985, the YRD, the PRD, and the Southern Fujian Delta were recognised by the central state as Coastal Economic Open Regions. During this period, urban and industrial infrastructure was vigorously constructed in these cities and regions, accompanied by the reform of economic institutions and the implementation of a series of preferential policies to promote the development of export-oriented manufacturing.

This spatial selectivity of the central state has promoted the rapid economic development of coastal China and created a long-term disparity between the coastal and inland areas. For example, by analysing data of gross domestic product (GDP) and industry output, Fujita and Hu (2001) discovered that, on the one hand, there was an increasing inequality in income distribution between coastal provinces and inland provinces between 1983 and 1994, and especially after 1990. The gap reached its peak in 1994, when per capita GDP in the coastal region was double its counterpart in the inland region (Fujita and Hu, 2001). In this study, the coastal region means twelve coastal provinces with sea harbours while the other 18 provinces are classified into the inland region (Fujita and Hu, 2001) (see Figure 3.5).³

³ Although Beijing City does not have a harbour, it was also included in the coastal provinces in this study because it is next to the port city of Tianjin (Fujita and Hu, 2001).

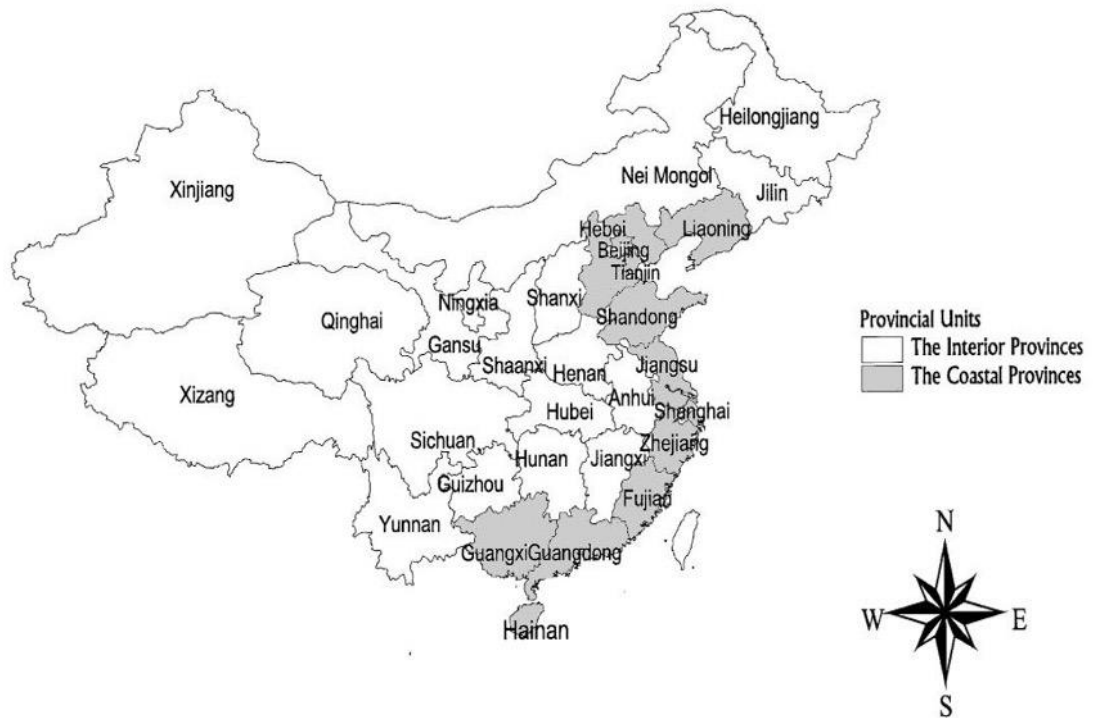


Figure 3.5 Coastal and inland regions in China

Source: Compiled based on Map 1 in Fujita and Hu (2001, p.6).

On the other hand, Fujita and Hu (2001) found that industrial production in China also showed a trend of agglomeration in the coastal region from the 1980s to 2000, and led to a disparity between the coastal and inland regions around the output of the secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy. Fujita and Hu blame this disparity on the intensified influence of globalisation and economic liberalisation. The former is measured by the uneven distribution of exports and foreign direct investment (FDI) which was concentrated on the coastal region. The latter is demonstrated by the faster shrinkage of the share of state-owned enterprises in industrial gross output value, and the rapid growth of township and village enterprises in coastal provinces, compared with their counterparts in the inland region (Fujita and Hu, 2001).

This uneven development of regional economies is also reflected in the delineation of and differentiated development guidance on macro-economic regions by the central state since the mid-1980s. Three macro-economic regions - the Eastern Coastal Region, the Central Region, and the Western Region (Figure 3.6a) - were named in *the Outline of the 7th Five-Year Plan for the National Economic and Social Development of the PRC* (*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo guomin jingji he shehui fazhan di qi ge wunian jihua*):

During the '7th Five-Year Plan' period and even in the 1990s, it is necessary to accelerate the development of the Eastern Coastal Region, focus on the construction of energy and raw materials in the Central Region, and actively prepare for the development of the Western Region. The development of the

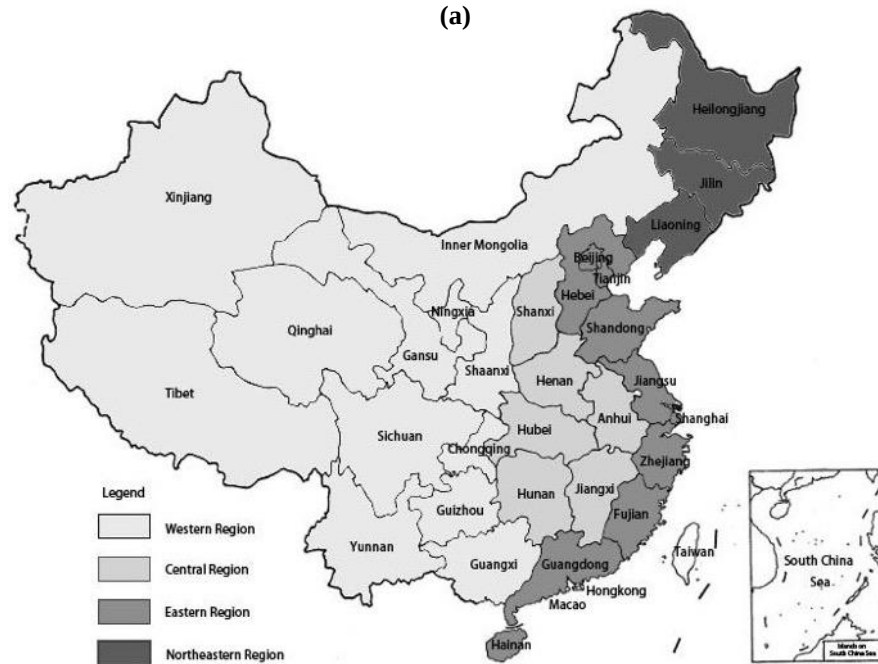
Eastern Coastal Region should be well combined with the development of the Central and Western Regions, so as to support and promote each other. (State Council, 1986, 'Regional Layout and Regional Economic Development Policies', paragraph 1).

These macro-economic regions are not administrative units like provinces. Instead, they are mainly statistical and economic units designed by the central state to measure the status of economic development and implement differentiated development policies at a supra-provincial scale. In this plan, it was planned for the Eastern Coastal Region to raise its level of industrialisation and vigorously develop foreign trade; the Central Region was regarded as a base for industrial energy and raw materials; and the Western Region was encouraged to focus more on agriculture and livestock farming (State Council, 1986). These positionings of each macro-economic region were not only consistent with the state spatial selectivity introduced above involving priority to the coastal region, but also implied that the inland region was regarded as the provider of resources for the urbanisation and industrialisation of the coastal region. This state-guided division and coordination of labour across macro-economic regions is critical for understanding the agenda-setting behind the institutional city-regions in inland provinces such as Anhui Province which will be illustrated in Chapter 5.

In fact, the economic disparity between these three macro-economic regions, indicated by per capita GDP, constantly expanded through the 1980s and 1990s, during which time the Eastern Coastal Region showed the most rapid economic growth and greatest wealth accumulation (Fan and Sun, 2008). However, this disparity has slowly narrowed due to the accelerated growth of the other two macro-economic regions, especially the Central Region, from the start of the new millennium (Fan and Sun, 2008; Peng et al., 2018). It is also in this context that a series of regional programmes dedicated to the development of the inland region were initiated by the central state, such as the Western Development (1999-present), the Rise of Central China (2004-present) and the Revitalisation of the Old Northeast Industrial Bases (2002-present). These programmes were all highlighted in the *Outline of the 11th Five-Year Plan for the National Economic and Social Development of the PRC* as strategies to promote coordinated development between the macro-economic regions. The North-eastern Region was also named in this national plan as a fourth macro-economic region; it includes a province previously in the Eastern Coastal Region and two provinces previously in the Central Region (Figure 3.6b).



(a)



(b)

Figure 3.6 Macro-economic regions in China

Source: Compiled by the author.

It is not hard to notice that these conditions of uneven development of regional economies in post-reform China since 1978 have been largely influenced by state spatial selectivity, and have in turn affected the new round of spatial policies since the 2000s. As a province in the Central Region and next to the coastal provinces, Anhui Province has undoubtedly become an important entry point for the central state to restructure the regional economies towards more balanced development. This special location in the map of Chinese regional economies provided an important context for the agenda-setting behind building an urban cluster and metropolitan ring

in Anhui Province since the 2000s (see Chapter 5), and further influenced the formation of associated planning imaginaries (see Chapter 6) and institutional practices (see Chapter 7).

3.3.2 Growth and transformation of Chinese urban economies

The growth and transformation of urban economies is the second functional-economic context that is important to the emergence and development of institutional city-regions in China. Yeh and Chen (2020) contend that Chinese economic transition since 1978 can be divided into three stages ‘delimited by major changes of state policies’ (p.644), which are highly relevant to the spatial transformation of urbanisation from cities to city-regions, as understood from a functional-economic perspective.

The first stage features rural industrialisation from 1978 to 1990 under the influence of economic reforms and the open-door policy. This stage promoted the industrial development of rural areas, especially in the coastal region, and accelerated their associated urbanisation (Yeh and Chen, 2020). The second stage is the rapid urban expansion with a land-centred growth model during the 1990s, which was affected by state policies around the marketisation of urban land, the commodification of housing, and the rescaling of state power and responsibilities. In 1988 the trading of use rights of urban land and housing built on urban land was introduced. Subsequently, the tax-sharing system introduced in 1994 has reduced the tax revenue of local governments and made the transaction fees from selling urban land use rights a major source of government income. In this context, the expansion of urbanised areas has been strongly promoted by local governments, leading to the massive development of suburban areas such as the construction of development zones and industrial parks, and the rise of the real estate industry (Xu, 2008; Zhen et al., 2010; Yeh and Chen, 2020). These conditions have led to the emergence and rapid development of city-regional economies, mainly within the territory of an administrative city-region, and usually at provincial and prefectural levels, as introduced in Section 3.2.1.

The third stage is the emphasis since 2000 on tertiary industry in urban economies while addressing inter-city connectivity (Yeh and Chen, 2020). The development of tertiary industry has been strongly promoted by state policies. A large number of service-sector businesses have swarmed into urban spaces both in central and peripheral areas, and have further accelerated the formation of inter-city networks based on flows of ‘producer services, knowledge exchange and business activities’ (Yeh and Chen, 2020, p.647). As reviewed in Section 3.2.1, the strand of literature stressing a relational understanding of Chinese city-regions from the functional-economic perspective is specifically developed upon this focus on inter-city networks (Zhang and Kloosterman, 2016; Zhao et al., 2017a; Cheng and LeGates, 2018; Zhang et al., 2018). In this

sense, the development of city-centred regional economies in China has further evolved and covered the territories of multiple administrative cities.

This transition of urban economies in post-reform China not only lays a functional-economic foundation for understanding why institutional city-regions, in the morphology of mega-city regions, i.e., urban clusters and metropolitan rings, have been proposed in Anhui Province since the mid-2000s (see Chapter 5 for details). It also implies that the building of these institutional city-regions must deal with both the functional-economic relationships between cities and the organising of a city-centred regional economy within each administrative city. This characteristic is particularly important for the institutional settings in terms of converting planning visions of the development of mega-city regions into material outcomes grounded in local jurisdictions, an idea which will be presented in detail in Chapter 7.

3.3.3 Industrial restructuring accelerated by the global financial crisis

The third functional-economic background element that has been a precondition for the building of institutional city-regions in China is the nationwide industrial restructuring which has taken place since the 2000s. The onset of the global financial crisis in 2007-2008 accelerated the upgrading and relocation of export-oriented and labour-intensive industries, with considerable effects on both the coastal region and inland region (Zhu and Pickles, 2014; Yang, 2016). As introduced in Section 3.3.1, the open-door policy and associated state spatial selectivity contributed to the involvement of China in the global economy in the 1980s and 1990s, which was further accelerated after China's entry into the World Trade Organization in 2001. This condition has promoted the rise of China as a 'world factory', featuring the rapid growth of export-oriented and labour-intensive industries first emerging from the coastal region (Fujita and Hu, 2001; Yang, 2009, 2016).

However, this model of industrial development in coastal China has reached its limits, including but not limited to a shortage of necessary resources for industrial production and expansion such as land, water, and electricity, increased costs of raw material and labour, the appreciation of the Chinese currency, among other factors, since the 2000s (Zhu and Pickles, 2014). Meanwhile, the influence of the global financial crisis in 2008 accelerated a shift in the markets for final products from the US and Western Europe to emerging economies, and also led these emerging economies, such as countries in Southeast Asia, to become the new production centres of transnational corporations (O'Neill, 2011; Yang, 2016). These new production centres are deemed to have 'relatively low-wage workers, highly capable export-oriented manufacturers, abundant raw material, and sizeable domestic markets' (Yang, 2016, p.2) and affected the role of coastal China as a 'world factory'.

In this context, a restructuring of Chinese industrial geographies has occurred since the 2000s, and especially after the global financial crisis. On the one hand, industries in the coastal region have started to be upgraded to support higher-value activities such as expanding research and development, and the accelerated development of high-tech industries (Zhu and Pickles, 2014). On the other hand, low-end production, especially the labour-intensive manufacturing originally located in coastal China, has started to relocate towards lower-cost and better-resourced locations (Yang, 2009, 2016; Zhu and Pickles, 2014; Wei, 2015).

This industrial relocation has occurred both across national borders and internally in China, with the participation of both transnational corporations and Chinese enterprises. From a transnational perspective, Yang (2016) finds that since 2008 there has been a considerable relocation of labour-intensive manufacturing firms from coastal China to other countries in Southeast Asia, while a similar trend is also examined relating to Chinese apparel enterprises which had set up over a thousand factories in Southeast and South Asia by 2009 (Zhu and Pickles, 2014). Meanwhile, industrial relocation has also started within the national borders of China, with a trend of moving from coastal areas to inland areas. Some labour-intensive industries, such as the low-end manufacturing and apparel industries, are relocating from the Eastern Coastal Region to the Central Region (He and Wang, 2012), the Western Region (Zhu and Pickles, 2014) and to more inland cities within coastal provinces (Zhu and Pickles, 2014).

These trends of industrial restructuring constitute an important basis for understanding the rationales behind the building of institutional city-regions in inland China since the late 2000s, with consideration of the inland areas' functional-economic relations to coastal areas. Chapter 5 will illustrate how promoting industrial relocation across macro-economic regions was finally placed on the policy agenda of the central state in the second half of the 2000s, and directly influenced the initiation of the city-region building programme in Anhui Province.

In summary, Section 3.3 has given a functional-economic context for understanding the emergence and development of institutional city-regions in contemporary China since the 2000s. This background includes the widespread influence of globalisation, marketisation, and state spatial selectivity on the development of regional and urban economies in post-reform China, and depicts a picture of Chinese economic geography including regional disparity, the evolution of urban economies, and industrial restructuring. It has laid a basis for observing how functional-economic rationalities have influenced the conceptualisation and concretisation of the institutional city-regions in Anhui Province over the last two decades.

3.4 The territorial-administrative basis for building institutional city-regions in China

This section briefly introduces two characteristics of the Chinese state territorial system for the provision of a territorial-administrative basis for an understanding of the construction of institutional city-regions since the mid-2000s. The first is the multi-scalar organisation of administrative divisions (Section 3.4.1), and the second is a special structure – the *tiao* and *kuai* – developed for interpreting central-local and inter-sector relationships in the operation of the state territorial system (Section 3.4.2). These characteristics are essential to a decoding of the power relations within or affiliated to the state system in building institutional city-regions in China, which will be initially reviewed in Section 3.5 and further investigated through the case study of Anhui Province in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

3.4.1 The multi-scalar organisation of administrative divisions

The PRC has a centralised state system whereby the constitution gives sovereign power to the central government led by the Communist Party of China (CPC), while multi-tier local governments share limited autonomy while obeying the general commands and control of upper-level authorities (Jing et al., 2016). Relying on this principle, each local government has a corresponding administrative territory as a geographical distribution of state power. These are mutually exclusive in a horizontal dimension but overlap at a vertical scale.

The formation of this state territorial system is built upon a legacy inherited from the historic empires in China since the early period of feudal society and which has experienced persistent evolution during the history of the PRC. As Zhou (2005) contends, China as a unitary authority with strong centralised power and multi-tier administrative territories first emerged during the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BCE), and had shown a degree of continuity for over 2,000 years before the foundation of the PRC. During this long history, the tiers, areas, and names of the administrative divisions constantly changed, serving the needs of the central power for governing subnational territories and the associated socioeconomic issues (Liu et al., 1999; Zhou, 2005).

These changing administrative divisions can generally be classified into three levels according to their relationships with central power (Zhou, 2005). The lowest level was the ‘county-level administrative division’ (*xianji zhengqu*), which was not only farthest from central governance and official appointments, but also the most stable in terms of spatial areas during the historical transformation. The highest level was the ‘high-level administrative division’ (*gaoceng zhengqu*), which was closest to central power but could not supervise the lowest level administrative divisions directly. The intermediate level between these two was the ‘ruling-county administrative division’ (*tongxian zhengqu*). Each level could contain several forms and tiers of administrative unit in the same period: for instance, the intermediate level in the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) included different divisions, i.e., *Lu*, *Fu*, and *Zhou*, among which some *Fu* and *Zhou* were even

supervised by Lu. This three-level territorial system was the main structure of the administrative divisions in historic China, with very limited exceptions, mainly during and prior to the early Tang Dynasty.

In contemporary China, this three-level territorial system has basically been inherited and preserved, albeit with two specific adjustments: first, the intermediate level has been enriched by more varieties and tiers of administrative division, and second, counties have been replaced by town-level units positioned at the lowest level. Based on these adjustments, the state territorial system has generally been deemed to include four or five administrative tiers (Ma, 2005; Chung and Lam, 2010). Ma (2005) classified China's administrative divisions into four basic tiers – province level, prefecture level, county level, and township and town level – while Chung and Lam (2010) add the sub-provincial level between the province-level and prefecture-level to create a five-tier system (see Table 3.1).

Within this multi-tier system, the province-level units belong to the highest-level administrative division, and are supervised by the central state directly and empowered to direct intermediate-level administrative divisions such as sub-provincial units, prefecture-level units, and some county-level units. Like the conditions in the Yuan Dynasty mentioned above, there is also a vertical relationship between different tiers of units internal to the intermediate-level administrative division; most county-level units are supervised by sub-provincial or prefecture-level units. Correspondingly, as the lowest-level administrative division, township-level units are directed by county-level units in most cases, while in some special situations they are governed by prefecture-level units.

As reviewed in Section 3.2.1, institutional city-regions can include the jurisdiction of an administrative city or the territories of multiple administrative cities, which implies the diversity and complexity of the scalar configurations involved in the concept and embedded in its building process. This characteristic, on the one hand, corresponds to an ideal context identified in Chapter 2 for further investigation of state-led city-region building - a complex arrangement of state spatial configurations beyond the simple dichotomy of central and local. On the other hand, it also gives a basic background for understanding the power relations and institutional settings involved in building the urban cluster and metropolitan ring in Anhui Province, as shown in the empirical Chapters 5 to 7.

3.4.2 The tiao-kuai structure of the Chinese territorial administrative system

Building upon the multiple levels and varieties of administrative divisions introduced above, a set of organisational structure metaphorically abstracted as 'tiao-kuai' has been developed to interpret the state territorial system in contemporary China (Figure 3.7). 'Tiao' and 'kuai' can be

understood as two ‘agents’ of state power in the governance of subnational territories (Jing et al., 2016). *Tiao* means ‘strip’ in Chinese, and refers to the vertical relationship between functional departments distributed through multi-tier territorial units (Jing et al., 2016). For example, the NDRC is an agency of the State Council responsible for directing the implementation of the overall objectives and strategies for socioeconomic development. The NDRC has subordinate bureaus in subnational administrative units at (sub-) province-level, prefecture-level, and county-level. The relationship between each tier’s Development and Reform Commission (DRC) is referred to as *tiao*, where upper-tier DRCs are empowered to supervise the lower-tier DRCs’ departmental functions, and in turn, the lower-tier DRCs must follow the objectives and policies made by the upper-tier DRCs. Analogously, other functional departments, such as the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (MOHURD), the Ministry of Natural Resources and so on, are all configured by the ‘*tiao*’ system to ensure that the spirit, decrees, and policies of higher levels of government, especially the central state, can be implemented more uniformly and smoothly (Mertha, 2005).

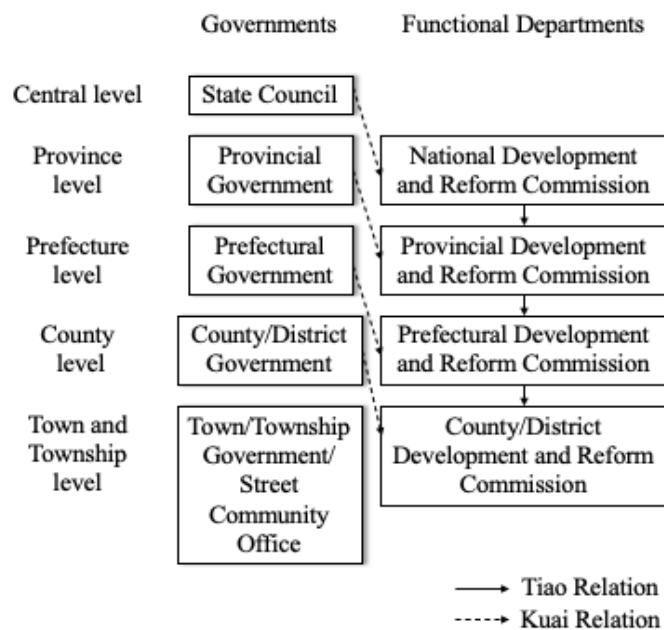


Figure 3.7 Example of a tiao-kuai structure in the Chinese state territorial system

Source: Compiled by the author based on Mertha (2005) and Jing et al. (2016).

By contrast, *kuai* means lump in Chinese, and usually refers to the power and liabilities of territorial governments, at each tier of their jurisdiction (Jing et al., 2016). For instance, a prefecture-level government can be considered a *kuai*, as it enjoys a certain degree of autonomy over general affairs within its prefectural territory although it still needs to obey the overall supervision of the corresponding province-level government and the State Council. Compared to the emphasis on central regulation within the *tiao* system, *kuai* is more geared towards mobilising local initiatives in jurisdictional governance.

‘Piece-’ or kuai-based leadership relations help local governments achieve a degree of independence from external influence, enhance sensitivity to local conditions in the policy process, and facilitate co-ordination between functional departments. (Mertha, 2005, p.797)

In addition, as Jiang and Waley (2020b) contend, kuai can also refer to ‘the horizontal relations that exist at each scale between state and party organisations and also all the other state institutions such as state-owned enterprises’ (p.343). In this sense, it is noteworthy that tiao and kuai relationships are not only involved in the organisational structures of party and government, but are also embedded in the configurations of state-owned enterprises and state-affiliated institutes. Accordingly, the roles of these quasi-state actors in building institutional city-regions should also be analysed in the context of the framework of the state territorial system. This feature will be illustrated in detail in the empirical chapters.

In theory, the tiao-kuai structure is designed to reflect a delicate balance of power and initiatives between the state actors (Mertha, 2005; Cartier, 2011; Jing et al., 2016). By adjusting specific rules within the dual system of tiao and kuai, the centralisation or decentralisation of specific powers, resources, and obligations is supposed to be achieved within the Chinese state territorial system (Mertha, 2005; Jing et al., 2016). However, in fact, the deficiencies of the tiao-kuai structure are also obvious and restrict its actual effectiveness. Zhou and Li (2009) assert that when the administrative leadership of tiao and kuai focus on a common subject (such as making city-regional plans with the involvement of both the NDRC and provincial governments), many problems can be caused, like the restriction of administrative efficiency, conflicts between same-tier functional departments and territorial governments over dealing with local affairs, and even overall tensions within the state system. Besides this, Jing et al. (2016) argue that the clash between tiao and kuai can also cause fragmentation of authorities and concentrate too much rule-making power at a personal level rather than an institutional level for solving contradictions internal to the institutional setting. These conditions are crucial context for dissecting the power relations in scalar, horizontal, and sectoral dimensions in the discursive and material construction of the urban cluster and the metropolitan ring in Anhui Province, and will be presented further in Chapters 6 and 7.

In summary, the two features of the Chinese state territorial system introduced in Section 3.4 – the multi-scalar administrative divisions and the organisational structure and endogenous conflicts of tiao-kuai structure – have not only shown the reasoning behind choosing contemporary China as a context to investigate the research directions of this thesis identified in Chapter 2. This section has also provided indispensable background for understanding the territorial-administrative patterns and structures that carried the state-led building of the urban

cluster and metropolitan ring in Anhui Province, which will be scrutinised in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

3.5 State-orchestrated building of institutional city-regions in China

Based on the contextual information about the functional-economic conditions and territorial-administrative configurations introduced in Sections 3.3 and 3.4, this section reviews the literature about the motives (Section 3.5.1), strategies (Section 3.5.2), and power relations (Section 3.5.3) involved in the state-orchestrated building of institutional city-regions in contemporary China. It provides academic coordinates for the following empirical chapters, by looking into which aspects of, and to what extent, the main research directions identified in Chapter 2 have already been discussed in the Chinese context. The research directions that are the concern of this section are mainly the roles of the state and the political mechanisms associated with the state in the production of city-regional imaginaries and city-regional institutions in contemporary China.

3.5.1 Motives of the Chinese state in building institutional city-regions

There are two angles in the literature for interpreting why the Chinese state has initiated or intervened in the construction of institutional city-regions in the post-reform period especially since 2000s. One angle concerns the motives of the state associated with crisis management, and contends that it is the crises induced by expanding regional inequality, agglomeration externalities of large cities, and fierce competition among local governments that drove the central and province-level governments to restructure regulation towards a city-regional scale (Xu, 2008; Luo and Shen, 2008; Xu and Yeh, 2011a; Li et al., 2014; Dai et al., 2014; Wu, 2016; Zou and Zhao, 2018; Li and Jonas, 2019). The other angle stresses the motives of the state related to attracting investment, and striving for redistribution by repositioning the city-regional scale as a focus of state governance. These motives are found mainly belonging to local governments at provincial and sub-provincial levels (Xu and Yeh, 2005; Wu and Zhang, 2007; Xu, 2008; Li et al., 2014; Ye, 2014).

The intersection of these two angles is a focus on the competition between localities. Due to a series of reforms of the economic institutions mentioned in Section 3.3.2, inter-locality competition for investment has intensified with a concomitant rise in local state entrepreneurialism since the 1990s (Xu and Yeh, 2005; Xu, 2008; Wu and Zhang, 2010; Wu, 2016). This trend has been accompanied by city-based accumulation strategies: urban land and housing are commodified according to the policies of the central state and manipulated by local governments to attract investors and create large amounts of income. The GDP of localities derived mainly from these strategies has, in turn, become a key indicator to evaluate the capacity of local officials to promote economic development, and is accordingly central to their promotion

(Xu and Yeh, 2005; Jiang and Waley, 2020b). These conditions further intensify the excessive competition between localities and have resulted in problems like ‘widespread imitation of sector developments, redundant construction, and environmental degradation’ (Li et al., 2014, p.134).

To confront these competition-induced problems, the building of institutional city-regions covering more than one local government’s jurisdiction has been initiated by upper-level governments at central and provincial levels since the 2000s, in the expectation that it would promote coordinated development between local territorial units with less competition (Luo and Shen, 2008; Ma, 2012; Dai et al., 2014; Wu, 2016). Nevertheless, on the other side, governments at the provincial and prefectural levels, have engaged in building institutional city-regions within or slightly bigger than their territory to enhance their competitiveness (Xu and Yeh, 2005; Luo et al., 2010; Ye, 2014; Wu, 2016). These motives create an intricate picture of institutional city-regions in China.

It is not hard to see a contradiction in these motives of the Chinese state for the building of institutional city-regions – a desire to rectify uneven development influenced by fierce competition coexists with the continued pursuit of local competitiveness. In this pair of contradictory motives, more interestingly, the position of province-level government is remarkable because it contains both strands of motive mediating the power interactions between the central and local scales. From this perspective, investigating the special roles of province-level governments in building institutional city-regions can provide a good access point for scrutinising the power clashes and balances in restructuring state spaces. This point will be highlighted in the empirical Chapters 5 to 7.

In addition to generating local competition, the state’s motives behind building institutional city-regions are also linked to the alleviation of problems caused by the oversized agglomerations of population and economic activities in large cities (Zou and Zhao, 2018) and the economic disparities both internal to and between macro-economic regions (Li et al., 2015; Li and Jonas, 2019). In the first case, building institutional city-regions is usually expected by the state to spatially restructure the functions of metropolises across a larger region, distributing some non-command-and-control functions to more peripheral areas. For the second motive, coordinated development between different territorial units is pursued through involvement in a common functional-economic network at a (super) mega-city regional scale. The second motivation is also observed in the agenda-setting behind the urban cluster and the metropolitan ring in Anhui Province which will be illustrated in Chapter 5.

3.5.2 Strategies initiated by the Chinese state in building institutional city-regions

This section reviews two main strategies widely applied in building institutional city-regions in China and closely associated with the main concerns of this thesis: the planning and the institutional settings. The first strategy is the strategic planning of city-regional space. As introduced in Section 3.2.1, this strategy has formed diverse imaginaries of city-regions in different morphologies varying from metropolitan areas to (super) mega-city regions within or across provincial boundaries (Wu and Zhang, 2007; Xu, 2008; Luo and Shen, 2008; Luo et al., 2010; Ma, 2012; Li and Wu, 2013; Wu, 2016). Compared to the spatial planning focusing on urban development and especially land use, the strategic planning of city-regions stresses more multidimensional coordination and cooperation between different territorial units around economic, social, environmental, and other issues. Sun and Chan (2017) contend that this kind of strategic development plan for city-regions creates a regulatory tool to distribute and share common responsibilities over multi-tier and multivarious territorial organisations. Meanwhile, with the rise of strategic planning at a mega-city regional scale, Xu (2008) argues that this strategy has become an important tool of government at the central and provincial levels to ‘reposition regions and reassert their functional importance in local and regional governance’ (p.181).

However, the efficiency of these city-regional plans in promoting coordination and integrated growth of diverse territorial units has been widely questioned (Xu, 2008; Luo and Shen, 2008; Luo et al., 2010; Li and Wu, 2013). Beyond the inter-locality competition mentioned in the last section, the deficiency in strategic planning of city-regions is also rooted in the contents of plans. Rather than involving compulsory regulations spread over urban plans, more guiding principles without enforcement are being included in these strategic plans (Li and Wu, 2013). In other words, although we cannot say that the plans are merely discursive and paper things, the effect of their implementation is hardly guaranteed in the absence of coercive force. The complex politics internal to the state territorial system and associated power conflicts are important causes of inefficiency in the strategic planning of city-regions, which is true throughout the making and implementation of plans (Xu and Yeh, 2011b; Li and Wu, 2013; Sun and Chan, 2017). This issue will be reviewed in Section 3.5.3 and further discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

The second strategy is to build institutions to promote inter-jurisdictional cooperation and coordination targeted at city-regional development (Luo and Shen, 2009; Ye, 2014; Dai et al., 2014; Li et al., 2015; Wu, 2016; Li and Wu, 2018). These institutions are usually formed by building cooperative relationships among existing, or newly established, government organisations with different jurisdictions, to work on a specific issue such as transportation, environment, tourism, and so on. Alternatively, an organisational framework including multi-tier and multi-sector government organisations from different territorial units can also be shaped to promote the comprehensive development of city-regions.

For example, in the case of the YRD, a three-level institutional framework has been gradually formed to make city-regional policies and supervise their implementation since the 2000s (Chen, 2016). The highest level consists of government and CPC leaders at a provincial level from Shanghai, Zhejiang, and Jiangsu, and is responsible for deciding the directions, overall strategic aims, and principles for cooperation. The intermediate level includes vice-provincial officials who are responsible for refining the strategic aims proposed by the highest level, and formulating overall aims for trans-jurisdictional cooperation. The lowest level contains officials from different sectors within provincial and prefecture-level governments, who take part in making specific plans and policies in order to meet the aims mentioned above. For the highest and intermediate levels, annual meetings are the main method of conducting their missions, while more frequent communication and contact occur during the work of the lowest level. However, analogous to the critiques of strategic planning, some scholars contend that city-regional institutions are also unable (or at least not competent in their attempts) to reduce the conflicts internal to state territorial system that arise in promoting cross-jurisdictional coordination, regardless of whether they are organised bottom-up, top-down, or in a multilevel framework (Luo and Shen, 2009; Li et al., 2015; Li and Wu, 2018). These viewpoints will be discussed in Section 3.5.3, and further investigated in Chapter 7.

Beyond the two strategies mentioned above, emerging literature has also looked at more specific state spatial strategies contributing to the building of institutional city-regions. For example, the roles of state-initiated new town projects in city-regional formation and development are discussed in recent studies (Shen and Wu, 2017; Zou and Zhao, 2018). Zou and Zhao (2018) link the initiation of the Xiong'an New Area immediately south of Beijing to the long-term motivations and strategies of the central state and province-level governments in coordinating development within the BTH. Shen and Wu (2017) assert that the new town projects initiated by the Shanghai city government in the suburbs of its jurisdiction, such as Songjiang New Town, are crucial state spatial strategies to expand the accumulation of capital for metropolitan development. In addition, the planning and governance of inter-jurisdictional infrastructure, especially transportation infrastructure in the PRD, have also been the subject of much investigation in recent studies (Li et al., 2014; Xu, 2017; Zhang et al., 2020a; 2020b).

This literature has shown the diversity of state spatial strategies for building institutional city-regions in China, with remarkable analysis and critique of the deficiencies and problems involved in specific projects. During this process, the intertwined relationships between state motives, spatial strategies, and complex power relations associated with the state territorial system are receiving increasing concern. This concern opens up the potential for a deeper understanding of the dilemmas and actions of the Chinese state as it attempts to strike a political balance in the

pursuit of socioeconomic benefits at the city-regional scale. This will be further investigated in Chapters 6 and 7.

3.5.3 Power relations involved in the state-orchestrated building of institutional city-regions

This section first reviews the literature about the interactions and conflicts between multi-tier and multivarious state actors in building institutional city-regions, especially those involved in the formation and implementation of the state spatial strategies mentioned in the last section. Then, although the issue is still under-studied in the literature, this section also reviews the limited involvement of actors affiliated to or external to the state system in building institutional city-regions, with specific attention to their interactions with state actors.

3.5.3.1 Collaboration and competition between state actors in building institutional city-regions

As introduced in previous sections, the Chinese state is not monolithic, but involves complex scalar, horizontal, and sectoral relations as shown in the building of institutional city-regions. Based on the contradictory motives of upper-level and lower-level governments mentioned in Chapter 3.5.1, it is not hard to imagine that conflicts are easily, even inevitably, caused when diverse state actors are involved in the making and implementation of common strategies for building city-regions, for example in city-regional planning (Luo and Shen, 2008; Xu, 2008; Luo et al., 2010; Li and Wu, 2013; Li et al., 2015; Xu, 2017; Zhang et al., 2020a). Luo et al. (2010) argue that, based on the case study of planning for the Nanjing Metropolitan Ring, both political and economic calculations from local governments, such as competition for investment or possible loss of administrative jurisdiction, can lead to uncooperative actions in plan implementation. This is the case despite the fact that the plan-making process refers more to the voluntary participation of all member jurisdictions in a bottom-up manner. Similar arguments are also asserted by Xu (2008), investigating the PRD Urban Cluster Coordinated Development Plan, in which an ‘unbalanced political representation’ (p.178) is found to be embodied in the planning process. Cities with higher administrative status are endowed with more important positions in the regional economy so that they are given, or have the chance to attract, more support from central and provincial-level governments to develop large projects. By contrast, the interests of some other localities are undermined, which leads them to be uncooperative with, or even to oppose or neglect, specific contents of the plan (Xu, 2008).

It is noteworthy that inter-state conflicts involved in city-regional planning not only exist between different levels of government, as mentioned above, but are also common between different sectors or within the tiao-kuai structure introduced in Section 3.4. For instance, the competition between the Ministry of Construction (or its successor, the MOHURD) and the NDRC over the

authority to compile city-regional plans is found in existing studies (Xu, 2008; Li and Wu, 2013). This competition creates contradictions within the strategic arrangement of some city-regions and has resulted in dilemmas for local governments in plan implementation. Furthermore, the negotiation between *tiao* and *kuai* also spreads across city-regional planning, especially between central ministries and provincial governments. Li and Wu (2013) question the capacity of central ministries, both the NDRC and the MOHURD, to deal with the problematic lobbying of local interests manipulated by provincial governments in making city-regional plans for the YRD. Zhang et al. (2020a) also find distinctive interests and abilities of the Ministry of Railway, the Guangdong provincial government, and the relevant city governments were involved in bargaining around the planning of railway infrastructure for the PRD.

Nevertheless, compared to the abundant discussion of contradictory motives and widespread tensions among state actors, limited attention has been given to the mechanisms produced by the Chinese state to deal with the contests and game-playing involved in building institutional city-regions. Although various coordinated institutions for building institutional city-regions have been introduced in literature, as illustrated in Section 3.5.2, the focus of studies is usually why and how these official institutions are formed and developed, and their weakness in promoting *de facto* cooperative development (Luo and Shen, 2009; Li et al., 2015; Li and Wu, 2018).

Thus, existing studies typically examine the *de jure* regional institutions formulated as formal state projects. However, this approach overlooks (i) whether there are informal institutional arrangements without official declaration being produced between state actors to push forward city-regional strategies; (ii) what political mechanisms or technologies are utilised (both officially and informally) to deal with the conflicts internal to the institutionalisation of Chinese city-regional construction. These issues will be further discussed in the empirical chapters of this thesis.

3.5.3.2 Interaction between actors within and beyond the state in building institutional city-regions

The roles of actors external to the state system in the building of institutional city-regions are seriously under-studied in the literature. In Jonas and Moisio (2018)'s framework of the geopolitics of city regionalism, urban planners, private consultants, and think tanks are all deemed crucial actors 'to promote the globalization of city-regions on behalf of the state' (p.365) in the context of the North Atlantic area. Although building institutional city-regions in contemporary China is widely recognised as a state-orchestrated process, that does not mean that actors external to the state system are completely excluded. In the empirical studies on the construction of networks of inter-city transportation infrastructure in the PRD, Li et al. (2014) examine the involvement of non-state actors such as foreign or private investors, and quasi-state actors such

as state-owned enterprises, e.g., Guangdong Guangfo Intercity Co Ltd, in the construction of railways and metro systems at a city-regional scale. Meanwhile, they also find close interactions between these actors and diverse state actors (especially the NDRC) and city governments, during this process. Similar involvement of business actors in building institutional city-regions is also found in developing megaprojects such as transport hubs and new towns at the periphery of Shanghai City (Shen and Wu, 2017; Jiang and Waley, 2018). In these cases, coalitions between state-owned companies and multiple levels of government have significantly steered the rapid development of land and real estate at the metropolitan periphery, and have contributed to capital accumulation at an expanded city-regional scale.

Based on this literature, if we want to deeply explore the power relations in the state-led building of institutional city-regions, there are three key angles of further investigation: firstly, what kinds of non-state or quasi-state actors are involved in the diverse state spatial strategies for building city-regions; secondly, whether these actors are incorporated in formal or informal institutions together with state actors; thirdly, how the participation of these non-state or quasi-state actors influences state spatial selectivity towards city-regions in contemporary China. These issues will be investigated in the empirical Chapters 5 to 7.

In summary, Section 3.5 has reviewed the diverse motives of the Chinese state for building institutional city-regions, stressing a pair of contradictory considerations between upper-level governments and lower-level governments. The province-level governments have been situated in a special position in this contradiction. Two main types of strategies led by the Chinese state to push city-regional building forward – strategic planning and regional institutions – have been introduced, with special consideration of distinctive actors and their power relations in the formation and implementation of the strategies. Beyond this, some other state spatial strategies discussed in recent literature, such as new town projects and inter-jurisdictional infrastructure, which have significant influence on the formation of the institutional city-regional have also been presented in this section with reviewing the roles of actors beyond or affiliated with the state in their development. This literature has provided a valuable basis for the empirical investigation of this thesis, narrowing the research directions towards more specific angles.

3.6 Conclusion

On the one hand, this chapter has clarified the reasoning for contemporary China as a good context to explore the research directions identified in Chapter 2. On the other hand, it has provided essential background for investigating the political-economic mechanisms in building Chinese city-regions which will be presented in the following empirical chapters.

Firstly, I have reviewed the conceptualisation of city-regions in the Chinese context. This proves and extends the standpoints reviewed in Chapter 2 that the city-region is not only a spatial projection of functional-economic relations but also endowed with the political-administrative attributes in constituting its shape (Ward and Jonas, 2004; Harrison, 2015; Jonas and Moisis, 2018). I have examined the definitions of Chinese city-regions in the existing literature through the lens of the diverse concerns of functional economy, territorial jurisdiction, and institutional politics highlighting the focus of this thesis on the building of institutional city-regions in contemporary China. More specifically, I am interested in how institutional city-regions are conceptualised and concretised in state-led practices under the comprehensive influence of functional-economic rationalities, territorial-administrative configurations, and mechanisms and techniques for shaping spatial imaginaries and institutions. This thesis will contribute to the refinement of the conceptualisation of city-regions beyond a unified submission to economic principles, paying more attention to their interactions with political-administrative patterns – the first research direction identified in Chapter 2. Based on this concern, two types of institutional city-regions named in Chinese state policies since the 2000s – the urban cluster and the metropolitan ring – are introduced as representatives of the polycentric and monocentric imaginaries of mega-city regions respectively, for further investigation in the empirical chapters.

Secondly, I have illustrated the functional-economic context and territorial-administrative basis for understanding the emergence and development of the institutional city-region in contemporary China. On the one hand, the mutual interaction between globalisation, marketisation, and state spatial selectivity has led to an intricate map of Chinese economic geography featuring the uneven development of regional economies, the growth and transformation of urban economies, and nationwide industrial restructuring. This map formed a precondition for the evolution of the city-centred regional economy in China in the 2000s, moving towards mega-city-regionalisation and spreading from coastal to inland areas. On the other hand, the multi-tier organisation of Chinese administrative divisions and the operation of the *tiao-kuai* structure has made the building of institutional city-regions in China inevitably sensitive to the scalar, horizontal, and sectoral relations associated with the state territorial system. Understanding these conditions will facilitate the study of city-region building against a background which is less characterised by neoliberal tendencies in regional governance and more by the strong involvement of the state in the spatial governance of socioeconomic issues, and the complex arrangement of state spatial configurations beyond the simple dichotomy of central and local – the expected context for locating the research directions identified in Chapter 2.

Thirdly, based on this conceptualisation and contextual information, I have reviewed the literature about the motives, strategies, and power relations involved in the state-orchestrated building of

institutional city-regions in contemporary China. The top-down management of crises that emerged out of urban and regional development and the bottom-up pursuit of local competitiveness have coexisted with contradictions to constitute the diverse motives of the Chinese state behind the building of institutional city-regions. These motives are embodied in the strategic planning and institutional moves towards a city-regional scale, and are reflected in the construction of suburban new towns and inter-city infrastructure targeted at city-regional development. Frequent and complex power interactions have been found in the formation and implementation of these strategies, which not only refer to the well-discussed collaboration and competition between state actors, but also include the under-studied involvement of non-state and quasi-state actors. This literature review has laid a foundation for investigating how power relations have developed in producing the discursive imaginaries of city-regions, and how they have been embedded in the institutional settings for converting discursive imaginaries into material outcomes – the second and the third research directions identified in Chapter 2. Further, this body of literature has also inspired this thesis to give special attention to informal institutions and hitherto overlooked actors involved in shaping city-regional imaginaries and realities, as well as the specific mechanisms and techniques developed to deal with the divergent interests and conflicts arising from this process.

These research directions as they fit into the context of contemporary China will be specifically explored in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 around the case study of Anhui Province. The next chapter will explain why the case study approach is used, and the reasons behind selecting the specific sub-cases in Anhui Province. The strategies and processes of data collection and analysis associated with this case study will be also illustrated in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Research design and methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter illustrates the methodologies and strategies which I used to target, collect, and analyse empirical data to achieve the research aims and answer the research questions outlined in Chapter 1. I first give an overview of the research design in Section 4.2, which shows the basic contents of methodologies and strategies I employed in the empirical investigation and presents the logical links between them and the aims and questions of this research. Then, in Section 4.3, I explain the rationales for applying the case-study approach in this research, and give the reasons for selecting two city-region building programmes in Anhui Province (the Wanjiang City Belt (WCB) and the Hefei Metropolitan Ring (HMR) as cases for empirical investigation. This is followed by Section 4.4 about the main strategies employed to collect and analyse the empirical data around these two programmes, which is combined with an illustration of how I complied with ethical standards and responded to the limitations of these strategies in the empirical investigation. Finally, I summarise the whole chapter and show its connections to the subsequent chapters.

4.2 Overview of the research design

I applied qualitative strategies in the case-study approach to achieve the research aims and answer the research questions (see Figure 4.1). The WCB and the HMR were selected as cases to investigate the political-economic nature of state-led city-region building in China. More specifically, data was collected around three aspects of the two programmes: (a) the context and agenda-setting behind their initiation (in response to Research Question 1), (b) the formulation of overall plans for them (in response to Research Question 2), and (c) the progress and institutional setting of developing two new town projects included in each programme (in response to Research Question 3).

Interviews, document analysis, and site visits were employed as the main strategies to collect empirical data about these aspects of the WCB and the HMR. This data was mainly collected during my fieldwork in Anhui Province and other provinces in the Yangtze River Delta (YRD) from October 2018 to May 2019, while additional data was also collected before and after the fieldwork to provide supplementary information for my research. After that, this collected data was classified into three types – textual data, numerical data, and image data – for further analysis. New concepts and theories were generated from this data analysis in response to concerns

highlighted in the aims and questions of this research. These will be presented in the subsequent chapters.

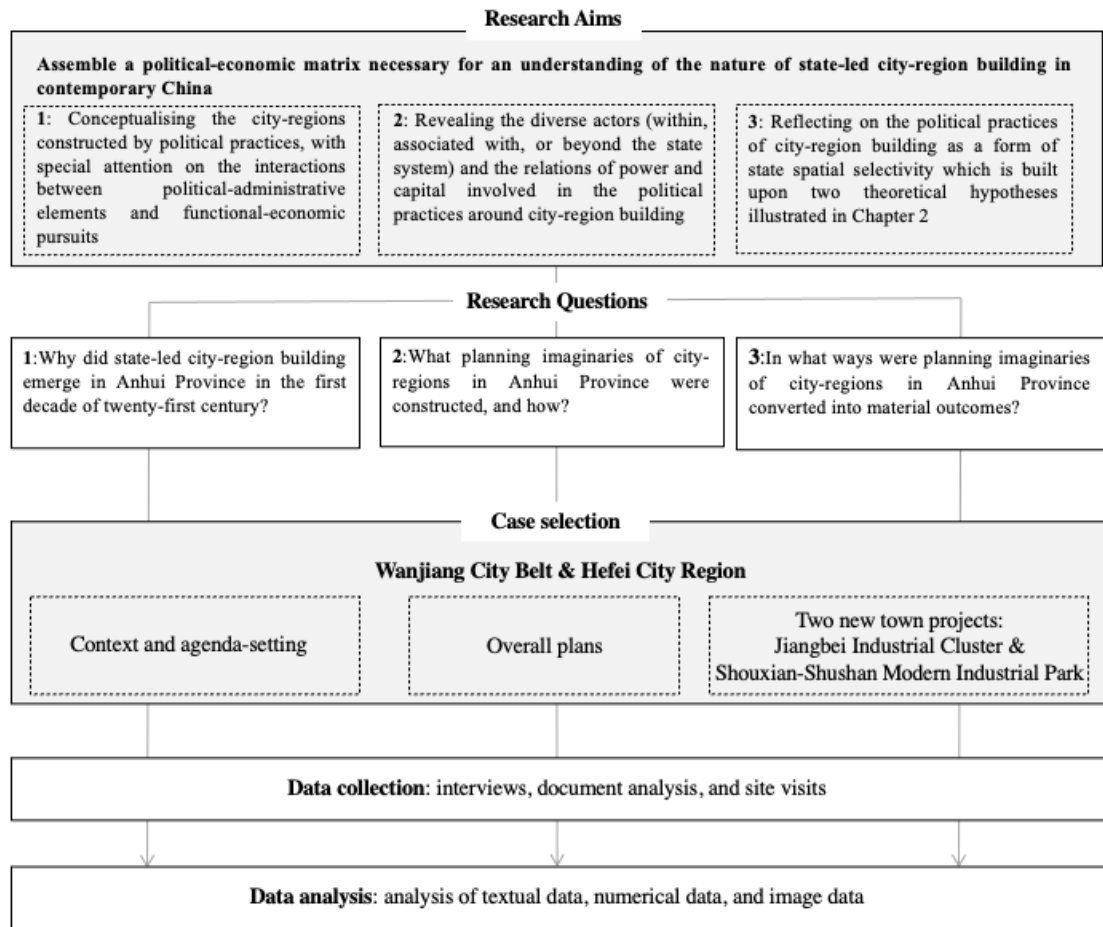


Figure 4.1 Overview of the research design

Source: Compiled by the author.

4.3 Rationales for the case-study approach and case selection

The case study has been widely regarded as a valid and reliable approach to investigate the operation of state-led city-region building programmes in contemporary China, as illustrated in Chapter 3 (Li and Wu, 2013; Li, Wu, and Hay, 2015; Luo and Shen, 2008; Luo et al., 2010). In this literature, the case-study approach provides the advantage of carrying out an in-depth examination of a specific city-region building programme in a real-life context, while scrutinising who is involved in each programme, in what ways, and for what purposes they are involved. Meanwhile, the case studies can also overlap with historical research strategies, such as oral history, to provide data around a case from the past to the present (Yin, 2018). In this sense, the approach of the case study is suitable to provide empirical evidence for the research questions shown in Figure 4.1 in terms of both historical and present facts of city-region building.

It is noteworthy that this study does not intend to generalise its findings to every city-region building programme in China. Instead, it is aimed at providing a reliable and valid interpretation

of the political-economic nature of state-led city-region building in contemporary China, specifically in the under-studied Anhui Province, which is open to examination, refinement, and modification in future studies.

Based on this conception, my choice of the WCB and the HMR in Anhui Province as the cases in this research is driven by both ‘intrinsic and instrumental interest’ (Stake, 1998, p.88). On the one hand, it was the observations I made relating to the WCB and a new town project - the Jiangbei Industrial Cluster (JBIC) - prior to my doctoral study, that inspired me to question the existing literature on city-regional studies, and which laid a basis for the theoretical concern, aims and questions of this research. In this sense, my research is ‘intrinsically’ endowed with an interest in understanding the conditions of the WCB in particular.⁴ On the other hand, based on my experience during the fieldwork, I find that the supplement of the HMR as a comparative case to the WCB can provide richer empirical evidence for my research questions and open a broader space for generating concepts and theories. From this perspective, the HMR, together with the WCB, further act as ‘instrumental’ cases to ‘provide insight into an issue or refinement of theory’ (Stake, 1998, p.88). I will elaborate on specific reasons for the case selection in my research from these two angles.

4.3.1 Intrinsic interest behind the case selection

When I studied for a master’s programme in Nanjing University between 2014 and 2017, I was involved in a planning project commissioned by the Planning Bureau of Wuhu City, a prefecture-level city in Anhui Province, to be formulated by the team led by my master’s supervisor. This project involved planning the public service facilities for a new town, the JBIC, located in the administrative territory of Wuhu City (Figure 4.2). In the planning process, I had the chance to do in-depth fieldwork in the JBIC and conduct interviews with government officials, entrepreneurs, and residents about their feelings, needs, visions, and actions concerning the development of this new town.

Some unusual phenomena of local governance emerging from this fieldwork captured my interest. On the one hand, the local officials, who were responsible for planning and managing the JBIC, faced a quandary in clarifying the development orientation of the new town. This was because they had to consider the visions of both the Anhui provincial government and the Wuhu city government on developing the JBIC, but these two state agencies had divergent, even contrary, priorities. On the other hand, a large real-estate enterprise was extremely influential in the

⁴ This process can be classified as an ‘intrinsic case study’ (Stake, 1998, p.88), which means that ‘the study is undertaken because one wants better understanding of this particular case’ (Stake, 1998, p.88).

planning process. The manager of this enterprise was invited by local officials to take part in the planning consultation as the partner of the government in building the JBIC. During the consultation, this manager was bluntly critical of a series of decisions made by the government in developing the new town. The officials who were present did not refute this criticism but asked our planning team to satisfy the demands of the enterprise as much as possible in the service facilities.



Figure 4.2 Locations of the WCB and the JBIC (in 2017)

Source: Compiled by the author.

These phenomena subverted my prior impressions about the dominance of local governments in the governance of new towns in suburban China, and further pushed me to inquire why these unusual power relations occurred in building the JBIC. It was during this initial inquiry that a bigger picture of city-region building in Anhui Province gradually became clearer to me. I began to realise that these special moments of local governance were probably linked to unintended outcomes of policy implementation in the WCB – one of the most significant city-region building programmes in Anhui Province over the last decade (Figure 4.2). The WCB was the first of a series of national-level programmes initiated by the National Development Reform Commission (NDRC) since 2010 to promote the relocation of industries from coastal China to inland China. A cluster of cities in Anhui Province was identified as a spatial vehicle for these relocated

industries, especially from the YRD. The JBIC was planned to be one of the core industrial zones in this urban cluster. This proposal involved the planning and institutional setting of the JBIC, and further played an important role in shaping the political-economic landscape of the JBIC. It was exactly this perception that triggered my preliminary interest in exploring state-led city-region building, especially in terms of how the process of city-region building influenced the political-economic development of the particular localities. In turn, the WCB and the JBIC which was part of it naturally became the ‘intrinsic’ objects in my research, ready for further theoretical inquiry.

4.3.2 Instrumental interest behind the case selection

Based on this intrinsic interest, I reviewed the literature on city-region building and extracted my research aims as laid out in Chapter 1. By fitting these aims into the Chinese context, I proposed the research questions of this thesis. It is these research aims and questions that caused me to select the case study as an instrument to provide empirical evidence. The WCB became the first choice for collecting empirical data, while its subordinate entity, the JBIC, became a sub-case to investigate the complexity of the political-economic conditions in taking the WCB from paper to reality. In addition, the formulation of the overall plans for the WCB was selected as another sub-case to scrutinise the production of discursive imaginaries of city-regions and look into the power relations involved in making the plan. The reason for choosing overall plans was that they represented the most fundamental and comprehensive visions of the WCB, which were the basis for any special plan or action plan made for the programme. I think they can better show the basic logic behind constructing the overall imaginaries of the city-region during its planning. In fact, I also foresaw that these imaginaries would probably be adjusted in the subsequent special plans when different actors and interests were involved in plan-making. So I also collected data about the plans for the JBIC and compared it with the preliminary imaginaries constructed in the overall plans for the WCB in my data analysis. This finally provided evidence of a transitional phase between the discursive and material construction of city-regions, which will be elaborated on at the beginning of Chapter 7.

In contrast with my selection of the WCB as a case, which was decided before the data collection, the selection of the HMR as another case emerged during the data collection. When I conducted my fieldwork in Anhui Province (see Section 4.4. for details), I found that the HMR – also a city-region building programme in Anhui Province – was repeatedly referred to by many informants as a case for comparison with the WCB, to illustrate the diversity of city-regional policies in Anhui Province since the first decade of the twenty-first century. This information caught my attention and prompted me to do a background investigation on the HMR. During this process, I found that the HMR was initiated by the Anhui provincial government in 2008 to promote the

development of a regional economy centred on the provincial capital, Hefei City, and covering its surrounding cities. After a decade of change, the planning area of the HMR has grown to include all the cities in central Anhui and some cities included in the WCB, with the involvement of more local authorities in the formulation and implementation of plans related to it (Figure 4.3). This meant that, compared to the WCB, the HMR was launched in a similar period and nearby location, and in the same province – conditions which seemed to provide an analogous political-economic environment for the development of these two programmes. Based on this basic similarity, three noteworthy differences between the two programmes further laid a foundation for me to select the HMR as another ‘instrumental’ case. I believed that it would provide additional information, beyond and in contrast with what could be acquired from the WCB, for attaining the aims of this research.



Figure 4.3 Locations of the HMR and the SSMIP (in 2017)

Source: Compiled by the author.

Firstly, the WCB and the HMR demonstrated two ways of defining city-regions in Chinese policy discourse, as illustrated in Chapter 3. The HMR was named as a metropolitan ring in planning documents, while the WCB was more often depicted as an urban cluster. Selecting the HMR as another case opens a window to observe why this difference in city-regional definitions was developed in the same period in Anhui Province and how it was embodied in planning imaginaries.

It will refine the conceptualisation of city-regions in the Chinese context, especially in the policy discourse (related to Research Questions 1 and 2).

Secondly, as mentioned above, the WCB and the HMR were initiated by state agencies at national and provincial levels respectively. This not only implies a difference in the political-administrative configurations used in formulating and implementing these two programmes, but also meant that city-region building could be utilised as a strategy to respond policy agendas set at different scales. Accordingly, the inclusion of the HMR in the case study can help provide more insight into both the context and agenda-setting behind city-region building (related to Research Question 1), and the diversity of power relations involved in the making and implementation of plans (related to Research Questions 2 and 3).

Thirdly, in contrast with the dilemma of local officials in governing the JBIC, which resulted in my ‘intrinsic’ interest in studying city-region building, I was informed that a new town project in the HMR - the Shouxian-Shushan Modern Industrial Park (SSMIP) (Figure 4.3) - was also receiving the same kind of intervention from both provincial and local governments, but unlike the JBIC it was progressing very smoothly. This aroused my interest and prompted me to investigate why divergent outcomes in terms of local governance happened in the SSMIP and the JBIC, and what different political-economic mechanisms functioned in this process (related to Research Question 3).

Based on these reasons, the HMR was further incorporated into data collection and analysis in the case study. Its context and agenda-setting, overall plans, and the subordinate SSMIP were also selected as sub-cases to investigate the three research questions respectively. They were expected to form both contrasting and complementary relations with the WCB to provide empirical evidence for the aims and questions of this research. The specific strategies utilised to collect and analyse the data related to these cases will be illustrated in the next section.

4.4 Data collection and analysis

Semi-structured interviews and document analysis were the main strategies used to collect data to investigate all three research questions in the case studies of the WCB and the HMR. Site visits to the main cities and new towns included in these two programmes were also conducted, to obtain a direct view of the physical outcomes of city-region building. As mentioned in Section 4.2, I conducted fieldwork in China from 15th October 2018 to 24th May 2019, collecting data for the case studies. All site visits and most of the interviews were conducted during this fieldwork, while the collection of documents related to the case study stretched from the spring of 2018 to the end of 2021. The data analysis was carried out during and after the fieldwork, including the thematic coding of textual data (i.e., interview transcripts, document text, and notes made during interviews

and site visits), and the analysis of numerical data and image data included in the collected documents.

Before getting into the details relating to the collection and analysis of data, it is necessary to state my positionality in this process, especially during the fieldwork. As a young scholar with very limited connections to the field and the cases I looked into, I mainly acted as an ‘outsider’ to collect data about city-region building in Anhui Province. This position did not make it easy for me to contact and interview some of the targeted informants, especially government officials in specific positions (see Section 4.4.1), or to collect undisclosed documents related to the cases (see Section 4.4.2). To make up for this weakness, social networks built during my master’s studies in Nanjing University in China (and associated planning practices in Anhui Province) were mobilised, which built bridges for me to contact some informants, and broadened my channels of data collection subsequently through the snowball method (see Section 4.4.1). These social networks, meanwhile, also enriched my position during the fieldwork. Some informants viewed me as a more trustworthy researcher because I was introduced by their acquaintances. It made them willing to give me more detailed and in-depth information about the cases. These difficulties in data collection due to my positionality, and the way I coped with them, will be illustrated in more detail below.

4.4.1 Interviews

In this research, interviews were not only used to obtain in-depth information about the context and agenda-setting, planning process, and material construction of the WCB and the HMR, but were also employed to grasp the reasons and perceptions that might explain the actions of different actors. During the fieldwork, 41 informants were involved in 34 semi-structured interviews, which included 28 one-to-one interviews and six group interviews (see Appendix B).⁵ Most of these interviews were conducted in the interviewees’ offices, and lasted from 30 minutes to two hours, while five interviews were conducted by phone,⁶ and one was conducted by text

⁵ The reason for doing group interviews was that several informants suggested inviting other informants (introduced by themselves) to the interviews for the purpose of providing supplementary information for the outlined questions I had given them prior to the interviews. At first, I was hesitant about whether this kind of group interview was necessary, but eventually it proved to be helpful. Because the formulation of some plans and associated institutions for the WCB and the HMR had been around for ten years before I did the interviews, it was hard for a single person to clearly remember the details. Discussion among several (often two or three) informants in the group interviews meant that most of this vague information could be illustrated more clearly and even finally clarified.

⁶ The reason for conducting interviews by phone was that informants expressed that they were too busy to arrange a face-to-face meeting at an appropriate time (e.g., 8am to 7pm). So, the interviews by phone were suggested by me or themselves because they could provide a more flexible arrangement of time and place for the informants.

communication on WeChat.⁷ As shown in Appendix B, these informants are classified into five types: government officials, think tank and university researchers, planners, company managers, and leaders and residents of local communities.

Firstly, 22 government officials were interviewed during the fieldwork. They can be divided into two categories. One category included 14 government officials who were directly involved in the agenda-setting behind the WCB and the HMR (related to Research Question 1), or the formulation of overall plans for the two programmes (related to Research Question 2), or the development of the JBIC and the SSMIP (related to Research Question 3). Based on their specific roles in these actions, these officials were interviewed to provide information on, first, the motivations and purposes behind the initiation of the WCB and the HMR; second, the procedures of making overall plans for the WCB and the HMR and the reasons behind the formation of certain planning imaginaries (e.g., delineation of and changes to city-regional boundaries, layout of industrial and urban spaces, etc.); third, the progress of planning, management, and construction of the JBIC and the SSMIP; and, fourth, their interests in and perceptions of all these actions and their relationships with other actors. In addition, I also interviewed government officials in the other category, which included eight people without direct involvement in the WCB and the HMR but who could provide contextual information for these two programmes. This information mainly related to the history and current situation of regional policies and economies in Anhui Province and the YRD (related to Research Question 1).

Approaching these informants was a difficult process which was full of frustration and compromise. Prior to the fieldwork, I identified some government organisations involved in the WCB and the HMR by browsing the official websites of the NDRC and the Anhui provincial government, and reading historical news published online related to these two programmes. Based on this preliminary identification, I called the office phones published on the websites of these government organisations, introduced myself and my research, and asked if it would be possible to interview officials associated with the specific issues concerned by my case study. In most cases, the people who answered the phone said that they could not give me any promise without instructions from the leaders of the offices or departments. They suggested I send a 'formal' application through the fax numbers given by them, elaborating on my identity and aims for the interviews, and outlining prepared questions. However, there was usually no response to these faxes (with my contact information) for a long time, and finally I was refused for various reasons when I called again to check on the progress. The reasons for refusal included, but were not

⁷ WeChat is a Chinese messenger app like WhatsApp in the UK. The interview was conducted through WeChat because the informant preferred to communicate by text, rather than audio, through this medium.

limited to: they could not find an appropriate person to accept my interview; they were too busy to accept my interview; or the relevant officials just did not want to do the interview.

This situation meant that I had to find other channels to reach informants from government agencies. I tried asking for help from friends, the supervisor of my master's thesis, and alumni of Nanjing University, where I got my master's degree, who might have been expected to have relatives, friends, or acquaintances working for government agencies relevant to my case study. This channel proved efficient, to some extent, because it not only brought me into contact with some informants but also introduced more government officials for further interviews through the snowball approach. Nevertheless, the limitation of this channel was also obvious because not every targeted informant could be approached through my social connections or those of my informants. For example, considering the power relations in the government, my informants only introduced officials at the same or lower administrative levels as themselves for further interviews. Because the highest administrative level of informants approached through my social connections was the office director in the relevant provincial department, it was difficult for me to get in touch with any official higher than this level, such as those in the central ministries. This lack of sources for interviews was potentially problematic to the study of the WCB due to it being identified in my background research as a programme initiated by the NDRC. In response to this limitation, I was able to compensate by using data about central government's involvement through other sources. This included documents – historical archives, published policies and plans, and news reports – related to the views, actions, and roles of central government in the two programmes (see Section 4.4.2), and narratives of other informants in the interviews about their observations of and interactions with state actors at a central level. Meanwhile, I also bore this limitation in mind when I analysed the data, to avoid any over-interpretation and unreliable speculation.

Beyond government officials, I also interviewed six researchers from think tanks and universities, and eight planners from institutes of urban and regional planning to provide information for the case studies. It is noteworthy that the think tanks mentioned here refer to organisations that are entirely or partly funded by, and serve, government agencies at multiple levels and different sectors, with a de facto subordination to them. They are responsible for studying issues related to the work of government agencies and then formulating and assessing related policies. This kind of think tank is very common in China in relation to government agencies at each level, and each sector has a need to acquire additional intellectual support for their decision-making. They are not government agencies in the strict sense but are still scalar-specific and sector-specific due to their links with the state system.

Analogous to the two categories of government officials classified above, some of the interviewed researchers and planners took part directly in the formulation of overall plans for the WCB or the

HMR, or else in drafting the special plans for the JBIC or the SSMIP. The others were not directly involved in these actions but contributed to the agenda-setting and development of the two programmes as policy counsellors. The data provided by these researchers and planners is related to topics similar to those addressed by the government officials mentioned above, but unlike with the officials, it involved the perceptions of academic and technical experts in the process of building these programmes.

The process of approaching these researchers and planners was similar to but much easier than for the government officials. On the one hand, I picked up some names of these kinds of informants from academic papers and news reports and asked for recommendations from acquaintances working in or related to these institutes to get the chance of an interview. Because I had been studying urban planning in universities in China for eight years, it was not too hard for me to get in touch with people in these planning institutes or in universities and research institutes, people with expertise on urban and regional planning. On the other hand, some other identified researchers who could not be reached through these channels, and some informants who were not identified at first but also played important roles in the issues that concerned me were accessed later through the snowball approach.

Finally, two managers from the real estate company mentioned in Section 4.3.1 and three people from the resettled community in the JBIC were interviewed. These informants provided valuable data for Research Question 3, especially about the roles of business actors, and the interactions between state actors and local residents in building the JBIC. The reasons for choosing this company for the interview was its significant role in the urban development of the JBIC, which was partly identified from my experiences mentioned in Section 4.3.1, and further informed by the interviews with government officials during the fieldwork in the JBIC. One of the informants in this company was an office director responsible for making and implementing the company's development strategies in the JBIC. I approached this informant in a very direct way – I went to the reception desk of the company in the JBIC, introduced myself and the aims of my visit, and asked if I could interview someone who was familiar with the issues that I was interested in. This manager was introduced to me soon afterwards, and accepted my interview.

Another informant was a property manager working for a housing project developed by this company in the JBIC. The interview with this informant was not planned but coincidentally occurred when I visited the housing project. I met this informant in an office next to the project and did a short interview – around 30 minutes – to get to know the history and extant conditions of the housing project, and some general information about people who bought or lived in apartments there.

The three informants from the resettled community were leaders and residents of the original villages which had been demolished due to the construction of the JBIC. The reason for interviewing a small number of this kind of informant is that what they provided was supplementary, rather than primary, data for my research. This data was collected mainly for triangulating with information given by government officials and company managers, while also adding some missing views. These community leaders and residents provided information about the general process of demolition and resettlement of their villages, the interactions between villagers and other actors during this process, and the condition of the resettled community and their experiences living in it. I approached these informants when I visited this community in the JBIC. I met the first resident in a small green space in the community while this informant was enjoying his lunch break alone. I introduced myself and listened to the informant's experience in and perceptions of the demolition and resettlement. After that, the informant introduced me to two village leaders who were also residents of this community and were involved at that time in establishing a residents committee for the community. They accepted my request for an interview and gave me more detailed and comprehensive information about the demolition and resettlement of their villages. The reason for there being no corresponding informants with similar identities (company managers and people from local communities) contacted in the SSMIP was that there was no real estate company investing in it and no resettled community built in the SSMIP when I conducted the fieldwork. But I nevertheless obtained some information from the interviews with government officials working for the SSMIP about demolition and resettlement activities related to the project.

In addition to these interviews conducted during the fieldwork, I also interviewed two government officials again in January 2020, after the fieldwork, to complement the data on the construction of the JBIC and the SSMIP (see Appendix B). Besides this, the brief notes of an interview conducted in September 2014, prior to my doctoral study, were also incorporated in the data analysis. The informant in this interview was another manager of the real estate company in the JBIC mentioned above. This interview provided information on the power relations between state agencies and business actors in building the JBIC.

The collection and usage of the data derived from the interviews complied with the ethical standards reviewed by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Leeds on 24th October 2018.⁸ All informants were anonymised using alphanumeric codes shown in Appendix B, which only refers to their job roles in broad terms. The letters in codes represent the categories that informants belong to: A refers to government officials; B refers to think tank and university

⁸ It was confirmed that the interview conducted in 2014 could be used for academic research. My usage of its data also complied with the standards of ethical review in this research.

researchers; C refers to planners; D refers to company managers; and E refers to leaders and residents of local communities. The combination of a letter and a number in a code represents a specific informant being interviewed: for example, A7 refers to a senior staff member working for the Anhui Reform and Development Commission. In Appendix B, I also give the date(s) and theme(s) that I took the interview(s) with each informant.

An information sheet was read before the interviews were conducted and a consent form was signed – or orally accepted – by all participants if they agreed to join in. There were two reasons for using verbal consent to replace signature in some interviews. The first was that some informants – usually ones working for government agencies or government-affiliated think tanks – agreed to accept the interview but refused to give their signatures on paper or electronic file. This was a subtle means of avoiding potential trouble. Some informants said to me that if I asked them to sign something, they would view this interview as an ‘official’ thing, which meant that it would need to go through a lengthy process to get approval from the organisations they worked for. But they suggested to me to avoid this process which would probably have made the interview impossible – this view made sense in consideration of my experience of failure to access government officials through ‘official’ channels as illustrated above.

For this reason, they preferred to give me verbal consent, which was usually recorded, to conduct the interview. Another reason was that some interviews were conducted by phone, for which the informants thought verbal consent was more convenient to them. Based on these consents, the interviews usually started with some prepared questions structured according to the assumed positions of informants in the cases. After that, I adjusted the questions and proposed new questions in response to the answers from the informants. These conversations were recorded, if the informants agreed with it, and I also made notes about key points made in all interviews.

4.4.2 Documents

Documents, as a source of data in this research, comprised both printed and digital materials varying from policies, plans, statistics, academic literature, and government reports, to archives of historical events and maps, and records of news reports. These documents were collected to triangulate the data about the agenda-setting, planning, and material construction of the WCB and the HMR which was also derived from the interviews described in the last section. Firstly, the documents were used to present the context involved in the agenda-setting of the WCB and the HMR in Anhui Province in the first decade of the twenty-first century (related to Research Question 1). Two key components of this context were highlighted in the interviews which related to the paths of regional development policies and the emerging conditions of regional economies. To test the validity of this information, I further collected: (a) the policies, plans, state

administrations, and transcripts of speeches by key government leaders relevant to the regional development of my research areas from 1952 to 2010 (current territory of Anhui Province is finalised in 1952); and (b) economic statistics relevant to the research areas in the 1990s and 2000s. These documents were collected from physical and online archives of historical documents, official websites of corresponding state agencies, statistical yearbooks and monographs, and other online literature databases. Meanwhile, in the search for these documents, I also discovered evidence of significant engagement of some state agencies and think tanks in setting the agendas behind the WCB and the HMR, which was derived from news reports and academic literature. This finding, in turn, helped me to restructure my questions in the interviews with government officials and think-tank researchers to scrutinise their roles in the agenda-setting for the two programmes.

Secondly, documents were collected to analyse the planning imaginaries for the WCB and the HMR, which was also relevant to the interviews concerning the rationales and planning procedures for both programmes (related to Research Question 2). The overall plan for the WCB – *Plan for Wanjiang City Belt Demonstration Zone for Accepting Industrial Relocation (Wanjiang chengshi dai chengjie chanye zhuanyi shifanqu guihua)* (2010-2015) – and its revised edition published in 2016 were downloaded from the official websites of the NDRC and the Anhui provincial government respectively. By contrast, the overall plans for the HMR experienced more changes over time, as evidenced in four documents: (a) *Outline of the Development Plan for the Economic Ring of the Anhui Provincial Capital (Anhui shenghui jingji quan fazhan guihua gangyao)* (promulgated in May 2008); (b) *Several Opinions of the Anhui Provincial Committee of the CPC and the Provincial Government on Speeding Up the Construction of the Hefei Economic Ring (Zhonggong anhui shengwei anhui sheng renmin zhengfu guanyu jiaquai hefei jingji quan jianshe de ruogan yijian)* (promulgated in August 2009); (c) *Medium- and Long-Term Plan for the Development of Hefei Economic Ring (Hefei jingji quan zhongchangqi fazhan guihua)* (drafted from 2014 to 2015 but unpublished); and (d) *Outline of the 13th Five-Year Development Plan for the Hefei Metropolitan Ring (Hefei dushi Quan 'shisan wu' fazhan guihua gangyao)* (promulgated in December 2017). Of these, (a) and (b) were downloaded from the official websites of the Anhui Development and Reform Commission (PDRC of Anhui) and Anhui provincial government respectively, while (c) and (d) were accessed through personal contact with informants working for the corresponding state agencies. In addition, I also collected special plans and action plans for the WCB and the HMR, generally promulgated following these overall plans, to help me better understand the meanings of certain planning strategies, which were provided by informants in most cases. Some news reports published by mass media or websites of state agencies about the procedures and progress of making these plans were also collected as another source to test and complement the data collected from interviews.

Thirdly, the documents were utilised to show the positioning of the JBIC and the SSMIP in the planning imaginaries of the WCB and the HMR, and to scrutinise the process of converting these envisaged positionings into material outcomes (related to Research Question 3). Beyond looking into texts and maps related to these two new towns in the plans for the WCB and the HMR mentioned above, the master plans and special plans for the JBIC and the SSMIP were first collected via informants working in the management committees of the two new towns. After preliminary analysis of these plans and of information got from the interviews, a significant change was found in the positioning of both new towns, which was closely associated with the planning visions of Wuhu City and Hefei City. Accordingly, further plans for these two cities in relation to the development of the JBIC and the SSMIP were collected with the help of informants from the planning bureaus of both cities.

In addition to these plans, economic and social statistics, government reports, and news reports were collected to expand on the progress of building the JBIC and the SSMIP in the 2010s, while policy documents were collected to demonstrate the institutional settings for managing and funding them during this process (related to Research Question 3). Specifically, an online database of enterprise information – Tianyancha⁹ – was used to show the capital composition of urban investment and development companies for the JBIC and the SSMIP; this was an important source to test and complement the information given by interviewees about the state actors and their contributions to the financing of the two new towns. This database was also used to check some information on enterprises based in both new towns – names of these enterprises were acquired from the interviews and government reports – which were relevant to the plans investigated above. This information included but was not limited to their business range, their size and composition of capital, the location of their headquarters if they had them, etc. Policy documents, government reports, and media reports were further used to test and supplement the data derived from the interviews about the relations between enterprises and state agencies in the development of the JBIC and the SSMIP.

4.4.3 Data analysis

I classified the collected data into textual data, numerical data, and image data, and analysed them in different ways (information on the numerical and image data that I collected is given below). The textual data in this research included the transcripts of audio recordings of interviews, handwritten notes made during the interviews and site visits, and texts of collected documents. This data was analysed through thematic coding which included two phases identified by Coffey

⁹ Tianyancha is an online database launched in 2014 to show information about the operating, personnel, and capital conditions of enterprises registered in China. Its website is <https://www.tianyancha.com>.

& Atkinson (1996). The first phase is ‘data reduction’ (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p.28), which means labelling text segments by general themes (i.e., codes) and building an index of these themes (i.e., code list) to ‘facilitate the retrieval of data’ (p.28). The second phase is ‘data complication’ (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p.29), which means a heuristic discovery of these labelled texts - one strategy is reassembling text segments according to the themes attached to them and generating new concepts by looking into the relationships between text segments within the same themes or belonging to different themes (Tesch, 1990).

The themes that I used to label textual data in the first phase were derived from concepts included in the research questions, and classified into two levels in which the second-level themes were subordinate to the first-level themes. For example, one of the first-level themes was ‘planning imaginaries of the WCB’ (related to Research Question 2) and the second-level themes it contained were ‘definition of the WCB’, ‘boundary delineation of the WCB’, ‘plan for urban system in the WCB’, ‘plan for infrastructure in the WCB’, ‘plan for industries in the WCB’, and so on. These themes were tagged in the margins of digital files (in Word or PDF formats) and paper documents, and linked to the text segments which were referred to by using the annotation function and highlight function (for digital files) as well as pen-marking (for paper documents). Then I made a code list consisting of all the themes, and marked the interview codes or document pages following each theme.

This list was helpful in retrieving data for more in-depth analysis of text in the second phase of coding. On the one hand, I put the text segments attached to the same themes together to explore the patterns involved. For example, through analysing text tagged as ‘plan for industries in the WCB’, I found that the spatial organisation of industrial systems in the plans for the WCB presented a nested pattern with two layers (see Chapter 6 for details) – one was a relatively flat network in its planning area with some cores and subzones, and the other was a ‘hub-and-spoke’ (Harrison, 2015) relationship between the WCB as a whole and the YRD beyond its planning area. Based on this investigation, on the other hand, I compared the patterns discovered in each second-level theme to generate more accurate findings from the first-level theme. For instance, by comparing the pattern mentioned above with patterns identified in themes such as ‘plan for urban system in the WCB’, ‘plan for infrastructure in the WCB’ (and other themes) I found that this double-layered organisation of functional-economic spaces was common in the plans for the WCB, and it was also usually combined with a vision of agglomeration.

This finding contributed an important aspect to the interpretation of ‘planning imaginaries of the WCB’, identified as a first-level theme, which still needed to be integrated with the analysis of ‘political-administrative attributes in the plan for the WCB’ (another second-level theme) to give a more in-depth interpretation. Further, a comparison was conducted between patterns identified

from the first-level themes such as ‘planning imaginaries of the WCB’ and ‘planning imaginaries of the HMR’, in order to shape a more comprehensive interpretation of the planning imaginaries of city-regions constructed in Anhui Province since the end of the 2000s – an important concern of Research Question 2. In this sense, the thematic coding in my research was a process that at first was derived from the research questions, and which ended up responding to them.

In addition to this analysis of textual data, I also analysed the numerical data and image data to provide supplementary evidence. The numerical data in my research included the statistical data of economic conditions including gross domestic product (GDP), per capita GDP, industrial output, registered capital of enterprises, costs of land development and revenues from selling use rights of land, and so on. They were analysed to quantify the economic context involved in the agenda-setting of the WCB and the HMR (related to Research Question 1), and the capital relations and revenue and expenditure of state agencies and private companies in the development of the JBIC and the SSMIP (related to Research Question 3). This analysis was used to build on the findings from analysing textual data and to facilitate the triangulation of data as mentioned in Section 4.4.2. For example, in the analysis of textual data, I found that one of the important contexts for the initiation of the WCB was the economic gap between Anhui Province and the YRD. To test this finding, I collected the annual per capita GDP of Anhui Province, Shanghai City, Jiangsu Province, and Zhejiang Province from 1995 to 2010, and fit them into a well-developed framework (Qi et al., 2013) for evaluating and comparing the economic development stages of provinces and cities in China (see Chapter 5 for details). Based on this analysis, I not only verified this economic gap between Anhui Province and the YRD, but also presented its extent and trend in a more visual way through graphs.

For the image data, I mainly analysed maps included in the historical archives and plans, and photographs taken during the site visits. The maps were analysed to look into: (a) the planning boundaries of the WCB and the HMR with a focus on their transformation in different plans and their relations to existing administrative jurisdictions and planning boundaries delineated in previous regional policies (related to Research Question 2); and (b) the location, boundaries, and land use of the JBIC and the SSMIP with particular attention paid to the linkages between these elements and the planning imaginaries of the WCB and the HMR (related to Research Question 3). The photos were mainly used to show the depressed scenes of real estate development in the JBIC (related to Research Question 3), which supplement the findings about the material construction of the JBIC (see Chapter 7 for details).

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have elaborated on how qualitative strategies were mainly employed to collect and analyse the data in the case studies of two city-region building programmes – the WCB and the HMR – in Anhui Province, China. This research methodology was designed to respond to research aims and questions derived from the literature review in Chapters 2 and 3, and generate research findings presented in subsequent Chapters 5 to 8. The case selection of the WCB and the HMR was based on both the ‘intrinsic interest’ that inspired my study on the political-economic complexity of city-region building in China, and the ‘instrument interest’ that provided rich material for the empirical investigation of this research aim. Three aspects (or sub-cases) of these two programmes – the context and agenda-setting, the formulation of overall plans, and the construction of two new town projects – were further selected to investigate Research Questions 1, 2, and 3 respectively.

During data collection, interviews and documents were the main sources of the empirical data about these three aspects of the WCB and the HMR, while site visits also contributed grounded experience. Five types of informants – government officials, think-tank and university researchers, planners, company managers, and leaders and residents of local communities – were interviewed during and after the fieldwork. One of the main difficulties emerging from the interviews was approaching targeted government officials. This was partly overcome by mobilising my social connections, but it still seriously restricted the range of information that I had accessed to. I tried to make up for this deficiency by looking for as much missing information as possible from documents and interviews with accessible informants, but the analysis of this information was still undertaken very carefully to avoid over-speculation. Beyond this supplementary role, documents were mainly collected to triangulate the data derived from the interviews around each research question.

The analysis of data collected from these strategies was conducted according to the type it belonged to. Thematic coding was used in this research, first to reduce the textual data for retrieval, and then to complicate the textual data to discover new patterns and generate new theories. There was a mutually beneficial relationship between this coding process and the research questions in this research: the data reduction was based on themes derived from the research questions, and in turn the outcomes of the data complication answered the research questions in depth. The numerical data and image data were analysed to supplement and inspire this thematic coding of textual data.

Through the practice of these research methods, I generated a series of findings in response to each research question. Chapter 5 will respond to Research Question 1 by elaborating on the political and economic contexts that were involved in the initiation of the WCB and the HMR, and illustrating the procedures of agenda-setting and policy proposal behind the two programmes.

Chapter 6 will respond to Research Question 2 by presenting the discursive imaginaries of the WCB and the HMR embodied in their overall plans, and looking into the power relations involved in the formulation of these imaginaries. Chapter 7 will respond to Research Question 3 by scrutinising the positioning of the JBIC and the SSMIP in the planning imaginaries of the WCB and the HMR and institutional settings shaped for converting these plan positionings into material outcomes. Finally, Chapter 8 will summarise the findings and refine the main arguments and theoretical contributions of this research.

Chapter 5: Historical paths, emerging agendas, and entangled actions behind the initiation of the Wanjiang City Belt and the Hefei Metropolitan Ring

5.1 Introduction

This chapter responds to Research Question 1 of this thesis (see Section 1.2): why did state-led city-region building emerge in Anhui Province in the first decade of the twenty-first century? My investigation of this question is built on the theoretical hypothesis introduced in Chapter 2; that state-led city-region building is a ‘path-dependent layering process’ (Brenner, 2004, p.111). State power and its spatial configurations and associated socioeconomic outcomes, formed in specific historical periods, can be viewed as political-economic ‘layers’ that precondition new rounds of state spatial regulation towards city-regional development.

From this perspective, in the first half of this chapter, I identify some key political and economic contexts, or in other words the ‘layers’, that created a premise for the initiation of two city-region building programmes, the Wanjiang City Belt (WCB) and the Hefei Metropolitan Ring (HMR), in late-2000 Anhui Province. The trajectories of regional spatial regulation in Anhui Province from 1952 to the 2000s are revealed in Section 5.2, and the transformation of regional and urban economy related to Anhui Province in the 2000s is examined in Section 5.3. In the second half of this chapter, I look into how these political and economic ‘layers’ were combined with emerging agendas set at national, provincial, and local scales to trigger the proposal of the WCB and the HMR (Section 5.4). I contend that the actions of diverse actors within or associated with the state system contributed to this process on behalf of the scalar-specific interests. The findings of all these sections are summarised in Section 5.5.

This chapter mainly contributes to Research Aim 2 and Research Aim 3 of this thesis (Section 1.2) by revealing the politics of the ‘path-dependent layering process’ (Brenner, 2004, p.111) involved in setting agendas and formulating preliminary considerations of policy options behind the state-led city-region building. This chapter also provides a more detailed examination of political-economic contexts in which the institutional city-regions in Anhui Province can be conceptualised by political practices shown in Chapters 6 and 7. In this sense, this chapter is conducive to accomplishing Research Aim 1 as well. These contributions will be synthesised with empirical findings set out in Chapters 6 and 7 to constitute an overall response to the research aims of this thesis (see Section 8.3 for details).

5.2 Trajectories of regional spatial regulation in Anhui Province

In this section, I trace the transformation of regional institutions and spatial policies associated with contemporary Anhui Province from its establishment in 1952 to the initiation of the WCB

and the HMR in the late 2000s. Two trajectories of regional spatial regulation are found to be embedded in this transformation: the first is promoting regional cooperation between Anhui Province and the YRD (see Section 5.2.1), and the second is the division and differential development of sub-provincial regions (see Section 5.2.2). Meanwhile, actors involved in shaping these two trajectories are found to be diverse, with changing roles over different historical periods (see Sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2). On the one hand, constant reconfiguration of power has occurred within the state system, especially between the central and provincial levels, affecting the conduct of cross-provincial cooperation and sub-provincial regulation. On the other hand, state-affiliated think tanks have played indispensable roles in identifying and reinforcing specific paths of regional spatial regulation.

5.2.1 Trajectory I: promoting regional cooperation between Anhui Province and the YRD

Promoting regional cooperation with the YRD has been a consistent theme of territorial institutions and spatial policies associated with Anhui Province since the 1950s. In the context of the planned economy before 1978, this theme was mainly achieved by administrative integration and coordinated development of industrial production. The central state played an important role in deploying institutional settings and providing overall guidance. An active response was given by provincial governments both in Anhui and the YRD. From 1978 to the late 1990s, during the period of reform, regional cooperation between Anhui Province and the YRD was more embodied in growth-oriented spatial strategies. As introduced in Chapter 3, the YRD – especially coastal cities and towns – became the area that ‘got rich first’ i.e., had rapid economic growth, based on its better industrial basis, the advantages of location, and prioritising policies from central state. The Anhui provincial government was greatly interested in attracting the economic benefits from the YRD. Institutions for cross-provincial economic coordination were established, accompanied by defining the Wanjiang area of Anhui as a focus of state spatial selectivity.¹⁰ These interests and strategies continued in the 2000s, but were intertwined with a pursuit of more balanced regional development encouraged by the central state. Based on this general guidance, the Anhui provincial government further broadened and strengthened their economic cooperation with the YRD and made it clearer in their official declaration.

¹⁰ As mentioned in Chapter 4, Wanjiang (皖江, Wan River) means the section of the Yangtze River located in the territory of Anhui Province because Anhui is called Wan (皖) for short in Chinese. Although there are no clear spatial boundaries of the Wanjiang area in official documents, it generally refers to the total area of administrative cities along the Wanjiang. It is smaller than the planning area for the WCB which also includes an administrative city – Hefei – and two county-level units in Luan City, none of which are located along the banks of the Yangtze.

In the early 1950s, there were six mega administrative divisions (*da xingzheng qu*) in the PRC established for consolidating the leadership and control of the CPC over the whole country (Fan, 2007). Anhui and provinces in the YRD - Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Shanghai - were incorporated into the East China Mega Administrative Division.¹¹ A dispatched agency of the party-state, the East China Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPC (for short, the East China Bureau) was given administrative responsibility for a comprehensive list of issues in this jurisdiction, including politics, military, economy, and social affairs. In this context, regional cooperation between Anhui Province and the YRD in this period mainly carried out the spirit of the party-state at a central level around national defence. The East China Mega Administrative Division, especially its coastal part, was envisaged by central leaders as the first area likely to be attacked in the event of an invasion by the US and the Chinese Nationalist Party in Taiwan (Xie, 2013), so industrial development in this area was restricted with the intention to relocate industrial enterprises from coastal provinces to inland provinces (Cheng, 2012; Xie, 2013; J. Wu, 2018).

This arrangement was actively followed up by provincial governments in the YRD and Anhui. In 1949, the Shanghai city government organised a congress including representatives from all walks of life to make its working guidelines. Relocating factories to inland areas was deemed one of the main ways to keep and develop industry and commerce (Xia, 2001). In 1953, leaders of the Anhui provincial government visited Shanghai – the most industrially developed area in the East China Administrative Division – to discuss the relocation of industrial talent, technology, equipment, capital, and factories (Party History Office of CPC Hefei City Committee, 1991). After that, 105 industrial enterprises successively moved from Shanghai City to Anhui Province between 1954 and 1960, with the building of factories for electric motors, dyeing, textiles and so on (Party History Research Office of CPC Anhui Provincial Committee, 2002). This laid the industrial foundation of Anhui Province, and especially of Hefei City, in the early PRC. However, power struggles among the top leaders of the CPC resulted in the collapse of mega administrative divisions in 1954. Gao Gang and Rao Shushi, as first secretaries of the Northeast Bureau and East China Bureau respectively, were criticised by the Central Committee of the CPC for building ‘independent kingdoms’¹² in their jurisdictions and promoting ‘de-centralism’ of the CPC’s leadership (Fan, 2007). This was seen to be against the spirit of the policies of Mao Zedong, the General Secretary of the CPC from 1943 to 1976, which were to strengthen centralisation of the

¹¹ The East China Administrative Division also included parts of Shandong Province and Fujian Province besides Anhui and provinces in the YRD (Fan, 2007).

¹² This criticism regarding ‘independent kingdoms’ (*duli wangguo*) first appeared in the *Resolution on Strengthening the Unity of the CPC* (*Guanyu zengqiang dang de tuanjie de jueyi*) in 1954. Although this document criticised the behaviour of Gao and Rao, they were not explicitly named as its targets. It was in the following meetings and decisions of CPC that their names were singled out (Fan, 2007).

CPC's regulatory authority. In this context, six mega administrative divisions were abolished when the province became a high-tier administrative division once again in the PRC.

Nevertheless, this breakdown of administrative integration did not mean the interruption of regional cooperation. On the contrary, coordinated growth of the economy, especially around industrial production, had been emphasised since 1958 and became the main theme of regional institutions and spatial policies until 1966. From 1958 to 1960, seven economic coordinated regions (*jingji xiezuo qu*) were established nationwide. Because of its special location, Anhui Province was incorporated into the East China Coordinated Region¹³ and the Central China Coordinated Region¹⁴ at the same time. However, considering its closer economic connection with the YRD, Anhui Province was required by the Central Committee of the CPC to mainly take part in economic coordination within the East China Coordinated Region (Party Literature Research Centre of CPC Central Committee, 1995).

Compared to the previous East China Bureau, the new East China Coordinated Region was not an official administrative division. Rather, it was more like a region-based coordinating institution focusing on economic development. A temporary state agency named the East China Economic Coordinated Committee, consisting of government officials from member provinces, was organised (Junhua Zhang, 2007; Zhu, 2013). It was responsible for coordinating cross-provincial issues around infrastructure building, industrial production, transportation, culture, and education. Among them, production of steel and associated equipment was the core of all coordination while other production and construction unfolded around it (Zhu, 2013). The comparative advantages of each province were utilised to promote this coordination. Shanghai City mainly provided experts and skilled workers, technologies, and machines, while the other provinces with poorer industrial bases, such as Anhui Province, contributed through the exploitation and initial processing of raw materials and mobilisation of the labour force (Interview B2). For example, Shanghai City was required to give 500 machine tools to six factories in Anhui Province, Jiangsu Province, and Shandong Province for coordinated coal production (East China Economic Coordinated Committee, 1958). In turn, Anhui Province was asked to conduct more production in rubber and bearings in the co-development of the transport industry (East China Economic Coordinated Committee, 1960). It is clear that provincial governments played more significant roles in this industrial coordination, although it was still under the guidance of central ministries

¹³ The East China Coordinated Region included territories in Shanghai and Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, Fujian, Shandong, and Jiangxi provinces (Party Literature Research Centre of CPC Central Committee, 1995).

¹⁴ The Central China Coordinated Region included parts of Hubei, Hunan, Jiangxi, Henan, and Anhui provinces.

such as the Planning Commission and the Economic Commission of the PRC (Junhua Zhang, 2007; Zhu, 2013).

However, from 1961 to 1966, the provincial roles were weakened again when the committees of the economic coordinated regions were replaced by central bureaus. This was one response from the Central Committee of the CPC to the negative results of the Great Leap Forward campaign to reconfigure state power over economic regulation to the central level (Party Literature Research Centre of CPC Central Committee, 1997).¹⁵ It is noteworthy that, although central bureaus in this period were also dispatched agencies of the party-state at a central level, their range of power was much smaller than that of their predecessors which existed from 1950 to 1954. They were mainly responsible for the planning, administration, and organisation of economic activities in each region (Zhu, 2013). Anhui Province was governed by the East China Bureau with in an area of the same size as the previous East China Coordinated Region. The links previously built in some industries such as coal and electricity between Anhui and other provinces such as Shanghai and Jiangsu had continued, but the power of provincial governments in allocating resources on a supra-provincial scale diminished a lot (Interview B2). The central bureaus were ended in 1966 because of the start of the Great Cultural Revolution, which led to anarchy in both China's political system and socioeconomic life for around ten years and rendered regional programmes impossible (Hsing, 2010).

Since 1978, as introduced in Chapter 3, a series of spatial policies were initiated by the central state of the PRC to promote economic reform and a so-called 'open-door' to the world market. The YRD became one of foremost state spaces to develop an export-oriented economy. In 1984, Shanghai City was declared as a *Coastal Open City*, together with four cities in Jiangsu Province and Zhejiang Province (State Council, 1984). Then, in 1988, most of Shanghai City, Jiangsu Province and Zhejiang Province was included in the YRD Coastal Economic Open Region (NDRC, 1988). Associated devolution of economic regulation occurred there, with various policy benefits to commercial business enterprises. These policies not only greatly increased the amount of foreign direct investment (FDI) in the YRD but also accelerated the development there of export industries. Anhui Province, however, was excluded from these benefits of state spatial regulation. This was because in the 1980s Anhui had been reallocated into the Central Region rather than the Eastern Coastal Region (see Chapter 3). This condition expanded the economic

¹⁵ The Great Leap Forward Campaign was initiated by the CPC to promote radical leaps in production in agricultural and industrial output nationwide between 1958 and 1960. It had some positive influences on improving production and power in its early stages but, more importantly, caused extremely imbalanced development of the industrial system and serious economic losses for farmers, as well as immense loss of life due primarily to famine.

gap between Anhui Province and the YRD, especially between Shanghai City and the coastal cities in Zhejiang Province and Jiangsu Province (Cheng, 2012).

In this context, the Anhui provincial government showed great enthusiasm in promoting economic cooperation between Anhui Province and the economically advanced areas in the YRD. Zhang Jinfu, the provincial secretary of the CPC Committee in Anhui at that time (1980-1982), proposed to learn about the experience and technology of industrial production from Shanghai City and other coastal provinces through developing horizontal economic coordination (Party History Research Office of CPC Anhui Provincial Committee, 2002). The establishment of Shanghai Economic Region was deemed to have a good chance of achieving this. It was initiated by the State Council in 1982 as a pilot project to reform economic administration and build a cross-provincial economic network (State Council, 1982). At the initial planning stage, Anhui Province was not included in the Shanghai Economic Region, which only covered Shanghai City and ten cities in Jiangsu Province and Zhejiang Province. However, the leaders of the Anhui provincial government applied to join the Shanghai Economic Region and finally were successful in 1984: Anhui Province was identified as member in a high-level conference of the Shanghai Economic Region (Gao, 2003).

At the same time, a delegation of the Anhui provincial government led by Zhang Jinfu also visited Shanghai City, Jiangsu Province, and Zhejiang Province in order to develop economic coordination. They hoped to bring back advanced experience of management and new technologies of production in the YRD to improve and reform traditional industries in Anhui Province (Interview B2). Some actual industrial cooperation, in other words assistance, occurred after these efforts. For example, fifty technical experts from the National Cotton Factories No.1 and No.2 (two state-owned enterprises in Shanghai) were dispatched to textile factories in Anhui Province over three years to train textile workers. Several famous state-owned enterprises in Shanghai City producing bicycles, watches and sewing machines also imparted their technologies to factories in Anhui province and authorised the latter to produce goods under their brand names (Interview B2).¹⁶

In the 1990s, more actions were deployed by the Anhui provincial government to strengthen economic linkage with the YRD following the establishment of the Pudong New Area in Shanghai initiated by the central state in 1992 (see Chapter 3 for details). The Anhui provincial government proposed a remarkable slogan – ‘Developing Wanjiang, Echoing Pudong’ (*kaifa Wanjiang,*

¹⁶ Bicycles, watches, sewing machines and radios were called ‘*san zhuan yi xiang*’ (the spinning three and the speaking one) from the late 1970s to the early 1980s in China. They were important products in the daily lives of Chinese people during this period, and used to measure the wealth of families.

huying Pudong) (Anhui Planning Commission, 1995). The Wanjiang area were the most economically advanced area in Anhui at that time and had close socioeconomic links to the YRD with the Yangtze River as the main waterway. There were two purposes behind this slogan. The first was shaping the area along the Wanjiang as a key economic region in Anhui Province, analogous to Pudong New Area in Shanghai City, to attract foreign investment. The second was striving for the transfer of economic benefits from the YRD to Anhui Province, to take advantage of the development of the Wanjiang area (Interview B1). This pursuit was also confirmed and accentuated to some extent by the spatial policies of the central state: Wuhu City in the Wangjiang area was selected by the State Council in 1992 as one of five Open Cities along the Yangtze River, soon after the start of the Pudong project, to promote an export-oriented economy. Since then, a series of policies have been promulgated by the Anhui provincial government to promote regional cooperation between the YRD and Anhui Province, especially the Wanjiang area. For example, cross-provincial infrastructure of transport, water, post, and telecommunication between the Wanjiang area and the YRD were put on the agenda of the Anhui provincial government for socioeconomic planning (Anhui Planning Commission, 1996). Several agreements for the procurement of energy sources, raw materials of industrial production, and products of agriculture were also reached between governments in Anhui Province and Shanghai City (Lü, 2009).

In the 2000s, as mentioned in Chapter 3, the spatial regulation of the central state moved away from Dengist policies emphasising growth in a limited number of cities and regions. A more balanced pattern of regional development was pursued and embodied in macro-economic regional policies. Anhui Province was incorporated into the Central Region, prioritising grain production, energy and raw material supply, modern equipment manufacturing, and high-technology industry (State Council, 2006). Based on this general guidance, the Anhui provincial government further broadened and strengthened its economic cooperation with the YRD and made this clear in its official declarations. ‘Integrating into the YRD’ and ‘Eastward development’ were proposed in 2003 and 2005 respectively as province-level development strategies (Anhui Provincial Government, 2006a; Huang and Li, 2008). More traffic and energy infrastructures between Anhui Province and the YRD were planned (Anhui Provincial Government, 2006a). Special financial and institutional support was given to cities and counties in Anhui Province neighbouring Jiangsu Province and Zhejiang Province (Anhui Provincial Department of Finance, 2005). A series of cooperation framework agreements were reached by the Anhui provincial government and the province-level governments of Shanghai, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang to accelerate cross-border construction of infrastructure and promote industrial cooperation (Research Team of Central Committee of Zhi Gong Party, 2009). During this process, more enterprises from the YRD were persuaded to invest in cities of Anhui Province, especially in the Wanjiang area, through investment promotion organised by the Anhui provincial government (Gao and Liu, 2003).

It is noteworthy that, in 2006, the leaders of the Anhui provincial government submitted a report to the State Council requesting the involvement of Anhui Province in a plan for developing a YRD urban cluster drafted by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (MHURD) in 2005 (Cheng, 2012). The request was soon approved by the State Council, and the whole territory of Anhui Province was incorporated into the officially designated YRD Urban Cluster (Interview C1). However, this plan was never promulgated as an official document (Interview B3). It was not until 2016 that the WCB was incorporated into the *Development Plan for the Yangtze River Delta Urban Cluster (Changsanjiao Chengshi Qun Fazhan Guihua)* (promulgated in June 2016 by the NDRC), and then in 2019 the whole area of Anhui Province was included in the *Outline of the Regional Integrated Development Plan for the Yangtze River Delta* promulgated by the State Council as mentioned in Chapter 3.

5.2.2 Trajectory II: division and differential development of sub-provincial regions in Anhui

Another trajectory of regional spatial regulation in Anhui Province is the division and differential development of sub-provincial regions. In fact, it was in the 1980s that the designation of economic regions emerged in the policies of Anhui Province for the first time. This can be viewed as a response by the provincial government to growth-oriented economic reform led by the central state in post-reform China. Each sub-provincial economic region has been given distinctive development strategies. Among them, the Wanjiang area and Hefei City were expected to lead the economic growth of the whole province, and accordingly got preferential support in the 1990s. But before 1978, differential development of sub-provincial areas had also been embedded in the spatial regulation of Anhui Province in the period of planned economy. This prioritised the construction of infrastructure, industrialisation, and urbanisation in some identified regions and cities, and preconditioned regional spatial policies after 1978. This section traces the evolution of this trajectory from the 1950s to the end of the 1990s, highlighting the features of each stage. The central state, provincial government, and think tanks all contributed to this path-shaping, while their roles changed at different stages and initiatives.

Although there was no clear division into economic regions in the spatial regulation of Anhui Province before 1978, some areas and cities were identified as foci for the state to develop infrastructure, agriculture, and industry. Multiple levels of government, especially the central and provincial levels, were deeply involved in this regional regulation, but their roles were quite distinct for different projects. For example, the central state showed strong leadership in the development of the basin of the Huai River in Anhui Province, with active implementation and coordination by the Anhui provincial government. The Huai River flows through three provinces (Henan, Anhui, and Jiangsu) and flooding has been a very serious problem since the twelfth century with terrible effects on agriculture and people's livelihoods (Shen, 2017). In this context,

the State Council of the PRC published the *Decision on governing the Huai River* (*Guanyu zhili huaihe de jue ding*) in 1950 to guide the overall direction and ways of controlling the flood waters (State Council, 1950). A dispatched agency of the Ministry of Water Resources, the Committee Governing the Huai River, was organised from 1950 to 1958 to lead the work. The office of this committee was set up in Bengbu City in Anhui Province, and the basin of the Huai River in Anhui Province was selected as a key region for governance. In the following policies made by this committee, a series of water conservation facilities such as Foziling Reservoir in Huoshan County and Meishan Reservoir in Jinzhai County were planned and constructed to store floodwater, provide irrigation, and generate electricity (Yuan, 2014). A large amount of fiscal funding was given by the central state to these facilities, mobilising talent and labour forces nationwide to support their planning and construction. These actions effectively reduced the harm caused by floods to the Huai basin in Anhui, and improved agricultural conditions, provision of industrial energy, and transportation of waterways in the region.

With the completion of the major infrastructure projects, the Committee Governing the Huai River was withdrawn in 1958, and its personnel and power of regulation were devolved to provincial governments for some 13 years until 1971. During this period, the Anhui provincial government led and finished some new water conservation facilities such as building an artificial river, Xin Bian River to further solve the flood issues around the Huai River (Tan and Ye, 2012). However, this devolved regulation with limited cross-provincial coordination resulted in chaos in river governance when each province placed more emphasis on benefiting its own territory rather than prioritising the mutual benefits of the whole basin (Shen, 2017). This stimulated the recovery of central agencies for governance of the Huai River in 1971, which has continued until now. During this whole process, the Anhui provincial government was not absent, but the central state showed a higher degree of involvement in regional spatial regulation at a sub-provincial scale. This implies that central power is motivated and able to intervene in the spatial selectivity of sub-provincial regions when their development has significant supra-provincial socioeconomic influences. This logic is also involved in the initiation of the WCB (see Section 5.4.1).

By contrast, the Anhui provincial government showed higher independence in the spatial selectivity that involved promoting industrialisation within its territory from 1952 to 1978, although its actions were also directed and limited by the regulatory strategies of the central state. Following the state territorial system of the early PRC, in early 1950s Anhui there were only five urban settlements entitled ‘cities governed by provincial government’ – the predecessor of prefecture-level cities. Two of these five cities were located by the Yangtze River, Wuhu City and Anqing City; two were near the Huai River, Bengbu City and Huainan City; and one was in the middle of Anhui Province, Hefei City. These cities were designed by the Anhui provincial

government as key areas for industrial development, with more financial support and preferential policies. For example, most of the 105 industrial enterprises which moved from Shanghai City to Anhui Province, mentioned in Section 5.2.1, were relocated to these five cities during 1954 to 1960 with the rapid growth of factory districts (Party History Research Office of CPC Anhui Provincial Committee, 2002). Among the cities, Hefei City as the provincial capital of Anhui Province got more than half of the relocated enterprises (Compilation Committee for Hefei General History, 2017; J. Wu, 2018). This decision was influenced by active coordination between the Anhui provincial government and the Hefei city government. It not only brought talent, technologies, and equipment to Hefei City, but also filled gaps in its industrial development, such as enhancing new manufacturing sectors.

From the late 1950s to the 1970s, more urban settlements were designated as cities governed by provincial government in an administrative sense based on their progress of industrialisation, especially around exploitation of raw materials for industrial production. For instance, Maanshan City and Tongguanshan City (predecessor of current Tongling City) were established in 1957 with rapid expansion of iron mills and copper mills relying on the exploitation of corresponding mines nearby. Suixi City (predecessor of current Huaibei City) was established in 1959 based on the development of Huaibei Coal Mine. Although a large amount of industrial production in Anhui Province was disrupted by the Great Cultural Revolution from the mid-1960s to the mid 1970s, these cities with their strong industrial base were still deemed key areas for the limited economic development of the whole province. In the *4th Five-Year Economic Plan of Anhui Province (Anhui sheng di si ge wunian guomin jingji jihua (1971-1975))*, and province-level conferences organised later, developing the coal-mining Huaibei area and the steel mills of Maanshan City were proposed as two of the most important strategies to promote the economic development of Anhui Province. In addition to the focus on industry-based cities, urban and regional development around the crucial role of Huang Mountain (the scenic location that is one of the so-called ‘Five Great Mountains of China’ located in southern Anhui) in national tourism was also promoted by the provincial government. It was associated with state investment in roads, airports, railways, and other urban infrastructure in this area (Party History Research Office of CPC Anhui Provincial Committee, 2002).

Since the 1980s, economic regions rather than individual cities have started to become the focus of the spatial regulation of the Anhui provincial government. The division of the province into economic regions, the strategies initiated to develop each region, and the preference in resource allocation among regions have been constantly adjusted with strong influence from national policies. In the *Outline of Economic and Social Development Strategies for Anhui Province (1986-2000) (Anhui sheng jingji shehui fazhan zhanlve gangyao)*, economic regions, in other

words ‘regions of strategic layout based on economic development’, have first been proposed in the policies of the Anhui provincial government. The territory of Anhui Province was divided into five economic regions: Central Anhui Region, Region along the Yangtze River, Northern Anhui Region (along the Huai River), Southern Anhui Region, and Dabie Mountain Region (in western Anhui). This division into economic regions was based on geographical elements and existing economic links (Cheng, 2012). Based on the development conditions before 1978 illustrated above, the Region along the Yangtze River, the Northern Anhui Region, and Hefei City (in the Central Anhui Region) had better foundations in industries such as mining, metallurgy, and manufacturing. Tourism contributed a lot to the economic growth of Southern Anhui Region. In this context, the Anhui provincial government identified these three regions and the provincial capital, i.e., Hefei City, as key areas to lead the economic development of the whole province in the 1980s (He et al., 2005).

However, this relatively balanced spatial regulation did not last for a long time, and the focus was quickly transferred to the Wanjiang area. Preferential policies from both provincial and central governments positioned the Wanjiang area as the frontier of Anhui Province in opening to capital from foreign countries and rich areas in China such as the YRD (see Section 5.2.1). This focus on the Wanjiang area was further expanded to the region centred on Hefei City after the mid-1990s when the Anhui provincial government proposed to intensify investment in high-tech industries in Hefei City (Anhui Planning Commission, 1996). Establishing the ‘awareness of the provincial capital’ was proposed by experts from Anhui Academy of Social Sciences and accepted by leaders of the provincial government (Interview B1). Increasing population, developing industries, and strengthening scientific research in Hefei City have become common pursuits of the Anhui provincial government and Hefei city government to increase the primacy of the provincial capital (Interview B2). Meanwhile, the importance of Hefei City in regional development was also raised at the central level when it was identified as one of the technical and educational bases of China. The only national-level high-tech development zone in 1990s Anhui Province was established in Hefei City with a large number of subsidies from the central state and the Anhui provincial government, and associated preferential policies on tax concessions, personnel assignments, and so on (Li, 2011). Since then, the Wanjiang area and Hefei City have become the most economically advanced areas in Anhui Province and maintained rapid growth through the 2000s (see Section 5.3). This changing focus on sub-provincial regions and cities in Anhui Province reflects in part the provincial government’s response to the changing national focus on the spatial economy and in part the province’s own interests.

In summary, the two trajectories illustrated in Section 5.3 show the general direction of regional spatial regulation in Anhui Province towards outward cooperation with the YRD and differential

development within the provincial territory. They prefigured the political and economic contexts in the late 2000s Anhui, and inevitably limited state spatial selectivity around city-region building such as the WCB and the HMR. In addition, it is not hard to notice from the transformation of trajectories that both the central state and the provincial government played important roles in shaping the paths of regional institutions and spatial policies. However, their roles were not set in stone but constantly changed over different historical periods. Generally speaking, the provincial government showed stronger enthusiasm, capacity, and autonomy in promoting region-building in the post-reform period compared to its position in the planned economy. But that did not mean the retreat of the central state, which still actively intervened in cross-provincial coordination and influenced regional and urban development at a sub-provincial scale. In this process, the contribution of quasi-state think tanks, such as the Anhui Academy of Social Sciences in shaping the paths of regional regulation in Anhui Province cannot be overlooked.

5.3 Transformation of Anhui Province's regional and urban economy

In addition to the trajectories of regional spatial regulation, two characteristics of Anhui's regional and urban economy in the early years of the 2000s were also referred to by many informants as important preconditions, in other words main triggers, for the initiation of the WCB and the HMR. Both features show uneven development of the spatial economy, but at cross-provincial and sub-provincial scales respectively. One of the features is growing economic disparity between Anhui Province and the YRD, which contextualises Anhui's effort to relocate industries from the YRD in the late 2000s (Section 5.3.1) and, in addition, influenced the agenda setting behind the WCB. The other feature is the rise of Hefei's urban economy with an expanding disparity between it and the surrounding cities in central Anhui (Section 5.3.2). This constituted one of most important elements of the economic background to the initiation of the HMR. Details of these two features are illustrated in this section.

5.3.1 Growing regional economic disparity between Anhui Province and the YRD

According to the criteria for evaluating China's economic development stages developed by Qi, Yang, & Jin (2013), there are three basic stages and seven sub-stages of economic transformation measured by per capita gross domestic product (GDP) (see Table 5.1). Each stage has its own characteristics in economic development corresponding to the relative contributions of primary production and manufacturing to economic growth. In the first basic stage, the main output for trade is from primary production such as agriculture, with relatively low rates of capital accumulation, growth of labour force, and growth in total factor productivity. In the second basic stage, the contribution of manufacturing to economic growth expands, with higher rates of capital accumulation and growth in productivity responding to a rise in the rate of investment. In the third

basic stage, the share of manufacturing in economic growth declines compared to the second stage, with slower accumulation of capital and growth of labour force while the high total factor productivity is less associated with industrialisation. This means that regions in different stages of economic development have distinct sources and dynamics for economic growth, which enables inter-regional coordination based on the uneven development of production factors.

Table 5.1 Criterion for evaluating economic development stages in China (per capita GDP/CNY)

Basic stage	Sub stage	Time			
		1995	2000	2005	2010
Stage I. Primary Production	Primary production I	3,032-4,231	3,667-5,167	4,167-5,917	3,733-5,267
	Primary production II	4,231-8,462	5,167-10,333	5,917-11,750	5,267-10,467
	Primary industrialisation	8,462-16,923	10,333-20,750	11,750-23,500	10,467-21,000
	Middle industrialisation	16,923-33,846	20,750-41,417	23,500-47,000	21,000-42,000
Stage II. Industrialisation	Late industrialisation	33,846-63,461	41,417-77,667	47,000-88,083	42,000-78,733
	Primary developed economy	63,461-101,538	77,667-124,250	88,083-141,000	78,733-126,000
Stage III. The developed economy	Advanced developed economy	101,538-152,308	124,250-186,500	141,000-211,500	126,000-189,000

Source: Developed from Qi, Yang, & Jin (2013)'s work by transferring the currency of per capita GDP from US dollars to CNY using the exchange rates recorded by International Financial Statistics (IFS).

In my interviews with government officials and think tank researchers from Anhui Province, the economic disparity between Anhui Province and the YRD was identified as one of important preconditions for the initiation of the WCB in the late 2000s (Interview B1; Interview B2; Interview A6). However, little evidence was given by informants to prove this disparity existed. For the purpose of examining this information, I compare the per capita GDP of four province-

level units from 1995 to 2010 (see Table 5.2) and fit it into the criterion for evaluating economic development stages (Figure 5.1). It confirms the existence of regional economic disparity between Anhui Province and the YRD over these fifteen years, and that this disparity expanded over this timeframe.

Table 5.2 Per capita GDP (CNY) in Anhui and the YRD from 1995 to 2010

Province	Shanghai City	Jiangsu Province	Zhejiang Province	Anhui Province
Time				
1995	17,779	7,319	8,149	3,070
1996	20,647	8,471	9,552	3,524
1997	23,397	9,371	10,624	3,929
1998	25,206	10,049	11,394	4,235
1999	27,071	10,695	12,214	4,495
2000	29,671	11,765	13,416	4,779
2001	32,201	12,882	14,713	5,313
2002	35,329	14,396	16,978	5,736
2003	39,128	16,830	20,444	6,375
2004	46,338	20,223	24,352	7,681
2005	51,474	24,560	27,703	8,670
2006	57,310	28,685	31,684	10,044
2007	62,041	33,837	36,676	12,039
2008	66,932	40,014	41,405	14,448
2009	69,165	44,253	43,842	16,408
2010	76,074	52,840	51,711	20,888

Source: Data collected from official website of National Bureau of Statistics <http://data.stats.gov.cn/easyquery.htm?cn=E0103>, accessed on 20 December, 2019

As shown in Figure 5.1, Anhui Province indeed lagged behind provinces in the YRD in terms of economic development since 1995, and this gap has further expanded since the mid-2000s. In 1995, Anhui Province was in the same stage of economic development as Zhejiang Province and Jiangsu Province, while Shanghai City was two stages ahead of them. However, from 1996 to 2006, the economic growth of provinces in the YRD was much faster than that of Anhui Province. Zhejiang Province and Jiangsu Province reached ‘middle industrialisation’ in 2004 and 2005, while Anhui Province was still in primary production at the end of 2006. It was not until 2007 that Anhui Province finally entered the second stage of economic development, as the other provinces in the YRD had done a decade ago or earlier. At this point, Shanghai City had been in late industrialisation for three years and was approaching the criteria for a developed economy in 2010. Zhejiang Province and Jiangsu Province also entered late industrialisation in 2009, while Anhui Province was still stuck in primary industrialisation.

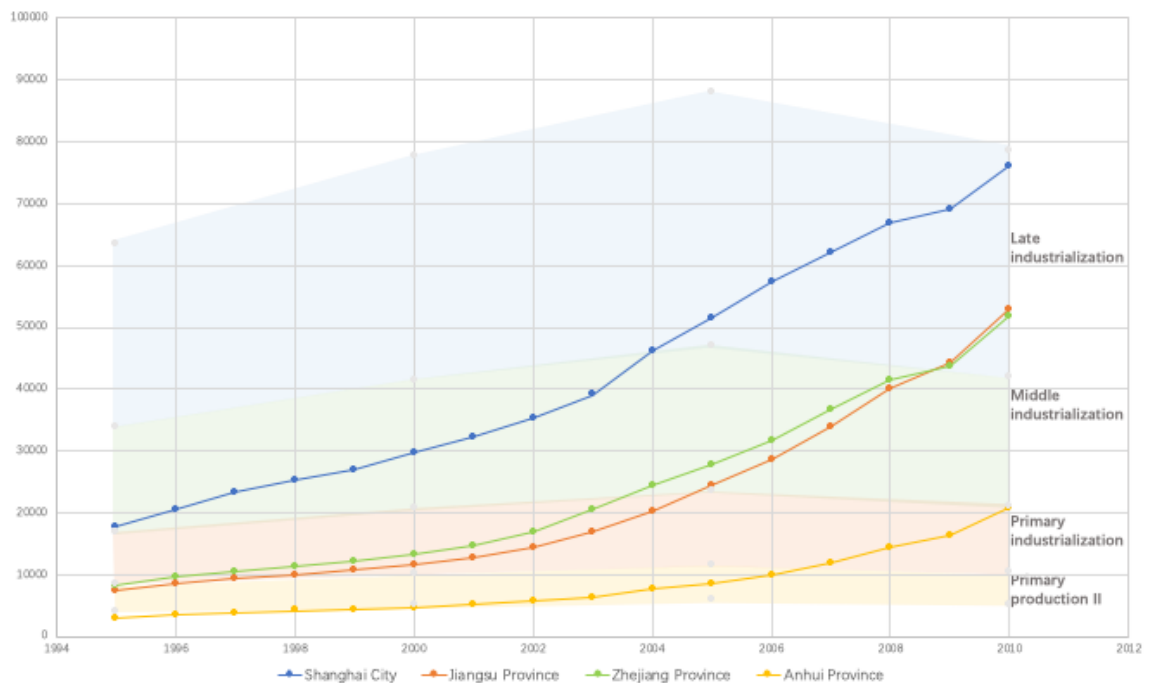


Figure 5.1 Economic development stages of Anhui and the YRD from 1995 to 2010

Source: Drawn according to statistical yearbooks of Anhui, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang.

This gap in economic development demonstrates the difference in industrial structures between Anhui Province and the YRD, which contextualises the realities and potential of industrial relocation mentioned in Chapter 3. When Anhui Province entered primary industrialisation in 2007, its demand for secondary industry grew a lot – a rise associated with the expanding contribution of manufacturing to economic growth. This driving force of economic development was partly set aside by Shanghai City and some economically advanced cities in Zhejiang Province and Jiangsu Province when they reached the end of late industrialisation. This is supported by statistics on the contribution of the three types of industries to GDP (see Figure 5.2). In 2007, the contribution of secondary industry to provincial GDP in Anhui was at its highest

60.41% – compared to its counterparts in the other three provinces. This index in Shanghai City was only 46.89% accompanied by a relatively stronger tertiary industry – contributing 52.28% of its GDP – which was 17.01% higher than the same data in Anhui Province.

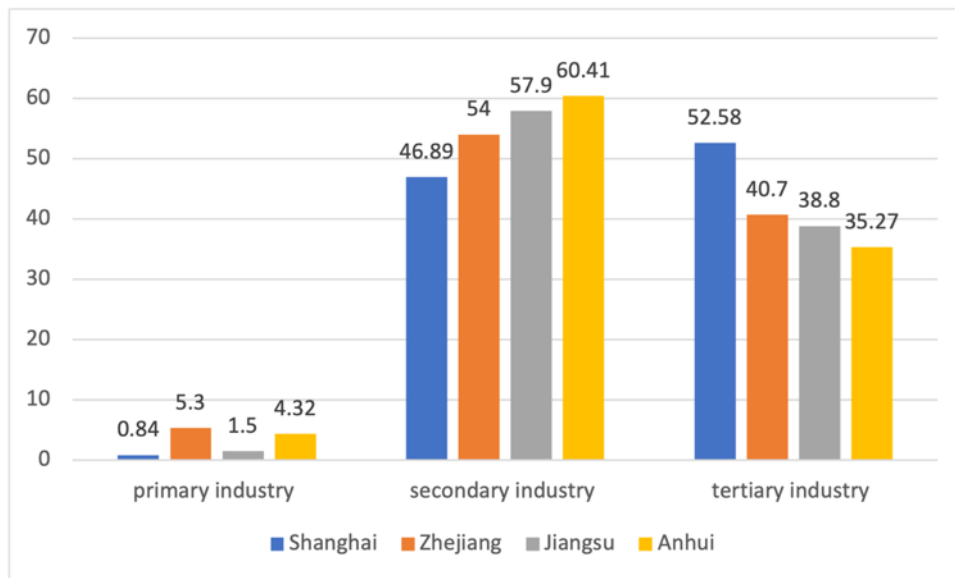


Figure 5.2 Contribution of three types of industries to GDP in 2007

Source: Drawn according to statistical yearbooks of Anhui, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang.

Meanwhile, this difference in industrial structures was further strengthened by the policies of the Shanghai city government. In the *Eleventh Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social development in Shanghai City* (*Shanghai guomin jingji he shehui fazhan di shiyi ge wunian guihua gangyao*) (2006-2010), the Shanghai city government proposed to pursue a transformation of industrial structures by rapidly developing tertiary industry and promoting the evolution of secondary industry from labour-intensive with high energy consumption to technology-intensive and environmentally friendly.

Continue to promote the ‘retreat from two to three’[replacement of secondary industry by tertiary industry] policy in the central urban districts. Accelerate the evolution, adjustment, and transformation of traditionally concentrated industrial areas such as Yangpu, Pengpu, Taopu, and Wujing. (Shanghai City Government, 2006, p.27)

This condition contextualises the moving-out of some secondary industries from the economically advanced area of the YRD since the late 2000s, to new locations at lower stages of economic development. It was further intensified by the shock caused by the global financial crisis in 2008 when lower-cost and well-resourced locations were sought by foreign investment (see Chapter 3). All of this provided Anhui Province with a chance to strive for relocated industries from the YRD, and it also influenced the agenda-setting of the multiple levels of government behind the initiation of the WCB, as will be discussed in more detail in Section 5.4.1.

5.3.2 Rise of Hefei's economy in central Anhui

Although the economic development of Anhui Province lagged behind that of the three provinces in the YRD, it also itself experienced a rapid growth in 2000s. As shown in Table 5.3, the GDP of Anhui Province in 2010 was four times what it was in 2000, with an average annual growth rate of 15.1%. Meanwhile, the industrial structure in Anhui transformed a lot in this decade, with a big expansion of secondary industry's contribution to the whole economy. In 2000, the contribution rates of the primary, secondary, and tertiary industries to the provincial GDP were 24.1%, 42.67%, and 33.26% (Statistics Bureau of Anhui Province, 2001), while these rates changed to 13.99%, 52.08%, and 33.93% in 2010 (Statistics Bureau of Anhui Province, 2011). This trend is consistent with the feature of the second stages of economic development, industrialisation, abstracted by Qi, Yang, & Jin (2013).

Table 5.3 GDP (billion CNY) in Hefei City and Anhui Province in the 2000s

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Hefei City	32.5	36.3	41.3	48.5	59.0	85.4	107.4	133.4	166.5	210.2	270.2
Anhui Province	303.8	329.0	356.9	397.2	481.3	537.6	614.9	736.4	887.4	1,006.3	1,235.9
GDP Ratio (%)	10.7	11.1	11.6	12.2	12.3	15.9	17.5	18.1	18.8	20.9	21.9

Source: Data collected from Anhui Statistical Yearbook (2001-2011).

During this evolution of Anhui's economy in the 2000s, the economic growth of Hefei City, the provincial capital, was more significant still – with an average annual growth rate of 23.6% (see Table 5.3). The contribution of Hefei City to Anhui's economy increased a lot at the same time, as Hefei's contributing proportion of the entire provincial GDP doubled in the 2000s from 10.7% to 21.9%. At the end of the 2000s, Hefei contributed over one fifth of the provincial GDP, ranking first among seventeen prefecture-level cities of Anhui Province (Statistics Bureau of Anhui Province, 2011).

Accompanied by the rapid growth of GDP and its contribution to the provincial economy, the gaps in economic development between Hefei City and its surrounding cities in central Anhui also expanded significantly from 2000 to 2010. This is reflected in two ways. On the one hand, Hefei City took a lead in economic evolution in central Anhui. Based on the criteria shown in Table 5.1, in 2000, Hefei City and its surrounding cities (Huainan City, Luan City, Chuzhou City, Anqing City, and Chaohu City) were all in the stage of primary production (see Figure 5.3a).

Among them, Hefei City, Chuzhou City, and Huainan City, three cities with better industrial bases, were one or two stages ahead of the others. In 2005, the economic development of Hefei City surpassed all other surrounding cities and it became the only city in central Anhui to enter the stage of industrialisation (see Figure 5.3b). Hefei City kept its leading position through to 2010, when it reached the stage of late industrialisation - a stage ahead of Huainan City, and two stages ahead of all the other surrounding cities (see Figure 5.3c).

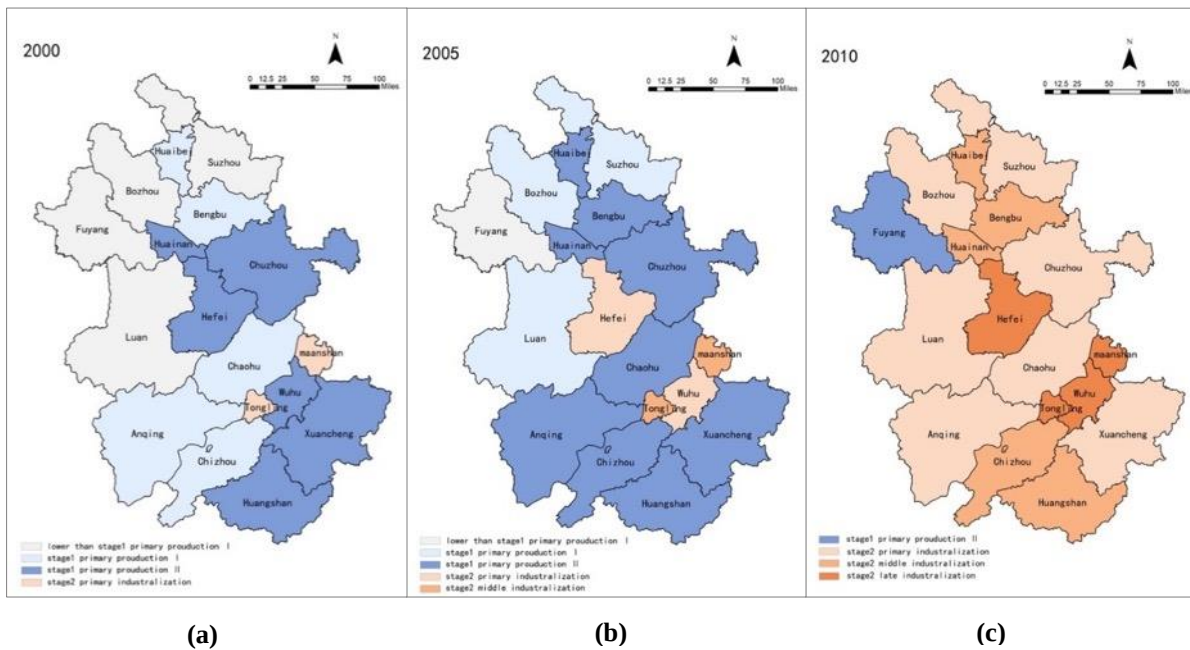


Figure 5.3 Economic development stages of prefecture-level cities in Anhui Province in 2000(a), 2005(b), and 2010(c)

Source: Data collected from Anhui Statistical Yearbook (2001, 2006, 2011) with standards shown in Table 5.1

On the other hand, the growth of Hefei's economic volume was much more rapid than that of its surrounding cities in the 2000s, with acceleration in the mid- and late 2000s as shown in Figure 5.4. The GDP of Hefei City increased sevenfold in that decade and reached 270 billion yuan in 2010, which was near to 3.8 to 4.4 times the GDP of the other cities in central Anhui. This expanded gap in GDP was mainly attributed to a boom in the development of secondary and tertiary industries in Hefei City (see Figure 5.5). In 2000, the GDP of secondary industry in Hefei City was 1.5 to 2.9 times that of other cities in central Anhui; however, in 2005 it reached 3.2 times higher than the highest and 5.2 times lower than the lowest city's GDP of secondary industry in central Anhui beyond Hefei, and further expanded to 3.7 the highest and 12.4 times the lowest of the levels beyond Hefei in 2010. The gap in tertiary industry was not so dramatic but also

reached four times the highest to six times the lowest GDP of tertiary industry for cities in central Anhui at the end of 2000s.

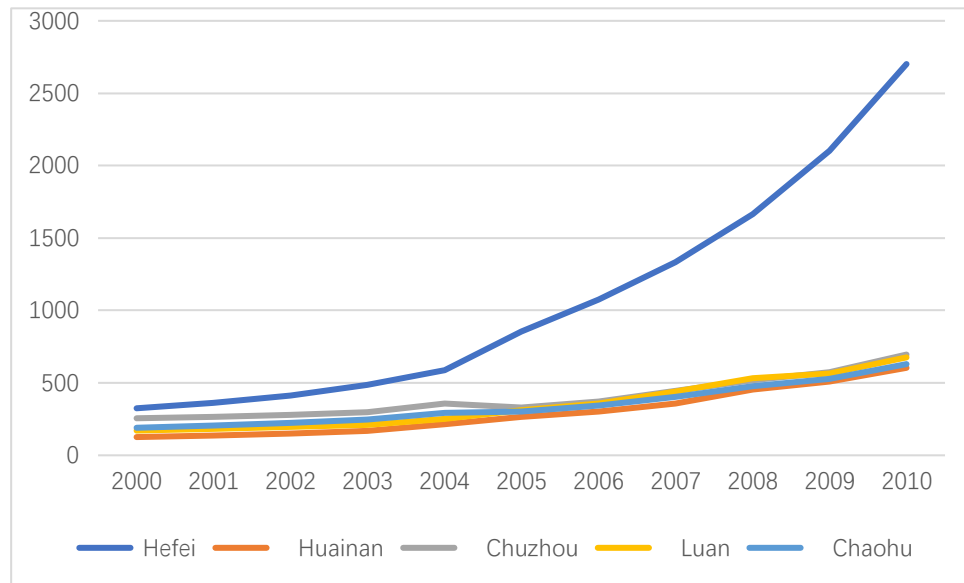


Figure 5.4 GDP of prefecture-level cities in central Anhui from 2000 to 2010

Source: Data collected from Anhui Statistical Yearbook (2001–2011)

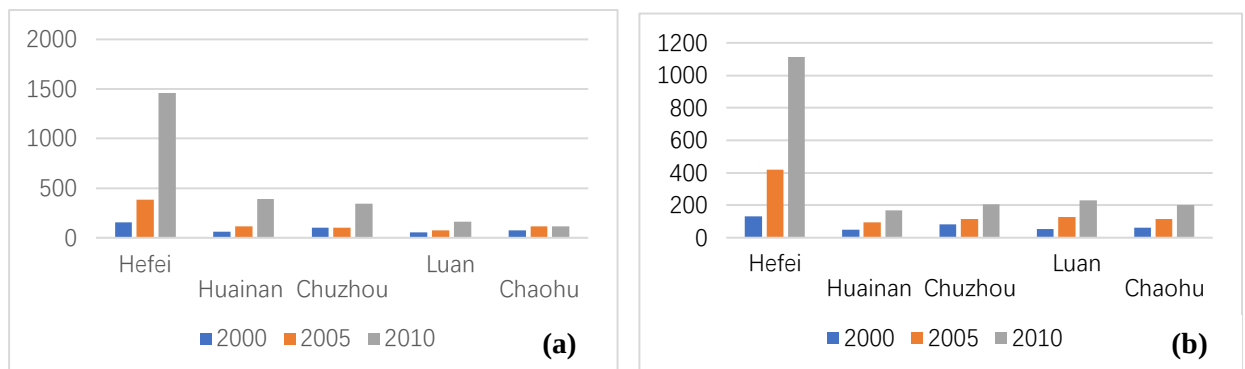


Figure 5.5 GDP of second industry(a) and tertiary industry (b) in central Anhui

Source: Data collected from Anhui Statistical Yearbook (2001, 2006, 2011)

The evidence illustrated above shows the significant contribution of Hefei City to the provincial economy, and the expanded economic gaps between Hefei City and its surrounding cities in the 2000s. In this sense, developing a regional economy centred on Hefei City became possible, stressing both the economic primacy of Hefei City and its economic coordination with the surrounding cities. Meanwhile, Hefei City was also deemed by provincial government to have the political responsibility for helping the economic development of its ‘little brothers’ around it (Interview A12). Other cities in central Anhui were expected to provide both energy and other resources for the growing economy in Hefei City, and to receive industrial enterprises and capital when they relocated from Hefei City (Interview C4). These motivations, based on the economic

development of Hefei City and central Anhui, were embodied in the agenda setting of the Anhui provincial government behind the initiation of the HMR (see Section 5.4.2).

In short, Section 5.3 has highlighted two characteristics of the regional and urban economies associated with 2000s Anhui that were the functional-economic context for the initiation of the WCB and HMR. The growing economic disparity between Anhui Province and the YRD not only provided urgency for the central state to balance development between macro-economic regions, but also provided a chance for Anhui Province to prepare to take some of the relocating industries from coastal China. It was a window of opportunity to find new engines for economic growth and industrialisation in Anhui Province. Meanwhile, Hefei City contributed in ever more significant ways to the provincial economy over that decade, with an expanding gap between itself and its surrounding cities in central Anhui. This implied a potential to develop the regional economy centred on Hefei City with differentiated development and coordination between cities around functional-economic activities.

5.4 Agenda setting and policy proposal behind the WCB and the HMR

As introduced in Chapter 3, the challenges caused by the economic disparity between regions and cities has attracted intense attention from academia, mass media, and multiple levels of government since the late 1990s. These challenges are both caused and significantly influenced by evolving globalisation and fierce local competition. The situation called for an update of regional spatial regulation towards a more balanced model, and new drivers for urbanisation and industrialisation. In this context, coordinated regional development was put on the top of the agenda of both the central state and the Anhui provincial government, with both highlighting the significant roles of leading cities and the cluster of cities to sustainable economic growth. Solutions to this agenda in Anhui depended on the trajectories of regional regulation and the conditions of the regional economy. As introduced in Chapter 4, the WCB and HMR were areas established in 2010 and 2008 respectively which partially geographically overlapped (see Figures 4.2 and 4.3) but represented contrasting responses these national trajectories and regional conditions. The WCB was initiated to promote industrial relocation from coastal China, especially the YRD, to Anhui, with the urban cluster in the Wanjiang area was delineated as the main area to take the relocated industries. By contrast, coordinated growth between Hefei City and its surrounding cities in central Anhui was envisaged through by the HMR.

5.4.1 Initiation of the WCB: promoting industrial relocation across macro-economic regions

The initiation of the WCB was first a response to the agenda setting at the national scale around the uneven development of China's regional economy introduced in Chapter 3. The expanding

economic gaps between coastal China and inland China since the 1980s (see Section 3.3.1) led to a proliferation of academic research on regional disparity, and criticism of the regional policies of central state from policy elites of economically disadvantaged provinces in the 1990s (Wang, 2008). This research and consequent criticism contributed to the narrowing of regional disparities being placed on the agendas of the central state since the mid-1990s (Wang, 2008). Meanwhile, the economic development of the Eastern Coastal Region has also faced considerable difficulties since the 2000s (see Section 3.3.3). These difficulties attracted attention from academia, media, and local governments to discuss the limits of the export-oriented and labour-intensive economy in coastal China and the urgency of industrial relocation across macro-economic regions (Ni and Zhang, 2005; Xie et al., 2007; Tang, 2008).

This discussion was absorbed by the policy making of the central state in the second half of the 2000s and led to a series of national policies. For example, in the Eleventh Five-Year Plan for Utilizing Foreign Capital, the NDRC (2006) proposed that:

With the rising cost of production factors in the Eastern Region, the Central and the Western Regions will usher in a good opportunity to utilize foreign capital...[We should] seize the opportunities of the international relocation of manufacturing and the relocation of foreign investment from the Eastern Coastal Region to vigorously promote the relocation of foreign capital towards the traditional industrial bases in the Central and the Western Regions and the Northeast Region (NDRC, 2006, pp.4, 10-11).

In August of 2010, these visions were developed into a formal guidance promulgated by the State Council – the Guiding Opinions of the State Council on Accepting Industrial Relocation in the Central and Western Regions (*Guowuyuan guanyu zhongxibu diqu chengjie chanye zhuan yi de zhidao yijian*). This overall guidance stipulated the basic principles for the promotion of industrial relocation from the Eastern Coastal Region to inland China and illustrated the main industrial types and spatial models of industrial development encouraged and supported by the central state in this process. Some other issues, such as infrastructure and institution, that were designed to accelerate this industrial relocation across macro-economic regions were also listed (State Council, 2010). It is noteworthy that this guidance proposed to shape a batch of key economic regions in the Central and the Western Regions as the core spaces to promote the agglomeration of relocated industries and lead the development of surrounding areas.

Although there was no more illustration on the locations and morphologies of these key economic regions in this guidance, a number of national level ‘Demonstration Zones for Accepting Industrial Relocation’ were approved by the NDRC since 2010 and can be viewed as representative policies. All these zones were located in the inland provinces and shared as their

main goals the attraction of industrial enterprises and capital based in coastal China and an increase in the capacity to develop and expand related industrial agglomeration. The areas of these zones usually include administrative jurisdictions of several prefecture-level cities and/or county-level cities. The WCB in Anhui Province is the first of these Demonstration Zones for Accepting Industrial Relocation identified by the plan of the NDRC in January 2010, and this was followed by the approval of other zones in Guangxi Province (in 2010), Chongqing City (in 2011)¹⁷, Hunan Province (in 2011 and 2018), Hubei Province (in 2012), Liaoning Province (in 2020), etc.

Further, the selection of the WCB, rather than other spaces, in Anhui Province to build the national level Demonstration Zones for Accepting Industrial Relocation was indeed dependent on the paths taken by state spatial regulation and the development of the spatial economy as illustrated in Sections 5.2 and 5.3. This process involved the participation of and interaction between quasi-state think tanks, mass media, and state agencies at provincial and central levels.

Since the mid-2000s, the necessity of expanding the YRD – as an institutional city-region defined in the 1990s and including Shanghai City and fourteen economic advanced cities in Zhejiang Province and Jiangsu Province – into the ‘Pan-YRD’ (*fan changsanjiao*) was widely discussed in the academic literature and the mass media (Zhu and Liu, 2005; Jinghan Zhang, 2007). Building a new state space including the YRD and its surrounding areas in central China was considered conducive to the formation of a more complete and robust network of industrial production and advanced producer services. This network was envisaged to take advantage of differences in the stages of economic development between the YRD and central provinces to organise the division of labour, and in turn, to solve problems involved in the uneven development of the regional economy.

Among these surrounding areas, Anhui Province, especially its Wanjiang area, was advocated as an ideal place for incorporation into the Pan-YRD by think tanks such as Anhui Academy of Social Science and mass media including the Anhui Daily, which are affiliated to the Anhui provincial government (Yao, 2004; Lü, 2009). The long history of regional cooperation between Anhui Province and the YRD was seen to provide a good foundation for functional-economic connections, while the difference in industrial structures and other factors of production was believed to show the potential for industrial relocation and coordination. Specially, in these research outputs and reports, the urban cluster rather than a single city was considered as a better

¹⁷ Because Chongqing City is a province-level city, so the sub-provincial units governed by it are not termed as ‘city’. Accordingly, the national-level Demonstration Zones for Accepting Industrial Relocation in Chongqing City includes prefecture-level urban districts and counties.

– a more ‘cost-effective’ – spatial unit to join in the integrated development of Anhui Province and the YRD. As one commentator wrote:

As far as the current situation in Anhui is concerned, the integration of a single city into the YRD is difficult and the value is small, but the clustering or grouping [of cities] may be a better and faster way to integrate into the YRD...At this stage, the best way for Anhui to connect with the YRD and build the Pan-YRD Economic Region is to strengthen the building of its own urban cluster as a growth pole...and form a base for manufacturing and accept relocated industries and capital (Lü, 2009, pp.25-26).

This kind of view was consistent with the spatial selectivity of the central state since the mid-2000s in relation to the promotion of urbanisation and functional-economic agglomeration through the development of urban clusters (see Section 3.2) and, indeed, reflected a series of policies of the Anhui provincial government in the late 2000s (Section 5.2). This condition not only implies the top-down transfer of spatial policies within the state territorial system of contemporary China but also presents the mutual reinforcement of policy discourse and academic discourse in shaping institutional city-regions.

In 2008, Hu Jintao, then the general secretary of the CPC (March 2003 to March 2013), gave a speech to declare that Anhui Province was a member of Pan-YRD – still a fuzzy concept without clear definition in the policy realm – and described its roles within it:

[Anhui] should use its advantages in location, natural resources, and labour force to actively participate in the division of labour in the regional development of the Pan-YRD, to proactively accept industries relocated from the coastal area, and to strengthen horizontally its economic alliances and coordination with brother provinces (Hu, 2008).

The spirit of this speech was actively responded to by the leaders of the Anhui provincial government, and soon transferred into the provincial agenda.

After he [Hu Jintao] proposed this concept [Pan-YRD], the CPC committee and provincial government of Anhui carefully studied and deeply understood this speech for the purpose of implementing its spirit. The then-secretary of the CPC Committee of Anhui Province [Wang Jinshan], and the then governor of the Anhui provincial government Wang Sanyun...went to Shanghai, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang to investigate...Anhui was proactively required to join the ‘Rich Person’s Club’...At that time, Anhui had apparent gaps with Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Shanghai in terms of economic and social development. [Anhui] just wanted to integrate into the YRD and accept more and better industries relocated from the YRD (Interview A6).

The ‘Rich Person’s Club’ mentioned by the informant was the Forum of Main Leaders in the YRD. This forum has met annually since 2005; it comprises the main leaders from governments of the provinces and main cities in the YRD who meet to discuss cross-provincial regional cooperation. Leaders of the Anhui provincial government have been involved in this forum since December 2008. It can also reflect the acceptance of provincial governments in the YRD of the agendas pursued by both the central state and the Anhui provincial government.

In addition, the central government, and especially the NDRC, was actively engaged in clarifying and providing policy options to the agendas proposed by the general secretary of the CPC in that speech. This work was conducted in coordination with the Anhui provincial government. In July 2008, the leaders of the Anhui provincial government invited Fan Hengshan, director of the Regional Economic Division of the NDRC and Deputy Director of National Office for Promoting the Rise of Central China (June 2006 to April 2014), to undertake a field survey in Anhui Province to push forward policy making in the spirit of Hu’s speech (Interview A6; Interview B1). The Wanjiang area were selected by the NDRC as the main field for the one-week survey. But it is interesting to note that Hefei City was also incorporated into this survey as a result of the suggestion of provincial officials. This adjustment was consistent with the longstanding preference of the provincial government for the growth of their provincial capital, as illustrated in Section 5.2.

A report was made after this survey and submitted to the leaders of the Anhui provincial government for further discussion. A preliminary consensus was reached in this discussion about establishing a demonstration zone in Anhui Province with the spatial form of urban cluster to promote industrial relocation from the coastal China especially the YRD to Anhui Province (Interview A6). The area of this urban cluster should, it was agreed, mainly be based upon the Wanjiang area while other cities could also be considered. Based on this consensus, the Anhui provincial government submitted another report to the NDRC after the survey, requesting a national-level plan for concretizing this policy option. The political resources of the provincial leader were used to push forward the policy process more smoothly. The leader of Anhui provincial government wrote a letter to Li Keqiang, the then vice premier of the State Council (March 2008 to March 2013), to illustrate the necessity and benefits of this policy option. It was soon transferred to the main leader of the NDRC with Li’s supportive comments (Interview A6). After these proceedings, the planning for the WCB as a nation-level Demonstration Zone for Accepting Industrial Relocation was formally initiated in 2009. The outcomes and power relations involved in making this overall plan for the WCB will be illustrated in Chapter 6.

5.4.2 Initiation of the HMR: promoting inter-city coordinated development in central Anhui

The HMR was proposed in response to the provincial agendas on accelerating economic growth and balancing inter-city development in central Anhui. This response, on the one hand, was dependent on the spatial regulation of Anhui provincial government around the longstanding plan to create a growth engine centred on Hefei City for the provincial economy, and on the other hand, it further combined with new agendas of the central state on balancing development between localities since the mid-2000s.

Firstly, building Hefei as a modern large city was proposed as the top priority of the Anhui provincial government in 1995. This policy agenda was incorporated by the Hefei city government into its *Overall Urban Plan for Hefei (1995-2010)* (*Hefei chengshi zongti guihua 1995-2010*). The population in the jurisdiction of Hefei City was expected to increase from around 4 million to 5.2 million, with an expansion of urban districts from 111.9km² to 168km². In November 1999, the ‘Seminar on building and developing Hefei as a modern large city’ was co-organised by the Hefei city government and Anhui Academy of Social Science (Xing, 2000). Experts from research institutes and think tanks in Anhui Province, Shanghai City, and Beijing City were invited to take part in this seminar to give policy suggestions. Urbanisation was deemed to be an important solution to this agenda, mainly referring to the promotion of inward migration from rural areas to urban districts through the provision of more employment, public services, and so on (Xing, 2000). Meanwhile, improving coordinated and differentiated development of industries between Hefei City and its surrounding small cities was also suggested by participants. Making the large city lead the development of small cities was viewed as one of the strategies to increase the population working for non-agricultural production.

On this basis, in the early 2000s a research group belonging to the Anhui Provincial Department of Finance suggested adjusting the administrative divisions of central Anhui to expand the jurisdiction of Hefei City at the expense of the territories of adjacent prefecture-level cities (Research Group of Anhui Provincial Department of Finance, 2003). Although this suggestion was not immediately adopted by the Anhui provincial government, similar ideas around developing the Hefei-centred regional economy through the adjustment of administrative divisions prevailed in the 2000s. On the one hand, the Hefei city government actively annexed its subordinate counties and turned them into urban district, which was a popular strategy employed by prefecture-level governments in China to acquire more urban land for further market transactions (Wu, 2016). On the other hand, experts from quasi-state think tanks in Anhui Province, for example, from Anhui Academy of Social Science, also advocated the adjustment of boundaries of prefecture-level cities and made suggestions along these lines to the Anhui provincial government through various advisory reports (Interview B2). Cities with better economic performance were supposed to be given more territories to support their development,

and Hefei City was the first focus. This proposal was eventually translated into a policy in 2011 in which the territory of the prefecture-level Chaohu City was divided into three parts and merged into its neighbouring jurisdictions of Hefei City, Wuhu City, and Maanshan City. It was a significant step to expand the area of Hefei City as an administrative city-region in Anhui Province.

Since the mid-2000s, these provincial agendas and local actions further overlapped with the national agenda on promoting coordinated development between localities. As introduced in Chapter 3, the principle of ‘taking megacities and large cities as the leader’ (State Council, 2006, ‘Chapter 21’ paras.7) in inter-city coordinated development was highlighted in national policies, which was passed on to the policies of Anhui provincial government. Guo Jinlong, the then provincial secretary of the CPC committee (December 2004 to December 2007), announced this updated agenda in the Eighth CPC Congress of Anhui Province.

We will develop and expand the central cities and give full play to the leading and influential roles of urban clusters. The weak capacities of central cities to lead and influence [the surrounding area] is an important reason for the slow development of the regional economy and the lag of urbanisation in our province. To promote leapfrog development, we must...strengthen the power of central cities, and pay more attention to the roles of urban clusters. (Guo, 2006)

The HMR – in its preliminary name, the Economic Ring of the Provincial Capital – was proposed in this speech. Hefei City was identified as the central city of an institutional city-region in central Anhui, although there was no clear definition and delineation of the Economic Region of the Provincial Capital at this stage. Just as had been the case in Anhui Province during the 1990s, as mentioned above, the work of clarifying the policy option proposed by the Anhui provincial government was still at this point conducted by local governments. In May 2007, the Hefei city government organised a seminar on how to build the Economic Ring of the Provincial Capital. Officials from the Anhui provincial government and the governments of Hefei City, Luan City, and Chaohu City adjacent to Hefei City were invited, accompanied by experts from think tanks affiliated to the Anhui provincial government. The definition, boundary, objectives, strategies, and other related issues of building an Economic Ring of the Provincial Capital were discussed in this two-day seminar (Jiang et al., 2007). Unfortunately, this clarified policy option was not really transferred into formal policy; this was partly attributed to the lack of institutions to push it forward.

It [the Economic Ring of the Provincial Capital] was only a concept then. It was proposed but no one referred to it later...At that time, Hefei did some things but there was no organisation to carry them out. (Interview A12)

This condition was changed in 2008, when the Anhui provincial government established a high-level institution to push forward the policy making of Hefei Economic Ring – an updated name for what was to become the HMR.

[In 20]08, the provincial secretary of the CPC visited [Hefei City], in order to support the building of the Hefei Economic Ring. The provincial committee of the CPC and provincial government set up an institution. At that time, the provincial governor was the head of the leading group. Two offices were established to be responsible for daily work, which was subordinated to the Anhui Development and Reform Commission (PDRC of Anhui) and the Hefei city government. (Interview A12).

An official document was published by the Anhui provincial government to guide the policymaking of the Hefei Economic Ring. This required that the drafting of overall plans, the construction of transport networks, the development of industries, environmental governance and so on be specified and implemented by various departments of the Anhui provincial government and relevant city governments (Anhui provincial government, 2009). At that point, the HMR as a state-led city-region building programme in Anhui Province formally started.

To summarise, Section 5.4 has revealed that the initiation of the WCB and the HMR involved contributions from diverse policy elites in a combination of historical contexts with emerging agendas based on scalar-sensitive interests. The WCB was proposed as a policy solution to address the national agenda on uneven development between macro-economic regions, but highly dependent on the accentuation and rearticulation of the political-economic relations between Anhui Province and the YRD. By contrast, the HMR was mainly initiated as a policy of Anhui provincial government designed to accelerate and balance socioeconomic development in central Anhui; this policy inherited the spatial regulation paths of provincial and local governments around the relationships between Hefei City and its surrounding areas and overlapped with the agenda of the central state on inter-city coordination. The policy elites from quasi-state institutions such as some think tanks and mass media played important roles in the setting of agendas that lay behind the WCB and the HMR and in lobbying for the WCB and the HMR as solutions to these agendas. Their actions were usually in the interests of the government agencies to which they were affiliated while government officials in corresponding positions also actively engaged in seeking solutions to those agendas in ways that serve scalar, territorial, and sector sensitive interests. These findings have extended state spatial selectivity theories by unfolding the

political nature of the ‘path-dependent layering process’ (Brenner, 2004, p.111) – the historical contexts did not ‘naturally’ lay a premise for the state-led city-region building in Anhui Province but were brought to the fore through their selective identification and rearticulation by policy elites in policy practices (see Chapter 8 for more detailed reflection).

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter examined the political-economic contexts and agendas that preconditioned the city-regional policies associated with Anhui Province in the second half of the 2000s, and revealed the actors and actions that contributed to the proposal of the WCB and the HMR as policy options in response to these contexts and agendas. In Section 5.2, I traced the trajectories of regional spatial regulation in Anhui Province from 1952 to the 2000s. I found that, on the one hand, diverse regional institutions and spatial policies were initiated to promote cross-jurisdictional cooperation between Anhui Province and the YRD (Section 5.2.1). In the planned economy, organisations and institutions were established by the central state and actively responded to by provincial governments to promote coordinated development of industrial production between Anhui Province and the YRD. From 1978 to the late 1990s, national policies of uneven growth stimulated rapid economic development of the coastal region. It aroused the enthusiasm of the Anhui provincial government to share, or in other words strive for, economic benefits from the YRD through regional coordination. Learning from Pudong’s experience, the Wanjiang area in Anhui Province was identified as a pioneer to develop an export-oriented economy and build connections with the YRD in the spheres of industrial structure, energy supply, transportation infrastructure, and so on. These strategies continued in the 2000s, but were intertwined with the pursuit of more balanced development across macro-economic regions encouraged by the central state.

On the other hand, I have revealed that the creation of boundary divisions and the differentiated development of sub-provincial regions were embodied in state spatial regulation in Anhui Province (Section 5.2.2). Although the division into economic regions covered the whole provincial territory since 1986, the Wanjiang area and Hefei City were always placed as pacesetters to lead the growth of the provincial economy. Before 1978, the cities which were given priority and support to develop industrialisation and urbanisation were located in these two areas. In the post-reform period, improving the primacy of Hefei City became a longitudinal policy of Anhui’s spatial regulation. It was accompanied by a focus on the Wanjiang area’s development as mentioned above. Compared to the first trajectory, the provincial government showed stronger capacity and autonomy in region-building within its territory – although it was also affected by national regulation, especially around cross-jurisdictional issues. These two trajectories of regional spatial regulation were conditions for the advantages of the WCB and

HMR within political and socioeconomic configurations in late-2000s Anhui Province. They enhanced their chances to become ideal locations for new rounds of state spatial selectivity towards coordinated growth at cross-provincial and sub-provincial scales.

As a result of growth-oriented uneven development since 1978, the regional disparity in economic performance associated with Anhui Province further expanded in the 2000s (Section 5.3). Beyond the widely discussed challenges to political stability and economic growth, this feature also showed opportunities for Anhui to accelerate industrialisation and develop the metropolitan economy. At a supra-provincial scale, industrial development of the YRD surpassed that of Anhui at a faster pace but meanwhile faced the limitation of extensive growth (Section 5.3.1). Some secondary industries were therefore excluded from the economically advanced area of the YRD and had to look for new locations with cheaper and more abundant resources for industrial production. This provided a chance for Anhui to strive for these relocated industries, with its advantage of close links with the YRD. Depending on the paths of previous spatial regulation, cities in the Wanjiang area were successful in serving this target. At a sub-provincial scale, the rapid growth of Hefei significantly enlarged both its contribution to the provincial economy and the economic gaps between it and its surrounding cities in central Anhui (Section 5.3.2). This caused a potential trend of expanding agglomeration and networks of economic activities centred on Hefei City but beyond its jurisdiction.

Relying on these political-economic paths, the WCB and the HMR were initiated in late 2000s Anhui Province. This was a path-dependent response to emerging policy agendas set at national and provincial scales (Section 5.4). I argued that this process involved the contribution of diverse actors from state agencies, think tanks, mass media, etc. in identifying and rearticulating historical paths to serve scalar-sensitive interests. Dealing with the uneven development across macro-economic regions had been on the agenda of central government since the 1990s and this triggered the spatial selectivity of the NDRC towards promoting industrial relocation from coastal China to inland China starting in the 2000s (Section 5.4.1). The WCB was proposed as one of the policy solutions to this national agenda with the efforts of policy elites from the provincial scale – quasi-state think tanks and mass media affiliated to the Anhui provincial government, such as the Anhui Academy of Social Science and *Hefei Daily*, and government officials – to rationalise and advocate the cooperation and integration between Anhui Province and the YRD based on the inherited political-economic conditions. By contrast, it was mainly the provincial agendas on accelerating economic growth and balancing inter-city development in central Anhui that triggered the initiation of the HMR (Section 5.4.2). However, the formation of this agenda was in fact influenced by local actions on expanding the metropolitan economy centred on Hefei City and the national agenda on promoting coordinated development between localities. Officials from

provincial and local governments and experts from corresponding quasi-state think tanks and research organisations also contributed to this process. The next chapter will investigate how the WCB and the HMR, emerging from these contexts and agendas, were concretised in discourses and images through the plan-making process.

Chapter 6: The production of city-regional imaginaries in the planning of the Wanjiang City Belt and the Hefei Metropolitan Ring

6.1 Introduction

This chapter responds to Research Question 2 of this thesis (see Section 1.2): what planning imaginaries of city-regions in Anhui Province were constructed, and how? The overall plans for the Wanjiang City Belt (WCB) and the Hefei Metropolitan Ring (HMR) – promulgated between the late 2000s and the mid 2010s – and their formulation process are selected as the empirical cases for this question. I spread my investigation across, firstly, what city-regional imaginaries were presented in planning discourse and images for the WCB and the HMR (Section 6.2); secondly, by whom and in which institutions these city-regional imaginaries were shaped through plan-making (Section 6.3); and thirdly, how divergent interests emerging from these institutional settings are dealt with during the plan-making and fixed into the city-regional imaginaries (Section 6.4). The main findings from this investigation will be summarised in Section 6.5.

The investigation of these issues contributes to the research aims of this thesis (Section 1.2): (i) I refine the conceptualisation of Chinese city-regions embodied in the planning discourse (Research Aim 1). The superimposition of economics-derived spatial visions onto territorial patterns of state administration is revealed in the pluralistic imaginaries of WCB and HMR; (ii) I examine the power relations involved in the production of city-regional imaginaries in China (Research Aim 2). On the one hand, the variegated reconfiguration of state power – distributed across multiple scales, territories, and ministries – and the involvement of quasi-state think tanks – an important yet under-studied type of actor – are revealed in the institutional settings during the plan-making for city-regions. On the other hand, I find diverse mechanisms and techniques that are used to accentuate, reconcile, or balance divergent interests in plan-making and lead to the final look of city-regional imaginaries; (iii) I reflect on state spatial selectivity theory (Research Aim 3) through identifying the influence of entrenched spatial organisation within or associated with the Chinese state, e.g., the *tiao-kuai* structure, the scalar- and territory- sensitive state agencies and think tanks, etc., on the production of city-regional imaginaries as a path-dependent and contested process. These contributions will be synthesised with empirical findings from Chapters 5 and 7 to constitute an overall response to the research aims of this thesis (see Section 8.3 for details).

6.2 Pluralistic imaginaries of city-regions in plans for the WCB and the HMR

This section shows the political-economic attributes contained in the territorial imaginaries of the WCB and the HMR, as embodied in planning discourse and images. Given that the territorial

imaginary of city-region is understood as ‘the demarcation of the horizontal bounds of city-regional space’ (Davoudi and Brooks, 2020, p.4) (see Chapter 2), I mainly scrutinise the planning boundaries of the WCB and the HMR (Section 6.2.1) and the spatial arrangement of functional-economic activities within these planning boundaries (Section 6.2.2). The pluralistic imaginaries of city-regions in Anhui Province are revealed through this investigation, in which the territorial patterns of Chinese state administration are found to lean towards the spatial visions derived from functional-economic ideas. Further, the ‘relationally-networked hub and spokes model’ (Harrison, 2015, p.27), an interpretation of city-regions in policy discourse (see Chapter 2), also shows divergent morphologies in the plans for the WCB and the HMR.

6.2.1 Planning boundaries of the WCB and the HMR

Defining boundaries is an essential step in the institutionalisation of a region (Paasi, 1986; Paasi, 2009), and one that is widely manipulated by governments as a policy tool to shape city-regional imaginaries in planning discourse (Davoudi and Brooks, 2020). In the policy experience of the North Atlantic area, city-regional delineation usually derives from functional-economic considerations, i.e., using some criteria to identify an agglomeration or network of economic activities centred on the selected core cities. For example, in the United States, population density and commuting ties were applied to identify the Metropolitan Statistical Area (Fricke and Gualini, 2018). More diverse socioeconomic indicators – the housing market, business links, supply chains, etc. – were estimated and used to define city-regions in the United Kingdom (Harrison, 2010; Beel et al., 2021).

However, as introduced in Chapter 2, the entrenched geographies of territorial politics also penetrate into city-regional delineation. For example, in the Northern Way programme of the United Kingdom, it was exactly the political-administrative tension that resulted in the expansion of the city-regional area (González, 2006), and the changed mapping of city-regional boundaries from vaguely indicated economic areas to a clear overlap with the jurisdictions of local authorities (Harrison, 2010). In this sense, planning boundaries are crucial evidence to show how city-regions are conceptualised in a specific policy context: are they functional entities strictly measured by economic criteria? Or are they administrative units mainly set for reorganising state regulation? Or else, as argued in this chapter, the planning boundaries of WCB and HMR in Anhui Province imply a new territorial imaginary of city-regions: the territorial patterns of state administration are superimposed onto economic-derived spatial visions.

The boundary of the WCB was first delineated in the *Plan for Wanjiang City Belt Demonstration Zone for Accepting Industrial Relocation (2010-2015)* (NDRC, 2010) (Figure 6.1), and has been

kept in subsequent plans promulgated by government agencies at multiple levels since then. The specific description of this planning area was as follows:

[The WCB] covers the Yangtze River Basin in Anhui Province, including the whole territories of Hefei City, Wuhu City, Maanshan City, Tongling City, Anqing City, Chizhou City, Chaohu City, Chuzhou City, Xuancheng City, and Jinan District, and Shucheng County of Luan City, a total of fifty-nine counties (or county-level cities and districts) linking up with the whole province of Anhui, and connecting with the YRD. (NDRC, 2010, p.1)

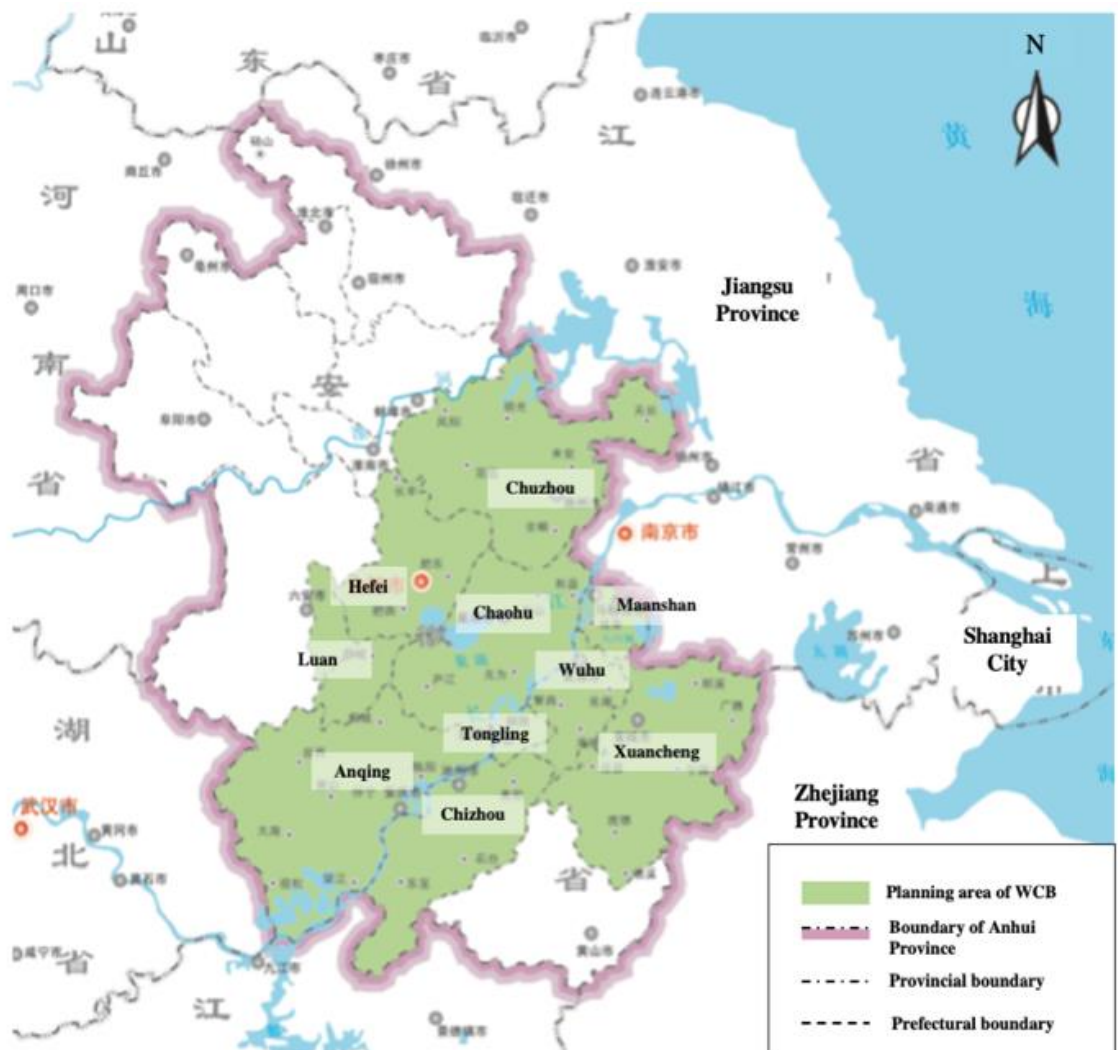


Figure 6.1 Planning area of the WCB (delineated in 2010)

Source: *Plan for Wanjiang City Belt Demonstration Zone for Accepting Industrial Relocation (2010-2015)*.

In this map and textual description, the planning boundary of the WCB was directly equal to the combined borders of corresponding administrative cities or their subordinated county-level units. This reliance on the territorial patterns of state administration was mixed with economic rationalities by policy elites in justifying city-regional delineation:

Why did we delineate the WCB [like this]?...The economic agglomeration in Anhui was mainly located along the Yangtze River, especially around important [administrative] cities like Maanshan, Wuhu, Tongling, Hefei, Anqing, Chizhou, and, farther away, Chuzhou and Xuancheng. These [administrative] cities comprise almost the entirety of Anhui's economic strength. (Interview B1)

In this interview, one of the main drafters of the *Plan for Wanjiang City Belt Demonstration Zone for Accepting Industrial Relocation (2010-2015)* implied that the boundary delineation of the WCB was driven by the identification of a functional-economic agglomeration measured by the sum of socioeconomic strength owned by each administrative unit. Here, socioeconomic strength mainly refers to gross domestic product (GDP) and population:

At the end of 2008, the planning area had a population of 30.58 million and a GDP of 581.8 billion, which accounted for 45% of the whole population and 66% of the whole GDP in Anhui Province. (NDRC, 2010, p.1)

This logic was subtly different from that in the existing research, mentioned at the start of this section, on the role of political administration in city-regional delineation (González, 2006; Harrison, 2010). There is no obvious transformation in the plans for the WCB from an economically rational model to one that takes political balance into account. By contrast, the boundaries of state administrative territories formed the spatial basis of the economics-derived imaginaries of the city-region from start to finish, in which the cities in an administrative sense were converted into the functional-economic components of the WCB.

Analogous to the WCB, the HMR shared a similar dependence on administrative territories in boundary delineation with the dramatic expansion of the planning area. In the *Outline of the Development Plan for the Economic Ring of the Anhui Provincial Capital*, the initial HMR covered the territories of three prefecture-level cities – Hefei City, and its neighbouring Luan City and Chaohu City (Figure 6.2a) (Anhui Development and Reform Commission, 2008b). It was nearly half the size of the WCB, with an area of 34,400 km² and a population of 16.03 million (Anhui Development and Reform Commission, 2008b). This planning area was further expanded in the subsequent plans promulgated for the HMR from 2009 to 2017 with the incorporation of more administrative cities. In 2017, territories in seven administrative cities in Anhui Province were incorporated into the HMR with a total area of 57,400 km² – 1.67 times its initial planning area (Figure 6.2b).

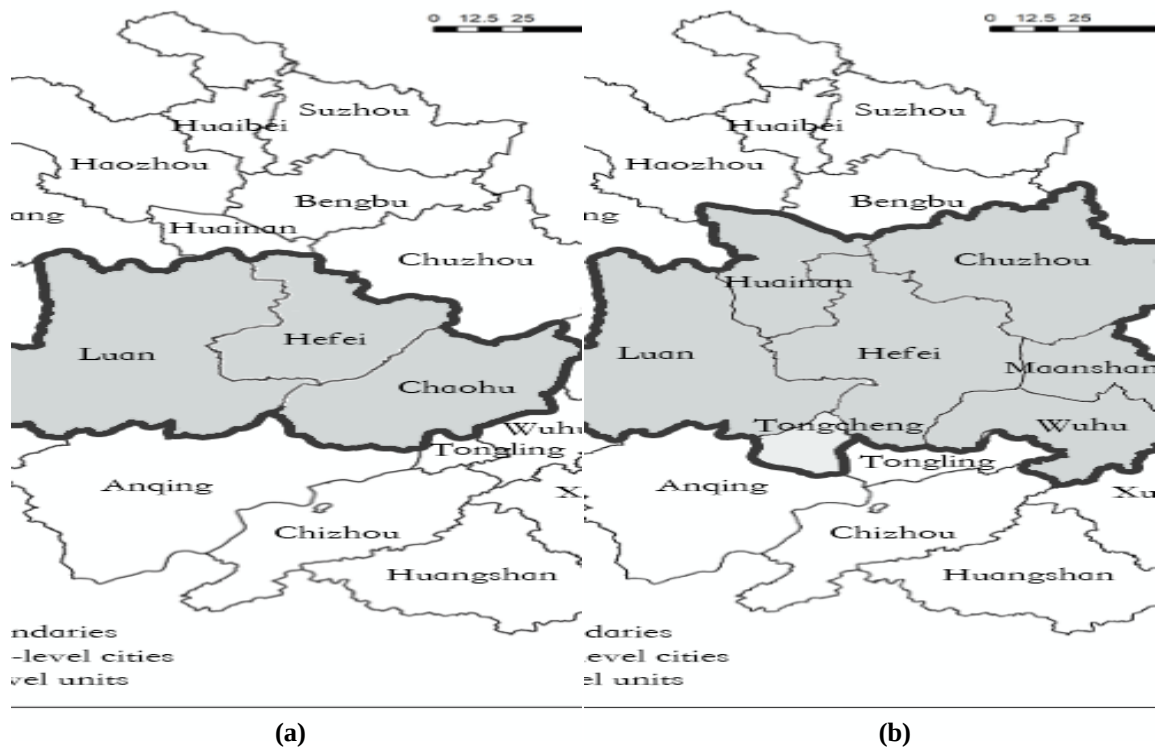


Figure 6.2 Changing planning area of the HMR

Source: Compiled by author according to the *Outline of the Development Plan for the Economic Ring of the Anhui Provincial Capital* and the *Outline of the 13th Five-Year Development Plan for the Hefei Metropolitan Ring*.

In contrast with the WCB, a clearer indicator – traffic time – was explicated in the planning discourse to highlight the functional-economic logics behind the boundary delineation for the HMR:

Development basis [of HMR]: ...The three cities – Hefei, Luan and Chaohu – are close in space with fast and convenient [inter-city] transportation. The urban districts and counties of Luan and Chaohu are respectively within the one-hour and two-hour economic rings centred on Hefei. (Anhui Development and Reform Commission, 2008b, p.2)

Here, one-hour and two-hour economic rings refer to the functional-economic areas defined by the traffic time between the core city and its surrounding area. As introduced in Chapter 3, the traffic time especially as related to commuting activities is a commonly used indicator to measure the metropolitan ring in policy discourse in China. However, the usage of this indicator was somewhat tricky in this case: the boundary of HMR was not delineated according to existing traffic time – even today, when the traffic conditions have been greatly improved, the traffic time between the urban centre of Hefei and the edges of the other two administrative cities by common

transport means such as cars, buses, and trains is still much more than two hours. Instead, this indicator of envisaged functional-economic activities was manipulated in the plans to rationalise the boundary delineation of the HMR based on the political-administrative considerations. As illustrated in Chapter 5, one of key agendas behind the proposal of HMR was making Hefei City play a role of leading the economic development of its surrounding cities. In this context, incorporating Luan City and Chaohu City, which have almost the poorest economic performance in central Anhui, into an institutional city-region centred on Hefei City was decided at the start of, even before, the formal planning for the HMR (Interview A12). And the emphasis of the traffic time as a ‘development basis’ of the HMR in planning discourse, accordingly, was more like a strategy to ‘prettify’ this politics-driven delineation of city-regional boundaries with a future vision of functional-economic linkages. This feature was again different from the experience observed in the Northern Atlantic area: the territorial patterns of state administration are considered as the background colour for the territorial imaginaries of city-regions in Anhui Province from the outset of the planning rather than an incident that led to the disruption of economics-centred imaginaries of city-regions (González, 2006; Harrison, 2010).

6.2.2 The spatial arrangement of functional-economic activities within the WCB and the HMR

In addition to boundary delineation, the territorial patterns of state administration are also found to precondition the spatialisation of functional-economic activities within the WCB and the HMR. The administrative cities included in their planning areas were equalled to basic components of functional-economic networks under the name of ‘hubs’, ‘wings’, ‘corridors’, and so on. However, beyond this similar superimposition of political and economic attributes, the ‘relationally-networked hub and spokes model’ (Harrison, 2015, p.27) showed divergent morphologies in the territorial imaginaries of the WCB and the HMR. A nested relationship was found in the territorial imaginaries of the WCB with this city region as a whole envisaged as a ‘spoke’ extending from its external ‘hub’, the YRD, but with also a more homogeneous and flatter ordering of functional-economic networks being contained in the planning area of the WCB. By contrast, the spatialisation of function-economic activities all revolved around shaping a multidimensional agglomeration and network centred on Hefei City and radiating out through all the member cities.

6.2.2.1 The WCB: driving an extension of the global city-region

In the planning discourse, the WCB was depicted as an interface between one of the most economically developed city-regions in coastal China – the YRD – and a broader area with a less developed economy in inland China. It was endowed with dual roles to counter the crisis of industrial development faced by the YRD and lead the growth of the Central and Western Regions.

In this sense, the WCB seemed to be a bridge to mediate the flow of production factors across macro-economic regions.

The WCB...is an important part of the Pan-YRD and the closest area to take in the relocation and influence of industries from the YRD to central and western China...By promoting the orderly relocation of industries, guiding the rational movement and better allocation of production factors...[the WCB] will make more room for development in the YRD and other parts of the Eastern Region, promote the upgrading of its industrial structure, and improve the quality and competitiveness of production. It will also better drive the development of the Central and Western Region and promote the optimal allocation of resources and the adjustment of the regional economic layout. (NDRC, 2010, p.1-4)

However, if we scrutinise the planning strategies designed for the WCB, we find that the connections between the WCB and inland China were given very limited attention. By contrast, more emphasis was placed on how to strengthen the function-economic linkages between the WCB and the YRD, and how to promote the urbanisation and industrialisation of the WCB itself. On the one hand, the WCB was envisaged as an extended area of the YRD with industrial and infrastructure networks ordered in conjunction with the latter. This was first reflected in the identification of the main industrial types in the WCB. Industrial types that urgently needed to be moved out from the YRD were selected as one of the foci.

[T]argeting at industries in the YRD and other coastal areas that urgently need to be relocated...[the WCB should] vigorously revitalise the equipment manufacturing [industry], accelerate the upgrading of the raw material industry, and promote the growth of the textile industry. (NDRC, 2010, p.16)

Taking the textile industry as an example, as introduced in Chapter 3, Zhu & Pickles (2014) found a trend of relocation of apparel factories from the coastal region to inland provinces since the early 2000s. This was triggered by increasing costs of labour, land, water, electricity, etc., and stricter restrictions on discharge and treatment of pollutant. This relocation was selectively encouraged by the plan for the WCB by, for example:

Encouraging the relocation of the textile and apparel industry in the Eastern Region to the WCB and building the Wanjiang textile industry base; developing high-end combed yarns, mercerised yarns, coloured spun yarns, multifunctional, environmentally friendly differentiated fibres and natural environmentally friendly fibres;...promoting high-efficiency and short-process, water-free or

water-less printing and dyeing technology to improve printing and dyeing and finishing capabilities. (NDRC, 2010, pp.20-21)

It is not hard to see from this text that the WCB was not positioned as a ‘garbage station’ that passively accepted all the phased-out industries from coastal China. Instead, it was envisaged as a ‘test bed’ to experiment with industrial restructuring with both environmentally friendly and growth-oriented considerations. This strategy was also consistent with the ideology and policies of the central state on strengthening environmental protection and energy conservation since the early 2000s (Li and Wu, 2012a). In addition to the arrangement of industrial linkages, infrastructure in the WCB was also designed to strengthen the functional-economic connection with the YRD by:

Accelerating the construction of infrastructure in the WCB, vigorously building a comprehensive transportation system integrated with the YRD, enhancing the energy supply level in the region,...and accelerating the integration of the regional information system. (NDRC, 2010, p.28)

This infrastructure-enabled regionalisation was not new in the studies of Chinese city-regional planning in which a focus is given to the building of transportation networks, especially around railways (Xu, 2017; Harrison and Gu, 2019; M. Zhang et al., 2020b). It could also be found in the plan for the WCB – the construction of a fast passenger railway network linking WCB with the Eastern Region was encouraged. More specifically, the overall plan for the WCB required incorporating the passenger transportation network of the WCB into the *Inter-City Rail Transit Network Plan for the YRD* (*Changsanjiao chengji guidao jiaotong guihua*) when the latter was revised. Although they were only mentioned very briefly, nominating these projects already made a lot of sense. As a national-level plan made by the NDRC, they could provide significant benefits and convenience to Anhui Province in future planning and construction of railways, such as quicker approval for specific projects, more construction land quotas, possible funds, and easier loans from banks (Interview B1). These are all benefits hidden under the planning discourse. Another remarkable infrastructure linkage concerned energy. As illustrated in Chapter 5, there had been a history since the 1950s in which Anhui Province was a source of coal and electricity for the YRD following a series of coordinated production agreements between the two places. In the plan for the WCB, this linkage was given a formal position so that WCB was named as a ‘base of energy and raw materials for the YRD’ (NDRC, 2010, p.37). This meant that a more stable supply relationship between Anhui Province and the YRD around the production of energy and raw materials was supported by the central state.

On the other hand, and associated with these YRD-oriented strategies involving industrial type and infrastructure, the WCB was also planned to strengthen industrial and urban agglomeration in its own area. For example, various development zones based on the industrial types mentioned above were encouraged to be built in large numbers and significant size in the WCB. This was unusual at that time because the establishment and expansion of development zones had been seriously restricted by the central state since the early 2000s (Jiang and Waley, 2020a). In this context, the strategy was described as a special ‘big gift package’ by the officials of Anhui provincial government, in view of the considerable benefits in terms of construction land quotas and financial support from the central state (Interview A6). The specific contents of these benefits will be illustrated in Chapter 7. Meanwhile, cross-jurisdictional integration was widely encouraged in the planning discourse to strengthen the territorial imaginary of the WCB as a polycentric urban cluster:

Strengthen the status of Hefei City, Wuhu City, and Anqing City as regional central cities...Accelerate the integration between Hefei City and Chaohu City, Hefei City and Luan City...Hefei City and Huainan City...Promote the urban integration between Wuhu City and Maanshan City while stressing their coordinated development with Jiangbei [the north side of the Yangtze River]...Accelerate the development and expansion of the urban districts of Anqing City. (NDRC, 2010, p.12)

Through these strategies, the territorial imaginaries of the WCB were embodied in the plan as an extension of the YRD’s functional-economic network. Firstly, the industrial development of the WCB was built on an envisaged division of labour between the WCB and the YRD. The main industrial types planned for the WCB – equipment manufacturing, the raw material industry, and the textile industry – were selected in view of the urgency and demand caused by the YRD’s transformation towards higher value-added sectors. Secondly, infrastructures – such as transportation and energy supply – were designed to strengthen the functional-economic connections associated with this envisaged division of labour. Thirdly, industrial and urban agglomeration in the WCB was further promoted in the plan to shape a new growth pole in the extended global city-region. In this sense, the WCB was not merely a regional programme with province-prioritised interests in Anhui like many of its predecessors as shown in Chapter 5. Instead, it was imagined as a new state space to enhance the competitiveness of the Chinese super mega city-region in the global production network. The plan attempted to turn the disparity between macro-economic regions into a chance for new growth for both economically developed and underdeveloped regions.

6.2.2.2 The HMR: shaping a metropolitan region centred on a provincial capital

In contrast with that of the WCB, the spatial arrangement of functional-economic activities within the HMR focused more on shaping a hub-and-spoke relationship between Hefei City and the other member cities. Firstly, the envisaged urban systems in the plans for HMR were designed to improve the urban primacy of Hefei City which was reflected in the control of population size, the setting of city positioning, and the guidance for the spatial direction of urban development. The population size planned for Hefei was much more than that of its counterparts in other member cities. For example, the population of Hefei City was expected to be between five and ten million in 2025 while all other prefecture-level cities in HMR were only projected to be between one and three million people (Governments of Hefei City, Huainan City, Chuzhou City, Luan City, Maanshan City, Wuhu City and Tongcheng City, 2017). At the end of 2016, the population of Hefei City was 2.46 million, while the population of every other prefecture-level city in the HMR except for Maanshan City was just over 1.2 million (Statistics Bureau of Anhui Province, 2017). That means that Hefei City was given greater room for population growth – to four times its current population – compared with room for 2.5 times growth in other cities. This population vision was part of giving a more central position to Hefei City in the functional-economic network of the HMR as shown in the following policy slogans:

Building a dense urban area with Hefei City as the hub, and Luan City and Chaohu City as two wings. (Anhui Development and Reform Commission, 2008b, p.4)

Strengthening the core status of Hefei City, cultivating Wuhu City as the sub-core, and improving the functions of Chuzhou City, Maanshan City, Luan City, and Huainan City as regional central cities. (Governments of Hefei City, Huainan City, Chuzhou City, Luan City, Maanshan City, Wuhu City and Tongcheng City, 2017)

A ‘centripetal’ form of urbanisation in the HMR was further encouraged to reinforce this positioning. Cities around Hefei were directed to expand their urban space towards the jurisdiction of Hefei City. For example, Luan City was guided into an eastward expansion of its urban districts which was depicted as ‘closing ties and narrowing distance with Hefei City’ (Anhui Development and Reform Commission, 2008b, p.4). In the latest overall plan for the HMR, this strategy was summarised with a remarkable slogan: ‘Developing towards the east, echoing to the influence of Hefei’ (Governments of Hefei City, Huainan City, Chuzhou City, Luan City, Maanshan City, Wuhu City and Tongcheng City, 2017, p.52). The new town in the east of Luan City was also positioned as a growth pole for this prefecture-level city.

Secondly, infrastructure, especially transportation infrastructure, was planned as the foundation for the ‘spokes’ of the HMR. Highways and railways radiating and connecting the urban districts of Hefei City and other member cities were planned as the main traffic corridors of the HMR. This strategy was described as an attempt to build a ‘one-hour commuting ring’ centred on Hefei City. This concept underlined the commuting times of people who rely on highways and railways to travel between the main urban settlements and industrial agglomerations,.

Constructing highways and national-provincial trunk road networks with Hefei as the centre and directly accessing Wuhu, Maanshan, Huainan, Luan, Chuzhou, Tongcheng, and Dingyuan County...Forming six rail transit lines radiating from Hefei – Hefei-Wuhu-Xuancheng, Hefei-Maanshan, Hefei-Anqing-Jiujiang, Hefei-Chuzhou, Hefei-Luan, and Hefei-Huainan – as soon as possible...Shaping an intercity transportation network from Hefei to member cities within the ‘one-hour commuting ring’. (Governments of Hefei City, Huainan City, Chuzhou City, Luan City, Maanshan City, Wuhu City and Tongcheng City, 2017, p.21)

More importantly, these identified traffic corridors were further envisaged as ‘tracks’ to lead to an infrastructure-enabled agglomeration of industries and urban settlements. Compared to the guidance on ‘centripetal’ urbanisation, this strategy implied a vision of spatial integration between Hefei and the other member cities, as can be seen in the following exhortations:

By strengthening the construction of urban infrastructure, we encourage the agglomeration of the urban population and industrial parks along the main traffic arteries. (Anhui Development and Reform Commission, 2008b, p.4)

To give full play to the leading role of the core cities, jointly building industrial belts along Hefei-Luan, Hefei-Huainan, Hefei-Chuzhou, Hefei-Maanshan, Hefei-Chaohu-Wuhu, Hefei-Tongcheng, Wuhu-Maanshan, and Hefei-Tongling corridors. (Governments of Hefei City, Huainan City, Chuzhou City, Luan City, Maanshan City, Wuhu City and Tongcheng City, 2017, p.33)

Thirdly, the layout of these industrial belts also reflected the key idea of developing industries in the HMR. A complementary relationship in the industrial system was guided to form between Hefei and its surrounding cities in the HMR. Hefei was identified as the command-and-control centre, while other cities were envisaged as areas of influence and support. On the one hand, this relationship was seen to contribute to the development of a common industrial agglomeration. Leading industries in Hefei were encouraged to expand and upgrade, promoting development of supporting industries in the surrounding cities. We see this, for example, in the guidance for the automobile and parts industry, a key industrial agglomeration planned for the HMR:

Support leading enterprises such as *Hefei Jiangqi* to accelerate the development of passenger vehicles and commercial vehicles, and actively develop energy-saving, environmentally friendly, and new-fuel vehicles; encourage Luan- and Chaohu-related enterprises to strengthen cooperation and support with vehicle manufacturers and vigorously develop the auto-parts-supporting industry to increase the rate of local support for complete vehicles. (Anhui Development and Reform Commission, 2008b, p.5)

On the other hand, the plans encouraged the agglomeration of high-end industries and related functional-economic activities, such as finance and research and development, in Hefei City, as well as the relocation of low-end industries from Hefei to the surrounding cities.

Encourage Hefei's non-competitive industries to move to the surrounding areas, and guide the concentration of technology development, product design and marketing functions to the central city [Hefei]...Focusing on cooperation in the industrial chain, give full play to the guiding role of the central city [Hefei] and key enterprises in constructing the industrial chain, and support qualified enterprises to actively extend the industrial chain across cities and areas. Focusing on the fields of steel, automobiles, machinery, chemicals, and deep processing of agricultural products, intensify the joint development and cooperation between upstream and downstream industries in Hefei and in Luan and Chaohu. (Anhui Development and Reform Commission, 2008b, p.6)

Construct a coordinated and interconnected financial market in HMR with Hefei as the centre. (Governments of Hefei City, Huainan City, Chuzhou City, Luan City, Maanshan City, Wuhu City and Tongcheng City, 2017, p.67)

Taking Hefei as the centre, we will improve the technical service functions of Hefei, and jointly build a technology transfer platform [with other member cities] for the HMR. (Governments of Hefei City, Huainan City, Chuzhou City, Luan City, Maanshan City, Wuhu City and Tongcheng City, 2017, p.69)

In this spirit, the collaborative development of development zones between Hefei and its surrounding cities was also envisaged.

Support the three cities [Hefei, Luan, and Chaohu]...co-build cross-city development zones or build enclaves of [development zones], promote cross-city land cooperative development based on the principles of sharing tax and benefits. (Anhui Development and Reform Commission, 2008b, p.15)

Hefei city government was encouraged to cooperate with other local governments in the HMR to build development zones in cities with relatively low levels of economic development. These governments could share the costs and benefits in development of industrial parks at the rate they agreed upon. This strategy was described in the plans as a win-win game because it was supposed to both help Hefei City overcome the shortage in its construction land quotas and accelerate the industrial and economic development of the corresponding areas in other regions.

These spatial arrangements of functional-economic activities in the plans for the HMR demonstrate a territorial imaginary of metropolitan region centred on a provincial capital. On the one hand, this city-regional imaginary was constructed by stressing the primacy and centrality of Hefei City as a ‘hub’ in a functional-economic network consisting of all the other member cities included in the HMR. On the other hand, strategies were made to shape and strengthen the ‘spokes’ connecting Hefei City and the other cities in the HMR. These two shaping paths are simultaneously reflected in the vision of the urban system, infrastructure network, and industrial development in the HMR. A ‘centripetal’ form of urbanisation was suggested in the plans to promote the positioning of member cities, based on the core role of Hefei City and the expansion of surrounding cities towards the territory of Hefei. Meanwhile, when Hefei City was placed at the top of a population hierarchy, it was also set as the starting point of a radial traffic system connecting it and all other cities in the HMR. This infrastructure-enabled development of city-regions laid the foundation for an industrial system in the HMR, with Hefei City as a command-and-control centre and its surrounding cities as areas of influence and support.

To summarise, Section 6.2 has revealed the pluralistic imaginaries of city-regions in Anhui Province as embodied in the plans for the WCB and the HMR. This plurality has been shown in terms of two aspects: the first was a superimposition of functional-economic rationales onto political-administrative configurations in constituting the city-regional imaginaries. On the one hand, the territorial sum of the administrative cities was regarded as a proxy for the area of the functional-economic agglomeration. And in turn, the functional-economic indicator was used to justify the delineation of city-regional boundaries based on political-administrative considerations. On the other hand, administrative cities were further abstracted into spatial-economic symbols – ‘hub’, ‘sub-core’, ‘wings’, etc. – to constitute the envisaged networks of industry, infrastructure, and urban development within the boundaries of city-regions.

Secondly, a plurality was also shown in the divergent spatial structures of the WCB and the HMR developed from the common ‘relationally-networked hub and spokes model’ (Harrison, 2015, p.27). A nested relationship was found in the spatialisation of functional-economic activities in the WCB – it was shaped as an emergent city-region within a global city-region in transformation. The main connections and agglomerations were planned for this vision to construct the WCB as

a functional-economic ‘spoke’ radiating from its external ‘hub’ in the YRD. In contrast, a complete ‘hub-and-spoke’ model was envisaged within the planning area of the HMR. The provincial capital, Hefei City, was positioned at the centre of this metropolitan region, building its functional-economic connections to all member cities. Both these aspects have proved the coexistence and interaction of political and economic elements in constituting the territorial imaginaries of Chinese city-regions.

6.3 Institutional settings for producing imaginaries of the WCB and the HMR

This section investigates the actors and institutions involved in shaping the territorial imaginaries of the WCB and the HMR during the plan-making. It examines the diverse institutional structures developed to coordinate actors within or affiliated to the state system in plan-making for the two programmes. Inter-scalar and inter-ministry collaborations were found between state agencies at the central and provincial levels in making the overall plan for the WCB (Section 6.3.1). By contrast, plan-formulation for the HMR experienced a downscaling of state regulation from provincial dominance to horizontal collaboration among cities (Section 6.3.2). In addition, the under-studied roles of quasi-state think tanks in plan-making for both programmes will be highlighted (Section 6.3.3). As place- and sector-sensitive partners to state agencies, quasi-state think tanks were vanguards in providing knowledge and expertise in the formulation of city-regional imaginaries. However, their participation in and influence on final decisions were very limited and the last word was given to state entities.

6.3.1 Inter-scalar and inter-ministry collaborations in plan-making for WCB

The first overall plan for the WCB, the *Plan for Wanjiang City Belt Demonstration Zone for Accepting Industrial Relocation (2010-2015)*, was promulgated in the name of the NDRC in January 2010 with the approval of the State Council. Nevertheless, state actors from other central ministries and the Anhui provincial government were also involved in its actual drafting. They constituted an ad-hoc planning regime from late 2008 to late 2009, accompanied by the quasi-state actors investigated in Section 6.3.3, working towards the formulation of this plan. The NDRC had overall leadership, and developed the inter-scalar and inter-ministry collaborations with other state actors in the preparation and drafting of the plan.

6.3.1.1 Inter-scalar collaboration based on dual affiliation of the Anhui Development and Reform Commission (PDRC of Anhui)

In planning for the WCB, the inter-scalar collaboration between state agencies mainly unfolded between the NDRC, the PDRC of Anhui, and the leadership of the Anhui provincial government. Among these, the PDRC of Anhui was the only state actor which participated throughout the

whole process of plan-making. This is associated with its special role in the state territorial system: the PDRC of Anhui had (and still has) dual affiliation with the NDRC and the Anhui provincial government. On the one hand, in the *tiao* (strip/scalar) system, the PDRC was the subordinate of the NDRC at a provincial scale. It helped the latter collect more grounded information, and embodied top-down policies in the provincial context. On the other hand, in the *kuai* (piece/territorial) system, the PDRC was a department of the provincial government, conducting comprehensive regulation of social and economic issues. It was, accordingly, also a representative of the provincial interest in exercising its daily work. This condition made the PDRC of Anhui an essential intermediary between its sector-based superior, the NDRC, and its territory-based superior, the Anhui provincial government, in inter-scalar collaboration. In the plan-making for the WCB, it was not only one of the main designers in constructing city-regional imaginaries. It also played an essential role in the embodiment and reconciliation of various imaginaries of the WCB from the other two actors.

In the stage of planning preparation, as introduced in Chapter 5, officials from the PDRC of Anhui were on behalf of the provincial government to accompany colleagues from the NDRC on a preliminary field trip. This was conducted in July 2008 for the purpose of clarifying the policy option proposed by the leader of the central state organisation on developing a Pan-YRD region with the involvement of Anhui. It was the earliest collaboration between the NDRC and the PDRC of Anhui around the WCB, and produced the core theme of the overall plan: establishing the first demonstration zone in Anhui that would accept the industries relocated from the coastal region. After the formal launch of the WCB, an official collaboration between the NDRC, the PDRC of Anhui, and the Anhui provincial government was established in an institutional sense. The Leading Group of Plan-Making for the WCB Demonstration Zone for Accepting Industrial Relocation was organised in December 2008. This group was responsible for the management of time, personnel, and finance in the overall plan for the WCB. Its highest-level leaders were the director of the NDRC and the governor of the Anhui provincial government. However, the actual agencies drafting and revising the plan were the Regional Economic Department of the NDRC and the PDRC of Anhui.

In 2009, the plan-drafting stage for the WCB formally unfolded. The first draft of the *Plan for the Wanjiang City Belt Demonstration Zone for Accepting Industrial Relocation (2010-2015)* was mainly made by the PDRC of Anhui, with comments from the leadership of the Anhui provincial government and no participation from the NDRC (Interview A6).¹⁸ The first draft of the plan was mostly tailored to provincial conditions and left room for inter-scalar negotiation. In the second

¹⁸ Beyond state agencies, quasi-state think tanks in Anhui were actively involved in this stage. This will be discussed in Section 6.3.3.

half of 2009, coordination between the NDRC and the PDRC of Anhui materialised. The latter submitted its draft to the Regional Economic Department of the NDRC and joined in the Plan Drafting Group for the WCB working in Beijing. This second phase of plan-drafting was dominated by the NDRC, which upgraded the position of the WCB from a more localised programme in the first draft to being highly linked with the national agendas (Interview A6; Interview B3). This adjustment preconditioned the support of other central ministries for the WCB (see the following part of Section 6.3.1) and rationalised the place of the two industrial concentration zones in the final planning imaginaries of mega-city regional projects (see Section 6.4.3). The PDRC of Anhui was largely responsible for the interpretation of the provincial context, the transfer of planning views between the NDRC and the leadership of the Anhui provincial government, and attempts to reconcile divergent views in the planning discourse with the NDRC (Interview A6).

6.3.1.2 Inter-ministry collaboration as an NDRC function to mobilise resources for city-regional development

Horizontal collaboration between central ministries became prevalent in the second phase of plan drafting, organised by the NDRC. It is noteworthy that the NDRC was and still is ‘the most comprehensive and powerful ministry-level commission’ (Li, 2011, p.246) in contemporary China. It is half a level higher than the other central ministries, and responsible for making the national five-year plan for economic and social development. This five-year plan includes overall guidance on major projects and important issues related to other ministries. Correspondingly, the NDRC is also the authority that grants approval for many of these projects. In this sense, it is endowed with considerable capacity to mobilise other central ministries to support its own planning.

In July 2009, the NDRC organised a one-week field survey in the WCB based on the first draft of the WCB demonstration zone plan. This survey team was led by the vice-director of the NDRC and consisted of nearly a hundred officials and experts from twenty-two national departments such as the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, etc. Analogous to the fieldwork in 2008, the whole process was also accompanied by officials from the PDRC of Anhui. These people were divided into eight groups and did field surveys in ten cities of Anhui at the same time. The Anhui provincial government held two meetings with this survey group before and after its fieldwork. In the first meeting, the director of the NDRC and the provincial governor separately introduced the basic considerations of plan-making for the WCB from the national and provincial perspectives. In the second meeting, the survey group, especially people from central ministries other than the NDRC, gave comments and suggestions about

infrastructure, industrial distribution, main projects, and regional cooperation in the WCB (Anhui Television, 2010).

The intentions of the NDRC in organising this survey were not only to collect high-quality suggestions for planning, but, more importantly, to strive for policy benefits from the central ministries involved. For example, if officials from the Ministry of Transport recognised and agreed with the necessity of constructing cross-river bridges or regional railway lines in the WCB, approval for related projects shown in the plan would be greatly accelerated (Interview B3). The survey was further associated with more financial support from the Ministry of Finance and special construction land quotas from the Ministry of Land and Resources in the actual construction of these projects. Based on this survey, the NDRC further communicated with the related central ministries in plan-drafting on how to embody suggestions benefitting the WCB in the planning discourse. This process resulted in one of main distinctions between the first draft and the final version of the *Plan for the Wanjiang City Belt Demonstration Zone for Accepting Industrial Relocation (2010-2015)*.

The main change [between first draft and final plan] was...some policy support from relevant ministries...There were no national ministries' opinions in our provincial draft [i.e., the first draft made by the PDRC]. Based on the higher positioning and efforts undertaken by the NDRC, some support from central ministries was reflected in the plan. For example, the Ministry of Land, the Ministry of Environmental Protection, the Ministry of Finance all gave their support [to the final plan]. (Interview A6)

It is noteworthy that some policy benefits from central ministries, such as those on funding and construction land quotas, were not written into the plan but were reflected in the ensuing material construction of the WCB. This was to avoid jealousy and comparison from other provinces (Interview A6).

In addition to these two types of collaboration between state agencies in plan-making for the WCB, it is necessary to highlight an institutional flaw in this planning regime. The actors from the YRD and lower-level territorial units in the WCB were completely ignored. In line with the planning imaginaries shown in Section 6.2, the WCB was envisaged as integrating the functional network of the YRD by building multidimensional connections to the latter. However, no actor from the YRD was invited to give comments and suggestions on these cross-provincial strategies. Meanwhile, guidance on developing urban and industrial agglomerations in the WCB was imposed on each city and some county-level units in the WCB, but governments lower than provincial level were rarely involved in making the overall plan for the WCB and had only limited

participation in expressing local conditions and views through the consultation organised by Anhui provincial government. This institutional setting meant that the *Plan for the Wanjiang City Belt Demonstration Zone for Accepting Industrial Relocation (2010-2015)* mainly fulfilled the interests and visions of the central state and the Anhui provincial government. It left hidden the dangers and risks involved in converting the city-regional imaginaries (as shown in the planning discourse and images) into material outcomes, such as in terms of the strategies which needed the cooperation and actions of local governments in the WCB. This issue will be illustrated in Chapter 7.

In general, this section has shown how these institutional collaborations between state agencies unfolded within the planning regime for the WCB, and investigated the changing roles of the different actors involved in each stage of plan-making. Two findings have been highlighted: the first was that inter-scalar collaboration in plan-making for the WCB was sector-specific but endowed with tension due to the consideration of territory-based interests. It contributed to scrutiny of the embedding of the tiao-kuai structure (see Chapter 3) in the institutional setting of Chinese city-regional planning. The second argument was that inter-ministry collaboration in the plan-making for the WCB was utilised as a strategy to mobilise political and economic resources for city-regional development in the implementation of the plan. It implied an art of government – ‘planning ahead’ – serving for material construction of specific city-regional imaginaries presented in planning discourse and images.

6.3.2 From provincial dominance to inter-city collaboration in plan-making for the HMR

Compared to the WCB, the institutions formed for making the territorial imaginaries of the HMR experienced a more dramatic transformation between 2008 and 2017. It was characterised by an increasing number of state agencies and corresponding changes in the institutional structures. The PDRC of Anhui, in a similar role to that of the NDRC in the WCB, dominated the plan-making in the first overall plan for the HMR - *the Outline of the Development Plan for the Economic Ring of the Anhui Provincial Capital* (promulgated in May 2008). Similar inter-scalar and inter-sector collaborations were formed in this process but on a lower scale and in a looser way. However, in the revision of this plan after late 2009, city governments were empowered with more leadership in the plan-making for the HMR. An inter-territory collaboration was constituted between them. The PDRC of Anhui took a back seat while the Hefei Development and Reform Commission became the actual organiser. This meant that the latest overall plan for the HMR, the *Outline of the 13th Five-Year Development Plan for the Hefei Metropolitan Ring*, was promulgated in the name of all the included city governments in 2017.

6.3.2.1 2006-2008: Dominance of the PDRC of Anhui

As introduced in Chapter 5, the HMR was firstly marked on the provincial agenda in 2006. The Economic Ring of the Provincial Capital (the earliest name of the HMR) was proposed for the first time in the official discourse of Anhui in a speech made by the then provincial secretary of the CPC. It referred to a vague area with economic growth as its goal and with a Hefei-centred city-region as its spatial morphology. Following this speech, the PDRC of Anhui was authorised by the leadership of the Anhui provincial government to make a regional plan based on this concept. A planning group was thus formed at the end of 2006 and led by Yu Qun, the then vice-director of the PDRC of Anhui (Anhui Development and Reform Commission, 2008a). The planning preparation was all organised by this group with limited participation by local authorities and other provincial departments. Field trips were conducted in Hefei, Luan, and Chaohu, in which leaders of city governments were invited to panel discussions giving their expectation and suggestions (Anhui Development and Reform Commission, 2008a). Meanwhile, other provincial departments such as the Provincial Department of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (PDHURD) of Anhui were also asked to contribute text to the plan (Anhui Development and Reform Commission, 2008a).

The formal plan-drafting started in early 2007 with coordination between the PDRC of Anhui and a quasi-state planning institute affiliated with the PDHURD (Anhui Development and Reform Commission, 2008a). This was a very interesting combination in terms of the roles of quasi-state think tanks and the capacities of different government sectors in city-regional planning. This issue will be specifically illustrated in Section 6.3.3. This overall plan for the HMR was finalised as *the Outline of the Development Plan for the Economic Ring of the Anhui Provincial Capital* with approval from the Anhui provincial government granted in May 2008. It is clear that the PDRC of Anhui dominated the whole process of plan-making, with very limited participation from city governments and other provincial departments. The latter state agencies played more supporting roles, such as respondents and assistants in the preparation and formulation of the plan, compared to the leadership role played by the PDRC of Anhui.

6.3.2.2 Since 2009: Cross-scalar leadership from provincial and prefecture-level governments

This domination by the PDRC of Anhui in making overall plans for the HMR has been weakened since 2009 due to a new institutional setting which has seen city governments empowered in cross-scalar leadership in the building of the HMR. A policy was promulgated by the CPC committee and the government of Anhui province to accelerate the construction of the HMR (CPC Committee and Government of Anhui Province, 2009). In this policy, a coordinating institution was established to plan, construct, and regulate the HMR. The leadership of this institution was named as the Leading Group for the Building of the HMR. It consisted of top leaders of the

provincial government, city governments, and related provincial departments. This group was responsible for ‘leadership, organisation, and coordination’ (CPC Committee and Government of Anhui Province, 2009, p.2) of actions in building the HMR.

The role of this Leading Group in planning the HMR involved mainly proposing its overall principles and general objectives. Further, the HMR Leading Group reached framework agreements on inter-city cooperation, especially the co-building of mega-projects (Interview A11; Interview A12). These actions were not carried out in order to make a specific plan. Instead, they furnished the contents of regular discussions in the joint meetings of the HMR Leading Group. These joint meetings have been organised every year since 2010 with the participation of leaders from member city governments and related provincial departments. Top leaders of the provincial government did not participate in any meeting – they were merely *de jure* leaders to mark the provincial government’s emphasis on the HMR.

Beyond the annual joint meetings of the project leaders, two offices of the Leading Group were established to organise and coordinate daily work for the building of the HMR. These were the actual offices in which the overall plans for the HMR were drawn up. It is particularly worth noting where these offices were located: one was in the PDRC of Anhui, and the other was subordinate to the government of Hefei. The latter one was *de facto* operated by the Hefei Development and Reform Commission. This means that, in the institutional sense, the majority of overall plans were still made within the system of Development and Reform Commission – albeit distributed at provincial and prefectural levels with an emphasis on Hefei city government as an important organiser of this planning regime.

6.3.2.3 Since 2009: Inter-territory collaboration with a leading role for Hefei

In contrast with the inter-scalar collaboration for the WCB, the Hefei Development and Reform Commission took on more responsibilities in planning for the HMR. This was because Hefei was positioned as a bellwether of inter-territory collaboration between city governments in the planning of the HMR. Provincial departments were mainly deemed to be assistants and supporters. This institutional feature was explained by an official in the Hefei Development and Reform Commission who participated in the planning for the HMR between 2009 and 2016 as follows:

Hefei undertook the leadership in all specific affairs [for planning the HMR]...We asked Luan City and Huainan City to take the lead. They both disagreed. They cannot lead, can they?...[The planning of] infrastructure, industry, agriculture, and tourism were all led by Hefei...But we were still under the leadership of the provincial party committee and provincial government, weren’t we? Provincial

departments gave us support. For example, the provincial environmental department, the PDRC, and the PDHURD all gave support. (Interview A12)

It was interesting that the leadership of Hefei City in this inter-territory collaboration was viewed as not in doubt. This was owing to the higher political status and stronger economic capacity of Hefei City compared to other member cities in the HMR. Although Hefei City was not a sub-provincial city (see Table 3.1), like many provincial capitals in China, the positioning of its top leader – the city secretary of the CPC committee in Hefei – was indeed half a level higher than its counterparts in other prefecture-level cities in Anhui Province. The secretaries of the CPC committee in Hefei City were usually the only leaders of cities who were included in the standing committee of the CPC at the provincial level – the core of state power in Anhui Province. This demonstrates the political privilege of Hefei City, compared to other cities in Anhui Province, in combining its territorial interests with the provincial agendas. In turn, it was also endowed with more liabilities in implementing the provincial agenda using its own advantages. It was considered that Hefei City should lead and support the development of other cities in the HMR (Interview A12). In this spirit, Sun Jinlong – then the secretary of CPC committee in Hefei City (2005-2011) – convened the first annual joint meeting within the leadership in the HMR. Although these meetings were held in other member cities later, the Hefei Development and Reform Commission, especially the Office of the Leading Group in Hefei, was always one of the main organisers of this meeting, and the one to transfer and connect provincial agendas and city actions.

As shown in Chapter 5, the rapid growth of Hefei's economy in the 2000s made it the city with the highest GDP in Anhui Province, and expanded the gap between it and the other cities in the HMR. This stronger economic capacity, accompanied by its political positioning, made Hefei bear more of the expense in the inter-territory collaboration for the planning of the HMR. A typical example is in drafting the *Plan for the Urban System in the Hefei Economic Ring (2013-2030)* (*Hefei jingji quan chengzhen tixi guihua 2013-2030*), a special plan that refined and developed the content of the urban system included in the overall plans. This plan-making was mainly organised and funded by the collaboration among Bureaus of Housing and Urban-Rural Development at city level, quasi-state planning institutes were commissioned to specifically formulate the content. The total cost paid to these planning institutes was 5.5 million CNY, of which the Hefei City paid two million, while the Chuzhou City, Luan City, and Huainan City each paid one million CNY, and Tongcheng City paid only 500,000 CNY. Political status and economic capacity differentiated the positions of Hefei City and other cities in inter-territory collaboration for plan-making for the HMR, and denoted the leading role of Hefei City in the production of territorial imaginaries for the HMR.

The institutional transformation shown in this section has presented a downscaling of state power in the formulation of city-regional imaginaries for the HMR, which was different from the recentralisation of state power prevalent in post-2000s China as argued in previous studies (Li and Wu, 2012a; F. Wu, 2016;2018). In addition, the emergent inter-territory collaboration presented a hierarchical structure under the guise of nominal equality. It revealed an important but under-studied issue: that the political status and economic capacity of administrative cities can cause their power and liability to diverge in the coordinated formulation of city-regional imaginaries.

6.3.3 Quasi-state think tanks as vanguards of plan-formulation but excluded from the finalizing of plans

Beyond the various state actors, quasi-state think tanks, including research and planning institutes, also held important positions in the institutional structure of plan-making for the WCB and the HMR. In the plan-making for the WCB and the HMR, these think tanks were usually at the vanguard in providing knowledge and expertise to formulate city-regional imaginaries, especially in the stages of plan preparation and drafting. In most cases, state agencies chose their own affiliated think tanks to work in the plan-making. Their relations in this process could be in terms of coordination or commission. But, in the HMR, there was also cross-sector cooperation between state agencies and think tanks. This demonstrates a transfer and balance of power and expertise in the city-regional planning of contemporary China. However, no matter which think tank was employed for plan-making, its participation in and influence on final decision-making was very limited. Their proposals were no more than suggestions in obedience to the decisive role of state agencies.

In making the *Plan for the Wanjiang City Belt Demonstration Zone for Accepting Industrial Relocation (2010-2015)*, two think tanks – Anhui Academy of Social Sciences (entirely funded by the Anhui provincial government) and Anhui Economic Research Institute (entirely funded by the PDRC of Anhui) – were highly involved in the formulation of the first draft plan. They coordinated with officials from the PDRC of Anhui to draft the outline and preliminary version of this plan. They built the basic logics and general aspects included in the overall plan for the WCB.

These scholars from universities and Anhui Academy of Social Sciences got together and had some principle-discussing meetings, brainstorming sessions...[These were about] how to make the plan, how many chapters and sections should be included, and finally formulating a general outline. Later, the

making of specific contents was handed to Anhui Economic Research Institute. Related office directors of the PDRC all took part in this process. (Interview A6)

The work of think tanks in this process was not easy. There was no reference for this plan because it was the first plan of the NDRC focusing on industrial relocation across macro-economic regions. Neither the NDRC nor the Anhui provincial government gave a clear idea or guidance on planning scope or contents. Accordingly, the knowledge of experts in think tanks was vital to the shaping of planning imaginaries at this stage.

It [the PDRC] invited us to make [the overall plan], but to be honest, nobody knew what the plan was going to be then...The director of the PDRC gathered some experts [from think tanks] but he too was confused. He also did not know what to write. So, it was all of us [experts] that thought about every little thing. We even made five drafts (Interview B1).

A similar situation can also be found in the planning for the HMR, when experts had to deal with complicated demands and requirements from city governments involved in inter-territory collaboration since 2009. This was described by a senior planner in Hefei Academy of Planning and Design, a state-owned planning institute led by the Hefei Housing and Urban-Rural Development Bureau and commissioned to make the *Plan for the Urban System in the Hefei Economic Ring (2013-2030)*.

Every city government has its own interests when we made it [*Plan for the Urban System in the Hefei Economic Ring (2013-2030)*]...We did two field trips in each city and conducted surveys, interviews, panel sessions with main departments...We had to balance different demands proposed by each city. (Interview C4)

In addition to these sector-confined relations, cross-sector cooperation between state agencies and think tanks was found in the plan-making for the HMR. After the planning group of the PDRC of Anhui drafted a framework for, they employed Anhui Urban and Rural Planning and Design Institute to refine this framework in preparing the preliminary draft.

After formulating the planning outline, [the planning group] did multiple comparisons and selections and then commissioned Anhui Urban and Rural Planning and Design Institute to do the preliminary research and textual research [for the overall plan]. It was [chosen] because of its experience and foundation in studying the Economic Ring of the Provincial Capital. (Anhui Development and Reform Commission, 2008a)

This planning institute was a state-owned enterprise affiliated to the PDHURD of Anhui; it participated mainly in making regional and urban spatial plans at provincial and city levels. Choosing this think tank to draft the plan exposed the lack of capacities of the Development and Reform Commissions in the spatial planning, although they were widely commissioned by multi-level governments to facilitate coordinated regional development since mid-2000s. By contrast, the Departments (Bureaus) of Housing and Urban-Rural Development and the planning institutes affiliated to them had more abundant experience in making strategic spatial plans with a regional view since the late 1990s (Y. Li, 2011). In this sense, cooperation between the PDRC and Anhui Urban and Rural Planning and Design Institute in plan-making for the HMR was indeed a strategy employed to share and transfer the expertise and experience of regional planning associated with the state system.

However, the participation of these think tanks in decision-making was very limited compared to their active roles in the plan formulation. There were few think tanks involved in the final stage of plan-making for overall plans in the WCB and the HMR. As illustrated in Sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.2, the final versions of draft plans were usually made by state agencies – Development and Reform Commissions at central, provincial, and prefectural levels (and in some case county level) – and submitted to higher-level actors for vetting and approval. This means that the drafts with big contributions from think tanks were no more than references for the last stage of plan-making dominated by state agencies. The latter actors had the power to decide what could be kept and what should be deleted, added, or adjusted. But it did not mean city-regional imaginaries formulated by think tanks could be totally changed by state actors. Instead, there was a balance between intellectual rationalities and political interests in finalising these planning imaginaries. This will be illustrated in Section 6.4.3.

In brief, Section 6.3 has investigated the actors and their institutional relations involved in formulating planning imaginaries for the WCB and the HMR. Diverse collaborations between state agencies have been found to have been carried out in inter-scalar, inter-ministry, and inter-territory manners, which exposed some rooted tensions, political arts, and emergent trends involved in shaping city-regional institutions in Anhui Province. The tiao-kuai structure within the state territorial system preconditioned the dual roles of the PDRC of Anhui as both representative and intermediary of sector-specific and territory-based interests in inter-scalar collaboration in the making of the overall plan for the WCB. Inter-ministry collaboration showed the capacity and dexterity of the NDRC in mobilising political and economic resources for the development of the WCB in terms of plan-implementation. A transformation from provincial dominance to inter-territory collaboration between city governments in the HMR challenged previous views on the recentralisation of city-regional planning, marking a trend of the

downscaling and devolution of state power. In addition, this section has also called attention to the under-studied roles of quasi-state actors, especially think tanks, in formulating plans for city-regions in contemporary China. They were important providers of knowledge and expertise to state agencies, and played an indispensable vanguard role in hatching initial plans. Although they were affiliated to the state system and excluded from the decision-making, which was dominated by state agencies, this did not lead to subservience, as we shall see in the next section.

6.4 Spatial politics of producing imaginaries of the WCB and the HMR

This section looks at the techniques and mechanisms utilised to deal with divergent interests involved in producing the imaginaries of the WCB and the HMR during the plan-making process. These interests are not only scalar- and territory-specific but also refer to the trade-offs between different actors in the fields of economy, politics, and public administration. Firstly, I spotlight the authority and techniques of intellectuals from quasi-state think tanks in shaping the spatial boundaries of the WCB (Section 6.4.1). Geographical concepts are used to rationalise benefits derived at the provincial level in the spatial selectivity of the central state. Secondly, an overlap of multi-level expectations on city-regional development is discussed in the expansion of the planning area for the HMR (Section 6.4.2). The different expectations of state entities at central, provincial, and prefectural levels for gains in the building of the HMR are superimposed on it. Thirdly, I reveal the juxtaposition of economic rationalities and political interests in the spatialisation of functional-economic activities (Section 6.4.3). These occur in the strategic choice of planning development zones in the WCB, and reveal disputes between the intellectual elites from the think tanks and officials from the NDRC and provincial government.

6.4.1 Re-narrating ‘the Yangtze River Basin’: conceptual production in favour of provincial interests in delineating the WCB

The ‘Yangtze River Basin in Anhui’ (NDRC, 2010, p.1) was highlighted in the *Plan for the Wanjiang City Belt Demonstration Zone for Accepting Industrial Relocation (2010-2015)* to denote the geographical basis of the WCB. Its area in this plan was equal to the jurisdictions of nine prefecture-level cities and two county-level units (see Figure 6.1). However, there was no consensus on the explicit area of the Yangtze River Basin in academic discussion which varied depending on the different focus, for instance related to geology, hydrology, crops, etc., behind its delineation. In the policy realm, the Yangtze River Basin was more endowed with significant economic meaning, taking the Yangtze River widely identified as both a resource and a corridor to (inter-) regional development. In this sense, denoting the planning area by means of the Yangtze River Basin (the part in Anhui) indeed rationalised the delineation of the WCB as an economic region with a well-recognized natural base. By doing so, the connection of the WCB to the

downstream area of the Yangtze River – i.e., the YRD – could also be accentuated and naturalised in planning discourse. This action was consistent with both the historical trajectories of regional spatial regulation and the new agendas behind the launch of the WCB shown in Chapter 5.

However, from another angle, if the policy elites only wanted to take advantage of the symbolic meaning of the Yangtze River, why would not they use similar concepts inherited from previous policies in Anhui Province, for example the ‘Regional along the (Yangtze) River’ (proposed in 1986) or the ‘Urban Cluster along the (Yangtze) River’ (proposed in 2006)? If we compare the usage of these concepts carefully, a big difference in boundary-delineation can be found. In the regional policies of Anhui Province in prior to the Wanjiang City Belt, the sum of administrative cities along the Yangtze River and adjacent to the YRD is usually equal to a sub-provincial economic region for stressing the connections between Anhui and the YRD through the river and spatial proximity. For example, the area delineated as the ‘Urban Cluster along the (Yangtze) River’ incorporated the jurisdictions of eight prefecture-level cities, six of which had shores on the Yangtze River while two others bordered the YRD (see Figure 6.3).

Nevertheless, ‘the Yangtze River Basin in Anhui’ (NDRC, 2010, p.1) referred to in the WCB contained, but was not limited to, this area. Indeed, it included an additional area in central Anhui – Hefei City and two county-level units next to it. The motivations behind this delineation were revealed by an expert from Anhui Academy of Social Science, who took part in drafting the first version of the *Plan for the Wanjiang City Belt Demonstration Zone for Accepting Industrial Relocation (2010-2015)*:

At that time, we [experts from think tanks and officials from the provincial government] were thinking that there would be little meaning if [we] did not incorporate Hefei into [the WCB]...because the area of Maanshan, Wuhu, and Tongling was very small at that time...Our idea was to drive industrial relocation in the whole province...[so] we racked our brains to [find ways to] expand it [the spatial area of WCB] again and again. Hefei City was not inside initially [but] we made every effort to incorporate Hefei. (Interview B1)



Figure 6.3 Planning areas of the Urban Cluster along the (Yangtze) River in Anhui Province (delineated in 2006), and of the WCB (delineated in 2010)

Source: Compiled by author according to the *Outline of the 11th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the Urban Cluster along the River* and the *Plan for Wanjiang City Belt Demonstration Zone for Accepting Industrial Relocation (2010-2015)*.

The ambition of the Anhui provincial government to make the WCB lead the development of the whole province was rooted in the plan-making, even in the earliest stages. As a state space identified by the NDRC, delineating a broader area for the WCB meant that more parts of Anhui Province could share the benefits of land, industries, financial subsidies, etc., from the central government. It would correspondingly create a bigger and stronger growth engine for Anhui Province. But why, according to my informant, was Hefei City essential for this delineation? Geographic proximity between Hefei City and the Urban Cluster along the Yangtze River (see Figure 6.3), emphasis on developing the provincial capital (see Section 5.3), and raising the economy of Hefei City (see Section 5.4) were all, he told me, potential reasons (Interview B1). Furthermore, incorporating Jinan District and Shucheng County of Luan City into the WCB was consistent with the agenda of the Anhui provincial government in developing the HMR. These two county-level units were the oldest members of the HMR, incorporated into it in 2007, and had the closest connection to Hefei City. In the plan for the WCB, Hefei City and these two county-level units together constituted the ‘Hefei Core’. This was envisaged as one of the growth

poles in the WCB, with the particular goal of ‘accelerating the development of the Hefei Economic Ring’ (NDRC, 2010, p.11).

In this sense, the plan makers were in urgent need of a new concept to rationalise their province-benefitting intentions behind the delineation the WCB. The ‘Yangtze River Basin in Anhui’ was created in this context in order to expand the spatial resources beyond the previously defined urban clusters.

You are studying geography – you know, we [experts from think tanks] racked our brains to find a solution [a new geographical basis]. It [the solution] was the Yangtze River Basin: [we can say] although Hefei is not close to the Yangtze River, it can be a part of the Yangtze River Basin; because rivers in Hefei link with the Yangtze River...Besides, Changfeng County [subordinated to Hefei City] is called a watershed between the Yangtze River and the Huai River [to the north]. Taking this watershed as boundary, the southern side can be called the Yangtze River Basin and the northern side can be the Huai River Basin...According to this, our incorporation of Hefei into the WCB is still valid due to it having a geographical basis – Hefei can be a part of the Yangtze River Basin. (Interview B1)

It is not hard to find from this interview that there was a reversal of cause and effect in the boundary delineation of the WCB. It was not because the Yangtze River Basin preconditioned or restricted a geographical area for further development of the WCB. To the contrary, it was the a priori setting of boundaries for the WCB that triggered the selection and re-presentation of the Yangtze River Basin that justified this delineation. The vague identification of the Yangtze River Basin gave experts a lot of space to present this concept in their preferred manner, although it did not look rigorous enough to stand up to scientific testing. In this process, the boundary delineation itself was deemed to be one of the most important strategies to strive for spatial resources through the plan-making. These experts from quasi-state think tanks affiliated to the Anhui provincial government consciously defended the interests of the province in the national-level plan. A bias toward place-specific interests was embedded in the production and provision of knowledge in plan-making for the city-region. It was built upon scalar- and territory-specific connections between the state system and quasi-state think tanks.

6.4.2 HMR in expansion: an overlap of multi-level expectations on city-regional development

Compared to the ‘one-off’ boundary-delineation for the WCB, the planning area of the HMR initiative has almost doubled since 2008 (see Section 6.2.1). The impetus behind this expansion

was the different expectations of state agencies at central, provincial, and local levels for the gains from building the HMR. The motivation of the provincial government to shape a metropolitan economy in Central Anhui was intensified by competition among local governments for the redistribution of land and subsidies. It was further mixed with the national agenda on creating a new growth engine for the extended YRD through grouping economically developed cities in Anhui Province. Different imaginaries of the HMR were led by these expectations but finally synthesised into a common vision of the city-region: an all-in-one patchwork shaped by both bottom-up and top-down plan-making.

In the first overall plan made by the PDRC of Anhui in 2008, the HMR consisted of a ‘core’, Hefei City, and two ‘wings’, Luan City and Chaohu City (see Section 6.2.2). The economic foundation of Hefei and its connection to bordering cities were viewed as the reasons for this delineation (Interview A12). However, the possible expansion of this area was also conceived of in this plan:

With the further improvement of the transportation network and the acceleration of regional integration, the surrounding area [of the HMR] will gradually integrate itself into the Economic Ring of the Provincial Capital. The area covered and influenced by the Economic Ring of the Provincial Capital will expand to Huainan and Bengbu to the north, Chuzhou and Maanshan to the east, and Anqing, Wuhu, Tongling and a broader area to the south. (Anhui Development and Reform Commission, 2008b, p.1).

This vision was partly achieved in the following decade. It was first promoted by the application made by both prefecture-level governments and county-level governments to join the HMR between 2007 and 2013. The governments of Huainan City and Tongcheng City were the earliest to apply, which they did when the formulation of the first overall plan was approaching its end. This action was noted by the plan-makers in the postscript of the plan with several strategies to encourage their integration into the planning area of the HMR. Later on, Dingyuan County of Chuzhou City was approved to be incorporated in 2012, followed by the involvement of the entirety of Chuzhou City in 2013. The reasons for these cities applying to join the HMR were mainly centred around two points. The first was the search for a spill-over of economic growth from Hefei City, especially through industrial relocation:

The enthusiasm of each city [for joining the HMR] was relatively high...Hefei should play a leading role to surrounding cities, to member cities; it should support its brother authorities. For example, we started to relocate some industries from Hefei City to its surroundings; for example, a chemical factory in

Feidong County of Hefei City was relocated to Dingyuan County; some auto parts [enterprises] relocated to Luan and Huainan; and some local equipment and packaging [enterprises] relocated to Tongcheng County...So, Hefei indeed brought a lot of opportunities for cities in the HMR. (Interview A12)

The difference in development stages between Hefei City and its surrounding area made industrial relocation possible. This process was not only led by the market but also directed by the governments in the plan as shown in Section 6.2.2. In addition, taking advantage of upper-level government redistribution mechanisms was another strong motivation of local governments for joining the HMR. This redistribution was mainly linked with beneficial economic policies to development zones and the special construction land quota.

Why did Chuzhou ask to join the HMR? It was because the HMR enjoyed the beneficial policies for the Hefei-Wuhu-Bengbu Demonstration Zone for Self-Innovation. If Chuzhou joins the HMR, it will share the policy benefits given to this development zone too. Besides, Anhui was made a Special Policy Area, which was approved by National People's Congress. Its total area is 400 km² which doesn't need to match the population. In previous plans, you had to estimate the population first and then were given a corresponding quota of construction land. This Special Policy Area was made for the WCB at first, which was for accommodating relocated industries from the YRD. It means most of the industries would be transferred from elsewhere so they were not bound to population and land in the inland region. The National People's Congress gave Anhui a land quota of 400km². Provincial government can decide for itself how to distribute it. The HMR programme got a share of this quota from this policy. So, if someone joins the HMR it can share these quotas. (Interview C4)

The Hefei-Wuhu-Bengbu Demonstration Zone for Innovation and the Special Policy Area mentioned by informants are two key policies which have been implemented in Anhui Province since the early 2010s. The first one was proposed by the Anhui provincial government and involved financial subsidiaries and tax breaks for the development zone. Research institutes and enterprises located in its planning area and associated with scientific and technical innovation can share these economic benefits. Another policy was approved by the central state to give benefits to the WCB concerning land use. In fact, the redistribution of the quota for construction land by the provincial government was not limited to the WCB but covered other state programmes at a sub-provincial scale such as the HMR. The benefits from these two policies overlapped in the HMR, which stimulated the interest of local governments to join in.

Beyond the active participation of local governments, the central state also had a significant influence on the expansion of the planning area for the HMR. In 2016, a very different delineation of the HMR appeared in the *Development Plan for Yangtze River Delta Urban Cluster* promulgated by the NDRC. Eight cities of Anhui Province – basically coinciding with the area of the WCB except for two county-level units neighbouring Hefei City – were incorporated into this urban cluster alongside the whole territory of the YRD. In this plan, the development of five city-regions was proposed as one of the most important spatial strategies to fuel the growth of the YRD. These city-regions were all the most economically developed areas in each province. The HMR was the only one located in Anhui and served the goals of nurturing a new growth engine for the YRD and building a relational hub for the economic belt along the Yangtze River.

The HMR should use its advantage of location in connecting the east and the west in the construction of the Yangtze River Economic Belt, and its advantage in gathering rich innovative resources to accelerate construction of the demonstration zone for accepting industrial relocation. (NDRC, 2016, p.19)

In this sense, the HMR defined in this plan was different from the one identified by provincial and local governments. It was identified as the core area of the WCB – a nation-level programme – covering only three cities. The one with best economic performance in Anhui was Hefei, and the other two played important roles in connecting the economic activities of the Yangtze River, i.e., Wuhu and Maanshan. Based on the tiao-kuai structure illustrated in Chapter 3 and Section 6.3, DRCs at provincial and city levels had to follow and reflect this vision in the plans they made, but they also did not want to give up their own planning imaginaries. In this context, the central government's idea for delineating the HMR was superimposed on the previous vision for building a metropolitan region in central Anhui. It made for a further expansion of the planning area of the HMR since 2016 to include all the cities incorporated at the urging of state agencies at central, provincial, and local scales.

6.4.3 Finding a compromise in strategic choices for development zones: juxtaposition between economic rationalities and political interests

There were two juxtaposed strategies for developing the development zones in the plan for the WCB. The first was building two large 'concentration zones to accept relocated industries' at cross-jurisdictional scale along the Yangtze River, while the second was the upgrading and expansion of existing development zones in each member city. This result demonstrated a compromise between economic rationalities and political interests in plan-making for the WCB. When intellectual elites insisted on the efficiency of economic development and public administration, additional attention was given to the political benefits and official promotion by

government officials. The institutional structure for plan-making made it clear that intellectual elites from quasi-state think tanks did not have enough power or a chance to fight for their standpoints. They were excluded from the finalising of the decision-making, while the NDRC had little participation in the preliminary plan-drafting. However, this did not mean that the intellectuals' vision could be overruled completely by state agencies. In fact, their role as producers of place-specific knowledge was indispensable and irreplaceable. These tensions resulted in a compromise choice for planning development zones in the WCB.

Building two 'concentration zones for accepting relocated industries' was proposed in the overall plan for the WCB as one of the most significant strategies to promote industrial relocation. The rationale and general approach to developing these two concentration zones were summarised in the plan as follows:

For adapting to the trend of large-scale and clustering relocation of industries and taking advantage of the Yangtze River as a golden waterway, planning and constructing concentration zones accepting high-quality relocated industries within an area along the Wanjiang River with suitable development conditions. It will rely on leading cities, break out from the limitations of administrative divisions, and promote cross-river and coordinated development of cities along the Yangtze River. (NDRC, 2010, pp.14-15)

These two concentration zones were envisaged as key spaces to accommodate a large number of relocated industries from east China with the advantage of river transportation via the Yangtze River. Accordingly, it was felt that they needed massive spatial resources with long riverfronts and good ports, which was hard to achieve in the jurisdiction of a single city. For this reason, building concentration zones on a cross-jurisdictional scale was proposed in the plan and followed by a special institutional setting to manage them. This involved 'exploring coordinative institution with the direct governance of provincial government and co-building across divisions' (NDRC, 2010, p.15).

This seemingly reasonable strategy, however, did not exist in the first draft of the overall plan, which had mainly been drawn up by experts from think tanks affiliated to the Anhui provincial government. On the contrary, this strategy was opposed by experts when it was proposed by the leadership of the provincial government in plan-drafting:

To tell you the truth, the two concentration zones did not exist when I took part in making it [*Plan for the Wanjiang City Belt Demonstration Zone for Accepting Industrial Relocation (2010-2015)*]. When some leaders of the provincial

government proposed them, we [experts] had reservations. In fact, we did not agree with construction of the concentration zones. (Interview B1)

The reasons behind their opposition were based on two points. The first was their estimation of the development condition of existing industrial parks in the WCB, and the second was their doubt about the viability and feasibility of special institutions set up for concentration zones.

We did scientific research [on planning development zones]. These two concentration zones were not in the research. At that time, the biggest difficulty for development zones along the river was attracting investment. They had space. They had a lot of approved land but there was no investment coming in. So, the problem is not no space [to develop] but is too much space that cannot get the investment...Besides, I worked in local government. I worked for development zones in counties. This direct governance by the provincial government is a problem. It is hard to do well...Accordingly, we did not design these two concentration zones when [we] drafted the plan. (Interview B1)

As explained by the leading expert, planning a large-scale development zone in the WCB was viewed as an unnecessary strategy because, based on his research, space in the existing development zones was sufficient to accommodate the relocated industries. In addition, there were foreseeable difficulties involved in managing cross-jurisdictional development zones. Based on these views, the experts designed another, more conservative, pathway to develop development zones in the new draft – this involved upgrading, properly expanding, or if necessary relocating existing industrial parks. However, the NDRC proposed another consideration in the revision of the first draft made by province: the WCB needed flagship projects to denote its significant role as the first demonstration zone in China to accept relocated industries across macro-economic regions. In other words, these flagship projects would serve as a kind of spatial symbol in the propaganda of national policies.

The establishment of two concentration zones was proposed by the NDRC when they revised the first draft of the plan. Because this plan was intended to facilitate accepting relocated industries, they thought there was a need to design some special areas. It established two concentration zones on the north bank of Wanjiang. This showed the particularity of this plan...In addition, this plan was designed to solve the problem of uneven development of regions...: at that time the south bank of the [Yangtze] river was relatively developed but the north bank was relatively underdeveloped. If two concentration zones could be built on the north bank, [this could] improve the industrial foundation of the north bank with

new employment and income [opportunities] so that uneven regional development conditions could be changed. (Interview A6)

If the flagship projects – two concentration zones – were built, massive policy benefits would be given to these projects. It would further show the resolution and action of the central state towards narrowing regional inequality both at the cross-macro-regional and sub-provincial scales. In this sense, these concentration zones were embedded with the symbolic meaning of promoting more balanced development of the regions. They functioned like showpieces of the national programme rather than merely a strategy with practical value to provincial development. Accordingly, they were more irreplaceable to the NDRC than the strategy designed by provincial experts. Meanwhile, building concentration zones was also supported by provincial leaders, as agreed by all interviewees mentioned in this section, because this kind of mega-project which was supported by the central state was deemed to be an easier way to show the achievements of officials in their term of service (Interview A6). If these projects were implemented successfully, the reputation of officials relating to their ability to govern the province effectively would be largely improved. It would be critical to their promotion within the bureaucracy of the state system.

Accordingly, despite the opposition of provincial think tanks, two concentration zones were still written into the overall plan for the WCB, which was issued in 2010 with an alliance of officials from the NDRC and the PDRC of Anhui finalising the plan-making. The overruling of expert opposition to this strategy further revealed their lack of ability to intervene in decision-making, as mentioned in Section 6.3.3. However, this does not mean that their opinions were not considered at all. Their grounded analysis of and strategies on existing development zones in the WCB could not easily be replaced by officials from the NDRC and was indeed recognised by NDRC officials (Interview A6). It is not hard to find from this case that disagreement among actors around strategic choice for development zones in the WCB was not based on a simple dichotomy of national interest and local interest. Indeed, the standpoints of different groups grew from and contained more complicated elements, such as scientific consciousness, political symbolism, official promotions and so on. All of these could be sources of disagreement and could be involved in shaping a particular spatial imaginary for city-regions.

As Davoudi & Brooks (2020) assert, ‘planning is about politics of place and its policies and practices are simultaneously the producers, the carriers, and the products of spatial and scalar imaginaries’ (p.8). This has been confirmed in Section 6.4. Planning imaginaries about boundaries, areas, and functional-economic spaces in the WCB and the HMR were injected with place-specific interests pursued by diverse actors. Representation of these interests was not only sensitive to the territorial or scalar positions of these actors but also referred to a division between intellectual experts and state agencies. Section 6.4 has investigated three mechanisms of spatial

politics which unfolded in the plan-making for the WCB and the HMR to realise the expression of a single or multiple interests in the planning discourse.

The first was the manipulation of a discursive tool – the re-defining of geographical concepts – to expand provincial interests in the spatial selectivity of the central state (Section 6.4.1). It not only showed the authority and technique of experts in shaping the imaginaries of the WCB, but also highlighted their scalar bias in producing and providing knowledge for city-regional planning. The second mechanism was the overlay of diverse interests within state agencies which drove the expansion of the city-region area in planning (Section 6.4.2). Central, provincial, and local governments had different motives about building the HMR, which led to different visions of its planning area. These visions were superimposed on each other in the planning process through bottom-up and top-down institutions and produced a patchwork of city-regional visions in the final area of the HMR.

The third mechanism was the juxtaposition of economic rationalities and political interests in planning the functional-economic space – particularly the development zones – for the WCB. It demonstrated an under-studied structure of power relations in city-regional planning, beyond a vertical or horizontal relationship within the state system and incorporating disputes and bargaining between experts and state agencies. Experts from provincial think tanks insisted on a pursuit of economic efficiency with the smooth operation of public administration. By contrast, policy propaganda and official promotion were considered more by state actors at national and provincial levels. The dominance of state agencies in finalising planning imaginaries made their strategic choice hard to challenge. But this did not mean that the proposals put forwards by experts could be easily subverted in the planning discourse given the irreplaceable roles of these experts in producing place-specific and grounded knowledge.

6.5 Conclusion

The evidence surveyed in this chapter demonstrated the outcomes and institutions of plan-making for the WCB and the HMR and the techniques and mechanisms that were utilised to accentuate, reconcile, or balance divergent interests involved in producing city-regional imaginaries. The pluralistic imaginaries of city-regions were shown in the plans for two programmes (Section 6.2). This plurality was mainly presented in two ways. The first was a desire, different from experiences in the Northern Atlantic area, of balancing the spatial logics of functional economy and political administration in presenting city-regional imaginaries from beginning to end. Boundary delineation and spatialisation of functional-economic activities for the WCB and the HMR were superimposed onto spatial patterns driven by economic logics and confined to state administration.

This made the city-regional imaginaries presented in the plans for the two programmes seem to be a jigsaw puzzle made up of city-type administrative units endowed with economic significance.

The second aspect was that both programmes were endowed with a strong desire to promote growth and correct uneven development. The difference was that the WCB overlapped with a cross-macro-regional vision for achieving both targets, while only provincial agendas were present with the HMR. Based on this context, the WCB was defined as a new growth engine in the extended global city-region – the YRD – while its growth was mainly promoted by industrial relocation from the YRD. In contrast, the planning imaginaries of the HMR showed a typical morphology of a metropolitan economy centred on the provincial capital, Hefei City. The spatialisation of functional-economic activities for the two programmes, accordingly, stressed the divergent organisational structures of relational networks. The WCB as a whole was envisaged as a ‘spoke’ of its ‘hub’ in the YRD, while Hefei was positioned as the ‘hub’ of the HMR with multi-dimensional ‘spokes’ between it and other member cities. This is one of the aspects that embodied the plurality of city-regional imaginaries in the planning for the WCB and the HMR.

The institutions of planning for the two programmes have highlighted diverse collaborations within the state system and the special role of quasi-state actors – think tanks affiliated to state agencies – in shaping the city-regional imaginaries (Section 6.3). Inter-scalar and inter-ministry collaborations were found between state agencies at central and provincial levels in making the overall plans for the WCB. The Development and Reform Commissions were the dominant force in this planning regime. The inter-scalar collaboration in plan-making for the WCB was sector-specific but endowed with tension due to the consideration of territory-based interests. It was highly associated with the *tiao-kuai* structure in the Chinese state territorial system. The inter-ministry collaboration was manipulated as a strategy to mobilise political and economic resources for city-regional development in the implementation of the plan. This collaboration was enhanced by the leading role of the NDRC in the governance structure of Chinese ministries. In contrast with the WCB, a downscaling of state power was found in the transformation of institutional structure for plan-making in the HMR. Meanwhile, inter-territory collaboration between city governments has also emerged since 2009, with the *de facto* leadership of Hefei City in the organisation of planning actions. This chapter also showed the influence of the political status and economic capacity of cities on their powers and liabilities in the coordinated formulation of city-regional plans. Beyond these collaborations within the state system, quasi-state think tanks also held important positions in the institutional structure of plan-making for both programmes. These think tanks had scalar-specific and sector-specific links with the state system. They played the roles of indispensable vanguards in the production and provision of knowledge for the shaping of

city-regional imaginaries. However, their participation in plan-making was mainly confined to the early stages of drafting, and they were excluded from the finalising of decision-making.

Finally, in discussing the contested nature of plan-making for the WCB and the HMR this chapter examined techniques and mechanism of dealing with divergent interests involved in the production of city-regional imaginaries (Section 6.4). The interests behind city-regional planning were found to be not only scalar- and territory-specific but also referred to a division between the intelligentsia and state agencies. Accordingly, the role of experts from quasi-state think tanks in these spatial politics was very special. On the one hand, they represented place-specific interests due to their affiliation to the state system. They mobilised tools in knowledge production to orient city-regional imaginaries to the advantage of the state agencies they were affiliated to. On the other hand, they also stood for economic rationales in plan-making in the face of potential clashes with the pursuit of purely political ends or personnel development by officials from the state system. Their weak position in the institutional structure for plan-making meant that they could not directly influence the final outcomes of city-regional shaping. But this was offset to some extent by their irreplaceable role in producing place-specific and grounded knowledge, and led to a compromise between the different propositions of the think tanks and state agencies for shaping specific imaginaries. In addition, there were also divergent interests in city-regional planning between state actors at multiple levels. The expansion of the planning area in the HMR demonstrates an overlap of these interests which was driven by both bottom-up and top-down institutions. The formulation of all of the plans mentioned in this chapter has finished, but their implementation has not yet been completed. The next chapter will investigate the political-economic mechanisms involved in the materialisation of city-regional imaginaries produced by the plan-making process.

Chapter 7: The materialisation of city-regional imaginaries through the building of the Jiangbei Industrial Cluster and the Shouxian-Shushan Modern Industrial Park

7.1 Introduction

This chapter responds to Research Question 3 of this thesis (see Section 1.2): in what ways were planning imaginaries of city-regions in Anhui Province converted into material outcomes? I contend that the construction of two suburban new towns - the Jiangbei Industrial Cluster (JBIC) and the Shouxian-Shushan Modern Industrial Park (SSMIP) - were utilised as a spatial process to concretize and restructure the city-regional imaginaries of the Wanjiang City Belt (WCB) and the Hefei Metropolitan Ring (HMR) illustrated in Chapter 6. Here, the new town refers to a spatial unit combining development zones – dominated by industrial land – and urban districts with functions like residence, business, public services, and so on.

The main findings of this chapter are presented through detailed investigation into four issues: firstly, in Section 7.2, I examine how the planning visions for the JBIC and the SSMIP reflected the pursuit through the WCB and the HMR of city-regional growth and balanced development, and further how this pursuit diverged and changed based on local considerations. Secondly, in Section 7.3, I reveal how state actors scattered over different scales and territories were organised into coordinated institutions for managing and funding the JBIC and the SSMIP based on these changing visions. Thirdly, in Section 7.4, I scrutinise how various enterprises in the sectors of industrial production and real estate were forged into collaborative relationships with state agencies, in order to derive greater profits from investment in the JBIC and the SSMIP. Finally, in Section 7.5, I investigate what happened to these state institutions and state-enterprise coalitions when the expected growth in the JBIC and the SSMIP did not appear or stumbled. Section 7.6 summarises all the findings of this chapter.

Through this investigation, I provide evidence to respond to the research aims of this thesis (Section 1.2): (i) I reveal the importance of suburban new towns in constituting the planning imaginaries of city-regions in China, and affirm that city-regional imaginaries are not one-time results fixed in plans but are constantly changed in the policy process (Research Aim 1); (ii) I examine diverse coalitions between power and capital – from actors within, associated with, or beyond the state system – and their transformation in materialising these city-regional imaginaries mediated by new towns (Research Aim 2). This enriches our view of city-regional institutions in China by providing a more on-the-ground perspective; (iii) I reflect on state spatial selectivity theory in the Chinese context by disclosing how the operation of power and capital is conditioned and extended within the entrenched state territorial system (Research Aim 3). This evidence will

be synthesised with the empirical findings obtained from Chapters 5 and 6 to constitute an overall response to the research aims of this thesis (see Section 8.3 for details).

7.2 Planning the JBIC and the SSMIP in the changing visions of city-regions

This section shows how the planning visions for the JBIC and the SSMIP reflected the city-regional imaginaries of the WCB and the HMR respectively, and changed as a result of local considerations. I argue that firstly, in the visions of upper-level governments – central and/or provincial governments – the JBIC and the SSMIP were catalysts in accelerating the expansion of functional-economic agglomerations and networks transcending the restrictions of territorial administration in the WCB and the HMR respectively. They were also endowed with the task of balancing the disparity between administrative territories by promoting growth of economically underdeveloped areas.

However, secondly, these visions were significantly changed with the involvement of local expectations in the planning for the JBIC and the SSMIP. Along with the rise of the Wuhu city government in the planning authority for the JBIC, the positioning of the JBIC leading the coordinated growth of a multi-city region including Wuhu City, Chaohu City, and Maanshan City was watered down. Instead, economic growth and territorial development within the jurisdiction of Wuhu City became the new focus in the planning discourse. By contrast, the cross-boundary growth was strengthened in the planning for the SSMIP. Its image evolved from being a development zone benefiting Shou County to one that was a part of a new airport town serving the metropolitan economy centred on Hefei City. The progress of implementing these plans in the JBIC and the SSMIP will be illustrated briefly in Section 7.2.3 with an introduction to linkages to state institutions and state-enterprise relations discussed in the following part of this chapter.

7.2.1 Planning the JBIC: from a growth pole in the multi-city region to an engine for Wuhu City

The JBIC is one of two ‘concentration zones for accepting relocated industries’ proposed in the *Plan for the Wanjiang City Belt Demonstration Zone for Accepting Industrial Relocation (2010-2015)*. As mentioned in Section 6.4, it was the state spatial selectivity of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) and the Anhui provincial government that flagged these two concentration zones in the overall plan for the WCB in 2010. The NDRC wanted to shape these two concentration zones as a showpiece project to mark the determination and capacity of the central state to promote industrial relocation from coastal China to the inland region. Meanwhile, they were also regarded by the provincial leadership as important mega-projects to showcase political achievements. Following this fundamental vision, a series of special plans related to land use, industrial development, and some other issues around the development

of the two concentration zones were formulated between 2010 and 2012 under the leadership of provincial departments of Anhui such as the provincial offices of the NDRC (PDRC) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (PDHURD).

7.2.1.1 The JBIC as the core of the Wuhu-Maanshan-Chaohu city-region

In this stage of planning, which was dominated by central and provincial departments, the JBIC was firstly positioned as the heart of a multi-city region including Wuhu City, Maanshan City, and counties in Chaohu City along the Yangtze River. This can be seen in the following official pronouncements:

Relying on Wuhu City and Maanshan City...the planning and constructing of a concentration zone accepting relocated industries [i.e., the JBIC] along the [Yangtze] river in Wuwei County and He County of Chaohu City [is needed] to promote industrial collaboration and common development. (NDRC, 2010, p.15)

The JBIC...is developed in connection with Wuhu City and Maanshan City across the [Yangtze] river for the building of the Maanshan-Wuhu-Chaohu industrial agglomeration and promotion of the development of Maanshan-Wuhu-Chaohu modern urban network along the [Yangtze] river. (General Office of Anhui Provincial Government, 2011a, 'Chapter 3', 'Section 3', para 2)

In this vision, building the JBIC was deemed an opportunity to accelerate the agglomeration and networking of industrial activities and urban functions beyond city jurisdictions and towards the multi-city regional scale. This motive influenced the site selection of the JBIC in the border area of three cities mentioned above (Figure 7.1) – a 200km² area was delineated in the territory of Chaohu City facing Wuhu City and Maanshan City across the river. It was given a long shoreline on the Yangtze River for constructing freight ports to strengthen its transportation linkage to the Yangtze River Delta (YRD). This location also reflected the aim of the NDRC and the Anhui provincial government to narrow regional disparities in the WCB, as mentioned in Section 6.4. In 2010, the per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of Maanshan City and Wuhu City ranked second and third among all of the 17 prefecture-level cities in Anhui Province, while Chaohu City was only positioned 13th, with less than a third of the per capita GDP of the other two (Statistics

Bureau of Anhui Province, 2011). In this context, the JBIC was conceived as an engine to lead the growth of the area north of the Yangtze River in the Wuhu-Maanshan-Chaohu city-region.

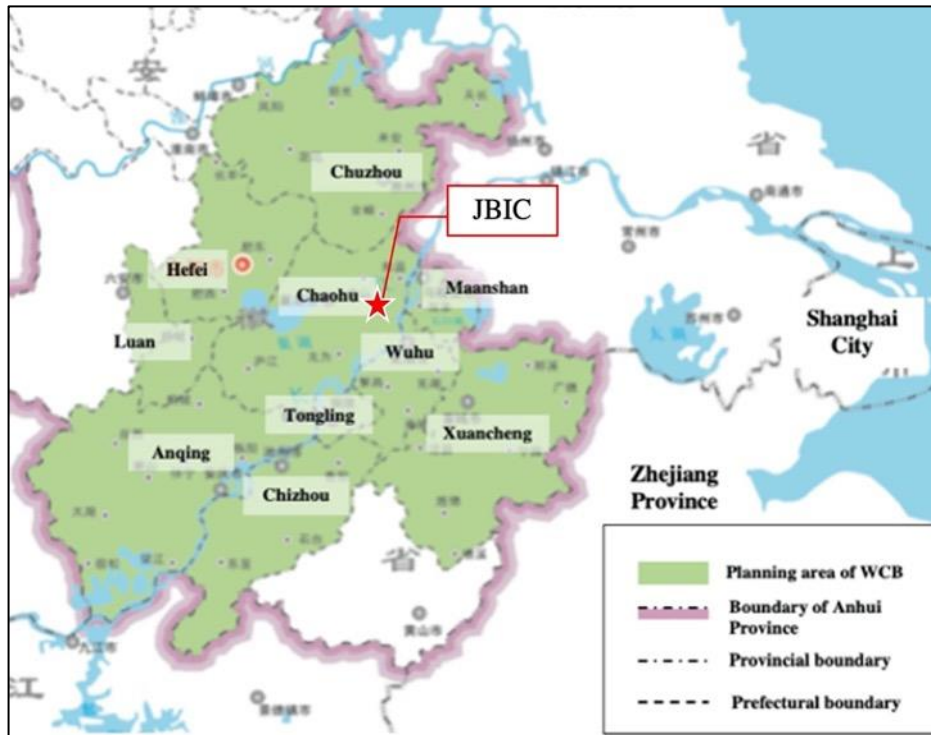


Figure 7.1 The location of the JBIC in the planning area of the WCB (in 2010)

Source: Compiled by the author.

Based on this location, industrial development in the JBIC was envisaged as building on the industrial foundation of the Wuhu-Maanshan-Chaohu city-region and making up for the city-region's deficiencies. For example, the automobile industry and its sub-suppliers were identified as a focus of manufacturing in the JBIC (General Office of Anhui Provincial Government, 2011a). The rationale behind this choice was associated with the leading roles of the automobile industry in the industrial development of Wuhu City and Maanshan City (Shenzhen Research Institute of Urban Planning & Design, 2010). The headquarters of two well-known Chinese automobile enterprises – Chery Automobile Co., Ltd. and Anhui Hualing Automobile Co., Ltd. – were located in Wuhu City and Maanshan City respectively, and led to a significant agglomeration of the auto parts industry in these cities.¹⁹ In this context, the Wuhu-Maanshan-Chaohu city-region was positioned as 'the base of national domestic brand automobiles' (NDRC, 2010, p.10) in the overall plan for the WCB, and existing agglomerations were expected to be integrated, expanded, and upgraded. The JBIC was imagined as both beneficiary and contributor to this vision. Its geographical proximity to existing agglomerations was deemed to assist the JBIC to better attract automobile enterprises relocated from coastal China (Shenzhen Research Institute of Urban

¹⁹ According to the data collected on September 11th, 2021 from an online database of Chinese enterprise information (<https://www.qcc.com>), the registered capital of Chery Automobile Co., Ltd. was over 5 billion CNY while Anhui Hualing Automobile Co., Ltd. had a registered capital of 500 million CNY.

In this vision, the land use of the JBIC would be required to balance industrial and urban functions, while the land used for industry and logistics would be over 50% of the total area (Interview C1). The other land was mainly planned for urban construction, including residential areas, a business district, public service facilities, city parks, and so on, to serve the industrial establishments (Figure 7.3). Multiple cross-river transport corridors – railways, highways, and urban expressways – were planned to connect the main industrial zones and urban centres in the JBIC and corresponding zones in Wuhu City and Maanshan City (JBIC MC, 2011). Based on this plan for land use, two start-up areas for construction were delineated between 2010 and 2015 for the

JBIC (Figure 7.3). An area of 5km² dominated by industrial land was planned in the north of the JBIC, which was next to the harbour district of Zhengpu Port and across the river from the industrial zones of Maanshan City. Another area of 15km² was planned in the south of the JBIC, which was expanded on the basis of the urbanised area of Shenxiang Town and the facing urban districts of Wuhu City across the river.

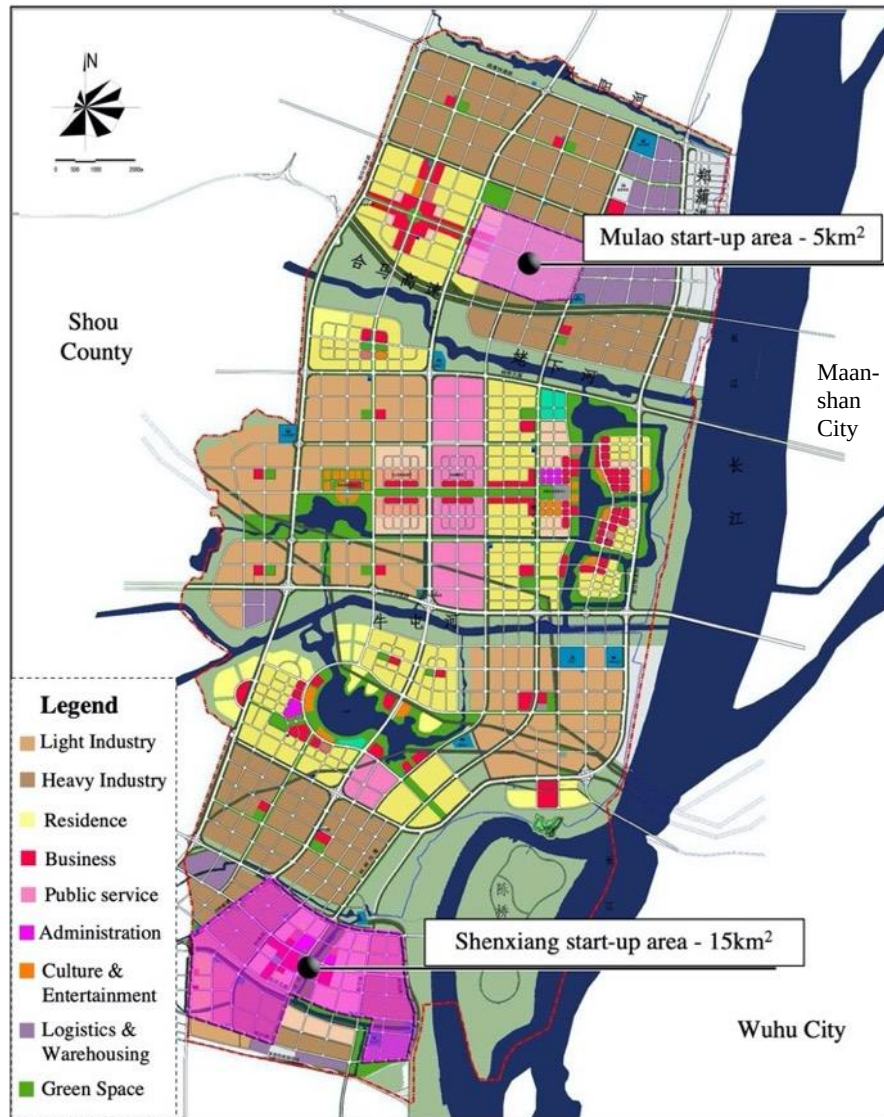


Figure 7.3 The land use plan for the JBIC (made in 2011)

Source: *The Plan for the Start-Up Area in the JBIC (2010-2015)*(Anhui sheng jiangbei chanye jizhongqu qibuqu guihua 2010-2015).

7.2.1.2 The JBIC as an engine for Wuhu City

However, these visions embedding the JBIC into a multi-city regional network have been greatly weakened in plans since 2012, with the rising participation of the Wuhu city government. After the separation of the prefecture-level Chaohu City in 2011, as introduced in Chapter 5, the area of the JBIC delineated by the NDRC and the Anhui provincial government was included in the administrative jurisdictions of Wuhu City and Maanshan City. This change triggered the re-

delineation of the JBIC's planning area in early 2012. The preliminary area of the JBIC was divided into two parts according to the boundary between Wuhu City and Maanshan City. The northern part was annexed into a new town project governed by the government of Maanshan City, while the southern part was expanded to form the new JBIC (Figure 7.4). The new JBIC was also 200km², and mainly planned by the Wuhu city government.

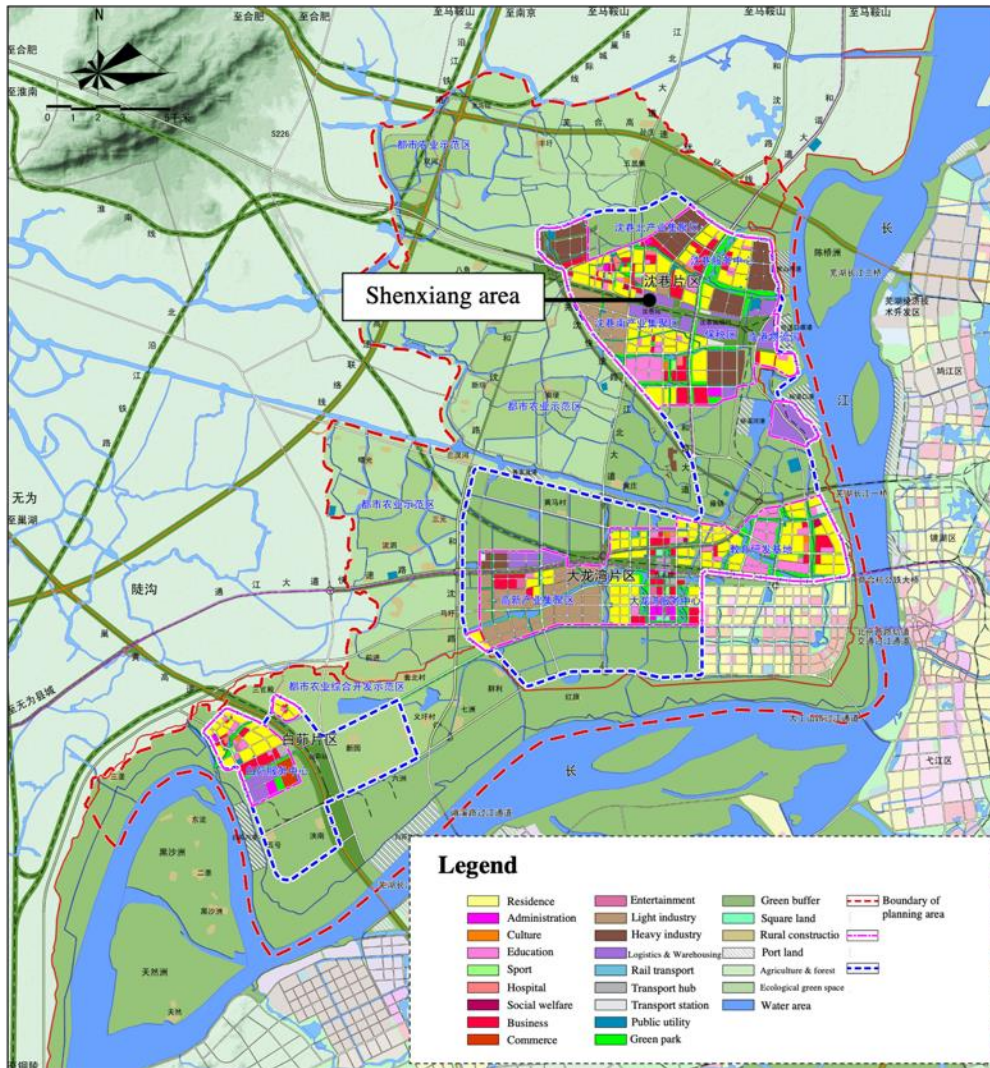


Figure 7.4 The land use plan for the JBIC (made in 2016)

Source: *Master Plan for the JBIC (2016-2030)* (Anhui sheng jiangbei chanye jizhongqu zhongti guihua 2016-2030).

In this context, Wuhu city government's vision was more central, and even dominant, in the planning for the JBIC. This finally led to a focus on the growth of the metropolitan economy and territorial development within the jurisdiction of Wuhu City. In *the Master Plan for Wuhu City (2012-2030)* (*Wuhu shi chengshi zongti guihua 2012-2030*), building JBIC was highlighted as 'the leading strategy to promote the spatial development of Wuhu City in the future' (Wuhu City Government, 2013, p.55). A polycentric structure of the metropolitan economy was planned for Wuhu City in which the JBIC was identified as one of three urban cores (Figure 7.5). This vision was further refined in *the Master Plan for the JBIC (2016-2030)*. The positioning of the JBIC was

moved in provincial plans from an ‘industrial new town’ to a ‘a happy and liveable modern new town’ with ‘advanced manufacturing as its mainstay and an agglomeration of modern service industries’ (Wuhu City Government, 2016, p.24). The total proportion of land planned for industrial production, logistics, and warehouses was reduced to 30.7% from the 50% initially planned. By contrast, urban functions, i.e., residence and public service facilities, were given more land, accounting for 34% of the total area. The ideology that guided this layout of functions was called the ‘integration of industry and city, and gave equal emphasis to the development of industry and urban functions in the JBIC (Wuhu City Government, 2016).

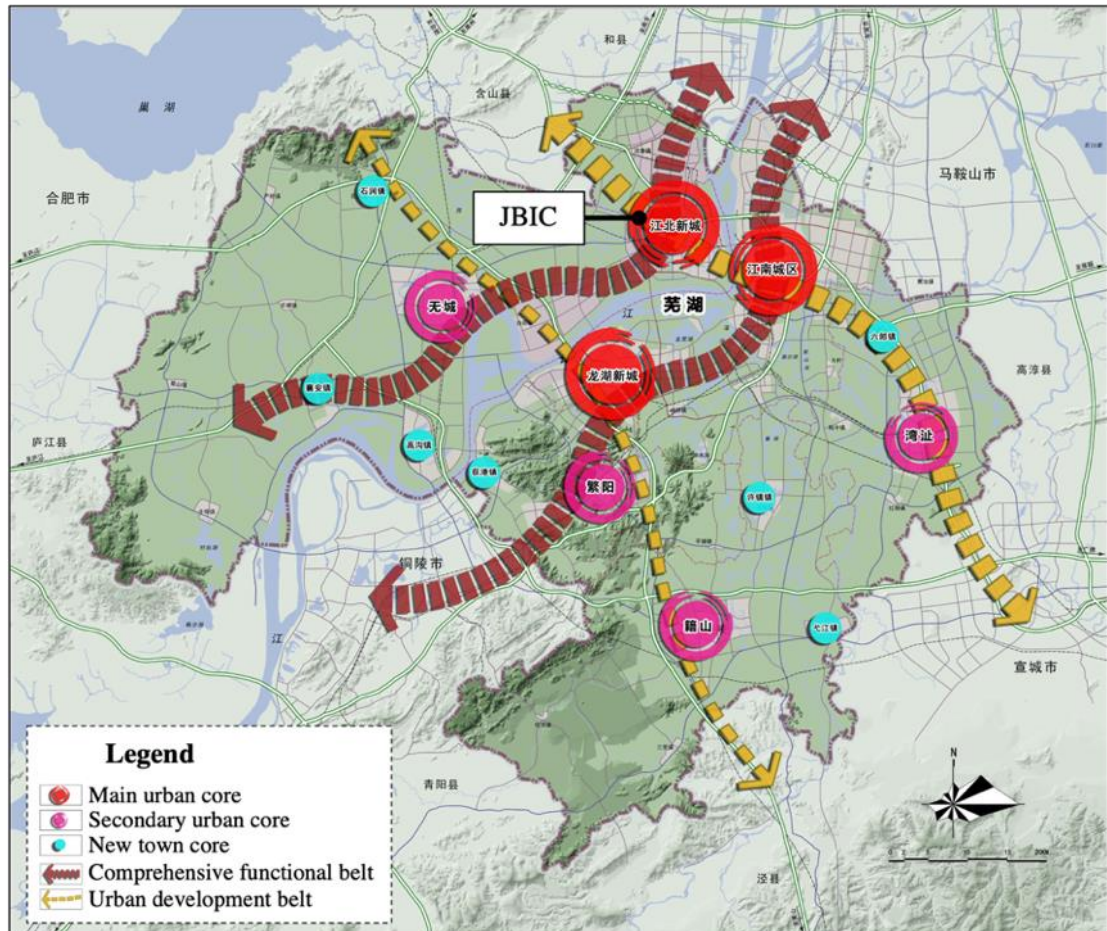


Figure 7.5 The spatial structure planned for Wuhu City
Source: *Master Plan for Wuhu City (2012-2030)*.

In other words, the primary image of the JBIC – as a demonstration zone of cross-macro-regional relocation of industries and an engine for multi-city regional growth – in the planning discourse was replaced by a new urban district for Wuhu City. The plan for industry, transportation infrastructure, and public services in the JBIC was considered an essential part of the overall development of Wuhu City. For example, although the auto industry was still positioned as one of the key industries in the JBIC, its focus shifted to ‘Research and Development’ sectors (R&D) and the manufacture of new energy vehicles (Wuhu City Government, 2016). It was viewed as a supplement to, and upgrading of, the existing auto industry located in the area of Wuhu City south

of the Yangtze River, i.e., the Jiangnan area, as is clear from the following government pronouncement:

The JBIC should upgrade the existing industrial advantages – the production of vehicles and auto parts – in the Jiangnan area [the area of Wuhu City south of the Yangtze River] through an expansion of the new energy automobile industry chain. They [the JBIC and the Jiangnan area] will jointly create a superior industrial agglomeration with close links between upstream and downstream [in the auto industry chain]. (Wuhu City Government, 2016, p.28)

Seven cross-river transportation corridors – two highways across the province, two inner-city expressways, and three urban main roads – were planned to connect the JBIC and the Jiangnan area (Wuhu City Government, 2016). Before this plan, there was only one bridge connecting the two banks of the Yangtze here. Besides this, the JBIC was also envisaged as a window for Wuhu City to show off the city's image and attract high-end consumption (Wuhu City Government, 2016). Accordingly, plans were made to develop public service facilities such as schools and hospitals to satisfy local needs in the same way as in the Jiangnan area. A number of iconic public buildings for hosting international commercial activities and cultural and sports events were also expected to be built in the JBIC (Wuhu City Government, 2016). In short, the JBIC plan after 2012 indeed foregrounded the vision of the Wuhu city government on jurisdictional development.

7.2.2 Planning the SSMIP: a booster for cross-boundary redistribution and growth in the HMR

7.2.2.1 The SSMIP for the growth of Shou County

As mentioned in Chapter 6, building development zones with cooperation between local governments had been encouraged in the overall plans for the HMR since 2008. It was viewed as a strategy to promote both the expansion of the industrial network centred on Hefei City and the industrialisation of economically underdeveloped areas. The SSMIP was established in this context with the urging of policy promulgated by the PDRC of Anhui in 2012 designed to narrow regional disparity: seven development zones were planned to be built in economically underdeveloped cities or counties in Anhui, with the assistance of the Anhui provincial government and the governments of local units, i.e., prefectural cities, urban districts, and counties with better industrial performance (Anhui Development and Reform Commission, 2012). Here, the assistance included financial investment and management experience. The Anhui provincial government provided the former, while the local units gave both.

The SSMIP was one of these development zones. It was built in the territory of Shou County with assistance from the Anhui provincial government and the Shushan district government (Figure 7.6). Shou County and Shushan District are two county-level units bordering each other in the HMR. Shou County was subordinate to Luan City until 2015 and is now subordinate to the prefecture-level city of Huainan. Shushan District is subordinate to Hefei City. There has long been a big gap in terms of economic development between these two entities.

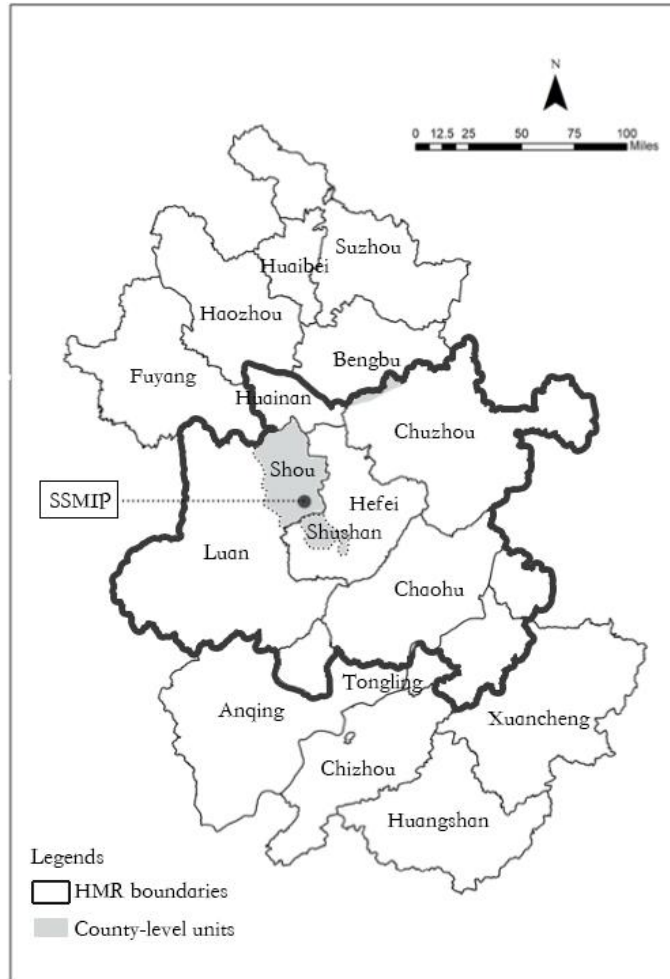


Figure 7.6 The location of the SSMIP in the planning area of the HMR (in 2008)

Source: Compiled by the author.

The per capita GDP of Shou County was only 7,652 CNY in 2012, which ranked 60th out of all the 62 counties or county-level cities in Anhui Province (Statistics Bureau of Anhui Province, 2013). By contrast, Shushan District, which is adjacent to Shou County to its south-east, was selected as one of the ‘top 100 urban districts with comprehensive competitiveness in China’ (China Committee for Development of Medium and Small-Sized Cities, 2012). Its per capita GDP in 2012, 75,965 CNY, was almost ten times that of Shou County (Hefei City Bureau of Statistics, 2013). In these circumstances, building the SSMIP was envisaged by the Anhui provincial government as a means of balancing economic development between Hefei City and its surrounding area. It was a kind of compulsory redistribution in the HMR which aimed to create a

growth engine for Shou County with the contribution of the district government of Hefei City. As one of my interviewees reported:

It was for addressing the imbalance in regional development...We saw [it] very clearly at that time. The reason behind the good economic performance in some areas was well-developed industries. Its vehicle was the well-developed development zones. In turn, the industrial foundation of lagging areas was bad without good development zones...Therefore, we pushed relatively developed areas to support relatively weak areas by building industrial parks. The purpose was to consolidate the industrial foundation and improve the level of industrialization of lagging areas....It was the political responsibility [of local governments to give assistance]. (Interview A6)

7.2.2.2 The SSMIP as a component of the regional economy centred on Hefei City

Based on this overall vision, in early 2012 the governments of Shou County and Shushan District were required to organise the planning for the SSMIP. In this stage, the SSMIP was endowed with a new role: an essential component was to promote the cross-boundary growth of the metropolitan economy centred on Hefei City. This was incorporated in the planning area of the Xinqiao Airport New Town, an urban development mega project led by the governments of Hefei City and Luan City and initiated in 2012. This project covered a total area of 696km² around Hefei Xinqiao Airport – an important hub of air transportation in Central China – of which an area of 354 km² was in the territory of Shou County while the rest was in the territory of Hefei City (Hefei Planning Bureau and Luan Planning Bureau, 2012) (Figure 7.7). The Xinqiao Airport New Town was therefore viewed as an opportunity to push the expansion of functional-economic agglomeration from Hefei to its surrounding area (Hefei Planning Bureau and Luan Planning Bureau, 2012).

for construction – and planned to attract enterprises in advanced manufacturing, e.g., for high-end auto parts and precision machinery, and new emerging industries such as electronics, biomedicine, and new materials. The land for urban functions was planned mainly to serve the needs of these enterprises and people working for these enterprises (SSMIP MC, 2012). This was very different from the vision for the JBIC mentioned above, which would provide public services beyond local needs. In summary, with the dominance of local governments in the planning, the target beneficiary of constructing the SSMIP was broadened from just Shou County to encompass the entire region centred on Hefei City. The vision for narrowing regional disparity coincided with the pursuit of cross-boundary growth of the metropolitan economy in the HMR.

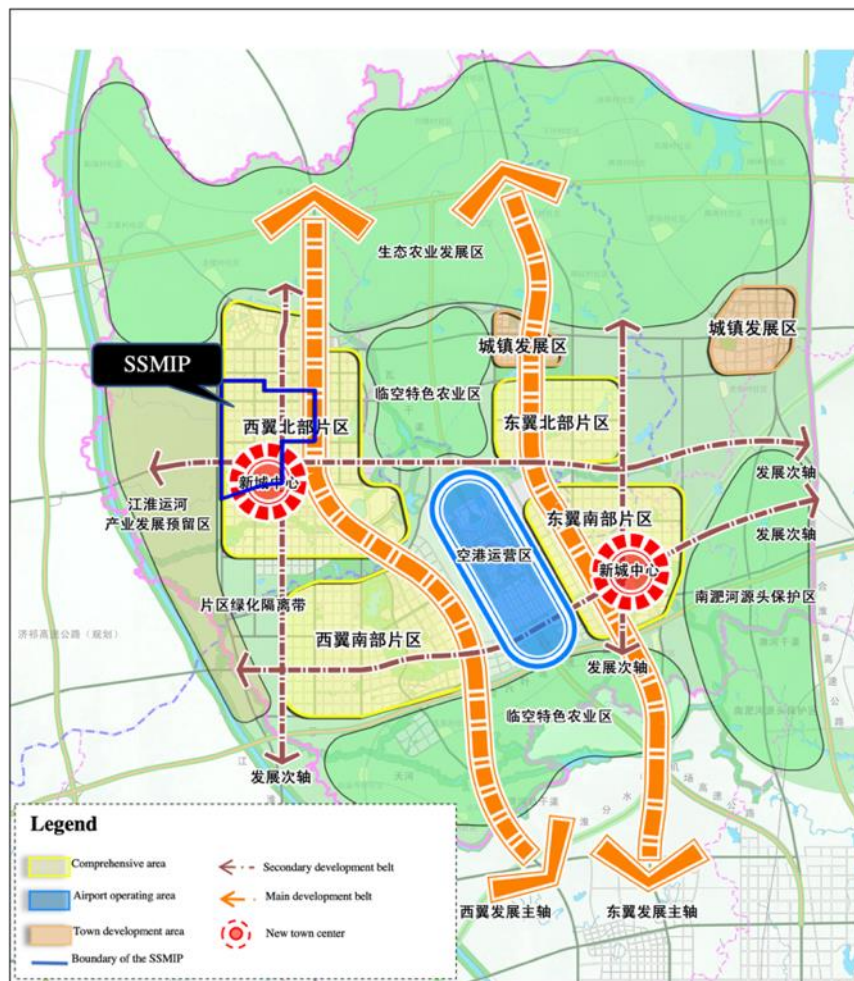


Figure 7.8 The SSMIP in the spatial structure of the Xinqiao Airport New Town
Source: *Master Plan for the SSMIP (2012-2030)*.

These visions for the JBIC and the SSMIP provided a new illustration of how state ambitions for building suburban new towns are realised in contemporary China. The promotion of capital accumulation and urbanisation was no longer confined to the structure of administrative cities as found in previous studies (Jiang et al., 2016a; Shen and Wu, 2017). Instead, new suburban towns reflected the impulse of upper-level governments – i.e., the central state and provincial government – to seek city-regional growth by breaking through administrative boundaries. New

towns were envisaged as both the catalyst for the formation and expansion of a functional-economic network covering multiple cities, and a booster for balancing regional disparity. However, these visions were not set in stone but differentially transformed through blending with the plans of local governments. The JBIC was demoted from being a growth pole in the polycentric mega-city region – i.e., Wuhu-Maanshan-Chaohu City-Region – to contributing to the territorial development of a single administrative city-region, i.e., Wuhu City. On the other hand, cross-boundary growth was enhanced in the planning vision for the SSMIP, along with the deployment of the metropolitan economy centred on but transcending the jurisdiction of Hefei City.

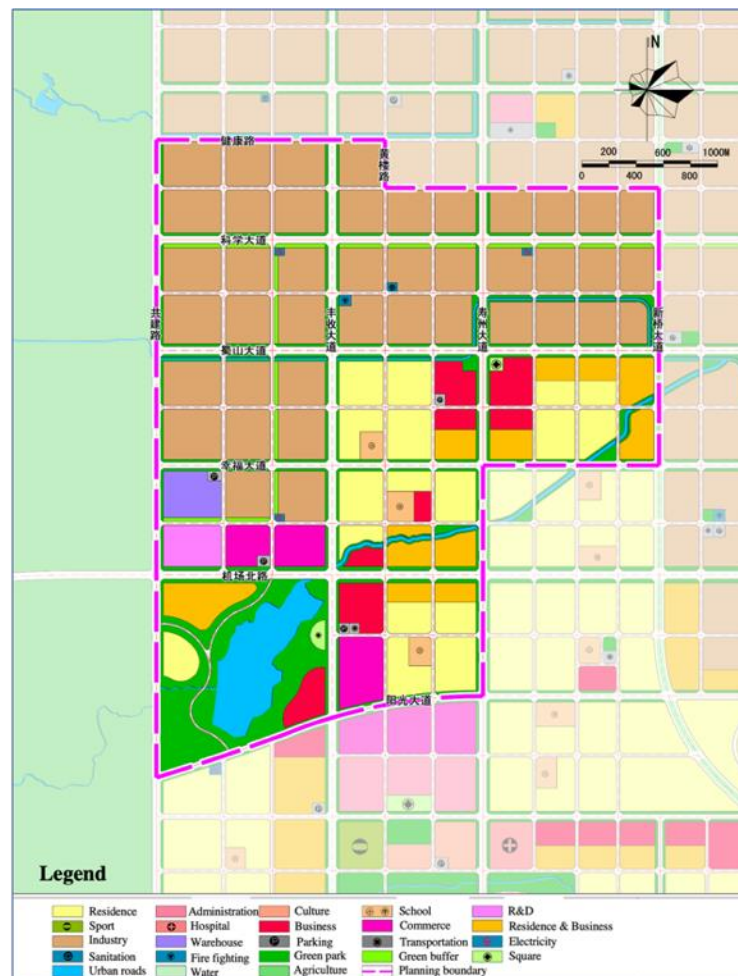


Figure 7.9 The land use plan for the SSMIP
Source: *Master plan for the SSMIP (2012-2030)*.

7.2.3 The progress of plan implementation in the JBIC and the SSMIP

Prior to the planning of the JBIC, beginning in 2010, most of the land was farmland. Arable land accounted for 72% of the total area, while the proportion of land used for construction, such as housing, infrastructure, etc., was less than 8% (Shenzhen Research Institute of Urban Planning & Design, 2010). This also means that the majority of people living in this area were still farmers

and made a living through agricultural production (Interview E1). This condition was dramatically changed during the implementation of the plans mentioned above.

Alongside the establishment of the JBIC, an ambitious slogan – ‘laying the foundation in a year, seeing the result in three years, and making great changes in five years’ – was proposed by the Anhui provincial government (Anhui Provincial Government, 2010, para 2). It guided the radical development of land in the JBIC in the first few years (Figure 7.10). The state actors had completed the acquisition and maturation of almost all land in the start-up area of the JBIC (around 20km²) as of 2014 (Interview A18) (see Section 7.3.2 for details of land development procedures). This not only included compensation and resettlement for land-losing farmers but also demolition of existing buildings and the construction of infrastructure such as roads, water supply and drainage, electricity, and even some industrial plants in the area. The roles of, and relations between, different state actors in this process will be illustrated in Section 7.3, showing how the land was utilised as an asset to redistribute within the state system and use as leverage for further industrial and urban development.

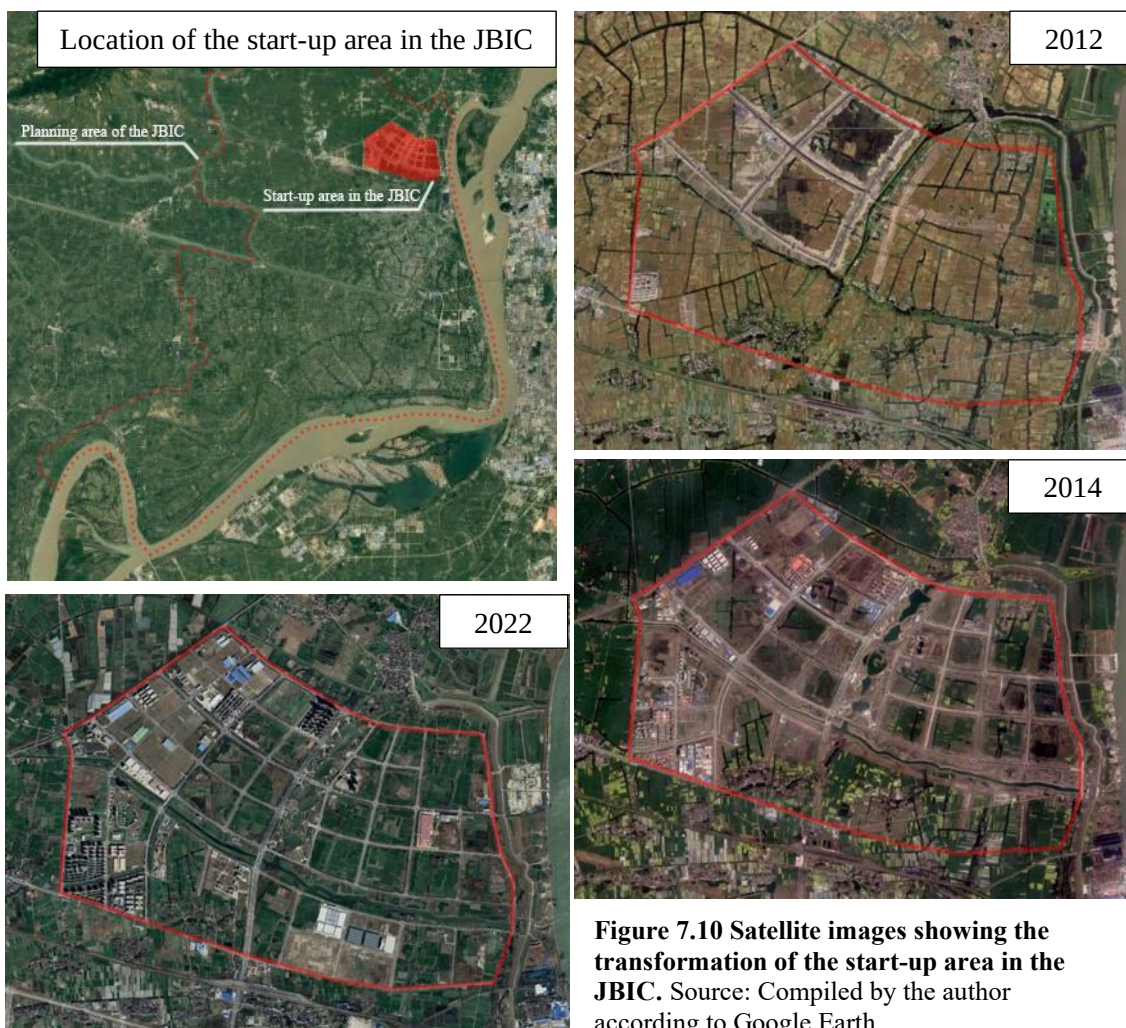


Figure 7.10 Satellite images showing the transformation of the start-up area in the JBIC. Source: Compiled by the author according to Google Earth.

This effort towards land development demonstrated the state's belief in and support of the JBIC's growth, and stimulated the associated expansion of investment from the private sector in industrial production and real estate (Interview A17; A18). The types of leading industrial enterprises in the JBIC were basically consistent with the premises of the plans with their capital sources mainly coming from coastal China or expanded from Wuhu City (JBIC Management Committee [MC], 2018b). The largest real estate company, Baoneng Group, was viewed as an important partner of state actors in shaping the urban functions of the JBIC (Interview A18; D1). These growth-oriented coalitions formed between state and enterprises will be scrutinised in Section 7.4.

However, the growth of the JBIC has not continued in recent years following the cessation of state-funded land development. The number and capital scale of large industrial enterprises in the JBIC in 2018 were similar to their counterparts in 2014 (Interview A17), and the development of real estate was also stuck as a result of a slowdown in growth (Interview D1; D2). This growth dilemma will be specifically investigated in Section 7.5, revealing the causes behind it and the risks involved in building the JBIC. The transformation of state institutions and state-enterprise coalitions during the period of stagnant growth in the JBIC will also be discussed in that section.

By contrast, a more conservative pace of land development was presented in the building of the SSMIP (Figure 7.11). With similar conditions of land and original residents to those in the JBIC before the planning mentioned above, in the SSMIP land totalling only 4 km² – around one-third of the planning area – had been gradually acquired and matured by the state actors as of mid-2019. This strategy involved considering, on the one hand, balancing the project's budget, and on the other hand, being limited by the construction land quota allocated by provincial government (Interview A21).²⁰ All of this was closely linked with the funding institution formed for building the SSMIP, which will be illustrated in Section 7.3.

Meanwhile, it is noteworthy that industrial production in the SSMIP grew rapidly and even transcended the industrial scale of the JBIC. For example, the total gross output of the industrial enterprises above a designated size in the SSMIP was 2.65 billion CNY in 2018 (SSMIP MC, 2019).²¹ This was almost the double that of its counterpart in the JBIC in 2017, which was only 1.33 billion CNY (JBIC MC, 2018a). Correspondingly, the development of urban functions in the

²⁰ Here, the construction land quota means the upper limit on the amount of agriculture land that one locality can covert to urban use. It was highly regulated by the central state and allocated level by level from the top down. The details of Chinese land quota system will be discussed in Section 7.3.2.

²¹ 'Industrial enterprises above a designated size' means enterprises for whom the main business income is more than 20 million CNY per year.

SSMIP started late. The first housing project was initiated in the SSMIP in 2017, and was followed by the provision of social and commercial services.

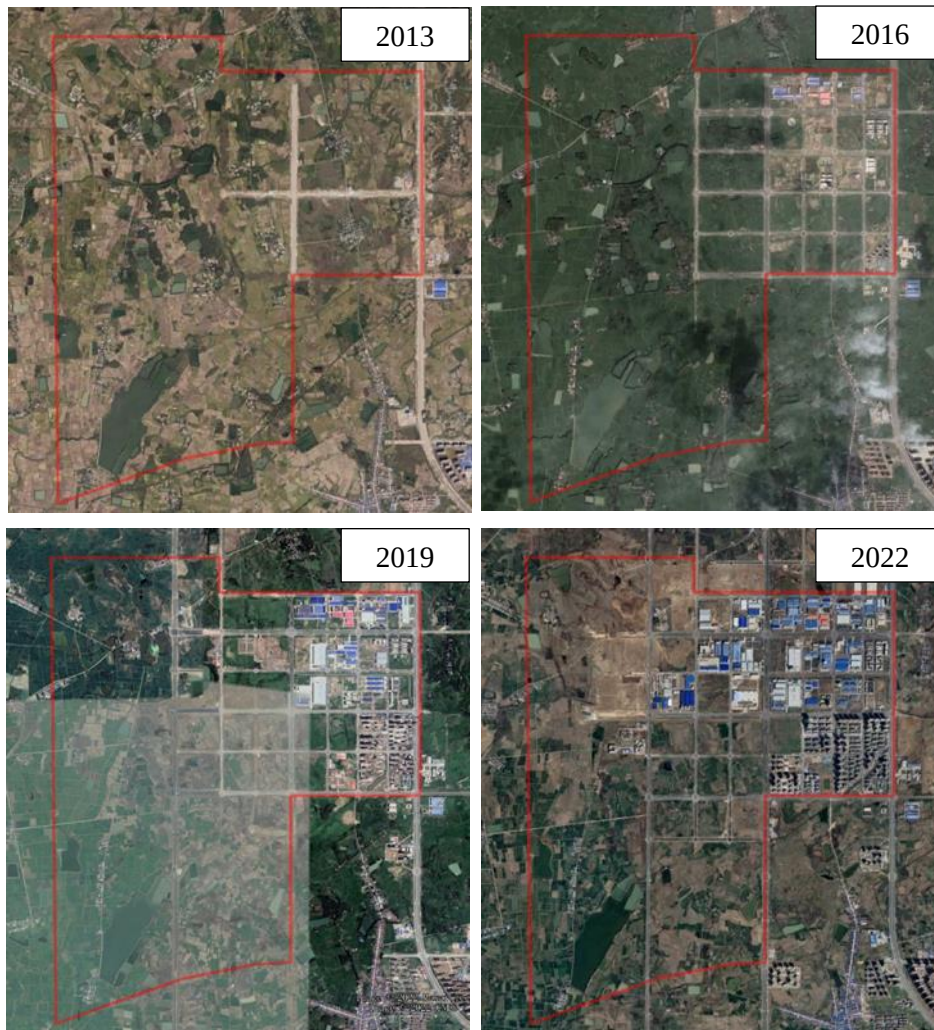


Figure 7.11 Satellite images showing the transformation of the SSMIP

Source: Compiled by the author according to Google Earth.

This process of building the SSMIP reflected the planning vision around cross-boundary growth in the HMR. Most of the industrial enterprises were relocated and expanded from Hefei City (SSMIP MC, 2019), which was also the origin of some good quality social infrastructure (e.g. state schools and colleges) (Interview A21). This was largely the consequence of the horizontal coordination in the management of the SSMIP, as shown in Section 7.3, and stemmed from the way in which industrial production and urban consumption in the SSMIP were promoted by manipulating economic and social resources controlled by the Shushan district government. This mechanism will be illustrated in Section 7.4. In addition, the limitations to the existing growth model of the SSMIP will be discussed in Section 7.5, followed by an analysis of their influence on the coordination between different actors.

In summary, Section 7.2 has contended that planning for the JBIC and the SSMIP demonstrated state spatial selectivity towards city-regional growth and balanced development. However, this

planning vision was not static. Instead, it was formulated and changed in a dynamic and scalar-sensitive process affected by the compromise between and integration of central, provincial, and local interests. In this process, the imaginary of the JBIC in the plans was transformed from being a growth pole of a polycentric mega-city region in the WCB to being an engine of a single administrative city-region i.e., Wuhu City. By contrast, the planning vision of the SSMIP as a beneficiary of redistribution within the HMR was further integrated into the local economy through a new role: to promote cross-boundary growth in the regional economy centred on Hefei City. Whether these visions were partly realised or failed to be achieved depended on the progress of plan implementation in the two new towns. Their levels of success were closely associated with the organisation and mobilisation of diverse actors within and beyond the state system in building the JBIC and the SSMIP, as will be illustrated in the next sections.

7.3 State institutions for managing and funding the JBIC and the SSMIP

This section investigates the institutions that organised diverse actors within the state system to manage and fund the JBIC and the SSMIP in these changing visions towards city-regional growth and balanced development; it investigates too the power relations between state actors involved in these institutions. Firstly, I scrutinise the interaction between state actors in the management regimes of these two new towns. On the one hand, this interaction is presented here as inter-scalar wrestling in the JBIC and inter-territory coordination in the SSMIP over the power and benefits of spatial production through the operation of the Management Committees (MCs) of new towns. On the other hand, I reveal the necessary interaction between the MCs and other formal government bodies in the management of the JBIC and the SSMIP. This interaction was characterised by the relative lack of power of MCs in social regulation and the provision of public services.

Secondly, I probe by whom and in what ways state capital was invested into the finances of the JBIC and the SSMIP. Analogous to the power composition of the MCs, their subordinate urban investment and development companies (UIDCs) also included diverse shareholders representing state capital from multiple scales and territories. The generation and change of this mixed capital in the UIDCs, accordingly, was not only associated with territory-based revenue, but also linked to the redistributions influencing the new towns. They were both important foundations for the financing of the UIDCs of the JBIC and the SSMIP from actors outside the state system.

7.3.1 The composition of multi-scalar and multi-territory power in the management of the JBIC and the SSMIP

MCs of new towns are a common kind of state agency in contemporary China. They are usually organisations of formal government at a specific level dispatched to supersede lower levels of

government and to manage the economic development of new towns. As Shen et al. (2020) contend, the MC ‘represents the creation of a new scale of state power’ (p. 8) which makes the new town into an enclave of upper-level governments in their subordinate administrative units. For example, the Shanghai city government bypassed its hierarchical subordinates, i.e., the governments of an urban district and townships, to directly supervise a new town (Lingang) in the city’s periphery (Shen et al., 2020).

Based on this observation of the MC of a new town, this section further reveals the diversity of power sources in the formation of this ‘new scale of state power’. I found that both the MCs of the JBIC and the SSMIP were not supervised by a single government body but reflected the inter-scalar and inter-territory interactions between multiple state actors. The power composition and transformations of these MCs were closely linked with the city-regional visions illustrated in Section 7.2 and influenced by the bargaining between state actors over their economic and political interests. In addition, the fact that MCs had fewer powers over social regulation and the provision of public services is of particular note. Not only did this leave considerable space for introducing other state actors beyond the MCs into the management of both new towns, but it was also an important factor stimulating the emergence of friction in managing the JBIC.

7.3.1.1 Inter-scalar compromise in the management of the JBIC

As mentioned in Section 7.2, the JBIC MC experienced a transformation from being headed by the Anhui provincial government to being co-supervised by the Anhui provincial government and the Wuhu city government. This process was associated with the inter-scalar competition for the power over, and benefits from, spatial production in the JBIC. Before July 2012, the planning area of the JBIC was all in the territory of He County, which is subordinate to Chaohu City. This meant that most of the income generated through land development (such as selling the right of land use) and a part of the tax on enterprise income in the JBIC would be accumulated by the local governments of He County and Chaohu City. However, since January 2011, these benefits from the spatial production in the JBIC were instead transferred to the Anhui provincial government, legitimised by its supervision of the JBIC MC. This is clear from the following official announcement:

All of the tax revenue collected from the newly established enterprises in the industrial clusters [i.e., the JBIC and the JNIC] after 1 January 2011...shall be the income of the industrial clusters. According to current institutions, all income belonging to local governments shall become provincial income. (Anhui Provincial Government, 2011, p.1)

The emphasis on polycentric mega-city regional growth in the planning discourse, as mentioned in Section 7.2.1, became an essential condition for rationalising this institutional setting. The upscaling of developmental power in the JBIC from local institutions to provincial level was considered an institutional innovation because the latter was seen as more capable of mobilising resources across administrative units (Interview A6).

Nevertheless, this change encountered resistance from the Wuhu city government, and this from February 2012 led to an inter-scalar compromise in the management of the JBIC. The new planning area for the JBIC was all located in the territory of Wuhu City, following the separation of the administrative territory of Chaohu City in July 2011. This was when the radical development of land in the JBIC started. The JBIC MC was responsible for raising funds and financing this land development, but the work on social regulation and public services associated with the process was assumed by local governments in Wuhu City. For example, although the compensation to resettled villagers was provided by the JBIC MC, the organisation of demolition and resettlement in the JBIC, which involved a lot of negotiation, was conducted by town-level governments (Interview A18).

Because the JBIC MC was only an ad hoc subordinate agency of the provincial government, it was not given full powers in state administration as it would have if it had been a formal government body. The intention behind this institutional arrangement was to make the JBIC MC 'travel light and without burdens' (Zhang, 2012, p.20) and to enable it to play the role of a for-profit enterprise rather than a welfare provider. However, the MC could not really stay outside of all social issues because its economic actions usually involved intervention in the daily lives of people in the JBIC. Social issues were also the cause of most interactions between the MC and local governments.

The underpowered nature of the JBIC MC meant that local governments were burdened with many 'thankless tasks': they needed to provide people, time, and money to assist the MC in some of the work of constructing the JBIC, but at the same time they could not get any economic benefits from this coordination. For instance, the initiation of development projects such as land development, construction of industrial plant, and so on all needed approval from upper-level governments (Interview A17; A18). Although the MC was supervised directly by the provincial government, these projects still needed to be approved level by level from the bottom up according to the formal laws and regulations set for state administration. This procedure left space for obstacles from the local government, and reduced the efficiency of development in the JBIC (Zhang, 2012).

It was in this context that state power at the prefectural scale was involved in the decision-making and daily operation of the MC, becoming another leadership force involved in managing the JBIC. The management of the JBIC was adjusted to ‘province-city coordination under the leadership of the city’ in February 2012 (JBIC MC, 2020). The then-secretary of the CPC committee of Wuhu City, and then-deputy mayor of the Wuhu city government were designated as heads of the JBIC MC in 2012 and 2013 respectively. This preconditioned the further integration of the JBIC into the vision of Wuhu City, as illustrated in Section 7.2.1. Meanwhile, the planning area of the JBIC had also been gradually annexed into the urban districts of Wuhu City between 2011 and 2014. This gave the Wuhu city government *de facto* control over economic development and responsibilities in social affairs in building the JBIC. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the Anhui provincial government did not entirely retreat from the management of the JBIC. For instance, it retained control of funding from 2010 to 2016, while returning all the revenue to the JBIC MC to fuel the development of the JBIC. In this sense, an inter-scalar compromise was indeed reached between the provincial and prefecture-level governments in order to shape the power composition of the JBIC MC.

7.3.1.2 Inter-territory coordination in the management of the SSMIP

In contrast with the situation in the JBIC, the power composition of the SSMIP MC was more stable, with horizontal coordination between county-level governments. The SSMIP MC was established in 2012 under the co-leadership of the Shou county government and the Shushan district government. As of 2018, there were around forty civil servants working in the MC. They were mainly transferred from their original posts in these two county-level governments, which each contributed almost the same number of employees to the MC (Interview A21). There was no clear division of the power and responsibility between these two county-level governments in the daily operation of the MC. However, the officials from Shushan district government were deemed to play more important roles in attracting investment for the SSMIP with their experience and sources brought from their original posts in Hefei (Interview A21). This will be elaborated on in Section 7.4.

It is noteworthy that there was no obvious financial stake for the Shushan district government in building the SSMIP. Up to the present, all government revenues raised from the development of the SSMIP have gone to the SSMIP MC, and these will probably be integrated into the finances of Shou county government in the future (Interview A21). In this sense, the actions of officials, especially leaders, from the Shushan district government were more motivated by political interests from upper-level government rather than financial benefits from urban development.

The leaders of the SSMIP MC from Shushan district government were basically promoted in their career positions. It was a kind of recognition of these people in the political sense. Accordingly, they were willing to come here and worked hard [in the SSMIP MC]. For example, two leaders with personnel rank analogous to the mayor of town and township in Hefei were promoted to the rank equivalent to deputy-mayor of county here. (Interview A21)

By contrast, officials from the Shou county government showed a stronger capacity to communicate and negotiate with local governments in Shou County to guarantee the progress of building the SSMIP. Analogous to the situation in the JBIC, it was inevitable that the SSMIP MC would coordinate with formal government bodies in economic and social management. The initiation of development projects in the SSMIP required approval from the Shou county government first, and followed the latter's policies in industrial and urban development (Interview A21; A22). Meanwhile, the SSMIP MC also needed assistance from town-level governments for the demolition and resettlement of the original villagers in the SSMIP (Interview A21). This was because officials from the Shou county government were more familiar with the government environment in Shou County and so handled the inter-government relations better (Interview A21). It is not hard to see from these actions that the smooth progress of building the SSMIP could not be separated from this inter-territory coordination in the operation of the MC.

7.3.2 Funding the JBIC and the SSMIP through state capital from diverse actors and mechanisms

This section reveals the complex composition of state capital in funding the JBIC and the SSMIP. Firstly, I investigate the changing shares of different shareholders in the UIDCs subordinated to the MCs of the two new towns. This not only reflects the multi-scalar and multi-territory sources of state capital in the investment in new towns, but also shows its close linkage to the formation and transformation of power relations mentioned in Section 7.3.1. Secondly, I scrutinise different channels through which state actors contributed to the capital-raising activities of the UIDCs. This demonstrates the interconnection between territory-based revenue, the redistribution of state-owned resources, and bank loans in funding the JBIC and the SSMIP, and the interactive mechanism between state actors manipulating these channels. These findings further contribute to existing studies on UIDCs in contemporary China, which share an emphasis on how UIDCs have been utilised by local governments as a tool to finance urban development, raising funds from actors beyond the state (Jiang and Waley, 2018; Li and Chiu, 2018; Feng et al., 2020). My arguments supplement this literature by examining how the ownership of UIDCs was shared by different state agencies and how the redistribution of capital within the state system influenced the financial mechanisms of UIDCs.

7.3.2.1 Diverse state actors as shareholders of UIDCs in the JBIC and the SSMIP

Anhui Province Jiangbei Development Company Limited (JB Company) and Shouxian Shushan Modern Industrial Park Investment Company Limited (SS Company) are the two main UIDCs which were used to fund and operate state-dominated projects in the JBIC and the SSMIP respectively. These projects included, but were not limited to, land development and infrastructure construction. In addition, they were also engaged in the management and operation of state-owned capital, such as investing in other enterprises mainly located in the new towns.

Although these two UIDCs were de jure directed by the MCs of the two new towns respectively, their ownership, referring to the main shareholders funding and overseeing the two companies, was de facto shared by multiple state actors mainly distributed at local and provincial levels. The JB Company was initially owned and fully funded by the JBIC MC in 2010 with a start-up capital of 18 billion CNY, but a UIDC of the Wuhu city government (Wuhu City Construction and Investment Company Limited) made increasing investments in JB Company from 2015 until it owned more than 40% of the shares in 2020 (Tianyancha, 2021b). This transformation was consistent with the scalar reconfiguration of state power in the JBIC MC illustrated in Section 7.3.1. Along with the rise of the Wuhu city government in the management of the JBIC, its financial control and support of this new town were also enhanced. This was accompanied by the reduced share of the Anhui provincial government in the finances of the JB Company.

In contrast, as far as the SSMIP MC is concerned, a new actor - the Anhui provincial government – was involved in its finances along with two other local authorities at county level. The start-up capital of SS Company was injected in 2012 by three state-owned investment companies owned by the governments of Shou County, Shushan District, and Anhui Province respectively, with a share ratio of 5:3:3 in total assets of 110 million CNY (Tianyancha, 2021d). Since then, all three companies have increased their investment in SS Company year by year, and have promoted an expansion of the registered capital of SS Company to 610 million CNY (Tianyancha, 2021d). Their shareholding ratios have remained unchanged since 2016, at which point the holding company owned by Shou County government owned 40.98% of shares, the Shushan District government company owned 24.58%, and the Anhui provincial government's company owned 34.43% (Tianyancha, 2021d). This shared ownership of SS Company echoed the planning vision behind building the SSMIP illustrated in Section 7.2.2: the growth of Shou County, as a means to reduce regional disparity, was achieved through dual support from the state actors in the province and Hefei.

In addition to this capital from the provincial and local governments, there was also an illustration to show how state capital at central level was involved in the building of the JBIC as a flagship

project, which was highlighted in the national-level plan. In 2016, a UIDC – Wuhu City Wanjiang Urban Construction and Investment Company Limited – invested 30 million CNY in JB Company becoming its third largest shareholder of the latter even though it only accounted for 0.56% of the total shares (Tianyancha, 2021b). It is noteworthy that although the term ‘Wuhu’ appears in the name of this UIDC, the UIDC’s actual controller was a company backed by central government. The China Development Bank Development Fund Company Limited (CDB Fund) – a subsidiary of China Development Bank – had over 82% of the shares in this UIDC (Tianyancha, 2021e). The CDB Fund was committed to investing in projects in the key areas advocated by the central government. Injecting capital into state-owned enterprises of local states, especially their UIDCs, was one of the main strategies of the CDB Fund in order to take part in, or even control, mega projects and industries operated by local authorities (Tianyancha, 2021c). Accordingly, its investment in the JBIC through a company registered in Wuhu City also demonstrates the tilt of state capital owned by the central state in the locality-dominated project that fell within the supporting scope of national policies. In this sense, although it was still local states that were de facto in charge of the UIDCs of the JBIC and the SSMIP, the channel and space for capital injection was also open to the central state.

7.3.2.2 Divergent channels of state actors to fund the JBIC and the SSMIP

There were three main channels utilised by different state actors to raise funds for the building of the JBIC and the SSMIP. The first was territory-based revenue, which was mainly from collecting tax and selling use rights to state-owned land in the new towns. The second was capital-based revenue, mainly bank loans obtained by mortgaging state assets and investment income obtained by operating state-owned capital. The third was redistribution-related revenue such as financial subsidies, tax refunds, and increases in the construction land quota given to the new towns – the latter served to expand the amount of state-owned land available for the sale of land-use rights, thus providing an important but easily overlooked source of revenue. Territory-based revenue was mainly collected by the MCs of the JBIC and the SSMIP while redistribution-related revenue was regulated by the state agencies supervising these MCs. A large part of the revenue got from these two channels was injected into the capital of JB Company and SS Company, and laid the grounds for these companies to pursue growth of capital-based revenue.

From this basic structure it is apparent that the redistribution of state-owned resources had a significant influence on both the territory-based revenue and the capital-based revenue in funding the JBIC and the SSMIP. Firstly, in the most direct way, cash transfer in the name of financial subsidiaries contributed a large portion of the money available for the building of both new towns. In the JBIC, for example, 500 million CNY per year had been given to the JBIC MC by the Anhui provincial government from 2010 to 2015 (Interview A6). In September 2015, one billion CNY

was injected into the JB Company by a UIDC fully controlled by the Wuhu city government, which further invested an additional 400 million in 2018 and 2020 respectively (Tianyancha, 2021b). This additional investment accounted for almost one-third of the total fiscal revenue in the JBIC in 2018, which was only 1.24 billion CNY (JBIC MC, 2019). A similar situation can also be found in the SSMIP, in which 130 million CNY per year was injected into the SS Company by UIDCs of the Anhui provincial government, the Shou County government, and the Shushan District government between 2012 and 2016 (Interview A21).

Secondly, in addition to the cash transferred from the supervising agencies of the MCs, there was also a redistribution of tax within the state system inclined towards both the JBIC and the SSMIP. In China, corporation tax has been shared between the central state, provincial government, and local governments at multiple levels since 2002 (Liu, 2020). For example, if an enterprise was registered in Wuhu City, 60% of the tax collected from it would probably belong to the central state, while the other 40% of tax would be shared by the Anhui provincial government and the Wuhu city government in a proportion prescribed by provincial government.²² This means that the provincial government has the power to adjust the distribution of corporation tax among local authorities. As mentioned in Section 7.3.1, a special fiscal institution of the JBIC was built by Anhui provincial government in 2011 (Anhui Provincial Government, 2011), which meant that corporation tax collected from enterprises registered since 1st January 2011 in the JBIC would be entirely transferred to the Anhui provincial government until 2015. However, it is noteworthy that all this income was actually transferred to the JBIC MC during this period as a preferential policy by the provincial government (Anhui Provincial Government, 2011). A similar situation can also be found in the SSMIP where the corporation tax received by the Shou county government was wholly disbursed to the SSMIP MC (Interview A21). This redistribution of tax regulated by the state agencies supervising the MCs indeed increased the territory-based revenue for funding both new towns.

Last but not least was the relationship between the redistribution of the construction land quota and territory- and capital-based revenue from the transaction and mortgaging of the land. For the purpose of reserving arable land, the central state of the PRC has developed a top-down institution to limit the amount of land for urban construction converted from agricultural land (Ministry of Land and Resources, 2006). The Ministry of Land and Resources allocated a certain amount of construction land quota to each provincial government per year – as does its present incarnation,

²² This is just a demonstration of the most common proportion of distributing corporation tax in China since 2002. However, there are also some exceptions, for instance, the tax collected from railway companies, state-owned banks, and offshore oil and gas companies has wholly belonged to the central state since 2010 (State Taxation Administration, 2010).

the Ministry of Natural Resources. Then, the provincial government distributes this quota to local authorities directly subordinate to it, for example, prefecture-level governments and some county-level governments directly supervised by the provincial government. It is noteworthy that the provincial government can also leave a part of construction land quota as ‘a special quota’ to give to some projects which it supports such as cross-boundary transportation infrastructure and the two new towns investigated in this chapter.

The construction land quota is very important for land use and transaction. For example, even though local governments have purchased agricultural land from rural communities, they still cannot do any urban construction such as building infrastructures on this land if they do not have enough corresponding construction land quota (National People’s Congress, 2019).²³ Agricultural land in such a case, accordingly, is required to preserve its original functions such as arable land, forest, pastures, etc., even if it is marketised (e.g., its use rights are traded) or leveraged in bank loans. This means that such land provides less revenue to local governments because both the purchase-sale value and mortgage value of agricultural land are generally much lower than for land with urban uses (Xiao and Zhao, 2015). In this sense, the allocation of construction land quota is indeed a top-down regulation of essential resources for funding the development of localities.

In this context, the Anhui provincial government promised to assign construction land quotas of 5,000 mu – around 3.33 km² – to the JBIC MC per year from 2011 (Interview A6), and of 1250 mu – around 0.83 km² – to the SSMIP MC per year from 2012 (SSMIP MC, 2019). The amount of these quotas was considerably larger in comparison with other localities in Anhui. For instance, Wuwei county, next to the JBIC, was only given a construction land quota of 3.35km² in 2012 (Land Resources Bureau of Wuhu, 2012) even though its territory covers 2,441.71km² (Wuhu City Bureau of Statistics, 2013) – twelve times larger than the planning area of the JBIC. This construction land quota as a policy benefit was not only provided by the provincial government. In fact, it was also partly due to an increase in the construction land quota allocated by the central state to the Anhui Province due to the implementation of the WCB as a centrally initiated programme (Interview A6).

Based on the construction land quotas and spatial plans illustrated in Section 7.2, the MCs of JBIC and the SSMIP respectively cooperated with their UIDCs, JB Company and SS Company, to get

²³ There have been two types of land ownership in contemporary China since 1986: state-owned land and collective-owned land (National People’s Congress, 2019). Collective-owned land means the land owned by rural communities – the collection of people in this village – which can be classified into agricultural land and rural construction land. Before 2020, only the use right of state-owned land could be legally sold to enterprises for conducting urban construction.

revenue from land development in the two new towns. As explained by officials from both MCs, this procedure basically included four steps (Interview A18; A21). The first step was land acquisition – the MCs bought collective-owned land from rural communities and made them into state-owned land. The second step was selling this land to the UIDCs and then returning this transaction fee to the UIDCs in the name of a ‘special fund’. This activity was designed mainly to expand the UIDC’s assets in order to obtain more loans from banks to fund the new towns, especially from land development. The third step was called ‘land maturation’ which refers to land levelling and constructing basic infrastructures such as roads, water supply, electricity, heating, drainage, sewerage, telecommunication, and so on. The scale and sequence of land development in this step was arranged by the MCs and funded by the UIDCs. The last step was selling the use rights to these ‘matured’ land to investors, mainly to develop industries and real estate. Some of the ‘matured’ land was kept by UIDCs to develop some MC-led projects such as public utilities, housing for resettled villagers, or a handful of real estate projects – industrial plant, commercial districts, etc.

These four steps occurred on a rolling basis during the building of the JBIC and the SSMIP. In this procedure, the territory-based revenue came mainly from income in the final step minus cost in the first and third steps. The second step contributed to the increase in capital-based revenue. However, it is noteworthy that there was no *de facto* territory-based revenue (i.e., profits generated from this procedure) in the JBIC due to the cost of land development far exceeding the income from land transaction. The reason for this situation was the interplay between radical development of land and the sluggish development of industrial production and urban consumption. This will be elaborated on in Section 7.5.1.

In summary, Section 7.3 shows that state power and capital scattered across different scales and territories were driven together in a fluid and entangled manner to manage and fund the JBIC and the SSMIP. In the first half of this section, the diverse sources of state power and their interactive mechanisms are found in the operation of the MCs of both new towns as a ‘new scale of state power’ (Shen et al., 2020, p.8). Inter-scalar competition and conflicts over benefits and liabilities in the spatial production of the JBIC stimulated the power change in its MC from domination by the province to a compromise between the governments of Anhui Province and Wuhu City. By contrast, inter-territory coordination between the governments of Shou County and Shushan District ran smoothly in the SSMIP MC, which was mainly triggered by political pressures and interests from provincial governments. These interactions between state powers stimulated the transformation of city-regional visions illustrated in Section 7.2. In addition, the underpowered nature of the MC in social regulation and public services also necessitated coordination from official government bodies in the management of both new towns.

In the second half of this section, I reveal the complex composition of state capital and its operation mechanism in funding the JBIC and the SSMIP. It was reflected in, on the one hand, the shared ownership of the UIDCs established for financing each of the two new towns. On the other hand, strong interconnections are found between three identified channels – territory-based, capital-based, and redistribution-related – utilised by different state actors to raise funds for both new towns. Among them, the redistribution of state capital – cash, tax, and land – is examined, and found to have a significant influence on the financial mechanisms of UIDCs.

7.4 State-enterprise coalitions towards industrial and urban growth in the JBIC and SSMIP

This section investigates the contribution of state institutions, illustrated in Section 7.3, to mobilise capital from companies operating either partly or wholly outside the state system to invest in the JBIC and the SSMIP. I find that the involvement of prefecture-level government in the JBIC and cross-boundary collaboration in the SSMIP accelerated the expansion of the metropolitan economy tilted towards the two new towns respectively. In this process, different coalitions between the state and enterprises were formed to reap the actual or expected benefits from industrial production and (production for) urban consumption.

7.4.1 Industry-based coalitions: exploitation of advantages in manufacturing at a metropolitan scale

As illustrated in Section 7.2, industrialisation was positioned as the most important strategy to promote the growth of the JBIC and the SSMIP. In the JBIC, the envisaged path to accelerate industrialisation was promoting the expansion of existing industrial agglomeration, whether on the polycentric mega-city regional scale or in the jurisdiction of an administrative city-region, through attracting industries relocated from coastal China, especially the YRD. By contrast, the urban district of Hefei City was planned as an ideal source of industrial investment in the SSMIP. In this context, the main state actors involved in the management of the JBIC and the SSMIP were engaged in mobilising the political and economic resources they controlled to achieve these visions. A common strategy they utilised in this process was to forge coalitions with industrial enterprises located in the metropolitan economies centred on Wuhu and Hefei respectively.

In the JBIC, two leading companies based in Wuhu City, Anhui Conch Venture Investment Co., Ltd (ACVI) and Chery Automobile Co., Ltd – were mobilised by Wuhu city government and the JBIC MC to set up subsidiaries in the JBIC. This was viewed as a crucial strategy by local officials to provide the initial impetus for industrial growth, especially the formation of industrial clusters, in the JBIC (Interview A17). As introduced in Section 7.2.1, Chery Automobile Co., Ltd is a famous automobile manufacturer in China, and is directly controlled by the state capital of Anhui Province and Wuhu City. ACVI appears to be a privately held investment company but it is

actually born out of the reform of a previous state-owned enterprise – Anhui Conch Holdings Co., Ltd. (ACH Co., Ltd.) in 2002 (Weng, 2010).²⁴ The long-standing connections between these leading companies with state capital made it easier for them to cooperate with local governments for mutual benefit. It also manifested in the industrial development of the JBIC.

The JBIC MC invested 30 million CNY in a subsidiary of Chery Automobile Co., Ltd (Kaiyi Automobile Co., Ltd) on the premise that the latter promised to register and conduct production in the JBIC (Interview A17). This enterprise was expected by local officials to lead the clustering of equipment manufacturing in auto industries in the JBIC (Interview A17). Correspondingly, attracting the investment of ACVI in the JBIC was important for promoting the agglomeration of material industries there relying on the key technologies and production scale of ACH Co., Ltd (JBIC MC, 2018b). As explained by an official from the JBIC MC, the Wuhu city government gave significant support to helping the capital of ACVI be successfully listed in Hong Kong on 19th December 2013, in the name of China Conch Venture Holdings Ltd, although no details of this support were explained to me (Interview A17). In turn, the executives of ACVI promised to invest in four to five big projects of material industry in JBIC, and registered a subsidiary there, named Anhui Haichuang New Energy-Saving Building Materials Co., Ltd, in June 2013. However, this subsidiary of ACVI did not start any construction in the JBIC until it was transferred to a subsidiary of China Conch Venture Holdings Ltd (Interview A17). This meant that this subsidiary could enjoy the preferential policies designed for overseas companies, including but not limited to a high percentage of tax refunds (Interview A17). This dubious activity was acquiesced in by the JBIC MC.

In the SSMIP, similar coalitions can also be found between the SSMIP MC and industrial enterprises originating from Hefei City, especially the territory of Shushan District. What is different is that the formation of these coalitions was not only driven by financial connections between state actors and companies, but was also built on the relationship of trust between these two. As of the end of 2018, the capitals of twelve of the total 15 industrial enterprises above a designated size in the SSMIP were in the jurisdiction of Hefei City (SSMIP MC, 2019). These were enterprises were relocated from Hefei City, or their headquarters were based in Hefei City. In addition, more small industrial enterprises were relocated from Hefei, especially Shushan

²⁴ ACVI was established by executives of ACH Co., Ltd. by raising funds from the employees of the latter in 2002. The motivation for building this new company was to reform the ACH Co., Ltd. from an enterprise wholly funded by the Anhui provincial government to a joint-stock enterprise shared by the state and private capital. In this context, ACVI invested in ACH Co., Ltd. and became its second shareholder since 2004 with 49% of the shares (Chi et al., 2013). Meanwhile, the biggest shareholder of the ACVI was the labour union of the ACH Co., Ltd., accounting for over 82% of the shares, and successive CEOs of the ACVI were all executives of the ACH Co., Ltd.

district (Interview A21). This situation for industrial investment benefitted from both the bridge roles of officials from Shushan district government and the profit-seeking choices of entrepreneurs.

On the one hand, the horizontal coordination in the management of the SSMIP, as illustrated in Section 7.3.1, helped the SSMIP MC have better contact and communication with enterprises based in Hefei City.

[Considering] the linkages of MC's leaders to Hefei, diverse resources based in Hefei have been introduced to the SSMIP...They usually invite and accompany these resources [i.e. enterprises] located in Hefei to have a look in the SSMIP. It is equivalent to an activity for communicating information and ideas, which means that effective investment information can be formed and transferred. (Interview A21)

On the other hand, investment in the SSMIP can provide cheaper land and more preferential policies compared to the original locations of some industrial enterprises, but with a familiar policy environment and reliable government relations.

There are many industrial enterprises relocated from our high-tech district and Shushan District. They felt the need to expand the scale of production but had no land in the original districts. In this case, they chose to come here [the SSMIP]...We know how to provide package services to these enterprises including supervising construction, production, and operation and refund of some taxes...There is no big problem. (Interview A21)

Both these aspects can be viewed as advantages of the institutional arrangement for the SSMIP MC, which built a channel between the core and the periphery of the Hefei-centred regional economy for the circulation of investment information and the sharing of economic resources.

7.4.2 Property-based coalition: promoting the (production for) urban consumption

As illustrated in Section 7.2, promoting urbanisation was another important vision involved in the planning for the JBIC and the SSMIP. During the actual construction, this vision was mainly achieved by two intertwined strategies: firstly, the promotion of the development of real estate related urban functions (housing, business, public services, etc.), and secondly, the promotion of the consumption of real estate. State-controlled resources, such as land in the new towns and public services distributed at a metropolitan scale, were utilised as incentives to mobilise investment from the private sector into these two areas.

In the implementation of these strategies, real estate companies in the private sector were mobilised by the Wuhu city government and the JBIC MC to invest heavily in the production for urban consumption in the JBIC. Shenzhen Baoneng Investment Group Co., Ltd. (Baoneng) was the largest investor in real estate in the JBIC, and was described as the partner of government in developing urban functions there (Interview D3). The company was established in 2000 and is headquartered in Shenzhen City, with a registered capital of 300 million CNY (Tianyancha, 2021a). It has been mainly engaged in investing in urban properties, modern logistics, cultural projects and tourism, and modern financial industries nationwide (Tianyancha, 2021a). In 2012, Baoneng bought use rights for six blocks of land in the JBIC from JBIC MC, with a total area of around 3 km², to develop real estate and follow-up operations of housing, business, industry, a school, and a hospital (Interview D1; Interview A17). 30 billion CNY was planned to be invested in these projects, as shown in the strategic investment agreement signed in 2012, to construct floorage of six million square metres in the next ten years.

This investment was based on the optimistic estimate of Baoneng of urban growth in the JBIC (Interview D1). But what is more noteworthy is the special incentives given by state actors to strengthen this optimistic vision of growth – or, in other words, enhancing the confidence of enterprises that they could get excess profits through investing in real estate in the JBIC. Baoneng expected the JBIC MC to acquiesce to its land speculation activities. This speculation was based on the price gaps between selling use rights to the industrial land and the land for commercial or residential purposes – land transaction fees for commercial, residential and business purposes in the JBIC were around 30 times those for industrial land. As explained by an official from the JBIC MC, one of the blocks of land leased to Baoneng was planned as industrial land but Baoneng failed to construct any industrial plant on the land (Interview A18). By contrast, buildings like business offices had been built in numbers on this land and named as ‘industrial incubators’ of small and micro enterprises. This was not in accordance with industrial conditions or the positioning of a start-up area in the JBIC, but was approved by the JBIC MC with a clear recognition of the motivations behind the action:

That project of Baoneng – they probably want to change the functions and sell it out...They built it for small business offices and, like, small villas...But as a so-called incubator, how can they find so many high-tech companies to settle there? They probably want to use the bonus from [potential] changes in urban planning in the future – turning the industrial land into business and housing land – and then selling it on...Do you think that project is suitable for an industrial incubator? It is actually not reliable. (Interview A18)

In this case, the JBIC MC is unlikely to make money from Baoneng's land speculation activities. Its acquiescence was more like a pact to keep an important investor and partner involved in the urban development of the JBIC.

In addition, the priority given to the JBIC in the redistribution of public service funding at the prefectural level was utilised as another incentive to attract and keep Baoneng investing in its real estate, especially housing and business projects. As explained by a manager of Baoneng, the Wuhu city government promised to relocate the buildings of the Jiujiang district government from the central city of Wuhu to the JBIC – especially to projects which Baoneng had invested in – when it bargained with the latter to increase its investment (Interview D1). Meanwhile, Baoneng also planned to build and manage on its own a high-quality private school and a private hospital in JBIC to attract consumers for its housing project. Eventually this plan was changed following the participation of local governments, as will be explained in the next section.

In the SSIMP, a similar strategy was also used to enhance the competitiveness of urban consumption, although the property development there was mainly conducted by the new town's UIDC (SS Company). In order to attract consumers to buy housing projects developed by SS Company, the SSMIP MC utilised its educational resource in Shushan District to locate a branch of a prestigious state school – Hefei No. 50 Middle School, governed by the Education Bureau of Shushan District Government – in the SSMIP (Interview A21). This school opened classes for free education to 2,500 students covering nine grades, beginning in the first grade of primary school. The SSMIP MC funded all of the physical construction of this school through SS Company, while its operation was conducted by Hefei No. 50 Middle School East School Educational Group (Interview A21). The housing project developed by SS Company was further incorporated into this school district. This meant that families who bought apartments in this housing project could qualify their children for admission to this branch of the school – one of best primary and junior high schools in Hefei City.

In summary, Section 7.4 shows how state actors forged coalitions with enterprises engaged in industrial and property investment in the JBIC and the SSMIP for the purpose of promoting industrial and urban growth in the two new towns. For the industry-based coalition, the advantages of manufacturing at the metropolitan scale were exploited by mobilising the investment of industrial enterprises based in Wuhu and Hefei into the JBIC and the SSMIP respectively. The capital connection between the Wuhu city government and leading industrial enterprises in Wuhu promoted the expansion of those enterprises to the JBIC. The trust relationship between the Shushan district government and manufacturing enterprises based in Hefei City boosted the relocation of the latter to the SSMIP. For the property-based coalition, the utilisation of good resources, especially public services such as highly rated schools, at a

metropolitan scale was still a crucial incentive to enhance the competitiveness of the new towns in attracting the production for urban consumption – real estate related to urban functions – and the urban consumption of these properties. In the SSMIP, this strategy was conducted through the redistribution of educational resources controlled by the Shushan district government. In the JBIC, this involved the promise of the Wuhu city government to a privately-owned real estate company, Baoneng, about the relocation of government buildings. In addition, the acquiescence of the MC to land speculation by the real estate company was also found to be another strategy to keep the property-led coalition in the primary stage of urban development in the JBIC.

7.5 Transformation of growth-oriented coordination in the dilemma of growth

This section is concerned with what happened to the state institutions and state-enterprise coalitions illustrated in Section 7.3 and 7.4, when the expected growth in the JBIC and the SSMIP was jeopardised. In this section I explore an important but under-studied theoretical question: what will happen to growth-oriented coalitions if the growth is not achieved? I argue that, firstly, the growth of two new towns was accompanied by significant risks and limitations. In the JBIC, the huge debt of JB Company from the large-scale and rapid development of land was hard to make up through selling land-use rights or collecting taxes for quite a long time. This resulted in the MC facing financial risks and stagnating while promoting the growth of the JBIC which had previously driven by land development. By contrast, the condition in the SSMIP was reversed. The quota-limited supply of construction land available to the SSMIP was insufficient to meet the growing needs of industry, which thus challenged the sustainability of the existing growth paths.

Secondly, I examine the transformation of growth-oriented coalitions in building the two new towns which emerged in response to these risks and limitations. Inter-scalar cooperation between state actors in funding the JBIC was strengthened around sharing the MC's risks and fostering a new growth path led by industrial production. This was accompanied by the introduction of professional companies, beyond the state system, into the management and operation of state capital. By contrast, horizontal collaboration in the SSMIP MC continued to bear the burden of addressing land shortages in the zone development. However, the coalitions between state and enterprise suffered breakdown at varying degrees in both production for manufacturing and for urban consumption. This process was accompanied by the transfer of risk and loss from the private sector to the state system.

7.5.1 Risks and bottlenecks constraining growth in the JBIC and the SSMIP

Although both the JBIC and the SSMIP faced problems in promoting lasting growth, their conditions were very different. The growth of the JBIC experienced a dramatic fluctuation in which it grew rapidly in the first few years of town building, but after that it started a long-term

downturn and showed signs of decay. By contrast, the growth of the SSMIP was relatively steady and promising, but its sustainability was limited by a shortage of land.

7.5.1.1 Financial risks to state and enterprises arising from the stagnant growth in the JBIC

As mentioned in Section 7.2.3, the JBIC was located in an area with good conditions for agricultural production but far from urban and industrial areas. It was in this context that radical land development was conducted in the JBIC between 2010 and 2014. The land levelling and infrastructure construction in an area of around 20km² finished with the demolition of buildings and the resettlement of many of the original villagers.²⁵ The vast majority of the costs produced in this process were borne by the JBIC MC, as illustrated in Section 7.3.2, through the revenue from selling use rights to the ‘matured’ land, collecting tax, redistribution from upper-level governments, and financial operation of the UIDCs – getting loans from banks and investment in other enterprises.

However, almost all those revenue channels have encountered difficulties in the JBIC over recent years. Initially land finance was insufficient. The total investment of the JBIC MC in land development in the JBIC was around 12 billion CNY as of 2019 (Wang et al., 2019). As explained by an official from the JBIC MC, the average cost of land development in the JBIC, including land acquisition, compensation to resettled people and land maturation, was around six million to 10.5 million CNY per hectare (Interview A18). However, the transaction fee of industrial land over the last ten years has only been between 450 thousand and 1.1 million CNY per hectare (Interview A18). The transaction fee for housing and businesses was relatively higher, as mentioned in Section 7.4.2, at between 15 million to 21 million CNY per hectare. However, in the case of the JBIC there was a lack of demand for housing and business uses of land due to the slow growth in industries and urban consumption in the locality.

The industrial situation in the JBIC in 2019 had barely changed since 2014 (Interview A17). There were still only eight industrial enterprises above a designated size, and the others were mostly small enterprises inconsistent with the vision of industrial development shown in the initial plans. The expected agglomeration of industries around the leading manufacturing enterprises mobilised from Wuhu City failed to materialise. Local officials blamed this failure on the poor transport connections between the industrial enterprises in Wuhu City south of the Yangtze River and the JBIC on the north side (Interview A17; A18). As of 2019, there was still only one cross-river bridge connecting the start-up area of the JBIC to the central part of Wuhu City on the other bank.

²⁵ Although the total number of resettled people was not given, a local official working on this issue stated that there were over eight villages involved in this process, and that one of them, Yinjiang Village, had around 5,600 people being resettled (Interview E1).

A reason for this situation was that the Wuhu city government found it hard to take on the huge investment needed for this kind of mega transportation project (Interview A17). This stagnation of industrial growth meant that the tax revenue received by the JBIC MC, mainly from industrial enterprises, was very limited: only 539 million CNY in 2019 (Interview A18).

Meanwhile, the real estate market in the JBIC was also in trouble. The housing project developed by Baoneng had been on sale since 2014; however, only less than half of the apartments had been sold by the middle of 2019. In fact, most of the apartments sold were compensation for resettled villagers (Interview D2). More worryingly in terms of stagnation, only 245 out of all the 2,654 apartments had ever been lived in (Interview D2), creating a scene of sparsely populated neighbourhoods around this project – empty streets, shops, apartments and overgrown vegetation (see Figure 7.12). Similar conditions can also be found in many other real estate projects developed by Baoneng in the JBIC, projects involving hotels, business districts and office buildings (Interview D1). This condition inevitably worsened the financial situation of Baoneng, made worse by the failure, as of 2019, by the Wuhu city government to relocate government buildings to the JBIC as it had promised. This was seen by my informant, a manager working for Baoneng, as an act of deception (Interview D1).



Figure 7.12 Scenes of Baoneng's housing project in the JBIC

Source: Photographed by the author in May 2019.

Along with these difficulties in getting territory-based revenues from the JBIC, the redistribution of both cash and construction land quotas from the Anhui provincial government to the JBIC MC has also decreased since 2015. As illustrated in Section 7.3.2, the financial subsidy given by the Anhui provincial government – 500 million CNY per year – only lasted six years, from 2010 to

2015. After that, this provincial subsidiary was reduced each year until it was completely stopped in 2021, while the subsidy from the Wuhu city government was not increased (Interview A17). Meanwhile, the Anhui provincial government limited the land development of JBIC by decreasing the provision of construction land quotas to the JBIC MC. The rationale behind this was to avoid the worsening of state financial risks caused by high leverage in the land development of the JBIC (Interview A7). According to a media report, the JBIC MC was burdened with 4.6 billion CNY of debt by the end of the first quarter of 2019 (Wang et al., 2019). This condition also led to greater difficulties for the JB Company in getting loans from banks.

7.5.1.2 The restrictions of the construction land quota on the rapid growth of the SSMIP

In contrast to the financial risks and stagnant growth in the JBIC, the difficulties met by the SSMIP were very different. As introduced in Section 7.2.3, industrialisation and urbanisation in the SSMIP were both promoted steadily by the SSMIP MC with continued growth over the last few years. The financial conditions of the SSMIP MC and its UIDC were also quite healthy (Interview A21). However, its growth was increasingly constrained by the shortage in its quota of construction land.

As illustrated in Section 7.3.2, a special quota of construction land of around 83 hectares per year was promised by the Anhui provincial government to the SSMIP MC from 2012 to 2016. After that, this quota was decreased to around 67 hectares every year since 2017. However, the actual construction land quota given to the SSMIP from 2012 to 2018 was less than around 47 hectares per year (SSMIP MC, 2019). This quota was far behind the pace needed for the SSMIP MC to attract investment and construct important infrastructure (Interview A21). The reason behind this insufficient provision of construction land quota was probably the decrease in the total quota of construction land given by the central state to the Anhui provincial government.

There are several cooperative construction zones in Anhui Province, according to conference records of the provincial government. The requirement is that when the Department of Land and Resources allocates the annual quota, our quota should be independently listed from the quota of Huainan City and Shou County...Because the total provincial land quota has gradually decreased, from the perspective of the land department, they probably cannot satisfy the previous policies...The land quota of any cooperative construction zone in Anhui basically cannot be satisfied. (Interview A22).

As one of the most important revenue sources of the SSMIP MC and its essential material for leading spatial production in the SSMIP, this shortage of construction land quota was viewed as

a big hinderance for the further industrial and urban growth of the SSMIP (Interview A21; Interview A22).

7.5.2 Transformation of growth-oriented coordination in the JBIC and the SSMIP

In the context of these different growth dilemmas faced by the JBIC and the SSMIP, the relationship between state actors in funding two new towns and the coalitions between state and enterprises in promoting industrial and urban development of the two new towns also underwent significant changes. These changes reveal how the risks which emerged from the growth dilemmas were absorbed or shared by diverse actors within and beyond the state system. Further, these risk-taking mechanisms also pushed the consolidation or breaking of different growth-oriented methods of coordination.

Firstly, the redistribution of state capital played more important roles in responding to the financial risks met by the JBIC MC. In the context of a severe lack of revenue to offset its heavy debt, the JBIC MC submitted a report to the provincial government expressing their difficulties and asking if the latter could absorb part of its debt as its *de jure* parent organisation (Interview A17). The PDRC of Anhui [Anhui Development and Reform Commission] organised a work team to undertake a survey in the JBIC at the end of 2018 and then formulate a series of solutions to these difficulties; the survey was finally placed on the desks of provincial leaders in 2019 (Interview A7). Through coordination with the Wuhu city government, new institutions for funding the JBIC were found by the Anhui provincial government in the spring of 2020 (Information Office of Anhui Provincial Government, 2020). The Anhui provincial government increased its fixed financial subsidy to the JBIC to 150 million CNY per year from 2020 to 2025 and built an incentive subsidy at the same time – the amount of which was flexible according to the financial performance of the JBIC MC (The Paper, 2020).

What is more noteworthy is that an investment fund was co-established by two UIDCs of the Anhui provincial government and the Wuhu city government in 2021, which will introduce a fund management company, beyond the state system, into the operation of the JBIC (JBIC MC, 2021). The total size of this fund is 2.4 billion CNY, of which 400 million CNY was made available in the first year, with the remaining funds to be contributed annually. It has been registered in the JBIC and will exist for a decade. During this period, all investment from the fund will go into industrial projects located in the JBIC. This means that the state capital redistributed from provincial and prefectural scales to the JBIC will be operated in a more professional and specialised way. This can make up for the lack of representation for the JBIC MC and its UIDC in the capital operation.

However, the main burden of dealing with the shortage of construction land quota has still been taken on by the SSMIP MC without effective support from the redistribution by the provincial government. In this context, the SSMIP MC has started to argue for the redistribution of construction land quotas from Shou County and Huainan City and to intensify the reuse of existing construction land (SSMIP MC, 2019). This has reshaped the relations between the SSMIP MC and some industrial enterprises in ways which will be illustrated in the next point.

Secondly, for industry-based coalitions between the state and the enterprises, follow-up joint actions in the JBIC were threatened by depressed industrial development and new environmental policies of upper-level government. For this reason, their conversion into a sustainable alliance remains in doubt. ACVI did not fulfil its promise to the Wuhu city government to invest more in the JBIC due to the lack of supporting enterprises in the industrial chains (Interview A17). The project mentioned in Section 7.4.1 was the only investment of the ACVI in the JBIC as of 2019. Further, this only remaining enterprise was also threatening to retreat from the JBIC, influenced by the new environmental policies put forward by the central state since 2018. These policies prohibit the distribution of heavy-polluting enterprises along the banks of the Yangtze River, where the plants of ACVI are located (Interview A17). This means that the ACVI cannot develop any new projects near its existing industrial base, and limits the potential for industrial expansion. In order to keep this investment, the JBIC MC had to engage in looking for partner enterprises for ACVI to locate somewhere not too far away and conduct deep processing works (Interview A17). In this context, the JBIC MC still played an active role in trying to keep the coalition with local industrial enterprise, in order to preserve the engine of growth in the JBIC. However, leading enterprises like ACVI had more advantage in choosing ideal resources and mobilising the assistance of local government, especially in a context of economic stagnation.

Although there has been no obvious breakdown of the coalition between the SSMIP MC and industrial enterprises originating from Hefei City, there are suggestions that this coalition will also grow increasingly unsustainable if the shortage of construction land quotas in the SSMIP lasts for a long period (Interview A22). In fact, the SSMIP MC has started to bargain with some enterprises, asking them to return land if their scale of production does not justify use of so much land (SSMIP MC, 2019). This strategy has become the quickest solution in the case of an invalid application for construction land quota from higher-level governments. But if this situation continues, the SSMIP MC would probably be forced to upgrade the industrial structure in pursuit of higher added value per unit area, or it would be difficult to find new incentives for industry development and they would miss the potential for further growth.

Finally, for property-based coalitions, a part of the loss was shared by state actors at local scales and by the private real estate company, while some other parts were absorbed by the redistribution

of public service at a prefectural level. A remarkable case which occurred in the depressed development of real estate in the JBIC was a reverse transaction of land. In 2015, Baoneng returned the use rights for two blocks of land in the JBIC to the Land and Resources Bureau of the Wuhu city government for a negotiated price (Zuo et al., 2015). These two blocks of lands were initially bought in early 2014 for the construction of a business district and a housing project respectively, at a total price of 406.5 million CNY. The return of this land meant that Baoneng lost a deposit of 81.3 million CNY and local government accumulated a backlog of ‘matured’ land that was difficult to sell off. In this sense, the private property enterprise transferred the risk to local government by taking a part of the loss first.

In addition, influenced by dismal consumption of housing, there was also not enough demand for other public services developed by Baoneng itself, as introduced in Section 7.4.2. For example, Baoneng planned to establish a private middle school to improve the attractiveness of their housing project to buyers (Interview D1). However, they had to decrease the land scale of this school and lower construction standards because of sluggish occupancy rates of the housing project. Finally, the schoolyard was sold to the government of Jiujiang District in Wuhu City and became the site of a state school mainly serving students from villages and towns in and near the JBIC (Interview D1). Meanwhile, Baoneng refused to construct other public projects, such as a hospital, planned in the agreements with the JBIC MC, and stopped the operation of some facilities, such as hotels and shops, to reduce costs (Interview D1). In this case, for the purpose of keeping Baoneng’s investment in the JBIC, the JBIC MC agreed to give priority to introducing small and micro enterprises to settle in the industrial project developed by Baoneng (the speculative development of land mentioned in Section 7.3.2). By contrast, the property-based coalitions in the SSMIP were further expanded with the involvement of more property companies attracted by the good state school originating from Hefei City (Interview A21). This further confirms the driving force of high-quality education resources, especially primary, middle and high school, in forging growth-oriented coalitions in the urbanisation of new towns.

In summary, conflicts and negotiations occurred among the actors in promoting the transformation of diverse growth-oriented coordination in the face of a downturn or potential threat to growth in the two new towns. Firstly, the inter-scalar coordination between state actors, especially institutions for redistribution in funding the JBIC was reinforced to share the debt risks of the JBIC MC. Meanwhile, the SSMIP MC had to bear the burden of the majority of pressure for growth in case the promise of redistribution could not be met. Secondly, the leading industrial enterprises were in a more dominant position in their negotiations with the JBIC MC in a stagnant scenario, but their own development was also inevitably constrained. By contrast, the SSMIP MC challenged its alliance with the industrial enterprises in an attempt to provide an alternative

solution to the constrained land use, although the future of this path is still unclear. Finally, the risk of loss in the JBIC could also be shifted between state and real estate enterprises, for instance through the return of land, while both parties share part of the loss in this process. The government of the prefecture-level city also played an important role in risk absorption and dilution, especially in the transformation of property-based coalitions in the JBIC. The redistribution of public resources at a prefectural level was used again as a strategy to maintain the shaky coalition between local government and real estate enterprises.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has examined how diverse actors within and beyond the state system were mobilised in the construction of new towns planned for leading the city-regional growth and balanced development. Firstly, it has revealed that the motivations behind the state-led development of new towns in suburban China were not merely confined to capital accumulation and territorial development within an administrative city-region (Jiang et al., 2016a; Shen and Wu, 2017; F. Wu, 2018). Instead, they also fit into institutional mega-city regional visions – as an engine for the cross-boundary growth of industrial and urban networks in the WCB, or as a booster for cross-boundary redistribution of economic resources in the HMR. Further, we must recognise that planning was a dynamic process which implied that the visions behind building new towns were not static. With the involvement of local considerations in the planning of the new towns, these polycentric mega-city regional visions, shaped by upper-level governments (i.e., the central state and provincial government), were transformed for both the JBIC and the SSMIP. The common trend in their transformations was an emphasis on the positions of the new towns in the growth of the metropolitan economy. But what was different between them was that the metropolitan economy highlighted in the planning for the SSMIP was breaking through the boundaries between cities – Hefei and Luan – rather than stressing economic development within a single city territory as shown in the JBIC and in studies mentioned at the start of this paragraph. More remarkably, this expansion of the metropolitan economy was co-promoted by city governments from both sides of the administrative boundary. This marks a distinction from the widely discussed competition and confrontation between state actors in the periphery of the metropolitan economy (Li and Wu, 2012b; Jiang et al., 2016a).

Secondly, this chapter has examined how state actors were organised to achieve these changing visions of building new towns. It has shown a more complex composition of state power in the management of the JBIC, especially reflected through the operation of MCs. I have argued that the MCs of new towns, as ‘a new scale of state power’ (Shen et al., 2020, p.8), were not formed in a vacuum, but shaped through the bonding of state powers from different scales and territories into a sort of jigsaw puzzle. This process was not always smooth but could be full of disputes over

benefits and liabilities in spatial production, as shown in the JBIC. This made the coexistence of state power from the provincial and prefectural scales in its MC seem more like a compromise. However, the interaction between state actors can also be harmonious, as observed in the SSMIP MC. This horizontal coordination was mainly mobilised as a result of the political pressures and benefits given by the provincial and prefecture-level governments who were the main advocates of the vision for cross-boundary growth. The underpowered nature of the MCs in social regulation and public services has also been highlighted, which necessitated coordination from official government bodies in the management of both new towns. Analogous to this management institution, the composition of state capital in funding two new towns has also shown its multi-scalar and multi-territory nature. As a supplement to existing studies of UIDCs in contemporary China (Jiang and Waley, 2018; Li and Chiu, 2018; Feng et al., 2020), I have revealed that the ownership of the two UIDCs – the *de jure* subsidiaries of the MCs of the JBIC and the SSMIP respectively – were *de facto* shared by different state actors. More importantly, I have identified three channels utilised by state actors to raise funds for both new towns, in which the influence of redistribution-related revenue to the financial mechanisms of UIDCs has been spotlighted.

Thirdly, attention has been given to scrutinise how enterprises were mobilised by state actors to invest in the industrial production and urban development of new towns. In previous studies, coalitions between the state and enterprises in building new towns in contemporary China were mainly investigated under the framework of growth machine theory, in which the profit-seeking of different actors in speculative development of land was highlighted as a key incentive to promote the formation and actions of these coalitions (Luo and Shen, 2007; Zhang, 2014; Jiang et al., 2016b). This chapter supplemented that literature by highlighting the diversity of mechanisms involved in forging coalitions between the state and enterprises in the development of new towns. Capital linkage and trust relationships promoted the formation of industry-based coalitions between state actors at a local scale and industrial companies located in the central area of Wuhu City and Hefei City. This coalition accelerated industrial investment in both new towns through the state-led expansion of the metropolitan economy. Meanwhile, the manipulation of public service resources at a city-regional scale was also a crucial incentive in triggering property-based coalitions between state actors and real estate companies. This strategy could attract both investment in real estate towards new towns and the urban consumption of this real estate.

Finally, this chapter has answered a question that has been seriously overlooked in the urban and regional studies of contemporary China: what will happen to growth-oriented coordination, within the state system and between the state and enterprise, if there is a failure to achieve the growth? The different growth dilemmas met by these two new towns have been presented as examples in this investigation. These dilemmas were manifested as financial risks to state and enterprises

arising from stagnant growth in the JBIC and restrictions in the construction land quota on the rapid growth of the SSMIP. In Harvey's (1989) hypothesis about urban entrepreneurialism, although based on instances in the US and the UK in the 1980s, these kinds of risk were usually assumed and absorbed by the local public sector rather than by private capital. However, some features different from this assertion have been observed in the risk-sharing between actors in dealing with growth dilemmas of these two new towns. For instance, the debt risks of the JBIC MC were not absorbed singlehandedly but shared between state actors in the reinforced coordination around the redistribution of state capital. Correspondingly, losses in the development of real estate was also shared by local authorities and private capital through reverse transactions in land. Meanwhile, the redistribution of public resources at a city-regional scale diluted this risk and loss to some extent. It is not hard to see from these cases that not growth-oriented coalitions were not entirely disrupted or faced with collapse when expected economic growth encountered difficulties. To the contrary, the risks were better controlled and shared by putting the new town into a multi-scalar governance framework in which the redistribution of capital and resources owned by the state played a significant role.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

The overall aim of this thesis has been to assemble a political-economic matrix to understand the nature of state-led city-region building in contemporary China. A critical review of the literature and a qualitative investigation of empirical cases in Anhui Province have been employed to attain this aim, with the findings presented in previous chapters. These findings have contributed to conceptualising the city-region and interpreting the political-economic dynamics involved in forging the agendas, imaginaries, and institutions linked to city-regions. In this chapter, I firstly summarise the main findings of each previous chapter (Section 8.2) and then synthesise these findings to arrive at key arguments of this thesis in Section 8.3 as a response to the three research aims shown in Chapter 1. Finally, in Section 8.4, I illustrate the main limitations of this research and suggest some implications of this research for future studies.

8.2 Chapter review

Chapter 1

In the first chapter, I explained the necessity and rationality of this research as a response to existing literature around the conceptualisation of the city-region and the interpretation of the dynamics behind its formation and development (Section 1.1.1), explained the reasons for selecting Anhui Province in China as my empirical focus (Section 1.1.2), presented the main aims and central questions of this thesis (Section 1.2), and gave an overview of the thesis structure (Section 1.3).

Chapter 2

This chapter introduced key concepts and the basic concerns of this research through a critical review of the literature written in English and contextualised mainly in Western European and North American countries. I first presented the conceptual basis of the city-region as a territorial projection of social relations and proposed the urgent need to investigate an economy-centred conceptualisation of city-regions through the lens of political-administrative relations in spatial shaping (Section 2.2). Based on this concern, diverse functional-economic dynamics that drove the emergence and development of city-regions were first reviewed in Section 2.3; these were seen to be closely associated with the new ‘geographical expression of the division of labour’ (Smith, 2010, p.192) in the intensified globalisation of capital circulation.

The regulatory capacity of the state to respond to these functional-economic dynamics was discussed in Section 2.4.1, which established a key theoretical standpoint of this research: that city-region building is significantly influenced by the spatial selectivity of the nation state, while the role of regional autonomy at the sub-national scale in building city-regions is yet to be thoroughly examined. This theoretical standpoint led me to articulate the concerns of my research in relation to the motives (Section 2.4.2) and strategies (Section 2.4.3) of state agencies at different positions in building city-regions and the power relations involved in these state-orchestrated strategies (Section 2.4.3). A series of vital but understudied issues involved in these research concerns were put forward in this review and were given particular attention in the following chapters.

Chapter 3

The third chapter explained the importance of contemporary China to the research concerns identified in the last chapter and introduced essential background for subsequent chapters. Firstly, I proposed three academic perspectives on conceptualising city-regions in the Chinese context – the functional-economic, the territorial-jurisdictional, and the institutional-political – and clarified the conceptual focus of my research on the institutional city-region (Section 3.2.1). Two names given to institutional city-regions which have been widely mentioned in the policy discourse of contemporary China – the urban cluster and the metropolitan ring – were introduced in Section 3.2.2 as a terminological basis for the empirical investigation.

Secondly, I illustrated the functional-economic context (Section 3.3) and territorial-administrative basis (Section 3.4) for an understanding of the emergence and development of the institutional city-region in contemporary China. The functional-economic context was manifested in the uneven development of regional economies (Section 3.3.1), the growth and transformation of urban economies (Section 3.3.2) and industrial restructuring nationwide (Section 3.3.3); all these were shown to be inseparable from the particular forms of state intervention into socioeconomic space that began in 1978. The territorial-administrative basis refers to the multi-scalar organisation of administrative divisions (Section 3.4.1) and the *tiao-kuai* structure within state territorial system (Section 3.4.2); both showed the complexity of state spatial configurations. These conditions, I argued, mean that contemporary China provides an ideal context for my research concerns. Thirdly, based on the response to specific research concerns identified in Chapter 2, I critically reviewed the motives (Section 3.5.1), strategies (Section 3.5.2), and power relations (Section 3.5.3) involved in the state-led building of institutional city-regions in contemporary China. This review set a coordinate for my empirical investigation in and around Anhui Province and my more specific research concerns.

Chapter 4

I illustrated the methodologies and strategies that I used to target, collect, and analyse empirical data to achieve the research aims and answer the research questions that were outlined in Chapter 1, defined in Chapter 2 and contextualised in Chapter 3, and for which I presented the findings in Chapters 5, 6, and 7. The overview of the research design was presented first (Section 4.2), followed by the rationale for utilising the case-study approach and selecting the Wanjiang City Belt (WCB) and the Hefei Metropolitan Ring (HMR) (and sub-aspects involved in these two cases) as specific cases of state-led city-region building programmes in Anhui Province, China (Section 4.3).

After that, I discussed the main strategies that I applied to collect and analyse the empirical data relating to WCB and the HMR in Section 4.4, showing the procedures, limitations, and considerations of positionality and ethical issues involved in conducting these strategies. Semi-structured interviews (Section 4.4.1) and document analysis (Section 4.4.2) were the main strategies used to collect data, while site visits, briefly introduced in the beginning of Section 4.4, also contributed grounded experience. For the data analysis (Section 4.4.3), I utilised thematic coding as a main strategy, first to reduce the textual data for retrieval, and then to complicate the textual data to discover new patterns and generate new theories. Numerical data and image data were also analysed to supplement and inspire this thematic coding of textual data.

Chapter 5

In this chapter, I responded to Research Question 1 of this thesis: Why did state-led city-region building emerge in Anhui Province in the first decade of the twenty-first century? In the first half of the chapter, I identified the political-economic contexts that preconditioned city-region building in Anhui Province, which I identified as the trajectories of regional spatial regulation (Section 5.2) and characteristics involved in the transformation of regional and urban economies (Section 5.3). In the second half of the chapter, I argued that the proposal to establish the WCB and the HMR involved contributions from diverse policy elites in a combination of historical contexts with emerging agendas based on scalar-sensitive interests (Section 5.4). This not only contributed to the politics of ‘path-dependent layering’ (Brenner, 2004, p.111) involved in the early stage of state spatial selectivity (see Section 8.3.3 for details) but also revealed variegated motives and interests under the general umbrella target of ‘enhancing competitiveness’ (see Section 8.3.2 for details).

Chapter 6

Here I responded to Research Question 2 of this thesis: What planning imaginaries of city-regions in Anhui Province were constructed, and how? Firstly, I argued that planning imaginaries for the WCB and the HMR were in both cases superimposed projections of functional-economic visions and state-administrative patterns onto institutional spaces (Section 6.2.1), but each showed divergent structures in the spatial organisation of functional-economic activities (Section 6.2.2). This argument refined the conceptualisation of city-region in the existing literature as illustrated in Section 8.3.1. Secondly, I examined diverse and changing institutional structures involved in the production of the planning imaginaries of the WCB and the HMR (Section 6.3). In this way the Chinese experience is used to enrich the study of city-regional institutions, especially relating to the tensions pervading the reassembling of state configurations and the role of quasi-state actors during the production of city-regional imaginaries (see Section 8.3.2 for details). Finally, I revealed the techniques and mechanisms that were utilised to accentuate, reconcile, and balance divergent interests emerging from these institutional settings (Section 6.4). I took the ‘compromised city-regionalism’ (Harrison, 2010, p.21) one step further by looking into more diverse politics in the production of city-regional imaginaries (see Section 8.3.2 for details).

Chapter 7

The last empirical chapter responded to Research Question 3 of this thesis: in what ways were the planning imaginaries of city-regions in Anhui Province converted into material outcomes? I contended that the state-led construction of the Jiangbei Industrial Cluster (JBIC) (Section 7.2.1) and the Shouxian-Shushan Modern Industrial Park (SSMIP) (Section 7.2.2) was envisaged as a vital strategy to turn the planning imaginaries of the WCB and the HMR into material realities. However, I also argued that the imaginaries of these two new towns were differentially changed as a result of local considerations. Correspondingly, I gave a brief introduction about the procedures behind and extent to which the planning imaginaries of these two new towns were materialised (Section 7.2.3). This provided a context for observing the actors and actions involved in this process, and these were investigated in the following sections. These findings enriched existing research on the composition and transformation of city-regional imaginaries (see Section 8.3.1 for details).

On this basis, I shed light on how power and capital within, associated with, and beyond the state system were organised and mobilised to achieve the changing imaginaries behind the JBIC and the SSMIP. In Section 7.3, I examined the state institutions – established in a fluid and entangled manner – created to manage and fund the JBIC and the SSMIP. In Section 7.4, I examined the capabilities of these state institutions to forge coalitions with enterprises – associated with or independent from state capital – to promote the growth of the JBIC and the SSMIP. Finally, in

Section 7.5, I examined the transformation of these growth-targeted state institutions and state-enterprise coalitions when the expected growth in the JBIC and the SSMIP was jeopardised. This investigation contributed to an understanding of city-region building in China from a more grounded dimension through scrutiny of the materialisation of city-regional imaginaries mediated by contested coordination within the state system and between the state and enterprises (see Section 8.3.2 for details)

8.3 Assembling the political-economic matrix of city-region building in China

Echoing to the research aims proposed in Chapter 1, this section illustrates the three significant contributions of this research to city-regional studies and state spatial theories; these contributions are introduced here and developed in the subsequent sub-sections. Firstly, this research has refined the conceptualisation of Chinese city-regions by proposing and developing a new concept – ‘institutional city-region’ – and revealing the interactive mechanisms between functional-economic logics and territorial-administrative patterns during its formulation and materialisation (Section 8.3.1). I have challenged the political-economic dynamics that prevail in “compromised city-regionalism” (Harrison, 2010, p. 21) in the Anglophone context by revealing the role of territorial patterns of state administration as the basic prerequisites for the designation, demarcation, and establishment of institutional city-regions in Anhui Province.

Secondly, this research has re-delineated power relations and capital relations during the building of institutional city-regions in China (Section 8.3.2). The significant roles of overlooked actors beyond the state system, i.e., quasi-state think tanks and private entrepreneurs, in shaping the city-regional imaginaries, institutions, and material outcomes have been highlighted (Section 8.3.2.1). The operation of state power has been found to go beyond the central-local dichotomy and to manifest itself in diversified models of city-regionalism which have been co-orchestrated by actors at multiple scales, territories, and sectors (Section 8.3.2.2). Specifically, these models have accentuated the importance of intermediaries such as provincial departments whose role in Chinese city-region building often goes unremarked; alongside this, my research has underlined the importance of the *tiao-kuai* structure embedded in the Chinese state territorial system. The capacities of the state in mobilising capital within and beyond the state system to promote the materialisation of institutional city-regions have also been revealed. In addition, I have drawn attention to techniques and mechanisms that have been utilised to address tensions emerging from these power and capital relations. These techniques and mechanisms have been understudied in academic discussion on Chinese city-region building (Section 8.3.2.3).

Thirdly, this research has enriched and deepened the political nature of state spatial theory (Section 8.3.3). Through looking into the city-region building in Anhui Province, I have found

that the ‘path-dependent layering process’ (Brenner, 2004, p.111) involved in state spatial selectivity does not occur naturally but is highly influenced by the intervention of policy elites and serves scalar-sensitive interests. The city-regional institutions, no matter whether built in an ad hoc or relatively stable manner, all grew out of entrenched state spatial configurations and were endowed with tensions inherited from them. These tensions were further entwined with contested interaction between actors within and beyond the state system, and finally were harnessed by state spatial selectivity towards building institutional city-regions in contemporary China.

8.3.1 Refining the conceptualisation of city-regions from a political-economic perspective

This research has been developed based on a conceptual hypothesis – derived from my critical review of the Anglophone literature – that the city-region defined by state-led spatial practices is a compromise between functional-economic logics and political-administrative realities (Harrison, 2010; Granqvist et al., 2020) (Section 2.2). This insight drove this thesis’s first research aim involving an examination of the applicability of this hypothesis – firstly to conceptualising the city-region in the context of contemporary China and secondly to ‘zooming in’ on the political and economic components that make up city-regions – and further that city-regions are formed by a compromise in the state-led practices. This aim has been accomplished through two steps:

In the first place, I developed the concept of the institutional city-region (Section 3.2.1) to reveal the unspoken intersection between functional-economic logics and territorial-administrative patterns in constituting the planning imaginaries and institutional settings of Chinese city-regions. This concept was proposed based on a reassessment of the existing literature in which: (i) a high degree of consistency between the planning boundaries of city-regions and state territorial jurisdictions was found in a number of examples with a common vision for the coordinated arrangement of city-centred regional economies (Wu and Zhang, 2007; Xu, 2008; Ma, 2012; Li and Wu, 2013; Ye, 2014; Sun and Chan, 2017; Li and Jonas, 2019); (ii) setting the city-region as a new scale or territorial platform of state spatial regulation was found to be largely driven by a desire to pursue growth or manage crises in socioeconomic development and relied on the restructuring or consolidation of extant state powers spreading across different jurisdictions (Shen, 2004; Luo and Shen, 2009; Yang and Li, 2013; Li and Wu, 2013; Ye, 2014; Li et al., 2015; Wu, 2016; Sun and Chan, 2017; Li and Wu, 2018; Zhang and Sun, 2019; Tang et al., 2022).

Based on this preliminary validation of my conceptual hypothesis, as a second step I scrutinised the functional-economic logics and political-administrative realities embedded in the city-regional imaginaries and institutions behind the WCB and the HMR in Anhui Province. My investigation revealed that territorial patterns of state administration not only constrained the

boundary-delineation of the city-regional imaginaries (Section 6.2.1) – as summarised above – but also laid a foundation for the designation and demarcation of functional-economic spaces within the WCB and the HMR in terms such as ‘hubs’, ‘wings’, ‘corridors’, etc (Section 6.2.2). Meanwhile, I found that the rearrangement of these administrative spaces in plans was indeed directed by a vague assessment of economic agglomeration or commuting networks (Section 6.2.1) and embodied in the different reflections of the ‘relationally-networked hub and spokes model’ (Harrison, 2015, p.27) (Section 6.2.2). These findings have further clarified the intersection of political and economic perspectives in the planning imaginaries of Chinese city-regions and supplemented previous studies of these political and economic components.

Going a step further, by looking into the politics involved in the production and materialisation of the planning imaginaries behind the WCB and the HMR, I found that the institutional city-regions shown in the planning discourse are not limited to being a compromise between economic and political considerations. Instead, they can also be presented as an overlap between different imaginaries of the socioeconomic gains – especially around stimulating growth and narrowing uneven development – expected by state actors at different scales and territories (Sections 6.4.1 and 6.4.2), or as a juxtaposition of economic rationalities and political achievements (Section 6.4.3). These mechanisms will be specifically illustrated in Section 8.3.2.

In addition, a compromise of functional-economic logics to political-administrative realities was indeed found in constructing the JBIC and the SSMIP as important strategies involved in the materialisation of the planning imaginaries of the WCB and the HMR. For example, the JBIC was initially planned by upper-level state agencies, referring to central and provincial levels here, as a growth engine to lead growth in the WCB across the boundaries of three administrative cities (Section 7.2.1). But this vision was quickly diminished in the following plans as a result of the involvement of state agencies at prefectural level intent on prioritising development within the jurisdiction of Wuhu City (Section 7.2.1). This change resulted in an inter-scalar compromise around the reallocation of the benefits of socioeconomic development (and the political authority to administer this development) in the JBIC to decrease conflicts between provincial and local governments over its management (Section 7.3.1).

The case of the JBIC has enriched our understanding of the intersection of functional-economic logics with political-administrative realities in constituting the city-regional institution in which economics-oriented reconfiguration of state power was restructured to avoid political tension. In this sense, the institutional city-region as a new scale or territorial platform of state spatial regulation in China was not and could not be fixed, as long as its power composition allowed political wrangling based on economic interests to persist.

To summarise, this research has refined the conceptualisation of city-regions – especially those constructed through political practices led by the state – in the context of contemporary China, and it has contributed to the broader literature by uncovering diverse interactions between political and economic elements, including but not limited to the need to compromise in establishing city-regions. I have contended that the institutional city-region in China is derived from the functional-economic rationalities as understood by the political-administrative configurations and mediated through planning imaginaries and institutional settings. The city-region as projected in discursive formations or through institutional assembly is embedded in the entrenched tensions within state administrations and emerging visions of functional-economic relations. The production of city-regional imaginaries and institutions, involves the superimposition of economic interests onto political-administrative configurations, the juxtaposition of economic rationalities and political achievements, and a compromise between state actors seeking economic benefits based on political harmony. Therefore, the city-region in China can be seen as an institutional space standing at the centre of this political-economic matrix.

8.3.2 Delineating the political-economic relations of state-led city-region building in China

To accomplish the second aim of this research, I developed a triangular framework to understand how the agencies of power and capital within, associated with, or beyond the state system are mobilised and organised to produce these imaginaries and institutions of city-regions in China. This framework has focused on: (i) the actors and their motives or interests involved in city-region building, (ii) the relations of power and capital directly or indirectly acting on city-region building, and (iii) the techniques and mechanisms developed to address tensions arising in city-region building. These three dimensions are not mutually exclusive but are intertwined with each other in specific practices.

8.3.2.1 Actors, motives, and interests involved in state-led city-region building in China

This research has filled gaps in the previous literature, shown in Section 3.5, by exploring the role of quasi-state and non-state actors in building Chinese city-regions and added depth to broader studies on the diverse motives and interests of the state in city-region building (reviewed in Sections 2.4.2 and 3.5.1) in particular by revealing the special position of meso-level state agencies, namely provincial government, involved in the Chinese context.

Firstly, I have found that quasi-state think tanks play indispensable roles during the agenda-setting and plan-making for institutional city-regions in China as shown by my empirical investigation of the WCB and the HMR in Anhui Province. Their roles included three aspects. The first was the intermediary introduction of academic ideas around city-region building into the policy field.

This can be observed in the advocacy of incorporating Anhui Province into the extended YRD as an institutional city-region (Section 5.4.1) and the lobbying of provincial and prefecture-level governments to develop the city-centred regional economy around Hefei City (Section 5.4.2). The second was their early role in formulating preliminary imaginaries of the city-regions in the planning process – although they were excluded from the final decision-making (see Section 6.3.3). The third was an important technical function: legitimising the scalar-specific and territorial-scalar interests of the state behind the city-region building highlighted in Section 6.4.1, to this end using the conceptual production of the Yangtze River Basin.

These roles are all closely relevant to the power relations between the quasi-state think tanks and state agencies involved in city-region building that will be illustrated later. This highlighting of the roles of quasi-state think tanks has not only contributed to the China-focused literature but also responded to the research gap identified in Anglophone literature (Section 2.4.3) in relation to the question of who mediates academia and the policy realm in the production of city-regional imaginaries and who is endowed with the power to introduce academic ideas concerning city-regions into policy discussions? My Anhui case studies suggest that in China, it is the quasi-state think tank that performs this role.

Secondly, through my investigation into their roles in the development of the JBIC and the SSMIP, I have argued that both state-owned enterprises and private enterprises are deeply involved in converting the planning imaginaries of city-regions into material outcomes. As important sources of capital for new town development, these enterprises share motives and interests as state agencies to derive financial profit from growth. These financial gains are not only limited to profit from industrial production (Section 7.4.1) and property development (Section 7.4.2) in the new towns; they also refer to the exchange of benefits with state agencies in relation to their support for the enterprise in other areas; for instance, Wuhu city government contributed to the list Anhui Conch Venture Investment in Hongkong (Section 7.4.1).

Thirdly, in addition to these quasi-state and non-state actors, I have also examined the Chinese state as an institutional ensemble of power (Jessop, 1990) rather than a monolithic entity, especially as it relates to city-region building. Through the case studies of the WCB and the HMR, the motives and interests of state agencies involved in this process were found to be scale, territory, and sector specific with an entangled pursuit of growth and redistribution in the socioeconomic spheres together with considerations of political issues. The provincial government became a gathering place for all kinds of motives behind the city-region building; it not only pursued economic growth driven by urbanisation and industrialisation, but it was also intent on narrowing regional and urban disparities at sub-provincial scale (Sections 5.4, 6.2, and

7.2). Meanwhile, attempts to redistribute land and subsidies from central government was also found to be a motivating force for provincial government (Section 6.4.1), while specific strategic choices of provincial leaders were also influenced by considerations of official promotion (Section 6.4.3). All these findings made state agencies at provincial levels a valuable focal point for understanding specific motives hidden behind the slogan of ‘enhancing competitiveness’ as an umbrella target widely recognised in city-regional policies both in the Western and Chinese contexts (Ward and Jonas, 2004; Xu and Yeh, 2005; González, 2006; Harrison, 2010; Luo et al., 2010; Ye, 2014; Wu, 2016; Wachsmuth, 2017; Liu et al., 2019; Granqvist et al., 2020) (Sections 2.4.2 and 3.5.1).

8.3.2.2 Relations of power and capital impacting the state-led city-region building in China

Through my empirical investigation of the WCB and the HMR, this research has revealed how two processes involved in the state-led production of regions – the ‘centrally orchestrated regionalism’ (p.36) and the ‘regionally orchestrated centralism’ (p.36) proposed by Harrison (2008) based on England cases (Section 2.4.3) – were applied and reconfigured in the institutional setting of city-region building in the Chinese context. As illustrated in Chapter 6, during the formulation of city-regional imaginaries, a planning regime was formed between central and provincial governments to make state agencies collaborate across scales and ministries in the formulation of the overall plan for the WCB (Section 6.3.1), while a constant downscaling of state power from provincial to prefecture-level governments was found in the institutional settings for the plan-making of the HMR (Section 6.3.2). These seemingly clear institutional structures were in fact permeated by the complex operation of state power as conceptualised through Harrison’s ‘centrally orchestrated regionalism’ and ‘regionally orchestrated centralism’.

Although the central state represented by the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) played the role of top leader of the planning regime for the WCB in order to channel state power into the regional scale – a salient feature of the ‘centrally orchestrated regionalism’ – China has no devolution of state power from central to regional scales as can be seen in the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) in England (Section 6.3.1). On the contrary, the mechanism of power operation within this process was closer to the trend of recentralisation accentuated in existing studies around Chinese city-region building (Li and Wu, 2012a; F. Wu, 2016, 2018) in which the central state tries to reallocate local development by creating the city-region as a new scale above the localities in spatial plans (Section 6.3.1). However, what is more interesting in the WCB case was that the promotion of recentralisation was not monopolised by the central state but also involved a ‘regionally orchestrated centralism’ led by Anhui provincial government. The inter-scalar coalitions between central and provincial governments mediated by

the Anhui Development and Reform Commission [PDRC of Anhui] directed the operation of centrally and regionally co-orchestrated city-regionalism in the planning of the WCB and led to a city-regional imaginary positioned at sub-provincial scale while legitimised by central-level policies.

By contrast, the production of city-regional imaginaries for the HMR showed the transformation of ‘regionally orchestrated centralism’. The PDRC of Anhui initiated and dominated the production of preliminary versions of planning imaginaries for the HMR between 2006 and 2008, but this condition was transformed in 2009 into a cross-scalar leadership in the planning regime involving provincial and prefecture-level governments (Section 6.3.2). More significantly, this cross-scalar leadership overlapped with an inter-territory collaboration between city governments involved in the production of the latest planning imaginaries of the HMR (Section 6.3.2). The state agencies at provincial level became the nominal supervisors of this process while the de facto actions were directed by inter-territory collaboration at local levels to create a territorial platform for cross-boundary governance in which the leading role of Hefei city government was secured (Section 6.3.2). It is clear therefore that the province-driven ‘regionally orchestrated centralism’ in the planning of the HMR evolved into a regionally and locally co-orchestrated city-regionalism and even a locally dominated city-regionalism.

In addition, the mosaic composition of state power and its fluid relations in institutional settings can also be observed in the conversion of city-regional imaginaries into material outcomes through the construction of suburban new towns, an understudied area in the literature. The management committees (MCs) for both new towns were created as new institutional spaces to create state power from multi-scalar and multi-territory sources (Section 7.3.1). The formation of these MCs was an ongoing process endowed with distinctive power relations – inter-scalar competition in the JBIC and inter-territory collaboration in the SSMIP. Meanwhile, their lack of power in social regulation and public services also necessitated institutional coordination with official government bodies. The extension of my focus on institutional relations to the realm of state capital revealed a complexity analogous to that of state power operations. The ownership of the main urban investment and development companies (UIDCs) established for financing the JBIC and the SSMIP was found to be shared by multiple state agencies (Section 7.3.2). I also examined the three main channels – territory-based, capital-based, and redistribution-related – that were utilised by state agencies to raise funds for both new towns; here I highlighted the significant but understudied influence of the redistribution of state capital on the financial mechanisms of UIDCs.

Another contribution of this research relates to the ability of the state to mobilise actors beyond the government to contribute in practices around city-region building in China and government's power and control of capital in its relations with these actors. As mentioned above, I found that quasi-state think tanks and research institutes were mobilised to contribute to agenda-setting and plan-making for the WCB and the HMR. Due to being entirely or partly funded by, and serving, government agencies at different levels and sectors to provide intellectual support for policy making, these quasi-state think tanks and research institutes are indeed place- and sector-sensitive partners to state agencies in city-region building and play the part of representing the state's interests in interactions with other actors (Section 6.4.1). However, this does not mean there was no conflict between these quasi-state organisations and the state agencies they are subordinated to; for example, tensions between scientific rationalities and political interests appeared in the production of city-regional imaginaries for the WCB (Section 6.4.3).

On the other hand, I also found the state agencies were able to forge growth-oriented coalitions with enterprises for the development of the JBIC and the SSMIP by mobilising political and economic resources not limited to the new town but set at city-regional scales. Capital linkages and trust relationships promoted the formation of industry-based coalitions between state actors at local scales and industrial companies located in the central area of Wuhu City and Hefei City (Section 7.4.1). The property-based coalitions between state actors and real estate companies were motivated by their acquiescence in land speculation and the redistribution of public services towards the new towns (Section 7.4.2).

To summarise, these findings has not only enriched the studies on the institutional shaping of city-regions in a context that contrasted markedly with the Anglophone literature (Section 2.4.3), revealing a more complex arrangement of state spatial configurations beyond the dichotomy of the central and the local. Meanwhile, they have also shown that the variegated and ever-changing operations of power and capital involved in these institutional variants cannot be covered by the single trend of recentralisation or devolution. Rather, I have contended that the city-regional institutions in Anhui Province may share a top-down model at the initial stage, but they have experienced the strengthening of local authorities in subsequent practices with the involvement of academic input and private capital in the fluid and intertwined composition of power and capital.

8.3.2.3 Techniques and mechanisms addressing tensions in state-led city-region building in China

Based on a widely-discussed picture in the literature, it is clear that tensions among actors occur at every stage of the city-region building (Sections 2.4.3 and Section 3.5.3). This research has

taken the study of the politics of city-region building further by shedding light on the techniques and mechanisms that are developed to reconcile divergent interests in the production of city-regional imaginaries and reduce the threat to the sustainable operation of city-regional institutions.

The economic gains pursued by actors involved in the planning regimes for the WCB and the HMR have been found to be scalar- and territory-specific, with the result being that there is disagreement on how to imagine a city-region that can better serve its own interests and those of different actors. In this context, I examined three techniques or mechanisms that were utilised in the plan-making process to embed diverse interests into the city-regional imaginaries leading to the WCB and the HMR eventually becoming a balance between powers. The first technique was the conceptual production of the policy term Yangtze River Basin in the boundary delineation for the WCB. This, my findings indicate, was manipulated by experts from quasi-state think tanks in Anhui Province to expand the provincial benefits in the spatial selectivity of the central state (Section 6.4.1). The second mechanism was the superimposition of different expectations of state agencies at central, provincial, and prefectural levels in order to gain from the building of city-regions, as a result of which, in this case, we find a constant expansion of the planning area for the HMR (Section 6.4.2).

The third mechanism was the juxtaposition of economic rationalities – derived from the scientific judgement of quasi-state think tank experts who also mediated these logics – against political interests held by actors in different government positions in the strategic design for the development zones as key functional spaces of the WCB (Section 6.4.3). Notably, the authority of intellectual elites in quasi-state think tanks in the knowledge production around city-regional imaginaries is clear from this third mechanism too. These quasi-state think tanks are endowed with the ability to assist or bargain with political elites in highlighting the scientifically evidenced rationality in the spatialisation of functional-economic activities in the city-regional imaginaries.

Furthermore, my findings give shape to the mechanisms developed to dilute the risks and losses involved in converting the city-regional imaginaries into material outcomes through the construction of suburban new towns. This has served to answer an important but under-studied question: what will happen to the growth-oriented coalitions if the growth is not achieved? The conditions that constrained the growth of the JBIC and SSMIP result from the financial risks to state and enterprises arising from stagnant growth in the JBIC and the restrictions on the construction land quota on the rapid growth of the SSMIP (Section 7.5.1). In this context, I found that redirecting the distribution of state capital towards new towns plays an important role in maintaining coordination among the state institutions in response to these risks and bottlenecks (Section 7.5.2). Meanwhile, although sustainable coalitions between the state and enterprises

around industrial and property development were both threatened if losses have to be shared among actors, the reallocation of commercial resources and public services – influenced or operated by state agencies at local scales – helps reduce losses and slows down any potential breakdown of state-enterprise coalitions.

8.3.3 Reflections on city-region building as state spatial selectivity

The state spatial selectivity approach has laid a theoretical foundation for this study (Section 2.4.1) and fits well into the Chinese context around building institutional city-regions (Sections 3.2 and 3.5). Through my empirical investigation of the WCB and the HMR, this thesis has, in turn, contributed to this approach by deepening our understanding of the political nature of state spatial selectivity in China, responding thereby to the third aim of this thesis. This theoretical contribution is mainly reflected in the following three aspects.

Firstly, my research shows that the ‘path-dependent layering process’ (Brenner, 2004, p.111) involved in state spatial selectivity does not occur ‘naturally’. Instead, it is heavily dependent on the intervention by policy elites who serve scalar-sensitive interests by selectively (re)articulating the political-economic contexts behind city-region building. In Chapter 5, I argued that the preliminary proposal of the WCB as a policy option for responding to emerging agendas revealed the entangled interests of central and provincial governments in a complex policy process. This process, I argued, includes: (i) the spatial selectivity of the NDRC towards promoting industrial relocation from coastal China to inland China, (ii) lobbying by quasi-state think tanks and mass media in Anhui Province for the incorporation of Anhui Province into an enlarged YRD as a new institutional city-region; and (iii) the official endorsement by national leaders of this new institutional city-region and the subsequent response of state agencies at central and provincial levels to this endorsement (Section 5.4.1).

A number of political-economic ‘layers’ were seen to be relevant to relations between Anhui Province and the YRD. These were the trajectory of state spatial regulation around promoting regional cooperation between Anhui Province and the YRD (Section 5.2.1) and the transformation of regional economies in the context of the growing disparities between Anhui Province and the YRD (Section 5.3.1). These layers were accentuated and reinterpreted by policy elites involved in the complex policy process to promote and legitimise the state spatial selectivity towards the building of the WCB (Section 5.4.1). Similarly, the complex political process is also visible in the case of the HMR. The proposal to form the HMR has been examined in terms of Anhui provincial government’s agenda on expanding growth for the provincial economy and the agenda of central government on balancing development between localities (Section 5.4.2). The ‘layers’ around the political-economic conditions of Hefei City and its surrounding cities in Central Anhui

(Sections 5.2.2 and 5.3.2) were articulated by various policy elites – including experts from quasi-state research institutes and think tanks and government leaders – to legitimise the development of a Hefei-centred regional economy that serves provincial and prefectural interests (Section 5.4.2).

Secondly, I have explored the influence of entrenched state spatial configurations on shaping new city-regional institutions in the Chinese context. The institutions specifically established to build city-regions (both ad hoc and more stable) have been found to have been assembled despite the tensions within existing functions and relations within or associated with the state territorial system. For example, during the formulation of city-regional imaginaries for the WCB, the planning regime was a relatively ad hoc institution that only existed between mid 2008 and late 2009 (Section 6.3.1), and its organisation and the operation of powers involved in it were highly reliant on the *tiao-kuai* structure of administrative organs. This structure preconditioned the dual roles of the PDRC of Anhui as both representative and intermediary of sector-specific and territory-based interests in the inter-scalar collaboration between the NDRC and Anhui provincial government. In addition, superimposed on the *tiao-kuai* structure, my research further suggested that the political positioning of administrative cities affects the operation of city-regional institutions. This is reflected in the de facto leadership of Hefei city government in the inter-territory collaboration over the production of planning imaginaries for the HMR (Section 6.3.2).

As well as ad hoc institutions for plan-making, more long-term and stable institutions for city-region building cannot escape tensions rooted in entrenched state spatial configurations. For instance, if we look back to the power composition of the JBIC management (Section 7.3.1), we see that the contradictions between Anhui provincial government and Wuhu city government were not only embedded in but became exacerbated in the JBIC MC before 2012. This was because the JBIC MC, as a new institutional space created by Anhui provincial government before 2012, attracted the interest of the Wuhu city government in the new town development. In this sense, rather than defining these city-region institutions as something ‘new’, I have contended that they should be better understood as a jigsaw-like bricolage of power that accommodate competing interests extended from the entrenched state territorial system.

Finally, as argued in previous sections, city-region building as a state spatial selectivity in China has been proven to be a political process that is endowed with the contestation between different actors and mediated by the state-led actions. My research has shown that this process not only encompasses actors within the system. On the contrary, the actors beyond government – no matter whether quasi-state think tanks or private enterprises – all play important roles in the whole process of city-region building and are deeply involved in the interactions between power and

capital around the restructuring of state spaces. Correspondingly, diverse techniques and mechanisms are utilised to cohere both state agencies and relationships between state agencies and these non-state and quasi-state actors.

Relying on all these findings and arguments, this thesis has finally assembled a political-economic matrix to understand the nature of state-led city-region building in contemporary China. In this matrix, the conceptualisation of Chinese city-regions has been positioned at an intersection between functional-economic rationalities and political-administrative realities. The motives and interests of diverse actors – within, associated with, or beyond the state system – have been revealed through an account of the relations of power and capital involved in the production of city-regional imaginaries and the shaping of city-regional institutions. My research has also revealed the techniques and mechanisms that were developed to address tensions arising within this process. This matrix not only contributes to existing city-regional studies with a Chinese focus and those set in a broader context, but it also contributes to state spatial theories by shedding light on the political practices around city-region building in contemporary China.

8.4 Limitations and looking forwards

The research presented in this thesis is limited by its focus on the ongoing transformation of city-regions and the associated evolution of state-led city-region building in the twenty-first century. The main limitation is shown in the selection and application of the research methods, as illustrated in Chapter 4. The empirical investigation of cases in Anhui Province only provided a perspective to understand state-led city-region building in contemporary China, and even that with the qualifications that are outlined below. It cannot (and is not intended to) lead to generalisations about other contexts. Rather, this case study approach provided evidence for me to reflect on and contribute to the literature on the key concepts discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, and to generate a new understanding of these concepts. In this sense, the findings of this research are confined to a ‘conditional/consequential matrix’ (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p.87) which means that all my findings are built upon a set of conditions and consequences sensitive to time, space, political-economic backgrounds, etc.

Accordingly, one of the limitations of this research is its condition-sensitive feature. This means that the key arguments of my research, involving the re-conceptualisation of city-regions (Section 8.3.1), the re-interpretation of political-economic relations in state-led city-region building (Section 8.3.2), and reflections on state spatial selectivity (Section 8.3.3), may prove to be difficult to adapt to other ‘conditional matrices’. For example, although the WCB was a city-region wholly included in the territory of a single province (i.e., Anhui Province) the central state was directly involved in specific actions, especially the plan-making, included in its building process. This

condition is very different from many sub-provincial city-regions in China discussed in previous studies (Luo and Shen, 2008; Dai et al., 2014; Wang and Shen, 2016). The central state was either absent from the building process of these city-regions, or indirectly involved in it, through the supervision, guidance, or support of specific actions initiated and dominated by provincial and local governments. In this sense, the montage of ‘centrally orchestrated regionalism’ observed in the WCB (Section 8.3.2) is hard to find in some other sub-provincial city-region building programmes.

However, this limitation suggests a promising direction for future research: the comparative study of ‘conditional matrices’ in city-region building. The question can be proposed as follows: which conditions lay a foundation for the divergent presentation of city-regional imaginaries in planning discourse? My research touched on this concern in some important ways, but the topic deserves further study. For instance, I linked the discussion on why different spatialisation of functional-economic activities appeared in the plans for the WCB and the HMR (Section 6.2) to main findings of Chapter 5 around divergent paths involved in regional spatial regulation and the development of a regional and urban economy in Anhui and the divergent agendas behind these two programmes. However, future investigations of conditional matrices behind city-region building can be deeper and broader, for example, adding cultural and social elements, or conducted in the contexts of different provinces in China or even different countries.

In addition, returning to the cases in Anhui Province, the state-led building of both the WCB and the HMR has continued after the data collection for this research. More importantly, the YRD as a new institutional city-region in China has finally been expanded with the incorporation of the whole territory of Anhui Province (State Council, 2019), as was advocated by policy elites in Anhui Province since the mid 2000s (Section 5.4). This strategy is bound to have new impacts on city-region building in Anhui Province and will probably help to promote the transformation of the WCB and the HMR. In fact, in *the Outline of the Regional Integrated Development Plan for the Yangtze River Delta*, the WCB and the HMR are viewed as key components and new growth engines for this new YRD (State Council, 2019). This is indeed consistent with one of trajectories of regional spatial regulation in Anhui Province – promoting regional cooperation between Anhui Province and the YRD (Section 5.3.1) and strengthening the hub (YRD) and spoke (WCB) morphology of functional-economic networks envisaged in the overall plan for the WCB. In this context, investigating once again institutional city-regions in Anhui Province, as a new part of the YRD, and associated power relations involved in their building process will provide an important update on the findings of this research.

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Appendix A: List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Name / Phrase
ACVI	Anhui Conch Venture Investment Co., Ltd
ACH	Anhui Conch Holdings Co., Ltd.
Baoneng	Shenzhen Baoneng Investment Group Co., Ltd.
BTH	Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei
BTT	Beijing-Tianjin-Tangshan
CDB Fund	China Development Bank Development Fund Company Limited
CPC	Communist Party of China
CRDP	City-Region Development Programme
DRC	Development and Reform Commission
DHURD	Department of Housing and Urban-Rural Development
FDI	Foreign direct investment
GDP	Gross domestic product
HMR	Hefei Metropolitan Ring
JB Company	Anhui Province Jiangbei Development Company Limited
JBIC	Jiangbei Industrial Cluster
JJJ	Jing-Jin-Ji
MC	Management Committee
MOHURD	Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development
NDRC	National Development and Reform Commission
PRC	People's Republic of China
PDRC	Provincial Development and Reform Commission
PDHURD	Provincial Department of Housing and Urban-Rural Development
PRD	Pearl River Delta
RDA	Regional Development Agency
SSMIP	Shouxian-Shushan Modern Industrial Park
SS Company	Shouxian Shushan Modern Industrial Park Investment Company Limited
UIDC	Urban investment and development company
WCB	Wanjiang City Belt

Appendix B: Formal recorded interviews

Type	Organization	Position	Themes	Date	Code
Government officials	Office for Yangtze River Delta Regional Cooperation	Officer from Anhui	Anhui's works in YRD Integration	2019.01.16	A1
		Officer from Zhejiang	<u>Group interview:</u> Zhejiang's works in YRD Integration	2019.01.16	A2
		Officer from Zhejiang			A3
		Officer from Zhejiang			A4
		Officer from Shanghai	Shanghai's works in YRD Integration	2019.01.16	A5
	Anhui Development and Reform Commission	Ex-division director	Policy making of the WCB case	2018.12.25	A6
		Senior staff member	Anhui's works in YRD Integration & Implementation of the WCB case	2019.05.07	A7
	Jiangsu Development and Reform Commission	Principal staff member	Jiangsu's works in YRD Integration & Relations with Anhui	2019.03.12	A8
	Zhejiang Department of Natural Resources	Principal staff member	Zhejiang's city-regional policies & relations with Anhui	2019.01.08	A9
	Hefei Development and Reform Commission	Principal staff member	Hefei's work in regional cooperation	2019.04.23	A10
		Division director	Implementation of the HMR	2019.04.23	A11

Type	Organization	Position	Themes	Date	Code
		Ex-division director	Policy making of the HMR	2019.05.15	A12
	Hefei Bureau of Natural Resources and Planning	Deputy division director	<u>Group interview:</u> Policy making of the HMR	2019.05.15	A13
		Section chief			A14
		Staff member	Policy making of the HMR	2019.03.13	A15
	Maanshan Development and Reform Commission	Principle staff member	Attitudes to WCB case and HMR	2019.4.25	A16
	Management Committee of Anhui Jiangbei Industrial Cluster	Division director	<u>Group interview:</u> JBIC development	2019.05.06	A17
		Principal staff member			A18
			JBIC development	2020.01.10	
	Management Committee of Maanshan Zhengpugang Modern Industrial Park	Section chief	Re-delineation of the JBIC in 2012 and following new town development in Maanshan City	2019.05.21	A19
		Staff member	Re-delineation of the JBIC in 2012 and following new town development in Maanshan City	2019.05.21	A20
	Management Committee of Shoushu Modern Industiral Park	Section chief	SSMIP development	2019.05.23	A21
				2020.01.08	
		Section chief	SSMIP development	2019.05.27	A22

Type	Organization	Position	Themes	Date	Code
Think tank and university researchers	Anhui Academy of Social Science	Ex-head of school	Policy making of the WCB case	2018.11.30	B1
		Ex-deputy head of academy	Policy making of the WCB case and the HMR	2018.11.30	B2
	Nanjing University	Professor	Nanjing's city-regional policies	2018.12.17	B3
	Chinese Academy of Sciences	Research fellow	<u>Group interview:</u> YRD's regional policies	2018.12.24	B4
		Research fellow			B5
		Research fellow	Policy making of the YRD integration	2019.1.14	B6
Planners	Anhui Research Institute of Urban and Rural Planning and Design	Senior planner	Regional & urban planning within the WCB case	2018.12.21	C1
		Senior planner	<u>Group interview:</u> Regional & urban planning within the WCB case	2018.12.21	C2
		Senior planner			C3
	Hefei Research Institute of Urban Planning and Design	Senior planner	Regional & urban planning within the HMR case	2019.05.15	C4
	China Academy of Urban Planning and Design (Shanghai Branch)	Senior planner	Regional & urban planning within the WCB case	2019.01.15	C5
		Senior planner	Shanghai's regional & urban planning	2019.01.16	C6

Type	Organization	Position	Themes	Date	Code
	Zhejiang Research Institute of Development Planning	Senior planner	Zhejiang's regional & urban planning	2019.01.08	C7
	Hangzhou Research Centre of Urban Planning	Planner	Hangzhou's regional & urban planning	2019.01.08	C8
Company managers	Baoneng Group (Wuhu Branch)	Office director	Real estate in JBIC	2019.05.06	D1
		Property manager	Real estate in JBIC	2019.05.06	D2
		Manager	JBIC planning	2014.09.26	D3
Leaders and residents of local community	Residential Committee (in preparation) of Tianheyuan Community	Member of community committee	<u>Group interview:</u>	2019.05.06	E1
		Member of community committee	Relocated community in JBIC		E2
	Tianheyuan Community	Resident	Relocated community in JBIC	2019.05.06	E3

Appendix C: Glossary of Chinese terms

Chengshi qun	城市群	A Chinese equivalent of the ‘city-region’ which refers to a cluster of cities with the polycentric feature
Da xingzheng qu	大行政区	Mega administrative divisions established at supra-provincial level in the early 1950s
Dushi quan	都市圈	A Chinese equivalent of the ‘city-region’ which emphasizes the leading roles of a (super) mega city or a large city in the development of its regional hinterlands
Jingji xiezuo qu	经济协作区	Economic regions delineated by central committee of CPC between 1958 and 1960 to coordinate economic development between provinces
Kaifa Wanjiang, huying Pudong	开发皖江，回应浦东	A slogan proposed by Anhui provincial government in mid-1990s to stress the development of area along the Wanjiang to imitate the Pudong New Area in Shanghai City
Tiao-kuai structure	条块关系	A set of metaphorical concepts to interpret the organisational structure of state territorial system in contemporary China
Wanjiang	皖江	The section of the Yangtze River located in the territory of Anhui Province