

Perspectives on China's Urban Space: Review and Synthesis

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Abstract

The Chinese urban landscape is vibrant, diverse, and sometimes puzzling. This essay tries to outline the major forces that constitute and re-constitute this landscape. Persistence of the soft-budget constraint is important. But this should be seen in conjunction with the increasing role taken on by urban municipal governments, which is many times strengthened by the land leasing system. Place promotion and image building are not only targeted at the transnational corporations, but also at the SOEs and large private enterprises. Influx of FDI and the corporate reforms have brought about much wider income spreads and the formation of a new urban middle class. This, together with the housing reform of 1998-99 and reforms in the financial sector, has added a choice dimension to the urban spatial form. On the other hand, the reforms have also produced a new class of urban poor struggling to cling to the dwindling stock of dilapidated danwei housing.