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THE CITY THAT ATE CHINA—

RESTRUCTURING & REVIVING BEIJING

Carolyn Cartier

A blue-tinted photograph of a city skyline, likely Beijing, with smoke rising from the left side. The image is used as a background for the text.

THE BEIJING CAPITAL REGION has reached the limits of environmental sustainability. The roads are clogged up with traffic, the city's residents worry about contamination of food and water, and air pollution in Beijing has become a deadly serious environmental and health issue. But Beijing's problems cannot be solved by Beijing alone. Hebei province forms a geographical collar around both the inland capital and coastal Tianjin, its historical port. As the largest producer of iron and steel in China, Hebei is also the major source of industrial pollutants in the region. What's more, its iron and steel industries consume significant quantities of water. Together with increased agricultural and urban household demand, these industries have created a crisis of water supply in the capital region.

In the absence of a rigorous culture of environmental conservation, the Chinese government has proposed solutions that combine engineering (long-distance water transfers), economic restructuring (downsizing Hebei's heavy industry), and the relocation of 'non-capital functions' 非首都功能 of Beijing to outside the urban core. To address these complex problems, the government is creating a 'new' city-region called Jing-Jin-Ji, a composite of the 'jing' 京 in Beijing 北京, the 'Jin' 津 in Tianjin 天津 and 'Ji' 冀, an historical name for Hebei.

This complex regional strategy seeks to transform Beijing from a traditional high-density city with a large, single urban core into a multi-centre, city-region that encompasses and integrates Beijing, Tianjin, and Hebei. It aims to achieve new standards of urban governance through a set of plans for environmental management, industrial restructuring, new transport infrastructure and new town development, all of which will support the relocation of Beijing's municipal government outside the city's historical core.

This 'meta-solution' to the region's environmental and other complex problems, including housing, transportation, and the management



The Hebei 'collar': Many maps of Hebei erroneously omit the 'flying land' 飞地 of Langfeng city between Beijing and Tianjin

Image: chinaknowledge.com

of natural resources, requires major changes to how the region is administered. What is today called ‘rearranging the pieces’ 板块 exists in the strategy of ‘adjusting the administrative divisions’ 调整行政区划 by which the state has estab-

lished and redefined the governing space of subnational territories (such as provinces, prefectures, and counties) since the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE).

At its 30 April 2015 meeting, the Politburo formally endorsed the Jing-Jin-Ji Co-operative Development Outline Plan for the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region 京津冀协同发展规划纲要. The concept itself had been discussed and deliberated for a decade and some of the components of the scheme were already in development. However, as of December 2015, the detailed plan had still not been publically released, or perhaps even finalised.

The international media has variously and somewhat misleadingly described Jing-Jin-Ji as a ‘future megalopolis’, ‘new mega-region’ or ‘super-city’. The outline plan embraces more prosaic, but important goals. One, easing the ‘non-capital functions of the city; two, strictly regulating the size of Beijing’s population; three, promoting ‘co-operative development’ 协同发展 among the three regions in environmental protection and transportation; and four, letting the colleges and enterprises of Zhongguancun (Beijing’s ‘Silicon Valley’) take the lead in linking Beijing with Tianjin and Hebei. In other words, the Jing-Jin-Ji plan will ‘spatially restructure’ the existing city-region to create better conditions for development in and around the national capital.



The Jing-Jin-Ji Co-operative Development Outline Plan: the three oarsmen have the characters for Beijing, Tianjin, and Hebei on their backs. Their boat is called ‘integrated development’

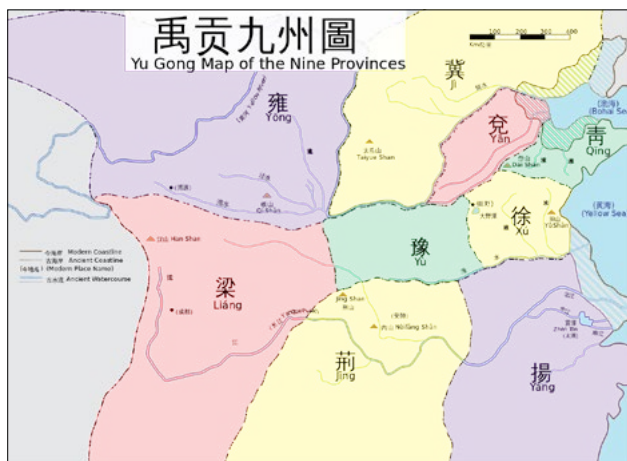
Image: gjgwyw.cn

What's in a Name?

As mentioned above, the name Jing-Jin-Ji is a contraction of the three place names Beijing 京, Tianjin 津, and Hebei 冀. Where the first two are simply the second characters of the contemporary place names, Ji refers to an historic administrative division called Jizhou 冀州 in the area that today encompasses all three contemporary jurisdictions: Hebei, Beijing, and Tianjin. Jizhou first appeared in the 'Yu Gong' 禹貢 or 'Tribute of Yu' chapter in the classical text *Book of Documents* 書經, which dates back to the fifth century BCE. By using the 'Ji' of Jizhou in its formulation Jing-Jin-Ji, the party-state is subtly stressing both continuity and historical legitimacy.

China's rulers past and present have all changed official place names to reflect desired political-economic transformations. After 1949, and especially during the Cultural Revolution of 1966–1976, the Party-state renamed places to make them more 'red'; many of these quietly regained their original names—or at least pre-Cultural Revolution names—in the early 1980s.

Jizhou itself was not always Jizhou: the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) called it Zhili 直隸 (simplified as 直隶) or 'directly ruled' to indicate how the historic capital governed its surrounding region. Use of the name Zhili (previously romanised as Chihli) continued into the Republican era



The *Book of Documents* referred to Jizhou as one of 'nine provinces'

Image: commons.wikimedia.org, taken from Hou Renzhi (侯仁之), ed. (1959). 中国古代地理名著选读·禹贡 [Selected Masterpieces of Ancient Chinese Geography: Yu Gong]. Beijing: Scientific Publishing (科学出版社)

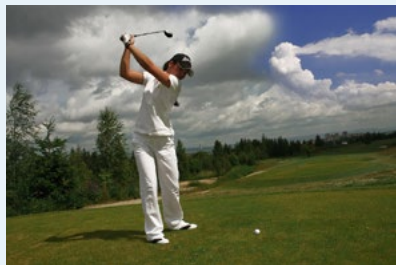
(1912–1949). But when Chiang Kai-shek 蒋介石 moved the Republican capital to Nanjing in 1928, the region around Nanjing was also called Zhili, more specifically, Nan Zhili 南直隸, ‘southern directly-ruled’, to distinguish it from Bei Zhili 北直隸, ‘northern directly-ruled’. At the same time, Bei Zhili was renamed Hebei 河北 or ‘north of the [Yellow] river’.



The province of Zhili, 1912–28
Image: en.wikipedia.org

When the People’s Republic was established in 1949, with Beijing as its capital, ‘new China’ inherited a set of eleven ‘provincial-level’ cities (cities with the administrative status of provinces) from the Republican era. In 1954, the status of all but three, Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai, was scaled down to sub-provincial. Although Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai are called ‘municipalities’ in English, the translation can be misleading. In Chinese, in accordance with China’s system of administrative divisions 行政区划体系, they are called ‘directly-governed cities’ or *zhixiashi* 直辖市—the same *zhi* and the same concept as in Zhili. That is, they are under the direct control of, or report directly to, the central government. The three original *zhixiashi* were joined by Chongqing in 1997.

In addition to the four *zhixiashi* and twenty-two provinces, China has five ‘autonomous regions’ 自治区 (Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Tibet, and Xinjiang) and two ‘special administrative regions’ 特别行政区 (Hong Kong and Macao) that also have equivalent, provincial-level status. Theoretically, Beijing, Tianjin, and Hebei are all provincial-level entities and are therefore of equal rank. But it is clear from both the order of the names in Jing-Jin-Ji and subsequent official statements, including remarks made by Xi Jinping himself, that Beijing enjoys priority.



Golf is popular in China

Image: pixabay.com

GOLF: IT'S NOT OK, IT'S OK,

by Aiden Xia

China's Communist Party listed playing golf as a violation of discipline for the first time in its revised disciplinary code that was released on 21 October 2015. The prohibition applies to all eighty-eight million party members.

The Party's most recent crackdown on golf and golf courses began in 2004. The sport had been considered bourgeois and counter-revolutionary in the first decades following the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, but grew rapidly in popularity with the newly moneyed during the 1980s and 1990s. Golf courses have a huge environmental impact, especially in areas where water resources are scarce. However, in defiance of the 2004 ban, the number of golf courses in China continued to grow to more than 600 in 2015.

Xi Jinping's anti-corruption teams have taken note. In March 2105, the National Development and Reform Commission announced the shutting down of sixty-six golf courses in major cities like Shanghai and Beijing and across twenty provinces. In Guangdong province, which boasts the world's largest golf facility, the Mission Hills Golf Club, officials were banned from playing golf during work hours in December 2014. A vice mayor of Wuyishan city in south-eastern Fujian province, meanwhile, was sacked in September 2015 for belonging to a golf club and playing the game when he should have been at work.

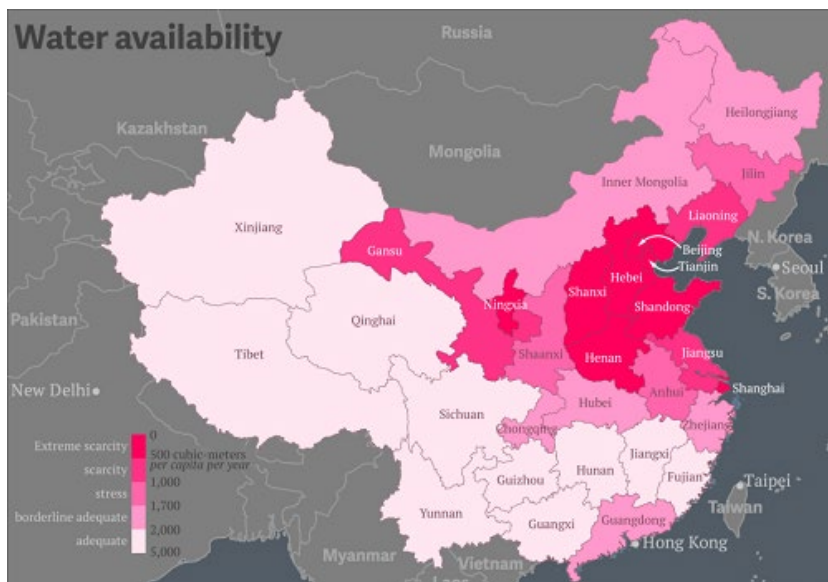
STOP PRESS:

In early April 2016, the *Discipline Inspection and Supervision News* 纪检监察新, the flagship newspaper of the Central Commission for Disciplinary Inspection (CCDI), published an article clarifying that 'playing golf itself is not a wrongdoing'. Government officials will be subject to punishment, however, if they accept membership cards illicitly, use public money to play golf, or play during office hours.

Environmental Challenges Facing Jing-Jin-Ji

In February 2015, Chinese media reported that of the ten Chinese cities with the worst air quality, only Zhengzhou in Henan province and Jinan in Shandong were not in the capital region. The other eight were Tianjin, plus seven prefectural-level cities in Hebei: Baoding, Xingtai, Shijiazhuang, Tangshan, Handan, Hengshui, and Langfang. Beijing did not appear on the list, clearly a face-saving gesture given its position adjacent to Baoding, Langfang, and Tangshan, not to mention its internationally infamous problems with air pollution.

In fact, in December 2015, Beijing announced the first ever ‘red alert’ for hazardous smog. Some of the air pollutants in Beijing come from increased car use in the capital. But much of the particulate matter found in its air comes from heavy industry and coal burning in Hebei. Yet because party officials are generally only responsible for the jurisdictions to which they are appointed, they historically had little incentive to co-operate across boundaries, even for mutually beneficial outcomes. The concept of Jing-Jin-Ji recognises that there can be no solution to the region’s environmental problems unless it involves the region as a whole.



THE NEW ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION LAW, by Aiden Xia

China's updated Environmental Protection Law came into force on 1 January 2015. This was the first time that this fundamental statute was revised since it was enacted in 1989, a reflection of the Chinese government's awareness that during the past three decades, the country has been sacrificing environmental quality for the sake of economic development.

A report by the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency found that by 2006, China had become the world's leading emitter of carbon emissions, at volumes seven percent higher by volume than the United States. The new law recognises both China's global responsibilities and the reality that unless China can solve or ameliorate its environmental problems, the Chinese Dream will become a nightmare.

The amended Environmental Protection Law stipulates heavier fines, naming and shaming of companies that break the law, and punishment of local government officials who don't enforce the law. It allows Chinese NGOs to file lawsuits against polluters on behalf of the public, and provides confidentiality to whistleblowers to encourage public participation. It also requires that information about environmental monitoring—including the specific pollutants discharged, the collection and use of discharge fees and so on—be published.

Hebei produces about one quarter of China's national steel output. Hebei Iron & Steel is the largest firm in China by output, and the third largest in the world. The iron and steel industry doesn't only create noxious emissions. It also requires a lot of water: approximately 75,000 gallons per tonne. But Hebei doesn't have enough water resources to meet its combined industrial and other needs. By the mid-2000s, moreover, Beijing and Tianjin each had less than half the water resources they needed to meet local demand; Beijing has the lowest average per capita water availability of all of China's major cities. In the 1990s, Beijing began diverting water from Hebei as well as Shanxi province, but this was not a long-term solution. An increasing appetite for water in Beijing due both to an increase in population and the demands of its urban lifestyle (including the maintenance of golf courses—see *China Story Yearbook 2014: Shared Destiny*, p.239), has lowered the groundwater of the North China Plain by some 300 metres since the 1970s.

In December 2013, after Hebei Iron & Steel flouted central government requirements to decrease production, its CEO was forced to resign under suspicion of corruption. In December 2014, the Ministry of Environment declared Hebei the main target in its ‘war on pollution’ 污染宣战. New quotas require Hebei to cut one-third of its steel and cement production and related coal burning. This is not as economically adventurous as it may sound: declining domestic demand after years of expansion has resulted in over-production and falling prices. The steel and related heavy industries (not just in Hebei but China generally) have already been compelled to downsize. In Hebei, however, this is policy, and strictly enforced: the provincial governor, Zhang Qingwei 张庆伟 declared in a 2014 CCTV interview that ‘If an extra tonne of steel is produced, local officials will have to take responsibility and be sacked’. In January 2016, Zhang reported that Hebei’s economic growth in 2015 had dipped to 6.8 percent, down 0.9 percent from the previous year, which he attributed mainly to anti-pollution measures.

Sensibly, the Jing-Jin-Ji plan mandates that Beijing and Hebei cooperate on the funding of environmental management, including the treatment of the large amounts of wastewater that are discharged into the rivers feeding the regional reservoirs. Two thirds of the catchment area of Beijing’s Miyun reservoir lies to the north, in Hebei. But engineering solutions are one thing: it is still not clear how the three areas are to share the costs of cross-boundary environmental mitigation.



The 'war on pollution'
Image: edu.sina.com.cn

SOUTH-NORTH WATER TRANSFERS, by Carolyn Cartier

The massive South-North Water Transfer Project 南水北调工程 transports water from the Yangtze River system northwards via three main routes, two of which are in the east, serving the capital region. The ‘central’ route, the more westerly of the two eastern routes, moves water from the Danjiangkou reservoir in Hubei province along a 1,432-km-long canal to Beijing’s Miyun reservoir. Miyun is the main supplier for Beijing’s Water Works No. 9, the largest treatment plant for drinking water in China. The ‘eastern’ route diverts water from the Yangtze River at Jiangdu, in Jiangsu province, north along the route of the historical Grand Canal and through tunnels under the Yellow River. It forks near Jinan, capital of Shandong province, to supply the eastern Shandong peninsula as well. The planned ‘western’ route would move water from the headwaters of the Yangtze across the high-altitude watershed divide to the headwaters of the Yellow River.

First conceived in the 1950s, the South-North Water Transfer finally received the go-ahead from the central government in 2001, which was planning for the 2008 Beijing Olympics in the midst of a water crisis. Work didn’t begin on it until the 2010s, however, and ‘southern water’ only arrived in the capital in December 2014. But in 2015, researchers discovered that levels of lead in the Danjiangkou reservoir from 2007 to 2010 were twenty times the maximum level considered safe by international standards. The study questioned but did not provide information on current levels.



The regions interlocked watersheds
Image: edudisk.net



The Danjiangkou reservoir

Image: en.syiptv.com

Maximum safe levels of lead in drinking water supply



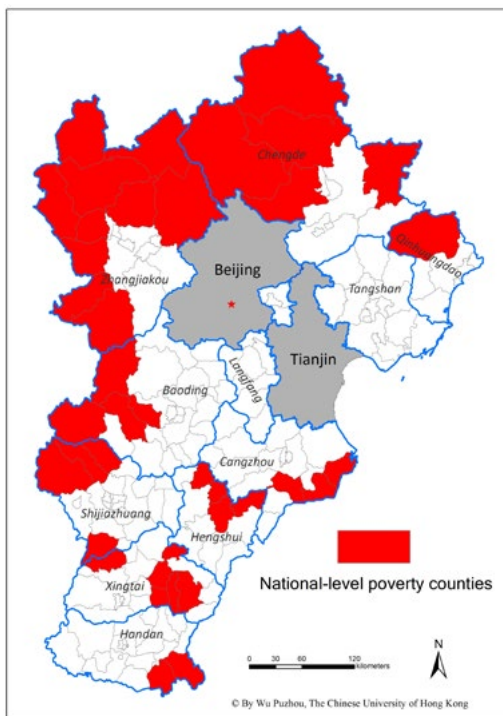
Lead levels in Danjiangkou reservoir, 2007–2010

Source: WHO, EPA, MWR, Journal of Environmental Informatics

The Poverty Belt

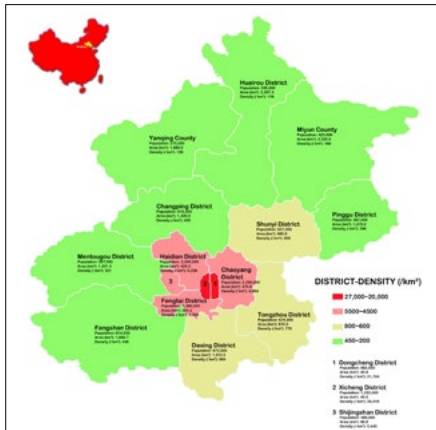
Coverage of the Jing-Jin-Ji plan in the Chinese media makes little mention of the ‘capital’s poverty belt’ 环首都贫困带. This consists of thirty-nine counties and county-level administrative districts in Hebei, some of them along Beijing’s border with Chengde 承德, Zhangjiakou 张家口, and Baoding 保定, the prefecture-level cities to the north, west and south of the capital respectively. The 2006–2007 Bluebook of Regional Development in China (2006–2007 年: 中国区域经济发展报告) brought the ‘poverty belt’ to national attention when it likened the capital to ‘a European city surrounded by African countryside’. Among the twenty-one regions with provincial status, only four of them have more counties on the national list of ‘counties requiring “poverty alleviation” 国家扶贫县’ than Hebei. (The province with the fewest poor counties is the southern island of Hainan, with only five; those with more are Gansu (forty-three), Shaanxi (fifty), Guizhou (fifty), and Yunnan (seventy-three).

The C-shaped ring of under-development around Beijing is land that historically served as a kind of defensive buffer around the capital. Hilly in the northwest and west, it slopes downwards as it traces the northern edge of the North China Plain to define the city’s eastern boundaries. State



National-level poverty counties

Image: Pu Wuzhou, The Chinese University of Hong Kong



Beijing population map

Image: beijingconflict.wordpress.com



Beijing relief map

Image: beijingconflict.wordpress.com

planners have minimised industrial development in the counties upslope from Beijing to protect downstream populations from industrial run-off. Some areas of these poorer counties are designated ‘military restricted zones’ 军事禁区, with limited construction of even basic infrastructure.

Nonetheless, mining and the pervasive agricultural use of pesticides and chemical fertilisers in the poverty belt have polluted rivers and streams, contributing to the ongoing crisis of water management in the capital region. Jing-Jin-Ji’s major reservoirs—Miyun, Panjiakou, and Guanting—or their catchment areas are all situated within or adjacent to the poverty belt. Drought, poor management (including historical failure to control contamination from fish farming, tourism, and agricultural runoff), and the pollution of the waterways have compromised the water quality of the reservoirs even as Beijing has depleted its own aquifers.

For all these reasons, the report calls the poverty belt a threat to ‘political and social stability’, beneficial for neither Beijing’s world image nor its long-term security. Yet in the decade since the 2006–2007 Bluebook of Development, State Council-approved ‘poverty alleviation programs’ for Hebei have enjoyed uneven success.

THE TWO-CHILD POLICY, by Emily Feng

In October 2015, China's National People's Congress approved a dramatic policy change: the country's controversial one-child policy was finished. In its place, the two-child policy, under which all married couples could have two children, would be in force from 1 January 2016.

The two-child policy is less the result of a sudden moral reckoning than of economic and demographic calculations. The one-child policy has left China with one of the worst gender imbalances in the world, and children without siblings are struggling to support ageing relatives on their own. What's more, there are fewer and fewer younger workers to replace a rapidly aging workforce. On its current path, by 2050 China will have only 1.6 workers for every retiree, a ratio comparable to Japan or Singapore. But unlike those countries, China, to quote a phrase frequently used by economists, may well get old before it gets rich. To offset population decline, China has set its annual birthrate target at twenty million births, an increase, according to the National Health and Family Planning Commission of three million additional births a year.

In many ways, the two-child policy is an extension of what already was in recent years a growing body of legal exceptions to the one-child policy. Ethnic minorities were always exempt from the policy while, in 1987, families living in the countryside whose first child was a girl were also allowed to have a second child. In November 2013, couples in which either parent was an only child were also allowed to have a second child. However, only 700,000 of the eleven million qualifying couples applied for permission to have a second child, raising questions about what percentage of the ninety million Chinese couples that qualify to have a second child under the two-child policy will take advantage of the new policy.

There are two major reasons why Chinese couples have been slow to embrace the relaxation in family planning policy. They may consider the cost of raising a second child simply to be too great, particularly in first-tier cities like Beijing and Shanghai, where property prices are some of the highest in the world. China's top law-making bodies have discussed giving two-child families economic and educational subsidies but are yet to implement any specific policies.

The second reason is cultural. After almost four decades and at least two generations under the one-child policy, which has been not only enforced by law but normalised through education, media and culture, many couples no longer desire to have more than one child. Cash incentives, government propaganda, and slightly more generous vacation policies might not have any noticeable effect in changing societal attitudes.



The two-child policy was announced in October 2015

Image: Day Donaldson, Flickr

If large numbers of couples do decide to have a second child, another possible problem relates to gender equality. A 2013 national survey of Chinese college-age women conducted by the All China Women's Federation found that ninety percent of women had experienced gender discrimination while seeking employment. More generous maternal leave and family planning policies will make women who decide to have two children more expensive to hire, especially without additional state support. Without first creating comprehensive social programs to support working women and tackle larger issues of sexism in the workplace and society at large, the two-child policy could not only fall short of its goals but also undo years of progress in women's rights.

Implementation of the two-child policy has been delegated to provincial governments to allow for consideration of the varying circumstances of each province. Faced with unreliable population statistics, provinces face the daunting task of calculating reasonable birth targets and then calibrating social policy to achieve the desired results—a social engineering experiment that will have enormous implications for China's society and economy for years to come.

Urban Mosaics

Since the 1980s, the State Council has made thousands of changes to the administrative divisions within urban areas. The first wave re-named rural prefectures and counties as prefecture-level and county-level cities, thus transforming collective rural land into land open to urban development. In some cases, where the administrations of adjacent areas refused to co-operate, the State Council simply eliminated the boundaries themselves. Over time, cities in China have thus become mosaics in which borders, administrative divisions, new towns, rail lines, industrial parks, rivers, and even air quality are the pieces in a puzzle that may shift about from one plan to the next.

Since the 1950s, the administrative divisions of Beijing and Tianjin have remained relatively stable, even as the rural counties surrounding them have undergone multiple transformations, including in the 1950s and 1960s when they became ‘people’s communes’ and, more recently, urban districts. In 2009, the State Council approved the merger of three of Tianjin’s coastal counties-turned-districts to form the Binhai New Area, modelled after Shanghai’s Pudong New Area. Beijing’s last rural counties, Miyun and Yanqing, were upgraded to districts in November 2015, bringing them under direct administration by the Beijing municipal government.

Now, with the establishment of Jing-Jin-Ji, the ‘pieces’ need to be re-structured once more.

Of the four general goals of the preliminary Jing-Jin-Ji plan, the first is relocating ‘non-capital functions’ of Beijing outside the urban core. Beijing is currently home to two governments: the central, or national government, and the city government, both situated in the urban core around the Forbidden City. Under the plan, Beijing’s municipal (‘non-capital’) government will move to Tongzhou 通州, the northern terminus of the Grand Canal in imperial times.

Tongzhou is twenty kilometres southeast of the city centre. It is a district of 906 square kilometres with a population of more than one



The 'Tongzhou New City' 通州新城 is not a city as such but a new 'town development'. It will rise from some fifty square kilometres of land by the historic canal; these images come from the Tongzhou city website
 Source: image.baidu.com

million, and it includes the vibrant Songzhuang 宋庄 art colony. Moving the municipal government to Tongzhou will help to relieve traffic, residential, and other pressures on the city centre.

As early as June 2013, the Beijing Party Congress had called for a new 'government sub-centre' 行政副中心 in Tongzhou. This marked a significant break with the Party's decision in the 1950s to go against the advice of urban planners like Liang Sicheng 梁思成 and develop Beijing as a single-centre, high-density capital city. The Tongzhou government centre also features in the Beijing Planning and Exhibition Hall and in the Beijing 2004–2020 Master Plan, which stresses green, low-carbon development, and sustainability.

Along with the municipal government, social services including health and education are to be developed or headquartered outside the city centre. This (the fourth goal of the plan) presents a special challenge for the elite university sector in Beijing. Beijing has eight world-ranking universities, a number of them on historically significant campuses. Tianjin has two universities and Hebei none. What will be the relationship of



Xi Jinping was party secretary of Zhengding county, Hebei, 1983–1985

Image: news.ifeng.com

Beijing's universities to institutions in Tianjin and Hebei? How will 'non-capital functions' be defined in this context? It is interesting to consider that whereas in Brazil and Australia, national capitals were constructed outside of existing major cities, in the case of Beijing, the national capital will take over the historic centre

of the city, while the city itself (or its organs of government and support services) moves into the periphery.

Transcending divides—whether educational, economic or other—between the three territories of Jing, Jin, and Ji will require engineering new transport links, establishing new eco-industrial zones and building new urban centres. There are already plans for twenty-seven new rail lines to crisscross the region, including a high-speed line between Beijing and the Hebei provincial capital of Shijiazhuang.

The Political is Personal Too

Xi Jinping has closely associated himself with the Jing-Jin-Ji plan. His rise to the Party leadership began in 1982 in Hebei, where he was appointed deputy party secretary of southwest Zhengding county. The National Development and Reform Commission first proposed to co-ordinate development in the region in 2004, when Xi was still governor and party secretary of Zhejiang province. He joined the Politburo's Standing Committee in 2007. It was the following year that ranking officials of the three jurisdictions met formally for the first time, in Tianjin. In 2011, by which time Xi had been elevated to the vice-presidency, the concept of a 'capital economic circle' appeared in the national Twelfth Five-Year Plan. Then, in 2014, by which time he was both President and Party General Secretary, Xi

Jinping called for specific Jing-Jin-Ji integration plans, and soon a suite of specific measures was announced. These included the relocation (possibly by the end of 2016) of the wholesale clothing markets in Beijing's Dahongmen and Beijing Zoo to Langfeng in Hebei, removal of mobile phone roaming charges within the region, and regional coordination of airport security.

Back in September 2013, when the central government approved the Action Plan for Air Pollution Prevention and Control in Jing-Jin-Ji and Surrounding Areas, Xi went to Shijiazhuang and led a widely publicised 'struggle session' with the Hebei Provincial Party Committee in which he criticised provincial Party Secretary Zhou Benshun 周本顺 for 'not paying enough attention to work for the poor', among other things.

On 24 July 2015, shortly after attending a Jing-Jin-Ji integration meeting chaired by Vice-Premier Zhang Gaoli 张高丽, Zhou Benshun was detained and placed under investigation—the first provincial leader to be detained while holding office. Zhou was subsequently photoshopped out of the photographs of the meeting. The former Hebei Party secretary is an associate of Zhou Yongkang 周永康, the past head of state security who was sentenced to life in prison in June 2015. Thus at the same time as he was promoting regional co-operation, Xi removed one of the most powerful leaders in Hebei, conveniently ridding himself of a potential factional enemy in the process.



Zhang Gaoli
Image: news.21cn.com

Conclusions

The capital region is reaching developmental limits that demand urgent and complex management solutions. The current approach, rather than emphasising the principle of conservation, deploys the state's power and authority to rearrange or spatially restructure resources, economies, and populations—to 'construct' 建设 *jianshe*—on a vast scale.

The Party-state's upbeat rhetoric on Jing-Jin-Ji focuses on the scale of the transformation itself. China has a long history of employing massive engineering projects, the Three Gorges Dam, for example, to solve difficult problems. Given the impact these projects tend to have on local populations and also the uncertainty of their outcomes, free debate might raise uncomfortable questions. The official media is relatively silent, for instance, on the challenges posed by the existence of the poverty belt to regional integration, possibly because the Party-state has not yet worked out how to solve them.

That the Party-state is carefully managing the information around Jing-Jin-Ji is not unusual. The Party has controlled the narrative of China's development—urban and otherwise—since the Yan'an era in the 1940s. It decides what information to release into the public sphere and how to frame it, and times its release in a strategic manner designed to bolster both its own legitimacy and state security.

Given that the Jing-Jin-Ji concept has circulated for over a decade and much of the detail has yet to be released, or even finalised, it is useful to ask why it has been announced now. The central government regularly times such announcements to compel local governments and regional interests to prepare for change and also to consider them while planning future projects and policies.

It is also interesting to note that there has been little discussion of the lessons that the capital region might take from the development of the Yangtze and Pearl River deltas, both of which are highly integrated regions with multiple, interconnected centres, unlike the Jing-Jin-Ji region with its focus on Beijing. And whereas tourism into Jiangsu province from Shanghai continues to grow, Beijing has not generated similar synergies with Hebei, which has 'wild Great Walls', the old 'hunting palace' at Chengde, nature parks, and the beach resort of Beidaihe, among other attractions.

Isabel Hilton, the editor of the bilingual environmental website China Dialogue 中外对话 has observed how 'the design of China's future cities will not only affect the health and wellbeing of their residents; it will

also be an important factor in the battle to contain China's soaring carbon emissions. These questions, therefore, are of high importance to all of humanity'. If Jing-Jin-Ji can help to solve, or at least mitigate the region's environmental problems by remapping its boundaries and jurisdictions, it will strengthen and enhance Beijing as a majestic and dignified national capital and become the Xi Jinping era's most significant contribution to China's urban history.

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