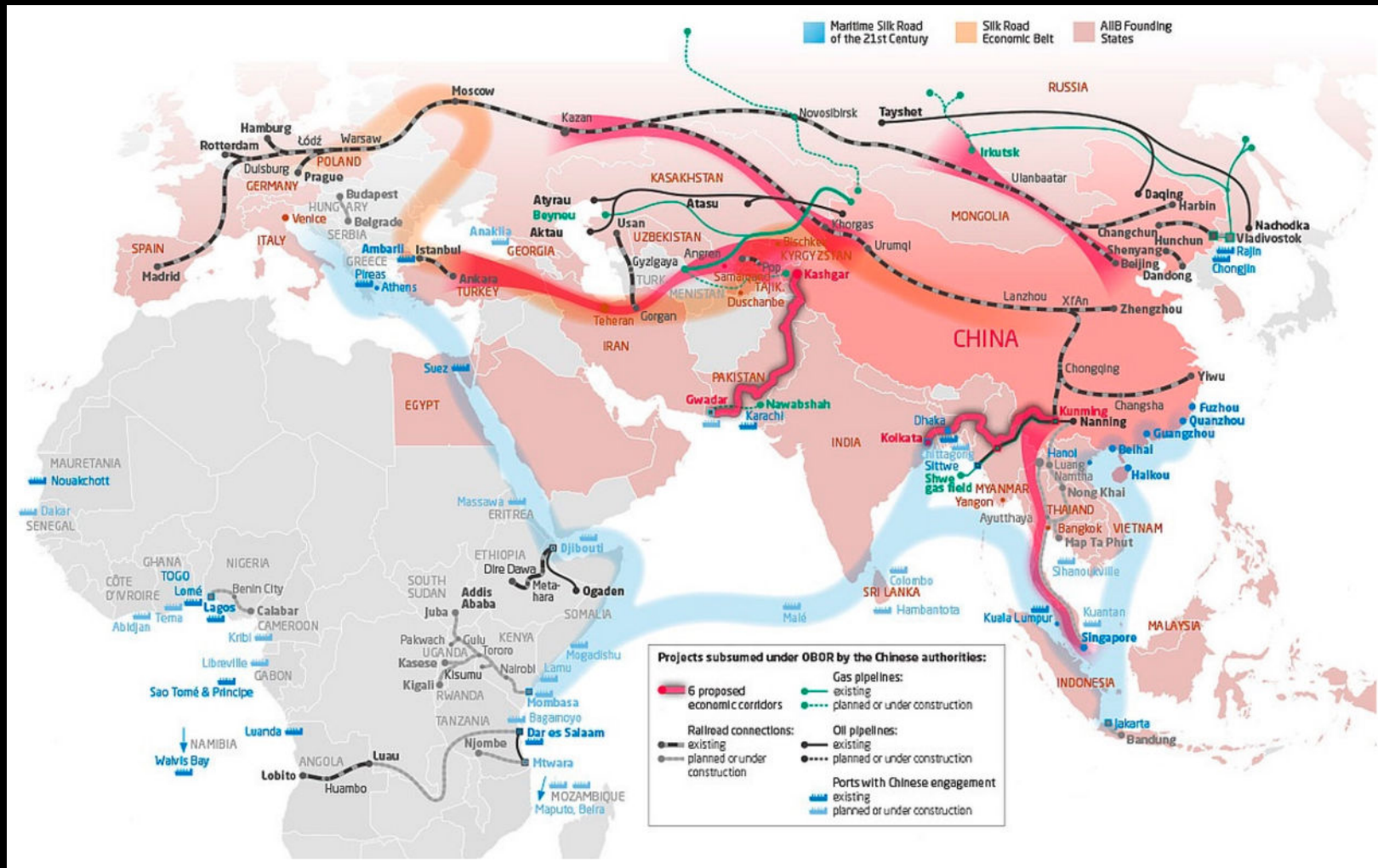




The Urban Origins of China's Belt and Road Initiative

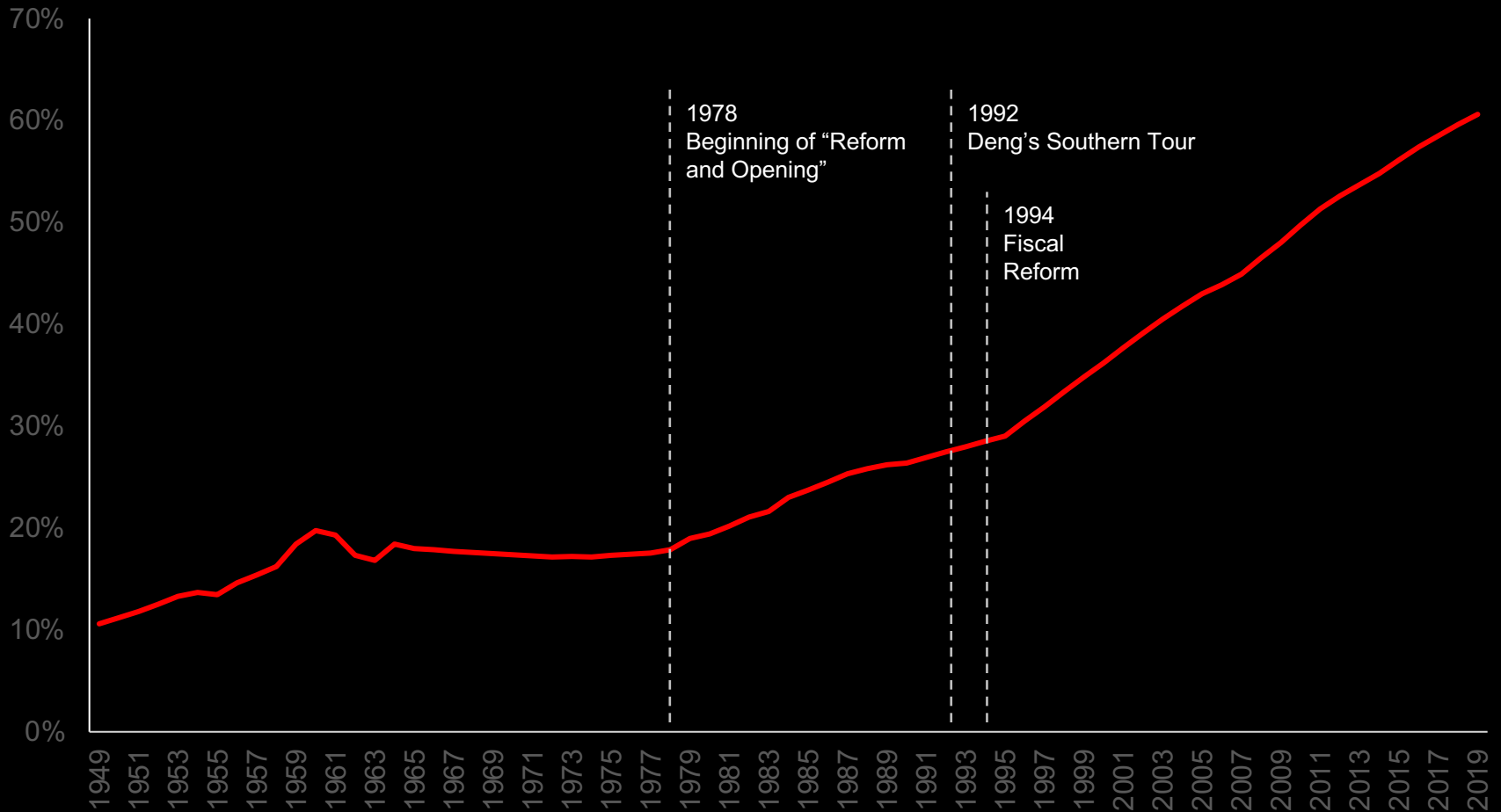
Nick R. Smith
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The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a strategic platform for China to reshape the world's economic geography

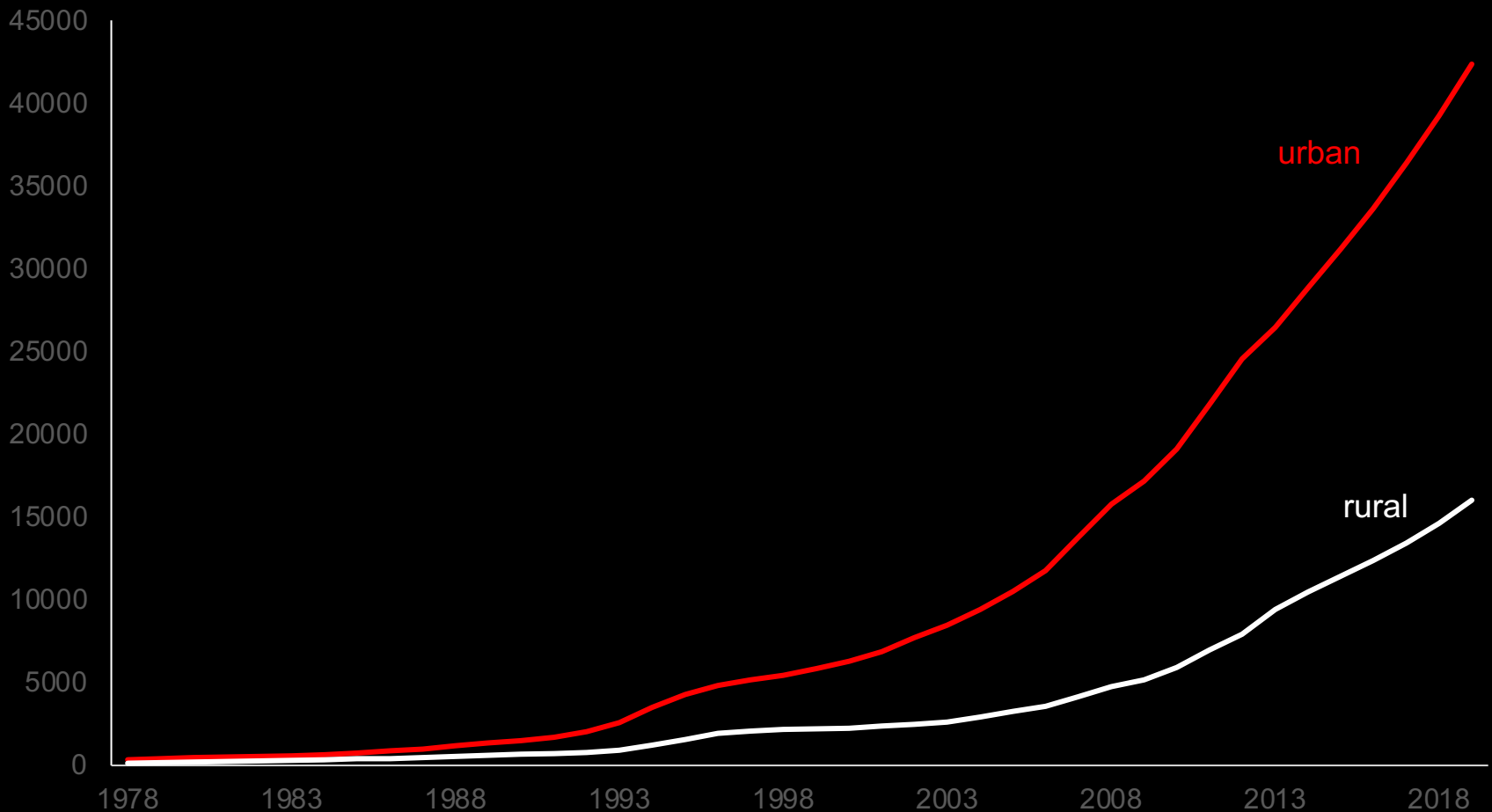


Map of the Belt and Road Initiative (Mercator Institute for China Studies)

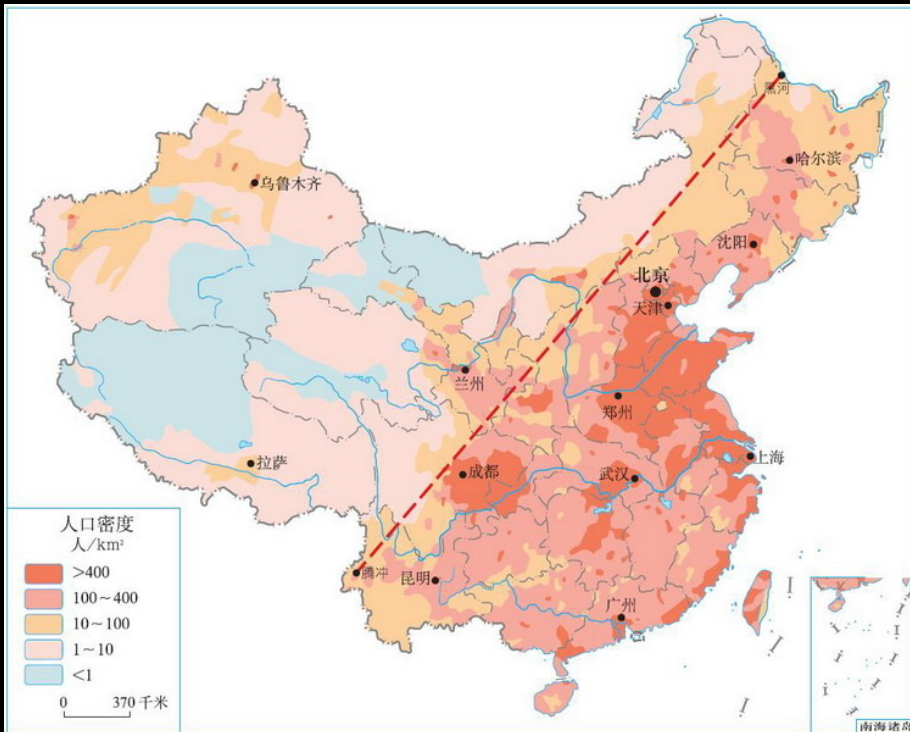
Chinese urbanization has accelerated since 1978



Accelerated urbanization relied on the extraction of labor, land, and resources from rural areas and populations ...

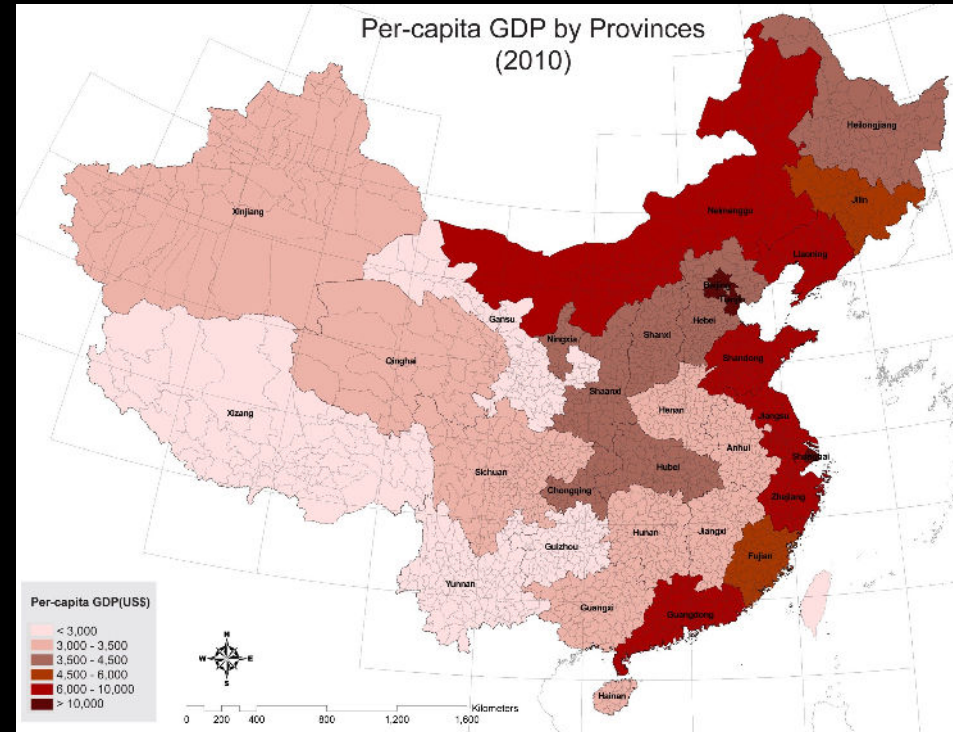


... and uneven development between China's mountainous interior and the more fertile and economically vibrant coast



Population density (2010)

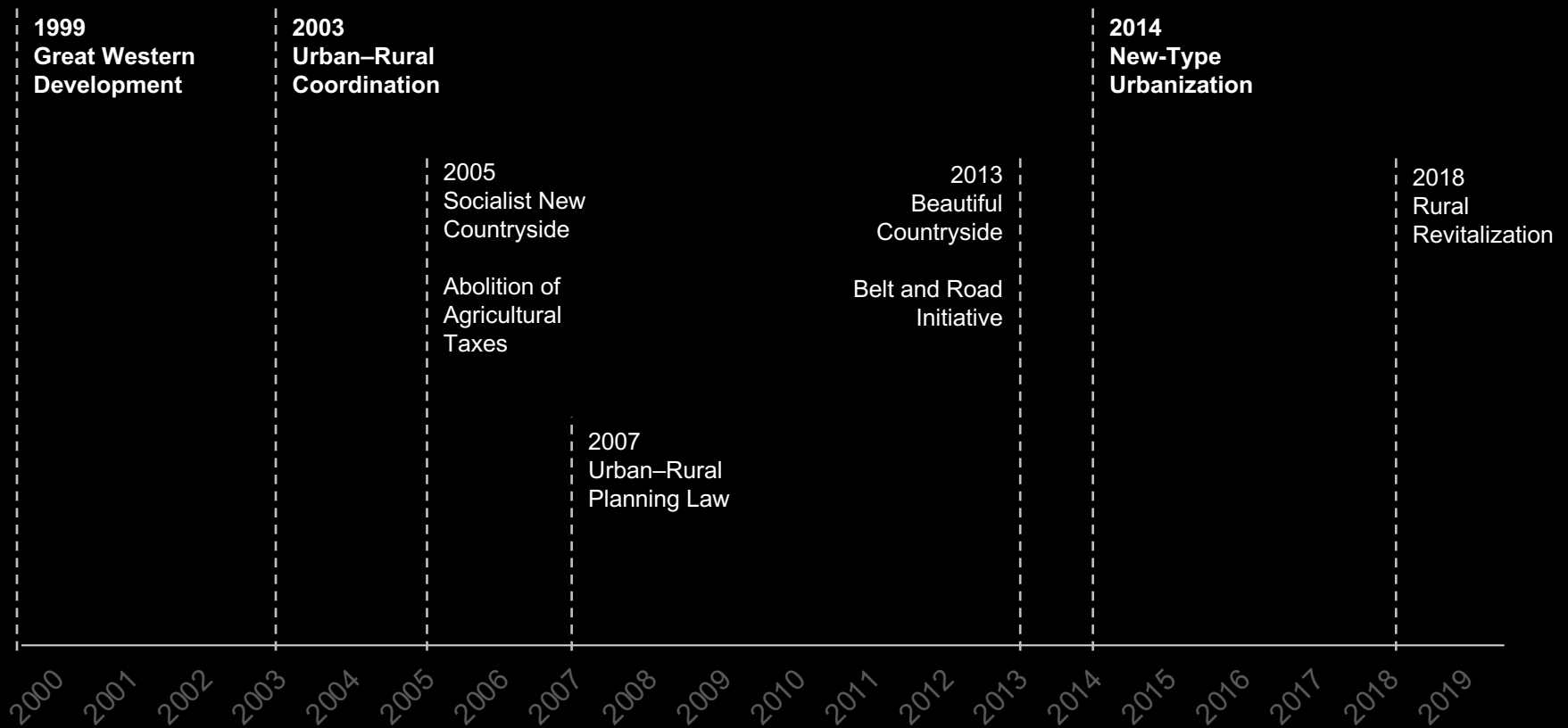
The legend shows population density in people per square km



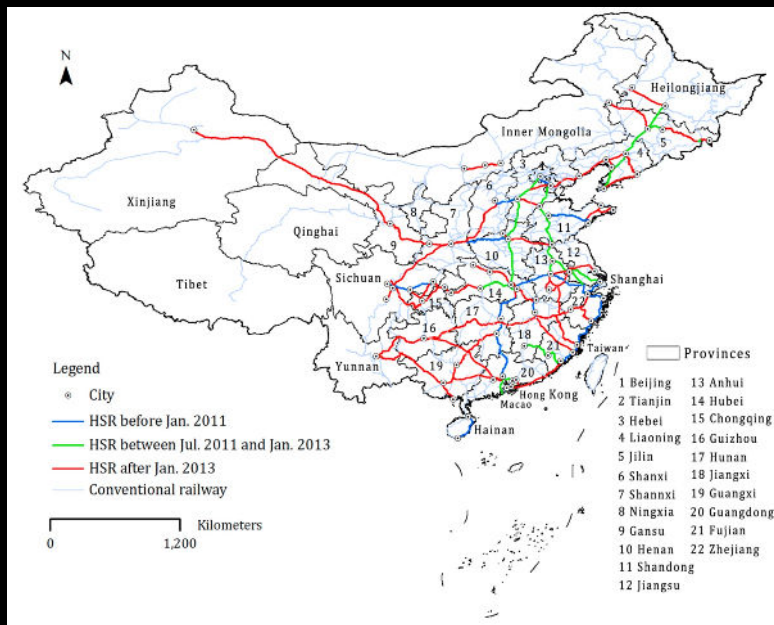
Per capita GDP (2010)

The legend shows per capita GDP in USD

China enacts a series of policy initiatives aimed at addressing regional and urban–rural inequality



Leading to large infrastructure projects that are meant to boost development in the western interior



Chinese high-speed rail over time (MPDI)



Qinghai-Tibet Railway

But substantial regional and urban–rural gaps have persisted

Table 1. The share of intra-region and inter-region disparities based on nominal GDP per capita

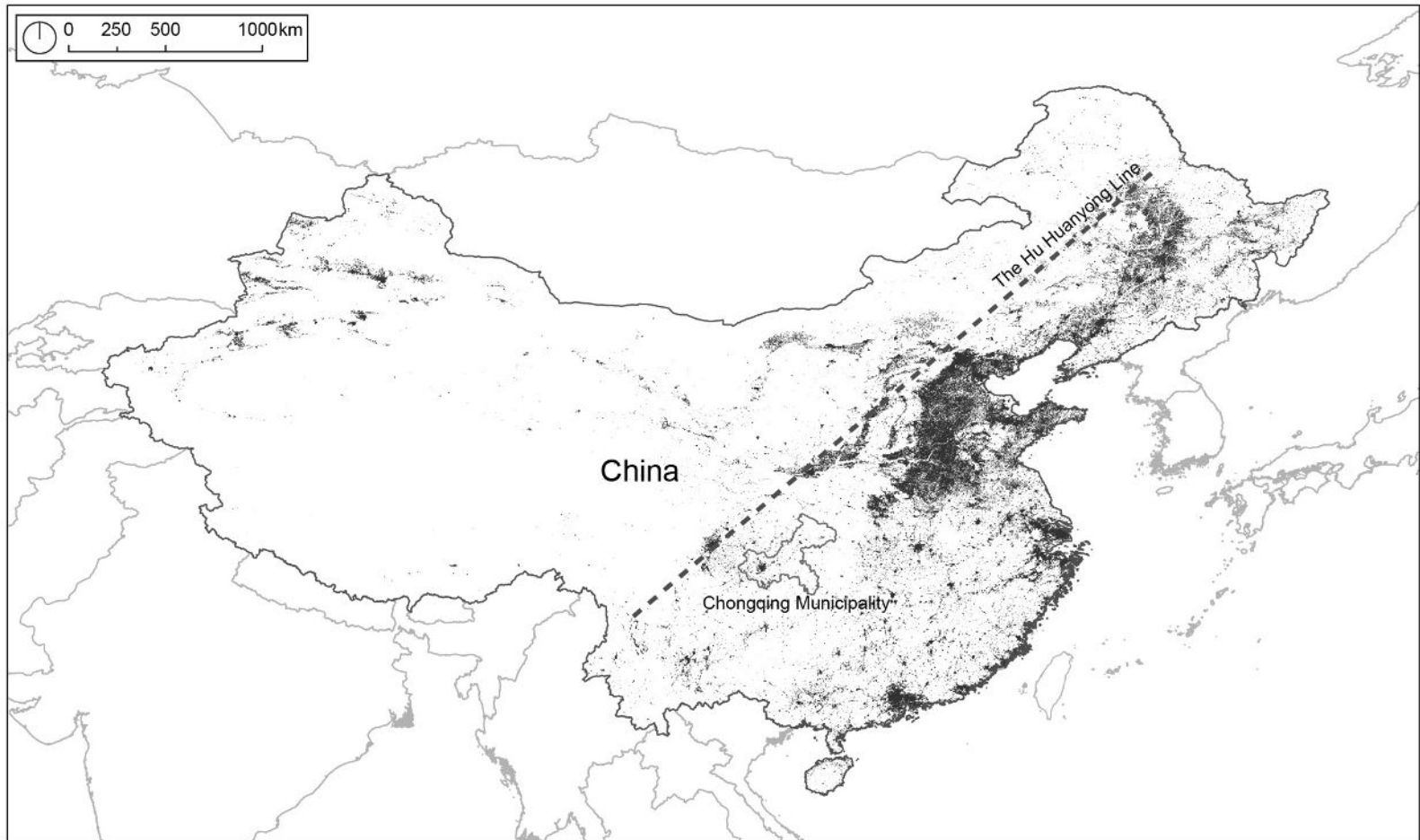
Year	Disparities within Eastern	Disparities within Central	Disparities within Western	Disparities within Northeastern	Disparities Among Four Regions
1978	64.7%	4.0%	6.3%	2.6%	22.4%
1990	40.7%	5.7%	8.3%	3.0%	42.3%
1996	29.1%	1.5%	10.6%	1.8%	57.0%
2004	29.5%	1.9%	13.2%	1.1%	54.4%
2014	29.9%	3.7%	24.6%	4.4%	37.4%

Table. 2 The share of disparities between urban and rural areas based on household income per capita

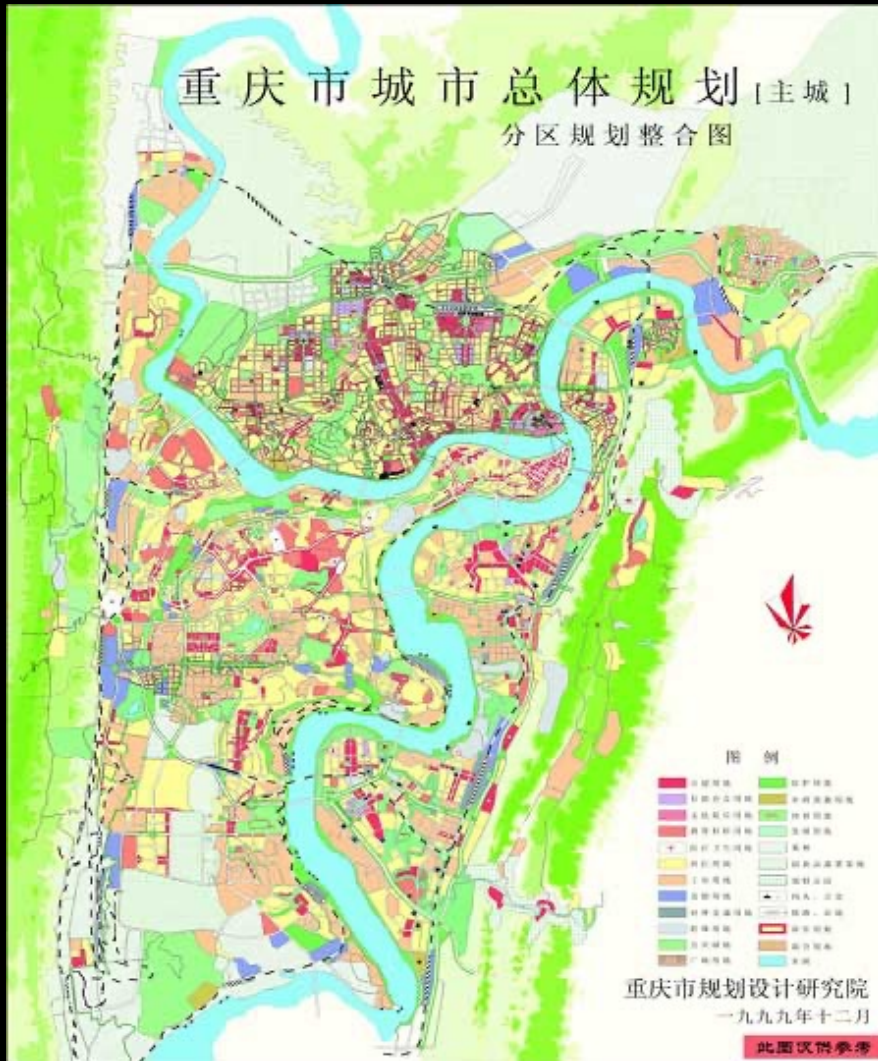
Year	Disparities within urban areas	Disparities within rural areas	Disparities between urban and rural areas
1985	3.1%	42.6%	54.3%
1990	4.4%	31.1%	64.5%
1996	8.7%	20.1%	71.2%
2004	5.7%	16.5%	77.8%
2014	8.7%	8.7%	82.6%

Li Shantong, Wang Fei, and Xu Zhaoyuan. 2016. "The Trend of Regional Income Disparity in China." Working Paper Series No. 193. RIMISP.

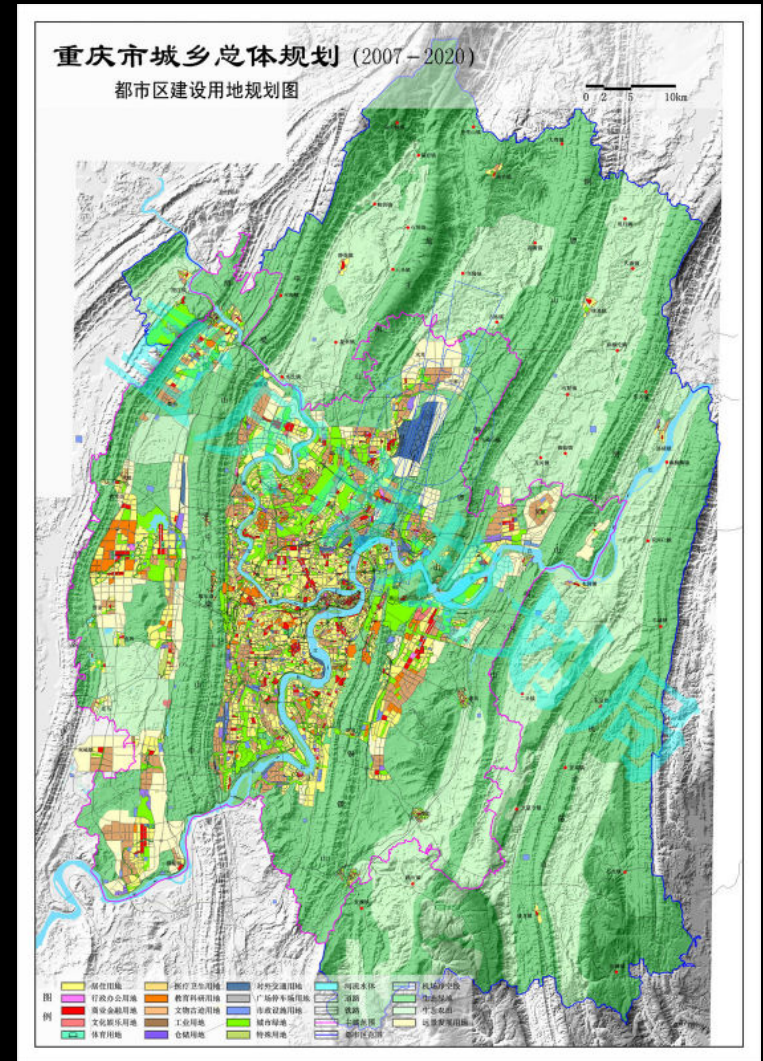
Chongqing has played an important role in China's efforts to address regional and urban-rural inequality



Municipal planning has emphasized urban expansion

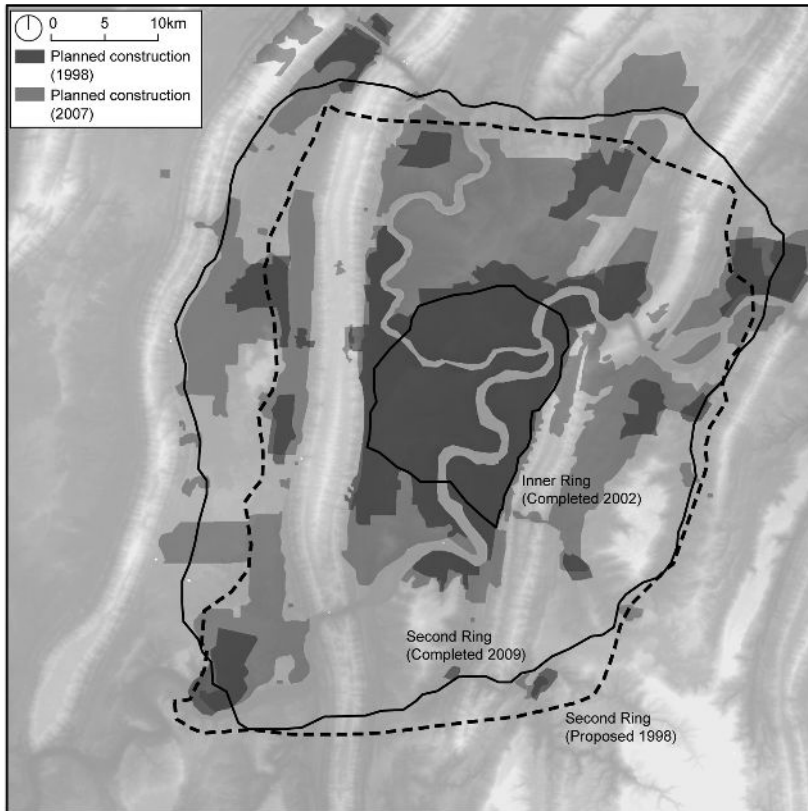


Chongqing 1998 master plan

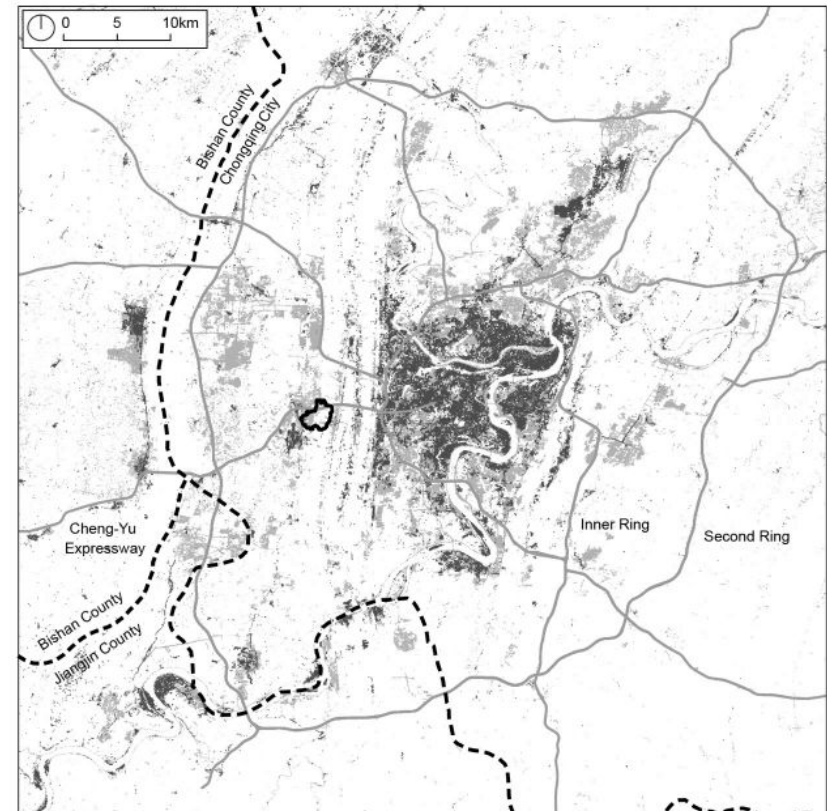


Chongqing 2007 master plan

Chongqing has rapidly expanded in terms of both population and land use

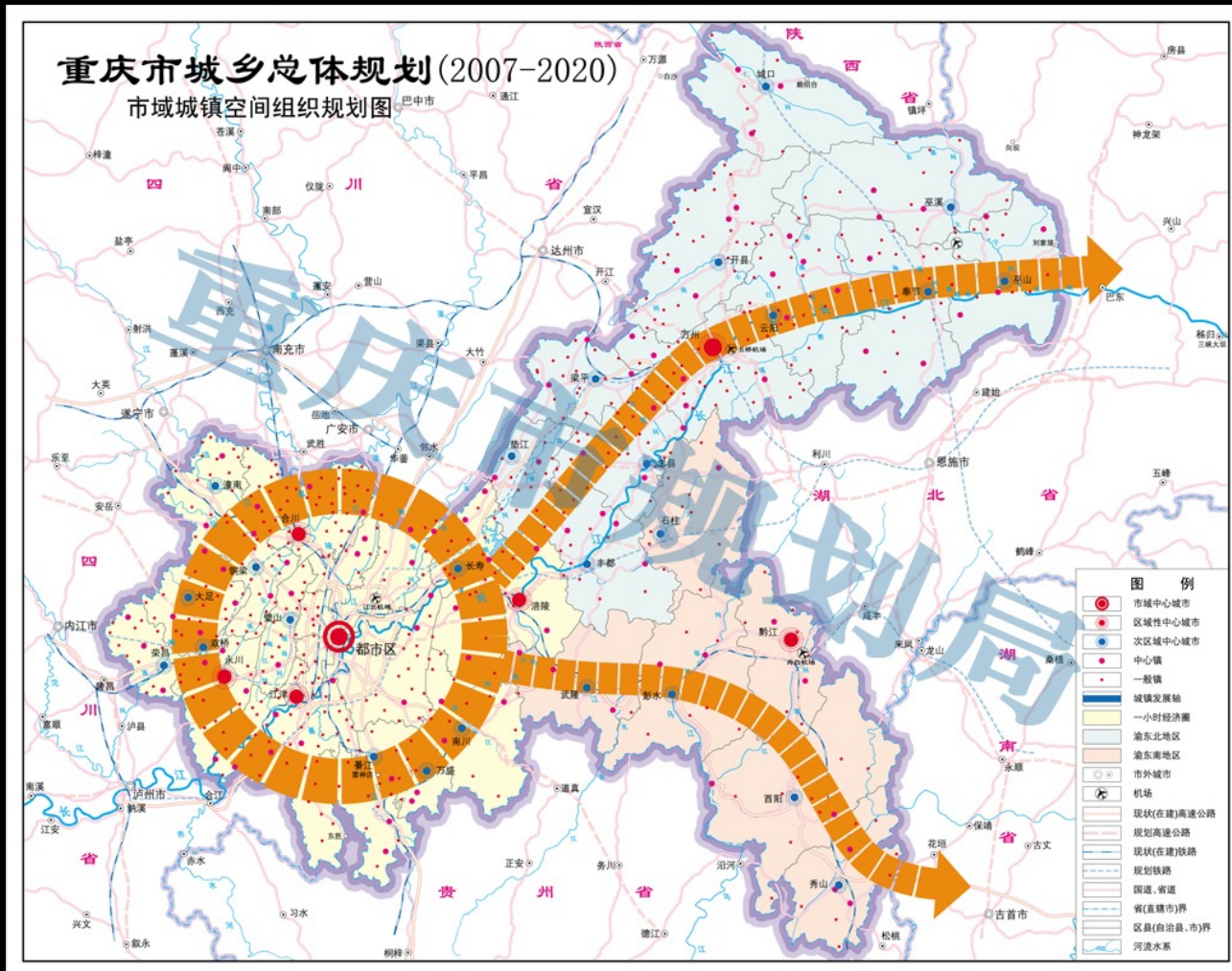


Planned urban expansion 1998 (dark gray), 2007 (light gray)



Actual urban expansion 2000 (dark gray), 2010 (light gray)

Through the “One Circle, Two Wings” strategy, Chongqing is relocating rural populations to drive urban expansion



Chongqing 2007 master plan: municipal urban space grouping plan

Chongqing has sought to become China's next "global city"



Lujiazui, Pudong, Shanghai



Jiangbeizui, Chongqing: "A global city-level CBD"

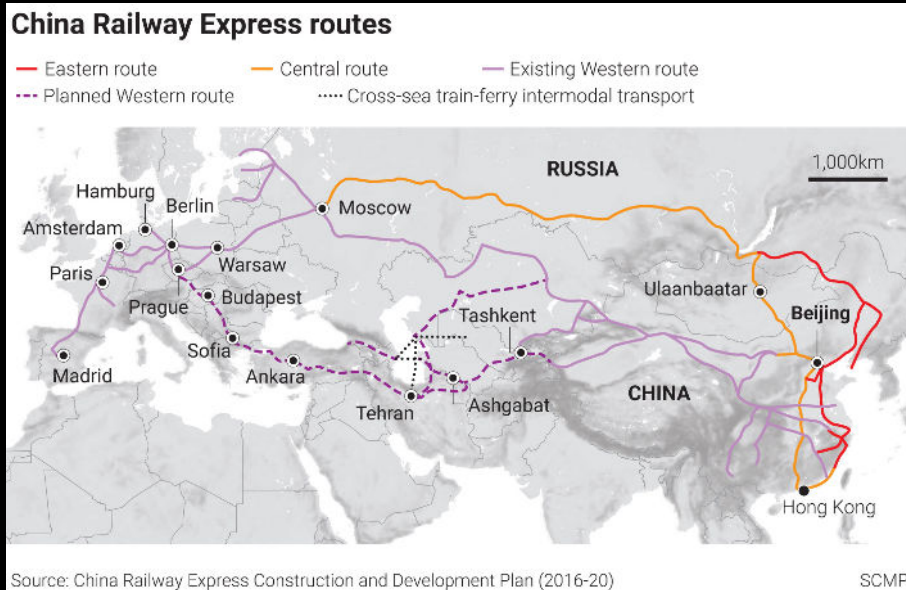


Marina Bay Sands, Singapore



Raffles City, Chongqing

Chongqing built up infrastructural connections with the Eurasian continent, launched in 2011



China Railway Express Map (South China Morning Post)



China Railway Express, 2011

China Railway Express catalyzed a more ambitious strategy to turn Chongqing into China's economic fulcrum

“One River, Two Flanks, Three Oceans”
yi jiang liang yi san yang
一江两翼三洋



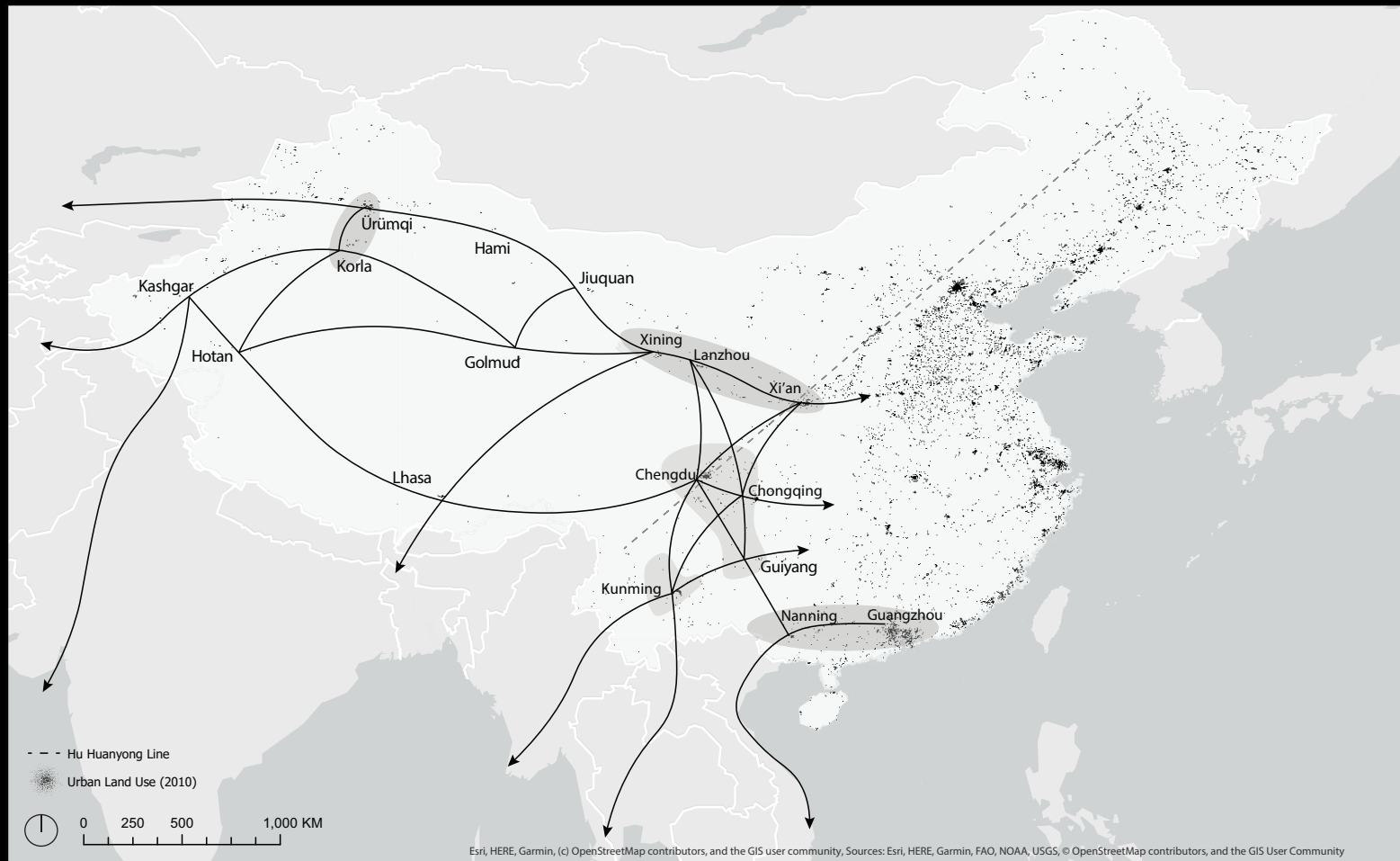
Chongqing rail connections (iChongqing)

Anticipating the two-pronged structure of the BRI, announced in 2014



Map of the BRI (The Economist)

Beyond Chongqing, the BRI has been seen as a way to boost regional urban development in China's west



The hub of which is the Cheng–Yu–Gui urban megaregion (Chengdu, Chongqing, and Guiyang)



Plan for the Cheng–Yu urban mega-region

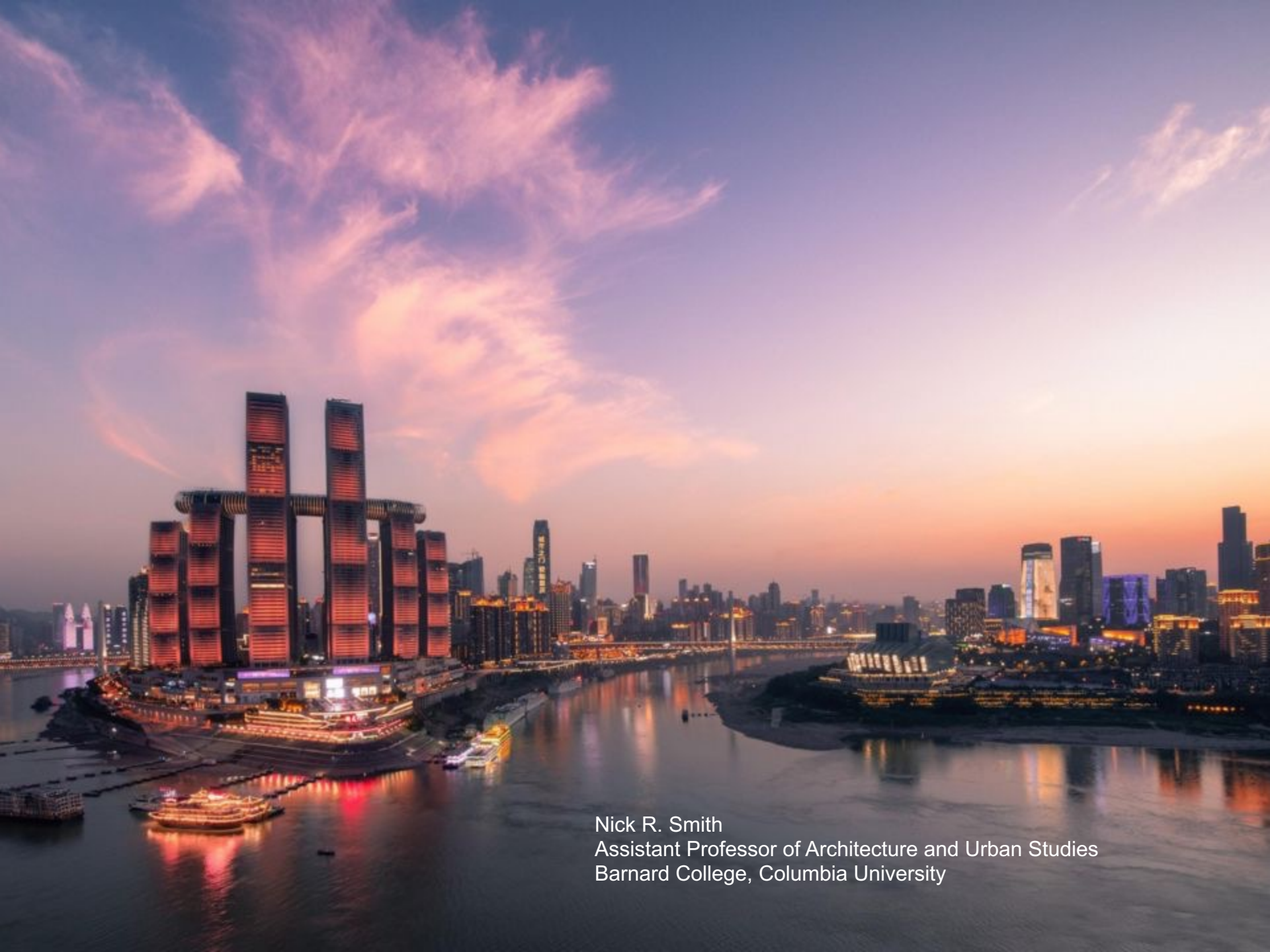


Cheng–Yu–Gui high speed rail

But these transnational infrastructures are not always good for local communities



Hailong Village, Chongqing



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