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Assembling state power through rescaling: Inter-jurisdictional development in the Beijing-Tianjin Zhongguancun Tech Town

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ABSTRACT

Recent studies have applied the explanatory framework of state rescaling to interrogate China's emergent city-regional governance. Much of the extant literature has concentrated on either the centrally driven city region-alism from above or local efforts on cross-boundary cooperation from below. Rather than simply abstracting the multi-dimensional and multi-scalar dynamics in the rescaling process around one singular state project, this paper moves forward to explore the co-existence and co-functioning of variegated rescaling processes contributing to regional governance by deploying assemblage as a heuristic approach. This paper examines an inter-jurisdictional development zone – Beijing-Tianjin Zhongguancun Tech Town in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region to provide a relational and processual understanding of scalar politics on the ground. Our analysis demonstrates how discrete and fragmented spaces and actors are assembled within a specific entity through various rescaling processes. The interplay of local, regional and national actors with different motivations gives rise to a new inter-scalar and inter-jurisdictional regulatory regime for regional industrial integration with relative coherence. This emergent governance regime is sustained and embedded in both topological and territorial political relations. This article furthers the understanding of China's city regional governance by analysing a situated assemblage. It provides an applicable perspective for investigating other *trans*-local projects and city regionalism.

1. Introduction

State rescaling has been frequently used as an explanatory theoretical reference to explain the state spatiality and urban and regional development across Western and non-Western countries, inspired by the seminal work of Jessop (2002) and Brenner (2004). However, the driving forces and concrete approaches of state rescaling are contingent on specific institutional contexts. In Western countries, the rescaling towards the city-region scale is largely driven by the crisis in capital accumulation in the context of the periodic shift from 'Atlantic Fordism' and Keynesian Welfare National State to the Schumpeter Workfare Post-national Regime (Jessop, 2002). Beyond the experience of Atlantic Fordism countries, although some general tendencies of state rescaling have also been observed in East Asian countries, the specific forms and processes of state rescaling vary due to contextual differences (Park, 2013).

In China, state rescaling is neither a response to the crisis of the Fordist-Keynesian regulatory approach nor triggered by the 'politics of distribution'. Rather, it is a crisis management of governance deficit caused by local entrepreneurialism under the decentralisation process brought by marketisation (Wu, 2016). In this regard, city regionalism has been regarded as the result of the state-orchestrated rescaling, which largely follows the territorial logic of the nation-state but involves complex scalar politics and internal contradictions shaped by the state configurations. Regional plans, jurisdictional adjustments, and regional projects such as the National New Areas have been deployed to enhance state control for selective regional development (J. Li & Chiu, 2020; Y. Li & Wu, 2012; Ma, 2005; Su, 2022). Meanwhile, bottom-up regional practices have been observed through horizontal cooperation between local governments and between the state and business (Y. Li & Wu, 2018; X. Zhang, Li, Zhou, Luan, & Yuan, 2023). The top-down approach of state rescaling has been criticised for ignoring bottom-up forces (Cox, 2009). However, bottom-up regionalism remains an ad hoc arrangement rather than a legitimised process to generate state rescaling.

Scholars have begun to realise that city regionalism orchestrated by the nation-state from above and the formation of a growth coalition from below alone cannot entirely explain the grounded process of city-region building in China (Y. Li, Chen, & Wu, 2023). China's state

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rescaling essentially involves diffused and fragmented interactions between the central and local governments and between state and non-state actors rather than a dichotomous process of centralisation and decentralisation. In this article, we examine city regionalism by combining the assemblage theory and critical political economy, using inter-jurisdictional development in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei Region as a case study. First, despite recognising the involvement of multiple actors in city-region-building, the complexity of scalar practices and concrete governance models for spatial transformation on the ground is seldom investigated. What remains unclear is the 'actual' politics in the implementation process rather than the perceived structure and mechanism. Second, the interactions between multiple actors rather than individual actors determine regional assemblages. The city-region building is not merely implicated on a national or another discrete scale but is constituted simultaneously by multi-scalar relations (Mansfield, 2005). The state should not be treated as a unitary actor. Instead, the 'elements of central, regional and local institutions' are assembled through a topological network, representing more stretched and fluid political relationships beyond territorial boundaries (Allen & Cochrane, 2007, 2010). The relational interpretations of scales and networks help to explore the ongoing arrangement of different actors and the political remaking of regional space in the case.

Following the topological accounts of state space, this research examines the process of assembling state power along with the emergent city regional governance under multiple rescaling initiatives involving multiple-dimensional and multi-layered processes. This city-region building process is constituted by topographical and topological interactions. More specifically, this research attempts to answer two related research questions. First, who are the key actors involved in city regionalism, what kind of new actors emerge and enrol, and what are their actions and programmes in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region? Second, how are the heterogeneous actants and their power and capacities mobilised and assembled within a particular locality through various rescaling? This research contributes to understanding the complex relationship between city-regional transformation and state spatiality restructuring in China. The theoretical integration of rescaling and assemblage offers a new perspective to explain how on-the-ground practices of city-regional governance are actualising in China.

2. Rescaling of the state and city regionalism in China

2.1. Theoretical origins and conceptual limitations

The theory of state rescaling was originally developed in advanced capitalist countries in the West. Driven by the changing of capital accumulation, in association with the decline of Fordism, the crisis of the Keynesian welfare state and the rise of neoliberalism, European countries have seen wide-ranging state spatiality restructuring, especially on supranational and subnational scales (Brenner, 2004). Rescaling is actively employed by the nation-state as a state strategy to 'displace or resolve crisis tendencies, to manage regulatory problems, to recalibrate power relations, and/or to establish a new geographical basis for capitalist development and political-economic governance' (Brenner, 2009, p. 68). The reorganisations of statehood occurring at various scales ranging from international to regional and local levels represent the redistribution of state power.

While the states remain active and play key roles under new state arrangements, the post-nation neoliberal states have been redefined and reconfigured in the emergence of 'inter-scalar rule regimes' (Peck, 2002). The reconfiguration process is multi-dimensional: upwards for internationalisation, downwards for denationalisation and outward rescaling for destatisation (Bulkeley, 2005; MacLeod & Goodwin, 1999). The relativisation of scale suggests scale is politically constructed (Delaney & Leitner, 1997); therefore, the ongoing politics of scale has become the focus of urban and regional governance.

One of the conceptual limits of state rescaling theory is that the theory is rooted in the experience of North American Fordism and is applied mainly in Western politico-economic contexts. To transcend this limitation, a growing body of literature focuses on its applicability and limitation in non-Western countries, such as Japan, Korea, Brazil, Turkey, India and China (Kennedy, 2017; Park, 2013). These studies underline that the specific forms of state rescaling are contingent on concrete historical, political, and social conditions beyond the general trends of state rescaling.

New forms of state rescaling have been critically examined in historical and geographical contexts in different countries, resulting in another conceptual limit. The thesis of state rescaling has been applied to non-Western contexts as a valuable framework to describe the evolution of state space and identify driving forces for state rescaling. Political democratisation, politics of regionalism, the process of social struggles, and uneven geographies of development could be the driving forces for state rescaling with distinct objectives (Park, 2013). However, less attention has been paid to the recurring state rescaling and over-layered multiple scalar practices in a constantly rescaling process (Ngo, Yin, & Tang, 2017). Another critique is that despite the relational stretch of scale, the rescaling process and multi-scalar power relations remain in a vertical hierarchical system, which failed to capture the new arrangements of state power (Allen & Cochrane, 2010). The next section will elaborate on how the thesis of state rescaling has been applied to China and how these conceptual limits have been transcended or intensified in China.

2.2. The process of state rescaling in China

The reconfiguration of state spatiality has also taken place in China. However, the reasons and consequences of using these rescaling tools are contingent on China's unique institutional and historical contexts. Most researchers have recognised historical contingency and path dependency of political-economic evolution in China (Z. Li, Xu, & Yeh, 2014; Lim, 2017; Wu, 2016). In China, state rescaling is not a response to the crisis of the Fordist-Keynesian regulatory approach. Instead, it is regarded as crisis management of governance deficit of proceeding regulatory regimes and geopolitical strategies for international competitiveness. Political and economic decentralisation by the national state in the post-reform period was the initial driving force of state restructuring. Wu (2016) develops a comparative conceptual framework of periodisation of state spatial selectivity between the West and China and claims that the city region is a new form of state spatial selectivity through state-orchestrated rescaling in China. China's state selects city-regions as privileged sites for new forms of governance to cope with the entrepreneurialism crisis under the downward rescaling brought by marketisation reform and to re-centralise state power by upward rescaling. Lim (2017) proposes an incisive analytical framework that involves place-specific policy experimentation and institutional path dependency to conceptualise the state-rescaling process in China. Su (2014) draws on the theory of state rescaling and networked polity to explain the regionalisation at Yunnan's extra-regional, inter-regional and intra-regional scales. Multi-scalar regionalisation is established and facilitated by network connections that entail state agencies and enterprises across different scales. Most of the literature has focused on state rescaling at the city-regional level and the emergence of subnational regional plans as the results of rescaling the statehood (Chen, Zhang, Li, & Zhang, 2014; Y. Li & Wu, 2012; Sun & Chan, 2017).

Others examine specific cross-boundary projects for city regionalism. For example, Su (2012) explores two transnational regionalisation projects in the Great Mekong Subregion and the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar forum by expanding on the theory of state recalling. He identifies three spatial strategies the Chinese state adopted: upward coordination with international organisations, downward implementation with local authorities and outward corporatism with state-owned and private enterprises. Similarly, Li et al. (2014) investigated the inter-jurisdictional infrastructure project for the

making of city regions in the Pearl River Delta by analysing vertical state-rescaling (upscaling and downscaling) and horizontal rescaling (statisation and destatisation). Zhang, Li, et al. (2023) explains the inter-city cooperation in the Pearl River Delta, characterised by the rescaling of the land regime, using the Shenzhen–Shanwei Special Cooperation Zone as a case.

However, the rescaling is not narrowly confined to the emergence of city regionalism but also involves practices and projects in many other spheres. For instance, large urban development projects (UDPs) such as Lingang New Town function as a tool for state rescaling, and they are employed to enhance the state's governance capacity, reassert their control and reorganise the state space, which involves cross-scalar politics between state actors and is triggered by specific tensions and conditions (J. Li & Chiu, 2020; J. Shen, Luo, & Wu, 2020). Sheng and Webber (2019) employ state rescaling as a valid lens to study the rescaling water governance in the South-North Water Transfer project upward, downward, outward and inward through the selective use of neoliberal tools. Inward rescaling means that the state may take over market functions.

Similarly, the rural development programmes in China initiated by the higher-level governments and implemented by local governments reveal the dynamic of state rescaling (M. Shen & Shen, 2018). The state regains its leading role in the countryside by interacting with multi-level governments and restructuring local state apparatus. In China, state rescaling has also taken place in the jurisdictional adjustments and administrative reranking, which complexified the power relationships within and across different levels. For example, Ma (2005) recognises the importance of the administrative level in China's political system and conceptualises the restructuring of urban administration as an adjustment of relationships between cities and counties. Introducing the provincial-leading-county system (*shenguanxian*) in Jiangsu Province involves upscaling and downscaling state power and power reshuffling among scalars in both vertical and horizontal dimensions (Luo, Cheng, Yin, & Wang, 2014). Chinese state selectively re-ranks cities to empower and disempower subnational authorities to engage in interurban competition and cooperation (Su, 2022).

2.3. Zoning as a rescaling strategy

Development zones have been designated and employed as one of the most important governance instruments by China's various levels of government since the economic reform. Initially, the nation-state established special development zones to create spaces of exception for the new form of capital accumulation and the political integration of variegated sovereignty (Ong, 2004). The special development zones involve creating special economic zones in specific regions and Special Administrative Regions in Hong Kong and Macao, termed 'zoning technologies' by Ong (2004). The zoning technologies extended to other national development zones, including economic development zones, high-tech zones, National New Areas, and free trade zones (Ngo et al., 2017). Recent national zoning strategies, such as National New Areas, often involve re-centralisation through the central state's intervention and following decentralisation to local governments for implementation, giving rise to a multi-level governance structure (L. Li, 2015). Under the centrally approved state rescaling projects, the local governments manipulate the zoning and administrative structures for microscopic rescaling at the local level. The establishment of National New Areas denotes the rescaling of state power relationships both vertically with special permission and institutional innovation and horizontally accompanying the cross-jurisdictional administrative changes (Chao & Lin, 2020).

Since the 1990s, more types of development zones have been created by local authorities at the provincial, city, county, and township levels by deploying similar zoning technologies. This phenomenon, also known as 'development zone fever', has featured the marketisation reform and fiscal reform in the devolution period (Cartier, 2001). In

addition to the economic explanation, such as land finance (Hsing, 2010) and inter-city competition, zoning technologies deployed by local authorities represent a bottom-up rescaling strategy for more jurisdictional power and resource control. Local authorities have devised zoning technologies in status rising, illicit expansion, and annexation between districts/counties and development zones (Ngo et al., 2017). Zoning has also become used as a multiple-purpose instrument of statecraft that is increasingly related to state territorialisation (Anguelov, Peck, Zhang, & Su, 2023; Cartier, 2018). Development zones have been repurposed and rescaled to pursue Greater Bay Area regionalisation, reflecting the simultaneity of centralised control and local experimentation (Anguelov et al., 2023). More specifically, development zones such as Qianhai in Shenzhen, Nansha in Guangzhou and Hengqin in Zhuhai are designated to facilitate cross-boundary flows of knowledge and capital between Guangdong and Hong Kong though innovations in land use, capital control, and regulatory framework and are mobilised to promote the central state's regionalisation projects (Anguelov et al., 2023; Zhong & Su, 2019). In China, the construction of inter-jurisdictional industrial parks has become the main form of city-to-city cooperation. In the pioneer research on inter-jurisdictional zone by Luo and Shen (2009), a joint development zone between Jiangyin and Jingjiang was induced by the growth coalition between local governments and business. Xian, Chan, and Qi (2015) identified that provincial governments play a strong role in the development of inter-jurisdictional industrial parks using Suzhou-Suqian Industrial Park as a case study. They argue that the roles and functions of provincial governments are transforming to indirect approaches in post-reform era. In more recent cross-boundary development, multi-scalar government interventions and market mechanisms based on reciprocal relationships have been employed in new speculative and experimental practices for inter-city cooperations in the Yangtze River Delta Region and Greater Bay Area (Y. Li et al., 2023; X. Zhang, Li, et al., 2023). In new governance forms and scale building processes, bottom-up innovative initiatives have been increasingly intertwined with top-down state interventions (Y. Li et al., 2023; X. Zhang, Shen, Sun, Zhou, & Yang, 2023). In sum, zones should not be merely understood as economic space through state-market relations. Still, they should be viewed as subnational territories to facilitate territorial urbanisation cum industrialisation and to enhance administrative capacity and authoritarian control (Cartier, 2018). In this regard, the relational analysis of regionalisation, territorial arrangement and zoning strategies should be advocated.

3. Framing scalar politics and practices in shifting regional assemblage

The extant studies mentioned above have demonstrated the applicability of the thesis of state rescaling in China's unique political economy and reflected the progress and limitations. To overcome its limits and shortcomings, this paper adopts assemblage thinking as a heuristic approach for analysing the multiple and overlapping rescaling strategies in the context of city-regional development. While there are tensions between the positions of structuralist political economy and poststructuralist assemblage thinking, scholars have correctly noticed the critical political economic approach to scale can leverage insights and analytical orientation from poststructuralist relational approaches (Bickerstaff & Agyeman, 2009; Keil & Addie, 2015; MacKinnon, 2011). Rather than fully integrating these two approaches, this paper is conceptually situated against the debates on the spatiality and politics of city regionalism by selectively incorporating core elements of assemblage thinking to capture the complexity of city regional transformation and state space restructuring.

The concept of 'assemblage' was principally introduced as a philosophical concept by poststructuralist thinkers Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to refer to a set of relations between heterogeneous entities that work together in particular ways at once. This Deleuzian-inspired assemblage was later reinterpreted by De Landa (2006) to an

'assemblage theory' to highlight the relational processuality of composition, the agency of human and non-human actors, and the relations of exteriority. Assemblage thinking adopts a flat ontology that emphasises a relational view of the world and a topological understanding of the space (Müller & Schurr, 2016). While assemblage-based approaches have been increasingly applied in critical human geography in many sub-disciplines (Anderson, Kearnes, McFarlane, & Swanton, 2012; Briassoulis, 2019), they are only partially linked to its philosophical usage and are generally deployed to describe a provisional collective of disparate actors (McCann & Ward, 2011; Ong & Collier, 2007; Sassen, 2006). In this sense, assemblage thinking has been mobilised in various ways, ranging from using of assemblage as a concept to a simple descriptor and ethos (McFarlane, 2011; Nail, 2017). Since the early 2000s, assemblage thinking has increasingly been utilised in situated governance studies at various spatial scales due to the conceptual affinities between governance and assemblage (Briassoulis, 2019). It has been applied to fields as diverse as geopolitics, infrastructure development, policy production and mobility, and regional governance which is of particular relevance to this paper. These studies selectively use assemblage thinking as a conceptual apparatus or methodological orientation to differing degrees, showing different readings of assemblage. For instance, assemblage has been deployed as a descriptive orientation to contribute to the socio-material transformation of the city, as a concept to conceive the agency of interaction and parts, and as a critical imaginary of progressive cosmopolitanism (McFarlane, 2011). Brenner, Madden, and Wachsmuth (2011) distinguish assemblage as a specific research object, a methodological extended framework, or an alternative ontology in relation to political economy and criticise that the adoption of assemblage as an ontology basis for critical urban studies ignores the context and structure of the broader political economy. Despite ongoing debates around the assemblage as a conceptual apparatus or ontology, scholars have agreed with the practical value of assemblage used as a methodological-analytical framework (Baker & McGuirk, 2017; Brenner et al., 2011; Castree, 2002).

Similarly, the application of assemblage theory has recently become fashionable in geography and urban studies in China, and it has varying uses. Some employ it as a broad concept or are inspired by core elements of assemblage thinking. For example, Li, Chen, and Wu (2020) adopt assemblage thinking to articulate the ongoing process of spatial production and interactions of various actors, including the market, state and society, in making suburbs in post-reform China. Shen et al. (2020) explain the horizontal networked governance of the Linggang mega project as an assemblage of state powers. Similarly, Su (2014) analyses the network connections that facilitate Yunnan's multi-scalar regionalisation and argues that the multi-scalar regionalisation is situated within an assemblage of state institutions and enterprises at various scales. Other studies radically engage with assemblage thinking in the Deleuzian sense to highlight the materiality as well as the complex relations between heterogeneous actors across places. By drawing assemblage thinking, the organisation and implementation of infrastructure projects under the Belt and Road Initiative are conceptualised as assemblages composed of both inside and outside human and material actors (Han & Webber, 2020; Rogelja, 2020). Han and Webber (2020) adopt assemblage to understand the emergence, maintenance, diffuse nature and effects of China's water machine in which governments, corporations, universities and international institutions are held together and mutually influence each other. Han, Liu, and Jiang (2024) disentangle Tesla Gigafactory in Shanghai through an assemblage-informed approach to explore the translocal politics of materialisation involving complex relationships between heterogenous actors such as government agencies, Tesla, suppliers, technological use of raw materials, land and financing.

Its applicability to regional governance and the spatiality of regional politics remains underappreciated in China. In our study, we conceptualise the regions and places as both territorial and relational at the intersection of networked topology and territoriality to unpack the complexity of emergent city-regional governance. This paper does not reject the structural constraints and downplay the importance of structural contexts in reconstructing and rescaling regional governance. Meanwhile, we have a modest aim to further examine the scalar politics from a relational and process-oriented perspective and selectively incorporate core elements of assemblage thinking to help frame the scalar politics and embodied practices as a provisional, situated, relational arrangement of heterogeneous actors in which regional governance and politics are recomposed and restabilised in the context of various conditions, actors and projects. Applying assemblage is not straightforward, but we identify the following complementary viewpoints.

First, regions and places are interpreted as assemblages composed of dissimilar and heterogeneous elements, including government agencies at multiple scales, corporations, and the enrolment of discursive and material elements like policy, infrastructure, land, and capital. Although rescaling account has already attempted to stretch the meaning of scale in association with relationality to highlight social/political construction and interpenetrating of the multi-scalar power relations, state power remains organised vertically (Amin, 2004; Brenner, 2004; Paasi, 2004). In contrast to the hierarchical and horizontal imaginary of state spatiality, the topological understanding inspired by assemblage thinking helps to capture the provisional and cross-cutting nature of political arrangements in practices and negotiate the tension between topographical and topological relations (Allen & Cochrane, 2007, 2010). To challenge regions and places as bounded, fixed and nested hierarchal territories, we argue for an emphasis on heterogeneity, multiplicity, and indeterminacy. Our research focuses not on the scale per se but on the politics and processes that occur at situated scales. The assemblage thinking does not privilege any actors or any pre-given scale. Instead, the interactions and conjunction processes of diverse actors, either state or non-state, local or extra-local, produce the assemblage as a living whole.

In China, the role of the Chinese state in the governance changes is salient (Wu & Zhang, 2022). China's political system is characterised by periodisation of power changes through a polymorphic and multi-scalar process (Anguelov et al., 2023; Wu, 2016). That means China's state rescaling essentially involves fragmented and multi-scalar interactions between the central and local governments and state and non-state actors rather than a dichotomous process of centralisation and decentralisation. It would be problematic to understand state rescaling as a mechanically centrally driven upward or downward process or a structurally coherent system. In this regard, various political actors, including the central state and local authorities and non-state actors embedded in political-economic structures, come together to reshape the spatial structure of regionalism. Their multiple and overlapping desires and interests are negotiated within the differentiated regional space.

Second, with the co-existence of diverse actors and their entanglement within the regional assemblage, the region building is an active and ongoing construction process rather than a resultant formation or output/product, which involves constant territorialisation, deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation. The use of assemblage can provide a processual perspective to avoid reductionism and structuralism. This way of thinking allows us to trace historical origins and multifaceted and layered practices by emphasising temporality and relational processuality. On the one hand, assemblage as a temporary nexus of elements is provisionally stabilised, new elements may enrol, and the historical relations may change in the process of new becoming (Anderson & McFarlane, 2011). The attention to the process constituting assemblage resonates with the periodisation of state structuration. On the other hand, the alignment process generates links between various levels of activities and disparate actors. Beyond attending to the emergence and mutation history, urban processes and spaces are produced in a 'situated assemblage' of different logics, actors, practices, and projects, which can reveal the complexity of reality (McGuirk & Dowling, 2009). The rescaling projects as actor-specific practices denote the process in the

making of assemblage and the labour of assembling, which is central to our analysis.

Existing empirical studies on state rescaling in China mostly restrain the discussions within specific state spatial projects, ranging from re-emerging city-regional governance, large urban and rural development projects, and administrative restructuring to establishing various development zones. Intragovernmental relations, contradictions, and interactions between state actors and non-state actors in project implementation, have been critically scrutinised in these typical cases. Current research has recognised the recurrence of state rescaling and investigates the dynamic rescaling process chronically. Nonetheless, spatial practices are often spatially related across different scales. Still, their interactions are ignored, especially how differential rescaling strategies deployed by multiple actors are re-articulated and reassembled into a particular locality. State rescaling has been occurring across many fronts, and therefore, disparate projects interact with each other with far and near relations. The new regional strategies indicate the reproduction of new spatial imaginary and mobilisation from the central state (Meulbroek, Peck, & Zhang, 2023). Still, its materialisation includes variegated modes of zoning and *trans*-jurisdictional projects, which are together embedded in the spatiality of the party statecraft for political, economic, social, and environmental ends (Anguelov et al., 2023; Y. Li et al., 2023; Wang, Wu, & Zhang, 2023; X. Zhang, Li, et al., 2023).

Third, by drawing assemblage thinking, we describe the composition and re-articulation of different scales of practices and their localised substantiation as a smaller assemblage in which topological networks are made and remade. The analysis of spatiality and temporality of regional assemblage consists of localised and non-localised interactive practices through localised connections (Marston, Jones, & Woodward, 2005). Assemblage thinking reconceptualises the scale in a relative way and encourages multi-scalar thinking to emphasise the relations to both larger and smaller scales (Kamalipour & Peimani, 2015; Legg, 2009). Scales are interwoven rather than hierarchically situated with presumed primacy. Inspired by this, we highlight the mutual shaping of spatial configurations within specific assemblages to avoid the limits of 'methodological nationalism' (Wimmer & Schiller, 2002) or 'methodological localism' (Brenner, 2019). The local site has become the entry point for understanding the articulation of components of different scales in relational interactions. The actors of regional assemblage also have access to local and translocal assemblage at smaller scales and different scales of assemblages form parts-wholes relations with cascading effects (DeLanda, 2016).

Recent interpretations of Chinese city regionalism have begun investigating localised practices involving cross-scale and cross-boundary politics. Multi-scalar alliances have been developed through inter-city partnerships, usually as inter-jurisdictional industrial parks (Y. Li et al., 2023; X. Zhang, Li, et al., 2023; X. Zhang, Shen, et al., 2023). The multi-scalar alliances transcend the local space and incorporate the actors spatially located in multiple localities and at multiple scales. These cases have largely been regarded as bottom-up development while the agency and interconnectedness of actors across multi-scalars have been neglected. In this paper, the national, regional, city, and local scales are not pre-determined in a vertical hierarchy. However, the actors at these scales connect and interact to form a translocal assemblage, which could be employed as a new extra-territorial expression of the spatial arrangements of components and their alignments. In the following sections, we will use an inter-jurisdictional development zone as a detailed empirical case to describe the regionalism process on the ground in the BTH region.

4. Research methods

This paper selects Beijing-Tianjin Zhongguancun Tech Town (BTZGCTT hereafter) as a case to examine the assemblage of political actors and their interactions on the ground through the combined

perspective of state rescaling and assemblage thinking. Beijing-Tianjin ZGC Tech Town (BTZGCTT) is a new development zone in the Baodi, a northwest suburban district of Tianjin, close to Beijing. It has been newly established and facilitated by the latest round of regional strategy associated with the coordinated development of Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei. It is also a part of Zhongguancun's development strategy as an enclave industrial park of ZGC for industrial relocation and an important collaborative innovation platform.

This case is selected as it gains more momentum in this context than other juxtaposed urban and regional development projects. In practical terms, this project was designated and delivered by both internal and external political actors. It requires a new approach to governance that spans different territories and coordinates different policy agendas. The case illustrates the newly formed collaborative relations and undergoing integration process. Moreover, this case has emerged as a flagship for regional cooperation. Its significance has been emphasised by many informants during fieldwork when we were scoping representative projects within the BTH region. It has also received wide media coverage and was promoted as a showcase by the official websites of stakeholders (governments, ZGC Management Committee, and development corporations), indicating its uniqueness and potential to succeed in regional integrated development.

The empirical sections rely on data collected in fieldwork in 2023 and public sources materials, including policy documents, in-depth interviews, and site visits. Interviewees were selected based on their roles and expertise. Interviews focused on the rationalities and origins, development process and progress, difficulties and challenges, key relationships and dependencies between key stakeholders, institutional arrangements, and the implications and effects of concrete policies and projects within the BTH region. We interviewed governmental officials from different levels and separate government organisations, including five from the central state agencies, three from Beijing, and five from Tianjin. Direct communication with the BTZGCTT Management Committee provides a panoramic view and detailed information on its development history and concrete practices. We also interviewed four planners and four academics who participated in relevant policymaking and research projects or conducted academic research in relevant fields. During the site visit, the staff from the management committee and local representation companies (e.g. SIASUN Robotics) offered guided tours in their exhibition halls to better understand the industrial development and the interactions between government, private businesses, and local villagers. The interviews were also supplemented and cross-checked by other policy and planning documents, related reports and statistics collected during the fieldwork or from open-source data. These materials help trace more detailed information regarding the development history, wider networks, concrete actions, and influences of central actors identified by the interview data. Moreover, we have also conducted fieldwork in Tianjin in 2018 and 2019 to investigate the role of the peripheral area in regional development, which places a historical basis for this research. Based on previous fieldwork, we have identified the implications of new regional planning on local development strategies. Meanwhile, the changes in the relative importance of peripheral areas in past few years highlight the effects of distinctive governance arrangements in our selected case.

5. New spatial imaginary of Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region

5.1. Top-down policy region and the crisis of entrepreneurial governance

Since the reforms policy, the BTH region, including Beijing, Tianjin, and Hebei Province, has developed into the third largest mega-city region with great development potential. It is centred on the capital of China, Beijing, and has a unique spatial configuration and development modality. The BTH region constitutes three provincial-level authorities, with two municipalities under the direct control of the central state, Beijing and Tianjin, as the core and Hebei Province as the hinterland.

The concept of the BTH region has been recognised by planners and policy-makers as early as the 1950s (Tang & Meng, 2021). However, its geographical scope was not fixed and was continuously redefined by various regional policies and planning with different policy agendas.

Several regional integration initiatives were launched in the 1980s and the 1990s. At the beginning of reform, the State Planning Commission, the predecessor of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), piloted comprehensive territorial planning in selected areas, including the Beijing-Tianjin-Tangshan Region, in 1981, aiming to capitalise on local resources and encourage regional cooperation through market mechanisms. Meanwhile, economic cooperation has become an increasingly important theme for regional development. The central state established the North China Economic and Technological Cooperation Region to promote horizontal economic cooperation. In addition, Beijing and Tianjin promoted voluntary economic cooperation organisations such as the Mayor Joint Conference between cities in Bohai Rim. These attempts enlarged the regional cooperation to a wider area. However, these earlier initiatives were gradually abandoned in the 1990s due to the over-ambitious plan, weak linkage and ambiguous cooperation mechanisms.

The planning practice of the BTH region continued in the 21st century. For example, Liangyong Wu from Tsinghua University proposed the 'Greater Beijing' concept and published three reports to promote cross-boundary development in the BTH region between the late 1990s and 2013 (Tang & Meng, 2021). This metropolitan development strategy also indicates Beijing's development orientation to become a global city, benchmarking against Greater London and Paris. Despite a long history in policy and planning discourse, BTH remains a top-down policy region, and its regional identity and actual functional linkages between its member cities were fragile (Interview, an academic from Peking University, 03.2023).

This is mainly caused by the downscaling of governance from a centrally planned economy to the rising localism in line with the marketisation reform. Urban entrepreneurialism has strengthened the fragmentation of governance at the regional scale due to jurisdictional-based competition (Wu, 2016). As the core cities of the BTH region, the competition between Beijing and Tianjin for being the regional economic centre has always intensified, as shown in their own planning positioning (Wang, Wang, & Kintrea, 2020). Since the reform policy, Beijing has transformed from a medium-sized socialist city in the 1980s to a global city with modern urban landscapes, dramatic spatial expansion, a comprehensive industrial system and a strong knowledge economy (Mabin & Harrison, 2023). The new crisis emerged along with Beijing's rapid expansion and development. Due to the political privilege of being the capital city, Beijing's rapid development heavily relies on the support of neighbouring cities, resulting in an uneven geography of the BTH region. For instance, Li and Jonas (2023) argue that the BTH region is essentially Beijing-centric at the expense of surrounding small towns and cities in Hebei, which produced the 'poverty belt' and 'property belt' surrounding Beijing. The increasing disparities and property boom have threatened the local long-term economic development as well as the overall competitiveness of BTH as a global city region. In sum, the tensions around territorial distributional politics have further restricted cross-boundary cooperation and produced the uneven geography of the BTH region.

5.2. Materialisation of BTH as a new national strategy

The renaissance of the BTH region was promoted by the new political leadership, Present Xi Jinping, who proclaimed the coordinated development of the BTH region as a new national strategy in 2014. The construction of the BTH region is claimed to be a regional solution to Beijing's 'urban disease' and a coordinated approach to enhance regional competitiveness. Moreover, the coordinated development approach aims to reassert the role of Beijing as the national capital through decentralising non-capital functions (Mabin & Harrison, 2023).

The decentralisation measures are implemented across various scales, including the BTH region, the Beijing metropolitan area and the core city (Tang & Meng, 2021). An integrated and coordinated imaginary of the capital city region is constructed in the latest regional plan.

The upscaling to a national strategy is a milestone for the BTH region, which manifests the changes in the structure and operations of regionalisation to cope with management crises. The 'top-level design' by the central state has recentralised its role in policy formulation and implementation. In 2015, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and State Council jointly approved the Outline of Coordinated Development of Beijing, Tianjin, and Hebei Province. The Outline Plan prioritises intergovernmental cooperation in transportation, environmental protection, and industrial integration to materialise the new spatial imaginary. In this sense, the regional plan functions as a discursive device and rescaling strategy to reinforce strategic awareness and significantly influence local development pathways (Meulbroek et al., 2023).

Regarding the implementation, policymaking and implementation have been coordinated and monitored by the central state, or more precisely, the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei Collaborative Development Leading Group, settled in the National Development and Reform Commission. Beijing, Tianjin, and Hebei Province established their own leading group for coordination with higher and lower tiers of government. The concrete projects and tasks are indeed implemented and proceeded by local governments (Interview, a government official, NDRC, 03.2023). This fact means that the inter-city partnership is still negotiated between administrative units.

The infrastructural network construction and environmental improvement in the BTH region has achieved substantial progress due to the command-and-control policies and substantial investment in public infrastructure (Interview, an academic, Beijing Forest University, 03.2023). On the one hand, the central state has outward rescaled to state-owned enterprises (SOEs) that cooperate with local authorities to finance and construct infrastructures such as high-speed railways (Z. Li et al., 2014). On the other hand, stringent and unified regulations and standards were implemented under the regional framework, and a target responsibility system was set up with clear regional and local improvement goals and responsibilities to cope with environmental degradation in the BTH (Wang et al., 2023).

Although the central state may manipulate SOEs, research institutes and public institutions' decision-making in location choice, industrial relocation, integration and upgrade remain constrained by the legacies of urban entrepreneurialism and territorial-bounded interests. First, the relocation mainly relies on top-down political mandates rather than market mechanisms. Unlike the Pearl River Delta (PRD) and Yangtze River Delta (YRD) regions, the industrial chain and supplier chain linkages between the three parts of the BTH region are relatively weak (Interview, an academic, Beijing Capital University of Economics and Business, 03.2023). Tianjin and cities in Hebei have limited resources (e. g., human capital, networks, and business environments) to undertake the relocated industries or transform innovations. It is complained that most enterprises have been relocated to the PRD and YRD region ultimately (Interview, an academic, Beijing Forest University, 03.2023).

Second, jurisdictional-bounded interests remain the major barrier to regional industrial upgrading and transferring. Although the new regional plan encourages relocating high-tech industries and research functions rather than merely high-polluted or low-end industries to Tianjin and Hebei, Beijing would prefer to relocate high-quality industrial projects to its own suburbs rather than other cities in the BTH region to secure employment and economic growth, especially in the post-pandemic period (Interview, a government official, Beijing Municipal Commission of Planning and Natural Resources, 04.2023).

Third, the ambitious policy rhetoric with ambiguous measures has created space for coordinated development and growth coalition formation in China's regional building (Meulbroek et al., 2023). The central state allows autonomy to local authorities due to path-dependency

of political system and in turn local authorities also have agency to resonate the regional strategy for entrepreneurialism governance. How to facilitate industrial cooperation and relocation has become the focal point for city-regionalism in the BTH region. Empirical analysis in the following sections is needed to explain how different interests are lodged in a wider network.

6. Scaling Zhongguancun science park: translocal expansion and connection

The predecessor of Zhongguancun (ZGC hereafter) was established in 1988 as China's first high and new technological development zone. Located in the northwestern suburb of Beijing and benefiting from a close relationship with China's most prestigious universities and research institutions, ZGC has quickly developed into a global hub of high-tech business with a strong information communication technology sector, known as China's 'Silicon Valley' (Zhou, 2005). ZGC enjoys benign capital-labour relations and has advantages in cooperation networks with local and international technological expertise, representing a variegated regional development model in China, unlike other regional development models (J. Zhang & Peck, 2016). By 2021, ZGC hosted 24,055 high-tech enterprises in six leading sectors, including information technology, green energy, bio-engineering and new materials, with over 2.5 million employees (Management Committee of Zhongguancun Science Park, 2022). It has enabled Beijing to be China's most technologically developed city, with higher R&D investment and outputs.

The institutional transformation of the relationship between China's state, indigenous firms, multinational corporations, universities, and research institutes in the ZGC has been well observed (Zhou, 2005). It is in line with the recuring of rescaling. Initially, the development of ZGC was largely driven by the entrepreneurship of indigenous technological enterprises and multinational enterprises' localisation efforts, which were motivated by marketisation reform. The state did not intervene directly until the late 1990s. In 1999, the central state approved the establishment of ZGC Science Park. In 2009, the State Council further promoted ZGC as the first National Innovation Demonstration Zone and initiated a new round of institutional reform. As a result, the Management Committee of ZGC was raised to a municipal-level, government-extended organisation and shared the same institution with the Beijing Municipal Science and Technology Commission. Over the last two decades, ZGC has continuously expanded, and the demonstration zone area has enlarged from the original experiment zone covering an area of 100 km^2 in Haidian District to annex multiple discrete parks in Beijing with an area of 488 km^2. Therefore, ZGC has established 16 spatial separated subordinary zones under the banner of "multiple parks under one zone" (Ngo et al., 2017). The subordinary zones under the direct control of the Management Committee of Zhongguancun Science Park have independent relations in terms of management, personnel, and finance (Interview, a government official from BTZGCTT Management Committee, 05.2023).

As the National Innovation Demonstration Zone, ZGC is also expected to take advantage of its autonomy and preferential policies to explore new mechanisms of regional cooperation and, hence, to promote industrial and innovation chain integration. A more recent rescaling strategy ZGC employs is establishing collaborative industrial parks in the BTH region and other areas across China, aiming to enhance its innovation capacity and demonstration effects. By 2021, ZGC has cooperated with 26 local authorities and established 27 enclave industrial parks (Management Committee of Zhongguancun Science Park, 2021). This measure has facilitated the outflow of new technology and promoted industrial collaboration and complementation between ZGC and local governments.

Compared to subordinary zones in Beijing, enclave industrial parks outside Beijing are organised in a more flexible and diversified governance structure. Despite limited support from ZGC, local industrial parks

remain keen to operate under the ZGC brand and develop strategic cooperation with ZGC due to its privileged political status and administrative capacity. ZGC has also been mobilised by the central state to actively promote the coordinated development of the BTH region through building cross-boundary industrial parks in this region (Interview, a government official, Beijing municipal development and reform commission, 04. 2023; Interview, an academic, Beijing Capital University of Economics and Business, 03.2023). Within the BTH region, ZGC has established several collaborative industrial parks of different sizes and degrees of involvement in Tianjin and Hebei. The collaborative industrial parks can facilitate industrial relocation, disseminate new technology and management experience, and promote local place image (Interview, an academic, Beijing Capital University of Economics and Business, 03.2023).

Both internal and external expansion and collaboration are mainly proceeded by ZGC Group with the participation of SOEs affiliated with the central state. As the development corporation of ZGC, ZGC Group is responsible for investment, technology and finance services, and industrial park construction and operation. In 2015, Zhongguancun Group, China Merchants Group, and China Communications Construction Group jointly established a new platform corporation, Zhongguancun Coordinated Development Investment Corporation (Z-Link+), to engage in deep regional cooperation (Fig. 2). Since its establishment, it has promoted inter-jurisdictional industrial parks in several cities within and outside the BTH region. Among these projects, BTZGCTT is listed as one of the most successful cases. To what extent can this industrial cooperation project or platform elicit genuine cooperation between Beijing and Tianjin? How do ZGC and its development corporations as external actors intersect with local actors? These will be examined in the next section.

7. An inter-jurisdictional assemblage: the Beijing-Tianjin Zhongguancun tech town

This section interprets the interactions between actors in the development process of an inter-jurisdictional development zone. It investigates the co-existing and co-functioning of multiple rescaling projects in this locality through the lens of *trans*-local assemblage. The state at both central and local levels, management committees, corporations and their power, knowledge and resources are assembled to form new political arrangements for cross-boundary development, aiming to promote city regionalism in the BTH. The emergence and transformation of BTZGCTT reflect the changes in membership, deterritorialised and reterritorialised relationships and reshaped spatial linkages.

7.1. Assembling state power in BTZGCTT

The BTZGCTT project is a new development zone adjacent to Baodi New Town and Baodi Economic and Technological Development Zones (Fig. 1). Different from these two locally promoted projects, the formation of this project involves multiple actors in and outside Tianjin. The initial scheme of BTZGCTT can be traced back to 2013, and it was finally launched after a three-year negotiation between ZGC and the Baodi District Government (Interview, a government official from BTZGCTT Management Committee, 05.2023). A bilateral cooperation agreement has been signed between ZGC and the Baodi District Government to legitimise the division of labour, respective responsibilities, benefit redistribution, cooperation model, etc. In this sense, the establishment of BTZGCTT is largely driven by an ensemble of state actors.

The development of BTZGCTT benefits from two national strategies, namely the coordinated development of the BTH region and the establishment of the Zhongguancun National Innovation Demonstration Zone. The rationale behind the project is associated with the requirement of Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei collaborative development. Meanwhile, Zhongguancun also wants to create new space for its

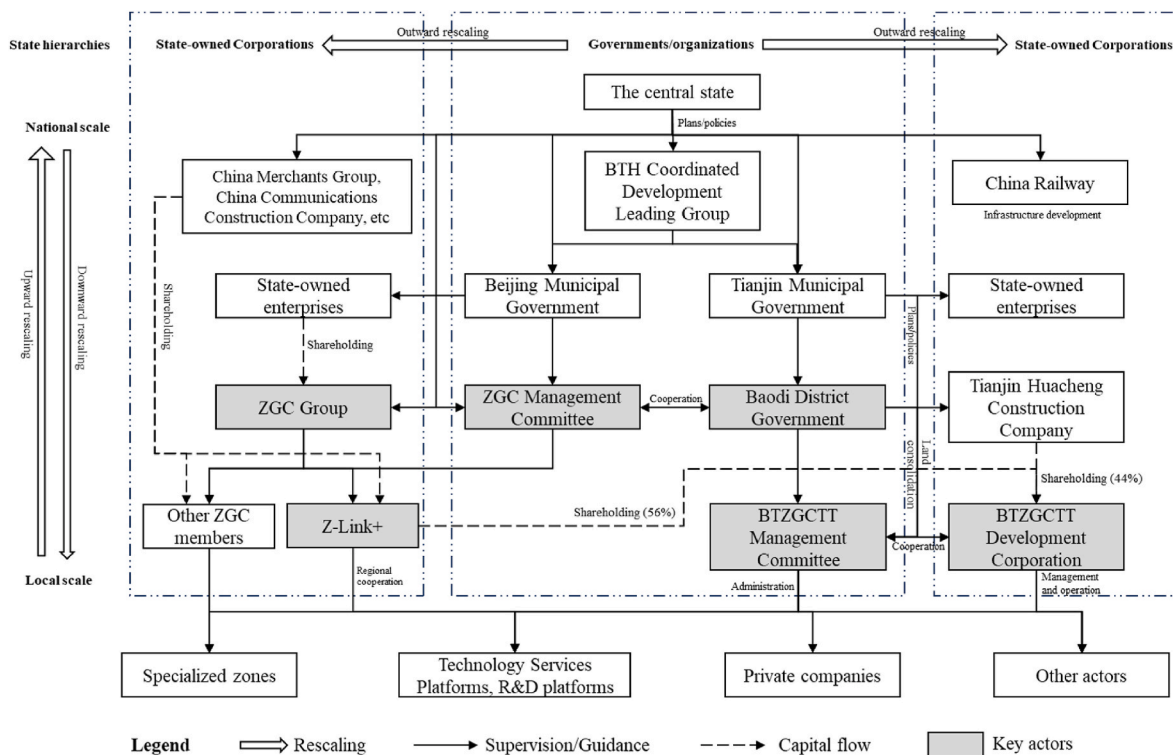Fig. 1. Digital and physical sand table of BTZGCTT. Source: Photo taken by authors, 04. 2023.

Fig. 2. Assembling state power through multi-directional rescaling processes in BTZGCTT.

own development. Considering our strategic location and cheaper land and labour costs, ZGC finally decided to cooperate with Baodi to co-develop an industrial park. (Interview, a government official from BTZGCTT Management Committee, 05.2023)

The state agencies include the central state, municipal and district governments, state-owned corporations, management committees, and affiliated development corporations (Fig. 2). The central state does not

dominate but influences its emergence significantly. First, the central state upscaled the governance to a regional scale and built a coordinated spatial imaginary. In this way, it mobilised resources and lower-tier government actors to act in city-region building. The national political mandates have facilitated the bottom-up cooperation between ZGC and Baodi. Second, the ZGC National Innovation Demonstration Zone is a centrally sanctioned and supervised form of 'local' experimentation with

greater autonomy. The central state co-opts ZGC as one of the leading actors in facilitating regional cooperation. Third, the central state legitimised local experimentation in the BTZGCTT through follow-up policy endorsement. For example, BTZGCTT has been listed as one of the most important collaborative innovation platforms in an industrial integration implementation plan to guide industrial relocation and innovation cooperation in the BTH region, which is jointly formulated and published by several ministries of the central state and governments of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei (Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, 2016). Fourth, the central state outward scaled responsibilities to its affiliated state-owned enterprises, who work with local authorities to construct regional infrastructure and provide funding support. The operation of Jing-Tang and Jing-Bin Inter-city Railways has significantly improved Baodi's locational advantage and enhanced the connectivity between Beijing and Baodi.

To align with the national political mandates and new national strategies, local governments increasingly enforce top-down initiatives and, at the same time, intertwine their own development agenda with national strategies through new spatial practices and institutional innovation, owing to the path dependency of the hierarchical political system and the strengthened national state intervention or party-state discipline under President Xi's regime. As introduced earlier, ZGC has strived to develop strategic cooperation outside Beijing to enhance its leading role in innovation and promote demonstration effects in line with continuous upscaling. BTZGCTT is the first and the only one of the existing collaborative industrial parks in which ZGC has made substantial investment (Interview, a government official from BTZGCTT Management Committee, 04.2023). Baodi is selected to experiment with ZGC's new development model for regional cooperation due to its advantageous location as the geographical centre of Beijing, Tianjin and Tangshan, with the potential to be integrated into the Beijing Metropolitan Region. Moreover, although Baodi District is a relatively less-development area, it has abundant land resources, improved physical connectivity, and streamlined administrative ranks. ZGC, therefore, can intervene in its planning, construction and management throughout the development process, as guaranteed by the cooperation agreement.

The central state's rescaling strategy has influenced the spatial strategies of Tianjin, which is explicitly reflected by its new planning discourses (Wang et al., 2020). The peripheral areas between Tianjin and Beijing, such as Wuqing and Baodi, have been motivated to seek new development opportunities in the name of regional cooperation. The BTZGCTT stood out from these projects and received more attention from political leaders of Tianjin (Interview, a government official from Wuqing Development Zone, 04. 2023; Interview, a government official from BTZGCTT Management Committee, 04.2023).

The competitiveness of BTZGCTT is mainly derived from the support of ZGC, Tianjin municipal governments, Baodi district government and newly created actors. Baodi district government set up this new development zone to raise its political status and promote local economic development by creating taxation and employment. It made great efforts to complete village demolition and relocation work in the early phase and to ensure the actual development following the original plan. As the official from the management committee introduced,

> Wuqing has advantages similar to ours, but it lacks a development land quota. Baodi demolished old villages and expropriated and consolidated land very quickly while implementing the Shanty Area Rebuilding policy in Tianjin. Then, we purchased land from the Baodi District Government at the market rate (Interview, a government official from BTZGCTT Management Committee, 05.2023).

However, due to new planning regulations, around half of the planned area will be withdrawn during the making of the new spatial territorial plan (Interview, a government official from Baodi District Government, 04.2023). The district government has prioritised the development of BTZGCTT and finally successfully squeezed more land quotas elsewhere to keep the original plan.

The formation and maintenance of BTZGCTT involves interactions between state actors and manifests the rescaling process in various ways and directions (Fig. 2). First, the BTZGCTT initially devised a programme-tailored governance regime involving heterogeneous actors. In doing so, the BTZGCTT, as a newly established space of exception in Baodi, is a relatively independent and privileged political entity in management and operation. It can intersect on multiple scales, cut across the government hierarchy in decision-making, and externally mobilise political and economic resources.

Second, under the banner of ZGC, the BTZGCTT has been quickly upscaled to the national high-tech development zone status (Fig. 2). The new application and approval have become increasingly difficult, let alone a new development zone. This upscaling is closely related to its governance innovation and deep engagement of ZGC as a platform corporation. As a result, BTZGCTT has autonomy in manipulating preferential policies and privileges of ZGC, conditional on its own capacity and demands (Interview, a government official from BTZGCTT Management Committee, 05.2023).

Third, the BTZGCTT has been recognised by upper-level governments as one important platform for innovation and industrial cooperation between Beijing and Tianjin. Political power and resources that belong to the Tianjin Municipal Government have been devolved to the management committee of BTZGCTT (Fig. 2). Many new preferential policies in Tianjin were first trailed and customised for high-tech enterprises in the BTZGCTT, such as the Hai River Talent Policy. Tianjin government also gives us special privileges on land approvals. The land transfer plan only needs approval from Baodi District Government; once approved, the land can be leased. We are also keen to provide effective administrative service to new investors. We guarantee that the enterprises can start construction immediately once they purchase land and put it into production immediately after completion (*nadi ji kaigong, jungong ji touchan*). Moreover, we also achieve the mutual recognition of high-tech enterprises between Beijing and Tianjin to avoid a cumbersome verification process during relocation. (Interview, a government official from BTZGCTT Management Committee, 04.2023).

7.2. Governance innovations in operation

BTZGCTT has been constructed from scratch within a very short period. The substantial construction started in 2017 after completing village demolition land acquisition tasks. The construction of BTZGCTT is divided into four phases, with a total planned area of 14.5 km^2. It was positioned as not just an industrial park for cross-boundary industrial collaboration between ZGC and Baodi but also a new technology town with a residential function in the south (Fig. 1). It is projected that BTZGCTT will create 120,000 jobs and accommodate 80,000 residents after complete construction.

Its operation has enrolled many new actors, including the newly established management committees and development corporations in practice. BTZGCTT is significant to multiple governments because of its size, development speed, and, more importantly, the unique institutional setting. As a local development project, its governance structure consists of a management committee and affiliated state-owned development corporations, the common governance apparatus under state entrepreneurialism (J. Shen et al., 2020). Market instruments, including the land-centred development model, remain at work locally. However, BTZGCTT is evolving towards a *trans*-local assemblage in which heterogeneous and discrete actors are connected, and the capacities of BTZGCTT are gained through the interactions between its members (Fig. 2).

First, the institutional arrangement involves extra-local stakeholders within and beyond the multi-level states. The extra-local and local actors work together to reshape the local state space. Given that the new development may involve cross-boundary communications and negotiation, joint conferences with the attendance of leaders from the ZGC Management Committee, Baodi District Government, ZGC Group, and

local development corporations are regularly organised to make strategic decisions and deal with the conflicts and tensions during cross-boundary cooperation (Fig. 2). ZGC and Baodi District Government would not interfere with concrete affairs, but they implement their implications through subsidiary institutions. The management committee is an ad hoc extension body of the Baodi District Government for project administration. It retains the approval power and outsources the development and management rights to development corporations to deliver the project in practice. Under this governance framework, a political network is formulated and embedded in Baodi to facilitate translocal linkages between central actors.

Second, the joint venture development corporation, Tianjin Jing-Jin Zhongguancun Tech Town Development Corporation, was purposely established to safeguard ZGC's power for zone management within a 30-year cooperation period. This new development corporation is responsible for formulating and implementing development plans, attracting investment, managing industrial projects, and developing urban infrastructure. It is operated by joint ventures of Z-Link$^+$ and a state-owned corporation affiliated with the Baodi District Government (Fig. 2). Z-Link$^+$ holds 56 percent of the shareholding by cash investment and plays the dominant role in the management and operation (Interview, a government official from BTZGCTT Management Committee, 04.2023).

This special arrangement can form a reciprocal relationship between ZGC and local governments and simultaneously avoid local governments' impediments to regional cooperation for their short-term political or economic interests. On the one hand, ZGC is not driven by extracting profit, and its primary object is to facilitate cross-boundary cooperation to implement national rescaling strategies with political values. BTZGCTT is a well-designed project that can realise self-balancing. With the initial investment by Z-Link$^+$, the leading role in innovation and demonstration effects for regional coordinated development of ZGC can be enhanced through developing a development model featured by 'Innovation in ZGC, Transformation in Baodi'. On the other hand, the development corporation develops an effective benefit-sharing mechanism through shareholding. The Management Committee of the BTZGCTT retains most of the revenues generated by the new development, such as land and tax revenue. ZGC can profit from providing professional services in the industrial park operation. As the government official from the management committee mentioned,

> We are responsible for the primary land development and entrust the platform corporation for the subsequent operation and management. The platform corporation attracts new industrial projects and develops infrastructure projects. We pay for their professional services and commission fees according to the investment scale. The tax income will be retained by the Baodi District Government. As far as I know, sharing tax revenues across provincials remains impossible. There is no legal foundation for this measure. Moreover, the brand effects of ZGC will cause land appreciation, which is also a primary source of income for us. We hope the land revenue and tax income can sustain the development of the BTZGCTT in a virtuous cycle. We paid the platform corporation as much as possible to balance the interests of ZGC (Interview, a government official from BTZGCTT Management Committee, 05.2023)

Third, the subtle governance innovation with a clear division of labour has facilitated specialisation and cooperation between *trans*-local states and non-state actors. Rather than performing as a revenue generator, the jointly established development corporation performs more like a broker, a consultant, and a professional manager to bridge the governments, private businesses, research institutes, etc. ZGC has introduced its own innovation resources and relocated many industrial projects to BTZGCTT. For example, ZGC Medical Device Park, another member of ZGC Group, has also established a new branch zone in BTZGCTT. Based on cooperation with ZGC, BTZGCTT has also gained the capacity to liaise with other actors, including research institutes, universities, incubators, technical service platforms and private

businesses, to promote innovation cooperation (Fig. 2). This will solve local companies' development problems and enhance the development zone's attractiveness to potential newcomers.

BTZGCTT has evolved from villages into an embryonic technopole for industrial integration in the BTH region. The first phase, with an area of 4.19 km^2, has been completed, and the second phase, with an area of 5.2 km^2, has started construction. By the end of 2023, over 1500 market entities were registered at BTZGCTT (The Beijing News, 2024). The representative high-tech enterprises such as SIASUN, LabTech, SINNET, and HCCCAP, whose headquarters or R&D centres are based in Beijing, have built up their new production bases in BTZGCTT. Most high-tech companies have integrated into Beijing's industrial chain and supply chain. The built environment has changed significantly. Modern office buildings and factories have sprung up (Fig. 3). Key public facilities, including Nankai Middle School, public library, and ecologic parks, have been under construction to improve urban function.

Overall, the construction of BTZGCTT represents a localised articulation of various actors and their actions through rescaling. The governance innovation in operation has formed a provisionally stabilised *trans*-local assemblage and generated the capacity to deepen inter-jurisdictional cooperation. It is still an ongoing project with the potential of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation. In 2023, Z-Link$^+$ moved to BTZGCTT to show their determination on this project (The Beijing News, 2024). New actors and investors will participate in its future development.

8. Discussion and conclusion

This paper has pursued a critical engagement with rescaling theory and city regionalism in China by selective combination of the assemblage theory and critical political economy, using an inter-jurisdictional development in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei Region as a case study. Inter-jurisdictional development zones in China present a typical case for the city regional governance and state spatiality changing. We examine the creation and operation of BTZGCTT in the BTH region to explore how variegated rescaling strategies are designated and initiated by different political actors and how discrete and fragmented spaces and actors are assembled within a specific entity through a range of state rescaling processes. This research demonstrates that the ideas of assemblage thinking can help in understanding the scalar politics and practices in the remaking of city regions through a combination of relationality and territoriality.

We argue that the establishment of BTZGCTT is not singularly driven by the new regional strategy launched by the central state nor the bottom-up scaling jumping initiatives. Rather, the emergence and operation of BTZGCTT involve multiple projects and multiple actors that consist of a *trans*-local assemblage beyond the locality, which contributes to and is constrained by a shifting regional assemblage. The interplay of local, regional and national actors with different motivations creates a new inter-scalar and inter-jurisdictional regulatory regime for regional industrial integration with relative coherence. Based on this informative case, we illustrate the efforts of assembling different actors through the variegated directions of state rescaling and unfolding the localised articulations. We highlight that the interactions between these actors are integral to the ongoing political construction of cross-boundary governance. In other words, regional or territorial management and local development were drawn together to assemble a new approach to materialise city regionalism. Cooperative relationships around the project provisionally sustain the new governance regime.

The assemblage-inspired approach highlights the relational complexity of the state-rescaling process in China under its political economy. We observe the vertical and horizontal disaggregation of the state and the networked interactions within and across territorial boundaries and multiple scales, resembling the 'networked polity' as a new form of regional governance in Europe (Amin, 2004; Ansell, 2000). The findings also echo and advance the extant research on
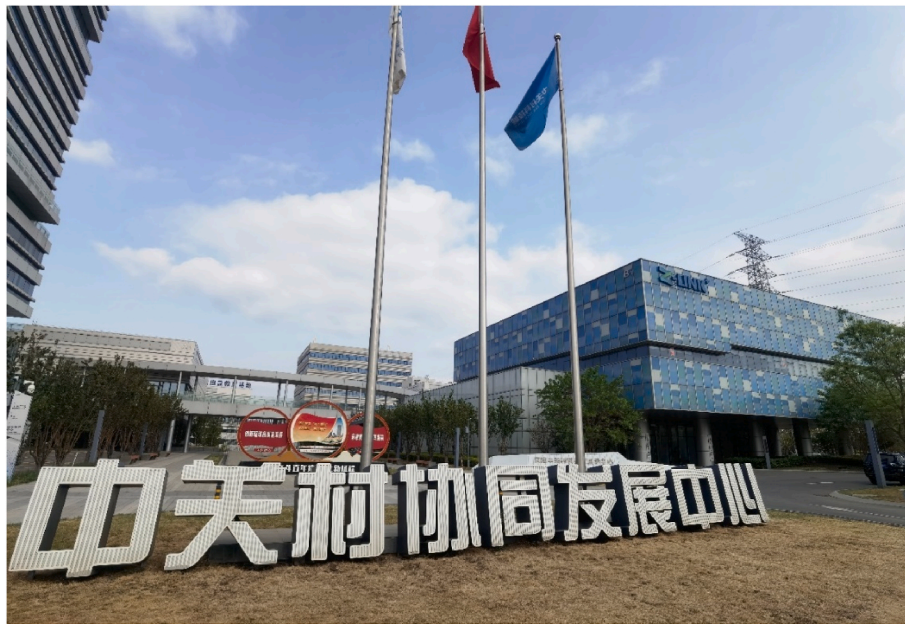
Fig. 3. Zhongguancun Coordinated Development Centre Buildings in the BTZGCTT. Source: Photo taken by authors, 04. 2023.

inter-jurisdictional industrial parks in the context of China's regional development in China (Y. Li et al., 2023; X. Zhang, Li, et al., 2023). Under the state entrepreneurialism governance framework, the city region building involves two intertwined processes: 'centrally orchestrated regional imaginary and regional cooperation through multiple alliances' (Y. Li et al., 2023, p. 12). The governance model and cooperation mechanism in inter-jurisdictional industrial parks in different regions vary. For example, the inter-jurisdictional industrial park co-developed by Shenzhen and Shanwei in the Pearl River Delta revolves around a rescaled regional land regime (X. Zhang, Li, et al., 2023), while in the Yangtze River Delta, local governments of other cities set up a collaborative technological park in Shanghai by their development corporations. Our case demonstrates the broader actors across multiple sites and scales engaging in and co-functioning in an inter-jurisdictional development zone and highlights their emergence, heterogeneity, interdependency, and contingency.

The findings also have significant policy implications on city regionalism in China. First, while the salient role of the central state in regional development in China has been referred to (Y. Li & Wu, 2012; Wu & Zhang, 2022), we also want to emphasise the importance of their interactions with local and regional actors. Rather than imposing top-down command and control or governance afar, national actors work with extra-local and local actors in new territorial formation. The local actors have agency and autonomy to promote city regionalism to realise their agendas more innovatively. Policy interaction and interdependency across different scales is increasingly critical to materialise city regionalism. Second, the new interpretation enables us to realise the diversity and possibility. The multiple and diverse interests and activities contribute to the new governance regime. Therefore, there is no explicit template to replicate in other sites or situations. By learning from the emergence and maintenance of BTZGCTT, more diversified experiments can be trialled to assemble heterogeneous actors coherently through rescaling.

The application of assemblage as a heuristic approach has three implications on regional governance in the Chinese context and can potentially guide future empirical research. First, assemblage thinking argues for topological politics to capture the changing geography of state power that political actors are 'logged' within the region (Allen & Cochrane, 2007, 2010). The combined perspective allows us to investigate relationally intertwined dimensions of geography such as place,

territory, scale, and network together (Jessop, Brenner, & Jones, 2008) to explore how they are crossed and reworked for city-region building. The scale should be understood as a dimension, and 'multiple scales work together as relational processes' (Mansfield, 2005, p. 468). State hierarchies are more or less present within urban and regional political structures due to institutional structure, not scale (Allen & Cochrane, 2010, p. 1074). Future research can investigate the relational politics of regionalism and focus on the interrelationships and embeddedness of a range of actors.

Second, in drawing attention to the co-existence of heterogeneous elements and the constitutive interactive processes, our research clarifies the institutional complexity of intra-state relationships and their interplays with non-state actors, including development corporations, private businesses and research institutes. Assemblage thinking allows us to go beyond the binary of the central and the local, the state and the market, the social and the material, and instead to emphasise both the agency of the actors at multiple scales and the agency of their interactions that co-function in city regional governance in practices. We focus on assembling state power in this paper. In the future, more actors, such as regional firms and regional innovation networks, engaging in regional development can be coded as parts. The role of materiality also merits further comments for new interpretations on regional land regimes (X. Zhang, Li, et al., 2023), water and air governance (Wang et al., 2023), and cross-boundary infrastructure delivery (Z. Li et al., 2014).

Third, the grounded investigations at the local/smaller scale can enrich the nuanced understanding beyond the totality of readings of city regionalism in China. Nowadays, Chinese-style regionalisation is being pursued by localised zoning strategies rather than by formal regional institution-building (Anguelov et al., 2023). The local has gone beyond territorially defined political entities, tangled the boundary between the urban and region, and generated variegated landscapes and governance modalities. City regionalism occurs at multiple sites, scales and fields within and beyond the region. In this context, different policies, projects and actors are linked together through interdependent relations. Informed by the concept of 'assemblage of assemblages' (DeLanda, 2016), more on-the-ground research on diversified and innovative local practices is needed, and the extra-local actors, *trans*-local flows and interactions with other larger assemblages are subject to more attention.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Weikai Wang: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Fulong Wu:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Project administration, Funding acquisition. **Fangzhu Zhang:** Supervision, Project administration, Funding acquisition.

Declaration of competing interest

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