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Political, Economic and Social Dominance of Major Cities in East Asia During the Twentieth Century

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Abstract

One of the greatest shifts in human societies has been the change from dispersed settlement patterns toward a complex urban pattern. Prior to the industrialization there were only a few urban places scattered throughout the world and none could compare with numerous cities of today with respect to size and complexity. In recent decades the growth of cities in Asia has been particularly remarkable as there has been an increase in the number of medium sized cities and the growth of a number of mega cities. This urbanization of the world's population has corresponded with other fundamental changes in human society although the relationship between urbanization and other social changes differ for time periods and regions of the world. Among the other changes were the transition from an agricultural toward a diverse economic structure and tremendous increases in population size along with declines in birth and death rates. Many researchers view these changes as being interlocked in a complex set of reciprocal causal relationships. This paper reviews explanations of urbanization with a focus on the emergence of mega cities and their

relationship to smaller cities and to national levels of economic development. Special attention is given to literature on primate cities and to whether such cities hinder economic development for Asian societies.

Introduction:

Humans have lived in cities for more than 5,000 years. Interestingly, cities appear to have developed independently in the different regions of the world. Urban researchers have suggested that the two most critical factors for the development of cities were a surplus of food and the emergence of forms of social organization that were not based on the family system (Sjoberg 1960). The surplus of food freed some individuals to pursue non food producing activities. Forms of social organizations that were not based on close kinship relationships evolved as a way for individuals in this simple but diversifying economy to exchange surplus products with one another. Whereas food production could best be pursued in sparsely settled areas it is likely that people in new non food producing activities found it more suitable to live together in more dense settlements. In larger settlements individuals could exchange ideas and learn new trades from one another as well as form centers in which trading could proceed. These centers also led to further increases in food surpluses by providing a desirable way for producers to get rid of surpluses and by providing knowledge and technology needed for advances in agriculture. Over time the reciprocal nature of this relationship allowed and perhaps stimulated the growth of more and more cities and an increase in the size of existing cities.

The spread of cities during preindustrial times, whether by diffusion or by independent developments, was an essential step on the way to the massive increases in urbanization that have characterized the last one hundred fifty years. Early cities were small in size with few having more than several thousand people and a small percentage of the total population in even the most urban areas of the world was small. It was not until the after 1800 that the size of cities increased dramatically

(Davis 1965). At the beginning of the 1800s only two percent of the worlds population lived in cities and none of the cities that existed even at this point in time had reached more than one million people.

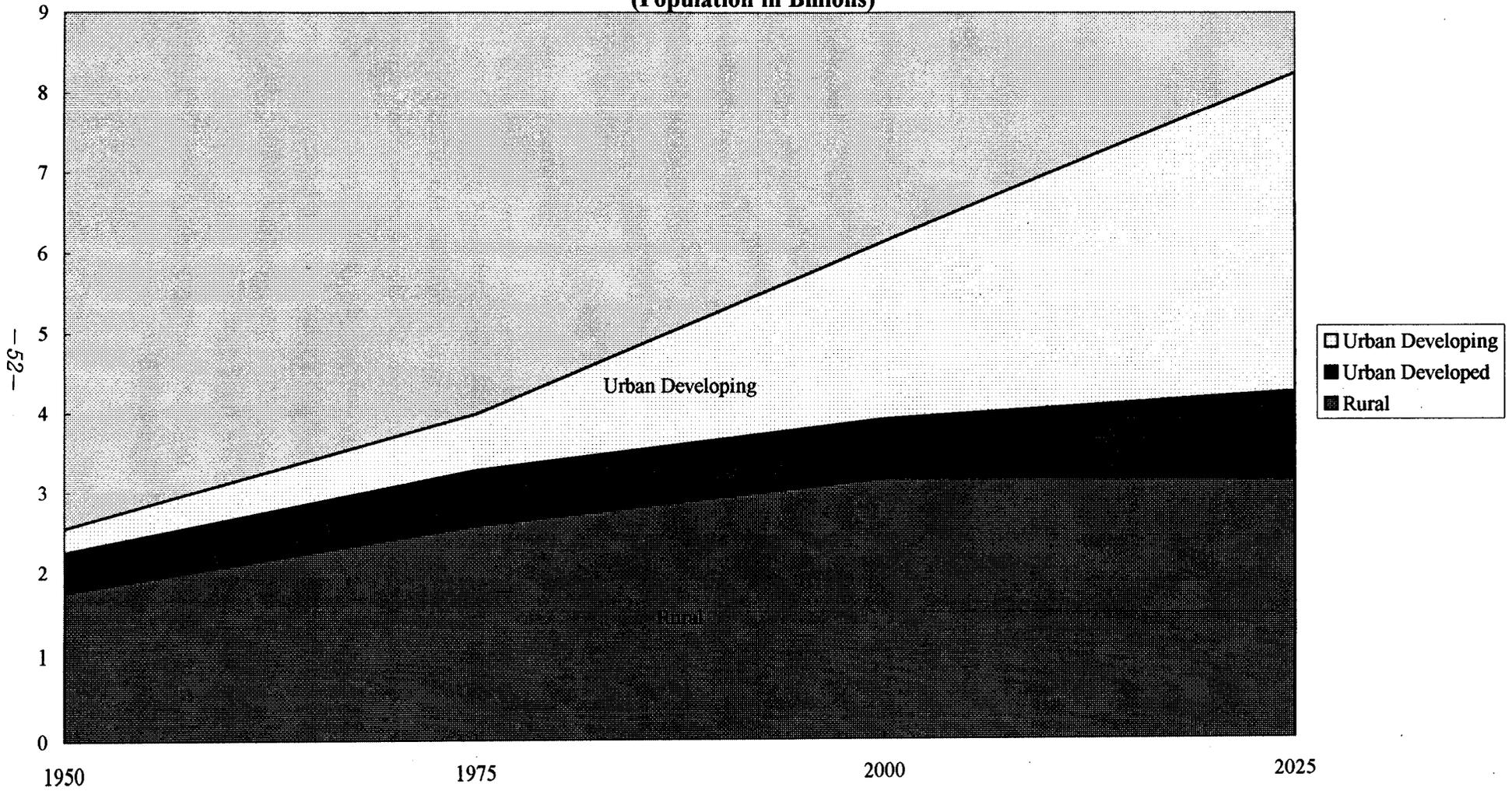
By 1950 nearly thirty percent of the worlds population lived in cities and one city, New York, had reached a population of at least 10 million people. In the few ensuing decades the proportion of people living in cities has increased rapidly and more than half of the worlds population is expected to live in urban places in the near future. The number of people living in cities has increased much more rapidly than overall population as cities have attracted rural migrants to augment their natural increase and from more places becoming urban. This urbanization of population has included the emergence of a significant number of cities with populations of more than 10 million people and the development and growth of many cities with population sizes ranging from several thousand to several million people. This paper describes the recent growth of cities of different sizes and discusses issues concerning the roles cities of different sizes play in societies. Of particular concern are questions regarding the advantages and disadvantage of the development of an array of cities of different sizes as opposed to urbanization of population where large portions of the urban population are in a few or even one city. The paper draws heavily on information recently published by the United Nations (1995).

Recent Patterns of Urbanization that May Influence Urban Dominance:

Figure 1 shows the size of the worlds rural population and urban populations for the developed and developing countries from 1950 to the present and projections to the year 2025. At the start of this interval the urban population was 738 million compared to a rural population of 1.8 billion. By 1960 the urban population had passed 1 billion and the rural population was nearing 2 billion. In 1995 the urban population was 2.6 billion and the rural population was 3.1 billion. This represents a tripling of the total urban population compared to a less than doubling of the rural population. Between 1950 and 1995 the percentage of the worlds population

figure 1

Urban Population Growth 1950-2025 (Population in Billions)



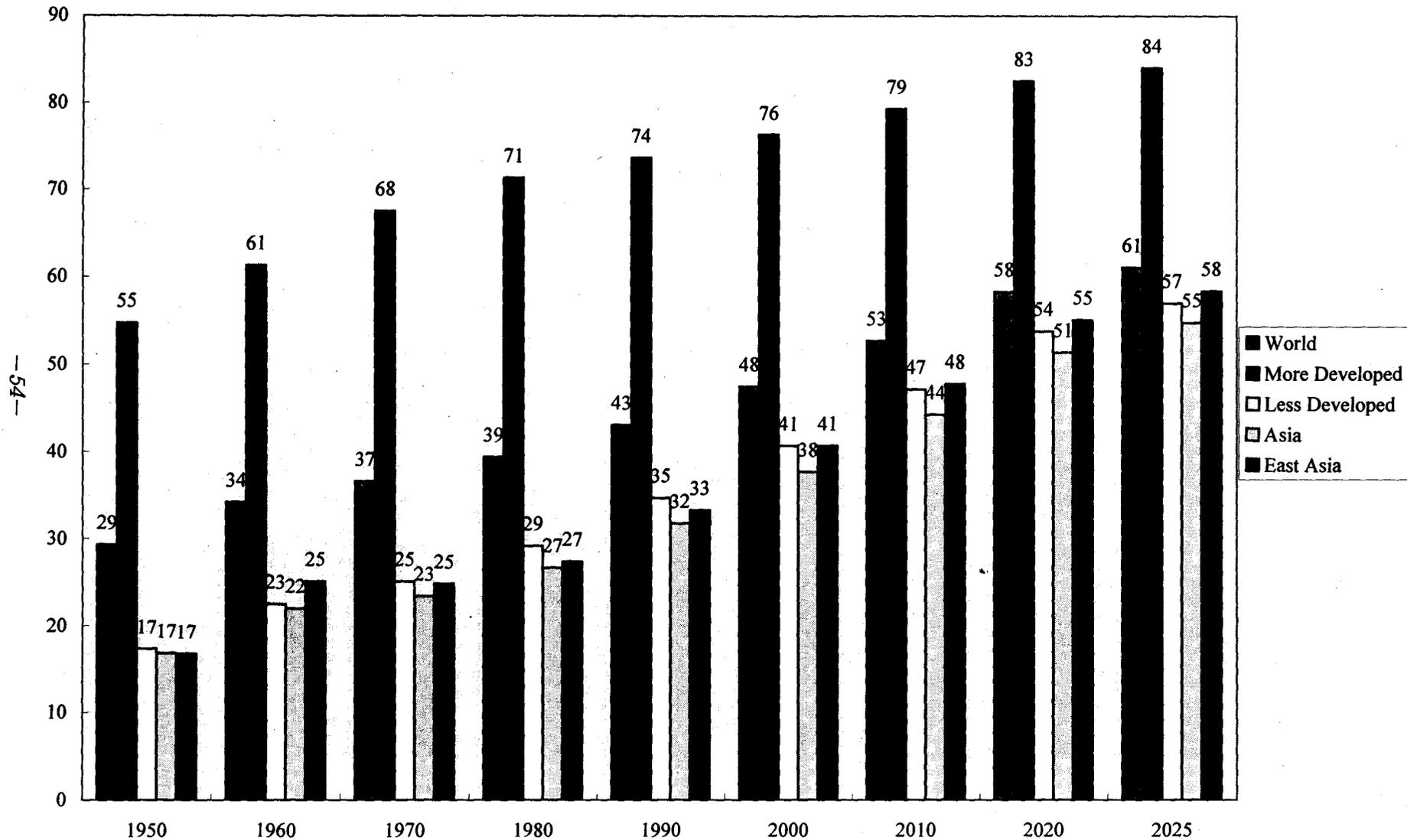
living in cities increased from 29 percent to 45 percent. The United Nations projections indicate that the world's urban population will increase by more than another 2 billion people to reach a population of 5.1 billion people by 2025. Over this same interval the rural population is projected to increase by a mere 97 million people and the rural population will then make-up 29 percent of the total population, the same percentage held by the urban population in 1950.

Figure 1 also shows that the size of the urban population in developed countries was slightly larger than the urban population in developing countries in 1950 but that the great majority of the increase in the urban population since 1950 occurs in developing countries. By 1995 the urban population of developing countries was almost twice the size of the urban population living in the more developed nations. According to the projections the urban population of the developed regions of the world will be just over 1 billion in 2025 whereas the urban population of the least developed regions of the world will have surpassed 4 billion thereby obtaining a size that is four times larger than the developed countries. Given that the developed countries had a larger urban population than the developing countries in 1950 this comparison is astounding. It is noteworthy to mention that this growth differential is a result of higher levels of rural to urban migration and much higher rates of natural increase for developing countries than for developed countries. An important difference between the urbanization that is taking place in developing countries and the rapid urbanization of developed countries in the previous century is its widespread occurrence throughout the world and the vastly increased number of people involved. The context in which the developing countries are urbanizing is vastly different from the world context in which developed nations urbanized. The urban population of developing countries in the late 1990s increases by approximately 150,000 people every day (United Nations 1995).

Figure 2 shows regional trends in urbanization for 1950 and 1995 and projections to 2025. Clearly urbanization is a worldwide phenomenon. Regions that were already highly urban continue to experience low levels of urbanization while urbanization in

Percentage of Population for the World and Selected Areas, 1950-2025

figure 2



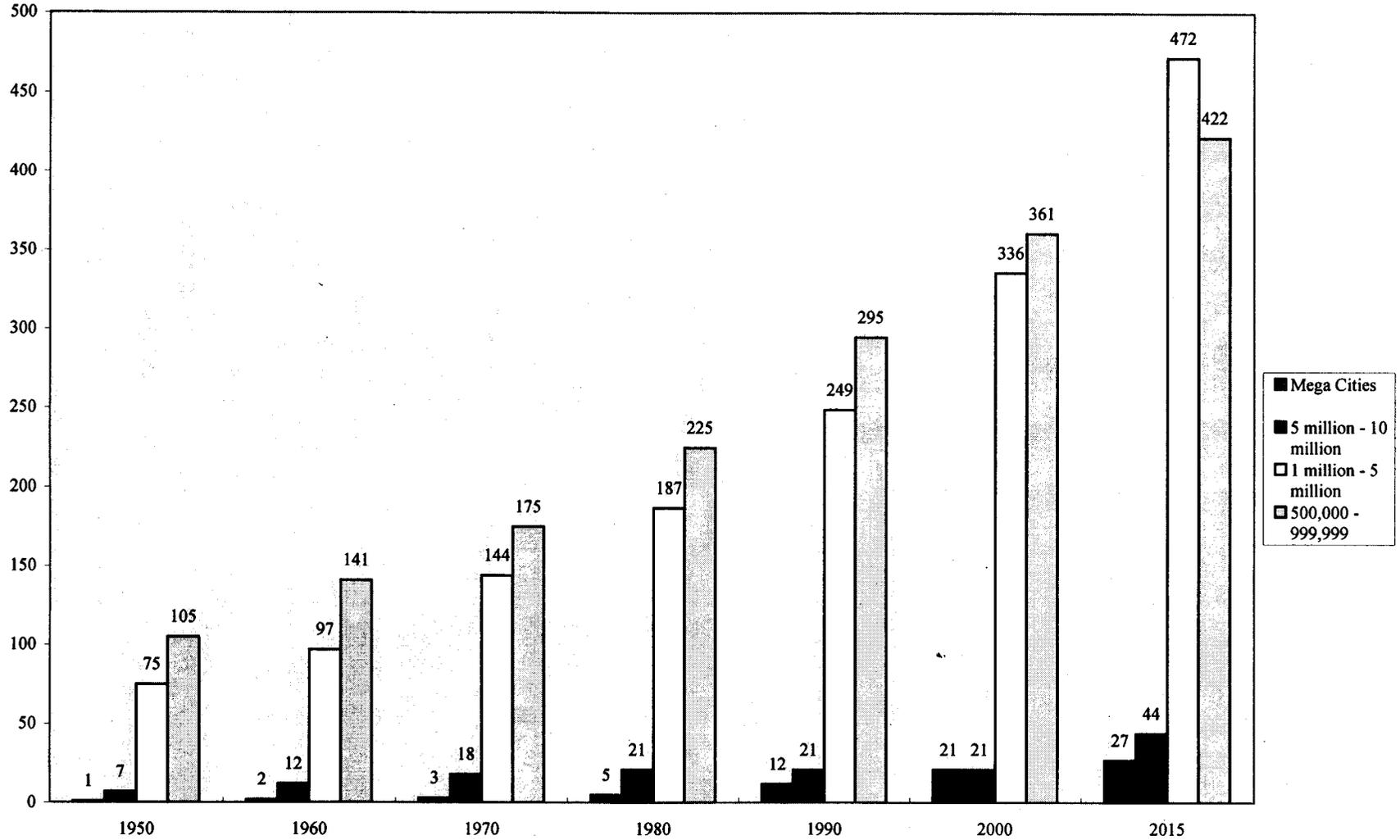
other regions, primarily Asia and Africa, continue at a rapid pace. In 1970 only 23 percent of Asias population was living in urban areas. This increased to 32 percent in 1995 and is expected to increase to 55 percent by 2025, just 6 percentage point lower than the world total. The UN data also show that the average annual growth rates for Asia is currently over 3 percent and will remain above 2 percent until at least 2025. Only Africa has a higher rate of urbanization. Asias share of the urban population increased from 37 percent of the worlds urban population in 1970 to 46 percent in 1995 and Asia is projected to hold over one half of the world urban residents by 2025.

A major concern of this paper is the growth of cities of different sizes and their implications for the role of primate cities. The rapid urbanization of the worlds population that has occurred since 1950 and that is likely to persist for several decades into the future corresponds with a great increase in the number of large cities and a significant increase in the percentage of urban population living in large cities. This is important because until recently increases in urbanization was dominated by a proliferation of cities of less than 500,000 people. In 1950 there were 188 cities with a population of at least 500,000 people (*Figure 3*). By 1990 there were 579 or three times this many cities of 500,000 or more people as in 1950. The United Nations projections indicate there will be 965 cities with 500,000 or more people by 2015. This is over five times as many as in 1950.

A review of the United Nations data on cities of various sizes shows large increases in the number of cities in each of the four sizes categories for which data are published (*Figure 3*). The number of cities with a population of 500,000 to 999,999 people increased from 105 to 295 between 1950 and 1990 and is expected to increase to 422 by 2015. This would represent a quadrupling of cities in this size category over a mere 65 years. The increase in the number of cities with a population of 1 million to 5 million residents was even more remarkable. Their number increased from 75 to 249 in 1990 and is expected to increase to 472 by 2015. There would be six times as many cities in this category in 2015 as in 1950. The number of cities

figure 3

Number of Cities By City-Size for the World 1950-2015



(Source: United Nations Population Prospects: The 1994 Revisions, Estimates and Projections of Urban and Rural Populations and of Urban Agglomerations U.N. New York, 1995).

with 5 million to 10 million people has tripled, increasing from 7 in 1950 to 21 in 1990. The number in this size category is projected to increase to 44 by 2015, double the number in 1990 and six times as many as in 1950.

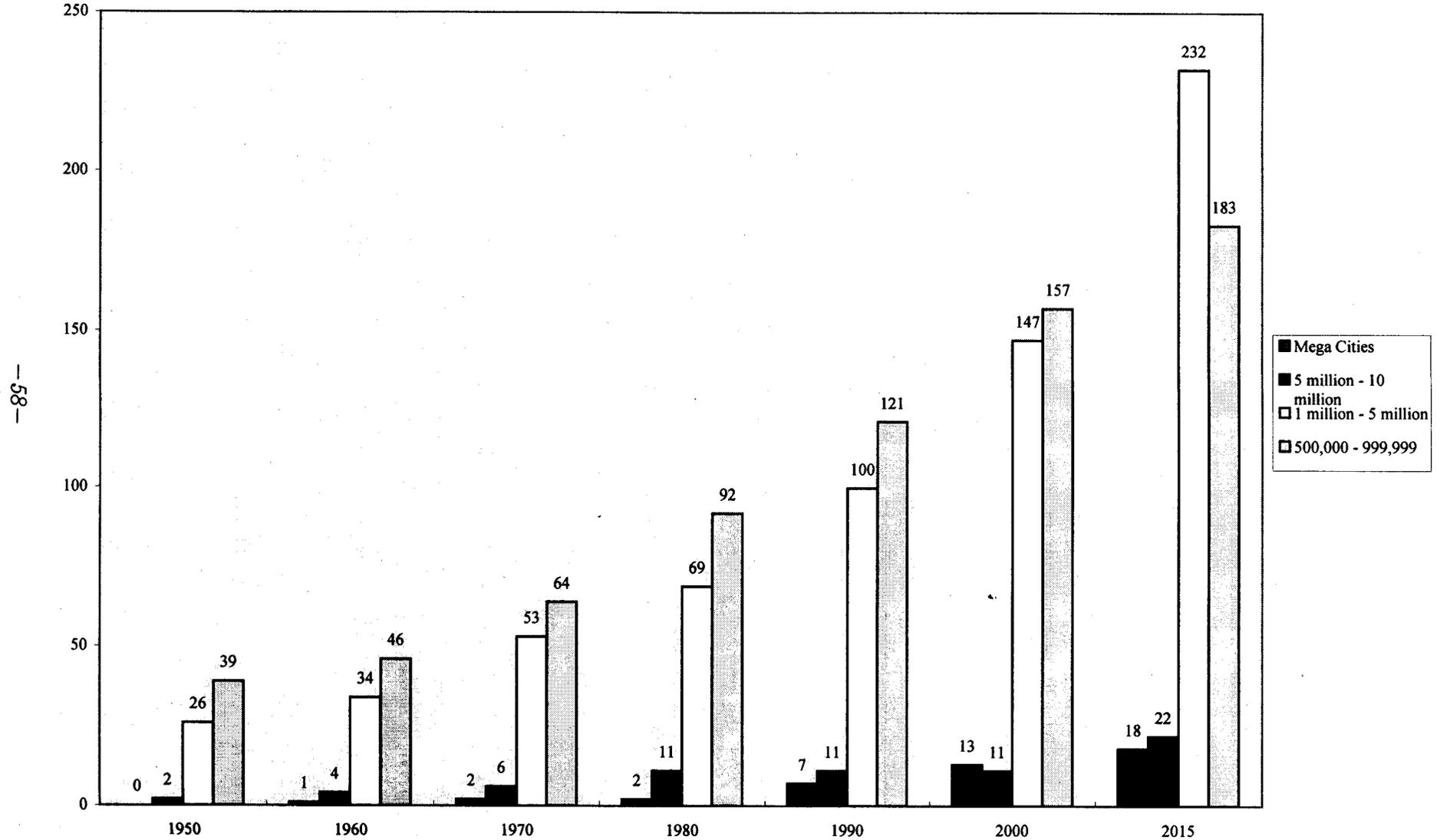
One of the most remarkable aspect of urbanization during the last few decades has been the emergence of mega cities, cities with a population of 10 million or more people (McGee and Robinson 1995). Large cities are of particular importance in research on urbanization because size has typically been associated with urban primacy or the amount of influence a particular city has in national and international affairs. Until recently, no city in the history of human society had obtained a population of this size. Indeed, in 1950 only one city had reached this size and it contained less than 2 percent of the worlds urban population. One additional city per decade reached mega city size between 1950 and 1970 bringing the grand total to three mega cities in 1970. Two more were added during the 1970s and the number more than doubled in the 1980s as 7 other cities reached mega city status. By 2015 the number is expected to more than double again, rising to a total of 27 cities with a population of at least 10 million people (Figure 3). The proportion of urban people living in them will climb from 1.7 percent in 1950 to about 11 percent in 2015.

The increase in the number of large cities has occurred on a somewhat larger scale in Asia than for the world as a whole. In 1950 the proportion of the worlds large cities that were in Asia was 35 percent, or 67 of the 188 cities with a population of 500,000 or more people (Figure 4). By 1990 there were 239 large cities in Asia and this was 41 percent of the worlds large cities. The number is expected to nearly double by 2015, reaching 455 and making Asia home to almost one half of the worlds largest cities. Incredibly, a much higher proportion of the mega cities will be located in Asia. Already 7 of the 12 are located here and by 2015 the number will rise to 18 of the 27 mega cities.

Like the rest of the world and Asia as a whole, East Asia has experienced high

figure 4

Number of Cities By City-Size for Asia 1950-2015



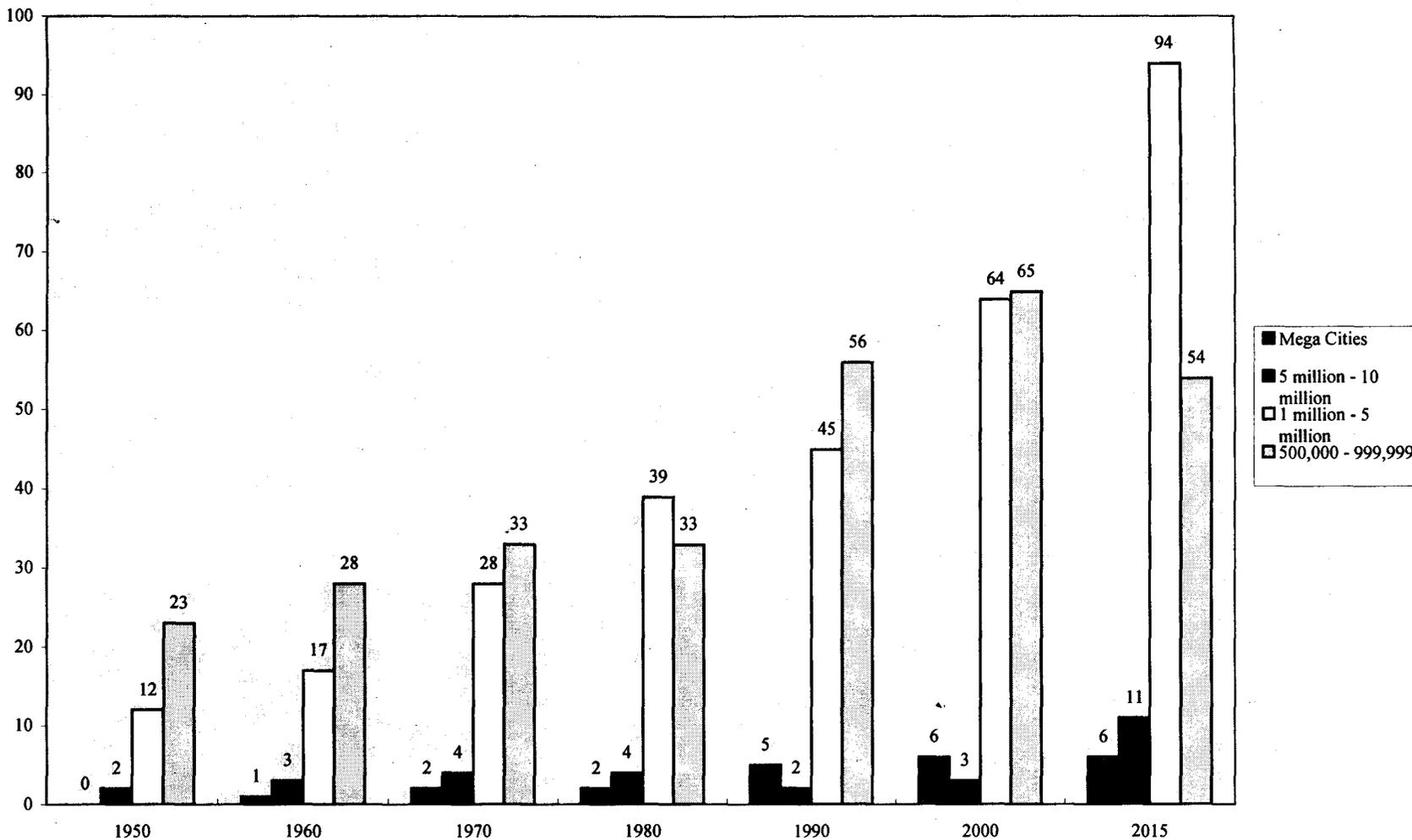
levels of urbanization during the last few decades and is expected to become much more urban over the next few decades. The growth of larger cities has also characterized urbanization in East Asia as the number of cities with at least 500,000 people increased from 37 in 1950 to 108 in 1990 (*Figure 5*). Between 1990 and 2015 the number of large cities is expected to increase to 165, over four times as many as existed in 1960. As for the world and Asia as a whole, the number of cities in each of the size categories has increased dramatically. There were 23 cities in East Asia with a population between 500,000 and 999,999 people in 1950 and 56 of this size in 1990. Interestingly, the number in this size category is expected to rise to 65 by the year 2000 and then decline to 54 by 2015. This is because many of the cities in this size category are expected to become cities of 1 million or more people and there are fewer cities of less than 500,000 people that will grow into this category in the next two decades. This is unusual since the number of cities of this size is projected to increase by a substantial number between now and 2015 for the world and Asia as a whole.

The number of cities in East Asia with a population of 1 million to 5 million people has increase from 12 to 45 and is expected to more than double again by 2015, with 94 cities then having between 1 million and 5 million inhabitants (*Figure 5*). The number of cities in East Asia with 5 million to 10 million people was the same in 1950 and 1990 with 2 cities in this size category. This is partly because some cities grew into mega cities and were not replaced by cities of smaller size growing to this size. However, by 2015 the number of cities with 5 million to 10 million people is expected to increase from the 2 in 1990 to 11, constituting one half of Asian cities of this size.

East Asia was the location of Asias first mega city (Tokyo) and the worlds second and third mega city (Shanghai and Osaka). In 1990 five of Asias seven mega cities and of the worlds twelve mega cities were in East Asia. *Table 1* shows the full list of cities reaching mega city-size for each of the time points between 1950

Number of Cities By City-Size for Eastern Asia 1950-2015

figure 5



(Source: United Nations Populations Prospects: The 1994 Revisions, Estimates and Projections of Urban and Rural Populations and of Urban Agglomerations U.N. New York 1995)

Table 1. The Emergence of Mega Cities, Cities of 10 Million or More People

Year	Cities	Population	Year	Cities	Population	
1950	New York	12.3		Seoul	12.3	
1960	New York	14.2		Karachi	12.1	
	Tokyo	11.0		Delhi	12.1	
1970	Tokyo	16.5	2000	Buenos Aires	11.4	
	New York	16.2		Metro Manila	10.8	
	Shanghai	11.2		Cairo	10.7	
1980	Tokyo	21.9		Osaka	10.6	
	New York	15.6		Rio de Janeiro	10.2	
	New Maxico City	13.9		Dhaka	10.2	
	Sao Paulo	12.1		Tokyo	28.7	
	Shanghai	11.7		Bombay	27.4	
	Osaka	10.0		Lagos	24.4	
	Tokyo	25.0		Shanghai	23.4	
1990	New York	16.1		Jakarta	21.2	
	New Maxico City	15.1		Sao Paulo	20.8	
	Sao Paulo	14.8		Karachi	20.6	
	Shanghai	13.5		Beijing	19.4	
	Bombay	12.2		Dhaka	19.0	
	Los Angeles	11.5		New Maxico City	18.8	
	Beijing	10.9		New York	17.6	
	Calcutta	10.7		Calcutta	17.6	
	Buenos Aires	10.6		Delhi	17.6	
	Seoul	10.6		2015	Tianjin	17.0
	Osaka	10.5			Metro Manila	14.7
	Tokyo	27.9			Cairo	14.5
	Bombay	18.1			Los Angeles	14.3
Sao Paulo	17.8			Seoul	13.1	
Shanghai	17.2			Buenos Aires	12.4	
New York	16.6			Istanbul	12.3	
New Maxico City	16.4			Riodrjaneiro	11.6	
2000	Beijing	14.2		Lahore	10.8	
	Jakarta	14.1		Hyderabad	10.7	
	Lagos	13.5		Osaka	10.6	
	Los Angeles	13.1		Bangkok	10.6	
	Calcutta	12.7		Lima	10.5	
	Tianjin	12.4		Teheran	10.2	

Source: United Nations Population Division, World Urbanization Prospects: The 1994 Revisions, Estimates and Projections of Urban and Rural Populations and of Urban Agglomerations (U.N., New York, 1995). and 2015.

Although East Asia has led the way in the development of mega cities during much of the past few decades, only one of the next 15 cities to become mega cities is expected to be located in East Asia. Despite this, 11 of the cities to reach mega city size between 1990 and 2015 will be in Asia. If city population size is related to influence, East Asia's influence in urban exchanges seems likely to decline.

Primacy of Cities:

Since their first appearance cities have been centers of influence. Political leaders, religious leaders and other influential people have resided in cities from which they obtained and wielded their power. The sphere of influence of the first cities was undoubtedly limited to a relatively small territory from which cities obtained food and a few other needed resources. With the gradual increase in the number of cities and the emergence of a few larger cities of several hundred thousand people the sphere of urban influence also increased gradually (Sjoberg 1960). The ability to transport goods and the ability to effectively communicate limited the scope of influence that a city could have on distant places.

The industrial revolution profoundly changed the urbanization process and its patterns. In many places it obliterated farming as a major occupation and led to massive migrations of the rural farm population to cities. More importantly, industrialization created a need for additional resources for the city. Raw materials needed by industries had to be extracted from distant places and transported into cities. In many cases large quantities of resources needed by a particular city could not be obtained from their immediate hinterlands and therefore had to be obtained from hinterlands in other parts of the world. The transport of resources directly from far way hinterlands was impractical. Rather in most cases there was a need to gather the resources in a nearby city for dispersal to other cities. This meant that in addition to being tied to nearby hinterlands cities were linked to one another in a system of interdependence.

The nature of the links between cities and their hinterland and of cities to one another has been a subject to of considerable disagreement. One of the leading perspectives that is concerned with the relationships cities have with one another is referred to as urban primacy. This perspective was first expressed by Jefferson (1939) in an article in which he depicted the city, particularly a major city, as the creator and preserver of civil societies. He identified only a few cities that could be identified as primate cities at the time he was writing but suggested that the emergence of additional primate cities was highly likely. *The major thesis of urban primacy is that a small number or even one city organizes and controls exchanges between cities and their hinterlands within a nation.* The urban primacy perspective also postulates that there is little economic, social or political integration in a given system of cities linked by primacy. In a typical case the primate city serves as an intermediary between all other cities in the system.

One of the key indicators of primacy has been population size (Ginsburg 1988). Primate cities are designated on the basis of population size that is more than twice the size of the next largest city in the country. In his original formulation Jefferson (1939) explained that in some cases a city could dominate even though the size difference between it and the next largest city was not so great. In their extensive review of studies of urbanization Kasarda and Crenshaw (1991) note that urban primacy involves several complex notions that are difficult to define or operationalize. Certainly the proliferation of large cities complicates the applicability of the notion of primate cities in the modern context. It seems less likely that a single or even a few cities can organize and control the activities of cities that have millions of people even if the largest city is many times their size. Improved transportation and communication systems have had an impact on these systems. Systems that traditionally only linked smaller cities with primate cities are now being altered in a way that more directly link cities of different sizes with one another. While data are not available to empirically investigate newly forming organizations and relationship between cities it seems reasonable to postulate that many of the cities that have increased their size will not be as dominated as in previous times.

Primate cities are sometimes viewed as being undesirable because of the possibility that they are parasitic. Some researchers view them as taking and squandering resources obtained from the hinterland (De Cola 1984). Indeed, in some cases surpluses have been taken by force with little or no payment to the people and places providing them. Primate cities are sometimes linked with the notion of colonialism whereby they serve as a collection point from which national resources are transported to other nations. *Still, the overwhelming evidence indicates that large cities, including primate cities, are the key to resolving many of the most serious social, economic and political problems facing today's societies.* Cities are being challenged to provide opportunities for thousand of new residents each day. They must provide opportunities for employment, education, and health care among the many other needs faced by urban residents. In nearly all parts of the world, if not in every part, cities are providing higher levels of opportunity than can be provided in rural area. Large cities have led the way in promoting many changes in traditional economic, political and social systems that are needed to resolve many of the most serious problems facing rural and urban societies. For instance, cities have promoted changes in the roles women play in societies by enhancing opportunities for their participation in the paid labor force. This has resulted in lower fertility rates and corresponding declines in rates of overall population growth. Members of different ethnic and religious groups have learned to work and live together in large cities. Yet, there are many urban problems that will be worsened by the continued growth of cities. Cities that experience huge increases in population will have serious problems in meeting the needs of their residents. These problems will range from those associated with meeting fundamental needs such as securing food to social environmental problems such as crime to problems with the physical environment such as air pollution.

In a recent review of urbanization in Asia, Ginsburg (1991) notes that the gaps in research are so formidable that many researchers might be reluctant to initiate research on this topic. In undertaking the tasks of preparing this paper we came to greatly appreciate this observation. Urbanization is occurring at such a rapid pace in

Asia and other parts of the world that it is exceedingly difficult for researchers to provide timely assessments (Goldstein and Sly 1975). Much of the research on urbanization has proceeded as though patterns and processes of urbanization that characterizes the West apply to Asia. More recently, some researcher have pointed to unique conditions under which urbanization is taken place in Asia (McGee and Robinson 1995). More rapid rates of population growth, distinct agricultural practices, different governmental efforts and policies as well as historical and cultural features are among the factors that distinguishes recent urbanization in Asia from earlier periods of urbanization in the West. More importantly, there are problems with basic demographic data and serious problems with data pertaining to specific social, political and economic issues. For example, it is not uncommon to see some cities listed as mega cities in one report omitted in another study because of differences in data sources. It is crucial that these gaps in data be alleviated so that a better understanding of the relationship between facets of urbanization such as primacy and a host of social, economic and political issues can be gained.

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