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Can Equalization of Public Services Narrow the Regional Disparities in China? A Spatial Econometrics Approach

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Abstract: Regional disparities that challenge the economy and public administration must be confronted by the governments and public in developing countries. As the extensive mode of economic growth has caused many problems in China, it is necessary to find other ways to promote the development of poor areas to narrow regional disparities in the country. This paper measures the equalization of public services and residents' living standards in China, based on a provincial panel data for the period 2001–2013, to analyze the impact of the equalization of public services on China's regional disparities. The empirical results, based on spatial econometrics models, show that the equalization of all types of public services can promote the regional equality of incomes and consumptions. There is also evidence suggesting that the regional disparities are affected by other economic and social factors.

Key words: equalization of public services, regional disparities, spatial econometrics, China

JEL classification codes: C33, D31, O53

1. Introduction

The question of how to narrow regional disparities in China is a significant question that is not only related to the governments' decision-making but is also associated with the equality and justice of society. After long-term economic growth, China, which is the biggest developing country in the world, has developed several serious problems. Among these, extremely unbalanced regional development is quite conspicuous (Lee, Peng, Li, & He, 2012). Comparing the economic data of China's rich cities, such as Shanghai, Beijing, and Tianjin with the poor provinces, like Guizhou, Yunnan, and Gansu, shows that the average GDP per capita of the three rich cities is 3.2 times higher than is that of the three poor provinces. To narrow the regional disparities, some practical difficulties must be addressed. The rapid economic growth in China is based on the high consumption of resources; this has led to serious environmental pollution, with the result that the economically developed areas in China are often heavily polluted (Chen, 2015). Both the

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