

Preface

The People's Republic of China and the United States of America are two countries with outstanding qualities and features. Both countries, in a mid-latitude location, have a vast territory as well as large populations. The U.S. and China represent world powers which exert significant influence globally. As permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, they have important roles in international affairs. China is an ancient oriental civilization with tremendous historic depth, while the U.S. is a modern western society founded as an independent state just little over two hundred years ago. The U.S. and China are the two leading economies in the world. Despite rapid economic growth over the past three decades China has retained some characteristics of a developing country as expressed, for instance, in a moderately high GDP per capita by international comparison. The U.S. has been the economy with the highest total amount of produced goods and services, and the country's GDP per capita is also markedly high.

Exploring the geographical similarities and differences between the two countries, especially in terms of their populations, resources, cultures and economies, helps to provide more insights into the human-environment relations in both countries as well as to enhance and broaden the mutual understanding and common ground between them. Moreover, such comparative perspectives on the geographies of China and the U.S. could be valuable for addressing and reaching the goal of global sustainable development.

An indispensable component of regional geography is a focus on a home area, state or country with a mission to further national geographic education. Comparative research on the geographies of China and the U.S. contributes to a better understanding of the differences and similarities of both countries. A comparative study of the two countries has become—in the wider context of global change and globalization—an important teaching content and research method in regional geography.

The comparative approach dates back to the earliest stages of geography in the fourth and third centuries B.C. It re-emerged as a viable perspective in the foundation of modern geography in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Organizing and compiling relevant teaching materials about the similarities and the differences in the geographies of China and the U.S. can be the basis for providing scientific and objective insights into the national conditions for the two countries' citizens, for promoting spatial and

geographic thinking, for enhancing an understanding of the other country's cultural values and ultimately for a sound development of the human-environment relations in China and the U.S. Thus, this book is a new attempt in the field of comparative geography, with potentially great relevance in the field of geographic education.

The main thread of the book is the theme of human-environment interaction, with core contents on economic and regional sustainable development. The major approach employed throughout the book is that of a regional comparative study of China and the U.S. The book is organized in four parts. Part I includes three overview chapters: *Introduction*, *Physical Geography* and *Population & Ethnic Geographies*. Part II consists of four thematic chapters: *Agriculture and Food Production*, *Economic Geography*, *International Trade Issues and Status*, and *Mega-Regions of China and the U.S.* Part III focuses on regional comparisons in three chapters: a comparison of *Regional Urban Economic Clusters*, a comparison of four metropolitan areas in China and the U.S. which have seen rapid *Urbanization & Urban Sprawl*, and the *Main Agricultural Regions* of China and the U.S. in comparison. In Part IV, the concluding chapter, we finally pay particular attention to *Research Cooperation between Chinese and American Geographers* and its significance in the *Quest for Sustainable Development*.

A Comparative Geography of China and the U.S. is a book project that invited 20 geographers from American and Chinese Universities to collaborate on a Sino-U.S. regional geography textbook. In each chapter, American and Chinese authors joined in the task of a given theme in the regional comparative analysis of China and the U.S. The eleven chapters were completed in co-authorship by the following teams: Chapter 1: Rudi Hartmann and Jing'ai Wang; Chapter 2: Jing'ai Wang, Honglin Xiao, Rudi Hartmann and Yaojie Yue; Chapter 3: Lucius Hallet, Jing'ai Wang and Rudi Hartmann; Chapter 4: Mark Leipnik, Yun Su, Robert Lane and Xinyue Ye; Chapter 5: Hongmian Gong and Huasheng Zhu; Chapter 6: Gregory Veeck and Yuejing Ge; Chapter 7: Russell M. Smith, Yuejing Ge, Rudi Hartmann, Xiaping Dong and Yang Cheng; Chapter 8: Susan Walcott and Huasheng Zhu; Chapter 9: Tao Ye, Brian Muller and Peijun Shi; Chapter 10: Mark Leipnik, Yun Su and Xinyue Ye; Chapter 11: Peijun Shi, Clifton Pannell and Tao Ye. Rudi Hartmann and Jing'ai Wang designed the outline of the book and co-organized the Chinese-American team work in the completion of the book. While Rudi Hartmann had the main responsibility in the final editing of the texts, Jing'ai Wang took on the task of designing the layout of the maps and figures. Peijun Shi reviewed the book several times and provided useful comments and suggestions. Tao Ye was responsible for communication and coordination as well as for the formatting of the draft manuscript. Fang Lian reproduced most of the maps in GIS operations.

The outcome of the book is the result of an innovative team effort in establishing the foundations of a new comparative geography of China and the U.S. Due to the huge amount of information and data presented in this volume errors and mistakes may have occurred as well as imperfections in the layout of the book. The editors and chapter authors look forward to comments and suggestions from the readers.

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