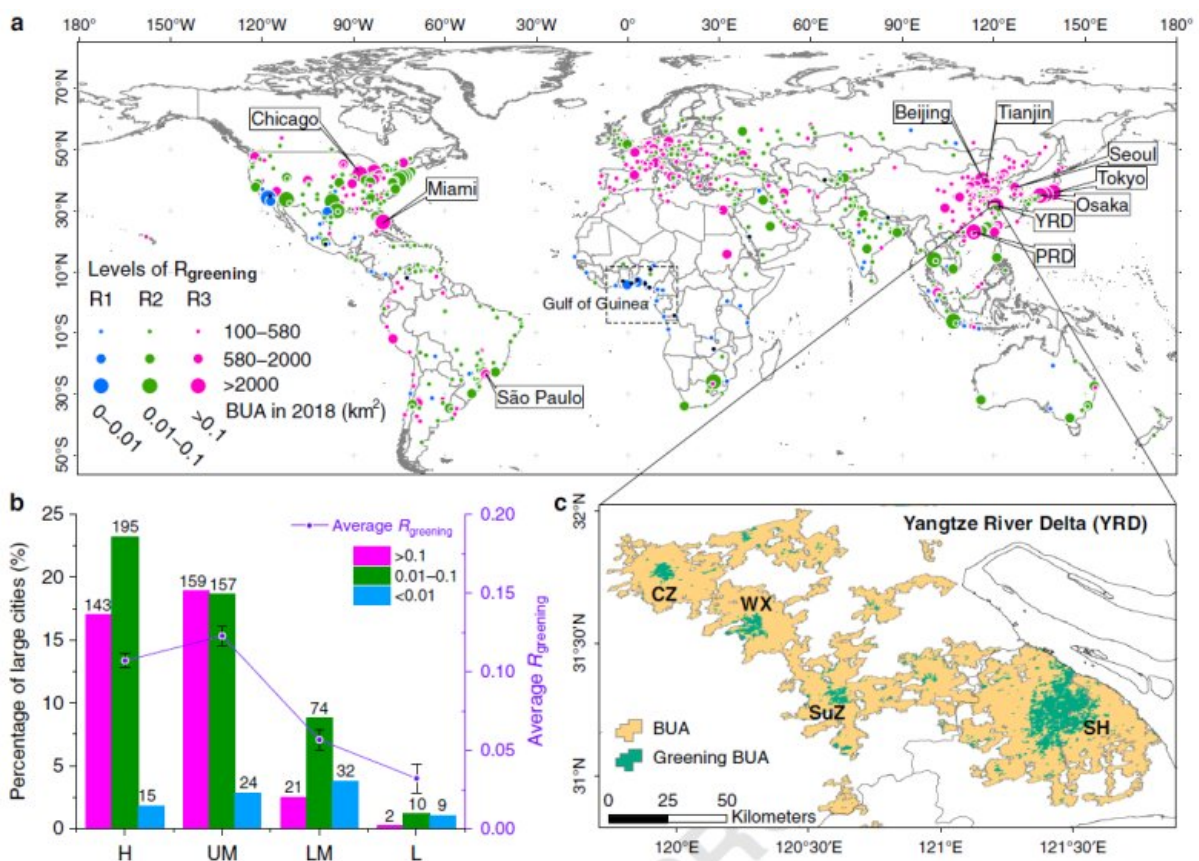


Scientists quantify dramatic uneven urbanization of large cities throughout the world in recent decades

October 26 2020, by Li Yuan



Distribution of large cities with greening BUA. Credit: SIAT

According to the latest report from the United Nations, the global

population will reach 9.7 billion, and 68% of the population will live in urban areas in 2050. Undoubtedly, sustainable urban development is critical to the future of humanity.

At present, sustainable urban development is an increasing concern worldwide and it has been prioritized in the 2030 Agenda for the U.N.'s Sustainable Development Goals. To achieve the goals, it is essential to track the urbanization progress of cities at different development stages in as detailed a way as possible. However, a global perspective that clarifies the urbanization characteristics of [large cities](#) around the world is still lacking.

A joint study, published in *Nature Communications* on Oct. 23, addressed the questions of how large cities have developed globally in recent decades in terms of urban expansion, population growth and urban greenness change, and what the relationships between the urbanization features and economic levels are.

The study was conducted by Dr. Sun Liqun and Li Qinglan from Shenzhen Institutes of Advanced Technology (SIAT) of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Prof. Chen Ji from the University of Hong Kong, and Dr. Huang Dian from National Supercomputing Center in Shenzhen.

The researchers analyzed 841 large cities with built-up areas (BUAs) over 100 km² from 2001 to 2018, and found an uneven distribution of urbanization at different economic levels. On average, large cities in the [low-income](#) and lower-middle-income countries had the highest urban population growth, and BUA expansion in the upper-middle-income countries was more than three times that of the high-income countries.

From 2001 to 2018, the urban expansion of China was the largest, accounting for 47.5% of the total urban expansion in the world. Globally, more than 10% of BUAs in 325 large cities showed significant

greening (P

Citation: Scientists quantify dramatic uneven urbanization of large cities throughout the world in recent decades (2020, October 26) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-10-scientists-quantify-uneven-urbanization-large.html>

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