

*Urbanisation with Chinese characteristics: Will the National New Type Urbanisation Plan of 2014 – 2020 benefit the rural and migrating population or is China repeating the same faults of the past?*

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## Abstract

Forced displacement and resettlement and forced land expropriation backed by an overall lack of the rule of law in the realm of land rights has allowed China to develop recklessly. This happened, in most cases, at the expenses of a paralysed rural population. If successfully implemented, China's National New Type Urbanisation Plan NUP (2014–2020) will not only relocate a great quantity of rural dwellers to urban spaces and officially change their status but it will also improve their livelihoods dramatically. This improvement, however, will be impossible to achieve within 2020. This study was designed to predict the future repercussions for farmers and migrants affected by the NUP. It did so by carrying out a study on China's past urbanisation. Chinese hydropower project data were used as well as contemporary examples such as nail houses and urban villages and, finally, this data was subjected to a critical analysis. The results showed that these events can be considered as evidence of China's inability to stick to the rules of the game regarding displaced individuals' wellbeing. It was also found that China's constant commitment to economic growth at the expense of the unprivileged population will be pursued again in the NUP. The blurred yet specific aim of the NUP, 'rural-to-urban coordination'<sup>1</sup> is more difficult than what China thinks.

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<sup>1</sup> Cheshmehzangi, A. (2016). China's New-type Urbanisation Plan (NUP) and the Foreseeing Challenges for Decarbonization of Cities: A Review. *Energy Procedia*, 104, p.147.

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*Per Helmi*

## Introduction

Urbanisation, displacement and migration in China are three threads of the same fabric. The unconditional need for development, apart from driving these three concepts to the edge of Chinese urbanisation, has also dynamically changed the country since the Reform and Opening Up period. The quest for modernisation has, therefore, provided a concrete impetus for China's urbanisation.<sup>2</sup> China experienced three noteworthy 'waves' of urbanisation as stated by Liu et al.: one in the 1980s, another in 1992 and the last in 2003.<sup>3</sup> During these stages of Chinese development, many villagers and farmers lost their land and were forced to migrate or to relocate, not without complications. In addition, this occurred often without them giving full consent. Yet the aforementioned epochs are not the only ones in which Chinese rural inhabitants' suffering was caused by development.

This dissertation will examine the past experiences of Chinese urbanisation in regards to its rural and migrating population. It will do so by carrying out an extensive research on hydropower projects and conclude that the economic growth and domestic consumption have always been pivotal, although unprivileged farmers and migrants were suffering from it. It will consider also contemporary examples and conclude that

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<sup>2</sup> En.cnki.com.cn. (2019). *THE URBANIZATION AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN CHINA AFTER THE REFORM AND OPENING-UP-- 《Economic Geography》 2009 年 01 期*. [online] Available at: [http://en.cnki.com.cn/Article\\_en/CJFDTotal-JJDL200901009.htm](http://en.cnki.com.cn/Article_en/CJFDTotal-JJDL200901009.htm) [Accessed 10 May 2019].

<sup>3</sup> Liu, Y., He, S., Wu, F. and Webster, C. (2010). Urban villages under China's rapid urbanization: Unregulated assets and transitional neighbourhoods. *Habitat International*, 34(2), p. 137.

the 'rural-to-urban coordination' of displaced individuals, predicted by the plan, is too ambitious to be realised within the time frame of the NUP (2020) and is not a priority of the Chinese government. The augmentation of domestic consumption is the core of the plan and in order to achieve it, Chinese farmers, rural dwellers and migrating individuals will have to suffer yet again.

The following part of the dissertation will provide a background of the history of Chinese urbanisation as well as its consequences for the population. Furthermore, historically relevant moments will be taken into consideration in order to give a clear overview of the political influence that has altered China's development at the expense of the rural population. Local governments' transgressions and the avidity of a changing country had a serious impact on its farmers.

In the second part of the thesis, I will analyse the past examples of China's forced displacement and resettlement and provide some policy recommendations in order to avoid the loss of employment for the rural displaced, notwithstanding that China is not applying any readmission policy for displaced/unemployed individuals. The 'hydropower project' examples shed light on China's ferocious need for growth and the consequences for the displaced villagers affected by it.

The present and future situation of Chinese urbanisation are examined in the third part, dedicated to the National New Type Urbanisation Plan (NUP). The project began in 2014 and is supposed to come to an end in 2020. It is intended to boost the

urbanisation level as well as domestic consumption and economic growth. Displacement and relocation are planned as well and it might be unbearable for a large portion of the predicted millions of migrants.

After the evaluation of the proposed plan, the fourth and last part of the dissertation focuses on two peculiar yet controversial phenomena of Chinese urbanisation: nail houses and urban villages. One of the NUP's aims is to reorganise and reshape these two anomalies, whereby a large amount of population will be resettled. China is designing a new urbanisation wave, with highly ambitious intentions. The results can be reached in terms of numbers, however, the outcome may jeopardize the wellbeing of millions of people again.

### Methodology and Literature review

Secondary research within this dissertation has allowed me to first focus deeply on the historical background of the Chinese history of development and, secondly, to conclude that a large portion of scholars focus more on the superficial outcomes of the NUP rather than on what it means for individuals to be displaced and resettled. The reasons behind my comparison of China's past development projects such as hydropower dams with future displacement and relocation practices is based on the severe repercussions that dams had for China's rural dwellers. Scholars have deeply analysed them after the completion of the various dams and aftermaths are universal for displacement and relocation.

The few examples I chose to take from overseas are in the realm of working and re-employment, as in the example of Germany. The rest of the arguments have been supported by circumstances where China has demonstrated a rather careful approach to inclusivism and respect to the most underprivileged fragment of its country – the peasants.

The majority of the chosen sources are Chinese academic articles in translation. The use of theories and articles from Chinese scholars as well as international academia sheds light on the need for China to consistently reconsider its past-mistakes and reformulate policies in order to put its population's wellbeing before the economic growth.

## China's Urbanisation background

In 1949, the year of the proclamation of the People's Republic of China (PRC), only one out of ten people was an urban dweller. Urban population in the following 66 years kept rising with an annual average growth of 4% per year, resulting in the urban transformation of China nowadays: 771 million people lived in Chinese cities in 2015 – more than 13 times as much as right after the revolution. At the same time, from 1978 to 2010, the number of cities has augmented from 193 to 658.<sup>4</sup> The year 2011 has been pivotal: notwithstanding its great agricultural tradition, the number of China's urban residents outnumbered their rural counterparts.<sup>5</sup> The situation after 1949 kept on changing, and from the establishment of the PRC to the reform period of the 1980s, three main epochs have characterized Chinese history within its urbanisation: 1949-1957 with the first five year plan, 1958–1965 and the mutable years of the Great Leap Forward, and 1966–1978 – the motionless juncture between the beginning of the Cultural Revolution and Chairman Mao's death.<sup>6</sup> China's urbanisation in these years was meaningfully slower than its economic development. When the economic expansion started to become evident in the cities during Deng's era, migration correspondingly increased. A significant event occurred, then, along

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<sup>4</sup> Wang, X., Hui, E., Choguill, C. and Jia, S. (2015). The new urbanization policy in China: Which way forward?. *Habitat International*, 47, p. 279.

<sup>5</sup> Chen, M., Liu, W., Lu, D., Chen, H. and Ye, C. (2018). Progress of China's new-type urbanization construction since 2014: A preliminary assessment. *Cities*, 78, p.181.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

with the first implementation of market-oriented reforms.<sup>7</sup> The 'household responsibility system' was introduced and replaced the production brigade, a milestone of socialist governance at the village level. The household, therefore, became the crucial unit of production and individual parcels of land were allocated to villagers.

On top of this reallocation of land procedure, the surplus of agricultural production generated by each household was kept by the farmers. This policy revolutionised the approach to work. The surplus was managed by households independently, hence commercialised in the free market as a logical response to the de-collectivisation process. The dissolving brigades system introduced a new form of administrative control over the village: the village committee. This new body represented the first grassroots unit of direction and supervision in rural China who was seen as an autonomous organisation and whose representative leaders were elected by the villagers.<sup>8</sup>

The number of rural migrants seeking fortune in first-tier cities started, simultaneously, to represent a problem. Thus, the rural industrialisation policy of the 1980s and 1990s was introduced to block this practical hurdle and keep villagers at home by employing them in township and village enterprises (TVEs). Since the flow

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<sup>7</sup> Kan, K. (2016). The transformation of the village collective in urbanising China: A historical institutional analysis. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 47, p.592.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem.

of migrants was extremely strong, TVEs did not work as the government was hoping. As a result, villagers were dispersed to remote small cities and towns in order to seal off the desirable first-tier cities' access.<sup>9</sup> The decision behind the foundation of TVEs, despite their failure and the poor competition with rapidly growing state-owned enterprises (SOEs), was the idea of having peasants to 'leave the land, but not the village.'<sup>10</sup> Although TVEs hired millions of surplus farmers and represented an attempt to industrialise the villages, the private sector firms in the cities attracted the most interest. TVEs, compared to SOEs and rising private corporations were insignificant as well as dispersed from commercial destinations.<sup>11</sup>

China's extraordinary migration began not only because of the failure of TVEs, but also as a result of the unsustainability of individual rural existence. Farms were small, products were sold for miserable prices and the costs for inputs such as pesticides and fertilizers increased dramatically. The end of the 1990s, therefore, represents the crucial moment in which China started to change its socio-economic morphology: the enormous rural population of approximately 900 million people started to move or had been moved from their traditional habitat.<sup>12</sup> The consequence of this impetus, coupled with the governmental desire to urbanise the country, resulted in a reckless

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<sup>9</sup> Kassiola, J. (2016). Coordinated Rural-Urban Development in China: a New Social Spatial Reorganization Plan for Urbanization, Migration, and Rural Development. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 22(1), p. 79.

<sup>10</sup> Idem. p.90.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem.

expansion of Chinese cities, often by merging villages and turning rural areas into urban by depriving farmers of their fertile lands.

Nevertheless in most circumstances this happened without changing the villagers registered status from peasants to citizens. While the peasant population was on the move to first-tier cities, local governments and developers began to put in place a new form of urbanisation based on rural land acquisition and subsequent transformation into urban land. Correspondingly to the massive increase in urban surface, the Chinese central government was forced, in 1996, to urgently block the construction of new cities in order to preserve farmlands.<sup>13</sup> Preserving the countryside and its arable land was supposed to keep the pace of urbanisation under control. However even if this policy can be seen as a turning point for China's urban growth, it has only represented a formality.<sup>14</sup> Certainly, the number of actual cities has maintained stable after 1996 – at about 660. Yet the population has started to concentrate and spread into the existing cities and expand them. The aforementioned 'formality' can be represented by statistical figures: the urban built area increased by 162% from 1996 to 2015, resulting in a shift from a period of rapid growth of the number of cities to a period of rapid expansion of the size of the cities.<sup>15</sup> What came after the abolishment of new cities and the subsequent expansion of the existing ones

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<sup>13</sup> Guan, X., Wei, H., Lu, S., Dai, Q. and Su, H. (2018). Assessment on the urbanization strategy in China: Achievements, challenges and reflections. *Habitat International*, 71, p. 103.

<sup>14</sup> Chen, M., Liu, W. and Lu, D. (2016). Challenges and the way forward in China's new-type urbanization. *Land Use Policy*, 55, pp.334

<sup>15</sup> Guan et. al. op. cit. (2018) p.104.

cannot be better described as ‘incomplete low-quality urbanisation’.<sup>16</sup> Guan et al., moreover, describe Chinese urbanisation as characterized by ‘four highs and five lows’: high in expansion, consumption, investment and emissions, low in quality, harmony, degree level, sustainability and inclusiveness.<sup>17</sup> The next chapter will focus on the reasons and ineptitudes behind these concepts.

### Local governments’ misconduct

In the 1980s, when urban land reform began, local governments were given the authority to lease the urban state plots for real estate purposes, specifically development projects. The 1986 Land Administration Law gave the village committee the right to administer the land through the newly established Bureau of Land Administration. This body was responsible for land allocation, acquisitions and the implementation of land laws among other duties.<sup>18</sup> The formation of this Bureau has even been criticised as anti-constitutional, since the constitution of 1982 banned all land-use rights transfers.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless the amendment of the constitution in 1988 gave it the opportunity to survive.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>18</sup> Cecc.gov. (2019). *Land Administration Law of the People's Republic of China | Congressional-Executive Commission on China*. [online] Available at: <https://www.cecc.gov/resources/legal-provisions/land-administration-law-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-0> [Accessed 14 May 2019].

<sup>19</sup> Ding, C. (2003). Land policy reform in China: assessment and prospects. *Land Use Policy*, 20(2), p.112.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem.

This specific authority however did not extend to collective land. As a result, in order to expropriate farmers from their rural land and transform it into urban land, local governments had to ensure landless farmers a compensation.<sup>21</sup> Compensation for collective land increased with time due to higher profits, resulting in local governments seeking agricultural lands with lower values and then selling them to developers. This way of expropriating farmers' land had disastrous consequences for Chinese peasants, as well as for the whole country. After the initiation of this new way of contracting land, property rights over land in China have been described as economic – de facto – rights, instead of legal rights.<sup>22</sup> Hereby the value of land is the price for what agencies compete notwithstanding the status of the land and mostly their inhabitants' wellbeing as well as consent.

The decentralisation of rural governance has given local government' cadres a significant amount of decisional power which collapsed into numerous episodes of corruption, whereby state agencies assumed the form of enterprises, making profit at the expense of those who lived on the arable land.<sup>23</sup> Scholars such as Kan recognize the expropriation of land during the Reform Era as a 'territorial mechanism' for the expansion and accumulation of both urban area and capital.<sup>24</sup> From now on, in order

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<sup>21</sup> Chen, T., Li, X., Hui, E., Lang, W. and Guo, Y. (2019). From Habitat III to the new urbanization agenda in China: Seeing through the practices of the "three old renewals" in Guangzhou. *Land Use Policy*, 81, p.515.

<sup>22</sup> Li, B. and Liu, C. (2017). Emerging selective regimes in a fragmented authoritarian environment: The 'three old redevelopment' policy in Guangzhou, China from 2009 to 2014. *Urban Studies*, 55(7), p.1401.

<sup>23</sup> Gong, T. (2006). Corruption and local governance: the double identity of Chinese local governments in market reform. *The Pacific Review*, 19(1), p.91.

<sup>24</sup> Kan op. cit. p.593.

to describe China's behaviour towards urban land expansion through expropriation, Zhu's description of a 'predatory state' with the only aim of maximising profits at the expense of a silent society should be taken into acknowledgement by the readers.<sup>25</sup>

The reason for this definition is hereafter described.

Hurried urbanisation and urban areas specifically, have faced reckless expansion and disordered spread.<sup>26</sup> As a result of this excessive quest for money from land sales, the built areas have increased at a yearly growth rate that has outpaced urban population growth. From 1981 to 2012 the built area expanded by 513% resulting in an annual rate of 6% and a total urban land expansion from 7400 to 45,000km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>27</sup> 6% is also the annual growth rate by which built areas were growing in contrast to the 4% of urban population growth between 2001 and 2005.<sup>28</sup>

One can think of this as a miracle in terms of development, however, the fact that urban population density was simultaneously declining, is a confirmation of the contrary. More land got expropriated in order to start construction projects and create space for people who did not need it. Local governments' excessive performance on land-sales and development is rooted partially in an index based on gross domestic product and, specifically, asked by the central government who aimed

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<sup>25</sup> Qian, Z. (2017). Resettlement and adaptation in China's small town urbanization: Evidence from the villagers' perspective. *Habitat International*, 67, p.35.

<sup>26</sup> Guan op. cit. p.103.

<sup>27</sup> Chen et al. (2019) op. cit. p.334.

<sup>28</sup> Guan op. cit. p.103.

at the economic growth of the country. The required single index was causing local governments, who feared to disobey the central governments orders, to maximise incomes even if it was practically ignoring the law. Not surprisingly, the reckless expansion, construction and transformation of rural to urban spaces has resulted in urban areas without population, also known as ghost cities.<sup>29</sup> Ordos, in Inner Mongolia, is probably the most famous example. Constructed to host one million people, it has, today, a resident population of 100,000. Following Žižek's words, the tragedy of the Great Leap Forward is repeating today comparing the 'iron foundry in every village' with the 'skyscraper on every street.'<sup>30</sup> Speculation excess is evident and it can be described in post-productive China as an overall lack of 'rules of the game' which has led to spontaneous development of rural areas as stated by Lang et al.<sup>31</sup>

This absence of urban master planning and inefficiency has produced fragmentation, inefficient land use and disharmony. Moreover, China has the highest quantity of impervious surface area (ISA) on planet.<sup>32</sup> ISA areas are those natural pavements which have been destroyed and substituted with synthetic surfaces such as roads and buildings and most importantly, where water cannot penetrate. Moreover China's architecture is typically characterized by very long and wide roads, voluminous

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<sup>29</sup> Wang et al. op. cit. p.282.

<sup>30</sup> Žižek, S. (2011). Three Notes on China: Past and Present. *positions: asia critique*, 19(3), in Sorace, C. and Hurst, W. (2015). China's Phantom Urbanisation and the Pathology of Ghost Cities. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 46(2), p.306.

<sup>31</sup> Lang, W., Chen, T. and Li, X. (2016). A new style of urbanization in China: Transformation of urban rural communities. *Habitat International*, 55, p.2.

<sup>32</sup> 2016 Chen et al. op. cit. p.336.

squares and massive buildings.<sup>33</sup> In order to save valuable fertile land, China needs to avoid the further adoption of this style in future.

Furthermore, because massive cultivable areas have been occupied by construction, the farmland quality adjacent to development areas as well as part of the remaining arable land are of bad quality for China's food-producing future.<sup>34</sup> Worrying data display China's urbanisation as highly polluting: 40.4% and 16.8% are the documented percentages of both poor and extremely poor groundwater quality in 1100 water stations across 182 Chinese cities.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, solid waste at the municipal level has currently reached 7 billion tons corresponding to 800,000 acres of garbage – and the annual rate is increasing at a dramatic rate of almost 5%.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, if the red line of 1.8 billion mu (120 million hectares) is breached, the consequences could threaten China's food security harshly.<sup>37</sup> Arable, fertile land turned into urban land is, therefore, cruelly jeopardising domestic food-production as well as its population, namely, farmers.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>34</sup> Wang et al. op. cit. p.282.

<sup>35</sup> Guan et al. op. cit. p.102.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>37</sup> News.cgtn.com. (2019). *'Red line' policy protects China's arable land*. [online] Available at: <https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d514d316b444f32457a6333566d54/index.html> [Accessed 14 May 2019].

## The consequence of China's urbanisation for its rural habitants

### Background

The number of landless farmers in China has exceeded 40 million ten years ago and is still increasing by 2 million annually.<sup>38</sup> These numbers are bound to the urbanisation process China is undergoing and has undergone. They represent a social consequence of development. The speed of China's urbanisation from 1996 to 2015 is the highest ever recorded – four and a half times larger than the one from the revolution until the death of Mao.<sup>39</sup> China reached world's average level of urbanisation in 2014. The world's ordinary time to reach this average was 50 years: it took 40 for the USA but it only took 15 for China.<sup>40</sup> China's phenomenal urbanisation however needs to be carefully monitored in the future. Urbanisation with Chinese characteristics has demonstrated that it can result in the uncontrolled expansion of its cities which can lead to threats for its population. An idea behind urbanisation is rooted in the fact that incomes are higher in urban areas, therefore eliminating rural land in order to create higher-salaries' working hubs promotes progress. However, the 'Northam curve' mentioned by Chen et al. shows how the superior limit of urbanisation is about 80% and not 100% how logic would suggest. The aim of urbanisation, therefore, is to reach a balance between urban and rural and not the blind cancellation of arable land

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<sup>38</sup> Wang et al. op. cit. p.282.

<sup>39</sup> Guan et al. op. cit. p.98.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem.

for the sole purpose of a new urbanity.<sup>41</sup> As a result of forced displacement for development reasons, a huge flow of migrating farmers has begun to gather in China.

### The unfair practice of Chinese displacement and relocation

Forced expropriation of land indeed is a governmental action which seeks to create formal obstacles to communication by excluding a third party monitoring mechanism.<sup>42</sup> Villagers' resettlement and adaptation to a new environment is not much taken into consideration and, simultaneously, there have been a few cases where villagers have actually met and created powerful interest coalitions to change land-related policies.<sup>43</sup> The blocking institutions are at the village level or neighbourhood committees, whereas members of the Party often fear distrust and resist mobilization by unhappy stakeholders, which can lead to social unrest.<sup>44</sup> Although Rogers and Wilmsen define resettlement as a program implemented by the government, whose aim is to combine capital and land in order to reorganise labour and people's wellbeing through controlled space, the outcomes of this phenomenon have frequently been unsuccessful in China.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Chen et al. (2016) op. cit. p.337.

<sup>42</sup> Qian, Z. op. cit. p.41.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>45</sup> Rogers, S. and Wilmsen, B. (2019). Towards a critical geography of resettlement. *Progress in Human Geography*, p.1.

The unhappy results of displacement in China have occurred as a consequence of gentrification. Urban land expansion and hydropower plants projects among others resulted in overall accumulation by dispossession.<sup>46</sup> The concept of pure voluntary resettlement in China is blurred. Wilmsen and Wang recognize that the outcomes regarding displacement and relocation in China do not depend on its voluntary or involuntary nature, but on the final outcomes in terms of wellbeing of the relocated individual – which is regarded as an achievement rather than the norm in China.<sup>47</sup>

Public participation in the process of displacement and resettlement is also severely lacking. Top-down decision making is one of China's governmental trademarks. Public participation in development projects in relation to the environment, for example, has been proposed and a specific law has been implemented. Notwithstanding the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in existence since 1979, public participation in the scoping stage of the assessment only became a formal requirement 20 years later, in the 'Regulation on Environmental Management of Construction Projects' of 1998, when developers had to update the inhabitants while formulating the EIA.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Harvey, D. (2003). The right to the city. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 27(4), p.949.

<sup>47</sup> Wilmsen, B. and Wang, M. (2015). Voluntary and involuntary resettlement in China: a false dichotomy?. *Development in Practice*, 25(5), p.613.

<sup>48</sup> Li, T., Thomas Ng, S. and Skitmore, M. (2012). Public participation in infrastructure and construction projects in China: From an EIA-based to a whole-cycle process. *Habitat International* (36),1 p.48. Cited in Purer, M. (2018) The Lack of Public Participation in the Chinese Environmental Impact Assessment Process: Consequences of a Changing Law

The action of informing the affected population of development's consequences without their involvement in the decision-making course got recognized as not sufficient. Chinese peasants had, therefore, to wait until 2003, when the National People's Congress (NPC) eventually validated the EIA Law.<sup>49</sup> The study on the public participation in the EIA process by Matteo Purer labels the aforementioned law as a highly problematic aspect of China's openness to the affected population. Indeed the population is asked to review top-down decisions at a stage where experts have already drafted the outcomes of the project.<sup>50</sup> The public is not asked to give its opinion in the scoping stage, when relevant decisions are taken.<sup>51</sup>

### China's unbalanced geographic distribution of cities

In addition, the morphology and distribution of Chinese cities is very uneven: the south-eastern region of China is the area that hosts the majority of the cities due to its favourable natural conditions and policies related to development, as a result it is the most economically developed area of China.<sup>52</sup> This geographical division is explained virtually by Hu Huanyong's Hu-Line.<sup>53</sup> The distribution of the cities in 45%

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<sup>49</sup> Moorman, J. L.; Ge, Z. (2007). Promoting and strengthening public participation in china's environmental impact assessment process: Comparing china's EIA Law and U.S. Nepa. *Vermont Journal of Environmental Law* 8(2) p.282. Cited in Purer, M. (2018) The Lack of Public Participation in the Chinese Environmental Impact Assessment Process: Consequences of a Changing Law.

<sup>50</sup> Purer, M. (2018) The Lack of Public Participation in the Chinese Environmental Impact Assessment Process: Consequences of a Changing Law. p.4

<sup>51</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>52</sup> Guan et al. op. cit. p.107.

<sup>53</sup> Ibidem.

of land in the south-eastern region accounted for a total of 589, 89.6% of China's total and an astonishing 95% of the country's total population. Contrarily, the north-west region hosts only 5% of the total population, in just 68 cities.<sup>54</sup>

The foundation of new cities and the enlargement of pre-existing towns, especially in the south-eastern region for the sake of urbanisation, has led to migration from the villages – at times voluntarily, but often forced. The rural population's size peaked in 2000, with 808 million rural dwellers. It then started to decline and fell to 603 million in 2015 – an inferior number compared to the 1979 figures.<sup>55</sup> With regard to urban population increase, China's National Bureau of Statistics has estimated in 2014 that approximately 45,000 rural residents leave their villages daily to seek fortune in the cities.<sup>56</sup> This phenomenon will eventually result in China's urban population to reach one billion within less than 15 years.<sup>57</sup> Villagers leave for cities mostly for economic purposes, yet in many cases the exodus is a consequence of displacement. High quality arable land in villages gets expropriated for the sake of development, however farmers get often meagre compensations and inferior quality land in exchange for this.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Chen et al. (2018) op. cit. p.181.

<sup>55</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>56</sup> Kassiola, J. (2016). op. cit. p. 77.

<sup>57</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>58</sup> Chen et al. (2016) op. cit. p.335.

Social injustice has characterized the Chinese countryside for decades and the lack of planning has caused anomalies. Urban villages emerge for instance, when rural settlements are not turned into urbanities because of great compensation costs. Local governments in response prefer to avoid the responsibility over relocation and compensation, leaving the settlement to be governed autonomously.<sup>59</sup> Now that cost and time-consuming procedures such as demolition have been avoided, social order and governance problem arise in certain examples and circumstances.<sup>60</sup> Villages-in-the-city, urban villages or *chengzhongcun*, literally are 'villages encircled by city boundaries'.<sup>61</sup> The integration of local villagers into the municipal environment does not occur smoothly and urban-villagers often become forgotten. Several of problems related to social order are consequences of rapid urbanisation.<sup>62</sup> Grassroots units, the self-organised governing bodies which reside in urban-villages, therefore, deserve further support.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Lang et al. op. cit. p.2.

<sup>60</sup> Idem. p.3.

<sup>61</sup> Zhang, L. (2011). The political economy of informal settlements in post-socialist China: The case of chengzhongcun(s). *Geoforum*, 42(4), p.473.

<sup>62</sup> Lang et al. op. cit. p.2.

<sup>63</sup> Ibidem.

## Examples of Chinese peasants' displacement and relocation

By year 2017, more than 58,000 dam projects were in operation globally and half of these were in China only. Dams provide large irrigation, reliable flood control and hydroelectricity, apart from overall economic, public service and societal improvement.<sup>64</sup> China has a tradition of dam building stretching back millennia: Dujiangyan Dam in Chengdu was built 2200 years ago and is still successfully used today for irrigation and inundation control.<sup>65</sup> Astonishing numbers show how China has erected 86,000 dams during only 40 years, from 1949 to 1990.<sup>66</sup> These extremely high numbers reveal China's scarce water-reserves, therefore, reservoir projects as well as water management have represented a highly important prerogative in China's rise and precaution.

Not surprisingly, former President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao were previously hydro-engineers.<sup>67</sup> For this reason, dam projects do also receive a strong support from the government notwithstanding their controversial impacts on nature and typically on society. Indeed amongst 50 large dam projects studied by Scudder between 2001 and 2004, 82% of the cases, which included a displacement and

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<sup>64</sup> Huang, Y., Lin, Li and Ning (2019). *Social Impacts of Dam-Induced Displacement and Resettlement: A Comparative Case Study in China*. P.1

<sup>65</sup> Tilt, B., Braun, Y. and He, D. (2009). Social impacts of large dam projects: A comparison of international case studies and implications for best practice. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 90, p.S254.

<sup>66</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>67</sup> Chen, Y. and Landry, D. (2018). Capturing the rains: Comparing Chinese and World Bank hydropower projects in Cameroon and pathways for South-South and North South technology transfer. *Energy Policy*, 115, p.562.

resettlement program did not achieve positive outcomes.<sup>68</sup> In terms of economic, cultural and social wellbeing, large reservoir projects can have brutal repercussions on the relocated communities. According to Wilmsen and Wang, who analyse the truthfulness behind the formal differentiation between voluntary and involuntary relocation in China, 'the success of involuntary resettlement is contingent on recasting the involuntary as voluntary.'<sup>69</sup> The two aforementioned scholars also criticise the commonplace of acknowledging a successful resettlement as an 'achievement and not a norm.'<sup>70</sup> Voluntary resettlement fundamentally differs from involuntary resettlement for the fact that individuals can choose either to stay or to be relocated. The outcomes of voluntary resettlement are often more positive than those of their counterpart, because of the altruistic motivations behind it.<sup>71</sup> Moreover voluntary resettled individuals can enjoy more financial resources allocated to their well-being, more flexibility in terms of the time when the household decides to be relocated and a complete and long-term commitment by the government in order to improve regional development.<sup>72</sup>

In the context of the National New Type Urbanisation Plan, a revolutionary amendment of law has been proposed by the scholar Wilmsen. In order to accelerate

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<sup>68</sup> Scudder, T. 2012. "Resettlement Outcomes of Large Dams." In *Impacts of Large Dams: A Global Assessment*, Berlin: Springer-Verlag. p.40.

<sup>69</sup> Wilmsen, B. and Wang, M. (2015). *op. cit.*, p.612.

<sup>70</sup> *Idem.* P.613.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibidem.*

the economy of the country and to move significant parts of the rural population into urban centres, following the guidelines of the NUP, the 'Regulations for Land Acquisition Compensation for Large and Medium Hydropower and Water Conservancy Projects' need to be changed. Before the hypothetical amendment, in the instance of farmland expropriation new farmland was provided for the farmers as compensation. The former replacement, however, will no longer be provided and farmers' recompense will be the relocation to a nearby town or city.<sup>73</sup>

This forced urbanisation measure is in conflict with the established so-called 1982 Regulations for National Construction Projects, whereby compensation for the displacement and relocation process included a monetary subsidy in order to re-establish peasants' livelihoods after the loss but, mostly, a parcel of land as physical compensation.<sup>74</sup> However do farmers really want to change their livelihoods and move to urban environments for the sake of urbanisation? Or should land-based rural resettlement from the 1980s be reviewed for the welfare of its victims? Moreover, the remarkable feature in the process of new established displacement and relocation is the fact that, while, according to the Plan, the processes of Hukou and urban renewal will be characterized by spontaneous, self-directed migration, the third one – resettlement – is arranged and developed in a top-down, state-promoted process.

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<sup>73</sup> Wilmsen, B. (2017). Damming China's rivers to expand its cities: the urban livelihoods of rural people displaced by the Three Gorges Dam. *Urban Geography*, 39(3), p.346.

<sup>74</sup> Yan, D., Wang, M., Wang, H. and Shi, G. (2018). Policy and implementation of land-based resettlement in China (1949–2014). *International Journal of Water Resources Development*, 34(3), p.456.

Hence the reservoir forced displacement and resettlement is arranged in line with the State Council's plan to compulsorily urbanise regardless of livelihoods' degeneration, among further problems.<sup>75</sup>

Chinese governmental bodies such as the Ministry of Agriculture have proven in the past that rural to urban transition in China has been highly problematic: among 58 villages 14,000 working-aged people – who lost their land for urbanisation, 34.15% were chronically unemployed.<sup>76</sup> Another investigation undertaken by the government in 2003 proved that the revenues of 46% of landless farmers' amidst 28 provinces declined severely as a consequence of relocation to urban areas.<sup>77</sup> Some cases will be analysed hereafter and problems related to relocation following large-scale hydropower projects will be taken into account for future policy recommendations.

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<sup>75</sup> Wilmsen, B. (2017) p.347.

<sup>76</sup> He, Shenjing, Liu, Yuting, Webster, Chris, & Wu, Fulong. (2009). Property rights redistribution, entitlement failure and the impoverishment of landless farmers in China. *Urban Studies*, 46(9), 1925–1949. cited in Wilmsen, B. (2017). *Op. cit.* p.346.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibidem*.

## *Dam projects induced displacement and resettlement*

### The Manwan Dam in Yunnan

China does not have a blissful history of rural-to-urban resettlement. Or, specifically, the outcomes are, in most cases, more beneficial for the economic improvement of the country and local governments rather than for the livelihoods of those who have been affected by it. Located on the lower basin of the Mekong River in the southwestern region of Yunnan, the Manwan Dam has created several controversies related to the outcomes for the affected community involved. The dimensions of the reservoir are 132m in height, covering an area of 23km<sup>2</sup>. However after its conclusion, 6225 mu (411ha) of farmland got impacted by floods resulting in an inundation that affected 114 villages, 8 townships and 4 counties. These numbers can confuse the reader and are hard to conceive of as actual impacts. Yet in terms of the victims, the outcomes have been tremendous.

The estimated number of relocated farmers was supposed not be higher than 3052 individuals. More than twice as much, however, had to be resettled, ultimately.<sup>78</sup> To make matters worse, the amount of recompense resources for the peasants who lost their land was not enough – resulting in a too low budget allocated for compensation<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Tilt et al. op. cit. p.254

<sup>79</sup> Ibidem.

Moreover the Manwan Dam has created paradoxes and inequalities when it came to energy distribution. Ironically the area close to the reservoir project is constantly witnessing electricity and water shortages, even if the dam was created to provide more of both. The Manwan dam was nevertheless prompt in delivering the energy eastwards to booming cities in Guangdong where demand for electricity is related to the manufacturing and commercial sector. As a matter of fact, this unjust distributive measure was better known under the State's policy – 'Send Western Electricity Eastward Plan'.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, as identified by Wang et al., who interviewed both near and far resettled peasants, compensation and relocation worked differently and did not lead to good results for either. The near-resettled were responsible for the construction of their new houses, received a smaller plot of land in comparison to the expropriated one and of bad quality in terms of fertility. Moreover the lack of irrigation forced the farmers to change cultivation from rice to wheat or corn. Healthcare and education suffered from relocation because of the mediocre transportation infrastructure.<sup>81</sup>

While compensation for near-relocated individuals has shown severe hurdles for its victims, far-relocated peasants' compensation was better. Like the near-relocated, they were also responsible for the construction of their own houses however, the

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<sup>80</sup> Wang, P., Wolf, S., Lassoie, J. and Dong, S. (2013). Compensation policy for displacement caused by dam construction in China: An institutional analysis. *Geoforum*, 48, p.5.

<sup>81</sup> Ibidem.

monetary compensation they received was higher and the location was closer to the nearest county town, facilitating, therefore, the availability of healthcare and education.<sup>82</sup> Sadly, in both cases, eventually, near and far-relocated farmers' incomes produced by agricultural work was insufficient forcing them to reach the town and work in factories.<sup>83</sup>

An interesting study has been undertaken recently by scholars Tilt and Gerkey, who analyse the relationship between displacement and social capital across not only the Manwan, but also other reservoirs in the Mekong River basin. Financial and labour exchange are not very active in the area and *guanxi* – interpersonal ties and networks – which are considered to play a pivotal role in rural society, have been compromised by ambiguous property rights and job security issues. In fact networks of people have been considered less in Manwan than in the other three reservoirs located in the Mekong River basin.<sup>84</sup> A 2016 study found that, 20 years after the completion of the dam, resettled households in Manwan are less resilient and interconnected in terms of giving and receiving labour. They are still suffering the mistakes made by the government in estimating the number of displaced farmers and are amongst the poorest farmers in China.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>83</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>84</sup> Tilt, B. and Gerkey, D. (2016). op. cit., p.155.

<sup>85</sup> Idem. p.158.

Considering that the profits of the population in Manwan in 1991 were 6.7% higher than the provincial average, these numbers are serious.<sup>86</sup> Interconnections related to loans given and provided between households are also very low, likewise labour-exchange partners. The reason why the resettled farmers are still suffering stands both in the rise of the prices for construction materials during the 1990s in contrast to the fixed compensation, which made the reconstruction of new houses unaffordable and, as aforementioned, the wrong calculations by the resettling agency concerning the estimate number of displaced people.<sup>87</sup>

These hurdles can and could have been monitored by the government – which was responsible for the dramatic outcomes that the displaced farmers have had to witness. The engagement of rural communities in decision making prior to any resettlement plan is highly recommended in order not to fall in the same trap. Public hearings and peoples' concerns are highly important in the rural-traditional environment by aligning regulations with practice and avoiding insurmountable future problems.<sup>88</sup> Ethnic minorities and the gender issues are part of a general concern in many displacement and relocation actions. China is home to more than 50 ethnic minority groups. In the case of the Manwan Dam project, numerous impacted villages are home to minority people such as the Yi and Dai – two amongst nine ethnic minority

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<sup>86</sup> Tilt et al (2009) op. cit p.254.

<sup>87</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>88</sup> Brown, P. and Xu, K. (2010). Hydropower Development and Resettlement Policy on China's Nu River. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 19(66), p.795.

groups in Yunnan. The displacement of these minorities from their ancestral villages puts their cultural roots under threat.<sup>89</sup> Women's marginalisation occurred when the monetary recompense for the expropriated house was given in the hands of the male, therefore, ostracizing the role of the female individual in the household.<sup>90</sup> Well-organised public hearings should, thus, integrate women and individuals from ethnic minorities into the decision making process.

### *The Three Gorges Dam in Yangtze River*

#### Introduction to the project

In terms of average yearly power and overall installed capacity, the Three Gorges Dam is the largest hydropower dam ever constructed by humankind. In addition, it had the largest resettlement related to dam projects ever undertaken through its 600km of length.<sup>91</sup> Official numbers report 1.3 million people displaced, amongst 13 inundated cities, 140 towns and 1350 villages.<sup>92</sup> Approved by the National Peoples' Congress in 1992 and officially launched in 1994 on one of the world's longest rivers – the Yangtze – the Three Gorges Dam extends its reaches from Hubei Province to Chongqing city.

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<sup>89</sup> Tilt et al (2009) op. cit p.255.

<sup>90</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>91</sup> Wilmsen, B. (2017) op. cit. p.17.

<sup>92</sup> Xinhua. (2016). World's largest shiplift completes China's Three Gorges project. Retrieved from [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-09-19/content\\_26825380\\_4.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-09-19/content_26825380_4.htm).

Before the project was proposed and accomplished, the area was famous for its suggestive sceneries, deep-rooted culture and delicious oranges.<sup>93</sup> Yet after the completion of the project, its reputation and fame changed drastically. The motivations behind the construction of the reservoir were the improvement of the navigation on the Yangtze River and additional electricity production: two factors in line with China's greater economic boom.<sup>94</sup>

The case is nowadays well known among scholars for the massive repercussions that the population adjacent the enormous hydropower development has witnessed. With regard to the focus on rural-urban resettlement, highly quoted by scholars in general, we need to readdress the emphasis on terminology that labels the displacement and relocation process subsequent hydropower projects. While migration researchers call it rural-urban migration, scholar Li Heming et al. recognizes that 'development-induced forced displacement and resettlement' should be further used as a more appropriate terminology.<sup>95</sup> Moreover in the case of the Three-Gorges, the population involved in the displacement was rural-to-urban, urban-to-urban, as well as rural-to-rural.

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<sup>93</sup> Heming, L., Waley, P. and Rees, P. (2001). Reservoir resettlement in China: past experience and the Three Gorges Dam. *The Geographical Journal*, 167(3), p.201.

<sup>94</sup> Wilmsen, B. and Wang, M. (2015) op. cit. p.616.

<sup>95</sup> Idem. p.195.

### Rural-to-urban relocation

Living conditions before the Three Gorges Dam Reservoir (hereinafter, TGPR) have not been easy for the farmers' community. Amongst the 20 counties affected by the TPGR, 12 were listed as poor.<sup>96</sup> When compared with other forms of relocation such as the 'poverty alleviation' one, deeply analysed by Wilmsen and Wang, whereby 35 amidst 96 counties listed as poor in terms of average per capita income, received extensive help, we can recognize that the example of the Three Gorges Dam should have been enlisted as one of such programs.<sup>97</sup> The concept of voluntary and involuntary are, however, rather blurred in the case of China's projects: those who do not agree to move are, at the end, compulsorily relocated by the forces of the poverty alleviation system – transforming the previous settlement into a ghost town since the vast majority of the residents decide to move.<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless the aspects related to relocation from – and to – ghost cities as well as resettlement projects in so-called villages in the city or urban villages will be further examined and evaluated in following chapters.

The sole aspect that we should consider here is the failed idea of relocation with livelihood enhancement. Moreover, since the case of TGPR has been driven by financial interests rather than welfare improvement, it is not surprising that less

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<sup>96</sup> Idem. p. 616.

<sup>97</sup> Wilmsen, B. and Wang, M. (2015).

<sup>98</sup> Xue, L., Wang, M. and Xue, T. (2013). 'Voluntary' Poverty Alleviation Resettlement in China. *Development and Change*, 44(5), pp.1168.

attention has been put towards the improvement or, at least, towards not deteriorating the well-being of the affected community. Now the reason why rural-to-urban resettled individuals have lower incomes and worst livelihoods overall compared to their counterparts is related to the dependency on the destination sites. While rural-to-urban resettled people see their reality and environment changing drastically – from farmland to urban land, urban-to-urban and rural-to-rural displaced people have less adaptation troubles. A turning point in the history of the TGPR has been the 1998 floods that inundated a large part of the farmlands and caused the relocation of farmers into municipalities. This occurred although the rural dwellers were supposed to be relocated on land-based criteria.<sup>99</sup> At the beginning, the project was meant to improve the livelihoods of the affected rural population in the basin region through the strengthening of agrarian practices under the Regulations on Resettlement for the Construction of the Three Gorges Project on the Yangtze River (1993).<sup>100</sup> Yet, in the 1990s, relocated rural dwellers started to convert the forestland adjacent the reservoir into farmland – in most cases, however, naturally incompatible for cultivation.<sup>101</sup> Moreover the deforestation process led to serious land erosion making the topsoil thinner and thinner and, therefore, very unfertile. In addition, soil erosion diminishes the depth and water-holding capability – leading to higher

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<sup>99</sup>Wilmsen, B. (2017) op. cit. p.10.

<sup>100</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>101</sup> Ibidem.

frequency of both droughts, mountain vulnerability and most importantly to the 1998 flood, which caused the deaths of more than 3000 individuals.<sup>102</sup>

The government, thereafter, introduced first the National Forest Conservation Program, limiting the deforestation and promoting reforestation and later in 2001 new regulations on relocation and environmental protection were finally approved and enacted by the State Council.<sup>103</sup> Concerning the farmers' relocation, the 2001 guidelines deleted the principle of taking farming and agriculture as a basis for peasants' relocation, therefore, openly promoting and, to a certain extent, forcing the rural population to migrate to the cities. Some reasons for this are the growing lack of farming land in the Three Gorges Area and the restrictions that have been put into practice regarding the opening of new farmland, for example, new farmland cannot be created on slopes greater than 25 degrees.<sup>104</sup> Moreover one important aspect in the 2001 principles centres around the administration of the relocation funds: a separate part has been added in order to make clear that the ruling authorities will not raise the relocation budgets.<sup>105</sup> The 2001 regulations have encouraged, therefore, the actual rural-to-urban resettlement – respectively 190,000 and 200,000 peasants

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<sup>102</sup> Tan, Y. and Yao, F. (2006). Three Gorges Project: Effects of Resettlement on the Environment in the Reservoir Area and Countermeasures. *Population and Environment*, 27(4), p.360.

<sup>103</sup> Heggelund, G. (2006). Resettlement Programmes and Environmental Capacity in the Three Gorges Dam Project. *Development and Change*, 37(1), p.193.

<sup>104</sup> Idem. p.194.

<sup>105</sup> Ibidem.

– to become resettled in eleven provinces distant from the region and in nearby townships.<sup>106</sup>

Problems related to the lack of workplaces and to the level of suitability for the farmers started to emerge. Farmers that moved into cities and changed their environments from land-based life, to relocation into high-rise buildings, trying to access jobs in the secondary and tertiary sectors. The erosion of livelihoods and the search for new opportunities brought the relocated community to face real issues. Their struggle to prevent rural unemployment crashed with the actual lack of workplaces and as a result the differences between rural-to-rural and urban-to-rural employment after relocation is striking, notwithstanding the rural-to-urban resettled people received the largest amount of compensation (because of the loss of their land and the loss of the rights they had in relationship to the land), from 2003 to 2011 the employment situation of urban-to-urban resettlers and that of rural-to-urban ones was very distinct and remarkable.<sup>107</sup> While, in 2003, the lack of jobs was a noteworthy feature for both urban-to-rural and urban-to-urban resettlers, figures in 2011 show a positive and improving situation for the original urban dwellers.

The urban-to-urban cohort has shown a better adaptation that resulted in higher and more stable employment in small-scale businesses in the private sector. Yet at the same time the number of workers employed in manual labour had declined for urban-

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<sup>106</sup> Wilmsen, B. (2017) op. cit. pp.9-10.

<sup>107</sup> Idem. p.15.

to-urban in comparison with rural-to-urban. In other words this phenomenon shows how manual jobs were highly available during the intensive years of the dam's construction and how both cohorts were employed in the construction phase as workforce. The figures in 2011, however, display how by the end of the transitioning phase and as new townships and cities were established following the dam's formation, the majority of the urban-to-urban were able to abandon manual jobs and find more suitable employment in private small businesses. Rural-to-urban resettlers, in contrast, were unable to transit out of manual jobs – resulting in permanence in low-skilled and extremely disadvantageous occupations.<sup>108</sup>

### Policy recommendations and future governmental improvements

The aforementioned residual socio-political issues related to labour discrepancies occurred after the completion of the Three Gorges Dam. The State Council addressed this problem in a statement that promised the catching up of provincial living standards for relocated people within 2020.<sup>109</sup> Hu Jintao's words in 2007 calling out for better living standards and employment under the renowned umbrella-term 'harmony within society', will have the aim to alleviate poverty and work for the reconstruction of a solid region. Nevertheless at that time both President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao – who emphasized the importance of ecological protection

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<sup>108</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>109</sup> Duan, Y. and Wilmsen, B. (2012) Addressing the resettlement challenges at the Three Gorges Project. *International Journal of Environmental Studies*, 69(3), pp.468-469.

and resettlement – missed the opportunity to be present at the ceremony for the completion of the dam.<sup>110</sup>

The Three Gorges Project Construction Commission (TGPC) has been in authority for the scoping and the relocation phase. Since 2008, it was a collaboration with the Ministry of Finance and the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) in order to formulate guidelines and a working strategy for the ‘post-construction’.<sup>111</sup> Multiple universities and organisations have participated in the plan resulting in 2011’s ultimate Working Plan being officially agreed upon by the State Council. The Plan’s aim is to provide aid to the 20 counties that have witnessed the gruesome aftermath of the Three Gorges Dam by allotting more than 50 billion RMB over the ten years period from 2011–2020.<sup>112</sup> Social and economic welfare are the meant to be improved dramatically.

According to the head of commission Cai Qihua, the post-construction works will address three different spheres: post-resettled peoples’ condition enhancement, geological cataclysm avoidance and environmental protection.<sup>113</sup> Moreover he stated that the future work related to post-construction will be highly complex and premeditated strategy will be key. The emphasis Cai puts on the planning phases stands in contrast to the Chinese tendency to skip and disregard the importance and

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<sup>110</sup> Yardley, J. (2007). *China - Three Gorges Dam - Impact*. [online] Nytimes.com. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/19/world/asia/19dam.html> [Accessed 3 Jun. 2019].

<sup>111</sup> Duan, Y. and Wilmsen, B. (2012) op. cit. p.469.

<sup>112</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>113</sup> China.org.cn. (2019). *Three Gorges Dam post-construction plan -- china.org.cn*. [online] Available at: [http://www.china.org.cn/business/2009-04/13/content\\_17595915.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/business/2009-04/13/content_17595915.htm) [Accessed 4 Jun. 2019].

delicacy of this phase in past development instances.<sup>114</sup> The scoping phase may require, thus, more than two years.<sup>115</sup>

Care and attention is, therefore, a rather positive approach to the improvement of the current situation. Unfortunately the commission's director does not mention and include in any statement the importance of more active public participation and to actually listen to the affected community ideas about the recovery project. In line with the National New Type Development Plan, the idea behind the new forms of resettlement within the Three Gorges Dam region is motivated by the densely inhabited area. Around 210 townships and almost 1400 villages hosting 80,000 rural relocated people will be persuaded to eventually leave the countryside and accept relocation into adjacent urban areas, this time promising adequate compensation to those who lost land and crops to be able to purchase a house in the nearby urban spheres.<sup>116</sup>

This example shows how the New Type Urbanisation agenda's mentality follows its guidelines constantly in order to secure future resettlement schemes persistently on a rural-to-urban basis. In addition to further relocation schemes, training programs will be established in order to boost employability in the new zone. At this point it is relevant to mention that, since the government is promoting new forms of more

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<sup>114</sup>Purer, M. (2018) The Lack of Public Participation in the Chinese Environmental Impact Assessment Process: Consequences of a Changing Law. p.8.

<sup>115</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>116</sup> Duan, Y. and Wilmsen, B. (2012) p.472.

sustainable agricultures, it should simultaneously combine the promotion of trainings with the development of new forms of sustainable agriculture. Notwithstanding the Working Plan's aim to improve employability in industrial new-built sectors through specific training schemes, those who stay on the land should also receive some support and training focused on the development of sustainable agriculture.

### Large-scale farms and cooperatives

An interesting approach that could be adopted in future displacement and relocation practices – whereby peasants' farmland is seized and gets compensated with new land – is the establishment of large-scale farming. Old methods of giving each farmer a new independent plot of land are less monitored by the central government and often jeopardize the quality of food through the abuse of pesticides and fertilizers. Moreover the allocated plot is, in most cases, unfruitful in comparison with the expropriated one. Indeed Wu et al. first analyses the reason why so many small-scale farmers use exaggerated amounts of chemical additives and realize that the bigger the farm, the smaller the amount of synthetic additives involved.<sup>117</sup> The authors' motivation for farmers' overuse of chemicals relies in the unfair farm sizes of China's countryside. Typical size for cropland is approximately 0.1 ha. In addition, the scholars

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<sup>117</sup> Wu, Y., Xi, X., Tang, X., Luo, D., Gu, B., Lam, S., Vitousek, P. and Chen, D. (2018). Policy distortions, farm size, and the overuse of agricultural chemicals in China. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 115(27), p.7011.

suggest how these farmers should rent their land to large-scale farming industries and venture into non-agricultural markets.<sup>118</sup>

Yet instead of exiting the lands, would it not be better to participate in the process?

Data shows how the increase by 1% in the size of the farmland corresponds to a 0.5% decrease in chemical additives use per ha. of land and virtually 1% of agri-labour's productivity increase.<sup>119</sup> Reforms related to land use and distribution would lead to sensational improvements and to the combination of improved rural households' well-being and environmental protection in the Three Gorges reservoir area as well as throughout China in general.

China is world's largest consumer of pesticides and fertilizers in the world employing over 30% of global agricultural chemicals on just 9% of the world's cropland – which, based on rural households research declined from 0.73ha in the 1980s to 0.53ha in 2003.<sup>120</sup> Removing policy boundaries and distortions related to the land use would improve the environment since massive amounts of chemicals won't be purchased anymore. These adjustments would, therefore, help saving money, sustain the farmers' wellbeing and leading to local, regional and global pollution reduction. Contemporary technology would also be at farmers' fingertips, thus, modernizing the lands and the owners' approaches to cultivation.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>119</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>120</sup> Huang, J. and Ding, J. (2016). Institutional innovation and policy support to facilitate small-scale farming transformation in China. *Agricultural Economics*, 47(S1), p.228.

<sup>121</sup> Wu et al. op. cit. p.7011.

If large-scale farming can be a too revolutionary approach, cooperatives in China have also shown positive outcomes. Productivity and income have experienced drastic improvements resulting from the subscriptions of small-scale farmers. A study by Wanglin Ma and Awudu Abdulai who took 480 random apple farmers' households in Gansu, Shaanxi and Shandong in 2013, is striking for small-scale farmers' submission to cooperatives.<sup>122</sup> Apple yields, household incomes and net returns have been compared and differences between participants and nonparticipants emerged.

If positive results occurred in different regions with apples then why should it not be beneficial in the Three Gorges Area for its famous oranges? Moreover the affiliation to cooperatives has strengthened quality and enhanced agro-food safety.<sup>123</sup> The involvement of displaced population in cooperatives can improve farmers' bargaining power as well as include modernity into their business lives by allowing them to benefit from modern value chains.<sup>124</sup> Although Hao et al. found that cooperative sale for the aforementioned apple commerce received more request for wholesalers and a rather negative influence on small dealers; this approach has no bad influence on the cooperative itself. In other words, small-holder families within cooperatives have no problems meeting high-value agricultural market requirements.<sup>125</sup> This should be

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<sup>122</sup> Ma, W. and Abdulai, A. (2016). Does cooperative membership improve household welfare? Evidence from apple farmers in China. *Food Policy*, 58, p.102.

<sup>123</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>124</sup> Hao, J., Bijman, J., Gardebroek, C., Heerink, N., Heijman, W. and Huo, X. (2018). Cooperative membership and farmers' choice of marketing channels – Evidence from apple farmers in Shaanxi and Shandong Provinces, China. *Food Policy*, 74, p.54.

<sup>125</sup> Ibidem.

combined with more environmental friendly farming practices and farmers should be trained in order to not commit same mistakes as in the past.

### Vocational education and training

In order to form a solid integration of rural-to-urban displaced population, more job positions need to be established in applicable positions such as: sales positions and factory work, among others.<sup>126</sup> Training schemes to overcome skill shortages will be provided to the rural-to-urban population moving into nearby cities and townships in the region – as stated by the Working Plan. The training, within the Working Plan will provide efficient intermediate and higher level vocational preparation for those who aspire to be employed in urbanities as well as basic training for rural-to-urban displaced individuals and uneducated urban dwellers.<sup>127</sup> The way in which training programs will be introduced and sponsored in such a delicate environment deserves special attention.

To overcome the lack of skilled personnel, China should experiment and introduce Vocational Education and Training (VET) schools in the Three Gorges Dam area, in the outskirts of the reservoirs and these schools should be inclusive for urban-to-rural displaced people, those who had lost their possessions as a result of cataclysms – as well as urban-to-urban unskilled workers, displaced and relocated in new

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<sup>126</sup> Kassiola op. cit. p.10.

<sup>127</sup> Duan, Y. and Wilmsen, B. (2012) p.472.

environments.<sup>128</sup> The VET is intended as a training program for young people to access the employment sphere – the need for high-skilled workers in a high-skilled economy such as the Chinese one is expanding, however, to not only youngsters and new generations, but also to those adult households who are facing tough moments such as resettlement schemes. Pre-existing VET-schools in China have not brought relevant improvements and the system and regulations have been amended consistently.

However to the present day, China has discovered a strong and experienced partner for the future development of VET schools: Germany, a country that has since decades, established a corporative approach that joints together enterprises, schools and labour unions in a sole governmental framework.<sup>129</sup> As a result, the youth unemployment rate in Germany is the lowest in the European Union, at only 6%, more than five times lower than in countries like Italy, which never implemented such a centralised well-established system.<sup>130</sup>

Since 1997, China has been learning from German expertise and an assortment of different departments have been opened in collaboration with Germany. The three most powerful institutes for VET have been established in Beijing, Shanghai and Liaoning, where in the latter more than 80,000 students have started their

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<sup>128</sup> Stewart, V. (2015) Made in China: Challenge and Innovation in China's Vocational Education and Training System. *International Comparative Study of Leading Vocational Education Systems*. p.22.

<sup>129</sup> Barabasch, A., Huang, S. and Lawson, R. (2009). Planned policy transfer: the impact of the German model on Chinese vocational education. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 39(1), p.7.

<sup>130</sup> Statista. (2019). *EU: youth unemployment rate by country 2018* | Statista. [online] Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/266228/youth-unemployment-rate-in-eu-countries/> [Accessed 7 Jun. 2019].

education.<sup>131</sup> In Tianjin a German-Chinese VET (Aus- und Fortbildungszentrum) has been established in order to qualify its students/workers for electronic and metal manufacturing.<sup>132</sup>

The involvement and participation of the private sector within Chinese vocational education training such as the case of Germany, will contribute to a stronger growth of the Chinese VET. In fact, from the studying phase on, the trainee will be employed and demonstrate the learned skills, as well as earn their first salary – albeit during a training phase.<sup>133</sup> The introduction of VETs for displaced population could work both as job-relocating place as well as training school.

Of course, vocational schools should be introduced at the local level and not only in large cities. However, an arising dispute in China is the existing commonplace against negative view of vocational schools. When compared with the common belief with Germany, China sees vocational trainings as inferior in comparison to higher education such as university degrees. The fact that training programs have existed in Germany since mid-nineteenth century allow us to better understand how the population has, for generations embraced this alternative to higher education.<sup>134</sup> As a result, qualified workers, technicians and high-skilled workforce are in high demand,

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<sup>131</sup> Barabasch, A., Huang, S. and Lawson, R. (2009) op. cit. p.8.

<sup>132</sup> Idem. p.12.

<sup>133</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>134</sup> Baustoffwissen. (2019). *Geschichte der Berufsschulen in Deutschland - baustoffwissen*. [online] Available at: <https://www.baustoffwissen.de/kategorie-ausbildung/azubi-ratgeber/hintergrundwissen/geschichte-der-berufsschulen-in-deutschland/> [Accessed 31 Aug. 2019].

whereas the surplus of graduates in universities with broad degrees does not lead to any development.<sup>135</sup>

In recent years, precisely in November 2013, half a year after been elected as new president of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping committed China to additional economic reforms. At the Third Plenum of the 18<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the Communist Party, the newly elected president pledged for 'comprehensively deepening economic reform by centring on the decisive role of the market in allocating resources'.<sup>136</sup> Existing lacunae in education and vocational trainings were discussed by the Central Committee, which has shown a proneness to narrow the project.<sup>137</sup> VET has therefore been put along with the rest of the agenda's priorities and the focus was put on more innovation, higher quality, more cooperation between company and employee and further decentralisation and increased authority to the local level institutions.<sup>138</sup> One year later in a work report from the NPC in March 2014, Premier Li Keqiang reiterated the importance of modernity within the vocational education system.<sup>139</sup> Now a part from generalising the fundamentality of the concept, the impact of sound VAT projects in relocation sites and here specifically the Three Gorges Dam Working Plan should be included.

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<sup>135</sup> Blossfeld, H. and Stockmann, R. (1998). Guest Editors' Introduction. *International Journal of Sociology*, 28(4), p.19.

<sup>136</sup> Liu Qiang (2019). *Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform- China.org.cn*. [online] China.org.cn. Available at: [http://www.china.org.cn/china/third\\_plenary\\_session/2014-01/16/content\\_31212602.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/china/third_plenary_session/2014-01/16/content_31212602.htm) [Accessed 7 Jun. 2019].

<sup>137</sup> Stewart, V. (2015) op. cit. p.22.

<sup>138</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>139</sup> Ibidem.

## **The National New Type Plan – NUP 2014-2020**

### Structure of the Plan

Urbanisation has historically led to displacement and resettlement with severe complications for its victims, the rural people. This chapter examines the National New Type Urbanisation Plan, which is supposed to come to an end by 2020, only six years after its implementation in 2014, and which is the largest urbanisation project in world' history. Chinese development has led to massive amounts of people being displaced and relocated as a consequence of state-led urbanisation projects. The case of the NUP is meant to be the largest displacement and resettlement process the world has ever witnessed. The Plan will hence be put into comparison with official documents such as the State Council's 2010 'Urgent Circular on Further Enforcing More Rigorous Administration of Land Conversion and Villager Relocation Land Expropriation and Effectively Protecting People's Rights and Interests'. The document was a clear admonition from the central government to provincial governments in order to achieve the cessation of violent displacement and resettlement procedures.<sup>140</sup> The Plan will be analysed and taken as a basis for the dissertation and the concept of displacement-and-resettlement will be applied to past examples of urbanisation or construction projects but mostly, in view of this event, which is supposed to change the morphology of the country – again.

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<sup>140</sup> Qian, Z. (2017). op. cit. p.34.

The spatial dissemination of cities in China implies a certain degree of inequality and distributional disparity and the four regions of economic management are representative of the distribution of China's wealth through the built area:<sup>141</sup> the east, northeast, central and west. The prosperous east coast – China's speediest and most urbanised area, is the most economically advanced with 46% of the whole country's urban built land area within only 9% of the total land.<sup>142</sup> Although, central and western regions both shared the 21% of land area and the remote Northeast, 12%, they still represent the less developed fragment in terms of both industrialisation and urbanisation.<sup>143</sup>

In order to boost the economy of a country, which, in 2014, showed its lowest growth of GDP rate (7.4%) over the last 15 years, Prime Minister Li Keqiang has captained and assisted urbanisation for the years 201–2020.<sup>144</sup> Even before his promotion to Prime Minister, Li prophesized urbanisation as a tool to increase domestic consumption and, therefore, directly improving the country's economy through increased consumption and the resulting creation of wealth in a historical moment, where the world's export market was more and more untrustworthy.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Chen et al. (2016) op. cit. p.335.

<sup>142</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>143</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>144</sup> Kim, J. (2015). A Bumpy Road to Cities: Analysis of the Obstacles and Limits of China's New Urbanization. *Pacific Focus*, 30(3), p.373.

<sup>145</sup> South China Morning Post. (2013). *Li Keqiang warns of urbanisation risks in first speech as premier*. [online] Available at: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1193244/li-keqiang-warns-urbanisation-risks-first-speech-premier> [Accessed 10 Jun. 2019].

In addition statistical analysis has shown how urban citizens consumed almost four times more in comparison to rural dwellers who spent on average, 4,455 yuan (around 510 pounds a year).<sup>146</sup> The negative growth rate and rural-to-urban migration are linked together in order to improve the service sector and the domestic consumption. Therefore as stated by Premier Li, each rural migrant moving to the city will bring 10,000 RMB extra expenses yearly hence boosting the economy.<sup>147</sup> 10,000 predicted migrants every year will then, enhance consumption with 100 billion RMB every year.<sup>148</sup> The basis for this newly introduced form of urbanisation is, therefore, rooted into the belief that resettlement will be followed naturally by higher household consumption.<sup>149</sup>

Following the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in November 2012, the term 'xinxing chengshihua' (New-Type Urbanisation) has been legitimately announced.<sup>150</sup> Furthermore, in March 2014 Premier Li repeated his commitment to the New-Type Plan by emphasizing the importance of the term 'people-centred' in the concept of new urbanisation, cited into the 'Report on the Work of the Government'.<sup>151</sup> The New-Type Urbanisation Plan (hereinafter NUP) is the first ever Chinese attempt to coordinate urbanisation and migration. The management of the

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<sup>146</sup> Kim, J. (2015). op. cit. p.373.

<sup>147</sup> Wilmsen, B. (2017) p.2.

<sup>148</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>149</sup> Rogers, S. and Wilmsen, B. (2019). op. cit. p.5.

<sup>150</sup> Kim, J. (2015). op. cit. p.373.

<sup>151</sup> Ibidem.

project is in the hands of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) and 12 governmental ministries participate actively in the decision-making process.<sup>152</sup>

The aforementioned inter-ministerial Joint Committee put together by the central government has three core responsibilities: first the promotion of the Plan through sound policy implementation as well as the coordination of chief issues with decision-making bodies and State Council; second, the reinforcement of consultation and material sharing for the sake of key task development; finally the supervision, inspection and overall control and report to the State Council.<sup>153</sup>

The Joint Committee is formed by the reform commission together with ministries with different social influence such as the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Transport as well as other entities such as the Peoples' Bank of China.<sup>154</sup>

This diversity of roles and actors defines the multiple nuances that the Plan entails. Coordination is, therefore, the pivotal characteristic to succeed. When in 2014 the NUP was finally released, in accordance with the 13<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan, the fundamental plot and pivotal aspect of the new urbanisation was the people. In accordance with the plan and in comparison with the previous Five-Year Plan, the amount of content related to urbanisation grew from 294 in the 8<sup>th</sup> Plan to 4574 in the 13<sup>th</sup>.<sup>155</sup> The central

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<sup>152</sup> Kassiola op. cit. p.84.

<sup>153</sup> Chen et al. (2018). op. cit. p.185.

<sup>154</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>155</sup> Chen et al. (2019) op. cit. p.2.

government is, therefore, taking this as a core feature for the county's future development.

### The urgency of Harmonism within the Plan

Moreover, policies will need to be representative of innovative and sophisticated thinking. The NUP must be centred on thoughtful proposals rather than the impulsiveness that has characterized China's first sprawling urbanisation. Most importantly China needs to learn from its history and adopt an interdisciplinary approach by avoiding committing the same mistakes.<sup>156</sup> Before moving on to the real content and policy structure of the NUP and focusing on the different sections and aims of the NUP, special attention has to be put on the promotion of 'people-centred or people-oriented' practices – an omnipresent slogan that is repeated by governing agencies whenever the Plan is mentioned.

When adopting a people-centred approach, the NUP engages in the improvement of the quality of life and the safety of its people through strategies based on people-centrism.<sup>157</sup> Is the people-oriented slogan just an excuse through which the government only wants to reverse the economic slow-down? A propagandistic promise in order to calm down sceptical beliefs? Many scholars do repeat the slogan in their explanations, however, the importance of the effectiveness and the real

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<sup>156</sup> Idem. p.181.

<sup>157</sup> Chen, T., Li, X., Hui, E., Lang, W. and Guo, Y. (2019) op. cit. p.518.

meaning of the slogan is not often well described and processed. The conceptual framework of the NUP, is, in theory rooted mainly in: humanism, people-oriented urbanisation, inclusivism, rebalancing the difference in benefits for rural and urban people, sustainability within development and harmonious coordination.<sup>158</sup> Chen et al.'s categorization involved: humanism, inclusivism, sustainability and harmonism.<sup>159</sup> These four central leitmotifs will be questioned further, however, the realisation that these important aspects of civic life and wellbeing are missing severely in China's policy making is already a step forward. In the context of displacement and relocation following development/urbanisation projects, harmonious public participation is of crucial importance. If China's pledge is the aforementioned inclusivism and harmonism within public involvement, true social development will be possible.

### From land-centred to people-oriented

The transfer from 'land-centred to people oriented' – another recurrent statement – will be considered in depth.<sup>160</sup> The practical aspect related to the people-centred conceptualisation is the sharing of the same benefits for rural and urban individuals before 2020.<sup>161</sup> This coordination and equality of treatment will be evident if China

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<sup>158</sup> Chen, M., Gong, Y., Lu, D. and Ye, C. (2019). Build a people-oriented urbanization: China's new-type urbanization dream and Anhui model. *Land Use Policy*, 80, p.3.

<sup>159</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>160</sup> Wang et al. op. cit. p.281.

<sup>161</sup> Guan et. al op. cit. (2018) p.108.

extends public services such as education, vocational training and affordable welfare housing.<sup>162</sup>

The last topic, housing, is very important in order not to separate families and households, whereby only one member of the family migrates to urban areas to seek job opportunities and the rest waits at home. Exorbitant pricing for the houses in urban areas tend to separate the migrant member of the family with the rest.<sup>163</sup> As a result, the exorbitant housing prices as well as the distance from home leads to the largest migrating flow on earth concentrated in a small period: the 'Chunyun' or 'Spring migration'.<sup>164</sup> In this 40-day period, the Lunar New Year Spring Festival is celebrated by commuters and their families. This year's numbers are ghastly: According to NDRC's deputy director Lian Weiliang, almost 3 billion trips will be made during this period – 0.6% more than in 2018.<sup>165</sup> Chinese migrants' families are facing serious long-distance and long periods of time separated from working family members in most cases.<sup>166</sup> Some couples, however, are either forced or voluntarily bring their children along with them into the urban areas. Official statistics from 2014 estimate that the number of rural-urban migrant workers are a totality of 269 million. This number however does not include the non-working members of the various

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<sup>162</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>163</sup> Chen et al. (2018) p.188.

<sup>164</sup> CNN Travel. (2019). *Earth's biggest human migration on a map*. [online] Available at:

<https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/china-spring-migration-chunyun/index.html> [Accessed 11 Jun. 2019].

<sup>165</sup> CNN Travel. (2019). *World's largest annual human migration now underway in China*. [online] Available at:

<https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/lunar-new-year-travel-rush-2019/index.html> [Accessed 11 Jun. 2019].

<sup>166</sup> Guan et. al op. cit. (2018) p.101.

households.<sup>167</sup> Nevertheless these discrepancies will be further investigated in the following chapter dedicated to the Hukou problem.

### The Hukou Problem in China

Residents' compulsory registration is a unique way in China to catalogue its population nationally. China's Hukou system is an exclusive tool for governments to control migration within the borders. Access to social welfare benefits such as education, healthcare and retirement pensions are strictly linked to a migrant's registration status.<sup>168</sup> Very often, for example, rural-to-urban migrants without Hukou are not allowed to purchase properties within their hosting city and in addition have to pay more for social services.<sup>169</sup> Agencies and authorities related to the Hukou (Household Registration System) such as the Hukou Police are responsible for recording every new-born as belonging to either the urban or the rural Chinese nationality.<sup>170</sup>

Furthermore the recorded information will be stored and kept into the Hukou registration book and archives will be carried for routine controls every time one is about to move to another place.<sup>171</sup> Foucault's description of a modern state which

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<sup>167</sup> Li, B., Chen, C. and Hu, B. (2016). Governing urbanization and the New Urbanization Plan in China. *Environment and Urbanization*, 28(2), p.516,517.

<sup>168</sup> Briefing, C. (2019). *China is Relaxing Hukou Restrictions in Small and Medium-Sized Cities*. [online] China Briefing News. Available at: <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/china-relaxing-hukou-restrictions-small-medium-sized-cities/> [Accessed 1 Jul. 2019].

<sup>169</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>170</sup> Wang, F. and Liu, Y. (2016). Interpreting Chinese Hukou System from a Foucauldian Perspective. *Urban Policy and Research*, 36(2), p.154.

<sup>171</sup> Ibidem.

justifies truth based on power-knowledge rather than on the reason of the state itself is highly relatable in the example of the Chinese Hukou. Moreover power relations are put into practice by various governmental actors rather than the state.<sup>172</sup> When first introduced in 1958, the Hukou (household registration system), drew a line between urban people and rural people. The urban class members enjoy the benefits of a welfare state such as access to political and economic opportunities while the peasant population is deprived of the possession of these.<sup>173</sup> The situation from the Mao era until today has changed only very slightly in terms of Hukou reforms, therefore the social strata is still divided into the rich, the urban workers and then the peasants, separating urban from rural. However, at present, rural dwellers are venturing into migration movements to urban areas in order to seek fortune – yet maintain their peasant belongings bureaucratically and in a practical way.<sup>174</sup>

### The NUP and the Hukou

After three years of deep planning, the National New Type Urbanisation Plan has reached consensus and has been implemented, therefore, contributing in the relaxation of the Hukou for 45% of all the new urban residents who migrated to

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<sup>172</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>173</sup> Chan, K. (2014). China's urbanization 2020: a new blueprint and direction. *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 55(1), p.3.

<sup>174</sup> Idem. p.2.

cities.<sup>175</sup> Many scholars are questioning what will happen with the 55% residual new citizens without Hukou and corresponding benefits and this remains an unsolved dilemma to be unravelled in the future. The NUP, which was passed in 2014, will give 100 million more migrants the opportunity to have access to education and health – basic, yet fundamental benefits that urban Hukou owners already possess.

Specifically concerning migrants' children, education will be compulsorily introduced for grades one to nine by 2020. Social complications and discrimination arises, for example, when those rural-to-urban migrants' children who attempt to go to public schools find themselves very disadvantaged. When children are not attending low-quality migrant schools and access public schools, they often do not get the right attention from professors and get discriminated against because of their peasant origins.<sup>176</sup> Migrants face terrible outcomes when it comes to reputation in the cities.

On the other hand however by 2010, amidst those 106 million migrant children, 70% were left-behind in rural areas.<sup>177</sup> Vulnerability in terms of education and development are present and very intense in rural areas for left-behind kids. The

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<sup>175</sup> Maher, J. (2019). *China's New Urbanization Plan: Obstacles and Environmental Impacts* | *Smart Cities Dive*. [online] Smartcitiesdive.com. Available at: <https://www.smartcitiesdive.com/ex/sustainablecitiescollective/china-s-new-urbanization-plan-obstacles-and-environmental-impacts/246981/> [Accessed 13 Jun. 2019].

<sup>176</sup> Yiu, L. and Yun, L. (2017). China's Rural Education: Chinese Migrant Children and Left-Behind Children. *Chinese Education & Society*, 50(4), p.310.

<sup>177</sup> Idem. p.307

separation is hard to overcome.<sup>178</sup> Urban to rural migration in China in general has been stigmatized by media and clichés related to migrants additionally contribute to their denigration. A plethora of diseases such as stress, depression, sexual risks and infections are associated at times with the migrant movements.<sup>179</sup> The result is that urban residents often despise rural migrants. At this point, the Hukou reform in the NUP would at least lead to a more harmonious and fair balance between peasants and citizens. It is the beginning, however, as previously mentioned, the lack of quality in rural schools should be further taken into consideration and corrected. Moreover trustworthy network connections together with agencies responsible for the integration of peasant migrants should be established, thus facilitating the integration in the new environment and avoiding barriers towards social capital reconstruction.<sup>180</sup>

### The cautionary example of Zhengzhou (the 'Zhengzhou-effect') and discrimination against rural-to-urban migrants

The industrial centre of Zhengzhou applied and then quickly withdrew certain policies related to the relaxation of the Hukou system in relationship to migrants. Henan's capital opened its doors in 2001 and again in 2003 – catastrophe outcomes, however,

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<sup>178</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>179</sup> Chen, X., Stanton, B., Kaljee, L., Fang, X., Xiong, Q., Lin, D., Zhang, L. and Li, X. (2011). Social Stigma, Social Capital Reconstruction, and Rural Migrants in Urban China: A Population Health Perspective. *Human Organization*, 70(1), p.305.

<sup>180</sup> Ibidem.

led to the drastic recall of the policies.<sup>181</sup> The decision to block the acceptance of migrants and the distribution of urban social benefits occurred when the 10% increase of new residents was intensely criticised by the pre-existing urban population which claimed the city was unable to absorb the wave.<sup>182</sup>

The case of Zhengzhou's Hukou relaxation is relevant in order to understand the NUP's aim to be less restrictive in small cities and towns rather than in big cities or even regions' capitals. When the capital of Henan opened its doors to migrants seeking urban Hukou certification and consequently benefits, through a permissive policy implementation, the hurried increase of urban population led to severe problems: massive traffic jams, overwhelmed medical infrastructures and swelling cases of criminality jeopardised the city's public security.<sup>183</sup>

Moreover fraud cases related to housing occurred in Zhengzhou. A former head of the housing administration office and part of his family possessed two Hukous each and got caught having multiple properties among them. The number was beyond 30.<sup>184</sup> The social welfare's weakening process became also evident with regard to public schooling and led to a critical loss of educational capital.<sup>185</sup> The arrival of

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<sup>181</sup> Chan, K.W., Buckingham, W. (2008). "Is China Abolishing the Hukou System?" *The China Quarterly*, no. 195, 2008, p.603.

<sup>182</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>183</sup> Kassiola, J. (2016). op. cit. p. 77.

<sup>184</sup> Refugees, U. (2013). *Refworld | China: Fraudulent documents, including the manufacturing, procurement, distribution and use of passports, hukou, and resident identity cards (RICs), particularly in Guangdong and Fujian; instances of officials issuing fraudulent RICs to citizens and selling authentic RICs on the black market (2010-September 2013)*. [online] Refworld. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/527a3ade4.html> [Accessed 1 Jul. 2019].

<sup>185</sup> Chan, K.W., Buckingham, W. (2008). op. cit. p.603.

migrants and their families brought the overcrowding of the classrooms in the capital city's institutes. The number of pupils skyrocketed over 80-90 per classroom.<sup>186</sup>

The reactions of the residents were then fired. The idea that the overwhelming presence of migrants' children would deteriorate the quality of education, compromising the life of those middle-class, students grew strong.<sup>187</sup> Moreover the pre-existing bias rooted into anti-rural sentiment by the urban population emerged dramatically. Rural migrants are often depicted as ignorant, unsophisticated in their style and inexperienced in city life.<sup>188</sup>

The two major types of discrimination that rural-to-urban migrants witness in China have been recognized by Juan Chen as institutional and interpersonal discrimination.<sup>189</sup> The former harassment is experienced by migrating peasants in the restriction of access to jobs as well as education and health care. Political and institutional barriers are responsible for this phenomenon.<sup>190</sup> The latter manifests itself in the form of social obnoxiousness exerted by citizens. Verbal insolence as well as feelings of superiority resulting in overall racism are examples of interpersonal discrimination.<sup>191</sup> The problematic behind these conflicts that represent Chinese social inequity habitually contribute to a negative influence on mental health and

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<sup>186</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>187</sup> Kassiola, J. (2016). op. cit. p. 77.

<sup>188</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>189</sup> Chen, Juan (2013) "Perceived Discrimination and Subjective Well-being among Rural-to-Urban Migrants in China," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 40 : Iss. 1 , Article 8. p.134.

<sup>190</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>191</sup> Ibidem.

wellbeing for rural-to-urban migrants.<sup>192</sup> Moreover the perceived feeling of social injustice which characterizes rural migrants' daily routine results often in them feeling inferior, depressed, frustrated and overall excluded from the society they are surrounded by.<sup>193</sup>

### Citizens' participation and the NUP

'More than in Western liberal democracies, the hand of the state in China weighs very heavily indeed and is formally or informally present in (almost) all governmental activities'<sup>194</sup>

While in Western societies the citizen's participation is seen as a democratic basis as well as a tool for people to contribute to professional governance, China's example has, for decades, shown how the country's legislation has always underscored this lack fiercely.<sup>195</sup> The political and social life of Chinese citizens has been severely silenced by the government, resulting in various forms of unfair displacement practices. Dams, nail houses and urban villages are symptoms and causes of the new

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<sup>192</sup> Lin, D., Li, X., Wang, B., Hong, Y., Fang, X., Qin, X. and Stanton, B. (2009). Discrimination, Perceived Social Inequity, and Mental Health Among Rural-to-Urban Migrants in China. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 47(2), p.178.

<sup>193</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>194</sup> Pieke, F. (2009). The Good Communist. In Li, H. and de Jong, M. (2017). Citizen participation in China's eco-city development. Will 'new-type urbanization' generate a breakthrough in realizing it?. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 162, p.1086.

<sup>195</sup> Idem. p.1087.

formulated Plan and the reflection of the well-known top-down approach. Yet Chinese pledge of a more ‘Western’ bottom-up approach consistently clashes with its past. For example bottom-up practices in China have historically only been tokenistic and inclusive in an extreme formal manner. As stated in the first chapters, the result, therefore, has been the local governments’ ruthless claims of arable land and the displacement of farmers for the sake of economic growth and GDP-related goals, whereby the public’s opinions have never been taken in consideration.<sup>196</sup> The economic slowdown that the NUP wants to tackle and the prophesised harmony and inclusivism somehow evoke states of distrust.

### Aims of the NUP

In order to introduce basic public services in all urban areas, China is putting attention on compulsory education for rural migrant workers’ children, free basic training professionalization for unemployed migrant workers, basic pensions, medical insurance and social housing.<sup>197</sup> The increase of the urban population, an aim of the Plan, symbolises not only the relocation of rural individuals into urban realms, but incorporates into the project several social benefits. While the urbanisation rate will grow by almost 20 million citizens each year during 2014–2020, urban Hukous are

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<sup>196</sup> Idem. p.1088.

<sup>197</sup> Kim, J. (2015). op. cit. p.376.

meant to grow at a pace of 10%<sup>198</sup>, therefore, the NUP is promoting the transformation of rural migrants into urban dwellers – benefits included. Consequently the transition from land-centred to people-oriented in response to the past mistakes aims to tackle problems related to social injustices. As previously said, the urban schooling provision for migrant’s children has to reach the absolute totality followed by training schemes against unemployment.<sup>199</sup> Moreover social services in three core areas are meant to increase respectively. Pensions, health care and affordable housing will increase respectively from 67%–90%, 95%–98% and 12.5–23%.<sup>200</sup>

### Aims within displacement and resettlement

The most relevant aim of the 2014 NUP related to migration and displaced population is the ambitious project for 2020 to relocate ‘three hundred million people’ (San ge yi yi ren).<sup>201</sup> This colossal resettling movement will include 100 million peasant migrants to settle in cities respectively with a secure urban housing and social security. The first 100 million people will be settled in central and western cities in a corresponding relocation close to their villages, therefore, avoiding the long-distance migration.

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<sup>198</sup> Wang, D. and Christiansen, F. (2019). The pursuit of new citizenship by peri-urban residents in China: Status, rights, and individual choice. *China Information*, p.5.

<sup>199</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>200</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>201</sup> Chen, M., Liu, W., Lu, D., Chen, H. and Ye, C. (2018). op. cit. p. 185.

Second, it will include the transformation and renovation of shantytowns and, third, the upgrading of villages-in-the-city where the last 100 million people reside.<sup>202</sup>

Of course, at the same time, the liberalisation of the Hukou system in relationship to the citizenisation of migrants needs to be highly controlled. It has been mentioned before that the urbanisation' path China has undertaken is unique: from a land-centred, development-driven avid regime to a monitored and abstractly fatherly, loving approach. The unique and prudent path that China will take consists in the avoidance of a ferocious opening up of the Hukou system. The total relaxation of the Hukou system would lead to the overflow of migrants into the largest and richest cities, such as Shanghai and Shenzhen.

Whilst most underdeveloped countries in different continents have seen a severe level of rural-to-urban migration, the serious lack of employment possibilities have led to so called favelas or urban slums.<sup>203</sup> Africa, Asia and South America have failed in a the so called 'harmonious integration' of their rural transitioning individuals, resulting in high levels of criminality, unstable social wellbeing, non-functioning infrastructure, disgraceful health issues and, certainly, dependence on the illegal-informal employment sector, resulting in pure poverty.<sup>204</sup> The promotion of small and medium sized towns is, therefore, highly recommended and will be part of the NUP's agenda.

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<sup>202</sup> Chen, M., Liu, W. and Lu, D. (2016). *op. cit.* p.337.

<sup>203</sup> Wang, X., Hui, E., Choguill, C. and Jia, S. (2015). *op. cit.* p.279.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibidem.*

The priority of urbanisation will be the promotion and progress of new towns and their industrialisation in order to boost employment.<sup>205</sup> The modernisation of agriculture will be further improved and promoted by simultaneously endorsing off-farm jobs and boosting the industrialisation process of the villages through the introduction of large-scale farming.<sup>206</sup> The improvement and cancellation of the rural-urban bias won't be a result of overall welfare and a natural process, but will represent a policy driven by the state.<sup>207</sup> The goal of China's current urbanisation project is to fill the gaps and bring modernisation where it is lacking in terms of resources' unsatisfactory agglomeration. Peasant workers, however, must be taken into real consideration. Overcoming the urban-rural discrepancy is related to policies concerning Hukou reform, improved transparency in the consultation and public participation during negotiations, increased bargaining power for migrants and more self-governance at local level – an aspect that will be further analysed with the grassroots governments. Bottom-up practices are crucial for the successful outcomes of the NUP.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Chen et al. (2016) op. cit. p.337.

<sup>206</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>207</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>208</sup> Li, B., Chen, C. and Hu, B. (2016). p.530.

## **Displacement and resettlement in Nail households and Urban Villages in the NUP**

### The emergence of Urban Villages

Urban Villages, also known as old villages or in the Chinese version – *chengzhongcun*, can be described with the peculiar label of special collectively owned land which falls within rural administration.<sup>209</sup> This hybrid form of spontaneous development occurs because of the difficulty of turning agricultural land into non-agricultural land after the requisition of peasants' parcels. As a result, the requisitioned farmland is left to the original owners in order to avoid displacement, resettlement and compensation, as stated by strict principles related to the transformation of land rights.<sup>210</sup>

Urban villages arose after the Reform and Opening Up period in 1978 and continued to grow in the 1980s. Village cooperative shareholding companies are the official owners of urban villages. Southern coastal cities such as Shenzhen and Xiamen gave birth to these first settlements which then took root in inland cities as well.<sup>211</sup> This phenomenon is an accidental spin-off caused by rapid urbanisation and the expansion of the built area has brought, automatically, the emergence of unique urbanised rural society characterized and affected by informal urban planning and bad-quality housing conditions.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Li, B. and Liu, C. (2017). op. cit. p.1406.

<sup>210</sup> Lang, W., Chen, T. and Li, X. (2016). op. cit. p.2.

<sup>211</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>212</sup> Li, B. and Liu, C. (2017). op. cit. p.1406.

What is more is that the current renovation of urban villages is promoting the displacement and resettlement of its inhabitants. The city of Shenzhen is a remarkable example for this process: the upgrade of some of its urban villages is resulting in the explosive increase of the price of the rents that tenants are not able to afford, therefore, resulting in a displacement process. Workers who earn around 3000 yuan per month experience the rents prices' doubling or tripling with discouragement.<sup>213</sup>

Urban villages can be typically subdivided into three different types: hyper-dense ones that develop in the inner city – with a built area that exceeds 70%, older villages' converted to medium-density ones and less dense urban fringe villages where the built area is less than 30%.<sup>214</sup> Shenzhen's urban villages are usually part of the first class. While, during the 1980s and 1990s urban villages emerged after the establishment of special economic zones (SEZs) and were located close to places of work as well as factories, later generations of villages in the city emerged around hurriedly urbanising districts.<sup>215</sup>

Yet unlike shantytowns and urban ghettos in Latin America, Chinese urban villages are not a result of the invasion and spontaneous construction of houses by

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<sup>213</sup> The Guardian. (2018). *Hundreds of thousands displaced as Shenzhen 'upgrades' its urban villages*. [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/aug/23/hundreds-of-thousands-displaced-as-shenzhen-upgrades-its-urban-villages> [Accessed 26 Jun. 2019].

<sup>214</sup> Ai, S. (2014). *Villages in the city*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, p.49.

<sup>215</sup> Ibidem.

migrants.<sup>216</sup> They rather epitomize the mixture of migrants' demand for affordable housing and the urban expansion of the cities that have encompassed rural zones. Despite their positive function as cheap housing supply for lower-class migrant citizens, urban villages are a complex issue for city governments. Crime rates are high and poor infrastructure and services degrade the livelihoods of those who live in urban villages – threatening public security also.<sup>217</sup> The demolition and reconstruction of urban villages and the eventual change of status can also be substituted by the renovation and upgrading of it. Redesign and employment programs coupled with infrastructure development can improve the environment and transform urban villages into cultural hubs as well as micro-economical social ecologies.<sup>218</sup>

With regard to the reestablishment of urban villages, the example of Liede in Guangzhou will be considered as a way of understanding urban villages' improvement. This chapter will focus on the centrality of grassroots organisations within urban villages' political administration. When grassroots movements replace the centrality of local governments and it manages to work fine, the situation of rural migrants and displaced people does not worsen dramatically. Grassroots movements often demonstrate great interest in the wellbeing of their inhabitants by improving social

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<sup>216</sup> Zheng, S., Long, F., Fan, C. and Gu, Y. (2009). Urban Villages in China: A 2008 Survey of Migrant Settlements in Beijing. *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 50(4), p.426.

<sup>217</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>218</sup> Al, S. (2014). op. cit. p.49.

and commercial services such as education, medical services and other activities, turning grassroots into proficient and reliable self-sustainable communities.<sup>219</sup>

### Urban Villages in the NUP

In both his papers from 2016 and 2018, Chen underlines with emphasis the importance of the NDRC in promoting the transformation of shantytowns and urban villages where one portion of the ‘Three hundred million people’ will be resettled.<sup>220</sup>

The final aim in 2020 is to stabilize and improve the livelihood of those 100 million people who reside in urban villages, yet, this cannot be achieved without a conscious matching rural land transfer system. The transformation of rural land into urban land should follow an equitable path.<sup>221</sup> Moreover as mentioned before, the affordability of the houses should not be a hazardous and drastic change when large-scale redevelopment of urban villages is undertaken.<sup>222</sup>

Furthermore since the NUP does not specify, nor mention anything about how to build up a solid social security system for displaced and relocated farmers, the alternative of the migrants’ enclave – the urban village – is sometimes preferred by those migrants seeking a harmonious life in the city.<sup>223</sup> Besides, the NUP does not properly address the rural collective land problem, therefore, the transmission of

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<sup>219</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>220</sup> Chen et al. (2016). op. cit. p.337.

<sup>221</sup> Chen et al. (2018). op. cit. p.185.

<sup>222</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>223</sup> Wang, X., Hui, E., Choguill, C. and Jia, S. (2015). op. cit. p.282.

homestead rights among urban residents is still not possible.<sup>224</sup> In the context of urban villages' identity protection, urban villagers have often fought for the preservation of the site against demolition, resulting in the so-called 'nail house effect'. The loss of cultural heritage and identity are main factors that bring villagers to rebellion.<sup>225</sup>

### *The nail house effect and the response of grassroots organisations*

Since China is heavily focusing on urban redevelopment projects, where demolition and reconstruction represent the main growth scenario, it has been planned for a huge number of residents to be displaced and relocated elsewhere.<sup>226</sup> When the discontent becomes critical, certain households refuse to leave their property, frustrated by the violation of their rights and generally against the forced eviction. This gives birth to a 'dingzihu' – a Chinese neologism meaning 'nail-house'.<sup>227</sup> The word itself reminds of an object stuck into the ground and which hardly removable as well as of something thin and lonesome, like a nail, in comparison to the surrounding demolished and empty field. This phenomenon has happened throughout epochs yet is meant to be increasing during the NUP period because of the aforementioned millions of migrants that have to be relocated during the modernisation process of certain metropolises. Moreover, a large amount of these dingzihus happen in urban

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<sup>224</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>225</sup> Al, S. (2014). op. cit. p.49.

<sup>226</sup> Shin, H. (2013). The Right to the City and Critical Reflections on China's Property Rights Activism. *Antipode*, p.1177.

<sup>227</sup> Ibidem.

villages. This form of involuntary migration has, throughout time, attracted a plethora of attention of the media in addition to the sensationalism of those families who rebelled against demolition.<sup>228</sup> The main concerns can be fair or unfair planned compensation or whether peasants are consulted during the decision-making process and to what extent.<sup>229</sup> With regard to the final demolition and how to convince the households to eventually move, autonomous redevelopment grassroots are emerging.

The number of individual displacees' protests have been increasing throughout the years. Government data displays the increasing numbers in comparison: whilst 1994 records show only 10,000 protests, the situation twenty years later is shocking: there were 74,000 protests related to displacement and relocation. Moreover the jump from the 58,000 demonstrations in 2003 to the numbers of the following year (74,000) is alarming.<sup>230</sup> Official institutions and governmental bodies are frequently not able to persuade homeowners to abandon their house at a stage where demolition has already started. When shantytowns or part of urban villages are in the process of being renovated or rebuilt, grassroots organisations composed of resettled people become crucial in the process. Since urban regeneration does not start without all

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<sup>228</sup> Li, B., Chen, C. and Hu, B. (2016). op. cit. p.520.

<sup>229</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>230</sup> Shin, H. (2008). Driven to Swim with the Tide? Urban Redevelopment and Community Participation in China. LSE STICERD Research Paper No. CASE130. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1159361>

projected households accepting the terms and leaving the site, nail houses do represent a strong limitation for the perpetuation of the reconstruction.<sup>231</sup>

Celebrated as ‘soft demolition and redevelopment’, autonomous redevelopment organisations are democratically established and most of the time, formed by retirees, ex-cadres and regular citizens who volunteer as activists without benefitting from their active participation.<sup>232</sup> The aim of the ARC is to use the power of the masses in order to convince stubborn residents to collaborate for the sake of the development.

Caojiaxiang district in Sichuan’s capital, Chengdu, has been the most remarkable example of efficient autonomous redevelopment’s involvement. The northern part of the city’s *chengzhongcun* had become the epicentre of a massive renovation project with a value of 330 billion yuan.<sup>233</sup> The project, which encompasses the renovation of poor infrastructure within a large part of the shantytown as well as the relocation of commercial activities and its huge population of almost 1.5 million people, covers a total area of 212 km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>234</sup>

Renovation has become a priority in Caojiaxiang since the majority of households are cramped into buildings dated back to the 1950s and 1960s. These dilapidated buildings had, in most cases, shared kitchens as well as shared bathrooms hence

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<sup>231</sup> Deng, Y. (2017). “Autonomous Redevelopment”: Moving the Masses to Remove Nail Households. *Modern China*, 43(5), p.496.

<sup>232</sup> Idem. p.499.

<sup>233</sup> Ye, V. (2016). *Old town turns over new leaf on renovation*. [online] Available at: <https://archive.shine.cn/city/specials/chengdu/Old-town-turns-over-new-leaf-on-renovation/shdaily.shtml> [Accessed 3 Jul. 2019].

<sup>234</sup> Ibidem.

appalling hygienic conditions before being renovated and substituted by modern high-rise ones.<sup>235</sup> From February 2012 on, the local government announced the actual demolition plan and the autonomous redevelopment commission (ARC) got democratically elected through open proposal and election by the inhabitants. The public body represented by 21 representatives was responsible for debating on decisions related to demolition and relocation taken by the government. Specific tasks they were entrusted with included: the propaganda and property rights assurance in the project's scoping phase, the collection of public feedback as well as the transmission of policy development information to the displacees.<sup>236</sup> Further responsibilities included the persuasion of the ARC to let stubborn residents leave and accept the relocation process – avoiding the transformation of their households into 'nail households' and convincing them not to ask for outrageous monetary compensations.<sup>237</sup>

In the case of Caojiaxiang the ARC informed the residents to move, the majority agreed, however, precisely six households decided to rebel and become nail houses, disagreeing with governmental decisions. Multiple compensation and relocation schemes were offered, such as: cash, relocation elsewhere and relocation in the original place.<sup>238</sup> The ARC's peculiarity in response to the residents' refusal has been

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<sup>235</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>236</sup> Liu, L. and Xu, Z. (2018). Collaborative governance: A potential approach to preventing violent demolition in China. *Cities*, 79, p.31.

<sup>237</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>238</sup> Ibidem.

the direct harassment of those who rebelled. The stubborn got overwhelmed by marginalising manoeuvres such as: isolation, defamation and subtle threats.<sup>239</sup> When the pressure was unbearable and the dingzihus got officially labelled as ‘enemies of the masses’, slogans and verbal intimidations started to be used as tools of persuasion against dingzihu’s households. ‘Demanding more and getting more will come to no good end!’ (多吃多占没有好下场) – these kinds of sentences became daily routine in the harassment process.<sup>240</sup> The special feature of autonomous redevelopment is that governmental strengths are shifting and turn the nature from intimidating by government to intimidating by autonomous citizens’ organisations.<sup>241</sup>

Conflict resolution methods in the arena of displacement and relocation are various yet governmental action has seldom maintained a calm attitude and has, historically, shown highly incoherent reactions. Violent incidents as well as military action have been often applied by the government resulting in ferocious resolutions.<sup>242</sup> Since accommodating peoples’ desires in the context of urban development has been a hard task, collaborative approaches like the Caojiaxiang one have demonstrated extensive sustainability and overall peaceful approaches between government and citizens.

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<sup>239</sup> Deng op. cit. p.504.

<sup>240</sup> Wang H. (2012) “Duochi duozhan meiyou hao xiachang: Chengdu Jinniu qu maochong zhuhu gua hengfu biqian” (Demanding more and getting more comes to no good end: hanging eviction banners and posing as tenants in Jinniu district, Chengdu), April 13. <http://www.canyu.org/n46374c6.aspx> cited in Deng op. cit. p.504.

<sup>241</sup> Deng op. cit. p.505.

<sup>242</sup> Liu, L. and Xu, Z. op. cit. p. 31.

Moreover another aspect that is avoided by collaborative autonomous development is the unfair concessions such as extreme compensations that can result from long and unresolved disputes. Whilst, in the past, authorities were giving excessive amounts of compensations to nail households, the ARC – a bottom-up grassroots organisation is responsible for equality within displacement and relocation.<sup>243</sup> In this way, unfair and opaque procedures are avoided. The zero-sum game of violent demolition against the win-win mentality behind ARC can be better understood from the perspective of legitimacy within governance and its potential in finding different solutions than the customary ones, where violence was involved, notwithstanding that peoples' violence is part of the autonomous redevelopment. The unilateral policy goal becomes the shared goal of stakeholders.<sup>244</sup>

If collaborative governance enhances trust between state and people, as it has been in the case of Caojiaxiang, then it needs to be taken as an example for further development projects. The sophisticated and clever idea of involving people instead of official bodies to employ authoritarianism contributes to the construction of a 'harmonious society' (和谐社会) through pioneering 'social management' (社会管理) innovations.<sup>245</sup> The success of the experience in Caojiaxiang is, therefore, being applied today in multiple demolition, displacement and relocation projects inside

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<sup>243</sup> Wang, M. and Lo, K. (2015) Displacement and Resettlement with Chinese Characteristics: An Editorial Introduction. *Geography Research Forum*, Vol. 35 p.4.

<sup>244</sup> Liu, L. and Xu, Z. op cit. p. 31.

<sup>245</sup> Deng op. cit. p.511.

Sichuan and outside of it.<sup>246</sup> While Chinese rural villages are famous historically for being homogeneous, stable and socio-politically isolated, the new wave of development has often brought to the loss of these intricate qualities. Community and economic networks amongst peasants are part of what makes the Chinese countryside strong, therefore, the coordination of social ties are fundamental for the wellbeing of the rural population.<sup>247</sup>

### *The redevelopment and regeneration of Urban Villages: the case of Mayan and Liede*

The enlargement of cities through the incorporation of the countryside and the resulting redrawing of Chinese cities' borders have incorporated rural with urban villages. This incorporation has led to the inclusion of the villages into the urban administrative domain.<sup>248</sup> The factors that contributed to this reshaping are mainly economic and territorial reformation.<sup>249</sup> Reallocating powers within deep-rooted communities such as Chinese rural villages is not an easy procedure.

### Mayan Village Five-Wedge Seal

The example of the Mayan Village's Five-Wedge Seal can be used, however, to further understand the importance of redistributive techniques. Creativity and democracy

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<sup>246</sup> Ye, V. (2016). op. cit.

<sup>247</sup> Ye, Y. and LeGates, R. (2013). *Coordinating urban and rural development in China*. Cheltenham: Elgar. p.185.

<sup>248</sup> Kan, K. (2016). Op. cit. p.1.

<sup>249</sup> Ibidem.

within redistribution is at the top of this alternative way of governance. The Mayan village has become famous throughout China for the grassroots democratic invention of the five-wedge seal. The importance of seals in Chinese daily life is vital: they symbolise the certification and formalisation of documents in the largest cities as well as in the most remote villages.<sup>250</sup> The representation of the seals, used by corporations and governmental bodies to display responsibility, is in the case of Mayan split into five pieces. The grassroots democracy approach consists in the fair division of the responsibilities put in the hands of the five representatives elected by the people. Each representative has, therefore, the ownership of one 'slice' of the round seal.<sup>251</sup> No document can, thus, be seen as approved if the seal is not completed.

### Liede Village (de-collectivisation, de-ruralisation and re-collectivisation)

Located in the city of Guangzhou, Guangdong's capital, Liede is a fascinating example of the de-ruralisation and re-collectivisation of urban villages. The southern-coastal village's settlement can be dated back in history to around the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127AD).<sup>252</sup> As a rural and agricultural-based community, Liede did not change until the Reform Era. Generally speaking, the 1980s have played a crucial role for the

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<sup>250</sup> Ye, Y. and LeGates, R. (2013). op. cit. p.184.

<sup>251</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>252</sup> Kan, K. (2016). Op. cit. p.2.

aforementioned village, as well as for many other villages, changing their status into 'urban villages'.

The pivotal mechanism to transform rural villages into urban villages, as already described in previous chapters, starts with the expropriation of land. The industrialisation and modernisation of Liede and its commercial rise is, thus, a feature of the 1980s and the Reform Era, however, the loss of the rural status and the official conversion into the so-called urban administrative unit, only got introduced in the 2000s.<sup>253</sup> The demolition and following restoration of the whole village, allowed Liede to become a modern, multifunctional neighbourhood. As a result, any trace of rural roots disappeared from the structure of the village, vanishing and transitioning into a modern space.<sup>254</sup>

As a matter of fact the revitalization has consistently altered the demographic and socio-economic nature of the urban village. Native villagers in the community enjoyed a drastic increase in property values and surpluses coming from the collective economy. However the more unprivileged, rural-based and uneducated migrant renters experienced severe displacement and resettlement.<sup>255</sup> The ones who, then, replaced the old community of rural migrants were high-educated, middle class and wealthier individuals.<sup>256</sup> *Chengzhongcuns*, resulting from China's rapid urbanisation

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<sup>253</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>254</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>255</sup> Liu, Y., Wu, F., Liu, Y., & Li, Z. (2016). *Changing neighbourhood cohesion under the impact of urban redevelopment: a case study of Guangzhou, China. Urban Geography, 38(2), p.278.*

<sup>256</sup> Ibidem.

process, are often not able to assimilate local peasants into the urban realm. Issues related to social order and governance belong to the multiple costs related to rapid urbanisation. Pre-existing and self-organised grassroots are key in order to facilitate the *chengzhongcun's* costs through the promotion of harmony and democratic stability.<sup>257</sup> Moreover generational villages' clanship, which ruled over rural society, is often pictured as a political hurdle, obstructing the sound development of urbanisation.<sup>258</sup>

Nevertheless, the case of Liede shows how new generations are able to focus on modernising and restructuring rural areas – helping the society to transit from productive to living space. The transition from socialist brigade to administrative village occurred in 1987, however, without leaving the institutional framework obsolete.<sup>259</sup> Collectively owned resources, which remained a belonging of the village, started to be managed by a new representative body for the collective community. This new-formed villagers' committee at grassroots level, has therefore, made it possible for socialist leaders of the brigade, to transfer their authority and influence to a new political space.<sup>260</sup> As a consequence, the brigade's deputy secretary became chairman of the villagers' committee.

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<sup>257</sup> Lang, W., Chen, T. and Li, X. (2016). A new style of urbanization in China: Transformation of urban rural communities. *Habitat International*, 55, p.3.

<sup>258</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>259</sup> Kan, K. (2016). Op. cit. p.5.

<sup>260</sup> Idem. p.6.

The chairman, moreover is part of the largest indigenous families in Liede: the Lis which are among 45% of the whole population – the chairman presided for more than 25 years – until 2013.<sup>261</sup> The transformation of a clan and kinship-based village into an efficient urban government in China comes along with five typical transformation phases which affect the villagers as analysed by Zhu: first conversion from agricultural to non-agricultural land, second native villagers' shift from agricultural to non-agricultural, third the change of the standard of living that comes along with transitioning, fourth the transition from the homogeneity of the bounded rural community to the heterogeneity and openness of the urban community, fifth the improvement of the new-formed networks and the familiarisation with the new people.<sup>262</sup>

Liede village, however, established a shareholding cooperative financial association in 1991.<sup>263</sup> The village's community has been preserved and mostly given benefits through 'institutionalised redistributive mechanisms'.<sup>264</sup> Public goods were provided as well as a dividend redistribution, which worked on a shared basis. Each villager got assigned an amount of dividends per year since being part of the cooperative. Therefore the newly formed village company survives through joint capital.

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<sup>261</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>262</sup> Qian, Z. (2017). op cit. p.36.

<sup>263</sup> Kan, K. (2016). op. cit. p.6.

<sup>264</sup> Idem. p.7.

The neoliberalisation of the village occurred thanks to the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. Neoliberalism included the reduction of state supervision within economic matters as well as the prioritization of market practises.<sup>265</sup> Following the neoliberal openness, Liede's rents increased. The true beneficiaries of Liede have been the original house owners, who did not experience any form of displacement and relocation. Migrants who lived on a rent basis though got expelled. Neoliberalism in China's real estate – specifically urban villages has, therefore, an inclusive nature, however, does not address fairly the problematics of those who are the most in need. The upgrading of home owners to stakeholders is a step forward the avoidance of displacement and resettlement, yet no attention is given to those who do not share interests.

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<sup>265</sup> Wang, Y., Shao, L., Murie, A. and Cheng, J. (2012). The Maturation of the Neo-liberal Housing Market in Urban China. *Housing Studies*, 27(3), p.344.

## Concluding remarks

The National New Type Urbanisation Plan is a highly ambitious project. Even though China's past faults in the context of development have been partially acknowledged and a more harmonious future is predicted, the expected positive social outcomes are unreachable by the plan within the end of the NUP (2020).<sup>266</sup> Propagandistic slogans such as the creation of a 'harmonious society' function as a facade for the actual aim of the NUP – to create more domestic consumption through the increase of urban population.

The rushed urban land sprawl which China has both created and witnessed is complicated to understand without observing it from non-traditional angles. The outcomes for the population are various and so also, are the aspects on which China has to focus its attention for future improvement. Less stress on local government resulting in the avoidance of reckless land expropriation would be a safe beginning.<sup>267</sup>

The years of the post-reform, the 1980s and the transformation of China from a rural to an urban economy have brought to an urban sprawl that is mainly motivated by economic growth rather than the improvement of the population's livelihood.<sup>268</sup>

Further consequences of China's wild expansion have resulted in an unbalanced distribution of urban areas, leaving parts of the country very underdeveloped in

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<sup>266</sup> Dilemma X. (2019). *China: National New-type Urbanization Plan 2014-2020*. [online] Available at: <https://dilemma-x.net/2014/03/17/china-national-new-type-urbanization-plan-2014-2020/> [Accessed 3 Sep. 2019].

<sup>267</sup> Guo, X. (2001). Land Expropriation and Rural Conflicts in China. *The China Quarterly*, p.166.

<sup>268</sup> Zhang, K. (2002). What Explains China's Rising Urbanisation in the Reform Era?. *Urban Studies*, 39(12), p.2301.

comparison to southern and eastern coastal regions.<sup>269</sup> These regions a part from representing China's economic hubs receive often also energy from impoverished areas of the country. Hydropower dams, for example, give the majority of their produced energy to the richest areas. However the aftermaths of the hydropower projects have been disastrous for displaced and relocated farmers:<sup>270</sup> More than 6000 individuals were resettled in the Manwan Dam episode and 1,3 million in the Three Gorges Dam, not to mention floods and the tremendous loss of arable land. In a dispersive environment such as the one experienced by those villagers who lost their land for the sake of economic development, and the relocation of the latter into a non-friendly world such as the city, China has only seldom adopted inclusive policies, has failed in the past, and still does in the present times. The loss of identity, of cultural roots, of generational networks, is hard to overcome for a villager who is forced to be a citizen.

Notions of unprofessionalism jeopardize relocated farmers. Therefore China's pledge should centre on the relocation of farmers with corresponding vocational training programs for the activities that are not included in their previous life in the village.

The example of Germany analysed at the end of the second part, is helpful, and regardless if China has already established some vocational schools in cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, this support should be given anytime a relocating process risks

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<sup>269</sup> Guan et al. op. cit. p.107.

<sup>270</sup> Wang, P., et al. op. cit. (2013). p.5.

to put the wellbeing of a farmer and its family in danger.<sup>271</sup> However these sort of inclusive policies are not part of the NUP's agenda.

Moreover, the appropriation of farmers' land should be compensated when possible to the inclusion of the seized agriculture workers into large-scale farms, when fertile land has not been expropriated for real estate purposes. Large scale farms help the environment, enhance food quality and do not leave displaced farmers without an occupation.<sup>272</sup> The problem of occupation is not the only one that the displaced population faces. The agricultural population's struggle in getting an everlasting urban certification, also known as an 'urban hukou' and the corresponding benefits such as free access to education, pension services and medical assistance, has not been reached for close to 234 million rural migrants in 2013.<sup>273</sup> China also made the mistake to open this franchise too much as an experiment – like in the example of Zhengzhou, where students' registration to schools rose so steeply that classrooms were overwhelmed and urban parents started to discriminate and harass migrants. This exaggeration brought to the withdrawal of the hukou relaxation.<sup>274</sup> Harmony and balance are elusive elements and China has demonstrated no equilibrium in the case of Zhengzhou.

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<sup>271</sup> Barabasch, A., Huang, S. and Lawson, R. (2009) op. cit. p.8.

<sup>272</sup> Wu, Y., Xi, X., Tang, X., Luo, D., Gu, B., Lam, S., Vitousek, P. and Chen, D. (2018). Policy distortions, farm size, and the overuse of agricultural chemicals in China. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 115(27), p.7011.

<sup>273</sup> Wang et al. op. cit. p.280.

<sup>274</sup> Kassiola, J. (2016). op. cit. p. 77.

China has no history of delicacy whatsoever in the contexts of comprehensive policy making. Another aspect that the Chinese government and the NDRC should consider in depth is the inclusion of its population in active participation when it comes to different decisional processes. In addition, I believe that a harmonious society and development can be reached through public hearings and giving the population the chance to speak up and openly expose their thoughts about different topics that directly affect them.

The background history, however, shows how public hearings are always accepted after a stage, where crucial decisions have already been taken therefore working as a mere consultative pattern.<sup>275</sup> The government has therefore not only ignored its population, but also deceived it. In addition, no amendments concerning public participation are forecasted. Keeping up with the life in the city is not an easy demand, however the situation for citizens is complicated since the NUP is planning to fix the problem of urban villages and nail households. The modernisation of so-called villages in the city as well as the complete eradication of nail houses is meant to succeed through the participation of grassroots organisations although without benefitting the migrant population. The example of the Autonomous Redevelopment Commission (ARC), which convinced Caojiaxiang's stubborn households to move without reaching violent governmental measures is striking. Grassroots democracy

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<sup>275</sup> Li, T., Thomas Ng, S. and Skitmore, M. (2012). *op. cit.*1 p.48.

has also functioned well in Mayan villages, where the round seal, the symbol of Chinese documents' formalisation has been split in 5 parts in order to promote democratic decision making.<sup>276</sup> The case of Liede includes both positive and negative outcomes. The fact that the house-owners did not get expelled and furthermore became stakeholders, making little fortunes, does not include those migrant workers who found themselves stuck in a modern and pricey environment and had no other option but leave because of the insane rent' increases.<sup>277</sup>

Overall, China's pledge for modernisation is, nowadays, hidden behind terminology such as 'harmony and stability' or 'from land-centred to people-oriented' while the higher domestic demand is the only reason behind China's ultimate wave of newly planned urbanisation. Transitioning from actual land-centrism to people-oriented policies is not what China has planned in the NUP. Its rural population which suffers since decades is meant to be suffering again through China's decisions and lack of actual support.

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<sup>276</sup> Ye, Y. and LeGates, R. (2013). op. cit. p.184.

<sup>277</sup> Kan op. cit. p.593.

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