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Interpreting China's new urban spaces: state, market, and society in action

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Chinese urbanism has long historical roots and has profoundly influenced world civilizations. Yet, the Chinese city has not, until very recently, attracted sustained or intense global attention. In the post-reform era, especially after 1992, the scale and speed of China's urbanization, and the intricacy of its dynamics and socio-spatial consequences have dwarfed those of other countries in the world. The latest reform era of urban China is characterized by a renewed and thriving urbanism, which manifests itself in the sheer scale of new urban space (re)production and the intricate interrelationships among the state, market, and society. The proliferation of new urban spaces signifies the emergence of new mechanisms of space (re)production, which have led to the rise of a new urban spatial order (He & Wu, 2009; Kong, Chia-ho, & Tsu-Lung, 2015; Lin, 2009; Ma & Wu, 2005; Wu, 2005, 2007). Here, new urban spaces refer to emerging physical/virtual, social, and cultural spaces that are situated at the confluence of China's recent economic and political liberalization, globalization, and market transition. The term also denotes a general condition of rapid socio-spatial transformation signaling the latest episode of China's urbanization.

In this era of market transition, existing geographical research is dominated by the political economy approach, examining state and market interactions and offering a frame for interpreting the production of China's new urban spaces (e.g., Lim, 2014; Lin, Li, Yang, & Hu, 2015; Peck & Zhang, 2013; Wu & Phelps, 2011; Wu, Xu, & Yeh, 2007; Zhang & Peck, 2014). Yet, studies at a more micro scale, studies that focus on socio-spatial practices such as contentious actions regarding issues of social integration and on the public sphere under the overarching framework of state-society relations, have not been fully explored in geographical research (some exceptions include He & Xue, 2014; Kong et al., 2015; Liu, Li, & Breitung, 2012; Qian, 2014). As a result, existing studies of China's urban geography have tended to neglect the social aspects of new urban spaces. As a matter of fact, the production of new urban spaces in contemporary China has profoundly influenced the urban socio-economy and is related to a complex constellation of social processes and social relations. In addition to the unbalanced research perspectives, from a methodological perspective empirical analyses and

econometrics still dominate current scholarship of urban China studies. In contrast, there is insufficient engagement with current developments in social theory.

The rise of China has provided new opportunities and challenges for urban scholars to theorize and re-conceptualize China's renewed urbanism (Kong, 2010; Lin, 2011; Pow, 2012). The constantly growing research community, especially the cohort of young and well-trained scholars, suggests that urban studies in and of China are well prepared to go beyond positivist paradigms and contribute to the development of new urban theories emerging from the global south. To this end, we advocate, on the one hand, for nuanced analyses of the dynamic, often mundane, socio-spatial practices at relatively micro scales: such studies require sharpened sensitivity to the quagmire of actions, relations, and meanings in the rapidly changing Chinese society. On the other hand, Chinese scholars should not lose sight of macro political-economic transformations and of the changing dynamics of power and dominance. We therefore propose a general theoretical research framework, one that looks beyond the state-market or state-society dualism, as an alternative for better understanding and interpreting the ongoing transformation of China's new urban spaces.

This special issue attempts to apply the state-market-society framework to grasp the new characteristics and unique trajectory of China's urbanization. Specifically, the collected papers engage in innovative interpretations that provide a better understanding of the new dynamics of production of China's urban space and of the resultant new spatial order: they achieve this by reviewing the continuing evolution of China's urbanism, interrogating the changing role of key players in producing and governing urban transformation processes, and exploring the new urban spaces for the marginalized. Overall, this special issue aims to introduce new perspectives and interdisciplinary methods to explore China's renewed urbanism, by examining changing interrelationships between state, market and society.

This collection of papers offers a complement to and an extension of a special issue entitled "Consuming and Producing China's New Urban Space: State, Market, and Society" published in *Urban Studies*, November 2015. The "state, market, and society triad" calls on scholars to adopt a holistic and inclusive analytical perspective by taking all three stakeholders into account (He & Lin, 2015). In this special issue, we place a stronger emphasis on the governance of China's new urban spaces and on spaces for the marginal and discriminated groups in Chinese urban society, including rural migrants, the urban poor, and the less documented gay people. Most papers are selected from contributions by a group of urban scholars who presented their research in an international symposium entitled "The production and mutation of China's new urban space, state, market, and society" hosted in Sun Yat-Sen University, Guangzhou in December 2011. These papers are organized around the following two subthemes: (1) Producing and governing new urban spaces; (2) New spatial order for the underclass.

Producing and governing new urban spaces

The first group of papers examines the production of various types of new urban spaces and the governance and planning of these spaces (Lin and Zhang; Chan and Li; Xu; and Wang and Li; all this issue). These four papers present detailed

examination of the evolving state–market–society power relations by looking different processes of new urban space production and of socio-spatial transformation, for instance, the political and spatial dynamics of the landscape of uneven development in Beijing, entrepreneurial city building exemplified by the Shanghai Expo, integrated ideologies of environmentalism and entrepreneurialism in planning Tianjin’s eco-city, and the remaking of a trade-painting village resulting from state territorialization and neoliberal governance.

Lin and Zhang offer a renewed explanation for China’s epochal urbanization by exploring the transformation of Chinese metropolises that apply neoliberal urban strategies. Specifically, they examine how Chinese municipal governments pursue land-centered urban development as a means of revenue generation to contest the delegation of state power and responsibilities. Their systematic analysis of Beijing identifies a distinct urban development strategy whereby land commodification and land use planning are mutually reinforced as sources of infrastructural finance. Lin and Zhang also demonstrate that, since 2004, land development in Beijing metropolis shows an uneven development pattern whereby inner suburbs rather than the urban core become the focus of land commodification. They further reason that the less costly land conversion in suburbs and the special institutional set-up, which allows suburban counties to retain land conveyance income, are major factors contributing to this uneven pattern. This also explains why Beijing continues expanding without any effective internal transformation. These findings pinpoint a significant trend: spatial inequality is exacerbated and social discontent is intensified. Wealth keeps transferring from the powerless, the disadvantaged, and the peripheral to the powerful, the advantaged, and the central under the persistent mechanism of land expropriation and commodification. They conclude that neoliberalization never undermines state power; instead, power is consolidated through spatial commodification. In addition, the state and market are not diametrically opposed, rather, the authoritarian state has explored ways to reshuffle and transform itself to embrace and take advantage of the market.

Chan and Li further the discussion on state–market relations by examining the idea of the entrepreneurial city in the Chinese context. Their focus is on how the omnipotent government functions in the process of entrepreneurial city building and how different stakeholders negotiate the implementation of entrepreneurial spatial policies. Through reviewing the restructuring of urban spaces triggered by the Shanghai Expo, they find that, within the process of economic restructuring, negotiations that took place within the state system were tougher than those between the state and non-state sectors. Meanwhile, the grassroots remained excluded from the decision-making process on residential relocation, while the downscaling of governance contributes to the efficient implementation of the displacement. Spatial restructuring in Shanghai Expo is pursued in an active, entrepreneurial fashion such that a new urban spatial order is mirrored in a social recomposition of “yuppies” replacing “yuffies” (young urban failure) in the city proper while a new market for urban living and production concomitantly forms in suburban new towns. A key to understand these processes is that such restructuring, both in the city and suburbs, is mostly driven by the private sector in the West, whereas in China, it is intentionally promoted and enacted by the state. The case study of the Shanghai Expo demonstrates fundamentally different driving forces

propelling the spatial restructuring compared to those in North America and Western Europe. As Chan and Li contend, the development of the entrepreneurial city in China is essentially a state project which largely depends on an integrated approach and the effectiveness of policy implementation.

The paper by Xu documents the emerging new role of urban planners in safeguarding the natural environment in an eco-city project in China, which challenges the traditional recognition that urban entrepreneurialism and environmentalism are in conflict. This study focuses on the of Sino-Singapore Tianjin Eco-City (SSTEC) project and interrogates the bargaining process between “ecological value” and “commodity narrative” in which intense struggle over what to privilege unfolds. In this study, a positive attitude towards the environment in local entrepreneurial endeavors provokes a new interpretation for decrypting development-environment tension in the production of new urban space in transitional China. As the SSTEC case demonstrates, “environment” is not necessarily an oppositional strand of entrepreneurial practice; instead, “ecologicalization” and commodification, environmentalism and entrepreneurialism are well integrated in some cases. In other words, ecological demands are creating new pressures on entrepreneurial urban governance such that the state, at all levels, proactively inserts “environmental care” into its entrepreneurial policy agenda. This imposes more demands and pressures on planners in entrepreneurial plan making. Informed by the SSTEC case, Xu argues that rather than treating urban planners as a homogenous group of professionals being forced to compromise with the state in environmental protection, they should be viewed as hybrid and diverse entities that represent divergent and sometimes contentious state interests. Although confrontation between planners and landed interests always persists, there is no doubt that the active role of urban planners in spatial transformation, especially in green projects, has started to reshape urban development paths in a positive manner.

Against the backdrop of continuously transforming state–society interactions, Wang and Li examine an intriguing case of how the “backward” village of Dafen in Shenzhen has been transformed into an art cluster through a “best practice” of governing. Employing the approach of state territorialization, they inquire into how the dynamic process of territorialization, together with the Chinese version of moral citizenship, contribute to the constantly restructuring social landscape in Chinese cities. Wang and Li contend that, equipped with a market mind-set, the state brought a profound makeover to Dafen Village to create a cultural cluster where the original sporadically formed settlement of the trade-painting community creates new regulation space for political economic experimentation. They also identify two rounds of de-territorialization, re-territorialization, and counter-territorialization which were initiated by the implementation of the master plan and the conditioned welfare policies respectively: the master plan triggered a struggle between the town government and the villagers, while the welfare policies brought up the contentious issue of who deserves to access local public services onto the center stage. The neoliberalized welfare reform in Dafen Village represents a re-regulation of the existing welfare system that conjures up a new *hukou* system and derivatives for migrants. The consequent new forms of inclusion and exclusion portray the neoliberal stance of the local government, which seeks temporal and fragile alignments with those social groups producing economic values. This study concludes that, under the new technology of self-regulation, the

Dafen experience might shed light on the plural meaning of territory in which contingent configuration of power is frequently formed.

New spatial order for the underclass

The second group of papers tells the somewhat forgotten stories of the marginal and disadvantaged groups behind the glorious stories about China's economic miracle and epochal urbanization. The three papers in this section do not deal with specific types of new urban spaces. Rather, the discussions revolve around the emerging new spatial order in urban China and are situated in a general process of socio-spatial transformation that can be interpreted using the state-market-society framework. The three papers shed light on the new spatial order molded by the powers of the state, market, and society and delineate their socio-spatial implications for underprivileged groups.

Traditionally, low-income neighborhoods are conceived as homogenous substandard settlements. He et al.'s study of six large Chinese cities demystifies the homogeneity of low-income neighborhoods in urban China. They juxtapose factors respectively related to institution, market, and demography to present a detailed examination of the complex patterns and mechanisms of housing differentiation and housing poverty in low-income neighborhoods. Findings from this study shed some new light on how the state and the market brought about different imprints on various aspects of housing status and housing differentiation in China's low-income urban neighborhoods. Although institutional factors continue to determine some basic dimensions of housing, such as housing tenure and housing area, market forces have swiftly transformed the most malleable aspects of housing conditions such as housing facilities, and will eventually replace some institutional legacies. Meanwhile, the presumed homogeneity of poor neighborhoods is challenged. It is worth noting that within-group housing differentiation is more palpable than between-group housing differentiation, suggesting that low-income neighborhoods in large Chinese cities are highly fluid and heterogeneous. Another finding from this study is about the different impacts on housing poverty exerted by different institutional elements. For instance, party membership and *hukou* tend to have a lasting effect on determining housing poverty, while state-owned-enterprises/collectively-owned-enterprises affiliation fails to prevent housing poverty. In addition, the well-functioning market remuneration system helps to reduce the risk of housing poverty, yet the working poor remain a severe problem.

In a similar vein, Li explores the latest housing consumption change in urban China under the overarching state-market-society framework. Drawing on a household survey conducted in Guangzhou, 2010, the study examines the extent of improvement in housing conditions in conjunction with, and subsequent to, the attainment of homeownership. Findings from this study are twofold. First, housing-condition improvements upon homeownership attainment are substantial, and are much greater than those resulting from subsequent moves up the housing ladder. Improvements in housing are mainly through the purchase of reform housing that has been commodified since the late 1990s. Second, homeowners in Guangzhou seldom sell their present flat when moving up the housing ladder. The prevalence of second home ownership could be attributable to the buyers' ability to pay, as well as to the *hukou* registration, which guarantees access to good schools and hospitals. The study acknowledges that although

housing ladder climbs are increasingly determined by success in moving up the job ladder and in wealth accumulation, path dependency underpins personal housing careers. Housing outcomes actually are largely influenced by the socialist past such that, apart from access to education, job, and personal income, parents' position in the work unit hierarchy as well as *hukou* status remain significant in housing consumption. Li argues that what, and how much, the household already possesses, determines to a great extent the present and future housing ladder climbs. Owners of reform housing and former peasants on the urban–rural interface with claim to land ownership rights are particularly privileged in housing career advancement.

Qian takes on a hidden and taboo issue in Chinese society: the sexuality of gay men, and interrogates the complex dynamics between the performance of homosexual identity and the dominant heteronormativity in China. By investigating the ways in which heteronormativity unfolds in gay men's cruising in public space of People's Park in Guangzhou, this study reveals how public cruising places can be mobilized as spaces of alternative socio-spatial ordering and simultaneously, closeted spaces to experience and reassert hegemonic divides of public/private, normal/abnormal. The emphasis on self-disciplining does not eradicate "illegality" or expressions of gay desire, whereas self-disciplining subjectivity constantly defines or redefines the transgressive geographies and collective gay identity in the park. Ironically, gay cruisers' resistance to the hegemonic divides reproduces the closet by perpetuating erasure and invisibility. With the examination of the tripartite relationships between public space, gay cruising, and construction of gay subjectivity in People's Park, Qian argues that cultural and political potentials of the cruising space cannot be simplified as equivocal or antithetical. To heterosexual outsiders, gay cruisers display transgression and resistance, which resides in China's cultural norms and Confucian tradition. The tripartite relationships are inextricably intertwined with negotiations with heterosexual mainstreams, heteronormative cultural norms, and the culturally conservative state regime. Qian also contends that, to enrich our understanding of the intrinsically dialectical relations between public space and sexual subjectivity, the multiple ways in which difference is assembled, contested, negotiated, and the sophisticated connotations that sexualized public spaces can engender, should be taken into account.

Towards a structural and situational interpretation of Chinese new urban spaces

In this special issue, we try to make sense of China's renewed urbanism by reinterpreting the interrelationships between state, market, and society amidst the processes of producing and governing new urban spaces, especially the urban spaces produced for and by the disadvantaged. Papers included in this special issue provide vivid vignettes of China's changing urban socio-spatial dynamics and offer new interpretations of China's renewed urbanism either by introducing a new theoretical/analytical perspective or by presenting new empirical material and findings. We believe that the rich primary empirical material and rigorous analysis in this collection of papers add depth and robustness to research on China's urban space (re)production. In addition, this special issue focuses attention on the spatiality and peculiar urban experience of marginalized groups, including those who suffer from the relentless exploitation of

cheap labor and land-based assets, that is, accumulation by dispossession amidst China's renewed urbanism, as well as those on the margins socially and culturally. This collection of papers is expected to contribute to the growing corpus of literature on China's phenomenal urban transformation and renewed urbanism. In particular, it is our hope that this collective effort can elicit new thinking on theoretical and methodological exploration and contribute to renewed understanding of China's new urban spaces.

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