

**Two-Track Urbanization: Examining the  
Reciprocal Relationship between the  
Central and the Local Policy-Making on  
China's Urbanization Process**

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## *Abstract*

This research project seeks to examine the reciprocal relationship between the central and the local policy-making on urbanization in China. In particular, this project explores what has been left out of discussions concerning China's urbanization: how do local authorities implement national urbanization policies and how do the modifications or innovations they made force changes on national directives? In exploring this question, this project will employ both historical and comparative methods. This project intends to provide a historical review of the evolution of major national policies and institutions regarding urban development since 1989 and observe how local policy-making motivates changes to national urbanization guidelines by comparing the urbanization process of Shanghai and Guangzhou.

## *Introduction*

For the three-decade-long period of the centrally planned economy era after the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) pursued policies designed to restrict urban growth under the influences of both Marxist anti-urbanism and Mao's personal distaste for large cities. As a result, most of the population remained as farmers living in rural villages. When economic reforms initiated in late 1978 kickstarted rapid economic growth, however, this policy of restricting rural to urban migration gradually gave way to a large-scale movement of rural workers to the cities. China's urbanization boom was underway. In many respects, China's urbanization process has followed an unprecedented path since rapid economic growth and rapid urbanization began when China was still a centrally planned economy based on the Soviet model. Furthermore, the nation has experienced so many changes in the way the central government intervenes in the urbanization process because of CCP's one-party dictatorship and the Chinese tradition of centralization of power. Hence, regional development has been profoundly affected by such interventions.

However, a trend of decentralization from the national to the local emerged in recent decades. Local governments, especially those of large cities, have gained more autonomy on fiscal authority and regional development. As a consequence, they become more involved and have more say in local urbanization strategies. Thereby, when local authorities implement a mandate from the center, they may send a signal back to the central government by modifying the central directive or innovating a new one, which can result in the center adopting their ideas. Hence, the state urbanization strategy has been increasingly influenced by local and regional interests, albeit the central authority is still in a stronger position of power and authority. This project will explore this interrelationship between the national and the local.

The research questions I seek to answer in my project are:

1) How do local governments respond similarly and differently to the central urbanization policies since 1989?

a. What are the similarities and differences among urbanization policies/measures on the local level?

2) How do local policies/measures on urbanization provide impetus for central policy changes?

a. What are some major changes that the central authority made in response to local jurisdictions' implementation of its policies?

## *Literature Review*

### **Depiction of the Concept of Urbanization**

According to the definition by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of China, borrowed from the internationally renowned urbanist Sir Peter Hall, the connotation of urbanization includes two aspects. First, it is the process of population concentration in urban areas as a result of rural migration or due to an increase in the number of urban areas along with the growth of social productive force. More importantly, urbanization is a process of changing social and economic structure. It implicates the replacement of predominantly rural culture by predominantly urban culture (Standard 1998: 108). Premier Keqiang Li emphasized that urbanization is about a complete change from rural to urban style in terms of industry structure, employment, living environment and social security (Li, 2013).

“Urbanization” was first formally conceptualized in China in the 1989 Urban Planning Law. It states: “The State shall guide itself by the principle of strictly controlling the size of large cities and developing medium-sized and small cities to an appropriate extent in the interest of a rational distribution of productive forces and of the population” (Urban Planning Law 1989, Article 4). The provision is ideologically based and central-planning-oriented. It echoes the so-called “small-town consensus”, reflecting the legacy of anti-urbanism in the pre-reform period (1949-1978). The consensus settles the essence of urbanization strategy as “strictly control the size of large cities, rationally develop medium-sized cities, and vigorously promote the development of small cities and towns” (Zhou 1997: 307). The Urban Planning Law shows that the national government preferred scattered, small-scale urbanization in the rural areas and rejected large-scale urbanization at that time. The concrete central directive based on this ideology is reflected in the *Special Plan on Urbanization Development (2001)*, a subsidiary document of the *Tenth Five-Year Plan (2001-*

2005): 1) to promote urbanization and transfer of rural population into cities; 2) coordinate development of cities of all sizes to form a rational cities-towns system; 3) develop small cities and towns with a focus on county capitals and major towns, actively develop small and medium-sized cities, improve the central cities' function as regional hubs and enhance the large cities' role as centers of gravity; and 4) avoid expanding urban areas blindly. Although the guideline indicates a more balanced official approach towards developing cities of various sizes, it still imposes constraints on the expansion of urban areas. The two documents prove that the "small-town consensus" had remained in the central guidelines for a considerably long period of time.

Nevertheless, urbanization in China must be considered a developing process under a changeful policy-institution environment. Because of the central government's interventions in regional development and because China is still in its early stage of urban transition, adjustments to national or local urbanization policies and institutions are frequently being made. Since 1989, there have been a series of central policy changes due to the ideological shift from "small-town consensus" to one relying on megacities to play a central role in regional development. The Political Report on the 17<sup>th</sup> National Congress (2007) affirms that the central government has acknowledged the need to "form city clusters with megacities as the core". Several factors have made profound impacts on this shift among which decentralization of fiscal authority is the most dominant one.

### **Decentralization of Fiscal Authority**

Especially in the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, decentralization of fiscal capacity from the center to the local gradually occurred as China opened itself to the world. China initiated the Open Door policy in 1978 to attract foreign investment in the country, only limited to special economic zones (SEZs)



at first. After the initial success of the SEZs, 14 coastal cities were designated in 1984 the status of coastal open cities (COCs), which were entitled to set up their own economic and technological development zones (ETDZs) and given the right to approve foreign investment projects up to a limit (Lu 2012: 47). Despite these initiatives, a decisive turning point in favor of metropolitan growth came in 1992, when the paramount leader Deng Xiaoping called for speedier reform and greater openness of the economy in his Southern Tour speeches (Deng, 1992). Soon after, the COCs were allowed to launch various development zones, sprouting the process of marketization of the economy on the local level. Implementing these coastal preferential policies required the delegation of authority to local levels to plan open zones as well as to borrow capital for urban infrastructure development (Laquian, 1997). Moreover, the greater role of central cities became increasingly eminent as the Open Policy was extended to all of China after 1992 (Lu 2012: 49). As a result, the COCs gained greater autonomy in local development planning and finance. The upshot was a diminution of central administrative and fiscal capacity, which in turn, has moderated the ability of the central government to manage the course of reforms or to take major initiatives.

Empowered with autonomy, local governments have changed from passive agents of the central state to active developers responsible for local prosperity. In order to expand their fiscal capacity, the localities are highly motivated to create an urban planning system more responsive to the market and conducive to economic development and rapid urbanization. To some extent, decentralization of economic management set off a transformation that gradually replaced central directives with material incentives to the agents at local levels. In consequence, the state urbanization strategy has been increasingly influenced by local and regional interests in a more decentralized post-reform political-economy structure.

## **Reciprocal Relationship: The Local Influences On The National**

In the era of centrally planned economy (1949-1977), the Central Committee held the absolute power and authority. However, now in the context of decentralization, local jurisdictions may notify the center as they implement central directives differently, which can result in the central government adopting their ideas. For instance, based on socialist ideology, China's 1982 Constitution forbade any organizations or individuals to "appropriate, buy, sell, or lease land, or unlawfully transfer it in any way". The inhibition was broken when Shenzhen became the first place in China where land use rights were leased through public tendering in 1987<sup>1</sup>. Other special economic zones (SEZs) and coastal open cities (COCs) soon followed suit to conduct trial land use rights transactions (Li 2009)<sup>2</sup>. In this process, a pivotal institutional change was detaching land use rights from land ownership, which had been a state monopoly since the establishment of PRC. This made it possible for legal persons to own and transact land use rights. Subsequently, an amendment to China's Constitution in 1988 officially legalized the transfer of land use rights through leasing and subleasing transactions between users, developers, and local governments. This institutional change opened up the marketization of urban property market. The real estate sector has become an important component of the urban economy and property development and thus provided a big push for urbanization.

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<sup>1</sup> Shenzhen was the first SEZ in China. The SEZs can be considered experimental fields of China's modernization and economic reforms. They are given more market-oriented economic policies, including exemptions on duties and from labor regulation, etc. by the Chinese government. In general, the SEZs enjoy preferential treatments and more flexible governmental measures to attract foreign capital and business. This allows them to utilize an economic system more conducive to the market. So, it is possible for Shenzhen to "break some rules".

<sup>2</sup> Coastal open cities (COCs) have similar functions to the SEZs in stimulating exports and attracting foreign capital. They are all located along the coast and can be considered an extension of the SEZs.

Before the mass privatization of housing started in 1994, some cities actually started pilot housing reforms to privatize urban housing consumption and production in the 1980s. Zhengzhou experimented a “three thirds system (*san san zhi*)” – a subsidy policy to promote new housing sales in a way that the local government, the *danwei* (the general name given to a place of employment) that the individual belongs to, and the individual himself, bears one third of the housing price. Its implementation demonstrated that people had the need for housing and some purchasing power, but they were short of impetus for buying under the system of public housing with low rent. So, the local government terminated this institution in 1985 (Web). In 1986, Tangshan carried out a new policy that raised monthly rents of public rental housing by 70 percent to 80 percent and sold public housing units to tenants at discounted prices (Web). This policy fundamentally shook the ingrained concept of housing welfare in residents’ minds in the central planning economy era. A local housing market soon emerged and prospered. These local policies both impelled the issuance of the State Council’s Decision on Deepening Urban Housing Reform in 1994 after which mass privatization of housing on the national level started. Therefore, as (large) cities obtain greater autonomy, they have been playing an increasingly important role and are able to influence central policy-making.

### **“Two-Track Urbanization”**

With all these changes, since early 1990s, China’s post-reform urbanization has been proceeding along two tracks: one is the “conventional urbanization” sponsored by the government and the other is the “spontaneous urbanization” driven by local economic development and market forces (Zhu, 1999: 160). Although the first one still has a strong influence, the latter one has become increasingly important in the urbanization process for large cities and metropolises, thanks to the decentralization of economic management. So,

entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century, China's urbanization policies have continued to evolve on the front of redefining the central urbanization guideline.

## *Methodology/Logic of Inquiry*

In investigating and exploring the reciprocal relationship between the central and local policy-making, I mainly use the comparative method. Methodology that involves data from more than one time period in more than one entity and has an emphasis on interregional comparison is appropriate and relevant for my project.

In the context of fiscal decentralization, local governments have been playing crucial roles in China's urbanization process despite the fact that the central government is still pivotal. I investigate what kinds of measures and/or policies large cities have taken to cope with central urbanization policies over time. Meanwhile, I examine their effects within their jurisdictions in order to answer the question of how do they provide impetus for central policy changes. I use published reports, institutional data as primary sources and academic literature and media sources as secondary sources.

I decided to choose two coastal open cities (COCs), Shanghai and Guangzhou, as comparison entities, because they share certain similarities while differences between them are also significant. First, they are amongst the most important central cities in China of which Shanghai enjoys the status of direct-controlled municipality<sup>3</sup>. Second, each of them is a major industrial center with a coastal location, a rich hinterland, and a privileged place in China's urban and industrial history. However, their industrial structure varies considerably – it is

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<sup>3</sup> Direct-controlled municipality is the highest level classification of cities in China, with the status equal to that of the provinces. A city with such status is under direct control of the central government with limited power. Shanghai is among the four direct-controlled municipalities of China (Web).

more diversified in Shanghai and narrower in Guangzhou. This leads to their different policies on urbanization. In addition, both cities have been active reformers on urbanization process, but their reform strategies differed in timing and scope and in the determination with which they have been implemented.

I intend to measure and compare the local urbanization policies of the two cities in terms of two dimensions: 1) planning of urban land use through the examination of university town, and 2) migrants' quality of life in terms of policies regarding housing conditions of migrants in cities. Decentralization of economic management stimulates the localities to strengthen their fiscal capacity. Urban land planning is a primary tool to accomplish it. Moreover, a remarkable feature of China's fast economic growth and massive urbanization is the rapid expansion of urban land in the form of suburbanization. Parallel to the suburbanization is the fundamental reshaping of landscapes. The reshaping of urban land structure is manifested mainly in changes of land use patterns. Despite the extensive studies on the central business districts (CBDs) and special economic zones (SEZs), little research looks into another form of land use patterns, university town, in the two cities. Therefore, I evaluate the problems generated by the development of university towns to see if its construction could be in fact inefficient spatial expansion.

Second, Rural-urban migration is one of the core issues of urbanization. The housing reform has created a considerable homeownership rate among urbanites; meanwhile, gives rise to the jarring housing disparity between urbanites and migrant workers. It is due to the linkage of *hukou* (household) registration to public services and the socio-economic gaps exacerbated by it. Without local *hukou*, lots of urban housing is not accessible for migrants since a local urban *hukou* continues to be an important qualification. In exploring policies addressing migrants' living conditions in cities, I look at homeownership disparity between urban *hukou* holders and those without

urban *hukou*. I identify the major types of urban housing and public-housing programs targeting low-income families in each city and whether they are available or affordable for migrant workers. In doing so, I look at how are the cities' institution on migrants' homeownership different from and similar to each other and whether and how they benefit migrant workers.

In addition, I investigate a prevalent type of migrant housing arrangement called villages-in-the-city (ViCs). Geographically, ViCs are located within city limits, but their residents have rural *hukou* status. As cities develop effective rental regulations, ViCs create a series of problems that engender dangerous housing conditions. In recent years, local governments have begun a campaign to urbanize and redevelop all ViCs while facing strong resistance from ViC residents. I look into how the city governments cope with ViCs similarly and differently; how do they resettle ViC residents by inspecting the Tangqiao ViC in Shanghai and Tianhe ViC in Guangzhou.

## *Findings*

### **Part 1. Planning of urban land use**

Decentralization of economic management provides local government with great motivations for stimulating local changes in order to maximize local revenues. Local assets have become a substantial source of local revenues, as what the governments can command is only the state-owned land assets within their jurisdictions, riding on the land reform. Meanwhile, the role of market has become significant in the process since economic reforms. Hence, land use planning has become a major tool for the localities to cater to the market and to expand fiscal capacity. Although emerging market forces and pricing mechanisms influence land development and urban form to some extent, the ways they are occurring across large cities point to the still predominant roles of non-market factors, that is, official behavior and institutional modalities of planning. The first part of this section provides an insight into the general trend of urban land use formed during the process of relocating industrial facilities and remaking of urban economic space. At the same time, driven by this unprecedented urbanization, Chinese cities have witnessed remarkable urban sprawl. The second part of this section portrays another major impetus of suburbanization, urban sprawl in the form of suburban development, besides fiscal decentralization. The last part of this section explores a kind of land use pattern that takes place in suburbs – university town – in Shanghai and Guangzhou, with intent to prove the inefficiency of urban spatial expansion.

### **I. Reshaping of urban land structure**

The localities are highly motivated to create an urban planning system more responsive to the market and conducive to economic development. Meanwhile, market forces have increasingly influenced urbanization processes, particularly in land development. When the service industry that was nonexistent before economic reforms flourishes and private enterprises resurge, the reconfiguration of urban economic space inevitably takes place in Chinese cities. The major trend is the increasing separation and specialization of urban land use, as a result of the simultaneous process of the relocation of factories from city cores and the redevelopment of inner city.

In reshaping the urban economic space, the first step is relocating industrial facilities from the center of city to urban fringes. It takes decades to accomplish this process. For instance, in Shanghai, between 1991 and 2004, land allocated to industrial use in the central city decreased by 42 percent, from 45 to 25 square kilometers (World Bank 2008). Nowadays, industries tend to be located in the outskirts since rural land is more plentiful and much cheaper than land in inner city. By doing so, it frees up a substantial amount of space for other land uses in the core. Moreover, it to some degree solves problems associated with industrial land use such as environmental pollution and inefficient infrastructure supply (Wu, 155). To appeal to global businesses and foreign investment, many cities have constructed brand new industrial districts outside the inner city, called High-Tech Development Zones or Economic and Technology Development Zones. Those zones often allow flexible planning control or autonomous rights of land subdivision, and lower land premium (Zhu 1994). In short, the cheap land is an essential instrument for local governments to induce foreign investment.

Parallel to the evacuation of industrial facilities is the redevelopment of formerly industrial land at central locations. Municipal governments have facilitated these shifts, prompted by the eagerness to make city centers a haven



for commercial uses. There has been a wave of building mega-projects in core areas of large cities, among which building central business districts (CBDs) has become a vital development strategy. By 2002, thirty-six cities, including Shanghai and Guangzhou, had planned or established at least a new CBD (Lu, 140). In Shanghai, the Lujiazui CBD was built in the Pudong area across the Huangpu River. Guangzhou had also successfully built the Zhujiang Xin Cheng CBD. The CBDs house a variety of commercial activities and, more importantly, financial and business services. They are places filled with business opportunities. From the design of CBDs to launching high-end department stores, (inter)national competitions are extremely fierce. Experts from industrialized countries, for instance, the USA, Japan, and France, participate in the planning process. From global mass retailers like Walmart and ISETAN to luxury brands like Hermes and Cartier, multiplex shopping and entertainment establishments resembling malls have proliferated. World-renowned multinational enterprises such as Mitsubishi and JP Morgan have broken into the Chinese market and locate in skyscrapers in CBDs. Today, the commercial landscape in downtown of most Chinese city is well-developed. The overall arrangement of urban land is increasingly specialized and well-structured.

## **II. Suburbanization**

As industrial facilities are transferred to city outskirts and new economic functions are developed, urban spatial expansion in the form of suburban development becomes one of the hallmarks of the large cities in China. It also brings in a large influx of rural-urban migrants. When the migrant influx first began in the 1980s, the central city was the chosen residential location of most new arrivals (Wu 2008: 101). However, with high-end real estate development occurred in downtown, central-city housing turns to be more costly and less attractive to migrants. So, they have gradually moved to urban periphery.

Besides, local population that can't afford the rising prices of downtown housing also chooses to move outward. Inner suburbs have become a more important receiving area for not only migrants but also local residents. Consequently, high-tech zones, new commercial housing, resettlement housing, rural villages and migrant communities juxtapose in urban fringes. As a result, rural-urban migration has become another driver of urban expansion along with fiscal decentralization.

### **III. University town**

One of the emerging urban spatial development patterns that is typically exercised as part of suburban development is university town. The impetus for the implementation of university towns comes from the following aspects. First, in order to carry out the central government's strategy of "rejuvenating the country through science and education" (1999), local governments greatly increase college enrollment with intent to popularize higher education. They also realize that university towns would stimulate the development of local economy; push forward urbanization and eventually generate revenues. Most importantly, it would be an effective way to boost GDP growth, a very important indicator of promotion to a higher position of officials. Second, universities need to expand teaching space and to improve teaching quality to accommodate the increased number of students. Furthermore, universities need to meet a series of qualifications set by the education department. For instance, they must satisfy specific requirements on the floor area of college campus. Third, market forces are aware that it is a great opportunity to earn a profit from investing in this huge project. Besides, the investment risk is relatively low and the return is relatively stable.

The development of university towns is one of the most staggering urban spatial growth patterns in terms of scale. By the beginning of 2000s, over fifty

university towns were developed across the country. Each is a large-scale land development initiative accommodating multiple universities clustered in a concentrated geographic region (Table 1). The average size of these university towns is less than 20 square kilometers with almost twelve universities each. The university towns share many features. This section focuses on the investigation and assessment of the two university towns in Shanghai and Guangzhou.

*Table 1 Major university towns across China (2010)*

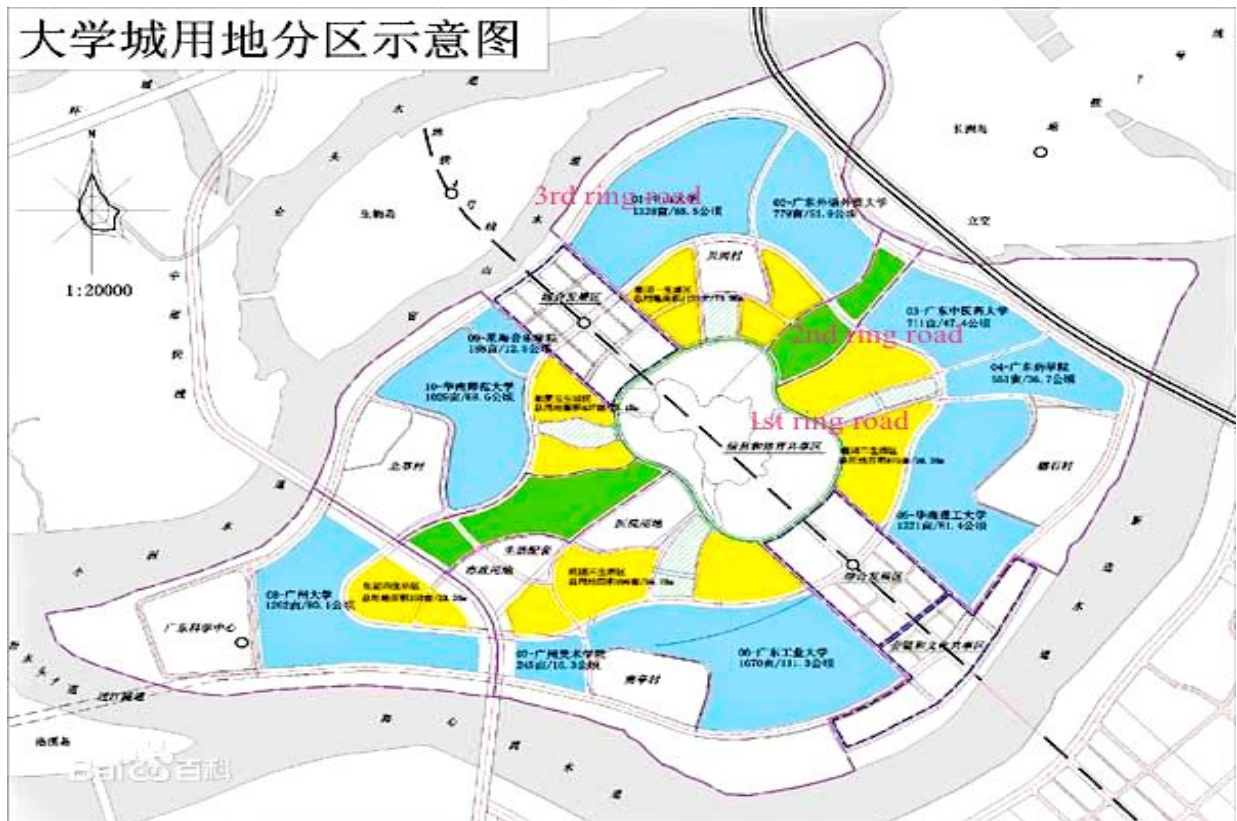
| <i>Name</i> | <i>City</i> | <i>Area (sq km)</i> | <i>Number of universities</i> | <i>Current Enrollment</i> |
|-------------|-------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Shahe       | Beijing     | 8                   | 36                            | 80,000                    |
| Liangxiang  | Beijing     | 6.5                 | 5                             | N/A                       |
| Yuelushan   | Changsha    | 3.33                | 13                            | 72,000                    |
| Changzhou   | Changzhou   | 13.33               | 6                             | 54,000                    |
| Chongqing   | Chongqing   | 33                  | 14                            | 80,000                    |
| Guangzhou   | Guangzhou   | 43.4                | 10                            | 100,000                   |
| Hainan      | Haikou      | 6.67                | 3                             | 22,000                    |
| Xiasha      | Hangzhou    | 10                  | 14                            | 40,000                    |
| Dongfang    | Langfang    | 13.3                | 27                            | 40,000                    |
| Xialin      | Nanjing     | 70                  | 11                            | 110,000                   |
| Songjiang   | Shanghai    | 4.83                | 7                             | 80,000                    |
| Shenzhen    | Shenzhen    | 2                   | 5                             | 10,000                    |
| Jimei       | Xiamen      | 31.21               | 10                            | 200,000<br>(planned)      |
| Longzihu    | Zhengzhou   | 22                  | 5                             | 117,000<br>(planned)      |

*Source:* Web.

### **a. Guangzhou University Town (Guangzhou City)**

Guangzhou University Town is one of the largest of its kind, started construction in 2003 (Baidu). It is located about 17 kilometers (10.5 miles) from downtown Guangzhou City (45 minutes by metro) and 34.4 square kilometers (about 13.28 square miles) of land with a target enrollment of 150,000 to 200,000 students. The whole university town houses ten universities at present and plans to accommodate three more. The completion of the university town involves multiple phases of construction. Two have been completed so far. The first phase is the construction of Xiaoguwei Island of 18 square kilometers in Panyu District. The physical layout of Guangzhou university town is noteworthy: it features three ring roads that separate different land uses in the town (Figure 1). The land surrounded by the innermost ring road is used for a big stadium, physical recreation facilities, and green space. The land between the first and second ring roads is used for student dormitories. Classrooms, offices, and administrative buildings are built between the second and third ring roads. The third ring road serves as a buffer on the river shore, separating the town from the off-campus communities and neighborhoods.

Figure 1 Guangzhou University Town in Guangzhou City



Source:

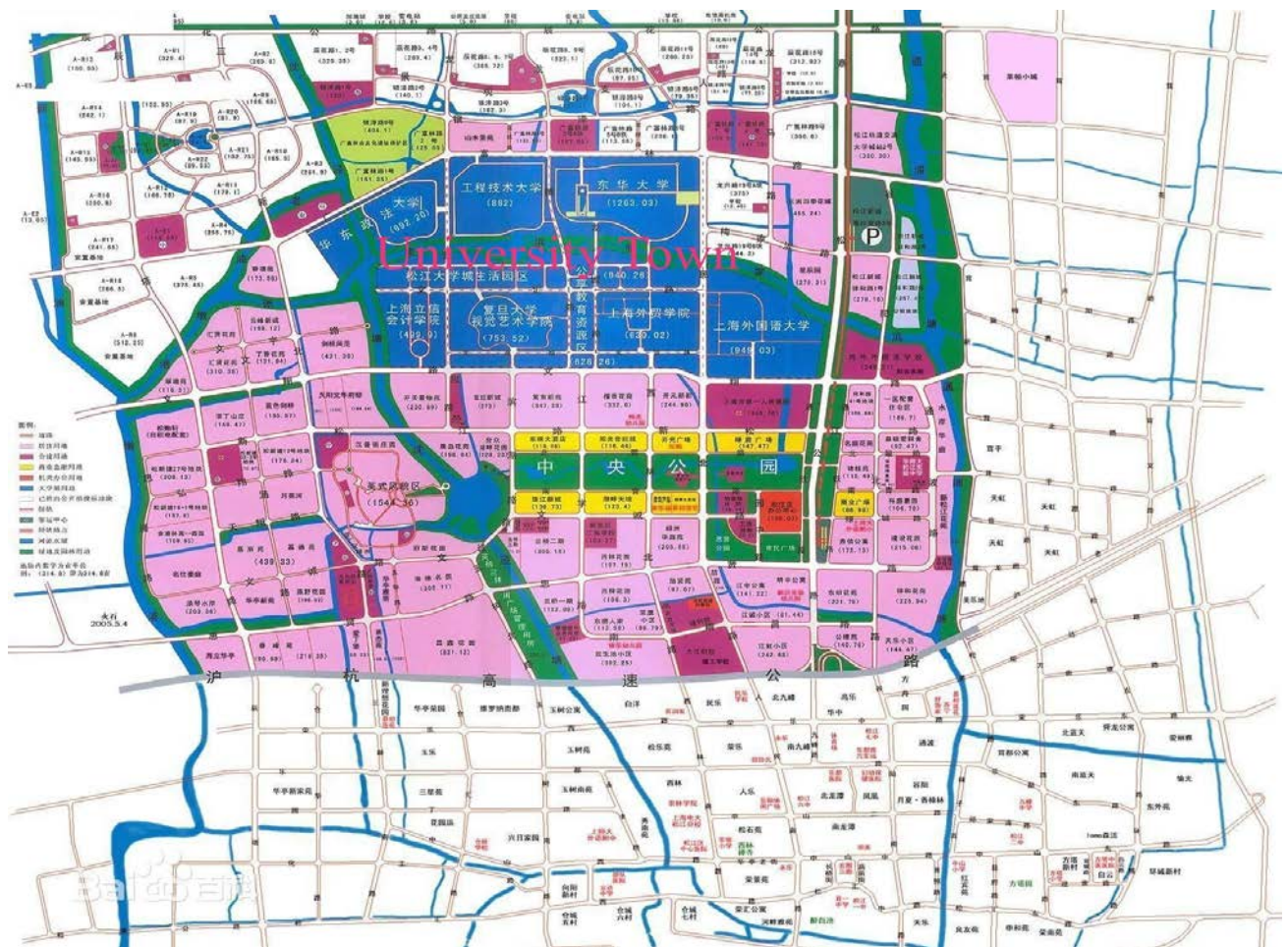
<http://baike.baidu.com/picview/4557/4557/0/00e93901213fb80e76a13b4434d12f2eb9389434.html?fr=lemma#albumindex=0&picindex=4>.

### b. Songjiang University Town (Shanghai)

Songjiang University Town is located in the outskirts of Shanghai in Songjiang District, started construction in 2000. It is located about 20 kilometers (12.4 miles) from downtown Shanghai (at least 50 minutes by metro) and covers about 533 hectares (5.33 square kilometers) of land with an enrollment of 100,000 to 120,000 students. The university town houses seven universities.

At the beginning the project stated that it was dedicated to build a digital, “fenceless” campus and sharing educational resources among universities. Greenbelts or artificial rivers separate the universities; libraries, labs and stadiums are also shared through Intranet; and students and faculties use One-Card-Through system to get access to all resources. It is interesting to see that the university town (the blue area) is tightly surrounded by land mainly for residential uses (pink), administrative (dark purple), and commercial (yellow) uses (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Songjiang University Town in Shanghai



*Source:*

<http://baike.baidu.com/picview/134734/134734/0/27d647eeea0c1de8b2fb95d2.html?fr=lemma#albumindex=0&picindex=1>.

### **c. Assessment**

Looking into the two university towns, data shows that the their construction does to some degree bring new development opportunities to the local community, specifically the real estate sector. In 2008, three years after all the universities had officially settled, the GDP of Songjiang District was 734.48 billion RMB, among which primary industry declined by 2.1%, secondary industry by 6.7%, and tertiary industry grew by 15.1% compared to the last year. It shows that the district has successfully transformed its economic development mode by gradually shifting emphasis on primary and secondary industries to tertiary industry. The University Town, whether directly or indirectly, has definitely contributed to this transformation. Likewise, Panyu District, where the Guangzhou University Town is located, also experienced substantial economic growth. In the past, the Xiaoguwei Island was composed by wasteland and uncultivated land. But, the launching of Guangzhou university town stimulates consumption of in average 80 billion RMB every year. The average price of newly built commercial housing nearby has hit 15,000 RMB per square meter. Therefore, it is proven that university towns contribute to boosting local economy at least in the short run.

In spite of the short-term economic benefits, the preliminary assessment reveals a variety of design defects. First, clustering of universities may help build inter-university connections and intellectual resource sharing; however, they create physical barriers to intra-university communication. This is because the

majority of universities relocate only a few colleges and programs into newly established university towns when their central administrative units and other colleges remain on old campuses. For instance, Guangzhou University of Foreign Language and Trade has moved its undergraduates into the university town while its graduate programs remain on its old campus in downtown Guangzhou City. Fudan University has only left its department of visual arts at Songjiang. Furthermore, no evidence so far demonstrates that inter-campus collaboration has more added values compared to intra-campus linkages. Thereby, the opportunity costs of physical separation within universities may well exceed any benefits gained from clustering different values.

Second, although both university towns claim that they strive for a truly “fenceless” campus, the fact is that the size and spatial arrangement dwindles the possibility of resource sharing in an actualized way. To take Guangzhou University Town as an illustration, it is almost impractical for students to take classes at other universities in the town. Because the ten universities have their classrooms built along the second ring road on the island, the average distance between department buildings on the opposite side of the island is about 5 kilometers. With no school buses provided and in-so-far imperfect online course system in China, sharing classes is really a hardcore issue. The ambitious goal seems to be infeasible and creates dilemma for school administrations. If students can’t benefit from clustering universities, the rationale for building university towns remains in question.

Third, the design of university towns may not be foresighted. It is anticipated that the demand for higher education will increase in the near future as standards of living continue to rise along with the development of urbanization and industrialization. Universities must expand in order to accommodate more students. However, as shown in figure 2, each campus in the Songjiang university town is so packed and large amount of commercial housing



enclose the town tightly, such that there is little space available for additional construction in the future. It implies that any expansion will have to take place in other locations, creating multiple campuses for a university, which goes back to the first issue discussed above.

Compared to geographic obstruction, a more serious problem is the societal blockage. University towns may not be able to incorporate itself into the locality. Moreover, their isolated and remote locations make it extremely hard for students and faculty to connect with the bigger society. Geographically, all university towns are developed in urban fringes and in many cases in the middle of nowhere. But, the local community is generally not capable of providing a good environment for job creation since most of them are yet to be developed, especially the tertiary industry. So, university towns may not exert positive impact on the local knowledge-based economy. As a result, students have to search jobs or internships in downtown where most companies are located. However, public transportation near university towns are specifically designed for the convenience of residents in newly developed real estate, not for students. For instance, students in Songjiang have to take unlicensed taxi to get to the metro station, and then get to downtown area. Hence, the spillover effects of university towns in general appear to be weaker than expected.

The issues discussed above suggest that the negative consequences and associated efficiency losses of the university town project could be substantial, which will affect the long-term sustainable growth of cities. It raises the question of the efficiency of the so-called urban spatial development pattern. Moreover, exerting negative impacts on people who stay in the university towns challenges the necessity of this mega-project. Indeed, It reveals the phenomenon that local authorities sacrifice public resources and manpower for the purpose of the growth of GDP and the embellishment of their career. The creation of university towns may have stimulated the prosperity of the real estate sector in

the short-run, but it can't achieve most of the primary goals as anticipated. Some says it is by nature an image project. Unfortunately, the Party hasn't had an explicit direction addressing the problems with university town, perhaps because the seriousness of the problem has not been exposed as it is still relatively new and under the development phase.

## **Part 2. Policies/measures regarding housing conditions of migrants in cities**

Rural-urban migration is one of the core issues in the urbanization process. According to the 2010 census, the number of floating population has exceeded 221 million<sup>4</sup>. In exploring migrants' quality of life in large cities, this part looks at housing disparity between urban *hukou* holders and those without one, because housing disparity is an important indicator of a person's socioeconomic status. By 2010, housing reforms since the 1980s has created a 72 percent homeownership among urbanites, but the rate among migrants in cities is less than 1 percent (Wu, 119). The jarring housing disparity between urbanites and migrants is due to both the close linkage of *hukou* (household) registration to public services and the socio-economic gaps exacerbated by it<sup>5</sup>. The two reinforce each other and perpetuate the disadvantaged position of migrants, especially low-income migrant workers.

The first part of this section observes major types of urban housing and various affordable housing programs targeting low-income families in Shanghai and Guangzhou; and discusses the availability and affordability to migrant

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<sup>4</sup> The term "floating population" is officially defined as those living outside the place in which their *hukou* registration (household registration) is recorded for more than six months (Ren 2013: 117). Migrant workers in meeting urban labor force needs consist most of the population.

<sup>5</sup> While an urban *hukou* comes with full provision of social welfare, a rural *hukou* lack most of the welfare benefits enjoyed by urban residents and involves self-responsibility in food supply, housing, employment, and income (Wu 2010: 94).

workers and their families. The second part of this section examines a specific type of migrant housing arrangement called villages-in-the-city (ViCs).

### I. Urban housing and affordable housing programs

Chapter Thirty-five of the Twelfth Five-Year Plan details the central directives in the housing sector, “...The [local] government is responsible for enhancing the supply of the affordable house... For the low-income families with housing difficulties in town, to practice the low-price renting mechanism, for the lower-middle-income families with housing difficulties, to practice the public housing mechanism, for the up-middle-income families with housing difficulties, to practice the mechanism that combine the renting and purchasing of the commercial house”. In response to the national policy, implementations vary in scope across cities.

Table 2 Urban housing types and availability for migrants in Shanghai (2013)

| Types of Urban Housing                                   | Qualification  | For Migrants |            | For Urbanites |
|--|--|--------------|------------|---------------|
|  |  | Own (Y/N)    | Rent (Y/N) |               |
| Private housing ( <i>siyou zhuzhai</i> )                 | Anyone, but only those with local urban <i>hukou</i> can qualify for bank mortgage loans | Yes          | Yes        | Yes           |
| Commercial housing ( <i>shangpin fang</i> )              | Anyone, but only those with local urban <i>hukou</i> can qualify for bank mortgage loans | Yes          | Yes        | Yes           |
| Private rental housing ( <i>siren zulin fang</i> )       | Anyone   | Yes          | Yes        | Yes           |
| Municipal and work-unit public housing ( <i>gongzu</i> ) | Sitting local urban tenants; must with local urban <i>hukou</i>                          | No           | Yes        | Yes           |

|   |  |    |                             |     |
|---|--|----|-----------------------------|-----|
| <i>fang</i> )   |  |    |                             |     |
| Economic and Comfortable housing ( <i>jingji shiyong fang</i> ) | 1) Local urban residents with local urban <i>hukou</i> for at least 3 (consecutive) years; and<br>2) with low or medium income (minimum wage 1,820 RMB per month) can purchase at subsidized price | No | No                          | Yes |
| Price-limit housing ( <i>xianjia fang</i> )                     | 1) Local urban residents with local urban <i>hukou</i> for at least 7 years; and<br>2) with less than 27,600RMB per-capita annual disposable income  | No | No sublease within 10 years | Yes |
| Low-rent housing ( <i>lianzu fang</i> )                         | For rental to 1) local urban residents with local urban <i>hukou</i> for at least 3 (consecutive) years; and<br>2) with less than 25,200RMB per-capita annual disposable income                    | No | No                          | Yes |
| Resettlement housing ( <i>dongqian fang</i> )                   | For local urban residents relocated from areas undergoing redevelopment  | No | Yes                         | Yes |

Source: based on [www.shanghai.gov.cn](http://www.shanghai.gov.cn).

Table 3 Urban housing types and availability for migrants in Guangzhou (2013)

| Types of Urban Housing | Qualification    | For Migrants |            | For Urbanites |
|------------------------|------------------|--------------|------------|---------------|
|                        |                  | Own (Y/N)    | Rent (Y/N) |               |
| Private housing        | Anyone, but only | Yes          | Yes        | Yes           |

|   |  |     |                            |     |
|---|--|-----|----------------------------|-----|
| <i>(siyou zhuzhai)</i>  | those with local urban <i>hukou</i> can qualify for bank mortgage loans  |     |                            |     |
| Commercial housing ( <i>shangpin fang</i> )                     | Anyone, but only those with local urban <i>hukou</i> can qualify for bank mortgage loans   | Yes | Yes                        | Yes |
| Private rental housing ( <i>siyou zulin fang</i> )              | Anyone   | Yes | Yes                        | Yes |
| Municipal and work-unit public housing ( <i>gongzu fang</i> )   | Sitting local urban tenants; must with local urban <i>hukou</i>  | No  | Yes                        | Yes |
| Economic and Comfortable housing ( <i>jingji shiyong fang</i> ) | 1) Local urban residents with local urban <i>hukou</i> for at least 3 (consecutive) years; and 2) with low or medium income (minimum wage 1,524RMB per month) can purchase at subsidized price | No  | Yes                        | Yes |
| Price-limit housing ( <i>xianjia fang</i> )                     | 1) Local urban residents with local urban <i>hukou</i> ;<br>2) pre-tax fixed income less than 100,000RMB; and<br>3) no homeownership of any residential housing                                | No  | No sublease within 5 years | Yes |
| Low-rent housing ( <i>lian zu fang</i> )                        | For rental to 1) local urban residents with local urban <i>hukou</i> ;<br>2) no  | No  | No                         | Yes |

|   |   |    |     |     |
|---|---|----|-----|-----|
|   | homeownership of any residential housing; and 3) with less than 15,600RMB per-capita annual disposable income |    |     |     |
| Resettlement housing ( <i>dongqian fang</i> ) | For local urban residents relocated from areas undergoing redevelopment                                       | No | Yes | Yes |

Source: www.laho.gov.cn.

Table 4 Urban housing types and availability for migrants based on the two cities

| Types of Urban Housing                             | Description   | Qualification  | For Migrants |            | For Urbanites |
|--|---|--|--------------|------------|---------------|
|  |   |  | Own (Y/N)    | Rent (Y/N) |               |
| Private housing ( <i>siyou zhuzhai</i> )           | Pre-1949 urban housing unites passed on within family and housing in rural areas  | Anyone   | Yes          | Yes        | Yes           |
| Commercial housing ( <i>shangpin fang</i> )        | Available for anyone to purchase at market price  | Anyone, but only those with local urban <i>hukou</i> can qualify for bank mortgage loans | Yes          | Yes        | Yes           |
| Private rental housing ( <i>siyou zulin fang</i> ) | Anyone can rent already-purchased commodity housing, public housing (with permission), resettlement housing, and other types of private housing | Anyone   | Yes          | Yes        | Yes           |
| Municipal and work-unit                            | Sitting local urban tenants can   | Sitting local urban tenants can  | No           | Yes        | Yes           |

|   |   |   |    |                     |     |
|---|---|---|----|---------------------|-----|
| public housing<br>( <i>gongzu fang</i> )                        | purchase ownership or use rights to their rental home from their municipality/work units and trade units        | purchase and trade units on secondary housing market  |    |                     |     |
| Economic and Comfortable housing ( <i>jingji shiyong fang</i> ) | Reserved for low- and medium-income urban families; available at relatively low price comparing to market price | Local urban residents with low or medium income can purchase at subsidized price                            | No | No                  | Yes |
| Price-limit housing ( <i>xianjia fang</i> )                     | Reserved for low- and medium-income urban families; price is fixed by the government                            | Local urban residents with local urban <i>hukou</i> with per-capita annual disposable income below standard | No | Yes with conditions | Yes |
| Low-rent housing ( <i>lianzu fang</i> )                         | Reserved for families with low income and/or smaller living areas per capita than local minimum standard        | For rental to local urban residents with the lowest income  | No | No                  | Yes |
| Resettlement housing ( <i>dongqian fang</i> )                   | Reserved for families being relocated for redevelopment projects at a subsidized price                          | For local urban residents relocated from areas undergoing redevelopment                                     | No | Yes                 | Yes |

As shown in table 2 and 3, both Shanghai and Guangzhou governments set up a series of affordable housing programs in response to the national calling. Comparing the two tables, the two cities employ roughly the same policies with the exception of subtle differences, for example, the number of years of obtaining a local urban *hukou* to qualify. Table 4 is a summary of migrant access to urban housing based on table 2 and 3. Among the eight major

types of urban housing, only three are available to migrants – commodity housing, private housing, and private rental housing. Commodity housing and private housing are the only real property sector open for migrant homeownership; however, the very low income of migrant workers and skyrocketing housing prices make them far out of their reach. In addition, a local urban *hukou* is required to qualify bank mortgages for new commercial housing. Programs targeting low-income families, such as economic and comfortable housing and low-rent housing, are only available for urban *hukou* holders. Price-limit housing can be sublet to migrants after specified number of years. Not surprisingly, only urban *hukou* holders may qualify for the purchase of work-unit and municipal public housing and resettlement housing at subsidized price. Although there have been affordable housing programs exclusively for non-urban *hukou* holders in both cities since 2010, they are still at the initial stage. The effects of such programs remain unclear.

The result illustrates that the urban-rural divide continues in the housing sector. Most urban housing types, in particular those that are more affordable, are not accessible for most migrants. A local urban *hukou* continues to be an essential qualification. It demonstrates that the majority of large cities continue to control the distribution of social welfare by placing significant limits on eligibility for urban *hukou* registration. Therefore, low-income migrants have very limited housing choices. They are forced to be tenants even after years of living in the city.

In fact, *hukou* reforms under the administration of President Hu Jintao have begun to address the urban-rural divide. Premier Wen Jiabao made a national calling for local authorities to abolish discriminatory measures against migrants as early as 2003. Yet, changes tend to occur in towns and small cities (den Hartog 2010: 371). While the system has been loosened for the more privileged migrants in recent years (e.g., migrants with advanced degree and



sponsored by their employers), the central government still has not explicitly addressed how to work out the dilemma of migrants caused by the connection between *hukou* registration and public services. Accordingly, local governments dodge this troublesome issue. The primary problem facing most migrants without a local urban *hukou* remains unsolved. In the end, private rental housing becomes the only choice left.

## II. ViCs

Moreover, the result of migrant housing surveys conducted in Shanghai, Beijing, and Guangzhou between 2005 and 2010 shows that low cost and proximity to workplace are higher priorities for migrant workers than security and space (Ren 2013: 119). But, many of the (new) affordable housing units are built on the urban fringe so that migrants found them less attractive. Migrant workers find them less attractive. So, a variety of factors create conditions for the formation of Villages-in-the-City (ViCs), which is especially prevalent in cities in the Pearl River Delta.

Neighborhoods of ViCs were formally rural but have become enveloped by urban outward expansion. Though physically located within city limits, the local residents of ViCs obtain rural *hukou* status. By virtue of this status, they have stakes in collective land rights and thus the rights to build additional structures or expand their homes. They then rent out to migrants in order to boost income and migrant workers find them more affordable. Therefore, migrants find ViCs much more appealing as a place to settle. On the other hand, the practice of ViCs causes a series of problems such as unauthorized construction, irregularity of rental activity, leasing of unsafe dwellings, inadequate housing conditions, damage to the appearance of city, etc.. Since they do not own the units, migrant workers tend to have little incentive to improve their shelters. After all, the *hukou* system of granting only temporary residence

permits to migrants discourages them from making investment to the places they live. Overall, living conditions of migrant workers are poor – overcrowded, with limited amenities, and located in perilous environment (Figure 3).

Figure 3 The interior look of a typical ViC



Source: Baidu Image.

Figure 4 The Tianhe ViCs in Guangzhou surrounded by high-rise buildings



*Source:* Baidu Image.

### **III. Assessment**

Both local governments of Shanghai and Guangzhou have experienced similar changes in their stance toward ViCs over time, from the initial hands-off approach to regulation and redevelopment in recent years. During the initial stage of economic reforms, the municipal governments focused exclusively on developing new areas on the outskirts of the city where land was abundant and state-owned (Wang et al., 2009). The government avoided the villages which later became ViCs on purpose, because urban governments generally have a weaker hand in dealing with the collective ownership of rural land. As the city quickly expanded outward, some villages were surrounded by urban development and became enclaves in the city (Figure 4). Seeing the large volumes of migrant inflows and a limited supply of affordable housing for migrants, villagers developed their land into today's ViCs. Some of them are even close to the Central Business District (CDB), for instance, the Tianhe ViC in Guangzhou.

When the cities were expanded to a significant level, the governments began to urbanize ViCs within the city limits. In 1992 alone, in Guangzhou, 68 administrative village committees and 173 natural village committees were transformed into urban resident committees. As compensation, the *hukou* status of villagers was changed from agricultural to non-agricultural (Yusuf 1997: 136). Once acquiring village land, the Guangzhou government wants to redevelop those ViCs while lacking of financial capacity to build commercial properties and to take care of villagers' money compensation and social welfare needs. It collaborates with real estate developers in the redevelopment. As most villagers' houses are taken down, intense negotiations often occur among the government, villager-landlords, and developers such as the amount of compensation.

In the current phase, since 2003, the Guangzhou government has begun campaigns to urbanize and redevelop all ViCs. However, they have been facing strong resistance from ViCs since not all villagers are willing to let go of their rural *hukou* and lose their collective ownership to land. The government then legally recognized their ownership over self-built housing by granting them 70 years of ownership rights over their built properties. Yet, their collective ownership is still forfeited, which makes ViCs vulnerable to redevelopment. Once the land becomes state-owned, it is a lot easier for the city authority to relocate residents and demolish existing houses on state land.

The Shanghai government used to urbanize ViCs through administrative measures in the form of directly issuing demolition permits. Although local residents had channels to reflect their willingness, they did not have a say at all in critical issues such as whether they agree to the demolition and how much the compensation should be. In one word, the local authority had the final say. The problem with the government-led model was that first, the government invested too much and it was not able to complete the whole process alone.

Second, the redevelopment process often came to a deadlock where before, some residents asked the authority to renew their ViCs; but once the government stepped in, they did not easily agree to relocate because of dissatisfaction with compensation.

In 2010, Shanghai introduced the measure of “二次徵詢” in order to avoid launching a project in a hasty manner and show respect to residents’ opinions as much as possible. The first consultation occurs before starting up a resettlement project. A project will be launched only if more than 90% of the total number of households agrees to be resettled. The government will consult the residents again about the resettlement and compensation plan. The plan will not come into effect until more than 80% of the total number of households consent. At this point, the redevelopment will officially set in motion. The experiment of this measure in Tangqiao ViC in Pudong in 2008 demonstrated its feasibility (Wang 2012). Moreover, given the lack of public resources for redevelopment, the government has resorted to market forces and private-sector resources and compensation practice has changed from in-kind to monetized forms. That way, the profitability of ViC renewal is increased and project costs have been decreased.

Before the Twelfth Five-Year Plan (2011~2015), no official documents from the Chinese government have ever explicitly mentioned ViCs even though “urbanization” has always been included. After local authorities put efforts into the redevelopment of ViCs for more than a decade, the national policy eventually mentions it: “Optimizing urbanization layout and form...pushing forward the reconstruction of the ViCs and rural-urban fringes...” (Chapter 20, the 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan). Although the language is brief and vague, it shows that the central government affirms the achievement of local governments and encourages the continued urbanization of all ViCs.

In spite of adopting different measures, redevelopment – compensating villagers at the market price, demolishing existing structure, and building high-rise commercial properties – has recently become the predominant model of urbanizing ViCs. Villager-landlords benefit more or less from the redevelopment projects through various forms of compensation. In contrast, the housing conditions of migrant tenants have only worsened as ViCs are redeveloped. The redevelopment approach does not take into account the housing needs of migrants living in ViCs. Migrant tenants are evicted when a ViC is redeveloped; meanwhile, there are few other affordable housing options in the city. Redevelopment has greatly reduced the stock of affordable rental housing and therefore led to sharp rise in rents. Some migrants have to move to places far away from the urban areas, or go back to the countryside. For example, many migrant workers prefer rentals in Huaqiao Town, Jiangsu Province, which is 45 minutes away from factories in Anting Town, Shanghai by bus, to avoid high rents in Shanghai. What's more, many are found living in squatter settlements, parking garages, basements, and storage rooms (Su 2011). In conclusion, migrant housing situation has become desperate as local governments continue to redevelop all ViCs while overlooking migrant housing needs.

## ***Conclusion***

The political system of China determines the asymmetrical power relationship between the central and local governments. Regional development has been profoundly and constantly affected by the central government in the way that the center intervenes the local urbanization process. However, through the analysis of one of the urban spatial development patterns and policies addressing migrants' quality of life in large cities, it is demonstrated that the position of localities are getting much more powerful, as reflected in it forcing changes in central directives. Although the central government hasn't

responded to the negative impact of university town, based on its policy change regarding migrant housing, it is very likely that it will address this problem in the near future. Moreover, the control over local authorities becomes harder since the local fiscal capacity expands. The situation turns from the traditional top-down, supervisory control to in some cases, the locality bargains with the national and the national has to make deals with the locality. In addition, the research shows that although there might be some modifications, localities learn or imitate local policies from each other. On one hand, the reason could be that once a policy is proved successful in one place, other localities learn, test, and modify this policy within their jurisdiction. On the other hand, it has to be related to the trend of imitation that is prevalent among Chinese government officials. In order to improve their political achievement, once other localities figure out a way to stimulate the economic growth, they tend to duplicate it, no matter it is reasonable or not.

## ***Strengths and Limitations***

Using the comparative method will provide a deeper understanding of the effects of central policies on the urbanization process of large cities as well as how local changes may spur central policy changes. The two cities I choose are comparable in many perspectives but are also very different. The comparison will help highlight the particular features of each city's urbanization policy and make the differences among their policies more clear. However, this study will not focus on small townships since they are not comparable with coastal cities in many aspects. So, it will not tell us much about how central urbanization strategies affect small and mid-sized cities or towns. In addition, the official documents and policies issued by the Communist Party are traditionally sweeping and ambiguous in terms of language. Usually, it is nothing beyond one line when addressing certain issue. Readers, including local government officials,

have to infer the meaning. Last but not least, due to the incredibly fast changing speed of China, the data sources I use may be considered out of date.

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