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**The spatial dimension of negotiated power relations and social justice
in the redevelopment of villages-in-the-city in China**

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justice
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Abstract

This paper investigates the spatial dimension of power relations and the seeking of social justice through an urban redevelopment project. It seeks to provide an on-the-ground investigation on the role of space in affecting power relations and hence the seeking of social justice. Bringing together a relational approach, the positioning of actors and the broader bottom-up conceptualisation of power, this paper presents a link between power and space, suggesting that different forms of power are stemmed from the multiple connections which different actors draw from space, be it place or shifting positions. In the investigation of China's villages-in-the-city redevelopment, this idea suggests that dispossessed are not entirely powerless, although their formal rights to participate are forfeited. In other words, dispossessed's power is spatially defined and their seeking of justice is determined by negotiated power relations. Put in the context of a Chinese city, this paper moves the discussion of social justice beyond liberal democratic societies where most of the literature is based. Such a move is expected to generate new understandings of the geographies of social justice.

Keywords:

Social justice, power and space, Chinese cities, urban redevelopment, villages-in-the-city

The spatial dimension of negotiated power relations and social justice in the redevelopment of villages-in-the-city in China

In China, a growing number of land appropriations, forced evictions and demolitions as a result of the country's aggressive urbanisation have raised concerns about the plight and rights of the dispossessed (Ming, 2011; Washburn, 2011). The defence of property and land use rights, however, is always frustrated by the lack of effective political channels and the pervasive abuse of power. Urban dwellers, in response to these political constraints, have initiated non-institutional and undisciplined actions to protect their rights and resist oppressive measures (Cai, 2008). The emergence of informal actions has not only extended the idea of rights in a legal/constitutional sense, but has also opened up new opportunities for the dispossessed to strive for fairness and justice.

Whilst in China social justice has become a new concern, in the West its origin dates back to ancient Greece. Social justice is an intricate concept. Definitions of justice have long been discussed but no common agreement has been reached. In urban literature, discussions on justice have been in response to the awareness of 'injustice' – uneven geographical development and a growing material difference between social groups – derived from neoliberal policy formulation. One of the understandings stemming from this awareness is that justice has different meanings in different political, social and historical contexts (Young, 1990; Visser, 2001; Harvey, 2002). Central to this perception is the role of space in producing and resisting domination and repression. Early efforts to incorporate space in discussions of social justice included Davies's (1968) idea of 'territorial social justice' which refers to a justice of distribution in space or across space. This treatment of space is referred to by Pirie (1983, page 469) as "justice in space" because space is conceived of as a product of injustice rather than as a criterion for judgement. Harvey's (1973) early discussion on space and social justice basically followed this territorial tenet. To truly describe spatial justice, Pirie (1983, page 471) developed the concept of viewing "space as process". This position, as argued by Dikeç (2001), requires the adoption of a dialectical rather than a materialistic view of space. Such a view considers the more abstract spaces of economic and social relationships and how such spatiality produces, and reproduces, domination and oppression. This perspective, according to Dikeç (2001, pages 1792-1793), provides a tool to distinguish "injustice in space" (a distribution pattern of injustice) and "produc[tion] and reproduc[tion] of injustice through space".

This dialectic formulation has been further elaborated by Edward Soja's (2010) recent attempt to synthesise space, rights and social justice into a theory of spatial justice. Considering social justice as a broad, but intricate, concept including the establishment of rights, democracy, liberty and equality, Soja (2010) further interweaves Henri Lefebvre's (1996) 'right to the city' with social justice by advocating a "new spatial consciousness" for justice. Central to this perspective is a socio-spatial dialectic (Soja, 1980), in which space is considered as neither physical nor comprising hard social and economic

conditions but as a dynamic setting filled with different forces that shape interactions and events. The 'right to the city' is considered as a social process that shapes such settings, that is, determines spatiality, and at the same time, is shaped by it. Spatial (in)justice is, therefore, affected by this dialectic relationship.

The above discussion suggests three roles played by space in understanding social justice: (a) the geographical differences in the meaning and characteristics of social justice; (b) the spatial expression of social injustice; and (c) space/spatiality in producing, and reproducing, injustice. The first and the second roles involve a physical manifestation of social justice/injustice across space and the third a process whereby space creates social justice/injustice. Whilst Dikeç (2001, page 1793) suggests that "form and process are inseparable", the three insights do not necessarily conflict with each other. Indeed, they suggest three spatial dimensions of social justice.

While acknowledging the spatiality of social justice, a major force that catalyses the outcome is power. Urban literature which follows a Marxist tradition tends to focus on the domination of structure and the way that ideologies are taken up by people. Power, in this sense, is the top-down capacity possessed by a certain group of people or institution over powerless people/groups. This position is challenged by Michel Foucault who radically reworks the notion of power by suggesting a bottom-up perspective.¹ In Foucault's (1980a, 1980b) conceptualisation, power is conceived of as a set of relations between individuals, and between individuals and institutions. Individuals not only receive power, they also enact and resist power when formulating relations with others/institutions. This perception suggests a local form of power that has been elaborated on extensively by scholars in various areas of academic research. In my investigation of the spatial dimension of social justice, it is Clegg (1989) and de Certeau's (1984) elaborations that provide useful insights. Seeking to differentiate the nature (i.e. what is power) and function (i.e. what does power do) of power, Clegg (1989) adopts a relational approach in attempting to understand the interconnections of individuals and institutions in the creation of power. While his work provides an early example of the animate nature of power, Clegg, according to Faulconbridge and Hall (2009), fails to further elaborate on how actors construct different forms of power. De Certeau's (1984) investigation of the everyday practice of constructing power has shed light on this issue. He suggests that power is structured by the space-time positioning of actors. This implies power is grounded "in the territorial positioning of actors and in the degree of control they exercise over (materials and imagined) places" (Weller, 2009, page 792). The position of actors, therefore, does not only configure their power but also their tactics to exercise power.

Bringing together the relational approach, the positioning of actors and the broader bottom-up conceptualisation of power has presented a link between power and space: different forms of power are derived from the

¹ I do not suggest Foucault has played down, or overlooked, the top-down form of power. His perspective suggests that power from below has not given the importance it deserves.

multiple connections which different actors draw from space, be it place or shifting positions. If power is linked to space, so too are the power relationships between actors who exercise power. Based on this insight, economic geographers, such as Wellers (2009), investigate how the relational positioning of various airlines constitutes a shifting spatiality of power relationships in Australia's aviation industry. Although these studies focus on economic actors, they demonstrate the role of space in influencing power relations, and provide useful insights into the spatial dimension of social justice from a practice-based perspective. In the case of China, space-time positioning implies the dispossessed are not entirely powerless, although their formal rights are forfeited. In other words, urban residents' power is spatially defined and their seeking of justice is determined by negotiated power relations.

It is the objective of this paper to investigate the spatial dimension of power relations and its impact on the seeking of social (in)justice through an urban redevelopment project. Unlike research which examines the relations between the top-down and bottom-up power (Zunino, 2006, for example), or investigations on how a network of power, or governmentality, is constructed to organise socio-economic order (Barnett, 2001; Tang, 2006), this paper takes a humble focus on the 'local' form of power and the way that such power is negotiated by individuals. Holding to the principle of equal opportunity and recognition (Fainstein, 2010), social justice, in the context of urban redevelopment, is defined as equal rights to access urban land and equal opportunities to engage in redevelopment and retain a particular livelihood. Put in the context of a Chinese city, this paper moves the discussion of (in)justice beyond that in liberal democratic societies where most of the literature is based. Such a move is expected to generate new understandings of the geographies of social justice. In the next section, an overview of social justice in Chinese cities, and the implications of the recent redevelopment plan in Guangzhou city, will be presented. This is followed by a discussion of major players in the redevelopment process, which suggests that their power is constituted by space, notably local policy, native identity and location. Through an examination of the negotiation process, the last section will show, through empirical evidences, how spatially defined power affects the relations between different players and the negotiations surrounding redevelopment. The information used in this paper was drawn from my ethnographic study on a Guangzhou neighbourhood, in particular semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with local cadres, native villagers and migrants regarding to the redevelopment throughout 2010 and early 2011.

Space and social (in)justice in Chinese cities

Geographical differences in the characteristics and meaning of social justice, as noted, suggest that the logic for domination in Chinese cities, the structure that social justice is embedded in and the possible resources that actors are able to draw upon to resist oppression are different from their capitalist counterparts. Reviewing literature on urban inequality under socialism, Tang

and Lee (2003) reveal that social (in)justice under socialism is generated by a different logic. China's socialist tradition implies a similar experience. However, the three decades of China's economic reform have strengthened market forces as a major dynamic for urban development and has created a transitional economy featuring both state planning and market mechanisms. The juxtaposition, yet contradiction, of these forces suggest that China has a distinctive path of development which is guided by a very different logic (Friedmann, 2005; Naughton, 2006). The implication of this insight on the study of China's urban space and social justice is that meaningful discussions should consider Chinese society at multiple levels including the institutional restrictions that are inherited from the socialist command economy system, the dominant role of the state in formulating development (Tang, 1997; Xu and Ng, 1998; Wu, 2007; Zhang, 2008), its governing logic (Tang, 2000) and the formation of a land-based urban economy (Lin, 2007; Hsing, 2010). These forces form the spatiality that affect the planning, development and social justice of Chinese cities.

Focusing on structural constraints, Chung and Tang (2010) have made an initial effort to investigate the geographies of social injustice in Chinese cities. They argue that social injustice stems from structural inequality inherited from the Maoist period rather than from capital accumulation. Central to their argument is the prolonged socio-spatial-institutional dualism between urban and rural. This dualism suggests that 'urban' and 'rural' are not just locations, but are separate incompatible systems operating independently. This is vividly illustrated by the dualism in land ownership and its associated land use rights (Ho, 2001; Zhu, 2003), land management (Ho and Lin, 2003), planning and regulations (Zou, 2003). At another level, a household registration system (*hukou*) classifies people into urban and rural residents, with the livelihoods of the former the responsibility of the state and the latter left to self-reliance (Guo and Liu, 1990).

Urbanisation did not reconcile this dual structure. As a result, although a village's farmland is being encroached on and its residents end up living in a city, its land use, planning and public administration remain regulated by the rural organisational network. Moreover, farmers' rural registration also remains unchanged, and thus their livelihoods continue to be supported by their rural collective in a self-sufficient way. Clearly, such a system has created injustice, as urban expansion has encroached on farmers' agricultural land, stripped away their income from cultivation, and, at the same time, has excluded them from the urban system and its associated socio-economic rights and privileges (Chung and Tang, 2010). Oppression and exclusion have thus become a synonym for injustice in Chinese cities. Nevertheless, such exclusion has retained farmers' rights to use residential land, which is allocated to them by their collective unit for housing purposes gratis. These farmers then, in an unjust urban context, expand their residences by building additional storeys, aggressively and illegally, to generate easy rental income (Tang and Chung, 2002; Zhang et al, 2003; Wang et al, 2009). These activities soon transform their place of residence into a chaotic landscape of illegal construction, indiscriminant land use and extremely high building density with many illegal activities (Wei, 2000; Xie, 2003). These settlements

are known as 'villages-in-the-city' (*chengzhongcun*), a manifestation of social injustice in Chinese cities.

Villages-in-the-city is not the only form of spatial manifestation of injustice but unlike other inner-city neighbourhoods where the urban underclass congregated,² villages-in-the-city has demonstrated two dimensions of social exclusion in Chinese cities. Chung (2010) reminds us that villages-in-the-city has inhabited two major groups of people – rural migrants and indigenous villagers. They were all farmers and their rural household registration status has excluded them from the urban system as noted. This is the first dimension of social injustice – an urban-rural disparity. The second dimension of injustice is observed within villages-in-the-city. China's household registration system has anchored all peasants' identity, as well as their social, political and economic rights and opportunities, to their residential location (Chan and Buckingham, 2008). At one level, rural migrants and native villagers share the same experience. Nevertheless, rural migrants leave their home villages to move to the city seeking job opportunities, and as a result they fail to enjoy their spatially bounded social economic eligibility. In addition to the missing of local support such as education to their children, migrants as 'outsiders' in villages-in-the-city have been further marginalised. Conversely, indigenous villagers in villages-in-the-city are able to make use of their 'local' resources and opportunities, leasing out their land/houses to 'outsiders' to support their livelihood. Thus, if villages-in-the-city is a spatial expression of social injustice, it has demonstrated in both an 'urban-rural' and a 'local-outsider' dimension.

Such structural induced exclusion and discrimination suggests that an individual's political and civil rights which are promised by the *Chinese Constitution* are broken pledges. This has become an important issue when urban residents' rights to live in a particular location, to use land and to maintain their existing living style are increasingly challenged by land development activities – a direct result of the formation of a land economy (He and Wu, 2005; Li, 2007). Unlike liberal democratic societies where an individual's political and civil rights are protected by an independent legal and judicial system, such system is missing in China (Cabestan, 2005). Further, individual rights are subordinated to the rights of the state (Peerenboom, 1993). This setting has exposed individuals to the hegemony of the state and profit-driven capitalists during (re)development, making them difficult, if not impossible, to safeguard their rights to use land, to engage in planning, to articulate their needs and to obtain reasonable compensation/relocation arrangement. The absent of legal protection over basic political and civil rights has exacerbated the disparities that derived from the dual structure as noted and portray the picture of injustice in China's reform era.

In this context, furtive rental activities, indiscriminate land use and unauthorised constructions that found in villages-in-the-city has represented residents', in particular the native villagers, distinctive way of organizing their livelihood in the context of social injustice in cities and their right to use land

² Different groups of urban underclass share the commonality of poverty. See, for example, He *et al* (2010) for a detailed account on low-income communities in different Chinese cities.

in the midst of a city. Nevertheless, without legal enforcement, these rights will be easily eroded by the all-powerful Chinese state during land development. Indeed, urban redevelopment in Chinese cities is not simply a result of global competition (Paquin, 2001) and neo-liberal government policies (Peck, 2006) as demonstrated in capitalist cities. While urban authorities have considered villages-in-the-city as spaces of disorder in which urban planning and public administration are not effectively implemented (Chung, 2009; 2010), redevelopment is a government process aiming to incorporate these settlements into the urban planning and governance system. While urban planning in China is considered as a spatial technology which allows the state to effectively regulate the spatial structure of a city (Tang, 1997; 2006), planning for redevelopment is a process which often reproduces domination and oppression over urban land use and city image. An attempt at urban regulation in Guangzhou city, for example, is illustrated by a comprehensive urban redevelopment scheme to eliminate 'three oldies' (old villages, old urban districts and old factories) (Guangzhou City Government, 2009).

Thus, the redevelopment of villages-in-the-city becomes the battlefield on which villagers defend their immediate rights and livelihoods – justice from their point of view. Indeed, how local residents defend their rights against redevelopment is an effective way to investigate the spatiality of social justice, however this was not covered by Chung and Tang's (2010) investigation as noted. Evidently, Guangzhou government's political intention to incorporate villages-in-the-city into the governing network demonstrates a direct power contest between the government and the villagers, and begs the question: how does this power competition affect the villagers' right to use land?

The persistence of the structural restrictions, the primacy of the state and the formation of a land economy have entailed old and new forces affecting the spatiality that contextualises power relations between the players involved in redevelopment. How does such spatiality affect the negotiations among stakeholders and rewrite the geographies of (in)justice? Although the exclusion of migrants in negotiations has made this paper impossible to examine the power relations between migrants and native villagers during redevelopment, the situation of the former will be briefly mentioned to demonstrate their vulnerability. Particular focus will be put on the power relationships between native villages and their collective units to investigate how villagers assert their rights in redevelopment. Using the redevelopment of Xinxiang village³ in Guangzhou as the case study, the following sections will discuss the role of major players involved in the redevelopment of villages-in-the-city.

The government, the individual and the collective in the villages-in-the-city redevelopment

Xinxiang is one of 138 villages-in-the-city in Guangzhou. The former village dates back to the Song Dynasty (over 900 years ago), when the villagers'

³ The names of the village and the interviewees have been altered to prevent identification.

ancestors migrated from northern China and settled in the fertile Pearl River delta. Before the 1990s, Xinxiang was a poor village whose people were involved in farming and fishing. The rapid pace of development since the 1980s has transformed the surrounding areas into a new city. While villagers lost their farmland and income from cultivation, the massive influx of construction workers has allowed them to lease out their greatly expanded houses for rental income. The central location of the village – 2.5 km from Guangzhou city's East Railway Station and well connected to the underground railway and roadway network – has escalated the level of property leasing activity. Individual villagers are keen to use their houses to profit from this activity. As a result, within the existing 300 *mu* of residential land (*zhai ji di*), more than 1,400 five to eight storey houses have been built. The aggressive use of land has led to illegal construction activities, a crowded living environment, poor physical amenity and disorderly conditions. Moreover, as a consequence of the dual structure as noted, Xinxiang has retained its collective organisation as well as a collective economic entity. While the latter is no longer organising agricultural production, it has been converted into a shareholding company (*gufan gongci*), known as the Xinxiang Economic Development Company (hereafter Xinxiang-EDC or the EDC), in which every native villager holds a share. The EDC manages the collective land (both residential and construction) and other assets as well as the income generated from land leasing. On the eve of redevelopment, these activities generated an annual revenue of about 200 million *yuan*.

The redevelopment of Xinxiang is guided by Guangzhou city's agenda to transform the area into the city's new CBD. The government's prime position in the redevelopment is not simply directed by its revenue appeal, as Lin and Yi (2011) suggest. Rather, it is driven by an agenda to consolidate the power and the ruling position of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP, 2004) – a political task formulated by the central government and implemented at various levels. This is particularly important for sensitive issues such as the redevelopment of villages-in-the-city which can easily spark social unrest. In Guangzhou, the government's active regulation is legitimised by the principle of 'state-led' and the policy of 'one village, one policy'. The former is the overarching principle for almost all Chinese policies. It emphasises government power and leadership in all issues related to redevelopment – a top-down form of state power. 'One village one policy' represents a unique framework in Guangzhou's redevelopment. Chung and Zhou (2011) suggest that it has allowed a certain level of flexibility at the operational level and provided the government authority with a lot of space to intervene in the planning and development process. However, unlike other cities where illegal land seizure and forced eviction are reported, Guangzhou city government has adopted a relatively soft approach to promote villages-in-the-city redevelopment (Chung and Zhou, 2011). If shortage of land in inner-city is a major constraint for Chinese cities to portray their ambitious master plan and hence government's hard-line approach for land development, such moderate attitude could be explained by the substantial increase in Guangzhou city's land stock (for development) after a series of territorial adjustment has expanded its urban district (Chung, forthcoming). This soft approach suggests

power and spatial contest between the government and the villagers will be resolved by negotiations rather than hard confrontations. 'State-led' in Guangzhou, therefore, is usually translated into the supervisory, and sometimes facilitating, roles played by the government, which seeks to use flexible tactics to avoid potential social unrest.

Residents of Xinxiang village are an important stakeholder group. However, unlike in liberal democratic societies where participation is almost a citizen's intrinsic right, in China residents' rights to engage in redevelopment planning are, in a sense, decided by local policy. This has provided an alternative explanation for the local spatial production of power. The flexibility of the 'one village, one policy', as noted, has opened a gateway for participation and negotiation, providing villagers with a rare opportunity to shape the future of their village – a right that they have not enjoyed before. Participation of relatively powerless groups in decision making is considered a key component in the pursuit of a just city in Fainstein's (2000; 2010) version of social justice. Healey (1997), employing the idea of collaborative planning, further suggests that people's involvement in negotiation, bargaining and debate realises people's rights and opportunities. Although residents in villages-in-the-city are allowed to engage in the redevelopment process, the right to participate is defined by one's position in the village. As noted, there are two groups of people living in villages-in-the-city: indigenous villagers and 'outsiders'. Indigenous villagers, who have retained their collective membership and land use rights, enjoy the rights to engage in the redevelopment – a privilege that derived from their place attachment and local identity. In contrast, outsiders are not entitled to any of the abovementioned memberships and rights in villages-in-the-city. Their exclusion has consolidated the disparity between 'local' and 'outsider', vividly demonstrates that people's rights to participate are spatially bounded, resulting in unequal power relations. Such a scenario also suggests that the resident's right and power to contribute to redevelopment decisions is not straightforward and automatic as discussed by Hao *et al* (2011).

Although there is participation in the planning for Xinxiang's redevelopment, it is achieved collectively in the Chinese context. The Xinxiang-EDC, the 'collective unit' formed by native villagers, is the legal land owner and the representative of all indigenous residents of the village, representing them in all negotiations with the government and property developers. Although this formal institution does not include individual participation, the EDC, making use of the flexibility provided by the 'one village, one policy' regulation, organises informal channels of participation for individual villagers, such as opinion polls and villagers' meetings, hoping to collect their opinions about redevelopment plans and to generate a consensus. This local initiative has created the spatiality that affects power relations between the villagers and the EDC and negotiation between the two. Spatiality is further demonstrated by the fact that only indigenous villagers enjoy the right to participate in these informal engagements.⁴ Despite the informal nature of engagement, residents took this rare opportunity to

⁴ Interview with Mr Yao, a native Xinxiang villager, on 25 March, 2010.

exercise their rights and raise their concerns resulting in heated discussions on compensation standards and placement arrangements.

The socialist legacy of 'collective system' suggests that the Xinxiang-EDC plays a key role in the redevelopment. In general, it is actively involved in the redevelopment of villages-in-the-city through employing consultants, submitting planning applications, seeking financial support, negotiating with planning authorities and communicating with indigenous villagers (Chung and Zhou, 2011). Specifically, the Xinxiang-EDC's relational positioning in redevelopment has created multiple roles. The first, as noted, is as the representative of all indigenous villagers at negotiations with the government and property developer. In this position, the major task of the EDC is to articulate the need of the villagers, their expectations about redevelopment, and fight for their benefits (in both individual and collective terms). Nevertheless, when the EDC negotiates with its members – native villagers – it often acts as the government's power broker. This second role requires the EDC to convince the former villagers to follow the agenda of the city government by agreeing to the overarching principles of redevelopment, the general redevelopment plan, the timetable and the institutional arrangements set by the authorities. The EDC's third role is as a business firm wanting to undertake profitable activities. As a land owner, the Xinxiang-EDC also seeks to utilise its land for revenue after people quit agricultural production. The formation of a real-estate economy after the commoditisation of land has provided the EDC with valuable opportunities to be involved in an urban economy by leasing land for commercial activities. Their involvement in the land economy has strengthened their economic power, making them an important local stakeholder that pursues their own interests during redevelopment. The relational positioning and multiple roles of the EDC suggest its interests are not necessarily always in line with that of the villagers. Its triple role, as described above, produces an interesting power relationship between the EDC and its member native villagers. A strong alliance will form when common needs are recognised and, conversely, confrontations occur.

It is worth mentioning the role of property developers, a new stakeholder in the redevelopment of villages-in-the-city in Guangzhou. They represent a new, capitalist power coming from an emerging urban land economy. Initially, they were not allowed to be involved in the redevelopment of villages-in-the-city (*Southern Metropolis Daily*, 2002). The exclusion of property developers has protected residents in villages-in-the-city from most of the unfavourable impacts of urban redevelopment, or put another way, from the spatial expansion of capitalism, described as the 'spatial fix' of capitalism by Harvey (1975; 2006). Nevertheless, this restriction was removed in 2007. While this policy change solved the long-term difficulty in pooling development funds for the redevelopment of villages-in-the-city in Guangzhou, it has invited property developers into the ball game and makes them a major player in the planning and negotiation process. In the following section, negotiations and the power relations among the major stakeholders in the redevelopment of villages-in-the-city will be examined.

Spatially constituted power and negotiations during planning for redevelopment

In 2007, when the Xinxiang-EDC was authorised to launch redevelopment, negotiations between (a) native villagers and the EDC; (b) the EDC and the government; and (c) the EDC and the developer began immediately. Table 1 shows the important events during the planning for Xinxiang's redevelopment. Particular focus will put on the first arena to investigate indigenous villagers' spatially constituted power and the impact of the EDC's shifting position on its power relations with the developer and the state.

Table one here

Negotiations between the native villagers and the EDC were embedded in individuals' informal rights and the unstable relationship between them and the EDC. Villagers' informal rights to be involved in redevelopment are strengthened by a spatially enacted power, which has levelled their unequal, institutionally constructed, power relations with the EDC in the negotiation process. Initially, this spatially enacted power derives from native villagers' local identity and place attachment to Xinxiang. Like many villages in south China, native villagers in Xinxiang are tied by blood relationships. There are four major clans in the village and their population is about 4,000. Not only have they built their ancestor halls in the village, their ancestral houses and graves are located in the area. Interviews with Xinxiang villagers reveal their strong desire to retain their traditions and strong links with the past, as well as their existing social networks.⁵ Their spatially configured power is further strengthened by their awareness of their rights to use land. They consider their existing right to occupy their houses gratis, as well as income generated from renting out spaces with the house as an alternative form of 'welfare'. They have strong concerns that such a right, and source of income, will be retained after redevelopment. This has added to other economic concerns in the context of a land-based economy, as the village's geographical proximity to the new CBD suggests a high land value after redevelopment.

Xinxiang villagers' spatial and economic awareness has raised their consciousness on property rights, an idea that did not exist in China before the commoditisation of land in the 1990s. Property rights of rural land have been considered as ambiguous and fragmented (Kung, 2000; Ho, 2001; Cai, 2003). If property rights are considered as a bundle of rights including use, income, transfer, mortgage, sell, and devise, the villagers under the collective system enjoy only the rights to use – cultivation and accommodation on farmland and resident land respectively. Since land is owned collectively, individual villagers' land use rights are fragile – they will lose such right whenever there is land expropriation, or the collective units (i.e. the land owner) sell the land illegally. Moreover, although property rights in general and farmers' land use rights in particular are officially recognised, existing legislations tend to protect the interest of the state as an urban landowner

⁵ Interview with Mr Li, a native Xinxiang villager, on 25 March, 2010.

but not the individuals land use rights (Wilhelm, 2004). While it is possible that Xinxiang villagers' right consciousness has, in return, cultivated their sense of place, poor legal enforcement is unlikely to provide strong institutional protection for an individual's land use rights. Despite this legal gap, the embryonic idea of property rights has strengthened, in collective sense, native villagers' bargaining power during negotiations.

Therefore, Xinxiang villager's spatial, economic and rights awareness has offered them opportunities to turn around the unequal power relationship, which, as argued by Chung and Tang (2010), disadvantaged them by the structural constraints. In other words, villagers who have long been discriminated against by their urban counterparts now find their inherited land use rights a precious resource, providing them with a bargaining power that they never anticipated. Spatially constituted power therefore enables villagers in Xinxiang to strive for a just process and outcome in the redevelopment in a bottom up manner.

Power derives from spatial awareness and local identity has consolidated native villagers' demands to continue to live on their village land. This intention was reflected in the result of a survey that was conducted in the early stage of the redevelopment, with 80 per cent of the villagers objecting to redevelopment if on-site replacement is not undertaken and their existing land use rights forfeited.⁶ As the legal representative of the villagers, the Xinxiang-EDC strongly supported and articulated these demands and worked on the native villagers' behalf to gain better compensation for them at other levels of negotiation. Partly driven by the aim to minimise the risk of desperate confrontations, and partly to consolidate the EDC's role as its power broker, Guangzhou city government responded by flexible policies, making concessions as well as providing rooms for bargaining through the EDC. Thus, while indigenous villagers' rights remain informal, their spatially constructed power and the EDC's positioning has allowed them to move beyond what Arnstein (1969) regarded as 'tokenism', (that is, for information and consultation), to articulate local needs and to influence decision making on some critical issues.

The consensus on replacement accommodation arrangement and the government's concessions do not automatically generate a stable, collaborative relationship between the native villagers and the EDC. Li and Li's (2011) recent study on the private-public coalition for redevelopment in Shenzhen has missed this point. Informed by regime theory (Stoker, 1995; Stone, 1989; Elkin, 1987) which often conceptualise urban coalition as a relative stable relationship, they assume only one type of relationship exists between villagers and their representative, the shareholding company, that is, either collaboration or confrontation. The multiple roles of the Xinxiang-EDC and its relational positioning with different stakeholders suggest a more complicated situation. The EDC's role as a collective business firm has received considerable challenges from its members – native villagers. Xinxiang villagers' spatial awareness, as noted, has generated their strong demand to audit collective assets and to clarify collective rights. Such demands stem

⁶ Interview with Mr Zhang, a local cadre, at Xinxiang village on 26 March, 2010.

from their suspicion of power abuses and embezzlement of collective land amongst members of the managing team of the EDC. Suspicions arose for two reasons. First, the management of the EDC is concentrated in the hands of a few people not elected by the villagers⁷. Second, information about collective assets, including financial accounts, was never released to the villagers. Since the Xinxiang-EDC, as the legal economic entity that represents all villagers, owns and manages land – precious local resources that indigenous villagers could potentially access to maintain or improve their livelihood – villagers worry that their rights of access will be lost and collective assets will be privatised by local cadres after redevelopment. Based on these uncertainties, villagers thus demanded a reassertion of their 'right to know' and to access collective property before they made a decision on redevelopment.

Such a demand was raised at a village meeting in August 2009 (Table 1). As the EDC failed to provide positive responses to their concerns, over 100 villagers demonstrated at the entrance to Xinxiang village, demanding the EDC clarify the ownership of some properties and explain the current situation in regard to 'collective assets' such as the way that they were being managed, the allocation of collective revenues and their status after redevelopment.⁸ The protest continued for a number of weeks as the EDC failed to respond. The demonstration drew considerable public attention and information was posted on the internet, criticising the lack of transparency of the EDC management and advocating for a fair and just redevelopment. Finally, the protest was cracked down on by riot police, with four villagers arrested.⁹ Thus, the government's wish to induce social stability through flexible tactics is not entirely successful. Further, an unstable relationship between the villagers and the EDC has been created and negotiations deadlocked.

Villagers' distrust of the EDC and the confrontation between the two highlight a fundamental issue in the pursuit of social justice – the denial of villagers' legal rights for elections. As the designated representative of Xinxiang village, it is the EDC's job to rationalise the villagers' demands and expectations and present them to other stakeholders. However, whether native villagers' abovementioned rights are effectively articulated depends on how representative the EDC is of each individual that belongs to it. Central to this argument is the level of democracy in the village, that is, the holding or otherwise of grassroots elections for local leaders. Indeed, as early as 1987, the National People's Congress passed a law on rural governance which included a call for direct elections. For many reasons, its implementation was postponed in a number of provinces. In Guangdong province, it was not until 2001 that a local bill was passed to implement village-level elections. Xinxiang village, as one of the rural settlements (although located in the city), is supposed to follow the provincial regulations but interviews with villagers reveal that elections have never been held in the village. The lack of elections

⁷ They were village-level cadres under the villagers' committee. The convert of the villagers' committee to the EDC, as a pre-requisite of villages-in-the-city redevelopment, has retained their leadership in the village.

⁸ Interview with Mr Hu who participated in the protest against the EDC, 15 June, 2011.

⁹ Ibid.

not only affects the representativeness of the EDC, it also makes it difficult for native villagers' to make decisions to shape the future of their village. If public engagement is about the pursuit of people's rights, it is a broken promise in the Chinese context.

Fragmentation in the pursuit of people's rights suggests that villagers' demands could be distorted, or 'traded off' for other benefits – a jeopardy of a just outcome. This is particularly the case when one of the hats that the Xinxiang-EDC is wearing is as a business firm. While the EDC itself is involved in different business activities, extra demands for 'collective' benefits have been applied for without the knowledge of the villagers. For example, on top of the floor space for rehousing, the EDC requested an increase in the proportion of commercial land use so that it could sustain its revenue after redevelopment. The business firm position of the EDC has allowed it to materialise such desires through collaborating with the property developer. Land is the key element in building such a partnership and a major source of power of the EDC. In addition to its role as a powerbroker, the Xinxiang-EDC was assigned the task to transform the 'village' into a modern development within the new CBD. Combining this assignment with its own profit aim, the EDC opted for a partnership with a property developer – an investment corporation that is interested in the redevelopment of villages-in-the-city. The premium location of the village and the scale of redevelopment have strengthened the Xinxiang-EDC's power to attract a reputable and financially strong developer to participate in the project. Despite this, the EDC did not have the upper hand in searching for a developer.¹⁰ This is because on-site replacement and 'inch-to-inch' rehousing has significantly reduced the floor area for commercial purposes after redevelopment. In addition to the construction cost and the need to have sufficient cash flow to pay the indemnity in advance, most developers do not find this project attractive. Playing the role of a facilitator, Guangzhou government put forward a preferential policy, allowing the Xinxiang-EDC selling part of the village's land to the developer and giving it full ownership and rights for future development (Table 1).

This arrangement successfully secured a partnership with a developer. Such partnership has consolidated the power of the EDC as a business firm. Driven by the mutual recognition of a common need – profit – the partnership worked together to formulate a high density redevelopment plan. Although their desire to aggressively change the set density was checked by the authority, a concession was given, allowing the final plan a plot ratio of 5.6, a total of 649,000 m² of floor space will be provided, about 350,000 for rehousing purposes and the remainder for different kinds of commercial purposes.¹¹ Native villagers knew very little about the terms of the partnership, the financial arrangements, the increase in commercial land-use and the impact of high development density in the future development. Under the existing system, they have no right to propose a motion of 'no confidence' in the EDC, their only representative with designated government power. This

¹⁰ See note 6.

¹¹ Ibid.

unequal power relationship is a major constraint in people's rights to engage in the local planning process and to seek a just outcome. Resident discontent and frustration is translated into their reluctance to sign the redevelopment and compensation agreement.

Nevertheless, the unequal power relationship does not make Xinxiang villagers complete 'losers' in seeking a just redevelopment. Disputes between the EDC and the villagers and their deadlocked negotiations invited more forceful government intervention – a tighten up of the moderate approach. Pressure from the city government forced the EDC to manoeuvre to ease villagers' resentment and obtain their support. This became a pressing issue when the Guangzhou government announced the target to redevelop nine villages-in-the-city including Xinxiang before the opening of the Asian Games in November 2010 (Guangzhou City Government, 2010). In the context of Guangzhou's state-led redevelopment, which a breakdown in negotiations is not an option, the EDC capitulated. On the one hand, it responded to villagers' inquiries by: (a) publicise their financial records and the number of collective assets; (b) conduct a detailed household survey to collect villagers' opinions; and (c) set up a task force including villagers to overlook the redevelopment. On the other hand, hard and soft tactics were used with the villagers such as raising the possibility of impending lawsuits against them, relentless persuasion and mentioning tempting allowances for agreement. At the same time, the EDC fought hard for better compensation for villagers, even using material benefits to earn their support such as an extra cash allowance for those who initiated support for the redevelopment plan. This tactic proved successful so more and more villagers gave up their struggle with the EDC and gave in to a generous compensation scheme which provides on-site replacement, 'inch-to-inch' rehousing and a cash allowance. Ultimately, only 19 households refused to sign the agreement for redevelopment so they were sued by the EDC for damaging the collective interest of the village.¹²

The above discussion demonstrates a complicated relationship between the indigenous villagers and the Xinxiang-EDC, a coexistence of collaboration and confrontation when the position of the latter shifted in the redevelopment process. While common interests have generated a certain degree of cooperation between the EDC and the native villagers, disputes have jeopardised the relationship when the EDC's position shifted and the subsequent power relations changed. However, under the strong regulation of the Guangzhou government, confrontations give rise to creative tensions which push the EDC to manoeuvre to overcome the challenges posed by the villagers. In this sense, the city government played, unexpectedly, a sympathetic role by regulating the predatory behaviour of the EDC, its power broker. Therefore, despite the unstable situation and the unequal power relations, villagers' rights to shape their own redevelopment are being reasonably well articulated, with most of their demands being met. Social justice, in a sense, has been achieved.

Ironically, the upholding of justice among native villagers is associated with a persistence of exclusion and oppression of another group – tenants –

¹² Interview with Mr Zhang, a local cadre, on 17 February, 2011.

whom local people regard as 'outsiders'. The negotiations in the redevelopment of Xinxiang have completely excluded this group. As noted, these tenants are migrant workers who come from the countryside looking for jobs in cities. Both as non-indigenous villagers and non-Guangzhou people, they do not enjoy spatially bounded rights to engage in the redevelopment. Further, rental activities in Xinxiang village have created a landlord-tenant relationship between the native villagers and the migrant workers, allowing the former to dominate the latter both economically and socially (Tang and Chung, 2002). This new relationship, in the context which individuals' political and civil rights are not effectively protected, has further consolidated the unequal power relations between the two groups and placed the migrants in an almost invisible position, despite the number of these 'outsiders' in Xinxiang village being more than ten times the number of indigenous villagers. Where will they go after the redevelopment of Xinxiang village? What are their needs? Do they prefer redevelopment? Is there any government assistance or support programs for them? All of these issues are not discussed in the redevelopment of villages-in-the-city. Chatting with outsiders in the village reveals their helplessness in regard to the redevelopment, which will mean a loss of affordable accommodation.¹³ However, as outsiders, there is nothing they can do to change the situation. No spontaneous activities for voicing their opinions and their needs exist, nor is there any way for them to defend their right to live in an affordable manner in the city. The exclusion of outsiders has exacerbated the injustice between 'local' and 'outsider' and produced a new geography of social injustice in urban China.

Conclusion

This paper has provided an empirical investigation of social justice in urban China, with specific reference to the redevelopment of Xinxiang village in Guangzhou. Focusing on the negotiations between the villagers and the EDC, this study has demonstrated the spatiality of social (in)justice. Spatiality, in a broad sense, is constituted by the structural constraints stemming from the command economy, a new urban land economy in the context of lacking legal protection on individuals' political and civil rights, and, at the local level, from Guangzhou's unique and flexible redevelopment policy of 'one village, one policy'. Embedded in such context, social justice is the defence of villagers' collective land use right and their exiting livelihood. Power is spatially constituted. This argument is vividly illustrated by: (a) indigenous Xinxiang villagers' local identity and strong place attachment; (b) their land use rights; and (c) the location of their village. This spatially enacted power has provided native villagers, in collective sense, with strong bargaining power, allowing them to seek equal opportunities and fair treatment under the institutional constraints in planning for redevelopment. Moreover, the relational positioning of the EDC affects its power relationships with its members (that is, native

¹³ While social housing does not exist in urban China, and migrant workers are not entitled to any social benefits under the household registration system, villages-in-the-city have provided them with affordable housing in an urban environment (Song *et al*, 2008).

villagers), the government and a property developer and hence the process and outcome of negotiations. Table 2 summarises the aims and the power of major stakeholders involved, as well as the results of negotiations.

Table 2 here

The case study of Xinxiang could be considered as a piece of the broader 'right protection' (*wei quan*) or 'rightful resistance' (O'Brien and Li, 2006) movement in China. It demonstrates that residents' rights to participate in the planning process and shape the future of their former village are spatially bounded. If these rights represent the villagers' pursuit of social justice, then they have been incompletely delivered, and spatially confined by the boundary of this particular village-in-the-city. Such justice is a minor gain. While indigenous villagers' right to participate, their land use rights and desire to retain their existing livelihoods have been realised through spatially constituted power and collective representation of the EDC, 'outsiders' fail to enjoy such rights, not to mention their rights to land and housing in cities. Very often they become the victims of redevelopment and residential displacement creating a new geography of social injustice in China.

The spatially bounded system of justice has shown that people's rights are still tied to their place identity and household registration status, rather than protected by an independent legal system. Clearly, it is a broken system in which social differentiation is exacerbated. While the formation of a landed property-based urban economy has, unexpectedly, provided a few people with power to seek equal rights and opportunities, the persistence of the socio-spatial segregation between urban and rural has extended the vulnerable state of the worse-off. The impact of market reform in China appears to reduce income inequality by offering new economic opportunities, an experience similar to that in the former Eastern European socialist countries (Smith, 1994), but the persistence of the old structure derived from a command economy suggests structurally-constituted inequality has changed little. Indeed, the juxtaposition of the market and the Chinese state has produced a much more complicated setting than that in Eastern Europe. One should not consider the relationship between market reform and structural constraints as a 'zero-sum game', and suggest either deeper market reform or a removal of the latter would bring a better, more equal society. In this sense, spatially bounded justice should not be considered as a move towards greater social justice. In fact, in the case of Xinxiang, the socialist legacy of collective units in the form of the Xinxiang-EDC, has retained the tradition of collective representation and collective action, allowing native villagers' demands to be better articulated and their rights better protected. Structural constraints, in this scenario, play a creative role.

In a discussion of social justice and power relations, the story of Xinxiang's redevelopment is inspiring in two ways. First, the pursuit of social justice in liberal democratic societies serves almost as a synonym for anti-capitalism or anti-neoliberalism. Market forces, when operated in a regulative manner in China, is not necessarily the dreadful devil that brings injustice. Second, while advocates of social justice in a liberal democratic society have

called for the construction of urban commons and the launch of collective political action, a powerful mechanism – the collective system – is already in place in China. This collective framework has provided substantial potential for the seeking of equity and justice in Chinese cities. Therefore, the challenge of pursuing social justice in China stems neither from the domination of market forces nor from a lack of collective action. Rather, it stems from the building of rule of law, the removal of the constraints which contributed to structural inequality, and the incorporation of new opportunities that a regulated market could provide. While the country's half-baked market reform has generated rapid economic growth in urban areas, demands for a just society and a more inclusive system are growing. However, under the ideology of pragmatism, it appears that people's land use rights and participation have been used as a flexible response to various social dislocations and discontent stemming from the country's rapid urbanisation. Obviously, such a strategy will further divide Chinese society and exacerbate inequality and injustice. The Chinese state's desire to consolidate its rule by the construction of a 'harmonious society' is jeopardised in this and other ways.

Table 1 A chronology of Xinxiang village's redevelopment

Time	Important event	
2008	April	Redevelopment proposal approved by the city government. Property developers approached Xinxiang-EDC to seek development opportunity. The EDC identified one and negotiations between the two stakeholders began.
2009	July to August	A household survey was conducted. The result showed 80 per cent of the native villagers had objected the redevelopment.
	August	A villager's meeting was organised. Villagers raised their concerns about the redevelopment. Discussions also sparked dissatisfaction about the EDC's lack of transparency and possible corruption during the planning process.
	August	Villagers protested at the village entrance.
	August	In response to the villagers' demands and the protest, a task force, which included villagers, was formed to oversee the redevelopment of the village.
	October	Another round of surveying was conducted to collect villagers' opinions on replacement, compensation and rehousing arrangements.
	November	A second villagers' meeting was organised to discuss the various issues related to the redevelopment.
2010	January	Guangzhou City Government (2010) announced the plan to demolish nine villages-in-the-city, including Xinxiang, before the Asian Games.
	January to February	A new round of consultation was conducted through questionnaires. A draft of the compensation scheme was available for discussion. Within a month's time, two improved schemes were released for further discussion.
	March	Guangzhou Daily (2011) reported that the Xinxiang-EDC and the potential developer had signed a memo to form a partnership for redevelopment.
	April	Consensus on compensation, the redevelopment plan and arrangements basically reached. More detail was publicised. The total area of the redevelopment site is now 105,000m ² .
	May	Villagers who agreed to the compensation scheme and the related arrangements signed the moving agreement with the EDC one after another.
	July	Demolition of Xinxiang village began. A total of 1,390 houses will be demolished. However, negotiations with those who had not signed the moving agreement continued.
	November	Demolition suspended as a result of the opening of the Asian Games in Guangzhou. Only 1,000 houses were demolished. Negotiations with 'nail households' (families which refuse to move for redevelopment) continued.

	January	Demolition resumed but the progress was affected by 19 nail households (covering 24 houses) which refused to move. Legal action was taken against them.
2011	January	A land auction sold a proportion of the Xinxiang village (628,280 m ²) to a developer for 472 million <i>yuan</i> . Sixty per cent of the land premium was rebated to the Xinxiang-EDC to fund the redevelopment (Guangzhou Daily, 2011).
	December	'Nail households' lost in the lawsuit. They were forced to move.

Stakeholders	Aim and expectation	Roles and power	Negotiation outcomes
Guangzhou government	Land development, remove spaces of disorder, include villages-in-the-city in the urban management system	Policy maker, administrator and regulator; top-down, institutional, powers include policy making and administrative power	Successfully launch the redevelopment of the Xinxiang village, an improvement of its modern city image, elimination of spaces of disorder
The Xinxiang-EDC (shareholding company)	On-site placement, improve the living environment and increase land value	A triple role of (a) the representative of native villagers; (b) city government's power broker; and (c) a profit seeking business firm; spatial and institutional enacted powers	Convince native villagers to support the redevelopment, successfully fight for the highest possible compensation for native villagers, create a partnership with a property developer, guarantee future revenue through high density development
Individual native villagers	On-site placement, improve the living environment but maintain their <i>status quo</i>	Member of a collective unit, de facto land owner, spatially enacted power derived from local identity, land use rights, and central location of their village	Discuss and agree/disagree with the redevelopment plan, compensation scheme; enjoy on-site replacement, rehousing and other collective benefits (if any) after redevelopment
Property developer	Making a profit	Profit seeking capitalist with market information and technical know-how; market power	Provide capital and professional services for land development, profits expected after the redevelopment project completed
Tenants (outsiders)	Given no chance to articulate their needs and expectations	People from outside; powerless	Being 'squeezed out' from Xinxiang village after redevelopment

Table 2 Stakeholders and their power in the redevelopment of Xinxiang village

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