



Resettlement practice and the pathway to the urban ideal

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ABSTRACT

Resettlement studies in China and globally have focused attention on the inadequate planning and implementation practices that have led to the impoverishment and dislocation of affected people. There is a growing body of literature that explores the power effects of resettlement planning. Analysis identifies how the vested interests of the actors and agents that commission development guide the planning process and shape target populations to cohere with political economic objectives. This article builds on the governmentality of resettlement literature by analysing the micro politics of power as it is elaborated during the activity of constructing the built environment. This is achieved through analysis of implementation of a Poverty Alleviation Resettlement scheme in the middle reach of the Yellow River, Shanxi, China. Through resettlement, villagization acts as a process of subjection that achieves China's political economic goals of poverty alleviation, urbanisation and demand driven economic growth. The micro politics of power reveals that in achieving Chinese government goals, resettlement serves to redefine space in terms of a continuum that challenges the dominant development trajectory.

1. Introduction

Resettlement planning is a popular strategy in China and globally, as it serves to organise populations that are displaced during the elaboration of political economic goals in developing countries. Resettlements serve diverse purposes, but are commonly an ancillary project to infrastructure construction such as for reservoirs or roads (Li et al., 2001; Cernea, 1997), or accompany land use planning such as for nature reserves (Cernea and Schmidt-Soltau 2006; Schmidt-Soltau and Brockington 2007), agricultural intensification and commercialisation or urbanisation (Hillman, 2013; Sargeson, 2013). Current trends include consolidating smaller villages into larger ones to provide greater access to services, market opportunities and infrastructure (roads, schools, health clinics, irrigation) (Baird & Shoemaker, 2007; Evrard & Goudineau, 2004; Lin, 2003; Merkle, 2003; Xue et al., 2013). This research on resettlement has commonly focused on the impoverishing and dislocating effects of such development. The difficulties of removing often large numbers of people from an origin and re-establishing them in a destination has led to a considerable body of literature that identifies the complexities of undertaking such projects.

In China in particular, resettlement has made a significant contribution to rural and urban development throughout its political economic history. During the early years of the reform era the rationale for resettlement was to support the booming industrial growth. However, major projects such as reservoirs have left a trail of impoverishment and

reflect a history of failed implementation (Vanclay, 2017). Large numbers of people were moved long distances or into another community (in the city or regionally), which often results in conflict and dislocation for people that struggle to adapt to the new conditions (Vanclay, 2017). Despite the failures, the attachment the Chinese government, as well as transnational development agencies, have to resettlement is evident through a change in rationale. Resettlement is now a solution to the poverty problem and a project in its own right, instead of a mere side-project.

As a result of past failures, emphasis is placed on creating planning guidelines and social safeguards to try an ameliorate problems with implementation. Research has documented how resettlement planning has evolved overtime and that at various stages planning guidelines have been produced by transnational development agencies to form part of the development project apparatus. These guidelines filter down through agency funded projects, in the process assimilating national policies into mainstream planning ideology. Regional planning thus involves a multitude of developmental agendas that address local contextual conditions as well as the political economic objectives of the nation state, but that are subsumed under a globalised development ideology. Therefore, in addition to impacts and outcomes, resettlement literature has documented the implications of the assimilation of affected people into the dominant development discourse through planning.

This critique identifies the problematic of modes of subjection that

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are enabled during resettlement or the governmentality of resettlement (Li, 2007). Plans are a product of the people who make them, thus the converging vested interests of agents that promulgate development and thus planning for it, negate claims of objectivity (Wilmsen and Webber, 2015). Outcomes hence reflect these agendas. Research reveals the effects of power and how it flows through the development apparatus, including through state and society, to reveal nuances in outcomes which are ideologically imbued (Lestrelin, 2011). Therefore resettlement is critiqued as a power laden activity in which planning practices organise living environments and livelihoods and in the process re-configure local identities (Li, 2007).

Poverty Alleviation Resettlement (PAR) is a Chinese national rural development policy. It differs from many resettlement programs in that it is a short distance resettlement scheme in which policy enables villages to remain on their administrative land. It is essentially a house building program designed to lift the living standards of rural villages, but is subsumed under rural development policy that advocates urbanisation as ultimate solution to the poverty problem (UNDP and CASS, 2013). This article examines implementation of this scheme in the catchment of the middle reach of the Yellow River and argues that the act of building a village is a social engineering activity (see Fig. 1). In this article, I build on the literature that examines modes of subjection through resettlement and bring into focus the effects of power as it flows through construction of villages. PAR is subsumed within a regional development plan for the catchment, the implications of this for the articulation of power in villages is investigated through analysis.

Following this introduction, the article has seven remaining sections. Section two presents a theoretical framework for analysing power and subjection during resettlement. Section three presents a literature review of resettlement planning and practice in China and globally. Section four describes China's urbanisation since the reform era. Section five analyses relevant rural development policy for understanding the dominant development discourse and section six describes the local PAR plan, research region and research methods. Section seven analyses implementation of PAR in two case study villages. The final section discusses key findings and makes a theoretical contribution to understanding power and subjection through resettlement in this context.

2. Power, subjection and the resettlement process

As opposed to the conventional definition of power that polarizes dominator over dominated, Foucault (2000) defined power as multi-dimensional with relations that possess diverse forms. Relations are defined in terms of a subject and an object of knowledge that can be formed or modified under certain conditions to form desired subjectivities (Florence, 1994). Resettlement is one activity that reflects this process in which power flows through conditions to redefine the relationship between people, their dwelling place and livelihoods. Under the dominant development discourse conditions represent neoliberal techniques of power such as commodification and the institutionalisation of free markets to produce entrepreneurial subjectivities (Harvey, 2007).

This process of subjection (or governmentality) has been documented in the resettlement literature in terms of the power effects of resettlement planning. Li (2007) in particular has documented the techniques employed during implementation of a nature reserve in Indonesia, to 'render technical' deficiencies in requisite qualities in target populations to be resettled. By identifying problematic traits, prescribed tools and techniques civilise conduct and conform behaviour and beliefs in line with the dominant discourse, thus justifying development projects on the basis of the benefits they bring (Gordon, 1991; Agrawal, 2005; Ferguson, 1994). Plans are therefore imbued with power, produced through a political process in which multiple actors contest or cohere in pursuit of their vested interests (Wilmsen and Webber, 2015; Ferguson, 1994; Whittington, 2012; Katus et al., 2016; Lestrelin, 2011).

This research contributes to this literature by analysing the micro politics of power that is enabled through the action of constructing the built environment. Foucault believed power is embedded in the practices of daily life, including in town design, to refine subjectivities that operate in a planned environment (Li, 1999; Mitchell, 1991). Foucault (2007, 2009) described the urbanising techniques that enhance circulations of ideas, wills and orders to increase supervision by authorities and govern the behavioural norms of the population. Property is protected through the concentration of houses and walls, ensuring the security of the population. Likewise regularisation of goods and people through the built environment, street layout, proximity to natural features and connections with the broader environment govern social

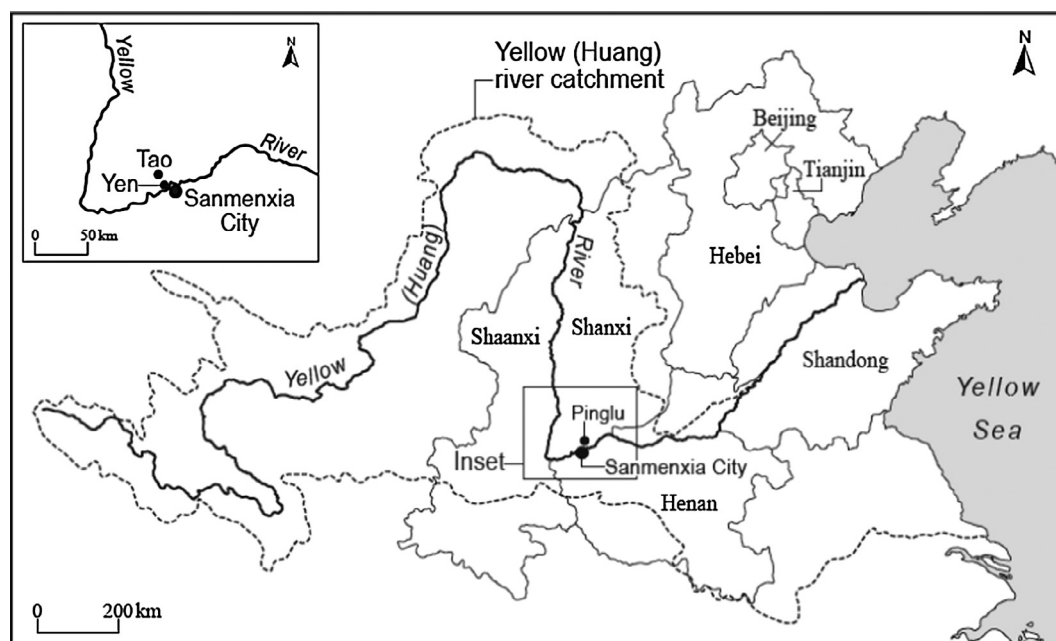


Fig. 1. Map of Yen and Tao in the catchment of the Yellow River.

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