



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Habitat International

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/habitatint

Conflicts and regional culture: The general features and cultural background of illegitimate housing demolition in China

Haoying Han^a, Xianfan Shu^{b,c,*}, Xinyue Ye^d

^a Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou 310058, China

^b Department of Land Management, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou 310058, China

^c Laboratory of Rural-Urban Construction Land Economical and Intensive Use, Ministry of Land and Resources, Beijing 100812, China

^d Department of Geography and Computational Social Science Lab, Kent State University, Kent 44242, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Demolition and relocation conflict
Violent demolition
Illegitimate administration
Regional culture
Culture and conflict
Count regression

ABSTRACT

Conflicts caused by housing demolition and relocation have been a major threat to social stability in China. However, our knowledge of what characterizes these conflicts and how they emerge remains inadequate. This article aims to address these two questions. In a general sense, this paper is also an attempt to promote a better understanding of the relationship between conflicts and regional culture. Based on an analysis of 575 cases of illegitimate demolition collected from news websites, we find that most illegitimate demolition cases occur against the background of the public sector's expropriation in urbanization projects. Moreover, a spatial agglomeration of illegitimate demolition cases is found north of the Yangtze River. A count data regression model is developed to assess whether regional culture is relevant. The results confirm that regional cultural features, which are quantified using 7 cultural dimensions of the GLOBE project, influence the probability of illegitimate demolition. Specifically, residents of a region with higher uncertainty avoidance, humane orientation and in-group collectivism are more likely to experience illegitimate demolition. In contrast, a region characterized by high performance orientation, assertiveness, institutional collectivism and power distance has a relatively low probability of experiencing illegitimate demolition.

1. Introduction

Since 1995, China has undergone a remarkable urbanization process, during which its urban population has increased by more than 400 million (from 383 million in 1995 to 779 million in 2015) (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2016). According to World Bank data (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL>), this number accounts for approximately 30% of the world's total urbanized population during the corresponding period. Inevitably, this urbanization process has led to surging urban expansion and redevelopment (Cheng & Masser, 2003). According to Chinese Family Panel Studies (ISSS, 2017), during the past two decades approximately 10% of Chinese households in old towns or suburbs have experienced housing demolition and relocation projects intended to make room for new development programmes; the population involved may exceed 100 million. However, these projects also cause conflicts (hereinafter referred to as housing demolition conflicts) that are now pervasive throughout China and have become a major threat both to the country's social stability (Yang & Liu, 2014; Yu, Wu, Zheng, Zhang, & Shen, 2014; Zhang, 2004) and to the government-citizen relationship (Liu & Xu, 2018). These

conflicts usually involve complex laws and regulations along with a considerable number of stakeholders who have complicated mutual interactions (He, 2014; Liu & Chen, 2012; Tan, 2008a, b). As a result, such conflicts have been regarded as a kaleidoscope that reflects the urbanization process currently underway in China.

Although these conflicts are frequently spotlighted because of the tragic stories involved, they are usually categorized academically as land conflicts or urban-rural conflicts, and there are few specialized studies of this phenomenon (Bao, Ye, & Xu, 2014; Yu et al., 2014). Moreover, current research uses many similar terms to denote these conflicts, such as “violent demolition”, “violent forced demolition”, “demolition and relocation conflict” and “forced demolition conflicts”, thus indicating the lack of a unifying conceptual basis. As a result, our understanding of the features characterizing these conflicts remains inadequate, especially from a quantitative perspective. Therefore, the first aim of this article is to present a quantitative description of these conflicts based on clear criteria to ameliorate the conceptual vagueness that surrounds this phenomenon.

Another important issue that characterizes the discussion of these conflicts is how they emerge. Research has shown that both formal

* Corresponding author. Department of Land Management, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou 310058, China.
E-mail address: shuxianfan@zju.edu.cn (X. Shu).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2018.04.008>

Received 26 March 2017; Received in revised form 12 April 2018; Accepted 20 April 2018
0197-3975/ © 2018 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

institutions and the behavioural decisions of stakeholders play important roles. According to Yu et al.'s (2014) classification, housing demolition and relocation conflicts in nature result from property rights disputes. The background of these disputes is the increasing attention paid by the post-Deng regime to the protection of private property rights and Chinese citizens' growing consciousness of these legal rights (Zhang, 2004). However, property-related laws and regulations are widely criticized as being well written but poorly enforced, reflecting a lack of co-ordination between central and local states (Erie, 2012). This lack of co-ordination is sometimes even regarded as a kind of conflict between central-local governments considering their divergent policy preferences towards growth and development (Li, Chiang, & Choy, 2011). More bitter critics opine that these property-related laws and regulations are not fully based on the principle of property protection (Erie, 2012). For a long time, property rights were highly fuzzy, creating a condition for rapid primitive capital accumulation (Zhang, 2004). Moreover, the "public interest", which is the only legitimate reason for expropriation under Chinese law, remains in need of clarification, although the State Council attempted to prescribe it more specifically in the 2011 "Regulation on the Expropriation of Buildings on State-owned Land and Compensation" (Liu & Xu, 2018). Commonly, the power of interpreting "public interests" is still controlled by local authorities (Zhou, Peng, & Bao, 2017). In this light, housing demolition and relocation conflicts are rooted in the contradiction between two aims simultaneously embedded in the law: property protection and pro-development principles.

Governments also have more specific institutional reasons. China's property cycle cannot be fully explained by economic fundamentals alone; governmental factors, specifically the abovementioned central-local conflicts over financial, fiscal and land resources, also play crucial roles (Li et al., 2011). Since the 1990s, an evaluation system based on economic performance, combined with local budget constraints imposed with the 1994 tax-sharing reform, has led to local governments' single-minded pursuit of revenue and economic growth (Tao, Su, Liu, & Cao, 2010; He, Zhou, & Huang, 2016). As a result, local governments find that land resources (of which they are still the only suppliers for urban development) are the one "stone" they can use to "kill many birds" (Ping, 2011). That is, local governments can ease their fiscal hardships through highly profitable land leasing, promote economic growth using land as a strategic resource in regional competition for investments and reduce unemployment after drawing capital successfully (He et al., 2016; Tao et al., 2010; Tian & Ma, 2009; Wu, Luo, Zhang, & Skitmore, 2016). These incentives have made a significant contribution to land urbanization in China (Ye & Wu, 2014) and are recognized as a key immediate cause of land acquisition conflicts and housing demolition conflicts (Ding, 2007; Bao, 2009; Tao et al., 2010; Liu, 2012a). Based on three game models of land acquisition, which always accompanies housing demolition and relocation in China, Hui & Bao (2013) find that the conflicts caused by illegal land acquisition are proportional to the land revenues that the local government can obtain and are inversely proportional to penalization. Liu's (2012b) case study on the imposition of the administrative lawsuit in Xuzhou indicates that local governments may be able to avoid penalization because loopholes in the existing administrative expropriation system leave leeway for illegal land acquisition (cited in Zhou et al., 2017).

With regard to homeowners, Bao and Yuan (2014) and Xie (2014) discuss how they may be influenced by behavioural economic factors in demolition conflicts. They argue that loss aversion, the endowment effect and mental accounting make land/home owners more reluctant to accept development projects, which may further exacerbate these conflicts. In addition, Wang, Bao and Lin (2015) investigation of the regeneration projects prompted by the Beijing Olympics confirms that the prospect theory affects residents' anticipation of and decisions about housing relocation.

Whether these explanatory attempts are institutional or behavioural, however, the underlying contributions of culture (informal

institutions) are rarely mentioned or discussed. Indeed, the formation of formal institutions relies heavily on cultural factors such as cultural values, conventions, codes of conduct and norms of behaviour (Hayek, 1960, p. 151; North, 1990, pp. 20–63; Peng, 2011). One's behaviour also depends heavily on one's cognition of the circumstances (Su & Liu, 2014; Witherington, 2007), which is further affected by the cultural features of the area (Lv, 2015). In short, culture "programs the collective minds" of its members (Hofstede, 1984). Thus, exploring the cultural factors behind this phenomenon can help us to propose more humanistic and localized policies to avoid or resolve these conflicts.

Some studies have observed that cultural factors play an important role in the formation of housing demolition conflicts. For example, Peng (2011) argues that local governments' mercenary and aggressive decisions about land-related issues can be partly attributed to the absence of political ethics in contemporary demolition policies, whereas Zhang (2004) and Qiang (2015) state that the traditional nostalgic provincialism of Chinese people also catalyses housing demolition conflicts. However, it seems too general to regard China as a culturally homogeneous entity. Rather, China is a country with rich regional diversity (Zhao, Li, & Sun, 2015). Based on face-to-face semi-structured interviews in three cities (Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou), Wu, Zhang, and Webster (2013) find that China's regional cultural diversity influences local governments' practices in urban redevelopment projects. According to their interviews, local villagers in Guangzhou have a stronger bargaining position than those in Beijing and Shanghai because there is a stronger clan culture in Southern China. Hin and Xin (2011) provide another case study of how the clan culture may play a crucial role in village redevelopment by comparing two projects in Shenzhen, another city in Southern China. Nevertheless, such regional cultural diversity is seldom considered in existing studies on housing demolition conflicts. Filling this gap is another aim of this article.

In summary, the aim of this article is twofold. First, it seeks to present a general quantitative description of housing demolition and relocation conflicts in China. Second, it explores the relationship between these conflicts and regional cultural features.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. The second section introduces the case data source and some basic statistics from these data. In section 3, based on the findings provided in section 2, hypotheses regarding the relationship between illegitimate housing demolition and regional cultural features are proposed and then tested using a count regression model. Section 4 presents our conclusions and a discussion.

2. General features of illegitimate housing demolition

2.1. Sample definition

It is difficult to define precisely what a conflict is¹. Inspired by Yi and Jiang (2014), an appropriate alternative may be to focus attention on cases in which there are illegitimate behaviours. First, these cases can be definitively identified according to related laws, thus helping to avoid the ambiguity of the concept of "conflict". Second, these cases can be regarded as drastic conflicts because someone has broken the law, a feature that may provide clearer indications of what characterizes these situations. Theoretically, during a housing demolition and relocation project, either the demolisher or the original homeowners could be the lawbreakers. Following media criticism of some demolishers' barbarism, this article focuses attention on cases in which demolishers break the law. Specific articles of related laws and regulations that are used to define illegitimate cases of housing demolition are listed in Table 1.

¹ Some researchers have attempted to propose a precise definition of conflict by listing the specific behaviours that may occur in a conflict, e.g., "radical behaviours that cause casualties, property loss or incur social instability such as vituperation, vilification, fist-fight and so on," according to Tan (2008b). However, these behaviours are also difficult to define.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7455056>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7455056>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)