

Right to the city and critical reflections on property rights activism in China's urban renewal contexts

Hyun Bang Shin

Contents

Introduction	1
Contextualising the right to the city: <i>Whose</i> right counts	2
Displacement, protests and 'nail houses' in China's urban renewal.....	6
Property rights, ownership and the limits of property rights activism.....	8
Locating the feeling of sympathy for nail houses among urban residents.....	11
Building a foothold for migrants' right to the city through alliance	20
Conclusion: Seeking a popular place-based alliance for the right to the city	22
References	25

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Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion
London School of Economics
Houghton Street
London WC2A 2AE
CASE enquiries – tel: 020 7955 6679

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Telephone: UK+20 7955 6679
Fax: UK+20 7955 6951
Email: j.dickson@lse.ac.uk
Web site: <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/case>

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Editorial Note

Hyun Bang Shin is a Lecturer in the Department of Geography and Environment at the London School of Economics, and a CASE associate (h.b.shin@lse.ac.uk).

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Abstract

The rapid transformation of urban socio-spatial landscape in China has resulted in an increasing degree of frustration and discontent among local residents who face threats of demolition and eviction. This has given rise to sporadic protests by local residents who are often known as ‘nail households’, that is, persistent protesters who are fixed to the land and hold onto their dwellings in protest against unwilling eviction and demolition of their dwellings. The presence of these protesters provides an effective example of local residents’ out cry in China. This paper is an attempt to critically re-visit the existing debates on local residents’ property rights activism in urban redevelopment processes, and to discuss the extent to which it can be an effective strategy. The paper refers to the right-to-the-city debate to examine *whose* right counts in China’s urban renewal contexts. It also makes use of empirical findings, both quantitative and qualitative, to examine how nail houses are received among local residents and migrants, and discusses the extent to which migrants can fit into local residents’ struggle against the top-down imposition of neighbourhood transformation. The paper ultimately calls for the need to form a place-based alliance that enables urbanites including migrants to come together to launch an effective claim on their right to the city.

Keywords: right to the city, property rights, urban renewal, nail houses, displacement, China

JEL classification: I38, K42, O18, P26

Introduction

China's urban transformation has produced "city of *Chai*" (Campanella, 2008). *Chai*, meaning 'demolition', is inscribed on the surface of every built structure that is doomed for demolition as part of urban development. Because of its heavy focus on physical transformation involving wholesale demolition of dwellings and residents' displacement, China's urban renewal incurs an escalating degree of residents' frustration. The amendment to the Constitution in 2004 and the enactment of the Property Rights Law in 2007 laid a legal foundation for the protection of lawfully acquired private properties from unlawful expropriation. These legal changes have further fuelled discontents and angst among those displacees who fear that their perceived legitimate rights to their land and housing would be violated (Hsing, 2009).

One of the expressions that has captured the nation's attention in recent years is 'nail households', (in China, *ding-zi-hu*). This refers to those persistent resisters who are fixed to the land and hold onto their dwellings in protest against unwilling eviction and demolition of their dwellings, which substantially hinders the progress of urban projects driven by local authorities and developers (see for instance, Watts, 2007; Yardley, 2007). These struggles often lead to fatal incidents in which protesters take on drastic measures, even risking their own lives through self-immolation. One of the latest incidents involved the self-immolation of three family members in Fuzhou, Jiangxi province (China Daily, 2010). The strategy of resisting eviction is largely based on the property rights notion that is held by homeowners, and sometimes by public tenants who have lived in their administratively allocated rental dwellings until eviction. In this regard, these struggles are often viewed from the perspective of 'property rights activism' (Lee, 2008). Nail households are mostly succumbed to the power of local authorities and/or developers, and become displaced with or without expected compensation, but they provide an effective example of local residents' outcry in China where struggles for political rights are beginning to emerge, albeit sporadically (Goldman, 2005).

Against this background, this paper is an attempt to critically re-visit the existing debates on local residents' property rights activism in urban redevelopment processes, and to discuss the extent to which it can be an effective strategy for urban residents. I do this by referring to the debates on the 'right to the city' (Lefebvre, 2003; Marcuse, 2009) to examine *whose* right counts in China's urban renewal contexts in particular, and also by resorting to empirical findings to examine how nail houses are received among local residents and migrants. In doing so, this paper makes substantial contributions in several ways. First, it extends the right to the city debates to urban China contexts, and through this localisation, attempts to produce what Laurence Ma (2007) refers to as "local epistemologies". This requires the construction of a critical and comprehensive local knowledge about the experience of local residents, which is embedded in the existing regulatory practices and institutional settings. Second, this paper is an attempt to respond to the urgent call to go "beyond empiricism" in urban China studies, and to address "the critically important issues of social and environmental justice" (Ma, 2007, p.556). While expressing "a strong sense of empathy for the feelings and experiences of the disadvantaged individuals under study" (ibid, p.563), that is displaced residents in urban renewal projects, it is also necessary to carry this out with the support of a more grounded knowledge about how nail houses are

understood and viewed by local residents. The latter aspect in particular has been relatively scarcely studied in the existing literature. Third, this study gives a particular emphasis to how migrants in cities can fit into the overall struggle against top-down imposition of demolition that affects their own *rented homes*. While there are numerous studies that empirically discuss the residents' spatial and social experiences in their destination cities, the existing debates on urban residents' struggle against demolition and urban renewal tend to focus *implicitly* on urban *permanent* residents¹ who hold local household registration status and enjoy comparatively more privileged access to urban and social services based on what can be termed as 'local citizenship' (Smart and Smart, 2001). This paper is an attempt to address how migrants can fit into the overall discussions about local residents' struggle in the process of urban transformation that has been carried out largely in favour of land-based political and business interests (Hsing, 2010). Fourth and finally, this paper makes use of a set of both quantitative and qualitative data collected as part of my recent research project in Guangzhou, which includes enquiries into the views of local residents and migrants on nail houses. The resulting analysis sheds light on the possible opportunities to form a place-based alliance that enables urbanites with various characteristics (e.g. housing tenure, household registration status and neighbourhood location) form an effective collective claim on the right to the city.

The rest of this paper consists of six sections. The paper initially reviews the literature on the right to the city and draws implications for residents facing urban renewal and displacement in China. Then, it explains in more detail how nail houses have emerged in China in the context of urban renewal, and then moves on to elaborate on the limits of existing property rights activism. These discussions will lay the foundation for my subsequent argument that the struggle to claim the right to the city is a political act that requires the construction of solidarity between disparate social groups and their collective action. Here, evidence is presented in two sections, demonstrating that this construction of solidarity really has potential on the basis of a supportive feeling for nail-house activities. The final section draws concluding thoughts.

Contextualising the right to the city: *Whose right counts*

There is growing interest among academics, activists and ordinary citizens about how to claim the 'right to the city'. The concept has also been increasingly borrowed by international organisations such as the United Nations Habitat to refer to the acquisition of redistributive justice (e.g. provision of infrastructure or tenure regularisation in informal, slum settlements). The Lefebvrian notion of the right to the city, however, goes beyond the normative framework and actively seeks political programmes to intervene and take control of the process of the production of urban space (Lefebvre, 2003). As Lefebvre states:

“...the *right to the city* is like a cry and a demand...The *right to the city* cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities. It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed *right to urban life*”
(Lefebvre, 1996, p.158; original emphasis)

1 For instance, Shih (2010) discusses Shanghai's changing renewal practices by focusing on how the “residents' legal rights of ‘return settlement’” have changed over time with no reference to migrants who would have a very different set of experiences in the same place.

For Lefebvre, the proliferation of capitalist accumulation has resulted in an increasing level of disenfranchisement of urban inhabitants. To reverse the process, Lefebvre calls for the right to the city that involves “an urban spatial approach to political struggles with the participation of all those who inhabit the city without discrimination” (Dikeç 2001, p.1790). According to Mark Purcell, two essential rights are at the heart of Lefebvre’s right to the city: the right to participation and appropriation (Purcell, 2002). The former right to participation calls for urban inhabitants to take a key role in decisions related to the production of urban space. On the other hand, the right to appropriation involves confrontation with the process of capital accumulation that is centred around the valorisation of urban space (ibid, pp.101-103).

David Harvey pays more attention to the fundamental political economic contradictions in the capitalist accumulation processes. He argues that “Patterns in the circulation of surplus value are changing but they have not altered the fact that cities...are founded on the exploitation of the many by the few” (Harvey, 1976, p.314). Hence, Harvey focuses on the process of accumulation by dispossession, which does not simply occur at the primitive stage of capitalist development, but at various stages of capitalism to supplement existing cycles of accumulation, constituting the “core of urbanization under capitalism” (Harvey, 2008, p.34). The struggle to acquire the right to the city in this regard inevitably centres on struggles against the capitalist accumulation in order to protect the rights of, e.g. villagers who lost their lands due to natural resource development.

“The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization” (Harvey, 2008, p.23)

In this regard, the demand for the right to the city should be about gaining “greater democratic control over the production and utilization of the surplus” (Harvey, 2008, p.37). With his understanding that the contemporary urbanisation is part of neoliberal projects to provide a spatial fix to the crisis in the accumulation of capital, the notion of the right to the city is not just about merely expanding inhabitants’ access to the city in quantitative terms but about making cities qualitatively different (Harvey, 2003). Henri Lefebvre’s right to the city is also based on *autogestion*, which refers to the “democratic participation, workers’ self-management, and control of ordinary peoples’ destinies” and which “must be perpetually negotiated and enacted, relentlessly practiced and *earned*” (Merrifield, 2006, p.140). The key is to “bring people together to oppose the ‘omnipotence’ of the state and multinational capital” (ibid.).

One of the challenges in this regard is the question of *whose* right counts, which is at the core of Peter Marcuse’s enquiry (Marcuse, 2009). Marcuse’s reinterpretation of Lefebvre understands the right to the city as involving “an exigent demand by those deprived of basic material and existing legal rights, and an aspiration for the future by those discontented with life as they see it around them, perceived as limiting their own potentials for growth and creativity” (p.190). Here, Marcuse makes a distinction using economic and cultural terms to define whose right we need to protect and expand. Economically, the deprived are classified as including the excluded (who are part of the capitalist system but without the social protections gained by the working class), and the working class itself. In cultural terms,

Marcuse emphasises the expansion of the right to be held by the directly oppressed (in race, ethnicity and so on) and the alienated (of any factions of economic class and social groups that resist the ruling system) (Marcuse, 2009). Other than these, those ruling groups who hold material interests (e.g. business people, gentry, capitalists, establishment intelligentsia and political elites) are thought to have already acquired the right to the city in their own terms. This point has also been echoed by David Harvey who also laments that “Increasingly, we see the right to the city falling into the hands of private or quasi-private interests” (Harvey, 2008, p.38).

The right to the city debate has been around for some time, but it is yet to be translated into fully established urban practices. Some notable cases are reported, for instance, as in Brazil where the 2001 City Statute came to legally recognise the right to the city as a collective right (Fernandes, 2007). It is imperative to seek strategies that are tuned to various urban contexts, for the forms and shapes of the right to the city struggle should be imagined by taking into account the local configuration of institutional regulatory structures as well as the contradictions within specific political economic systems. As Dikeç (2001) states, “approaches to, and principles of, justice are time and space specific” (p.1788). Therefore, any discussions of identifying emancipatory right to the city and organising corresponding movements should address this specificity of time and space. The struggle to re-claim the right to the city for the oppressed, alienated and economically deprived would be subject to challenges of different nature, which are tuned to specific urban socio-political, economic and institutional contexts. With the need to involve marginalised urban populations and form a solidarity that goes beyond the conventional class-based labour movement, the right to the city movement becomes a struggle that attempts to secure access not only to urban space but also to “political space”, as Dikeç (2001) points out:

“The right to the city, therefore, is not simply a participatory right but, more importantly, an *enabling right*, to the defined and refined through political struggle. It is not only a right to urban space, but to a political space as well, constituting the city as a space of politics. Urban citizenship, in this sense, does not refer to a legal status, but to a form of identification with the city, to a political identity” (Dikeç 2001, p.1790)

What would all these mean for urban residents who experience displacement or forced eviction due to intense renewal activities in a country like China? First of all, China’s transition from a planned to a market-oriented economy has involved changes to the ways in which urban and social services are provided, which increasingly depend less on direct provision by the state and employers (known as work-units or *danwei* in China) (Wu and Huang, 2007; Smart and Smart, 2001). The protection of private lives including private properties is said to have a better prospect under the legal framework that goes through gradual reforms, while the state seems to establish itself more as a regulator and legal protector of various social rights (Thelle, 2004). In urban renewal scenes, this has led to the evolution of government regulations from in-kind compensation of displaced residences (e.g. on-site re-housing upon renewal project completion) to monetarised compensation (Shin, 2007; Shih, 2010). While in some cases the overall cash compensation for eligible resident might have been generous, the booming real estate market since the 1990s has meant that most displaced households find it beyond their financial means to relocate in neighbourhoods close to their original place of residence.

Second, in China, the access to various urban and social services, including the right to receive redevelopment compensation, is conferred upon a particular notion of ‘citizenship’, redefined in the process of economic transition in such a way that renders citizenship rights as socio-economic benefits rather than “political claims against the State” (Keane, 2001). One of the persistent institutions that shape the geography of people’s access to various social rights is the household registration system (*hukou* in Chinese), which has been in place until the present since its formal implementation in 1958. It functions as a tenacious measure to dissociate migrants with no permanent local hukou from accessing various social services in their destination cities (Solinger, 1999). Li Zhang (2002) also finds that migrants are “still officially classified as temporary residents in the city and treated as noncitizens” (pp.317-318), facing “prejudice and unequal treatment in everyday life”, denial of basic services such as education for children, and denial of access to state-subsidised (rental) housing nor to construction of their own dwellings (ibid). It is apparent that China sees the imposition of ‘statist citizenship’ whose terms and conditions of exercising citizenship are determined by the state (Miraftab and Wills, 2005). Recently, evidence seems to suggest that there is a move towards blurring the boundary between agricultural and non-agricultural hukou, and to reshape the entitlement of citizens to strengthen instead the separation between permanent residents with local hukou and migrants (Smart and Lin, 2007; Smart and Smart, 2001).

Third and continuing from the above point, the heavy influence of household registration system is also vividly pronounced in urban renewal processes. Compensation measures for displacees, both in-kind (e.g. relocation housing) or cash-based, have been largely based on one’s tenure status, the ownership of formally acknowledged property rights, and in particular, the possession of a local permanent hukou (in Chinese, *changzhu hukou*). All these act as a way of screening the eligibility of displacees for compensation (Shin, 2007). For residents in rural villages, their membership in village collectives also determine their eligibility for the receipt of benefits, if any, from village redevelopment (Hsing, 2010). Other than those tenants in private dwellings that are subject to the rent control by the government (that is, tenants with standard rents), most private tenants are effectively excluded from receiving compensation upon displacement, as they are required by government regulations to directly enter into negotiation with their landlords: the outcome is heavily skewed in favour of landlords. The most negatively affected are the migrant tenants without local permanent hukou, who are significantly disadvantaged in this process.²

2 For instance, in Beijing, the detailed regulations for the city’s implementation of urban housing demolition and management in 1991 stated that owners and users of buildings subject to demolition were entitled to compensation (Article 4), but individual users were restricted to the holders of permanent hukou registered within the demolition boundary (Article 23) (BMG, 1991). In 2001 when the regulations experienced a major change, property owners, public tenants or those tenants in private dwellings subject to standard rents were considered as the major recipients of compensation resulting from demolition (BMG, 2001). In Guangzhou, the 2003 regulation on the management of urban housing demolition also restricts any discussions of formal compensation to property owners and public tenants subject to government-regulated standard rents (Article 26) (GMG, 2003). The 2009 guideline from Guangzhou on the renewal of inner-city areas provided preferential treatments to those property owners whose dwellings were smaller than 40 square metres only if they held Guangzhou urban hukou (Article 9 (GMBLRHM, 2009). The restriction of compensation eligibility to the holders of permanent hukou was also evident in Shanghai (Article 6) (SMG, 2006).

Therefore, any calls for the right to the city in Chinese cities in the context of urban renewal would require attention to those migrants and private tenants who are the least protected and alienated in urban processes. In this regard, the recent call for *hukou* reform by a number of Chinese newspaper editors in unison (Canaves, 2010) for instance is a political act, and it is only in this context can we understand why the central state has become so sensitive about the movement.

Displacement, protests and ‘nail houses’ in China’s urban renewal

Urban renewal in China has substantially intensified since the 1990s. Beijing, for instance, saw the introduction of a new policy in 1990, which relied heavily on the input (both technical and financial) from (not necessarily private) developers (see Shin, 2007). Clearance and redevelopment have become the norm of urban renewal policies since the 1990s, accompanied by local residents’ large-scale displacement (Shin, 2009; Shih, 2010). While there is a growing emphasis on establishing the ‘rule of law’ in China, opportunities for ordinary citizens to put forward their claims are still narrow. Some commentators such as Cai (2007) believe that the mounting social pressure, exemplified by homeowners’ intensifying protests against housing demolition, would restrain government violations and expand the exercise of the ‘rule of law’. The latter tends to be adhered to when it does not violate essential interests of the government. Because of the limited opportunities in legal channels, protestors often make use of various “non-legal modes of resistance, including protests, petitions, and deadly confrontations” (ibid, p.194). With the help of the internet and the attention of some audacious media, these struggles sometimes produce a huge impact upon the society, at which point the government makes its concession by making extra provisions or allowing the court to handle. However, the results of the latter, even if successful, are not always transferrable to other similar cases (for instance, see Johnson, 2004).

Various measures appear to be taken by those who mobilise resources and support, including: (1) persistent appeals to higher courts; (2) media exposure; (3) winning the support of sympathetic (often high-ranking) leaders (O’Brien and Li, 2005, pp. 38-42). As I have discussed elsewhere (*author*, 2008), the reform of legal and administrative arbitration systems in recent years provide urban residents confronting unwilling displacement with a means to express their voices, albeit constrained and limited in its scope. While urban residents increasingly resort to law suits either individually or collectively (see Johnson, 2004; Hsing, 2010), these law suit attempts are often marred by bureaucratic processes that act as barriers to plaintiffs, and the existing judicial processes tend to work in greater favour of the government and developers (Fang, 1999; Human Rights Watch, 2004; Johnson, 2004). Taking a dispute case to the local court therefore is a very challenging experience, not to mention the low chance of winning against powerful elites and developers (O’Brien and Li, 2005). Studies show that in mainland China, very few people tend to have the will and intention to resort to formal measures when it comes to contesting the state (Li, 2004).

The constraints upon local residents who are subject to displacement and who are short of means to change the course of neighbourhood demolition creates discontent. Nail households emerge out of these discontents, exercising their ‘right to stay put’ against external forces driven by land-based political and business interests (Hsing, 2010) (see

Figures 1 below). Referring to these protests, You-tien Hsing (2010) defines them as “individualized modes of protest, such as physically occupying homes and farms slated for demolition” (2010, p.18).³ As noted by Michael Ball, local residents’ blocking strategy to hinder the demolition and site clearance progress is likely to induce greater costs on local authorities and/or developers, as it buys time for residents to devise “an alternative preferred regeneration scenario” as well as creates space for “successfully making a political statement” (Ball, 2004, p.127).

Figure 1: Defiant building standing alone in a cleared site of Tianjin © Hyun Bang Shin 2009



Due to the very nature of nail houses that stand in the way of various development projects, they have been portrayed in negative images by government officials who may claim them to be of nuisance or the occupiers as trouble-makers. As Hsing argues (2010), protesters are “presented as uncooperative and opportunistic negotiators for higher compensation and are accused of sacrificing the public interests for personal gain, and even of causing housing price hikes” (p.78). Propaganda material in Figure 2 below clearly shows some examples of this government perspective, which report the latest propaganda initiatives that I came across in a case study neighbourhood in Guangzhou.⁴ Nail households are depicted here as those selfish neighbours who stand in the way of local community interests. However, the

3 In Hsing’s discussions, nail houses appear largely in relation to peasants’ relocation. However, it would be reasonable to acknowledge that she was also regarding those protests by inner-city residents or residents in villages-in-the-city as part of nail house activities. This is evident in her following statement: “nail households who succeed in getting higher compensation are mostly inner-city residents or residents of the urban fringe, rather than those in rural or semirural areas” (Hsing, 2010, p.203).

4 This neighbourhood is called Pazhou village in Haizhu District, and is further explained in a section that comes before the conclusion of this paper.

extent to which local residents of various household circumstances (e.g. housing tenure, household registration, migration) support nail house activities is not much revealed. Do they also regard these activities as something of nuisance? Is it only homeowners who have properties to protect, for instance, who feel sympathetic towards nail households? Before looking more into these questions, I will consider, in the following section, the emergence of property rights activism in recent years, and argue that the property rights reform during the last ten years or so has given rise to an increasing degree of property rights awareness, but that the property rights activism on the basis of this notion of property ownership in its current form in urban China is rather narrowly focused.

Figure 2: Stigmatisation of nail house in Pazhou village



Property rights, ownership and the limits of property rights activism

The implementation of the Property Rights Law in 2007 and the amendment to the Constitution in 2004 have raised people’s expectation of having their privately owned properties protected. In particular, in the case of those in the owner-occupation sector that has become the dominant tenure form in contemporary Chinese cities since the late 1990s, this anticipation is more prominent. The growing notion of property rights and therefore amounting interests in protecting their properties as well as the quality of their neighbourhoods lead to what Ching Kwan Lee has referred to as ‘property rights activism’ (Lee, 2008). Similarly, You-tien Hsing also refers to nail houses as “the ultimate form of localized social activism” that attempts to protect local residents’ property and against its forceful expropriation (Hsing, 2010, p.207).

However, the question of how progressive these property owners can be needs to be further scrutinised. Experiences from the West have shown that the relationship between homeownership and civic virtue is multi-faceted. For left-leaning critics, the growth of owner-occupation leads to the proliferation of privatism that centers on one's own lifestyle and secluded private space with owner-occupiers' much less concern for political and social issues (Lundqvist, 1998). On the other hand, more conservative perspective would regard owner-occupiers as having greater willingness to participate in societal issues that affect their vested interests in privately owned properties (ibid). This would however be in so far as these societal issues affect their property values. For David Harvey, this would be the expression of "intense possessive individualism" (Harvey, 2008, p.32). What he means by this is that, with vested material interests in the exchange value of owned properties, homeowners' political interests are known to be centred around preserving (and increasing) property values, which leads to fragmented forms of collective action with broken links with wider societal movement.

Given the situation that there are more than 80 percent homeowners in urban China, it is important to point out that the time-constrained ownership of land use rights, which come as a bundle with full ownership of housing posits serious threats to both homeowners and to the state. As far as the land use right is concerned, the maximum duration of its possession by homeowners is typically 70 years for residential use, and there is much speculation over what would happen when it expires in the coming decades. This affects every home-owner in urban China, and therefore, provides a potentially solid platform on which society-wide solidarity among homeowners could be mobilised instead of neighbourhood- or estate-based fragmented movement to safeguard individual property values.

Nevertheless, even if this kind of solidarity is to be mobilised, it may only involve mainly homeowners without necessarily being extended to those non-owners, who are either directly oppressed or alienated, to borrow Peter Marcuse's terms, in China's urban renewal contexts. This concerns the issue of how to define urban residents. For some time since the housing and property rights reform, the focus has been on the ownership of private properties and its protection. This was at the centre of the formulation of the Property Rights Law in the first place. How to define and categorise urban residents is also closely related to the issue of *whose* right to the city, discussed earlier in this paper. As I outlined earlier in this paper, the regulations on residents' receipt of and negotiation over redevelopment compensation would divide urban residents into two distinctively separated groups: those permanent residents who are eligible for compensation (property owners and public sector tenants) and those who do not qualify (private tenants and migrants without local household registration) (Shin, 2007). Local residents' protests and resistance to displacement and demolition (hence the rise of nail households) are to a large extent configured and dictated by the governing compensation-related regulations and the reconstruction of property rights institutions. In particular, China's existing property rights and *hukou* institutions are experiencing changes that come to make certain segments of urban residents face severely constrained opportunities, if not completely barred, to take part and voice out against the ruling state (Shin, 2010). Private rental tenants and migrants who are marginalised in Chinese cities in spite of their immeasurable contributions to urban economic growth are the most negatively affected, eliminated from intervening in any part of urban planning processes (see Wu and Webster, 2010 for more discussions on marginalisation in urban China contexts). These marginalised groups constitute a substantial

share of urban population. Yet, there is hardly any opportunity for them to voice out in city affairs, that would severely affect their life chances.

I refer to two of the recent academic works to illustrate that much of the on-going debates on urban residents' rights rest on those with entitlement to a set of rights based on their legal property ownership and hukou status. Cai (2007) for instance discusses protests by homeowners to protect their legal rights, and states that "The laws that are supposed to protect citizens are ineffective, and those stipulations made and enforced by governments at the central and local levels ignore their [homeowners'] interests" (Cai, 2007, p.194). However, the discussions here are by and large oriented towards homeowners. This may be grounded in the notion that homeowners are the legitimate holders of property rights, based on titles and deeds, without considering the rights to the use of house and land that much of migrants would hold on to. This goes very much against the very notion of the right to the city that Lefebvre has argued for. As Dikeç (2001) notes, "Lefebvre's notion of the right to the city is a call to advance an urban spatial approach to political struggles with the participation of all those who inhabit the city without discrimination" (p.1790).

The lack of attention to migrants' rights in China's urban development contexts is also evident in Hsing's insightful publication on land-centred accumulation and land politics (Hsing, 2010). Hsing refers to "two types of housing protests in large cities" which include "property rights protests and residents' rights protests" (Hsing, 2010, p.61). Here, the former refers to the protests by "private homeowners in the prerevolutionary era, whose property was appropriated by the Beijing Municipal Government" (ibid, p.61), while the latter refers to those launched by "property owners and tenants" who "shared a territorial identity as urban residents" (ibid, p.62). She goes on to say that "Residency was the physical anchor for the quotidian support networks of job, family, community, and urban service- the life-worlds -of city residents" (p.62), but does not link these to hukou issues. This is a key shortcoming, as the hukou status has been influencing heavily the eligibility of local residents to receive compensation upon displacement. In close relation to this, while Hsing rightly calls for equal attention to both homeowners and tenants for residents' rights mobilisation based on their "place-based identity" (Hsing, 2010, p.83), she does not specify particular tenure types for tenants. That is, whether they are public rental tenants or private tenants, in particular migrant tenants in private dwellings. Various news reports covering protests against house demolition in China usually omit the precise nature of housing tenure, but this is largely due to the fact that the right of private tenants and especially migrants to redevelopment compensation and relocation measures is hardly guaranteed by existing legal and administrative institutions. Making a distinction between public and private tenants is therefore significant. The possession of local hukou, which also determines one's access to local public rental housing in the first place, makes a great difference in terms of people's mobilisation of what Hsing calls "residents' rights".⁵ The

5 Hsing refers to public rental tenants when she addresses tenants' protests. This becomes evident when we read the statement that says "One of the most common grievances of *chaiqianhu* protesters concerns 'unfair relocation and demolition compensation'" (Hsing, 2010, p.73). She further states that "The majority of *chaiqianhu* wanted on-site relocation or relocation within the general area of their original homes" (ibid, p.74). 'Relocation and compensation' are for local hukou holders, that is, Beijing hukou holders in this circumstance. The absence of migrant tenants in Hsing's work is also clearly witnessed when she discusses strategies of mobilisation. The first strategy of "sustaining rights claims" refers to protesters' refusal to change addresses on residents' identification cards after

question I raise here is: Is there a room for private (migrant) tenants to launch a concerted effort to fight against the authority to claim their collective right to the city?

In my earlier paper on land, housing and property rights in poor neighbourhoods (*author*, 2010), I have argued that the way forward in terms of resisting neighbourhood demolition is “to resort to the fragmentation of property rights, supported by the coalition of residents on the basis of rights-based awareness” (*author*, 2010, p.128). This proposition would require residents with access to the ‘use value’ of their neighbourhood and dwellings therein (rather than the ‘exchange value’ on the basis of access to formal property ownership) to come together, acknowledging the differences among them on the basis of their varying degree of accessing property ownership. Property rights activism by homeowners alone (and to some extent, by public tenants in urban China context) would be limited due to the fact that on the one hand, it provides a selfish pursuit of the notion of ‘just us’ (see Merrifield 1996 and Dikec 2001: p.1789 discussion on this notion). On the other hand, it fails to recognise the common language for all those who share particular time and space. For some, the pursuit of property rights activism may be understandably considered positive, but this should be to the extent of which the activism can bear some fruit in the authoritarian state like China. This strategy, however, requires a clear direction towards forming a coalition with those of different ownership entitlements, in particular with migrant tenants who make up a substantial proportion of urban population and private tenants. Whether or not this sense of solidarity can be constructed is an important issue, and there is more evidence to be collected. This is where I now turn to discussing empirical findings in the following two sections.

Locating the feeling of sympathy for nail houses among urban residents

Calling for the establishment of a coalition between homeowners and private (migrant) tenants to overcome the limits of property rights activism may sound utopian to some critics and onlookers. After all, nail households in Chinese cities have been known to be using ‘stay-put’ tactics launched by mostly property owners, who have access to legally acknowledged formal property rights and therefore entitlement to compensation. These characteristics substantially differ from those of private tenants and especially migrants. The construction of a coalition between the disparate social groups involving private (migrant) tenants would require a sense of solidarity as the cornerstone of this political struggle. The immediate question is whether nail-house protests would receive support from private tenants and migrants who hardly reap the benefits, in both material and psychological terms, from the wholesale clearance of their neighbourhoods and displacement.

In this section, a unique set of data from this author’s latest research project in Guangzhou, China, is analysed in order to investigate the degree of sympathy for nail houses among local residents. The results from both questionnaire survey and qualitative in-depth interviews with local residents will be examined. The survey was carried out in late 2009 in three neighbourhoods: one village-in-the-city called Pazhou village in Haizhu District and two inner-city neighbourhoods located in Liwan and Yuexiu Districts (see Figure 3 for the

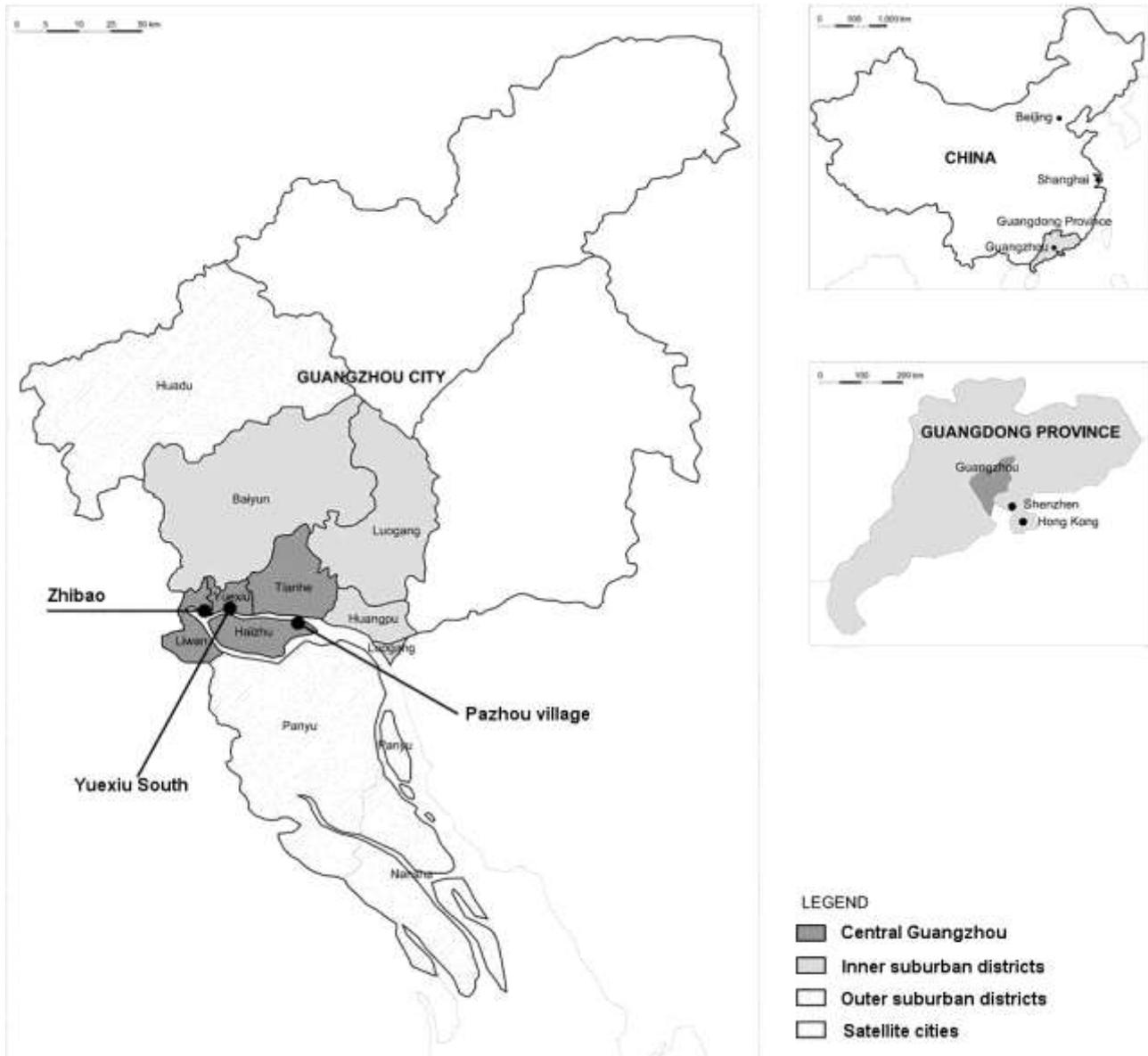
displacement (*ibid*, pp.79-80), but again, this is not the kind of right that migrant tenants in particular can enjoy.

location of these neighbourhoods in Guangzhou). The selection of these neighbourhoods and their discussion in this paper are explicated by the nature of these neighbourhoods. Pazhou village is one of the numerous villages-in-the-city (*cheongzhongcun* in Chinese), which are frequently found in Guangzhou and the wider Pearl River Delta region. According to the basic information from the district planning bureau, Pazhou has more than 3,000 villagers, and a large number of migrants whose number at peak time would reach nearly 10,000 people. Villages-in-the-city have been widely known for the concentration of high density buildings that are erected by local villagers to accommodate commercial activities and housing demand from migrant tenants. These villages-in-the-city are in fact former rural villages that have become urbanised in the midst of Guangzhou's outward expansion (Chung, 2010; Tang and Chung, 2002). They are known for the high share of migrant population, proliferation of construction activities that do not conform to municipal planning regulations, and the domination of village collectives in local governance structure that often comes into conflict with the higher levels in the administrative hierarchy. On the other hand, inner-city neighbourhoods are known for more regular forms of built structure with historic origins and relatively high share of homeowners and public rental tenants, the latter usually allocated administratively. One of the study sites in my project is known as Zhibao neighbourhood, having 1858 households according to the basic information from the district planning bureau. Zhibao is the largest neighbourhood in a redevelopment district named Enninglu. The other neighbourhood is designated as a relatively small-scale redevelopment district known as Yuexiu South, and has over 600 households. The share of public housing in these two neighbourhoods reach about 40 and 50 percent respectively, thus suggesting a reasonably high share of dwellings that are in private hands.

At the time of the survey, these neighbourhoods were under threat of demolition, influenced heavily by the municipal drive in preparation for the city's hosting of the 2010 Summer Asian Games. In total, 675 responses were collected from the questionnaire survey: 255 from Pazhou village, 260 from Zhibao and 160 from Yuexiu South.⁶ The questionnaire survey made efforts to ensure that the neighbourhood sample size was proportionate to the size of official estimates of neighbourhood population (obtained from local planning bureaux). As a detailed household registration data were not available, households in each neighbourhood were randomly selected by resorting to a random route method using street maps and house numbers, and by using a fixed interval approach to contact households on each street. Part of the questions in the survey included respondents' awareness of the term, nail households, and if yes, their degree of having sympathy for nail households. 438 valid respondents turned out to be aware of this term, and the data collected from these respondents were subject to ordered logit regression analysis. Here, valid responses refer to those samples without missing values for the following four main variables: (a) housing tenure; (b) hukou status; (c) neighbourhood; and (d) concern for demolition in the near future. Ultimately, 381 cases were included in the regression.

6 The survey aimed at obtaining the views of residents with local hukou and migrants on neighbourhood changes and housing transition, and therefore, households were selected in such a way as to make sure approximately an equal share of both groups could be included in the sample. Eventually, about 42 percent of the total survey respondents were migrants and the other 58 percent local residents with Guangzhou hukou. Given the demolition schedule of survey neighbourhoods, there remains the possibility that response is likely to be biased in favour of those who support nail houses, but the efforts by governments to discourage nail houses and depict them negatively also suggest that the survey may underestimate the full extent of respondents' support for nail houses.

Figure 3: Location of study neighbourhoods in Guangzhou, China



The key questions this section is going to consider are as follows. To what extent do people feel sympathy for nail houses? Is this sympathy dependent upon their housing tenure, hukou status or residential location? As indicated in Table 1, it turns out that the majority or 53 percent of 438 respondents who were aware of the term ‘nail households’ indicated that they felt sympathetic towards nail houses. The trend is more or less similar even if the respondents are broken down into sub-categories such as housing tenure, the possession of Guangzhou hukou (either rural or agricultural), neighbourhood location, and people’s level of concern for demolition in near future. For instance, it is interesting to note that the majority of homeowners and public rental tenants (56 and 53 percent respectively) were feeling sympathetic towards nail houses. This is somewhat expected, given their assumed property rights awareness in the process of housing and property rights reform and their legally protected entitlement to redevelopment compensation upon their house demolition. What is more interesting, however, is the large number of private tenants, mostly migrants, who were also feeling sympathetic for nail houses (49 percent) even though they hardly receive compensation upon neighbourhood renewal and demolition of their rental dwellings. Furthermore, while 54 percent of Guangzhou hukou holders were feeling sympathy for nail

houses, one in two non-Guangzhou hukou holders also indicated a similar sentiment. However, while 55 percent of urban Guangzhou hukou holders indicated their sympathy for nail houses, slightly lower share (49 percent) of agricultural non-Guangzhou hukou holders were feeling sympathy for nail houses.

Table 1. Degree of sympathy for nail households by various household characteristics

Variable	Variable value		Very much disagree	Somewhat disagree	don't know	Somewhat agree	Very much agree	Total
Tenure, Housing	Homeowner	n	13	61	38	73	69	254
		%	5.12	24.02	14.96	28.74	27.17	100
	Public tenants	n	3	10	9	10	15	47
		%	6.38	21.28	19.15	21.28	31.91	100
	Private tenants	n	7	38	25	42	25	137
		%	5.11	27.74	18.25	30.66	18.25	100
Hukou status: GH for Guangzhou Hukou	Guangzhou Hukou	n	16	72	50	81	83	302
		%	5.30	23.84	16.56	26.82	27.48	100
	<i>GH, urban</i>	n	16	65	44	74	80	279
		%	5.73	23.30	15.77	26.52	28.67	100
	<i>GH, agricultural</i>	n	0	7	6	7	3	23
		%	0	30.43	26.09	30.43	13.04	100
	non-Guangzhou hukou	n	7	37	22	44	26	136
		%	5.15	27.21	16.18	32.35	19.12	100
	<i>non-GH, urban</i>	n	0	6	4	11	5	26
		%	0	23.08	15.38	42.31	19.23	100
<i>non-GH, agricultural</i>	n	7	31	18	33	21	110	
	%	6.36	28.18	16.36	30.00	19.09	100	
Neighbourhood	Pazhou village, Haizhu	n	9	39	31	49	34	162
		%	5.56	24.07	19.14	30.25	20.99	100
	Inner-city neighbourhoods	n	14	70	41	76	75	276
		%	5.07	25.36	14.86	27.54	27.17	100
	<i>Zhibao</i>	n	10	53	30	41	43	177
		%	5.65	29.94	16.95	23.16	24.29	100
	<i>Yuexiu South</i>	n	4	17	11	35	32	99
		%	4.04	17.17	11.11	35.35	32.32	100
Concern for demolition	Not worried at all	n	13	67	37	71	49	237
		%	5.49	28.27	15.61	29.96	20.68	100
	Somewhat worried	n	1	28	13	24	21	87
		%	1.15	32.18	14.94	27.59	24.14	100
	Very much worried	n	9	14	22	30	39	114
		%	7.89	12.28	19.30	26.32	34.21	100
Total	n	23	109	72	125	109	438	
	%	5.25	24.89	16.44	28.54	24.89	100	

The next question to probe is whether there is any significant difference in the degree of sympathy for nail-house activities among people of different characteristics especially in relation to their housing tenure. In order to find this out, the paper adopts regression analysis. The model specification, which follows below, specifies that a degree of sympathy for nail households is a function of housing tenure and other control variables such as

demographic characteristics, household characteristics and neighbourhood factors and so on.

$$\text{Nail House Sympathy} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * \text{Housing tenure} + \beta_2 * \text{Other controls} + \varepsilon$$

Here, the dependent variable is about ‘Do you agree or disagree that nail-house is an inevitable phenomenon?’ with options of (1) very much disagree, (2) somewhat disagree, (3) don’t know (4) somewhat agree, (5) very much agree. Due to the ‘ordered’ nature of the dependent variable, the model is estimated by ordered logit model. Table 2 presents the summary statistics for regression samples.

Table 2. Summary statistics for regression samples

Variables	Observation	Mean ^(a)
Age ^(b)	381	44.533
Gender		
<i>Male</i>	381	0.441
<i>Female</i>	381	0.559
Tenure, Housing		
<i>Homeowners</i>	381	0.575
<i>Public tenants</i>	381	0.113
<i>Private tenants</i>	381	0.312
Hukou		
<i>GH, urban</i>	381	0.633
<i>GH, agricultural</i>	381	0.058
<i>non-GH, urban</i>	381	0.063
<i>non-GH, agricultural</i>	381	0.247
Neighbourhood		
Pazhou village, Haizhu-qu	381	0.352
Inner-city neighbourhoods	381	0.648
(Zhibao)		(0.420)
(Yuexiu South)		(0.228)
Worry about demolition		
<i>Not worried</i>	381	0.533
<i>Somewhat worried</i>	381	0.210
<i>very much worried</i>	381	0.257
Household assets (RMB)		
<i>Less than 10,000</i>	381	0.210
<i>10,000 ~ 50,000</i>	381	0.205
<i>50,000 ~ 100,000</i>	381	0.118
<i>100,000 ~ 200,000</i>	381	0.160
<i>200,000 ~ 500,000</i>	381	0.168
<i>Over 500,000</i>	381	0.139

Note: (a) Other than age, mean values for other variables refer to the share of respondents in each label; (b) A standard deviation, minimum and maximum values for ‘age’ are 12.916, 17 and 88 respectively.

Table 3. Housing tenure and degree of sympathy for nail households

(Dependent variable: ‘Do you agree or disagree that nail-house is an inevitable phenomenon?’ with options of (1) very much disagree, (2) somewhat disagree, (3) don’t know (4) somewhat agree, (5) very much agree)

	(1) Tenure		(2) Other controls		(3) Demolition worry	
	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.
Tenure (private tenants exc.)						
<i>Homeowners</i>	0.476**	(0.200)	0.651*	(0.332)	0.575	(0.366)
<i>Public tenants</i>	0.309	(0.322)	0.382	(0.462)	0.332	(0.459)
Hukou (non-GH agricultural exc.)						
<i>GH, urban</i>			0.427	(0.420)	0.473	(0.425)
<i>GH, agricultural</i>			-0.197	(0.459)	-0.159	(0.440)
<i>non-GH, urban</i>			0.472	(0.404)	0.521	(0.446)
Neighbourhood (inner-city exc.)						
<i>Pazhou village</i>			-0.032	(0.250)	0.045	(0.272)
Age			0.007	(0.011)	0.009	(0.011)
Male			-0.054	(0.230)	0.031	(0.246)
Head of household			0.319	(0.219)	0.325	(0.230)
Size of household			0.082	(0.064)	0.085	(0.067)
Education level (no schooling exc.)						
<i>Primary to high school</i>			-0.508	(0.735)	-0.416	(0.743)
<i>College</i>			-0.810	(0.814)	-0.654	(0.826)
<i>University</i>			0.034	(0.851)	0.185	(0.890)
Employment status (in schooling exc.)						
<i>No job after interrupting study</i>			-2.601	(2.116)	-2.859	(2.143)
<i>Non-paid family business</i>			-3.239*	(1.987)	-2.998	(1.845)
<i>Unemployed</i>			-3.064*	(1.855)	-3.007*	(1.688)
<i>Retired</i>			-3.087*	(1.858)	-3.067*	(1.685)
<i>Never had a job</i>			-2.882	(1.886)	-2.890	(1.844)
<i>Employed, regular</i>			-2.507	(1.825)	-2.467	(1.652)
<i>Temp. worker</i>			-2.929*	(1.846)	-2.948*	(1.678)
<i>Self-employed</i>			-2.726	(1.838)	-2.631	(1.675)
<i>Farming</i>			-2.851*	(1.858)	-2.900*	(1.701)
Regarding oneself as middle class			-0.393	(0.246)	-0.383	(0.263)
Size of living space			-0.000	(0.001)	-0.000	(0.001)
Log of monthly household income			-0.070	(0.160)	-0.085	(0.183)
% share of rental income			0.732	(1.255)	0.595	(1.270)
Respondent being party member			1.195*	(0.668)	1.233*	(0.683)
Presence of party member in household			0.688***	(0.254)	0.773***	(0.255)
Length of stay in neighbourhood			-0.010	(0.008)	-0.012	(0.009)
Household assets including real estate (over 500,000 RMB exc.)						
<i>Less than 10,000</i>			-0.304	(0.468)	-0.393	(0.464)
<i>10,000 ~ 50,000</i>			0.314	(0.444)	0.231	(0.438)
<i>50,000 ~ 100,000</i>			0.515	(0.470)	0.454	(0.469)
<i>10,000 ~ 200,000</i>			0.761*	(0.406)	0.815**	(0.398)
<i>200,000 ~ 500,000</i>			0.189	(0.373)	0.102	(0.375)
Concern for demolition (very much worried exc.)						
<i>Not worried</i>					-0.677***	(0.255)
<i>Somewhat worried</i>					-0.492	(0.322)
Pseudo R-squared	0.0048		0.0442		0.0510	
No. of obs.	381		381		381	

Note: *, **, *** significant at 10%, 5%, 1% respectively. Robust standard errors are in parentheses

Table 3 is the first set of results from this regression model. The coefficient of homeowners, for instance as in Model (1) in Table 3, represents the difference between homeowners and private tenants in the extent to which they feel sympathetic about the inevitability of nail-house activities. A positive coefficient implies that homeowners are more likely to feel sympathetic about nail households in comparison with private tenants. As shown in Model

(1) in Table 3, it appears that when only the housing tenure variable is controlled for, homeowners are more likely to feel sympathetic than private tenants, and this likelihood is statistically significant (at five percent level). There is no statistical difference in the degree of sympathy for nail houses between public and private tenants.

In Model (2) of Table 3, more explanatory variables are controlled for, as they are thought to affect the relationship between the degree of sympathy for nail households and housing tenure status. Yet, as shown in the table, the coefficient of homeowners becomes larger, though the significant level decreases from five percent to ten percent. This implies that homeownership turns out to have a reasonably independent effect on sympathy for nail households from other explanatory variables such as age, gender, education level, household assets⁷ and so on.

Table 4 shows more understandable results of Model (2) in Table 3. It shows a probability of choosing each degree of sympathy by hypothetical homeowners and tenants who are highly comparable in every aspect but their housing tenure.⁸ For highly comparable homeowners and private tenants, in every aspect other than their housing tenure, the homeowner group have probabilities of 28.1 percent and 32.7 percent respectively of ‘agreeing with nail households very much’ and ‘agreeing somewhat’ while for private tenants the figures are 16.9 percent and 27.7 percent respectively.

Table 4. Probability of choosing degrees of sympathy by ‘comparable’ homeowners and renters

Tenure, Housing	very much disagreed	somewhat disagreed	don't know	somewhat agreed	very much agreed
Homeowners	3.65%	20.75%	14.87%	32.65%	28.09%
Public tenants	4.73%	24.97%	16.14%	31.18%	22.99%
Private tenants	6.78%	31.46%	17.12%	27.73%	16.92%

To what extent is homeowners’ sympathy for nail houses influenced by their concern for demolition? It may be hypothesised that those people who are more concerned for demolition of their homes would feel more sympathetic for nail-house activities. Model (3) in Table 3 suggests that when a degree of concern for demolition is controlled for, the size of coefficient for homeowners goes down from 0.651 to 0.575, and it is no longer statistically significant. The implication is that *compared to private tenants*, homeowners are more sympathetic for nail households not because of housing tenure status itself but because of the difference in the degree of demolition concern between homeowners and private tenants. It turns out that those who worry about demolition tend to have a greater

7 It should be acknowledged that the questionnaire survey with regard to the size of household assets might not have captured the actual size. The reasons may be diverse, including under-reporting of their actual financial and real estate assets or unclear notions of the market value of their real estate properties. Therefore, the responses to the household asset question could only be taken as indicative of the respondents’ notion of their asset size. It can be confirmed that homeowners who own properties tend to cluster around the higher end of the asset size, while tenants tend to cluster around the lower end.

8 The figures bear a property of 'holding all other characteristics constant' across different housing tenure groups and hence the differences in the numbers across different tenure types are entirely attributed to nothing but housing tenure.

sympathy for nail households, and this is felt greater among homeowners on average: This indicates that homeowners with tangible properties under threat by demolition tend to display a greater degree of sympathy for nail households.

Lastly, Table 5 presents a neighbourhood effect on the relationship between housing tenure and people's feeling for nail houses. That is, the table shows whether the degree of relationship varies by neighbourhood. The same set of regressions has been run but samples are divided by neighbourhood using 'interaction term' between housing tenure and neighbourhoods in order to find out if the neighbourhood characteristics collectively influence the relationship between people's housing tenure status and their sympathy for nail households. Here, the analysis considers two distinct types of neighbourhoods: village-in-the-city (Pazhou village) versus inner-city neighbourhoods (Zhibao and Yuexiu South). Table 5 reveals that the homeownership effect on sympathy for nail households is largely concentrated in Pazhou village. In other words, in inner-city neighbourhoods, there is no statistically significant difference between homeowners and private tenants. Furthermore, inconsistent with the results from the total sample regression, the effect of homeownership on Pazhou village residents' sympathy for nail households turns out to be independent from people's concern for demolition as seen in Model (3), Table 5: The coefficient of Pazhou homeowners experienced a marginal change from 1.988 in Model (2) to 2.052. This outcome differs from what was observed in Table 3 when neighbourhood effects were not considered. There appears to be no relationship observed between people's concern for demolition and their sympathy for nail households in Pazhou village. In contrast, the relationship does exist in the inner city neighbourhoods: the addition of concern for demolition dummies indeed reduces the coefficient of homeowners (from 0.277 to 0.178), which is consistent with the result in Table 3.

Possible explanations for the results above, that is homeowners in the Pazhou village having sympathy for nail houses independent from their concern for demolition, may be the village's particular characteristics that are not captured in the questionnaire survey and the regression model. At the time of the questionnaire survey, all three study neighbourhoods were under pressure from the local governments to complete demolition and site clearance in time for the commencement of the Guangzhou Summer Asian Games that took place in November 2010. In retrospect, it turned out that by the end of the first half of 2010, approximately six months after the questionnaire survey, only Pazhou village was completely demolished, while demolition works in the other two neighbourhoods were half completed and put on hold until after the Asian Games. This suggests that the Pazhou villagers who owned properties would have been very much aware of the impending demolition of their village. While these villagers might have been very much worried about the demolition itself, knowing the inevitability that loomed over their village, the majority of them would be more concerned about the size of redevelopment compensation that they were entitled to for being the member of their village collective. News reports suggest that only a handful of local villagers resisted demolition by early 2010 (Nanfang Dushibao, 2011).

Table 5. Housing tenure and degree of sympathy for nail households by neighbourhood

(Dependent variable: ‘Do you agree or disagree that nail-house is an inevitable phenomenon?’ with options of (1) very much disagree, (2) somewhat disagree, (3) don’t know (4) somewhat agree, (5) very much agree)

	(1) Tenure		(2) Other controls		(3) Demolition worry	
	Coeff. ^(a)	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.
Tenure (private tenants exc.)						
Pazhou village						
Homeowners ^(b)	0.696***	(0.237)	1.988***	(0.611)	2.052***	(0.625)
Inner-city						
Homeowners	0.336	(0.231)	0.277	(0.387)	0.178	(0.390)
Public tenants	0.310	(0.323)	0.140	(0.473)	0.089	(0.478)
Hukou (non-GH agricultural exc.)						
GH, urban			0.328	(0.437)	0.350	(0.445)
GH, agricultural			-0.373	(0.453)	-0.370	(0.453)
non-GH, urban			0.295	(0.443)	0.333	(0.452)
Age			0.012	(0.012)	0.014	(0.012)
Male			0.020	(0.244)	0.108	(0.250)
Head of Household			0.228	(0.238)	0.208	(0.241)
Size of Household			0.056	(0.065)	0.060	(0.067)
Education level (no schooling exc.)						
Primary to high school			-0.636	(0.760)	-0.564	(0.816)
College			-0.944	(0.848)	-0.782	(0.904)
University			-0.053	(0.887)	0.075	(0.948)
Employment status (in schooling exc.)						
No job after interrupting study			-2.771	(2.303)	-3.124	(2.437)
Non-paid family business			-3.115	(2.041)	-2.803	(2.104)
Unemployed			-3.197*	(1.924)	-3.041	(1.966)
Retired			-3.266*	(1.917)	-3.192	(1.958)
Never had a job			-2.940	(2.119)	-2.981	(2.331)
Employed, regular			-2.615	(1.886)	-2.499	(1.923)
Temp. worker			-3.033	(1.911)	-2.913	(1.949)
Self-employed			-2.819	(1.909)	-2.624	(1.952)
Farming			-3.244*	(1.944)	-3.138	(2.002)
Regarding oneself as middle class			-0.431*	(0.252)	-0.438*	(0.259)
Size of living space			-0.001	(0.001)	-0.001	(0.001)
Log of monthly HH income			-0.044	(0.193)	-0.064	(0.194)
% share of rental income			0.740	(1.317)	0.570	(1.366)
Neighbourhood (inner city exc.)						
Pazhou village			-0.716	(0.821)	-1.473	(1.021)
Respondent being party member			1.413**	(0.718)	1.436**	(0.727)
Presence of party member in household			0.678**	(0.272)	0.741***	(0.276)
Length of stay in neighbourhood			-0.012	(0.009)	-0.014	(0.009)
Household asset including real estate (over 500,000 RMB exc.)						
Pazhou village						
Less than 10,000			0.600	(0.806)	0.644	(0.864)
10,000 ~ 50,000			0.666	(0.724)	0.700	(0.723)
50,000 ~ 100,000			0.910	(0.622)	0.898	(0.641)
100,000 ~ 200,000			1.066*	(0.585)	1.135*	(0.595)
200,000 ~ 500,000			-0.308	(0.433)	-0.302	(0.453)
Inner-city						
Less than 10,000			0.022	(0.611)	-0.216	(0.616)
10,000 ~ 50,000			0.803	(0.604)	0.598	(0.600)
50,000 ~ 100,000			0.875	(0.714)	0.750	(0.698)
100,000 ~ 200,000			1.207*	(0.623)	1.167*	(0.602)
200,000 ~ 500,000			0.914	(0.683)	0.622	(0.694)

	(1) Tenure		(2) Other controls		(3) Demolition worry	
	Coeff. (a)	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.
Concern for demolition (very much worried exc.)						
Pazhou village						
<i>Not worried</i>					-0.163	(0.480)
<i>Somewhat worried</i>					-0.133	(0.587)
Inner-city						
<i>Not worried</i>					-0.874***	(0.335)
<i>Somewhat worried</i>					-0.658	(0.425)
Pseudo R-squared	0.0066		0.0560		0.0639	
No. of obs.	381		381		381	

Note: (a) *, **, *** significant at 10%, 5%, 1% respectively. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. (b) Listed homeowners only, as there are no public tenants among Pazhou village respondents in the regression sample

Continuing from the above explanation, the independent effect of homeownership on sympathy for nail households from demolition concern among the Pazhou homeowners may also be explained by the unique ‘governance’ structure experienced in villages-in-the-city as well as these villagers’ collective ownership of land (for more discussions on this, see Hsing (2010), especially Chapter 5). Each villager’s membership in the village collectives guarantees entitlement to a certain share of financial benefits that may be reaped from the development of village land, planned and implemented by the village leadership. While there may potentially be disputes and conflicts within the collective with regard to the equitable redistribution of future benefits from village redevelopment, it may be assumed that villagers are relatively in a better position in terms of safeguarding their assets in comparison with homeowners or public tenants in inner-city neighbourhoods who are more likely to launch individualised resistance and/or negotiation.

Building a foothold for migrants’ right to the city through alliance

The sympathetic feeling towards nail households is evident among surveyed residents. This positive feeling was consistent across people of different tenure, hukou status and neighbourhood location as shown in Table 1. The regression results further indicate that homeowners stand out, as expected, in terms of the strength of this feeling of sympathy for nail households when compared with private tenants. Private tenants’ sympathy for nail houses is comparatively weaker than homeowners or public tenants, but a substantially high share of private tenants (49 percent) and migrants (51 percent) were sympathising with nail households (see Table 1), suggesting that there is a great opportunity to exploit in terms of building solidarity. As noted earlier, homeowners and local villagers in urban China are entitled to redevelopment compensation and relocation measures on the basis of their property ownership and membership in village collectives respectively. Public rental tenants are also eligible to receive compensation if their residence is administratively allocated, which by default would usually mean that they possess local hukou. Migrants without local hukou face restrictions in terms of the level of access to various services, which are provided in host cities increasingly on the basis of ‘local citizenship’ (Smart and Smart, 2001). This preferential treatment of urban residents has led to the rise of what Li Zhang calls “urban nativism” (2002, p.327). A natural question that arises from this is: Would urban residents with local hukou and entitlement to compensation and relocation feel positive about granting the same kind of entitlement for their private tenants including migrant neighbours?

The above question was one of the topics of discussions with local residents in the aforementioned semi-structured interviews.⁹ As expected from the questionnaire survey results, the majority of interviewees who expressed their views on nail-house activities were feeling positive or sympathetic about nail-house activities (14 interviewees out of 21). Quite interestingly, in the case of responses to the question of granting redevelopment compensation to private tenants and migrants, there is a marginal and yet noticeable difference between the interviewees from the Zhibao inner-city neighbourhood and those from Pazhou village. In the case of Zhibao, twelve out of sixteen interviewees were clearly expressing their views about this, and of the twelve interviewees, three were disinterested in the subject matter, while nine were expressing negative feeling about the proposition, stating that tenants were tenants and that unlike landlords, they were not to be subject to compensation. For instance, a male interviewee who had been living in the Zhibao neighbourhood for more than forty years pointed out that tenants and migrants “should not be compensated, as they are not homeowners and are living here only as renters. It is only logical that homeowners are given this [compensation]”.

Interestingly, among the Pazhou residents, however, the views were rather mixed. While only six out of thirteen interviewees were clearly voicing out their views about the said proposition, only two were articulating a negative attitude, and the other four (two migrants and two Guangzhou hukou holders) were explicitly positive about the idea of granting redevelopment compensation to migrants in particular. A migrant interviewee who had been living in Pazhou for about ten years before displacement argued that migrants should “receive compensation, as numerous migrants have invested in the neighbourhood”. This view was shared by an 82-year-old male migrant interviewee who was displaced after living in Pazhou for about two years. He supported the idea of allowing compensation “if [buildings were] rented and have a signed contract”. He added:

“Let me give you an example for you to listen to. The father of that man who set up the factory had invested money there [in Pazhou], renting a building from someone with a surname Xie and signed a contract...In the contract it was as such that relocation compensation would all be his landlord’s. The result was that he did not receive any. It was miserable for him. He invested tens of thousands of money and did not retrieve any”

Another interviewee who is a local villager holding a Guangzhou hukou also advocates the idea of making relocation provision for migrants, explicating that “they have greatly contributed to the construction and development of Guangzhou”. This is reiterated by another local villager who explained:

“As far as I can see, they don’t get compensation. After all, they do not have property rights [of the house they live in]. But, they should be subject to

9 The semi-structured interviews with local residents were conducted in late 2010, about one year after the questionnaire survey in order to find out the impact of the demolition progress on residents’ livelihood. These interviews were conducted on those residents from the Pazhou village and Zhibao neighbourhood were interviewed. In total, 29 interviews were carried out: eight of them were the original participants in the survey, and due to practical constraints, the rest were recruited through snowballing (recruitment of further interviewees through known contacts). Among the 29 interviews, thirteen were conducted with the residents from Pazhou, and the rest with the residents from the Zhibao neighbourhood. Most interviewees were holders of Guangzhou hukou, while four from Pazhou were non-Guangzhou hukou holders.

relocation measures. They have contributed a lot to the construction of Guangzhou. Demolition and house-moving would have a great impact on people, and they should be relocated”

While the views of the above interviewees may not be conclusive nor representative of the residents in both Pazhou and Zhibao, they seem to suggest a greater potential in places like the Pazhou village in terms of promoting a sense of solidarity on the basis of mutual understanding in order to voice their concern and put forward greater claims on imagining what kind of city is to be built. The concentration of migrants’ daily and commercial activities in villages-in-the-city and the benefits that are reaped by local villagers from this concentration of migrants’ activities seems to provide an ample opportunity for exploiting place-based alliance.

Conclusion: Seeking a popular place-based alliance for the right to the city

For Lefebvre, the key to the right to the city would be realising ‘revolutionary urbanism’ and political participation rather than merely critiquing the capitalist production of urban space. Discussions about the right to the city in rapidly urbanising China would inevitably include the temporal and spatial dimension of the key question, ‘whose right counts’. In China’s urban development contexts, the key role of the real estate sector and land development (Shin, 2011; Hsing, 2010) results in the situation in which the right to the city for developers and local authorities, and to some extent for those affluent home-buyers, are guaranteed. As mentioned earlier in the paper, the domination of land-based politics in urban China in which the control of power and resources are heavily skewed in favour of local states and developers also imposes greater pressure on residents. A particular segment of urban population, that is, private tenants including migrants, are severely disadvantaged in the process of urban renewal.

Urban (re-)development projects are often subordinate to local economic development strategies, while urban land assembly and the sale of land use rights become critical to local state’s performance and public finance (Haila, 1999; Ding 2005). Local authorities in China are highlighted for their “target-driven approach to implement policy” (Plummer, 2004: 7), and for their entrepreneurial orientation (Shin, 2009). Under these circumstances, the property rights reform and the strengthened protection of private properties would naturally give rise to the emergence of property rights activism especially among homeowners. The recent phenomena of homeowner-led protests against projects with potentially hazardous environmental outcome demonstrate this.¹⁰ Nail households reflect the signs of this activism translated into urban struggles surrounding urban renewal projects, frequently launched by homeowners who are increasingly organised to fight for their ownership rights and related property-based interests (Read, 2003; Yip and Jiang, 2011). It is, however, not clear how these struggles by homeowners would incorporate the rights of tenants and especially those of migrants.

10 One of the well-known cases is the Shanghai residents’ protest against the high-speed rail link between Shanghai and Hangzhou, which took place in the summer of 2009. See Kurtenbach (2009) for its coverage by The Guardian.

Then, what would be the way forward for China's urban residents to claim their right to the city? The struggle to re-claim the right to the city for the oppressed, alienated and economically deprived may be subject to challenges of different nature in countries experiencing transition from socialist planned economy to market economy. In China, recent reports suggest that there are concessions being made by governments to adopt more inclusionary measures (e.g. public hearings) to alleviate local residents' frustration against demolition and displacement (Cai, 2007; People's Daily, 2011). These are nevertheless aimed at property owners without giving explicit considerations to private tenants or migrants. This suggests, however, how concessionary measures such as participatory practices can be adopted selectively by ruling authorities as part of measures to subdue rising popular discontents. In Vietnam, for instance, where market-oriented economic liberalization has been implemented without significant change to the political system, the promotion of participatory decision-making at the commune level turns out to be interpreted as "a feedback mechanism" for "absorbing popular discontent into the formal structures of the Party-state" (Mattner, 2004, p.126). In mainland China, deliberative democratic process, if it at all exists, can be skewed in favour of the Communist Party members or at least to those loyal to the Party disciplines (Leib and He, 2006). Sajor and Ongsakul (2007) also states that in many transitional countries, "institutions for participatory planning and for fair negotiations in environmental conflict situations are non-existent or undeveloped to date" (Sajor and Ongsakul, 2007, p.797). The progress that China makes in terms of allowing greater room for public participation is commendable, but these concessionary policy measures are confined to property owners without extending to include non-owners in the schema. There is more to be demanded through collective actions that bring together owners and non-owners, in particular migrant tenants. As argued in this paper, there may be a possibility to form this alliance, as demonstrated by their attitudes toward nail-house protesters.

Furthermore, the key point in Lefebvre's framework is to ensure that "The right to the city was a right to use, the right of appropriation (clearly distinct from the right to property)" (Mitchell and Villanueva 2010, p.668). Hence, the key issue to address here in relation to the discussion of the right to the city in Chinese urban contexts is how to re-orient the urban protests such as those of nail households towards addressing broader structural accumulation issues. The existing protests against eviction and demolition are focused on distributional issues (that is, sharing of redevelopment profits) without addressing the very act of exploitation of the built environment by developers and/or governments, and also without tackling speculative real estate commodity production chains. As Merrifield explains, "when people are utterly excluded from active political participation in city affairs, distributional issues...are often all that's left for communities and groups to organize around and to seek substantive representation" (Merrifield, 1996, p.202).

The centrality of property values in residents' resistance against redevelopment and demolition also allows local states and developers to frame nail households as the expression of selfish acts that go against public interests. As Diamant et al (2005) point out, "in asserting claims (for unenforced rights or benefits) both individuals and groups have to learn how to couch their grievances in terms that will garner public and official support" (p.11). For nail households or protestors against eviction, their claims have been framed in a twisted way, mostly depicted as selfish demands (or, even as greed) for more compensation. Therefore, it is urgent to imagine a new direction to turn this around. The increasing

domination of the exchange value over use value in contemporary cities (Dikeç 2001) is also echoed in China, indicating that there is a need of imagining political programmes to fight this trend. Seeking the “language of *commonality*” (Merrifield 1996, p.200; original emphasis) that “would strive to bind people together, but in a togetherness in *difference*” (ibid, p.201; original emphasis). In China, the question is how to seed a binding relationship of solidarity, and how this could be produced between permanent urban residents and those more transient (e.g. migrants in urban villages), and between poorer segments of individual homeowners and non-owners (e.g. poor private tenants and informal dwellers).

The analysis of the questionnaire survey and qualitative interviews discussed above suggests clearly that building a binding relationship of solidarity is not impossible. For the right to the city to be achieved, it is important to re-visit the central tenet that “It is the urban political life which is to be changed, not the city per se. In other words, the right to the city entails not a right to be distributed from above to individuals, but a way of actively and collectively relating to the political life of the city” (Dikeç 2001, p.1790). The act of building a binding relationship of solidarity in China as pointed out earlier is therefore a major political act in the country where political participation is severely constrained. The results from the empirical findings earlier in this paper suggest that there is a strong possibility to construct an alliance between migrants and non-migrants and between homeowners, public and private tenants. How to facilitate the construction of this solidarity and let it shape the future of their neighbourhoods rather than being subject to changes imposed upon them remains a challenge. This lies in front of urban researchers, practitioners and activists operating in and working on urban China.

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