Explore a theoretical framework of urban borderland and informality: village-in-the-city in the Chinese context

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by

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The rapid urbanization process in China has created an interesting semi-urbanized space called Chengzhongcun (CZC, interpreted as village-in-the-city), which is beyond a simple dichotomy between the rural and the urban. The existing literature on CZC remains controversial. It either views CZC from a functionalist perspective that emphasizes instinctive response of the urban poor to the state’s incapacity in providing housing and jobs, or from a legalist view that regards CZC as an unplanned, ungovernable and disorder space. Both perspectives, however, view CZC as informal urban space that is fundamentally separated from the formal sector, and neglect the role of state in the creation of formal-informal relationship. Yet, the previous studies presumed CZC is isolated from the surrounding urban environs, and over-emphasized the distinctive characteristics in each CZC.

This paper seeks to fill in this gap and aims to broaden the understanding on CZC. This paper will first review the extant literature on CZC and points out the inadequacy of the research. Then, it seeks to find an alternative perspective and explore a theoretical relevance of urban borderland and informality. This paper will contribute the current debates on the village-in-the-city.

Keywords: urban informality; urban borderland; Village-in-the-city; China

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All are welcome!