

City University of Hong Kong

Department of Public Policy

Research Student Seminar

**Revisit China's Neoliberal Urbanism:
An Ethnographic Research on a
University Town in Guangzhou**

Paper presented at American Association of Geographers 2019 Annual Meeting, in Washington, DC, USA (3-7 April 2019)

by

Yongshen LIU

PhD Student

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Abstract:

Extant literature on China's neoliberal urbanism is mainly preoccupied with its institutional incentives and the political-economic dynamics, marked by the state's dominance with its sponsorship and supervision of capital-market operation, driven by its pro-growth aspirations and gentrification strategies.

Meanwhile, confronted with the brutal neoliberal production of urban space, the society used to be perceived as vulnerable to dispossession and displacement. However, this paper attempts to revisit China's neoliberal urbanism beyond the political-economic repertoire, and highlights a more spontaneous and powerful role that the society is playing, by offering institutional accounts. Drawing upon an ethnographic study in the Higher Education Mega Center (HEMC) of Guangzhou, this paper argues that in an institutionalized neoliberal context, the state-market-society nexus is closely intertwined, which manifests itself at fourfold dimensions: (1) the entangling of state and market, (2) the establishment of a market society, (3) the reflexive effects between neoliberalization and Chinese urban entrepreneurialism, and (4) the capital-centric rule in urban (re)development. In particular, the socioeconomic and socio-spatial contradictions in the HEMC case informs us about the aggressive and insatiable production of urban space led by the entrepreneurial local state, who has been bounded by the market-oriented and capital-centric rules in the institutionalized neoliberalization.