

ZHAO Nannan

Topic: Envisioning the Public Interest in China's Urban Planning Regime: Evolving Through the Inherited Structure and Emergent Agency in Guangzhou Urban Regeneration Practices

Abstract: How to capture, represent, and materialize public interest in planning has gone through multiple rounds of experimentations, crystallizing a number of regulatory regimes of planning in different historical and political-economic contexts. In China, the growing awareness of a heterogeneous society has, again, foregrounded the issue with the ever-proliferating insurgent activities of the settler community, the participatory of the industries, and the knowledge bodies, on top of the (semi-)vertical decentralization of the land-and-planning sector itself.

Things at issue here is the constitutional structure of the representative mechanism for the public, - in terms of the uneven power of actors and their varying participating rights and practices, and the impact on those who are affected by their policy outputs - and the process of its re-constitution. Situated in this concern, this study aims to unravel the dynamic interactions between insurgent agency by the community and the inherited structure, and possible outcomes. This study then attempts to explore possibilities to pry open the pre-existing structure and nurture reconfiguration of the representative mechanism for the public. Reckoning with Giddens' structuration thinking, this proposed research will take a processual approach to examine how planning regime evolves through the interactions of inherited structure and insurgent agencies: on the one hand, I will engage the planning parameters that have been developed by Habermas, Healey, and Forester on John Dewey's ideas of the "public" to examine China's regulatory structure of planning and its changes; on the other hand, I will engage literature on scalar politics in contentious/insurgent actions to understand the variegated social groups and their agencies, which are sometimes collaborative and some other times, conflictual and competitive.

The city of Guangzhou might be a valuable site for studies on such a dynamic process, in which insurgent actions by residents, journalists, intellectuals, and others, seem to have nudged a number of regulatory reforms, incremental as they were, in urban regeneration projects. As a practitioner and observer in the Enninglu regeneration project, the candidate has collected a range of first-hand dynamic data in the past three years. During the fieldwork, the candidate's experiences in participatory observation will be deployed to kick start the data collection, whilst more informants

will be approached through the snow-ball effect for interviews and focus group discussions. Both agencies along with discursive and material/performative dimensions will be collected. Secondary data of media reports, policies, and other official documents will be included as well. Upon completion, this research aims to provide a more nuanced picture of the interactions between inherent structure and insurgent actions in regeneration project, and how the process reshapes the regulatory system of planning to capture, represent, and materialize the public interest in an ever-heterogenous society.