

Displacement and Resettlement with Chinese Characteristics: An Editorial Introduction

Mark Wang*
The University of Melbourne

Kevin Lo**
Hong Kong Baptist University

This special issue focuses on population displacement and resettlement in China and argues that many aspects of displacement and resettlement make China a unique case. From a wide variety of viewpoints, the contributors to this special issue provide readers with rich empirical evidence and insightful conceptual framework for understanding the causes, processes, and consequences of displacement and resettlement in China. Their contributions address varied types of displacement and resettlement, such as natural resource exploitation (e.g. dams and mining), urban renewal, and environmental protection, many of which have not received sufficient research attention. This special issue introduces the Chinese perspective to enrich the global discussion of population displacement and resettlement, opening up new possibilities for future research.

***Keywords:** Displacement, resettlement, resource exploitation, urban renewal, environmental protection, China*

Population displacement and resettlement has become a proliferating global issue, especially in developing countries. A considerable body of research shows that involuntary displacement and resettlement significantly disrupt the lives of affected people, and the negative consequences often generate social conflicts with serious repercussions (Fratkin, 2014; McDowell, 1996; Shami, 1993). Furthermore, the dichotomy between voluntary and involuntary resettlement has been a subject of intense debate. It can be difficult to define voluntary or involuntary resettlement, both empirically and theoretically, as many 'voluntary' resettlements have been found to involve less obvious forms of coercion (Milgroom & Spierenburg, 2008; Morris-Jung & Roth, 2010; Mulugeta & Woldesemait, 2011; Xue, Wang, & Xue, 2013).

This special issue focuses on population displacement and resettlement in China, where it has become a significant social problem. China is undergoing unprece-

* Mark Wang, School of Geography, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. myw@unimelb.edu.au

**Kevin Lo, Department of Geography, Hong Kong Baptist University, Kowloon Tong, Hong Kong. lokevin@hkbu.edu.hk

dedented economic growth. There is enormous demand for infrastructure development – and consequently for resettlement projects – to sustain growth and support an increasingly urbanised population. Chinese and Western media have reported conflicts associated with resettlement. Do displacement and resettlement in China simply reflect a global phenomenon? Alternatively, is there something unique about China's experience? This editorial introduction and the special issue argue that many aspects of displacement and resettlement make China a unique case, in terms of causes, processes, and consequences. This special issue introduces the Chinese perspective to enrich the global discussion of population displacement and resettlement, opening up new possibilities for future research.

Diversity is another central emphasis of this special issue. Resettlement in China, as elsewhere, comes in different types. Additionally, given the country's diversity and scale, even one type can take many different forms. Development-induced displacement and resettlement can include natural resource exploitation (e.g. dams and mining), urbanisation and encroachment on farmland, urban renewal, and environmental protection. The differences between these subtypes are significant. The relevant literature on China focuses on reservoir resettlement, with the Three Gorges Dam the most-studied case (Heming, Waley, & Rees, 2001; Jing, 1997; Tan, Hugo, & Potter, 2003; Wilmsen, Webber, & Yuefang, 2011; Yuefang & Steil, 2003). The literature has established that China's reservoir resettlement is forced/involuntary, and that it has had a negative social and economic impact on affected people. Although reservoir construction is a significant cause of displacement in China, other causes leading to 'hidden' cases of displacement and resettlement often are ignored. Examples include, but not limited to, resettlement triggered by urbanisation, urban renewal, poverty alleviation, and environmental conservation. In light of the importance of the phenomenon in China, this issue addresses a seriously under-researched area by examining less-studied types of resettlement and presenting different perspectives on them.

In this editorial introduction, we first briefly survey the existing literature on displacement and resettlement in China and then introduce the articles in the special issue. We conclude with a discussion of the theoretical contributions of the articles.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF DISPLACEMENT AND RESETTLEMENT IN CHINA

Our literature survey identifies four characteristics of displacement and resettlement in China: the dominance of development-induced displacement and resettlement; government-led and serving governmental interests; low compensation for those displaced; and the lack of post-resettlement livelihood restoration. However,

given the great diversity of China, these characteristics should not be taken as universal but rather as significant trends.

The Dominance of Development-Induced Displacement and Resettlement

Broadly speaking, there are three agents of displacement: war and other types of violence; natural disasters, including climate change; and development projects. Unlike African and Arab countries, which have borne the highest global levels of war refugees, China experiences the world's highest levels of development-induced resettlements. Worldwide, development-induced resettlement projects force approximately 15 million people each year to leave their homes, with China contributing the majority (Cernea, 2006). This number, however, does not include displacement and resettlement related to urban development projects, which is staggeringly common, as almost every city in China is undergoing considerable development.

The role of development in resettlement raises questions about fairness in outcomes. As Dickinson and Webber (2007) argue, following Wilmsen & Webber (2105: 79), "The linkage between the 'process of development' and the 'outcome of development' is not inherent, instead being bounded by the aspirations of the state and/or the project proponent, and subject to their interpretations of development". Empirical studies have been very clear that most people affected by reservoir resettlement in China have suffered economic impoverishment, social disarticulation, and environmental degradation (Heming et al., 2001; Rogers & Wang, 2006; Wilmsen et al., 2011). The enormous benefits of dams – electricity generation, flood control, and easier navigation – come with high costs that are borne by those dispossessed to make way for development. In official discourse, development justifies dispossession and resettlement. However, to what extent does development benefit the poor?

Government-led and Governmental Interests

Displacement and resettlement projects in China are almost without exception government-led and serve governmental interests. These interests include environmental protection, such as the construction of hydropower, which the government views as 'clean' energy, ecological restoration, economic development, and poverty alleviation. As a result, much of the literature focuses on the role of government in displacement and resettlement, especially regarding compulsory land acquisition (Tan et al., 2003; Yuefang & Steil, 2003). Although World Bank policy directives mandate the involvement of affected populations in the planning and implementation stages of resettlement (Milgroom & Spierenburg, 2008), the government's dominant role means that non-state stakeholders do not contribute meaningfully to the governmental processes. The voices of the poor and politically marginalized are rarely heard. Without meaningful participation of the affected people, how can their interests be protected? There is no institutional mechanism to guarantee that resettled people can live properly in their new locales.

We also should be mindful that government in China is far from monolithic. It instead comprises multiple levels that are more or less independent from each other, within a 'de facto federalism' system (Lieberthal, 1992; Zheng, 2007). In fact, the central-local relation often is a critical factor in Chinese governance, and displacement and resettlement is no exception. Local governments initiate many urbanisation-related resettlement programs, sharing economic benefits from land acquisition with developers. The central government does have policies and guidelines, but local government is given (intentionally or not) a great deal of freedom in implementation (Lo, 2014). There is no guarantee that the procedure the central government has established will be followed; corruption and mismanagement abound. For scholars of displacement and resettlement, it is important to note that the size and nature of a resettlement project will determine which level(s) of government will be involved. For example, the central government spearheads the Three Gorges Dam as a national development project, whereas local governments mainly implement urban development and renewal projects.

Low Compensation

There is some variation in compensation for displacement and resettlement, depending on the locality, the type of resettlement project, and the negotiation tactics employed by the resettlers. Nevertheless, the level of compensation has been very low in general (Heming et al., 2001). Typically, the compensation package includes an apartment or house of similar size to the demolished dwelling, and some cash to cover the cost of moving and to compensate the loss of land. The compensation formula stipulated by the central government has been unfair, and local governments often fail to pay the full amount out of self-interest (Jing, 1997). According to central government policy, resettlement subsidies should be 4–6 times the average annual output value of acquired land whereas land compensation should be 6–10 times the average annual output value (Ding, 2007). Such calculation is unfair because it ignores the increase in the market value of land that comes with land use change. Inadequate compensation is especially problematic because welfare provisions and social security in China are underdeveloped. Depriving farmers of land, which serves as an important safety net, without providing alternatives puts great pressure on an already vulnerable population.

Out of Sight, Out of Mind

Government has the dual role of initiating and structuring the displacement process and of ensuring the livelihood restoration of the affected people post-resettlement. In China, insufficient post-resettlement livelihood restoration is associated with how the government determines what should be compensated and how it calculates compensation. Thus far, Chinese resettlement programs have largely ignored the post-resettlement issues faced by resettlers (Shi, Chen, & Yu, 2009).

Resettlement projects often focus on the physical moving of people and houses, while paying little attention to post-project issues such as community building and restoration of livelihoods. A key livelihood concern among resettlers in rural-urban migration is the lack of educational and occupational experience, which makes it very difficult for resettlers to adapt to urban life (Zhu & Prosterman, 2007). Fairer compensation is necessary, but it is equally important for the government to help farmers, especially middle-aged farmers, to overcome the challenges of adapting to an urban lifestyle. For example, the government can organise training programmes to equip farmers with vocational skills, provide employment guarantees or opportunities, conduct workshops on starting a business, and offer start-up funding to small businesses.

THE ARTICLES IN THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

The contributors to this special issue examine the complex and multifaceted phenomenon of displacement and resettlement in China from a rich variety of viewpoints and with a deep understanding of the subject. Their contributions address varied types of displacement and resettlement in China, many of which have not received sufficient research attention.

David Wang opens the discussion with a case study of the urban renewal process in Shenzhen, which has resulted in the demolition of many urban villages (*chen zhong cun*) and the resettlement of their inhabitants. Urban villages are, quite literally, villages (in the sense that the government classifies them as rural and village committees that collectively own the land and properties) that have been engulfed by the expansion of urban areas (Wu, 2009). The paper offers a detailed analysis of the key stakeholders, as well as the strategies and perspectives of urban villagers and real-estate developers during the resettlement process. Significantly, David Wang argues that the resettlement process is not a one-way process with real estate developers as bullies and urban villagers as victims. Rather, the relationship between urban villagers and developers should be characterised as both collaborative and competitive.

This article is followed by Zhang's analysis of urbanisation-induced resettlement in Chongqing and Kunming, both large inland Chinese cities undergoing rapid urbanisation. Focusing on the impact of resettlement, the paper provides a compelling account of the different types of resettlement arrangements and argues that the experience of the farmer-resettlers varied significantly depending on the type of housing to which they were relocated. The diversity in resettlement arrangements epitomises the fluctuating practices of urbanisation-induced resettlement projects at the local level.

Li, Wang and Day analyse the strategic gaming of conflict resolution in resettlement. Their findings suggest that local authorities enjoy a great deal of flexibility in dealing with different types of disputes, although the processes lack transparency.

The authorities tend to give concessions (e.g. higher compensation) to ‘nail households’ (*ding zi hu*) to ensure progress and avoid more serious conflicts. However, concessions for ‘nail households’ (those that resist and delay displacement and resettlement) may have adverse effects on future resettlement as they can seem unfair to resettlers who received standard compensation.

Returning to the city, Li, Chen and Li study the resettlement associated with urban renewal of slums and squatter settlements (*peng hu qu*) in Fushun. Like other industrial cities in northeast China, Fushun is home to many large residential neighbourhoods developed by now defunct state-owned enterprises. During the state-owned sector reform in the 1990s, many workers were laid off and these neighbourhoods gradually deteriorated into slums. They conducted a comprehensive impact assessment to discover the impact of these resettlement programs at the district, community, and individual levels.

In the penultimate paper, Han explores the intersection between reservoir resettlement and urbanisation using the case of Qingshanzui reservoir project in Yunnan province. The case demonstrates the benefits of resettling affected people to cities. However, and similar to Wu, Han argues that the success of the resettlement depends on the degree of sociocultural and economic adaptation.

The next paper turns to the ecological resettlement of ethnic minority groups in Guizhou. One of China’s most multicultural provinces, Guizhou also is one of its poorest and most environmentally harsh. To eliminate stubborn poverty, the Guizhou government has earmarked more than two million people for relocation from 2012–20, with the majority of resettlers ethnic minorities. Wu discovers that most of the ethnic resettlers have been relocated to newly designated industrial parks in proximity to cities or county-towns. They are expected to adapt by becoming factory workers and public employees. However, the conversion of farmers with different cultural backgrounds and languages into urbanites has been a challenge.

In the final paper, Yang and Day introduce yet another form of resettlement. In many Chinese cities, urban expansion is accompanied by the relocation of government administrative offices from the central city to new towns located on the outskirts. These ‘government job resettlement’ programs have been implemented mainly to stimulate the development of new towns. The authors argue for a new evaluative framework of post-resettlement travel welfare based on the Sen-Nussbaum Capabilities Approach. The new framework is more relevant to people’s actual travel experience, and can generate a compelling alternative to the current utility-based quantitative approaches to travel well-being evaluation.

TOWARDS A MORE NUANCED UNDERSTANDING

This special issue elucidates various types of development-induced displacement and resettlement. Although all of the papers concern China, each focuses on a spe-

cific type of displacement and resettlement. This issue provides original insights into China's less-studied types of displacement and resettlement, which have not received sufficient research attention, mostly because China's displacement and resettlement studies have focused overwhelmingly on the case of the Three Gorges Dam. It is evident that the more localised types of displacement and resettlement are distinct from the Three Gorges Dam resettlement because with the former, local governments are the key actors. There are few national guidelines for displacement and resettlement, and local governments often do not adhere to them.

The empirical advances presented in this rich collection of papers make a strong case for a more nuanced approach to the study of displacement and resettlement in China. In particular, two themes emerge. First, much of the attention on resettlement in China has focused on the role of the government and developers, in large part due to the assumption that these actors are the key decision-makers. This has led us to overlook the role of resettlers, who are not entirely passive participants. This collection, in fact, shows that it is not uncommon for resettlers to fight for better compensation. For example, both Li et al. and Wang describe 'nail households' as a well-known phenomenon in China, where the affected people refuse to move out of the original dwelling and delay the resettlement process as much as possible. Which resettlers are more inclined to resist, the strategies they employ and the results they obtain are some of the questions that future studies should address.

Second, there is considerable diversity in the resettlement process, in terms of governance, compensation levels, and resettlement destinations. Consequently, the impact of resettlement is marked by a high degree of variety. From the perspective of the affected people, the results of resettlement are not always "economic impoverishment, social instability and environmental degradation" (Heming et al., 2001). In fact, Wang, Hui, Chen and Li, Xiao, and Wu in this special issue all argue that the resettlement programs they studied mainly have benefited resettlers, raising their living standards and creating more economic opportunities. Although the empirical evidence must be interpreted critically, it does suggest that displacement and resettlement in China are not homogenous, as once was thought. There is a need for broader and deeper understanding of the dynamics between different types of resettlement and their impact. Why do some resettlement projects seem to produce better results, from the perspective of the people they affect? This is not an easy question to answer. In sum, we will need a new theoretical framework that integrates the causes, processes, and effects of displacement and resettlement, rather than treating them as separate issues.

REFERENCES

- Cernea, M. (2006). Development-induced and conflict-induced IDPs: bridging the research divide. *Forced Migration Review*, 261:25-27.

- Dickinson, D., and Webber, M. (2007). Environmental resettlement and development, on the Steppes of Inner Mongolia, PRC. *Journal of Development Studies*, 43(3):537-561.
- Ding, C. (2007). Policy and praxis of land acquisition in China. *Land Use Policy*, 24(1):1-13.
- Fratkin, E. (2014). Ethiopia's Pastoralist Policies: Development, Displacement and Resettlement. *Nomadic Peoples*, 18(1):94-114.
- Heming, L., Waley, P., and Rees, P. (2001). Reservoir resettlement in China: past experience and the Three Gorges Dam. *The Geographical Journal*, 167(3):195-212.
- Jing, J. (1997). Rural resettlement: past lessons for the Three Gorges Project. *The China Journal*, 38:65-92.
- Lieberthal, K. G. (1992). Introduction: the "fragmented authoritarianism" model and its limitations. In K. G. Lieberthal & D. M. Lampton (Eds.), *Bureaucracy, politics, and decision making in post-Mao China*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, pp. 1-30.
- Lo, K. (2014). China's low-carbon city initiatives: The implementation gap and the limits of the target responsibility system. *Habitat International*, 42:236-244.
- McDowell, C. (1996). *Understanding Impoverishment: The Consequences of Development-induced Displacement*. Oxford: Berghahn books.
- Milgroom, J., and Spierenburg, M. (2008). Induced volition: Resettlement from the Limpopo National Park, Mozambique. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 26(4):435-448.
- Morris-Jung, J., and Roth, R. (2010). The blurred boundaries of voluntary resettlement: a case of Cat Tien National Park in Vietnam. *Journal of Sustainable Forestry*, 29(2-4):202-220.
- Mulugeta, M., and Woldesemait, B. (2011). The impact of resettlement schemes on land-use/land-cover changes in Ethiopia: a case study from Nonno resettlement sites, central Ethiopia. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 13:269-293.
- Rogers, S., and Wang, M. (2006). Environmental resettlement and social dis/re-articulation in Inner Mongolia, China. *Population and Environment*, 28(1):41-68.
- Shami, S. (1993). The social implications of population displacement and resettlement: An overview with a focus on the Arab Middle East. *International Migration Review*, 27(1):4-33.
- Shi, G., Chen, X., and Yu, Q. (2009). Post-resettlement support: Policy aimed at

- poverty alleviation and sustainable development. *Advances in Water Resources and Hydraulic Engineering*. New York: Springer, pp. 1446-1455.
- Tan, Y., Hugo, G., and Potter, L. (2003). Government-organized distant resettlement and the Three Gorges Project, China. *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, 18(3):5-26.
- Wilmsen, B. and Webber, M. (2015). What can we learn from the practice of development-forced displacement and resettlement for organised resettlements in response to climate change? *Geoforum* 58(1):76-85.
- Wilmsen, B., Webber, M., and Yuefang, D. (2011). Development for whom? Rural to urban resettlement at the Three Gorges Dam, China. *Asian Studies Review*, 35(1):21-42.
- Wu, F. (2009). Land development, inequality and urban villages in China. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 33(4):885-889.
- Xue, L., Wang, M. Y., and Xue, T. (2013). 'Voluntary' poverty alleviation resettlement in China. *Development and Change*, 44(5):1159-1180.
- Yuefang, D., and Steil, S. (2003). China Three Gorges project resettlement: Policy, planning and implementation. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 16(4):422-443.
- Zheng, Y. (2007). *De Facto Federalism in China: Reforms and Dynamics of Central-local Relations*. Hackensack, NJ: World Scientific Publishing Company.
- Zhu, K., and Prosterman, R. (2007). *Securing Land Rights for Chinese Farmers: A Leap Forward for Stability and Growth*. Washington, DC: The Cato Institute.