

How Unique is 'China Model': A Review of Theoretical Perspectives on China's Urbanization in Anglophone Literature

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Abstract: As a major aspect of the 'China Model', urbanization in China is being heatedly discussed in the Anglophone literature in the last two decades. By considering China's urbanization as a 'testing ground' of 'western' theories, these studies are important for the understanding of China's ongoing urban restructuring and exchanging knowledge with 'western' insights. Based on a survey of existing studies, this paper identifies various endogenous and exogenous concepts and explanations of China's urbanization. It is suggested that China's urbanization is mainly driven by a combination of political decentralization and neoliberalization with various forms of social stratification and mobility. However, it is argued that the distinctness of the 'China Model', which is usually used to support the legitimacy of studies of China's urbanization, has led to many controversial arguments and diminished the due contributions of Chinese scholars in the knowledge production of China's urbanization. To consolidate the legitimacy of studies on China's urbanization and enhance the roles of Chinese scholars, we suggest future studies to pay more attentions to the fundamental theories with looser constraints and 'true questions' on China's urbanization.

Keywords: theoretical perspective; urbanization; endogenous; exogenous; China Model

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1 Introduction

Up to now, China has maintained its fast growth for more than 30 years and accumulated a huge volume of wealth. The trajectory of China's drastic development is so special that it is usually termed as the 'China Model'. The 'China Model' catches even more eyes when the world found that China still kept its steady growth after the financial crisis since 2008. Some foreigners even start to change their questions from 'Does China matter?' to 'Why does China matter?' (Ma, 2009). Actually, a lot of Chinese scholars (both indigenous and oversea) also wonder 'why this old car (China) can run so fast though it is so crude?' (Zhou, 2008). While few agree-

ments have been reached on the key distinctive characteristics and unique mechanisms of the 'China Model', most scholars will agree that urbanization is one of the most important components of the 'China Model'. Just as 'the urban question' lies in the hearts of capitalist states (Castells, 1977), urbanization also plays a decisive role in driving both the economic growth and socio-economic transformations in China (Wu, 2007). On one hand, China's rapid economic growth and influx of foreign capital have always been driven by the processes of urbanization in terms of both influx of rural migrants and expansion of urban land (He *et al.*, in press). On the other hand, as China is rapidly moving towards an urban society, it is being increasingly re-

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shaped by the transformations in both its spatial landscape and social classes. Just as viewed by economist Joseph Stiglitz, China's urbanization would be one of 'the two keys to influence human development in the 21st century' (People's Daily Online, 2005).

As a result, China's urbanization has become one of the most important themes on China's top policy agenda and is attracting increasing attentions in Anglophone urban studies. A large number of papers on China's urbanization have been published in English journals in the last few decades. For the purpose of this review, we have traced published articles and books on Google Scholar (November 2013). Using the combined keywords 'China urbanization geography-CNKI'^①, 20 200 publications were identified since 2000. If we exclude the word 'China' to include academic researches on any country, the number of returned papers and books was 56 500, indicating that the geographical studies related to China's urbanization take a proportion of nearly 35.75% in studies of urbanization in the world. Many English book series on urban China have also been published, including the Routledge's studies in human geography (Fan, 2008), studies on China in transition (McGee *et al.*, 2007), housing and society series (Wang, 2004), contemporary China series (Wu, 2007; Lin, 2009a; Wu *et al.*, 2014), planning, history and environment series (Lu, 2006) and Blackwell's studies in urban and social change (Logan, 2008). Another evidence is the attendance of foreign geographical annual meetings. As many as 229 abstracts containing 'China' were presented in the 2013 Annual Meeting of Association of American Geographers (AAG).

These overseas studies not only introduce new perspectives to interpret the ongoing urban restructuring, but also serve as a bridge to compare China's urban processes with 'western' insights on Western urbanization. Therefore, it will be useful to briefly summarize China's urbanization in Anglophone literature. However, while some scholars have conducted comprehensive reviews on the major themes in urban studies of China (Yan, 1995; Ma, 2002; Li, 2005; He *et al.*, 2006), the theoretical perspectives on China's urbanization have not been referred to very much. Therefore, this paper represents a modest effort in this direction. An analytical

framework will be developed to summarize the major theoretical perspectives adopted in English geographical journals and help advancing our interpretation of China's urban transformations in future studies.

2 An Analytical Framework to Summarize Existing Theoretical Views

There is a large body of literature on China's urbanization and urbanism (Middelhoek, 1988; Pannell, 1990; Yeung and Zhou, 1991; Wei, 1995; Yan, 1995; Ma, 2002; Li, 2005; He *et al.*, 2006). Most of these reviews are organized around major themes of China's urbanization. For instance, in their review of geographical studies from 1995 to 2005, He *et al.* (2006) classify relevant studies into three themes, i.e., internal change and reorganization of cities (including urban growth, (re) development, suburbanization, urban system), external globalizing forces (FDI, global cities), and political and social transformations (urban governance, migrants, housing changes, regional inequalities). Ma (2002) provides a preliminary overview of the progress in achievement of researches before 2000 related to such themes as conceptualization of urbanization, effects of globalization, urbanism, land use and administrative reorganization. Pannell (1990) also identified a series of topics varying from definition of city and level of urbanization, urban system and spatial inequality, path of urban development, internal structure and methodological issues.

While existing literature reviews have covered the major themes of studies on China's urbanization, they can be further extended in the following two ways. First, since existing reviews are no latter than 2006, they can be enriched by incorporating more topics and achievements in the more recent studies. Second, as most existing reviews include a large proportion of empirical studies, the major advances in theoretical perspectives to China's urban transformation are inadequately summarized. Actually, as Ma (2002) concludes in his review, a context-based theorization of urban change is still under-developed and the political role in China's urbanization is still inadequately examined. Consequently, the importance and legitimacy of many studies on urban

^① We use keyword CNKI to exclude the articles published in Chinese and compiled by www.cnki.net

China are being questioned while the literature on China's urbanization is booming. For example, some researchers already started to reflect how much knowledge previous studies have been produced to interpret urban restructurings in China; some also criticize that the so-called 'Chinese characteristics' of urban processes in China may become a 'cliché' (Chan, 2010) if researchers emphasize the country-specific features on the one hand and adopt the Western theories on the other. Therefore, this paper tries to provide a summary of the major theoretical perspectives to China's urbanization based on updated English studies.

Theory is usually defined as a 'systematically related set of statements' to increase scientific understanding of various phenomena (Hunt, 1991). These statements have two general characteristics: on the one hand, they are usually composed with abstract concepts which are generalized from many concrete phenomena; on the other, they represent a series of relations that are empirically testable and applicable to interpret facts. To put it simply, theory mainly includes derivation of abstract concepts with clear definitions and development of law-like mechanisms with general power of explanations. According to this classification, the existing theoretical perspectives on China's urbanization can be classified into two types: concepts and mechanisms or driving forces. According to the ways of theorization, existing perspectives can also be classified into two sorts: endogenous and exogenous geographies (Liu and Xu, 2008). The former are based on typology or generalization of typical (or special) cases, the latter are derived from imported premises or existing perspectives. The combination of these classifications leads to a framework presented in Table 1, which is helpful for us to understand existing theoretical perspectives on China's

urbanization. In the following sections, we will present the major theoretical perspectives to China's urbanization based on this framework.

3 Concepts on China's Urbanization

Generally, scholars adopt two ways to define the features and terms of China's urbanization. Whilst some scholars try to put forward various Chinese-style terms based on the urban processes and phenomena in China, some others mainly try to apply existing Western terms to interpret and demonstrate the ongoing urbanization in China. This section will provide a brief summary of each type of concepts and definitions.

3.1 Domestic terms: from *chengzhongcun* to *chenzhenhua*

An important contribution of studies on China's urbanization is the formation and explanation of various Chinese-style terms. The most typical examples are the usage and definition of *chengzhongcun* (village in the city) and *hukou* (household registration) in Chinese context. *Chengzhongcun*, which is also translated as urban villages, villages-in-the-city and sometimes peasant enclaves (Ma and Xiang, 1998), was introduced to English literature in as early as the 1970s (Johnson, 1976). Nevertheless, due to its complex features in terms of property right, population composition and landscapes, *chengzhongcun* is still attracting scholarly attention, such as its connotations (Chung, 2010) and property rights (Li, 2008). Similarly, *hukou* as one of the most basic and special terms in China, has also become an important term in studies on China's urbanization. Chan (2009) has reviewed the heated discussions of this term in urban studies. *Danwei* (work unit) (Bjorklund, 1986;

Table 1 A matrix of theoretical perspectives on China's urban transformation

Perspective	Concept and definition	Explanation of driving forces and socio-spatial outcome		
		State	Economy	Society
Endogenous geographies: generalization of specific urban processes and phenomena	<i>Chengzhongcun</i> (village in the city), <i>hukou</i> (household registration), <i>danwei</i> (work unit), township, <i>chenzhenhua</i> (city- and town-ification), peripheral urbanism	De/recentralization, controlled urbanization, urbanization from below, land leasing, urban planning, administrative urbanization	Marketization, housing commercialization, land market, globalization, exo-urbanization	Transition, <i>guanxi</i> (social network), dual-track urbanization; inequality, (housing) differentiation
Exogenous geographies: application of existing theories	Level of urbanization, (post) sub-urbanization, redevelopment, gated community, enclave urbanism	Scale, governance, entrepreneurship, place promotion	Neoliberalism, capital accumulation, rent gap, capital switch, growth coalition, shortage economy	Migration, life course, residential satisfaction; segregation, social deprivation, gentrification

Wu, 2005), development zones (Wei and Leung, 2005) and township (Ma and Fan, 1994) are also among the most well-known terms with Chinese characteristics. Recently, new migrant enclaves such as ethnic enclave (Li et al., 2009), *xincheng* (new town) (Lin, 2007; Xue et al., 2013; Shin, 2014), and *chengzhenhua* (city- and town-ification) (Chen and Gao, 2011) are drawing more and more scholarly attention. The urbanization paths of inland cities are also being increasingly studied under the term of peripheral urbanism (Cliff, 2013) or frontier boomtown urbanism (Woodworth, 2012).

3.2 Imported terms: from level of urbanization to enclave urbanism

More studies try to describe and interpret China's urbanization with Western concepts. However, quite a few of these studies introduce new meanings to these terms. In this sense, they also make theoretical contributions to studies on China's urbanization. One of the most salient examples is the 'level of urbanization'. As a clear and basic term in examining urbanization, the level of urbanization should be easily and accurately constructed. However, under both the *hukou* system and the special administrative structure in China, statistics of urbanization levels released by Chinese Government can be very misleading. The exclusion of many semi-urbanized rural migrants is a common issue, which is often known as 'incomplete urbanization' (Chan, 2010) or 'under urbanization' (Chan, 1994; Sjoberg, 1999) in China. To clarify the misconceptions and provide a more accurate estimation of China's urbanization level, many studies have been conducted to define China's urbanization level and each city's urban area (Ma and Cui, 1987; Zhou, 1988; Zhang and Zhao, 1998; Zhou and Ma, 2005). Based on the empirical stages of urbanization summarized from Western urban development, suburbanization is another important term borrowed from Western literature to depict and understand the patterns of urban expansions in China (Zhou and Ma, 2000). In the latest literature, the post-suburban form of China's urban spaces is also noticed and attracting more academic attention (Wu and Phelps, 2011).

Besides these two general indicators of urbanization, some terms characterizing specific forms of urbanization are also being introduced to interpret ongoing urban transformation in China. For example, gentrification is becoming an important perspective to interpret various

forms of urban redevelopment or social mobility in China (He, 2007). Gated community is also introduced to study new urban forms in China along with the commercialization of housing provision (Wu and Webber, 2004). There is also a recent trend to package different new forms of urban spaces in China into a general term, such as 'enclave urbanism', which is applied to denote not only the commercial residential neighborhood (Breitung, 2012), but also many other forms of enclaves, such as walled city, *danwei* and migrant clusters (He, 2013).

4 Explanations on China's Urbanization

This section will provide a summary of the mechanisms or models of the driving forces and explanations of various socio-spatial outcomes in urban development. As mentioned above, they can be classified into the endogenous and exogenous theoretical perspectives according. For instance, Ma and Wu (2013) mainly take an endogenous perspective when they argue that the systems and institutions specific to China's urban restructuring mainly include strong party-state at the central and local levels, close relationship between city leaders' career advancement and performance of their cities, rural-urban migration and strong inter-personal ties; Wu (2002a) also adopts an endogenous perspective to identify 'three pillars' (party-state, *danwei* and *hukou* system) of urban governance in China. In contrast, Logan (2008) mainly takes an exogenous perspective when he applies four 'western' perspectives (including modernization, dependency theory, developmental state and post socialist transition) to theorize China's urban transition; a similar argument can be made to the extended political-economic framework (based on theories such as 'capital switching', 'rent gap' and 'property regime') developed by Wu (1997) to explain the changing urban built environment in China.

Besides the endogenous-exogenous typology based on the starting point of theorization, the commonly used 'state-economy-society' trichotomy is also helpful to interpret the theoretical perspectives. To help interpret these three-dimensional factors reshaping China's urbanization, we have summarized the key features for each dimension based on both China's urban practices and existing theoretical researches. First, the most salient feature of China's political institution is *decentrali-*

zation/recentralization and restructuring, which makes the *scale* or central-local relation a rather explanative view to China's urban processes. Second, the economic aspect is mainly characterized by *marketization* and growth, which make the theories on *neoliberalization* and capital *accumulation* prevalent in studies of China's urbanization. With respect to the social dimension, the keywords are *transition* and mobility, which makes social *differentiation* and population *migration* the most important themes in social transformation in urban China. We will give a brief summary of previous studies according to this triple classification in the rest of this section.

4.1 Political driving forces of China's urbanization

It is commonly agreed among scholars that state plays a predominant role in China's urban transformation (Lin, 1999; 2000; 2007). As a strictly hierarchical party state, China is characterized by its strong power of government, which is not only the 'ultimate policymaker' but also the 'controller' which evaluates and approves major projects (Ma, 2002). In the pre-reform era, central government dominated China's urbanization through planned commands, *danwei* system, *hukou* system and various forms of political mobilization. These policies significantly reshaped the urban development in socialist China. For instance, by constraining the influx of rural population and economizing the cost of urbanization (Chan, 1992), urbanization rate in China was kept under 20% for 30 years. This is often known as the 'controlled urbanization' (Lin, 1998). After the reform and opening, local states started to play a more important role, though central government still remained 'the leading actor in the unfolding drama of economic transformation' (Ma, 2002). As a result, China's urban restructuring is increasingly reshaped by the changing central-local relations in the post-reform era. Accordingly, both endogenous and exogenous perspectives have paid substantial attention to the central-local relation.

4.1.1 Endogenous perspectives: from decentralization to recentralization

As depicted by a proverb in Chinese 'those above have policies while those below have their own ways of getting around them', local governments always try to bargain their own interests in the cellular or honeycomb structure which is beyond the reach of central govern-

ment (Shue, 1988). Thanks to the political decentralization since the 1980s, local governments gained more resources and incentives to promote urbanization in their jurisdictions. As a result, in the 1980s China was witnessed a boom of township, which is usually known as the '*urbanization from below*' (Ma and Fan, 1994; Ma and Cui, 2002) and '*dual-track urbanism*' (Shen *et al.*, 2002). Different types of cities were also systematically investigated such as those in the Zhujiang (Pearl) River Delta (Eng, 1997), the Wenzhou Region (Wei *et al.*, 2007) and Sunan Region (Wei, 2002), in which local states have dominated the local urbanization. However, the central-local relation was greatly restructured after the tax-sharing reform in 1994. As a response to the changing logic of political economy after the tax-sharing reform, China's urbanization also shifted its path of development in the 1990s. As Wu (1997) highlights, 'only when the central government launched the institutional and fiscal decentralization that the reorganization of urban development started'. According to the devices of tax-sharing, the taxes and fees generated in land expropriation constitute the largest proportions of fiscal revenues for most cities. As a result, the process of local-led *land leasing* becomes a decisive factor of China's urban development (Yeh and Wu, 1996; Wu, 2001; Lin and Ho, 2005; Zhu, 2005). The tax-sharing system also stimulated the inter-regional competition. To maximize fiscal revenue and accelerate urbanization within local jurisdictions, *urban planning*, especially, the strategic development planning, has also become a popular driving factor of urbanization (Wu and Zhang, 2007; Lin *et al.*, in press). To emphasize the important roles played by the local states in China's urbanization, some scholars propose terms such as 'state-sponsored and spontaneous urbanization' (Shen *et al.*, 2002) and 'administrative urbanization' (Liu *et al.*, 2012).

4.1.2 Exogenous perspectives: from scale to urban entrepreneurialism

Many Western perspectives are also introduced to theorize the role of state in China's urbanization. For example, *in situ urbanization* is applied by some scholars to interpret the bottom-up urban development in China (Zhu *et al.*, 2013). However, the most intensively studied and most widely applied perspectives are *scale*, *governance* and *urban entrepreneurialism*. First, the contradictory interactions between the central and local in China entail the application of the concept of *scale*

(Ma, 2005; Shen, 2007; Smart and Lin, 2007; Lin, 2009b). Under the Chinese context, scale is generally conceptualized as the administrative structure or political hierarchy, in which urban resources (such as fiscal revenues and grand projects) are allocated proportional to the level of a city in China (Zhao and Zhang, 1995; Fan, 1999; Chung, 2007; Chan, 2010). According to this perspective, China's urbanization is usually considered to be scale-related and the mega cities play the leading roles. Moreover, the large cities often accelerate their paces of urbanization through annexation of adjacent counties or other forms of administrative reorganization (Ma, 2005; Zhang and Wu, 2006). Second, as the local governments start to have more autonomy in promoting urbanization, urban *governance* becomes a heated term in recent studies on urban China (Wu, 2002a; Shen, 2004; Zhang and Wu, 2006; Xu and Yeh, 2009). Thirdly, the *urban entrepreneurialism* is also applied as an important perspective to interpret the role of state in urbanization. It is argued that Chinese local states, like their western counterparts, have also shifted from managerialism to entrepreneurialism while actively making various strategies to create conditions to attract investment. However, there are some distinct features of China's entrepreneurialism, such as state domination (Wu, 2003; Wu and Phelps, 2011) and coordination by upper governments (Chien and Wu, 2011). Under the analytical prism of urban entrepreneurialism, Chinese local states have adopted a series of urban strategies to improve their images and promote economic growth (Wu, 2000).

4.2 Economic driving forces of China's urbanization

With the deepening of marketization in China, economic factors and marketing logic have gained increasing explanatory power in the understanding of China's urbanization. In the pre-reform era, many important urban facilities and elements (such as housing and land) were mainly provided by the *danwei* under the system of 'enterprises running the society'. To economize the costs, most *danwei* only provided facilities at the lowest standards, making urbanization lagging behind industrialization (Chan, 1992). However, as urban housing and land market developed in China, many 'capitalism' characteristics emerged in China's urbanization. Many theoretical perspectives based on the capital accumulation and liberal regime are thus introduced.

4.2.1 Endogenous perspectives: from marketization to globalization

As a gradual progress, China's marketization is promoted by different agents in different fields. The key arena of marketization determining the post-reform urban development in China is *housing commercialization*, creation of urban *land market* and *economic globalization* (Wu, 2001). First, the *housing commodification* after the ending of public housing provision system (Wu, 1996; Zhou and Logan, 1996) is one of the most important factors influencing the built environment and life style in urban China. For example, it is revealed that housing commercialization not only increased private home ownership (Li, 2004), but also promoted the urban redevelopment (He and Wu, 2009). Second, the creation of *land market* is another driving force of China's urbanization. However, not like the housing market, which was mainly formed by the 'roll-out' of the state from housing provision, China's land market was initiated with the redefinition of land ownership and permission of land lease. Since Yeh and Wu (1996) summarized the major types of land transaction in a theoretical model, more attention has been drawn to the role of land development in urbanization. While some scholars focus on land development dominated by local governments (Lin, 2010, Lin and Yi, 2011), others also notice the processes led by rural collectives that have created a fragmented urbanizing landscape (Li, 2008; Zhu and Guo, 2014). Third, *globalization* and foreign investment have also greatly reshaped the urban development in post-reform China. For instance, it is noticed that much Singaporean investment has gone to China's industrial parks and accelerated the process of urbanization (Yeung, 2000); the investment from Hong Kong, China and Macao, China also greatly promoted the urbanization in the Zhujiang River Delta (Sit and Yang, 1997). The booming urban development pushed forward by the global forces is usually labeled as 'exo-urbanization' (Sit and Yang, 1997) or 'externally driven' urban development (Eng, 1997).

4.2.2 Exogenous perspectives: neoliberalization and capital accumulation

As China shifted to a market economy, many Western theories based on (neo)liberal regime and capitalism are also introduced to explain the new urban processes in China. For example, Wu (1997) developed a theoretical framework to interpret the transforming mechanisms of

the restructuring of urban spaces (especially, built environment), which combines many views based on capitalist states, such as *rent gap* and *capital switch*; Zhu (1999) applied the perspective of *growth coalition* to interpret the local practices in attracting investments and promote urbanization in China. However, the most influential yet controversial perspective is *neoliberalization*. As noticed by Wu (2007), radical 'urban revolution' rather than gradual changes are happening in China's urbanism and urban spaces in response to multiple crises and in pursuit of rapid development. Therefore, it is argued that China's urbanization is undergoing profound neoliberal shifts and can be termed as 'neoliberal urbanization' (He and Wu, 2009). Similar to many western neoliberal states, *capital accumulation* is also seen as a driving force for to China's economic rise and urban restructuring (Wu, 2007; He and Wu, 2009). This viewpoint has gained widespread popularity in recent studies. From the panel on 'Neoliberal China' in the 2007 Annual Meeting of the American Association of Geographers to 2011 Asia Pacific Network for Housing Research Conference, more and more scholars have resorted to neoliberalism when theorizing China's transformation and urbanization. It seems natural to label post-reform China as 'capitalism' with some adjectives, such as hybridity of 'developmental neoliberalism' (Chu, 2002) or 'authoritarian capitalism' (Ma, 2009). Even some of the most influential theorists such as David Harvey and Jamie Peck also try to explore Chinese economy and China's transition from political intervention to marketization under the prism of neoliberalism with 'Chinese characteristics' (Harvey, 2005; Peck and Zhang, 2013). However, the 'Chinese characteristics' still sparked fierce controversies surrounding the suitability of adopting neoliberal theories to study China's urbanization (Wu, 2008; Huang, 2008; Nonini, 2008; Wu, 2010; Cartier, 2011; Xu, 2011). For example, while China has shown emerging signs of accelerating capital accumulation through producing and selling urban spaces (He and Wu, 2009), some argue that the central government's engagement with neoliberalism is to some extent a 'loose hug rather than an intimate embrace' (Liew, 2005); similarly, although China's urban spaces are being transformed under the growth-centered logic, the Chinese state seemingly has skipped the 'roll-back' era but continues to play an interventionist role (He and Wu, 2009). As a result, it can be expected that more debates will be drawn to

the perspective of neoliberalization of China's urban processes in future studies.

4.3 Social context and outcomes of China's urbanization

China's urban society is also experiencing great transformations with rescaling of state power and marketization. In the plan economy, Chinese urbanites had very low mobility under the *hukou* and *danwei* system. On the one hand, they scarcely moved to rural region or other cities constrained by the migration control imposed by the *hukou* system; on the other, the social mobility was also very low in urban China because most urban residents were tied to their own *danwei* by both social welfare provision and personnel record system. However, China is witnessing a huge amount of *migration* and rapid social *differentiation* in the post-reform era. Unlike the political and economic dimensions of urbanization, relatively fewer theoretical considerations are made of social aspects of urbanization in China and existing studies focus more on the description than explanation of ongoing socio-spatial processes. Moreover, studies have not only investigated the social factors as the context and impetus of urbanization, but also examined the socio-spatial patterns as the outcomes of urban transformation.

4.3.1 Social context and impetus of urbanization in China

Population migration and *guanxi* (social networks) are among the most extensively studied social factors of China's urbanization. Studies on migration mainly concern the influence of rural migrants (*nongmingong*) on urbanization under the *hukou* system. The *hukou* system mainly promoted urbanization through two ways of migration control. On the one hand, owing to the highly uneven development among different regions in China, many rural labors (the 'floating population' were up to 2.6139×10^8 in 2010 according to the 6th population census (Data are available at: http://www.stats.gov.cn/zgrkpc/dlc/yw/t20110428_402722384.htm) are attracted to many mega-cities by the higher level of wage and more job vacancies. On the other, constrained by the *hukou* system, most of these semi-urbanized rural migrants are not counted as urban population and are excluded from or limited to the access of urban welfare and job opportunities. This contradiction of 'attraction vs. exclusion' rather than strict control of rural-urban

migration is now the key to understand the role of *hukou* system in promoting urbanization in post-reform China. In fact, the *hukou* system is a highly selective mechanism and the socio-economic eligibility of *hukou* status conversion is closely monitored and controlled in order to facilitate labor supply (Labor regime) (Fan, 2004) and economize the 'urbanization cost' (Chan, 1992; Chan and Buckingham, 2008; Chan, 2009). Migration permits and enrolment certification legislation were brushed aside during the Great Leap Forward, when the concerns for labor supply and economic growth were urgent. The manipulation of institutional urban-rural inequality and migration formed a *hukou*-related 'differential citizenship' (Wu, 2011) and a huge class of super-exploitable migrant labors (Chan, 1996; 2009), which attracted a large amount of foreign investment and greatly promoted China's urbanization. Studies on *guanxi* in China's rapid urbanization mainly take it as an important bridge in both rural-urban migration and foreign investment. On the one hand, informal social connections facilitated the influx of rural migrant workers from the same origins and made them clustered in a specific 'ethnic' enclave village, such as *Zhejiang Village* in Beijing (Ma and Xiang, 1998). On the other hand, the informal social ties also help attracting various foreign investments in the globalization era. For example, quite a lot of investments are embedded and 'fixed' in dense networks of social and political relationships (Smart and Smart, 1991; Hsing, 1996; Yeung, 2000; Smart and Lin, 2007).

4.3.2 Socio-spatial outcomes of urbanization in China

Many studies have also evaluated the socio-spatial outcomes of urbanization in China. Existing studies mainly focus on the themes of *housing differentiation*, *housing mobility* and *social deprivation*. First, it is noticed that privatization of real estate has become a source of socio-spatial differentiation in the post-reform China (Wu, 2002b). Therefore, both patterns and contributors of housing differentiation in urban China have been examined. It is revealed that differentiation within social groups is more significant and both institutional factors and market mechanisms contribute to the housing differentiation (Liu et al., 2011). Dissimilarity and spatial variation of housing tenure in China are also shown to be significant while the extent of segregation of social groups is not as profound as its Western counterparts (Li and Wu, 2008); it is suggested that the development of

gated contributes significantly contributes to the intensification of *residential segregation* (Wu, 2005). Meanwhile, as urban redevelopment currently becomes a prevalent urban phenomenon in China, the spatial replacement of social classes further intensifies the social differentiation in urban China. Perspective of gentrification is introduced to interpret this process (He, 2007; 2010). Second, *housing mobility* is also among the most extensively examined topics on urban China (Li and Huang, 2006). Li (2004) introduces the *life course* perspective to explain the change in residential mobility rate in Beijing and finds that the thesis of residential mobility as a housing-adjustment process may be less applicable to Chinese cities; Fang (2006) tries to explain the housing mobility based on the theories of *residential satisfaction* for residents living in redeveloped neighborhoods in Beijing, showing that low residential satisfaction does not lead to frequent moving behaviors because of lacking ability to adjust their changing housing needs. Third, scholars also make substantial efforts to reveal social *deprivation* and *inequality* in urban China, and many researchers have investigated the configuration and crystallization of deprivation and urban poverty among various social groups (Fang et al., 2002; Wu, 2004; He et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2010a; 2010b; Chen, 2011), the formation of disadvantaged groups and socio-spatial inequality patterns in urban China (Zhou and Logan, 1996; Logan et al., 1999; Wang and Murie, 2000). Generally, all these three topics are closely related to the state (Lin, 1999; 2007) and influenced by both *hukou* system, the legacy of *danwei* system and the rise of private housing.

5 Summary and Comments

To sum up, this literature review mainly summarizes the theoretical perspectives rather than empirical evidences in existing geographical studies on China's urban processes. Generally, studies on China's urbanization either adopt an endogenous perspective to generalize the mechanisms of urban development based on specific practices and processes happening in China or apply exogenous theories to explain the phenomena or transformation in urban China. Many concepts and explanations of both urbanization models and driving forces are provided. As implied above, China's urbanization is being restructured by the combination of *political re-*

scaling, neoliberalization and various forms of *social stratification* and *mobility*. Specifically, the studies on the political forces in China's urbanization mainly focus on the decentralization and recentralization of political control from a scalar view. The researches on the economical aspects emphasize the marketization of urban spaces such as housing and land and apply the prisms of neoliberalization and capital accumulation to interpret the urban transformation in China. With respect to the social dimension of urbanization, studies not only examine various social factors influencing urban transformation but investigate the socio-spatial outcomes in urban restructuring. While it is impossible to exhaust all the studies and provide detailed explanations of existing theories in such a short paper, we believe this literature review includes the major theoretical views adopted by scholars and provides a useful base for future studies on China's urbanization. However, more critical reading and reexamination of these theoretical terms and perspectives reviewed above are necessary to develop more sophisticated theoretical perspectives on China's urbanization.

5.1 Review of concepts on China's urbanization

As the studies reviewed above suggest, the terms to depict and theorize China's urban transformation are still underdeveloped. On the one hand, many terms are just translated into English from Chinese newspapers or policy documents. This makes many terms under Chinese cultural background blurred by the complex institutions in China. For example, the definition of urbanization level is defined based on both the *hukou* status and the political division of urban spaces in China; since the connotation of China's *hukou* status and the administrative structures are continually redefined by the government, it is incompatible with similar indicators in other countries. Actually, migration and administrative adjustments also happen in Western countries. However, they do not cause much trouble because the terms adopted in academic literatures try to avoid directly borrowing concepts from the policy documents. Therefore, the conceptual terms vulnerable to policy changes should be avoided in future theoretical studies on China's urbanization. On the other hand, many concepts are also directly introduced from Western literatures with inadequate reflections of their applicability. For example, the concepts and theories on 'capital' and

'surplus value' have been widely used to explain the urban processes in the so-called 'socialist' China. However, few studies have concerned whether it is suitable to apply these notions originating from capitalist regimes to a country which is alleged to have eliminated classes. If not, can we and why should we take China as a capitalist country? What is the exact connotation of the 'capital' and 'class', which is the base of the existence of 'capital', in urban China? By the same token, the 'public' property right system is also unclearly defined. If it is true, can we interpret the 'state' as the grabber of surplus in the two-track land market? If not, should we take the 'state' as an equivalent to capitalist in Marxist perspectives? Since the answers to these questions are critical for the validity of such notions as gentrification, neoliberalization and rent gap, more studies should be made to further clarify these concepts in the future.

5.2 Review of studies on political driving forces

A number of themes continue to have exploitable potentials. First, current studies tend to over-emphasize the hierarchical structure of Chinese political organizations. However, the state-sponsored urban processes in China are not just influenced by the juridical and territorial demarcation between different levels of governments. For example, the reconfiguration of urban system, planning practices and formation of various 'development zone' are as important as decentralization and administrative adjustment for China's urbanization. Second, scholars tend to neglect the continuity of China's political system before and after reform and opening-up and 'how this continuity is related to the contrasting urban processes' after reform. In addition, since the local states were also active in the planned economy period (Zhou, 2008), it is equally important to examine the similarities and coherent logics in different periods, especially the legacy of urban privilege, official incentives, growth strategies and empowerment of local states. Third, more attention should be paid to the role of *danwei* system and various development zones. It is noticeable that while the spatial forms (*danwei* is gated and enclosed yet development zones are zoned and more open) and functions in the provision of public facilities (*danwei* focuses on provision of consumption infrastructures yet the development zones provide investment environment), they are quite similar in the sense that both aim to promote industrialization and both enjoy a high de-

gree of independence (the *danwei* system or development zone management committee is actually a kind of government branch). Hence, it will be fruitful to investigate their roles in promoting urbanization under Chinese political context.

5.3 Review of studies on economical driving forces

There are also some points worth noticing with respect to this topic. First, while the growth logic is emphasized in China's urban transformation, the intervention by the government is still dominant. Consequently, it is rather important to answer '*how neoliberal is China's urban processes?*' (Nonini, 2008; Wu, 2010) and '*in what sense and way are capital drawn to urban spaces?*'. Second, it is necessary to pay attention to the question of 'why', i.e., '*why could China provide attractive environment for foreign investments on the base of its rigid political system?*' and '*why China is so passionate in promoting its economic growth through urbanization?*'. Third, scholars need to examine the formation of social classes in China's socio-spatial restructurings. Since the 'class restoration' is the key for neoliberalization (Harvey, 2007), to what extent the class power has 'restored' in China is important to answer the two questions (how neoliberal is China and why China becomes neoliberal) raised above.

5.4 Review of studies on socio-spatial outcomes

There are still some gaps meriting further attention for the studies on the socio-spatial mobility and stratification in urban China. First, as most existing studies focus on the socio-spatial consequences of urbanization in China, inadequate attention has been paid to the question that '*in what sense are the urban groups classes?*' (Solinger, 2012). Second, while it is reasonable to define current labor regime as a kind of institutional discrimination (Solinger, 1999), it is also necessary to answer '*why the rural migrants would like to move to the urban areas?*' It seems that the peasants choose to move to cities rather than live in the rural region. As a result, we should focus on the state-led contradictions in migration control and unequal institutional devices, which lead to some new forms of 'gates' in contemporary urbanization. Third, as more rural migrants move back to the cities or towns of their home regions, it is important to know how this backflow affects the urbanization of both their origins and the destinations.

6 Concluding Remarks: From Unique Evidence to Unique Theories

To conclude, we will discuss existing theoretical studies on China's urbanization from the perspective of knowledge production. In our opinion, the more challenging crisis in current theoretical studies is not the inadequate attention paid to theorization (Ma, 2002) or even the inaccuracy of some specific terms borrowed from Western literatures, but the legitimacy of many theorizing efforts. It is noticeable that a large proportion of previous studies tend to justify the importance of their studies by emphasizing the distinctive characteristics of China's urbanization which may not be explained by Western theories. However, we contend that this research paradigm have shifted the major focus of many existing studies from *explanation* of China's urban practices to testing the *applicability* of Western theories. More importantly, highlighting the exceptional features of China's urbanization has placed theorization of China's urbanization based on Western theories in a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, if China's urbanization is as unique as it is alleged to be, it would be unnecessary to adopt Western perspectives to China's practices because these two are mismatched (Fig. 1). Conversely, if few studies can pinpoint the critical 'Chinese characteristics' which make the 'Western' theories improper, the distinctness of China's urbanization would be just a 'cliché' (Chan, 2010). On the other hand, scholars are trapped in an embarrassing place while emphasizing the distinctiveness of China's urbanization. We argue that overemphasizing the regional or institutional differences tends to create a modern form of 'exceptionalism' (Schaefer, 1953) and a constructed occidentalism (Liu and Wang, 2013), which greatly hinder Chinese researchers from general theoretical reflections of the underlying mechanisms in China's urbanization and distinctive theoretical contributions to human knowledge. This partly explains why Chinese scholars fail to own the dominant discourse power in China's urban studies (Zhang et al., 2013).

Therefore, the major concerns for future studies should be in-depth and finer explanations of ongoing urban phenomena and processes (Fig. 1a) rather than the uniqueness of China's urban development. To help achieve this shift in goals of theorizing China's urbanization, this paper suggests two strategies for future

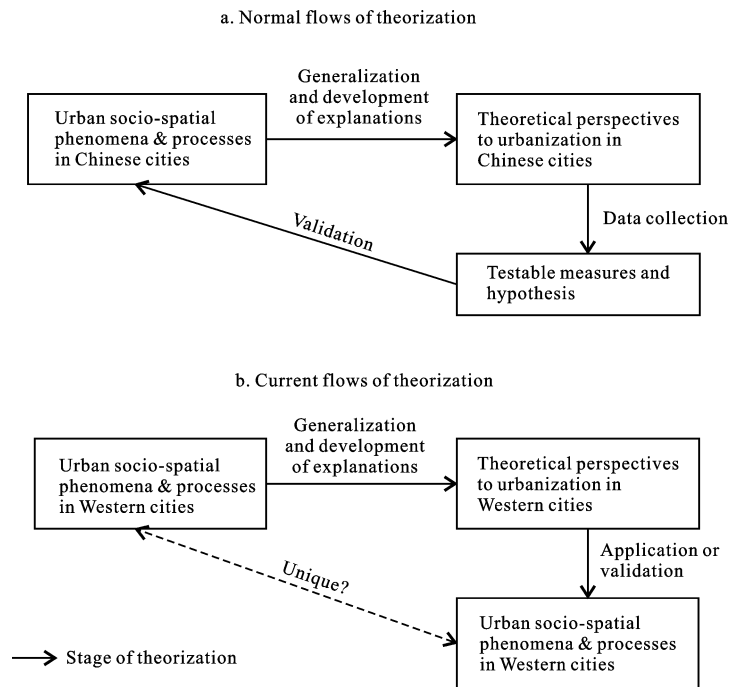


Fig. 1 Flows of theorization in normal and current studies

studies. First, it is necessary to resort to the fundamental theories rather than those specific to certain urban processes. For example, it is preferable to apply the Marxian or Foucauldian theories than the gentrification theory. The main legitimacy of this strategy is that the fundamental theories usually have fewer restrictions and can be applied to more general conditions. Second, it is more important to focus on the 'true questions' of explanation rather than empirical validation. The 'true questions' denote those about why something happens rather than whether a phenomenon fits certain theories developed on other practices. For instance, it will be more important to answer 'why Chinese Government is so obsessed by urban expansion?' than 'whether China's urbanization is a kind of entrepreneurialism'. Nevertheless, we are not saying that the latter does not have its academic values because it does provide new evidences for Western theories and indicates the suitability of a theory for China studies. We just remind the researchers that direct answers to such questions as 'why the urban processes are like that' are more useful for our understanding of urban China. Therefore, it would be more meaningful to start from China's real urban contexts of urban China, distinctive or not (Ma, 2002; Ma and Wu, 2013), to develop more sophisticated new theoretical perspectives with stronger explanatory powers.

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