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**BARGAINING FOR HOME:  
A CASE STUDY OF URBAN VILLAGE  
DEMOLITION PROJECTS IN BEIJING**

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# **Bargaining for home:**

## **A case study of urban village demolition projects in Beijing**

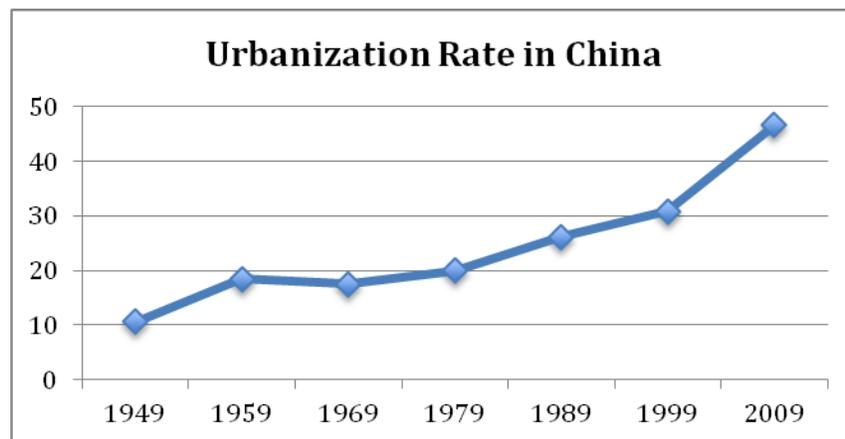
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### **Abstract:**

Using the Liulang Zhuang village as a case study, this paper explores how the simplification of state projects contradicts the complex reality of urban villages, how the state legitimates itself in conducting the projects, and how people receive and react to the state's advocacy. This paper begins by introducing the forming of urban villages and the state's policy toward them, aiming to show how the state's simplified version of urban design ignores history, the eco-system and the variety of social experience in the village. In order to legitimate itself, the state uses both "high-modernist" and "collective" ideology, claiming one should sacrifice personal interest for the collect good, which, in this case, is the development of the city. The exiting literature tends to see people as either totally subject to the state's policy or resisting it. Neither approach explains the situation in urban villages. The empirical data in this study shows that, influenced by ideology, past experience and current policy, people adopt a strategy of "bargaining", rather than total consent or radical resistance to the state. By allowing room for people to bargain, the state successfully shifts people's attention from questioning the ideology to how much they can gain. By agreeing to bargain, people gradually lose ground and yield to the state's projects.

## Background:

Ever since the market reform, the urbanization rate<sup>1</sup> in China has increased dramatically. As it is shown in Graph 1, the number increased from 20% in 1979 to 46.6% in 2009. It took 22 years for China's urbanization rate to rise from 20% to 40%, while it took Britain 120 years, France 100 year, Germany 80 years and America 40 years to do the same.<sup>2</sup> As the capital of China, Beijing's urbanization rate also increased rapidly. The number soared from 58.5% in 1980 to 85% in 2009, ranking the second highest among all cities in China.<sup>3</sup>



Graph 1. Urbanization Rate in China<sup>4</sup>

## The Projects and Government's view:

With the high urbanization speed, more and more people swarmed into the

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<sup>1</sup> The number of city population divided by the number of whole population.

<sup>2</sup> Chinese Cities Development Report 2009(中国城市发展报告). Beijing: China City Press, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> China Statistical Yearbook (中国统计年鉴). 2009

<sup>4</sup> National Bureau of Statistics of China: Urbanization rate in China (1949-2009).

cities and the cities grew rapidly. All kinds of modern buildings were mushrooming. Shopping malls, expensive restaurants, high-class recreation centers, commercial houses could be seen everywhere. Advanced transportation systems were built not only to link within the cities but also to help the cities to reach outward.

In order to meet the needs for further development, the cities demanded an increasing amount of land and started to sprawl out into suburban areas. With the expansion of the cities, some villages that used to lie at the urban-rural fringe zones are now taken into the cities and usually lie alongside freeways or near city centers. Without being reformed, these villages kept their original forms and stuck out in the cities like islands in the sea. Surrounded by urban infrastructures, the villages became the semi-urban places that could neither be defined as city nor village, so they are now called urban villages. These villages can be found in all major cities in China.

Beijing, like many large cities in China, has experienced several rounds of urban sprawls. Therefore urban villages in Beijing could be seen in both city centers and urban-rural fringe zones. Up to the year 2004, there were 231 estimated urban villages in the center of Beijing<sup>5</sup> and 112 urban villages near the integration zones<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Qing Yang, "231 Urban villages will be dismantled". *The Beijing News*, 28 Sep. 2004

<sup>6</sup> Jinshui Cai, "Beijing declare war towards urban villages", *Frontline*, 2005, issue 03.



Pic. 1 Sprawl of Beijing City



Pic. 2 Urban villages

China's urbanization process has been continuously stressed. The government sees it as an important way to promote economic growth and keeps pushing it forward. Not only the speed but also the quality of the urbanization is deemed particularly important. In the 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan, the central government continues to stress on optimizing the layout of the cities and elevating the level of urbanization.<sup>7</sup> The urban villages, being so different from the cities, were seen not only by government officials but also some scholars, as malicious tumors of the cities, which hinder the general quality of the urbanization, and therefore should be torn down.

After studying 240 urban villages in Fujian province, the research group of Fujian Provincial Civil Affairs Department concludes some characteristics of urban villages. For example, they are usually located in the city centers and people living in them no longer participate in agricultural production. Instead, villagers now rent

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<sup>7</sup> China's 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan on National Economic and Social Development, also known as "China's 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan". The plan starts from 2011 and ends in 2015. The five-year plans are a series of social and economic development initiatives which first starts in 1953.

houses out as a source of income. Since the renting prices are usually rather low, these villages usually attract many migrant workers. The study concludes that the gathering of heterogeneous people tends to bring prostitution, gambling and drug abuses which are harmful to cities' safety.<sup>8</sup>

Xiangyang Xin<sup>9</sup> researches on the urban villages in Beijing and also insists on the urgency of reforming them. He argues that urban villages compromise the quality of urbanization because of their negative influence on cities' environment and appearances. He finds that urban villages usually lack basic infrastructures like public bathrooms and toilets. The public spaces, such as streets were dirty, messy and usually covered with all kinds of garbage, which damage the general look of the city. Lying near transportation intersections, and swamped with floating population, the villages suffer from poor social managements and high criminal rates. Xin believes that the unstable environment of urban villages could exert very negative influence on the surrounding area.<sup>10</sup>

The "evil" of urban villages is also demonstrated from economic perspectives. Xinhong Zhou finds that most urban villagers build extra floors on their original houses for the purpose of collecting more housing rents. However, Zhou believes, adding extra floors are not only dangerous and illegal but also extremely inefficient in terms of land using. After calculating the input-output ratio, he draws the conclusion

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<sup>8</sup> Di Wu and Peng Gao, "Research progress of domestic urban villages" in *Academic Forum* 2009, Issue 12. PP. 114-119.

<sup>9</sup> Deputy director of the Capital Institute of Social and Economic Development.

<sup>10</sup> "Diagnose urban villages – Interview with Xiangyang Xin" 2006. *Law and Life*.

that the land would be of more value if a villager's house were replaced by commercial building. With urban renewal projects, he continues, the quality of urbanization would be very much enhanced.<sup>11</sup>

To echo central government's urbanization policy, the Beijing municipal government also pushes forward the urban renewal process. Using the 2008 Olympic Game as an opportunity, the government makes great efforts in speeding up the urban village demolition process. On Beijing's 61<sup>st</sup> Mayor office meeting, officials expressed the determination to reform urban villages:

*"Due to the imbalanced urbanization process, many urban villages have emerged. They are generally impoverished and chaotic and have become the curbs of the city's overall progress. In order to welcome the 2008 Olympic Game, improve the city's image and build up harmonious society, the Beijing municipal party committee determines to demolish 171 urban villages near the Olympic avenue in three years, from 2005 to 2007."* <sup>12</sup>

After the Olympic Game, Beijing's urban renewal project further intensified. On 5 May 2010, the City People's Congress of Beijing held a meeting and discussed the plan of reforming 50 major urban villages within two years.<sup>13</sup> Compared with previous villages, these urban villages usually are located at urban-rural fringe zones. They are not only much bigger in size, larger in population but also have longer history and more complicated management systems. Tearing down these villages would be a

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<sup>11</sup> Xinhong Zhou, "An economic analysis of the forming, continuing and reforming of the urban village " in *Fudan University* 2007.

<sup>12</sup> The Beijing News. 28, Sep. 2004

<sup>13</sup> Beijing Daily. 6 May. 2010

more difficult task and bigger challenge for the government.

In his book *Seeing Like A State*, James Scott argues that in designing a state project, the government tends to have an over-simplified view based solely on a scientific belief to maximize productivity, which he calls “high-modernist ideology”<sup>14</sup>. However, he thinks this view usually contradicts with the local knowledge, which he calls “Metis”, and ignores the complexity and diversity of real life. If an authoritarian state is willing and able to use its coercive power to carry out the projects and there is no strong civil society to resist, the projects would fail.<sup>15</sup>

Urban demolition projects in Beijing fits into Scott’s general description. The government determines to tear down urban villages based on the high-modernist ideology to maximize the land value and improve the general image of Beijing city. However, what Scott fails to discuss is how the government legitimizes itself in persuading people to accept its view and how people in the project think about and react to the state’s policy that overlooks their real life situation? In this case, how does the government legitimate itself in tearing down people’s houses and how the urban villagers view and decide to do towards the demolition project? Using the Liulang Zhuang urban village as a case, this article therefore aims to explore 1) how the over-simplified view of the state contrasts the complex reality of people’s lives in the village; 2) how the government legitimates itself in implementing the

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<sup>14</sup> James C. Scott, *Seeing like a state: How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed*, Yale University Press, 1998, p.4.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

over-simplified urban demolition project; and 3) how the ideology is viewed and received by the urban villagers. What are their reactions towards this project? Answering these questions would help us better understand the propensities and limitations of the government policy and how the society and government interact with each other.

In advocating its demolition project, the Beijing government uses both the “high modernist” and the “collective” ideology. On the one hand, it argues Beijing is becoming a global city and its appearance represents the entire country therefore it is very important to keep it nice and clean. It is perceived that wiping off the urban villages would not only improve the general look of the city but also raise the living standards of the people. Many red banners are hanging up in the village writing “The urban village is full of safety hazard and should be demolished. Villagers would enjoy a prosperous life if they move to residential buildings.”



Pic. 3 Demolition Slogan

One the other hand, the government also underlines that urban villagers should

contribute to the overall situation of the country and put collective interest before personal needs. The *Research Report on Accelerating the Transformation of Urban Villages* writes:

“We should propagandize about the necessity to tear down the village among villagers and lead them to think from the perspective of the entire picture so that they can rightly deal with the relationship between the state, the collectiveness and the individual.”<sup>16</sup>

### **The Case of the LiulangZhuang village:**

Based on the standards set by the municipal authorities, Liulang zhuang urban village is listed by the Beijing municipal government as one of the “50 major urban villages” scheduled to be demolished by 2012. Different from the urban villages demolished before the 2008 Olympic Game, Liulang Zhuang village is located further from the city center and has a longer history as a natural village. It is situated on the southeast of the Summer Palace and the northwest of Zhongguancun Science and Technology Park.

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<sup>16</sup> 关于加快推进城中村改造的调研报告。The Research Report on Accelerating the Transformation of Urban Villages. 19<sup>th</sup> Aug. 2011.



Pic. 4 The Location of Liulang Zhuang Village

The village is very rich in cultural heritage and multifarious in local knowledge. It first gained its name during the Ming Dynasty because of the poetic view of the willow trees in summer breeze, so it was called “柳浪庄” (Liulang Zhuang). In Qing Dynasty, the village’s name changed to “六郎庄” (Liulang Zhuang) in memory of the legendary character Yangyan Zhao (the sixth general of Yang’s family), who defeated Liao army. In late Qing, Empress Dowager Cixi used the Summer Palace as her summer chambers and many people in the village used to work for her. Even today, some people still feel superior to others because their ancestors used to serve the empresses.

Besides its interesting history, the Liulang Zhuang village is also famous for its rice production, which is called “Jingxi Dao”. The Jingxi Dao is clear as crystal and very delicious to eat. Therefore it was used as a tribute for the government for quite a long time, from the Qing Dynasty even up to contemporary times. Many original villagers strongly identify with the Jingxi Dao because it used to bring prosperity and good

name to the area. Fan, a 57-year-old respondent could not stop talking about the taste of the rice. “The fragrance and taste of Jingxi Dao is beyond comparison, much better than today’s rice.” Yu, a 72 original resident also said “I tasted the rice when I was little, there is nothing better than it.” According to the news report, Kangxi Emperor, Cixi Empress and Mao Zedong are all fans of the Jingxi Dao.<sup>17</sup> Before 1992, the village enjoyed an idyllic life, with a population of 4736, and 1795 households.<sup>18</sup>

With the rapid urbanization, Liulang Zhuang village is changing day by day and is now totally different from what it used to be. After 1978 reform, the developers started to take over the farm land and build factories in the surrounding area. The waters nearby were polluted and unable to be used for rice planting anymore. At present the farmland is completely gone and the original residents can no longer live on agricultural production. Moreover, the urbanization process accelerated after 1992 and the prosperity of the technology park attracted many migrant workers to the area searching for jobs. Seeing this as a lucrative opportunity, many original villagers living in Liulang Zhuang village started to add floors on their houses and rent them out to migrant workers. Although these floors bring a lot of income to the villagers, such practice is actually banned by the law. According to *The Land Administration Law of the People’s Republic of China*, although the villagers have the right to use the land, they do not have the right to sell, give or rent the land to others

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<sup>17</sup> Sulina, *The History and Present of Jingxi Dao*. Beijing Youth Daily, 22th Jun. 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Editorial committee of Haidian district gazetteer, *Haidian district gazetteer (海淀区地名志)*, Beijing Publishing House 1992.

or for non-agricultural uses.<sup>19</sup> In spite of the law, villagers are still opening their houses for rent as a source of income. To minimize the cost, the newly built rooms are usually very small and do not conform to national safety standards. However, since the rent is relatively cheap and the place is quite close to the technology park, a significant number of migrant workers come to live in the villages. Now there are around 50,000 people living in the village and 40,000 of them are floating population. This population consists of a variety of people, ranging from construction workers, cleaners, to private owner of small business, college graduate students. They are all coming from various places in China.

Although the village does not look as neat as the commercial district, the life is dynamic in the village. Walking into the Liulang Zhuang village, one could see two primary areas, namely the market area and the residential area. The market area is alongside the main street of Liulang Zhuang village and it is full of all kinds of shops, providing people living in the village for food, clothes and other daily necessities as well as entertainment. The east entrance of the main street starts from the Liulang Zhuang primary school, and many migrants' children were studying in the school. Alongside the street, there are butchers, grocery stores, snack shops restaurants, hair salons, clothing stores, shoe stores, laundry rooms, clinics, and security brigades. The street is busy with all kinds of people coming and going, while some dress very modern and others shabby. Some people from the nearby area saw the business

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<sup>19</sup> The Land Administration Law of the People's Republic of China. 1998

opportunity in the Liulang Zhuang village and also come to the village with their movable booths to sell stuff such as snacks or hand-made crafts. On the west end of the main street, there is a big food market selling all kinds raw meat, fish, vegetables and staple food. The village is filled with the smell of food, which is very tempting for people passing the area.

Around the market area is the residential area. Most illegal constructions like rooms for rent built by the original villagers could be seen there. Some rural characteristics are kept in the village: villagers for instance still raise dogs, cats, chickens and ducks outside their houses. Although the village looks rather chaotic and messy, the local polices and villagers work together to keep everything in order. Some villagers volunteer to maintain the peace and order in the village and in turn earn a little income. In the rented houses, a number of owners set up private safety cameras in hallways to take care of the their personal properties. In the research reported by NFC<sup>20</sup>, the villagers are generally satisfied with the security level in the village. <sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> NanfengChuang, a news magazine that was founded by Guangzhou Daily Newspaper Group in 1985.

<sup>21</sup> Xiaofei Zhang, Xinghuan Zhang, Yiqun Liu etc. "Searching for Social Management Innovation in Urbanization Process". *NanfengChuang*, 19<sup>th</sup> Oct. 2011.

Table.1 Satisfaction towards public security administration in the Liulang Zhuang village

LiulangZhuang Village	Self-rated satisfaction degree of public security administration
<b>Very good</b>	5.2%
<b>Good</b>	50%
<b>Acceptable</b>	23.4%
<b>Not Acceptable</b>	21.4%

Source: NFC

For many migrant workers coming to Beijing, living in the Liulang Zhuang village is not only cheap but also convenient. It is an ideal place both for business and for life. Yongli, who came to Beijing in 2009, is now working as a salesman of computer components in the science and technology park. He and his wife Ling live together in a 10-square-meter rented room in the Liulang Zhuang village. The room rent is about 300 yuan per month, which is quite cheap even in the village. Yongli's income is about 3000 yuan a month and Ling's income is higher, about 4000 yuan. Yongli's parents also live in the village. The young couple usually eats in Yongli's parents' home after work. Ling is 22-year-old girl who loves to dress up. However, she is reluctant to spend too much money on clothes and accessories. The only pair of earrings she wears is given by a friend. "My dream is to save up money and open a beauty salon", said Ling. "I am satisfied with my life now, my salary is good and the room-rent is cheap. I can buy all the things I need in the village. In this way, I can

save more money and realize my dream.” When asked about the demolition project, Ling said “I am satisfied with the situation here. True that the village is a little crowded and dirty, but it is acceptable. I do not want to move because the rent is so low here and saving money is my primary goal at the moment. But if the village will be torn down, I have no choice but to leave. I don’t know where to go yet...”

Hua, who came to Beijing with her boyfriend in 2011, is a shop assistant in a clothing store in Liulang Zhuang village. Hua’s boyfriend is selling video games in the science and technology park. Unwilling to part with her boyfriend, Hua comes with him and finds a job in her fellow townsmen’s cloth shop in the village. Hua is very worried about the demolition, “My boyfriend’s pay is really good and we want to stay here. It is very hard for us to find a similar place to live.”

Yu came to Beijing from Xi’an with his cousin. He opened a store selling meat pie on the main street of Liulangzhuang village. The store is very small and his materials are very simple. Besides working, Yu and his friends would play billiards, sing karaoke or drink beer together as enjoyment. “It took me a long time to find a place like this,” said Yu “I don’t know what will happen tomorrow, but the life today is good.” The living condition as described by the government does not seem to bother the migrant workers. Their primary goal is to find a cheap, comfortable and convenient place to stay. However, the migrants don’t have a say in the demolition process for the houses do not belong to them.

For the original villagers, a good number will say that they enjoy the life in the

village. Some rich villagers have moved out of the village a long time ago and bought houses in other places, but most villagers still stay in the village. Since they are renting their houses out as a source of income, they are quite free during the day. Wang, whose family has lived in the village for four generations, is now 81 years old. His son and daughter collect rents from migrant workers and provide him with food and clothes. Wang loves to play chess or chat with his friends in the afternoon, especially when the weather is nice. Wang feels very nostalgic towards the beautiful scenery and old life in the village. He has great sentiments to this village and is very dissatisfied with the demolition project. "The village used to be so beautiful..." "It is different now but it is still my home. I don't want to move."

Wu is a 50-year-old original villager living in the village. Three years ago he borrowed 400,000 yuan and added four floors to his original house. He is now living on the fourth and fifth floors and opened bottom three floors for rent to migrant workers. He owns about 20 rooms for rent, and each room is about 500 yuan a month, which makes a 10,000 yuan a month in total. "There are many people willing to live here", Wu continues, "I do not worry about tenants." As a leisure activity, he raises pigeons, dogs, cats, and turtles in his home as pets. He volunteers to maintain the peace and order in the village and earns a little money for the job. "I don't see the reason why we have to go. My life is perfectly good here and I don't have to worry about the income. If we were moved to other places, I won't earn enough money to pay back to my friends and relatives. Moreover, I will lose my source of income." "It is

true that the security is not very good in the village, but if we are cautious, there will not be a problem.”

Wu is not alone in his situation. Many urban villagers have invested in the renting business. Tian invested 200,000 yuan and has an income of 5000 yuan a month. “The money is much, but it is enough for living.” “I build the floors last year, if the village is to be torn down by next year, there won’t be enough for me to recover the cost.” “The government wants to move us further away from the Beijing city and let us live in apartments, we can’t rent out houses anymore.”

The relationship between the migrants and the original villagers is complicated one. On the one hand, the former view the latter as their landlords and generally fear for them. Some of the migrants claim having the experience of being discriminated by the original villagers. On the other hand, they share the common interests of protecting the village and making it better. Some villagers and migrant workers become very good friends and hangout together. They jointly set up a Liulang zhuang online forum and a QQ group to discuss the history, lives, entertainment, memories, experience and opinions about the Liulang Zhuang Village. Moreover, there is a section especially devoted to discuss the demolition project where people can share their views and experiences.

## **Discussion:**

The “high-modernist” and “collective” ideology adopted by the government is premised on its goal to develop and to improve people’s living standards. The paradox is that in order to achieve the goal, people have to suffer and sacrifice first. If the urban village is an impediment for the city’s development, they should be torn down for the sake of making better lives for the people. However, the important question to ask is how can people’s living standards be improved by tearing down people’s homes? Whose lives are to be sacrificed and whose lives have been improved by the project? Do people really think that the government position is sustainable and it is legitimate to sacrifice their homes for the city’s development?

The classical explanation of people’s reaction to the mainstream propaganda is Karl Marx’s false consciousness. The theory argues that people’s judgments have been clouded by the prevailing ideology and they act in certain way because they generally agree with the slogans and mass media reports advocated in public by the ruling class. Gramsci used the term “hegemony” to denote the way one social class dominates over others not only by political and economic control but also by projecting its own way of seeing the world and letting the subordinated to accept it as “common sense” or “natural thing.”<sup>22</sup> In the Liulang Zhuang demolition case, although people do not strongly question the ideology of sacrificing their need for the

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<sup>22</sup> Gramsci, Antonio (1971), *Selections from the Prison Notebook*, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare & Goffrey Nowell Smith, Lawrence and Wishart, London.

good of the country, neither do they take it as common sense and willingly give up their homes. Feng, a 45-year-old woman who was born and brought up in the village strongly identifies with it and agrees that “There is nothing wrong with the development of the city, but why should we sacrifice so much? And even our home land? We have already lost our farm land and the beautiful scenery, is that still not enough?”

In her book *Agents and Victims in South China*, Helen Siu (1989) argued how people comply with the government’s policy during of Mao’s era. She believes that during that time, people generally do not question the state’s ideology at all. However even if they want to, they do not have any power to fight back but to yield to the government’s decision.<sup>23</sup> However, this view may be applicable in the Mao’s era, but people in China today have relatively more freedom and agency and do not immediately comply with the government.

James Scott in his book *Domination and the art of resistance: Hidden Transcript* discussed about the two different transcripts, namely the “official” and “hidden” transcripts. He believes that although people openly seem to agree with the official ideology, but they are actually wearing a mask. In other words, publicly people seem to subscribe to ideological claims, but they are actually have believes of their own.<sup>24</sup>

This theory is partly true in the case of Liulang Zhuang village. Although it is true

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<sup>23</sup> Helen Siu, *Agents and Victims in South China*, Yale University Press, 1989.

<sup>24</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. Yale University, 1990.

that people do not take the “official transcript” as object truth, the concept of “hidden transcripts” lacks explanatory power. The urban villagers live in the village are very active in expressing their own views. They set up online forum to openly discuss what they want and how the policy is not good enough for their situations. They will use all kinds of strategies to show their disapproval of the policy. For example, Wu posts couplets on his door to express the unfairness to tear down his house. Qin, a 35-year-old villager also talks openly about his right to live in the village as long as he wants.

Yurchak criticized the ideology theories by saying that they only provide a binary division between recognition and misrecognition of ideology. “They do so by producing another problematic binary between ‘truth’ and ‘falsity’, ‘reality’ and ‘mask’, ‘revealing’ and ‘dissimulating’.” He believes that the true or false of ideology does not matter so much because people perform according to the real circumstances. Some times people do not act based on what they believe in but what the reality is asked of him, which Yurchak calls performative shift. <sup>25</sup>

The case in the village shows that when facing the demolition policy, the ideology still matters because it shapes people’s idea about what they can do and how they can do it. However, the existing ideology is not omnipotent. Its influence is also determined by the historical experience of the people and the constant redressing by the state.

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<sup>25</sup> Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was forever, until it was no more*. Princeton University Press, 2006.

In the Liulang Zhuang village, instead of doing nothing or resisting, the villagers actions can be classified as, what I would like to call, “bargaining”. With the prevailing ideology, people do not directly question whether it is right to sacrifice anyone’s interests for the so-called “collective interests”. Of course, the ideology alone does not do the trick. People’s past experience also influence their acceptance of the ideology. The memories from the Collectivization era are still fresh and haunt people in the way that to be unwilling to contribute to the collective good is to be on the side of the people’s enemy and therefore should be punished. With the historical legacy, the rightfulness of ideology is reinforced in people’s mind. In spite of the prevailing ideology, the reality of people’s material experience contradicts with and challenges it. As Fiske puts it, people’s material social experience constantly reminds them of the disadvantage of subordination and thus poses a threat to the dominant class... <sup>26</sup>

Knowing this, the state builds its ideology not only by continuous stressing it but also by allowing people to negotiate within it. Although the government would not tolerate people’s direct questioning of its ideology, it, to some extent allows room for people to bargain for their interests. Therefore, under the demolition circumstance, villagers as well as migrants would use all kinds of strategies to bargain with the government in order to loss less during the inevitable process.

The migrants and the original villagers have different ways of negotiating. The

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<sup>26</sup>John Fiske 'British Cultural Studies and Television'. In Allen (Ed.), op. cit. [includes summary of Hall's account of 'preferred readings' and alternative reading strategies: pp. 292-3. 1992.

migrants do not have much voice in the project because they are only renters and not owners. Their way of bargaining is constantly expressed by how much their lives are made convenient by the village and their desire to stay in the village as long as possible. Fei, a 25-year-old migrant girl says “I don’t think the government will take down the village any time soon in spite of what it advocates. The village is so big and lively. My child is in the primary school of Liulang Zhuang village, and so do many of my friends’ children. If the village is torn down, what will the government do with the school?” Yu, a 26-year-old man thinks “I have lived in this village for two years and I really love this place. This is the first place I stayed since I come to Beijing. The village is so good I don’t think the government will tear it up if we try to keep it in order.” In the online forum, people continuously post threads to show their attachment to the village and constantly organize group activities in the QQ online group to prolong the process of demolition. There is a special section dedicated to the memory of the Liulang Zhuang village.

Different from the migrant workers, the original residents have more bargaining chips in conversations with the government. According to article 8 of *The Land Administration Law of the People’s Republic of China*, the land in the city belong to the country and the rural and suburban land, if does not belong to the Country, belongs to all the villagers collectively. In Liulang Zhuang village, because the land are collectively owned by the villagers, the government has to get people’s consent and sign a contract in order to ask them to move. As a result, the villagers use all their resources

to show the government that they should get more. Some of them stress their rights to live in the village and the unwillingness to move to other places. Others claim that they will not be able to live if they moved to other place, because they are deprived of their source of income. Wu firmly expressed his ideas “I will not move if the government do not compensate me enough.” In negotiating with the government, not only some western concepts such as “rights” were used, some historical figures such as “Baozheng” who represented justice in traditional folk culture is also used in people’s words to express the aspiration to be treated fairly.

### **Conclusion:**

The rapid and unequal urbanization process in Beijing resulted in the forming of many urban villages. In order to improve the general look and the function of the city, the Beijing municipal government aims to wipe off those villages and replace them with modern architectures. However, this simplified view of the urban design overlooks the dynamics of the urban villages and contradicts with the complex reality of people living in the village. The urban village has a very long history and a much more complicated eco-system that consists of both migrant workers and the original villagers. To them, the village is much more than just a spatial container, it is a place where they build up social relations and where they call home.

In persuading people to comply with the urbanization project, the government uses both the “high-modernist” and “collective” ideology to convince people that it is

natural and normal to sacrifice their own interests of living in the village, and contribute to the collective good of the development of the Beijing city. Although the state does now allow people to question the ideology it advocates, it gives room for people to bargain for their own interests.

People's responses are significantly determined by the state's ideology, people's past experiences and the current policies. The historical legacy of putting people into the category of willing or refusing to contribute to the state project scares people to persistently go against government plans. The compliance or denial to the state project denotes whether one wants to be friend or enemy of the people. Afraid of being isolated and punished, people dare not stand against the government so that the only possibility left for them is to bargain with the government. By giving people the room for bargaining, the state protects the ideology by successfully shifting people's focus on whether it is right to sacrifice someone's right for the collective good to how much one should sacrifice. By negotiating with the government, the people also gradually lose ground and acknowledge government's legitimacy of tearing down their houses *de facto*.