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## Policy process diffusion: Transforming the governance model in Chinese cities

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# UNRISD

United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

Working Paper 2018-15

## **Policy Process Diffusion**

*Transforming the Governance Model in Chinese Cities*

*Bingqin Li and Lijie Fang*

prepared for the UNRISD project  
New Directions in Social Policy:  
Alternatives from and for the Global South

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## Acronyms

<b>Hukou</b>	Household Registration
<b>SO</b>	Social organization
<b>PRC</b>	People's Republic of China
<b>CASS</b>	Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
<b>UNSW</b>	University of New South Wales
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>CPC</b>	Communist Party Congress
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

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## Abstract/Summary

The growing migrant population in Chinese cities has created serious challenges for the hosting cities. Ignoring migrants' need for social integration might help the government or host society save money in the short term, however, it can sow the seeds of social instability in the long term. Local governments in China are concerned that they have to cope with the economic, social and political pressure resulting from a rapid growth in the urban population. Following the abolishment of the Detention and Eviction System (*Shourong Qiansong Zhidu*) in 2005, the treatment of migrant workers and migrants in general improved significantly. Until 2015, migrant workers gained greater access to social insurance contributions and benefits, while rural–urban migrant children could attend urban schools. In some smaller cities and large cities in the west, migrant workers could access government-subsidized housing. However, these policy changes did not fully satisfy the demands of the migrant population. This may be due to policies being poorly designed or difficult to implement. It may also be a result of migrants' responses that stem, for example, from marginalization vis-à-vis the urbanization agenda or lack of trust in the system.

Several approaches have been employed to relieve the pressure of migration: (i) using control and repression to reduce the visible signs of dissatisfaction in public spaces; (ii) using compensation to ease dissatisfaction; and (iii) identifying the root causes of dissatisfaction and seeking to resolve problems. In the past, local governments often resorted to the first and second options—using social control and economic compensation to maintain stability. The reality is that the costs of these approaches are very high, both financially and socially. Heavy-handed control has resulted in deeper dissatisfaction and lower trust in the state, while compensation rendered in exchange for stability has stimulated the appetite for more compensation and, in turn, distorted society's understanding of social justice. In some cases, instead of reducing the open expression of discontent, people were incited further. In this context, the central government has become increasingly interested in changing the approach of governance by further addressing the causes of dissatisfaction.

However, an idea from the top may not necessarily be taken up willingly at the local level. In this paper, we focus on how the idea of community governance is pushed downwards along the administrative hierarchy, and horizontally at different levels of government. Through this policy process, we examine the relationship between multiple stakeholders and how social organizations and civil society become involved in the provision of social services and in facilitating community building.

We studied the cases of four urban areas: Haicang, Guiyang, Chengdu and Taicang. We found that in these cities, co-production and participatory governance are imposed on the urban communities by higher level authorities, with the state playing very active roles in initiating, financing and facilitating the process. Despite much-improved community environment, however, communities are still not participating to the extent that the state would like. Nonetheless, we argue that this top-down approach has its merits. It may be an efficient way to ignite the co-production process and, to some extent, sustain it. When these practices are embedded in an authoritarian hierarchy, however, local officials involved are unavoidably evaluated using two separate performance assessment systems, the hierarchical and the horizontal, which have not been compatible so far.

Despite the different names for these models, the common features are that the government is introducing new actors to the governance system to reduce the governmental responsibility for providing services directly and allocating funding

directly. There are different perceptions of this attempt in the existing literature: one is that the government is seeking to make it easier to maintain control; the second is that the government is seeking to withdraw its responsibility for this system. Our research suggests that it is misleading to argue that the government reform is focused on maintaining tight state control. However, it would be reasonable to claim that the reform is an attempt to seek ways to reduce the tension between the state and public. The state is seeking a better governance approach to replace the old approach, so that the state is not at the centre of every problem faced by society, and can redirect some of the pressure to other actors in society. In this sense, contracting out social services to non-governmental providers is not in conflict with the attempt to improve community governance, if it can help reduce pressure at higher levels.

## Introduction

The increased migrant population in Chinese cities has created serious challenges for the hosting cities. Though ignoring the migrant population's need for social integration might help the government or host society save money in the short term, it can sow the seeds of social instability in the long term (Tonkiss 2005; Silverman 2002; Foa 2011). In the 1990's, the concept of social exclusion was used to study marginalized migrant populations, particularly cheap laborers (Roche and Van Berkel 1997), and the studies on the migrant workers in China also followed the same trend (Li 2005; Li 2006; Ren and Wu 2006; Wang and Zhang 2006). The core focus of these studies was on the livelihoods of these migrants (particularly rural–urban migrants) and the unfair treatment they received from the government and mainstream society. These studies indicated that Chinese migrant workers faced unequal treatment in terms of access to work, housing, welfare and education for children. However, migrants live and work in host cities and contribute to these cities; thus, the local governments of the host cities should not view them as burdens to society (Yu 2010). From the perspective of social development and citizens' rights, migrant workers should be accepted by cities as equal citizens (Wang 2006). The starting point of the research before 2010 was based on social justice—all members of society should be treated equally, with equal access to social protection and social services.

In practice, the local governments were not happy with these comments. They argued that they were the ones that had to cope with the economic, social and political pressure resulting from rapid growth in the urban population. Some local governments raised the concepts of the urban population's carrying capacity and comprehensive bearing capacity (The Sixth Census Office, Ningbo City 2012), arguing that a city has limited ability to take on a new population. The life quality of residents is affected when the number of people and density exceed a certain level, and, thus, cities need to control population growth. This line of argument garnered a lot of criticism, given that Chinese cities are not among the most populated cities and do not have the highest density; however, they are not the best managed cities either. In terms of size, Jakarta, Delhi and Manila are probably more chaotic than Beijing and Shanghai, though Tokyo, Seoul and New York are better managed. It is true that population density may affect life quality; however, cities with higher densities (such as Hong Kong and Macao) have not reached their limit. Thus, it is delusive to justify that large cities in China cannot host more people. Further, when people discuss population pressure, they are not referring to future pressure caused by new migrants—they are discussing about the people who have already lived and worked in these cities for years. This means that the so-called lack of “carrying capacity” is more about the lack of governing capacity rather than the financial, special and natural resource limits pointed out by local governments (Li, Chen and Hu 2016). The roles of resources and governing ability are linked—better governing ability means that a place can overcome resource constraints more effectively. Cities such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Tokyo and Seoul are all examples of cities overcoming resource constraints as a result of improved governing ability. In this sense, poor governance is one of the core reasons behind the difficulties associated with migrant integration.

Following the social policy reform of China in 2005, the treatment of migrant workers and migrants in general have improved much. Migrant workers have since become entitled to social insurance contributions and benefits while rural–urban migrants' children can attend urban schools. In some smaller cities and large cities in the west,



migrant workers are even able to live in government-subsidized housing. However, these policy changes did not satisfy the migrant population, and the protests against unequal treatment continue. Sometimes, this may be a result of poor policy designs that made policies difficult to implement at local levels. For example, the transferability of social insurance between different regions is technically very difficult to achieve (Li 2014). However, it is also clear that local governments are not always willing to implement the policies. Increasingly, farmers are not always interested in attaining urban Household Registration (Zhang and Tong 2006).

In recent years, governance has become a more serious issue. The reforms do not seem to have benefited the targeted recipients though it has affected the vested interests of those who are benefiting from the existing system. For example, urban citizens are not always willing to grant more access to services and benefits to migrant workers like they did at the turn of the century. For example, urban parents are not willing to let their children receive education in the same schools as rural children and do not wish to have more numbers of rural children competing with their own children in university entrance exams (Ann et al. 2015).

As the tension between rural and urban interests became more serious, local governments tended to view the social issues associated with migrant population as a threat to social stability. They focused on maintaining stability and took any action to prevent expression of discontent (Zhang 2011). As a result, the policies were not made out of consideration for protecting citizens' rights and maintaining social justice but for minimizing social conflicts. Several means were employed to maintain social stability: (i) using control and repressing voices to reduce dissatisfaction in public spaces, (ii) using compensation to ease dissatisfaction and (iii) identifying the root causes of dissatisfaction to resolve problems. In the past, the Chinese government often resorted to the first and second options—using social control and economic compensation to maintain stability. The reality is that the costs of these approaches are very high, and the effects are not as positive. Heavy-handed control has resulted in deeper dissatisfaction and lower trust in the state, while compensation rendered in exchange for stability has stimulated the appetite for more compensation and, in turn, distorted society's understanding of social justice. In some cases, some of these measures, instead of reducing the open expression of discontent, incited people further (Tang 2012).

In this context, the central government has become increasingly interested in changing the approach of governance by further addressing the causes for dissatisfaction. Therefore, at the central government level, local governments were given permission to undertake experiments to improve social governance and the integration of migrant populations. In this process, social organizations and the civil society have become important players in the provision of social services and in facilitating community building. In this paper, we examine the process of transforming the governing approach in different parts of the country to determine how the different processes of transformation have unfolded.

## **Policy Process Diffusion: The Chinese Context**

### ***Policy diffusion in China***

In recent years, public policy researchers internationally have begun to recognize that the changes China has experienced since its economic reform are much more complicated than the popular understanding of top-down policy making and local enforcement

stereotype. According to the old stereotype, policies are made at the center, and local governments do not have any bargaining power. This leads to the conclusion that the government system remains the same as China has carried out economic and social policy reforms. It has been argued that without corresponding institutional changes, China's reforms—such as introducing new policies and new actors to the system—would be very difficult to implement (True and Mintrom 2001). Increasingly, public policy researchers have sought to unveil the mechanisms that underpin China's social and economic changes. In recent years, research on diffusion (including policy and institutional diffusion) has become increasingly important.

Policy innovation and diffusion are important topics in literature to understand the way the Chinese government system operates. To avoid confusion, in this paper, we use the term “policy adoption” to represent policy—either newly invented or a replicate of existing practices that have been assumed in another location. Policy diffusion can refer to the spread of policy practices into different local governments or between different levels of governments. In a multiple-level and multiple-location government matrix, as in China, diffusion can happen in both dimensions (Zhu, 2014). There are different approaches to policy diffusion, including coerce competition, learning and social construction (Simmons et al. 2007).

The study of the policy diffusion in China has gained increasing importance since the 2010's. Wang and Lai (2013) summarized four models of policy diffusion: a top-down hierarchical diffusion model, a bottom-up absorption radiation diffusion model, a horizontal diffusion model (including between regions and sectors) and an inter-regional catch-up or learning model. Wang and Lai (2013) argued that there are different approaches to policy diffusion: policy learning (including party-organized training and campaigns, learning from other countries and field visits), local competition driven by a performance-based promotion system, imitation, administrative directives and social construction which means different actors and social-economic factors jointly contribute to policy diffusion with the purpose to build a stronger sense of community and social participation. Wang and Lai argued that in the policy fields in which local government officials are not confident or do not have sufficient capacity, social construction is used.

Zhu's (2014) work explained about those features of the Chinese public administration system that may constrain policy diffusion. He indicated that the diffusion of public service innovation within authoritarian China comes with two features: (i) the coexistence of vertical administrative centralization and fiscal decentralization and (ii) the performance-based evaluation of government officials. As a result of these two features, local government officials compete with each other. Alongside the changes in the governance ideology of the central government, the performance evaluation system continues to be updated and enriched, thereby affecting the behaviors of local governments.

Zhu and Ding (2016) argued that policy attributes play an important role in the speed of policy diffusion across different regions. They found that policies that are in favor of economic growth, such as slum demolition and urban regeneration, spread faster than policies that are not as economically friendly. Similarly, Zhang and Li (2011) studied how the central government in China used competition and awards to motivate local governments to implement policies that they were not otherwise implementing. They concluded that this diffusion method may be useful for policy areas that local governments are reluctant to implement if they were not promoted through competition and awards. Zhang (2014) studied the effect of government officers' job rotation on the

outcomes of policy diffusion. He discovered that many regions have become less reliant on gross domestic product. There are other economic indicators in the cadre examination system. The evaluation criteria for officials' performance has become diverse these days. Promoting representative policy innovation might become a new means to enhance the political influence of officials.

## ***Policy system and process diffusion***

A problem with the diffusion literature in public policy is that it is mainly focused on new policies and does not examine the policy process or policy system. Policy process diffusion refers to the spread of a policy system or process of decision-making that was not used in a certain area in the past. However, in the context of China, the study of diffusion is generally related to the nature of development—seeking transformation to a different system either from state to market or from central planning to a decentralized system—and is often not about a single policy but about a whole set of new actors, practices and institutional arrangements that may not exist in a geographic or policy area. A typical example was the introduction of the Rural Household Responsibility System in the 1970's. One could categorize this system as policy diffusion by looking only at how it is described on paper. However, if viewed as a partial privatization of productive input combined with a performance-based pay system, its diffusion has gone far beyond rural villages and has lasted until the present time. In this sense, the diffusion of a policy system and process systematically reshapes the way all policies are made and implemented. Another example is the introduction of development zones or special economic zones, which became the pioneers for policy experimentation. These days, even if the government does not initially test policies in special economic zones, they continue to undertake pilot experiments for other policies. Another example is the introduction of management and accounting practices in the business sector in the earlier days of reform. These business practices fundamentally changed the relationship between the state and businesses (Firth 1996). The idea that privatization or decentralization can be more productive later spread into the operations of the public sector, after which local officials became assessed and rewarded as if they were business managers.

To a great extent, these system and process changes provide the institutional underpinning for policy changes. Unfortunately, some of the policy system and process diffusion were labelled by many researchers as policy diffusion. Consequently, it leads to the conclusion that China has made many policy changes without changing the policy system and processes needed to support these changes, which is very misleading.

### ***What is special about policy system and process diffusion?***

The analytical framework for policy diffusion introduced by Wang (2013) may also be useful for the analysis of policy system and process diffusion. However, a new system or new process not only involves an analysis of what activities are undertaken but also how people achieve these activities—that is, the people involved will need to change their way of thinking and approaches in order to approach things differently. It takes a lot more than the initial enthusiasm to deliver long term and systematic changes. For example, system change requires people to behave differently without necessarily providing detailed guidance on how they should behave. Thus, it takes time for the people involved to determine how things operate in the new system and re-establish their relationships with other stakeholders.

In this paper, we examine how new social governance (after introducing self-governance and social organizations into community governance) as a new policy system and process

was introduced to the previous command-control public administration system at local levels and how diffusion was managed in China. There are many perspectives on community governance. In this paper, we focus on the governance of the migrant populations in urban communities as this is one of the most important and challenging issues in urban community governance.

## **Four Case Studies: The Background**

In this research, we examine the results of four cities (urban districts): Haicang District in Xiamen, Fujian Province, Chengdu in Sichuan Province, Guiyang in Guizhou Province and Taicang in Suzhou, Jiangsu Province. We selected these case studies because of the cities' determination to implement the governance reforms for different reasons.

As a result of urbanization, cities in China have to deal with some general issues, which are as follows. The first issue is rural–urban migrant workers. This migration derives from a household-level decision in response to personal circumstances, whereby people are attracted to cities for its employment opportunities, higher incomes and urban lifestyles. These migrants often still own land in rural areas and are officially recorded as part of the rural population. They are considered a “floating population” (“liudong renkou”) or “long-term residents” (“changzhu renkou”) of the cities. Family members who do not work in the city remain in the rural areas or live in the city as dependents.

The second issue is landless farmers. Every year in China, about four million migrants lose their rights to use land. All the land in rural China is owned by rural collectives, and farmers are assigned on a contract-basis to use land through Household Responsibility contracts (first signed in the 1970's) under two forms of tenure: farmland (including agricultural land, forest and grassland) and homesteads (for building houses of no more than 200 m<sup>2</sup>). These contracts can be reviewed and renewed at the end of the contract term. Collective land is retained to build public facilities and be rented for village-based businesses (Li et al. 2016). Farmers can lose their land usage rights for different reasons:

- they lose the right to use the land for farming or homesteads but retain the collective land;
- they lease the land to other people and cannot continue to work on it during the contract period;
- they lose the right to use and earn from the collective land, receive compensation and lose their status as farmers.

The way land rights are determined is a result of the bargaining between rural villages (villagers) and the local government. The rural collectives—represented by rural “cadres” (party secretary, village head and village committee members)—bargain with the urban governments for compensation. Once an agreement is reached, farmers receive compensation and are moved to newly built resettlement housing in the urban area in question and effectively become formal urban residents. In either circumstance, ex-farmers move into cities or move to resettlement compounds to work and live—either permanently or temporarily. Despite local variations, cities throughout the country face several common challenges in terms of urban governance. These are discussed in the following section:

1. How to restructure the urban social services and social protection system, which were only designed to encompass the urban population? In recent years, there have been numerous efforts to improve open access to employment

opportunities, social insurance coverage (Li 2017) and contributions and access to certain social services, such as medical care and social housing (Li 2014; 2016; 2017). However, migrants still face serious challenges in the areas of education, university entrance exams and access to urban social protection, such as minimum wages (Li 2013; Wang and Jiang 2016).

2. How to create a sense of belonging among the migrant population? As migrants come from different social and economic backgrounds, they are not always treated equally in the system and do not always identify with urban citizens. This is particularly serious when people directly experience unfair treatment (Li et al. 2016). For example, as found in our fieldwork, farmers resettled in cities do not always consider themselves part of the communities in which they live and prefer to socialize with their fellow villagers. Some of the people who had experienced land acquisition felt that they were victims of the process and found faults with community officers or fellow residents.
3. How to improve living conditions and public security in migrant-concentrated neighborhoods? In urban migrant enclaves—including “villages in the cities,” “urban slum areas” and peri-urban informal housing settlements—social services and basic infrastructure are not always available. A formal governing structure is also not established. As a result, these places suffer from poor living conditions and higher crime rates. In the past, these places became the targets of urban regeneration; however, this regeneration was only successful in moving the problems elsewhere (Lan 2007).
4. How to integrate rural and urban governance in newly urbanized areas? A number of governance issues arose during the resettlement period. For example, local elections began in villages in the 1980’s, yet experimentation with elections started in urban neighborhoods only in 1999. It was rolled out to the whole country only in 2010. This meant that, for a number of years, ex-farmers lost their right to vote. This problem was resolved when urban communities began holding elections; however, technical difficulties remained around the fact that people can only be registered to vote in one location. Thus, in many parts of the country, resettled ex-farmers still hold shares of rural collective businesses, which require them to maintain their rural Household Registration (Hukou). As a result, they can only participate in elections in the villages where their businesses are located.

All these questions need answers; however, the pressure placed on the Chinese urban government authorities to resolve these issues was unprecedented, with the proportion of migrants in cities so high that it was difficult to find similar situations in well-managed cities in developed countries. As aforementioned, unique to the Chinese case is not how many people the cities can hold, but rather the lagging governance structure and process in response to the speed of population changes. In addition to the above general issues, each city also has to face its own problems. The nature of these problems is often related to the social and economic context of the city, as discussed below.

## Haicang

### *The state of migration*

In the Haicang District of Xiamen City, Fujian Province, the resident population at the end of 2015 was 33.2 million people. Table 1 displays how Xiamen City’s population has changed over time. Haicang experienced its fastest population growth in the past five

years. In 2003, the temporary population was less than 50,000, which increased to about 300,000 in 2012. After a slight decrease due to the economic slowdown, the total number of migrants in Haicang began to increase in 2014, reaching 27.3 million people. Overall, the population of Haicang has increased by 10.5% in the past five years. In contrast, the growth of the local population has been steady, with an increase of 50,000 during the past decade.

Table 1. Permanent residents in Xiamen, by district (2010–2014; unit: CNY10,000)

Year	Xiamen District	Siming District	Huli District	Haicang District	Jimei District	Tongan District	Xiangan District
2010	356	93.3	94.2	29.4	58.7	49.9	30.5
2011	361	94.8	95.6	29.9	59.5	50.4	30.8
2012	367	95.9	97.1	30.5	60.7	51.4	31.4
2013	373	97.0	98.9	31.2	61.7	52.3	31.9
2014	381	98.3	100.6	32.5	63.3	53.6	32.7
Total growth in five years	7.0	5.4	6.8	10.5	7.8	7.4	7.2

Data source: Xiamen Municipal Bureau of Statistics (2015) and Xiamen Statistical Yearbook.

The Haicang population is also considerably mobile (Table 2). At the peak of 2012, the floating population became more than 180,000. In the Xinyang Neighborhood of Haicang District alone, the floating population reached 10 million. The number of the floating population varied between 16.5 million and 21 million each year. If we examine the length of stay of the floating population, by the end of 2015, about 12% of the people were temporary migrants who had only stayed in Taicang for six months to one year, 29% had stayed between two and four years and 59% had stayed for more than five years (Table 2). Compared to the previous year, people stayed longer on average.

Table 2. Permanent and floating population in Haicang District, by neighborhood (1 October 2011 to 30 September 2012)

NEIGHBOURHOOD	TOTAL							
	Annual population (average)	End of year total	Permanent			Floating		
			Average	Beginning of year	End of year	Average	Beginning of year	End of year
XINYANG NEIGHBOURHOOD	113,973	122,691	15,389	15,213	15,565	98,584	90,041	107,126
HAICANG NEIGHBOURHOOD	145,358	156,107	85,463	82,621	88,305	59,895	51,987	67,802
DONGFU	54,599	59,667	29,638	29,293	29,982	24,961	20,237	29,685
HAINONG	3,375	3,668	1,043.5	1,057	1,030	2,331.5	2,025	2,638
FIRST FARM	2,593.5	2,754	2,066	2,027	2,105	527.5	406	649
TIANZHUSHAN	38	38	38	38	38	0	0	0
HAICANG DISTRICT	319,935	344,925	133,637	130,249	137,025	186,298	164,696	207,900

Source: Xiamen Municipal Bureau of Statistics (2013) and Xiamen Statistical Yearbook.

The migrant population in Haicang has comprised different types of migrants, as given below:

1. Skilled and unskilled migrants—In the 1990's, an investment zone was established to host Taiwanese investors. The main type of migrants was businesspeople, professionals, technical staff and migrant manual workers

working for Taiwan enterprises. Among the migrant workers, some held local Household Registration in other districts in the city, some were from other regions of Fujian Province and some were inter-provincial migrants. These migrant workers mostly lived and worked in the investment zone. While outside the investment zone, they lived and worked in rural areas. The locals and residents in the investment zone were not integrated.

2. Urbanized ex-farmers—With the expansion of the industrial zone, the urban population in Haicang has increased rapidly since the 2000's. Some of this population comprise resettled farmers who had lost their lands. These ex-farmers are not migrants in the strict sense as they have not relocated far from their homes; however, they are now counted as urban citizens.
3. Migrants due to gentrification—When compared to the inner-city area of Xiamen, Haicang's house prices have risen more slowly over the past decade. More and more people who used to live in the Xiamen City area are attracted by the fast improvement of Haicang, which is facilitated by an improved transportation system and better access to good schools and healthcare services. These migrants buy houses, live in Haicang and commute to inner-city areas for work. With a growth in the momentum of Haicang's house prices, people from other parts of Fujian Province or even other provinces have migrated in order to invest. For example, more than 70,000 houses have been purchased by migrants in the Longyan Neighborhood in Haicang (Xiamen News 2014-12-27).

### ***Social problems***

Previously, there have been a clear segregation between investment zones and surrounding areas. As aforementioned, the investment zone was self-contained, and the people inside the zone were generally better educated and more skilled migrants than the people in the surrounding areas. For many years, the zone operated like an urban enclave surrounded by rural villages. However, problems arose as a result of this distinction. There was a lack of cultural connectivity between the migrant population and local people, local communities and even local governments because of this separation. At the same time, the migrant population did not feel a strong sense of belonging to Haicang.

In addition, the sense of social responsibility was not strong. Haicang changed rapidly from a rural town to a new industrial city, and the original residents retained their traditional way of life. The local population was not keen to be part of the urban community development. They did not care about socially beneficiary courses, and the “not in my backyard” attitude was quite strong. For example, even when there was funding from the government to lay sewer pipes for people's houses and public toilets in peri-urban villages, from which the locals could benefit, the villagers were happy to build the pipes only if they were not close to their own homes. As a result, socially beneficial projects ceased, and no one benefited from them (Yao and Liu 2014).

In recent years, Haicang's real estate market has become popular for speculators, and the local government is willingly encouraging real estate investment. Homebuyers have rushed in to buy retirement homes, popular school catchment homes and opportunities for comfortable living as the city has actively marketed itself in this manner. This has led to greater demand for land for real estate development. As discussed by a local official from the Xinyang Neighborhood office:

In terms of demographic structure, the Xinyang Neighbourhood has more than 180,000 people, and 17.6 million migrants ... Because there are many enterprises, there is a large influx of migrants. Those who can afford to buy houses live in Shanbian Community. Those who cannot are highly mobile. They rent houses in the three villages nearby. The villagers take the opportunity to build a large number of houses. There have been a lot of problems, including dense construction, unsafe buildings, poor sanitation and hygiene. Some villagers who just moved into cities themselves and do not even look after the houses once they are rented out. Earlier migrants, such as those street vendors from Hebei Province, became acquainted with the villagers, bought or rent the undecorated or vacant houses of the villagers, and became landlords themselves ... The villagers who stayed could not always get on well with the migrants ... The community was so badly managed that Xinyang Neighborhood was labelled by the provincial government as a problematic neighborhood which needs to be dealt with comprehensively with the supervision of higher authorities.

## **Guiyang**

### ***The state of migration***

By the end of 2014, Guiyang's total population was 4.70 million, with 3.74 million holding Guiyang's Household Registration, 1.98 million working outside the agricultural sector, 1.94 million registered as farmers and 1.83 million people counted as the floating population (living less than six months away from the place where they registered their Hukou). Among this floating population, 1.29 million people were immigrants and 544,000 people were emigrants. Therefore, there was a net inflow of the migrant population.

Further, the city had embarked on aggressive urbanization schemes, which meant that the rural population and rural-urban migrants could be urbanized quickly. For example, from January to August 2016, the Guiyang urban Household Registration rate increased from 63.1% to 64.6%, with 64,726 people who used to be registered as the rural population now registered as the urban population. The target was 65% by the end of 2016. Though the remaining 82,500 people in the floating population had lived in the city for less than six months, they were also granted Urban Household Registration (Guiyang Evening News, 17-09-2016).

### ***Social problems***

Similar to Chengdu, Guiyang has not suffered from the serious burden of in-migration like cities in coastal areas have. In contrast, the migrants are mostly from nearby rural areas. However, in recent years, Guiyang has gained media attention due to its large-scale real estate developments ('Chaoji Dapan'). A typical example is the "Century City" ('Shijicheng') project in Jinyang New District, which opened in 2007 with a construction area of six million square meters. After completion, it will become a residential and business center that can accommodate 170,000 people. At the time of our fieldwork, 40,000 households (~120,000 residents) had already moved in. Such large compounds of newly built neighborhoods place enormous pressure on the community governance.



## Chengdu

### ***The state of migration***

The Sichuan Province used to be an important source of migrant workers in China. According to the 2010 Census, 26% of the Sichuan total population (20.91 million) moved to other parts of the country for work. However, as the capital city of Sichuan Province, Chengdu was one of the main destinations of rural–urban migrants that moved within Sichuan. Before 2000, about one-third of the migrant population from Sichuan Province, which comprised of about one-fifth of Chengdu’s total population (Luo 2002), moved to Chengdu. In the city’s population growth from 2001 to 2010, 120.59 million people (88.85% of the total population growth) was a result of migration. The Sixth Census data indicated that there were 2.62 million migrants in total, accounting for 18.66% of the city’s resident population (Chengdu Municipal Development and Reform Commission 2012).

The slowing in economic growth since the economic crisis in 2009 has introduced further challenges in terms of hosting the migrant population in the city. According to the Sichuan Provincial Human Resources and Social Security Office of Employment and Migrant Workers, in 2013, 1.66 million migrants from the Sichuan Province returned to the province from other parts of the country. Some of them resettled in Chengdu instead of returning to their home villages. In recent years, however, as Chengdu’s economic growth accelerated and surpassed that of coastal areas, more migrant workers decided to return (Li 2015).

### ***Social problems***

Unlike large coastal cities that are keen on keeping migrants out, Chengdu has been friendly to migrants—particularly those from the same province. This is partially because the city authority recognized early on that it needs to retain talent to maintain economic growth. Unfortunately, a large proportion of the capable labor force moved to other parts of the country.

Chengdu was one of the earliest cities that sought to champion rural–urban integrated development and experimented with land reform and equalization of social security entitlements in order to encourage farmers to settle in cities permanently. The idea was to establish an urbanization model that was friendlier to the migrant population than the large cities in coastal areas. However, researchers soon found that farmers were not keen on staying in the cities. Farmers found it difficult to buy houses, had fewer employment opportunities than in other large cities, and were viewed disparagingly by the urban population (Sui et al. 2014). In this sense, Chengdu’s problem is that it does not know how to make urban life seem more attractive to the migrant population.

## Taichang

### ***The state of migration***

Taichang is a county-level city. Taichang began to attract a larger migrant population in 2000, mainly because of the city’s accelerated economic growth, which created many new employment opportunities. By the end of 2015, there were about 0.48 million local people and 0.46 million migrant long-term residents (>six months) there. For many years, Taichang’s urbanization rate was artificially kept low because of the Household Registration system, which meant that the rural population who worked and lived in the

city were still registered as rural. Since 2004, the city decided to embark on New Rural Construction in which farmers lived in much higher density in cities. By the end of 2015, around 66.8% of the rural population lived in newly-constructed urbanized neighborhoods (Wang, 2016). Despite its high rate of migration, Taicang does not have many low-income migrants. The city hosts foreign enterprises that largely hire workers for assembly lines. However, in recent years, it has started to attract high-tech enterprises that hire more skilled workers.

### ***Social problems***

As a small city, Taicang's neighborhood size is smaller on average than large urban communities. However, service delivery was only designed to encompass local citizens or urbanized farmers—there were almost no social services developed for the migrant population. As a result, community management officers were seriously understaffed. In terms of migrant services, there was only Household Registration and family planning management. In recent years, however, Taicang began to develop commercial housing estates, and some of these were sold to people from outside the city. However, a large proportion of local people are urbanized farmers who have retained their Household Registration as farmers in their own villages even if they lived in the cities; thus, they cannot enjoy the same rights as other urban residents whose registration is with the community in which they live.

## **What Must Be Achieved?**

There are several facets to solving the challenges caused by the increased migrant population in Chinese cities. The first focuses on public administration—the challenge is to figure out how to increase the capacity of the local government and public servants to encompass a larger and more diverse population. The second is to figure out how to contract out the social services that used to be delivered by the government to the non-government sector. The third is to find out how to develop, finance and deliver new initiatives for services and infrastructure. Overall, the government wishes to be less involved in direction provision of services while also increasing the types of services provided. It also wishes to devolve decision-making power and delivery of certain services to communities. Some preliminary solutions to these challenges are detailed in the following sections.

### ***Clarification of responsibilities regarding migrant governance***

As discussed earlier, the migrant population was not part of the urban public administration system previously. As a result, policies were often made only to encompass urban citizens, which left a vacuum in urban governance. However, no services were provided to migrant populations in urban neighborhoods, particularly if they were tenants. This not only caused great inconvenience for the migrant population but also made it difficult to prevent and reduce crime. Therefore, a main task of the local government was to reform the public administration system, clarify the responsibility of managing the floating population and, through appropriate reward and punishment systems, encourage stakeholders to cooperate with the public administration of the floating population. This will include:

- residential registration and recording by relevant government departments
- employer and landlord responsibility at work and in communities
- neighborhood watch and 'grid master' ('wangge yuan') supervision

## ***Enhancing safety in residential communities***

In communities with highly mobile tenants, public security can potentially deteriorate. Crimes such as robbery, stealing, sex trade, drug dealing and gambling can become more serious. As a result, crime prevention and control is an important aspect of jobs in communities with a large floating population. However, it is not possible for the small number of community civil servants or social workers to detect all the problems. Thus, a coordinated network is needed to maintain public safety. The principle is to be led by the government, clarify responsibilities and guarantee multiple stakeholder participation. Ultimately, a framework for self-governance by community members (including street-level government agencies and civil society private businesses) must be established, in which:

- Housing authorities should be responsible for urging real estate management companies to provide services to residents. Important departments of companies need to exercise access control, anti-theft umbrellas and other protection facilities. Public parking space needs to be planned jointly by construction, land and other departments. City management departments must install street lights in complex and remote areas to ensure that the streets are well lit. Neighborhood communities need to improve physical protection facilities such as security entrances for old buildings. A resident self-governance team should be established so that residents can actively participate in crime control.
- Strict security precautions' control should be introduced with the help of a basic information platform with the joint efforts of public security, city management, traffic police, armed police, industry and commerce and street and neighborhood committees, property companies and other forces. The purpose will be to impose information management on both the penetrant residents and the floating population.
- Each urban community or village should have a “grid master”. This person takes full responsibility for a grid, which usually includes 100 to 200 households, although the number varies in different cities. Their role is to manage all possible issues related to the people, public space, issues and objects in the grid. They should visit each household in the grid at least once every year.

## ***Cultivating a sense of belonging***

Public participation is considered positive for enhancing public awareness, building the capacity for self-government and constructing a sense of belonging. Migrants, particularly tenants, tend to anchor their life outside their residential communities and, subsequently, care less about the public life in the communities in which they live (Liu et al. 2010). In the cities studied in this research, social services or community activities were identified by all interviewees working for community committees as a means to entice migrant residents to be more engaged in community affairs. The idea is that when they start to use services or attend activities, they socialize more and come to know other residents better. It is also believed that if migrants have a voice in the community, this may improve their sense of civic responsibility.

Organizing community activities is a frequently-used tool in migrant-concentrated communities. For example, the Haixiang Community in Haicang uses community activities to improve social cohesion. They organize family activities, public lectures,

performances, quizzes and other cultural and sports activities to improve social bonds. These activities are not necessarily designated and organized by the authorities. While the government organizes some largescale events during national holidays, smaller scale activities are often organized by neighborhood committees and residents themselves. In the Haihong Community in Haicang, social enterprises play a larger role. In Guiyang and Taicang, professional social work agencies were introduced in migrant communities to actively cultivate a community atmosphere in those highly alienated communities.

### ***Seeking a new social governance model in urban communities***

New policies have addressed some of the social challenges faced by the migrant population (although not necessarily successfully), such as access to employment opportunities, social insurance coverage, labor protection and contracts (Huang et al. 2014; Meng 2012; Li 2014; Huang and Tao 2015). However, these were only policy changes. Though researchers have studied about these policy changes and the outcomes of these changes, they have often assumed that the policy system or process have not changed. By taking a closer look, we can see that there have been top-down efforts to seek changes to the governance system—to break away from the rigid bureaucratic governing style and develop multiple stakeholder participation and co-governance at the grass-roots level. The intention was to treat individuals, the private sector, civil society and the state as all being possible contributors to community development.

### ***National strategy***

The concept of social management was introduced in China in the 1990's (Pieke 2012). In 2004, the Fourth Plenary Session of the 16th Communist Party of China Central Committee proposed the concept of building a “harmonious society”, which called for strengthening social construction and management and promoting the innovation of a social management system. On 19 February 2011, President Hu Jintao stated that social management is indispensable for human society. The purpose of social management is to maintain social order, promote social harmony, ensure people live and work in peace and contentment and create a good society for the development of the cause of the party and country. The basic tasks of social management include coordinating social relations, standardizing social behavior, solving social problems, resolving social contradictions, promoting social justice, coping with social risks and maintaining social stability. Successful social management and promotion of social harmony are prerequisites for achieving a flourishing society (Hu 2012). Xi Jinping used the term “social governance” to replace “social management” (Xi 2014), as “governance” is a broader term that involves management and self-governance. Xi further defined that social governance emphasizes on systematic governance, governance by law and governance by dealing with the root causes of problems and using all possible means to solve these problems. The idea is to change from a government-managed society to co-governance via multiple actors including the government, market and society. This demands a contemporary social governance system and the capacity to govern (Xi 2016).

In 2010, the state made the decision to actively promote good governance at the community level by freeing up the registration of social service organizations and encouraging social innovation at local levels. Why did the central government start stressing about the importance and urgency of social management and governance so much more than in the past? A direct answer to this is that people were becoming dissatisfied with the status quo, and, so, the expression of their dissatisfaction in terms of letters and petitions became louder despite the policy changes (Dimitrov 2015). In the early days of the reform, even minor deviation from policies during the central planning period resulted in obvious change, and the benefits were easily detectable and thus

appreciated by the beneficiaries. In contrast, these days, even the beneficiaries of a policy are accustomed to steady improvement and, sometimes, take major improvements for granted. However, as more people have moved into cities to demand more services and competent management, governments at different levels that used to work under tight population control have found it difficult to cope with the fast growth. It has become impossible to follow the old set of management methods that relied heavily on people following a single ideology, working for a single job and living in a single location throughout their life. Although the economy is in a better situation and most people's lives have obviously improved, the sense of safety and security has lowered over time. The social development of the country is becoming more complicated (Chan et al. p10). Additionally, though this more varied society offers more opportunities and facilitates social mobility, different social groups and individuals have very different aspirations and ideas about how a society should function. Integrating these interests, needs and ideas is difficult due to several barriers, which are as follows:

- Different levels of government and relevant government departments pursue their own interests, objectives and needs, which makes it difficult to integrate and coordinate government actions (Li et al. 2015).
- As the society becomes more open and mobile, people are more willing to participate in society and have greater awareness of their rights, which increases the demand for self-governance.
- China's rapid economic and social transformation dismantled the previously-collectivized social support system and caused increased social tension, which resulted in greater difficulties in the current social management reform and innovation, as, in many communities, the people were reluctant to socialize with each other or offer support to each other.

As a result, the Chinese central government faced a challenge that involved solving several problems at the same time: (i) a social and political need to shift from state management to social governance; (ii) the fact that local government officials do not necessarily support the idea of meeting the aforementioned social and political need; and (iii) the fact that people are not yet keen to be active members of their communities.

From the central government's perspective, producing a "policy" and having it endorsed by political leaders is only the beginning—extra effort must also be invested to realize this policy. Changing governance is about changing the way people behave—not only government officials but also other stakeholders. It is much more difficult than solving one single problem. The benefits of self-governance and social management are mostly learnt from the experiences of other countries and via various literatures. Thus, it is not clear how self-governance and social management may operate in the Chinese policy system and whether they can be seamlessly integrated into this system.

### ***Local responses***

Once the national agenda was set, local governments developed their own responses, often in consideration of local circumstances. In the four cities we interviewed, each city developed its own terms and interpretations of the new governing model. In Haicang, this model was a "joint-production" ('gongtong diazo') initiative. It was an effort by the government to push for a coproduction working approach, in which policy initiatives were made and delivered by community members or social organizations. The government became a facilitator and possible fund holder.

In Chengdu, the model was a “three social interaction” (‘sanshe hudong’) initiative. Three social elements—society (or community), social organization and social workers—were the pillars of this model. These are the three pillars that the government needed to enable and strengthen. The core of this model is self-governance. The discovery of residents’ needs and their satisfaction are all based on communities. A self-governance system that includes a bottom-up self-governance organization within each estate and a standing democratic decision-making organization—a community resident council—has also been established.

Taicang’s model focused on the “interaction between the government and communities” (‘zhengshe hudong’). This model has several features: (i) clear political and social separation by urging grass-roots-level government to relinquish its habit of trying to do everything, resisting social organizations taking over responsibilities and promoting the rule of law; (ii) helping self-governing organizations become independent from the government and improve their capacity; and (iii) preventing the government from treating self-governing organizations as subordinates.

Guiyang initiated a model of “one core and multiple actors” (‘yihe duoyuan’). There are two features in this model. One is to clarify the responsibilities of multiple actors. The community party will take the lead and the other actors (such as resident council, resident committee, social organizations and self-governing organizations) will be responsible for self-governance, self-servicing, self-monitoring and democratic decision-making. A major feature of Guiyang’s governing model is that it actively uses a community information platform to collect mega data and share information among different government departments.

Despite its different names, these models’ common features are the government introducing new actors to the governance system to reduce its responsibility for directly providing services and allocating funding. There are different perceptions about this attempt in the existing literature. The first perception is that the government is seeking to make it easier to maintain control (Yam and Gao 2007), and the second perception is that the government is seeking to withdraw its responsibility toward this system (Yu and He 2011). Our research suggests that it is misleading to argue that the government reform is focused on maintaining tight state control. However, it would be reasonable to claim that the reform is an attempt to seek ways to reduce the tension between the state and public. The state is seeking a better governance approach to replace the old approach so that it is not at the center of every problem faced by the society and can redirect some of the pressure to the other actors in the society. In this sense, contracting out social services to non-government providers is not in conflict with the attempt to improve community governance if it can help reduce pressure at the higher level.

## **How Governance Transformation Began in Each Case**

Despite the current problems faced by China, actually instigating transformation requires a suitable trigger or driving force. The assumption of the authoritarian regime tends to state that the local governments are merely enforcing the central government’s command. However, the four examined cases indicated four different drivers.

Haicang: Haicang instigated the reform because the mayor of Xiamen moved from Guangzhou and wished to push forward a governance reform with which he had started to experiment in Guangzhou in 2004. As a new initiative, the mayor proposed to

undertake a local governance reform by introducing the joint-production model for community development. In this sense, Haicang's governance reform was imposed by the central government's decision to move an official to a different location.

**Chengdu:** Chengdu had a much longer history of experimenting with social development than other cities we have studied here. It began an experiment of rural–urban coordinated development in 2003, with strong encouragement from the then party secretary. These were primarily experiments with new policies. The actual decision to improve governance began in 2009 after Chengdu suffered tremendously from the earthquake in 2008. The city needed to be reconstructed and people needed to be resettled—the challenge was enormous. Non-government organizations (NGOs) travelled from all around the country to offer voluntary support. During this period, local government officials realized that there could be a different relationship between the state and civil society. People have great potential to organize, govern and serve themselves. After all, in the wake of such a serious natural disaster, it was impossible for the government to undertake all activities singlehandedly. Due to this internal drive, the city authorities started to work more closely with the NGOs and the city society to experiment with self-governance.

**Guiyang:** Guiyang, as one of the poorest provinces in China, previously had many active international NGOs working in the fields of poverty reduction and empowering the poor. As a result, the city was no stranger to social organizations. However, as in the past, the local government placed tight control over NGOs. As the constraints for international NGOs were tightened, local NGO employees found it difficult to survive without international resources. Though the city's party secretary was keen on improving urban governance to respond to the central government's encouragement, the local party secretary was unsure how to achieve this. As a result, the previous NGO organizers and employees decided to actively engage with the government.

**Taichang:** Taichang was not an initiator of social governance. The governing ability of the local government was very strong, and the government officials were highly educated and competent. However, civil society and NGOs—particularly the types involved with community development—did not exist in the past. Similar to Guiyang, the local officials did not know how to undertake community governance reform; thus, they invited people from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) to help establish pilot schemes. The CASS researchers helped invite NGO leaders and social workers from Guiyang.

### ***Diffusion downwards and horizontally***

Paradoxically, shifting from a governing model—in which bureaucrats followed commands from above—to a model in which the government becomes a member of the community that funds, facilitates and delivers services alongside other actors cannot be achieved with a single command. Resistance to change can be strong and, even if there is no resistance, adopting a new approach takes time to learn. In all four cases, we noted strong encouragement from the higher authorities that included several key elements, as discussed in the following sections.

### ***Strong promotion in the government system***

Strong promotion was used to attract lower-level authorities' attention, signaling that some major changes were going to occur. This promotion involved several steps, the first of which was training. As one interviewee joked about the training process:

We were first 'brainwashed' by the city, then we 'brainwashed' those below us ... We work in the system, when this type of policies is published, we have to enforce

them, right? So we had to understand it. After we understood, we brought in the village heads, and village cadres to ‘brainwash’ them. When they were properly ‘washed’, they would follow us ... Maybe initially they could accept this type of thinking, but [in the end] we made sure that they would not reject it. Once they decided to follow us, it means the policy was ready to be distributed to the public.

When asked what they were taught during the training sessions, he mentioned that they were reminded of some of the problems they had to face on a daily basis, such as the fact that despite trying so hard to deal with various problems, there seemed to be more problems and people were less satisfied—as there were something wrong with the way they handled these problems. The government could not deal with all these problems singlehandedly. To change this situation, they needed to adopt a different working approach—to encourage other people to work together and get local people involved in the decision-making. Once the people become aware of all the concerns and different interests, they can negotiate among themselves; thus, the state no longer has to manage the conflicts and can shift its role from player to referee.

### ***Application and response at the lower level***

After the training, local officials were encouraged to take the ideas back to their agencies and develop suggestions on how to apply the new model of governance to their own policy field and daily operations. It is argued in the Chinese government policy diffusion process that it is crucial for local governments to demonstrate that they conform to the central government’s initiatives. However, it is important to highlight that this conformity is at most theoretical. Local governments or local level officials must express their willingness to conform to the party’s or higher authorities’ views (Edin 2003). However, as discussed earlier, this type of reform does not have ready-made policy prescriptions. Therefore, the party view is a theoretical anchoring to the reform that allows quite wide ranges of local variations. The officials were not asked to copy policies directly but were encouraged to develop responses that fit local circumstances or the nature of their own policy fields. In this sense, local governments had to internalize the “spirit” of the reform and demonstrate how they would apply it.

### ***Policy learning at the same level***

Apart from vertical diffusion, diffusion also occurs horizontally. This is often achieved via policy learning tours. These tours have two functions. The first is to set examples so that peer groups that are not convinced at the training stage are convinced as a result of witnessing good examples. For example, the Shanbian Community in Haicang was a peri-urban community that expected the government to acquire their land; thus, for many years, the village did not invest in its infrastructure. This occurred in many peri-urban villages near Xiamen. However, as the “Beautiful Countryside” initiatives were introduced, Shanbian began to experiment with participatory approach.

The second function of these tours is to inspire the local authorities that have little idea about how to proceed. This can be observed from the variety of courtyard initiatives in Chengdu, according to which different courtyards offer different types of services. This can also be observed in Haicang’s peri-urban village beautification initiatives, in which almost every village has its own projects. As discussed by the local cadres, there could be several motivations behind producing different projects. One is that officials are truly concerned about the differences in local circumstances. Another is that local officials do not wish to be seen as copycats—they wish to present something new to impress higher authorities. To some extent, this aligns with the city-level response to higher authorities, such as the four models we identified for the four cities we studied.



## ***Engaging the general public***

Attaining public involvement can be perceived as an attempt to diffuse the “spirit” of the policy reform at the grassroots. As discussed by Zhang and Li (2011), the nature of certain public policies such as maintaining public hygiene or changing unhealthy lifestyles requires the active engagement of the general public. Without the engagement of the users or potential beneficiaries, the government will not be able to achieve its desired outcomes. Moreover, transforming the governance to a bottom-up approach results in similar problems. Developing public participation involves several features. The first is improving public awareness. The second is gaining public support for maintaining social order, which requires a higher level of trust in local governments. The third is involving the public in self-governance. We noted each of these features in the reform promotion in all the four examined cities. As each city shared similar features, here we only discuss the case of Haicang as an example.

To improve public safety and the legal awareness of migrants, the Haicang government sought to familiarize the public with the law and enhance residents’ awareness of the law. In contrast to the traditional method of preaching to the residents, the government implemented more active use of new technologies and methods to publicize the law. These included the following:

- legal knowledge competitions,
- public lectures to introduce the law,
- publishing legal pamphlets and educational reading materials,
- using billboards to display legal information and
- providing legal advice in the community center and through other community activities.

The advocates of the reform used the morning rush hours to publicize the law. They visited areas where people tend to congregate—such as street markets, supermarkets, bus stations, factories and schools—in order to provide legal advice and distribute pamphlets. Further, schools with a large number of migrant children were targeted for legal advocacy. The students were encouraged to teach their parents about various laws and regulations. In addition to using traditional legal publicity billboards and publicity vehicles, the ideas were also promoted through the use of social media platforms such as WeChat, microblogging and internet web pages. Users were encouraged to interact with the community social workers and government officials. The use of social media increased the ease of participation. The effect of this publicity remains difficult to determine; however, the intensity and coverage can be identified via the official data provided by the Haicang government. A total of 26 legal publicity activities were organized in the first nine months in 2015, involving over 12,260 migrants. Nearly 370 persons attended our on-site counseling. More than 11,330 pamphlets were distributed and nearly 2360 publicity souvenirs were handed out.

Improving trust was primarily undertaken by improving services in Haicang. As discussed by researchers, Chinese residents’ trust in the local government mainly derives from the fulfillment of promises regarding infrastructure and service improvement (Li and Mayraz 2015; Zhong 2014). The local governments in China are aware of this and Haicang actively used services such as the ones listed in the next section to build trust. In the Xinyang community, the local officials focused on solving the practical issues faced

by migrants. They assigned staff members to neighborhoods and tried to help people in their communities. These services included the following:

- Employment services—The government used an information technology platform to match labor supply and demand and provide job-matching services. Employment services were also provided through multiple channels such as the talent and labor markets, economic service centers, investment companies and trade unions. Women's federations were also involved in employment services.
- Travel—The city introduced public bicycles and public transport as low-cost travel options. These helped join the industrial parks and residential areas.
- “After four o'clock schools” for migrant children—A more detailed discussion of this initiative has been undertaken in a later section in this paper.
- Special training for migrant students—This included online courses and on-site training. The training materials included policy advocacy, using the internet and using social media to access public service platforms to seek jobs and schedule health examinations and medical treatment.
- Localized new services—The government is now considering whether to provide short-term floating population accommodation and the union is considering installing coin-operated laundry machines to allow migrant workers to wash their clothes more easily.

These services were implemented to help the migrants while simultaneously gaining their trust. As a community grid master stated:

When I started working in 2008, I first visited the residents. The door opened, I showed the person my ID, and he shut the door loudly in my face. Later he explained that he thought I was trying to sell things to them ... [Some residents] called us the ‘government’s dogs’ ... We just kept knocking on people’s doors for two months. By the time the grid master system was set up, we were well acquainted with local residents. Once they got to know us, they started to trust us more. When they were familiar with our faces, slowly trust will grow. I was in charge of more than 400 households then. The buildings were 20 storeys high. I do not know how many stairs I had climbed. Because I often walked up the stairs, explained the new policies to them often, slowly we became familiar with each other. They also told others that I was trustworthy. After the grid system was formally set up, the residents started to come to me to ask for help. Before that, we only nodded to each other.

To promote people's engagement in self-governance, social organization and self-governance organizations are encouraged by the government. By 2015, Haicang supported 4.6 social organizations for every 10,000 people. Various urban communities had been established. At the community level, residents organized a moral evaluation council, a joint-production council, a concentric consultation hall and other self-government organizations. The role of these organizations is to help reduce tension and resolve conflicts among the residents. The system can be different in different communities. In the Xingwang neighborhood, there are 15 registered and documented social organizations such as choirs, badminton clubs, table tennis clubs, seniors' associations and women's associations.

Communities used to hold these activities; however, they were not recorded or registered. Registration helped make the local government aware of their existence and provide

guidance to these organizations so they can be better organized and maintain long-term operations. Anyone could join the activities in Xingwang neighborhood, including the migrant population. Activities targeting the floating population such as the “Culinary Competition” which encourages migrants to cook dishes from their places of origin were also held. The community also established a resident self-governance group with seven members, which was initiated by the residents. The public space in the neighborhood was initially dirty and messy, and two residents started cleaning by themselves. As the grid system was established, the government adjusted its planning for land use, painted the houses, and helped improve the community environment. Residents were also willing to contribute. After the initial stage of tidying was completed, the neighborhood hired two security guards and a cleaning personnel. Two other older people in the neighborhood were appointed to help open the community gate and perform some other chores. Thus, residents who had previously refused to pay property management fees became willing to pay. Thus, these new services were funded by the property management fees and the government did not have to cover the cost.

## Two examples

### ***Four o’clock school***

The “four o’clock school” was designed to care for migrant workers’ children. Urban primary schools finish at 3:00 pm or 4:00 pm, after which urban children can return home or attend after-school classes, often with the help of their grandparents. However, migrant children often do not have this support. Their parents work long hours and are reluctant or cannot afford to pay for private classes offered outside school. To help migrant parents cope, some urban governments—such as those in Wenzhou in the Zhejiang province—decided to encourage urban communities to provide facilities to care for migrant children after school. This practice was picked up by other cities and communities, although the providers are different.

In Haicang, there was no formally run four o’clock school for several years; however, some retired school teachers offered this service voluntarily in some communities. Later, the government decided to encourage social organizations to offer such schooling. The corresponding social organizations contracted the service funded by the local government. “Haicang’s four o’clock schools” were different from other cities’ schools because the service was originally only provided to migrant workers; however, the services were opened to non-migrants when the community leaders realized that other urban residents had similar demands. This extension of services sent a positive signal to the original urban residents—that migrants can help introduce new services and inspire local services. This attitude was welcomed by all residents and made migrants feel welcome.

In Chengdu, “half past four schools” were introduced in 2012. In March 2013, a “Student 430 Project” was established admitting students from low-income, single-parent and migrant families or junior primary school students. These schools helped children complete their homework on time and encouraged the students to do crafts, engage in sports and film watching. Although these classes are still held on the school premises, school teachers do not instruct the students. After 4:30 pm, the Community Education Institute enters the schools. School teachers can participate, but only as volunteers. This service was soon picked up by different communities, each of which had individual features.

In Guiyang, these schools are called “half past four schools.” Initially, the government established these schools in communities and used community social workers (often civil servants) to operate them. However, they soon found it impossible to provide such services because of the limited staff members. Consequently, the facilities were discontinued—a half past four school in a community was unused for more than three years. As social organizations started contracting services, half past four schools became a popular service since social organizations could package the school together with other projects such as activity centers, community libraries or reading rooms.

This example clearly illustrates the status of migrants in the community. Initially, the idea was to meet the needs of migrant population and to create a special service for them. Later, it was observed that local residents have similar needs. This service was therefore opened to local residents as well. Thus, the migrant population can contribute to the lack of local services through the expression and satisfaction of their own needs. From the perspective of service supply, the migrant population also inspired new services that would benefit the locals. It can thus be claimed that they are not merely “takers.” They also inspire. This concept of equal rights and obligations helps the migrant population integrate well into the community’s agenda.

In the past, government-funded community services were constrained by the earmarked project funding model—it was very difficult to move beyond administrative constraints. Often, the migrant population and urban residents received different treatments. Although this could produce targeted policy to address some of the migrants’ needs, it divided the locals and the migrants. When funding was used for migrants, it created the illusion that migrants count as an urban population. In an economic climate in which government resources are abundant, people are willing to help migrants. During economic recession when resources become limited, however, local people become reproachful of migrants for consuming resources that they consider should be theirs. In several cities, this has clearly become a major source of tension. Four o’clock or four-thirty schools in Chinese cities emerged out of migrants’ needs, and the services were then extended to the non-migrant population. When this practice equally benefited the whole population, the social tension eased.

### ***Land acquisition***

Addressing issues related to urbanization often requires the contribution of multiple stakeholders. Considering land acquisition and resettlement as an example, a project cycle involves multiple stages. Each of these stages requires collaboration between different departments. In the past, these departments did not work together because of bureaucratic division of responsibilities. For example, the local government only communicated with the village leader. If the village leader was corrupt, farmers would only receive a fraction of the compensation funds. When farmers signed contracts with the government department dealing with land acquisition, they may have had questions regarding future pension and employment arrangements and housing resettlement. However, land authorities were not necessarily aware of the policies of other departments. However, the officer concerned might make promises that they were not in a position to fulfill in order to attain a quick contract. Later, the farmer may discover that the earlier promise was invalid, and they might subsequently feel cheated.

To avoid this, the Haicang government decided to adopt joint action and collaborate with each department in order to facilitate land acquisition. The result is obvious—the local officials from the land authorities reported that there have been no petitions for several

years even though the city is acquiring land at a much faster pace. The stages of land acquisition include the following:

- Persuading farmers to give up their land—As discussed by an officer in Haicang,

We have involved a lot of people from different government departments, such as Women's Federation, United Front Department, district government, young officers and people from the Association of the Disabled. In one land acquisition project, we sent a dozen of retired army officers to visit the villager's homes. They were originally from the village and the villagers felt closer to them. As a result, they were willing to let us into their homes. District-level officers such as judges, prosecutors, officers from water and electricity supply are also involved in this. At the village level, there were also village cadres, rural elites.

- The resettlement of landless peasants—This stage requires the cooperation of the planning department and private enterprises that will use the land in the future and building companies.
- Resettlement planning—This planning requires a master plan that will involve multiple sub-plans. The consolidation of multiple plans into one reduces administrative costs and construction costs. All departments such as urban planning, housing authorities, water and sanitation, electricity and heating supply and environment need to work together to produce the master plan.
- Assessing and addressing farmers' needs during resettlement—These needs include housing needs (such as apartment size and the direction that the house faces), schooling (including primary and secondary schools and kindergartens), community facilities (such as local temples, meeting places and shops) and green space.
- Housing construction period—In the past, farmers were only allocated houses once they were built. They only knew how many square meters they were entitled to and how many bedrooms the new apartment would have. They had no say regarding the property design, location, quality of the construction and so forth. Haicang changed this practice by involving farmers in the design, construction and allocation process. Farmers organized a supervision team to inspect the housing construction process and offered their opinions regarding what would be a suitable housing design. In the Lingang neighborhood, for example, people previously preferred large houses because large families liked to live together. Therefore, approximately 50% of the people chose three-bedroom apartments. However, more people currently prefer two-bedroom apartments because they are easier to rent out. In recent regeneration projects, the planners first consulted the farmers who would be affected and subsequently changed the design of the apartments. Simultaneously, the farmers established a monitoring group during the construction process to oversee the quality of the project. This reduced disputes after the houses were constructed.
- Addressing the practical issues raised by “nail” households—Nail households refer to households that refuse to relocate, even if the surrounding households have agreed to do so. For example, in the case of Dongyu Village, the demolition of the Seafood Street would have led to the people who sold seafood in the area becoming unemployed; thus, they were not keen to relocate. The

government agreed to move the stalls to a different site so that the vendors could continue with their business. Some villagers also received compensation for the loss resulting from the relocation. Migrants signing the contracts voluntarily were able to select resettlement apartments earlier than other people. Furthermore, their children could enroll early in the best schools. These supporting measures required multi-sectoral cooperation to complete.

- Post-resettlement governance—The resettlement area is often populated by residents from different rural villages and are strangers. In rural areas, farmers from the same village lived together for generations; thus, the social atmosphere in the settlement area changed. Residents did not feel that they shared a common identity. As a community officer said,

When they first moved over, it was a mess. The residents were from different places. They kept the bad habits in rural areas to urban communities ... Chicken, duck, green vegetables, poor health environment and bad traffic habits ... I thought about how to deal with this. The first thing I did was to look after the elderly, and the second was to influence the young people ... Obviously it is more than just the elderly and children. However, young adults are out to work, and they do not have time to participate in the community activities. We first set up a community Elderly Association to start a variety of activities ... The purpose was to make the residents feel united. Originally people did not know each other ... After the activities, they started to become familiar with each other ... Later, we felt that there was no point organising activities all the time. We started to ask residents what they need ... They told us the most important thing was that they had nothing to do during the day and were bored. So we organised the elderly to set up a Tai Chi Association. We helped to invite a teacher. With all these activities, they were much more identified with the community.

Thus, inter-sectoral collaboration helped make land acquisition and resettlement (or urban regeneration) much less confrontational.

However, not all cooperation worked effectively. In Guiyang, there has been an attempt to involve social work organizations to persuade farmers to relinquish their land. Such attempts helped relieve the tension between the government and farmers; however, the director of the social organization stated that he did not think they would work more in this regard because the villagers considered themselves as insiders and other people as outsiders. Although the social workers did not represent the government and farmers were more comfortable with them than with government officials or real estate developers, they were outsiders and farmers were not interested in taking their advice. Furthermore, powerful village cadres demanded social organizations to work for them—helping them persuade farmers to accept unfair terms of resettlement. Some young and inexperienced social workers did not understand the nature of their work and became assistants of the strong-handed village leadership, which caused mistrust between the villagers and social workers.

In Taicang, social organizations were involved in the governance of resettled farmers who had lost land. The farmers felt that they were not treated fairly during the land acquisition; they were discontented with the property management, unhappy about the use of collective land and felt that they had no future. All this distrust and anxiety was directed

towards the community officers. To help relieve the tension, a social work organization was introduced in the community. The social workers spent a year trying to organize public events and inviting residents to attend and these ex-farmers became less tense over time. However, it is important to note that the social organization was only able to reduce tension—it was not in a position to solve the ex-farmers’ problems.

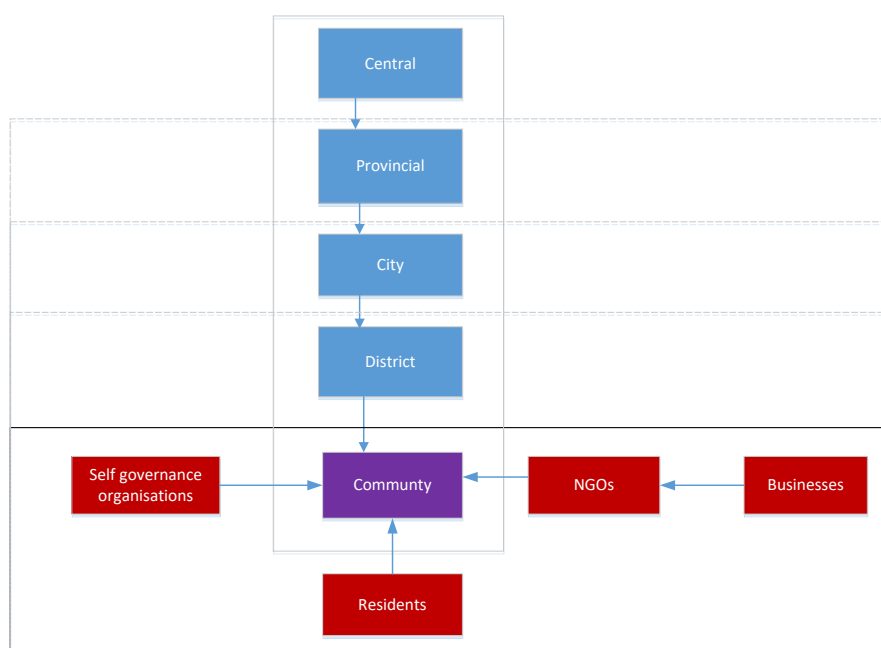
## Discussion and conclusion

This paper has examined China’s policy system and process diffusion. We have argued that policy system and process diffusion should be treated separately from general policy diffusion because system transformation requires more systematic change and demands the coordination of all stakeholders. The four case studies indicated that the Chinese government uses a similar diffusion strategy to ordinary policy diffusion in order to promote system changes. Our fieldwork evidenced that great efforts were invested in these reforms in each case. Despite the unified formula for policy diffusion, the local authorities were provided space to develop their own initiatives that led to some innovative solutions to local problems. However, the top-down diffusion of the bottom-up governance approach in Chinese communities encountered several challenges as discussed in the following sections.

### *Partial reform faces institutional constraints*

The bottom-up approach of governance is embedded in a top-down governing structure. Figure 1 portrays the nature of this government reform. In essence, it is an attempt to amalgamate a hierarchical system and horizontal system. The reform is diffused downwards through the hierarchical system, and then diffused horizontally and further down at the community level. However, tension emerges at the intersections of the two systems.

Figure 1 The nature of the governance reform



Source: Authors’ creation

We can consider migrant workers’ household registration (“*Hukou*”) in Haicang as an example. In the past, a large proportion of *Hukou* was registered in the local labor market

(or talent exchange centers). The new policies require that as long as migrants have signed a labor contract with their employers, they should be allowed to file their *Hukou* with the community in which they live. If an employer is not qualified to be recognized as an enterprise, the worker should also be allowed to file their *Hukou* in communities. However, the *Hukou* status is not attained through simple registration. Upon losing their jobs, migrant workers can leave Haicang without relinquishing their *Hukou* status, which makes it extremely difficult for communities to determine the real residents. This causes several problems for community service arrangement. Consequently, communities desist from accommodating migrants. However, new policies were issued from the top before the communities determined how to adjust to this change; currently, migrants do not have to register with the community and can register with the police. Unfortunately, the communities were not informed of these changes and were stuck between two systems as they fielded inquiries from their residents.

Another example is community service. As discussed by the director of a community in Haicang, “The community authorities introduced reform to decentralise social services based on our consultation with the members of the community. The governing structure was changed to one office and two centres. However, in the district and the city governments, the regulation did not change. They continue to use ‘three offices and five centres’ service model. This caused extra burden for us. We had to produce two sets of documents in case the higher authorities want to inspect our work.”

These two examples indicated that the reforms were introduced to improve services; however, there will always be conflicts at the intersection of the two systems because the reform only occurred at the local level. Given that “local” could refer to different levels in a multi-layered government system, the intersection level can vary. This variation is reflected by the dotted lines in Figure 1. Theoretically, grassroots officials are expected to have a lower service burden with community self-governance and self-service. In contrast, they complained that they had an increased workload. This increase in work is because the public administration system did not transform accordingly.

### ***Pressure to deliver visible outcomes***

The reform was pushed downwards from the top levels of the government; thus, the government played a dominant role. The initial idea was to transform each government level’s way of thinking and functioning; the governments were, however, eager to attain results and particularly in places that were designated as good examples of the reform in action. Thus, the higher authorities established inspections, competitions and awards to encourage the lower authorities and communities to deliver the outcomes that the higher authorities wished to see.

For example, NGOs in both Haicang and Guiyang complained that the government officials were too pushy. Once the NGOs were granted a license to deliver a service and before they could effectively establish their operations, the government officials began bringing in visitors to present the outcomes. The NGOs had to cooperate by showing the visitors around—putting on a show became part of their daily job.

Similar challenges were encountered among community social work organizations that are meant to help develop a stronger sense of community among residents. They realized that if they organized public events such as festivals and activities, it was easier for the government to view these results and record them as performance outcomes. As a result, the number of community entertainment events funded by the state increased. However,



as one interviewee questioned, “Why does the state spend so much money to hire NGOs to entertain the residents all the time? Is this a waste of taxpayers’ money?”

### ***Government withdrawal versus self-governance and servicing***

The transformation from community management to governance provided non-government actors a larger role, mobilized their resources and encouraged self-governance. Therefore, it changed the relationship between the government and the community. However, local government officials may have different understandings of the intentions of community governance even with the strong pressure from the higher-ups. To some extent, the push from the senior officials could have resulted in a cynical response from local officials who believed the campaign would be like other campaigns in the past—it would not last or could be a disguise for the government’s intention to withdraw from certain social policy responsibilities. Some services were allotted to community self-governance organizations without any government support, which resulted in a lack of organization, conflict or in the service getting terminated.

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