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**Life after resettlement in urban China - State-led community building as a reterritorialization strategy**

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**Key words:** Resettlement, reterritorialization, post-displacement, state-led community building, neighbourhood governance, deterritorialization, neighbourly relations

**Abstract**

Resettlement so far has been conceptualised as large-scale form of displacement taking place within a short time frame. This study attempts to reinterpret resettlement as a two-stage process involving both the deterritorialization and reterritorialization of residents by shedding light onto the processes and challenges involved in rebuilding the sense of community of residents after being resettled. Drawing on the case of a relocation settlement in Shanghai, I find that the Chinese state is heavily involved in reterritorializing residents because of its desire to consolidate its influence at the grassroots level and the practical necessity to assist tens of millions of resettled residents who lack access to essential amenities and services. The

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state uses a mechanism which I describe as state-led community building to attempt to rebuild the sense of community of resettled residents in a way that also renders residents more governable. In practice, this involves increasing the number and power of residential committees and to foster resident volunteering and participation through community organisations and events. State-led community building works relatively well on retired urban residents but fails to attract other resident groups including rural and working migrant residents.

## **Introduction**

State-led resettlement schemes have become a salient feature in many countries across the globe (Hsing, 2010; Kearns and Mason, 2013; Kleinhans and Kearns, 2013; Ghertner, 2014; Hammar, 2017; Nikuze *et al.*, 2019; Rogers and Wilmsen, 2020). Affecting large numbers of residents within a short timeframe, resettlement is particularly common in fast developing global South countries such as major urban redevelopment and expansion projects in China (Wang and Wu, 2019), slum clearance schemes in India (Ghertner, 2014) and Zimbabwe (Hammar, 2017) and rehousing programmes targeting low-income residents in South Africa and India (Patel, 2016; Meth and Buthelezi, 2017; Meth *et al.*, 2019). Resettlement so far has been conceptualised as a variegated form of *displacement* that distinguishes itself through its large scale and short timeframe (Hamnett, 2020). At the individual level, resettlement involves the breaking down of existing psychological and social relations of residents to their home and locality (Elliott-Cooper *et al.*, 2020). On a larger scale, resettlement also includes the systemic dismantling of the cultural and social capital of existing communities (Hsing, 2010; Rogers and Wilmsen, 2020). Whilst being mindful of the productive and effective research drawing attention to the problems of displacement, this study argues that it is necessary to look beyond the single moment of displacement and to examine the *post-*

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*displacement* struggles and experiences of residents after being resettled, which so far remains relatively under researched. In particular, this study contends that resettlement involves the crucial second act of *reterritorialization* (Hsing, 2010; Rogers and Wilmsen, 2020). Unlike displacement which focuses on the moments and processes of un-homing (Elliott-Cooper *et al.*, 2020) and the dismantling of communities (Atkinson, 2015; Liu *et al.*, 2017), *reterritorialization* focuses on whether and how resettled residents rebuild their sense of home and belonging and social relations. In the case of China, recent research argues that the state is heavily involved in the *reterritorialization* of resettled residents and aims to reshape the social norms and relations of residents in a way that would render resettled residents ‘more governable’ for the state (Rogers and Wilmsen, 2020; Hsing, 2010; Wang, 2020). However, whilst there is some awareness of the post-displacement struggles of residents and the state’s vested interest in *reterritorialization*, relatively little is known about *how* the state’s is trying to *reterritorialize* residents. Drawing on the case of Heshu Hangcheng resettlement town in Shanghai, this study introduces the concept of *state-led community building* to describe the way the state attempts to rebuild the sense of community of resettled residents in a way that also transforms them into more governable subjects.

### **Post-displacement struggles and resettlement as a process of *reterritorialization***

The concept of displacement has imbued urban studies, with existing research finding largely similar processes of (mostly marginalised) residents being physically uprooted and their local social relations and sense of belonging destroyed (Ghertner, 2014; Atkinson, 2015; Lees *et al.*, 2015; Elliott-Cooper *et al.*, 2020). Displacement has arguably become the most important framework to determine the winners and losers of urban (re)development. State-led resettlements which are particularly prevalent in the fast-developing global South, is interpreted as a form of displacement that distinguishes itself due to its speed and large scale

but otherwise share the same features as other forms of displacement such as gentrification (Elliott-Cooper *et al.*, 2020; Hamnett, 2020). Displacement studies have been integral to understanding the consequences of urban (re)development but there is now growing evidence signalling the need for alternative analytical pursuits that move beyond the singular moment of physical uprooting and to focus on the post-displacement struggles of residents (Wallace, 2020; Wang, Z., 2020; Watt, 2021). Large-scale rehousing programmes in very different socio-political contexts including the United States (Popkin *et al.*, 2009), the Netherlands (Kleinhans and Kearns, 2013), South Africa (Meth and Buthelezi, 2017; Meth *et al.*, 2019), India (Patel, 2016) and China (Wilmsen, 2016; Jiang *et al.*, 2018; Zhang *et al.*, 2018) present both problems but also benefits of state-led relocation schemes that cannot be encapsulated by the framework of displacement. In the US, the state-led HOPE IV scheme demolished large numbers of public housing estates and resettled its mostly low-income residents to socio-economically more mixed areas. Research drawing on longitudinal survey data collected from residents over five years since their resettlement shows that residents preferred their new housing and felt safer in their new neighbourhood but also struggled with financial difficulties such as paying for utility fees as a result of being relocated to private housing estates (Popkin *et al.*, 2009). Relocated residents also have difficulties establishing new social relations with existing residents when they just moved into their new mixed-income neighbourhoods (Kleit, 2005). In India and South Africa, recent state-sponsored rehousing programmes aim to alleviate poverty by resettling low-income residents living in informal settlements to formal public housing (Meth *et al.*, 2019). The resettlement brought significant improvements to their living conditions including owning their own toilet and improved protection from frequent flooding. However, due to poor compensation practice in India, residents suffered from overcrowding whilst relationship breakdowns between resettled couples occurred in the South African case due to tensions over the ownership of the new

property (ibid). Although the benefits and problems of resettlement programmes vary geographically, they share in common the fact that they are often long-lasting problems that occur and persist after the resettlement. Whilst these problems are undoubtedly *triggered* by the resettlement of residents, it requires alternative analytical frameworks to capture their complexities.

In China, state-led resettlement schemes are widespread and have resulted in the physical uprooting of tens of millions of residents (Hsing, 2010). To enable a smooth process of resettling residents, the state would often adopt a strategy that Hsing (2010:188) describes as the *detrterritorialization* of residents. Deterritorialization takes place prior to and during resettlement and involves the “physical, social and cultural dismantlement” of existing communities (Hsing, 2010:188). Local state officials consciously adopt deterritorialization as a strategy to weaken the ability of residents to carry out collective resistance against resettlement (Hsing, 2010:185). The dismantling of existing of community relations is often achieved by a divide and conquer strategy (Hsing, 2010:192) that involves giving preferential treatment, such as providing state employment, to village cadre leaders who are the ones mobilizing and leading collective actions (Wu, 2016:643). Additionally, generous compensation schemes, including cash compensation, state pension and one or more properties, also become important bargaining chips to convince residents (Jiang *et al.*, 2018; Wang, Z. and Wu, 2019). The amount of compensation varies greatly whereby homeowners situated in expensive city centres or strategically important areas, such as areas designated for major events (e.g. Asian Games), receive much higher compensation compared to rural farmers located in the peripheries of the city (Liu *et al.*, 2017). The rifts between residents created through the process of resettlement are often irreparable (Hsing, 2010:193) and long

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years of neighbourliness and solidarity are destroyed through redevelopment (Wu and He, 2005; Liu *et al.*, 2017; Wang *et al.*, 2017).

Thus far, the processes of deterritorialization in Chinese resettlement schemes is interpreted as a variegated form of displacement and is understood as an essential mechanism to free up valuable land for profit-driven mega urban projects (Jiang *et al.*, 2016; Shen and Wu, 2017; Wang, Z. and Wu, 2019). However, there is growing recognition that urban (re)development and resettlement not only serve to generate economic growth but is also a key instrument for consolidating the state's power (Wu, 2018a). The demolition of informal settlements for instance, is often driven by a desire to restore a state-dominated 'spatial order' to the city (Hsing, 2010; Wu, 2002). Furthermore, the resettlement of minority groups in China also serves to align their lifestyle and social order to the Chinese state's vision. According to Rogers and Wilmsen (2020:266), through state led resettlement schemes "small-island inhabitants become climate resettlers, herders become sedentarised agriculturalists or urban labourers, smallholder farmers become wage labourers". Through this perspective, resettlement is viewed as a *subject-making* process that reshape the social order of residents, communities and spaces and serves to restore a spatial order that benefits the state (Hsing, 2010; Rogers and Wilmsen, 2020). For Rogers and Wilmsen (2020:258), resettlement is a *reterritorialization* process that seeks to "render people and space more governable" for the state. Of course, not all residents are resettled for political purposes. The majority of resettled residents in China are still indigenous residents living in inner cities and peri-urban areas and are relocated because of profit-driven or major infrastructure development schemes (Wilmsen, 2016; Wang and Wu, 2019). However, regardless of the underlying motivation, resettlement has undoubtedly resulted in many long-term social impacts for affected residents mostly related to adapting to their post-resettlement livelihood and lifestyle (Wang, 2020).

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The difficulty to adapt is particularly severe amongst rural and ethnic minority residents who are not used to the urban lifestyle that resettlement results in. For instance, resettled landless farmers often struggle to find employment as they have been working in agriculture for the most part of their life (Jiang *et al.*, 2018). Especially older landless farmers see a significant drop in their income because they are too old to retrain in a different occupation but too young to receive state pension (Wu *et al.*, 2013; Wang, Z. and Wu, 2019). For many resettled residents, it often takes many years to regain their original level of income and living standard (Wilmsen, 2016). Moreover, rekindling social relationships after resettlement is challenging as rural residents are often discriminated against by urban residents and tend to isolate themselves from their urban counterparts (Zhang *et al.*, 2018; Du *et al.*, 2020). For residents who are used to a rural lifestyle (e.g. herders, farmers), living in an urban environment also requires significant adjustment such as getting used to living in high rise apartments (Wang, 2020). In light of these problems, in China, resettlement therefore does not end with the physical removal of residents. Both the motivation to assimilate population groups that deviate from the Chinese state's social order and the many acute post-resettlement struggles faced by residents require the Chinese state to come up with a strategy to reterritorialize resettled residents. In this paper, I argue that if deterritorialization is concerned with breaking down existing social norms and relations then reterritorialization in China should be understood as a process of *rebuilding the social norms and relations of resettled residents* in a way that benefits the state. So far however, very little is known about *how* the Chinese state is able to reterritorialize resettled residents. Below, I introduce the concept of state-led community building as the main mechanism for the state to reterritorialize resettled residents.

### **State-led community building as a reterritorialization strategy**



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In order to successfully reterritorialize resettled residents, the Chinese state makes use of a set of mechanisms which I describe as *state-led community building*. State-led community building in China involves increasing the state's presence and influence at the grassroots level by increasing the quantity and power of neighbourhood level state organisations. It also includes efforts to involve residents in community activities and to stimulate them to partake in a neighbourhood governance structure that is dominated by the state. State-led community building is borne from the Chinese state's need, as an authoritarian regime, to maintain societal stability and political legitimacy and is not only applied to resettled residents but affects all residents in urban China (Wang, Y. and Clarke, 2021). Decades of market reform, economic decentralization and rapid urbanisation have eroded the state's control at the grassroots level (Wu, 2002). For example, informal settlements such as urban villages are governed by a rural village collective (Chung, 2010) whilst extensive housing privatisation resulted in the formation of homeowner associations in commercial housing estates (He, 2015; Lu *et al.*, 2018). As part of its attempt to regain control over the governance of cities, the state sought to extend its presence and influence at different geographic scales including at the grassroots level where existing state organisations, including street offices (*jiedao*) and residential committees (*juweihui*), have been significantly strengthened (Shieh and Friedmann, 2008; Read, 2012; Wu, 2018b; Tang, 2020). There are two types of grassroots level state organisations. Firstly, *party branches* (*dang zhibu*) provide the 'political leadership' in residential neighbourhoods and are headed by a branch party secretary who is a government official. The party branch works in tandem with the second key organisation called *residential committees* (RC in short), which officially are self-governing residential organisations where members of the RC are directly voted by residents. The lowest official level of government are street offices (*jiedao*) in urban areas and townships (*zhen*) in rural areas, so in theory RCs are not part of the state's administrative apparatus. However, in

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practice, RCs are led by a party secretary who is a staff member of the street office or township government and in most cases holds both the role as party secretary (the de-facto leader) of the RC and of the party branch (Shieh and Friedmann, 2008). RCs are responsible for a broad range of welfare and social services including taking care of elderly residents who are living alone to mediating family conflicts (Heberer, 2009; Wu, 2018b). During the COVID-19 pandemic, RCs are responsible for enforcing and monitoring lockdown and the quarantine of returning residents. Since the 2000s, a series of policies such as ‘community construction’ and ‘grid governance’ were introduced to increase the quantity and administrative capacity of residential committees (Read, 2012; Tang, 2020). For instance, the ‘grid governance’ policy introduced in 2013 has increased the RCs’ capacity to collect information and monitor ‘target population groups’ which are likely to cause social conflicts that could lead to greater social unrest (Tang, 2020).

In addition to more state presence, the state is trying to increase resident participation in neighbourhood governance. For the Chinese state, the objective of creating party branches and RCs is to create communities that operate as a collective to deal with neighbourhood issues and to carry out government mandates under the leadership of the party state (Tang, 2020). From a practical point of view, resident participation in neighbourhood governance is also indispensable because the sheer number of residents and responsibilities means that residential committees are unable to fulfil them on their own. Residential committees are usually in charge of around 3-4000 residents but often only employ less than ten permanent staff members. With a handful of permanent staff members and a mountain of responsibilities ranging from mediating neighbour disputes to carrying out census surveys, RCs have no choice but to rely on residents’ participation. Consequently, the state strongly promotes resident ‘self-governance’ and tries to attract more residents to take part in formal community

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activities (Shieh and Friedmann, 2008). Community participation however, is relatively low in contemporary China (Heberer, 2009; Wang et al., 2020). The transition to a market-society since the 1980s has led to a much more individualised way of living that is characterised by decreasing levels of neighbourly relations and sense of belonging which in turn has reduced residents' willingness to participate in community activities (Heberer, 2009; Wang et al., 2020). Rather than rejecting the state's dominance in neighbourhood governance, residents simply choose to retreat from formal community life and activities (Wang et al., 2020).

Although state-led community building is not restricted to resettled residents, it plays a particularly important role for resettled residents for range of reasons. Since the early 2000s, resettlement involves rehousing residents *en masse* to so-called relocation settlements (dongqian anzhi fang). Residents would often receive one or more properties in relocation settlements as compensation depending on the value of their original property and land (Shih, 2010; Wang, Z. and Wu, 2019). The state makes use of market mechanisms to finance and develop relocation settlements often through the proceeds from state-led and profit-driven urban development projects (Robinson *et al.*, 2020; Shen *et al.*, 2020). Despite using market mechanisms, relocation settlements are fundamentally state-owned and residents need to rely on the state to adapt to their post-resettlement life. Relocation settlements lack many basic infrastructure and amenities and are located in the peripheries of cities which are commercially unattractive for private developers to invest in. Consequently, resettled residents need to depend on the state to develop amenities such as hospitals, schools and commercial facilities. Residents also need state assistance to help to deal with private estate management firms, the maintenance of their neighbourhood and accessing public services. Especially resettled rural and ethnic minority residents lack awareness and knowledge of property rights and are not accustomed to interacting with estate management (Gaerrang,

2015; Jiang *et al.*, 2018). Compared to residents who have not been resettled and migrant residents, resettled residents have also lost their existing local social ties and support network and thus tend to rely more on the state (Wang, Z. *et al.*, 2017; Du *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, due to their residential composition, relocation settlements may be regarded as ‘high priority’ neighbourhoods requiring state-led community building measures. Residents in relocation settlements include resettled residents who may be dissatisfied with the relocation and migrant residents who are regarded as having the potential to cause greater social unrest (Tang, 2020:5).

### **Research methodology**

This study adopted a mixed methods case study approach and draws on research in one major relocation settlement named Hesha Hangcheng (Hesha from hereon) in Shanghai. Fieldwork in Hesha was carried out over the duration of a year including multiple site visits in June 2018 and July and August 2019. To investigate whether and how residents have tried to rebuild their sense of community and how the Shanghai government was involved in the post-resettlement life of residents, the project collected a range of qualitative data. They include official and internal reports and other written materials such as official directives on the Hesha settlement, government and scholarly publications on Shanghai’s large-scale social settlements, news articles and blog posts. Fieldwork also includes 35 semi-structured interviews lasting between one to two hours. 19 interviews were conducted with urban and rural resettled residents, shared ownership housing, social rent and migrant residents. Additionally, 16 government officials involved in Hesha settlement were interviewed including senior officials of the Hesha Hangcheng Neighbourhood government and leaders and staff members of seven residential committees and communist party branches. Other

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forms of qualitative data include field observations, informal visits to community events, and informal conversations with local residents and shop owners.

### **Rebuilding communities for the state – The case of Hesha Hangcheng relocation settlement**

The Hesha settlement is situated in Shanghai's Pudong New District and is one of 38 planned large scale social settlements developed by the Shanghai municipality in the early 2000s.

Large numbers of low-income residents living in dilapidated and overcrowded properties and residents resettled by urban (re)development projects in Shanghai have prompted the municipality to develop so-called large-scale residential communities (known as *daxing juzhu shequ* in Shanghai) to accommodate the residents. These large-scale residential communities are a mixture of relocation settlements, shared ownership housing and social rent housing.

The development of these large-scale social settlements is an entirely state-led initiative whereby the settlements were centrally planned and then delivered through market mechanisms (Wu, 2018a). The private sector does not play any role in their development.

The municipality provided the land for the settlements and also jointly funds their development together with the respective district governments where the settlements are located. Funding came from the proceeds of profit-driven mega urban projects owned by the Shanghai government. The masterplans for the settlements were created by the Shanghai municipal planning bureau and developed by several state-owned development corporations working directly under the municipality (Xu, 2011). Hesha was initiated in 2010 as part of the municipality's second batch of large-scale social settlements, covering an area of 5.03km<sup>2</sup> and currently has a population of over 70,000 residents. The settlement's planned total population is 150,000 residents and is located in the rural part of Shanghai's Pudong New District (see figure 1). There are around 22,600 resettlement housing units in Hesha which

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account for around 60 percent of the settlement's total number of housing units and is spread across 11 gated residential neighbourhoods. Hesha also has affordable housing for low-income residents including shared ownership housing (27 percent) and social rent housing (5.2 percent). Moreover, the settlement has attracted large numbers of migrant tenants who account for more than 30 percent of the total population (Internal document). Given the large size of the settlement, a new level of government was created to be in charge, which is called the Hesha Hangcheng Neighbourhood (shequ) government (Hesha government hereon). It sits below the Hangtuo township government and is in charge of the entire settlement. The housing for resettled residents were completed in phases and delivered in batches of residential neighbourhoods (xiaoqu), which like private commodity housing estates all have security guards, physical walls and gates. The size of residential neighbourhoods varies but on average accommodates around 900 households. In Hesha, a residential committee is usually in charge of two to three residential neighbourhoods. Residents relocated from rural Shanghai live in separate residential neighbourhoods from urban residents relocated from Shanghai's inner cities. This study will refer to residential neighbourhoods consisting only of rural resettled residents as rural resettlement neighbourhoods and neighbourhoods inhabited by urban Shanghai residents as urban resettlement neighbourhoods. In Hesha, both urban and rural resettled residents have received significant levels of compensation, whereby on average residents received 2-3 properties and in some cases receiving 4-5 properties.



*Figure 1* Location of Hesha Hangcheng relocation settlement

Despite the high level of compensation and relatively decent rental income of resettled residents however, support from residential committees and party branches in the newly developed residential neighbourhoods were still required for various reasons. During the early years, Hesha residents faced many challenges including the absence of basic infrastructures including roads, public transport, grocery shops, and schools (Senior official of Hesha government, July 2019). Another key challenge was to govern resettled residents, who moved in from almost all of the districts in Shanghai including inner city, peri-urban and rural districts. Residents were completely unfamiliar with their new surrounding and their new neighbours and needed help for many issues. For instance, although residential neighbourhoods were managed by private estate management companies, it often took several months before an estate management was hired to take over all the duties from the state owned developers. Residents therefore needed government support during this transition

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from state developers to private estate management with regards to managing the estate. Even after the take-over, residential committees need to act as the intermediary between residents and the private estate management with respect to negotiating the price of the service charge, collecting outstanding services charges and discussing and identifying repair responsibilities amongst others. The reason for this dependence is because most resettled residents are not used to a private governance format and interacting with private estate management.

Resettled inner city residents used to live in publicly managed housing such as work-unit estates or traditional courtyards which have always been managed by residential committees.

On the other hand, rural resettled residents lived in villages managed by the rural collective and where housing repair was carried out by the individual. Resettled rural residents are thus not familiar with the idea of paying a service charge or having a private estate management.

The party secretary of a rural resettlement neighbourhood in Hesha explained that at first most of their rural resettled residents were reluctant to pay the private estate management and that it took a year for the residential committee to convince 95% of the residents to pay the service charge. Having lived many decades in publicly or collectively managed housing estates also means that resettled residents are accustomed to asking for help from their residential and village committees, respectively, when encountering problems in their neighbourhood, such as conflict with neighbours (Interview with party secretary of residential committee B, July 2019).

Apart from providing assistance to residents, party branches and RCs are needed to implement state directives. One important government directive that RCs were working on when the author visited in July 2019 was Shanghai's new policy on waste sorting. Following President Xi Jinping's urge to reduce waste, from the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2019, the Shanghai government required all its citizens and organisations to sort their waste into four different



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categories or face fines up to 200 Yuan for individuals and 50,000 Yuan for companies (China Daily, 2019). Residential committees have been at the forefront of enforcing the new regulation including informing and educating residents about waste sorting rules, distributing information sheets and new waste equipment as well as monitoring the uptake of waste sorting (Senior official of Heshu government, July 2019). For Heshu, each RC needs to ensure that around 1,800 households are properly following this policy. However, the seven RCs we interviewed only have five to seven permanent staff. Resident participation and volunteers are thus indispensable for the completion of this tall task as one RC party secretary explains: “If there were no volunteers then there would have been a lot of mess and nobody would separate their waste.” (Party Secretary of residential committee C, urban resettlement neighbourhood, July 2019). Resident volunteers were key in enforcing the waste separation directive according to one volunteer:

“We are the ones working on the waste separation policy the government introduced. We set up eight spots for waste separation in the neighbourhood and we have teams of volunteers working in morning and afternoon shifts and stationed at these spots to inform residents about the waste separation scheme.” (Volunteer resident relocated from inner Shanghai, July 2019)

In addition to volunteers, the party secretary in one urban resettlement neighbourhood acknowledges that good neighbourly relations can help the RC to better enforce the waste separation scheme:

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“The neighbourly relations amongst residents is very good...so it comes across much more natural and casual when you ask everyone whether they have separated their waste and stuck the QR code onto their trash bags<sup>1</sup>.” (Party secretary of residential committee A, July 2019)

The waste separation schemes is only one of the many tasks and government directives that require the participation of volunteers and the cooperation of residents. From the example of waste separation, it becomes apparent that the governance of resettlement neighbourhoods in Hesha requires the collaboration between RCs, volunteers and residents whereby the RC sets the direction and tasks that volunteers and residents need to carry out and comply with, respectively. One volunteer in an urban resettlement neighbourhood describes this form of collaboration between state and residents as follows:

“There are three sources of energy that help this neighbourhood run so well. The first one comes from the party branch, this is political energy. The second energy source comes from our volunteer teams, without the volunteers, even if you have a lot of political energy, it would be useless. Finally, the energy from the population (qunzhong), the degree of public participation and support is very important. Our neighbourhood has all three sources of energy” (Retired resident volunteer, party member and director of residential committee of neighbourhood A, June 2019).

Community participation and resident volunteers however, are not a given in Hesha and it took years for the township and Hesha government to build up the neighbourhood governance structure and the current level of community engagement. Below I set out the various mechanisms the state employed to try and rebuild the community in Hesha.

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## **Setting up neighbourhood state organisations and recruitment of party member volunteers**

Initial state presence in Heshu's newly developed residential neighbourhoods took the form of government workstations (zhengfu gongzuo zhan), also known as government representative offices (zhengfu paichu jigou), which were created by the township government. Government workstations are temporary government institutions set up to support residents until party branches and RCs, which require a set number of members and sufficient funding, can be created (Interview with RC party secretaries, July 2019).

Government workstations are responsible for preparing residential neighbourhoods to apply for party branches and RCs. The sequence of setting up state institutions is very important whereby party branches must be established first before creating RCs:

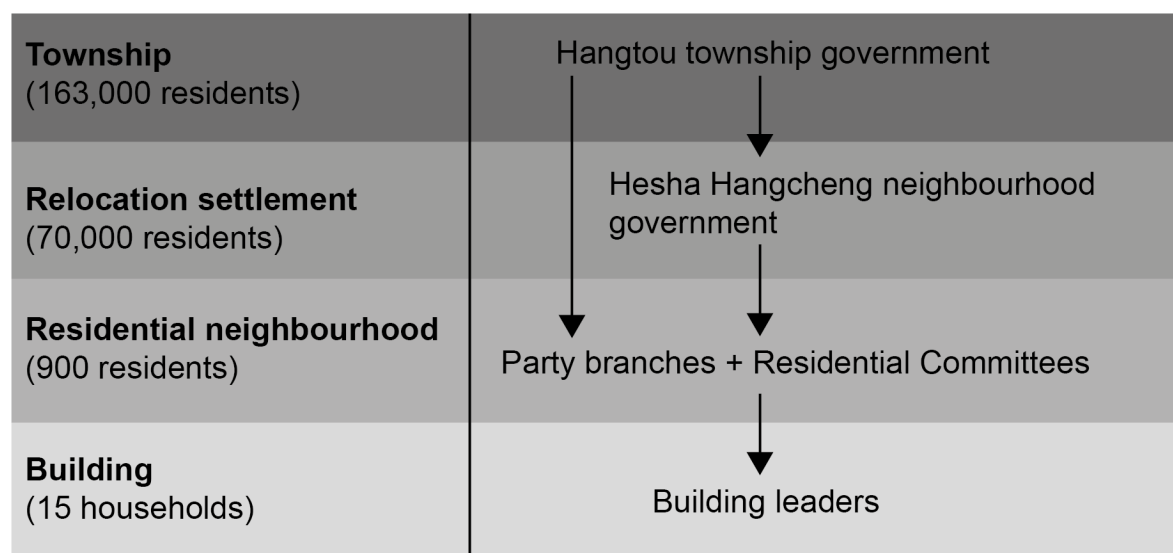
“The neighbourhood was completed in late 2009...and it was in 2010 that a party branch was created. It was only in 2013 that the residential committee was created. We had to do this step by step, you firstly need to have a party branch before you can create a residential committee. This is because we are all led by the party so you cannot jump the rank (tiao ji).” (Party secretary of residential committee Z, native Hangtuo relocation settlement, July 2019).

In practice, candidates put forward for the resident committee election need to be screened by the party branch first. This is to ensure that candidates are considered trustworthy and reputable amongst residents and that their values and ideals align with the party state (Party secretary of residential committee A, July, 2019). Resident volunteers are of crucial importance during this early process of establishing state presence and residents who are party members were the main target of recruitment: “You need to mobilise the party members first. Many of our volunteers are party members. You need to establish the

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relationship with residents first.” (Party secretary of residential committee B, urban resettlement neighbourhood, July 2019).

Another important governance mechanism set up by RCs, which relies on volunteers, is the *building leaders scheme*. The building leaders scheme requires every building within the residential neighbourhood to have five resident volunteers taking on a leadership role in a specific aspect. Each building on average has 15 households. The duties of the five residents include 1) a communication officer responsible for informing residents about the latest information and policies regarding the neighbourhood, 2) a conflict negotiator who helps residents from the same building resolve conflicts (e.g. noise nuisance), 3) a security officer who is the first point of contact for residents if they have any concerns about the security of their home or the building, 4) a sanitation officer who is in charge of keeping the cleanliness of the building and 5) the building leader who oversees all the aforementioned aspects. The building leaders scheme allows the RC to exert more influence over individual households by assigning volunteer personnel to each building. Concurrently, the scheme also reduces the workload for RCs as RC staff members do not need to directly manage 2-3000 residents but instead only need to govern the building leaders. Figure 2 shows the governance structure of Heshu settlement and how many residents or households each level of governance is in charge of. The building leaders scheme can be considered as the settlement’s most granular level of governance.



*Figure 2* The governance structure of Hesha Hangcheng relocation settlement

### **Fostering community participation through rebuilding neighbourly relations**

The recruitment of resident volunteers is an ongoing process because volunteers are needed across a range of activities. Residential committees also realise that solely relying on party member residents is not enough to complete all the tasks since only few residents in their jurisdictions are party members. However, recruiting non-party member residents is more difficult because residents normally engage very little with RCs unless they encounter specific problems that require the RC's assistance. The RCs in Hesha have therefore created a series of activities and interest groups that are aimed at firstly improving neighbourly relations and secondly increasing the interaction between residents and RCs as a way to recruit more volunteers.

### ***Creating interest and hobby groups***

One common strategy employed by RCs across Hesha is to set up a variety of interest groups that residents can participate in. Organising interest groups is a RC's duty but also an important way for RCs to recruit more resident volunteers. The most commonly offered interest groups focus on singing, dancing and calligraphy and attract many retired residents

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especially in urban resettlement neighbourhoods. There are also interest groups unique to certain RCs. For example, one RC created a charity kitchen which meets once every fortnight to cook for elderly residents who live alone or low income households. In addition to providing a space for residents to pursue their interests, these informal groups also become an important platform for residents who come from across Shanghai to get to know each other and form new neighbourly ties:

“We also created this charity kitchen where residents can come and volunteer, get to know each other and complain about things together. These activities are very helpful in strengthening the cohesion between our residents and create a sense of belonging.” (Party secretary of residential committee, urban resettlement neighbourhood F, July 2019)

RCs are responsible for setting up the interest groups including providing the space, finding teachers for the classes (e.g. singing, dancing), and appointing a resident leader for each interest group. There are thus more occasions for leaders and members of interest groups to interact with RC staff members which in turn allow RC staff to recruit volunteers more naturally as one volunteer explains:

“When I just arrived in this neighbourhood, there was something I had to sort out and the RC helped me. So that is why I came to this RC and the party secretary here is very kind...Then I saw that there were different interest groups such as dancing and singing so I joined these interest groups and then I started to be a volunteer as well.” (Retired resident, relocated from inner Shanghai in 2015 and neighbourhood volunteer, July 2019)

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Our research shows that successful RCs in Heshu settlement have managed to recruit many volunteers through this method. For example, one RC in charge of an urban resettlement neighbourhood states that since the RC's establishment in 2014, it was able to increase its initial seven volunteers, who are all party members, to over 70 residents in 2019 out of which only 11 are party members. The RC has also created 11 interest groups which have become important channels to recruit more volunteers (Party secretary of residential committee B, urban resettlement neighbourhood, July 2019).

### *Community activities and schemes*

Aside from standard interest groups, RCs organise a variety of community activities and schemes aimed at increasing neighbourly interactions between residents. RCs often invest great efforts into creating novel activities to attract the attention of residents:

“This is a positive cycle. If we did not have good neighbourly relations then there would be many conflicts amongst the volunteers and residents and people would not want to participate in our activities...So whenever we create activities, we always make an effort to attract as many people as possible. You have to make sure that your activities are novel and creative, if they are mediocre then people won't take part.” (Party secretary of residential committee B, urban resettlement neighbourhood July 2019)

One RC in charge of an urban resettlement neighbourhood has for instance organised a ‘goods exchange event’ where residents can bring their unwanted items and exchange them with other residents. According to the RC's party secretary, the underlying idea was to give residents more chances to see and interact with fellow residents and to improve the relationship between residents, volunteers and the RC (Director of residential committee B,

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urban resettlement neighbourhood, July 2019). The Hesha government introduced a similar scheme in 2018 which encouraged residents to exchange goods and services. The idea was also partly borne out of necessity since Hesha still lacked many amenities. In some resettlement neighbourhoods for example, residents still struggle to find a plumbing service. According to a senior official at the Hesha government, the ‘service and goods exchange scheme’ was a way to harness the talents and skills of residents and use it for the benefit of the entire settlement. Residents could register with the Hesha government and indicate their particular skills (e.g. plumbing, electrician etc.). Residents would receive points from the Hesha government for each time they provide a free service to another residents. The points in turn can be used to access services offered by the Hesha government and other residents who are on this scheme. The scheme also intends to improve residents’ relationships with the local government and residents outside of their own residential neighbourhood (Interview with senior official at Hesha government, July 2019).

### **Vision versus reality – The outcomes and challenges of state-led community building**

Since Hesha’s creation in 2010, the Hesha government, party branches and RCs, have continually invested into state-led community building but the outcomes after nine years is relatively mixed as different population groups reacted differently to the state’s community rebuilding attempts. Residents resettled from inner-city Shanghai, including those who live in shared ownership and urban resettlement neighbourhoods, have engaged the most. Especially retired urban residents participate enthusiastically in community organisations and activities. This is mostly because the community groups and activities, such as calligraphy or dancing, were designed with urban residents in mind. Urban residents are also familiar with living in apartments and interacting with residential committees which only exist in cities. Additionally, being located quite far from their children and friends who live in inner-city



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Shanghai and being retired, urban residents have the time and willingness to participate. In contrast, elderly resettled residents from rural Shanghai who make up a third of residents in Hesha, are much less engaged. Almost all of the rural residents in Hesha settlement are native residents who were resettled from either the Hangtou township or the Pudong district. Unlike urban residents, most of the elderly rural residents are essentially *landless farmers* (He *et al.*, 2009) who worked as farmers and lived a rural lifestyle until they were resettled. For elderly rural residents, being resettled to Hesha settlement involved adapting to a completely new urban way of life including living in high rise apartments and paying a service charge for their housing amongst many other aspects (Interviews with three resettled rural residents in their 60s, July 2019). Given the many challenges of adapting to their new lifestyle, elderly rural residents are therefore all the more reluctant and disinterested in the various community activities and groups, which they are not familiar with. Compared to urban resettled and shared ownership neighbourhoods, the verdict about the success of community building was much more negative in RCs in charge of rural resettled neighbourhoods. An interview with the RC's director of a rural resettlement neighbourhood, where all its residents used to be native farmers from the Hangtou township, reveals:

“The residents here they do not have the same way of life as the elderly aunties from inner city Shanghai. Residents here do not like singing or dancing. The mindset of residents here has not changed yet. For instance, the waste separation scheme, half of the residents have changed their mindset [such as] people like myself who are younger or my parents' generation. But residents from their 60s upwards do not participate and their mindset is only slowly adapting to this new life. They cannot catch up to the mindset and progress of our time (yushi jujin). They do not want to progress and improve. They still want to return to their old way of living and return to the past. They keep saying how it was better in the past

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before they were relocated.” (Director of residential committee Z, rural relocation settlement, July 2019).

A second challenge is recruiting younger volunteers. Resettled residents of working age have mostly sold their compensation property(ies) in order to buy an apartment closer to the inner city. The remaining working age residents in Hesha are predominantly migrant tenants, who rarely volunteer or participate in community activities due to their busy working schedule. Despite their lack of community engagement however, RC staff members remark that migrant tenants cooperate well with new state directives such as the waste separation scheme and rarely complain. The residential turnover of migrant tenants is also very quick, averaging between half a year to two years thus rendering any significant community engagement more unlikely (Senior official, Hesha government, July 2019). Consequently, almost all resident volunteers are retired, which in turn is a major concern for RCs: “The average age of our volunteer group is 60 and considered quite young already. The average age of other neighbourhood volunteer groups is around 70 years” (Volunteer and conflict negotiator in urban resettlement neighbourhood A, July 2019). The main worry is the issue of liability if elderly volunteers were to injure themselves or become sick because of their work for the RC. Many RCs in the Hesha settlement have already placed an age limit of 70 years when recruiting volunteers. However, with a generally aging population in Hesha, where more than half of the population are above the age of 60 (Internal document), and a highly mobile tenant population, it remains unclear how RCs will be able to recruit more volunteers in the next decade.

Furthermore, despite frequent neighbouring amongst resident volunteers, several note that their relationship with neighbours and fellow volunteers has changed significantly since their

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rehousing. Residents feel that neighbourly relationships have become more formal and less intimate and that smart phone messaging has replaced in person interactions as one resident explains:

“We have a shared wechat group and are very active on our wechat group now...We would ask how everyone is doing, and people would share what is going on in their homes. We have a volunteer wechat group, public square dancing wechat group, singing wechat group, dancing wechat group, and a wechat group with some good friends and neighbours. Back in our old neighbourhood, there were very few wechat groups because we would meet each other in person anyways...But the wechat groups are more about organising activities and less about sharing our personal stories...it is more formal. Back then we would share more of our own stories because we met in person.” (Retired resident, relocated from inner Shanghai in 2015 and neighbourhood volunteer, July 2019)

Another major challenge voiced by RCs is the difficulty to keep volunteers engaged and under the command of the RCs. Residents may have joined the RCs as volunteers due to a passion for community work or loyalty to the communist party but maintaining their enthusiasm and the leadership role of the RC is challenging. Participation in state-led community organisations and activities is voluntary and RCs do not have the financial resources or the authoritative force to entice or coerce residents into community participation. As the party secretary of one urban resettlement neighbourhood remarks, fundamentally the relationship between RCs and volunteers and residents is not defined by a clear hierarchy and interest:

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“Actually governing people in a company is very simple because there is a clearly defined relationship based on interest (liyi guanxi). Governing people in a neighbourhood is much harder because the relationship is not defined by interest. This person does not have to listen to me. There is no such thing as a leader (lingdao). If people are nice then they would call me party secretary but if they are not nice then they can easily say, who are you and why should I care? Even volunteers are the same.” (Party secretary of residential committee C, urban resettlement neighbourhood, July 2019).

To address their lack of authority, over the years RCs have tried to maintain the enthusiasm of volunteers by rewarding volunteers on a periodic basis. Rewards include gifts such as shampoos or household products, holding an annual event with residents and to recognise and entertain volunteers through talent shows and bingo games. Volunteers also receive monetary ‘rewards’ such as a monthly 400 yuan payment to building leaders. However, in recent years regulations have changed and RCs are no longer allowed to pay or reward volunteers. As a consequence, the relationship between RCs and its volunteers has worsened:

“There are no material rewards for volunteers... This makes our work as the residential committee really difficult. The volunteers think that we just sit around in the office and do nothing. They think that, as volunteers, they need to do all our work here but do not receive anything. Many residents complain and blame us.” (Staff member of residential committee Z, rural relocation settlement, July 2019)

The case of Heshu shows that state-led community building is not a straightforward process and the outcomes vary greatly depending on the population group. Whilst the state has been successful in engaging retired residents resettled from the inner cities, there is a lack of

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working-age volunteers and little participation from rural resettled residents and migrant tenants. The absence of a clear hierarchical relationship between RCs and volunteers is also a major challenge for the state to maintain its dominance at the grassroots level. China's marketisation has had a profound impact on the social order of cities and it remains to be seen whether elderly volunteers, who grew up in a socialist China, will be able to pass on the baton to a generation that has been raised in a market society. The case of Hesha settlement has also shed light on a much less powerful side of the Chinese state. From the example of the waste separation in Shanghai, it is possible to see that the state directive's success hinges upon the voluntary participation and cooperation of residents, which cannot be gained through stringent penalties but rather through positive engagement with residents. Compared to the powerful state owned development corporations involved in urban development, Hesha's grassroots state organisations are much more resource-stricken and dependent on the goodwill and participation of residents.

## **Conclusion**

Displacement has become the most dominant framework to assess the social impacts of urban (re)development across the globe (Ghertner, 2014; Atkinson, 2015; Lees *et al.*, 2015; Elliott-Cooper *et al.*, 2020). State-led resettlement schemes, which are particularly prominent in the fast developing Global South, have also been interpreted as a form of displacement that distinguishes itself through its scale and speed (Ghertner, 2014; Elliott-Cooper *et al.*, 2020; Hamnett, 2020). However, there is growing evidence showing that resettlement schemes produce more complex and long-lasting problems beyond the immediate struggle of displacement (Popkin *et al.*, 2009; Kleinhans and Kearns, 2013; Meth *et al.*, 2019). Studies interpreting resettlement as a means of subject-making and a method to enforce a spatial order dominated by the state also signal the need to consider resettlement as more than just a

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mechanism to physically remove residents (Hsing, 2010; Wu *et al.*, 2013; Rogers and Wilmsen, 2020). Focusing on the post-resettlement life of residents (Wang, 2020), I conceptualise state-led resettlement schemes as a two part process involving the breaking down of communities through deterritorialization and crucially the rebuilding of place-based social relations and sentiments through reterritorialization. Building on reterritorialization as a conceptual basis, this study contributes in two ways to the ongoing research on the social impacts of urban (re)development.

Firstly, reterritorialization as an analytical framework has shed light on the state's motivation and role in assisting residents to adapt to a life after resettlement. Through the lens of displacement, the state is often understood to play a complicit or leading role in the resettlement of residents (Hsing, 2010; Ghertner, 2014; Jiang *et al.*, 2018; Wang, Z. and Wu, 2019) whereby the state's interaction with residents is characterised by coercion and bargaining and seemingly ends once all residents have been removed. By focusing on the reterritorialization process, this study shows that the involvement of the state extends well into the post-resettlement lives of residents and is motivated by political and practical reasons. Resettled residents face a series of struggles including lack of access to amenities and services, absence of community relations and difficulty to adapt to living in a privately governed estate particularly for those who have not lived in cities. In light of these problems and to avoid any potential social unrests, the state is obligated to support residents in adapting to their post-resettlement life including assistance with the day to day management of the relocation settlements and the provision of essential services and amenities. Additionally, leading the reterritorialization process also allows the state to keep resettled residents engaged in community activities and help to carry out state directives, such as the waste sorting scheme. Both the practical necessity to assist millions of resettled residents and the

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political motivation thus mean that the state cannot stop at breaking down the social norms and relations through deterritorialization but crucially needs to rebuild them in a way that is more governable for the state and ensures societal stability (Rogers and Wilmsen, 2020). In contrast to the Chinese state's near omnipotent ability to entice and coerce residents to resettle, the reterritorializing process has also revealed a much less powerful side of the state when trying facilitate community engagement amongst resettled residents. As Heshu's case shows, state-led community building is fraught with challenges. Rural and migrant residents rarely participate in community activities whilst residential committees struggle to maintain a hierarchical relationship with its resident volunteers. Through the case of the Heshu settlement, this study hopes to have shown the potential of reterritorialization, as an analytical framework, to help illuminate the state's long-term role in the post-resettlement life of residents in a variety of geographical and socio-political settings.

Secondly, existing studies often focus on the destruction of existing communities through displacement but little is known about whether and how residents are able to recover from the process of un-homing and loss of community (Wu and He, 2005; Hsing, 2010; Elliott-Cooper *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, although there is a growing awareness that resettlement involves a process of reterritorialization, it is still relatively unknown how this process unfolds in practice. Through the case of Heshu, it can be seen that the state has devised a mechanism, which I call state-led community building, to reterritorialize resettled residents. This mechanism firstly involves strengthening state presence at the grassroots level by increasing the number and responsibility of party branches and residential committees (Shieh and Friedmann, 2008; Tang, 2020). Once state presence in neighbourhoods has been established, the state then focuses on stimulating resident participation in state-led community organisations and activities. The objective of state-led community building is to create 'self-

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governing' communities under the leadership of the communist party. To stimulate participation, the state firstly focuses on rebuilding the neighbourly relationship amongst residents and increasing their sense of belonging through the creation of a range of community organisations and events. The organisations and events are all aimed at increasing the interaction between residents and the residential committees. The loss of neighbourly relations through (re)development is often regarded as key signs of displacement and unreversible social damage (Atkinson, 2015; Liu *et al.*, 2017; Wallace, 2020; Watt, 2021). Yet, state-led community building has revealed that neighbourly interactions also play a key role in the rebuilding of communities whereby residential committees regard it as a stimulant for sense of belonging and community participation. This new understanding of the role of neighbouring may provide a fruitful avenue for future studies interested in whether and how new communities are created in the first place.

### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> In order to track the uptake of the waste separation scheme and identify individual households who have not followed the regulation, in Shanghai all residents are required to stick a designated QR code onto their waste bags.

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