Abstract
This paper examines the role of political capacity in effecting urban policy in market-oriented socialist regimes. In recent years, scholars have debated the role of the state in guiding the processes of urban development and expansion. This paper hypothesizes that urban policy implementation is possible, but difficult to fully realize, even for regimes with governmental structures that provide extensive state power and control. Two case studies are considered: China, which features more large cities than any other state, and Vietnam, which retains one of the fastest rates of urbanization in world history. Ultimately, while both states have demonstrated little success in fulfilling urban expansion policy through the implementation of household registration systems, China has partially succeeded in managing direct urban development of its cities, due to more effective methods of administrative organization. Neither country, however, can be considered to have complete control over its urbanization process, as individuals and outside interests retain extensive control over their development and expansion.
**Introduction**

In 2015, construction on Shanghai Tower, the tallest building in China and the second tallest on the planet, was officially completed. This dramatically twisting skyscraper anchors and dominates Shanghai’s financial district of Lujiazui, on the newly developed eastern bank of the Huangpu River. The neighborhood, for decades a low-rise slum of warehouses and factories, has since 1992 erupted into one of the most intensely developed central business districts in the world, featuring three supertall skyscrapers,¹ miles of elevated footpaths, and ten separate landmark five-star hotels. The district’s sleek, wealthy, and futuristic atmosphere is so iconic that, when the 2013 film *Her* necessitated a film set for a 2050 rendition of Los Angeles, central Shanghai was the obvious choice for its stand-in.

The swift transformation of Lujiazui, from an unremarkable shantytown into one of the most iconic skylines in the world, is emblematic of the massive urban revolution that is rapidly transforming the nature of life in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Contrary to the widespread perception of the low-incomes world as undeveloped, rural, and largely pre-industrial, the urban populations of low and medium income states are growing at an amazingly rapid pace. The global urban population, which already outnumbers its rural counterpart, is expected to increase by another 2.5 billion people before 2050 (which will represent 69 percent of the world population),² with 90 percent of that growth occurring in Asia and Africa alone.³ The state of China is expected to add another 292 million urban residents by 2050, while its socialist brother to the south, Vietnam, has one of the highest urbanization rates in the world, at 3.4 percent per year.⁴ Given the Earth’s recent attainment of a majority urban population, as well as the present

---

¹ “Supertall” refers to developments above 300 meters in height.
² Liu, 585
³ World Bank, 60
⁴ Ibid.
rapidity of urban growth, it is essential to understand to what extent these state governments are capable of controlling and manipulating the process of urbanization.

This paper investigates the question: Do the governments of China and Vietnam differ in their abilities to successfully implement urban policy, and if so, why is this? The two case studies of China and Vietnam were chosen due to their mutually high rates of urbanization, their historical and cultural similarities, and their comparable timelines of industrialization and development. In particular, in the past thirty years, both China and Vietnam have embarked on rapidly improvised yet structurally similar economic reform programs, combining their traditional Maoist political organizations with free market economies emphasizing the attraction of foreign direct investment and the achievement of rapid economic development; therefore, the question for both states is to what extent the extensive political capacity afforded to Maoist regimes is compromised or otherwise affected by the prioritization of developmental goals in the context of urban development and rural-urban migration.

This paper is divided into five sections. It begins by introducing the background and major theories behind governmental capacity, urbanization, and rural-urban migration. Sections two through five evaluate the case studies of China and Vietnam, evaluating each country’s capacity in implementing policies concerning the two policy areas that together constitute the process of urbanization: urban development, referring the physical construction of a city’s private and public spaces, as well as rural-urban migration, which drives virtually all new urban population growth in the cases of China and Vietnam. These two metrics were evaluated through investigations and analysis of present literature on the subjects, as well as through in-country research and interviews taking place in Beijing, China and Hanoi, Vietnam.

---

5 Zhu 2012, 78
Theory and Background

Broadly speaking, the literature surrounding the politics of urbanization is divided on the question of to what extent governments are capable, in theory or in practice, of effectively implementing large-scale policies concerning urban development and urban population growth. The term “capable” in this context refers to the concept of “political capacity,” defined broadly as “the ability of the state to wield power to carry out basic tasks,” and for the purposes of this paper, as “the ability of the state to achieve the kinds of changes in society that their leaders have sought through state planning policies, and actions.” Essentially, state capacity measures to what extent states are capable of implementing the policies that they have enacted into law. Works investigating the role of state capacity in the process of urbanization tend to fall within one of two major camps: those who view urbanization as a largely autonomous process that occurs without, or despite, a large degree of state intervention, and those who view urbanization as a process that can be effectively guided and manipulated by a rational and capable state.

In the case of urban development, these two conflicting positions are taken up by two schools of urban planning theory: incrementalism and synopticism. Incrementalism is a general theory of urban planning methodology that advocates for a small-scale, often improvisational approach to an urban planning challenge, as opposed to the preparation and attempted execution of ambitiously planned projects and goals. The theories of incrementalism limit the scale and ambition of urban planning projects, under the argument that cities function most efficiently when decisions are firmly bounded by practical limitations, and plans are developed in a cautious manner. Incrementalists cite ambitious planning failures, such as Saint Petersburg’s Okhta

---

6 O’Neil, 309
7 Midgal, 13
8 Quinn, 7
9 Lane, 290
Center and, closer to home, the city of Seattle’s waterfront tunneling project, as evidence that urban planning is most effective when limited to a small scale.\textsuperscript{10,11} By contrast, advocates for synopticism as an approach to urban planning maintain that governments are capable of effectively implementing sustainable large-scale urban planning and radically transforming cityscapes, so long as these plans carefully evaluate available policy options and strive for as rational and systemic of an approach to urban design as possible.\textsuperscript{12} These theorists cite successful cases of large-scale urban planning, such as the planned cities of Canberra, Brasilia, and Navi Mumbai, as evidence that governments can exhibit significant capacity in implementing urban policy, so long as that policy is rationally sound.

In the case of urban population growth, this same debate is framed around the subject of rural-urban migration, which drives virtually all population growth in the cities of China and Vietnam.\textsuperscript{13} Literature on the subject is conflicted as to what extent governments can implement effective policy to manage, facilitate, or constrain this process. Arthur Lewis, one of the first scholars to investigate the role of the state in facilitating migration, argued that rural-urban migration will primarily occur without, or despite, state intervention, as a natural byproduct of industrialization.\textsuperscript{14} Lewis’s model states that rural economies always suffer from labor surpluses, while urban economies suffer from labor shortages; because of this, a significant wage difference persists, inevitably triggering large-scale migration to urban centers, the motivation for which is strong enough to counter state policies prohibiting this large-scale population transfer. According to Lewis, as industrialization proceeds and urban areas become saturated with migrants, the labor

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{10} Kramer
\item \textsuperscript{11} Leslie
\item \textsuperscript{12} Lane, 293
\item \textsuperscript{13} Zhu 2012, 78
\item \textsuperscript{14} Lewis, 446
\end{itemize}
imbalance will eventually sort itself out without significant state intervention.\textsuperscript{15} However, Lewis’s assumption that the migration of rural people to urban areas is solely the result of wage differences is unfounded; rural migrants have many other reasons to relocate, including personal connections, material desires, or cultural influences, all of which can be actively promoted or repressed by the state to some degree. In short, Lewis’s theory of rural-urban migration provides a strong overview of the mechanics of the process, but assumes an overly passive role of the state that rarely plays out in reality.

Other scholars have hypothesized a more active role of the state in containing or restraining urban expansion through migration. In the early 1970s, Michael Todaro attempted to formulate a cohesive analytical theory of urban labor markets in what he deemed “less developed” countries. Todaro concluded that, contrary to Lewis’s model, the urban traditional sector could not be substantially reduced without “a concentrated effort at making rural life more attractive.”\textsuperscript{16} In other words, rural-urban migration would occur regardless of the extent of the wage differential; a migrant will relocate even if they end up receiving a lower wage in their new urban environment, because of their anticipation of job opportunities in the future.\textsuperscript{17} Todaro’s model indicates that policymakers in developing countries should work to bring “city lights” to the countryside, rather than futilely dissuading rural migrants from incorporating themselves into the urban sphere.\textsuperscript{18} While this theory of rural-urban migration does help to explain the consistently high unemployment rates of migrants in major cities, it joins Lewis’s model in not recognizing the diversity of motives in relocating to urban areas.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 448
\textsuperscript{16} Todaro, 147
\textsuperscript{17} Cornwell, 24
\textsuperscript{18} Todaro, 147
In his 1966 article *A Theory of Migration*, Everett Lee attempts to sort the inconsistent and debatable literature on migration into several distinct categories. Lee divides the forces of rural-urban migration into “positive” and “negative” factors, the former being those that attract migrants to destination areas, and the latter being those that push migrants to leave their homes. Like Todaro, Lee concludes that policymakers can play a significant role in manipulating these factors, particularly those considered “positive,” but adds that migration is the result of an intricate combination of factors that cannot be fully controlled. Lee’s approach to the issue of migration seems the most comprehensive of all major authors, as he takes into consideration the many personal factors that affect migration, emphasizing that “we must expect to find many exceptions to our generalizations, since transient emotions and accidental occurrences account for a considerable proportion of the total migrants.” Ultimately, Lee’s assertion that policymakers can play a significant, yet ultimately partial, role in determining the extent of rural-urban migration and urbanization is one that this investigation intends to help confirm or deny.

In order to measure successful implementation of urbanization policy by China and Vietnam, it is important to set consistent and objective expectations of the state, as well as to ensure that the diverse policies enacted by these two cases can be compared in a reasonable and consistent manner. Because of this, instead of evaluating the success of the Chinese and Vietnamese states on a purely policy-by-policy basis, this investigation aims to provide a more consistent and objective analysis of this diverse set of policy outcomes by, in the case of urban development, utilizing theorist Jieming Zhu’s model of the “commons and anticommons.” Because it can be assumed that the urban development policies of any one state aim to maximize the provision of usable space in an urban area and limit land scarcity, the measurement of the

---

19 Lee, 50  
20 Ibid., 53  
21 Ibid., 51
degree of effective land use in a city can serve as a proxy for that government’s success in implementing its urban development policy. Zhu’s model allows for efficiency in land use to be measured in an objective manner through the measurement of any one urban site’s plot-ratio and site-coverage. Plot-ratio refers to a building’s floor area divided by its site area, while site-coverage refers to land area covered by buildings, divided by its total site area. As an example, a low-density suburban development exhibits low plot-ratio and low-site coverage (abbreviated to LPR-LSC), while an immensely compacted slum would exhibit HPR-HSC. Most urban structures, however, fall under the two intermediate categories of LPR-HSC and HPR-LSC. Of the two, the latter is far and away the healthiest, most efficient, and most sustainable method of urban development, as it allows for a densely-packed population while still retaining extensive green space and public property, referred to as the “commons”. Its appearance in a city landscape is therefore indicative of carefully controlled planning by municipal administrators and bureaucrat. LPR-HSC, by contrast, is a highly inefficient method of urban development, as it maintains a set of inefficiently built low-capacity structures, while eliminating the presence of public space and green areas, a process referred to as the “anticommons.”

If a city develops in the absence of capable urban development policy implementation, LPR-HSC development will endogenously emerge by default, as it can occur spontaneously and individually without the guidance of large-scale planning controls. As families grow and migrants arrive to the city, individual landowners carry out individual projects of expansion and reconstruction to maximize enhanced land asset value, which typically results in encroachment upon formerly common areas. Streets transform into narrow alleys, courtyards become back

---

22 Zhu 2012, 78
23 Ibid., 79
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 79-80
rooms, and municipal infrastructure is neglected or outright abandoned. Extensive LPR-HSC development is unhealthy, unsustainable, and ultimately indicative of an absence of central planning and an incapability to effectively manage and control urban development and expansion by state authorities.

The debate within the field as to the degree of capability any government can exhibit in implementing urbanization policy, between incrementalists and synoptics in the case of development and Lewis and Lee in the case of expansion, is ultimately one I hope to contribute to through the following investigation of political capacity in China and Vietnam. My hypothesis is that, due to its lengthy development of a more efficient urban administrative organizational structure, China has exhibited greater capacity in implementing urban development policy than Vietnam. In the case of rural-urban migration, however, I argue that neither China nor Vietnam can be considered entirely capable in executing its migration policy, as both states have retained migration policies that are too overambitious, anachronistic, and contrary to the present economic realities in both states so as to ever be wholly implemented. The evidence for these arguments comes through an analysis of the extent of HPR-LSC development within China and Vietnam’s major cities, as well as an investigation into the experiences of contemporary rural migrants moving into these cities, in potential violation of their governments’ migration policies. My hypothesis suggests that the synoptic planning field is accurate in its assumptions of capable and rational administration in the realm of urban development. However, in the case of urban expansion, the model proposed by Everett Lee is correct in its assertion that rural-urban migration is only constrainable to a certain extent; industrializing states with urban-based economies are not be able to eliminate the process altogether.

26 Ibid., 80
Urban Development in Vietnam

As previously described, the extent to which a state’s large cities demonstrate high plot-ratio and low site-coverage development, thereby preventing common space from devolving into the state of the anticommons, is indicative of the capacity of its regime to effectively implement its urban development policies. The application of this methodology to the state of Vietnam and its largest cities, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, indicates that the Vietnamese state is largely incapable of implementing effective urban development policy. From 1978-1988, as the Vietnamese regime implemented market-oriented reforms and its cities began to rapidly grow, LPR-HSC development increased 30 percent, and in 2005, accounted for 84.8 percent of new housing space. One reason behind the increase in uncontrolled LPR-HSC development is the 1991 abolishment of public housing construction in Vietnam, one of the few methods of ensuring efficient and accessible urban development. The removal of the state from the housing industry allowed private and untracked contractors to take up the lucrative business of housing provision, resulting in administrative paralysis within the regional governments. This incompetence of local housing authorities is evidenced by a 1992 survey of new housing construction, which found that out of 170 new houses in a Ho Chi Minh City neighborhood, 150 of them did not have housing permits, and were essentially developed in the complete absence of administrative guidance.

The absence of the state as a guiding factor in the maintenance of old neighborhoods and the construction of new ones in Vietnam has resulted in decades of worsening housing quality within the state. As of 2001, 47 percent of Vietnamese reported living in slum conditions, five percent higher than the regional average. Similar surveys conducted in 2003 estimated that 30

---

27 Zhu 2012, 81, 84
28 Ibid., 81
29 Ibid.
30 Roberts and Kanaley, 32
percent of the Vietnamese population has less than three square meters of living space, 50 percent of urban residents lack access to piped water and other infrastructural essentials, and 25 percent live in housing that is classified as substandard or temporary.\textsuperscript{31} This overabundance of inefficient and inadequate self-built housing has led to a severe housing shortage in major Vietnamese cities, and has produced massive and rapidly increasing inequality between working class Vietnamese and the elite upper class.\textsuperscript{32}

As mentioned, the lack of capacity in implementing sustainable and efficient urban policy that has spurred Vietnam’s housing woes can be traced to inefficiencies and gaps of control within the Vietnamese state’s socialist bureaucracy. Following the onset of the \textit{doi moi} economic reform movement of the late 1980s, Vietnamese property rights were institutionalized with the 1993 Land Law, which ensured basic private property rights for all Vietnamese landowners, albeit in a rhetorically socialist framework; landowners are issued Land Use Certificates, which allows them to lease land from the state in perpetuity.\textsuperscript{33} Since 1993, a complex and frequently contradictory network of ministries and municipalities has regulated land ownership in Vietnam’s cities, which, while maintaining the potential to be extremely thorough and constraining, has ultimately proven incapable of guiding urban development.\textsuperscript{34}

Urban administration in Vietnam is comprised of a hierarchical pyramid of units, descending from the central government at the top to \textit{guan} (districts), \textit{phuong} (wards within districts), and \textit{to} (collections of 30-40 families within wards) at the very bottom.\textsuperscript{35} This significant extent of micromanagement in Vietnam’s administrative hierarchy is in theory able to facilitate a form of effective and direct democracy, but in reality, allows local agencies within

\textsuperscript{31} Yip, 194
\textsuperscript{32} Gough, 185
\textsuperscript{33} Zhu 2012, 82
\textsuperscript{34} Leaf 1999, 300
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
urban districts to direct a significant portion of policy decisions, meaning that the city as a greater whole loses administrative power. Urban regions themselves rarely align with the administrative boundaries set by the government; Vietnam engaged in a process of province splitting in 2005 that increased the number of National Level Cities from 40 to 64, but left its large urban megaregions, including Hanoi, Da Nang, and Ho Chi Minh City, under the jurisdiction of several competing territories, leaving the central city proper much smaller in area than the urban region that it anchors.

In addition to this inefficient degree of urban decentralization, Vietnam’s municipal governments also contain significant inefficiencies and administrative redundancies, the easy manipulation of which reduces the effective implementation of urban policy. Mass organizations under the guidance of the ruling Communist Party, such Women’s Unions, Farmers’ Associations, and Youth Unions, take an active role in forming and implementing urban development policy, particularly at local levels, in which the state’s own tos and phuongs may be governed by corrupt or distant administrators, who maintain essential ties to top officials, but few real connection to the neighborhoods they govern. In some cases, offices in both the state government and the party structure are assigned to the same realm of administration, which creates tremendous ambiguity as to the practical division of responsibilities. For example, the Ministry of Construction governs the lower-level Bureau of Construction, which also has responsibilities to the head of the District People’s Committee, therefore forcing it to report to both the party and the state. These bureaucratic redundancies and inefficiencies open up opportunities for those who know how to “work the system,” including locally-based community

---

36 Ibid.
37 Zhu 2012, 86
38 Leaf 1999, 302
39 Ibid., 301
activists and wealthy developers, neither of which have strong preferences toward large-scale urban policy implementation or reform. The overlap of these various offices and organizations has resulted in a significant inconsistency between “law on paper” and “law in reality” in regard to urban development policy in Vietnam.

As a result of these administrative inefficiencies, the capacity of the Vietnamese government to implement centralized planning and reform urban policy is severely undermined. This incapacity is exemplified by the 1990-2010 Hanoi Master Plan, developed by the Ministry of Construction at the onset of doi moi, which outlined an extensive plan of cohesive spatial development in the city, including a new central business district and many cases of efficient HPR-LSC development. The plan, however, is based on unrealistic assumptions of demographics, as it assumes that households are in residence only in the location indicated on their household registration, which excludes recent or unregistered migrants. In addition, the plan does not recognize the volume of individuals undertaking the reconstruction of their own property within the city, even as self-built housing emerges as the primary form of development in Hanoi. Ultimately, the present cityscape of Hanoi has little in common with the predictions of 2010 as outlined in the Master Plan, and remains at similar levels of inaccessibility, inefficiency, and inequality as were present in 1992. The inability of Vietnam’s central planning apparatuses to implement widespread top-down planning policy in Hanoi is indicative of the administrative redundancies and inefficiencies that lower the Vietnamese state’s capacity to successfully implement and manage urban policy.

---

40 Ibid.
41 Yip, 201
42 Leaf 1999, 303
43 Ibid., 305-306
Urban Development in China

While the Chinese state, like most rapidly developing countries, has struggled to effectively manage the development of its burgeoning urban centers, it has ultimately succeeded in implementing large-scale urban development policies to a greater extent than its Vietnamese counterpart. Urban development analyses in China have demonstrated the widespread presence individual-built LPR-HSC structures, which are inherent to rapidly developing urban landscapes in lower-income countries; however, unlike Vietnam, the state has also successfully carried out many cases of centralized planning in the form of HPR-LSC development, demonstrating moderate capacity in implementing top-down urban policy.

Although there are no direct comparisons between measures of LPR-HSC development in Chinese and Vietnamese urban areas, one study indicated that China has been largely able to prevent the widespread growth of LPR-HSC slums in its cities, with almost 80 percent of current housing investment being undertaken by central or local governments, as opposed to unregulated individual homeowners and builders.44 In the case study of the city of Shantou in Guangdong, population density reached 931 residents per hectare in 1998, with the city maintaining an impressive plot ratio of 2.94 and site coverage of 59 percent.45 In the Luohu district of Shenzhen, an urban renewal project imitated in 1998 created stricter planning guidelines citywide, with plot ratios reduced from 4.95 to 0.95 on average as a result.46 Those low-efficiency self-built houses and structures that remain have largely been altered or removed; one case study in the central Chinese city of Chengdu found that an effective, if brutal, program of urban renewal instigated by the city authorities successfully removed most self-built housing sites and 1950s-era

44 McGee, 241
45 Zhu 2004, 438
46 Ibid., 440
tenements from the city center.\textsuperscript{47}

The greater success of the Chinese state in implementing its urban development policies than its Vietnamese counterpart has resulted in comparatively higher housing quality across the state’s urban centers. As of 2001, only 38 percent of urban Chinese were living in slum conditions, nine percent lower than the Vietnamese rate, and lower than the regional average.\textsuperscript{48}

As a result of this increase of efficient usage of space and planning, buildings being constructed in 1995 had 80.3 percent more floor space than those constructed in 1990.\textsuperscript{49} Another 2001 survey estimated that over 70\% of the total population was living in fully equipped residential buildings, and that the average usable floor area of Chinese dwellings had reached 12-14 square meters per person,\textsuperscript{50} over three times the Vietnamese average. In contrast with the aforementioned 1990 Hanoi Master Plan, which was never realized in a significant manner, the Chinese Communist Party’s 1992 Shanghai Master Plan both planned and implemented the complete renovation of the old city of Shanghai, successfully reconstructing an urban area of 3,800,000 m\textsuperscript{2} and relocating 1,000,000 residents.\textsuperscript{51} Today, central Shanghai is a veritable monument to the power of urban planning, featuring wide streets, elevated expressways, and some of the tallest skyscrapers in the world, in contrast with the winding alleys, traffic-choked side streets, and almost absurdly narrow buildings of central Hanoi.

China’s relative success in maintaining an active and efficient role in implementing efficient urban policy can be attributed to a history of seizing opportunities lent by economic development, as well as a model of administrative organization that prioritized centralization and consolidation in urban regions. As opposed to the Vietnamese government, which was still

\textsuperscript{47} World Bank, 66
\textsuperscript{48} Roberts and Kanaley, 32
\textsuperscript{49} Zhu 2004, 428
\textsuperscript{50} Jia, 96
\textsuperscript{51} Qi, 795
recovering from the devastation wrought by the Vietnam War just ten years prior to the onset of *doi moi*, the Chinese state had implemented effective and extensive apparatuses of state control well before the onset of its reform period, and so was able to respond to the onset of widespread rural-urban migration and the resultant urban population boom early in their occurrences. The state initially took a hostile approach to urban expansion, diverting the flow of rural-urban migrants from urban areas and instead allowing “rural urbanization” to develop only in the peri-urban areas of major cities.\(^{52}\) The development of these migrant resettlements was tightly controlled by the state, with most migrants being housed in specifically built state dormitories,\(^{53}\) preventing them from autonomously contributing to the development of these large urban centers. In addition, the state allowed for increased industrialization in the rural settlements surrounding coastal cities, from which the majority of rural-urban migrants were likely to originate.\(^{54}\) The effective implementation of these anti-urban policies, although ultimately not sustainable in the long term, was essential in buying time for the Chinese state to redevelop its urban areas and prepare for rapid urban growth prior to the onset of large-scale rural-urban migration.

In the 1980s, the Chinese government, like its neighbor to the south, embarked upon a more pro-urban policy of development, which allowed for efficient redevelopment of urban space as these areas began to reap the benefits of labor surpluses and foreign direct investment. As in the case of Vietnam, China has largely decentralized the organization of urban policy-making from the central authorities to local municipalities and wards, which in theory allows for a system of effective intraparty democracy and delegation.\(^{55}\) However, unlike Vietnam, the

\(^{52}\) McGee, 240-241
\(^{53}\) Ibid., 241
\(^{54}\) Ibid., 237
\(^{55}\) Zhu 2004, 329
Chinese state also embarked on an early policy of administrative reclassification of rural land, allowing cities to consolidate administration of such expanded lands under a central government dominated by the core city. The megacity of Guangzhou, for example, absorbed its two adjacent counties in 1999, which increased its population by more than 40 percent and solidified municipal control over the administration process. While rural land in China is controlled and developed by village collectives, urban land is technically owned by the municipal government (although increasing property rights may change this), and the latter can seize the former’s holdings by compensating farmlands according to existing use value. The efficient turnaround of rural holdings to their urban municipal neighbors has increased access to infrastructure services and standards, resulting in the provision of urban public goods to these peri-urban regions. In the case study of Dong Mei Village, just outside the city of Quanzhou, the designation of the village from a rural to urban district in 1999 was accompanied by a surge of infrastructural projects and improvements initiated by the municipality of Quanzhou, demonstrating that municipal government capacity and control increases substantially as territories are incorporated into the core of the urban fabric.

I was able to observe this ability of the Chinese government to institute effective urban development within the boundaries of its municipalities during my brief time in Beijing, through an exploration of the former slum neighborhood of Xinzhuang. In the literature that I had uncovered, the most recent of which dated from 2007, Xinzhuang was portrayed as a large, largely autonomously developed LPR-HSC neighborhood, which existed in defiance of the Beijing municipal government’s nominal control of the district. The neighborhood was known as

---

56 Ibid., 238  
57 World Bank, 67  
58 Ibid.  
an infamous migrant slum, in which recent arrivals could find affordable rent, albeit in cramped and unsanitary single-story shacks and small houses. By the time I arrived in late 2014, however, the vast majority of the slum had been entirely redeveloped. Most of the neighborhood now consists of towering apartment blocks that exhibit clear signs of efficient HPR-LSC construction, including public parks, wide sidewalks, an extensive creekside walking path, and easy access to buses and the Beijing subway system. Off of the major streets, some self-built LPR-HSC residences and storefronts still remain, but they are few and far between. The neighborhood is firmly integrated into the infrastructure of Beijing, exemplified by the new subway line, Line Six, constructed after the 2008 Olympics, which can shuttle the area’s new residents to the downtown core in as little as ten minutes. While the neighborhood as a whole now functions more efficiently and offers a higher quality of life than before, this is to the detriment of its previous inhabitants, most of whom have likely been evicted to another slum further away from the city core. This supposition is supported by recent data concerning intraurban migration in Beijing, which found that 1.98 million migrants, or 60 percent of the city’s total migrant population, live in the inner suburban area, with another 763,000 migrants, 20 percent of the migrant population, living in the extreme fringes of the Beijing metropolitan region.60

Ultimately, the rapid redevelopment of Xinzhuang, from a largely self-built LPR-HSC slum into a well-integrated and cohesively developed HPR-LSC neighborhood, demonstrates the greater degree of capacity of the Chinese state to implement top-down urban planning development and uphold its urban development policy.

__________________________

60 Jacka, 102
Rural-Urban Migration in Vietnam

In the cases of both Vietnam and China, growth in urban areas occurs almost exclusively through the process of migration from rural to urban areas,\textsuperscript{61,62} as such, the state’s capacity to implement policy pertaining to urban population growth depends on its ability to implement its policies concerning rural-urban migration, and success in this regard is considered demonstrative of capacity in implementing urban growth policy. Unlike the case of urban development policy, there is no need to devise a general proxy for the achievement of these capabilities, as both China and Vietnam retain virtually identical urban growth policies, realized through what are termed “household registration systems.” These extensive systems, characteristic of Marxist-Leninist political organizations, essentially serve as both monitoring systems and intrastate migration controls, as they track all citizens of the state, and determine the extent to which they are officially granted freedom of movement within the country.

Ultimately, Vietnam’s household registration system, termed ho khau, has largely failed to effectively manipulate and constrain rural-urban migration in the country. The system, modeled after its Chinese counterpart, was first established in the north in the mid-1950s, and in the south of the country after its reunification in 1975.\textsuperscript{63} Prior to the doi moi economic reforms, the ho khau registration system was an essential tool of political control and state surveillance, and as such, was a necessary requirement of life under the socialist apparatus; a Vietnamese citizen would be unable to eat, work, or marry without one.\textsuperscript{64} The system is separated into three categories: KT1, a person registered in the province or city where he or she resides, KT2, a person who has changed their place of residence within the province or city, and KT3, a person

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{61} Sit, 299
\item \textsuperscript{62} McGee, 230
\item \textsuperscript{63} Nguyen, 1109
\item \textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
from another province or city, who has obtained temporary registration in their place of destination for one year before it must be renewed.65

Since the onset of doi moi, slight modifications to the ho khau system have been implemented, allowing government policy to more effectively match the reality of its demographics; this, however, has not prevented large-scale deviation of Vietnamese from the standards set by their ho khau. As of 2007, a migrant with KT3 registration, after having lived stably in their new location for one year, can re-register their ho khau to KT1, more accurately reflecting their new status as permanent urban residents.66 However, re-registering is a time-consuming and burdensome process, and there remains a large “floating” population of migrants within Vietnamese urban areas who have lived there for many years, yet maintain temporary or rural residency on their ho khau.67 As an indicator of this, the data on population in Ho Chi Minh City depicts a growth rate of just 7.5 percent between 2002 and 2005, while data on the number of workers employed in enterprises in the city demonstrated a growth rate of 39 percent in the same period.68 A study by the UNDP suggested that the size of Vietnam’s “floating population,” referring to those residing in a location different from their place of ho khau registration numbers between 12 and 16 million, which would represent between 13 percent and 18 percent of the state’s total population.69 The size of this population has grown in the past decade; rates of rural-urban migration increased from 2 million in 1999 to 3.4 million in 2009, and the share of migrants in Vietnam’s total population increased from 2.9% in 1999 to 4.3% in 2009.70

Ultimately, the vast discrepancy between the official population metrics of Vietnam’s urban areas and their actual populations, as well as the rapidly accelerating rates of rural-migration to

65 Leaf 1999, 205
66 Nguyen, 1110-1111
67 United Nations, 5
68 Nguyen, 1111
69 United Nations, 5
70 Vietnam Population and Housing Census, 2009
these cities, demonstrate the incapacity of *ho khau* household registration system to effectively constrain urban immigration as it is designed to do.

The difficulties that the Vietnamese government faces in maintaining the strict policies of the *ho khau* system were revealed in the research and interviews that I conducted during our time in Hanoi. Of the ten interviews with migrants that I had conducted, six were in the process of obtaining, or attempting to obtain, permanent residency in Hanoi (with KT3 registration), two were fully registered residents within the city (with KT1 or KT2 registration), and two more were entirely unregistered within Hanoi and should be considered members of the Vietnamese floating population. Because the connections that our group made in Hanoi were mostly with other university students, these migrants were primarily students attending the National Economic University on student scholarships, with temporary KT3 student resident permits that they hoped to convert into permanent residency. According to one subject, “Anh,” students without a residential permit in Hanoi such as herself are required to live in the university dorms, which are considered substandard by the student population, as they lack hot water, free meals, or Internet access. Another migrant student, “Quynh,” was able to secure residency outside of the dormitories by moving in with a cousin who had recently made the move to Hanoi, although if she wished to stay in the city after graduation, she would have to reregister her *ho khau* to continue living there. Anh and Quynh represent a fairly typical narrative of well-educated student migrants in Hanoi, in which, having achieved academic success, their attempts to relocate permanently to the city for work are generally considered a hassle, but certainly not impossible. Neither student expressed attitudes that the administrative constraints on rural-urban migration in Vietnam would affect the success of their move to the city in any significant way.
beyond a reduction in quality of housing, and each assumed that they would eventually work
full-time in Hanoi, regardless of the bureaucratic hurdles in obtaining this status.

“Truong,” another migrant student at the National Economic University in Hanoi,
diverges from this norm, in that he relocated to Hanoi as a young child without the aid of
academic scholarships. Truong was able to secure residency in Hanoi because of what he bluntly
termed “nepotism;” his mother was friends with a teacher in the city, who agreed to take Truong
into her home and pretend he was her own son for official purposes. When Truong was 14, his
real mother moved to Hanoi on a permanent KT2 permit, having obtained a marketing position
with the Hanoi Beer corporation, and he was able to move back in with her. Truong, a near-
lifelong resident of Hanoi, has never officially reregistered his ho khau, which remains tied to a
small community outside of Haiphong; however, likely due to his family’s high-income status,
he has been able to solidly integrate himself into Hanoi life, as a high-achieving university
student with several prospective job offers in his future. When asked how the processes of
registering for classes or benefits worked for him, Truong replied that “They just ask for the birth
certificate, no more questions. They don’t care.”

The case of another migrant, “Vinh,” also departs from the student migrant norm, as he
moved to Hanoi to attend the National Economic University in 1983, well before significant
reform of the ho khau system ever began. Then as now, Vinh was able to relocate to Hanoi on a
student permit, and had to reregister his ho khau as a permanent resident afterwards. When asked
how he facilitated this process, Vinh bluntly explained, “It was because I had a lot of money.”
Vinh was able to purchase a piece of property in Hanoi after the institutionalization of the 1993
Land Law, which entitled him to residency KT1 ho khau on the basis of land ownership. Vinh,
now a professor of economics at the National Economic University, ultimately asserted that the municipal government “lets anyone in who has money or education.”

The experiences of these student migrants to Hanoi demonstrate the incapacity of the Vietnamese bureaucracy to fully implement and uphold its own urban expansion policy, which remains far removed from the demographic and economic realities of the modern Vietnamese state. Of the migrants interviewed, two had openly defied their ho khau registration policy, while six others had were largely able to sidestep these regulations due to money and connections within the governmental system. These results reinforce the widespread assumption that networking and relationships, not official policy, are what drive rural-urban migration in Vietnam. Nonetheless, even these well-off and well-connected students did face occasional discrimination and political hurdles due to their rural ho khau, albeit likely with much less consequence than low-income migrants to the city.

Rural-Urban Migration in China

Like the ho khau, the Chinese household registration system, termed hukou, is both extremely broad in scope and deep in intended effect; because of this, the ambitious system has suffered the same failings as its Vietnamese counterpart, and has proven largely unable to limit or control the increased rates of rural-urban migration that have occurred since the state’s economic opening in the 1980s. The hukou system was established in the early 1950s to serve the purposes of resource distribution, migration control, and the monitoring of targeted groups of people.71 The system placed exceptionally strict controls on internal migration within China, such that by the 1970s, peasants could be arrested just for entering a city.72

---

71 Yu, 207
72 Young, 32
undocumented migrants in Chinese cities still lack medical care, child education, and retirement pension because of their lack of proper hukou.\textsuperscript{73} Like Vietnam, which held out on implementing household registration reforms until well into the doi moi reform period, China only began cautious reformation of its hukou system in 1984 with the introduction of the “self-supplied food grain” hukou, allowing rural residents to obtain residence status in market towns provided they had local employment and housing.\textsuperscript{74} While this shift in policy affected only a small amount of relatively wealthy rural residents, it paved the way for further reform in the late 1980s and early 1990s, although these reforms continued to predominantly apply only to wealthy families.\textsuperscript{75}

To streamline control and monitoring of its population, China’s hukou policy is organized into two district categories: socio-economic status (hukou leibie), and residential location (hukou suozaidi).\textsuperscript{76} Because rural occupancy is tied to low socio-economic status for all but a minority of rural Chinese, rural-urban migrants in China must therefore both reregister their place of regular hukou registration, and convert their hukou status from agricultural to non-agricultural, a process that few rural Chinese are able to successfully complete due to the strict requirements of both categories.\textsuperscript{77} Since 2001, many provinces and large cities have begun to allow migrants who satisfy certain criteria, such as maintaining a “stable place of residence” and a “stable source of income,” to obtain urban hukou.\textsuperscript{78} The latter designation excludes jobs in the informal sector, or otherwise unskilled labor, and therefore maintains the exclusion of most poor migrants.

Ultimately, many of these reforms are slow to address the challenges associated with urban

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 835
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 836-838
\textsuperscript{76} Chan, 821
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 823
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 841
population growth or successfully incorporate rural-urban migrants into urban administrations and economies,\textsuperscript{79} as the experiences of today’s migrant populations indicate.

Rural-urban migration in China is formally dictated by a small number of national institutions, which allows the state to monitor and facilitate official migration to its cities in a cohesive manner. Of all formal migration to Beijing in 2008, 63 percent was approved by government departments, 24 percent by higher education institutes, and 10 percent by military departments.\textsuperscript{80} These three institutions have nearly exclusive control over the migratory rights of Chinese nationals to urban areas, and coupled with other social and economic mechanisms of control, in theory allow the state to completely control and dictate domestic urban population inflow.\textsuperscript{81} However, an extensive population of informal migrants within China has, since the implementation of stringent household registration in the 1950s, migrated to urban areas in defiance of the control apparatuses of the state. China’s floating population was estimated at 170 million as of 2010, 17 percent of the state’s population,\textsuperscript{82} a proportion almost equivalent to the Vietnamese rates of ho khau defiance. The Chinese floating population has grown by 90 million since the year 2000, demonstrating a massive extent of unprecedented and unregulated migration into the urban areas of China.\textsuperscript{83}

As these population trends make clear, the restrictive measures of the hukou household registration system are not motivating rural residents to avoid migration to large cities, but rather, are simply motivating them to undergo the process outside of state channels entirely. The trouble and expense of legally registering a temporary urban hukou, along with the knowledge that migrants will be marked as “outsiders” with or without it, keeps most migrants from attempting

\textsuperscript{79} Wang, 400
\textsuperscript{80} Chan, 829
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 830
\textsuperscript{82} Liang, 698
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.
the registration process at all. One migrant explained her situation, saying “Why should I [register] – I won’t get anything in return. If you register for a temporary residence permit, it just makes it easier for them to track you down.”

The employment of migrants is likewise largely unaffected by the strict limitations imposed by the hukou policy. These regulations are “widely ignored” by employers, who simply hire migrants through advertisements and personal contracts instead of labor departments or state-sponsored recruitment agencies. Governmental restrictions and crackdowns have had only a minor effect on the employment of migrants in Chinese cities, as their desired wages remain substantially lower than those of their legal urban counterparts.

Despite the many bureaucratic hurdles and impracticalities that rural Chinese face in maintaining sufficient quality of life as urban residents, most reside within the state’s urban areas in willing defiance of these limiting mechanisms. In one survey of unregistered rural-urban migrants to Shanghai, all participants disclosed that they frequently experienced discrimination, both at work and looking for work, due to their lack of Shanghai hukou. Those Shanghai residents with legal hukou have access to common reserve funds for obtaining safe and secure housing; migrants without it must find their own housing, which typically takes the forms of shantytowns in the peri-urban areas of the metropolitan region. One migrant worker articulated that, because of her lack of Shanghai hukou, she received a third of the income of her colleagues, and received no support for the state for her children’s childcare and education. Despite these barriers to healthy and successful integration within urban society, most migrants stated that they earned a much higher income than they could in their hometowns, and many expressed that they

84 Jacka, 95  
85 Jacka, 99  
86 Ibid.  
87 Wang, 398  
88 Ibid., 399  
89 Ibid.
have permanently integrated themselves into city life, with one participant stating that she had become “a city woman.” In many cases, these migrants felt that they had lost their identity as rural denizens and felt uncomfortable when they returned home, and several couples planned on raising their children as permanent residents in Shanghai.

Ultimately, like Vietnam, China’s administrative capacity in facilitating and monitoring urban growth and expansion is limited. The *hukou* household registration system is an efficient instrument to facilitate formal migration to urban areas, and has undergone significant reform in the prior two decades, compelling it to mirror more closely the state’s demographic realities. Nonetheless, the political and economic realities of modern China remain too far estranged from the policies expressed by the *hukou* system for it to effectively restrain migration, and indeed, close to a fifth of the total Chinese population is openly defying it every day. As in the case of Vietnam, in which rural-urban migrants stated their determination to permanently settle in Hanoi despite the institutional barriers to that outcome, rural-urban migrants in Shanghai demonstrated a similar intention to reside to the city, regardless of the discrimination and hardship that their rural *hukou* inflicted upon them.

**Conclusion**

When we conceptualize the development and growth of a city over long periods of time, it is tempting to imagine these developments occurring entirely as organic and autonomous processes. Many of the world’s largest cities today, including Beijing, Cairo, Karachi, and Mexico City, have developed from small settlements alongside key waterways or trade routes into the massive cosmopolitan megaregions that dominate the world economy today, constantly

---

90 Ibid., 397
91 Ibid., 399
changing hands from one regime to another, yet always developing and expanding seemingly independently from the powers that rotate occupancy within. However, urban development does not occur in a vacuum; at every step of the processes of urban growth and development, planners and administrators in the background have carefully implemented, or attempted to implement, modifications to the size, layout, and structure of these metropolitan areas. The question of to what extent these policy makers are capable implementing large-scale policies concerning urban growth and development, however, has largely remained up for debate.

Vietnam has undergone a phenomenal period of urban growth since the inception of the *doi moi* economic reforms in the 1980s, with the major cities of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City having grown from populations in the hundred thousands in the early 20th century to the tens of millions today. In both cities, urban development has largely occurred on the individual scale, with self-built shantytowns and sprawling slums characterizing the majority of growth in the past decade, manifesting in the cities’ characteristic winding alleyways and tucked-in shop fronts. The state of Vietnam’s urban development is largely a result of the redundancies inherent in the state’s overbuilt bureaucracy, which delegates policy implementation to offices governing on the scale of small neighborhoods, and leaves enough room for outside interests opposed to macro-level reform to effectively work their way into the system. The government has also largely failed to uphold the urban growth policies outlined by its outdated and inefficient *ho khau* household registration system, with the result that new migrants constantly find ways to manipulate the system to accommodate their movement into the city, or simply disregard it altogether with little real consequence.

The Chinese state’s equally archaic and unrealistic *hukou* household registration system fares little better than its Vietnamese counterpart, with close to 17 percent of the country’s
population having defied it altogether, resolving to live in abysmal conditions within the state’s urban megaregions rather than face deportation to the rural and economically stagnant communities that they come from. However, unlike Vietnam, the Chinese state has proven moderately capable in directing urban development within its cities, frequently producing widespread top-down planning implementation and reform within its megaregions of Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and others. China has achieved this success in directing implementing development policy due to an early history of engagement with the mechanisms of urban development, as well as a consistent policy of administrative centralization in large urban municipalities, which streamlines the implementation of large-scale planning projects.

Ultimately, neither the Chinese nor Vietnamese regime can be considered a successful case of full implementation of urbanization policy. Both market-oriented socialist states continue to pursue an “economic production at all costs” strategy of development, allowing profit-oriented interest groups such as private developers and rent-seeking officials to dictate the direction of urban development and population growth. However, as this investigation demonstrates, cities are not permanent structures, immobile and unmoving; both states will have opportunities to regain capacity and more effectively revise and dictate urban development and growth at a point in the future. In the meantime, it is the residents of these cities, particularly lower-class rural migrants, who silently suffer the consequences of postponement.
Works Cited


**Works Consulted**


Congressional-Executive Commission on China. “China’s Household Registration System: Sustained Reform Needed to Protect China’s Rural Migrants.”


