Tyrannical Participation Approaches in China's Regeneration of Urban Heritage Areas: A Case Study of Baitasi Historic District, Beijing

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In China's new model of heritage area regeneration, a series of approaches have been undertaken to promote community participation which is branded as inclusive and innovative by the local authority. Using Baitasi Historic District in Beijing as a case study, this research examines such new participation approaches. By analysing how the government has failed to meet the communities' demands as well as to engage the communities in the decision-making process but only the implementation stage, I argue that the government has misused the concept of participation by equating attendance and notification to higher levels of participation. The participation approaches are 'the tyranny of participation' which *de facto* helps to justify the official agenda, exploit the communities for their financial contribution, and target the already privileged group while continuing to marginalise the underprivileged. These approaches make the new regeneration model no different from previous ones in terms of facilitating displacement and widening the socioeconomic gaps between the lower-class and the middle- and upper-classes. This research finally reflects on the flawed motivation, strategy, and subsequent negative consequences of such community participation and calls for more attempts in heritage practices to solve the issues.

Keywords: Community participation, tyranny of participation, heritage areas, relocation, regeneration

Introduction

Ever since the decentralisation of heritage, heritage conservation requires effective and sufficient community participation (Smith, Morgan, and van der Meer 2003; Atkinson 2008). The experiences and emotional attachment to the place of the wider communities constitute the authenticity of heritage (Madgin et al. 2018). Meanwhile, urban heritage areas are usually the dilapidated parts of cities inhabited with marginalised people. The regeneration inevitably has significant impacts on their daily lives and property rights (Shin 2010; Wang and Aoki 2019). However, the regeneration of urban heritage areas in

China has long been criticised for its lack of community participation (e.g. Zhao 2013; Zhang and Wu 2016; Zhang and Lenzer 2020).

Partly as a response to the criticism, China has been shifting the model of heritage area regeneration from massive destruction and (re)construction to incremental and small-scale preservation with a series of actions to promote collaboration between the state, investors, and the residents. Seemingly, there are now more opportunities for the communities to have a say in the regeneration of their neighbourhoods. The questions need to be asked, then, are: with the new participation approaches introduced, to what extent have the communities been included in the regeneration projects? How have they benefited from such community participation? If not, how have their interests been impaired by the participation approaches?

To answer these questions, I use Baitasi Historic District (hereinafter BHD), a historic district in Beijing, as a case study to scrutinise its current regeneration project, Baitasi Remade (*baitasi zaisheng jihua*). This paper seeks to unpack the nature of the new participation approaches and explore whether these approaches are truly inclusive and have served the communities, especially the underprivileged people's needs, or have exacerbated the social injustice among different classes. More broadly, the paper aims to reflect on participation practices in the heritage field that share similar flawed motivation and strategy of community participation, and the subsequent negative consequences for the communities.

Although participation has been deemed as an effective way to promote empowerment and sustainable development (Lyons, Smuts and Stephens 2001), Cooke and Kothari (2001) harshly criticise that rather than supporting and empowering the marginalised groups, participatory development actually reinforces the privileged position and interests of the power-holders, which is essentially the 'tyranny' of

participation. By reviewing the concept of tyranny of participation, and analysing the discrepancies between the government's participation approaches and the community's responses in BHD, I argue that the current voluntary relocation and community activities make the project appear inclusive by offering the original residents free choices to move or to stay and opportunities to connect to the authority. However, the project does not confer any decision-making power to the residents. The relocation choices and community activities are all pre-determined by the authority rather than a result of community consultations. The process of incorporating community into the project is the 'tyranny of participation' through which the government exploits the community to serve its official agenda, and covers its unjust exercise of power (Cooke and Kothari 2001). These tyrannical approaches reveal that the motivation, strategy, and consequence of community participation are all important indicators to evaluate participation effects.

This research combines secondary and primary sources by bringing together a literature review with semi-structured interviews. Secondary sources used to inform the study are government policy documents, journal articles, and media coverage for demographic data of BHD, details of Baitasi Remade, and comments of Baitasi Remade from various sources. To understand the implementation of Baitasi Remade, and analysing residents' relocation choices and perceptions of the participation approaches, 37 interviews were conducted in January and June to September 2019. The interviewees were policymakers in the municipal and district governments of Beijing, staff of the

company and planners working on Baitasi Remade, volunteers helping with Baitasi Remade, and original residents and tenants in BHD[1].

Heritage area regeneration and community participation in China

Paradigm shift of China's heritage area regeneration

China's regeneration of urban heritage areas in the early stage around the 1990s was relatively radical. It usually started with forced relocation of most, if not all, original residents, and followed by demolishing dilapidated historic buildings and reconstructing historic-style buildings. The result was turning the original residential neighbourhoods into commercial districts or tourist attractions completely (Zhu and Maags 2020).

This early model of regeneration is closely associated with China's land reform and political decentralisation in the late 1980s and early 1990s which were centred around land revenue, economic strategy, and urban construction to stimulate regional economic development and release the financial burden of the central government (Zhang and Marsh 2016). Since then, local government has been able to sell the use right of state-owned land and benefited a great deal from the land transaction. Urban heritage areas, like many other old and dilapidated urban neighbourhoods, have become valuable assets for local government to increase local revenue and showcase the modernisation of urban areas (Zhang 2008). In the regeneration of heritage areas, similar to regular old and dilapidated neighbourhoods and urban villages, local government and private developers form the pro-growth coalition and turn the heritage

1 The policy makers, company staff and planners were reached through the planning institute I was working at. The residents and volunteers were reached through my random encounter in the field. The interviews lasted from twenty to forty minutes and were audio-recorded with the interviewees' consent. All the interviewees are anonymised in this paper.

areas into growth machines to acquire economic benefits through land deals and commodification of heritage (Zhu 1999; Su 2015).

Frankly speaking, a certain degree of relocation and building restoration in China's urban heritage regeneration are essential and perhaps the only choice to improve the living standards of the residents, as urban heritage areas are usually in poor condition due to historical reasons. In the planned economy era, many heritage areas were distributed to employees of state-owned enterprises. With an increasing number of people sharing living spaces initially designed for fewer people, illegal additions were common, which worsened the building condition (Martínez 2016). Since the 1980s after the Opening and Reform, a large number of migrant workers moved to the cities. Because of the central location and proximity to jobs, and low house prices of heritage areas, many migrant workers have become tenants of heritage areas. While original residents who can afford apartments on the free market have gradually moved out. Currently, the demographic composition of urban heritage areas in China is usually original residents who are mainly the elderly plus migrant workers or other tenants that are not originally from the cities. The heritage areas usually have a high population density and lack private toilets, kitchen spaces, storage spaces, sewage systems, etc. (Wang and Aoki 2019). Regeneration in reality is complicated and difficult since it involves a large number of people and a large amount of financial input.

However, the complexity and difficulty of conducting regeneration do not justify the previous radical and economic-centric regeneration model. As advocated by preservationists, the previous regeneration has caused a series of problems such as gentrification of heritage areas, the breaking up of social networks, and the loss of authenticity of heritage (e.g. Qian 2007; Zhang and Zhao 2010; Martínez 2016). Some scholars put forward alternative models of regeneration (see Qian 2007 for detailed

examples). The common features of those models are regeneration in a small-scale and milder manner and relying on a low degree of government-community collaboration to financialise the projects.

Entering the new century, heritage conservation has been growingly emphasised by the central government due to the recognition of the cultural, economic, and political significance of heritage (Yan 2018). Heritage is believed to be important to strengthen the national identity and cultural characteristics of Chinese citizens and promote cultural communication between China and the international community (Bao and Li 2019). Against this backdrop and drawing upon the various alternative approaches promoted by scholars, the regeneration model of heritage areas in China after 2004 has been changed into building-by-building, small-scale and incremental rehabilitation (Zhou, Zhou and Liu 2017).

In the new model of heritage area regeneration, there are two features that are directly related to residents. First, the forced relocation of almost all original residents has been replaced by partial and voluntary relocation where residents can choose to stay or to move. In some cases, original residents can choose to move back to the neighbourhoods after rehabilitation (Duan and Zhang 2017). Second, cooperation between the government, investors, and the communities is promoted in various aspects such as financing rehabilitation, enhancing community bonds, opening up new businesses, and improving the environment (Dai, Zhu and Xu 2012). Compared to the previous regeneration model, the new approaches appear to have raised the level of community participation from financial collaboration between the government and communities to considering and fulfilling communities' needs during the regeneration projects. Zhang et al. (2020) argue that micro-redevelopment may have the potential of strengthening citizens' power in some places. However, how much communities can

participate in the regeneration, and how much they can benefit and be empowered need to be further investigated.

Community participation debate in China's heritage conservation

To start with, it is useful to understand what communities in China look like. In rural areas, the communities living in proximity are usually based on kinship. While in urban areas, the communities are more complex. In the planned economy era, work-units (*danwei*, such as government departments, state-owned enterprises, public schools, etc.) constituted the urban communities and provided social services to the residents (Chen 2013). Due to the collapse of the work-units after the planned economy era, neighbourhood communities formed around certain living areas are consequently developed (Heberer 2009). Street Offices, the basic level of municipal government, and Resident Committees, the community autonomous organisations (although in reality, usually the extension of local government without much autonomous power), now take the responsibility of community management (Fan 2014). Spatially, there are still neighbourhood communities organised around work-units. Administratively, work-units no longer bear responsibilities of management and service providing. Heberer (2009) contends that under the new system, the communities' political participation (e.g. election of resident representatives) and social participation (e.g. taking care of the elderly, disabled, and sick people, or involving in leisure activities) in China have been enhanced compared to the planned economy era generally.

In heritage conservation, specifically, the communities' role is nevertheless far more limited. For instance, theoretically, when formulating the conservation and management plan of heritage areas, local officials and planners are required to consult communities. In reality, only a few practitioners would discuss with communities. Most of the public hearings and interviews are symbolic participation (Yang and Wang 2016).

In the implementation stage, the projects are usually government-led or market-led (Wong et al. 2021), whereas community-led projects are rarely seen and likely to fail (Chen, Wang and Waley 2020). There are some positive examples where projects are initiated or widely participated by communities (see Nitzky 2013; Li and Zhu 2014; Ding and Ruan 2016 for examples). However, the successful cases are contingent upon certain conditions, such as an open-minded local leader and advanced administration system where power can be actively shared by the authorities with investors and communities. In some cases, nevertheless, the communities have to use media exposure, protests, struggles, etc. to tilt the power imbalance between the authorities and the communities (Verdini 2015; Li et al 2020). It is also argued that community initiatives are more likely to succeed in rural areas because communities based on kinship with more collective interests and experiences are closely tied, thus are easily organised and led by elderly leaders to pursuit the same goals. While urban communities that lack such bonds are indifferent to each other out of the consideration of avoiding troubles (Ding and Ruan 2016). Meanwhile, there is a lack of authorities' fostering and support of civil societies, and low participation awareness (Heberer 2009; Fan 2014). Furthermore, compared to regular old and dilapidated neighbourhoods and urban villages, urban heritage areas embody the cultural significance and historical characteristics of cities. In recent years as the central government reiterates the significance of heritage conservation, local government has controlled heritage area regeneration projects more tightly than regular urban regeneration projects to respond to the central government, thus tend to avoid sharing power with not only communities, but also investors (Zhang 2008; personal communication).

That said, the common situation in China's heritage area regeneration is that, in those government-led and market-led projects, communities can only participate in

running businesses after the projects are finished with few opportunities to participate in the decision-making process (Wang and Bramwell 2012; Su and Wall 2012; Wang and Huang 2013). Although they may raise their demands and concerns through Resident Committees or Street Offices, their voices are likely to be marginalised by the local authorities' pursuit of economic benefits and political agenda (Shin 2009). In fact, the elite vision of heritage conservation imposed by the government is centred around space beautification and economic development (Chen, Wang and Waley 2020). The central government values nation building through promoting traditional Chinese culture and constructing advanced cities (Ye 2011; Harrell 2013), while the local government is keen on land revenue and political promotion (Wang 2012). These objectives rarely correspond with those of the residents living in heritage areas.

Therefore, Nitzky (2013, 226) criticises that participation in China is *canjia*, not *canyu*. The difference is that *canjia* is to passively take part in or attend, whereas *canyu* is to actively take part in with a contribution. Drawing upon Arnstein's ladder of participation, Plummer and Taylor (2004, 42) summarise a Chinese version of the ladder of participation: attendance, notification, expression, discussion, decision-making, and initiative/self-management. They point out that it is attendance and notification that are frequently observed, while higher levels of participation are neglected. They also criticise that China's current approaches are not actual community participation but a 'misuse of participation'. In some cases, the participation *de facto* supports the official agenda of the government rather than the community's development. In others, the motive of the government to promote participation is to obtain free labour from the community and to obtain community financing (Plummer and Taylor 2004, 52-53). Due to the authorities' insufficient understanding of participation, and the authoritarian role of the government agencies (Nitzky 2013), what

is occurring in China is the 'tyranny of participation', a concept I will turn to next (Cooke and Kothari 2001).

Conceptual framework: tyranny of participation

As Crooke (2010) argues, 'community' is sometimes exploited as a panacea to justify the authorities' practices in heritage conservation. When the communities disagree with the government, however, communities are neglected or suppressed (Waterton and Smith 2010). Cooke and Kothari (2001, 3-4) use 'tyranny of participation' to describe the flawed participatory development: tyranny 'is the illegitimate and/or unjust exercise of power'. The precondition of real participation practice is making '"people" central to development by encouraging beneficiary involvement in interventions that affect them' (Cooke and Kothari 2001, 5). However, the tyranny of participation turns participation into a '"hegemonic" device to secure compliance to, and control by, existing power structures. The control is more subtle than direct domination, taking the form of seeking the "commitment" of those to be controlled and then allowing a degree of "responsible autonomy" within limits' (Taylor 2004, 137). The purpose of agencies to use the tyrannical participatory approaches is to 'implement their projects more efficiently rather than seeking "real" participation from the affected community', which ends up reproducing or reinforcing the existing 'dominant power structures' (Henkel and Stirrat 2001, 171).

Since the emergence of the 'tyranny' criticism, some scholars find it too radical and critical (e.g. Hickey and Mohan 2004; Nair 2016). Pollock and Sharp (2012) contend that urban redevelopment and community participation and empowerment are in essence conflictual. The conflicts may be better perceived as a fair reflection of the government-community relations. Meanwhile, scholars nonetheless do widely acknowledge that the tyrannical participation 'has often failed to engage with issues of

power and policies and has become a technical approach to development that, in various ways, depoliticises what should be an explicitly political process' (Hickey and Mohan 2004, 4). Based on the theoretical and empirical studies of various scholars worldwide (e.g. Gaynor 2014; Enns, Bersaglio and Kepe 2014), the tyranny critique to participation is indeed insightful in terms of reflecting upon what is effective participation, and the mechanisms of how tyrannical participation reinforces power imbalance and exclude marginalised groups.

In practice, the tyranny of participation can be manifested in various ways. Among them, three types of manifestations are highly relevant to the BHD case. First, participation is restricted to a predetermined framework to serve a predetermined outcome, all pre-set up by the authority (Taylor 2004; Enns, Bersaglio and Kepe 2014). Second, the authority may link 'the development of participatory processes to the introduction of the user-pays concept', and 'associate participation only with the community financial contribution, and not with what communities gain from the process' (Plummer and Taylor 2004, 38; Gaynor 2014). Third, the participatory decisions may reinforce the interests of the already empowered population, not necessarily the authorities themselves, while continuing to ignore the marginalised (Cooke and Kothari 2001, 7-8). The BHD case, as I will show, demonstrates the government's pre-determined official agenda, exploitation of communities for financial contributions, preferred target groups, and ultimately, the 'tyranny of participation'. This case not only reveals the lack of higher levels of participation in heritage regeneration practice but also reveals the government's misuse of participation through equating attendance and notification to higher levels of participation to serve its official agenda and implement the project efficiently.

Study area and its current regeneration project

Baitasi Historic District

BHD is one of Beijing's *hutong* (small alleys) areas in the Old City bordered by the Second Ring Road. It covers an area of approximately 37 hm^2 and is surrounded by Beijing's important financial and administrative districts (Figure 1 and Figure 2). The area has several historic temples and courtyard houses (*siheyuan*) registered for protection by the Beijing Municipality. The most famous one is *Baitasi* (the White Pagoda Temple), the only remnants of the Yuan Dynasty (1272A.D.-1368A.D.) in Beijing (Figure 3).

According to the household registration (*hukou*), approximately 6,000 households live in BHD in the 2010s. The average living area for one family is 23.37 m^2. In reality, many people such as migrant workers living in the area have their households registered elsewhere, making the actual population much larger and the average living area much smaller than the official numbers. In one courtyard house which was originally designed for one family, there can be three to twenty families sharing it. Considering the high population density, the poor building condition, and the lack of amenities, the living conditions in BHD are poor, which is a shared feature of many functioning heritage areas in China.

The communities in BHD is not homogenous. Some residents have lived in BHD for generations and own private properties. Some residents used to be employees of state-owned enterprises who rent public houses. These people are registered Beijing citizens. Migrant works and affluent businessmen came in BHD since the 1980s and have rented low-cost houses or bought valuable courtyard houses respectively. These people may have their household registered in Beijing or elsewhere. Among these residents, Beijing citizens (original residents) who have been neighbours for a longer

time share similar socioeconomic background and more collective memories, thus are closer to one another. The ties between the migrant workers and the Beijing citizens are sometimes not close. And the businessmen do not necessarily live in BHD, but just use the courtyard houses as investment. In the later elaboration, I will use 'residents' to refer to original residents with Beijing hukou. Although tenants should technically be considered as 'residents', I will separate tenants from residents to make the expressions concise.

Baitasi Remade

The government-initiated regeneration of BHD started as early as 2000 with the relocation of some residents and restoration of the designated historic buildings. The regeneration work in the first decade was physical environment-oriented and centred around the White Pagoda. In order to showcase the White Pagoda as a landmark in the Old City of Beijing, surrounding buildings were lowered. In February 2013, Beijing Huarong Jinying Investment and Development Co., Ltd. (hereinafter Jinying) was founded to initiate a new regeneration project in BHD. Jinying is a subsidiary corporation of the Financial Street Holdings Co., Ltd., a state-owned investment company in Xicheng District, Beijing. In 2015, Baitasi Remade was officially declared to start[2]. In the first half of 2019, the relocation was suspended due to a lack of government funding and new housing sources, while other programmes were in progress. According to Jinying, the suspension of relocation had nothing to do with residents' willingness to relocate or other feedback. In the summer of 2019, the district governments of Beijing started a new round of relocation in the Old City. The future

2 Interview with the staff of Jinying by Zhulong Study Group during the 2020 Beijing Design Week: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/e5sVW9WO1dT6k7CMOM5PoQ.

relocation in BHD will follow the new regulations set up by the district governments, but has not started yet. Due to the COVID-19, I was not able to continue studying the new round of regeneration. While the regeneration in the first decade was in a small scale. Therefore, the scope of this research is Baitasi Remade from 2015 to early 2019 when the project was consistent with no change of policy or plan. My interviews with the residents and tenants across time also found no radical change of opinions.

In this period of time, the plan of Baitasi Remade is comprised of four steps: (1) relocation of residents through partial and voluntary relocation, (2) improvement of the public environment by upgrading infrastructure, beautifying building façades, adding parking spaces and green spaces, and demolishing illegal constructions, (3) introduction of cultural catalysts such as Airbnb, boutique shops, design exhibitions, and art galleries, and (4) design and creation of communities by hosting community activities. The last three encourages community input, and are termed altogether as 'community co-construction programmes' by Jinying.

The voluntary relocation, particularly, is said to be negotiation-based. Ideally, Jinying would dispatch staff to discuss with the households whether they choose to stay in BHD or move out of BHD, and present to them the detailed compensation plan. There are some rules for the relocation. First, only when the families living in one courtyard house all agree to move, the families will move all together. As long as one family chooses to stay, all the families have to stay. The reason is that the government believes it is easier to rehabilitate and reuse houses when they are completely vacant. Second, the plan offers three options for residents who want to move: (1) purchasing new apartments in high-rises assigned by the government with monetary subsidy, (2) only monetary subsidy which can be freely disposed of by residents, and (3) switch to other courtyard houses in BHD. The amount of monetary subsidy is based on the market

value of their courtyard houses. Only property owners can obtain the subsidy, while tenants are not eligible. At the end of 2018, 10% of the residents were relocated, lower than the goal of relocating 15% to 20% of the residents in the first phase. Approximately 90 courtyard houses of the 900 were vacated.

With regard to the community co-construction programmes, the official website of Baitasi Remade highlights some community activities held by Jinying such as a micro-temple fair and a community marathon, and the Baita Reception Room (*baita huiketing*) which is set up for residents to have lectures, exhibitions, and other kinds of activities[3]. One of the most important platforms for community co-construction is Beijing Design Week, an annual design exhibition and competition initiated by the state's Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Beijing Municipality. BHD has become one of the exhibition spaces of Beijing Design Week since 2015. Jinying uses Beijing Design Week as an opportunity to collect adaptive reuse ideas for the courtyard houses and public spaces in BHD[4]. Jinying's public promotion of Baitasi Remade is enthusiastic about introducing well-known architects' adaptive reuse designs with courtyard houses in BHD (Figure 4). It is believed that these new designs have successfully inserted infrastructure to dilapidated historic houses to improve residents' living conditions[5]. Jinying, therefore, advertised their project as 'closely related to residents' daily lives, and forming a new neighbourhood ecology' (Baitasi Remade 2019, 108). And Baitasi Remade has been commented as 'a great example of heritage

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3 From 'Community Neighbourhood' section of the website of Baitasi Remade: https://www.btsremade.com/en/community-neighborhood.

4 From 'Baita Event' section of the website of Baitasi Remade: https://www.btsremade.com/en/baita-event.

5 Media coverage from Sohu, 28 April 2018: https://www.sohu.com/a/229780213_523366.

area regeneration, as it is guided by the government, participated by civil societies, and combined with residents' cultural lives'[6].

In my interviews with Jinying, they expressed that 'we value community participation very much'. They introduced that their measures were two-fold. First, the relocation is negotiation-based. There will no longer be any violence or threats involved. Second, they emphasise the construction of neighbour relationship, especially the relationship between the original residents and the young new-comers who will move in after the regeneration. 'One of the characteristics of the Old City of Beijing is acquaintance society (*shuren shehui*). We hope to keep the living culture this way as it always has been.' Their way of building neighbour relationships is to foster community organisations and help with community activities. 'The BHD residents' participation rate of the activities is quite high. The themes and contents of the activities are all come up with by the residents aged 50 to 60 or so. We mainly work on organising and guiding them.'

Regeneration in practice: tyranny of participation at work

From the promotion of Jinying and the district government, Baitasi Remade seems to adopt an inclusive and fruitful participation approach by providing residents with various ways of participating in the process. However, my interviews with the residents and tenants disagree with the authority's promotion of the project.

Incomplete inclusion of movers

Based on the interviews with the residents and the district government, the voluntary relocation is not as voluntary as Jinying would have it seem. Some of my interviewees

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6 Comment from scholar, same source as Note 5.

who would like to move but choose to stay for now have expressed their discontent with the relocation plan. According to the potential movers, although there is no violence or threats involved regarding relocation, the plan still has two major problems: vague communication of the policy between the authority and the residents, and lack of freedom in terms of the three relocation options originally proposed by the government. What is worth mentioning is that, in my interviews with Jinying and the government, they tended to avoid questions related to relocation, and directed me to other departments for answers back and forth.

Regarding the communication of the policy between Jinying and the residents, as the residents complain:

> Some of us still don't know nothing about the relocation. We don't know where to get the information……. The only way is to ask neighbours and friends. If you are lucky, you may come across someone who happens to know something (Resident 3).

> There are so many details about the compensation plan. It's so complicated. I couldn't fully understand it…… I just hope they [the government] gives us more money. Otherwise, I can't afford to move. You know the house price in Beijing. It's crazy (Resident 6).

> There is a formula to calculate the amount of money we can get. And they say it's scientific and reliable with the coefficients set up by experts. But they don't let us know the formula and the coefficients. They just calculate on our behalf and tell us the results (Resident 15).

The interviewee who talked about the formula and coefficients is a well-educated man who always keeps an eye on the regeneration project in BHD and the policy of Beijing in general. However, most of the residents in BHD are not as well-educated and keen on public affairs as he is, which makes the poor communication between the authority and the residents even less effective.

Regarding the relocation options, movers tend to choose the first one of the three options, which is using monetary compensation to purchase new houses assigned by the government. The reason is that the option of switching to other courtyard houses has not been implemented yet. And the government-assigned houses usually come with subsidies or discounts, whereas new houses on the free market are not affordable with the compensation. In recent years, the living expenses and house prices in Beijing have increased substantially, whereas the amount of compensation is decreasing. More than half of the current residents in BHD are the elderly who are already retired. They cannot cover the extra cost of housing with their limited pension.

The government-assigned new houses are not desirable for the residents as well. BHD is surrounded by many facilities and services that are essential to its residents. For the elderly, there are some prestigious hospitals around the neighbourhood. Some pharmacies are within walking distance, some of which are specialized in Chinese herbs which the elderly find more trustworthy than Western medicine. In the southern part of BHD, there are many grocery stores, barbershops, restaurants, convenient stores, etc. that have been serving the neighbourhood for more than twenty years. For parents with school children, some good elementary, middle, and high schools are nearby. In comparison, the new houses assigned by the government is usually located in newly developed areas situated in the periphery districts of the city without enough facilities and services constructed yet. Due to the periphery location and undesirable layout, the houses usually value less than houses on the free market and are difficult to sell. Some of the government-assigned houses are co-owned by the government and the residents, thus are not allowed for transaction. One resident gave an example of how important it is to live close to hospitals for the elderly:

> Last month, one of my old friends who moved to the suburb just passed away. He had a heart attack and his wife called an ambulance. But when the ambulance got there, he was already gone. It's not a single case…… It takes too much time for the ambulance to get to the suburb. It's far, and the traffic congestion on the way is terrible (Resident 4).

Although equipped with modern facilities, the new apartments and new neighbourhoods are an indifferent environment for people who are used to close connection with their neighbours:

> We meet old friends every day, not on purpose, you know. You go grocery shopping, you go to the hospital, and you see people, so you greet them. But you move to apartment buildings, you never see your neighbours. You don't even know their names, whether they are men or women, what they do for a living. You close your security door, and you don't see people. I can't make new friends there, and I can't see my old friends (Resident 9).

In addition, the rule that relocation can happen only when families sharing one courtyard house all agree to move is believed unreasonable and inflexible and commented as 'stupid' by some residents in an online forum. Therefore, the choice of accepting to relocate is actually highly constrained for residents. Due to the restriction of monetary compensation, the condition of the new houses, and the requirement of consensus between neighbours, those who would like to move are trapped in their dilapidated houses.

As indicated by previous studies, residents with enough social and cultural capital or bargaining skills, such as help from media and scholars, and personal connections with the local government, are able to negotiate or even violently resist relocation, and finally make the government alter their plan in order to maintain social stability (Zhai and Ng, 2013; Huang et al., 2020). This is not what happens in BHD, as the residents lack such social and cultural capital and the bargaining skills. Meanwhile,

due to some personal specificities such as property ownership disputes between the residents and the government, or among their own family members, the residents never self-organise to argue with the government in a collective way. As complaint by some resident, 'we wish we had some leaders to guide us to fight, like in other areas and other cities. But we have no one. People have no experience or capabilities.'

Incomplete inclusion of stayers and complete exclusion of tenants

In BHD, there exists a group of people who actively choose to stay mainly due to their strong emotional attachment to the neighbourhood, poor health conditions and heavy reliance on the surrounding hospitals, and relatively good housing quality. The government is not intended to relocate them after all so as to retain the heritage value and traditional lifestyle of the neighbourhood, according to the district government. These stayers are also not involved in the regeneration, but in a different way compared to the (potential) movers.

One of the three relocation choices, switching to other courtyard houses with new neighbours, is planned as an option for those that stay in the area. An important step towards switching courtyard houses is rehabilitating the vacant houses. However, the rehabilitation is initiated by Jinying in collaboration with architects, without enough consulting with the residents. In the eyes of the interviewed:

> I don't like the new design. At first glance, it's modern and shiny, and you have a toilet, kitchen, storage space, and everything in there. That's nice. But you see, it's not a courtyard house anymore. The attic they add on top is so low. You have to squat. We are old, and that's difficult. It uses concrete, big glass windows like someone will be peeking at my life (Resident 15).

Only one resident with a background in architecture appreciates the design, partly because the 1976 Tangshan Earthquake affected some of Beijing's historic buildings:

> The old houses are shaky. I've seen the broken bricks. They are very brittle. And the beams, too…… Their new design is smart. They keep the original appearance of the eaves, roofs, and beams. But they use new materials, so the houses are stable. You don't need to worry about earthquakes (Resident 21).

The reason that residents gave for being excluded from consultations on the design of the houses is that the houses are not meant for them: 'Those designs are for young and rich people. We can't afford the rehabilitation cost. It seems like the government doesn't welcome us in this neighbourhood anymore.'

'Not welcome' is not just a subjective feeling of the resident, but implied by the latest 2016-2035 Master Plan of Beijing which envisions Beijing as a global capital city bearing the political, cultural, and economic functions of the nation (Beijing Municipality 2017). To achieve the goal, the Plan requires relocating the 'low-end population' (*shujie diduan renkou*) who are essentially the elderly and migrant workers. While younger generations with a higher level of education and consumption power are believed to be able to boost the economic advancement and enhance the living environment of the inner city, thus are 'welcome' (Beijing Municipality 2017). According to Jinying, their goal is to purposefully gentrify the area:

> Of course we will keep some inward businesses to offer service to the elderly residents. But you see we are close to the financial districts. There will definitely be more working spaces, living spaces, and businesses in BHD for those people working in the financial districts. We want an adjustment of the usage of existing space which will no longer target original residents, but more the new people…… Our goal is to *shujie* (disperse) low-income people in order to increase the investment potential, tourism value, and business value of this derelict urban area, to brand it, to make it a new cultural icon of the city (Staff 2).

It is therefore not surprising that among the 90 vacated courtyard houses, around half of them have been rehabilitated and are now being reused as Airbnb, offices, etc. for young people, while none of them are occupied by original residents as living spaces[7].

Regarded by the government as the 'low-end' population, the stayers in BHD cannot fully participate in the regeneration not only in the process of rehabilitating and switching to vacant courtyard houses. They are also not fully involved in other community co-construction programmes. According to the residents, the frequent visitors to the Baita Reception Room are residents from other neighbourhoods:

> They [visitors to the reception room] read about this place and the timetable of the activities on WeChat or something, so they come here. Some of them even live very far. We locals don't really go there. It doesn't feel like our place. We're not interested in the activities (Resident 17).

This is in contradiction to Jinying's version of high participation rate of community activities of the residents in BHD. My interviews with the volunteers corroborate the residents' version: 'Residents of BHD don't really come, usually people from other neighbourhoods. They [residents of BHD] have their own activities…… We don't ask why they don't come.' And one staff of Jinying admitted that the participants of the programmes were actually a few 'community representatives', young volunteers, architecture and urban design students, heritage scholars, media, designers and planners, and foreign tourists.

Another group of residents excluded from the regeneration is tenants, including migrant workers who work nearby and live in BHD, and small business owners in BHD. They are not originally from Beijing. Compared to the residents who have hukou

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7 Interview with staff of Jinying by The Paper, 4 December 2019: https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_5118492.

and own properties in BHD, these tenants are completely excluded from the regeneration. An owner of a small corner store from Anhui Province told me:

> I've heard about the relocation. I'm not sure what I'm gonna do next, probably move to somewhere with a chance to continue the business. I'm afraid I have to move when the time comes, right? I will miss this place. I've been here, what, like ten years? People are nice here (Tenant 1).

A grandma who was helping her daughter, a migrant worker from Henan Province, to take care of the new-born baby expressed her concern:

> This place is close to my daughter's workplace. Most of all, it's cheap. But we will have to move. Our landlord is discussing relocation compensation with the government. He doesn't live here any longer. He moved out years ago. Once they agree on the money stuff, we will have to move (Tenant 3).

It is common in BHD for original residents with the ability to afford modern apartments to move out and lease the courtyard houses to migrant workers and small business owners. They usually moved before the government-led regeneration. Once they sign the contract with the government, the tenants will be expelled. Though tenants are significantly and disproportionally affected by the regeneration project, they are never considered by Jinying or the government, because they are neither property owners nor seen as community members. At the same time, whether they are part of the original community is not a consensus among the original residents. Some residents have closer relationship with the tenants and view them as '*ziji ren*' (my own people), some view them as 'low quality' and 'outsiders' thus dislike them, and some take a neutral position. The consensus is that the small businesses the tenants provide are important for the neighbourhood.

Summary

The ‘community participation’ in BHD well accords with the three aforementioned manifestations of the tyranny of participation. The relocation policy and implementation of the voluntary relocation reveal the first type of tyranny of participation. The government claims that the negotiation process between the residents and the government with regard to whether to relocate or not and how to relocate is community input. However, I contend that this is a misunderstanding of participation, as the entire policy framework is pre-set by the government without consulting the residents. The regeneration project is initiated by the government to serve the political agenda of reducing population density and optimising land use in the Old City of Beijing to improve the built environment and release non-capital functions of the capital city (Beijing Municipality 2017). The priority is not serving the residents’ needs. Meanwhile, the three relocation options are pre-determined by the government. The flaws of the relocation plan have deprived the residents of the right to have transparent and equal conversations with the government and to choose freely based on their needs.

Second, relocation is a costly process. It is estimated that to accomplish the relocation goal of the entire Old City of Beijing, the cost will be approximately 1.4 billion yuan (~0.21 billion USD). It is the two inner-city districts, Xicheng and Dongcheng Districts, that are responsible for the funding without sufficient support from the central and municipal governments. The two district governments have claimed that they are considering setting up a special fund to tackle the issue, but have not started yet. In previous years, it was common for residents to become rich overnight due to the remarkable amount of relocation compensation provided by the government (He et al., 2010). In recent years, the scale of the regeneration and relocation means that the government can no longer afford such compensation. As a resident in BHD

complaint, ‘people from outside think we can get super rich by *chaiqian* (demolition and move) and they get jealous. But that’s years ago. Now, we get poor by *chaiqian*!’

Thinking about the idea of ‘user-pays’ discussed by Plummer and Taylor (2004), the movers of BHD, as ‘users’ of the relocation, have also become ‘payers’ of the relocation. The government has passed on the financial burden to the residents. Since the government has failed to provide them with a reasonable amount of compensation, the movers who finally decide to relocate have to pay for the relocation on their own to some extent, which fits in the second type of tyranny of participation. By turning forced relocation into negotiation-based voluntary relocation, the government can incorporate residents into the regeneration project in order to facilitate the government’s exploitation of the residents, particularly the (potential) movers, for their financial contribution toward the regeneration project.

Third, the situation faced by stayers and tenants is the last type of tyranny of participation. The communities of the BHD consist of not only visitors and future newcomers but also current original residents and tenants. However, the government’s community participation approaches only target the visitors and future newcomers, not the original residents and tenants. The former group is the government’s preferred population who are already privileged socially and economically. Whereas the latter group is the undesirable population who are already underprivileged. In the regeneration project, the movers have made spaces for newcomers. The stayers and tenants may be expelled by the newcomers due to the future increase of living expenses, change of living environment, and breakup of social networks. Therefore, the community participation approaches and the new regeneration modal are no different from previous ones in terms of facilitating displacement and gentrification. Through displacement and gentrification, the regeneration project has reinforced the privileged group’s social and

economic position, while impaired the underprivileged group's property and participation rights and worsened their economic status. The social and economic gaps between the underprivileged people and the urban elites will be enlarged due to the biased community participation approaches.

Discussion and conclusion

Drawing upon the BHD case, some reflections on community participation are necessary. In terms of the definition of 'community', different contexts ascribe different interpretation and importance to it (Berger, Dicks, and Fontaine 2020). Meanwhile, 'community' should not be bounded by geographical location, but is also strengthened by 'shared interests, common causes or collective experiences' (Waterton and Smith 2010, 9). As in the BHD case, the non-homogenous and non-consistent communities is comprised of different groups that are organised around people's backgrounds, interests, and hukou. The communications between those groups are relatively limited, but they still maintain a stable and kind neighbour relationship with frequent small help, greetings, and leisure activities in their daily lives. This makes the authority's community co-construction programmes somewhat redundant, as there is already a high level of social participation of the existing communities. What is lack of is political participation not only in terms of election of resident representatives as classified by Heberer (2009), but also decision-making power. Therefore, it is firstly important to understand the inner dynamics of the communities and focusing on the right communities. This should not only constitute the younger and wealthier population desired by the authority but more importantly, the direct occupiers and users of the urban spaces who will be more significantly influenced by the projects.

The difference between social participation and political participation draws us into the reflection of the definition of 'participation'. The ladder of participation

(Arnstein 1969) reveals that participation cannot be simply divided into 'good' or 'bad', but is more of a spectrum with different levels which may be applied in different situations and contexts. What is worth discussing is what counts as 'effective' participation. Based on the BHD case, the indicators of effective participation ought to include inclusive strategies, positive consequences, as well as the authority' legitimate motivations of community participation. The reason for having unreasonable strategies and negative consequences in BHD is partly due to the authority's motivation of focusing on their political agenda and economic profits only, which inevitably leads to the neglect and damage of the current communities' interests when the latter conflicts with the former.

Looking at a larger scale, the BHD case is representative in heritage area regeneration in China in terms of the specific approaches of relocation and community co-construction programmes, which I have encountered many times in practice, especially in small cities that are eager to learn from major cities. Such participation approaches have been taken as advanced experiences and spread to a wider scale in China. The case is also representative around the world for archaeological sites, museums, etc. in terms of the flawed motivation, strategy, and consequence of community participation (e.g. Perkin 2010): the motivation is centred around authority's pursuit, not community's interests; the strategy is pre-determined by the authority without community input; and the consequence is marginalisation of the already marginalised. In this sense, the fail of achieving the three indicators leads to the three manifestations of tyrannical participation in BHD respectively. In practice, it may be relatively easier to improve strategy and pursue a more positive consequence. The evaluation and modification of motivation, on the other hand, requires more

consideration and attempts, which is what scholars and practitioners can keep working on.

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