Driven to swim with the tide? Urban redevelopment and community participation in China

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Contents

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Editorial Note

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Acknowledgement

Abstract

Over the last decade, there has been growing attention to the issue of neighbourhood governance and community participation in China. The focus has been on the extent to which community involvement in rule-making and decision-making processes could be promoted. The issue of community participation in urban redevelopment, however, has received little attention. Urban redevelopment in contemporary Chinese cities is taking place on an unprecedented scale, dissolving long-standing local communities and demolishing poverty-stricken neighbourhoods. Examining the case of Beijing, this paper questions current redevelopment planning and residents' appeal procedures. It considers the extent to which local communities in dilapidated neighbourhoods have difficulty making an impact on decisions affecting their neighbourhoods' redevelopment. The paper considers the extent to which local residents could express discontent and put forward 'rightful claims'. The paper concludes that community participation in neighbourhood redevelopment remains at the bottom of the ladder of participation, and that the vested interests of local authorities and developers in urban redevelopment projects restrict poor residents' active participation in decision-making processes.

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Introduction

In the Western literature, community participation in urban regeneration has emerged as one of the main policy issues during the last two decades. Although there is little hard evidence about the impact of community participation upon project outcomes, it has been accepted 'good practice' for the past 40 years in the West. Discussion focuses on *how* to effectively engage community representatives and local residents in project design and implementation (Ball, 2004; Burton, 2003). Increased attention to community views coincided with a newer emphasis on establishing local regeneration partnerships as a vehicle for area-based initiatives in tackling poverty and social exclusion (Geddes, 1997). Local communities are regarded as being "intended beneficiaries," having "the greatest stake in the future of the area" and knowing "from experience the range of issues" that need to be tackled (Macfarlane, 1993 cited in Chanan, 2003: 17). In Britain, community participation was considered as "a way to speed processes and generate more acceptable proposals" (DoE, 1994: vi), but the concept has grown quickly to be regarded as a right in participatory democracy (DETR, 2000), and being "central to the process of empowerment and a necessary condition for overcoming social exclusion" (Wood, 2000: 20). At European Union level, "active citizenship" was put forward to promote "active cooperation of local residents in public schemes designed for the improvement of disadvantaged or underdeveloped localities" (Chanan, 1997: 5).

In developing countries, community participation is largely associated with the emergence of development project partnership schemes as well as the implementation of participatory approach in urban and social development (Midgley, 1986). The concept of development partnership has evolved from a partnership between central and local governments to deliver services to partnership between governments and private capital, and to local partnerships to promote locally-driven initiatives which involves local communities (Southern, 2002: 18). The inclusion of local communities is advocated in various policy documents by international agencies. For instance, in 1993, UN-Habitat stressed the importance of setting up multi-sectoral partnerships between the public sector, the private sector and the third sector (residents and their organisations) to establish roles that are "complementary and mutually-supportive" (UN-Habitat, 1993).The gradual empowerment of urban services users was recommended, and the public sector was given a role to create an enabling environment for users to accomplish this (Choguill, 1994).

In mainland China, the concept of 'community' has received increasing attention in policy discourse from the mid-1980s (Bray, 2006). This is closely associated with involving local communities in the provision of social welfare (e.g. Leung and Wong, 1999; Liu, 2004; Wang, Yip, Zhang, Wang and Hsiao, 2005) and urban service delivery (Xu and Chow, 2006). Over the last decade, residents' voluntary participation in community affairs has also been emphasized in line with the government promotion of 'community building'. This could be described as an attempt to rationalize and modernize existing neighbourhood-based grassroots organizations (Bray, 2006). Community participation has also been at the core of experimental projects in rural development and poverty alleviation (e.g. Plummer and Taylor, 2004b). Recently, more critical literature has stressed the limits of community participation in policy-making and implementation (Cai, 2004; Chu, 2004) and the changing nature of urban governance that re-invents local communities to create a "governable society" (Wu, 2002a).

Community participation has been rarely discussed, however, in the context of urban regeneration. Urban regeneration in contemporary Chinese cities entails complete demolition and redevelopment, displacing the majority of local residents and dissolving long-standing communities. Hence, urban regeneration in China can be largely equated with urban redevelopment. This places China's experience of community participation in a different context to those of more industrial and post-industrial cities of the West where debates are focus on their active involvement in changing the character of a continuing community.

This paper critically examines the degree of local community participation in the urban redevelopment process. It argues that local residents are effectively barred from taking part in project designation and design, and there is little opportunity for them to express their discontent or secure ownership of any changes. The discussions in this paper draws on evidence from multiple sources – existing literatures, governmental reports and policy documents, and in-depth interviews with local residents and officials. The majority of local residents interviewed were recruited from an inner city neighbourhood in Dongcheng district, Beijing. The neighbourhood's redevelopment was phased in, and at the time of my field visits, its first phase was completed, replacing largely one-storey dilapidated public rental dwellings with high-rise commercial flats. Its second phase was yet to commence, and has not started as of March 2007.

The rest of this paper is divided into five sections. It begins with a brief overview of the way in which community participation in China's urban neighbourhoods is

understood. Second, it will examine urban neighbourhood transformation and its implication for the way in which local communities are shaped. The third section examines the way in which community participation in urban redevelopment is limited and faces constraints. The fourth section touches upon the notion of 'rightful resistance' (O'Brien, 1996) in urban redevelopment, and examines the extent to which local residents could express their discontent and put forward 'rightful claims'. The final section sums up and concludes.

1.   Community participation in urban neighbourhoods

The concept of community lacks a clear-cut definition. Policy documents often loosely define a community as a population in a given locality (for example, DETR, 2000). Diverse social and economic circumstances within a given locality, however, indicate that a community is hard to define. Residents may belong to 'multiple communities' that may extend beyond a locality (Ball, 2004; Kearns and Parkinson, 2001). In China, the term 'community', has a specific spatial definition for administrative purposes, territorially defined to include residential areas within the jurisdiction of an urban grassroots organization called residents' committee (in Chinese, *jumin weiyuanhui*) (Bray, 2006: 534). [1] The main function of a residents' committee is to facilitate government-community communication, maintain local public order and provide social service delivery (Mok, 1988). Until the 1990s, it had been a useful vehicle of welfare provision especially for those vulnerable groups who were left out of the employment-based social welfare system. Day-to-day operation of a residents' committee relies heavily on a few salaried members (who are usually elderly retired women) and volunteers from local communities. A case study in

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[1]   It is necessary to note that the territorial definition of a community in urban China for administrative purposes does not diminish its diverse nature. Work-unit compounds and municipal housing estates built in the planned economy period were known to have homogeneous characteristics in their social composition. Residents, however, had different sets of interests and experiences based on their individual characteristics (e.g. educational attainment, positions in their work places, etc.), which led to differential access to community resources (Logan and Bian, 1993). The differing degree of housing space consumption among residents turned out to raise serious complaints especially when redevelopment compensation was monetarised in 1998 (Shin, 2007b). Although residents could be divided into 'multiple communities' based on individual engagement in various activities within and beyond a locality, they are be treated as 'a community' based on the fact that there is no distinction in the way they are treated in urban redevelopment processes.

Guangzhou suggested that about 4 per cent of local residents voluntarily undertook activities organised by residents' committees (Chan, 1993: 180). With the assistance of residents' committees, local authorities as well as local branches of the Communist Party often launch collective neighbourhood mobilization programs that range from free consultation with professionals to moral education. These may "facilitate the cultivation of a sense of neighborliness" by bringing communities together, but they place "strong moral sanctions of collective participation" with less respect to individual privacy (ibid, 212). Community participation in neighbourhood affairs is therefore largely associated with residents' participation in state organized space. This poses problems for the promotion of community participation in a western sense. It is cited as one of the main obstacles to carrying through poverty alleviation programs in rural China. As Janelle Plummer argues: "for many Chinese farmers the idea of working together is associated with the days of the collective economy" (Plummer, 2004: 9). During the planned economy era, most urban residents were also mobilized through their work place, which became the main locus of citizens' participation in urban political, social and economic affairs (Lü and Perry, 1997). In return, they were "promised an egalitarian, redistributive order that provided job security, basic living standards, and social opportunities for those from disadvantaged backgrounds" (Tang and Parish, 2000: 1).

Over the last decade, there has been increasing attention to the way in which urban communities engage and become part of a new form of neighbourhood governance (for instance, Bray, 2006; He, 2003; Zhang, 2003). This reflects the emphasis given by China's central and local governments to reconfiguring residents' committees around the concept of 'community building' (or *shequ jianshe* in Chinese). [2] The promotion of this new form of neighbourhood governance is interpreted as having dual objectives (Bray, 2006): (1) more comprehensive delivery of social services to meet the diverse needs of local residents; (2) institutional change to achieve greater political and social integration. Some see it as having resulted from "compromises between community development and urban control" (Jones and Xu, 2002: 114). One interesting initiative is the direct election of residents' representatives. A residents' committee was usually staffed mostly by elderly volunteers (usually retired women) appointed by local authorities. The new 'community building', relies on employing professional community workers (or *shequ* cadres), who are younger and come from a trade-union

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[2]   The implementation of 'community building' was officially endorsed by the announcement of the 'Opinion of the Ministry of Civil Affairs on promoting community building nationwide' in December 2000 (for the review of the development of 'community building' program, see Kojima and Kokubun, 2002).

or the Communist Party background. These cadres are to represent the interests of residents and mediate their relationship with local bureaucrats. To encourage residents' participation in this new urban governance arrangement, these cadres are selected by direct election. From 1998, the direct election of residents' representatives has spread to many cities, mostly located in coastal provinces (Trott, 2006). Some critics welcome these changes in neighbourhood governance, as they have "the potential for further autonomy" (Jones and Xu, 2002) and may open up space for residents' democratic participation in decision-making processes (He, 2003).

Indeed, other new organizations have emerged, enjoying a greater degree of independence and creating "possibilities for increased participation by Chinese people in decisions affecting their daily lives" (Taylor, 2004: 26). These social organizations include traditional ones such as the Women's Federation that has adapted to the changing environment and expanded its local coverage. They also include private enterprise associations, specialist organizations (in areas such as trade and commerce) and welfare associations, all of which enjoy "greater involvement in decision-making within their respective areas" (Taylor, 2004: 26). It is argued that the emergence of these organisations constitutes important progress towards involving people in decisions at the local level that affect their lives. These social organisations are increasingly employing "strategies of negotiation and circumvention" to influence policy making and implementation (Saich, 2000).

However, they take place within a context of strong social control by the state. Despite the voluntary participation of active residents in community affairs, getting involved in decision-making is still an uneasy affair for most urban residents. Public participation is not readily discussed in public discourse, and its promotion in regulatory, decision-making and rulemaking processes is still at its infancy (Wang, X., 2003). One example is the previously cited direct election to select *shequ* cadres. In most cases, candidates are 'nominated' by party officials, endorsed by indirect election in which only heads of families or residents' representatives cast their votes (Trott, 2006). 'Community building' as a new means of building a self-managed grassroots organization in contemporary Chinese cities cannot be separated from the administrative hierarchy and from the influence of the Communist Party. This erodes the very foundation of *shequ* offices as self-governing autonomous entities (Kojima and Kokubun, 2002).

So far, we have examined the notion of community participation in Chinese contexts, and the emergence of a new form of neighbourhood governance in recent years. It is shown that community participation in urban China is largely associated with local

residents' involvement in collective activities, and that the promotion of 'community building' as a self-managed grassroots activity cannot be separated from the state's determination to maintain social control. Before examining the limits and constraints of community participation in urban redevelopment processes, the following section examines the impact of 'neighbourhood transformation' in the reform era on the way in which local communities are shaped. It will show that urban redevelopment largely targets dilapidated neighbourhoods that contain less mobile and poorer residents who have been excluded from sharing the benefits of reform.

2.   Neighbourhood transformation and local communities

In the process of building a socialist China after her foundation in 1949, China followed in the footsteps of other socialist countries in Eastern Europe in re-creating its urban neighbourhoods. From 1949, the idea of communal living became the basis of a socialist society, leading to the adaptation of 'micro-districts'. The policy aimed at constructing "a self-contained community of residential quarters, including dormitories, communal eating and recreation places, crèches, kindergartens, schools and local medical facilities, shopping and other service provision" (French and Hamilton, 1979: 9-11). This principle expanded to such an extent that "most urban residents would rarely have any need to travel beyond the walls of their work-and-living unit" (Gaubatz, 1999: 1497). State enterprises were the major entities that supplied such facilities as part of in-kind welfare provision for their employees. Municipal housing bureaus provided and managed rental accommodation for those registered urban residents whose work-units were not rich enough to do so. Therefore, local communities were by and large tightly knit by their proximate relationships in both their work places and residential compounds.

In this regard, residential mobility was very low for many decades until before the recent Open Door and Reform policies. Provincial or inter-urban migration was subject to strict control through the enforcement of the household registration system (or *hukou* in Chinese terms) which tied welfare benefits and employment to an individual's original place of residence (Chan, 1994; Solinger, 1999).Movement within cities was less restricted, but the self-reliant residential compounds and restricted urban growth without suburbanization led to limited movement even within cities. Residential relocation was largely influenced by supply-side constraints (Wu, 2004b: 456). Individual housing needs resulting from job transfers or family change (for example, childbirth or ageing parents) were brought forward to residents' work-units or municipal housing management bureau for determination, if any relocation

was requested. Households residing in rental dwellings provided by their work-units or municipal housing bureaus were not able to move freely. Any moves were determined, or negotiated at the most, by their work-units according to pre-set criteria.

When cities slowly woke up to the implications of the reform era in the 1980s, changes to inner city neighbourhoods were still 'organic'. Urban redevelopment was a piecemeal process, involving re-housing of local residents (Wu, 1999). This meant that local communities remained largely intact in terms of social composition. Since the mid-1990s, however, this 'organic' process has given its way to large scale real estate development that has involved mass clearance and reconstruction of long-standing inner city neighbourhoods with residents' permanent dispersion to new estates in suburban districts (Fang and Zhang, 2003; Zhang and Fang, 2003). The profit-led nature of inner city redevelopment has been strengthened by urban land reform (Zhang, 1997) and commercialization of urban housing (Wang and Murie, 1996). Big variations in rents and the value of land make urban neighbourhoods in strategic locations prone to takeover by real estate capital (Wu, 2002b).

In (post-) industrial capitalist cities, contemporary urban policies have entailed a more inclusive approach towards regeneration partnerships, moving "from a narrow preoccupation with physical regeneration to a wider concern with the economic and social regeneration of communities" (Geddes, 1997: 7). This has not been the pattern in China's urban redevelopment policy. Since the mid-1990s, urban regeneration in China has been dominated by property-led redevelopment (He and Wu, 2005). In Beijing, for instance, with the arrival of new redevelopment policies that reflected the 'entrepreneurial' characteristic of the local state, nearly one quarter of local residents in Dongcheng district (one of Beijing's four inner city districts) were found to have been affected by urban redevelopment projects between 2000 and 2005 (Shin, 2007a).

Subsequently, the spatial and social changes in urban China during the reform era have brought significant changes to the way in which local communities have been shaped. In comparison with the pre-reform practices, urban residents are now increasingly mobile, seeking upward mobility in their housing ladder to become homeowners. This suggests that residents are increasingly associated not on the basis of their employment status (as was the case in work-unit based residential compounds) but on the basis of their capacity to buy property. Under market conditions, they begin to behave as active consumers of commodified housing and meet their individual housing needs with their significantly increased financial means. Recent empirical studies testify to such behaviour (Li, 2000; Wang and Li, 2004; Wu, 2004a). Homeowners are increasingly organized through the formation of homeowners'

committee (called *yezhu weiyuanhui* in Chinese), exercising their property rights to intervene in the way their properties are managed and neighbourhood affairs are decided (Read, 2003). This inevitably brings conflicts with other neighbourhood-based organisations such as residents' committees and property management offices (Zhang, 2003).

Unlike the newly constructed residential estates, old dilapidated neighbourhoods in inner city districts and on the urban fringe are characterized by poverty concentration. Liu and Wu (2006) note that better-off and well-connected households have escaped from these neighbourhoods to become homeowners elsewhere, and rented out their rental dwellings to migrants. The result has been poverty concentration in communities that are "economically and physically marginalized" (Wang, Y.P., 2003: 259). Poor residents have become less mobile, confined within these poverty-stricken neighbourhoods in increasingly fragmented cities (ibid). They have failed to benefit from housing privatization and commodification, many living on means-tested social assistance programs (Liu and Wu, 2006). They are the ones who have become largely subject to profit-led redevelopment. The limits and constraints of community participation in the following section are associated with these residents.

3.   Community participation in urban redevelopment: limits and constraints

This section explains the ways in which urban redevelopment projects have been implemented to minimize local residents' resistance and contain their discontents and frustration. These measures seek to maintain social stability and the swift implementation of urban neighbourhood transformation, which work in favour of development partnerships between local authorities and developers. Three issues are addressed: (1) limited participation in project design and implementation; (2) constraints upon residents in legal disputes; (3) lack of communication with local authorities.

Limited participation in project design and implementation
A European Commission report defines community participation in urban regeneration as "the active participation of local inhabitants in schemes to regenerate disadvantaged or declining areas" (European Commission, 1997: 19). This indicates that community participation includes various forms of involvement that ranges from consultation to actual participation of community representatives in project design, implementation and evaluation. Some draw a distinction between residents'

participation in general community activities (horizontal involvement) and the participation of community leaders and representatives in decision-making (vertical involvement) (Chanan, 1997; DETR, 2000). It is generally acknowledged that the two forms of participation are closely related, and complement each other where local communities are successfully involved in neighbourhood improvement projects.

We have seen that community participation in China's urban neighbourhoods entails residents' participation in grassroots activities organized by residents' committees. This indicates, to some extent, the presence of 'horizontal involvement', but the nature of residents' day-to-day associations differs considerably. Do residents in China engage in 'vertical involvement' in the process of neighbourhood transformation through redevelopment projects? When a neighbourhood is subjected to a redevelopment project, residents are expected to 'participate' actively in a model that promotes, in principle, multi-sectoral partnerships between the government, real estate developers and local residents. For instance, in a pilot redevelopment project in a neighbourhood called Haiyuncang, the official description stated that the redevelopment of Haiyuncang neighbourhood was carried out according to a new model in which the government was to organize activities, enterprises implement and residents participate. In practice, it is the partnership between local authorities and developers that is the key to the success of a redevelopment project.

The critical role of the partnership between local authorities and developers is illustrated in Figure 1 below. This figure sums up a typical implementation process of a redevelopment project, and is based on a government recommended procedure announced in June 1994. This notice carried an important weight in the history of urban redevelopment in Beijing, as the four inner city district governments of Beijing were given planning power and autonomy to authorize redevelopment projects within their jurisdiction (Beijing Municipal Government, 1994a; Fang and Zhang, 2003: 155).

As shown in the figure, local authorities hold the right to designate a project area. In principle, each district government's urban renewal office carries out feasibility studies, which becomes the basis of neighbourhood designation as a redevelopment project area. In practice, developers often approach urban renewal offices with an application to initiate redevelopment in a neighbourhood of their choice. The application is then considered by the urban renewal office, and is approved if it meets planning criteria. Once developers obtain planning permission to carry out a redevelopment project, they embark on producing a project design plan that includes plans for site clearance and local residents' displacement and relocation. This plan

requires government approval (Beijing Municipal Government, 2001: Article 9). When this plan is approved by the district government, a public announcement needs to be made, which includes the names of the developers, the demolition area, the demolition schedule and the compensation details (ibid, Article 10). The local authority and developers also carry out publicity works so that residents are informed of the imminent redevelopment project and their displacement. This is also the moment when local authorities organize a residents' assembly to 'demonstrate their support for the program'. Residents' committees and volunteers in grassroots activities are often mobilized to attend such meetings.

Figure 1: Urban redevelopment process in Chinese cities
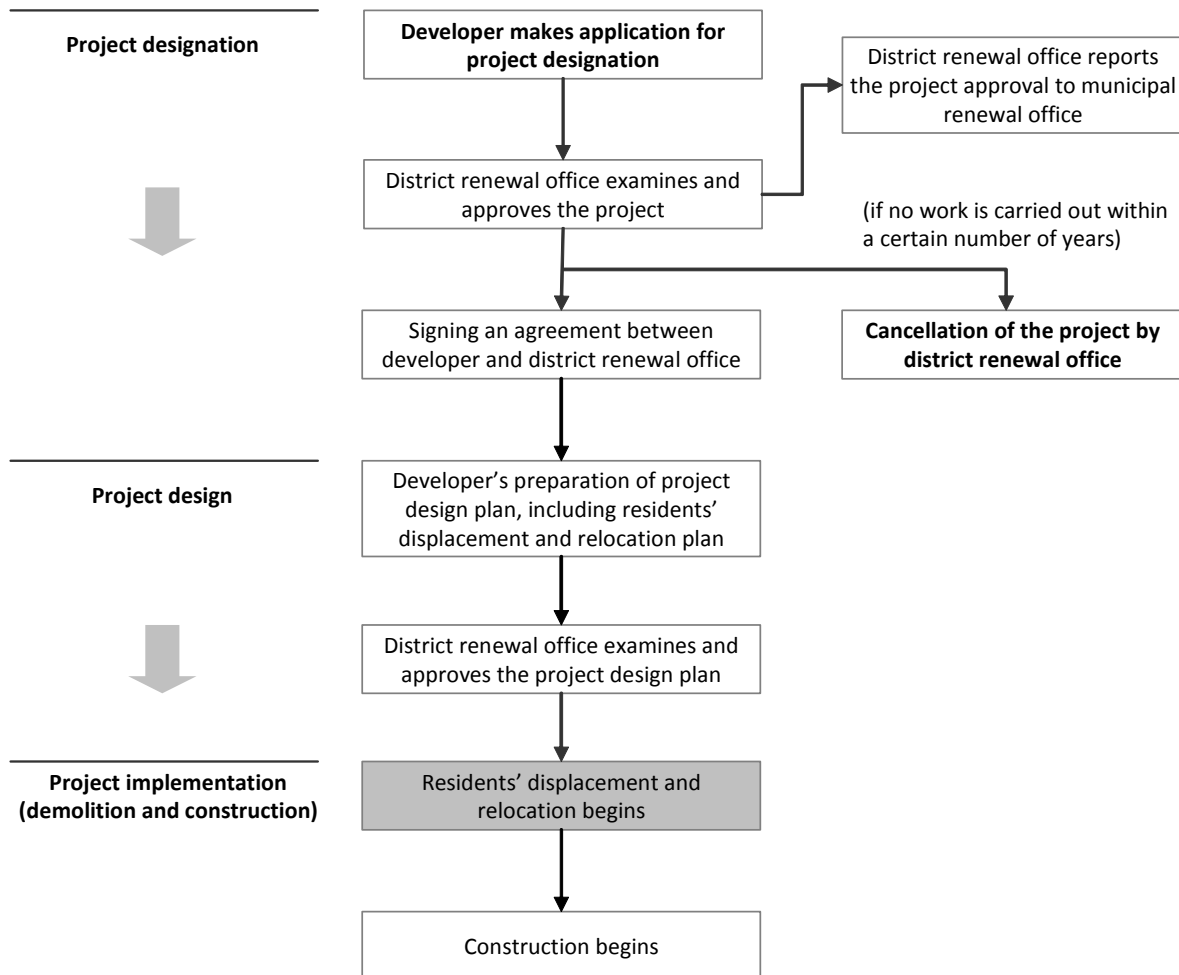
China's urban planning during the planned era was noted for its lack of provision for public participation (Yeh and Wu, 1999). This legacy continues to live on in the reform era. As seen above, the redevelopment process explicitly prohibits residents from participating in project designation and design processes. Local authorities and

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developers make important decisions at the early stage of a redevelopment project, and residents are invited to participate only at the implementation stage. There is no legal process like public hearing or public voting to hear residents' voices or obtain their consent before designating a neighbourhood as a redevelopment project area.

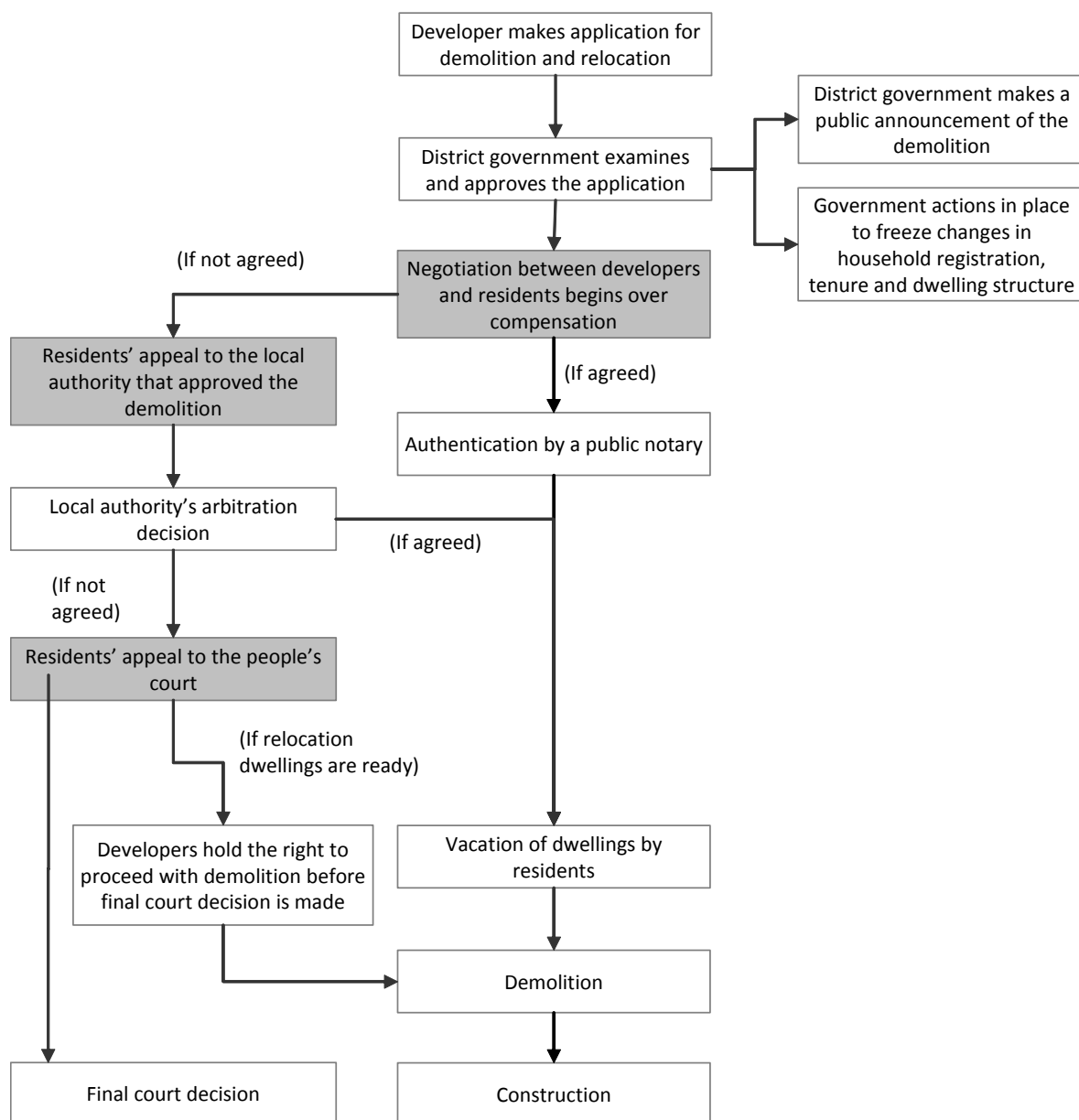### *Constraints upon residents in legal disputes*

The absence of opportunities for residents to intervene in project designation and design reinforces their weak position when they face negotiation over compensation upon their displacement. As shown earlier in Figure 1, residents come in only at the stage of project implementation when most crucial decisions have been already made. Although residents are invited to make complaints and even appeal to the court, these procedures hardly favour residents.

The national regulation on the management of demolition and relocation processes first appeared in March 1991 (State Council of China, 1991). Its major revision was made in 2001. In Beijing, when demolition is announced, local residents and developers are required to negotiate and come to an agreement on the level of compensation (Beijing Municipal Government, 2001: Article 12). If no agreement is reached, they then refer the matter to arbitration by the district government (ibid, Article 15). Figure 2 below shows the negotiation and arbitration process.

The flaw in this process is that it is the same local government agency that grants initial planning permission to developers to carry out redevelopment projects. It is therefore very unlikely that the local government would arbitrate in a way that might hinder the progress of urban redevelopment. If residents refrain from accepting the local government's arbitration decision, they can take the case to the people's court (Beijing Municipal Government, 2001: Article 15). Experience shows that residents rarely win cases against developers (Fang, 1999; Johnson, 2004).

If residents refrain from vacating their dwellings without legitimate reasons, local authorities also hold the right to instruct relevant bureaus to proceed with forced eviction, or obtain court orders to do so (Beijing Municipal Government, 2001: Article 16). Developers and demolition companies possess the right to proceed with demolition if they can prove that they have fulfilled their legal responsibilities of providing residents with cash compensation or relocation dwellings. In such a case, the residents' further appeal to the people's court would not prevent developers from demolishing their homes.

Figure 1: The process of negotiation over compensation in Beijing's urban redevelopment

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                    ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                    │  Developer makes application │
                    │   for demolition and         │
                    │   relocation                 │
                    └──────────────┬──────────────┘
                                   │
                                   ▼
                    ┌─────────────────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────────────┐
                    │  District government         │───────▶│ District government makes a  │
                    │  examines and approves       │        │ public announcement of the   │
                    │  the application             │        │ demolition                   │
                    └──────────────┬──────────────┘        └──────────────────────────────┘
                                   │                        ┌──────────────────────────────┐
    (If not agreed)                │                        │ Government actions in place   │
  ┌────────────────────────────────┤                  ─────▶│ to freeze changes in          │
  │                                 ▼                        │ household registration,       │
  │              ┌─────────────────────────────┐            │ tenure and dwelling structure │
  │              │ Negotiation between          │            └──────────────────────────────┘
  │              │ developers and residents     │
  ▼              │ begins over compensation     │
┌──────────────┐ └──────────────┬──────────────┘
│ Residents'   │                 │ (If agreed)
│ appeal to    │                 ▼
│ the local    │  ┌─────────────────────────────┐
│ authority    │  │ Authentication by a public   │
│ that         │  │ notary                       │
│ approved the │  └──────────────┬──────────────┘
│ demolition   │                 │
└──────┬───────┘   (If agreed)   │
       ▼                          
┌──────────────┐
│ Local        │
│ authority's  │
│ arbitration  │
│ decision     │
└──────┬───────┘
(If not │
agreed) ▼
┌──────────────┐
│ Residents'   │
│ appeal to    │
│ the people's │
│ court        │
└──────┬───────┘
       │ (If relocation
       │  dwellings are ready)
       ▼
┌──────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐
│ Developers hold  │      │ Vacation of      │
│ the right to     │      │ dwellings by     │
│ proceed with     │      │ residents        │
│ demolition       │      └────────┬─────────┘
│ before final     │               ▼
│ court decision   │      ┌──────────────────┐
│ is made          │─────▶│ Demolition       │
└──────────────────┘      └────────┬─────────┘
                                    ▼
┌──────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐
│ Final court      │      │ Construction     │
│ decision         │      └──────────────────┘
└──────────────────┘
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Residents resisting or appealing against demolition also experience difficulties due to tight demolition and relocation schedules imposed upon them. It is not uncommon to find residents being forced to vacate within weeks of receiving demolition notice. During this short period, they are required to come to an agreement on the level of compensation, find a temporary or permanent relocation dwelling and make all the arrangement for house-moving from a neighbourhood they have lived for decades. When part of a neighbourhood called Xinzhongjie in Dongcheng district was subject to demolition in December 1999 to make way for a luxurious commercial high-rise

estate, residents testified in the interviews with the author that they were allowed only three weeks to vacate their dwellings.

Residents receive incentive payments if they move house in good time (ibid, Article 32). Incentive payments are also given if they move out of inner city districts. This has been a common practice since the early 1990s (Beijing Municipal Government, 1994b). The author's interviews indicated that the scale of such incentive payments was quite substantial, reaching 9%~12% of their total cash compensation. The tight schedule of residents' displacement from their dwellings places a huge amount of stress and anxiety on residents, especially if vacating their house involves no definite prospect of re-housing.

> People received the [redevelopment compensation] offer, pulled in cars for viewing. Just took that offer…At that time, our displacement was really bustling…Everyday, got in a car, went to see houses…our house-moving was made really hastily. From 16 April to 6 May. Twenty days to find a house and move out. My goodness…
>
> (66-year-old female resident, moved to an outer suburban estate)

Lack of communication with local authorities
Local authorities are involved in every stage of a redevelopment project from project designation to project implementation. They remain, however, as an official mediator when disputes arise over the method and level of compensation. Local authorities may sympathize with the fate of residents facing displacement, but it is often the case that they maintain a 'non-interventionist' policy to remain impartial. An official explains:

> [Residents] might refrain from moving out. Then, the demolition company just has to get in touch with the family and resolve the situation…In the end, the only way out for them is to negotiate with the demolition company to see if there's any other means to supplement compensation. From the viewpoint of the government, however, we cannot speak out, because we have to guarantee impartiality of our policy implementation. It has to be equal for everyone…
>
> (Official from the Displacement and Relocation Department, Dongcheng district government)

Remaining impartial may be a recommended virtue of local authorities mediating disputes between conflicting interests, but when residents are endowed with substantially lower resources and poorer legal knowledge, supporting neither residents

nor developers acts in favour of developers. This influences the way in which residents obtain redevelopment-related information. The in-depth interviews with residents facing redevelopment suggest that they feel more comfortable with discussing the issues with residents' committee leaders who they come in contact on a daily basis, but there is evidently lack of communication between residents and local authorities. Table 1 below summarizes the channel of obtaining redevelopment-related information by local residents based on the authors' interviews.

Table 1: Channels of obtaining redevelopment-related information

Interviewee description	Have you asked the local authority?	Have you asked the neighbourhood committee leader?	Have you discussed with your neighbours?	Have you tried to get information on your own?
51-year-old female	No	Not available	Yes	Yes
44-year-old female	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
54-year-old female	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
75-year-old female	No	No	No	Not available
44-year-old female	Not available	Yes	Not available	Yes
43-year-old female	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
70-year-old male	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
47-year-old female	Not available	Yes	Yes	Yes
57-year-old female	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Yes	2	7	7	8
No	5	1	1	0
Not available	2	1	1	1

Residents' committee leaders are usually the first point of contact for local residents, as they act as mediators between local residents and the local authority. Residents' committee leaders take a visible role when it comes to neighbourhood redevelopment,

as they usually accompany developers when carrying out a household survey that forms the basis of calculating redevelopment compensation costs. This is because residents' committee leaders are in principle best acquainted with the lives of local residents.

The previous table also suggests that local residents are reluctant to ask their local authority. Only one interviewee out of nine mentioned that she had gone to the municipal housing bureau to find out more information about the new compensation policy. Other interviewees did not consider making a direct enquiry to the local authority, in particular, the Street Office that was primarily responsible for the administration of the redevelopment project in their neighbourhood.

In fact, the author's interviews with some residents who were subject to neighbourhood redevelopment in the near future expressed strong criticisms of developers and, to some extent, local officials. These strong criticisms were due to their antipathy towards profit-oriented commercial redevelopment. Some of the criticisms included:

> Ask who? The demolition squad doesn't explain that to you. The Street Office just says it's going to be the end of the year. The Street Office doesn't tell the true story to us ordinary people…The Street Office should have told us about whether or not the demolition would take place. Take a note of this clearly. At the moment, everyone has a lot of complaints on this matter… Previously, the Street Office was the poorest work unit. Now, it's become the richest
>
> (70-year-old male resident, facing redevelopment and displacement)

> This Street Office, what a despicable being it is. If you don't believe this, then do a survey, and everyone will swear at the Street Office. I'll tell you about them. They think of taking advantage of residents…Talking about the Street Office, [they are] just wicked…It always thinks of making money…those dregs of society, caring for the people? Who would believe that?
>
> (57-year-old female resident, facing redevelopment and displacement)

4. Seeking 'rightful claims' in urban redevelopment

Urban redevelopment began to intensify from the early 1990s. In Beijing, a new redevelopment policy, which depended heavily on developers' finance, came into existence in 1990, just one year after the violent oppression of democratic movement in 1989. While pursuing market-oriented reform policies to achieve sustained economic growth, government officials and the Chinese Communist Party (hereafter CCP) were particularly concerned to maintain socio-political order and stability through authoritarian rule (Chen, 1997; Lau, 2001). Urban redevelopment projects were largely targeted on inner city neighbourhoods. Poor residents were excluded from sharing the benefits of housing privatization and homeownership. Clearance and redevelopment, the main redevelopment strategy since the 1990s, was accompanied by large-scale displacement. Since the mid-1990s, as the urban redevelopment intensified, there were intermittent reports of bulldozing against the will of local residents, some of whom began to seek ways to exercise their 'right to stay' against what they saw as organized oppression by local government and professional developers. Since the residents' degree of involvement in redevelopment is limited to the early stage of project implementation (that is, negotiation over compensation and displacement), the incidents of resistance mostly occur in relation to their displacement and the demolition of their dwellings.

Kevin O'Brien's prominent article on 'rightful resistance' in China points to a new phase in participation. He reports on an increasing popular struggle in China to establish 'rightful claims' using the language of the 'authorities and established values' (O'Brien, 1996). Rightful resistance refers to "a form of popular contention that (1) operates near the boundary of an authorized channel, (2) employs the rhetoric and commitments of the powerful to curb political or economic power, and (3) hinges on locating and exploiting divisions among the powerful" (ibid, 33). In order for this rightful resistance to take place, resisters need to "become aware that they have been granted certain protections", and then "craft effective legal tactics, mobilize followers, and win a measure of sufferance, even support, for their contention" using "the vocabulary of the regime to advance their claims" (ibid, 35). The reform of legal systems in recent years provides a useful platform on which residents facing redevelopment and displacement could exercise their right to resist within the existing legal framework. Law suits filed by displacees and residents in redevelopment districts against developers seemed to have been gradually gaining in popularity. Ian Johnson, a Wall Street Journal correspondent, reported the case of two pioneering citizens in Beijing who made a series of failed law suits against the municipal government which had made huge profits from demolishing their homes in central

Beijing in the mid-1990s (Johnson, 2004). Recently, in Chaoyang District, a near suburban district next to Dongcheng District, more than one hundred households collectively filed a law suit against a demolition company, claiming that its certificate of demolition issued by the Chaoyang Bureau of Land and Resources was not legitimate, and that it should be cancelled in order to stop their dwellings' forced demolition (Jinghua Shibao, 2004). In many of these cases, it was reported that residents rarely won against developers or governments (Fang, 1999). Often, the myriad of bureaucratic processes acted as obstacles to the residents' petition and legal proceedings (Beijing Review, 2005). So was the use of implicit and explicit force that deterred people from resorting to judicial solutions (Human Rights Watch, 2004; Johnson, 2004).

Refusing to vacate dwellings also seems to be a widely used strategy among residents facing displacement. This strategy is often employed as part of strengthening residents' position by means of delaying demolition schedules and thus incurring greater costs on developers. In urban redevelopment projects, "a blocked regeneration outcome may mean no change in a locality, but that option still provides for the possibility of achieving an alternative preferred regeneration scenario, or of successfully making a political statement" (Ball, 2004: 127). In other words, unlike developers or local authorities, no change in their neighbourhoods can also be a viable option for local communities. Judging from some of the negotiation cases reported by the interviewees, it seemed that negotiations were not uncommon, providing even greater motivation for the residents to insist on staying put when their expectation were not met. An interviewee recollects some of her neighbours' actions at the time of her neighbour's demolition:

> As soon as we were told to move out, we moved out right away. Those people who didn't move out received more money. They were formidable. They didn't obey and made all the noise, then took the money… [Such people] were not few
>
> (69-year-old female resident, moved to a near suburban estate)

Indeed, the strategy of blocking redevelopment and demolition by refusing to vacate their dwellings appears to be a common tactic cited by residents facing displacement. Anyone encountering a resident facing displacement may hear comments like "[if inadequate compensation is offered] we will not move out. We will just keep on living here" (44-year-old female interviewee). The blocking strategy has become a well-known phenomenon in China – *dingzihu*, which could be literally translated as 'nail

house' or 'nail house household' (see for example, Yardley, 2007). Although these nail houses eventually become subject to forced demolition (see for example, Chen and Sun, 2006), they provide a powerful showcase that demonstrates residents' protest against local authorities.

Some of the news reports on displacees' protests in recent years indicate that individual protests are on the increase. The government assessment of the number of protests was that "there were some 74,000 protests" in 2004, "up from 10,000 in 1994 and 58,000 in 2003" (The Economist, 2005a). Given the exercise of censorship and political control, the number was likely to be underestimated. Most protests were isolated and contained, though occasional violent incidents alarmed the nation. For instance, a nation-wide shock was received in August 2003 when a man died after setting fire to himself in protest at his home's forced demolition in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province (China Daily, 2003). His family was one of the ten out of one thousand families in his neighbourhood, who refused to move out. Less than a month later, another similar incident occurred, this time, in the heart of Beijing, the Tiananmen Square. A peasant set fire to himself in the morning of 15 September, suffering serious burns (Jiangnan Shibao, 2003). He was also protesting against his home's forced demolition and poor compensation. The Ministry of Construction also revealed that between January and July 2002, the residents' protests against demolition resulted in twenty six deaths (China Daily, 2003), clearly indicating the seriousness of violence and resistance to demolition. The protests and violent clashes seemed to be on the increase especially in rural areas where many lands were taken for urban expansion and the provision of infrastructure services (The Economist, 2005b). These sporadic cases of organized protests were found to take place across the cities, but most cases were eventually unsuccessful and isolated (Human Rights Watch, 2004: 26-31). To some extent, this was not surprising as most individual and collective actions in mainland China were isolated and short-lived, if not managed by the state (Beijing Review, 2005; Cai, 2004; Johnson, 2004). Moreover, the most problematic issue for the residents engaging in legal proceedings such as lawsuits and petitions was that even if the outcome was in the residents' favour, legal proceedings would do little to stop the demolition. As a Beijing-based lawyer commented, "the house is gone anyway" even if the verdict turned out to support residents (China Daily, 2003).

5.   Conclusion

Plummer and Taylor, who examined the experimental experiences of applying participatory approach to China's rural development, devises their own version of 'a ladder of participation', which is divided into six hierarchical stages (from top to bottom) as follows (Plummer and Taylor, 2004a: 42-44): (1) initiation or self-management of projects by communities; (2) community participation in formal decision-making; (3) discussion usually in the early stage of projects; (4) expression of views in an organized space; (5) attendance to meetings where public agencies make decisions; (6) notification of activities by officials.

Notification does not involve any form of direct or indirect participation, and as one progresses up the ladder, the degree of participation increases. In China, Plummer and Taylor argue that expression becomes increasingly influential, but "a more problematic face of this form of participation has been called *confirmation*, and describes the form of participation that occurs when project officials seek community confirmation of their own views…by only asking participants to become engaged in a narrow band of questions and issues that are closely linked to the decision that an external agent or government official wants to pursue" (ibid, 43). It is argued that in rural China, attendance "is the dominant model of participation in rural development initiatives implemented by government" (ibid, 43).

Reflecting upon the discussions in this paper regarding local residents' limited participation in redevelopment projects, there seems a long climb ahead for residents before reaching the top of Plummer and Taylor's participation ladder. These redevelopment experiences suggest significantly constrained community participation in the most critical stages of project designation and design. Residents are notified of the imminent redevelopment project without opportunities to intervene to influence the local authorities' decision. While local authorities and professional developers share the goal of neighbourhood transformation and the maximization of development gains, community participation is minimized in the midst of realizing this goal. Since the residents' involvement comes only at the time of preparing for displacement and demolition, the intervention only concerns residents' demands for appropriate relocation measures and compensation for remaining residents on compassionate grounds rather than with preserving their neighbourhood. The only occasion they are able to express their views is when they enter into negotiation to agree upon redevelopment compensation, but this process strongly favours developers. In short, community participation in neighbourhood redevelopment can be equated with their agreeing to evacuate in timely manner and not to delay redevelopment schedule.

Alarmed by a series of protests about demolition and land confiscation, the municipal government began to issue some supplementary regulations that provided limited opportunities for residents to express their views on the redevelopment of their neighbourhoods. One of the recent regulations includes municipal guidance in April 2004, which stipulates that a consultation meeting should be held when more than forty per cent of the residents in a redevelopment neighbourhood do not come to an agreement over compensation with developers/demolition companies. All the parties concerned in a demolition process are required to attend the consultation meeting, including the neighbourhood committee leaders, the Street Office, and residents (Jinghua Shibao, 2004). These measures, however, still confine residents' participation to project implementation, and do little to engage the residents from an early stage of redevelopment.

Will the government go beyond the existing practice and adopt a more inclusive approach? Government officials in China are known to be driven by the pressure to meet social and economic targets, which form the basis of assessing their performance (Plummer, 2004: 7). This "target-driven approach to implement policy" (ibid.) goes against enhanced community participation, which often entails a great deal of time and resources to come to an agreement. Therefore, involving communities in possibly 'endless discussion' may go against the vested interests that local authorities themselves have in urban redevelopment projects. They have shown a strong entrepreneurial taste in the way they promoted urban redevelopment strategies (Duckett, 1998; Shin, 2007a).

If any change is to occur, this may come from the increasing pressure to involve homeowners, whose numbers have grown substantially in the reform era. Equipped with full or partial property rights that last up to seventy years under the new property rights regime, homeowners have shown signs of becoming a new form of interest group, organizing homeowners' associations to exert their interests. It is argued that the vested interests of homeowners in protecting their material wealth would eventually lead to a growing demand to participate in neighbourhood governance and decision-making (Read, 2003). This leads to an ironic situation in which homeowners as the beneficiary of real estate development and urban redevelopment activities determine the fate of urban poor residents whose dwellings and neighbourhoods are demolished to make way for further growth of homeowners. In principle, displacees from redevelopment neighbourhoods may themselves join the rank of homeowners, but various structural constraints upon displacees and their weak socio-economic status suggest that urban redevelopment is more likely to serve as "an exit to the much constrained private rental sector" (Shin, 2007b: 181).

With the increasing investment of real estate capital and intense urban redevelopment, it is expected that urban poor's participation will continue to be restricted and that local governments and developers will favour means to maintain social stability and prevent any community or individual resistance that may hinder redevelopment projects. As pointed out by a legal expert from China, the participation of urban residents in decision-making and rulemaking processes is still at its infancy. It is hampered by restrictions and manipulation by those whose vested interests conflict with those of ordinary citizens (Wang, X., 2003). The vested interests of local authorities and developers in urban redevelopment activities certainly aim to ensure uninterrupted pursuance of professional developers' profit-making activities and local authorities' promotion of urban restructuring and economic growth. The existing redevelopment policy framework suggests that the ownership of neighbourhood change lies with local officials and entrepreneurs. It is therefore important to open up discussions to seek ways in which more power can be transferred to local residents, allowing them to shape the future of their neighbourhoods.

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