

## **Urban Development Issues in China's Cities: Part Three**

### **The difficult task of expropriation in an aging society**

“We need not exclude the poor from renovated neighbourhoods” (a journalist)

Source: “*Zhongguo Xinwen Zhoukan*”, China Newsweek, No. 11, 28 March 2005

Abstract: As Chinese cities have expanded at a rapid pace over the last twenty years, the question of expropriation has remained a central issue in Chinese society. Early this year in Chongqing, several cases involving “dingzihu” families fighting against the expropriation of their home by means of a recent law on land ownership, attracted both nationwide and worldwide attention and revealed the realities of expropriation – particularly in old neighbourhoods. Aside from legal implications and the compensation and relocation of those expropriated, there is another very important issue to address that has been largely neglected– the relationship between expropriation and an aging Chinese society.

Through the example of an elderly man expropriated from his home in an old neighbourhood in Beijing, this article highlights the conflict between expropriation and a changing demographic structure. Two years ago, the expropriation process was already hindered by factors related to an aging population. Compared to other large cities, Beijing's old neighbourhoods are highly concentrated and often the focus of business and cultural activities. In terms of housing however, many of the homes in these neighbourhoods are in an advanced state of disrepair and have become dangerous to live in. Building renovation programs should be put in place immediately to protect old neighbourhoods that hold historical value. A more common way of getting rid of inhabitants however has been expropriation.

The inhabitants of old neighbourhoods do not always have the financial means necessary for building work. Many are elderly low- to middle-income families who do not wish to relocate. It is not certain as to whether these families can afford to buy suitable housing with the pay-out they receive from expropriation. One notable consequence of moving them to far-off suburban areas, is that elderly people (who traditionally lived together in a family setting) are finding daily tasks such as visits to the doctor or shopping, increasingly difficult to manage. The social ties that these events provided have been severed, and it is likely that new expenses are incurred which further stretch

their pensions. These problems are not addressed by current public measures, and financial compensation can only be seen as a temporary solution.

According to official statistics, people over 60 represented more than 10% of China's total population in 2005. This figure reveals the extent to which China is already affected by population aging, a phenomenon mostly observed in large cities. With aging populations on the rise, perhaps these facts should be factored in to broader government policies. Where this subject is concerned, the difficulties surrounding expropriation are just the tip of the iceberg.

[End]

“We need not exclude the poor from renovated neighbourhoods”, “*Zhongguo Xinwen Zhoukan*”, China Newsweek, No. 11, 28 March 2005



<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/2.0/fr/deed.fr>