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Migrants and the new stage of public housing reform in China

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1 Introduction

Since 1958, China has enacted the Household Registration System (*hukou*) to manage its population and distribute welfare goods to Chinese citizens (Chan & Zhang, 1999). The *hukou* system classifies each individual Chinese citizen based on their residential origin, defined in terms of “agricultural *hukou*” or “non-agricultural *hukou*”. The agricultural *hukou* is mainly granted to residents of rural areas who live on certain pieces of rural land they own, while non-agricultural *hukou* is applied to residents of urban areas who are subject to local government redistribution of urban resources. *Hukou* is inherited. New-borns are granted their first *hukou* from one of their parents. In principle, it was designed to be persistent and regional-based. In this way, the *hukou* system has helped the state to limit population migration across cities and between rural and urban areas, protecting the permanent property rights of households with agricultural *hukou* (Wang, 2000; Zhang et al., 2009). However, in 1978 (with the establishment of the ‘opening-up’ policy), the Chinese government eliminated *hukou* restrictions on population mobility as it impeded the pace of urbanization by limiting labour force movement into urban areas. From then on, many Chinese people have left their hometowns in rural areas and small towns and moved into cities. The Chinese government refers to its internal migrants as ‘the floating population’ or ‘the migrant population’, including those who move for several reasons, like working, visiting relatives, studying, etc. Academia mostly focuses on migrant households who work in cities, and in the rest of this study I call them migrants. Unfortunately, the reforms only reduced restrictions on population mobility. While migrants have been allowed to move to cities for work, they had to retain their original non-local residence registration. The *hukou* restriction has continued to prevent them from accessing the same citizenship rights as those granted to local residents. As such, few migrants were allowed to change their *hukou* status to local urban *hukou* and settle down in cities permanently. In the early stages of urbanisation in China, when the development of urban infrastructure lagged far behind the growth in urban population and public services fell short of residents’ demands, local authorities had taken the *hukou* as a means to protect limited urban resources from being spent on the inflow of Chinese people who retain their original *hukou* outside of their territories (migrants).

The *hukou* system has drawn a social-economic line between residents with local *hukou* and migrants (Wang, 2004; Démurger, et al., 2009). Working in cities without the local-*hukou*, migrants have been treated very differently in terms of their working conditions and access to welfare. Most migrants have been restricted to jobs undesirable to local residents, such as manual labour in factories and in catering, and their incomes have remained

at low levels (Wang, 2004; Wong, 2005). Critically, in terms of access to housing, urban residents usually have been able to obtain accommodation by following one of three core pathways: acquiring commercial housing through the market; participating in affordable housing projects, or renting accommodation either in the private sector or in the form of subsidized rental housing provided by employers (Wang, 2004). Considering the very high price of commercial housing and the limited purchasing capacity of migrants, buying commercial housing in the market has been costly and usually not been a realistic option for migrants. Moreover, most migrants have not been allowed to access subsidized housing as equally as local residents. Consequently, they have become concentrated in low-quality housing. For example, slum housing, “urban villages” (*Chengzhongcun*)¹ and employer-provided dormitories have become the main types of housing for low income migrants ((Li and Duda, 2010; Song et al., 2008)). As such, several special concepts have become widespread in describing migrant housing: such as “group rentals” (*qunzu*) and “ant tribe” (*yizu*) (Huang & Li, 2014), which reflect a group of migrants crowded in private rental housing, giving rise to the metaphor of an ant hill. In short, accessing decent housing has been an ‘elusive dream’ for most migrants; gaining local urban *hukou*, even if it is a temporary local urban *hukou* like the blue print *hukou*, has been the only formal way to enable migrants getting access to local citizenships, including public housing. However, due to strict regulations, this route represented an “impossible dream” for most migrants.

Nevertheless, as the migrant population has become an essential part of the urban labour force, the Chinese government has gradually established reforms. These try to keep a balance between the focus on economic growth and the obligation to improve migrants’ access to urban welfare. However, in contrast with the vast and sharply increasing migrant population, the actual beneficiaries of those reforms have been rare (Huang & Tao, 2015; Logan et al., 2009). Furthermore, the road to eliminating housing inequalities between local residents and migrants has been a challenge, with the guiding ideology shifting among neo-liberalist, productivist and protectivist influences (Lee & Zhu 2006; Wang et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2014). Prior to 2008, during the economic transition, the unfriendly and unequal situations of migrants have been aggravated. In the 2010s, the national state has started to put more efforts in reducing the worsened situation of migrants. Below I provide a brief introduction about the major policy reforms and changes in the context in the past forty years. Insight in that matter is essential for understanding the changing position of migrants regarding access to welfare services, especially housing, in the urban environments where they settle.

Research Context

The worsening of the housing situation of migrants during marketization, decentralisation and rapid urbanisation

The opening-up policy, in 1978, which shifted China's economy from a 'planned' one to a 'market oriented' one, was a turning point in Chinese urban growth (Howell, 1993). In the following three decades, it made China's economic development impressive, approaching a double-digit annual economic growth rate (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2009). However, as economic growth has been a central priority, policy transition has significantly suppressed the development of both public housing and the well-being of migrants in cities (Wu, 2001a; Lee, 2000; Ye and Wu, 2008; Yao et al., 2014). Government interests were mostly tied to GDP growth and to the booming of industry. The development of housing has focused on the expansion of the real estate industry, which has even been defined as the pillar industry of China since 2003. Local governments also have had the worries that the provision of public housing would suppress the increase of housing prices and thus decrease local government revenues.

Moreover, since the economic transition, the political and government structure of China has gradually shifted from a highly centralized one to a mixture of both centralization and decentralization, and this has also hindered the development of public housing (Xu, 2011). On the one hand, the Chinese state has withdrawn the national fiscal input in welfare supply and has started moving various responsibilities over policies and practices to local governments, who had to establish their own welfare systems based on their financial strength. For example, the central government has instructed local governments to collect both money and land for the development of public housing. However, on the other hand, the decentralisation of investment and responsibilities has been confronted with the centralisation of the tax system. Since the tax-reform in 1994, the central government has increased its share of taxes to over fifty per cent. Thus, local governments were confronted with a heavy financial burden to carry out local construction, and they had to take land-leasing revenues as the primary extra-budgetary revenues for dealing with the budget shortages. Consequently, local governments have preferred to lease land to for-profit projects, and automatically limited their supply of land for constructing public housing (Wu, 2001; Ye and Wu, 2008). As local governments have had autonomy in deciding on the scale and the target of the local public housing system, the left-over and limited amount of public housing that was built was often realised by state owned enterprises and located at neighbourhoods with poor facilities (Wu 1996; Lee, 2000). Allocation favoured government employees or the very poorest residents, the government carried inescapable responsibilities for (Lee, 2000; Wang et al., 2012; Logan

et al., 2010). The major housing schemes, like the prioritization of access to existing public housing; the development of affordable housing – such as ownership-oriented public housing - and the establishment of the Chinese housing provident fund, was mainly available for local residents (Logan et al., 2010; Zhao & Bourassa, 2003). Under this strategy, housing difficulties, like shortages in low-cost (public) housing, income based housing inequalities, and poor housing conditions have increased among low-to-middle income households and migrants (Huang & Jiang 2009; Logan et al., 2009).

Since 1978, the increase of urban industry, especially industrialisation in larger urban centres, has not only become the key driver of national economic growth, but also the driver of power and privilege. The accelerated pace of urbanisation and industrialisation, along with the policy of favouring urban growth at the expense of rural areas, has enlarged the rural-urban social-economic gap, and thus, the potential income enhancement has resulted in a high rate of migrant population growth in cities, adding additional difficulties in providing adequate social welfare to migrants (Huang & Li, 2014). Annual salaries in large cities are often around ten times higher than in rural areas (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2016). Drawn by the prospects of higher income and increased job opportunities, in 2011, the migrant population has increased to over 230 million, sharing 17 per cent of the total population in China (National Population and Family Planning Commission, 2012). Cities have made little effort to suppress the increasing inflow of migrants. Instead, they have continued to relax the *hukou* barrier to ensure a sufficient inflow of labour force for urban industry development (Chen & Hamori, 2009). However, the old housing and *hukou* policy was insufficient to solve the housing problem. On the contrary, under these conditions, due to the persistent *hukou* barrier, more poor housing and informal housing have emerged in the old or suburban areas of cities to accommodate the increasing migrant population. This stimulated increasing social inequality between local residents and migrants, and between advantaged migrants and disadvantaged migrants (Wu, 2004; Zhao, & Bourassa, 2003).

Approaches in early reforms to reduce housing difficulties for migrants

From 2003, some coastal cities of China have started to experience a shortage of migrant labour (Chen & Hamori, 2009; Knight et al, 2011). The Chinese government has gradually recognized migrants' indispensable contribution to urban economic growth and the day-to-day operation of cities. Meanwhile, problems faced by migrants, unfriendly and unequal situations like housing inequalities and poor housing conditions, have drawn wider concern from the government, social media and academia (Zhang et al., 2009; Wu, 2004). The academy and social media have argued that the government should improve the supply of welfare-goods for migrants instead of simply taking advantage of the inexpensive and extensive labour force

that migrants represent (Wang, 2000; Nielsen et al., 2007). In 2006, migrant housing became one of the key priorities for the Ministry of Urban-Rural development of the People's Republic of China (The state council of China, 2006). This was the first time that the issue became part of the agenda of the Ministry. To reduce the increasing social contrasts and to stabilize socio-economic development, in 2006, the national government put forth the goal to "build a harmonious society" (Hong, 2010). This policy has been a sign that China's stated focus would change from economic growth to overall societal development. These new ideas have drawn much attention to policy and institutional reforms, and assisted facilitating and protecting "basic housing rights" of all residents, including migrants. In late 2007, the Chinese state concluded that public housing is a necessary vehicle to meet the basic housing needs of low-to-middle income households (The state council of China, 2007), and since that proclamation, in principle, the housing system in China has entered a new era involving a resurgence in public housing provision (Chen et al., 2014).

After over thirty years of marketization and privatisation, in the new stage of housing development, since 2008, the state has again turned to public housing as a solution to the emerging problems of the Chinese economy and society. The Chinese state expected that the revival of public housing provision would, on the one hand, cope with the growing shortage of supply of low-cost housing and rising housing difficulties among migrants, and on the other hand, deal with the economy slowing down. In other words, although marketization still plays an important role in guiding urban development, local governments have been forced to favour both urban economic growth and every citizen's well-being (Wang and Murie, 2011). A new scheme of public housing, the public rental housing scheme (*gongzufang*), has been advocated by the government since 2008. Public rental housing provided at below market prices, targets both low and low-to-middle income households. It provides decent and inexpensive shelters with a stable lease, and is expected to be supplied on a broad scale. Apart from the public rental housing scheme, the contemporary public housing system also has two types of subsidized owner-occupied housing, the price-cape housing (announced in 2006) and economic affordable housing (established in 1998), and one type of subsidized rental housing, the low rent housing (launched in 1994 and merged with the public rental housing scheme in 2014) (Zou, 2014). Unfortunately, up to now, only public rental housing has been official available for migrants (Chen et al., 2014).

However, as conflicts in the housing governance structure remained, local governments still lacked political and economic incentives to develop public housing, and thus those policies have typically turned out to be rhetorical in nature. The national fiscal support has remained poor. For example, in 2011, the Chinese state announced to develop 10 million units of public housing, which required an input of 1.3 trillion *Yuan*; however, the national input

only budgeted 0.103 trillion *Yuan* (Xinhua Net, 2011). With limited fiscal support, local governments, especially those of larger cities, have responded negatively to national imperatives (The National People's Congress of China, 2009). As the value of urban land and the land needs for profitable projects have increased sharply in the late 2000s, large cities, especially those whose economic growth relies heavily on land finance, have been more cautious about spending resources and using land for constructing public housing. Regarding to regulations on housing access, relevant reforms, such as relaxing *hukou* restrictions and providing housing subsidies for migrants, have been highly variegated and have mainly served the urban industry needs rather than social stability (The National People's Congress of China, 2009). For instance, industrializing cities have mainly supplied public housing to manual migrant workers, aiming to stimulate industrial development, often with special dormitories that have been built to accommodate migrants working for big companies. Post-industrial cities, aiming to promote a more knowledge-based economy, on the other hand, have primarily offered public housing to well-educated affluent and professional migrants. Thus migrants who have gained assistance in accessing housing have normally been the ones that best fit the market's needs, i.e. "desirable migrants" (Mak et al., 2007; Yao et al., 2014). The early housing reforms that promoted the mitigation of housing difficulties for migrants have, in such cases, actually been a way to promote goals related to economic development (Huang and Jiang 2009).

In general, scholars agree that early housing reforms, before 2014, have had some positive impact on expanding housing construction and improving housing conditions for urban residents. However, there still seems a long way to go before migrants can access public housing equally (Hui et al., 2014; Li & Zhang, 2011). In recent years, research has begun to recognise that changes in the context, including the demographic diversity of the migrant population, the establishment of the New Urbanisation Plan, and the emergence of the first case in which the national ideas on both public housing and migrants have been intensively implemented (the city of Chongqing), have had important influence on housing development and life trajectories of migrants in urban China (Huang & Tao, 2015; Chen et al, 2014). Below, I will elaborate on these changes.

Diversity among the migrant population

As China continued to promote the path of urbanisation, the above-mentioned negative welfare conditions have never discouraged migrants from flowing into cities. In 2011, the urban population increased to over fifty per cent of the total population (National Population and Family Planning Commission, 2012). In recent years, there has been an increasing variation in the statuses of migrants, which has created obvious within-migrant-group

differences (Li, 2010).

Early research has mostly identified migrants as non-local *hukou* holders and ‘second-tier citizens’ who are young and single, have low education levels, low wages and inferior occupations, and show high levels of residential mobility (Song, et al., 2008; Kuang & Liu 2012). They mainly move into cities for jobs, and have very little sense of belonging to the city. Their housing choices are characterised by the fact they are ineligible to access public housing, and unable to purchase commercial housing or afford the high rents of private housing. They therefore concentrate in informal housing and/or employer provided dormitories, group renting. They hardly invest in improving housing conditions (Huang & Tao, 2015). They have little chance to settle in their destination cities (Zhu & Chen, 2010).

In recent years, however, a group of new migrants has gradually begun to dominate the migrant population (Cui et al., 2015; Li, 2010). ‘New’ here is a phrase that contrasts with earlier research understandings of migrants. In 2011, over half of the migrants in cities were migrants born after 1980 (National Population and Family Planning Commission, 2012). Instead of following typical occupational pathways among migrant workers, such as construction workers and servers in restaurants, some migrants have successfully started their own businesses as entrepreneurs after several years of adaption to city life (Li, 2010; Cao et al., 2015). Others with higher-level (above college) education have moved away from traditional agricultural areas and are well integrated into city life as local residents. These highly educated migrants are typically born after 1980s, and have no farming experiences in their childhood. These ‘new’ migrants frequently express a strong desire to stay in cities, and are more likely to use their household resources to negotiate different pathways into the housing market (Cui et al, 2015; Zhao et al., 2018). They should be considered as ‘prospective urbanites’ rather than as a ‘floating population’ – a term coined to specify the floating status of traditional migrants in the past (Cao et al., 2015; Zhao et al., 2018).

Academia and social media has divided new migrants into four major groups: labour migrants, intellectual migrants, entrepreneurial migrants, policy migrants (Li, 2010). The first refers to migrants who do simple manual jobs, such as factory workers and restaurant servers; the second refers to migrants who hold at least a university degree or a college education; the third refers to migrants who have already accumulated their financial assets to open workshops, such as small businesses and private companies; the fourth refers to migrants whose move to the city has been facilitated by government policy interventions in land and housing. As the last group normally obtains their homes through non-market channels, research has only focused on the former three groups, which represent migrants that are labour-intensive, knowledge-intensive and asset-intensive.

The increasing variety of migrant profiles has had obvious impacts on housing access. For some migrant categories housing has been more affordable and thus accessible than for others. This has resulted in different experiences of social integration among migrants in urban China (Li, 2010; Cui et al, 2015). This has brought new challenges to the local housing system and raised questions on how to meet the diversified housing needs of migrants and whether they should/could be encouraged to settle in cities? These questions have become timely topics for both governments and academia.

Promoting the PRH policy and the New Urbanisation Plan

To cope with the increasing social problems among migrants and to deal with the poor implementation of the public rental housing policies, since 2011, the national government has gradually linked practices in developing PRH to the evaluation of local governments' political achievements (The state council of China, 2011). The state has determined to eliminate the housing difficulties for migrants by greatly expand the provision of public rental housing and relaxing the *hukou*-related PRH distribution system (Wang and Murie, 2011).

The turning point for policies on migrants has been the announcement of the “New Urbanization Plan” in March 2014 (Kim, 2015; Li et al., 2016). The “New Urbanization Plan” established a series of policies to redefine the urbanization policy, transferring the Chinese economy from the current infrastructure investment-based one to a consumption-based one. Regardless of the human factors, it counters the decline of export and the slowing growth of the domestic economy. It considers migrants as an important engine for stimulating the domestic consumption. The logic was that if migrants could change their *hukou* and become urban citizens permanently, they would spend more on housing and other goods in cities, which would increase the domestic demand. Therefore, a major part of the “New Urbanization Plan” involves encouraging migrants to integrate and even settle in cities. However, changing the registration place and status of a *hukou* registration is a complex trade off and a rigorous procedure, especially when the *hukou* transfer is from an agricultural *hukou* to a non-agricultural *hukou*. It involves giving up the long-term (almost lifelong) socio-economic rights tied to the original rural areas within certain years and getting access to the socio-economic rights typically awarded in destination cities (Li et al., 2016; Kim, 2015). “New Urbanization Plan” reforms have gradually ensured that migrants gain more benefits from both the destination urban areas and their rural hometown, but have made it more complicated for migrants to make a decision on their final settlement.

On the one hand, the “New Urbanization Plan” continued to reduce the *hukou* restriction and claimed that migrants should be eligible to access basic public services that are provided to local residents. To increase migrants' confidence to move into cities, the state decided to

further extend the coverage of basic urban public services, especially access to public rental housing. On the other hand, the “New Urbanization Plan” established a series of policies to improve the rural-urban land market and to protect the property right of rural residents (Lang, et al., 2016). The land management system in China did not authorize rural residents a clear right to their land. In other words, although, in principle, land belongs to each household, it is collectively owned by village committees. Under this specific ownership structure, compensation from the land that rural households usually received was always smaller than they were supposed to share. The “New Urbanization Plan” aims to make farmers’ rights very clear, and thus, farmers become shareholders of the businesses on their land and can receive reasonable money from their land (The state council of China, 2014). In recent years, especially in more developed regions, the value of, and income from rural land has become more consistent and significant, and thus, rural–urban migrants appeared to have increasing interests in maintaining their rural assets (Hao & Tang, 2015).

The state planned to make some 100 million migrants urban residents by 2020 (The state council of China, 2014). Moreover, if successful, the rural land collected from these 100 million migrants could be important to financing further urban development. Moreover, to enforce the national objectives on expanding public rental housing provision more efficiently, the “New Urbanization Plan” limits the responsibilities to the government bodies above the county and township levels. This regulation would make the distribution of responsibilities more clear at provincial and municipal level and ensure an efficiently supply of both land and money for developing public rental housing.

The emergence of the Chongqing programme

Although the Chongqing programme was established before the announcement of the “New Urbanization Plan”, it created a palpable example of the national governments’ ideas for developing public rental housing and improving housing conditions for migrants. Moreover, policies and reforms for ensuring the implementation of the Chongqing programme shared some similarities with those of the “New Urbanization Plan” (Lafarguette& Jayaram, 2011). Therefore, findings on the Chongqing programme represent an important and timely reference to the possible policy implications of the “New Urbanization Plan” in China.

Although the national input for constructing public rental housing was also limited in Chongqing (around 10 per cent of total investment), unlike other cities, which resisted the national requirement, local authorities of Chongqing have shown to be very motivated in developing public rental housing (Chongqing Morning Post, 2011). The programme planned to meet the housing demands of around two million low-to-middle income residents. The average space allowance was 15 to 20 square meters per person, and rents were 10 to 12 *yuan*

(less than two Euros) per square meter per month, equivalent to 60 per cent of the market price nearby. In 2011, the public rental housing being constructed in Chongqing was equivalent to 10 per cent of the total output of the whole country (Chongqing Municipal Commission, 2011). By 2013, Chongqing had realized the largest supply of public rental housing in China, and its mode of provision has been subsequently applied in other cities on smaller scales (People, 2013). By 2015, the municipality had built nearly 45 million square meters of public rental housing, nearly 700 thousand units, more than the target set in 2010 (China Youth Daily, 2016). Moreover, the public rental housing programme is ultimately ownership-oriented. The government has developed an initiative which means that after five-years of renting, eligible sitting tenants are able to buy their units from the providers at cost prices. However, if buyers of public rental housing later choose to buy housing from the market, they will be required to sell their housing back to the provider (Xinhua net. 2011). In reality, the government has delayed realizing the sale of public rental housing, and as of the end of 2017, no regulation has been announced so far.

Unlike public rental housing in other cities, the Chongqing programme allows all migrants to apply for public rental housing with equal status to local residents. The government has reduced the *hukou* barrier, and stated that migrant applicants only need to be over 18 years old, hold stable employment and have participated in the pension system for over six months (The land and housing management bureau of Chongqing, 2011). The municipality of Chongqing also implemented similar strategies as used in the “New Urbanization Plan” to ensure the running of the public rental housing programme. For instance, the task of public rental housing construction was not delegated to lower level governments (the districts), but was carried out by two state-owned enterprises under the direct control of the municipality. Furthermore, the municipality also announced relevant reforms on the land market to ensure that intra-provincial rural–urban migrants get considerable compensation if they give up their rural rights (mainly their land) in exchange for local urban *hukou*. It even provided free job training, assistance for school transfer, equal access to public rental housing and other social insurances to encourage migrants to settle in the city. As said, these reforms also helped the municipality to collect a certain amount of land from rural–urban migrants (Huang, 2010). Moreover, that land could be used for funding the public rental housing programme. Between 2010 and 2013, half of the public rental housing occupants were migrants (Kaifeng Foundation, 2011). The municipality aims to absorb ten million intra-provincial rural–urban migrants into the urban areas of Chongqing between 2011 and 2020 (Huang, 2010).

The Knowledge Gaps and Motivations of the Thesis

Since the opening-up policy, migrants have brought about significant social changes and differentiation in the urban society of China, and their difficulties in accessing housing have been recognised by researchers around the world (Démurger, et al., 2009; Huang & Jiang, 2009; Wang, 2000). Previous research has mainly focused on the increasing importance of the market in housing provision, the rise of homeownership and the boom of commercial housing, the shortage of public housing provision, housing inequality between migrants and local residents, etc. (Huang, & Tao, 2015; Wang and Murie, 1999; Lee, & Zhu, 2006; Lee, 2000). However, despite the links between housing systems and welfare practices identified in other societies (e.g. Hoekstra, 2003), understanding of the housing system in China has rarely been elaborated on at more global level, especially not in relation to the welfare regime theories provided by Esping-Andersen (1990, 1999) and Holliday (2000). Recent research, nonetheless, has raised interest in placing the welfare system of China within a more global welfare regime classification (Hudson et al., 2014). Thus, one of the motivations of the thesis is to advance regime classification as a basis for interpreting variations in China's housing system across different stages of economic growth.

Another motivation is to address recent changes in housing policy and governance. Most research so far has been done before recent critical changes in context, especially before the "New Urbanization Plan". Given the fact that both the national reforms and local implementations of public housing development policies are recent phenomena, empirical research on the new relationship between migrants and their access to public housing is still scarce. Knowledge of what roles the recent push for public rental housing has played in increasing economic growth, promoting urbanisation and industrialisation, and maintaining social stability in China has thus been very limited (Wang and Murie, 2011). Although a few studies have examined local experiments on providing certain migrants the opportunity to enjoy equal housing rights, they have mainly focused on small-scale public housing supply (Chen & Liu, 2016; Liu et al., 2016). Unlike in other cities, in Chongqing, local autonomy in public housing provision has been highly consistent with both the national housing policy and objectives of the local economy. However, experiences in Chongqing have hardly been explored (Gan et al., 2016). The theoretical challenges are to connect the vast and important system-changes related to neo-liberalisation and decentralisation in housing governance, urbanisation and citizenship provision to the recent housing policy in China, especially the expansion of the provision of public rental housing, and to explore the role that public housing policy has played in sustaining both economic and social development in urban China.

Furthermore, due to lack of empirical data, there has been a lack of research on how the new context, including the diversified migrant population, the promoting of *hukou* reform and the revival of public rental housing provision, has influenced housing and life trajectories of migrants in urban China. This thesis also addresses this knowledge gap. The motivation is to provide important insights into, first, migrant households' attitudes towards, and experiences of accessing public rental housing, and, second, their approaches to settling in the city permanently in relation to the emerging urban context. The thesis examines how changes in the institutional context, especially the elimination of *hukou* barriers and the attainment of equal access to public rental housing, have influenced the housing choice of migrants in urban China. Moreover, under the relaxed and friendlier regulations, barriers for more disadvantaged migrants in getting access to public rental housing or for being able to settle in cities permanently have been reduced. Theories of stated and revealed preference are applied to study the preference for accessing public rental housing and the preference for permanent urban settlement among migrants in connection to these reforms. The thesis explores the impacts that the new versions of the relaxed *hukou* system and inclusive public rental housing policy have had on providing equities to migrants with different social-economic status and thus sustain economic and social development in Chinese cities. Below I explain the research objectives and questions.

Research Objectives and Questions

The main aim of this research is to understand the new approaches of China in expanding its supply of public rental housing and reducing *hukou* barriers to public rental housing that aim to assist migrants to stay longer or even settle in cities. These related reforms together represent one of the core strategies developed by China since the late-2000s to build a more inclusive society for migrants and stimulate an increasingly sluggish urban economy. The geographic focus of the study is the municipality of Chongqing which first expanded the provision of public rental housing at a broad scale and reduced its *hukou* restriction to allow migrants to access public rental housing with equal status to local residents. To achieve the main objective, I developed four research questions (Figure 1.1). The research started by examining the development of public housing in China based on the dynamic Chinese welfare state framework (research question 1). This part of the research helps us to draw a fuller picture of the housing system in China. The rest of the thesis zooms in on the city of Chongqing as a more specific and insightful case.

Research question 2 examines how the public rental housing programme has been established and promoted by the local authorities in Chongqing. The analysis uses the theory

of housing provision structure, and is linked to the structural changes in China, including decentralisation, the changing welfare regime, processes of neo-liberalisation, and the relaxation of the *hukou* system. The thesis then moves to a more in-depth study on how migrants have responded to the new context in terms of the stated and revealed preference they have for applying for public rental housing (research question 3). The last part of the analysis then focuses on how policy reforms in housing and *hukou* have influenced the preference for permanent urban settlement among migrants (research question 4). It compares the influence of institutional factors before and after the policy transition.

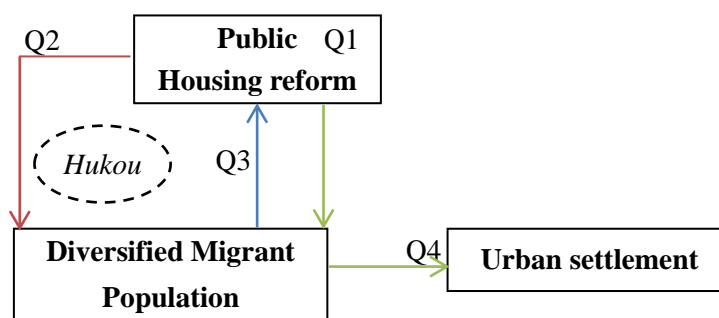


Figure 1.1 Thesis structure design

The first question considers the public housing system in China from a broader perspective. It links variations of the housing system to different models of the welfare state (figure 1.2). The results connects to recent debates on whether the new stage of public housing development in China represents a step towards a more socialized approach (Stephens, 2010). This part applies the four welfare regime types established by Esping-Andersen (1990) and Holliday (2000) to examine and classify the past and present stages of the Chinese housing system, focusing on variations in, and recent implementations of public rental housing provision in both Chongqing and Beijing. Beijing is selected as a case for contrast, as it represents a significant case of a city that carried out extremely strict policies and applied poor practices in providing public rental housing to migrants. I put forward the idea that the development of the public housing system in China, from a social-democratic or socialist welfare regime to a more market orientated one, features or reflects elements of both Western and Eastern welfare regime constellations, shifting among social-democratic, corporatist, liberal and productivist regime influences. Moreover, China is not as unique as has been often theorised, as globalisation and marketization have affected every sphere of China, including its public housing system. The Chinese government has continued to adjust strategies for developing public housing in line with goals on social protection and social investment. The current housing system in China should be understood

as a hybrid one, with two sub-systems, a local citizenship-based system and a migrant-based system. The former is developed for providing universal social welfare for local-residents, and is very much more similar to the universalistic system that Esping-Andersen proposed. The latter targets migrants and appears closer to the logic of the productivist welfare regime, with the provision of public rental housing subordinate to objectives of economic growth.

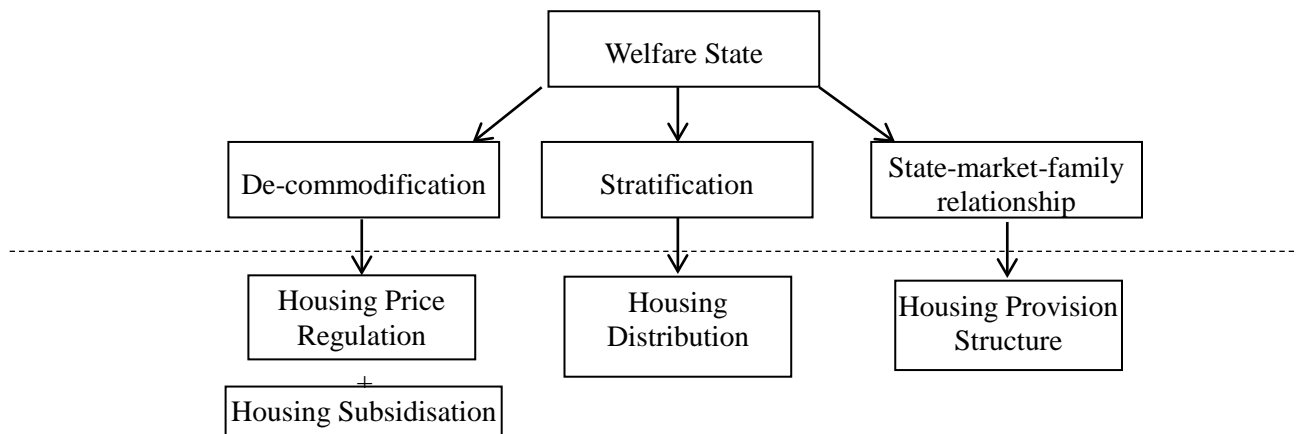


Figure 1.2 Welfare regime framework and its corresponding criteria in housing system

The second research question focuses on the public rental housing programme in Chongqing, the first experimental case of implementation of the new national policy. In this part, the thesis provides a detailed description on how the programme emerged and has been shaped under the current market-oriented housing system conditions and the decentralized public housing provision scheme, which has otherwise suppressed the construction of public rental housing (figure 1.3). The analysis focuses on the roles that different participants/actors have played in promoting public rental housing construction in Chongqing and provides an extensive discussion on how far the programme can go, and whether it can be copied by other cities. From the perspectives of neo-liberalisation and decentralisation, it examines the re-organised relationship between local government, state-owned-enterprises and private sector actors, and evaluates four key preconditions for the realisation of Chongqing's public rental housing programme: the specific political conditions, the strong political and economic incentives of municipal officials, the powerful capacities of state-owned-enterprises, and the distinctively large stock of land for raising funds. The Chongqing programme provides an example that suggests that local governments in China may choose to strengthen their control over the market to enable greater cooperation between governmental and market actors in realizing a large supply of public rental housing.

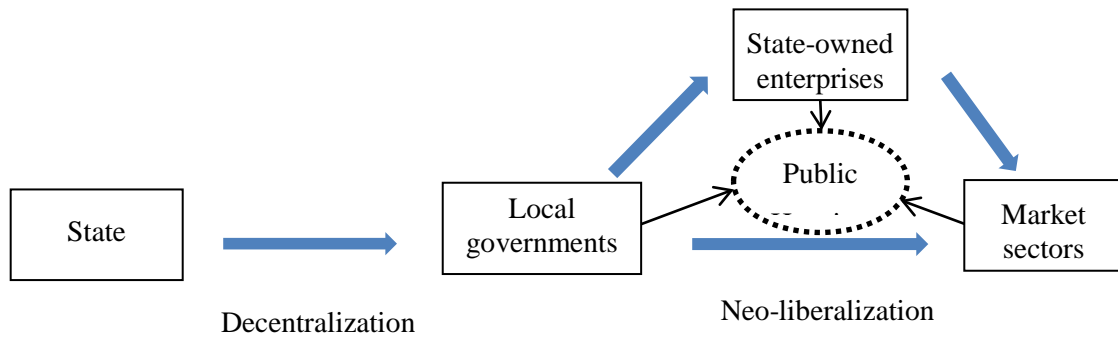


Figure 1.3 Housing governance in China

With the third research question, the study moves the focus to the micro-level. Question 3 addresses the relationship between migrants and their process of accessing public rental housing. The data for this research come from a retrospective survey conducted at the very early stage of the *hukou* and public rental housing reforms, between 2010 and 2013, with 546 migrant households, and from the application and distribution data downloaded from the website of the Public Rental Housing Management Bureau, between 2013 and 2016. I investigated factors related to the stated preference for public rental housing; factor related to the real action undertaken to put the preference into practice; and factors related to the intensity of the efforts undertaken to realize the preference (that is: through ongoing application for public rental housing). Factors include understanding of policy, housing related factors, housing related factors and the demographic situation, socio-economic stages and migration strategies of migrants. The analysis answers a series of questions: whether there is a gap between migrants' stated preference for public rental housing and their revealed preference, as expressed through actual behaviour to apply for public rental housing; between those who applied one-to-three time and those who continued to apply for public rental housing for between 4-11 times; whether the public rental housing policy and the provision of public rental housing matches migrants' preferences.

The fourth research question extends the third question by asking how the establishment of the public rental housing programme and the *hukou* reforms have influenced the preference for permanent urban settlement among migrants in Chongqing city. First, the study is especially interested in how the institutional and socio-economic factors are related to the preference for permanent urban settlement before and after the policy transition. It is hypothesised that the relaxed *hukou* and housing policy have encouraged disadvantaged migrants to state a preference for settling in cities. Moreover, the superiority of socio-economically advantaged migrants in stating a preference for permanent urban settlement has been restrained since the reforms. Second, the study tests whether migrants

who have accessed public housing are more likely to make a plan to realize their preference for permanent urban settlement. The answer to the hypothetical question is expected to be affirmative.

Why the City of Chongqing?

I selected the city of Chongqing as the research area. The territory of the whole city (82400 km²) is governed at the provincial level in China, and with a vast rural area (over 98 per cent), its urbanisation rate was only 61 per cent in 2015 (Chongqing Municipal Bureau of Statistics, 2016). However, the urbanisation rate of its centre, the nine core districts, which is 6.6% of the total territory (see figure 1.4), has been 88 per cent in 2015 (Chongqing Municipal Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Therefore, in order to make our micro-level analysis more comparable with other big Chinese cities, in terms of urbanisation rate, population structure and economic development, the survey was only conducted in the central metropolitan area of Chongqing. The nine core districts are Yuzhong, Shapingba, Jiu longpo, Yubei, Jiangbei, Beibei, Banan, Da dukou. Since 1997, the rapid urbanisation and industrialisation has been concentrated in this area. In chapters 4 and 5, I call this area ‘Chongqing city’.

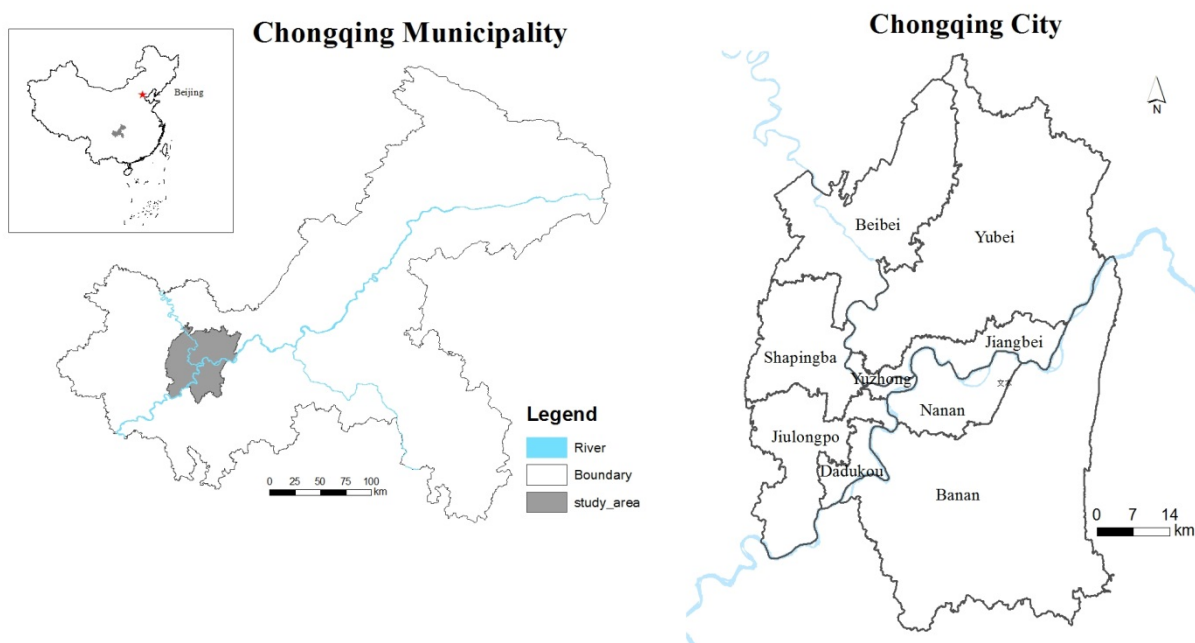


Figure 1.4 the city of Chongqing

Chongqing was selected for several reasons. First, among all cities, the municipality of Chongqing has carried out the first and most extensive policies to date aimed at supplying public rental housing in China. Meanwhile, it is also the first city which has extensively

eliminated *hukou* barriers to public rental housing for migrants. By 2015, over 60 per cent of the public rental housing units have been occupied by migrants (China Youth Daily, 2016). Thus, Chongqing represents a unique opportunity and provides timely data for answering our research questions.

Second, Chongqing represents a broad group of recently developed second-tier cities in which marketization has had a profound effect upon their urbanization and industrialization, and where the inflow of migrants has taken a high share of their labour markets. These cities have become the target of the “New Urbanization Plan”, and have been required to provide equal rights for their migrant populations. Therefore, these cities have a common task to bridge the urban-rural economic gap and to eliminate the local-migrant inequalities in sustaining the healthy development of their economy. Taking Chongqing as an example, from 1998 to 2013 its urbanization rate grew from 32 per cent to over 62 per cent, with its GDP climbing from around 143 billion *yuan* to about 1266 billion *yuan* (Chongqing Municipal Bureau of Statistics, 2016). In 2015, its population had grown to over 30 million (Chongqing Municipal Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Manufacturing, especially in the IT sectors, has boosted its economic growth, making it an attractive spot for lower-cost labour (migrants) from the vast, less developed districts of the Chongqing region and from other cities. By 2013, over 230 companies from the Fortune Global 500 had a presence in Chongqing (Chongqing News, 2013). Meanwhile, since 2012, it has become one of the fastest growing cities in China with an annual growth of GDP reaching over 10% (XinHua Net, 2016).

A large number of migrants have been attracted to the industry of Chongqing city, mainly surplus labour from the vast rural areas of Chongqing and intra-provincial rural-urban migrants. In 2013, of the nearly 30 million Chongqing inhabitants, over eight million lived in the Chongqing city area, with nearly 40% of them being migrants (Chongqing Municipal Bureau of Statistics, 2014). Meanwhile, during this rapid urban development, the migrant population in Chongqing has been diversified, as elsewhere in China (Li, 2010). More specifically, there has been an emergence of skilled and affluent migrants. From 2000 to 2010, the share of migrants with college or university degrees has nearly tripled (from 9% to 24%). Next to the traditional younger cohort (around 20-30 years old), a group of older migrants (30-40 years old) has also featured among the migrant population.

Of course, Chongqing is also unique in terms of its political background for carrying out such an innovative project. Since 1997, Chongqing municipality has been under the direct control of the national government, and a lot of privileges have been given to it to ensure a rapid economic growth. In the Chinese 12th Five Year Plan (2011-2015), Chongqing was outlined as the manufacturing base and service industry centre of China, and the major

economic growth point, the transportation centre, and the industrial powerhouse for the vast western part of China. Meanwhile, Chongqing has received certain autonomy, and preferential policies to establish experimental reforms for achieving an inclusive society. Since 2007, Chongqing and Chengdu were selected as pilot cities to experiment with ways to break the rural-urban *hukou* gap, and provide equal rights to migrants. In 2008, the arrival of Mr Bo Xilai as the mayor of Chongqing, implied a more radical shift, enabling the Chongqing programme and the *hukou* reforms (Miller, 2012). As one of the most competitive politicians in China, Bo initiated several campaigns, called the *mingshen* programme, to eliminate social inequalities and improve people's livelihoods. There were also political motivations in that initiating these reforms helped him to gain higher political status. The public rental housing programme became one of Bo's key campaigns. Thus, while other local authorities were still lacking incentives to invest in public housing, Chongqing has greatly improved funding for, and relaxed regulations on *hukou* and public rental housing between 2010 and 2013.

All in all, the public rental housing programme, the features of migrant population, its urban development status and the administrative context of Chongqing, all made it the most suitable and perhaps most provocative case for understanding the new stage of public housing development in China. However, understanding of recent transformations in Chongqing is still not well developed. Although Chongqing belongs to the four municipalities directly under control of the central government, the capital city of Beijing and coastal open metropolitan regions like Shanghai and Guangzhou have drawn wider attention among scholars (Li 2010). These cities have, also, always held tough policies on migrant access to public housing. Therefore, the study focus on Chongqing is highly important for learning from the first experiences in the new stage of housing development in China.

Data and Methodology

To address the research questions, the thesis integrates several theoretical perspectives related to decentralization, neo-liberalization and housing preferences (stated and revealed). The whole research uses two types of data, secondary statistical data for the qualitative studies in chapters 2 and 3 and survey data and website released individual data for the quantitative studies in chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 2 applies the welfare regime framework to examine recent changes in the housing system, drawing on contrasting examples from two Chinese cities: Beijing and Chongqing. Esping-Andersen's 'Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism' (1990, 1999) has provided a powerful and commonly used framework for comparative welfare state analysis. Building on this, Holliday (2000) introduced a fourth one, the 'productivist' welfare regime,

which has become dominant in explaining social policy and welfare system in the East Asian economies (Aspalter, 2006; Castles et al., 2012). Hoekstra (2003) developed a framework to link housing systems to welfare regimes, and this chapter applies his framework to classify the stages of housing system development in China.

Chapter 3 applies the theories related to decentralization and neo-liberalization to examine the governing structure of the public rental housing programme in Chongqing, the roles of market, state, state-owned enterprises and private sectors (figure 1.3). Neo-liberalization generally features a market-driven approach which increases market reliance and maximizes the private sector's function in socio-economic development (Harvey, 2005; Wu, 2010). In 1978, Dengxiaoping created a concept of "socialism with Chinese characteristics", which introduced the market to economic development for achieving Chinese socialist goals. Some research thus describes the process of neo-liberalization in China's socialist society as the "neo-liberalisation with Chinese characteristics" (Wu, 2010). This reflects both the inflation of market involvement and the maintenance of government regulatory controls. In regard to the intensively developed public rental housing programme, the authorities of Chongqing enabled an innovative application of the ideas of decentralization and neo-liberalization, and it reveals how the market and public sector could serve the welfare objectives of local authorities as well as private businesses. The municipality has made use of their local power and autonomy to deliver welfare services, based on their control of the state assets, state-owned housing developers, and banks (Lee, 2000; Wu & Webster, 2010).

Chapters 4 and 5 are based on survey data collected in Chongqing. Respondents comprised of migrants who have stayed in Chongqing city for at least half a year but did not have a local *hukou*. I performed a stratified random sample, and collected representative data from migrants in Chongqing city. In total, 605 survey questionnaires were conducted, and 546 valid responses were obtained. The response rate exceeded 80 per cent; those who declined participation in the survey mostly mentioned 'lack of time' as the reason for not participating.

Chapter 4 examines the stated and revealed preference for applying for PRH among migrants. Therefore, life course theory and the theory of stated and revealed preference are applied in the analysis. To examine the discrepancy between stated preferences and actual moves, we asked respondents to look back on their socio-economic status, housing experiences, housing trajectory, and their settlement plan over time. The 'recall error' is expected to be small because the retrospect period is only three years, between 2010 and 2012. Government leased household level data about the application and distribution of public rental housing between 2013 and 2016 is also used to further investigate the eagerness of migrants to obtain public rental housing.

Chapter 5 examines how the two main institutional barriers to permanent urban settlement – the *hukou* differentiation and access to public rental housing – relate to migrants' stated preference for permanent urban settlement before and after the policy transition. Binary regression analysis is used to model the relationships. Control variables include demographic factors, socio-economic factors, circumstances of migration, housing experience, etc. The institutional factors indicate options that are available for migrants to obtain permanent urban settlement, and the control variables mainly reflect the needs and capabilities of a migrant household to state a preference for permanent urban settlement.

Thesis outline

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter one, this chapter, introduced the research context, research questions, theory and methods, the study area, data and methodology. Chapter two to five are based on papers that were published or submitted to peer-reviewed journals, and each chapter corresponds to the above-mentioned research questions respectively, with a split – as referred to above – between chapters 2 and 3 on the one hand, where macro-level analyses based on documents and statistical material prevail; and chapters 4 and 5 on the other, where micro-level analyses based on a survey of individual households prevail. The papers may have some overlapping descriptions about the study area and data. Last, the thesis ends with a conclusion, where it returns to the research questions and elaborates on the theoretical and policy implications of the whole research.

Note

1. This refers to a unique phenomenon which formed part of China's urbanization efforts. Through the process of urban sprawl, rural villages formerly located in the suburb were surrounded by urban development. These villages became the main places of settlement for low-to-middle income urban citizens.

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