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# Repertoires of Resistance: How Agency Fuelled Rhetoric, Resistance and Rebellion During Mao's Housing Revolution.

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## *Abstract*

*Little published research highlights how Chinese residents sought to resist state imposed housing policies when Mao Zedong was Communist Party leader (1949 - 1976) of the People's Republic of China. By using extracts from previously unpublished eye witness accounts, this paper bridges that gap in existing scholarship. The paper shows how Burke's (1966; 1969) dramaturgically informed method of narrative analysis may be instrumental in revealing agency as resistance. Analysis of three previously unpublished vignettes, contextualised within metaphorical representations of resistance, reveals a new tripartite typology of agency whereby resistance is characterized as: agency through deferment; agency through acquiescence and agency through protest. The potential of hidden transcripts, discourses of rightful resistance and the donning of the metaphorical perruque to reveal sub - cultures of power at the neighbourhood level in Mao's China are exposed. The extent to which the eclectic mix of both resistance strategies and tactics enabled the residents and other stakeholders to improve their social, cultural and material capital over space, place and time is reviewed. In its concluding comments, the paper reflects on the new typology. The methodological challenges present when using eye witness accounts in reviews of agency as resistance both in the Maoist era and mainland China as a whole are considered. Implications for future research and resistance theory are also explored.*

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## Introduction

Existing accounts of Maoist housing policy tend to be canonical, positivist and deductive in nature, reflecting the extent to which Maoist hegemony continues to dominate scholarship (Huang, 2004; Wu, 2015). Furthermore, published scholarship suggests that Beijing residents had negligible discretion when moving home. Such reviews *ipso facto* design out the individual voices of those who have experienced the radical social, economic and political reforms imposed by the early Communist regime (Xing, 1999; Zhang, 1997a). Several scholars have challenged the dearth of qualitative, humanist and inductive research regarding Chinese residents' experiences during the collective period by using the oral history method to reveal previously undocumented events. These writings include the work of Western researchers who have applied a modified version of the Western oral testimony paradigm to the mainland Chinese context (Hinton, 1966; Stave, 1985) and Chinese authors who seek to capture the essence of the Maoist era (Li-Wen, 1987). The work of a new generation of Chinese researchers, although not yet mainstream, has also made a valuable contribution. Here, writers have used the first person narrative form to document China's rich, complex and, at times, turbulent history (Chang, 2008; Xinxin and Sang Ye, 1986).

With two notable exceptions (see Jiang, 2006; Zweig, 1989), the distinct modes of resistance deployed by residents during the Communist revolution have seldom featured in published scholarship. Moreover, existing scholarship does not draw on transcribed, detailed verbatim accounts of Beijing residents' housing histories. The oral history extracts which inform this paper are taken from a wider collection comprising detailed sixteen oral testimonies of men and women born during the Nationalist (Kuomintang) era when Chiang Kai-shek was party leader. The interviewees therefore bore witness to Mao's far-reaching housing reforms. This paper explores the research collaboration between the paper's author (an Irish academic who has worked in England for nearly thirty years), a team of Chinese social scientists based in Beijing and a native Chinese speaker in shaping the research methodology. It is noteworthy at this juncture that this study applied Kwong's flexible definition of oral testimony, as 'a deliberate effort to collect and use oral information for the purpose of historical reconstruction' (Kwong, 1992, p 26)

in facilitating the research collaboration. Furthermore, previous studies have also overlooked opportunities afforded by narrative analysis to reveal agency as an instrument of resistance when negotiating housing pathways (Clapham, 2002) in the Chinese context. This paper seeks to redress these deficits in existing knowledge.

The paper builds on Jean-François Lyotard's proposition that *petites histories* (micro histories) form an integral element of the post-modern condition when applied to knowledge advancement. Lyotard's position regarding resistance, however, is not without controversy. His reluctance to define 'resistance' itself alongside his questioning of whether Marxist principles support those facing tyranny are noteworthy (Silverman, 2002). Moreover the ambiguities, not to say limitations, of Lyotard's postmodernist thesis when placed in the Chinese context must also be acknowledged. Of particular significance in this regard is the transferability of the Western notion of the sublime (Huajun, 2010), China's complicity in the advancement of global capitalism and the dialectical relationships between internal and external modes of resistance (Dirlik and Zhang, 1997).

Nonetheless, the analysis here shows how micro histories, as part of wider narrative accounts, expose resistance during an unprecedented era of political and social reform which penetrated to the very heart of everyday Chinese life. Significantly, the findings suggest that the interviewees' housing pathways were by no means determined by a monolithic, totalitarian Communist regime. Rather, the transition from Nationalist to Communist rule was tentative, iterative and exploratory, thus enabling the residents to negotiate and, at times, exploit weaknesses in the emergent Communist Party line. Significantly, the residents' accounts also show the inextricable link between the ineffectiveness of power and the resilience of the human spirit (Abdu-Lughod, 1990) thus reinforcing Davies' proposition that 'agency is synonymous with being a person' (Davies, 1991, p. 42).

The research undertaken to inform this paper had four aims. Firstly, the study set out to review the capacity of oral testimony to highlight three residents' resistance strategies in Maoist China when moving home. Secondly, the study intended to examine how degrees of agency may be construed as continuums of resistance when examining residents' re-

constructions of their housing pathways. Thirdly, the study intended to assess the benefits and limitations of applying one dramaturgically informed method of narrative analysis to three Chinese residents' detailed oral accounts of their housing pathways during the Mao era. Finally, the research sought to explore the conceptual utility of the residents' repertoires of resistance when negotiating their relationships with key stakeholders during this period of radical political transition in China.

Arguably, the ability to recount one's life story freely without prescription, interruption or agenda may be construed an act of agency. Indeed, the Western oral history movement has become synonymous with representing politically, socially and economically disenfranchised groups whose voices traditionally have been hidden from history (Passerini, 1987; Seider, 1985). For those interested in oral history, the claim that the interview process itself, when conducted skilfully, generates what Frisch (1990) has described as a 'shared authority' between interviewer and interviewee is no revelation. Through dialogicality, new interpretations of history, gaps in existing chronologies and previously undisclosed facts emerge. When viewed in this way, as Bourdieu (1998) implies, research is a cognitive, re-interpretive and unconscious process which may potentially liberate both interviewer and interviewee. Indeed, untold stories potentially possess a self-affirming quality, a latent power which, if unleashed, has the capacity to subvert political control by creating *les lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) and *les lieux d'oubli* (forgotten spaces) (Wood, 1999). Such stories provide a rhetorical framework which allow us to review our motives for action as well examine the motives of others. As Gusfield (1989, p 17) suggests, 'when we speak, act, dress, eat, and generally conduct our lives, we communicate and, in doing so, persuade others, including ourselves.' Yet as the findings reveal, the capacity of personal testimony to empower unequivocally is relative to context and verbal reconstructions of events coded by temporality.

### Three Stories of Resistance

The first vignette features Liu Xia-hui<sup>1</sup>, a former apprentice tailor whose welfare had been provided by a guild from when he was 15 years old.

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<sup>1</sup> In keeping with research ethics protocols, all names have been changed to protect the identity of interviewees.

Finding himself at a residential crossroads, Liu Xia-hui deployed both strategic and tactical resistance when negotiating his spatial constraints. His prevailing personal strategy of agency through deferment enabled him to critically review the local housing options available to him. By maintaining a ‘contained underlife’ (Brook, 1987), Liu Xia-hui deferred with impunity his ultimate housing decision. This strategy allowed him to reject accommodation offered to him by a regime intent on used housing stock to realise political and economic goals. The extent to which agency through deferment helped to restore the symbolic capital eroded during his years as one of Beijing’s many thousand apprentice tailors is considered. The way in which self-internalisation of hegemonic views of inferiority shapes resistance is also examined (Prilleltensky and Gonick, 1996).

Fan Zhang, mother of seven children born in the Chong Wen district of Beijing in 1929, is the focus of the second vignette. Her housing pathway analysis 1929 – 1997 reveals a spectrum of agency through acquiescence, a strategy which encompassed strategic empathy, compliance and ultimately submission to the state’s rule of law as she prioritised providing food and shelter for her family during the Maoist era. The extent to which prevailing government narratives and mass property appropriation neutralised any potential for her to protest directly is considered. The analysis reveals parallel discourses of dignity and hidden transcripts (Scott, 2008) embedded in discussions between Fan Zhang and local government officials regarding the nature of Mao’s Four Olds - *po si jin* - old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits (Gao, 2002 and others).

The third vignette focuses on Qing Hong, a mother of two children born in 1931 in the Chaoyangmen district. Defying the cultural stereotype of a submissive lower class Chinese woman, she defended her family against state enforced eviction when ordered by government officials to move to the remote province of Ningxia some 1,000 kilometres west of Beijing during the Cultural Revolution (1966 - 1976). She remained resolved to protect her family home despite being publicly humiliated at a ‘mass struggle meeting’ (Bridgham, 1967) where party officials verbally and physically abused resisters. The ambiguous position of her landlady as both tenant advocate and landowner are explored. The extent to which the landlady encouraged Qing Hong to adopt a discourse of rightful resistance (O’Brien, 1996) is also examined.

## Metaphors of Resistance, Agency and Negotiating Identity

Resistance scholarship frequently defers to Foucauldian claims that 'where there is power, there is resistance' (Foucault, 1978, p 95) and that agency may be characterised as 'forms of resistance against different forms of power...a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their point of application and their methods used' (Foucault, 1982, p 211). Given the deference to Foucault documented in the literature, it is perhaps surprising how ill-defined the term 'resistance' is in existing scholarship. Current definitions range from Proffitt's assertion that it is 'active efforts to oppose, fight and refuse to co-operate with or submit to...abusive behaviour and control' (Proffitt, 1996, p. 25) to Carr's proposition that it involves 'engaging in behaviours despite opposition' (Carr, 1998, p. 543).

Yet, as this paper will show, resistance does not always result in a reallocation of power. Rather, it is nuanced in nature and may be manifested by a dynamic interplay between resisters, key stakeholders and other actors over space, place and time. Indeed, as Vinthagen and Johansson (2013) contend, not every agentic act may be construed as resistance. Rather, resistance is heterogenic and may be an unconscious practice which is contingent on historical context and which engages with power intersectionally. When counteracting oppressive macro political forces, resisters may challenge authority by using flexible, complex and latent labyrinthine networks of micro strategies designed to empower, challenge and capacity build. Furthermore, as Vinthagen and Johansson (*ibid*) also posit, research must ensure that non-political practices are also considered in resistance studies, a call to which this paper has responded. Vinthagen and Johansson (*ibid*). Therefore far from being a dichotomy between romantic and pragmatic, passive and non-passive or overt and covert, resistance is multi-layered, complex and speculative. In characterising these more subtle acts of rebellion, several writers have adopted tropes, metaphors and other rhetorical devices to explore manifestations of resistance in everyday life. As a collective, Scott's concepts of 'hidden transcripts', 'disguised discourses of dignity' and 'words as weapons of the weak' (Scott, 2008) all serve to highlight the importance of covert

tactics such as engaging in gossip or speaking in euphemisms when framing acts of insubordination. Complex and self-choreographed in nature, these recalcitrant acts bear little resemblance to more visible direct acts of protest. Such agentic speech and apparently autonomous behaviour create discourses of rebellion in their own right from which resisters may harness strength. Levi-Strauss (1966) characterizes these eclectic and more localized resistance tactics as *bricolage* (translated literally as ‘handiwork’). By employing *bricolage*, people may speak through what may occur (by speculating) or what has occurred (by reflecting). As a collective, *bricolage* creates an infrapolitical domain which simultaneously captures and subverts real life power relations. The net result is thus both conformity and resistance.

Moreover, as Bourdieu (1998) suggests, inaudible resistance equally warrants consideration. This distinct mode of resistance may occur when people share a common social identity, not least when the capacity to express verbal dissent may be stifled by distinct political, social and cultural contexts. Such manifestations of resistance are evocative of Michel de Certeau’s proposition that when facing forms of tyranny, people exploit existing institutional structures to suit their own ends. Thus rather than engaging in direct protest, people disguise their acts of resistance by assuming the metaphorical *perruque* (translated literally as a ‘wig’). The *perruque* wearers hoodwink those in power into thinking they are knuckling down to their demands when, in reality, they are self-servicing at their employers’ expense. (de Certeau, 1984). Jiang’s research demonstrates how donning the metaphorical *perruque* enabled Chinese farmers to ‘poach’ state politics during Uxin Ju’s Grassland Campaign (1958 – 1966), a strategy which subsequently empowered resisters to meet their own individual objectives (Jiang, 2006).

O’Brien’s concepts of ‘rightful resisters’ or ‘policy based resisters’ is also relevant. Here, when political promises have been violated, rightful resisters exploit weak and localised links in the leadership hierarchy to realise their own strategic objectives (O’Brien, 1996). Yet the right to deploy rightful resistance tactics is clearly far from universal. Most significantly, it is noteworthy that the discourse surrounding ‘rights’ in China varies significantly from the Anglo-American equivalent. One important distinction here is that ‘rights’ in the Chinese context are gener-



ally viewed as a state of conferred privilege intended to reinforce, rather than challenge, prevailing political ideology. Perry's research highlights the way in which Chinese rights discourse is enmeshed with a morality which reinforces the collective good (Perry, 2008). Rightful resistance measures used by villagers during the disastrous Great Leap Forward's famine period (1958 – 1962) to out manoeuvre corrupt government officials have been highlighted by Thaxton (2008). Thus, at times of political transition, resisters may find themselves negotiating and suppressing their self-identity to safeguard their very survival. Yet crucially agency still rises to the fore. In such scenarios, as Foucault (1984: p. 420) asserts, 'the individual is still an individual, he or she is forced to not only juggle multiple, contradictory forms of subjugation from various and, at times, competing social institutions, but is also forced to construct some sort of seemingly coherent self-identity from these multiple subjugations as well.'

For some, confronting head-on those who exploit their position of power may prove altogether too challenging. When feeling the effects of oppression acutely, some may turn to an advocate to represent their cause. But advocates are not immune from the doctrine of social egoism which decrees that all forms of interaction seek to promote self-interest. The temptation for an advocate to graft their own personal and/or strategic objectives onto a given cause may prove too great. As a result, those who seek counsel may find themselves being manipulated by advocates and other stakeholders who seize the chance to service their own opaque agendas.

With this multi-faceted review of resistance in mind, the paper will now focus on housing context in which the three interviewees found themselves immediately following the 1949 revolution.

## From Dynasty to Danwei - Mao's Housing Revolution

Prior to the Communist era, most Beijingers lived in the city's *sibeyuan* the capital's vernacular architecture located in the elaborate network of alleyways known as *hutong*. The first *sibeyuan* was reportedly built during the Han Dynasty (206 BC - AD 220). China's urban housing stock was

in dire need of state investment and regulation. Centuries of neglect under dynastic rule meant that the new Communist regime inherited a national residential housing stock which, if based on physical condition alone, was arguably more a liability than an asset. Land reforms had been mooted during the Nationalist era, evidenced by the publication of the draft the Civic Code 1929 and the Land Law Act 1930. But the combined distractions of the threat of Japanese invasion, civil war, warlord tyranny, government corruption and soaring inflation sabotaged these proposed legislative measures. Consequently, neither the Code nor the Act was implemented.

The dearth of urban governance provided the perfect breeding ground for unscrupulous landlords to extort high rents from tenants for whom alternative housing options were negligible (Zhang, 1997a and 1997b). Although landlords were expected to assume responsibility for their tenants' housing maintenance and repair, these responsibilities were not enforced by the state. Tenants were therefore often compelled to undertake costly maintenance work at their own expense, thereby unwittingly investing in their landlord's property interests (Zhang, 1997b).

There were some alternatives to private rented housing. As Bray and Rankin independently posit, accommodation provided by artisans and merchants guilds (unions) formed a modest part of the country's housing stock (Bray, 2005; Rankin, 1993). Introduced after the formation of the first People's Republic in 1912 and managed at neighbourhood level, guild housing (known colloquially as 'housing associations') provided accommodation for designated workers and their families. On the one hand, these interdependent relationships reflected the enduring Confucian social hierarchies that had formed the bedrock of Chinese morality. On the other hand, the guilds perpetuated the feudal infrastructure exploited by merchant traders for commercial gain.

But the power of guild housing was soon to be eclipsed by the implementation of large-scale state housing measures. With victory in sight in the late 1940s, the Communist regime began to expedite its housing vision with vim and vigor. In December 1948, the Party's first housing policy statement entitled 'Issues About Housing Property in Cities' provided the rationale for appropriation of private property. On the eve of the Communist victory in August 1949, a further housing policy was

announced which confiscated anti-revolutionaries homes and large property companies owned by the Nationalist government. Crucially, rather than prioritizing investment in existing or new stock, the new regime introduced three major housing policy instruments to realise the collective vision: seizure of private property and mass eviction; the branding of landlords as counter revolutionaries; and the creation of *danwei* (work units). These three policy measures are considered in the following section.

The first policy measure began to take hold in the early 1950s when the state seized private residential stock, thus transforming family homes into a public welfare good. The eviction campaign gathered further momentum during the Cultural Revolution when the Red Guards posted signs on the doors of resistors which read: 'Order. Private homeowners should submit their deeds. Those who disobey this order will be killed without exception' (Hsing, and Lee. 2009, p. 19). Although precise figures are not available, one source suggests that around a third of Beijingers were evicted outright by the state during this period.

During the second policy phase, the new regime resolved to eradicate profiteering landlordism. Private rented properties were treated with the same contempt as commercial enterprises. Landlords were deemed 'counter revolutionaries' as they were perceived to run counter to Mao's mission to eradicate the Four Olds. Stringent rent controls were designed to curb profiteering landlordism (Zhang, 1997a). But as rental revenue income decreased, so too did capital for investment in the deteriorating housing stock. Consequently, private housing stock languished even further into advancing states of disrepair. Overcrowding became commonplace. Street homelessness or 'squatting by open drains' hitherto unheard of in China, reached unprecedented levels (Jung, 2003 p. 114).

The third policy stream created *danwei* (work units) which replaced the guild housing during the 1950s and 60s, creating co-dependency between residency, housing, employment and the state. Neighbourhood committees were established as surveillance units to scrutinise local residents' movements. The housing revolution had begun.

## Research Methodology

This paper's author is a social scientist specialising in oral history, housing and social history, urban planning and comparative research methodologies. Previous research collaboration with four Chinese universities alongside other fieldwork had highlighted the lack of published qualitative research on the housing pathways of the urban Chinese population before and after the Communist revolution. Drawing on both the Western and Chinese oral history paradigms, the research methodology was co-produced by this paper's author and three social scientists based at Beijing's China Agricultural University (CAU). The initial oral history interviews from which extracts contained in this paper are taken were conducted in Mandarin. The study conformed to both research ethics guidelines advocated by Sheffield Hallam University the British Oral History Society. Interviewees were recruited using the snowballing method, mainly comprising family, friends and acquaintances known to the interviewers. Research participants were invited to relay their personal housing histories freely from birth to the present day. Interview prompts were minimal. When prompts were used, they were open ended and designed to support the interviewee in the reconstruction of his/her housing pathways e.g. where and when s/he was born; first memory of home; what triggered each house move or what kind of property s/he lived in and with whom. In all cases, interviewees provided detailed accounts of their housing history. Each interview lasted two hours or more. The social constructionist housing pathway approach was then applied to the accounts to reveal the dynamic between the individual and institutional when negotiating house moves over space, place and time (Clapham, 2002).

To preserve the integrity of each interview, verbatim interview transcripts were produced for each interview in both English and Mandarin. The Mandarin translation was also 'backwards' translated from English for additional rigor. The preliminary textual analysis pointed to a diversity of resistance measures deployed by the residents when negotiating the Maoist housing era, an area neglected by existing scholarship. Three accounts were then selected ultimately for a more micro level textual analysis. Burke's dramaturgically informed method of narrative analysis that allows for a review of how processual, action orientation

agency may be construed as an instrument of resistance, was applied to the textual segments (Burke, 1969). Each testimony was then parsed into the five principal categories deemed as comprising the narrative act. The first two elements provide the context in which motive may be examined, namely the act itself (what occurred) and the scene (the social, political and cultural context in which the act took place) (Burke, *ibid*). Detailed textual analyses of the three remaining narrative elements facilitated a focus on sub- and supra-agency, namely: the agent(s) (who or what facilitated the act of resistance); the form of agency (what resources were deployed in performing the act, including any material or rhetorical instruments used by the narrator) and finally, the purpose (why resistance ensued thus highlighting motive).

## **Agency Through Deferment - Liu Xia-hui's Story:**

Liu Xia-hui was born in 1933 in Tong County, around seven and a half kilometres south east of Beijing city centre. Two years before the Communist victory at the age of 14, he moved from his family's ancestral home to Qianmen in Beijing to take up a tailor's apprenticeship. Deferring to the Communist public liberation narrative, he explains how he came to Qianmen 'in 1947 before the Chinese Liberation. In 1949, my apprenticeship was completed. It took me 3 years to learn the skills.'

In pre-Communist China, Qianmen was regarded as Beijing's most strategically important craft and merchant guild neighbourhood reportedly going back as early as the Ming Dynasty (1368 – 1644). For working class Chinese, apprenticeships in the textile, shoe making, printing or metal work industries were commonplace. More affluent classes gravitated towards apprenticeships in commerce and trading. Liu Xia-hui joined thousands of young men from lower-class Chinese families who travelled to the capital from far across China in the hope of securing an apprenticeship. Liu Xia-hui highlights the prevailing cultural expectation of the time that lower class young men would train to be a tailor: '... when it came to my generation, I moved out and worked as an apprentice, learning craftsmanship and practical skills.'

The dormitories in which the apprentice tailors slept became communities in their own right. Liu Xia-hui's initial reconstruction of his living accommodation suggests low expectations regarding his employer's responsibility to provide adequate shelter:

At that time, all the apprentices were staying under one roof, some of them left after the end of the apprenticeship... It was the workshop of the capitalists... I worked there during the day and slept on a mattress on the floor at night. Normally there were three or four people. We couldn't ask for more... At that time, we were happy enough as long as there was a place to sleep.

In the absence of remuneration, the Qianmen apprentices were entirely dependent on their employer for food and shelter. When invited to elaborate on his apprentice quarters, Liu Xia-hui reiterates the minimalist nature the accommodation:

'It wasn't much of a room, we worked there during the day and just slept on the floor during the night... just somewhere to sleep. We didn't get paid, we just worked for the capitalists. The capitalists provided us with food and accommodation'.

The guild mentality perpetuated the class consciousness which had fuelled the 1949 revolution. The apprentice tailors were ruthlessly exploited by the capitalist classes. Strict hierarchies existed between servant and master. Apprentices were reportedly forced to light incense then kow tow daily in front of the factory owner to express gratitude. As degrading as this was, more horrifying ordeals have been documented. Rumours ran rife about apprentices being incinerated in factory chimneys and dismembered by unregulated machinery. Consequently, factory owners were forced to source new recruits from across China to fill skills shortages (Perry, 1993).

Isolated from their families with recourse to neither financial nor cultural capital, opportunities for the Beijing apprentices to resist using direct protest were few and far between. As Prilleltensky and Gonick have noted, a self-internalisation of the hegemony which perpetuates political and psychological oppression (Prilleltensky and Gonick 1996). This sense of inadequacy is achieved by distorting peoples' views of what

constitutes distributive justice at specific points in time. Consequently, any concerns regarding equality are subsequently usurped by strategies of survival. Moreover, as Gardner et al (2000) contend, the need for social acceptance may result in self-stereotyping of identity whereby dominant behaviours, customs and practices common within the oppressed group rise to the fore. Such actions create sub-cultures in their own right. Significantly, Liu Xia-hui's testimony evidences the symbolic importance of hegemonic dress in denoting the lowly status of apprentices relative to the merchant traders. He recalls:

The richer people would learn about trading. I was a trainee tailor near Qianmen. In the past, nobody paid much respect to a tailor...In the past, if your family was poor, you would come here to learn craftsmanship. For example, the shoemaker, tailor, hairdresser, all in the service industry, without much culture. For the richer families, they tended to learn about trading, business, so that they would be dressed in a presentable manner. If you were a craftsman, you could just wear whatever you liked and no one would care or pay much respect to you.

Adopting an interrelated strategy of invisibility and assimilation, Liu Xia-hui negotiated his three years as an apprentice tailor to the extent that he remained faithful to the profession until his retirement. Having finished his apprenticeship aged 16, he married in 1956 (aged 23) and moved into a property owned by the tailors guild on Exhibition Road, north west of Beijing city centre. He describes the property as being around 'around 13-14m' in size. At that time, he was earning 56 RMB a month and his rent was 5 RMB, just under ten per cent of his household income. He lived in this property for 'about 7-8 years' with his wife and their four children (two boys and two girls). The first of his children was born in 1957. He explains the role of guild housing associations and its links to the workers co-operative movement:

The institution was established in 1956, when I completed my apprenticeship. In 1956, co-operatives of the craftsman were formed and institution was then established.

The analysis of Liu Xia-hui oral testimony suggests an enduring interdependency between employees and the guild replicated at neigh-

bourhood level. As the extract below reveals, household size and length of guild service were key criteria in the guild housing allocations process:

At that time, house allocation was either based on the number of the people in your family, or the length you had been working with the institution. Whoever got the better qualification would get the house first.

Like many of his peers, Liu Xia-hui and his family found themselves occupying a guild property that had fallen into serious disrepair. In the extract below, he describes how the guild association opted to transfer tenants within its existing stock rather than undertaking essential property repair and maintenance tasks:

The house was leaking after 7-8 years. We then spoke to the housing association. They didn't fix it. At that time, if the leak was bad and too dangerous to live in, they would put in an application for you to transfer to somewhere else.

Significantly, guild housing was one of the few alternatives to state controlled accommodation at a time when the new Communist regime favoured property appropriation over new build. Guild housing was absorbed into the *danwei* system from the mid 1950s onwards. But Liu Xia-hui and his family benefited from the small window of opportunity in the very early years of Communist rule, which enabled them to reject state housing in favour of guild-managed accommodation. Furthermore, agency by deferment evokes what Brooke (1987) has termed living a 'contained underlife,' whereby people seek to resist within existing institutional structures without necessarily pressing immediately or overtly for radical change. Liu Xia-hui's testimony suggests he had local knowledge that enabled him to defer his housing decision:

The other option was to rent a house from the state, the terrace houses built by the government. When the government demolished the terrace/ bungalow houses and built the multi-story apartments, you could then be transferred to the new apartment building.

Knowledge of the government's prevailing strategy shaped Liu Xia-hui's tactics on the ground. De Certeau's (1984; 2004) distinction



between strategic and tactical resistance is also noteworthy both here and in respect of the analyses of the two vignettes which follow. De Certeau (2004, p.222) defines strategic resistance as: 'the calculation or manipulation of power relationships that become possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated'. Significantly, the distinct tactics deployed in realising the strategy are under the radar and therefore opportunistic, speculative and serendipitous. As de Certeau (1984, p.37) asserts, 'tactics derive their power from their invisibility and opportunistic versatility. It (the tactic) takes advantage of 'opportunities' and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids.'

Monitoring the guild's local housing development activities, Liu Xia-hui noted how 'the institution I worked with built some new apartments in year 1984.' Further assessing what accommodation would be available at the local level, he opted to defer moving into the first property offered to him by the guild association. Overall, he perceived no net gain in accepting the state property: 'I was only given a roughly 60m<sup>2</sup>, 3 bedroom apartment. Also, I would have had to return the old house in exchange for a new apartment.'

Significantly, as his recollection below suggests, his motivation for deferring on the house move was based on prioritising his children's anticipated housing needs. Upon marriage, women in early Communist China were expected to live with their in-laws. Liu Xia-hui's testimony reveals how he rejected the guild's first transfer offer accommodation, despite the property being larger than his existing home. He recalls:

The one built by the institution...at that time we didn't take it. I was thinking about my four children. If my two sons got married then the three bedroom apartment would be too small for all of us, so I decided not to take the first offer....I was willing to wait for the next offer, a bigger house, or a house waiting to be improved.

Local housing knowledge became capital which enhanced Liu Xia-hui's ability to defer on the state imposed house move. His reconstruction of why he rejected the first offer foregrounds the importance of hope in cultivating resistance (Snyder et al, 1991).

Another reason was, if you didn't take the new apartment, there would be some old vacant houses when the families moved out, then you could ask for the vacant old houses, you might even get one or two of them.

Ultimately, Liu Xia-hui ended up with two properties thus restoring, albeit modestly, elements of the symbolic capital which had been eroded during his apprenticeship years. His ultimate deference to guild housing evokes the donning of the metaphorical 'perruque' in preserving housing for his family whilst simultaneously assessing the local options available. Equally, his continued dependence on the guild for shelter suggests a tolerance, if not a willingness, to allow his identity to be re-subsumed by his former employers.

## Agency Through Acquiescence: Fan Zhang's Story.

Fan Zhang, a mother of seven children, was born in 1929. Her childhood home was a *sibeyuan* built by her grandparents located in the Chong Wen District south west of Beijing city centre. She lived there with her husband, seven children and eleven members of her extended family for nearly seventy years. As a lower class married Chinese mother in the early Communist era, Fan Zhang had no property rights as only male children were allowed to perpetuate the family line. Moreover, with no rights initiate divorce, women were frequently reduced to the status of a living widow trapped in the domestic sphere. In 1997, the *sibeyuan* was demolished by the government as part of mass clearance. She was then allocated a state flat in the Fengtai District, around twenty kilometres south west of her childhood *sibeyuan*.

The analysis of Fan Zhang's housing pathways 1929 - 1997 reveals a wide spectrum of agency as resistance encompassing strategic empathy, acquiescence and ultimately submission. She recalls how 'during the mid 50s, the government was calling. With the increasing population in Beijing, the government was calling the wealthy families to give up some of their rooms for the homeless.'

Government seizure of residential housing involved the mass eviction of residential occupiers and the appropriation of property deeds and

blueprints. People were required to sign a new housing contract which identified the state as landlord. Fan Zhang described how, following submission of the property's blueprint, she and her family were 'then issued a new housing permit from the government'. In the more substantial extract below, she describes how all property was seized by the government during the chaotic and controversial decade of the Cultural Revolution, reducing homeowners to leaseholders in one fell swoop:

During the Cultural Revolution, all the properties, no matter how many you owned, even just for one, you needed to have a housing contract. The contract was given to you by the country. The original ownership certificate of the property, it needed to be handed to the housing authority, whether it was a private ancestral property or rental property. Every month you would have to submit your payment to the housing authority.

Mass public protest against government seizure of private property in the Mao era was very rare. Pye's (1991) thesis that the Chinese cultural propensity to frame expressions of identity by relationship dominated by social groups (namely family members, work colleagues and neighbours) is noteworthy here. Thus Fan Zhang's recollection of performing obeisance to suppress 'self' is not entirely surprising. She recounts:

At that time, we gave away the rooms in the South. The rooms were given to a pharmaceutical factory to use as a workshop. We were still living in the East courtyard.

Lack of recourse to independent legal counsel and fear of government persecution may well have neutralised many potential acts of resistance in early Communist China. However, acquiescence must not be confused with consent. Van Rooij et al's (2014) analysis of intergenerational local environmental activism in one Chinese village during Mao's reign highlights the distinction between acquiescence and compliance. Specifically, their research highlights how local Party officials, industry representatives and community groups rationed residents' access to instruments of justice when seeking to challenge government waste disposal strategies. When it became apparent that personal agency ceased to stimulate a fair hearing, submission rather than resistance ensued. In short,

the villagers became reconciled to their powerlessness and subsequently behaved compliantly.

That said, Mitchell (1990) postulates a more nuanced distinction between acquiescence and assent, whereby any conscious deliberation undertaken independently of everyday practice becomes a form of coercion in its own right. Hence subscription to any given political orthodoxy becomes, in effect, an act of surrender as people allow their independent thoughts to be eclipsed by a ruling force's strategic objectives. Residual personal agency is thus diverted to more pressing concerns, namely the provision of essentials such as shelter and sustenance which form the basis of a self-preservation strategy. For thousands of Beijingers during the early years of Communist rule, the need to preserve residual agency was heightened as threat of homelessness by state eviction became a daily reality. As a mother of seven children, it is hardly surprising that the analysis of Fan Zhang's testimony reveals how her vestigial agency was diverted into preserving the essentials of life. She recalls:

At that time, the authorities would make the (housing) allocation and changes to the houses as they wished. We would just obey whatever they said and wouldn't complain much. We were just busy working for our living, hoping to get paid for food...since I have so many children.

Further analysis of Fan Zhang's testimony reveals the relevance of the Chinese concept of *zheren* (Ku, 2003), which places reciprocity at the core of individual and state relations. As state housing controller, the government was deemed responsible for completing essential repairs and maintenance in exchange for the property's deeds and payment of rent. She recalls:

The property you owned, once you had submitted your housing contract, you too needed to pay. That's it, it was considered living in the property of the housing authority, they would do the repair works for you.

If taken at face value, Fan Zhang's reflections imply a form of emancipatory resistance. After all, the Chinese concept of *zheren* implies reciprocity between individual and state. Yet further analysis highlights the speculative exchanges behind closed doors between herself, her fa-

mily members and local state-appointed housing officials in an attempt to understand the rationale behind Mao's 'the Four Olds' (po si jiu - old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits). Such discussions are reminiscent of Scott's (1987) concept of 'hidden transcripts'. Through symbolic inversion, these veiled discourses of resistance produce a further sub-culture of power stimulated by the covert discussions of less powerful stakeholders. By implication, any policy ambiguity, if further legitimised, has the potential to create an alternative political ideology. Speculating on the rationale for the 'Four Olds,' Fan Zhang recalls:

Why did we need to submit our housing contract to the housing authority? It was for the "po si jiu". Who knew what that meant at the time? We didn't know.

Fan Zhang's testimony suggests that local government officers had only a partial, if not distorted, view of the political ideology adopted by the central state at the time. She recounts:

There was this person in charge from the housing authority, he didn't know what the Four Olds was either. He was saying, if one family lived in a detached family house, then that was one of the Four Olds. The family would have to give up a room and let a stranger move in.

The dearth of knowledge amongst local state officials regarding Party ideology evokes Goffman's (1971) theory of 'impression management' which argues we create impressions by expressions. When re-encountering an authoritarian regime, actors assume a different identity that services their self-preservation or even advancement. Less visible communities of discourse during the Maoist era became off-stage performances that enabled the residents and low level bureaucrats to debate Party policy away from the ruling elite's gaze. These hidden transcripts create communities of discourse that construct a further sub-culture of latent resistance in their own right.

Significantly, the power of the public Communist narrative seems also to have been instrumental in securing Fan Zhang's compliance with state property appropriation strategy. One source suggests that between 1949 – 1976, the population increased by 154 million, the equivalent of 4.7 million a year (Chan and Xu, 1985). Fan Zhang's reconstruction of

how her family surrendered further rooms to the state is imbued with elements of this dominant national narrative:

By the end of the 1950s, again, the government called for more rooms because of the growth of population. Therefore in our East courtyard, we gave away our rooms in the East and West.

During the Cultural Revolution the epicentre of Chinese family life, which for centuries had been anchored by harmony, hierarchy and cohesion, was thrown in chaos. Fan Zhang recalls the impact on herself and her family when more state-appointed tenants moved into the ancestral *sibeyuan*:

Me and my husband along with my two daughters were then moved to the two rooms in the North where there used to be the living rooms. The lobby area of the North then became the dining area. That was the second time we gave our rooms away, renting out to some new tenants. Our housing situation remained the same until the mid 60s.

Although forced to surrender her family home to the government, Fan Zhang's testimony highlights how resistance through acquiescence enabled her to navigate these unprecedented political, economic and social changes instigated under Maoism by focusing on her family's basic needs.

## Agency Through Protest - Qing Hong's Story

Qing Hong was born in 1931, the year the Japanese invaded Manchuria. She married at age 15. The analysis of her housing pathways highlights how manipulative discursive tactics were used by key stakeholders, namely her landlady and government officials, to stimulate agency through protest. Unlike thousands of Beijing residents at the time, she successfully defended herself and her family against forced state eviction. Ultimately, she secured a job with the local housing department. She was subsequently offered state housing but rejected it in favour of a mutual exchange.

Qing Hong's first house move took place shortly after her marriage when she moved out of her Beijing childhood home, a *sibeyuan* in the

Chaoyangmen district she shared with ten other family members. With her husband, she took up occupation of a private rented property in Deshengmen. She recalls how they 'moved there after the liberation of Beijing in 1949 and rented a house near the old hospital.'

In pre-Communist China, the traditional family model was highly patriarchal. Women were expected to obey their fathers, husbands and, in the event of being widowed, their sons. As a lower class, illiterate Chinese mother with negligible social, cultural or financial capital, Qing Hong's employment options were limited to unskilled labour. She recalls:

Life was pretty tough at that time....do you know what did we do for living? We washed black cotton and made things out of it to sell for living. For example we made cotton trousers and blankets.

But their occupation of the property was disturbed when, in 1956, government officials ordered the family to move to the sparsely populated desert region of Ningxia Province, a journey of over 1,000 kilometres west of Beijing. She recounts:

In 1956, the private houses were made into public housing by the authorities. We were told to move to Ningxia province... It would have been difficult for us to travel that far with all my children.

The analysis highlights how Qing Hong's landlady deployed a discourse of rightful resistance to coerce her tenant into fighting the proposed state eviction. The enduring Confucian values of hierarchal family relationships underpinned by harmony, stability and respect both inside and outside the home were not entirely eclipsed by the new Communist order (Shapiro, 2001). Indeed, it was to precisely these values which Qing Hong's landlady appealed when urging her tenant to fight the state eviction. Qing Hong recalls how: '...our landlady didn't think it (the forced move) was a good idea. It would have been difficult for us to travel that far with all my children'.

Pressure from authorities mounted on Qing Hong to surrender her rented family home, culminating in her being summoned to a mass struggle meeting. In Mao's China, mass struggle meetings were very public affairs. Those identified by authorities as deviating from the party line were verbally and often physically abused in full view of relatives, friends

and neighbours. Qing Hong recollects how ‘we were treated badly after a public meeting with the authorities - they insisted that we move away.’ Despite multiple government attempts to oust her, Qing Hong resolved to remain in occupation of the rented family home. She recalls how ‘we were threatened with eviction from the house on three occasions but we fought to stay. I told them that we will never give in and please don’t come anymore. They didn’t come again.’

Having both endured public humiliation at the mass criticism meeting and successfully defended her family against the threat of forced eviction at the hands of the state, Qing Hong then faced another menace – the prospect of living in decrepit accommodation. The analysis reveals how her landlady failed to fulfill her repairing obligations, despite legitimate protestations from her aggrieved tenant. Qing Hong recollects how:

We had some problems with the electricity in the house and the roof was leaking. Yet our landlady had no intention of fixing the problems. We were so upset. We went to see her and discuss the problems with her. I said to her, “with customary respect we will call you “aunty”...so my aunty....why would you be reluctant to fix the house for us?

In China, it is commonplace to address middle-aged female acquaintances or neighbours in the community as ‘aunty,’ a title which suggests formality, respect and amiability. Moreover, ‘aunty’ figures were often seen working at grass roots level within neighbourhoods, frequently accumulating intimate knowledge of residents’ behaviour and actions. Indeed, Pye (1991) has gone as far as to suggest that some ‘aunties’ acted as informants during the Cultural Revolution by reporting recalcitrant residents to local Party officials. By implication, private sector tenants were, out of necessity, obliged to maintain healthy relations with their landlords.

As the extract below indicates, Qing Hong’s landlady urged her tenant to deploy a discourse of rightful resistance (O’Brien, 1996) when negotiating with the state housing provider. If successful, this maneuver would have served to fulfill the dual goals of discharging the landlady’s repairing obligations and placating her aggrieved tenant. Qing Hong recounts how her landlady encouraged her to remain in occupation of



the dilapidated dwelling but to use her housing circumstances to exert pressure on the authorities:

Our landlady heard what I said and came up with an idea. She said, you have so many children and you are living in a run down house. Based on these conditions you should be given a house by the authorities.

Significantly, it was at this juncture that Qing Hong resolved to secure employment with the state. On face value, her resolution to work for the government would suggest that the panoptic power of the Communist regime coerced her into adopting a dialectical mode of resistance as part of a survival strategy. Indeed, as the excerpt below suggests, her decision to secure employment with the housing authority evokes the Foucauldian concept of 'disciplinary power' (Foucault, 1979) whereby people negotiate oppressive regimes by moderating their own behaviour.

At that time, the housing office, which was not far from where I lived, was recruiting and I signed up for it. The wages I earned every month helped to feed the family. My children were very well behaved and didn't give any trouble.

Relative to laundering black cotton to be turned into trousers and blankets, working for the state provided better security and pay, including a pension for lower class Chinese women. Qing Hong recalls how she 'became a permanent member of staff after working for three years. It wasn't bad at all for illiterate people like us to have a job.'

Moreover, Qing Hong's testimony challenges the orthodox view that the Communist housing regime was a highly rigid, inflexible institution. Rather, her account evokes an evolving organisation that required party officials and workers to be flexible, resulting in mutual gain:

The housing office at the time was not a very formal organisation. I cooked for them. I carried water and did whatever I was asked to do. I was not educated and was employed to use my capacity for manual labour and practical tasks.

Her decision to work at the housing office suggests she survived by living a 'contained underlife' (Brooke, 1987), a mode of being which

enables people who seek to resist within existing institutional structures without necessarily pressing for radical change. Furthermore, the way in which her decision to work for the state housing provider represents a form of strategic resistance is noteworthy. For instance, to what extent might the informality of the organisation have allowed for opportunities to lobby for housing on behalf of herself, her husband and her children? Interestingly, the state did offer her housing despite her earlier refusal to submit her family home to government officials. But she refused the offer. Significantly, her spatial constraints were finally resolved independent of the state. Her representation of how her spatial needs were ultimately met suggests a sustained belief in the landlady's prophetic qualities, testimony to the landlady's enduring influence on her tenant:

In the end, just like the landlady had said, we qualified to be allocated some rooms in Hunglou. But we didn't move in because we were only given one and a half rooms. It was too crowded for the whole family. The rooms were exchanged with the house we are staying in now.

Significantly, Qing Hong's account of how her housing needs were ultimately resolved by a non-state housing provider illustrates the importance of reciprocity through *quanxi* in Chinese culture (Ku, 2003). In 1976, the year of Mao's death and the Tangshan earthquake, Qing Hong and the Hui family arranged to exchange properties, thereby resolving both families' housing dilemmas.

Some Hui (Muslim) families were living in Honglou. One of the Muslim men remarried following the death of his wife and his second wife gave birth to a baby girl. The family became ostracised by neighbours when it became known that 'the mother couldn't produce enough breast milk to feed the baby...she had to eat some pig's trotter which the family believed would help to stimulate more milk (see Holroyd et al, 2005).

Despite being adequately housed, Qing Hong found herself still having to protect her interests in the family home she had fought so hard to defend from state seizure. On this occasion, however, the threat did not come for the government but from her son-in-law:

I moved here in 1976, the year when the earthquake happened, and settled here since then. I have married twice. My brother introduced me to my second husband... We were together for thirteen and a half years. The son of my second husband asked if I could give him my house. I said no. Why? When we got married, we had a mutual agreement that we will not take each other's house. Why would his son be asking me for a house then?

Qing Hong's account demonstrates the power of agency through protest in defending the family home at a time when lower class Chinese women had negligible cultural, financial or social capital. By directly challenging state eviction, she safeguarded both her family and landlady's property interests. Moreover, by finding work with the local housing provider, she maneuvered herself into a position whereby she could obtain intelligence regarding local housing resources. Her housing resolution via a mutual house exchange demonstrated the power of networking during the Maoist era.

## Conclusion and Reflections

The paper has revealed how oral testimony extracts examined through the lens of Burke's (1969) dramaturgically informed method of narrative analysis may be used to further existing knowledge on agency as resistance during the years when Mao Zedong led the Communist Party (1949 – 1976). This analysis suggests that the interview process allowed the narrator to negotiate hegemonically selected antithetical elements of the past, a phenomena characterised by Ryan (2011, p. 2) as 'mnemonic resistance'.

Secondly, the study intended to review how agency, in its different guises, may be construed as an instrument of resistance when applied to the residents' reconstructions of their housing pathways under Maoism. A particular ambition of the paper was to identify more nuanced, multi-layered and self-choreographed everyday acts of resistance neglected by previous research. These multi-layered discourses of resistance warrant further examination in their own right. The paper has shown the potential of hidden transcripts, discourses of rightful resistance, and the donning of the metaphorical perruque to improve social, cultural and

material capital. The findings suggest that a form of relational resistance was at work in Maoist China that shifted over space, place and time. Significantly, diffidence, ambiguity and ignorance on the part of key actors have also been shown to foster resistance. Social egotism, the doctrine which decrees that self-interest drives all human action and interaction, has emerged significant in shaping the actions of resisters and other stakeholders. The paper's review of motive (the 'why' embedded within the narrative form) in shaping the residents' housing pathways shows the value in conducting a more detailed review of self-interest in resistance studies.

The new tripartite typology proposed here, derived inductively from eyewitness statements, argues that agency may be construed in specific contexts as protest, acquiescence and deferment. Each interviewee's account of his/her resistance is framed by one of these forms of agency as resistance to accentuate its application in that specific context. The analysis contained in each of the three vignettes has elected to frame each vignette by using one of the three discrete themes from this typology.

The paper is also a call for resistance studies to consider the application of the typology to other political, social and historical contexts, not least the merits in exploring how these latent discourses of power may be unleashed. Multiple stakeholders have been shown in this paper to shape acts of resistance at a critical juncture of political reform. A future focus on how resistance may be revealed using stakeholder analysis would therefore help facilitate a more critical, systematic and temporal orientated review of motives, means and relative power bases. The universal nature of agency in enabling the human spirit to triumph even in the most adverse sets of circumstances suggests that the typology may be applied to other international contexts. For example, how might the new typology provide fresh insights into how residents negotiated their housing during the rise of fascism in Europe during the first part of twentieth century?

A further theme of reflection is the extent to which the three elements of this new typology are closely interrelated across a continuum of space, place and time. For example, strategic resistance through long-term acquiescence may prove unsustainable, counterproductive and undesirable. In such scenarios, direct protest may become the resistor's

principal route to restorative justice. Furthermore, resisters' tactics may be underpinned by a discrete strategy based on partial local knowledge of state policy implementation. Political upheaval is then negotiated tactically and covertly by the resistor, allowing him/her to suspend crucial decision-making. The case of apprentice tailor Liu Xia-hui is indicative of this approach. Additionally, sustained acquiescence may give the external impression of strategic compliance with authority. But it may also enable the resistor to focus on immediate priorities from which personal power ultimately may be derived and consolidated. Fan Zhang's narrative highlights this nuance. Similarly, a critical incident may occur or an opportunity may present itself from another stakeholder, which may lead to direct protest when this outcome was perhaps neither envisaged nor intended. In such scenarios, motives of resisters and stakeholders may be opaque, differ or even conflict with one another. Yet challenges to authority may, in the fullness of time, generate mutually beneficial outcomes for all involved. Qing Hong's account evokes this aspect of the resistance continuum.

Thirdly, the study considered how one dramaturgically informed method of narrative analysis may be applied to three Chinese residents' accounts of their housing pathways to reveal agency as resistance. When analysing qualitative oral accounts of housing pathways, the extent to which the narrator deems the house move to be liberating or constricting lies in the foreground. In this respect, this paper sought to provide an alternative to the analyses more frequently found in oral history research, notably grounded theory and, to a lesser extent, analytical induction. Further research, analysis and debate is needed to assess the benefits and limitations of such an approach.

However, caution must be exercised when applying Western methods of narrative analysis to interviews conducted in Mandarin. Wang's review of cross-national autobiographical accounts concludes that when reporting childhood memories, Western adults tended self-reference more frequently than their Chinese counterparts (Chen, 2007). Furthermore, there is evidence that Mandarin speakers are more likely than their English-speaking interviewees to use vertical, spatial metaphors, notably 'shang' and 'xia' when discussing abstract concepts of time (Chen, 2001). As the closest English translations of these terms are 'next' and 'earlier/'

later' respectively, this implies that Mandarin speakers may have a more 'vertical' representation of time whereby the previous month is referred to as 'the month above' and thus creating a culturally specific view of temporality when framed in the narrative turn.

Fourthly, the research intended to explore the utility of the residents' distinct repertoires of resistance when negotiating their spatial constraints with housing providers, notably the state and but also local private sector landlords and one guild housing association during this period of political transformation. Written documentation of these events as recounted through the eyes of those who have witnessed such radical change is one way of ensuring that resistance measures in Mao's China are preserved in years to come.

But any simplistic claims that manifestations of residents' agency had the capacity to neutralise the power vested in the state in early Communist China are highly misplaced. In the tripartite relationship that existed between the state, residents and other stakeholders in Mao's China, the state unquestionably reigned supreme.

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