

# The Pains of Chinese Cities: On the Collusion of Power and Capital

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## Abstract

China's urbanization in the past 30 years, leading to almost all of the cities showed same face: based on the ubiquity of new buildings, commercial centers and cars on the road everywhere, so made all cities look take on an altogether new aspect.

In this process, capital has seized not only public attention but also the money of taxpayers. The government and the property developers have joint hands to unscrupulously carve up the city lands, destroy cultural monuments, 'renew' historical neighborhoods, and interfere with urban planning to realize their own interest. It is worth noticing that most of these people do not have a professional background in designing cities. They lack both the basic knowledge of city and humanitarian concerns. What they do know about is how to be opportunistic and seek personal gains from the public sector. The accelerating urbanization in China has facilitated and motivated the collusion between the government and big businesses. As the room for power rent-seeking grew larger, more and more corrupted governmental officials have chosen to sacrifice the cities' future for profits.

One after another, cities of hundreds and even thousands years of history have been torn down and reestablished with a 'modern' look. Cultural critics have mocked the major cities in China by personalizing them as follows: the plastic Beijing, the smug Shanghai, the hasty Guangzhou, the numb Wuhan, and the gloomy Xi'an, etc.

Besides, capital has taken down along its way the cities' humanistic traditions, cultural history traces, modest and courteous folk customs, aged buildings, former residences of historical figures, and natural scenery. It upsets the harmonious relationship between human and nature, human and society, as well as human and human in the traditional Chinese culture.

In addition, capital has significantly promoted commercialism. While encouraging

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the growing greed for wealth accumulation and material enjoyment, it also hinders the process of freedom and democracy.

What's more, capital has been portrayed in China's urbanization process as 'the most democratic and the best planner.' However, it has actually resulted in a brutal violation of the public life of average citizens, whose convenient life, personal safety, public space, cultural life, and recreation opportunities have become some people's instruments for making money.

After 30 years, it has become a shared concern among many people the wide-spread problems of contemporary China: environmental pollution, population overgrowth, over-exploitation of lands, destruction of natural resources, traffic jams, and cities besieged by garbage. What's even worse, capital has not only alienated the cities but also its residents.

Today, the government is trying to improve the situation by changing its mode of development, but it is no easy job. If not handled well, the new attempts may be reduced to yet another wave of 'vanity projects.' While the rich hold on to their right to immigrate to other countries if things go wrong, the majority of average Chinese people would have to suffer the cost to their familiar lifestyle.

Here lie the pains of Chinese cities. But where could we find the prescriptions to their diseases?

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