Local Traditional Knowledge in Its Urban Context

Local Traditional Knowledge in Its Urban Context:

A Case Study of Bai Ethnic Minority in Dali, China

By

Huier Ma and Huhua Cao

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FOREWORD

For some, global awareness has expanded horizons, made evident new possibilities, and revealed the richness of human life in different places around the world. For others, this new knowledge has led to a sense that the world is shrinking and that we are one, as time eliminates our old conception of distance. For all, this new knowledge that has accompanied economic and cultural globalization has reinforced our sense of personal identity in a larger community where we share common characteristics.

Cultural identity was traditionally place-based, as humans needed to communicate directly with each other. Localities developed a way of life with their unique culture, as well as language, to express those locally held and widely shared concepts of place and people. Such localities may not have had distinct boundaries and may have shifted with migration and demographic change, but throughout such change, place remained a primary marker in how we recognized the people that inhabit different areas. Place-based cultural identity is under severe pressure in China as urbanization blurs the cultural divides and gathers a diversity of peoples in a smaller number of larger cities. Even when a rapidly growing city like Dali has a majority Bai culture, it nevertheless faces the pressures of a larger society that is adopting a lingua franca and a common set of mores, reinforced by formal education and official media.

China has long experienced mass migration and the subsequent mixing of distinct groups of people. The Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368) and its expansion into Yunnan Province occasioned the influx of migrants from northwest China. The Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) saw the large-scale, planned settlement of parts of Yunnan, including Dali and its hinterland, with Han migrants coming from Nanjing and points farther north. A distinct local culture developed over the centuries but here, as in many other locales, established groups and in-migrants co-existed. That phenomenon of in-migration and co-existence is not unique to Yunnan and indeed can be found on a global scale throughout history. What is different today is that such groups co-exist in the context of a national and global culture.

The study of the Bai culture of Yunnan carried out by Huier Ma and Huhua Cao shows a proudly and strongly expressed faith that Bai culture is vigorous and sustainable, even if the signs of its erosion are evident. That pride is undoubtedly a key not only to the survival of this culture, but to success in many other domains, including economic. Examples abound worldwide. However, local people try to square the circle, wanting their children to have all the advantages of urbanites in Chinese megacities while maintaining the sense of who they are. That effort, in the face of the absence of official support, extends to having young children learn standardized Mandarin before they acquire Bai, or to adopt daily lifestyle patterns and living accommodations that fit conventional ideas of what it means to be modern. Whether this will work to maintain a balance between traditional and modernized identity remains to be seen. This particular case of the Bai culture is undoubtedly repeated in many other instances in the vast and complex country of China, the home of fifty-five official ethnic minorities and more than three hundred languages and dialects. An official place for these languages and cultural identities remains to be determined in China as it hurtles towards a collective identity, a single language and a common set of behavioural norms.

This study also highlights a unique architectural and urban form tradition within the broader architectural tradition of South China. The unique form of the courtyard house, its decorative features as well as the layout of whole settlements, is undoubtedly a national treasure, as explained and illustrated in this study. The discourse on such built heritage often, as here, revolves around issues of preservation and conservation. The local Bai people are understandably conflicted about this important architectural heritage, as it denotes a pre-modern past, domestic discomfort and a burdensome preservation effort, while at the same time being a magnificent demonstration of cultural achievement. Perhaps, as seen in a handful of cases around China, innovative architects will think about how to make such traditional housing suitable for modern lifestyles, or how to re-invent that architectural tradition in new, contemporary forms. Architectural heritage is a foundation stone for tourism because it is easily consumed through mass tourism. Interestingly, the local Bai people seem to embrace the potentials of tourism and see no conflict with the preservation of their local identity. Indeed, the opposite of conflict may be the case when outsiders pay homage to the local culture through their visits.

Of course, the economic potential of tourism is also accompanied by dangers when the local urban form becomes an open-air museum and local traditions become commodified to suit tourists bent on quick and easy

consumption. This balancing of tourism potential and cultural identity is certainly not unique to Dali. Examples throughout China abound of a preserved architectural form and the complete loss of an authentic local life. This sad outcome for the best-known ancient towns is a very recent phenomenon, reminding us of our fragile hold on authentic local identity.

This study also focuses on cultural traditions, including the elaborate and graceful costumes of the Bai. Increasingly confined to the elderly, the question arises whether younger generations will maintain these clothing styles or whether they will only be seen in museums or historical photos. In other cultures, such elaborate clothing is somewhat transformed or integrated with modern forms. In Japan, the kimono is worn for special events and festivals. Only a few years ago, the rejection among the young of traditional dress in Sikh culture is now reversed with many young men re-adopting the colourful and elaborate turban. Identity is important and perhaps especially for the young looking to find their unique place in our globalized culture. But questions remain. Can the ritualistic traditions and material production of a cultural community survive the loss of its language? The loss of a language means the loss of an oral culture but also results, in many cases, in the inaccessibility of an entire tradition. Do those rituals become merely folklore?

This study is a sincere effort to highlight these important, contemporary questions in our fast-homogenizing world. Huier Ma and Huhua Cao immersed themselves in this local environment to delve below surface impressions to reveal the tensions and possibilities of a distinct local culture. The authors visited the urban and rural homes of the Bai people, let them tell their story and how they felt about their culture and its future. How that future plays out for the Bai people in their homeland of Yunnan surely holds lessons for other culturally distinct localities in China. They have made sense of their story, without imposing an outsider's view or an authority's interpretation of the place of local culture in the larger society. Telling the story alone is surely a step in the long march towards self-affirmation and pride of place, much like holding up a mirror and having a good long look at ourselves.

John Zacharias
Chair Professor
Laboratory on Urban Process Modelling and Applications
Peking University
Beijing, China

ABSTRACT

As China experiences rapid urbanization, local traditional knowledge (LTK) has been increasingly brought to the public's attention as a significant feature of cultural identity and inclusiveness. Especially in ethnic minority areas, it is important to respect LTK so that the cultural identity and social cohesion of ethnic minorities can be sustained in an increasingly urbanized environment. The objective of this research is to explore the incorporation of LTK during the process of urbanizing China's ethnic minority regions from the perspective of residents. Using Dali City as a case study, this book investigates local Bai people's perspective on LTK with urbanization in mind.

Multiple methods are employed to examine the impact of LTK on Dali's cultural landscape. Based on questionnaires answered by eighty Bai people, this research finds that the city has a well-preserved Bai cultural landscape. Complementary to the questionnaire findings, the focus group analysis and daily field observations lead to a conclusion that local Bai people perceive cultural preservation as necessary for their future. Respondents placed a high cultural value on the Bai language, traditional architecture, and traditional festivals. Nonetheless, a discrepancy is evident between participants' preference for cultural preservation and their actual commitment, which reveals that preservation is facing challenges, especially among the younger generations.

By demonstrating that there are profound differences in Bai LTK conservation between the urban and rural areas, this study contributes to more realistic descriptions of the impact of urbanization in Dali. Particularly, it captures the cultural processes which transform the built environment and reveals that a further step is required to integrate LTK with urban development. The decision-making process for ethnic cultural preservation is highly complicated and refers to achieving a benefit equilibrium for every stakeholder using a more participative approach. LTK has an intrinsic value for a liveable city and is instrumental in inclusive urbanism. The research findings assert a better understanding of cultural preservation from the perspective of Bai people in Dali and shed light on the interplay between LTK and sustainable development in the ethnic minority region.

摘要

　　随着中国城市化进程的加快，地方传统知识 (LTK) 作为一种文化认同和包容的重要因素引起了人们越来越多的关注，特别是在少数民族地区。在日益加深的城市化环境中，尊重 LTK 对保持少数民族的文化认同和社会凝聚力尤其重要。本次研究将从居民的角度探讨地方传统知识在中国少数民族地区与城市化的相结合。以大理市为例，本文从城市化的角度考察了当地白族居民对 LTK 的认识。

　　本文结合多种调研方法，着重探讨了白族传统知识对大理市的文化景观的塑造和创新的过程。通过对 80 名白族居民的问卷调查发现，大理保存了较为完整的白族文化景观。作为问卷调查结果的补充，焦点小组讨论和每天的实地观察总结出当地白族普遍注重文化保护。受访者认为白族语言、传统建筑和传统节日都具有很高的文化价值。然而，他们对保护文化传统的看法与实际行动并不一致，这意味着白族文化保护面临挑战，特别是对年轻一代。

　　本研究通过论证白族传统知识的体现在城乡之间有着明显差异，真实地呈现出城市化对大理的影响。特别是通过对改变建成环境的文化过程的解析，本文总结出将 LTK 与城市发展相结合需要进一步的工作。保护民族文化的决策过程是复杂的，它需要一个参与性更强的方法来照顾到各方的立场。LTK 体现了宜居城市的内在价值，并在包容性城市的建设中发挥着重要的作用。研究结果从大理白族居民的角度进一步加深了对文化保护的理解，这有助于更好地将地方传统知识融入到少数民族地区的可持续发展。

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CNY	Chinese renminbi
DBAPG	Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture People's Government
ICC	Intraclass correlation coefficient
LTK	Local traditional knowledge
MOHURD	Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development
PRC	People's Republic of China
TNPC	The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China
VIC	Village in the City
UPDY	Urban & Rural Planning & Design Institute of Yunnan

LIST OF IMPORTANT CHINESE TERMS

Bai ethnic group   *Bai-zu*，白族
Bai folk song   *Da-ben-qu*，大本曲
Civilian persons   *Min-jia*，民家
Multiple courtyard houses   *Duo-jin-yuan*，多进院
Ethnic identification   *min-zu-shi-bie*，民族识别
Four buildings and five courtyards   *Si-he-wu-tian-jing*，四合五天井
Feng shui philosophy   *Feng-shui*，风水
Sanyuejie Festival   *San-yue-jie*，三月街
Sea-view holiday cottage   *Hai-jing-fang*，海景房
Multiple courtyard houses   *Duo-jin-yuan*，多进院
Reading Chinese characters in a Bai way *Han-zi-bai-du*，汉字白读
Three buildings with a screen wall   *San-fang-yi-zhao-bi*，三坊一照壁
Torch Festival   *Huo-ba-jie*，火把节
Urban population   *Cheng-qu-ren-kou*，城区人口
Village in the City   *Cheng-zhong-cun*，城中村
Village housing land   *Zhai-ji-di*，宅基地

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since the economic reform in 1978[1] and the housing reform in the late-1990s,[2] China has been experiencing rapid urbanization. In the past four decades, policies at all levels of government have put more weight on land-driven economic growth (Wu and Zhang, 2007; Jiang *et al.*, 2017). Municipal governments tend to use the land market to accumulate capital for urban development and use urbanization as an economic growth machine. As a result, China is facing increasing economic, social, and environmental pressures. Some of these pressures include housing prices rocketing, high vacancy rates, and the deterioration of the living environment, (Choy and Li, 2017). Also, the characteristics of regional culture are gradually weakened by the inflow of migrants, goods, and information (Meng and Liu, 2013). In response to these problems, the central government decided to launch the New Urbanization Plan[3] in 2014 (Chen, 2015; Chen, Liu and Lu, 2016), before the publication of the New Urban Agenda.[4] The New Urbanization Plan (2014-2020) is the first

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[1] After Deng Xiaoping came to power, there was a series of economic reforms that introduced the concept of a free market into China's development. Before these reforms, private business was not allowed, and there was no real estate market (Gu *et al*., 2012).

[2] Theoretically, China's urban housing reform started in the 1980s. In 1983, the State Council drafted and wrote the private property ownership rights into the Constitution which paved the way for the urban housing market. When the allocation of welfare housing officially ended in 1998, it marked the completion of the housing reform and the establishment of a market-oriented urban housing system (Chen, Hao & Stephens, 2010).

[3] The New Urbanization Plan (2014–2020) is a response of the Chinese central government that promotes the idea of sustainable development and inclusive urbanization (Chen, 2015; Choy & Li, 2017).

[4] UN-Habitat III New Urban Agenda explains inclusive development as a process of participation that leads to the civic engagement of urban residents, fosters a sense of belonging and social cohesion, and is important to human settlements (United Nations, 2015). Although the statement of intent is clear for the New Urban Agenda, there have been several questions about how ideas of inclusiveness can be translated into practice, especially where there are extreme imbalances in resources and power,

official plan that regards sustainable urbanization as a national policy in China; and notably, it pinpoints the need for a transition from land-oriented urbanization to people-centred urbanization (Long, 2014; Chen *et al.*, 2016). The preservation of local culture is regarded as a criterion for cultural diversity. One objective of the New Urbanization Plan is to build liveable cities that conserve the natural landscape and local culture (National Development and Reform Commission, 2014). Moreover, this people-centred urbanization approach aims to promote more social services in rural areas and encourage rural migrants to settle in small cities and towns.

Urban areas are unevenly developed in Western China[5] where most minority regions are located. It has a much smaller number of urban clusters in comparison to Eastern China[6] (Han, Cao and Liu, 2018). The levels of urbanization in ethnic autonomous areas are much lower than that of the national level (Cao *et al.*, 2014). Even the central government has launched the Western Development Program[7], yet this region remains less urbanized. Apart from the natural conditions or the complicated topographic features of Western China, there are also socio-economic disadvantages, such as having a greater illiteracy rate in comparison to Eastern China, which hinders urban development in this region (Cao, 2010). Li (2017) suggests that more attention should be drawn to urbanization in Western China.

Dali City (hereafter, Dali), located in the Yunnan Province in Southwest China, has a high level of cultural diversity. In addition to the predominant ethnic group of the Bai (68%), there are twenty-four other ethnic groups living in the city (Yang, 2018). With few competitive modern manufacturing industries, local traditional knowledge (LTK) is often an important resource for tourism and economic development in ethnic minority regions (Liu, 2013; Zhao, 2015). Recently, LTK has been brought to the public's attention

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and where the involvement of the poor is limited in the process of urban development (Shand, 2018).

[5] Western China includes Chongqing, Gansu, Guizhou, Guangxi, Neimenggu (Inner Mongolia), Ningxia, Sichuan, Shaanxi, Qinghai, Xinjiang, Xizang and Yunnan.

[6] There are several ways to define Chinese territorial division. According to Anwear & Cao (2008), there are three major regions in China: Eastern China, Central China and Western China. The Western Development Program has modified the regional division since 2000 to state that Eastern China now includes the following provinces: Beijing, Fujian, Guangdong, Hainan, Hebei, Jiangsu, Liaoning, Tianjin, Shanghai, Shandong and Zhejiang.

[7] The Western Development Program was initiated by the Chinese central government in 2000 as a national strategy to minimize the gap between urban development in Western China and the rest of the country (Li, 2017, 5).

as a significant feature of cultural identity and inclusiveness. However, it has been omitted in urban planning for a long time in China, especially as cities continue to be further influenced by Western culture due to the Open Door Policy[8] (Chen, 2011). Although most cities in China are city-level administrative units, they are usually comprised of both urban and rural areas. Many cities in ethnic minority regions, such as Dali, are still undergoing tremendous rural transformations. Embodied with rules, rituals and meanings, Bai dwellings convey an aesthetic appreciation of traditional culture (Liu, 2010; Liu, 2013). If traditional architecture were to disappear over time, it would be an unjust loss due to urbanization. It seems that integrating more LTK with urban development would support the central government's new urbanization strategy.

This research uses Dali as a case study to investigate the role of LTK in ethnic minority cities. Since Dali is historically the homeland of the Bai people, this study explores the incorporation of LTK in the city's development through a Bai perspective of cultural preservation. Furthermore, this study attempts to answer the following questions: How do the Bai people understand the transformation of the built environment in Dali? How do these ethnic minorities alter their perceptions of traditional practices during urbanization? To obtain answers, a preliminary cross-tabulation analysis was conducted for the eighty unpublished questionnaires collected in 2017. Three focus groups were carried out in 2019 and analysed through a "margin coding"[9] process and followed up with an interpretation of the survey findings. Moreover, in order to acquaint the researcher with the local cultural context, field observations were also carried out across a variety of Dali's neighbourhoods. The research results highlight the interplay between architectural traditions and the cultural landscape in Dali, and also demonstrate a better understanding of the Bai minority's urban experience.

This book consists of six chapters. This first chapter introduces the research context. The second chapter examines recent literature relevant to this study while presenting the research questions and research framework at the end. The third chapter (methodology) provides an overview of the study area (Dali), the data resource (questionnaire and focus group), as well as analytical processes. Chapters 4 and 5 elaborate on LTK and urbanization

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[8] The Open Door Policy became a national policy of China in 1978. Its main objective is to achieve modernization through "selectively integrating Western technology and anything that is beneficial to China's development, such as management experience" (Han, 2018).

[9] The margin coding method is appropriate for identifying key themes and analyzing processes associated with a particular topic (Cameron, 2016, 219).

based on the results of the data analysis. Lastly, the research findings, with empirical contributions, are summarized in Chapter 6. Research limitations will also be addressed in this chapter.

CHAPTER 2

EXPLORING URBANIZATION AND BAI CULTURE IN CHINA

2.1. Urbanization in contemporary China

China has experienced ongoing urbanization since 1949, and even more so after a series of economic reforms in the 1980s. Since then, the urbanization rate has increased dramatically and has been accompanied by massive rural-urban migration, the rapid expansion of cities, and the construction of new city districts (Zheng, Wang and Cao, 2014; Long, 2014; Liu and Cao, 2017). The urban population rate reached 59.6% as of 2018 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2019), demonstrating a 41.7% increase since 1978 (Li, 2017). It is therefore expected that urban population growth will continue. By removing some institutional constraints, like the bipolar Hukou system, the national urbanization rate reached 63.9% by the end of 2020 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2021). The rate is expected to reach about 76% by the end of 2050 (Gu *et al.*, 2015).

Li (2017) finds four interrelated factors that influence urbanization in China: the Chinese perception and the scope of urbanization;[10] economics and central planning; institutional factors; and the Hukou system (household registration system).[11] Unlike other countries, a distinct feature of China's urban development is that government policy plays a crucial role in urban planning. The central government usually tries to promote economic growth by building cities. However, formal community participation is absent in urban decision-making (Cheng and Zhang, 2004; Gaudreau and Cao, 2015; Logan, 2018). As described by Shen and Shen (2018), the central government maintains control of political decision-making, while municipalities can control specific economic decisions on urban development at a local level.

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[10] The population in both cities and towns is categorized as an urban population in the census.
[11] The Hukou system was implemented in 1958 regarding the management of socioeconomic resource allocation by assigning citizens to either an agricultural household status or urban household status (Li, 2017).

Nonetheless, small towns and urban districts in larger cities do not have any autonomy in decision-making. These administrative units cannot sell their land or manage their development (Gu *et al.*, 2015).

2.1.1. Accelerators of urbanization

China's national urbanization rate was 11.8% in 1951, and 17.9% in 1978—only a 6.1% increase in 27 years (Chan, 2014). The turning point of 1978 was the Open Door Policy. This national policy has allowed China to shift to a socialist market-oriented economy and adopt modern concepts that are often associated with Western culture (Hu, 2018). Following these economic and policy changes, there came a process of the commodification of land, a surging rural labour surplus, and place promotion in cities (Chen, 2011). In the context of contemporary China, modernization is arguably a process of westernization, which has greatly increased since 1978 (Li, An and Yang, 2007; Pan and Campbell, 2018). However, a growing public awareness of vernacular culture has emerged in recent years, and the central government also called for preserving local culture in the New Urbanization Plan (2014-2020).

Several institution-led reforms have also contributed to this greatly accelerated urbanization during the last four decades. In particular, they are the land policy reform,[12] housing reform,[13] and Hukou reform[14] (Han, 2012; Li, 2017). According to Chen *et al.* (2011), the reformed housing system contributed to a remarkable increase in housing construction and rural-to-urban migration, which subsequently led to urban expansion in China. When the Hukou system became less restrictive in the 1990s, many rural surplus labourers started to seek jobs in cities. However, migrant workers could not access urban welfare without urban Hukou (Han, 2012). The latest Hukou reform came after the release of the New Urbanization

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[12] In 1983, the State Council drafted and wrote the private property ownership rights (including real estate property rights) into the Constitution for preparing the transition to a market-oriented housing market (Chen *et al.*, 2011). In 1988, new land administration laws were established for separating the right-to-use from the state-owned land ownership (Jiang *et al.*, 2017).

[13] After the land policy reform in the 1990s, the distribution of welfare housing still progressed slowly due to the continuing debate on the sale of state-owned land and company dormitories (Chen, Guo and Wu, 2011). The urban housing reform conducted in 1998 had abolished welfare housing and enabled rights to private property ownership (Chen *et al.*, 2011).

[14] After the 1990s, the liberalization of Hukou allowed rural migrants to register as contemporary urban residents and get a job in cities (Weilier, 2015).

Plan in 2014, aiming to extend the basic urban services to the migrant population and rural residents (State Council, 2014; Chan, 2014). Additionally, it separates the land rights from rural Hukou. According to the Yunnan Department of Public Security (2015), this new household registration system will remove the separation between the rural and urban classes simply by identifying the regional difference.[15] It will also provide rural residents with more social benefits without affecting their rights to agricultural land (Yunnan Department of Public Security, 2015). Moreover, the New Urbanization Plan claims to grant 100 million new Hukou to temporary residents in cities and towns where the urban population (*Cheng-qu-ren-kou*, 城区人口)[16] is lower than 3 million by 2020 (Chan, 2014). There will also be no restrictions preventing rural migrants from acquiring resident status in small cities and towns where the urban population is lower than one million (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2014). Li (2017) suggests that this plan will help a significant number of ethnic minority migrants to move from rural areas to cities.

When considering the location, increasing populations within towns signify the development of non-agricultural industries (Li, 2017). These towns are important for China's urbanization since they deal directly with labour surplus from the countryside. Large cities have a limited capacity to absorb the rural surplus labour force. Therefore, towns are usually assigned a significant role in receiving large numbers of these rural migrants. It is evident that these rural migrants positively influence the transformation of traditional lifestyles and civilizations in their hometowns (Liu, 2013). There is also evidence that this can increase secondary and tertiary industries in rural areas as a result of major economic growth (Wang and Hu, 1999). Ultimately, the newly released land management law consolidates rural land rights and allows better commercial use of rural construction lands[17] (The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China—TNPC, 2018). This leads to the rural population being decreasingly enticed by urban Hukou and subsequently, more resources are captured for urbanizing the rural areas.

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[15] For the purpose of promoting urbanization for the rural population, the State Council drafted a unitary household registration system. It is suggested that rural and urban populations will both be registered in a "Resident Hukou". Each province will gradually abrogate the original Hukou system based on their individual implementation schemes.

[16] Cities and towns in China are actually comprised of urban and rural areas.

[17] Starting on January 1st, 2020, rural collective construction lands can enter the real estate market without the transition to state-owned lands (TNPC, 2019).

2.1.2. Land-centred urbanization

Contemporary urban development in China is centred on land. Since the economic reforms, marketization has had a fundamental impact on the socio-spatial order of Chinese cities (Chen, 2011). A blossoming manufacturing industry has drawn an influx of migrants from rural areas to cities, and this has led to extensive construction of urban housing. Making use of the market mechanism, local authorities stimulate investments and other economic activities through the housing market. Many of them regard urban construction[18] as a machine for economic growth and the solution to an over-accumulation of capital. As a result, the growth rate of urban built-up areas has increased much more quickly than the growth of the urban population has. Between 2001 and 2007, the areas of cities at prefecture-level had grown by 70% whereas the associated population increased by merely 30% (Zheng *et al*., 2014). The contrast between these rates implies a significant number of vacant apartments. Urban land could be used more efficiently instead of building an oversupply of urban housing. Chen *et al*. (2016) suggest that urbanization not only attempts to increase the urban area but also requires local authorities to balance every dimension of the development.

As part of urban expansion, large amounts of cultivated land were permanently transformed for industrial and commercial use. This kind of transformation in land use resulted in many concerns such as waste of land resources and environmental degradation. Currently, cities in the developing world that grow through a strategy of privileging economic growth have excluded many stakeholders, particularly the poor and the marginalized (Mahadevia, 2001; McGranahan, Schensul and Singh, 2016). Mahadevia (2001) suggests that the new perspective of sustainable development[19] should be inclusive and people-centred.[20] According to Zhu and Tian (2017), inclusive urbanization in China could be successful through a three-

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[18] Urban construction in China has two fronts. One is urban projects managed by municipal governments and the other is rural, non-agricultural development initiated by village collectives (Zhu & Tian, 2017).

[19] Sustainable development is a key term in contemporary development policymaking and debates. However, many development programmes emphasize the environmental aspects of urban development and economic growth which ignore the basic human needs of the poor in developing countries and increase social inequality (Mahadevia, 2001).

[20] People-centred development has gained increasing acceptance since the 1990s. It emphasizes that development should be inclusive and use a bottom-up approach to consider all dimensions of sustainable development (Mahadevia, 2001).

pronged strategy: 1) subsistence farmers' rights to their collective land should be clearly defined when treating land as an economic asset; 2) rural development and village improvement should be incorporated into municipal planning as a priority and provide enough social facilities and infrastructure; and 3) urban spatial expansion should be restricted to curb urban sprawl. In response to the current urbanization challenges, the Chinese government is advocating improved practices of sustainable development (Chen, 2015; Choy and Li, 2017).

2.1.3. People-centred urbanization

Within the international agenda, the publication of both the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (2015) and the Habitat III New Urban Agenda (2016) gave rise to the concept of inclusive urbanization (Shand, 2018). Significantly, the 11th Sustainable Development Goal is to "make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable" (UN, 2015). The commitment to leave no one behind implies that inclusive urbanization must be the theme of the UN-Habitat III New Urban Agenda. According to Shand (2018), inclusion also refers to the distribution of benefits in which all city inhabitants can enjoy the same benefits of urbanization and realize their rights to the city.[21]

As discussed earlier, the New Urbanization Plan is working towards people-centred urbanization in China (Cao *et al*., 2014). The central government has made several important changes to improve the implementation of the plan. There are more institution-led reforms, such as the new Hukou reform and the new land management law, that aim to cover rural dwellers with basic urban services and protect their rights to the city. Along with these reforms, the central government has granted more autonomy to municipalities. Many local authorities can operate their own implementation schemes under a workable framework. For example, amongst the medium-sized cities (with an urban population between 500 thousand and one million), those with higher carrying capacity could make their own decisions to grant more Hukou to migrants (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2014). This will urbanize the ethnic minority population by encouraging more minorities to live in cities (Li, 2017). Moreover, regarding the preservation of folk houses, the central government also highlights the need to respect the preference of local villagers (UPDY, 2018). However, without setting the same standard for all local authorities

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[21] The right to the city is an idea that was first proposed by Henri Lefebvre, and this idea can be recognized in the New Urban Agenda (2016) of "leaving no one behind".

and due to the lack of a universal monitoring system, it is difficult to ensure all municipalities are making real progress with good working ethics.

2.1.4. Urban planning experiences

A top-down planning system is dominating urban development in China. Many Chinese metropolises are facing an increasing shortage of construction land; therefore, the central government has begun to shift its policy focus to the existing built-up areas in cities (Guo *et al*., 2018). Li and Liu (2018) and Guo *et al*. (2018) both discuss the redevelopment of the Village in the City (VIC)[22] in terms of improving land use efficiency, as well as how cities can use this kind of village as a growth machine.

The Chinese government makes primary decisions regarding urban planning at three different levels.[23] Many processes are political and have not fully met the needs of local people. On the planning and policy side, Logan (2008) describes this top-down system as fragmented due to the contestation for authority between the different levels of government. Notably, there is competition between different jurisdictions at the same level. Other challenges to the effectiveness of policy execution are the decisions being obstructed by municipal offices, along with the transitions between periods of centralization and decentralization (Logan, 2008). The local traditions that are essential to cultural identity have been ignored by local authorities, architects and developers for a long time (Chen, 2011; Yang, 2016). Recently, in light of cultural reflection and restoration, some architects have begun to appropriately merge traditional elements with modern building requirements and construction methods. In response to the cultural preservation objective of the New Urbanization Plan, the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (MOHURD) has published instructive guidelines for local builders. Since competitiveness is the basic objective of city branding,[24] this has led to a variety of urban projects in

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[22] Li & Liu (2018) state that the VIC (*Cheng-zhong-cun*, 城中村) is a special category of collectively owned land within urban areas. However, residential lands in the VIC cannot legally be developed for commercial use because they are strictly regulated by the rural administrative system (Li & Liu, 2018). They also argue that the development of VIC occurs because urban administrative and monitoring systems do not effectively cover the collectively owned lands in urban areas.

[23] Like other countries, there are three levels of government in China: national, provincial and municipal.

[24] City branding is the process of applying the strategy of product branding to cities. The practice of city branding in China started in the 1980s and has yielded both positive and negative outcomes (Zhao, 2015).

China. For instance, the Dali municipal government has carried out many Bai architecture revitalization projects which seek to enhance the city's attractiveness and build the identity of the city (Zhao, 2015).

2.2. Minorities' urbanization in contemporary China

In addition to the Han majority, there are fifty-five ethnic minority groups officially defined by China's central government. This is the outcome of several historical and political processes. Due to differential policy treatment,[25] the minority population has increased significantly in the past few decades. **Figure 2.1** compares population growth rates between Han and ethnic minorities from 1990 to 2010. The growth rates of minorities are higher than that of the Han, especially in the 1990s. The minority population as a percentage of the national population grew from 6.6% in 1982 (Wu, 2014) to 8.8% in 2012 (Guo, 2017). In 2020, the minority population increased 10.3% in comparison to the 2010 Census data (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2021). Even though the percentage of minority populations is relatively small, the absolute number is significant. According to the 7th Census of Population, the number of ethnic minorities exceeded 125 million in 2020 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2021). Southwestern China has the highest concentration of ethnic minorities (Li, 2017). Apart from the fact that minorities have unique cultural characteristics, most of them live in peripheral locations. Cao (2010) argued that ethnic minorities are socially, economically and politically significant to China's development. Education is important as it lets minorities better adapt to the urban environment and integrate with China's modernization (Cao, 2010). However, Cao and Feng (2010) find that, due to cultural reasons, girls tend to get married at an early age and have less access to education in comparison to boys in the ethnic minority regions. Therefore, optimizing the socio-cultural environment may be a necessary governmental intervention in China's inclusive urbanization.

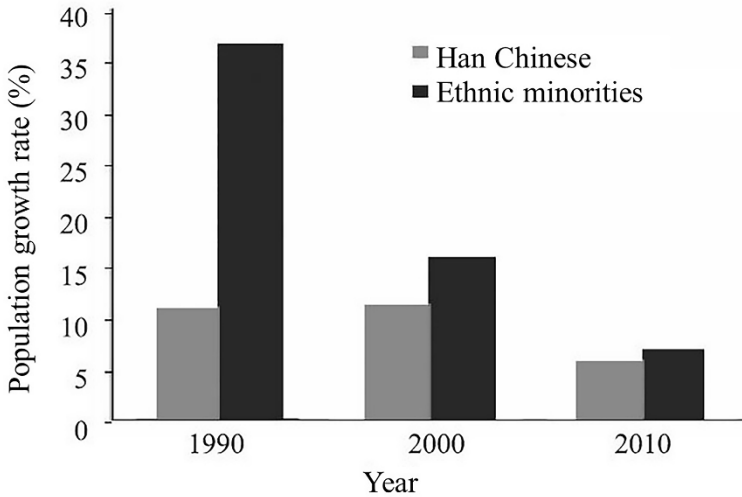[25] The One Child Policy did not apply to ethnic minorities.

Figure 2.1. China's population growth rate from 1990 to 2010
Source: Cao *et al.* (2014, 24)

Among all the ethnic minority groups in China, eight have more than one million urban dwellers. They are Hui, Korean, Manchu, Miao, Mongol, Tujia, Uygur and Zhuang (Zhu and Blachford, 2012). If comparing the largest minority group with the smallest of these eight, the Zhuang had a population of 16.6 million in 2010 while the Bai only had about 2 million (Gustafsson and Yang, 2015; Guo, 2017). **Figure 2.2** depicts the urbanization rates of minorities from 1990 to 2010. While the increase in the total minority population is remarkable, they were not actively involved in the urbanization processes. The urbanization rate of minorities increased from 16% in 1990 to 33% in 2010 and, at the same time, the national urbanization rate jumped from 26% to 50% (Cao *et al*., 2014). Unlike other ethnic groups, Korean people are extremely urbanized, having a higher level of urbanization than the entire population of China (Gustafsson and Yang, 2015).