

From landlessness to homelessness: exploring landless farmer's loss of belongingness after land expropriations in urban China

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ABSTRACT: *In a world where rapid urbanization and industrialization is still on-going, land expropriation, landless farmers and their post-landless lives becomes an unneglectable phenomenon and causing serious social problem that threatening social stability and coherence within the local and national level. In order to gain better understanding on farmers' post landless lives, this paper introduces 'belongingness' (as a concept of people's feel of home) to study people's social behaviors. After that, this study analyzes the loss of farmers in land expropriation and how they are related and affecting farmer's sense of belongingness. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that a diversification of compensation strategy is needed and compensation for farmers' belongingness is necessary for both individual farmers' and the societies' social capital construction. Understanding these may prevent marginalization of the farmers and facilitate better integration of them.*

Keywords : *Belongingness, Land Expropriations, Landless Farmers, Social Capital, Urban China*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Urbanization is spreading out all over the world with the economic growth, especially the global south. According to the data from the World Bank, the proportion of urban population in the world increased from 48.6% in 2004 to 56.4% in 2015[1]. The urban area is under the pressure of increased population and seeks for expansion in order to accommodate them. Many empirical studies on urban development shows that urban expansion (or urban sprawl) is still inevitable due to the rapid urbanization process especially in developing countries[2][3]. Therefore, land grabbing is more and more frequently occurring as a consequence of urbanization[4]. Land expropriation usually involves in such urban expansion as a tool to transform agricultural land into urban land which is also defined as land conversion[5]. Farmers lost their land during the expropriation and therefore needed to be compensated for the losses. Thus, it is important to identify the loss of farmers in land expropriation. Since many farmers were absorbed by the cities with their lands and started their new urban lives after the expropriation, it is important to study farmers' lives after land expropriation (post landless lives) to measure the on-going damages from land expropriation rather than focusing the one-time damages only. An important concept is needed in order to interpret the fundamental feeling in the change of life: belongingness. Studies have proved that feeling and belongings would facilitate individuals to better perform in groups and achieve better psychological well-beings[6]. Moreover, current studies on "belongingness" are mainly based on migration and immigration under the increasingly mobile world. In most of the cases, the targets are people who voluntarily move from one place to another, so their movements are motivated by seeking for better opportunities. However, people like the landless farmers are forced to leave their places and start their new lives against their will as well as their living skills. Therefore, studying landless farmers' loss of belongingness in their future lives would contribute to identifying their long-term loss and help better understand what constrains farmers facing in integrating into cities. With such an objective, this paper would attempt to answer the question on "what are the belongingness loss of landless farmers and what are the impacts of such loss in their new urban lives" through linking farmers' physical loss to social and emotional loss in the context of landless urban lives.

The following sections would firstly provide theoretical bases to define and materialize the concept of "belongingness". The next part then identifies farmers' loss from land expropriation, followed by linking the concept belongingness through exploring the meaning of land, home and place. Conclusions will be drawn in the end with the significance of belongingness to farmers' post landless lives and the necessity to compensate farmers' belongingness loss.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are numbers of researches and articles studying the effect of feeling belonging on individual's mental/physical health, social performance as well as social integrations[7][8][9]. According to these studies, the sense of belonging is a fundamental desire of individuals' lives. People are motivated by their belonging needs and perceive belongingness through building up stable and positive interpersonal connections and interactions. On the other hand, belongingness is strongly related to one's root. For instance, the place where people have lived in for generations, life course experiences and other symbolic events or items relating to people's origins are attributed to one's root. Pitonyak cited that "to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul" to express the significance and existence of belongingness[8].

Nira provided a more specific definition of belongingness in his research that "belonging is about emotional attachment, about feeling 'at home'"[10]. The definition seems simple. However, the meaning of home is another abstractive and subjective concept that differs through time, region and cultures. For instance, Hagepointed out that "home" is an on-going project relating to one's sense of hope for the future[11].

Fortunately, there are some common criteria of home identified by previous studies such as familiarity and control, safe and secure, as well as self-expression and identification where Duyvendak conceptualized the criteria as "Familiarity", "Heaven" and "Haven"[12][13]. Duyvendak set the concept "Familiarity" as the precondition for the other two. He explained it from the perspective of environmental psychology that "home is perceived as a safe and familiar space, be it a haven or shelter, where people can relax, retreat and care"[14]. Not only the place itself, place-related daily routines and activities also contribute to the sense of familiarity. Once the condition of "Familiarity" has been satisfied, it comes to the next stage that a place should be seen safe and private. In most cases, the micro level of the house, is considered as "home". However, feeling at home is not limited in private space. It is claimed that people can also perceive the feel of home in public places. In order to achieve that, the place needs to be symbolic for individuals to 'be', develop and express themselves as a group and build up relationships and communications within the group. It is called "place as haven" by Duyvendak.

III. ANALYSIS OF BELONGINGNESS

If we summarize the scholars' view on belongingness, it can be concluded that belonging is basically an emotional attachment. Such emotions can be attached to places, group of people (community & society) or one's personal experience. The three attachment subjects are related to and can be reinforced each other. Taking an example from Duyvendak, the form of gay community in Castro, was initially started by the excluded gays who were forced to leave their hometown in order to seek for freedoms. After they formed up the gay neighborhood in Castro, they viewed there as their true home rather than where they initially came from. The gay groups, who could not feel at home in their original home places because of whom they are, started with getting together and then settled down in a new place. Their similar personal experience and characters helped them to form a group and the place where the group settled was then given a meaning by the group. The case also reflects the idea that feeling of "home" is constructible through shared identities, consensus, symbolic buildings and places. Home does not necessarily have to be a private space, or a shelter but rather the feeling of connecting to other people and places.

Here rises another question: "Why belongingness matters?" After finish defining the concept, it comes to how does it contribute to individuals' lives and what is the meaning of studying that?

Firstly, as it is mentioned before that belonging is a fundamental human desire. People have the motivation to form and maintain stable and long-term interpersonal relationships so as to continue identifying themselves through the process. Baumeister and Leary put "love and belongingness" into the middle of his motivation hierarchy, right after the survival needs such as food and secure[7]. The position of the need of belongingness also indicates that people need belongings to achieve higher level of needs when they fulfil individuals' needs to perceive as an important part of achieving one's wellbeing[15]. Other researches done in psychology studies also indicate that feeling of belonging enhances students' performances at school and contributes to clinical use as well as continued theory development in psychiatric nursing which are key components of human wellbeing[16].

As the other key dimension of belongingness, the place attachment can be well explained by the geographical theory of affordance. It is Gibson who presented the theory that "the affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes either for good or ill"[17]. The affordance is therefore the opportunity observed by individuals to broaden their capability in achieving their valued lives (freedom)[18]. Affordance of places differs through different observers based on their knowledge and skills. For instance, an agricultural field would bring crop harvesting to farmers with cultivating skills but might not offer the same to people without such skill. On the other hand, the affordance could also be non-physical such as atmospheres. Ettma used an example of skate-boarders to show both affordances of place (physical and non-physical). Kerbs in a park can be perceived by skate-boarders as tools to practice their tricks.

On the other hand, with the gathering of skate-boarders in the park, the park is now providing a skating environment for skaters to entertain and exchange knowledge[19].

From the above we learn that belongingness is a basic emotional attachment, and it is the feeling at “home” and proverbially needed by human beings. The attachment could be meant to certain people or groups, places and people’s life courses and experiences. The feeling of home should contain at least the three dimensions: people knows the place (Familiarity), the place is safe and private space (Heaven) and place for self-expression and identification (Haven). In the meantime, belongingness is a key element for human beings’ wellbeing, both physically and socially.

IV. FARMER’S REACTION: LANDLESSNESS AND HOMELESSNESS

After identifying what belongingness is and for, we continue to analyze the loss of farmers in land expropriation and how they are related and affecting farmer’s sense of belongingness.

Expropriation, also known as eminent domain or compulsory purchase, means the legal institution that allows government to acquire properties that against the will of the property owners to achieve some public purpose[20]. Cernea brought his Risk of Impoverishment model to address farmers’ loss from land expropriation[21]. The model was based on livelihood approach that divides and analyzes people’s livelihood assets through five capital perspectives: physical capital, natural capital, human capital, social capital and financial capital[22]. According to Cernea, losing land has some other consequences despite the land itself (losing the land itself was defined by Cernea as Landlessness) and their houses (Homelessness). First, people will lose their income source. Since lots of land expropriation occurred under the circumstance of taking agricultural land into urban construction land, farmers who used to live and work on their land are losing their income source, especially when they were absorbed into the city where their cultivating skill does not fit the labor market. It is called Joblessness by Cernea. The loss of income source would then lead to food insecurity of the affected households and may threaten their lives (Mortality). The affected farmers’ disadvantaged economic situation would then marginalize them from the mainstreams in their urban lives (Marginalization). Moreover, the displacements caused by land expropriation would also lead to the loss of common property (pastures, forested lands, water bodies, burial grounds, quarries, etc.) or services and break down the previous networks of the affected farmers (Social Disarticulation). The risks of impoverishment and their related livelihood capitals are summarized in the Table 1:

Table1 Cernea’s risk of impoverishment model and livelihood assets

Cernea’s risk of impoverishment	Affected livelihood Assets
Landlessness	Natural capital/ Financial capital
Homelessness (home as shelter)	Physical capital/ Financial capital
Loss of Access to Common Property and Services	Natural capital/ Financial capital
Joblessness	Human capital
Marginalization	Social capital
Social Disarticulation	Social capital
Food insecurity	Natural capital
Increased Morbidity and Mortality	Human capital

We firstly look at what Cernea called “landlessness” and “homelessness” in relation to belongingness. The physical characters of land and home would match to the dimension of place attachment of belongingness. Farmers are detached from their working/ productive land and the place where they used to live. From the perspective of affordance theory, they lost the opportunity of harvesting and living afforded by the land. The same as the common property and services since the farmers can no longer have access to the same piece of land.

The risk of “joblessness”, “food insecurity” and “morbidity” are paying more attention on farmers’ changed lives in the future. The biggest change is that there’s no longer incomes from agricultural products since they have already lost them and been absorbed by the cities. In fact, the change of living source detached farmers from their previous life courses, routines and experiences. They became fresh starters with (in most cases) unsuitable knowledge and skills in the cities. The damages cause them losing the familiarities of their lives and turned them into strangers of themselves. To reflect onto the three attributes of home in Duyvendak’s study, farmers who lost their land and were replaced into cities have lost the whole three dimension of home which is “familiarity”, “home as heaven” and “home as haven”.

The last part, “marginalization” and “social disarticulation” are the consequence losing belongingness in the city. The term marginalization refers to a process that people are trapping into a downward situation because of their disadvantaged economic and social status (can be caused by external changes or internal characters). Instead of presenting a static situation, marginalization emphasizes the dynamics of the downward trend[23]. On the other hand, there is always a term “fitting in” when talking about the immigrants’ social integration in their hosting countries. The term can also be used in the situation in studying farmers’ urban lives.

Basically, it takes time for “outsiders” to fit into a new environment in real term. In the case of transnational immigrations, it might take decades, even several generations to finally achieve the goal of “fit in” [24]. To imply the similarity to the farmers who also experienced change of living environment (against their willing), they also face with the problem of “fit in” since they became the minority of the city and “strangers” to the city. Thus, theoretically speaking, the landless and displaced farmers lost their previous home as a whole because of the big change of life.

V. CONCLUSION

It is claimed that farmers are not well compensated for their losses because their losses are much more than a piece of land. We tend to argue that disadvantaged people can get together and have a place for self-expression and rebuilding their social capital. However, this self-organized belongingness seeking might threaten the social capital of the society as a whole. The agent oriented belongingness building is creating social exclusion and segregation between different groups and people from disadvantaged groups would face to marginalization because of the segregation. Therefore, government interventions at macro level are needed to build a coherent society rather than a small community. Policies promoting positive interactions, inclusion societies should be carried out. On the other hand, with discovering the belongingness losses of landless farmers and the threatens of self-oriented belongingness (re)building, governments should make forces on compensating farmers’ belongingness at a bigger picture in order to prevent marginalization of the farmers and facilitate better integration of them. Unfortunately, current compensation studies and policies are lack of such attentions and still keeping their focus on market value and property rights.

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