



Nick R. Smith. *The End of the Village: Planning the Urbanization of Rural China.* Globalization and Community Series. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021. Illustrations, maps. 324 pp. \$27.00, paper, ISBN 978-1-5179-1092-1.

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The End of the Village: Planning the Urbanization of Rural China is an urban studies book by Nick R. Smith, an assistant professor of architecture and urban studies at Barnard College, Columbia University. Smith presents and analyzes narratives and practices of the municipal planners and policymakers, village cadres, and village inhabitants in Chongqing and Hailong, a city and its peripheral village in southwest China, in response to the rural development crisis and in the context of the national urban-rural coordination program (2003-13) and its successors, such as the new-type urbanization (begun in 2014). The events documented in this book span from 1997 to 2018. Through in-depth analysis of interviews, ethnographical evidence, and spatial analysis, Smith reveals the actors' agency, the political nature of the urban-rural coordination program, and the devastating effect of the program on the Chinese village as a meaningful social institution and a viable unit for autonomous economic development. Moreover, on a theoretical level, he uncovers the generative force of a disjuncture between China's de jure administrative urban-rural separation and its de facto urban-rural integration. While the evidence-packed storytelling can serve as a valuable secondary source for students of urban stud-

ies as well as the history of contemporary China, the novel theoretical framework proposes a new approach to research on urbanization in China and Asia.

With this book, Smith achieves four goals. First and most directly, he rebuts the Chinese party-state's characterization of its urban-rural coordination program as nonpolitical initiatives that solely aim to improve welfare in rural areas. Keeping the spotlight on local actors, Smith demonstrates that local actors competed to interpret and leverage the national programs to serve their own goals, and the cumulative effects of their actions ended up eroding social and spatial institutions of the traditional village and turning the village into rural simulacra dependent on the urban area and the state. As a result, although rhetorically claimed to be for the advancement of rural welfare, the urban-rural coordination program practically pushed for integration of rural areas into an urban-centric configuration and extended the party-state's control into previously semi-autonomous rural areas.

Second, Smith's book adds to the existing critical literature on China's urban-rural coordination program, which has been scrutinizing gaps

between the stated objectives and the actual outcomes of individual policies, the uneven implementation of the program, and the cumulative effects of parallel programs that interact in unpredictable ways. To this body of work, he contributes a thorough case study that vividly documents the messy processes in the implementation of the national programs and a wide range of impacts of the program on rural society. As the title of the book summarizes, instead of bringing economic development to rural areas, urban-rural coordination brought “the end of the village” and reconstituted the urbanization of rural China for more easy party-state control. His account is in dialogue with critical analyses on urban-rural coordination and strengthens the case against the earliest literature on the same subject that uncritically adopted the party-state’s lens and narrative.

Third and most prominently, Smith introduces a new analytical framework to analyze urban-rural relations in China. As Smith summarizes, early research on urban-rural relations in reform era China was city-centric. Later studies on the subject discovered the unfitness of *de jure* urban-rural categories as an analytical framework to study rural transformations in China since the economic reform and wrestled with it by redefining the rural, emphasizing the internal heterogeneity of the rural and the varied ways urbanization unfolds outside of cities, or recombining China’s existing urban and rural categories. Smith points out that this fixation on creating refined conceptual urban-rural categories to account for novel rural developments misses the opportunity to consider the mismatch between urban and rural categories and processes as a generative force in Chinese urbanization. By following the actors’ actions in detail and in context, Smith successfully demonstrates that actors indeed manipulated the mismatch between urban and rural categories and processes to advance their interests, thereby shaping urbanization in China. Last, Smith argues for the usefulness of this framework to study urbaniz-

ation not just in China but also in Asia more broadly.

Smith supports his argument and theoretical agenda with skillful analysis of information from more than two hundred interviews conducted during his fieldwork in Chongqing and Hailong, ethnographic observation of actors, and spatial analysis. Using these varied sources, he depicts how local actors addressed the rural development crisis and welded the urban-rural coordination program to their benefit. The combination of interviews, ethnography, and spatial analysis is an outstanding methodological choice because it enables Smith to go beyond party-state documents and a sweeping narrative to reach the actual individuals living the rural development crisis and urban-rural coordination program. It is with these first-hand interviews and observations on the ground that Smith manages to present a comprehensive and lively recount of the impacts of urban-rural coordination on actual people, to unpack the politics in the program, to reveal the manipulation of disjuncture between *de jure* urban-rural separation and *de facto* urban-rural integration by actors, and to highlight the eventual consequence of the process: the disappearance of the village.

In the introduction, Smith lays out the historical context of and describes the urban-rural coordination program. He also explains why he selected Chongqing and Hailong as his subject of study. The program was launched by the party-state of China in response to the rural development crisis resulting from China’s *de jure* urban-rural separation. It included projects like the abolishment of agricultural taxes, land reform, and registration reform. The program started in 2003 and disappeared in 2013 when the next administration headed by Xi Jinping took power. However, it lived an afterlife in intensified versions in new national programs, such as the National Plan for New-Type Urbanization, introduced in 2014. Smith selected Chongqing and Hailong as examples to study villages’ transformation under these pro-

grams because they were some of the earliest and most consequential experiments in urban-rural coordination. As a result, Smith sets the backdrop for his following storytelling and establishes the significance of his case study.

Smith organizes the main content of the book into two major parts, each containing three chapters. The chapters are thematically organized, not chronologically. The events in chapter 1 span from 1997 to 2011, chapter 2, 2001-7, chapter 3, 2003-10, chapter 4, 2011-13, chapter 5, 2007-14, and chapter 6, 2013-18. The first part, chapters 1 to 3, introduces the three main actors, their challenges in the rural development crisis, their solutions, and the ways they adapted their solutions to the urban-rural coordination program. This first part of the book lays the groundwork for Smith's argument that actors had agency in the urbanization process and treated the *de jure* separation of rural and urban, or the disjuncture between China's *de jure* administrative urban-rural separation and its *de facto* urban-rural integration, as realities to be leveraged and coped with. In interactions with these forces, the actors generated alternative forms of urbanization. The second part of the book, chapters 4 to 6, analyzes the interactions among these three actors in urban-rural coordination and further illustrates how their actions, including their uses of the disjuncture between urban-rural categories and processes, contributed to the urbanization of the village.

In chapter 1, Smith aims to describe the municipal planners and policymakers responsible for implementing Chongqing's urban-rural coordination program. He does not include explicit definitions of "municipal planners" or "policymakers." It is implied that municipal planners refer to planning experts with relevant education and/or those serving in senior official roles in official organs or private institutes tasked with planning responsibilities—such as Chongqing's Bureau of Housing and Urban-Rural Development or Chongqing's Mu-

nicipal Planning and Design Institute. Policymakers seem to refer to higher-level municipal officials who oversaw more official duties, such as Chongqing's municipal mayor and party secretary. [1] Smith delivers a comprehensive introduction of planners but only more hidden and scattered mentions of policymakers.

In regard to planners, he shows that the core challenge to municipal urban planners was how to maintain their professional legitimacy and survive as a profession. Smith draws on previous research and Chongqing's examples to show that historically the urban planning profession found that its survival depended on scientific rationality, which served political leaders, and relied on the politically determined *de jure* urban-rural separation to define their planning subject and to conceal their inability to explain or guide messy rural developments. Detailing planners' opinions on and reactions to their tasks in the urban-rural coordination program, he shows that urban planners saw the program as a challenge to maintain its appeared scientific rationality. Because the program tossed the urban construction boundary up for negotiation and included rural areas, which contradicted theories and defied planning, into planners' responsibilities, planners needed strategies to keep a clear definition of their responsibilities and continue to demonstrate their scientific rationality. Smith analyzes planners' actions and exposes that their strategies amounted to an effort to preserve the *de jure* urban-rural separation while absorbing the rural into an urban-centric overarching plan. With these actions, the planners set villages on an alternative urbanization path.

With policymakers, however, their challenges in the rural development crisis, their solutions, and their adaptation to the urban-rural coordination program are less clear. Smith mentions that Chongqing's party secretaries had their own visions for urban development: one of the municipal secretaries brought in planning experts from

Beijing to support his view on urban development, one deputy mayor sought to expand Chongqing's urban land area for his development plan, and one interim party secretary of Chongqing called for the municipality's most remote villages to be fully depopulated. Nevertheless, there is no summative analysis in this chapter that synthesizes the challenges municipal policymakers faced in the rural development crisis or their response to these challenges. Nor is there an explicit argument on how policymakers tried to make sense of urban-rural coordination. Did policymakers share the same challenges and responses as the planners? If policymakers indeed refer to higher municipal officials, it is unlikely the case, although the policymakers had high stakes in planners overcoming their challenges because they were in a symbiotic relationship. In that case, a more explicit discussion on policymakers and an explanation of why they are considered the same analytical actor as the planners could have made this chapter easier to digest. If policymakers are referring to planners themselves, not higher municipal officials, perhaps a definition could have helped orient the readers more firmly. Notwithstanding, Smith cogently makes the case in chapter 1 that municipal planners had their own challenges and agendas in response to rural development crisis and urban-rural coordination, were incentivized to preserve urban-rural separation, and hence gave rise to a new form of urbanization—urbanization by other means.

In chapter 2, Smith discusses the second actor: Hailong's village cadres. Drawing on the literature on village leadership in China and Hailong village cadre Yan Jing's personal tales, Smith shows that the main challenges this group faced were how to retain political legitimacy and how to build financial and organizational capacity to catalyze village development in the midst of a rural development crisis and urban-rural coordination. Smith's narration and analysis draw out that the solution Hailong's leader pursued to address the leadership legitimacy crisis relied on his personal success as an

entrepreneur to produce a charismatic aura and his capabilities to deliver growth. Smith also notes that this strategy sets the village on a path-dependent trajectory of growth. Most importantly to Smith's central argument, he shows that village cadres leveraged the disjuncture between urban-rural categories and processes to achieve village growth. The cadres capitalized on the *de jure* rural status of their village and the accompanying possibility to collectivize and convert village land. Meanwhile, they grasped the opportunity afforded by the de-industrialization of the adjacent Chongqing municipality (Chongqing's policy of moving manufacturing industries out of the urban center to grow service industries) in urban-rural integration.[2] It was this simultaneous use of *de jure* urban-rural categories and *de facto* urban-rural integration that drove the rapid growth of Hailong and defined its economic as well as sociospatial transformation in urbanization. In other words, the actor's interaction with the disjuncture between urban-rural categories and processes shaped the autonomous industrialization without urbanization in Hailong village.

Smith introduces Hailong's inhabitants in chapter 3. He uses case studies by other scholars and his own ethnographical research to show that the main challenges villagers faced were stability and survival. He then presents his rich ethnographical evidence to describe the villagers' solution to these challenges. With conversations and textured observations, Smith illustrates that villagers used their unique rural land use rights to construct a network of social spaces that hosted community-based systems of mutual support. Moreover, through spatial analysis of villagers' houses, Smith reveals how villagers used their relatively higher degree of freedom in land use rights to also build their houses as physical hubs of their family and enable diversification of their family economic activities that captured economic benefits in industrialized urban centers. The urban-rural coordination program posed an immediate threat to these effective solutions because its regis-

tration reform sought to convert rural residents into urban residents, thereby taking away their unique land use rights. Villagers responded to this threat with a reluctance to give up their rural status. This chapter aptly establishes the case that villagers leveraged the party-state's *de jure* system of urban-rural difference and exploited the *de facto* urban-rural integration processes to formulate their survival strategies. Smith further argues that these strategies could be conceptualized as an alternative approach to urbanization if urbanization can be understood as an intensification in the circulation of affect across assemblages of human and nonhuman actors defined by their mutual interactions rather than by their relation to a territorial or scalar hierarchy. In this sense, village residents' interactions with the disjuncture, too, were generating urbanization.

Chapter 4 focuses on how municipal planners and policymakers contested the definition of Hailong's planning boundaries with the village cadres. Smith's central argument in this chapter is that the urban planning process was political rather than scientific or rational as the planners and policymakers claimed and that it was the politics of coordinative planning that dedicated the formulation of Hailong's statutory village plan. In the chapter's storytelling, actors other than municipal planners and policymakers also contested the definition with village cadres, including district officials, party-state leaders, and urban planning experts accountable not to local but to national state leaders, but Smith treats these additional actors as part of the main actors or as resources to the main actors. District officials are considered sub-municipal policymakers, party-state leaders, and urban planning experts accountable to the national leaders and are considered resources to be leveraged by village cadres instead of active players in the game. The protagonists of the story are municipal planners and policymakers—the High Tech Zone's management committee—and the village cadres. Smith uses comparisons of different versions of Hailong's village plans and Chongqing's master

plans, reports of political developments, and planners' accounts to show that both the zone's committee and the village cadres strived to seize the opportunity of "relaunch," a national initiative under the urban-rural coordination program, to push for their development plans that would affect Hailong. To me, there is a slight disconnect between this chapter and chapter 1, because planners' fundamental drive to defend its appearance of scientific rationality as exposed in chapter 1 is not apparent in chapter 4's narrative. It is not immediately clear who made up the majority of the High Tech Zone management committee and what motivated them. It seems that the zone behaved more in line with policymakers who were primarily concerned with municipal growth and expansion of urban land (for economic and political reasons), although it is mentioned that planners expected the zone's master plan to integrate rogue villages into the municipal's planning regime. This vagueness again brings up the question of who the policymakers were and why they were the same analytical actor as planners. However, it does not undermine Smith's overall argument in this chapter. Unpacking the details in the process of negotiation, Smith successfully demonstrates that indeed the *de jure* separation of urban and rural was far from scientific, rational, or objective; the zone (a mixture of planners and policymakers) and the village cadres drew on their own political resources to support their versions of urban construction boundary; and they manipulated the *de jure* separation of urban and rural to advance their own agenda, all the while shaping the urban contour of Chongqing and Hailong.

Chapter 5 explores how Hailong village cadres repurposed municipal policymakers' policies in the urban-rural coordination program to consolidate control over Hailong's collectively controlled land and convert them for real estate project Hailong City, as well as transform the villagers into shareholders. Smith argues that Hailong cadres rode on national policies and interpreted municipal policies aimed at addressing the disjuncture

between de jure urban-rural separation and de facto urban-rural integration to carry out their own growth plan. In doing so, they successfully pursued a path of self-urbanization. This chapter reads like the second half of chapter 4 because the first half of the chapter covers the same plan discussed in chapter 4. Whereas chapter 4 discusses how the urban construction boundary in this plan was negotiated, chapter 5 explains how this plan was passed and used by village cadres. Smith contextualizes Hailong cadres' challenge and stake in passing the plan by explaining the urban-rural land use regulatory framework in China and the economic problems it generated for villages' self-urbanization. He then tells the story of how municipal policymakers caved to village cadres because of a new national policy and thus granted official approval to village cadres' plans, as well as how village cadres used municipal policy precedents to bypass legal obstacles and *legally* proceed with the real estate project in their village plan. If some of the village cadres' maneuvers could be unpacked further, how village cadres were able to repurpose municipal policymakers' policies would be clearer. For example, how did Hailong cadres convince the town that they could directly purchase construction land from another village without going through the municipality, and why did the municipality not insist that it act as the middleman? However, the omission of this negotiation process, perhaps due to source limitations, does not jeopardize the overall soundness of this chapter's argument. The point is clear that Hailong cadres used national policies and municipal policies in the urban-rural coordination program for their own agenda and their actions resulted in the village's self-urbanization.

In chapter 6, Smith documents villagers' responses to the end of the village and the displacement of both village's institutions and its inhabitants. With the construction of Hailong City, introduced in chapter 5, Hailong cadres were self-urbanizing the village. Using rich ethnography again, Smith paints the varied experiences of villagers in

the urbanization process. Weaving together observations and conversations, Smith shows that some villagers felt uneasiness with the end of the village's sociospatial institutions and their profit loss from the very start, while others underwent a progression from being optimistic about the financial and social benefits of urbanization to feeling nostalgia for the loss of their homes, fear for urban social relations, and anger toward the village cadres for their exclusion of villagers from decision making and profit-sharing. In the end, most villagers opted to leave the village for their family elsewhere instead of moving into the new Hailong City. Intriguingly, Smith used the "ghost talks" by the villagers as an organizing theme to document how villagers expressed their negative feelings toward the urbanization of their village. This chapter is a humanistic depiction of the results of actors' actions in response to the rural development crisis and urban-rural coordination program—the end of the village.

In the conclusion of the book, Smith briefly outlines the existence of tensions between artificial categories of land governance and the transformational processes of land use intensification in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. Noticing the similarities, he calls for an Asian agenda for urban studies that investigates the generative force of such disjunctures and helps to bring these contested politics of disjunctive urbanization into focus.

Overall, this book presents a detailed and comprehensive case study of local actions in the rural development crisis and urban-rural coordination program in China. It successfully reveals the politics of this process and points out that the party-state's effort to combat the rural development crisis is the beginning of the end of the rural as it has existed. With analyses that follow the narratives and practices of the actors, Smith shows that the disjuncture between China's administrative urban-rural categories and its urban-rural reality was present in this urbanization process as

a reality and a force. Its theoretical novelty is well established and provides a helpful framework to conceptualize urbanization in China. Moreover, thanks to its use of interviews and ethnography, this book could be useful as a secondary source. In sum, this book is valuable not just to students of urban studies but also to students of the contemporary history of China, especially to those who study the history of urbanization, rural development, urban-rural relationships, the urban planning profession, and local politics.

Notes

[1]. It is unclear how Smith categorizes municipal policymakers. In this chapter, Chongqing's vice party secretary and deputy mayor, Huang Qifang, and party secretary, Bo Xilai, are treated as municipal leaders, but in later chapters, Chongqing's municipal secretary, Bo Xilai, is also treated as a national political leader.

[2]. Smith does not spell out in the book whether this municipal policy is part of the urban-rural coordination program. Overall, it is not explicit whether the practices of village cadres described in this chapter were in response to the program.

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