



Title: ‘When a Rural County becomes an Urban District’: The Country Government and Rural Urbanisation in Yunnan province

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The presentation primarily delved into the transformation of rural area of Chenggong (city district in Kunming) in China into a major urban district. It also analysed the social outcome of such processes in this area. Mainly three processes were involved in such transformations. First, the municipal government has transformed the rural county into a modern urban district by constructing a new University town, high raise apartments, and entertainment zones. In a drive towards the making of a new Kunming city, the municipal government has set up the district headquarter in Chenggong. Secondly, the transformation of Chenggong county (known as ‘flower kingdom’) into an industrial cluster model has created a new business model where large companies have become important players. Third, in the process of land transfer, the rural populations have become landless.

Chenggong county in China has experienced massive urban expansion in terms of its size and scale. China has administrative hierarchy in the urban and rural forms of government. County government is the local government at the basic level. It has partial urban land under its control, which can be used for urban infrastructure and projects. However, the party committee at the county level plays a crucial role. Their performance is evaluated and incentives, promotions and appointments are based on that.

In 2003, the process of transformation of Chenggong, an agrarian county to urban city district began and continued till 2013. This county initially was known as the ‘flower kingdom’ in Chinese popular parlance. It was considered to be a greenhouse cultivation area, where cash

crop cultivation was much in demand. At present, Kunming municipal government has used vast area of this urban land to build a university town. For this, land has been extracted from the Chenggong county province. In its transformation from rural county to an urban district, a new model of industrial cluster has been created. There has been the rise of a new class of landless peasantry, who are dislocated in this entire urban expansion project.

The rural county has become part of the urban centre and they have been changed from a Xian (County) to Zhu (district). This has led to a verticality of many county government offices. Once you transfer from county to municipal or district level, it means municipal administration has more power to get taxes from bureau and the county government. Before 1994, China followed an unified system of collection of allocation of taxes made by central government. But after 1994, there was a new system which allowed flexibility in income and expenditure. Eventually, there was deficit between income and expenditure and there was pressure on county government to increase its fiscal capacity. Now the fiscal capacity needs to be improved. The system of sharing of taxes between central and the provisional government also changed a lot from 2002 to 2005. County government has to give some tax to the provincial government as well. The idea was that, if you have less money no matter what you do, you have to give taxes to the central government. County governments also have to pay some taxes collected from land use to the authorities. County government has to think of various ways to generate revenue. The other problem which county government was facing was the problem of enterprises reforms. Most enterprises were dealing with agrarian commodities, such as food, wine, tobacco chemicals and went through severe debt crises. To solve this problem, county government tried to orient enterprises in to commercial based enterprises.

In the drive to modernisation, part of the county has been merged with Kunming. In 2002, it was mainly an agrarian county, and land was limited, it was only 0.75 mu of land given to farmers. It has now evolved to a large scale commercial production house. Agriculture population in this county constitutes of almost 80 per cent of total population. So, it is mainly cash crop cultivation that engages most of the population within the county. The farmers took extra land on lease from the other farmers or they rented their land to the commercial enterprises. The farmers also engaged in other kind of business, such as, orchard farming. It was a highly specialised agrarian production based county where cash crop cultivation was actually able to give them higher returns than the grain cultivation.

Yunnan suffers from the feeling of being backward in the Chinese provincial economy. 1999 was the turning point when a world culture expo was held in Kunming and since then the focus of the municipal government has been to change the region into an international mega city centre. Emphasis was given to Chenggong county because it was close to the Kunming municipality and would develop faster.

The Dounan flower market in Chenggong is one of the largest flower markets. This has been part of the new industrial cluster model introduced by county government. The Dounan flower market began as a family run business. Later in 1990's land area used for the flower product expanded. Change came in terms of production of greenhouse cultivations of flowers, which has now become a feature of Chenggong's Dounan flower market. Also in 1995, Chenggong county government invested 3.84 million yuan and constructed a flower trading market in an area of 12mu. In 1997, this increased to 6,030mu and then in 1998, they also created shopping place where various kinds of flowers could be sold. In 2002, Kunming national flower auction centre introduced specialised flower centre in Chenggong county.

The main social issue that emerged is that of a new class of landless peasantry. Most of the population moved from the rural county to the cities, but in case of rural county that population has refused to move from this county. They have been unable to go along with the transformations and move to newer kinds of jobs. For generations, these people have been farmers and now find it tough to change professions.

In conclusion, the speaker observed that in this case study Chenggong county, land has become a contested space. There are various studies which talk about how the 're-territorialisation' of land by the municipal government has redefined spaces that they can control. In case of China, municipal government not only controls inner core which is considered to be part of their jurisdiction but they want to control outer space which is actually the county government's area. The spaces are contested and have created conflicts between the local governments who want urban expansion, agro business management farm and land to be used for commercial purposes and focus on cash crop production.

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About the Speaker

Dr. Ritu Agarwal is an Associate Professor at the Centre for East Asian studies, School of

International Studies, JNU. She holds a Ph.D. in Chinese studies from University of Delhi. She completed her M.A. in Political science, JNU. Her doctoral work explored the micro-level agrarian transformation in Yunnan province and she is currently engaged in questions of evolving property regime in China. Her research interests are: rural political economy, urbanisation, gender studies and provincial politics. Dr. Agarwal studied Mandarin Chinese from Beijing language and Culture University, Beijing. She was a visiting scholar to Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, Kunming; Jinan University, Guangzhou; Chinese University of Hong Kong and was affiliated to East Asia Institute, National University of Singapore, Singapore.

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