

# *People Around the Edge of The City*

## *——The Impact of Governmental Public Policies on Street Artisans*

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**Abstract:** In China, there is a group of artisans hidden in the corners of the city, with business replaced by mass manufacturing. They moved to big cities from rural areas with the surge of modernization and urbanization. With lower-income and dwindling customers, they have become marginalized in society, thus being susceptible to changes in governmental policies. This paper explores and analyzes the effect of “household registration” policy, “displacement and resettlement” policy, and “social security” policy on the living and working conditions of the marginalized group living conditions, business, and self-recognition through interviewing seven artisans, including bicycle-repairers, instrument-makers, and paper-cutting artists.

**Keywords:** Street Artisans, Governmental Public Policies

## **1. Introduction**

Street artisans in cities include old bicycles repairers, electric bikes retailers, musical instruments maker, and menders. They are the productive forces from the past and are also the breadwinners in the corner, playing an important complementary role in the urban service system [1]. However, with the gradual improvement and refinement of the industrial division of labor, street artisans were gradually marginalized in society. In general, not only have they completely lost the attention of the society and the media, but their relatively difficult economic and social circumstances also make them more likely to lose their resilience to changes in government policies. This paper analyzes the influence of policy on the community of street artisans through the vicissitudes of individual occupation and life circumstances. In the summer of 2021, the researcher (the author) conducted an investigation on some street artisans in Shanghai through the combination of interviews, questionnaires, and recorded images. By interviewing various artisans about their life stories, this paper reveals and analyzes their living conditions, working status, difficulties encountered, and the changes that happened to their lives resulting from governmental public policies.

## **2. Research Design**

### **2.1. Research Subject**

The paper's subject of investigation is street artisans engaged in business like old bicycle electric bike repair, electric car accessories sales, repair and production of handmade musical instruments, repair

shoes, paper cutting handicrafts, making pancakes, and manual noodles production. It highlights their features of busker repair, handmade, and other professional skills. The major business they do is providing daily maintenance and repair as well as supplying some common goods for city residents; They usually work in small shops on the street or in opening public places. The nature of their work is generally freelance and small-scale traders.

## 2.2. Research Methods

This research design includes an interview as the main method, supplemented by questionnaire collection. Seven street artisans in the downtown area of Shanghai were investigated.

The subjects are randomly picked from a pool of street artisans whose lives and working conditions were influenced by the public policy of the government to ensure the partiality of the research. The interview is semi-standardized so that vocabs can be adjusted during the interview for artisans who generally received less than six years of rudimentary education. Moreover, the whole interview will become more flexible with only some predetermined questions and topics, including their living and working environment, changes and improvements in their lives brought by the socio-economic development of China, problems and hardship they confront due to modern technology and industrialization process, and types of public policy and their direct and incidental effect on them. The interviewer and researcher's role in the interview is mainly a listener and inquirer who wants to know more about the subject.

Some general interview questions and topics are listed as follows:

1. Why did you choose to learn and practice your business?
2. Who are your consumers?
3. According to the displacement and resettlement act of the government, the shop you rent will be dismantled, what's your plan for the future of your business?
4. Are there any compensations or schemes the government provides you with?
5. In comparison to your landlord or your neighbors, do you think you get equal treatment regarding this displacement and resettlement act?
6. Are you a registered people of this city?
7. Does the current household registration system benefit you or harm you?
8. Do you think you are an urban citizen or earn equal respect compared to an urban citizen?
9. Are there any plans you made for your retirement, considering that you are now around 60 years old? Do you want to find an apprentice or to let your son and daughter learn and practice your business?

## 2.3. Basic Information of the Subjects (Street Artisans)

Table 1,2 and 3 shows the basic Information of the subjects (street artisans)

Table 1: Basic occupational information.

Name	Occupation / Business	Place of origin (province)	Educational Level or educational experiences	Income estimated (¥ per month)	Number of employees
Zhang	Bicycle repairer	Jiangsu	Primary school	2000	0
Wu	Bicycle repairer	Jiangsu	Primary school	2500	1
Yang	Musical instrument mender	Jiangsu	High school	15000	2
Hu	Hand-made Shanghai noodle maker	Shanghai	Primary school	3000	0
Xi	Traditional Chinese paper-cut artist	Henan	Secondary school	6000	0
Lin	Chinese-style baked roll maker	Zhejiang	Primary school	5300	3
Meng	Leather shoe mender and maker	Sichuan	No educational background	2500	0

Table 2: Basic working condition information.

Name	Estimated area of the shop (m <sup>3</sup> )	Daily working hours	Mode of business	Previous working experience	Plans of retirement
Zhang	15	10	Repair	No	No specific plans
Wu	12	12	Repair and merchandize	No	No specific plans
Yang	25	11	Repair and Hand-made	Carpenter	Recruit and teach an apprentice
Hu	30	7	Hand-made	No	Teach his son to continue his business
Xi	15	8	Hand-made	Worker	No specific plans
Lin	10	11	Hand-made	No	No specific plans
Meng	8	10	Repair, hand-made and merchandize	Seamer	Work until death

Table 3: Basic information of artisans living conditions.

Name	Family structure	Family income (¥ per month)	Distance between living place and shop (km)	Social insurance
Zhang	2 adults + 1 child	3500	3	Healthcare insurance, old-age insurance, city basic living allowance
Wu	2 adults + 2 children	4000	0	Healthcare insurance, old-age insurance
Yang	2 adults + 1 child	15000	10	Healthcare insurance, old-age insurance
Hu	2 adults + 1 children	4500	5	Healthcare insurance, old-age insurance
Xi	1 adult + 2 children	8000	15	Healthcare insurance, old-age insurance
Lin	1 adult (single)	5300	18	No
Meng	2 adults	2500	1	Healthcare insurance, old-age insurance, city basic living allowance

### **3. Research Background**

#### **3.1. Phases of Chinese Social-economic Development and Corresponding Strategies of Public Policymaking**

##### **3.1.1. The Early Stage of Reform and Opening-up (the 1980s to 1990s)**

Before the year 1978, China had already established an independent and relatively complete industrial system and economy, but the whole country was still suffering from poverty and hunger. In 1978, China's GDP was only 25.9 billion US dollars, and its per capita GDP was 156 US dollars. More than 80 percent of the Chinese lived in rural areas, which meant that 84 percent of the Chinese lived below the international poverty line of 1.25 US dollars per day [2].

After the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee, the Chinese government initiated a series of economic and social reforms while their impacts last till today [3]. The economic institution was transformed from a government-led planned economy and an industrialization model of high accumulation, high input, and low consumption to a market-oriented market economy, with more emphasis on balanced economic development (focusing on the development of light industry) and the improvement of people's condition of living.

By implementing the policy of liberalization and opening up, it attracted a huge amount of foreign investment, foreign capital, advanced technology, and mature firm management strategies to flow into China. The Chinese government also opened special economic zones in southeastern coastal areas and Hainan province to set aside land and space for economic development. At the same time, in terms of population movement, the population control policy before the reform and opening-up policy strictly controlled city development and the urbanization of the rural population. The tight control of the flowing and migration of people was consistent with the oppressive and government predominant social policies. However, with the change of economic and social system and the establishment of special economic zones, population control policies were also passively adapting to the market economy system and the urbanization process based on industrialization.

The opening up of southeastern coastal areas, township enterprises, and special economic zones have attracted about 40 million rural people from various provinces to the cities. Furthermore, with the reform of rural land (allowing privatization), about 200 million surplus rural labor force, due to the limited capacity of the local economy, has formed a large number of the exported labor force and floating population and migrated to cities. Between 1978 and 1994, the urban population's share of the population doubled, from 17.92% to 28% to 62%. A part of the rural population that swarmed into cities, often restricted by educational level and human capital, could only be engaged in retailing or selling common goods and repairing, while some people with special techniques became handicraft men. These two groups of people rose to become street artisans in China.

##### **3.1.2. Middle Period of Reform and Opening Up (the 1990s to 2000s)**

With the influx of considerable numbers of rural-urban migration into cities, the problems of social security and crime emerged in cities. However, at that time, the Chinese government still adopted the consistent "paternalistic" management in public social affairs. The government used its power to formulate public policies and implemented them by force [4]. The Interim Regulations of the Ministry of Public Security on the Management of Temporary Urban Residents issued by the Ministry of Public Security on July 13, 1985, created the era of temporary residence permit management. This system showed the country's acceptance of floating population in cities to a certain extent, but more importantly, "management". All migrants who wanted to survive in the city and engaged in work or business must go to the public security bureau to get a temporary residence permit. In addition, the police would patrol the city and randomly check the ID cards or temporary residence permits of

residents. Those who failed to provide relevant documents in time would be repatriated. A temporary residence permit guaranteed their life, business, and work for those with relevant documents. However, for those who had just entered the city or those unable to find and secure a fixed job or residence, the temporary residence permit policy severely restricted their freedom to live in the city. However, after the “Sun Zhigang” Incident and a series of violent incidents caused by the immoderate implementation of the policy, the government eventually loosened its control on temporary residence permits. It introduced more moderate measures, such as residence permits, to manage the floating population.

### **3.1.3. Present Conditions (2005-2021)**

As a large number of people flooded into cities, the old areas of cities confronted a large number of problems, including the aging of building constructions and structural and functional decline. At the same time, the city layout, municipal system, infrastructure, buildings and constructions, and roads of the old city could not meet the skyrocketing urban population. In order to promote the sustainable development of the economy and society and improve the urban functions and environment, the Chinese government has opened up a new round of urbanization movement featured by “radical demolition reconstructions”, which indicated the removal of old buildings on a large scale, and then reconstructing new residential buildings, roads, infrastructure, and business areas. The government has offered generous compensation to the owners of demolished houses but nothing to the tenants of houses and shops [5].

## **3.2. Personal Background of Artisans**

With the development of the economy and society and the adjustment of social and public policies, the living and working conditions of street artisans are constantly changing. These artisans fall into two main categories. The craftsman has mastered a skill through years of learning and practicing and relies on his skills and experience to earn income. The second category is street vendors, who work in repairing or low-threshold manufacturing jobs and rely mainly on their labor for income.

### **3.2.1. Craftsman (Yang-Musical Instrument Mender & Xi – Traditional Chinese Paper-cut Artist)**

Master Yang, whose hometown is in Jiangsu Province, was originally doing wood carving and has accumulated a certain foundation of carpentry. With the urbanization of China in the 1990s, Master Yang followed the trend and came to Shanghai. Yang fell in love with the craftsmanship of violins as soon as he discovered that the intricate wooden box could produce such beautiful sounds. In the early 1990s, he entered the school factory of Shanghai Music School and worked to carve and decorate musical instruments. After studying in Shangyin training class, he mastered the techniques of violin making and maintenance and then started his music instrument shop near Shanghai Music School. He recalled that when he first came to Shanghai 20 years ago, the government required a temporary residence permit. At that time, a college student in Shenzhen who could not find a job and thus failed to get a temporary residence permit was deported and finally died unexpectedly. This tragic event reported in the news left Yang with a long-lasting impression. However, the policy has changed dramatically, and the temporary residence permit is no longer a must.

Master Yang introduced that a fine violin he made would be priced up to 100 thousand yuan, but the ordinary ones are much cheaper. It takes half a year of person-hours to complete a violin. With the double reform policy in education, more and more children are arranged by their parents to learn to play the violin, and the industry is booming. Now there are many violin shops nearby, and competition is inevitable.

The rise of musical instruments and production factories is challenging. The production of instruments in these factories is batching. To be used for production, Violin wood only needs to be placed in the factory for one to two years or so and placed in the oven drying for half a year. Each worker is responsible for a certain process, and the production cycle is just about one week. On the contrary, for experienced artisans, the selected wood should be set aside for 15 to 20 years to become qualified, and then the process of painting, drying, and finishing extends the hand-making period to 80-100 hours. Compared with industrial processes, the operation efficiency of manual production is much lower, and the production cycle is also much longer, so the cost of manual production is much higher than that of industrial production. However, the business of hand-made violin makers, such as Master Yang, is still not greatly impacted, for the hand-made violins produce higher quality sounds with wider vocal varieties than those made by violin factories, and his target customers now are mainly the high-income people who have pursuits in high-quality musical instruments.

### **3.2.2. Street Vendors (Master Chang & Master Wu)**

More than 20 years ago, Master Chang, a native of Yancheng, came to Shanghai on the recommendation of his relatives living in Shanghai. He rented a shop on Guangyuan Road, covering several square meters, and set up a bicycle repair shop. The shop is close to the municipal government dormitory courtyard, so the people who come to fix their bicycles include common people as well as the family members of government officials. From bicycles to gas cars to electric cars, vehicles have changed over the past 20 years. He fixed whatever trending vehicles were on the market. However, due to the rise of living conditions and the growing numbers of automobiles in the city, increasingly fewer people demand the service of bicycle repairing. Only the elderly, who are reluctant to scan and pay for the sharing bicycles, are regular customers. Chang said it was easy to open a shop, but the most difficult thing was keeping a shop. He was always in the shop almost all the year round and had no time to accompany his son when he was young. Chang's son studied and worked in Shanghai and is now engaged in IT.

In 2006, Master Chang bought a 60-square-meter house nearby, where his son's family lives after getting married. During the past 15 years, the house has become the best guarantee for his child. Shops near Guangyuan Road were originally facing demolition and closure. "But last year, the Premier said that industries related to people's livelihood would be retained, so my shop will not be demolished." However, with the rise of the Shared economy, people with short-distance travel demand can lease shared cycling for short-term use, this reduces a lot of people's need to have their bicycle, so the demand for the car is also less, Master Chang repairing business is becoming more and more cold and cheerless.

Master Wu's repair shop for bicycles and electric bikes is in the Laoximen area, which will be completely demolished. Many old public houses around have been closed. Across the street, new high-rise apartments have sprung up. Wu's father set up the shop here more than ten years ago, and now it has been passed down to Xiao Wu. Because of the impact of shared bikes, Master Wu turned the original repair shop into a wholesale shop specializing in electric vehicle parts. Master Wu opened the shop at half-past eight with a small reputation in this area and closed it at seven in the evening. Business is booming, but the rent is high, and the profit is thin.

## **4. The Effect of Governmental Public Policy on Street Artisans**

The enactments and adaptations of public policies are the government's direct responses to social and economic transformation, while the implementation of social policies also promotes economic and social development and transformation. It is the interplay between public policies and social, economic development that sustain Chinese society. In order to achieve an objective and



comprehensive analysis of the public policies' impacts on street artisans, this paper selects three policies that are most relevant to street artisans and all rural-migrant workers in China: household registration policy and residence permit policy, displacement and resettlement policy, and social security policy.

#### **4.1. Household Registration and Residence Permit Policy**

The household registration policy was initiated when the country was founded. It refers to the investigation, registration, and declaration of household registration within the scope of its jurisdiction by authorities at all levels, and the establishment, classification, division, and compilation of household registration according to certain principles [6]. It is a territorial protection mechanism as the holders of household registration permits enjoy the social security and other services provided by the places they live. Although the household registration system ensures that the rights of urban residents are not deprived or violated; However, this closed social policy blocks the floating population, including migrant workers and street artisans, from enjoying a fair treatment in the city, making them always play the role of people on the edge of the city, that means the semi-citizenization. The government has also made solutions to this inequity in social policies by issuing temporary residence permit policies and residence permit policies to provide certain social security for migrants and reduce social inequity.

Master Yang, a handmade violin maker, said that when he first came to Shanghai in the 1990s, he needed certain conditions to get a residency permit, such as a job and a permanent residence. In order to stay in the city, he had to find relatives he knew in the city to provide him with a place to live and help him find a job at the Shanghai Music School. Finally, he successfully applied for a residence permit. The procedures for the permit were also very complicated, requiring a certificate issued by the employer and one's ID card to the police station, and paid 50 yuan for the permit and 200 yuan for the deposit, which at that time for these migrant workers who just came to Shanghai, was not a small cost. Mr. Zhang, a bicycle repairman, also mentioned that it was not easy to apply for a residence permit when he first came to Shanghai. He spent a lot of energy, time, and money.

All these reflect the threshold of the residence permit whose aim is to provide social security for migrant workers policy is still very high, for handling the residence permit need to spend time and money, and even relationships to make some real poverty and hope to be able to sell their labor to the city and technology for their livelihoods and may, had to leave or be chengguan away from the city with the police. Yang was impressed. He recalled the "Sun Zhigang" event in 2003. At that time, the government strongly enforced the temporary residence permit (the predecessor of the residence permit) policy, and those who were found to be unable to show their temporary residence permit or ID card on the street by urban management officers or police were detained and deported from the city. This kind of robust implementation caused the management chaos, finally leading to the unnatural death of the detained Sun Zhigang. His death caused a wide range of public opinion pressure and disturbance. Eventually, it forced the government to carry out reform, relax the control system on the migrant population in the city, and change the temporary residence permit system to residence permit, which means the city management personnel cannot forcibly detain urban citizens. Therefore, the government's social and public policies will also be supervised by public opinion. However, the residence permit policy, which aims to manage and protect the rights and interests of urban migrants, still hinders social mobility to some extent, blocking poor migrant workers from finding a foothold in the city.

Moreover, even if migrants get residence permits, their social security rights and interests are still not as good as those of urban residents, household registration holders. Services such as education and health care are heavily skewed to the urban residents. Yang's son could not get a high school education in Shanghai because he did not have a Shanghai household registration, so he had to send

his son back to his hometown in Jiangsu Province when he was in middle school. Even the education of primary and junior high schools has a certain threshold for the migrants, who need to obtain qualifications and apply for a residence permit.

Due to the existence of the household registration system, social inequity factors were more serious. Resources and benefits were tilted to urban residents, while the interests of urban migrants, including street artisans, were not respected and guaranteed in the early stage of China's urbanization in the 1990s. After that, temporary residence permit and residence permit policies were introduced to some extent to provide social resources and benefits to migrants who were qualified to obtain certificates while marginalizing migrants who could not get permits. In a large social context, the government's social public policies on household registration and residence permit constantly seek a balance between safeguarding the interests of urban residents and providing migrants with certain opportunities and social security, trying to achieve social equity under the premise of social stability.

#### **4.2. The Displacement and Resettlement Policy**

In order to transform the urban area to meet the demand of the social and economic development of the city, the government expropriated the land, demolished and rebuilt the houses, and compensated the displaced persons. Compensation, however, is not the expected value (market value) or the negotiated price of the expropriated land and demolished houses, but the government's choice between reasonable market value and negotiated price [7].

The purpose of government demolition is often for the social public. Since the reform and opening up, The Chinese government has taken economic construction as the most important thing, so the demolition policy serves the economic construction and urban development. However, it is worth noting that the government will also compete with residents for land acquisition and house demolition interests, showing the departmentalism of government interests. In the usual analysis of social and economic policies, there is a basic assumption: the government is a social person, and the fundamental purpose of all its actions is to maximize the interests of the public. However, in actual reality, the government is composed of different natural persons and is inevitably affected by economic interests. When the government departments responsible for implementing demolition policy are specifically involved in the whole process of demolition, they will find its huge profit space. As rational "economic men", government officials sometimes compete with other interest subjects or monopolize competition to maximize their interests. This governmental tendency partially leads to the unequal circumstances inflicted on the street artisans. To minimize the compensation cost, only the owners of houses and shops will receive a certain amount of money, while tenants will not receive any compensation. However, after the demolition, the tenants such as street artisans renting shops will be greatly affected; Their way of working and living changes, breaking their dependence on familiar environments, affecting social relationships, and increasing living costs. For street artisans, the negative impact is reflected in the time and effort they spend to find a suitable shop. Master Wu mentioned that the rental cost of the shop before demolition was low because the shop was old, and with long-term cooperation with the landlord, he could negotiate a lower rent. After the demolition, he found a suitable shop cost several times higher than the original. The increase in the cost of production was translated to a higher price for the product he sold, thus suffering from decreasing competitiveness and a lower net revenue earned in the market.

Moreover, street artisans lose a large number of old customers after moving away from the community they originally served, and it takes a lot of time to cultivate and attract new customer groups, so their business will be seriously affected in a certain period.

Demolition policy is a kind of social public policy-oriented by the economy and urban development. However, the government usually does not pay attention to the fair compensation mechanism for demolition for its interests, which greatly harms the interest of marginalized groups



and social-disadvantaged groups who could only afford to rent shops and homes in old neighborhoods of the city, with relatively low cost. Nevertheless, their landlords and owners of resettled shops received a considerable amount of compensation from the government, thus sharply increasing the economic inequality between the marginalized street artisans and their landlords and wealthy real-estate owners.

#### 4.3. Social Security Policy

In the early and middle stages of China's urbanization, the residence permit and temporary residence permit policies enable migrants to obtain certain social security, such as medical security and K-9 compulsory education to a certain extent. However, at the level of social security and welfare, social inequality still exists in large numbers. In 2015, the government issued an urban and rural co-insurance policy, promoting equal distribution of social resources and providing basic guarantees for marginalized and poor groups. Urban and rural co-insurance policies also promote urban and rural development integration. In 2015, non-employees in urban areas were fully covered by medical insurance. In 2017, serious disease insurance covered rural areas.

Meanwhile, subsistence allowances covering both urban and rural areas were being fully implemented. Zhang and Wu are very satisfied with the urban-rural co-insurance policy because although they are registered in rural areas other than Shanghai, they can enjoy the same medical and social insurance as Shanghai residents. The social public policy of urban and rural co-insurance has greatly improved the fair social treatment and development of the basic endowment insurance, basic medical insurance, and minimum living security system, and reduced the problems of social inequity caused by the household registration system.

### 5. Advantages and Disadvantages of the Research

#### 5.1. Advantages

1. Research Design combining interviews and questionnaires can collect more comprehensive and in-depth information of subjects.
2. The analysis of the impact of public policies is conducted in a more comprehensive and objective way by combining pure theory with practice.
3. Start with the analysis from the life and work of the respondents, get closer to the reality, and vividly interpret the impact of the policy.

#### 5.2. Disadvantages

1. The sample size was insufficient, with only 7 respondents.
2. Interviews are highly subjective, and the objective impact on policies cannot be directly explained from interviewees.

### 6. Conclusions

After the reform and opening up, with the rapid development of the economic and social structure and form of Chinese society, the government's social and public policies have been adjusted accordingly. However, the purpose of the policy is complex and diverse. While pursuing rapid economic development, the problem of social inequality should be minimized to maintain social stability. At the same time, the personal economic interests of each individual working for the government will conflict with or be consistent with the economic and social interests and goals of the government as a whole. This series of factors lead to the impact of policy being multi-faceted. This

study analyzes the influence of social policies on marginalized groups and vulnerable groups in China and non-urban groups by analyzing the influence of policies on street artisans of a small group in society. When public social resources are scarce, the household registration system distributes the scarce resources to the urban household registration holders, supports them, and enables them to drive the development of the urban economy. However, as migrants enter cities in the process of social urbanization in China, unfair distribution of social resources and security has caused social conflicts and impacts on economic and social development. Therefore, the government has issued temporary residence permits and residence permit policies to control migrants and provide certain social security. However, although the groups receiving the policy's benefits have improved benefits and welfare, the situation of the groups not covered by the policy has further declined and become the poor, marginalized groups in the social corner. At the same time, the government's demolition policy promotes the development of urban social space and economic growth and increases the gap between the rich and the poor and social inequality. In order to solve the social inequality as much as possible, the government launched the urban and rural co-insurance policy, which provides basic social security for all urban and rural people while increasing fiscal expenditure. Therefore, it can be concluded from the household registration system, demolition policy, and urban and rural co-insurance policy, in many cases of policymaking and decision strategies, there is always a trade-off between promoting economic development and reducing social inequality, as most of the incentive-related economic and social policies aimed to increase economic growth and market freedom widen income, wealth, human capital, or opportunity gap in the society. So, the government often implements the strategy of satisficing in its decision-making of public policies, reconciling between the interest and demand of different stakeholders to reach a satisfactory and appropriate consequence instead of the optimal one.

At the same time, urban migrants represented by street artisans are marginalized in society because of their economic and social status, losing part of their social discourse power. Thus, being susceptible to the public policy change of the government. They lose the flexibility to respond to the influence of public policies, which is why public policies should pay attention to the influence on socially disadvantaged groups.

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