


Article

Are Local Residents Benefiting from the Latest Urbanization Dynamic in China? China's Characteristic Town Strategy from a Resident Perspective: Evidence from Two Cases in Hangzhou

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Abstract: The Characteristic Town (CT) program is one of the most notable strategies in China's urbanization process in recent years, responding to the drawbacks of the past decades of crude urbanization development model and maintaining and promoting capital accumulation and economic growth with innovative approach to space production. However, no studies have been conducted to examine whether residents actually benefit from it. Therefore, we combined desk research, participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and questionnaires to evaluate its influence on residents in two representative cases in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, where the program originated. The results show limited improvement in public benefits: a general but insignificant improvement in the living standard of the residents; residents' public participation is generally lacking; residents' cognition of self-identity has begun to appear deviation, and barriers between them and foreign workers have begun to emerge; residents' assessment of the new development strategy varies from case to case. Compared to other urban and rural redevelopment, renewal, and construction practices around the world, the CT program does not seem to appear to be overly special or advanced in terms of securing and enhancing public benefits. To this end, this study concluded that it is necessary to consider the need to adopt an official evaluation system that attaches equal importance to economic, environmental, and social factors, further strengthen the supervision of local financial expenditure, effectively strengthen the role of the public, improve infrastructure and public service facilities, and enhance the comprehensive training of indigenous people.

Keywords: Characteristic Town; resident benefits; Hangzhou; Zhejiang; China

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1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, the phenomenon of rapid urbanization worldwide, including the trend of urban sprawl and expansion under it, has become a major focus. This process has become one of the most important causes affecting global development, especially for emerging developing countries [1]. Its extensive discussion has now expanded from the classic U.S. case to many other global countries and regions, such as Europe, Australia, Africa, and Latin America [2–10]. However, many research findings have shown that the process drives growth often accompanied by negative effects that cannot be ignored, such as causing damage to agricultural lands, marginal lands and other ecologically sensitive lands, climate change, energy consumption, food security hazards, public health problems, and exacerbating inequities and injustices among different populations and regions in various dimensions [11–21]. This set of problems has increasingly become a threat to the achievement of sustainable development. The role of public policy as a means for public authorities to strategically use various resources to solve public problems, achieve public goals, and realize the public interest has been increasingly emphasized [22]. Many studies

have called for the need to develop and implement integrated policy approaches covering various dimensions such as economic, social, and spatial dimensions, including planning and other measures to sustain and promote sustainable development [2,17,20,21,23–25]. Naturally, the assessment of various policies and strategies has increasingly become a focus of research, for example, in energy, housing, land use, tourism, climate, etc. [26–32].

For China, since the market-oriented reforms in 1978, and especially since the 1990s, it has experienced a rapid process of urbanization and economic development, echoing to some extent the secondary capital circuit in Harvey’s model of three circuits of capital [33]. The rise of state entrepreneurialism has been an important driving force behind this process [34–39]. Various departments within the Chinese state participate in the market economy by establishing their own businesses in pursuit of profit, risk-taking and production [34]. State entrepreneurialism, which combines planning centrality and market instruments, reconciles the two through a new state-market relation (the state acting through the market), and continues to drive the realization of China’s increasing development and strategic agendas [36,37]. Driven by state entrepreneurialism, China’s capital accumulation and economic growth model in the past decades relied on the development of export-oriented low-end manufacturing and real estate industries, i.e., the continuous conversion of agricultural land into urban construction land to promote industrial parks and real estate construction, which has been confirmed by many studies [40–47].

However, this development model has faced significant problems. For example, rural areas are lagging behind in various aspects of development and have become a weak link in China’s urbanization process, such as lower incomes, poorer infrastructure and public services, and less government and social investment and policy support [48–52]. Along with the growing scale, urban areas also face a number of dilemmas, such as environmental pollution, traffic congestion, housing constraints, urban poverty, and inequality [53–58]. Moreover, the results of market-oriented reforms have led to a high degree of linkage between China’s current economic growth and development model and changes in global markets. However, the deepening globalization process and the advent of the era of cognitive-cultural economy have caused increasing national and regional competition [59–62]. It is a stark fact that during the rapid urbanization process, the advantages of China’s current development model are therefore declining, such as resource scarcity, environmental damage, and growing labor and land costs [63].

In the face of these challenges, a program called Characteristic Town (CT), which originated in Zhejiang Province, one of China’s most developed provinces, was initiated by the Chinese central government in the mid-2010s. In contrast to the capital accumulation and growth approaches of past decades, this strategy aims to develop new development spaces on the urban-rural fringe areas that integrate production, ecological, and living dimensions and to drive urban-rural co-development and enhance growth competitiveness and endogenous development capacity by emphasizing the development of emerging industries and the promotion of the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries [64]. This strategy can be seen as the Chinese central government’s positive response to the increasing need to transform and upgrade China’s old development model and the “urban-rural integration” development during the urbanization process [65]. The strategy has thus become one of the latest and most important dynamics in China’s urbanization process.

As an innovative development initiative, the CT strategy, and the richness it implies have become a high-profile public, policy and academic focus. Existing research has focused on the following: 1. the exploration of the origins of this strategy in Zhejiang Province; 2. the process of elevating this new strategy from a local initiative to a national level policy and focus; 3. the typological policy approach of CTs [65–69]. In particular, the first two are aspects that have received more attention in current research. However, no studies have yet examined the strategy or even the broader philosophy of governance behind it based on a primary audience perspective. A new governance and development policy and strategy should be considered not only from the perspective of its framers, implementers, and promoters, but also from the perspective of its audience. With these in mind, the main

objective of this study is to help bridge the existing research gap, i.e., to explore the benefits of this important strategy for a critical audience of local residents. The reality of the past decades has shown that the traditional development model in China's urbanization process has non-negligible drawbacks, driving rapid economic growth at the expense of many dimensions. While the CT strategy represents distinct transformation of the traditional development model and a distinct change in development philosophy that is emerging in China's urbanization process and marks a new dynamic in China's urbanization. Therefore, the contribution of the results of this paper is, first and foremost, to contribute to a more comprehensive assessment of the emerging CT strategy by exploring its influence on local residents. It can also help to understand and assess the implications of the ongoing new dynamics of China's urbanization process and provide insights into the formation and improvement of new potential development models to avoid repeating the mistakes of past development models, such as how to sustain and promote growth through innovative development frameworks, and how to more purposefully safeguard the public interest that has often been neglected in the past in the pursuit of new development models. In addition, many countries, and regions around the world, especially in the global South, are often similarly confronted with the dilemmas posed by the crude urbanization development models of the past, and this paper can also provide some inspiration for them.

From the existing available literature, few other projects can be found that are very similar to the specific content of the CT program. However, a large number of other globally relevant practices and projects of spatial development-oriented urban and rural redevelopment, renewal, and construction that also aim to sustain and promote growth, as well as the examination of them from a public perspective, can bring reference to this study. Extensive research on them suggests that the public interest may actually receive negative effects as a result of them, such as: damage to the traditional physical environment and historical culture; increased environmental pollution such as air and sound; new threats to physical and psychological health; deterioration of neighborhood relations; reduced economic activity and income within the neighborhood; reduced sense of belonging to the local area; decline in security and safety; The invasion and erosion of private space; the emergence of social exclusion and isolation; the marginalization of citizens and society; restrictions on access to support resources [70–81]. These findings help us to formulate hypotheses for the expected outcomes of this study. Given the purpose of the CT program (to promote joint and coordinated progress in the production, ecological, and living dimensions with the promotion of industrial development at its core), we expect that some of the above results may not occur. Specifically, for example, the local physical and human environment may be greatly improved as a result of the promotion of the CT program. Thus, the local traditional physical environment and historical culture may be well preserved, protected and upgraded, and the environmental pollution status may be greatly improved. We also expect that with the spatial upgrading and revitalization of local development, people may gain stable neighborhood relations and more economic benefits, and consequently increase their sense of belonging to the local area, and public safety issues may also be improved. We also believe that people will have greater access to support resources. Considering the promising vision established by the CT program, we believe that social exclusion and isolation may become less pronounced. Moreover, public participation is often in a weakened position in these practices due to China's authoritarian state tradition [82–85]. However, considering the innovative significance of the CT program, this may bring new changes to public participation. With these expectations in mind, we launched a formal study. The following provides a more detailed presentation.

2. CT Development: Key Texts and Literature

The development of CT originated from the then governor of Zhejiang Province, Li Qiang's inspection of small towns and industrial parks in the province in 2014. During this time, he first introduced the concept of CT. Following the trend, the provincial government report in early 2015 listed the development of CT as a key task and work of the govern-

ment [86]. In April of the same year, the provincial government issued a special policy document No. 8 for CT, proposing to focus on promoting CT development to facilitate the province's economic transformation and upgrading and the development of "urban-rural integration" [64].

In the official conception, the definition of CTs is the development space platforms that relatively independent of urban areas, have clear industrial positioning, cultural connotation, tourism, and certain community functions, and are different from administrative divisions and industrial parks. CTs need to basically meet the following main points: 1. located in the urban and rural fringe areas, relatively far from major urban built-up areas; 2. the planning area and construction area are set at about 3 km² and 1 km², respectively; 3. through the development of emerging industries and promotion of traditional industries to upgrade, forming a pattern of industries with distinctive characteristics for each CT; 4. become gathering places for innovative and entrepreneurial elements with many advantages such as capital, talents and technology; 5. develop a comprehensive function that integrate industry, culture, tourism, community and other functions; 6. Adopt the principle of "government guidance, enterprise as the main body and market-oriented operation".

Current academic findings have confirmed that the CT idea is deeply rooted in Zhejiang's tradition of well-developed private sector and private economy, known as the "massive economy" [65–69]. The "massive economy" is a form of economic organization constituted by primary industrial clusters, which is characterized by one village producing a single product and one town developing a single industry and helps to reduce costs and raise production efficiency [87,88]. However, as a labor-intensive and low value-added model of capital accumulation and growth, it has faced increasingly difficult situations such as increasing labor and raw material costs, scarcity of land resources, environmental degradation, lack of innovation [89–92]. Therefore, the CT strategy can actually be understood as an effort by Zhejiang to escape from the shortcomings of the traditional "massive economy" development model by—not to completely separate itself from the "massive economy", but to re-energize and expand its development potential by providing new sources of development on this basis [65,68,69]. Specifically, it advocates a sustainable economic growth model by promoting a labor-intensive economy to a knowledge- and culture-intensive economy to facilitate economic transformation and upgrading and "urban-rural integration" development [93]. The ideas underlying the CT program have thus been key to its rapid elevation from a local issue to a national policy. Because it coincides with a new set of development concepts pursued by the Chinese central government in recent years [65–69], such as such as reducing urban-rural and regional disparities, industrial specialization, intensive land use, environmentally friendly development, and people-centered development [66,94,95]. Undoubtedly, the CT Program is an innovative project initiated by the entrepreneurial state to improve growth capability and competitiveness at the local, regional, and national levels through innovative capital accumulation approach.

The convoluted and interesting process of CT strategy becoming a national level policy is another focus of current research. This process was evaluated as a representative case of adopting and implementing policies too quickly without sufficient thought [68,96]. In July 2016, the central government proposed to develop about 1000 CTs with strong capabilities in various aspects by 2020 [97]. However, behind the scenes, as two national-level departments, the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (MOHURD) and the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) have competed fiercely for the right to lead the CT program. The latter basically copies the philosophy and policy setting of Zhejiang, which regards CTs as new regional spatial nodes and emphasizes the development and enhancement of integrated functions based on industrial functions; while despite learning some advanced experiences from Zhejiang, the former still gives more priority to traditional community construction and architectural planning, and therefore regards CTs as administrative towns [67,68]. In September 2020, the Opinions on Promoting the Standardized and Healthy Development of Characteristic Towns was issued, which officially confirmed the NDRC's definition and regulation of CT development is the only

interpretation [98]. Miao and Phelps argue that this overturns the inherent perception of the Chinese state in many previous studies, namely that it is not a unified entity as commonly assumed, but rather that within it there is a strong competition between different organizations for more benefits and power as well [67].

Recently, a new study also explored a typological policy approach to CTs, classifying them and providing ex ante development policy guidance [69].

However, the relevant research to date has mainly been from the perspective of those who formulate, implement and drive development policies and strategies, but has not yet touched on an important issue: while new policy and strategy set a rosy vision for new development, do their primary audiences actually and/or sufficiently benefit from it? For a new development and governance phenomenon and even for the new philosophy of governance that emerges behind it, not only should attention be paid to the novelty of the concept, design, or development approach, but whether and to what extent it benefits its primary audience is also an important dimension to look at. For the CT strategy, the single largest group of its audience is undoubtedly the local residents. In this article, therefore, we develop a broader exploration of the CT strategy and the new dynamics of urbanization in China behind it, centered on local residents.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Case

This study adopted the case study approach, which is heavily used in social science research. It is an empirical research tool that allows for the examination of contemporary phenomena in real-life contexts and is particularly useful for improving understanding of a wide range of phenomena, including individual, organizational, social, and political phenomena, and thus allows researchers to explore processes in real-life contexts in depth and thereby gain a richer understanding [99,100].

The case study area is Zhejiang Province, the birthplace of the CT strategy. It is one of the most economically developed provincial administrative regions in China, located on the southeastern coast. Despite occupying only 1.1% of the country's area, it ranks fourth and eighth in GDP and resident population, respectively, according to 2020 data [101,102]. Zhejiang is also one of the regions with the most balanced urban and rural development in China. As of 2020, its per capita disposable income for urban and rural residents has ranked first in China for 20 and 36 consecutive years, respectively.

Subsequently, we selected specific cases based on the following three principles. First, although a large number of CT candidates exist, as of now, there are five batches of officially recognized CTs totaling 60. Specific cases are selected from these 60 CTs. This is because they tend to have developed to a more mature stage and can better present the clear features and latest cutting-edge results of the CT strategy. Second, the cases are selected from Hangzhou, the capital city of Zhejiang Province. This is because Hangzhou was the first to implement the CT strategy in the whole Province and even in the whole country of China, and both the CTs that emphasize new industries and those that are dedicated to promoting the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries were first born in Hangzhou. And Hangzhou has the largest number of CTs among the 60 official CTs. Therefore, the CT located in Hangzhou is more representative. Third, as mentioned earlier, there are two main directions of CT development: new industries and redevelopment of traditional industries; therefore, the selection of cases should consider both of them.

Yuhang Dream Town (YDT) and West Lake Longwu Tea Town (WLLTT) are selected as the 2 cases. They are both located in the urban-rural fringe of Hangzhou. The former is located in the Cangqian Sub-district in the northwest, while the latter is located in Zhuan-tang Sub-district in the southwest. Both sub-districts have just transformed from township status in recent years and therefore still retain many of the characteristics of rural areas. YDT focuses on emerging industries and is one of the first batch of CTs to receive official recognition. WLLTT is dedicated to the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries and is one of the third batch of CTs to receive official recognition but is the first CT

dedicated to the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries to receive official recognition. Therefore, these two CTs are representative. Figure 1 presents the geographical location of the cases. Figures 2 and 3 visually show the distinctive development of the areas where two cases located before and after the CT strategy was launched: from the old impression and identity of dilapidation, chaos and poverty to a new impression and identity of a thriving and promising area with a promising future. Benefiting from the innovative development model brought about by the CT strategy, they have transformed from small, underdeveloped rural towns, typically on the rural-urban fringe, to a new source of new impetus for the urbanization process, helping to promote local and regional growth. Specifically, Cangqian where YDT is located was originally a typical small suburban town, dominated by traditional agriculture and traditional secondary industries. After CT development, it has now become an innovative and entrepreneurial area with emerging Internet-related industry industries (Internet entrepreneurship, Internet finance, etc.). Similarly, Zhuantang where WLLTT is located is also a typical small suburban town with traditional agriculture and traditional secondary industries, of which the tea industry is one of its major characteristics. Now, after CT development, it has also become a post-industrial economic area with tea-related industries around tea elements.

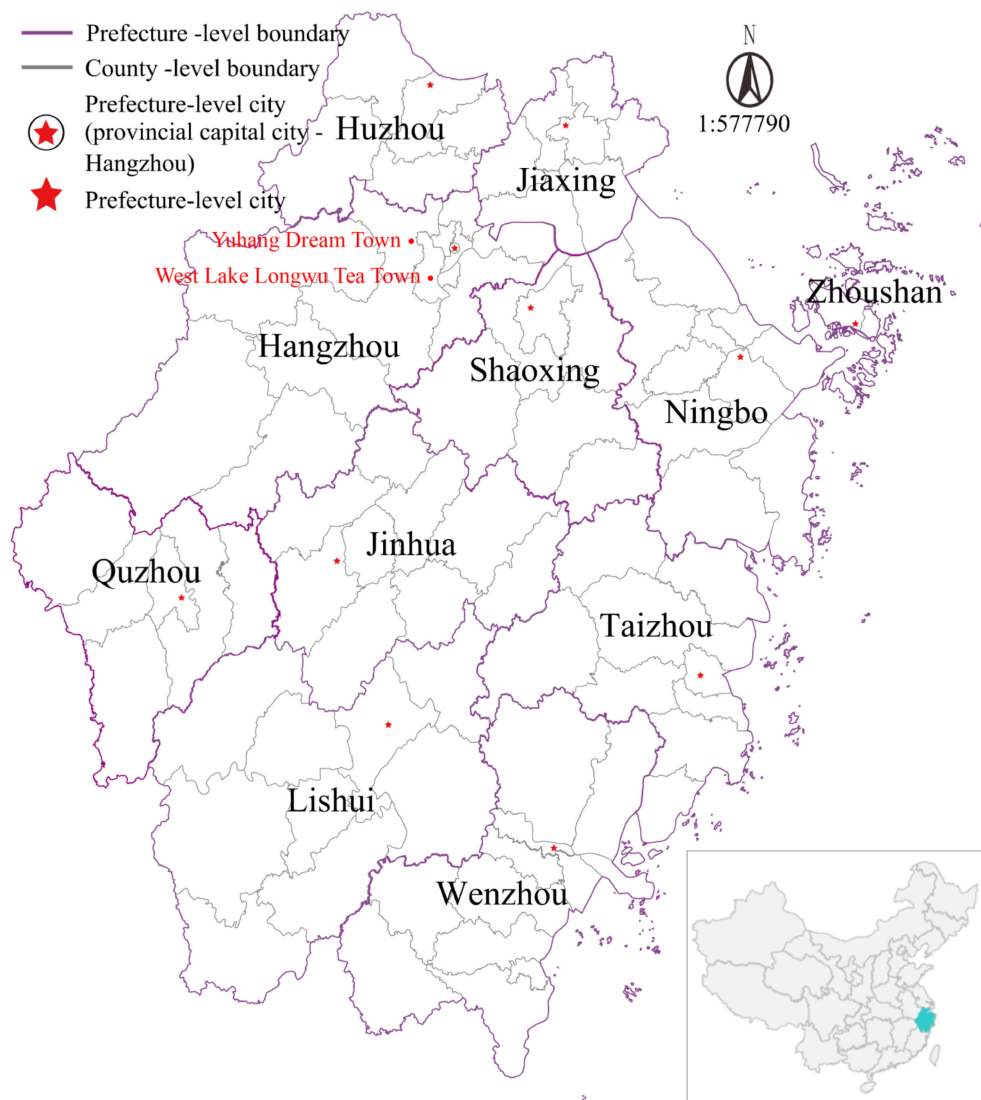


Figure 1. Geographical location of the cases (source: authors).



Figure 2. Scenes of the area where YDT is located before and after the Characteristic Town (CT) development (source: authors' compilation).



Figure 3. Scenes of the area where WLLTT is located before and after the CT development (source: authors' compilation).

3.2. Data Source and Analysis

To develop a comprehensive analysis of the CT strategy, we organized and conducted a 10-month long-term study from November 2021 to August 2022. The long-term study involved both desk research and fieldwork. Data were obtained from participatory observation, in-depth interviews, questionnaires, and a variety of public and non-public materials (documents such as laws, regulations, policies, plans, designs, reports, publicity materials, media reports, etc.) obtained from various sources. Thus, the primary and secondary data used in this paper are selected from part of this long-term study during this period. In terms of in-depth interviews, the long-term study conducted a total of 53 in-depth interviews with 52 people, involving 12 government officials, 4 planners and designers, 3 scholars, 2 developers (with 3 interviews), 7 entrepreneurs and businesspeople, and 24 residents. While as shown in Table 1, the research involved in this paper mainly refers to 31 interviews of 30 of them, including 5 government officials, 3 planners and designers, 3 scholars,

2 developers (with 3 interviews), and 17 residents. The questionnaires were mainly targeted at local residents, and a total of 121 were distributed, including 60 for residents in the area where YDT is located and 61 for residents in the area where WLLTT is located. The data from the questionnaires are also part of the research covered in this paper.

Table 1. List of total interviewees for this paper (source: authors).

Categories	Date	Code	Character
Government officials	15 December 2021	G1	Deputy Director of Management Committee of Hangzhou West Science and Technology Innovation Corridor, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province
	22 December 2021	G2	Section Chief of Small Town Section, Investment Promotion Bureau, Management Committee of Hangzhou Future Science and Technology City, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province
	29 December 2021	G3	Deputy Director of Urban Construction Management Office of Cangqian Sub-district, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province
	30 December 2021	G4	Director of Regional Development Office of Cangqian Sub-district, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province
	30 December 2021	G5	Chief of Beautiful Town Section, Zhuantang Sub-district, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province
Planners and designers	17 December 2021	P1	Planner of Zhejiang South Architectural Design Co., Ltd.
	22 December 2021	P2	Planner of Planning and Construction Bureau, Management Committee of Hangzhou Future Science and Technology City, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province
	22 December 2021	P3	Planner of Planning and Construction Bureau, Management Committee of Hangzhou Future Science and Technology City, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province
Scholars	14 December 2021	S1	Professor of Department of Urban and Rural Planning, School of Design and Architecture, Zhejiang University of Technology
	18 December 2021	S2	Professor of the Department of Urban and Rural Planning, School of Design and Architecture, and Dean of the School of Design and Architecture, Zhejiang University of Technology
	19 April 2022	S3	Associate Professor of the Department of Human Geography and Urban and Rural Planning, School of Geography, Nanjing Normal University
Developers	10 December 2021	D1	Regional Executive General Manager of Bluetown Construction Management Group Co., Ltd.
	24 December 2021	D1	Regional Executive General Manager of Bluetown Construction Management Group Co., Ltd.
	2 March 2022	D2	Manager of Investment Department of Hangzhou Zhijiang Operation Management Group Co., Ltd.
Residents	9 December 2021	R1	Resident of Zhuantang Sub-district, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province
	13 December 2021	R2	Resident of Cangqian Sub-district, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province
	13 December 2021	R3	Resident of Cangqian Sub-district, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province
	13 December 2021	R4	Resident of Cangqian Sub-district, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province
	13 December 2021	R5	Resident of Cangqian Sub-district, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province
	13 December 2021	R6	Resident of Zhuantang Sub-district, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province
	13 December 2021	R7	Resident of Zhuantang Sub-district, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province
	26 December 2021	R8	Resident of Cangqian Sub-district, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province
	26 December 2021	R9	Resident of Cangqian Sub-district, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province
	4 March 2022	R10	Resident of Zhuantang Sub-district, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province
	4 March 2022	R11	Resident of Zhuantang Sub-district, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province
	7 March 2022	R12	Resident of Zhuantang Sub-district, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province
	9 March 2022	R13	Resident of Zhuantang Sub-district, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province
	9 March 2022	R14	Resident of Zhuantang Sub-district, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province
	10 March 2022	R15	Resident of Zhuantang Sub-district, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province
	10 March 2022	R16	Resident of Cangqian Sub-district, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province
	25 March 2022	R17	Resident of Cangqian Sub-district, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province

Through participatory observation, the researcher was able to learn about the development activities and circumstances of the CT strategy, and to gain and feel a lot of information about local development. The types of respondents included those who know and/or have directly participated in and/or are participating in the local development planning and development process, as well as those who lived in the local area for a long time and felt the changes in local development and were influenced by them. Through conversations and interviews with a variety of people, researchers can also gain insight into a range of issues, such as their perceptions of local development and other issues relevant to the study, and how they are influenced. The questionnaire survey of residents can help to further explore various aspects of the residents under the CT strategy. After getting a basic picture of the residents, the questionnaire mainly consists of the following parts: living standards; public participation; self-perception and interpersonal relationships; overall assessment of local development. The questionnaires were administered on-site by the researchers, using a random sampling method to obtain a representative sample. To avoid possible duplication of responses, each household was limited to one questionnaire. In addition, the distribution of the questionnaires maintained a balanced sample size of the two cases. We also triangulated the data to improve the accuracy of the study.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Basic Socio-Economic Characteristics

Figures 4–8 show the main socio-economic characteristics of the residents of the two cases of YDT and WLLTT. Based on the investigator's observations and the results of the questionnaire, the main characteristics are as follows. Most of the respondents were middle-aged and elderly, and in the two cases, residents aged 40 and above accounted for 55.2% and 57.4%, respectively. Residents were basically still rural residents or used to be rural residents, and therefore had limited education and skills, making it more difficult to engage in higher-paying jobs. Their education level was generally low, and most residents had only a high school level or below (accounting for 63.7% and 75.5%, respectively). This also leads to their generally low-income levels. Their household monthly income was mostly concentrated in the range of 5000–15,000 yuan, reaching 53.4% and 54.1%, respectively. It is worth mentioning that the residents of WLLTT were mostly engaged in tea-related work. The two occupations they were most engaged in (farmers and self-employed people) were related to tea.

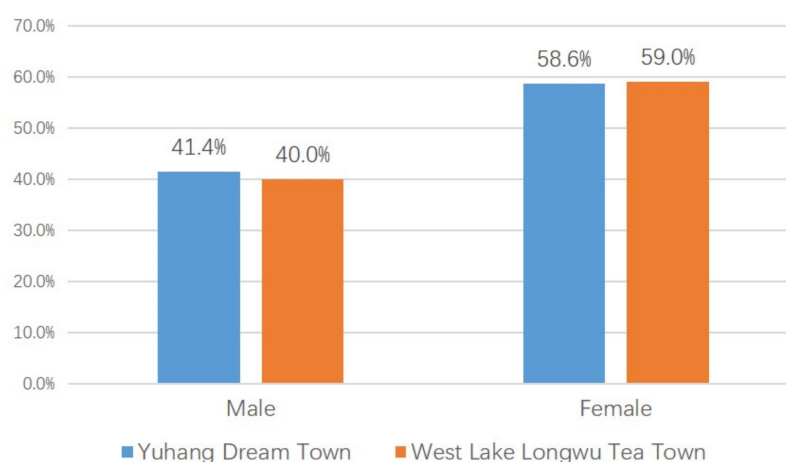


Figure 4. Gender distribution of respondents (source: authors).

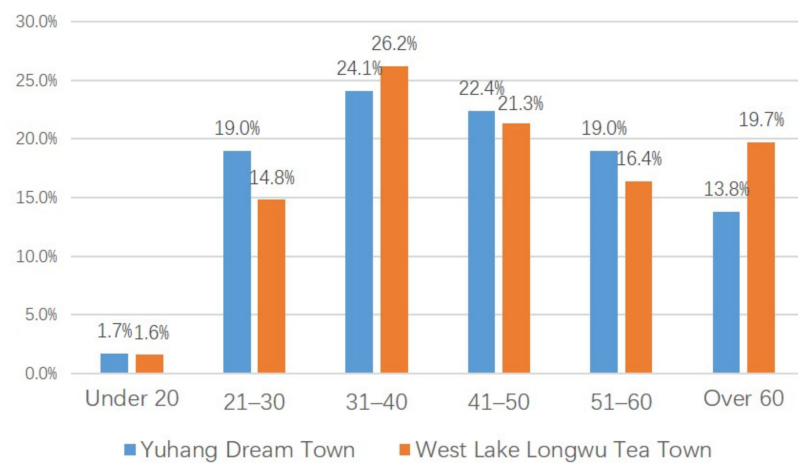


Figure 5. Age distribution of respondents (source: authors).

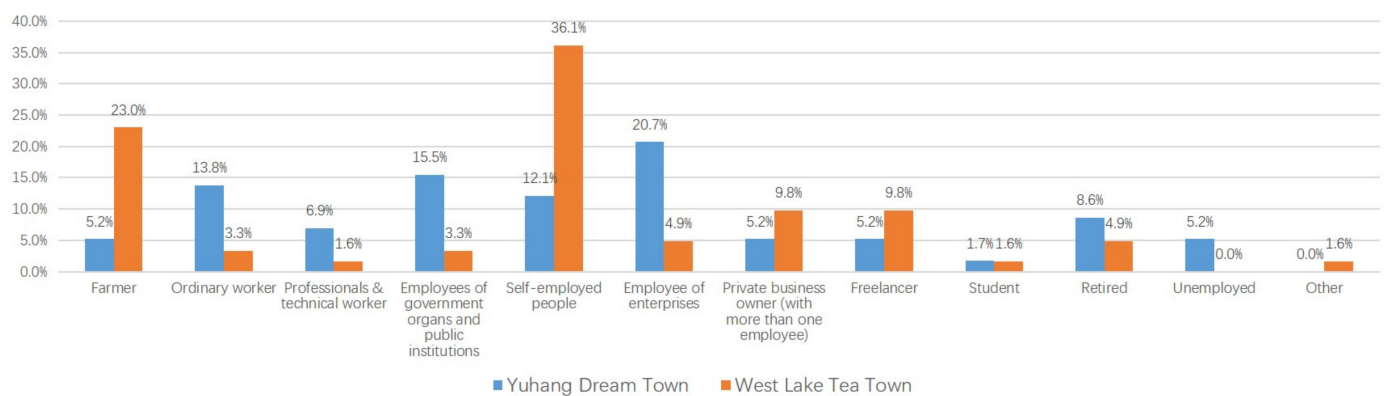


Figure 6. Employment distribution of respondents (source: authors).

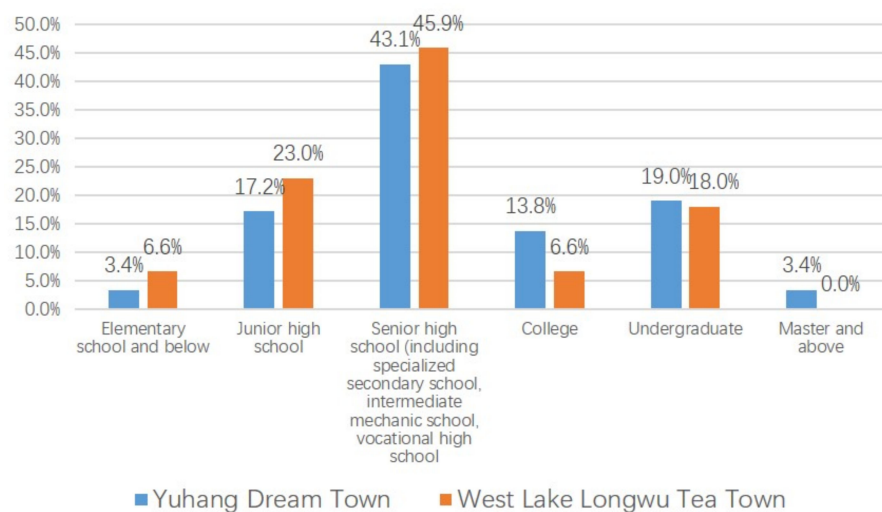


Figure 7. Educational background distribution of respondents (source: authors).

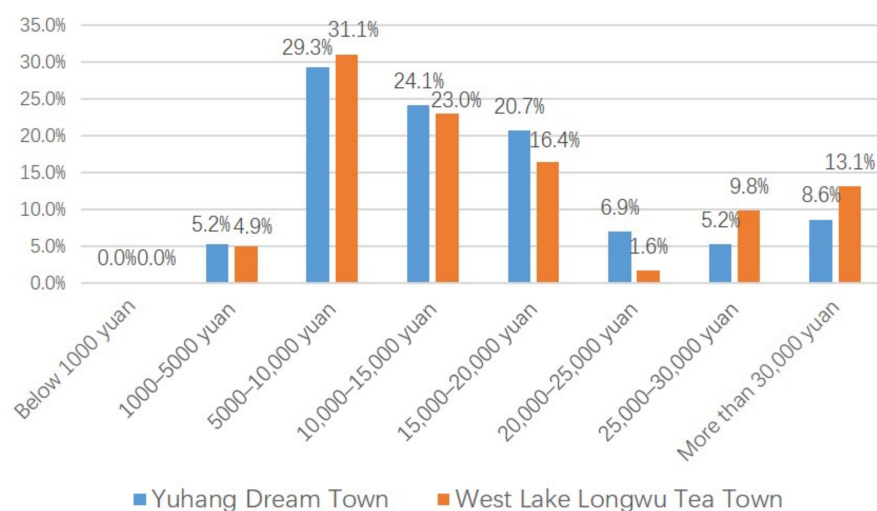


Figure 8. Household monthly income distribution of respondents (source: authors).

4.2. Living Standards: Overall but Limited Improvement

Figure 9 shows the aspects that respondents want the CT development to focus on to improve the standard of living of the respondents, that is, the points where residents in these urban and rural fringe areas were most eager to improve their living standards through the development of CTs. Among them, the four aspects that the residents of YDT were most hoped for were the increase in economic income, the improvement of the ecological environment, the improvement of conditions of the business environment and business facilities, and the improvement of the housing conditions. They were selected 41, 38, 33, and 27 times, respectively. While the four aspects most hoped by the residents of WLLTT were the increase in economic income, the improvement of the ecological environment, the improvement of conditions of the cultural, leisure and tourism environment and related facilities, and the improvement of conditions of the business environment and business facilities. They were selected 44, 44, 34, and 24 times, respectively. As shown in the above survey data, three common aspects were selected most frequently in the two cases, namely, the improvement of the ecological environment, the increase in economic income, and the improvement of conditions of the business environment and business facilities. This shows the points of greatest concern for residents in these urban and rural fringe areas. Among them, the increase in economic income ranked first in both cases, which showed the simplest desire of these residents was to obtain an increase in economic income, because residents in these urban and rural fringe areas tended to have lower income levels than major urban areas, and the increase in economic income is often the point that most highlights the improvement of living standards for residents. The improvement of the ecological environment ranked second, because in China, the ecological environment of the urban and rural fringe areas is often relatively poor. Therefore, this was also a point of concern for residents to improve their living standards. While the improvement of conditions of the business environment and business facilities is often associated with the improvement of economic income. Many interviewees shared their views on this:

“I think, for us residents, the most important thing for us to improve our standard of living is, of course, the increase in economic income. This is the most real and fundamental thing. With the increase in income, we can then discuss other things. So when the CT practice started to develop here, I was looking forward to it helping to increase my income.”¹

“We live in such a messy environment. How can the standard of living be good? The environment must be improved. I want fresh air, clean roads, green spaces.”²

“We need a good business environment and facilities, which can attract popularity, drive the economy and our income.”³

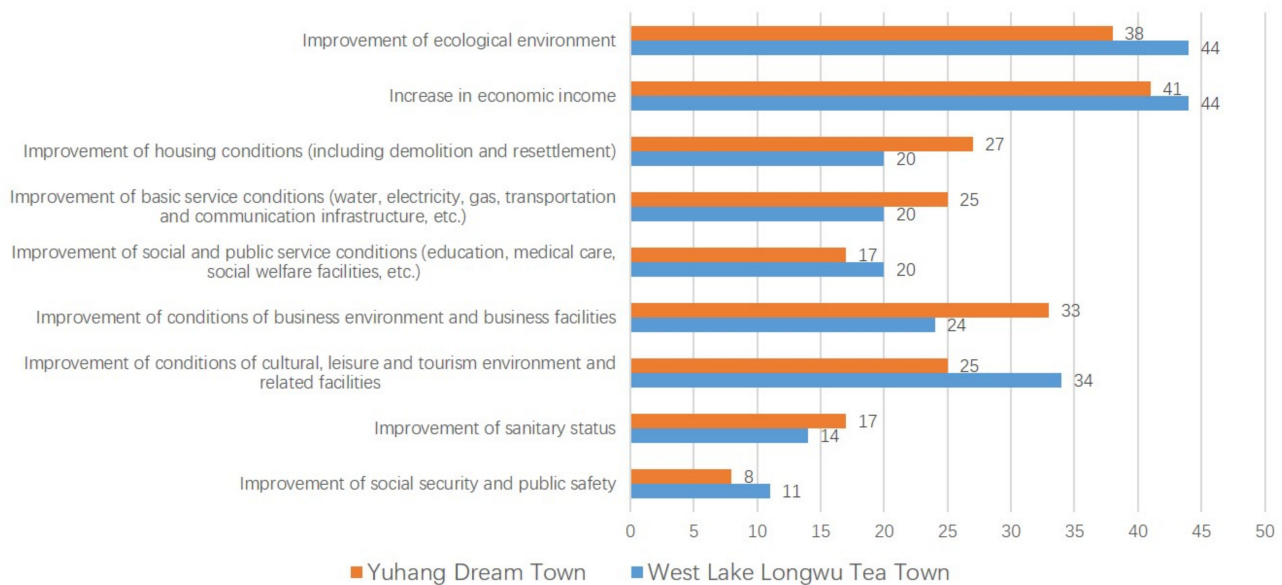


Figure 9. Frequency of selected aspects that respondents want the CT strategy to focus on to improve the standard of living of the respondents (choose up to 4) (source: authors).

As shown in Figure 10, roughly speaking, most respondents believed that their living standards have been improved more or less from the development of CTs. The proportion of answering “Yes” accounted for 84.5% and 85.2% of the two cases, respectively. This seems to indicate that the CT practice has helped improve the living standards of these residents in the urban and rural fringe areas. Subsequent findings revealed more details.

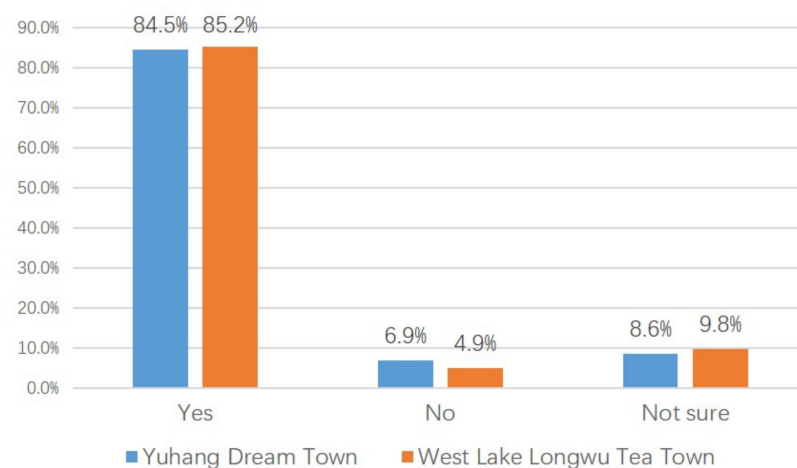


Figure 10. Respondents’ opinions on whether their living standards have been improved in the CT practice (source: authors).

Figures 11 and 12 show the influence of CT development on their living conditions in the eyes of the respondents of the two cases. Respondents felt a majority of improvement (“increase significantly” and “increase slightly”) in all 9 aspects in 2 cases. In most aspects, the selection of “increase slightly” had the highest proportion. Considering the survey in Figure 9 shows the 4 aspects that residents of the 2 cases most want to improve were related to 5 aspects, including the improvement of the ecological environment, the increase in economic income, the improvement of conditions of the cultural, leisure and

tourism environment and related facilities, the improvement of conditions of the business environment and business facilities, and the improvement of the housing conditions, it is necessary to focus on them.

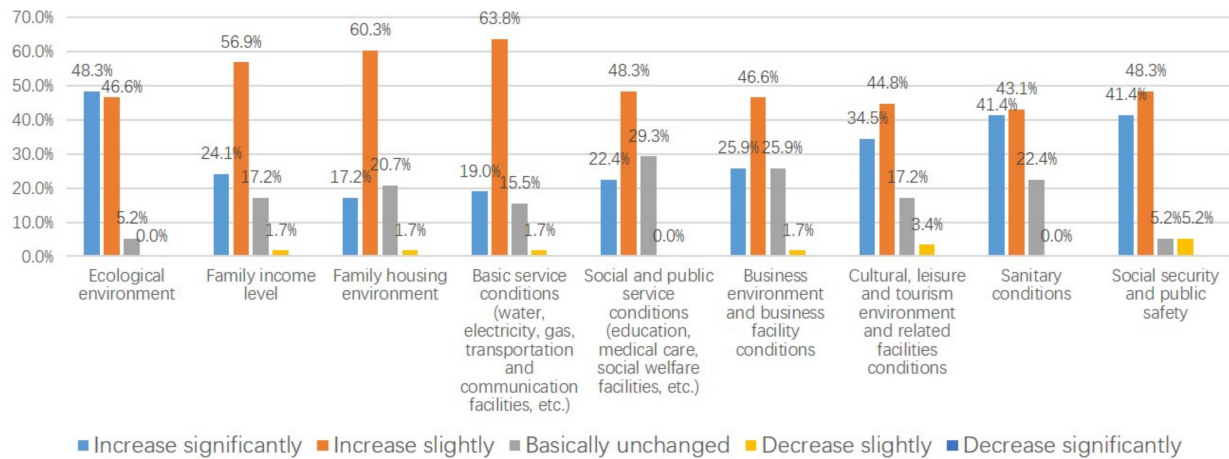


Figure 11. The influence of the CT practice on the living conditions of respondents (YDT) (source: authors).

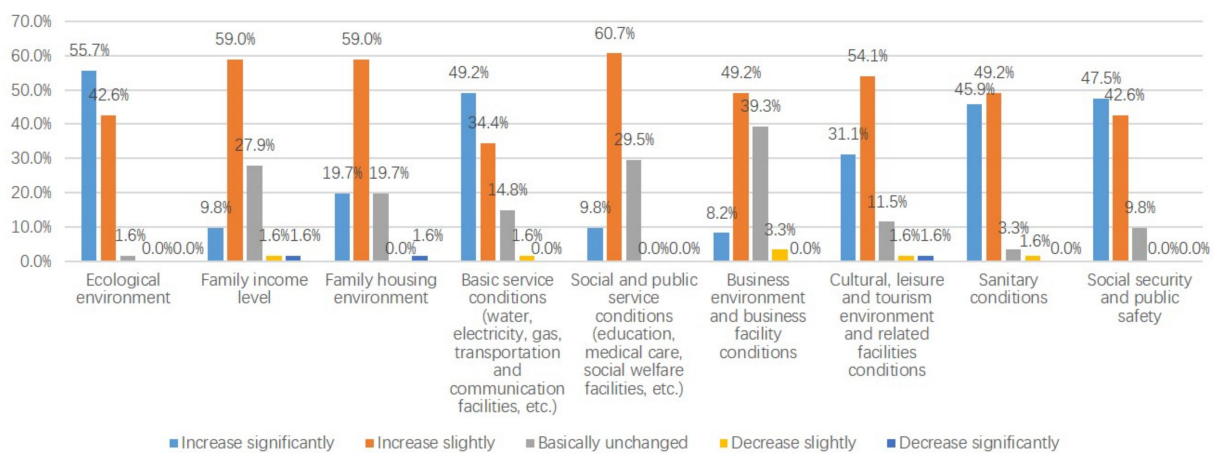


Figure 12. The influence of the CT practice on the living conditions of respondents (WLLTT) (source: authors).

Specifically, in the two cases, the highest proportion of respondents' choice was the ecological environment, reaching 94.9% and 98.3%, respectively (Figures 11 and 12). This shows that, for most residents, the improvement of the ecological environment was the most significant. Respondents spoke of this as well:

"I have to admit that the environmental conditions we live in are really much better than before. It is really unbearable to look back on the bad ecological environment here in the past." ⁴

In terms of conditions of business environment and business facilities, the percentages of respondents in the two cases who thought it had improved were 72.5% and 57.4%, respectively, ranking 8th and 9th in their respective 9 aspects (Figures 11 and 12). It can be seen that from the perspective of local residents, the improvement of the conditions of the business environment and business facilities they own was limited in all 9 aspects.

"I feel that we have always lacked a sufficient business environment, even after the CT development. Without a good business environment, there will not be enough people willing to come. Especially for people like us who are engaged

in our own small businesses, if there are not enough people willing to visit, the increase in income will also be affected.”⁵

The situation is relatively better for the conditions of the cultural, leisure and tourism environment and related facilities. The proportion of residents in the two cases who believed that it had been improved was 79.3% and 85.2%, ranking 6th and 4th, respectively, (Figures 11 and 12).

“After the development of the CT, the cultural and leisure conditions we can enjoy in our lives have improved a lot. Now we have many cultural and leisure facilities to use, not only parks and fitness facilities, but also many cultural venues, such as museums. These things enrich my life.”⁶

In terms of family income level, as shown in Figures 11 and 12, 81% of the residents of YDT believed that it has been improved, ranking 5th among their 9 aspects. While the situation in WLLTT was relatively bad. Only 68.8% of the residents believed that their family income level has been improved, ranking 8th among their 9 aspects. Obviously, under the influence of the CT development, the number of residents of YDT who have increased their income was more than that of WLLTT. Figures 13 and 14 reveal more details. For residents of the former, the increase in income was mainly due to the increase in rent driven by the CT development, which accounted for 70.2% of the reason. While the income of residents of the latter also benefited from the increase in rent (21.4%), it was more from the tea business (45.2%). It must be noted that the influence of rental income on income increase is often more stable than the influence of tea industry income on income increase. The increase in rent may not be very significant for the increase in residents’ income, but it is often long-term and continuous, and there are few influencing factors. While the income of the tea industry is easily affected by fluctuations in various factors such as climate, season, tea quality, and changing market demand. This makes it impossible for everyone who makes a living from the tea industry to have a steady increase in income. This may be the reason why the number of residents in WLLTT who have increased their income was less than that in YDT. But on the other hand, this volatility may also make tea industry income more likely to obtain a larger floating increase than rent. Figure 15 illustrates this. First, echoing Figures 11 and 12, Figure 15 shows that the increase in the household income level of the residents in the two cases does fit the category of “increase slightly”, because in the two cases, the income increase in the residents who have increased income was basically concentrated in the range of 0–5000 yuan, reaching 91.6% and 71.4%, respectively. However, although the total number of residents whose income has increased among the residents of WLLTT was smaller, their income has increased more than the residents of YDT. In the three ranges of “1000–5000 Yuan” (42.6% and 64.3%, respectively), “5000–10,000 Yuan” (6.4% and 19.0%, respectively), and “10,000–15,000 Yuan” (2.1% and 7.1%, respectively), the proportion of WLLTT was obviously higher, which reflects the greater volatility and uncertainty of tea industry income than rent.

As far as the family housing environment is concerned, the proportion of residents in the 2 cases that they believed that they have been improved was not high in all 9 aspects, with 77.5% and 78.7%, respectively, ranking the 7th and 6th in their respective rankings (Figures 11 and 12).

“I feel that my housing environment has improved, but it’s not very obvious or important. It’s just that the facade of my house has been repaired, which can be said to improve my standard of living, but it’s not really that big of a positive influence”⁷

“My house was demolished and relocated to an apartment building. If you want to say whether the housing environment has improved, you can say it has improved. Of course, it can be regarded as an improvement in living standards, but in fact, this itself is not very useful.”⁸

Figure 16 shows the ways in which the housing environment can be improved. Among the residents whose housing environment has been improved in the two cases, the residents

of YDT were more dependent on demolition and resettlement (60.0%), while the residents of WLLTT were more dependent on housing repair (56.3%).

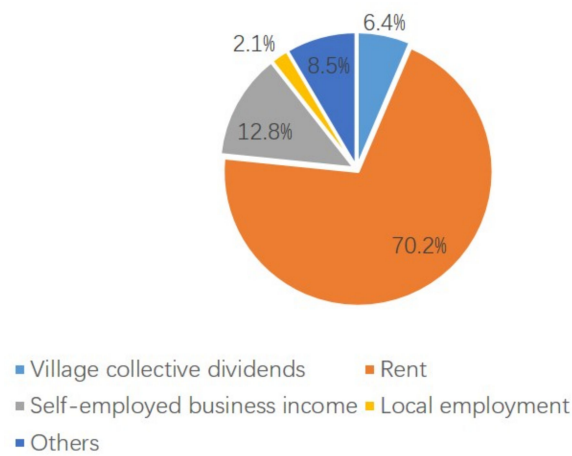


Figure 13. Reasons for the increase in respondents' household monthly income under the CT practice (YDT) (source: authors).

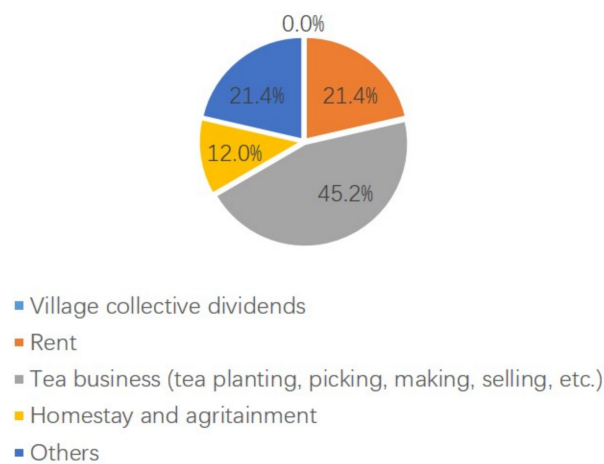


Figure 14. Reasons for the increase in respondents' household monthly income under the CT practice (WLLTT) (source: authors).

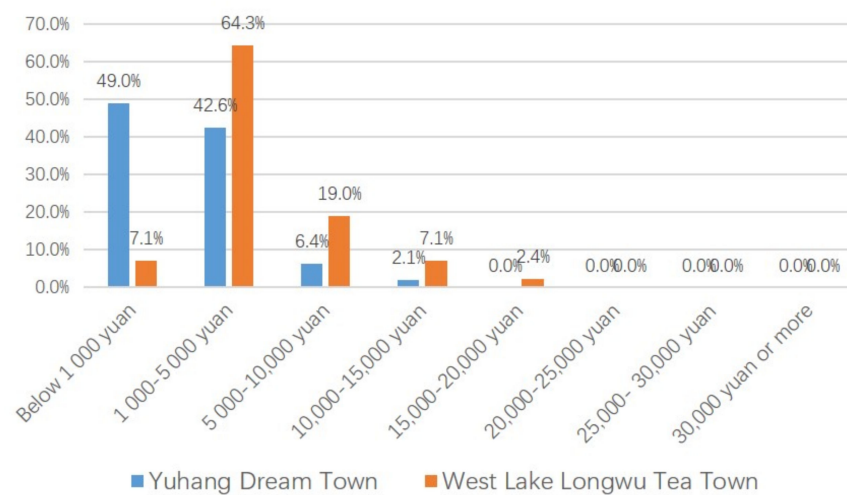


Figure 15. Amount by which respondents' monthly household income was increased due to the CT practice (source: authors).

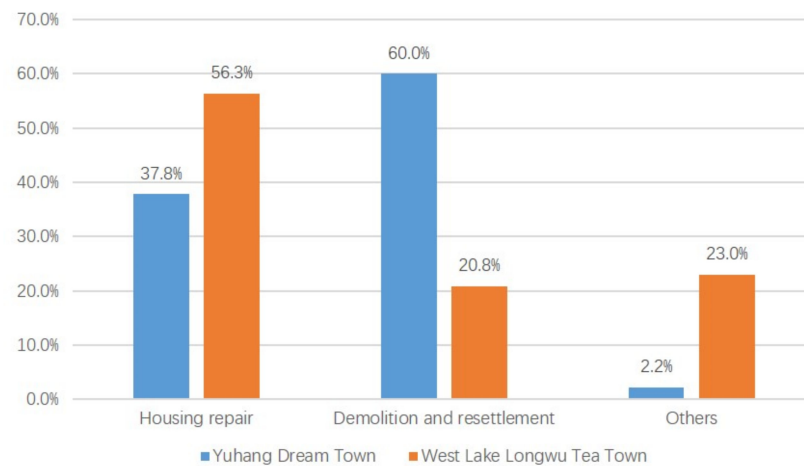


Figure 16. Reasons why respondents' family housing environment has improved due to the CT practice (source: authors).

Figure 17 evaluates the changes in residents' living standards after the CT development. In general, most of the residents in the two cases believed that their living standards had been improved compared with those in the central urban area. Only 5.2% and 9.8% of residents in two cases, respectively, believed that their family's living standard was still far inferior to the central urban area. Most agreed that their living standards, although still not comparable to those in the central urban area, have improved significantly (56.9% and 55.7%, respectively). There were also a considerable number of people who believed that their family living standards were generally not much different from those in the central urban area (24.0% and 18.0%, respectively) or have even significantly exceeded those in the central urban areas in some respects (13.8% and 16.4%, respectively).

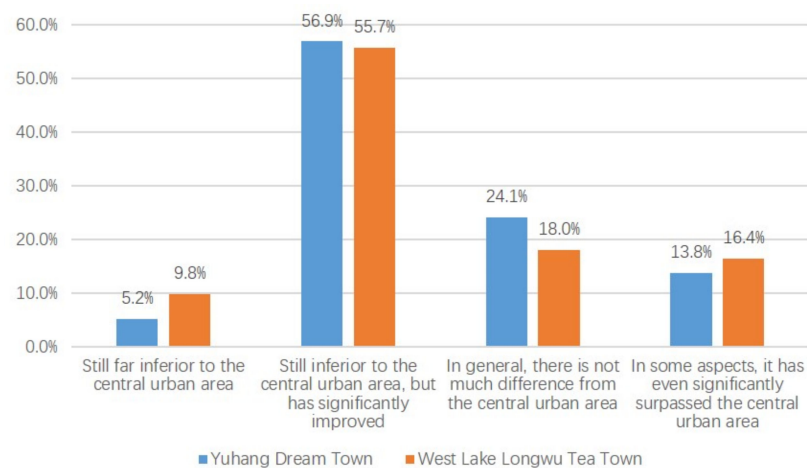


Figure 17. Respondents' evaluation of family living standards under the CT practice compared with the living standards of central urban areas (source: authors).

As mentioned above, YDT and WLLTT are representative and basically represent the highest development situation of the current CT practice. Judging from the situation of the two cases, it can be considered that the CT development has a positive impact on the living standards of residents in general, but the effect is limited. First, responses from residents of the two cases expressed aspects that the development of CTs could help improve in the living standards. Among them, economic income, ecological environment, conditions of the business environment and business facilities are the three most desired aspects. This actually typically reflects the real situation in many urban and rural fringe areas in China. Because in many of these areas in China, residents have often had to endure lower economic

income, worse ecological environment, and other conditions for a long time. Judging from the results so far after the CT development, although residents generally admit that the 9 main aspects of their living standards have been improved more or less due to the CT practice, and they recognize that their living standard has been improved compared with that of the central urban area, these improvements are generally not obvious, and there is still a lot of room for improvement. The narration of an interviewee is representative:

“In general, this is definitely beneficial to the improvement of our living standards although it does not have such a big effect and influence on many places. I am looking forward to future developments that will really put things into practice that promote our good life.”⁹

Considering that these two cases have longer development time and better development degree among all CTs, the overall situation of other CTs is very likely to be similar to or even inferior to those of these two cases. Therefore, it is necessary to pay more attention to the positive effect of CT practice on residents' living standards. Moreover, in the two cases themselves, the obvious difference between the two cases is that the number of residents who get income increase in YDT is more than that in WLLTT, but the increase range of the residents of the latter is more than that of the former. This is confirmed to be related to the characteristics of the tea industry of the latter. In addition, in the improvement of family housing environment, the former mainly relies on demolition, while the latter relies on repair.

4.3. Public Participation: Very Limited Public Participation despite Positive Residents' Wishes

However, on the other hand, the public participation of local residents presents a more negative characteristic. Most residents had a low level of understanding of their local CT development. The largest proportion is “general understanding” (36.2% and 49.2%, respectively), followed by “less understanding”, accounting for 32.8% and 36.1%, respectively (Figure 18).

“To be honest, we ordinary people have very limited understanding of the development of the local CT. We don't really know what's going on here and what to do in the future. In most cases, the government has come to tell us that something needs to be done, and we ordinary people are just passively cooperating.”¹⁰

“Basically, the higher-level governments inform us through the village committee or sub-district office that they need to develop here, and then we will learn about these contents. Or sometimes we know some information ourselves through the Internet, newspapers, and other means. But we basically can't get more details.”¹¹

This is also reflected in the selected frequency of the way for respondents to understand the development of local CTs shown in Figure 19. The most common way for residents to understand the planning and construction of the local CT was government propaganda, which has been selected 46 and 36 times, respectively, reflecting that the most common way for residents to obtain access was through notification from government departments. This was followed by community propaganda, which was chosen 36 and 25 times, respectively. Community propaganda was mainly organized by village committees or neighborhood (resident) committees, so in essence it can be said to be a continuation of government propaganda.

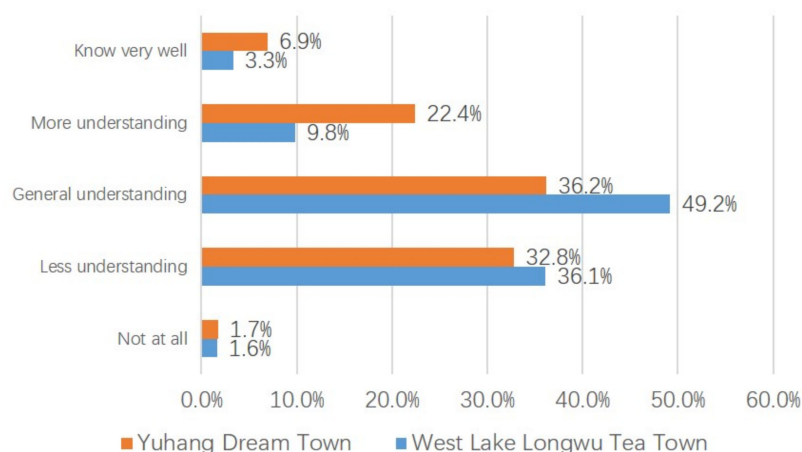


Figure 18. Respondents' understanding degree of the local CT practice (source: authors).

In response to this situation, as shown in Figure 20, most residents indicated that they should be involved in the planning and construction process. The proportion of residents who chose “should” was as high as 82.8% and 85.2%, respectively. Among the residents who thought “should”, more people thought they should be in “research stage before planning and construction—consultation with residents” (39.6% and 50.0%, respectively) and then “scheme stage of planning and construction—residents participate in discussing the scheme” (37.5% and 34.6%, respectively) (Figure 21). This shows the residents' high level of identification with the legitimacy and rationality of their own participation in the process, as well as their desire to actively participate in the early stages of development. In terms of the way of participation, they were very willing to rely on the role of local neighborhood (resident) committees/village committees to organize (45.8% and 65.4%, respectively) (Figure 22). Therefore, in order to enhance the public participation of residents, the role of grass-roots organizations would be very important, but they have not played a great role at present.

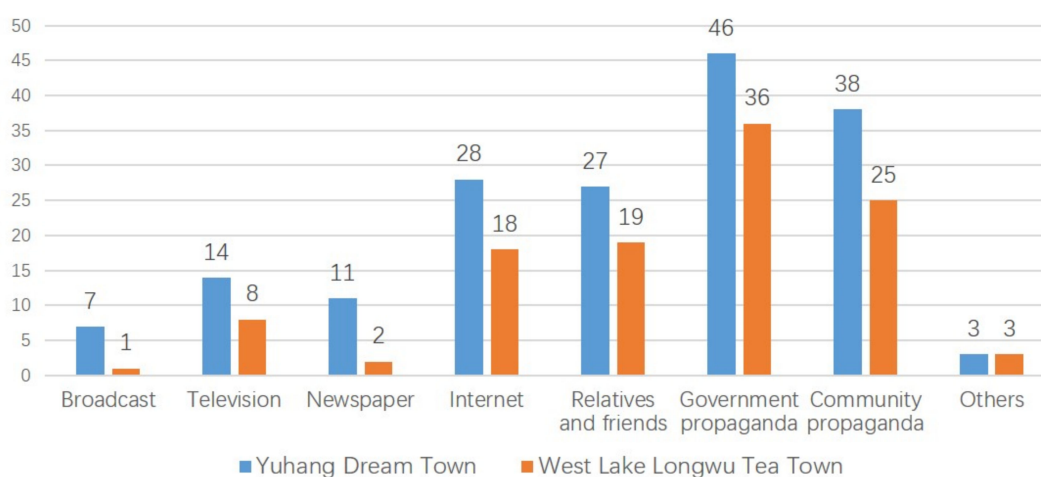


Figure 19. Selected frequency of the way for respondents to understand the development of local CTs (source: authors).

“I hope that the village committee can organize everyone effectively, so that we can know what we should know in time, so as to respond. But now they are basically useless. They are currently only the government's messenger, and it is difficult to really represent our interests.”¹²

In addition, a considerable number of residents were also very willing to participate in the form of personal opinions through suggestion boxes and e-mails (33.3% and 21.2%,

respectively). Because this method could better protect personal privacy and make it easier for residents to say what they really want to say.

“I prefer this anonymous method, so that many things that cannot be said in official occasions can be said, and I don’t have to worry about being known by others.” ¹³

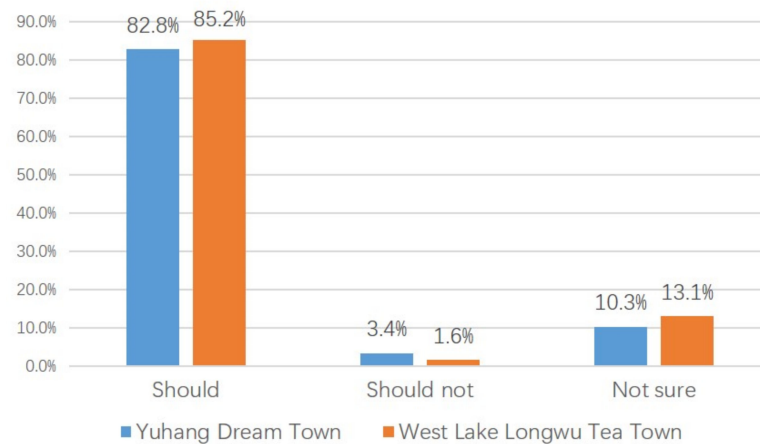


Figure 20. Respondents’ opinions on whether residents should participate in the formulation process of the planning and construction of the local CT practice (source: authors).

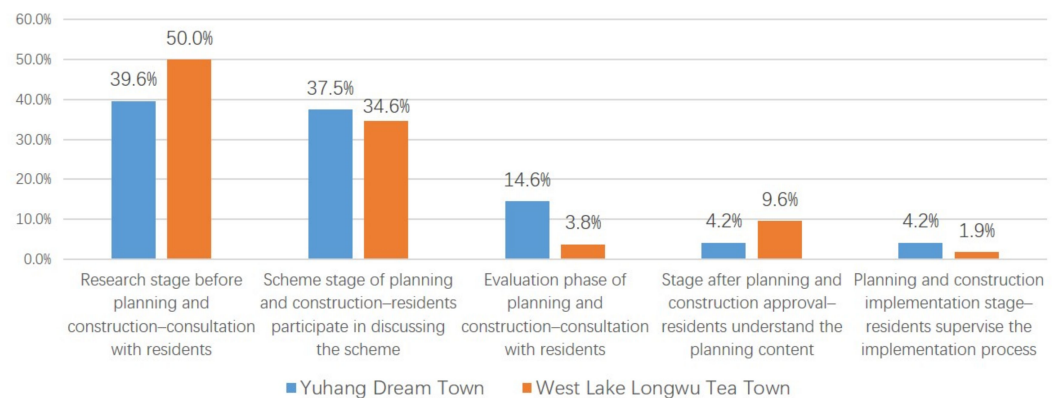


Figure 21. Respondents’ judgments about the stage in which residents should be involved (source: authors).

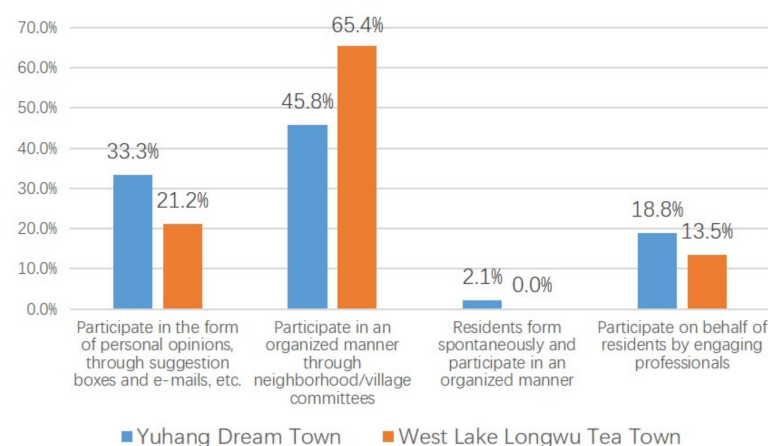


Figure 22. Respondents’ opinions on how residents should participate in the formulation of the planning and construction of the local CT practice (source: authors).

However, it is a pity that most of the residents have not participated in the discussion activities on the formulation of the planning and construction of local CTs. As shown in Figure 23, 91.4% and 85.2% of the residents in the two cases, respectively, have never participated in such activities. The participation of the residents themselves was seriously lacking. Correspondingly, in fact, most residents had a positive desire to participate in such activities, accounting for 79.3% and 82.0%, respectively (Figure 24). For many of them, the main reason was that this kind of discussion activity could make the planning and construction of CTs more accurately reflect the opinions of residents, which could better promote local development (52.2% and 58.0%, respectively) (Figure 25). On the other hand, the main concern of residents who selected not to participate was that even participating in such discussion activities might only be superficial and formal and would not play a practical role (90.0% and 85.7%, respectively) (Figure 26). As an interviewee said:

“I don’t want to participate in such activities, even if such activities really exist. Because I don’t think the opinions and ideas, we express in these events can really get the government’s attention or make them willing to make changes for us.” ¹⁴

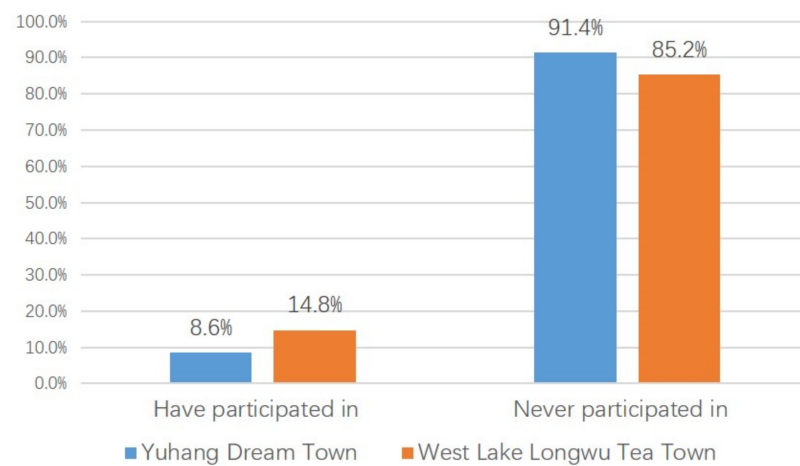


Figure 23. The proportion of respondents who have participated in discussion activities on the planning and construction of the local CT practice (source: authors).

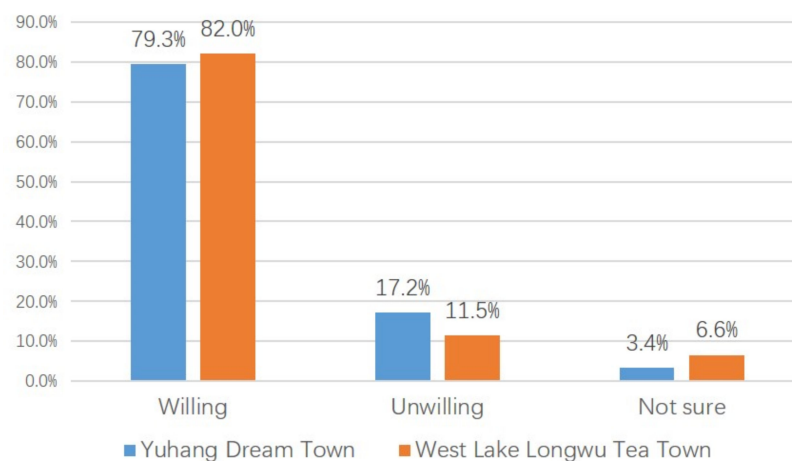


Figure 24. Proportion of respondents willing to participate in discussion activities on the planning and construction of the local CT practice (source: authors).

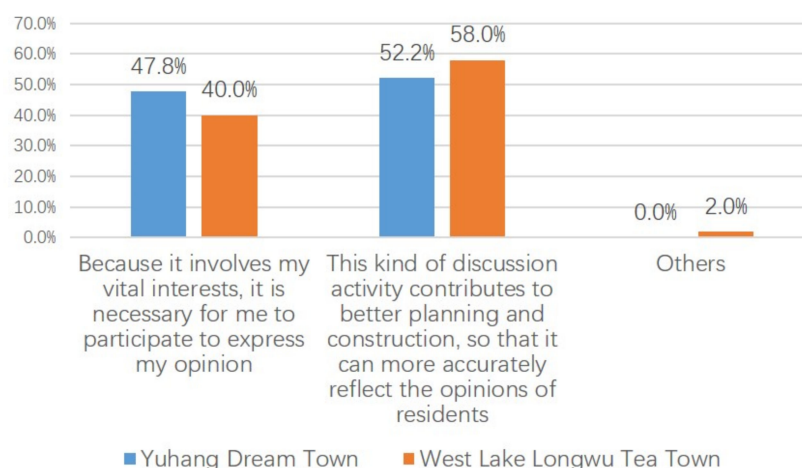


Figure 25. Reasons why respondents are willing to participate in discussion activities on the planning and construction of the local CT practice (source: authors).

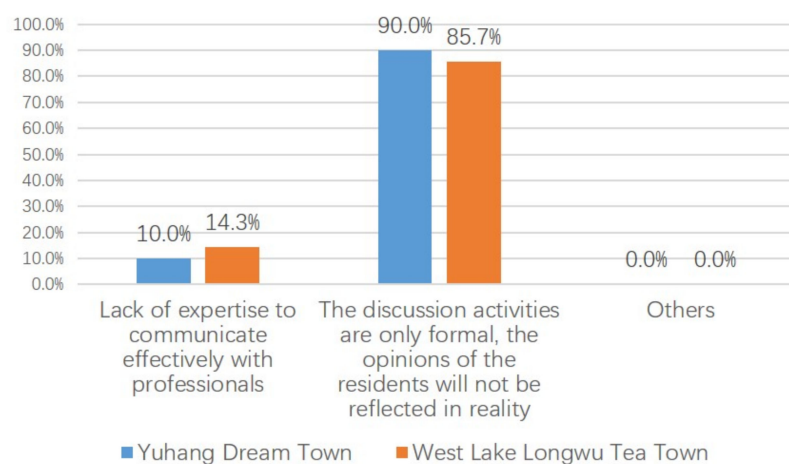


Figure 26. Reasons why respondents are reluctant to participate in discussion activities on the planning and construction of the local CT practice (source: authors).

The survey of residents in two cases shows that public participation in the CT development presents a negative result. Residents have a low level of understanding of local CTs and lack sufficient means of understanding. Although many residents show high enthusiasm for participating in the development process of CTs, the opportunities for residents to participate in the development process of local development are few. There are also residents who think that even if they do participate, it is superficial and formal, and lacks a real role. Residents are not really involved in the process, at least so far, this new local development agenda still rarely reflects the will of the residents. People are more just passively adapting to the plan, preventing their own interests from being lost as much as possible and expecting their own interests to be maintained and developed. And this lack of public participation is most likely not unique to these two cases, but a common phenomenon in the CT practice. Although the CT practice reflects the new accumulation and growth model under the continuous development of Chinese state entrepreneurship, the examination of official documents related to the development of CTs shows that there is little mention and encouragement of public participation. Therefore, to a certain extent, the CT practice can be said to be more inclined to the unilateral actions of the state and other actors. Considering that YDT and WLLTT are already one of the most famous CTs, compared with other CTs, the public has more ways to understand them and gain more information. Moreover, due to their high popularity and model effect, the state has given them more public participation than other CTs to some extent in order to build them into

image projects ¹⁵, ¹⁶, ¹⁷ and ¹⁸. Thus, the situation of public participation in other CTs is likely to present a similar or even worse scenario. An official familiar with the issue of Zhejiang CTs implicitly acknowledged the situation in the interview ¹⁹.

4.4. Self-Perception and Interpersonal Relationships: New Potential Changes and Dynamics

New local developments also bring potential changes to residents' original self-perceptions and interpersonal relationships. As shown in Figure 28, the original cognition of the residents of the two cases as rural people has begun to be broken. Although the perception that self was still an attribute of rural people still accounted for the largest proportion (46.6% and 73.4%, respectively), changes have occurred. Some people were confused about whether they belong to urbanites or people of countryside, they thought they belong to neither (24.1% nor 14.8%, respectively).

"I don't know whether I am an urbanite or a person of countryside now because the situation is different. I am no longer a traditional rural person now, but I am not a typical urban person either. I sometimes feel confused and lost now and feel like I don't belong to either side." ²⁰

There were also some people who believed that their identity attributes have been transformed from rural people to urban people (25.9% and 4.9%, respectively).

"I don't think I am a rural person anymore. Look at our current living environment, it is completely different from the previous rural area. I think I am an urban person now, but I just live in a relatively remote area." ²¹

Compared with the case of WLLTT, this phenomenon was more obvious in the case of YDT. The reason may be that the latter is more developed than the former and is closer to the so-called 'city' despite being both urban and rural fringe areas. In addition, in general, after the development of CTs, the interpersonal relationship between residents had no negative impact on the whole. The majority believed that the interpersonal relationship with the neighbors was relatively harmonious (50.0% and 63.9%, respectively) (Figure 27).

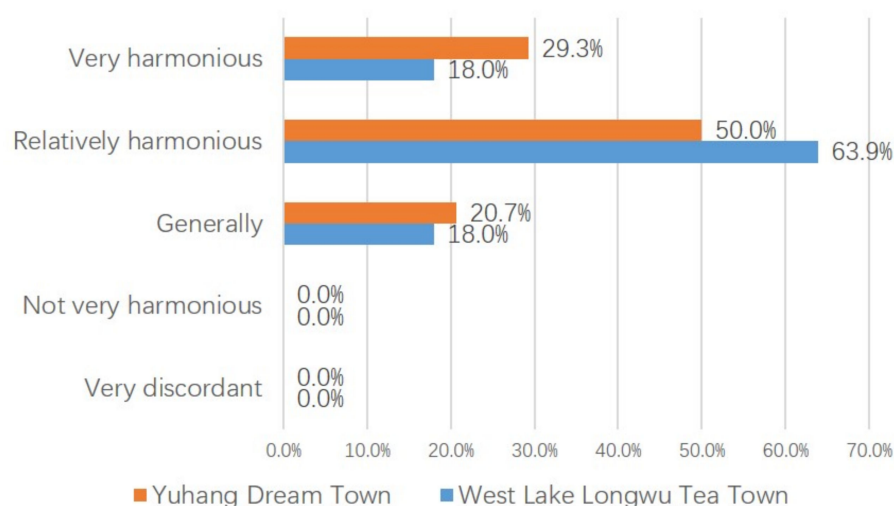


Figure 27. Changes in the interpersonal relationship between respondents and their neighbors after the local CT practice (source: authors).

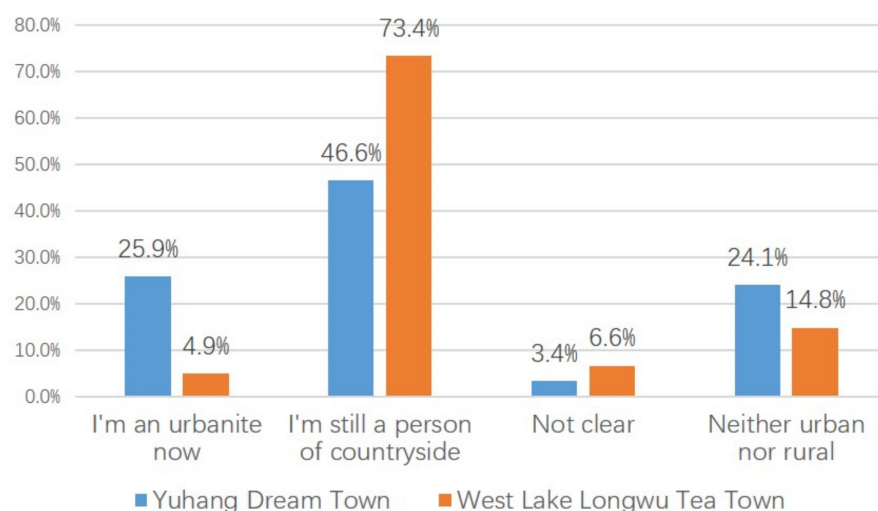


Figure 28. Changes in respondents' personal identities awareness after the local CT practice (source: authors).

However, the interpersonal relationship between residents and migrant workers appears to be different. After the CT development, along with the changes it brings to the local development, the number of migrant workers who come to these two urban and rural fringe areas has increased significantly. When it comes to residents' impression of these migrant workers attracted to the local area, most residents had a good impression of them (63.8% and 68.9%, respectively) (Figure 29). But this may just be a phenomenon that remains on the surface. A considerable number of residents indicated that it was basically impossible to establish friendship with these migrant workers (41.4% and 32.8%, respectively) (Figure 30). Figure 31 shows the specific reason. For the residents of YDT, the top three main reasons were not belonging to the same social class (45.8%), not having common themes (29.2%), and not having many chances to meet them (20.8%). For the residents of WLLTT, the top three main reasons were not having common themes (45.0%), not having many chances to meet them (35.0%), and not belonging to the same social class (15.0%). The main reason for this difference may be that YDT's migrant workers were mostly start-up entrepreneurs, who often had a bachelor's degree or above, which was in sharp contrast with local residents who generally had lower education. As stated by one resident:

"I don't think there is any so-called friendship between us. Unlike us, they are all highly educated talents, and we are not destined to be on the same level." ²²

On the other hand, most of the migrant workers in WLLTT were engaged in small businesses, so they were not so different from the local residents in terms of 'social class'. The lack of common themes was well understood, as local residents and migrant workers tended to have different priorities. Compared with the residents of YDT, the residents of WLLTT had a significantly higher probability of choosing 'not much chance to meet them'. This may be because the residents of WLLTT were more dispersed, so it was difficult for them to see others all the time.

"We all live in scattered places here. We don't often see migrant workers." ²³

In the end, as shown in Figure 32, it can be seen that although local residents and migrant workers had a relatively harmonious relationship (37.9% and 49.2%, respectively), residents who believed that the relationship between the two was general also accounted for a considerable proportion (34.5% and 34.4%, respectively). The interpersonal relationship between residents and migrant workers is therefore, facing a new dynamic.

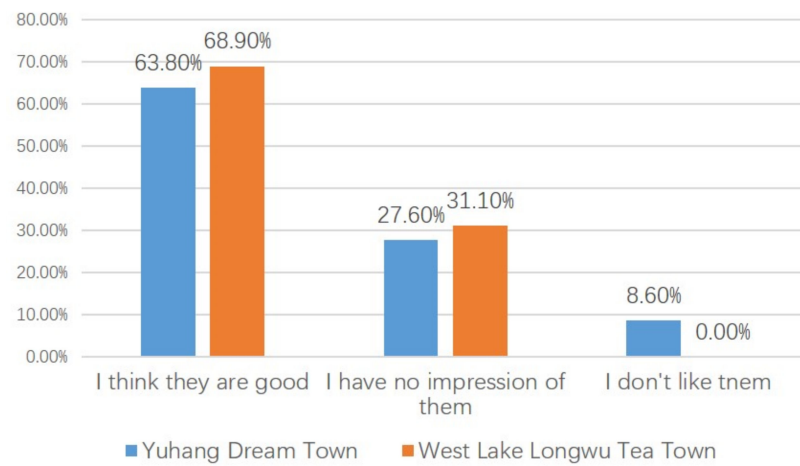


Figure 29. Respondents' impression of migrant workers due to the local CT practice (source: authors).

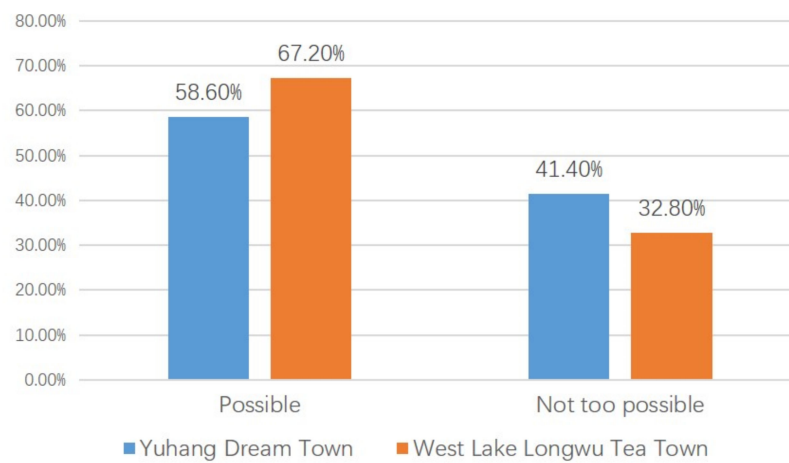


Figure 30. Possibility of establishing friendship between respondents and migrant workers (source: authors).

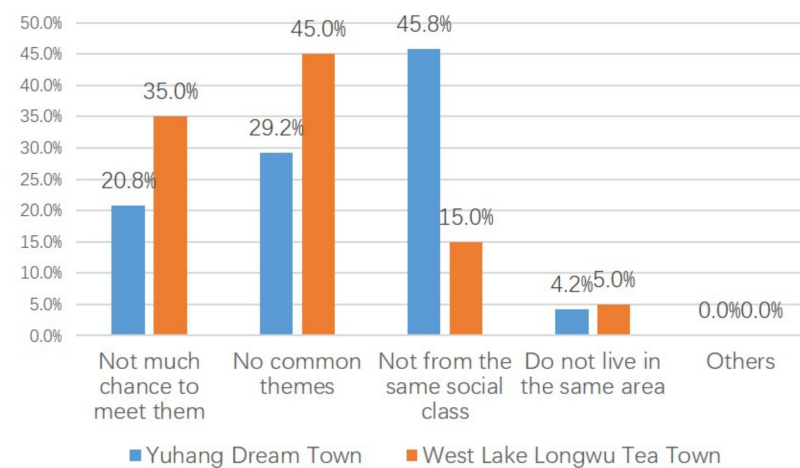


Figure 31. Reasons why respondents thought they are unable to form friendships with migrant workers (source: authors).

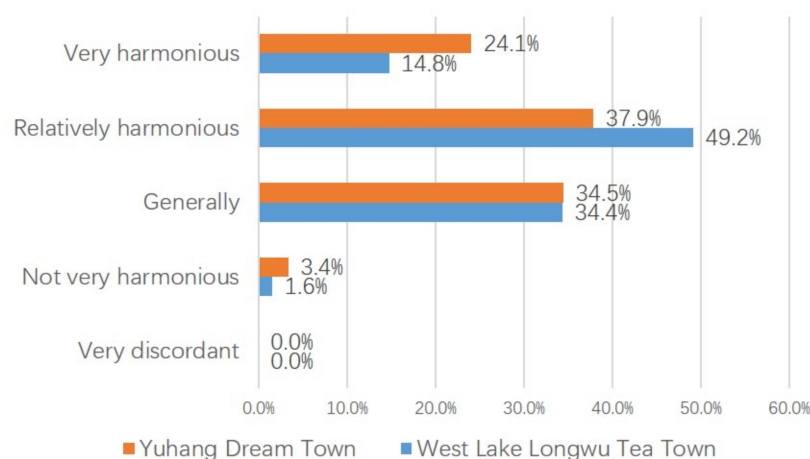


Figure 32. Respondents' views on the relationship between local residents and migrant workers (source: authors).

The investigation of two cases shows that the CT practice has caused potential changes in local social conditions. Local residents' perception of themselves as rural people has begun to change. There are already some people who think they are already urbanites or are confused about whether they are urbanites or rural people. This situation is caused by the local development brought about by the CT practice. As far as the local conditions of these two cases are concerned, YDT is more obvious because its local development level is higher than that of WLLTT. In addition, with the increasing number of migrant workers attracted by the opportunities brought about by the development of CTs, the social estrangement between the aborigines and migrant workers has begun to emerge. Although the local specific conditions of the two cases are different, they both show the estrangement between the aboriginal people and migrant workers in their life and work: they are more like two independent groups that lack sufficient linkage. This is obviously detrimental to long-term local development. As things stand, it is hard to tell that these situations have occurred in all the urban rural fringe areas where all the CTs are located. Because these situations often occur first in more developed regions. For the two cases, they are located in Hangzhou, the largest city and provincial capital of Zhejiang Province, and they are also CTs with the longest development and high degree of development, so these situations are more obvious in them. This may not be the case for the areas where other CTs are located. Because of their own level of development, they may not have reached this stage yet. However, with the continuous deepening of the CT practice, it is reasonable to speculate that such situations are likely to occur in more and more CTs and their areas that are increasingly developed, so it is necessary to be vigilant.

4.5. Overall Assessment of Local Development: Overall Recognition but Obvious Differences

This study further examines the residents' true views on the promotion of local development by the CT practice. It examines the residents' overall evaluation of the CT practice's potential to drive local development.

As shown in Figure 33, in general, most residents believed that local development at least benefited from the CT practice, and their proportions were 74.1% and 80.3%, respectively. Specifically, as shown in Figure 34 when asked what aspects of the CT practice most promoted local development, the four aspects that YDT residents selected the most the number of times they were selected were environmental construction (37), tourism development (30), Infrastructure construction (water, electricity, gas, transportation, and communication infrastructure, etc.) (28), and increased local visibility (28). As for the residents of WLLTT, the conditions were: increased local visibility (39), environmental construction (36), overall transformation, upgrading and development of local economy and industry (29), and infrastructure construction (water, electricity, gas, transportation,

and communication infrastructure, etc.) (29). Environmental construction, infrastructure construction (water, electricity, gas, transportation, and communication infrastructure, etc.) and increased local visibility were the three aspects that were selected in common. This is not surprising. The CT practice has significantly improved the local environment and infrastructure through post-industrialization-oriented space production and accumulation strategies in these urban and rural fringe areas. At the same time, the CT development has also brought huge popularity to the local area. In the eyes of residents, these were typical changes that the CT practice has brought to local development.

“If you would say the biggest boost to local development, I think the most obvious is definitely the environment and infrastructure. Now these conditions here have been greatly improved, from the ‘low level of the countryside’ to the ‘high level of the city’.” ²⁴

“I think one of the biggest contributions of the CT practice to the local development is to improve our reputation here. For example, when Longwu was mentioned in the past, everyone would confuse it with another place called Longjuwu. Now, as long as when it comes to Longwu, everyone knows that this is a famous tea-related area.” ²⁵

“When we talk about Cangqian now, everyone will think of the well-known entrepreneurial city. Who would have thought that not many years ago, this place was still a barren farmland?” ²⁶

The difference was that in the case of YDT, tourism development was another selected aspect, while in the case of WLLTT, it was the overall transformation, upgrading and development of local economy and industry. The reason why tourism development was more chosen among the former may be that the CT development has brought a new development approach to the local area, that is, tourism, and has attracted many tourists, as well as domestic and even foreign delegations. Before that, the local industry only stayed in agriculture and some low-end manufacturing, and there was basically no tourism development. The reason why overall transformation, upgrading and development of local economy and industry was chosen more by the latter may be that it has significantly promoted the transformation and development of the local economy, from agriculture, low-end manufacturing, and some simple tourism to a clearly post-industrial economy.

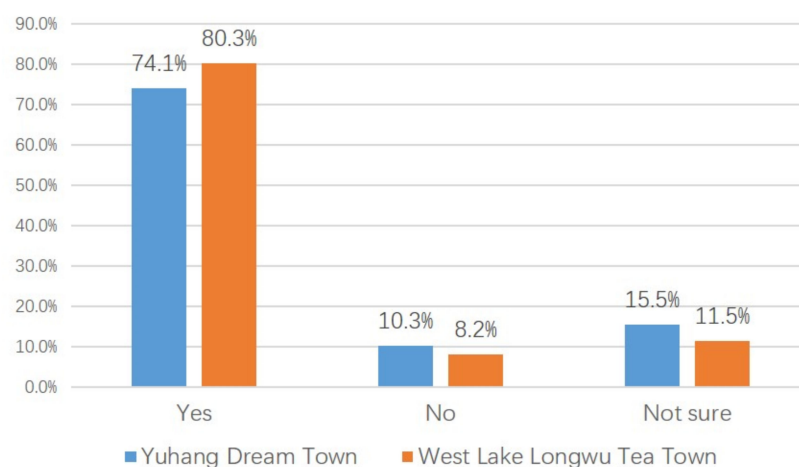


Figure 33. Respondents’ opinions on whether local development benefits from the local CT practice (source: authors).

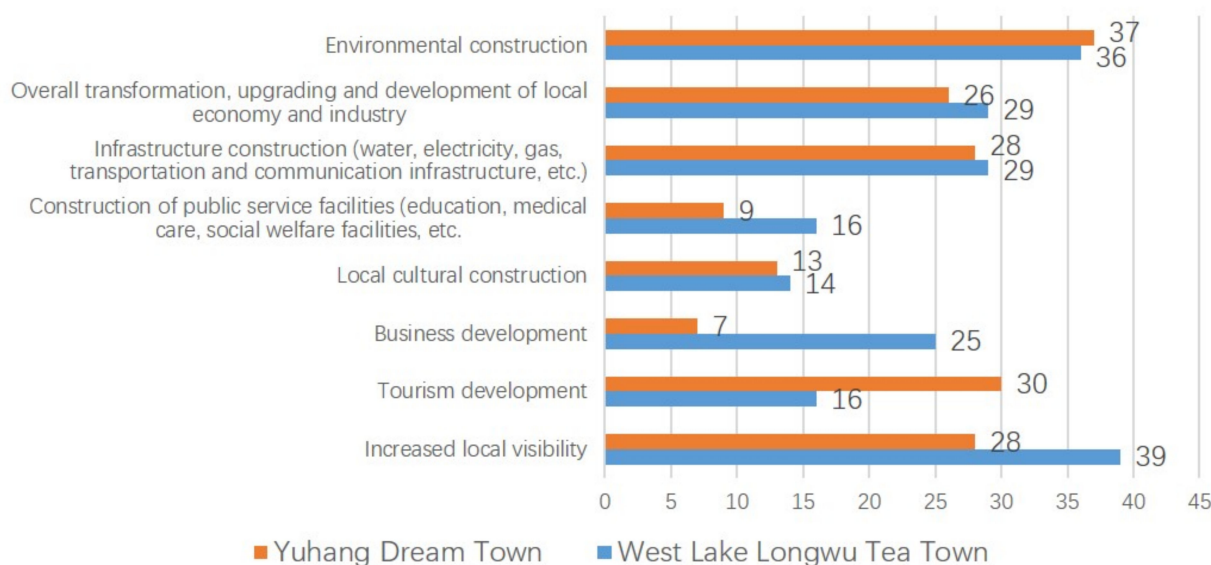


Figure 34. Frequency of selected aspects that respondents believe the local CT practice contribute the most to promote local development (source: authors).

Figures 35 and 36 further reveal more details, reflecting residents' satisfaction with the promotion of various aspects of local development by the CT practice. In the case of YDT, residents were generally satisfied with the fact that the CT practice promoted local development in all aspects. In all 8 aspects, the option with the highest proportion was "quite satisfied". Among them, the highest was increased local visibility (69.0%), and the lowest was tourism development (43.1%). In addition, in all aspects, the proportion of residents who were satisfied ("very satisfied" and "quite satisfied") basically accounted for the most important part. With the exception of tourism development, residents were more than 50% satisfied with all other aspects. Among them, the highest was environmental construction (93.1%) and the lowest was local cultural construction (58.6%). Residents were less satisfied with tourism development, accounting for 46.5%. Combined with Figure 33, this shows that although residents generally believed that the local tourism development has achieved good development under the CT development, it was still not enough to fully meet the expectations of residents. It still has a lot of upside potential. As stated by one resident:

"I think the role of the CT practice in the development of tourism here exists. Tourism development can be said to have developed from nothing. But I am still not very satisfied because I think it could have done more and better." ²⁷

Compared with YDT, the satisfaction level of residents of WLLTT seems to be significantly lower. In the three aspects of overall transformation, upgrading and development of the economy and industry, local cultural construction, and business development, the proportion of residents who felt general about them was the highest, reaching 50.8%, 47.5% and 52.5%, respectively. Moreover, the proportion of residents who were satisfied with these 8 aspects ("satisfied" and "quite satisfied") was also significantly smaller than that of YDT case. The reason for this may be that, although both were urban and rural fringe areas, the WLLTT was less developed than the YDT, and was still closer to the so-called traditional rural area. The words of a resident who belongs to WLLTT but was familiar with YDT because of his own experience were representative:

"Our place has actually made great progress, but compared with the area where YDT is located, it is still closer to traditional rural areas, without enough development degree. Residents have high expectations for the CT practice to drive local development, but the reality will be more difficult. After all, the development foundation here is not as good as that of the area where YDT is located, so the

speed of development will definitely be slower and there will be more problems. Therefore, the psychological gap of residents will be relatively large.”²⁸

Therefore, even though as shown in Figure 36, many residents believed that overall transformation, upgrading and development of local economy and industry was one of the four most prominent aspects of the CT practice to drive local development, but 50.8% of the residents still felt general with it, which reflected the ambivalence of the residents.

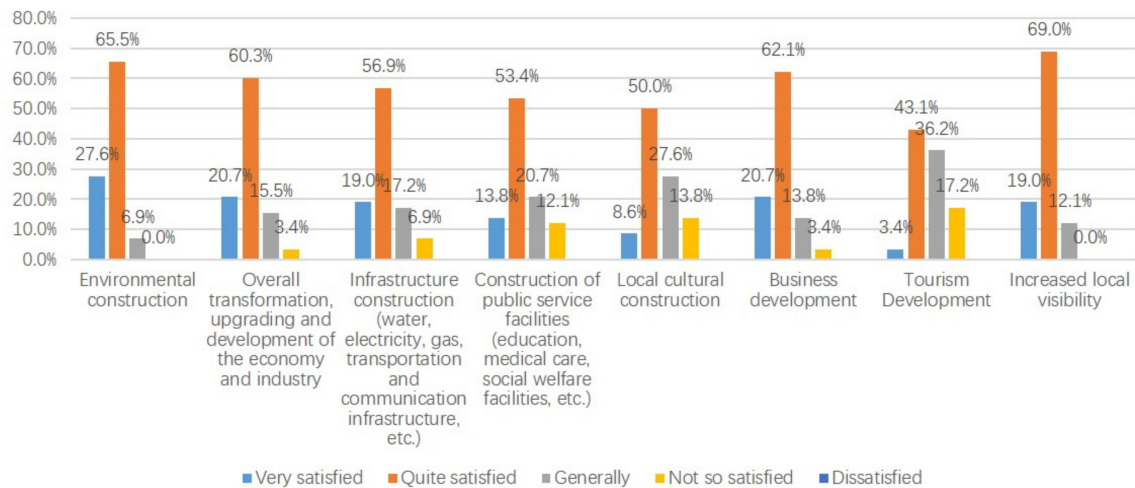


Figure 35. Respondents' satisfaction with the local CT practice to promote local development (YDT) (source: authors).

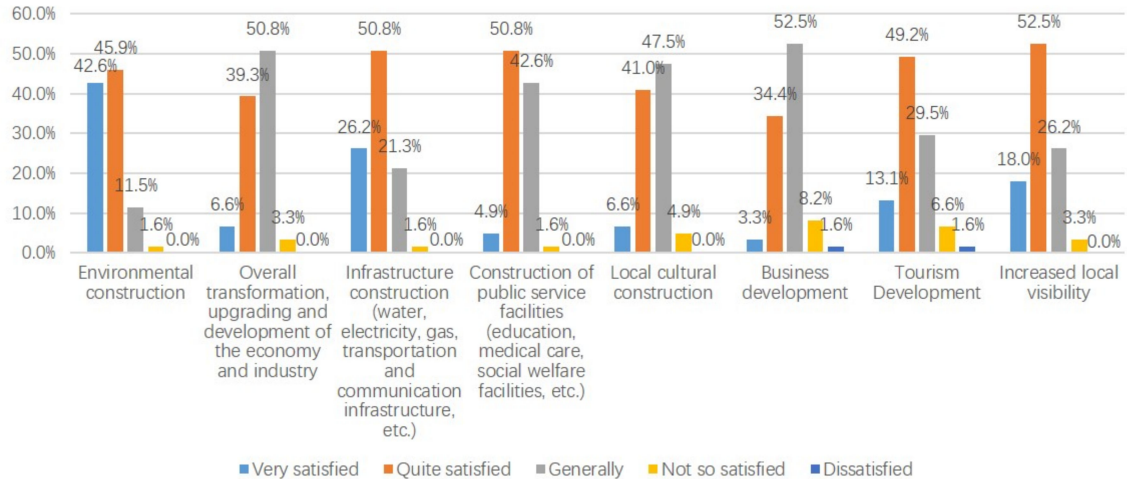


Figure 36. Respondents' satisfaction with the local CT practice to promote local development (WLLTT) (source: authors).

Nonetheless, as shown in Figure 37, in general, when asked comprehensively about the comparison between local development and the development of the central urban area under the effect of the CT practice, most residents believed that local development was still inferior to the central urban area but has significantly improved (53.4% and 54.1%, respectively). Only a minority of residents believed that local development was still far inferior to the central urban area (5.2% and 16.4%, respectively). This shows that although residents had different levels of satisfaction, in general, they relatively recognized the positive effects of the CT development on local development.

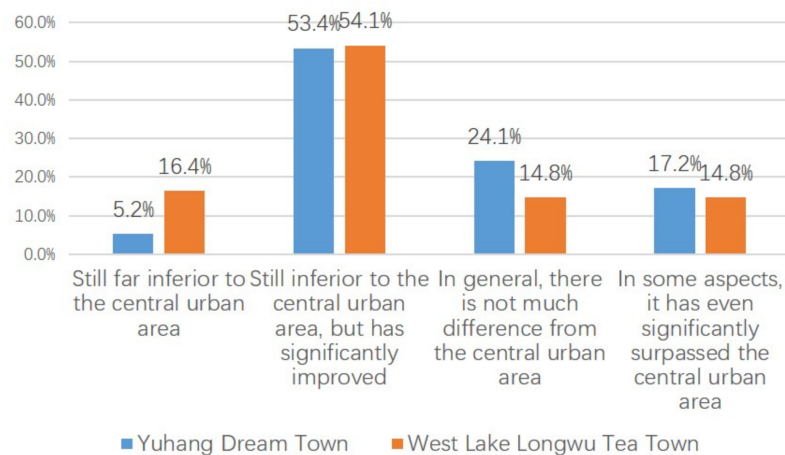


Figure 37. Respondents' evaluation of local development under the local CT practice compared with the development of central urban areas (source: authors).

The study also surveyed residents' suggestions. Figure 38 shows the opinions on the aspects that the respondents think that the local CT practice in the future needs to focus on to promote local development. Among them, the proportion of residents in the two cases who believed that they need to continue to pay attention to overall transformation, upgrading and development of local economy and industry in the future was the highest (31.0% and 41.0%, respectively). This fully echoes the purpose of the CT development. In the YYDT case, commercial construction ranked second. Many residents thought that local business conditions need to be strengthened. As one interviewee said:

"I feel that we should pay attention to the development of commercial facilities here. Now there are many migrant workers here, and a lot of beautiful landscapes have been created. If more commercial conditions can be developed in the next step, more people and investments can be attracted here, making this area more prosperous." ²⁹

While in the case of WLLTT, tourism construction ranked second. This may be because WLLTT has a good natural environment foundation and is vigorously combining the development of tea industry and tourism. As stated by a resident:

"I think our future development here will undoubtedly need to focus on tourism development. We have good natural and human conditions, and the current development is also improving this content, so why not make good use of these?" ³⁰

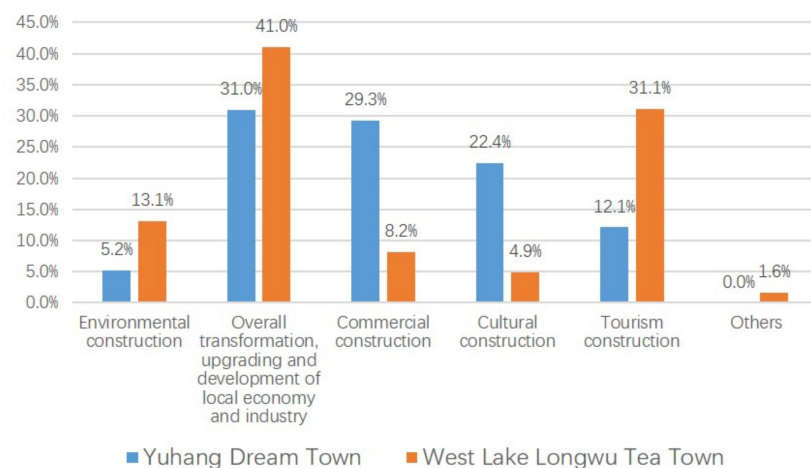


Figure 38. Opinions on the aspects that the respondents think that the local CT practice in the future needs to focus on to promote local development (source: authors).

Finally, the study also asked residents about their willingness to continue supporting future local development activities (Figure 39). Most residents selected “willing to” (37.9% and 41.0%, respectively) and “very willing to” (32.8% and 39.3%, respectively). This shows that although there are various problems in the CT practice, it is clear that residents still have a relatively strong willingness to support local development.

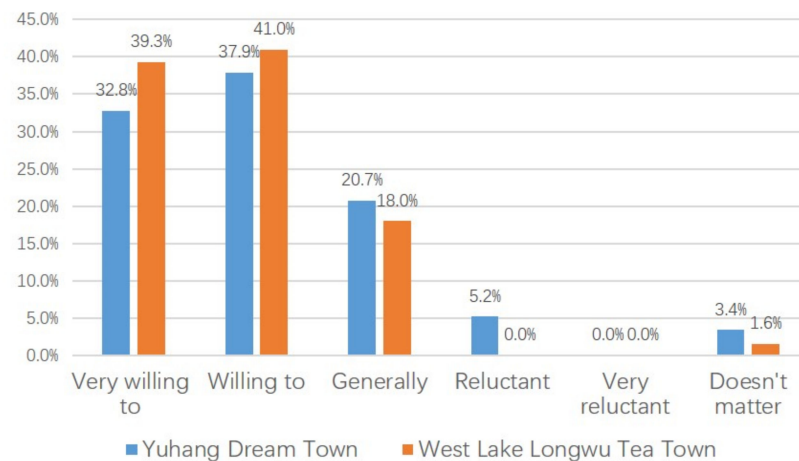


Figure 39. Respondents’ willingness to support various development activities of local CTs in the future (source: authors).

This part of the survey shows the overall evaluation of the residents in the two cases on the potential of the CT practice to promote local development. On the one hand, the residents of the two cases generally agree with the results of the current CT practice to promote local development. On the other hand, obviously, based on the specific local conditions of different cases, the specific evaluations of residents in the area where CTs are located are different. Considering that there are 60 officially recognized CTs in Zhejiang, and there are still a large number of candidate CTs, it is not difficult to predict that the evaluation of residents of each CT would be very different. For example, on some issues, such as aspects that respondents believe the local CT practice contribute the most promote local development, respondents’ satisfaction with the local CT practice to promote local development, and respondents’ evaluation of local development under the local CT practice compared with the development of central urban areas, the answers are expected to be different. However, there are still some commonalities that deserve attention. For example, the results of two cases show that environmental construction, infrastructure construction and increased local visibility are the three points that residents believe that local development benefits most from the development of CTs. This is not difficult to understand. Based on the new space production approach of creating new development space of Chinese state entrepreneurship embodied in the CT strategy, the significant improvement of the environment and infrastructure conditions in the areas where CTs are located is par for the course. The improvement of these conditions would undoubtedly help better achieve local accumulation and growth. Moreover, the development of CTs could often help many previously unknown and backward urban and rural fringe areas to establish new images and create development conditions, thereby further helping their local growth. Therefore, the significant increase in local popularity is not difficult to understand. Thus, it is reasonable to speculate that these three points are likely to be more chosen by local residents in the areas where many other CTs are located. In addition, although the specific circumstances are different, in some issues, for example, such as residents’ satisfaction with the CT development to promote local development and the degree of support for the CT development in the future, the proportion of positive answers has maintained a relative high level. This may be because these 2 cases belong to the objects with a higher degree of development. Therefore, it must be considered that in other CTs, the situation of some

issues may be worse than these 2 cases. Because at present, many other CT may not be as developed as these two cases.

Finally, after the discussion in all the above sections, we review the expectations of the results before the case study was conducted, based on the findings. First, it can be said that the CT program's effect on local living environment is somewhat in line with our expectations. Compared to the potential destruction of the traditional physical environment and historical culture, environmental pollution, and the health problems it causes, and the decline in security, that can result from the numerous urban and rural practices associated with redevelopment, renewal, and construction around the world, the CT strategy has indeed improved them in many ways. The results show that in all areas (ecological environment, housing conditions, basic service conditions, social and public service conditions, business environment and conditions, cultural, leisure and tourism environment and conditions, sanitary conditions, social security, and public safety), the local population has obtained better benefits compared to the previous ones. Such improvements, however, still fall short of our expectations that they would be greatly improved. Given China's consistent efficiency in advancing planning and construction activities, we believe that the improvements obtained should be relatively significant. In contrast, as of now, the improvements in these areas are still insufficient and there is more room for improvement. In terms of economic benefits, in line with our expectations, there has been a real increase in the income of local residents along with local development activities, although admittedly this increase has not been a blowout. However, there were also a number of findings that directly contradicted expectations. For example, we had expected stable social relationships and a lack of social exclusion and isolation here. But the results show that while relations among the indigenous people remain relatively harmonious, a potential estrangement between aboriginal and foreign workers based on factors such as education level, personal interests, and location of residence. The increase in residents' sense of belonging to the local area is also in doubt. Some local residents have already demonstrated confusion about their local identity. A number of local residents have also complained about local life and feel that their standard of living has not improved significantly. In addition, given the innovative nature of the CT program, we had expected that it might help improve public participation, which has been marginalized in China. However, the results of the study show that public participation has not actually improved substantially. The public continues to assume a passive and vulnerable role in new development activities, despite a strong desire to participate. We believe that, in general, the CT program is, at present, substantially limited in its contribution to the benefits of residents. In many of these fields, the CT program does not appear to have had a significantly different positive effect compared to other practices and programs. Moreover, while it does improve the standard of living of residents to some extent, its impact is not significant. This improvement may have been a passive spin-off and effect of the CT program's promotion of local growth, rather than a result of its active pursuit. Despite the apparent innovation in the approach growth is pursued, the primary focus of the strategy currently appears to remain solely on improving and optimizing local fiscal and economic structures and approaches.

5. Conclusions

Originating from Zhejiang Province, the CT program is an innovative new development strategy launched by the Chinese central government in recent years to develop new development spaces that combine productive, ecological, and living dimensions. Existing studies have mainly explored the origins of the strategy, the process of elevating it from a local initiative to a national policy and focus, and the typological policy approach of CTs. However, no study has yet explored the benefits of the strategy for the public. Based on desk research and fieldwork, this paper selects two typical cases in an attempt to bridge this research gap.

Based on the processing and exploration of the study data and results, the main intuitive conclusions of the findings of this study are summarized as follows: 1. CT

development has contributed to some extent to the improvement of various aspects related to residents' living standards, but this improvement is not significant; 2. residents' public participation is very limited, despite their high level of enthusiasm; 3. local residents' perceptions of their self-identity have begun to be skewed and barriers between them and foreign workers have begun to emerge; 4. residents' overall agreement with the role of CT practices for local development, but it varies from case to case.

Contrary to expectations, the results of the study of the CT program suggest that it does not currently appear to be overly special and advanced in terms of securing and enhancing public benefits compared to many other practices related to urban and rural redevelopment, renewal, and construction around the world. The main focus of the strategy currently seems to remain aimed at sustaining and enhancing capital accumulation and growth through innovative approaches. Although some public gains can be witnessed, at this stage this may only be the superficial passive added effect of the new development agenda, although the CT strategy also paints a rosy picture for the public.

In particular, given the state of all the existing CTs, the situation could be much worse. Because these CTs of two cases have a longer development time and higher development level than most other CTs. Therefore, the overall situation of other CTs is likely to be similar to or even inferior to these two cases. The effect of CT development on the improvement of residents' living standards may be less obvious in other CTs, because the current positive effect of CT development in other areas may be weaker. In other words, at present, in a certain number of CTs, their development may be more limited in helping residents' living standards. In terms of public participation, although the public participation of the two cases has been very lacking, considering that they are the flagship model of the entire CT practice, they have actually been given more public participation than other CTs. Public participation in other CTs is likely to be even more lacking. In addition, considering the continuous deepening of the CT practice, the issues of changes in the self-identity of residents and the estrangement between residents and migrant workers observed in the two cases are likely to be extended to other areas where other CTs are located. Moreover, based on different case situations, although residents of different CTs obviously have many differences in the overall evaluation of the potential of the CT practice to promote local development, the high proportion of positive responses in many of the issues in the two cases may decline markedly in the other CT cases.

Therefore, follow-up improvements need to be paid close attention, not only to the areas of these two CT cases, but also to the areas where all the CTs are located. Overall, for the CT strategy, one of the latest dynamics of the current urbanization process in China, although it embodies the idea of an innovative development model of capital accumulation and growth, it remains to be seen in the long run to what extent it can really work. To this end, in response to the above, we conclude with the following recommendations. Firstly, although the CT program proposes an innovative approach to development, there is a need to therefore, be vigilant and guard against a new round of blind pursuit of economic gains and speculative behavior that takes advantage of this opportunity, thus causing damage to the public interest. Consideration could be given to adopting a system of evaluating officials with equal emphasis on economic, environmental, and social factors and further strengthening the supervision of local fiscal expenditures. Secondly, public participation should be effectively enhanced. The continuation of the current development model may divert the CT program from its original goals and turn many areas into cradles of profit. With the increasing emphasis on developing the innovation economy and "urban-rural integration" development, the importance of public participation may be more important than ever. Attention should be paid to public opinion, and public opinion should be given the stage to fully express their thoughts and participate in affairs. Thirdly, efforts should be made to bridge the gap between indigenous people and foreign workers. This can be done by further strengthening the infrastructure and public service facilities to provide better conditions for foreign workers to live and work, so as to enhance their recognition of the local community. Consideration can also be given to enhancing comprehensive training for

indigenous people to improve their overall quality so as to reduce the “class difference” with foreign workers.

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Notes

- 1 Interview: Resident of the area where Yuhang Dream Town is located, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 26 December 2021. R8
- 2 Interview: Resident of the area where Yuhang Dream Town is located, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 10 March 2022. R16
- 3 Interview: Resident of the area where West Lake Longwu Tea Town is located, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 4 March 2022. R10
- 4 Interview: Resident of the area where Yuhang Dream Town is located, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 25 March 2022. R17
- 5 Interview: Resident of the area where West Lake Longwu Tea Town is located, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 4 March 2022. R10
- 6 Interview: Resident of the area where West Lake Longwu Tea Town is located, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 4 March 2022. R11
- 7 Interview: Resident of the area where Yuhang Dream Town is located, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 26 December 2021. R9
- 8 Interview: Resident of the area where West Lake Longwu Tea Town is located, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 9 March 2022. R14
- 9 Interview: Resident of the area where West Lake Longwu Tea Town is located, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 9 March 2022. R13
- 10 Interview: Resident of the area where West Lake Longwu Tea Town is located, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 7 March 2022. R12
- 11 Interview: Resident of the area where Yuhang Dream Town is located, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 13 December 2021. R4
- 12 Interview: Resident of the area where Yuhang Dream Town is located, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 13 December 2021. R5
- 13 Interview: Resident of the area where West Lake Longwu Tea Town is located, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 10 March 2022. R15
- 14 Interview: Resident of the area where West Lake Longwu Tea Town is located, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 4 March 2022. R10
- 15 Interview: Deputy Director of Management Committee of Hangzhou West Science and Technology Innovation Corridor, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 15 December 2021. G1
- 16 Interview: Director of Regional Development Office of Cangqian Sub-district, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 30 December 2021. G4
- 17 Interview: Associate Professor of the Department of Human Geography and Urban and Rural Planning, School of Geography, Nanjing Normal University, 19 April 2022. S3
- 18 Interview: Manager of Investment Department of Hangzhou Zhijiang Operation Management Group Co., Ltd., 2 March 2022. D2
- 19 Interview: Deputy Director of Management Committee of Hangzhou West Science and Technology Innovation Corridor, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 15 December 2021. G1
- 20 Interview: Resident of the area where Yuhang Dream Town is located, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 13 December 2021. R2
- 21 Interview: Resident of the area where West Lake Longwu Tea Town is located, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 10 March 2022. R15
- 22 Interview: Resident of the area where Yuhang Dream Town is located, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 13 December 2021. R4
- 23 Interview: Resident of the area where West Lake Longwu Tea Town is located, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 13 December 2021. R6
- 24 Interview: Resident of the area where Yuhang Dream Town is located, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 26 December 2021. R8
- 25 Interview: Resident of the area where West Lake Longwu Tea Town is located, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 4 March 2022. R10
- 26 Interview: Resident of the area where Yuhang Dream Town is located, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 13 December 2021. R3
- 27 Interview: Resident of the area where Yuhang Dream Town is located, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 13 December 2021. R3
- 28 Interview: Resident of the area where West Lake Longwu Tea Town is located, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 10 March 2022. R15

- 29 Interview: Resident of the area where Yuhang Dream Town is located, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 26 December 2021. R9
- 30 Interview: Resident of the area where West Lake Longwu Tea Town is located, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, 9 March 2022. R13

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