**Appendix A Methodology and Fieldwork Notes**

The methodology of this study is based primarily on ethnographic research I conducted for the larger project on state-led urbanization in China. From 2012 to 2014, I conducted a total of 105 semi-structured interviews in the city centers and rural outskirts of Kunming, Chengdu, Zhengzhou and Beijing municipalities. The first three cities are located in Yunnan province, Sichuan province, and Henan province, respectively. Both Yunnan and Sichuan provinces are located in western China, while Henan province is in central China.

My field sites included an “urban village” (*chengzhongcun*) in Kunming, six villages and urban communities (*shequ*) in Chengdu and its outskirt counties, seven “urban villages” and urban communities in Zhengzhou municipality, and the “petition village” (*shangfangcun*) in Beijing. “Urban villages” are enclaves in Chinese cities, the land of which are still collective-owned and are typically much lower than in other urban neighborhoods. In the drive to urbanize, local governments have made concerted efforts in demolishing residences and shops in “urban villages”, convert the land to state ownership and sell it to real estate developers at commercial rates.

The field sites were not randomly selected. They were selected based on my personal connections with local contacts. The field sites do not provide for a systematic regional variation of local state capacity or the intensity of the use of thugs. With these limitations in mind, the study does not seek to explain the regional variation in the intensity of the use of TFH or how that maybe related to regional state capacity.

My personal connections introduced me to the sites and provided initial contacts. I relied on snowball methods subsequently to recruit more interviewees. For ethic concerns, I choose not to disclose exact locations of the field sites or identities of the interviewees. The majority of the interviewees were villagers (in the city outskirts) and urban residents who had been affected by land expropriation and housing demolition efforts spearheaded by local authorities. Some of them have become activists who organized or participated in collective actions against the state’s expropriations of their properties. Whenever access was available, I also interviewed party leaders in the localities who made decisions on state actions. The semi-structured interview questions were aimed at learning about how citizens’ livelihoods have been affected by urbanization, and the governance aspect of the expropriation and demolition processes. It was from the many in-depth interviews that I have learnt coercive force, particularly the use of third-party coercion, was prevalent in acquiring citizens’ compliance.

Additionally, I drew upon Chinese-language secondary literature in sociology and criminology on the development of underground societies or mafias *over time*, a common pattern of which is from the “thugs-for-hire” without much organizational structure to the networked and organized underground criminal groups. I also gathered evidence through secondary research on the use of thugs by the state in other policy areas, such as collection of taxes and fees and implementation of the one-child policy.

The list of field sites and time of visits are as follows:

* A village in Kunming, Yunnan, Summer 2012 (12 villagers/activists)
* Two urban communities (*shequ*) in Chengdu, Sichuan, Summer 2013 (2 residents; 2 party cadres)
* A village in Shuangliu county, Sichuan, Summer 2014 (11 villagers/activists)
* 3 villages and *shequ* in greater Chengdu, Summer 2014 (16 villagers/residents)
* Beijing “petition village”, Summer 2014 (9 petitioners)
* 7 villages/*shequ* in greater Zhengzhou, Summer 2014 (50 villagers/residents/activists; 5 village party cadres)