International Journal of China Studies

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Special Issue

China: Government, Space and Power

Introduction

Metropole Power: Approaches to Centre and Periphery in Contemporary China
Gary Sigley

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International Journal of China Studies · China: Government, Space and Power · Guest Editor: Gary Sigley

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China: Government, Space and Power

Guest Editor

Gary Sigley

International Journal of China Studies

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Government, Space and Power

Guest Editor

Gary Sigley

UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA

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Introduction

Metropole Power: Approaches to Centre and Periphery in Contemporary China

Gary **Sigley***
The University of Western Australia

1. Introduction

The 2012 edition of the Chinese Academy of Social Science *Blue Book on Social Development: China's Social Situation, Analysis and Forecast for 2012* declared that sometime in the same year China's urban population would cross an historic milestone to constitute more than 50 per cent of the overall population. Bearing in mind that we should take such claims with a grain of salt knowing that the measurement of what is and isn't "urban" is sometimes more a matter of administrative decree rather than rigorous academic reasoning, it is plainly obvious even to the casual observer that China is indeed urbanizing at an extremely rapid rate. This process is having profound effects on the nature of social, cultural and economic life and will rightly be the focus of intensive research in the decades to come. Indeed the subject has already been well explored from numerous angles in the academic literature thus far (Bray, 2005; Davis *et al*., 1995; Friedmann, 2005; Jacka, 2006; McGee, 2007; Oakes and Schein, 2006).

Yet urbanization as a phenomenon does not only impact on the immediate geographical and social space of the urban, the influence of its economic and cultural power extends far beyond the city limits. The factories and construction sites of China's eastern seaboard are a beacon attracting tens of millions of migrant workers. The remitted income and acquisition of associated urban values of the rural-to-urban migrants, the *nongmingong* 农民工, in turn effect physical and cultural change back upon the villages. The strongly urban biased consumer and ideological values of the media, particularly through advertising and entertainment (such as popular television dramas and matchmaking programmes) are also an important conduit for the transfer of an urban worldview to the broader society. The rapidly developing and improved transport infrastructure is likewise enabling a mass exodus in the other direction from the urban to the rural in the form of the urban tourist,

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an increasing number of whom are driving their own vehicles on pleasure jaunts through the countryside. In a country as vast as China not all of these effects are even, nor indeed is the scale and pace of urbanization, but they are significant enough to be worthy of critical attention and each is a piece of the broader mosaic.

Nonetheless the process of urbanization does not render everyone equally urban, even those newcomers who enter the city in search of a future find that they are often treated as "second-class citizens" (Pun, 2005; Solinger, 1999). Urbanization in China has gone hand in hand with significant social stratification, a phenomenon also well researched (Goodman, 2008; Li, 2010; Otis, 2011; Whyte, 2010). In many places the cityscape has expanded so fast that, in an ironic reversal of Mao Zedong's famous guerilla strategy, the city has come to surround the countryside. In so doing the neologism of the "urban village" (*chengzhongcun* 城中村) has now entered the Chinese lexicon. The *chengzhongcun* is not akin to the "urban village" of trendy downtown Beijing (Soho Sanlitun for example) or other such global cosmopolitan visions of gentrified inner-city community living. Rather, it is a hybrid zone where the urban meets the rural, or, as I shall argue below, where the "centre" meets the "periphery". It is in these hybrid zones that the lives of the urban "other", that is, the *nongmingong*, are played out and new identities forged and contested. It is also in these liminal zones that state power seeks to assert its authority and shape the social landscape according to its will (Dutton, 1998).

I argue here that there is another way in which we can consider the relationship between the urban and rural in the context of a rapidly changing China. That is, as an uneven power relationship between the metropole centre and the non-metropole periphery. The notion of the "metropole" has been used to describe the relations between the Western colonial centre and the spaces "outside" which were subject to various forms of colonial power, and of the multifarious ways in which the "periphery" also reflected back upon the "centre" (especially in terms of constituting notions of progress, race and nation) (Webster, 2006). With some modification I argue that the notion of the metropole as a heuristic device can help clarify central aspects of the power/knowledge relationship between the Chinese party-state (that is, a one-party nation-state) and Chinese society at large, especially those sections of society outside the immediate physical and social scope of the Chinese metropole. In this instance "metropole" not only refers to the physical manifestation of all that is urban but also, and perhaps more importantly, to a specific form of governmental reasoning emanating from the centre that seeks to condition and shape the periphery.

Firstly, to refer to an oft-quoted statement from Lucien Pye (1992: 235), China is "a civilization pretending to be a [nation-]state". In this instance for

"civilization" read "empire". I do not have the space here to examine in detail the pros and cons of this argument; suffice to say that present-day China does indeed represent the only remaining nineteenth-century, that is "premodern", multi-ethnic empire (Crossley, 2002). To forge this gargantuan entity into a modern nation-state requires an enormous act of will from the centre upon the periphery. This includes the processes, both violent and nonviolent, of incorporating the non-Han regions into the fold of the nation, a process well documented elsewhere (Mullaney, 2011).

Secondly, taking ethnicity out of the equation, the biggest divide in contemporary China (or indeed "modern" China) is itself between the "urban" and the "rural". In 1947 in the seminal classic *From the Soil* (*Xiangtu Zhongguo* 乡土中国) Fei Xiaotong (1992: 37) wrote that "Chinese society is fundamentally rural". Fei (1992: 40) further described the (Han) farming communities as being fixed and immobile. "Being fixed in space, people live in solitude and isolation," he wrote. The post-1949 *hukou* 户口 system of household registration did certainly perpetuate this condition of relative isolation, at least directly from urban China if not from the ideological reach of the Maoist party-state. However, the rural in contemporary China is certainly no longer "fixed and immobile". As mentioned above, farmers have *en masse* migrated to the cities and many a rural community has been absorbed by an expanding urban landscape. Yet the *hukou* system is still firmly in place perpetuating a system of second-class citizenship, forever marking out the *nongmingong* as "Other" and bearing all the associated connotations the term implies.

The essays in this collection explore different facets of this so-called metropole power, of which urbanization is a correlate phenomenon, right from the very epicentre in places like the Pearl River Delta and cosmopolitan Shanghai, to a small village in Anhui – Xiaogang – which in the late 1970s was the site of the first experiment in "household farming" that would in turn help trigger a nation-wide shift in agricultural policy in the 1980s. The contrast between the Pearl River Delta and the Anhui village of Xiaogang could not be greater. It was in the Pearl River Delta that China's experiment with urban reform first began in the late 1970s transforming the bucolic landscape of what is now known as Shenzhen into a bustling metropolis in the short space of three decades. Xiaogang, by contrast, despite its historic role in laying the way for reform was for much of the last thirty years of reform clearly on the outside, but it too now has been thrust into the trajectory of nation-building modernization in efforts to create a "new socialist countryside" (*shehuizhuyi xin nongcun* 社会主义新农村), and to ensure that no point in the nation-state remains unconnected from the centre.

It is through this grid of profound social change in which the centre works upon the periphery (to greater and lesser degrees of success) that the essays

here examine the intersection of government, space and power. Government is understood in the broad Foucauldian sense of the "conduct of conduct", that is, in the heterogeneous ways in which state power in China comes to impose its will on the citizen-subject. The essays collectively point towards a form of Chinese governmentality, what I have elsewhere playfully described as a form of "liberal despotism" (Sigley, 2004). Space in these essays represents the point at which government and subject meet in the contested zones. These spaces take the shape of villages in the heartland of Anhui, of urban villages in the Pearl River Delta and of the cityscape of Shanghai. Power is the concrete manifestation of opposed wills, one seeking to control and order, and another to resist and evade. In what follows I briefly consider how each of the papers relates to the central themes outlined above.

2. Government

In terms of government the contributions provide different angles on a complex question. However banal it sounds there is no getting away from the dominance of the party-state when it comes to government in China. Although much "space" has been opened up for private life since the onset of reforms in 1978, the party-state still continues to play the determining role in government at all levels. Yet whilst this remains the case it would be incorrect to suggest that since 1978 nothing has changed. In parallel with the development of a market economy, albeit a "socialist market economy", the scope for individual agency in terms of choices relating to lifestyle has created new sites for self-expression and subjectivity both within and beyond the emerging consumer culture. As I have argued elsewhere (Jeffreys and Sigley, 2009) we can understand the shift that has taken place in China as one of "government" to "governance". That is, the party-state has divested itself of some authority and direct administrative control in favour of allowing certain sections of the population to practice greater degrees of self-autonomy (see also Hoffman, 2006). In the analysis of deeply embedded concepts such as *suzhi* 素质 (human quality), for example, we see that the terrain of government has widened considerably and that not all citizens (or we might say "citizen-subjects" to capture the dual sense of autonomy and heteronomy implied here) are treated equally. In terms of the discourse of *suzhi*, for example, some are seen to possess the attributes of "high quality" (*gao suzhi* 高素质) and are thereby able to govern themselves, whilst others are in the "low quality" (*di suzhi* 低素质) category and in need of "self-improvement" (Sigley, 2009).

Li Lingling examines in her contribution the resistance on the part of rural-urban migrant writers who critique and mock the sanitized vision of the urban landscape proffered by the local government and urban property

developers. These urban-migrant writers inhabit the hybrid zone of the urban/rural in two senses. Firstly, they are themselves rural migrants who have come to the city in search of employment opportunities. Secondly, due to strained financial circumstances, they must reside in the *chengzhongcun* (urban villages) which whilst now surrounded by the urban still retain a sense of being "outside", "marginalized" and even "dangerous". The status of being "rural" is thus saturated in terms of both place of origin and place of residence. Whilst the urban authorities and property developers look upon the space of the *chengzhongcun* as unruly, disordered and unsafe, Li notes that for the urban-migrant writers these liminal spaces become the battle-ground for contesting their sense of new identity and in so doing offer a valuable critique of metropole reasoning that would wish to ignore and eradicate the presence of the *chengzhongcun* altogether. We can detect here some similarities between the experience of writers from the "colonies" who vented their rancour against the metropole establishment (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2002). Li's work reminds us that government is much more than the act of policy formation and implementation but just as equally about the formation of conceptual categories of "the governors" and "the governed". In her work we gain unique insights to subaltern voices critiquing the efforts of urban authorities to make the city in the image of a "middle class utopia".

In continuing to focus on government, Thao Nguyen in her contribution examines "citizenship" in Shanghai where authorities focus their attention on the process of "civilizing" the new rural-to-urban migrants, seeking to improve their *suzhi* (human quality) and cope with a rapidly changing urban social landscape. Nguyen's work is somewhat sympathetic to the tasks confronting government in contemporary China. The very success of the reform process in creating a more plural, dynamic, mobile China are also the very processes which make it more difficult and challenging to govern. She notes that, "*Shequ* [community] building should therefore be viewed as an attempt by the party-state to build formal institutions of political participation to ensure that collective actions against the state can be organized in a politically acceptable manner and that they do not spill onto the streets and pose a threat to social stability."

Through an examination of the "civilization campaign" (*wenming huodong* 文明活动) and "community building" (*shequ jianshe* 社区建设) Nguyen outlines how government in Shanghai has adapted its strategies in the shift from the "work unit" (*danwei* 单位) to the "community" (*shequ* 社区) as the terrain of urban government (which can also be understood in terms of the aforementioned shift from "government" to "governance"). According to government statements, the "community" promises to be a site of increasing local autonomy and self-governance (*zizhi* 自治). However, Nguyen notes that such claims need to be understood in terms of a limited autonomy that

is graded and granted according to the level of *suzhi*. For instance, we see in this transition a state-led effort to incorporate the large influx of migrant workers into Shanghai through a process of encouraging them to develop a sense of "being urban" and "being civil", what Nguyen refers to as a process of cultivating an "inner urbanism". In this regard Nguyen argues that, "Civilizing campaigns at the *shequ* level should be understood as attempts to rectify the 'deficient' component of China's urbanization process as manifested in the 'poor quality' (*di suzhi*) of its vast workforce of rural-urban migrants."

3. Space

From the villages of the remote rural areas to the *chengzhongcun* of urban China, space itself is both an artefact of government and a contested zone. Space in this sense is a problematization, something that governments wrestle with in determining the desirable, at least from the view of the authorities, dimensions, and of making spaces that are more amenable to surveillance and intervention, especially in terms of securing "social stability" (Sigley, 2013). Just as equally, however, space is also seen as a significant site of resistance and negotiation between the party-state and the citizenry. Two of the contributions focus squarely on urban China and investigate the social consequences of rapid urban expansion and rural-to-urban migration.

David Wang's study of the urban villages of Shenzhen serves as an informative introduction and overview of the phenomenon of the urban village. Shenzhen is itself a product of reform, a city that did not exist before 1978. As one of the first, and without doubt the most significant, Special Economic Zones (SEZs), it is fair to say that it is the birthplace of modern Chinese state capitalism. And in a measure of how fast Shenzhen has grown, it is also the first city to confront the "urban village". With a focus much more on the native villagers rather than the urban-migrants, Wang's study shows that in the case of Shenzhen the native villagers have been able to resist and deflect to varying degrees the developmental intentions of government urban planners. We see that the local villagers have been able to effectively adapt to changing circumstances and maintain a sense of collective identity through the creation of village companies. Wang concludes that the case of the urban villages in Shenzhen, at least as far as the native villagers are concerned, is a positive model for urban villages in other parts of China (many of which have little space or power of negotiation with the city government and property developers).

Li adds to Wang's informative overview by focusing on the rural-to-urban migrant, the *nongmingong*. Whereas Wang provides a view of the urban village from the perspective of the native villagers, Li comes at the

problem from the view of the rural-to-urban migrant, and in particular the urban migrant writer. In this case quite a different perspective emerges. In her study of urban alienation and identity, Li examines the relationship between the rural migrants and the urban spaces (typically the urban village) they occupy, and those spaces from which they are excluded. Drawing upon the voices of the subaltern through interviews and "labour literature" (*dagong wenxue* 打工文学) we are given privileged access to the phenomenon of the urban village from the point of view of the *nongmingong*. Instead of seeing the urban village as a "cultural wasteland" (*wenhua shamo* 文化沙漠) we instead see them as spaces of "cultural production". Li adroitly highlights the battlelines drawn over identity in the contest to make meaning and (dis)order out of urban space. The neat and imposing blueprints of the urban developer and city official are pitted against the wit, sarcasm and passion of the pen of the migrant worker. Li calls upon urban residents and officials to look at the space of the urban village in more favourable terms. She holds that, "Demolishing urban villages means destroying the cultural cells of the organic city and excluding the cultural possibilities and diversity of life in the city that everyone can call 'home'."

Hongguang He, by contrast, focuses our attention back on rural China. His paper reminds us that the social transformation underway in China is not just confined to the urban areas and highlights the planning intentions of the centre upon the villages in the "new socialist countryside" (*shehuizhuyi xin nongcun*) campaign, a governmental campaign of enormous significance yet one which has received very little scholarly attention in the anglophone academy. Hongguang He examines spatial change in the village of Xiaogang, which – as mentioned above – is famous for being the first village to switch from collective to household farming in the late 1970s. We see in Xiaogang the strong hand of the state concerned as it is with "modernizing" the village by bringing order and meaning to village space. In a paper that straddles both the themes of space and government, Hongguang He outlines what he refers to as the "spatialization of government". In so doing he asks: how has space been (re)designed in a particular way to govern or manage the village? Whilst acknowledging the rise of individual forms of subjectivity even in rural China during the reform period, Hongguang He also argues that "a collectivized form of subjectivity still persists and that this collective family identity is built into village public and domestic spaces". Through his case study we gather that the development of public space forms an ongoing site of negotiation between the government and the local villagers. Hongguang He argues that "new forms of space continue to bolster collectivized rather than individualized forms of subjectivity". This contrasts with Yan Yunxiang's (2009) work on the "individualization" of rural China and will serve as a useful addition to this important area of research.

David Wang in his contribution on Shenzhen also highlights the collective function of the urban village. Wang argues that the villages as a form of collective agency have played an important role in providing a safety net and form of collective representation for villagers as the society and landscape around them undergo a dramatic transformation. In this regard, the urban villages that Wang describes are kinds of liminal spaces between the urban and the rural, and during the process of urbanization they become hybridized zones. Wang argues that both Ferdinand Tönnies's terminology of *Gemeinschaft* and *Geselleschaft*, often used to characterize rural and urban communities respectively, could both equally be applied to the urban villages. As Wang notes, "In the urban village we find both the kind of *Gemeinschaft* rural community and *Geselleschaft* modern urban society." This fascinating blend of the "rural" and the "urban" right in the heart of the metropolis that is now Shenzhen is only possible because of the continued existence of the space of the urban village, itself a product of the specific form of land tenure that, until recently in Shenzhen, distinguished between rural and urban households. Wang's study is thus a testimony to the divergent possibilities available to city planners in the context of China and that in the process of urbanization Chinese cities do not have to become an undifferentiated homogenous space of sameness. But perhaps more importantly the form of collective ownership found in some of Shenzhen's urban villages points to the possibility of different forms of grass-roots associational life and empowerment that may be helpful in the transition towards more broader participatory forms of political life. To simply destroy the urban village is to eradicate this possibility. This brings us to the final theme of the papers, "power".

4. Power

As I noted in the introduction we could understand this form of power as extending from the "metropole", a term I modify here to denote the significant omnipresence of an urban-based party-state in contemporary China. Power in this sense finds its strength both in the physical apparatus of the state in implementing and enforcing policy but also in the forms of knowledge and expertise which assist in rendering the social terrain visible and amenable to intervention. Yet as other contributors note, even when subjects meet this condition for self-improvement it does not guarantee that they will be welcomed into the arms of the urban citizenry and aspirational middle class. As Li argues, "The different worlds of the rural and the urban have become the most significant symbols of social class and cultural identity in China." All of the essays explore this divide in one way or another. Li, Wang and Nguyen examine those spaces of the "urban" and "rural" which overlap. As a result of a system of household registration (*hukou*), which divides the population

administratively into either a "rural" or an "urban" resident, it is very difficult for rural migrants to officially change their status. Even if they could change residency from "rural" to "urban" they are still marked out as different.

Nguyen's paper adds to Li's insofar as it goes beyond the "migrant" versus "resident" divide to note that even within the "migrant" category there is a stratification of "high quality" (*gao suzhi*) and "low quality" (*di suzhi*) migrants, thus bringing to our attention the significant process of social stratification within urban China and the varied responses of government in "managing" these different groups. One of the key problems confronting this metropole power is how to incorporate "the other" into urban space, that is, to welcome them not just as migrants but more importantly "new citizens" (or in the case of Shanghai, the "new Shanghainese", a label which is only currently applied to the "high quality" migrants).

The papers are thus collectively describing a form of power emanating from the metropolitan centre seeking to shape and condition the conduct of China's citizenry. Even in the remotest corners of China, at least in the papers in this collection, local governments, whilst having some leeway to implement to suit local conditions, must at the end of the day comply with prefectural, provincial and central directives. Power in this sense is not applied evenly; it uses dividing practices to distinguish between the "quality" (*suzhi*) of different subjects and to impose different regimes. But at the same time through the use of the pen or in other acts of evasion those who are the target of such transformative agendas can and do speak back. Collectively the essays in this collection offer as a cross-section of contemporary China and the conflicts, tensions and contestations between state and society.

Note

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Urban Villages as Spaces of Cultural Identity: Urban Migrant Writers in the Pearl River Delta

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Abstract

Through an analysis of a case study of urban migrant writers and urban villages in the Pearl River Delta this article examines the relationship between migrants and urban spaces in contemporary China. Urban migrant writers record the cultural experience of rural-urban migration in contemporary China from the point of view of the urban migrants (*nongmingong*) themselves. The "urban villages" (*chengzhongcun*) are not only a residential place for these new urban migrant writers, but more importantly, as urban spaces they also play an important role in both reconstructing the cultural identities of the urban migrant writers and contributing to the cultural production and vitality of the Chinese metropolis. The article first outlines the urban migrant writers' life and experiences in the urban villages and describes how urban villages have become urban migrant spaces. By analyzing the physical spaces and cultural conflicts in urban villages, the article then discusses how such spaces become spaces of cultural psychology and in turn influence the self-image and urban experiences of urban migrant writers. The article then analyzes the unique urbanization process and urban cultural construction movement in metropolitan China and suggests the construction of the city's image and its power of aesthetics, that is, of the ability to determine what should be included and excluded from the urban landscape, further intensifies the self-identity of the new urban migrant writers. The article concludes by arguing that as spaces of cultural identity urban villages exhibit the cultural diversity of urban culture, where urban migrant writers participate in cultural and literary production. Demolishing urban villages means destroying the cultural cells of the organic city and excluding the cultural possibilities and diversity of life in the city that everyone can call "home".

Keywords: *urban village, urban migrant writer, space, cultural identity, aesthetic power, city image, Pearl River Delta*

JEL classification: *J15, J61, O18, Z13*

1. Introduction

Since the start of China's economic reform and opening up three decades ago, about 230 million migrant workers have left their rural homes and traveled across the country in search of work.[1] Many of the new urban migrants[2] are traveling from inner rural provinces to the urban centres of coastal southeast China. Following the historic changes brought about by the implementation of the policies of "reform and openness" (*gaige kaifang* 改革开放) in 1978, the Pearl River Delta became one of the earliest regions in China to implement reforms that attracted workers from all over China. Thus the region is also the place where *dagong* literature (*dagong wenxue* 打工文学), or labour literature, was born. In the early 1990s there was a popular ditty in the inner provinces: "if you want to get rich, go south!" "South" here refers to the Pearl River Delta, or more accurately Guangdong Province. In search of their dreams, rural people came to cities like Guangzhou and Shenzhen in pursuit of opportunities. Since as early as the mid-1980s migrant workers who are sensitive and talented in writing began to create literature about their own working lives in the Pearl River Delta. Those people are defined as urban migrant writers in this research. The works they created are defined as *dagong* literature.[3]

The rural-to-urban migration and social transition has been as profound and as traumatic as the 19th-century industrial revolutions in Western countries. Since the *hukou* 户口 system of household registration was established in 1958,[4] rural and urban China has been divided into two different worlds. Under strict regulations which allocated every citizen a rural or urban household registration, a change to nonagricultural household status was, and remains, extremely difficult. A farmer wishing to visit the city during most of the Maoist China (1949-1976) would find the task extremely difficult. Firstly, in order to buy a train ticket or stay in a hotel, he needed a letter from his work unit or rural authorities. Secondly, he could not buy a meal in a restaurant in the city if he forgot to bring his ration tickets. With nowhere to sleep and nothing to eat few could survive for long in the cities. (Wong, 1994: 335-355) Consequently the *hukou* system restricted free mobility and formed the dual rural-urban system, which resulted in the cleavage of rural and urban society. (Sun, 2003) The different worlds of the *rural* and the *urban* have become the most significant symbols of social class and cultural identity in China. Therefore, the urban experience of migration is a journey through the rural-urban barrier, a journey between two different worlds. Urban migrant writers record the traumatic urban experience and cultural memories of the process of urbanization, industrialization and modernization in contemporary China. What is more, the transformation and perplexity of their own cultural identity is part of that process and reshapes the cultural map of urban space in the Pearl River Delta.

Since the 1980s, for urban migrant writers living in urban villages is a common cultural phenomenon and experience. They come from different provinces and gathered together in urban villages of Shenzhen, Guangzhou and other cities in the Pearl River Delta, just like the Bohemian intellectuals who gathered in Greenwich Village of New York in the early half of the 20th century. However unlike the writers in Greenwich Village, urban migrant writers in China were not originally writers. Most urban migrant writers were rural-urban migrants who worked, or are working, in workplaces in the Pearl River Delta. Yet they felt compelled to put their experience in writing and *dagong* literature was thus created.

What happens when people belonging to different cultural and regional groups live in the same space of the urban villages? In the process of conflict and compromise with the local culture (both that of the original villagers and of the surrounding urban areas), what kind of cultural identity of migrant writers has been established? What kind of new view and new cultural elements do the urban migrant writers bring to the cities? By answering those questions we will find the unique process of transition of rural people's cultural identities, and how urban cultures form and evolve in the process of China's urbanization, industrialization and modernization, all of which are important parts of the huge social change taking place in contemporary China.

The study of migrant workers in China has received a great deal of attention in recent years. The research straddles many disciplines including urban sociology, urban anthropology, and urban cultural studies. Researchers based outside China have paid attention to the politics of identity of urban migrants in China exploring the different aspects of gender and class (Ngai, 1999: 1-18; Feng, 1998; Jacka, 2006), consumption (Yu and Pan, 2008: 143-245) and policy (Wong, 1994: 335-355). The research shows much interest in the plight and identity of women migrant workers and issues of gender and labour. Mainland Chinese scholars, by contrast, mainly focus on economics, social institutions, government polices and psychological adaptation during the journey of rural-urban migration. The area of urban migrant writers' urban experiences and cultural identities has been less explored. Researchers in contemporary Chinese literature did not pay much attention to the *dagong* literature and urban migrant writers until 2004, and even in this case they are more concerned with the contribution their literary texts can make to the construction of the city image. (Yang, 2007: 3-18) In short, very little research has discussed the relationship between urban spaces and the new urban migrants in terms of their own cultural identity.

This paper examines the identities of urban migrants from a fresh angle, that of urban imagination of urban spaces. It first outlines the urban migrant writers' life and experiences in the urban villages and describes how urban villages have become urban migrant spaces. By analyzing the physical

spaces and cultural conflicts in urban villages, the paper then discusses how such spaces become spaces of cultural psychology and in turn influence the self-image and urban experiences of urban migrant writers. The paper then analyzes the unique urbanization process and urban cultural construction movement in metropolitan China and suggests that the construction of the city's image and its power of aesthetics, that is, of the ability to determine what should be included and excluded from the urban landscape, further intensifies the self-identity of the new urban migrant writers. The article concludes by arguing that as spaces of cultural identity urban villages exhibit the cultural diversity of urban culture, where urban migrant writers participate in cultural and literary production. Demolishing urban villages means destroying the cultural cells of the organic city and excluding the cultural possibilities and diversity of life in the city that everyone can call "home".

2. Theorizing Space and Identity in the Urban Village

It is an ironic twist of fate that urban villages should become the residential places for rural-urban migrants. Since the mid-1980s the flow of rural-urban labour has become more flexible[5]; in going to the city a farmer does not need a letter of approval or ration ticket anymore, but to settle down in cities and find affordable accommodation is still a big problem. Because of the state ownership of land and powerful programming regulation, it is impossible for urban migrants to occupy land and build a residential place just like rural-urban migrants in India do, for example. And for a long time both the central and local government did not supply accommodation to those urban migrants. It is a fantasy for early arrived urban migrants who come to the cities to buy commercial apartments in cities, but such property is extremely expensive and out of the reach of most migrants. So for urban migrants to settle down in urban spaces and to make a new life for themselves and their families is not an easy task. (Liu and He, 2008: 19-23)

If they cannot find a job in the factories, where dormitory accommodation is often supplied, they would sleep in the streets. However, doing so prior to 2003 was dangerous, if they did not have temporary resident permits, they could be rounded up and repatriated to their rural home.[6] Except for the factory dormitories, the accommodation of lowest rent for new urban migrants is to be found in the urban villages. The "urban villages" are the once rural farmlands in the Pearl River Delta that as the cities expanded have developed into either factories or cheap residential areas. Most of these original villages are now surrounded by high modern buildings; some of them are even very near to the central districts of the cities. The local farmers, the original occupants of these villages, do not do farming any longer. As David Wang describes in this volume, they sell or lease their farmland to the city

Figure 1 Street and Daily Lives in Yangji Village

government or enterprises and use the money to create joint-stock companies and engage in business[7], some of them doing so quite successfully. However, even though the farmland may have vanished the actual residential area of the village is retained and it is within this and the immediate spaces around it that the original inhabitants see economic opportunities and build apartments for rent to new urban migrants. As Figure 1 reveals, the building of these cheap apartments does not follow the city building codes and they are often crowded and ramshackle. For many ordinary urban residents and city planning officials they are an eyesore and symbol of backwardness. These villages are now defined as "urban villages" (*chengzhongcun* 城中村) by scholars and the term has entered everyday parlance and the media. (Lan, 2005: 433)

Michel Foucault noted that: "Space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power." (Foucault, 2002: 349-364) In further narrowing the research question I ask, as a cultural locale where urban migrant writers reside, what is the role of urban villages in both reconstructing the cultural identity of urban migrant writers and the cultural production of cities? My core argument here is that urban villages have become "urban migrant cultural spaces" which represent the cultural identity of urban migrant writers. Moreover, urban migrant writers experience the reproduction process of urban spaces under the slogan of "urbanization".

By constructing a utopian city image and cultural identity, the government uses its aesthetic power to reconstruct the spaces of urban villages, which further intensifies the self-identity of the new urban migrant writers. This process is a representation of how state power seeks to shape urban space and identity and how the "subalterns" seek to resist that power and assert their own identity.

Cultural identity is "not a theory of the knowing subject, but rather a theory of discursive practice". (Hall, 1996: 1-17) It is constructed in and through difference and in relation to others, and is constantly destabilized by what it leaves out. (Hall, 1996: 1-17) According to Hall's theory of "cultural identity", the study of the cultural identity of urban migrant writers is in fact an exploration of their urban experience and the cultural conflict between the local inhabitants, the mainstream urbanites and the outsiders, that is, the new urban migrants. Identity is also, of course, constructed within discourse and power, and the power system decides who are included and who are excluded during the ongoing reconstruction of social relationships. One mode of existence of social relations of production is space and the process of producing space itself. (Lefebvre and Donald, 1991) In adding to Hall and Lefebvre, I hold that space is both a site of social production constructing social relations, and also the production of cultural identity. Urban villages which represent urban migrant spaces for urban migrant writers are such spaces that reveal cultural conflict and power in contemporary urban China.

To examine urban migrant writers in the entire range of urban villages in the Pearl River Delta would require a huge research effort and cannot be accomplished here. My method is to select migrant writers who live in, or used to live in, urban villages of Shenzhen and Guangzhou, the two typical cities that attract most of the urban migrant writers. My data is derived from in-depth interviews and analysis of the literary texts written by these writers.

3. Urban Migrant Spaces: Daily Life and Communication in Urban Villages

Not all urban migrant writers live in urban villages all the time, but most of them at least have the experience of living in urban villages for some time during their transition to the cities. They often gather together to form a cultural community and attract other new urban migrants with an interest in writing into the fold. Some of them may leave the urban village after living there for a period, but other urban migrant writers would usually come and replace them. Thus, urban villages have become comparatively stable cultural spaces for new urban migrant writers.

Dagong literature originates from Shenzhen, the large "special economic zone" in the Pearl River Delta on the border with Hong Kong. Its particular place of origin in Shenzhen is Baoan District, a district famous for its countless urban villages. Since the mid-1980s, with the reform and opening up of Shenzhen, Baoan District has become an industrial zone and attracted many urban migrant writers over time. The presence of urban migrant writers brings new meaning to the urban villages. Urban villages are not only places for residence, or places for local culture, but spaces where new urban migrant culture is born, and cultural spaces for urban migrant writers where they can share their spirit and literature.

The charm of the urban village comes from the residence of former urban migrant writers who have become well-known as successful writers. An Shiliu is one of them. He stayed in Shenzhen for more than ten years and published his book *My Shenzhen Geography*. When interviewed for this research he said, "I lived mainly in urban villages. How many urban villages have I lived in? I never counted them, at least more than ten."

In 1993, An Shiliu traveled from Guangxi Autonomous Region (bordering Guangdong) to Shenzhen. His first job was working as a factory worker in a paper-making company with payment of 100 yuan a month. At that time he lived in the dormitory of the factory. Then he changed a lot of jobs and came to Shiyan, one of the urban villages in Baoan District. There he met Guo Haihong, another famous urban migrant writer who was working as temporary editor in the Shiyan Cultural Station (*wenhuazhan* 文化站).[8] Guo was editing a newspaper called the *Dagong Village* and attracting a great many young migrants to contribute. An Shiliu, Guo Haihong and other migrant writers later themselves created one of the earliest and first literary newspapers published by urban migrants called *Overtime*. In the first publication they declared their slogan: "We have just finished working overtime for the boss, now we work overtime for our destiny." This slogan influenced and encouraged a lot of migrant workers to get involved.

However, after two or three issues, Guo went to *Dapeng Bay*, the earliest and most well-known *dagong* magazine (labour magazine) in the Pearl River Delta. An moved to Longhua, another urban village in Baoan District. In order to keep in touch and continue the publication of *Overtime*, they founded *Overtime Literature Community* and met regularly in the rented premises of friends in the urban villages. On the Mid-Autumn Day of 1994, An Shiliu and his writer friends held a literature party in Shiyan, where they recited their poems and shared their homesickness. Such parties are held very often among urban migrant writers. Six years later, when An memorialized his life in Shiyan, he wrote: "Shiyan is the first place where my thoughts came into conflict [with the new environment], and the first place I met the questions of spirit, dream and reality." (An, 2005: 15)

Longhua is one of the most famous urban villages with a flow population of one million in an area of seventy square kilometers. It has over time attracted nearly three hundred urban migrant writers. (Ma, Feng and Zou, 2009: 17) In 1994, An Shiliu came to Longhua and lived in an old abandoned cultural station. In the old, nearly collapsed two-storey apartment he met a group of freelance writers who wrote for newspapers and magazines all over the country. In the old street of Longhua, they edited the *Longhua* newspaper and published *dagong* (labour) poems. A journalist at the time reported that:

> … Some of them didn't have desks, they wrote on the bed. It was so crowded in such a small room, they wrote, worked and slept in the same place. And there is no electric light, they just write under the dim light of candles. (Wen, 2006: 8)

In order to meet the deadline of one magazine, Yang Nutao, one urban migrant writer, worked in the workplace during the day and wrote novels at night. The passion of creating drove him. He finally worked it out, without sleeping for three days and nights. (Wen, 2006: 8) Things like this happen very often in urban migrant writers' lives, especially when they can receive payment for contributions. It is a great honour for them to get any such payment.

Although urban migrant writers are rich in spirits, their daily lives are always in poor condition, especially when they are out of work. An Shiliu remembered his hard times in the old street of Longhua, "I retreated to a dark broken room near the old cultural station, upset and bored, down and out. We (his migrant writer friends) chatted and drank wine together. At that time we were so poor that we didn't have rice to cook … If one of us got payment for writing work, we would get together to celebrate. Life was hard and without hope, but our happiness and dreams never left us." (An, 2005: 18)

In An Shiliu's life in Shenzhen there are another two important urban villages. One is 74 District of Baoan where he lived for two years and where he christened his rented room "Marginal Hostel". Whilst there he and his friends founded a poetry newspaper and published a collection of poems entitled *Margin*. The other urban village in An's life at the time was Xiameilin, where in rented rooms An, along with his comrades, forwarded the concepts of the "1970ers [*qiling hou* 七零后] Generation Poem" and the "1970ers Generation Poet", which soon became a cultural phenomenon leading to the concepts of the "1980ers [*baling hou* 八零后] Generation" and the "1990ers [*jiuling hou* 九零后] Generation" in China.[9]

All those cultural events which influenced the poetry map of China, took place in a small rented room of Xiameilin Weimian village in Shenzhen. By the weak light in the lodgings An Shiliu wrote an essay "1970ers Generation: Retreat of Poet Identity and Presence of the Poem". After the essay was

published, "a great many letters found their way to this secluded corner of Xiameilin." (An, 2005: 35)

In a way, urban migrant writers are truly cultural wanderers and troubadours in the Pearl River Delta. They come from different provinces, and some of them come from out-of-way villages in Guangdong province, all speaking different dialects. However, in the spaces of urban villages, those migrant writers formed a cultural community where they supported each other, shared lives and passion for literature. This is possible because they have established the same cultural identity. However, compared to official urban residents and the original villagers they are still outsiders.

Urban villages are temporary residences for urban migrant writers. As their conditions improve as they find jobs as editors for newspapers and magazines, or as civil servants working in a government office, they would leave the urban villages. That is their best result, to get a decent job working in the bright office and move to a "respectable neighbourhood", instead of working overtime as migrant workers in a factory and living in a dark and dim room. But only very few people are lucky, most urban writers flow from one urban village to another; or from one city to another. If the cost of living in Shenzhen gets higher, or if they find a job as an editor in another city, the migrant writers move to urban villages in nearby Guangzhou or Dongguan.

In a word, the literary creation of urban migrant writers is simultaneous with their wandering lives and urban experience. Urban villages are important cultural locales of their survival, communication and writing. Chinese sociologists believe that floating population in big cities have formed a new kind of structured social space. (Xiang, 1996: 99-111) The birth of the cultural community of urban migrant writers is a concrete presence of that new social space. This new urban cultural community differs from the community of local urbanites (that is, those who possess urban household registration and typically do not live in urban villages but in standardized urban residential areas call "communities" – see Thao Nguyen's article in this issue) in various ways including the means of surviving in such an environment, the social networks of communication, and the rules and values associated with daily life. It is the distinctive nature of life in urban villages and the status of the urban migrant that unites them as a community. What is most significant, however, is that the urban migrants come from many different parts of China and have different customs and languages and dialects. In times past when Chinese from one village, town or region traveled to distant places (either in China or abroad) they often created "native village associations" (*tongxianghui* 同乡会). But the experience of urban migrant writers is breaking with this long-held tradition. That is, the sharing of identity and experience in close proximity, and of the shared "literature" of the migrant writers, displaces regional identity and gathers urban migrant writers under a common banner.

For urban migrant writers, their writing and lives are mixed together with the spaces of urban villages. Urban villages are spaces connecting urban migrants and cities, creating a new relationship and new urban experience between people and cities. Urban migrant writers are the most sensitive people among new urban migrants, and urban villages are the best cultural spaces which stimulate their imagination about the city and themselves. In the eyes of urban migrant writers, urban villages are places full of poetry and inspiration for their writing. It does not mean lives in urban villages are pleasant. Guo Haihong said in his interview, "Poetry here does not mean red flowers and green trees, or beautiful scenes. It is poetry made by people, the atmosphere of life, and it is even broader than the city itself. Urban villages are museums and monuments of Shenzhen's development." Urban villages have become "urban migrant cultural spaces" for urban migrant writers. What is more, their lives and experiences in urban villages are producing the birth pangs of new identities.

4. Physical Spaces as Spaces of Cultural Imagination

There are two meanings of urban villages as "urban migrant cultural spaces". Firstly, urban villages are physical spaces where urban migrant writers reside, write and communicate. Secondly, the cultural spaces are "spaces of identity" composed of different kinds of relations. Generally, urban migrant spaces are not just the places of buildings or habitation; they are also symbolic spaces for cultural communities. (Zhao, 2007: 186-188) To what extent do urban villages in this regard represent, construct and intensify the cultural identity of urban migrant writers?

Firstly, the location and physical spaces of urban villages influences the relationship between urban migrant writers and the city. The physical nature of urban villages and communication with the local community influence the urban experience of urban migrant writers, their cultural psychology and the way they look at themselves. Urban villages are surrounded by high modern buildings and, as far as they are seldom visited by local urban residents, are isolated communities. This physical location separates the new urban migrants and the modern cities outside. This separation upsets the migrants who used to believe that the city is a huge dream-factory where they can enjoy all the city has to offer. However, the only places they can afford to stay in the cities are factory dormitories or urban villages. After all that effort to move from village to city they still live in "villages".

Just as Baoan District in Shenzhen gathers urban migrant writers, so too do urban villages in Guangzhou . One example is Liede, near the centre of the new Pearl River City District in Guangzhou. Another example is Yangji, near the centre of Tianhe, another important district in Guangzhou.

These two urban villages are very typical. Firstly, they preserve hundreds of years of local Cantonese culture. There are small rivers and canals criss-crossing the villages. At Dragon Boat Festival every year the local people hold dragon boat race competitions as they have been doing for hundreds of years.

Secondly, both of the urban villages are totally surrounded by modern high buildings. If you stand on the overpass on the Guangzhou Expressway you may see the most modern face of Guangzhou, but if you dare to go through the gate of Yangji Village, you may see another face, the preexistence of Guangzhou itself.

In the early 1990s Guangzhou started its process of urbanization and developed towards the east, occupying large areas of farmland. In the mid-1990s, these traditional villages became urban villages. Meanwhile, millions of new urban migrants swarmed into the urban villages. As David Wang describes in this collection, the original inhabitants of the villages saw the opportunity to make money. They built tall apartment buildings side by side and rented them to the new urban migrants, including of course many urban migrant writers. In order to earn more rent, the locals built as many apartments in every space as possible. Thus was created the "handshake building" (because you can literally reach out from the window and shake hands with the person in the opposite building) and "a gleam of sky" (because

Figure 2 A "Gleam of Sky" in Yangji Urban Village on a Sunny Day

the alleyways are the floors of deep canyons). Indeed, living in the urban village it is hard to get much sunshine. Inside some of the rooms in urban villages it is dark the whole year round.

One migrant writer described Liede village in his novel as such:

> Buildings are built in disorder, without design. Thousands of curving alleyways, it is much harder to find your bearings here than in the mountains … It is like a big [chicken] coop. The buildings are crowded together without following any plans which makes the residents particularly worried about safety and sanitation. (Dai, 2003: 161)

The use of "coop" to describe the living quarters is apt as the rented rooms are usually very small, sometimes bedroom, kitchen and bathroom are in the same space.

However, urban migrant writers still choose to live in urban villages. The reason is simple: the rent is low. Urban villages separated and surrounded by high buildings are the most affordable doors open to them, and simultaneously, they make a distinction between urban migrant space and other urban spaces. In living in the crowded spaces of the urban villages, both space and life are closed off. Urban migrant writers always have to look up and out if they want to view the cities. An Shiliu in describing Shenzhen from the window of his rented room writes that, "It seems like looking outside from a prison cell … Outside the window is a colourful city, like paradise far away." (An, 2005) Although they live near the central districts of the city, because of the closed space and poor living conditions in urban villages, they feel the long distance between cities and themselves. That is why An Shiliu christened his rented rooms "Marginal Hostel". The marginalization is not only the description of their living spaces, but also the representation of their self-location in the city and their own cultural identity.

The feeling of marginalization even exists when frequenting public spaces outside of the urban villages. A female worker (*dagongmei* 打工妹) remembered her first experience to go shopping in Shenzhen. When they saw the price tag for an exquisite looking pen, "We were dumbfounded!" One thousand yuan is equivalent to ten times their monthly wages. "We knew then that we had come to a place we didn't belong. The shop shocked us. We were then afraid of going to the next shop." (Fuping 1991, 2008) A migrant worker related to me his first shopping experience in Dongguan. Wandering past the front of the Walmart supermarket, he was too timid to enter, and just looked in a daze at goods behind the glass window. His friends thereafter often teased him for his experience of Walmart window shopping. Although rural migrants to the cities will invariably overcome their fear of the urban shopping centre, many of them nonetheless have to overcome the initial obstacle of entering such urban spaces.

The circumstance of isolation, marginalization and disorder of space in urban villages brings horrible and unsafe feelings to new urban migrants, and reconstructs their sense of "urban feeling structure". "Feeling structure" is a recognition and way of life, constructed by internal individual experience according to time and space. It is a product of special history, space, social relations and natural circumstances, and it also reproduces the imaginative relations between "people and city". (Luo, 2006: 94) "Urban feeling structure" of urban migrant writers, produced by the imaginative relations of spatial experience, exists often in the metaphor between city and themselves. From their writings on self-image and social relations between self and urban spaces, we can see the influence of physical features and ecological systems of urban villages in creating cultural imagination.

Enduring the severe impact of urban spaces, both in body and spirit, urban migrant writers are "body narratives" in the transition from rural to urban China. The self-images they create in their writing are of low-down animals, such as cockroaches, worms, and mice. Or sometimes they compare themselves to injured birds, fish, fallen leaves, iron, dust and so on. These self-images represent their self-identities and their relationship with the city. To quote some examples:

> "In the colourful city, I am as mean as dust." (Lu Chuansheng: *People in an Alien Land*)

> "I was in the hardware factory, as lonely as a piece of iron." (Zheng Xiaoqiong: *Stream*)

> "Oh cockroach, you are my illness, you are my food chain, you are my relatives from rural to urban places. The Spring Festival is coming, but you never jump down the building and threaten me[10] … You never share the rent with me … on this little planet we live in sin. I never hate you, because sometimes I like darkness just like you." (Xie Xiangnan: *Cockroach*)

These images describe the living conditions of writers. The physical spaces of cities and urban villages are very different from their homes in the countryside. In the dark rooms in urban villages the cockroach is the usual cohabitant. They compare the city to a "stone forest" and themselves to mean animals. The feeling of segregation and marginalization is thus often based on physical spaces and reflects the cultural identity embedded in such spaces. These images visually represent the relations between urban spaces and migrants themselves, and reveal their subjective positions in cities. Thus, the huge differences between spaces of the modern city and the urban village makes urban migrant writers feel that cities belong to the local urban residents and elites, whereas as migrants and residents of the urban village they are just outsiders who do not belong. In the mid-1980s an urban migrant writer

Lin Jian wrote a novel titled *The Other People's City*. The novel touched the hearts of migrant workers and the author soon became well known.

When space and people integrate closely, people can switch the subject position of "I am here" to "I am". (Lynch, 1960) The cultural identity of subjectivity plays an important role here. Different identities produce different urban experiences and images. Urban citizens who live in more respectable "communities" (*shequ* 社区) have different urban experience, and their cultural images and identities cannot be the same as urban migrant writers. This happens even in the same spaces. Spaces of urban villages, like all other representative symbols, are symbols of social relations and cultural identities, and reproduce the relations between different cultural groups.

5. Cultural Conflict between the Original Villagers and the Urban New Migrants

Besides the location and physical spaces of urban villages, the communication and cultural conflict with the local people also influence the cultural identity of migrant writers. There are two different systems in terms of distribution of occupation, entertainment, residential ways and social psychology in the "dual community" of urban villages belonging respectively to the migrants on the one hand, and the original villagers on the other. (Zhou, 2000: 107-112)

Hall believes that identities are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, and "are constructed through, not outside, difference". (Hall, 1996: 1-17) When villagers live in villages for generations they do not have the confusion of self-identity, because the society they live in is relatively homogeneous. When boundary of rural-urban society fractures and society experiences the tumult of modernization, industrialization and urbanization, identity then becomes a problem for all concerned. Thus, cultural identity always happens in crossing boundaries of time, space and communities. Living in the same spaces of urban villages, the local people and new urban migrants respectively construct "the image of the other", which clearly demonstrates the symbolic meaning of "urban migrant cultural space" of urban villages.

Although the migrant people and the locals live in the same spaces, they seldom communicate with each other. In interviews I asked urban migrant writers the following two questions: "Do you often affiliate with the urban locals? Have you ever quarreled or conflicted with them?" An Shiliu answered: "Seldom. I seldom make friends with local people. [As for the second question] I don't know whether the rise of rent is a type of conflict." Dai Shaniu, another migrant writer who has lived in more than five urban villages in Guangzhou, said: "No communication with the locals. Sometimes I quarreled with the local landlord, mostly over the rent. Generally speaking,

we get along with each other, and live our own lives. Yet it seems that we and the locals live in two different spaces."

Urban villages are spaces where the locals live from generation to generation. As Lan Yuyun notes, urban villages:

> … are strictly organized, and are social locales which have a stable operating system and logic. Many social features of these social locales, such as nativism, stabilization, strong homogeneity and unique system of survival and development integrated by history and reality, have huge differences with [the experience of the] floating population. (Lan, 2005: 363)

Whether in terms of politics, economics, or social customs and cultural values, the impenetrable fortress constructed by local people separates them from new urban migrants. Accordingly, there is no need and desire for communication between the two groups. In Lan Yuyun's research on Zhujiang Village of Guangzhou, one old village man said:

> Those outsiders feed us. Without them, we cannot possibly survive. However, after their coming, circumstances in the village changed a lot. The feeling of safety is reduced. We dare not go out at night. Those outsiders rush and go on the rampage. We are not able to walk. If we are run down by them, there is nowhere to find them. Besides, those northern people[11] like eating chilli. Once they start cooking, we have to close all the windows. So we usually cover our noses, wipe away tears, and curse those outsiders when dinner time comes. (Lan, 2005: 366-367)

The local people have conflicting attitudes toward new urban migrants. On the one hand new urban migrants contribute to the rental economy. On the other they believe that these "outsiders" disturb their traditional life system, customs and public security. In order to protect themselves, they keep on guard toward urban migrants and avoid communicating with them. Thus, it is very hard for new urban migrants to integrate with local people. The two groups are wary of each other, yet somehow form relatively stable and harmonious cultural communities.

The apparent harmony does not mean, however, that there is no conflict in urban villages. In fact "no communication" just means a deeper rift between urban migrants and the locals. Firstly the design of space in urban villages isolates the urban migrants from cities and local urban people, the two groups seldom communicate. When they communicate it is invariably to "pay the rent". "Money" is the only connection. The situation is the result and representation of the huge gaps between the two groups. By excluding others, they form their own cultural communities and cultural identities.

Secondly the two groups look down upon on each other. The local people impute the disorder and public security to urban migrants, which is in fact a

result of misgovernment. In the eyes of local people, "outsiders" are always "poor" and "dirty". But in the eyes of urban migrant writers, the local people are lazy and parasitic. Dai Shaniu said: "No communication is not because *couldn't*, but *wouldn't*. It is not worthwhile communicating with them." This attitude captures most of the migrant writers' attitudes toward the locals. "You can see the lives in urban villages. The local people reap profits through rent. They do not work and just drink tea [*yumcha* 饮茶] in the restaurants from morning to afternoon. The local youth do not get much education and reap what one has not sown. They contribute nothing to the city. It's us alien people who contribute to the prosperity around us. But we are excluded from sharing the development." From the representations the two groups have of each other, we can see the system of reconstructing cultural identity. The two groups' reaction is like the reaction of the West to the Other which Edward Said described in *Orientalism*. The images they create and the ways they see others are not to understand "who they are", as they are not willing to understand the truth of "who they are", but to reconstruct "who we are". Although they seldom communicate, they can still create ugly and negative images to describe each other.

The identity constructed by the structure of the urban village deeply influences the relationship between migrants and locals, and it reflects the discourse in daily communication. The locals in urban villages are rural people as most new migrants used to be, but they do not have any common class consciousness. The locals called the migrant workers "*laozai* 捞仔" or "*laomei* 捞妹", meaning men or women from northern China who come to Guangdong to make money. They abuse the migrant workers with such words. The words of discrimination in daily life constitute a discourse which represents how the locals see the migrants, and it also impacts on the way urban migrant writers see themselves. In their writings, they admit in a form of self-mockery that they are "*laozai*": "We are *laozai*. So what? We are more noble people than those parasitical locals. We feed ourselves by hard work."[12]

It has been three decades since rural-urban migration began. Urban migrant writers I interviewed mostly think that local people treat them better than before, but most of them do not consider themselves as residents of cities in the Pearl River Delta. At the same time, the local people insist on maintaining the boundary of their cultural identity. In interviews or in the mass media, most locals think that the new urban migrants are colonizing their community and bringing impurity to their local culture. A local PhD student who researched industrial restructuring in the Pearl River Delta told me, "Of course these alien people should be excluded from sharing the GDP of Guangdong."[13] In Dayoo Club, one of the local online communities in Guangzhou, the locals and the new urban migrants often quarrel about the cultural identity of Guangzhou people. Most of the locals claim that only

people who are born in Guangzhou and who speak Cantonese are Guangzhou people, and there should be strict distinctions between Guangzhou people and outsiders. By contrast, the new migrants argue that migrant people contribute to the development of Guangzhou. There is not a modern high building, they argue, which is not built by alien migrant workers. (Yarong, 2008) One urban migrant writer thinks that Cantonese is the most unpleasant dialect in the world. However, in order to reduce the conflict and get along with the locals, some migrants learn to speak Cantonese. It is a way to get better jobs and integrate. Nonetheless, many migrants prefer little communication with the locals in the urban villages as they figure that the best way to avoid conflict is not to communicate with each other very often.

To sum up, the physical distinction between spaces of urban villages and that of spaces outside urban villages constructs the psychological distinction of urban migrant writers. What is more, living in the same spaces, the urban migrant writers seldom communicate with the local Cantonese, which represents the deep cultural divide between people of different cultural groups. The physical spaces and conflict with local culture make urban villages a cultural locale for the production of new urban experience and self-identity.

6. Image Production, Aesthetic Power and Self-identity

It is not only the physical spaces or cultural conflicts which make urban villages spaces of cultural identity, but also the city images produced by the city government or mass media (which in China are owned and operated by government entities). The catchword of the 2010 Shanghai Expo was "Better City, Better Life" (see Thao Nguyen's article in this issue). This better life is a modern city image imagined by the city government. It has become a goal of urbanization and guided city planning since 2003. In the eyes of official urban designers, the image of a modern city should be represented by high modern buildings, huge shopping malls, broad squares, artificial grassplots, shining neon lights and so on. This city image is the aesthetic taste of the leisure class and the middle class and transmitted by the mass media. In order to construct the cultural soft power of cities, local mass media start the movement of establishing new cultural images of cities. Such a movement is a project half assigned by city governments and half by the media elites themselves.

For example, Yuan Jin studied the city imagination created by mass media in Guangzhou from 2002 to 2006, and found that, in city images:

> … we can see scholars, officers, teachers, students, civil servants, white collar workers, managers, businessmen, retired workers and so on, people from different groups and classes, but we can never see the migrant workers. It means that a large population of millions of migrants is overlooked. They

> are not considered as part of the city image, nor the discussion about city images in the public area, because they have no discourse of power. (Yuan, 2006)

In theory, the aesthetic power is operated by the mass media, by creating city images, by practice, and by production of urban spaces. Thus, urban spaces, no matter whether physical spaces, social spaces or cultural spaces, become the locale of struggle of all kinds of power. Urban villages near the CBD (central business district) of cities are the focus of "the struggle over space". For example, in order to beautify the city, the crowded urban villages seem ugly in the eyes of the city government and should be demolished. The elites and the public establish their imaginings of urban villages from media representations. One professor in a local university told me that the urban village is a horrible place. "My legs would shake once I stand by the gate to Shipai village."[14] But in fact, he had never entered an urban village. A government officer and doctor of anthropology said to me in surprise when told of my research interests, "There is no culture in urban villages, how can you research urban villages?" Such understandings of urban villages influence the attitude that the public has toward urban villages, that is, as a dirty place and den of iniquity, which destroys the beauty and security of the city, and should be razed and demolished. (Guo, 2006: 10-12)

Meanwhile, urban villages and the valuable land they occupy are lusted after by real estate developers. City planning in urban China is essentially driven by real estate development. The city government sells lands to real estate companies, and real estate companies build high-rise apartments to sell to residents and investors, and in turn gain huge profits. Both real estate companies and the city government benefit from the demolition of urban villages. They compensate for the land of the locals and build new apartments for them somewhere else. For local people, the most important thing they care about is whether they can get adequate compensation based on market rates and a new place to reside. In 2007, by demolishing Liede village, the government of Guangzhou started the movement of "rebuilding" urban villages. As Liede village is near the centre of Pearl River New Town, the compensation was very high. Some of the locals even became billionaires after redeveloping the urban villages. As for the cultural tradition, the city image of Guangzhou established by the mass media is the local Cantonese culture. It is beneficial to the local people. However, because these new urban migrants are not considered part of the city image, the city government currently takes no measure to supply accommodation to new urban migrants. The prevailing logic is that their cultural identity is alien and should be excluded from sharing the urban spaces just like the situation in sharing the GDP of the city.

Figure 3 The Demolished Liede Village after 2007

In the struggle over space, the new urban migrants are the weak group. They are isolated and marginalized in the urban villages. Over time the physical spaces they can occupy are now becoming smaller and smaller. They have to move to rural areas further and further from the city, or go back to their rural hometowns. From "the place of dreams" to a "paradise far away", the city imagining is transformed with the experience of urban migrant writers. Their voice is daunted by the hegemonic utopian city image in which their cultural spaces "do not exist". In the course of the process of ongoing urbanization the cultural identity of marginalization thus becomes even stronger:

> By her body, she expresses her feeling. By silence, expresses disagreement. By outspread trace, expresses the being of a fact. (Shan Xuehu: *Rainworm*)

As urban migrant spaces, urban villages have become the symbols of identity. Just like the identity of exclusion and marginalization for urban migrant writers, the urban villages are also excluded from the city images of a "better life".

7. Conclusion

For the rural-urban migrant urban villages are special spaces, they are not only the environments and cultural locales for urban migrant writers to reside, but also spaces of cultural identity. As important urban migrant cultural spaces, urban villages exhibit the cultural diversity of urban culture, where urban migrant writers participate in cultural and literary production. In some respects it should be noted, because of urban villages, urban cultures in the Pearl River Delta are more tolerant to migrant people, compared to other big cities like Beijing and Shanghai.

Urban villages are representations of power and cultural conflict in the urbanization process in contemporary China. Generally speaking, urban spaces are "identified spaces". Spaces are identified for people who occupy them. Different urban spaces may be occupied by people with different identities. People belonging to different groups of cultural identity have different feelings about the same spaces. In contrast, urban villages reconstruct the cultural identity of urban migrant writers through the struggles and conflicts for urban spaces, among the different groups in cities. Behind these conflicts are questions such as: whose cities? What should a better life be in the cities? What should images of urban spaces look like? The officials, real estate companies, the locals and the new urban migrants have different answers.

The city image is established through power struggles in which one group dominates another. However, a more comprehensive city and urban space can contain spaces for different groups of people, and accommodate the multicultural experience. Yet the local city government has the absolute power to reconstruct spaces in urban villages, and to design city planning by imagination created by the government and the elites. By destroying cultural spaces of the organic city, the aesthetic hegemonic power excludes the cultural possibilities and diversity of life in the metropolis. The reproduction of urban villages in the Pearl River Delta is a micro-representation of how the government uses its aesthetic power to design a better city, and reproduce identified spaces to include and exclude people, both physically and culturally. Although urban migrant writers contribute to the GDP of the city and cultural production in the Pearl River Delta, it is hard for them to gain the urban citizenship. To drive out the urban migrant writers may lead to the monotony and desolation of urban culture. As time passes by it will influence the health of public culture.

Notes

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1. A report from the National Bureau of Statistics of China indicates that the total population of migrant workers in 2009 was 229.78 million. The number has increased by 1.9 per cent compared to 2008. See <*http://news.dayoo.com/china/201003/23/53868_12326312.htm*>, 2010-03-23.
2. Migrant workers, white-collar workers, migrant writers and so on, who have come to the cities in search of work are categorized as new urban migrants for the purposes of this research.
3. In Chinese *dagong* means "to engage in manual labour" and by extension it has come to refer to those migrants in search of labour in the factories and constructions sites all across the eastern seaboard.
4. The *hukou* system of household registration is a law passed by the National People's Congress, the equivalent of China's parliament, which in the past, through a system of rationing and entitlements, restricted the free flow of people from the countryside to the city. Although no longer an impediment to movement, rural migrants to the cities are still not entitled to all the benefits which the urban holders of *hukou* are able to derive. It is extremely difficult, if not downright impossible, to change from a rural to urban *hukou*.
5. In 1984, the central government indicated that "rural people are permitted to work and do business in cities by feeding themselves". Thus the massive wave of rural-urban migration began.
6. In 2003, a college student Sun Zhigang was nabbed by police when he walked along the street in Guangzhou. As he did not carry any identification certificate to prove his identity, the police judged him as *nongmingong* 农民工. Sun died in custody after mistreatment. This incident was published in newspapers and soon triggered the discussion against the system of administrative detention. It caused such a stir that a number of legal scholars declared the administrative rules to be unconstitutional. The authorities acknowledged the injustice and the measures were abolished.
7. They could do so because the rural farmland is collectively owned (even though it was allocated to different households). This is quite different from the system of state ownership of urban residential land.
8. A "cultural station" is a government-sponsored organization promoting various cultural and literary pursuits in the local community.
9. "1970ers" originally means poets and writers born in the 1970s. Later it became a term to identify all the Chinese people born in this decade. The same applies for the terms "1980ers" and "1990ers". This is a set of terms used to divide different cultural groups and age cohorts in China, because people belonging to different generations vary greatly in the way of life, behaviour, value and so on.
10. Many migrant workers climb to high buildings and threaten the boss with jumping if they have wages owing to them.
11. Local Cantonese call provinces north of the Nanling mountains "north", and call people from those provinces "northern people".

12. What is interesting is that, the word "*lao*", meaning "making money" in Cantonese, is originally a neutral word, but when it is used with regard to new urban migrants, the term becomes derogatory. The misunderstanding is firstly produced by the cultural gap. Cantonese culture is very different from the cultural tradition of other provinces in China. In early July 2010, in order to welcome the Asian Games, the Guangzhou Political Consultative Conference, a kind of representative body, proposed that the local television station should extend the Mandarin airtime instead of Cantonese, which led to protests of local people in support of the Cantonese language. The local Cantonese believe that such measures will demolish their local culture, which reflects cultural conflicts and worries of cultural identity of the local Cantonese in the rural-urban migration and urbanization period.
13. Economic development in contemporary China, as in many other countries, is measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP). GDP is also the most important criterion to judge the achievement of officials at all levels. Urban migrants contribute to the GDP of urban cities; they pay taxes and insurance. But they are not included in the calculation of the average GDP as they do not possess local residence. The way of numerating the average GDP is to divide gross GDP of the local city, including the shares contributed by urban new migrants, by the numbers of registered permanent residents. The contributions of the urban migrants are those not considered in this equation.
14. One of the famous urban villages in Guangzhou.

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Governing through *Shequ*/Community: The Shanghai Example

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Abstract

This paper explores the government-led community/*shequ* project in urban Shanghai as a new social institution designed to solve some of the emerging social problems associated with economic reforms. Community-building seeks to move away from a model based on direct government towards a model of structured self-governance. Together with the family and the schools, *shequ* form a bulwark against moral degeneration in the society. More importantly, infusing *shequ* with "moral purpose" also revitalizes the Party's legitimacy at the grassroots. This paper elucidates the ways in which *shequ* governance attempts to make up the spiritual and moral shortfall in society through the example of "civilizing campaigns" (*wenming huodong*). Using the new category of "new Shanghainese", this paper argues that in making the distinction between those fit to govern themselves and those, for various reasons, must be governed by others, new notions of citizenship are being created. However, communities are seen to have a morally uplifting character and a generally positive influence in the formation of citizen-subjects.

Keywords: *community (shequ), governance, citizenship, legitimacy, civilization, quality (suzhi), "new Shanghainese", Shanghai, danwei (work unit), moral*

JEL classification: *J15, O15, Z13, Z18*

1. Introduction

More than three decades of economic reforms have significantly altered the political, economic and social landscape of China. While there is no doubt that economic prosperity has lifted millions out of poverty and made China one of the most powerful countries in the world, the costs of growth including rising income inequality, corruption, and environmental degradation have significantly eroded these gains. As a result, "mass incidents" which is

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euphemistic for strikes, street protests, roadblocks and other forms of mass protests have been on the rise. One way for accounting for this is the emergent "rights consciousness" in China (Goldman, 2005). Another plausible reason has been the ineffectiveness of government (usually local government) in addressing genuine complaints from citizens in the first instance resulting in them "snow-balling" into larger protests (Yu, 2009). As a consequence, the issue of "governance" has come into sharp focus for the Party and posed the following questions: How can the Party effectively govern in an increasingly diverse and polarized society undergoing rapid transformation? More importantly, how can the Party maintain political monopoly whilst also trying to control these forces of change?

Re-asserting control in a society currently experiencing some of the most disruptive changes has been an ongoing preoccupation and source of headache for the Party. Thus far, the party-state has averted crisis and continues to steer the country with some measure of skill and dexterity. However, in order to remain in control, the Party needs to continuously reinvent itself by redefining its role *vis-à-vis* the population. Jiang Zemin's "Three Represents" (*san ge daibiao* 三个代表) and Hu Jintao's "people-centredness" (*yi ren wei ben* 以人为本) are pivotal moments in reconceptualizing the task of governing in the wake of greater societal polarization and diversification. The state project of building a "harmonious society" (*hexie shehui* 和谐社会) is a culmination of these efforts to close the income and opportunity gap.

This paper will look at the government-led community/*shequ* 社区[1]-building project as a new social institution designed to solve emerging social problems associated with reforms. *Shequ*-building seeks to move away from a model based on direct government intervention towards a model of structured self-governance. Specifically, the paper draws from the data collected from the author's field notes on the civilizing campaigns (*wenming huodong* 文明活动) carried out at the *shequ* level in Shanghai between 2006 and 2007. In China, neighbourhood *communities* are seen as instruments for teaching "civilized behaviour", for the inculcation of moral values and the overall "moral development" of society (Heberer, 2009). Together with the family and the schools, *shequ* form a bulwark against moral degeneration in the society. More importantly, infusing *shequ* with "moral purpose" also revitalizes the Party's legitimacy which has been waning in recent years.

The paper begins with an explanation of the rationale behind *shequ* construction in China. In particular, it focuses on the issues that pose challenges to urban governance as they play out at the *shequ* level such as the breakdown of the urban work unit (*danwei* 单位), the privatization of the housing market and the increase in the rural-to-urban population. This will be followed by a description of the laws, policies and programmes carried out under the *shequ* construction project. In this section, the three "self"

(*zizhi* 自治) functions of the *shequ*, that is, citizen's self-management, self-education, and self-service will be assessed. The paper argues that while steering people to govern themselves invokes neoliberal ideas, this however, must be understood as a means to strengthening "the Party's governing capacity" (*dang de zhizheng nengli* 党的执政能力) and not to be mistaken as "autonomy" as understood in Anglophone discourses. The final section explores the role of *shequ* in the ethical training of migrants in Shanghai based on established models as promoted by "spiritual civilization" campaigns (*jingshen wenming huodong* 精神文明活动). According to Bray (2006: 545), "the implementation of various schemes for moral accounting demonstrates that the community is far from a seamless whole, because it invokes a range of dividing practices that publicly distinguish between the moral and amoral, the fit and the unfit, or, as it is often expressed in China, between those of high 'quality' and those of low 'quality'." These dividing practices enhance rather than undermine the governing capacity of *shequ* because it justifies the necessity for state intervention.

2. The Rationale for *Shequ*/Community Construction

In the era of the planned economy, no *shequ*/communities existed in the real sense of the word. In fact, it was not until the rehabilitation of sociology in the mid-1980s that the term *shequ*/community was taken up with gusto by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA). China's establishment of a market economy and the subsequent dismantling of the *danwei* (work unit) provide the context for China's current *community*-building project. The implications of these changes will help to explain why *shequ*/community-building was so urgently needed in the post-Mao[2] era.

Urban China under Mao was defined by the *danwei* system. This system evolved from being a tool for the effective mobilization of labour to one that sought to oversee and administer every other aspect of urban life in a comprehensive and all-encompassing way (Bray, 2005). *Danwei* provided more than just employment to its members but also welfare benefits and social identity in return for political loyalty. The *danwei* was therefore the basic organization of a "totalitarian society" because "enterprises, educational institutions, hospitals, people's communes and other organizations were nothing but *danwei* subordinate[s] to the government" (Xu Y., 2008: 143). *Danwei* was thus the model *par excellence* of Chinese socialist governance. Put in another way, urban governance was successfully realized at the level of the *danwei*.

In order to "join with the international mainstream" (*yu guoji jiegui* 与国际接轨) and be part of the international supply chain, China's opening up to the outside world meant that its state-owned enterprises (SOEs) had to be

radically overhauled to remain competitive (Wang, 2007). Many if not all SOEs were operating at below capacity and over-burdened by the welfare functions it was asked to fulfil under the Maoist planned economy (Naughton, 1997). As expected, a great number were sent bankrupt resulting in hundreds of thousands losing their jobs and along with this, their entitlements to basic services such as state-subsidized housing, healthcare and pensions (Burkett and Hart-Landsberg, 2004). A few were amalgamated and consolidated under joint-venture agreements and some remain in operation propped up by non-performing loans from state-owned financial institutions (*ibid*.).

The coming apart of the *danwei* has been interpreted as a "hollowing out" of the state and to some extent this is true (Xu F., 2008a). However, a "hollowing out" should not be seen as a weakening of the party-state or that the state is "pauperized" by these changes. If anything, the party-state has made great financial gains from unburdening its social welfare function onto "society". Further, its policy to allow some people to get rich first has brought immense wealth to the state coffers affording it the ability to reconsolidate and invest in priority industries. In fact, as former vice-premier Zhu Rongji once said, the object of SOE reform was to "*zhuada, fangxiao* 抓大, 放小", that is, to let go of the small unproductive and unprofitable industries while taking control and ownership of large and strategically important ones. This strategy has yielded dividends for the SOEs that are now run by children and relatives of high-ranking government and Party officials. According to a recent report compiled by Willy Lam for the *China Brief* (14th January 2011), the combined assets of the 129 central SOEs also known as *yangqi* 央企 in China, was 21 trillion yuan (US$3.17 trillion) accounting for 61.7 per cent of the country's total gross domestic product (GDP) in 2009. This goes to show that income inequality is still a major sticking point after more than thirty years of reforms.

The reforms have also meant that more people than ever are now found outside of the *danwei* system. This meant that the Party-state could no longer exercise control of residents through old-style disciplinary mechanisms and mass mobilization. Privatization of housing, a product of the dismantling process, has resulted in more people living further away from their place of work and that they lived less with co-workers as neighbours. This trend, together with the influx of rural-urban migrants, has produced an urban society that is more fragmented, heterogeneous and divisive therefore providing a recipe for urban unrest.

Another important aspect of China's transformation has been the re-emergence of many social ills which were absent (or driven underground) during the Maoist period. Negative social phenomena such as crime, prostitution, gambling, addiction and epidemics like HIV/AIDS have created new challenges for the party-state. In the urban areas, rising unemployment,

declining living standards and forced relocations due to urban development have led urban residents to open confrontation with the local government (Perry, 2010). Although protests have targeted local actors in the administration, it has nevertheless been seen by the party-state as undermining its legitimacy, which, lacking electoral grounding, is based on serving the "people's" interests, no matter how vaguely defined these may be.

The *shequ*-building project is the government's response to mounting pressures to resolve social tensions. Designed to replace *danwei* and the neighbourhood committees, *shequ* provides citizens with a sense of empowerment through formal political participation. It was hoped that through active participation at the *shequ* level, citizens will learn to cultivate the right kind of behaviour and mode of thinking necessary for the further development of society. In the process, the Party network is being strengthened even as it delegates the task of "governing" to others more up to the task. This suggests that self-government and "governing" has become a more diffuse and inclusive project that, in the context of China, is not separate from state rule but is actually constitutive of it: enhancing, enriching and revitalizing the state in the process of improving, helping and guiding the population to ever higher levels of material wealth and spiritual well-being (Jeffreys and Sigley, 2009).

3. From "*Community* Services" to "*Community*-Building"

The legal framework for the construction of *shequ*/communities in China came in the form of the 1989 *Law on Urban Residents Committee Organization* (Xu F., 2008a). While commonly translated to mean "community" in Chinese, *shequ* actually refers to a territorially defined area. A compound character, *shequ* comprises of "*she* 社" which means "society" and "*qu* 区" which refers to an area or zone (Xu F., 2008b: 634). Accordingly, *community* in China does not mean natural social groupings but refers to a spatially defined, officially administered urban unit. In China therefore, *communities* correlate to already existing grassroots administrative units as demarcated by the government (Bray, 2006). This is not to suggest that communities of the kind that exist in the West are not present in China, but to emphasize that *communities* in China are conceived and practiced for the purposes of enhancing the party-state's ability to govern, hence "governing through community" (Rose, 1999). As China rapidly urbanizes, urban residential *communities* are thus the new frontiers of government in Chinese cities of the twenty-first century.

As Feng Xu (2008a: 26) notes, *shequ*-building which begun in the late 1980s did not become national policy until 1998. This corresponded with the rapid disintegration of the *danwei* system resulting in large numbers of people being laid off and cut off from the social benefits they once enjoyed

by virtue of being affiliated with their *danwei*. Reflecting Deng Xiaoping's pragmatic and cautious approach to reforms which he once described as a process of "crossing the river by feeling the stones", *shequ* construction also began its life as a series of "experiments" in selected cities (Xu F., 2008a). The experiences of these sites were then given full consideration with debates ensuing in academic and policy circles as to the relative merits of each (*ibid*.). Shanghai, being one of the pilot cities to participate in this experiment, underwent *community* construction in 1996 mainly in response to the new situation created by the deepening of SOE reforms and the corresponding need for new social management methods (Xu Y., 2008). Despite variations in practice from city to city, a model of *community*-building generally took shape.

In the beginning, *community* was only narrowly conceived as a means for replacing the *danwei* in terms of social service provision. Gradually, the scope of *community* work began to expand beyond the original idea of "*community* service" (*fuwu* 服务) to that of holistic "*community*-building" (*jianshe* 建设) including culture, health, environment, education, morality, policing, grassroots democracy, and "Party-building" (Bray, 2006). The Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA) even set up a Division for Grassroots Authority and Community/*Shequ*-Building (*jiceng zhengquan yu shequ jianshe si* 基层政权与社区建设司) (Xu F., 2008a: 26). For example, in 1993, before *community* construction was officially adopted as policy, the MoCA released a document entitled "Some Suggestions Regarding the Acceleration and Development of Community Services" (*guanyu jiakuai fazhan shequ fuwuye de yijian* 关于加快发展社区服务业的意见) in which *shequ* was solely defined as a functional replacement for *danwei* in terms of its social welfare role. However by 2000, "*community*-building" had replaced "*community* services" as the new paradigm of government. In this document, the MoCA outlined what *community*-building involved:

1) Expanding services to marginalized or vulnerable populations such as the elderly, children, the disabled, less well-off families, and other people in need of social assistance.
2) Improve *community* healthcare through education and service provision. In particular, pay attention to family planning issues, disease prevention and generally promote healthy living.
3) Promote *community* culture. This is to be facilitated by the implementation of national programmes of "socialist spiritual civilization". The spaces and resources of the *community* such as billboards, plaques and columns should be used to propagate a "healthy" and "wholesome" culture. The aim is to create citizens who will realize the goal of constructing a civilized and harmonious *community*.

4) Beautification of the *community* landscape. A clean, green, and sanitized *community* will be better conducive to healthy living. The goal is to increase residents' awareness of the need for environmental protection.
5) Strengthening *community* policing/surveillance. Upholding public order and preventing crime lie at the core of this goal. *Communities* also have a responsibility to rehabilitate and monitor released prisoners. Management of the floating population is also another role of the *community*. In this way, social stability will be guaranteed.

(MoCA 2000)

Clearly, "*community* services", the MoCA's initial response to the break-up of the *danwei*, was inadequate in dealing with the complex urban situation. After a decade of "*community* construction", it would appear that these efforts are yielding positive results. As Xu Yongxiang (2008: 147) observes: "fundamental changes in formerly 'squalid' neighbourhoods, sanitation, landscaping and streets' have been brought about." He further argues that:

> Community services and recreational facilities are gradually being set up for the benefit and convenience of residents, and security conditions and the cultural atmosphere are being improved. Increasingly, [what were once drab] neighbourhoods are [now] becoming communities. (*ibid*.)

However, it remains to be seen whether the former identity of the "*danwei* person" (*danwei ren* 单位人) has been succeeded by the new "*community* person" (*shequ ren* 社区人) even though meaningful conceptions of citizenship and identity are emerging against this backdrop (Herberer, 2009). The primary reason for this, and as I will elaborate below, is the gap between official discourse about *shequ* and the reality as practiced at the grassroots. For example, *community* self-governance is being promoted as the new discourse of *shequ* construction in urban China. This however, does not mean that *communities* are regarded as a "mechanism through which ordinary citizens can (collectively) confront the might of 'faceless' government" (Bray, 2006: 532) but more a "containment strategy". *Shequ*-building should therefore be viewed as an attempt by the party-state to build formal institutions of political participation to ensure that collective actions against the state can be organized in a politically acceptable manner and that they do not spill onto the streets and pose a threat to social stability.

Throughout the literature on *shequ* in Chinese, the idea of "self-governance" (*zizhi*) is promoted as a core goal and strategy of *community*-building in China. What does this mean? The natural inclination is to render *zizhi* "autonomy" in the sense that civil society is regarded as an autonomous sphere of action outside or beyond the reach of the state. However, in my interviews with local officials as well as ordinary citizens in Shanghai, *zizhi*

does not connote action outside the established parameters of state discourse and practice. In fact, when *zizhi* is used, it is seen as being an integral part of state discourse in developing the modern subject whether understood as a collectivity like a *shequ*/community or at the individual level of the citizen/subject (Herberer, 2009). Further, what is intimated in these responses is that China is different in the sense that the origins/context of its *shequ* project proceeds from historically and politically specific set of circumstances. Compared to the Maoist past, Chinese now experience more freedoms than they have ever experienced at any other time in history. *Shequ* then provides the *pingtai* 平台 or platform for experiments in participatory democracy and *shequ* self-governance is an expression of this democratic principle albeit in a Chinese setting. The Communist Party of China (CPC) has made repeated claims to the effect that China is "not ready" for democracy because the "quality" of its population is, on the whole, low (Yu, 2009). The development of *shequ* self-governance is meant to rectify this situation so that one day, in the not too distant future, some form of representative government will eventuate in the People's Republic of China (*ibid*.). The *shequ* should therefore be viewed as a training ground for the creation of citizens who will one day inherit the China of tomorrow and lead it into a bold new future (Goldman, 2005).

Citizenship and the embryonic beginnings of participatory democracy could be potentially germinating at the level of *shequ*. The Chinese state links the promotion of the "full development of the individual" (*ren de quanmian fazhan* 人的全面发展) and the overall national strength (*guojia de zonghe guoli* 国家的综合国力) as part-and-parcel of the same project (Sigley, 2004). Nations are comprised of individuals but not just any individual. To be a modern and well respected nation state in a world of nation states, the Chinese state desires the kinds of individuals who are civilized, modern, consuming, and of a generally "higher" quality. Add to this list "political docility", because upsetting the political *status quo* is tantamount to treachery, so above all else, this "high"-quality individual must respect the political order. This political order suggests *community*-building forms the lowest level of government, namely at the level of the sub-district. Insofar as it is "self-governing", it refers to the fact that *communities* lie outside the formal structures of government. Thus, although *community*-building is a state-sponsored project, communities have limited autonomy in the management of their affairs.

The three "self-functions", namely, self-management, self-education, and self-service of *shequ*/community are a means for the state to offload some of its responsibilities onto social actors and organizations. In terms of self-management, *communities* are expected to mobilize itself to meet policy goals. It is also expected to create and manage its own management structures like

committees and sub-committees as well as organize its own meetings (Bray, 2006). Concerning self-education and self-service, *communities* are expected to be self-reliant (*ibid*.). In tandem with state goals to raise the overall quality of the population, *communities* must substantially rely on their own resources to improve the intellectual, spiritual and moral qualities of its population (*ibid*.). The scope of *shequ* self-governance therefore extends beyond meeting the "economic shortfall" but also the moral and spiritual shortfall resulting from the collapse of communism as a hegemonic discourse in the post-Cold War world. From the MoCA (2000) document, it can be gleaned that "problematic" sections of the population such as migrant labourers, delinquents, the unemployed, and the drug addicts are particular targets of "*community*-building".

The next section explores how *communities* in Shanghai are realizing the goal of building "harmonious *communities*" at the grassroots. In particular, it elucidates the ways in which these *communities* attempt to make up the spiritual and moral shortfall through the example of "civilizing campaigns" (*wenming huodong*). The conceptual link between notions of "moral quality" and "self-governance" will be made and it will be argued that this linkage is imperative for the realization of "harmonious society" as envisioned by the Hu-Wen leadership. In making this link however, it is inevitable that dividing practices be used to identify those who are capable of governing themselves and those who must be subjected to further supervision by their *communities*. However, communities are seen to have a morally uplifting character and a generally positive influence in the formation of citizen-subjects.

4. Divided Communities: Civilizing Campaigns and the "New Shanghainese"

Twenty-first century Shanghai has attracted the attention of academics and observers for many different reasons. Its glittering skyline bedazzles spectators who flock to the bund to admire the architectural feats of Chinese modernization. With the Pudong financial district the central focus of the city's reform efforts, Shanghai's spatial divisions are fast altering the physical landscape and are having a tumultuous impact on the lives of everyday people. In order to comprehend the sheer impact of this change, we look no further than the numbers. Shanghai has experienced an explosion in population size (both formal and informal), so this means that the city is expanding and reclaiming what were once rural farmlands and turning these into habitable new neighbourhoods.[3] Shanghai is also growing vertically which means that more people than ever are living in apartments and high-rises.[4] Shanghai's demographics also indicate that its population is aging and that more migrants, who in the past were expected to "move on", have

now permanently settled in the city. This has had the greatest impact on population dynamics and also problematized the "Shanghai identity". Just who are the "new Shanghainese" (*xin Shanghairen* 新上海人) and how have they changed notions of citizenship in Shanghai? Crucially, how have the "new Shanghainese" been linked to the project of "harmonious community" construction in this fast-changing metropolis?

The label "new Shanghainese" (*xin Shanghairen*) was first coined by the Shanghai Spiritual Civilisation Office in a survey conducted to ascertain the city's new demographic make-up (*China Daily*, 13th January 2007). According to the survey, "new Shanghainese" referred to those who have come from overseas or other provinces. They have either obtained a local *hukou* 户口 (residence permit) or a temporary residence permit and have lived in the city for more than five years. They also have decent jobs and stable incomes and plan to stay in the city in the long term. In other words, "new Shanghainese" refer to this elite group of migrants, who in the past were barred from obtaining Shanghai citizenship but now enjoy the full modicum of rights offered by the city government. Why has this been the case?

Shanghai was not always a "migrant-receiver" city. During the Maoist period, the state launched two major city-to-countryside migration episodes (Li *et al*., 2010). The first occurred in the 1950s in which millions of Shanghai youth had their *hukou* annulled and were sent to the countryside to "build socialism". The second wave occurred in the lead-up to the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) in which mostly skilled workers were sent to build military factories in far-flung places. With the rebuilding of Shanghai made a priority in the 1990s, the gates to *hukou* attainment were opened but it did not confer equal citizenship on all new arrivals. This was because the overarching strategy of the Shanghai Municipal Government was to develop the city through science and technology (*kejiao xing shi* 科教兴市) in which the aim was to transform the city into a "platform for talent" (*rencai gaodi* 人才高地). *Hukou* restriction to educated and wealthy migrants was a means to realize this dream.

Li *et al*. (2010) in their in-depth analysis of the *hukou* system in Shanghai found that there were three pathways to obtaining a *hukou*. The first is through what is known as the "talent scheme" (*rencai yinjin* 人才引进), the second is through attainment of college-level qualifications (the higher the better), and finally through inter-region marriages (*liangdi hunyin* 两地婚姻). For migrants without "talent" (i.e. educational attainment) and wealth (because talent is sometimes not enough), the best they can do is to apply for a "transient residence card" (*linshi juzhuzheng* 临时居住证). This is why they are commonly referred to as "second-class" even "third-class" citizens in the literature on migrants in China (Solinger, 1999). Even those with "talent

cards" cannot be guaranteed permanent residency. In fact, "talent" is so broadly defined that in 2007, only 38 per cent of college graduates with talent cards could successfully convert their temporary residency to official Shanghai *hukou* (Li *et al*., 2010: 152). Gradations of talent depend on the ranking of the university one is enrolled with, the degree one is studying for, the marks one gets, the prestige and stability of one's place of employment, and so forth. So stringent and arbitrary are these measures that they have turned the conferment of *hukou* into a complex process and a lucrative business for the Shanghai government (*ibid*.).

City governments act like enterprises and weigh up their fiscal burden with the gains they will have made from the *hukou* system. While on the one hand, attracting people of "high quality" or "talent" is an absolute must to maintain Shanghai's competitiveness, on the other, city administrators do not want to shoulder the financial burden of social welfare provision. Many social commentators have decried the *hukou* system instituted in the 1950s to keep the rural population landlocked in their place of birth. In 2003, the tragic death of a migrant student Sun Zhigang while in police detention because he was found without the relevant residency permits, unleashed a torrent of anger and led to the abolishment of the then controversial detention and repatriation policy (*China Daily*, 10th June 2003). However, at the root of this problem lies the *hukou* system, which far from being relaxed, has undergone substantial transformations that enhance the party-state's capacity to exercise greater control, in particular, in deciding who becomes full-fledged members of the society and who is excluded. The residency permit system thus creates a situation whereby a "regime of discrimination" and "exclusion" is normalized and is based on "technoscientific" reasoning which rewards "talent" and punishes or dehumanizes persons of "low talent" and "low quality" (Sigley, 2009). The fact that they are not counted as part of the official population in the national census shows that migrants are regarded as sub-persons, represented by a transient resident card that only recognizes their capacity for labour and nothing else.

As the second generation of migrants (*nongmingong er'dai* 农民工二代) come of age, a new dilemma now faces the government because unlike their parents who have accepted a fate of rootlessness, this new generation want to make a life for themselves in the cities. For many children of migrants, returning to the countryside is not an option but staying on in the cities is also nearly impossible given the low status and marginalization of migrants due to systemic inequalities arising out of the *hukou* system. The Foxconn suicides in 2010 (Kahney, 2010) highlighted not only the plight of migrant workers in general but the grave situation facing many second-generation migrants living in cities in particular. In response, sociologists in China have made a passionate appeal to the government and enterprises to make a

conscious effort to make these new migrants full-fledged citizens. They put the problem thus:

> Over the last thirty years, China has depended on huge numbers of cheap laborers, mainly from rural areas, who have forged an export-oriented style "world factory", and fueled the rapid growth of China's economy. But at the same time, the basic survival rights of the work force have been overlooked; we have denied migrant workers' dignity, paid them at wage levels below the average for third world countries, made it impossible for them to settle and live in the cities, while leaving them to drift back and forth between cities and the countryside. We have made them live a migrancy life that is rootless and helpless, where families are separated, parents have no one to support them, and children are not taken care of. In short, this is a life without dignity. From the tragedies at Foxconn, we can hear the loud cries for life from the second generation of migrant workers, warning society to reconsider this development model that has sacrificed people's fundamental dignity. (Kahney, 2010)

A poignant article in the *People Daily* (13th January 2007) also points to the bitter irony in the label "new Shanghainese" used to denote only the "high-quality" migrants while completely ignoring the millions of migrants who call Shanghai home. "New Shanghainese" does not only draw on distinctions between the "old Shanghainese" or locals and non-locals but also between different groups of migrants. The article calls on the government to include in the category of "new Shanghainese" all those who have contributed to the prosperity of Shanghai but have been rendered invisible by this label:

> While applauding the contribution made by these "new Shanghainese", we seem to have forgotten about another, much larger, group of people who have probably made more of a contribution to the city's boom over the past decade. They definitely deserve the title of "new Shanghainese" or even Shanghainese.
>
> They are the construction workers who have built the city's futuristic skyline in Lujiazui, and the thousands of high-rises, subways, bridges, tunnels and ring roads, as well as the landmark Shanghai Museum, Pudong International Airport and Shanghai Grand Theater.
>
> They are also the nannies who look after children, cook and keep millions of Shanghai families clean and tidy.
>
> This group of people usually young women also work in the city's many restaurants and entertainment venues that make Shanghai such an agreeable place to live.
>
> They are also the city's many delivery workers, supermarket cashiers, refuse collectors, masseurs, and clothing and food vendors.

Being a city that is built upon the labour of migrants, their plight thus forms the backdrop of *community*-building efforts in Shanghai. The aim of *community*-building with regard to the so-called "temporary" migrant population is to generate a sense of belonging without affording them the full spectrum of rights and protection that would otherwise be conferred to *hukou* holders. The government does not want to be held liable for their welfare even though they are cognisant of their indispensable role in the industrialization of cities. "Socialist spiritual civilization" campaigns carried out at the *community* level are meant to create solidarity, promote societal cohesion, and reduce conflict by advocating self-responsibility. This fits nicely with the discourse of *community* "self-governance" by putting the blame squarely on migrants and their "low quality" for their demise in society.

Civilizing campaigns also move the focus from "welfare provision" to other, less tangible measures of overall well-being such as morality, ethics, culture, safety, and belonging. Since they cannot confer citizenship status to migrants, *communities* help bridge the gap by improving the quality of life for their migrant population through volunteer, educational and philanthropic activities. For example, while in Shanghai, I participated in a programme whereby the social work students of my university volunteer their time as teachers in a migrant *community* school. The focus of our activities was not so much to replicate the curriculum taught at school but to bridge the knowledge gap arising out of disadvantage in background, culture and experiences of the students. Many of my students came from families that did not abide by the one-child policy and much of their time outside class was spent helping their families run small businesses or babysit younger siblings. In effect, many of these students did not have a childhood and as almost all did not have any fond memories or experiences of the countryside, they envision their futures in Shanghai. For this reason, the *community* initiative was to cultivate students' sense of belonging and identification with Shanghai in the hope that one day the *hukou* system will "catch up" with society and that full citizenship will be eventually attained.

Slogans painted throughout *shequ* in Shanghai capture the state's desire for *shequ* self-governance: "*wo zuo, wo canjia, wo xiangshou* 我做, 我参加, 我享受" ("I do, I participate, I benefit"). Further, it must be re-iterated that "self-governance" is an integral part of state rule and does not imply an equality between citizens in terms of the right to govern, but as Nicholas Rose (1999) points out, turns on a division between those "fit" to rule and those fit only to be ruled by others. The majority of migrants are deemed to be at the "infant" stage of self-help which therefore supports the continuing role of government in their improvement and supervision. Migrants can however, improve their "inner urbanization" not only through consumption and participation in the production of cheap and low-end goods but also by

improving their "personal quality" in terms of skills, education and degree of urbanization (*chengshiren* 城市人) (Xu, 2009: 55). Self-help books are replete with guides on how to improve one's demeanour and behaviour and full of admonitions against social taboos like spitting in public, jaywalking and queue-jumping. Reminders to say "please" and "thank you", "hello" and "how are you?" show that restraint and self-control are the hallmarks of civilized personhood. However, improving the social capital of migrants could also be viewed as a conscious effort on the part of the state to move China up in the global supply chain from reliance on low-end, labour-intensive, export-oriented production to high-end, technologically sophisticated work. If migrants have more skills and social capital, it is hoped that they can bargain for higher wages and better living conditions in the labour market. Improving the "quality" of migrant population is therefore linked to the improvement of the social order and the overall economic standing of China.

As China adopts measures of "good governance" in line with recommendations from international institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations, it is beginning to move away from a dependence on coercive methods to a service-oriented, people-oriented approach. This is particularly true with regard to the treatment of migrants and slowly we are witnessing a realization of Hu Jintao's "people-first" (*yi ren wei ben*) strategy. It also means that authorities are seeking new ways to make migrants "legible" through *hukou* selection criteria, ranking systems, and other complex application and bureaucratic methods involved in the registration process. On the economic front, this is also supported by the move away from an emphasis on GDP growth towards growth that addresses issues of inequality and poverty crystallized in efforts to build an "all round, well-off" (*quanmian, xiaokang* 全面, 小康) and "harmonious society" (*hexie shehui*). However, the barriers to full urban membership in the *community* are still considerably high for migrants. Although they can obtain temporary residence permits and their cheap labour is needed to fuel China's continuing development, they are still held in contempt by locals and increasingly by other migrants of "talent" and "higher quality". For example, an excerpt from a pamphlet distributed to volunteers at the migrant *community* I taught at reveals the ambivalent attitude towards migrants by other migrants:

> …However, with the inward flow of these people is the danger that they [migrants], through their "naïve young eyes", will view this [discrimination] as a type of "social inequality". Their lack of understanding of the rational development of this inequality has contributed to this and has already seeped into their everyday lives and to the core of their very existence. It is very likely that a feeling of hatred will arise from this shared sentiment.[5]

In the past, the literature on rural-urban migrants in China has focused on discrimination arising from tensions between locals and non-locals, that is, between Shanghainese *hukou* holders and non-Shanghainese without *hukou* (Solinger, 1999). Nowadays with the introduction of a new residency permit system on top of the already existing *hukou* system, internal differentiation is made between migrants of "higher quality" and those of "lower quality" determined predominantly on the basis of educational and cultural attainment. What new research has shown is that a further distinction needs to be made between the "new Shanghainese" referring to these superior migrant-citizens and their "poorer-quality" country cousins (Li *et al*., 2010). This goes to show just how unreliable and problematic the dichotomous distinction between outsider/insider, migrant/non-migrant can be. Moreover, the more the government divides this group, the more it is able to exert control over them. If migrants cannot coalesce around a common cause, they cannot pose a threat to the party-state. Thus by granting some the exclusive right to *community* urban membership denied to others, the state removes from local identity the need for "place embeddedness" and hence lessens the potential for confrontation between migrants and the party-state. Therefore you can be officially recognized as a Shanghainese citizen if you have "talent" and money even if you have only lived in the city for a short period of time. Conversely, you may be a migrant labourer who has resided with your family for over two decades but you are not counted as part of its official population.

5. Conclusion

In sociological parlance, *communities* are spontaneous sociological facts that can be made up of people in the same geographical location who share similar beliefs and have similar values. In China, the legal definition of "community" is a "fixed" geographical entity regardless of its internal composition. *Communities* formed along the lines of *danwei* were predictable and easily penetrated by the government. People used to work and live together, and the intimacies of their daily routines made known to all where the distinction between private/public was a non-issue. However, with the onset of reforms and the desire to link up to the global economy, *danwei* became the first casualty, shedding hundreds of millions of employees in the process. Simultaneously, population policy was relaxed to supply the growing coastal cities with cheap labour to fuel the industrialization process. No longer attached to the land or *danwei*, many found employment in the private sector that emerged almost overnight. This trend, coupled with the inadequate social infrastructure to cater to the new population demographic, troubled the CPC deeply. The CPC's presence at the grassroots (previously via *danwei*) was disorganized and weak. People no longer looked

to the state for survival, identity or sustenance. Party revitalization was thus desperately needed.

Shequ-building must be viewed in this context: as a response to the demise of post-*danwei* society and a breakdown of the CPC's political infrastructure at the grassroots. The much-touted self-governance of *shequ* exists only on paper and is limited to encouraging residents to help themselves in the realm of public service provision thereby significantly reducing the costs of governance. However, in the realm of political leadership, the "spiritual" guidance of the Party has not yielded to social pressure. "Governing through community", as analyzed by Rose (1999), has become the new strategy in linking government to disparate social elements similar to practices in neoliberal Western countries. However, where communities of interest in the West can converge to put demands on their government, *communities* in China can only tentatively push for gradual change.

In the case of Shanghai, change has occurred in the example of *hukou* reform in which different "residency status" could be obtained conferring access to different levels of benefits or welfare cover. For migrants of little "talent" very few services are available while for others with talent and are regarded as of "higher quality", a full range of rights and protections are offered. The label "new Shanghainese" (*xin Shanghairen*) is an example of how the party-state employs dividing strategies in the governing of this problematic group. "New Shanghainese" refer to a new category of migrants with college degrees, cultural and financial capital and a desire to live in Shanghai in the long term. It ignores the contributions and even the existence of the millions of other migrants who have contributed to the industrialization of Shanghai and the diversity of their *communities* who also call the city home.

The aim of *community*-building arising in the context of the need to better manage this underclass of migrants is to turn migrants into "urbanites" by focusing on ways in which they could improve. Civilizing campaigns at the *shequ*/community level should be understood as attempts to rectify the "deficient" component of China's urbanization process as manifested in the "poor quality" of its vast workforce of rural-urban migrants. "Socialist spiritual civilization" campaigns encourage migrants to adopt the good habits of urban people. By internalizing norms of proper dress, etiquette and polite forms of address, it is hoped that this will stop the social stigmatization associated with migrants and rural China in general. However, even though self-governance is being promoted, migrants are, on the whole, regarded to be at the "infant" stages of self-help which means that while some are trusted to govern themselves (e.g. the "new Shanghainese"), others require continued governmental intervention. Further, it is hoped that in the process of improving the skills and social capital of migrants, China will also be able

to improve its economic standing by moving away from an economic model that relies on keeping the migrant working population marginalized in order to remain competitive.

Notes

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1. Throughout this paper, I will be using *shequ* (the Chinese translation of "community" from English) and "community" interchangeably. However, where "community" is used in the Chinese context, it will be italicized to indicate that *community* does not have the same meanings as in Anglophone discourses.
2. What I want to convey with the use of "post-Mao" is not so much a historical break with the past (although at a certain level a "break" has occurred) but to suggest that with the official endorsement of the "socialist market economy" in the Chinese Constitution in 1991, China is no longer the society it once was under Mao and this needs to be acknowledged in some way. In my case, I have chosen to use "post-Mao" to denote this change. My Chinese supervisors brought to my attention that in Chinese academic writing, "post-Mao" is never used because CPC rule has not ended and that to do so was to convey that it has. What we are witnessing, as I am told, is a transformation of communist rule to meet the challenges arising out of adoption of a "market economy". In other words, the market economy has transformed the Communist Party and not brought about its demise. The use of "post-Mao" therefore conveys both change and continuity. For an appreciation of the Maoism in a secular age, see Timothy Cheek's (2006) *Living with Reform: China since 1989*, pp. 32-74.
3. According to China's National Bureau of Statistics, Shanghai's population stood at approximately 23 million which represented a growth of more than 37 per cent from the 2000 census.
4. According to the 2000 Census, the average living space per inhabitant in Shanghai is 11.8 square metres.
5. This came from a pamphlet written by Shanghai University students who made up the bulk of volunteers for the "Sunflower Project". This project provided, amongst other things, Sunday classes to the children of migrant workers at the Minhang District migrant community where I volunteered as an English teacher. The initiative is part of a larger government project known as the "Community Project". For further information, visit <*http://www.community.org.cn*>. Translation is my own.

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Continuity and Change in the Urban Villages of Shenzhen

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Abstract

The urban village, or *chengzhongcun*, is a unique urban communal formation in China and Shenzhen is one of the places that the urban villages first emerged. The creation of urban villages in Shenzhen is a simultaneous process with the creation of the new Shenzhen city. The original agricultural villages within the Shenzhen area were surrounded by rapidly urbanizing landscape. To make a living and adjust to economic competition in the new city of Shenzhen, the urban villagers transformed themselves into builders of self-constructed buildings utilizing their personal lots. They also became the major landlords of their self-constructed housings. Over the last three decades, the Shenzhen city has grown at an astonishing rate from a population around 300,000 to twelve million. The urban villages have become essential places for rural-to-urban migrants to survive in the city because of its low rent and flexible enforcement of the *hukou* household registration system. In a different arena, the urban villagers are forming new economic collectives – the village companies which since the early 1990s have generated great wealth for the urban villages and the original villagers. In this paper, we shall give an overview of some of the key aspects of the urban villages in Shenzhen through historical and social lens.

Keywords: *urban village, Shenzhen, informal buildings, urbanization, urban renewal, demolition and relocation, rural migrants, special economic zone*

JEL classification: *O15, J15, J61, Z13*

1. Introduction

The rapid growth of urbanization and economic power of Shenzhen, which has been transformed from a handful of sleepy villages into a large modern metropolis, has dazzled both Chinese and foreign visitors. However, people

often overlook the *chengzhongcun* 城中村, or urban villages, that have already blended into the surrounding urban landscapes. These are the original villages that have been surrounded and absorbed by the rapidly expanding city. The urban villages are now a nationwide phenomenon in China (see Li Lingling's paper in this collection on the urban villages of Guangzhou). Shenzhen's urban villages are amongst the first of their kinds in contemporary China and therefore well worth serious study and analysis. They represent a special space of contestation and negotiation in urban China. The urban villages are Shenzhen's bridges to its past and could help in the understanding of the process and effects of rapid urbanization of China in the last 30 years.

In this paper, I shall introduce the urban villages in Shenzhen in terms of their culture, history, and population. I shall present specific examples of Shenzhen's urban villages. I shall argue that despite their many apparent flaws and perceived chaos, the urban villages have performed with essential unity and provided direction for the original villagers as they weather the rapid urban changes and subsequent socioeconomic pressures all around from the 1980s up to the present.

2. Literature Review

Technically the name "urban village" in Chinese is called *chengzhongcun* or simply village in the city or village amidst city. Chung Him, a scholar from Hong Kong, is correct in pointing out that there are major deficiencies in literatures across China and the West defining urban village or village-in-the city. According to Chung, "urban village" is a borrowed term. Chung argued that the Western form of urban village as seen in Britain and the Chinese "urban village" or village-in-the-city are very different concepts. Hence Chung insisted on using the term "*chengzhongcun*" or its direct word-for-word English translation "village-in-the-city" to describe the urban village phenomenon in China (Chung, 2010). As noted by Chung, the urban village as modern urban planning concept first emerged in England in the 1990s as a part of the revival of the traditional urbanism (Chung, 2010). England was one of the first places where the modern urban village concept was materialized with the aim of developing "village-style neighbourhood in an urban context" (Murray 2004). However for name sake, sometimes, the English urban village are also referred to as "village in the city" as seen in Nicholas Taylor's *The Village in the City* (Taylor, 1973). In other scholarly works, many authors have simply referred to the *chengzhongcun* or village-in-the-city as urban village (Song *et al*., 2008; Wang *et al*., 2009). While acknowledging their differences, for this paper I shall continue to use the term "urban village" simply for the ease of it instead of the Chinese word *chengzhongcun* or "village-in-the-city".

The studies of migrant enclaves and low-income urban neighbourhoods have been popular subjects in China seen from Xiang Biao's (2005) portrait of the Zhejiang village in Beijing. Or more recently, Lian Si's (2009) study of *yizu cun* 蚁族村 (ant tribe village), a form of college graduate congregate enclaves in the city. Although some of these Zhejiang villages or ant tribe villages are urban villages, most are simply low-income neighbourhoods frequented by migrant tenants. Urban villages as those in Shenzhen have the very important dynamic of having original villagers-based communal self-government. There are also the interesting aspects of economic collectives, such as the urban village companies. In addition, although the scholarly research on urban villages at the national level across various regions are popular in China with particular focuses on Guangzhou and Beijing, the research on Shenzhen's urban village is limited, particularly on the internal mechanism of original villagers and their collective organization and identities.

The latest edition of the book *Chen Village* (Unger, Madsen and Chen, 2009) partially touches on the topic of urban village. Unger, Madsen and Chen used the pseudonym "Chen Village" to describe their subject village in the north of Shenzhen. In the previous editions of this book, much of the emphasis was on the political and social history of the village. The latest expanded edition focused more on urbanization and the social and economic transformations in the village which are very similar to those of Shenzhen's urban villages, yet the concept of urban village was never mentioned or explored. From a different angle, Gregory Guldin's *What's a Peasant to Do? Village Becoming Town in Southern China* (2001) tried to present an overall review of the urban village phenomenon in many different sites across the Pearl River Delta and China's southeastern coast. Guldin put a heavy emphasis on "townization", that is, the transformation of a village into a small town. Guldin called them "townized villages" but many of the villages mentioned by Guldin in Shenzhen and neighbouring Dongguan are indeed urban villages. Guldin provided an essential overview of the social and political changes within the local villages due to urbanization in the last two decades of the twentieth century.

There are limited Anglophone publications by Chinese scholars on the subject of urban village in China and specifically on those of Shenzhen. Yaping Wang, Yanglin Wang and Jiangsheng Wu's (2009) article "Urbanization and Informal Development in China: Urban Villages in Shenzhen" is likely the most updated research on urban villages of Shenzhen. These Chinese researchers have cited extensive Chinese government decrees and documents to provide a crucial historical overview on the village-city government relationship with regard to informal housing construction on village land (Wang, Wang and Wu, 2009). There are also a few other scholarly works by Chinese scholars on the urban villages with interests ranging from

land markets to the housing of rural migrants (Tian 2008; Zhang, Zhao and Tian, 2003). Within China many domestic scholars and government-affiliated researchers have done extensive studies in Chinese on the urban villages in the Pearl River Delta region with the aim of helping the government's move to "regulate" (*zhili* 治理) the villages. In one of the latest general publications on urban villages, while acknowledging the unique ability of urban villages in sheltering migrant labours, Liu Mengqin (2010) of the Guangdong Social Science Academy presented the urban village as a major problem and obstacle to normal urbanization in China in her book *The End of the Village: A Study of the Urban Village and Its Reform* (*Cunzhuang Zhongjie: Chengzhongcun ji Qi Gaizao Yanjiu* 村庄终结: 城中村及其改造研究). The themes of unruly villages are repeated in various Chinese scholarly publications and popular among the local media outlets of China (*Southern Metropolitan Daily*, 2011).

However, not all domestic Chinese scholars carry the same negative view of urban villages. One of the most notable works published by mainland scholars on the issue of urban villages is Li Peilin's (2004) *The End of the Village: Stories of Yangcheng Village*. Li's work on Guangzhou's urban villages, which is very similar to those in Shenzhen, is a classic in the study of urban villages. Li's book presented some of the positive qualities of the urban villages in terms of social diversity, convenience, and upward social mobility. Recently, there are also many Shenzhen scholars publishing news and magazine articles in support of the urban village as a necessary place for low-income migrant labourers (see Li, 2007; Chen, 2009). They argue that the urban village is not a shame of Shenzhen. On the contrary, the urban villages are Shenzhen's precious sites of local cultural heritage and have helped alleviate much housing pressure on the city overall.

In summary, the topic of the urban village in Shenzhen and in China more generally tends to bring out extreme opposing views from mainland Chinese academia. The kind of negative views generated from various sectors of society and the city government towards urban villages are, nonetheless, dominant. There is an unspoken consensus in the media, academia and government that the urban villages are problematic. That is, they constitute a problem that needs to be reformed and restructured. I hope to present in this paper a balanced evaluation of the urban village phenomenon in Shenzhen to show that the urban village is a necessary step in contemporary Chinese urban development.

3. The History and Cultural Heritage of Shenzhen's Villages

Thirty years ago, most of Shenzhen was made up of villages. Zhang Yibing, a popular local archeologist, once estimated that Shenzhen had over 1,300 historical "natural villages" (*zirancun* 自然村) (Fu, 2006). These natural

villages are the common ancestor of today's urban villages. Often, a single current urban village is the coalition of several historical natural villages. The villages, depending on location, engaged in either agricultural or fishing activities. The villages are very similar in terms of their social hierarchical structures. Each village was built around a dominate clan of a particular surname lineage that reserves the right to build an ancestral hall (*citing* 祠厅) in the centre of the village to demonstrate their dominance and importance.

The main distinctions among the villages are the cultural, linguistic, and religious affiliations. In both the northern and eastern sections of Shenzhen, large numbers of villages are Hakka, which is a distinctive cultural and linguistic Han sub-ethnic group in contrast to the Cantonese-speaking Han population majority in the province of Guangdong. In addition, there are also scatterings of small villages that speak forms of Chaozhou dialect from the

Figure 1 Folk Religion Worship in a Village of Shenzhen (photo by author, 2009)

northeastern part of Guangdong Province. In terms of belief systems, among the villages there are a combination of Buddhist, Taoist, and various forms of indigenous folk religions. One interesting example of Shenzhen's religious scene is the practice of Mazu worship in several villages. Historically, the largest religious site in Shenzhen is *Tianhougong* 天后宫 which is dedicated to the worship of Mazu, the protector of sailors and fishermen. The worship of Mazu has its origins in the neighbouring coastal Fujian province and is often associated with fishing villages.

Shenzhen's urban villages varied in number and size over time especially after the commencement of economic reform and the founding of Shenzhen as a city in 1979. Wang Ruyuan (2004) counted only 71 urban villages within the then Shenzhen Special Economic Zone in 1999. The total urban village area in Shenzhen was about ten square kilometres. The size of the villages varies greatly from year to year due to land sale and government acquisition of land. There have been many cases of large villages dividing into smaller villages from the early 1980s onwards. For example, Huanggang Village, which I have visited extensively, was divided into the current Huanggang Village and Shuiwei Village in the year 1980. Another of my research villages, Buxin Village, was divided into the current Buxin Village and two other villages in the late 1970s.

Despite varying in location and geography, most of Shenzhen's villages share a similar history. The county of Xin'an, which included both the current Shenzhen and Hong Kong regions, was established in the 16th Century in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 CE). Because of the historical connection, many villages in Shenzhen and Hong Kong share the same lineages. Since the Opium War (1839-1842 CE), the Hong Kong region became separated from Xin'an County when it became a British concession. The remaining areas of Xin'an County was later renamed Baoan County which remains as name of the local region until the founding of Shenzhen in 1979.

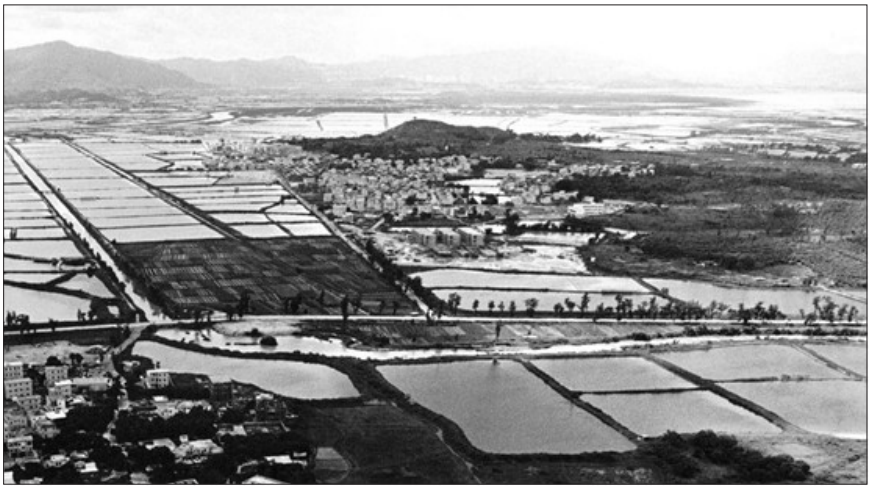
Prior to 1978, Shenzhen's villages, like most Chinese villages, had gone through the great political turmoil in the first three decades of the People's Republic of China (PRC) since its founding in 1949. The Great Leap Forward (1957), the Four Clean Up Campaigns (1963-1966 CE), and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976 CE), all greatly affected the villages of Shenzhen. It might be surprising to people how deep the penetration of political campaigns was back then. The highest command of "Chairman Mao" could spread from the centre of Beijing to the furthest corners of what we know call Shenzhen. During my fieldwork I was always amazed by the fact that the villagers of this locality, who at the time could barely speak or understand Mandarin, could nonetheless memorize the songs of the Cultural Revolution and the three political essays (*laosanpian* 老三篇) of the Chairman.[1] I was told by one villager that during those days, when the newest teaching was issued by

Chairman Mao through telegraph, the entire village would gather around to study it even when it was late in the night.

Overlapping the great political chaos, there was the significant historical phenomenon of "*taogang* 逃港" in Shenzhen. Taogang literally means fleeing to Hong Kong. By some estimation, counting only those from Guangdong province alone, 565,000 people attempted to flee from Shenzhen to Hong Kong. Among those, at least 140,000 were successful (Lu, 2008). This is only the official version of the figure which is likely to be a great underestimation. During those years of turmoil, tens of thousands of people from elsewhere and large numbers of local villagers fled on foot from Shenzhen to Hong Kong. Sometimes, they walked across the mangrove swamp bordering Hong Kong. Sometimes they just swam across the Shenzhen Bay. As a consequence, in the urban villages, many if not most of the original villagers have relatives who fled to Hong Kong. The reason of their fleeing could vary greatly. Some were sincerely fleeing political persecution and food shortages while others simply wanted better wages and opportunities. The *taogang* event shook the villages of Shenzhen to their cores. Many villages reported losing half of the able-body male population to *taogang* during the 1960s and 1970s. It should be noted that the *taogang* event was never successfully curbed by the border guards who were often local villagers themselves. They faced the dilemma of stopping their friends and relatives from fleeing or neglecting their duty. The phenomenon of *taogang* was only greatly reduced after the economic take-off of Shenzhen in the 1980s.

In March 1979, the city of Shenzhen was founded in the Baoan County areas with the approval of the Chinese State Council. In May 1980, it was officially declared the first Special Economic Zone of China. With the proclamation, Shenzhen was rapidly urbanized in the 1980s. In the following decades, the villagers proved themselves to be amazingly flexible and adaptable to the new urban environment that was gradually surrounding them. Initially, they leased village land for small factories by Hong Kong or Taiwan investors. Later, they began to set up small factories of their own with particular specializations. For example, Huanggang Village in southern Futian District had a sand transport business that was entirely village-owned in the 1980s. The villagers dug up sand from nearby land and transported it by truck to the various construction sites. Later on, they set up a rubbish collection and recycling business by importing waste from Hong Kong. For a while, their specialty was importing used tires from Hong Kong to recycle on village-owned sites. In Buxin Village, the villagers set up a small fish bait factory that supplies the Hong Kong consumer market. The local villagers simply called it the "red worm factory". These factories were all set up in the mid-1980s. It was the "first bucket of gold"[2] for the villages. However, the real business opportunity came later when Shenzhen expanded

Figure 2 Shenzhen in Early 1980s (courtesy of Shenzhen Huanggang Holding Company Ltd, 2010)



in population. The villagers were able to start large-scale accommodation leasing operations.

4. Rural-to-Urban Migrants and the Making of Urban Village

Since the mid-1980s, Shenzhen has become a magnet for migrants from all over China looking for work. The policy of economic reform and Shenzhen's status as a SEZ made Shenzhen the land of many firsts in China. Shenzhen was the site of many significant and new political and economic trends. First, there were the initial signs of the loosening of the system of household registration system (*hukou* 户口) which used to effectively block rural residents from living and working in the cities. The loosening of the *hukou* system in Shenzhen helped to usher in the age of the rural-to-urban migrant workers (*nongmingong* 农民工) in China where millions of rural farmers flocked to coastal and urban China to take up manufacturing jobs. In Shenzhen, there was also the beginning of the end of the "iron rice bowl" (*tiefanwan* 铁饭碗) policy toward permanent employment and equal pay systems of the "big rice pot" (*daguofan* 大锅饭). Shenzhen was the first place for flexible wages according to one's ability and effort. Shenzhen's Zhuyuan Hotel is famous for being the first workplace to fire workers in the history of the People's Republic of China.

With the myth of Shenzhen being a paradise for hard workers, flexible wages and hiring without *hukou* restrictions, large number of migrants came to Shenzhen from all over China with very different skill levels. Initially,

most of the migrant workers were housed in factory dormitories. Gradually and for various reasons, many migrants began to settle in the urban villages. Some of these migrants did not have stable employment. Many of them were self-employed or employed by small businesses. In addition, the later migrants often came with their entire family to the city and they were no longer satisfied with the dormitory as a place to live. This is often the case during my interviews with the migrants. In the late 1980s, massive numbers of migrants began to move into the urban villages attracted by the cheap rent and the loose residential registration. Subsequently, Shenzhen's population skyrocketed and it was during this time that the urban villagers began to see great changes in their life.

Today, Shenzhen has a total estimated population of 12 to 14 million plus or minus the very unstable migrant population.[3] The official government census puts Shenzhen's total long-term residential population as 8.9 million and the floating population to be around 2 million (Lu, 2010). Out of the 8.9 million long-term residents, only 2.3 million have Shenzhen *hukou* and the rest have proper urban *hukou* registration[4] from other Chinese cities (Lu, 2010). No matter what figure one uses from the lowest estimation of 12 million to the highest estimation of 14 million, Shenzhen has experienced tremendous population growth within 30 years. The original Baoan County Annals (Baoan Xianzhi Committee, 1997) stated that the county had roughly only 300,000 residents in 1978 just prior to the founding of Shenzhen.

In the 1990s, the villagers were quick to take advantage of the migrant population boom in Shenzhen and start building rental apartments. The rent that the villagers charged was always, and continues to be, the cheapest in the city. The present average rent in the villages ranges from 1,000 to 2,000 yuan[5] per month for the most basic apartment suite. The apartment unit could be shared by a single family or by a ragtag group of migrants from the same home town. For the migrants, the urban village is an excellent place to start their new urban life in Shenzhen. For the original villagers, the migrants are great tenants who do not complain much about the crammed and chaotic conditions of the villages. The lucrative apartment rental operation would soon become a norm among the urban villages in Shenzhen. When I was interviewing one former village chief at Buxin Village, he comically suggested that after 1984, villagers no longer cared about planting crops for harvest. All the villagers cared about is "growing buildings" (*geng lou* 耕楼).

5. Relation between Villages and Government over Land

Shenzhen's urban villages are very ambiguous places in term of land rights. According to the Chinese Land Administration Law, all urban land belongs to the Chinese government. The so-called ownership of property within urban

areas by citizen or non-government organizations is actually a long-term renewable lease of up to 70 years. However, the Chinese Land Administration Law also clearly states that all agricultural land in rural areas belongs to the village collective. Thus, a grey zone of ambiguity is created surrounding the urban villages of Shenzhen and many others around China. The urban villages were historically agricultural villages that were absorbed into an urban zone or new city in the case of Shenzhen. In Shenzhen, the villages remain in control of their land even after the urbanization process. Hence, the urban villagers are urban residents with special collective property rights.

Shenzhen was constantly expanding throughout its first two decades with new roads and new buildings encroaching onto the borders of the villages. Often, the city government would have new plans for public infrastructure around or inside the villages. In this regard, one of the often unspoken conflicts of interest between the villages and the local government in Shenzhen is that of land acquisition, which is a direct assault to the villages' collective landholding permitted by the Chinese Land Administrative Law. In earlier cases of the mid-1980s, the city government purchased the land very cheaply from the villagers for their own urban design and planning. Compared to current prices at minimum over 5,000 yuan per square metre, the land sold to the city government back in the 1980s was at 4.5 to 6 yuan per square metre, roughly 3,000 to 4,000 yuan per *mu* 亩 (660 square metres).[6] The villagers under political pressure or simple ignorance agreed to the terms of the city government.

Some of the most vivid examples of land acquisition happened in Huanggang Village. The city government used a large chunk of this village to build the Huanggang Border Terminal in the late 1980s, which is now the main border terminal between Shenzhen and Hong Kong. In the mid-1990s, another piece of land was acquired from Huanggang Village to build the Futian District Government Complex. In the year 2000, the city government again acquired a large northern section of Huanggang Village to build the Shenzhen Exhibition Center. In the more inland village of Buxin, a similar process was repeated in the 1980s and 1990s. The city government, for example, bought land cheaply from villagers to build the Jingwei Beer[7] factory. When interviewing a retired village chief, it is estimated that Buxin has lost over two thirds of its original village land during the initial acquisition stage in the 1980s and 1990s.

Although the government had achieved success in acquiring land from the villages, the villagers had their ways of not cooperating with the city government. The villagers had started a massive building boom within the villages in the late 1980s. It was a direct challenge to the planning and zoning of the city government. The privately constructed buildings did not follow regulations on size and standard. In addition, there are indications that

the villagers' private constructions were spreading onto neighbouring land outside the villages. Hence, in 1986, the city government formally introduced policies to limit the size and height of privately constructed housing in the villages. It limited the size of each building site to 80 square metres. Each villager was allowed 40 square metres of building space (Shenzhen Municipal Government, 1986). In 1989, the city government introduced the red line policy to limit the size of the village. The policy stated that the villages and villagers could only construct buildings within the red line drawn by the government (Shenzhen Municipal Government, 1989). It was meant to define the modern borders of the villages. Furthermore, the city government issued new decrees to strengthen control over all village-owned land within the red line and put them under direct jurisdiction.

However, since the red line policy of the late 1980s and the limitation on how high the villagers could construct their buildings, the city government has achieved very little success in regulating the villagers. None of the decrees was effectively followed by the villagers. Almost all villages had violated the government's regulation on the size and height of the buildings to different degrees. The villagers had constructed blocks and blocks of buildings that were at least over five floors tall. In reality, the phenomenon of rampant construction (*luanjian* 乱建) was everywhere. Attempts to construct buildings

Figure 3 Shenzhen Urban Village Sprawl (photo by author, 2008)

beyond the government red line also continued but at a much smaller scale than before. According to Wang Yaping (2009), the government's decree in the late 1980s had an exactly opposite effect. The villages had instead sped up their *luanjian* building effort which had become an out-of-control phenomenon. Contrary to popular perception of authoritarian style of governing in China, in the case of Shenzhen, the city municipal government has been for a long time reluctant to forcefully deal with local villages. This was likely because of Shenzhen's symbolic importance of being an experimental special economic zone. The local government has been for a long time very cautious to use any sudden forceful measures against large collective entities such as the urban villages. Or simply they did not find the villages to be an overwhelming concern with so much energy devoted to building the main streets of the Shenzhen city.

The result of the villagers' rampant construction is today's infamous urban village landscape full of densely constructed apartments. So narrow is the distance between the buildings that the locals call them the "kissing buildings" (*qinwenlou* 亲吻楼) or "handshake buildings" (*woshoulou* 握手楼). The highly dense buildings of urban villages formed a unique scene of their own. Except for some of the main streets across the villages, most village streets between apartments are extremely narrow. Very often, one will encounter streets between two apartment blocks that is about the size of footpath of typical Western suburban home. The streets between the apartments can sometimes be compared to the popular Chinese expression describing a deep valley with only one line of sky, that is, *yi xian tian* 一线天 (Wang, 2004). This is not an exaggeration. Many urban village streets keep on the street lights for 24 hours because of the almost perpetual darkness between the densely constructed buildings. The humid condition of Shenzhen makes the alleys look even worse. Many scholars have raised concerns about the quality and potential for fire dangers among the urban villages' buildings (Wang, 2004).

Throughout the 1990s, some original villagers began to cooperate with the newly emerging class of Chinese real estate developers, both state-owned and private. Because of shared profit and mutual interest, the villagers are more cooperative with the real estate developers than with the city government. This new partnership phenomenon started to be repeated throughout the villages. Better quality apartment complexes started to emerge around the villages. The improvement of housing quality also attracted a new generation of migrants to the villages. These were mostly single white-collar workers and Hong Kong residents. In the early 2000s, the force of real estate developers became ever more prominent among the villages as they got involved in urban renewal projects that often have a priority for the villages. Kingkey Group, one of the largest real estate companies in Shenzhen, had its beginnings in

Figure 4 *Yi Xian Tian*, Narrow Space between Buildings (photo by author, 2009)

the urban villages. The founder of Kingkey Group, Chen Hua, was an early migrant construction labourer in the early 1980s (Zhongtou Guwen, 2008). Chen made his fortune and built a business empire by getting involved in urban renewal projects in the urban villages. The once two-way game between the villagers and the city government has become a three-way game between city government, the real estate developers, and villagers. The three sides are pursuing their own interests. However, the game has become more cooperative and less zero-sum.

6. The Urban Village Community

The German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies first introduced the concept of *Gemeinschaft* and *Geselleschaft* to distinguish the rural and the emerging modern urban community in Germany in the early 20th Century. Interestingly, both Tönnies's terminologies of *Gemeinschaft* and *Geselleschaft* could be applied to the urban villages. In the urban village we find both the kind of *Gemeinschaft* rural community and *Geselleschaft* modern urban society. Thirty years ago, the urban villages of Shenzhen were *Gemeinschaft* of tightly knitted village communities, just like most villages in China. The village of Shenzhen had a well-established ancestral hall (*citing* 祠厅) lineage system which was strengthened after the economic reform. The prosperous villages have spent large sums to erect and redecorate their *citang* to strengthen their collective identity and community feeling.

After the rapid urbanization process, the *Geselleschaft* of Tönnies's started to form in Shenzhen's village. Tönnies's original definition emphasized the emergence of individualism in modern capitalist urban society where people were bound by common aspiration and codes of conduct. After the formation of Shenzhen city and the urbanization of the village areas, the individual villagers were very quick to adapt to the new urban and economic reform environment and took the opportunity to profit from their villager identity and land ownership. One particular act of individualism was the rampant building effort described above. In addition, the boom in residential population within the village also made it hard for everybody to know everybody else.

Since the mid-1980s there was a melting pot-like phenomenon of many different regional Chinese cultures from various inland provinces with the local coastal Pearl River Delta village culture (as is described in the fiction of the urban migrant writers discussed by Li Lingling in this collection). With the settling of a migrant majority in Shenzhen and in the villages, the migrants have brought their provincial cultures to Shenzhen and the villages. Today, the urban villages are filled with regional-flavour restaurants, a simple but obvious indicator of diversity. Some of them are from spice-obsessed mountainous provinces of Sichuan, Guizhou, and Guangxi. There were also the equally spicy varieties from the central Yangtze provinces of Hunan and Hubei. These restaurants are usually small with room enough for only six to eight tables. However, they are intensely loyal to their regional style and flavour. Shenzhen's urban village culinary scene is in fact as diverse as those in long-established food courts of Beijing. The original villagers are not swallowed up by the regional cultures. The Cantonese herbal tea shop is usually just around the corner. There are many famous local food chains grown out of the villages. For example, the locally famous Chao Tai Beef Restaurants were originally from the urban village of Gangxia.

Although the urban village to a degree is the melting pot of Shenzhen and China, there are also conflicts of economic and cultural elements among its various groups of residential populations. Provincial and regional prejudices are major causes of social conflict in China. In the more developed coastal urban areas of China, the sense of regional or provincial superiority is particularly strong. Although Shenzhen is often called the migrant city of China, there is still a strong undercurrent of nativism among the villagers and early Guangdong migrants who spoke Cantonese and are deeply rooted in this locality. Most of the later migrants are from poorer inland provinces. They either spoke heavily accented Mandarin or their regional dialects, and they are now the majority of the urban villages' residents. However, in terms of economic and political power, they are the weaker party compared to the collective of local villagers. The basic relation between them and the villagers were that of tenants and landlords. The local villagers, now mostly relatively prosperous and wealthy, often look down on the out-of-province migrants. The migrants because of the perceived exploitative economic relationship with the landlord villagers or their own provincial prejudices also disrespect the local villagers. Interestingly, in spite of regional differences, they have formed a consensus about the local villagers as being lazy, greedy, and useless. During my interviews with migrants, when I asked them how frequent they communicate or socialize with the original villagers, they always said that the only chance that they communicate with the original villagers was during rent collecting.

7. Negative Images of Urban Villages

In present-day Shenzhen, the urban village received many strong negative stereotypes, which to certain degrees are arguably true. The urban villages from the typical main-street Shenzhen citizens' view are basically a kind of "ghetto" for rural-to-urban migrants. The word "ghetto" here is referring to the modern American description of poor sectors of the inner city inhabited by racial minorities. The type of negative stereotype projected toward the ghetto in the United States is very similar to those projected at the urban village in Shenzhen by the average Shenzhen citizen, at least without the racial element. The stereotypes of "dirty, chaotic, and dangerous" urban villages are common in Shenzhen for those who live outside the villages. They are also prominent in the thinking of the city government.

There are many different kinds of crimes in the urban village. The most heinous and rampant are thefts and break-ins. Both the perpetrators and victims of this kind of crime are mostly migrants. The originally villagers' residence are usually heavily guarded with dogs and other surveillance measures. Aside from common theft, the urban villages are infamous for their

organized criminal activity, which branches out into various aspects of the underground economy. The organized crime in the villages could vary greatly in scale. Some are gangs and some are mafias. Originally, the organized crimes first emerged when the original villagers formed gangs among themselves to either protect themselves or to bully the migrants. Increasingly, the gangs of local villagers are replaced by much larger gangs made up of migrants with provincial allegiances. There are also countless regional gangs vying for control over sections within the urban villages. Lately, there are also the Hong Kong-based triad elements setting up bridgeheads in the villages (Quan, 2010). Most of the time the gangs are not a serious concern to average residents of the urban village. However, they are a monthly headache for small shops and restaurant owners as they collect their protection money. In addition, there was potential danger for bystanders when the gangs started fighting each other for turf control.

With the great variety of criminal organizations, there is bound to be a vibrant underground economy in Shenzhen's urban villages. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the villages were the place for "*Huang, Du, Du* 黄, 赌, 毒", the big three in Chinese public security concern. *Huang* or yellow in the mainland Chinese context represents any immoral activities from pornography to prostitution (see Sigley, 2006). The first *Du* is gambling. The second *Du* is drug use. In the urban village, all three elements are very prominent. *Huang*, however, is likely the biggest of the three. One could find prostitutes in a wide variety of price range and locations in the urban village. Clubs, bars, massage parlours, barber shops, and even small theatres are places where the prostitutes attract their customers. As for other such activities, there is the pirated pornographic DVD sold from various small video stores. These shops also host an amazing selection of other pirated DVDs usually on sale just days after the global premier of new blockbuster movies. Gambling is probably the least prominent in the urban villages. However, there are rare cases of mini-gambling dens in the villages and small slot machines in some convenient shops. Drug use is viewed with much severity. Because of historical and legal reasons, the offense of selling drugs and using drugs are much more severe than gambling activities and prostitution. The local police (*gonganju* 公安局) and the village security team tend to take drug-related activities very seriously because it would reflect poorly on their work. However, there are always the rumours of drug use by idle village youth since the 1990s.

8. The Urban Village Success Story

Despite all the negativities about some urban villages, one could not deny the success of many villages. In terms of economic organization, the urban villages of Shenzhen are definite shining examples for similar urban

settlement or townized villages in developing nations. In 1992, the Shenzhen government passed decrees to let villages form their own village joint-stock company (*cungufengongsi* 村股份公司) (Shenzhen Municipal Government, 1992). This is a historical moment for the villages which over the era of the People's Republic have changed from natural villages to work brigades to village again and finally to companies and residential communities. Every village in Shenzhen now has a village company of its own. The companies basically act as the parallel governing structure of the villages in charge of economic affairs. As an economic collective, the village company will distribute dividends to the shareholding villagers. It also takes care of social welfare in the form of community clinics, kindergartens, and activity centres for the villagers. In many ways, the companies proved crucial in the villages' efforts to maintain some self-governing power. Soon after 1992 and the formation of the companies, the villages were brought into the city government administration network. The political unit of the village, the village committee (*cunweihui* 村委会), no longer exists. In its place, there is the first the street office (*jiedaoban* 街道办) and then the residential committee (*juweihui* 居委会). The new government organs are all controlled by the city government.

Since the formation of the companies, all villages were put on the same starting line. Over the next two decades, they strived for success and achieved different results. So far, for over two decades, no village company has gone bankrupt. Some villages have become great successes. The village companies in many ways symbolized the urban villages of Shenzhen at present. They have provided important cushions for the average villagers during the period of rapid economic change and urbanization. The companies as economic collectives have provided unity and direction for the villagers. This is especially true among the more successful villages. The collective spirit has helped them deal with powerful organizations whether it is the city government or the real estate developers. This is especially precious when considering examples of urban villages from elsewhere in China. More often than not, without any form of economic collective organization the urban villages could be completely demolished and relocated based on government or real estate developers' terms, as is now often the case in many other rapidly urbanizing Chinese cities. The very existence of so many urban villages in Shenzhen proved that the urban village collective model has worked.

Huanggang Village is one of the largest urban villages in Shenzhen. The village is one of the first villages to undergo the urbanization process. Its current total size is about half a square kilometre. It is a Zhuang surname village. The village has approximately 700 years of history. The total population of Zhuang descent in Huanggang is about 1,700 (Huanggang Zhuang Clan Association, 2010). In 1992, by decree of the Shenzhen city

government, Huanggang Village is no longer a village but a part of the city. Hence all village-related political structures were abolished and replaced with urban administrative structures of street office as mentioned above. In the same year, the Huanggang villagers formed the Huanggang Joint-Stock Company with a registered fund of 200 million yuan. Currently, by conservative estimates the company is worth more than six billion yuan. The Huanggang Village Company owns two large hotels, one large department store, and a variety of properties ranging from office buildings, restaurants

Figure 5 Huanggang Business Centre (Huanggang Shangwuzhongxin) (courtesy of Huanggang Holding Company Ltd, 2010)

to rental properties (including apartments, factories, and shops). In June 2009, the ambitious Huanggang Company finished construction on its first skyscraper, the Huanggang Business Centre (*shangwuzhongxin* 商务中心), a 62-floor office building with the height of 268 metres in Shenzhen's CBD (central business district).

Huanggang Village is a one of the bigger villages in Shenzhen for its size and population. However, the village is overall well administered. Some areas of the village are better planned and administered than anywhere in Shenzhen. Overall, the village is safe, and well monitored and governed. The restaurants are clean. The supermarkets and open-air fresh food markets are vibrant. The buildings constructed by the villagers are not as crammed and chaotic as elsewhere. They seem to have a uniform look of similar height. Since very early on, the village company had enforced their own standard of building regulations and planned the village area by themselves. On this, Huanggang stands apart from other villages in Shenzhen in their ability to control the average villagers and enforce a kind of economic collectivism.

At present, Huanggang Village has a very large public square which has a European-style watchtower at the centre. On the square, there is a platform for theatre and speeches. Behind the square there is the family temple and ancestral hall for the Zhuang family, which is one of the largest family temples among Shenzhen's villages. Behind the temple, there is a village museum, one of the first of its kind in China. There is also a private park for the Zhuang

Figure 6 Villagers Gathering during an Important Holiday at the Village Square with *Citang* in the Background (courtesy of Huanggang Holding Company Ltd, 2010)

clan near the temple. The village has another much larger park blocks away which serves as a public park for the city but bears the Huanggang name.

On 23rd August 2010, Premier Wen Jiabao visited Shenzhen to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the foundation of the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone (SEZ). Hu (2010) from Xinhua News Agency reported Wen's visit to Shenzhen in detail. Among his various ceremonial stops in Shenzhen, the premier visited Huanggang Village. Such a visit by a head of state is highly choreographed for its symbolic meaning. Reading it from Chinese social and political context, this visit highlighted Huanggang village's significance as a major achievement of the Shenzhen SEZ. The official story by Xinhua News Agency described the village's importance as follows:

> Thirty years ago, the Huanggang villagers made less than nine *mao* (90 Chinese cents) daily on fishing and farming. Fleeing to Hong Kong had become a popular activity among villagers. At its worst, there were only 16 people left in the village. Today's Huanggang is a land of high-rises, beautiful environment and collective economic holding of more than six billion yuan. Every month, the average village has a dividend of 6,000 yuan. (Hu, 2010)

Figure 7 Premier Wen in Huanggang Village (courtesy of Huanggang Holding Company Ltd, 2010)

9. Conclusion

The urban village of Shenzhen is quite a complex phenomenon with issues ranging from history to economics, from local politics to cultural heritage, from population movement to village self-government. Many scholars and officials have emphasized greatly on the negative aspects of the urban village, that is, the high crime rate, chaotic buildings, and lack of administration. However, they failed to balance their view with the potential positive elements of the villages in term of cultural diversity, low-cost housing, and economic self-government. There are indeed great lessons to be learned from the urban villages of Shenzhen. Despite many of their flaws, the Shenzhen urban villages could be examples and models for countless urban villages in China that are facing the potential danger of being completely demolished and relocated. In many cases elsewhere, due to the lack of collective economic organization, the villages ceased to exist after the urbanization process. And the villagers were forced to face the sudden onslaught of urban lifestyle and fierce competition. In the cases of Shenzhen's urban villages, the village company has provided direction and unity for local villages. Their continuing existence throughout three decades of rapid economic changes proved their effectiveness. In addition, a well-performing village company as an economic collective could provide riches for the villagers for generations and the necessary protection to the local cultural heritage.

Notes

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1. They were "To Serve the People", "Study Norman Bethune", and "The Old Fool Moves Mountains". Bethune was a Canadian medical doctor who served with the Communist Red Army during the Civil War and died in China.
2. The Chinese colloquial expression of primitive capital accumulation.
3. The Shenzhen Municipal Government officials tend to use the 14 million figure as Shenzhen's population. Yet the official census tends to cite the total population figure to be no more than 12 million.
4. These are urban migrants who migrated to Shenzhen from other Chinese cities.
5. With the current exchange rate of 6.3 yuan : 1 dollar (USD), it is around 166 and 332 dollars (USD).
6. The original information was 3,000 to 4,000 yuan per *mu*. During my interview at Buxin and Huanggang Villages I was informed that the city government compensated the villagers for their land acquisition at 2,000 yuan per *mu* or around 3 yuan per square metre.
7. Shenzhen's most popular local brand for beer.

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Village Spatial Order and Its Transformations in an Anhui Village[+]

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Abstract

Rural space in China has undergone profound reconfiguration and reconstruction since the reform era began in 1978. The latest round of change was initiated in 2006 when the central government launched a new policy known as "Building a New Socialist Countryside". This paper deals with the "spatialization of government" in Xiaogang, which is reputedly the first in China to decollectivize and commence agricultural reform in 1978. Based on the village experience, this paper analyzes two types of rural space and delineates the logic behind their transformation over the past two decades. The paper argues that while spatial transformation underpins many significant changes in rural social, economic and political structures, new forms of space continue to bolster collectivized rather than individualized forms of subjectivity.

Keywords: *space, governmentality, rural China*

JEL classification: *O18, P21, P32, R12*

1. Introduction: Space and Social Formations

At the turn of the last millennium, the leaders of Xiaogang decided to move from their old location and relocate to a new site approximately two miles away from the original location. At the time of my sojourn there in 2008, the whole rebuilding project was almost finished. My informants detailed the three reasons behind the move from the original location. Firstly, the old location had become very crowded due to having been irregularly planned. Secondly, the village was built on arable land, and the Chinese state was concerned about land shortage problems. The village cadres' long discussions with the villagers convinced the latter that moving to a new open area would not only increase the amount of arable land but would improve their living conditions

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enormously. Finally, the old village rested on low-lying land. This meant that the villagers were at risk of contracting a serious parasitic disease called "snail fever", and diarrhoea as well. One third of the village children suffered from parasitic intestinal roundworms. Taken together, these factors posed a serious threat to the Xiaogang villagers' lives. Village cadres offered three incentives to encourage villagers to move from the old site to the new area. The village had a small kiln factory producing clay tiles: the cadres promised to offer a highly discounted price for tiles for the newly-built houses. Twenty eight households, attracted by this encouragement, moved immediately. The cadres gave 100 yuan for every newly-built room in the new location, thus combining encouragement with financial support. This material aid came from the local township, which also supported the villagers' relocation. As well, the cadres built two wells and other infrastructure, including, for example, the main road system in the new area, thereby solving the problems of drinking water and transport.

Why were the local cadres and villagers so enthusiastic about the relocation? Where did the financial support come from? Was the move related to a larger context? My primary interest in this case study of Xiaogang village's relocation is that it echoes the recent macro-space transformations in rural China. In this paper, focus is upon the spatial order of the "Building New Countryside" project (*Xin Nongcun Jianshe* 新农村建设, hereafter XNJ). The key question I am going to explore is: How was space (re)designed in a particular way to govern or manage the village? This paper will also pose the following questions: How much of a coincidence was it that the XNJ, a top-down project, promoted this relocation and that the villagers not only voluntarily joined this comprehensive project but also reorganized their location? Were there any problems associated with relocation? If so, what were they and how were they solved? What do the local villagers think about this central government project? What are their expectations of the local building plan? The inextricable link between space and power will be the focus of this paper, namely, how rural spatial order is shaped by and in turn shapes power relations and local governance.

In his study of Xiajia village in Heilongjiang, Yan Yunxiang argues that the changes of rural domestic spatial order that occurred from Mao to post-Mao times "reflect a growing sense of entitlement to individual rights in private life" (Yan, 2003: 139). This paper argues that while spatial transformation underpins many significant changes in rural social, economic and political structures, new forms of space continue to bolster collectivized rather than individualized forms of subjectivity. Needless to say, there is no clear-cut line between the privatization and collectivization of rural spatial change. In this paper, I emphasize the collective subjectivity that the process of spatialization has brought about.

As a micro-space case study, the main body of this paper is composed of three sections: village space and its relocation, village public space and domestic/family space, of which the domestic space has shown the most change as a result of Xiaogang's relocation. Suffice to say that today there is a common quest for privacy and individuality, for, as Yan argues in his book *Private Life under Socialism*, newly-modelled houses and the reconfiguration of domestic space have greatly restructured family relations and gender difference. However, during my fieldwork, I found that a collectivized form of subjectivity still persists and that this collective family identity can also be testified to in village public spaces.

2. The Master Plan

In 2007, the village was designated as a "Model Village" for the XNJ. The local authorities were impressed by the new "Master Plan" proposed by the village leaders. The Master Plan was initiated by the village cadres to win the Model Village competition. Being awarded this recognition would allow the local township to prioritize its development and resource support. During the planning process, the cadres consulted with recognized professionals by deliberately designing the village according to the guidelines of the relevant governmental planning regulations and laws, and in so doing they were eligible for both financial and ideological support. In line with the Master Plan, the village leadership planned to build new asphalt roads (a total of 1.2 km), public lavatories, channel canals and sluices, and to dismantle dilapidated houses. Further, the village decided to build a new drainage and sewage system which would link Xiaogang's reservoirs and major rivers with the country's farmlands, a methane supply system,[1] and a rubbish collection centre. A decision was taken to install new traffic lights as well. On paper at least, the cadres claimed that they would spare no efforts in investing in and supporting infrastructure proposals and plans. They were determined to rebuild the village space and design a nearly brand-new built environment.

This Master Plan, however, was neither unique nor unprecedented. It was a long-term development plan (*guihua* 规划) related to the village image (*mianmao* 面貌). I should emphasize here that in 2008, the "PRC Urban Planning Law" (1990) was replaced by the "PRC Urban and Rural Planning Law", Article 18 of which clearly indicates that:

> Village planning should be geared to the local rural specific situations, respect the villagers' own wishes and manifest the local character. The plan should cover areas like construction scale, housing, roads, water supply, drainage, electricity supply, garbage collection, poultry-raising, public facilities and public services.

Xiaogang's Master Plan was accordingly divided into five sections: the present village layout and its problems; the design guidelines; the design details; the immediate priorities; and, suggestions.[2] It involved the whole 119, 200 square metres of land and all of the villagers. This plan was not just paying lip service to the new circumstances. Xiaogang village planning was a reflection of the strategic national project to transform rural spatial order.

3. Village Space and Its Relocation

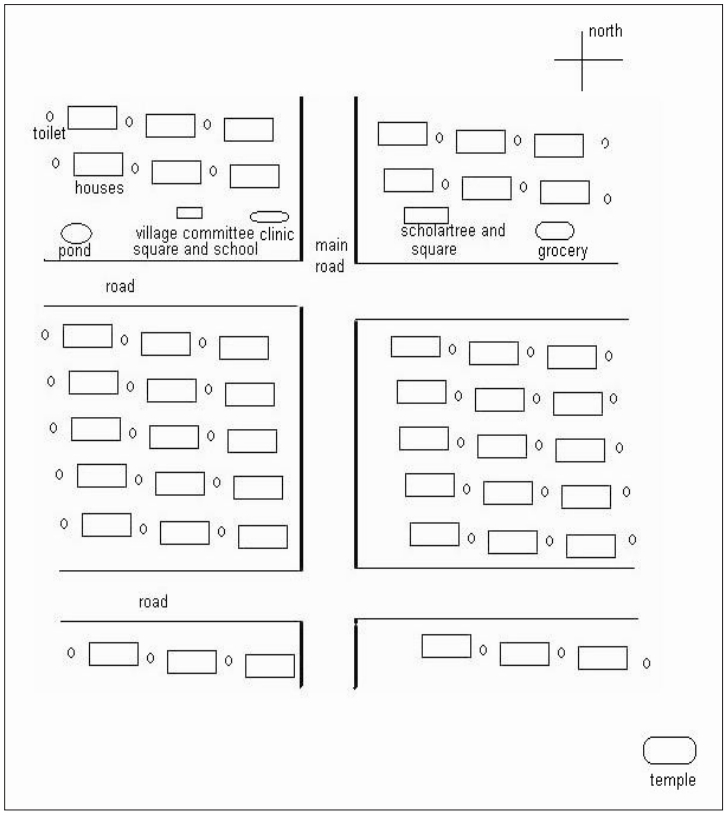
According to the then Chinese premier Wen Jiabao, the XNJ should not be interpreted as simply building villages in the literal sense (cited in *People's Daily Online*, 2006a). Rather, the face, appearance and images are also significant dimensions of rebuilding the countryside. What is the typical *old* village? One former cadre from Xiaogang village observed in 2008:

> In old times, building a house needed to avoid a lot of taboos and customary restrictions. Generally, we had five restrictions, namely water, wood, earth, road and fire. This meant we never built a house facing water (rivers), woods (the crossbeams could not be constructed in the opposite direction of the trees and forests), earth (the corner of another house), roads and fires (e.g., chimneys, kilns). The perfect rule of relations between houses was the Azure Dragon of the East in the left, and the White Tiger of the West in the right, which preferred that the left of a house is gradually higher than the right. What is more, we did not build three shapes of houses; that is, houses shaped like a white blade (which means to cut, *qie* 切), like a rake (which means to push, *tui* 推), like an axle (meaning to shake, *yao* 摇). In those cases, it would spell misfortune, unintended danger and unhappiness. The ideal position of a house was with ponds in the front and mountains at the back. (Wang Xinping, interview, 21st October 2008)

The logic behind traditional village space links with the extant understandings of localized tradition relating to geomancy and Confucian and Daoist philosophy. The two key logics, according to my interviewees, are "village harmony" and "familial hierarchy": the former can only be achieved by reinforcing the latter. The size, direction and decoration should not oppose the natural order (L, interview, 22nd October 2008). As Ruf (1998: 15) notes, traditional house-building was trying to symbolize a "unity of large, extended patrilineal families", several generations living under the same roof, and the notion that a harmonious family produces prosperity and fortune (*jia he wanshi xing* 家和万事兴).

The recent changes in house-building have not neglected these rural architectural customs, as one can see from Figure 1. Before focusing in detail on how these changes have been undertaken in recent years, I shall first divide the rural space into two types: public and domestic. I shall then analyze their

Figure 1 The Master Plan for Xiaogang Village[4]



manifestations and changes. This categorization is based on my understanding that in a given village such as Xiaogang, the two most important spatial formations are the public and the domestic. Villagers' practice within these spaces reflects their own understanding of what type of spatiality they respond to, are attached to and prefer.

Generally speaking, the design of rural space is concerned (a) with the location, layout and decoration of a house, and (b) with its relations with other houses in the village. The new Xiaogang is a "cluster village"[3] located around a central road which splits the village into two (see Figure 1). The village extends from east to west and there are two auxiliary roads going through north and south. Each house is separated by two metres from the next and occupies an estimated six *zhang* 丈 (approximately twenty metres) from left to right. This type of design aims to facilitate the governance of village space, thus increasing the legibility (Scott, 1998: 30) of governing. By mapping out a clearly spatialized place, the new village is designed to cater to the new

rationale of governance, under which power is carried out in a more capillary way. As Friedman, Pickowicz and Selden note: "Straight lines and squares seemed efficient, modern, socialist" (Friedman *et al*., 1991: 193).

The village relocation and new design were launched by the central government in February 2006 as part of a major XNJ campaign. The key aims of this national programme were to restructure the Chinese countryside politically, socially, culturally as well as spatially, with the slogan "advanced production (*shengchan fazhan* 生产发展), improved livelihood (*shenghuo kuanyu* 生活宽裕), civilized social atmosphere (*xiangfeng wenming* 乡风文明), clean and tidy villages (*cunrong zhengjie* 村容整洁) and democratic management" (*guanli minzhu* 管理民主).[5] While this type of government policy was not new in the history of Chinese society, the scale and scope of this particular project was unprecedented and more in-depth compared to projects such as Tao Xingzhi's China Education Improvement Association Programme (1927) and the Countryside Reform Association Programme (1932), Yan Yangchu's "Civilians' Education" Programme in Hebei (1924-1936), Liang Shuming's "Countryside Construction" Programme in Shandong (1931), and the CCP's Cooperative Movement in the Yan'an era (1935-1948) (Liang, 2006; Selden, 1995; Luo *et al*., 2008: 1-6). These villagization (Scott, 1998: 235)[6] projects demonstrate that reform of the rural areas has been a long-standing phenomenon in Chinese history, predating the foundation of the People's Republic in 1949. Nonetheless, these abovementioned regional and national projects exerted little influence over Xiaogang village. This does not mean that there were no spatial changes in Xiaogang but rather that there is a trajectory along which Xiaogang space has been transformed.

The traditional Xiaogang village, according to my interviewees, was built in the Republican Era in the 1920s. The ancestral hall played a central role in village space as both intra- and extra-familial relations were built around common surnames. As Hsu argues, the ancestral hall, as an other-worldly residence, clearly shows the villagers' "complete submission to ancestral authorities, on the one hand, and their struggle for and recognition of individual and family superiority on the other" (Hsu, 1948: 55). However, the Land Reform enacted in the early 1950s completely destroyed this social system. The landlords were suppressed and replaced by the "Poor and Middle Peasants" (cf. Ruf, 1998: 84). In terms of village space, in the past most resources were spent on production rather than on consumption. Thus, there has been little change in village space. In September 1958, the Chinese Ministry of Agriculture ordered all of the provinces to launch a "comprehensive programme in all Communes" (Luo *et al*., 2008: 3). The central slogan was "militarization of organizations (*zuzhi junshihua* 组织军事化), militant actions (*xingdong zhandouhua* 行动战斗化), and collectivization of lives (*shenghuo jitihua* 生活集体化)". In line with this policy, Xiaogang

did not permit any kitchens to be built in the new houses. Villagers were required to eat in the common dining hall instead of in private residences. Post-1963, when the central government reconfirmed the significance of agriculture, some new concrete houses were built. In 1964, however, Mao Zedong called for all Chinese villagers to "learn from Dazhai Village", a call signalling a Pyrrhic victory of state mobilization and the loss of village house-building. As Thaxton (2008: 302) observes, the villagization "disordered the normal architectural pattern of the household". From then on, Xiaogang devoted all of its resources to agriculture: any houses built were stigmatized as "decadent nests of the bourgeoisie" (*zichanjieji de anlewo* 资产阶级的安乐窝). As one old villager commented to me: "Everything was collectivized. Building your own house could only jeopardize your life".

The contemporary "new socialist countryside" movement, one of the primary objectives of China's 11th Five-Year Plan (2006-2010), operated in a strikingly different context. The project clearly stated: "XNJ is a major historic mission in China's modernization processes".[7] It aimed to improve rural people's living standards, narrow the income gap between rural and urban populations,[8] expand the domestic demand for consumption, and, more importantly, to echo the construction of a harmonious society (*hexie shehui* 和谐社会), a social developmental goal, advocated by the then CCP General Secretary Hu Jintao, to be achieved by 2020.

This scenario gave full expression to the requirement for rural economic, political, cultural and social development in the new circumstances in which the central authorities redirected attention and resources to deal with the growing gap between town and country and to the general policy neglect in rural areas. Currently efforts and funds are being channelled nationwide into installing rural water conservancy facilities, building roads, expanding the use of clean fuel such as methane and solar energy, building rural power networks, and improving rural education, health care and hygiene systems. As Hu Jintao stated in 2007: "We should shift our focus to infrastructure construction and social development in the rural areas and take further steps to tackle the problems arising for agriculture, farmers and the countryside."[9]

It is in this context that the new village of Xiaogang was designed according to the consistent standards and requirements of the village Master Plan. All of the houses face southwest and occupy the same acreage. Toilets are located outside eastern corner when the houses are built in the east, and outside the western corner when the houses are built in the west.[10] However, the process of building has not been without controversy and conflict. Tang Zengying, a local female villager, wanted to align her house to face directly south[11] rather than southwest. Her request was rejected immediately not only by the cadres but by her fellow villagers as well. The reason was simple; refusing to be standardized interfered with the whole image of the village. For

this reason, Tang's proposal met with strong public opposition. In the end, she had little option but to obey.

Zhao Houyou, a builder who also objected to the new arrangement, had already paved a house base in the old place before the whole village decided to move to the new area. The village cadres tried to persuade him to relocate by all means but to no avail. Zhao asked for additional compensation for the already built base. The village had limited financial support and could only provide him with the regulated subsidy. By criticizing his house as damaging too much arable land, the village put him under considerable pressure. Since arable land protection is a basic national policy, Zhao had obviously violated this policy, and he finally relented.

It must be remembered that this newly built village is still influenced by the legacy of the Maoist era. While power has not receded, the ways in which it is carried out have changed. This is evidence of the emergence of a new form of governance via internalization and interiorization. However, the location and acreage of the new village, decisions *vis-à-vis* financial support and the differentiated reward system have combined to cultivate a collectivized version of subjectivity, showing that sovereign power[12] is still influential. By the time of writing this paper, there were no villagers located in the old location. While this cannot be exclusively attributed to the influence of sovereign power, the existence of coercion and the use of political power are clearly demonstrated. The simple fact was that some residents did not want to move out or build their new houses according to the Master Plan.

However, this government-induced Master Plan, with its intention to re-form the traditional knowledge production of built environment, demonstrates that state power remains manifest in the ongoing spatial remaking of the village built environment. In the meantime, a collectivized form of subjectivity emerges in the production of village space. In the remainder of this paper, I shall examine this new form of subjectivity.

4. Public Space and the Grandfather Scholartree

In contemporary rural areas of China, there is no civil society organized in a Western sense.[13] However, public space does exist. In recent decades, this type of space has been steadily and systematically developed. Chinese academia has not only paid attention to the rural tea house (Dai, 2005), to rural civic organizations and their relations with rural self-governance (Wang *et al*., 2004), rural public space and social control (He, 2008), institutional public (i.e., village committees) and non-institutional public space (temple festivals, local markets and a variety of popular lunar festivals) (Li and Zhao, 2007), but has also addressed the issue of the rural Habermasian public sphere (Zhu, 2005). Most academic articles deal with the social destruction that marked

the decollectivization era, the current rural social atomization, the political vacuum in the aftermath of the Reform and Opening-up, and the urgency of restoring public space. The state-centred framework is still the dominant analytical tool. Wu (2008) categorized the rural public into two spatial forms: the first is structured upon social units and is endogenous and intrinsic; the second is structured upon state authority, which is exogenous and external. In doing so, he urged the reinforcement of the government's role in rural public space. But, by locating the (trans)formations of rural public space in this dichotomy, he devalued or underestimated the heterogeneity of the rural spatial order. I shall analyze two Xiaogang village public spaces and avoid the above reductionist argument.

The natural village, as the most basic social unit in the countryside, has varied social connections and personal communications. When these connections and personal communications have become public and settled, a public space is formed. When the place wherein these connections and personal communications happen is set in the form of buildings, a constructed public space is formed. I found two different public spaces in Xiaogang in terms of social formation.

The old Villagers' Committee office was located in the northwest of the village, a location higher than the other areas of the village. Thus, it was apparent that the Committee wanted to watch over the whole village spatially. From the 1950s to the 1970s, the period of the People's Commune, the Committee office was the place where villagers assembled. It was full of political implications for this was not only the place where villagers gathered to communicate with each other, it was also a place for propagating national policy. It was thus a place with clear political characteristics (Mao, 2000: 143). The new Villagers' Committee building is two-storied. In front of it is a square, a little larger in size than the scholartree square which is in the northeast. The entrance to the Committee building is at the east of the square. Entering through the gate, and walking up the steep cement steps, one sees the Committee office, which is spacious and accommodates some 40 people. Access to the roof is through the side door. Looking down on the square, one is reminded of scenes of political gatherings in the Maoist era, e.g., a miniature Tian'anmen Square.

The new Committee office marks the centre of the village, from both the perspective of scale and the position of the buildings located in the village. This suggests a manifestation of sovereign power.[14] However, the facts are quite different, for although the square outside the committee building is broad, it attracts few villagers. The pond near the square, which invariably has little water in it, has been transformed into a trash receptacle. A few villagers frequently visit a clinic and store located nearby, but people linger here for a short time only. As regards the other areas in the square, they are used for

transportation and stacking items; they are not being fully utilized as public space. The gate of the committee building is always closed: this building is only used as a place to receive guests from the upper levels. Even when it is open, villagers tend to ignore it, as if it has nothing to do with them.

The square's surface is built with bricks, which makes it different from its surroundings. It is separated from a primary school standing opposite by a wall. Around the square, there are a grocery store and a clinic. Thus it appears the facilities are well equipped. The Committee building is usually closed, signalling that it is a spatially politicized place. The square and the Committee building are two integral parts of the official space. However, it gives people little sense of homeliness and neighbourliness.

The People's Commune was based on a publicly owned system in which the administrative Villagers' Committee had the dual function of managing agricultural production and administrating the village (Mao, 2000: 145-147). Hence, it was not only the administrative centre but a place for large-scale gatherings, one that played an important role in commanding the whole village. With the implementation of the Household Responsibility System in 1981, production and administrative organizations were separated in the villages, rendering the household the village's basic production unit. At the same time, the function of the Committee was weakened, as were the functions of the square and the Committee building. As may be seen from this, specific places have their own specific purposes in a particular period of time. With the disappearance of said specific purposes, their influence has subsequently diminished. In the case of the Committee space, it was transformed into a space which had less impact on the villagers' daily lives.

In contrast, in the northeast, I found another public space under the "scholartree", a space for villagers' daily communication, leisure and gossip. Villagers frequently gather under the tree, which is said to be more than 300 years old. For this reason, it is respectfully addressed as the "Grandfather Scholartree". People make an offering niche for the purpose of paying their respects to it. Concomitant with the development of the economy, villagers built a square around the tree. The square is located at the intersection of two streets. Around the tree, people have positioned three rows of stone benches in the form of an "L". As a result, the form of the square is circled. Villagers often gather here with many lingering for long periods of time. According to my observations in the summer of 2007, villagers gathered here from around 10:30 in the morning. The elders enjoyed the coolness, and women chatted with each other with their babies in their arms. At noon, it became more crowded: villagers often had their lunch here. Some left around 2:00 p.m., but gathered again at 4:00 p.m. until dinner time. Owing to the lack of lighting facilities in the square, villagers did not gather here after dark. During the day, they often sat in the shade of the tree, the branches of which extend into

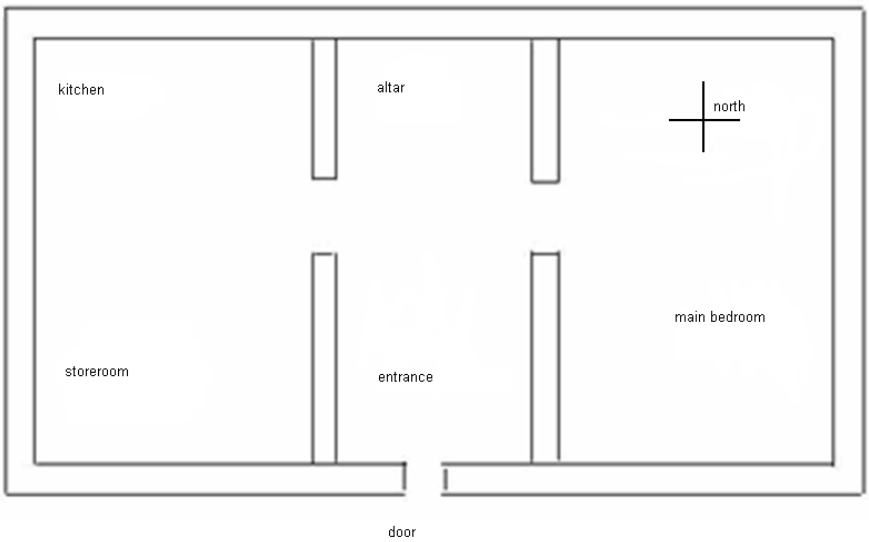
the opposite street. Thus, the mental space of the square expands to a space where the villagers sit on stone seats in the opposite street. The unshaded area is less popular with the villagers. In sum, the area under the scholartree has been transformed by the villagers into a public space.

This analysis echoes the Foucauldian approach employed by MacKinnon (1997) and Murdock (2000) when researching rural Britain's local-central relations in the Scottish Highlands and the British Rural White Paper issued in 1995. MacKinnon (2000: 298) argues that "the local state has been restructured through the development of 'managerial' technologies designed to realize the objectives of neo-liberal programmes of government". He further argues that "managerial technologies" are designed to "promote local economic competitiveness through deregulation and the attraction of mobile investment" (MacKinnon, 2000: 305). Murdoch (1997: 115) contends that the British Rural White Paper shows "how the state now seeks to govern 'through communities'". The administration of rural space in China attests to their arguments. Local Chinese villagers retain their own right to self-govern and reinterpret state policy in the context of the XNJ. However, the contingencies and specificities of the Chinese case need more examination. Although the Villagers' Committee still represents the state, the latter no longer plays a particularly active role in the villagers' lives. This supports MacKinnon's argument that local village dwellers do not passively accept state administration. The deregulation of the village is articulated in the abovementioned invisible battle of the "Villagers' Committee versus the Grandfather Scholartree". The former has given way to the indigenous nature of the tree, reconfirming a tendency towards non-political voluntary gathering. In other words, by participating in the public space under this tree, the villagers are reclaiming their own sociality. Murdock's understanding that the issue of the British Rural White Paper signals "government through communities" can also be found in Xiaogang village, where the representative of the state, that is, the Village Committee, has gradually lost its former strong influence and mobilization power. By so arguing, I suggest that the retransformation of the Villagers' Committee space reflects a new form of governance in which Xiaogang villagers have more autonomy to organize and communicate. This argument, however, does not mean that there is a trend towards individualization, as I shall explain below.

5. Domestic/Family Space and Its Recent Remodeling

The typical traditional house in Xiaogang faced the southwest and consisted of major rooms and wing rooms. The houses were usually surrounded by farmland. Within the village, there were ponds, wells and other facilities essential to daily life as well as roads leading to far-off locales. The purpose of Figure

Figure 2 A Traditional Old House Design in Xiaogang



2 is to demonstrate, more specifically, the hierarchy of room distribution in traditional rural Chinese society. Usually, the eastern part houses the senior household members while the western and central parts are multi-functional (often as kitchens, hallways, animal pens or temporary storerooms). While it is oversimplifying to say that old Chinese houses had no space division, it is widely accepted that there was no clear demarcation between public and private spaces (David Bray, personal communication, 24th February 2009). Compared with British terrace houses, (semi-)detached houses, or bungalows, Chinese houses emphasize more an ethos of differential hierarchy (Fei, 1998). The house space allocation encodes the patriarchal Confucian order. Most of the houses in Xiaogang were built like this before the 1990s, a time when some families still lived poverty-stricken lives in old tumbledown thatched cottages with doors made of straw.

In this form of family space, individuality gives way to collectivity and familial hierarchy. The (re)production of collectivized family relationships in traditional houses has been examined in detail by both Francesca Bray (1997: 57-58) and David Bray (2005). For David Bray (2005: 28), "the most singular feature of traditional family space was the manner in which it demarcated difference within the Confucian family relationships." The spatial distance and the distribution of rooms are patriarchal, highly gendered and male-dominated, reflecting the ethos of Confucianism. The old village houses in Xiaogang support these demarcations.

However, I would like to add here that in this non-compound form of dwelling, invisibility is impossible, as Figure 2 indicates. This is the Chinese

version of a panopticon. In accordance with this type of design, everything is within the gaze of the family members. "The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately" (Foucault, 1979: 200). This is a machine which spares no one, producing a high degree of surveillance and disciplinary power. The local authorities in Xiaogang village attempted to draw a connection between the "political effectiveness of sovereign to a spatial distribution" (Foucault, 2007: 13-23).[15]

By the 1990s, according to figures released in 2007 by the Statistics Bureau of Anhui Province, per capita housing space for Anhui farmers increased to 34.8 square metres from 11.7 square metres in 1980. Amongst this, per capita housing space of brick, wood and reinforced concrete structures reached 34.26 square metres, which accounts for 88 per cent of the total housing space.[16] Likewise, in Xiaogang, houses underwent dramatic change as new houses sprang up at an almost competitive pace. My question is: were these new houses similar in style and architecture to the previous ones? A comparison between these two family spaces in two different periods is useful to any understanding of how "new forms jostle with the old, creating complex and contingent assemblages of space, power, meaning and identity" in China (David Bray, personal communication, 2nd February 2009).

The striking change concerns matters of individuality and privacy. That is, the increasing differentiation between public space and private space within the house. Habermas (1989: 44) claims that "[t]he privatization of life can be observed in a change in architectural style". The conclusion he reaches regarding the 17th-century British gentry also applies to Xiaogang village, which has seen a shrinking of public family life and, as a consequence, an increase in the "solitarization of the family members" (W.H. Riehl cited in Habermas, 1989: 45). And, as far as architectural style is concerned, today there is more specification of function between kitchen, bathroom, living room and storeroom.

Specifically, there are two models in the new Xiaogang village.[17] In Model A (a two-storied-house, see Figures 3, 4, 5 and 6), in relation to habitability, the main consideration is given to dividing clean and dirty places. The front yard, which faces the south, is mainly used for production and living, in the middle are rooms which are regular in size, and the backyard faces north. The building enjoys plenty of sunlight and good ventilation. In the summer it can be protected from the heat of the sun. For the division of functions, the public areas are divided into different sections. The doors and windows are made using new durable lightweight steel. The roof has an insulation layer made of clay and straw, the same with the walls. This layout is also designed for water-saving. Underground water is utilized, and rainwater is collected for flushing toilets, cleaning floors and irrigation. In addition, the local government promotes an environmentally friendly waste

Figure 3 A House in the Building Process (2008)

Figure 4 A Local Town House (Two Skylights on Top)

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Figure 5 Ground Floor (Model A)

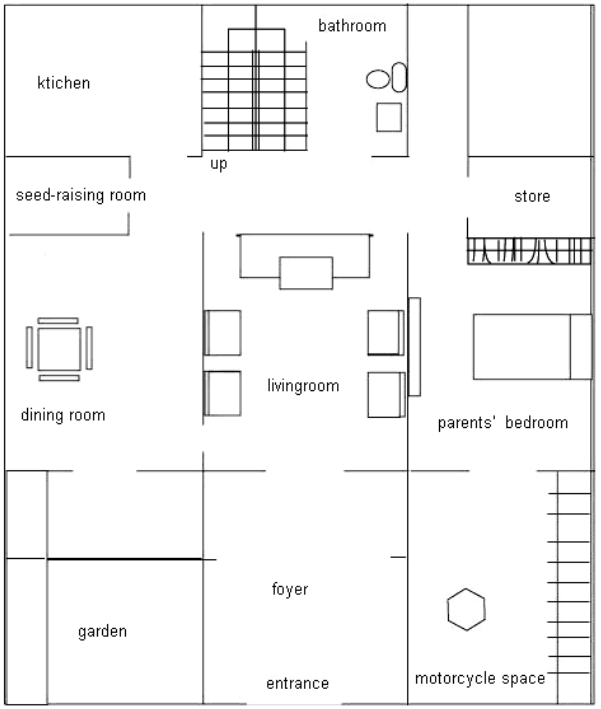
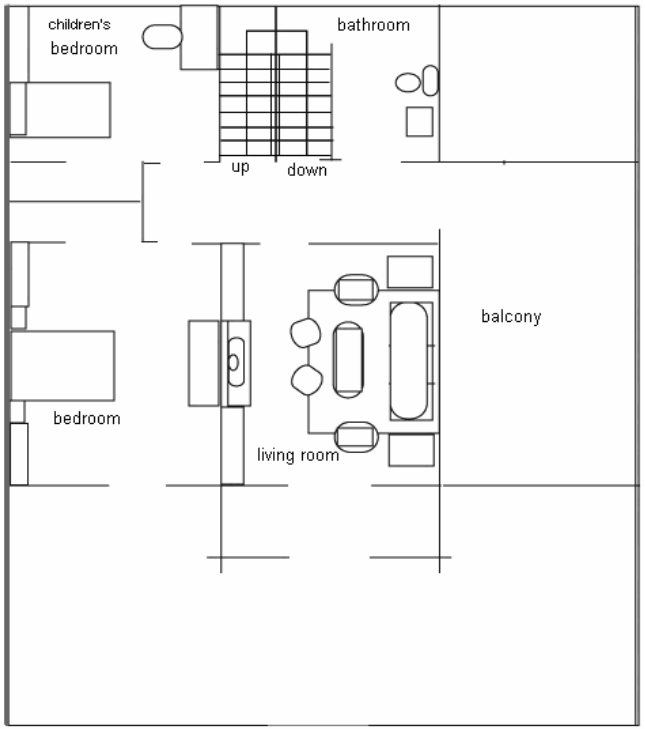


Figure 6 First Floor (Model A)



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disposal design; waste treatment is divided into three parts which is helpful for sewage systems. The local government also promotes land conservation; all of the buildings in both the front and back yards are square and regularly sized. Model A's basic size is 157 square metres: the internal size is 140 square metres. In the interest of material-saving, the construction components are used for their functional purpose, representing environmental suitability. The locals do not opt for decorative materials. Instead, cheap local construction materials are used, such as rubble, bluestone, moso bamboo, and straw.

In Model B (a three-storied house, see Figures 7, 8 and 9), this type of building caters to farmers' different lifestyles, the changes of farmers' lifestyles and household size. It accords with farmers' lifestyle well since it is

Figure 7 Ground Floor (Model B)

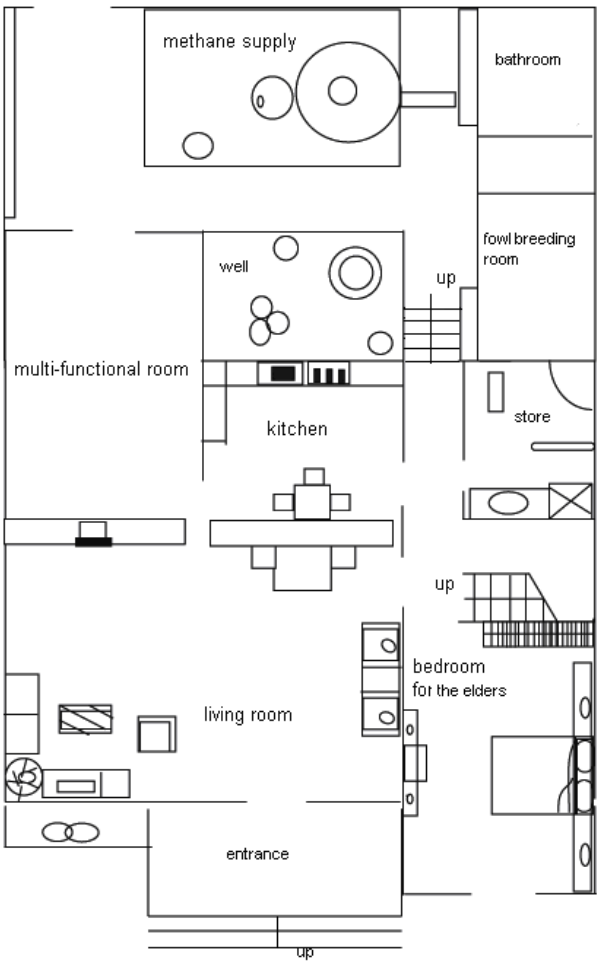

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Figure 8 First Floor (Model B)

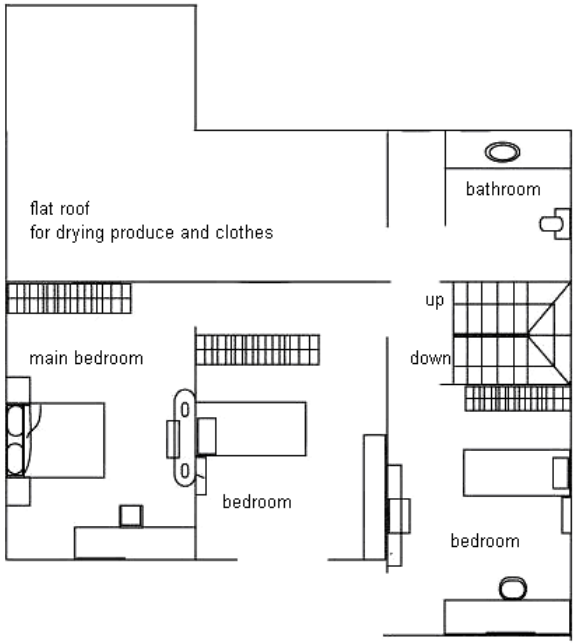
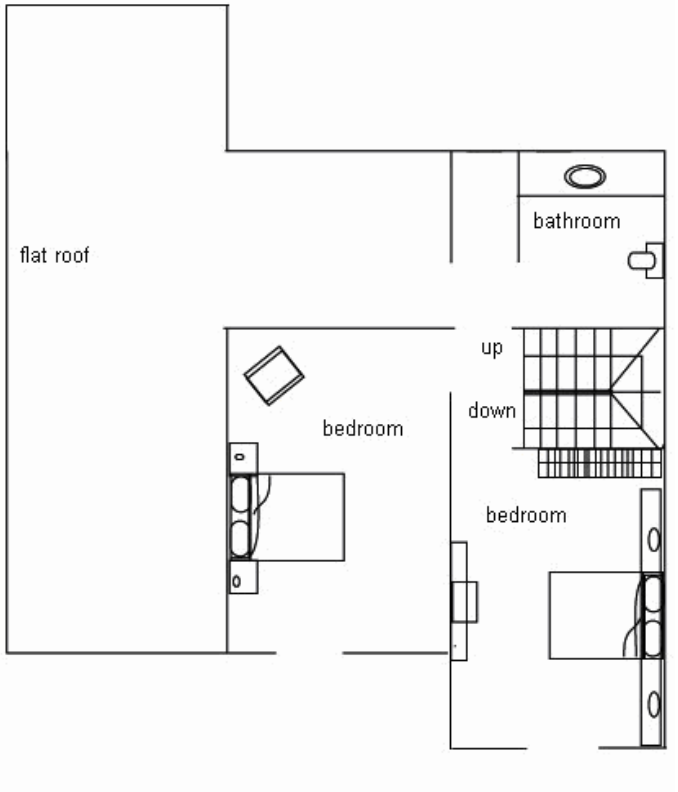


Figure 9 Second Floor (Model B)



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practical, economic, collective, and simple in construction. It can be adapted for different purposes such as farming, sideline agriculture and business. It also has a clear zoning of functions. There are different places for both dynamic and quiet purposes, for clean and dirty usage, for living space for people and for livestock. All of the rooms enjoy ventilation and sunlight: the central room is spacious and bright. And in the interest of saving energy and protecting the environment, a three-part sewage toilet and solar energy are used. The whole size totals 178 square metres.

How do villagers use these domestic spaces? The basic function of a house represents only two activities for the villagers, that is, eating three times per day and sleeping at night (*ri tu san can*, *ye tu yi xiu* 日图三餐, 夜图一宿). Through interviews, I found that, although there has been an obvious change in functional divisions, little change is observable in the villagers' traditional lifestyles. Usually, not all of the rooms are used as most of the villagers worked outside the village and only come back during Chinese New Year or to celebrate other lunar festivals. Although they have built new houses, this does not mean that there would inevitably be some changes in lifestyle. I want to emphasize here that building this type of house is to a large degree a symbolic contribution to the current wave of spatial change. "You have to do it even if you cannot afford it. People will sneer at you if you still have a *pingfang* 平房 (one-storied house)," a local resident told me. In other words, having a new house is to a greater extent, as Chan, Madsen and Unger conclude (2009: 298-299), a "symbol of prestige".

According to the Chinese Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Construction in 2008, China has the largest construction market in the world. Its rural building area increases by one billion square metres each year, nearly half of the world's total. It is estimated that the construction industry will take up 40 per cent of the country's total energy consumption by 2020, becoming the world's largest energy user with an estimated 1.5 trillion *yuan* spent annually (*People's Daily Online*, 2008). In 2006, approximately 81.62 per cent of Chinese homes were privately owned. This is higher than the proportion in some developed countries, for example the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany, where the rates are below 70 per cent (*People's Daily Online*, 2006b).

What is the driving force behind these spatial changes and house remodelling? As Yan Yunxiang (2003: 123) notes: "Economic prosperity was certainly one reason villagers were able to improve their dwellings." But as Yan Yunxiang also notes, the spatial changes in his village "should be understood as part of the transformation of private life, which is characterized by the rise of youth autonomy, the decline of patriarchal power, and at a deeper level, the rising awareness of the individual" (Yan, 2003: 123-124). Suffice it to say that rural domestic changes have given way to

more individual freedom and autonomy. Yet, on the other side of this new phenomenon is another form of collectivized subjectivity. There was a high degree of competition for superiority behind this building boom. In addition, it must be kept in mind that one of the motivations for house-building is the villagers' fear of being labelled as lagging behind the architectural fashion. As one villager told me: "My son will be wifeless if I do not build a house like this" (Xu Musheng, interview, 24th December 2008). In other words, this building style is an uncritical response to the discourse of modernity. It shows that most villagers, after spending most of their savings, and/or a lot of money from whatever resources were available, have become victims of modernization in their quest for privacy, modernity and superiority. As Hsu (1948: 40) notes: "Worldly residences are not so much places to house the individual members in comfort and ease as they are signs of unity and social prestige for the family group as a whole – the dead, the living and the generations to come."

There is some dissimilarity here with Foucault's research undertaken in certain European countries. While his focus is on the individualization of Western governmentalities, this is only partially true in my case study. The valorization of individuals who make their own choices is not applicable in these spatial transformations as there are still many constraints and limitations. In the larger context, the villagers' right to make their own choices is still highly limited.

6. Conclusion

As can be seen from the above discussion, the sovereign power of the state is still manifest in Xiaogang such as where and how to relocate. However, often more subtle forms of disciplinary power are built into the material/social fabric of the village. As MacKinnon (2000: 299-300) observes: "While individuals are indeed constituted through the effects of social forces, this does not preclude them from intervening creatively to transform social structures." From this quote, it may be contended that the XNJ is the "empowerment of strong self-reliant communities and the covert withdrawal of the state" (Murdoch, 1997: 117). In Xiaogang village, however, the state does not withdraw: it simply redraws. It still maintains or attempts to maintain its legitimacy by cultivating a new spirit of citizenship, by building new types of villages and creating new ways of life (cf. Hoffman, 2003). Although the XNJ claims a restructuring of the countryside and aims to reorganize the spatial order of Chinese villages in general, the project drew an unintended response from the villagers, a response that was closely related to the villagers' desire for self-image, marriage opportunities, and a broad social presence in the village at large.

This paper also draws attention to the understanding of neo-liberalism. While there is considerable debate on the applicability of the concept of neoliberalism in China,[18] I contend that the marketization of the rural space – and its inextricable link to the discourse of modernization – has dramatically remade China's rural societies, unpacked the concentration of state power, and unravelled the previous all-embracing form of Mao's governmentality.

The villagers were supposedly individualized after the implementation of the Household Responsibility System. But this does not mean that they are autonomous for while on the one hand, in an economic sense, the villagers are much more individualized, on the other, in terms of people's lifestyles and the design of their houses, there is still a high level of conformity. There is a homogeneous and faceless collective form of "the farmer", who constitutes rural China and who is operated on by the discourse of modernization.

Notes

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1. Under the "National Rural Methane Project", the number of households with a methane supply will increase by 23 million in 2010 from 22.6 million at the end of 2006. This project is to promote the use of methane pits to process rural organic waste and provide clean energy (*People's Daily Online*, 2006a).
2. Local building brochure entitled *The Building and Designing of Xiaogang Village*, October 2007.
3. Basically, there are three types of village space, namely "linear hamlet" or "string village" which circles a local town, "cluster village", "round village" or "walled village" which extends along rivers, lakes, creeks or roads, and "tessellated village" which is scattered between village ponds, lands and factories. See Cheng *et al*., 2001.
4. This layout partly verifies what the quote above has described.
5. "Several Suggestions Concerning the Promotion of Building a New Socialist Countryside", 2006.
6. "Villagization" is a term coined by James Scott connoting rural reconstruction projects orchestrated by the state.
7. The Fifth Plenary Session of the Chinese Communist Party's 16th Central Committee, October 2005, *The Proposal of the CCP Central Committee for*

Formulating the 11th Five-Year Plan (2001-2005) for National Economic and Social Development.

8. The income gap between the rural and urban population has widened from 2.57 to 1 in 1978 to 3.30 to one in 2006.
9. "Chinese President Underscores Efforts to Raise Farmers' Income", *<http://www.news.cn>*, 2007, accessed 10th May 2009.
10. In the old village, all the toilets were open and simply constructed using mud brick or flagstones. In the 1990s, a national campaign on toilets and sanitation, initiated by the Chinese government on the basis of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), was introduced in Xiaogang village. In line with this programme, Xiaogang villagers began to build a new type of double-urn latrines. For each of these toilets, they were rewarded 50 yuan. Starting from 2006, the Xiaogang Village Committee, supported by the Patriotic Health Campaign, decided to fund more toilet-building. The Patriotic Health Campaign was founded in the 1950s, when Mao Zedong initiated a programme to "fight against the bacteria-war". Local cadre Zhang Housheng told me that "to keep a clean environment is an important element of XNJ". In his understanding, having a clean toilet is not only related to personal hygiene, but more importantly, to public health and cleanliness.
11. Why did this lady prefer this direction? I heard two versions. An old villager told me that in traditional China, only the emperor has the authority to face "directly south", which has connotations of absolute power and imperial superiority. Therefore, local villagers usually avoid challenging this taboo. Even though imperial China has collapsed, Xiaogang still acknowledges this tradition. Another version was that "direct south" symbolizes "Fire" and it melts "Metal" in the Chinese Five Elements (*wuxing* 五行) theory. Building a house facing south could result in the owner losing money (the metal element). But apparently, Tang Zengying wanted to challenge these taboos.
12. The sovereign power was exercised at a higher political cost compared to disciplinary power given that it "resorted to glaring examples to ensure a continuous mode of operation"; sovereign power "had to be spectacular so as to instil fear in those present" (Foucault, 1979: 3-5). It was "too costly in proportion to its results" (Foucault, 1996: 232-233). This type of sovereign power was repressive, negative and essentially juridical.
13. By this I mean there is no intermediary force which could establish an independent organization that exercises a "check and balance" influence over the CCP-led government. Take the Village Self-Governance Committee as an example. Although the Committee has had more to say in recent years, it is still under the "guidance" or "gaze" of the local government. There is also no opposition party in the village elections.
14. However, this does not mean it needs to be physically located in the village centre.
15. It should be noted that few new houses were built during the Maoist era. Those that were built followed the traditional models.
16. Source: local archive office, 10th October, 2008, Fengyang County. On a national level, per capita housing space was 22.2 square metres, of which rural space was 25 (Luo *et al*., 2008: 6).

17. Local building brochure: *The Building and Designing of Xiaogang Village*, October 2007. Also see China Rural Technology Development Centre, 2007, pp. 84-86.
18. One of the criticisms of employing neo-liberal governmentality in rural China has centred on the lack of support and resources from the government. In other words, governmentality in this area is weak and unsystematic. Judging from the urban-rural gap in terms of official development level and degree of prosperity published by the central government and statistics bureaus, this is a verifiable conclusion. However, in the case of Xiaogang, it is simplistic to restrict governmentality to the urban area. Because the village is acting as a "model" for the XNJ, it is a vehicle through which this new form of governmentality can be carried out. In so doing, new forms of collective subjectivity are being remade.

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Book Review

Thomas Heberer and Christian Gobel, *The Politics of Community Building in Urban China*, New York and London: Routledge, 2011, 191 pp. + xiii

This is an insightful book written by Heberer and Gobel that illustrates China's urban communities, *shequ* 社区, as a channel for bridging the gap between government and the community. Re-development, or in the words of the authors, reconstruction, is an effort by the central government to gradually transfer provision of social services and public security from the state to the community. Indeed, this is not an attempt to democratize the villages and challenge the control and powers of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), but as the authors have interestingly pointed out, it is a way of re-organizing China's urban neighbourhoods. Reconstruction, carried out in this manner, gives it legitimacy to resolve issues confronting China's urban communities such as socioeconomic problems, inequality in wealth distribution, social tensions and maintaining stability amidst rapid urban changes.

The authors have pointed out that the erosion of the *danwei* 单位 which used to be the "source of employment and material support" for the urban Chinese has destabilized their social lives. Hence, the emergence of the *shequ* is significant for its compensatory role in providing a new platform for social security and community values. Nevertheless, from a political angle, the emergence and development of *shequ* represents an intriguing study of central-subnational government relationship. In this particular instance, the reconstruction of the *shequ* exemplifies the powers of the state and the CCP. It manifests itself in the state's strategic planning and social objectives of the urban communities as well as improvement of the administrative apparatus through indirect empowerment of the community by means of fostering local self-governance. As Heberer and Gobel succinctly put it, "that such empowerment would generate support for the regime" indicates the actual situation of an urban community in China presently. Basically, the *shequ* is a means by central government to regulate community participation and provide a form of guided urban self-governance.

This book continues to explore and test the hypothesis that the *shequ* is indeed the central government's attempt at controlling an urban community and guiding its development according to its principles and beliefs. Has it succeeded? Has it met its objectives? These are some of the intriguing questions and matters of governance, attitudes, social security, infrastructural

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power that the authors try to answer and reconcile through their study and interviews with the residents and local decision-makers in the cities of Shenyang, Chongqing and Shenzhen. This book is the outcome of their extensive research and has for the first time enlightened readers with the re-organization of China's urban neighbourhoods; the adaptive capacity of the Chinese community and the role of the Party-state in balancing state and people power in an urban community.

The affinity between state and community is analyzed in the first part of the book and described through various issues including institutions of social control, infrastructural power, self-administration and *shequ* governance, while detailed facts on social security and community attitudes and participation are succinctly captured in the latter half.

The events after the 1970s when China liberalized and economic development grew have resulted in social fragmentation which compromised urban stability. Thus the re-organization of the urban neighbourhood that followed in the 1990s was to propagate community-building and create some form of social equilibrium. However, this process led to an increase in state and Party control. Clearly, an intention for more community autonomy was bridled when *shequ* re-construction required significant resources and finance. This was necessary to successfully carry out the re-organization and provision of social services. Indeed, state and Party intervention increased considerably and yielded discrepancies between what was perceived as mobilized and genuine participation in the *shequ* units. Thus whether it was more or less autonomy in the urban units apparently depended upon the financial condition of the *shequ*. Those communities that possess assets, incomes and employment and less state aid for successful completion of tasks and services were likely to be in control as opposed to those that did not. Even then, there is a tendency for the leadership in these units to be guided by the rules of the state and Party.

Although the study has shown that the increased role of the state can lead to more amenities and services to the community, however, it does not automatically translate into a *shequ* that is more harmonious and warm. It merely shows that there is a form of stability through state guidance. It appears to be in conflict with the notion that an established urban community should have some form of autonomy, self-administration and more citizen participation. These are indicators of a shift from government and Party control to self-governance. But these seem to be lacking in the established urban communities and the authors conclude that *shequ* re-construction merely increases state infrastructural power rather than nourishes self-administration and autonomy. It is obvious that most urban communities tend towards dependence upon the state and Party in mobilizing participation and provision of social services and infrastructure. As rightly pointed out by Heberer and Gobel, the establishment and re-organization of the *shequ* demonstrates

strong paternalistic and hierarchical features influenced by the bureaucratic and authoritarian nature of the Party-state. However, in fairness, the *shequ* does fulfil the tasks of social control but provides a limited measure of self-autonomy and self-help.

There is indication that *shequ* serves as an extension of infrastructural power and cannot adequately provide for autonomous community participation. In sum, the re-development and re-organization of the *shequ* will still be important and necessary as they represent a form of potential entity in the future as they are the base for community identity, legitimacy and stability. The future holds potential for such urban communities in China as they are the "masses" or "the people". Consequently, the process of mobilizing them for practically any agenda, particularly political participation, nation-building and development of China, will be much easier and more methodical.

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