[Chinese Urban Villages Research]

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ABSTRACT

“Throughout history, expanding cities have always run over villages, hamlets, estates, gardens, and soft elements that constitute the countryside, the domain that hosts agriculture and nature.” Urban Villages, essentially a composite of these “soft” elements, remained as one of the hardest anchors among the residual or by-product in China’s urban development.

Until 1985, the Pearl River Delta region had been mainly dominated by farms and small rural villages. The onset of economic reform and the open-door policy brought an influx of foreign investment which fueled the unstoppable train of urbanization. Rapid urbanization let to the formation of Urban Villages, a contested space between urban and rural land. Conflicts between different constituents of these spaces start to emerge.

In the view of city government, urban villages are illegal constructions rather than a part of the city’s fabric. They are often considered an urban pathology that is incompatible to the city’s modernity. Thus, the complex power structure within the debate of urban villages is often misconstrued and misunderstood as the dichotomy between city government and indigenous villagers. However, the migrant workers, the most vulnerable group who relies heavily on urban villages’ informal housing are often neglected and ignored by planners and architects. Therefore, there is an opportunity to dissect the urban landscape from an alternative point of view: finding spatial agencies for migrant workers.

The project focuses on researching urban villages within the Pearl River Delta region of China. The research strives to identify and understand the constituents at play and their respective spatial agencies and find possible interventions in both conventional and non-conventional design method that would start generating spatial agencies for migrant workers.
BACKGROUND

Pearl River Delta:

The focus of this research is on the Pearl River Delta region of the People's Republic of China, one of the most economically dynamic regions of the country since the launch of China’s economic reform in 1979.

Over the past 30 years, the PRD has become a megalopolis consist of metropolises such as Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, and Dongguan. According to the World Bank Group, the PRD has become the largest urban area in the world in both size and population.¹

Behind the staggering economic achievement is the world’s factory that manufactures products such as electronic devices, textiles, garments, and a wide range of other goods.

Until 1985, the PRD had been mainly dominated by farms and small rural villages. The onset of economic reform and the open door policy brought an influx of foreign investment which fueled the unstoppable train of urbanization. Rapid urbanization led to the formation of Urban Villages, a contested space between urban and rural land. Conflicts between different constituents of these spaces start to emerge. Among them, the most pressing concern is the absence of viable, affordable housing solutions in most major cities. If cities continue on the course of force land expropriation and village gentrification, soon millions of migrant workers and city newcomers face the imminent threat of being homeless.

Urban Population Growth
Major Cities: 1982-2007

- Guangzhou: 63% 85%
- Dongguan: 12% 85%
- Foshan: 18% 91%
- Shenzhen: 32% 100%
- Zhongshan: 14% 85%
- Zhuhai: 41% 85%
WHAT IS A URBAN VILLAGE?

- Urban villages are the unusual products of rapid urbanization through land expropriation.

Different from the western planning concept of the “urban village”, which refers to a village style neighborhood in the urban context of western countries. These villages are developed from rural settlements and become transitional neighborhoods under rapid urbanization. The urban village is called “chengzhongcun” in Chinese, literally “village encircled by the city”. The rapid expansion of Chinese cities has been encroaching into surrounding villages since the 1990s.
Many observers had regarded the urban villages as the only cosmopolitan spaces in Guangzhou. Immigrants from other parts of the country sell local products and open regional restaurants in urban villages, adding a layer of cultural diversity over the predominant Cantonese culture in the city.

Among this urban hotchpotch, there are three major social groups: landless farmers whose farmland was forcibly expropriated by the city government; rural migrants who provide cheap labor to the city while suffering from institutional discrimination; and employees of small street-run businesses.
Citizens with an urban household register, usually do white-collar work in the city, but can’t afford city rent.

Indigenous villagers with rural household register; landlords of urban village housing or shopowners of small business in the village.

Migrant workers with a temporary residence permit; does various work in the city.
Within these settlements, the land is divided into farmland and housing plots. Both kinds of property belong to the village as a collective, but individual households are entitled to claim a portion of them. When urban expansion encroaches into rural land, the city government needs to acquire land rights from the rural collective to convert rural land into urban land. In many cases, to avoid the costly compensation to relocate villagers, the city government only expropriates the farmland of the village, and the housing land remains in the hands of the collective.

Because the villagers’ rights are not alienable to a third party outside of the collective, they cannot capitalize their assets through land or housing sale, so they redevelop their housing into leasing units to gain profits. Village housing, typically low quality and high-density with many closely packed apartment blocks of 2–8 floors, is rented out to migrant workers and also some urban residents. When the help from the guidelines of government policy, the Guangzhou Urban Redevelopment Office has set ambitious goals to eliminate nine, eventually all, urban villages in Guangzhou, following the redevelopment paradigm of the “Liede model.”
THE BATTLE OF URBAN VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT

The Players:

Who’s the Winner and Who’s the Loser?
- LAND MANAGEMENT LAW

Separation of the Right to Use and Ownership of the land

In 1984, the National People’s Congress enacted the Land Management Law. The law separated the rights of use from the ownership of land, established the State Land Administration. Second, the law authorized the land-use rights for use and transfer of land. Under the reforms, the state, the people, and the public have a legal right to use and manage land. The market is no longer dominated by the state, and it has become a central part of the economy. However, the reforms have also raised concerns about property rights and the potential for land speculation.

- LAND-USE REFORM IN GUANGDONG PROVINCE

Leveraging the Land Use Right System

In 1986, the government in Guangdong province, in line with the market-oriented reforms, introduced the land-use-right system. The system allowed land to be used for construction and development, but not owned. This system was later expanded to other provinces, and became the basis for China’s modern land-use system.

- THE HEART OF CHINA’S REAL ESTATE MARKET BOOM

In 1990, the State Council of the People’s Republic of China abolished the Two-Handed System, allowing real estate developers to enter the market. The State Council released the “Urban Land Management and Use Reform Program” in 1992, which allowed the state to sell land to developers for development. This marked the start of China’s real estate market boom.

- THE “THREE REFORMS” AND FOUR ESTABLISHMENTS” POLICY

In 1994, the central government implemented a new policy aimed at improving the quality of urban development. This included three core reforms: urban land-use rights, urban housing system, and urban infrastructure. Four establishments: urban planning, urban design, urban construction, and urban management.

- THE THIRD STAGES OF THE HOUSING REFORM

In 1998, the urban housing reform entered a new phase. The government introduced the “Three-Handed” system: urban land-use rights, urban housing system, and urban infrastructure. The system aimed at improving the quality of urban development and balancing the interests of all stakeholders.

Housing Marketization

The State Council’s Decision on Nov 29, 1994, decided to establish the urban housing market system. In the same year, the urban housing market system was officially launched. Since then the urban housing market system has been gradually developed and expanded.

- INTRODUCING FLEXIBILITY IN TRANSFERRING USE RIGHT OF RURAL LAND

On October 30, 2006, the Land Reform Law of the Seventh National Congress of the CPPCC proposed the decision on granting rural and urban real estate development.

- SEIZING MIGRANT WORKERS’ EXPLOITATION

The government has taken measures to protect the rights of migrant workers, including the issuance of a temporary work permit and the establishment of a migrant worker service center. These measures have helped to improve the living conditions of migrant workers and reduce exploitation.

- PER PERSON ALLOCATION

Round 6: 1986

- Migrant Workers

Round 7: 1990

- The stirring of the real estate market, resolute efforts to break free from the monopoly of the state.
- adding social security, property prices.
-.property prices.
- The taking of the real estate market, resolute efforts to break free from the monopoly of the state.

- THE EXPERIENCE OF “LOW-LEVEL POPULATION”

On October 10, 2017, the National Development and Reform Commission released a report on the experience of “low-level population”. The report highlighted the challenges faced by rural migrants and the need for better policies to support their integration into urban society.
FINAL ROUND: 2020

Developer
I made a lot of money!

City Government
I made the city a better place!

Villagers
I became a millionaire overnight!

IT’S A TRIPLE WIN!

RIP
Migrant Workers
1985-2020
Migrant Workers in Cities

**Primary Industry** 0.5%

**Secondary Industry** 51.5%
- Manufacturing 29.9%
- Architecture 18.9%

**Tertiary Industry** 48%
- Wholesale & Retail 12.3%
- Transportation & Storage & Postal Service 6.6%
- Hotel & Catering 6.2%
- Residential Service & Repair 11.3%
- Other 11.6%

Mr. Zhang is from Hubei. He came to Shipai Village in 2011.

Together with two friends from his hometown, Zhang now runs a small computer screen shop. He rents a single-room unit and uses all the empty space for storing computer components.

After paying for material costs and rents for the shop and his room, Zhang earns over 3,000 RMB (433 USD) per month, but material costs keep rising.

His wife works as a saleswoman in another IT company. She manages to save about 1,200 RMB (173 USD) per month.
Mr. Chen is from Hebei. He has lived in the Sanyuanli Village for three years as a migrant worker, and now runs a hair salon.

All of his eight employees are migrants from different provinces in China.

The rent of Chen’s shop costs 2,000 RMB (290 USD) per month.

His shop makes a good profit because there are a lot of young people between 20 to 40 years old living in the village and the demand for hair salons increases progressively year by year. On contrast, Chen only pays 600 RMB (87 USD) per month to rent his home.

Stefan Al, Villages in the City: A Guide to South China’s Informal Settlements (Hong Kong: Hong Kong U.P., 2014), 155.
Mr. Wang

Mr. Wang is from Sichuan.

After graduating from art school, Wang got bored of working as a designer in the advertising industry and sold his business and moved to Dafen Village for a new life.

Wang found a job in an electronics factory with a monthly salary of 900 RMB (130 USD).

After two years, Wang quit his job at the factory and rented a small exhibition area in Dafen Village and became a painter.
THE THREE VILLAGES
Shipai Village

- Total Population: 270,000
- Area: 99 acres
- Area per Person: 61 sqft
- Building Height: 7-9 stories

Stefan Al, Villages in the City: A Guide to South China’s Informal Settlements (Hong Kong: Hong Kong U.P., 2014), 127.
Shipai Village: Digital Industry

Primary Retail

Secondary Retail
Sanyuanli Village

- Total Population: 85,000
- Area: 17 acres
- Area per Person: 86 sqft
- Building Height: 4-6 stories

Stefan Al, *Villages in the City: A Guide to South China’s Informal Settlements* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong U.P., 2014), 147.
Sanyuanli Village: Clothing Industry

Primary Retail

Secondary Retail
Dafen Village

Total Population: 10,200
Area: 23 acres
Area per Person: 99 sqft
Building Height: 3-10 stories

Stefan Al, Villages in the City: A Guide to South China’s Informal Settlements (Hong Kong: Hong Kong U.P., 2014), 81.
Dafen Village: Art Industry

Primary Retail

Secondary Retail
The “Ten-Thousand Villages Campaign” was an integrated renovation on urban villages in Shenzhen that Vanke started.

They aimed to renovate urban village housing into long-term rental apartments (at affordable price), within a neighborhood of community commercial, community education and industry work. The rent for the renovated apartments would remain in the same range as the original housing units, with a slight increase, in exchange for a more secure and comfortable living environment with basic home appliances.

However, despite the relatively “low” increase in rent that Vanke believed to be reasonable, many tenants still complain about it, and many of them are forced to leave. This is mainly due to the fact that many migrant workers have very high price elasticity to their rent; a 10% increase in rent may cause them to go from just getting by to unable to sustain their life.

Despite the generic method of construction, housing typologies among various villages have subtle differences intended to accommodate the specific industries that were integrated into the village’s economy.
In response to the migrant worker housing scarcity in the city of Guangzhou, this intervention proposed three major reforms consisted of a special zoning policy for the urban village area, a reform in the redevelopment model, a reform in the affordable housing tenure policy to help establish a formal rental system for the low-income population.
Three-Reform and Two-Preservation Policy

- Transform existing zoning regulation and impose new building regulations to create a better living condition.

- Transform existing redevelopment method. Introduce a more flexible development model which allows collective-owned enterprises (COEs) and villagers’ share-holding companies to conduct self-redevelopments.

- Transform housing and retail tenure policy to encourage development in the affordable housing sector and local business.

- Preserve cultural heritage and economic ecosystem inherent to the village.

- Preserve and expand the affordable housing sector to accommodate migrant workers and other low-income population.

Zoning Reform and Infrastructural Development

- The government will take the lead to fill the vacancy of basic infrastructures, and generates incentives for self-developments.

- 30% of the newly developed housing units must be affordable housing, and the rest can be sell in the commercial housing market.

- 50% of the newly developed housing units must be affordable housing, and the rest can be sell in the commercial housing market.

- New developments must conform to the zoning and building regulations.

Redevelopment Reform and Affordable Housing Retainment

- Newly developed affordable housing units will be rented out on a 70 years lease.

- Regardless of the household register status, qualified low-income population are entitled to affordable housing. Local business owner and essential city service industry employee are prioritized in the selection process.

- Tenants are responsible for paying an accumulative fund for covering building maintenance cost and a portion of the land lease renewal fee at the end of the 70-year contract.
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