Village Redevelopment and Desegregation as a Strategy for Metropolitan Development in Southern China: Some Lessons from Guangzhou City

(Accepted by International Journal of Urban and Regional Planning)

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Key Words

Acknowledgement

Abstract

How to integrate millions of migrant workers into the local communities remains a core challenge to China's urban transformation. Recently, driven by the national policy of integrated metropolitan development, some cities have aggressively engaged in the redevelopment of urbanizing villages (*chengzhongcun*) to promote formalization and desegregation. This article adopts a historical-micro perspective to examine the actual role of urbanizing villages in city making, through an in-depth analysis of how migrants and villagers struggled for symbiotic co-existence in the different stages of urbanization since the 1980s. It argues that state-led village redevelopment creates more problems than it has solved. Redevelopment eliminates some of the spatial and institutional separations that characterize the socialist Chinese villages by dissolving the barriers against formalization and marketization of the collective village land. This action produces new social inequalities and tensions by uprooting the visible, self-governing communities that have already existed to facilitate spontaneous, grassroots rural–to-urban transitions of villagers and migrants. To cope with these problems, intervention into resolving the emerging problems of Chinese cities must consider a fundamental policy shift from a sole reliance on the means of formalization and integration to a greater emphasis on the application of informality and segregation.

1. Introduction

How to integrate migrant workers with the local community is becoming a major challenge to China's urban transformation. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2015), the total population of migrant workers in China was estimated to be about 168 million in 2014. In recent years, the Chinese government has come to realize that the discriminations against migrant workers, if not properly resolved, may eventually escalate into social crisis. Moreover, assimilating millions of migrant workers into the urban ways of life can turn them into consumers and urban dwellers, who may help boost the local economy. Therefore, a series of new policies and guidelines have been promulgated to gradually eliminate the distinction between urban and rural *hukou* with the aim of promoting equal opportunities for and removing the barriers against migrant workers to settle permanently in cities.[1] This policy shift towards providing local residency for migrant workers constitutes part of the ongoing attempts of the local state to pursue metropolitan development through the promotion of formalization and desegregation.

This is particularly the case in the Pearl River Delta (PRD) region, in which three decades of rapid urbanization have resulted in a widespread presence of urbanizing villages (*chengzhongcun*). Urbanizing villages are regarded as an undesirable form of urban development, despite the fact that they contribute to the supply of affordable housing for migrant workers. As Chung (2009) suggests, urbanizing villages are irregular territories shaped by state-led planning's failure to integrate rural villages and people into urban development. In these "uncontrolled" areas, public space is eroded by the progressive construction of "unauthorized" buildings for renting purposes (Hang, 2004; Zhang et al., 2003). These disorderly spaces also impose potential fire safety and social security threats (Liu et al., 1998). Apart from its "chaotic" and "messy" landscape, another perennial problem is its collective ownership system, which does not conform to urban, modern standards. Land requisitions by the state, especially in southern China, are typically only limited to arable land, leaving the collective status of village housing sites untouched (Kuang and Göbel, 2013). The continuation of collective ownership deprives villagers of their rights to trade their landed properties in the open market. This defective ownership is considered to be a major cause of social and economic inequalities in urbanizing villages.

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[1] See the CCP's Decision on Several Important Issues Regarding Rural Reforms made in 2008. At the local level, for example, the Guangzhou Municipal Government translated these national policy intents into local practice by issuing Suggestions on How to Implement Integrated Economic and Social Development in Urban and Rural Areas.

Non-local residents such as migrant workers can only rent houses in the urbanizing villages, thus reinforcing and perpetuating their status as temporary, marginalized outsiders in cities (Wong et al., 2007; Chan and Buckingham, 2008; Démurger et al., 2009).

In recent years, many city governments have attempted to transform and annihilate these ungovernable spaces through redevelopment. In 2002, the Guangzhou municipal government issued its first policy paper (Decree No. 7) to guide the upgrading and land titling within urbanizing villages. Under China's unique rural––urban system, villagers' housing sites (*zhaijidi*) and collective land (*jititudi*) are not transferable in the open market unless they are turned into state-owned land (*guoyoutudi*) through state-led land requisitions. Under Section 2.1 of the Decree, however, villagers' housing sites and their collective land could be converted into state-owned land after the villagers' *hukou* had been changed from "agricultural" to "non-agricultural" status. This policy provided a strong impetus to village redevelopment as it offered the legal backing behind the marketization of rural land. Village redevelopment in Guangzhou began with a few pilot projects in some villages, such as *Liede*, *Yangji*, and *Linhe*. In 2009, the Ministry of Land Resources of the central government issued a policy called *sanjiugaizao*, which encouraged the redevelopment/rehabilitation of three categories of old areas, namely, old towns, old industrial buildings and old villages. Following this policy, the municipal government decided to expand the redevelopment of urbanizing villages.

Neighborhood redevelopment as a metropolitan development strategy has often been criticized as failing to address the needs of the affected residents. For instance, Zhang and Fang (2015: 294) suggest that, China's recent urban regeneration resembles U.S. urban renewal in the 1950s and 1960s, as "both used government authority and subsidies to make large-scale private or quasi-private investment attractive" in the name of improving the built environment. Consequently, urban regeneration ushered in growth coalitions between local governments and developers, excluding residents' formal participation and thus limiting their rights to adequate compensation and replacement housing (Abramson, 2001; Slater, 2006; Shi and Cai, 2006; He and Wu 2009). Redevelopment often displaced migrant workers whose tenure security was poorly protected under their informal, unwritten tenancy agreements with landlords (Wu, 2016). In this study, we contribute to the literature by examining the complex effects of formalization and desegregation created by village redevelopment. We argue that the literature has not sufficiently explored how a vibrant community has emerged in these urbanizing villages through informal arrangement, spontaneous adjustment and mutual accommodation of differences between locals and outsiders. Based on our intensive field research in some villages of Guangzhou since 2008, this paper seeks to trace the evolving relationships between villagers and

migrant workers at different stages of urbanization, explain in detail how an emerging local community was developed, sustained and enhanced through the years, and finally examine how such a community is at risk of being dismantled by state-led village redevelopment strategy.

2. Conceptual Framework and Research Methods

Our study borrows insights from recent research, which supports a strategic use (rather than eradication) of informality and segregation in order to provide a viable and affordable life space for the underprivileged social segments in an urbanizing context. Informality is a recurring theme in the literature about Third World urbanism. In the 1960s, policy debate on this issue was dominated by proposals to remove the informal settlements through forced eviction and relocation of urban squatters into public housing (Hardoy and Satterthwaite, 1993). In the 1970s, the debate shifted toward an emphasis of upgrading as an alternative to facilitate long-term improvement of informal resettlements (van Horen, 2000). Subsequently, the question of informality moved to the core of the debate. Integrating the slums into formal, manageable urban systems through the reforms of non-conforming land tenure was recommended as a proper policy direction. One of the representative works of this period was De Soto's (2000) call for empowerment by titling the informal assets of the poor, believing that the establishment of a private property rights system to facilitate asset trading in the formal markets would automatically lead to the elimination of inequality, desegregation and poverty. Nevertheless, this approach of formalization quickly lost ground, as the tides of privatization and legalization during the 1990s had created many undesirable consequences in the developing countries.

For example, Roy's (2003) work on Calcutta shows that the process of sorting out title claims often stirred up violent and fierce competition among residents. Studies of Bogota and Lima show that residents with land titles continued to face credit risks in the face of limited employment opportunities (Kagawa and Tukstra, 2002). Berner (2000) suggests that, in Manila, formalization displaced the most vulnerable residents by making land markets unaffordable to the poorest. These empirical studies reject the notion of formalization as a viable strategy to replace the space of informality, giving rise to a new wave of studies on the role of informality in city making. Roy and AlSayyad (2004) argue that informality is "an organizing logic, a system of norms that governs the process of urban transformation itself". Extending from this work, Roy (2005: 148) defines informality as "a mode of urbanization", suggesting that "informality is not a separate sector but rather a series of transactions that connect different economies and spaces to one another". In similar vein, Lees (2010) suggests that the informal settlements provide a workable and affordable space for the poor in urban areas. Tonkiss (2013: 168)

argues that informality is "a primary mode of everyday urbanism", which can facilitate "more flexible, more responsive and more pragmatic city-making".

Urbanizing villages constitute a form of urban informality in the Chinese context (Wang et al., 2009; Liu et al., 2010; Zhang, 2011; Wu, et al., 2013). Some recent studies have begun to perceive them as the coherent components of a Chinese city (Song, 2008; Kochan, 2015). Although the urbanizing Chinese villages bear resemblance to the informal squatter settlements in Third World cities, there are also major differences. In some Latin American countries such as Brazil and Mexico, rural farmers sell all their land and houses in the countryside and migrate to the cities (Perlman, 2010). They arrived to find that they could not afford to rent proper accommodation, and thus had to build their shelters on land in or near the urban areas (Turner, 1969; Aguilar, 2008). These informal settlements are, therefore, mostly enclaves of rootless rural migrants who have built self-help housing on uncontrolled urban land. Urbanizing villages in China have also received a large population of rural migrants. However, they are not enclaves of rootless migrants. Instead, these migrants are housed within indigenous communities, in which villagers build houses on their homestead lands and lease them to the migrant workers (Tian, 2008; Chung, 2010). Further, these migrants come to explore job opportunities in the cities without giving up their land and houses at home. In this context, the issue at stake here is not simply about a divide between villages and city, but also a stratification between indigenous villagers and migrant workers within the urbanizing villages. To better understand urbanizing villages as a form of urban informality, therefore, we need to explore *how urbanizing villages have enabled and constrained the integration and assimilation of migrant workers into the community of indigenous villagers*.

The community of urbanizing villages is spatial bounded and ethnicity based. It refers not only to the sense of belongings or affiliations of its inhabitants, but more importantly, defines the associated rights and entitlements to material benefits of its members. In Guangdong Province, many urbanizing villages were established since the South Song dynasty (AD 1127–1279). Families with different surnames ran away from warfare in northern China at the time and came to build their "natural villages" in different parts of the Province. Maintaining a close neighborhood watch and defending each other became practical strategies for these new migrants settling and flourishing in a new place. They established strong social bonds by inter-marrying and residing in close proximity to each other, and had a solid sense of the community. Not surprisingly, urbanizing villages were by tradition xenophobic and discriminatory, given that lineage-based social networks had firmly established a society of acquaintance, under which villagers tended to view all those who were not descendants from the same blood line of their ancient families within the villages, as outsiders.

Such phenomena have persisted in the reform period, as evidenced by many studies which confirm that migrant workers are socially and politically excluded despite their essential contributions to the local economy. Migrant workers pay rental income to the villagers and allow them to enjoy a reasonably good quality of life, after the locals have lost their arable land to urbanization (Siu, 2009; Liu, 2009). Many provide labor services in the neighborhood retail shops and restaurants of the urbanizing villages (Wang et al., 2009). Living in subdivided apartments, however, migrant workers are much poorer than villagers (Wang et al, 2010). Lacking local ties, migrant workers could only rely on their hometown community for social support (Liu, et al., 2012). Furthermore, migrant workers were excluded from village-based elections, social welfare services and shareholding systems, rendering them unable to participate in the decision-making processes of community governance (Lan, 2005; Zhu and Guo, 2015). Chung (2009: 253) describes urbanizing villages as the "spaces of disorder" that contain many ideal conditions for urban problems and social segregation to spread.

We explore this question in some urbanizing villages which are currently under the administrative purview of the new Huangpu District. Like many of their counterparts in the PRD region, most villages located in the district had existed since the South Song dynasty, when some clans (such as Zhong, Liu and Mai) immigrated into the area. During the 1980s and the 1990s, the municipal government requisitioned arable land for the construction of four industrial zones, including Economics and Technological Development District, Hi-tech Industrial Development Zone, Free Trade Zone and Export Processing Zone (Wong and Tang, 2005). In 2002, these industrial zones were amalgamated to form the Guangzhou Development District (GDD). Swift land requisitions swallowed villagers' arable land but left their housing sites intact, creating more than 20 urbanizing villages in the district. As Leaf (2007: 176) suggests, urbanizing villages "appear more as sites for further redevelopment than [as] coherent setting[s] in their own right", because their continuing existence presented a persistent barrier for the official pursuit of urban modernity. From the late 1990s, the GDD started to expel labor-intensive and polluting factories in order to make way for higher value-added production including, namely, creative industries and research and business development. In 2005, the municipal government merged the GDD with the Luogang Town to form the Luogang District. In 2015, the municipal government further combined the Luogang District with the Huangpu District to establish a new administrative district, which is now called the new Huangpu District. With this rapid urban transformation, redeveloping urbanizing villages into urban settlements has been driven by two main urban policy objectives: creating a business-friendly environment by providing new office and commercial spaces with modern infrastructure for business investors; and, building more inclusive

neighborhoods with quality housing to attract and retain talents and professionals to live and work in the district.

This study reports our field research on six urbanizing villages, two of which have completed redevelopment and the remaining four have just obtained planning permission for redevelopment. We conducted over 120 interviews with the local actors, including migrant workers, villagers, village cadres and local officials.[2] Our field research was divided into three major stages to enable a back-and-forth triangulation between data collection and analysis. The first began in July 2008, and focused on interviewing villagers to understand how urbanization had affected their living conditions and collective organizations.[3] We also visited a number of governmental departments at the district level, and interviewed officials who were familiar with the policy implementation in social welfare provision, village asset management, and village redevelopment. The second stage began in December 2012. It focused on examining the conflicts between migrant workers and villagers.[4] Between 2013 and 2017, field visits were conducted to deepen our understanding of the interactions between villagers and migrant workers, with a focus on those completely redeveloped villages. Based on these interviews and field observations, the next section will present our analysis of how and why urbanization has consolidated the indigenous communities, which provided life support for the villagers but created institutional barriers against the inclusion of migrant workers.

3. Exclusion and Segregation in Indigenous Communities

During the 1980s and the 1990s, urbanization pushed villagers to increasingly rely on their village collectives for social welfare services and personal subsistence, thus reinforcing the importance of indigenous communities in urbanizing villages. After the implementation of the Household Responsibility System in the early 1980s, many villagers earned higher income by selling their vegetables and fruits to nearby cities. The improvement of villagers' standard of living was also reflected in the widespread building booms that characterized the late 1980s. According to the *Luogang*

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[2] To protect the interview participants, their identities in this article are kept anonymous.

[3] The interviews with villagers were usually completed within 120 minutes.

[4] Starting with interviews with villagers, we found no difficulties in contacting migrants as villagers helped in introducing their tenants to us. Moreover, restaurants and groceries shops within the villages were good venues for meeting and chatting with migrants. We also met many migrant taxi drivers when we were travelling within the districts by taxi. Comparatively, the interviews with migrant workers were shorter (usually ending within 45 minutes) because they typically worked very long hours and could not afford time for long conversations. The migrant workers living in the villages came from different provinces, such as *Guangxi*, *Hunan*, *Henan*, *Anhui* and *Qinghai*. They were earning a net monthly income of about 1,500 to 8,500 yuan.

Town Gazetteer, 1,996 new village houses with a total gross floor space of 146,700 square meters were built between 1984 and 1990. Meanwhile, increasing off-farm employment opportunities became available to villagers. Working in the rural enterprises operated by the township government was one typical example. Another off-farm job was to engage in transportation services. During the early 1990s, public transport system in the PRD region was lagging behind its economic demand, hence offering lucrative opportunities for intra- and inter-city transportation services. A villager revealed that he had invested about 5,000 yuan in buying a motorcycle, which he had used to transport goods and passengers between Luogang and the urban core of Guangzhou city.[5] This allowed him to earn a monthly income of about 400-600 yuan. His "success" was envied by his brother, who only earned a monthly income of about 160 yuan as a secondary school teacher. During the early 1980s, many villagers switched to non-farm activities, leaving behind the rice fields to their families. Consequently, some families secured help from non-local farmers, especially during the fruit harvest seasons. As some villagers recalled, the first batch of migrants came from Guangxi province. They began by serving as helpers, and after a while, some of them rented arable land from the villagers for growing rice and vegetables. These non-local farmers were willing to leave their hometowns because farming in their own villages did not provide them with a decent livelihood. These non-local farmers were the earliest "migrant workers". Alongside cultivating the land leased by the villagers, these non-local farmers built their makeshift shacks near the fields. They usually did not demand much local resources.

With improvement in their income and housing conditions, the villagers began to collaborate with each other under the village collectives to enhance the village infrastructure. Local cadres recalled that, in one instance, their village collective had invested as much as 900,000 yuan in building a tap-water system for every household in the late 1980s.[6] Beginning in the 1990s, the municipal government requisitioned a massive amount of arable land for the construction of industrial zones. After losing their arable land to urbanization, the villagers received a certain amount of land returned by the state for non-agricultural uses. All these returned land parcels were called "reserved commercial land (*ziliu jingji yongdi*)" and were legally allowed to be leased for uses such as hotels, factories and storage buildings. This policy was intended to generate recurrent rental income for the land-lost villagers to pay for their collective expenses. The rental income was divided into two major parts: funding the provision of village infrastructure and social welfare services, and paying dividends to individual villagers.

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[5] Interview, June 2012.
[6] Interview, June 2012 and January 2015.

In many villages, the village collectives used the collective income derived from land leasing to provide a typical range of village infrastructure and services, including clean water system, primary school, neighborhood clinic and security team *(zhibaodui* or *hucundui*) for maintaining local order. After deducting the expenses of these services, the remaining collective incomes were distributed to villagers as dividends. All these benefits and basic facilities were funded and managed by the village collectives, and the money actually came from the villagers' land compensation fees and the rental incomes of their "reserved commercial land." In the eyes of the villagers, village facilities were not public property to be shared with the migrant workers. Similar to their dividend earnings, these facilities were their private entitlements that they righteously and exclusively owned by surrendering their agricultural land to the state for urbanization. When their economic wellbeing and prospects were closely tied with the collectives, villagers become more, rather than less, identity-conscious after urbanization. Their membership rights to collective assets were both ethnicity-based and place-based (Wong, 2016). For instance, only indigenous villagers who had registered their *hukou* with the village were eligible for full shareholding benefits.

In 2003, these villages were converted into urban neighbourhoods, within which the *hukou* status of all villagers were changed from "agricultural" to "non-agricultural", and their Villagers' Committees were re-organized into Residents' Committees. Despite these administrative changes, some villagers suggested that they were still unable to enjoy equal welfare benefits as urban residents.[7] Although the district government had increased its welfare contributions to villages since the early 2000s, village welfare expenditure was still not fully shouldered by the state. For instance, the total sum per capita to support the operation of a new medical cooperative system was about 120 *yuan* in 2007. The district government only contributed one-third of this amount and the rest was equally shared by individual villagers and their collectives. Inadequate state finance into the social welfare provision implies that village collectives remained highly instrumental rather than defunct to villagers in the newly formed urban neighborhoods.

Such a self-reliant, village-based social welfare system has strengthened village collectives as self-governing entities exclusive to the indigenous villagers. Migrant workers in urbanizing villages have no entitlements to nor influence on the village welfare benefits. Furthermore, the persistence of homestead land system created another major obstacle to migrant workers to participate in local affairs through grassroots elections. Under the Organic Law of the Residents' Committee, all committee members are

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[7] Interviews, December 2012.

selected by the local residents who have registered their *hukou* with the neighborhood. According to the district government policy paper issued in 2005 and entitled "Some Suggestions on the Election for Residents' Committee", residents who did not register their *hukou* with the neighborhood could only vote in local elections if they fulfilled two requirements simultaneously: proven ownership of real estate in the neighborhood and residency in the neighborhood for more than half a year. It was nearly impossible for migrant workers to own real estate in urbanizing villages, as villagers' houses were not allowed to be legally sold on the open market.

4. From Confrontation to Symbiotic Co-Existence

These discriminations caused acute tensions between migrants and villagers from the early 1990s, when an increasing number of new migrant workers arrived to support the rapid expansion of the nearby industrial zones. Some migrant workers were living in the dormitories provided by the factory owners, and others rented housing from the villagers. This rising influx of migrant workers expanded the villagers' rental incomes, but it also created numerous conflicts within the local community. Migrant workers were often seen to generate public hygiene problems and social security threats, presenting a great challenge to local governance in peri-urban areas (Liu et al., 1998). Recalling their experiences of the early 1990s, the villagers admitted that they initially felt upset with the expanding population of migrant workers, and tended to view them as "dangerous intruders."[8] The villagers' hostile attitude toward the migrant workers, coupled with language barriers and ethno-cultural differences, sometimes triggered heated, violent clashes between them. A village cadre stated that his daily work at that time had been spent on dispute resolution, such as to stop villagers fighting with migrant workers simply because they could not stand the odor of spicy food emitting from the latter's residence.

Disputes over tenancy contracts (which were usually oral rather than written agreements) created a major source of conflicts between villagers and migrant workers. During the late 1980s and the early 1990s, many migrant workers were short-term tenants. They usually chose to break the contracts when they needed to move elsewhere for new jobs. These frequently happened when the GDD underwent a rapid industrialization process largely driven by labor-intensive and export-oriented production. As the official statistics show, light industries such as weaving, food processing and the production of aluminum cans for carbonated drinks accounted for nearly 80 percent of the total industrial output. At that time, some migrant workers in the GDD spent long hours working in the factories. Many were

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[8] Interview, November 2012

forced to work continuously on the production lines, and their daily lives, behavior and even their "moral conduct" were tightly monitored by their employers, who could terminate their employment without any justification (Li, 2005). Some villagers revealed that the migrant workers in their villages tended to stay for short periods, from several months to two years, during the early 1990s.[9] The villagers further explained that the high turnover of migrants was largely due to the low job security offered by local enterprises.[10] Once they changed employment, they moved out of the villages and looked for new accommodations closer to their new jobs. This frustrated the villagers, and led to major disputes. In some extreme cases, landlord villagers were "kidnapped" when they went to argue with migrant workers who had refused to make rental payments.[11]

Migrant workers were accused of creating not only hygiene problems, but also security threats to the community. The villagers saw the rates of theft and public disturbance climb steadily, and became increasingly fearful of the menace their new neighbors posed to them. In response, villagers mobilized and organized security teams to manage this perceived hazard. The villagers also complained that the migrant workers were consuming the village resources that did not belong to them. To recover their costs, some village collectives imposed various levies on migrant workers. As a village cadre described, his village charged a so-called monthly management fee of 4 yuan on each migrant worker.[12] Such fees were a heavy financial burden to most migrant workers, who could only earn an income of 50 to 80 yuan per month at that time. Lacking the knowledge and confidence to redress their hardships through proper legal action, many of the migrant workers chose to express their anger to the villagers. All of these problems only served to expose the tensions and escalate the hostility between villagers and migrant workers.

Since the early 2000s, however, their relationships began to significantly improve. Villagers gradually changed their antagonistic attitudes toward migrants because villagers had to increasingly rely on their rental incomes to make a living. After losing all their arable land to urbanization, rental payment by migrant workers became a principal source of villagers' household income. According to a villager, the monthly rental income derived from his two-bedroom unit increased from 100 yuan in 2000 to 1,800 yuan in 2015, while the rise of commodity prices was only about 70%. He had three units for renting. The rental income constituted more than 50% of his household income in the past decade. With the

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[9] Interviews, December 2012 and May 2015
[10] Interviews, November 2016.
[11] Interviews, December 2012 and April 2017
[12] Interview, December 2012

stable incomes derived from property leasing, villagers could enjoy a better quality of life, such as leisure travelling, which used to be a rare luxury during the 1980s and 1990s.[13] The rental incomes generated from leasing accommodation to migrant workers also enabled villagers to provide better education opportunities for their children. A villager reported receiving about 3,000 yuan of rental income each month, which was enough to cover the tuition fees and living costs of his daughter enrolled in a social work program at Guangzhou Zhongshan University. [14]

To protect rental income, villagers began to adopt a more amicable and pragmatic approach to interact with migrant workers. This was especially so when the migrant workers started to have more geographical choices for accommodation, as a continual improvement in local transportation services had enhanced the accessibility of many once relatively remote places. In order to attract and retain tenants, villagers tended to become more eager to open their communal resources to the new neighbors. Between 2010 and 2012, we observed that villagers were willing to share the use of village facilities such as clinics, primary schools and recreational facilities with migrant workers. In the community clinics, for example, the villagers no longer insisted on a priority service for themselves over migrant workers. Instead, they had come to accept the principle of "first-come-first-served" for medical treatment. This served to placate the migrant workers, who were still paying a higher fee than villagers for medical services. In many village schools, scholarships that had originally been set up only for the villagers' children were also open for applications by children of the migrant workers living in the same neighborhood. Moreover, community recreational centers and school bus services, which were previously reserved for the exclusive use of villagers, became accessible to migrant workers. In handling local conflicts, the Residents' Committees invited migrant workers to participate in their mediations. For example, local cadres were willing to pay visits to the residence of migrant workers rather than summoning them to the office of the Residents' Committee during office hours.[15] Moreover, the time and place for meetings were mostly scheduled to suit the convenience of the migrant workers. In some neighborhoods, if migrant workers were required to come to the office for dispute mediation, the Residents' Committee even paid them a small compensation wage for attending the meeting.[16]

5. **Urbanizing Villages as Spaces of Informality**

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[13] Interviews, June 2012.
[14] Interview, July 2012
[15] Interviews, December 2012
[16] Interviews, December 2012.

The economic prospects and social opportunities of migrant workers also grew with their rising importance to improving the villagers' incomes and livelihoods in the community. A migrant worker from Hunan said that she had been working as a manager in a hostel owned by a villager for more than eight years. Not only was she responsible for managing the daily operations of the hostel, but she also acted as an agent to help recruiting villagers as part-time domestic helpers in migrant workers' families.[17] She was satisfied with her job, as she had not expected to be appointed as a manager with her elementary educational background. In the villages under this study, more than 70 percent of the medical doctors and nurses were non-local people who offered basic health care services, such as immunization and curing ailments, for the villagers. Some doctors indicated that they treasured their jobs, because having received training from medical schools in small cities, they had to struggle for limited employment positions as medical doctors in urban areas. Some village cadres indicated that these migrant doctors were indispensable because it was tremendously difficult to recruit qualified local medical professionals who were willing to serve in their small villages.[18]

Urbanizing villages provide migrant workers with not only jobs, but also opportunities to run small businesses (see Figure 1). Many neighborhood restaurants were run by migrant workers, who offered a variety of foods such as "Lanzhou Lamian (noodles)," "Hunan spicy cuisine," "Guilin rice noodles" and "north-eastern dumplings." To save money, some migrant workers lived in the restaurants where they were working, even though they knew this was officially prohibited due to fire safety reasons. Some of them explained that they ran these small businesses in the villages, because the villagers shunned the demanding chores and tiny monetary returns from these businesses. Some migrant workers set up property management companies in the urbanizing villages. Taking advantage of their thick networks with other migrant workers from the same origins, they served as housing management agents, providing one-stop services, including property advertising, renter solicitation, furniture rentals, repairs and maintenance. The villagers became increasingly willing to entrust their properties to these agents.[19]

<Figure 1> to be inserted

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[17] Since industrial restructuring, the social mix of migrant workers has changed. Migrant workers included not only factory workers, but also salesmen, technicians, doctors and nurses working in the neighbourhood clinics. These migrant workers who earned relatively high income were able and willing to hire part-time domestic helpers. After losing their land to urbanization, it was difficult for villagers to find a job in the non-farming sector. Some middle-aged female villagers were willing to work as domestic helpers, even though their families could generate rental income from leasing house to migrant workers.

[18] Interviews, December 2012 and May 2015.

[19] Interviews, January 2016.

Local institutions and rules of the urbanizing villages have made them autonomous, segregated communities that exclude non-indigenous inhabitants from enjoying equal welfare and political rights in daily governance. However, this should not lead us to overlook the fact that such spaces of informality produce fertile resources for the subsistence and social development of migrants whose wellbeing has long been neglected by the local governments. Lacking access to local *hukou*, migrants were mostly forced to take up only low-paid and informal employment. Moreover, the urban areas offered unaffordable housing and expansive market services to these poor migrant workers. In contrast, with a high degree of autonomy in the management of community affairs, the urbanizing villages could provide more flexible, affordable and practical solutions to address the economic and social needs of migrant workers. For instance, without the need to strictly follow formal urban standards, the urbanizing villages offered the migrants entry to low-rent accommodation and waiver in business licensing requirements. Some restaurants without formal licenses were allowed to exist in the neighborhood as long as their food and services were accepted by villagers.

Urbanizing villages provided the platform to support the growth of social capital of migrant workers, and empower them to better organize themselves in defending their rights. Unlike their predecessors, the present generation of migrant workers has not only developed a better awareness of social equality, but also built up the capacity to safeguard their rights and interests (Shan, 2012). We saw a similar pattern of empowerment replicated in the GDD. For instance, migrant workers had the courage and capacity to organize protests against wage offences and unfavorable employment contracts in the past, and demand higher pay and increased participation in company management nowadays (Li, 2011). Indigenous villagers supported the struggle of migrant workers for labor rights and benefits, forcing the state and enterprises to mount a direct response to their expressed demand for better remuneration and safer working environments. Improvement in income and job security enabled the migrant workers to afford higher rents and commit to longer periods of tenancy agreement, which were also favourable outcomes to the indigenous villagers.

6. **Formalization and Desegregation by Village Redevelopment**

The mutual efforts of villagers and migrant workers to accommodate differences and accomplish the common interests had turned the urbanizing villages into spaces of urban informality that nurtured a gradual, positive process of rural-urban transition. However, these significant roles of the urbanizing villages in city making were thwarted under the metropolitan development strategy, which aimed wholeheartedly at a swift removal of the "chaotic" and "messy" village landscape and an assimilation

of this informal space into the formal urban fabric. In 2003, conversion of all villages under this study into urban neighborhoods and the change of villager's *hukou* from "agricultural" to "non-agricultural" status were complete. These changes permitted the conversion of collective land into state-owned land to support village redevelopment. In the early 2000s, the district government implemented redevelopment of a few small villages, by directly assembling land titles, providing rehousing and compensation, and coordinating construction. Since 2009, the *Sanjiugaizo* policy has promoted a bottom-up approach, under which villagers were permitted to initiate their own redevelopment plan in collaboration with property developers. To facilitate successful project implementation, the municipal government reduced the land premium for land conversion, allowing property developers and villagers to share a greater proportion of income arising from redevelopment (Lin, 2015). Moreover, to provide economic incentives for villagers to surrender their housing land for redevelopment, the municipal government introduced the measure of "one village one policy (*yicunyice*)" to allow more flexibility in dealing with compensation for "unauthorized" houses, as long as the basic compensation rate (1,200-1,500 yuan per square meter) was followed.[20]

Under the *sanjiugaizao* policy, the district government has progressively promoted redevelopment in more and more urbanizing villages. Local officials explained that village redevelopment could achieve two major goals in metropolitan development.[21] First, redeveloped neighborhoods with new community facilities became compatible with the surrounding built environment which was increasingly occupied by high-rise, modern industrial and office buildings. Moreover, all community facilities were managed under urban standards, enabling villagers and migrant workers to enjoy a genuine urban way of life. Second, the redevelopment projects eliminated the institutional discontinuity between the urbanizing villages and the city; for instance, by integrating the territories of urbanizing villages into the "state-owned" urban land system, under which real estate could be freely traded in the open market. With this change in the land ownership status, the institutional barriers to and traditional discrimination against non-indigenous villagers could be removed.

These physical integrations by a demolition–redevelopment strategy, however, brought significant social problems. Redevelopment inevitably resulted in a ruthless displacement of the migrant workers (Wu et al., 2013; Lin, 2015). Better housing meant higher prices and rent that low-income migrant workers could not afford, and thus they were forced to move to nearby villages that had not yet been

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[20] "*Zhaijidizheng*" only permitted a maximum building height of 3.5 storeys for each housing lot. Those additional structures exceeding 3.5 storey were defined by the local authority as "unauthorized."
[21] Interviews, December 2012.

redeveloped. Some migrants who did not want to move to other remote villages decided to look for job opportunities elsewhere. A migrant worker from Sichuan said that she had just received a job offer to work in a factory in Chongqing. She had decided to take this new job located closer to her friends and parents who were living in the rural villages near Chengdu. Many migrant workers, especially young people, indicated that they would leave once they found better employment elsewhere. They further explained that the recent *Hukou* conversion policy could not help them much because it only gave credits to those skillful workers with higher educational qualifications.[22] For those who operated small restaurants and property management companies, as in the urbanizing villages, some of them chose to close their business. When they saw shop spaces in redeveloped neighborhoods had been mostly occupied by chain stores, they expected that it would be difficult for them to get formal business licenses after village redevelopment.

Village redevelopment also produced numerous conflicts among villagers. Under the *sanjiugaizao* policy, compensation was allowed for "unauthorized" structures. But, the government compensation for those "unauthorized structures" caused disagreement among villagers and their relatives, because they began to argue about who really owned these structures. Traditionally, villagers inherited strong inter-familial ties cultivated by their ancestors who had built their homes in the same place for generations. It was natural that villagers shared the use of assets and resources with each other (such as close relatives or neighbours). The government's attempt to formalize the entitlement of those "unauthorised" structures triggered the disputes among villagers. Some were even involved in violent bodily clashes with their neighbours and close relatives. A villager indicated that he felt sad, even though village redevelopment substantially improved his household wealth. His brother now treated him as enemy and refused to keep contact with his family. The underlying reason was that they contested over the compensation for a shabby house with a floor space of about 30 square meters constructed on their shared courtyard.[23]

7. Community Rebuilding: Problems and Challenges

Redevelopment also created three profound impacts on community building in the redeveloped neighborhoods. First, redeveloped neighborhoods have encountered difficulties in cultivating a sense of belonging in new spaces, even though it could provide modern housing for migrant workers and easier

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[22] Interviews, April 2017.
[23] Interview, December 2012.

access to political participation in neighborhood governance. The socio-economic characteristics of migrant workers have changed. Some young migrant workers, interested in pursuing fulfilling lives in urban areas, were willing and able to pay higher rents to live in decent apartment buildings rather than shabby village houses. In recent years, the growth of some new enterprises has expanded employment opportunities for them. The migrant workers living in the district engaged in a wide range of professions—not only as factory workers, but also salespeople, technicians, software programmers, doctors, nurses and so on. The older generation of migrant workers worked for their families in the countryside at the cost of their own quality of life. They maintained a minimal standard of living in the workplaces and remitted a major portion of their incomes back to their families in the countryside. However, the current generation of migrant workers are working to realize their own ambitions, rather than working for their families (Friedman, 2012). A couple originating from a rural village in Wuhan suggested that they were happy with their one-bedroom apartment, even though they paid a monthly rent of 2,500 yuan, which was about 5 times the rent for village housing.[24] Like many of their friends renting housing in the area, they did not intend to stay in Luogang permanently, as they could not afford to buy an apartment there.

Depending on location, the housing prices of redeveloped neighborhoods ranged from 16,000 to 26,000 yuan per square meter. Some high-income migrant workers could afford to buy properties in these neighborhoods, but owning property here does not cultivate their local attachment. One couple used all their savings to make the down payment on their one-bedroom unit. They still had to leave their parents and children in their home village, however, as they could not afford to buy a bigger unit in Guangzhou for accommodating the whole family.[25] Moreover, most migrant workers did not intend to give up their housing sites in their home villages, despite their pursuit of an urban way of life. A migrant worker who had served as a taxi driver in Guangzhou for more than 10 years suggested that he had two main reasons for retaining his housing land in his home village.[26] First, upon the completion of a high speed railway project, the accessibility of his home village would be substantially improved. Second, the user rights for apartments in urban areas have only 70 years, whilst there is no expiry date in the use of *zhaijidi*. Given these considerations, he and his family members (including his parents and elder brother) used all of their savings (about 700,000 yuan) earned from hard work in cities to build two three-storey village houses on the *zhaijide* allocated by their village collectives. This migrant worker suggested that his village house occupied a site area of 150 square meters, which was much bigger than

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[24] Interview, July 2015.
[25] Interview, June 2016
[26] Interview, July 2015

those in Luogang (no more than 100 square meters on average). He and his family were living separately in two urbanizing villages. They planned to work for another five years in the city, and would then return to their home village. In this context, migrants were still what Leaf (2007) calls "translocals," who keep one foot in the city and the other in their places of origin.

Second, redevelopment has enlarged the income disparities of the residents within redeveloped neighbourhoods. Even some migrants could afford to rent or buy properties in the redeveloped neighborhoods, they are still a comparatively underprivileged social segment because many villagers have experienced a rapid rise in their private wealth after village redevelopment. After surrendering their housing land for redevelopment, villager households received new apartments in the redeveloped neighbourhood as compensation. Under a booming real estate market, many villagers have become multimillionaires. Village redevelopment has also resulted in greater economic inequities among villagers. A villager suggested that he and his family (including his wife and two sons) were holding 9 apartments, including 3 three-bedroom units and 6 two-bedroom units, when he surrendered two village houses with a total floor area of approximately 1,000 square meters for redevelopment. The open market value of his properties was estimated to be nearly 20 million yuan.[27] He further explained that he "brought" two land parcels from the village collective in late 1980s. During the mid-1990s, the government did not strictly enforce the building codes in villages. Some village cadres suggested that the village collective therefore turned a blind eye toward unauthorized housing construction and received revenue from "selling" housing lots to villagers.[28] As some villagers disclosed, it was not difficult to get a site for housing construction as long as they were willing to pay the land costs.[29] However, another villager and his families were not so "lucky." [30] He did not have enough money to acquire more housing lots within the village. As he only had one old house with a total floor area of about 300 square meters, he and his family were only compensated with 2 three-bedroom units currently used for self-occupation.

Finally, the state-led community building programs have suppressed the development of self-governance. In many third-world cities, formalization was mainly driven by privatization and a reform of the land title. The state usually confined its role to legalization (or more specifically, title offering) and allowed the penetration of market forces to shape the contours of cities (Gilbert, 2002; Roy, 2005).

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[27] Interview, January 2016
[28] Interviews, June and September 2016
[29] Interview, December 2012.
[30] Interview, September 2016.

With an emphasis on the establishment of property rights regimes and the development of electoral democracy, the strategy of formalization generally undermined the role of the state in local governance, especially in terms of the provision of health, education and social welfare services (Moore, 1999). In contrast, the outcome in redeveloping China's urbanizing villages is different. Wu (2017) suggests that China did not follow the path of neoliberal growth because "state entrepreneurialism", as a form of governance in urban redevelopment, has enabled the socialist state to extend its power into the market sector through institutional innovations in development control. In this study, we found that formalization and desegregation by means of village redevelopment has strengthened, rather than undermined, the role of the state in public goods provision and community governance. With the retreat of the state during the 1980s and the early 2000s, villagers organized themselves for the provision of community facilities and welfare services, reinforcing Villagers' Committees and Shareholding Cooperatives as self-governing entities. However, the current city development strategy constitutes an attempt of the socialist state to eliminate rural-urban demarcation and embrace a highly-regulated way of urban modernity. With its long-standing concern about political stability, the local government has re-established its administrative control in these new neighbourhoods through active involvement in community rebuilding.

To this end, the community organizations have been directed to embrace new urban standards of neighborhood governance. For example, they are now required to go through formal auction and tender procedures in leasing out their collective properties. Consequently, the successful bidders were mostly the operators of chain stores. Moreover, formal licensing for local small businesses, such as food and beverage outlets and property agency services, is now strictly enforced. Last but not least, the government disbanded the villagers' self-organized security teams, which were considered inefficient, and installed local police stations in the neighborhoods to maintain law and order. These urban standards, as Shied and Friedmann (2008: 1993) best described, are "a government checklist, a service evaluation and a quality of life measure all in one, setting benchmarks ranging from the minimum number of volunteers, to the minimum number of annual neighborhood-wide cultural activities, to the acceptable level of crime rates". Being required to deal with numerous top-down directives from the Street Office, some village cadres indicated that they had little discretion in formulating local, grassroots measures but to implement the state policies.[31]

8. **Conclusion**

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[31] Interviews, December 2016 and April 2017.

As a form of urban informality, urbanizing villages have played an important role in city making by providing distinctive spaces that support the urban transitions of their inhabitants, including both villagers and migrant workers. Villagers' self-organization for social welfare provision reinforced urbanizing villages as self-governing and segregated communities. Such reconsolidated indigenous communities, which allowed informal rules and tremendous flexibility in grassroots solutions to emerge and flourish, have in turn provided migrant workers with not only affordable housing and employment but also business opportunities to pursue what Kochan (2015: 945) calls "much-needed social, cultural and economic capital" in the city. Nevertheless, the current trend of village redevelopment has uprooted more and more of these visible communities, by creating modern but rootless neighborhoods. Village redevelopment has eliminated the spatial and institutional separations that characterize urbanizing villages by integrating the collective village land into the fold of formal markets. However, as shown by the findings of this study, new income inequalities have emerged to impede practical interactions of residents in the redeveloped neighbourhoods, and intensive state-led community building programs have limited the development of self-governing capacity of communities. To cope with these problems, the government leaders should consider a fundamental transformation of their interventionist approach, from a sole reliance on formalization and integration to a greater emphasis on informality and segregation as possible solutions to the urban problems in China's swollen cities. Furthermore, they need to rethink the importance of reconsolidating the communities of migrant workers' home villages in the countryside. Unlike urban squatters in the developing countries, most migrant workers in China still have their land and houses in the countryside. When cities have demonstrated their limited capacities to offer equal opportunities for migrants, the countryside should not merely serve the function of what Friedman (2012) called a "safety valve," allowing Chinese migrant workers to secure a subsistence living in case they lose their jobs in cities. Rather, it should be a place that enables more young people to meet their material, social and cultural needs locally without having to leave their families to make a living elsewhere.

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