Tumors in the Crevices of Metropolis
Urban Villages in the Pearl River Delta, Guangdong

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ABSTRACT

"Village in the city" is a social phenomenon in urbanization in China. They mostly appear in the downtown and outskirts segments of cities like Shenzhen or Guangzhou. Urban villages are a special phenomenon created by China's urbanization efforts. In contrast to conventional rural and urban communities, urban villages pose many challenges to the growth of the current urban economy and society. The article introduces the origin and characteristics of urban villages and reveal the obstacles they create to city development: the exorbitant building density, occupancy of central city areas, the inharmonious visual effect on city sightseeing and so on. This paper demonstrates the possible solutions and the existing barriers in the process of redevelopments, such as the compensation for urban villagers, the sluggish progress of social improvements, and the distinct differences between rural areas and urban areas. Realizing the necessity and difficulty of redevelopment, related policies and actions in the rebuilding and developing "urban villages", villagers' social security, villagers' transformation into citizens, social management, and environmental construction should be implemented by the government. By making progress on the internal and external sides of urban villages, the problems might be solved in the near future.

Keywords: Urban Villages, Urbanization, Pearl River Delta, Clan Culture, Land policies.

1. INTRODUCTION

"From a small fishing village to a megacity." This is how the Chinese history textbooks describe Shenzhen's appalling and expeditious urbanization of Shenzhen, one of the members of the Pearl River Delta city circle members. Together with Shenzhen, 8 other major cities - Guangzhou, Foshan, Zhaoqing, Dongguan, Huizhou, Zhuhai, and Jiangmen – make up the Pearl River Delta (PRD), potentially the largest super megacity globally. After less than 4 decades of rapid construction, numerous skyscrapers have crept up from the dirt, asphalt has been blanketed over the bumpy khaki-colored roads, and the number of cars running over them has been increasing exponentially. However, towers and wide avenues are not the only "souvenirs" rapid urbanization has left for these cities. Urban villages are often referred to as the "tumors". These unique identities fostered in the crevices between urban grounds have germinated many deep-rooted problems that governments have long been trying to eradicate. However, the management of chaos caused by the urban villages has ceased to advance for as long as

they have even come into people's sights. In recent years, the "urban village" has aroused heated discussion among the Chinese government departments, worldwide academia, and society. Research and reviews have focused on the mechanism and issues of the PRD villages. On top of previous works, this essay will investigate the causes by looking into the government's policies and existing religious and familial concepts; the issues by addressing the appearance, the hygienic situation, and the economy; finally, with some possible solutions attached.

2. VILLAGES-INCITIES ARE THE BY-PRODUCTS OF RAPID URBANIZATION IN THE PEARL RIVER DELTA

2.1. The Lag of Regulation in the Formation of Village-in-city

The policy fails to catch up with the rapidly growing Pearl River agglomerations. The root cause of the formation of villages-in-cities is the policy of

administrating city-countryside separately. The Urban-rural dual system was erected under the phase of Command Economy, in which the new government greatly encouraged the development of urbanization and industrialization. In the early 1950s, the government released legislation prohibiting and restricting rural migrants toward newly built urban areas. Stations were established at borders to dissuade peasants from moving into cities. What is more, in 1958, China published its Household Registration Regulations, in which it explicitly stated the formalities rural dwellers had to possess to become a city resident: An employment letter, acceptance certificate, or permission license to which authorized institutions attribute. However, with restricted education, skills, and social status, most peasants were defeated by the rigid requirements. As a result, the flow towards the city was clotted. The disparity and isolation between urban and rural regions increased [1]. Policies set for urban areas are not valid in villages, rendering the deficiency in village-city unity. One of the special land policies for rural areas is collective landlordism. For over half a century, Chinese rural regions have adhered to the policy of collective landlordism. According to the Land Law, the transition from collective landlordism towards government ownership could be achieved by village collective actively handing over the ownership to the state. The peasants did not gain much from the transition due to limited compensations and therefore were reluctant to give up on the appreciating land. On the grounds of insufficient benefits from the government, the peasant groups retain their neighborhoods. Furthermore, Collective landlordism also introduced a deep-seated competition within the villages. According to Lan, the ambiguity of the policy created a loophole for residents to generate personal benefits in the name of collective ownership. The illegal residence expansion is one of the issues derived from the leaky policy [2].

With the introduction of Reform and Opening-up, urban areas have been expanding at an expeditious rate. Governments began to expropriate vacant farmland for urban construction. Nonetheless, the government temporarily detoured populated villages to avoid extremely high reformation and social costs. Due to restricted flow and wide social gap between villages and novel urban areas, expansions engulf the areas that the urbanization process had abandoned. Therefore, underdeveloped villages are geographically encompassed by modern facilitated cities, which used to grow crops.

Furthermore, the shortage of affordable accommodations for the influx of migrants leads to the growth and fortification of urban villages. As urbanization carries forwards, the demand for accommodations from the constant influx of immigrants increases. The increasing demand for accommodations results in the appreciating urban housing prize, of which many are enormous figures for newcomers. In contrast, the urban villages provide cheap rental housings that, though so

cramped that people refer to them as the "kissing buildings", could bear a dense population, as shown in Figure 1.

In addition, these villages are located in the centers of the cities, rendering them very appealing to workers who seek convenience for on and off work. "Shipai" village is the largest urban village in Guangzhou. It is located less than 3 kilometers away from Zhujiang New City, the busiest region in Guangzhou. Next to it are one hospital, two universities, and several metro stations—it could not be more convenient. In 2020, Over 60000 people claimed this area of less than a square kilometer as their home [3]. Spontaneously, urban village housing became the primary choice for newcomers. During the Reform and Opening Up stage, The PRD cities developed and expanded at an extremely high rate. However, the government was relatively laggard in realizing issues and adjusting to long-term implied strategies. Inevitably, these special villages-in-cities take place.
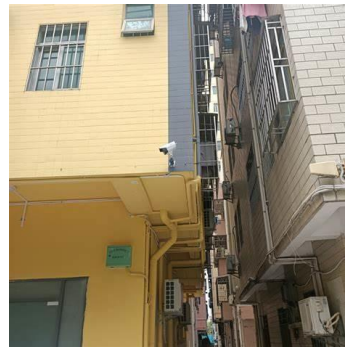

Figure 1 "Kissing buildings" in Shenzhen urban villages

2.2. The influence of clan culture in the formation of village-in-city

There has been little quantitative analysis of how the potent lineage and religious beliefs within Southern Chinese led to the formation and fortification of the PRD urban villages. Families accumulated great significance in Guangdong. According to Freedman, "at least 80% of the villagers' live with their linear relatives,' and a village usually consists of only one lineage [4]. " Chen Hansheng also points out that "In the Pearl River Delta region, this ethnic land is even more common. In most counties, ethnic farmland accounts for 40 percent or more of the cultivated land [5]." (Also shown in Table 1) One evident manifestation of the emphasis on lineage is the ancient ancestral halls. The largest and best-preserved hall lies in one of the PRD cities: Guangzhou. The Chen Temple, shown in Figure 2, was collectively constructed by all the Chen clans in Guangdong Province in 1888. In ancient Chinese culture, ancestral halls are places for worship, weddings, funerals, traditional education, and other great events. Though more spiritual existence nowadays, feudal traditions like the Chen temple still have their holy prevalence. This might lead to deep-seated feudal ideas and burden the government with many intangible

humanity issues. According to Meng, peasants back before commonplace urbanization were constrained by numerous conventional codes, rendering the arouse of their "regionalism, individualism, clansmen and superstition [6]." Under feudal moral values, members have the obligated fidelity towards the clan and their behaviors are often restricted by the traditional remains. Therefore, many of the residents feel that they should not leave their native clan territories. Early urbanization workers are seriously hindered and baffled by the dogged and shiftless villagers who tightly cling to their conventions. Coupled with the fixed policies, governmental agencies could only turn off and turn a blind eye towards managing the more tenacious villages, yet do not realize that the stale tradition accumulates itself and the development of rural society and economy. In Guangdong, every clan, which often consists of a common family name, claims its own territory and status; as Freedman quoted, "there is barely any mixed residence." Villagers often have intense senses of attachment toward their clan.

Table 1. The proportion of Clan-owned land In the Area of cultivated land (15 counties in Guangdong)

Name	%	Name	%	Name	%
Zhongshan	50	Gaoyao	40	Deqing	40
Taishan	50	Guangning	10	Yunfu	30
sihui	30	Yunan	40	Enping	40
Nanhai	40	Heshan	40	Kaiping	49
Shunde	60	Xinhui	60	Xinxing	30

Figure 2 The Chen Temple today filled with tourists

3. PROBLEMS AROUSED TO THE URBAN VILLAGES IN MODERN SOCIETY

The long-lasting Urban villages had created problems for the city development in the Pearl River Delta, and the government had a hard time dealing with them. First, it has been found that urban villages have occupied too much of the precious city lands. In the cities like Shenzhen or Guangzhou, every inch of the land is expensive and valuable. Government can utilize these lands for business corporations, industrial factories, or public areas in favor of profits or citizens' living conditions. Due to the rapid urbanization process, land has already become one of the most limited resources; plus, the location of most urban villages is at the center areas of the city, which further shows their potential values [7]. Due to the massive population and over-crowded buildings in the urban villages, the hygiene condition in Urban villages is pretty bad, which is the second problem that aroused. The buildings are too close in these areas, creating a timid walkway that is constantly visited while seldomly cleaned. People tend to gather their daily waste together or throw garbage there since it is common in the neighborhood and convenient. But it is perfect for infectious diseases to spread around. During the COVID-19 pandemic breakout in Shenzhen, few of the first group of patients were found in urban villages and quickly spread out the whole area, forcing the government to lock down the Urban villages first among all the areas in the city to prevent further spreading. The third problem was related to the crime rate in these areas. It is commonly known that Urban villages are usually poorly supervised and mostly occupied by uneducated, low-income workers, which leads to a relatively higher crime rate compared to other areas of the city. Organizations or individuals with criminal intentions can easily set roots in the urban villages where there are various hiding spots and few police forces. And population there might be more endurable toward behaviors like violence, stealing or even drug dealing since some of them are lack moral standards. Last but not least, it should not be ignored that Urban villages are mostly inconsonant with the overall sightseeing of the city, considering that the crowded and old buildings can barely fit with the newly built skyscrapers, malls and residential buildings. There are pictures taken from higher angles to illustrate how inharmonic Urban villages are. (As shown in Figure 3)

Figure 3 Guangdong's Urban Villages

Narrow and poorly planned streets are a huge inconvenience for people inside or outside the urban villages: It will be harsh for public transportation to drive inside the villages. People living outside the village will avoid driving into the complex and time-consuming roads and rather take a long lap to get to their destinations. What is worse, cities like Shenzhen mostly

demand garbage trucks to clean up waste in the city. Bad traffic inside the urban villages limits the possibility for these trucks to clean trash there. Long-time stacked trash is a threat to local residents and might lead to widespread disease. A harmonized and beautiful city sightseeing is beneficial for creating a great impression on new arrivals to the city [8].

Urban villages are widespread across the bay areas because it was where the rapid but cheap city development policy around the 70s and 80s mainly implied. The clustered housing units and accommodates attracted a huge number of immigrants, unintentionally shifting the structure of the population and housing markets. Cities like Shenzhen or Guangzhou have deep-rooted Urban villages that were supported by rural migrant workers. They are the groups of people who come to developed cities seeking higher incoming and living standards while receiving a lower level of education [9]. These people work in the labor force and live inside those low-rent houses owned by the earlier generation of immigrants. Workers like them can be a double-edged sword for the government: on the one hand, they offer highly efficient workforce while requiring lower wages, but on the other hand, they are forming the community supporting the Urban villages. This makes the redevelopment program more difficult and attracts more population to move into urban villages for lower rents, which could break the equilibrium state of the housing market, causing continuous growth in housing prices. Rising housing price seems beneficial for real-estate owners or native residents, but they will create barriers and discourage the younger generation who have potential interest and ambition to take risks in developed cities. Lack of influx of young population will increase the average aging of the population and dramatically change population structure, which ends up damaging the productivity and economic growth of the city. Government should realize that urban villages are problems for now and future, that the benefits they currently create will not be sustained long enough and eventually become unsolvable loopholes for the near future.

Unfortunately, although problems exist, the government has a hard time solving these problems for many reasons. The most important reason why the government cannot rebuild urban villages is the stakeholders involved, which include: landowners, local government, real estate developers, and rental residents. Landowners will bargain for compensation or new housing during the process of redevelopment. They also require improved living conditions with lands and even a bonus from the appreciation of the land after removal. Local governments are interested in maximizing the land value in the city, benefiting from the land appreciation or improving the modern impression of the city, so they can further accumulate the wealth of space for future expansion [10]. Plus, since the state council issued a

document in 2013 that called for stronger interventions and regulations in the real estate market and the city's modern transformation, local governments tend to play a bigger role in the housing market, pursuing higher profit. For real estate developers, the factor they value the most is profit. In redevelopment, they search to build a tighter relationship with the local government to build a trustful image or attract bigger scale business contracts. For rental residents, they are the least powerful stakeholders on the list but, at the same time, the largest. They are mainly composed of a floating population, low-income workers and unemployed new arrivals. Most of them rent houses from local urban villagers and rely on the low rent price to make a living in the city. It will be hard for the government to compensate or find new residential areas for these populations if the redevelopment occurs.

4. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEMS

To prevent the rising crime rate, it is essential to develop a complete police system inside the urban villages, and government should invest more in surveillance cameras or security that help prevent crime in the first place. Furthermore, the local government should promote hygiene awareness among the people inside the urban villages through education and set specific laws to punish people who worsen the environment or create more job positions as street cleaners for urban villagers. To beautify the city views, it is great to utilize the crowded buildings, setting parks or sports areas on the roof of those buildings. Government should also consider introducing new compensations and policies to encourage the villagers to be part of the urban population. Education, medical aid, and social security for villagers should be the equivalent of the city dwellers. More Public institutions should also be established to train villagers to be suitable for urban jobs. Before rebuilding urban villages, compensation and discounts for registered migrants to provide affordable accommodations are also required. There are a lot of possible solutions involved in solving problems inside the urban villages. But most of them are heavily related to whether the government would actively take action. For the government, the foremost step they should take is to improve the social representations of urban villagers. During PRD's urbanization, the government has been giving too much attention to keeping the process speedy and cheap, leading to many immature urban areas, of which urban villages are manifestations. The government should take the experience as a warning regarding village transformation. In addition to transforming space, governments should no longer neglect the necessity of political and social improvements.

Villages in cities have a special identity: within the built-up urbanized area, but also remain the social attributes of a traditional rural village. Both urban cities

and rural villages have distinct management policies, yet neither could be utilized solely in these special social spaces. Without making reasonable and forceful adjustments towards the ponderous two-fold policies, "the village will be left dependently on the path of the traditional settlement pattern. Therefore, governments should consider adjusting and fusing the old policies or even establishing new ones for better management and improvement of the urban villages. Possible adjustments could be made towards land ownership, education, medical aid, and other adequate compensations. The land ownership policy is the core policy that needs adjustments. Any ambiguity and loopholes from which villagers could derive personal benefits should be eradicated. Villagers should not be given the veto of conducting illegal activities, including reaching their arms out for more space. Meanwhile, governments could also consider providing compulsory education to all ages of villagers, helping them to adapt fully to an urbanized civilization. Education should be holistic, meaning conveying common knowledge and training them in basic skills required for their possible jobs in the future. At the same time, villagers who cooperate with reform should receive at least the equivalent compensations and beneficiaries as those of the urban dwellers. Public institutions must ensure proper substitutional accommodations for new rural immigrants and temporarily provide free medical aid and social security during the first few years of their lives in the cities. In summary, governments must put in a continuous effort to move the minds of villagers. Compared to rough demolition, exerting a subtle influence on the vicious economic and social structure is the true essence and appears to be the most effective way.

Besides directing internal improvements and reconstructions, governments also consider adjusting extrinsic elements that dictate the development of villages-in-cities. These places have provided cheap accommodations for the large influx of immigrants coming from outside the cities. Out comers who parasite on the villages also creates a challenge for governments. Governments should enhance their migration policies to impede the spurring effect given by immigrants in short of income. Possible improvements could increase the supply of affordable accommodations for newly registered migrants, requiring the governments to cooperate with local developers and real estate companies to exploit more land for a larger resident capacity, preventing the lost migrants from seeking refuge in urban villages. To prevent crime rate rising, it is essential to develop a complete police system inside the urban villages, and government should invest more in surveillance cameras or security that help prevent crime in the first place.

In conclusion, redeveloping urban villages requires changes from the inside and outside of them. It definitely needs effort from both government and citizens.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper has presented the information about urban villages and issues they create in cities around the Pearl River Delta, suggested possible solutions to these problems, and pointed directions for future redevelopment. By learning about previous research and articles, this paper has summarized the history of the development of urban villages, mainly focusing on explaining the reasons for the emergence and the influence it brought on city culture. The discussion about the influence of urban villages continued to the second main body part, which is more about the problems they caused as the by-product of city development. Our article also addressed the possible solutions for urban villages redevelopment that require changes from both inside and outside urban villages. The redevelopment of urban villages is essential. Therefore, our findings can help people and the government detailly clarify the existing barriers and the essentiality of rebuilding the urban villages. The whole process can be sluggish, and huge differences might not take place in the near future. But city governments should not allow urban villages to remain unchanged or rely on them to cover up the existing problems of overly high accommodation prices and the lack of residential space. Only when governments start to pay attention and actively implement policies for suitable internal political systems inside the villages and external support for the unharmful urban villages can be within reach

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