

Ran Liu

Urban Village Redevelopment in Beijing, China

New Housing Opportunities for Migrant
Workers

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ISBN 978-3-031-61663-1 ISBN 978-3-031-61664-8 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-61664-8>

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To my family

Preface

This book tentatively conceptualizes and traces the “spatial opportunity structure” of migrant workers in Beijing’s “urban villages” (*chengzhongcun*, literally “villages in the city”). Urban villages are a specific phenomenon of contemporary Chinese urbanization, where local landowners have built “informal” settlements to house migrant workers and other low-wage earners. In the book, the mobility of migrant workers following “urban village redevelopment” symbolizes a changing “geography of opportunity” in Beijing.

Urban villages are essential to service-based metropolises like Beijing in China’s transition. Urban villages are in the process of “growth coalition,” capital accumulation, and knowledge production cycles. Many urban villages have been demolished in the last decade (2009–present) to make way for new injections of high-tech capital. Unproductive activities and informal tenements have been converted to higher value uses or gentrified. Many migrant workers moved to opportunity in Hebei, becoming the main targets of the dispersal policy and the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei (BTH) city-region annexation policy.

Rather than foregrounding debates about changes in land use morphology, this book focuses on the reshaping of social relations in urban village redevelopment. This book explores the contradictions of urban village redevelopment. On the one hand, urban village redevelopment is initiated by the state but still creates new opportunities for the grassroots. On the other hand, redevelopment destroys old orders but also encourages new forms of grassroots alliances.

This book provides a fascinating analysis of how decentralized competition (such as bottom-up urban villages) and monopolistic centralization (such as top-down redevelopment) have been brought into play in the *common* pool resource (CPR) framework in contemporary China. Urban villages are located in a decentralized and spatially discrete system that can dampen incentives for monopoly rents. This differs from the platformed provision of rental housing in monopolistic and oligopolistic markets.

Finally, the book has provided a critical interpretation of the relationship between land, labor, and capital in the knowledge economy, where the activities of

knowledge production and the content of what is produced (e.g. ideas, images and digits) tend to be *common*, but land is not. As Karl Polanyi pointed out in his influential work on *The Great Transformation*: “But labor, land, and money are obviously *not* commodities. . . None of them is produced for sale. The commodity description of labor, land, and money is entirely fictitious.” Henry George, in his influential book *Progress and Poverty*, also identified the monopoly of land as the fundamental social maladjustment and argued that “we must make land *common* property.” Where should the rentier economy go? This book provides an in-depth analysis of Beijing’s “urban village redevelopment” in the late 2000s.

This book was funded by a grant from the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC project number: 42071201): “Measurement and Regional Heterogeneity of Citizenization Opportunities of Chinese Rural Migrants.” The book includes dozens of surveys and rare historical photographs of demolished “urban villages” in Beijing. It is a highly recommended reading for policymakers, researchers, and students interested in China’s current urbanization and urban issues.

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April 2024

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Acknowledgments

This research was funded by a grant from the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC project number: 42071201).

I would like to thank the publisher, Elsevier, for permission to:

- (a) Adopt Tables 1 and 2 from the following source: Ran Liu, Tai-Chee Wong (2018) Urban village redevelopment in Beijing: the state-dominated formalization of informal housing. *Cities* 72:160–172. The two tables have been reused in Tables 4.3 and 4.4 in Chap. 4 of this book.
- (b) Fig. 2, Fig. 6, Table 1 and related text (on pages 9, 11, 13–14) are partly taken from the following source: Ran Liu, Tai-Chee Wong and Shenghe Liu (2020) The peri-urban mosaic of Changping in metropolizing Beijing: peasants' response and negotiation processes. *Cities* 107:102932. These materials have been partially reused in Figs. 6.2 and 6.3, and Table 6.1 in Chap. 6 of this book.
- (c) Fig. 1, Fig. 3, Fig. 5 and related text (on pages 3–4, 9–11) are partly taken from the following source: Ran Liu, Richard Greene (2022) Informality or creativity? The development and demolition of artist and IT worker villages in metropolitan Beijing. *Cities* 130:103996. These materials have been partially reused in Figs. 6.7, 6.8, and 6.10 in Chap. 6 of this book.

I would like to thank the publisher, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. for permission to use Table 3 from the following source: Ran Liu, Tai-Chee Wong and Shenghe Liu (2013) Low-wage migrants in northwestern Beijing, China: the hikers in the urbanisation and growth process. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 54(3):352–371. The old table has been reused in Table 5.5 in Chap. 5 of this book.

Contents

1 Introduction to Urban Villages and the Enforced Transience of Migrant Workers	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.1.1 Urban Village as Informality	1
1.1.2 Urban Village as Heterogeneity	7
1.2 Background: Shifting “Geography of Opportunity” of Migrant Housing in Beijing, China	12
1.2.1 Urban Village as a Networked and Opportunistic World	12
1.2.2 Urban Village as a Contested and Constitutive Space	17
1.3 What This Book Is About	24
1.3.1 Overarching Research Question	24
1.3.2 Overarching Research Aim	24
1.3.3 Detailed Questions and Specific Research Objectives	26
1.3.4 Rationale for the Study	26
1.4 Research Methods and Contexts	30
1.4.1 Selection of Beijing as a Case Study City	30
1.4.2 Research Methods	32
1.5 Organization of the Book: The Chapters	32
References	43
Part I Emerging Urban Village	
2 Emerging Urban Village and Legitimacy Debates: A Supply-Side Institutional Analysis	49
2.1 Introduction	49
2.2 Rural Land Development Rights as Peasants’ Right to the City	54
2.2.1 Peasants’ Right to the City	54
2.2.2 State Monopoly on Rural Land Conversion and Transaction	57

2.3	Peasants' Counterplots: Why Do the Authorities Tolerate Such Informal Markets?	60
2.3.1	Peasants' Informal Housing Markets	60
2.3.2	State Tolerance	62
2.3.3	An Institutional Analysis of State Acquiescence	66
2.4	Survey of Urban Villages in Haidian District: From State Tolerance to Growth Coalition	70
2.4.1	Xiaojahe Urban Village: Informal Rental Housing Market from the Supply Side	70
2.4.2	An Ongoing Debate on Land Monopoly and Rental Income Distribution	79
	References	85
3	Resilience of Housing Supply in Urban Villages for Migrant Groups: A Demand Side Investigation	93
3.1	Introduction	93
3.2	Tenure Hybridity/Continuum: From the Perspective of Lefebvrian "Planetary Urbanization"	97
3.2.1	An Overview of Lefebvrian "Planetary Urbanization"	97
3.2.2	A Need for "Tenure Continuum" Thinking in Our Age of Planetary Urbanization	101
3.2.3	Different Forms of Informal/Semi-Formal Tenure in a Global Context	103
3.3	Stratified Citizenship in Tenure Hybridity/Continuum — The Example of Migrant Children's Education	104
3.3.1	"Points System" and the Role of Tenure in it	104
3.3.2	Educational Policy for Migrant Children in Beijing	107
3.4	A Tenure Hybridity/Continuum Structure for Migrant Groups in Transitional Beijing	109
3.4.1	Tenure Hybridity/Continuum: Permanent or Transient?	109
3.4.2	A Proposed Structure for Tenure Hybridity/Continuum	112
3.4.3	Why Is Tenure Hybridity/Continuum a Resilient Arrangement in Urban China?	115
3.5	A Broader Scope of "Trans-Rural Network" for Multi-Site Tenure Strategy Between Village Home and Beijing	118
3.5.1	A Planetary Thinking on the Trans-Rural Network	118
3.5.2	The Importance of Rural Land Ownership in Rural-Urban Migration	120
	References	122
 Part II Erasing the Urban Village		
4	Urban Village Redevelopment in Beijing	133
4.1	Introduction: The State's Rationale for Urban Village Redevelopment	133

4.1.1	Dissolution of Patron-Client Relationships in the Urban Village	133
4.1.2	Beijing Urban Village Redevelopment: Development and Impact	136
4.2	Survey of Redeveloped Villages in Haidian, Beijing	141
4.2.1	Background of Haidian Urban Village Redevelopment	141
4.2.2	Haidian Model (海淀模式) as the Most Symbolic and Representative of Beijing's Urban Village Redevelopment	145
4.2.3	Survey Methods	155
4.3	Socio-Spatial Outcomes: Territorial Reconfiguration and Gentrification	159
4.3.1	Key Actors in the Formalization Process and Their Different Fates	159
4.3.2	Changes in the Rental Housing Market in the Redeveloped Urban Villages in Haidian District: 2009 to the Present	163
4.3.3	Haidian Model of Housing the Knowledge Economy	167
	References	176
5	Urban Village Sprawl After Demolition in Beijing	185
5.1	Introduction	185
5.1.1	The Role of the Urban Village Beyond “Flexible” Social Housing	185
5.1.2	Urban Villages to House the Knowledge Economy and Its Precarious Workers	187
5.2	A Review of Government Policies to Control Urban Village Sprawl in Beijing	191
5.2.1	Management and Demolition of Urban Villages	191
5.2.2	Changes in the Distribution of Migrant Groups in Beijing: 2000, 2010 and 2020 Census Data	195
5.3	Four Representative “Dispersal Routes” for Migrant Tenants Following the “Dispersal Policy” in Beijing	198
5.3.1	Dongxiaokou (Haidian-Changping-Chaoyang Interface): From the Largest Garbage Dumps to Urban Forest Parks	198
5.3.2	Dispersion of Migrant Garment Manufacturing and Wholesale Workers: From Fengtai to Daxing and Then to Hebei	201
5.3.3	Disappearance of Cuigezhuang Art Clans (near the 798 Art District) and Re-gathering of Dispersed Artists in Songzhuang	208
5.3.4	Shigezhuang Village in Huilongguan (Haidian-Changping Interface) as an Emerging Giant “Ant Tribe” Area	211
5.4	A Case Study of New Housing Opportunities for IT Workers during Urban Village Sprawl from Haidian to Changping	214
5.4.1	Why Did IT Workers Choose to Live in Urban Villages?	214

5.4.2 A Comparative Study to Track the Mobility
of IT Workers 217

5.4.3 How Have Migrant Tenants Responded to Demolition? . . . 221

References 224

Part III Preserving the Urban Village

**6 Grassroots in Incremental Village Redevelopment:
New Opportunities for Migrants in the Commons 235**

6.1 Introduction: Logics of Urban Village Redevelopment—
Commodification vs. Reciprocity in the Commons 235

6.1.1 Urban Village as Commons 235

6.1.2 Logic of Opportunism in the Ambiguities
of Collectively Owned Rural Land 238

6.2 Coevolving and Unitary Formality-Informality
for the Production of Urban Villages in Metropolises 244

6.2.1 Urban Village as Peri-Urban Mosaic in Constantly
Unresolved Tensions 244

6.2.2 Urban Village as a Formal-Informal Mix
in Micro-adaptation Processes 245

6.2.3 Case Study of a Garbage Dumping Village (Banjieta
Village 半截塔村) in Dongxiaokou Town,
Changping District 250

6.3 Issues of Rent Seeking, Appropriation and Provision
in the Incremental Modes of Artists’ and IT Workers’ Villages . . . 258

6.3.1 Urban Village as “Semicommons” for Migrant
Creative Workers 258

6.3.2 Urban Village as a Porous Space or Interstice
for Grassroots Rent Appropriation 262

6.3.3 Surveys on Heiqiao Art Village (黑桥村)
and Shigezhuang IT Ant Tribe (史各庄村)
in the Creative Economy 267

References 274

**7 Conclusion: Prospects for a Communal but Contested World—New
Opportunities for the Urban Village 279**

7.1 Summary of Findings 279

7.2 Originality of This Book 282

7.3 New Opportunities and Future Prospects: Dialogue
with Comparative Urbanism 283

References 284

Index 285

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Abbreviations

BOL	Build-Own-Lease
BOO	Build-Own-Operate
BOT	Build-Operate-Transfer
BTH	Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei
CBD	Central Business District
CCLE	Chongqing Country Land Exchange
CCTV	China Central Television
COE	Collectively-Owned Enterprises
FAR	Floor-to-Area Ratio
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GINs	Global Innovation Networks
Habitat III	Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
LGFVs	Local Government Financial Vehicles
LTRA	Long-Term Rental Apartments
Mao	Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-Tung)
NELM	New Economics of Labor Migration
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NIMBY	Not-In-My-Backyard
NPC	National People's Congress
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPP	Public-Private Partnerships
PRC	People's Republic of China
REITs	Real Estate Investment Trusts
RER	Regional Economic Resilience
RIS	Regional Innovation System
RMB	Renminbi (Chinese currency, Yuan)
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SOE	State-Owned Enterprises

STR	Short-Term Rental
TVEs	Township and Village Enterprises
UN	United Nations
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme

Chapter 1

Introduction to Urban Villages and the Enforced Transience of Migrant Workers



1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 *Urban Village as Informality*

Over the past four decades, Chinese metropolises, including Beijing, have witnessed the emergence, redevelopment, proliferation and persistence of informal habitats to accommodate low-wage migrant workers. Informal habitats take various forms, such as urban villages for the ant tribe,¹ underground accommodations for the rat tribe,² and capsule apartments³ that are widely dispersed in the old municipal and work-unit housing areas and newly built residential compounds (Huang and Yi 2015; Gu et al. 2015; Cook et al. 2013). In addition, “snail households” living in removable cargo

¹The “ant tribe” phenomenon, which refers to the spatial concentration of low-income graduates in urban villages, has attracted much attention from policymakers, academics and the public media (Lian 2010, 2011). With the expansion of higher education and the shortage of public housing, urban villages provide affordable but substandard housing for low-income graduates. Contrary to Lian’s (2010, 2011) pessimism about their housing crisis, Gu et al.’s (2015) and He’s (see He et al. 2011; He 2014) research on Tangjialing and Shigezhuang in Beijing and Xiadu and Nanting in Guangzhou has shown the vibrant life, rich community culture and strong group identity despite the harsh or even hostile physical environment of the villages. He (2014) and Gu and Smith (2020) also pointed out that studentification provides an important prism for understanding the ant tribe, and studentification could be a potential solution for upgrading urban villages.

²“Rat tribe” (or “mouse tribe,” *shu zu*) refers to basement tenants who live in overcrowded underground tunnels and basement cellars with no windows. Huang and Yi (2015) referred to these basement tenants as “invisible migrant enclaves.”

³“Capsule apartments” refer to the self-assembled small apartment structure that can transform private rental housing into multiple “capsules.” The capsule apartment is relatively small, with only a single bed. The Beijing Municipal Government issued the “Decision on Amending Several Regulations on Beijing Rental Housing Management (Draft)” in 2010, which requires a per capita building area of 10 square meters. According to the case study by Cook et al. (2013), the building floor area per capita is only 2.2 square meters.

containers and prefabricated metal shelters in Shanghai and Guangzhou (referred to as “containerization of migrant housing” or “container housing” as another form of precarity and informality) have received much attention (Ling 2021, 2022; Tang et al. 2021).

Among the various forms of illegality between the above informal habitats, Chinese migrants’ housing acquisition is predominantly dependent on illegitimate rental arrangements, where local landlords are their “patrons” and migrant tenants are their “agents.” In the presence of informality and illegality, surveillance and spatial governance by local state agents, as well as a landlord-tenant alliance and bottom-up conformity tactics, can sustain their structural development. The proliferation of informality with varying degrees of housing security has become inevitable as a result of the underprovision of public goods in a *quasi*-residential club economy, rather than the traditional municipal public sector economy, in China’s post-Mao urban governance and financing system (Webster and Lai 2003). Webster et al. (2016) point out that informality in Chinese cities is not equivalent to poverty. Nevertheless, it has a “substitution effect” in reducing poverty, as informality allows low-wage migrants to live at a lower cost than officially allowed. This allows migrants to spend more on other welfare-enhancing expenditures. There is still a long way to go in restructuring urban governance to accept informality as an economic and social contributor to urban growth.

Urban villages (namely *chengzhongcun* 城中村, literally meaning “villages in the city”) are representative of informal⁴ habitats in urban China (see Fig. 1.1). As argued by Wu et al. (2013), the applicability of the concept of “informality” to transitional China is indeed debated, as squatting is prohibited and then so rare as to be almost non-existent in the country. Urban villages, dubbed China’s “*favelas*” by Webster et al. (2016), are seen as a globally unique property system that can innovate the way informality is defined (Zhao and Webster 2011). For example, the functioning of informal tenure in urban villages is illegal, but partially legal.⁵ Classifying tenure as either formal or informal is not sufficient to identify owner-occupied and rented types. “Development rights” and “citizenship rights” are contested and crucial.

On the one hand, China’s urban villages are emerging through the co-evolution of urban economies and rural collectives. Interestingly, the latter (village land power) can to some extent withstand the former (local state power) because rural collectives were granted collective ownership of rural land in a pre-reform people’s commune

⁴According to Wu (2018), there are three sources of informalities in urban villages in China: (a) the lax rural land use regulation due to the ambiguity of rural collective ownership in the Chinese Land Law; (b) the farmland acquisition process, which omits the overcrowded rural residential plots in villages to save land development costs; and c) the municipal public services do not cover rural villages, so village collectives provide the informal and private services.

⁵Squatting means that occupation and development have taken place without the formal consent of the landowners—the rights to the squatted land are therefore illegal and the settlements are informal (Roy 2005, 2009; Vasudevan 2014). In China’s informal settlements, however, urban village tenants have signed leases with landlords, a regularized form of tenure.



Fig. 1.1 Typical urban villages and redevelopment in Beijing. **(a1, a2 and a3)** Shucun 树村 is a famous rock and roll village in Haidian District. **(b1, b2 and b3)** Nanxiaojie 南小街村 is a garment manufacturing village in Daxing District. (Source from fieldwork in 2016 and 2017. Photographs by the book author)

system (Liu et al. 2012). This kind of collective land ownership is also a monopoly power, especially when rural collectives supply the scarce land in prime locations to the urban growth system. Liede village (猎德村, see Fig. 1.2) is a widely cited case due to the timing of its redevelopment—it was an urgent political task for the Guangzhou government to renovate the informality that was at the heart of the CBD and also on the route to the site of the Guangzhou Asian Games in 2010 (Lin et al. 2011; Wu 2018). Wu (2018) elaborates on the uniquely Chinese character of “state entrepreneurialism,” which combines two seemingly contradictory trends: the use of market instruments and the strengthening of state control. Interestingly, the contradiction of these tendencies in the Chinese case is essential for understanding the uniqueness of the Chinese-style “growth machine,” which provides space and interstices for village landlords and migrant tenants to enable their agency and also maintain their own spaces (namely informality) in state-led development. In the case of Liede village, collective village governance is preserved through redevelopment, even though the village landscape has been completely modernized. Wu et al. (2013) suggest that since the redevelopment of the urban village, a new form of informality—state-sanctioned informal development—has been introduced.



Fig. 1.2 Liède village 猎德村 in the heart of Guangzhou’s CBD. (a) Village gate. (b) Resettlement housing. (c) Restoration of their ancestral temple. (d) The administrative center of the village compound. (Source from fieldwork in 2018. Photographs by the author)

On the other hand, rural collective property is ambiguous and uncertain in competition with formal property rights. In urban villages, there is always a high risk of government interference and forced demolition. Key stakeholders (including local government cadres, developers, villagers, buyers and tenants) often compete for access to collectively owned land, creating a multi-stakeholder equilibrium. One result of ambiguous property rights is that land development is highly unpredictable and valuable assets are left in the public domain (Barzel 1989; Zhu 2005). Through two case studies of Beijing in China and Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam, Zhu and Hu (2009), Zhu (2012) cited the concept of “commons”⁶ to explain land development problems in high-density urbanizing Asia, such as underutilization/underinvestment

⁶“Commons” refers to property rights with open access to resources. As pointed out by Hardin (1968), individuals seeking personal gain will lead to the depletion of public resources through overconsumption and underinvestment (i.e. the “tragedy of the commons”). “Anticommons” are “hold-out” problems where multiple owners can exclude each other from effectively mobilizing resources.

of scarce land resources, overconsumption of scarce environmental amenities, and rent dissipation phenomena.

In the case of *semi*-open access to resources, the functioning of informal property rights depends on multiple strategic interactions between local governments and multiple stakeholders (Lin and Lin 2023). From an institutions-as-equilibria perspective, Lin and Lin (2023) compared the key variables contributing to the diverse practices and divergent fortunes of informal property rights in different Chinese cities—flourishing in Shenzhen, selectively interfered with in Beijing, and eliminated in Sanya. Figure 1.3 shows the different urban village redevelopments in different cities in China, based on the book author’s field trips to Beijing, Guangzhou and Shenzhen.

- (a) Beijing selectively demolished urban villages and resettled local landlords, as illustrated by the redevelopment of Sungezhuang village (孙各庄村) in Tongzhou District (see a1 and a2 in Fig. 1.3).
- (b) Guangzhou adopted similar demolition and redevelopment strategies in key locations such as Liede village (猎德村, see Fig. 1.2) and Xian village (冼村, see b1 and b2 in Fig. 1.3) in the heart of the CBD.
- (c) Shenzhen financed large-scale urban village renewal with densification and gentrification on the spot, such as Caiwuwei village (蔡屋围村, see c1 and c2 in Fig. 1.3), which was partially demolished to make way for the high-rise buildings in Shenzhen’s financial center. After receiving high compensation, the Caiwuwei Village Joint Stock Company and the local government sought new development opportunities to redevelop the rest of the village.

Beijing did not adopt the micro-regeneration strategy of Shenzhen (c1 and c2 in Fig. 1.3). Instead, Beijing opted for a large-scale redevelopment of the entire urban village to build new public housing and innovative incubators. Figure 1.4 shows the demonstration of public housing projects in Haidian District, Beijing. The local government completely demolished Tangjialing village (唐家岭村, see photo a in Fig. 1.4) and Huanghoudian village (皇后店村, see b in Fig. 1.4). The villages were rebuilt as resettlement housing, and some were designated as public housing for talented employees of Haidian’s giant IT companies. Zhongguancun Inno Town, which was built on the site of Dongbutou village (东埠头村, see c1, c2, and c3 in Fig. 1.4), is very special—it was planned to be the “maker’s paradise” (called *chuangke* 创客, creative professional), synonymous with Beijing’s creativity and innovation. Start-up companies and talents can apply for government subsidies such as rent waivers or reductions. Through this mode of urban village redevelopment in Haidian, local landlords have been resettled and can earn higher rental income from these upgraded innovative sectors and high-quality talents. The “parkization” (Yuanquhua 园区化) of the redeveloped urban village was supported by local governments, and the rural collective lands were preserved—this is indeed the Beijing mode of state-sanctioned informal development (such as Liede village in Guangzhou, see Time-weekly 2017). This book discusses this policy shift in Beijing, which avoids the social contestation generated by large-scale redevelopment, but invokes changes in tenant structure.



Fig. 1.3 Urban village redevelopment in Beijing, Guangzhou and Shenzhen. **(a1 and a2)** Sungezhuang village 孙各庄村 demolition and resettlement in 2016 in Beijing. **(b1 and b2)** Xian village 洗村 demolition and resettlement in 2018 in Guangzhou. **(c1 and c2)** Redevelopment of Caiwuwei 蔡屋围村 in 2023 in Shenzhen. (Source from fieldwork in 2016, 2018 and 2023. Photographs by the book author)

Similar institutional and political economic analysis is needed to better understand the spatial variation of informal property rights at finer scales, such as within cities and communities, where bargaining power varies in nature, type and process



Fig. 1.4 Urban villages redeveloped into talent housing projects in Haidian, Beijing. (a) Tangjialing village 唐家岭村 was a famous IT village that was redeveloped into public housing. (b) Huanghodian village 皇后店村 was demolished and rebuilt into public housing. (c1, c2, and c3) Zhongguancun Inno Town was redeveloped from Dongbutou village 东埠头村 into an innovation incubator and public housing for start-ups. (Source from fieldwork in 2019. Photos by the book author)

from case to case. However, the operation and variation of informal property rights have rarely been compared across different urban villages in transitional China.

1.1.2 *Urban Village as Heterogeneity*

Low-wage migrants in major Chinese gateway cities, such as Beijing, are mostly accommodated in matchbox-like village housing units, which are poorly constructed and equipped, and largely inconveniently located (Zhang 2001; Zheng et al. 2009; Fan 2011; Liu 2015). Interestingly, the spatial heterogeneity of urban villages in Beijing is somewhat similar to the geography of immigrant clusters in global cities in the US, such as Los Angeles and San Francisco. A large body of literature has demonstrated that different origins are associated with different patterns of settlement and integration in the US immigrant gateway. Upward mobility occurs across



Fig. 1.5 Xiao village 肖村 (near the Xiao village subway station and the Fengtai-Chaoyang interface) as an early cluster of platform delivery workers in Beijing. (Source from fieldwork in 2016. Photographs by the book author)

the ethno-racial dichotomy, but through the ethnic community (Zhou and DiRago 2023; Logan 2011; Massey and Denton 1993). In this sense, “spatialization” has become essential to life chances and upward mobility. Los Angeles is the site of new “spatialized” social groups that were previously distinct and now occupy the same place. As Lee and Zhou (2015) argue, a globalized post-Fordist economy has combined with immigrant selectivity to create a stratified workforce in the US immigrant gateway—hyper- and hypo-selected immigrant groups are increasingly bifurcated between college-educated professionals and low-wage service workers in a post-Fordist, deregulated and globalized economy. Strikingly, migrants in transitional Beijing are also everywhere, and their informal settlements (like urban villages) are concentrated yet diffuse, heavily interspersed with local urban dimensions.

This spatial patterning would underscore a different but similar “spatialized” feature of in-migration between Beijing and US immigrant gateway cities. The “spatialization” of urban villages is made more complex, dynamic and evolving by the dramatic shifts from old Fordist manufacturing systems to the post-Fordist, service-based and digitalized economy. Many migrant entrepreneurs or tenants find urban villages favorable locations when seeking market opportunities, recognition and closer integration with nearby mainstream institutions. Many urban village tenants are engaged in mobility work that closely intersects urban spatial dimensions. Relevant empirical studies conducted in Beijing over the past decade include the politics of space production by migrant tenants in diversified urban villages.

Platformed Delivery Workers in the Urban Village Most delivery workers are young male migrants who have either graduated from vocational schools or come from the manufacturing, construction, and garment sectors, and who intend to live in some urban villages, such as Xiaocun (肖村, see Fig. 1.5), Feijiacun (费家村), and Yinmajing (饮马井). As explored by Sun and Zhao (2022), the spatial setting of an

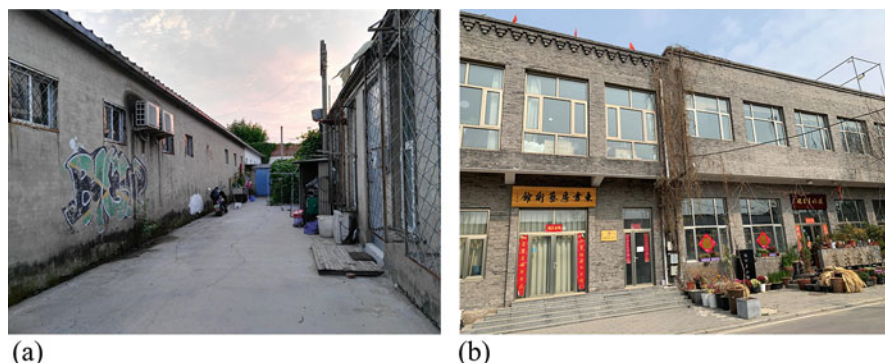


Fig. 1.6 Heiqiao 黑桥 art village in Chaoyang District (a) and Songzhuang 宋庄 art village in Tongzhou District (b). (Source from fieldwork in 2016 and 2023. Photographs by the book author)

urban village promotes a safety net, especially for newcomers, to gain a foothold in the city and the platform industry. Informality (such as the urban village) and platformed integration can provide migrant workers with a high degree of “autonomy,” while at the same time disciplining and monitoring them. For this reason, an urban village is a key site of opportunity and can simultaneously be a site of negotiation and self-creation (Visser et al. 2017; Van Doorn et al. 2020).

Art Villages Liu et al.’s (2013) fieldwork on the evolution and relocation of Beijing’s “art villages” tells us about the intersectional relationships between urban villages and cultural and creative industries. The boom in art villages may reflect a continuous search for suitable art studios, residences and galleries by some creative but often financially poor artists. As their study of Yuanmingyuan art village (the first phase of Beijing’s “art villages” in the early 1990s in a village near Peking University in Haidian District), Songzhuang (宋庄, see b in Fig. 1.6) and some art villages around Factory 798 (such as Heiqiao 黑桥, see a in Fig. 1.6), one of the reasons the village can attract artists is “freedom”—fewer administrative restrictions on art making and more tolerance for their bohemian lifestyle. Ren and Sun (2012) also highlight the spatial strategies of the local state to extend its control over these artists through the “districtification” of former artists’ villages—the designation of former art villages as official cultural and creative industry clusters. The art village is a site of great social and intellectual turbulence (the creative urban milieu and “not comfortable” places, see Hall 2000: 646) and a site of new state control over cultural production. In response, artists are relocating to new areas away from state surveillance and real estate fever (Ren and Sun 2012; Liu et al. 2013).

Ant Tribes Gu et al.’s (2015) study of the two ant tribes—Tangjialing (唐家岭村) and Shigezhuang (史各庄村, see Fig. 1.7)—can provide a clear picture to interpret how the low-income college graduates have clustered in the urban villages. The two ant tribes are close to the high-tech employment centers in Beijing (e.g. Zhongguancun 中关村 Science and Technology Park, Shangdi 上地 Software

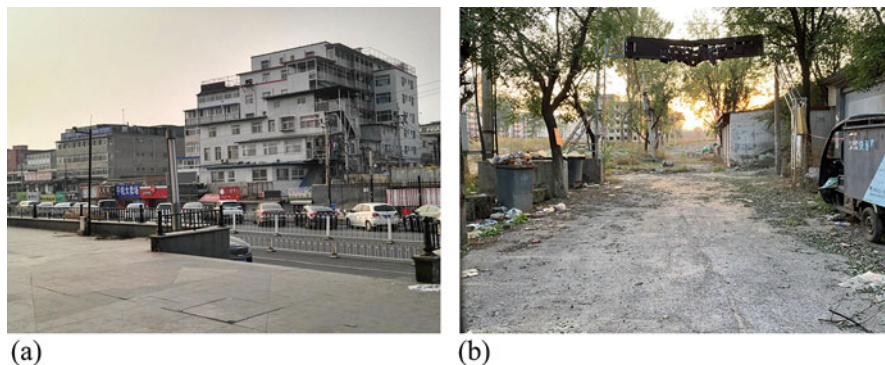


Fig. 1.7 Shigezhuang 史各庄 IT worker village in the Changping-Haidian interface (a) and its demolition in 2021 (b). (Source from fieldwork in 2018 and 2021. Photographs by the book author)



Fig. 1.8 Banjieta 半截塔 garbage dumping village in the Changping-Haidian interface. (Source from fieldwork in 2016. Photographs by the book author)

Industry Center, and Beijing Aerospace), and there are many bus lines and subways between Tangjialing and Shigezhuang and these employment centers. Low-income college graduates share the vibrant street life and rich community culture of the ant tribe, although the physical environment in the rural village is harsh.

Garbage Dumps in the Urban Village Kao and Lin’s (2018) research on Beijing’s garbage dumps in urban villages recounts another form of “otherness,” in which a weakening of governance capacity has opened up an important space. In this new space, the disadvantaged groups (including villagers as dump managers and rule enactors, and migrants as truckers) can create new geographies of dumping as a result of their manoeuvres for survival (Fig. 1.8).

Factories, Warehouses and Recycling Yards in the Urban Village The research on the displacement events in Beijing’s Xinjian village (新建村) proved that the



Fig. 1.9 Two representative garment villages. (a) Zhejiangcun 浙江村 (including Deng village 邓村 and Ma village 马村) in Fengtai District. (b) Nanxiaojie 南小街 village in Daxing. (Source from field research in 2016 and 2017. Photographs by the author)

urban village has become a site of spatial governance and control, and a medium for techniques of control over the migrant population (Morris 2022). In the model of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei city region, Beijing is a site of governance and administrative functions and is home to “world-class” functions. Non-capital functions (*fei shoudu gongneng* 非首都功能) such as manufacturing (see Fig. 1.9) and logistics have been relocated to Hebei Province. The dispersal is a sectoral spatial upgrading initiative to address the “urban ills” caused by the migrant explosion—Beijing’s population is expected to stabilize. To facilitate this process, the city of Langfang (廊坊市), near Beijing, was chosen as the site for the resettlement. The migrant tenants of Beijing’s urban villages have moved to Langfang following the government’s intervention and demolition of the villages.

For an example of such heterogeneity in Beijing’s urban village, let us return to the theme of difference and multiplicity beyond a formal vs. informal binary hierarchy. “Difference” involves differential relations between heterogeneous components that are at the same time connected. Before we ask the Socratic question “What is...?” or define the “being” of a thing, we can gain knowledge by understanding “What is a differential” (e.g. “Which?” “Where?” “When?” “How?” ...) that is immanent in the processes that structure it (Smith 2014). There is a self-organization of multiple processes of a “differential.” For example, urban villages emerge when the uneven capacity to govern a piece of rural land (by multiple actors) can open up a “contested space,” especially for disadvantaged social actors, including low-wage migrant tenants. However, our focus would not be on the Foucaultian critique of spatial governance or governmentality, such as displacement events, village demolition, rezoning and *in situ* renovation. In particular, this book highlights a “connected structure” of urban villages as a whole, as well as their “contested spaces” and “constitutive processes” as a “being.”

This book develops three propositions for the analysis of Beijing's urban village—connectivity, contestation and constitutiveness to overcome the dualist analysis of formal vs. informal settlements. The book takes the form of a critical dialogue with the literature of geographical analysis, political sociology and real estate economics to address the shifting “geography of opportunity” of migrant housing against the backdrop of urban village redevelopment in major Chinese gateway cities such as Beijing. Building on the philosophies and theories of space and rights claims of Henri Lefebvre, Gilles Deleuze, Elinor Ostrom, David Harvey and Neil Smith, this book aims to shed light on the changing low-income housing opportunities of migrant workers as local authorities have cleared many urban villages over the past decade. It argues for a social constructivist understanding of urban village redevelopment in Beijing and its impact on migrant workers' housing opportunities, which are highly dependent on the specific constitutive role of the spatio-temporal context on a case-by-case basis.

1.2 Background: Shifting “Geography of Opportunity” of Migrant Housing in Beijing, China

1.2.1 Urban Village as a Networked and Opportunistic World

1.2.1.1 The Logic of Opportunism Under State Entrepreneurialism

The transition from Mao to Deng was marked by a series of pro-market reforms, resource mobilization and devolution of power to the regions, as well as the entrepreneurialism of urban governance⁷ (Harvey 1989, 1994). Smith (1994), Hall and Hubbard (1996) argue that entrepreneurial forms of governance have produced a new urban geography that requires a rethinking of issues of social justice in the city. Transitional China is no exception. In the varieties of urban entrepreneurialism elaborated by Wu (2017, 2018, 2020), “state entrepreneurialism” with Chinese

⁷Entrepreneurialism of urban governance replaced urban managerialism (in the 1960s) as the central motif of urban action. As Harvey (1994: 365) argued, the rise of the “entrepreneurial city” refers to increased inter-urban competition on a number of dimensions. Harvey argues that we can divide this competition into four different forms: (a) competition for a better position in the international division of labor; (b) competition for position as a center of consumption; (c) competition for control and command functions (especially financial and administrative powers); and (d) competition for government redistribution of various forms of expenditure. According to Harvey (1994), the four forms of competition are not mutually exclusive, and the mix and timing of these strategies are pursued in relation to global shifts to (re)produce the uneven fortunes of urban regions. Recent studies have focused on the transformation of traditional public administration into a “new urban managerialism” (including outsourcing and the competitive tendering of public services and public-private partnerships, PPP) and the mutation of urban entrepreneurialism into a “financialized” value extraction machine in the post-crisis West (Phelps and Miao 2020; Beswick and Penny 2018).

characteristics is a mode of urban governance that witnesses the transformation of the state into an entrepreneurial market agency through a combination of planning centrality and market instruments—namely, “the state acts through the market rather than just being market-friendly” (Wu 2020: 326). Wu (2020) also pointed to the speculative nature of state-led entrepreneurial governance and the trend of its mutation into financialized governance (namely, new debt-machine dynamics in systemic financialization).

Interestingly, informality and the governance of informality are also intertwined with “state entrepreneurialism” and its financialized mode of governance. On the one hand, the entrepreneurial governance exercised by local governments can maintain some discretion through state-sanctioned informality and informal practices as exempt from central control (Wu 2018). The old “world factory” development model had mobilized internal labor mobility and local land transfers to enhance China’s export-led global competitiveness. The entrepreneurial local state and rural collectives ensure the supply of low-cost land and low-wage migrant labor for industrial activities—with the local state maintaining its monopoly position in land acquisition and rural-urban land transformation. On the other hand, urban villages and unauthorized buildings have sheltered low-wage migrant workers for their social reproduction process. The importance of informality and informal practices can be seen in reducing the costs of urbanization as China’s capital accumulation expands and relies on overseas markets rather than domestic demand and mass consumption by the internal labor force. 375.8 million migrant workers⁸ (124.8 million inter-provincial and 251 million intra-provincial) account for 26.6% of China’s 1.41 billion population, many of whom have not yet acquired urban citizenship and are seeking employment opportunities by adopting the multi-location livelihood strategies (2020 census data, see Chinese National Bureau of Statistics 2021). According to the seventh National Population Census 2020, migrants account for 38.4% of all permanent residents in Beijing, despite a slight decline in the migrant population since 2016 (see Fig. 1.10).

Against the backdrop of “state entrepreneurialism,” city governments also play an important role in influencing or managing the scale and direction of migration—this is the Chinese variant of Zelinsky’s mobility transition model (see Skeldon 2019; Zhu 2018; Tan and Zhu 2021). Job opportunities are determined by demand and supply-side determinants of the urban labor market. There is a paradox between the demand-side need for cheap labor and the supply-side circularity, trans-locality or multi-locality livelihood strategies of migrants. Its urban informality and governance have constituted a flexible accumulation system to accommodate migrants’ multi-locality livelihoods on the supply side of “state entrepreneurialism” when inter-urban competition is intense. For this reason, the urban village is never a contradictory example of local spatial governance. On the contrary, migrants seek opportunities in a more flexible labor process than was planned before 1978.

⁸“Migrants” are those who have lived for at least 6 months after leaving a registered household place (hujidi 户籍地).

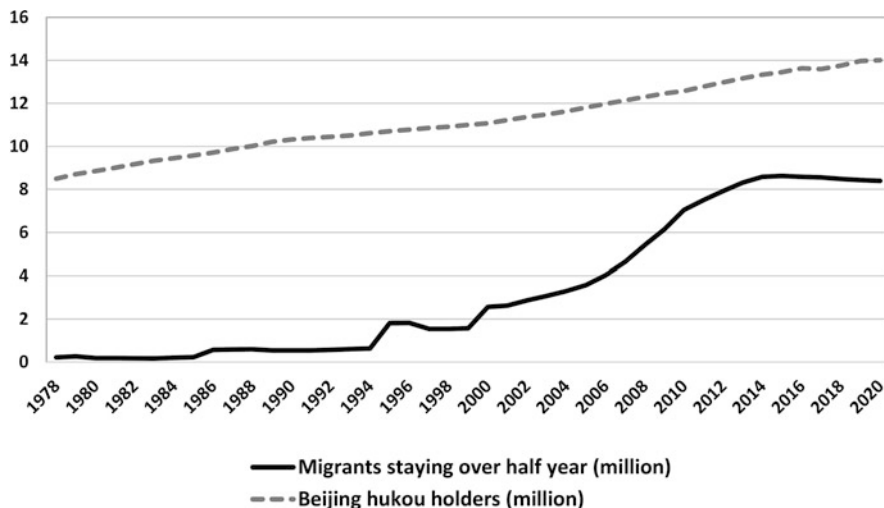


Fig. 1.10 Growth of migrants and local *hukou* holders in Beijing, 1978–2020 (Based on Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics, 2021)

On the other hand, those who choose an urban village (landlords and tenants) cannot be described as mere victims of the hyper-growth of an informal economy. The urban village is often an opportunistic world for migrant workers. China’s market-led reforms are proceeding in a progressive and dual-track⁹ manner, maintaining a residence control (urban vs. rural *hukou*,¹⁰ local vs. non-local

⁹“Dual track” is seen as a hotbed of social injustice. Since the beginning of housing reforms in the 1980s, the system of housing provision in urban China has gradually shifted from one dominated by the public sector to one oriented by the private market. Housing privatization has given rise to a dual-track housing system, characterized by the coexistence of the “plan track” and the newly introduced “market track.” The dual-track system of land allocation and housing provision is also a long-standing dilemma that has led to inequality and distributive injustice (Chan and Buckingham 2008; Hsing 2010; Lin 2009).

¹⁰“*Hukou*” refers to the system of residence permits (namely the household registration system) that separates the rural population from the urban population, and the local population from the non-local. In a centrally planned economy and during a period of transition, the *hukou* system grants a wide range of social benefits and rights to the urban population, while denying them to the rural population. In July 2014, China’s State Council issued the “Advice on Further Innovation of the *Hukou* System,” which set out a new policy for *hukou* reform, whereby Chinese citizens would no longer be divided into rural and urban (as they had been since 1958), but would instead be universally registered as “residents” (jumin 居民). From 1984 to 2015, a migrant worker had the right to work in the city with a temporary residence permit (zanjuzheng 暂居证), renewable every 1 or 2 years, subject to proof of employment. During this period, migrants maintained their non-resident status and enjoyed relatively few social benefits in the host city. Since 2015, the new “residence permit” (juzhuzheng 居住证) system for migrants has been applied nationwide (see the 2015 Interim Regulations on Residence Permits). At the same time, a new “points system” (jifenzhi 积分制) for transferring to local *hukou* was also introduced to ensure that migrants can

hukou) and the plan-market dual-track land system (rural vs. urban, non-marketized vs. marketized, see Lin 2009; Lin and Ho 2005; Wang et al. 2012; Hsing 2010; Chan and Buckingham 2008). In the dual-track and mixed system, the institutional-geographical boundaries are not completely closed, but porous. Migrants can build up their heterogeneous trans-local “mobility capital”,¹¹ and networks, especially in the informal environments between origin and destination. Rather than segmented village boundaries separating the migrant enclave from an open metropolitan economy, it is found that the high concentration of rural migrants and small-scale garment producers in Beijing (Zhejiangcun 浙江村) and Guangzhou (Xiaohubei 小湖北村) have become active agents in forging domestic and global market interactions and maintaining the nationwide trans-local network (such as raising financial capital, acquiring business information, recruiting new employees, and seeking a normative right to community development where possible, see Zhang 2002; Liu et al. 2015). More impressively, the functions and forms of the urban village vary greatly from case to case, depending on the market opportunities they can find to serve the Beijing metropolis, the entrepreneurial skills of the grassroots, and the willingness of the local state to tolerate the illegal practices.

1.2.1.2 Redefining Urban Village in an Open and Mixed Economy

Interestingly, Beijing’s heterogeneous urban village economy is somewhat similar to the rapid growth of immigrant ethnic economies in Los Angeles in the 1990s. Nee et al. (1994) noted that in ethnically heterogeneous cities such as Los Angeles, ethnic boundaries are porous and interethnic economic transactions are mediated through the growing mixed economy. Harvey (1994) also noted the informal provision of services (such as babysitting, laundry, cleaning, repair, and other odd jobs) that emerged as an important aspects of the New York and Los Angeles economies in the 1970s. Harvey argued that this informality, which emerged during the service-oriented transformation, was in fact an increasing commodification of the traditional system of mutual aid within low-income communities (ibid)—he therefore defined informality more broadly across an entire US urban system. Harvey (1994: 373) argued that the informalization observed in US and European cities brought “the urban process in the advanced capitalist countries as a whole much closer to the

enjoy a similar level of public services as local urban residents (Chan 2018; Chan and Wei 2019). The 2014 *hukou* reform policy opens up smaller cities and controls megacities. As a result, *hukou* restrictions have mainly been lifted in smaller cities and towns and eased in third- and fourth-tier cities, but restrictions remain strong in megacities. In 2019, the State Council issued an opinion calling for *hukou* restrictions to be lifted in all mainland Chinese cities with fewer than three million permanent residents. *Hukou* restrictions will be relaxed in large cities with three to five million permanent residents, and simplified in large first- and second-tier cities.

¹¹“Mobility capital” refers to the uneven distribution of capacities and potentials for mobility in terms of the surrounding physical, social and political opportunities for movement (see Kaufmann et al. 2004; Erel 2010; Sheller 2014).