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Cecilia Wong, Miao Qiao and Wei Zheng

# 'Dispersing, regulating and upgrading' urban villages in suburban Beijing

Urban villages in China are very much a phenomenon of socio-spatial segregation rooted in deeply institutionalised urban–rural administrative dualism. This paper makes an original contribution to the debate by examining the role played by planning policies and measures in the redevelopment of urban villages in suburban Beijing under the state's National New Urbanisation Plan. By taking a spatial perspective, the analysis unpacks the dynamics between the top-down planning approach and three case-study urban villages, especially how the villages have responded differently to the implementation of the new urbanisation strategies. Our findings shed light on the Chinese state's ambitious strategy of restructuring informal urban spaces and activities under the rhetoric of 'ecological civilisation' and reconfiguring both people and activities into hierarchical city clusters.

**Keywords**: urban village, China, spatial restructuring, suburban Beijing, urbanisation

## Introduction

In China, urban villages, 'villages in the city' or *chengzhongcun*, are very much a phenomenon of socio-spatial segregation rooted in deeply institutionalised urban–rural administrative dualism (Liu et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2013). Urban land, where development is formally planned under urban master plans, is owned by the state, whereas land in rural villages is collectively owned by villagers and not within the scope of formal planning. Land in rural areas can only be planned for development after being expropriated and converted into 'construction land'. Due to the high compensation cost involved in relocating villagers, urban expansion simply encircles land around the village and results in a 'village in the city'. Rapid urbanisation in Chinese cities, especially since the turn of the millennium, means that planned urban expansion besieges rural villages in the peri-urban areas without integrating them into formal urban development. This bewildered landscape is similar to what McGee (1991) described as *desakota* in South East Asia, where urban and rural settlements intermingled and coexisted.

With the pace of the economic and spatial growth gathered in China's largest cities, new urban villages have been formed at the edge of continuously expanded suburban areas. Despite the large number of studies on urban villages, they tend to focus on internal housing and living conditions and socio-economic issues in large

Cecilia Wong is Professor of Spatial Planning, Dr Miao Qiao and Dr Wei Zheng are Research Associates, at the Manchester Urban Institute, Department of Planning and Environmental Management, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL, UK; email: cecilia.wong@manchester.ac.uk; qiaomiaojoe@163.com; helen.zheng@manchester.ac.uk

cities such as Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Shanghai and Beijing (e.g. Li and Wu, 2013; Du and Li, 2010; Zheng et al., 2009), but less so on the *spatial planning* of the village's restructuring process. Through its National New Urbanisation Plan (NUP), the Chinese state has shifted its urban development strategy towards a more human-centred and environmentally sustainable approach (State Council, 2014). This paper aims to make an original contribution by examining the 'paradigm shift' in China's urban policies under the NUP and how this has been translated into local planning policies and measures that impact on the redevelopment of urban villages in the suburban area of the Beijing metropolitan region. By taking a spatial perspective, our analysis focuses on the dynamics between the government's top-down planning approach and the urban village's response, at the neighbourhood level, to the restructuring of the transient peri-urban space. The discussion will shed light on China's ambitious strategy of restructuring informal urban spaces and activities under the rhetoric of 'ecological civilisation' and reconfiguring both people and activities into hierarchical city clusters.

## The urban village: a socio-spatial product of urbanisation

Following China's open-door policy in the late 1970s, many small towns and villages experienced an initial period of *in situ* urbanisation after the rise of township and village enterprises. However, there were major policy shifts in the 1990s that prioritised development such as industrial parks and real estate in large cities, which were further elevated by deepening market reforms after the year 2000. With state-directed investment concentrated in large cities, urban expansion has been rampant, fuelled by local financing schemes that are heavily reliant on the sale revenue of expropriated rural land (Qian and Wong, 2012; Zhang and Wu, 2006). As urban expansion pushes its frontier, rural villages have been drawn into peripheral urbanisation processes. Given the ambiguity of development rights in collectively owned rural land, indigenous villagers have started to construct illegal buildings and extend their own homes for rental income (Wu et al., 2013).

The formation of the urban village is very much related to the complex interaction between dual land ownership and the stringent household registration system (*hukou*). Despite disordered and illegal construction, the organic development of urban villages has served a critical and positive role in providing inexpensive housing for low-income residents and the rural migrant workforce (Hao et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2009). Most rural migrants, without urban *hukou*, are not eligible for government-subsidised affordable housing and are priced out of commodity housing. They tend to live in factory housing units or rent in urban villages. The formation of informal housing markets in unruly urban villages has thus been tolerated (Liu et al., 2012). Urban villages also cushion social conflicts brought by rapid urbanisation strategies,

as landless farmers and indigenous villagers can secure rental income (e.g. contracting out farmland or leasing dwelling space) to free them from laborious agricultural work (Liu et al., 2010; Zheng et al., 2009). There is, however, a stratified structure within the neighbourhood, with indigenous villagers on the top as a petty rentier class with *de facto* right over the collectively owned land; rural migrants at the bottom enduring poor living quality and higher rent levels; and urban *hukou* tenants in between, renting within easy commuting distance (He et al., 2010).

While urban villages are regarded by some as a self-help and practical model of providing low-cost housing for the least advantaged (Chan et al., 2003; Zhang et al., 2003), they come with the costs of a dilapidated environment, security risks, unfair income distribution, public revenue loss and a lack of social cohesion (Tian, 2008). As urbanisation continues, these 'shanty towns' become eyesores in the modernised urban mosaic and obstruct development in what has become a downtown location with prime land value. With the gradual introduction of government-led redevelopment programmes to urban villages, many indigenous villagers were relocated and compensated for their loss of land and property, whereas tenants were simply evicted without any compensation. Such redevelopment has squeezed migrant workers out of housing space (Wu, 2016b) and is seen as a redistribution of interest by increasing land value (Zhou, 2014). Under Beijing's redevelopment initiatives, new housing estates constructed on former village sites are found occupied by high-income tenants/owners, while low-income migrants are forced to move further afield (Liu and Wong, 2018).

Redevelopment policies often result in gentrified neighbourhoods and have negative consequences on the urban poor (Song et al., 2008; Davidson and Lees, 2005). London's first council estate in the 'Boundary Street', widely seen as at the vanguard of a progressive social agenda, has more recently been argued as an early example of 'social cleansing' as only eleven out of 5,700 residents moved back to the newly developed council flats in the 1890s (Wise, 2018, 28). The social and community impact brought about by drastic slum clearance in London's Bethnal Green in the late 1950s is another well-documented example (Young and Willmott, 1957). The radical concept of 'expulsions' was adopted by Sassen (2010; 2014) to highlight the 'savage sorting' process of winners and losers for capital accumulation and economic growth since the 1980s. Her empirical analysis documents the destructive and brutal process of people being made redundant from their livelihoods and living spaces at the 'systemic edges' where diverse socio-economic and institutional systems are in play (Sassen, 2014). Her case studies, found in socialist and capitalist societies across both the global North and global South, capture a wide range of phenomena of socio-economic inequalities, from shrinking economic spaces and housing crisis under the financial crash in North American cities through to land grabs and agricultural degradation in Asia and Africa.

The peri-urban area is a flexible and transitional space in a constant state of flux to

accommodate migration and heterogeneous production and consumption functions (Rauws and de Roo, 2013; Gallent, 2006). The unique settlement pattern of the urban village as an 'unregulated asset and transitional neighbourhood' (Liu et al., 2010, 136) should be seen as the socio-spatial product of China's rapid urbanisation process (Zhang et al., 2003). The rampant conversion of land use has been the driver of urban village formation, but this land-centred approach to revenue generation also led to their demise in the process of urban gentrification (Wang et al., 2009). The emergence, proliferation and regeneration of urban villages epitomise the intersection of different institutional, social and economic factors. Based on the discussion above, the driving forces and impacts on urban villages brought by the recent 'paradigm shift' in China's urban policies will be examined by addressing four main research questions, which will then be followed by a discussion to draw out key policy implications. The four main research questions are:

- What political and institutional forces shape the rationale and logic underpinning the new urbanisation strategy?
- What restructuring measures are adopted locally to deliver state policies and strategies?
- What are the relationships between urbanisation and the socio-spatial order of places?
- What are the socio-spatial impacts on urban villages brought by new types of urbanisation and what are the responses and predatory formation of new interests in the reclaimed space of urban villages?

## Spatial restructuring: from local problems to new urbanisation planning

As a centralised state, the *structural* policy frameworks of central government are particularly forceful in framing and reframing spatial development in China. Until recently, the urban village was very much regarded as a *local* problem resulting from urban expansion led by local government. The redevelopment of urban villages has often been incentivised by local commercial and economic interests and the need to upgrade a messy landscape for major sports events (Zhou, 2014). However, the model of redevelopment is very much contingent on the prevailing local conditions and local policies. For example, Guangzhou's One Village One Policy (Lin et al., 2015), Foshan's Three Old renewal (Sun et al., 2011), and Shenzhen's 'urban regeneration scheme' (Lai et al., 2017) all exhibit different levels of community participation and innovative institutional arrangements. Since 2014, central government has been rolling out a new urbanisation agenda to put a halt on land-centred development in large cities, with top-down goals such as urban–rural integration, growth containment and environmental sustainability. With heightened pressure to

achieve these goals, the spatial restructuring of urban villages has to be examined in an emerging policy context.

The election of President Xi in 2013 marked the beginning of a new generation of central leadership, envisioning a new path of economic development. Rather than continuing the historic, double-digit GDP growth rate, the government aims to rebalance its economy to achieve quality growth at a 'new normal' medium to high rate. Meanwhile, there is a concomitant shift towards a 'new type of urbanisation' through holistic state planning. The NUP is an ambitious economic stimulation strategy that moves away from heavy industries to domestic consumption, addresses urban–rural inequalities and promotes environmental sustainability (Wang et al., 2016). The NUP aims to get 100 million migrant workers an urban *hukou* and to find land to build 30 million housing units with associated public amenities and infrastructure by 2020.

These long-term state policy visions are unified by the concept of '*ecological civilisation*' introduced in the 12th Five-Year Plan (Wang et al., 2016). Through promoting domestic consumption and environmental governance, the state aims to reshape urban growth by moving away from labour-intensive, export-led manufacturing to more technology-intensive modes of clean production (Chang et al., 2016). The decentralisation of urban development and the GDP growth-oriented cadre promotion system have led to the wasteful use of land, environmental degradation and vicious inter-urban competition (Tao et al., 2010). The introduction of the NUP in the context of economic new normal and ecological civilisation signifies the recentralisation of state power to coordinate urban development (Wu, 2016a; 2016c).

In December 2015, state leaders called a high-level meeting specifically to discuss key policies and strategies for China's urban development, for the first time since 1978. This meeting, with more explicit interpretation of the NUP, signals the state's commitment to a major overhaul of urban policies. The key principles discussed include the importance of *in situ* urbanisation and urban containment, and the promotion of new development models of 'smart growth', the 'compact city' and an 'urban growth limit' (Jabareen, 2006). More importantly, the meeting also set local government in train to devise and implement their local schemes of '*penghuqu* [shanty town] redevelopment', which aim to upgrade the physical living conditions of all dilapidated neighbourhoods by 2020, especially informal settlements like urban villages. The One Integration, Two News implementation principle was promulgated in February 2016 to integrate rural migrant workers within cities and towns, reinvigorate 'small and middle-sized cities and towns', and promote a 'new type of urban construction' under the *Guidelines on Further Development of New Type of Urbanisation* (State Council, 2016b).

Since the urban form and associated infrastructure are not yet locked in, the NUP presents both challenges and opportunities for spatial restructuring that is financially and environmentally sustainable (State Council, 2016a). City clusters, rather than monocentric cities, are designated to serve as a spatial planning instrument. These

hierarchical urban agglomeration systems, with spatially compact and economically integrated groupings of cities, are the 'ultimate urban spatial form for China's New Urbanization' (Fang and Yu, 2017, 135). The spatial division of labour among cities of different sizes is promoted, with smaller cities and towns tasked with converting rural migrants into urban residents, whereas large cities are geared for advanced urban functions such as political centres, financial hubs and technological innovation engines. Under such spatial reconfigurations, large cities will continue to drive high-end economic growth within ecological resource limits, with the population tightly contained in small neighbouring towns and cities (Wong et al., 2008).

Differential land policies are enacted in different tiers of cities, with growth containment and population caps in large cities such as Beijing and Shanghai to pave way for more ecologically sustainable development (Yang, 2018). Meanwhile, local government is instructed to promote the development of a thousand 'characteristic towns' with commercial or cultural characteristics by 2020 (MOHURD, 2016). The NUP is very much the practice of state rescaling in urban policy to achieve institutional change within entrenched urban–rural dualism and a more sustainable strategy for economic growth (Lim, 2017). However, the use of hierarchical city clusters to develop a new form of urbanisation can lock in the historic path of development that reinforces the spatial status quo and privileges large cities.

## Beijing's response to the NUP: master planning and 'dispersing, regulating and upgrading'

With the recentralisation of urban policy in China, research on urban village redevelopment needs to take this new policy context into account, as it will be rather different from the contingent approach in the pre-NUP era. The Beijing municipal government's recent policies on 'dispersing, regulating and upgrading' the capital city, epitomising a hasty local response to the wider state urban-policy framework, have caused serious tension and media attention. Urban redevelopment planning in Beijing provides a critical case to examine how the reinsertion of state power creates different dynamics in the peri-urban space.

Following the successful bid to host the 2008 Olympic Games, the Beijing City Environment Office conducted a survey in 2002 on urban villages in the city (Sina News, 2006). The survey identified 332 urban villages in central Beijing, covering an area of seventeen square kilometres and over a million people (about 80 per cent of whom were migrants). Since then, the capital has undergone four rounds of government-led restructuring of urban villages (see Table 1). Urban village redevelopment often leads to the conversion of collectively owned rural land to state ownership and involves the relocation of indigenous villagers with financial compensation. Demolition in urban villages has thus become a dream ticket for villagers to become instantaneous multimillionaires.

**Table 1 High-profile urban village redevelopment in Beijing, 2004–17**

| *Time* | *Redevelopment issue* | *Scale and target of implementation* | *Spatial planning strategy* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2004–2006 (*chaiqian*) | Classify areas into<br>• Type 1 dilapidated neighbourhoods in inner Beijing, and<br>• Type 2 urban villages in the urban–rural transition zone | • Demolish and redevelop 171 Type 1 neighbourhoods<br>• A total area of 6.97 million square metre | • Redevelop Type 1 and Type 2 neighbourhoods around the Olympic venues and within the 4th ring road<br>• Chaoyang, Fengtai, Haidian and Shijingshan districts |
| 2008–2011 (*tengtui*) | • Urban village redevelopment in Beijing's official green belt<br>• Enhance environmental and ecological protection | • Redevelop 45 urban villages | • Beijing's first green belt (covers 240 square km, 177 villages)<br>• Across six city districts of Chaoyang, Haidian, Fengtai, Shijingshan, Changping and Daxing |
| 2010–2015 (*nongzhuanju*) | • Further redevelopment of Type 2 urban villages to promote urban–rural integration | • Over 300 urban villages | • Area around 5th ring road especially in the urban–rural transition zone<br>• Covers Chaoyang, Haidian, Fengtai, Shijingshan, Changping and Daxing |
| 2015–present (*gaizao*) | • *Penghuqu* (shanty town) redevelopment | • Redevelopment impact on 150,000 households (2,600 are rural) by 2017 | • Covers all 16 Beijing municipal districts and all counties |

*Source*: Compiled by the authors from online sources (Sina News, 2004; BMG, 2011a; 2011b; 2012; 2016a; 2016b)

The Olympic Games provided a strong impetus for the holistic regeneration of areas within the fourth ring road between 2004 and 2006 to proclaim Beijing's new image as the host of major global sports events. However, more extensive spatial restructuring has been carried out since 2010 and extends to the fifth ring road and other outer metropolitan areas. As Table 1 shows, the government has gradually shifted its redevelopment strategy spatially from the inner core to the outer periphery, from specific locations to extensive coverage of the peri-urban area. Meanwhile, the policy rhetoric has evolved to downplay the imperative aspect of redevelopment: from the blunt language of *chaiqian* ('demolition and relocation'), through the vague term of *tengtui* ('voluntary evacuation', which tends to make space for urban development and green space), to the more neutral phrases of *nongzhuanju* ('conversion from agricultural to urban residency') and *gaizao* ('renewal and upgrading') (Nguyen, 2017).

With central government's heightened emphasis on Beijing's functional role as a capital city, the spatial restructuring policies of Beijing lead the way, showing other major cities how to implement new urbanisation principles locally. The new Beijing Master Plan (2016–30) imposes strict upper limits on the city's population size and built-up land area. Such a growth cap allows little space for further expansion and, for the first time, Beijing has to reduce its population, especially in the inner urban districts. The Master Plan also reformulates its core urban functions as the national centre for politics, culture, international relations and technological innovation. As part of the Beijing–Tianjin–Hebei (Jing–Jin–Ji) integration strategy, the *non-core* urban sectors and institutions of Beijing, such as low-tech manufacturing, wholesale markets, lower-ranking education and medical institutions and government administration, will be dispersed to other peripheral locations in the Jing–Jin–Ji metropolitan region.

In addition, Beijing's 13th Five-Year Plan of Economic and Social Development stipulated the operational content of the newly defined *urban–rural transition zone* by imposing strict regulations on illegal land use, buildings and business activities. Meanwhile, the ecological functions of the urban–rural transition zone will be restored through deindustrialisation of resource-intensive polluting sectors and major reforestation of degraded land. The control of real-estate development has been tightened by the Beijing government as all regeneration projects, including urban villages, have been subsumed under the revamped *penghuqu* (shanty town) development programme. The policy focused on improving physical conditions in low-quality residential areas rather than on real-estate profit, with district government as the sole bearer of redevelopment liability and developers acting as subcontractors. Other specific policies include the Clean Air Action Plan, which sets stringent targets for coal consumption and vehicle emissions control.

The Dispersing, Regulating, and Upgrading Action Plan (DRUAP) was issued by the Beijing municipal government in early 2017. It aims to disperse low-end economic sectors, regulate informal land use and illegal buildings, and upgrade the capital's urban functions and image. As stated in the plan, its implementation is a *necessary requirement* to optimise Beijing's spatial form by reducing the inner core's population density and dispersing non-capital urban functions to the wider Jing–Jin–Ji area. This top-down action plan is seen by the authority as urgently realising a new type of urbanisation by curing so-called 'urban diseases' and taking a major step towards creating a world-leading and liveable capital city. Since most economic activities in urban villages, such as small factory units, wholesale markets and low-cost housing, occur in low-rent informal spaces, the once-vibrant informal economy is now deemed 'low-end' and urban villages become the target of restructuring.

The pace of enforcement has intensified after a fire in the suburb of Daxing on 18 November 2017 (Lo, 2017). The drastic action of large-scale demolition of illegal buildings, shutting down factory units and evicting migrant workers without urban

*hukou* has been taking place across the city, with urban villages bearing the brunt of the DRUAP. The removal of informal development in the past tended to focus on housing and was carried out case by case, whereas the current clearance action is city-wide and extensive, and aims to uproot the entire economic base that sustains the livelihood of urban villages. As remarked by the Communist Party secretary of Beijing, Cai Qi, 'to implement the new Beijing Master Plan is to implement the strategic decision of central Party leadership and central government, which is a major political mission' (*Beijing Daily*, 2017). The enforcement of the DRUAP changes the context of previous urban village literature and offers new threads of inquiry.

## The tale of three urban villages in suburban Beijing

With the state exerting stronger control over the spatial configuration and models of urban development, Beijing has spearheaded the reform with its new Master Plan and the DRUAP to carry out city-wide redevelopment programmes. It is, however, important to find out how the top-down redevelopment policies have manifested in local neighbourhoods with different socio-economic conditions and locational characteristics. The redevelopment experience in three urban villages, Hanjiachuan, Langezhuang and Dinggezhuang, are discussed to shed light on the debate (see Figure 1).

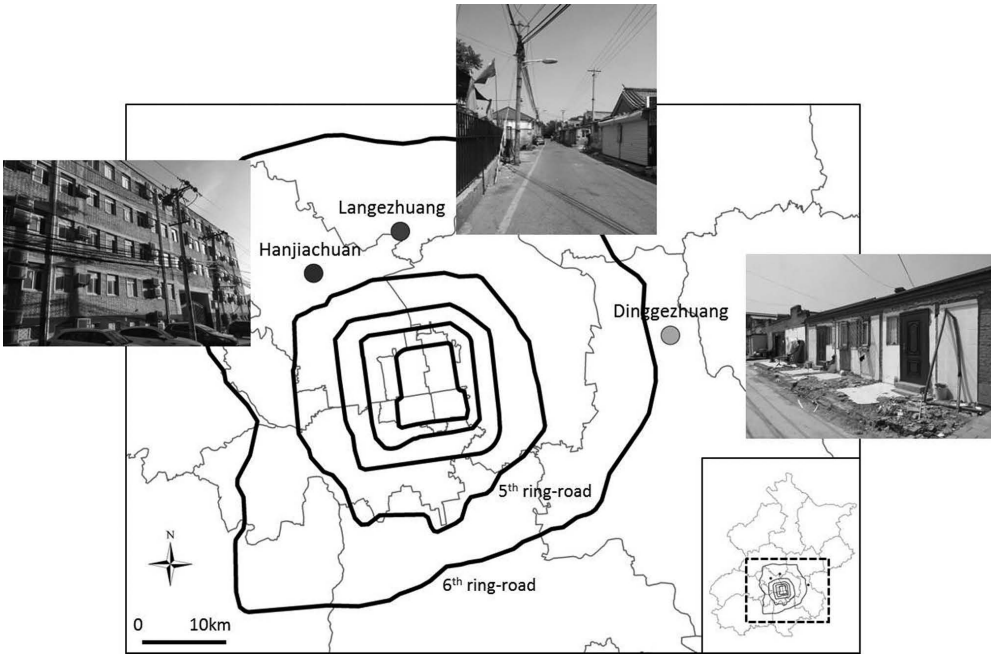


Figure 1 Location of the three urban villages in suburban Beijing
*Source*: Authors

The empirical data analysed in this paper is based on three strands of fieldwork carried out in Beijing during May–November 2017. A qualitative, criterion-based assessment of the physical living environment, local amenities, infrastructure provision and green-space quality of the neighbourhood was first carried out. A questionnaire survey with around 120 residents was achieved in each neighbourhood to ascertain residents' living experience and satisfaction level of the village environment.[1] This was followed by semi-structured interviews with village cadres, residents' committee members and professional planners on key aspects of community governance and development. The primary data were supplemented by relevant statistical data, policy documents and media reports. In addition, a workshop with twelve planners, from different planning institutions and consultancy companies in Beijing, was conducted in March 2018.

The three urban villages were chosen as they map well onto the typical spatial and functional patterns of urban villages identified in the literature, with Hanjiachuan an 'arrival' settlement for new and relocating rural migrants, Langezhuang a rural enclave besieged by planned urban expansion, and Dinggezhuang a site of mixed rural economy with a small manufacturing sector. Our criterion-based assessment shows that the urban form and physical environment of all three urban villages could be characterised as low-rise, with dilapidated and poorly maintained buildings, and a dirty and unpleasant streetscape, with fly-tipping and chaotic parking. Nonetheless, all had good transport connections as they were accessible to municipal roads with at least two lanes, and to public transport with seven to eight bus stops within a one-kilometre distance. Residents could easily make short trips within and around the village using bikes, bike sharing and electric carts. The daily life of village residents was well supported by local businesses as there were plenty of restaurants, supermarkets, barbers and other services.

Despite the poor quality of living conditions, all three urban villages had functional economies and basic amenities to support local livelihoods. Residents in the three urban villages, however, exhibited very different characteristics which reflected their

1 The questionnaire survey was conducted in twenty-one neighbourhoods in the Beijing Metropolitan Region during May–June 2017. The questionnaire consists of five key sections: demographics, housing and local environment, commuting patterns and transport use, waste disposal and recycling, and lifestyle and attitude. Spatial data were compiled at the township level as the basic analytical unit to develop a novel approach for the selection of case-study neighbourhoods, via a multi-stage spatial clustering sampling strategy. The total population size of all eight case township units (just over 1.1 million population) was first chosen. After considering sample validity and time and financial resources, a 0.2 per cent sample size with a 15 per cent attrition rate was decided on, and a total sample size of 2,600 was targeted. The sampling frame of neighbourhoods was based on the National Statistics Bureau's 2014 sample of neighbourhoods in Beijing townships. After the twenty-one neighbourhoods were identified, around 120 participants were approached in each neighbourhood with a non-probability quota sample – based on age and gender distribution at the township level. A total of 2,507 questionnaire responses were collected, which is deemed a large-scale community survey when compared with similar studies.

very different functions (see Table 2). Hajiachuan served as a residential enclave and launch pad for transient workers and young graduates seeking cheap and convenient housing next to the buoyant jobs market in Haidian, where the advanced telecoms, software, science and technology sectors concentrate. In contrast, Dinggezhuang, located at the edge of the designated administrative new town in Tongzhou, still retained some of its function in farming as well as diversifying into small manufacturing. Dinggezhuang therefore had more homeowners and longer lengths of residency, though it had become a migrant destination. Langezhuang, sandwiched between Beijing's two largest suburban residential communities of Tiantongyuan and Huilongguan, had benefited from good road and public transport accessibility. It functioned as a typical urban village by providing accommodation for low-income migrant workers in factories and for small businesses.

**Table 2 Characteristics and travel modes of surveyed residents**

| *Key attribute* | *Hanjiachuan (%)* | *Langezhuang (%)* | *Dinggezhuang (%)* |
|---|---|---|---|
| EDUCATION | | | |
| Primary/junior middle school | 53.7 | 47.1 | 63.5 |
| University degree | 14.0 | 8.4 | 7.1 |
| EMPLOYMENT | | | |
| Factories | 9.8 | 13.7 | 13.5 |
| Small businesses | 42.6 | 35.0 | 33.3 |
| Public organisations | 13.1 | 6.0 | 9.5 |
| Private companies | 11.5 | 8.5 | 7.9 |
| Farmers | 4.9 | 2.6 | 8.7 |
| Working locally | 33.7 | 25.0 | 28.8 |
| INCOME | | | |
| under 50,000 RMB | 29.3 | 44.1 | 47.1 |
| 50,000–150,000 | 54.3 | 50.5 | 41.2 |
| 150,000–300,000 | 13.8 | 5.4 | 8.4 |
| RESIDENCE | | | |
| Length | 78 months | 75 months | 159 months |
| Residence under three years | 43.7 | 37.7 | 39.0 |
| Floating migrants | 22.1 | 30.4 | 32.8 |
| Long-term residents | 77.9 | 69.6 | 67.2 |
| Homeowners | 3.3 | 6.8 | 34.4 |
| Renters | 84.4 | 83.1 | 58.6 |
| Living area (under twenty square metres) | 52.1 | 48.7 | 32.0 |

| *Key attribute* | *Hanjiachuan (%)* | *Langezhuang (%)* | *Dinggezhuang (%)* |
|---|---|---|---|
| LOCATION FACTORS | | | |
| Transport accessibility | 41.2 | 33.3 | 51.0 |
| Public facilities and services | 28.9 | 33.3 | 27.1 |
| Environmental quality | 18.4 | 23.2 | 8.3 |
| Green space | 11.4 | 10.1 | 13.5 |
| COMMUTE (trip mode) | | | |
| Car, taxi and motorcycle | 10.2 | 17.2% | 14.5 |
| Metro | 10.2 | 4.7% | 9.2 |
| Bus | 19.3 | 18.8% | 19.7 |
| Cycling and walking | 35.2 | 37.5% | 34.2 |
| Electric bike | 17.0 | 21.9% | 19.7 |
| SHOPPING (trip mode) | | | |
| Car, taxi and motorcycle | 27.0 | 33.7 | 18.3 |
| Metro | 4.0 | 7.1 | 3.7 |
| Bus | 43.0 | 16.3 | 27.5 |
| Cycling and walking | 15.0 | 22.5 | 19.3 |
| Electric bike | 11.0 | 18.4 | 30.3 |
| Number of respondents | 120 | 122 | 128 |

In informal settlements, residential satisfaction in the wider neighbourhood environment, rather than internal housing conditions, has been underresearched in Chinese cities. Our survey therefore asked participants to rate different aspects of their living environment, both within and around the neighbourhood. As shown in Table 3, surveyed residents' average ratings of air quality, tranquillity and walkability within the neighbourhood in all three villages were leaning towards the satisfaction side, as was overall environmental quality (with an average above three). The residents also rated the environment surrounding the neighbourhood towards satisfaction, though with some variations among the three villages. It is important to note that only a very small proportion of respondents (around 10 per cent) were dissatisfied with their overall living environment; about 30–40 per cent were satisfied/very satisfied, though it is notable that about half were indifferent (see Figure 2). The findings suggest that there was a high degree of contentment and complacency among urban village dwellers, which means that they were unlikely to be motivated or have the capability to change the dilapidated conditions of their neighbourhoods without government support and intervention.

**Table 3 Satisfaction with the living environment within and around the neighbourhood**

| *Satisfaction rating (1–5, with 5 being very satisfied)* | *Hanjiachuan* | *Langezhuang* | *Dinggezhuang* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Within the neighbourhood | | | |
| Sport facilities | 2.9 | 3.4 | 2.7 |
| Air quality | 3.2 | 3.2 | 2.9 |
| Tranquillity | 3.3 | 3.4 | 3.1 |
| Walkability | 3.4 | 3.4 | 3.3 |
| Overall environment | 3.3 | 3.4 | 3.2 |
| Around the neighbourhood | | | |
| Access to nature | 3.6 | 3.5 | 3.0 |
| Parks and playgrounds | 3.0 | 3.3 | 2.8 |
| Green space | 3.1 | 3.3 | 3.1 |
| Sport venues | 2.6 | 3.1 | 2.6 |
| Infrastructure | 3.4 | 3.2 | 3.5 |
| Public services | 3.3 | 3.3 | 3.3 |
| Overall quality | 3.3 | 3.4 | 3.3 |
| Number of respondents | 120 | 122 | 128 |

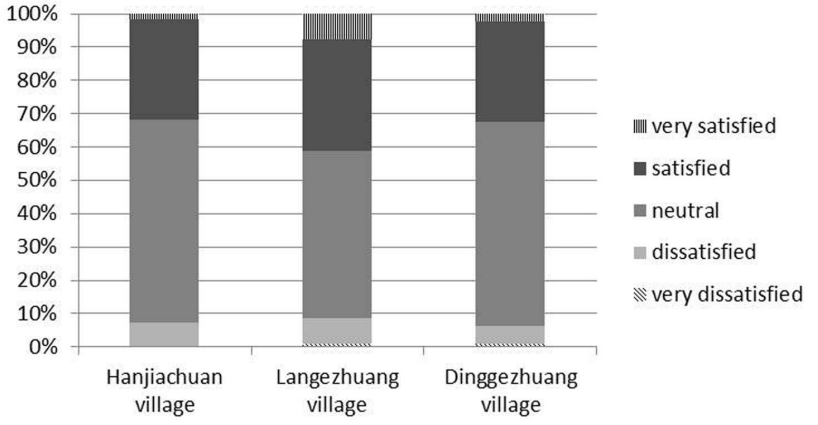


Figure 2 Surveyed residents' overall satisfaction with the living environment
*Source*: Authors

## Spatial restructuring of three urban villages

Our discussion turns to focus on the different restructuring experiences of the three villages under the enforcement of the DRUAP and the new Beijing Master Plan.

### Hanjiachuan: 'There is no other way but counting on redevelopment'

Following its redevelopment into an IT park in 2010, Tangjialing became a quintessential symbol of the urban village with a twist of fate. The displacement of residents to nearby Hanjiachuan means that the Tangjialing model of informal housing, such as partitions, add-on constructions and 'white-collar apartments', was directly copied to Hanjiachuan. Rather than tackling informality, the redevelopment of Tanjialing simply displaced the problem further afield to a new peripheral location. Hanjiachuan is, however, excluded from the planned redevelopment zone in the Beijing Master Plan. This is disappointing news for local villagers as their dream of becoming multi-millionaires has to wait for at least another five to ten years. Located at the foot of Baiwang Mountain, Hanjiachuan is close to the forest park that is the nearest to central Beijing. Given the latest environmental protection policy, it is inappropriate to urbanise the area. Furthermore, the village is next to a military base, which makes any change of land use difficult.

Although not included in the urbanisation plan, Hanjiachuan has *de facto* been urbanised. It was the most vibrant neighbourhood among the three urban villages we visited in May 2017. The village's main streets were packed with all kinds of shops and restaurants and small stalls lined the narrow paths to villagers' houses. There was a buzzing flea market at the corner of the village, selling meat, vegetables, cheap clothing and everyday gadgets. Its informal housing market was larger in scale than that of the other two. A considerable number of two- to three-storey low-rise buildings were scattered amidst villagers' houses. There were two massive blocks of 'youth apartments', renting out 300–450 single rooms. The enforcement of 'dispersing, regulating and upgrading' policies was devastating for the village economy. Our second visit to Hanjiachuan was in November 2017, only four months after the first visit, but the flea market had vanished and 'no business licence' notices were pasted on the doors of many shops and businesses. The 'youth apartment' tenants were given notice to move out before the end of 2017.

The problems faced by Hanjiachuan are deep-rooted and it has a very limited capacity to self-regenerate if the government does not take redevelopment action. As one village cadre commented, 'This village is already a mess. Over the years, problems have accumulated; small repairs here and there will not make much difference. There is no way out but counting on redevelopment.' However, the enforcement of the DRUAP has dwindled rental revenue in Hanjiachuan and posed real threats

to villagers' livelihoods. Villagers are forced to consider new ways of income generation but returning to agricultural work is the least popular option. The most plausible option is for villagers to take up low-skilled jobs in nearby urban areas, or to look for new enterprises.

> Farming is hardly profitable; the soil quality in our village is not so great! Currently, the most profitable crop is cherries, about 10,000 yuan per *mu* per year. The only way forward is to combine agriculture with tourism. Plants can be grown in greenhouses and attract city folks to experience farm work and eat organic food. But it requires huge investment. We can't afford that. (Interview with a village cadre)

The double-edged sword of redevelopment is rising living costs. The abrupt eviction of local businesses means that villagers have to shop elsewhere. During our visit in November, the government also introduced the Clean Air Act to ban coal-burning heating in the coming winter. Instead, steel pipes were under construction to bring central heating to villagers' houses. Although the infrastructure is funded by government, villagers are required to pay a three-thousand-yuan 'heating bill' per household each winter, which is a large sum for most villagers. The redevelopment of Hanjiachuan can be seen as a big step towards the state's ecological agenda, though at the expense of the dynamic functions of the village economy and the livelihood of its residents.

## Langezhuang: 'This opportunity is once in a lifetime'

Langezhuang received a redevelopment notice from Changping district government in 2015; the official redevelopment plan was announced in 2017 and implemented in 2018. As the prelude to the DRUAP, the Jing–Yu Wangfa ('Beijing–Henan Good Fortune') market was demolished in March 2017 before our visit and over three thousand people were dispersed from the site. 'Henan' was included in the name of the market as many migrants left this populous province (south of the Yellow River) for Beijing. Many Henan migrants settled in Langezhuang, making ends meet by trading recycled goods. During our visit in May, the village was still full of buzz, with a small shopping street extending from the village entrance, packed with small supermarkets, convenience stores, street food stalls, a barber shop and a pharmacy. Walking a bit deeper into the village, there were sites that included a small manufacturing factory and workshops for motorcycle and printing equipment repair.

Contrary to the image of rampant illegal buildings in urban villages, we could not see much trace of illegal construction in Langezhuang. While villagers' houses appeared to be crowded and chaotic, there was no sign of any vertical extension. This is reflected in our survey findings that around 40 per cent of participants were satisfied or very satisfied with the living environment. However, small red metal plates

with serial numbers were stuck on villagers' doors to certify their tenant status. As a village cadre commented:

> Illegal construction has been under control in the village. So, even with the migrants, the total number of residents here is rather small.[2] We have no big problems meeting basic needs, such as water and electricity. If illegal buildings were not under control, there would be interrupted water supplies and power cuts.

The enforcement of the DRUAP was not seen as a big problem for local villagers. Although the local informal economy had shrunk rapidly, with redevelopment around the corner, they were looking forward to receiving financial compensation and moving to new homes. Individual villagers had limited influence over the relocation and compensation package, as negotiation with government and the developers was carried out by village cadres. Village cadres, representing all villagers' interests, could exert a major influence throughout the planning process. They were called into meetings, alongside planning experts, to express their preferences and needs. All participatory activities were conducted before the final draft was publicly presented to gather feedback from villagers. The control and redevelopment of Langezhuang epitomises the accelerated process of city-wide upgrading and it brings new opportunities to indigenous villagers. As explained by one village cadre:

> We will ask planners to address our preferences, especially the location and layout of our future neighbourhood. We will also ask them to adjust the orientation and spacing of our apartment buildings to get good sunlight in our homes. Good transport access is also important. This opportunity is once in a lifetime.

## Dinggezhuang: 'We are on board, but just need to be patient'

The new Beijing Master Plan sets out plans for the relocation of all administrative departments of Beijing's municipal government to Tongzhou to reduce development pressure in central Beijing. Since Dinggezhuang is located at the edge of the new administrative centre in Tongzhou, it is fated to be redeveloped in the foreseeable future. During our site visit, illegal construction in the village was well contained and villagers' houses were in their natural state, without many extra rooms for letting. It was therefore unlikely that local villagers could rely on rental income. According to a village cadre, villagers' livelihoods were dependent on growing vegetables, manual work and rental income.

The most notable economic feature in Dinggezhuang was a small industrial park (about ten hectares), hosting about thirty small factories making furniture, construction materials and machine parts. These factories took advantage of the village's

2 In November 2017, 450 indigenous villagers and approximately seven thousand migrants still resided in Langezhuang.

locational access to a nearby highway. However, the sweeping implementation of the DRUAP had a detrimental impact on manufacturing economies in Dinggezhuang, as all factories were ordered to shut down and move elsewhere immediately. According to one village cadre, enforcement was rather brutal. The typical method to drive those small manufacturers away was to cut their water and electricity supply. Since most factories were run by migrants, they did not have any bargaining power with the government. Their rental contracts were with the village and both parties knew that it was illegal to build factories on rural land. Without these factories, villagers lost not only paid jobs, but also the rental income from migrant workers. Another village cadre complained:

> At the moment, factories are shut down, new licences for small businesses are suspended, and land development is prohibited. All the paths to develop the village economy are blocked by policies from above.

Although the village's economic functions have been stripped, the problems are only temporary. Being close to the new Beijing administrative sub-centre means that Dinggezhuang will soon be redeveloped and all of the villagers will become urban residents. Based on the experience of nearby villages, the modest compensation package will involve two to three new apartments per household and around 1 million yuan per person. All villagers will be enrolled in a social-insurance programme and can receive a monthly pension of 1,800 yuan after they are sixty years old. Since there is no set standard for compensation, village cadres are geared up to fight for better terms when negotiation comes. Their attitude has been hardened after learning the lessons of the past. Several plots of village-owned land were expropriated by the state in the 1980s and 1990s and compensation was based on the value of crops planted on the land. Villagers back then were only too happy to receive a small lump-sum payment of 10,000 to 20,000 yuan per household. As a village cadre reflected:

> They had never seen so much money in their lives. Back then, 10,000 yuan was quite a decent sum. In hindsight, farmers gave up their land too easily. They didn't realise the true value of land. Nowadays, information is everywhere on the Internet. Villagers are more astute about how much their land is worth. We are on board, but just need to be patient.

## Discussion

By triangulating different data sources, we are able to establish the rhetoric and driving forces behind the ambitious strategy pursued by the NUP and its interpretation and implementation by local government. The empirical data collected from the three case-study villages also helps to identify the socio-spatial impacts on urban villages

in Beijing brought by the radical implementation of spatial-restructuring measures. This penultimate section aims to provide an overarching discussion of these research findings in the light of China's changing urban policy context.

## Top-down 'creative destruction' versus bottom-up 'organic entrepreneurialism'

Many big cities in China, especially Beijing, have reached their growth limit and the state's recent recentralisation of urban policy is not an accident. The rhetoric of ecological civilisation is very much an ideological construct employed by the state to bulldoze any obstacles in its new urbanisation path. A new type of urbanisation, in the optimal form of hierarchical urban agglomeration systems, is employed to sieve the population and activities to realise the image of a modern China, towards new modes of production and new styles of consumption. The rescaling of urban development starts from top-tiered cities by removing low-end economic activities and their associated labour. By comparing pre- and post-demolition change in four urban villages in Beijing, Liu and Wong (2018) found that the population dropped dramatically, by 84 per cent. Recent official figures show that Beijing's residential population shrank by 22,000 in 2017, following the official population cap (Yang, 2018). One can argue the spatial restructuring of the NUP is a *creative destructive* strategy to stimulate a new form of economic growth that matches with a modern, advanced and smart image of ecological urbanisation. However, it also highlights the uncomfortable fact that the expulsion of informal activities and migrant workers is seen as a game-changer to achieve sustainable growth and ecological civilisation.

The NUP and shanty town redevelopment are very much top-down impositions on local communities' organic entrepreneurial activities in the form of informal housing, factories and trading markets. Hanjiachuan's development has been an opportunistic response to the continuous development of the IT sector and industrial parks in Xibeiwang. After providing rental accommodation for the ant tribe over the past decade, redevelopment eventually kicked in. Due to its proximity to the Baiwang Mountain Park and a military base, Hanjiachuan is not planned for redevelopment. The dismantling of the village economy means that villagers are bewildered by their future prospects and have to find jobs elsewhere or shift to agritourism to earn a livelihood. Being sandwiched between the two largest housing estates in Beijing, Langezhuang is zoned for urban redevelopment in the Master Plan. The villagers are embracing the plan fully and look forward to receiving hefty compensation from the government. Dinggezhuang, as a farming village, has established a mixed economy by having small factories and renting to artists and painters. The bottom-up initiative from the village and local government to create a cultural sector was halted by the state's plan of developing Tongzhou as an administrative new town. There are

forthcoming plans of annexing Dinggezhuang into the new town and villagers are ready to move on and bargain for better relocation packages.

As admitted by the village cadre, many of these villages are in a dilapidated state and will need investment to upgrade and redevelop. From a planning perspective, the issues are twofold: who should be involved in deciding the redevelopment approach, and what is the timeframe and the approach taken to carry out the enforcement of demolition and eviction? The removal and eviction are very much a top-down initiative which bypasses the village committee. By compensating native villagers generously, the government has quietened many dissident voices. However, the planners we interviewed question whether giving villagers an urban *hukou* and financial compensation will enhance their well-being. There are anecdotes that some overnight millionaires lost their money within a few years at the gambling tables without knowing how to manage their sudden wealth. More importantly, some villagers are losers in the process, as the removal of the informal economy does not necessarily involve any prospect of urban redevelopment and financial compensation.

## Breaking from the past with a new type of urbanisation

Previous studies (e.g. Zhang et al., 2003; Zheng et al., 2009) argue that the elimination of urban villages would require the provision of other forms of low-cost housing, such as small housing units from government, to support the least advantaged migrants to fuel the urban growth machine. Furthermore, villagers would devise counterplots to any redevelopment to maintain their livelihood and bargain for higher compensation (Liu et al., 2012). In spatial terms, the redevelopment of urban villages will simply shift informality to outer locations through a spatial displacement process (Wu et al., 2013). With the state's stronger grip on the new urbanisation agenda in 2016, a fundamental shift in local government's approach towards informal development was witnessed in Beijing. Under the state radar, the capital city has gathered momentum to carry out major demolition and eviction under its DRUAP across the city and planned for new urban redevelopment via its new Master Plan. Housing poor rural migrants and low-skilled labour was no longer an issue of state concern, but the physical upgrade of urban space to meet its modernisation and ecological agenda was. Indeed, the government introduced population caps in big cities to shift its production mode towards a smart and ecological pathway. Beijing's population has already dropped by 0.1 per cent in 2017, for the first time in twenty years (*China Daily*, 2018).

The extensive city-wide action of the swift demolition of informal structures has left little time for the rippling process of major spatial displacement to take place. These drastic actions of demolition and eviction, implemented by local government rather than village committees, do not actually resolve the dualistic urban–rural structure, but serve to impose regulations on rural space to forbid illegal entrepreneurial

activities. The growth coalition between village collectives and urban governments (Zhao and Webster, 2011) will thus be dissolved, as local governments align themselves more closely with the central state. These clearly depart from the previous approach of espousing 'tolerance' and utilising 'delay' tactics towards informalities in urban villages. Indeed, as shown in our case studies, villagers hardly struggled or made any counterplots as they were under tightly enforced existing law, overcome by the holy grail of ecological civilisation and/or buyout by compensation packages. The new urbanisation agenda also sheds light on the *deliberate* nature of ambiguity in rural landownership (Ho, 2001), which is now exploited to reduce the scope of villagers' rights over their land.

## Policy implications

The implementation of the new urbanisation agenda in Beijing can be characterised as firm, high-handed and highly visible in a top-down fashion. The restructuring and redevelopment of urban villages in suburban Beijing can be argued as urbanisation *reconstituted* in ecological clothing, and the eviction of migrants and businesses is a form of 'eco-cleansing' to pursue an alternative growth strategy. Being the capital on the doorstep of the state, Beijing has to set a sterling example for other large cities to roll out their master plans under the guidance of central government (MOHURD, 2017). Based on recent experience in Beijing, planners who attended our workshop argued that a more nuanced understanding of local contexts was important for policy making and planning control at the local level. The existing dual land-use policy was criticised by some as unhelpful, which echoes the argument that the ambiguities of property rights and village governance status have to be properly addressed if informality is to be eliminated (Wu et al., 2013). In the planners' own words:

> Unlike Shanghai and Shenzhen, Beijing does not have well-established local policies on urban renewal. Better local policy on redevelopment is required in Beijing to promote innovative renewal approaches. (Planning consultant with urban renewal specialism, 2018)

> There have been too many restrictions for land designated for urban construction use in formal planning, but very limited control in non-construction zones. There should be various standards for developing different types of non-construction land. (Senior government planner, 2018)

> The peri-urban area is under great pressure to be urbanised and the government needs to pay attention to ensure that relevant policies and management are implemented. (Senior strategic planner, 2018)

Since implementing the NUP is still at an early stage, lessons should be learnt to adjust implementation practice in Beijing and other cities. More importantly, a new Ministry of Natural Resources was established in 2018 by merging a number of departments to realise integrative planning and to ensure that development is contained by an ecological red line. This means that more substantial and in-depth research will be required to track the changing policy landscape of the implementation of the NUP and its differential impacts on different socio-economic segments of the society and across different spatial areas.

## Conclusion

China's NUP has made a step change by adopting a 'human-centred approach' to pursuing a more sustainable means of urban development. However, to realise this core principle fully at the local level, especially the demolition of informal development in urban villages, will require more considerate and measured approaches. Any large-scale removal of informal development is challenging; the drastic enforcement action has dismantled buoyant local economies and evicted low-income workers from the urban labour market. To the government, urban villages are just 'borrowed space, borrowed time' for the migrant workers; hence their well-being has not been accounted for in the entire planning and enforcement process. Our findings show that these transient spaces had escaped the framing of official planning until the enforcement of the DRUAP. However, urban villages have served Beijing's growth machine well, as their mundane economies provide foundational services for the marginalised in society who do not have an urban *hukou*. In resonance with Sassen's (2014) argument, the effects of the NUP can be argued as a 'savage sorting' of the 'low-end' economy and 'low-end' population to repurpose different urban spaces and neighbourhoods across the city cluster.

Planning is a complex political construct that encapsulates different activities, with different powers in different territorial contexts. The wider implementation of the NUP, if following in the footsteps of Beijing, is likely to create state-led 'systemic edges' that expel rural migrants and other low-skilled workers from China's major cities. Although the state is hoping that the 'surplus migrant workforce' will trickle down the urban hierarchy of a city cluster through its characteristic town programme, it is doubtful that small cities and towns can develop economies large enough to absorb the surplus workforce. If the 'city-cluster' strategy fails, rural migrants will most likely seek to re-enter the major cities. In that case, the NUP, especially if implemented along the lines of DRUAP, will make major cities a much harsher environment in which to make a living. The NUP has the risk of exacerbating problems of social injustice rather than promoting a human-centred approach. The UN's Habitat III has affirmed the importance of cities as the driver to end poverty in its New Urban Agenda (UN-Habitat,

2016). The planning community needs to be more critical of the so-called 'transformative' redevelopment agenda, not just in China but internationally.

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