VILLAGES IN THE CITY

A Guide to South China's Informal Settlements

Edited by Stefan Al

Contributing editors:
Paul Chu Hoi Shan, Claudia Juhre, Ivan Valin, and Casey Wang

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CONTRIBUTORS

(in alphabetical order)

Stefan Al is a Dutch architect, urban designer, and an associate professor of urban design at the University of Pennsylvania. In an international career to date, he has worked as a practicing architect on renowned projects such as the 2,000-foot high Canton Tower in Guangzhou, the preservation of world heritage in Latin America at the World Heritage Center of UNESCO, and an 11,000-acre new eco-friendly city in India. Al's research focuses on the evolution of urban form from a global perspective. His articles have been published in the *Handbook of Architectural Theory, Urban China*, and other publications. He has edited the book *Factory Towns of South China* and is currently writing a book on Las Vegas entitled *The Strip*.

Marco Cenzatti holds a laurea in architecture from the University of Florence, a master's degree in housing and urban planning from the Architectural Association in London, and a PhD in urban and regional planning from UCLA. Currently, he is a lecturer in architecture and city and regional planning at the College of Environmental Design, UC Berkeley. Besides urban and peri-urban development in Southern China, his most recent work focuses on urban change, the production of social space, and urban industry. His publications on these topics include "The (Changing) Colors of the American City," *New Geographies* (2011, Vol. 3); "Heterotopias of Difference," in *Heterotopia and the City* (edited by M. Dehaene and E. Vervloesem, 2009), and "The Permanence and Change of Urban Industry," *Harvard College Economics Review* (2006, Vol. 1).

Margaret Crawford is a professor of architecture at UC Berkeley. A graduate of Berkeley, the Architectural Association, and UCLA, she has also taught at SCI-Arc, Harvard GSD, and the University of Florence, Italy. She is the author of *Building the Workingman's Paradise* and editor of *The Car and the City* and *Everyday Urbanism*, along with numerous articles on topics in the American built environment. She has been conducting research in the Pearl River Delta since 2005.

Jiang Jun is a researcher, architect, editor and writer whose experimental urban research explores the interrelationship between design phenomena and urban dynamics. He was the founding editor-in-chief of *Urban China Magazine*, the chief curator of the "Street Belongs to . . . All of Us!" exhibition in China, and the project director at the Strelka School in Moscow. His works have been presented in exhibitions including the Shenzhen Biennale, China Contemporary, and Kassel Documenta. He is currently an associate professor at the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts and visiting fellow at the ESRC Centre of Oxford University.

Laurence Liauw is the principal director of SPADA Ltd and an associate professor (part-time) at the University of Hong Kong. An ex-investment banker, he has practiced in the past 18 years as a registered architect, professional urban designer, and strategic development consultant in the UK, Malaysia, Mainland China, and Hong Kong. He graduated from the Architectural Association London and City University in London and is a winner of international competitions and design awards. His expertise lies in China's urbanization process, strategic planning, and urban development, leading to his publications *AD: New Urban China* (2008) and *New Economic Spaces in Asian Cities* (2012). His professional projects have focused on international CBDs, financial districts, academic and technology campuses, aviation cities, creative industries, cultural institutional buildings, hospitality healthcare, as well as aging populations in urban development. He serves as an expert advisor to government planning bureaus and development agencies in China and Asia. Liauw was a creative team member for the Shanghai World Expo Shenzhen Pavilion in 2010, and an exhibitor at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2006. He has lectured widely on design and urban development at Harvard GSD, Columbia University, University College London, Tsinghua University, and Peking University.

Nick R. Smith is a PhD candidate in the Department of Urban Planning and Design at Harvard University. Smith's research combines ethnography and spatial analysis to explore processes of urban transformation, planning, and policy in rapidly developing contexts, with a particular emphasis on China. Most recently, Smith's work has focused on the planning of peri-urban villages in the context of urban-rural coordination. His research is supported by grants from the National Science Foundation and the Wenner-Gren Foundation.

Jiong Wu (Abingo) is a PhD student in architecture at UC Berkeley, studying housing and habitation in China. A native of Zhuhai, she is a graduate of the South China University of Technology and the Berlage Institute in Rotterdam. She has worked in architecture and planning offices in Rotterdam and Guangzhou.

INTRODUCTION

Villages in the City: A Guide to China's Informal Settlements

Stefan Al

In 2011, bulldozers tore down nearly the entire village of Dachong, destroying over 10 million square feet of village housing and evicting more than 70,000 residents, many of them migrants.[1] In what was called one of the key urban "upgrades" of the decade, a vibrant community had been turned into a rubble-ridden demolition site. Only a few old trees, historic temples, and ancient wells were preserved, further accentuating the bleak new hole that formed amid the skyscrapers of Shenzhen.

Located inside the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone, Dachong Village had become a prime real estate location when it was engulfed by the explosive development of the surrounding city. Developers and government officials saw the village's adjacency with a new high-tech industrial zone as both a major nuisance and business opportunity. Following the familiar *tabula rasa* approach to planning, the village would be subsumed in the anonymity of the surrounding city only after it was razed. Billboards with images of corporate office towers, a five-star hotel, and a colossal mall already visualized the future of the village on the demolition site, while banners celebrated the "scientific urban planning" and the "collective

transformation" of what was to be the largest redevelopment project of its kind in the Pearl River Delta, aspiring to become a national model for upgrading older urban areas.

The local press did not question these empty slogans, nor the eviction of the countless politically disadvantaged migrants. Rather, they framed the redevelopment as a conflict between the real estate company and the village households owning the land. A few families had refused to transfer their property rights, but after the district government approved eminent domain, the remaining homes were razed as well. Those who had agreed to transfer their land rights were given more than 100 million RMB compensation to sell their properties, propelling the former farmers into the *nouveau riche*: some of the villagers even made it to the ranks of RMB millionaires.[2]

Dachong Village is just one of the countless villages wedged within new urban areas and is now being eliminated. But what the local people call a "village" is in reality an urbanized version of a village: an "urban village." Literally "villages within the city," or *chengzhongcun*, these are previously agricultural villages that have been engulfed by the city. Parallel with the surrounding urbanization, these villages have too become "urban," but in their own way. They no longer consist of the picturesque farms of rural China, but of high-rises so close to one another that they create dark claustrophobic alleys—jammed with dripping air-conditioning units, hanging clothes, caged balconies and bundles of

buzzing electrical wires—crowned with a small strip of daylight, called by locals "thin line sky."

The emergence and proliferation of these urban villages is a unique phenomenon of urban China that occurs in many regions and in different forms, as a consequence of the rapid urbanization that has resulted from land reform, the dual urban and rural land ownership and management system, and the large influx of an underprivileged migrant population. At the cusp of the economic reform in China in the 1980s, in a process that continues until today, municipal governments could only achieve partial land acquisition in the countryside. Since at the time villagers were too costly to compensate and relocate, they could only transfer the farmland surrounding the villages into industrial areas and housing. The now landless villagers had to find another source of revenue and went from growing vegetables to leasing out apartments to a steady stream of migrant workers, who sought employment in the newly built nearby factories. Since their collectively owned villages were unconstrained by city building laws and set-back regulations, villagers were able to add story after story to their homes, leading to the literal extrusion of the village's narrow building lots from low-rise to high-rise. As a result, disproportionally narrow streets delineate the new high-rise version of the village. At times, buildings stand so close to one another that they are dubbed "kissing buildings" or "handshake houses"— you can literally reach out from one building and shake hands with your neighbor.

For a moment, the "kissing buildings" worked out for all stakeholders. They helped the government to transfer large portions of collective land to urban property ownership, while supplying the villagers with a new livelihood because they could no longer farm. The villagers were promoted to landlords, and many chose to enjoy their new affluence in more opulent parts of the city and moved out of the village. In their place came migrants from all over China, in search for cheap rent. Largely excluded from the general housing distribution system as well as homeownership because of their limited rights and low incomes, their housing options were limited. Often, they preferred living in urban villages to the monotonous dormitories in the factory compounds, since the villages, in close proximity to the factories, offered many services including different types of shops and restaurants.[3] To them, urban villages provided a suitable place to live, and with their burgeoning economies, places to work as well.

Their success seems to be short-lived, however; urban villages are being wiped almost as soon as they pop up. The Dachong Village, one of the largest urban villages in south China until the bulldozers rolled in, is paradigmatic of the demolition of urban villages all over China. More than a thousand village redevelopment plans exist all over China, affecting millions of people.

As urban villages have become valuable real estate in current urban locations, city governments aspire to deal with the "problem" of the villages permanently, eager to transfer the collective village-held land use rights back to the state. The village redevelopment benefits the government and the developers, who make a fortune by developing large swaths of land in prime locations, and only those native villagers who successfully negotiate their transfer of land use rights for housing, moving costs, and loss of livelihood. Moreover, unless the villagers are able to negotiate for an urban *hukou* (the household registration system that privileges urban over rural residents), they could end up having no access to social security or health care. And in spite of their organization in Village Collectives (VC), the government can exercise eminent domain at any time. Migrants end up losing most, left with few or no alternative to affordable housing. They are also the last to be considered, as they suffer under a rural *hukou*, an inferior form of citizenship. Urbanization in China certainly helps create wealth, but the wealth is unequally distributed, and is forced through land evictions and the maintenance of political inequalities systematically produced in the household registration system.

Image 1. Bulldozers only leave a few trees on the site that was previously Dachong Village, one of the largest urban villages in south China. Photo by dcmaster, Flickr.

In the process, the city as a whole loses unique histories and places in exchange for the relentless repetition of cookie-cutter office blocks and residential enclaves. It is poignant that Chinese city planners, desperately pondering ways to infuse identity into their newly built homogeneous cities, overlook the urban village. Their unique urbanisms, histories, spatial experiences, culture, and cosmopolitanism could bring a more diverse texture to the future of the city.

This book argues for the value of urban villages as places. Although much academic research has focused on their role in providing affordable housing to a migrant population, they have insufficiently been approached from an urban design perspective. It is this urban design argument that could potentially help persuade city governments to integrate villages into, rather than to expel them from, their cities.

While few urban design professionals have been involved in their design, the urban design merits of the urban villages are plentiful. Their densely grouped, compact footprints are highly efficient, with much higher population densities than the surrounding city. Since most of the ground level of the villages has a commercial function, urban villages are truly mixed use, giving local residents the convenient proximity to neighborhood stores, restaurants, and places to work. This also contributes to an active street life with plenty of "eyes on the street." The fine-grain urban fabric provides more intimate and human-scaled urban spaces. The streets are usually too narrow to accommodate cars, and the small blocks provide a denser network of pedestrian connections than the oversized,

modernist mega-blocks outside of the villages. For these reasons alone, people in the urban villages mostly travel on foot or use public transit rather than a car. Walking through their undulating streets gives an interesting experience, enhanced by the variability of village buildings. As much as urban villages play an important role in providing affordable housing to a disadvantaged migrant population, they can also offer a vital mixed-use, spatially diverse, and pedestrian alternative to the prevailing car-oriented and monotonous modernist-planning paradigm in China.

To reveal these qualities, this book depicts several urban villages in a series of drawings and photographs that range from large scale to small scale. An aerial photo and figure ground drawing show their unique morphologies and incredible densities, particularly in relation to the monochrome city context. The "architour" provides a balanced architectural view, pointing to cultural heritage highlights as much as to dilapidated buildings. A section through each of the village's main streets—inspired by Terasawa Hitomi's vivacious illustrations for the Japanese book *Daizukan Kyuryujyou*, which provides a final record of the now destroyed Kowloon Walled City in Hong Kong[4] —uncovers the immense concentration of social life in the dense structures. The commerce map highlights the small shops of the mixed-use villages, which provide services to the local population and tourists. These shops are also opportunities to many small business owners and entrepreneurs, and supply work to residents. These give a clue of how each village has its unique industry. Finally, close-ups of a housing unit and a resident provide

a peek into the villagers' homes and daily lives in the village.

In order to give a balanced view and not to idealize urban villages, we have documented a wide variety of villages throughout the Pearl River Delta, in cities such as Dongguan, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Foshan, and Zhuhai. We looked for villages that were all very different, whether in size, density, history, dominant industry, wealth, and reputation, so as to avoid stereotypes. Often, a village is dominated by a special industry, be it information technology, shoe manufacturing, ceramic production, replica products, or massage parlors. Some villages are well-known backdrops for filming Chinese operas, while others have a more infamous status, thanks to a red-light district. Some villages display wealth and even build their own plazas and museums to celebrate the village's history and future, while others are less prosperous with unpaved streets that are littered with rubble and trees filled with drying clothes.

By sampling in different cities we were able to see differences, as well as similarities, of urban villages in the five cities. These variations can partially be explained by the differences among their surrounding cities. Many villages in Dongguan and Foshan, for example, are engaged with electronics and ceramics, respectively, giving a hint of the dominant industries of these two cities. In addition, counting the number of stories of buildings in urban villages almost literally enumerates various levels of urbanization of the enclosing cities. The ones in Shenzhen and Guangzhou are the tallest, since these cities were urbanized first, while Guangzhou's villages are older, because of the city's long history.

Image 2. Like many other urban villages, the buildings in Xiasha Village stand so close to another that they create a "thin line sky." Photo by Stefan Al.

The height of the urban village buildings is thus a barometer of urbanization, a marker of the lack of affordable housing, and sadly, also an indicator of impending demolition; as the higher they get, the more prominent they become prey to developers and governments. Knowing that many of the urban villages featured in this book are on the brink of destruction, the following chapters will provide a valuable documentation of this unique accident in China's maelstrom of urbanization—a premature eulogy if their demolition cannot be avoided.

Looking across cases also reveals similarities in terms of their urban features. In an urban China dominated by drones of generic skyscrapers, traveling through these urban villages presents an alternative vision of modernity that reminds one of Marco Polo's journeys in *Invisible Cities*. Typically, you can access them only by going through a gateway, which doubles as a security gate since villages have their own private police force. Once inside, there is an air of cosmopolitanism with dialects heard from all over China, and restaurants with cuisines from many regions. The narrow and populated streets in the markets in some villages, with their open display of exotic products, appear more like *souks* than *hutongs*. These lead to unexpected open spaces with children rollicking outside, or to ancient temples where the elderly are playing mahjong.

It is easy to misperceive these places as slums. Dickensian nightmares portrayed by the local press often describe the urban village in pathological terms, for instance, as an "eye sore," "scar," "ill," or even "cancer" of the city. They further stigmatize the migrant residents as filthy, as burglars, drug users, or

even murderers. The reporters' quotes of unsanitary conditions and crime rates help authorities justify their destruction. The government perceives them as a messy threat to their more sterile vision of modernity. Even some of Hong Kong University's graduate students of urban design, many of whom come from China, hesitated to visit the urban villages at the beginning of our study.

Although many villages have dirty alleys and dilapidated buildings with poor lighting and ventilation (and sometimes a 15-story building topped with roof shacks goes without an elevator), the people living in these buildings are not the urban poor.[5] They are productive, if politically disadvantaged, citizens with jobs. Many urban villagers have television sets, refrigerators, and occasionally, even cars. For them, the place is not a "slum" but an important, affordable, and well-located entry point into the city where they can become full urban citizens after a few years of steady jobs. They can eventually receive decent health care and social benefits, and send their children to proper schools. Furthermore, even white-collar workers or college students frequent the urban villages to enjoy their many services, or sometimes even prefer to live in the urban villages.

From this perspective, the emergence of urban villages in China fits in a worldwide trend of "urban informality."[6] Much of the world's urbanization occurs in the informal sector, outside of institutional structures such as building regulations, zoning laws, or land tenure. Hundreds of millions of people around the world are excluded from formal housing, explaining the existence of the

favelas in Rio de Janerio, the *barrios* in Mexico, and the shantytowns in India.[7] Developed nations, too, have their forms of extralegal and unplanned communities, for instance, the *colonias* border settlements in Texas. As research shows, these communities are not marginal, but fully embedded into the economy.[8] The study of Chinese urban villages can contribute to this scholarship, particularly because urban villages are not synonymous with the urban poor. Urban villages are anything but marginal; they are integral to an economy that relies on low value-added labor, created by the state's inability to provide adequate housing to millions of blue-collar workers who are playing an important part in the economic development of China.

Moreover, the poor condition of individual buildings in the urban village does not justify the eradication of the entire village area. As in any city, buildings come and go, but streets, open spaces, and everything else that give long-term identity to a place can be sustained and even integrated into the future of the city. They could be treated like the older historical villages that some Western cities have been smart to incorporate into their greater urban fabric—places such as Gràcia in Barcelona, or the West Village in New York City. Their irregular and small grain of urban fabric provides a welcome variety to the larger homogeneous city grid, whereas the small lots bring opportunities to smaller businesses.

Total demolition, the default option of the state, is problematic because of the lack of proper substitutes. Not only does it erase the unique historical and cultural traces of the village, the redevelopment can put pressure on the surrounding infrastructure and is also expensive. In addition, demolition eventually

forces migrants to resettle in suburban areas that have potential for trouble. China's 12th Five-Year Plan announced the building of 36 million of affordable housing units by 2015, but most of them are located on the outskirts of the city. These are lesser alternatives to the urban villages, since the villagers will need to make long commutes to work. Their isolation from the city and the lack of social diversity would easily turn them into ghettos, much like the *banlieues* in Paris. Instead of urban villages, cities would be better to redirect their anxieties to even more threatening disruptions of their vision of modernity: the newly constructed ghost towns and malls. These are the empty and high-end antitheses of the urban villages, such as Ordos City in Mongolia and the South China Mall in Dongguan, which is the largest mall in the world and also the emptiest, with a 70% vacancy rate (Beijing's Sanlitun Village, on the other hand, is a thriving outdoor retail center, thanks to its village-inspired open spaces).

Yet, as Margaret Crawford and Jiong Wu write in this volume, "the beginning of the end" of urban villages in Guangzhou is a *fait accompli*. Planning groups dedicated to their destruction have already demolished the 800-year-old Liede Village, and turned it into a paradigm of village redevelopment. Despite this, Crawford and Wu remain optimistic that a new generation of planners and officials will offer more progressive planning for the villages. They could be guided by important counter paradigms to the Dachong and Liede

Image 3. Visitors and villagers in Daxin Village play pool outdoors. Photo by Stefan Al.

redevelopments, such as the Dafen and Huanggang Villages.

Dafen Village in Shenzhen is internationally infamous for its production of "fake" paintings ranging from Da Vinci to Warhol, which are exhibited in countless exhibition alleys that make the village a popular tourist attraction. As Jiang Jun's chapter shows, Dafen represents hope for urban villages not only because of its economic success, but also because of the fact that the village is recognized as a model by city officials, who agreed to feature Dafen in the Shenzhen Pavilion of the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai.

Nick R. Smith's chapter illustrates how Huanggang Village, also in Shenzhen, has been inventively and independently redesigned by its own village shareholding corporation. The village managed to redevelop, achieving balance between a respect for its rural past and aspirations to an urban future that includes 40-story towers and ubiquitous closed circuit television. The village became, according to one city planner, "even more urbanized than the city," which led Smith to reverse the understanding of Huanggang from a "village in the city" to a "city in the village."

Marco Cenzatti argues for a similar epistemological shift for the region of Guangzhou as a whole, that is, to invert our understanding of "the village in the city" to "the city in between the villages." Challenging the urban-rural dichotomy, he shows that villages, like cities, can be key actors of urbanization, as they were in ancient Greece, and as they have been in the Pearl River Delta until recently. Reinstating the focus on the village could lead to

a richer, more variegated pathway of urbanization in the Pearl River Delta, one that is evoked by his map "Villages in Greater Guangzhou" that accentuates the rich patchwork of hundreds of villages.

And as Laurence Liauw argues in his essay, the upgrading of urban villages is necessary from a housing perspective, not in the least for the lack of an appropriate alternative. China's current social housing policy, he critiques, is incapable of housing the people it plans to accommodate. While the living conditions in urban villages are currently substandard, tested village upgrading strategies to overcome villages' persistent ailments offer a more viable alternative to out-right demolition.

Finally, one way of reorienting the urban village debate from stigma to strength has been through the application of a photographic lens. The twelve case studies featured in this book are photographed in a "lomography" style, which finds its origin in the mass-produced inexpensive cameras of the 1950s. The leakage in the inexpensive plastic bodies led to partial over-exposure, creating unpredictable and dramatic effects in the photos, including vibrant and saturated colors, high-contrast images with vignette and film grain, and cross processed colors. The low-tech cameras have regained their popularity particularly in Asia, where amateur photographers appreciate the spontaneous, artistic, and unpredictable photos as an exciting alternative to the predictable precision of the digital SLR.

By doing so, it can shed a more adequate light on the urban village, commensurate with the subject matter, as a counter to the uneven

political geography and skewed arena of representation. Instead of what the *Shenzhen Daily* claims to be a "gloomy picture" of the urban village, with "rampant burglary, drug abuse and trafficking, prostitution, organized crime and even murder," this book attempts to paint a fairer picture that depicts the urban villages' uniqueness, pedestrian friendliness, human-scale, accessibility, vibrancy, and spontaneity—in short, all the elements that make up a good city.[9]

1. "Works starts on Dachong renovation," *Shenzhen Daily,* December 22, 2011.
2. "Villagers to get billions from Shenzhen demolition," *Global Times*, January 25, 2010.
3. For some examples of factory workers living in urban villages, see *Factory Towns of South China,* edited by Stefan Al (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012).
4. Terasawa Hitomi, *Daizukan Kyuryujyou* [Kowloon Walled City] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1997).
5. Fulong Wu, Chris Webster, Shenjing He, and Yuting Liu, *Urban Poverty in China* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2010), 74.
6. The theoretical notion of urban informality has been advanced by AlSayyad and Roy, for instance, in *Transnational Perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America, and South Asia*, edited by Ananya Roy and Nezar AlSayyad (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004).
7. See, for instance, *Illegal Cities: Law and Urban Change in Developing Countries*, edited by Edesio Fernandes and Ann Varley (London and New York: Zed Books, 1998), and *Rethinking the Informal City: Critical Perspectives from Latin America*, edited by Felipe Hernandez, Peter Kellett, and Lea Allan (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010).
8. See, for instance, Janice Perlman, *The Myth of Marginality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).
9. Wu Guangqiang, "Urban villages, an ill of the city," *Shenzhen Daily*, April 18, 2011.

Image 4. Dafen Village is known for the numerous "fake" paintings that are exhibited throughout the village, including in its alleys. Photo by Stefan Al.

The City in between the Villages

Marco Cenzatti

The phrase "Village in the City" is widely used to summarize a condition in Chinese cities that, as urbanization proceeds, is becoming increasingly common. Following the economic success of the last decades, cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou have been expanding, encroaching on, and surrounding once isolated rural villages. By means that have changed over time, and usually change from case to case, the agricultural fields of the villages are transformed into new parts of the expanding metropolis—residential towers, commercial centers, industrial and business parks. The residential part

of the village changed not only its economic base, but also its physical appearance and social makeup. "Villages in the city," with their entrance gates, old houses, and crowded and narrow alleys, are still easily recognizable. Yet, they have lost their social homogeneity, as urban immigrants move into villages, where they find cheap housing and often end up outnumbering the villagers themselves; villagers, on the other hand, add four or five stories to their residences, and rent the additional space to migrants. It even happens that an entire village is rented out to migrants, while villagers have moved to new residential towers.

The focus on the metropolis and on "villages in the city," however, hides two related considerations. First, villages in the city are just the most emblematic and extreme in a wide range of changes that have been occurring in most, if not all,

of the villages of the Pearl River Delta (PRD). Second, villages, in and without the city, are not only the victims of urbanization—although in most cases they are. They are also a starting point of urbanization and a key element in a process of urban change that is markedly different from the dominant Western model.

In the West, explanations of urban development for a long time have been dominated by the narrative that began with the Chicago School of Urban Sociology and saw urban expansion characterized, at least since the industrial revolution, by rings radiating out from the original commercial, industrial, or financial city into the countryside. Over the last fifty years this model has been complicated with the addition of satellite towns, suburbs and exurbs, edge cities, polynucleated metropolises, but its basic narrative has not changed: urbanization

Image 1. The village of Baishan is completely engulfed in the city of Shenzhen, but it still maintains its nucleus of older houses, surrounded by the village's new apartment buildings. The city's residential towers hover over them in the background.

continues to expand from the city outwards and, by the same token, the countryside is still left at the loosing end of the story, systematically eroded by (sub-)urban growth.

It is tempting to assume that the same dynamic has been at work in China in the post-Mao era: the (modern) city is the motor of urbanization and (pre-modern) villages are representatives of the countryside, inexorably surrounded by, assimilated into, and erased by the urban. Yet, until recently, Chinese regions such as the PRD have shown that the urbanization of a region originated in the industrialization and densification of villages and towns, rather than from the expansion of the central city. If anything, Chinese urbanization (and we should perhaps use a term different from "urbanization"), from the beginning of the opening-up policies to the mid-1990s, started with a pattern of urbanization that recalls the *synoikism* of ancient Greece, where urbanization started with villages, growing, encroaching on one another, and coalescing into towns. Different from the Greek antecedent, however, villages and towns of the PRD did not become a single city. Rather, they developed into a region of diffused urbanization. Geographer Terry McGee (1991) called similar regions in Southeast Asia *desakota*, identifying

them by their closeness to major metropolises, a mix of (mostly small-scale) agricultural and non-agricultural activities, the availability of cheap labor, close relations and good transportation linkages through the region, and participation in the global economy. In short, seeing them as a spatial organization where urban and rural coexist, rather than clashing.[1]

This type of development can be recognized around Guangzhou, beginning in the late 1970s, with the progressive rural industrialization and changes of agricultural activities in the PRD. The urbanization of Guangzhou, however, suggests a larger-scale, unfinished synoikism. The ten districts that compose Greater Guangzhou today are dotted with a myriad of villages that, since the beginning of the post-Mao era, have participated in the industrialization and urbanization of the region, but are not part of the city. Thus, while in Guangzhou's central districts there are many cases of "villages in the city," there is a much greater number of villages that surround Guangzhou and on which the city depends.

Spatially, this has resulted in a growing urban form that, rather than radiating out of a center, produces a center-less (or village-and-town-centered) region. These

villages are not relics of the past that should be modernized, eliminated, or preserved as museums. As recently as in the period between the establishment of PRD's Special Economic Zones to the mid-1990s—in the period that Ma and Fan called "urbanization from below" and Shen, Feng, and Wong named "dual-track urbanization"[2]—they have been the driving force of the industrialization and urbanization of the region. It is only over the last fifteen years or so that the metropolis has asserted its dominance over the urbanization of its surroundings, in the process that George Lin called "city-based and land-centered development." Thus, rather than a contradiction between city and countryside, the Pearl River Delta faces a contradiction between two types of urbanization, a village-based urbanization "from below' and a "center-based" one that echoes the metropolization of the Western model.

In this sense, villages-in-the-city are not an isolated phenomenon. They are the extreme form of a broader and more general dynamic that is changing the relationship between the city and all the villages. In this change, villages are denied a voice in the type of urbanization in progress, and perhaps the opportunity to help to develop a regional urbanization that is more variegated and more appropriate for the PRD.

Urbanization from Below

. . . Migration to towns and the growth of town population are creating a new track of 'urbanization from below' whose processes and control mechanisms differ greatly from those of the dominant city-based track of urbanization from above.

(Ma and Fan, 1994: 1629–30)

In part this "urbanization from below" has its historical roots in the Chinese leaders' traditional mistrust of large cities, resulting in a level of urban population that

remained below 30 percent for the entire Maoist period. More significantly, several key policies of Deng Xiaoping's reform package supported the growth of villages

and towns while discouraging the growth of large cities. For example, the Agricultural Responsibility System[3] and other economic reforms that de-collectivized land
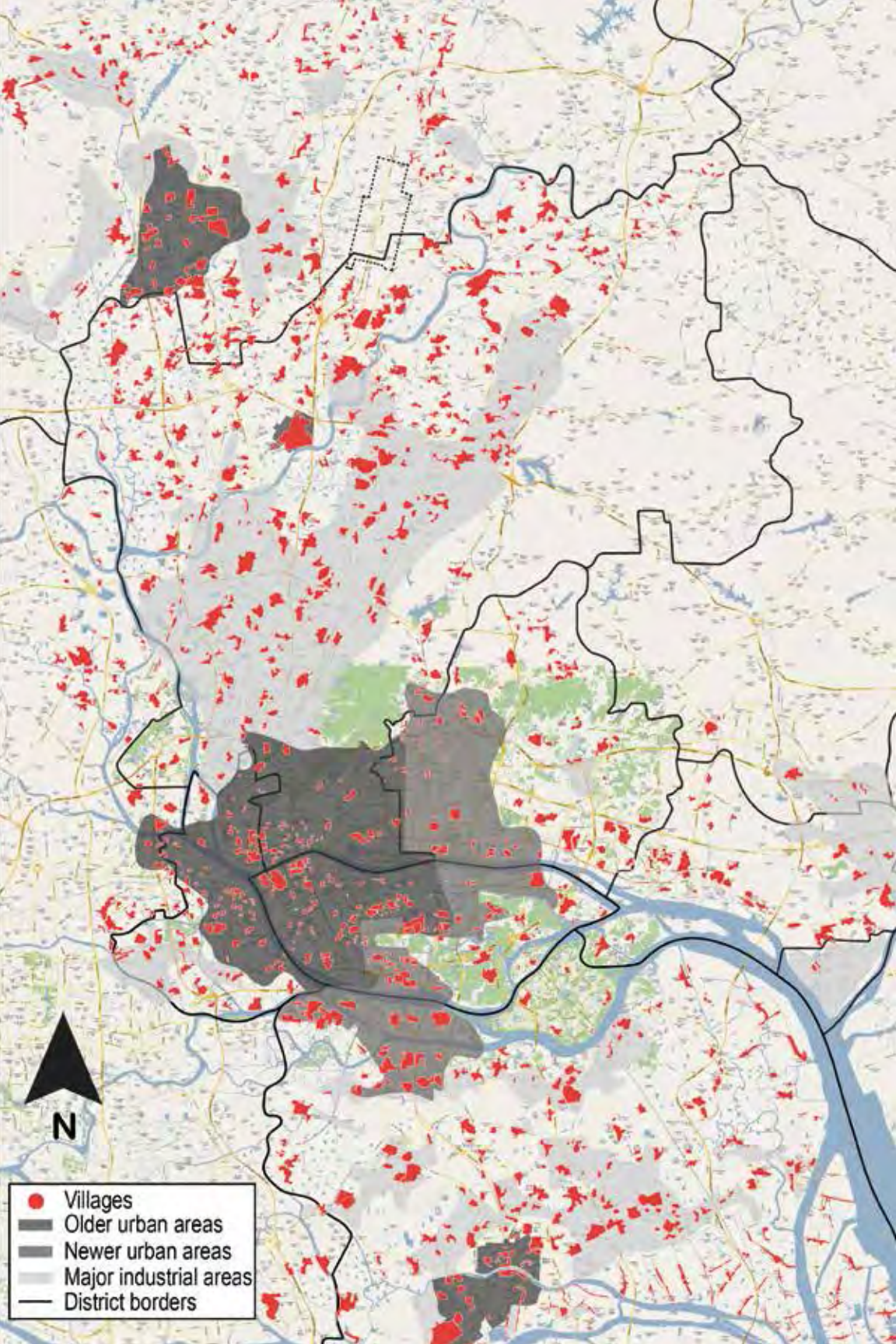
Legend:
- Villages
- Older urban areas
- Newer urban areas
- Major industrial areas
- District borders

N

use, allowed diversification of agricultural products, gave access to open markets, produced a rapid growth of agricultural productivity, improved living conditions in many villages, and increased the importance of market towns. Similarly, after 1978, when rural collectives, families and individuals were allowed to engage in artisanal and small-scale industrial activities, a new wave of industrialization started across villages. By the mid-1980s, many of these small-scale enterprises had become Township and Village Enterprises (TVEs), the most successful and rapidly growing component of the Chinese economy, accounting for over 30 percent of China's GNP by 1990.

On the other hand, large cities were deliberately left out of these changes. The increase in agricultural productivity had created a large surplus rural population, but the central government believed that cities would be unable to sustain the influx of the rural migrants and directed, via the residence permit system,[4] migration towards villages and designated towns. The convergence of these two sets of policies led to both the growth of villages and to the number of designated towns which jumped from fewer than 3,000 in 1980 to about 9,000 ten years later.

The PRD is a prime example of urbanization and industrialization from below. The first factor was the unique character of development of TVEs in the delta. Until the end of the 1980s, in most of the country TVEs remained limited to production for national consumption, eschewing international markets. In the PRD, by contrast, they were almost immediately geared to investment from abroad and production for export. On the one hand, the connection with foreign countries was favored by the establishment of the Special Economic Zones of Zhuhai and Shenzhen in 1978 as the first test of Deng Xiaoping's opening-up policies, and by the expansion of the SEZs to the entire PRD by1985. On the other hand, many village residents who had emigrated to Hong Kong and Taiwan during the Maoist era had maintained contacts with their village. Thus, the open-door policy created the conditions for successful émigrés to invest in their village of origin. As a result, TVEs in the PRD thrived, with their export increasing from less than 0.5 percent of total Guangdong exports in 1978 to 17 percent in 1985, and 66 percent in 1991 (Ho 1995).

Although data for the growth of industrial production is not available at the village level, the difference in the period 1978–1984 between the growth of industrial output in Guangzhou (10.3%) and the small and medium-sized towns of the PRD (averaged at 22.4%) is a clear indicator that the economic growth of the region was not centered in the metropolis.

Not surprisingly, the growing economic importance of rural industry attracted immigrants and was accompanied by a sort of "Village and Township Urbanization" that largely ignored Guangzhou: while the average growth rate of urban population was minimal in the Maoist period (0.75% annually between 1957 and 1978), the rate increased to 7.70% (per year, between 1978 and 1986) after the opening of the SEZs. This growth was, indeed, concentrated in the Special Economic Zones, which grew at a 30.88% annual rate. By contrast, the rate of growth for Guangzhou was 3.17% and its share of urban population declined from over 67% to 50.33% (Xu and Li 1990).

At a smaller scale, Panyu County well exemplifies the rapid township and village-based urbanization of the PRD. Despite its central location, within easy reach of Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, and Macao, for the first half of the 1980s, Panyu's rate of economic growth was limited, reaching 15.94% in 1985. The following year, however, the rate of industrial and agricultural output jumped to 32.38% and remained there for the rest of the decade, second only to Dongguan, a few miles away, in the entire country. Similarly, migrant population, which had never before exceeded 5,000, jumped to 15,751 in 1986, and by 1991 reached 89,167 (Lin 1999). Between 2000 and 2008, Panyu's official population increased from 650,000 to 1,600,000.

Image 2 (p. 11). Villages in Greater Guangzhou. The highest density of villages and the highest industrial concentration in Greater Guangzhou are found in the districts of Huadu (to the north), Baiyun, Yuexiu, Tianhe, Huangpu, Liwan, and the part of Panyu north of the Shawan Shuidao branch of the Pearl River (running west-east, at the bottom of this map).

Most villages in the Pearl River Delta are "lineage villages," i.e., villages established by common ancestors and whose residents share the same surname even today. By contrast, villages in the south part of Panyu, usually stretched along a river or canal bank and only marginally industrialized, were established after the 1949 by the Maoist government. © Marco Cenzatti.

Two major factors triggered this sudden growth. One is the already mentioned opening up of the entire delta to foreign investments and commerce. The other is the rapid development of Panyu's transportation infrastructure. As geographer George Lin points out, the most interesting aspect of this development was that it was largely planned and financed by local governments rather than by a single, central agency. This "has significantly contributed to the formation of a distinct extended metropolitan region characterized by intensified rural-urban interaction . . . growing mixture of urban/rural activities, and commercial development in nodal and ribbon form" (Lin 1999: 249).

As Image 3 shows, even today this urban and rural mixture and the over 300 administrative villages[5] that form its nodes remain a distinguishing feature of Panyu's landscape. Thus, returning to the synoikism of classical Greece, rather that coalescing into a single city, Panyu's villages have evolved in centers of agricultural as well as industrial production and have come together in part of a region of diffused urbanization, or better a *desakota* region.

City-Based and Land-Centered Development

Since the mid-1990s, however, a new wave of urbanization or, more precisely, a city-based and land-centered urban revolution, has gradually taken place through which cities, particularly large cities, have managed dramatically to upgrade and expand their urban built environment as a means of reasserting their central position in the rapidly globalizing Chinese economy.

(Lin 2007: 1832)

This "urban revolution" and "land-centered development" started with the separation, in 1988, between land ownership—which remained in the hands of the state—and land-use rights—which could be bought and sold. The latter possibility created a de facto land market. In turn, the market of land-use rights offered municipal governments a way to raise capital by selling (leasing, to be precise) urban land to private developers. This was and is particularly important for the local government, since urban land is the only stable asset on which city governments can rely— by expropriation, allocation, or conveyance—to generate revenue by changing the designation of rural land to urban. "City-based," on the other hand, refers to the large projects, often signed by star architects, which a city needs in order to promote itself and establish an identity that allows it to "to get on the map" and meet the competition of other regional and global centers. Thus "city-based" and "land-centered" dynamics are woven together: the development of place-making projects raises the value of the surrounding land, and land-use rights transactions provide the local government with capital to finance those projects.

Guangzhou's growth over the last two decades has been driven by this process. Between 1988 and 2000 in Guangzhou non-agricultural land doubled from 35,000 hectares to about 70,000 and increased from less than 10% of Guangzhou's total land to 19%, while agricultural land decreased from 78% to 65% (Lin 2007: 1842). The decrease of agricultural land indicates that a large part of the new development did not occur as restructuring of the already urbanized "old" Guangzhou, but as new development in rural areas.

From the 1990s onwards, this coincided with Guangzhou's multi-prong effort to restore its dominant position on the Pearl River Delta and to re-establish, via the implementation of a regional master plan, top-down control over regional growth. To begin with, in June 2000, the city boundaries were extended to incorporate the previously independent counties of Panyu in the south and Huadu in the north.[6] Second, the city undertook the construction of a vast network of new roads and railways that promoted its reach throughout the region. This also facilitated access to the deep-water port under construction at the southern tip of the newly created Nansha District. Finally, it began several large place-making interventions that expanded its urban core. Among them, the city planned a new central business district (CBD) in the Tianhe District, followed by the even newer cultural and business center of New Zhujiang City (with the Guangzhou Opera House designed by Zaha Hadid and the Guangdong Museum designed by Rocco Yim) at the southern border of the district. Between 2002 and 2008, it also built new monumental structures for the
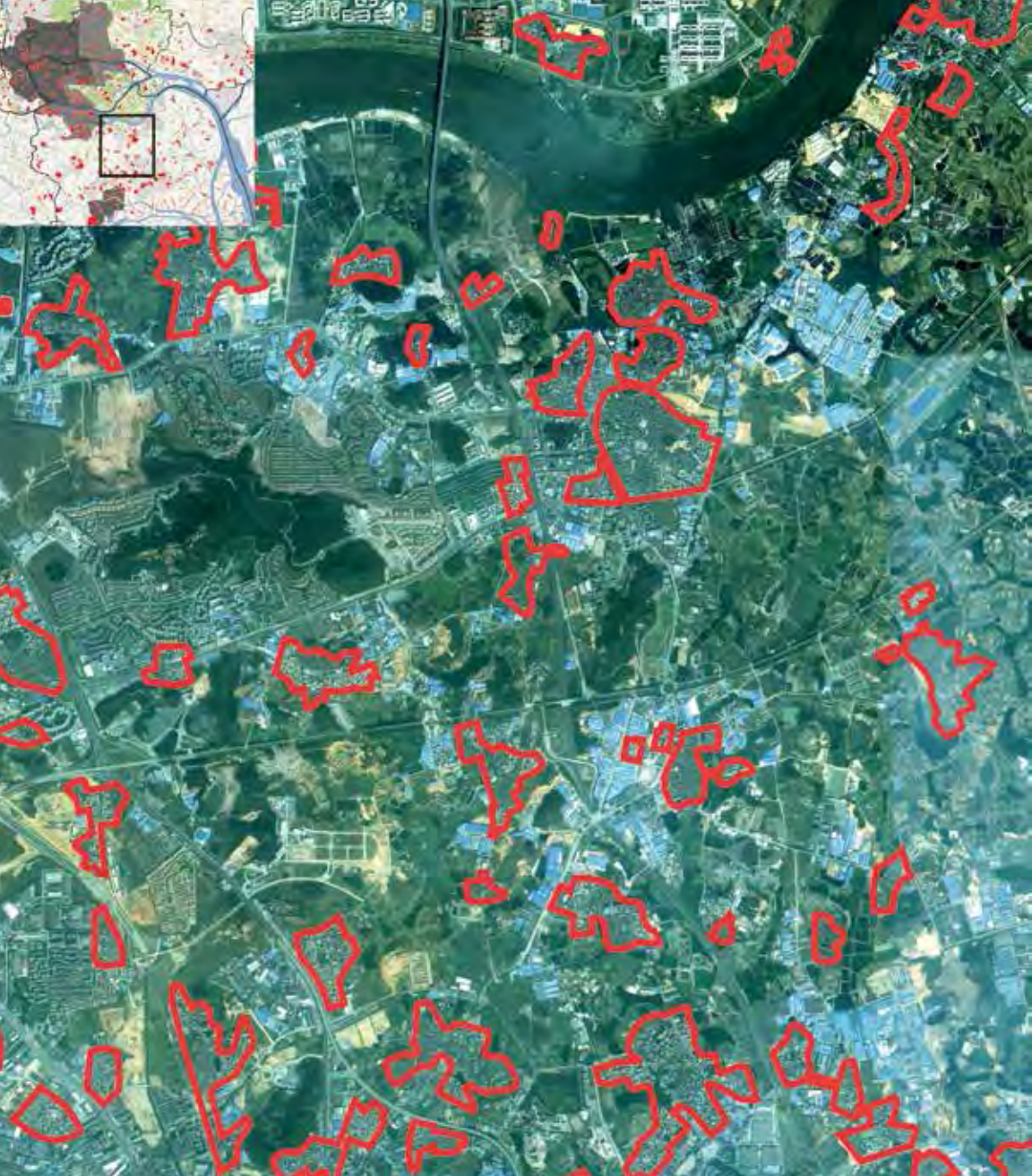
Image 3. Panyu. This slice (at the northern end of the district, closest to the older part of Guangzhou) shows the mixed landscape of the district. Villages (outlined in red), industrial buildings (most of the buildings with blue roofs), agricultural fields, and fish ponds (darker green) coexist in close vicinity.

Image 4. The University City occupies an island in the Panyu District, at the border with Haizhu and Huangpu. As they lost their agricultural land, the villages of Beigang (Image 5) and Suishi (Image 6) turned to commerce. Shops offering goods and services to students were opened. The village of Beiting (Image 8) has been fighting to keep their homes while Lianxi Village (Image 7) has been rebuilt (unsuccessfully, as it turned out in the following years) as a museum.

Canton International Trade Fair in the Haizhu District.

As a final example of place-making, it may be worthwhile to mention the construction of the University City between 2000 and 2004. The city is composed by ten university campuses, either new or relocated from the older districts of Guangzhou. Located on an island at the northern tip of Panyu District and on the border with Haizhu, the complex suggests that the center is now truly expanding into a district that was an independent county only twelve years ago and that still has a *desakota* character. In the four years of construction the island has lost all its agricultural fields and has produced its own villages in the city.

The villages on the island exemplify the different destinies that villages in the city often face (see Images 4–8).

Conclusion

Returning to the initial differentiation between the characteristics of urbanization in the West and in China, one could conclude that the period of "urbanization from below" has been an interlude that is now concluded, that Panyu is becoming a suburb of Guangzhou, and that what looked like a *desakota* region was just a moment of passage towards a fully urbanized condition increasingly similar to the Western model. Such a position, however, would fall back on the presumed urban-rural dichotomy and would again identify the city

as the sole agent of urbanization. As a result, place-making, place-promotion, and land-centered development will be the path towards further modernization and urbanization, even if this means to ignore—in fact, to erase—the urban fabric in which they are immersed.

The recent history of urbanization in the Pearl River Delta, however, also demonstrates a pathway to urbanization that is different from the West, both in the way an urban territory is organized and in the actors who have a voice in the process. Recognizing the viability of the *desakota* region provides a different reading of the region and offers a new focus and direction for intervention. From this perspective

villages and local towns, rather than either remaining invisible or regarded as remnants of the past, should be considered as key actors in the current urbanization process. Far from being leftovers of a premodern time, villages are very much an active part of the changes that the Pearl River Delta is undergoing. In fact, they are the economic base of the region. For example, villages are the main, if not the only, providers of housing for migrants; villages have changed their agricultural production, responding to the mounting demand for fresh produce and fish from the markets and restaurants of the delta; they are also the location of the myriad of firms in the region, in sectors as diverse as furniture making, electronic games, and car assembly. With these multiple roles and their ubiquity across the delta, villages are also the natural starting point for the maintenance and strengthening of linkages between the rural and the urban that a *desakota* region offers and requires. They have the potential to be important actors in establishing a distinctively Chinese way to urbanization.

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1. McGee and Ginzburg coined the term *desakota* using the two Indonesian words *desa* (village) and *kota* (town) with the intent to underline the difference between these regions and the traditional Western dichotomic view of urban vs. rural. The term and the concept have been picked up by several scholars of China's urbanization (e.g., Johnson and Woon 1997; Lin 2001; Sui and Zeng 2001; Heikkila, Shen, and Yang 2003; Xie, Batty, and Zhao 2005).
2. "Dual-track urbanization" (cf. Shen, Feng, and Wong 2006) identifies two dynamics of urbanization: one of spontaneous urbanization

similar to the urbanization from below and a simultaneous dynamic from the center where, villages in the city, as suppliers of housing for migrants, remain a key factor. For the purpose of this essay "urbanization from below" better focuses on the overall presence of villages in the urbanization process.

3. Experiments with the Household Responsibility System began in 1978. Wide implementation followed by 1980–81. The system allowed rural households to contract land plots and machinery from the village. Under the system, farmers were free to decide what to grow on their plot and keep the land's output, after paying a share to the state.
4. The residence permit system (*hukou*) was introduced in 1958 (for the history of *hukou*, see Chan 2009).
5. Administrative villages are bureaucratic entities, with an official local government. Natural villages are villages that formed "naturally," i.e. without state intervention. A natural village may also be an administrative one, if it is recognized by the state.
6. In 2005 the district of Nansha was formed by separating the southern part of Panyu.

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Image 5. Beigang Village.

Image 6. Suishi Village.

Image 7. The Lingnan Impression Park has replaced the original village of Lianxi.

Image 8. Beiting Village.

Binhe Avenue 濱河大道

Fuqiang Road 福強路

Guangshen Expressway 廣深高速公路

Furong Road 福榮路

50 100 200m

XIASHA VILLAGE
下沙村

Established by the Huang family during the Song dynasty, Xiasha Village has over 800 years of history. The descendants farmed, fished, and cultivated oysters for a living. They also planted mangroves along the coastline to protect the village from tides.

During the 1990s, the village was substantially redeveloped. To reduce pollution, village executives purposely pushed out heavy industries and set up a clothing industry. At one stage, the village was famous for major Chinese clothing brands. Xiasha Village is also renowned for its *pan cai* feast that is celebrated during Chinese New Year. In 2002, the village broke the Guinness World Records for hosting 60,000 people in its *pan cai* fest.

Today, the main streets of the village are full of massage parlors. At night the village transforms into a red-light district.

擁有超過 800 年歷史的下沙村，是黃氏家族在南宋時遷居到此而成立的。黃氏的後代主要以農業、捕魚和養殖生蠔為生，他們在沿岸種植了紅樹林以防禦海潮。

在 1990 年代，下沙村開始了重建工程。村民引進了服裝企業，以減少重工業的污染問題，因而令下沙村成為了著名的名牌服裝生產總匯。此外，下沙村的農曆新年大盆菜也是很有名的。在 2002 年農曆正月十五日，下沙村的盆菜宴請了 60,000 位賓客，還因此打破了健力士世界紀錄。

今天，下沙村大街滿街都是按摩和休閒場所。晚上下沙村就變化成了紅燈區。

Total population: ~40,000
總人口：~40,000

Area: 35 ha
面積：35 公頃
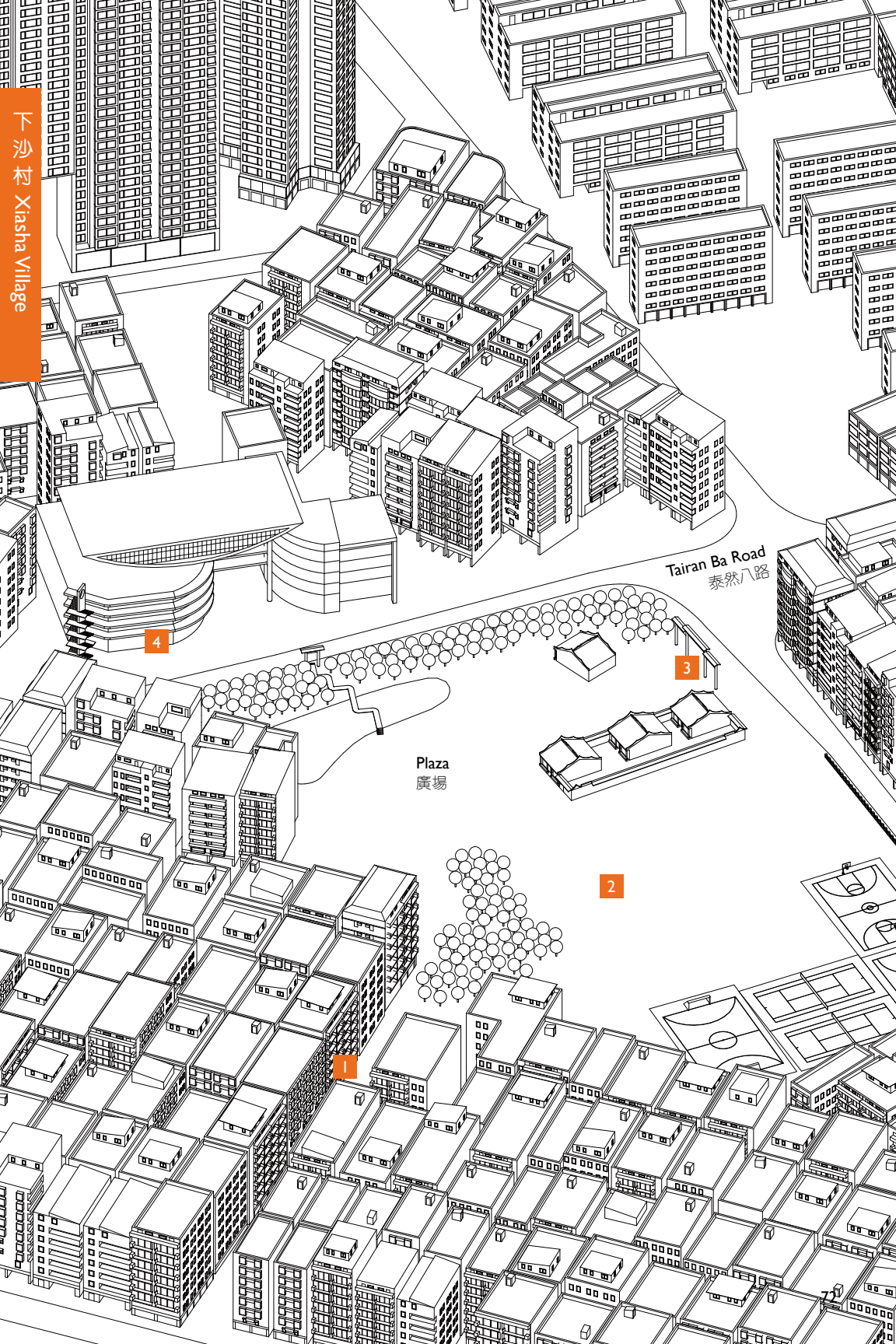
8.75 m² per person
每人 8.75 平方米

Building height: 7–9 stories
建築物高度：7–9 層

High street width: 7–8 m
主要街道寬度：7–8 米

Lane width: 4–5 m
次要街道寬度：4–5 米

Alley width: 1–2 m
支路寬度：1–2 米

4

Tairan Ba Road
泰然八路

3

Plaza
廣場

2

1

Architour
建築巡禮

1 One of the many streets of Xiasha Village. Here you will find your daily goods, fresh food, restaurants, and massage parlors.

2 A large, open space plaza in the middle of an urban village! It is currently being renovated. Many unique structures and sculptures adorn the square.

3 A fine example of a traditional Chinese gateway.

4 The people of Xiasha are proud of their history and achievements and they have built a museum dedicated to the history and tradition of the village. The building also houses a library, kindergarten, and offices for village executives.

1 下沙村其中的一條商業街道。在這兒你可以找到日常用品、新鮮食物、餐廳及按摩和休閒場所。

2 城中村中心一個正在重建中的廣場！ 在這兒你會找到不同的獨特傳統建築物和雕像。

3 一個傳統中國牌坊屹立在廣場上。

4 下沙村村民對自己的歷史和成就非常自豪。因此他們蓋了下沙博物館，讓訪客了解村的歷史和傳統。博物館設有圖書館、幼稚園和村董事的辦公室。
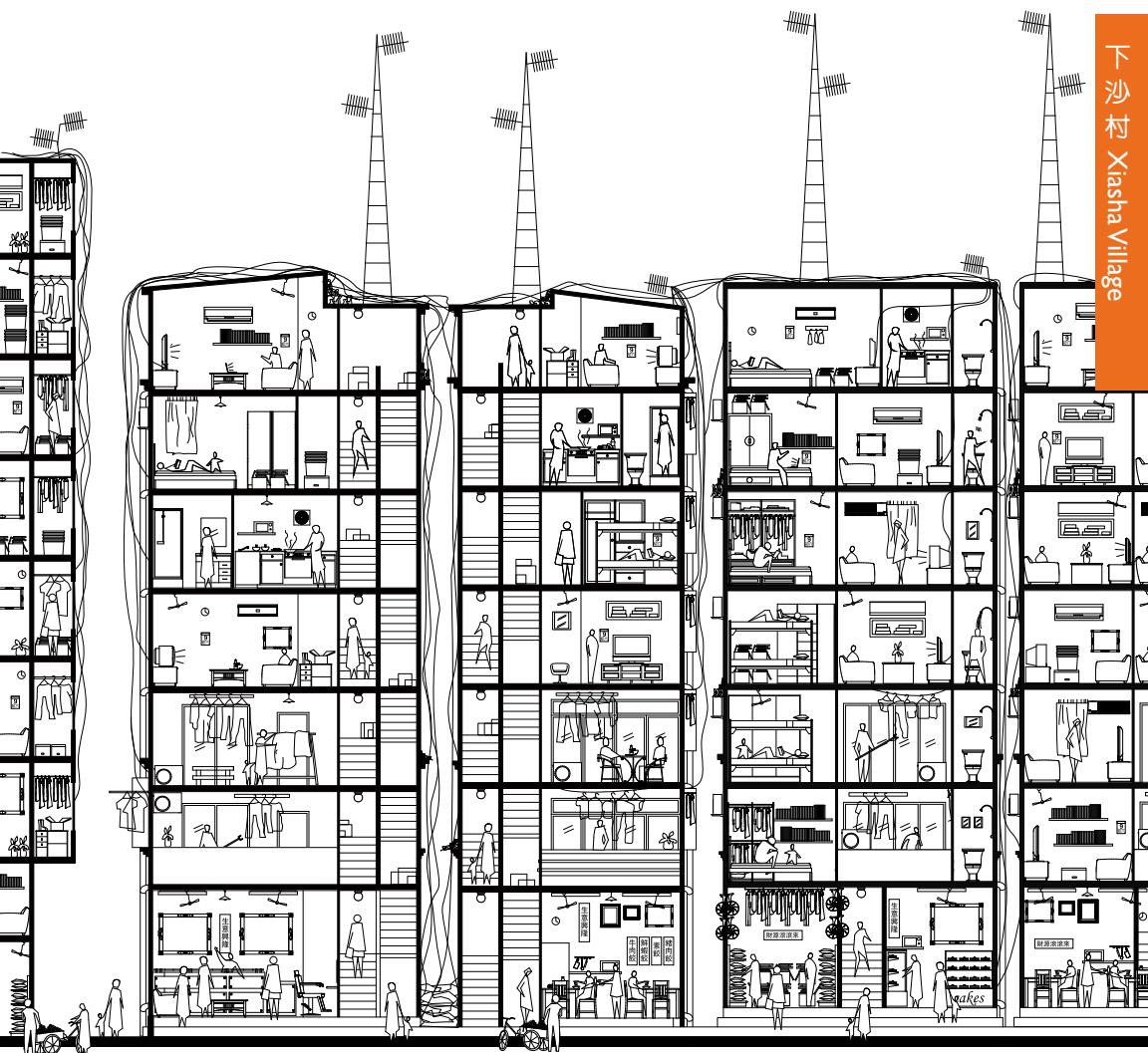
Citang Hou Street
祠堂後街

The vibrant Citang Hou Street accommodates a variety of uses ranging from residential to retail of everyday goods, convenience stores, and restaurants. The street directly fronts the large plaza of Xiasha Village. During Chinese New Year, Chinese round tables fill the plaza to host the traditional *pan cai* feast. Eaten layer by layer, *pan cai* is served in a large round bowl with layers of different ingredients.

Every day, the plaza is used for all sorts of activities including cycling, roller blading, and worshipping.

祠堂後街佈滿了日常用品店、餐廳和便利店等商鋪。這條街面向下沙村廣場。在元旦的時候，村民在廣場內放滿圓桌，舉行盛大的盆菜宴會。盆菜是把不同的餸菜一層一層的疊在一個大圓盆內，供食客享用。

平時，這廣場是村民踏單車，玩滾軸溜冰和作拜祭儀式的地方。

Commerce
商業

A. Fashion Shop 時尚商品

City Pretty Person Fashion 都市麗人時裝	A1
Dragon Fly Shoes 龍飛鞋業	A2
Outstanding Good Person 卓婭佳人	A3
Belloann Fashion 巴萊亞時裝	A4
Biass Fashion 卡你布拉士時裝	A5
Willis Fashion 維利斯時裝	A6
Sa la la Fashion 莎啦啦時裝	A7
Cefiro Fashion 塞飛洛時裝	A9
Grain Feather Fashion 禾羽時裝	A10
Cobalt Stone Fashion 鈷石時裝	A11
Port One Dragon Fashion Collection 港一龍時裝總匯	A12
Playboy 花花公子時裝	A13
Blue Out Feeling 藍色出情	A14
Cardcini Fashion 卡仙妮時裝	A15

A. Fashion Shop 時尚商品

Enormous Day Shoes 巨日鞋業	A16
Lancy Fashion 麗詩時裝	A17
Enter 1982 Fashion Enter 1982 時裝	A18
Europe Song Fashion 歐歌時裝	A19
Farmer Fashion 莊稼人時裝	A20
Grain Court Fashion 禾苑時裝	A21
City Woman Fashion 都市女人時裝	A22
New Elegant Charisma 新雅魅力	A23
Yisica Fashion 依斯卡時裝	A24
City Good Person Fashion 城市佳人時裝	A25
KCQ Fashion KCQ 時裝	A26
Jade Fragrance Fashion 碧黛芬時裝	A27
Happy Accessories 快樂飾品	A28
Aiyaya Fashion 哎呀呀時裝	A29
Step Green Shoes 踏青鞋店	A30
European Mind Branded Shoe Discount Shop 歐維思品牌鞋折扣店	A31
Quality Shoe Bag Store 優尚品鞋包坊	A32
Amanda Fashion 阿曼達時裝	A33

B. Health & Beauty 健康美容

Creative Salon 創意沙龍	B1
South North Drug Store 南北藥行	B2
Beautiful Impression 美麗印象	B3
Dragon Clan Hairstyle Famous Store 龍派髮型名店	B4
Beauty Always Benefits 美尚惠	B5
Thousand Good Shop 千佳行	B6
Hair Origin Land 髮源地	B7
Xiasha Mouth Cure Centre 下沙口腔治療中心	B8
Shenzhen Blue Fly Clinic 深圳藍翔門診部	B9
Love Forever Wedding Photography 鍾愛一生婚紗攝影	B10
Sir Glasses 爵視眼鏡	B11
Safe Step Sports Gear 安踏體育	B12
Original Hairstyles 首創造型	B13
Consistency Drug Store 一致藥店	B14
Sight Nice Glasses 視嘉眼鏡	B15

C. Entertainment 娛樂

Gold Peng Leisure 金鵬休閒	C1
Man Happy Game Room 君悅遊戲室	C2
Video Shop 影片店	C3
Add Prosper Leisure Island 加旺休閒島	C4
New Gold Source Leisure Centre 新金源休閒中心	C5
Adult Toys 成人用品	C6
Love Nest Bar 愛巢酒吧	C7

D. Restaurant 食肆

Red Tea & Dessert House 紅茶館甜品屋	D1
Good Farm Bakery 佳田麵包店	D2
Yellow Product House Private Dishes 黃品居私房菜	D3
Jade Tea House Restaurant 翡翠茶餐廳	D4
New Prosper Rice Rolls King 新旺腸粉皇	D5
Taiwan Fresh Made Tea 台灣鮮泡茶室	D6
Bashu Peak Restaurant 巴蜀峰餐廳	D7
Good Taste Home Restaurant 好食家餐廳	D8
Together Celebrate Hall Chinese Herbal Tea 同慶堂中國茶居	D9
Now Bake Cakes 即烤蛋糕	D10
Blessed European Cakes 幸福西餅	D11

D. Restaurant 食肆

Ba Eat Noodle Shop 巴食麵館	D12
Absolute Taste Duck Neck 絕味鴨脖	D13

E. Public Service 公共服務

Xiasha Community Working Station 下沙社區工作站	E1

F. Grocery 雜貨

Cow Kitchen Junk Food Store 牛廚零食店	F1
Hundred Direction Convenience Store 百方達便利店	F2

G. Electronic Products 電子產品

Fly Dragon Communication 飛龍通訊	G1
Middle Easy Communication 中易通訊	G2

Xiasha Street 下沙街

0   10   25   50m

Housing
房屋

1.8 m

3.2 m

8.4 m

6 m
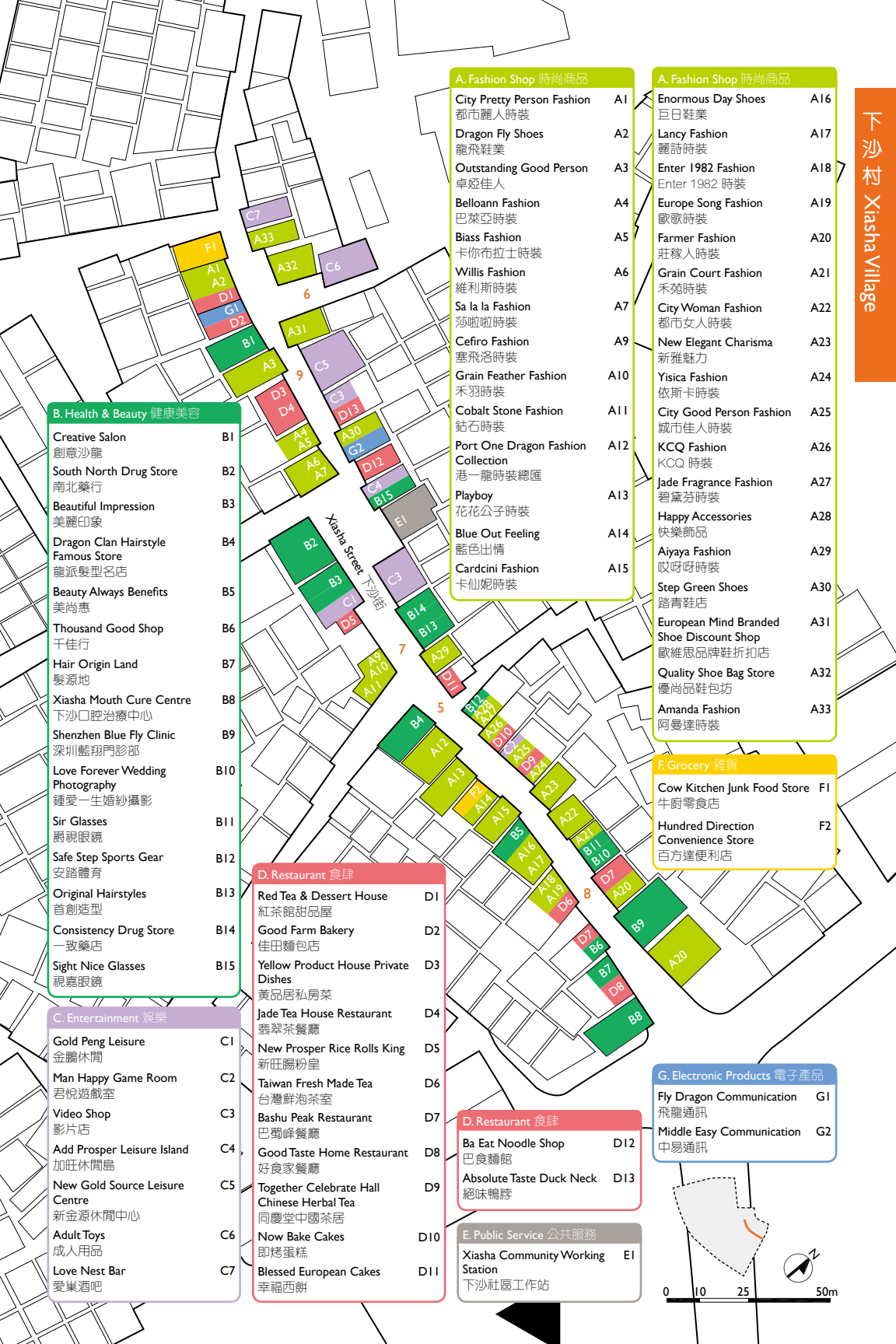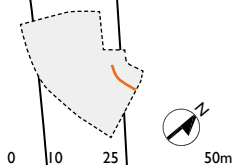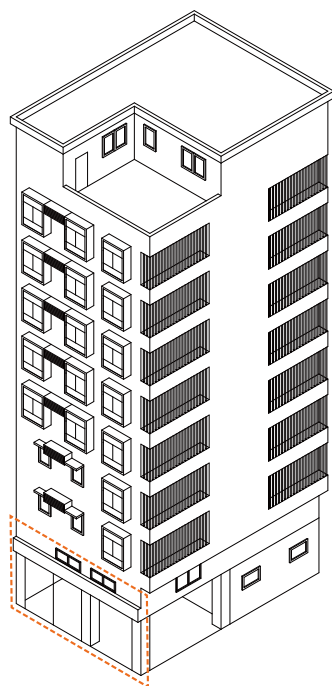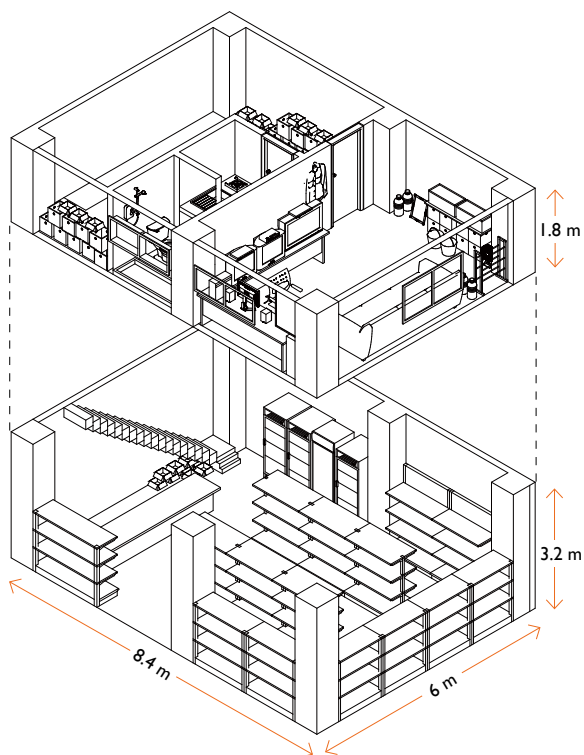
Mixed-use units are very common in urban villages; this is an example of a dual-function retail and residential unit in Xiasha. The ground level houses a 24-hour convenience store. The second floor provides office and living quarters to the same renter. Some of the spaces are also used for storage of stock.

在下沙城中村非常普遍的混合功能單位一例：地面樓層是 24 小時便利店，二樓是便利店辦公室和租戶居住空間，還擺放了存貨。

Commercial and residential
商住兩用單位

1 person
1 人

Area: 100 m² (incl. retail shop)
面積：100 平方米（包括商店）

Monthly rent: ~4,000 RMB
月租 ~4,000 元人民幣

Boss
老闆

I am from Hong Kong. I decided to move to Shenzhen because housing prices were a lot cheaper here as compared to those in Hong Kong. I wanted to open a store to kill time.

I have lived in the village for over ten years now. Initially, I did not choose to live here for any particular reason. I was just looking for a good location to open a convenience store.

When I was looking for a place to set up a store, one thing that attracted me here was the sex industry. This street was used to be full of prostitutes looking for business at night. I thought that if I opened a convenience store here, I could earn some money, both from visitors and prostitutes. But nowadays you won't see prostitutes on this street anymore. In fact, the sex industry in Xiasha is no longer as active as it used to be, but you can still find prostitutes in the massage and entertainment parlors.

If you are not after a luxurious lifestyle, you can be like me and retire young. You don't need a lot to live and eat in Shenzhen, since living costs are still lower than those in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, be careful at night! There are many pickpockets in this area at night when a lot of people pour into the village for the entertainment parlors. So hide your expensive items!

我來自香港。我決定搬來深圳是因為當時這兒的房屋價格比香港的便宜很多。我當時想開一間便利店來打發退休後的時間。

我住在這村已超過 10 年了。最初我選擇住在這裡，並沒任何特別的原因；我只是想尋找一個好位置，開設一間便利店。

吸引我來下沙村開店是這裡的色情行業。以往這條街晚上滿街都是到處尋找顧客的妓女，所以我想，如果我在這裡開設便利店，便可以賺這些遊客和妓女的錢。現在妓女消失了，儘管你仍然可以在按摩和娛樂場所找到色情服務，但是下沙村的色情行業已沒有以前那麼活躍了。

如果你不追求豪華的生活，你可以和我一樣，選擇年輕退休。在深圳你不需很多金錢也可生活，因為這兒生活成本仍然低於香港。不過，晚上要特別小心！因為很多很多小偷會在晚上光顧娛樂場所的客人！所以請好好看守自己的貴重物品！

Disclaimer: To protect the identity of the research subjects, persons shown are not actual portraits of the interviewees.
聲明：為保護受訪者的私隱，照片中的人物並非真實的受訪者。

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