



# INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF TRADITIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

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## WORKING PAPER SERIES

### DISPLAYING TRADITION

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## DISPLAYING TRADITION

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- |  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>(Re)placing Home: Examining the Shift in Mosul's Urban Spaces and Demographics After Abandoning the Historic Core in the Post-War Settings</b><br><i>Yousif Al-Daffaie</i>                        | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>Cyberabad's Dispossessed Communities:<br/>How the Built Environment Structures Children's Social Lives</b><br><i>Lyndsey Deaton</i>   | <b>21</b> |
| <b>Vanishing Memory and Identity: Tomb Caretakers and Their Descendants at the Imperial Tombs of the Qing Dynasty in China, Seventeenth Century to Present Day</b><br><i>Meng Li and Gehan Selim</i> | <b>51</b> |
| <b>Regeneration of the Urban Village from the Cultural Production Perspective: The Case of Nantou Old Town in Shenzhen</b><br><i>Yifei Li and Ruitong Yang</i>                                       | <b>75</b> |

## **Traditional Dwellings and Settlements**

Working Paper Series

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**(RE)PLACING HOME:  
EXAMINING THE SHIFT IN MOSUL'S URBAN  
SPACES AND DEMOGRAPHICS AFTER  
ABANDONING THE HISTORIC CORE IN THE  
POST-WAR SETTINGS.**

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*Cities experience major alternations to their urban spaces during the natural process of urban regeneration in post-war periods. As a result of the destruction of infrastructure and services, a de facto shift in the location of functional and vital urban spaces occurs, and thus, potentially leaving spaces of cultural heritage and memory in ruins, due to the lack of timely reconstruction and the prioritization of infrastructure revitalization. With Mosul’s Old Town as a case study, this paper aims to investigate the population shift in Mosul 3 years following the ISIS insurgency, specifically from the historic core (Old Town), to debate the fate of the currently abandoned Old Town of Mosul. Building on the population shift, the paper maps the locational shift of the locals following the ISIS insurgency, illustrating the alternation of the population distribution in the post-war setting of Mosul. To achieve that, the paper undertakes qualitative methodologies, using an interactive approach of semi-structured interviews with internally displaced locals, as well as a non-interactive approach of archival documents analysis and visual and audio material that documented the process of the urban shift. Additionally, a one-day event that included Iraqi policy makers and stakeholders was utilized within the data collection and triangulation process. The study examines the shifting locations of traditions of everyday social life that were produced from the change in urban spaces and the revitalization of the historic core in the post-war setting. This study, therefore, underlines the threat of a potential shift in the Mosuli identity, with a renewed urban core and commercial centres, as well as the changing demographics and the displacement of original habitants, as results of the lack of infrastructure and service rebuilding in the historic core.*

**Keywords:** *Historic Core, Post-War, Mosul’s Old town, Left Side, Abandoned landscapes, Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs), Immigration, Cultural Heritage, Spaces of Memory.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION: A New Normal?

Within a small radius of around 1.3 km, lies more than 41 heritage sites, 6 specialized markets, and 12,000 houses, connected through narrow alleyways “Awjat”, which provided jobs for craftsmen of blacksmiths and goldsmiths, and residence for interconnected neighbours who shared these alleyways for centuries. The multi-functional historic core of the Old Town suffered from massive destruction between the years 2014 and 2017, and subsequent negligence regarding its reconstruction, which caused mass immigration both internally and externally. The locals, who could not afford to rebuild their shops and houses, have moved out - internally- to the “Left Side” (a local name for the eastern coast of Mosul) of the city, or -externally- to nearby cities such as Duhok or Erbil. The ones who could afford the reconstruction have individually initiated it with personal efforts, which leaves a lot of room for “architectural freedom” to make decisions in the functionality and the style of their reconstructed property. On the one hand, this creates a new spontaneous layer to the historically spontaneously-expanded old town, as historic cores are impacted by conservation and repurposing just as much as they are by destruction. On the other hand, the mass-destruction faced by the city blurs the

line of what has been the cultural tradition for centuries, which creates confusion in the identity of Mosul. This confusion can later be embodied in renewed traditions, a change of the distribution of the locals and their dwellings, and a subsequent locational shift in the spaces of cultural heritage and historic practices.

This locational shift within the Old Town's demographics and commercial functionality impacts factors that include diversity, tribal and traditional values, as well as the economical state of Mosul. While the central government argues that there is simply no funding for such reconstruction; "I have not received a single penny for reconstruction", said Nawfal Al-Agoub, the governor of Nineveh, regardless of reports that confirm the receipt of \$320 million for reconstruction<sup>1</sup>. This governmental withdrawal from the responsibilities of reconstruction, as well as the limited capacity of NGOs, who are only able to help with moderate to minor destruction, have trapped the locals between the dream of a re-built, or a new, normal. The latter seems the most likely however, due to the severe lack of documentation of the pre-war settings, and the limited funding and ability to reconstruct, caused by the aforementioned factors.

This 'new normal' breaks free from the constraints of pre-war functionalities, and the norms related to generational crafts, specialized markets, and location-specific practice. To bring closer the image of the current functionality of Mosul, one needs to examine the pre-war settings; the specialized markets, the nature of the houses, the alleyways, and the historic landmarks. Subsequently, one can pinpoint these locations, while examining the locational and functional network of spaces, and how they interconnected to draw an overarching image of Mosul's Old Town. Afterwards, one needs to examine the renewed practices; ones that remained, changed, or vanished. The 'before and after' images will contribute to pinpointing the shift of functionalities and locations of places of the 'physical spaces'. However, this is far from enough to determine the impact of the mass destruction, as functionalities and physical aspects of the heritage are not the sole creators of the overarching heritage of Mosul. To form a larger understanding of the 'new normal' one must also trace the shift in the location of the locals within the City. The internal and external immigration need to be studied as a result of the slow reconstruction, the new residents of the city, and the renewed practices and social interactions within the Old Town. These intangible factors form the potential 'new normal' just as much as the tangible ones do. The two are not separated however, they interconnect, cause and impact, affect and are impacted by each other.

Therefore, this paper examines both intangible and tangible shifts of the demographics and functionality in the Old Town through a spatial lens, aiming to examine the interplay of these factors as key elements that will impact the city's foreseeable future, through examining the migration of the locals of the Old Town internally and externally, and the change in the demographics and origins of the residents of the old town, as a spark that potentially ignites a drastic change in cultural spaces in the Old Town.



Fig. 1: Qanater within the Awjat. (Source: Sa'ad Haad)

## 2. GENERATIONAL ACTS

Right from the eastern border of the Old Town on the Tigris, starts the dense area of specialized markets and historic landmarks, from the Corniche Street, passing by Bab Al-Saray, Al-Najafi Street, Al-Sayagheen Street, Al-Maidan Square, to arrive at Al-Sirjkhane, all while having direct visual contact with the Hadba'a Minaret from Al-Nuri Mosque, and the "Big Ben of Mosul": the bell tower of Al-Sa'a Church. This dense, yet functionally diverse, area connects these landmarks and markets through two main streets (Nineveh and Al-Farouq), and a network of spontaneous, organic and narrow alleyways and cul-de-sacs, locally called "Awjat". These Awjat had over-the-ground water drainage system and pointed or semicircular arches that vault underneath the second story of a house, providing a passage underneath it for pedestrians, locally called Qanater (Figure 01). The Awjat were not solely circulation and permeability devices, they provided social aspects through creating communities between neighbours, shared events, and culture of interconnectedness and community. Additionally, these Awjat have held specialized markets for craftsmen including goldsmiths, carpenters and blacksmiths, who created 'signature' Mosuli items including cribs and jewellery.

This image was a snapshot of the livelihood, the functionality, and the geographic proximity of the Old Town, its landmarks and Awjat in the pre-war settings. It is a brief description of the social, commercial and cultural spaces in which different interactions and transactions took place within the area. The desired outcome of such descriptions is not to paint a detailed image of each space, but to shift scales from the 'Old Town' to the 'Spaces within the Old Town' when addressing the issue of shifting demographics and abandoned spaces. This scale is largely more useful to understand this issue than looking at the area as one big space which is suffering from negligence, mass immigration and cultural cleansing<sup>2</sup>. For this reason, a brief look at the typologies and initiation of such acts will aid in determining the level of destruction, the issue of abandoning such spaces, and the impact of newly-introduced demographics to the future of these sites. Afterwards, an overarching image of the 'Old Town' scale, will naturally unfold as a result of an accumulative understanding of the activities within the Old Town, and the disappearance of the locals that initiated, maintained and passed them over the generations.

The first, and possibly the most representative of declining interest in such generational acts due to immigration, is Al-Najafi Street. Built during the Ottoman Empire following a plan to make a street that links Nineveh Street to the Town Centre, the plan aimed to cut through a house of a native Mosuli Family called Al-Nujaifi. Therefore, the street was named this way as a tribute to that family, which ironically owned two multi-storey buildings on either side of the street following its construction <sup>3</sup>. The street started as a significant distributor of books, newspapers and magazines; S.A, in a semi-structured interview, mentioned: "By the end of the '50s and the beginning of the '60s, Al-Arabi, Al-Hilal, Al-Sa'a were among the more important magazines and newspapers. Those were published in Beirut and Cairo and arrived in Al-Najafi Street after 2 or 3 days. Newspapers that were published in Baghdad would arrive in Al-Najafi Street the next day or the same day". The Street started to adapt as scanners and photocopiers were introduced, as L.A affirmed "[Al-Najafi Street] has changed a lot through the years. The houses surrounding the street became printing presses, storage units and workshops. They all relate to stationery. it started to intertwine with Bab Al-Saray [a more commercial street for everyday groceries]". In parallel and shortly after its construction, Al-Sayagheen Market extended from it, which mainly held goldsmiths. With time, the street started to become divided into northern and southern parts, with the northern one being invaded by sweet shops and groceries, as they attracted considerably more sales than books over time. As a natural result, following the destruction of the street, book shops are very late to opening, if not at all. When asked about the return of life in Al-Najafi Street, Y.A responded "It is back to 30% of its original functionality, but not like how it was. Al-Najafi Street used to be very dynamic and full of people. Right now there is no momentum like this. This goes back to the fact that other places are destroyed. The locals also fear remaining explosives under the debris.". This statement indicates that there has been no effective cleaning process for the debris in this street, while grocery shops and bakeries have opened, as Al-Mawslia TV has documented that the first business to reopen within



Al-Najafi Street was a bakery. The change of functionality of authentic bookshops, the invasion of groceries and sweets shops, alongside the government and mayoralty's lack of effort to clearing debris and preparing these historic bookshops to reopen, are not only impactful on the collective memory and perception of a cultural street but also excludes a sector of the society, who have individual memories and personal attachments to such spaces. Al-Najafi street is not an exception or the sole mediator of unique practices, it is a link in a network of cultural heritage in the Old Town. This network also includes functionalities and targets other sectors of the society, whom exclusion poses a threat to the overarching cultural heritage in the Area.



Fig 2: Orizdi Building (Governmental) opposite to privately owned cloth shops. (Source: Sa'ad Haad)

An example of this is Al-Sirjkhane Street, which is chosen by 80% of female participants, due to the dominant function of merchandise of women's clothing. Although it is a much easier case to present than Al-Najafi Street, due to the mainstream appeal of female clothes in comparison to book merchandise, and the subsequent quicker reopening of its shops, it is still interesting to understand both the natural and the war-resulted change in demographics within a significant destination like Al-Sirjkhane Street. Before the mass-immigration of the Jewish minorities following the Israeli settler colonialism of Palestine, the street's merchants were Jewish; the oldest participant, 81, mentioned: "In Ramadan, the shops are open until the sunrise, but most of the shop owners were Jewish." The street has always been a destination for not only



Mosuli women but also residents of surrounding villages and suburban areas. Such commercial significance and popularity have gained the mayoralty's attention, as one of the first streets to have its street paved, and debris cleared, was Al-Sirikhane Street, as Al-Mawslia TV has documented. The street and surrounding similar streets have -almost- returned to its full functionality due to the shop owner's individual efforts, however, the surrounding area of governmental buildings, like the Orizdi Building, remain untouched (figure 01). This contrast between the governmental efforts to reconstruct and the individual's blurs the line between what is reconstructed and revitalized, and what is not, and causes confusion to the local's perception about the status of the Old Town, and the possibility of a safe return.

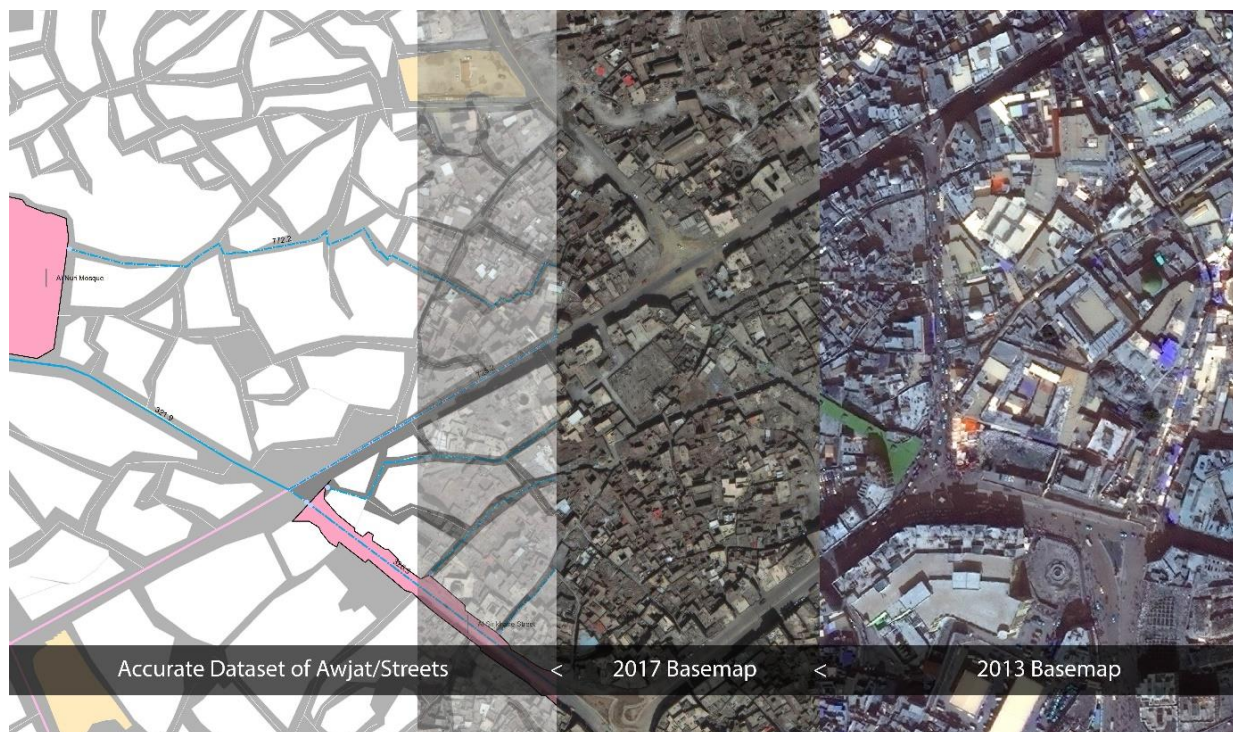


Fig. 3: Building of ArcGIS Dataset (Source: Image graphically worked by the author.)

While the government celebrates the victory over ISIS and the restoration project of Al-Nuri Mosque<sup>4</sup> funded by the Emirati government<sup>5</sup>, the question remains for Mosul: Within the continued atmosphere of sectarian and security tensions, and the continued risk of a second ISIS insurgency<sup>6</sup>, alongside the severe lack of services and infrastructure, who is the returning population? Who would agree to sacrifice security and accessibility to essential services? What are the motives? Is it powerful nationalism that compels the locals to return and attempt to better the city? Or is it a lack of financial competence to be able to build a life elsewhere? Or does this issue entail deeper matters that include traumatized sects and religions that fear the city too much to return, which allows space for a new demographic that can use the now-cheaper rent in the Old Town? This paper examines these questions to debate the fate of the abandoned spaces that the locals

vitalized for centuries, to ultimately question the possible shift in the cultural heritage of the city with a - potentially permanent- renewed demographics in the post-war settings.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

Locals could argue that adaptation is just as significant to the return of the daily life as the conservation of heritage sites and restoring the traditional values, and thus render the 'new normal' not as frightening as architects and urban planners and academics perceive it to be. Therefore, this essay will still look at the potential new normal as a gateway for the loss of identity, whilst utilizing the locals as the backbone and first-hand source of information. The locals provide current, factual evidence, rather than theoretical speculation of potential impacts drawn from similar cases or historic evidence, which could output 'detached' results that are disconnected from real-life implications.

Therefore, I interviewed 10 local participants and received responses from 69 participants. In which I have enquired on the general situation of the livelihood of the Old town, with particular focus on the returning population of Mosul, as well as the disappearance and reappearance of crafts in the Old Town. This helped build an understanding of the local perspective on the tangible and intangible reconstruction of Mosul. I have later furthered this understanding through looking at governmental websites and news agencies, to contrast the local perspective against the governmental focus with regard to the return of life in the Old Town. I have analyzed reports and governmental documentaries on the Old Town and triangulated the numbers and facts against independent NGOs and news agencies, while utilizing the first-hand experience extracted from interviews with the locals as the driving force for the creation of arguments and analysis of results. This is chosen to ensure transparency and relevance of the results to the situation of the Old Town, while vitalizing first-hand experiences and memories.

The main first-hand source of information is the local's input on the spaces which held the crafts and memories, and experiences with renewed populations and abandoned spaces. I have furthered the initial understanding of the spaces of crafts and specialized markets through researching their biography and the growth of their relationship with the original habitants. The main external materials used are news agencies' interviews with the locals, documentaries, archival documents, and governmental statements. Additionally, I have attended and supported a one-day event that included Iraqi policy makers and stakeholders, in which the topic of Mosul's reconstruction and cultural heritage was discussed by heads of NGO's, University of Mosul's staff, and governmental representatives. Finally, I have used this material to illustrate the results in visual maps, drawn from scratch on ArcGIS. This brings closer the results on spatial maps, while providing a

database of accurate maps of Mosul, build from the Basemap of 2013 – one year before the insurgency-, and contrasted against the 2017 map (Figure 3)– the year Mosul was liberated.

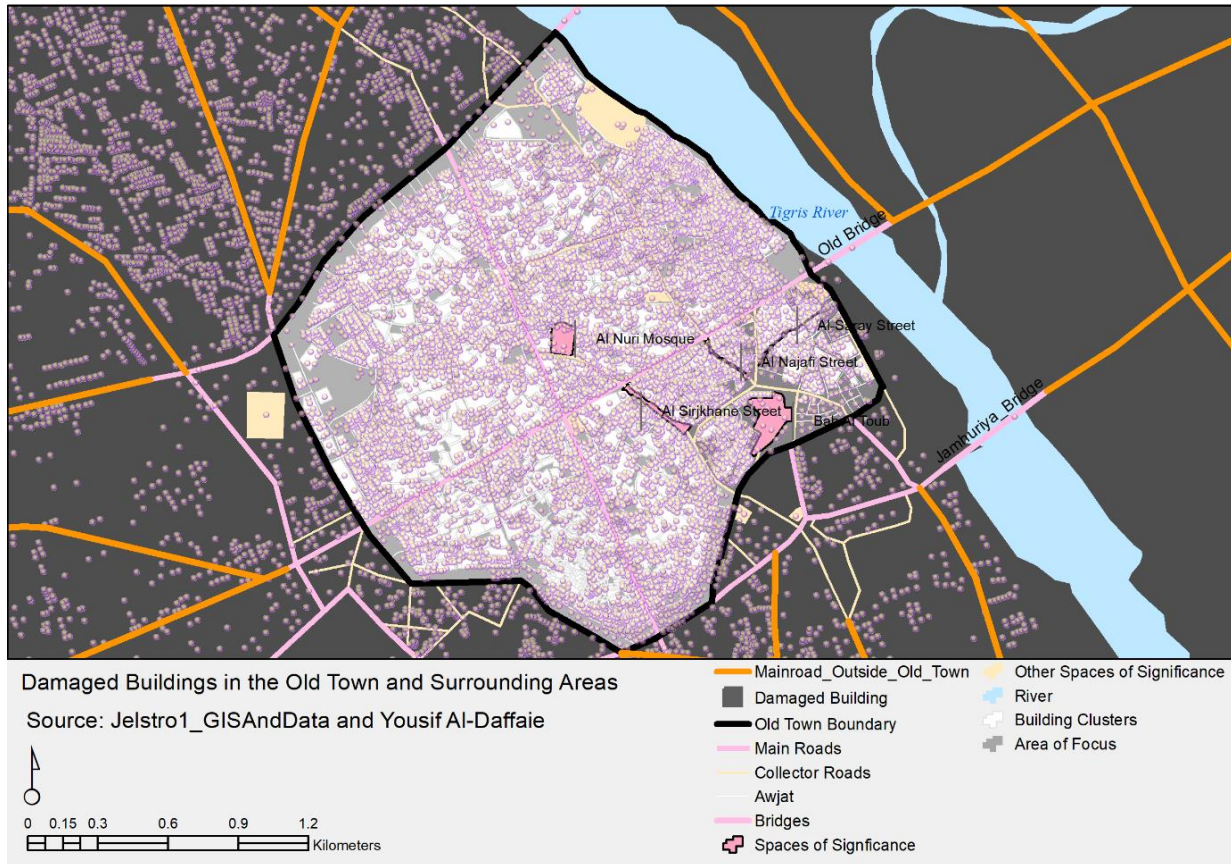


Fig. 4: Damaged Buildings in the Old Town. (Source: author).

#### 4. SPATIALIZING IMMIGRATION

The plethora of external immigration from Mosul following and during the ISIS insurgency remains uncounted, however after investigating reports of NGOs and institutes including the UNHabitat <sup>7</sup>, NRC Iraq<sup>8</sup> and the IOM<sup>9</sup>, one can estimate that over a million locals have fled the city externally. There is no current accurate count of the population of Mosul, its demographics and the distribution of residents, however with the estimation of a million displaced locals, the count of around 600,000 remaining residents in 2015 from 1.43 million in 2003<sup>10</sup>, and the number of more than 53,000 destroyed homes in the west side (which includes the Old Town) <sup>11</sup>, one can safely estimate that over half of the population have been displaced, and it is verified that only 4% of displaced intending to return<sup>11</sup>. Although it is widely known that external displacement destinations included Duhok, Erbil, and Turkey, it is a lot less known who of such displaced people still have a form of connection to the Old Town, through a business that they control, or a



house that they rent, or a family they visit. Such questions require a large initiative to count and register this sector of the population, which aids in understanding the renewed dynamics of the relationship between the locals and their town in the post-war settings. Therefore, this paper shifts the attention from the destination of immigration to the places of departure, to understand the potentially abandoned spaces.

As the Old Town was the most impacted by the liberation operations, the spaces within it suffered the most destruction. As it is the commercial node of the large city of Mosul, the shop owners and the community alike, have suffered great losses and were forced to leave. However, to understand the departing population, one needs to first understand the housing situation in the Old Town, as it held around 12,000 homes, with 8000 of them destroyed or damaged <sup>12,13</sup> (Figure 4). As of after the war, the NGOs have been consistently helping with the reconstruction of moderately damaged homes; L.A, an NGO worker, stated: “NGO's do not help in reconstructing houses from the ground but help in reconstructing parts of partially demolished houses. In order to help, they ask for the original owner, the owner has to have the house's documents.”. All while many of the locals have fled to the Left Side of the city. The externally displaced people, who have built a life elsewhere, have begun to rent their original houses in the Old Town for a significantly cheaper cost, due to the lack of services and security in the area of the Old Town. This has caused the population of surrounding villages to move to the Old Town, and rent houses that are around half the cost of their respective counterparts in the Left Side and original villages. S.H, who lives in the Left Side but works in the Old Town stated “The locals of the Left Side took advantage of the immigrants from the right side and started renting houses expensively. A 100m<sup>2</sup> house costs 300,000 ID (App. \$250). In contrast, the people were still afraid of living in the Right Side, so, the rent there for a house became 50,000 (\$41) a month. As such, the ones who immigrated internally were damaged the most. The ones who came from outside villages were poor, and when they came to Mosul they couldn't afford houses on the Left Side, so they rented the cheaper option in the Old Town.” As such, one can describe the housing image of the Old Town: Houses are either entirely, or moderately destructed with habitants living in them, or reconstructed with individual efforts, and either rented to a new demographic or by the original owners. While it is clear that many of the locals take a nationalistic approach and claim that “if we did not stay and attempt to rebuild, who would?”, other locals claim logicity and state that if a place is not attempting to become my home, so why should it be? Between the former and the latter mentality, the abandoned spaces in the Old Town tell this story of a half-authentic half-confused identity.

Although more research needs to be undertaken to quantify the numbers of new demographics, IDPs, and the numbers of locals that moved from the Old Town to the Left Side of the city, the markets and their shop owners give an idea of the extent of which the Old Town is revitalized; if it becomes dynamic and popular again as a commercial node for the overarching Mosul City, a larger opportunity will be present for the

original shop owners to return, which could have a reversing force for immigration and displacement. However and as of yet, the typology of the markets and the items they offer are governing the return of its shop owners. Bab Al-Saray, Al-Dawasa and Al-Sirjkhane markets have returned nearly entirely, while more craft-oriented and sector-exclusive streets and specialized markets are significantly slower to reopen; L.A. Stated “Bab Al-Saray has been 90% reconstructed with individual efforts. the mayoralty helped a little with the pavements and sewage”, in contrast to Q.O’s – a sculptor- statement when asked about craftsmen “Let’s say there were 100 [craftsmen], the ones that came back were less than 10. They tried reconstructing [the Awjat] and making them more organized, but they didn’t come back.”. One could argue that such slow reopening of non-essential markets is to be expected, due to the drop in population size, the disappearance of the ‘niche’ population that was interested in such streets, and the lower financial returns from investing in such reconstruction works. Although such arguments are true at their core, however, one must remember that the sense of belonging does not only come from individual memories and attachments to spaces, but also to the collective memory, made from a web of images <sup>14</sup> that formed the image of the city over decades. Therefore, the current status of the Old Town’s selective reconstruction process, with the lack of synchronization between the government, NGO’s and locals (Dr Oday Al-Chalabi, from the Department of Architecture in the University of Mosul, in a public workshop, mentioned that there is no such synchronization when asked about it), leaves abandoned spaces (whom original owners and shop keepers have fled the city and refuse to return due to the financial inefficiency of their crafts) that could be exploited for more financially-rewarding practices.

This leaves the question of the subsequent meaning of the abandonment of such spaces to the city’s cultural heritage. Especially for Mosul, the demographics of the city was extremely diverse; Mosul held more than 9 minority groups and 4 religions <sup>7,15</sup>, each played a significant role to the overarching cultural heritage of the Old Town. Whether it be through celebrations and fests, food, clothing, religious practices, or crafts, each of these groups have contributed individually to form the collective diverse image of the city. The sudden disappearance of these groups leaves a gap in the cultural heritage, with abandoned spaces that solidified their existence and documented their contribution to the cultural heritage, including churches, synagogues, and public spaces that are decorated specifically for their events. Another form of ‘minorities’ was original Mosulis that perfected specific crafts, like goldsmithing, blacksmithing or carpentry. Those crafts were inherited through generations within their families; craftsmen from Al-Sayagh work in goldsmithing (Al-Sayagh means the goldsmith in Arabic), Al-Haddad in Blacksmith, and even Al-Qahwaji for owning coffee shops; Q.A stated “The shop owners have been there for long years. When they came back, they go to the same job. So if someone had a spice shop, he would be from Al-Attarin family. So the families would work in the job that their family is known for. Like Al-Attarin, Al-Gassabeen, Al-Sayagheen”. The craftsmen that worked in such jobs have been designated their spaces, small workshops and tools for multiple generations.

Their disappearance and the potential shift of their spaces does not only alter the image of the city and its cultural heritage, but also alienates this sector of the society from their own city, should they decide to reopen their businesses.

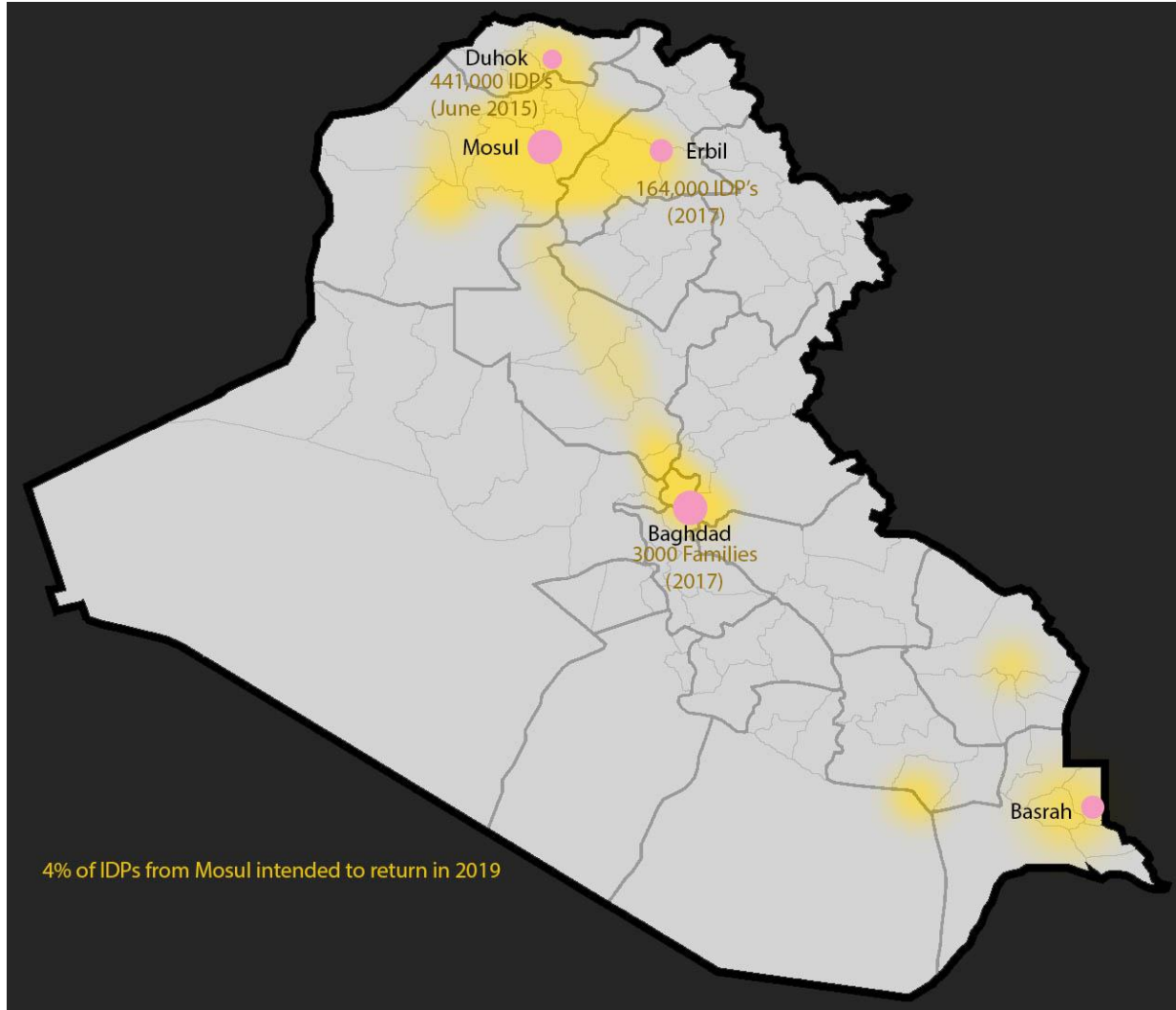


Fig. 5: Country-Wide IDP's from Mosul. (Source: Data from ReliefWeb, 2019; BBC, 2017; KRG Cabinet, 2017; Ali S., 2016, NCCI, 2015. Image Graphically worked by the author).

## 5. EXPLORING ABANDONMENT:

As mentioned earlier, more research needs to be undertaken to understand or estimate the number of Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs) and immigrants, and their destinations. However, until then, this paper attempts to understand the patterns of displacement within the City of Mosul, the resulting abandoned spaces, and the common destinations for three kinds of Mosulis: 1. Ones who left for other Iraqi cities; 2.

Ones who moved to the Left Side, and; 3. Ones who moved within the Old Town (Whether them being shop owners that moved their shop locations, or moved house locations to a less damaged area within the Old Town). The attempt to map such activities within the selected methodology is illustrative and does not attempt to represent the larger population of Mosul. The point of such exploration is to understand the dynamics of what happens after the displacement and immigration; do these people still have a form of connection with the Old Town? Is remotely controlling businesses a common practice? What are the perspectives on Mosul's reconstruction? What is the perception of the Old Town by people who have fled it for some time? These questions will not only determine the probability of a return, but also the extent of which this exploration is permanent or subject to reversing soon, as well as the collective image formed on the Old Town 3 years after the liberation.

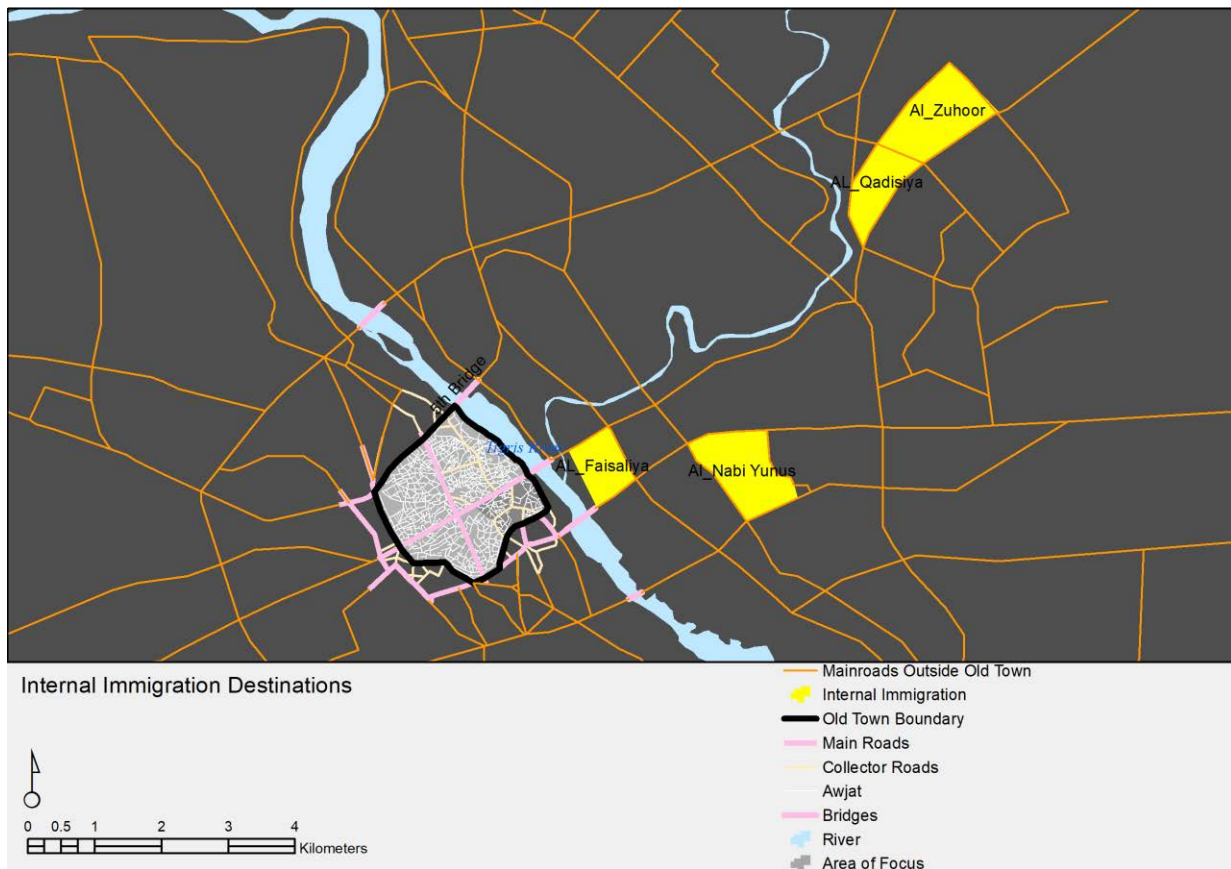


Fig. 6: Internal Immigration Destinations. (Source: author).

Looking at the first kind of Mosulis: The ones who left to other Iraqi cities, there is a large number of documents that evidences their immigration to Dohuk, Erbil and Turkey (Figure 5); The governorate of Dohuk has mentioned on multiple occasions the overwhelming numbers of the IDP's residing in them, which rose from 75,000 in September 2014 to 441,000 in June 2015, with the majority of them being from



minority groups such as Christians and Yazidis, and coming from Ninewa. While in 2017, 164,000 Mosuli IDPs were residing in the Kurdistan Region, in which Erbil is the Capital<sup>17</sup>, up from 36,000 in November 2016<sup>18</sup>. This massive hike in immigration and displacement in a small timeframe has witnessed the daily displacement of around 10,000 Mosulis in the peak of the ISIS insurgency in mid-2017. Therefore, it is estimated that around half a million Mosulis now reside in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), and within the interviews, the participants have repeatedly stated the practices of remote business or house renting; S.A mentioned "... specifically Christians, they have left the city to Erbil, Nineveh Valley, or outside Iraq. They have built a life elsewhere. Right now, if Christians want to come back, it is safe for them, but they rented their house in Mosul, and live in Erbil. When they come to the city to collect the rent, they would visit and walk around the city". Although it also changes the demographics of Mosul, there is a larger threat of those who bought properties elsewhere and sold their houses in the Old Town, especially from the minorities.

As for the second case: Ones who moved to the Left Side, there are more complex dimensions that impact the study of this case. The constant movement of the locals from the right to the Left Side took place before the ISIS insurgency, and it was caused by lack of physical space and social factors, including the natural expansion of the family and the subsequent requirement for more space due to the increase of family members, the "ambition" for a larger space and breaking free from family constraints, and the increased need for privacy and independence; S.A stated:

[some people had] no ambition to expand to bigger houses. My father decided to move, but my uncles lived for decades in a house that is not bigger than 150m<sup>2</sup> and did not think of leaving. They thought about this later. Their children grew up and there was no space anymore".

Such requirements cannot be provided in the Old Town, due to the lack of space and the small area of houses in the Old Town, which are typically 50-150 m<sup>2</sup>. The Left Side, being a more modern urban development, naturally has a larger space which allows for family expansion. A participant has mentioned that the ex-residents of the Old Town reside in specific neighbourhoods in the Left Side, which allows for the continuation of the community, but in a different physical landscape. This internal movement started even before the insurgency, as S.A mentioned "The richer ones in the Old Town have left and went to the Left Side because families have expanded. Every house contained 5-6 families, so they expanded and went to the Left Side. Like Al-Zuhoor or Al-Qadisiya or Al-Nabi Yunus neighbourhoods (Figure 6). My father and uncles decided to expand and move to a bigger house. If you look closer at the newer neighbourhoods, the houses in them are owned by relatives that moved together from the right side, this is in the '60s and the '70s.". Aside from the natural continuous movement from the Old Town, the ISIS insurgency has caused mass immigration to the left Side, due to the aforementioned factors. While it is estimated that the number of

residents in the Left Side has doubled following the ISIS insurgency<sup>16</sup>, it is evident from the constant governmental efforts to return the street side vendors to the Old Town after moving their businesses to the Left Side. Fishmongers have stated that they started to work in Faisaliya in the Left Side, however, were forced to move back to their original space Al-Sammajah in Al-Maidan, following authoritative demands. The same forceful treatment to revitalize the Right Side was enforced on mini-bus and taxi drivers; S.A mentioned: “A month ago I saw the police trying to get bus owners to go to the right side.”

The third demographic -Mosulis who moved within the Old Town- have the least data recorded, as no participant has had any information about such cases, and the reports point to the fact that the damage is too high for people to move within the Old Town. This occurs naturally since 10 out of 52 neighbourhoods are inhabitable, 23 moderately damaged (half of its buildings are destroyed), and only 16 are lightly damaged <sup>16</sup>. The resulting image indicates that the heavily damaged buildings are not reconstructed, and the original residents have fled elsewhere, and the owners of moderately and lightly damaged houses have either reconstructed them with help of NGOs, or fled the city and rented their moderately, or lightly damaged houses to a new demographic who immigrated from surrounding villages. Contrasting this against the initial dense nature of the Old Town, leaves little room for intra-movements in the demographics, as such movements will do little for upgrading the quality of life.

## **6. ANALYSING ABANDONMENT: MEMORIES, IMAGE, IDENTITY AND FATE:**

While the literature within the post-war Mosul field tackles multiple dimensions of its reconstruction including the recording of heritage sites <sup>20</sup>, the reuse of heritage buildings<sup>21</sup>, or vitalizing historic mosques<sup>22</sup>, only a few have addressed the issue of cultural heritage, including the cultural cleansing of ISIS<sup>23</sup>, and provided an analysis of the systemic targeting of culture and memory by terrorist groups<sup>2</sup>. However, and even with constant efforts of international institutes including the UN<sup>24</sup> and IOM<sup>9</sup> to document the immigration patterns, there has been an evident lack of attempts to bridge between the three fields: The physical destruction, the cultural heritage, and the mass immigration of the locals from the Old Town to surrounding cities and even in Mosul itself. This paper has thus far presented numbers and evidence to illustrate the patterns of immigration of Mosulis as a memory of the war, the subsequent abandonment of heritage spaces including Al-Najafi Street and Al-Sayagheen, and the resulting erasure of generations of crafts, know-how and traditions. However. the question remains: how does this abandonment impact the collective memory of the image in the long run? And how are the locals perceiving the Old Town following this drastic change within the vital spaces?

Collective memories are advocates for the vitalization of cities<sup>25</sup>, they are a shared web of images<sup>14</sup> that form the common perception and mental image of spaces. Within times of war, the individual memories of loss, fear and destruction transform these spaces to former sites of terror<sup>26</sup> and the meaning of the space shifts to include governmental betrayal and societal trauma. This transformation of meaning and memory minimizes the collective desire to reconstruct and detaches the locals from the space; as H.S stated

As a person who lived in the Left Side, since the liberation till now, I did not go to the Old Town because I do not want to see that sight. I have great memories in these places especially the right side, as I went to the cinemas, shops and stadiums. Right now they are all destroyed. I do not want to recall memories that are now hurtful.

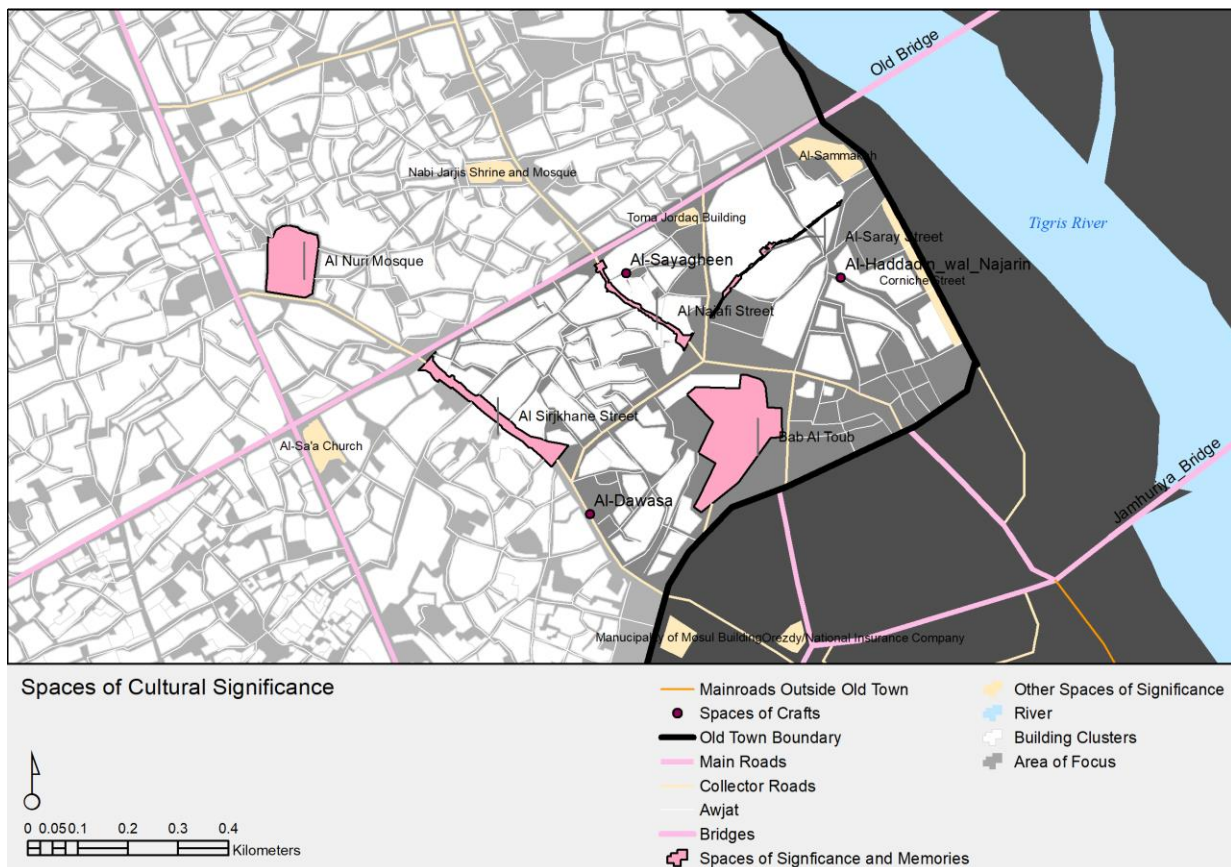


Fig. 7: Spaces of Cultural Significance. (Source: author).

The renewed collective memory of such rapid, traumatic transformation of spaces, leave a sentiment of abrupt emotional detachment, caused by the erasure of spaces of meaning, and the discontinuation of the commercial efficiency (in case of shop owners). In the case of the Old town, and even within the lightly-damaged neighbourhoods, the mass immigration of the original locals and the introduction of the new demographic, leaves less reason for the remaining natives to remain and rebuild. The Awjat functioned as

incubators for communities of shared memories. The locals have remained in the small houses in the Old Town, despite the modern expansion of the Left Side, due to the intangible heritage present within the Awjat of the Old Town (Figure 7). This intangible heritage of shared practices, events and memories was the glue that bonded the attachment of the communities to their Awjat. The disappearance of the locals from these Awjat caused abandoned landscapes of narrow alleyways, sporadically inhabited by some renewed demographics, and a few locals. This abandonment does not only impact the memories and image of the City, but directly impacts the identity of the City of Mosul, which in its turn, controls the fate of the City.

Places are highly dynamic essences that are subject to change over time, even though they may seem to be connected to terms that are seen as 'stable' including 'sense of place' 'identity' and 'character' <sup>27</sup>. Mosul is a prime example of Kim Dovey's argument when he stated the ability of place, and its entailing terms, to change. The rapid and massive change in the Old Town's spaces has directly impacted the sense of place in the Old Town. The destructed landmarks and spaces of significance have blurred the sense of identity amongst the locals, and erased the character of the city. While the initial erasure of such traits in a city does not immediately wipe the identity of a place and the locals' sense of attachments - and multiple examples of this include Munich, Berlin<sup>28</sup> and Warsaw<sup>29</sup> -, it is the consistent negligence, the lack of reconstruction, and the subsequent permanent immigration of the original habitants that causes a potentially permanent change in identity. As explained earlier, the habitants in Mosul's Old Town were not sole occupiers of space, they represented generations of crafts and exclusive know-how, that formed physical items that contributed to the image of the City and the overarching identity. The abrupt disappearance of such vital contributors to the identity does not only impact the tangible output that they produced, but also the intangible essence of their existence, that incubated the sense of belonging, sense of place, and the locals' attachment to the spaces they vitalized. Subsequently, the lack of cultural markets which hosted these generations of craftsmen will be an opportunity for renewed use by the new demographics, which causes the overarching issue of the 'lost heritage'.

The issue of the 'lost heritage' is being manifested within Mosul on the multi-layers of its tangible and intangible dimensions. On the tangible front, the abandoned Awjat, specialized markets and cultural streets are igniting the identity issue within the locals, while on the intangible, the locals are diminishing and being replaced by new demographics on daily basis. Going back to the government's celebration of the Hadba'a Minaret's rebuilding, this has to be contrasted against the deeper issue of confused identity and cultural heritage, which creates the question: Will the revitalization of Al-Hadba'a minaret solve, or work towards, solving the issue of the lost heritage?

## 7. DISCUSSION: RESTORED HERITAGE SITES ON DISPLAY

While there is no correct or incorrect answer for the aforementioned question, one can begin to understand the overarching image from this study's results and begin to rationalize priorities for the reconstruction. In the midst of the mass-displacement of the demographics, the death or immigration of craftsmen and minorities, the crisis in Mosul, and especially the Old Town, is amplified by the abandoned narrow alleyways, the specialized markets that are reopening in different functions and the houses that acquired heavy damage, are all witnessing a lack of initiative for their reconstruction. From interviews, locals estimate that the average cost for reconstructing a house is around \$15,000, and a shop around \$5000. The Hadba'a Minaret's reconstruction costed a donation of \$50 million. In other words, this would have helped reconstruct around more than half of the 5393 severely-damaged houses in the Old Town <sup>30</sup>. Aside from the return of homeowners upon the rebuilding of their homes and providing essential services, such return of the original demographics would vitalize a lot more areas than what the minaret would. The revitalization of homes eventually means the revitalization of the Awjat, the specialized markets, the cultural crafts and traditions, while the rebuilding of Al-Hadba'a Minaret means rebuilding an important heritage site that reconstructs some of the image of the city – Image, in the literal sense.

While the reconstruction of such heritage sites could work towards the rebuilding of the sense of place amongst the local Mosulis, as it functioned as an orientation device and a landmark, this impact is much less existent, due to the decreasing number of locals who work and/or live in the Old Town. The locals that have individual memories with the minaret and the communities that formed the collective memory of the Minaret have been displaced and replaced, and the new demographics have little connection with such landmarks. Shop owners who abandoned their shops due to the inability to rebuild, and the craftsmen whom business models are inefficient due to the lack of support, are the main demographic that advertised, vitalized and promoted the minaret as a symbol of the city. As such, there is an urgent need for the return of such demographics. Such a return is only possible through the revitalization of their businesses, homes, and services.

As such, the question of “what is next?” for Mosul is not a very straightforward one. As this paper underlined, the revitalization of specialized markets is only taking place for financially viable businesses, minorities are migrating and renting their homes to new demographics, and the locals are finding it increasingly difficult to live under such conditions. The naive answer given the aforementioned factors is largely dystopian and, to some extent, irrational: Mosul is on the verge of a permanent shift in demographics and cultural heritage. This answer disregards historic precedents and the ability of cities to reform, revitalize and reconstruct over a long period of time. Additionally, cities are continuously impacted by change, re-use

and destruction just as they are impacted by preservation and construction. Therefore, the question needs a comprehensive study of the history of war and peace in Mosul and the surrounding region, an inclusive study of the government's plans for reconstruction, and a city-wide survey to quantify the new demographics, their origins, intent to remain, and register their activities, perception, and integration with the City's spaces.

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**CYBERABAD'S DISPOSSESSED COMMUNITIES:  
HOW THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT  
STRUCTURES CHILDREN'S SOCIAL LIVES**

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## CYBERABAD'S DISPOSSESSED COMMUNITIES: HOW THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT STRUCTURES CHILDREN'S SOCIAL LIVES



*The neoliberal regime of dispossession in India has been studied from the perspective of landholders (both legal owners and those who invoke a claim) while leaving dependents, such as children, without a voice. This article attempts to show how the spatiality of dispossession affects children's everyday patterns of play by comparing the memory of play with observations of play in three dispossessed villages on the fringe of Hyderabad (Cyberabad). Here, the 'violence of urbanization' describes the ways in which new actors and architecture commandeer public play spaces away from children.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Cyberabad is a large development composed of a series of Special Economic Zones (SEZ) for Information Technology and Financial Services companies on the periphery of Hyderabad, India. It was planned to leapfrog Hyderabad into the professional services sector following the design precedents of Malaysia's Cyber Corridors and San Francisco's Silicon Valley through the neoliberal redistribution of municipal and state resources. In the process of progress, however, seventeen villages were dispossessed of their land.<sup>1</sup>

Promoters of Cyberabad argue that dispossession is necessary to bring middle class employment, stimulate domestic and foreign investment, and boost the economy of an antiquated city. The villagers challenge that the lauded benefits never trickle-down to "true Hyderabadis" as white-collar jobs are allocated to outsiders and the subsidies required to entice multi-national corporations to invest in this desert location siphon municipal funds from public projects. Some contemporary scholars such as Jamie Cross, Michael Levien, and Anamica Singh refuse this dialectic and argue instead for a complex spatiality based on anticipations, reinforced pre-existing inequalities, and spatial co-production.<sup>2</sup> Their work calls for a deeper understanding of the impacts of the *neoliberal regime of dispossession*; a term coined by Levien that I will continue to use to distinguish the predatory approach of dispossession under the neoliberal phase of capitalism in the Indian context. I also uphold his definition of dispossession as a "social relation of coercive redistribution" and the reliance on David Harvey's theory of *accumulation by dispossession*.<sup>3</sup> A call made even more relevant to architects, urbanists, and policy makers as the World Bank and other global financial institutions successfully incentivize National and State governments, especially but not exclusively, in the global south to implement neoliberal development policies at an increasing rate. In this paper, I seek to address concerns that urbanization under the regime of neoliberal capitalism is more violent than under other regimes.

Understudied throughout the academy, children offer a unique perspective on the *spatiality* of dispossession.<sup>4</sup> They are typically integrated members of the village community with some spatial agency and with high stakes in the viability of public space but without the permission to directly participate in the politics or the economy.<sup>5</sup> Drawing inspiration from Kevin Lynch's *Growing up in the City*, Louis Chawla led an empirical investigation of children's spatialities across seven case studies with specific attention to the forces that shape access to public space in *Growing up in an Urbanizing World*.<sup>6</sup> Leveraging Arjun Appadurai's idea of a "scape" to account for the deeply perspectival and uneven character of the forced behind globalization, Sunaina Maira and Elisabeth Soep's *Youthscares* presents ideas and analysis about how youth move across "literal and imagined spaces, specifically analyzing the intersections between popular culture practices, national ideologies, and global markets."<sup>7</sup> And, more recently, in *Children in the Anthropocene* Karen Malone compares qualitative case studies of children's spatialities in Bolivia and Kazakhstan to reveal how underprivileged children are implicated in the discussions of the Anthropocene.<sup>8</sup> While there are limited studies of children's play as an index of dispossession, scholars have recognized that youth's experiences are an important voice to understand spatialities within the framework of complex contemporary processes.

To understand how the neoliberal regime of dispossession has influenced children's play, this research pairs the oral history of each village, specifically focusing on the ways in which elders remember playing and how spatial changes have occurred with current observations and behavior mapping of children's play spaces. In this paper I answer questions, such as how has public space that was previously used for play been compromised? and, how do children play in these communities today? in order to contribute to the on-going discourse of how dispossession processes under distinctly neoliberal policies reproduce spatial inequality. Methodologically, this investigation lends itself to an ethnographic approach that values extended exposure of place and saturation in the voices of the participants for credibility. While I have only engaged a subset of the data (oral history, observations, and behavior mapping), the findings in this study are informed by a larger ethnographic project conducted intermittently over two years living and working in Cyberabad.

In the discourse on children's play spaces, the notion and expectations of play are not normalized and vary across cultural contexts. In this study the general expectations were developed through ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with social organizations and school staff in these communities. Play is defined as a social activity in which children engage for enjoyment and recreation rather than for serious (productive) purposes. Generally, in these communities, the traditional means of play (based on memories and expectations of family members) require safe,<sup>9</sup> open spaces but not equipment or toys or direct supervision/organization.

I begin by describing the methodology of the project and then reveal the findings of two case study communities: Nanakramguda and Rajiv Nagar. I have changed the names all villagers to protect their identity. For each community, I give a brief oral history of spatial changes and reflections from elders who remember how they played in the community before the development began. Then, I reveal the ways in which children currently play in each community through 52 hours of observations and behavior mapping of public play spaces. Finally, I discuss the gaps within the design and planning process that produced these landscapes and conclude by reinforcing the theme that the neoliberal regime of dispossession is a complex spatiality that reproduces and often exacerbates pre-existing spatial inequalities in these communities.

## 2. THE EXPERIENCE OF DISPOSSESSION

The experience of dispossession is contextual to the various scales of individuals, families, communities, and cities. In Hyderabad, when I began the process of identifying and selecting communities to work with, I was confronted with a city-wide theme of ‘erasure.’ Unlike my previous work on dispossession in the United States or in the Philippines, where the use of land acquisition policy is heavily regulated and highly visible (through reports, watchdog groups, and government accounting processes), the neoliberal regime of dispossession in Hyderabad is largely undocumented when it comes to the dispossession of land from low income groups (LIGs).<sup>10</sup>

Erasure has a prominent place in many urban histories but by nature is difficult to document. My initial process of site selection relied on the formal record of the *Master Plan for Cyberabad Development Authority Area* (CDA Master Plan, 2001, p. 9) that identified seventeen villages to be dispossessed by the plan’s implementation.<sup>11</sup> This plan laid a blanket of formality over a fridge area of Hyderabad that historically functioned in the space between formality and informality. By bringing these villages squarely under the watch of speculators who had capitalistic anticipations about raising land value, the government created a motive for dispossession based on income classification and the ability of families to prove legal entitlement.

Field verification of these villages revealed a spectrum of conditions ranging from gentrification to displacement to eviction. However, while all conditions were triggered by the formality of the Cyberabad Development Authority Master Plan, the practice of reorganization to comply with the plan’s land use and building regulations was almost entirely informal. Stories of corruption, bribery, silent occupation, and loud protest circulated amongst the locals still living and working on the village sites. I selected three villages along this spectrum of dispossession as case studies: Nanakramguda, Ishaan Nagar, and Ranjiv Nagar; however, for the purposes of this conference paper I will only describe the cases of Nanakramguda and Ranjiv Nagar. Erasure in the case of Hyderabad is a premeditated consequence of the process of obtaining formality through informality.

### 3. METHODS



Fig. 1: This map shows the area covered by the Hyderabad Urban Development Authority (light grey) with the Cyberabad Development Authority Area (dark grey) and the locations of the case study sites (red). A locator map in the upper right corner shows Hyderabad (red) within the state of India. (Source: Subik Shrestha & Author, 2020).

This paper engages a subset of data from a larger ethnographic research project. While only the 14 interviews with community representatives (elders) and 52 hours of observations and behavior mapping are investigated, the findings were inextricably informed by concurrent and iterative interviews with 26-teenage residents of these communities and interviews with 14 community representatives, 4 government officials, 3 building professionals, and 3 related non-profit representatives in the child-services sector. Their voices will be integrated when they color the interpretation of data, the selection of play spaces, and the development of themes.

PLAY SPACE	Alley	Kirana Shop <sup>12</sup>	Temple	Vacant Lot	Main Street
NANAKRAMGUDA VILLAGE	x	x	x	x	x
RAJIV NAGAR	x	x	x		x

Table 1: The selection of public place spaces, (source author, 2020).

Behavior mapping is an objective observation method. In this paper, it is centered on the specific play spaces (place-centered) and aims to record all user's behavior through time in each place through a tailored system of diagrammatic drawing and annotations. After analyzing the interviews with teenage residents, I identified 13 possible “public play spaces” across the three communities.<sup>13</sup> My research team and I conducted four site observation sessions in one-hour blocks (reported in 15 minute increments) using behavior mapping to document patterns of use in each space (four hours/site spread out between morning/afternoon and weekday/weekend).<sup>14</sup> The map legends were developed based on criteria deemed relevant from the interviews (male/female, child/adult, standing/walking/biking/driving, and direction of travel) and applied consistently across all observations. Extensive fieldnotes and sketches/photographs were recorded during the observation periods.

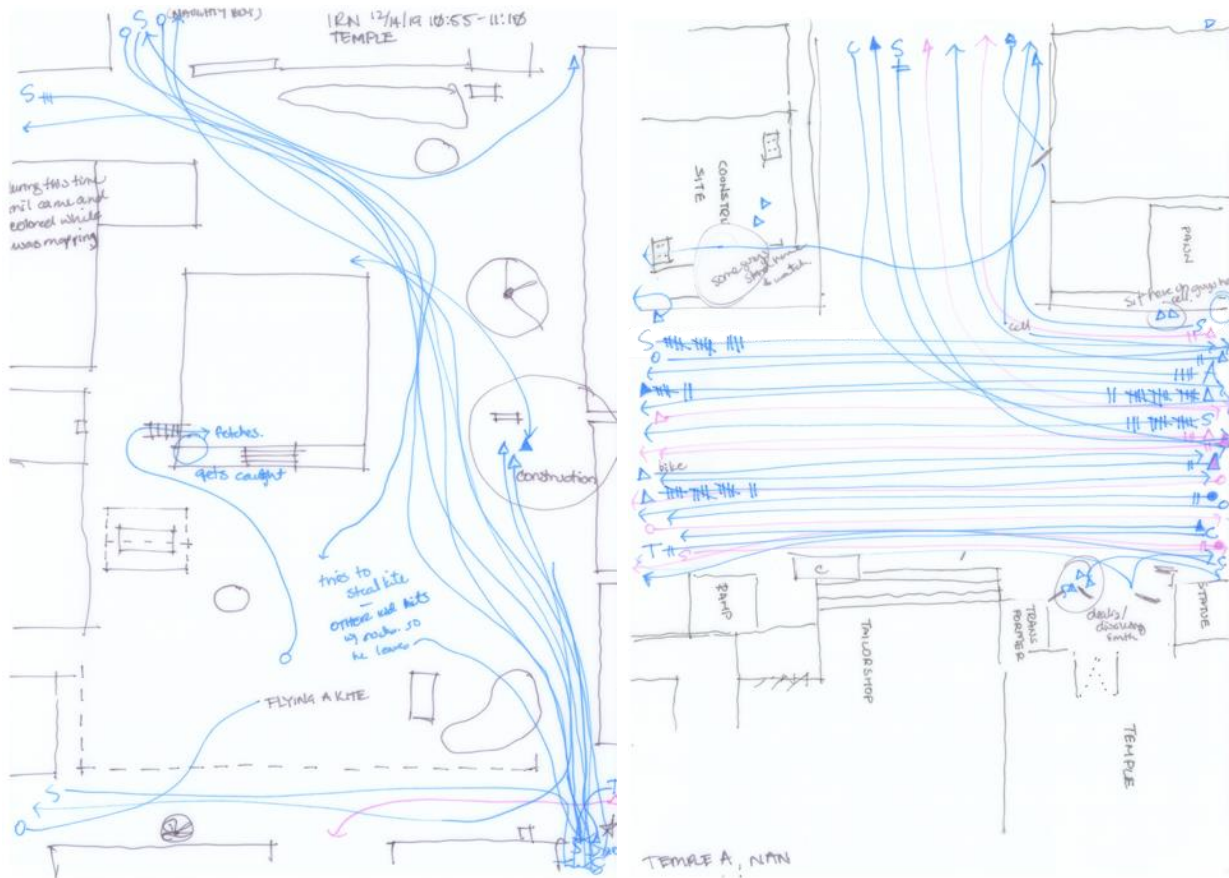


Figure 2: (L) Behavior map from 10:55-11:10 am on December 14, 2019 at Ranjiv Nagar shows only males entering the temple ground space; (R) Behavior map from 4:25-4:40 pm on December 10, 2019 at Nanakramguda Village shows high foot traffic coming from the temple intersection on the main road.

All the behavior mapping took place in early December 2019, which had an average high temperature of 82 F (28 C) and average low of 58 F (15 C) with 57% humidity. This month had the least amount of rainfall for the year with an average of 0.7 days collecting 0.2” of precipitation. The fair-weather conditions are assumed to

encourage the highest rates of use for outdoor public spaces. The following sections describe the material impacts to public space in three villages that were dispossessed by the Cyberabad Development Authority Master Plan and my observations of how children today use public space within them.

#### 4. THE CASE OF ENCROACHMENT: NANAKRAMGUDA VILLAGE

Nanakramguda Village is an example of encroachment along the spectrum of dispossession. While the village remains unmoved, it is only linked by the memory of surviving residents to the old agricultural village dating back some 400 years. Walking down the main street, I could see the effects of market forces and a shifting demographic on the historic village architecture. What were once 1-floor, low-slung, clay tile roofed farmhouses have been replaced with concrete, mid-rise, paying guest towers with parapet roofs for drying laundry. The old houses with out-buildings for cooking, bathing, and storage have been enclosed with concrete walls effectively creating semi-private courtyards while the new towers have space-efficient exterior stairways pouring directly out to the street and limited public domain. The architectural juxtaposition was accented with walled-off vacant lots, *tiffin* vendors (afternoon snack), and street-level shops.



Figure 3: Farmhouse, now vacant, surrounded by mid-rise construction with high-rise towers in the background. (Author, 2019).



As told in separate interviews with Ritvik and Balraj, the former and current heads of the village respectively, the village has been predominantly comprised of Lodha-caste people who migrated from Aurangabad to Hyderabad to be guards for the Nizam generations ago.<sup>15</sup> Under the *jaggr* system, families were given land to cultivate.<sup>16</sup> As the state transitioned to Independence, the area was then managed by a *Waqf Board* with little disturbance to day-to-day life.<sup>17</sup> Some farmers had *loni patta* (assigned lands) but most did not have any formal documentation “as was the way.”<sup>18</sup>

In the early 1990s, Vijay Nirmala started shooting films in the area and shortly after, Producer Ramanaidu purchased 40 acres and built the Ramanaidus Film Studio on lands near the village. This was viewed favorably by Ritvik and Balraj because they knew of farmers who were compensated well for the land; Balraj noted specifically, “40% over market value.” However, they contrasted the earlier land sales with the land grabs of the early 2000s, in which then Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu (CM Naidu) gave notice to the occupants that several hundred acres of land in Nanakramguda would be taken by the government without compensation, even for the few farmers with *patta* (title). With bitterness, Ritvik noted that only the film studios were compensated during the land grab, he believes, because “[they] belong to the Telugu Dessam Party (TDP) and had family connections to congress.”<sup>19</sup>

*Patta*-holding members of the community took their case to the supreme court. At the time of this fieldwork, nearly 20 years later, most of the land has been grabbed by the Telangana State Industrial Infrastructure Corporation as part of the Nanakramguda IT Park (an SEZ).<sup>20</sup> Some of the land has been developed for multi-national corporations and the rest lies vacant but enclosed (inaccessible to farm). No official court settlement has passed. Despite the intense commercial and infrastructure development in the neighboring SEZ, the remaining village still lacks basic public infrastructure such as a primary health center, library, community hall, ground, or even drainage infrastructure. When asked about the contrast between the neighboring SEZs and the village’s lack of infrastructure, the local corporator Avula Satyanarayana blamed an extreme lack of municipal funds to the extent that he is not even able to replace the few damaged streetlights that line the main road.<sup>21</sup> In interviews, the villagers consistently brought up these disparities as a source of suffering.

Against the memory of a childhood playing cricket in the fields, climbing boulders, and singing in the streets, the elders voiced concerns that today their children do not have the same opportunities. The village is enclosed by newly constructed highways and SEZ compound walls leaving it to grow only by increasing density and building up. For generations, villagers proudly farmed for a living but now they rely on service jobs such as home guards or running *tiffin* centers and renting out rooms to the masses of migrant construction workers. Although a small community, there have not been any pathway programs, job-

trainings, or employment set asides for the villagers to ease the transition from agriculture to service labor. Ritvik and Balraj shared similar figures for the population of residents. Of the local residents they believe about 70% are Lodha Caste with Scheduled Caste and Muslims being the next two largest groups and the remaining are a mix of Reddy Caste and Other Backward Classes.<sup>22</sup> They agree that few have been able to leave and buy farm land farther out of the city so most of the 4,000 original villagers stayed. A steady influx of over 8,000 migrant workers has completely changed the character of the community. The migrant workers are typically young men without their families from the northern and eastern Indian states living in rented dormitory rooms.

The increase in migrant construction workers combined with the decrease in parents working in the home, has raised real concerns about child safety, specifically for teenage girls. The streets are no longer safe places to play as they have been commandeered by migrant workers walking to and from the nearby jobsites. Ritvik and Balraj expressed concern that their village had no place for children to play. During their term as political leaders they have both repeatedly lobbied the local government but were told each time that according to the city plans Nanakramguda had reasonable access to a ground in Kothaguda. However, they disagree in practice as the Kothaguda Ground is located 1.5 miles from Nanakramguda on the far side of the Outer Ring Road (a new 6-lane raised highway) with no pedestrian pathways. It is not just material concerns, though, as Balraj said, “those people [referring to the residents of Kothaguda] do not like outsiders coming in and cause [us] problems.” Neither knew of any children or families in Nanakramguda who considered the Kothaguda ground a reasonable place for their children to play.

Where do children play in Nanakramguda if not in the Kothaguda ground identified by the planning documents and not in the adjacent fields that are now walled-off construction sites? The findings from the iterative interview process with children suggested a range of spaces outside of the home that held promise as public play spaces even if they are only “public” in practice. From these, I selected four specific sites - an alley, an abandoned lot, a *kirana* storefront, and a corner on which the main Hanuman temple stands (as indicated in Figure 4) to observe and map user behavior. I selected the spaces for diversity of themes, locations, and space types.

Analysis revealed that of the four spaces, only the abandoned lot and the alley loosely functioned as play spaces. The alley and the abandoned lot are the farthest from the main street and had more locals than migrant workers passing through when compared to the Hanuman Temple and the *kirana* shop. The abandoned lot and the alley were popular with younger children of approximately 4-12 years but less teenagers were visible.



Figure 4: Historic Nanakramguda Village has been reduced to the nuclear area by encroaching SEZs. The large orthogonal buildings spaced out are surrounded by privatized public space while the residual village retains a small unit scale with high density and limited access to public space. (Source: Subik Shrestha & Author, 2020).

The abandoned lot was shaped like an obtuse wedge on the inside of a shallow curve in the lane where sand had been dumped to construct the nearby towers and some construction debris remained. Residents parallel-parked cars along the edge of the lot, which gave children a sense of protection from the road, although most vehicular traffic was limited to two-wheelers (motorcycles and mopeds). On early weekday mornings, at lunch, and then at the end of the day construction workers used the lane to cut through a back entrance to the village next to the lot and access the main road where they walked to and from the SEZ jobsites.

Many villagers were superstitious about this lot because it was adjacent to the abandoned mid-rise tower that collapsed three years prior. As a typical semi-formal building process in fringe development, the tower was originally designed for four levels (ground plus three levels) but was being constructed by the on-site builder to seven levels (ground plus six levels). The reasons for the collapse range from structural (inadequate reinforcement, missing columns, irregular shape) to siting (the buildings were constructed too close to each other violating setbacks).<sup>23</sup> Tragically, the collapse led to the death of 11 people and two more seriously injured. The builder was jailed, two town planning section officers were suspended for not stopping the construction, and the deputy municipal commissioner and the assistant city planner were both placed under suspension.<sup>24</sup> The lingering superstition hinders the redevelopment of the site and the space is left for the children and the cars.



Figure 5: The abandoned lot. (Source: Author, 2019).

Sometimes during my observations, I witnessed parents sitting outside on the steps or watching from their balcony. The children who lived nearby came together instantly as if a magnetic force pulled them to the lot upon returning from school. They played through many activities from gossiping to kites, wrestling, showing YouTube videos on their phone, dancing, *kho kho*, and *kabaddi* - but usually, they were in a frantic mix simultaneously.<sup>25</sup> They knew everyone. Their group was only around on weekday evenings and occasional weekend mornings but even during those times it waxed to over 20 children and then moments later waned to two or three as friends were called home to take on chores or homework or were distracted by another game. There were some teenagers (both girls and boys) who came under the guise of watching their younger siblings but quickly strayed to calmer activities such as chatting on a nearby piece of tin. In groups, the older boys teased the girls and then ran away. While this space functioned closest to how other community grounds functioned in neighboring communities, it lacked the formal games such as cricket and the age diversity (no adults) but had the added benefit of intimacy and surveillance.



Figure 6: (L) the alley and (R) the passage cut through. (Source: Author, 2019).

The next space was a paved alley on the opposite site of the village reminiscent of a medieval town because of the proportions of the narrow alley to the high, balcony-filled walls of mid-rise towers on either side. The narrowness, perhaps, was a main reason that the alley was not used for through-traffic by four-wheelers (cars and trucks) and was mainly for pedestrians, bicyclists, and two-wheelers. The solar orientation meant that the alley was in shade for most of the day and the expanse of concrete held onto the cooler temperatures, so it was a respite from the hot summer sun. The alley had a few unique architectural features that I didn't find outside of this area. First, there were large concrete plinths outside a few of the homes that adults and children regularly used to rest and engage with people on the street. This contributed to the street life as surveillance as well as set a tone of relaxation. I found that they were often occupied by women living in the towers above. There were also two very narrow passages (less than 2 feet) between towers that connected the alley to another lane (Figure 6B). These passages were the favorite hiding/chase route for young children, who delighted in jumping out at passing friends. The towers also had occupiable balconies that were used throughout the day – in the mornings for airing out the bedding, then for drying hair, then for laundry, then for yelling down to the children or traveling salesmen. I did not witness any migrant workers on this lane; it seemed to be a space where women had more agency and spent most of their time thus regulating the use of the space.

There is just this really nice air... it feels protected... there is a woman who was at the sewing shop at street level with the wall opening to the street and was there all day... sort of keeping eyes on the street... a lot of balconies with a lot of mothers doing laundry... they were pretty suspicious about us [the research team] and came up and questioned us. (Lyndsey Deaton, Fieldnotes, December 2019)

The alley and the abandoned lot contrasted with the Hanuman Temple and the *kirana* shop in how they were used by children. The *kirana* shop was opposite of the government primary school on the main road and was mentioned by many children as a store that they visited. Architecturally, the shop was removed from the street by a large covered awning (shading an area of about 150 sq. ft.). The *kirana* shop was in a type of strip-center with five other shops – all set back equally but not all with a covered awning - and so this transition space became an important place for gathering. Street vendors lined up carts selling samosas, dosas, and sugar cane juice. This semi-private transition space was mostly occupied by adult men – either migrant workers relaxing with a cigarette and snack or by local elders sitting around and discussing political matters. Only occasionally would children come to the store and even then, it was with the purpose of purchasing some supplies and immediately leaving. Streetlights existed but never turned on and an on-going sewage infrastructure project pushed traffic further into the sandy pedestrian path and, in turn, the pedestrians were pushed into the transition space creating crowds of people jostling about and shifting as traffic increased and



decreased. The road was usually crowded with four-wheelers and even semi-trucks and buses. When the school opened in the morning and then let out in the afternoon the children immediately dispersed. A few stood around waiting for a family member to come on a two-wheeler to collect them but most walked home via the rear alley avoiding the main road altogether.

The Hanuman Temple was on the corner of the main street and a cross-lane. While both aspects were observed separately neither was a place that children played. The Temple was consistently busy, and the cross lane was frequently blocked by patrons parking cars. The Temple was also the stop for the public bus as well as many private school buses. The children who got off the bus either walked home with their friends or were met by a family member and escorted home. Shops lined either side of the Temple on the main road and wrapped around the corner of the lane slowly transitioning into residential towers at the end of the block.

There were a lot of shops, but I saw very few [people] getting to the shops. People were going to the temple or going to the bus stop. I saw a lot of workers standing at one point. There were many vegetable shops but very few people actually came there. I saw heavy trucks. Kids were moving only on the cross street. (Shekar Ankani, Research Assistant Fieldnotes, December 2019)



Figure 7: (L) the main road at dusk (Source: Author, 2019) (R) the private fields of Trindset Winz above the main road. (Source: Kavya Meghana, 2019).

The main road transformed in the evenings and became another space altogether from dusk to late evening. It became more than a bazaar. As the sun went down and the jobsites let out, the migrant construction workers would fill the street crowding out vehicular traffic; the main road became a pedestrian-only space with numerous vendors setting up the market (Figure 7L). Out of the thousands of men that came to the street, I only ever saw perhaps 10-20 women (all vendors working their cart with their family). This gendered space pushed local villagers and especially children into their homes.

Deprived of safe and accessible public spaces to play, many parents have responded by not allowing their children outside of the home. The architecture of newer middle- and upper-class housing complexes privatize internal play space as an architectural pattern. Three of these complexes have encroached between the village and the SEZ. All of them feature privatized grounds and open spaces (Figure 7R). They are heavily guarded, enclosed, and typically raised above ground level. These spaces are inaccessible to the locals.



Figure 8: Enclosed courtyard connects neighboring houses. (Source: Author, 2019).

Even local resident's older houses have been renovated and enclosed with walls allowing children to play in internal private courtyards. The courtyard shown in Figure 8 connects three neighboring family houses, several outbuildings, and a *kirana* store all enclosed by a perimeter wall. The children from these houses are able to run back and forth and play on the rooftops as well as in the open court. In interviews, the children said they never have need to venture beyond the walls and felt the broader community was essentially unknown.



## 5. THE CASE OF GENTRIFICATION: GACHIBOWLI VILLAGE



Figure 9: A façade of furniture stores line the Gachibowli-Miapur Road that cuts through the heart of Rajiv Nagar. (Source: Author, 2019).

Gachibowli Village is an example of gentrification. The community today is bifurcated by the Gachibowli-Miapur Road, a major 6-lane connector that is often backed up with commuter traffic traveling to/from the information technology SEZs. On either side of the roadway, 5-floor commercial buildings have sprung up with a uniquely high number of furniture dealerships. But, behind this outer layer of commercial structures, the two halves of the community have evolved in contrasting ways that clearly show the winners and losers of the neoliberal regime of dispossession. On the west side, the locals with *patta* have largely developed the lots into 5-level paying guest accommodations while on the east side the government has allocated space for a *basti* (informal community<sup>26</sup>) for those without *patta*. The president of the Rajiv Nagar *basti* stated it clearly:

Earlier there was no development but since the past 12 years there is a lot of development happening. It was one unit back then, after this main road [referring to the Gachibowli-Miapur Road] has come then the division took place... This development is good for the rich and bad for the poor. For the poor, they ask them to leave but for the rich with a good house they can't say so.

The transformation of the community in the last two decades has been so extreme that the *basti* has been formally excluded from the Gachibowli Village area in official documents and renamed, Rajiv Nagar. This surreptitious move by the planning authorities and political leaders mean that their data for the progress of residents in Gachibowli Village is skewed. It also made it challenging to piece together the spatial history of this once cohesive community. However, interviews with the Basti President, the representative Member of the Legislative Assembly, the principal of the local school, a local politician, and the general secretary of the old Village Welfare Association gave enough information to form a community profile of key changes over time. All agree that Gachibowli Village was a village on the urban fringe of Hyderabad until the early 2000s and included what is presently the Rajiv Nagar *basti*. Perhaps more interesting, is that the leadership from Rajiv Nagar still consider themselves part of Gachibowli Village while the leadership of Gachibowli Village consider Rajiv Nagar a distinct and separate place.

The General Secretary of the Gachibowli Village Welfare Association provided more insight into how the bifurcation led to such exaggerated socio-economic outcomes. In his perspective, the root of the cause was differences in land ownership. Gachibowli Village was originally settled by Scheduled Caste households with a few Other Backward Classes, minority households, and Lodha Caste households. Historically, Scheduled Caste people were not able to own land (landless). During the Green Revolution, Indira Gandhi's government leased 5 acres of *chalaka* land per Scheduled Caste family on the fringe of Hyderabad.<sup>27</sup> The government did not give *patta* for *chalaka* lands but authorized cultivation of the land in which farmers were able to reside on and cultivate for commercial sale of agricultural products. Because the arrangement was temporary, farmers only grew minor crops such as wheat and maize that required less investment and held less risk. Some farmers were able to purchase more lucrative *chenu* land (with *patta*) on which they grew crops like rice. Many farmers held both types of land. Roughly, *chalaka* lands were on the east side of the small main road (that eventually became the major 6-lane Gachibowli-Miapur Road) and *chenu* lands, west. However, on two separate occasions, the government took back large portions of the leased lands without compensation. Those farmers who were more reliant on the leased lands for income were disproportionately disadvantaged. Then, as Cyberabad developed, those farmers with *patta* received windfall returns if they developed their plots into paying guest housing, while the farmers with the remaining leased lands had no development rights to invest and lost farming as their traditional livelihood as property values increased and farming profits decreased.

The first significant government take-back occurred in the 1980s when the state government developed an area of 15 acres as a private, planned village called Anjaiah Nagar for government employees (quarters for non-gazetted officers). This village infrastructure is still discernable just north east of the remaining Gachibowli Village. This planning action displaced a few households into temporary shelters near the main

road. The second take-back was in the early 2000's as the state government sought to develop the road network and utility infrastructure for Cyberabad. The main road in Gachibowli Village was identified by city planners as a major connector between Old Mumbai Highway in Gachibowli and Highway 65 in Miyapur. It was expanded into a 6-lane divided road. The road was expanded to the east, further dispossessing the leasers and seeding the formation of the *basti*.

The road and the SEZs brought demand for property. Those with *patta* benefited by selling or developing. While the value of land for speculation was dramatically increasing, a state-wide drought and shifts in state subsidies to farmers (largely diverted to build infrastructure for Cyberabad's SEZs) resulted in state-wide "agrarian distress."<sup>28</sup> Through these systematic changes the *basti* grew into a dense residential settlement of farmers-turned-service workers (many auto drivers, kiosk sellers, and watchmen) while on the west side of the road, the community rebranded itself as a hub for paying-guest accommodations catering to the needs of migrant, white-collar, information technology service workers. Many of the original residents on the west side used their profits to purchase land farther outside of Hyderabad and maintained the paying-guest accommodation only as a revenue business.

The final shift in land rights infilled the only public space in the community – a large ground on the north side of Rajiv Nagar. The winning Member of the Legislative Assembly candidate ran on a platform of bringing a primary school to Gachibowli Village. However, he was confronted with implementation issues as land prices increased and his office was unable to find an affordable site for the school. As a common practice in many city governments, he enclosed half of the public grounds and built the school; the remaining half was enclosed when the school expanded to include secondary grades. Today, the school serves over 600 students, which means that the remaining open space inside of the school compound is not sufficient for even the school children to play on during breaks. The principal said that when possible, they bus the students to the nearby University stadium so that they can have an open space to play formal games. Due to these space constraints, the principal can only afford to schedule one hour of physical education for the students per week. The school buildings and ground are enclosed with a wall, gate, and guard - all off-limits for play when classes are out of session.

We have only one P.E.T. period weekly and we can't make it daily so students after playing here and going home, there is *no place for them to play* and what else can they do other than sitting and wasting time on the phone?

The informants described a different childhood. One of vast spaces for play and games that helped integrate the diverse community. The principal noted that he believes for children living in these economic conditions,

rural life was better than urban life because to him, urban life exposes children to negative temptations (drugs, trafficking, and child labor) and there is no space for children to play.



Figure 10: The gentrifying community of Gachibowli Village has been bi-furcated by the Gachibowli-Miapur road dividing the community into a rental community on the west and a *basti* on the east side of the road. (Source: Subik Shrestha & Author, 2020).

Today, the two halves of the community present very different landscapes for children. On the developed west side of the road, families have been replaced by young IT professionals while on the east side in Rajiv Nagar, the local families mix with families of migrant workers drawn to the Rajiv Nagar for low rents and easy access to labor. Therefore, after some uneventful pilot observations in the developed west side, the formal observations and behavior mapping were confined to Rajiv Nagar. With the transition from a small rural community in which everyone “knows” everyone, and children roam with agency, these new communities present dangerous landscapes and parents feel the need to restrict their children’s domain to the house and immediate surroundings. One of the participant’s mother explained her new role as a “guard:”

I am afraid because, the roads aren't good, the streets aren't good, and children are small, so I am afraid to send [referring to the nearest park 2 km away]. I love them so much and I don't

want to lose them. This is why I work and come back by 7a.m. - by the time they wake up. I provide all the facilities they need here itself.

...I also take them to tank bund during seasonal festivals and I am like *a guard* to them. I will never leave them alone and if at all there are people like you who come and ask to send [invite the children for activities], I deny. Previously, I used to drop them at school but now we stand here and watch them, the school is visible from here. I won't allow them to cycle on the streets. Also, during the Sundays, I lock the gate and here itself they play [they live in a lower level parking deck and she is referring to the gate to the deck].

Where do children play in the spatially segregated Gachibowli Village where urban life presses into old patterns of agricultural livelihood? With limited space to play and under the watchful eye of parents, children's spaces become framed around the household and the journey to and from the local school. I selected a small alley deep within the community, the temple ground, a *kirana* shopfront, and the bustling entry to the community off of the Gachibowli-Miapur Road (main street) for the observations and behavior mapping. I selected the spaces for diversity of themes, locations, and space types but also to correspond to the spaces in the Nanakramguda case study.



Figure 11: Local children playing back streets of Rajiv Nagar. (Source: Author, 2019).

The back alley in Rajiv Nagar was a popular hangout for children of all ages. The narrow lane was difficult to traverse in a 4-wheeler (car) and didn't connect with another main street, rather it looped back on itself like the eye of a needle wrapping around the endemic Hyderabad boulders. Most homes opened directly onto the street, but a few had a small entryway that was enclosed with a gate. The plots were small at between 100-200 sf – just enough for a zero-lot-line, two-room house. The homes had a kitchen area and a sleeping area.



However, a politician held the house at the top of the hill, that was over 600 sf and had two bathrooms – one that he rented to the community and the other for his family. The children who lived here knew each other; either because of family connections or friendships that have evolved over time. I observed teenagers sitting casually in the doorways, talking and watching the small children in the street. The children played in a variety of ways from formal games, to climbing the walls, to tricking friends, to chasing others, to riding bicycles. The cacophony of children's shouts, neighboring laughter, and the pattering of feet added to the other domestic street sounds such as dishes clinking, water pouring, a Bollywood ringtone, and the call to prayer from a neighboring mosque. However, these sounds felt far removed from the typical sounds of car honking and *tiffin* vendors yelling that are anticipated in the city.

The second site, the temple ground, was spatially a pivot-point in the community from the procession of the Gachibowli-Miapur Road up the hillside into the pile of houses, boulders, and alleyways. It was located at the base of the hill and signified the transition between the “deep” residential areas of the community to the more commercial areas. The entry was on the outside edge of a 90° turn on the main street in Rajiv Nagar. This corner of the main street was a place of community gathering and even protest. One evening, after hours of observation, our team was unusually late to leave the community. Some national political news trickled down, enraging a subset of villagers who took to the street raising nationalist flags, banging pots, and starting commotion. The small group grew to a mass of over 300 young men in minutes who came running down from the hills to join the protest at this critical corner. Cyberabad Metropolitan Police (CMP) were called out and dismantled the stationary protest over the next few hours. It was interesting that despite the religious tone, the protesters did not enter the temple grounds but rather remained at this corner with the gated temple entry as a backdrop. The politician noted in an interview that the police were so quick to respond because he had personally paid for the installation and monitoring of three closed-circuit television cameras (CCTV) – one at the community entrance, one at the temple ground, and one in front of his house. While unsettling for me (in a position as a middle-class foreigner) to reflect on privately held CCTV cameras, most children expressed the use of CCTV cameras as their primary improvement to public spaces when asked “how would you make this space feel safer?”

Inside the temple grounds, stood a few trees, some food vendors, the temple pavilion, and some temporary shading structures that the *pundits* (Hindu teachers/knowledgeable people) could rest under. While the adults were eating, praying, and sleeping, children gathered on the far side (opposite the street) in a small strip of land before the cliff that was used for dumping garbage. This small strip was flat, open, and the children said that it “felt safe because of the adults who rest nearby.” This space was transformed every morning into the cricket field. The hillside was used by girls to walk around on, to watch the game of cricket, and to talk. It was



a space that was obscured by the temple and trees from the main road - secretive enough to feel private and personal, but yet, still safe enough to venture without their family's watchful gaze. (Fig. 12)



Figure 12: The main street section showing Pooja Kirana & General store at 4:00 pm on a weekday just after school was released. (Source: Author, 2019).

The third observation location was the *kirana* store (Pooja Kirana & General Store) located on the main street between the temple the Gachibowli-Miapur Road. Because of the slope, it, like other shops, had slanting stairs leading to the raised entrance. These stairs made for a great hang-out location for children who came to collect an after-school snack or supplies for school. I observed that during the weekdays, for many children, this was a ritual to stop off at the shop. It was an excuse to take some time between school and home in which they had a little more agency to direct where they went and with whom. The store was also popular for adults, both male and female, who came regularly. The stacked-up inventory outside of the shop blocked the frequent traffic and offered a protected space for the patrons to gather. Additionally, residential units were located above the shops and surrounding businesses. During our observations, more than one of these residents came down from their balcony to inquire about our work. This speaks to the watchfulness and curiosity of the community. One inquirer was a retired engineer who was interested helping us and expressed pride in his profession, telling the onlookers that we were discussing important “engineering business.”

The final location for observations was at the entrance of Rajiv Nagar – where the main road intersected with the Gachibowli-Miapur road. 5-level commercial buildings framed either side of this juncture. On the north side a large parking lot separated the commercial strip from the road. The upper floors were non-descript offices while the ground level included a plant shop, a popular franchise ice cream shop, and a general store specializing in mixed nuts. From this parking area, I observed how the residents of Rajiv Nagar intersected everyday with the larger framework of Cyberabad. Mostly, patterns revolved around adults waiting on, catching, and departing from hired transportation (autos, scootys, etc.) or walking up, down, and across the business road. Rarely were children visible at this intersection. I only consistently observed children walking to and from their school in small groups, mostly accompanied by parents. Sometimes, I saw teenage boys in groups walking along the road – perhaps to the mall or perhaps just walking in circles. Once, I saw two small children come alone and play just in front of the general store. They had followed their mother, who entered

the store alone and then left without them. However, after about an hour an employee came out and shouted at the children who promptly ran back into Rajiv Nagar. This scene made it clear that the store employees considered the open parking area their territory and defended it against playing children (which could be for reasons of business or the safety of the children).

These four sites could be interpreted as gradients of child-friendly spaces in practice. The space deepest within the community, the alley, was the most popular and best equipped architecturally with protective features. The temple ground and *kirana* store offered two different types of spaces for occasional gathering that were dictated first by how adults used them and then by daily circulation patterns. When less adults were present, children made use of the temple grounds. When coming home from school, children made use of the *kirana* store steps. The final space, at the intersection of the main road was not welcoming to children and the tenants actively dissuaded children from gathering to play. This trajectory of gradient also aligns with exposure to the city and possibly relates to parental perceptions of safety and spatial control.

## 6. DISCUSSION: IS URBANIZATION ALWAYS VIOLENT?

Yves Pedrazzini et al introduced the concept of the *violence of urbanization* as an alternative to the ‘usual suspects’ for attributing crime in the city, which are young people that live in poor neighborhoods.<sup>29</sup> This concept is appropriate for the discussion on the neoliberal regime of dispossession because it assigns responsibility to the process of urbanization itself (planning, design, construction, revaluation, and as a catalyst for subsequent processes) and it raises the stakes for the loss of public space. The development processes in these communities are contemporary examples along the spectrum of the neoliberal regime of dispossession performing encroachment, displacement and resettlement, and gentrification. The elders and leadership in each community remember a time when public space, especially with supportive architectural patterns such as safe gradients of privacy, were the stage where they, as children, socialized, played, and “hung-out.”

While nostalgia is problematic as a direct comparison these descriptions tell of the anticipations and cultural expectations that parents have of their community spaces. Further, Clare Rishbeth and Mark Powell found that “personal meanings contribute to affective bonds between people and place” based on memory studies with migrant communities and public space.<sup>30</sup> Their work underscores the important role that memories of childhood play in the attachment elders and leadership have to the public spaces in their community. As development impacts the community spaces and transforms the architecture, these nostalgic connections are ruptured and anticipations, unfulfilled.

In interviews, parents consistently anticipated that urbanization would result in their children having a similar, if not a better, quality of space for play. Anthropologist Jaime Cross explored the dreamed of and desired futures that comprise, maintain and interrupt capitalism in present-day India by studying dispossessed families in nearby Visakhapatnam.<sup>31</sup> He found that it is both the anticipation and continuous delay of hopes, dreams and expectations of urbanization that have come to define capitalism. In these communities, the value of urbanization is largely vested in uneven opportunities for livelihood and progress. Stories of fulfilled dreams rest with families who have legitimate property rights as their area urbanized while those without property rights were further marginalized.

Yet, not all forms of urbanization affect residents in the same way. Under the regime of neoliberal capitalism, property rights exaggerate class inequalities by situating space as a speculative commodity in which the most economically profitable use of space is rendered superior. Property rights are used to dispossess families occupying land without legitimate claims. “Dispossession,” as Levien states, “is a political apparatus for coercively redistributing land.”<sup>32</sup> In both Nanakramguda and Ranjiv Nagar, historically privileged castes, classes, and genders who have had legitimate access and claim to space have been able to benefit from urbanization while underprivileged families who have been legitimately prohibited from claiming space have been dispossessed and spatially redistributed.

Compared to urbanization during the colonial regime or the post-colonial developmentalist regime, urbanization under the regime of neoliberal capitalism presents a more violent form. Urbanization under the colonial regime attempted erasure and cultural assimilation while supporting imperial resource extraction. Aspirations and expectations remained constrained in a system of feudal-like social relations. Urbanization under the post-colonial developmentalist regime fueled nationalist anticipations. Nehruvian planning, as a key spatial form, contributed to an image of India built on and by underprivileged families.<sup>33</sup> Yet, by investigating children’s play spaces in a rapidly urbanizing area under neoliberal capitalism, I found that families had built dreams and desires of personal progress while in reality they were drowning in an increasingly uneven class geography. In these two cases, the Other Backward Class families were dispossessed of property in ways that appear to restart the cycle of poverty. Both communities were dispossessed of accessible and child-friendly public spaces in order to commoditize property from which most families will not benefit. This suggests that the neoliberal regime of dispossession is more violent than other forms of urbanization because it socially reproduces conditions of marginalization – further segregating and dividing communities.

This violent urbanization disrupted traditional architectural patterns like narrow lanes and introduced new actors, such as migrant construction workers and heavy automobile traffic, that heightened the risk to children in previously innocuous spaces. In communities where small homes offer limited privacy and territory, public

space is necessary as a spatial component for children to fulfill their developmental needs. Yet, the material impacts brought by neoliberal urbanization have impacted how and where families live, and children play.

The planning and implementation of Cyberabad is an important example of the responsibility and stakes of urbanization. Strategic design documents such as the Cyberabad Development Authority Master Plan lay out the strategy and justification for dispossession. Through this document, consultants, architects, planners, and policymakers grabbed land from both case study communities (17 revenue villages in total) in order to transform the area for the needs of multinational corporations, specifically those in the information technology and finance sectors such as Amazon as shown in Figure 13. **(Fig. 13)**



Figure 13: The Amazon India Headquarters, a LEED BD+C Gold building, inside the walled SEZ compound and newly constructed middle-class housing across the street with the Nanakramguda Women's Center still standing amidst the construction rubble in the foreground cut off from the community (Source: Author, 2019).

Reviewing the planning documents provides insights into how this design process violently drove material changes that have resulted in the loss of critical space for children to play in these communities.<sup>34</sup> However, the Master Plan is limited to development control regulations (land use zoning regulations and building regulations) and it does not include vision planning, sustainable planning, natural, historical, and cultural resource management, healthy community planning, defensible planning, capacity planning, area development planning, network planning, form-based planning, or plan-based programming.<sup>35</sup> There are two perspectives by which to critique the failures of the Cyberabad Development Authority Master Plan.

On the one hand, planning practitioners in the US and Western Europe would argue that the missing eight comprehensive planning strategies are considered best practices. The gap in planning strategies resulted in a lack of planning processes (identification and analysis of alternatives, socialization, implementation, monitoring & evaluation) and products (Vision Plan, Development Plan, Planning Standards, Development Program, and Regulating Plan) that may have addressed critical spatial issues through a public engagement process with the full spectrum of stakeholders.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, southern theorists would recognize that

the very purpose of centralized planning in many contexts is to provide a legal framework for dispossession. In this logic, planning is not always a vehicle for universal good but rather a vehicle that transfers wealth to those already with power. Therefore, the concept of “best practices” is rendered irrelevant as the very purpose of planning as a technology is to “remove people” and establish the right to scrape the terrain clean of any previous claim to it.

The history of dispossession in Hyderabad, from the Mughal Empire to the British Empire, demonstrates that planning and property rights have been used as a means of dispossession and reallocation for those in positions of power. The Master Plan does not list the existing families or villages as key stakeholders although the Cyberabad Development Authority covers an area of 20 square miles (52 square kilometers). Instead, the goals of the Master Plan are to address,

...The need for special planning control, high level of infrastructure and managerial inputs and special investment zone and other relevant consideration, (for)... surrounding areas of Hitech City and surrounding areas including IIIT, Indian School of Business, proposed Golf course, proposed Sports Complex and Durgam Cheruvu as Special Development Areas.<sup>37</sup>

At the time the plan was produced, the executive in power was Chief Minister Naidu. In his autobiography he reveals his intentions for the Cyberabad Development Authority to be the vehicle that “leapfrogs” Hyderabad into a modern global city by selling special development rights to multinational corporations and fast-tracking fantastic projects, such as an F-1 racetrack (that required a state investment of over \$80M) in order to boost the tourism and hotel industry.<sup>38</sup> These actors (officials, multinational corporations, and large land-title holders) were considered the primary stakeholders resulting in a Master Plan that fails to meaningfully account for underprivileged communities, like the original residents of the 17 revenue villages and the many other marginalized communities that were never legally recognized.

The observations and behavior mapping revealed that children in these villages are sincerely concerned about their safety. During and after the violent urbanization of realizing Cyberabad, the public spaces in each community have changed in ways that increase risks to children. The *actors* change; foreign people have regular access to previously intimate spaces, vendors compete for public space to sell goods, and dangerous vehicles are prioritized over pedestrian walkways. The *architecture* changes; narrow alleys are widened, empty lots are developed, street vendor’s carts encroach on sidewalk spaces. Largely in response to safety concerns, families with the financial means have either moved away or constructed solid concrete walls around their homes to establish a protective interior courtyard. However, even these solid walls have a compounding effect on the danger of the street.<sup>39</sup> The domestic work which used to function as “eyes on the street” no

longer looks out onto the street but stays protected in each courtyard. Many families without the financial means keep their children at home for as long as possible. And, a few families have become numb to the risks and expose their children.



Figure 14: (L) Migrant construction workers come to purchase goods on the main street where vendors have set up stalls on the pedestrian pathway. (R) Children, without any safe open space use the top deck of the recently collapsed residential tower to fly a kite. (Source: Author, 2019).

In both communities, the observations and behavior mapping showed that the traditional public spaces such as the temple grounds and the vacant lots were no longer the primary play spaces. Instead, interior courtyards and the smallest residential side streets were the most used spaces. The architectural shift, from the open spaces of the past to the new narrow and small pockets demanded changes in play. While the elders remembered long games of cricket lasting days on empty fields, the observations and behavior mapping showed that the children today play gully cricket in the narrow alleys and modified versions of *kho kho* and *kabaddi* that can be played without running far distances. Children are creative, though. They have invented new ways of socializing and engaging within the new architectural confines as their domain decreases and new threats appear.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The neoliberal regime of dispossession is being replicated around the world through bank loan programs, selective master planning practices, and legal instruments like eminent domain. It describes the ways in which the development of Cyberabad is ‘violently urbanizing’ the fringe of Hyderabad by encroaching, displacing and resettling, and gentrifying the subsidized farming communities for the benefit of SEZs for information technology and financial multinational corporations. Other prominent researchers have shown how this process exacerbates existing inequalities through a complex spatiality based on anticipations, reinforced pre-



existing inequalities, and spatial co-production but little is known about how the material implications (planning and architecture) impact the spatial domain of children who live in dispossessed villages.<sup>40</sup>

I began by describing the methodology of the project and then revealed the spatial history, data collection, and findings of each study site within the case study communities. Both Nanakramguda (the case of encroachment) and Rajiv Nagar (the case of gentrification) revealed that the practice of childhood play has changed largely in response to the unique patterns of development under a regime of neoliberal capitalism. Safety is a key concern for children of all ages but especially for teenage girls. As this type of development brings new actors and architecture, spaces become increasingly gendered and cohesive community ties weaken resulting in increasing danger. With limited domains, traditional games such as *kho kho* have been modified to take place in small niche areas, stationary activities abound such as playing on the cell phone, and the street in front of the house transforms into the primary public space. Without safe public spaces for kids to socialize, their developmental needs are compromised. In Cyberabad, the ‘violence of urbanization’ extends to describe the ways in which actors and architecture commandeer public spaces away from children.

These environmental changes are premeditated and planned through design documents that strategize for the benefits of stakeholders. Western planning practices would argue that a review of the design documentation for Cyberabad reveals an alarming absence of planning tools and practices that could have alleviated the gap following. However, a deeper look into the traditions of dispossession underscores the “techno-power” of planning to establish the legitimate right to grab property for some and relinquish claims of ownership for others. The Cyberabad Development Authority clearly established that the stakeholders do not include the villagers least of all the children and instead prioritized the interests of information technology and financial multinational corporations to cultivate a market of land speculation.

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## NOTES AND REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Das, D. (2015). “Hyderabad: Rapid urbanization, water scarcity and the difficulties and possibilities of human flourishing,” in *Urban Studies*, Special Issue Article: Environmental governance for urban resilience in the Asia-Pacific, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Cross, J. (2014). *Dream Zones: Anticipating Capitalism and Development in India*. London: Pluto Press; Levien, M. (2018). *Dispossession without Development: Land Grabs in Neoliberal India*. New York: Oxford University Press; Singh, A. et al. (2020). “Neoliberal Spatialities in Gurgaon: Privatization, Negotiation and Reciprocity in India,” in *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 31 (2).

<sup>3</sup> Idem, Levien, p. 16; Harvey, D. (2003). *The New Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>4</sup> I leverage Massey’s use of the term “spatiality” as a product of intersecting social relations constituted by the mutual production of space and time. Massey, D. (2005). *For Space*. London: Sage, pp. 10-11.

<sup>5</sup> In this paper, public space is defined as space accessible to the broader public in practice rather than space designed or intended to be public.

<sup>6</sup> Lynch, K. (1977) *Growing up in Cities*. Cambridge: MIT Press; Chawla, L. (2002). *Growing up in an Urbanizing World*. London: Earthscan Publications.

<sup>7</sup> Appadurai, A. (1996) *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Maira, S. and Soep, E. (2005) *Youthscapes: The Popular, the national the global*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

<sup>8</sup> Malone, K. (2018) *Children in the Anthropocene: Rethinking Sustainability and Child Friendliness in Cities*. Milperra: Palgrave McMillan.

<sup>9</sup> The research revealed 11 types of fears that children are confronted with in relation to public spaces that inhibit their use as play spaces but this area is beyond the scope of this paper (bullying, aesthetic affect, drugs, crimes against women, fighting, murder, nature, superstitions, thieves, vehicles, human trafficking).

<sup>10</sup> Nicholas Tagliarino surveyed the legal policy for resettlement and actually found that India is one if not the most highly ranked of the 50 countries in the study for progressive and human-rights oriented resettlement. However, after two years and numerous contacts, I was never able to find documentation that would indicate these laws were practiced in this context. Tagliarino, N. (2018). “The need for national-level legal protection for populations displaced by expropriation: laws on land acquisition and resettlement in 50 countries,” in Eds. Michael Cernea and Julie Maldonado’s *Challenging the Prevailing Paradigm of Displacement and Resettlement: Risks, Impoverishment, Legacies, Solutions*. New York: Routledge.

<sup>11</sup> Revenue villages are small administrative regions with defined borders and headed by a village administrative officer. Each revenue village could contain multiple settlements.

<sup>12</sup> A *kirana* shop is a small sundry shop (snacks, domestic goods, basic groceries) that is usually family owned and often located in a house in a residential area.

<sup>13</sup> The spaces included streets with shops, alleys between houses, abandoned lots, pastureland, and temple grounds.

<sup>14</sup> For safety reasons the research team was not able to be present in the communities after 7 pm or before 7 am. From personal experience and interview findings, there is a rich night life to these spaces as adults return

from work. This is an important aspect to understand the dual work of these community spaces that are public in practice.

<sup>15</sup> The Nizam refers to specific monarchical rulers from 18th through 20th century in Hyderabad State.

<sup>16</sup> Landlords (jagirdari) extracted surplus value from a predominantly agrarian peasantry class in a way that maintained their class status and contributed to the accumulation of wealth by a dominant class.

<sup>17</sup> A Waqf Board or Council is an Indian statutory body that manages philanthropic donations for religious purposes as recognized by Islamic Law. In this case, the Waqf Board managed land in the area that was donated to support poor communities for their livelihood.

<sup>18</sup> Singh, Ranjith (2019) Interview with Santhosh Tekumal, Prakash Gadipe, and Lyndsey Deaton on September 30, 2019. Singh, Jaipal (2019) Interview with Santhosh Tekumal, Sekhar Ankani, and Lyndsey Deaton on November 3, 2019.

<sup>19</sup> The Telugu Dessam Party is a Nationalist Party whose platform has largely focused on bolstering the power of the Telugu People. It was the party of CM Naidu.

<sup>20</sup> TSIIC (2020). “List of Industrial Parks in TSIIC.” Accessed at <https://tsiic.telangana.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/IP-List.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Kumar, S. (2013). “Hamlet unchanged: Welcome to Nanakramguda,” in *The Hindu*, April 02 2013. Accessed at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Hyderabad/hamlet-unchanged-welcome-to-nanakramguda/article4573961.ece>

<sup>22</sup> Since the National census only occurs once a decade with the last being in 2011 and this area has undergone significant change, they village leader’s perspectives are given more weight to understand the village demographics. Most groups classified today as “Schedule Castes” come from groups that have been historically considered as outside of the Varna system (Hindu religion) and were formerly called “untouchables.” Similarly, “Scheduled Tribes” are groups of indigenous peoples outside of the Varna system and have been institutionally marginalized. “Other Backward Classes” is a broader term used to classify groups which are educationally or socially disadvantaged (including Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes among other groups).

<sup>23</sup> Express News Service (2017) “Too many violations led to Nanakramguda tragedy: Probe finds G+6 building was built despite sanction for only G+3,” in *The New Indian Express*. Accessed at <https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/hyderabad/2017/jan/08/too-many-violations-led-to-nanakramguda-tragedy-1557366.html>

<sup>24</sup> Deccan Chronicle (2016). “Hyderabad building collapse toll rises to 11, police detains builder,” in the *Deccan Chronicle* 11 December 2016. Accessed at <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/current-affairs/111216/hyderabad-building-collapse-toll-rises-to-11-police-detains-builder.html>

<sup>25</sup> *Kho kho* and *kabaddi* are active Indian games played with other people that typically involved running, teams, and strategy.

<sup>26</sup> See Gautam Bhan’s “From the *basti* to the ‘house’: Socio-spatial readings of housing policy in India,” in *Current Sociology* 65 (4), 2017, pp. 587-602 for a definition of a *basti* as an “auto-constructed neighborhood in an Indian city” as a contra-distinction to the ‘slum.’

<sup>27</sup> While the definitions of *chalaka* and *chenu* lands are difficult to corroborate, a more common definition is *chalaka* lands are produce one crop annually (less fertile land) while *chenu* lands produce multiple annually (wet

lands, fertile lands). In Agricultural and irrigation system under Qutb Shahi Period, Maqubool references *chalaka* lands in a description of how the Qutb Shahi government scheduled taxes by land fertility (Hyderabad: Osmania University, p. 89).

<sup>28</sup> See Chindarkar, N. (2007). "A Comparative Analysis of Farmers' Suicides in Andhra Pradesh, India," in *Methodological Innovations Online* 2 (2), pp. 6-19; Sridhar, V. (2006). "Why do Farmer's Commit Suicide?: The Case of Andhra Pradesh," in *Economic and Political Weekly* 41 (16), pp. 1559-1565; Patnaik, U (2004). "It is a Crisis Rooted in Economic Reforms," in *Frontline* 21 (13), pp. 22-26.

<sup>29</sup> Pedrazzini, Y. et al (2014). "Violence of Urbanization, Poor Neighborhoods and Large-Scale Projects: Lessons from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia," in *Built Environment* 40 (3), pp. 394-407.

<sup>30</sup> Rishbeth, C. and Powell, M. (2013). "Place Attachment and Memory: Landscapes of Belonging as Experienced Post-migration," in *Landscape Research* 38 (2), pp. 160-178.

<sup>31</sup> Cross, J. (2014). *Dream Zones: Anticipating Capitalism and Development in India*. London: Pluto Press.

<sup>32</sup> Levien, Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>33</sup> Goswami, M. (204). *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>34</sup> 'Underprivileged' because these communities are disproportionately composed of marginalized groups such as SC, ST, and BC all within LIGs.

<sup>35</sup> These documents were requested in interviews with the Chief Planner of the Town and Country Planning Office, Hyderabad, the Chief of TSIIC, and the Director of the Telangana Real Estate Authority. The only guiding documents ever discussed for Cyberabad were the CDA Master Plan and the HMDA Master Plan.

<sup>36</sup> The CDA Master Plan did publish the plan in the newspaper in compliance with sub-section (2) of section 8 of the AP Urban Areas (Development) Act, 2971, giving 7 weeks' time for receiving objections and suggestions thereof (from the public). However, the town planning consultant retained, Vastu Silpa Consultants (Ahmedabad) and the funding agency, the Hyderabad Urban Development Authority, did not define the stakeholders in the CDA Master Plan nor describe any process that engaged the villagers as stakeholders. In interviews, village leaders often commented that the "didn't know" what was happening until they were forcefully evicted or barred entry to their plot.

<sup>37</sup> CDA, page 57.

<sup>38</sup> Naidu, C. (2000). *Plain Speaking*. Australia: Penguin Books.

<sup>39</sup> *Solid compound walls* are not completely a reaction to the safety concerns as there are historical, class-based, and typological precedents that should be considered. However, observations revealed that the functionality of the walls changed in response to this violent urbanization in a way that offers a new interpretation of the architecture.

<sup>40</sup> Cross, J. (2014). *Dream Zones: Anticipating Capitalism and Development in India*. London: Pluto Press; Levien, M. (2018). *Dispossession without Development: Land Grabs in Neoliberal India*. New York: Oxford University Press; Singh, A. et al. (2020). "Neoliberal Spatialities in Gurgaon: Privatization, Negotiation and Reciprocity in India," in *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 31 (2).

## **Traditional Dwellings and Settlements**

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### **VANISHING MEMORY AND IDENTITY: TOMB CARETAKERS AND THEIR DESCENDANTS AT THE IMPERIAL TOMBS OF THE QING DYNASTY IN CHINA, SEVENTEENTH CENTURY TO PRESENT DAY**

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# VANISHING MEMORY AND IDENTITY: TOMB CARETAKERS AND THEIR DESCENDANTS AT THE IMPERIAL TOMBS OF THE QING DYNASTY IN CHINA, SEVENTEENTH CENTURY TO PRESENT DAY

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*This paper explains the changes around memory and identity of tomb caretakers of the Imperial Qing Tombs in China from the mid-seventeenth century to the early twentieth century, as well as those of their present descendants, in order to state that memory and identity are vanishing and urgently need to be preserved. A pilot investigation was conducted in China from December 2019 to January 2020. In addition, the Eastern Qing Tombs in Hebei, the First Historical Archives of China and the National Library in Beijing were visited for data collection. This study also adopted the methods of interview, observation, and searching through original archives.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Ancient China has a long history of funerary architecture and culture. The ancient Chinese ‘Construction System of Imperial Tombs’ (*Linqinzhidu*, 陵寝制度), abbreviated to CSIT, can be traced back more than two thousand years.<sup>1</sup> Among those ancient Chinese imperial tombs, the Imperial Tombs of the Qing Dynasty are among the most outstanding artefacts left by the last feudal dynasty in China. They form part of the World Heritage Site of the Imperial Tombs of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, groups of ancient buildings that have been entered into the World Heritage List by UNESCO.<sup>2</sup> The Imperial Tombs of the Qing Dynasty are distributed across three places: the Qing Tombs outside the Mountain Pass (*Guanwaiqingling*, 关外清陵) in Liaoning Province; the Western Qing Tombs (*Qingxiling*, 清西陵) in Yixian County, Hebei Province; and the Eastern Qing Tombs (*Qingdongling*, 清东陵) in Zunhua City, Hebei Province. They include the final resting places of almost all the emperors in the Qing Dynasty<sup>3</sup> and their empresses and concubines. The construction date of the first Qing imperial tomb in Liaoning Province is unknown, but it was around the end of the Ming Dynasty,<sup>4</sup> and the last Qing imperial tomb in Hebei Province was completed in 1914.<sup>5</sup> To safeguard and provide services and maintenance for the imperial tombs for a long time to come, a group of people were settled in an organised way around the tombs; historically, they were called tomb caretakers and considered imperial civil servants. This group expanded during the centuries of continuous construction of the imperial tombs. Today, feudal dynasties are long gone, a great change in the social and political landscape has taken place, and the imperial tombs have been managed and protected by the national government, which owns them. However, descendants of the tomb caretakers are still living in the original places, though their identity has been changed into that of ordinary Chinese citizens, meanwhile, the relationship between the descendants and the tombs is vanishing.



Research about the tomb caretakers is rare, and most of the current studies focus on the architectural, historical and archaeological aspects of the imperial tombs themselves. Chinese scholars have conducted some research into the tomb caretakers in recent years, with historical research into the tomb caretakers of the Imperial Tombs of the Qing Dynasty providing details about the origins of the tomb caretakers, their living conditions and some of their daily practices. Guangyuan Xu<sup>6</sup> is one of the most remarkable experts on the Qing imperial tombs today, in whose study an almost-complete picture of tomb caretakers during the Qing dynasty is revealed.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, different researchers have explored the lives of tomb caretakers through history, who were distributed to Liaoning Province, the Eastern Qing Tombs and the Western Qing Tombs, separately.<sup>8-14</sup> On the other hand, few studies have mentioned the changes among and disappearance of the tomb caretakers' identities and ways of life, which has followed along the wider changes in the social and political landscape.<sup>15-18</sup> In this situation, few scholars have thought about preserving or using this vanishing identity from different perspectives: for instance, adopting this vanishing ancient culture in order to develop rural tourism.<sup>19</sup> Besides this, this vanishing identity is considered a cultural element that should be protected, in addition to an element of tourism,<sup>20</sup> and it is also argued that the vanishing identity should be protected as a part of the cultural heritage site according to the values of cultural heritage integrity.<sup>21</sup> Before discussing how to deal with vanishing memory and identity, it is necessary to give a comprehensive explanation and narration of the changes in the relationship between the historical tomb caretakers and their present descendants, and the imperial tombs over the centuries. This kind of panoramic narration is rare in the Chinese literature and completely absent in the English literature. Therefore, the task of this paper is to narrate and explain the connection between the Imperial Tombs of Qing and the descendants of the historical caretakers, in detail, in order to highlight the urgent need to re-discover the descendants' vanishing memory and identity.

## 2. RESEARCH BACKGROUND: CONSTRUCTION OF THE IMPERIAL QING TOMBS

The formation of the group of tomb caretakers is closely associated with the construction of the imperial tombs. People were moved and resettled to the areas around the tombs, and, consequently, the phenomenon of communities of tomb caretakers' descendants continues today. This section will explain the construction procedures for the imperial tombs as a background for this paper.

The Qing Dynasty was the last feudal dynasty in the history of China, an ethnic-minority political power that was established by the Aisin-Gioro (*Aixinjueluo*, 爱新觉罗) family, who belonged to the Manchu ethnic group. In 1616, the Great Khan Nurhaci (*Nuerhaqi*, 努尔哈齐) founded an ethnic-minority regime named the Later Jin (*Houjin*, 后金) in the northeast of China; shortly afterwards, he established the capital of the regime in Liaoyang, in today's Liaoning Province. Twenty years later, a new leader, the Great Khan Huangtaiji (皇太极), the son of Nurhaci, changed the name of the regime from the Later Jin to Qing (清). The Qing

regime was always in conflict with the central government of the Ming Dynasty, and in 1644 the Qing army broke through the Great Wall and overthrew the Ming Dynasty.<sup>22</sup> Emperor Shunzhi (顺治), the son of Huangtaiji, ascended to the throne in Beijing, declaring the beginning of the Manchu rule over the whole country, which would last for nearly 300 years until 1912, known in Chinese History as the Qing Dynasty. In almost 300 years of the Qing Dynasty there were 12 emperors, including the Great Khans Nurhaci and Huangtaiji, who were posthumously recognised as emperors of Qing by Emperor Shunzhi in Beijing. With the exception of the last Emperor Xuantong (宣统), who died after the People's Republic of China was established and was buried in Hualonglingyuan (华龙陵园) in Yixian County, Hebei Province as an ordinary citizen of China, the other 11 emperors of the Qing Dynasty established their own imperial tombs.<sup>7,23</sup>

Before breaking through the Shanhaiguan (a pass of the Great Wall, 山海关), the Qing regime originated from northeast of China; therefore, there are four sites of Qing imperial tombs in Liaoning Province of China today, where Emperor Nurhaci, Emperor Huangtaiji and other ancestors of the Aisin-Gioro family were buried. The four sites are the Yongling Tombs (永陵), Fuling Tombs (福陵) and Zhaoling Tombs (昭陵), known collectively as the Three Imperial Tombs of Shengjing (盛京三陵), and the Dongjingling Tombs (东京陵). With the transfer of the political centre, the architectural scale of the later imperial tombs was much larger than these Liaoning Province sites.

**The Eastern Qing Tombs** is the largest burial complex in the history of the Qing Dynasty, holding the remains of the largest number of imperial family members. The tomb garden covers an area of about 2,500 square kilometres. After conquering Beijing, the Emperor Shunzhi (顺治皇帝) chose the land under Changruishan Mountain (昌瑞山),<sup>24</sup> where Zunhua City, Hebei Province stands today, to construct the imperial tomb, and this became the site of the first imperial burial garden. The construction of the Eastern Qing Tombs took 245 years to complete, from 1663 to 1908, and there are 14 tombs in total, including five tombs for emperors, four tombs for empresses and five tombs for imperial concubines, in which 157 people were buried.<sup>25</sup> With so many people buried in there, many of them need to be buried with others or to share a plot. The ancient Chinese advocated polygamy, so the Emperor's harems were numerous and hierarchical. There was one Empress (the Emperor's wife, 皇后), one *Huangguifei* (concubine of the highest rank, 皇贵妃), two *Guifei* (concubines of high rank, 贵妃), four *Fei* (concubines of middle rank, 妃), six *Pin* (concubines of low rank, 嫔), and uncertain numbers of *Guiren* (贵人), *Changzai* (常在) and *Daying* (答应), who were in the lowest three ranks.<sup>26</sup> Some empresses and *Huangguifei* had their remains left in multi-burial tombs with their emperors (Table 1), but multi-burial tombs were uncommon for empresses in the Eastern Qing Tombs. Among the four tombs for empresses, there is only one empress that shared a tomb with concubines of different ranks (Table 2). In the five tombs of concubines, multi-burial tombs or building more *Baoding* (grave mounds, 宝顶) in a plot was common; at most, nearly 50 people were buried in one plot, as

not one of that emperor's concubines, except the empresses and a few *Huangguifei*, had any right to have their remains in separate tombs (Table 3).

Name of Tomb	Date of Construction	Main Buried Emperors	Number of Multi-buried Women
Xiaoling Tomb (孝陵)	1663-1664	Emperor Shunzhi (顺治皇帝)	Two empresses
Jingling Tomb (景陵)	1676-1681	Emperor Kangxi (康熙皇帝)	Four empresses and one <i>Huangguifei</i>
Yuling Tomb (裕陵)	1743-1752?	Emperor Qianlong (乾隆皇帝)	Two empresses and Three <i>Huangguifei</i>
Dingling Tomb (定陵)	1859-1865	Emperor Xianfeng (咸丰皇帝)	One empress
Huiling Tomb (惠陵)	1875-1878	Emperor Tongzhi (同治皇帝)	One empress

Table 1: Information of emperors' tombs in the Eastern Qing Tombs. Adapted from Xu.<sup>7</sup>

Name of Tomb	Date of Construction	Main Buried Empresses	Number of Multi-buried Concubines
Zhaoxiling Tomb (昭西陵)	1725-1725	Huangtaiji's Empress Xiaozhuangwen (孝庄文皇后)	Null
Xiaodongling Tomb (孝东陵)	1688? -1693	Emperor Shunzhi's Empress Xiaohuizhang (孝惠章皇后)	Twenty-eight concubines
Dingdongling Tomb in Puxiang Valley (普祥峪定东陵)	1873-1879	Emperor Xianfeng's Empress Xiaozhenxian (Cian) (孝贞显皇后-慈安)	Null
Dingdongling Tomb in Putuo Valley (普陀峪定东陵)	1873-1879 1895-1908 (extension)	Emperor Xianfeng's Empress Xiaoqinxian (Cixi) (孝钦显皇后-慈禧)	Null

Table 2: Information of empresses' tombs in the Eastern Qing Tombs. (Source: Adapted from Xu.<sup>7</sup>)

Name of Tomb	Date of Construction	Number of buried People
<b>Jingling Huangguifei Tombs</b> (景陵皇贵妃园寝)	1739-1743?	Emperor Kangxi's two <i>Huangguifei</i>
<b>Jingling Fei Tombs</b> (景陵妃园寝)	1676? -1681	Emperor Kangxi's forty-eight concubines and one prince
<b>Yuling Fei Tombs</b> (裕陵妃园寝)	1745-1752?	Emperor Qianlong's one empress and thirty-five concubines
<b>Dingling Fei Tombs</b> (定陵妃园寝)	1859-1865	Emperor Xianfeng's one <i>Huangguifei</i> and fourteen concubines
<b>Huiling Fei Tombs</b> (惠陵妃园寝)	1875-1878	Emperor Tongzhi's four <i>Huangguifei</i>

Table 3: Information of concubines' tombs in the Eastern Qing Tombs. (Source: Adapted from Xu.<sup>7</sup>)

**The Western Qing Tombs** form the second and last imperial burial garden of the Qing Dynasty, located in Yixian County, Hebei Province. It took 186 years (1730-1914) to construct the whole complex. There are four tombs for emperors including the Tailing Tomb (泰陵), Changling Tomb (昌陵), Muling Tomb (慕陵) and Chongling Tomb (崇陵); there are also three tombs for empresses and three tombs for concubines. Beside these, there are also three tombs for other imperial relatives. Altogether, 80 people were laid to rest there.<sup>27</sup> The construction of the Western Qing Tombs was started by Emperor Yongzheng, the third emperor of the Qing Dynasty in Beijing. He gave the reason that there was no place to build tombs within the gardens of the Eastern Qing Tombs, opening another Qing imperial burial garden, the Western Qing Tombs.<sup>28</sup> Later, Emperor Qianlong, the son of Emperor Yongzheng, created the Zhaomu System (昭穆之制) in order to balance the status of the Eastern and Western Qing Tombs, which required that grandchildren and grandparents had tombs built in the same garden.<sup>29</sup> However, this system did not continue for long.<sup>7</sup>

The location of the tombs should have been free from gales, insects and flooding, and the quality of the soil had to be good; in addition, mountains and rivers were essential.<sup>30,31</sup> Each tomb consisted of a group of buildings with different functions (e.g. buildings shown in Figures 1-2) with the numbers and sizes of buildings for different tombs determined by the CSIT.<sup>32</sup> The CSIT for emperors, empresses and concubines are each very different and they were followed strictly to show the hierarchy there of imperial family.<sup>26</sup> A standard emperor's tomb from front to back consists of 24 large and small buildings; if it was the first emperor's tomb to be built in the garden (Figures 3-4), there are three other buildings at the front.<sup>7</sup>



Fig. 1: Longendian Palace (the main palace that is the most important aboveground architecture) of Yuling Tomb in the Eastern Qing Tombs (Source: authors).



Fig. 2: The Eastern Hall (left hand side) which was used to store the tributes made of silk, temporarily kept the memorial tablets at times, and for emperors to change clothes; and the Eastern Liaolu (right hand side) as the place to burn offerings, in the Yuling Tomb of the Eastern Qing Tombs (Source: authors).





Fig. 3: Shipaifang Archway (stone memorial archway) of the Eastern Qing Tombs which is the first architecture in the line of the imperial tombs garden of Ming and Qing Dynasties. (Source: authors)

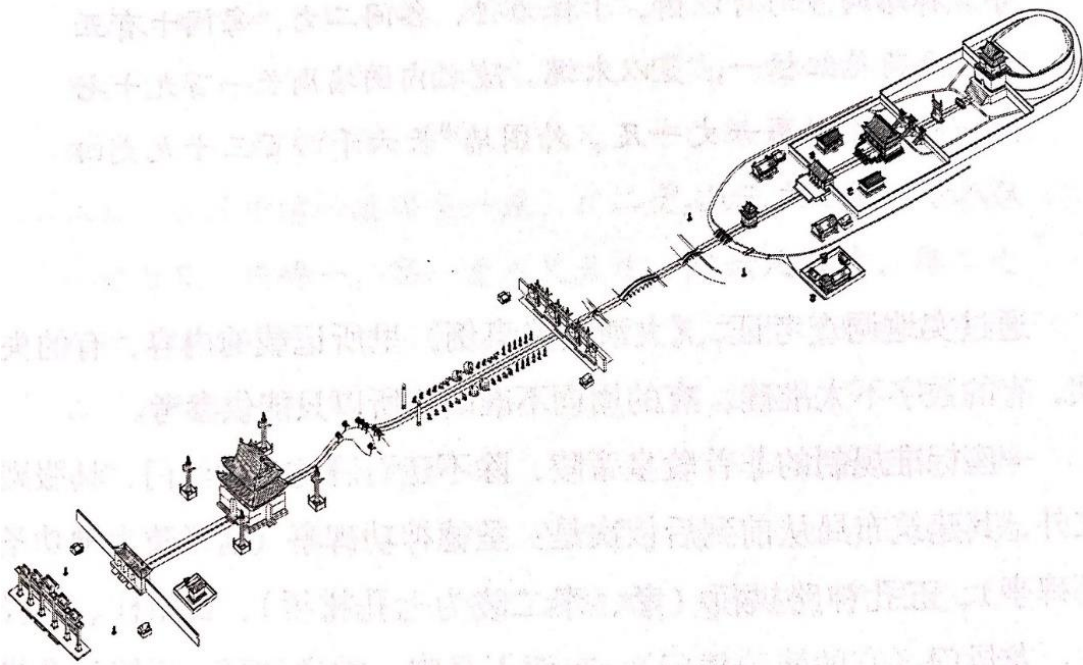


Fig. 4: Layout from the front to back (left to right) of Xiaoling Tomb in the Eastern Qing Tombs. Being the first tomb in the garden, there are three more buildings, in the very front, than other tombs in the garden. The emperor's coffin was placed in the underground palace, located at the very back of the site. (Source: Xu.<sup>48</sup>)



Compared with an emperor's tomb, a standard empress's tomb is missing five buildings; moreover, each single building in an empress's tomb is smaller than that of an emperor.<sup>7</sup> The tomb for concubines is the simplest: it not only includes fewer buildings, but the scale of each building is smaller. Meanwhile, the remains buried in there are placed in a limited space with a large number of other bodies (Figure 5).

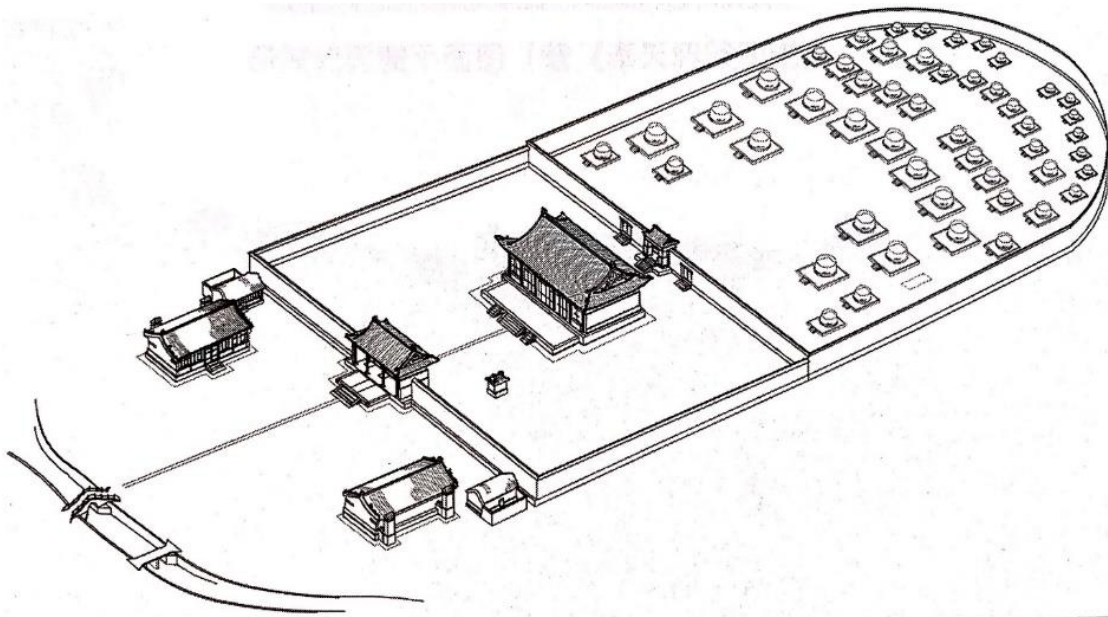


Fig. 5: Layout of Jingling Fei Tombs in the Eastern Qing Tombs, including forty-nine tombs of Emperor Qianlong's concubines located at the very back of the site. (Source: Xu.<sup>49</sup>)

The tomb of an emperor is the main tomb; the tombs of his empresses and concubines are subordinate tombs which are built adjacent to the right or left of the emperor's tomb. At the same time, the names of the tombs of empresses and concubines should match the name of the emperor. Not all tombs are strictly standardised: some are standard, some are a little bit above standard, and some are below standard. The standard relates to the preferences of tombs' masters and the national strength at that time.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. GOLDEN AGE OF TOMB CARETAKERS, BEFORE 1924

When a tomb's construction was completed, it needed to be handed over to the governing body for daily management and guarding, which was the role played by tomb caretakers. Attitudes to the role of tomb caretaker through history have been complicated; sometimes the position is represented in a positive light, which focuses on nobility and glory, but sometimes, there are more negative interpretations of being given the role like it was a punishment or a sign that the current Emperor did not trust them. Firstly, there have been many honourable relatives of emperors among tomb caretakers. For instance, the *Jinyizisun* (descendants of brothers and sisters of emperors' mothers, 舅姨子孙) played the role of safeguarding the imperial tombs

of Liaoning Province, before they were replaced by the members of the emperor's family in the Eastern and Western Qing Tombs of Hebei Province.<sup>12</sup> The reputations of these people were more honourable; for instance, the sons of Emperor Kangxi, Yunti (允禵), Yunxu (允禩), Yunhu (允祐) and Yunqi (允禔), all used to guard imperial tombs. Among them, Yunqi assumed the position of highest-ranking officer at the Eastern Qing Tombs for 41 years.<sup>7</sup> For those outside the imperial family, guarding imperial tombs was an honour. For example, the *Qiandingrenfu* (thousands of labourers, 千丁人夫) in the imperial tombs of Liaoning Province were the thousands of Han officials and civilians that surrendered to Nurhaci and then helped to produce munitions; they were highly thought of and sent to become tomb caretakers.<sup>33</sup>

However, for some imperial relatives or officials in high positions, being sent to guard tombs might mean that they had lost the favour of the current Emperor. Yunti was sent to the Eastern Qing Tombs because of his political differences with his brother, Emperor Yongzheng.<sup>34</sup> Some ministers were sent to take care of tombs because they were so old that there was no position for them at the centre of power.<sup>7</sup> Empress Xiaoxian's nephew was demoted to be the lowest level of labour at the imperial tombs because of his offences.<sup>35</sup>

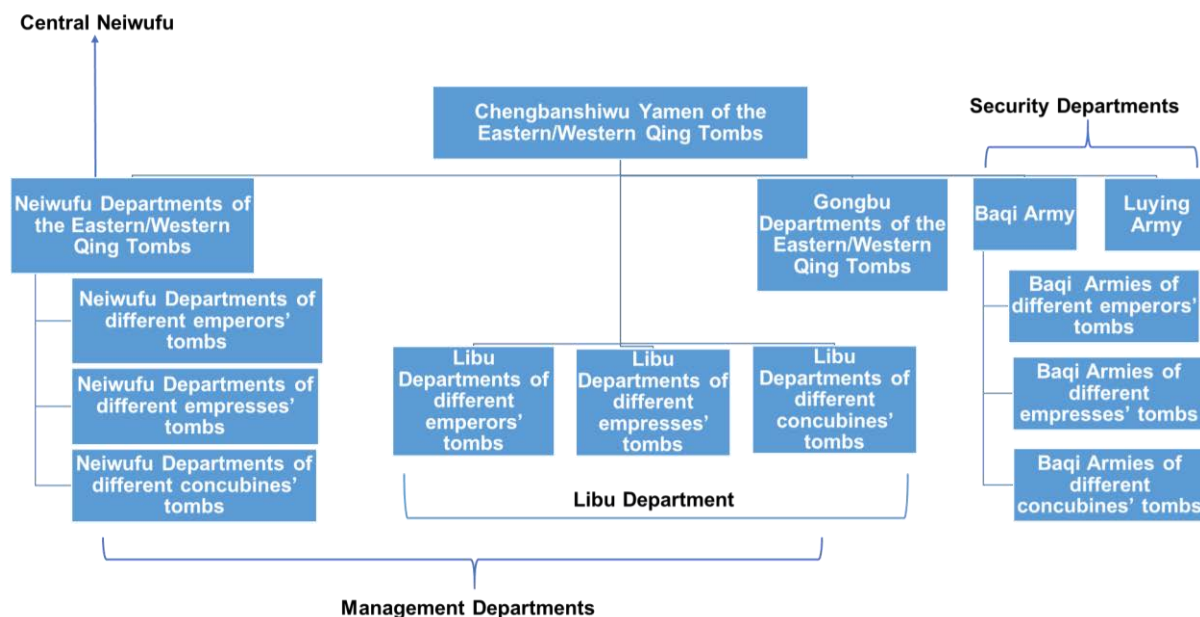


Fig. 6: Organisational chart of safeguard of the Imperial Tombs of Qing Dynasty. (Adapted from Xu.<sup>7</sup>)

The caretakers' duties were divided into three main categories: security, daily maintenance and cleaning, and preparations for the imperial sacrifices. At the beginning, there were only two *Yamen* (government offices in feudal China, 衙门) – Zongguan Yamen (总管衙门) and Guanfang Yamen (关防衙门) – in each tomb in Liaoning Province, which were in charge of guarding and maintaining imperial tombs. Later, in the Eastern and Western Qing Tombs, they were further subdivided into several departments including the Neiufu

Department (Imperial Household Bureau, 内务府), Libu Department (Ministry of Rites, 礼部), Gongbu Department (Ministry of Works, 工部), Baqi Army (Manchu Army of Qing, 八旗) and Luying Army (Han Army of Qing, 绿营). All of these departments were overseen by the top governing body, the Chengbanshiwu Yamen (Main Department of Imperial Tombs, 承办事务衙门); among them, the Neiwufu Departments of the Imperial Tombs were subordinate to the Central Neiwufu Department (Figure 6).

In 1658, the first group of people sent to guard the area were soldiers of the Luying Army who had settled in Malanzhen of Zunhua (around the Eastern Qing Tombs). With the construction of the Eastern Qing Tombs, the number of officers in the Luying Army increased to 187<sup>36</sup> and the number of soldiers increased to 2971.<sup>37</sup> Another group that was settled relatively early around the imperial tombs was the Gongbu Department, at the end of the Qing Dynasty, there were approximately 150 and 120 people who worked at the Gongbu Departments of the Eastern Qing Tombs and Western Qing Tombs,<sup>38</sup> respectively. According to calculations and a comparison of data from different literature, by the late Qing Dynasty, there were more than 7,000 tomb caretakers in the Eastern Qing Tombs.

The caretakers' daily work was extremely delicate, and people from different departments had to take their share of the work. In general, the Neiwufu Department performed the duties of housekeepers, the Libu Department were responsible for all the preparations for the sacrificial rites, the Gongbu Department undertook the repair of the whole complex and equipment manufacturing, and the security departments protected the site and *Fengshui* (geomancy, 风水) of the entire area. For instance, the sacrificial activities at the Qing imperial tombs were very frequent, and this was the busiest time for tomb caretakers. The Neiwufu Department needed to arrange taking out and drying the decorations and treasures in the buildings in advance; meanwhile, thoroughly cleaning all the facilities and grounds,<sup>39</sup> caretakers' wives were engaged in preparing the sacrificial meals.<sup>40</sup> Tomb caretakers in the Libu Department needed to clean all the space outside the buildings, and supply fresh food for sacrificial activities, such as milk, fruit, and meat; they needed also to prepare the speeches and manage the ceremonial gold and silver vessels<sup>39</sup>. The Gongbu Department needed to make the vessels, handmade flowers, and sacrificial articles that would be burned.<sup>41</sup>

Another example is the *Shubu* (Tree Keepers), who appear many times in the Archives of Qing and whose job it was to look after trees, specifically. Masses of pine trees were planted in the gardens of the imperial tombs; the *Shubu* in the Neiwufu Department not only needed to plant the trees, but also take good care of them and controlled the pests on a regular basis.<sup>39</sup>

The daily lives of tomb caretakers were supported by the Qing government. There are many records in the Archives of Qing detailing the official payments of wages to tomb caretakers. The construction of their dwellings was all paid for by the Qing government and the places where they lived were the origins of today's

villages of descendants. There were also some government-funded welfare institutions for tomb caretakers. Emperor Yongzheng used to award money to the top officers among the caretakers and asked them to plan and improve the welfare of the group; the officers invested the money, and the profits were used as a welfare fund for tomb caretakers.<sup>36</sup> These welfare payments would include extra money to the caretakers' families for weddings and funerals, as well as the establishment of local government-run schools. In most cases, the position of caretaker was hereditary, which is one of the reasons that they have lived there for generations.

In addition, tomb caretakers also organised entertainment. The Huanghui Society(皇会), for example, which was created by Yunti, has very few records. There were a lot of activities of the Huanghui Society's entertainments, such as traditional lion dances, music, acrobatics, martial arts and dragon lanterns.<sup>42</sup> As they were supported by the central government, tomb caretakers were very particular about their daily food, clothing and etiquette. Their food was exquisitely prepared and served in finely-crafted containers; they believed in Shamanism, worshipped crows, magpies and dogs, and followed elaborate rituals for meeting different people on different occasions.<sup>20</sup>

The excellent working and living conditions afforded to tomb caretakers for generations in the Qing Imperial Tombs reached a turning point in 1840. As the Opium War of 1840 began, the Qing regime was on the verge of collapse, and economic support from the central government began to decline; during this crisis, there was some rioting among tomb caretakers.<sup>15</sup> In 1900, the two highest-ranking officials of the Eastern Qing Tombs committed suicide by throwing themselves into a well, because they had no idea what to do about the aggression from the foreign Eight-Nation Alliance forces in the imperial tombs area.<sup>7</sup> After hundreds of years, the support from the central government to the tomb caretakers ended in 1924, when the abdicated Emperor Xuantong (known as Puyi Aisin-Gioro) was driven out of the Forbidden City by warlords.<sup>15</sup>

#### **4. SUPER-CHANGES IN TOMB CARETAKERS' IDENTITY**

The great changes in the political and social landscape led to a drastic change in the identity and everyday lives of the tomb caretakers. The radical changes in the identity of the descendants, their living conditions and livelihoods, as well as their vanishing memories that urgently need to be re-discovered and preserved now, all need to be taken into account.

Since 1924, when the golden age of the tomb caretakers was essentially ended, their ways of life changed dramatically as they had to resolve the problem of having no livelihood. China's economic production was still dominated by agriculture during the Qing Dynasty, but tomb caretakers had never engaged in agricultural production. Taking the group of the Eastern Qing Tombs as an example, in the early and mid-Qing periods,

tomb caretakers' income depended on the support from the government; in the later period, the funds were reduced until they were terminated completely. In 1915, the government agreed to rent the land behind the imperial tombs to other farmers and use the rental income to feed caretakers; meanwhile, some land was also distributed to caretakers, but they had no experience of farming, so that they could only rent out the land to make money.<sup>15</sup> This was also the preferred option to resolve the issue of the livelihoods of tomb caretakers in the Western Qing Tombs.<sup>17</sup>

The mountain and land behind the Eastern Qing Tombs had been a forbidden zone in terms of the *Fengshui* of the imperial tombs. However, land reclamation caused the original architectural designs to be destroyed, and the damage to the natural environment was continued across the whole region because caretakers had to survive. There were many pine and cypress trees planted by more than 500 *Shubu*, which were cultivated for more than 240 years, becoming a forest; however, during the crisis, some caretakers also participated in the trade of cutting down ancient trees to sell the timber in addition to the trees chopped down by warlords.<sup>15</sup> There were gold mines in the area, but mining had not been allowed by the Qing Dynasty, because it would destroy the *Fengshui*. Some tomb caretakers were forced to join the mining industry in order to live, but, even so, there were still many caretakers unable to find a secure livelihood. Some of them sold the publicly owned houses that they used to live in; some caretakers even stole items from the imperial tombs to sell.<sup>15</sup> The situation was similar in the Western Qing Tombs, in which tomb caretakers also lived by renting land and going out to work.<sup>16</sup>

This chaotic situation did not improve significantly until around 1949, when the People's Republic of China was founded. The identity of the tomb caretakers' descendants completely changed from being imperial civil servants of the Qing Dynasty to becoming ordinary Chinese citizens. From 1949, the tomb caretakers at the Western Qing Tombs no longer performed the maintenance duties and lived the lives of ordinary farmers.<sup>18</sup> In 1953, Dongling Manchu Xiang Township was established in the Eastern Qing Tombs area, and from 1984 onwards, villages and towns that had evolved from the settlements of the former tomb caretakers of the Eastern Qing Tombs were founded, one after another.<sup>15</sup>

During this difficult transition, the descendants learned to support themselves through agriculture, business and handicrafts.<sup>15,17</sup> It is worth mentioning that some of the skills were derived from their working experiences serving for imperial family and were passed on to future generations as a way to provide a livelihood. For instance, the restoration of ancient buildings is a very popular industry among descendants in the Western Qing Tombs area.<sup>17</sup> A documentary also mentioned that the descendants at the Eastern Qing Tombs were engaged in the creation of intangible cultural heritage, relating to handicrafts from the era of the imperial family, as well as the development of local tourism through offering traditional cuisine.<sup>43</sup>

#### 4.1 CHANGES IN LIVING SPACE

The original living space and conditions of the tomb caretakers and their descendants have also undergone great changes. Firstly, in terms of regional administrative management, the administrative units have been changed from the original caretakers' settlements, categorised as *Zhen* (镇), *Ying* (营) and *Quan* (圈), into the contemporary administrative villages and towns. Taking the settlements around the Eastern Qing Tombs as an example, there were three *Zhen*, nine *Ying* and eight *Quan* settlements, in which lived tomb caretakers from different departments;<sup>11</sup> nowadays, those have become large and small villages and towns, such as Dongling Manchu Xiang Township and Malanyuzhen Town. Around the Western Qing Tombs, there are also many villages that evolved naturally from the former caretakers' settlements, such as Zhongyicun Village, Huabeicun Village and Xiaoxincun Village.<sup>21</sup>

Secondly, the tomb caretakers' original residential buildings have been demolished. These houses were built in a very characteristic way, different from the traditional Chinese construction of structures facing south. All the houses were built to face the direction of the guarded tomb, so these houses are also called 'Wangling houses' (houses that face tombs); however, these houses were badly damaged after 1942, and they are now difficult to find.<sup>11</sup> The *Annals of Changrui Mountain* (《昌瑞山万年统志》) written by Yinglian (英廉), an official of the Qing Dynasty, recorded the original construction scale and form of caretakers' residences in detail, while in Guangyuan Xu's *The System of Imperial Tombs of the Qing Dynasty* (《清朝陵寝制度》), the current conditions of those old sites are also described.

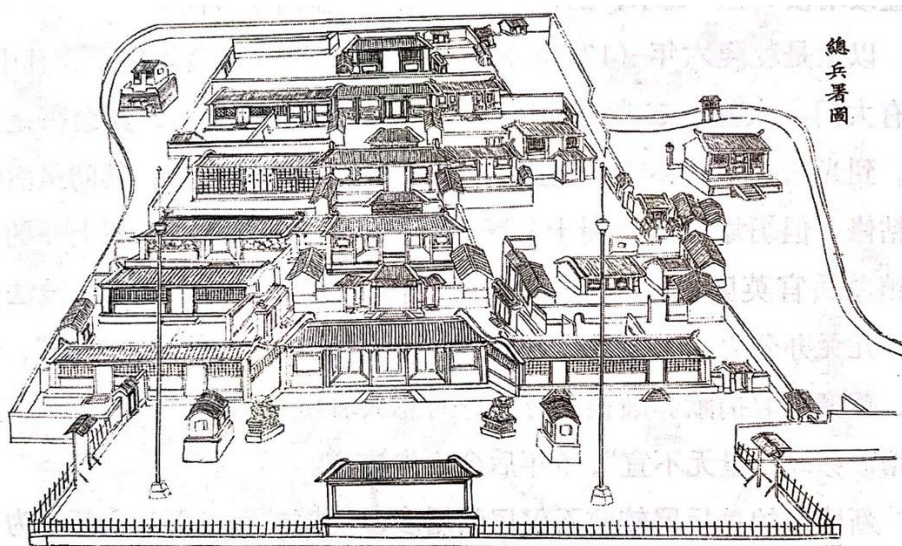


Fig. 7: Sketch of Zongbingshu Office (General Military Office 马兰镇总兵署), where the Luying Army officers had been working and living. It was the military headquarter of Luying Army in the area of the Eastern Qing Tombs. (Source: Yinglian.<sup>36</sup>)



According to various reports in the literature and the observation of pilot fieldwork in Malanyuzhen Town (one of the settlements around the Eastern Qing Tombs in which descendants now live) conducted on 24 December 2019, it is very difficult to find the remains of the tomb caretakers' original living spaces today. For instance, there were many original houses in Malanguan, Malanyuzhen Town, where the Luying Army settlement stood (Figure 7), but by 2005 only one building remained (Figure 8). The only surviving building was then destroyed by fire in November 2006.<sup>44</sup>

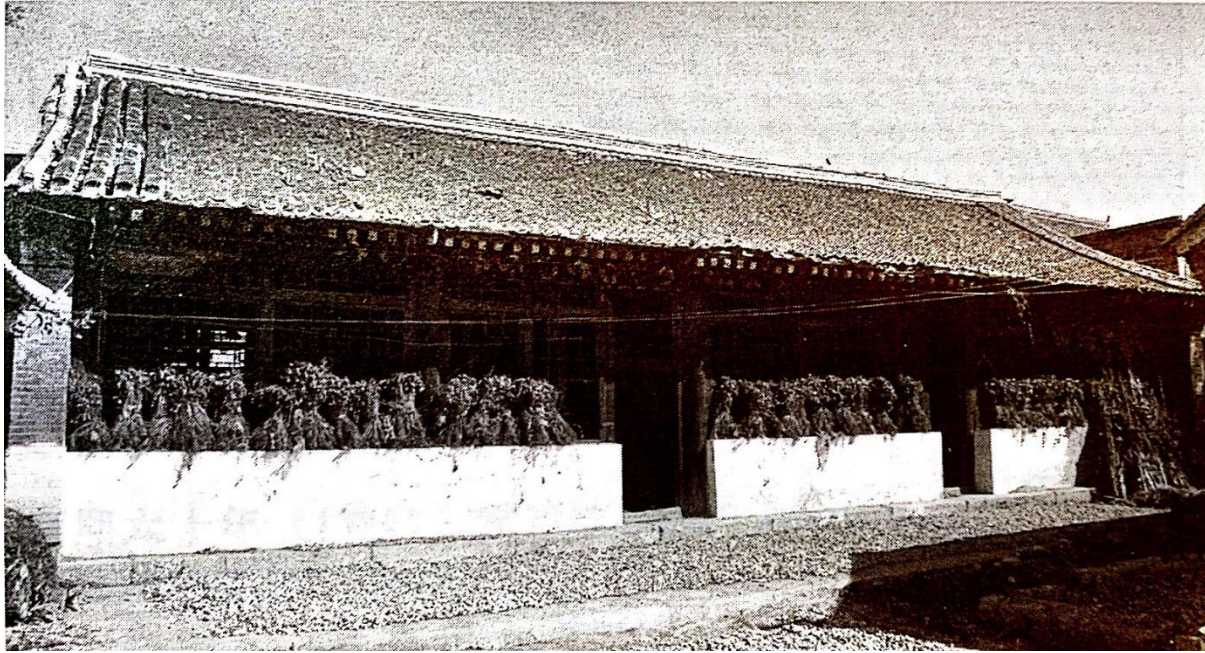


Fig. 8: Photograph of the last remaining building of Zongbingshu Office, before being burned down in 2006. (Source: Xu.<sup>44</sup>)

The damage to the original living space is connected to the fact that the main material of ancient Chinese architecture was wood, which decays and catches fire easily, but more importantly, it was caused by the lack of attention paid to protection. The hierarchical and complex design of the tomb caretakers' original living spaces reflected the strict systems around tomb construction in the context of the Qing Dynasty, which itself is a part of the culture of the imperial tombs. However, most existing studies on the Imperial Qing Tombs focus on the architectural and historical perspectives, as well as the combination of cultural heritage and tourism, while ignoring the culture, memory and identity of the people living around the tombs. While developing the construction at the regional level, policy makers paid more attention to improving the living conditions and environment of the residents with modern means, while the original buildings, even if they still existed, could meet the superior standards of modern living conditions. Therefore, when Zhao<sup>45</sup> investigated some existing descendants' villages around the Western Qing Tombs, he pointed out:

The tomb system recognized at the national level clearly points at the architectural heritage dominated by the tomb buildings and explains the aesthetic significance and historical value of the imperial tombs from the perspective of the planning and architectural design of the tomb area. The local level has a relatively weak understanding of the tomb system and pays more attention to the superior living conditions to be created based around the tomb area.<sup>46</sup>

## 4.2 CHANGES IN DAILY LIFE

It is not enough to change the lifestyle and living space in order to complete the transformation from imperial civil servants of the Qing Dynasty to ordinary citizens of China, the descendants' communities need to make another important step in getting rid of the details that represented their old identity in daily life. First, the last caretakers and their descendants abandoned their Manchu family names and adopted Han surnames. This action reflected social and political changes. Politically and ideologically, the end of the Qing Dynasty represented the end of feudal rule in China, as well as the beginning of a revolution to build a new democratic republic, which represented great social progress. However, the identity of the tomb caretakers, as well as the culture they maintained, were thought to be the remnants of a backward society. Therefore, to reduce discrimination against them, after the fall of the Qing Dynasty, descendants of tomb caretakers changed their Manchu surnames to Han ones.<sup>15,20</sup>

Secondly, the etiquette and costumes of the caretakers' descendants have gradually become Han-style, which also closely reflects social change. With the end of the Qing Dynasty, there was no longer a strict hierarchy; naturally, therefore, a complex system of etiquette was no longer required.<sup>20</sup> In terms of personal faith, few descendants believe in Shamanism today,<sup>16</sup> but they have kept the habit of owning dogs and the ban on eating dog meat.<sup>20</sup> As for the tomb caretakers' entertainments, some of them have disappeared completely, while others have been preserved as intangible cultural heritage. The Huanghui Society of the Eastern Qing Tombs, mentioned previously, was dissolved in 1913 due to the lack of financial support,<sup>42</sup> whereas the dragon lantern show (*Baizilongdeng*, 摆字龙灯) at the Western Qing Tombs has been preserved<sup>17,18</sup> and it was included in the extended list of national intangible cultural heritage in 2008.<sup>17</sup>

## 5. VANISHING MEMORIES OF DESCENDANTS

With the changes to the traditional lifestyle and living environment, the recognition by tomb caretakers' descendants of their special group identity is vanishing with the disappearance of living memory. Especially in the decades from the mid-twentieth century to the 1980s, culture, politics and ideology experienced almost constant change due to the great changes in Chinese society; the memories of the descendants were gradually lost during these changes. In the Posijiu Movement ('Elimination of the Four Stereotypes') of the Cultural

Revolution, all the genealogies that recorded the history of the group and articles that preserved its customs were destroyed.<sup>16,18</sup> This meant the destruction of the memory and identity of the tomb caretakers, and it also presents difficulties for research today into the descendants of tomb caretakers. Therefore, most existing studies on the caretakers are from a historical perspective. The few investigations into the current situation of their descendants have mainly concentrated on Zhongyicun Village, a village of caretaker descendants by the Western Qing Tombs.

Even so, there are some people who want to re-trace the memory. For instance, for the Western Qing Tombs communities, the area, first, was the living space of their ancestors for generations and, second, there is the precious cultural heritage. Therefore, some of them are making continual efforts to rewrite their family trees and village annals, so as to pass on their family histories and memories to later generations.<sup>21</sup> Some descendants went to Beijing several times to consult archives and documents to investigate the history, origins and surnames of local villages and tomb caretakers; others are trying to revive the traditional activity of the dragon lantern shows, and the local government is also interested in promoting traditional culture and heritage among the local descendants of the caretakers.<sup>16</sup>

Emotionally, the older generation of descendants still have a special affection for the imperial tombs. In periods of war, the caretakers existed in name only and voluntarily protected the imperial tombs; the older generation have been reluctant to leave their homeland, they would be proactive preventing tourists from damaging the imperial tombs.<sup>14</sup>

Compared with the older generation, the young's memory of the past is vaguer, and their identity as descendants of the tomb caretakers has already been greatly weakened. Yan<sup>18</sup> conducted a survey in the Zhongyicun village that showed that more than half of the descendants never participate in and celebrate their own traditional festivals; almost all of them presently celebrate the traditional festivals of the Chinese nation. Nearly half of the respondents are not familiar with their own group's culture, and nearly half have never passed on a specific aspect of the group culture to their children. The elderly people are mainly responsible for the cultural transmission, but most children are indifferent to the memory and culture of the group.

It is a similar situation in the Eastern Qing Tombs. On 4 January 2020, the author visited the World Heritage Site there and had a long casual conversation with a tour guide of the site. She said she was not a descendant of the caretakers, but her husband's family was. The intermarriage between descendants of local caretakers and girls from other places has become more and more common, which is consistent with Yan's finding.<sup>18</sup> When asked which department of caretakers her husband's family used to work in, she said she had no idea; she had only heard that they used to live rich and leisurely lives. When asked if she often heard stories about caretakers from old people at home, she said she heard very little. Because she works in the Eastern Qing

Tombs, she knew something about the history of the caretakers. However, not all the descendants would be engaged in work connected to the imperial tombs, and the memory and identity of the caretakers were far away from them.

On 24 December 2019, the author conducted an open-ended interview for more than three hours with a community activist, referred to as EA, who is trying to re-discover the fragments of memories within the communities. He can clearly describe that his ancestors were caretakers and worked as *Shuhu*. He is trying to re-trace the caretakers' original living space, which is a part of the research on imperial tombs that he has done all his life. EA has conducted a lot of fieldwork to investigate and try to locate the demolished caretakers' houses. He said it is almost impossible to find the remains of the original buildings in the Eastern Qing Tombs area. They can be located generally only by relying on historical documents, but there are still some original caretakers' houses in the Western Qing Tombs area.

As the communities' older generations age and pass away, re-tracing memories becomes more difficult. With the lack of textual documentation, it is difficult to maintain the communicative memory of a group, for more than three or four generations, which is passed on in everyday communication.<sup>47</sup> EA also mentioned that re-discovering old memories might have been a little easier 20 or 30 years ago. However, now, more than a century has passed, many of the older generation have already died, and it is unclear how many memories and stories they would have to pass on. On 16 April 2020, the author had a casual conversation with EA over the phone for half an hour, and again EA referred to his own investigation difficulties. He said he asked several older descendants about the materials, colours and structures of some old buildings' roofs, but he found that the responses differed greatly from each respondent; it was difficult to research even with help from historical sources.

In addition to actively investigating the history, EA also promoted the situation of the tombs and the communities to the outside world through online platforms. He posted regularly, with citations, about the cultures of the tombs, and spatial changes of the original settlement based in Malanyuzhen Town. For instance, on 12 May 2020, he posted a picture to demonstrate that the former site of the *Yamen* of the Libu Department (The Office of the Ministry of Rites) and the storehouse for the gold and silverware of the Xiaoling Tomb. However, it is now a row of modern buildings in Malanyuzhen's Old Town. On 15 June 2020, EA posted other pictures taken by himself showing the last and only old *Menlou* (Gateway) in Malanyuzhen Town and he called for the preservation of this last old building in the area.

The author also contacted another community activist online in Xilingzhen Town, which surrounds the Western Qing Tombs, who is referred to as WA and whose ancestor was a senior official among the tomb caretakers of the Western Qing Tombs. She noted that although her community is close to the tombs, a

World Heritage Site, and has a close historical relationship with the imperial tombs, today there is little interaction between the community and the area's heritage. As a result, many experienced old craftsmen and much of the traditional culture are neglected in the community. WA left the big city and returned to her hometown to launch her 'Cultural Communities' project. The aim of her project is to form a long-term community educational system, and she offers free book-lending and weekly training and workshops on traditional arts and culture to the villagers for free. For example, in October 2017, she organised workshops such as 'Storytelling by the Descendants of the Tomb Caretakers, of Legends in the Western Qing Tombs' and 'Making Traditional Handmade Mooncakes'. These workshops were open to everyone for free, and sometimes trips were organised for local primary and secondary school students to attend.

However, the efforts of scattered community alone are insufficient to re-discover the communities' memories and cultural identities associated with heritage. In the first place, current scattered community activities cannot fully and effectively achieve the aim of documenting and preserving the re-discovered community memory and cultural identity. As mentioned above, there are community activists trying to expand the influence of community culture through promoting it to the outside world, but not yet following a systematic recording and preservation practice. Some communities are dedicated to re-trace the memory and culture with their own efforts, but the outcome of such individual actions is limited. In which way, the recording and preservation will only be reflected in the re-tracing of family memories and will only be beneficial to a single village at best, but far from the aim of re-discovery of entire communities' memories and cultural identities.

Secondly, scattered community activities to date have not been able to achieve the goal of reconnecting the community with the heritage of imperial tombs. As mentioned above, the imperial tombs are state-owned, so the protection and management of the tombs are carried out under the framework for general national heritage conservation. The reconnection between the community and the imperial tombs needs to be achieved through the process of consultation between the community activities and the national heritage conservation framework, while the existing scattered activities of individual community members cannot fulfil such consultation process.

Finally, scattered community activities are normally lack of a unified goal, and unable to connect the re-discovered memories and cultural of communities with the needs and development expectations of the communities to form a long-term sustainable process. As mentioned earlier, the development expectation of the local government is to create better physical living conditions for the local communities, which is also one of the reasons for changing the communities' living space, while the needs of the community itself are unclear because there has been little research to explore the needs of community members. The common initiation of the existing scattered community activities was basically the emotion and sense of responsibility

of serval residents. For most community members, it may be difficult to realise the significance of re-discovering the community's memory and culture identity.

Therefore, there is an urgent need for a systematic and professional framework to guide communities in re-discovering heritage-related memories and cultures. Within this framework, recording, preservation, and promoting of re-discovered community memory should be regulated. The framework should also be multi-party cooperated that integrates the existing scattered community activities, where the foundation of cooperation is to root into the communities and understand the real needs of the community residents, in order to effectively link the objectives of the activities with these needs.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the current research work has investigated the tomb caretakers, who were an integral part of the Imperial Qing Tombs. It has been found via field search and literature reviewing that from the mid-seventeenth century to the early twentieth century, the tomb caretakers have played a crucial role in taking care of the imperial tombs. However, their lives and identity changed dramatically following the decline and fall of the Qing Dynasty; by 1924, they had completely lost the support of the government. At present, the descendants of the caretakers still live around the imperial tombs, living the same lives as ordinary farmers in other parts of China. According to the interview with a few local residents and scholars, because of the changes in the political and social landscape over the last century, the life of the whole group has undergone countless changes. However, the literature and archive search indicated that the existing textual record is too limited to show the memories of descendants from 1924 to the present day. It has also been found during the literature and field searching that, the memory and identity that were connected to the tombs are disappearing, and urgent and difficult action is therefore required to make sure they are documented, narrated, restored and preserved. The field search has suggested that while there are already community activists working on this, there is still an urgent need for a more systematic, professional and practical approach to achieving the goal. To develop a framework that suits the above needs, should also be an important goal for the future research work.



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<sup>6</sup> Guangyuan Xu, a Manchu Chinese scholar, who was born in March 1946. He is a member of Chinese Society of Forbidden City, and now living in Zunhua city, Hebei province of China, who has been engaged in the research on imperial tombs of Qing dynasty, and empresses and imperial concubines of Qing, since the 1970s. In 1977, he came to work in the Cultural Relics Depository of the Eastern Qing Tombs and served as the Director of the Research Office of the Cultural Relics Administration of the Eastern Qing Tombs for many years until retirement. So far, he has published more than twenty books and more than sixty papers.

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## **Traditional Dwellings and Settlements**

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### **REGENERATION OF THE URBAN VILLAGE FROM THE CULTURAL PRODUCTION PERSPECTIVE: THE CASE OF NANTOU OLD TOWN IN SHENZHEN**

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## REGENERATION OF THE URBAN VILLAGE FROM THE CULTURAL PRODUCTION PERSPECTIVE: THE CASE OF NANTOU OLD TOWN IN SHENZHEN



*The urban village represents one of the most vibrant urban forms in modern China's cities, which indicates that the urban-rural duality has changed, and the cultural dynamism brought by demographic shift needs reassessment in the changing landscape. This paper draws on the cultural production theory to analyze the evolving socio-spatial traditions in urban villages by reviewing a cultural event inhabiting "Nantou Old Town" in Shenzhen. The paper applies interdisciplinary perspective to research and evaluate the relationship between urban regeneration and cultural force and then develop suggestions for a sustainable urban regeneration strategy.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

As a transitional neighborhood, the urban village has rooted in the history of the rapid urbanization of China. Since 1989, the urban villages have transformed from the rural settlements, forming hybrid communities in the city with multiple informal features and providing affordable housing for the migrant population. When the urban-rural duality has changed during the urbanization, the cultural dynamism brought by the demographic shifts needs reassessment in the changing landscape.<sup>1,2</sup> Though the urban village represents one of the most vibrant urban forms in modern China's cities, it has been stigmatized wherein excluded from the dominant urban discourse for a long time. The debates on urban village remain unexplored in order to provide a long-term strategy that considers cultural diversity and creativity as crucial assets for urban regeneration.

It thus requires an interdisciplinary approach to research and evaluate the relationship between urban regeneration and cultural force. Based on the review of cultural production literature, the research expands upon the case study, site visits while seeking multiple perspectives from urban theories, political economy and cultural sociology. The paper starts with examining the debates on the urban village of Shenzhen through its transitional image and diverse academic views. After a review of the culture-led regeneration project in "Nantou Old Town", the paper reevaluates the meaning of "local culture" in the urban environment. The research sees through the cultural production perspective and develops implications for sustainable urban regeneration strategy by finding the driving force for holistic revitalization.



## 2. CULTURAL INQUIRY INTO URBAN REGENETATION

Since the 1970s, the cultural turn has played a central role in urban planning throughout Europe and USA.<sup>3-5</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, the cultural economy devised by "city entrepreneurs" strategy rose to prominence against a background of industrial decline and financial speculation.<sup>6</sup> Driven by "world city" marketing, city leaders consider culture as a key to bolstering a new economy and to dealing with decayed urban areas.<sup>7</sup> Shenzhen, as China's leading Special Economic Zone, has intended to symbolize its change from a border manufacturing zone into a "world city" and to work as a service -sector core through mass planning and construction of downtown area during the last thirty years.<sup>8</sup> Shenzhen did earn the hallmark of "Creative City of Design" in place marketing by achieving significant urban growth while leading the culture and creative industry.<sup>9</sup> Creative City of Design is, to some extent, another "world city" in rhetoric. Such cities have captured the popular imagination, with local politicians, municipal officials and business, and media elites worldwide grasping the idea.<sup>10</sup> More specifically, the city authorities advocate strongly on the image of "world city" since image has become an important part of the city branding process in the globalization process. In the "world city" image competing, the elite culture contribute to the urban economies by attracting global investment and tourists as well as stimulating the process of gentrification in the inner city.<sup>11</sup> In the 21st century, gentrification represents the leading edge of spatial reconstruction, deindustrialization, globalization, and nationalist revival not only on the city-scale but also the global scale.<sup>12</sup> It is worth noting that urban cultural resources are usually identified with those of the elites while the underclass and popular culture are often excluded from the dominant discourse during the gentrification process.

In fact, the cultures in the city are produced and consumed along with economic and political power. When the culture emerges as both a theme and a strategy of urban redevelopment, we consume the city's art, food, and images and also its real estate. At the same time, the rise of the symbolic economy also influences public preference for cultural consumption. Both actions have done so much to nourish and to destroy the city's distinctive cultures in the meantime. When all cities pursue the same modern, creative image, it results in the loss of "authenticity".<sup>13</sup> In consequence, the diversity of cultural and social life are being assimilated by the homogeneous ethos, triggering the trend of building flagship projects as well as class alliance. However, as can be seen, the evidence of how far flagship and major cultural projects contribute to a range of regeneration objectives is limited.<sup>14</sup> From Western experiences, such model has met with strategic dilemma with a lot of projects abandoned. It criticizes the cultural planning as a nostrum for the complex structural, social, and economic problems of the post-industrial cities.<sup>15</sup> In Chinese cities, the effort of reinventing "authenticity" is limited to the restoration of historic buildings and fashioning with creative visuals. However, the real urban "authenticity" exists in the belonging of community and the coherence of everyday experience of urban inhabitants, whether to the origin of the city or the new beginning after the newcomers moved in.

The key lies in understanding the authenticity from the perspective of urban inhabitants as space creator. In brief, the homogeneous model of culture-led urban regeneration is rhetorically enchanting and practically unrealizable while eventually leads to gentrification. Thus the paper try to inquiry about the nature of “culture” in planning policy, or specifically, the motivation of “local culture” in driving sustainable urban regeneration and economic growth.

The renovation of urban villages forms an essential part of urban regeneration and lies in improving the living conditions and reviving the local cultures. To avoid homogeneous results, a thorough understanding from cultural production perspective is essential. The paper then draws on the study of cultural production regarding the interconnectedness between urban regeneration and cultural force. In French Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s broad theories, the field of cultural production provides a theoretical model for analyzing diverse cultural preferences and practices among different fields, groups and classes. In the following paragraphs, the field of cultural production is useful in explaining the complicated relationship between social practice, lifestyle, and cultural taste relating to the urban village. More importantly, Bourdieu’s theory transcends the visible interactions between individuals to foresee the invisible structural relations emerge only through their effects, namely, he called “field”.<sup>16</sup> “Field” is ‘a structured space of positions in which the positions and their interrelations are determined by the distribution of different kinds of resources or “capital”’.<sup>17;18</sup> Besides, Sociologist Diana Crane has incorporated Bourdieu’s theory on cultural production and further developed it into a more contemporary domain of media and urban culture. In its core, her argument in the book “The Production of Culture: Media and the Urban Arts” is that “we cannot understand cultural forms without the contexts in which they are produced and consumed”.<sup>11</sup> In order to illustrate the corresponding relationships, it is necessary to reference the three cultural domains conceptualized by her: The core domain is dominant to disseminate culture to a mass audience (national and international) such as television. The peripheral domain is dominant by cultural organizations disseminating cultures on a national basis but to distinct subgroups, usually based on age and lifestyle. While the third domain, usually referring to urban culture, is created and disseminated in urban settings for local audiences, such as concert, exhibition, theater and drama. Basically, the audience disseminated by the peripheral and third domain is distributed differently according to distinct demographics and social categories, such as age, sex, race, class, and different clusters of social attitudes and world views.<sup>11</sup> The idea of categorized domains deciphers the relationship between lifestyle, cultural taste and social class and above all, the way of cultural dissemination.

### **3. DEBATES ON URBAN VILLAGE OF CHINA**

In terms of the urban village, scholars in urban planning, geography, sociology, and other areas have carried out rich findings and put forward the reform measures from different perspectives. Urban planners and

researchers focus on the physical problems of land use, planning management, and construction landscape. At the same time, the sociologists focus on the living conditions, social security, and the residents' (including local villagers and migrants) cultural positions, for instance, social and cultural distinction and their identity dilemma. The latter findings provide the literature framework for this paper as a starting point for the cultural inquiry.

China is now “in the midst of the largest mass migration the world has ever seen” with unprecedented urbanization problems.<sup>19</sup> Established as the first open-market city after the reform of modern China, Shenzhen has experienced a striking growth, bringing an increasing number of migrants from all over the country to fuel the industry over the last three decades. As an affordable housing solution during the burgeoning urban development, “urban village” is the arrival settlement for the migrant population, especially for the low-income peasant workers. Different from the “slum”, “urban enclave” or “squatter” in the global context, the urban village is a vibrant socio-economic entity. It accommodates residence, shops, factories, clinics, schools, ancestral temples, and police stations integrated as a hybrid community with the local villagers' ownership of property rights. The thriving business of urban village was born from the migration history, diverse lifestyles, and cultural backgrounds. It reflects the authentic scenarios of everyday life in contrast with the cosmopolitan lifestyle. There were collective memories, traditional social norms and relationships, and diverse cultures that intertwined with the urban inhabitants' recognition of the space.

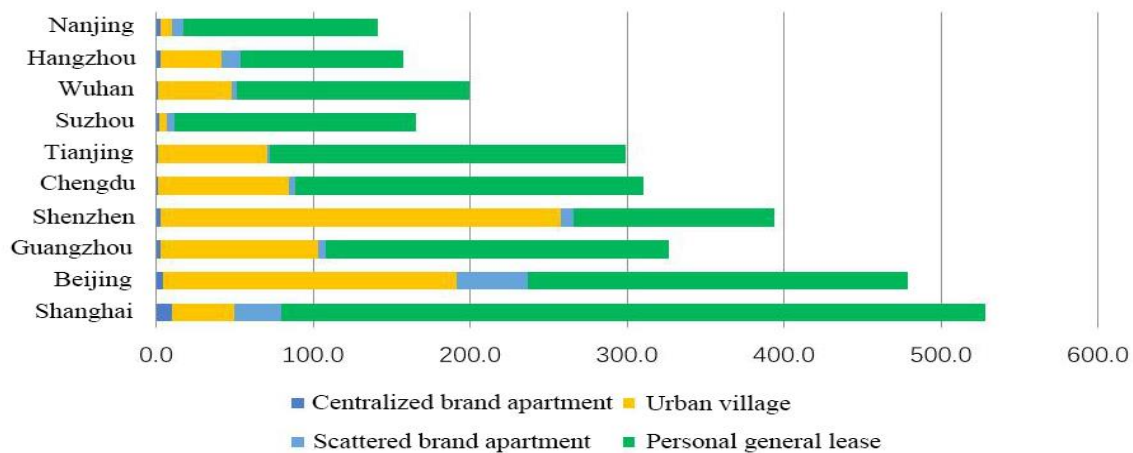


Fig. 1: Types of housing leased by the migrant populations (Source: from Lianjia Research Institute, *Long-term Leasehold White Paper 2017-2018*, reproduced by author)

To date, more than half of the migrant population in Shenzhen live in urban villages (when three-quarters of the total population in the city is migrants).<sup>20</sup> According to Lianjia Real Estate Agency's statistics until 2017, 16 millions of the residents in Shenzhen live in rental housing, wherein 11 millions of them live in urban

villages (including suburban villages). Further, Lianjia Research Institute (LRI) reports that the proportion of urban village tenants was 52.9% when that of commercial housing was 32.4%. Nevertheless, from the long-term investigation of LRI in Shenzhen, the actual proportion of rental housing in urban villages might reach 60-70%.

Owing to the large stock, high rental ratio and low rent, urban villages are unsurprisingly favored by tenants including university graduates, technical workers and employees of public institutions. This part of tenants constitutes a significant proportion of the burgeoning “new middle-class” in China categorized as “the group within the economy that encompasses managers and supervisors, professionals, and technical workers, all of whom have access to higher returns acquired from their professional qualifications.”<sup>21</sup> Different from the old impression, the people live in urban villages shows a tendency of multi-class and multi-cultural backgrounds rather than the dominant low-income peasant workers. This is in line with the overall growing education level of the migrant population in China: people with the undergraduate background and above has doubled from 2011 to 2016 and there is an upward trend of higher education background. It shows a signal of growing housing need of the professional group in mobility. At the same time, it is noticeable from the report that 90% of the urban village tenants are young population (from 20 to 35), which also indicate an intimate connection between tenants’ age, educational background, and workplace. The following data verify the finding that 55.5% of the tenants commute to the workplace within 20 minutes which means lots of them to live near their workplaces.<sup>22</sup> The superior location of urban village enables the migrant population to live and work with a minimum cost of commuting. Meanwhile, the thriving central business areas depend on the “necessary and poorly paid” service sector: cleaners, security guards, maintainers, and other blue-collars who live in urban villages as well. High-skilled, middle-wage workers and unskilled, low-wage workers coexist in the community according to similar lifestyles and tastes rather than social classes.

Regardless of developing endeavors to preserve these communities, the urban villages have long been stigmatized in dominant culture because of the poor images: dirty streets, crowded living spaces, disrepair facilities. This was mainly due to its early images profiled by traditional official medias in core domain of dissemination such as newspapers, television and films. From the city authority's point of view, on the one hand, the vulgar informal settlements seem to be the obstacle for urban development in need of framing “world city” image. However, on the other hand, it is the high demand of the global economic system for massive labor force to establish industrial bases in Asian countries that promotes the formation of migrant communities.<sup>10</sup> The urban social polarization and housing segregation driven by globalizing forces are prevalent in large cities in China and further aggravated by the defective social welfare system and differential treatment.<sup>23</sup> Hence the urban village serves as an eclectic housing solution for the migrant labor force owing to the limitation of national residential permit system (“Hukou” in Chinese) which distinguishes rural and

urban population. Since “Hukou” is the fundamental barrier deciding the housing ownership and public services in the city, while the government cannot go beyond the system to solve social housing for peasant workers. Generally, most of peasant workers would go back to their hometowns after made certain earnings from the city or met with health problems. Under the unprecedented flows of the population in the age of globalization, the “Hukou” system acts in contravention from the endeavors of general citizenship, which claimed both the right to housing in the city and the right to make use of public spaces.<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, nomadic lifestyle seems to be the inevitable choice for the migrant population at the moment whilst urban villages as housing providers also make the social structure problem spatialized.<sup>25</sup>

The comprehensive understanding of urban village raised in 2002 when Chinese Sociologist Li published a series of papers, illustrating the genesis of such social phenomenon by referring to the dialectical relationship between urban and rural.<sup>26</sup> Some other Chinese sociologist believes that the migrant population has formed a new structured social space that has distinguished lifestyles, behavioral rules, relationship networks, and even ideology than other urban social groups.<sup>26</sup> The social space emerging from urban villages not only manifests the changing spatial production relations but also the social production relations between local villagers (landlords) and the migrants(tenants) as well as their cultural identities. As for the local villagers, their mode of production has changed, no longer engaging in agriculture, whereas their social-economic organization and lifestyles have yet been fully urbanized. In urban villages, the local residents are self-isolated from the urban environment by their local dialects, clan ties and rural lifestyle, which can also seen as a form of cultural segregation. The fact is that social hierarchy as well as culture taste, is not constant but socially and historically constructed which provides sources for creativity and innovation. The cultural practices of local villagers would more or less transform through cultural reproduction and demographic urbanization upon their offspring with the reconstruction of economic, social and cultural capital. As a result, the rural culture, folk culture, and urban culture would be further integrated in the future. Different from the local villagers, the migrant workers do not possess any assets in the city, nor inherited social relationships. Those without permanent or legal residence have almost no social existence about their localization. As Bourdieu argues that “individuals may be more or less characterized by one’s place of permanent residence”.<sup>27</sup> In the migrant communities, the majority of urban poor especially unskilled peasant workers are employed as blue-collar and service workers (with low economic and cultural capital), and many of them are rural or of rural origin(with low social capital). The large number of rural-turned urban population forms a new group representing “Quasi-folk low culture” borrowed from Gans’s concept. “Quasi-folk low culture” is a blend of folk culture and the commercial low culture which catered to audiences who were just merging from ethnic or rural folk cultures. It consists of unamalgamated ethnic groups whose lack of integration into a national culture has managed to preserve many unadulterated elements of provincial or foreign folk culture.<sup>28</sup> However, the migrant workers’ low status and low purchasing power mean that their cultural needs receive little attention.<sup>29</sup>

At the same time, as barely localized, they are less possible to consume urban culture unless they establish their own positions as newcomers to restructure and recreate the relevant sub-field and sub-culture in the city. Nevertheless, the scarcity of housing rights and citizenship of migrants also pulls them away from the right of difference, such as class and culture. To wit, it is the deprivation of socio-economic right from the migrant population as urban inhabitants in substance.

Since social and spatial segregation is the persistent fact within the complex history of uneven geographical development, it is inevitably a long-run process for both local residents and migrants to resettle in the city, reconstituting social hierarchy and realizing cultural integration. For migrant population and rural-turned class, cultural reproduction is still a potential approach for reclaiming status in the city. In a word, the urban village phenomenon has transcended the manifestation of urban-rural spatial transition. What is more, it is a process of cultural reconstruction by the migrant population along with their social mobility. This fills in the gap of cultural inquiry in related research of urban village in China which used to focus largely on land reform, planning management and spatial production. In particular, the way of cultural dissemination is inseparable from the cultural reconstruction process during urbanization. It has also been through a great change from dominant mass dissemination to polycentric networked dissemination and broad public participation in contemporary society.

#### **4. CULTURE-LED REGENERATION PROJECT: THE CASE OF NANTOU OLD TOWN**

The first exposure of “urban village” in UABB (2005) attracted lots of criticism for open displaying the city’s “tumor”. According to the five-year plan of the Shenzhen government since 2005, the primary goal was to demolish 20% urban villages, although strong resistance and complex negotiation exist. The turning point happened around 2010 when the Dafen oil painting village proved itself a successful mode for revitalizing the economic and cultural influence of Shenzhen’s urban villages. Dafen’s mode was a bottom-up practice initiated by painting traders employing self-educated oil painting workers (most of whom are peasants) and the subsequent painting industry chain. Although Dafen’s mode is not reproducible, it set a milestone for regenerating urban village in Shenzhen.

When it turns to 2017, the “Shenzhen& Hongkong Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism/ Architecture” (UABB) developed the idea of “urban curation”, inhabiting “Nantou Old Town” as the exhibition venue for the first time (Fig. 2). This cultural event has stood out as a new template of cultural-led regeneration process in China. The theme of Biennale, “Cities, Grow in Difference”, can be interpreted as an experimental opportunity to balance the urban regeneration and historic preservation in Nantou Old Town. Urbanus studio, the curator of 7<sup>th</sup> UABB, speaks that “by reshaping the cultural and spatial context of Nantou, it is to evoke the sense of





Fig. 2: Biennale poster by Urbanus, accessed from *Archdaily*: (Source: <https://www.archdaily.com/884976/2017-bi-city-biennale-of-urbanism-architecture-opens-this-week-in-shenzhen> [2020-02-28])

belonging and community awareness of the local residents, ultimately in hope to provide an alternative strategy and prototype for the regeneration of Shenzhen's urban villages.”<sup>30</sup> As for the exhibition venue, artworks were placed in the public space of Nantou; stores were renovated and upgraded; artistic shows responded to the street life scenarios. The indoor exhibition presented research, design, and artworks with the vision to the world, the global south, and especially to the southern part of China, focusing on urban issues emerging from rapid urban development.<sup>31</sup> Visitors were fully encouraged to imagine the future vision of urban villages and explore the potential planning for a better living environment. Meanwhile, the local residents have also been guided by the professional to conduct spontaneous bottom-up activities through a variety of public participation, including gourmet tasting, pop-up market, reading day, free lottery, *etc.* In other words, the Biennale strongly encouraged the residents' participation in the space and content of exhibitions. Among those dazzling shows, the most important thing in the first place is how did the cultural activities interact with local villagers(landlords) and migrants(tenants). For instance, one of projects called “Mapping Nantou” illustrates the residents’ efforts on creative building methods against the standard construction

regulations, which indeed resonated with the residents. “Mapping Nantou” paid close attention to the initiative behind the chaotic appearance. Through an in-depth observation of the residents’ life, the research group presented the dynamism of everyday life in Nantou, and more importantly, analyzed the cultural characteristics and social relationships of the migrant population.

The cultural event has stimulated an extended discussion on urban village among different classes, professionals, organizations, and generations through public participation and online interaction. Besides, some professional and cultural organizations like “Wancunfusu”, “Shenzhen Urban Promotion Center”, “Archiposition” have long been advocating to raise social awareness and demand change for urban villages over ten years. By organizing cultural activities including lectures, research programs, workshops, tours, curations, publications, competitions and small renovation projects, the voices of tenants were able to be heard since then. In recent years, with the growing power of the social network and We-media, increasing voices of support for urban villages has been learned. Thereby, the professionals started to collaborate as cultural intermediaries on transforming the image of urban villages and help to disseminate the sub-cultures. It is worth noting that a considerable number of professionals such as architects and creative industry workers were early tenants of urban villages, which means that the peripheral professional group is partly rooted in the migrant communities in Shenzhen.

At the end of 2019, Shenzhen Planning and Natural Resource Bureau have issued the documents of “Working scheme of promoting characteristic urban villages for historic preservation and comprehensive improvement”, targeting seven pilot projects, including Nantou Old Town. The document recognizes the significant role that Nantou plays in the urban development process as for the intrinsic historical and cultural values for more than a thousand years. It further explained that, first of all, the urban village is an essential carrier of intangible cultural heritages such as ancestral hall culture, Hakka culture, and migration culture inherited by the local residents and newcomers. Second, it guarantees the large housing demand in the city area. Third, it provides low-cost living space and helps maintain the balance between employment and housing. The working scheme aims to improve the urban infrastructure and industrial structure as well as the protection of the cultural-historical landscapes for a better living environment. It's worth noting that the regeneration strategy transformed from government-led property regeneration to protective regeneration with the involvement of public participation. From the searchable results relating to urban village regeneration policies(2004-2019), there is a great shift from punishing illegal construction, demolition, real estate auction to comprehensive improvement, micro regeneration and industrial restructuring.<sup>32</sup> It indicates that the understanding of the urban village phenomenon has undergone a significant change through decade, influencing the government's orientation on development planning. In this circumstance, the importance of bottom-up participation and cultural value of urban village have been taken into account ever than before. Nevertheless, the nature of “cultural value” remains unexplained in the policy.

As domestic and international scholars assert, the informal migrant community is not a temporary phenomenon but an integral part of the cities' growth, economic activities and lifestyles just like other regions in the world.<sup>33;34</sup> The accommodated lower-middle and working-class have their own forms of culture to reinforce their status and identities. Apart from the elite culture which is easier to attract investments from governmental agencies and corporations, the sub-culture also functions to attract the new audience and build new social networks usually base in the creators' communities. In other words, the culture value manifests not only the tangible and intangible rural heritages and middle-class culture but also the ever fusing and changing new cultures produced by newcomers. In brief, the "culture value" in the planning policy is supposed to transcend the narrow meaning of local culture which usually refers to folk culture and other archaic forms, creating its particularity and scarcity in the national and even international cultural arena.

## **5. RE-EVALUATING "LOCAL CULTURE" FROM THE CULTURAL PRODUCTION PERSPECTIVE**

A positive urban space would be the cultural quarter in the sense of being a good place which attracts everyday users and visitors, not removing cultural production from the arena of consumption.<sup>35</sup> The urban village symbolizes the physical spatial segmentation, whereas the social distinction is much more complicated and the field of cultural production is obscure and indeterminate. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the interconnectedness between cultural force and urban regeneration in order to discover the intrinsic meaning of "local culture".

Shenzhen has always been open to new cultures and newcomers owing to its particular history and inclusive legacy. In the circumstance, the urban village as the carrier of cultural and social changes, accommodates the transformable new middle-class in the recent future. They are both producer and consumer of cultures. The cultural change is ever so quick during periods of high social and geographical mobility when lifestyles and cultural tastes are continually transforming throughout the life course and no longer correlated with the social class origin. To migrant cities like Shenzhen, the urban authenticity to which they pursue will not be inborn or inherited. It is achieved through endeavors of mutually constructing the origins and new beginnings of the city. The right to inhabit in the city empowers the migrants to shore up their economic and cultural identity, creating an image to connect an aesthetic view of origins and a social view of new beginnings.<sup>13</sup> In general, people with common lifestyles tend to inhabit the same residential communities because these groups crosscut traditional social class categories. Meanwhile, level of interest to specific cultural activities in the peripheral domain can be understood in terms of lifestyle.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, multiple scholars have conducted both qualitative and quantitative studies to find that the new middle-class in China is stratified in terms of different consumption patterns and mobility patterns.<sup>21;37;38</sup> It thus proved that new lifestyles and new forms of

cultural taste can disseminate through the peripheral domains. However, the issue is who owns the dominant power in the field.

The idea of embedding the exhibition venue into the living space has brought the exhibits close to its content (including but not limited to). In this manner, the Biennale defines itself as an "on-site" exhibition by putting the research results on display among "research objects" which distinguished from the expo-like international exhibitions. To some extent, the Biennale succeeded in bringing increasing visitors as well as public attention and also resonated with the intellectuals and professionals. However, there were barely interactions between some of the artworks and the residents. For instance, some public art installations by overseas artists interacted with neither the residents nor the visitors. Most of the public art installations represent the artists' abstract or utopian ideas whereas the audience with different backgrounds perceives the artworks differently, which closely related to their cultural, classes and tastes differences. In Bourdieu's view, the artwork exists not only as a material production but also as a symbolic object that recognizes and distinguishes its audience by class, habitus, and capital. In another word, the artwork is understood as a manifestation of the field as whole, in which all the powers of the field, and all the determinants inherent in its structure and functioning are concentrated.<sup>39</sup> However, the audience of analogous quasi-folk low culture could neither understand their living environment in globalization background through exhibition form, nor favor the pure artistic products from the artistic field since both of the sub-fields attract their audience by specific interests, work, traditions, values, and sentiments respectively. More importantly, it is in fact an autonomous process of producing and consuming their own products within each field. The segregation breaks only when the sub-culture was mass produced to highlight its symbolic value that disseminating lifestyle or status attractive to the outsiders who were to consume.

Towards "commercializing" the cultural products, the economic and cultural capital of class fraction start to accumulate and reconstruct. In turn, some peripheral media doubts that the Biennale has contributed to the gentrification of urban villages by renovating spaces as the exhibition venues. It is becoming trendy to use the tempting high-brow lifestyle to make up the urban village. Such doubts come from the incongruous changes in Nantou. For instance, three fine bookstores were freshly renovated during the Biennale to attract numerous visitors while barely residents visit. After the Biennale, they receive a plummet of visitors and become an empty shell representing a conflicting lifestyle. It reminds that once the link between international culture and local communities is legitimized, the resulting space becomes commercialized and, to an extent, discriminatory.<sup>40</sup> That is to say, the economic power dispossesses the field and produces culture totally alien to its recipients which intensively accelerates invasion of economic capital. The cultural event in Nantou may bring up temporary economic benefits, whereas it partly leads to gentrification and social exclusion in the process.

People can neither understand the cultural form without its context nor consume any cultural products without symbolic values. In general, there is no strict corresponding relationship between cultural preference and social class, and the public chooses according to their habitus, values and education levels. In contemporary society, cultural preference manifests a free status between different classes and culture fields, which is mainly distinguished by the similar lifestyle and taste rather than social class. The middle-class prefers high-culture to approach the lifestyle of the upper class while sometimes the middle-class culture and low culture feed off each other for novelty. Since the categories of lifestyles are much more than that of classes, the number of cultural organizations in the peripheral and local domains continues to expand.

In a peripheral urban neighbourhood, different agents seek to create power of discourse, explanation, ideology and cultural value to grasp the dominant power in the field and thus establish their social presence in the city. Cultural practices within a peripheral urban neighbourhood can contribute to foster the sense of place, community belonging and local collective action.<sup>41</sup> Local cultural organizations, which are usually part of cultural networks— sub-cultures or art worlds— are often sources of new ideas, a few of which eventually reach the cultural arena.<sup>11</sup> They distinguish themselves from the “creative class” which is globally identified as “good taste” but to a great extent referring to the consumeristic elite group, and usually results in cultural and spatial sameness.<sup>42</sup> In the urban areas, some localized cultural agents have been held down by the statistical contribution of the design companies. The output of some localized symbols is not counted in the local economic growth but intangibly exists as international resources, for instance, the vulgar image of Hongkong’s slums as popular inspirations for Hollywood movies. It reminds us that, in the first place, even the “diversity” of regional cultures has been controlled by the post-Fordism mode of production. Second, the value of local culture is largely unexcavated independently, nor effectively disseminated since it has yet established based on fostering local creative force. A culture would be better understood and represented originating from the local context while effectively arising public participation, as long as the authorities establish a sophisticated system to support educational attainment, skill training and creative clusters to cultivate. Both localization and globalization play essential roles in building local competence and exporting localized symbols. In terms of the informal migrant communities, the dominating young population represents a strong fluidity between sub-cultures which stimulates creative ideas and communications and further accelerates the cultural reconstruction in parallel with their social mobility. Once the sense of place and community belonging was established, the urban village can be seen as an incubator as well as a seed bank since different ideas, cultural organizations and lifestyles constantly subdividing and exchanging in the transitional neighborhood. Reversed from the previous image of “vicious community”, the urban village would reposition itself in the urban regeneration process as a bottom-up creative cluster in prospect.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The paper examines the regeneration process of the urban village in Shenzhen by case studying the Bi-city Biennale (2017) inhabiting “Nantou Old Town”. It seeks to embed the domestic phenomenon of urban village into the context of globally spread culture-led urban regeneration. The author argues that the “culture value” in the domestic planning policy ought to transcend the provincial meaning of local culture and produce its scarcity and distinctiveness in the national and international cultural arena. Therefore, cultural reconstruction is vital to the conservation and regeneration of local cultures and identities, as the source of creativity comes from the ever-changing urban culture. Thus, it is essential to highlight the significance of informal migrant communities that produce and consume diverse cultures.

The 7th UABB creates a new template for urban regeneration strategy driven by cultural event in China. It hopes to evoke the sense of belonging and spatial awareness of the urban inhabitants by reconnecting the culture and spatial context of the urban village. At the level of urban image reinventing, the event has reversed the stigmatized image of the urban village and presented its thriving business of authentic everyday life to the public. At the institutional level, it raised the consciousness of the historical and cultural value of urban villages which accelerates the cultural-led regeneration policy. To some extent, the grand cultural event crystallizes and popularizes the issue of urban villages, whereas diverts attention away from the major structural problems of urban-rural transition. Neither could it lead to a sustainable culture regeneration strategy unless the field of cultural production changed or the dominant power shifted. Undoubtedly, the professionals and stakeholders endeavor to distribute their understandings across different realms, introducing the topic from sub-field to the field of mass production. It still requires a top-down consensus and response to undertake the long-term regeneration strategy.

The formation of local culture force requires government's support in cultivating incubators for the production of new ideas, new organizations and new generations locally based as well as the related consumption environment. In particular, the urban village as an integral part of China's urbanization, plays a positive role in bringing transferable new human resources and the informal economic entity as support. In order to evoke a holistic revival, it is essential to blaze the trail for public involvement because the key to sustainable cultural regeneration is to guarantee the autonomy and dominant power of which cultures were produced. In consequence, some suggestions are proposed to facilitate the sustainable long-term strategy, including 1) preserving the authenticity of history and culture of the urban villages, 2) integrating the informal socio-economic entity, 3) improving urban infrastructure and public services, 4) building organic organizations and vibrant communities by empowering the urban inhabitants and embracing diverse social and cultural changes.

In terms of the current cultural market of China, the corresponding relationship between different tastes of classes and Bourdieu's conclusion on distinction has changed. In other words, the cultural practices of migrant population are not statically homogeneous, nor their social status.<sup>43</sup> Besides, Bourdieu's work on cultural production focuses mainly on two fields: literature and art, although Crane has replenished the field of media production. However, both of their works did not exemplify the production modes in post-modern society, such as new media and other internet-based dissemination. This aspect worth further discuss referencing Manuel Castells' theory of the network society.<sup>44</sup> The decentralized effects of new media on social space and cultural stratification might bring farseeing insights to the making of cultural policies in urban planning. The emerging question is how does internet-based dissemination shape the general public's lifestyle, value and cultural taste echoing with the changing socio-spatial traditions. Hence the paper also welcomes multidisciplinary views from and conversations with peer researchers to enrich the limited perspective.

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### 313. INFORMAL URBANISM & REFUGEES RESETTLEMENT

1. Virtual Investigation: Place Identity and Perceptions of Refugee Resettlements City Utica, NY, *Pamane Chainvat*
2. Urban Villages as Invisible Beacons of Economic and Social Success: The Role of Migrant Communities in Shenzhen, China, *Pangyu Chen, Tim Heath, and Jiayi Jin*
3. Between Integration and Segregation of New Traditions: The Case of the Syrian Refugees' Settlements in Egypt, *Maye Yebia and Iman Hegazy*

### 314. ART, CRAFT, AND ARCHITECTURE

1. Architectural Quranic Inscriptions and the Dilemma of Interpretation, *Noha Hussein*
2. Garbage as generators: Alternative Ecosystems of the Global South, *Angeliki Tsoukala and Aparajita Santra*
3. Site, Archive, Medium and The Case of Lifta, *Mark Jarzombek, Elyahu Keller, and Eytan Mann*
4. Socio-spatial Networks of a Traditional Craft Settlement: An Alternative Approach to Understanding Intangible Heritage, *Anjali Mittal, Namit Gandhi, Nishant Gautam, and Tarun Kumar*