

CONTESTED TERRITORY:

The Evolving Spatial Geographies of Jian Sha Zhou Village

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ABSTRACT: China's urbanization of rural areas has allowed many people to be elevated out of rural poverty and to have alternatives to farming for their livelihood, yet political corruption, economic polarization, land fragmentation, and disputes over land rights are escalating. These themes are evident in Jian Sha Zhou, a village on the periphery of Dongguan in southern China. Jian Sha Zhou exemplifies both the robust adaptability of villages that have transformed from simple agricultural units into a variety of settlements, as well as the intrinsic problems that result from urbanization. This article explores the evolving spatial geographies of the village and the competing and contradictory forces acting upon it. It specifically addresses the way in which contestation of land rights has resulted in development stasis. Unlike the village uprising—and the government's reaction to it—in Wukan, in Guangdong Province, which became the focus of national and international media, most contested issues remain at a local level and go unreported. The land dispute in Jian Sha Zhou is archetypal of the increasing problems associated with the urbanization of rural land. As such, it provides insights about the future development of the sites that exist across China's rural–urban fringe.

KEYWORDS: Rural urbanization, spatial geographies, contested land, periphery, Dongguan, southern China

In 2008, on an excursion from Shenzhen to Guangzhou to explore the effects of the economic global downturn in urban areas in the Pearl River Delta, we visited Jian Sha Zhou, a village of 1,800 people on the outskirts of Dongguan (Bolchover and Lin 2011). In a 2009 article in *South China Morning Post*, Fiona Tam reported that up to 20 million migrant workers across the Pearl River Delta had vacated their factory dormitories and returned to their village homes. We expected to find peripheral urban areas dormant and development ceased. A plot of land in Jian Sha Zhou seemed to reflect our expectations: a scattering of three- to four-story unfinished brick houses with no windows or any of the

external cladding (tiles, render) common to the area. In addition, the buildings had no clothing drying outside windows, suggesting that the houses were unoccupied. The buildings appeared as isolated blocks situated in an agricultural landscape of vegetable patches and banana trees (Figure 1).

This built fabric was different from the village typology found in southern China, comprised of dense clusters of village houses surrounded by fields and planting areas. The visual evidence seemed to support that construction had been curtailed by the financial crisis and that migrant workers had returned home.



FIGURE 1: *Jian Sha Zhou in 2008, half-completed buildings on the Danwei site. Image credit: Joshua Bolchover*

Three years later, in 2011, we revisited the site. Given the resumed vigor of the Chinese economy, we expected to find the land fully developed, without any traces of its rural origins. Remarkably, the plot remained unchanged, yet at its edge two new residential towers of over thirty stories had been constructed (Figure 2), and the village hummed with industrial activity.

How could such rapid development coexist with such vacancy? Why did one plot of land remain undeveloped, while the village itself was rampant with new construction and economic fervor? This article investigates the evolving spatial geographies of Jian Sha Zhou as a microcosm of the im-

pact of rural urbanization and its associated political context. Rather than analyze land market policy (Ho and Lin 2003), property rights, or the precise legal frameworks of Chinese land development (Ho 2001), we focus on the spatial implications of the urban transformation. As a mini-scenario (Bunschoten, Binet, and Hoshino 2001), this case study highlights the forces (and their possible effects) that may have an impact on future urban development. Because of changes in land policy over the last thirty years, China is witnessing increased contestation over land ownership, compensation, and use. In the majority of cases, the contestation is a result of the difference in status between rural and urban land. This



FIGURE 2: *Jian Sha Zhou in 2008 (left) and in 2011 (right). Image credit: Joshua Bolchover*

case study of Jian Sha Zhou illustrates reasons behind such disputes and explains why they will shape the future of urban development, particularly in peripheral urban sites in China.

PART I: **THE CONTEXT of INDUSTRIAL** **TRANSFORMATION in the** **PEARL RIVER DELTA**

Patchwork Urbanization in China

The volatile conditions of land transformation from rural to urban has created territories of sprawling urban substance reminiscent of Cedric Price's description of the modern city as a "scrambled egg," whereby the center and periphery have become interlaced and indistinguishable from each other (Shane 2006). Closer inspection of this scrambled substance reveals a patchwork of distinct territories in different stages of transformation: golf courses, suburban housing, villages, agricultural land, factories, construction sites, and abandoned projects all coexist within this urban carpet. Figure 3 maps out these distinct types within the urban agglomeration of the Pearl River Delta.

Uneven development occurs on a regional scale (Fan 1995), on a provincial scale (Ho and Lin 2004), and on the scale of land plots, depending on the power, financial status, and political clout of individuals and agencies acting on this terrain. In some

instances, the complex issues surrounding land ownership rights and those staking a claim to these rights result in conflict (Guo 2001). The resulting impasse leaves land fallow—buildings half completed or in ruinous condition. The stalemate is the outcome of conflicts played out among the different agents in the urbanization process. The land becomes an island of uncertain status—neither fully rural nor urbanized—that is surrounded by pervasive territorial transformation.

Policy Change and Industrialization

Territorial transformation is reflected in Guangdong Province in the Pearl River Delta. In 1978, Deng Xiao Ping selected Guangdong to be a pioneer province of China's opening up, instigating a series of policy reforms that commenced with the formation of the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone (Spence 1999). In effect, the zone operated as an economic enclave, encouraging foreign direct investment through tax incentives and the provision of cheap and available land. Because of its strategic location adjacent to the financial powerhouse of Hong Kong, with close family networks that extended across the border, economic development in Guangdong occurred rapidly and smoothly. This was also true for companies and individuals investing from Taiwan, and for other overseas Chinese who utilized Hong Kong as a mediator and conduit to the mainland. To facilitate development, stimulate market

forces, and allow land to be urbanized, new laws were introduced regarding land ownership and use, triggering development in rural areas. In 1981, villagers became able to lease their land for industrial or commercial activities as long as the original ownership remained the same (Central Committee of Communist Party of China 1981). The reforms allowed development to take place via bottom-up processes at the scale

of individual actors in rural villages and via large-scale projects organized by bureaus within the state apparatus. This dual strategy promoted the urbanization process from what was essentially a rural condition: in 1978 the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone was a part of Bao'An County, which was renowned for lychees, fishing, and oyster farms. These development policies were reflected in the constitution, which desig-

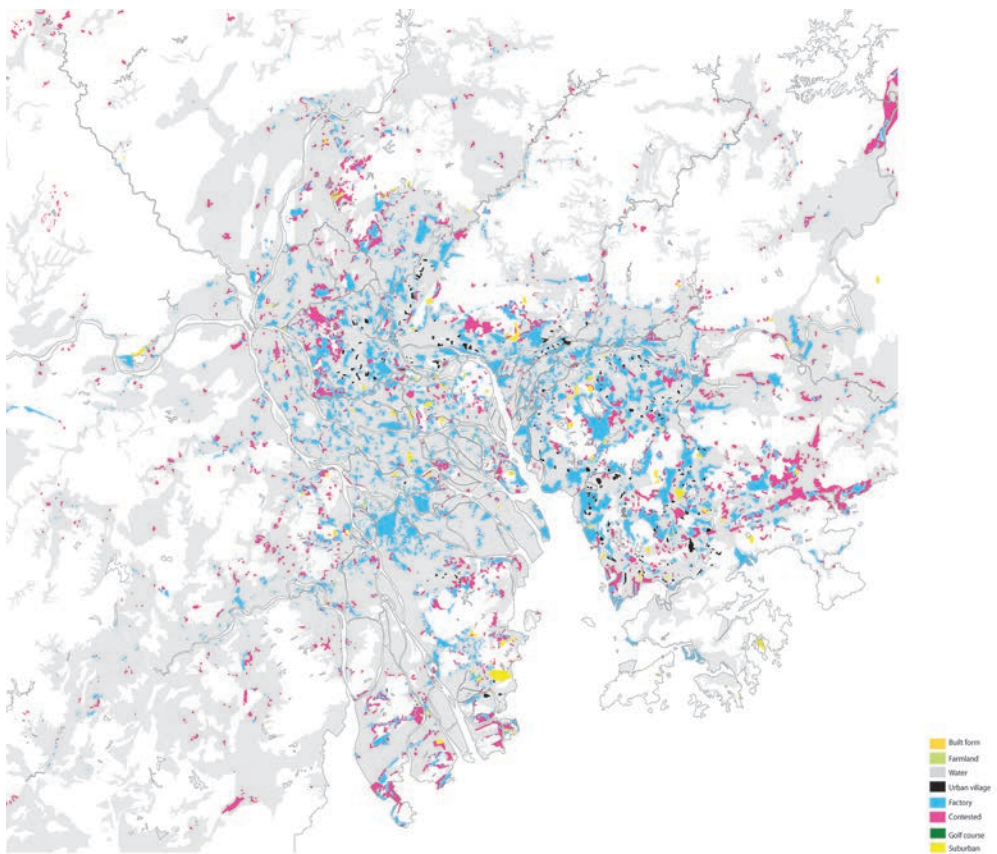


FIGURE 3: The “scrambled egg” of urban substance in the Pearl River Delta. Image credit: Joshua Bolchover

nated urban land as state owned and rural land as owned by village collectives.

In 1982, to expedite government-led development, a legal structure was instituted that allowed rural land to be changed to state land via expropriation (National People's Congress of People's Republic of China 1982). Expropriation changed the status of land from rural to urban if the change was deemed to be in the "greater public interest" (for example, if a highway or industrial park were to be developed), and villagers were compensated both for their land and their loss of income (Friedmann 2005).

In 1988, the law changed further to allow land use rights to be sold or leased at market value (National People's Congress of People's Republic of China 1988). The shift toward land as an increasingly profitable commodity extended the set of potential stakeholders to include real estate developers, foreign companies, and business entrepreneurs, and altered how rural villagers engaged with these stakeholders and undertook development projects themselves.

Village Organization and Its Adaptation and Evolution

For many rural villages within Shenzhen and the fast-growing hinterland of the Pearl River Delta, the new policies provided incentives to shift from a purely agrarian community to one engaged with real es-

tate development and management, factory construction, and industrial production. The diverse range of economic activities is overseen by the village cooperative: in essence, the village management company. Operating as an executive board of a large corporation, the village cooperative manages the economic decisions of its shareholders (the villagers), as well as social welfare and municipal services. A twin organization, the village committee (often with the same members) mediates between the higher-level local government and the village and is responsible for administering policies at a local level. The villagers democratically elect their leaders, although more often than not, the appointed Communist Party cadre is the most successful candidate.

The evolution and flexibility of the village cooperative are exemplified by Yu Min Cun, a simple fishing village prior to 1978, which is situated directly on the border between Hong Kong and Shenzhen. As the first wave of development left some villages increasingly wealthy, village cooperatives diversified their portfolios to include investment in villages in other parts of the Pearl River Delta. In the 1980s, Yu Min Cun had profited from expropriating its land to the local government and to Hong Kong investors wishing to set up factories. During the next phase, in the 1990s, the village corporation (as a result of the 1988 legislation) bought the land use rights to a 3000-m² plot of land over 60 km away in Dong-

guan. As Dongguan was emerging as the next industrialized landscape, with attractive economic incentives set in place by the city government, this was a shrewd move and highlights the interconnected capacity for growth that is embedded within the social and familial networks found in the Pearl River Delta (Smart and Smart 1991). The example of Yu Min Cun highlights the way in which the evolving economic policy of the 1980s triggered multiple ways for villages to make money. However, the escalation and speed of development that these policies catalyzed brought with it unforeseen situations and land disputes. As a result, the legal system has had to adapt to try to keep pace.

Legality in the Development Process

Even though the language of Chinese land law is often straightforward, the way in which it is interpreted, executed, or monitored varies vastly between provinces, local city governance, and village collectives (Ho 2001). This wide margin between law and its practice has created the potential for black-market loopholes or gray areas to emerge. In particular, as the process of expropriation became more profitable, further incentives to cut corners, reduce administration fees, and increase margins were realized through loopholes or through corruption (Lin 2009). Examples include villagers selling or leasing their homes for commercial uses, state-owned enterprises selling land use rights at market value

without paying money to the local government, village collectives exchanging land rights for developer shareholdings, and local governments expropriating land from villages without due compensation. These mechanisms set the stage for potential conflicts between the different stakeholders, including villagers, local governments, developers, and factory owners, which have surfaced through the ambiguity of development rights, land compensation, and the specific designation of rural or urban land (Cai 2003).

Disputes, Corruption, and Villager Protests

In some cases, the relationship between the village chief and the villagers can become fractious, particularly if the chief is perceived to favor the priorities of the local government over the needs of the village, or if the chief is undertaking corrupt practices (Cai 2003). The fractiousness is most acute when it comes to land sales. The example of Wukan in the Pearl River Delta demonstrates the escalation from discontent about land sales into a full-blown protest in December 2011. In that case, the village chief was accused by villagers of expropriating land without due compensation. Given that local governments acquire almost one third of their revenue from land sales, there are clear incentives to sell village land, as Michael Bristow reported for BBC News in December 2011 (Bristow 2011). The protest was amplified after one

village protester, Xue Jinbo, died in police custody apparently from a “sudden illness.” In an unusual move, because of local and international mass media coverage, the local government met the villagers’ demands. The village head was replaced with the leader of the demonstrations (BBC News 2012), two local government officials were fired, and an investigation into the death of Xue Jinbo was promised. Yet this example is only one of potentially hundreds of thousands of protests that occur each year (Li and O’Brien 1996). Exact data are impossible to find because of their sensitive nature; any official government figures are presumed to be massively underestimated (Bristow 2011).

Rural Development at the Fringe

Since 1978, the Chinese government has promoted Shenzhen and Guangdong Province as a laboratory site for testing new directives that are often later implemented in other areas in China. As a result, the conditions found in the Pearl River Delta attest to the potential issues and successes that could influence the future development of other locations. Although the economic reforms have clearly unleashed widespread urbanization by industrialization, with rural villagers playing an important role in this transformation, the mechanisms of expropriation and claims of land ownership have led to increased altercations between different stakeholders. As China enters its next phase of development, albeit a slower one,

a key issue will be how to resolve residual conflict at sites and still maintain a diversity of actors in the urbanization process. Part I explained the backdrop to the increasing level of contested sites and its origins in the fundamental difference between rural and urban land. Part II will investigate Jian Sha Zhou—a village on the fringe of Dongguan. This article posits that it is the fringe areas that will become critical in the resolution of future development in China, as that is where the tension between rural and urban processes is most heated.

PART II: JIAN SHA ZHOU CASE STUDY

The context and macro-policies described in Part I serve as a basis for understanding the mechanisms of transformation occurring in Jian Sha Zhou. Between June and August 2011, we interviewed local residents, factory owners, and the local village committee to ascertain the impact of these large-scale policies and resultant local standoffs. This case study documents the process of rural to urban transformation in Jian Sha Zhou.

Industrialization of Jian Sha Zhou

During collectivization in the Mao era, Jian Sha Zhou consisted of three small agricultural villages producing rice and fish under three production teams. After 1978, the three were joined under one village com-

mittee. In the 1980s, the local government encouraged the village committee to develop the industrial production of fireworks and bricks. This effort failed, and the committee switched from direct investment to management. To raise capital, some land use rights were sold to outside investors, and the money was used to build factories. The factories were leased to foreign companies attracted both to the rent and labor costs, which were lower than in the more established factory areas of Shenzhen, and to the area's natural resources, such as the river. The first was a print-works factory operated by a Hong Kong investor; it was soon followed by a garment factory operated by a Taiwanese company. These examples stimulated local entrepreneurs to engage in industrialization, such as the Dongguan Baojian Paper Company, a paper factory that gained a preferential land lease from the village collective in 1989.

The Network of Industrial Production Within the Village

The development of the Baojian Paper Company was paralleled by changes in Chinese consumer habits. According to data from one paper factory, toilet paper consumption increased 11 percent each year between 1990 and 2003, providing a quickly accelerating, profitable sector (Zhongshan City ...Paper Products Factory 2008). The growth quickly spawned an industrial network of different-sized companies: Baojian processed raw pulp from

Guangxi into paper and cardboard tubes; other companies produced plastic wrapping; and small-scale family businesses processed the large rolls into small sections and packaged them for distribution. The industry attracted businesses from Sichuan, Zhejiang, and Shanghai. The village collective also invested and is currently responsible for 30% of all factories. As the demand for factories increased, so did the rent: in the three years between 2008 and 2011, rents increased by up to 60% (Ms. Lu, a paper workshop owner, and Ms. Ye, a manager of a paper factory, in discussion with the author, August 2011). As a result, many villagers shifted from production to land management, building factories for rent or leasing their land to newcomer operations via the 1988 legislation that allowed them to lease or sell their rights to land use as long as they had permission from the village committee.

Viewed from a tall building, Jian Sha Zhou appears like many other industrialized towns in China (Figure 4). However, a walk around Jian Sha Zhou reveals the specific transformation of this village into a dispersed factory network for toilet paper production. Large two-meter rolls of paper are hauled from factories to domestic production houses, which are adaptations of the typical village shop-house. Figure 5 shows this typology, consisting of a ground-floor commercial shop front with overhanging second and third stories for living space.



FIGURE 4: *Jian Sha Zhou's emerging urban fabric. Image credit: Timo Heinonen and Tian Xuezhong*



FIGURE 5: *The adaptation of the shop-house. Image credit: Joshua Bolchover*

In the adaptation, the shop is replaced by a small assembly room, typically a large table full of toilet rolls being placed into wrappers by four to six people sitting on plastic chairs with a band-saw in the back to cut the large rolls into smaller units. The floor above is used for storage, with the windows

extended into a large floor-to-ceiling opening to winch materials out of the room and into a waiting truck. Living space is on the uppermost floors. Figures 6A, 6B, and 6C depict the production sequence, from large paper rolls to packaging to distribution.

This network of small- to medium- to large-scale producers, each with a differentiated role, can collectively earn yearly returns of several billion renmenbi, with current trade extending as far afield as Africa (Ms. Ye, in discussion with the author, August 2011).

The transformation of the village into an industrial production network has accumulated capital for the village collective and made some of the more entrepreneurial villagers wealthy. The most successful, such as the founder of the Baojian Paper Factory, identified a niche market opportunity. Although some villagers are directly involved in the production process, the majority of workers and business operators are outsiders. The local villagers, for the most part, are indirectly involved as land agents or are responsible for constructing and leasing factory buildings.

The Controversy of the Danwei Site

In contrast to this rapid industrialization, one plot amidst the frenzied construction is devoid of activity, containing a series of empty and incomplete three-story brick houses, interspersed with patches of vegetable crops and wasteland. Its current sta-



FIGURE 6A, 6B, 6C: *The distributed factory of toilet roll production. Image credit: Joshua Bolchover*

tus is disputed by villagers and occupants alike, with the ambiguity of ownership rights tracing back to the period of consecutive policy changes affecting land ownership and use in the 1980s. In the mid-1980s, when the village undertook the shift from agriculture to management and industrial production, a plot of land was acquired by a former Danwei, an industrial production unit under collectivization. The Danwei, Dongguan Electrochemical Group, decided to use the land to build houses for its workers. The shift away from the Danwei system to state-owned enterprises after 1978 left many of these entities in financial disarray. As a result, the company decided to divide and sublet the land use rights to its employees or other nonlocals for housing construction. This was illegal—the state company had no legal authority to approve the occupation of the land (Ho and Lin 2003). Shortly after housing construction began in the early 1990s, the local government prevented further construction on the site, much to the chagrin of the occupants. When we asked why construction had been suspended, a local resident responded:

I don't know. Go ask the village officials....It is absolutely absurd! We acquired the land through due process and have all the certificates, how can they do that? It's no use talking about law with the party. They just do what they want. (Discussion with author, June 2011)

In 1993, the Dongguan government built a new highway directly adjacent to the plot, subsuming the land within a new planning regulation (“urban greenery”), and thus rendering any new construction illegal. As a result, the houses have remained in a half-finished state for almost twenty years. This is astonishing, given that the region has, according to the United Nations “World Urbanization Prospects: The 2011 Revision,” one of the fastest rates of urbanization in the world. Since our first visit in 2008, the majority of blocks remain empty, although a small number are occupied by migrant workers who moved to the town to work in the local factories and lease the buildings from the resident owners. The land surrounding the blocks is planted with vegetable patches of corn, beans, and choy sum (a Chinese green vegetable) that are tended by the inhabitants. An overview of the site and the new highway is seen in Figure 7.

The consequential urban fabric manifests the stalemate between the owners of the blocks and the village officials. Both are playing a waiting game to see who will succumb first. The critical and contentious point regards the actual nature of the acquisition of the land. The owners believe that the land was expropriated by the Danwei, and thereby converted from rural to urban status, and that they were given permission to build their houses. If that were the case, the village collective would have no rights to the land. The Deputy Secretary of Jian Sha Zhou Village Committee argues the

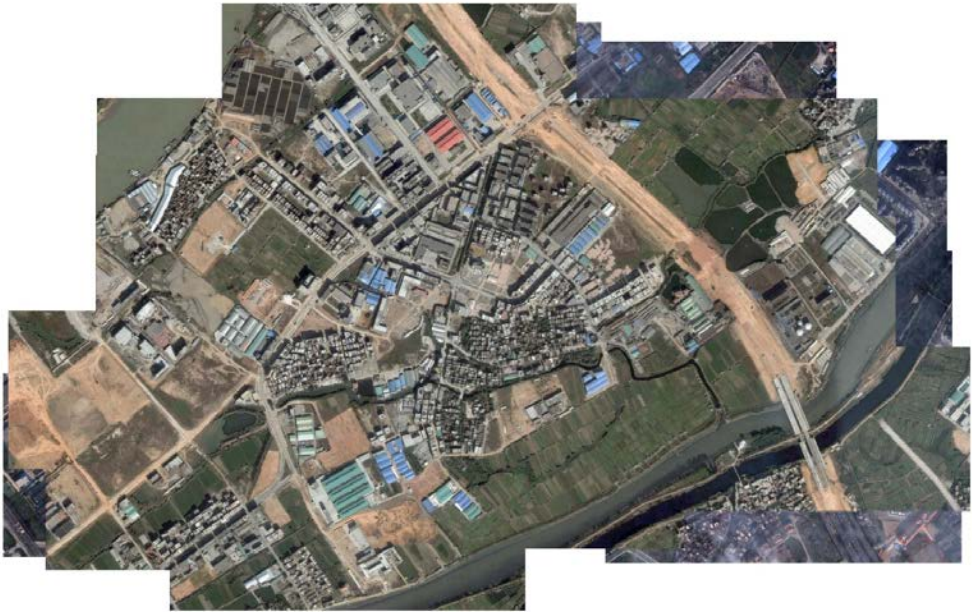


FIGURE 7: *The contested Danwei site and new highway. Image credit: Timo Heinonen and Tian Xuezhu*

opposite: “Say whatever they want! At the end of the day, it is rural land and it belongs to the collective” (Liu Zufa, in discussion with the author, June 2011).

However, according to Mr. Liu Zufa, none of the original contractual agreements can be found. Even if they were to be recovered, it is unclear whether their validity would be overruled by the new planning policies that zone the area as urban greenway, prohibiting any form of construction. The officials at the time have also long been replaced, and so the stalemate continues. The stagnation contrasts with the construction of two new residential towers of around thirty

stories that overlook the contested Danwei site. These were not there when we visited in 2009. The residential development is typologically more attributable to areas closer to urban districts rather than industrial peripheral areas as seen in the case of Jian Sha Zhou. What was the motivation for this construction, who were the stakeholders, and why had it taken place so quickly?

The “Villagers-to-Residents” Policy and Its Effect

In 2004, the Dongguan city government launched its “villagers-to-residents” policy. This mechanism was introduced to fa-

cilitate expropriation of land—to free up land that was owned by the villagers, particularly land that was occupied by village houses—for industrial or higher-density residential use. The policy was implemented based on a set of criteria that effectively judged whether the village was still rural or had become urban in character. Although Jian Sha Zhou was designated rural prior to 2004, the physical fabric is now much more urban in character (Figure 8).

The Dongguan government issued the following guidelines in 2004. If a village met just one of these conditions, it was deemed eligible to become a “shequ,” or urban neighborhood:

- more than 50% of the population had an urban-hukou;
- there was less than 80 m² of farmland per capita; or
- more than two thirds of villagers were no longer involved in agricultural production.

Clearly, for any of the rural villages that had undergone industrialization, any of these conditions were typical rather than exceptional. The effect of becoming a shequ meant that all villagers received an urban-hukou and so became eligible for social services such as health care and education. However, their collective land became state land, albeit with compensation, effectively transforming rural land into urban land and placing the control of the land within the state apparatus. In terms of organization, the village committee effectively remained the same. It was renamed as a resident committee, with the villagers becoming residents holding shares in all village enterprises. Fundamentally, this shifts the balance away from villagers as entrepreneurs toward the village cooperative as the predominant agent of change. Furthermore, land itself has become more of an abstract financial tool held by numerous shareholders rather than an asset that can be directly occupied, farmed, or developed.

The new residential towers were built as a collaborative venture between the vil-



FIGURE 8: *Jian Sha Zhou, a new shequ. Image credit: Joshua Bolchover*

lage resident committee and a developer. A showroom in the village allows villagers and outsiders to see a model of the development (Figure 9) and enquire about costs of purchasing a flat.

Through leasing the rights of land use to the developer, the villagers became shareholders; those who previously lived on the land received a preferential price on a flat. The excess flats are sold to outsiders or other urban residents from inner Dongguan, with profits split between the developer and the village cooperative. Currently, the model is expedient and highly profitable, as evidenced by the construction of three

residential towers in just two years. This wave of residential development synchronizes with China's inflated housing-market bubble, which the government has since been trying to stabilize (Branigan 2011). Throughout these edge-regions of Dongguan, residential housing towers are being constructed, such as the Spanish-themed development shown in Figure 10, that are replacing factories, agricultural land, and village houses.

The creation of the shequ enables such development to occur more easily, as it facilitates the acquisition of larger land plots. As a result, in just thirty years, farmland has



FIGURE 9: Model of new residential development: a business venture between the village cooperative and a private developer. Image credit: Joshua Bolchover



FIGURE 10: *The rampant construction of residential towers in Dongguan as part of China's overheated housing bubble. Image credit: Joshua Bolchover*

succumbed to the city both in name and in character. However, this shift has its disadvantages and may lead to further disagreements.

Governmental Control Versus Informal Development

The shequ policy is illustrative of the government's capacity to invent new regulations to regain control of land transformation. The policies of the early period of reform, in the 1980s, released powerful global economic forces that were channeled through the mechanisms of land ownership

and use that were accorded to rural villages. These opportunities were facilitated by the differences between urban and rural citizens and the ability of villagers, and particularly village cooperatives, to use land rights as a commodity. As a mechanism to counter this unchecked and indeterminate development, the shequ policy wrests control away from individuals and their own rights of land use and places it within the control of the village cooperative. For rural villagers this means that they now have to forego almost all of their past livelihood to become shareholders within the collective enterprise. Although it could be argued that

villagers have always been part of the collective entity of the village, the evolution of the collective itself has been profound. The village cooperative, as in the example of Jian Sha Zhou, is no longer charged with decisions regarding agricultural quotas, as was the case prior to reform; instead, it is a highly organized business involved in numerous investments and dealings with outside stakeholders, such as property developers and foreign investors. As the Deputy Secretary of the Jian Sha Zhou Village Committee states, “We’re performing duties as a government while doing business as a company....It will change but now that’s the situation” (Liu Zufa, personal communication, August 2011).

Recently, the entrepreneurial opportunities open to villagers about their land use rights have been stifled. If the earlier period, with its rapidly changing policies, demonstrated the potential for conflicts to result from disagreements about legal land contracts, the future will probably see more disputes emerge between villagers and the cooperative leadership itself (Guo 2001). As the shequ policy takes force in areas such as Dongguan, and as the cooperative takes on more of the villagers’ assets, more grievances are likely. There is a potential contradiction between what is necessarily good for the villagers and what is best for the business of the cooperative. When money flows freely through the hierarchical strata, all is fine. Yet, as in other economic situations, particularly those as unpredict-

able as China’s, the businesses will have their ups and downs. The down periods are likely to spur disenchantment between villagers and local officials, or mistrust over dealings between local officials and private developers. There are probably many cases where this is already happening. There are also numerous opportunities for corrupt practices, and gray areas of land policy and methods of expropriation. What links all of these issues is the designation and transformative process, both in character and in legality, of rural to urban land.

Peripheral Urbanization and Its Future

The Jian Sha Zhou case study reveals how one formerly rural village has transformed, via numerous policy changes and legal constructs, into what is now deemed an urban neighborhood. Currently, the historical transformation is revealed through the distinct spatial conditions from different periods of development within close proximity to each other. The entrepreneurial actions of the mid-1980s, when industrial development was the priority, contrast with the current emphasis of the resident committee on developing housing blocks. The leftover site in Jian Sha Zhou attests to the contestation over land rights and brings to light the possible illegal loopholes associated with expropriation. The site is at an impasse, especially as compared with the speed of construction on the adjacent plot. The specific conditions of transformation

within Jian Sha Zhou can be seen as characteristic of similar development phenomena throughout the Pearl River Delta, as well as in other industrializing areas of China, particularly in peripheral urban areas. As the city boundary extends, subsuming village land, the discrepancies between policies associated with either rural or urban designations come into conflict with each other. The outcome is that peripheral areas are particularly vulnerable to contestation. The creation of the shequ (urban neighborhood) is an attempt by the government to bring rural land development under tighter control by limiting the number of developers and discouraging individuals from entrepreneurial action. The residents become shareholders in much-larger-scaled developments, rather than undertaking the projects themselves. This future will inevitably produce more homogeneous forms of housing and commercial development similar to those in Jian Sha Zhou. The future challenge for the peripheral sites is how to harness the potential of their rural status to initiate new models of urban development. If a village like Jian Sha Zhou can transform itself into a complex network of paper production involving numerous stakeholders and different scales of operation, the same scenario could be put to work for biotechnology, energy innovation, or intensive hydroponic (soil-less and greenhouse-based) agriculture. Jian Sha Zhou demonstrates that the instability of the urban edge in China will shape the future characteristics of urban development. The next five years

will no doubt witness increased levels of spatial disputes as discrepancies over land ownership come to the fore. In this respect, the future transformation of cities in China will depend on the successful and productive negotiation between the rural and the urban.

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Note: a series of interviews was conducted between June and August 2011 by the author, Liang Zhiyong, Timo Heinonen, and Tian Xuezhong. All interviews were conducted either in Putonghua or Guandonghua and translated into English by Liang Zhiyong. Where names are not shown, anonymity was preferred by the interviewee.

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