

Slum Formation or Urban Innovation? – Migrant Communities and Social Change in Chinese Megacities

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Introduction

China's economic success over the last 20-30 years has been accompanied by rapid urbanisation based mainly on rural-to-urban migration flows. Many observers expect high-speed urbanisation and massive population redistribution to continue for another one or two decades (Chan 2010:64). Nevertheless, China seeks and claims to be pursuing a process of urbanisation that does not enable slums to arise (Wen 2007). This could present a significant and more optimistic alternative to the depressing idea of a worldwide formation of 'mega-slums', or a 'planet of slums' as projected in Mike Davis' book of that name (2006; 2004).

This paper raises the question of whether Chinese megacity development of today, particularly its migrant communities, can offer strategies for the cities of the future. After a brief description of the characteristics of urbanisation and the rise of megacities in China, it focuses on the informal dynamics of migrant enclaves that have emerged in many of the country's large cities since the 1990s, which often take the form of urban villages. As will be shown, nearly all areas of migrants' life and work in Chinese cities are marked by informality, from their residence status and their frequent non-contractual employment to inadequate healthcare, improvised schooling and uncertain housing for them and their children. Drawing on the experience of Beijing in the north and Guangzhou in the south of China, this paper analyzes the development, types and structures of migrant communities. An interim conclusion to the question of what can be learnt from migrant communities in Chinese megacities to benefit the future of megacity development in general is drawn by highlighting two alternatives, namely whether informality and migrant enclaves in China should be viewed primarily as a problem, i.e. as forerunners of extensive slum formation, or primarily as a solution, i.e. as transitional stages of experimental informality and precursors to subsequent integration.

China's rapid urbanisation and the rise of megacities

The starting position for urbanisation was extremely unfavourable in China. Following the founding of the People's Republic, anti-urbanisation policies were pursued for decades under Mao Zedong which have been discontinued only gradually since the 1980s. As a result of these policies, China has thus far been considered "under-urbanised". In 1980 when economic reforms were getting underway, the country had only 15 cities with populations of more than a million. In 1997 it had 34 (Yan 2002:39), but by 2006 this number had risen to 117. This period was dominated by urbanisation and migration policies that – in contrast to previously – no longer aimed to prevent urbanisation and rural-urban migration but rather placed a premium on developing small and medium-sized cities, and considered restrictions on migration to the very large urban centres as a suitable means of doing so. Until recently, the development of megacities has been viewed in largely negative terms in China, for reasons including traffic problems, energy shortages, and pollution. The economic incentives that accompanied Chinese reform policies, however, were of a quite different nature – they drew the majority of rural migrant workers precisely to the large cities and export production centres in the southern part of the country. This incongruity between the aims of the political leadership and the practical economic incentives is related to some extent to the role of the cities in the Chinese administrative hierarchy.

The Chinese administrative hierarchy comprises the following levels: central, provincial, prefecture, county, and town and township governments. This structure basically determines the configuration of the country's urban administration as well: provincial-level cities, deputy-provincial cities, provincial capitals, prefecture-level cities, county-level cities, and towns (Chan 2010:66). In the course of the reform process, ever more cities received extensive rights of autonomy. This doubtless made a substantial contribution to China's economic rise. As a means of drawing private and foreign investment, land use rights for state property are leased for periods of up to 70 years. To this day, there is no land in private ownership in the People's Republic of China. Investments increase the prestige of municipal authorities in the eyes of the central government, while at the same time the local governments have benefited from the high tax revenues. As a result, competition arose among cities (via the regulation of taxes and property prices) that encouraged wasteful use of energy sources and raw materials. Although the central government has been attempting for several years now to slow down local economic growth, especially in the real estate sector, municipal governments thwart this by functioning in large part as companies competing for the highest GDP (Chen 2006).

Embedded in a paradigm shift in development policy, as well as in a broader strategy of sustainable development, in recent years megacities have increasingly come to be viewed in light of their advantages, namely as centres of trade and economic activity that can meet the needs for services and consumer goods. Their combination of economic activities and high population densities are seen as providing the conditions for a wide range of occupational opportunities. Megacities are also seen as offering a solution to China's scarcity of land relative to other countries. By the year 2025, China will have at least eight megacities – Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu, Chongqing, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Tianjin and Wuhan, with a population of more than 10 million each. Urbanisation will also focus on the central and western regions of the country. Besides Chengdu and Chongqing, China's future powerhouses will include Urumqi, Lhasa, Nanning, Beihai, Xiamen, Fuzhou and Hefei (Moody/Lan 2010). Some 325 million more people are expected to move to urban areas within one generation. Whereas 607 million people, or 46% of the Chinese population, were living in cities in 2008 (NBS 2009), this figure will probably grow to over one billion by 2030. Environmental lobby groups are arguing that energy and essential services can be supplied more efficiently to concentrated urban areas. But the unprecedented pace of this development will nevertheless pose huge challenges, and innovative solutions, e.g. in the transport sector, will be needed.

One innovative and efficient option in the development of megacities is the formation of mega-urban spaces that establish connections with small and medium-sized satellite cities. The satellite cities are supposed to act as production centres and offer occupational opportunities (Moody/ Lan 2010). As such, Chinese urbanisation policy is now gradually assuming a direction that has for all practical purposes been determined by the spontaneous rural-urban migration of recent decades and that better accords with the structure of economic incentives.

Institutional foundations of rural-urban migration and informalisation

The formation of migrant settlements in large cities and megacities (like the process of transformation in general) has been marked by the special institutional features underlying the restructuring of Chinese society not only in economic terms but also with respect to social spaces. Of fundamental importance for understanding the development of urban migrant settlements in the People's Republic of China is the country's registration system (*hukou*

system). It stipulates that every household has to be registered as either urban or rural, and that every individual has a specific permanent (urban or rural) place of residence.¹ Changing one's place of residence requires permission from both the place of origin and destination. The reason for this strict regulation goes back to the land reform pursued in conjunction with the founding of the People's Republic of China, and developed within the context of the Chinese planned economy. Following the land reform,² every household was classified in the early 1950s as either urban or rural. Rural households had a claim to the distribution of land, urban households to the assignment of a place of work. Urban households were generally integrated into a comprehensive – albeit low-level – system of social security. Since 1958 this principle of household registration has served to prevent spontaneous rural-urban migration (as it had existed before in the 1950s) and at the same time as a basis for the distribution of a wide range of rationed foods and goods. Although it lost this latter function in the course of the 1980s, the *hukou* system is intended to continue serving as a means to monitor and control processes of migration.

In the Chinese planned economy, an urban *hukou* was connected to a *danwei* (work unit) and thus to a series of privileges. This affected not only the claim to a job but also to old-age and health insurance, subsidised housing, the right to send children to state schools, easier access to higher education, and a large number of lesser benefits. This network of urban privileges has doubtless been weakened with the transition to a market economy. Massive layoffs took place with the restructuring of state companies as of the late 1990s, for example, which had an especially strong impact on middle-aged women. Surcharges became necessary in the education and health sectors. Despite this, an urban *hukou* continues to enjoy numerous advantages over a rural *hukou*. Conversely, migrants to the cities have to get by without all the privileges of the urban residents. This is the background against which the rise and expansion of the urban villages needs to be viewed.

On arriving in the cities, rural migrants are faced with a process of informalisation in practically all areas of their lives. 'Informalisation' here means entering into relationships that are not regulated contractually, or legitimised by legal frameworks, but instead are based in large part on personal relations or social networks.³ Ananya Roy expresses much the same in the following statement: "In many parts of the world, the site of new informality is the rural/urban interface. Indeed, it can be argued that metropolitan expansion is being driven by informal urbanization" (Roy 2005:149). In China, the *hukou* system forms the major foundation for this metamorphosis into informality – or, under unfavourable circumstances, into illegality. To remain in the cities legally, migrants have to produce numerous papers such as residence permits, work permits, employment registrations, and family planning certificates. Because until the beginning of the 21st century fees were required for each of these documents, hardly any migrants had managed to accumulate all of them. This, however, could be very dangerous. The "three-without population" (*sanwu ren yuan*), i.e. people who lacked a valid ID, housing and regular income, could be taken from the streets by the authorities, placed in local deportation centres and sent back home.⁴ The system of "detention and repatriation" (*shourong qiansong zhidu*), originally designed as a support measure,

¹ For a more recent discussion on the *hukou* system see Chan/Buckingham 2008, Wang 2004.

² The land reform, which took land from the large landowners and distributed it to the peasants who worked it initially privately and later collectively, started before the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 in the zones under Communist power and was then continued and concluded throughout the country until 1952.

³ For a more detailed treatment of different conceptualizations of informality and how they are used in analysing migration processes in China, see Gransow 2008.

⁴ The legal foundation was a regulation from the year 1982 that was actually designed to provide shelter and re-transport to beggars and homeless persons in Chinese cities. This regulation was expanded to apply to the "three-without population" in early 1992.

increasingly became a means of forced deportation as well as a way for authorities to “profit from” migrants. Relatives and friends had to pay “ransoms” in order to free migrants who were being held pending deportation.⁵ This practice also developed into a lucrative source of income for local security authorities and warders. One might adopt a term from Pei Minxin here and speak of a “predatory state” (Pei 2006). The practice drew public criticism by March of 2003 at the latest when Sun Zhigang, a 27-year-old graphic artist, died in a deportation centre in Guangzhou after his “crime” consisted of not having valid papers at a routine check on the street by the police. The case triggered public outrage and on 20 June 2003 the regulation behind the deportation centres was rescinded.⁶ This marked the start of a turn in migration policy. In recent years China’s political leadership has made increasing efforts to lay the legal foundations for equal treatment of rural migrants with respect to work and civil rights. These legal structures, however, have run up against restrictions in local social welfare systems, and will therefore not be put into place without a radical reform of the *hukou* system.

Discussion on rescinding the *hukou* system has been underway for many years now, with actual trials running in several provinces. These trials are accompanied by attempts to create comprehensive social security systems, which thus far however have quickly run up against limits in terms of both cost and only local validity. Until very recently, the focus was placed on viewing migrant workers merely as an economic force, and not as citizens with equal rights. The intent was to achieve a degree of flexibility that would enable authorities to respond to different local economic conditions as well as to limit or extend periods of residency for the migrants depending on labour market demand and supply. The aim of the new regulations was therefore to enable ordered as well as temporally limited absorption of migrants in the cities. Their residency was to be legalised, while at the same time the option of sending them back to the country was to be left open. It was not until the “Proposed Solutions (by the State Council) to the Migrant Worker Problem” of 26 January 2006⁷ that measures started to be taken to improve migrants’ integration into their urban working and living environments.

Informal networks, jobs, housing and services

Networks based on family or regional ties were of central importance especially in the early phases of rural-urban migration in the 1980s and 1990s, and thus far chain migration continues to be the dominant pattern. Urban centres are especially attractive if one already has relatives or friends there, as well as the prospect of employment – often arranged by those network ties as well. With the development of transportation and communication facilities (particularly mobile phones), these relational networks fulfil a large number of social functions, providing a minimum level of social cohesion, security and safety, and serving as hubs for information as well as employment and housing arrangements. They promote social order, both for migrants themselves as well as in the broader context of serving as informational channels for job opportunities, namely helping to ensure that rural workers only leave their places of origin if they have employment and housing prospects in the destination

⁵ “Ransom” levels were 500 to 800 yuan per person for one detention center in Hunan Province (roughly the monthly wages of a migrant worker). From 1996 to 2002, this center took in 3.2 million yuan for more than 10,000 migrants (Cheng 2007:96).

⁶ On 1 August 2003 the “administrative measures to support vagabonds and beggars without urban livelihoods” (*Chengshi shenghuo wuzhuo de liulang qitao renyuan jiu zhu guanli banfa*) went into effect, replacing the regulation of 12 May 1982 entitled “Measures to detain and repatriate urban vagabonds and beggars” (*Chengshi liulang qitao renyuan shourong qiansong banfa*) (Schnack/Yuan 2010:130).

⁷ “*Guanyu jie jue nongmingong wenti de ruogan yijian*” (Guowuyuan 2006)

area. At the same time, they help reduce the transactional costs for the respective employers by ensuring a smooth supply of suitable workers.⁸

The labour market emerging in Chinese cities is highly segmented. People with urban household registrations monopolise jobs in state industry, government administration, education and the rest of the formal sector. Those with only a rural household registration, which includes most migrants, are formally excluded from these high-status jobs. Most migrants to the cities work in manufacturing, the service sector, construction or commerce. In 2008, more than 140 million rural labourers were working in urban areas, mainly in the construction, manufacturing and service sectors (NBS 2009). Migrant workers are restricted to jobs that local people would not want because the pay is too low or the work is too hard or dirty. In the major cities at least, catering and construction offer the most employment to migrants and therefore merit attention. Despite the barriers, migrants have been increasingly breaking into industrial employment in some areas. Many state-owned enterprises continue to employ migrants on temporary contracts even when they lay off regular workers. Migrants are preferred not only because their wages are low but also because they are not entitled to the welfare benefits that impoverished state enterprises find increasingly difficult to pay. Nevertheless, with a large (and growing) income gap between rural and urban areas in China, the numbers of labour migrants (as well as their expectations) are still rising. Migrant workers are often employed without a contract, insurance or welfare programs, with minimal benefits, high rates of work-related accidents and little job security. Under these conditions, migrant workers are especially in need of social services and social security measures. Lacking a sound safety net, rural migrants mobilise personal networks and utilise individual and household strategies to cope with a variety of risks associated with migration processes.⁹

The type of job also determines the type of housing for migrants in the cities. These can be roughly divided into the following: 1) construction workers, who comprise the largest share of male migrant workers and generally sleep in barracks set up on the construction sites; 2) factory workers, both male and female, who are usually housed in company-owned dormitories; 3) household workers who are accommodated in private households. For many other types of migrant labourers, their place of work is also where they live. Only a certain number of rural-urban migrants, therefore, rent their apartments on their own and usually live in urban villages – not infrequently these are individuals employed singly in shops or trades, small-scale production enterprises or the restaurant or service sectors, or they are cleaning personnel, pedlars, etc., or in other words hold mainly informal jobs.

However, the extent to which demand for private housing has increased in recent years precisely by migrants is clear from the overview below (see Table 1 and Figure 1 in the Appendix).¹⁰ The number of officially registered temporary migrants alone rose from 40.5 to 116.6 million in the period from 1998 to 2008. The number of those migrants living in housing that they rented themselves rose from 11.35 to 57.2 million. In percentages this represents a rise from 28 to 49%; i.e. in 2008, 49% of registered migrants had housing they had rented themselves. These figures clearly reveal the rapid rise in low-priced accommodations for migrant workers in the cities. They can also be interpreted as expressing

⁸ For a more extensive look at migrant networks see Ke/Li 2001. The problem of workforce shortages in the Pearl River Delta is addressed in Zheng 2006.

⁹ This paragraph is based on Gransow 2006, p.75.

¹⁰ The Ministry of Public Security counts the number of temporary resident permit holders registered at local police stations. People have to register when staying more than three days at a place different from their place of permanent registration. Besides labour migration, the main reasons are education, medical treatment, official and business trips, visiting relatives and friends, and tourism.

a growing tendency toward migration by entire families.¹¹ And in meeting this demand, the urban villages found in large cities and megacities in China have thus far played a central role.

Along with tendencies toward longer stays and the migration of entire families, the demand for schools for migrants' children has also increased. Because their children were excluded from public schools until 2006 or could only attend these schools in exchange for relatively high fees,¹² migrants founded a large number of private schools themselves for their children. But even taken together, the existing range of public and private schools was not nearly enough to cover the need (see e.g. Guangdong 2006:438). Many schools and daycare facilities operate in a grey zone. On the one hand there is much demand despite the relatively high prices, while on the other hand these schools and facilities are not recognised by the Ministry of Education because they cannot meet the local municipal standards for instructors, curricula or materials, which are generally considerably higher than in the migrants' predominately rural regions of origin. Nearly without exception, the teachers at the informal schools are migrants themselves.

The question of how to implement compulsory schooling for the children of migrants in the cities has been taken up in recent years by the mass media and NGOs, and has increasingly become a topic of public discussion. In 2005 the National People's Congress revised the Compulsory Education Law¹³ and opened the way for integrating migrants' children into the urban school system. This laid an important legal foundation. However, there are numerous practical hurdles because many of the public schools take high fees in spite of the new legal guidelines or pose other barriers to accepting children of migrants. Schools in migrants' regions of origin provide instruction that only meets their own guidelines and does not approach standards in the large cities. There are also many more primary than secondary schools for children of migrants, which makes the transition to the first three-year stage of secondary schooling all the more difficult.

Another problem is the exclusion of rural migrants from the urban healthcare system. This is significant precisely in megacities, whose population densities and global links make them especially susceptible to contagious diseases. Migrants have to meet nearly all the costs for health check-ups and treatments themselves, and most of them cannot afford these expenses. While the average migrant's budget has a maximum of 100 yuan a month available for health costs, treatment for a minor illness (such as a cold) at a large hospital costs 500 yuan, which would swallow almost an entire month's income. Financial emergencies frequently cause migrants to interrupt necessary follow-up treatments after emergency care at a hospital. The department of external injuries at the People's Hospital in Guangdong Province has treated an average of 200 migrants per year, of whom one third have not been able to pay the bills. Some hospitals have therefore refused to take migrants as patients (Xiang 2005:162f). Given this situation, areas with high migrant populations such as urban villages have produced a number of more informal smaller clinics and healthcare centres that attempt to fill the market niche for providing healthcare to migrants – with all the attendant risks (Bork et al 2010; Gransow 2010). These services, however, are used only with great reserve. In the event of illness, the preferred practice is to wait and see how it develops instead of making use of informal services that are hard to vet.

¹¹ See Wang 2006 and Shi 2005:19.

¹² In the late 1990s, fees were 780-1000 yuan per child and semester in e.g. Guangzhou. Given that the average wages at this point were still below 700 yuan a month, this was a considerable burden for migrant families, especially if they had multiple children.

¹³ (Article 12, §2 of the Compulsory Education Law 2006, cited in Xia 2006:33)

Medical services are insufficient while their prohibitive costs can easily put migrants into abject poverty; small companies in the informal sector are not able to take preventive measures against occupational illnesses and the hazards of contagion, and occupational safety is deficient. At the same time, migrants' working and living conditions expose them to greater health risks, while only a vanishingly small percentage have health insurance. Reform is intended to ensure the community-oriented character of health facilities, end the sale of medicines by clinics, and establish a uniform network of medical care for the entire population (Bi 2008). This type of program, however, is still a long way off and leaves open the question of how far-reaching social policy objectives and guidelines from the central government can be implemented at the various local levels.

The rise and types of urban villages

With the rapidly swelling tide of rural-urban migration, the need arose for affordable housing at the urban destinations. This was found in what are known as "urban villages".¹⁴ They can provide the urgently needed living space because for administrative purposes they are located in rural areas that are collectively owned by villages or rural communities. And because this housing market is largely a matter of private living space, it is freely available to migrants as well, despite all the government regulations and restrictions on entering into rental agreements (Zhang 2005:247f.). According to these rules, which however are often ignored, landlords and tenants have to conclude rental agreements and register with the local police authorities. The native rural population in the "villages", i.e. that part of the rural population which has not migrated there but rather whose land has been affected by the expansion of the city, has the right to erect its own housing on its collectively-owned territory – a resource available to neither the urban residents nor the migrants. This special resource is quite literally the foundation for erecting buildings that the village population can use itself or rent out. These urban villages are not subject to the municipal administration, i.e. the buildings can be modified or improved for rental purposes with relatively few restrictions. Because the buildings do not have to meet fire protection or other standards, rents can be kept very low.

Taking the examples of Zhejiang Village in Beijing and Shipai Village in Guangzhou, two different types of urban villages are presented below, including how they arose over the 1990s. While the villages in Beijing, i.e. not only Zhejiang Village but also Xinjiang Village, Henan Village and Anhui Village, are named after the provinces of origin of their inhabitants who come mainly from the same areas and have similar occupations, Shipai Village in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou used to be a natural village whose character changed in the course of immigration to Guangzhou and the expansion of its metropolitan area, becoming a mixed settlement of migrants from very different places of origin.

Zhejiang Village in Beijing

The first urban village to arise in China was Zhejiang Village in Beijing in the 1980s.¹⁵ It comprises an area of 26 villages in Nanyuan in the district of Fengtai. After some families from an area of Wenzhou in Zhejiang Province noted a high demand for textiles and leather goods on travelling through Beijing in 1983, the village underwent a period of expansion.

¹⁴ This part is based on Gransow 2007.

¹⁵ The name "Zhejiangcun" has been used unofficially since 1988, publicly for the first time in 1992, namely in the Beijing daily newspaper *Beijing ribao*.

Migrants from Wenzhou started working on a small-scale production basis together with state stores in 1987 and/or rented sales space from them. Little by little they monopolised the market for leather jackets. This expanding business required a larger workforce, leading to a continuous flow of migrants from Wenzhou as of the late 1980s. By 1994 already the village had around 110,000 inhabitants, of whom 14,000 were Beijing natives and 96,000 were migrants. Of the latter, a good half of them came from Yueqing and Yongjia Counties in Wenzhou in Zhejiang Province. The remaining 40,000 peasants came from the provinces of Hubei, Jiangxi, Hebei and Sichuan, and worked for the Wenzhou entrepreneurs. Migrants from the same areas also live together; for example, those from Yueqing County live in the villages of Macun, Dengcun, Houcun and so on (Zhou 1998:59).

The expansion of Zhejiang Village was also accompanied by an increased demand for numerous services. These included grocery stores, restaurants, small health clinics, hairdressing salons (many of which also function as bordellos) and shops offering special products from Wenzhou, as well as the villages' own daycare facilities, primary schools and bus lines that ensure continuous travel services to inhabitants' places of origin. With the growing need for housing, some of the Wenzhou entrepreneurs invested ever greater sums in the real estate sector, and erected – albeit without the relevant permits – hundreds of buildings on their own in 1992-3. This provided some of them with lucrative annual rental revenues of 800,000 yuan, of which a small amount was paid to the local village administration (Zhang 2001:81).¹⁶

Informal elite groups also emerged in conjunction with this expansion of Zhejiang Village. As the employers, the entrepreneurial migrants from Wenzhou controlled the jobs and thus acquired a certain influence as well as some effect on coveted social resources, in particular for workers from other provinces such as Hebei. Influential individuals functioned as crisis managers, negotiating between migrants who often had an illegal status and the local Beijing administrative and registration authorities. To strengthen their position, some of these individuals engaged the support of young men, and thus youth gangs have existed in Zhejiangcun since 1994, with a similar structure to those in Chinatowns abroad (cf. Chin/Fagan 1995). Conflicts and power struggles arose between dealers from Wenzhou and local authorities over shop sites and rents at Jingwen Market, the largest commercial building in the area whose five floors have space for 1,754 shops (Zhang 2001:111).

In light of these developments, the Beijing authorities conducted several raids against migrants without residence permits, and in late 1995 carried out a comprehensive demolition campaign to eliminate all illegal buildings – a measure that financially ruined a number of the recently wealthy local bosses but was ultimately of only minimal success. While the Beijing municipal government continually endeavours to take action on a regular basis, it faces opposition not only from the migrants themselves but also from the landlords who derive considerable revenue from monthly rents of up to 2,000 yuan, as well as from the district authorities who profit from the flourishing business activity, and not least of all from representatives from the migrants' provinces of origin who try to stand behind their people (Yuan/Zhang/Wang 1997). A further demolition campaign took place in 2006 during preparations for the Olympic Games in Beijing.

Shipai Village in Guangzhou

Characteristic of the migrant settlements in Guangzhou is a type of “village surrounded by the city” (*chengzhongcun*). With the advent of economic reforms, the city of Guangzhou expanded increasingly to the east. Peasants’ farmland in the surrounding villages was requisitioned for commercial or residential use. The peasants received compensation and the right to remain in their houses, as well as to build new housing or additional floors on existing buildings. These rights also extended to their children. At the same time, ever more migrant workers were coming to Guangzhou. The local peasants in the “villages” discovered the profitable business of renting to migrants and started to add floors to their houses. Five or six-storey buildings are not infrequent, and in some areas (for example in Sanyuanli) they extend up to eight floors. Hardly any space remains between the buildings, so people now walk in narrow, dark alleyways. These conditions have become a topic of intense debate in the press. On the one hand they are described in nearly lyrical terms such as “houses that shake hands” or “houses that kiss each other.” But the “villages” are also seen in very negative terms, described in the press with metaphors such as “pustules”, “tumours” and worse.

In contrast to Beijing, the settlements here have retained the original names of the natural villages, and are called e.g. Linhe, Liede or Yangji Village. The entrances generally have a gate with the name of the village on it. A typical example is Shipai Village, which has around 50,000 inhabitants. These include around 12-13,000 of the original rural population, of whom 70% now rent living space to the approximately 36-39,000 migrants. Among the migrants, men outnumber the women, and are generally under 40 years of age and often already have families who usually live in their places of origin. Around half of the migrants in Shipai have residence permits. They come primarily from Hunan, Hubei and Sichuan, initially also from Shandong. Here too there are some connections between places of origin and occupations. Whereas migrants from Hunan usually work in construction, the hairdressers (both men and women) are predominately from Hebei and Sichuan.

Until 1980, Shipai was a normal village at the outskirts of Guangzhou. Then its farmland was requisitioned and it became one of the 138 “villages in cities” in the newly acquired areas of the rapidly expanding metropolis. In 1987 the Tianhe district set up an administrative apparatus below that of district level for Shipai, which thus became an administrative village and the first rural (self-) administered unit under the jurisdiction of an urban authority. By 1994 all of the farmland belonging to Shipai had been requisitioned. All the settlements of the village inhabitants of Shipai now lay within the borders of the new administrative village. Shipai had become a “village in the city”.

Fuelled by the compensation received for the farmland, the village community of Shipai developed a strong economy with a large real estate company at its core. A series of reforms were carried out in 1997 that were intended to improve “integration” of the village. First of all the collective enterprises were converted to shareholding enterprises. Secondly, the village committee (with its 27 sub-groups) was reorganised into five neighbourhood committees under the administrative office. Attention was focused on new uses for the land resources, in order to survive as a rural community in an urban environment under the new conditions of a market economy. Thus a specific model arose that combined economic interests and social clan structures, and which strengthened social cohesion among the (formerly) rural village community. Historical and cultural resources continued to play a role in local power structures. The three leading clan families, namely the Chis, Pans and Dongs, rebuilt their ancestral homes and used their social networks to drive local policy within the framework of the new market economy. Given the relative autonomy of the village administration, a social

space for exerting local power was created which corresponded to the conventional structures of the local village population (Lan 2005:34). In this way Shipai Village found an effective means of reinventing itself while at the same time retaining traditional social relations. Playing an especially important role are leisure activities, which strengthen relations among clan members, serve to maintain a joint cultural heritage and counteract dissipative tendencies in unfamiliar urban structures. The local traditions of the village community make available social and organisational resources that facilitate integration into the urban metropolis, although this continues to run up against limits set by the relatively low educational level of the village population.

Characteristic of Guangzhou's urban villages is the coexistence of a minority of local village people (most of whom have moved into better residential areas) and a majority of migrants from a wide range of regional and social origins. Both groups can be described as marginalised with respect to the urban population because they are not authorised to share urban privileges in the form of education and social security. At the same time, the two groups differ in a few crucial features. The original population make up the landlords, while the migrants are the tenants. The former became a marginalised group without ever setting foot outside their village – instead, their village was swallowed up by the city. Favourable happenstance meant that many of them have been able to acquire a certain prosperity without having to work especially hard to do so. Yet in comparison to the urban population they are relatively uneducated as well as unfamiliar with the urban structures and processes surrounding them, and some of them have trouble putting their abundant leisure time to good use. The migrants, on the other hand, left more or less distant places to work for a better life in the big city. Their job conditions are very tough and their incomes are much lower than those of the urban population, but they save as much as they can and send the money back home. In contrast to the original village population of Guangzhou, they have hardly any leisure time. Despite these differences the two groups have the basic shared interest of maintaining the existing landlord-tenant arrangements in the “villages”, and thus of maintaining the “villages” as such.

Interim conclusion

As different as Zhejiang Village and Shipai Village are in their individual features, these two examples nevertheless share a combination of innovative, experimental and forward-looking developments on the one hand, and a lack of governability and high levels of uncertainty and crime on the other. An interim conclusion to the question of what can be learnt from migrant communities in Chinese megacities to benefit the future of megacity development in general highlights two alternatives, namely whether informality and migrant enclaves in China should be viewed primarily as a problem, i.e. as forerunners of extensive slum formation, or primarily as a solution, i.e. as transitional stages of experimental informality and precursors to subsequent integration.

From the outside these “villages” frequently leave an impression of uncontained growth and neglect. Their respective city governments fear that the chaotic use of land, dilapidated buildings, insufficient infrastructure and lack of social order could cause these “villages” to develop into extended slums. Not least of all, city leaders fear for the image of their cities. For years now, the press too has been criticising the “villages” as a source of social problems and environmental pollution, and a blot on the city landscapes.

Under the banner of “maintaining public order and combating crime,” municipal policy in the 1990s initially consisted of carrying out raids, tearing down illegal buildings, and forcibly repatriating migrants who were apprehended in the cities without valid papers. By 2002 at the latest and fuelled by the SARS crisis in 2003, official voices have increasingly been calling for intervention and massive renewal projects to eliminate these “villages in cities”. Events such as the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing and the 2010 Asian Games in Guangzhou are welcome occasions for local authorities to pursue such plans. The latest example of this type of policy is a trial project in Beijing consisting of placing gates around 16 migrant villages at night and strictly inspecting the papers of all those entering and exiting. This is intended to set a limit to spontaneous immigration and rising crime rates (MacKinnon 2010). As part of urban renewal plans in both Beijing and Guangzhou, two concrete stages have been specified in the demolition and redevelopment of the “villages”: The first is a change in legal status and a transfer of decision-making power from the native population to state authorities; and the second is the actual redevelopment based on the authorities’ plans.

A distinctive feature of the first stage consists of discontinuing the rural status of the “villages” in institutional terms, thus changing what has thus far been collective into state-owned territory. The native village inhabitants receive an urban *hukou* and the rural administration (village committees) are reorganised into urban resident committees. In the second stage, the villages are reconstructed on the basis of urban planning projects and in accordance with municipal regulations. Illegal buildings can be eliminated without compensation. Land management is to be standardised by holding open bidding processes for property leases and construction projects. Construction projects will require official permits and buildings will be inspected for height and number of residents. Dilapidated structures will be replaced by new ones. Some of the existing flats will be given to the native village population as compensation, others will be sold at market price. Private entrepreneurs and joint ventures will be encouraged to invest. Renewal of these areas will no longer lie in the hands of the native rural population, but rather fall under the jurisdiction of the urban administrations. This is essentially one of the last acts of the “primary accumulation with Chinese characteristics”. By means of this push to urbanise and incorporate the “villages”, the native village inhabitants will formally become citizens of the cities with equal rights. This new status, however, will rob them over the long term of the rights and rental options they have enjoyed thus far. Land-use rights will go first to the city government, and then potentially to construction companies. Behind a rhetoric of preventing slum development lies the aim of city governments to retain control over these areas (Zhang 2005:250f).

Official government policy on the urban villages is directed at their negative aspects. It underestimates their function of making low-cost housing available to a large number of migrant labourers. For all their problems and the attendant criticism, the urban villages have supported urbanisation and served to integrate rural migrants without straining government resources. A strategy of demolition and renewal, by contrast, does not acknowledge this function and leads inevitably to numerous conflicts between governmental levels, construction companies, the native rural populations and migrants. This type of renewal will be very expensive: The construction companies will have to compensate current owners as well as pay fees for land transfer, environmental protection and building taxes (cf. Li 2003: 66). These will be added to the price of future apartments, and will therefore greatly exacerbate the problem of favourably priced housing for migrants. The migrants will not be able to pay the new rents without substantial subsidies from the government.

Social change in Chinese megacities

Eliminating the urban villages that are already well underway in Beijing and Guangzhou still represents more a policy of exclusion and of channelling migrants to smaller and medium-sized cities than one of creating megacities and pursuing principles of sustainable development. This type of policy will not serve the younger generation of migrants who are now increasingly coming to the cities with the intent of remaining there and who require qualification and integration opportunities; nor does it fit in with the visions of a harmonious society, whose basis is seen in the founding of a broad middle class.

Research on migration in China currently draws a general distinction between two generations of migrants, namely the first generation that was born in the 1960s and 1970s and worked in the cities in the 1980s and 1990s, and the second generation that was born in the 1980s and currently makes up the majority of migrant workers in the cities. While the first generation's reasons for migrating focus on the hardships of working the fields, the shortage of land, and the poverty of life in the countryside, younger respondents report that they know nothing about agriculture (because they have spent all their time at school), and that they view working or doing business elsewhere as a promising opportunity. In other words, while push factors exerted a comparatively dominant effect on the first generation (40%), pull factors have played a much stronger role for the younger respondents, only 25% of whom list push factors (Wang 2003:198/99, 201). Generally higher and more varied expectations can be seen on the part of the younger generation¹⁷ as well as a stronger orientation toward labour migration. In addition, the new generation of migrants has tended to grow up with the new media. Social networks play a smaller role for job seekers in the second generation than in the first – both advertisements and government initiatives have a greater significance here (Cai 2008: 382f). These characteristics of the second generation of rural-urban migrants indicate that their individual sights are set far less on returning to the countryside than those of the first generation, and that their rural societies of origin are also becoming less decisive factors in their individual valuation of income and standards of living. In the absence of effective means of integration for this second generation of migrants, social tendencies toward polarisation and alienation in the urban centres can very easily intensify.

The global financial crisis, which triggered steep declines in business for the Chinese export industry in 2008/2009, made Chinese society clearly aware of the drawbacks of an economic strategy that places a one-sided emphasis on export production. Around 25 million migrant workers lost their jobs (NBS 2008). Since then, expansion of the domestic market and strengthening of domestic consumption have become a credo in the structural reorientation of the Chinese economy, with greater weight attached to innovation, investment in research and development, and higher qualifications for personnel. Together with higher wages, this type of strategy could also promote the development of a broad middle class (cf. Zoellick 2010), and thus also social stability in Chinese society as a whole.

According to a recent report by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in August of 2010, a broad middle class is already a reality in China. The basis for this lies in the bank's definition of middle class as "those with consumption expenditures of \$2-\$20 per person per day in 2005 PPP\$"¹⁸ (Key 2010:5). This would place 63% of the Chinese population (or 817 million people) in the middle class in 2005, with 34% in the income group of 2-4\$ per capita per day,

¹⁷ Of whom 90% were not yet married – in contrast to the older respondents in the first generation of migrants, 81% of whom were married.

¹⁸ Purchasing power parity

25% in the 4-10\$ group, and 3.5% in the 10-20\$ group. The basic criteria used here, however, are open to question. The definition is problematic not only because of its one-sided focus on income level,¹⁹ but also because of its inclusion of the lower income group (2-4\$). Situated barely over the subsistence level, this group can fall very quickly into absolute poverty as a result of numerous different risks and influences. And it makes up more than half of the middle class so defined. This assessment overlooks both the vulnerability of a large segment of the class, as well as its disproportionate distribution. Moreover, within the group of white-collar workers, there are tendencies toward division and polarisation that promise little in the way of social cohesion. These are indicated by phenomena such as what Chinese sociologist Lian Si has called an “ant tribe” situation, namely young college graduates who had come to the cities from outside to study but then on completing their programs do not find work or prefer precarious conditions in the more attractive megacities to a secure income somewhere in the provinces. With monthly incomes barely above those of the rural migrants, they live in very tight quarters (most have fewer than 10m², 38.4% have fewer than 5m²; Lian 2008:61). As poorly paid white-collar migrants, they too number among the inhabitants of urban villages in megacities like Beijing or Guangzhou. Mostly young and often unmarried, they are described as a specific status group that ranks clearly above blue-collar migrants, but also clearly below local white-collar employees. As a university education is still seen as a major route to having a career, Lian’s report shattered this widespread Chinese dream. Obviously, white-collar workers in China’s megacities cannot simply be equated with the Chinese middle class (as Charles Wright Mills did in his classic study on the American middle classes (2002 [1951])). The new urban middle classes may be growing rapidly, but they appear to be greatly fragmented and marked by tendencies toward polarisation.

In 2009, the urban-to-rural income gap in China reached a ratio of 3.33:1, and thus became higher than ever before (Fu 2010). Currently the processes of social change underway at the micro-level in Chinese megacities (such as the emergence of a new generation of migrants with expectations of becoming urban citizens, including white-collar migrants with low and unstable incomes) are pointing more toward urban-rural polarisation being shifted into the cities. This tendency would be diametrically opposed to the development of a broad middle class which is sought in the vision of a ‘harmonious society’. What is needed here are structural adjustments, but also a greater role for civil society itself and its organisations that might play a mediating role between migrants’ individual livelihood strategies and public policy at the meso-level.

Conclusion

The examples from Beijing and Guangzhou clearly show that from the perspective of the municipal governments, urbanisation policies continue to dominate that are based on controlling and channelling the flow of migrants toward smaller cities. This perspective holds that newcomers should have easier access to urban residence permits and rights, but that these rights – as before – should be granted primarily to workers who bring investment and/or strong qualifications. Thus considerable legal barriers to migration will persist in the future as well, and will continue to generate conditions for the formation of more urban spaces marked by informality. As current developments show, this affects not only domestic migration within China, but also to an increasing degree Chinese megacities as destinations for international migration. Thus migrant settlements have formed e.g. in Guangzhou for traders of African origin (Li/Ma/Xue 2009). Slum prevention measures based on tearing down and

¹⁹ Zhou Xiaohong, for example, employs a more complex system of indices which includes not only income but also education and occupation (Zhou 2008).

sealing off urban villages should be seen as counterproductive from the perspective of encouraging sustainable megacity development. This type of short-term intervention ultimately transposes the social polarisation between urban and rural populations into an intra-urban form of polarisation.

The exceptional dimensions and pace of urbanisation in China have already brought learning processes that suggest there can be no long-term alternative to sustainable megacity development, pro-migration policy and participatory planning processes, in whatever concrete forms these take in the various regions of the country. Chinese scholars of internal migration²⁰ and political leaders at the central level have recognised the need for active integration policy addressing rural migrant workers in urban areas for several years now and have also implemented such public policy – at least in part. The ‘experimental informality’ that can be observed in migrant settlements and megacity development all over China offers numerous points of intersection that are of interest not only for developments in China itself but also worldwide.

²⁰ Wang/Wang/Wu:2009; He/Liu/Wu/Webster 2010; Xu 2008; Zheng/Long/Fan/Gu 2009.

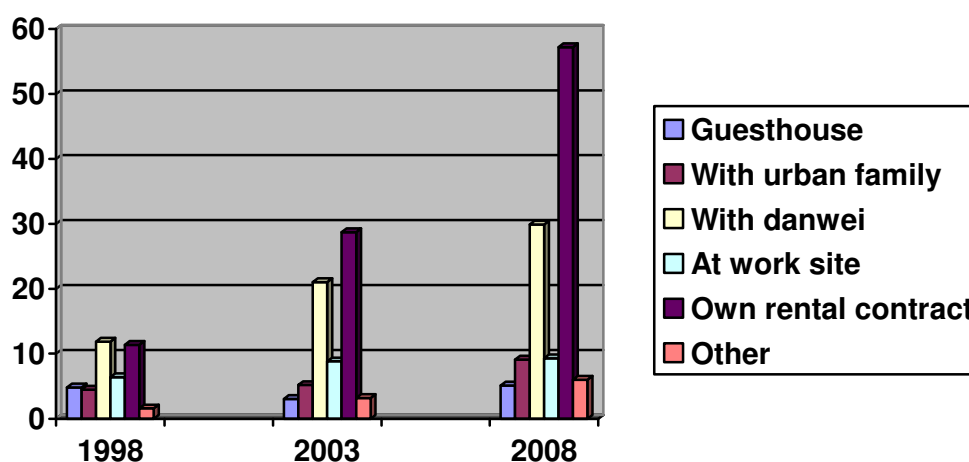
APPENDIX

Table 1: Types of housing for migrants with residence permits in Chinese cities (1998, 2003 and 2008, migrant numbers in millions)

	1998	%	2003	%	2008	%
Total	40.5	100	69.9	100	116.6	100
Male	24.3	60	41.0	58.6	67.0	57.5
Female	16.2	40	28.9	41.4	49.6	42.5
Migrant workers	32.6	80	61.5	88	79.6	68.3
Men	19.6		36.1		46.6	
Women	13.0		25.4		33.0	
Housing types						
Guesthouse	4.82	11.9	3.03	4.3	5.1	4.4
With urban families	4.45	11.0	5.17	7.4	9.1	7.8
With work units	11.85	29.3	21.05	30.1	29.9	25.6
At work site	6.39	15.8	8.81	12.6	9.3	8.1
Own rental contract	11.35	28.1	28.71	41.1	57.2	49.0
Other	1.59	3.9	3.17	4.5	6.0	5.1

Sources: Gongan 1998:2; Gongan 2004:2; Gongan 2008, own calculations. These figures refer to the entire municipal administrative area, not only to the city districts.

Figure 1: Types of housing for migrants with residence permits in Chinese cities (1998, 2003 and 2008, migrant numbers in millions)



Source: see Table 1.

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