

## SEGREGATED PUBLIC SPACE AND THE RIGHT TO THE CITY



With urbanization, native villagers have been faced with a flow of strangers into their former village space, a phenomenon to which they have contributed by renting apartments to migrants. Native villagers also face increased intervention from higher administrative bodies, as, once urbanized, they are fully subordinated to the authority of the state and lose their village institutions' prior relative autonomy. The state is asserting its power by shaping urban space via redevelopment projects to integrate the villages into overall city planning. The state also makes its presence felt visually, by carving out new public spaces for political propaganda and for citizens' altruistic volunteering at charitable events, but also for citizens to engage in leisure activities and to create a feeling of belonging in the *shequ*, the urban community.

Since the reform era, Chinese public space has shifted from the monumental representation of socialist ideologies to a wide array of political as well as recreational and commercial spaces (Gaubatz 2008: 73–75). Municipal government urban planners have fostered the creation of plazas and pedestrian areas to accommodate commercial development as well as parks and squares to satisfy the fast-growing population's recreational and socializing needs.

This chapter shows how public space is created as part of building “livable communities” (*yiju shequ*). The concept of livability has been in circulation for about fifty years among urban planning experts across the globe (McArthur and Robin 2019). A malleable term, livability has been used to push for policies focusing on social services,

aesthetics, safety, and environmental issues (Ley 1990; Pacione 1990). This understanding of livability has been reinforced by a host of international indicators and ranking systems.<sup>1</sup> Livability services city branding and is driven by a consumption-oriented vision of urban life in the effort to attract global capital; in the Asian context, Singapore is a premium example of a state touting livability to meet this goal (Teo 2014). However, livability is also a form of response to the idea of the “right to the city,” initially voiced by Henri Lefebvre (1996 [1968]).<sup>2</sup> While the right to the city has become a rallying cry for many urban social movements, it has also gained traction with NGOs and international organizations (Mayer 2009; Costes 2010). A recent UN Habitat policy paper, “Right to the City and Cities for All” (United Nations 2017), defines “livable cities” as cities that are inclusive (pro-poor, gender, youth, and aging), welcoming to migrants, and safe, and which protect their heritage.

China’s grassroots livability policies, shaped by preexisting community-building (*shequ jianshe*) policies, reflect the shift in central-government rhetoric toward people-oriented development since the early 2000s. This shift was roughly contemporaneous with a push for economic upgrading via a move from an industry-heavy to a service-based economy across a number of Chinese cities. Such local efforts to upgrade have resulted in what has been called a “talent war” among Chinese cities to attract educated white-collar workers (see chapter 1; Shen and Li 2020). Livability is considered a key tool in this war: cities compete for talent via preferential *hukou* policies and policies aimed at improving the quality of life.

This emphasis on the well-being of urban dwellers means that public space features centrally in livability projects. However, in urbanized villages where native villagers coexist with new residents, the shaping of public space also aims to integrate the migrants and create a new, more inclusive sense of belonging to the *shequ*, or urban community. The construction of urban public space in former rural villages is not easy, because the limited space available for public use often overlies former village public space, juxtaposing urban public space onto former rural public space. Despite the Chinese state’s modernist approach, the planning of this space is therefore contingent (having to deal with existing conditions) rather than total, to borrow James Holston’s (1989) terms. While this recombinant urbanization (Kipnis 2016) has not replaced village sociality entirely with urban sociality, it has resulted in variegated forms of sociality.

Amanda Huron (2017) argues that the cohabitation of strangers constitutes an obstacle to commoning. Indeed the prevalence of su-

perfidial “traffic” relations, i.e., minimal contact between city dwellers (Wirth 1938; Hannerz 1980), is often noted as a characteristic of cities. However, while urbanized Chinese villages are on the one hand quintessentially urban as places that bring strangers together, on the other they are places where native villagers, tied by dense networks of face-to-face communality, have to deal with the arrival of massive inflows of strangers. The potential for conflict is therefore heightened, while the preexisting commonality that Ostrom emphasizes as a condition for successful commons-building, namely that its members “share a past, and expect to share a future” (2015: 88), is severely weakened.

The process of creating public space in urban villages is graduated. Livable Community policy explicitly prioritizes the more advanced urban communities, which it targets with Livable City (*yiju chengshi*) projects. Redevelopment projects generate splintered urbanism on the city scale, as they prioritize urban villages deemed more “mature” —that is, more advanced in the urbanization process—and often capitalize on existing village-level public infrastructure and services.<sup>3</sup> The creation of public space also generates splintered urbanism at the urban village scale, and the uses of public space reproduce existing divisions between social classes.

The availability of space is often limited. Although urban villages manifest a low degree of residential segregation (Hao 2015), and despite the state’s wish to integrate city inhabitants into solidary, self-governing urban communities and foster their sense of belonging in their locality, social segregation remains strong. Indeed, the limited public space available generates rivalry among residents over access rights. Referring to urban commons as a city’s “atmospherics” —its spheres of sociality and connectedness within networks—Borch and Kornberger (2015: 6) claim that unlike common-pool resources, urban commons are not rivalrous. In cities, one person’s consumption of a park or shopping mall not only does not decrease but actually increases their value for others, as when crowds come together for people to enjoy the presence of others or to observe what others are purchasing. Note that, *stricto sensu*, this open access combined with nonrivalry makes “sociality” a public good rather than a common-pool resource in economists’ typologies. However, the absence of rivalry in urban settings is highly contestable, as this chapter shows.

To what extent is the new urban public space actually public? This chapter plays with several meanings of the term “public” in relation to space. First, public spaces emerge “with the differentiation of a nominally representative state on the one side and civil society and

the market on the other,” implying a separation from the household as the private sphere of social reproduction (Low and Smith 2006: 6). Public plazas and squares particularly embody the conception of public space as a site for the collective expression of citizenship (Low 2000; Low and Smith 2006; Miller 2007; Lazar 2014). It is hard to apply Habermasian notions of the public sphere in China’s case (see Huang 1993; Madsen 1993; Rankin 1993). The Chinese state’s provision of public squares and parks serves governmental purposes; from a Foucauldian point of view, public spaces are, *par excellence*, a site for the exercise of governmentality and the shaping of disciplined subjects, but they are also “representational spaces,” sites for the reassertion of state sovereign power (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]; Oakes 2019).

Second, “the public” refers to a form of typically urban sociality in that it consists of people who are virtually strangers whose impersonal interaction in public space is often considered a typically urban characteristic (Wirth 1938; Sennett 1977; Hannerz 1980). A third notion of “public” has a better bearing on the situations encountered in the field, namely the public as a group of people uniting around a shared issue or interest (Dewey 1991 [1927]). This notion allows for grounding the public in physical space and viewing public spaces as sites of a diverse range of citizenship practices (Smith 1996; Mitchell 2003; Lazar 2014; Woodman and Guo 2020; Low 2017). In China, emerging publics can be citizens claiming civil rights through legal action (Brandtstädter 2013), or equally, ordinary citizens claiming their right to access space, forming a public through their simple, quotidian, often collective practices in public space (Farquhar 2009; Thireau 2020). Local residents’ everyday uses of public spaces demonstrate a variety of purposes, motivations, and understandings that can lay the foundation for the formation of counterpublics.<sup>4</sup> For migrant incomers, being able to use public space is a recognition of their right to the city as new urbanites (Mitchell 2003; Harvey 2012).

In a final sense, “public” refers to a state-provided public good, publicly managed and accessible to all. As public spaces are increasingly neoliberalized and turned into profit-generating sites, the question of who they benefit makes them spatial representations of ongoing redefinitions of citizenship and the state (Staeheli and Mitchell 2008; Loughran 2014).

This chapter first examines the various livable city projects enacted in Shenzhen, Xi’an, and Chengdu. The Shenzhen municipality is the most explicit about the prioritization of already-developed communities. The “let some people get rich first” logic is transposed

from the national to the city level. While the creation of public space for communal use features centrally in livable city projects, there is limited availability of truly state-provided public space. Next, ethnographic observation of the actual uses of public spaces highlights their strongly segregated character. As village public space is reshaped as urban public space, native villagers tend to maintain certain communal activities that they carried out in such spaces before urbanization. Actually, migrants appear to use public space more frequently than natives. Because their rented apartments have limited living space, they need it far more for their childcare and personal well-being activities; however, they are often relegated to the margins of spaces monopolized by native villagers. In the third section I explore the differential, class-based understanding of the right to the city among non-native urban village residents, and the sense of future possibilities and entitlement that leads them to seek to change their *hukou* and claim their right to the city. While low-skilled migrant workers express their right to the city based on their contribution to building it, middle-class, non-*hukou*-holding residents espouse the municipal authorities' vision of the right to the city, in which an individual's deservingness depends on their self-responsibility and ability to contribute financially to the urban public goods regime.

### Creating Livable Communities in Limited Space

Community officials in Chinese cities are being enlisted to enact municipally issued livable-city policy. Because of the broadness of the term, local community responses are varied. A general characteristic of livable communities is that their basic urban infrastructure—sanitation, sewerage, garbage treatment, transportation—should function well, and they should also include improved public services and cultural and sports facilities. The livability policies for urban villages are more specifically concerned with integrating native and non-native residents into solidary urban communities. The creation of public space is a key instrument for achieving this goal, but success strongly depends on the presence of preexisting communal village space.

Public spaces are not new to urbanized villagers. The introduction of the *hukou* under Mao reduced their ability to sell agricultural produce at urban markets and strongly restricted their potential for moving to the city, contributing to local retrenchment.<sup>5</sup> Although village life was mainly based on interactions between familiar members

connected through kinship and neighborhood ties (Fei 1939; Yang 1959), there was another form of public life in the small village committees and cultivation groups, and at the administrative village level, in the village assembly (*cunwei dahui*), which had returned to the fore in the reform era. Although the policy of building livable cities presents the creation of public space as an ex-nihilo government action, it depends heavily on preexisting former-village public space and on the timing of redevelopment projects. Thus public space in urbanized villages takes various official and unofficial forms.

### *Building an Integrative Public Square in Pine Mansion*

Shenzhen's livable communities (*yiju shequ*) policy has accompanied its "double promotion" (chapter 3) of economic and ecological improvement together with improved government services and governance capacity. In 2012 Shenzhen's municipal government issued its Work Plan for the Construction of Livable Communities in Shenzhen, with an emphasis on a "comfortable life, a beautiful environment, complete functionality, and a sense of happiness for the people" (*xinfu gan*).<sup>6</sup>

Reflecting Shenzhen's history, the plan recognizes a gap between the districts that originally lay within and outside of the special economic zone, and how, in the outlying districts where Pine Mansion is located, urban communities had not been planned, infrastructure was lacking, and "the quality of services and level of grassroots cultural institutions need to be improved." Shenzhen aimed to reach the status of "advanced city and model city for the construction of livable cities in the country and Guangdong Province" by 2020. This goal was scheduled in three steps, each with quantified targets for the percentage of communities that achieve livable status: in the short term (2012–13), funds and resources "should be used first to support communities with better basic conditions to build livable communities," while secondarily fostering the development of communities "with ordinary or poor basic conditions"; in the middle term (2014–15), established livable communities should be used as models to "accelerate the construction of communities with certain basic conditions"; and finally 2015–20 involved "increase[d] investment in communities with poor conditions."<sup>7</sup>

Pine Mansion was addressed in the second step. In 2015, the subdistrict government invested 700,000 RMB in the construction of what it calls a "street heart park" (*jiexin gongyuan*), i.e., a park "integrating leisure and greening." Evolutionary rhetoric is used to



**Figure 5.1.** Public square in Pine Mansion urban village, Shenzhen. © Anne-Christine Trémon.

describe the change in a *Southern Daily* article: “Taking advantage of the opportunity to create a livable community ... wasteland overgrown with weeds and littered with garbage has become a street heart park.”<sup>8</sup> The “park” (actually a small square) is situated on the far side of the pond that faces the ancestral temple (*citang*). It stands next to the community office and the main shareholding company’s headquarters and is bordered by *diaolou*, tower buildings built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by merchants and returned overseas Chinese, the village’s most prosperous members, to display their wealth. These *diaolou* have been moved from their original sites among the low-rise houses with tiled roofs to clear space for the construction of high-rise buildings.

Presenting the square as if created out of chaos and dirt, the *Southern Daily* makes no reference to the former village space it has actually replaced. The article hints at Pine Mansion’s long history but does not mention the ancestral temple, the main reason why this village square lies there. There is little greening, but the village’s renovated public square includes a children’s playground and fitness equipment, a concrete stage for communal and propaganda activities, and a brand-new basketball court, replacing the old one. Until 2016 the basketball ground was fenced and kept locked for the use

of only the native-villager basketball players. After the government funded the renovation, the fence was removed, and the area was opened to all. Now children and adults play and exercise there during the day.

While the concept of the livable community is rather vague, it denotes a wish to combine urban renovation with migrant integration: “In Pine Mansion, where migrant workers form the majority of the population, the demand for leisure [facilities] was particularly urgent.”<sup>9</sup> Pine Mansion’s migrants had not awaited governmental intervention, however: since the early 2010s couples had strolled in the evenings around the stalls offering cheap clothes and counterfeit items for sale, young factory workers had clustered around the pool tables on the sidewalks provided by internet cafés, and children had played and adults had danced on whatever tract of space was available. Now, apart from the playing and the dancing, most of this activity is gone as a result of the industrial and migrant population upgrading policies described in chapters 2 and 3.

Cleanliness, acceptable leisure, and governmental presence together form what is understood as a livable community and a civilized city. The creation of China’s livable communities largely amounts to creating neatly demarcated public spaces, earmarked for leisure, that everyone knows have been paid for by the government. When asked whether Pine Mansion’s public square was open to all, most responded that it was, because the government had paid for it. The government makes its demiurgic intervention visible by using it to advertise its policies with slogans and informative posters. However, nobody in Pine Mansion uses the term “street heart park”; they call it “[the place] near the ancestral temple” (*citang nabian*). When I referred to it as a public square (*guangchang*), several people expressed the opinion that it certainly could not qualify as a square due to its small size, and one exclaimed, “It’s certainly not a public square—it’s a basketball court!”

The pond between the temple and the square confers the impression of a wide-open space, but the usable space is much smaller than it appears. Many migrants complained about the small size of the park and lamented the lack of space for leisure activities. Most of the green spaces around Pine Mansion are owned by a private golf course company and inaccessible to ordinary citizens. Within the community the density of the buildings leaves very little space for leisure. Besides the temple square I counted only three tiny spaces at crossroads and one small playground with government-provided play and fitness equipment. The temple square is by far the largest

space. It was the only point of reference for Mrs. Bei, who had just arrived from Henan Province to live in the village with her daughter and son-in-law. She had trouble orienting herself because, unlike the village she had come from, “the buildings are so close together you can hardly see the sun.”<sup>10</sup> Confirming the diagnosis of splintered urbanism resulting from the concentration of efforts on the temple square and the lack of space elsewhere, Mrs. Yu, the social worker, noted that the fact that activities are only organized in the temple square excludes a large proportion of the urban community’s residents due to their numbers and the distance many have to walk to get there.

The native villagers are proud of the upgraded square, mentioning it frequently as one of the major changes to the village that urbanization has brought. When asked, they state that there should be no discrimination between themselves and newcomers—whom they refer to as outsiders, *waidiren*—in the use of public facilities. The fact that the government paid for the remaking of the public square and installed the basketball court probably plays a role here. The space is indeed public, in the sense that diverse people use it for a variety of activities and interact with one another there. However, the dividing line that sharply differentiates native villagers from migrants in the community is visible in their use of this public space, where a temporal division can be observed between natives and outsiders, as shown next.

### *Dearth of Public Space in River Hamlet*

In July 2020 the Xi’an Municipal Development and Reform Committee published the Livable and Happy Community-Building Plan 2020–21.<sup>11</sup> With this policy the municipal government aimed to implement measurable goals and concrete promises at the community level. The plan sees the ideal livable community as one providing public services, including transport, schools, exercise equipment, bookshops, restaurants, medical centers, seniors’ centers, and efficient offices verifying and issuing identification and other civil documents. As it is disseminated down the administrative hierarchy from the municipal to the district, local, and finally community level, the officials of each echelon are expected to replace these broad goals with more measurable goals tailored to local circumstances. A variety of assessment criteria are adopted at the community level because the officials enacting these policies have to consider existing resources, what they can afford, and where extra funding might be obtained.

Each urban district determines how it will distribute its funds among the communities it governs. Generally Xi'an's core and older districts have prioritized improving living conditions, especially for marginalized populations such as retirees, former factory workers, and manual laborers. As one community official commented, "Economic reform was gentler in these older communities due to social stability concerns."<sup>12</sup> By contrast, in Gaoxin High-Tech District, which includes River Hamlet, economic growth has been prioritized over social stability, resulting in very selective approaches targeting only some marginalized groups, such as the former factory workers who had enjoyed a complete set of social and health services in the socialist era. For the rest, a policy of *laissez-faire* prevailed for as long as River Hamlet's informal economy was left to prosper—until the demolition.

The government has made virtually no attempt to finance public facilities. In densely populated River Hamlet, empty land is rare, so public space is both very limited and divided. There are two kinds of public space: first, two of the five former natural villages (see chapter 1 and map 1.7) have squares near the village committee (*cunweihui*) buildings. There is also a tiny green space at the end of a pedestrian overpass and a public square in a private mall in the south of the former village.

One of the former village committee squares is three blocks from River Hamlet's main street, hidden from view by the buildings surrounding it and with a narrow entrance. Walking in, one finds oneself in this tiny square with access to the former village temple complex, which now houses a village clinic, a seniors' center, and a seniors' university. Most migrants who work and live along the main street know of the square but rarely use it. Mrs. Yang from Xianyang, a city west of Xi'an, who arrived with her son to live in River Hamlet three years ago, said that she had passed the square many times but had never entered it, thinking it for native villagers only. Mrs. Zao, who originated from a rural area in the neighboring province, Shanxi, knew of its existence and about the native villagers' dancing and other activities in it as she had kept a vegetable shop next to it for ten years.

The local government has attempted to make the square a more official urban public space by installing a toilet at the side of the square next to the temple and the clinic. Since 2016, under the slogan "Toilet Revolution," city governments have built numerous public toilets in urban spaces (Wang 2020). On the main street a sign indicates their whereabouts. The natives felt that this government instal-

lation was depriving them of space they had exclusively enjoyed. Mrs. Wang, enthusiastic about practicing public square dance and socializing with her friends in this tiny square, commented, "It's so filthy to dance right next to a toilet! Can you imagine?" She admitted that the locals did not want the square opened to outsiders to practice dancing in. For natives, the government's installation of a public toilet in the village square was tantamount to taking away what they considered theirs.

Migrants thought hard when asked, "Is there any public space here?" Several ended up identifying just one area, the tiny green space at the end of the overpass. "It's so tiny it's invisible!" exclaimed Mrs. Cheng, who had been making jewelry in River Hamlet for fifteen years (see chapter 1), adding that she was sure that just two parked full-sized cars would fill the entire space. Moreover, the green space was a requirement in the construction of the overpass to satisfy the general condition that there must be a certain amount of green space with every construction of urban infrastructure (Li et al. 2009). Some street vendors set up their food stands on it, at the risk of being fined, and thus this intended public space became a private retail space.

### *Livable Communities and No-Man's-Land in Chengdu*

The livable city rhetoric is also in evidence in Chengdu. The Chengdu Urban Master Plan (2016–35) called for the building of a "high-quality, harmonious and livable city" by 2022.<sup>13</sup> In Chengdu the connection between municipal livable city rhetoric and community-level projects has been particularly strong. The wide-ranging reforms to the city's community governance system that began in 2017 were issued under the title "Opinions on Deepening the Development and Governance of Urban and Rural Communities to Build High-quality, Harmonious, and Livable Communities," explicitly linking grassroots community governance to building a livable city.<sup>14</sup> The document includes thirty separate points with goals as varied as strengthening grassroots party organizations, promoting volunteerism, improving community-service facilities, and unifying architectural design standards.

As part of the livable city project, the city launched the Chengdu's Top 100 Model Communities competition in 2018 to publicize the concept of community development and governance and promote the building of high-quality, harmonious, and livable communities (Li 2019). The newly created North Gate community was one of the top ten communities selected for the city's new governance approach.

There are several types of public space in South and North Gate communities: the communal spaces inside the gated communities; the streets and sidewalks, schools and schoolyards; the community centers; the formal state-run and informal parks; and some bits of open ground. The state-run public schools have strict control of access to their schoolyards, so these spaces are not public in the sense of being accessible to the public.<sup>15</sup>

There are two formal state-run parks in the joint community parks: a small one and a larger one called Elegant Culture Park that was opened in 2019. The latter, a paved area of about one hundred square meters, is at the corner of an intersection by the community's new Riverside Middle School (see map 1.6). The statue of a famous local poet has been erected in the center, and there are benches and exercise equipment around the perimeter. At the corner of the intersection opposite the park is a large billboard listing the twelve core socialist values championed by Xi Jinping; in short, the park is a didactic, regulated, and highly visible space.<sup>16</sup> Mothers from the nearby resettlement estate sometimes gather here to meet and chat with their young children in tow. But the park is generally not well used as it is completely paved and open, offering no respite from the sun. In many Chinese cities, public spaces designed for window-dressing purposes are often tailored for government-sanctioned functions rather than for city dwellers' quotidian uses (Miao 2011).

This is a stark contrast to a less-regulated green space along the river, where a stretch connected by about a kilometer of paths meanders through verdant grass and shade-giving trees. Its many visitors make it lively at all hours of the day: elderly Tai Chi practitioners gather in the morning, children and their caretakers wander through in the day, and young and middle-aged men gather to play basketball in the evening. This green space sees little state management and is less regulated than the formal park with its mandatory signs, waste bins, and benches. It is not even considered a park, a perception that crystallized during the resident survey. One respondent strolling by the river complained that the neighborhood lacked parks. Asked if this space was not a park, she answered no, because the government was not managing it. The term *gongyuan*, "park," contains the word *gong*, "public." Although it is not officially a park, this green space is well attended, because unlike the official public park it lends itself to a variety of purposes.

In fact it is less regulated because the municipal government had loaned it to a nearby real-estate developer over a decade earlier in exchange for help with selling the housing units. After the units were sold, the developer tried to return the responsibility for the

land to the government, which refused, informing the company that it was now responsible for its maintenance. The developer has hired a landscaping company to look after the space, but it is clear that the standards of maintenance and control in this park are much more relaxed than those of official city parks. The vegetation is less carefully manicured, and residents engage in a number of unsanctioned activities, including planting vegetables, burning incense and paper money for their ancestors, and even parking their cars (see chapter 2). The wastelands (*huangdi*) in the community, large fields that have been cleared but are still waiting to be developed, are similarly quasi-public spaces used by residents to grow vegetables. Such spaces can be paralleled with commons, in that they escape both market and state regulation. However, they do not fully conform to Ostrom's definition of commons in that they are not subject to any rules defined by the grassroots community.

Otherwise, the impact of previous village social spaces and social life seems to be minimal in shaping the use of public space due to the top-down-directed resettlement of South Gate. The new community-level management officers headquartered at the community centers play a significant role in running spaces intended for the public. These centers offer space for leisure and education both indoors and outside (see next section) and are the main state-sanctioned public spaces in both communities. Although formal state power stops at the subdistrict level and does not reach the community, the community management offices determine how funding is secured from the government and the types of activity for which government grants are sought, such as day and evening classes. Of course these activities are not reserved for former villagers, despite the latter's current dominance in key positions. Although the odd college-educated non-native manages to land a job at the community center, the fact that the community's leadership, including the positions of party secretary and head of the residents' committee, is made up only of former villagers plays a role in their strong feeling of entitlement to certain public spaces and activities, which incomers do not share. The practical uses of the community centers highlight this separation.

## Segregated Sociality and Care Practices in Public Spaces

Because of the limited space available, municipal governments refurbish preexisting public squares rather than creating new ones. In all three cases, the native villagers have a sense of legitimate priority in the use of public space, enhanced by the fact that many public sites

were formerly village public spaces where communal events were, and in some cases still are, held, and because local management bodies are generally made up of former villagers. Although government-funded public squares are intended for use by all, observation of their use shows the native villagers' clear tendency to assert their priority. Rivalry over the use of public space is therefore strong, although it differs across the three villages, reflecting the class-based relations between established native rentiers and migrant outsiders (Elias and Scotson 1994; Carrier and Kalb 2015). While several studies have pointed out the mistrust and lack of interaction between natives and newcomers, this rivalry worsens the existing de facto segregation (Wang and Messner 2012; Liu 2019; Li and Tong 2020). Wang (2015) mentions one case in Zengcheng city, Guangdong province, where the conflictual situation escalated into street fights.

The most glaring contrast is evident in the intensive way migrant newcomers use public space for livelihood and reproductive activities. Previous chapters have highlighted the uses of public and communal space for street-vending and gardening activities: this section focuses on caring for others. Brenda Chalfin (2014) argues that when performed in public, care practices, deemed to belong to the domestic sphere of reproduction, subvert state understandings of publicness. In urban villages, newcomers appropriate public space—or rather, exercise their right of use on it—and make a claim on the state by forming a social commons “organized around access by users to social resources created by specific kinds of human labor, such as caring for the sick and the elderly, educating children and maintaining households” (Nonini 2006: 166). In the Chinese context, this commoning of public space is encouraged by the state's livability policies. As shown by the way the state equips new public spaces with children's playgrounds, but also public toilets as in some cases examined next, the use of public space for care practices may not be the most valorized among state-sanctioned uses of public space, but it is not necessarily unforeseen by the state (Smart 2018; Zhang, Wu, and Zhong 2018), nor is it considered illegitimate. This underscores the complementary, rather than the opposition, of commons and public goods.

### *Divided Use of Limited Public Space in Pine Mansion*

There still is a sense that Pine Mansion's government-refurbished temple square somehow belongs to the native residents. Not only does the entire space, including the renovated temple, give value to

their new apartments, but their power as native owners is also asserted by their hegemonic use of the space—their spatial privilege (Loughran 2014). This is especially true on the ancestor's birthday on the twentieth of the ninth lunar month. The entire space is filled with tables receiving donations and selling firecrackers, an alfresco dining area, billboards listing the donations received, and a stage for musical and dance performances near the temple where the ancestral worship is performed. The participants sit on plastic stools around a hundred tables on the basketball ground to eat the meal cooked on large stoves in a small annex behind the administrative building, where several hundred kilos of meat are spread on plaited mats on the floor. People walk back and forth between the ancestral temple and the kitchen, meeting and exchanging news. Many migrant newcomers know about these activities and come to watch them, as confirmed by the surveys, but they do not know whether they are allowed to participate or what is being celebrated.

Although the community center's social workers make use of the temple square for charitable events, these mainly target migrants (both volunteers and beneficiaries), further underlining the separation between native and migrant residents. The daily temporal division in the use of the temple square also reveals this separation. Although native children are sometimes brought to the square by their grandmothers, the demographic predominance of the migrant population and the fact that many live in small apartments account for the majority occupation of the square by grandparents caring for children. Many are men, elderly migrants who sit chatting for hours while keeping an eye on their grandchildren. They complained about the lack of public toilets. One member of this gathering of "temple square grandfathers" described his daily schedule: cooking breakfast, going down to the square, returning home to cook lunch, going down to the square, having dinner, and often going back to the square again. Every time he or his grandchild needs the toilet, they have to go back to their apartment.

Among the people getting a haircut on Beneficence Day was a man in his fifties from Anhui, who had been living in Pine Mansion for more than ten years. His wife's brother had resigned from his teaching job in the 1990s and moved there to run a small factory. He was doing well, so Mr. Hong and his wife joined him. With the financial crisis in 2008 the factory went bankrupt, but although his brother returned home, they stayed. Hong's son works there, and his grandson is at a private school in Pine Mansion. Hong cares for him after school. He is unemployed, having lost his livelihood when



**Figure 5.2.** Children playing basketball in Pine Mansion. © Anne-Christine Trémon.

the Chengguan confiscated the cart from which he sold tofu that he made with his wife. Renting a shop floor costs several hundred RMB a month. Now his wife is ill, and his only source of income is his rural old-age pension of sixty to seventy RMB per month. Hong commented on the native residents who make money doing nothing but renting out apartments, stating that “they have more and more money,” and that although well-intended, activities such as Beneficence Day would not create substantial change in people’s lives.<sup>17</sup>

Migrant outsiders themselves emphasize their separation from native former villagers. They frequently use the word “they” (*tamen*) to refer to them, sometimes without even adding “locals” (*bendiren*). Three women in their fifties who were chatting on a tiny playground in a peripheral neighborhood commented about the temple square: “Those facilities are being used by the natives, so why would we go there?” one of them exclaimed. It is true that in the evenings the basketball courts are used exclusively by native young men. Mrs. Ding, a forty-eight-year-old woman from Jiangxi who has been living in Pine Mansion for eight years and in Shenzhen for twenty, noted that “before, there were not that many people [using the public square]

because *they* had locked it up and wouldn't let us in" (*bu gei jin*). She added that it was still mostly used by employees of the community center and the police station after work; that is, by native residents.

Indeed I observed that when these men arrived at around 6:30 to 7:00 each evening, the children and teenagers playing there left. Because it takes up most of the usable public space, a basketball match, which happens almost every day, consigns other users to the edges of the square. Mrs. Tan, a street cleaner in her fifties from Hubei who occasionally brings her two-year-old grandchild to the temple square, stated that *they* (the natives) do "large-scale activities" (*daxing de huodong*), such as basketball.<sup>18</sup> Although in principle everyone has the right to use the main public square, the space used for activities is indeed divided between natives and outsiders in inverse proportion to their numbers. Moreover, while native women dance in the open space between the pond and the temple at night, non-natives, mostly women, also congregate in the evenings to dance and do aerobics on smaller squares and sidewalks elsewhere in the *shequ*.

Mrs. Wang (see chapter 1) was born in 1950 and lives with her second son and her grandson in a house she has built in new Xiangxi neighborhood (see map 1.5). Her eldest son lives in Martinique, and her husband in Hong Kong. Her husband does not return often because he is "not used to living in the village" anymore, she said.<sup>19</sup> She lives like a typical rentier: in the morning she goes out early to exercise, then she takes the bus to the subdistrict, i.e., the former township (*zhen*), for morning tea and dumplings with friends, shops at the market for vegetables and groceries, and then returns to her house to cook for herself and for her son and grandson when they are around. Native villagers like Mrs. Wang display their status by spending money in subdistrict restaurants and shops rather than those in Pine Mansion; they also spend money playing mahjong every afternoon, although the village leaders disapprove of this habit. The number of mahjong parlors in Pine Mansion has visibly grown, despite being illegal and receiving inspections from the anti-pornography and anti-gambling office. Until a few years ago Mrs. Wang bet several thousand yuan, a lot of money, every afternoon. Because her losses were so heavy, she opted for another mahjong parlor, run by a woman from Hunan, where the stakes are lower. She stressed the difference between native residents' and outsiders' stakes: the former "play big." She now regularly plays every afternoon with a circle of five or six friends, all migrant women who have been living in Pine Mansion for years. Newcomers who have lived in the village for a long time have learned the local mahjong rules and generally play by them.

Another in-between private-public space, where the difference between natives and outsiders is felt less, is the large mall built in the north of Pine Mansion in 2016. Inside the mall, leisure is expensive: the film theater and skating rink cater to the children of families living in luxury apartments with access to a golf course and private international schools. They also provide plenty of free or inexpensive outdoor space for skateboarding, sports, and strolling. The non-native resident Mrs. Ding commented that the mall was about the best place around. She lives close to the mall, and it takes her only ten minutes to walk there from her home. She goes almost every week. The native villager Mrs. Wang took her grandchildren there when they came on a visit from Martinique.

In spite of the emerging native-outsider sociality around gambling, other interaction remains rare. When asked about the relationship between native Pine Mansioners and outsiders, one spontaneous representative of the temple square grandfathers, Mr. He from Hunan, answered, laughing, “I haven’t interacted with them—they’re like total strangers!” (*moshengren*). He stated that most Pine Mansion natives do not live locally, many living in Hong Kong and even Malaysia. He and his friends at the chess table said that they have nothing to do with their landlords because they hire people to look after the management of their buildings.<sup>20</sup> Elderly newcomers are more knowledgeable about native residents because they spend a lot of time in the temple square observing goings-on in the urban village.

### *Rivalry over Dance Space in River Hamlet*

Mrs. Zhou, aged fifty, a native from a village nearby who married into her husband’s family River Hamlet, stopped going to practice public square dancing in November 2018 because she had no heart for dancing or enjoying herself with her home on the verge of being demolished: “When there’s a catastrophe, how can you dance?,” she asked, in tears.<sup>21</sup> Until the demolition, dancing was the most widespread use of public space. “Public square dancing” was the answer given by 65 of the 163 survey respondents to the question, “What is the most important public activity you take part in within the community?”<sup>22</sup> “Drumming and dancing” (*luogu* and *yangge*) is a popular Shaanxi rural dance routine with rhythmic music and repetitive patterns of steps. Both the men and the women participating often wear brightly colored makeup. In the past, drumming and dancing was an expensive pastime that required the entire village to collect donations for, rehearse for, and organize the performance every year at the

spring festival. The performance style is unique to each village, and village dance groups would meet in competition for hours of intensive drumming and dancing. However, these spectacular events are now a distant memory, as there is no longer sufficient public space for them or any association organizing competitions.

Both native and migrant residents shared an interest in the search for space in which to practice public square dancing. The former were holding on to their limited space for this activity, in the village-committee squares. At the narrow entrance gate to River Hamlet's Team 1's village-committee square, a barking dog was chained inside a cage. The intention was clear: stay away or get hurt. In mid-2018, when the rumor of the impending demolition was at its peak, the public toilet was locked and a maintenance sign was affixed to the door. A group of native former villagers was playing cards beside it. One of them had the key to the toilet and opened it only for the use of the group.<sup>23</sup>

Social activities in public spaces besides the old village committee sites were already limited prior to the demolition because all available space on the main street was in commercial use. Jewelry, food, and makeup stalls occupied the sidewalks. As a result, local residents had to venture south to a public square next to a private mall (map 1.7). The square was built on land that had belonged to River Hamlet and had been expropriated by the district government and allocated to one of Xi'an's universities to extend its campus in 1999, and then it was sold to a private real-estate developer in 2016 (see Xu, Yeh, and Wu 2009 on the commercial uses of publicly allocated land). Anticipating a growing market for entertainment and leisure, the developer built a four-story mall with a glass and steel facade but had only managed to lease the top floor to a movie theater. The retail spaces were empty, with "Coming Soon!" signs in their windows. The major reason for this lack of success was the development of a grand new mall called the "District-Level Central Business District" only five hundred meters to the east.

Because of the short distance between the failed mall and River Hamlet's central residential communities, many residents, before they were evicted, would go to this public square every evening. Most were middle-aged or elderly residents, many from rural areas of Shaanxi or neighboring provinces, who had come to River Hamlet to help their adult children care for their children. Both natives and newcomers enjoyed the open space and lack of crowds. In the evenings several groups danced for hours. Makeshift playgrounds with pretend trains, balloons, and roller skates intended to attract

customers drew teenagers and grandparents and parents with children. Native residents and outsiders mingled. Thus in the context of this dearth of public space, as in Pine Mansion, the area in front of the private mall had become the main destination for public square dancing, childcare, chatting, and other activities. It appears that where government-led redevelopment has failed, public space has appeared.

Mrs. Jia, from Baoji in Shaanxi Province, moved to River Hamlet to live with her son's family and help with their newborn child. She had arrived a year earlier and found a job in the urban village as a waitress to make some extra cash. Many grandparents in their fifties and sixties had come to River Hamlet to work to financially contribute to their children's families and to care for grandchildren. Others had come to work and save money before returning to a small city or village to join their children's families. Their similarities helped them to make friends in the public square. They watched the young children playing while they chatted about their in-laws, harvests, and agricultural work back home. The high cost of living in the High-Tech Zone was largely evident in the mortgages of their white-collar professional children, whose mothers often complained how unfortunate their daughters and sons were to have to shoulder such a big debt while the River Hamlet natives did nothing but accumulate more wealth.

A group of up to seven migrant women often gathered around the children's playground, a small area that some shop owners had provided with roller skates, a bouncy castle, a miniature train track, and other makeshift facilities, which could be accessed for a small fee. Several public square dance groups, mostly women with a few men, used this square as a rehearsal space. Through surveys Wang Bo learned that these were often grandparents on a visit or parents whose children were at school. They often said, "We're done with childrearing!" They periodically moved between River Hamlet and their natal villages. Some said they had to take care of their crops, while others explained that they felt more comfortable living in their village than in a high-rise apartment. "Less complicated family relationships, more people you know from childhood," Mrs. Jia said. She felt that she fitted in with her small circle of close friends in River Hamlet but never felt truly herself there. She stayed mainly because her son needed her help and felt that it was her responsibility, but she quite enjoyed the relaxing atmosphere and the many things to do there.<sup>24</sup>

Fewer native former villagers came to this square than migrants, mainly because the middle-aged and older ones did not feel that it

suited their village lifestyle. They could easily afford to pay to get into the children's playground but found it little use and a waste of money. Instead the women preferred the old village committee sites for their dance rehearsals, and the native village men preferred to gather in a fish and flower market six hundred meters to the north in a neighboring former village. Despite the distance, they found the low-key single-floor shops and small green space more suitable and village-like. The steel and glass mall made them self-conscious about how they were dressed. "*Bu zizai*" (not feeling like oneself) was how Mr. Yin, a fifty-eight-year-old native villager, described it. He went to the market twice a week to chat with friends, including other native villagers and some bird-shop owners. This meeting space gave them the opportunity to keep up their village identity and maintain stable relations throughout the redevelopment's rapid demolition and rebuilding.

After the demolition began in late 2018, some native villagers began to disseminate articles and blog posts they had found online about illegal sales of land by the former village leaders, including the land that was now the public square next to the private mall. The natives' dissatisfaction with their compensation for the demolition of their houses surfaced in their questioning of the legitimacy of this public square. Why had they never been asked about the sale of this land? How was it that the former village leaders were allegedly promoted or given cash compensation after signing off the village's common land? This dissemination of information was stopped by the local subdistrict office, which quickly removed the printed screenshots posted on walls and electricity poles. Forming an oppositional public in this instance, they used public space to voice their dissent, but were quickly muted.

### *Public Rusticity and Middle-Class Elevation in South Gate*

The primary task of integration in North and South Gate communities is focused on the native villagers themselves. The *shequ* leaders make efforts to turn them into proper middle-class urbanites resembling the new inhabitants. Unlike in Pine Mansion, the largest group of outsiders is composed of the largely middle-class residents of the commercial apartment complexes, who distinguish themselves from the natives through their practices of consumption and education in public spaces.

Most of the weekday regulars at the North Gate community center are elderly villagers.<sup>25</sup> The center is at the edge of a large resettlement

estate for former villagers, contributing to the sense that it is part of the village space. Murals on the walls depict fields and scenes of rural life, making the rural past an object of consumption for urbanites. The community's designation as a model of community governance has meant that photographs of the murals have appeared in many local newspapers, attracting visitors from across Chengdu. They connect the space to its village roots and suggest a continuity between former rural village sociability and the urban present. Apart from the villagers, the other residents who use the space are stay-at-home mothers, with and without their children. On the weekends some parents bring their children to the center for classes in Chinese culture, although the quality of these classes is not considered high and only households who cannot afford private classes attend. During the week, while their children are at school, some of these mothers attend tea-serving (*gongfu cha*) classes.

Visiting urbanites from other Chengdu neighborhoods often sit in the outdoor teahouse after visiting the murals. It appears to be something of a pastoralist practice, celebrating a nostalgic rural idyll, as evidenced by the number of selfies taken there. Teahouses belong to a distinctively urban tradition of commoner public sociability that was particularly strong in Chengdu in the first half of the twentieth century (Wang 1998), which seems paradoxically reactivated along an urban/rural opposition in the clear division between the rustic outdoor teahouse that occupies a large part of the community center's outdoor space and the refined tea-serving classes held in the indoor tea studio. This separation suggests a dichotomous structuring of public-rustic and private-urban public space that "symbolizes and realizes" different hexis, or bodily dispositions (Bourdieu 1970, 1972: 193). Apart from the often-retired visitors from other neighborhoods, the outdoor teahouse is mainly used by retired native villagers, former peasants, to chat and relax. Meeting at the teahouse is simultaneously a way of asserting their status as new urbanites and of maintaining positive rural identities in spite of the devaluation of the countryside (Bruckermann 2020).

Inside the tea studio, stay-at-home women and some elderly men educate themselves in how to serve tea, which requires adopting specific body postures (especially when it comes to long-spout tea serving). Tea-serving and tea-tasting is an aspect of China's contemporary bourgeois hexis that reflects the practitioner's knowledge, refinement, and respect for tradition. It has become a popular pastime for middle-class urban dwellers and is a social class marker similar to that of wine- or whisky-tasting in Western countries. The tea students do not participate in other activities, such as the dancing, which is

dominated by a group of village women who meet in the mornings to practice in front of the community center. They have a changing repertoire of routines and costumes and frequently perform for audiences at the many ceremonies and official tours that take place in the community center. Conversely, the village women do not participate in the tea classes.

This indoor/outdoor, rustic/upper-class division is traversed by Mrs. Li, who teaches the tea-serving classes and is the manager of the indoor teahouse. She is from another rural area on the outskirts of Chengdu and married into South Gate village, making her both an insider and an outsider. She began studying with a tea master several years ago during the relocation process, and described how tea culture has transformed not only her mind but also her body. She wears traditional cotton or hemp gowns in muted colors, ties her hair back simply, and wears minimal makeup. This distinguishes her from the village women who participate in the square dancing with their dyed and permed hair, bright clothing, and heavy makeup. Mrs. Li was clearly nervous about teaching the tea classes, most notably when she was describing the history and origins of various teas, but she had no hesitation about strictly correcting the posture, gestures, and facial expressions of her more educated middle-class students. Indeed, much of the class focuses on the physical act of pouring tea rather than the qualities of the tea itself. For Mrs. Li and her students, serving tea is a tool of social and physical elevation.

The divisions in the usage of public space are further reflected in the differences between the resettlement and the commercial estates. While communal space on the resettlement estates is virtually nonexistent, the quasi-public space in the private and gated communities is largely only accessible to the residents of each apartment complex. Some of the commercial buildings with elevators attempt to reproduce the functions of the community center within their own walls. Apart from installing exercise and playground equipment, one complex has created a meeting room, where elderly middle-class residents meet for choir practice. Another has set up a community classroom in which, with the support of the North Gate community center, Jessica Wilczak taught English evening classes to adults. One of the reasons for organizing these classes, the facilitator from the community center explained, was to reach out to middle-aged, middle-class residents in the community. "Most people have the idea that the community (*shequ*) is just for old people and children," she said. "That's not true anymore. The community is here to serve all residents." This reaching out by the community centers, however, happens outside the centers themselves on the commercial estates.

## Hopes of Accessing Urban *Hukou* and the Right to the City

Many working-class newcomers living in River Hamlet and Pine Mansion use public space for childcare. Carrying out care activities in a public space signals a right to urban life that “combines the practical needs of everyday life with a substantive rather than abstract conception of modern citizenship” (Gandy 2006: 388, in reference to Lefebvre 1996 [1968]: 158). This section explores the sense of entitlement behind non-native residents’ decisions to claim, or not claim, their right to the city, both in Lefebvre’s sense of the actual exercise of one’s right to access urban space and in the juridical sense of applying for urban citizenship. The Chinese *hukou* system is fundamentally based on the principle of territorial entitlement: individuals receive welfare benefits in the locality in which they are registered. The responsibility for such welfare provision falls to local government, and there is considerable local variation in terms of both access to local citizenship and the level of public goods provision (chapter 1, Smart and Smart 2001). By denying the migrants who have built China’s modern megacities their welfare benefits and many social services in the locality where they live and work, restrictive *hukou* policies effectively devolve the cost of social reproduction upon the migrants and the localities from which they originate (Friedman 2018; Chuang 2020). However, migrant urban-village residents’ desire to acquire local *hukou* is not unanimous. Their wish to change their *hukou* depends on their potential for social reproduction back in their home village or town, based mainly on their landholdings. It also depends on their class-based sense of entitlement and their vision of their right to the city. Finally, it is shaped by the policy of the city they live in; this section focuses most on the case of Shenzhen, which has the greatest selectivity in its points system for earning *hukou*.

### *Hopes of Accessing Hukou*

Shen and Li (2020) note that the desire to engage in economic upgrading, coupled with restrictions to city growth, results in a particular dilemma in the Chinese context:

Ideally speaking, if a city can host an unlimited number of people, economic upgrading can be achieved through the attraction of higher-skilled workers at a faster pace than lower-skilled workers. This would mean that the population of these cities would continue to grow. However, the concerns over “big city disease” has resulted in the motivation to cap the total population of a

city. This means, in order to attract more people, a city must first reduce the total population. Then who should leave? (Shen and Li 2020: 6)

The answer for many cities is to target the so-called “high-end population” (and deter the low end) through a selective *hukou* policy that attracts highly skilled new residents in the effort to upgrade the existing population along with the economy.

Among the 163 responses to the randomized survey carried out in River Hamlet, 69 had local *hukou* and 94 did not. Very few of the latter were contemplating a change in their *hukou* registration from their locality of origin to Xi’an, but it is not worth citing precise numbers because the survey results were strongly biased. The survey was carried out before the shock of the demolition was suddenly imposed upon River Hamlet. What is clear is that many recent migrants who worked in the service economy were struggling to establish a foothold in their new environment and did not consider purchasing an urban apartment and getting urban *hukou* attainable in the foreseeable future. For them, living in River Hamlet was only transitional until they moved back to their rural origins or the closest township or county seat to purchase housing and care for their parents (see Zhan 2018 for a similar case in Beijing). Rather than saving money to buy a spot in the city, they primarily focused on saving to live elsewhere.

The sudden and complete urban transformation of River Hamlet had been kept secret from both natives and migrants, who did not believe that the district would dare to carry out what had been rumored for years. Moreover, there were projects afoot to integrate migrants into urban society through a relaxation of *hukou* policy that had been introduced just months before the demolition, which welcomed high-school-educated migrants and encouraged them to transfer their *hukou* to River Hamlet.

When Wang Bo’s fieldwork began in April 2018, every day a dozen or so rural migrants were having their *hukou* relocated at the household registration office (*huji bangongshi*) next door to the River Hamlet subdistrict office, as long as they could prove that they were joining family members with local urban *hukou* or putting down a payment on an urban apartment. But by early 2019 the entire main street of River Hamlet had been demolished, forcing its residents to move out: tenant migrants first, property-owning natives next. Migrants who lost their livelihoods and apartments also lost their chance to transfer their *hukou*. But as the previous section on temporary stays for the purpose of caregiving has shown, and for reasons that are further explored in the case of Pine Mansion below, many

migrants are opting to circulate between city and countryside rather than give up their rural *hukou* (Chen and Fan 2016).

Of the 159 residents who responded to the Chengdu survey, just over half (52.2 percent) claimed to have local *hukou*.<sup>26</sup> Of those with nonlocal *hukou*, less than a quarter (23.6 percent) said they were planning to apply for local *hukou*. Of this minority, 75 percent were under sixty, which did not differ drastically from the proportion of nonlocals who were *not* planning to apply for local *hukou*, of whom 69.7 percent were under sixty. It seems that age was not the biggest determinant of whether or not a nonlocal resident intended to apply for local *hukou*. However, because the surveys were conducted mostly during the day and on weekdays, the working population is under-represented. It seems likely that a majority of the working population living in the commercial complexes either had a Chengdu *hukou* or were planning to acquire one. Indeed, acquisition of an apartment and that of Chengdu *hukou*, which were already closely linked, have become even more so under the new points system, with home ownership one of the easiest paths to acquiring local *hukou*.

A Chengdu *hukou* is becoming more appealing to middle-class residents across China: the city still has relatively affordable housing compared to Beijing, Shanghai, or Shenzhen, as well as a high standard of living. It is also easier to acquire: one middle-class couple in South Gate who had lived in Beijing for eighteen years without being able to secure a local *hukou* decided to relocate to Chengdu and succeeded in finally obtaining one. The husband was working in Beijing but returned to Chengdu on the weekends to spend time with his wife and son. He claimed to know many others in their situation, the husband working in a tier-one city (*yixian chengshi*) and the wife and child living in a tier-two city (*erxian chengshi*).<sup>27</sup> “In Beijing it’s not enough just to buy a house,” the husband explained, “you need to have gone to particular universities and have a master’s degree or even a doctorate.” Requirements are barely looser in Shenzhen, also a tier-one city.

Among the seventy-five non-native and nonlocal *hukou* holders surveyed in Pine Mansion, only forty-seven replied when asked if they wanted to apply for local *hukou*: thirty-six did not, and only eleven did. This is unrelated to their peasant or rural status, which is distributed equally between these forty-seven respondents and does not seem to depend on their length of residency in Pine Mansion, which for most was less than five years. The unwillingness to apply for a change of *hukou* among a high proportion of respondents was confirmed in interviews: most non-native respondents answered that

they did not have the means to change their *hukou*, which is only possible for those with money. Even shop owners and white-collar workers in stable employment, who might have the means, stated that they were not willing to transfer their *hukou* unless it would help to get their child into a local public school.<sup>28</sup> Property ownership may be another factor in their decision not to change their *hukou*; a third (thirteen) of those who answered “no” owned property in their hometown.

When they are successful, *hukou* applicants are asked to give up their land-use rights in their native village. Land is considered a form of social security (Chuang 2020), and the urban/rural dualism in land ownership makes it impossible to have both rural land and an urban *hukou*, hence many migrants’ reluctance to transfer their *hukou* despite having the means to do so (Cai 2016; Tyner and Ren 2016). Mrs. Song explained that her son had applied for local *hukou* so that his child can study in the city. But why would she transfer her *hukou*? “That would make no sense, we have hospitals and insurance at home!” She still owns a plot of land in her native village. Mr. He, from Henan, exclaimed that even if it were possible, he would not want to change his *hukou*; his roots are elsewhere, and he and his wife have “no secure source (*zhuolu*) of living.” If his child’s business lost money, he would have no place to escape to. Another temple square grandfather in his sixties would probably have the means to transfer his *hukou* because he lives in a three-bedroom apartment, for which his son pays 3,000 RMB per month. His wife has stayed in Shaanxi. “If I make the transfer I will lose my land; [for now] I still have two mu, and they will be valuable (*zhiqian*) in the future,” he smilingly explained.<sup>29</sup> However, willingness to change one’s *hukou* also seems to depend on age, as most of those who were planning to do so were under forty. Shenzhen’s points system favors younger migrants, and in general people in their twenties and thirties were more willing to answer the question about their plans and more optimistic about their life prospects.

Shenzhen’s system for converting to Shenzhen *hukou*, officially titled “points system for entering *hukou*” (*jifen ruhu*), was set up in 2012 following guidelines promulgated by Guangdong Province in 2011. The system aims to meet the objectives stated in China’s urbanization plan of increasing the size of the registered population while keeping the largest cities’ population within a certain size. Applicants score points for a list of factors and can apply if they reach the qualification mark; they are then ranked based on their maximum score and allowed to transfer their *hukou* based on the available *hukou* quota (see

chapter 1). As well as latitude regarding the relative weights of the variables in the points system, these quotas allow the governments of large cities such as Shenzhen to grant urban *hukou* to a small and selected number of educated high-income migrants who can contribute to the city's fiscal revenue, helping to fund the city's public services.

Shenzhen's points system for the identification of applicants eligible for local *hukou* is ideologically justified in its aim of "enhancing migrant workers' sense of belonging, making migrant workers hopeful, hardworking, more law-abiding, and more caring about the city."<sup>30</sup> The city authorities are preoccupied with regulating and stabilizing the floating population, and they see the points system as an incentive for migrant workers to register and plan their future in terms of place of work and residence. Thus not only does the *hukou* regime itself play a pivotal role in population management and resource allocation through "a series of governmental technologies" based on classification and calculation (Wang and Liu 2018), but the points system is also an instrument for governing the population by making it self-governing.<sup>31</sup>

Not only are applicants selected by the points-based channel according to their potential future contribution to the city budget, but they are also selected on the basis of the contribution already made, creating an incentive to make long-term plans. This is evident in the weight given to home ownership and participation in the social security program (Zhang 2012). The longer an applicant has owned property and contributed to the social security program, the more points they accrue. In 2018, home ownership accounted for about a fifth of the points needed for qualification, and points for participation in the social security program nearly a third. The amount of capital invested and/or tax paid also rates significantly; age and marital status less so. One further major category for earning points is the quality (*suzhi*) of the applicant, which is appraised in terms of educational credentials (type of degree or professional certificate); awards for outstanding performance at work; participation in charity activities (e.g., donations made to local communities), and volunteering at events advertising the city, or with the MRT, the city's public transportation network, or at the increasing number of volunteer-based activities that are supposed to foster migrants' integration into the city, such as those supporting charities. Five points can be earned for 250 hours of voluntary service, and two points by donating blood.<sup>32</sup> The threshold for eligibility is generally 100 points, but the real threshold (locally called "pure points," *chun jifen*) varies every year according to the available quota. Temporary residents are ranked each year by their

total number of points, but Shenzhen, which had over 10 million migrants, granted just 10,000 *hukou* in 2018, with only those scoring above 304 points obtaining Shenzhen *hukou* that year.

*Two Rights to the City: State-Sanctioned, and Based on the Commons*

All resident permit-holders (i.e., including *hukou* and non-*hukou* holders) are put into the points-based management scheme that can lead to urban *hukou* and also regulates applications for a school place. Following the 2014 Urbanization Plan, and now the 2021 Plan, all cities with a *hukou*-holding population above five million have adopted points systems, but here I focus only on Shenzhen, which has experimented with these systems already since 2010 with respect to *hukou* and since 2014 with respect to the allocation of school places (see chapter 2).

Not only does changing one's household registration require a huge investment in paid and unpaid labor to earn the number of points needed, but this is also the case when it comes to accessing a key public good such as a place at a public school. The case of Mrs. Gong suggests that the points-based system generates the opposite of a sense of belonging, and that although migrants may feel the injunction to plan their future, yearly adjustments to the points policy create a moving target that can also produce the opposite effect. Mrs. Gong (see chapter 4) is representative of the younger female migrant volunteers, aspiring middle-class incomers who consider it their duty to raise their own quality and that of their children through education, and to contribute to shaping the civilized city through volunteering. She stated, "Maybe some people feel that there can be benefits from volunteering, adding points for getting *hukou*, because for instance when you do fifteen hundred hours you get thirty points, but it also really does offer something; it encourages us."

When we met, Mrs. Gong had just realized that she would not be able to get her son into the local public middle school the following year. Asked if she felt like part of Pine Mansion after all her years spent there, she answered that most of the time she felt like she belonged (*guishugan*): "As long as there aren't any problems in life. But ... when you're facing a very clear problem, eventually you come to feel that you're not a local; there's no way of getting my son into a public school." This was how she introduced the topic. Her two sons were then at the local public primary and middle schools, and in 2018 her youngest son was due to move up to secondary school. When she had originally secured her children's school places, the score (*jifen*) required was not as high as it had become: "Our insurance score [*she-*

*bao jifen*] was just sufficient. Afterward, ... basically we were not able to keep up [*gen bu shangle*]. Many people bought an apartment—they are classified as *diwulei* [grade 5].” Her own score is at the bottom of grade 6 because she does not have social security. Until 2016 a place at a public school could be secured with either social security or a business license, and Mrs. Gong had scored very highly because she had been doing business in Shenzhen for more than ten years. In 2017 the policy was drastically tightened, especially regarding the social insurance requirements, and she now no longer has enough points to get her second son into the public secondary school.<sup>33</sup>

Her position as head of the community’s volunteers’ association did not help, and her son’s teachers could do nothing about it either, although Mrs. Gong confided that she had tried to speak to the head of admissions and to use the connections she had built through volunteering to get her son admitted. She did not consider embarking on collective action such as presenting a petition. She bore no grudge against the system, because she saw the requirements as normal: “Why? Because if it becomes equal for everybody, if there are no requirements, like in our native place [*laojia*] ... the teaching quality cannot be upheld. This is a first-tier city, isn’t it?” (*yixian chengshi*). By emphasizing Shenzhen’s first-tier status, she meant that selectivity is necessary to ensure good-quality education. She considered the system right, justifying it by invoking the principle of length of residency on which it is partly based. She regarded the removal of the social insurance (*shebao*) criterion necessary for the development of society: “There is nothing to be done. Society has to develop.” She did not dare to complain that she was the victim of an abrupt and unanticipated change in policy that she had no time to plan for.

While Mrs. Gong did not have the means to buy an apartment in Pine Mansion, she did not complain about those who jump the queue by buying property; here again she implicitly blamed the choice that she and her husband had made at the very beginning to buy a house in their native village rather than saving for property in Shenzhen. She blamed their own traditionalism: “We built a house in the village. We are traditional over there. [You] have to make a house in your home place first, then elsewhere.” This points to the difficult dilemma in which many migrant workers are caught, juggling between building a house on land in the home village to keep as a safety net and renouncing all rights in the place of origin by selling the land and investing as much as possible in, for instance, insurance and property that might qualify for points and accelerate their *hukou* transfer.<sup>34</sup> Mrs. Gong even blamed herself for not making the decision to buy insurance earlier,

although she probably did not have the means at the time and could not possibly have anticipated the change in policy.

Mrs. Gong not only did not express any sense of injustice but also argued that it is a matter of personal responsibility, with only the individual to blame, if he or she does not comply with the requirements.<sup>35</sup> Parents should consider their children's future in advance to ensure that they receive an education. Otherwise things will be "in a muddle," "turned upside down" (*luantao*). Her most striking argument was about people's territorial rights: asked if she felt there should be a difference in such rights between local and nonlocal *hukou* holders, she answered:

I feel that, for instance, if all my certificates are in order, fundamentally there is no difference from the locals [*bendi hukou*]. Regarding entering school, the locals certainly have priority over us. Those who have ancestral houses [*zuwu*], those with Shenzhen *hukou*. Why those with ancestral houses, because this place [Shenzhen] has been built by them. Even if some say that outsiders built it, these persons [the locals] will say that it's their territory [*dipan*], right? The outsiders are merely contributors [*gongxianzhe*]. And it is only if you contribute that people here will recognize you.

Her words acutely reveal the ways in which the logic of territorial entitlement to public goods affects the lives of migrant newcomers in urbanizing China, while they may simultaneously use such logic to justify their own exclusion. She alludes to some migrants' argument that they should be entitled to public goods because they have participated in building the city, sounding as if they have read Henri Lefebvre or David Harvey (2012: 78): "The right to use that common must surely then be accorded to all those who have had a part in producing it. This is, of course, the basis for the claim to the right to the city on the part of the collective laborers who have made it."

The temple square grandfathers who have lived in Pine Mansion for many years tend to voice a sense of injustice based on lack of recognition of the labor they contributed to building the city, and they view the charity programs with a certain degree of irony. Mr. He, the most vocal among them, arrived in Shenzhen more than thirty years ago in the 1990s as a carpenter. Not allowed to enter the Shenzhen special economic zone, he settled in a village and worked for a small family factory. He declared, "If we outsiders (*waidiren*) hadn't come, Shenzhen would have been an empty city and the buildings would not have been constructed. ... It is more civilized, more advanced, thanks to the peasant migrant workers (*nongmingong*). Beautification [happened] thanks to us."

Yet the fragility of this claim, as Mrs. Gong's self-denial of this right shows, is due to its close proximity to the logic of distribution that is being applied. It is, after all, based on a principle of justice that allocates public goods to those who have inherited or earned the right to benefit from them in a particular territory. The "right to the city" is an empty signifier (Harvey 2012: xv, 87).

### **Rivalry, Exclusion, and Differences in Entitlement**

As McCann notes in the North American context, "Quality of life is now routinely understood as a competitive advantage and defined in terms of consumption opportunities for wealthier and/or more economically valued class fractions who are able to choose the cities in which they live or invest on the basis of specific lifestyle characteristics." Livable city policies, he observes, often result in increasing urban inequality that makes the city *less* livable for many (2008: 37). Natives and outsiders living in Chinese urban villages alike express strong appreciation of state-provided public space. While they do follow state-encouraged best practices as citizens and engage in practices of self-discipline, for instance by participating in charitable events, what they expect from the state is mostly the increased quality of life that public space can provide, allowing them to engage in making friends and caring for their relatives.

Yet available space is limited in urban villages, not only because of the spontaneous urbanization that has led to high density and "kissing buildings" but also due to the prioritization of economic growth in the form of real estate. This results in splintered urbanism at the urban village scale, or the uneven graduated provision of public space, generating rivalry over the use of space. Even where the local state invests in the creation of space for communal activities and leisure, as in Shenzhen, and even more in Chengdu, this is often secondary to the use of space for residential complexes and malls. Public space is often concentrated only in some parts of the urban village, leaving many residents without access. Residents therefore resort to other spaces outside of the state's purview, with new counterpublics tending to form more around the informal use of malls and plots of land awaiting development rather than in the official public squares, where the state asserts its presence. Moreover, because many of these official spaces are provided as substitutes for those of the former villages, native residents exercise priority use rights, relegating others

to marginal, improvised public spaces or to the communal spaces on their residential estates, which are also often limited.

While the local state sees the purpose of shaping public space as fostering a sense of belonging to a new urban community, this integration occurs differently across the three villages depending on the class relations between insiders and outsiders. In Pine Mansion and River Hamlet, apart from certain traditional communal village activities, the nature of most activities performed in public does not distinguish native residents from newcomers, whereas in South Gate the class differentiation in the kinds of activity performed is much sharper. However, in all three cases, migrants use public space more than natives do for their daily social reproductive activities, and particularly for childcare.

This latter kind of social exclusion is also the result of decades of graduated provision based on *hukou* policy, reinforcing differences between natives and migrants, whose interactions are most often minimal and limited to relations between tenants and owners, although friendships between long-term non-native and native residents do emerge. Whether or not migrants wish to change their *hukou* greatly depends on the trade-off between what affords them security in the present and their plans for the future. It also depends on their sense of entitlement, which is shaped by not only the Chinese *hukou* system of territorial entitlement but also their social class. While low-skilled migrant workers with poor prospects of changing their *hukou* tend to express a sense of injustice and claim a Lefebvrian right to the city, middle-class non-*hukou*-holding residents have better chances and espouse a different view of the right to the city, one that is promoted by the municipal points system for acquiring *hukou*.

## Notes

1. The 2018 release of the Economist Intelligence Unit's annual rankings was accompanied by intensified media coverage of livability and a concurrent rise in the role of the concept in city branding (McArthur and Robin 2019).
2. According to Lefebvre, the right to the city is less a juridical right than a claim to urban life and is an oppositional demand that challenges the claims of the rich and powerful. It means transferring control from capital and the state to urban inhabitants, giving them "renewed centrality" and "enabling the full and complete usage of [the city's] moments and places" (Lefebvre 1996 [1968]: 179).
3. See the introduction to chapter 3 for a definition of splintered urbanism.
4. Warner differentiates counterpublics from oppositional publics in the Habermasian sense: they are the publics formed when "a dominated group aspires to re-create

- itself as a public and, in doing so, finds itself in conflict not only with the dominant social group, but also with the norms that constitute the dominant culture as a public" (Warner 2002: 80).
5. William Skinner (1971) modeled a cycle of closure/opening of Chinese villages in relation to dynastic/political cycles. Maoism was characterized by closure.
  6. Shenzhen government, Notice on Issuing the Work Plan for the Construction of Livable Communities in Shenzhen, n° 49, 3 May 2012, [http://www.sz.gov.cn/zfgb/2012\\_1/gb786/content/post\\_4990625.html](http://www.sz.gov.cn/zfgb/2012_1/gb786/content/post_4990625.html).
  7. See *ibid.*
  8. *Southern Daily*, December 2015, exact reference not provided for reasons of anonymization.
  9. See *ibid.*
  10. Interview by Anne-Christine Trémon, 23 March 2018.
  11. <http://m.cnwest.com/xian/a/2020/07/24/18950251.html>.
  12. This section is based on Wang Bo's *First Interim Report*, 21 November 2018, *Second Interim Report*, 11 April 2019, and *Final Report*, 31 October 2019.
  13. "Consultation on the Chengdu Urban Master Plan, Creating a Harmonious and Livable Living City" *Xinhua News Online*, 2 February 2017, [http://www.xinhuanet.com//fortune/2017-11/02/c\\_1121895014.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com//fortune/2017-11/02/c_1121895014.htm).
  14. *Opinions* available at <http://sq.sqyz.info:8087/QTWZ/XX.aspx?BH=1011&PKID=10>; see also Li Chunyu, "Chengdu Will Build 'Five Communities.' Let's See Which Are the Five?" *Chengdu News*, 21 September 2017, <http://www.gslcec.com/mtbd/2017-09-21/1388.html>.
  15. Jessica Wilczak, *Final Report*, 30 July 2019.
  16. Socialist values such as justice and equality are advertised everywhere in China's booming cities, in newly renovated public squares and on fences hiding construction sites. Along with General Secretary and Chinese president Xi Jinping's motto the "China dream" (*zhongguo meng*), they glorify his "new era."
  17. Interview by Anne-Christine Trémon, 25 March 2018.
  18. Short interviews with Mrs. Ding and Mrs. Tan, 27 March 2018.
  19. Interview by Anne-Christine Trémon, 10 April 2017.
  20. Interview by Anne-Christine Trémon, 28 March 2018.
  21. Wang Bo, *Survey Report*, 29 March 2019.
  22. *Ibid.*
  23. Wang Bo, *Fieldnotes*, 16 November 2018.
  24. Wang Bo, *Survey Report*.
  25. This section is based on Jessica Wilczak's *Interim Report* and *Final Report*.
  26. Jessica Wilczak, *Survey Report*, 19 January 2019.
  27. The tier system of city ranking does not represent an official classification. It is unofficial and based on criteria such as population size and real-estate prices, but also on subjective criteria such as the overall quality of the population and business environment. In the media there are frequent reassessments and speculations about which cities deserve to be in the first tier, the consensus being Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen. Both Chengdu and Xi'an are considered "new tier-one cities," and Chengdu "is a serious candidate for entering the first-tier cities list": "2020 Ranking of New First-Tier Cities," *National Business Daily*, 29 May 2020, <http://www.nbd.com.cn/articles/2020-05-29/1440178.html>.
  28. Guo and Liang (2017) report the same finding in the nearby city of Dongguan.
  29. Surveys and short interviews on 25 March and 29 March 2018.
  30. <https://baike.baidu.com/item/深圳积分入户分值表/18763901?fr=aladdin#2>.
  31. The objectives and ideological foundations are expressed in "Several Opinions of the Shenzhen Municipal People's Government on Further Strengthening and Perfecting

- Population Service Management," [http://www.sz.gov.cn/zfgb/2016/gb968/201608/t20160823\\_4316510.htm](http://www.sz.gov.cn/zfgb/2016/gb968/201608/t20160823_4316510.htm)
32. [http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog\\_1605b61680102wlca.html](http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_1605b61680102wlca.html) 2016深圳积分入户查询, 3 May 2016.
  33. The case of Mrs. Gong shows that access to social insurance is problematic not only for migrant workers with informal labor contracts (Cheng, Nielsen, and Smyth 2014) but also for petty entrepreneurs such as Mrs. Gong and her husband.
  34. However, there are signs that Chinese authorities are contemplating a reform of the system that will allow urban *hukou* holders to keep and inherit land in their places of origin.
  35. Parts of her answers, however, were rather ambivalent: "Because I hadn't planned this right, I'm not entitled to complain, but then also it's not as if I hadn't planned things right."