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Urbanizing Temporalities

(Re)Claiming the New in Shenzhen

… and then it became a city

In 2011 we sat in a mini-bus in Shenzhen, trying to not get dizzy looking back and forth between the ever-changing city outside and the TV monitors inside, which displayed short films from Chandigarh, Brasilia, Gaborone, Las Vegas, Almere and Shenzhen – six cities being showcased in »Six Under Sixty,« a multimedia exploration of urban change over the previous six decades. From December 2011 through February 2012, »Six Under Sixty« was a feature exhibition at the fourth Hong Kong-Shenzhen Architecture and Urbanism Biennale (UABB), located in Shenzhen's Overseas Chinese Town (OCT) district. The mobile movie theater brought the project out of the venue and into the city. In contrast to the larger exhibit, which assumed the city as such, film curator David van der Leer had commissioned six artists to make short films to explore those moments when »new towns stop being new and turn into actual cities.«[1] Called »… and then it became a city,« it implied that authenticity as a city was a quality to be earned and that there were people positioned to adjudicate the question. Had master planning and meteoric economic growth, for example, set the groundwork for the emergence of an »actual« city? Or might the instrumental efforts to create a particular kind of city have distorted Shenzhen's (and the film's other five cities') claim to some Platonic ideal of urbanity? According to filmmaker Wang Gongxin, who made the Shenzhen film for the exhibition, Shenzhen was a city in name only, a place defined by the people who made money by constantly drawing and redrawing circles on maps on and against the local landscape.[2]

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1 David van der Leer, *And Then It Became A City,* 2011 Shenzhen & Hong Kong Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism/Architecture (Shenzhen: UABB, 2011). Organized together with *6 Under 60*, curated by Rochelle Steiner, Stefano di Martino, Scott S. Fisher and Jennifer Stein. See also Myrna Ayoub, »Six under Sixty« http://www.myrnaayoub.com/6-under-60 (accessed 25 April 2021).
2 The circle in the title of WANG Gongxin's short film, *Shenzhen, A Circle is Drawn,*

Fig. 1: A view from the »...and then it became a city« bus, 2011. Outside the window, a view of Shennan Road, Shenzhen's iconic thoroughfare, while inside the bus, passengers watch a screening of Surabhi Sharma's short film about Chandigarh, Tracing Bylanes *(2011).*

That year, Shenzhen had just turned thirty and, via the UABB and other cultural events, seemed to be stepping beyond the limits of its photo-realistic renderings. Thirty is, after all, the second Confucian milestone: »At thirty,« the master said, »I knew where I stood.«[3] Indeed, the UABB had been established in 2005 (on the occasion of the city's twenty-fifth anniversary) as a forum for debating and promoting Shenzhen's urbanity, reminding us not only that the dreams of reason are

A City is Born, refers to the famous circle that Deng Xiaoping was supposed to have drawn on a map of China, indicating where the future SEZ would be built. For a cultural history of Shenzhen's circles and enclave development see, Huang Weiwen, »The Tripartite Origins of Shenzhen: Beijing, Hong Kong and Bao'an« in Mary Ann O'Donnell, Winnie Wong and Jonathan Bach (eds.), *Learning from Shenzhen: China's Post-Mao Experiment from Experiment to Model City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 65-85.

3   In *The Analects*, Confucius set the milestones for a human life: »The Master says: At 15 I set my heart on learning, at 30 I know where I stood, at 40 I had no more doubts, at 50 I knew the will of Heaven, at 60 my ears were attuned, and at 70 I followed my heart's desire without crossing the line.« Translated by James Legge (New York: Dover, 1971), 146.

inextricably part of the city's *raison d'être,* but also how the city has been a vehicle for realizing modern values of development and progress.

Shenzhen, officially established in 1980, has achieved fame as China's reform-era wunderkind, shooting to prominence as an »instant city« that seemed to take new form every decade; in the 1980s and 1990s, it was colloquially known as »the Special Zone,« a shortened form of »Special Economic Zone« (SEZ), which highlighted the diverse (and often conflicting) goals of the early reform era. In the 21st century it has been known as one of China's big four cities (in ranked order) – Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen.[4] For over a decade, western observers have analyzed the city's growth in and against theories of New Town development, asking with van der Leer, what tipped Shenzhen from the category of »SEZ« into that of »city«? Can we date that transformation? Can we plan it? In other words, can master planning and state investment create cities? Or is urbanization something less structured, more organic? These questions appeared anew on the occasion of the city's 40th anniversary in 2020, when Shenzhen was again thrust into the limelight, this time as a model and catalyst for renewing the Pearl River Delta (PRD) as the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), which would become the world's largest city with over 70 million people and 56,000 km². Will all eleven cities of the GBA become one city?[5] Or are there fissures within and between cities that force us to consider how modern urbanization strategies do, and do not, create cities?

To seriously answer the question about when Shenzhen »actually« became a city, however, we need a different approach than the one implied by framing Shenzhen as a New Town. The term »new« most certainly remains important to understanding Shenzhen's emergence as a city, but in a different way than implied by the New Town urban planning typology with its mythic origins in Ebenezer Howard's garden-city movement. Being new, we hope to demonstrate, is a practice, not a condition. This chapter thus asks not a »when« question – when do new towns stop being new and become cities? – but instead a »How« question: How does »becoming new« work as urban practice? How are cities declared as such? What happens when a city claims the status of new? How do these cities

4 See O'Donnell, Wong and Bach, op. cit. and Juan Du, *The Shenzhen Experiment: The Story of China's Instant City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020).

5 The eleven cities are Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Foshan, Dongguan, Zhongshan, Jianmen, Huizhou, Zhaoqing (all in Guangdong Province) and the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macao. Taken by itself, this region ranks as the 12th biggest economy in the world.

Map of Guangdong Province

Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao GBA

1. Shenzhen Qianhai Free Trade Zone
2. Guangzhou Nansha Free Trade Zone
3. Zhuhai Hengqin Free Trade Zone

Fig. 2: Map of the Bay Area. The China (Guangdong) Pilot Free Trade Zone was officially launched on April 21, 2015. Just over two years later on July 1, 2017, the Free Trade Zone was rebranded the »Guangdong-Hong Kong Macao GBA«. This rebranding marked an administrative shift; just as the integration of Qianhai into the Pilot Zone shifted authority from the city to the province, the elevation of the Pilot Zone to GBA shifted governing authority from the province to the central government.

fit into both longer historical processes of continuous re claiming the new and narratives of cities as defined by deep histories?

We examine Shenzhen because it captures many of the contradictions of the new. In both its official and popular representation, the city embodies the idea of an urban *tabula rasa*. When Shenzhen City was incorporated in 1979 and the SEZ created the following year, the site of the future city appeared to the eye as a large rural expanse stretching along the Cold War »bamboo curtain« border with Hong Kong, dotted by market towns that one passed through on the way to somewhere else. One famous origin story refers to how Deng Xiaoping »drew a circle« on a map to establish the boundaries of the SEZ. But this circle was drawn over a pre-existing area with diverse settlements that had flourished in the county's mountains, coasts, and surrounding bodies of water.[6] Creating

6 Juan Du makes this point in »Shenzhen's Urban Villages: A Micro-Political Tale from China's Mega-City« in Sascha Delz, Rainer Hehl and Patricia Ventura (eds.), *Housing the Co-op: A Micropolitical Manifesto* (Berlin : Ruby Press, 2020), 165-176.

Shenzhen, then, was far more than drawing lines on a map, but, as we show in this chapter, required the reclamation of local space into state-defined localities. This produced a string of settlements, a »city of satellites,« as Marco Bontje calls Shenzhen, consisting of district and sub-district level planned new developments all along its stretched out 81.4 km length from east to west.[7] The result was a vertiginous transformation into an ever-expanding urban landscape after 1980. The city drew its energy from the central government's declaration of it as an experimental space for introducing market reforms. Its birthright, it seemed, was speed, growth, and dreams of prosperity; today, as China's fourth largest city, it has a 2020 Gross Domestic Product of US $ 4.33 trillion.

As an early site for export production, and later as a site for technology, design, logistics, biomedicine, and finance, Shenzhen drew millions of new residents who encountered a city like no other in China. They found not only jobs and modern infrastructure, but also an unusual situation where local inhabitants, relatively few in number, did not dominate postreform urban transformation as in Shanghai, Beijing, or most other cities. The lack of an established elite »local« population created a sense of Shenzhen as an »immigrant« city like New York, where, as the slogan went, anyone (from China) can »come and be a Shenzhener«. Yet while migrants from other parts of China found new beginnings in the city, the indigenous populations, comprising several historical ethnic groups and speaking Cantonese, the Weitou dialect, Hakka, and languages other than the state standard Mandarin, formed a new kind of underclass distinct from both the white-collar managers and the blue-collar factory assembly line workers pouring into the city. While often rendered less visible in the relentless modernity of Shenzhen, their indigenous cultural geographies are central for understanding how Shenzhen has practiced the art of the new.

To explore this process, the chapter proceeds in three parts. First, we briefly situate Shenzhen within its historical and spatial context. Second, we explore how the new city of Shenzhen was called into being by literally and figuratively re claiming the indigenous geographies of its administrative predecessor, Bao'an County. Shenzhen laid claim to »new« status, we argue, by reclaiming what was decidedly *not* new – the long history of indigenous fishing and farming villages, regional localities and cultural

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7   Marco Bontje, »Shenzhen: satellite city or city of satellites?« in *International Planning Studies*, 24:3-4, 2019, 255-271. Bontje argues that Shenzhen can be interpreted as either a satellite city of Hong Kong or, despite the geographic distance, of Beijing due to the central government's direct influence.

geographies. Having shown how the local was reclaimed *by* the city, we turn in the third and final section to how this local, in the guise of so-called »urban villages,« works to establish its claims *over* the city. Here we examine how the historical spaces of former villages have shifted to the center of debates about urban renewal alongside the renovation of older, formerly »new« neighborhoods, a marked shift in a city that relentlessly promotes itself as future oriented.

Looking empirically at these examples allows us to theorize the new not as an outcome, but as a practice of what we call reclamation. The word »reclaim« evokes multiple meanings: to tame or to civilize, to cultivate wasteland, or to lift land from under water. It can also mean to re-use, to reassert a right, but also to rescue, to redeem, and to reform. The goal of these diverse acts of reclamation is often expansion, whether of land itself, of space for living, of trade and commerce, or of the claims of the state to space, place, and bodies. In the specific case of Shenzhen, as we show below, reclamation happens through a discursive and material transformation of the category of the local. It is this transformation, we contend, that allows for the incorporation, disavowal, and appropriation of the rural »local« as the raw material for the city and its incessant renewal, which continues today.

Situating Shenzhen

Calling Shenzhen »new« is both obvious and misleading. The city is forty years old, yet the territory it sits on has millennia-old histories of settlement. For at least the last five hundred years, the administrative ordering of the territory has gone through ever-accelerating changes, a consistent form of renewal. A crash course in history: The eastern coastline of the Pearl River Delta was, until the Ming dynasty in 1573, a singular administrative district known as Dongguan. Perhaps anticipating today's infatuation with the new, the Ming dynasty carved out a new county from the south of this district, naming it »New Peace« (Xin'an) by drawing on an expression: »Reform the old to establish the new, remove danger for the sake of peace« (*ge gu ding* xin, *qu wei wei* an). This, in turn, became the territory that the British came to partially colonize, slowly working their way from the southern Hong Kong Island in 1842, extending north to Kowloon in 1860, and then negotiating a 99-year lease for what became the New Territories in 1898, which extended British control to the Shenzhen river, about 25 mountainous kilometers north of Hong Kong Island. Thus did Xin'an county itself become divided in two: British-controlled

Fig. 3: This 1819 map of Xin'an County shows the two walled cities in the area, the County Seat at Nantou and the maritime fortress at Dapeng.

Hong Kong to the south of the river, and Xin'an county to the north. Xin'an was renamed Bao'an county in 1913, and it is this county from which Shenzhen sprung.[8]

The terminus of British colonial territory at the Shenzhen river proved, eventually, decisive in the creation of Shenzhen city. Known as the Sino-British border, it was guarded but generally permeable through all the different Chinese regimes, from the Qing dynasty (1664-1912) through the nationalist period (1912-1949) and the early Communist era (1949-1978). Despite being known as the »Bamboo Curtain,« it was never as aggressively patrolled as was the Berlin Wall, though in many ways it came to serve a similar geopolitical role. Farmers, traders, families, refugees fleeing the mainland, and smugglers usually found ways to cross. As Hong Kong grew in global economic importance, its proximity was one of the major reasons that Bao'an county was chosen for the Shenzhen SEZ in 1979. When Hong Kong was returned to China in 1997, what had been an international border suddenly became an internal boundary. Subsequently, the border was incorporated into Shenzhen's development

8   Two years after the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty, in 1913 the Republican govern-
     ment renamed Xin'an County Bao'an to avoid confusion with an eponymous
     county in Hunan.

Fig. 4: Today, Nantou's southern gate is the formal entrance into the old county seat, which has been rebranded as a tourist area in four steps, which illustrate both the process and uncertainty of reclaiming the new from extant historical sites. The first formal reclamation marked the return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty (1997), while the second occurred in preparation for the 2011 Universiade. Subsequently, Nantou was renovated as the main venue for the 2017 edition of the UABB, and in 2020 it emerged as the »new« old town, a commercial project spearheaded by Shenzhen real estate giant, Vanke.[9]

through the »One Country, Two Systems« policy, which allowed for formal and informal exchanges. The policy initially enabled Shenzhen to draw on Hong Kong's finance capital and shipping infrastructure, while providing Hong Kong companies access to low-wage manufacturing across the border. The border's new status suddenly reframed as internal contradictions that which had previously been handled as logical consequences of international difference, forcing the Chinese government to confront social issues such as right-of-abode, national curriculum, and intercity travel.[10]

9   Mary Ann O'Donnell analyzes the first effort to preserve Nantou in »Becoming Hong Kong, Razing Baoan, Preserving Xin'an: An Ethnographic Account of Urbanization in the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone« in *Cultural Studies*, 15:3-4, 2001, 419-443.
10 The policy and its permutations (usually glossed as »experiments«) also prefigured the complications that came with the Handover as what in one era could be under-
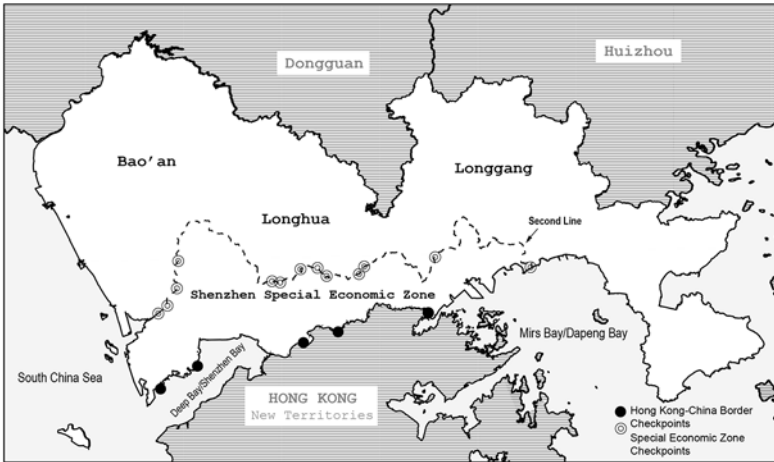
Fig. 5: Map of the Shenzhen SEZ *with border to Hong Kong and the internal »second line« border, 2020.*

On the face of it, we see a historical process of subdivision and re-integration, with new counties being carved out of old and then granted political agency within the nation-state. What this narrative obscures, however, is the fundamental transformation that China underwent during the second half of the 20th century as it sought to extend modernity as a homogenizing experience across a diverse and vast country where traditional social forms remained strong, especially in rural areas.[11] In traditional Xin'an, for example, society was integrated through historical relationships to the land. Cantonese (*punti*) societies controlled coastline and productive land, Hakka communities were located in mountain valleys and relied on rivers for potable water and transportation, and boat dwellers lived in boats, taking up temporary residence in harbors. The establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 entailed restructuring the relationships between these groups of people with

stood as »economic experimentation« or »colonialism« became in another era »political problems.« On the Hong Kong-Shenzhen border see the essays in Mary Ann O'Donnell, Denise Y. Ho, and Jonathan Bach, Forum on »Transformations of Shen Kong Borderlands« in *Made in China Journal*, 5:3, 2020, 92-140.

11   William Hinton's classic book, *Fanshan* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966) includes extensive stories of the work that the CCP did to bring farmers over to their way of thinking. In *National Past-times: Narrative, Representation, and Power in Modern China*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), Ann Anagnost analyzes how this work was continued and elaborated through successive campaigns, especially that of making a civilized society.

respect to a modern government; formally all were now socialist citizens with equal rights under law. In practice and tradition, though, each group continued, in significant ways, to be defined by its traditional rights to resources.

Residual claims to traditional social orders were, however, increasingly challenged during the Mao era, and became even more so during the post-Mao Reform era, when the shift to industrial urbanization (rather than rural collectivization) became the means for completing the project of modernization of both people and environment. As cities became the privileged site for constructing modernity, the rural was increasingly framed as backwards and premodern. The establishment of the Shenzhen SEZ intensified the existing dialectical opposition between agricultural and industrial China as the engine for the country's modernization.[12] However, unlike the Maoist era, which explicitly emphasized the importance of agricultural production, during the Reform era, agricultural production increasingly faded from national narratives to be replaced by a strategy of large-scale urbanization. Accordingly, during its first two decades Shenzhen was domestically celebrated as a model of rural urbanization and its success was increasingly offered as »proof« that urbanization would create a prosperous modernity.

The SEZ was a 327 km² experimental space, separated from the rest of former Bao'an county by a militarized internal border along the SEZ's northern edge, paralleling the border with Hong Kong on its south. Known as the »second line«, this internal border thus further partitioned old Bao'an county into the (mostly) urban SEZ and the (mostly) rural remainder, renamed yet again as New Bao'an, before being further administratively subdivided.[13] It was inside the space of the SEZ that Shenzhen's urban areas developed, expanding rural urbanization gradually to eventually include most of former New Bao'an, so that today Shenzhen has 1,748 km² of officially designated urban area, 300 km² of designated rural area, and an official population of over 12 million (though generally

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12 The place of agricultural production in Maoist modernization has been extensively studied and theorized since accelerated collectivization became the economic basis of socialist urbanization in the 1950s. See Jean C. Oi, *State and Peasant in Contemporary China: The Political Economy of Village Government* (Berkeley: University of California Press) for a comprehensive review of China's »dual society« model of modernization. See Helen Siu, *Agents and Victims in South China: Accomplices in Rural Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) for an ethnographic account of collectivization in the Pearl River Delta.

13 Bao'an county was divided further into Bao'an, Guangming, Longhua, Longgang, and Pingshan districts. Shenzhen city consists of Nanshan, Futian, Luohu, Yantian, and Dapeng districts.
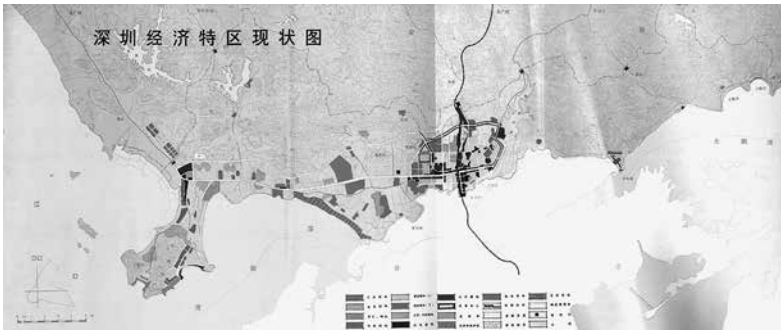
Fig. 6: Extant Development, Shenzhen SEZ, *1986. This map of extant development (1979 through 1985) in the* SEZ *was drawn for and included in the 1986 Shenzhen Comprehensive Plan. Significantly, the map did not include bottom-up urbanization that was occurring simultaneously with the official construction of the city.*

estimated at around actually 20 million).[14] Thus did Shenzhen emerge as one of the preeminent sites for the Chinese state's pursuit of the project of modernization via experimental forms of urbanization. Top-down decisions are often the focus of Shenzhen's story, leaving out how the traditional landscape was the framework within which the city as a site of modernization unfolded, to which we now turn.

Reclaiming Bao'an: Moving Mountains, Filling the Sea

Shenzhen's most well-known founding myth story locates its origin in a single fishing village in Luohu district, famously visited by Deng Xiaoping in 1984 on his »inspection tour« of the new SEZ.[15] If we want to designate an actual moment of creation, however, a better starting point might be an act of land reclamation several years earlier, on July 8, 1979, when a mountain in the western most district of Shekou was detonated in order to reclaim the local coastline and to level hilly land for industrial development. Shekou, an old customs harbor during the Qing era, was located far away from what would become »downtown« Shenzhen. But

14 Xiaolong Luo, Jianfa Shen, and Chaolin Gu, »Urban and Regional Governance in China: Introduction« in *China Review,* 14:1, 2014, 1-9. For comparison, this is more than twice the population of Berlin, which in 2020 had a population of around 3.7 million.
15 This was the hamlet of Yumin, part of Caiwuwei village. See Na Fu, »Border at the Centre of Myth: Fishing Village, Caiwuwei, Shenzhen« in O'Donnell, Ho, and Bach, op cit., 114-118.

it was symbolically important because it had already been experimenting with market reforms under the leadership of a company called China Merchants, today one of China's largest conglomerates. It was thus China Merchants had the privilege of firing »the first shot of Reform and Opening Up« as the event is commonly known, and which, »like a spring thunder marked the new era of Reform and Opening.«[16]

This first shot became iconic because it initiated what would become a common means of reclamation in Shenzhen, known popularly by the phrase »moving mountains to fill the sea«. During the 1990s mountains across the emerging city were quarried for both high-grade building stones and low-grade landfill, and leveled sections of mountain ranges were then developed as residential and commercial areas. The expression »moving mountains to fill the sea« reminds us that as a material process, reclamation has at least two objects: Shenzhen's coastal waters and its mountains. The expression also figures how the city's *tabula rasa* was created through large-scale engineering projects that not only displaced fishing villages, but also lychee orchards which had been planted on the mountains and the rice polders and fishponds that had been built into scarce farmland. The historic »first shot« thus brought an end to the regional fishing and oyster industries that had filled Shekou's original six small bays, now completely filled in. Over the next few years, the coastline was straightened and the mountain range leveled. In their place, a container port, industrial parks, and living areas were built – substituting one cultural geography for another. Today Shekou is a major base for oil exploration companies heading to the South China Sea and a favored location within Shenzhen for ex-pats, entertainment, and high-end living.

This brief story of Shekou indicates how the new is forged out of layers of existing cultural geographies. Undergirding these acts of reclamation is, crucially, the cultural geographic substrate of what we refer to as the local, or indigenous. The local seems to stand in contrast to the new, but local lineages, languages, and identities are literally part of the landscape out of which each successive »new« is forged through the crucible of the state. Thus, to understand what makes Shenzhen new, we have to understand the local – not as a prehistory, but as that which shapes the present. It sets the stage for understanding how the historical site of today's

16   This phrase is how the July 8, 1979 detonation is referred to in the Shekou Museum of China's Reform and Opening Up, as well as throughout Chinese media. The latter quote is the caption on a diorama portraying the historical event in the Shenzhen City Museum.

Fig. 7: Reclamation site on the northeastern banks of the Nantou Peninsula, 2003. Significantly, 20 years into urban construction, both earth (from local mountains) and architectural debris (from first-generation buildings) were used to »fill the sea.« In the middle ground are fishing nets and, in the back-ground, the Yuen Long mountains, Hong Kong New Territories.

Shenzhen, Bao'an County, was sequentially reconstituted as a new locality during the collectivization of the 1950s and at the beginning of the reform era in the 1980s, anticipating the ways in which it (or more precisely the residual rural) could be developed within and against the Shenzhen municipal apparatus. For reclamation is not only the act of moving mountains to fill the sea, but functions more broadly to bring the indigenous local into the structure of the state apparatus.

Under Mao-era collectivization in the 1950s and 1960s, villages had to position themselves within the frame of national production, in which rural agricultural production was meant to support industrial manufacturing in urban-designated areas, enforced by a strict household registration system (*hukou*) that unequally separated urban and rural populations and spaces, entitling the urban hukou holder to privileged access to city services and enhanced mobility. Mao-era Bao'an County was, with a few exceptions, designated »rural« and its resources and capital were transferred to cities such as Guangzhou to promote industrialization in an unequal exchange.[17] These policies resulted in rural areas effectively becoming decommodified and demonetized, often poorer and with less access to goods than before 1949, and local power structures had to adapt to the new national systems of cadres and party organizations.[18] This

17 On how national production transvalued identities, see Anagnost, op cit.
18 See Jakob Eyferth, »How Not to Industrialize: Observations from a Village in Sichuan« in *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 30:3-4 (April/July 2003), 75-92.

Fig. 8: Dongmen, 2008. Commercial towers overshadow public housing built for the first generation of official migrants in the foreground. Note also that the first generation of Shenzhen roads were narrow, designed for bikes and walking, rather than cars.

caused an increasing disjuncture for Bao'an residents who acquired places in the state apparatus while continuing to identify with their native villages and older historical cultural geographies.

Bao'an's residents thus came to exist in two different types of »local« space at the same time: The first is what we could call their »indigenous local« place, signified in Chinese by the word *bendi*, where their identities were connected to specific places to which they had both an emotional attachment and historical rights. The second is what we could call »state-defined locality,« signified in Chinese by the word *difang* when used to refer to particular governance structures, signifying a place's location in relation to the central government. Both words, *bendi* and *difang*, can be translated into English as local, but whereas the first signals an intimacy of belonging and builds on historical rights and territorial identities, the second absorbs these rights and identities into the larger structure of the state apparatus in order to deploy them toward national (i.e. nonlocal) ends. Local place and governmental locality overlap yet are also in tension with each other. They also are not firmly fixed: An indigenous local can become a bureaucrat representing nonlocal inter-
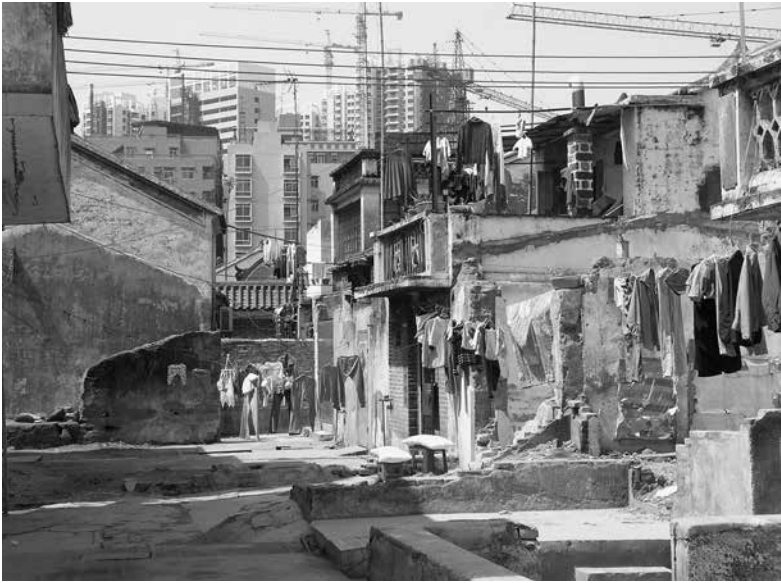
Fig. 9: Xinzhou, 2005. Located in Futian District, grassroots urbanization in Xinzhou was progressive and opportunistic. In the foreground, old village housing is still being used. Handshake tenements occupy the middle ground, while towers go up in the background.

ests. Similarly, a bureaucratic outsider sent to work in a new locality can develop new roots and a sense of belonging.

Shenzhen's first few decades exemplify the tensions between these two types of local spaces. Recall that early on Shenzhen was divided into two main areas: the SEZ, which became urban-designated, and New Bao'an, which remained rural.[19] The SEZ was identified and privileged as an explicit extension of national policy, while New Bao'an was identified with »native« interests. This spatialized distinction between state-defined locality (*difang*, in the SEZ) and the indigenous local (*bendi*, in Bao'an) was formalized by the militarized internal border, the so-called »second line,« that symbolically consigned the indigenous local beyond this border to a temporally and spatially premodern, and hence obsolete, status.[20] Yet the

19   In 1979, Guangdong elevated Bao'an County to Shenzhen City, in 1980, the central government elevated Shenzhen City to the status of SEZ in 1980, and then in 1981, New Bao'an was established.

20   The second line was officially decommissioned in 2010 when the outer districts were formally integrated into the SEZ, creating a new hybrid apparatus of indigenous and state interests circa 2003. See Mary Ann O'Donnell and Yan Wan, »Shen

contours of historical cultural geographies map onto the modern city in more ways than the rhetoric of newness lets on.

Historically, as noted earlier, indigenous Bao'an county was comprised of ethnic Cantonese, Weitou (a Cantonese sub culture), and Hakka settlements as well as boat dwellers who did not have land rights.[21] Within this space, the »natives« were the Cantonese, who traced their settlements back 800 years, while the Hakka were considered outsiders (having arrived in 1683), and they and the fishing families were considered »guests« of the Cantonese in the local social hierarchy. They occupied different physical spaces – the Cantonese and Weitou villages along the shores of the Lingding Sea and Shenzhen Bay to the west, Hakka villages in the mountain hinterlands and the distant Dapeng peninsula in the east. Separated by mountain chains and with orientations towards different bodies of water, they formed different subcultures. This ethnicized local geography became scrambled, however, when the Mao-era household registration system (*hukou*) came into effect in 1958.[22] Suddenly, as mentioned above, after hukou was introduced all residents were equally »local« from the viewpoint of the central government in Beijing yet despite collectivization and the forced settlement of fishing families on land, the previous social structures and geographies, including social hierarchies, cultural forms, and recognized land and water rights, persisted throughout the 1950s and 1960s. It was only with the formation of the Shenzhen SEZ, which brought massive migration of workers to the area from all over China, that the term »local« started to lose its specific meanings and come to refer to all »indigenous« settlements from before the SEZ.

Through this all, Bao'an's heterogeneous cultural geography continued (and continues) to inform the emergent locality of Shenzhen. We see this most clearly, for example, in the way the city developed from two initial locations, each chosen for infrastructural reasons: the train crossing from Hong Kong in Luohu to the east (near the original Shenzhen market town after which the city took its name and where the »downtown« formed), and the industrial park and port in Shekou, approximately

Kong: Cui Bono?« In Joshua Bolchover and Peter Hasdell (eds.), *Border Ecologies: Hong Kong's Mainland Frontier* (Basel: Birkhäuser-Verlag), 21-36.

21 Cantonese villages trace their roots back to the Southern Song Dynasty, circa 1200 CE.

22 On ethnic hierarchies in Ming and Qing Guangdong, see David Faure and Helen Siu (eds.), *Down to Earth: The Territorial Bond in South China* (Stanford University Press, 1995).

30 km to its west.[23] By 1986, it became clear that the city needed to expand beyond these areas, and the *1986 Comprehensive Plan for the Shenzhen* SEZ identified six local sites to »fill in« the approximately 30 km between Luohu and Shekou, thereby »reclaiming« the local as a chain of state-defined localities. At each of these sites a different locality emerged, which over time became landmark neighborhoods within the city of Shenzhen. Moving from east to west along the border with Hong Kong, these new sites comprised the Hakka region (Shatoujiao), the Weitou cultural area (Louhu and Shangbu), and a Cantonese settlement area (Nantou). A fifth site, Overseas Chinese Town (OCT) was established in the underpopulated hills between the Weitou and Cantonese areas. Shekou was located at the tip of the Nantou peninsula in an area that had been primarily settled (and resettled) by Cantonese and fishing families.[24]

Across this entire breadth of the new city the indigenous local was reclaimed to produce state-directed locality through the physical reshaping of the environment, the redeployment of historical cultural geography, and ongoing administrative restructuring. In each case, when urbanized districts were created out of pre-existing cultural geographies, the local people were eventually transformed from »local« villagers to national subjects through the hukou registration system as they became absorbed into the urban apparatus. Administratively speaking this reduced their difference, since they now shared the same category of »urban citizen« with more recent migrants to Shenzhen, even if social stigma could exacerbate residual differences between villagers and newcomers. Spatially, the new administrative districts often followed historical boundaries, such as when the Luoho District was split in 1998 into two along the historic Cantonese/Hakka boundary that ran along the Wutongshan mountain range.[25]

In the eastern part of this area, the old Hakka settlement of Shatoujiao (Sha Tau Kok in Cantonese), followed the pattern we have already established: It was first turned into a state-defined locality by reclaiming coastal land for industrial, commercial and residential development, then it created a commercial and tourist area along its border with Hong Kong (where mainlanders could come to shop for Hong Kong goods), and

23 As the new city was named after Shenzhen market, the commercial center of Luohu was renamed Dongmen. Luohu was expanded to include Shangbu, a satellite new town that included a city hall for the new city, two industrial parks, and living areas.

24 Outside the SEZ, just beyond Nantou, Bao'an's new county seat was established at Xixiang, which was not included in the 1986 Comprehensive plan, but would come to play a critical role in future efforts to generate value through reclamation.

25 It was split into Luoho and Yantian districts.

eventually became a neighborhood within a new urban center built around an immense new cargo seaport.[26] At each level of reclamation, the indigenous – both historical and recently constituted – became subordinated to a higher order state-defined locality. Cross-border commerce in Shatoujiao, as in other indigenous local (*bendi*) sites in the heart of today's city, relied on cultural ties across the border with Hong Kong, which preserved the importance of the indigenous structures for the economy of the modern city.[27]

As the city's fortunes rose with the global surge of exports, technology, design, and back-office needs, these reclaimed localities came to straddle two very different, though connected, worlds. One of them is the realm of globalization (now under strain), where Shenzhen's subdistricts serve as sites for the localization of transnational mega-city projects. In these »global« spaces, itinerant architecture firms conjure futuristic skyscrapers to attract the circulation of capital, and creative districts to attract »talent.«[28] The other is the story of the local villages set against the city's narrative of inexorable progress towards complete urbanization. Legally speaking, all the villages today are absorbed into the urban apparatus. This was a long and complex process, during which the entire city was gradually designated officially urban.[29] By 2004, the process of absorption of residual rural areas was technically complete, and the fully urbanized city proudly claimed that Shenzhen became the first city within China with no villages (i.e., no vestiges of the rural).[30] Yet despite their seeming obsolescence in the new city, the village's spatial, cultural, and

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26 This is the port of Yantian, one of China's four biggest deep-water container ship terminals and hence one of the largest in the world.

27 The centrality of these older relations, however, is being increasingly strained as ever-stricter border controls, due to both politics and the pandemic, have enforced stricter separations.

28 This story of neoliberal global urbanism is often told, though much remains to be written about how Shenzhen served as both a model and counter model for this phase of world urbanism. On globalization and urbanism in East Asia see, inter alia, Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong (eds.), *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

29 In 1990 the SEZ's New Bao'an County was partitioned into Bao'an and Longgang Districts, which were both given urban designation, and then further partitioned as the region became developed. See note 13. The original 1981 separation of the city into rural and areas, however, was never as absolute as it sounds, for there were exceptional pockets on both sides of the second line: In rural New Bao'an County, for example, there were market towns, which had an urban designation, while inside the urban SEZ, historic villages notably retained rural status.

30 Absorption of rural areas inside the second line into the urban apparatus took place from 1992-1996.

Fig. 10: Guanlan: Located on the banks of the Guanlan River, this early twentieth century tower overlooked the docks that had made Guanlan Town an important Hakka trade center in the northeastern mountain valleys of Shenzhen. Today, Guanlan remains an important commercial center, however, as seen in the photograph, transportation relies on a national road network and private cars, while nearby factories (in the background of the image) rely on international logistic networks, producing goods that are shipped abroad in containers.

economic imprint remained inextricable from the city. What makes the villages an integral part of the modern city? We turn, in the third and final section of the chapter, to the role these villages continue to play in today's urban landscape.

Shenzhen's Villages: From Obsolescence to Renewal

When the original SEZ was designated an urban area, it expropriated some village farmland for factories, but left villages initially under rural land law and with access to residual historical lands. This residual rural status within an urban space proved to be a loophole that allowed villages to pursue relatively autonomous strategies for survival not been anticipated by city planners. Thus, during the 1980s, villages used their remaining lands to set up businesses that corresponded to their historic diaspora relationships.[31] For example, the village of Caiwuwei, located

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31 See, inter alia, David Faure and Helen Siu, »The Original Translocal Society and its Modern Fate: Historical and Post-Reform South China« in *Provincial China,* 8:1,

next to the historical Shenzhen market, built village industrial parks to take advantage of their connections across the nearby border to Hong Kong (Wenjingdu checkpoint in Luohu) for both capital and commerce. After Deng Xiaoping's 1992 Southern Tour, when it was clear that reform and opening up would continue, the village's undeveloped land was expropriated by the government for future state-led development, constraining expansion. In response, villagers used homestead plots, originally conceived so that they could build family homes, to instead build tenements to rent out to the rural and urban migrants streaming into the city, usually without permission, to work in its factories, build its buildings, open restaurants, hair salons, and stores, or hawk food.

By the late 1990s, villagers across the city increasingly crammed in as many illegal buildings as possible into their plots, resulting in the infamous, tightly packed »handshake« building style, so named because you could shake the hand of the person in the building across from you by leaning out the window. With some irony, then, the villages turned into the very kind of high-density, informal, worker living spaces which New Towns had been ideologically developed to counteract. Shenzhen, in a sense, developed as an inverted New Town, where the planned city called the informal spaces into existence rather than vice versa. Because during the 1990s, Shenzhen did not have enough formal housing to meet demand, it came to depend on its »villages in the city« (aka urban villages), which at times housed up to 50 % of the population on only 4 % of the land in villages that ranged in size from a few thousand to well over 100,000 residents.[32] From 1992 through 2000 the city's population grew on average by at least one million people a year.[33] The urban villages with the most desirable locations were occupied by both urban and rural migrants, who took advantage of proximity to booming »Shenzhen.« For

2003, 40-59; Yow Cheun Hoe, *Guangdong and the Chinese Diaspora: The Changing Landscape of Qiaoxiang* (New York: Routledge, 2015), which argues for the priority of economic considerations over sentimental kinship as the driving factor in diasporic engagement after 1978; and Gary G. Hamilton (ed.), *Cosmopolitan Capitalists: Hong Kong and the Chinese Diaspora at the End of the 20th Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999) for a historical discussion of Hong Kong investment in Guangdong.

32   Indigenous villagers, now landlords, often numbered in the hundreds, while the tenants squeezed into their urban villages numbered in the thousands. See O'Donnell, Wong and Bach, *Learning from Shenzhen*, op cit., and Du Juan, *The Shenzhen Experiment,* op cit. On Caiwuwei, see Na Fu, *The Participatory Process of the Urban Village Redevelopment: Case Study in Shenzhen, China* (Master's thesis, Texas: Community and Regional Planning, the University of Texas at Austin, May 2014).

33   *Shenzhen Statistical Yearbooks* (Shenzhen: Shenzhen Government, 2016).

example, businessmen and construction workers lived in Caiwuwei in downtown Luohu, while the city's first generation of programmers and service workers lived in Gangxia next to the Shangbu Industrial Zone, which began assembling electronics for export. Today, Shangbu is more commonly known by its main neon-lit commercial street – Huaqiangbei, which gained notoriety during the 2000s for its production of knock-off (*shanzhai*) cell phones and other electronics, and as an incubator for technological innovation.[34]

In the urbanized villages, unskilled workers from rural areas rubbed shoulders with middle class managers and skilled workers in the bustling restaurants, busy markets, and countless small businesses of the villages, engaging in the kind of unplanned, face-to-face interaction that the tower block and dormitory settlements in the formally planned parts of the city seemed to foreclose. As informal spaces of exception nested within the SEZ, the villages became sites of friction, in Anna Tsing's sense, where the overlapping and overdetermined encounters of village and city created »the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference.«[35] The energy generated by the friction of these interconnections powered the city's growth as it leveraged the different roles, desires, and positions of these populations in the service of economic expansion. But, as Tsing also points out, friction also »gets in the way of the smooth operation« of power and »refuses the lie [that it] operates as a well-oiled machine.«[36] The villages and the city sparred as much as they benefited from each other. The city often described the villages publicly as »dirty, chaotic, and substandard.« Yet through their canny use of real estate, villagers sought, and quite a few secured, advantages and previously unimaginable wealth.[37]

Given their centrality, both spatially and socially, it is not surprising that the villages shifted from being sites of informal housing to sites for intense debates about urban renewal – the latest iteration of reclaiming residual Bao'an in the project of making Shenzhen. The villages were, and remain, the focus of dueling claims to what Shenzhen was, is, and

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34 On the now famous Huaqiangbei area, see Sylvia Lindtner, *Prototype Nation: China and the Contested Promise of Innovation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

35 Anna Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 4.

36 Ibid., 6.

37 For a detailed study of one such example, the Wen family real estate holdings in Shenzhen and Hong Kong, see Carsten Herrmann-Pillath, Guo Man, and Feng Xingyuan, *Ritual and Economy in Metropolitan China: A Global Social Science Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

will be. On the one hand, the city claims the land is legally »urban« land and therefore should be at the city's disposal as best serves the various »master« plans for Shenzhen's planned future, which usually includes a modern version of »slum clearance« and the development of office buildings, malls, and luxury apartments.[38] On the other, the villages claim ancestral ties and assert identity and autonomy, seeking to hold onto their assets or to sell them to the highest bidder. Both the city and the villages engage in a kind of elaborate dance of reconstruction, involving both collusion and resistance on both sides. Allegiances are rarely clean cut, for someone is able to profit under most any constellation, though the losers most always include the migrant workers as they are displaced to more and more remote settlements.

As the city came into existence, the villages were thus reclaimed as urban spaces in two different ways: The first was through the state's top-down administrative decisions to designate space as urban, which involved, inter alia, expropriating »unused« farmlands and legally integrating the villages into city (e. g., through zoning or building codes). The second lay in the new forms of urban identity formed over time through villages' responses to this forced integration. The dense urban spaces of the former villages, especially during the city's first three decades, were home to a vast number of migrants who used the village as a launchpad and eventually came to call the city home.

In this setting the local actors invested in the villages multiplied. Besides the villagers, the city, and the developers (all of whom are looking for ways to benefit from renewal of the villages) and the migrant workers at their mercy, another local actor has emerged in recent decades with a heightened sense of historicity—the professional middle class. In the early decades of Shenzhen only the villagers were truly local, but now, 40 years since its founding, there is an entire generation born to newcomers and raised in the city. For them, the urban villages have become places of personal meaning, even of nostalgia. Often well-travelled abroad, they are aware of the emotional and economic potential of his-

38 In 2009, the city promulgated the »Shenzhen Municipality People's Congress Standing Committee's Decision for Handling Illegal Buildings Left from the History of Rural Urbanization,« which resulted in a year of categorizing buildings in urban villages. The survey identified 357,000 »illegal« buildings that were »leftover from the history of rural urbanization.« This decision forced villages to negotiate with developers in order to remove illegal buildings and replace them with legal buildings as a precondition for compensation. This was the end result of the two-step process through which village land has been urbanized: First the legal status was changed (in two stages from 1992-1996 and in 2004) and then by changing the status of buildings in the urban villages.

Fig. 11: Hubei Ancient Village, 2019. A migrant girl studies in her parents' shop, which is located in a repurposed room in a Hubei alley.

torical preservation and heritage. The urban villages are meaningful to them in ways that differ from the descendants of local villagers, who lay direct claim to indigenous local histories. For the newer Shenzheners, the villages tend to be more a part of the history of the modern city than a link to an ancient past. The object of preservation, however, is the same space.

As a result of this renewed sense of historicity, local groups that cut across class lines have formed in recent years to try and preserve Qing-era (1664-1912) buildings in villages slated for demolition, and to capture, somehow, some of the vibrancy of the urban village in new planning. The city government has taken note, and while it still pursues the clearance and redevelopment of urban villages, it has responded to preservationist concerns by announcing the »revitalization« of seven urban villages.[39] At the same time, the city is proceeding to demolish Baishizhou,

39 The seven urban villages are in Luohu (Wutong AI Ecological Town), Nanshan (Nantou Ancient City), Bao'an (Qingping Ancient Marketplace), Longhua (Guanlan Ancient Market), Longgang (Gankeng Hakka Town) and Dapeng New District (Dapeng Fortress and Nan'ao Market), as reported in Shenzhen Economic News, 28 October 2019. On Hubei, see Mary Ann O'Donnell, »Heart of Shenzhen: The Movement to Preserve ›Ancient‹ Hubei Village« in Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Tridib Banerjee (eds.), *The New Companion to Urban Design* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 480-493.

one of Shenzhen's largest and best-known urban villages that had, at its peak, approximately 150,000 residents.[40]

Thus, the villages, as the site of nested localisms, have become a show-place for the whole range of urban renewal schemes and dreams, each worthy of a chapter in itself: At one end are attempts to renovate the existing village by modernizing its infrastructure, for example, by widen-ing the streets so fire engines can drive in, improving air, light, and sani-tation, repurposing old industrial buildings, and developing hotels, plazas, middle-class housing, and commerce. In the best cases, developers attempt to retain some of the character of village atmosphere. At the other extreme is the wholesale replacement and erasure of villages as they turn into office parks, luxury apartments, and shopping malls, with vary-ing forms of compensation for former residents, from sweetheart deals for some former villagers, to relocation to faraway housing developments for workers, to eviction for the less lucky migrants who must seek new quarters in ever-farther outlying districts of the city. In between these extremes are attempts at selective historic preservation by the city of cer-tain parts of villages, effectively turning them into commercialized tour-ist destinations, and selective attempts by villagers themselves to assert their indigenous local identity through erecting or renovating imposing gates, temples, and village museums, with funds often raised from dia-spora communities connected to the village.[41] Thus are the villages spaces for renewing the city in a dialectical fashion: On the one hand, villages repurpose existing spaces to provide informal housing, to connect with the diaspora, and to develop new ideas of heritage, preservation and cre-ative spaces. On the other, some municipal players see the urban villages as literally »blank« spaces on their maps, erasing them first in representa-tion in order to later erase them on the ground.

40 For an early piece on Baishizhou's demolition, now well underway, see Eli Mackin-non, »The Twilight of Shenzhen's Great Urban Village« in *Foreign Policy Online*, 16 September 2016, https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/09/16/china-demolition-economy-the-twilight-of-shenzhens-great-urban-village-baishizhou/ (accessed 25 April 2021).

41 An example of renovation would be Tianmian village, of erasure and replacement Baishizhou or Ganxia villages, of selective historic preservation Hubei village, and for assertion of village identity Xiasha.

Conclusion

At the 2011 Biennale with which our essay began, O'Donnell curated an exhibit that turned important dates in the history of the SEZ-turned-mega city into a retro video game where a hungry snake ends up eating its own tail as it »eats« history, ending in a »game over!« image of »boom!« only to repeat. Coming at the tail end of a larger exhibit that sought to implode the idea of a timeline of Shenzhen's condensed history, the faux video game captured the sense of infinity, hunger, self-reference, and temporal discordance coursing through the city as it continuously re-makes its history, sheds its skin, and molts from one urban imagination to another.[42] In this essay, we explored how the displacement of Bao'an by Shenzhen might be figured through acts of reclamation, where the physical transformation of the landscape simultaneously evokes an imagined future and erases the past. By straightening the coastline and leveling mountains, early construction *did* create a form of the physical *tabula rasa* that was ideologically demanded in and through New Town-style development. And yet, as we also showed, this new locality would not have emerged, and could not take on its contemporary contours, without reclaiming, reframing, and redeploying the local in its double meaning as the local indigenous and state-defined locality.

This process is cyclical: In Shenzhen, as buildings, villages, and neighborhoods age they also start to play the role of the »indigenous local« for the newcomers, turning them into objects for further urban renewal. We focused in this chapter on how former villages became sites of urban identity formation despite, and because of, their formal »obsolescence.« Early New Town-style planning has also begun to catch the attention of preservationists who see historical and aesthetic value in outdated factories, early high rises, famous hotels, and workers' housing compounds. But to understand how Shenzhen became new, it is the villages that occupy the pivotal, uncanny space that is at once a direct connection to the indigenous cultural geographies and the boom-town history of Shenzhen in its first few decades. Perhaps because the villages, for decades now, are perched on the edge of vanishing, they appear more than ever as keepers of the city's connection to its multiple pasts and its diaspora populations.[43]

42 Mary Ann O'Donnell, »BOOM! Shenzhen« in *Shenzhen Noted*, 2011, https://shenzhennoted.com/2011/12/21/boom-installation-images/ (accessed 25 April 2021).

43 »The vanishing,« writes Marilyn Ivy, »is never allowed to actually to disappear, but is kept hovering, with anxiety and dread, on the edge of absence.« It is how »ghostly reminders« of »potentially scandalous presences … act as constitutive reminders

Fig. 12: *Shake Hands with the Future: Artist, Luo Jinghe sits in front of her rendering of Baishizhou and its neighbor, Overseas Chinese Town. Wall mural displayed in the »Shake Hands with the Future« exhibition, which was held at the Handshake 302 art space, Shenzhen, May-June, 2015. In 2019, Handshake 302 was evicted from their space as part of the Baishizhou renewal process.*

Our chapter has drawn attention to the first two decades of development in Shenzhen, when the city was administratively established and planned, and its urban villages emerged within and against the new city. The expansion continues anew – in fact, new expansions are almost so common as to be old news. The technology giant Tencent's new New Town, »Net City«, to be completed by 2027, serves as perhaps a fitting epigraph. The size of Monaco, with room for 80,000 people, it has the obligatory claims to »New Town« status for the modern era – environmentally sustainable with attention to rainwater and solar energy, pedestrian friendly with self-driving cars as its main envisioned means of transportation, mixed use yet also a conglomerate headquarters, open and friendly yet also surveilled, controlled, and contained.[44] Net City is

of modernity's losses.« Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 242-3.

44 The US-based architecture firm NBBJ is designing the master plan. See http://www.nbbj.com/news/2020/6/9/wsj-tencent-builds-city-focused-on-people-not-cars/. See also »Tencent plans futuristic neighborhood in Shenzhen« in South China Morning Post, 13 June 2020, https://www.scmp.com/tech/innovation/article/3088632/tencent-plans-futuristic-neighbourhood-shenzhen-inspired-internets and »Tencent is building a Monaco-sized ›city of the future‹ in Shenzhen,« CNN, 15 June 2020,

one of several major new town projects in the city, including Shenzhen Bay Headquarters City and, most prominently, the Qianhai Free Trade Zone. Shenzhen is a city of layers of the new. Indeed, it can be navigated through its claims to newness, where each »old« layer can be categorized by its claim to once having been new. As long as it can keep up the expansion, it seems, it will never get old.

https://www.cnn.com/style/article/tencent-shenzhen-net-city/index.html (all accessed 25 April 2021).