

The Neglected Voices within Urban Village Regeneration as a Historic Urban Landscape: A Case Study of Nantou Village in Shenzhen

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Abstract

Rapid urbanization has resulted in uneven regional development in China's urban villages. As well as providing affordable housing for low-income foreign residents, it also provides income for indigenous residents. Despite this, the government has often been plagued with problems such as poor living conditions, insufficient public services, and illegal construction. Despite its potential for improving environmental quality and bringing economic benefits to urban villages while maintaining urban culture, the Historic Urban Landscape concept remains problematic for a number of reasons. Taking the Nantou Village renovation project as an example, we conducted semi-structured interviews with residents, combining literature review and field observations, with the aim of understanding the actual living conditions and spatial rights of the residents after the project's renovation. As a result of the project, visitors have been attracted, economic benefits have been generated, and the quality of the environment has been improved. Even so, it has not improved the residents' sense of belonging and has neglected to address the issue of high living costs faced by the original low-income residents. To balance excessive increases in rent, the government should either provide affordable housing for low-income foreign populations, or provide differentiated rental products.

Keywords

Urban Regeneration, Cultural Landscape, Urbanization, Spatial Rights, Urban Rural

1. Introduction

With the rapid growth of China's economy in recent years, the process of urba-

nization in China has also deepened. According to China's seventh population census, the population living in urban areas is 901.99 million, accounting for 63.89%, while the population living in rural areas was 509.79 million, accounting for 36.11% (Chen, n.d.). Compared with the sixth population census of China in 2010 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, n.d.), the urban population increased by 236.42 million, the rural population decreased by 164.36 million, and the proportion of the urban population increased by 14.21%. A study by American scholar Northam found that the interactive development path of urban population growth and urbanization process presents an S-shaped curve. The first stage is the initial stage of urbanization, in which the growth rate of the urban population is relatively low. When the proportion of the urban population exceeds 10%, the urbanization speed gradually accelerates; then, when it exceeds 20%, the urbanization process enters the second phase, where a rapid acceleration of urbanization occurs, which continues until the urban population exceeds 70%, at which point it slows down (Northam, 1975). A large number of studies have shown that this law applies not only to countries that have achieved a high degree of urbanization, but also to most developing countries and regions in the world. In this regard, it can be considered that China is in the second stage of rapid urbanization. However, due to the inadequate level of urban management, the advancement of urbanization in China is still accompanied by problems such as weak infrastructure and traffic congestion; furthermore, the regeneration of urban villages—which is unique to China—is the most prominent of the problems faced in urban construction.

1.1. The History of Urban Villages in China

The concept of urban villages was formally born in Britain in the late 1980s with the establishment of the Urban Villages Group (UVG) (Urban Villages Group & Aldous, 1992). Urban Village was defined as a residential community hosting a variety of migrant residents with similar cultural backgrounds and ethnic characteristics, located in the transition area or fringe of a city (Gregory et al., 2011). However, nowadays the Urban Villages' concept in China, also called Chengzhongcun, mainly refers to rural areas that have been occupied by the expansion of urban area in the process of urbanization and development (Pan & Du, 2021). The fundamental reason for the formation of urban villages is the difference in land-use attributes from those possessed by cities (Tian, 2008). As the development of urban villages always involves the transformation of land from collective rural land to state-owned land (Yuan et al., 2019), it is necessary to first describe the land-use system in China. Since the land reform in 1982, the Chinese government has implemented a land ownership system that divides the country's land into two types (Liu et al., 2012; Xu, Tang, & Chan, 2011): State-owned urban land and collective-owned land in rural and urban fringe areas (Zhang & Donaldson, 2013). However, when it comes to urban planning, the government does not have the right to plan for urban villages in urban areas that are collectively owned.

When the government wishes to carry out the transformation of urban villages, it must first convert the collective-owned land into state-owned land (Xu et al., 2011). Nevertheless, local governments retain the right to expropriate collective land for the public good (Xie, 2002), and some non-public urban use projects (e.g., industrial, commercial, and residential projects) can be justified and implemented under the banner of urban renewal, due to the ambitious definition of “public good” in the law (He, 2012; Cao, Feng, & Tao, 2008; Zhao, 2009).

Like the land-use system in China, the household registration system is also divided into two types—namely, urban and rural registration (Chan & Zhang, 1999)—which is one of the important reasons contributing to the lack of protection of the rights of urban village residents. The difference in the rights and interests possessed by the two types of registries mentioned above is particularly highlighted in terms of education; assuming that a person has a registration in the A district, it is likely that their children will not be able to attend schools in the B district, nor will they be able to go to schools in other cities (Fu & Ren, 2010). If a person has a rural registration, then it will be very difficult for their children to attend school in the city (Wu, 2011). The unequal rights with respect to the registration are also reflected in the right to buy cars, ordinary commercial houses, and medical insurance (Chan, 2018; Chan, 2009; Chu, 2020; Zhang & Treiman, 2013); however, the rural registration is not useless—it provides the right to own arable land and the right to build a house (on collectively owned land) and, thus, some residents with rural registration do not want to convert to the urban registration (Chen & Fan, 2016). In addition, although residents in urban villages can transfer their residence registration to achieve these rights, it is very difficult to obtain registration in a large city in China; for example, settling in Shanghai requires residence for five years or more, paying into income tax and social security, having a bachelor’s degree or higher, and other demanding conditions (Johnson, 2017). Under China’s special land management system, these rural lands are not incorporated into the cities but, instead, eventually form a special land pattern where rural lands belonging to collectives are surrounded by urban lands belonging to the state. Although the original rural residents in urban villages are passively converted to urban residents, most of them still belong to the rural registration, due to China’s household registration (called Hukou in China) system (Duda & Li, 2008), which leaves them with no policy protection for their rights, compared to residents who have an urban registration. For example, in some cities, only people who have an urban registration can send their children to the town school or buy commercial residential property in urban areas; even the health insurance system differs between the two registrations. This situation has been slightly improved by Guangzhou government’s “equal rights for rent and sale” policy (Guangdong Provincial Government, 2017), introduced in 2017, but these problems are still widespread in many cities in China. In addition, public services in urban villages also lag behind other urban areas, and there still exists a large gap between their environmental sanitation and living conditions

with respect to those of urban areas, resulting in a state of being in an urban area but living outside of it.

Geographically, villages in China can be divided into three types: 1) located in the urban core, with complete loss of arable land; 2) located in the suburbs, retaining a small amount of arable land; and 3) located on the outskirts of cities, still retaining a large amount of farmland (Liu et al., 2014). Urban villages are generally located in the fringe areas of cities or in zones that were originally in the fringe areas and are now in or near urban centers. In terms of management structure features, urban villages are mostly autonomous, run by non-government direct jurisdictional village committees (Hao et al., 2013). The semi-urbanized traits that urban villages have and the absence (or inadequacy) of governing bodies in the management of urban villages make social management difficult. The complex demographic structure of the residents living in urban villages, including indigenous villagers who have lived there for generations, citizens with local household registration, and migrant workers, coupled with the weak community management capacity based on the autonomy of the original villagers, can lead to a lack of social management and a complex security situation. In terms of urban planning, urban villages are often not included in the unified planning, construction, and management process, and the lack of planning control has led to the free, but blind development of urban villages. Although urban land is strictly regulated, in terms of planning and construction, rural land is managed autonomously, which has led to many irregular land-uses, especially in rural transition areas close to cities. Under the existing urban land management system, however, the construction plans of legally compliant conversions take months or even years to obtain approval, involving dozens of relevant municipal authorities (Hao, Sliuzas, & Geertman, 2011). Even though these villages are located within urban boundaries, the official rural landlord registration and collective land ownership of farmers largely protect them from interference through urban planning controls, and urban village collectives or villagers can obtain construction approvals from the township or village authorities with relative ease or, even, begin building houses without submitting any applications. Urban authorities have been unable to prevent or stop such illegal construction, as the negligent village chiefs often fail to enforce policies and regulations due to the potential profitability of the development process (Wang, Wang, & Wu, 2009). This has led to high concentrations of illegal and unauthorized buildings in urban villages, high housing density, poor lighting and ventilation, poor living environments, a lack of necessary infra-structure, and inefficient land usage. Although urban villages are often located in the middle or near the built-up areas of cities and have better geographical advantages, the dualistic land management model still leads to the existence of chaotic phenomena, such as unclear land ownership, lack of land management, uncontrolled land-use patterns, and confusing land-use functions, which all restrict the healthy development of urban villages.

The primary issue involved in the regeneration of urban villages in China is

the ownership of land; local governments have the right to expropriate collective land from village collectives, convert this land to state-owned land, and transfer it to developers and enterprises (Ding, 2007). In turn, the village collectives receive financial compensation from selling their land. Municipalities are in a lower position than village collectives in the negotiations for land development. As urban villages are village-led land developments and conversions, and such developments are outside the scope of formal urban land management and regulatory systems, villagers are in a better position than municipalities to gather important information about local development practices (Qian, 2015). Many village collectives in coastal areas of China have undertaken spontaneous shareholding reforms for land development (Po, 2008), which has improved the resolution of benefit distribution issues while reducing the difficulty of negotiation for the government. From the perspective of the participants, the main players in urban village regeneration are indigenous people, the government, and developers, all of whom compete for their interests (Hao et al., 2011).

A case study of a successfully regenerated village is Liede Village in Guangzhou. The Liede project also involved these three stakeholders. Different stakeholders have different needs for the regeneration project, and tend to adjust their strategies over time in response to the changing economic, social, environmental, and political environment (Zhou, 2014) which, in turn affects the evaluation of the project: the financial compensation demanded by the owner affects the cost of the regeneration project; new policies introduced by the government may affect the prospects of the household; and the negotiation between the developer and the government determines the details of the regeneration plan, such as floor area ratio and standard amenities, both of which directly affect the profitability of the project. At the end of the Liede project, it appears that all major stakeholder benefitted. The municipality obtained more revenue, while each village landlord owned one or more apartments in the CBD and could receive more dividends from the collective property in the future (Lin, 2012).

This is not an exception; studies have found that the ambitious Chinese government's compromise and generosity in compensation packages implicitly confirm the rights of landless peasants. This can be seen as a typical case of formalizing the rights of peasants as a minority of land-owning citizens through a combination of formal policy and "informal" power. Many peasants have become rich through compensation agreements and have become multi-millionaires overnight (Liu & Wong, 2018); however, such regeneration schemes, while achieving high levels of satisfaction for all parties, can create equity problems in other parts of the city, and are not considered sustainable (Li et al., 2014). Many studies have explored the negative impacts of urban village regeneration, and most of them criticize such projects due to the potential demolition of subsidized housing for migrant workers (Wu, Zhang, & Webster, 2013); however, some scholars have argued that urban village regeneration can have positive socioeconomic and environmental impacts, as well as benefitting migrant workers (Lin et al., 2014). In

addition, a small number of studies have discussed the rights exercised through resident participation and the importance of resident participation in enhancing residential satisfaction and accelerating urban village regeneration (Liu et al., 2017). In summary, most of the past studies investigating urban village regeneration in China have focused on institutions, government rights, basic public services, and benefit distribution, while few studies have focused on the satisfaction of residents after the regeneration. Only one study has included historical culture as an indicator (Tan et al., 2019), and its focus was on historical architectural culture in the traditional sense, rather than on the urban village itself as a carrier of urban memory.

1.2. Application of HUL Concept in Urban Villages

In November 2011, UNESCO proposed recommendations for the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach (Tian, 2008). The document defined the HUL approach as based on a change from considering the heritage of buildings or groups of buildings in a city in the context of dynamic urban development to considering the overall environment as a unified urban heritage. The document furthermore proposes means and methods for landscape approaches to provide a better conservation context and to integrate urban heritage conservation under a broader urban development framework. Furthermore, it defines the concept of “historic” in the HUL as follows: “The historic urban landscape is the urban area understood as the result of a historic layering of cultural and natural values and attributes, extending beyond the notion of ‘historic center’ or ‘ensemble’ to include the broader urban context and its geographical setting.” Many scholars have proposed various qualitative and quantitative analysis methods to form a holistic perception of the HUL, such as literature analyses and field surveys to reveal the attributes and values of the HUL (Urban Villages Group & Aldous, 1992), analyses of digital social platform interactions between the HUL and customers (Wang et al., 2009), and GIS-based visual analyses of the HUL (Wu et al., 2013). In the field of urban regeneration, some scholars believe that the HUL should be incorporated into national planning and that local governments should be guided to consider the HUL as an urban infrastructure, preserving the local culture and forming new tourist attractions (Wu, 2011). In a study on the regeneration project of Villasor in Sardinia (Italy), the authors propose a model that replaces economic compensation with transfer of part of the development rights and attempted to verify its feasibility (Xu et al., 2011). Some researchers have also proposed the use of contextual learning, activities to raise awareness, and co-creation to enhance residents’ engagement (Yuan et al., 2019). Current research on the HUL is focused on the three directions of holistic, value-based, and integrated approaches. Such as through semi-structured interviews reveals what affects the public’s willingness to participate in the revitalization of cultural heritage through cultural creativity (He et al., 2022). The academic discussion is mainly focused on the necessity of government policy, integrated management,

conservation, development, and planning disciplines, and there is still little research on how to move from theory to practice (Zhou, 2014).

In this study, we selected Nantou Village as study site for three reasons: 1) It is located in Shenzhen, a representative of China's rapid urbanization. 2) It has a dual identity, being both an urban village and a historical city. 3) Nantou Village underwent a two-year regeneration project in 2017; the regeneration project included the concept of HUL to make it a tourist attraction, but problems remain to this day after the project ended.

The major objective of this study is to analyze how the Nantou Village regeneration project in Shenzhen affected and related to the dynamics of change and unresolved issues from a variety of angles through the use of policy and law, the socio-economic impact, and the change in living conditions. Furthermore, this study aims to understand the real needs of local residents through semi-structured interviews and to provide suggestions for strengthening the protection of spatial rights for residents of urban villages when regenerating urban villages as HULs.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Area

Nantou Village, also known as “Xin’an Ancient County”, is located on the east coast of the mouth to the Pearl River, north of Nantou Skywalk in Nanshan District, Shenzhen City (Figure 1), Guangdong Province, covering an area of about 385,000 m² with a construction area of about 517,000 m² (Mi, 2019).

It has a history of nearly 1700 years since the establishment of Dong Guan County in 331, and was the seat of Baoan County Government before the establishment of Shenzhen Special Administrative Region. It is known as “the root of the history and culture of Shenzhen and Hong Kong”, “the capital of ancient eastern Guangdong”. In 1573, Shenzhen and Hong Kong became independent of Dongguan County and Xin’an County was established (The Government of the Qing Dynasty, 1688). Until 1842, when Hong Kong was ceded to Britain, Nantou Village existed as the capital of Xin’an County, a fact that demonstrates the long-term unification of Shenzhen and Hong Kong in terms of cultural origin, politics, economy, and military forces (Sun, 1998). Its existence is the strongest



Figure 1. The location of the study area: Nantou Village, Shenzhen.

evidence for the government to argue that the territory of Hong Kong is indivisible. It is not only the origin of Shenzhen culture, but is also an urban village. Nantou Village, located in Nanshan District—the center of Shenzhen—has a privileged location, but the lack of living environment and infrastructure has led to low rents in the area, which has attracted a large number of foreigners. The influx of foreigners, in turn, has prompted the original villagers to build additional houses in the urban village, leading to a further decline in the quality of the living environment, creating a vicious circle; however, as the original residents of Nantou Village can lead a good life with the income from their rental houses, almost all of the original residents have moved out of the village. According to the statistics, Nantou Village has a population of more than 30,000 people within its 34 hectares, 87% of whom are foreigners (Chen, n.d.).

2.2. Methods

Qualitative methods were primarily used in this study. Analyzing documents, conducting semi-structured interviews, and observing the field were the methods used to collect the primary data.

We first conducted a systematic literature review, including county annals, Shenzhen government planning policies on urban villages, related studies, news, and commentaries, which were screened. It is important to emphasize again here that this study focuses on how to strengthen the spatial rights of urban village residents when transforming urban villages into HUL; therefore, this study does not focus on the preservation of cultural heritage, focusing instead more on the history of the development of Shenzhen since its establishment, that is, the history of the development of Nantou Village as an urban village, the Nantou Village Regeneration Project, and its status after the project. Secondly, we conducted anonymous semi-structured interviews in Nantou Village between 1 April and 1 May 2022. The data obtained from the interviews were only used for the presentation of this paper, and will not be used elsewhere. The advantage of the method used is that it provides an objective understanding of people's true feelings. We interviewed a total of 590 residents who living in Nantou Village, residents including 9 landlords and 581 tenants, who were asked about the environment and changes after the regeneration project (Table 1). Finally, the information obtained from the literature review, interviews, and field observations was used to analyze the living environment and the real demands of the local residents after completion of the project.

3. Results

3.1. The Development Process of Nantou Urban Village (Before the Regeneration Project)

Phase I: Initial Phase (1980-1988)

Shenzhen was established in 1979, and in 1980, it became the first special economic zone established after China's reform and opening up. The Interim

Table 1. Participants and key questions for a better understanding of the current situation of Nantou Urban Village.

Participant	Questions
Landlords and tenants	<p>Has the infrastructure improved after the regeneration project?</p> <p>What changes have occurred in the living atmosphere?</p> <p>Has the sense of belonging improved by the regeneration project?</p> <p>Why did you choose to live in Nantou Village?</p> <p>Changes in the rental price.</p> <p>What parts still needed to be improved?</p>

Regulations on Land Use for Building Houses by Rural Community Members in Shenzhen Special Economic Zone (Shenzhen Municipal Government, 1982), published in 1982, and the Notice on Further Strengthening Rural Planning in Shenzhen Special Economic Zone (Shenzhen Municipal Government, n.d.), published in 1986, gave guidelines to villagers in Nantou Urban Village regarding the use of land for construction, specifications regarding the area of land for building houses (80 square meters), land requirements for offices and industrial land for the original villagers, and the redesignation of the Nantou Urban Village area. However, it also left some loose ends: some of the specific formalities for land acquisition were not completed adequately, and the villagers of Nantou Village continued to enjoy the right to use the old village houses. According to the requirements of the Interim Regulations, issued in 1982 (Shenzhen Municipal Government, 1982), the base area for new houses built by villagers generally did not exceed 80 square meters, so a grid pattern with 80 square meters as the base area slowly formed in Nantou County. With increasing economic affluence, villagers began to renovate and build additions; most of these buildings were built without government approval, so they are illegal buildings.

Phase II: Rapid Development (1989-2003)

By the end of the 1980s, with the rapid economic development of Shenzhen, the secondary industry brought in a large foreign population, and there was a huge market demand for rental housing. Driven by economic interests, Nantou villagers began to expand their houses to the largest extent possible. In order to control the situation, the Shenzhen Municipal Government issued the Regulations on Land Acquisition in Shenzhen Special Economic Zone (Shenzhen Municipal Government, 1989) in 1989, which not only failed to control the enthusiasm of the villagers in Nantou Village regarding private construction, but also triggered a rush to build before the policy was implemented, and the trend of illegal construction grew.

After the first phase, the problem of illegal private housing construction in Nantou Urban Village became quite serious, and the government issued many relevant policies, such as the Decision of the Standing Committee of the Municipal People's Congress on Resolutely Investigating and Dealing with Illegal

Buildings (Shenzhen Municipal Government, 1999) in 1999 and the Opinions on Handling Illegal Private Houses (Shenzhen Municipal Government, 2020) in 2001. However, these policies did not stop the villagers from building illegally; instead, most of them started to build more illegal private houses with the mentality of “building houses to keep the land rights”. At this stage, nominally, the land in Nantou Village was fully nationalized, but, in reality, the right to use it belonged to the villagers; thus, in reality, the construction of Nantou Village was not controlled by the government and remained in a free state.

Phase III: Deceleration (2004-2016)

In the second phase, the illegal construction in Nantou Village became increasingly intense, and, if left unchecked, it would have seriously squeezed Shenzhen’s future development space, so the Shenzhen Municipal Government promulgated the Decision of the Municipal Government on Resolutely Investigating and Dealing with Illegal Buildings and Illegal Land Use in 2004, and strengthened enforcement against illegal construction and forcibly demolished some illegal buildings in Nantou Urban Village. This phase saw a massive reduction in illegal construction in Nantou Village, and, as the historical value of Nantou Old Town was uncovered, Nantou Village was no longer only used for temporary housing of migrant populations. On the other hand, with their rising rental incomes, the original villagers gradually moved out of Nantou Village as they were able to live a better life with their rental incomes.

As a key city in China’s reform and opening up, Shenzhen has experienced rapid industrialization and urbanization. Through this process, a large number of original villages have been transformed into urban villages (Lai, 2016), occupying more than half of the urban area (Hao et al., 2013) and being distributed in different areas.

The government of Shenzhen introduced new policies and systems at an early stage, as shown in **Table 2**, to solve the local urban village problem, such as clarifying the compensation standards for demolition and relocation through policies and regulations, including urban village transformation in the urban planning system, the refinement and transparency of the use of urban village reconstruction funds, delineating the scope of responsibility, and creating a platform for communication between the government and villagers. This not only reflects the intention of the Shenzhen government to solve the current land-use and urban management problems (Chung, 2009), but also an attempt to regain control of urban land use and regeneration in the long run.

3.2. Nantou Village Regenerate as Historic Urban Landscape

In 2011, the Protection Planning of Nantou Old City, Shenzhen, mapped and redefined the boundaries of Nantou Village (UrbanSpace, n.d.). The new boundary of Nantou Village includes the area north of Shennan Avenue, west of Nanshan Avenue, east of Nantou Middle School, and the area south of the ancient city boundary of Zhongshan Park. This was conducted as a means of converting

Table 2. The changing process of urban villages policies in Shenzhen.

Phase	Year	Policy	Main Content	REF
Phase I: Initial Phase	1982	<i>Interim Regulations on Land Use for Building Houses by Rural Community Members in Shenzhen Special Economic Zone</i>	Rural land for housing construction must be subject to the requirements of the master plan of the city, and applications must be made to the government	Shenzhen municipal government, 1982
	1986	<i>Notice on Further Strengthening Rural Planning in Shenzhen Special Economic Zone</i>	Implementation of rural urbanization (conversion of rural land to urban land)	Shenzhen municipal government, 1986
Phase II: Rapid Development (1989-2003)	1989	<i>Regulations on Land Acquisition in Shenzhen Special Economic Zone</i>	Provides that the government can legally acquire rural land in Shenzhen	Shenzhen municipal government, 1989
	1999	<i>Decision of the Standing Committee of the Municipal People's Congress on Resolutely Investigating and Dealing with Illegal Buildings</i>	Identifies and investigates illegal buildings in urban villages and takes appropriate measures to deal with them	Shenzhen municipal government, 1999
	2001	<i>Opinions on Handling Illegal Private Houses Left</i>	Legal buildings in the urban village are subject to property rights formalities, and illegal buildings are subject to fines as well as demolition	Shenzhen municipal government, 2001
Phase III: Deceleration: (2004-2016)	2004	<i>Interim Provisions on the Regeneration of Urban Villages in Shenzhen</i>	Clarifies the conditions and methods of urban village regeneration; stipulates compensation standards for demolition and relocation; explains dispute resolution methods	Shenzhen municipal government, 2004
	2005	Shenzhen Urban Village (Old Village) Regeneration Master Plan Outline (2005-2010)	Comprehensively maps the city's urban village land boundaries, land scale, construction and renovation implementation, and other specific information; reasonably determines the scale of residential land reservation in urban villages and delineates comprehensive improvement zones	Shenzhen municipal government, 2005
	2016	The 13 th Five-Year Plan for Shenzhen Urban Renewal	Focuses on solving existing projects in urban villages; strictly controls the regeneration of old urban projects; encourages low-carbon ecological renewal	Shenzhen municipal government, 2016

a portion of the former collectively owned land into urban land, creating the conditions for the legality of the regeneration of Nantou Village. In 2016, the Shenzhen Municipal Government announced a new regeneration plan for Nantou Village and, in 2017, it held the Shenzhen-Hong Kong Bi-city Biennale of Urbanism/Architecture in Nantou Village, with the theme of "Cities, Grow In Difference", while promoting innovation in the use of space in urban villages. Unlike previous projects, this project was planned by the government, NPO, and a third-party urban design research institute in synergy, in order to preserve the spatial pattern of the main neighborhood while highlighting the cultural charm

of the village (Li, 2020). The buildings within the style coordination district should adopt a unified transformation based on not destroying the spatial texture of ancient buildings and the urban village. In terms of property rights, the government partially collects and leases the property rights of the buildings to be regenerated, the NPO organization identifies and positions the cultural regeneration elements of the neighborhood, and the business model of the regenerated buildings can take the form of renting only. All operators must be examined by the government and the market for qualifications. The roles of operators and managers should be separated from each other, and the management of the main shopping street buildings is implemented under the joint supervision of the government and the market. In addition, the project proposed the creation of a cultural brand for Nantou Village, by introducing public art to reshape the cultural atmosphere of the village and to arouse a sense of belonging and environmental consciousness in residents. This was expected to allow for the regeneration of the urban village to establish a virtuous cycle from the inside out, regenerating the village while curating the exhibition and providing a new direction of urban village regeneration that avoids large-scale knockdown and reconstruction.

Based on the uniqueness and cultural value of Nantou as an urban village, it was considered inappropriate to demolish the old and build the new on a massive scale, with comprehensive renovation more oriented towards the renewal and upgrading of physical spaces, which poses a challenge in promoting the cultural revival of the village and empowering future development. Therefore, it is necessary to iterate the urban renewal model, through top-down planning and government investment, in order to activate the culture of the old city in the early stages of regeneration. After the initial results, social resources should be encouraged to enter and the residents to cooperate with the city. URBANUS, a third-party design studio, customized six strategies for Nantou village (Meng, n.d.):

- Renovating the park;
- Reshaping the boundaries;
- Conservation of historical buildings;
- Activating the main street;
- Establishing creative factories;
- Updating the inner village.

Specifically, the project rectified the traffic access conditions in the main block, in order to improve the current state of street congestion and confusion, such as comprehensive management of stores opened along the street to prevent commercial operations from blocking the normal flow of people and improving the smoothness of the street. However, the phenomenon of various street vendors, simple kiosks, and motor-cycles and small cars competing to occupy the narrow streets in Nantou Village still exists. Secondly, street sanitation should be improved, the cleanliness of the streets should be enhanced, and the construction of public garbage disposal facilities and centralized disposal sites should be increased. Finally, cultural squares, parks, and fitness equipment should be provided, in order to improve the overall appearance of Nantou village and provide

a diverse living experience for its residents. In the regeneration process, the project took full consideration of the site constraints and adopted the flexible strategy of “minimum demolition of narrow, partial demolition compensation”, in order to avoid the deconstruction of permanent buildings. It starts from the Guandi Temple outside the city gate in the south, passes through the South Ancient Gate, Zhongshan South Street (i.e., the main street), turns northeast at the Baode Square, enters the cultural and creative factory area, passes the Dajiale Stage in the northwest, and enters Zhongshan Park in the north, ending at the North City Wall site; thus, it was connected with the existing Zhongshan West Street in the east-west direction of Zhongshan Mountain, together forming the new cross-shaped development spine of Nantou Village (**Figure 2**). The main axis links the existing gates and walls of the city, and was expected to evoke a sense of the boundaries of the village.

As the construction period for the Bi-city Biennale was only ten months, only two important nodal spaces were selected for renovation, one of which was the regeneration of Baode Square (**Figure 3**). The original tin houses on both sides of the square were a supermarket that provided residents with necessities and a grocery market that housed 16 stores. These were demolished and replaced by a fashion bookstore, an indoor exhibition, and a studio. The two buildings face each other, with a staircase shape on the facade facing the court, together creating a sense of a community center surrounded by an auditorium. During the exhibition, weekly cultural lectures were held to engage villagers and citizens alike while, after the exhibition, it was expected to host events such as concerts and readings, held spontaneously by social groups. These two buildings, with an area of less than 60 m², have successfully led to the rise of community culture and have become an important stronghold of cultural exchange between the city and

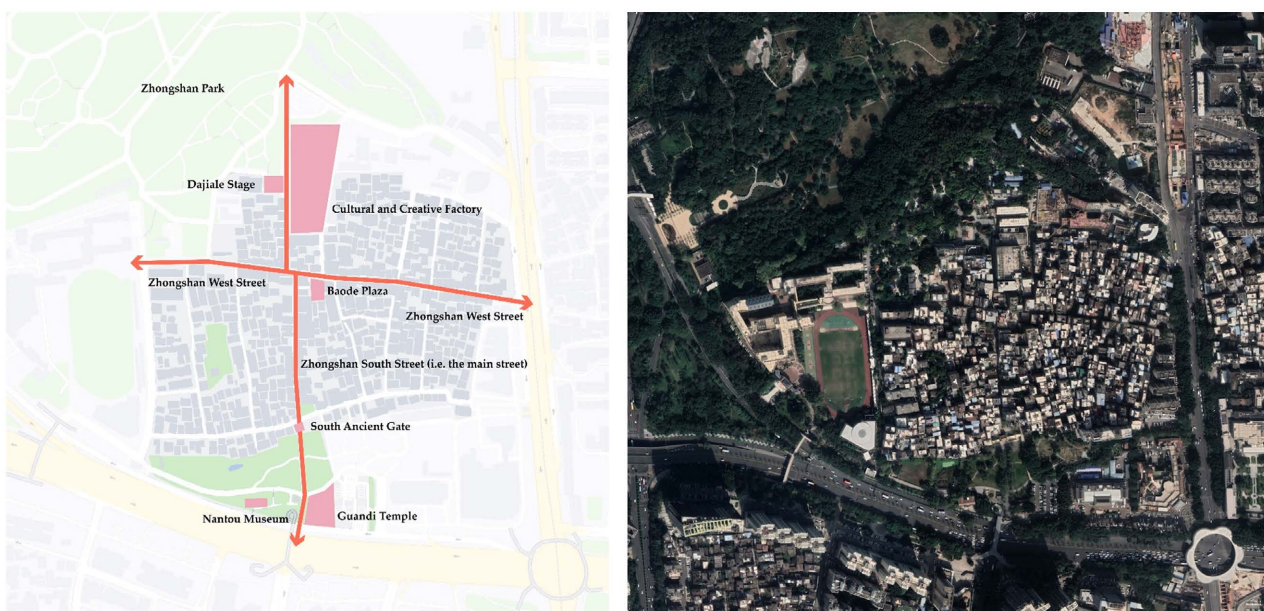


Figure 2. Nantou village conservation planning.

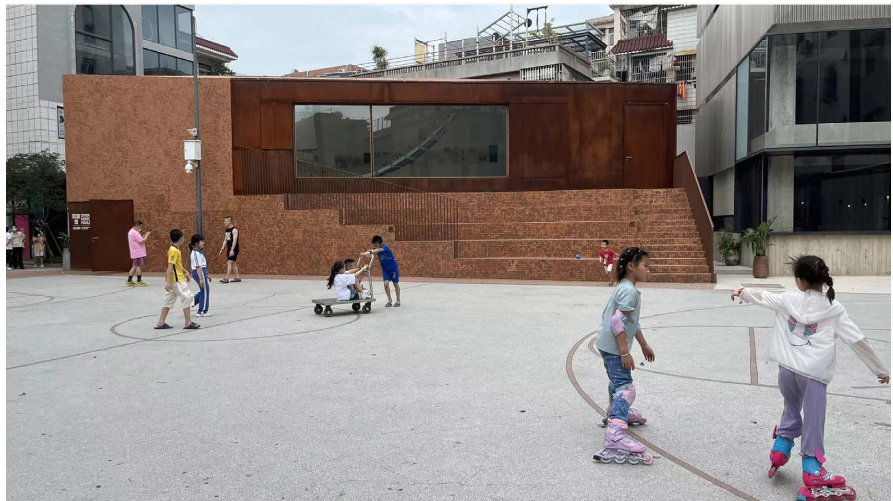


Figure 3. Baode Square. Source: Taken by the author.

the village.

The second space selected for transformation was the existing industrial plants on the north side. The factory square in the northern part of the Village was chosen as the main exhibition site for the Bi-city Biennale. To open up space from the crowded historical district, in order to free up the overall pattern, and also to enhance the image of Nantou Village as soon as possible and attract more enterprises and young people through the Bi-city Biennale, the government mobilized the original industrial enterprises in the factory area to evacuate during the Biennale through administrative actions, and the workers had to choose to quit their job and leave Nantou Village.

As a result of the publicity and influence of the exhibition, the business pattern and atmosphere of the important streets in Nantou Village were also transformed, to a certain extent. The streets and squares originally used as public spaces for villagers and tenants were converted into commercial streets serving tourists, while the old market-oriented commercial activities and living areas were reduced and the proportion of businesses serving tourists, such as cafes, exhibition halls, and cultural and creative stores, was increased. In general, during this regeneration process, the living space of indigenous people and tenants in Nantou Village became somewhat compressed, thus affecting their spatial rights. The spatial form and area of the Village did not change much after this regeneration, but the actual impact arises from two points: The forced conversion of spatial functions and the introduction of tourism.

The expropriation of the supermarket and grocery market at Baode Square, in order to convert them into bookstores, cafes, exhibition halls, and other commercial businesses for tourists, as well as the transformation of factories in the industrial zone into creative parks, are both forced conversions of spatial functions. The former led to the disappearance of some commercial and public spaces that supported the lives of villagers and tenants, while the latter led to the se-

verance of convenient connections between the living space and workplace of workers, both of which have indirectly affected the quality of the living environment of the original residents and, thus, their spatial rights. At the same time, the introduction of the “tourist” group has led to the transfer of some spatial rights of the main people in the historic district. Most of the main public spaces in the historic district have been transformed from the living space of villagers to tourist service visiting spaces. Even the living spaces of residents have become a part of the scenic tourism locations.

3.3. Current Situation of Nantou Urban Village

It has been two years since the Nantou Village Bi-city Biennale. Baode Square, the focus of regeneration at the time, is still one of the public spaces with a high utilization rate. A total of 35.5% of local residents (landlords and tenants) reported passing by it every day. Baode Square has, indeed, become a highly utilized open space in the community.

The factory in the northern part of the village, which was the main venue of the Bi-city Biennale, was oriented as a creative park that has not been settled by cultural enterprises for a long time; as such, the originally prosperous factory has experienced a relatively long vacancy (**Figure 4**). It has been partially converted into a temporary dormitory for sanitation workers, and is no longer open to ordinary residents. In terms of public health and road cleanliness, all residents believe that they have been effectively improved.

However, there is still a large gap between the living environment of the main street and the living area (**Figure 5**). The nine landlords surveyed all said that they can live a comfortable life through their rental income, and seven of them no longer live in Nantou Village. Therefore, they are not strongly attached to the Nantou Village community, with more focus on property rights and income for regeneration projects. In general, the landlords had a positive attitude towards the regeneration of Nantou Village. After all, the environment and infrastructure improvements will increase their income.

According to the survey of tenants, only 38.55% of the tenants had lived in

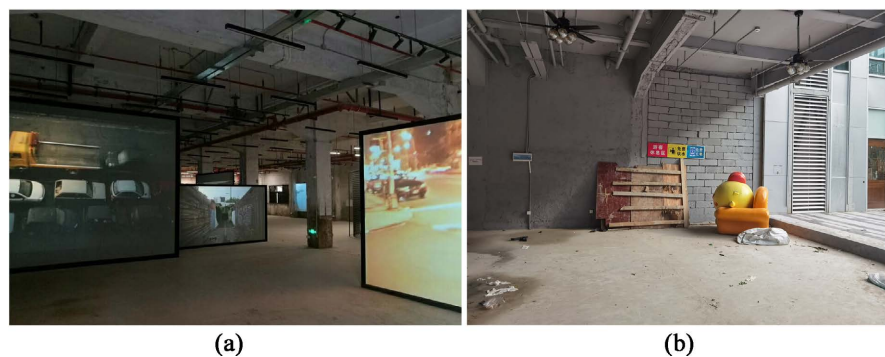


Figure 4. Long-term vacant factory. (a) Cultural and Creative Factory in 2018; (b) Cultural and Creative Factory in 2022. Source: Taken by the author.

Nantou Village for more than three years. 90.12% of the tenants who have lived in Nantou Village for more than five years experienced a significant increase in rent after the exhibition began, and most of them are engaged in the service industry such as takeaway, express delivery, and construction industries, mainly based on manual labor (Figure 6). Population mobility remains strong in Nantou Village. According to the recollection of Mr. Li, who has lived in the village for 12 years, although the community environment improved after the regeneration project, the rent has risen more than 20%; at the same time, some informal shops that could help to reduce living costs have closed, such as Sichuan Mah-jong House and Shaxian snacks.



Figure 5. Main Street and Living Area. (a) Main Street after Regeneration; (b) Living Area. Source: Taken by the author.

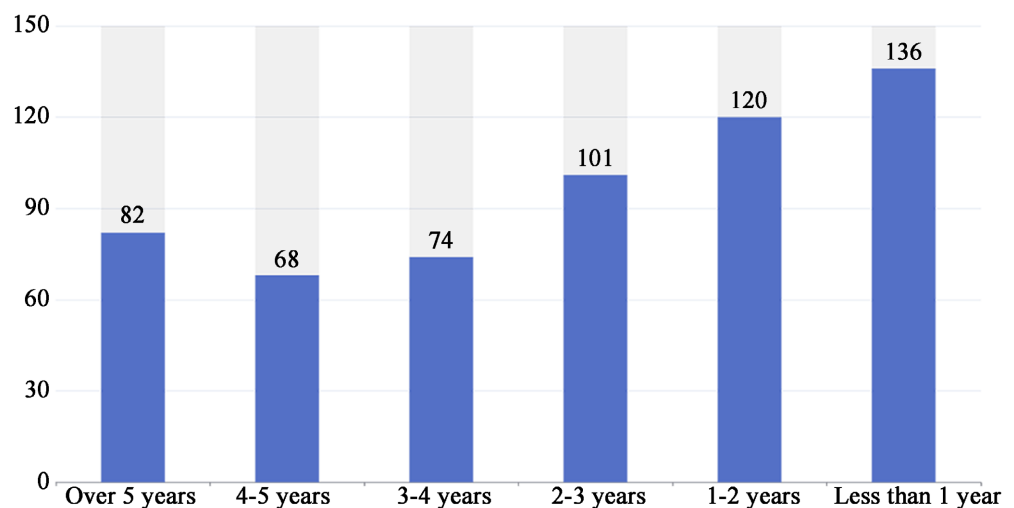


Figure 6. Tenant length-of-stay statistics.

Most of the reasons why tenants who have lived for more than three years have no choice but to move out include their convenience for children to go to school and their own work. Some residents expressed a preference for Nantou Village before the regeneration, as the rents were cheaper. In addition, no respondents cited the improved cultural atmosphere brought about by the re-development as a reason for making the choice to stay.

Surprisingly, 47.05% of the tenants who had lived in the village for less than three years had a high school degree or above, which may be related to the government's introduction of youth apartments after the Bi-city Biennale (Table 3).

Although the Shenzhen Municipal Government has been using the slogan "Once come, You are a Shenzhener naturally" as a city slogan for many years, but still 70.8% of the tenants said they felt no sense of belonging to this community, and price and location factors were the main reasons for choosing to live in Nantou Village. Further-more, many residents mentioned that, after the Bi-city Biennale, the number of tourists increased evidently, which led to more and more merchants settling in Nantou Village, which further led to rising rents and rising living costs. This has made Nantou Village more like a tourist attraction, rather than a low-cost residential area.

In summary, The Bi-City Biennale brings together cultural creatives and urban planners, blurring the lines between cultural events and regeneration projects, and between the government and curators. The reconstructed Nantou Village has attracted attention from ordinary tourists, cultural workers, and cultural-creative industry companies. The regeneration of urban villages without demolition and the promotion of large-scale events are also conducive to building Shenzhen's creative and inclusive image. This seems to produce a win-win situation for all parties: landlords passively receive higher rental income; future tenants have improved living standards, and their interests and rights can be legally protected; for the government, a smaller amount of demolition is required, and it does not need to pay high land ownership compensation fees; and, finally, it also completes the task of urban village transformation and local culture promotion.

4. Discussion

In David Harvey's analysis of spatial rights, he refers to the right to a decent and healthy life (Harvey, 2010). The living environment produces spatial differences between different classes, which is reflected in the spatial rights as a difference in

Table 3. Survey of education of people with less than three years of residence.

Education	Number	Average age
Elementary School Degree	24	50.5
Junior high School Degree	76	48
High School Degree	89	37
Above Bachelor Degree	168	31.5

the right to a living environment. The regeneration of urban villages should precisely involve the guarantee and realization of the environmental rights regarding the living areas of urban village residents. As a product of the current era, urban villages are in a specific stage of urbanization and a special geographical location and, so, they assume a special social function which has a positive effect, to some extent. First, they provide massive low-cost housing (Kochan, 2015). In the process of rapid urbanization, a large floating population enters the city, and the low-cost rental housing in the urban village provides an affordable option for the foreign population to live in, thus functionally compensating for the lack of housing security in the process of rapid industrialization and urbanization development by the Chinese government. Second, they provide livelihood security to former villagers. After losing their land and transforming their status into citizens, the production and lifestyle of the original villagers are not sustainable and, apart from basic social security, they can only rely on rental housing and dividends to maintain their livelihood (Hao, 2012). The unique location and low cost of urban villages bring advantages to the rental economy of the former villagers. Third, certain urban villages have become carriers of cultural inheritance. The architectural style and layout of some urban villages has local characteristics, and the unique ancestral shrines, ancient temples, theatres, and bazaars in the original villages make it possible to preserve the traditional village form of rural China within modern cities (Dong, 2020). As the original villagers, citizens, and foreigners all live in these villages, various lifestyles intersect and collide, and the urban village signifies times left behind with the rapid development of urbanization, carrying the unique culture in and of itself.

In addition, the study results must be interpreted with caution and a number of limitations should be borne in mind. As three years have passed since the regeneration project, where a large transient population exists, only 82 residents participated in the semi-structured interviews and were able to experience the entire transformation process of Nantou Village. Additional semi-structured interviews could be conducted in the future in order to improve the results. However, the study did not include a survey of evicted tenants because not enough of them were able to be contacted. It would be beneficial to improve the validity of the study results if a sufficient sample was used to investigate the reasons for the tenants' moving out and to understand the tenants' actual needs.

From the perspective of HUL, the regeneration of Nantou Village has achieved certain results. It has protected the physical heritage, such as temples and city walls, in the village, preserved the original street form, established a museum, and brought more tourists. It has successfully spread the local culture, attracted businesses, and driven economic growth; however, in the process of regeneration, the emphasis on the original local culture was too blunt, and only the original villagers with property rights participated in the whole regeneration process, while the rights of the tenants—who formed the majority of the community residents at that time—were ignored. As a result, the multi-cultural space formed

by the influx of foreigners in the process of urban generation has been destroyed. After the end of the project, there was also a lack of follow-up means to enhance the sense of belonging to the local area. Furthermore, the government should provide affordable living places for the original tenants—for example, by regulating the tiered pricing of rent taxes, assessing the surrounding rents, and providing differentiated rental products to balance the excessively rapid rent increases.

5. Conclusion

As an urban village, Nantou Village is being transformed into a community featuring regional cultural history, industry, and commerce. However, under the cover of the Bi-city Biennale, land-use and spatial relocations quietly took place, in which many living environments created by migrants were destroyed and replaced by formal landscapes that conform to the local culture and history. In this context, various social groups experienced a new round of mobility and migration. Originally, the original villagers lived here. With the entry of low-income people who work in factories, service industries, manual labor, or small-scale businesses, the main residents changed. The original villagers began a new lifestyle, relying on rental income, and then became rich landlords and moved to a better neighborhood (Di, 2021). Now, it is time for the original low-income residents to move out and be replaced by college students and middle-income people who seek opportunities in Shenzhen after graduation.

The regeneration of Nantou Village is a renovation experiment in urban village regeneration in a HUL area led by the government, guided by policies, and supported by commercial developers. From the perspective of the city government, optimization of the image of the historic district and the upgrading of the regional industrial layout are important and urgent tasks. Therefore, the Bi-city Biennale, which introduced administrative methods as a catalyst, showed some contradictions: the designers designed life-like scenes and spaces based on the original use needs of the villagers, while the government envisioned more “regularized” and “high-end” spaces. The government’s demand for such spaces ran counter to the actual living requirements of the villagers; as such, the regeneration has broken the balance of the informal economic model in the historic district, to a certain extent, but has failed to protect the original multi-cultural atmosphere. However, the regeneration of Nantou Village is a balanced solution that integrates many conditions, such as the urban background, historical conditions, and rights of residents. Compared with the traditional mode of demolition, reconstruction, and regeneration of Chinese urban villages, this regeneration method pays more attention to and protects the spatial rights of residents and other main users of the village.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

Ethical review and approval were waived for this study as no individual identification information was recorded, and all participants were anonymous.

Informed Consent Statement

Oral consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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