DOI:10.1111/1468-2427.12646

– MAKING THE 'INVISIBLE' VISIBLE:
Redevelopment-induced Displacement of Migrants in Shenzhen, China

YING LIU, STAN GEERTMAN, FRANK VAN OORT AND YANLIU LIN

Abstract
Gentrification in China is intertwined with urban redevelopment, which causes the large-scale displacement of rural–urban migrants from 'villages in the city' (ViCs). Because of the informality of ViCs, migrant renters have very insecure tenancy and during redevelopment they are treated as a negligible ('invisible') social group. As they are very difficult to locate after displacement, they are also literally invisible to researchers. To make the invisible visible, this study traced a sample of displaced migrants from Huangbeiling village in Shenzhen. The focus was on the displacement process and on identifying the consequences for the displaced. We found various forms of displacement during the redevelopment process. Nearby ViCs were prioritized by displaced migrants to minimize as much utility loss as possible. However, they generally suffer from decreased proximity, increased living costs, and the loss of social networks and job opportunities. Remarkably, some choose to return to the gentrifying village, enduring displacement in situ caused by increasing rents, drastic physical neighbourhood changes and declining liveability, in exchange for retaining their original social and economic networks. Large-scale urban redevelopment is causing the rapid shrinkage of informal housing. Recognizing and addressing the housing needs of this impoverished social group is a matter of urgency.

Introduction
After nearly four decades of China's economic reform, Chinese cities have undergone a profound transformation that has been accompanied by large-scale rural–urban migration and the restructuring of urban space. Land value capture has long been a hotly debated topic, and it has influenced a wide variety of land ownership regimes. One debatable outcome—gentrification, intertwined with urban redevelopment—has occurred in many Chinese cities, such as Shanghai (Wang and Lau, 2009; He, 2010), Nanjing (Song and Wu, 2010) and Guangzhou (He, 2012). This transformative process in urban China, which is characterized by thriving urban real-estate development and strong alliances between local governments and developers (Liu *et al*., 2017), can be viewed as part of a broader wave of gentrification, enforced under a neoliberal ideology for the recapitalization of urban space (Smith, 2002; He and Wu, 2009; Hall and Barrett, 2012). Gentrification is a multifaceted process that can generate radical changes in the urban landscape and socio-economic profiles of neighbourhoods. The displacement of low-income residents is one of the most worrying, albeit not always directly observed consequences. It can have profound impacts on displaced households, resulting in both economic and social injustice.

Land marketization and administrative decentralization following China's 1978 economic reform have facilitated massive urban redevelopment aimed at capturing the unleashed rent gap, of which a main target is 'villages in the city' (ViCs, also called urban villages[1]). ViCs are urban neighbourhoods that were originally rural settlements with

The authors would like to thank Xingtang Qiu and Dr Ping Huang for their generous help and support during the fieldwork. They also wish to thank the interviewees for sharing their experiences of displacement.

1 Although the term 'urban village' is more widely used in the literature, as pointed out by Chung (2010), the term leads to substantial misconceptions. This study therefore uses the term 'villages in the city'.

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longstanding land ownership rights, but are now encircled by and will eventually be incorporated into new urban development (Lin *et al*., 2014; Schoon, 2014; Ye, 2014). As a typical type of informal settlement in Chinese cities, ViCs are inhabited by millions of rural–urban migrants who have no tenancy security and are largely treated as invisible by both local governments and developers. When ViCs are demolished, migrants are simply uprooted. Although there is an established literature on the institutional disadvantages of migrants, their inferior position has seldom been examined within the context of gentrification and displacement, and there are very few, if any, empirical studies on the individual experiences of displaced migrants. The aim of this study was to understand the invisibility of migrant renters in the process of the redevelopment of ViCs, and to identify the impacts of redevelopment on this social group (i.e. to make the 'invisible' visible). Reliable quantitative data on this issue are lacking. Therefore, we collected primary information by tracking and interviewing a sample of displaced migrants from Huangbeiling village in Shenzhen.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. In the following section, we briefly review the literature on gentrification, urban redevelopment and induced residential displacement in urban neighbourhoods. In the third section, we discuss the informality of ViCs and the invisibility of migrant renters in the redevelopment process. In an attempt to make the invisible visible, in the fourth section we present the outcomes of our case study in Shenzhen, starting with the empirical methodology and data used, and subsequently providing evidence concerning the spatial, economic and social consequences of redevelopment-induced displacement of migrants. We draw our concluding remarks in the final section.

Literature review: gentrification, urban redevelopment and the induced displacement in neighbourhoods

Ever since Glass (1964) first identified the phenomenon in London, gentrification has mutated both temporally and spatially. Although early literature made a clear distinction between gentrification and urban redevelopment, the past few decades have seen a blurring of this distinction, especially in developing countries. Smith (2002) observed an emerging global urban strategy in which gentrification is increasingly embraced by both the market and the state as an effective way to promote urban prosperity, mainly through large-scale urban renewal projects. In the past few decades, urban redevelopment and its consequences, namely redevelopment-induced displacement, are thus often viewed through the lens of gentrification discourses (Lees *et al*., 2010). However, it is noteworthy that although gentrification now tends to go hand in hand with urban redevelopment, the interactions between the two processes are highly dynamic. For instance, a recent study by Wu (2016a) in Shanghai found that urban redevelopment has gone beyond gentrification and is more properly characterized as a state-mandated formalization process of informal settlements. These newly emerging cases warn against simply treating urban redevelopment and gentrification as the same process. The dynamics between them are rather context sensitive and need to be examined case by case. In our case (the redevelopment of Huangbeiling village in Shenzhen), the informal neighbourhood has undergone radical changes and a social upgrading process is going to replace low-income migrants by more well-off classes. We therefore situate this redevelopment project and our discussions within the broader gentrification narratives.

The issue of residential displacement constitutes the fundamental essence of gentrification (Lees *et al*., 2010). Compared with sporadic gentrification triggered by the return-to-the-city movement of the middle classes, gentrification by means of urban renewal is more directly, overtly and immediately associated with the physical eviction of incumbent residents. This form of direct displacement (Grier and Grier, 1978) has been extensively documented in the literature because it is most evident and observable.

Previous studies have shown that those subject to direct displacement tend to make short-distance moves (Bolt and Van Kempen, 2010; Kleit and Galvez, 2011). Underlying this pattern are such factors as place dependence (Kleit and Galvez, 2011), the presence of social ties (Popkin *et al*., 2004), and limited information about and access to other neighbourhoods (Bolt and Van Kempen, 2010).

Besides physical eviction, urban redevelopment projects are also very often related to a price-shadowing effect (Liu *et al*., 2017). As noted by Davidson (2008), urban redevelopment not only causes changes in the housing market but also generates property 'hot spots'. By creating contrasting and distinct urban landscapes, property hot spots represent a strong image of urban revitalization and thus attract the inflow of capital. These changes, which can also be viewed as part of a broader gentrification process, contribute to housing price increases in adjacent areas and lead to economic displacement (Marcuse, 1986; Davidson, 2008; Bernt and Holm, 2009). Economic displacement occurs when incumbent households cannot afford housing costs and are thus priced out of the neighbourhood (direct economic displacement), or when other households with the same income level are denied access to the neighbourhood due to the rent increases (indirect economic displacement or exclusionary displacement) (*ibid*.).

In relation to economic displacement, Vigdor (2002) conceptualized the locational strategies of poor renters suffering from rising housing costs in gentrifying neighbourhoods on the basis of moving costs and utility levels. He argued that, compared with households that are priced out (direct economic displacement), those that stay in the neighbourhood tend to experience the largest utility loss, since they have to absorb any (unreasonable) increase in housing costs. Although this situation was touched upon in Marcuse's (1986) examination of displacement pressure, it has only recently been more fully conceptualized and discussed in a burgeoning body of literature (see e.g. Davidson, 2009; Sakizlioğlu, 2014; Stabrowski, 2014; Atkinson, 2015; Shaw and Hagemans, 2015; Liu *et al*., 2017) that focuses on displacement *in situ*, namely the displacement of residents who remain in gentrifying neighbourhoods. Here, a seminal work is that by Davidson (2009), who, basing himself on the philosophical thinking of Lefebvre and Heidegger, approached displacement from a phenomenological perspective and emphasized the social facet of place. As he argued, besides the predominant displacement-as-out-migration perspective, displacement is also about the loss of place. This perception of place is, at its core, the lived experiences of individuals. As also delineated by Atkinson (2015) in the notion of 'symbolic displacement', a loss of sense of place represents complex emotions of alienation and estrangement brought about by drastic changes that take place in both the physical and the social fabric of the neighbourhood. This is a gradual but constant process of 'incumbent unanchoring to dwelling in place' (*ibid*., p. 377).

The above literature review showed the dynamic relationship between the processes of gentrification and urban redevelopment, and how redevelopment causes various forms of residential displacement in urban neighbourhoods. These theoretical insights into the patterns of displacement can guide our empirical analysis. This process, however, has not yet been systematically examined within the Chinese context. The different institutional, social and economic circumstances in Chinese urban growth give reason to believe that the mechanisms behind displacement and its consequences may to a certain extent be different in Chinese cities from those in Western contexts. In the following two sections, we first unravel the historical and institutional origins that have caused the disadvantaged position, or more accurately, the 'invisibility' of migrants in the process of redeveloping ViCs. After that, we examine the various forms of displacement in the case of Huangbeiling village, through the lived experiences of those displaced.

The 'invisible' social group during the redevelopment of villages in the city

Roughly speaking, two classes inhabit ViCs: the landlord class (indigenous villagers) and the tenant class (Chung, 2010). Migrant workers constitute the majority of the tenant class in ViCs. The reason for this can be traced back to the *hukou* (household registration) system that was introduced in the 1950s. Under this system, Chinese people are registered according to their birthplace as either rural or urban residents. Rural–urban migration was strictly controlled by the state before the economic reform. In cities, local urban residents have access to various services and amenities, such as schools, public housing and welfare programmes, that cannot be accessed by those without a local urban *hukou* (Wu, 2002). Since the central government started to relax restrictions on rural–urban migration in the 1980s, Chinese cities (especially coastal cities) have seen an unprecedented influx of migrant workers. However, the discriminatory rural–urban and local–non-local divisions still exist (Chung, 2010). Rural–urban migrants are largely excluded from formal labour markets and various urban services such as the education and welfare systems (Zhao and Howden-Chapman, 2010). This exclusion, which affects housing too, results in the clustering of migrant workers in ViCs: not only is the formal rental housing market in the city too expensive for the majority of migrants, but because of the *hukou* system most of them are denied access to the formal social housing system. Financial constraints and a shortage of land make local governments unwilling to provide rural migrants with social housing (Lin *et al*., 2014). This leads to a broadly similar pattern of social housing supply in Chinese cities, in which the social housing system is mainly oriented towards local citizens (Zhou and Ronald, 2016). Although a series of *hukou* reforms have recently been made to accelerate the process of turning rural migrants into urban citizens, only a limited number of highly skilled and professional migrants can apply to the new social housing programme (i.e. public rental housing). As a result, most migrants can only resort to informal sources for affordable housing—ViCs (He, 2013).

In many Chinese cities, these migrant enclaves are now subject to large-scale demolition and redevelopment, as part of the 'global urban strategy' (Smith, 2002). In February 2016, the Chinese central government released the 'Opinions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on Further Strengthening the Administration of Urban Planning and Development', in which it is stated that 'by 2020, the transformation and renovation of existing shantytowns, villages in the city and dilapidated houses in cities will be complete'.[2] Booming urban redevelopment will undoubtedly have enormous social impacts on urban areas in the form of direct and indirect residential displacement. This leads us to the contrasting fates of the two distinctive classes that live in ViCs (Wu, 2016a).

Although local villagers are also under the threat of displacement, in comparison to migrants they have a relatively stronger position during redevelopment. Chung (2013) and Wu (2016a) described the development of local villagers' strong property rights in ViCs—rights that are recognized by local governments during urban redevelopment. They are the main stakeholders with substantial bargaining power and are entitled to considerable compensation for displacement. After the redevelopment, local villagers may even choose to move back to their original neighbourhood, since in some cases part of the land is used for the construction of new properties to compensate villagers. Therefore, for many local villagers, redevelopment is a once in a lifetime opportunity to acquire a large fortune. In contrast, migrant renters are excluded from the decision-making process of urban redevelopment and are largely treated as 'invisible' by key stakeholders (Chung, 2013; Liu *et al*., 2014; Sun, 2015). As pointed out by Wu (2016b), the rights of migrant tenants during the redevelopment of ViCs have not yet been recognized.

2 Available at http://www.mohurd.gov.cn/wjfb/201602/t20160222_226696.html (accessed 8 September 2017).

The vulnerable position of displaced migrants during demolition is deeply rooted in the informality of ViCs, which can be traced back to the dualistic and fragmented landownership and a lack of regulation and governance (Wu *et al*., 2013). In the process of rapid urbanization, indigenous villagers lost their farmland, and thus their main source of livelihood, and millions of migrant workers were in urgent need of affordable housing (Chung, 2010; Wang *et al*., 2009). This situation has fuelled unprecedented informal construction activities in ViCs over the past two or three decades. Villagers replaced their traditional one- or two-storey dwellings with concrete houses of up to four or five storeys (and sometimes even seven or eight storeys), resulting in the well known 'handshake and kissing buildings' street profile (Tian, 2008; Wang *et al*., 2009; Lin *et al*., 2011; He, 2013). The informality of ViCs is reflected not only in the built environment but also in the rental practices (Wu, 2016b). Unlike the formal rental market, where written contracts are signed between landlords and tenants and both parties are required to register with the local police, the rental market in ViCs is very informal. It is common practice for migrant renters, especially lower-income migrants, to merely make verbal agreements with landlords (Zhang *et al*., 2003; Webster *et al*., 2016; Wu, 2016b). In general, the informality of ViCs has led to migrant renters lacking secure tenancy in the face of demolition and eviction. Nevertheless, compared with the substantial attention that has been paid to informal housing development in ViCs, the issue of the insecure tenancy of migrant renters has only recently been addressed (see e.g. Wu, 2016b).

This lack of academic attention is also due to another dimension of the invisibility of displaced migrants: the extreme difficulty in tracing them. It is always a considerable challenge for researchers to find those who have been displaced and give them a voice in academic narratives (Lees *et al*., 2010). As pointed out by Newman and Wyly (2006: 27):

> Estimating the scope and scale of displacement and exploring what happens to people who are displaced have proved somewhat elusive. In short, it is difficult to find people who have been displaced, particularly if those people are poor. By definition, displaced residents have disappeared from the very places where researchers or census-takers go to look for them.

Wu (2004: 12) also noted that in China it was 'impossible to trace residents of demolished houses'. Atkinson (2004) described this situation as the literal 'invisibility' of those who have been displaced. This is especially the case for migrant renters in ViCs: this social group is not only ineligible for resettlement housing, but also highly mobile, since many of the migrants do not have steady jobs. In the literature, despite the calls for qualitative accounts of residential displacement (Slater, 2006; Watt, 2008), empirical studies on the redevelopment-induced displacement of this social group are particularly rare, partly because of the difficulty in tracing this group.

Overall, the longstanding institutional neglect of migrants' housing needs and housing rights is evinced most significantly in the face of urban redevelopment. When demolishing ViCs, migrants are not considered an interest group and are rather invisible to the main stakeholders in the process, and unless exhaustive research efforts are made to locate them, they are also literally invisible. In an attempt to make this invisible social group visible, we carried out in-depth interviews with traced displaced migrants from a case study area in Shenzhen, focusing on their locational strategies and individual experiences of displacement.

Making the 'invisible' visible: a case study in Shenzhen

— Data and research method

Shenzhen is in the southeast of China, immediately to the north of Hong Kong. We chose Shenzhen as the study area because the process of gentrification driven by

urban redevelopment projects is more prominent in large cities, and compared with other large cities in China, Shenzhen is at the forefront of urban redevelopment: it is the city where ViCs first emerged and was one of the first in China to pursue urban renewal strategies (it started to redevelop ViCs as early as 1992) and it devised the country's first master plan for the redevelopment of ViCs (Chung, 2009). Finally, there are numerous such villages scattered throughout the city. The issue of the displacement of migrants arising from the demolition of ViCs is therefore more serious and urgent in this city.

We used various sources of data in our empirical research, including government documents, interviews, photographs and maps. These data were mainly collected during fieldwork carried out in Shenzhen from December 2013 to February 2014 and from March to May 2015. Government documents were obtained from government bureaus. Information on Shenzhen's urban renewal projects was gathered from the municipal government's website. We used mapping, field observations and semi-structured interviews to investigate the redevelopment of Huangbeiling village in Shenzhen and the spatial, economic and social consequences of redevelopment-induced displacement for migrants. Interviews with government officials in Huangbeiling sub-district office provided general information about the project, and interviews with displaced migrants gave us insights into individual experiences of displacement.

Migrants were recruited by the snowballing technique: interviewees were asked to refer others as potential interviewees. Although this sampling technique can generate unrepresentative sample groups, it is widely used for populations that are difficult to access. This method was indeed suitable for our research, since it is extremely difficult to locate migrants displaced from the redeveloped village. In this sense, we aimed not at recruiting a representative sample of displaced migrant renters in the city, but at exploring the individualized experiences of residential displacement and providing a rich understanding of this process.

We eventually found 22 displaced migrants, whose demographics are presented in Table 1. After 22 interviews, saturation was reached; that is, no new information could be obtained concerning the main aspects of the consequences of displacement. It is worth noting that, in this study, we applied a broader definition of 'migrant'. Following studies such as Jiang *et al*. (2012) and Zhao and Howden-Chapman (2010), in this study 'migrant workers' are people who work in Shenzhen but do not possess a Shenzhen *hukou*.

— Redevelopment of ViCs in Shenzhen and the resultant large-scale displacement of migrant renters

In 1979, Shenzhen was designated as a special economic zone (SEZ).[3] Due to rapid urbanization, Shenzhen is faced with a severe lack of land resources (Song *et al*., 2011). The municipal government therefore started exploring urban renewal policies and introduced a series of regulations and master plans to manage urban redevelopment practices, in which a main focus is the redevelopment of ViCs. In 2005, the master plan of 'Villages in the City' Redevelopment (2005–2010) was enacted. Chung (2009) identified this master plan as the beginning of Shenzhen's aggressive state-led redevelopment of ViCs. In 2009, the announcement of Shenzhen's urban redevelopment measures represented a more systematic implementation of urban renewal projects. In November 2016, the municipal government announced the 13th Five Year Plan of Urban Redevelopment (2016–2020). The objective is that, in 2020, 100 redevelopment projects of ViCs and old residential and commercial urban areas will have been accomplished. These projects are often aimed at improving the built environment of ViCs, and they target upper-middle-income groups. Old, shabby buildings constructed by villagers are demolished, making way for high-end residential and commercial complexes.

3 The SEZ was originally made up of four administrative districts—Nanshan, Futian, Luohu and Yantian—but in 2010 it was extended to cover the whole area of Shenzhen. The 'SEZ' used in this paper retains its original meaning.

TABLE 1 Interviewees' demographics

No.	Gender	Age	Place of *Hukou*	Education Level	Occupation
1	Male	48	Sichuan	Technical secondary school	Construction worker
2	Male	49	Sichuan	Junior high school	Labour contractor
3	Male	65	Sichuan	Primary school	Construction worker
4	Male	54	Sichuan	Junior high school	Construction worker
5	Male	41	Sichuan	Primary school	Day labourer
6	Female	45	Sichuan	Junior high school	Hour labourer
7	Male	35	Sichuan	Junior high school	Truck driver
8	Female	37	Sichuan	Junior high school	Cleaner
9	Female	35	Sichuan	Junior high school	Salesperson
10	Male	48	Sichuan	Junior high school	Construction worker
11	Female	36	Sichuan	Technical secondary school	Salesperson
12	Female	42	Sichuan	Junior high school	Day labourer
13	Male	30	Sichuan	Junior high school	Construction worker
14	Male	60	Chongqing	Primary school	Freelancer
15	Male	40	Sichuan	Junior high school	Construction worker
16	Male	46	Hubei	Primary school	Day labourer
17	Male	49	Sichuan	Junior high school	Construction worker
18	Male	37	Sichuan	Senior high school	Plumber
19	Male	40	Sichuan	Senior high school	Taxi driver
20	Female	37	Sichuan	Junior high school	Unemployed
21	Female	53	Sichuan	Junior high school	Cleaner
22	Male	50	Chongqing	Junior high school	Security guard

As mentioned, in the process of redeveloping ViCs, local villagers' property rights are recognized by the government. In the provisional regulations of 'Villages in the City' Redevelopment, it is stated that those who are entitled to compensation are the owners of the demolished buildings.[4] This is a result of a decades-long bargaining process between the municipal government and indigenous villagers. Wang *et al*. (2009) described this compelling process and showed the attitude of the municipal government towards villagers' illegal construction activities in ViCs changing from sympathy to intolerance and finally to compromise. Nevertheless, compared with the relatively strong position of their landlords, the tenant class in ViCs has a far inferior status. There is never any room for bargaining, and they are not entitled to any compensation. An extreme and persuasive example of this is the definition of 'residents' in ViCs provided in the above government document: '"Residents" in this regulation refer to members of the original village collectives [indigenous villagers] who possess a Shenzhen *hukou*, as well as other residents in the village who have procured the housing through legal means'. This narrow definition of residents by the municipal government has simply excluded millions of migrant renters in ViCs: they are not members of the village collectives and they do not possess a Shenzhen *hukou*, and owing to the informality of the rental markets in ViCs, they cannot obtain housing 'through legal means'. In the official narratives of the government, migrant renters are not considered an interest group and are intentionally ignored.

In Shenzhen, nearly a third of the ViCs are within the SEZ area, and many are centrally located. Because of the huge rent gap, ViCs within the SEZ have recently

4 Available at http://www.szns.gov.cn/gtj/xxgk21/zcfg10/zcfgjgfxwj42/5152744/index.html (accessed 8 September 2017).

undergone more redevelopment (Hao *et al*., 2012; Lai and Zhang, 2016). In 2008–15, a total of 35 projects covering an area of 1.92 km^2 within the SEZ were initiated by the municipal government. It is estimated that these projects caused the displacement of 247,091 migrants.[5] To our surprise, physical displacement on such a large scale encountered hardly any resistance from migrants. Attention from academics and policymakers is also rare. In the following section, we use the redevelopment of Huangbeiling village to illustrate the dispersal and struggles of this invisible social group.

Redevelopment-induced displacement of migrants in Huangbeiling village

– Demolition of Huangbeiling village

Huangbeiling village is one of the oldest ViCs in Shenzhen and it has strong locational advantages in terms of transport accessibility. It is situated on the north side of Shennan Road, one of Shenzhen's main roads; many bus lines service the village; and Huangbeiling station is also the transfer station for subway lines 2 and 5. In addition, Huangbeiling village is close to many urban amenities. For instance, a large park (Huangbeiling Park) lies just to the west of the village.

The redevelopment of Huangbeiling village was launched in 2011. The project consists of two phases. The first entailed the development of new buildings covering an area of 0.4 km^2 and a total investment of approximately 3.5 billion yuan (around US $0.5 billion). More than 1,400 buildings were bulldozed and approximately 30,000 residents were uprooted.[6] Figure 1 shows the urban fabric of the redeveloped part and the remaining part of Huangbeiling village. In the demolished area, a multifunctional complex consisting of a shopping mall, office buildings and high-end apartments will be built.

Our interviews confirmed the informality of the rental market in ViCs and the insecure situation of migrants' tenancy. None of the migrants interviewed had signed a formal contract with their landlord; most had just made verbal agreements: 'We never signed a contract with our landlord, just by verbal agreement' (interviewee 4, Luofang village, January 2014). They also stated that there was no official notice from either the government or the developers about the demolition. As recalled by another migrant:

> We did not know the exact date of demolition. They had never officially informed us. In those days, we were always wondering: will we need to move tomorrow? Or the day after tomorrow? We could not be sure (interviewee 19, Luofang village, April 2015).

This reflects the precarious situation of these migrant workers before the eviction: they knew they were going to be evicted, but not when it would happen. They were under constant threat, in terms of the occurrence of actual eviction, the consequences it might have and the availability of resources to mitigate the adverse impacts on their daily lives. This uncertainty about the future exerted considerable pressure on them, corresponding to Marcuse's (1986) conceptualization of displacement pressure, namely of households' subjective fear of the possibility of displacement.

Most of the migrant renters had heard about the planned demolition only from their landlords, and only in a very informal way. Therefore, when we asked them how many days they had been given to look for a new place, the answers differed a lot, ranging from six months to only several days. To make matters worse, some heard about the demolition at the last minute, thanks to the greed of their landlords: 'They

5 The population density of migrants in ViCs within the SEZ is based on the Annual Report of Redevelopment of Villages in the City in Shenzhen (Shenzhen Municipal Office of Redevelopment of Villages in the City, 2005), since no updated data are available. Therefore, the results should be treated with caution. Because of the continuing influx of migrants during the last decade, calculations based on data in 2004 tend to underestimate the scale of displacement.

6 Information provided by Huangbeiling subdistrict office.

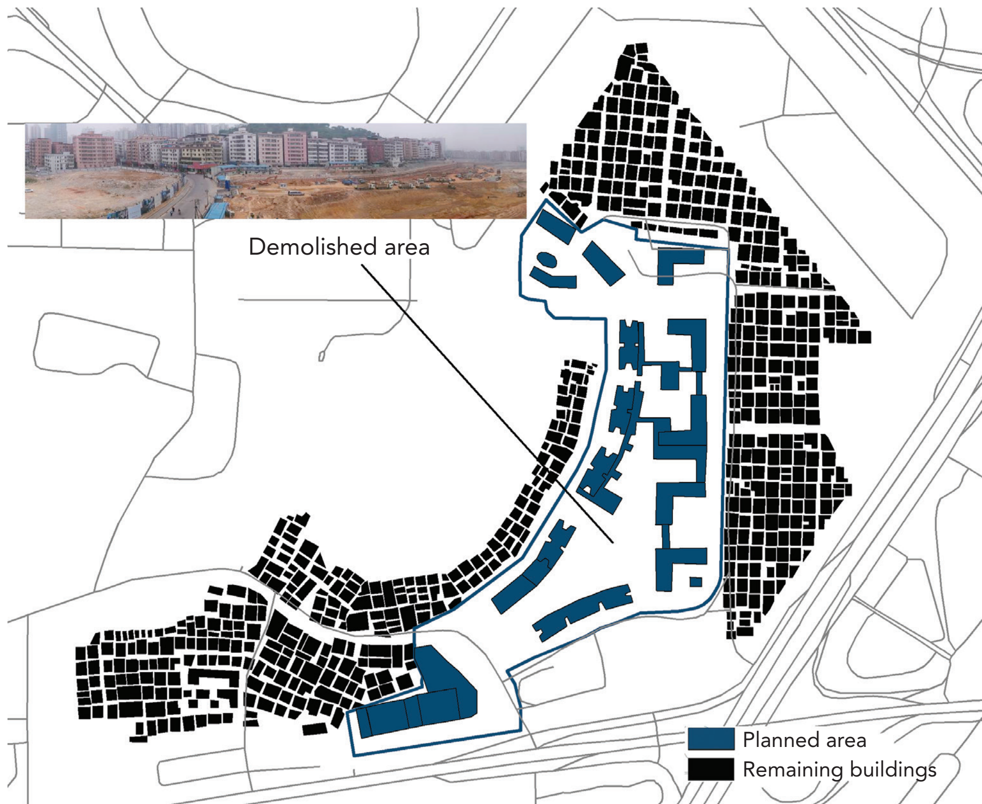

FIGURE 1 Demolished area of Huangbeiling village and the urban fabric of the remaining area (map drawn by Ying Liu)

[landlords] just kept the news to themselves until they [migrant tenants] had paid the rent for next month!' (interviewee 19, Luofang village, April 2015).

The above is a good illustration of the inferior position of migrants in ViCs: they were largely treated as peripheral, irrelevant and unimportant. Surprisingly, it seems that migrants not only accepted their marginalized position in the process of redevelopment, but also agreed with it:

> At that time, we only had 10 days to look for a new place, but we had no choice. We are just migrant workers. Who will listen to our complaints? No one will (interviewee 4, Luofang village, January 2014).

> Only the landlord can get compensation, we cannot. We are just outsiders. They asked us to move, we had no choice (interviewee 13, Luofang village, January 2014).

> The government wants to demolish the whole area. They want to construct new buildings. What can we do? We are merely renters here. When we are asked to leave, we just leave (interviewee 5, Luofang village, January 2014).

Migrants' attitudes towards their displacement reflect a strong sense of subordination, obedience and even fatalism. They consider themselves outsiders in the city, and they do not want to cause any trouble or get involved in any conflicts. Although they constitute

the majority of the residents of ViCs, they are the 'silent majority'. As observed by Zhao (2008), migrant tenants simply disappear from the site shortly after the announcement of the planned demolition, which evinces their literal 'invisibility'.

– Dispersal and struggles of displaced migrants from Huangbeiling village

Urban redevelopment through the demolition–reconstruction approach immediately leads to the physical eviction of incumbent residents, which is the 'direct displacement' conceptualized by Grier and Grier (1978). When their day finally arrived, 30,000 migrants living in the area slated for demolition were uprooted from Huangbeiling village and had to find somewhere new to live. According to interviews with migrants, the majority of them moved to the remaining buildings in Huangbeiling (Figure 1). Since there are no official records of where those who left the village moved to, this information could only be obtained through interviews. We eventually identified six places to which displaced residents had moved, namely the villages of Luofang, Xinxiu and Tianbei, and the sub-districts of Qingshuihe, Buji and Liantang (Figure 2).

Two patterns can be observed from the dispersal of the migrants we traced from Huangbeiling village. First, they continue to cluster in ViCs, and cases of relocating to other types of urban neighbourhoods are very rare. This seems to be a logical outcome, considering that migrants generally have low incomes and thus cannot afford to rent on the formal rental market, and that as a result of the *hukou* system they cannot enter the social housing system. This highlights the crucial role of ViCs in fulfilling migrants' pressing need for affordable housing, as suggested in the literature (see e.g. Song *et al.*, 2008). Second, the migrants we traced tended to prioritize nearby locations. This spatial attachment, which is in line with previous findings (Bolt and Van Kempen, 2010; Kleit and Galvez, 2011), reflects the migrants' strong desire to maintain their proximity to social groups, workplace and public facilities, all of which are linked to the original neighbourhood. In other words, borrowing from Vigdor's (2002) perspective of viewing displacement from moving costs and utility levels, nearby locations are sought, within their budget constraints, to minimize as much as possible the utility loss from decreasing proximity and accessibility. For instance, a displaced migrant who is an hour labourer and had moved to Luofang village (a ViC only 1.5 km away from Huangbeiling) said that she still went to Huangbeiling village to buy meat, since meat there is much cheaper. By staying close to Huangbeiling, it is possible to use these kinds of tactics to minimize utility loss. This contrasts with experiences of greater inconvenience for those who moved to places farther away: 'After the demolition, we found a place in Caopu village [a ViC in Buji]. The transport was quite inconvenient, so we just lived there for half a year' (interviewee 1, Huangbeiling village, December 2013). For this interviewee, the utility loss resulting from the relocation was too much for his family to bear, and this pushed him to seek new places.

A similar situation was described by another migrant concerning access to commercial facilities: 'There are many supermarkets in Huangbeiling village; everything is cheaper. But in the place I moved to, there is only one supermarket and pork is very expensive' (interviewee 3, Huangbeiling village, December 2013). These inconveniences, which are a result of reduced accessibility to various urban services, can all be translated into higher living costs. In other words, as a direct consequence of displacement, migrants spend more on their daily needs. However, no matter how hard they try to re-optimize their location strategies, utility loss is unavoidable. For instance, even those who moved to nearby Luofang village faced substantially increased commuting costs. For example, a construction worker who needs to travel frequently said the following:

> Living in Luofang village, you have to transfer wherever you want to go. It is so inconvenient. Compared to commuting in Huangbeiling village, I have to spend one hour more every day, and approximately 100 yuan more on the costs of commuting every month (interviewee 4, Luofang village, January 2014).

FIGURE 2 Dispersal of migrants from Huangbeiling village (map drawn by Ying Liu)

What is more devastating for displaced migrants, however, seems to be the loss of their social and economic networks. Unlike proximity and accessibility, which can possibly be retained by moving to places with similar locational advantages, a destroyed social network is much harder to re-establish elsewhere.

In the literature, ViCs are regarded as transitional neighbourhoods that retain traditional kinship-based and place-based networks that originated in rural villages (Liu *et al.*, 2010). To survive in the face of the many forms of exclusion and discrimination imposed on them through the *hukou* system, migrants from the same hometown tend to cluster together, resulting in the emergence of *tong xiang* (fellow townsman) ViCs in big cities. Huangbeiling village is a typical *tong xiang* village, and most of the migrants are

from Sichuan province. The clustering of *tong xiang* usually results in high degrees of occupational specialization, an outcome of a mutual learning process in low-skilled jobs between *tong xiang*. In Huangbeiling village, men usually work in the construction sector, and women as house cleaners (see Table 1). This means that for many of them, their jobs are temporary and unstable and are based on short-term contracts. As a result, searching for jobs is a part of their lives, and their level of income is highly contingent on their success in job hunting, in which information undoubtedly plays a decisive role. We found that for migrants in Huangbeiling village, there are mainly two ways of hearing about job opportunities. First, since the majority of them do not have steady jobs, they rely on kinship and social networks in their job-search strategies. As an interviewee reported:

> We don't have a steady job, so we rely heavily on our social network for job opportunities. For instance, if I hear about a job opportunity today, first I will ask my family, relatives or friends. After that I just go out and ask some tong xiang if they need a job. If you know very few people, you will get very few job opportunities, and you earn less (interviewee 2, Huangbeiling village, December 2013).

As such, for migrant renters in Huangbeiling village, a social network not only generates a sense of belonging and provides social support and assistance, but more importantly, it is also an important source of employment opportunities. As another migrant told us: 'Our job situation is unstable, and we rely a lot on social networks. My husband is a construction worker. Ever since moving to the new neighbourhood, he gets fewer job opportunities' (interviewee 12, Luofang village, January 2014).

Second, out of the aforementioned occupational specialization, an informal 'employment office' had gradually formed in front of one of the supermarkets[7] in the village. Every morning and every evening, migrants gather there to exchange information about job opportunities. This place is now so well known for the clustering of construction workers that labour contractors in other areas of the city go there to hire them. This informal 'employment office' can be considered a unique locational advantage of Huangbeiling village. Thus, those who left Huangbeiling village, and especially those who moved to faraway places, were deprived of crucial sources of information about job opportunities, both socially (social networks) and spatially (informal 'employment office').

Overall, those who were displaced to other places in the city encountered difficulties in travelling to work, had to pay more for their daily needs and got fewer job opportunities, mainly due to the loss of their social and economic networks.

– Moving back to Huangbeiling: the least bad option?

Turning our sight back to Huangbeiling village, the two-phase redevelopment has in a way enabled the maintenance of the old social fabric in Huangbeiling, since part of the village was left intact. As mentioned, after the demolition, displaced migrants prioritized the remaining part of the village, to which the majority of them moved. As a migrant told us:

> We wanted to stay in the remaining part of Huangbeiling village when they demolished the central part. However, that area was packed at that time since everyone wanted to stay there. After searching for about ten days, we eventually managed to find a place in Luofang village (interviewee 22, Luofang village, April 2015).

7 This is a new one that emerged after the demolition. The previous location was in the demolition area. Information provided by officials in Huangbeiling subdistrict office.

This shows that for those who moved to other places, leaving Huangbeiling was a reluctant decision, since they were left with no other option. Nevertheless, staying in the gentrifying village is not without costs. In fact, since the demolition, tenants in the remaining part of Huangbeiling village have suffered from severe rent speculation. This is the spillover effect of urban redevelopment that influences the rent levels of surrounding houses and in the remaining villages (Zhang *et al*., 2016; Liu *et al*., 2017). As reported by another interviewee:

> The rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Huangbeiling village before the redevelopment was approximately 800 to 900 yuan per month. After the demolition, the rent in the remaining part of Huangbeiling village rose to about 1,400 to 1,500 yuan per month (interviewee 9, Luofang village, January 2014).

When asked whether she wanted to move back to Huangbeiling village, she answered: 'Everyone wants to stay there because of its centrality, but how can I afford the rents now in Huangbeiling village, with so little income?' (interviewee 9, Luofang village, January 2014). This migrant was denied access to the remaining part of Huangbeiling village due to the rent increases. In other words, she was excluded from a once affordable neighbourhood, suffering from exclusionary displacement as a result of the price-shadowing effect of the redevelopment project (Marcuse, 1986).

To cope with increasing rents, migrants had to resort to various strategies. For instance, 'group renting' (*qunzu*) was prevalent in the remaining part of Huangbeiling village. Group renting is a survival strategy in which migrants respond to higher rents by consuming smaller living spaces (Wu, 2016a). In Huangbeiling village, it was very common for 10 or more people to share a two-bedroom apartment, and migrants had extremely poor living conditions in such arrangements. A migrant, who had group rented in Huangbeiling village, reported the following:

> In Huangbeiling, normally three or four families, sometimes as many as five families, live in a three-bedroom apartment. It is so common to house two families in the living room. Since every family has their own gas cooker, there are often five or six gas cookers in one apartment (interviewee 22, Luofang village, April 2015).

As argued by Vigdor (2002), low-income residents who remain in gentrifying neighbourhoods are trapped in that they have to absorb any (unreasonable) increase in housing costs, and they have to adapt their social practices around their daily lives accordingly. Their previous sense of place, even if not lost, has to be reconstructed.

Drastic changes also occurred in the physical environment of the village. For instance, the informal market that sold cheap meat and vegetables was replaced by a formal market with higher rents and prices; a mobile phone mast was torn down, leaving the migrants with a very poor network signal; and every day there were loud noises from the busy construction site nearby. The village has become less and less liveable because of the rocketing rents, worsening living conditions and reduced access to local resources. Changes in the built environment also contributed to an increasing sense of instability and precariousness, causing 'symbolic displacement' as conceptualized by Atkinson (2015).

Despite all these disadvantages, we found that, remarkably, five of the 22 migrants we traced had decided to move back to the gentrifying village. And this was not uncommon among displaced migrants from Huangbeiling village, as revealed by one interviewee:

> As far as I know, there were plenty of them who moved back to Huangbeiling. Some returned after just one month. Some even gave up the deposit for

> the new place, just to be able to move back immediately (interviewee 3, Huangbeiling village, December 2013).

There were similar descriptions from other interviewees:

> There were some who moved to a non-SEZ area, while many of them moved back to Huangbeiling village, because it was too inconvenient living outside the SEZ area (interviewee 9, Luofang village, January 2014).

> I know that many people who moved here to Luofang village eventually moved back to Huangbeiling village (interviewee 14, Luofang village, January 2014).

This interesting phenomenon indicates a re-optimization of displaced migrants' locational choices in the city. It is important to explore the reasons behind this, because in the Western context, gentrifying neighbourhoods are usually where low-income residents suffer the greatest impacts from rising rents and radical changes, and where they tend to escape from, whereas in the Huangbeiling case, the fact that displaced migrants eventually moved back to the village indicates the essential role of social and economic networks in their livelihoods. A trade off was clearly made by these migrants: they chose to suffer from displacement *in situ*, just in exchange for the restoration of their original social and economic networks. As discussed above, social networks play a crucial role in their income generation, and because of this, compared with the places to which they originally moved, the remaining part of Huangbeiling village was where they could obtain a maximum level of utility. Since rebuilding such networks is both time and resource consuming and is of greater uncertainty, for them, moving back was the best worst alternative. It should be noted that the Huangbeiling case presented in this study, is only exemplary in nature. It is therefore important to caution against overgeneralization of the spatial patterns, mechanisms and consequences presented above. Empirical research at larger scales with more representative samples is needed before any further generalization of the results.

Conclusion

China's current wave of gentrification is intertwined with booming urban redevelopment, engendering the large-scale residential displacement of low-income residents. Insights into the processes, the descriptive characteristics of displaced residents and the institutional shaping of the system are evidently needed. By situating an urban redevelopment project within the narratives of gentrification, this study provides a detailed examination of the fate of the most impoverished social group that is confronted with redevelopment-induced displacement: migrant renters living in ViCs. Owing to the lack of tenancy security, which is deeply rooted in the informality of ViCs, migrants are not considered an interest group when demolishing these informal settlements and are rather invisible to the main stakeholders in the process. The displaced are also literally invisible unless an exhaustive research effort is made to locate them. In an attempt to make the invisible visible, we conducted a case study in Huangbeiling village in Shenzhen to disentangle the displacement processes of a sample of migrant workers.

We observed various forms of displacement in the course of the redevelopment process. Even before the demolition started, migrant renters suffered the constant threat of physical displacement. Their inferior situation caused by the *hukou* system is reflected in the limited relocation opportunities that are available to them. In general, displacement in the form of short-distance relocation occurred most frequently, with substantial utility loss in terms of decreasing proximity to workplace and various urban services, increased living costs and the destruction of social and economic networks.

The longstanding institutional neglect of migrants' housing needs and housing rights has resulted in their disproportionate concentration in ViCs. Contrasting with this is the government's ambitious urban strategy to eliminate these stigmatized informal settlements by gentrifying and restructuring them one by one and at a fast tempo. A rapidly shrinking pool of affordable housing for low-income migrants, especially in central urban areas, makes their survival in the city more and more difficult. They are either displaced to peripheral areas of the city, where they face increased commuting time and costs, or they resort to tactics such as group renting, enjoying proximity and accessibility but suffering from extremely poor living conditions and the constant threat of displacement. This already marginalized social group has been further marginalized as a result of redevelopment-induced displacement.

An interesting and important finding is that, after a while, some migrants had decided to return to the gentrifying village. The main reason for this, as we have captured, is the crucial role of social networks in their income generation. The restoration of social and economic networks is, however, at the expense of displacement *in situ*, imposed on them through rocketing rents, drastic physical changes and declining liveability. This indicates that the maintenance of social and economic networks is viewed by migrant renters in Huangbeiling village as more important for their survival in the city. This is, in our opinion, a very important difference compared with mainstream displacement discourses in Western societies. Shenzhen's municipal government is redeveloping ViCs on a large scale. Through only one case study on a sample of migrants, we do not claim that the present case study is representative of the general situation in Shenzhen, and other cases might uncover dissimilar characteristics and mechanisms of the process. However, we do believe that our findings are relevant to more nuanced research on displacement, especially within the Chinese context.

Huangbeiling village was one of numerous low-income urban neighbourhoods swept away by a wave of gentrification under neoliberal urbanism, in which local state–capital alliances have been formed in pursuit of the recapitalization of urban space, giving birth to mushrooming flagship regeneration projects in urban areas (Smith, 2002; He and Wu, 2009; Hall and Barrett, 2012). However, the social and spatial injustices uncovered in Huangbeiling village also exhibit substantial context-based characteristics. For instance, the disadvantaged position of migrant renters during gentrification and urban redevelopment is to a great extent embedded in complicated and rather locked-in institutional arrangements, such as the *hukou* system. Discriminatory institutions, together with the authoritarian role of the state in China, have exacerbated the injustices inflicted upon these migrants. This is partially reflected in their sense of subordination, obedience and even fatalism. The findings of this research show the amplifying role played by pre-existing institutions in producing social injustices during displacement, which is in itself already a dispossessing process. Chinese migrants' experiences and struggles uncovered in this study, therefore, can offer additional precious insights to the literature, which is primarily based on Western contexts.

A key question arising from our research is how to provide affordable housing to low-income groups in large cities. Recent years have witnessed gradual reforms in the approaches applied by local governments for urban redevelopment in China. For instance, in Shenzhen, in recognition of the urgent need for affordable housing, the municipal government combines the redevelopment of ViCs with the provision of social housing, by requiring that demolition–redevelopment projects set aside at least 8% of the construction area for social housing units.[8] However, rural–urban migrants are not among the low-income groups that can benefit from these reforms, owing mainly to their *hukou* status. Although the *hukou* system has undergone substantial reforms in recent years, the reforms mostly benefit those migrants who have higher incomes or

8 See http://www.szft.gov.cn/bmxx/qcsgxb/tzgg/201601/t20160113_483046.html (accessed 8 September 2017).

educational levels. Low-income migrants with low educational levels are still largely excluded from the system, and they are incapable of voicing their needs and concerns during displacement processes. More research is needed to investigate redevelopment-induced displacement from the perspective of those who experience it (especially low-income migrants) to provide empirical evidence for possible reform in institutional settings in China.

Ying Liu, Department of Human Geography and Planning, Faculty of Geosciences, Utrecht University, PO Box 80115, 3508 TC Utrecht, The Netherlands, research.ying@gmail.com

Stan Geertman, Department of Human Geography and Planning, Faculty of Geosciences, Utrecht University, PO Box 80115, 3508 TC Utrecht, The Netherlands, s.c.m.geertman@uu.nl

Frank van Oort, Department of Economic Geography, Erasmus School of Economics, Erasmus University Rotterdam, PO Box 1738, NL-3000 DR, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, vanoort@ese.eur.nl

Yanliu Lin, Department of Human Geography and Planning, Faculty of Geosciences, Utrecht University, PO Box 80115, 3508 TC Utrecht, The Netherlands, yanliu_lin@hotmail.com

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