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Evolving Socio-Spatial Typologies for Dwelling in Huangyan's Industrialising Hinterland

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Photography by Katharina M. Borgmann in Taizhou, China

By studying formerly rural villages surrounding the Smart Moulding Town in Huangyan in the process of fragmented transition toward industrialization, the paper presents a selected catalogue of hybrid and dynamic practices, characteristics, and spatial typologies for dwelling uncovered at Huangyan's industrializing urban-rural interface. An empirical socio-spatial methodology was employed in Huangyan's hinterland to gain an understanding into the influence of the Smart Moulding Town on the everyday life of villagers living in its vicinity. The empirical research reveals a particular discord between the social and mental dimensions of spatial production in Huangyan's urban-rural interface, provoking that materialization of emerging dwelling typologies that do not necessarily align with the top-down visions epitomized by the Smart Moulding Town. Instead, these typologies integrate pre-industrial and industrial social structures, pre-urban and post-modern spatial features, and hybrid urban-rural cultural representation of dwelling space.

通过对黄岩智能模具小镇周边的农村进行研究, 本文展示了在黄岩工业化城乡接合部所发现的混合和动态的居住实践、

特征和空间类型。在黄岩腹地采用了实证社会空间方法, 以了解智能造型小镇对其周边村民日常生活的影响。实证研究揭示了黄岩城乡接合部空间生产的社会维度和精神维度之间的不和谐, 引发了新兴居住类型的产生, 而这些类型并不一定与智能造型小镇自上而下的愿景相一致。相反, 这些类型融合了前工业和工业社会结构、前城市和后现代空间特征, 以及居住空间的城乡混合文化表征。

The Practice of Dwelling

Globally, and particularly in China, the scale and pace of urban expansion is resulting in uneven and polarising socio-spatial development, with its impact most exaggerated at urban-rural interfaces (Brenner and Schmid, 2014; Soja, 2011; Wu et al., 2013). Interpreting these vast agglomerating regions requires an insight into the everyday struggles and inventive practices of inhabitants, or dwellers, who continuously adapt to and shape processes of extended urbanisation at regional and global scales (Brenner, 2000; Ruddick et al., 2017, p. 2). Since the 1960s, sociologists and philosophers such as Henri Lefebvre (1991, 2003) and Michel de Certeau (1984) have employed the lens of Marxist theory to conceptualise the production of space in terms of mundane and repetitive everyday practices, shifting our understanding of urbanisation toward a process



made up of socially produced space. This notion remains ever more critical today in revealing how the impact of these everyday practices is materialised and scaled up to inform the socio-spatial development of constantly expanding regions.

One type of everyday space relates to the activity of homemaking, i.e. dwelling (Lefebvre, 1991). Produced by heterogeneous social processes that give it meaning, the materiality of dwelling space reveals wider socio-cultural dynamics and locates them in a particular context (Bertuzzo, 2008, p.6), while also embodying the identity and emotional state of those who use it (Heidegger, 1971). Thus, to facilitate an understanding of the local impact of extended urbanisation, this article presents a selected catalogue of hybrid and dynamic practices, characteristics, and spatial typologies for dwelling uncovered at Huangyan's industrialising urban-rural interface.

Huangyan's Fragmented Transition toward Industrialisation

Within the mega-urban Yangtze River Delta corridor, the Smart Moulding Town (SMT) in Huangyan-Taizhou's hinterland is leading the local moulding industry's regional industrial upgrading process (Zhejiang Provincial Urban-Rural Planning Academy, 2015, p. 9). The development is a manifestation of the Characteristic Town (CT) policy, a national rural

urbanisation programme aiming to address food security, rural economic development, and urban-rural polarisation through a 'one town, one characteristic industry' model (Liao & Yi, 2018, p.17; Wenfang, 2018, p.449). Often, however, these developments only minimally or superficially address local challenges, instead imposing tabularasa developments that simply extend urbanisation into rural areas (Miao & Phelps, 2019, p.50).

This is the case at Huangyan's urban-rural interface, where formerly rural villages surrounding the SMT are undergoing a fragmented transition toward industrialisation, enabled by top-down farmland acquisition to provide profitable development sites. Entire villages are dependent on the renting of land to factories as lucrative income for village

collectives, while many ex-farmers are undergoing drastic increases in wealth and/or living conditions. However, this concentration and over-reliance puts the local area at risk of industrial decline, leaving unskilled villagers and landless farmers particularly vulnerable. Despite the physical flexibility and dynamism of use of everyday space in China, in which residential space often serves a dual productive purpose, the majority of the new top-down housing developments instead implement functionalist architecture with compartmentalised uses (Woodman, 2011, p. 126).

Emerging Socio-Spatial Typologies at the Urban-Rural Interface

To gain an understanding into the influence of the SMT on the everyday life of villagers living in its vicinity, an empirical socio-spatial methodology was employed by the author in Huangyan's hinterland. Moving beyond the notion of dwelling as an end-product or noun (habitat), towards a process or verb (to inhabit), Lefebvre's framework for spatial production was conceptualised through three interacting dimensions: social (dwelling practices and local rituals); physical (their material reality); and mental (the principle that governs dwelling practices; the way individuals perceive the constraints of their social world) (Kofman & Lebas, 1996, p. 17; Stanek, 2011). Focusing on the role of everyday practices within urbanisation processes, it remains an apt critical prism for revealing the complex transitional and informal conditions that characterise the Chinese urban-rural interface. As a methodology, it allows the potential for the relocation of theory production to diverse global contexts (Roy, 2011). Operationalising this framework as a methodology in the field generated several overarching themes – productive dwelling, evolving urban-rural identity, villagers as pioneers – which enabled the definition of emerging typologies for dwelling at Huangyan's urban-rural interface.

Productive Dwelling

Even within the regulated environments of functionalist new rural housing developments, dwelling remains intertwined with productive practices as industrial activity creeps into housing. The extra space offered by new developments is highly valued, for its potential for new income

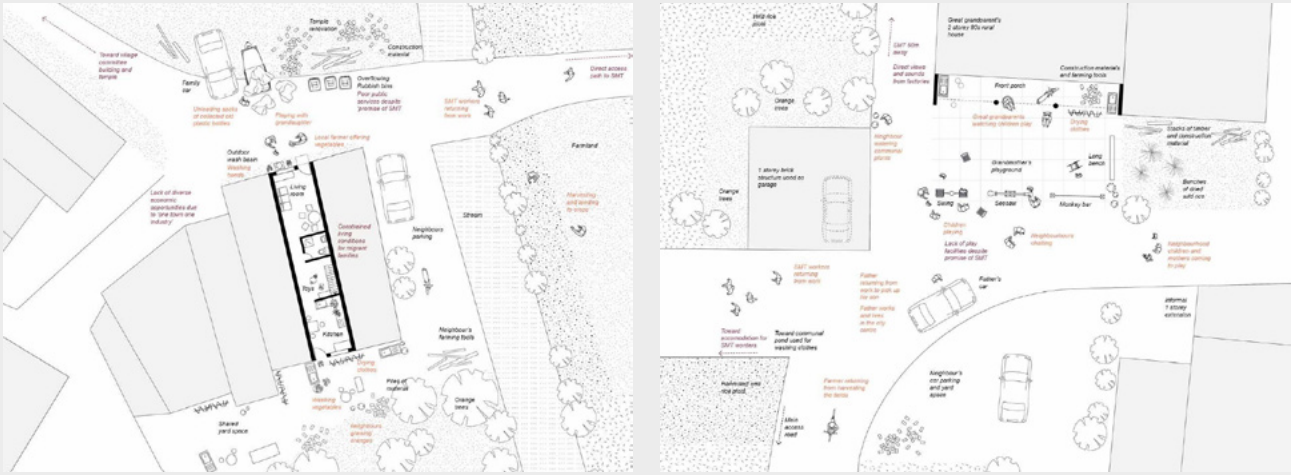


Figure 1 (left): Evolving urban-rural identity: Socio-spatial analysis of ‘the migrant family’s new rural house’ in Xingtou Village, a single storey old rural rental house lived in by an elderly migrant couple who look after their granddaughter and are involved in informal waste collection. Figure 2 (right): Villagers as pioneers: Socio-spatial analysis of ‘the grandmother’s playground’ in Xingtou Village, a playground built by a grandmother on the street space in front of her elderly parents’ old rural house and used by the whole neighbourhood.

opportunities such as household workshops. In some cases, work space is integrated into living rooms and garages, while in others, entire structures designed as private dwellings are repurposed for productive use. The SMT is often considered indirectly positive in terms of the productive potential of household industries, with opportunistic villagers capitalising on their relocation into more spacious developments. While the rapid shift from agricultural to non-agricultural income sources has a profound impact on villagers’ everyday practices, the long-term environmental impact of integrating industry into the everyday environment is largely overlooked by residents and policymakers alike. Workers endure harsh working conditions demanded by the moulding industry; their everyday lives entirely revolve around long working hours and 24 hour shifts, lacking time for family and leisure activities. Furthermore, the increase of migrant workers due to employment opportunities offered by the construction and operation of the SMT is changing the physical landscape of the surrounding villages. An informal rental market has emerged in response to the manifold constraints faced by these migrants (restrictions of the hukou system, low paid work, lack of affordable housing), generating new dwelling typologies and living arrangements, such as extensions to existing housing, temporary container structures on driveways, or informal subdivisions of new rural housing. By introducing their own forms of spatial appropriation, migrants add to the hybrid everyday dwelling practices in the villages.

Evolving Urban-Rural Identity

The rapid pace of industrialisation is resulting in

dramatic lifestyle changes in which perceptions of urban and rural areas differ vastly between villagers of different age groups. While older generations tend to remain attached to traditional rural practices centred around agricultural production, younger villagers more often embrace busy urban lifestyles and struggle to relate to the nostalgia of their older family members or neighbours. Nevertheless, spaces which suggest a persistence of an engrained rural identity remain prevalent, in even the most urbanised villages. While the majority of villages have lost most of their agricultural production, many retain their practice of vegetable growing for household consumption. However, new rural housing developments typically disregard the morphology of existing village and dwelling layouts, failing to provide space which caters for the everyday activities of rural lifestyles. Despite this, the habitual farming practices of older villagers persist in any available space around housing, industrial workshops, and vacant land. Farmland is re-appropriated at a micro-scale, where spaces designed for urban lifestyles, such as parking spaces and driveways, are used for drying rice, vegetable gardens, and keeping chickens. Despite CT rhetoric of promoting local culture, a loss of building heritage is common, with traditional housing structures, many with ornate decorative features, left in a dilapidated condition without inclusion in development plans. Often repurposed as storage, workshop, kitchen, or rental space, these old structures are generally disregarded. This forgotten rural landscape also includes water ponds which were once integral to village daily life, used for drinking water and washing vegetables, the majority of which are now contaminated with household and industrial waste.



Villagers as Pioneers

Many cases of innovative socio-spatial appropriation can be identified in the villages, often driven by an entrepreneurial mindset. In some cases, creative adaptive reuse of space is perceived as a unique marketing device for a family business, such as the creative craftsmanship of a private dwelling of a local carpenter, and the elaborately designed workshop of a door manufacturer. Others embrace practices that emerge from industrialisation, such as the informal recycling practices identified as an economic incentive in some villages. These entrepreneurial villagers often have an adaptive attitude to transformations in the area and do not remain attached to farming practices. In other cases, villagers take on the role of providing neglected public services, using their own resources to repurpose space toward a social function that can foster networks between neighbours. Particularly within new rural housing developments, it is common for garages to be used as public living rooms and neighbourhood mahjong halls. Simple facilities are often sufficient for the creation of collective dwelling spaces, such as communal vegetable gardens or a temporary tent structure erected on the street for a neighbourhood birthday party. Some institutionalised spaces are appropriated by villagers to serve their own social needs; many village senior centres function beyond their intended purpose, becoming key public spaces for all types of residents. The social capital built by these spaces is critical in allowing for effective informal negotiations, with residents from the new and old village areas negotiating the use of space at different times of the day.

Negotiating Multi-Scalar and Hybrid Transformations

These emerging socio-spatial typologies offer snapshots of the various stages of the transformation of this productive hinterland, illustrating the pivotal role of the micro-scale tactics of villagers in influencing top-down processes of extended urbanisation. At a regional and global scale, moulding industry investment is transforming villages, with their land critical in providing for industrial uses. Villagers are embedded, formally and informally, in trans-local moulding production lines which generate employment and attract

regional labour. At a city and neighbourhood scale, villagers create an informal local economy through their productive households and bottom-up provision of local amenities. At a family and individual scale, micro-scale survival tactics and evolving urban-rural practices play a crucial role in placemaking and facilitating social capital. Thus, regional industrialisation processes are not only transforming physical space, but also extending into the everyday lives of many people in the area surrounding the SMT: residential space with a dual productive purpose, a family member employed at a local moulding enterprise, a means of informal income in the production line, or the loss of farmland to the construction of a new factory. Furthermore, the empirical research reveals a particular discord between the social and mental dimensions of spatial production at Huangyan's urban-rural interface, provoking the materialisation of emerging dwelling typologies that do not necessarily align with the top-down visions epitomised by the SMT. Instead, these typologies integrate pre-industrial and industrial social structures, pre-urban and post-modern spatial features, and hybrid urban-rural cultural representations of dwelling space.

Despite vulnerable conditions and unequal agencies, these socio-spatial experimentations are redefining rural identity and defying the top-down compartmentalisation of space, through a negotiated urbanism (AlSayyad & Roy, 2004) between various scales and actors who carve out their own needs, identities, and practices (Fokdal & Herrle, 2019, p. 90). Uncovering these networks highlights the potential for local actors to take a leading role in more sustainable urban-rural development. In revealing the sometimes contradictory transformation dynamics playing out on the ground, these hybrid urban-rural typologies become a potential tool for challenging increasingly redundant urban-rural binaries, offering a foundation for defining new theoretical categories to capture the complex socio-spatial restructuring of planetary urbanisation.

