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HEART OF SHENZHEN

The movement to preserve “Ancient” Hubei Village

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When I want hometown taste, I go to Dongmen.

Lyrics from “Chao-Shan Boy in Shenzhen” by Pan Qionglin

Introduction

In the spring of 2016, a group of urban planners, architects, and public intellectuals started to discuss what they could do to preserve a section of the historical Shenzhen Market as a heritage site. The preservationists called themselves “Hubei 120.” The name referred to Hubei Village, the surviving section of the historical Shenzhen Market, and to Shenzhen’s emergency phone number, 120. Hubei 120 aimed to do something that many thought impossible – convince the Luohu Department of Urban Planning that it should require the developer, China Resources Real Estate, to submit a new redevelopment plan, one that would preserve the city’s “heart (*xin wozi*).” The preservationists argued that given its role as the epicenter of early Reform and Opening, the historical Shenzhen Market was a public resource and should be commemorated as such (Figure 36.1).

Before Hubei 120 sounded the call to preserve Hubei, many Shenzheners, including the Luohu government and the developer, assumed that the historical Shenzhen Market had already been commemorated as the “Dongmen Commercial Area,” which had been designated a historical area in preparation for the Return of Hong Kong to China (*huigui*).¹ In fact, when Hubei 120 organized in 2016, Shenzhen Market had already been part of the city’s official identity for two decades. At stake in the preservationist movement wasn’t whether or not the historical Shenzhen Market was the city’s heart, but rather how this heart should be represented. Hubei 120 claimed that although the Dongmen restorations constituted accurate representations of preservation knowledge circa 1997, without actual historical buildings the commemoration of Shenzhen’s history would be incomplete. They called to preserve a minimum area of 15,662.3 square meters, which included the layout and 78 historic buildings. However, they suggested that if the preservation area was expanded to 18,797.2 square meters, then sites built in the 1980s and 1990s could also be included. This larger area included the preservation of Luohu Cultural Park, one of the largest green spaces in the area. The inclusion of a park as a “historic site” was in keeping with Hubei 120’s



Figure 36.1 The “Map of Bao’an County Seat before the Establishment of Shenzhen City, 1953–1978” shows the location of the key sites that comprised “the Special Zone” during the 1980s and into the new millennium. Public source, Shenzhen Special Economic Zone 1985.

Source: Image adapted by the author

claim that historic areas were public resources and should be accessible by all Shenzheners (Figure 36.2, Figure 36.3).

The Hubei 120 movement revealed the fault line between locals and migrants that has not only informed the urban form of Shenzhen, but also the sense of belonging to the city and, in turn, the development of civil society. The original redevelopment plan had been developed in accordance with China’s national heritage standards and traditional regional identities, recognizing the Hubei Zhang’s claims by preserving and renovating the one superior (*youxiu*) building in the area – the Zhang Family Ancestral Hall. For the Hubei Zhangs, their identity as Shenzhen locals (*bendi ren*) was an ascribed status that they had been born into; the ancestral hall was the architectural representation of the family genealogy and the generations who had lived in the area for over 500 years. In contrast, for preservationists, their identity as Shenzheners was an achieved status that they had created by migrating to the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) – urban villages such as Old Hubei were important gateways (Bach 2017).

Ostensibly, the debate between preserving the entire village or a single ancestral hall was over migrant versus native identity as the truly “local” Shenzhen. However as we will see in this chapter, the Hubei 120 movement was part of a larger historical process that has dispossessed local villagers of their traditional identities and claims to the land; the Hubei Zhangs had little influence over the process. Moreover, even though migrant experience was foregrounded in the Hubei 120 articulation of Shenzhen history, migrant workers did not directly participate in Hubei 120 actions, except as audience for the actions of intellectuals. Consequently, at stake in the Hubei



Figure 36.2 Historical Shenzhen Market, circa 1990. This photograph hints at the original layout of market streets as well as the pace of urbanization.

Source: Photograph taken by the author at the Dongmen Pedestrian Street History Exhibition



Figure 36.3 Dongmen Pedestrian Street, 2010, one of Shenzhen's most popular tourist destinations.

Source: Photograph by the author

120 preservationist movement was not simply the idea of “come and you are a Shenzhenener,” but rather ongoing attempts to bring educated and rational voices to public conversations about the urban form of Shenzhen and the well-being of the city’s 20 million residents.²

Hubei 120: the second generation of Shenzhen intellectuals

Not precisely top down, but not exactly bottom up, Hubei 120 represents what many Shenzhen intellectuals see as the future of civil society – an impartial, professional third party that speaks for the common good in dialogue with the government and business interests. Their activism can be understood within and against the changing roles of China’s intelligentsia within a shifting public sphere.

In the post-Mao era, the marketization and professionalization of Chinese intellectuals created a lively, if relatively weak, public sphere. In turn, the plurality of ideas led to changing understandings of what an intellectual is and does, most famously culminating in the Tiananmen protest movement (Gu and Goldman 2004). The importance of Shenzhen in the post-Mao reconstitution of the public role of Chinese intellectuals has been twofold. On the one hand, the lesser-known Shekou Storm marked an important victory for young intellectuals and was a precursor to the 1989 protests (Xu 1995). On the other hand, many mark the start of post-Tiananmen intellectual activism with Deng Xiaoping’s 1992 Southern Tour, when he visited and praised the city’s level of market liberalization and openness to the outside world (Wright 2004). In 2016 the emergence of publicly active intellectuals within and against the ideological tightening under the leadership of Xi Jinping was significant, precisely because it set out to redefine the public sphere and create a viable public space for a third voice.

The first generation of Shenzhen’s migrant intellectuals came to Shenzhen as part of the early movement to build the SEZ. They understood their role as intellectuals with respect to a national project to reform and open the Maoist state apparatus (Mason 2016). In addition to technical intellectuals, there were also sociologists and economists interested in economic reform, as well as journalists and writers, architects, and urban planners. This generation actively explored how privatizing sections of the state apparatus (such as media and cultural production) would, in turn, create conditions for a different kind of civil society. At Shenzhen University, for example, the Institute for the Study of SEZs, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan hosted national conferences such as “What’s Still Special about the Special Zone,” while some of the most influential articles published by the *Shekou Bulletin* and the short-lived *Street Magazine* were exposés of conditions in factories and calls for transparency in business operations (Chen *et al* 1991). Shenzhen intellectuals encouraged migrant workers to write about their experiences, which they published in company newsletters and the state media. In each case, these interventions aimed to “oversee” the processes through which the Chinese state was being selectively dismantled and restructured in Shenzhen, bringing a third voice to the attention of state actors.

The first generation received local *hukou* when joining work units such as Shenzhen University or the Bureau of Urban Planning. Thus, unlike rural and unofficial migrants, many first-generation migrant intellectuals had access to subsidized housing, medical care, and school for their children. Nevertheless, the first generation did not identify emotionally with the city; they continued to identify with their childhood hometowns, joking that their children – the so-called “Shenzhen 2s” – were the “first” Shenzheners (O’Donnell 2006; forthcoming). In contrast, the second generation of Shenzhen intellectuals identified emotionally with the city. Crudely put, Hubei 120 intellectuals acted to preserve Old Hubei not only because it exemplified Chinese culture, but also because they loved the city; this “*xiangchou* (hometown nostalgia)” informed their sense of intellectual obligation and purpose.

As with the first generation of Shenzhen intellectuals, the decision of the Hubei 120 intellectuals to act on what they saw as the public good simultaneously articulated Shenzhen civil society and their right to speak *for* it. In this sense, the “public sphere” referred to a series of actions, in which intellectuals brought their interests and the interests of society to the attention of government officials and its appointed developers, the state-owned enterprise China Resources. The Shenzhen public sphere that Hubei 120 invoked was ironically predicated on the very inequality between “officialdom (*guanfang*)” and “common folk (*minjian*)” that had excluded many Hubei 120 intellectuals from participating in the drafting of the Shenzhen master plan. Habermas (1989) has emphasized that family institutions and property ownership comprised the threshold for participating in the early public sphere. In Shenzhen, intellectuals allied themselves to the state project of deepening reforms through education and the traditional role of Chinese intellectuals, justifying their actions because they “served the People (*wei Renmin fuwu*).”

Hubei 120 intellectuals aimed to widen public discourse about Shenzhen’s urban form beyond the voices of the government and developers. With respect to urban planning in general and the redevelopment of Old Hubei specifically, their actions constituted a public sphere comprised of the government, the developer, and intellectuals. These three actors were in conversation to determine the public good, even as each actor represented a different aspect of it: The government was responsible for social order, realized as the Master Plan. The developer was responsible for material resources to realize the plan as a specific place – a mega multiplex comprising a shopping mall, office buildings, and residential towers. Hubei 120 asserted a “watchdog” responsibility, reminding both the government and the developer about the weaknesses of the plan and its implementation in order to make Shenzhen even better. In this sense, it is notable that the Hubei 120 intellectuals did not see themselves as opposing the government and developer, but rather working with them to craft better plans and build a better city.

Pedagogical activism: extending the Shenzhen public sphere

Hubei 120 participants were all college educated, many had advanced degrees from prestigious universities both at home and abroad, and some key figures were professors at Shenzhen University’s School of Architecture. They had connections to the municipal and district governments, allowing them to have their opinions and suggestions heard by sympathetic government actors. They believed it was necessary to leave their classrooms, studios, and offices in order to educate both government officials and the public about the history of Shenzhen and how urban planning ought to serve a more comprehensive understanding of the city, its responsibilities, and potentials. Their strategy might be called “pedagogical activism” because, through the strategic use of “classrooms,” Hubei 120 aimed to influence Shenzhen’s urban plan.

The primary “classroom” was the Position (*Youfang*) Studio, where Hubei 120 organized its first public event, a two-day workshop held in July 2016. Position had opened an office in Shenzhen in 2016 with the aim to “rebuild the city and the public sphere.” During the first morning of the workshop, over 100 citizens learned about Hubei’s 500-year history, its connection to the historical Shenzhen Market, and the importance of its living traditions. To connect present-day Hubei to China’s urban traditions, Hubei 120 pointed to the narrow alleys of Old Hubei, its intense arrangement of shrines and paper blessings, and its bustling commercial corners.

Architecture professor Yang Xiaochun presented the results of an architectural survey suggesting that the movement to preserve Hubei had been simmering for several years. She argued that Hubei was important not only because it contained 78 historic and traditional buildings, but also because development had not distorted its layout of “three vertical streets and eight horizontal roads (*san zong ba heng*) (Figure 36.4).” This layout, she maintained, was unique to Guangdong

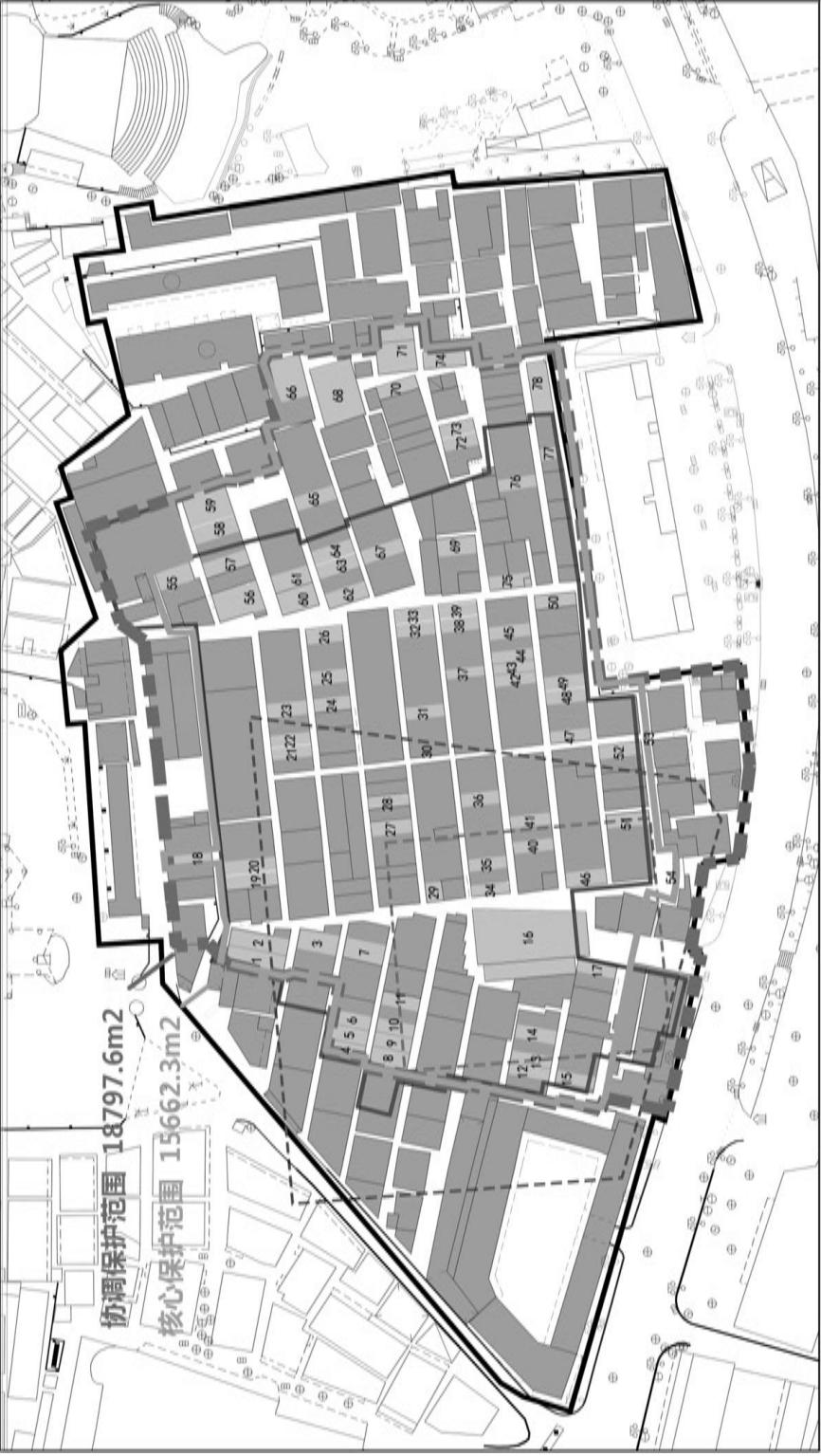


Figure 36.4 Map of Old Hubei Village and Location of Historic Buildings. This rendering shows the location of the 78 historic buildings as well as the “Three Verticals, Eight Horizontals” layout (solid brown line). Building #16 is the Zhang Family Ancestral Hall.

Source: Image used courtesy of Professor Yang Xiaochun

villages, and thus the entire footprint of Ancient Hubei needed to be preserved. Some of Shenzhen's most famous architects also led working groups in generating alternative development plans for the Hubei area, and encouraging guided discussion about urban planning, history, and spatial thinking. Additionally, eight urban planners and architects worked with workshop participants to develop alternative urban plans for the Hubei area that were discussed during the final workshop.

On July 25, 2016, Hubei 120 submitted *Hubei Calls for Rescue: "The Hubei 120 Public Urban Plan" Petition* to the Shenzhen Central Arts Commission and the Luohu District Urban Renewal Office, calling on the government to stop China Resources from demolishing Hubei Ancient Village and replacing it with high-rise residences, malls, and office space. The petition was the outcome of ideas generated during the workshop and included an alternative development plan, an analysis of the historic buildings that were located within the village, and images of everyday life.

Sham Chun: from walled cities to markets

In 1996, I interviewed a sociology professor from Shenzhen University. He maintained that whatever culture or history Shenzhen claimed was not representative of "authentic" Chinese culture and history. According to him, "culture (*wenhua*)" glossed imperial history and concomitant rural feudalism in China's central plains. He suggested visiting Xi'an, Beijing, and Kaifeng to get a sense of Chinese culture, historically speaking, Shenzhen was a small market town of no significance. This 1996 interview was conducted against the backdrop of preparations for the 1997 Return of Hong Kong. The British had carved the colony of Hong Kong out of Xin'an County, the territorial precursor to both Shenzhen and Hong Kong. As part of those preparations, Nantou was being restored as a walking museum that celebrated the reunification of the historic Xin'an County, even though the majority of Shenzhen intellectuals thought that Nantou was an inferior example of Chinese culture. Unsurprisingly, that iteration of "local" Shenzhen identity failed to resonate with migrants (O'Donnell 2001, 1999).

Hubei 120 preservationists argued for the primacy of Shenzhen Market – rather than Nantou – as the city's heart. First mentioned in Chinese documents in 1688, Shenzhen Market was large enough to constitute a landmark on the map that was included in the 1819 *Xin'an County Gazetteer* (Figure 36.5). The market was a walled compound named for the river that flowed just beyond its western gate. The name of the river used "*chun*," a Hakka term for "the ditch between fields," suggesting that the market arose when Hakka families entered Xin'an County after the Coastal Evacuation Edict was rescinded in 1669. According to missionary reports, there had once been several markets in the Shenzhen River valley, but by the 19th century, "Sham Chun" Market dominated the region (Hase 1990). During his lecture at the Hubei 120 workshop, local historian Liao Honglei emphasized that Hubei had a direct genealogical connection to Sham Chun. The historical Shenzhen Market was a compound situated in land controlled by Huangbeiling Zhangs. Their relatives, the Hubei Zhangs, held measurement rights over transactions conducted in the market, arbitrating disputes over weight and price with a designated scale.

In 1866, an unnamed Western cartographer produced a *Map of Sun-On-District* (Figure 36.6). The first comprehensive map of the region after the colonialization of Hong Kong (1842) and Kowloon (1860), this map provided accurate information about relative distances between towns and villages, the topography of the territory, and the location of navigable rivers. Place names were provided in Chinese characters and Western romanization of local pronunciations. Shenzhen appears as "Sham Chun," the pronunciation of Shenzhen in local dialect (Ng 1983). Like the 1819 *Gazetteer* map of Xin'an County, the 1866 *Map of Sun-On-District* simplified the complexities of Xin'an County society in order to facilitate the actions of non-locals – imperial

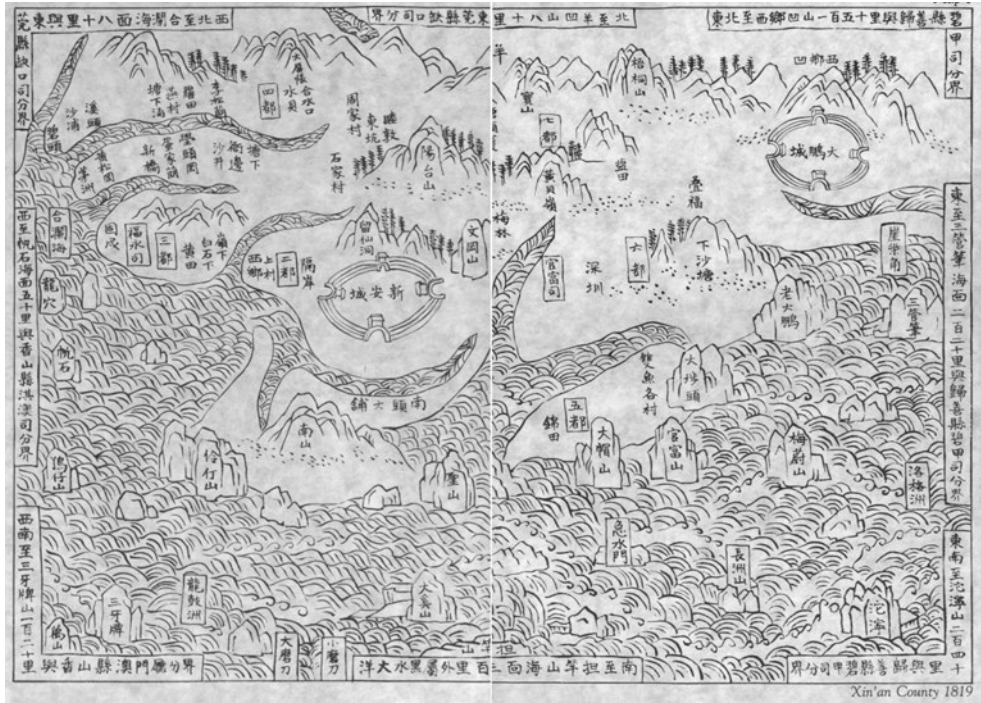


Figure 36.5 Gazetteer map of Xin'an County, 1819. The largest walled city on the map is "Xin'an County Seat" on the Nantou Peninsula.

Source: Public document copied from Xin'an County Gazetteer



Figure 36.6 Everyday life in Old Hubei – children playing in an alleyway.

Source: Image used courtesy of Peng Xin

magistrates and colonial merchants, respectively. Comparison of the two maps also shows that the colonial incursion of the British exacerbated on-the-ground tensions between western (*Punti*) and eastern (Hakka) towns and villages, which have continued to inform Shenzhen's vernacular geography. This history of successive occupations has been a constitutive tension in the region, making the construction of the "local" a continuously vexed project (Siu and Faure 1995).

Hubei 120 appropriated aspects of this history, not simply to claim that Dongmen was the Heart of Shenzhen, but to specify its physical location. During the Direction workshop, Professor Yang used an annotated version of the 1866 *Map of Sun-On-District* to achieve several aims. First, she accepted that scientific accuracy was the necessary precondition for civic discourse. Her own work mapping the historic buildings and footprint of Ancient Hubei, like the 1866 *Map of Sun-On-District*, organized spatial information according to cartography. Second, she anachronistically included the Shenzhen-Hong Kong border, which was not drawn until 1898 or 32 years after the *Map of Sun-On-District* was drawn. Third, she highlighted the locations of the two walled cities, Nantou and Dapeng, as well as four market towns – Shajing, Guanlan, Shatoujiao, and "Dongmen," equating the cultural value of imperial cities and local markets. The appearance of these four markets on Yang's annotated version of the 1866 *Map of Sun-On-District* suggests the extent to which the contemporary celebration of Shenzhen's informal market culture informed Hubei 120's historical understanding. During the 1990s, Shenzhen intellectuals had dismissed local market culture with respect to China's imperial past. Two decades later, Shenzhen intellectuals accepted the area's markets as a cultural root. What's more, these four markets were famously peripheral to the imperial culture of Nantou and Dapeng. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, Shajing was part of a stretch of land infamous as a haven for pirates (Lai 2004), Guanlan was known as an independent market that was essentially ungoverned and overrun by bandits (Krone 1967), Shatoujiao was a Hakka market (Hase 1995), and "Sham Chun" was a borderland upstart (O'Donnell 1999; 2001).

In retrospect, it is clear that Shenzhen Market's regional importance grew with Hong Kong's and the increasing importance of the Sino-British border to Chinese domestic politics (O'Donnell and Wan 2016). Local markets, Chinese heritage, and Western hegemony comprised historic strands that could be rewoven into new ways of belonging to the area (Siu and Faure 1995). By making this version of history available to officials and their appointed developer as well as the common folk, Hubei 120 aimed to specify what made Shenzhen "special," claiming that because markets and entrepreneurs were the origins of "local" identity, this identity should be commemorated through the preservation of Old Hubei.

Old Hubei: rediscovering the heart of Shenzhen

When Hubei 120 began organizing, there were two Hubei Village settlements: Old (*Jiu*) and New (*Xin*). Built during the 1990s, New Hubei was an orderly neighborhood comprising "handshake" and office buildings, a school, a clinic, and shops. The expression "handshake building" is a colloquialism used to describe six to eight story tenement buildings that have been built so closely together that it is possible to reach through one's window and "shake hands" with the neighbor. Handshakes are the distinguishing architectural typology of Shenzhen "urban villages," and best understood as the city's informal, working-class neighborhoods. In contrast, Old Hubei was a decrepit cluster of crowded and dank row houses, some of which dated from the late Qing and Republican periods. The walls were moldy, and the open gutters needed to be cleaned at least twice a day; during heavy rains, the area was subject to flooding. Migrants opportunistically retrofitted these residences with electrical connections and modern plumbing. They not only lived in the buildings but also used them as shops, warehouses, and workshops. Thus, when Hubei

120 claimed “ancient” status for “Old” Hubei Village, they also needed to transvalue the cultural importance of urban villages to Shenzhen identity.

In addition to holding “classes” and publishing articles about the history of Shenzhen Market and the importance of Old Hubei to that earlier settlement, Hubei 120 encouraged young Shenzhen residents, especially young intellectuals, to go to Hubei Old Village and discover the city for themselves. This (re)discovery of Shenzhen’s history was pedagogical in both form and ethics. On July 2, 2016, for example, preservationist Meng Yan took architect Ruan Yisan on a tour of Old Hubei. Local media reported on the visit, publishing images of Shenzhen’s most iconic architect telling China’s most well-known preservationist about the late Qing and Nationalist features that made Old Hubei architecture distinctive. Throughout the tour, Meng Yan respectfully referred to Ruan Yisan as “teacher” and Ruan Yisan diligently listened to the story of Shenzhen’s “heart” and why it needed to be protected. Indeed, these images emphasized that “lifelong” learning and teaching were simultaneously the proper roles of an intellectual and the form of an ethical life; Ruan Yisan’s tour of Old Hubei not only gave legitimacy to preservationists’ claims, but also modeled a proper intellectual life for younger generations.

The Hubei 120 workshop and concomitant petition to preserve Ancient Hubei Village ignited a powerful discussion throughout Shenzhen, including the “Everyone’s Hubei” series of public art interventions. Over the second half of 2016, 46 individuals presented spatial analyses of the area, created site-specific artworks, and organized public interventions to pressure the Shenzhen government to preserve the area. The underlying logic of these interventions was an extension of Hubei 120’s pedagogical activism. Architect Feng Guochuan brought middle-school students into Old Hubei and had them build models of the area, discussing the city’s complicated needs both to develop its downtown area and preserve its history. Performance artist Shen Piji gave a classical zither concert in the ancestral hall, ending it with a “rock and roll” style destruction of his instrument. The transition from harmonious music to gratuitous destruction of the instrument called attention to the need for material sites to house or shelter the city’s “heart.”

Beyond the architecture of Old Hubei, however, the Shenzhen intellectuals did not emphasize the indigenous village life, but rather the informal entrepreneurialism of Chao-Shan migrants. Better known as Teochew people, outside China, the Chao-Shan diaspora transformed Southeast Asia, their entrepreneurial activities becoming synonymous with Overseas Chinese capitalism, especially in Hong Kong and Singapore (Li 2016). When the Special Zone was first opened to foreign capital, many of the city’s earliest investors were overseas Chao-Shan. Locally, Chao-Shan entrepreneurs controlled Shenzhen’s produce, seafood, electronics, smuggled goods, construction, and unofficial currency markets; they have been the demographically dominant residents of Old Hubei since the first years of Reform. Many of Shenzhen’s most famous private companies grew out of this informal, but highly organized diaspora. As one Hubei 120 preservationist remarked on Chao-Shan success, “They grabbed both ends of the spectrum,” not only confirming that there was no level of Shenzhen society that was not influenced by Chao-Shan people, but also acknowledging that influence as a source of contemporary Shenzhen’s culture.

The influence of Chao-Shan entrepreneurialism on the “local” culture that Hubei 120 aimed to commemorate resulted from the demographic structure of early Shenzhen. In 1980, the population of Bao’an County was roughly 358,000, but the indigenous population of pre-reform Shenzhen market area was only about 45,000 (SHPO 2001). During the first few years of the Special Economic Zone’s (SEZ) existence, government leaders mobilized the state apparatus in order to bring administrators, engineers, investors, and labor to the newly established SEZ. The most significant number of official migrants were the 20,000 members of the Engineering Corps, who were deployed from Liaoning, Tianjin, and Shanghai to build the city. Official or “employed” migrants numbered about 50,000 (SSY 2016). In contrast, during the roughly nine

months (between 1980 and 1981) that Shenzhen's second Party Secretary, Wu Nansheng, was in office, he mobilized over 100,000 Chao-Shan compatriots to settle in the early SEZ with an eye to jumpstarting administration, manufacturing, and commerce (Wu 2015). Dongmen and Old Hubei were only two of the areas settled by Chao-Shan migrants. Other key areas included the electronics markets of Huaqiangbei, many of the township and village industrial parks in Longhua and Longgang Districts, and the fishing villages of Nan'ao in Dapeng District.³

As artists and intellectuals continued to explore Old Hubei, their lessons increasingly departed from the themes of "architectural preservation" and "local tradition," focusing instead on the role of urban villages and informal entrepreneurialism in the ongoing reproduction of Shenzhen's social ecosystem. Artists Kong Xiaoya and Da Yu, for example, held a "Fisherman's Banquet" on the raised floor of a demolished house. The awkwardness of this piece drew attention to the contradictions that have been built into the Shenzhen cityscape. On the one hand, the artists wore formal attire and ate their meal at a well-set table. Their clothing and the starched white tablecloth set off the uniforms and working-class clothing of the residents of Old Hubei, calling attention to the class differences between the Hubei 120 intellectuals and the urban village residents. On the other hand, in addition to housing downtown Shenzhen's service workers and manual laborers, many Chao-Shan migrants had transformed Old Hubei row houses into warehouses for nearby hotels, supplying the area with food via commercial networks that extended throughout the province. Consequently, "Fisherman's Banquet" also highlighted the interdependence of Shenzhen's high-end formal areas and its informal, urban village settlements.

Others, such as photographer Peng Xin, went into Hubei to capture images of everyday life. Her simple but lush images include scenes of a mother taking care of an infant, students wearing the Shenzhen school uniform, meat vendors at an informal shop, and a grandfather burning incense at a small shrine. Most of these "traditional" activities were in fact local to the Chao-Shan area. Other, equally moving images, included a garbage collector with a cigarette dangling from his mouth, a young girl doing homework outside her parents' shop, and an elderly couple holding hands as they walk through the street. Overwhelmingly, images of children growing up in Old Hubei Village emphasized Hubei 120's assertion that demolishing Shenzhen's past was tantamount to razing its future, and if that happened, where would the city be? (Figure 36.6).

Heart of Shenzhen: Shenzhen identity, urban villages, and limits to the public sphere

Hubei 120 introduced the idea of historic preservation as the city was preparing to celebrate its 40th anniversary. In newspapers and on the radio, in bookstores and lecture halls, people learned about the city's history, archaeology, and different migrations to the area. The emphasis on history allowed Hubei intellectuals to expand the question of urban villages from "affordable housing" to "urban identity." In turn, throughout the second half of 2016, Shenzhen newspapers, television stations, and independent news media used the preservation of Old Hubei and ongoing interventions to discuss the importance of urban villages as sites of Shenzhen's past, present, and possible future. After this flurry of activity passed, however, it was possible to evaluate the possibilities of and limits to the Shenzhen public sphere, circa 2016.

Urban villages have been an important site of informal articulations of Shenzhen identity and history. Hubei 120, for example, emerged out of ongoing public debate over the role of urban villages to Shenzhen's prosperity. Since the demolition of Gangxia (2009–2011), Shenzhen intellectuals have been increasingly aware of the value of urban villages for redevelopment, informal housing, and entrepreneurialism. What's more, as Shenzhen's downtown urban villages have been demolished, newspapers and social media have increasingly included accounts that

emphasize the social value of urban villages. In China, the media is known as the “throat and tongue of the Communist Party (*Dang de houshe*).” Thus, media coverage about Old Hubei was understood to reflect state support for the issue specifically, and awareness of the importance of urban villages more generally. The clearest indication that there was government support for rethinking the meaning of urban villages came in February 2016, when the governing body of the Shenzhen–Hong Kong Bi-City Biennale of Architecture \ Urbanism (UABB) announced that the next Biennale would be held in an urban village.

In addition, many public and private media outlets worked with Hubei 120 to publicize the intellectuals’ claims. Through their efforts to educate government officials and the general public, Hubei 120 used Shenzhen identity to momentarily detach the government’s interest in redevelopment from those of the developers and village property owners, creating a space for preservationists and other intellectuals to act. Many read this flourishing of civic engagement as a sign that the Shenzhen government agreed with the preservationists’ position that a third voice would enhance urban planning in the city, defining Shenzhen identity through a willingness to contribute to public debate. By December 2016, hundreds of ordinary residents had participated in events like the Hubei 120 workshop, and thousands had signed an online petition to save Ancient Hubei, with one notable exception – the Zhangs of Hubei Village. Their absence from this conversation was a visible reminder that the Shenzhen public sphere was predicated on the separation of officials from common folk. In comparison to Hubei’s Chao-Shan migrant population, the Hubei Zhangs were relatively privileged. Nevertheless, in the articulation of the Shenzhen public sphere, the Hubei Zhangs were also spectators to the actions of intellectuals.

Moreover, the question of what will happen to Old Hubei’s residents and shopkeepers once the plan has been finalized continues to haunt the project. After all, when artists went into Old Hubei, their work highlighted the city’s need for affordable and dignified housing options; renovating the village row houses will result in forced evictions. This process is graphically captured in the Chinese expression, “love the cage and change the birds (*teng long huan niao*),” which is often used to criticize preservationist projects that merely raise property values for the city’s elite. As Hubei 120 participants were well aware, the extent that Shenzhen can remain an immigrant city, where it is possible to proactively become a Shenzhener through one’s own labor, hinges on how this broader question is answered. Indeed, many who participated in Hubei 120 were arguably less interested in preserving the old row houses than in setting a precedent for bringing independent voices into the development of future urban plans. More immediately, many hoped that the Hubei 120 model could be redeployed to save other urban villages from demolition, most specifically Baishizhou, the largest urban village in downtown Shenzhen.

These problems notwithstanding, the preservationists’ success shocked many in Shenzhen and elsewhere. No one expected that they could push back against the Luohu government and China Resources. Consequently, Hubei 120’s tactics for pushing forward their agenda and the extent of their success tells much about the norms and forms of civil society in Shenzhen, circa 2017. Hubei 120 members were architects, engineers, urban planners, and academics. Their vision of civil society was based on professional standing and technocratic proficiency, and many understood their role to be an impartial “third party,” which could evaluate proposals for urban change from the disinterested perspective of knowledge, providing a counterweight to the biased perspectives of political expediency and economic necessity. Their strategy of pedagogical activism assumed the need for informed public discourse to move the city forward. Shenzhen’s civic intellectuals reworked the city’s history of professional and entrepreneurial migration to create a role for public intellectuals. Importantly, this understanding of the public sphere also found support in government halls and popular forums. That said, even as the successful preservation

of Hubei village revealed the intersection of civic engagement and Shenzhen identity, it also suggested current limits on a more inclusive public sphere.

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Notes

- 1 In English, the transfer of Hong Kong from British to Chinese authority is known as the “Handover,” while in Mandarin it is known as the “Return.”
- 2 Population figure announced by then Shenzhen Party Secretary Ma Xingrui during his state-of-the-city address, 2016. This is the “administration population,” which estimates all residents. In contrast, the “official population” of roughly 15 million people refers only to people with legal registration to be in the city.
- 3 These three sites – township and village enterprise (TVE) industrial parks, the Huaqiangbei electronics market, and the deep fishing industry centered on Nan’ao in eastern Shenzhen – have been central to the formation of Shenzhen identity. The TVE industrial parks made Shenzhen “the factory of the world” during the 1990s and 2000’s; Huaqiangbei pirated or “*shanzhai*” cell phones have made Shenzhen the “Silicon Valley of hardware,” and the presence of working fishing villages on Shenzhen’s eastern coastline continues to support the net-to-riches myth that “Shenzhen used to be a fishing village.” Chao-Shan migrants have dominated the informal development of all three areas.

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