

The changes and adaptation of food-ways with residential relocation during urbanization in Southeast China

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Recommended Citation

Chen, Yaolin (2020). "The changes and adaptation of food-ways with residential relocation during urbanization in Southeast China," *Urban Food Systems Symposium*. <https://newprairiepress.org/ufss/2020/proceedings/25>



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Abstract

By using personal interviewing, participatory observation, and field research out of different years 2014,2015 and 2016, the research contributes to providing descriptive aspects of demolition and relocation studies in Chinese urbanization, apart from existing literature mainly covering the fields of politics and economy. This transition remodels the space, especially interactions in the neighborhood. Their food-ways also undergo transitions both at the scope of family and community level. Before relocation, local people lived a self-supporting lifestyle with a small amount of replenishing necessities from markets, where they farmed abundant vegetables and food crops by themselves. Later, they are more dependent on supermarkets and local markets after relocation since food from the garden is insufficient. They continue to exploit fragmental farmlands and maintain previous dietary habits by gardening vegetables on their own and sharing home-grown food with new neighbors in order to fit into migration and urban life. The process of urbanization is not just farmers turning into citizens, but also the renewal of life. People develop a relationship with food and land by farming and produce interactions with families and villages via food. Food-ways play a fundamental role in social interaction and become the new field of knowing the impacts of urbanization.

Keywords

rural areas, transformation

The Changes and Adaptation of Food-ways with Residential Relocation during Urbanization in Southeast China

Abstract:

Using personal interviewing, participatory observation, and field research from different years in 2014, 2015 and 2016, the research contributes to providing descriptive aspects of demolition and relocation studies in Chinese urbanization. This transition remodels the space, especially interactions in the neighborhood, which is different from the existing literature mainly covering the changes of politics and economy in recent decades in China. Their food-ways also undergo transitions both at the scope of family and community level. Before relocation, local people lived a self-supporting lifestyle with a small amount of replenishing necessities from markets, where they farmed abundant vegetables and food crops by themselves. Later, they are more dependent on supermarkets, and local markets after relocation since food from the garden is insufficient with the land shrink. They continue to exploit fragmental farmlands and maintain previous dietary habits by gardening vegetables on their own and sharing home-grown food with new neighbors in order to fit into migration and urban life. The process of urbanization is not just farmers turning into citizens but also the renewal of life. People were developing a relationship with food and land and the interactions among villagers by farming and growing food. Thus, food-ways play a fundamental role in social interaction and become the new field of knowing the impacts of urbanization.

keywords: food-ways, rural areas, adaptation, transformation, urbanization,

Introduction

This paper conducts case research focusing on a unique location of a small village near a city in southeast China and explores the processes of urbanization along with migration and adaptation of residents' identity. When rural areas transform, they incorporate themselves into an urban place and expand. Thus, to further observe the ways in which villagers in rural areas create, recreate, and maintain their relationship with one other, this paper examines the changes and adaptation of food-ways—i.e., food production, gathering, preparation, and consumption—and how they identify themselves differently following the demolition of housing and relocation. For example, they might live in an apartment in cities but still are not used to buying daily food in the grocery store; instead, they try to find some uncultivated lands to maintain their rural lifestyle, such as cultivating vegetables by themselves.

The south part of Jiangsu Province, located in southeast China, went through this kind of rural urbanization. This part is one of the core places in the Yangtze River Delta, and it contains one of the regions with the highest urbanization level in China. It includes the City of Changzhou, City of Wuxi, and the City of Suzhou (encompassing the counties Zhangjiagang, Changshu, Taicang, and Kunshan). These places are also typical cases of Chinese rapid urbanization since the 1980s. Thus, the rural areas in these places have better economic development and faster urbanization compared to other rural areas in China. Early in the 1980s, Southern Jiangsu first entered the process of rapid rural industrialization. It is named after the 'Su Nan Model', indicating that development is driven by factories and enterprises in small counties, towns, and villages and later became one of the development models that have received significant national attention (Xiaolong Luo, JingXiang Zhang, Jie Yin, 2011:51).

Materials and methods

The rural areas in south Jiangsu have a fairly developed economic system and are also considered part of Suzhou city administration, whose GDP contribution¹ is \$18,597.47, accounting for 20% of total Jiangsu Province. However, the regions are rather sparsely populated compared to large cities like Shanghai. The space between the houses is big and these houses can be inherited by later generations following the areas' particular cultural conventions. One of the reasons why such a form of inheritance is allowed is that, in the long run, contracted land, houses, and house sites are considered personal property in rural areas. Meanwhile, the Household Contract Responsibility System continued to operate and enforce the landscape of countryside living distribution after the Reform and Opening Policy. The Household Contract Responsibility System requires people who want to cultivate the land to live on the land, and so these people make contracts for houses on the land they work based on how much land they need to harvest and provide for the people who live there. This also caused the loose distribution of housing and the low speed of migrations, even when these areas were experiencing many changes before the 21 century. Another reason for choosing Brigade Nine is that it is where I spent my childhood. After the demolition of houses and relocation, this ordinary and unremarkable village disappeared from the map shortly without any documentation as if it never existed, yet the village still exists culturally as part of people's memories. This area is representative of other such villages in its historical omission and existence. I want to keep a record of this process during urbanization and show how it was the epitome of change at the time.

ZhangJiaGang County has gone through big changes in the process of town planning adjustment. In 2000, Si Gang was incorporated into the core town of the country Yangshe, which means it is no longer a rural place on paper. However, due to the house distribution that focuses on convenience and affordability and the area's agricultural tradition, people in SiGang still hold lifestyles that rely on vegetable cultivation by themselves. SiGang and Yangshe are divided by a river. Thus, even though SiGang is under the administration of Yangshe, residents of SiGang still consider themselves to be villagers instead of citizens. Likewise, people who originally live in Yangshe also consider SiGang to be a rural area and its residents as villagers.

¹ <https://dy.163.com/article/E6MPUTF9053718WA.html>

SiGang originally had sixteen production brigades during the People's Commune period in the 1950s. After the Chinese Economic Reform and Opening-up policy, each production brigade became a living unit under the administration of Si Gang town. In 1986, since Brigade Nine was located in the main street of Si Gang town, it later changed its name to Si Gang Village. But due to the long period of shared living in the period of People's Commune, villagers still called it Brigade Nine instead of Si Gang Village as traditional way. In addition to this research field, this study also discusses the Qili Temple Unit Residential Community, located in Yangshe Town. It originally was the Brigade Eleven and later it was turned into a separate village named Qili Temple. These two villages are 1.24 miles away from each other, and the new relocation community for Brigade Nine is named after Qili Temple.

In order to obtain more detailed understanding of food-ways and people's thoughts and views about the relocation from different perspectives in this process, this paper will explore the food-ways before relocation, during the transitional time, and after relocation by conducting in-depth interviews with seven family households in Brigade Nine and participatory observation of villagers. Unlike previous research that analyzes the urbanization in China, this research tries to contribute empirical materials to this field through in-depth interviews. It is aimed at knowing more about the residents' views on food. They have shown their attitudes with their language during the conversations, with respect to depicting the food-ways and social interaction of these villagers living in Brigade Nine during demolition and relocation processes. The interview contains theoretical and abstract notions of food offered by people and how they form their identities based on those abstract concepts and the processes of the recognition and imagination for food-ways.

Participatory observation tries to conduct exploratory and narrative research and emphasizes getting local people's opinions by observing body language and emotion. It explores those body languages and identity formations surrounding food-ways, which villagers have not recognized or conceptualized. By doing fieldwork, I attempt to build connections by interacting with local villagers as a participant. Then I go closely into the field and get first-hand resources by direct observation. Thus, exploring what lies behind the villagers' daily life, the study can promote a more profound understanding of the local lifestyle.

Due to the literacy ability gap between different interviewees, some kids may not be able to give out the complete and structured discussion. Thus, this research will use a semi-structured interview method to set a background and talk with interviewees casually according to the outline of the interview. In addition, I will try to elaborate more on the description of personal experience, keeping the interview process in a state of dialogue. The interview sets food-ways as the main observation research field and separates them into two parts: daily and festival. In this research, interviews usually happened at their home or the place people would gather together. The Appendix has detailed information about the 27 interviewees.

I started the interview in Brigade Nine from a previous known family called Zhou. Following the recommendation of his family, the research also covered Zhou's brother called Older Zhou who lived not close to Zhou's house and was not in close contact. Also, I interviewed a neighbor called Chen's Family who lived very close to Zhou's house without any blood connection but kept in frequent contact. Then, I found Chen A Liang's Family and Xiong's Family who lived in the front house of Zhou's and opposite neighbor Zhu's Family and next-door neighbor Zhu's Family lived in the back house of Zhou's. These seven families all lived in SiGang for more than three generations and experienced the house demolition,

transition time, and relocation. The old generation had participated in the Great Leap Forward and deeply experienced the People's Commune. Nowadays, their family economic status is different, some of them have a better life after establishing factories; some of them still have part-time jobs and unstable wages. This difference causes the tensions between the neighbors. I conducted the pre-survey in December 2015. Following the survey and field work in February, August, December 2016, I also collected materials in 2017, January to February and April to May. Then I went to Brigade Nine and QiLi Temple Unit. I tried to observe how people there cultivate vegetables, look for lands, talk to each other when sitting in front of the unit gate or on the first floor of the apartment, cook at home, prepare for the festival, hold family parties etc.

Results and discussion

The process of how this village arose, developed, and faded away, then was demolished shows the gradual and unique way of urbanization in China's rural area. Rural areas play an important role in starting factories and absorbing laborers. The development of rural areas in southern Jiangsu has its own special background. The ancient phrase "Su and Hu have good harvest, the whole nation is enough" proves that Suzhou has always been a rich place; although, after 1949, the political movement led to the economic collapse and the people's life fell into poverty. But, with the fair economic foundation and the Rural Household Contract Responsibility System, since the 1980s, it promoted the development of rural areas in southern Jiangsu. Because the economic development progresses, a new style of settlement evolves in southern Jiangsu that generally presents "living residence + agricultural production + industry development" in one unit. It means the emergence of factories accelerated the process of industrialization in rural areas as well as help the whole development of China's urbanization. In the 1990s, the export-oriented economy developed vigorously. The reform of township enterprises and capital market forces continued to promote the concentration of rural production factors in advantageous areas such as cities and towns in southern east China. The "trinity" function of rural settlements in southern Jiangsu began to disintegrate, and rural industries were gradually separated from most rural areas and began to be centralized in the township and above the spatial scale (Xu Guo, LongQi Zhao, Guangbin Li, 2015). This process caused the transformation of rural areas. In 2006, the central government clearly put forward eight recommendations for comprehensively promoting the construction of a new socialist countryside in the form of the primary Document "Several Opinions of the State Council on Promoting the Construction of a New Socialist Countryside". The planning and construction of new rural areas are led by the government. They put the "space control" as the core part which are completely reconstructing rural residential spaces. (HengDe Cao, Yong Wang, Guangbin Li, 2007; Yong Wang, Guangbin Li, 2001).

If we take a step back to see almost a century ago, Louis Wirth defined the civilization: 'the distinctive feature of the mode of living of man in the modern age is his concentration into gigantic aggregations around which cluster lesser centers and from which radiated the ideas and practices' (Louis Wirth, 1938:2). It will be clear to see in this case study that the government is trying to focus on huge relocation by forcing these villagers to give up their own land and community. This is also a type of immigration, even they only move 2 miles from Brigade Nine to QiLi Temple southwards. It is also

different from Wirth's definition as he assumes that civilization is centered on the shared ideas and practices. The movement of these villagers is based on efficiency and big hidden profits by releasing large amounts of land. They are actually under administration of the city at the cost of its location - the nearest living cycle away from the outer city.

Let us take a deep look of their daily life on food. Before the demolition, villagers had a solid network by sharing food and common life. For example, when interviewing Old Zhou's family, his wife mentions that she makes some delicious food. She will use a bowl with her husband's family name on it as a container for the food. Then she will deliver the food to close neighbors. Later, the neighbors will get another chance to cook their food as an exchange. The point here is the bowl. It is not a single delivery or one time exchange. The bowl plays a role in the connection between them by sharing the food. In addition, the reason she did this is that the living distribution was obtained during the past decades which they are so familiar with each other. They are living in a single occupancy home with a house for each family that they can keep the door open in daily time. Thus, it enables them to live a life with bonds and also represents trust. What is more, they have alternative resources to get food: cultivating by themselves, going grocery shopping downtown or getting several necessities in the village's center.

However, when they move to the new unit in a city. Their food-ways changed a lot. Moving in multi occupancy buildings with dense populations makes food sharing difficult. It is hard to have access to others' rooms with the doors closed in apartments. Also, the old generations have difficulty climbing stairs and remembering the unit numbers, they find another way to maintain their connections. They will gather together at the gate of their living unit and have the random talk in the local market near their unit. But what they really want is to cultivate food, especially vegetables by themselves still. For example, when interviewing the Zhou's family, Zhou's wife spared all the efforts to look for uncultivated and available land. The nearest is 1.2 miles away from her home and the farthest is 9 miles away. The vegetables will be delivered to her daughter-in-law, her daughter, and her friends. The vegetables here are the key bonds for her to maintain her network after moving to the city.

The changes for migrations are hard for people if they have been familiar with their living space and no longer get back to them. This paper wants to capture the adaptation of the relocation process by focusing on the changes of food-ways. It is also an essential aspect of the massive Urbanization in China now.

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Appendix

Interviewee	Name	Year of Birth	Birth place	Current Address	Job Experience
Family1	Mr.Zhou	1941	SuZhou Downtown	Brigade Nine	1.Village secretary belongs to government office 2. Manager of a factory 3. Now Retired
	Mrs. Zhou	1947	Brigade Six	Brigade Nine	1.chef 2.Now Retired
	Son	1976	Brigade Nine	Brigade Nine	1.work in a battery factory 2.Now manages a factory
	Daughter in law	1980	Brigade Two	Brigade Nine	1.work in a textile factory 2.Now manages a factory
	Grandson	1997	Brigade Nine	Brigade Nine	College student
Family2	Mr.Chen	1947	Brigade Nine	Brigade Nine	Bricklayer
	Mrs. Chen	1952	Brigade Eight	Brigade Nine	1.Chef 2.Now Retired
	Daughter	1982	Brigade Nine	Brigade Nine	1.Kindergaten teacher 2.Now manages a kindergarten
	Son in law	1980	Brigade Seven	Brigade Nine	Manage a online toy shop
	Granddaughter	2007	Brigade Nine	Brigade Nine	Primary School Student
Family3	Mrs' Old Zhou	1941	Brigade Nine	Brigade Nine	Housewife
	Son	1969	Brigade Nine	Brigade Nine	Work in a textile factory as designer

	Daughter in Law	1970	Brigade Nine	Brigade Nine	Work in a textile factory
	Grandson	1997	Brigade Nine	Brigade Nine	College Student
Family4	Mr.Chen	1961	Brigade Nine	Brigade Nine	Retired
	Older daughter	1982	Brigade Nine	Brigade Nine	Accounting
	Young daughter	1986	Brigade Nine	Yangshe (Zhangjiagang Downtown)	Work in a factory
Family5	Mr. Zhu lived near Mr. Zhou	1945	Brigade Nine	Brigade Nine	Retired
	Mrs. Zhu	1950	Brigade Seven	Brigade Nine	Retired
	Older Son	1973	Brigade Nine	Brigade Nine	Part-time jobs
	Young daughter	1975	Brigade Nine	Yangshe (Zhangjiagang Downtown)	Part-time jobs
Family6	Mr. Zhu lived opposite of Mr. Zhou	1948	Brigade Nine	Brigade Nine	Farmers
	Mrs. Zhu	1958	North part of Jiangsu	Brigade Nine	Farmers
	Older daughter	1973	Brigade Nine	Brigade Nine	Part-time jobs
	Grandson	1991	Brigade Nine	Brigade Nine	Unofficial Policemen

	Young daughter	1978	Brigade Nine	Yangshe (Zhangjiagang Downtown)	Work in grocery store
Family7	Mr. Xiong's son	1978	Brigade Nine	Brigade Nine	Work in factory