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## Whose Games? The costs of being “Olympic citizens” in Beijing

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**ABSTRACT** Mega-events such as the Olympic Games tend to be accompanied by copious media coverage of the negative social impact of the Games, and people in the affected areas are often thought to share similar experiences. The research in this paper, which focused on the Beijing Summer Olympic Games of 2008, unpacks the heterogeneous groups in a particular sector of the housing market to gain a better understanding of how the Games affected different resident groups. The paper critically examines the experience of migrant tenants and Beijing citizens (landlords in particular) in “villages-in-the-city” (known as *cheongzhongcun*), drawing on their first-hand accounts of the citywide preparations for the Games and the pervasive demolition threats to their neighbourhoods. The paper argues that the Beijing Summer Olympiad produced an uneven, often exclusionary, Games experience for a certain segment of the urban population.

**KEYWORDS** Mega-events, Olympic Games, Displacement, Housing, Migrants, Beijing, China

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In urban China, migrants have only limited housing choices and experience insecurity of housing tenure, the conditions of which are framed by the imposition of temporary status through the continued exercise of *hukou*, a household registration system. This system, inherited from the planned economy era, regulates and limits access to urban social welfare provision (including public housing). This places unskilled migrants without abundant financial resources at greater disadvantage when they move to cities. Higher-income migrants have access to private home ownership and to a rental sector in the urban commercial housing market that has seen price spikes in most major cities in recent decades. For all other migrants, unless their accommodation is provided by their employers,<sup>(1)</sup> the major form of tenure is private rental tenure.<sup>(2)</sup> Low-income migrants often end up settling in the urban fringes and in abandoned suburban industrial sites or in dilapidated inner-city areas where local Beijing residents rent out extra spaces for private rental income. Houses in these areas are usually in poor physical condition and often lack basic services.<sup>(3)</sup> However, they provide the most accessible and affordable solution to migrants' need to stay close to their jobs under severe financial constraints.<sup>(4)</sup>

When Beijing was preparing for the 2008 Summer Olympic Games, the municipality carried out numerous "environmental improvement projects" (a euphemism for demolition and displacement) in what are known as *chengzhongcun* or "villages-in-the-city" (hereafter VICs), where migrant tenants far outnumber local Beijing permanent residents. These VICs are loci of informal building practices that evade municipal building codes, providing low-quality shelters predominantly for migrant tenants who cannot find affordable dwellings in central districts.<sup>(5)</sup> In Beijing, they are dilapidated residential areas often located in urban fringes or former industrial sites, classified by some academics in China as being part of "urban corners", to indicate their marginal position.<sup>(6)</sup> While these VICs are found on a large scale in major cities across mainland China, their origin and development patterns show variations.<sup>(7)</sup> One important shared feature is the informal building practices of former farmers, who densify their own dwellings to provide extra space for private lease to migrants in order to gain rental income. Building density tends to be very high in the Pearl River delta region, somewhat less so in Beijing. VICs, then, may not originally have been "informal settlements", but they are informal in nature given the prevalent informal building practices that are the basis of their development.

According to a government survey, about 332 VICs existed in Beijing's central and near suburban districts as of the early 2000s.<sup>(8)</sup> In September 2004, the Beijing municipal government decided to carry out "environmental improvement" projects in 231 VICs accommodating 33,935 households, aiming to complete these projects in 171 VICs before the 2008 Olympic Games.<sup>(9)</sup> The projects were overseen by a municipal organization, the 2008 Environmental Construction Head Office set up in December 2005, working with other district governments. It was estimated that the demolition of 171 VICs might lead to the eviction of about 74,100 permanent village residents and about 296,400 migrants.

The demolition of VICs can incur heavy costs not only for the migrant tenants but also the local village landlords whose livelihoods depend largely on rental revenues. While some studies have referred to the issue of mass displacement through urban renewal<sup>(10)</sup> and the use of the Games as a means to draw public attention away from this exacerbation of inequalities,<sup>(11)</sup> they tend to draw on secondary sources and personal observations for discussions. This paper presents post-Games empirical findings in an attempt to examine the experience of migrant tenants and Beijing citizens, including village landlords, by drawing on their first-hand accounts of how their lives were disrupted by the citywide preparations for the Olympic Games and how they experienced the Games. The research attempts to unpack the heterogeneous groups (in terms of tenure and residency status) in a particular sector of the housing market, and gain a better understanding of how the Olympic Games affected different resident groups.

Three main arguments are put forward. First, the loss of VICs associated with the preparations for the Olympic Games was an intensification of exclusionary practices routinely experienced by Beijing migrants. Despite moving to other remaining VICs to prevent their living costs from rising, they were expected disproportionately to bear the costs of the Games, experiencing disruption to their lives and going through involuntary house moves, often to locations further from the city centre. Second, the landlords in VICs were also affected, since rentals from the demolished buildings had been a major source of household income. Third, there was a clear division between the two groups (migrants and Beijing citizen landlords) in terms of their participation in neighbourhood activities associated with the celebration of the Olympic Games, reinforcing the identity of migrants to Beijing as outsiders.

## II. MEGA-EVENTS AND URBAN MARGINAL POPULATION

While host cities and countries find mega-event hosting to be “... *an opportunity for a massive physical and image make-over*”,<sup>(12)</sup> mega-events are criticized for their role in making cities work for visitors, while neglecting the needs of local residents and producing an uneven distribution of material costs and benefits.<sup>(13)</sup> The demolition of affordable dwellings, incurring residents’ displacement, has often been cited as one of the major negative social impacts of such mega-events as the Olympic Games.<sup>(14)</sup> Various reports suggest that such displacement is larger in scale and more brutal in nature in developing countries.<sup>(15)</sup> A report by the Centre on Housing Rights and Eviction indicates that the number of Beijing residents displaced as a result of Olympics-related urban (re)development projects between 2000 and 2008 is estimated to be about 1.5 million (about 14 per cent of Beijing’s permanent residents).<sup>(16)</sup> As COHRE speculates, these numbers are unlikely to include migrants, as government reports usually refer only to those permanent local residents who are eligible for compensation.

Critics further argue that it is the powerless in society who disproportionately bear the burden of cities being constructed to cater to the needs of visitors rather than local inhabitants.<sup>(17)</sup> Those poorer segments of society and those who are socially marginalized tend to go through an experience that is detached from the rest of the city’s festive mood.<sup>(18)</sup> For instance, in Athens, the Romani population was the main victim of evictions during the city’s preparations for the 2004 Summer Olympic Games, an attempt by the authorities to keep them away from the Games venues.<sup>(19)</sup> In Seoul, during the preparations for the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games, one of the most brutally oppressed groups was the low-income communities whose settlements were near the Olympic torch path, as the government did not want them to be visible to the media.<sup>(20)</sup> Delhi, as host city to the 2010 Commonwealth Games, also saw the intensifying “... *aestheticization of city space*”,<sup>(21)</sup> as slums in central city areas were removed in order to transform the city image in line with the “world class city” vision that Delhi promoted.

The negative social impact of mega-events is often overshadowed by the politics of the events. In developing countries in particular, hosting mega-events such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup has been frequently associated with such national political trends as nation-building in formerly divided countries;<sup>(22)</sup> the promotion of multicultural national identity;<sup>(23)</sup> the signalling of re-entry of the host country into the global community;<sup>(24)</sup> and changes to political institutions.<sup>(25)</sup> Host nations engage with symbolic politics, mobilizing social support to achieve particular visions of the state.<sup>(26)</sup> This association of mega-events with national politics suggests that any opposition to mega-event hosting may easily be interpreted as challenging the ruling regime, thus risking oppression. Furthermore, as Short notes, a mega-event ironically “... *reinforces nationalism*” rather than transcending it.<sup>(27)</sup> The national prestige associated with mega-events such as the Olympics and the use of patriotic sentiment boosted by the national government produce an unfavourable political environment for those expressing dissent or objecting to government policies. Social outcasts such as homeless people or persistent protesters against government policies are often criminalized and kept away from the public.<sup>(28)</sup>

These critical studies suggest that when we examine the experience of the marginalized groups in an Olympic project, we need to examine both the physical and subjective experiences of the affected, shaped within the political economic constraints of the host nation. It is also necessary to have a longer historical view<sup>(29)</sup> so that the role of demolition of low-income settlements in urban policy-making can be better understood. Therefore, in our study on the experiences of Beijing’s VICs residents, which includes both migrant tenants and their landlords, we will also focus on their physical and subjective experiences of the Games.

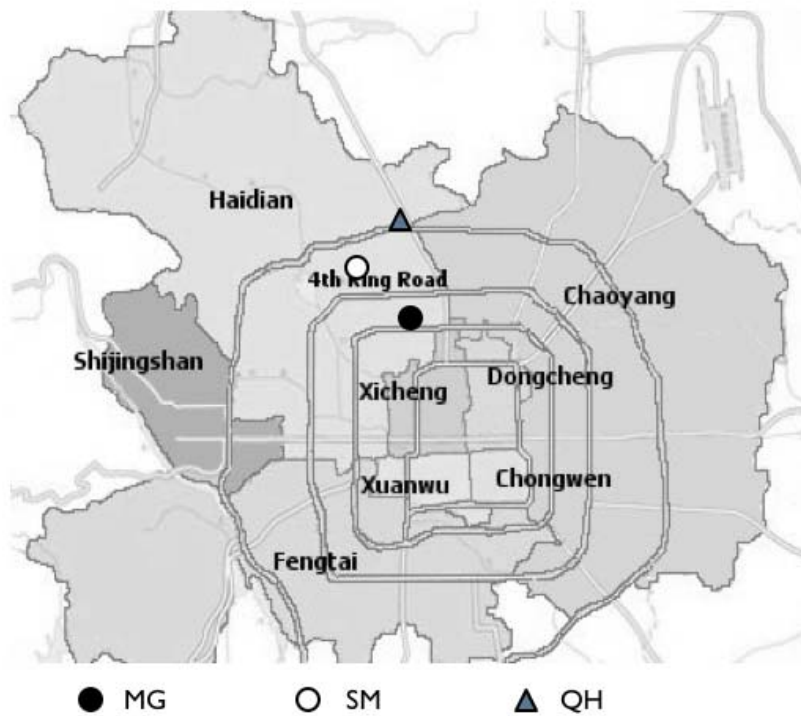
## III. RESEARCH DATA

In order to clearly understand VIC residents’ experiences of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games, we carried out post-Games fieldwork involving qualitative interviews with migrant workers as well as village landlords of formerly rural origin. These interviews were carried out between December 2008 and January 2009 in the suburban district of Haidian; Beijing is known for its concentric ring-roads, and the areas around and beyond the fourth ring-road are usually described as “near suburban” areas (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1

Location of study areas

SOURCE: Figure reproduced by Hyun Bang Shin



Official statistics indicate that as of 2008, 27.4 per cent of all permanent Beijing residents were migrants, the majority of whom (56 per cent) lived in the near suburban districts of Haidian, Chaoyang, Fengtai and Shijingshan (Table 1). Haidian was chosen for the field research as it had the largest share of VICs, when the municipal government identified 231 VICs for demolition by 2010.<sup>(30)</sup> Its nearly one million migrants constituted about one-third of its total population. Three Haidian neighbourhoods were selected based on accessibility and proximity to the city centre. One neighbourhood (MG) (Initials are used for all three neighbourhoods in order to preserve anonymity) is located just outside the northern section of the third ring-road near disused rail tracks north of Beijing North Station; the second neighbourhood (SM) lies just outside the northern section of the fourth ring-road near Tsinghua University and Yuanmingyuan; and the third neighbourhood (QH) is adjacent to the intersection between the fifth ring-road and G6 Jing Zang expressway. QH consists of three sub-neighbourhoods, named QH 2-Street, QH 3-Street and QH 4-Street. As part of the redevelopment, QH 2-Street and QH 3-Street were undergoing demolition, starting in 2005 and 2006, respectively, according to QH interviewees, and remained on-going as of December 2008. Official estimates of the population size were not available, but the interviewees suggested that local Beijing households in MG, SM and QH 4-Street reached 50–60, 150 and 1,000 households, respectively. House rents fell with distance from the city centre so that on average people paid lower monthly rents in QH (24–35 yuan/square metre) than in SM (40–50 yuan/square metre) or MG (35–71 yuan/square metre).

TABLE 1

Permanent population and density in Beijing, 2008

	Population ('000s)			Population density (persons per km <sup>2</sup> )
		Migrants	% population	
Beijing (total)	16,950	4,651	27.4	1,033
Inner-city districts	2,083	381	18.3	22,546

Dongcheng	553	101	18.3	21,823
Xicheng	673	112	16.6	21,284
Chongwen	297	53	17.8	17,978
Xuanwu	560	115	20.5	29,614
Near suburban districts	8,356	2,601	31.1	6,549
Haidian	2,930	906	30.9	6,802
Chaoyang	3,083	998	32.4	6,775
Fengtai	1,753	489	27.9	5,733
Shijingshan	590	208	35.3	6,997
Outer suburban districts	4,708	1,443	30.6	748
Other districts and counties	1,803	226	12.5	206

SOURCE: Tables 3-3 and 3-4 in Beijing Statistical Yearbook, 2009  
Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics (2009), *Beijing Statistical Yearbook 2009*, China Statistics Press, Beijing, pages 55-56

A total of 48 qualitative interviews were conducted: 17 in MG, 10 in SM and 21 in QH. Interviewees were selected from various parts of each neighbourhood, taking into account their tenure and household registration status: 28 were migrant tenants and 20 were local Beijing permanent residents, the latter divided into two groups, 14 landlords and six non-landlords. Migrant tenants, recruited through the snowball technique, had moved due to demolition during the pre-Games period. The average period of residence in Beijing for migrant interviewees was 5.9 years for those in QH, 3.5 years in SM and 6.7 years in MG.

#### IV. EFFICACY OF GOVERNMENT'S DEMOLITION POLICY

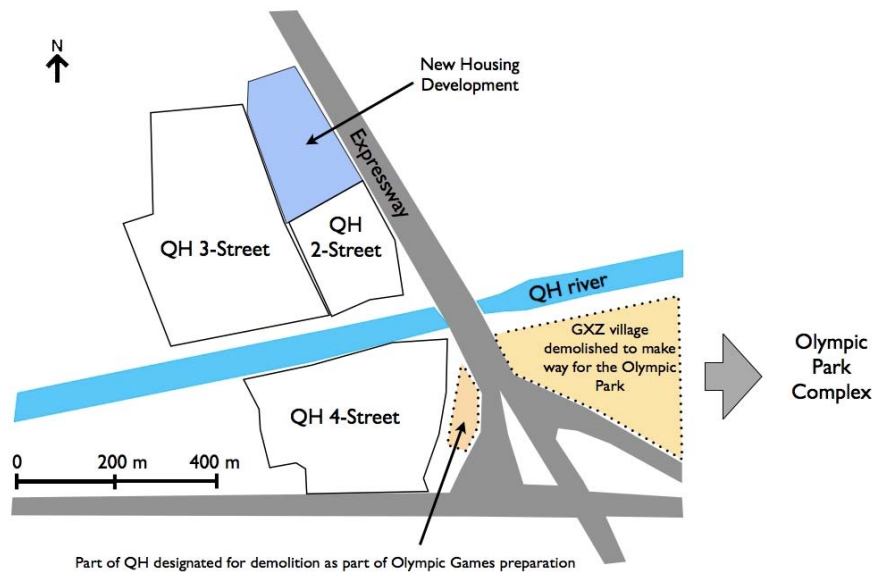
According to the Haidian district mayor, 47 VICs were to be subject to environmental improvement by December 2006 as part of the Games preparations, involving the demolition of 2,215,000 square metres of illegal construction.<sup>(31)</sup> In its 2009 annual yearbook, the Haidian district government summed up its Olympic-related improvement efforts, stating that 63 VICs and urban corners were subject to comprehensive improvement.<sup>(32)</sup>

Progress was slower than planned. For instance, while the district government aimed to implement 29 VIC projects, displacing 2,872 households, during 2005 and 2006, only five had been completed and 1,542 households displaced by December 2006, a completion rate of 53.7 per cent.<sup>(33)</sup> For instance, West Street in SM was supposed to be regenerated but this clearly did not happen. As one landlord interviewee living with his parents said:

“It’s been said during the last 10 years that this place would be demolished ... Before the Olympic Games, newspapers said SM West Street would be demolished, but until now, nothing has been demolished.” (male, landlord in his thirties, S3)<sup>(34)</sup>

The selection criteria for the 171 Beijing VICs intended for demolition before the Games could also be questioned. While some VICs experienced wholesale demolition, such as those located on what became the Olympic Park complex, only those parts of some VICs that were essential to the Games would have been demolished because of the time constraints. This was the case with the demolition of QH village, whereby although the village as a whole constitutes a large area divided by the QH River, only a small section of QH 4-Street, located in the southeastern corner where it meets the expressway, was designated for demolition, to be turned into a green space (Figure 2). This project was announced as an Olympic Games-related VIC improvement project in July 2006. The area to the east of the expressway, which used to be a large VIC, was also demolished to make way for the Olympic Park complex. The case of QH 4-Street’s partial demolition clearly indicates that the government’s attempts to demolish VICs as part of the Games preparations might have left some VICs only partly affected rather than completely eradicated. As a landlady in her fifties from MG village said, talk concerning VIC demolition might have been “... *only a slogan*” for some areas, as “... *the state did not have the strength*” (M16).

FIGURE 2  
 QH village precinct and the location of demolition areas  
 SOURCE: Figure reproduced by Hyun Bang Shin



## V. UNDERSTANDING THE CONSEQUENCES OF DEMOLITION PROJECTS: VIEWS OF THE VILLAGE LANDLORDS

To village landlords, the news of the demolition of other VICs as part of the Olympic Games clean-up provoked mixed feelings about the future of their own neighbourhoods. Among the 14 village landlord interviewees, 11 were aware of the demolition of VICs within the fourth ring-road or near major Olympic venues, but they were rather sceptical about the necessity for this. For instance, a 53 year-old landlord in SM (S7) claimed that demolition was “... *definitely because of the Olympic Games. If not, could the demolition be taking place so hastily? I feel like this village does not need to be demolished, as it would be difficult to relocate [villagers].*” His view was echoed by another landlady in her sixties from SM (S10), who indicated that the number of migrants in her neighbourhood increased because “... *chengzhongcun within the fourth ring-road were demolished and people had no place to live but to squeeze into outside areas.*”

The very survival of the study neighbourhoods, however, suggests that the eradication of all targeted VICs in Beijing would require greater effort and a longer timeframe. Talks of demolition and redevelopment have been around for many years in both SM and MG, making local residents weary of years-long government inaction to address neighbourhood dilapidation. The inability to enforce the projects generated a sense of instability: “*For more than 10 years people were talking about redevelopment but it has not taken place until now*” (male, landlord in his thirties, S3). “*From the 1980s there were discussions about demolition in this area, but nothing has happened. Whether or not demolition takes place is a matter for the state, and has no relationship with us*” (male, 43 year-old landlord, M5).

As for landlords living in QH 4-Street, the slow process of demolition in the adjacent neighbourhoods QH 2-Street and QH 3-Street (Figure 2) provided a reference point against which they could draw provisional conclusions about the future of their own neighbourhood:

“This area is definitely not going to be demolished. You know, as far as demolition is concerned, there is no fixed schedule. You say the QH 3-Street neighbourhood is undergoing demolition, but it’s been five years since the notice. Even though demolition has begun and takes place continuously, it has not finished yet. Only half-way through. So, our place here, nobody knows when it’s going to be demolished.” (male, landlord in his fifties, Q4-11)

In a departure from more general assumptions, landlords and local Beijing residents were often eager to have their neighbourhoods demolished and redeveloped as they considered it a means to improve their own living

conditions. They were also quick to point out the need for adequate compensation. While regulations exist to provide either in-kind (in the form of relocation housing) or cash compensation, the latter has become the norm since the early 2000s.<sup>(35)</sup> Local village landlords and public sector tenants were aware of the compensation policies and during the interviews, indicated the level of cash compensation they wished to receive.

What is more concerning to the residents is the loss of future rental income. For many, rental payments were an important source of extra income. The 11 landlord interviewees who disclosed their holdings had on average 10 tenant households and earned approximately 39,300 yuan per year. This was 57 per cent of Beijing's average household disposable income in 2008.<sup>(36)</sup> The highest rental income was enjoyed by a 52 year-old landlord interviewee in SM (S1) who was renting out 17 out of 27 units at the time of the interview and earned about 112,200 yuan per year. In about 2004, the family informally added two more storeys to an original 120 square-metre one-storey dwelling. The second highest rental income was earned by a 72 year-old landlord in MG who had 10 tenant households (M12). He added a second floor in 1985 to add more living space, and then spent around 150,000 yuan to add another floor in 2003 for renting. As he charged between 500 and 700 yuan per unit, it would have taken less than three years to recover the initial investment. As the earlier interviewee S1 mentions, rental income was the main, if not the only, source of family income. Migrant tenants were also aware of this situation. A 30 year-old male migrant stated: "*If demolition takes place, there is no more income source. For the local [Beijing] resident, house rent is the income source*" (Q4-2). Demolition, cash compensation and relocation (or re-housing on site) would improve the physical living conditions for these landlords but would destroy the basis of their major household income.

## VI. VIEWS OF MIGRANT TENANTS: "WE'D JUST MOVE AND FIND ANOTHER PLACE"

Migrant tenants were much less concerned than landlords about neighbourhood demolition. With regard to the citywide demolition of VICs, the majority of migrant interviewees (19) said they had not heard of the news or were not interested in following up the development. While private rental dwellings in VICs were the most accessible means of residence for migrants in Beijing, they were guaranteed no protection upon demolition. Cash or in-kind compensation is only for local permanent residents in owner-occupation or public rental tenure. The outcome for private tenants depends largely on their relationship with landlords. Usually, migrant tenants receive little protection, as an interviewee (Q4-2) stated: "*This [compensation] has no relation to us nor to my interest ... let it be their concern.*"

Migrants were well aware of their fundamentally insecure position in the city. They showed little expectation of tenure security, showed no strong sense of attachment to their existing residence and did not expect compensation for displacement. Of the 28 migrants interviewed, 17 had moved at least once while in Beijing, 11 of them because of demolition. Irrespective of their previous demolition experience, they held the view that, upon demolition, "... *we'd just move and find another place to live.*" One migrant, a 24 year-old woman (Q4-4), mentioned that she did not pay attention to demolition simply "... *because we are migrants.*" Her statement echoed the view that "... *we migrants have no rights*" (M3) and "... *we migrants do not receive any benefits*" (M9) from the government upon demolition. The restriction on their housing choices, the institutional constraints from the exercise of the household registration system and the continual efforts by the municipal government to eradicate accessible residential space such as VICs were accepted as part of their life.

Given the scale of demolition in the short time span before the Olympic Games, one would wonder whether the migrants were under pressure to pay higher rents. Eight interviewees reported that rents in the surrounding areas went up, and three interviewees who had to move indeed paid higher rents, as they wanted to stay close to their original place of residence. Interviewee Q4-10 (28 year-old male), who worked in a supermarket, paid 400 yuan compared to 260 yuan previously. His new residence was close to his previous neighbourhood, near the northeastern corner of the Olympic Park.

However, looking for affordable or cheaper places to live was a priority. As a 34 year-old male migrant living in QH 3-Street stated (Q3-4): "*If demolition takes place, rents will go up, and it is not a good thing ... it is better to have cheaper rents even if living conditions are worse.*" Keeping rents manageable was the motive for looking for places further out. A female migrant in her forties (Q4-8), working at Beijing University No 3 Hospital, used to live near the hospital in the northern section of the third ring-road but had



to move about five kilometres away to keep the same level of rent (about 300 yuan). This was a common experience. A 43 year-old migrant (Q4-3), a garbage collector, stated:

“From here to the north, around Xi’erqi village, rent is 100 something yuan ... At present, we can’t save money while living here. We cannot even save eight or 10 yuan per day. We would not be able to afford to live here.”

The continued availability of alternative VICs such as QH 4-Street and Xi’erqi allowed migrant tenants to find affordable dwellings when they needed to move. Even if 171 out of 231 VICs had been demolished before the start of the Olympic Games, as the government claimed,<sup>(37)</sup> this still left 60 VICs on their priority list for demolition by 2010; and the number remaining rises if we accept the government estimate of 332 VICs in Beijing by the early 2000s. As noted above, village landlords respond to the housing market by densifying their houses in order to provide more rental rooms for increased numbers of tenants. In this way, the capacity of the existing VICs to accommodate migrant tenants multiplied quickly. Landlords’ intention to build more was clearly spelt out by a landlady in her sixties (S10):

“This year, our state just hosted the Olympic Games. It spent a lot of money and currently does not have the energy to renovate this place. It may stop and rest for a year or two before it begins demolition. After waiting a couple of years, if the state does not demolish this place of ours, I will build. If it does the demolition, I will not build.”

Informal construction of rental dwellings by village landlords also provided tenants with extra assurance that demolition might not happen in the short term. As a 30 year-old male migrant (Q4-2) said: “*You look at the houses here. Many landlords built flats and rented them out, so in the short term, demolition may not happen*” (Q4-2).

## VII. WHOSE GAMES? MIGRANTS’ EXCLUSIONARY EXPERIENCE OF THE OLYMPIAD

A number of news reports emerged around the time of the Games on how they were received among the Chinese. Mainstream local Chinese media tended to report positive reactions from the public regarding the grandeur of the Olympic Games and the national prestige associated with the mega-event. Having failed earlier in competition with Sydney in the bid for the 2000 Olympic Games, Beijing’s chance to host the 2008 Games was an opportunity to prove to the world that China had finally integrated with the world economy, endorsed earlier in part by its accession to the World Trade Organization.

But there were also news reports of exclusionary experiences of the Games among migrants. Migrants, who were the builders of the Olympic city, were effectively excluded from sharing the joy of the Games, affected by many restrictions and bans imposed as part of Beijing’s environmental control. The Beijing Organizing Committee for the Games of the XXIX Olympiad (hereafter BOCOG) produced the Beijing Olympic Action Plan,<sup>(38)</sup> and its Social Environment Development section specifically classified the management of migrants as part of the government’s actions on “security, health care and sanitation”. It stated:

“Maintaining good social order – the projects of ‘safe community’ and ‘science- and technology-based security’ will be continued. Specifically, we will continue enhancing the public security structures from the grassroots and building a complete anti-criminal network among the citizens. Management of the floating population in the city shall be further improved and services will be provided.”

A citywide social cleansing operation to clear the streets of social undesirables was strengthened in early 2008,<sup>(39)</sup> affecting beggars, street vendors and unlicensed businesses. Construction sites and factories were to close temporarily during the months preceding the Games in order to improve the quality of Beijing’s polluted air, and migrant workers in these sectors were “persuaded” to leave Beijing.<sup>(40)</sup> As government security measures were tightened, ID checks for city-bound travellers were introduced to discourage migrant commuters from entering Beijing, under the name of and described as “management of the floating populations”. Several VIC landlords reported the impact of such exclusion: they had fewer tenants and lost

rental income, especially in QH where migrants were concentrated: “[Our] family’s [rental] income decreased from July [2008], as many [migrant] tenants went back home” (A 46 year-old landlady from QH, Q3-1).

Various civil codes (and penalties) were also implemented to encourage “civilized” behaviour. Rural-to-urban migrants were often viewed by urban local residents and policy enforcers as being “uncultured”, and were more negatively affected by the disciplinary measures than urban citizens. These codes also included no use of rickshaws in the city centre and other Games areas. Unauthorised activities that were deemed informal and uncivilised by the municipality were to be hidden from the view of local residents and visitors during the Games period. These restrictions were relaxed only after the closing of the Games, as the symbolic image of a rickshaw driving along the main artery next to the main Olympics stadium shows (Photo 1).

#### PHOTO 1

Olympic main stadium, Bird’s Nest and a rickshaw

SOURCE OF PHOTO: Photograph by Hyun Bang Shin, 2008



These restrictions on everyday life were felt by migrant interviewees who stayed behind in Beijing during the Games, enduring hardship because of constraints on their income-generating activities. A 30 year-old male interviewee (Q4-2) recollected the temporary closure of his wife’s clothing store located in the Wudaokou area of Haidian district. Another 45 year-old migrant (Q4-5) experienced difficulties when he could not run his bicycle repair street stall between 20 July and 20 September. Another family (Q4-4) had to move because the lorry they lived in did not have a Beijing number plate and was not allowed to park at their previous residence located near the northern section of the fourth ring-road, not far from the main Olympic complex.

Migrants’ inequitable experience of the Games was also evident in their exclusion from various neighbourhood-based cultural and sports activities that were part of the Games celebration. These activities, largely organized by grassroots organizations such as neighbourhood residents’ committees or local sub-district governments, were attended by more than “... 80 per cent of local villagers” (50 year-old male interviewee in QH, Q4-11), and were “...100 per cent for local villagers”, that is, with no participation of migrants (72 year-old male interview in MG village). While local Beijing citizens described their experience of participating in the Olympic Games-related volunteering activities, migrants considered those festive activities to be none of their business and mostly stayed away. Their deep-rooted perception that migrants were mostly excluded from neighbourhood affairs was expressed cynically by a migrant interviewee: “*The neighbourhood committee ignores us and only cares about birth control*” (Q4-5). One of the migrants expressed frustration about his attempt to participate in one of these neighbourhood activities:

“At the time of the Olympic Games, there was an activity organized in this place, and I went to watch it as it looked lively. A person, who looked like a person in the Street Office, saw me and said: ‘Where are you from and where are you going?’ So I said: ‘Did I cause anything to anyone? Did I do anything that violates the law?’ His eyes were looking down on people. Their vision is to discriminate against migrants ... Actually, we migrants and local people [from Beijing] are two different kinds, and they are not interested in migrants.” (male, 52 year-old landlord, S1)

The migrants’ experience of the Olympic Games reflects the decades-long consolidation of inequalities based on the policy of household registration, which severely constrains migrants’ rights in their destination cities. These inequalities are accompanied by stigmatization and marginalization in cities that they helped to build. Migrants are often looked down upon by local residents, who use such expressions as *suzhi tai cha*, literally translated as “the quality is poor” (or not up to standard), possibly referring to such characteristics as ill manners and low levels of education. The punitive measures put in place around the time of the Olympics reflect the bias and stigmatization frequently associated with migrants.<sup>(41)</sup>

## VIII. PATRIOTISM AND THE OLYMPIC GAMES

The Beijing Olympiad’s official slogan “One World, One Dream” was visible from every corner of Beijing when the city hosted the 2008 Summer Olympic Games (Photo 2). On the BOCOG website,<sup>(42)</sup> it states that the slogan:

“... expresses the common wishes of people all over the world, inspired by the Olympic ideals, to strive for a bright future of Mankind. In spite of the differences in colours, languages and races, we share the charm and joy of the Olympic Games, and together we seek for the ideal of Mankind for peace. We belong to the same world and we share the same aspirations and dreams.”

### PHOTO 2

Street fence with Olympic slogan: “One World, One Dream”

SOURCE OF PHOTO: Photograph by Hyun Bang Shin, 2008



In contrast to the international orientation of the slogan, mega-events such as the Olympic Games are often imbued with patriotic sentiment, which creates great challenges for any anti-Olympic movement or protest against the government’s policies. During the preparations for the Games and their subsequent

hosting, government policies and actions were often rebranded as being related to the Olympic Games, thus giving them a sense of urgency and exception. The Games were also thought to have been used as a way of diverting public attention away from social discontent and “... as a propaganda tool to promote national cohesion and rally an increasingly divided people around a common cause.”<sup>(43)</sup> The public support was high among Beijingers, as demonstrated by the 94.6 per cent support rate reported by an independent survey conducted in February/March 2000.<sup>(44)</sup>

Such exceptionally high support for the Games was sustained, and possibly strengthened, as the entire Chinese state disseminated pro-Olympic Games messages through the central and municipal governments. Patriotism was heavily emphasized during the Games preparations and neighbourhoods were decorated with slogans and placards that delivered pro-Olympic, patriotic messages (Photo 3). While “One World, One Dream” was its official slogan, the Beijing Olympic Games website displayed five main spirits of the Beijing Olympic Games in Chinese, giving top priority to the patriotic spirit for the glory of the country. The 2008 Olympic Games was indeed a major moment not only for the city but also for the country to promote itself and consolidate its confidence and pride, both domestically and internationally.

### PHOTO 3

Placard in a Beijing neighbourhood

NOTE: The words on the banner translate as: “For the glory of the mother land, for the glory of the Olympic Games”.

SOURCE OF PHOTO: Photograph by Hyun Bang Shin, 2007



This exceptional atmosphere, coordinated by the state, seemed to make migrant tenants and village landlords more tolerant of their harsh treatment and of the disruption to their livelihoods due to the mounting pressure of demolition. For instance, a 28 year-old male migrant interviewee (Q4-10) stated explicitly that even if the demolition of the VICs within the fourth ring-road might have incurred costs to migrants:

“This is okay, as hosting the Olympic Games is a major state affair, a very rare event. We can understand these arrangements by the state. Hosting the Games raises our country’s profile. Incurring a little bit of costs to my family is not a big deal, as long as the loss is not huge.”

This view was echoed by a village landlord (Q4-11) who held a Beijing hukou: “The Olympic Games is the nation’s major event and is our glory. We should support it strongly. Every resident should support it. Even if there is a sacrifice to make, we should endure it.”

## IX. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION



In their discussion about the material legacy of hosting international mega-events, Whitson and Macintosh argue that identifiable benefits are not evenly shared among citizens, and call for the reconceptualization of urban development and promotion to be more inclusive.<sup>(45)</sup> Our study of the impact of the Beijing Olympic Games on migrants and village landlords, as well as their experience of the Games, supports other claims about the uneven distribution of the benefits and costs of the Olympic Games. We find that they have reinforced existing socioeconomic and political inequalities, and our findings testify to Eitzen's argument that "... *the powerless bear the burden.*"<sup>(46)</sup> In China, the sharp distinction between migrants' and local citizens' right to the city is embedded in society.<sup>(47)</sup> Critics point out that local governments are increasingly redefining urban citizenship and associated benefit entitlements, giving preference to locally registered permanent residents irrespective of their rural or urban status.<sup>(48)</sup> Village landlords, although Beijing citizens, were negatively affected by the demolition pressure on Beijing's VICs, which saw the selective targeting of VIC locations strategically related to the Olympics. Migrants, as outsiders, faced exclusionary experiences of the Olympic Games, even though they were the backbone of Beijing's Olympic city construction.

In this paper, we have also shown that a more nuanced understanding is needed with regard to the analysis of the negative impact of the Olympic Games preparations on migrants' access to affordable housing in the city. First, the actual demolition, while being substantial, might still have left a significant share of existing VICs intact or only partly affected. As the example of QH village suggests, some VICs would have seen only part of the neighbourhood, rather than the entire area, being subject to demolition. The presence of remaining villages would have allowed migrants to "hop" from one demolished village to another, thus keeping the housing costs down while experiencing inconvenience due to longer commuting times. For migrants, it appears that housing tenure security is less of a concern than other practicalities when deciding whether to move.<sup>(49)</sup> As Beijing expands and its inner-city areas are redeveloped, low-skilled migrants without the resources to access private home ownership are pushed further out to suburban areas where affordable places such as VICs are concentrated. This has been further facilitated by the construction of extensive mass transport infrastructure, the metro line expansion in particular, and the hugely subsidized passenger fares. It is possible that the expected "slow death" of VICs in relatively central districts of Beijing, in its bid to become a "world city", will take place alongside the growth of VICs in outer suburban districts, thus producing a bifurcated city with spatial segregation.

A further question to be answered is why the harsh and unjust treatment of migrants in particular was accepted. While acknowledging the intensified security measures during the Games period, we highlight the role of nationalism and the promotion of patriotic sentiment in bringing stability to the country and diverting public attention away from domestic disputes. As Parker describes, the Beijing Olympic Games became "... *an outlet for Chinese nationalist fervour.*"<sup>(50)</sup> It makes marginalized populations more tolerant of the unequal treatment during the Games preparations and hosting period. The Games brought the Chinese people behind the Beijing Olympic slogan "One World, One Dream", even if it was a nightmare for some individuals. Migrants were badly treated not only because of the constraints on their economic activities but also because of the citywide demolition of accessible residential space. Village landlords suffered, sometimes losing their only source of income. When mega-event hosting is combined with heightened nationalism, vulnerability can be partially disguised. As the excitement of the Olympic Games fades away, the various social pressures suppressed before and during the Games period resurface, brewing new sources of social tension.

The findings of this research have implications for future mega-events in developing countries where the intensity of urban development is likely to produce a similar degree of demolition and displacement in a relatively narrow time frame. It is necessary to understand the social consequences within the broader framework of the political economy of urban development and its relation to hosting mega-events such as the Olympic Games, which comes with a specified, unchallengeable deadline. This acts as a catalyst to what happens within host cities during the post-event period. The empirical in-depth analysis in this paper suggests that the complete eradication of VICs was challenging, and they proved to be resilient even in times of municipal assault in the name of the Olympic Games. Nevertheless, the Beijing experience also testifies to the fact that the Olympic Games has acted as a catalyst for the municipality's vision of making Beijing a world city.<sup>(51)</sup> The presence of VICs may turn out to be incompatible with the municipality's city development vision, and the Olympic Games opened the door to more intense intervention in Beijing's most marginal, dilapidated space.

While most current studies of the social legacy of the Olympic Games tend to examine the scale of displacement of the poor, this approach needs to change so as to address the broader exclusion of poor residents or ethnic minorities or other types of urban marginal populations, whose stigmatization and

discrimination exclude them from equally sharing the new Olympic space with their urban neighbours. Sydney's experience in the 1990s, in preparation for its 2000 Summer Olympic Games, showed that:

“... public money being spent in this way [Games preparations] ... seems to polarize the city population into those who consume world class entertainment and benefit in other ways from its presence and those who cannot and do not.”<sup>(52)</sup>

Our study of the 2008 Summer Olympiad confirms this statement, and goes further to highlight that the Olympic experience in developing countries is likely to be many times harsher for urban marginal populations, who have a weak foothold due to the built-in structure of inequalities accumulated over time.

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<sup>1</sup> Li, Bingqin and Mark Duda (2010), “Employers as landlords for rural-to-urban migrants in Chinese cities”, *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 22, No 1, April, pages 13–31.

<sup>2</sup> Wu, Weiping (2008), “Migrant settlement and spatial distribution in metropolitan Shanghai”, *The Professional Geographer* Vol 60, No 1, pages 101–120.

<sup>3</sup> Huang, Youqin and Leiwen Jiang (2009), “Housing inequality in transitional Beijing”, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* Vol 33, No 4, pages 936–956.

<sup>4</sup> Li, Bingqin, Mark Duda and Xiangsheng An (2009), “Drivers of housing choice among rural-to-urban migrants: evidence from Taiyuan”, *Journal of Asian Public Policy* Vol 2, No 2, pages 142–156.

<sup>5</sup> Wang, Ya Ping, Yanglin Wang and Jiansheng Wu (2009), “Urbanization and informal development in China: urban villages in Shenzhen”, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* Vol 33, No 4, pages 957–973.

<sup>6</sup> Zhu, Mingde (2005) (editor), *Investigation of Urban Corners in Beijing (Beijing Chengqu Jiaoluo Diaocha)*, Social Sciences Academic Press, Beijing, 324 pages.

<sup>7</sup> In general, VICs have developed due to the rapid urban expansion engulfing former rural villages, resulting in the conversion of collectively owned “land for cultivation” (and sometimes “land for housing”, known as *zhaijidi*) into urban construction land. In cities such as Guangzhou and Shenzhen, the expropriation of farmland into urban construction land tends to take place with the village families retaining their *zhaijidi*, while urban governments allow village collectives to exercise collective ownership of a small share of former farmland in order for them to carry out economic activities (see Tian, Li (2008), “The *chengzhongcun* land market in China: boon or bane? A perspective on property rights”, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* Vol 32, No 2, pages 282–304. In Beijing, however, all lands, including farmland for cultivation and *zhaijidi* for residential use, tend to be expropriated (see Tian (2008) above), while the affected farmers retain ownership of their dwellings and become urban citizens with jobs provided in the state sector.

<sup>8</sup> Li, Ping and Qingyuan Zhang (2006), “The future of Beijing's 332 *chengzhongchun*: renovation plan points the dagger at the floating population” (Beijing 332ge chengzhongchun de weilai zhengzhi jihua jianzhi liudong renkou), *Economic Observer (Jingji Guanchabao)*, 24 September, accessed 8 June 2012 at <http://finance.sina.com.cn/g/20060924/13222941605.shtml>.

<sup>9</sup> Shin, Hyun Bang (2009), “Life in the shadow of mega-events: Beijing Summer Olympiad and its impact on housing”, *Journal of Asian Public Policy* Vol 2, No 2, page 134. pages 122–141

<sup>10</sup> See reference 9; also Smith, Christopher J and Katie M G Himmelfarb (2007), “Restructuring Beijing's social space: observations on the Olympic Games in 2008”, *Eurasian Geography and Economics* Vol 48, No 5, pages 543–554.

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- <sup>11</sup> Broudehoux, Anne-Marie (2007), “Spectacular Beijing: the conspicuous construction of an Olympic metropolis”, *Journal of Urban Affairs* Vol 29, No 4, pages 383–399.
- <sup>12</sup> Short, John R (2008), “Globalization, cities and the Summer Olympics”, *City* Vol 12, No 3, page 339. pages 321–340
- <sup>13</sup> Eisinger, Peter (2000), “The politics of bread and circuses: building the city for the visitor class”, *Urban Affairs Review* Vol 35, No 3, pages 316–333; also Gratton, Chris, Simon Shibli and Richard Coleman (2006), “The economic impact of major sports events: a review of 10 events in the UK”, in John Horne and Wolfram Manzenreiter (editors), *Sports Mega-events: Social Scientific Analyses of a Global Phenomenon*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, pages 41–58; and Whitson, David and Donald Macintosh (1996), “The global circus: international sport, tourism and the marketing of cities”, *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* Vol 20, No 3, pages 278–295.
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- <sup>17</sup> Eitzen, D Stanley (1996), “Classism in sport: the powerless bear the burden”, *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* Vol 20, No 1, pages 95–105.
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- <sup>20</sup> See reference 14, ACHR (1989).
- <sup>21</sup> Bhan, Gautam (2009), “‘This is no longer the city I once knew’. Evictions, the urban poor and the right to the city in millennial Delhi”, *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 21, No 1, April, page 140. pages 127–142
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- <sup>28</sup> See reference 16.
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- <sup>33</sup> Haidian District Government (2007b) “Haidian district’s major efforts to improve ‘villages-in-the-city’ produces notable achievement” (Haidianqu dali zhengzhi ‘cheongzhongcun’ chengguo xianze), 30 September, accessed 20 May 2012 at [http://www.bjhd.gov.cn/zf/qygh/fzgh/200709/t20070930\\_50781.htm](http://www.bjhd.gov.cn/zf/qygh/fzgh/200709/t20070930_50781.htm).
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