

TEMPORARY LIFE IN THE «RUINS»

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I. Introduction

My fieldwork site is an old “slum” (from the perspective of outsiders) neighborhood, which has been undergoing urbanism program for eight years, in the North of Nanjing city. With three months empirical observation and archive research in progress, I now focus on how the residents, who keep on living in the slum and refuse to move, live a temporary daily-life, not smoothly but successfully, in the look-liked ruins brought by demolition and whether the old community could be rebuilt in the settlement place or basically destroyed from anthropological perspective.



01. The temporary life in the ruins (By Lin)

I argue about two pairs of parallel lines during the urbanization or in the urban as a process: Firstly, there exists parallel lines in the definition of the temporal/transitional period, one of which is the assumptions of government/Real Estate Company while the other is the real experience of residents in everyday lives. In other words, the specific policy and actions of governments at all levels correspond to three periods (demolition-transition-resettlement) which are well-defined and isolated with each other, while the residents experience a real (and therefore blurred, outspreaded and interwoven) transitional/temporary period which starts from the moment they are informed of the replacement program, which is only the beginning of the demolition period in the government's logic. The second pair of parallel lines exists in the negotiation of compensation between residents and government when it seems like that both of them use the same language (the language of economy and the language of law), talking about the houses as the objects or as the residents' homes. That is to say, the government use current prices in assessment, while the residents use their every detailed effort which could also be claimed in an economic/law-related way as a response and bargaining counters.

The slum where I developed my fieldwork, which adjoined the south riverbank (the city) and the north part (the countryside) was born in the late empire China, from a swallow outside the city-wall to a residential square and essential passageway linking the city and the countryside because of new city plan practices. Today, it physically dying due to newer city plan ideas, which reminds us that the dynamic spatiality problems of rural-urban continuum area not only refer to the process of city expanding, but also issues about the role transformation of the conjunction between the city and the countryside. Therefore, they are not only contemporary changes at one time, but also a long and continual sets of changes during the process of modernity-city-making in the past century. In such a context, what the parallel lines could represent are more than the conflicts between residents and government in the temporary period under the impact of urbanization, but the collision among urban planning ideas and practices at different times themselves.

II. Location and Identity History

Chongde Street is in the north of Nanjing City in Jiangsu Province and adjoins the south bank of the Great River. The street arose since the late Qing Dynasty. Before that, it was a place of shallow between the city wall and the river. It appeared when the Qing Government opened the Beiguan Treaty Port for the European countries, which is close to it, and then developed quickly in the whole period of the Republic of China and also in the early stage of the People's Republic of China. The whole site, including the port, Chongde Street and other streets, then became an important shipping center and is still surrounded by amount of wharfs, both old and new. It also became the most important passageway, not only linking the urban district and the suburb district of the city, but also linking Nanjing City and the broad north part of the entire province. Then the Great Bridge of the Great River appeared, which made this site lose its importance gradually.



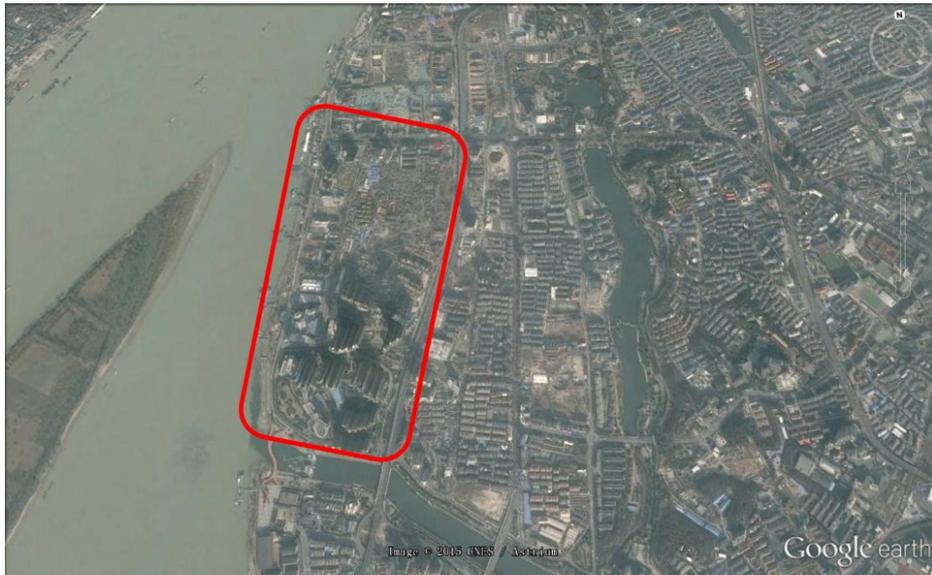
02. The pervasive housing form (By Lin)



03. The remnant of social life in the street during the demolition (By Lin)

So that, most natives in Chongde Street are immigrants, who came from other places since the beginning of last century, and their descendants, from second to fourth generation. They can be divided into three parts: (1) the individual water-side people from Hubei Province at first, who were then collective after 1949; (2) the fishermen

from Tianjin City, who left the women and the children settle down here and went for overseas business themselves, (3) the farmers from the north part of the province, most of who were from Huaian Town. The identity of immigrants and their descendants still represent in the natives' dialect, occupation, housing, group-dividing and neighborhood. It took them nearly a century become citizen of the city from immigrants. And before the demolition of the street started, it was still continually, even though fragmentally, absorbing the floating population both from the upper reaches of the river and the north part of the province. During all the period, most natives in this street belong to the low-income groups of the city, steadily.



04. The neighborhood on satellite map on 2015 April (from google earth)



05. The bird's eye-view map of the treaty port in early 20 century (from the local museum)

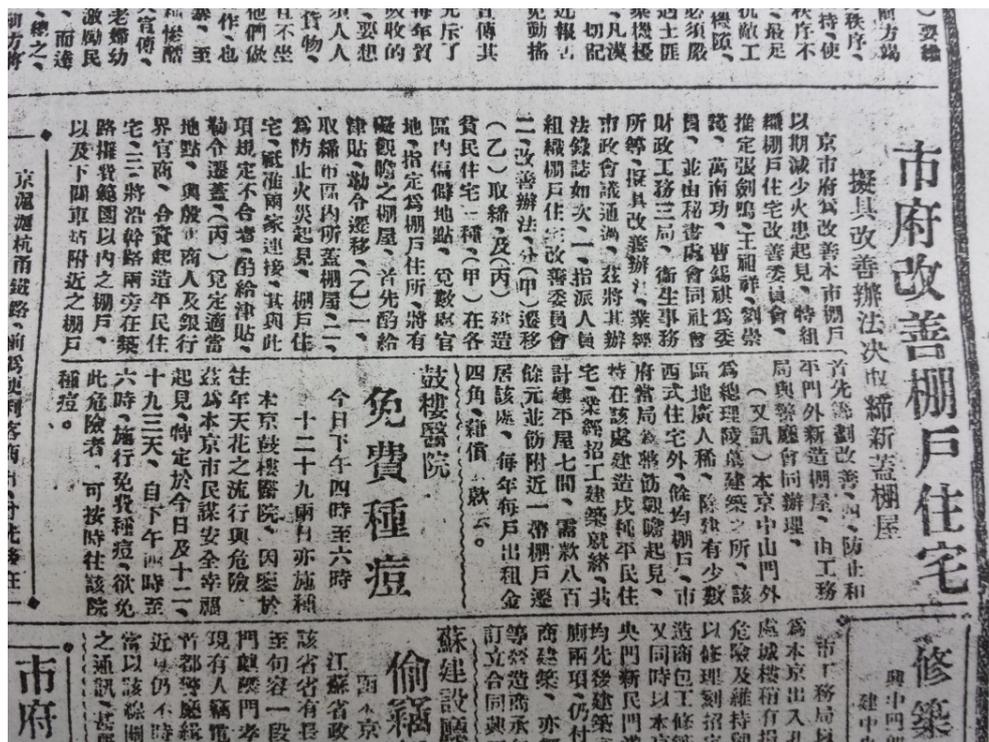
III. History of a “slum”

Chongde Street had been treated as a slum for over 90 years. In 1924, the government of Republic of China had already listed it on their plan of shantytown renovation for their Capital Planning in Nanjing. This image last for nearly a century. Before the demolition of it started in 2009, most houses in this street were still simple and crude, single storey or tow storeys. Some were transformed from old slums for improvement of living. The others were rebuilt in the foundation of the old slums. In addition, the natives used to build an attic, a kitchen or a toilet along the wall of the house for expanding their living space. All these made the street's shape and structure looked irregular and messy. The houses squeezed each other and often extended to the alley.

The other side of the identity as an old slum is intimate neighborhood, close contact and characteristic space structure, which enable the street a mature urban community. Before the demolition, the main street of Chongde street-community was always a crowd of stores, markets and peddlers. It's busy, bustling and attracting people both inside and outside the community. After the demolition, under the name of “renovation”, started, the stores totally closed and the traders were all gone. However, residents who kept on living here, although less and less, still carried on their daily life in the look-liked ruins, not smoothly but successfully. It had direct relation with the neighborhood here. It had direct relation with the intimate neighborhood and with the remaining of some places which were important for their past street lives.



06. The news about innovation project in 1920s (from the Central Daily News archives)



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IV. Three periods including staying, transition and replacement

The land of Chongde Street was sold by the district government in 1995 to several real estate companies, but didn't start any project on it until 14 years later. In 2009 June, the government began to show the public about the "renovation project" of Chongde street, with the truth of a totally demolition and resettlement project. Only after one month of the publicity, the government froze all the house property quickly and organized groups which need to introduce the project to the residents, persuade them to move, evaluate the condition their houses and negotiate with them about the compensation. By the October of that year, which is to say only after 3 months of the publicity, more than half of the 14000 residents, totally 6400 households, signed up the agreement and moved out of their houses. After that, the speed of sign-up and moving became slower and slower. So far, 2015 September, after 6 years of the beginning of the demolition project, there are still 1000 residents, totally 300 households, live, or to say, stay in their houses in Chongde Street. The government destroyed all the sign-up houses in 2014 January, and then built walls around the destroyed houses and slums for "the appearance of the city" in 2014 June, on which the Youth Olympic Games hold in Nanjing, not far away from this street. Surrounded by the long, crude concrete walls, the street looked like a real ruin.

The new resettlement buildings, which, committed by the government in 2009, were planned to finish in 2012, had only partly finished till 2015 March. Only 2000 households moved in these low-end buildings, far away from the place where they used to live in. That is to say, the households, who signed up the agreement and moved out from their old houses since 2009 July, have lived in rental places, with low

income and the compensation of less than 300 yuan/month for the whole households for nearly 6 years. The 2000 households have finally moved in their new apartment, but the others still need to wait for a long time and continue their lives in transition and waiting. Meanwhile, the real estate companies started to develop the land of Chongde street since 2012 and finished the first and the second stage of the constructing project, high-end residence communities and matched elite school, and have already sold up. The third stage of the project is in progress. Therefore, in the perspective of space, the new high-rise buildings are expanding while the slums or the old houses of residents who stay here are reducing. On the boundary of the two types of buildings, the incomplete high-rise building which is still growing and the slums nearly adjoin each other.



08. The open-air washing sink of one family, next to the working site (By Lin)



09. The border between the remaining neighborhood and the new high-rise buildings (By Lin)

V. How the neighborhood changes under the impact of urbanization

Firstly, It's essential to know how some natives or their ancestors obtained the land, built their houses and rebuilt them when the families became bigger and bigger, and how the others rent state-owned houses and finally turned them became themselves' and rebuilt them to improve their lives. All these housing histories, in addition to the natives' personal histories and the past of the neighborhood, affected both the natives and the government officials' decisions in their negotiation of compensation and resettlement.

Secondly, it's necessary to observe how the residents who refused to move and kept on living in the street managed their lives in the ruins for 6 years. In other words, it's important to observe how the neighborhood relationships changed during the demolition project, the publicity, the negotiation and the moving and how the relationships affected. Besides, I found a more complicate connect-network in the ruins, including the staying residents, the district government, the street office, the demolition-project groups, the real estate companies, the construction team and its workers, the floating peddlers coming after the demolition, the underworld of the demolition project, and the illegal peacemakers. Social justice under this multipoint connect-network is worthy to discuss.

Thirdly, how the new neighborhood is in the new resettlement buildings is worthy studying. On one hand, residents have partly rights of choosing the floor, the type and the number of building of their new apartment; on the other hand, according to the different compensation they received, their right of choosing the apartment is limited, which means they could not actually choose their new neighbors. Although generally speaking, all the new residents are from the same street, but the specific neighbors around every specific family in the past is gone. For some of them, their relationship with the neighbors dissolved even from the beginning of the demolition project because of suspicion, quarrel, rumor in terms of compensation and resettlement. Not only of that, for most residents, the domestic relationship in their own family also dissolved because they could not reach a consensus on the division of house-property or the compensation. Therefore, the resettlement does not only mean residents resettle their living space, but also resettle their relationships with other family members and the neighborhoods. Could these relationships continue or rebuild? If they can't, could the old street community be rebuilt in the new buildings? That's a question.



10. A temporary kitchen built during the demolition (By Lin)



11. Vegetable plots opened up by residents in the ruins where on the site of their neighbors' houses. (By Lin)

VI. The Real World inside the ruins

Firstly, there exists a special, new connect-network in ruins, taking the workers for example. In the ruins, not only the native live. The hundreds of temporary workers,

hired by the construct team and working for the high-side buildings for the real estate companies, live in the ruins, too. Firstly, in my fieldwork, I found that the temporary workers, most of whom from the villages in the north of the province, brought sense of lively to the residents instead of sense of unsafe. Some of them even tried to build a relationship with the construct team and the workers by a very meaningful action: give cigarettes to the workers and their managers. Secondly, I found that the large amount of workers brought great living need, which encouraged many floating peddlers came into the walls and selling foods in the ruins, in spite of risks. They primarily sold foods to the workers, therefore sought the protection of the construction plant to avoid the city inspectors' penalty. The natives benefit from them. They found themselves start to buy foods in the street again, no more finding the far and expensive markets. Thirdly, the workers fill in the gaps of the ruins in their everyday life. Only a few temporary workers wanted to live in the container, which cost them high deposit. The others preferred three kinds of local spaces in the street: the slum abandoned by the owners, the slum which was owned by someone but had no body living in and the abandoned state-owned buildings. What needs our attention is, even the abandoned slums and buildings need to pay rental expense, but the workers did not pay the past owners, but the construct team who undertook the demolition mission of the slum or building. The team would rent the abandoned slums and buildings when they could not destroy them for a variety of reasons.



12. An on-going negotiation between the residents and the workers (By Lin)

Secondly, we need to rethink the meaning of an “old-neighborhood” and therefore redefine it. Before I went to my fieldwork, I thought the neighborhood of an old-shantytown must be big enough so that we could call it “a community”. That’s why I imagined positively about the new resettlement buildings. I guessed that the old

community could easily be rebuilt as long as all the resident be resettled in the same place even though the old street-community was totally destroyed physically. But the fact is, the scale of the specific, real neighborhood for the natives was very small. There was no “common neighborhood”. What the natives had were their own neighborhood, different from each other, and the neighborhood is closely related with their house in space. On the other side, I found that the neighborhood had a pattern. Two different family may have different people as their neighborhood, but they may probably share a same pattern: good guys, normal guys, madman, fool, Er Baiwu (someone who doesn't understand the rules of social interaction in his culture well, therefore often break someone else's heart unintentionally) and Huo Naogui (someone always make trouble for the others on purpose, in the case of my fieldwork, making money for assisting the local government/company by threatening the residents). And when they moved to the new community, they still used this pattern to evaluate if the new circumstance of neighborhood good or not.



13. New peddlers in the ruins after all the stores closed and peddlers disappeared (By Lin)

Thirdly, the differentiation in the old slum neighborhood should be treated seriously. I thought the community in an old-shantytown was a collective with high homogeneity because they shared the same family relations, housing condition, everyday lives and occupations. But it's not. It had its own different parts since the beginning of the community. All the fishermen from Tianjin, the waterside-people from Hubei and the famers from Huaian had differentiation for a long period in their incomes, families, housing and social networks. The differentiation emerged especially when they faced the urbanism project.

At last, the world “inside the walls” is not isolated. The walls looks like isolate the insiders with the outside world. But in fact, the residents who kept on living inside the walls never feel lonely. Their lives are still lively: they expand their daily life and try to break the walls when their places are smaller and smaller. Facing the truth that they may move out soon, the residents try to frequently use the new facilities, new landscape, and new community welfares which are designed for the new residents in the future by the companies, which is unexpected by the government and hard to prohibit.



14. *Street-artist's work in the neighborhood: the Future City (By Lin)*

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