Sanfei Clean-ups: African Traders and Guangzhou’s Urban Development from a Global Perspective

by

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Abstract

As a beneficiary of global dispersal of manufacturing, Guangdong Province saw its light industries take off in the 1980s, which revived Guangzhou’s historical role as a trading hub. Beginning from the late 1990s, a large number of Africans came to the city to trade. In ten years’ time, they formed two conspicuous communities in urban-rural transitional areas. These communities center around a handful of former farming villages, which became subsumed within the city as it expanded, and a few wholesale markets. Because of their similar socio-economic status, Africans are sharing this space with migrant workers who were drawn to the city by all the new opportunities post-socialist urban developments offered. They both rent from former villagers who turned their houses into cheap tenements and in some cases become interdependent. Meanwhile, as China increasingly engages the West, both economically and culturally, the desire to construct global cities that serve as command centers for multinational corporations also grew in major municipalities. The land which African communities occupy thus becomes more valuable than ever. This dissertation focuses on one of these communities, Xiaobei, and investigates how it is affected by local government’s attempts to gentrify the area. So far the government’s efforts have been reduced to incessant crackdowns on sanfei – a term which refers to foreigners who enter, stay, and work in China illegally – mainly because of a Maoist legal legacy, which gives villagers tremendous negotiation power. The fact that the military owns some of the land in the area further complicates the matter. I consider, sanfei, as a racist code word constructed by news media and law
enforcement. It generates support for government actions which seek to evict Africans, undermine Villagers’ and the military’s control over the land in Xiaobei. This dissertation thus examines these actions in detail.
Introduction

I began my first field research of Guangzhou’s African community in the summer of 2014. Unable to get any response from several potential informants provided by Dr. Adams Bodomo, I decided to approach them on my own. On the first day I sat down in Moka, a Western style café on the first floor of Tianxiu Mansion, and ordered an American coffee. The menu was trilingual, Chinese, English and Arabic. Tianxiu Mansion, in an area known as Xiaobei, is one of the most recognizable places in Guangzhou of a large number of Africans. As a Chinese, apart from feeling disoriented, influenced by all the negative news reports of the widespread sanfei problem and rampant drug dealing among Africans, I could not help but feel a bit scared, no matter how hard my academic training tried to convince me to ignore such stereotypes. Besides, the facts that part of my research entailed asking them many sensitive questions such as their legal status and their encounter with Chinese authorities made me even more nervous. When I finally mustered up the courage and introduced myself to an African sitting next to me, he, to my disappointment, said he couldn’t speak much English. Just when I was about to return to my seat and re-strategize, he told me I should talk to his friend Dem who was a Senegalese from the U.S., which reignited my hope. I was then introduced to a serious looking man who was engrossed in his Ipad. He turned out to be one of the friendliest Africans I met. I told him about my project, and he was happy to help. He took my phone number and promised to call me later to set up a time for interview.
The next morning we met up at a Subway restaurant on the first floor of Tianxiu Mansion. I bought him a coffee, but he could not drink it because it was Ramadan. Dem grew up in Senegal, but he had both American and Senegalese citizenships and was operating as a supplier for some dollar stores in New York City. He had been going to China and importing from Guangzhou for more than ten years. Back in the early 2000s, he and his brother read about China and the opportunities it offered in the news and decided to try their luck. He did all the traveling and buying while his brother remained at home to take care businesses. He first went to Shenzhen, one of the fastest growing cities China near Guangzhou after hearing about the cheap electronics there, and continued further north to Guangzhou for its more diverse wholesale markets. Dem’s engagement with Guangzhou typifies thousands of Africans’ experience. In the early 2000s, thousands of Africans went to China to trade, although, unlike Dem, most of them export back to Africa. Before long, these Africans formed two robust communities in the city, Xiaobei and Guangyuanxi. Both were widely known among locals. However, since mid-2007, Guangzhou’s Municipal Government had been cracking down on the communities, especially, Xiaobei, and the number of Africans has decreased significantly. These crackdowns were all launched in the name of fighting sanfei.

*Sanfei* (三非), literally means “three illegally”, and “*sanfei* foreigner” refers to those who enter, stay and work in China illegally. The term came into China’s popular lexicon in around 2004, largely thanks to news media. As African communities in Guangzhou became more conspicuous, the state and its press increasingly associated *sanfei* with blackness. So much so that many people on the internet nowadays simply call Africans in China *sanfei* blacks (*sanfei* heiren 三非黑人). So *sanfei* taps into Chinese deep-seated
anti-black sentiments and furnishes them with a racial code word that can be invoked without the risk of appearing racist. Like the label of illegal immigrants in the U.S., sanfei likewise signifies a whole host of negative meanings such as drugs, crimes, counterfeiting, chaos, diseases, etc. So fighting sanfei takes on the meaning of preserving public goods. Indeed, as we shall see, the Municipal Government has been justifying its clean-up programs in Xiaobei in such terms.

This dissertation investigates the Chinese state’s construction of the sanfei discourse and its role in the Municipal Government’s efforts to turn Xiaobei into a more presentable urban space that fits the overall vision of a global city. The two, I argue, are intricately intertwined and mutually reinforcing. On the one hand, the sanfei discourse lends itself to the Municipal Government’s agenda of cleaning up Xiaobei. On the other hand the concentration of clean-ups in Xiaobei in turn produces more sanfei Africans. This dissertation, in other words, interprets the formation of the sanfei discourse as embedded in the larger processes of Guangzhou’s urban development in post-socialist China (1978-present). Like other major cities in China, Guangzhou, in its efforts to become an ‘international metropolis’, is aggressively transforming its urban landscape and redeveloping old neighborhoods. These urban developments are closely tied to increasing social polarization in China today with an emerging middle class guiding urbanization and a working class of mostly rural migrants that is being pushed toward social and geographical margin.

Since the economic reforms in 1978, the pro-growth Chinese government has been aggressively engaging global capital, which results in rapidly growing foreign direct investments and establishments of branches and headquarters of multinational
corporations in major cities. These developments call for certain types of offices and functional space that is conducive to attracting more investments and a new class of professionals and technicians who in turn also requires a new kind of commercial and residential areas. To launch what You-tien Hsing (2010) calls the great urban transformation, the state needs a tremendous amount of land and workers, resulting in the expropriation of farmland and redevelopments of inner cities. Consequently local farmers had to enlarge and rent out their houses to the incoming migrants to make a living. These neighborhoods, known as urban villages (chengzhongcun 城中村), are found in all major cities in China and occupy prime real estates. They remind the state of a backward and rural past, and thus constitute main targets of urban renewals and gentrifications. On the other hand, socialist state institutions which operate rather independently of municipal urban planning also own a large amount of land in inner cities, the redevelopment of which could also yield handsome profits provided municipal governments could gain control of it. However, to wrestle power from urban village authorities and state institutions is no easy task thanks to certain socialist legal legacies.

Into this already messy process came Africans. China’s revived marketplace and booming light industries thanks to the global dispersal of manufacturing have attracted individual fortune seekers from all over the world. Since the 1997 Asian Financial crisis, African traders, drawn by Guangzhou’s annual trade fairs and hundreds of wholesale markets, have been coming to the city. Due to their lower socio-economic status, they share space with rural migrants and are as a result inevitably caught up in the aforementioned urban processes. In fact, prior to 2007 the Municipal Government welcomed their presence and even facilitated the creation of a Sino-Africa Trade Zone in
Xiaobei because their advent revitalized the area and filled up vacant commercial and office buildings caused by over construction common in Chinese cities in the 1990s. However, as energy came to Xiaobei and urbanization deepened, the area became increasingly valuable, but also more and more at odd with the image of a modern city. 2007 represents a demarcating year in the Municipal Government’s attitude toward Africans. Since then, news coverage of Africans has been mostly negative and Africans have been subject to toughening sanfei clean-ups which include visa raids, drug busts, crackdowns on counterfeits, stop-and-frisk style document checks, and door to door inspections. Besides, the government also tried to herd Africans into gated communities and undermine the Sino-Africa Trade Zone.

Although the urban transformation that Guangzhou is currently undergoing is not unique, the formation of a racial discourse along the way is uncommon in China. The significance of this racial formation should not be overlooked. Sanfei, as a state sponsored racial discourse, might portend increasing racial conflicts in the near future since there were already precedents. On the afternoon of July 15, 2009, the municipal police launched a visa raid at the shopping malls on Guangyuanxi Road. While they were checking documents in Tangqi Clothing Market, a Nigerian men, whom the police claimed was involved in illegal currency exchange, jumped from the second floor to try to avoid being inspected. (Some suggest two Nigerians jumped off the building. See Branigan 2009.) The man seriously injured themselves and as he lied on the ground in agony, Africans in the area began to gather around the local police station. Soon over a hundred Africans were at the scene, blocking local traffic. The situation soon escalated into physical altercation between Africans and police. Eventually, more than a hundred
police, including anti-riot police (fangbao jingcha 防暴警察), were deployed to the area to calm the situation. It is not exactly clear how the injured African turned out. Some news sources claimed he died (Pomfret 2009, Zhao 2009) – the Reuters even said protesters dragged his blood dripping body to the police station (Pomfret 2009), others and the Nigerian community leader said he critically injured himself, but survived. Three years later, on Jun 18, 2012, again at Guangyuanxi, an African passenger argued with a motor cab driver over fair and it soon became a physical fight. A Nigerian informant told me when the police showed up, they joined the Chinese in beating the man, who later died in the local police station. An official news report, however, said that the postmortem examination showed no injury. The death sparked another assembly before the police station. A witness claimed that over a hundred Africans pounded police cars with rocks (“A Black Person Died” 2012). These two incidents were high-profiled and received a large amount of media attention, but there were numerous other smaller protests that were less publicized.

As we can see, racial conflicts may be more urgent than we assume, and it is particularly so if we take into account China’s demographical trend. In twenty years as population aging caused by family planning in the past three decades kicks in and the majority of the rural population becomes urban, China may have to rely on immigrants for labor (Pieke 2012: 41-42). This trend is reinforced by the reform era’s objectives of constructing international cities and appealing to foreign talents. There are already foreign enclaves in many large cities. Apart from Africans in Guangzhou, South Koreans and Indians have also formed their own communities in Beijing. As John Logan points out, globalization, migration and market reforms are the three key challenges facing
Chinese cities (Logan 2002). The emerging race issue in Guangzhou should thus be part of the conversation of migration and globalization under the context of Chinese urban development.

**Anti-black racism in China**

Anti-black racism in China is hardly a novel phenomenon. Frank Dikotter traces such sentiments to ancient times when light complexion symbolized beauty and refinement and dark skin physical labor and servitude. Although this preference of skin tone had little racial meaning, it later fused seamlessly with Western racial order under the context of colonialism. Chinese intellectuals in the 19th century such as Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, and Yan Fu internalized social Darwinism and racism in the West, and believed that black people were primitive and driven by uncontrollable sexual desire for white women (Dikotter 1992: 61-96). Such thinking reared its ugly head again in the late 1980s where conflicts between African and Chinese students broke out in several big cities including Nanjing, Beijing and Shanghai (Sautman 1994, Sullivan 1994). The racist concerns expressed during these protests closely paralleled Western ones. African students’ relationship with Chinese girlfriends played a huge role in igniting those conflicts. During some of the subsequent protests Chinese students invoked a strong sense of cultural superiority, which presaged the anxiety Chinese would feel that was brought by the country’s increasingly frequent contact with foreign cultures. All these sentiments carry over to the present day. Yinhong Cheng (2011) identifies the same strands of thought in contemporary discussions of Africans in the virtual space. Chinese today continue to see Africans as backward people draining China’s resources and
preying on Chinese women. Johanna Hood (2013) also reveals that Chinese public health media construct Africans as the antithesis of modern urban Chinese. Although Chinese society is increasingly exposed to the outside world, as anthropologist Andrew Kipnis (2016: 10) shows, cosmopolitanism and xenophobia can be on the rise at once. The sanfei discourse is a testimony to that observation.

Deconstructing the sanfei discourse represents an attempt to add to the studies of racism in China. But while many scholars in the field consider race as a cultural phenomenon, I try to examine the intersection of race, culture, class, and history. In her study of Subei people in Shanghai, Emily Honig (1992) shows that the rise of sea transport and natural disaster greatly contributed to the poverty of the northern part of Suzhou Province. Shanghainese, because of their higher socio-economic status, thus label migrants from that region Subei people discriminatorily. Branding Africans as sanfei similarly has a lot to do with Guangzhou’s revival as an international trading hub in postsocialist China and the association of Africans with poverty. In other words, I try to follow the advocacy of Aihwa Ong (1999) that human practices and cultural logics should be understood as embedded in broader economic and politic context. Also, while many scholars focus on the ideological component of race, I want to draw our attention to institutional constructive forces. Specifically, I will investigate state media portrayals, laws and regulations concerning foreigners and their enforcement by the police.

Institutional racism in the U.S. has been well studied. As early as in the 1900s, W. E. B. Du Bois was already insightful enough to point out how institutions could in fact reinstate serfdom. Later scholars (Blauner 1972, Wellman 1993, Harris 1996, Brown et al. 2005, Lipsitz 2006, Alexander 2012) have revealed how institutions and the legal system
continue to privilege whites, especially white males, after the abolition of Jim Crow laws. Some of them focus specifically on how police racial profiling and the criminal justice system can create a larger number of black criminals. Michael Brown et al., for example, expose the fallacy that blacks commit more crimes by showing that police are more likely to stop and arrest blacks (Brown et al., 2005: 149-50). Michelle Alexander similarly argues that the targeting of drug busts on black communities and unequal sentencing result in more blacks incarcerated, despite the similar drug crime rates across the racial spectrum (Alexander, 2012: 98-99). This scholarship aims to tackle a more hidden form of racism under the rise of the neo-conservatives in the post Jim Crow era. In the context of China where the state has never acknowledged that race has played any role in its public life, this scholarship is particularly informing and has inspired me to look at the constructive role of institutions.

To understand the constructive power of the state also requires us to realize its complexity. State action often cannot be simply interpreted as racially motivated, although the outcome feeds into an existing racial discourse. As Brown et al. point out, “discriminatory outcomes can be produced by actions that appear bureaucratically neutral or colorblind – sometimes even well intentioned, undertaken in response to concerns raised by minority communities” (Brown et al., 2003: 138). Institutional racism, in other words, thrives not simply on racial prejudice of individuals, but how state and/or business institutions are structured. And usually, prejudice and structural incentives are so intertwined that one is inseparable from the other. That’s why it is more dangerous and harder to critique. Anti-sanfei clean-ups, as a form of institutional racism, are no exception. However, arguing that such state actions are a form of racism should not be
taken to mean that no Africans violate immigration regulations, but people from all racial groups do and the fact that the *sanfei* discourse is closely tied to Africans have a lot to do with the type of trades they do in China and the urban space they occupy.¹

**Africans in Guangzhou**

The Africans in Guangzhou are part of a larger global trader community. Due to the various reasons already discussed by other scholars (Carter 1997, MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000, Stoller 2002) – historical roots, political turmoil, and the disastrous fallout of the Structural Adjustment Programs imposed by the IMF and World Bank on African countries – there is a long tradition of trading in Africa. The traders in Guangzhou have counterparts in all over the world. In fact, before the 1997 Asian financial crisis forced them to look for better opportunities in China, many Africans were in Southeast Asia with Hong Kong, Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur being some of the most popular destinations (Li et al. 2012: 63). Some of my informants still have businesses and companies in Thailand, France and the United States.

These traders live on price differences and travel across the globe in search of merchandise they can resell in other parts of the world for a better price. Cosmopolitan as they may be, they are not the typical representatives of multi-national corporations we usually associate globalization with. Most of them work as individuals and carry with them small amount of cash. In the words of Gordon Mathews who studies these traders in Hong Kong, they are “carrying their goods by suitcase, container, or truck across continents and borders with minimal interference from legalities and copyrights”
Mathews terms this form of operations “low-end” globalization. As a world factory, China is an ideal destination for these traders. Manufacturing, especially that in light industries, that took off under the economic reforms in the 1980s floods the market with cheap products such as electronics and garments. Guangzhou, with its long history of trade and home to more than nine hundred wholesale markets, is especially attractive (Li et al. 2009: 704). The city’s rapidly growing trading partnership with Africa also convinces many Africans that Guangzhou is a land of opportunities.

Africans in Guangzhou today concentrate in two main areas, Guangyuanxi and Xiaobei. The two are about four kilometers apart and separated by only a twenty-minute bus ride. Because of their proximity to each other, some scholars (Li et al. 2009) group them together and refer to the entire region as Xiaobei, although local Cantonese call only the area around Xiaobei Road as such. My research focuses only on Xiaobei largely because of practical reasons. During my short research trips, unfortunately, I was only able to establish close rapport with informants I acquainted in Xiaobei. The few I met in Guangyuanxi were either understandably suspicious or too busy to have in-depth conversation. The only one that was willing to help me soon got arrested after our first meeting for overstaying his visa. To this day, it is still not clear if he was released. Unlike Guangyuanxi, where the overwhelming majority is from Nigeria, Xiaobei is more diverse. Although West African countries such as Guinea, Mali, Senegal, and Ghana are well represented there, I’ve also met people from Congo, Kenya, Ethiopia and Angola. Admittedly, lack of attention to Guangyuanxi constitutes a significant gap in the dissertation, but I would argue that events in Xiaobei, due to its unique geographical location which I will discuss throughout this dissertation, are more in tandem with
Guangzhou’s urban development. The area, as a result, is also subject to more intense policing and clean-up efforts.

It is important to note that Africans in Guangzhou are mostly males (Bodomo 2010: 699). While female traders are not rare, taking a walk in Xiaobei, one can easily tell male traders are predominant. What’s more, many are single young men in their mid- to late twenties who are not afraid to show their interest in Chinese women. The fact that African communities in Guangzhou are a young male space also makes them more threatening to the Chinese psyche, which explains the success of the sanfei discourse because it invokes Chinese fear of African masculinity as showed in the student protests in the 1980s.

As African communities in Guangzhou become more conspicuous, especially after the 2009 protest, it has attracted more and more attention from scholars. Brigitte Bertoncelo and Sylvie Bredeloup (2007) show us how Africans use their business acumen and resourcefulness to plant their roots in Hong Kong and Guangzhou and add these two “trading posts” to their global network. Adams Bodomo (2010) through his surveys concludes that Africans are integrating into the local society and contributing to its economy. He argues that the local government should act as a facilitator instead of a disrupter of a community which has the potential of becoming a bridge between Africa and China. Yang Yang (2012), writing in a similar vein as Mathews, mainly looks at how the Africans live in an underground economy by taking advantage of the modern networks, transportation and infrastructure in the age of globalization. Meanwhile, scholars such as Zai Liang and Tao Xu (2012), Heidi Haugen (2013) and Roberto Castillo (2016) examines how African recreate social networks in Guangzhou. The
common threat of police harassments, shared religious beliefs and recreational activities such as soccer bring Africans together and help them find a sense of home in this strange land. This work paint a vivid picture of the community and provides much useful information on their daily lives. However they tend to relegate the state to the background and tell us little about larger structural forces. This emphasis on individual agency may reinforce Africans’ negative image of having no respect for laws and regulations. Perhaps worse still, they may reproduce the false image of a “borderless world” convincingly critiqued by Henry Wai-chung Yeung, an expert in globalization and urban development (Yeung 1998).

Some scholars are obviously aware of this risk and instead focus on how the state has caused sufferings on the community. Haugen (2012) has another piece that argues that rather than being cosmopolitan actors, visa restriction and other immigration regulations in fact immobilizes these traders. Many are trapped in Guangzhou. Shanshan Lan (2015, 2016, 2017), an immigration scholar who has multiple publications on Guangzhou’s African community, understands the issue of sanfei in a way akin to studies of institutional racism in the U.S. She examines state regulations that have structured Africans’ lives in Guangzhou. She directly challenges the notion of lawlessness among Africans by examining the “legal production of ‘African illegality’” (Lan 2014: 290), a perspective I share in this dissertation. My research attempts to add to the work Lan has already done by providing a more on-the-ground perspective, because in China, how laws are written, where Lan stops, usually greatly differs from how they are enforced in real life. Also Lan leaves unanswered a key question: what are the motivating forces behind the institutional racism experienced by Africans. By leaving it out, we risk
reinforcing the idea that institutional racism is simply a symptom of racial prejudice, a deviance from how institutions are supposed to run. I thus propose we should explain institutional racism in Guangzhou by examining its urban developments.

Despite their small number, there are indeed scholars who tie the formation of African enclaves to the city’s urban development. Li Zhang (2008) and Li, Ma and Xue. (2009), for example, explain how Guangzhou since the economic reforms is increasingly embedded in the global market, which, they argue, structures its urban spatialization and the African community is the result of this process. But in contrary to cities like New York, London and Tokyo, or “global cities” defined by Saskia Sassen (1991), Guangzhou is still developing and not quite there yet. So to differentiate it from global cities, Zhang categorizes Guangzhou as a “globalizing city”. I will further elaborate on the idea of global(izing) cities and its relevance with Guangzhou’s development in a later section, but suffice it to say that he and Li et al. accurately capture the linkage between the African community and the city’s involvement in globalization.

My research has benefitted enormously from this scholarship that tends to larger structural forces and aims to add more depth to the field. But unlike works previously discussed that present individual perspectives, these works provide few details about how state goals, immigration laws, and urban development policies transpire on the ground. How are laws enforced by the police? In what ways does the Municipal Government’s ambition to build a modern global city affect people’s decision making? How does the community respond? These are the questions that still need to be addressed. My research will seek to bridge this gap, paying attention to larger urban processes while not losing
sight of the human voice. To this end, we should first look at the historical context that created the African community.

**Guangzhou’s History of Foreign Trade**

Guangzhou was particularly appealing to traders like Africans today because of its bustling marketplace. As the capital of Guangdong Province, it is third largest city in China. Nicknamed the Southern Gateway of China and occupying the top corner of the prosperous Pearl River Delta (PRD), it has a long history of foreign trade and a key nodal point of the ancient maritime Silk Road. At one point during the Qing Empire (1644-1911), Guangzhou (formerly Canton) was the only port where trades with foreigners were officially sanctioned. Even though foreign trade in Guangzhou was under attack during the 1950s in the name of anti-regionalism, as Ezra Vogel (1969) notes, it was in fact part of the collectivization process. The Central Government never intended to eliminate foreign trade. Instead they were simply trying to nationalize and regulate it, which was clearly showed by the fact that the China Import and Export Trade Fair (also known as the Canton Fair) was inaugurated in 1957.

Following Mao’s death and having weathered the political turmoil of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, the more pragmatic central government now led by Deng Xiaoping refocused on developing the country’s economy and announced the policy of Reform and Open-up in 1978. They were intrigued by the success of neighbors such as Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan (Vogel 1989: 10, 76). To replicate what they had achieved, China needed their knowledge, experience, and investment. So in 1980 the
Central Government, as some of their East and Southeast Asian counterparts did before, established Special Economic Zones (SEZ) in four cities: Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou, and Xiamen, three of which were in Guangdong Province (Xiamen is in Fujian Province, but also in south China). These cities were the earliest testing grounds where foreign investments were reintroduced into China. According to Vogel, they were selected as the pioneers of the reforms for several reasons (Vogel 1989: 82-83). First, in anticipation of the reunification with Hong Kong, Macau and hopefully Taiwan, and knowing that people in Guangdong and Fujian shared deep cultural and family ties with people of those regions, the central government chose Shenzhen (bordering Hong Kong), Zhuhai (bordering Macau), and Xiamen (across the straight from Taiwan) so as to gain their goodwill since entrepreneurs from those unincorporated areas would be the first to benefit from the reforms. Second, Guangdong Province’s long distance from Beijing made it a safer option because social changes brought by the reforms might less likely cause political unrest. Third, unlike Shanghai, Tianjin, and the Northeast, Guangdong’s contribution to China’s industry was not significant. So any changes would not affect major production. But, perhaps most importantly, Guangdong was selected because reforms would be more likely to succeed there. Thanks to its long history of foreign trade, “Guangdong cadres were more receptive than others to trying new programs, and had access to world technology and management systems through Hong Kong” (Vogel 1989: 83). Success in Guangdong could potentially convince more conservative party leaders that the reforms would work elsewhere.

The reforms represented a change in the country’s production priority. Whereas under Mao’s administration heavy industry received most attention, now the focus was on light
industry because it could boost foreign sales (Vogel 1989: 211). The timing of the reform was perfect as well. Labor intensive industries that had fueled Hong Kong’s growth were losing out in global competition in the 1980s due to rising labor costs (Vogel 1989: 68-69). Partnership with mainland China and transferring manufacturing to nearby areas across the border provided the solution. As a result, cities like Shenzhen and Dongguan had basically become manufacturing back gardens for Hong Kong. As we can see, the outsourcing manufacturing that started in the West in the 1970s had a ripple effect and soon began to impact Hong Kong. Besides Shenzhen and Dongguan, Guangzhou was also affected by these arrangements as well.

Guangzhou was also a recipient of Hong Kong manufacturing, albeit to a much less extent. A 2002 survey shows that Shenzhen and Dongguan accounted for 63% of the Hong Kong factories set up in the PRD, while Guangzhou only had 9% (Yang 2006: 129). In 1984, Guangzhou also received the permission to build its own technological development zone (kaifaqu, 开发区) in the remote area of Huangpu, far away from the city core. Like the SEZ in Shenzhen, its goal was to attract foreign investment and technology. However, unlike the SEZ in Shenzhen which also catered to tourism and commercial establishments, the development zone in Guangzhou was limited to industrial development and much smaller in size (Vogel 1989: 214). Indeed, compared to Shenzhen which had a much smaller population to care for and enjoyed close proximity to Hong Kong, Guangzhou was at a much disadvantaged position. In the early years of the reforms, the city, due to its large size and poor infrastructure, even lagged behind some nearby counties in industrial development (Vogel 1989: 211). What eventually
rejuvenated the city was the restoration of its historical role as a trading hub and reviving
its marketplace.

*New Markets expanded throughout the city. A specialized market for agricultural
products, four blocks long, for example, was established on Qingping Road, just
north of Shamian Island. By 1988 it sold products from forty-three Guangdong
countries and twenty-three other provinces. Huge areas like Huanghua were set aside
for night markets, each several blocks long, with room for thousands of entrepreneurs
to sell their wares. Open markets were allowed on many streets, and some streets
permitted the erection of permanent wooden stalls. On the outskirts of the city,
farmers put up stalls on their own land near the road. Just as local factories
established outlets in other cities, so factories in other provinces and cities began to
set up sales outlets in Guangzhou* (Vogel 1989: 204).

Driving the growth of these vibrant markets was the now booming manufacturing in
Shenzhen and Dongguang. These developments were what immediately preceded the
establishment of all the major wholesale markets in Guangzhou that attracted the
Africans to come. Some of the local sellers I met in a garment wholesale market still rely
on Shenzhen manufacturers. A jeans seller whom I met in Guangyuangxi and who trades
almost exclusively with Africans, for example, travels to Shenzhen regularly to replenish
her stock. So the formation of the Xiaobei business community was not an isolated
occurrence, but a result of the overall changes in the PRD and the entire nation.

**Xiaobei**

What is commonly known as Xiaobei (小北) is a discursive area in the Yuexiu
District (越秀区), one of the oldest and the political core of the city. Its name derives
from Xiaobeimen, or Little North Gate, was once an entrance of the original city wall
during the Qing Dynasty. In other words, most of Xiaobei was for a long time outside of
the city proper and life there was mostly agrarian. After the Communists took over, because of its peripheral status, it changed its jurisdictional affiliation several times before settling down as part of Yuexiu District in 2005. Today in colloquial terms, it usually includes the vicinity of Xiaobei Road. In this dissertation, I mainly use the name to refer to a specific section around the intersection of Xiaobei Road and Huanshi Road because this is where Africans frequent. Most buildings with offices run by Africans and wholesale markets catering to Africans are located around this intersection.

Map of Guangzhou. Xiaobei is located in Yuexiu District (no.2 on the map) close to the northern edge.

Prior to 1980, the area was still mostly farmland consisting of four natural villages: Shangtang, Xiatang, Fengming, and Hengzhigang. The four were organized in the 1950s
under the administrative village called Dengfeng (登峰), named after the former name of Xiaobei Road. As the city expanded, most of the farmland was expropriated by the Municipal Government for urban development and farmers had to find alternative ways to make a living. Sensing the opportunities brought by the economic reforms, the farmers and their collective governing body, Dengfeng Village Committee before 1995 and Dengfeng Industrial Group after, built factories, warehouses, restaurants, and hotels on the land reserved for the Villagers. But most importantly, they greatly expanded their own houses and converted them into tenement buildings to accommodate the large number of rural migrants who were drawn to Guangzhou by its urban developments. Because of the dual land ownership (eryuan tudi zhidu 二元土地制度) created under Mao’s era, the Municipal Government could not take the remaining residential area of Dengfeng Village unless most of Villagers agreed to a compensation plan. In terms of governance, the Yuexiu District Government also had limited power because the Village Committee acted as a mini state with director and vice director elected by the villagers. The village committee they chaired also provided many social services and welfare benefits. As time went on, thanks to this autonomy, development of remaining Village area – bound by Heng’an Road on the south, Lujing Road on the East, Tongxin Road on the West, and Lujingxi Road on the north – was eclipsed by its surrounding areas, and became what is commonly referred to as an “urban village (chengzhongcun 城中村)”.

There used to be more than a hundred of these urban villages in Guangzhou and some have been completely redeveloped. As can be imagined, the conditions of rental houses in urban villages are poor at best. Most of the buildings were built in the 1990s, usually with little overall planning and without permissions of the government. To maximize
spaces and hence rental income, villagers also tried to take up as much common areas as possible, leaving only a narrow and dark alley between buildings. Inside, the apartments are usually small, in disrepair and without furnishing or many amenities. In some cases, the conditions are nothing short of horrific – rooms without proper roofing and insulation, sewage overflowing, trash piling up. As a result, many landlords no longer live in the villages, which causes maintenance to fall further behind. Because of the residents’ low socio-economic status and the lack of government regulation, urban villages tend to attract informal businesses. In Dengfeng Village, unlicensed hawkers and vendors used to congest Baohan Zhijie, the broadest street that runs through the neighborhood, especially at night. As a result, the floor was scattered with litter, and sanitary conditions were far from ideal. But still, urban villages like Dengfeng have many attractive qualities.

First and foremost, rental houses in urban villages are affordable. As discussed by multiple scholars (Chan 1994, Solinger 1999, Zhang 2002, Jacka 2005, Siu 2007), under the divisive system of Household Registration, or hukou, while urban residents enjoy all kinds of welfare benefits, rural migrants had to fend for themselves. Urban villages thus at least provide a cheap solution for housing. Because of this, migrant workers and ethnic minorities all chose to settle down in such areas. In the case of Xiaobei, the presence of Muslim Chinese such as Uyghurs served as a bridge for Middle Easterners to invest in the area. Some of the halal restaurants they opened in turn attracted Africans to come (Bolongaro & Li, 2016). Apart from their affordability, many urban villages are centrally located. They might be peripheral in the past, but now occupy prime locations in the city. Dengfeng Village, for example, is now one of the hundreds of nodal points in an intricate web of roads and highways. Huanshi Road, which links up the Guangzhou Railway
Station, Xiaobei, and the Huanshidong CBD, is connected to numerous bus lines and on top of it is the elevated Inner Ring Highway. Underground, Line 5 of the Guangzhou Metro stops at the Xiaobei Station every two minutes or so. This accessibility makes daily commutes and utilizing different urban services a lot easier. Apart from transport, Yuexiu Park, Baiyun Mountain, and Luhu Park are all nearby and several museums are within walking distance as well. It is very difficult to find another area that offers the same convenience while still being relatively affordable.

But Africans have other reasons that they like about Dengfeng Village. As pointed out by several scholars (Zhang 2008, Li et al. 2009, Yang 2012), they are there also
because it is very close to many wholesale markets. Li Zhang even believes that “dwelling close to the trading centers is decisive for the day-to-day survival of the African traders whose business is less well capitalized and specialized, and is informal” (Zhang 2008: 394). Moreover, since Xiaobei is very close the Railway Station, Africans living in Dengfeng can easily access the even larger wholesale markets opened around the Station. Baima Clothing Market, Baiyun International Leather Trading Center, Zhanxi Watch Wholesale Market, Guangzhou Beauty Exchange Center are all within reach of a short bus or metro ride.

Finally, well-traveled Africans prefer Xiaobei also because it is connected to other cities, provinces and the world by modern transport. These days, African traders no longer limit themselves to Guangzhou. They are exploring nearby towns such as Foshan and Huangqi and travel frequently to other provinces, such as Zhejiang where the town of Yiwu has emerged as another major global trading hub. Also many of them need to visit Hong Kong and Macau on a regular basis to renew their visas, and travel all over the world to handle their businesses. The ease with which they can access shuttles, trains, and planes from Xiaobei must have added to the appeal of the area. While the Guangzhou Coach Station is within a ten-minute walk from the Railway Station, the Guangyuan Coach Station is also close to Dengfeng Village, and airport shuttles pick passengers nonstop at the hotels nearby.

All these explain why Xiaobei is such a sought after place among Africans. Guanyuanxi, the other major African community, has a very similar profile and offers much of the same convenience. Apart from these two, Africans are found in several other similar areas as well. They vary in terms of distance to the city center and costs, but they
all form around urban villages, whose residents influence a much larger area. Official discourses usually refer to such areas as “urban-rural transitional regions (chengxiang jiehebu 城乡结合部)” because of their rural connections and different trajectory of development. These transitional areas first helped migrant workers, and later Africans, settle down in Guangzhou. They are truly “arrival cities” in Doug Saunders’s description (2012). However, in the eyes of the Municipal Government, urban villages are problems to be solved. Not only are they – thanks to the poor sanitary conditions and crowded buildings – not pleasing to the eyes, but are also thought of as breeding grounds for illegal activities such as drug dealing and prostitution. Besides, because of the middle lower class origins of these transitional regions, shopping centers sell mostly low end products and, in the case of Xiaobei and Guangyuanxi, counterfeits. The fact that many Uyghurs resided in Dengfeng also vexed the government. Uyghurs are a Muslim, Turkic speaking ethnic group found mostly in the northwestern region of Xinjiang. In news media, Uyghurs are usually portrayed as a violent group which launches attacks on the Chinese public. The Chinese government has been linking them to global terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda since the 9/11 Terrorist Attack, despite the lack of evidence (Cunningham 2012). In fact these attacks are more connected to their separatist movement, which can be dated back to the 19th century. But in any case, the local government in Guangzhou considers them a security threat. Further, respectively in 2009 and 2012, over a hundred Africans in Guangyuanxi gathered on the street to protest heavy policing. The incidents were widely covered by Western news media, and added urgency to clean-ups. But the fact that Xiaobei is subject to heavier policing than Guangyuanxi is very telling. It indicates that the ultimate goal for the government is to
redevelop Xiaobei because it occupies premium location in the city whose commercial potential is yet to be tapped into. But all the “problems” mentioned above constitute roadblocks to this goal and the government’s vision of a globalized Guangzhou and a modern urban space that can yield handsome lease revenue and add to officials’ political performance (zhengji 政绩).

**Building A Global City**

The Guangzhou Municipal Government’s heavy handed approach toward Africans is closely tied to the city’s ambition of becoming a global city, a title that is usually associated with large global financial centers. In her signature work, Saskia Sassen (1993) discusses the formation of global cities such as New York, London and Tokyo as a result of the global dispersal of manufacturing, a process also known as flexible accumulation. Flexible Accumulation, and post-Fordism, as detailed by Marxist theorist David Harvey (1990) was a response of the capitalist system to a myriad of troubles in the 1970s including stagnation, labor unrests, and economic crisis. In this process, manufacturing declined in countries such as the U.S., the U.K. and Japan, and was outsourced to parts of the world where labor was cheaper. At the meantime, producer services such as banking, insurance, and legal services grew rapidly and became highly concentrated in certain cities such as New York, especially in their CBDs, which became global control sites, where manufacturing and management decisions were made. World economy consequently became “spatially dispersed, yet globally integrated” (Sassen 1991: 3), and organized by such control sites. Although Sassen mainly discusses New

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York, London, and Tokyo, they are global cities par excellence, the role models that other municipalities strive to become.

The broader trends – decentralization of plants, offices, and service outlets, along with the expansion of central functions as a consequence of the need to manage such decentralized organization of firms – may well have created conditions contributing to the growth of regional subcenters, minor versions of what New York, London, and Tokyo do on a global and national scale (Sassen 1991: 8).

Indeed, many Chinese cities have been working aggressively toward the goal of becoming minor versions of the aforementioned cities, which are sometimes mentioned in government agenda and used by news media as standard that Chinese cities should be judged against. This is by no means a unique phenomenon in China. In fact, many major cities in the Global South aspire to become regional headquarters and financial centers.

Modernization and being recognized as a modern country have been the dream of Chinese elites since the 19th century. One can say that for China the entire 20th century has been a quest for the best way to realize this dream. Whereas during Mao’s era, the answer was self-reliance, in post-socialist China, it lies in globalization. As early as in 1987, the phrase “linking up with the international track (yuguoji jiegui 与国际接轨)” had appeared as an official rhetoric and in the 1990s, it became a popular phrase in newspapers, academic journals and official publications (Wang 2007). Most users of the phrase believed China needed to “link up” with the world in order to modernize and compete in the age of globalization. Although its meaning varied depending on the speaker, the West, as it did in 19th century modernization discourses, was right at the center. The question, was not whether China should learn from the West, but how to and
how much. In terms of urban development, this Westward push translates into the nationwide efforts to build “international metropolis (guojihua dadushi 国际化大都市)”.

The slogan of “building international metropolises” first emerged in official publications in the early 1990s as the ultimate goal of urban planning for several major cities in the east coast, especially those in the Yangtze River delta such as Shanghai and Nanjing. Guangzhou was also heavily influenced by this trend. In 1993, the Municipal Government was already contemplating ways to make Guangzhou a modern international metropolis. In April, the Municipal Government, along with the Guangzhou Academic of Social Sciences, held a symposium titled Modern International Metropolis: Guangzhou Marching Toward 21st Century (xiandaihua guoji dadushi: maixiang ershiyi shiji de guangzhou 现代化国际大都市:迈向 21 世纪的广州) in Dongfang Hotel, one of the four five-star hotels built in the northern suburbs. Experts from America, Germany, France, the UK, and Hong Kong attended and local scholars from renowned academic institutions such as Peking and Fudan University were also present. Five months later, the delegation of the Municipal Government headed by Vice Mayor Dai Zhiguo attended the Fourth Meeting of the World Association of the Major Metropolises held in Montreal. During the event, Guangzhou was officially inducted as a member city, the first one in China. The efforts did not stop at academic discussions and affiliating with international counterparts. In 1993, the Municipal Government, cooperating with Thomas Planning Services Inc. of Boston, began the planning of ‘Zhujiang New Town (zhujiang xincheng 珠江新城)’ in the newly incorporated district of Tianhe, which would eventually become a new CBD where multinational corporations concentrate. A huge amount of farm land was expropriated in the process and several urban villages redeveloped. Moreover,
hosting global events like the Asian Games (2010) and Global Fortune Forum (2017), which furnished the Municipal Government with perfect pretext to launch clean-ups and redevelopment projects, were just some of the latest examples of asserting its readiness to be recognized as a global city.

Nationally, by 2002, it was reported that as many as 182 cities in China were vying to become an international metropolis (Wu & Ma 2006: 195). In the discussions of such efforts, Chinese cities were often compared with those in the West to gauge whether they had all the necessary conditions to be like them. For example, in August 2002, the Workers’ Daily published an article which argued that very few cities in China have the foundation to potentially match Paris and New York (Qi 2002). It cautioned against bandwagon effect under which cities competed to match and supersede each other, and unbridled developments without careful planning which ignored harmful effects on the environment. Despite its critical view of the fervor to develop international metropolises, it never questioned the assumption that Western cities like Paris and New York were the role models. According to some writers (Lu & Cao 1992, “Jianshe” 1992), one of the most critical conditions of becoming an international metropolis, which China is lacking compared to Western countries, is a highly developed tertiary sector. Industries such as finance, trades, commerce, real estate, and services should be the pillars of the economy. This view is closely in line with Saskia Sassen’s observations about global cities.

Indeed, recent developments in China demonstrate many similarities with the US, UK and Japan in the 1970s and 1980s. According to Sassen, although producer services industries such as banking and legal services grew in all major cities in those three countries, former industrial centers all suffered various degrees of decline (Sassen 1991,
164-167). At the same time, financial centers with a high concentration of certain types of producer services industries such as Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate (FIRE) emerged. These industries are usually located close to each other in Central Business Districts which serve as command centers for global manufacturing. One can observe a parallel process happening China today, albeit at a smaller scale. Although there is no indication Chinese manufacturing is in decline, major cities have long been “outsourcing” their industries, not necessarily to other countries, but more distant and less developed rural regions within China. Also there is no denying that business oriented cities such as Shanghai and Guangzhou are leading China’s growth. In recent years a buzzword in Chinese urban planning is “headquarter economy (zongbu jingji 总部经济)”, which is basically an alternative term for Sassen’s global city. In a recent interview, Guangzhou’s First Deputy Mayor declared that Guangzhou always had the dream of becoming a financial center like London and New York (Zhu 2017). Judging from Guangzhou’s recent developments, the government is working very hard toward realizing that dream.

Meanwhile, some scholars (Wu & Ma 2006, Zhang 2008) caution against the direct comparison between China and the West. Fulong Wu and Laurence Ma argue that globalization is a process, rather than an end state. Compared to those in developed nations, cities in developing countries competing to become global cities should be called “globalizing cities” because usual criteria such as the number of multinational corporations (MNC) are not applicable. For this reason, Li Zhang (2008, 384), looking at the Xiaobei African community, contends that Guangzhou is a globalizing city. He points out that Africans are not “demand-driven professionals or low-paid workers” in Sassen’s global cities. Also Guangzhou is “neither a key command center controlling the flow of
global capital nor a leading seat with a large number of MNC branches but is nonetheless intimately tied to the world wide web of production and global commodity chains” (Zhang 2008, 393). However, his analysis is problematic because Wu and Ma’s conclusion is drawn from state-sponsored globalization, whereas the formation of African community in Guangzhou, as observed by other scholars mentioned earlier, is a form of grassroots globalization, which is not unique to China. It is in fact a common phenomenon in so-called global cities.

In their discussion of some of social changes in New York City in the 1970s and 1980s, John H. Mollenkopf and Manuel Castells (1992) observe that post-industrialization and globalization turned New York into a “dual city” with an upper middle class of white, mostly male, managers and professionals, and a female and multiracial middle lower class. The latter contributed to a growing informal economy (Sassen 1992), which, as Paul Stoller (2002) shows us, supported African traders in Harlem in the 1990s. Similarly Chinese cities today are also characterized by a rapidly growing middle class and a subordinate class, and this polarizing phenomenon and its connection to the same global structural forces have been discussed by Chaolin Gu and Haiyong Liu (2002) in their study of migrant enclaves in Beijing. They argue that China’s aggressive courtship of Foreign Direct Investment has led to a growth of highly skilled and well paid jobs at management level, and unskilled, irregular or low-paid jobs in the manufacturing industries in Chaoyang and Haidian” (Gu & Liu 2002, 201).

Sociologist David Goodman echoes their findings in his research of emerging class division in China. According to Goodman, since 2002, the Chinese government has openly embraced the cultivating of a newly emerging middle class and put in place
policies to increase its proportion (Goodman 2014: 92-99). This new middle class have
college degrees and employment in high-status occupations with supervisory obligations
and managerial power. Yet at the same time, there is a large semi-skilled or unskilled
population working in the informal economy, which, Goodman calculated in 2011,
accounted for 60 per cent of the urban workforce (Goodman 2014, 122). Whereas in the
New York, race and gender constituted a major divide separating the two classes, in
Chines cities it is the urban-rural divide thanks to the hukou system. Indeed, most of
those working in the Xiaobei African community are migrant workers, whose lives, as we
shall see, are in a myriad ways entangled with Africans. Granted, unlike Africans in
Harlem who were selling their goods to Americans, Africans, as Zhang says, in
Guangzhou are buyers (although there are quite a few Africans working low paid jobs),
but they are nonetheless actors in an informal sector created under the same globalizing
force. Hence I propose to understand the Xiaobei African community not so much as a
unique phenomenon of China because it is a developing country, but a different
manifestation of the same global processes that are affecting many major cities in the
world.

The Xiaobei African community, I argue, is the point of contention between the two
forms of globalization, one state-driven and the other grassroots. The former is
characterized by an active engagement of large and global capital, to accommodate which
the Municipal Government is aggressively redeveloping and gentrifying Guangzhou’s
older areas. The latter is epitomized by the small informal businesses and urban space
catering to Africans, whose grassroots nature is already discussed by Yang Yang (2011)
and will be further elaborated in this dissertation. The clashes between these two, in the
form of competition for urban space, are the root cause of the government’s attempts to clean up Xiaobei. However, I do agree with Fulong Wu’s call to pay more attention to local specificities.

Postsocialist China’s participation in and negotiation with globalization and how this process interacts with its agenda of modernization and nation building have been addressed by several scholars (Ong 1999, Wu 2006, Siu 2007, Kipnis 2016). They correctly point out that the break from traditions promised by modernization and the Westernization implied by globalization are not universal maxims. Instead we should pay attention to the full spectrum of complexities and nuances of globalization. In another piece, Fulong Wu argues that globalization should be understood as a grassroots phenomenon, particularly in developing countries where local agencies are often overlooked. In his view, globalization is a constellation of different materializations of interactions between global and local (Wu 2006). Aihwa Ong (1999), for example, shows us how by invoking a common Chinese identity and Confucian culture, elites in China and Southeast Asia build up transnational capital while resisting Western ideals such as democracy and human rights. In terms of urban developments in China, Andrew Kipnis uses the word “recombinant” to describe the hybrid nature of transformations exemplified by a small county in Shandong Province. For instance, rather than undermining existing social relations, consumerism that arose with urbanization simply reorganized the new and the old, in some cases even reinforcing traditions. But perhaps the most relevant to my analysis of Xiaobei Helen Siu’s study of Guangzhou’s urban villages. She shows that socialist practices such as the system of dual land ownership continue to exist in a modernizing China, which has huge ramifications for Xiaobei. The dissertation attempts
to add to this conversation of what Ong terms the “sinicization of modernization” (Ong 1999: 10) and the following two sections will further elaborate on urban politics in China and how it affects Xiaobei.

**A War of Land in Post-Socialist China**

The economic reforms in 1978 not only signaled the shift from a planned economy to a market one, but also foreboded a change from an industry-oriented government to one driven by sales of land use rights. You-tien Hsing (2010) in her illuminating analyses of how urbanism has become the main driving force behind local state actions interprets post-socialist urban politics in China as a fight over territories, or what she terms “territoriality”, which means “spatial strategies to consolidate power in a given place and time” (Hsing 2010: 8). Following the economic reforms, state power became decentralized, and urban politics became a fierce land grab not just between different levels district governments, but also between municipal governments and various state institutions, or *danwei* (单位), like hospital and military. This is because ever since the land leasehold market was established 1988, sales of land-use rights to private developers have become the most important source of income. As a result, municipalities and powerful *danwei*, which Hsing calls ‘socialist land masters’ all aggressively amass and develop their land. The more land one has, and the more centrally located and better developed the land is, the higher return one can obtain. In the 1990s, many cities created ‘development zones’, and as mentioned before Guangzhou was ahead of the pack and already had its own in 1984. By 2000s, as industries further declined in cities, building
‘new cities/towns (xincheng 新城)’ became a fad. According to Hsing, both were means for municipal governments to convert more farm land into urban ones and expand their territory. At the meantime, local governments also put in a lot of efforts to redevelop inner-cities to make room for modern mixed-use projects to boost property values. Urban villages became an obvious target. ‘Global Cities’ and ‘headquarters’ are thus branding strategies to justify such gentrification projects (Hsing 2012, 18-19) and reclaim land owned by village authorities and danwei. Indeed, as we shall see, this is the kind of projects that Xiaobei is constantly threatened by.

The ascendance of Tianhe District and Zhujiang New Town as the new CBD by no means signals the slow fading of older centers. According to Hsing, competition between districts prompts them to create their own downtowns with premium commercial real estate (Hsing 2012: 52). One result is that some large cities now boast multiple CBDs. In the case of Guangzhou, a neighbor of Xiaobei, Huanshidong, was the city’s first CBD and original business core. Although it can no longer compare with Zhujiang New Town in terms of size and importance, it is still widely recognized as a financial center and yuppie shopping and dining area. The Yuexiu District Government has no desire to simply let the Huanshidong CBD fall into historical oblivion. The 2006 Yuexiu District Work Report stressed the area’s vital role to the city and claimed that it was one of the three CBDs recognized by the Municipal Government and an Experiment and Research Base for Headquarter Economy (Gong 2006). This strong endorsement of the area by both the District and the Municipal Government has important implications for its neighbor Xiaobei.
Xiaobei, I have shown, occupies a prime location in the city. Being right next to Huanshidong, it holds the potential of becoming a service area for the CBD and matching property values there. Also, as the city upgrades its commercial spaces, Xiaobei, with its urban village and low-end shopping centers, appears increasingly discordant with the modern image the government hopes to build. Redeveloping Xiaobei for a land hungry district government makes a lot of sense. Sassen also observes that gentrification of older neighborhoods are common features when advanced capitalism shifts its foundation to services, which creates a class of high income professionals (Sassen 1991: 255). As mentioned before, such a professional class is also rapidly growing in China. They require the type of urban space exemplified by Huanshidong and Zhujiang New Town, and are as a result driving up the real estate market. As their number increases, while new districts like Tianhe could convert more farm land to accommodate them, old districts like Yuexiu have to rely on gentrification. That is why Xiaobei is always included in discussions of old neighborhood redevelopment plans.

**Dual land Ownership and Clean-ups in Xiaobei**

Redeveloping urban villages has been a major task for the Municipal Government since the 1990s. In the past two decades, many urban villages were cleared for commercial redevelopments and many people lost their homes in the process. But not all were victims. According to Hsing, China’s Constitution and the Land Management Law stipulate that while urban land belongs to municipal governments and thus can be leased out, rural land belongs to village collectives (the successors of work teams in Mao’s era) and cannot be leased out for profit (Hsing 2012: 5). This system of dual land ownership
and the complications it has created for municipal governments has been discussed by many scholars (Zhang, Zhao & Tian 2003, Tian 2008, Hsing 2012, Hung 2013, Schoon and Altrock 2013, Tang 2015). In essence, the fact that land of urban villages still belongs to collectives endows villagers with decisive bargaining power. As a result, redevelopment in some cases turned villagers into millionaires overnight. In Liede Village redevelopment for example, villagers were given apartments in the newly constructed residential complexes at the original site and according to their original house sizes. Many even had extra units to rent out. This complicates the picture certain scholars of post-socialist urban China paint: the onslaught of bulldozers powered by the twin engine of the state and land developers dispossessing residents of their homes.

This dualist system did not turn Dengfeng Villagers into millionaires, but it has simply allowed them to stay put. Since 2009, the Municipal Government has been trying to redevelop Dengfeng, for which Villagers had mixed feelings. On the one hand they hoped their Village became the next Liede and they would become millionaires. On the other hand, they were worried their compensation was much less, or worse still they had to relocate. But partly because of their negotiating power under the dualist system, redevelopment has not materialized. The existence of Africans in the Village also complicated the matter because they brought businesses and foot traffic to Xiaobei, pushing up rental costs in the area. Any compensation negotiation will have to take that into account. Meanwhile, for the Municipal Government, Africans’ negative image and their interaction with Uyghurs are both roadblocks to their plan to upgrade Xiaobei. They make gentrifying Dengfeng and Xiaobei a more pressing issue. So even before any redevelopment plan was announced, the government already began a more modest clean-
up project and putting more pressure on Dengfeng Village. In this process, the sanfei discourse plays a key role.

Cleaning up Xiaobei is not so much about taking over rural land as it is about expelling Africans. Although bulldozers never arrived at Dengfeng, the government has not left it alone either. The pretext of fighting sanfei has allowed the government to adopt a more focused approach of targeting Africans to improve the appearance of Dengfeng. Since 2007, there had been numerous sanfei clean-ups launched in the city and Dengfeng has always been a key target. It all started in April when the Municipal Committee for Comprehensive Management of Public Security (shiwei zongzhiban 市委综治办), an office responsible for maintaining social stability, announced that Dengfeng Street was one of the "Key Clean-up Streets (zhongdian zhengzhi jie 重点整治街)". Such clean-ups do not simply affect Dengfeng, but the entire Xiaobei area. They check Africans’ documents, inspect businesses that serve Africans periodically, and crack down on informal hawkers and vendors, all in the name of fighting sanfei, which is in fact a poorly disguised effort to make the area appear more orderly and somewhat gentrified. This sanfei discourse is a very powerful political tool as most Chinese informed of the issue support a tough approach regulating Africans, which again feeds back to the government’s clean-up efforts. In 2014, for example, the Yuexiu District Government launched a sweeping sanfei clean-up, and as a result, only few Africans are still living in Dengfeng today.

Anti-sanfei campaigns help local government achieve several goals. First they allow the state to gradually penetrate Dengfeng Villagers’ autonomy and strengthen regulation over their rental properties. Second, in the name of fighting sanfei, the government
cleaned up most informal businesses in Dengfeng in the 2014 clean-up. In the process, formal businesses were also affected because of the incessant police harassments and all Uyghurs left with a small compensation. Third, for the same reason, the government has been launching raids in all commercial buildings in Xiaobei, especially those outside of Dengfeng Village, cracking down on counterfeited products. Finally and most importantly, the government made it increasingly difficult for Africans to live in Dengfeng Village and eventually banned them altogether.

Because of all these government actions, Xiaobei is very different from just five years ago. Indeed, the area looks a lot more pleasing to the eye. In Dengfeng, unlicensed vendors no longer congest Baohan Zhijie; the floor is relatively clean; residents no longer have to worry about noise at night. Yet, most African residents have left the area, and with them businesses and energy. Many shops in Tianxiu Mansion are boarded up; two shopping malls were closed permanently; and businesses are down for many shop owners. Although many Africans still frequent Dengfeng, the atmosphere has become very subdued. Surveillance cameras are ubiquitous and policing is extremely heavy. Regular police, Armed Police Force (*wuzhuang jingcha* 武装警察), Special Police (*tejing* 特警), and City Administrative Law Enforcement (*chengguan* 城管) are all regularly seen in the neighborhood. During my short stay in the Village, I witnessed multiple times Africans being questioned and arrested. It is still too early to speculate if these clean-ups are preparations for the eventual complete gentrification, but it is safe to say that it is always on the government's agenda.
Method and Content

In her study of the mass destruction of homes in Shanghai and its impacts on individuals, Qin Shao laments the lack of attention paid to the human effects of housing reforms under China’s urban development. This dissertation represents a similar effort to provide a microscopic view of this great transformation and reveal how Africans, a rather unexpected group, get inopportune entangled in the process. It is largely based on my field research in Guangzhou conducted in the summers of 2014, 2015 and 2017. During those short periods of time, I tried to talk to as many different groups as possible so as to incorporate different perspectives. These included African traders, African community leaders, local Chinese who do business with the Africans, Chinese employees who work for Africans, and representatives of Chinese authorities such as a police officer. (To protect their identities, all names provided in this dissertation are pseudonyms.) I got to know most of my informants in the Xiaobei area, especially in Tianxiu Mansion. They then introduced me to others. In 2017, I moved into Baohan Zhijie and stayed there for three weeks. I got to see firsthand how Chinese and Africans live their lives there and interact.

The exchanges with my informants happened mainly in the forms of recorded interviews and casual conversations. Due to the briefness of my trips and the difficulty of establishing a lasting relationship that would have afforded me ample opportunities to talk to them, in my first visit I relied almost exclusively on interviews. This has created two problems. First, although no informants objected to the use of a recorder, the format might have deterred informants from opening up, especially when topics such as race and conflicts with authorities were sensitive in nature. Second, interviews shed little light on
their daily experiences. In my subsequent visits, I simply engaged my informants in casual conversations and focused more on spending time with them and establishing a good rapport. For example, I accompanied Ben in his business trips around the city and observed how a local real estate agent carried out maintenance work in rental houses of Dengfeng Village. This approach turned out to be much more fruitful and conducive to getting more information. But this also means I will have to rely on my research notes since exact conversations were never recorded.

Despite more success in my second and third trip, my overall time spent in Guangzhou was still brief. Fortunately, a few key informants are so trusting and supportive that they continue to provide me with stories and materials through phone calls while I was in the U.S., for which I am really grateful. To further compensate for the lack of materials, I draw heavily from online news reports and government news release. Since all news agencies in China are mouthpieces of the government, the reports they publish are very revealing in terms of the local government’s priorities and rationale. Moreover, mainstream news websites that carry these reports such as Sohu, 163, and QQ usually include a comment section where viewers can post their thoughts. It is one of the best places to gauge public opinions on race and measure them against the government’s propaganda. For detailed government plans, I resort to websites such as those of the Municipal and District Government. A government internal video report of the 2014 clean-up also features prominently in my research because it provides a lot of insights into that key action. Finally, local archives such as the Guangzhou Gazetteer are also great sources for local history and historical maps.
Chapter 1 looks at the development of the Northern Suburb, or which Xiaobei is part of. It provides a more detailed historical context of the Xiaobei African community. It shows that its formation and current governments to clean it up are in fact embedded in the entire transformation of the Northern Suburb. Chapter 2 examines the construction of Africans as sanfei by Guangzhou news media. Often times, news reports attribute the sanfei problem to the space they occupy. For example, urban villages like Dengfeng, which, due to their labyrinthine streets and chaotic house structures, are said to provide a safe haven for illegal activities. This reportage, I argue, paved the way for clean-ups in Dengfeng. Chapter 3 discusses how this media construction is reinforced by police racial profiling. Police in Guangzhou, as we shall see, thanks to the huge pressure to produce statistical results, pick on the easy targets like Africans. The skewed results they produce in turn justify more clean-ups and heavier policing in Xiaobei. Chapter 4 investigates how the Yuexiu District Government expelled most African residents following the 2014 campaign through the Community Office of Foreigner Assistance. I will show that underlying this effort is in fact the battle between the local government and the Dengfeng Village authority. Chapter 5 looks into Africans’ housing situation in Dengfeng and examines the government’s attempts to push African residents away from the Dengfeng and into gated communities like Jinlu Shanzhuang, which was portrayed as a model community for foreigner management. This push, I contend, reflects Guangzhou’s, as well as China’s, efforts to create an urban society dominated by a middle class living in gated communities. Chapter 6 focuses on the now cleared away informal market at the south end of Baohan Zhijie. I argue its formation is a result of Guangzhou becoming increasingly global. I will describe what it was like before the 2014 clean-up, largely
relying on informants’ accounts and news photographs. But despite the gentrified look of the market, some signs of its former existence still remains. Many informal businesses continue to operate in the area, showing their resiliency. Chapter 7 turns to the African market in Xiaobei, whose businesses and offices are housed in modern high-rises. I investigate government actions like crackdowns on illegal conversion of building space and counterfeits. I intend to show a messy situation where the Yuexiu District Government tries to gentrify an area with buildings owned by a powerful state institution, the Air Force Logistics Department. These buildings are used by established African traders, some of whom are community leaders. The mixed results of the government’s actions show the complexity of urban development in China. Finally, I conclude by reflecting on Africans’ circumstances, looking ahead, and beyond Guangzhou. As I try to disassociate the label of sanfei from Africans, I hope this study can sufficiently show that the Africans in Guangzhou are in fact making decisions based on their life circumstances like we all do.
Chapter 1 When It All Began

In mid-summer 2017, I moved into Dengfeng Village, the heart of the Xiaobei African community. With the help of my friend and a local real estate agent whom everybody referred to as Aunt Hong, I found a landlord, Mr. Shi, who was willing to rent a room to me for only three weeks at a reasonable price. Mr. Shi lived in a four-story building, which he built back in the early 1980s. As an urban resident, technically speaking, he was not allowed to own properties of the Village because Village land belonged to the collective and was not transactable. But Mr. Shi had connection and at the time the area was not considered desirable, so government enforcement might have been lenient. When a Villager approached Mr. Shi and proposed that if he built a house on the land owned by the Villager, he could have the upper floors, he jumped on the opportunity. Today, like other Villagers, Mr. Shi had a Homestead Certificate (zhaijidizheng 宅基地证) giving him the right to use and live on the land.

For various reasons, Mr. Shi now only “owned” the fourth floor (nobody really owns anything since all urban land belongs to either the collective in the case of urban villages or the state otherwise). It was a separate apartment with two bedrooms. Since Mr. Shi’s wife and their older son migrated to America and the younger son had married and moved away, he lived alone and had a spare room. Like most houses in Dengfeng Village, the apartment was in disrepair. The walls were cracked and the ceiling was moldy. In heavy rain, which happens a lot during summer, water would drip down from the ceiling. For the bulk of my stay in the Village, I was sleeping on a half wet bed.
While most Villagers did not invest in renovation because they no longer lived in the Village, Mr. Shi, like those who still did, was holding it off because of what seemed to be an imminent government renewal that threatened to wipe out everything.

Mr. Shi’s story is part of the sea change that Dengfeng Village underwent in the past three decades or so, which in turn constituted part of the even more impressive transformation of the Northern Suburb (beijiao, 北郊), the focus of this chapter. In this chapter, I will show that the emergence of the Xiaobei African community was in fact embedded in the development of the Northern Suburb, in which the state played a major role. As we shall see, the state-driven urbanization of the Northern Suburb created the conditions for the establishment of the African community. A recent study by two scholars from Guangzhou also makes the same argument (Mai & Lin, 2017), but this chapter will provide a more detailed historical account of the development of the Northern Suburb and focus on the transformation of its landscape. This process also reveals the shifting urban dynamics where the state, which cooperated with the grassroots to build the African community, eventually sided with large capital and pursued more classist and racist agenda of urban renewal and gentrification. The development of the Northern Suburb caused Dengfeng Village to lose a huge amount of land to the Municipal Government. Under the encouragement of the state and business investments, former farmers turned the land left over by the state into a fully functioning community of Africans and rural migrants. However, due to dual land ownership system, the development of the surrounding areas eventually eclipsed that of Dengfeng Village. Huanshidong, a neighboring area, even became Guangzhou’s first Central Business District. The sharp contrast between the two areas is a spatial manifestation of two forms
of globalization, one guided and state-driven, the other organic and bottom-up. The latter’s un-transactable status has greatly suppressed its market value, motivating the Municipal Government to redevelop the area.

So far these efforts have been largely unsuccessful. The Municipal Government has been attempting to redevelop Dengfeng Village so that it becomes a service area to the Huanshidong CBD so as to better tap into its market value, but for a number of reasons discussed later in this chapter, the plan has not materialized. The Village is stuck at what Liza Weinstein calls a “precarious stability” in her study of the slum of Dharavi (Weinstein 2014, 21). Weinstein complicates the global phenomenon of “accumulation by dispossession” described by David Harvey by paying more attention to local conditions and resistance. Despite the differences between Dharavi and Dengfeng, her analysis is inspiring for my research. While in Dharavi, competing authorities and local resistance have enabled residents to stave off demolition, in Dengfeng, the dualist system and lack of developer interest have resulted in its stagnant status quo. Although the persistent occupation of this space empowers the residents, Weinstein reminds us that that it is also detrimental to them because it simply means that they have the right to continue living a poorly serviced and sometimes dangerous area. That’s why Dengfeng Villagers are not necessarily opposed redevelopment – some even hope it will happen soon. What they are afraid of most is being relocated elsewhere because their rental income depends on the competitive location of the Village. However, on the other hand, a redevelopment would definitely evict all migrant workers and informal businesses, which would likely mean the end of the African community. But this is perhaps exactly what the government hopes to achieve so that the entire Xiaobei could realize its market potential.
Before 1950s

A portion of the Guangzhou City Road Map published in 1947. The orange lines were where the northern periphery of the original city. This map shows that most of the Northern Suburb was mounds, farmland, villages, and morgues (yizhuang 义庄).

The Northern Suburb is not an official designation, although it overlapped with a past official administrative district of Suburb (jiaoqu 郊区), which included all suburban areas surrounding Guangzhou. I define the Northern Suburb as the vast area immediately north of the ancient city wall, stretching from today’s Guangyuanxi Road to the west and Xianliezhong Road to the east, with Yuexiu Hill in the middle. Obviously, as part of Yuexiu District today, the area is completely urbanized and no longer semi-rural. But up until the 1990s, it was just a sparsely populated hilly periphery. According to a 1947 map published by the Public Works Bureau of Guangzhou (guangzhoushi gongwuju 广州市工务局), while the west of Yuexiu Hill was mostly villages and farmland, the east consisted of mainly mounds, farmland, coffin homes for migrants, a prison, a coin factory, and an army training facility. Although the Nationalist Government built a power plant and a
cement plant in the Western Suburb, the latter to support the construction of the Yuehan (Guangdong-Hankou) Railway, they mostly left the Northern Suburb undeveloped. Prior to 1950, the only major government projects in the Northern Suburb included Baiyun Airport, which was completed in 1933, and the Yuehan Railway, which was completed in 1936. The former was very far from the city and solely for military use, so it had little impact on the predominantly rural life of the area. Although part of the Yuehan Railway ran through the bulk of the Northern Suburb, trains did not stop there.

The area now known as Xiaobei was the middle section of the Northern Suburb outside the Little North Gate. Up until the 1980s, it was a settlement of a few farming villages such as Tianxin, Shangtang, and Xiatang. The only better known establishment was perhaps the Beiyuan Restaurant created by the Nationalist Government in the 1920s. These villages, according to a news report, dated back to more than two hundred years ago when a family with the surname Gong first settled down in the area (Deng 2011). Their residence attracted more to come and eventually a settlement of more than twenty surnames formed. For a long time, the only street that went through the area was Dengfeng Road, which was the only way up the Baiyun Mountain. The northern portion the Road eventually became Baohan Zhijie (which means Baohan Straight Street), the main street of Dengfeng Village where a large number of African traders frequent.

The name Baohan derives from Baohan Tea Shop, a small business opened in the 1930s (Liang, 2011). Before opening the business, the owner excavated a “title deed (maidiquan 买地券)” in the area, which was a piece stone with inscriptions buried with a woman from the Southern Han Dynasty (917-971). This kind of title deeds were very common in ancient China and they acted as property ownership certificate for the
deceased so that they could show authorities in the afterworld that they had claim over the piece of land where they were was buried. The news of the discovery travelled far and quickly because it was more than a thousand years old. Scholars and interested people flocked to the area to marvel at the archaeological find. Knowing the importance of Dengfeng Road to mountain climbers and seeing a golden opportunity to capitalize on the curiosity for the stone, the excavator opened up a tea shop in Xiatang Village. Since the said title deed dated back to the Southern Han Dynasty (917-971), and was created during the Dabao Era (958-971), they named the tea shop Baohan. By the time it opened, the area was already a busy little market with restaurants and shops. The tea shop closed after all the turmoil in the 1940s, but the name Baohan survived and became the name of the main street of Dengfeng Village.

The West Side and the Canton Fair

The Communists takeover began to usher in new changes to the Northern Suburb, the vastness and low density of which had yet to be taken advantage of. In 1956, the Central Government Guangzhou founded the University of Chinese Medicine in Sanyuanli, an area just north of Yuexiu Hill and very close to today’s Nigerian community. Two years later, the Municipal Government founded the Yangcheng Automobile Plant nearby. Around the same time, a chemical reagent plant, a battery plant, and a motorcycle plant also found their homes in the area. Despite these projects, according to Ezra Vogel (1969, 130), industrialization, especially heavy industries, was not the city’s top priority. Guangzhou was not even selected to become an industrial center in the First Five Year Plan (1955-1960) because of the city’s lack of raw materials and an industrial base. What
Guangzhou did excel and have in abundance, however, were light industries, handicrafts, and small workshops thanks to its long history of commerce. It made socialist collectivization a lot more challenging (Vogel 1969, 156), but it also provided a large variety of commodities for the Central Government to trade for foreign exchange. The west side of the Northern Suburb became the key venue where this trade took place, which was what first attracted Africans to Guangzhou.

In April 1957, to gain desperately needed foreign currency at a time when China had little contact with the West, under the permission of the State Council, Guangzhou hosted the first China Import and Export Trade Fair (also known as the Canton Fair) in the Sino-Soviet Friendship Building (zhongsu youhao dasha, 中苏友好大厦). The building, however, was built two years ago for a different purpose. In 1955, on the fifth anniversary of the signing of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance, the Provincial and Municipal Governments decided to hold an Expo of Soviet Economic and Cultural Construction Achievements, for which they needed to build a large venue. A Sino-Soviet Friendship Building just like the ones in Beijing and Shanghai came to their minds (Sun 2017). The task fell on the shoulder of the Cantonese architect Lin Keming. Lin decided to use a lot right by the ancient Liuhua Bridge located in the Northern Suburbs. He chose the site, according to a Yangcheng Evening News article, because of four reasons. First, the beautiful Yuexiu Park was nearby; second, it was proximate to the railway, which made cargo transport a lot more easier; third, it was only a short distance away from the city core and very accessible to visitors who stayed within the city; finally, as the lot was largely vacant, it required little relocation of local residents. Meanwhile anticipating the increasing freight and passenger traffic and to take
advantage of the Yuehan Railway, the Municipal Government also planned to construct a new railway station just north of the new expo center, and a major east-west artery named Huanshi Road (literally “City Ring Road”) that would cut across the entire Northern Suburb. Both projects unfortunately would not be entirely completed until the 1970s due to the chaotic political situations.
However, the Sino-Soviet Friendship Building was only used for two gatherings, not because the event was a failure. Quite the opposite, it was too successful. In its inaugural event, more than twelve thousand commodities were exhibited and traders from nineteen countries participated. Overseas Chinese from Hong Kong and Macau accounted for over eighty percent of those present. Six months later, the second Canton Fair was held, and it was again a huge success, so much so – combined trade volume close to ninety million U.S. dollars – that the event became a semi-annual feature of the city ever since (Li 2017). By the third Canton Fair the next year, however, it was apparent that the event had outgrown the Sino-Soviet Friendship Building and had to be relocated to a much larger expo center in the south of the city. It was not until 1974, after the Sino-Soviet Friendship Building was renovated and much expanded, when the Canton Fair returned to the Northern Suburb. In the 1980s and 1990s, Africans were among the attendants of the Fair, through which they learned of the trading potential Guangzhou held. In terms of the expo center, all the Soviet influence was removed and the building itself was renamed Liuhua Center for Chinese Import and Export Trade Fair (zhongguo jinchukou jiaoyihui liuhualu zhanguan, 中国出口商品交易会流花路展馆, hereafter referred to as the Liuhua Center).

The return of the Canton Fair, the completion of the Guangzhou Railway Station at the same year, and the market reforms a few years later all greatly stimulated the development of the area. Between 1985 and 2005, wholesale markets mushroomed around the railway station. For example, the Zhanxi Watch City opened to the west of the station in 1986; then in 1993 Baima Clothing Market opened nearby. These market, according to Mai and Lin (2017), were not targeting African customers. But
disembarking at the railway station, African traders were immediately drawn to such markets. As a result, specialized African markets eventually formed at the peripheries of these original ones. Further to the north, in 2003, for example, Canaan Export Clothing Market opened and became the center of the Guangyuanxi African community, the first in the city (A cluster of commercial buildings such as Tianxiu Mansion and Taoci Mansion in Xiaobei soon formed another African trading hub). But the west side of the Northern Suburb was not the only area that saw steady developments.

**East Side and Overseas Chinese**

Almost immediately after its establishment, the new Central Government began preparing to welcome overseas Chinese back. On the one hand, this was perhaps politically driven. As many overseas Chinese fled Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia, the Communists needed to show the world they, as the rightful ruler of China, had the ability to protect its people (“Unite to Convince” unknown date). Guangzhou naturally was at the forefront of this project due to Cantonese intimate connection with diasporic Chinese communities. In the early 1950s, three Overseas Chinese Reception Centers were established in the city to temporarily accommodate returning overseas Chinese. One of these centers was located in Sanyuanli, of the west side of the Northern Suburb (Zhou & Chen 2014). But, it was the east side that saw huge changes with the incoming of overseas Chinese.

Apart from political reasons, as detailed by historian Glen Peterson (2012), overseas Chinese were the major investors in China in the 1950s and 1960s. Those from Hong
Kong and Macau, as mentioned earlier, were also the main attendants of the Canton Fair. To attract more to resettle and invest in China, the Municipal Committee of the CCP made sure they were well accommodated in the city. In July 1954, during the city’s first congressional meeting, a proposal was passed to build an Overseas Chinese Village (*huaqiao xincun* 华侨新村). Taojin, a hilly area of over twenty-five thousand square meters at the foot of Baiyun Mountain only about two kilometers to the east of Xiaobei was selected. The goal was to build a “garden-style new village (*huayuanshi xincun* 花园式新村)”. In terms of architecture, both Western and Chinese elements were incorporated. For example, the village consisted of mostly two- to three-story Western style houses (*xiaoyanglou* 小洋楼), all of which, following the Chinese tradition, faced the south. All houses had yards and the entire Village was decorated with expensive species of trees, some of them imported from overseas. The construction of the Village was largely done by the end of 1958, but it kept expanding in the years that followed. By 1965, ten years after the project began and twice as big, it was finally considered completed. Considering most urban residents were still living in cramped tenements without even the most basic facilities such as bathroom and running water at the time, it is no exaggeration to say that the Village and the rest of Guangzhou were two different worlds. Those living in the village were no ordinary people either, many of whom, such as the Vice Governor of Guangdong Province, Huang Jie, were either important politicians or successful entrepreneurs. In 2006, the Municipal Government declared the village one of the cultural preservation areas (Chen 2006). Modifications of the village’s buildings and their surroundings were strictly restricted.
The establishment of the Overseas Chinese Village in Taojin sowed the seeds for rapid commercial developments after the economic reforms initiated in 1978 and paved the way for the surrounding area to become the city’s first Central Business District because it created a community with tremendous wealth, political power, social influence and overseas connections. As a result, more and more infrastructure and services were built around it in the subsequent years. In 1972, under the suggestion of Premier Zhou Enlai, the Central Government decided to invest twenty to thirty million yuan (about nine to thirteen million US Dollars) in Guangzhou’s infrastructure in order to expand foreign trade and meet the needs of the growing Canton Fair. Apart from rebuilding the Sino-Soviet Friendship Building and constructing a new railway station as mentioned earlier, part of the fund was earmarked for a modern hotel near the Overseas Chinese Village. Three years later, in early 1976, Baiyun Hotel, named after the Baiyun Mountain nearby,
was opened. The new landmark, occupying about fifty-nine thousand square meters and boasting thirty-four floors with 718 rooms, was the tallest building in China at the time (a record to be taken by another building in the area sixteen years later). The hotel, for its first five years of operation, only served foreign guests. In 1978, Guangzhou Friendship Store, a department store established in 1959 also serving exclusively foreign customers, was relocated to Taojin (Mai & Lin 2017) so that residents of the Overseas Chinese Village and foreigners staying in Baiyun Hotel could have easier access.

Soon, more and more shewai (foreign serving 涉外) hotels were opened in the east side of the Northern Suburbs to capitalize on the increasing number of foreign visitors brought by the Canton Fair. Most were built under the auspices of overseas Chinese, especially those from Hong Kong. Between 1979 and 1987, four five-star hotels were opened in Guangzhou, all financed by Hong Kong investments, three of which were located in the Northern Suburb. Garden Hotel, in particular, located opposite Baiyun Hotel, was built under the urgings of Liao Chengzhi, who was arguably the most important figure in overseas Chinese affairs in CCP’s history. Liao and his mother He Xiangning, a Hong Kong revolutionary, were the reason why CCP enjoyed strong support in Hong Kong before 1949. After the Communists took over, he was the Vice Chair of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission (Huaqiao shiwu weiyuanhui 华侨事务委员会) between 1949 and 1959, and then the Chair from 1959 until his death in 1983 (Peterson 2012: 23). Built and financed by the owners of Hong Kong Lee Garden Hotel (Vogel 1989: 203) and designed by the world renowned architect Ieoh Ming Pei (“Guangzhou Garden Hotel” 2015), Garden Hotel to this day remains one of the city’s most famous landmarks. Its “revolving restaurant…became the new symbol of modernity
and was quickly imitated by Inner Delta counties who wanted to show that they too had arrived” (Vogel 1989: 203). This shows that Garden Hotel, and by extension Taojin, represented the standard and direction of urban planning in Guangdong, or even the entire China.

By 1990, Taojin had firmly established itself as a yuppie area with strong association with modernity, luxury, and cosmopolitanism. It was commonly referred to as the Huanshidong (dong means east) CBD because of the eastern portion of Huanshi Road that runs through it. More and more global capital such as McDonald’s, Starbucks, and Louis Vuitton chose to set up their first shops in the area. Besides, it continued to concentrate a huge amount of political power because consulates of Japan, the UK, and France were all located there. Indeed, since the early 1990s, the Municipal Government has been slowly shifting the city’s business core eastward to the new district of Tianhe.
(whose business core, Zhujiang New Town, is basically a Taojin on steroid), but this does not mean Guangzhou has given up on Taojin. In fact, under the influence of global cities, the Yuexiu District Government announced a plan in 2009 to upgrade the Huanshidong CBD into an Intelligent Headquarter District (Huanshidong zhili zongbuqu 环市东智力总部区 IHD) in an attempt to attract high-end headquarters to settle down in the area. We will discuss this in more detail in Chapter 7, but suffice it to say here that Taojin, the east side of the Northern Suburb, leapfrogged other parts of Guangzhou in the 1980s. The development of Xiaobei, on the other, was very different.

**Xiaobei and the Formation of the African Market**

Compared with Taojin, changes in the middle section of the Northern Suburb were much less grandiose, but equally significant. Before 1949, the area was already a key agricultural base for the city. During Mao’s era, it followed a typical rural trajectory. All agricultural work was organized under communes and production teams. In the 1950s, Farmers of the few natural villages of the area formed the Dengfeng Production Team under the Shahe Commune (May & Lin 2017). In 1958, the Production Team established an agricultural machinery factory, expanding its work beyond farming. Two years later, the Team added a livestock farm, raising pigs and cows (Compete Record 1997). During this time, no radical changes happened in terms of landscape. A military base was set up and later became the Air Force Logistics Department. The Municipal Government did little outside of merging Xiaobei Road and the southern portion of Dengfeng Road, connecting both with a roundabout famously known to the locals as the Xiaobei Flower
Circle (xiaobei huaquan 小北花圈). The extended portion of Xiaobei Road (the original southern portion of Dengfeng Road) and the vicinity of its intersection with Huanshi Road eventually became popularly known as Xiaobei. As the middle section of the Northern Suburb, Xiaobei was originally an organic whole. The completion of Huanshi Road in the 1970s cut it in halves. The northern part became the Dengfeng area, whereas the southern part was absorbed into the city.

Following the economic reforms introduced in 1978, the Municipal Government began to realize the value of Xiaobei’s land and began developing it, at the expense of local farmers. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Municipal Government gradually expropriated most of the farmland of the area, on which they built various urban structures such as a power plant, an art museum, a youth activity center, a university, a Public Security Bureau, and a large amount of housing for workers (Wang 2008, 51, Complete Record 1997). The area was also influenced by the fervor of building shewai hotels, as was reflected in the opening of the Overseas Chinese Guest House on Lujing Road in the 1980s. According to my conversation with Aunt Hong’s husband, Dengfeng Village officials’ decision to sell most farmland to the government was not a popular one. Some of the proceedings took place under the table and a lot of land was simply sold at a very cheap rate in exchange for personal favors. The son of an official, for example, was charged with murder. To secure his release, the official gave up a huge tract to the government for almost nothing. Because of conflicts with Village officials, the husband told me, Villagers had organized multiple protests.

With most farmland gone, farmers had to find alternative ways to create income. In 1985, the Dengfeng Production Team, which was already developing land untaken by the
state, was disbanded and replaced by the Dengfeng Village Committee (Wang 2008, 78). While continuing to run the livestock farm, the Village also established various factories and enterprises such as the Baiyun Hardware Factory (Complete Record 1997, 504). The Villagers also demonstrated their business acumen by opening hotels such as Baohan Hotel, and Dengfeng Hotel, both of which was adapted into a major African market in mid-2000s. However, according to Wang Jianqing, a scholar who was involved in Dengfeng’s redevelopment and wrote a dissertation on the topic, by the 1990s, many Village enterprises suffered steep losses due to the lack of talent and managerial skills. Their meat factory, for example, lost close to a million yuan (Wang 2008, 64). As a result, property rental, which requires little education and skills, gradually became the major source of income for the Villagers. This transition was successful because it coincided with the huge influx of migrant workers drawn by the city’s urban developments. In just ten years, the migrant population in the Dengfeng area grew from 3,784 in 1991 to 31,081 in 2000. This lucrative rental market was further stoked after 2000 by the incoming Africans, who drove up rental costs. The area could absorb so many people thanks to all the rental houses Villagers built, most of which were four- to five-story buildings with each floor divided into four or five rooms. The rooms are usually small, between three to five square meters, and have little amenities. The 1990s saw a construction frenzy that packed in hundreds of buildings in a quarter square kilometer. In the photographs that Mr. Shi took after he finished the construction of his house in the early 1980s, the Dengfeng area was still mostly farmland. According to Mr. Shi, Villagers thought he was building a department store there because his four-story house was taller than most buildings in the area. By 2000, Dengfeng has become a typical
urban village with buildings so close to each other that in many cases only a line of sky was left between them.

Dengfeng Village. The low- to mid-rise structures in the middle are the tenement houses. The nine-floor building on the bottom right is Dengfeng Hotel, located at the southern entrance of Baohan Zhijie. Photo taken by author in September 2017 at the rooftop of Tianxiu Building.

Outside of Dengfeng, to the south of Huanshi Road, urbanization was equally palpable as a result of the economic reforms. Old houses on both sides of Xiaobei Road were all demolished and high-rise residential and commercial buildings were erected (Complete Record 1997, 99). Some of these buildings such as Tianxiu Mansion became business hubs and community centers for African traders in the 2000s. A three-building complex, each with thirty plus floors, Tianxiu was built with Hong Kong capital in 1993 and is one of the most well-known African markets in the city. The initial intention was to appeal to rich Hong Kongers and investors. According to a news report, Tianxiu’s
apartment sold at thirteen thousand yuan per square meter, creating a new record in the city’s residential real estate (Jing 2006). Today, the complex is occupied by African traders and businesses catering them. While the first four floors of Block B is a shopping mall targeting specifically Africans, the rest of the complex houses many offices operated by more established African traders. In fact, perhaps due to the exorbitant prices, the initial overall sales of Tianxiu properties were not ideal. According to a 2007 news report, many apartments and offices were vacant prior to the advent of African traders (Chen et. al 2007). This was not that surprising because the competition of land development between large land owners in the 1990s led to a high vacancy rate nationwide (Hsing 2012, 42). Aside from Tianxiu, Taoci Mansion and Xiushan Tower, also built in the 1990s, were equally known for their African businesses. The former was even renamed Sino-African Trading Mall before it was shut down in 2011, which we will discuss more in detail in Chapter 7. As we shall see, these buildings are a major reason why the African community could thrive, but they were not the only ones that benefited from the export business that Africans brought.

Beginning in 2000, small and informal businesses targeting African customers moved into Dengfeng. While more established ones rented shops from Villagers whose houses were located alongside Baohan Zhijie, hawkers and peddlers simply used the street. In 2005, the president of Yueyang Trading Mall invested twenty million yuan Dengfeng Hotel, remodeling the first two floors into an export market (Wang 2008, 162-163). When it reopened in 2006, many shop owners began to move in and the plaza in front of the Mall was packed with small vendors. A year later, trying to replicate Dengfeng Hotel’s success, Baohan Hotel also turned its first two floors into Jinshanxiang Trading
Mall. The two combine to house more than 500 stores (Wang 2008, 118). Before a major clean-up in 2014, Baohan Zhijie was so busy that it was hard to walk past without bumping into others.

Grassroots as the formation of this community may seem, the state in fact played an encouraging role in its inception. At the macro level, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation aiming at boosting mutual trade was inaugurated in 2000. In July 2004, during his trip to China, Malian president Amadou Toumani Touré paid a visit to Tianxiu Mansion. Although the visit was not official, the fact that official news media (“How Strange!” 2005) publicized it in a friendly tone afterwards implies that the state considered the formation of an African community in Xiaobei a positive development. In 2005, Kenya Airways chose Guangzhou as its first hub in China and one of its sales office is located on Tongxin Road of the Dengfeng area. The next year, Kenya’s ambassador to China went to Guangzhou to celebrate the first anniversary (“First Anniversary” 2006). At the local level, in the early 2000s, the Municipal Government designated Xiaobei as the Sino-Africa Trade Zone in order to fill up the vacant office and commercial buildings in the area. In daily life, under the urgings of the Municipal Government, some of the aforementioned office buildings collaborated with Public Security and Exit and Entry Department, and established foreigner assistance teams to help Africans solve problems in business and life. These teams encouraged building staff to study English and fixed mundane problems such as power outage (Wang 2006). All these inevitably sent a welcoming signal to Africans, encouraging more to come. As we can see, the formation of the Xiaobei African community was in fact the result of both state, business, and grassroots efforts.
In many ways, Xiaobei today shares many similarities with the once west side of the Northern Suburb. Both are transitional areas with urban villages, both are now known for their African communities, and both are home to many wholesale markets that serve these communities. But during my research, I discovered that Xiaobei is under a lot more policing and regulatory pressure. This is likely due to the fact that Xiaobei is adjacent to the Huanshidong CBD, which puts its lower class characteristics in sharp contrast. The pro-growth Guangzhou Government increasingly considered Xiaobei at odd with the modern image it tries to construct and Dengfeng Village, in particular, is the dead weight that is dragging Xiaobei down which could have been upgraded to serve the Huanshidong CBD. Although the Village has undergone complete urbanization, the government has always considered it a semi-rural space because of its origin as well as the rural migrants living there. The advent of Africans simply reinforces this impression because of their connection to poverty in popular culture. In describing Dengfeng Village, a 2009 report says, “Unlike other urban villages, there is no clan house in Dengfeng, but from there you can see twenty-plus-floor high-rises. Compared to the village houses, they look so ‘inharmornious’” (“Dengfeng Village” 2009). It then moves to describe the Africans: “because Africans living in Dengfeng are mostly from countries speaking minority languages, their economic conditions are not great.” The author in fact has a very sympathetic view of the rural migrants and Africans living there, but at the same time, they seem to see redevelopment as inevitable in an era of aggressive urban development. The government certainly agrees, but to redevelop Dengfeng is no easy task.
Precarious Stability

In 2009, to get ready for the 2010 Asian Games, the Municipal Government launched the “Three Old” Redevelopment Campaign. One of the “old” was urban villages. In July, the Municipal Government announced a plan to completely redevelop all six urban villages within the city core (“Guangzhou Six Largest” 2009). Considering the magnitude of the project, it was clear that the sports event was just a pretext from the get go. Sonia Schoon and Uwe Altrock (2015) in their study of the campaign also argue that instead of a last minute preparation for the Asian Games, it signaled a long term redevelopment project (227). The goal was to regain control of underdeveloped urban land so as to better utilize it. However, as is made clear simply by the facts that Dengfeng Village is still standing today and no imminent redevelopment is within sight, the government’s plan has not materialized. This inaction can be attributed to a number of reasons, but first and foremost, the government did not seem to have agreed on the approach.

The Yuexiu District Government began surveying Dengfeng’s vicinity in preparation for demolition and relocation in 2008 (Zhou & Wu, 2008). The plan was to replicate the successful model of Liede, another urban village that was completely redeveloped into luxury condominium complexes with investments from major developers such as R&F Properties, KWG Property Holdings Limited, and Sun Hung Kai Properties, all of which are listed in the Hong Kong Stock Exchange (Liang & Yang, 2013). The developer the government chose for the Dengfeng project was Hopson Development, one of the largest in Guangzhou. The government’s rationale behind this kind of cooperation was simple: the project would require little government input and it was the developers which were responsible for relocation. The public had high hopes for this project. According to a
2009 *Yangcheng Evening News* report, My Top Home, a popular local real estate agency, speculated that after redevelopment, the Dengfeng area would become the city’s most highly demanded luxury housing cluster, thanks to its proximity to Baiyun Mountain and Luhu Lake (Wu 2009). However, around the same time, the public was informed of a somewhat different plan for Dengfeng. An *Information Times* report said that the Yuexiu District Government planned to use three to five years to turn Dengfeng Village into a “leisure back garden (*youxian houhuayuan* 悠闲后花园)” for Huanshidong (Zhang 2010). Unlike the first plan which considered the park and the lake as a resource that justified construction of high density luxury high-rise condos, this plan saw the green space as a reason for preventing overdevelopment. Instead, it aimed to upgrade businesses and industries of the area, which meant on the one hand introducing modern commercial services to match those in Huanshidong, and on the other hand creating a conducive environment for high-end industries, replacing low-end ones. In other words, this “leisure back garden” was simply a convoluted way of describing gentrification.

Grand as both plans sound, they clearly did not bode well for rural migrants and Africans. In either case, neither group will be able to afford to use such a space. Fortunately, these plans had stayed plans and were never carried out. After the Asian Games, as the zeal of redevelopment subsided, there was even less incentive to follow through.

In 2012, an article on *Leju.com*, a popular housing website in China, reassesses the failure of the redevelopment (Wei 2012). The reason for the failure, according to the article, was the height restrictions on buildings in the area. Because the area was within the Baiyun Mountain Scenic District, buildings could not be above fifteen floors. This argument, however, is hard to substantiate because there are quite a few buildings of over
twenty floors presently located even closer to the Baiyun Mountain and Luhu Lake. But this does suggest that the conflicts between the two directions, one more aggressive and the other less so, perhaps did eventually paralyze any redevelopment. This chaos and lack of coordination in planning was exposed by another project that also include Dengfeng.

Before the Asian Games, Mr. Shi and other villagers received notice of demolition. The government, however, did not take any follow-up action. The Villagers were not informed of any concrete plans, and negotiation never took place. Instead, what the government did do was some cosmetic touch-up, i.e. putting new tiles on the façades of buildings near the entrance of Baohan Zhijie so that they appeared newer for visitors coming for the event. This beautification job was part of “Put On New Clothes and Hats”, a window dressing project before the Asian Games. The superficiality of this project was glaring. Only those that were deemed close enough to the entrance to affect the image of the neighborhood were worked on. Mr. Shi and his neighbor, for example, had new tiles, but all houses further down the street did not. Also only façades exposed to the public eyes benefited, and nothing was done about the interior to actually improve residents’ lives. So understandably, Mr. Shi had nothing but disgust for this project. More importantly, the project raises a key question. If the government planned to demolish these buildings initially, why would they still include them in the beautification project? Poor coordination within the government was likely to blame, but there were other reasons as well.

Compared to some other urban villages, Dengfeng had relatively little to offer for real estate developer. As all farmland was already taken, all that is left is a small and hyper dense residential area. Considering all Villagers prefer being compensated with
properties at the original location instead of being relocated, the redeveloped housing complexes would have much fewer available apartments to sell to the public, resulting in a reduced profit. In other large urban villages such as Liede, the land to be redeveloped was large enough to house highly profitable projects such as office buildings and shopping malls after compensating the villagers. Besides, located in Tianhe, Guangzhou’s new core and CBD that was still rapidly developing, Liede’s property value had a lot of room for increase. On the other hand, as part of the old core, the new Dengfeng will be subject to a ceiling imposed by property prices of the surrounding areas.

Besides, villagers’ consent, usually the biggest obstacle in a redevelopment project, is hard to obtain because of both the dualist land ownership system and villagers’ unitedness, which strengthen urban villages’ political agency and hence bargaining power. According to Mr. Shi, Dengfeng Village were not as close knit a community as other urban villagers like Sanyuanli and Liede which evolved from several extended families. In his words, “Dengfeng was simply a settlement of vagabonds outside of the city”. This might be true and can potentially be exploitable by developers, but the Village authority, which I will discuss more in detail in Chapter 4, still enjoys wide support and in many ways acts as a governing body in the Village. They are not going to give developers any discount. The Municipal Government learned how difficult it was to obtain consent through the Liede redevelopment which is widely hailed by news media and scholars as a successful model. Because the project had to obtain approval from almost every single villager, it took the government and developers years to complete the negotiation process. Having learnt its lesson, the Municipal Government issued a decree
in 2009 which stipulated that redevelopment projects could proceed if consent of 80 per cent of village collective members could be obtained (“Suggestions on Speeding Up” 2009). Perhaps due to some backlash, in 2012, a revision was added which raised the percentage to 90 (“Additional Suggestions” 2012). Then four years later, it was again dropped back down to 80 (“Villager Consent Percentage” 2016). As can be surmised from this switching back and forth, the percentage is a highly contentious issue because villagers’ consent directly impacts whether a redevelopment project could happen or not. Indeed, the Liede project might have been an extreme case because of the requirement of unanimous consent, but there is no reason to expect Dengfeng would be a lot easier, especially when we consider Dengfeng’s history of public protests (see Chapter 4).

Under such conditions, it is thus logical to assume that the government has a harder time wooing developers to take on this project. In 2015, the Yuexiu District Government announced a reboot of the Dengfeng redevelopment plan, but so far, nothing has taken place. In 2017, a personal friend of mine who works for R&F Properties told me their company was in discussion with the government about Dengfeng’s redevelopment, but again nothing concrete was known yet. Mr. Shi, now in his late seventies, was still holding off renovation of his house. It is hard to call it a success for the Villagers. It is not so much an inspiring story of villagers using their power to stave off redevelopment than one where the government lacks commitment and sincerity to improve housing for the urban poor. As I described at the beginning of this chapter, Mr. Shi’s house was in disrepair, but compared with many others, his was a lot better. Most of those I talked to in fact hoped for redevelopment, although they were worried about what compensation they could receive. But for rural migrants and Africans, who have almost no political power,
maintaining the status quo is indeed toward their benefit because they won’t receive any compensation if a redevelopment really happens. They will end up having to find other alternatives, which is not easy under the inflating property prices of Guangzhou.

As we can see, the formation of the Xiaobei African community is deeply imbedded in Guangzhou’s urbanization, especially the rapid transformation of the Northern Suburb. This process, however, is happening so fast that it is now threatening to destroy the community, which, thanks to the dual land ownership system, is hanging on by a thread. Perhaps anticipating the difficulty of redevelopment, the Municipal Government has been carrying out a more moderate clean-up since 2007. In the next chapter, we will learn how this sanfei discourse was constructed by the news media and how it lends itself toward the Municipal Government’s urban agenda.
Chapter 2 The Media Construction of Sanfei

Nowadays, as night falls, taking a stroll in the vicinity of Huanshidong and areas around Xiushan Building, Xiaobei Road, Taojin Road, and Garden Hotel, under the influences of neon lights and the unique smell of fragrance mixed in the air, it felt as if one was walking on the streets of some African city. Because of this, people nickname the area New York’s “Brooklyn” (Ke & Du, 2007).

In December 2007, Guangzhou Daily published an article titled “The Complete Record of the Guangzhou Black ‘Tribe’ (Guangzhou heiren ‘buluo’ quanjilu 广州黑人’部落’全纪录, hereafter as the ‘Black Tribe’ report, see Ke & Du 2007)”, which features some expose-style writing and ethnographic research. It covers a wide range of topics including who these Africans are, where they live in Guangzhou, how they make a living, and what potential social problems they bring. It is not difficult to understand why this report would fascinate those who have little knowledge about Africans in Guangzhou. With sensational details like the quote at the beginning, the authors walk you through the urban space these Africans occupy. To make its story more credible, the journalists interviewed Huang Shiding, the Director of the Institute of Urban Management Studies of the Guangzhou Academy of Social Science (GASS), who provides insights based on his research. According to Huang, Africans in Guangzhou belong to three socio-economic class. At the top are traders, some of whom have established offices in the city. In the middle are those employed by these traders, and at the bottom is a large number of laborers who come from absolute poverty (chipin 赤贫). At times it seems the report warns its readers that it is this last group that they should be worried about because most of these poverty stricken people are sanfei, and they bring crimes, but this is not always
clear. When Huang states that “The number of Africans is growing by thirty to forty percent each year…while criminal cases of drug dealing and robberies are also rapidly increasing, he seems to suggest that Africans as a whole, regardless of their socio-economic class, are a problem.

As we can see, the report skillfully links race, space, class, and the notion of sanfei together. According to Li, Lyons, and Brown (2012), this report constituted the first domino, which forced the government to adopt a series of actions that eventually led to the 2009 street protest by the Africans. However, as I will show, the report was not the first of its kind and the media buildup to it should not be ignored. Considering the Municipal Government’s intimacy with local news media, it is possible that it was using reports like this as a media campaign to push forward its agenda. In other words, the government might in fact have been more proactive than responsive. This chapter examines specifically the role of local news media in constructing the sanfei discourse, which has become a very versatile political tool. It has lent itself to various government projects such as immigration reforms (Lan 2015), increased policing (Li et al 2012), and street clean-ups. For this research, I will focus on the urban aspect of this discourse, which seems to be especially evident in Guangzhou news media, and investigate how it generates public support for the Municipal Government’s efforts to clean up urban-rural transitional areas such as Xiaobei, Guangyuanxi, and Sanyuanli by tapping into anti-black sentiments. Local news reports about sanfei, as I will show, draw from the same repertoire used to describe internal migrant workers, who had been residing in those areas years before the arrival of Africans. The Municipal Government has long been
redeveloping and cleaning up those areas, and the injection of the sanfei discourse serves to create more momentum.

I will be examining reports of popular local newspapers in Guangzhou such as *Guangzhou Daily, New Express*, and *Southern Metropolis Daily*, especially those published between 2007 and 2010 including the “Black Tribe” report. Although they are local publications, they enjoy a nationwide readership because they are often reposted online by major news websites, which include state-run ones such as www.xinhuanet.com, www.people.com.cn and www.chinanews.com, and more popular ones such as www.163.com, www.sina.com.cn, and www.sohu.com. I choose to focus on 2007 and 2010 for several reasons. First, these were the forming years of the discourse when it became aligned with blackness. Also this period was the final phase of Guangzhou’s preparation for the 2010 Asian Games. Pressure to clean up was particularly strong, and so were propaganda efforts. In 2009, however, the Africans took to the street as a response to the government’s heavy handed approach, taking the government by surprise. After the incident, local news media began to somewhat tone down their villainization of Africans. More and more reports were published featuring in-depth interviews with Africans who showed their perspectives. By then, however, the image of Africans as sanfei has been etched in people’s minds. Moreover, as we will learn in subsequent chapters, the Municipal Government continues to invoke this image in its urban projects. Apart from news reports, I will also look at other online sources such as *Baidu Tieba, Tianya*, and *Tiexue Community*, three of the most popular online forums, to gauge the influence of the sanfei discourse on the public.
Several scholars have already written about Chinese perception of blacks in recent years (Saavedra 2009, Shen 2009, Cheng 2011, Hood 2013, Frazier and Zhang 2014, Lan 2017). Martha Saavedra and Johanna Hood, for example, despite working with different primary sources, both examine media representations of Africans. They arrive at the same conclusion that blacks are portrayed as primitive, impoverished, and disease ridden, i.e. antitheses to the civilized and modern image that Chinese want themselves to be recognized as. But more scholars examine online discussions of race on the forums and discussion boards, including the ones mentioned earlier. For example, Yinhong Cheng identifies the same lines of thoughts in contemporary online discussions of Africans and the anti-black racism expressed during the campus protests in the 1980s. Both, he argues, stems from deep-seated ethnocentrism and social Darwinism that have survived to this day and inform discussion of various political topics such as China’s rivalry with Taiwan. Frazier and Zhang examine Lou Jing, a half black half Chinese girl’s rise to fame and its fallout on the internet. They contend that online forums become a discursive site where racial knowledge is being produced, contested, and disseminated under the context of globalization and diversifying Chinese society. Similarly, Shanshan Lan also looks at the role of online forums as venues where different racial ideologies compete. But she argues that they are intertwined with other popular discourses such as xenophobia, Han ethnic chauvinism and criticisms of state immigration policies, which may not be entirely racially motivated. Unlike other scholars, Simon Shen discusses in greater detail the context under which certain racial discourses became popular. He attributes these discussions to China’s engagement with Africa, especially in energy extraction and market development. Overall, this scholarship has not paid enough attention to the state’s
control over media, which indirectly implies that official media have little influence over popular opinions on online forums. Besides, more contextualization is still needed. Simply explaining the popular belief that most Africans are illegal immigrants by criticizing stereotypes that blacks are lazy and come to China to take advantage of Chinese welfare or oversimplifying it as xenophobia glosses over the complex urban politics behind. This chapter thus takes the first step towards a more nuanced understanding of racial discourses in China.

To this end, this chapter first examines the state’s control over media and shows that it is problematic to assume that public opinions in the virtual space is completely free from state oversight. After that, I will deconstruct the term “sanfei” by investigating its roots and how it became aligned with blackness. Then I will move on to explain how this discourse as discussed in news reports lends itself to urban upgrade projects. First news reports about sanfei help generate public concerns, creating a myth that Guangzhou is being invaded by Africans. Second, these reports racialize and exoticize certain urban spaces, especially Xiaobei, implying they are what Guangzhou would become if actions are not taken.

**News Media in China**

Unlike news media in the West, those in China are not independent of the oversight and censorship from the state and the Communist Party. In other words, the categorization of official and unofficial news media is meaningless since, not only news, all media productions, advertisements, TV shows, textbooks, religious materials, and
sports, have to be approved by the government’s extensive propaganda system before publishing. According to the political scientist Anne-Marie Brady, who is specialized in China’s leadership and has a detailed discussion of the propaganda system in China, even the notion of the media as the “Fourth Estate” or the “tool of the public” are strictly forbidden by the Central Propaganda Department (Brady 2010, 58).

Despite its secrecy, the history of China’s propaganda system and how it functions are rendered much clearer thanks to Brady’s insightful research. According to Brady, after the 1989 Tiananmen demonstrations, the Chinese government realized old school propaganda during Mao’s years such as mass campaigns and media blackout no longer worked. This was due in part to the state’s economic reforms and de-collectivization, which resulted in more and more people employed in the private sectors. Propaganda and thought work (sixiang gongzuo, 思想工作) for propaganda theorists and policy makers had become a blind spot in the 1990s (Brady 2010, 67). It was to Western public relation theories that they turned for help, and in the 1990s, works by Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman all had a huge influence on China’s journalism schools. Although China had long absorbed Western propaganda methods through the Soviet Union, Chomsky’s and Herman’s works which deal with mass persuasion under a privatized system upgraded China’s propaganda system. These theories have taught Chinese policy makers how to manage and control information and to guide public opinions.

One thing, however, did not change. The Chinese government and its propaganda system to this day continue to maintain a tight grip over its news media, which play a huge role in determining what information people receive and how people perceive it. The propaganda system consists of a network of bureaucracies and at the top is a senior
member of the Politburo Standing Committee, the top leadership of China. But the General Secretary of the Communist Party, who is usually also the president of the country also has strong influence over propaganda and thought work. Below these are the Propaganda and Thought Work Leading Group and the Party’s Central Committee Secretariat, which oversees the Central Propaganda Department (CPD), which “has a guiding role over the entire propaganda system” (Brady 2010, 10). One of the most important duties of the CPD since its re-establishment in 1977 is to:

*Organize and monitor the news media, broadcasting, television, culture, art, publishing, and so on to see that they correctly and in a timely fashion promote the CCP’s current line, guiding principles and policies. Assist the Party Central in checking up on all important editorials, news (including photos and film coverage), culture, art, and so on on which need to receive the examination and approval of the Party Central* (Brady 2010, 15).

This propaganda system also has extensive control at the local level. There are provincial, city and district branches of the Propaganda and Thought Work Leading Group. Propaganda cadres and offices are established at all levels of Party committees and state bureaucracies. Businesses are required to have such personnel and even foreign private enterprises are not exempted. All associations and institutions including the academic ones such as Academies of Social Science at all levels, from which many news reports draw their data, are under direct leadership of their propaganda departments. The reach of the propaganda system is too extensive to discuss in detail here and suffice it to say that it attempts to cover every source of information accessible to the public.

Besides, as media technology develops, the propaganda system also keep broadening its scope. Whereas mainstream media that the CPD referred to in the past only included Party-controlled outlets such as *People’s Daily*, CCTV and China National Radio, since
2004, CPD “has redefined the mainstream media as the leading Party papers, CCTV, China National Radio, and so on, as well as the newspapers people actually like to read, including *Beijing Daily*, *Xin Jing Bao* (Beijing News), popular websites such as Sina.com, and text messaging” [emphasis in the original] (Brady 2010, 74-75). So as we can see, unofficial and web based news media are not outside the watch of CPD, although they are not directly run by the state.

Browsing through any given day’s major newspapers, one can get a sense of CPD’s power. Doug Young, a former chief correspondent at Reuters and currently an associate professor of journalism at Fudan University in Shanghai, observes that front pages of all established newspapers are very similar with identical top stories, which are usually about the latest activities of top officials (Young 2013, 7). This is because all of these stories are directly taken from the official Xinhua News, the largest state-owned news agency in China. Also many of these stories are written by writing teams working for the government using certain coded names, trying to maintain an illusion of neutrality (Tsai and Kao 2013, 395). This again shows the non-existence of completely unofficial news media. Although commercial profits may sometimes motivate local publications to explore stories that CPD considers harmful to social stability, they do so at the risk of being completely shut down, and there have been such cases when newspapers published content deemed inappropriate by the state (Young 2013, 32). In other words, it would be a mistake to think of any source of information as completely independent. Rather, they are all, to different extents, kept in line with official guidelines and have as their goal guiding public opinions.
Admittedly, this power is never complete and always subject to challenges, especially in the age of internet. For example, it is very common for Chinese and foreigners to use Virtual Private Network (VPN) to bypass China’s firewall and access censored information such as YouTube and Facebook. Also thanks to anonymity in the virtual space, forum users may post content that is deemed subversive by the state. However, the state is always on the lookout for such challenges. During my field trip in the summer of 2017, there was widespread rumors that the government was going to crack down on VPN. Many Africans depend on foreign services such as Gmail for their businesses and to keep in touch with families, so they understandably concerned.

**Roots**

Although *sanfei* is a relatively recently construct, it would be a mistake to assume that it is an entirely new statecraft. In fact it is likely that some Chinese would find the term rather familiar. In the 1990s, a decade into its economic reform and marketization, the Chinese government widely used the label *sanwu renyuan* to describe and discipline rural migrant workers in big cities. *Sanwu renyuan*, or the “three-withouts people (三无人员)”, refers to those without a job or source of income, a place to stay and an urban household registration or the proper documents to stay in the cities.9

*Sanwu*, as explained by many other scholars (Solinger 1999, Lei 2003, Jacka 2005, O’Donnell 2006, Kochhar 2010) was largely a product of the household registration, or the *hukou* (户口) system, a discriminatory policy implemented by the central government in the 1950s to arbitrarily divide the population into urban and rural households so as the
prevent rural residents from migrating to urban areas. Although urban residents were under strict control by their work units (danwei 单位), under socialist planned economy, they enjoyed permanent employment as well as a welfare package that includes benefits such as provision of housing, pension and free health care. Rural residents, on the other hand, had no such privileges, and as a result an urban hukou was highly coveted. However prior to the economic reforms, it was almost impossible for rural residents to get an urban hukou, without which one could not find employments in cities. This, however, changed upon Mao’s death.

As elaborated in the previous chapters, Deng, Mao’s successor, reopened China to foreign investments in the 1980s, which led to rapid urban developments, especially in South China. This created an insatiable demand for labor. To satisfy this demand, the government took several steps that indirectly encouraged the rural-urban migration and the hiring of migrant workers (Lei 2003, 617). For example, the central government dismantled the commune system in rural areas, gave greater freedom to private and foreigner enterprises in hiring, and replaced permanent employment with labor contracts, making it easier for employers to hire cheaper rural laborers. What’s more, urban hukou by the 1990s had become a commodity available for purchase (although it came with a hefty price tag). Consequently, large cities such as Guangzhou and Shenzhen witnessed huge influxes of rural migrants, more than the government had anticipated. However, lagging behind in administrative tool, the government continued to rely on the hukou system to handle the situation, which appeared increasingly obsolete.

In the 1990s, the hukou system, as argued by Tamara Jacka (2005) who spent years studying migrant women in Beijing, rather than slowly being phased out, continued to
affect migrants in cities. For migrant workers, not having an urban *hukou* means that they could never really settle down in cities. Most migrant workers were hired as temporary workers in, for example, construction and their legal status in the city would end as soon as their work was finished. Without access to public housing that urban residents enjoyed, they concentrated in rental houses of urban villages. But even so, they had to obtain a lot of paperwork, go through different institutions, and pay a large amount of fees (Jacka 2005, 91-97). Many, seeing little in return, simply ignored the regulations, worked in informal sectors, and stayed in cities without documentation. These were the group that was labeled *sanwu*, although the term carried over to signify all migrant workers.

At the meantime news media began widely reporting on the issue of rural-urban migration. Li Zhang states that since the mid-1980s, both official and popular media had widely reported on migrants in Beijing, portraying their community as dirty and chaotic and linking them with crime, drugs and prostitution (Zhang 2001, 138 - 139). Labels like *sanwu* and *Liudong renkou* (floating population 流动人口) were products of this reportage. This practice of naming migrant workers and defining their differences, which continues to this day, is discussed by Youqin Huang and Chengdong Yi (2015). Huang and Yi study the “rat tribe” in Beijing, a derogatory label popularly used to describe migrant workers currently living basements of high-rise apartment buildings. By labeling migrants, they contend, such news reports abnormalize migrant workers and lend themselves to urban development plans which drive migrants further and further away from city centers.
With the use of derogatory labels, the state was able to deflect attention away from the structural forces that caused great social changes. For urban residents, they were seeing privileges tied to their hukou dwindle as the state continued to shed its social responsibilities and job security vanish as more and more were laid off. Labels such as sanwu, which portrays migrants as possessing nothing and coming to cities in search of urban privileges, made the connection for the public that it was the migrants who took away what they used to have. Moreover, such labels also tapped into the urban residents’ deep-seated sense of superiority over the rural population as they also imply rural crudeness. For example, it was not uncommon to see news media ridicule migrants for their lack of a sense of fashion, oblivion of the city’s local culture, and their thrifty consuming habits, invoking the sense of class distinction that urban Chinese held onto (Lei2003). So when Africans, who were already stigmatized globally in similar ways, arrived the late 1990s and early 2000s and joined migrant workers in urban villages, the media had an established local model to follow. In at least one case the journalist refers to sanfei Africans as sanwu (“Visiting Guangzhou” 2011). This explains why the ways the news media describe the Africans closely resemble those they did migrant workers. And the term sanfei inherited almost all the negative connotations sanwu implies: working class, undocumented, tied to criminal activities, impoverished, and uncivilized or sophisticated. All these connotations are embodied by transitional areas, especially urban villages. It was thus not surprising such news reports and the term sanwu struck a chord with the urbanites who would throw their support behind any development projects.

The Alignment of Sanfei with Blackness
“Fei” in Chinese means “illegal(ly)”, so depending on what it describes, the term *sanfei* can mean various illegal activities. Indeed, it has been, and still is, used to describe illegally operated commercial vehicles, unsanctioned religious activities, and illegal land use. However, it is predominantly used to refer to *sanfei* foreigners. The phrase “*sanfei* foreigners” first appeared in around 2004, when several news pieces reported on crackdowns in different cities on foreigners working illegally and committing crimes. At the time it seems that these reports were not pointing at any specific group. For example, one report on [www.chinanews.com](http://www.chinanews.com) publicizes the result of a crackdown organized by the Guangdong Provincial Public Security Department where 115 people were arrested, but it did not specify their nationality (Ke & Ou 2004). According to a separate report from the same source, however, the spokesperson of the Ministry of Public Security blamed the problem of *sanfei* on nationals of neighboring countries who entered China illegally and gave an example of Vietnamese women involved in marriage scams (Zhu 2004).

Meanwhile a piece from Changsha Evening News reported that many foreigners were illegally employed by various institutions in the city (Deng & Xiang, 2004). The report was more concerned about foreigners taking jobs from Chinese than potential criminal activities. Considering very few blacks were able to find employment in China, it was not likely that those were in fact blacks. In July 2006, the *International Herald Leader*, a newspaper under the official Xinhua News Agency, carried an alarming report about the increasing number of foreigners in major Chinese cities (Zhao, Yan 2006). According to the report, some of these foreigners are not only found in “high class” office buildings, but also courthouses and jails, which, the author claims, is a new phenomenon in the process of China’s urban upgrade and internationalization. Unlike the previous three
reports, this one recounts specific cases. In one of the cases discussed, a South African and a Tanzanian were involved in a money scam and the latter was arrested and sentenced to seven years and fined 20,000 yuan. Although one gets the impression that sanfèi mostly come from Third World countries, overall, the report’s racial implication is not strong. It also discusses a case of robbery committed by a group from Afghanistan and Iran and uses the term Yangren (ocean people, 洋人), which originates in the 19th century when China was invaded by European imperial powers and is usually associated with white Westerners, to describe the influx of foreigners. However, it is important to point out that these early reports were not by Guangzhou news media. In fact, Beijing run news sources continue to maintain a relatively racially neutral tone in reports about sanfèi. The news report about Beijing’s Hundred Day Anti-Sanfèi Operation launched in 2012, featuring a photo of a white Westerner, does not mention Africans at all (Zhao, Yanhong 2012).

But even in Guangzhou, Africans are not always represented in a negative light. In 2003, the Southern Metropolis Daily carried a piece about the novel phenomenon of Africans marrying Chinese (“Black Young Men” 2003). Although its focus on assimilation, which is reflected in the title “Black Young Men Marrying into Guangzhou Beauties’ Family”, makes it a suspect of ethnocentrism, its tone is so celebratory that it is almost unrecognizable to today’s reader. The report introduces four Africans living in Guangzhou, two of them married with Chinese wives. One of the two, Peter, came from a well-off family in Nigeria that could easily provide for him. As an enterprising young man, he nonetheless chose to go to Guangzhou to start his own business. Such a courageous adventure, the author informs us, was filled with obstacles and challenges.
Language barrier, lack of understanding of the city’s people and culture, both proved to be very costly to Peter. Receiving wrong and defected products was so common that he often had to inspect his order till early in the morning. It was this diligence and sense of responsibility that attracted his wife to him. Nigerian men, his wife told the author, were considerate and respectful of women. Not only did Peter share her housework, but he also consulted her opinions in life. Peter was such a fine young man that as soon as the wife’s parents met him they discarded their prejudices and happily accepted him. It may be overly romantic, but this narrative at the very least shows that the report was trying to foster an amicable relationship between Chinese and African. Even in a murder case reported in June 2006 by the same newspaper (Chen, Yan, & Xiang 2006), we do not see judgments on the entire African population or blacks, and there is no mentioning of a sanfei problem brought by the influx of Africans.

Beginning in 2007, however, local news report became much more focused in their reportage on the issue of sanfei. In February 2007, about ten months prior to the publication of the “Black Tribe” report discussed at the beginning, a local newspaper, New Express (xinkuaibao 新快报), published perhaps the first report that showed an obvious agenda of linking sanfei with Africans (Chen et al. 2007). The report begins by saying there are about ten thousand foreigners living in the province illegally. In 2005 alone, according to the report, authorities handled over eight thousand sanfei cases, three hundred of which resulted in deportation. 2007 also recorded a twenty percent increase in the number of sanfei arrested compared to the year before. After informing readers of the context, one of the journalists tells of an incident they witnessed. A few months ago, this journalist saw five black people being inspected by the police near Tianxiu Mansion in
Xiaobei, all of whom failed to provide their legal documents. A Chinese bystander told the journalist that inspections like this were frequent in the area because not everyone was documented. Before long, another African rushed to the scene with the documents of one of the Africans, who paid a fine of 50 yuan and was let go, while the remaining four were taken to the nearby local police station. Ten minute later, another African arrived and bailed three more out. This African told the journalist they were from Mali and engaged in export business in China. He insisted they were all legal. According to the report, the three that were released were very upset and spat on the wall of the police station. The journalist did not find out what happened to the remaining African because when they left he was still in detention. The report does not make any comment on the incident and instead, with a more inclusive tone, moves on to talk about African’s cultural differences. In fact, as we shall see in the next chapter, in official terms, the Africans involved in the incident were not sanfei. However, recounting it immediately after a discussion of the sanfei problem in the province, the authors help readers make the mental leap and align the label with Africans. Also the fact that it happened near Tianxiu Mansion ties Africans to Xiaobei.

Four months later, Guangzhou Daily published a report which not only doubled down on the alignment between sanfei and Africans (Chen, Wang & Liao, 2007), but also stressed their propensity to break laws and regulations. The authors offered an alarming example. The real danger brought by Africans, who tend to congregate in certain neighborhoods, according to the report, is their connection to drug dealing. It claims that a global drug trading network involving Africans inside and outside of China had been forming since the past year and the municipal police had already arrested three hundred
Africans related to drug smuggling. To drive home the point that Africans are law
breakers, the report features two images, the first one showing two Africans being
stopped by the police, and the second one three Africans sitting on the floor with their
hands cuffed behind their backs. According to the captions, the Africans in the first one
were being persuaded not to jaywalk, while those in the second were being arrested for
drug dealing. This very selective use of images would become a stock technique in many
Guangzhou news reports that deal with the issue of sanfei. A 2008 news report by
Guangzhou Daily, for example, devotes as much writing to Vietnamese illegal
immigrants as to a money scam committed by a Cameroonian, but it features two images
of Africans, one of which shows an man, eyes blurred, kneeling on one knee with his
hands behind his back (Wang et al. 2008). The caption reads: a foreign suspect arrested
for drug dealing. However, other than a brief mentioning, the report does not even
discuss drug dealing at all.

Compared to textual content, the use of images is more powerful as a political tool
because of the presumed objectivity of photography, which creates the illusion that it is
free of subjective intervention. The famed sociologist Pierre Bourdieu made the
following observation in the 1960s:

…it is commonly agreed that photography can be seen as the model of veracity and
objectivity: ‘Any work of art reflects the personality of its creator, says the
Encyclopedie Francaise. ‘The photographic plate does not interpret. It records. Its
precision and fidelity cannot be questioned.’ (Bourdieu 1990, 73)

In fact, rather than being an innate quality of photography, objectivity is imbrued by
social uses such as news coverage, which are assumed to be realistic from the get-go.
What’s more, the fact that photography is the result of careful and arbitrary selection of
the reality predisposes it to serve certain social functions. In the case of Guangzhou news media, the goal obviously is to cement the alignment between *sanfei*, African, and criminality.

As we can see, step by step, Guangzhou’s news media racializes the *sanfei* discourse. Viewed in this context, the “Black Tribe” report, which features sensational details and images, was just a continuation of this project, except that it had a much bigger impact. According Zhigang Li et al. (2012), the report quickly spread to the entire country through the internet. Indeed, the report was reposted in many popular forums such as Baidu Tieba and Tianya. By 2010, the term *sanfei* already had strong racial connotation, so much so that some people on the internet began referring to Africans as “*sanfei* blacks (*sanfei* heiren 三非黑人). At the meantime, the term also began to deviate from its original meaning which denoted immigration violation and take on a more discursive function for people to voice their racial concerns. For example, a blogger on sina.com with a penname “racial survival (*zhongzu cunwang* 种族存亡)”, wrote a blog in February 2010 titled “Possible Problems and Harms Caused by *Sanfei* Blacks in China (*Zhongguo Sanfei Heiren Keneng Yinfa De Wenti He Weihai* 中国三非黑人可能引发的问题和危害). In the blog, he lists eight problems that the influx of “*sanfei* blacks” may create, almost all of which have nothing to do with immigration violation. These include increased number of crimes, racial conflicts among Chinese, increased cases of AIDS, Chinese identity crisis, and marriage crisis among Chinese men due to Chinese women’s preference for black men’s big penises. According to the statistics posted next to the blog, almost a million people have visited and the content was reposted by others in Tianya and Baidu Tieba, engaging even more readers.
In fact it is quite easy to find similar contents on the Chinese internet. For instance there is a post titled “The Eight Harms of Sanfei Blacks (Sanfei Heiren de Bada Weihai 三非黑人的八大危害)” on Baidu Tieba (Bingyiailei, 2013); on Tiexue Community, a popular conservative forum, another post carries an alarming title Alert! The Harms of Huge Influx of Sanfei Blacks into China! (Jingti! Sanfei Heiren Daliang Yongru Zhongguo De Weihai 警惕! 三非黑人大量涌入中国的危害!)” (zhaocy1207, 2013).

Both feature similar content, which warns readers about diseases, increased crime rates, and threat to families and Chinese men’s masculinity. It is important to keep in mind that online content as this is not free from the government’s extensive censorship. So the fact that we can still access it today at the very least shows that such anti-black sentiments are not deemed a threat to the state or the Chinese society. But such sentiments are also expressed in spatial terms, as we see in the use of words such as “occupation”, “invasion”, and “collapse” in popular forums. Again, Guangzhou’s news media should take major responsibility for such rhetoric.

**Guangzhou Being Invaded**

The biggest legacy of the “Black Tribe” report, which makes many claims with no factual support, is without question the number of Africans it purports to be living in Guangzhou. According to Huang Shiding, the social scientist of GASS, statistics had the number of Africans living in Guangzhou for six months or more at 20,000. However, he claimed that this number was not accurate and some estimated the real number to be as high as 200,000. It is unclear what Huang’s source of information was, but all the people
I talked to, including a local police officer and several African community leaders, agreed that the number was greatly inflated. Another news report with clearer sources seem to corroborate their views (Luo & Liu, 2014). In fact, as recent as ten months earlier, a Beijing based newspaper still stated that there were about ten thousand illegal African immigrants in the entire Guangdong Province (“Africans in Guangzhou”, 2007). In any case, the number 200,000, as did the “Black Tribe” report, spread far and wide through the internet and took on a life of its own. 200,000 soon became 300, then 400, and 500. Even today, there are still people, upon hearing my research, asking me if there are 200,000 Africans in Guangzhou.

What helped rivet the number 200,000, or even more unrealistic ones, in people’s minds was news reports of the 2009 street protest in Guangyuanxi Road. The incident did not receive a media blackout, but most report contents were brief. A Nanfang Daily report, for example, only has a summary of the incident of fewer than two hundred words. It does not provide any in-depth interviews with the protesters in an attempt to understand their grievances. So not only does it omit key questions such as the way police enforce laws, but by simply stating that the trigger was an African injuring himself while fleeing from police inspection, it also implies that the assembly was unreasonable. Instead, the report devotes most of its content to profiling Africans in the city, and informs the public about how broadly they changed Xiaobei, which had nothing to with the protest. It is evident that the report aims to generate strong reactions from its readers, many of whom were perhaps not yet aware of the presence of Africans in Guangzhou.
The image of the left was used in news reports about the protest. It is a much closer perspective, which can lead readers to believe Africans completely occupied the street. The on the right (see TigerLikesRooster, 2009), which can be easily found on the internet, has a more distant view and shows a more complete view. In fact about half of the people present were Chinese onlookers. Also the crowd was far from taking the entire street. It is obvious that both photos were taken by the same photographer.
To add to the shocking effect, the news report features two photos, both seemingly showing Africans occupying an entire street. It is unclear if the photos were cropped, but they were almost certainly carefully selected. One can easily find other photos on the internet that were clearly taken by the same photographer. Some of these photos show a broader view of the scene, which offers a contrasting perspective. Indeed, there were a lot of Africans present on that day, but they were far from taking the entire street. This in fact should not be surprising because according to the same news report, there were only a hundred or so Africans taking part. Also it is likely that they were matched or even outnumbered by the onlooking Chinese. Yet, the two news photographs, along with the report, were widely reposted, both by online forums and nationwide news websites, while the less sensational ones were not used in news reports at all.

For Chinese readers, this incident, as mediated by the news report, gave them “hard proof” that there were indeed 200,000 Africans in Guangzhou. On Tianya Community, someone reposted the report and the photos, attracting more than two hundred replies (Huangshang, 2009). One says, “The number of blacks in Guangzhou have reached three hundred to four hundred thousand. This is just a conservative number! Next year it may reach 500,000!” The irrationality does not stop there. Another commenter claims that one tenth of the city’s population are black, an assertion that is outmatched in absurdity by yet another which declares that there are more than 30 million blacks in the entire Guangdong Province and the number is still growing thanks to illegal immigration. Evidently, facts no longer matter, that Guangzhou has hundreds of thousands of Africans has become a deeply entrenched belief, which, as we will see in the next section, can be exploited by news reports that justify clean-up actions.
Race, Class and Urban Space

While individuals on the internet could make baseless claims such as “Guangzhou has 500,000 Africans”, or “Guangzhou is overrun by Africans”, news reports usually convey such ideas in a much more subtle fashion. Some of the ways include discussing how widely Africans have spread and how much they have changed urban space. Mapping Africans’ congregations in the city (sometimes with visual illustrations) and describing their physical surroundings are common components in news reports, and they are not restricted to Guangzhou newspapers and carries beyond the 2009 protest. This fascination with the Africans communities is perhaps driven by both readers’ interests and needs to understand and manage them. For example, in the “Black Tribe” report, the authors claim that:

Currently, a huge “black ethnic community” is active in the ten kilometer radius around Hongqiao Residential Neighborhood. It reaches Yuanxiatian in the north, Jiangnanxi in the south, Zengcha Road in the west, and Wushan in the east.

This claim was meant to generate public concerns because the purported area almost covers the entire Guangzhou. Although Africans can indeed be found in many parts of the city, most are neighborhoods with individual Africans living among predominantly Chinese. But by claiming it is a single community, the authors make it sound more organized and threatening.

To make the threat more concrete, news reports tend to focus on how these foreigners are debasing Guangzhou modern urban space. This started from the very get-go even before the African community was stigmatized. In 2005, Dayoo, Guangzhou Daily’s
online version, published a piece about the then emerging African community (“How Strange!” 2005). In many ways it is very similar to the “Black Tribe” report. It informs readers about where these Africans are based in the city, which buildings they use, and how they live their lives and conduct their businesses. Overall it has a friendly tone and portrays Africans as hard working and assimilating people, but it has a title that clearly displays ethnocentrism: “How Strange! There is an “African Tribe” in Guangzhou Xiaobei Road.” The word “tribe” is sometimes used to describe all foreign communities, which confirms Shanshan Lan’s assessment that representation of Africans in China is intertwined with a broader sense of xenophobia and Han chauvinism (Lan 2017), but the combination of the word with “African” or “black” without question signifies backwardness and primitiveness due to entrenched misconceptions about Africa. At the time, the title was likely just an unsavory way to catch readers’ eyes, but it also suggests Africans were at odd with modernization in Guangzhou. If this was not at all obvious at the time, we can see this latent sense of superiority at full display in later reports.

As Guangzhou’s preparation for the Asian Games moved into full gear and clean-up actions intensified, Africans were increasingly represented as a threat to the modern city that Guangzhou is trying to become. Consider the following excerpt of a 2007 report discussed before:

If you ask people where (in the city) you can find most Africans, eight or nine out of ten will say ‘Xiaobei’. Within the one kilometer radius of the intersection of Huanshizhong Road and Xiaobei Road, there were hundreds of foreign enterprises. About 70% of the 600 or so offices in Tianxiu Mansion are rented by Africans or Middle Easterners. According to the (Chinese) shop owners in the vicinity, Africans usually care little formality, and love to form clusters. Such a personality has created a lot of trouble for the police officers of the nearby Liuhua Squad. For example, some fashionable African youths plug their ears up with headphones playing music.
walking and Hip Hop dancing at the same time. They usually ignore the footbridge and cross the street underneath.

On the day of the interview, we were observing from 4pm to 4:30pm. Within thirty minutes, some thirty pedestrians jaywalked, half of whom were Africans. A well-built African youth yelled at the traffic police, “I can’t read Chinese!” (Chen, Wang, Liao 2007)

The authors explicitly accuse Africans, especially African youths, of bringing chaos to Xiaobei, while they also inadvertently admit that locals are also violators since Africans only account for half. In fact many locals also find the bridge very inconvenient because it makes a simple cross more troublesome. Mr. Shi, my 70-year-old landlord, sometimes even hops over the fence that divides Huanshi Road to reach the other side instead of using the footbridge. Rather than troubles caused by Africans, this excerpt in fact tells us about the ongoing formation of an urban identity based on middle class life style. The modern urban space of Xiaobei, embodied by the multi-lane Huanshi Road, is supposed to serve the growing serious looking, suit wearing, and car driving corporate employees. Pedestrians should therefore make way for them and use the footbridge. The nonconforming and frivolous African youths hence constitute an antithesis to this space by disrupting its designed order, which as a product of modern urban planning ignores the working class basis and social fabric of the community.

This line of thinking based both on race and class is echoed in the “Black Tribe” report, whose authors are very explicit about China’s superiority. We learn very quickly that even the most established businessmen, those with offices in Tianxiu Mansion, are not the global elites who strike large trade deals with Chinese counterparts. Instead, they buy mostly second-hand appliances such as tape recorders and bulky television sets, the kind of “low-end (diduan 低端)” products that Chinese no longer use. This Third World
presence in the area, we are told, can drag down property prices. According to a former home owner of Tianxiu Mansion interviewed for the report, over ten years ago, the Mansion was one of the best residential buildings in the area. Only the wealthy could afford to buy a unit there. In just a few years, Africans “occupied” it and home owners “fled”. In other words, this interviewee suggested that the incoming Africans had ruined the building. In fact, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the entire area would not have flourished without all the business opportunities brought by the Africans.

At the meantime, for many journalists, the urban space occupied by Africans is also contributing to the problem of sanfei. It is almost a common practice for news reports about Africans to mention that urban villages provide safe havens for sanfei. The jaywalking report, for example, states that many foreigners in Sanyuanli scrimp on housing and live in the urban village, enabling Sanfei to blend in among them. But none of the reports is as sensational as the “Black Tribe” report. According to Huang Shiding, the reason why there could be as many as 200,000 Africans in Guangzhou is because of the many “invisible tribes (yinju qunluo 隱居群落)” in the city, by which he means urban villages. Many Africans, he says, throw away their passports immediately after they arrive and “disappear” into the city. What’s more, he continues, Africans are keen to bring their “brothers” over. Some absentee landlords in urban villages never check on their properties after renting out to Africans. Six months later, one tenant turns into seven or eight, all cramming into one apartment. These urban villages are also said to be rife with crimes. In one incident, the report recounts, a Malian resident of an urban village was killed and dismembered. The body parts were found inside his fridge.
In addition, the news also tells us urban villages are not the only culprit. Modern high-rises, at least those in Xiaobei, are also said to be actively harboring sanfei. In the 2007 New Express discussed before, for example, the journalists elaborate on the detective work they did. According to the report, one of the journalists posed as a friend of an African whose visa was about to expire. They went to Guolong Building, a thirty-story modern multi-function high-rise not far from Tianxiu, to inquire if they could help their friend rent an apartment. Despite being told this Africans had an expiring visa, the management staffer told them with certainty that that was not a problem because the friend could use the lease to renew their visa. There seemed to be little, if any, wrong doing in the staffer’s answer to the inquiry, but the report suggests that the staffer should have said no at the first place. To the journalists, this willingness to rent to a foreigner with an expiring visa already constitutes complicity.

Less than two months before the 2009 protest, Guangzhou Daily reported on an inspection in Xiaobei led by He Jing, the then Deputy Chief of the Guangzhou Municipal Public Security Bureau (Chen 2009). During the action, a Malian man was found living on the 29th floor of Tianxiu Mansion with a visitor visa, which, according to a police officer, did not allow him to engage in commercial activities, and an African woman on the 18th floor with a visa issued in Hainan Province, although she had never been there. The report does not specify if there was any infraction in either case, but by mentioning the two non-cases, the author inevitably implies that both, and by extension all, Africans were suspicious, and they thrive in Xiaobei thanks to buildings such as Tianxiu that accommodate them. The report then goes on to point out that there are a large number of foreign serving businesses in the vicinity of Huanshi Road and some of them are not well
regulated and illegal hiring is not uncommon. So, like all the news reports discussed so far, this one is also a call on the government to act: more thorough cleanups, heavier policing, and restriction on the incoming of Africans.

Act the government did. According to Li et al. (2012), the publication of the “Black Tribe” report and its fallout led the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) – the largest political advisory body in China consisting of representatives from various political parties, industrial and commercial associations and intellectual communities – to publish critical assessment of the Municipal Government. Li et al. believe the report forced the Municipal Government to implement a series of institutional and administrative changes including the creation of a computerized registration system for foreign renters (which I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 5). At the meantime, in July 2008, while Beijing was busying getting ready for the 2008 Summer Olympics, Guangzhou was also preparing for the 2008 Olympic Scientific Congress, which was scheduled to take place between August 1st and August 5th at the Baiyun International Convention Center (“Olympic Scientific Congress” 2007). As a final step of the preparation, the Municipal Public Security Bureau launched a clean-up named “Hurricane Special Operation” that included a clean-up of the vicinity of the venue. According to a news report by Information Times, a subsidiary newspaper under the Guangzhou Daily Group, the police inspected over 3,000 rental houses and 400 hotels in Baiyun District, and handled “a batch” of sanfei (Tong 2008). It was not clear if those were Africans, but Africans were known to be living in the urban villages of Baiyun, a relatively new administrative district. What’s more, the convention center is just about three miles from Sanyuanli and Guangyuanxi, so it was very likely that the operation had
affected many Africans who did businesses there, planting the seeds of grievance. This operation might have been the first one in the area, but in the following year residents there would find themselves dealing with the fact that police raids and inspections were becoming a new norm, as the Asian Games approached. The situation for the Africans must have become so dire that it drove them to take action, putting racial conflicts in China under global spotlights.

Post 2009

The 2009 protest received global attention. Western media such as the Guardian, Reuters, and Washington Post all reported on the incident, making the Chinese state realize the racial conflicts inside China are not domestic affairs. In the months and years that followed, news media, both local and national, published many reports reflecting on the protest. Indeed, changes are noticeable. We see more in-depth interviews with Africans, public calls for the media to be more responsible in their reporting, and even criticisms of locals of their racist attitude. At the meantime, we continue to see the same rhetoric and themes such as the immensity of their number, the protection they receive from urban villages, and the social problems they may bring.

On August 7th 2009, just two weeks after the protest, Southern People Weekly, a news magazine published by the Southern Newspaper Group which also publishes the Southern Metropolis Daily, carried a lengthy report titled “The Reality of African Businessmen in Guangzhou: Overwhelmed by Renewing Expiring Visa” (Wang, Weng, Li, 2009). Through the stories of several Africans, the report portrays these immigrants as
intrepid dream seekers. It gives readers a glimpse of some of the challenges they face such as competition, depreciating U.S. Dollars, and lack of support from their own government. But among them all, the visa issue is what is constantly haunting them, forcing them to always look over their shoulders because of the constant police inspection. The report does not elaborate on the issue, but it does point out that the duration of stay allowed by their visas is short and renewals are difficult. To a certain extent, the authors do present the Africans' lives from their perspective, but they do not necessarily challenge the conception that most Africans are illegal immigrants. This is because the authors do not raise the issue of police racial profiling and provide little information about China’s stringent immigration regulations.

Two weeks later, another Southern Newspaper Group publication, the *Southern Metropolis Weekly* published a six-piece series on Africans in Guangzhou. The tones of the reports range from liberal, relatively neutral to very conservative. Again, we see an attempt to understand the Africans and their difficulties, and some reports even imply that the arrival of Africans bring business opportunities to their communities, benefiting local Chinese. But we also see the familiar scapegoating of urban villages for providing hide-outs for illegal immigrants. Moreover, the final piece of the series (Bao, 2009), written by a professor of social science from Beijing, sounds a wary note and sketches out five potential problems brought by the incoming Africans. These include unacceptance by local Chinese who are “culturally shocked”, racial conflicts, sanfei problem, higher pressure on urban resources, especially urban space, and finally unique needs by the new immigrants.
So although all these news reports show improvements, they amount to little more than window dressing. It seems that they are more concerned about correcting local Chinese, who under the influence of previous news representations, show increasing animosity toward Africans. This is corroborated by news reports following the protest addressing anti-black prejudices. For example, in the six-piece series, there is a report surveying the public’s attitudes toward Africans (Bao, Hong, Luo 2009). The public, the author suggests, is actively shaping the image of the Africans. The report is very careful not to be overly critical, but does imply that it is wrong for some Chinese to treat black foreigners better than white counterparts and project individual behaviors onto the entire group. In an obvious attempt to appease the Chinese public, another in-depth report, published in the fortnightly news magazine *South Wind Window*, disputes previous media representations (Zhen, 2009). Through the mouths of different interviewees including Huang Shiding of GASS, the report points out that the media coverage of Africans tend to focus on negative incidents to attract viewers and misrepresent the group. Ironies abound in the report. Huang, for example, backtracked and agreed the number 200,000 was exaggeration. Although he acknowledged that the number came from a report featuring an interview with him, he denied ever giving that number. Also, *Guangzhou Daily*, which published the “Black Tribe” report that exemplified the biased media coverage criticized here, in fact belongs to the same publisher as *South Wind Window*. Finally, the report suggests strengthening communication between Chinese and Africans by organizing inclusive activities such as forums and friendly soccer matches.

Two years later, the *New Express* provides some sharper criticisms of local Chinese (Tan, Hou, Yao 2011). In response to a Nigerian’s grievance that he feels unwelcomed in
Guangzhou, a piece, titled “Black People Talk About Guangzhou; New Express Comments: If Tolerant, Please Don’t Call Them Black Devils”, asks its readers why a city like Guangzhou which prides itself on being tolerant and diverse could not accept another foreigner. Is it, the authors continue, because he is black? Then the report addresses the common conception that Africans tend to break laws by raising a very important question: have you thought about what makes Africans take their chances in a foreign country? This could have led to a productive conversation, but the answer offered, unfortunately, is far from satisfying. The authors blame it on the shortcomings in foreigner administration. Worse still, they state that as for sanfei, the government has to strike hard without mercy. After that, the report lists several stereotypes of Africans for readers to test if they are susceptible to racist attitudes. If so, they should correct themselves.

This whole discussion of racial prejudice by local Chinese is at best a misguided effort, and at worst helping the local state carry out its agenda by deflecting attention away from root causes of tension. It hardly addresses the racial profiling and the heavy handed approach adopted by the police, which was what triggered the protest at the first place. Also they continue to perpetuate the belief that sanfei is a black problem, while it has a lot to do with the way the police enforces laws. Moreover, these articles depoliticize the issue of sanfei entirely and make it about the irrational behaviors of the public. On the ground, the government and the police continued to launch clean-ups and document inspections happened on a daily basis. In June 2012, another spontaneous protest broke out following an African dying in the police station in Guangyuanxi. Once again, nothing really changed following the incident other than more window dressing. This is because
the real goal of the Municipal Government is to clean up all the transitional areas and push Africans farther away from the city core. Starting from late 2014, as we will learn in subsequent chapters, the Municipal Government began to put in serious efforts to clean up Xiaobei. In just a few months, the informal market in Dengfeng Village had largely disappeared. Then in July 2015, a so-called “largest clean-up” in twelve years was announced. The targets, according to a Yangcheng Evening News report, were urban villages, rural-urban transitional areas (Luo, 2015). Aside from the usual rhetoric of fighting crimes and improving sanitation, the author also describes rental houses of those areas as “low-class”, revealing the ultimate goal of gentrifying all of them.

When I was in Xiaobei in the summer of 2017, the number of Africans had noticeably decreased. Very few were still living in Dengfeng Village. The community in Guangyuanxi, on the other hand, was still relatively robust, and foot traffic was obviously busier. With the government unwilling to address, or insistent on implementing, incessant police inspections, there is no telling if another protest will break out. It is thus to the issue of policing we now turn. We will see what kind of policing are Africans subject to and how laws are not enforced equally. But at the same time, we will see how the entire policing system is structured in such a way that police officers have to prey on Africans to achieve their set goals in an age of aggressive urban development.
Chapter 3 Policing Africans in Xiaobei

Henry was a Nigerien in his mid-20s. I first met him at the Community Office of Foreigners Assistance of Dengfeng Street (the topic of next chapter) in the summer of 2015. We only met once more after that day and for the most part, he was not very trusting. He later told me he would not have talked to me if I did not show him my American student ID and driver license. That day, he was applying for the Registration Certificate of Temporary Residence, or the Police Registration as many Africans called it, at the Community Office. After he finished the application, I took a walk with him in Baohan Zhijie. As we walked, I noticed that Dengfeng Village was heavily policed. Surveillance cameras were installed in many different places, and during the thirty minutes I was there, three police patrol teams walked by. I later learned that the police presence was usually heightened at night. Even the Armed Police Force\textsuperscript{10} could be seen patrolling the neighborhood in the evenings. Obviously the local government has turned the area into a panoptic space where policing is omnipresent. For the African residents there, door to door inspections and raids became part of their lives, especially after the 2014 clean-up. On the street, stop and frisk style spot inspections targeting only black faces are very common. Henry gave me an example. He was once walking in the Xiaobei area behind a white man and a policeman approached them. The officer left the white man alone, but stopped Henry and asked to check his documents. Henry was very upset and he refused to show his documents. “I was furious”, he remembered. “I told him if you want to see my documents, you have to check that white man’s first.” But instead of checking the white man’s document, the policeman let Henry go to defuse the situation.
This blatant racial profiling by the police explains the Africans’ resentment toward them, which, as mentioned before, has led to two street protests in 2009 and 2012.

Photo provided by an informant in 2016. A team of Armed Police Force was patrolling the Baohan Zhijie neighborhood at night.

In the previous chapter, I investigate how news media, for the most a state institution, gradually construct the sanfei discourse. In this chapter, we will look at Public Security’s role in this process. As the police in China and one of the main government organs in charge of managing foreigners, Public Security has been fighting the sanfei problem for the past fifteen years. Since around 2008, Africans have become the target of many anti-sanfei police campaigns which usually include constant stop-and-frisk style inspections, visa raids, drug busts, etc. Suggesting that sanfei as a black problem partly constructed by the police should not be taken to mean that no African violates immigration regulations. Many Africans, as demonstrated by other scholars (Haugen 2012, Castillo 2016, Lan 2016) indeed overstay their visas or use fake passports. I have during my own research also come across Africans who are sanfei. However, Africans are not the only group that violates immigration regulations, and the fact that the general public associates sanfei
mainly with the Africans has a lot to do with how Public Security operates and enforces the laws. In other words, we should have a more nuanced understanding of illegality and look at what Shanshan Lan refers to as the “legal production of ‘African illegality’” (Lan, 2014: 290). The police targeting of the Africans, as we shall see, directly contributes to the production of a higher number of illegal Africans. What’s more, not only are they the main force in cleaning up Xiaobei, but the results of their work provide factual support for the government’s call to redevelop Xiaobei.

For this chapter, I rely heavily on the insights provided by a police officer, Dai, who works at a precinct near Xiaobei. His input greatly complicates the simple dichotomy of racist police and oppressed Africans indirectly portrayed by other scholars. Such a heavy reliance on one single informant necessarily entails one obvious caveat: the idiosyncrasies of small sample size. But considering Dai’s closeness to the situation and the difficulty of finding another police officer so forthcoming about their work, his insights are still valuable. Also I reference extensively scholarship on policing in China so as to minimize the potential errors. I will first examine the history of policing in China, and then explain why Xiaobei in particular is subject to heavier policing. After that, I will go into the workings of local police stations and elaborate how practices such as statistics production and monetary incentives push police officers to look for easy targets like Africans. Finally I will also address the issue of racial prejudice and discuss how it is tied to practices mentioned above.
Policing in China

Policing in China is the responsibility of Public Security organs, which from the central to the local includes the Ministry of Public Security, Provincial Public Security Departments, Municipal Public Security Bureaus (PSB), and local Dispatch Stations (paichusuo, 派出所). Various scholars (Bracey 1989, Bakken 2005, Tanner 2005, Tanner and Green 2007, Wong 2009, Trevaskes 2010, Wang 2015) have discussed in detail how these institutions came about, how they organize themselves, and how they function. Kam C. Wong traces the origin of CCP’s policing to the Disciplinary Patrol, or Jiucha (纠察), during the Canton-Hong Kong Strike in the 1920s. The strike was directed by the Communist Party and its disciplinary team (jiuchadui) was charged with directing the strike, supervising its members and enforcing strike laws and union orders (Wong, 2009: 69). Whatever the case, from its inception, the defining character of policing in China derived from its mindset of self-defense. According to Wong, the Party established its first security-defense organ, the Baowei Zuzhi (保卫组织), in 1927. This institution, “the earliest known state-sponsored public security organization in Communist China (Wong, 2009: 104)”, was designed to defend the Party from constant persecution by the Kuomintang, the Nationalist Party ruling China at that time. Guarding against subversion and protecting Party secrets were thus its top priorities. This history determines that the police in China, rather than being an independent professional department of law enforcement, always served as “an instrumentality of the state and in defense of the Party” (Wong, 2009: 92), and that is still true today.

But according to Murray Scot Tanner and Eric Green, there was another twist to the story. During this period, some internal struggle within the Communist Party also left an
indelible mark on police work in China. In the 1930s, in an attempt to copy the Soviet centralized and independent police system, the Chinese Soviet Government in Jiangxi set up the State Political Security Bureau, which, many public security historians now argue, led to widespread intra-party purges of party members (Tanner and Green, 2007: 650). Learning from this mistake, now the Chinese government guides the security system with the principle of “combining vertical and local leadership, with local leadership as the main part (tiaokuaijiehe, yikuiweizhu, 条块结合, 以块为主 hereafter referred to as the tiaokuai system) (Tanner and Green, 2007: 648). This means that although local Public Security Bureaus are controlled by their provincial and central superiors, the local party plays a more active role in directing them and organizing their work.

During Mao’s era, policing depended on the community and the masses, and the relationship between the police and urban civilian residents was a more intimate one. Many police officers spent their entire career working in one neighborhood and got to know the locals very well. The Residential Committee, the office after which the Community Office of Foreigners Assistance was modeled, was established to help with social control at the ground level. The success of policing during this period, of course, must be attributed to hukou system that prevented mobility of the population and the Maoist mass line where the people’s police should serve the people (Bracey, 1989: 132). The police and the residents collaborated to maintain social order. Crime rates during this period were relatively low and party officials prided themselves in claiming that, unlike in capitalist societies, people’s house doors did not need to be locked (Dutton 195).

Things changed drastically following the reforms of the late 1970s. The Reform and Opening Up policy in 1978 reintroduced the market economy into China and the central
government began shedding some of its responsibilities, including policing. Michael Dutton, a specialist in Chinese policing and social control, has discussed the introduction of the responsibility system (zerenzhi 责任制) into policing in the late 1970s following its huge success in agriculture. While the economic reforms gradually eroded the hukou system, the rural population began moving into cities and crime rates skyrocketed. The implementation of the reforms thus called for improved performance of the police and the professionalization of officers. Besides the enactment of criminal laws and other regulations regarding public security, the central government also introduced monetary incentives into local police stations and remuneration was tied to numbers of crimes solved. The relationship between the government and the police thus operated like a contract. It is not difficult to see all the problems the reliance on statistics can create, and it eventually plays a big role in the discriminatory targeting of Africans in Guangzhou through spot inspections and raids.

One odd by-product of the “responsibility system” is the resurrection of Maoist political campaigns. According to Dutton, the Party, alarmed by the increased crime rates, demanded that police forces bring them back down to the level of pre-reform days, an unachievable order, but one that must be followed nonetheless. To demonstrate their determination, the police brought back the campaigns that were so popular under Mao’s rule (Dutton, 2005: 201). These policing campaigns, as Susan Trevaskes points out, also serve as a tool for the state to construct a sense of coherence by bridging the past and the present in a period of drastic economic changes (Trevaskes, 2010: 8). Although these campaigns no longer center around political struggles, they are very much driven by political agendas. Instead of serving the “people” as in Mao’s days, the goal of policing
in post-reform China is to maintain social stability and create a secure environment for economic development. (Trevaskes, 2010: 58; Wong, 2009: 165).

Unlike campaigns during Mao’s years where the masses were mobilized and played a major role, these policing campaigns usually just involve a heavier-handed approach in raiding, arresting, sentencing and curtailing due process. Because the new campaigns were a response to the influx of the rural population into urban areas, it is not surprising that they have always targeted communities of rural migrants, although migrants are in fact more likely the victims of crimes that perpetrators (Bakken, 2005: 78). The state launched its first Strike Hard (yanda, 严打) Campaign in 1983; its driving principle was to combine leniency for first time offenders and those willing to confess with harsh punishment for recidivists and people who resist interrogation. However, Trevaskes argues that in reality, the harsh punishment side of the equation was the sole focus (Trevaskes, 2010: 56). Since then, the police have launched countless campaigns modeled after this one, targeting either serious crimes or specific types of crime such as drugs or prostitution. Public Security authorities launch campaigns so often that they have become a normal practice rather than special operations.

Among the long list of police campaigns are those directed against sanfei, which are characterized by ceaseless raids, heavy fines and prolonged detention (Haugen, 2012 73-73). Because these anti-sanfei endeavors derive from both the state’s response to the movement of rural populations into cities and the fact that the government has considered both groups as “floating population” in the city since 2008 (Lan, 2016: 11), they treat Africans very similarly to rural migrants. However, the situation for Africans is considerably more difficult because unlike rural migrants, they are a small group not
perceived to be an essential part of Guangzhou’s economic development; thus the Guangzhou Municipal Government has little incentive in accommodating them. For example, while the government has been slowly phasing out the Temporary Residence Permit (暂住证, zanzhuzheng), a document rural migrants must apply for in order to remain in cities, since 2010, giving them similar rights as those with urban hukou (“Guangzhou and Ten Other Cities”, 2010), it has been stepping up efforts to enforce the Police Registration in areas with heavy African presence. Xiaobei in particular has been subject to harsher policing because of its location at the center of the city and the consequent higher pressure on the police stations.

Xiaobei

Xiaobei is subject to the maximum amount of policing because it is close to the city’s political power center and the Huanshidong CBD. Xiaobei, as mentioned in the Introduction, is within the jurisdiction of Yuexiu District. Within a three kilometer radius of Tianxiu Mansion are the Provincial and Municipal Government Buildings, the Municipal Public Security Bureau and the Municipal Foreign Affairs. The Provincial Public Security Department and the Air Force Logistics Department are both within five minutes’ walking distance. Dai told me because of its proximity to all the state institutions, many government and Party officials lived in this area. When they saw the chaos in Dengfeng Village happen right under their watch, they applied extra pressure to the local police stations to clean up the area. Shanshan Lan also notices the sensitive nature of this area in her research (Lan, 2015:296).
But perhaps above all, the nearby state agency that exerts the most pressure on the local police to clean up Xiaobei is the Municipal Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, located about one and a half kilometers (about one mile) from the Baohan Zhijie neighborhood. According to a video produced by the Yuexiu District Government in July 2015, a mass clean-up followed the appointment of Ren Xuefeng (任学锋) as the Secretary of the Guangzhou Municipal Committee of the CCP in August 2014. Ren, who is also a member of the standing committee of the Provincial Committee of the CCP, chose Baohan Zhijie as the first stop of his “clandestine visits (anfang, 暗访)”. The video, titled *The Past and Present of the African Village* (*feizhoucun de jinxi*, 非洲村的今昔), was meant to be circulated internally among different government agencies. It is a
report of the “improvements” to the neighborhood that were put into place after the clean-up and how well the district government had achieved the goals set up by Ren. As discussed earlier, because of the tiaokuai system, local party committees have significant control over local PSBs. Trevaskes points out that while party officials do not interfere in individual cases, they nevertheless retain decision-making power over anti-crime policies (Trevaskes, 2010: 59). This is because social order “is a major item in the political evaluation of local Party officials” and their influence is particularly strong during anti-crime campaigns (Tanner and Green, 2007: 666). So Ren has a lot of personal stake in cleaning up such a key area of a city indelibly associated with the sanfei.

The fact that Xiaobei is located in such a key area with the Party secretary within walking distance must have resulted in more pressure on local police stations to produce results. The video accentuates this point with an illustration of Xiaobei marked with the locations of several of the key state agencies. The map shows the Baohan Zhijie neighborhood besieged by key institutions. To inject a sense of urgency, the map exploits sharp contrasting colors to highlight the neighborhood’s incongruity with its ambience. While the exaggerated green and blue colors that depict the nearby Luhu Lake and Yuexiu Hill almost turn the area into a theme park, the redness covering the neighborhood conjures up a sense of danger. Interestingly, at first glance, the neatly defined border of the red zone seems to indicate that the sanfei problem needs to be contained. But a closer look suggests otherwise because it does not exactly correspond to where the Africans gather most frequently. The Tianxiu Mansion is not even in the zone. The covered area corresponds to Dengfeng Village, which is the ultimate target of all clean-ups. The narrator of the video corroborates this point by attributing the chaos and
crimes to the Xiaobei’s urban-rural transitional status. This suggests that the ultimate goal for this clean-up was to redevelop the area so that it would not threaten the financial and business institutions of Huanshidong CBD which is also represented in this illustration.

Because of all these institutions in the area, surveillance of the police themselves must be pervasive, which inevitably translates into tough policing on the ground. Some of my African informants are also keen enough to sense the uniqueness of Xiaobei. Mr. Sultane Barry, a well-respected trader among West Africans, suspected that the city was dissolving the African community because of its strategic location. On the map shown in the video, the Air Force Logistics Department is not even named, only referred to as a “certain department of the Air Force”, indicating its sensitive nature. While this is certainly a factor, I contend that it is not the most important one. In fact, some of the high-rise office buildings in the area with many African tenants are in fact owned by the military. They rented offices and rooms to Africans knowing those offices directly overlooked the Air Force compound (see Chapter 7).

Pressured to “Produce Results” and the Manufacturing of the Black Sanfei Stereotype

As mentioned earlier, under the responsibility system, the performance of each local (street level) police station concerns not only the leaders of the station, but also the municipal, provincial and central government as well as Party officials. Thus the pressure on the local police station and the police on the ground is high. They must provide positive statistics to pass evaluations. Things are perhaps worse among the several
stations with foreigner management responsibilities (waiguansuo, 外管所) because their job concerns China’s national security and diplomatic relationships with foreign countries.¹¹

Because Dai’s precinct borders Xiaobei, his station is a waiguansuo and he has to handle foreigners, including Africans, on a daily basis. He gave me some idea what it was like to work under such pressure. Every year, his station has to submit a comprehensive foreigner management proposal and every month, the Yuexiu District Branch of the Municipal PSB evaluates all the waiguansuo. One of the items in the evaluation procedure is a spot inspection. Evaluators would choose a section of a road within a station’s jurisdiction and stop foreigners passing by to check if they carry their passports and have the Police Registration. The more foreigners there are, the more likely it is for the evaluator to catch someone without the documents, which means that the police become more punitive and restrictive in order to drive foreigners away. Apart from this, the evaluation procedure also focuses on local stations’ past month of records, scrutinizing the number of arrests and penalties. Stations can score points by catching sanfei and foreigners without the Police Registration. By the end of the month, all the waiguansuo in the city are ranked according to the evaluation. Dai told me that between 2007 and 2010, when Guangzhou was preparing for the Olympics and then hosting the Asian Games, the heads of the police stations took the ranking especially seriously, since it was tied to their political achievements (zhengji, 政绩).

Having a low ranking during those critical years could result in the precinct being categorized as a “key clean-up street (zhongdian zhengzhi jie, 重点整治街)” by the Municipal PSB, which would be bad news for local police. Once labeled as such, the

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Municipal PSB would watch that station more closely, have more inspections and launch more clean-ups in the area. This created more pressure on the heads of the police station, which translated into more work for the already overworked officers. Dai’s precinct was a “key clean-up street” in 2014. He recalled he often had to work overtime to “produce results (chuchengji, 出成绩)” In his survey of 19,000 police officers in Shenzhen, a nearby large city in the same province, Wang Xiaohai discovered that many police stations were undermanned and had to depend on paid security guards and volunteers to complete their jobs (Wang, 2015: 121). It seems that the situation is the same in Guangzhou because Dai’s experience echoed these findings: he told me his station hired many assistant police (fujing, 辅警) who were put in charge of many duties that they were not trained for and authorized to carry out. The threat of the “key clean-up street” label must have pushed waiguansuo to actively hunt for foreigners with violations and launch more campaigns.

Dai is no stranger to such campaigns. He recalled a drug bust in 2013 launched by the Municipal PSB in which more than 1300 police were mobilized. In one particular hotel, he said, more than a hundred people were arrested. Most of them were from Nigeria, Niger, and Congo and many were forced to jump out of the window to avoid being arrested. The operation was the subject of intense media scrutiny, most of which blamed the Africans for making, using, and dealing drugs (“Guangzhou Police Destroy”, 2013).

Xiaobei has had its fair share of campaigns and arrests as well. According to Li, Lyons and Brown (2012), the police set up a special patrol zones in the area in 2007. In 2009 the Municipal PSB, teaming up with several other departments, launched a major clean-up (Wang, Gong, Huang & Lin, 2009). How many people were arrested is
unknown, but news reports said “a batch (yipi)” of foreigners holding fake passports or without the Police Registration were identified and handled according to the law. As a result of the police’s heavy handed approach, many traders left the area and many shops in Tianxiu Mansion were closed (Li, Lyons and Brown 2012 67-68). However, despite all the policing, the informal marketplace in Dengfeng continued to exist and the neighborhood remained rowdy. That was until 2014, when the city almost completely cleaned up the neighborhood following Ren’s appointment. Thanks to the internal video, we get to see a more detailed report of this clean-up. According to the video, thousands of illegally operated vehicles were confiscated and some two hundred and thirty people were arrested.¹⁰

As we can see a heavy emphasis is placed on the statistics in reports of clean-ups. This is because, despite their inaccuracy and oversimplification, statistics turn the intangible goal of social control into a measurable object and the Municipal PSB judges local police stations based on statistical records. Dai commented that his superiors cared less about public security than statistics. As Borge Bakken has explained, the purpose of
launching anti-crime campaigns in general is to achieve three statistical goals: “lowering numbers of criminal cases, increasing arrests, and increasing the percentage of officially opened case files that are solved – the ‘case cracking rate’ (po’an lv)” (Bakken, 2005: 75). In waiguansuo, this would also include how many sanfei are arrested or how many foreigners are caught without the Police Registration. During international events, which happens more and more common these days, the push to produce such statistics is particularly strong. Campaigns are an effective way to achieve these goals because they allow the police as well as the whole criminal justice system to be especially heavy handed. Mass arrests and long sentences in turn generate favorable statistics.

Because crime statistics are created under pressure from above, we must treat the narratives they support with great skepticism. Bakken points out that the police could even “improve” their statistical performance (Bakken, 2005: 74-75). For example, the rate of solved crimes, obviously a very important index for the performance of a police station, can be easily manipulated by not reporting certain cases that are not easily solved or simply not opening investigations into such cases. Statistics important to waiguansuo such as number of sanfei arrested or foreigners without the Police Registration can also easily be improved by targeting the Africans.

Africans make easy targets for several reasons. First, unlike white foreigners who are more scattered around the city, Africans are concentrated in a few areas with Xiaobei and Guangyuanxi being the most prominent one. Also, the police well know that Africans are more likely to rent from private landlords and not have the Police Registration (see Chapter 4 & 5). Because white foreigners are usually formally employed or stay in hotels, the Police Registration is less of an issue for them. Finally, African sanfei are a lot
The term sanfei in fact includes those without valid immigration documents and those working in China without authorization. However, the way the law is enforced is heavily biased against the former group. Since many Africans violate the sanfei law for overstaying their visas, instead of working without authorization, they are very easy to catch and convict as all the police need to do is check their passports. Illegal workers, on the other hand, are much harder to convict, despite their large numbers.

Because the process for foreigners to get permission for formal employment is complicated and involves a lot of paperwork, many employers tend to avoid foreigners. Many foreigners, however, are still able to find jobs in the informal sectors where employers hire them illegally (although Africans are seldom able to find either legal or illegal employment because of their negative image in the eyes of Chinese employers and customers). Sometimes employers believe having a white foreigner as an employee may make their business more look “high-class (gaodang, 高档)”, but there are also cases where the foreigner has some unique skills required by the business. For example, Dai saw many Westerners working as DJs or performers in discos and night clubs and many Indians working in restaurants. During my research I also met a Pole and a Russian working in a gym as trainers, although neither of them was in good shape and neither had the skills to train anyone (the gym employed a Chinese trainer for the actual work). Neither of these white people was hired legally because even the gym itself was not legitimate. The gym owner took all the customers’ money and disappeared soon after I left China. China’s cash-based marketplace makes it very easy for employers to hire illegally and get away with it.
Dai expressed to me his frustrations at how difficult it was to catch foreigners working in China illegally. Even if the police catch them in the act, in most cases they cannot do anything. The foreigner could claim they were simply helping their friends. A foreign chef caught cooking in chef’s uniform, Dai complained, could still say he put on the uniform to pose for pictures and have fun. Again, paying people cash leaves no bookkeeping trail and makes it hard for the police to find evidence that would stand up in court. Mindful of their statistics and the goals set by the leaders, the police are as a result inclined to pick the easier target, which inevitably further inflates the number of African sanfei.

Monetary Incentives

Pressure from above is not enough to motivate local police stations to work so hard. The stick of negative evaluations would not work without the carrot of funding incentives. Not only are the police in many big cities overworked, but they are also underpaid. Several scholars have offered valuable insight into the parlous state of the municipal police finances. According to Bakken, the central government nowadays only provides a budget for the Ministry of Public Security (Bakken, 2005: 84). The provincial, municipal, and local Public Security organs are all dependent on their respective governments for funding. Municipal governments have underfunded their police so badly that in some cases police offices report being unable to afford electricity, phone bills or uniforms. Low salaries have led to corruption and involvement in gambling and drug trafficking. According to Tanner and Green, central government leaders refer to this structurally induced reliance on extra-budgetary and illegal income as “eating impure
grain (\textit{chi zaliang})” as opposed to eating “the emperor’s grain (\textit{chi huangliang})” (Tanner and Green, 2007: 667). Among the impure grains is the excessive use of fines. Catching foreigners, especially Africans, without the proper documents, is an excellent source of those extra incomes.

The heavy fines imposed on the Africans have been widely discussed (Haugen 2012, Lan 2015, Castillo 2016). Lan attributes heavy fines to the 2011 Interim Provisions of Guangdong Province on Administration of and Services to Aliens (Lan, 2015: 297). However, the act of singling out the Africans for fines began much earlier. In 2006, the Municipal PSB began fining foreigners who failed to carry passports with them 50yuan (about $8) (“Tens of Thousands of Foreigners”, 2007). Dai told me that, between 2006 and 2012, in order to motivate police, the Municipal PSB generously used surcharges from this fine as a bonus to reward local police officers. At one point, collecting this fine had enriched the local police officers to such an extent that Dai fondly remembered it as a “lucrative business (\textit{hao shengyi, 好生意}).” This phrase, he said, originated in a sarcastic comment made by a foreigner who was fined, but Dai and his colleagues embraced it. Castillo’s informant also shared this foreigner’s opinion and complained to Castillo that the police had “built an economy” out of it (Castillo, 2016: 296). He is absolutely correct. For this particular fine, Dai said the Municipal PSB would offer local officers double the amount they picked up in street collections as an incentive to go after law breakers. In other words, for every 50yuan fined, 100yuan would be returned to the local police station. In a single night during those years, Dai revealed, they could collect 1,000yuan to 2,000yuan. During the 2010 Asian Games, the police would install as many as three checkpoints on a single street. “Sometimes”, he said sympathetically, “the foreigner was
just trying to buy something in the 7-11 close to the hotel and did not bring their passport. Then they got fined.” For most foreigners, carrying their passports around in a foreign country risks theft, so many simply ignored the regulation and would rather risk being fined than losing their passports.

However, as life slowly returned to normal after the two sporting events, the good days for the police on the ground came to an end. In 2012, according to Dai, another deputy chief took over the Division of Exit and Entry Administration Department of the Municipal PSB, replacing the one that was disciplined for corruption. A lot of changes resulted and the application paperwork for bonuses and rewards became stricter and a lot more complicated. On the other hand, although the monthly ranking that Dai mentioned that was so important to waiguansuo continues to this day, it became moot as it was no longer associated with their leaders’ political achievements. So gradually the implementation of the 50yuan fine became more relaxed. The new Exit and Entry Administrative Regulation that came into effect in July 2013 finally repealed it. Instead, foreigners who do not carry their passports with them are now simply given a warning, a decision that Dai hailed as more “people friendly (qinmin, 亲民)”, except it was not really. It seems that taking away monetary incentives only caused officers to take measures to drive away the Africans from their precinct since passing the evaluation becomes the sole motivation. Worse still the new laws did not herald the ending of the heavy fining of foreigners.

Although the fine for not carrying one’s passport was abandoned, the fines for overstaying and not having the Police Registration are still in effect and they are getting heavier. On the very first day of my second field research trip in 2015, Billy, a Congolese
informant complained passionately to me about the shortened Police Registration and the expensive consequence of not having it. He told me the new fine for not having the document was 2,000 yuan (about $330), a jump from 500. Dai confirmed it and said they should get the document within twenty-four to forty-eight hours. If they waited for four days or above and got caught, they would be fined 2,000 yuan. As for the overstayers, based on how many days one had exceeded the visa limit, the police are now fining them at a rate of 500 yuan per day overstayed with a cap of 10,000 yuan to 20,000 yuan depending on the number of offenses (the cap, Ojukwu Emma, the Nigerian community leader told me, used to be 5,000 yuan prior to 2013). This is a very steep price to pay and can counterproductively force many to continue overstaying because they cannot afford to pay the fine. But it makes a very good source of revenue for the PSB, despite the fact that officers on the ground are benefiting less.

These monetary incentives make the already easy target of the African communities more vulnerable to police harassment and as a result they have also borne the brunt of the fines. Dai said buildings with many African residents were particularly heavily patrolled as they were usually popular spot inspection locations during the evaluation. He recalled their station once caught nineteen Africans without the Police Registration in a single building in a month and each was fined 2,000 yuan. Americans meanwhile were sometimes intentionally avoided by the police because they were more likely to protest and “overreact (meishi zhaoshi, 没事找事)”. On the contrary, the Africans were more obedient (guai, 乖). So the Africans’ compliance with the law can ironically cause them to become easier targets.
But that statement exaggerates Africans’ obedience. Dai reported that many Africans claimed that they lacked the money to pay the fine. Also they sometimes chose to flee, fake illness or even cried to earn sympathy. The police thus sometimes avoided them as well. Dai did not see those reactions as forms of protest, but as symptoms of “low quality (di suzhi, 低素质)”, a popular term that Chinese like to use to describe a wide range of behaviors deemed uncivil by the speaker. However, considering the completely different images presented by the media, I wonder how much overreacting, as Dai said Americans had sometimes done, would help these Africans. Even if it did, such overreactions on the part of Africans is likely to be taken as a further consolidation of their “low quality” image. Worse still, Dai said that a hostile attitude could warrant shortening their duration of stay or even their visa valid period. So faking illness is in fact quite a smart strategy. It is interesting that although Dai had demonstrated much sympathy for the Africans, he almost subconsciously refused to see that they were, like we often are, making the most sensible decisions under the circumstances. As a response, to make sure they pay the fines, police officers are now confiscating foreigners’ passports once they are found without the Police Registration, something that Dai admitted the police were in fact not authorized to do. The foreigners then have to ‘buy’ their passports back with the fine payment receipts. This is likely to cause even more Africans to flee when the police approach them.

As we can see, the ways in which the Chinese police system functions place Africans in a double jeopardy. The pressure to produce statistical results and the need to maintain enough funding force many local police stations to hunt for easy targets. While these targets used to be domestic migrants from rural China, it is now the Africans who are
sharing their neighborhoods that are targeted, because they are easier to demonize. The consequence is that Africans are disproportionately represented in the sanfei discourse, which now has a strong racial tone. The conversation with Dai gave me a glimpse of the officers’ stressful life and made me empathize with him at times. I also realize that the system works to give an institutional logic to the decision to racially profile the Africans. However, I could not help but feel that this logic is always mixed in with racial prejudice. When I mustered up my courage and confronted Dai with the question of racism, he honestly admitted there was racism within the police and that he sometimes acted in a racist way too.

Racial Prejudice

Dai never hinted at it, but based on our conversations, it was clear that racial prejudice among police stems from the top. He used the word “leader (lingdao, 领导)” a lot, but it was not always clear to whom he referred. It could be the head of his station, the Municipal PSB, the government, the Party or it could be all of them. But it is clear that the officers at the forefront of dealing with foreigners are constantly fed with racist ideas by their leaders.

As in other parts of the world, it seems that for the lingdao in the Chinese police system, words like “Africa” or “blacks (heiren, 黑人)” are signifiers of negative things such as chaos, crimes, drugs, backwardness, disease and poverty, all of which are seen as the antitheses of modernity. Dai reported that in Guangzhou, policing on blacks had always been very tough because their lingdao demanded that they pay more attention to
them. Also the *lingdao* of the Municipal PSB specifically cautioned the police against letting Yuexiu District become “little Africa (*xiaofeizhou* 小非洲)”*. It is as if the word “Africa(n)”, which was also used in the title of the internal video discussed earlier, in and of itself, warrants and justifies heavy policing. Other scholars (Cheng 2011, Hood 2013) have also observed that the media tend to portray Africa and Africans as backward and impoverished.

Meanwhile the *lingdao* hold completely different views of white foreigners. For example, there was an initiative to hire foreign volunteers to work in several Community Offices of Foreigners Assistance, but it eventually fizzled out partly because the *lingdao* in the street level government wanted to find white foreigners. However, only blacks came to apply. I asked Dai why the leaders preferred whites. He said they thought having white people in the office would make it more “high-class”. This contrast in attitude is shocking, but unfortunately not surprising. It stems from the common belief that one can enhance their social status by appropriating whiteness, which, as a proxy for Westernness, represents large investments, advancement, global reach, and hence “class”. White people are thus also believed to hold the authority of approving other countries’ modernization efforts. Consequently being able to attract white people to volunteer in the Community Offices could indicate the modern nature of the office and hence the desire to hire white foreigners.

Besides, when bad things happened to white foreigners, the police are more likely to protect them and show them the efficiency of a modernized police force. Consider an incident in 2012 that was widely publicized by different news media. A German woman lost her handbag containing goods worth more than 300,000 euros in a train terminal of
five to six hundred people in Shandong Province. The railway station police mobilized its entire staff, and retrieved the bag in a few hours by checking each individual passenger and examining surveillance camera footage (“German Lost Bag” 2012). The state news media certainly did not let such a golden opportunity for propaganda slip. A news article reported the incident with the headline “German Lost Handbag in Terminal: Police Retrieved with God Speed, Earning Compliments”. It included a clip of local news about the incident, which showed how the police was able to identify the men who took the bag by studying surveillance footage, highlighting the use of modern technology. We can learn a lot by close examining this news article. First, the mentioning of the value of the goods implies the significance of the woman’s assumed business activity in China. Besides, the character used in the headline to mean “compliment”, ping (评), also contains the meaning of evaluation and comments. The implied message is thus: the German woman, a signifier of the West, who was investing in China, was impressed with its success in modernization. Ironically, the cynical Chinese netizens were not sold. Many lamented in the comment section of the news reports that they would never have the same treatment. They were probably right, and neither would the Africans. Based on my conversations with Dai and my African informants, it is hard for me to imagine that a police station would devote the same amount of effort and resources to help a single African. While it is safe to assume no Africans in Guangzhou are expecting such premium treatment from the police, the blatant racial profiling they experience simply cannot be justified.

Dai confessed that they relied on their “hunch (zhijue, 知觉)” while they were on the beat and were more likely to stop and question Africans. Ojukwu Emma, the Nigerian
leader, told me even African government officials visiting China were stopped and checked by the police. What’s worse, their attitude is usually worse toward blacks. Dem, a Senegalese I befriended during my research, told me his nephew once tried to apply for the Police Registration. He went into the police station with his Chinese girlfriend. Not only was his application denied, but the officer also scolded the girlfriend for going out with a guy who could potentially bring diseases. Dai also said that whenever a foreigner was arrested and taken back to the station, the first question the officer handling the case usually asked is: is s/he white or black? Whites were usually treated more politely.

Dai is not immune to such racist behaviors himself and he attributed them to his over exposure to the “darkness (hei’an, 黑暗)”, referring to cases of Africans breaking the laws. I did not question what he said, but at the same time since Africans are often times targeted in clean-ups and spot inspections, the police inevitably encounter more illegal activities committed by Africans. In other words, it could be that targeting the Africans has taken a mental toll on the officers, reinforcing their negative image of Africans and therefore making the officers even more aggressive and biased in treating the Africans.

Dai recalled he was once in a raid in an apartment building. In one particular unit, he knocked at the door and a black woman answered while partly opening it. Dai clearly saw another person through the gap who disappeared into another room. Dai and his colleagues rushed in, but the person was already gone, perhaps escaping through the windows. The woman denied there was another person in the room. Dai agreed that the person might have taken flight because he forgot to bring his immigration documents, but his first instinct was that they were doing drugs in the apartment. He did not tell me what happened to the woman. They probably could not do much if she had all the documents,
but this incident definitely made the police even more suspicious of Africans, justifying more targeting of the community.

**Conclusion**

Before I left Guangzhou in the summer of 2015, I met up with Dem in Tianxiu Mansion to say goodbye. During our discussion, he received an email from his friend and he showed me the attachment. It was the minutes of the “Meeting Between Consul General’s [sic] and the Deputy Director General of Guangdong Foreign Affairs Office.” His friend, perhaps a staffer in one of the consulates, asked Dem to help translate the minutes into French and Dem gave me a copy.

Although it was a low-profile meeting (no news media reported on it), all participants held important positions. The African attendants included the Consul General of Uganda, Ethiopia, Mali, Nigeria, and Ivory Coast. On the Chinese side were the Deputy Director of Exit and Entry Administration Bureau of the Guangdong Public Security Department, the Deputy Head and Section Chief of the Exit and Entry of Guangzhou PSB, the Deputy Section Chief of Guangzhou PSB and the Deputy Director General of the Provincial Foreign Affairs. As we can see, Public Security had a heavy presence in the meeting because police treatment of Africans was the main issue on the agenda. The representatives for the Africans brought up many of the issues discussed in this chapter. For example, prolonged detention, increasing fines for overstayers, and racial profiling were all brought up by the consuls, who were hoping the Chinese government and the police could scale back their rigidity in dealing with their people. To all these requests,
the Chinese officials simply reiterated the official policy. In other words, no plan was made to change.

It is interesting that in his concluding remark, the Deputy Director General of the Provincial Foreign Affairs hoped that “future meetings would discuss other issues like promotion of investment and trade”. This statement shows the divergence between the two sides very clearly. While the African leaders were worried about the well-being of their people in this unfriendly foreign country, the Chinese leaders were only concerned with economic construction, which is the priority of the entire Chinese state.

As we can see, African leaders are well aware of the problems and did try to address them through formal and legal means. While the Chinese people on the internet raged about the lawlessness of the Africans in their own country and the impotence of the government in controlling them, they have little idea how their own government has been treating these visitors. At the end of the day, the whole Public Security system is to blame. The police officers on the ground, as Dem saw it, are just as victimized by this system, which works like a self-fulfilling prophecy. The police targeting of the Africans necessarily generates more African law-breakers and reinforces a negative image among the police and, thanks to the media, the Chinese public. This image justifies more targeting of the community and the cycle repeats. In the next chapter, we will continue to explore the issue of social control in Xiaobei, but we will focus on Dengfeng Village and investigate the relationship between sanfei clean-ups and control over the Village.
Chapter 4 Expelling Africans from Dengfeng Village

In my first appointment with a Congolese friend, Billy, in the summer of 2015, he showed me a short video which he filmed with his cellphone in front of the Community Office of Foreigners Assistance of Dengfeng Street (hereafter Community Office). In the video, at least thirty African residents were competing to apply for the Police Registration. The scene was chaotic. The Africans were surrounding a Chinese staffer of the Office, scrambling to get an application form. The staffer was yelling at them and struggling to free himself from all the hands trying to grab him. Billy told me earlier that year the Community Office began to implement a daily quota on the number of Police Registrations issued, which created a lot of trouble for the Africans. “You have to go there to see it,” Billy said. So a few days later, I did.

I arrived at the Community Office at 7:30am. When I arrived, there were already ten to fifteen Africans waiting outside. The Office was a small elevated structure with a staircase leading to the front door. Some Africans were sitting on the steps. I walked up and one of them asked me if I needed a number. I was a bit confused, but said yes. He then opened a notebook, which revealed a small pile of scrap papers with numbers, and gave me one. I took it and sat down next to him. That was the first time I met Henry, the Nigerien we met in the previous chapter. He explained to me the Office was giving out numbers before and only those with a number could apply, but since a few weeks back, it stopped, although they were not sure if the quota system was still in effect. “The rules here,” he said, “change often.” To keep the application process organized, the Africans
decided among themselves that the person who arrived first created numbers. People who showed up later each took a number and applied according to that number. That day, it was a woman also from Niger who created the numbers. Henry told me she came at 5:00am.

At around 8:30am, the staff of the Office began arriving one by one and started stamping the application forms before giving them out to the applicants. The Office door was already open, but the Africans were still waiting patiently outside. At this time, a Chinese landlord came up the stairs and asked Henry for a number, but a staffer from inside the Office stopped her. “Don’t take their numbers,” she said in Chinese. “They are useless. Come here. I’ll give you a form.” This, of course, happened without the knowledge of the Africans, who understood little Chinese.

At 8:45am, the staffer who just gave a favorable treatment to the Chinese walked out of the office with a stack of forms in her hand. At the sight of this, all patience and order
went out of the window. All the Africans went up the stairs, crowding around that staffer. The video Billy showed me was replayed right in front of my eyes. This staffer then began shouting at the Africans, telling them to form a line. The Africans, for fear of not being able to get a form, ignored her and kept pushing. The staffer struggled to go downstairs while the Africans followed her, some waving the numbers Henry gave them. “All of you will have a form,” the staffer pushed back and shouted angrily. “You are small people today.” She meant few, but I would not blame someone who took it the wrong way. Eventually, realizing that they all had a chance to apply, the Africans formed a line and a fight was avoided. They then each took a form and sat down to fill it out. One of the landlords expressed sympathy for the Africans. “They [the staff] don’t treat them like human,” she said. “Sometimes the Mamas [African women] had to bring their babies with them to the office. It was really difficult for them.”

Photograph of the Community Office taken by the author. The Africans were surrounding a staff who was holding a stack of application forms. They were worried they could not get a form and lost the opportunity to apply.
At around 9:10am, the officers from the local Public Security Bureau arrived and those who finished filling the forms gradually entered the office with their landlords. Henry was already inside the office with his, while the African woman who wrote up the numbers was still waiting for hers. Thirty minutes later, Henry finally got his Police Registration and left the Office happily, while the woman who created the numbers did not because she was not eligible. As we can see, the Africans take the Police Registration very seriously and endure a great deal of trouble to obtain it because it determines who can live in the neighborhood or not. Obviously, this has a huge impact on landlords as well as Africans. Those who do not want to deal with the trouble gradually move out. But the situation used to be not as bad. Dem, my Senegalese friend, said it was not strictly enforced prior to 2007. Even when it was initially enforced, it was a lot easier to apply, but things got serious following the 2014 sanfei clean-up.

In the previously chapter, I discuss how police racial profiling contributes to the association of Africans with sanfei. In this process, the Police Registration plays a key role because when police officers inspect Africans’ documents, it is the second thing they look at after their visas. Although technically speaking, not having the Police Registration does not make one a sanfei, the two are usually confused and both serve to create the impression that Africans have no respect for immigration regulation. In this chapter, we will look at the establishment of the Community Office and how it enforces the Police Registration. After the 2014 clean-up, the pressure that the Community Office put on African renters began to increase. The Office has relocated several times since then, but every time it relocated, the original office was retained and readapted for other foreigner administrative purposes. Within this half square meter area today, there are four such
institutions. Through manipulating the document’s application rules, the Community Office not only expelled most Africans from the neighborhood, but it also cordons off Dengfeng Village for future African renters.

The Police Registration has been such an important part of sanfei clean-ups because it helps the government achieve several goals. As this dissertation tries to show, the clean-up of Xiaobei so as to create a gentrified look is very much about ridding the area of Africans whom the Municipal Government considers detractive to a modern image. By far, the enforcement of the Police Registration has been the most successful means. But as we will see, expelling Africans and strengthening social control are two interconnected and simultaneous processes. On the one hand, by forcing Africans to register, the Office also forces landlord to register. It is a convenient means to improve data collection and generate knowledge about Dengfeng residents. Besides, the establishments of institutions like the Community Office also enable the state to gradually increase its power in an area that enjoys a certain degree of autonomy. In other words, this process is in fact one manifestation of the war of land in urban China between municipalities and various urban actors. In this case, it is the village collective that the Municipal Government is up against.

I will first look at the history of the Police Registration and compare it with a document that migrant workers are subject to. It shows that using disciplinary measure to expand state power into urban villages is not new. But while migrant workers could still live in Dengfeng, Africans were mostly driven away. Then I will detail the establishment of the Community Office and show how it acts as a neighborhood level government. After that I will discuss how the state has drastically increased its power following the
2014 clean-up through the Community Office, which I contend, is aimed at reducing the power of the Village. Then I show how the Dengfeng Neighborhood has become a panoptic space with the establishments of different government agencies. Finally, I conclude by looking at how Africans responded to such a heavy handed approach.

The Police Registration

According to the Ministry of Public Security, foreigners must go to a local Public Security Bureau within twenty-four hours of their arrival in China and apply for the Registration Certificate of Temporary Residence, or the Police Registration (“Foreigners Apply” 2016). It is a little pink piece of document that registers information such as name, nationality, date of birth, and, as the phrase “Temporary Residence” suggests, one’s address in China and duration of stay in that address. One must carry it around at all times and upon request of authorities one must be able to present it. Those who need to move during their stay in China are supposed to repeat the application process every time they move.

Anne-Marie Brady (2003) traces the beginning of the Police Registration to the late 1980s when China reopened to the outside world and more foreigners began visiting. At the time, the Police Registration was only one of a whole series of surveillance measures for foreigners (Brady 2003, 203). More extreme ones included restricting foreigners to designated hotels or dormitories and deputizing on-site staff as spies. It is obvious that these measures were not in concert with the country’s priorities of economic construction and attracting foreign investments. Most no longer exist and one might even question the
necessity of the Police Registration because it overlaps with visa in many ways and creates extra trouble for foreigners. Perhaps that was why it was not strictly enforced prior to 2007. The fact that local Public Security organs must now fund their own operations also made strict enforcement less practical.

Entering 2007, things began to change. The Olympics created huge pressure on Guangzhou’s Municipal Governments because the it was hosting the Olympic Scientific Congress. On top of that they were making their own preparation for the 2010 Asian Games and competing for the “National Sanitary City” title. So improving the appearance of the city and strengthening social control were critical. As discussed in Chapter Two, the same year, news media began to focus public attention to the Africans in Guangzhou and the sanfei problem. Since they purported that the real number of Africans was unknown (but assumed to be in the hundreds of thousands) and most of them were sanfei, negative reports such as the “Black Tribe” report provided a pretext for the government
to step up its enforcement of the Police Registration, which was invented to keep track of
the whereabouts of foreigners and implement social control. Its enforcement is mainly a
two-pronged approach. On the one hand, as we see in Henry’s experience, the
Community Office gradually tightens application requirements so that the procedure
becomes increasingly difficult. On the other hand, police and neighborhood inspectors
reinforced their patrols in the Dengfeng area, frequently checking all rental houses,
launching raids periodically and raising fines on violators.

The Police Registration was instituted about a decade after the Central Government
launched its economic reforms, which ushered a large amount of rural migrants into
cities. To manage these new comers, municipalities required rural migrants to apply for a
document called Temporary Residence Permit (zanzhuzheng 暂住证, not to be confused
with the Temporary Residence Registration, the Police Registration). Coincidentally
enough, the implementation of this document also began in Guangdong Province in the
mid-1980s, not in Guangzhou, but in Shenzhen, one of the Special Economic Zones
where foreign investments were initially introduced into China, which attracted large
numbers of rural migrants (Guo 2016). Soon this document was introduced to all cities
experiencing similar influxes of rural migrants.

Although it is unclear if this Permit provided a template for the Police Registration,
the two do share many similarities. First, the police, or Public Security agencies, are
responsible for issuing both. Also, not only does the permit dictates whether one could
lawfully live in the city, but it is also necessary for obtaining work permits or business
licenses (Jacka 2005 92). Similarly, foreigners need this document to stay at an address,
register offices and extend their visas. Moreover like the Police Registration, the Permit
has been a tool to discipline residents and landlords. On the one hand the government prohibits landlords from renting to those without the Permit. At the same time the police carry out door-to-door inspection, which has reportedly caused a lot of stress on many communities. In March 2002, a migrant worker broke his leg by jumping from a building in his flee from a raid (Xu 2002). The Africans would resort to the same extreme method seven years later in their fleeing from a raid, showing their common sufferings.

In their research of migrant integration in Guangzhou, Bart Wissink, Arjan Hazelzet, and Werner Breitung argue that the creation of the Temporary Residence Permit was based on the assumption that migrants would not settle down (Wissink, Hazelzet, & Breitung 2015, 101). That was why the Chinese government categorized them as the “floating population (liudong renkou, 流动人口)”. However, governments of different municipalities gradually came to realize that migrants were there to stay. Since the mid-2000s, both the hukou system and the Permit which had in fact created a form of institutional segregation have been under a lot of criticism from local scholars and news media. Gradually from city to city, it was replaced by the new Residence Permit (juzhuzheng 居住证), which at least on paper guarantees equal rights between migrants and urban residents. By 2010, many big cities, Guangzhou included, had already taken steps to abrogate the Temporary Residence Permit, and Guangzhou is also slowly extending access to subsidized housing to migrants (Lu 2010).

As the age of this discriminatory document slowly comes to an end, the rhetoric has also changed: like today’s Africans, migrants used to be signifiers of crimes, drugs and prostitution, but now they are being recast as quiet, hardworking contributors to the country’s economic development. Although it would be inaccurate to argue that the
government no longer uses prejudice against migrants as a pretext to clean up urban villages, anti-migrant rhetoric has at least lost some of its urgency. In the mid-2000s, when many migrants were still stuck in urban villages due to the lack of affordable public housing and Africans were coming in, this weakening anti-migrant rhetoric could prove inconvenient for the municipal government, which was speeding up its preparation for the Asian Games. For example, in August 2006, journalists from Southern News interviewed a few migrant workers living in an urban village in Baiyun District regarding the Temporary Residence Permit (Yan & Shan 2006). The report is very critical of the document and its enforcement. In particular, it points out that the application fee seemed to depend more on the whims of the officials than written rules, and inspectors treated migrants as if they were thieves and knocked at their doors in the middle of the night. The report cites one interviewee, Mr. Pan, who complained that although he had been working in Guangzhou since 1998 and had purchased his own home, he and his wife were still subject to the Temporary Residence Permit every year. This sympathetic tone could potentially delegitimize the government’s role and undermine its redevelopment efforts.

Seen in this light, the *sanfei* discourse filled a potential void of a powerful political slogan and the Police Registration replaced the Temporary Resident Permit as a new social control mechanism. With it the police could continue door-to-door inspections and raids, albeit under the aegis of fighting *sanfei*. The Municipal Government was never completely reticent about their intention. In 2008, it officially included foreigners in the category of “floating population” (Lan 2016, 11), giving new meaning to the term and renewing its urgency. It was likely that the government finds the Police Registration more
expedient than the Temporary Resident Permit. Unlike rural migrants, Africans do not have the benefits of a sympathetic media representation. The public is less concerned about their well-being, so law enforcement can be more aggressive. Also Africans’ racial difference makes them easier targets for the police on the street. As a result, the Police Registration is a much more effective tool for clean-ups, but its effectiveness cannot be explained without discussing the Community Office.

**The Community Office of Foreigners Assistance Dengfeng Street**

A news photo (see Ma et al., 2012) of the Community Office of Foreigners Assistance Dengfeng Street Yuexiu District before it moved. The Office opened in 2007 at the south entrance of Baohan Zhijie and moved to the north entrance in 2014.

The Community Office was established on August 27th, 2007, and, as mentioned earlier, was later relocated. The Office was the first of its kind in Guangdong Province and received a lot of news coverage when it first opened at the south end of Baohan Zhijie. One 2008 news report claimed that as foreign trade prospered in the Dengfeng area, it put huge pressure on foreigner administration (Feng 2008). Drug dealing and
thefts involving foreigners happened frequently and the number of sanfei was increasing. In response to these challenges, the Dengfeng Street Office, the lowest level government, established the Community Office. Its name, translated directly from Chinese, was in fact Foreigners Management and Service Work Station, which indicates its principle of combining disciplinary duties with assistance.

As Zhou Bo, a graduate student from the State University of New York at Albany who volunteered at the Office in 2012, explains, the Office was modeled after residents’ committees (juweihui 居委会), an institution first established in the 1950s to serve as a connection between residents and street governments. Although these committees are not formal governmental agencies, they take “order[s] from the local government and [constitute] an extension of municipal government's administrative system” (Zhou 2014, 21). The same can be said about the Community Office. In other words, although it carried ‘community’ in its name, unlike Dengfeng Industrial Group, the Office is a state agency. So it is safe to assume that the administrative side outweighs the service side.

To be fair, the Community Office, especially before it relocated, did offer some assistance and convenience to the Africans. According to a news article by New Express Daily in 2008, to help Africans adjust to the lives in China, the Community Office was providing services even Chinese could not enjoy (Ren & Xiao, 2008). First it acted as a free rental agent and helped them find housing. Also, it enrolled their children, referred to as “little devils”, at local schools. Moreover, it introduced high-end Halal restaurants to the area and worked with nearby banks and hospitals so that they were prepared to help foreigners. Perhaps most importantly, instead of having to go the police station to complete the Police Registration, which took more time and was more intimidating, the
Africans could report to the Community Office to complete the process. To make the Africans feel comfortable and encourage them to register, the Office even hired African volunteers. Zhou in his research also observed that overall the Africans’ impression of the Office was positive (Zhou 2014, 28-30).

But management and assistance were too sides of the same coin. At the time of the Office’s establishment, the city was preparing for the Asian Games as the country was preparing for the Olympics. The Municipal Government was trying to win the “Sanitary City” title and the Dengfeng Street Office was desperate to get rid of the embarrassing label of “Key Clean-up Street” designated by the Municipal Government. It is clear that some of the assistance provided by Community Office was perfectly in line with the government’s overall clean-up project. By acting as free rental agents, the staff in the Office directed Africans away from informal arrangements and into formal commodity housing. Jinlu Shanzhuang, a commodity housing complex right next to Dengfeng Village, for example, was selected as a foreign resident model neighborhood (more on this in the next chapter). Also, the introduction of formal businesses like dining and banking also undermined informal ones in the neighborhood, speeding up clean-ups.

Despite the Street Office’s alleged intention to create an image of a helpful neighbor, the connection between the Community Office and Village residents should not be exaggerated. While there were about three thousand foreigners living in the neighborhood in 2008, only five hundred and thirty-five people had applied for the Police Registration (Peng 2009, 40). In 2011, a news article even reported that few foreigners visited the Office for assistance (Zhang & Xu 2011). The initiative to hire foreign volunteers, as mentioned in the previous chapter, also seemed to be short lived. In our conversation,
Zhou Bo told me the volunteers were used more on an ad hoc basis and he never saw them when he was working there.

**2014 Clean-Up**

If the Community Office did not completely gain the trust of Africans, at least it was not oppressive. But things took at bad turn for Africans in 2014. As mentioned in the previous chapter, in August 2014, Ren Xuefeng was appointed the new Secretary of the Guangzhou Municipal Committee of the CCP. Three months later the Yuexiu District Government launched a mass clean-up under his lead. Since then inspections and raids happened more frequently. According to a late 2014 news article, an inspector in Dengfeng was tasked with checking rental houses every day (Chen et. al 2014). Apart from checking foreigners’ visas, his job also entailed convincing foreigners to complete the Police Registration. On the other hand, the Community Office, which move to the north end of Baohan Zhijie a few months prior to the clean-up to make room for a construction project, had basically forgone the service side of the equation and emphasized more social control. Its main task is to register the foreigners in the neighborhood.

For the Africans living in Dengfeng Village, this new office is a sinister institution, because its enforcement of the Police Registration turned really extreme. As showed in Henry’s experience at the beginning this chapter, the Community Office began to implement a daily quota in early 2015, which made the application process unnecessarily competitive. In the Meeting Between African Consul Generals and the Deputy Director
General of Guangdong Foreign Affairs Office discussed in last chapter, one consul summed up Africans’ predicament very well: the Community Office “can only register 60 people per day… [but] people who do not register within the stipulated 24 hours are made to pay fines and sometimes have their visas cancelled and they are deported.”\textsuperscript{16} The quota was likely a poorly thought-out solution to the Office’s increased workload due to strengthened efforts to push Africans to apply. But because of the competition, Billy, my Congolese friend, said some even had to go as early as 3:00am in order to secure a spot. But the bad news did not stop there.

The quota was only part of the new rules implemented by the Community Office, which also included shortened valid period of the Police Registration. “Have you heard,” Billy asked me during our meeting, “they [the police] are issuing seven-day Police Registration these days.” The claim was so incredible at the time I did not believe him. Prior to 2015, the Police Registration usually lasted till the end of one’s duration of stay listed on the visa. A seven-day registration meant that foreigners had to apply for the Police Registration multiple times during their brief stay in China, creating a huge burden on them. What’s worse, because of the quota system, there was no guarantee that they could get it each time they went. So sometimes they had to waste several days on the application process which must be repeated seven days later. The frequency of application in turn further exacerbated the workload of the Community Office, causing the bad attitude of the staffers. Dai told me this seven-day rule was implemented first to prevent Africans from using a fake address for registration purpose. Another important reason he said was to make African renters unappealing to landlords, who under the new rules must accompany their tenants for the application procedure.
The day I met Henry, several landlords were also present. Because some of them had full time jobs, they asked their tenants to go as early as possible so that they could finish the process early. While waiting for Henry, I talked to two of them. They were both very frustrated with the new rules. Not only did they have to come for the application these days, but those with several renters almost had to do it on a daily basis. One landlord told me he would not rent to foreigners any more once the current lease was up. He was particularly annoyed by the fact that he had to bring his Certificate of Property Ownership (fangchanzheng 房产证) every single time for the renewal because he did not like to carry such an important document around.

But it was Henry’s lucky day because the Police Registration he received that day was good till the end of his visa duration. He was just as surprised as I was. “I swear I had a seven-day registration before,” he said while searching in the phone for a picture of it. He could not find it, but he was too happy to care. His good fortune, however, did not signal a positive turn of events. His friend, the Nigerien woman who created the numbers, was not so lucky. Her application was rejected. As it turned out, the sudden generosity was not the result of the police’s sympathy for the Africans. Far from it, it was because the rules had changed once again. While the Nigerien woman was waiting for her landlord, a police officer came out and told her in broken English that they could not issue her the Registration because she did not have any prior record of residence in Dengfeng in the year 2015. Since Henry could speak some Chinese, he explained to the officer that she was living elsewhere earlier that year. The officer simply waved his hand and went back inside. Later, the same official came out again to take a cigarette. I asked him for a clarification. He explained that any foreigners holding the M business visa who
had previously lived in the Dengfeng neighborhood in the year of 2015 were eligible to apply. Otherwise they were no longer eligible. The majority of the Africans fell into this visa category, so basically the new rule declared this area off limits for new comers. The woman was very upset. She said something to Henry angrily in Songhai and left. Henry told me she said that had she known about the new rule, she would not have come at 5:00am. I did not know what happened to the woman afterwards. Since she had already signed the lease, she might just take the risk and stay in the apartment unregistered.

The frequency with which the rules for the Police Registration change in Dengfeng Village underscores the arbitrariness of laws and raises questions about the notion of “legality”. While many Africans tried their best to adjust and abide by the laws, it was the laws which kept changing that baffled them and made it impossible to be legal. The Community Office epitomizes the productive power of the state, which generates offenders by creating laws and penalties. In his discussion of legality, Michel Foucault points out that the intention of punishments “is not so much that they render docile those who are liable to transgress the law, but that they tend to assimilate the transgression of the laws in a general tactics of subjection” (Foucault 1995, 272). By keeping the Africans off balance, in other words, the local government normalizes transgressions of in Dengfeng Village so as to subject residents and landlords under state control. What’s more, the capricious nature of application regulations incentivizes Africans to move away. This blatant flaunting of state power, I propose, should also be understood as the culmination of long process of the local government trying to wrestle political power away from Dengfeng Village.
Mini Welfare State

During Mao’s era, Dengfeng farmers were organized in the Dengfeng Production Team (shengchandui 生产队) under the Shahe Commune (shahe gongshe 沙河公社). Following the reforms, in the 1980s, the Production Team was disbanded and replaced by the Dengfeng Village Committee with democratically elected leaders. Apart from developing remaining land, this grassroots government was also in charge of various duties such as village harmony, public safety, sanitation, organizing production, and basic welfare. In 1995, under the encouragement of the Municipal Government, most urban villages in the city became corporatized, which turned village committees they replaced into shareholding companies and villagers into shareholders. In Dengfeng, the company is named the Dengfeng Industrial Group. At the time the Municipal Government believed the establishments of such shareholding companies could on the one hand modernize business activities of urban villages, and on the other hand detach political and social leadership from its leaders. However, as Wang Jianqing points out, nothing really changed (Wang 2008, 62-63). Not only did the Company inherit the Village Committee’s land rights, it continues, to this day, to shoulder many social obligations. For example, the Company employs the younger generation in the Village; it gives Villagers a monthly “basic living assistance stipend (jiben shenghuo buzhu jin 基本生活补助金)”; every year end it pays shareholders dividends using its investment earnings; after villagers reach a certain age, the Company also pays them pensions (Wang 2008, 74). Dengfeng is not a unique case. In her comparative research of three urban villages in China, Beibei Tang cites a villager from Guangzhou as saying that their benefits are so good that even urban residents are jealous (Tang 2015, 734).
Because of the democratic nature of village leaderships and the welfare benefits village they provide, their relationship with villagers is particularly strong. To compete with them, district governments established street offices, which are the lowest level of government. In 1987, Tianhe District Government (Dengfeng did not become part of Yuexiu until 2005) instituted Dengfeng Street Office, which rules over a much larger area than the neighborhood discussed in this dissertation. By 2005 there were ten residents’ committees under its jurisdiction. While grassroots support for street offices varies from urban village to urban village that in Dengfeng is perhaps particularly weak because of the Village’s lack of representation in the residents’ committees. According to the Regulations of Residents’ Committee Formation, committee members should be selected or elected from the community (Wang 2008, 80). In Tang’s research, this was really the case in many urban villages. However, few Dengfeng Villagers worked in the residents’ committees in the area because of various reasons such as the lack of motivation to work for the government and the low pay those jobs offered (Wang 2008, 80-81). The fact that the local government was out of touch with Dengfeng residents was reflected in one survey Wang conducted. When asked whom they would turn to if they encountered difficulties in life, the shareholding company or residents’ committee, an overwhelming majority chose the former (Wang 2008, 83). Although the situation is better in other villages, overall, Beibei Tang’s research suggests that villagers care very little about residents’ committees even when they could partake in their elections (Tang 2015, 740). Meanwhile they care deeply about the administration of shareholding companies and their leadership. Dengfeng Villagers had petitioned multiple times to the Municipal Government in the past when Company leadership made decisions against their will.
The government’s lack of power in Dengfeng makes it a non-state space, which can be problematic. First, since the Chinese government treats Uyghurs as a security threat, Dengfeng, being home of many Uyghurs and so close to the Huanshidong CBD, is too important to be a blind spot in governance, especially after the 2014 attack in Kunming Railway Station where thirty people were killed. Also, the government’s weakness meant they had little access to some of the most basic information such as exactly how many rental properties existed in the Village. As a result, they were not at a good position to collect tax. According to Wang Jianqing, over thirty percent of the landlords neither registered their rental properties nor paid tax (Wang 2008, 114). In his study of urban village redevelopment in Guangzhou and Shenzhen, Him Chung (2015) understands redevelopment processes as “territorialization of the locate state” that enables it to fill up gaps in governance and better control key resources such as land. He is definitely correct. However, with Dengfeng’s redevelopment not within sight, sanfei clean-ups at least allow the government gain some ground on the Village. Through enforcing of the Police Registration, the Yuexiu District Government builds up its knowledge about landlords and rental properties. In another sanfei clean-up initiated in 2015, the Municipal Government also initiated a project to install an electronic security system on all rental properties in urban villages (Luo 2015). All renters, foreign or not, have to apply for the card key with the government. This way, the sanfei clean-up not only renders visible African renters, but Chinese ones as well. This improvement in data collection puts the government at a much better position to enforce social control and tax Villagers. As we can see, besides creating a gentrified appearance, sanfei clean-ups are also an important means for the state to encroach on the relative autonomy of Dengfeng. I talked to some
Villagers and they seemed to care little about what the Village could provide. One told me the dividend they received every year was only about 150 yuan ($23) per share, which no longer amounts to much in Guangzhou. The attempt of taking over governance of Dengfeng is made all the more clear when we look at the growing number of foreigner assistance offices in the area.

A Panoptic Space

All the foreigner management related office in Dengfeng area as of 2017

In September 2015, the Yuexiu District Government announced a dual-platform mode of administration (shuangpingtai guanli moshi 双平台管理模式) in Dengfeng Street that aimed to divide up foreigner management and service (“Dengfeng Street Established Two Platforms” 2015). The management part of the equation was assigned to
an office located at the original site of the Community Office, which, after the construction, was renovated. In early 2015, the original office reopened and was renamed Foreign Affairs Service Center of Dengfeng Community (dengfengjie waiguoren zonghe fuwu zhongxin 登峰街外国人综合服务中心, hereafter referred to as the FAS Center).

From its description, the FAS Center’s duties were very similar to the original Community Office and it also provided many services to foreigners. Aside from the Police Registration application, it also claimed to offer legal, counseling, and employment related services and Chinese lessons. A 2016 news report even says that the Center would have social workers pay family visits (jiafang 家访) and persuade shy foreigners to come out of their apartments (Liang 2016). Whether all these services were in fact provided and could benefit foreigners in the area are not clear, but they can certainly further improve the government’s information collection and make it more difficult for unregistered foreigners to live there.

Baohan Region Multifunction Service Center. On the left is a rolling screen showing currency exchange rates. Photo taken by author in 2017.
On the other hand, to facilitate the elimination of informal businesses, the Street Office established the Baohan Region Multifunction Service Center (baohan dique zonghe fuwu zhongxin 宝汉地区综合服务中心, hereafter referred to as the Baohan Center), the service platform which is charged with providing some basic convenience such as international phone calls and currency exchange. Interestingly, although the Baohan Center has also taken up the responsibility of rental assistance, it is assigned to the village collective organization, i.e. Dengfeng Industrial Group (“Dengfeng Street Established Two Platforms” 2015). This move represents a form of cooptation of the Village’s self-organizing power by the local state. While Dengfeng Industrial Group can continue to work for the benefits of the villagers, it has to do so under a government platform. Besides, the Baohan Center is also in charge of the administration of migrants
and ethnic minority residents. Migrant workers, like their foreign counterparts, can register and apply for the Residents’ Permit there. The Center has an office called Ethnic Minority Workshop which serves as a space for government officials at different levels to discuss and formulate administrative strategies (“Dengfeng Street in Search” 2016). This again goes to show that the real intention of this comprehensive clean-up was to strengthen the government’s regulation of Dengfeng Village and its diverse population.

Indeed, the responsibilities of both new Offices seem to overlap with the Community Office, but this was because the District Government was preparing to move the Office yet again in 2015 (Zhang & Liang 2015). The new Office, a two-floor building, is much larger (1,300m²) and is located on the other side of Xiatangxi Road, opposite the main Village area. It offers all the main services provided by the Community Office and the FAS Center. In the summer of 2017, I visited the new Office that just opened. The first floor was not a working area, but simply a hallway leading to the staircase to the second floor. The walls of the hallway served like an information board with different statistics and images introducing the migrant, both domestic and foreign, situation in Dengfeng and the improvements in administration that the Yuexiu District Government has achieved following the 2014 clean-up. Among the statistics is the increased numbers of registered foreigners and rental houses and decreased number of crimes since 2014. The second floor was the real office area where foreigners could apply for the Police Registration and landlords could pay taxes. On the day I visited, there was not a single foreigner. Considering most Africans had moved from the area, this was not surprising.
The original Community Office has become a detention center. To the left of the office, five farmed police were guarding the office. Photo taken by author in 2017

Despite the establishment of this spacious new office, the former locations were not deserted. As for the second location (the one I described at the beginning of the chapter), which had served as the Community Office for less than three years, it had become an office where residents apply for the keys for the electronic security system mentioned earlier. But what truly lays bare the government’s intention to drive away Africans is the fact that the FAS Center was converted into a detention center. Many times during my stay in Dengfeng, I saw Africans sitting inside the office being caged in by barriers. Beside the office, with rifles in their hands, were usually four to five armed police (a division of the military). For me it was quite a spectacle, but the residents there simply went about their businesses as if it was nothing unusual. But there was nothing normal about this because all these offices (and the heavy presence of police) have turned this once somewhat autonomous area into a Panoptic space, with state power on full display.
Leniency in Guangyuanxi

Although Xiaobei boasts the first Community Office of Foreigner Assistance, it is not the only area that has one. A similar office also opened in Guangyuanxi, the other major African community in the city, in 2010 (Li 2010). The area is also under the jurisdiction of Kuangquan Street, also part of Yuexiu District, and as mentioned in Chapter 1, is located in the west side of the once Northern Suburb. Having witness the chaos in the Community Office in Dengfeng in 2015, I decided to visit the one in Guangyuanxi to see if the situation was comparable. I arrived early in the morning to see if Africans also had to show up early to get in line. To my surprise, there was no one waiting.

After that day, I kept returning for a week, and never did I see the congestion I did in Xiaobei. Instead, I discovered signs of relative leniency in the area. Of the two Nigerians I talked to, neither had Police Registration, and neither had even heard of such a document. One of them had been coming to China for a few years, but he was never aware of this requirement. While by summer 2015, the informal market in Dengfeng had been mostly cleaned up, I still saw a night market in Guangyuanxi. However, I was not able to find out if the seven-day Police Registration or a quota system was also in effect in Guangyuanxi, but if much fewer people cared to apply, it mattered less whether those were implemented or not. I cannot conclude if this leniency was due to the fact that Africans protested twice in the area or that it was much farther from Huanshidong CBD. It could be both. But from my conversations with Dai, the police officer, I knew that the seven-day Police Registration was also in effect in Huanshidong CBD in order to prevent Africans from going there. This suggests the government was conscious of the fact that
public order of Xiaobei and that of Huanshidong are interconnected, and clean-up of the former is thus key to maintaining the image of the latter.

Moving Away

Ben and Ruza were two Kenyans I befriended in 2015. They both lived in Dengfeng Village for more than a year, but when I met them, they were trying to move away from Dengfeng. Ben told me he was sick of police harassments and having to apply for the Police Registration every week. Besides, their new home was a lot nicer. Later in my trip, I decided to pay them a visit and take a look at their new apartment. But it was located at a remote area, he had to show me the way in person. We met up at the McDonald’s in Xiaobei and took the subway. After more than an hour and two transits, we arrived at Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport. Then we walked for a twenty minutes, passing through a Five-Star Hotel, and finally arrived at a shuttle stop where a line of twenty or so people was waiting to get on the first bus. After about fifteen minutes, we hopped on the bus, which was packed. After about another twenty-five minutes or so, we finally arrived at a newly constructed gated community. But from there we walked for another ten minute before sitting down in his new apartment. The trip was quite an adventure as it took more than two hours. We started from one of the most crowded parts of the city and ended up in a sparsely populated gated community. It was brand new and made up of scores of twenty-plus-floor condominium buildings, some of which were still under construction. Around the community were still farmlands and villages, making the community almost like an urban oasis in the midst of the rural.
Ben said he liked it there. “Applying for the Police Registration is a breeze here. There is no hassle and the police don’t bother you.” In Dengfeng, during the worst months when the seven-day Registration and quota were in effect, he had to wake up once in a week at 4:00am to get in line and would not finish the process until 11:00am. Also the new apartment was spacious and fully furnished. That was another reason why Ben and Ruza did not bother taking anything with them when they moved out. The apartment had three bedrooms, so there was another roommate (who was not there during my visit). Each bedroom has a large bed and a window air conditioner. The patio was not very big, but did have a nice view. Perhaps the best part was the rent only cost 1,800yuan (less than $300) a month. Divided by three, it cost about the same as the tiny studio in Dengfeng. However, what Ben and Ruza had gained in quality, they sacrificed in distance. I left them that night at about 9:00pm. Not wanting to take the risk of missing the last subway train, I decided to take the shuttle at the airport. It turned out to be a bad decision. The shuttle was very slow and by the time it dropped me off at the Guangzhou railway station, it was already midnight and no city bus was operating in that area. It took me totally almost four hours to get back to the city core. The commute eventually proved too much for Ben as well. When I saw him again in 2017, he had left that gated community and moved back to a location much closer to Xiaobei. I asked if he could show me his place, he said he was staying at a hotel and rarely spent time there.

Ben and Ruza were not the only ones that left Dengfeng Village. In 2017, there were perhaps only a handful of Africans still living there. Aunt Hong, a local real estate agent, whom we will know more in the next chapter, told me Africans were now no longer allowed to live in the Village and their departure had caused rent to go down in the entire
neighborhood. Many like Ben and Ruza moved to peripheral areas of the city. Others, according to some scholars (Li et al. 2009, Haugen 2012), were moving toward neighboring towns. For example, Heidi Haugen in her field research observed that frequent police inspections of visa and the enforcement of the Police Registration have pushed Africans out of Yuexiu District. Foshan, a neighboring city, became a popular place for them to settle down thanks to its more welcoming environment (Haugen 2012, 74). The Africans themselves might have also played a role in their exit of Guangzhou, or even China entirely. In late 2014, a Gambian, who was traumatized by his experience in Guangzhou, started a Facebook campaign called “Gambian’s Nightmare in China” (Gambian’s Nightmare, 2014). In 2016, he and some other Gambians collaborated with two researchers including Heidi Haugen and created a blog titled *U-Turn Asia* (Haugen & Diederich, 2014). Both initiatives, featuring photographs and diaries of Africans, seek to expose the Africans’ hardship in Guangzhou and dissuade others from coming to China.

One of them laments in the diary:

> Is [sic] not easy at all, without police report penalty’s 2000 RMB [260 EUR], overstay 5000 RMB [EUR 655] and you will deported [sic] and you will buy your own ticket for the deportation and they don’t allow foreingnees [sic] to job [sic] in China.

As we can see, the Municipal Government succeeded in driving Africans away from Dengfeng Village largely thanks to the enforcement of the Police Registration. The 2014 clean-up and the consequent manipulation of the document’s application rules by the Community Office basically declared the neighborhood off limits for Africans. As a report of triumph, the video *The Past and Present of African Village* ends with a claim the successful clean-up of Dengfeng contributes to the overall improvement of Yuexiu
District’s the environment and order. As the narrator speaks, the audience are showed views of the District from a helicopter perspective. Scenes of modern high-rises, crisscrossing elevated highways, and typical metropolis skylines follow one another. This grand and literally top down vision cannot be more different from the microscopic view that Billy showed me in his video.

As we shall see in the next chapter, cleaning up Dengfeng was as much the result of power struggle between the state and the grassroots authority as it was about building a global city. Clean-up efforts are thus a two-prong approach. On the one hand, the Community Office expelled Africans from the neighborhood, and on the other hand it directed them toward gated communities, particularly Jinlu Shanzhuang near Dengfeng Village. This reflects the government’s attempt to create middle class communities that are modern, global, and conducive to population management.
Chapter 5 From Tenements to The Model Community

In 2017, I was able to find a place to stay in Dengfeng Village for only three weeks largely thanks to Aunt Hong, the local real estate agent. A Dengfeng Villager herself, Aunt Hong, as others called her, was quite well known in the neighborhood because not only did she help Villagers find renters, but she also maintained properties for absentee landlords and collected rents on their behalves. She had a little booth in the Village, and her phone never stopped ringing. Although she kept a cautious tone when we talked, she was very friendly and let me accompany her in her daily business around the Village. On my second day in the Village, a man showed up at Aunt Hong’s booth to talk about an apartment that she was commissioned to renovate. From their conversation, I could tell they had worked together in many projects. Later, they were going to taking a look at the apartment and Aunt Hong invited me to join them and I happily obliged.

I followed them as they led me through the labyrinthine alleys below a concrete jungle that shared a strong semblance with the now demolished Kowloon Walled City of Hong Kong. They were dark, wet, dirty and stinky. We went through so many twists and turns and ups and downs that I soon lost my sense of direction. We finally arrived at an entrance of a building, which looks more like a hole in the wall. Like Mr. Shi’s building, the stairs were steep and narrow, but much darker. You could smell the mold on entering. On the way up, Aunt Hong and the man were discussing how to carry stuff up and down the narrow stairs and whether they needed to hire others to do the work. We climbed to the fifth floor and Aunt Hong opened a door at the top of the staircase.
The apartment, about 60 square meters, occupied the entire fifth floor and was further subdivided into six to seven small rooms, separated by thin wood planks. Just like the alleys below, the arrangement of the rooms was so random and chaotic that some entrances were almost completely hidden. In the first room we looked at, there was another door inside which I thought led to either a balcony or closet, but it opened up to another individual room. The occupant of this inner room had to go through the outer one whenever they needed to leave or enter. The place seemed deserted at first sight, but a closer look revealed that people were still living there as there were still utensils and jars of seasonings in the kitchen. One of the doors was locked and another still had a blanket on the bed, which was simply a wooden bench. I asked Aunt Hong if the tenants were Africans, she said no, but Africans did live there before. Insulation in the apartment was primitive at best. The roof was simply made of wood and tin sheet, and some windows were simply covered up with tarp. One room did have a window air conditioner. I could not imagine living there without one because under the summer sun of Guangzhou, the harmful effect of this bare-bone setup was at full display. Ten minutes in, we were all soaked in sweat. Aunt Hong jokingly said the rooms came with sauna facility.
After discussing the renovation cost with the owner over the phone, Aunt Hong told the man the owner had to think about it and began locking the doors. Since it was still early, she offered to take me on a tour in the neighborhood. As we walked our conversations were constantly interrupted by her acquaintances who stopped to greet and talk to her. At times it felt as if she hoped my work could in some way help broker change, as she would ask me to take note of how bad the conditions were or if I could smell the terrible odor. She told me there were many Africans in the neighborhood between 2010 and 2013, but few were left now because the government no longer allowed them live here. Africans, according to her, tended to rent the worst-conditioned rooms because landlords had little trouble filling up better ones with Chinese renters whom they preferred. Now with most Africans gone, rents were down.

According to Aunt Hong, there were more Africans living in Jinlu Shanzhuang, a gated community of more than ten high-rise condominium buildings about a half kilometer from Dengfeng Village. Although most properties there were owned by Dengfeng Villagers, the environment was a lot better than the Village. According to Aunt Hong because the community was farther and more expensive, the apartments were not as popular among migrant workers. In 2007, the newly established Community Office of Foreigner Assistance began directing Africans in the Village toward Jinlu Shanzhuang, while the press declared it a “model community”. According to many news report, the government has found a solution to problems such as sanfei, crimes, and group renting. In this chapter, we will examine this claim, but more importantly, I relate this project to the broader state sponsored construction of an urban society that forms around gated communities. I will first examine the rise of gated communities since the 1990s, and then
moves on to investigate Africans’ housing situation and explains how it contrasts with what gated communities represent. After that, I will look at Jinlu Shanzhuang and whether it did show significant improvement over Dengfeng Village. Finally, I will conclude by briefly discussing what the trend of building gated communities means to Africans and Dengfeng Village.

**Gated Communities**

In Mao’s era, most urban residents enjoyed heavily subsidized state housing assigned to them through their work units, or *danwei*. But the economic reforms have since all but eliminated the role of *danwei* as care takers, and with it welfare housing. On the other hand, the reforms encouraged individualism and personal distinction, which drive consumerism and economic growth. While *danwei* in the past provided community services such as sanitation and kindergarten and created the cohesion among residents, now they fall on the shoulder of municipal governments (Bray 2005, 181). Beginning in the 1990s, the Central Government began to put more and more emphasis on the construction of “communities (*shequ,* 社区)”. Not only are *shequ* charged with community services already mentioned, they are also intended to recreate a sense of community in the face of rising individualism and influx of rural migrants.

One form of *shequ* that has become really common is gated communities. Spurred by the booming real estate industry, which has become the pillar of urban growth and the main source of revenue for municipal governments, home ownership has becoming a defining character of the urban identity. For the rapidly growing middle class, owning an
condo in a modern gated community is a status symbol (Zhang 2010) and, as David Bray says, a way for them to “be among people of their own kind and need not fear any interference from rest of the population who have not fared so well” (Bray 2005, 177). The consequent demand for such housing is driving up properties prices in all major cities in China. During my research, conversations between my friends, who were mostly professionals with well-paid jobs in large corporations such as banks, major real estate developers, and multinational corporations, often concerned such gated communities. They compared locations, prices, and services of their own communities, or asked for others’ opinion before purchasing.

These developments reflect the Municipal Government’s ambition to build a global city as described by Sassen. According to Sassen, the growth of producer services industry in financial centers across the world result in a concentration of highly educated professionals and technicians. This new class of well-paid workers call for gentrification of older neighborhoods in the city core and the constructions of luxury offices and residential areas (Sassen 1991, 254-255). Seen in this light, redevelopments of urban villages are a logical step. The prioritization of the Liede project also makes sense because it is located in Zhujiang New Town, the new CBD. As noted in Chapter 1, there had been discussion in 2009 to redevelop Dengfeng into a luxury community. Although the plan never materialized, it indicates that the government’s vision for Dengfeng follows the same rationale.

While redeveloping Dengfeng has yet to happen, all the beautification projects launched in the city show that often times the Municipal Government is willing to settle for a gentrified and modern look when redevelopment is not immediately possible. In fact
Jinlu Shanzhuang is not entirely a commodity gated community. It is older and less well maintained and hence does not look as luxury and offer fewer amenities than the newer commodity projects do. But as we shall see, it still shares many of the same characteristics of a modern gated community and pushing Africans toward Jinlu Shanzhuang can at least hide the disorder of Dengfeng Village, drive away those that are less financially capable, and construct the belief that Jinlu Shanzhuang, and by extension all gated communities, represents what a healthy global community should look like. On the contrary, the antithesis to what Jinlu Shanzhuang symbolizes, i.e. home ownership, order, civility, modernity, and middle class, is informal renting.

Africans’ Housing Situation.

We already met Ben and Ruza, the two Kenyans who moved to a very nice gated community in a far flung area, in the previous chapter. I first met them in front of an ATM near the Community Office arguing with their landlord. A mentioned in the previous chapter, they were trying to move out of their apartment as their lease was expiring. But they discovered the landlord had changed the lock. They could not get into their apartment and pack their belongings. The landlord would not let them in because she said they were late in paying rent. Ben and Ruza took out some money from the ATM and tried to pay the balance, but the landlord disagreed on the amount. So they were arguing by the street. I offered my help and translated for them. Eventually, the landlord backed down and let them into their apartment. But because the landlord had to go to work she asked her husband to let them in. At first Ben and Ruza insisted she go with them because they did not trust her. After I talked to the husband over the phone who
promised to open the door, they let the landlord go, but they wanted me to come along. I happily obliged and offered to help them move.

The apartment building was located in one of the lanes branching out of Baohan Zhijie. Its front entrance is almost entirely blocked by another building, but overall the building was in much better shape than the one I described earlier. The landlord’s family lived right next to Ben’s apartment. The husband was still in his pajama when we arrived and was quite a surly man. After confirming with his wife, he let us into the apartment. The room was a tiny studio, for which they paid one thousand two hundred yuan a month (about $200). Without air conditioning, it was quite hot inside. The walls were not painted and Ben and Ruza had to purchase all the furniture from fridge, stove to bed. It did, however, have a large patio, but it was surrounded by other buildings and water was constantly dripping down from all the air conditioners above, making the area much less pleasant. Ben and Ruza had been living there for more than a year. They were not partners as I originally thought, but just took turns to use the apartment.

After arguing some more with the landlord over the furniture, Ben and Ruza just packed their clothes and small items. Almost all the furniture was left in the room. I asked Ben why they left it since the landlords would take it. “I don’t look at it that way,” he explained. “To me time is more important. It’s not worth wasting it on small things.” Indeed, time is vital to Africans and was the reason why many Africans chose to live in Dengfeng Village. Like migrant workers, most Africans cannot afford better places that offer the same convenience. So they have to put up with the poor conditions of informal rental houses and abusive landlords. But despite its relative affordability, rental houses in Baohan Zhijie, because of their central location, are still more expensive compared to
those of more remote parts of city. A one-year lease is a huge financial commitment. That was why Ruza sublet her room to Ben when she went back to Kenya. In fact, room sharing of various forms is very common among African traders.

Africans in Guangzhou are on tight budgets. They frequently travel between cities or even countries and spend most of their day time sourcing competitive goods and negotiating deals. Few have the intention of settling down in China long term, and China’s immigration policies make it almost impossible to begin with. Accommodation is thus little more than a place to sleep at night and, for some, store their goods. There is no incentive for them to spend a large amount of money on it. So they usually find economical ways to meet their housing need. Sharing a room, like Ben and Ruza did, is the most common one. Dong Niu (2015), a post-doctoral scholar of Tsinghua University,
has done a detailed study on this phenomenon in the Dengfeng area between 2013 and 2015. Niu observes that cost was only one of the reasons for sharing. Due to the short duration of stay on their visas, they would rather spend time and energy doing market research and making deals than looking for apartments or wasting time on non-trading related activities such as applying for the Police Registration. So many simply moved in with someone who already had a lease and a vacant bed to share. This was not unique among those living in rental houses. Those who stayed in hotels, albeit much fewer in number due to the higher costs, also shared their rooms (Li et al. 2009 711). In fact this special demand for temporary housing among the Africans is so big that some opportunistic renters saw a chance to profit from it.

According to Niu, some relatively successful and long term residents in Guangzhou would work out deals with their landlords to modify the internal structure of their houses so that they could rent to more people. This way these Africans became “subsidiary landlords (erji fangdong 二级房东)”. They brought in more tenants for the real landlord, but pocketed some of the profits. Sometimes, a single apartment can house more than ten people, turning it into what Niu calls it “a family hotel”. On Uturn Asia, a Gambian wrote in his diary:

Another hard experience is that I have been living in a room congested by more than 16 people in a 4×4 sqm and this houselords [sic] are asking for 50 Yuan which is equals to 10 US dollars and the houses only contains mattresses and no blankets, no soap, no tooth paste, no food, no water to drink, everything you shall provide for yourself.

This, we have learned in Chapter 2, has provided a major fodder for the press to demonize Africans and informal rental houses. But from this excerpt, we can see that if given a choice, Africans would not want to live in such conditions either.
In fact phenomena like this are not a unique to China. African traders across the world adopt various strategies to save and make money from accommodation. Africans and other Third World immigrants in Hong Kong, for example, find cheap housing in Chungking Mansion in Hong Kong, with which many compare Tianxiu Mansion. These rental houses may or may not conform to all legal codes (Matthews, 2011). Hotel Belleclaire, a Single Room Occupancy hotel in New York City, were homes to many African traders. Despite the restriction, usually four or five of them cramped into one room (Stoller 2002, 15, 154). In Paris, African traders established squats by breaking into abandoned apartments and put up new locks on the doors. They then advertised the squats by word of mouth and sold them to fellow traders (MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000, 68-69, 88-90).

In fact, room sharing, or “group renting (qunzu 群租)” as news media call it today, has little to do with race or sanfei, despite the press reporting otherwise. Chinese, whether they are urban residents or migrant workers, inside or outside of China, have always been group renting to save costs. Growing up in the 1980s, my grandparents, with their family of nine, were renting a six-square-meter room. While studying in the U.S., I also saw Chinese students convert living rooms of apartments into separate bedrooms. In 2013, a Shanghai news article offers an insightful understanding of group renting (“Cities Will Be Cleaner” 2013). The author argues that the root cause for group renting was disparity between migrants’ low income and skyrocketing rents. Similarly, it was not the Africans’ illegal immigration status that make them to “hide” in urban villages. It was the combination of their economic status, the mobile nature of their work, and structural obstacles like visa restrictions that makes informal housing the only viable option.
However, the state either fails to see that or intentionally ignores it. Since the mid-2000s, large municipalities, especially Beijing and Shanghai, have been cracking down on group renting and subletting among migrant workers. One cannot help but question the state’s sincerity in handling the issue. As the Shanghai news article suggested, the real motive behind such projects was title of “world class city” and a high-end image.

**Enforcement of the Police Registration**

The government has long been aware of the semi-legal ways Africans devise to solve their housing problems in Guangzhou. During the first half of 2007, the Guangzhou Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the most important political advisory institution in the Chinese state, conducted a research on managing foreigners and rental houses. On the last day of August the same year, the results of the research were published in a report which found a well-coordinated management system involving related government institutions was lacking (“Research Report on Management” 2007). The issue that stood out most was the fact that most foreigners did not complete the Police Registration and many landlords, particularly those from urban villages, did not register their properties. This, it argues, might turn rental houses into a “safe haven (bifenggang 避风港)” for sanfei. The report made several recommendations including constructing a foreigner information network, dividing rental houses into three categories and creating administrative measures based on those categories. The three categories are hotels, communities with property management, and scattered residential communities (sanju juminqu 散居居民区). For the first two
categories, the report suggests more frequent inspections while for the third, it recommends the heavier involvement of neighborhood level government agencies such as the Residents’ Committee.

In December, 2007 the “Black Tribe” report again draws public attention toward rental houses, but makes even more pointed comment on the problem of room sharing. As noted in Chapter Two, Huang Shiding, the social scientist mentioned that seven or eight people are sharing one room that costs a hundred yuan or so a month. This statement betrays that Huang, as an academic authority and state representative, knew exactly that cost was the reason Africans shared rooms. However, instead of trying to find a practical housing solution for these traders, he, just as the CPPCC report, argued without factual support that these foreigners posed a serious threat to social order and called for again a more systematic way of management. Ironically, in a 2006 news report by discussed in Chapter 4 (see Yan & Shan 2006), Huang, a migrant himself in Guangzhou, criticized the top down enforcement of the Temporary Residence Permit imposed on migrant workers and had a very sympathetic tone in discussing their housing problem. He also strongly advocated for finding better ways to serve migrant workers and help them assimilate to Guangzhou. He even implies that crimes happened in urban villages because migrants were not emotionally invested in Guangzhou and did not see the benefits of reporting crimes. His drastically different attitudes toward the two groups not only show that race can divide one’s opinion on the same issue, but also indicates that the sanfei discourse and its link to criminal activities are problematic at best, and deceptive at worst.
Soon after the “Black Tribe” report, such a system was born, according to Zhigang Li, Michal Lyons and Alison Brown (Li et. al 2012 66-67). At the municipal level, a *sanfei* Management Team consisting of officials from different state agencies was established. Related departments also instituted their own Foreign Management Offices. Besides, the Municipal Government also created a new computerized system for foreigner management in all police stations and hotels “to collect information on foreign visitors [and construct] a well-equipped and networked information system”. At the neighborhood level, the Community Office in Dengfeng was already in place even before the report, but similar offices were soon set up across the city. In 2015, the Municipal Government launched the largest *sanfei* clean-up in twelve years and specifically singled out group-renting as one of the most serious problems that needed to be addressed. Again, emphases were placed on improving means of social control such as data collection and neighborhood surveillance, both of which depended on the Police Registration.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Police Registration records lots of personal information and a foreigner must carry it at all times. In other words, like passport and visa, it is a form of identification card. Requiring the governed to apply for ID cards, permits and licenses is a feature of every state, and a manifestation of state power. Compared to enacting laws, Stoller argues, these documents are much more invasive because not only do they regulate certain activities, but they also require the submission of personal information and ask applicants to jump through various hoops before they are granted (Stoller 2002, 101-102). This invasiveness is exactly what the Municipal Government counts on to further penetrate the Villagers’ control over the area. The room
sharing and subletting activities that many Africans rely on would have been a lot more
difficult once renting was formalized and landlords and renters alike were registered into
the government’s system. It would be easier for local state agencies to enforce occupancy
restriction and limit access to only lease holders.

Today the government enforces the Police Registration mainly in two ways. For hotel
users, the Hotel Industry System (luye xitong 旅业系统), the new computerized system
mentioned earlier, automatically registers them when they check in. But if they are
staying with their friends or sharing the room with others who do not formally check in,
they would be left out of the system. In other words the system is inherently biased
toward those who can afford to stay in hotels by themselves. But among Africans, hotel
users are few. For the vast majority of Africans who are renting apartments, they have to
go to a local police station or, in neighborhoods like Dengfeng, the Community Office to
complete the application process. These people will need to present proof of residence,
which usually means a lease. But because of their group renting situation, many Africans
do not have a lease. Although one can also use their roommate’s document and lease to
register, if multiple people register with the same address, it may alert the government
and lead to rejection of the application. Also, the police could check to see if renters
were really staying at the address or using it for registration purpose. In other words, this
lease requirement specifically targets the Africans’ housing situation and forces them to
choose between spending a lot more money on hotels or signing a long term lease, and
breaking the law by not registering and taking the risk of being arrested. Considering the
costs of the former, it is understandable that many chose the latter. But in many cases, it
is the inherent problem of this requirement that forces many to break the law.
As mentioned before, one manifestation of the government’s weak control over Dengfeng Village was the inability to collect rental tax. The Police Registration was designed to remedy this. To complete the application process for renters, landlords must show that they have paid rental tax. Many landlords simply could not provide the tax receipts for their renters. Or landlords might shift the tax burden onto foreign renters by asking them to pay it, which is in fact illegal. Zhou Bo, the graduate student of SUNY at Albany, told me that rental tax responsibility was usually negotiated between landlords and renters. While volunteering at the Community Office, he saw Africans pay the tax in the Office. In other words authorities knew that landlords shifted their tax burden onto the Africans and they could not do much. Kalil, a Guinean I met in Tianxiu Mansion, told me he once had to pay two to three hundred yuan (about $30 to $50) in extra every month in order to register himself. One time he had to move out of a place because he could not afford to pay the additional tax every month on top of his rent. For Kalil, he had no problem with the implementation of the Police Registration, but he insisted that authorities should make sure landlords fulfill their tax obligation. To be fair, this is hard to enforce because landlords could simply increase the rent to cover the tax. In other words, Africans have to pay more than locals do if they want to rent legally, a fact confirmed by a 2012 news article (Yao & Tan 2012). From the government’s perspective, who pays the rental tax matters little. As long as the rental property is registered, the renter’s information is collected, and the right amount of tax is paid, their mission is accomplished.

The fact that the enforcement of the Police Registration is aimed at regulating rental houses was best showed by Dem’s experience. Dem’s cousin was once in China on a
business trip and planned to undergo a medical treatment while she was there. While she was hospitalized Dem needed to help her extend her visa, which required the Police Registration. Despite having the document issued by the hospital verifying she was receiving treatment there, the local police station would not issue the document because it was not a ‘valid’ address. Dem went to the Exit and Entry Office of the Provincial Public Security Department, explaining what the police told him and hoping they would waive it. They, however, insisted that she have an address recognized by the government such as one on a lease or a hotel reservation. Dem then turned to the hotel she previously stayed at and asked the receptionist to give him a statement that she stayed there before, but they would not comply because she was not a current customer. Seeing the visa expiration date approach, Dem was really worried, although he could not tell his cousin. The solution he eventually came up with, was to book a hotel for a few days using her name and documents. The hotel managed to register her just before her visa expired. He told me how relieved he felt at the moment, despite wasting the money on the hotel. Had Dem not been able to do this for his cousin, she would have become a sanfei. As we can see, the new system of the Police Registration assumes that Africans would either be renting apartments or staying at hotels. Dem’s cousin fell into the crack of this system which was not designed to simply have an address on record.

Although all foreigners are subject to the Police Registration, Africans bore the brunt. Western tourists or businessmen are often willing to pay higher cost for a hotel, which, as mentioned earlier, would register them automatically. Some white foreigners working in Guangzhou are employed by organizations recognized by the government, such as schools and foreign companies and they are sometimes provided with formal housing.
Cynthia, an English teacher from Australia for example, was provided with two apartments by the two schools that employed her. She never had any problem completing the registration process and praised the government for its enforcement. She believed the Police Registration showed the government’s sincere concern for foreigners because it could help authorities contact them in case of emergency. The contrast with the Africans’ experience could not have been starker. But as we have learned in Chapter 3, Africans were impacted the most mainly because police operations such as raids and door-to-door inspections targeted Africans and hence concentrated in Dengfeng. Most Africans living in the Dengfeng area have firsthand experience of inspections. Ben for example was constantly harassed by door-to-door inspectors. He told me the police knocked on his door every morning at eight o’clock. Dem, my Senegalese friend, was also fed up with raids. “The police entered your apartment five o’clock in the morning”, he recalled. “They banged on the door. And if you don’t rush to open the door, you’ll find your door busted in no time. Under this heavy handed approach it is no surprise that Africans began moving away from Dengfeng, which was exactly the goal of the Municipal Government. The government’s plan, however, did not simply include eviction. They tried to direct them into a model community they were building as well.

A Model Community

During my stay in Dengfeng, I kept nagging Aunt Hong to show me around in Jinlu Shanzhuang, but for two and a half weeks, it was to no avail. Her reluctance was understandable because the neighborhood was a twenty-minute uphill walk away. In summer Guangzhou, this was not the most pleasant thing to do for someone whose daily
business already involved a lot of walking. Finally, one dusk before I left, she agreed
because she needed to check on her properties there.

The name Jinlu Shanzhuang (金麓山庄) literally means Golden Foothill Mountain
Garden. It at once refers to its location at the southern base of Baiyun Mountain and
conjures up a picturesque scenery that reminds one of luxury and nature.
Administratively speaking, the gated community is under the jurisdiction of the Dengfeng
Street Office, the lowest branch of the Municipal Government. It, as mentioned before, is
not a commercial project. In the 1990s, the collective Dengfeng Industrial Group, the
Village’s collective organization, decided to pool together Villagers’ money to build a
modern housing project one of its livestock farms no longer in use. Those who had
money all participated because it gave them an opportunity to buy properties at the price
of cost. Since each adult Villager was eligible to buy one, some families, like Aunt Hong’s, bought multiple condos. The project broke ground in mid-1990s, but from some reasons – Aunt Hong blamed the corruption and inefficiency of Village officials – the project was not completed until late 2006. After over ten years, the buildings look quite old today, but compared to the Village, they are still a lot better in many ways. They are bigger, better designed, and more widely apart. Although you can really see Baiyun Mountain unless you are standing on the rooftop, there is no lacking of trees and the air quality is noticeably better than Dengfeng Village, which very close to the main artery of Huanshi Road. Not to mention, all units have modern amenities such as piped gas, elevators, and garages on the ground floor. All entrances into the premise have guard booths and barrier gates, and there is also a kindergarten and family service center for residents. Public space is ample as well. During my visit quite a few senior residents were strolling, exercising, or walking their dogs within the premise. All these qualities match what Li Zhang observes in a middle class, if not elite, gated community (Zhang 2010, 108-115). But what makes Jinlu Shanzhuang unique is that despite its brevity, its history is inseparable from Africans.

No sooner had the Villagers settle down in Jinlu Shanzhuang than the government began constructing it as a model community of foreigner management. As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the services that the then newly established Community Office of Foreigner Assistance provided was to help Africans find accommodation. It was in fact a not so subtle attempt to “guide (yindao 引导)” Africans toward Jinlu Shanzhuang (Feng 2008). Several news articles (Chao 2008, Feng 2008, Guo 2008, Zeng & Luo 2008) informing the public about the establishment of the Community Office also
discuss how Jinlu Shanzhuang improved management of Africans in Dengfeng. Two of them (Feng 2008, Guo 2008) recount how a Sudanese volunteer at the Office contributed by directing his fellow Africans toward Jinlu Shanzhuang. On the other hand, apart from persuasion, the family service center within Jinlu Shanzhuang also tried to attract Africans by starting a special program that was designed to help Africans assimilate to life in Guangzhou. It includes Chinese courses, legal assistance and education, school enrollment for foreign children, and interactive events with Chinese residents (Huang 2012). The Dengfeng Street Police Station also set up an office inside the neighborhood that helped Africans complete the Police Registration. In March 2008, a Guangzhou Daily report counts 320 condos, a third of neighborhood’s total, being rented by foreigners and the management had registered 420 foreigners (Zeng & Luo 2008). According to the report, since the initiative began, there had not been a single criminal case in the community. The authors attribute the success to the neighborhood’s private property management, which is another defining character of post-danwei gated communities as well as a middle class life (Zhang 2010, 189-194).
Private cars in Jinlu Shanzhuang. The rolling LED message board reminded landlords to register their foreign tenants. Photo taken by author in 2017

Apart from crime prevention, some news articles also seem to suggest that Jinlu Shanzhuang had created a healthy global community. One of them (Feng 2008) says, “inside the community are not only green trees and chirping birds, but Chinese and foreign children playing together”. It then concludes the report by pointing out that the Dengfeng Street Office had always held as its motto that “people of all nationalities and colors are welcomed to contribute to the construction of a harmonious Dengfeng”. As we can see, at least for the state, the emergent middle class identity and a sense of cosmopolitanism are bound together by certain types of urban landscape including gated communities and, as we shall see in Chapter 7, luxury commercial and office space. Indeed, several of the news articles discussed here mention that compared to rental houses in Dengfeng Village, condos in Jinlu Sha could charge a lot more in rent, implying an upgrade over urban villages. Interestingly, in describing the community,
some news articles seem to try to erase the blackness of Africans so as to make the community sound more Western. While many news reports nickname Xiaobei “Guangzhou’s Brooklyn” or “chocolate city,” one author (Chao 2008) refers to Jinlu Shanzhuang as a “Yangren (洋人)” community. The term, literally meaning “ocean people”, originally refers to Westerners who arrived in China in the 19th century by the sea. Due to China’s colonial history, the term has since taken on very complicated and sometimes self-conflicting connotations. But in this context, it is used almost certainly to give the community a more Western, and hence more modern and global, appeal.

But since Yangren is not a common reference for black people, the attached positivity is also not stable. The same article also quotes a Dengfeng Street Office official who said that the endeavor to direct Africans toward communities like Dengfeng was to group them together so as to prevent conflicts between Africans and Chinese that originate from cultural and diet difference. One example he gave was the fragrance Africans wore and their body odor, which locals could not stand. This implication of segregation may sound sinister, but it had little bearing in reality because Africans were simply renting out of their own will and living in the community would not prevent any interaction they had with local Chinese. What the comment did show was that besides the lofty ideal of global urban space, the government also invoked racial prejudice to justify their project, a strategy consistent with the employment of sanfei. In 2009, even Zhou Yongkang, the once senior leader of the Communist Party and a member of the Politburo Standing Committee, visited the community, indicating the Chinese government’s acknowledgement of its role as a model community (“Hand in Hand” 2009). But did Jinlu Shanzhuang, really as these news reports claim, fix all the problem?
Change Or No Change?

Aunt Hong divided her condominium into two smaller individual units. Here inside the main entrance there are two doors for each unit. Photo taken by author in 2017

Despite the exulting press coverage, the situation in Jinlu Shanzhuang did not seem to generate significant improvements on the situation of group renting. Dong Niu conducted part of his research in Jinlu Shanzhuang and he discovered room sharing was a widespread practice there. In one case, he saw five Africans sharing three rooms. To maximize rental income, Villagers adopted the same strategy as they did before: subdividing their properties into smaller rooms to accommodate more tenants. Aunt Hong, for example, owned three condos in Jinlu Shanzhuang. One of them, about 30 square meters, was divided into two individual units, one of which was being rented by an African. For the bigger one she was charging 2,000yuan per month and the smaller one (with the African tenant) 1,000yuan. Before the 2014 clean-up, she said, she was able to charge more. Granted, the situation might have be much better in the first few years because the Municipal Government was trying to create the model community image, but
Dai, the police officer, told me that it later became a key clean-up area like Dengfeng Village because the same problems of group renting and low registration rate reemerged. What’s more, it seems that the government after all was not so confident about the private property management boasted by news reports.

From both published materials and experience of my informants, it is clear that the government continued to rely on heavy policing in Jinlu Shanzhuang. According to a 2012 report published by the Municipal Public Security Bureau, a police officer stationed in the community was tasked with door-to-door inspections every day (Zheng 2012). Although in the report, the police officer is portrayed as a friendly neighbor who went to talk to foreign residents every day, my informant’s experience was very different. Kalil had been in Guangzhou for six years when we met in 2014. He was more established and had his own registered office in the city. Instead of holding a short term business visa, he had residence permit, which was a long term visa. Because of his success, he was able to afford relatively better accommodation. In 2008, he was living in Jinlu Shanzhuang, and had a roommate to share the cost. One early morning, he remembered clearly, he just finished praying and was reading. Out of the blue, six or seven police banged on the door and came in with the security guard of the building. They searched around and checked his documents. Since they were all valid, the police left him alone. But his roommate did not have the Police Registration, so he was arrested. What angered him most was that the security guard tried to steal a piece of his merchandise from him.

As for crime prevention, there is no telling if the community was significantly better than in the Village. During my visit, I did see information board with warnings both in English and Chinese encouraging residents to “Pull together with hand in hand [sic], to
build one safe and drug-free community”. It is not clear if this was indicative of drug crimes in the community or propaganda to justify the enforcement of the Police Registration and door-to-door inspections.

The lack of real changes are not surprising since both the unwillingness to apply for the Police Registration and group renting are complicated issues as I have showed in this and the previous chapter. Pushing Africans into a gated community won’t fix the problems. What it does achieve, however, is an image of a middle class community that fits the broader vision of an international metropolis. As is expected, many Africans were priced out and had to find cheaper alternatives.

Implications For Dengfeng Village

In November 18, 2017, a major fire broke out in a migrant community located in the southern suburb of Beijing, in which 19 people lost their lives. Two days later, the
Beijing Government launched a mass clean-up and ordered many residents to move out in the dead of winter. The neighborhood, which was later demolished in the name of fire prevention, shared many similarities with Dengfeng Village including a concentration of informal rental houses and group renting. The incident has sparked an international discussion about the state’s attempt to evict “low-end population (diduan renkou 低端人口)” from the city. The term, according to a BBC report, originated in official news media in 2010 and has since been used in news reports and official publications (“Clean-up After Big Fire” 2017). Although the government denied any intention to expel migrants and create a pretext for the demolition, on the internet, there is even rumor that the fire was a government job (“Fire in Daxing District of Beijing” 2017). While this claim is entirely speculative and cannot be proven, local governments’ employment of criminals to facilitate relocation and demolition have been documented (Shao 2013).

What this could mean to Dengfeng Village is still too early to tell, but it at least shows that the government has increasingly less tolerance for migrant communities and group renting. This certainly does not bode well for residents still living in Dengfeng Village, Chinese and Foreign alike. For Africans, in particular, the situation might be even grimmer. As discussed in Chapter 2, news media use the same language, “low-end”, to describe the space they occupy and the merchandise they trade. In this sense, Gordon Mathews’s concept of “low-end” globalization might inadvertently contribute to the negative characterization of Africans.

On the other hand, Jinlu Shanzhuang’s role as a model community suggests that it was meant to be part of a broader initiative to direct foreigners into gated communities. Today Africans are found in many newly constructed gated communities. Ben, as
mentioned in the previous chapter, lived in a major real estate project in the suburban town of Huadu in 2015. Dem, when I met him in 2015, was staying with some friends in Jinshazhou, a newly developed area in the now rapidly urbanizing western suburb. It is now a well-known residential district with many gated communities and high-rise condominium buildings. The same year, a foreigner service center opened there (Wei 2016). Back at Dengfeng, in 2009, when the Municipal Government was carrying out that beautification project in at the south entrance of Baohan Zhijie, they also installed a security guard booth with car barriers, creating some semblance of seclusion (although in reality anybody can enter). But the government never simply had their eyes on cleaning up residences. They aim to clean up commercial activities and market space in Xiaobei as well and for this topic we now turn to the final two chapters of this dissertation.
Chapter 6 The Vanished Dengfeng Street Market

When I moved into Mr. Shi’s building in the summer of 2017 at two o’clock in the morning, I was greeted by hundreds of shirts and dresses in the narrow hallway. They were stacked up on the left side and hanging on the walls all the way up the first flight of the staircase. The style, the colors, and the sizes told me they were not for Chinese. As Mr. Shi’s apartment was on the third floor, I had to squeeze through with my 24-inch luggage without causing the stacks to collapse. Before I entered the building, the friend who helped me rent the apartment told me to be very careful because of the owner of this merchandise was not too happy about me moving in. He even took a copy of my friend’s identity card because he was worried we might steal his properties. For the next three weeks I would be walking past these stacks multiple times every day. But the distrust between me and owner would also disappear and we eventually became very good friends.

Brother Wu, the owner of the garments, was in his fifties and had been doing business in Guangdong Province since 2001. He had a very serious face and at first with his heavy Hubei accent, I could not tell if he was yelling at me or simply talking to me. But he turned out to be very friendly and loved talking to people. During my three-week stay in Dengfeng Village, I spent many evenings sitting next to him by Baohan Zhijie, watching how he did businesses. His customers were mostly African women, but he also sold fake luxury belts to men. Occasionally African men also bought his dresses for their girlfriends and wives back home. Over the years, Brother Wu had developed a unique
way to communicate with Africans. Since most of his customers were middle-aged females, he learned to address them as “Mama”. He understood certain numbers, and for those he did not, the best helper was the calculator. Apart from these, his English vocabulary consisted of little more than “how much”, “bigger”, “tomorrow”, and “finish”. But the Africans understood him just fine. In fact, sometimes, I was the only one who was clueless. When Brother Wu was not working, we spent a lot of time chatting. Sometimes, his friends, who were also migrant workers or businesspeople in the Village, would stop by to talk to him. Most of these people, including Brother Wu, lived in the Village as well. We talked about the Village, current events, politics, landlords, family, America, and so on. Although they were not close friends, they helped each other out and sometimes introduced customers to others. In many ways, Dengfeng is what urban activist Jane Jacobs would consider a well-functioning community.

But things were not entirely positive. Brother Wu often complained to me about declining businesses due to the reduced foot traffic in Xiaobei. Besides, he used to be selling on the street. Although he was constantly worried about being arrested, he kept what he made. Now in order to continue his business he had to rent a store – the entrance and the hallway of Mr. Shi’s building, for which he was paying 4,000 yuan a month. Indeed, most of the time, his store was not busy. He was hoping policing would abate after the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party in October and the Canton Fair that followed would boost foot traffic. I doubted if it would make a huge difference since the event had been relocated to the new Guangzhou International Convention Center in 2008. The new venue, surrounded by five-star hotels, is located in a recently developed suburban area called Pazhou Island, which is close to Zhujiang New Town, the new
CBD, twelve kilometers from Xiaobei. There was little Brother Wu could do but hope for things to get better.

This chapter explores the Dengfeng market from the grassroots perspective, with main attention to street vendors and peddlers. Although the market has a long history, it could flourish mainly thanks to the arrival of Africans. Supported by this particular foreign clientele, it truly is, to use Doug Saunders’s term (Saunders 2012), an “arrival city” for migrant entrepreneurs like Brother Wu, who provide affordable goods and services that are otherwise not accessible to Africans. Also this chapter will look at the 2014 sanfei clean-up and examines how it is in fact a barely disguised attempt to eliminate informal businesses. Through Brother Wu’s story and my observation, I will show how the market responded to the government’s onslaught and endures, although it also lost much of its vibrancy afterwards and the threat of future clean-ups is always at the back of everyone’s mind.

I argue that China’s increasing engagement with global structural forces such as flexible accumulation, which created the very conditions that support the existence of the market at the first place, is also driving the local state to eliminate informal commercial activities to create a modern marketplace and a global city. In Chapter 4, I discuss how the state has gradually encroached on the relative autonomy of Dengfeng Village. In this chapter, I will shift our focus to another battle field: that between the Municipal Government and street vendors, which was made up of mostly rural migrants. Migrants who could not find employment in formal sectors due to lack of education and urban hukou have to rely on informal markets such as Dengfeng. The Municipal Government deems the spaces informal businesses occupy ruining the modern image it is trying to
construct, and tries to push them as far away from the city core as possible. Sadly, unlike
the battle between the Municipal Government and the Village, this battle was one-sided.
Most informal businesses were gone following the 2014 clean-up and those who are
holding on are squeezed into tiny spaces that could barely keep them alive, as best
embodied by Brother Wu’s hallway store. In this process, Africans’ racial difference
becomes a convenient political tool for the Municipal Government to exploit to achieve
their goals.

**Informal Economy**

In Xiaobei, particularly inside Dengfeng Village, the line between formal and
informal is blurred. As Sassen (1992) points out, informality is discursive and comes in
different forms. Obviously, unlicensed vendors and hawkers can be easily categorized as
informal because they are simply not allowed to operate. However, shop owners in the
malls or by the streets that are licensed and pay rents can also be informal because they
sell counterfeited and unlicensed products or not report all of their profits. Or they may
put up racks on sidewalks, which they are not supposed to occupy, or they may hire
undocumented workers. Brother Wu, for example, since moving his business into the
hallway, no longer worried about law enforcement, but in fact other than paying rent, he
was no different from street vendors. He never registered his store, nor did he pay tax.
These businesses exist partly thanks to lax government control as a result of the legal
ambiguity under the rural-urban dualist system discussed before, but they also reflect a
broader trend.
Informal work is a global phenomenon that can be found from developed countries such as France and the U.S. to developing ones such as China, India, Nigeria, and Brazil. According to Robert Neuwirth, a journalist of global squatter communities and informal economy, a 2009 report found that half of the world’s workers depended on informal economy, a large discursive sector of Neuwirth refers to as System D (Neuwirth 2011, 19). Borrowing from the French African term *debrouillard*, Neuwirth tries to steer writers away from “informal economy” or “informal businesses” which tend to align unlicensed vendors and hawkers with criminals. Indeed, businesses in urban villages share the association with crimes. Hair salons, for example, are routinely thought to be brothels in disguise. Acknowledging this caveat, I decide to keep the term because it does draw attention to the contemporary context where state acts the main regulator of the market. Neuwirth uses “System D” quite generously, applying it to peddlers in ancient times and modern contexts. But as Saskia Sassen (1992) says,

...while today's sweatshops may look similar to sweatshops of one hundred years ago, the subsequent implementation of various health and labor code regulations gives the sweatshops of today a different form and meaning than when the vast majority of manufacturing took place in an unregulated environment (Sassen 1992, 80).

It is this very contemporaneity of the Dengfeng market that this chapter seeks to highlight. Besides, the hidden damage of terms like “informal economy” can be at least mitigated by presenting participants’ stories from their perspectives and focusing on common humanity.

According to Neuwirth, the informal economy is the world’s fastest growing sector of the economy today, particularly in the developing world. This has to do with the process
of flexible accumulation that has been taking place since the 1970s. As discussed before, as a result of global dispersal of manufacture, middle income groups of major cities are significantly eroded and income polarization has ensued, which has created a huge demand for informal businesses. On the one hand the elites with their consuming power are increasingly attracted to customized products and unique experiences. On the other hand, the poor could afford little more than those provided by the informal economy. The Harlem street market in the 1990s that Paul Stoller (2012) so vividly describes is a very good example. Although Sassen’s analysis concerns mainly the three global cities, it can also help explain the formation of the Dengfeng market as well. The rapidly growing middle class made up of mostly young professionals are now willing to pay for informal businesses that can provide services catering to their special needs. During my research, my Chinese friends who are doing very well financially thanks to their employments in large national and multinational corporations treated me many times to street barbeque restaurants that stayed open till much later than normal restaurants hours and operated in spaces converted from the proprietors’ own houses. Although these restaurants were not licensed, they were not necessarily cheap. But since they provided a unique street food and night market experience, they were very popular among young professionals. However, the formation of the Dengfeng market is a completely different story that is unique to China’s status as a world factory.

First, as the receiving end of the global manufacturing, China has been building infrastructures and urban spaces to accommodate it, which participants of informal economy can also take advantage of. For example, the wholesale malls where Brother Wu refills his stock and many new roads he uses were constructed to facilitate foreign
trade. Besides, major importers are not the only beneficiaries of cheap Chinese products, informal vendors are also taking advantage of them. Brother Wu’s merchandise, for example, is unsold stock from manufacturers who supply to bigger buyers. That’s why he does not always have the bestselling sizes and models. Moreover, it is the booming manufacturing in China and the state’s active engagement with the global restructuring process that draw Africans to China. Well aware of its manufacturing might, China has been wooing Africans to import Chinese products. On the other hand, African countries, whose manufacturing is lagging far behind, also have a huge demand for cheap manufactured goods. This match constitutes a huge pull factor for African traders who want to bypass Chinese middlemen who are selling Chinese products in Africa. So as the number of Africans grew in Guangzhou, they created a huge market for informal businesses that could provide more affordable services and products. So while informal businesses in global cities serve their wealthy middle class, the Dengfeng Market is providing for this unique African clientele. However, the impetus to turn Guangzhou into a global city is also driving the Municipal Government to gentrify and redevelop older and unregulated areas. While in New York, as Stoller shows, the Giuliani Administration eventually disbanded the Harlem street market, in Guangzhou, informal businesses are also under the similar threat. When I returned to Guangzhou in 2017, those barbeque stands were already cleared away for the expansion of a metro station, and the Dengfeng market also suffered significant damage from the 2014 clean-up.

Other writers have discussed informal markets spawned by the rise of Chinese manufacturing, and they, like my work, also approach these markets from a grassroots perspective. Neuwirth, for example, paints a vivid picture of how Chinese products such
as bikes and computer parts have helped create informal markets in Nigeria, which satisfy public needs not provided by the government. Similarly, Yang Yang (2012) explores how the informality is key to the success of Africans in Guangzhou. Writing about the same phenomenon but in a different setting – Chungking Mansion in Hong Kong, which serves as a major hub of certain Chinese products – Gordon Mathews draws attention to the non-state aspect of globalization. He suggests that Hong Kong’s porous borders and the government’s laissez-faires approach to the businesses in Chungking Mansion not only enable marginalized groups to survive and thrive, but may also offer lessons the world may learn from. Building on this literature, this chapter approaches the Dengfeng market from the same angle, but it also situates it within broader structural forces such as flexible accumulation and global city construction.

**Dengfeng Village Market**

If, both metaphorically and visually, Dengfeng Village is a tree, then its trunk is Baohan Zhijie. The informal market thrives on this street as well as the alleys growing out of it. The main source of life, or the busiest part of this market, is where the main branch, Nanyue Zhijie, meets Baohan Zhijie. At that intersection, there is an open area in front of Dengfeng Hotel, providing ample space for hawkers and vendors. That Baohan Zhijie evolved into a busy open-air market should not surprise the original residents there. According to Wang Jianqing, a Chinese scholar who wrote a dissertation on Dengfeng Village, the street used to be a trail leading up to the Baiyun Mountain in pre-modern times, and, not unlike today, vendors selling hiking products were lining up on
both sides of the street. In other words, the seeds of commercial culture in Dengfeng has long been planted.

Prior to 1990, agriculture was still the main industry in the Dengfeng area, but the villagers already showed their business acumen. As mentioned in Chapter 1, to capitalize on the increasing visitors to the city brought by the Canton Fair, they built Dengfeng Guesthouse, Dengfeng Hotel, and Baohan Hotel by pooling together villagers’ money. These hotels could not compare with the five-star hotels in Taojin constructed under the sponsorship of the Central Government, but they played an important role in attracting Africans to settle down in the area. Today, Dengfeng and Baohan Hotel are still quite popular among African traders. In 2006 The first two floors of the former were refurbished into Yueyang Trading Mall specifically catering to African and Middle Eastern traders (Wang, 2008). In the same year, opposite of Dengfeng Hotel, Jinshanxiang Trading Mall was also opened. But by the time these two malls were opened, individual shops on both sides of Baohan Zhijie and Nanyue Zhijie were already targeting African customers. These, in addition to the cheap tenements and already bustling Islamic restaurants, turned the neighborhood into a busy and organic community, toward which more and more vendors and hawkers gravitated.

Although some scholars (Li et al., 2012) believe that 2008 was the heyday of the Xiaobei African community, which they argue declined amid government actions following the “Black Tribe” report, the Dengfeng market remained robust until the 2014 clean-up. This is perhaps due to the fact that unlike nearby commercial buildings such as Tianxiu Mansion, Dengfeng is not entirely a wholesale market where Africans make purchases for their businesses. When government cleaned up nearby commercial
buildings, Africans moved on and found others, but they continued to live their lives in Dengfeng. The market served their daily needs such as food, socialization, international phone calls, and currency exchange. There were restaurants, wet markets, food stands, bars, hair salons, call services, porters, and shops selling a large variety of products from fashion goods, suitcases, to cellphone sim cards, and adult toys. We can still find many of these businesses in the neighborhood, but before the clean-up, the market was rowdier, livelier and more boisterous.

Dengfeng market before the 2014 clean-up. Photos taken by Li Dong, a Chinese photographer whose series *Baohan Zhijie – Guangzhou Black Street* (see Li 2013) is featured in 2014 *National Geographic*

Usually, the neighborhood is quiet in the morning. Although the wet markets serving mostly local Chinese are already busy, most shops are still closed and many Africans, who work till late or sometimes throughout the night, are still sleeping. However, shop owners like Brother Wu are not. He usually spends the morning checking out wholesale markets in other parts of the city to refill his stock. He does not return to open his shop until noon. But the market won’t fully wake up until the sun sets, when policing begins to relax. Prior to 2015, on a regular evening, the small plaza in front of Dengfeng Hotel would be entirely occupied by unlicensed vendors behind wheeled stalls that Cantonese referred to as the “running devils (*zougui* 走鬼)” because they were constantly engaged
in a guerrilla warfare with law enforcement. This bazaar stretched southward all the way through the tunnel under the railway to Huanshi Road, and onto the footbridge as well. Crossing the plaza in the middle of this congestion was quite an ordeal and not perfectly safe. As in any crowded areas of the city, pickpocketing was rampant. Brother Wu got three of his cellphones stolen. But as a running devil, Brother Wu was more concerned about officers from the Urban Administrative and Law Enforcement Bureau (chengguan 城管) than thieves. He recalled before the clean-up, those officers would chase vendors. “If they caught you, not only would they fine you, but they would also confiscate your merchandise.” Brother Wu had been caught several times, and the first time it happened, he resisted. Not wanting to lose his goods and cart, he pounded the officers’ truck with rocks. He was then arrested and detained for fifteen days. “The detention center was horrifying,” he said. “You’d eat and release yourself at the same place.” He was so traumatized by the experience that he never resisted again.

Despite these dangers, the market was exuberant with businesses. Every night, the hustle and bustle did not quiet down until two or three o’clock in the morning. Some bars were opened all night long and prostitutes could be seen throughout the night as well. This difference in tempo, which contrasts with that of the city proper, has never changed. The market is still busier at night and Brother Wu still runs his shop till early morning hours. But most “running devils” are gone, and the rest, like Brother Wu, became semi-formalized. To outsiders like me, the plaza is still bustling with energy, but to Brother Wu, it has lost most of its vigor. Whenever I marveled at the number of people passing through Baohan Zhijie in the evening, Brother Wu would tell me “this is nothing compared to before.” Perhaps what is more damaging than the clean-up is the increased
policing that has followed. Today, law enforcement can be seen throughout the evening and won’t leave until midnight. Coupled with government actions that drive away African residents, this tight grip on the community is really suffocating all the businesses.

**Arrival City**

While informal settlements and communities across the world provide spaces for (im)migrants to establish themselves in cities and grow, the informal businesses within these settlements are usually the only way these people can make a living. In India, rural migrants of Mumbai found jobs in the huge recycling industry inside the slum of Dharavi (McCloud 2010). In Nigeria, smoking fish and dredging sand in the lagoon settlement of Makoko are the main sources of income for many who just settle down in the city of Lagos (Leithead 2017). The now demolished Kowloon Walled City in Hong Kong once provided all kinds of jobs to economic refugees from mainland China who would not have been able to work in the city without documentation (Lambot & Girard, 1999). In Beijing, Wenzhou migrants also established self-organized wholesale markets and community services in an urban village (Zhang 2001, 68). In this respect, there is nothing special about the Dengfeng Village, in which migrant entrepreneurs like Brother Wu found a way to survive and start a family.

Brother Wu has very little education. He is from a farming village about 150 miles from Wuhan, the capital of Hubei Province, where he had thirty acres of land. Compared to his peers, he was doing quite well. Before migrating to the affluent south, he already had some experience in businesses. Since he had a horse, which many could not afford,
he could buy other farmers’ produce such as peanuts and soybeans, transport and sell them to large buyers. But the Jiang Zemin administration, he told me, made life very tough for farmers in the mid-1990s. Most likely he was referring to the tax reforms in 1994, which heavily favored cities and significantly increased burden on rural areas. The impacts of this reform are detailed by the political scientist An Chen (2008), but basically, it reduced local shares of the tax revenue to increase that of the Central Government’s. To compensate for the loss, local government of each level transferred the burden to the one below, which eventually hit farmers the hardest. Brother Wu recalled, for every acre of land, he was taxed 500yuan (about $60 then). It was simply impossible for him to live off his land. So in 1996, he left home and headed south.

His first stop, however, was not Guangzhou. In 1996, he went to Huizhou, a small coastal city about two hours away from Guangzhou, where he found a job as a longshoreman. The work, however, turned out to be too physically demanding for him, and he quitted to return home just after a few months. Besides, his sons were still young at the time. They needed him to be around. Two years later, he ventured south again, this time, not to Guangdong, but Jiangxin Province. There he became a ragpicker and managed to save some money by recycling tin cans and cardboards. In 2001, under the urgings of his sister-in-law who was doing clothing business in Guangdong, he joined her in Foshan, a rapidly growing city neighboring Guangzhou. His business did very well. So much so, he told me, that his competitors got jealous and the animosity eventually erupted into a physical fight. After that, he got kicked out of the community, and had to find a different market. He tried Panyu and Dongguan, two mid-size cities immediately south of Guangzhou (the former is now an administrative district of Guangzhou), but did
not have much luck. Then in 2004, a wholesaler from his hometown tipped him off about the African market in Xiaobei. He told him it was easy money and did not require a huge investment. It turned out this friend was right.

“In the first few years”, Brother Wu recalled, “business was really good”. In 2004 and 2005, he could make from 2,000 to even 10,000 yuan (about $300 to $1,450) a day. After the 2014 clean-up, however, he would call it a good day if he made 1,000 yuan. He attributed his initial success to the fact that China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001. It is not clear how big of an impact this had on the Dengfeng market since China’s accession concerns much more opening up its market to foreign products and export of raw materials. But during this period, China did significantly strengthen its trading relationship with Africa. According to Shanshan Lan, following the first Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in 2000, trade between Africa and China grew at a rate of 28 percent annually from 2001 to 2010. In 2011, China overtook the United States as Africa’s largest trading partner (Lan 2017, 24). Although migrant entrepreneurs in the Dengfeng Market like Brother Wu were marginal players in this process, many are able to become quite successful. Brother Wu, for example, managed to raise his sons in Guangzhou, where living expenses are a lot higher compared to most cities in China, and save enough money to buy a Nissan sedan for his sons to do business. His success is not an isolated case. During our conversations, Brother Wu told me multiple times how a woman who peddled children backpacks in Dengfeng already bought two apartments in a modern gated community, something even many local Cantonese are not able to do.
The 2014 Clean-up and After

Screenshot from the documentary *Past and Present of the African Village* which lists some of the clean-up statistics

In late 2014, as discussed in previous chapters, Ren Xuefeng, the current Secretary of the Guangzhou Municipal Committee of the CCP took a tour in Dengfeng Village, which signaled the beginning of a comprehensive clean-up of the Dengfeng Market. In the few months that followed, the Yuexiu District Government largely cleaned up the Dengfeng Market, especially the plaza in front of Dengfeng Hotel. As mentioned before, the term *sanfei* is occasionally used to describe behaviors unsanctioned by the government, so that eliminating unlicensed commercial activities is confused with cleaning up *sanfei* foreigners hardly needs justification. According to the internal video *Past and Present of the African Village* discussed in Chapter 3, as a result of the clean-up, illegal businesses were closed, illegally operated vehicles were confiscated and many people were arrested. Some of the statistics provided by the video is particularly revealing in terms of the extent and true intent of this clean-up. According to one screenshot provided here, on the top right, it says “The 'Six Chaotic’ chronic diseases were uprooted”. On the left, from top to bottom, it reads “3,143 cases of road blocking businesses were cleared away; 492
cases of illegal peddling, 1,054 cases of street occupation, and 426 cases of unlicensed restaurants (food stands) were handled.” However, the video does not mention how many sanfei were arrested. Obviously, informal businesses were the real targets.

According to Brother Wu, regular police force, Special Police Unit, Armed Police Force, and law enforcement from Industry and Commerce Bureau were all present during the clean-up. As a result, he observed, eighty percent of the street vendors either went back to their hometowns or moved to other markets. Perhaps realizing the large number of Uyghurs – whose potential ties to separatist movements constitutes a security threat in the eye of the government – in the neighborhood and the possibility of igniting an ethnic riot by forcefully removing them, the government paid Uyghur peddlers a few thousand yuan each to convince them to leave the neighborhood.18 Han Chinese vendors, however, did not receive such compensation. This shows the complexity and multifaceted nature of urban politics in Dengfeng. Because of Xiaobei’s proximity to the Huanshidong CBD
and key transportation hubs like the Guangzhou Railway Station, where just a few months prior to the clean-up a Uyghur attacked travelers with a knife, formalizing the marketplace and making sure of social stability are two prongs of the same clean-up project. In the *Past and Present* video, the narrator also cites ethnic, religious, and racial diversity as some of the challenges to the administration of the area. Apparently, the government considers these factors detractive to its modernization efforts and threats to the city’s normal functioning. Ironically, by launching such a massive clean-up, they could potentially destabilize the area. The compensation to the Uyghurs suggests that the government knew the risk, but went ahead with the operation regardless. The discourse of *sanfei* conveniently masks all the complexity underneath the clean-up. It is unclear how peaceful the process went, but the deployment of such heavy police force suggested that the government anticipated strong resistance. Indeed, shop owners from Yueyang Trading Mall did stage a small protest following the clean-up due to the consequent drop in transactions (more in the next section). Also, the normalization of heavy policing since the clean-up shows that the government deems it necessary to apply broad surveillance on a regular basis.

Today, the Dengfeng market indeed looks a lot cleaner and orderly. Vendors with carts, booths and stands that used to be operating at the plaza, under the tunnel, and on the footbridge, are all gone, and by 1:00am, the market begins to quiet down. Sometimes business was so bad that Brother Wu closed his shop at 1:00am. Even bars, which seems to fare better than other businesses, are affected. Mwangi, a Chinese migrant worker with a Kenyan nickname, used to be a waiter at a bar in Baohan Zhijie. The bar mainly served African customers and Mwangi had worked there for more than five years. But in early
2015, the owner decided to close the bar permanently, not because there was something fundamentally unsound about its operation, but because of the incessant police harassments during the clean-up. Mwangi told me the police came to check the Africans’ passports so frequently that no one wanted to come any more. Eventually, the lack of customers pushed it out of business.

As part of the clean-up, surveillance cameras were installed in many different corners of Baohan Zhijie, especially around the plaza in front of Dengfeng Hotel. Photo taken by author in the summer of 2017.

Besides, surveillance cameras can now be seen installed at every corner of the plaza to prevent recidivists. Brother Wu was well aware of their existence and told me several times that we were being watched as we conversed. He believed the moment he took his racks beyond the curb, law enforcement would show up. On the other hand, to help drive out informal operations that posed threat to key industries such as foreign exchange, the government established a Multifunction Service Center in Baohan Zhijie where foreigners can exchange their currencies and make international phone calls.
Despite all these, migrant entrepreneurs have demonstrated great resourcefulness and continue to practice informality in the neighborhood. Brother Wu’s shop, as mentioned earlier, is not exactly formal. Apart from selling without license and not paying taxes, he also stretches the limit of spatial regulation by the government to maximize his storefront. Knowing the store next to the hallway he is renting has yet to open due to some money dispute, he hung his dresses up on the gate that remained shut to better capture shoppers’ attention. Also he had a small tray full of men’s belts on the sidewalk, which he was not supposed to occupy. But he could only do so every day after 6:00pm, when policing begins to relax. Sometimes when he hung his clothes too early, law enforcement would ask him to clear it away. Brother Wu was not the only pushing the envelope. In fact, many shops have racks on the sidewalk after dark. Just outside of the Village, scores of mini vans that deliver goods for Africans and shopper owners are waiting on the side of Heng’an Road. None of them are licensed and they are sometimes park side by side with police vehicles. Besides, some of services that the government tries to replace with formal establishments are still in operation, albeit in a more covert fashion. For example, a fruit drink shop also doubled as a currency exchange and a hand bag store also provided international call services.

Moreover, peddlers and other opportunists continued to use the plaza, although they were much more mobile and smaller in their operations. On a regular afternoon, one would find business card makers whose actual production was located elsewhere soliciting on Baohan Zhijie, porters with flatbed carts sitting on the curb waiting for business, sellers of small back massagers who aggressively advertised their merchandise and used their massager on Africans while they were perusing Brother Wu’s dresses, and
a woman who Brother Wu told me worked at Dengfeng Hotel as a maid full time but
distributed flyers at the plaza during her off time for a shop to supplement her meager
income. In the evening, a couple of toy sellers at the plaza would be constantly firing
slingshot helicopters into the sky. The red and blue lights they emitted make them look
like mini fireworks as they shot fifty feet from the ground and then slowly descended,
capturing children’s attention. At around 9:00pm, the children backpack seller who
already bought two apartments showed up, dragging behind her a large bag full of
backpacks. She usually sold at the edge of the plaza, in front of Brother Wu’s store.
When she was not busy, she would strike up a conversation with Brother Wu. As the
night progresses and trash such as cardboard and plastic wrappings of merchandise began
to pile up, a lady perhaps in her seventies with a big bag on her back could be seen. She
checked the front of each shop, picking up all the materials she could resell for recycling.
As we can see, the clean-up did not eradicate informality in Dengfeng, and vendors and
peddlers are still able to carve out their own space in the now highly surveilled Village,
however narrow that may be. Interestingly, it seems that law enforcement was fully
aware of the continued existence of informal vendors and intentionally left them some
breathing room.

Compromise by law enforcement

In several occasions, Urban Administrative, or chengguan, officers came over to
Brother Wu’s store and told him to take his merchandise back into the hallway instead of
displaying them on the sidewalk. The first time I saw it, I thought they were evicting him
from the area for lack of a license and was really worried. Looking completely relaxed,
he told me the officers just came to inform him about an upcoming inspection and asked him to hide his merchandise for a few hours. This completely took me by surprise, because it shows that not only did law enforcement know about Brother Wu’s unlicensed operation, but they gave him a tacit approval to sell on the sidewalk as long as it was not during inspection. In fact, Brother Wu seemed to know some of the officers stationed in the neighborhood, and unlike that with Africans, their relationship with the vendors was not tense at all. Although I saw several arrests of Africans during my stay, I did not see any conflicts between vendors and law enforcement.

Chengguan officers patrolling Baohan Zhijie, making sure shop owners do not set up racks or stands beyond the curb. Photo taken by author in summer 2017.

This lasses-faire attitude can also be seen in another instance. Every midnight, a chengguan officer showed up to take a picture of Baohan Zhijie as a proof that the street remained orderly since the clean-up. Apparently, this was done more to satisfy their superiors than to represent reality. First, nowadays by midnight, the crowd was already getting smaller and some stores were even closed. Also, when the officer took the picture, he chose an angle that left out some of the stores that have racks on the sidewalk including Brother Wu’s. Finally he would tell shop owners to clean up before taking the
picture if he saw anything problematic. It is thus not difficult to see how the pictures can in fact prevent more and tougher clean-ups.

Protest by shop owners of Yueyang Trading Mall in early 2015 due to declining business following the 2014 clean-up. Photo provided by informant.

However, it is less unlikely that this connivance is the result of the officers’ sympathy for the vendors than their attempt to avoid being held accountable for the lax control. If what Dai, the police officer I talked to, told me about the police is any indicator, *chengguan* may face similarly high pressure from their superiors. So the more problems they report, the heavier their work load. Besides, pushing vendors too hard may provoke strong reaction from them. As mentioned early, following the clean-up, in early 2015, shop owners of Yueyang Trading Mall protested on the plaza, deploring law enforcement’s heavy handed approach. One of the banners reads “Power cannot be exercised without restraint; Please enforce laws legally”, while another says “Dengfeng people welcome foreign friends who do business legally”. Brother Wu told me the protest, which was not covered by any news media, was nothing major and the government handled it swiftly. I was not able to gather more information on the impact of the protest, but it seems that it did succeed in staving off further harassments. Aside from all the peddlers in the plaza, inside the trading mall, there are still many stores selling
fake soccer jerseys, despite the ubiquitous police notice warning people not to sell counterfeits. In fact, not just chengguan officers, the police and government officials are also well aware of situation. During my short stay in Dengfeng, I saw a high ranking police officer recording possibly for a documentary in front of Brother Wu’s store, and a government officer taking an escorted tour along Baohan Zhijie. So it seems that the state at least at this point is satisfied with a gentrified look, rather than an entirely gentrified neighborhood, but of course this status quo may change later.

**Looking Beyond**

I once asked Brother Wu what he would do if the government decided to thoroughly clean up the market or completely redevelop Dengfeng Village. He said he would go back to his hometown and farm. He told me he had three houses back home, two of which were now empty. The room where he currently stays, he continued, was worse than pigsty. But then another time, during our conversation, he said he would not mind staying in Guangzhou for good because he was used to the life there. I could tell Brother Wu wanted to stay in Guangzhou, but as an unlicensed vendor in an urban village selling to a clientele that the local government is hostile toward, he was well aware he could take nothing for granted. However, with minimal education and no Guangzhou hukou, he had few other options. Maybe he could find a job as a security guard or janitor, but he would have to give up a lot of personal freedom and accept a much lower income. He would still not be able to afford any housing other than that in urban villages. So there was really little incentive for him to give up what he’s currently doing.
When Brother Wu told me about his sons, I could tell he had high hopes for them, but they were, unfortunately, disappointments for him. Like their father, neither of them had Guangzhou *hukou*, nor did they have much education. They were living in another urban village quite far away from the city center. When I asked Brother Wu what they were doing, he was reluctant to tell me, and only said they were scamming people in the Guangzhou Railway Station. Later, Mr. Shi told me they were selling fake mouse traps. Maybe they would have been able to make their father proud had they had access to subsidized education. I did not get to meet Brother Wu’s wife when I was in Dengfeng. He told me she was back in their hometown taking care of their two grandchildren, both of whom were born in Guangzhou, but also without a Guangzhou *hukou*. So with no improvement in the foreseeable future, his store in Dengfeng seems to be his best hope.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, at Guangyuanxi, the other major African community, there was also an informal street market. Unlike the Dengfeng market prior to the 2014 clean-up, this one only appeared at night and catered to both Africans and local Chinese. Right outside the urban village Huangshengtang, which is stuck at the same precarious

![Image: Guangyuanxi street market. It only appears at night. Photo taken by author in the summer of 2015.](image-url)
limbo as Dengfeng, vendors usually appeared at around 7:00pm in the summer and set up their operations by the east side of Guangyuanxi Road. When I was there in 2015, it was still very noisy and rowdy. There were sellers of shirts, dresses, shoes, hand bags, and so on, displaying their merchandise on the ground and on racks. They were all “running devils”, which means they were also playing the cat and mouse game with law enforcement. It is unclear how much the two African protests in the area have helped sustain this market. But with the speed of Guangzhou’s developments and the decreasing African population, it may be only a matter of time when the government decides to clean it up as it did in Dengfeng.
Chapter 7 Gentrifying the Sino-Africa Trade Zone

Billy, the Congolese showed me a video of the Community Office, had been in China for more than ten years and was a good friend of Dem’s. Dem said he should be able to help me with my research and so introduced me to him. Billy shared an office with a friend in Block A of Tianxiu Mansion, which is in fact an condominium they rented. It was not a fancy one, but spacious and clean with basic furniture. The biggest advantage of the office, of course, was its location right above a bustling African market which occupied the first four floors of Tianxiu Mansion. This African market draw in a huge number of African traders, new and seasoned. Unlike most Africans, Billy was in Guangzhou as a representative of a foreign company (diaobiao jigou 代表机构), and instead of a short term visa, he had a residence permit, which allowed him to stay in Guangzhou for one year and was renewable. His company, headquartered in Congo Kinshasa, did all kinds of export related businesses: it exported Chinese goods back to African as well as other parts of the world; acted as a shipper for other African traders; and acclimated rookie traders to life in Guangzhou and helped them locate manufacturers for commission. During my first two trips to Guangzhou, I spent many hours in that office, talking with Billy, Dem and other Africans, and I saw Billy in multiple occasions hold meetings with new comers. Once these new comers plant their feet in Guangzhou, they, to Billy’s dismay, usually contacted manufacturers directly and try to cut him out to avoid the commission. Some made it big enough to open up their own offices. This is the structure and ecology of business community in Xiaobei: offices and shops mutually
supporting each other; veteran traders cultivating novices. However, this ecology is under serious threat.

In the last three chapters, I focus on Dengfeng Village and discuss how the Municipal Government expanded its power in the Village, expelled African renters, pushed them renters toward Jinlu Shanzhuang, and cleaned up the informal market. In this final chapter, we will leave Dengfeng Village and focus on clean-ups of the African market around intersection of Huanshi Road and Xiaobei Road. Unlike the Dengfeng street market, offices and businesses of this market are all housed in modern high-rises, on urban land. Since sanfei clean-ups began in the area in 2008, these high-rises have been subject to increasing government regulation, and Africans are right at the center of all the government actions. We have discussed how the Municipal Government gradually ousts unwanted players in Guangzhou’s urbanization such as shareholding companies (formerly village committees) and unlicensed vendors in previous chapters. In this chapter, we will introduce two other players. The first one are established African traders like Billy who occupy offices in Xiaobei. Some of these traders act as community leaders and have the power to mobilize other Africans. The other, state institutions, is perhaps by far the ones that pose the greatest challenge to municipal governments in urban developments because of their political backing. Some of the high-rises discussed in this chapter are owned by a powerful state institution, the Air Force Logistics Department (hereafter the AFLD). Its presence in the area makes the government’s job a lot trickier. Granted, these two groups are not the only ones affected by the clean-ups. Major real estate developers who own some of the buildings in Xiaobei, for example, are definitely hurt as well. Unfortunately, I was not able to gather much information on their
perspective. But based on my research and established scholarship, they and local
governments tend to act in sync, so it’s not likely that they will obstruct government
actions. At the same time, as I will show, the government did allow breathing room to
Africans renters and businesses in many buildings in the area, which mitigated their
damage.

Once again, the sanfei discourse lends itself toward the local government’s clean-up
efforts, which, I argue, were aimed at achieving two goals. First, the city wanted to
gentrify these buildings so that they could better serve the Huanshidong CBD. This
would also mean evicting African tenants and bringing property values of those buildings
up to par with those in Huanshidong. Second, the Yuexiu District Government wanted to
gain control of land owned by the Air Force Logistics Department. The two goals are
mutually reinforcing. To expand their power into properties owned by the AFLD, the
government has to rely on gentrification, and vice versa. However, unlike the efforts to
clean up Dengfeng Village, those in high-rises had mixed results.

As alluded to above, while the clean-ups in several shopping malls were more
successful, those in office buildings were less so. This could be the result of several
reasons. First, the AFLD, as part of the military, are very powerful. Second, real estate
developers and the government are partners in Guangzhou’s urban development. The
government might show more restraint since clean-ups hurt their profits. Third, the
Africans have demonstrated great resiliency and managed to find ways to continue
operating in those buildings. Fourth, as mentioned earlier, due to their success, Africans
with offices often act as community leaders. The government is aware of the risk of
angering them and provoking more mass protests, which would affect investments in the
city, especially when the Huanshidong CBD is nearby. Consequently the Municipal Government might have refrained from a more hardline approach. The current impasse reveals the messy nature of urban politics where various parties lay claims to prime urban real estates. (Unfortunately, since the issue concerns the military, I am not able to obtain a large amount of evidence to shed more light on actual interactions, which was highly sensitive and certainly more complicated, and be more compelling.)

I will first briefly review the formation of the Xiaobei African market, or what the government once designated as the Sino-Africa Trade Zone, and how it differs from the clean and orderly space exemplified by Huanshidong. Then I will briefly examine the fierce land war in urban China between municipalities and state institutions since the economic reforms in order to explain why it is a challenging, yet important, task for the Yuexiu District Government to overpower the AFLD. After that I will investigates three aspects of the government’s efforts to clean up the Xiaobei African market. They include strengthened regulation of usage of high-rises, crackdowns on counterfeits, and ban on foreign office registration since 2011 and their anti-piracy campaigns. Finally I finish by looking at the ban’s impact on the African business community and the strategies that Africans adopt so as to continue operating in Xiaobei.

The Sino-Africa Trade Zone

As already mentioned, the area of Xiaobei is cut through by the major city artery Huanshi Road. Walking on the sidewalk of this six-lane thoroughfare in Xiaobei, one feels surrounded by business buildings lined up on both sides. If one is to knock on the
door of an office inside these buildings, there is a good chance an African or their Chinese associate opens the door. Although they are no longer as vigorous compared to the period before 2008, these buildings are still quite busy. But things did not look as promising before mid-1990s. As mentioned before, there used to be many vacant offices in Tianxiu Mansion. China’s economic reforms and the arrival of the Africans rejuvenated the area by filling up the trading malls and hotels, which became specialized in serving this international community.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, trade between China and Africa grew rapidly and the wholesale markets around the Guangzhou Railway Station attracted more and more Africans. Soon trading malls specialized in African trade opened in Guangyuanxi and then Xiaobei. Yueyang and Jinshanxiang Trading Mall at the south entrance of Baohan Zhijie were just two example. Across Huanshi Road, Tianxiu Mansion, Taoci Mansion, and Xiushan Building were all well-known African markets. Among them, Taoci Mansion was so busy that it was renamed Sino-Africa Trading Mall (zhongfei shangmao cheng 中非商贸城). This emergent trade constituted a huge pull factor for not only
young and inexperienced traders, but also established veterans who came to Guangzhou following the Asian financial crisis in 1997. These veterans, or the first wavers as Dem called them, became main reason why an African community could take root. They had been in the export and shipping business before entering China, and many came to China already with a company registered somewhere else in Asia. Billy’s officemate, for example, had a registered company in Bangkok. Hong Kong and Jakarta are other two cities where these first wavers originally registered their companies. This worked out well for them, according to an informant, registering a foreign company takes longer and costs more money. Also by registering representative offices, they could avoid the short duration of stay allowed by a business visa and receive longer term residence.

Besides the increasing number of African traders in the area, the first wavers’ choice of Xiaobei was also due to the fact that there were ample office space there. The late 1980s and 1990s saw a construction frenzy of high-rises in Huanshidong. The Guangdong International Building project broke ground in 1987 and finished in 1991. The towering 63-floor edifice, was once China’s tallest and is still a landmark most locals take strong pride in. Then in 1992, the twin towers of the Guangzhou World Trade Center Complex was finished, followed by the thirty-six-floor Guangzhou International Electronic Tower four years later. All of these buildings are multi-functional with retail stores and restaurants in the lower floors and offices above, and their names suggest they were constructed with and intended to attract global capital.

Xiaobei was also affected by this optimism in the area’s real estate market. Tianxiu Mansion, Taoci Mansion, and Jinying Building were all completed in the 1990s. The original plan was likely that these buildings would become high-end shopping and office
areas serving the growing middle class drawn by Huanshidong’s development. However, the harsh reality of over construction soon set in. Tianxiu Mansion, for example, had a hard time renting its stores out in its first five or six years of operation (Qiu 2013). The fact that most owners were Hong Kongers who fell behind in their upkeep of their properties did not help either. To remedy the situation, the government designated the area as the Sino-Africa Trade Zone and incentivized Africans to come to the area. It is not exactly clear what the incentives were, but Brother Wu, the vendor in Dengfeng Village, told me they included rent discount. When Africans came, some of them converted these vacant stores into offices; others rented offices on the higher floors which were also quite affordable due to the lack of interest. Mr. Sultane Barry, the Guinean trader considered by many first wavers from West Africa as their community leader, for example, rented several stores on Block B of Tianxiu Mansion and used one of them as his main office. The presence of these more established traders and their offices served as anchors for individual traders and as a result a community was able to gradually take root. However, the government apparently saw these offices and Africans they brought as a means to revive Xiaobei more than a space for the African community to grow.

What complicated the picture was the involvement of the military. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the AFLD moved into a military base in Xiaobei sometime after it was established in the 1950s. They have since occupied a huge compound bordering Huanshi Road on the north, Xiaobei Road on the east, and Yuexiu Park on the south and west. In the 1990s, like many state institutions, they were developing land along the compound walls (more on this later). Along the east wall, they built many retail shops, and along the north one, they built at least two high-rises: Xiushan, an office building, and Guolong, a
condominium building. As African trade grew in the 2000s, Xiushan Building was converted into a shopping center and renamed Shunzhao Trading Mall, while many units in Guolong was rented to Africans who used them as offices and warehouses. Before long, Xiushan Building, along with Tianxiu Mansion and Taoci Mansion (which I suspect also belongs to the AFLD because private owners were not likely to have the power to name it Sino-Africa Trading Mall) became the most identifiable core of the African markets. As this market developed and the area gained foot traffic, land value of the area began to soar with the rest of the city. For the government that was keen to capitalize on this growth, the African market has become an impeding factor because of its more organic and laissez faire style.

A Laissez Faire Market

While no less global, the African market in Xiaobei are a far cry from the orderly and modern ones in Huanshidong. Although some of the high-rises were built even later than those in Huanshidong, they have a much more humble appearance. You won’t see a spacious plaza before the entrance; cars park randomly at the front; boxes of merchandise are sometimes piled up on the sidewalk; the closely spaced signs advertising various businesses and services on the façade connote crass commercialism. Besides, the Arabic translation everywhere conveys not so much the cosmopolitanism that Chinese associate with the West than exoticism, which is expressed in different news reports. In essence, these qualities differentiate the area from the modern space in Huanshidong because it generates a sense of spatial and cultural transgression that one feels when walking
through the area. Things appear in places where they should not in a modern business district. The same is true for the inside of these buildings.

Take Tianxiu Mansion, a three-building (Block A, B, C) multi-function complex, for example. As soon as you walk in the front entrance of Block B, instead of greeted by a bright, spic and span lobby, you notice merchandise being displayed on racks in the hallway, which some shop owners also use as storage space. Some of my interviews were conducted in the middle of bags of merchandise. It was not uncommon to see shop owners, most of them migrants, sitting on plastic stools in hallways, lean against merchandize, dozing off, or eat lunches in their shops. Because Block A and Block C of the complex are residential buildings and Tianxiu Primary School is nearby, I saw in several occasions Chinese and African children play in the hallway. Sometimes, shop owners also babysit their African clients’ children. Norms that govern modern urban space – public should be separated from private and work from leisure – are ignored there.

The management of the building also seems to care little about regulations dictating usage of building space. Mr. Barry, the aforementioned community leader, has an office on floor E of Block B, which, with a very low ceiling, was dark and somewhat claustrophobic. By design, it was a mechanical floor closed to any commercial usage, but the management first leased it to a sauna business and later converted it to stores. According to a news article, the management company even rewired the electricity of this floor so that its usage was shared by the entire building (Ruan & Xin, 2012). Tianxiu is not an exception. It is very common to see residential units being used as offices or warehouse. Dem told me that in the early years, many Africans also used their offices as
showrooms. According to Li et al. (2012), many stores were run by Africans, which was in fact against the law because foreigners were not allowed to own retail stores (“Self-Employed Business Regulations” 2011). In other words, despite being housed in skyscrapers, this business community is not very different from the informal market in Dengfeng Village. Both attempt to maximize the space they could utilize and use it in whatever ways they see fit.

The transactions conducted in this market are also not the kind people usually associate globalization with. Often times shop owners in Tianxiu are also small manufacturers from less developed regions of Guangdong Province who may or may not pay taxes for their sales. Their products are usually not patented or unbranded. What’s more, shops which sell second-hand goods abound. According to the “Black Tribe” report, a Congolese based in Tianxiu Mansion interviewed by the reporter purchased
mostly used products such as radio, television sets and cassette players, which the author kept describing as “low-end (diduan 低端)” and no longer wanted by Chinese. In many ways, Xiaobei is a third world space right next to a first world one. The laissez-faires business environment in Xiaobei is the opposite of the well-regulated urban space that the government is trying to construct and hampering Xiaobei’s growth in land value.

In Chapter 1, we learn that the Municipal Government seemed to have two different plans for the redeveloping Dengfeng Village in 2009. Despite being somewhat conflicting, both were designed to match and serve the Huanshidong CBD. The government’s plan for the high-rises is made in the same spirit. A 2007 development plan titled the Innovative Industry Development Proposal published by the Yuexiu District recommended the District to pay more attention to cultural production and innovation which could help retain headquarters in the district (“Innovative Industry” 2015). The plan considered high-rises in Xiaobei a key resource to improve the Huanshidong CBD, which would become an innovation headquarter. Then in 2013, the Yuexiu District Government announced another plan which painted Guangzhou’s urban development as a fierce competition among different administrative districts and Yuexiu’s arch rival was Tianhe, the new CBD (“Urban Development Planning” 2013). To rise to the challenge, it again emphasized the role of cultural production and innovation, and how they could help attract headquarters. It laid out a series of grand designs including strengthening the peripheral areas of the Huanshidong CBD. While it is very difficult to see through all the lofty goals set up by these plans to understand how they transpired on the ground and what they meant to Xiaobei, the common references used in these plans – culture, high end, brand name, modern – are obvious. These references contrast sharply with
businesses of the Xiaobei African market. The plan even suggested relocating some small scale wholesale markets in Yuexiu District into Dengfeng Village. Although the language was vague, it was obviously referring to the African market. However, to clean up this market, they have to face the formidable Air Force Logistics Department, a powerful state institution. In fact battles between municipal governments and state institutions are part and parcel of urban development in China since the economic reforms.

Urban Governments versus Land Masters

In her work about how global capital is “tamed” by Chinese urban politics, You-tien Hsing (2006) teases out the different layers in China’s urban developments. According to Hsing, nominally, all urban land (as opposed to rural ones as in the case of Dengfeng Village) belongs to the state, but in reality the situation is a lot more complicated and fragmented. Different state institutions such as schools, hospitals, state-owned-enterprises, and military can obtain and control a large amount of “administratively allocated urban land”, and are in fact major land masters. Hsing notes that as of late 1990s, two thirds of urban land belonged to such a category (Hsing 2006, 170). This two systems coexisted peacefully before the economic reforms when land could not be transacted and had little value. But things began to unravel following the 1988 land reform which allowed land use rights to be leased for profit.

As the economic reforms deepened, decentralization pushed different state institutions to create their own profits. We have seen what Public Security, the police in China, do to increase revenue in Chapter 3. For many land masters, they develop their
own land or collaborate with private developers (Hsing 2006, 171). This phenomenon was very common in the 1990s when different danwei were undergoing reforms. As mentioned earlier, many converted their compound walls into shops for rent, the most famous example being the electronic market along the south wall of the Beijing University campus (Bray 2005, 170). Although this was not legal, many state institutions were able to bypass official approval. This was at least partly attributed to the tiaokuai system mentioned in Chapter 3, which renders state institutions at once being governed by both local governments and party committees horizontally, and higher level institutions vertically. So Guangzhou’s Municipal Public Security Bureau is at once under the order of the Guangzhou Municipal Government and guided by the Municipal Committee of the CCP, and supervised by the Ministry of Public Security from Beijing. This apparently could create conflict in governance and in many cases superiors of certain state institutions are ranked higher than city officials. So municipal governments were well aware of the potential of going against more powerful figures if they were to hold state institutions accountable.

The confusion in governance gave state institutions opportunities to amass more urban land at a low cost and sell it largely independent of municipal governments’ involvement. While sales of land use rights through the government cost a lot more and come with a fixed tenure, those through state institutions are much cheaper – usually through negotiation than open auction – and not bound by time limits (Hsing 2006, 169). This has created a huge secondary and hidden land market that operates at the cost of municipal governments, which nominally owns all urban land. Besides, the competition between the two was what led to many vacant offices in the 1990s. So since the mid-
1990s, municipal governments have been trying to limit and co-opt the secondary land market. According to Hsing, the Shanghai Municipal Government established the Centre for Land Development in 1996 which served as a land bank that regulate all land transactions (Hsing 175-176). By 2002, such institutions were established across the nation, and the Ministry of Land and Resource Management also mandated open land auctions for commercial developments. However, there are still loopholes for state institutions to exploit and land use rights continue to be sold through negotiations. Redevelopments and infrastructure projects which governments could claim benefit the public thus become useful pretexts to control the growth of such land masters. Cleaning up the Xiaobei African market, legitimized by reasons such as fighting sanfei and counterfeits, was thus at once a goal and a means.

**Regulating Building Usage**

Clean-ups of the African market consist of several aspects, one of which is the strengthened regulation of usage of building space. Since the economic reforms, the revival of the marketplace, population growth, and urban development in the 1990s brought lots of opportunities. Many urban residents who lived in busy areas or owned old houses facing busy streets, under the stimulus of profits, converted their living space into storefronts. In the past the Municipal Government either legitimized these businesses by giving them licenses or simply allowed them to operate without licenses. Entering the new century, the Municipal Government felt that the marketplace was recovered enough to withstand state regulation. According to a news article, in 2000, the government announced for the first time a ban on converting residence to retail stores (zhugaishang...
Perhaps due to public opposition and dropping of property prices, in 2002 the government relented. As a result, more small businesses appeared all across the city. Then in 2005, a more serious ban was implemented. The ban first targeted Tianhe District, the emergent new CBD, and a news report speculated that Taojin (Huanshidong) would be one of the next targets (Gao, Ye, & You 2005). But then again, in 2007 and 2009 the government backtracked and made various adjustments to the ban, allowing some breathing room to businesses. The fact that the government went back and forth with the ban shows the contentious process of controlling usage of urban space which is one of the main mechanisms of constructing a modern state.

In his research of how African migrants became entangled in Turin’s urban politics, Donald Martin Carter has an insightful discussion of the mechanism of modern state and how it includes and excludes certain populations. Using Michel Foucault’s concept of “sequestration”, he argues that this discrimination is achieved by

> partitioning...individuals and spaces [which] – the distribution of productive functions into particular spaces such as factories, of persons into spaces that both “isolate them and map them,” the quality of surveillance, and the arrangement of spaces of production, care, and training – is of great importance to the development of the administrative complex of the modern state (Carter 1997, 110)

In the government’s mind, urban space should be cleanly categorized according to different functions: residential, office, commercial, storage, etc., and users should always conform to official designations. By assigning different functions to urban spaces, a government can convert them into quantifiable units – how many offices, stores, warehouses – so as to better market them and profit from them. The degree of conformity thus reflects the level of modernity and state power. The 2013 development plan by the
Yuexiu District mentioned earlier stresses over and over again the importance of building a modern urban core, which is key to its vision of becoming an international city.

However, space users of the African Market, as we have seen, subvert such rigid categorizations by using space in a flexible fashion. Allowing this to happen would jeopardize overall planning and the modern image the government tries to construct. Regulating space usage in high-rises of Xiaobei has always been part of sanfei clean-ups. In 2009, Guangzhou Daily reported an illegally operating restaurant in Block C (a residential building) of Tianxiu Mansion which was busted during a crackdown called “Hurricane 09” (Chen 2009). In the operation, a team of government officials from various departments including Public Security and Industrial and Commerce inspected businesses on Huanshi Road. In this particular case, an African woman, whom we learn from the news was probably a sanfei, served food in a residential unit. She was caught in the act.

But between 2014 and 2015, the Yuexiu District Government launched a series of clean-ups targeting three buildings in Xiaobei, Tianxiu, Taoci, and Guolong, particularly Guolong, which is a AFLD property. It started in January when the chairman of the District Committee of the CPPCC came down to the area to supervise a clean-up before the spring festival (“Chairman Zhong Junming” 2014). In Guolong Building, contents of fifteen illegally converted warehouses were cleared away. Then in June, the Hongqiao Street Office (like Dengfeng Street, it is a lowest level government in charge of the area) discovered that the property management company of Guolong converted the mechanical floor into retail stores and rented them out (“Hongqiao Street Held Meeting” 2014). The police in charge of the clean-up issued a warning to the lessor, which was unnamed, and
ordered the management company to correct it within three days. Barely a month later, the street office launched still another clean-up, this time because of the purported increased number of foreigners following the conclusion of Ramadan. It listed “warehouse converted from residence” and “retail stores converted from residence” as two main problems (“Hongqiao Street Launches Clean-up” 2014). The targets included three buildings in Xiaobei, Tianxiu, Guolong, and Taoci. In October, a sanfei clean-up hit Tianxiu Mansion and Guolong Building (“Hongqiao Street Foreigner Management Center” 2014). The operation discovered a residence in Guolong Building converted into a warehouse and again issued a warning to the lessor, whom was named this time as the AFLD hospital (which was inside the AFLD compound). Right before the year ended, the street office launched another sanfei clean-up in Guolong Building and discovered several condominiums converted into hostels (“Hongqiao Street Launches Foreigner” 2014). In summer 2015, there was still another similar operation (“Team Led by District Leader” 2015). It is hard to explain why so much action was focused in the building in such a short period of time. Or it could be that these were the only ones recorded on the Yuexiu District Government database open to the public. But what is clear is that the government was putting pressure on the AFLD, demanding that they follow relevant regulations. If regulating buildings was a relatively subtle approach, then fighting counterfeits was definitely an aggressive assault.

**Intellectual Property and Fighting Counterfeits**

In 2006, the Central Government announced the Eleventh Five-Year Plan, with the transformation of economic structure at the heart of its guiding principles (“Guiding
Growth of economy was said to move toward the tertiary sector and emphasis was placed on developing its own patents, recognized brand names, and globally competitive products (“Stick to and Improve” 2006). In response, the Yuexiu District Government set up its own goals for the five year period. Apart from continuing to develop business and commerce as mentioned earlier, they also included speeding up domestic innovative technological developments and striking hard on copyright infringements (“2006 Yuexiu District Government” 2009). One year later, the Innovative Industry Development Proposal mentioned earlier acknowledged that the District had yet to create an effective system to protect intellectual property rights, and explained how important it was to the development of innovative industries. This discourse of innovation, intellectual property, and fighting counterfeits coming from the top all the way to the local had serious implications for the Xiaobei African market.

In late 2010, the Central Government launched a nationwide campaign to fight copyright infringement and manufacturing and selling counterfeited products. A few months later, as a local support for the campaign, a sweeping clean-up named “Double-Strike Action (shuangda xingdong 双打行动)” by the Municipal Government hit many shopping areas in the city. In Yuexiu District the government fixated its attention on the Xiaobei African market. Prior to the crackdown, Africans were not commonly linked to counterfeits, although the “Black Tribe” report did mention African traders did not care if brand name products were authentic. In fact, the Chinese term for counterfeited products used in the campaign, jiamaoweilie (假冒伪劣), also denotes “low quality”. This again shows that from the get-go, the campaign had the intention of upgrading the African market and put pressure on small manufacturers, especially those that are not big enough
to patent their products. It thus surprised no one that Xiaobei bore the brunt of the crackdown. According to Yangcheng Evening News, from late February to early March, the District Government mobilized Municipal and District law enforcement and rigorously inspected several major commercial buildings including Taoci Mansion (Sino-Africa Trading Mall), Shunzhao Trading Mall, Tianxiu Block B (where the shopping area was), Yueyang Trading Mall and Jinshanxiang Trading Mall (Yang & Liu, 2011). Following the action, seventeen violations were filed, seventy-nine businesses were ordered to rectify their mistakes, and more than seventy-six hundred pieces of merchandise were confiscated.

Left: Shunzhao Trading Mall (previously Xiushan Building) has remained shut since the “double-strike action”. Right: the Foreigner Service Center near Shunshao Trading Mall is no longer in service. Photos taken by author in 2017.
In Taoci Mansion and Shunzhao Trading Mall, the problem of selling counterfeits was so serious that both buildings were ordered to shut down. The former, a nine-story building, had more than thirty stores on the ground floor, some of which run by Africans, selling electronics, hardware, textile, watches, and so on. Business was so successful that it was renamed the “Sino-Africa Trading Mall”. From the second through the ninth floor were all offices and fully occupied. After the “double strike action”, the license was revoked and most of the building was vacated (Zhang & Xu, 2011). The situation remained the same until 2017, when it reopened as a hotel. On the other hand, Shunzhao Trading Mall, which was no less busy than Taoci Mansion, remained shut till today. As mentioned before, this building, previously known as Xiushan Building, belongs to the AFLD. It is unclear why the building for all these years has remained closed. On the ground floor of the building, there was a community office of foreigner assistance, similar to the one in Dengfeng Village. This indicated the once large number of foreigners in the area, but like the building itself, the office is closed today.
In 2017, I was taking some photos of a building on a ramp beside it that led up to the AFLD compound. Seeing me holding up my phone, the security guard at the gate rushed to me and told me photos were not allowed in the military restricted area. In a polite manner, he demanded I delete the photos. I did, and asked him why the building was shut down. He sounded a bit hesitant, but told me military properties could not be rented out for commercial use, which was obviously not true. During that trip in Guangzhou, I also noticed all the shops outside of the east wall of the compound were closed and being renovated. They were still open as of 2015. On Yuexiu District Government’s website, the entire Shunzhao Trading Mall was listed in 2015 as available for rent (“List of Vacant Properties” 2015). So what do all these mean? Do they mean that the District Government has won the battle and successfully coopted this AFLD land so that the latter had to rent it through the government? I can perhaps never be able to verify this, but I can at least surmise what the government wants to do with the building.

When Taoci Mansion, the former Sino-Africa Trading Mall, reopened, it had a facelift. The glass walls at the front contrast sharply with the original front which was old and unassuming. The remodeled building looks closer to buildings in Huanshidong. It is now a condo-styled hotel and its rooms are listed between 300 yuan to 500 yuan per night on the internet.\(^{19}\) It is not overly expensive in Guangzhou’s standard, but it is still much more than what Africans can afford. As we can see, the crackdown on counterfeits, which cleared up a market that supported mostly lower class sellers and buyers and replaced it with a new fancy hotel, was in fact a mini gentrification project. It exemplifies how the state increasingly sides with large capital in the urbanization process. On the leasing information provided by the Yuexiu District Government, there was a condition for those
who wanted to rent Shunzhao Trading mall: the building could only be rented as a whole. In other words, small individual businesses were not wanted. While prior to 2010, Taoci Mansion (Sino-Africa Trading Mall), Xiushan Building (Shunzhao Trading mall) and Tianxiu Mansion constituted the three pillars of the Sino-Africa Trade Zone, today only Tianxiu is still operating. This I suspect was because it was the only privately owned building among the three.

Photo supplied by Dai, the police officer. The banner reads: “strike hard on exporting counterfeits and products that infringe upon intellectual property rights to Africa”.

On the other hand, since the crackdown, Africans and counterfeits have become interconnected. Before informing readers about the results of the clean-up, the Yangcheng Evening News article mentioned earlier, provided random statistics such as that in 2010, 79 per cent of the foreigners arrested for staying in China illegally were Africans (Yang & Liu, 2011). Even though the news article did not specifically invoke the term sanfei, it nonetheless drew from the popular discourse to justify the campaign that obviously
affected many people’s lives. The government video Past and Present of the African Village discussed in previous chapters also conflates the two issues by portraying them both as uniquely black problems. Dai, the police officer, sent me a photo he snapped recently in a wholesale market near the Guangzhou Railway Station while he was on duty. In it is a large banner that reads “strike hard on exporting counterfeits and products that infringe upon intellectual property rights to Africa”. This close alignment between the two is likely to be exploited by the government in the future for more clean-up actions.

This kind of crackdowns hurt the African market at the fundamental level. Most of the small traders are already subject to lots of ups and downs. Not only are they affected by China’s economy – whose appreciating currency against U.S. Dollars and rising property and consumer prices are particularly damaging – but they are also at the mercy of global economic climate and politics of their own countries. According to a CNN report in Jun 2016, the freefalling of oil prices and the subsequent restriction of access to U.S. dollars by certain African countries all took a toll on African traders in China (Marsh 2016). As the 1997 Asian financial crisis did, the 2008 financial crisis already made life very difficult for many traders. Local government actions like clean-ups and crackdowns on shopping malls further exacerbated the problem. Not only did Xiaobei lose many shops, it also lost most of the foot traffic came with them, hurting those remaining in the area. Billy, for example, complained to me many times about businesses getting worse and worse and not having enough money the pay rents. Many did not survive, so they left China. Or sometimes they went through a bad stretch and moved to cheaper areas in the city. The deterioration was noticed by scholars and journalists.
Zhigang Li et al. remark that 2007 was a turning point for the Xiaobei “enclave” (Li et al. 2012, 65-69). Government actions beginning in 2008 such as anti-sanfei campaigns and tougher enforcement of the Police Registration pushed many to leave for neighboring towns such as Huangqi. In their field research in 2010, they noticed that many stores in trading malls were closed. In 2011, Li was interviewed by a Chinese news network, during which he said compared to 2006 and 2007, the number of Africans trading in Guangzhou had dropped by a half. However, apart from the two fronts: strengthened regulation of usage of building space and crackdown on counterfeits, the government also directly attack established African traders in Xiaobei.

The ban on office registration

Dem recalled since around 2011, the government had stopped letting foreigners register representative offices in buildings of Xiaobei. “I don’t know who changed the rules, but rules changed”, Dem complained to me the very first time we talked. This did not make sense to him because those who wanted to register offices were the “good guys”. The “bad guys”, sanfei, were usually on short term visas. He was right. If the real intention of Municipal Government’s heavy-handed approach toward Africans was to rid the city of sanfei, those who try to register offices should be the last of their concerns because they have to go through a rigorous and tiresome procedure to get the approval from the government and their documents have to be inspected by multiple bureaucracies. Also they are established and relatively well funded.
According to Maggie, a Chinese immigration agent who also helped many Africans register their offices, since around 2011, most buildings in Xiaobei are no longer available for office registration. So Africans who want to open a representative office in Guangzhou have to stay far from the shops in Xiaobei and their customers. Shanshan Lan in her research of how government regulations impact Africans in Guangzhou attributed the ban to a 2011 legislation. According to Lan, the “Interim Provisions of Guangdong Province on Administration of and Services”, or the Guangdong Act as she calls it, is “the first piece of legislation at local government-level in China” (Lan 2015, 296). The law covers a broad range of foreigner activities in China including how to check in a foreigner in hotels, how hire foreign employees, how to enroll foreign students and how to rent housing to foreigners. Indeed, it also forbids the registration of foreign offices in locations close to key governmental and military establishments. According to Article 28:

To protect national security, social order and other public interests, any Public Security Institutions of the People’s Government above the county level can restrict foreigners or foreign institutions from setting up residence or office in the vicinity of Party and Government institutions or military restricted zones.

Those who have already established residence or office in such areas should relocate to permitted areas within the period as informed by the Public Security Institution of the People’s Government above the county level. As for the registered foreign enterprise or institution, Public Security Institutions should also forward the relocation notice to administrative departments of industry and commerce (“Interim Provisions of Guangdong Province” 2011).

The timing of the announcement of the legislation, which coincided with the “Double Strike Action”, was suspicious. Could it be in fact the government’s attempt to further weaken the power of state institutions and their hold of urban land? Xiaobei, with all the government, military and media institutions around as discussed in Chapter 3, does fit the
bill. However, as is usually the case in China, how the law is written is fact far from how the government implements it on the ground.

Government institutions, as my research found out, were not the enforcer. Dai, as a police officer with heavy foreigner management duties, had never even heard of the Guangdong Act. No official announcement was ever made and even the Bureau of Industry and Commerce, which, according to Maggie, was in charge of approving office registration, did not seem to be aware of this ban either. Maggie told me as long as one had all the necessary documents, the Bureau usually approved the application. This explains why the staffer was confused when I visited the Bureau in 2014 to inquire about which areas were affected by the ban. She had to ask a coworker and returned with a vague answer. She also corroborated what Maggie said that as long as the address was in an office building (instead of a residential building or retail store) and the applicant could provide all the necessary documents, there should not be any problem.

It turned out the ban was less of an official restriction than a refusal by different buildings to help the Africans finish the registration process. In the past, according to Maggie, after Africans signed contracts with leasing offices, property management companies would provide all the necessary documents for registration. After the ban came into effect, their leasing offices usually simply told her there was no units available. Maggie remembered in 2012 she heard about an office available for lease in Huizhou Building. Her client, a Malian, was interested, so she inquired the details in the leasing office. The staff refuted her rudely. “Who told you that? There is no such office.” If it was a Chinese, Maggie reflected, they might tell you otherwise. She was probably right. In fact, even to this day the leasing office of Tianxiu Mansion still says there are offices
available for lease. Maggie told me they could lease properties to foreigners, but just not provide the paperwork for them to register.

This less involved approach could be due to the complex ownerships of the buildings in Xiaobei. Some of the buildings, as we have already discussed, are owned by the AFLD, who has significant political power. Guolong Building today still has many African offices. It is unclear why the government was able to shut down Shunzhao Trading Mall in a single operation, while adopted a less aggressive approach of periodical clean-ups in Guolong, as we have seen. Perhaps the “Double Strike” Action launched by the Central Government gave the city and Yuexiu District much stronger legitimizing power. Apart from the AFLD, municipalities of some nearby cities of Guangdong Province also own some of the buildings in Xiaobei. For example, Huizhou Building is owned by the Huizhou Municipal Government which has an office in Guangzhou inside the building. Zhaoqing Building, likewise, is owned by the Zhaoqing Municipal Government which also has an office inside their building. Although these buildings have many African offices, it would be more difficult to clean them up.
Besides, other buildings are owned by major real estate developers, who enjoyed an intimate relationship with the government. In some cases, even the line between the government and private developers is blurred. As mentioned in a previous chapter, Tianxiu Mansion, for example, was built and owned by a Hong Kong corporation Changsheng Property Company. Its chairman, Zou Xichang, established his reputation after building Tianxiu Mansion and went on to complete several major projects in the city. His social influence landed him a seat in the Provincial Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference in 2004 and he remains a member ever since (Lin 2004). The same political advisory institution, according to Li et. al (2012, 66), published a study following the “Black Tribe” report that was very critical of the Municipal Government’s handling of Africans in the city. It is thus logical to assume the government and developers support each other. When the buildings were in trouble in the 1990s, Africans would have no problem registering because the government depended on them to fill up the vacant offices. Today in return building owners are perhaps obliged to support the government’s attempt to clean up Xiaobei. However, it may also be because of this intimate relationship that the government did not adopt a more hardline approach, which, as we shall see, became something that Africans could take advantage of.

It is perhaps impossible to completely understand the government’s intention in implementing the ban, but we can at least hypothesize based on how it is enforced. Taking the legislation at face value Shanshan Lan (2015) believes that the ban reflected the state’s attempt to limit the African community spatially in Xiaobei because they did not want it to spread closer the key government buildings. But the reality does not seem to support such an argument. When Maggie and I met, she was working for a
Mozambican who registered his office in the Sino Trade Center, where I interviewed her. Several of her clients were also registered there and the nearby Zhonghai Tower because they were not affected by the ban. Both buildings are in fact even closer to the Provincial and Municipal Government Buildings, although they are farther away from the Huanshidong CBD. It seems that the government is more concerned about evicting Africans from Xiaobei than containing them there.

Needless to say, many were affected by the ban on office registration. A Ghanaian for example told me he considered registering in Xiaobei, but his immigration agent told him it was not possible. So he searched somewhere else, but not many traders are willing to do that because they want to stay close to their clients who are novice traders unfamiliar with the city. Besides, many moved out to save cost, but then were able to move back in because of the ban. Billy’s officemate was such an example. But the ban hurt the community in a more profound way.

The “first wavers” who established offices in Guangzhou were true pioneers and they laid down the groundwork the community to sustain and grow. Not only did they bring their original customers to Guangzhou, their stable presence as residents also attract more to come because they make settling down in a community that is always in a state of flux with all the short term visitors a lot easier. Roberto Castillo, in his research of how Africans formed community in Guangzhou because of their shared sense of precariousness, observed the importance of these more successful traders to the entire African community. A Nigerian informant of his, who like Billy had a representative office in Guangzhou, gave other Nigerian traders business advices and had helped a few establish themselves in the city (Castillo 2015, 292). This explains why many of these
established traders became community leaders of their compatriots. Apart from helping new comers start up as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, they are also the liaisons between the community and the government.

Admittedly, these community leaders are traders themselves and not likely to organize mass protests which would jeopardize their own businesses. They could at least somewhat smoothen the relationship between the two sides by informing the community of latest government regulations. For example, after the 2009 protest, it was the community leaders who calmed down the angry Africans. During the 2015 Ebola epidemic, Mr. Barry also helped the Municipal Government swiftly track down a Guinean who had recently come back from his home country, which was heavily impacted by the outbreak, avoiding causing huge disturbance to the entire African community. Billy also kept a good relationship with the police. In 2016, he was invited to attend the Guangzhou Community Police Service Forum (guangzhou jingwu luntan 广州社区警务论坛), where the police gave him updates on regulations and in return he gave them feedbacks on police service from the African community. Such forums, he told me, happened once or twice a year.

Moreover, these offices sometimes also become gathering places for the short term traders. During our conversation in the summer of 2015, Mr. Barry said to me, “if you come here [his office] at seven o’clock this evening, you will be shocked. This place will be full…Because of Ramadan, we eat together. You will find more than fifty people here.” Ben, the young Kenyan, also took me to his friend’s office near Baohan Zhijie and introduced me to his Kenyans friends. He told me they met there almost every day after all the exhausting business trips around the city. As we can see, the established traders
and their offices provide a space for their fellow Africans to socialize, helping them regain a sense of home in this foreign land. Contrasting what governments hope them to be, these offices are not merely work places, but also religious and social spaces where multiple functions are performed. These offices thus play a key role in the overall health and viability of the entire community.

Resiliency of the Community

Depressing as all this might sound, so far the business community in Xiaobei has withstood all the assaults from the government. Thanks to their resourcefulness, the established traders continue to find ways to register offices in Xiaobei, which attract individual traders to come.

Ironically, the property management companies that turns the Africans away are also the ones that lend them help. As their revenue depends on the number of square meters rented out, management companies try to find as many tenants as possible. The enforcement of the ban on office registration is thus not toward their interests. This explains why even to this day, as mentioned earlier, the leasing office of Tianxiu Mansion is still advertising their offices in English, which indicates they are still appealing to foreigners. Dem told me because business was so slow now, they had many available offices. “Anybody can rent there if you have money. That never stopped.” This has become something that the Africans can exploit. Despite the ban, Africans realized as long as they didn’t ask for supporting documents, leasing offices had no problem renting to them. So they registered their offices in areas allowed by the government and rented
another unit in Xiaobei to keep in touch with their clients. These units are usually residential in official categorization. Guolong Building, as discussed earlier, remained popular among Africans after the announcement of the Guangdong Act. The same is true for Block A and Block C of Tianxiu Mansion. Billy’s office, where we met, was actually not registered. Billy used to have an office in Block B, the only office building of the complex, but a few years ago he left Xiaobei to save costs. With the move not working out, he tried to return. By then the ban was already in effect, so he rented a condo in Block A and registered his office somewhere else. Kalil, the Guinean who used to live in Jinlu Shanzhuang, was in a similar situation.

The tradeoff of this tactic is apparently the increased costs because they have to pay two rents. So in order to save costs, many share offices. Billy, for example, was not only sharing his office in Xiaobei, but he was also sharing the one that was registered, which Maggie told me was not perfectly legal. What they did was they split one address into two, and put, say, Room 204A and 204B on the registration forms. Somehow this worked and that was how Billy and his officemate managed to save some money. At the meantime, one has to wonder: with the frequency of raids and inspections in the area and its proximity to all the government institutions, authorities must know about these tricks. Again, the government's halfhearted attempt to enforce to ban is also showed by the fact that offices registered prior to the ban were mostly unaffected. As mentioned before, the Guangdong Act stipulates foreign institutions already established in prohibited areas must relocate. However, this part of the legislation was never really enforced. For example, Mr. Barry never received any official notice from the government that they had to move. Some of the oldest offices in Tianxiu Mansion are still there today. These offices can
remain registered in the building because Property Ownership Certificate is not required in office license and residency renewal. So the property management company has no reason to expel these long time tenants whom they can trust, especially when getting new renters has become more challenging. Again, this lax was likely due to the complex ownerships of these buildings. However, despite this breathing room allowed by the government, none of my informants showed much confidence and optimism in the status quo, and they are perhaps right.

I recently talked to a friend who was a project manager of one of the largest real estate developer in Guangdong Province. Based in the neighboring town of Foshan, he was in charge of projects mainly serving Guangzhou’s population. He gave me a lot of insights into the Municipal Government’s latest priorities. According to him, the Municipal Government was in the process of further tightening up licensing and registration. Chinese and foreigners alike were to be subject to greater scrutiny. For example, the government was cracking down on those whose registered address differed from the location where real work was performed. Also the Bureau of Industry and Commerce would check Property Ownership Certificates more carefully. If there was any discrepancies between the registration application and information on the Certificate, the registration would likely be denied. It is likely that this would make it impossible for Africans to split addresses like Billy did.

In 2017, I was once again sitting in Billy’s office talking to him. I clearly remembered when we talked the first time in 2014, our conversation was constantly broken up by his ringing phone. I had to stop my recording because I did not want to record his conversation. That day in 2017, however, we were able to have a relatively
uninterrupted conversation. There was a disappointment in his tone. He said he really
wanted to stay in Guangzhou because he liked it there, but he was not sure about how
long he could keep going. As I reflected on our conversation later, his hope and doubt
struck me as very similar to the sentiments that Brother Wu, the migrant businessman
from Hubei, expressed. The two of them, one Chinese, one African, one selling on the
street, one sitting in an office, could not have been more different, but in many ways,
their experiences have many parallels. They both traveled far from home to a strange land
to making a living; they both lacked a legal status that allows them to settle in that
strange land; they are both affected by some type of contestation between the local
government and another land owner; they both demonstrated tremendous resiliency in the
face of suffocating law enforcement; and they both longed to call this strange city of
Guangzhou home.
Epilogue

Although I started this project warily, in the course of my research, as I learned more and more about Africans’ journey in Guangzhou, I reflected more and more on my own in America. I go through many similar struggles Africans do in Guangzhou. Like that of Africans, my life in the U.S. is hampered in many ways by my migration status. Unable to find most jobs, life can become very desperate at times and the thought of making money in the informal economy always lingers in my head. Multiple friends have tried to persuade me to start a semi-legal purchase agent business (*daigou* 代购) that is currently very popular. Although I never did it, I’ve seen many Chinese, some of whom students, do it. They basically act as small time exporters, helping consumers in China buy American goods that are very expensive or not available there such as supplements, electronics, and fashion products. As discussed throughout this dissertation, the emergent middle class, living in increasingly globalized cities with a growing disposable income, has an insatiable demand for Western products. Many of these exporters do not necessarily have the immigration status to engage in such business, and because of the small amount, they usually do not pay tariffs. In essence, it is no different from what African traders are doing in Guangzhou.

To save cost, I also lived in a rental house that was in as bad a shape as those in Dengfeng Village for a year. The house, which I shared with seven other Chinese students, was located in a poor neighborhood that many would consider unsafe. Group renting is in fact very common among Chinese and Indian students in the U.S. I've met
some who live in apartments with the number of renters exceeding occupancy codes. Some of these apartments were illegally adapted to accommodate more people, others are sublet without the knowledge of management companies. Group renting has nothing to do with race or education level. Chinese, Indians, or Africans, are simply making the most sensible decisions based on their circumstances.

Perhaps what really struck a chord with me was when I read the explanation an African gave a reporter for why he wanted to stay in China. He said if he went home without making some money, he would be looked down upon (“Africans ‘Sojourning in Guangzhou’” 2011). I remembered in 2017, when I had some major setback on the job market, I had a soul searching conversation with my partner. She had a job offer but could not accept due to her immigration status, while I was limited to a tiny and grim academic job market also due to my immigration status. She asked me why we had to stay in this unfriendly country. In her opinion, we were here to study, and now that we had finished, it was natural that we return, especially when the US government did not want us. I explained to her once we left home, leaving family and friends behind, and spent all the years studying, there was the expectation that we could "make it", which meant being able to find a job and stay in the US. A return would imply failure because many of those who did not leave already had stable jobs, families, and properties, and we would have to start from zero. It does not mean one should never return, but when one does, we are expected to return having established ourselves in the US. I don't think my friends and family, as supportive as they have been, would, as the African said, look down upon me if I did return, but to use Paul Stoller's words, I want to "return home with honor" (Paul Stoller 2002, 174). It is this common humanity that I saw and experienced
over and over again in the process of researching and writing. However, the sanfei discourse dehumanizes Africans and portrays them as senseless racial invaders.

Although, as I have shown in this dissertation, the formation of this discourse is closely tied to Guangzhou’s urban development, its nationwide impact really dawned on me on in a recent conversation I had with a Chinese friend in the U.S. This friend was not from Guangzhou and had never talked to any Africans in Guangzhou. When I told him I was doing a research on Guanghzou’s African community, he immediately said as-a-matter-of-factly that most were staying in China illegally (heihu 黑 户). I asked him if he had read about that in the news or internet. He simply replied by saying that was how they were. The real irony is that while most Africans I talked to never planned to stay in China permanently, this friend never planned to return to China since coming to the U.S. and managed to do so by taking advantage of America’s political asylum protection. The sanfei discourse, however, prevented him from seeing the common humanities between him and Africans.

A New Racial Discourse?

As Sino-Africa partnership deepens and the number of Africans in Guangzhou decreases because of the Municipal Government’s heavy handed approach, however, China may move on from the sanfei discourse soon. In early 2018, the Spring Festival Gala, an annual live show broadcast nationwide and whose popularity in China is often compared to that of the Super Bowl in the U.S., featured a skit-cum-propaganda celebrating the completion and operation of the Mombasa-Nairobi Railway (mengnei

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The show starts with a festive tribal dance performed by a group of Africans, both females and males, some scantily dressed, others in animal costumes, in supposedly Kenya. Then a suit-wearing Chinese, taking center stage, introduces himself as a member of the training center for the new mengnei line. This character, played by actor Kai Zheng who uses his real name in the skit, brings on to the stage eight train attendants he has trained. Sporting sharp red and black uniforms, these attendants, all black females, greet the audience in Chinese slangs. Zheng then reveals a secret to everyone on stage as well as the audience that he is marrying another trainer of the center today and invites everyone to attend to their wedding. As the dancers and attendants retreat to the back stage, a young attendant, Cari, comes to the stage to ask Zheng for help. She tells Zheng her mother is arranging a blind date for her, but she is only 18 years old and does not want to get married. Instead she wants to go to China to study after working for the mengnei line. Zheng, sympathizing with Cari, decides to help her. Then the mother appears on stage, and became the most controversial part of the show. She was played by Chinese actress Naiming Lou who had her face painted black and dress braced up to create an image of a large chest and protruding buttocks. The grotesqueness is made even worse by a large monkey played by an African actor that comes with her. To convince her mother to cancel the date, Cari tells her Zheng is her boyfriend and as a results creates a series funny misunderstandings. Finally, when the real bride arrives, Zheng is forced to choose between the two girls. With the lie busted, Cari confronts her mother with the truth, who not only accepts it, but also gives Cari her full support because she was saved by the
Chinese Medical Team when she was young. She then declares she loves China. The skit then ends with another tribal dance.

Indeed, level of offensiveness caused by obvious racist portrayals of Africans and minstrelsy is off the chart. Various English news media (Perlez 2018, Wilkinson 2018, Zhang 2018) have already aptly criticized the skit, but it is the intersection of racial and sexual politics that they missed. The sexual role the skit prescribed Africans is much more revealing of China ambition in Africa, and can explain how the sanfei discourse differs from this perhaps new state-sponsored representation. First all black performers on stage who were given an opportunity to speak, included Lou, were females, and they all spoke in Chinese. Male performers are reduced to the background, dressed up as uncivilized savages and animals. The show flirted with racial mixing, which has generated a lot of anxiety in the past ten years as a result of China’s active engagement of Africa and the much propagated sanfei problem. The skit there attempts to address the issue and calm Chinese audience. At one point, the characters raise the uncomfortable question of whether the child between Zheng and Cari would be black or “white”\(^{20}\). Zheng offers a ludicrous answer by saying they would have one black child and one white one, as if race could still be cleanly separated in genetic mixing. But, of course, the real solution only comes with the arrival of the Chinese bride, who offers an escape for the audience. At the meantime, even if the ultimate immigration of Africans and racial mixing are inevitable (as is suggested by Zheng’s uncle in the skit who promises Cari he will find her a ‘fair-skinned’ Chinese boyfriend), the skit attempted to mitigate the anxiety by presenting Africa as sexually appealing and domesticable as in the character
Cari. Meanwhile all the unwanted elements of Africa, represented by hyper masculine savage looking African male dancers, remain in Africa.

Overall by feminizing Africa, the skit helps construct an image of African countries and Africans as passive recipients of China’s auspices. On the one hand, African countries should welcome Chinese investments and people, which was depicted as benevolent and civilizing. This is conveyed through the sharp contrast between the well-dressed train attendants and the almost naked dancers. On the other hand, Africans should also adopt Chinese culture and education, which are modern and can free Africans (especially African women) from traditions such as early marriage. Apparently, in Chinese government’s vision, its reach into Africa is a paternalistic mission that deprives its peoples of their agency.

It is not difficult to see how the sanfei discourse diverges from this new official script. The former draws public attention to Africans’ invasiveness. Within the symbolic matrix it creates, Africans were transgressors: they have no respect for national borders and immigration regulations; they detract from the modern urban space that Guangzhou tries very hard to construct; they are a pollutant to Chinese racial purity and, more importantly, a threat to Chinese masculinity. Apparently, the skit, approved by the Central Government, attempts to undermine this discourse and replace it with a less threatening one. However, it may not have worked as well as the government would like. In a forum discussion on Baidu, the responses to the show were mostly negative (Guyuela, 2018). One responder says “is it not enough for the black devils (heigui黑鬼) to cause chaos in Guangzhou? Now we are even bring them to the Spring Festival Gala.” Another, showing concerns for racial mixing, says, “To earn some African money, our Party should agree to
let black devils contaminate our blood. [The Party] doing anything for money. We should resurrect Grandpa Mao to deport the black devils”’. As we can see, by now the sanfei discourse and what it signifies may be too entrenched to be altered easily.

Sanfei Beyond Guangzhou

Nationwide, sanfei is a more flexible discourse that can target different groups. As discussed in Chapter 2, when the term sanfei first appeared in around 2004, news media employed it to describe undocumented workers from Southeast Asian neighbors. Outside of Guangzhou, this has never changed. Cities and provinces across the country has been tackling the sanfei problem. For example, in 2006, Henan Provincial Public Security launched a province-wide sanfei clean-up that lasted for five month. According to a news report, Vietnamese and Burmese were key targets of the action (Li 2006). Then in 2007, the city of Wuhan deported two Filipino domestic workers (Luo & Xu, 2007). In 2011, the county of Zhouning of Fujian Province also arrested 13 Vietnamese workers (Li, Wei & Zhou, 2011). As we can see, crackdown on sanfei is a nationwide project that involves governments of different levels. This is because China’s growing economy provides many opportunities for foreigners. In many cases, recruiting agents played an active role in connecting employers with undocumented foreigners.

The issue of sanfei became more serious in 2012. First, in May Beijing launched the “hundred day sanfei clean-up action”, targeting several specific areas in the city with high concentration of foreigners. The campaign was widely covered by Western news media, and their Chinese counterparts had to defend it by citing similar government projects in
Western countries (Liu 2012). According to news media, the cause for the move was two incidents, both of which happened immediately prior (Zhang, Zhu & Li 2012). First, the principal cellist of the Beijing Symphony Orchestra, a Russian, clashed with a Chinese woman aboard a train. The fight started when the Russian put his bare feet on the headrest of the seat in front of him, which was occupied by the female passenger. Not only was he not willing to take his feet down, but he insulted the woman with obscene language. The second incident involved a British man who was seemingly raping a drunken Chinese woman on the streets of Beijing. He was later stopped by Chinese passing by and beaten to unconsciousness. Both incidents were captured in film and posted on social media, which infuriated Chinese netizens. Obviously, the key detail that both foreigners, especially the Russian, are not likely to be sanfei is conveniently omitted. It is possible that as in Guangzhou cleaning up sanfei was simply a pretext for the Beijing Municipal Government to strengthen its regulation of certain urban space.

Less than two months later, the Eleventh Meeting of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress issued the new Exit and Entry Administrative Regulations, which toughened the punishments for sanfei foreigners. The Regulations came into effects the next year. As discussed in Chapter 3, the Regulations abolished the fine for not carrying a passport, but significantly increased the fine for failing to register with the local police. Since the issuance of the Regulations, sanfei clean-ups have become more and more frequent nationwide. Most of these clean-ups (except for those in Guangzhou) target undocumented workers, especially Vietnamese. So Frank Pieke’s prediction where China will depend more and more on immigrant workers is perhaps already happening. So far the label “sanfei Vietnamese” does not exist, but with the departure of Africans
from China and the Central Government pushing toward a closer partnership with Africa, the meaning of *sanfei* may soon change. In December 2017, a *Guangzhou Daily* carries a report titled “Over Sixty Thousand Sanfei People Uncovered in Twenty-One Months”, according to which all of those arrested were from either Southeast Asia or South Asia (Zhang 2017). The report does not mention Africans at all, so even the discourse in Guangzhou is perhaps shifting.

**Conclusion**

In this dissertation, I show how different state agencies in Guangzhou, mainly news media and police, construct a racial discourse of *sanfei* to generate momentum for its gentrification of Xiaobei, an area that occupies prime location in the city and could be worth a huge sum in the market. However, thanks to a couple of socialist legacies – the rural urban dual land owner system and powerful *danweis* that control key urban land, Xiaobei remains one of the most stubborn areas within the city core that defy redevelopment. Not only does it drag down property prices of the area, but it also constitutes a blemish on the city’s image. By launching incessant *sanfei* clean-ups, the Municipal Government gradually encroaches on the power of Dengfeng Village and the Air Force Logistics Department, which control most land in Xiaobei. These clean-ups may not help the government gain immediate control of Xiaobei, but they can at least facilitate the creation of a gentrified look. This is of course achieved at the expense of Africans, who are increasingly being pushed out of the city.
Twenty years from now, while Africans may be gone, China will have to depend on immigrants for labor. These immigrants, if the Southeast Asians currently working in China are any indicator, are likely to come from developing countries that are less developed than China. By then, China will consist of a mostly urban population, which means multi-racial and multi-cultural cities would become a norm. Not just Cantonese, but the entire China will be faced with a more grassroots form of globalization. The title of a global city that so many municipalities pursue should perhaps be redefined. A truly global city should not be judged by the number of foreign direct investments or how dominant industries like finance and real estate are, but how well the people can identify common humanities in a diverse urban population. If the skit of the Spring Festival Gala teaches us anything, it is that a genuinely equal relationship with racial others probably won’t come from the top. For this reason, this dissertation tries to highlight the common struggles that we as human beings all go through and return well-deserved dignity to a group who is much misrepresented. The Africans’ journey in Guangzhou is not a premeditated criminal takeover or racial invasion, but a story of how urban poor copes with increasingly globalized capital which threatens to take possession of all valuable land; how migrants try to settle down in a hostile receiving city/country; and how the disfranchised survive in the face of much adversity.
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Notes

1. The fact that many Africans overstay their visas has a lot to do with China tightening its visa issuance during the Beijing Olympics in 2008. China has unreasonably short – 30 days in most cases – business visa durations. In the past many Africans went to Hong Kong and Macau to renew their visas when they expire because it was very convenient. Prior to the Olympics, the central government blacklisted thirty-three countries whose citizens must return to their home countries to renew their visas. Africans were particularly hard hit because most of those countries were African and Asian (Southeast Asian, South Asian and Middle East) (See “China Tightens” 2008). The list, it seems, is still in effect today. The frequency of which one needs to renew and the cost involved might have forced many to simply overstay. Yang Yang mentions in her article that if they need more time to complete their business, they just overstay.

2. Overseas Chinese had been consistent investors throughout Mao’s years, but unlike those in the reform period where investments were capitalist in nature and in consumer goods, these investments were restricted to sectors deemed important to the state. They could remit some of their returns overseas, but some of the returns were also used to support their relatives in China. See Peterson 2012

3. The search with the key word “international metropolis” or “国际化大都市 (guojiahua dadushi)” in one of the most comprehensive academic databases in China, CNKI, yields results beginning mostly from the early 1990s. The phrase was also used in publications in the 1980s, but it was mostly used to describe developments in cities of other developed countries or regions.

4. This information is based on at the information I found at the Guangzhou Gazetteer Office.

5. Record from the Guangzhou Gazetteer Office

6. Record from the Guangzhou Gazetteer Office

7. The northern portion of Dengfeng Road became Baohan Zhijie.

8. Record from the Guangzhou Gazetteer

9. In some occasions the term also refers to those without the ability to work, a source to income and legal support in their old age. But such meanings are invoked less often and not what the term usually connotes.

10. The Chinese People’s Armed Police Force used to be part of the police system and is now part of China’s military. However, like the National Guard in the U.S. they can be deployed in state emergencies such as violent protests. It seems that both local Party Committees and Public Security claim control over them. According to Murray Scot Tanner and Eric Green, they are mobilized and activated by local party committees and governments (Tanner and Green 2007: 658). On the other hand, the Ministry of Public Security also claims leadership over the armed police. See “Overall Information”.

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11. Despite the police’s heavy-handed approach, Dai told me police officers had to be very careful because if protest happens, as in 2009 and 2012, consulates will get involved. And if a foreigner dies, it will become a case of foreign affairs. My informant from the Guangzhou Office of Municipal Foreign Affairs also told me how China treats the Africans in Guangzhou could affect how the African government treats Chinese in Africa. The significance of such protests thus goes beyond Guangzhou.

12. Foreigners of other racial groups might or might not experience the same amount of racial profiling. For example, I’ve met some Middle-Easterners and Indians in Xiaobei. They were subject to the same restrictions in their Police Registration applications. But they are smaller groups and much less conspicuous. Also unlike Africans, who are associated mainly with violent crimes and overstaying their visa, their image is not as bad, so police harassment might not be as serious a problem for them. Besides, Dai also suggested that police also profiled certain Middle Eastern women and white women in the area for prostitution as well. There are also a significant number of South Koreans in Guangzhou, but they live in a different part of the city and the government does not seem to be as concerned about them. This is perhaps because they are culturally closer to Chinese and generally assumed to be more affluent. Also they could easily pass as Chinese.

13. According to China News, Deputy Chief of the Guangzhou Municipal PSB, He Jing (何靖), was relieved of his duty and put under investigation by the Party. He was charged with accepting bribery and maintaining inappropriate relationships with multiple women. It is not clear if the fines the Police had been collecting from foreigners had anything to do with the charges against He. See “Guangzhoushi Gonganju” 2012.

http://www.ycwb.com/gb/content/2001-04/01/content_163504.htm. Accessed Feb 28, 2018


15. Here are two news reports, one from 2001 and the other from 2009. One can easily see the difference in their representations of the migrant workers. “Guangzhou Emphasizes Urban Village Clean-up: Migrant Temporary Community Will Present New Outlook (guangzhou zhuoli zhengzhi ‘chengzhongcun’: wailai zanzhu renyuan

16. The Consul actually said the police station on Xiatangxi Road was implementing the quota, but there is no police station in the vicinity and what he referred to was almost certainly the new Community Office.

17. In fact prior to 2017, there was no formal occupancy restriction in Guangzhou. But Dai, the police officer told me if multiple people register using the same address, they might find the group suspicious and would deny Police Registration application.

18. Based on my conversation with Brother Wu.

19. The rates were generated through the popular travel website in China, Ctrip. http://hotels.ctrip.com/hotel/6082046.html. Accessed Mar 9, 2018

20. In Chinese culture, it is a tradition to wish would-be-parents a fat white baby. It did not originate from a Western black-white racial dichotomy, as Dikotter says (see Dikotter 1992), but the discourse definitely fuses with Western racial order and reinforces the belief that a fair skin tone is positive and a dark one is negative.