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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Contingent Attachment: Long-term Lived Experience in the Redevelopment of a Third Front Neighbourhood

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Abstract

Employing the concept of "contingent attachment" as its key point, this paper investigates the transformation of residents' neighbourhood attachment during the redevelopment of a neighbourhood originally established during the Third Front construction period. By framing neighbourhood attachment as contingent, this paper seeks to highlight that the different directions of neighbourhood attachment hinge upon several factors: the entities mobilizing the narrative, the varying treatment of residents across different phases of the relocation, and residents' perceptions regarding the changes brought about by the relocation process. Special attention within this paper is paid towards the long-term lived experiences of residents since the onset of the Third Front construction to show how these experiences are woven into diverse narratives associated with residents' neighbourhood attachments.

摘要

本文以"依条件而变的依恋"这一概念作为核心点,研究了一个奠基于"三线建设"时期的社区在改造过程中居民邻里依恋的转型。通过为邻里依恋提供一个依条件而变的框架,本文力图展现邻里依恋的不同指向取决于多个因素:调用依恋叙事的实体、居民在被安置的不同阶段所受到的不同待遇,以及居民对安置过程所带来的变化的感知。本文尤其关注居民从三线建设开始以来的长期居住经历,并且将呈现这些体验是如何被编织进与居民的邻里依恋相关的多样叙事之中。

Keywords: neighbourhood attachment; contingent; urban redevelopment; Third Front construction

关键词: 社区依恋; 依条件而变; 城市改造; 三线建设

On 19 February 2018, an industrial heritage museum in Luzhou 泸州市, Sichuan province, opened a temporary exhibition entitled "The industrial memory of Qiancao 1965" to showcase the local history of the Third Front construction. Housed in what was once a vast workshop utilized by the Changjiang Crane Factory (*Changjiang qizhongji chang* 长江起重机厂), the museum provides a glimpse into the significant transformation of this area. Originally established in Beijing in 1965, the Changjiang Crane Factory was relocated as part of the Third Front movement to a site in Luzhou known as Qiancao 茜草. In 2014, to mark five decades since the launch of the Third Front movement, the Luzhou municipal government embarked on a comprehensive redevelopment of Qiancao. This project included the relocation of the Changjiang Crane Factory, along with two other Third Front factories, to the urban fringes. The overarching goal was to revitalize this industrial rustbelt into a thriving new urban centre. Consequently, all residents of Qiancao, including the Third Front migrants and their descendants, were forced to leave their homes and embrace relocation to other neighbourhoods.

The case of Qiancao is not an isolated incident in China. In recent decades, millions of Chinese citizens have had to leave their homes and relocate as part of the "great urban transformation." ¹



¹ Hsing 2010.

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The emotional consequences of mass relocation and the changes to residents' attachment to their neighbourhoods have garnered wide academic attention. In this paper, neighbourhood attachment refers to the emotional bond residents have with the neighbourhood in which they reside.² The physical demolition of a neighbourhood inevitably results in the erosion of people's attachment to it, an experience that some scholars view as traumatic for residents.³ Conversely, other scholars argue that residents may actually welcome relocation, seeing it as an opportunity to escape their squalid living conditions.⁴ In addition, relocated residents may form a new sense of attachment to their new neighbourhood, which may stem from their satisfaction with their improved built environment.⁵ The dynamic nature of neighbourhood attachment implies that it can be fluid and subject to change, necessitating a more nuanced understanding of its complexity and variations.

The story of Qiancao adds intricate layers to the complexity of neighbourhood attachment. Pre-redevelopment, many of the Qiancao residents included migrants, and their descendants, who had moved to the area during the Third Front era. Moreover, as workers in state-owned enterprises (SOEs), they had already experienced multiple relocations since their arrival in Qiancao. How have these long-term lived experiences affected the shifts in their neighbourhood attachment during the recent redevelopment? Drawing inspiration from a relational perspective of place attachment,⁶ this paper employs the concept of "contingent attachment" to investigate the dynamic nature of neighbourhood attachment. In the face of redevelopment, residents' neighbourhood attachment may be affected in different ways that are conditioned not only by the residents' immediate experiences during the different phases of the relocation but also by their long-term lived experiences since the Third Front era. Furthermore, residents' neighbourhood attachment may be mobilized by different entities to serve different purposes, rendering their neighbourhood attachment malleable. Through a detailed exploration of the different modes and dimensions of neighbourhood attachment in Qiancao, this paper endeavours to unveil the long-term impact of the Third Front era in a contemporary context. It also contributes to the ongoing debate on neighbourhood attachment in China's changing urban landscape.

Literature Review: Urban Change and Neighbourhood Attachment

Place attachment, as defined by environmental psychologists, refers to the "positive, affective bond between an individual and a specific place, the main characteristic of which is the tendency of the individual to maintain closeness to such a place." Neighbourhood attachment, a specific mode of place attachment, refers to the positive bond between individuals and the neighbourhood in which they reside. It signifies the extent to which these individuals consider the neighbourhood to be their home. The processes of urban development and change, such as urban regeneration and gentrification, can naturally lead to the erosion or even the complete dissolution of neighbourhood attachment, as numerous studies on displacement have revealed. Even without a physical relocation, the dramatic restructuring of the social class dynamics within a neighbourhood can also contribute to a loss of neighbourhood attachment among existing residents. In the context of gentrification, an influx of new residents with higher socioeconomic status can mean that existing residents may suffer from reduced access to their previous amenities, fewer employment opportunities and infrequent social interactions with the newcomers.

- 2 Zhu and Fu 2017.
- 3 See Shao 2013; Zhang 2018.
- 4 Wang, Zheng, and Wu 2019.
- 5 Zhu 2015.
- 6 See Harvey 1996.
- 7 Hidalgo and Hernández 2001, 274.
- 8 Zhu and Fu 2017.
- 9 Elliott-Cooper, Hubbard and Lees 2020; Slater 2009; Lees and Hubbard 2020; Lees, Shin and López-Morales 2015.
- 10 Atkinson 2015; Davidson 2008; Pastak and Kährik 2021; Shaw and Hagemans 2015.

Several scholars have presented a more nuanced perspective on the post-relocation experience, moving beyond the predominantly negative interpretation associated with the displacement discourse. 11 Reinout Kleinhans and Ade Kearns argue that whether relocation results in displacement largely hinges on the context.¹² For residents living in more deprived neighbourhoods, the high levels of population turnover and feelings of deprivation can lead to lower levels of neighbourhood attachment. 13 In such a context, it is problematic to simply assume that residents will experience emotional distress owing to forced relocation; residents may view relocation as an opportunity to gain better quality housing. 14 Thus, the term "forced" relocation may not accurately capture residents' perceptions, as they may anticipate the improvements brought about by the relocation. 15 Additionally, residents' attitudes towards relocation can be influenced by the relocation outcomes. Relocated residents might find satisfaction in certain aspects of their new neighbourhood, such as improved housing and local environment, yet have reservations about other aspects, such as increased expenditure on utilities and limited access to job opportunities.¹⁶ From a temporal perspective, residents may initially experience a sense of loss following relocation but then gradually develop an attachment to the new housing and neighbourhood as they become satisfied, or vice versa.¹⁷ This phenomenon can be further buttressed by the finding that even without social embeddedness, physical landscapes per se can contribute significantly to the forming of a sense of place attachment, an aspect which has long been underestimated. 18 In sum, to comprehensively explore the changes in neighbourhood attachment resulting from urban changes, it is necessary for researchers to adopt a more nuanced and balanced perspective by considering the complexity of residents' experiences.

Cities in China have undergone dramatic changes in recent decades, marked by urban expansion, inner-city restructuring and the consequential challenges faced by millions of urban and rural dwellers owing to land and housing expropriation, demolition and relocation. These changes have sparked heated academic debates on the displacement issue. The redevelopment and renewal of old neighbourhoods can signify not only the loss of homes and cutting of deep emotional ties for residents but also the potential disappearance of resources relied upon by residents to cope with the difficult constraints in their life. Such resources can include strong social bonds, low living costs, the flexible use of space and convenient neighbourhood location. Such factors can impact residents' attachment to their neighbourhoods and affect their willingness to relocate.

However, some studies, also based on the Chinese context, raise concerns about the predominantly negative readings of relocation. For example, residents, particularly those in low-income neighbourhoods, may express a desire for relocation, even when they have a strong emotional attachment to their current neighbourhood.²² Furthermore, strong neighbourhood attachment does not necessarily translate into neighbourhood stability, and relocated residents can form new attachments to their new neighbourhoods. Some scholars argue that the transformation of urban space in China since the housing reform has altered the meaning of neighbourhood attachment.²³ They find that residents now rely less on interactions within their neighbourhoods for social

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11 Kearns and Mason 2013; Kleinhans and Kearns 2013.
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¹² Kleinhans and Kearns 2013.

¹³ Bailey, Kearns and Livingston 2012.

¹⁴ Kleinhans 2003; Kleit and Manzo 2006.

¹⁵ Kearns and Mason 2013.

¹⁶ Kleinhans and Kearns 2013.

¹⁷ Goetz 2013.

¹⁸ Mesch and Manor 1998; Stedman 2003.

¹⁹ Shao 2013; Ong 2014; Liu et al. 2018; Morris 2022; Shih 2017; Wang, Zheng 2020; Xu 2020; Zhang 2018.

²⁰ Li, Jie 2015.

²¹ Li, Xin, Kleinhans and van Ham 2019.

²² Wu, Fulong 2012.

²³ Zhu, Breitung and Li 2012; Zhu 2015.

support and that satisfaction with the physical environment plays an increasingly pivotal role in shaping neighbourhood attachment. Thus, there are calls for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between urban regeneration and neighbourhood attachment.²⁴

The studies discussed above lead us to understand neighbourhood attachment, or place attachment more broadly, as being fluid, malleable and dynamic, in line with the arguments proposed by David Harvey:

[E]ntities achieve relative stability in both their bounding and their internal ordering of processes creating space, *for a time*. Such permanences come to occupy a piece of space in an exclusive way (*for a time*) and thereby define a place – their place – (*for a time*). The process of place formation is a process of carving out "permanences" from the flow of processes creating spatio-temporality. But the "permanences" – no matter how solid they may seem – are not eternal but always subject to time as "perpetual perishing." They are contingent on processes of creation, sustenance and dissolution.²⁵

Building on this relational space–time perspective, Sophie Yarker proposes the concept of "tangential attachment," which emphasizes the tangential relationship between residents and neighbourhoods that have been changed by cultural regeneration projects. ²⁶ She uses the metaphor of a tangential line, which touches a curve only at one point and does not intersect with it elsewhere. This theorization acknowledges residents' deep connections to a place while also capturing the dynamic aspect of the adjustment of local belonging after regeneration. Local residents, in part, look to certain spaces which have been transformed by urban regeneration to re-articulate their local identity while at the same time imbuing these identities with existing meanings.

Drawing inspiration from the dynamic relational perspective outlined above, this paper aims to employ the concept of "contingent attachment" to grasp the essence of neighbourhood attachment within the context of urban redevelopment. Neighbourhood attachment can be contingent in multiple dimensions. First, previous research predominantly frames neighbourhood attachment as a subjective emotional tie that is beneficial for personal welfare. However, contingent on the agencies appropriating residents' long-standing lived experiences for various purposes, this attachment can become a narrative that is less relevant (if not entirely irrelevant) to residents' actual welfare. Second, as indicated in previous research, residents' neighbour attachment is contingent upon their diverse perceptions of the transformations brought about by the urban redevelopment of their neighbourhood. Disparate pre-relocation conditions and varying experiences during the relocation process result in diverse emotional responses. Third, whichever neighbourhood residents form an attachment to is contingent on the aforementioned two points. Residents' neighbourhood attachment may either remain tied to the old neighbourhood, where their long-term social bonds and emotional ties persist, or shift to the new neighbourhood, especially if they were more open to moving home in the past and experience higher satisfaction following the relocation. In certain cases, attachments may form elsewhere if both the demolished old neighbourhood and the resettlement neighbourhood fail to provide an emotional anchor. Fourth, given the "perpetual perishing" inherent in neighbourhood attachment, residents' attachment may mutate during different phases of relocation. 27 These dimensions of the contingent nature of neighbourhood attachment are interconnected and together form a more nuanced framework on which to base our understanding. This paper, which studies a neighbourhood established during the Third Front era, takes the third dimension, namely, the different directions in which residents form attachments, as the framework

²⁴ Zhu and Ye 2024.

²⁵ Harvey 1996, 294. Emphasis added.

²⁶ Yarker 2018.

²⁷ Also see Goetz 2013.

and investigates other interwoven dimensions. In so doing, it seeks to move beyond a before-and-after relocation contrast by taking residents' long-term lived experiences into account and thus further highlight the contingent nature of neighbourhood attachment.

The subsequent sections of this paper are as follows. The next section provides an overview of the research site since the Third Front era and outlines the research methodology. Three subsequent empirical sections focus on the different directions that neighbourhood attachment can follow. The first examines how various agencies take advantage of the attachment to the old neighbourhood for different purposes. The second delves into how long-term lived experiences characterized by frequently moving home and moving to better oneself can also play a role in the shaping of the attachment towards the new resettlement neighbourhood. The third empirical section explores how long-term lived experiences contribute to a loss of anchor in both neighbourhoods, leading migrant residents to turn to their remote hometown for nostalgic attachment. This paper ends with a concluding discussion.

Overview of the Research Site and Research Method

To address the research question, this paper examines the case of Qiancao, a neighbourhood established during the Third Front construction period and redeveloped in recent years. In 1964, when the Third Front campaign was launched, various cities in the Third Front were selected to accommodate factories evacuated from the First Front. Luzhou, located on the banks of the Changjiang 长江 (Yangtze river) in southern Sichuan province, was among these selected cities. Specifically, segments of two factories from the First Front, the Beijing Crane Factory and Fushun Excavator Factory of Liaoning province, along with a workshop specializing in mechanical parts from Shanghai, were relocated to Luzhou. Between 1965 and 1967, Luzhou welcomed 1,100 workers from Beijing, 1,357 workers from Fushun 抚顺 and 65 workers from Shanghai.²⁸ Their family members either accompanied them or arrived later. The segment of the Beijing Crane Factory was renamed the Changjiang Crane Factory (abbreviated to Changai 长起), and the segment of the Fushun Excavator Factory was renamed the Changjiang Excavator Factory (abbreviated to Changwa 长挖). In addition to those migrant workers from the "mother factories," several local Sichuan residents, including demobilized soldiers, returning college graduates and peasants whose land had been expropriated, also joined the two factories. Meanwhile, with technical support from the Shanghai workshop, a local factory was transformed into the Changjiang Hydraulic Component Factory (abbreviated to *Changye* 长液).

Third Front construction sites were chosen based on the criteria that they were "dispersed, concealed, near mountains and inside caves." The plan was to relocate factories and research institutes from the First Front to remote, mountainous regions in the Third Front, primarily to protect and shield these important facilities in case of war.²⁹ However, perhaps owing to limited budgets and tight schedules, some projects deviated from this principle and were instead relocated to the suburbs of existing cities and towns. The Third Front factories in Luzhou were three such cases. They were sited on a peninsula called Qiancao, across the Changjiang from the city centre of Luzhou (as shown in Figure 1). Owing to budgetary and time constraints, the buildings on Qiancao peninsula were not meticulously planned and industrial workshops were situated in close proximity to residential and official buildings and surrounded by farmland. Similar to typical work unit compounds, the three factories constituted a self-contained community capable of meeting the everyday needs of workers and their families.³⁰ Furthermore, a convenient ferry to the centre of Luzhou enabled workers to access the city's various amenities and entertainment options during their leisure time.

²⁸ Feng 2017, 4.

²⁹ See Meyskens 2020, 239.

³⁰ See Bray 2005.

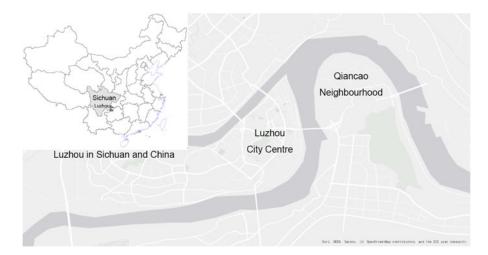


Figure 1. The Location of Qiancao. *Source:* Author.

The Third Front construction era came to an official end in the 1980s, coinciding with the easing of geopolitical tensions in East Asia and China's economic reform and opening up. ³¹ Many Third Front factories returned to their original locations or were relocated again to new sites closer to their places of origin, while a few opted to remain in the Third Front. In Qiancao, all three factories chose to stay in Luzhou and were considered as pillars of the local economy. ³² The migrant workers, however, followed different paths. Most of the Shanghai migrants working in *Changye* successfully returned to Shanghai, a move likely facilitated by their smaller numbers. *Changqi*, on the other hand, established a branch in Gu'an 固安县, a county in Hebei province situated just outside the administrative borders of the Beijing municipality. Some of *Changqi*'s migrant employees chose to relocate to the Gu'an branch, as it was closer to their hometown in Beijing or other cities in north China. In contrast, the majority of the migrant workers in *Changwa* remained in Luzhou. In the following decades, these three factories played a vital role in the local economy, and their employees enjoyed high socioeconomic status in the city.

Around the turn of the century, the SOE reform was launched and the three Third Front factories in Luzhou, like many other SOEs across China, underwent dramatic transformations.³³ The ownership of these factories switched from the state to non-state entities. Many workers, including the Third Front migrants and their descendants, were laid off. Struggling to establish social connections beyond their work unit compounds, some laid-off workers had to take on poorly paid jobs, such as gatekeepers, rickshaw drivers or peddlers selling handmade steamed-rice buns, in Qiancao or the city centre to make ends meet.³⁴ Even those who managed to retain their positions in the factories experienced a drastic reduction in their salaries and benefits. In general, the SOE reform led to a dramatic decline in the socioeconomic status of the workers in the three Third Front factories in Qiancao, mirroring the experiences of many other SOE employees across the country. These workers, who had once enjoyed a privileged position with a high standard of living, now endured traumatic upheavals and found their socioeconomic status much diminished. In the words of Ching Kwan Lee, it was as if they were experiencing "the revenge of history."³⁵

³¹ Naughton 1988.

³² See Jin and Zhao 2020.

³³ See Solinger 2002.

³⁴ Interview with a former CW worker, Luzhou, December 2016.

³⁵ Lee 2000.

However, the most dramatic transformation in Qiancao was wrought by a redevelopment plan initiated by the municipal government. As indicated above, although Qiancao is isolated, it is situated directly across the Changjiang from Luzhou city centre. In China's great urban transformation, Qiancao has shifted from being a rustbelt area to one with the promising potential of appreciation thanks to its waterfront location and proximity to the city centre. In 2014, the municipal government of Luzhou took the decision to redevelop the entire Qiancao peninsula. This ambitious project involved the wholesale demolition of nearly all existing buildings in the name of shantytown redevelopment (penghuqu gaizao 棚户区改造), and the creation of an industrial heritage park. The aim was to transform Qiancao into a modern urban core of Luzhou, characterized by various sectors including "modern finance, commercial service, creative industries, urban tourism, and eco-inhabitancy." As part of the redevelopment, all the 11,039 households in Qiancao, comprising more than 30,000 inhabitants, were to be resettled. For the Third Front migrants and their descendants, this meant yet another move to a new home in another location.

This article draws from fieldwork conducted from November 2014 to November 2020, a time period that spans the major part of the resettlement of Qiancao residents. The methods used are primarily qualitative, particularly document analysis and both individual and group interviews. Among the documents analysed are policy announcements and brochures issued by the municipal and district governments, and open letters posted online by local residents. Additionally, I also collected information from the display in the industrial heritage workshop. The focus of my interviews was primarily concerned with Third Front migrants and their descendants. I interviewed 22 individuals with non-Luzhou origins. These individuals were recruited using a convenience sampling strategy, with a deliberate effort made to ensure representation from both the first generation (16) and subsequent generations (6), as well as from both Changqi (4) and Changwa (18).³⁹ All interviews were semi-structured and ranged in duration from half an hour to five hours. Interviewees were asked to talk about their long-term lived experiences since the Third Front construction period, especially during the recent redevelopment of Qiancao, and their attitudes towards both neighbourhoods. In addition, I also conducted interviews with 29 native workers and 2 local officials as triangulation and supplementary material. I used NVivo to code and analyse observation notes and transcripts of all interviews.

Neighbourhood Attachment as Discourse: Revitalizing Attachment to the Old Neighbourhood

Even if the living conditions and environment in an old neighbourhood have deteriorated, long-term residents may still maintain a strong attachment to that place as it functions as both an emotional anchor and a reservoir of local resources. Beyond these functions for residents' subjective welfare, attachment to the old neighbourhood may also be mobilized by both the local government agencies for development purposes and the residents themselves when motivating their communities to participate in collective actions. In this regard, neighbourhood attachment can be less relevant to residents' actual welfare; it becomes a discourse contingent on the agencies mobilizing it for their own purposes.

The Third Front construction period has long been absent from Luzhou's local narrative. This is reasonable, as Luzhou was not founded during the Third Front era but has a much longer history and a more diverse economy. The three factories related to the Third Front era in Luzhou occupied

³⁶ Hsing 2010.

³⁷ For details, see Jin 2023.

³⁸ LDRC 2014, 1.

³⁹ Most migrants previously working in Changye had left. I was not able to interview the last remaining one.

⁴⁰ Li, Xin, Kleinhans and van Ham 2019.

⁴¹ See Martin 2003.

just a small and marginal part of the urban built-up area. Moreover, these factories had been facing operational challenges since the SOE reform launched in the late 1990s. The Qiancao residents were no longer high-status state employees with an "iron rice bowl" and, indeed, many had become laid-off workers facing financial difficulty. Partly owing to this decline in circumstances, an early version of Luzhou's urban master plan sought to demolish all the existing buildings in Qiancao and convert the land for commercial and residential use.⁴²

The narrative of Third Front construction in Qiancao has been revitalized since the initiation of the wholesale development of the area. For one thing, the municipal government used the Third Front connection to justify the redevelopment project. The policy document issued by the central government on shantytown redevelopment promised to provide preferential treatment to all shantytown settlements related to the Third Front movement. Consequently, the municipal government emphasized the link between Qiancao and the Third Front in its planning documents. The residents, former migrant workers and their offspring, made significant contributions during and after the Third Front movement, and as such deserved better living conditions. In practice, the redevelopment of all residential buildings in Qiancao was carried out under the banner of shantytown redevelopment, a proposal which was strongly opposed by local residents.

Then, as the redevelopment project was launched, the municipal government adjusted its plans to selectively retain some of the *Changqi* industrial plants, which were built between the 1960s and 1980s, rather than demolish everything. According to the revised plan, these buildings were to be transformed into an industrial heritage park dedicated to the Third Front movement. Such a sudden change in the redevelopment plans surprised even the officials at the district and sub-district levels. However, the project failed to attract sufficient financial resources from external investors and, as of 2023, was still far from completion. Nonetheless, a huge workshop was converted into an exhibition hall in February 2018 to host a temporary display dedicated to the memory of the Third Front movement.

In an effort to engender a positive reception and desire for the industrial heritage park, the Luzhou Culture Tourism Group, a government-affiliated company responsible for the park's development, aimed to mobilize residents' memories of the Third Front and their attachment to the old neighbourhood. At the entrance to the temporary display in the old workshop, the Third Front movement was described as the "nostalgia" of Luzhou citizens. The exhibits inside included not only obsolete machinery collected from the three factories but also old photos of the old neighbourhood and its residents, as well as propaganda slogans from the Maoist era. For example, a banner reading "setting up your bed in the workshop, eating and living in the factory" (chuangpu dazai chejian li, chi zhu douzai chang litou 床铺搭在车间里,吃住都在厂里头) attempted to evoke memories of the days when people worked selflessly on this site (see Figure 2-a). A display board in the hall showcased photos of the old residential neighbourhood. Ironically, the red-brick buildings in this neighbourhood, which had been labelled as a shantytown and already completely demolished, became symbols of a red/revolutionary journey according to the narratives presented in the display (see Figure 2-b).

The wholesale demolition and redevelopment of Qiancao also compelled some local residents to mobilize the narrative of the Third Front. In a similar vein, they also described the Third Front movement as a period during which they had made great contributions and sacrifices. Their use of the narrative, however, was to raise awareness of the fact that they were not being treated fairly in the relocation and redevelopment process and nor had they been over the long term. Reminding

⁴² Planning and Construction Bureau of Luzhou Municipality 2005.

⁴³ State Council 2013.

⁴⁴ LDRC 2014.

⁴⁵ See Jin 2023.

⁴⁶ Interview with an official of the sub-district office, September 2015.

⁴⁷ Interview with the president of the Luzhou Culture Tourism Group, November 2020.





Figure 2. Exhibits in the Display. *Source:* Author, November 2020.

people of their collective experiences associated with the Third Front movement was a way to enhance people's attachment to the existing community so that they could defend their rights collectively in the face of the impending demolition. When the district government announced its plan to expropriate housing and relocate residents, quite a few open letters, written by local residents, were posted in the neighbourhood. Some of these letters underscored Qiancao's unique relationship to the Third Front, as articulated in a letter endorsed by "the majority of Qiancao residents":

The people of Qiancao are more special. Responding to Chairman Mao's call, workers of the three factories arrived in Luzhou in the early 1960s from major cities such as Beijing, Fushun and Shanghai. We made ineffaceable contributions to the national defence of the People's Republic. We have dedicated our youth, our offspring, and ultimately our entire life (xian le qingchun xian zisun, xian le zisun xian zhongshen 献了青春献子孙,献了子孙献终身). However, we now find ourselves unable to secure our right to be relocated in our old age. This has left us feeling both aggrieved and disappointed. We, more than 30,000 Third Front workers and our family members, cannot agree. If our appeals are not heeded, we will refuse to be relocated. 48

Although some residents acknowledged that the neighbourhood was not in the best condition, they attributed the shabbiness and decline of the buildings to insufficient public investment in maintenance and contrasted this to the significant contributions they had made to the Third Front. Despite the poor living conditions, the convenient location of Qiancao and the harmonious atmosphere within the neighbourhood encouraged residents to remain, especially considering the potential increase in property values:

Qiancao is an industrial area managed by our three factories, which also provide public utilities. Despite our three factories delivering substantial profits and tax revenue to Luzhou since the Third Front movement, these funds have been barely utilized for the development of Qiancao ... We now enjoy the best traffic conditions ever. If we choose not to relocate, we have nothing more to lose, but will benefit from the appreciation of real estate values following the renovation.⁴⁹

My flat was constructed during the Third Front movement using high-quality materials to build these buildings. In 2008, during the Wenchuan Earthquake, we hardly felt any tremors in our flat ... Within our building, we share strong bonds with our neighbours, akin to a

⁴⁸ Extract from an open letter posted in Qiancao, November 2014.

⁴⁹ Extract from another open letter posted in Qiancao, November 2014.

family. During meals, we gather along the corridor, engage in conversation and share food. It's genuinely cosy here!⁵⁰

Both the municipal government and local residents shared similar discourses regarding the Third Front, portraying it as a time when significant sacrifices and substantial contributions were made. These discourses were mobilized to direct people's attachment to the old neighbourhood, but for two different uses. On the government's side, the Third Front movement served as a justification for two initiatives: the comprehensive redevelopment of the residential buildings in the neighbourhood and the creation of an industrial heritage park on the site. Ironically, the red-brick residential buildings that were held up as symbols representing "the red journey" were not preserved: they were demolished. The industrial heritage park concept, in essence, appeared more as a spontaneous project inspired by successful precedents in cities like Guangzhou rather than as a sincere homage to history.⁵¹ The narratives related to the Third Front that adorned banners in the display were merely superficial decoration. It remains uncertain how residents reacted to the imposed attachment associated with the Third Front era, given that the industrial heritage project had not been completed. On the residents' side, the contributions and sacrifices they had made during the Third Front movement formed the foundation of their demands for fair treatment, both in the upcoming redevelopment and in the long term. Evoking residents' attachment to the old neighbourhood and their shared hardships during the Third Front movement served to enhance a sense of collectiveness. This strategy proved effective. In November 2014, hundreds, if not thousands, of local residents gathered in the streets, blocking traffic in Qiancao for two consecutive days, to protest against the redevelopment plan and defend their neighbourhood.⁵² Such collective actions, which were once common during the peak years of China's SOE reform,⁵³ had become rarer over the past decade owing to increasing political pressures.

Shaping Attachment towards the New Neighbourhood with Long-term Lived Experience

Some studies have shown a different dimension to how urban regeneration projects may affect residents facing relocation. Urban renewal can offer residents access to compensation and improved living standards so that they can adapt to the new life more smoothly.⁵⁴ Such benefits can help relocated residents to develop an attachment to the new neighbourhood.⁵⁵ Following Yarker's concept of "tangential attachment," residents are able to carve out a new sense of belonging in the renewed neighbourhood.⁵⁶ In addition to the appreciation of the built environment, residents' long-term lived experiences, which may have been characterized by frequent house moves and the hope of bettering their circumstances, can also facilitate the formation of an attachment to the new neighbourhood.

In Qiancao, it was not uncommon to meet residents who expressed a positive attitude towards the resettlement neighbourhood. To mitigate any potential dissatisfaction and streamline the relocation process, the local government intentionally constructed the new resettlement neighbourhood to a high standard (see Figure 3). The brand-new buildings, boasting aesthetically pleasing façades and lush green surroundings, garnered praise from some residents who considered the resettlement housing to be the best in Sichuan province. The complete relocation of Qiancao's former residents to this new neighbourhood, which is located not too far from their original homes, has largely

⁵⁰ Interview with Mrs Cao, retired Changye employee, August 2016.

⁵¹ The consultancy documents on the industrial heritage site referenced several cases where Guangzhou had similarly utilized its industrial heritage.

⁵² See http://www.therealchina.org/2014/11/1115_18.html and http://www.therealchina.org/2014/11/1116.html.

⁵³ See Cai 2002; Lee 2007.

⁵⁴ Kleinhans and Kearns 2013; Varady and Kleinhans 2013.

⁵⁵ Zhu and Ye 2024.

⁵⁶ Yarker 2018.



Figure 3. Buildings within the Resettlement Neighbourhood. *Source:* Author, September 2016.

preserved their sense of community. An improved living environment and the retention of old social networks can greatly help relocated residents form an attachment to a new neighbourhood.⁵⁷ Two features are important in the interweaving of residents' long-term lived experiences with this new attachment: a history of frequent house moves and the experience of moving to improve one's circumstances.

Prior to the privatization-oriented housing reform that began in the late 1990s, moving home was a common occurrence for public sector employees in China, including SOE workers and their family members. Take the three factories in Qiancao as an example. The residential buildings built for their employees were constructed in various batches and constituted several different zones configured as villages. When a factory upscaled or received funding for housing, it would build another batch of housing units. These newly constructed flats, along with the ones left vacant when the previous occupants moved to the new units, would then be allocated to factory employees. To participate in the housing allocation, individuals willing to rent a new flat would submit an application to the housing management office. In a scheme similar to that documented by Ya Ping Wang and Alan Murie, eligible applicants were awarded points based on several factors relating to their personal and familial circumstances. 58 These factors included total years of employment (gongling 工龄), professional rank (zhicheng 职称), job position (gangwei 岗位), household size, awards earned by the applicant and whether the applicant's partner also worked in the same enterprise (shuang zhigong 双职工). Applicants were then ranked based on their total score. Applicants with higher scores were given higher priority in housing. For those whose ranking was too low to secure a new flat, they still had the option to choose one of the second-hand flats vacated by individuals with higher scores, provided they found the move worthwhile (with flat size being the most important consideration). The results of the rankings were made public for several days to ensure transparency in this process.

⁵⁷ Zhu and Ye 2024.

⁵⁸ Wang and Murie 2000.

In this context, the housing allocation process involved a comprehensive evaluation of various aspects of the employees' qualifications and circumstances. Even after many years, individuals still held vivid memories of their ranking within this system. With each residential move, residents would move to a better flat, as they had the choice not to move if they did not secure a flat they considered superior. Consequently, each move represented a validation of the residents' achievements over time. Although residents had to invest a significant amount of emotional and physical effort in each move, the frequent changes could potentially make their attachments to the neighbourhood more fluid and nuanced. The case of Mrs Yuan offers valuable insights to this point.

Mrs Yuan was born in Fushun. She was seven years old when she arrived in Luzhou with her parents in 1970 as part of the final cohort of Third Front migrants who relocated to *Changwa*. Following her graduation from a Luzhou normal college, she returned to *Changwa* and took a position in its affiliated primary school. During her first 30 years living in Qiancao, Mrs Yuan moved home several times. She provided a detailed account of her first home in Luzhou:

We arrived in Luzhou on 10 April 1970. Upon our arrival, we took up residence in the Third Village, which has recently been demolished. Our living conditions were extremely harsh at that time. When we first arrived, the building we were allocated was still in its raw construction phase, far from being completed. This was one of the initial residential buildings constructed here in Qiancao, and the influx of newcomers was overwhelming. The construction crew was stretched thin, struggling to complete all the work. We arrived months ahead of our furniture and personal belongings, which were delivered separately. So, during this gap period, we had to take matters into our own hands and manually plaster and paint the walls without any proper tools. It was a laborious and demanding task ... With seven members in my family, we all squeezed into a flat with two dormitories and one living room (liangshi yiting 两室一厅). The living space was extremely cramped.⁵⁹

In 2000, Mrs Yuan acquired her last flat before the recent redevelopment. At that time, the procedures for obtaining a flat had changed owing to the housing reform. Applicants were now required to make payment to gain ownership of the property, rather than remain as tenants; however, the scoring and ranking system for determining the sequence of housing selection remained unaltered. In this instance, the ranking system nearly resulted in Mrs Yuan losing her last flat:

Our family resided in a one-room flat for six years. In the year 2000, an opportunity to purchase a flat arose ... Initially, I was hesitant to buy it because, based on my ranking, the only available flats were either on the ground floor or the top floor [eighth floor]. On the day of housing selection, I told my ten-year-old daughter I intended to withdraw from the process. She cried and complained about our lack of consideration for her feelings. The flat we lived in then was quite a distance from her school, contained only one room, which was too small to accommodate a computer, and necessitated a long walk to reach the washroom and shower room. In contrast, the new flat, although second-hand, was much closer to her school and had an independent bathroom. She pleaded with us to see if there was still a chance. Her father cycled with her to the housing management office, where they were informed that my name had been called several times without a response, so all the flats left were taken by those with lower rankings. This news left us disheartened. However, when the manager lifted the blackboard displaying all the housing selection information, she made a surprising discovery. Tucked away in a corner, there was one flat still available, located on the eighth floor. Without hesitation, we paid the deposit, feeling incredibly fortunate. It seemed as though that flat was destined to be ours. 60

⁵⁹ Interview with Mrs Yuan, Luzhou, August 2016.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Mrs Yuan's memories reveal how both physical effort and emotional investment were made each time she acquired a new flat. However, these efforts did not easily translate into a strong emotional bond with her flat. On the one hand, Mrs Yuan and her daughter acknowledged that the flat had been their home for over 15 years and was filled with cherished memories and life experiences. On the other hand, the prospect of leaving the flat when a better opportunity arose was not a difficult decision for her to make. When the redevelopment project began, Mrs Yuan was very eager to secure a resettlement flat and was among the first residents to sign the housing expropriation agreement with the authorities. For her and some of her neighbours, the relocation associated with the redevelopment felt like another round of housing allocation and presented a chance to improve their living conditions. It is no wonder that some residents still referred to it as "housing allocation" (fenfang 分 房), the same term used in the pre-reform era. According to the compensation scheme, Mrs Yuan was entitled to receive a 69-square-metre resettlement flat in exchange for her existing 57.5-square-metre flat, without additional cost. She ultimately chose a 78-square-metre resettlement flat, paying approximately 37,000 yuan for the extra 9 square metres, which equated to 4,150 yuan per square metre. When factoring in other monetary compensation, her actual expenses were even lower. Mrs Yuan was satisfied with this compensation and could not help but convey her appreciation for the support provided by the Communist Party:

I believe that every household in Qiancao has seen their living conditions improve since the redevelopment. Our residential conditions and overall living conditions have all been on an upward trajectory. I imagine that the future "moderately prosperous society" (xiaokang shehui 小康社会) will be even better, but I am convinced that it is moderately prosperous after moving into our resettlement neighbourhood … Our living conditions in Qiancao have undergone a dramatic improvement thanks to this resettlement. In my opinion, everyone must be delighted with the positive change. To be frank, I genuinely appreciated the Communist Party for this. This is not flattery!⁶¹

In Qiancao, the relocation has significantly improved the living conditions for the majority of residents, as evidenced by the praise given by Mrs Yuan and some other interviewed residents. Furthermore, the new neighbourhood has successfully preserved the social bonds that existed in the former community. Thus, despite initial opposition to the redevelopment, the relocation proceeded swiftly and even more smoothly than some local officials had anticipated. 62 After the relocation, residents quickly resumed their social activities in the new neighbourhood. These findings support the argument that maintaining the social-spatial structure of a neighbourhood can at least partly prevent the negative impacts on residents' attachment to their neighbourhood when undergoing physical relocation.⁶³ The case of Qiancao also highlights how residents' long-term lived experiences play a crucial role in shaping an attachment to the new neighbourhood after relocation. The experience of moving "up the ladder" fuelled residents' thirst for improvement, and their history of frequent relocations facilitated their adaption to a new neighbourhood. In an interview, one resident even drew parallels to their past experience of moving to the Third Front, justifying relocation by saying, "We have come such a long way to the Third Front. Why wouldn't we move here to the resettlement neighbourhood?"64 Long-term lived experiences serve as reference points that enable residents to compare before and after, and thus enhance their satisfaction with the new neighbourhood, ultimately shaping their attachment to it.

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Interview with an official of the sub-district office, Luzhou, November 2016.

⁶³ Zhu and Ye 2024.

⁶⁴ Interview with Mr Song, Luzhou, November 2016.

Enhanced Nostalgia: Inverted Attachment to Their Hometown

As mentioned above, many studies of neighbourhood attachment associated with urban regeneration or urban redevelopment projects focus on the comparison between residents' attachment to their old neighbourhood and their attachment to the new resettlement neighbourhood. These studies seek to explore the extent to which urban changes influence residents' social bonds within their communities and, more generally, whether such changes contribute to the overall welfare of residents. The case of Qiancao, with its residents' unique background as Third Front migrants, introduces an additional layer of complexity. In the absence of what residents perceive as fair treatment during the redevelopment process, there is a risk that they will lose their sense of anchor within the community. Consequently, their place attachment may not be directed towards the old neighbourhood, the new neighbourhood or even the immediate urban environment – it may instead extend remotely to their hometown. Alternatively, the urban change and loss of a sense of belonging may elicit a strong sense of nostalgia for what was.

In 2014, it was fifty years since the Third Front movement touched Qiancao, and the sense of nostalgia was not very pronounced. During the intervening period, there had been opportunities for residents to return to their hometowns. As mentioned earlier, most of the Shanghai migrants who had been working in *Changye* left of their own accord, while *Changqi* established a branch factory in Gu'an county in Hebei in 1983 to relocate some of its employees so that they could be closer to their hometowns in north China. For the majority of those who stayed in Qiancao, this time span was long enough for them to adapt to life in Luzhou. The favourable living conditions for these workers, who enjoyed a high socioeconomic status, played a pivotal role. Mr Song, a retired engineer who had worked in *Changwa*, explained that, in contrast to the common belief that the Third Front was a less developed area, their lives had actually improved following relocation and were better than they had been in their hometown. In Luzhou, Third Front migrants had access to precious resources such as cheap natural gas, rice and commodities produced in Shanghai, which were all challenging to procure in their hometowns. The Third Front migrant children, who were born in Luzhou or brought there at a young age, maintained fluid identities and some even identified as Sichuan natives.

The repressed identity issue was triggered by the process of redevelopment and relocation in Qiancao. It is important to note that not all residents received as fair and full compensation as those described above. Some residents did not have full ownership of their flats because they lived in fei chengtaofang 非成套房 (incomplete suites) flats, which did not come with their own bathroom and/or kitchen. Such flats were also constructed and allocated by the enterprises, but at an earlier time when there were greater budget constraints on construction and enterprises had limited funds with which to build accommodation for their employees.⁶⁷ During the housing reform, these incomplete flats were excluded from privatization owing to the difficulty of dividing up property ownership of shared facilities. In the years that followed, the residents of these flats tried to gain ownership of their incomplete flats through petitions and lawsuits, but with little success, and they had remained as tenants. The redevelopment compensation scheme did provide each tenant household with a resettlement flat in a newly constructed residential complex, but these new flats were categorized as public rental housing (gongzu fang 公租房). Residents were required to pay a modest rent to secure their occupancy. After they had lived there for five years, they had the option to buy their flat at the market price, which might then be beyond their means. Public rental housing is the only category in China's current system of affordable housing that maintains its residents' status as tenants. In contrast to the idea of "moving up," noted above, many of the tenant residents I interviewed perceived the resettlement move as a downgrade. First, the public

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Interview with Mr Du, a second generation Third Front migrant, Luzhou, November 2016.

⁶⁷ For the logic of this construction mode, see Lu 2006.

rental flats were designed for low-income urban residents and were limited in size to 60 square metres per flat. Excluding shared areas (gongtan mianji 公摊面积), the usable space in these flats could often be smaller than that of their previous Qiancao flats. Second, as public rental housing is intended for low-income individuals, residents sometimes felt stigmatized, as their circumstances were highlighted by being placed in this type of housing. Feeling unfairly treated, these Third Front migrant residents remained detached from their resettlement neighbourhoods, even though their original communities had been dismantled during the redevelopment, and instead formed a more intense attachment to their distant hometowns. The experience of Mr Xu, a Beijing native who worked in Changqi, serves as a good case to exemplify this sentiment.

Mr Xu's life in Luzhou began well enough, but it then took a turn for the worse during the redevelopment. He had grown up inside the Second Ring Road of Beijing, in an area known as the traditional City of Beijing. In 1962, he began his career as an apprentice in the Beijing Crane Factory. Four years later, during the Third Front movement, he relocated to Luzhou to work at Changqi. Mr Xu noted that upon his arrival in Luzhou, his basic salary at Changqi was slightly more than what he had been earning in Beijing, reaching 37 yuan per month. Moreover, at that time, it cost only 10 yuan to support an entire family for a month in Luzhou.⁶⁸ His life was relatively decent. During his time living in Qiancao, Mr Xu moved home multiple times. At one point, he even moved to a flat with its own bathroom and kitchen. However, in a subsequent housing allocation process, he found the flat too small to accommodate his family's needs, so he made the decision to move back to an incomplete flat, which was older but more spacious. Regrettably, this choice meant that he lost the opportunity to buy his flat during the housing reform. In the recent redevelopment, Mr Xu, as a tenant, received a 57-square-metre rental flat, which was even smaller than his previous incomplete flat in Qiancao. The resettlement compensation scheme created a dividing line between Mr Xu and former colleagues who were homeowners. The process left Mr Xu deeply traumatized and he displayed a strong emotional attachment to Beijing. He lamented:

Beijing used to be my home, but as I no longer hold a Beijing *hukou*, I'm no longer considered a Beijing citizen. Retired workers in Beijing now receive pensions that can amount to 5,000 to 6,000 yuan per month, whereas I receive just over 2,000 yuan ... A former colleague who fled back to Beijing during the Cultural Revolution and stayed there, used to be referred to as the "Third Front deserter." He faced hardships for a time, but now in his retirement years, his pension surpasses mine. It makes me question whether those of us who followed the directives were wrong. Can we be at fault for adhering to Chairman Mao's orders? ... Sometimes, I find myself wondering, if I had stayed in Beijing, at least I would not have felt as aggrieved as I do now in this relocation.⁶⁹

As the wheels of history turn, there comes a point when we are done, and become useless. It will toss us out. We, the veterans of the Third Front movement, were once hailed as heroes for our contributions to the state. We built something from nothing. Now, we are considered obsolete, and the state seems to have forgotten us, treating us in this manner.⁷⁰

It is near impossible to ascertain whether Mr Xu's situation would genuinely have been better if his hypothesis were realized, as Svetlana Boym articulates in her research: "Nostalgia is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy. Nostalgic love can only survive in a long-distance

⁶⁸ Interview with Mr Xu, Luzhou, September 2015; a similar narrative can be found in an interview with a *Changqi* employee by CCTV. See http://tv.cntv.cn/video/C35153/6f34956c58154ee79703a07dcfa88a0e. Accessed 28 October 2023.

⁶⁹ Interview with Mr Xu, Luzhou, September 2015.

⁷⁰ Interview with Mr Xu, Luzhou, August 2016.

relationship."⁷¹ In cases of relocation, nostalgic attachment emerges when both the existing community and new neighbourhood fail to provide migrant residents with a sentimental anchor in the face of social-spatial changes. Even a migrant resident like Mr Xu, who had lived in Luzhou for nearly five decades, turned to a remote hometown for a sense of imaginary comfort. A study focusing on migrants' attachment in Guangzhou demonstrates that, in comparison to local residents, migrants often exhibit weaker levels of attachment to their neighbourhood. They tend to form attachments that are concerned more with functional dimensions, such as the services and facilities within the neighbourhood, rather than social contacts and trust.⁷² Thus, when faced with spatial injustice brought about by urban regeneration or redevelopment, migrants may make the choice to either leave or, as in the case of Mr Xu, develop an enhanced attachment to their distant hometown.

Conclusion

This paper employs the concept of "contingent attachment" to delve into the diversity of neighbourhood attachments among Third Front migrants and their descendants, as manifested during the redevelopment of Qiancao, and the role played by their long-term lived experiences from the inception of the Third Front movement in creating that diversity. Residents' attachments may head in different directions, including the old neighbourhood, the new resettlement neighbourhood and even their remote hometowns. The orientation of their neighbourhood attachment is contingent on the treatment they experience during relocation, their different perceptions of the changes brought about by redevelopment and, subsequently, their long-term lived experiences. In instances where residents harbour scepticism about the relocation process, they may consciously revive their attachment to the old neighbourhood. This often involves drawing on collective past experiences to rekindle a sense of community within the neighbourhood, fostering a shared identity for collective actions to defend their rights. Remarkably, even in the face of impending demolition, the old neighbourhood, where they had for so long resided, was unable to provide residents with social support. 73 Conversely, when residents are satisfied with the new resettlement neighbourhood, the development of a new attachment becomes a natural progression. This neighbourhood attachment is not solely rooted in an appreciation of the improved built environment, as noted by some scholars.⁷⁴ It is also influenced by residents' experiences of frequent relocations and the expectation that moving represents their own upward progression, experiences which shape a dynamic relationship between residents and their dwellings. The contingent nature of neighbourhood attachment is further evident in residents' evolving perceptions of the relocation at different stages. Initial doubts or opposition may transform into a welcoming attitude over time. Moreover, in situations where both the demolished old neighbourhood and the new resettlement neighbourhood fail to provide residents with an emotional anchor, their attachment to their remote hometown may intensify, resulting in a heightened sense of distress. Finally, neighbourhood attachment is significant not only for residents; it can also be strategically manipulated by the government and integrated into its discourses to justify redevelopment projects. However, the manipulation of neighbourhood attachment for these purposes is somehow superficial. The extent to which these top-down narratives interact with residents' interpretations remains to be fully understood.

The concept of contingent attachment echoes Harvey's proposition that place embodies a temporary "permanence." Individuals may develop a strong attachment to a place at a particular point in time and even gain a sense of permanence. However, when adding some other dimensions, the "permanence" will be subject to eternal changes, akin to a state of "perpetual perishing." To view neighbourhood attachment as contingent emphasizes that within a single urban redevelopment

⁷¹ Boym 2001, XIII.

⁷² Wu, Rong, et al. 2019.

⁷³ See Li, Xin, Kleinhans and van Ham 2019.

⁷⁴ See Zhu 2015.

⁷⁵ Harvey 1996, 294.

project, neighbourhood attachment can display diversity. This diversity is influenced by those who are seeking to mobilize the neighbourhood attachment and their objectives, the diverse treatment of different groups of residents at different phases of the relocation, residents' perceptions of the changes brought about by the redevelopment as either improvement or regression, and residents' long-term lived experiences as manifested by residents' life stories since the initiation of the Third Front movement. In this regard, it is crucial to recognize that neighbourhood attachment is by no means a "middle-class proclivity." Instead, it extends to the well-being of diverse social groups. If fundamental changes to a neighbourhood are inevitable, prioritizing the facilitation of mental and emotional anchors for those affected in the changing urban circumstance becomes imperative within the planning policy.

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