

would be much more comprehensible if it had been more highly synthesized. I became aware of this difficulty almost immediately when I searched for a general map of the entire region under discussion. Unfortunately, a general map was not included, although there are adequate maps of specific areas within the greater drainage system. Also, I would have greatly benefited from more contextual information about nature of the riverine shell mound sites, as well as the other site types, such as the blufftop earthen mounds that Claassen uses for comparisons. The lack of this contextual information has the effect of weakening the persuasiveness of the author's overriding thesis, at least for a reader unfamiliar with the details of the regional prehistory.

Claassen has advanced an intriguing explanation for the formation of the large, monumental riverside shell mounds found in some sections of the southern Ohio River drainage. Readers are likely to be persuaded by some elements of her arguments more than others. It seems very unlikely that this book will put to rest any debates on the function of these shell mounds, but it is certainly the case that it will act as a stimulus to further future debates and study. If the book serves as a corrective to the fact that the shell heaps of the Archaic have been underproblematized (p. 195) and that archaeologists "stare ritual behavior in the face yet cannot see it" (p. 167), then it will have achieved a most excellent outcome.

#### Reference Cited

Fish, Suzanne K., Paolo De Blasis, Maria Dulce Gaspar, and Paul Fish. 1997. Incremental events in the construction of sambaquis, southeastern Santa Catarina. Paper presented at the Congresso da Sociedade de Arqueologia Brasileira, September 22–26, Rio de Janeiro.

### Urban Development, Private Property, and Public Activism in China

David A. Palmer

Department of Sociology, University of Hong Kong,  
Pokfulam Road, Hong Kong (palmer19@hku.hk). 27 XII 11

*In Search of Paradise: Middle-Class Living in a Chinese Metropolis.* By Li Zhang. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2010.

The most tangible sign of the changes in Chinese urban economy and society over the past decades has been in urban development and housing. In the 1980s and early 1990s, the typical cityscape was one of endless expanses of drab 7-story concrete apartment blocks in *danwei* (socialist work unit) compounds, as well as, in the downtown districts, older neighborhoods of dilapidated homes in the traditional architecture. Most peoples' homes were owned by the state and assigned by their work units. By the 1990s, private ownership of homes became possible, and the private real estate market began to take off. Many were able to purchase their flats at rock-bottom prices from their work units, while others became buyers in

the private market; in the space of a few years, a middle class of homeowners was suddenly created. By the early twenty-first century, the property market had become one of the main arenas for many of the dreams, fantasies, conflicts, and tensions of postreform Chinese society: urban landscapes were transformed to a degree never achieved even at the height of revolutionary social engineering, with both older neighborhoods and *danwei* compounds being demolished to make way for new commercial and residential developments in increasingly sophisticated modern architectural styles; real estate developers became powerful members of the rising business class; a property market boom became the target of runaway speculation and repeated government efforts to "cool the bubble" and rein in prices, as incidents of conflict, protests, and even violence became ever more frequent, owing to forced relocations, illegal land expropriations, insufficient compensation, or simply the skyrocketing property prices that made the new dream (and social expectation) of home ownership increasingly impossible to attain for ordinary Chinese.

How have these profound transformations affected the daily lives, dreams, and social tensions of urban Chinese? Li Zhang's *In Search of Paradise* is an anthropological exploration of this question, through 15 months of fieldwork among middle class property owners in Kunming, conducted from 2000 to 2007. The book opens a fascinating window into contemporary Chinese society and culture through the prism of home development and ownership with its discussion ranging from broad societal and economic changes to the dreams, worries, and daily concerns of urban residents today. Zhang proposes to "understand the mutually constitutive and transformative relationship among three key aspects of the emerging urban regimes of living: spatial form, class-specific subjects, and modes of community governing" (p. 3). The book is an account of the rapid emergence of a modern middle class in China which finds its social and political existence through private home ownership. This "middle class" is still new and emerging and has not yet developed its own stable culture; it is heterogeneous, with members of varied backgrounds having acquired wealth in ways many would rather not talk about openly; and it is also precarious, with members constantly fearful of losing their rapidly acquired economic prosperity. Thus, it is primarily through its occupation of space that this middle class finds its most concrete expression. Zhang develops the concept of the "spatialization of class," through which we can trace how a newly emerging middle class, its dreams and values, are expressed and constituted spatially through the constitution of new gated communities. In contrast to the old *danwei* compounds in which coworkers of different rank and status lived in close proximity, as neighbors in relatively undifferentiated housing, always under the gossiping gaze of their *danwei* colleagues, the new gated estates are inhabited by unconnected strangers in search of their own "private paradise" who invest large sums to refurbish and redecorate their inner quarters and have little interest in nurturing neighborly relations—indeed, they consciously desire

to create a space for their own dreams and privacy, protected from the outer society. Their guarded compounds are markers of social status, symbolically excluding those of less “high-class” (*gaodang*) communities and identifying them with a new class defined by its lifestyle and its ability to consume. Much of governance has also been privatized, with management, security, surveillance, and infrastructure development delegated to private firms and homeowners associations. At the same time, however, this new form of private lifestyle and governance comes with a heightened sense of private property, which leads home owners to mobilize to assert their rights vis-à-vis developers and property management firms. Homeowners’ associations have thus become an important space for civic activism, moving outside of their “private oasis” to engage in the public sphere through petitions, protests, lawsuits, use of the media and the Internet, and other forms of grassroots action. Owing to the deep collusion and corrupt alliances between real estate developers and local state officials, such activism can hardly avoid becoming politicized.

Chapter 1 of the book traces the evolution of welfare housing in the Peoples’ Republic, from the prerevolutionary era to the post-Mao period, while chapter 2 examines the structure and practices of the growing real estate industry. The next two chapters probe the relationships between space and class, looking at the mutual formation of self-conscious middle class subjects and the physical spaces in which they live, while socioeconomic differences are “spatialized” through the distinctions between urban districts and estates. In chapter 5, Zhang considers the power dynamics at play in the massive displacement of ordinary city dwellers to make way for new developments. Chapter 6 discusses how property has become a central concern in romance, marriage, and masculinity, as home ownership has become an essential criteria in measuring a man’s worth in the eyes of prospective marriage and romantic partners. Finally, chapter 7 examines the privatization of governance and the increasing conflicts between property management companies and homeowners.

Although chapter 1 does offer some historical background, the book raises many questions on how the phenomenon could be inscribed into the history of urban spaces and culture in modern China. Indeed, while the booming housing estates and displacement of older residents and neighborhoods attest to a new differentiation of urban spaces along socioeconomic lines and to growing social inequalities, one must be careful when comparing the new configuration to the supposedly more egalitarian *danwei* welfare housing system which preceded it. Indeed, each *danwei* society was characterized by rigid internal hierarchies, and housing, though not so highly differentiated, was assigned primarily on the basis of rank, with the best and largest flats going to the higher-ranked leaders or those with the best *guanxi* connections with those leaders. Housing allocation served as a visible marker of rank within the *danwei*, and since *danwei* members typically lived in close proximity and visibility to each other, they could not escape being reminded daily, at home and at work, of their

relative position in the hierarchy. Furthermore, *danwei* themselves were unequal and unequally distributed, with key units enjoying the best land, best locations, and best housing. The *danwei* compounds were themselves part of a massive reorganization of urban spaces by the new socialist regime in the 1950s and 1960s, which leveled old spatial and social hierarchies and created new ones. The Republican era, from 1911 to 1949, also saw many experiments in social engineering, hygiene, and urban planning, which also produced significant changes to the spatial and social configuration of many Chinese cities and neighborhoods. Seen from this perspective, the current urban development and class milieu is but the latest—but perhaps the most thorough—in a succession of waves of urban transformation, each of which has seen the spatialization of new hierarchies and inequalities.

## Migrating and Dying: Capitalist Agriculture and Peasant Workers in Northwestern Mexico

Casey Walsh

Department of Anthropology, University of California, Santa Barbara, California 93106–3210, U.S.A. (walsh@anth.ucsb.edu). 24 XII 11

*Paying the Price: Migrant Workers in the Toxic Fields of Sinaloa/Migrar o Morir: Jornaleros Agrícolas en los Campos Tóxicos de Sinaloa.* Video. Produced by Alexandra Halkin. Distributed by Chiapas Media Project/Promedios. 2008.

For more than 100 years the river valleys of northwestern Mexico have been dedicated to the industrial production of agricultural commodities by companies seeking to locate products such as garbanzo beans and citrus in the urban markets of the United States. These companies were modeled on the success of the desert agriculture in the Laguna region in north central Mexico, which grew mostly cotton, as well as the large commercial farms that expanded throughout the river valleys of the southwestern United States. This agriculture depended on controlling three main forces of production. New industrial technology and engineering was required to bring water to these arid lands through irrigation works, to get the products to market with railroads and steamships, and to cultivate large expanses with internal combustion tractors and harvesters. Second, large and concentrated amounts of capital were needed to finance the reshaping of these landscapes, invest in technology, and pay for labor. Third, and perhaps most importantly, strong arms and backs were required to do the immense amount of semiskilled work that industrial agriculture required. The few local inhabitants in these semiarid areas did not suffice, and soon the farming industries were hiring laborers from afar. In the borderlands of northern Mexico and the southwestern United States, the pool of peasants living throughout the rural areas of Mexico