

## CREATING VISUAL AND PUBLIC ORDER



Underlying the current teleological vision of China's urbanization-cum-modernization is the longer-standing notion of the threat of all-consuming chaos. Continuous action is required to subdue it and generate spatial order (Lewis 2006: 2).<sup>1</sup> Despite the overnight redefinition of villages as urban following an administrative fiat, the prevailing idea is that the process whereby rural villages are naturally absorbed into the city's forward march, leaving behind the undesirable chaotic characteristics of their rural past, will be slow. Urbanized villages have earned a reputation as chaotic (*luan*), insanitary, disorderly, and unsafe, perceptions linked to the stigma associated with their mixed population of former peasants and large proportion of floating migrants, and to the fact that they were initially excluded from the urban planning taking place around them due to their rural status.

Such village enclaves are thus considered transitional; however, their transition is hindered by a variety of factors. Since legal urbanization in 2004, efforts in Shenzhen and elsewhere have been directed at incorporating issues such as migrant control and public sanitation into the urban governance system (Chung 2010), not just on the city scale but also at the most local level: that of the urban community, or *shequ*. The slow and uneven pace of their actual urbanization further fuels the civilizational discourse, which continues as long as urbanized villages display characteristics of their transitional state, signaling the threat of chaos. The previous chapters have shown that this is particularly the case in Pine Mansion in Shenzhen and in River Hamlet in Xi'an.

This chapter explores infrastructure provision practices and the accompanying rationales by which local authorities attempt to achieve

their civilizational ideal. It examines the role of public goods that are closely associated with the broader Chinese discourse on urbanization as a civilizing process: garbage disposal, electricity, sewerage, street lighting, greening, cleaning, and security to maintain order and resolve conflicts.

The focus here is on infrastructural public goods that create visual and public order. Although security may not appear to fit the usual definition of infrastructure, its implementation in China's new urban communities is performed by two units, the *Chengshi guanli zonghe xingzheng zhifa ju*, or City Urban Management and Law Enforcement Bureau, colloquially called the Chengguan, and the *Wangge guanli zhongxin*, or Grid Governance Center, known as the Wangge. These two units work together in close cooperation and with partially overlapping mandates. Both are responsible for maintaining visual and public order; while the Chengguan works by direct intervention, the Wangge applies a system of grid governance, a web of surveillance that is both digital and human. While infrastructural improvement is a goal within China's wider national modernization project, it is also an instrument for reaching another goal that the Chinese state sees as a high priority: the maintenance of order. Provision of the above infrastructural goods performatively shapes the new urban environment as a primary means of bringing the civilized urban community into being.

A substantial body of scholarship has devoted attention to the role of infrastructure in urban politics (among many others, Graham and Marvin 2001; Swyngedouw 2004; McFarlane and Rutherford 2008; Collier, Mizes, and Von Schnitzler 2016; Anand, Gupta, and Appel 2018). McFarlane and Rutherford (2008) call for a closer examination of political infrastructures, i.e., the specific ways in which infrastructure, and particularly sanitation infrastructure, matters politically. Historians have pointed out the close relationship between the broader project of modernity and the shaping of the modern metropolis. Public health and hygiene have been shown to be of particular importance to this project. Hygienism, which first emerged in urbanizing European and colonial settings in the nineteenth century, brings together concerns with order, policing, civic consciousness, and a particular kind of aesthetic.

Moreover, homogenous infrastructure was a historically important part of the modernist ideal of the uniform, spatially integrated, equitably serviced city, in which public goods were defined on the basis of nonexcludability and universal service obligations (Graham and Marvin 2001: 52, 80). In Western Europe and North America, privati-

zation and reduced state spending, in contrast to state and municipal authorities' earlier universalizing commitments, have increasingly fragmented infrastructure since the 1980s, leading to "splintered urbanism." Enclaves such as business zones, technopoles, and gated economies in which the rich live apart from the poor concentrate investment in infrastructure that is disjointed from the wider urban fabric, creating urban "archipelago" economies (Graham and Marvin 2001; Swyngedouw 2004). However, the urban fabric has always been fragmented and urbanism splintered in many cities in the Global South (McFarlane and Rutherford 2008: 370; see also Gandy 2006; Coutard 2008).

In China the party-state upholds a modernist commitment to improve and provide equal access to urban public goods. Yet city infrastructure planning and resource allocation have mostly been carried out with little regard for the needs of many residents because only the *de jure* urban population is considered in budget allocation. This chapter further highlights the graduated temporality and spatiality of governance in Chinese cities, and particularly villages-in-the-city, which are seen as passing through a transitional phase. Paradoxically, to reach the modernist goal of the integrated city, some are singled out as "model villages" whose outward appearance is the subject of intense attention, as in the cases in Chengdu and Shenzhen discussed below. Because such model villages are supposed to set the standard for surrounding neighborhoods and illustrate governmental policy goals both visually and materially, infrastructural interventions in such cases are often designed to hide from view what is considered unseemly.

Examining the ways in which infrastructural public goods are provisioned as part of the civilizing discourse on urbanization requires a closer look at the actors in urban governance and their governing techniques (such as points systems of reward and punishment, house visits, and campaigns) and technologies (e.g., databases, and connecting or cutting off sewerage systems).

The points systems, house visits, and campaigns are governing techniques inherited from the collectivist Mao era, when members of the production brigades were rewarded for their labor in the fields with work points (*gong fen*).<sup>2</sup> The house visit (*jiafang*) is a monitoring method widely used by social workers and also by teachers, who visit their students' parents' houses (Bakken 2000). House visits were practiced under Mao during mobilization campaigns (Perry 2019). The political campaign (*yundong*) is a technique by which the party-state in the Maoist era mobilized a target population (cadres/intel-

lectuals/peasants/the people) to perform political purges or to launch and apply a new policy (Hertz 1998). Campaigns are still widely used, with slogans remaining a central component (Trémon 2018); however, their political dimension has decreased, and their role in policy implementation, especially in aligning local officials' compliance and enforcement behavior with the regulatory demands of the central government, has grown (Zhou 2012; Liu et al. 2015).

Infrastructure is used as a technology of rule by, for instance, cutting off sewerage services or demolishing unsightly buildings to compel citizens to accept the changes forced upon them. Infrastructure can also be a technology of subjectivity (Ong 2006), insofar as its use in the production of a civilized, productive, clean, and healthy city drives the urban environment and the city's moral condition into relation with one another (Joyce 2003; Otter 2004.)

Such micro-infrastructural governing techniques and technologies are "micro" both temporally and spatially, as they can be decided and put into practice very swiftly, targeting specific locations. They therefore offer some flexibility and allow local leaders leeway in their use of them. When a change in policy is decided from above, campaigns quickly follow suit. Infrastructural upgrades in model villages, which are often experimental and ephemeral, can be used to stage adherence to upper-level government initiatives, in particular for the visits of higher officials, as described below.

The use of terms such as "technologies of power" and emphasis on their micro-dimension follow Foucault, but this chapter is also influenced by Laura Nader's view that we must study "invisible and visible aspects of power working vertically through institutions and ideas" (1997: 712).<sup>3</sup> The cases I describe display how governance is graduated; that is, constantly adjusted locally both to policies decided by upper-level authorities and to local authorities' vision of not only what remains to be done but also what can potentially be achieved based on the community inhabitants' "maturity" — their location in the evolutionary scheme of things. As a result, considerable variation can be found between both these urbanized communities and their subcomponent neighborhoods, although the governing techniques used are remarkably similar.

This variation is moreover situated within the same overarching framework of community-building (*shequ jianshe* or *shequ yingzao*), a concept that emerged in urban China in the 1990s at the same time as that of party-building (*dangjian*). Both are at times conflated as "community party-building" (*shequ dangjian*), revealing their close interrelationship. They were articulated as the CCP was transform-

ing itself from a revolutionary to a governing party (Ngeow 2011), its market reforms resulting in the privatization and closure of many state-owned enterprises. Community-building was piloted throughout the country in the 1990s, and in 2000 a Ministry of Civil Affairs document announced that it would become national policy to “support and ensure the rule of law and the fulfilment of responsibilities by community residents’ committees.”<sup>4</sup> The main goal of community-building is to create self-governing communities (*shequ*); that is, to enhance their governability (Nguyen 2013). Communities are not expected to self-govern in the political sense: they are expected to act autonomously while still under state control (see chapter 4). Middle-class citizens are the primary targets and instruments for achieving this controlled autonomy.

Along with expanding services to people in need of social assistance, dealing with family planning issues, and promoting community culture, two of the community-building policy goals are the beautification of the community landscape and upholding the public order.<sup>5</sup> Public order and visual order are seen as intrinsically related public goods. Community center (*shequ zhongxin*), public order (Chengguan), and grid (Wangge) employees closely monitor both the population and the urban environment. They conduct swift infrastructural interventions, cutting off access or putting new facilities into place, and they discipline via reward and punishment. I first look at how the beautification of the community landscape involves achieving a clean, green, and sanitized community. However, even in the most orderly community, attention to cleanliness and order varies depending on the neighborhood’s sociospatial characteristics and the timing of policies and mobilization campaigns.

As the next section describes, the Chengguan’s sanitization and policing of the urban community entails eliminating everything it considers messy, disorderly, and escaping control, especially where a large share of the population consists of floating migrant workers whose daily activities, such as street vending, threaten to disrupt the community’s visual order. In the most extreme case, cutting off utilities facilitates eviction. The third section deals with the Wangge’s role in the surveillance of the floating population and in preventing conflict between migrants and the native population to secure social stability. I conclude, by closely observing what is lacking in a community, where problems might arise, and what is in need of repair or elimination, by highlighting how all these actors practice gradual infrastructural governance, a form of sometimes brutal, albeit finely tuned, provision in which both spatial and temporal flexibility are key.

## Beautification and Cleaning Campaigns

This section looks at the civilizing discourse in cleaning and greening policies in urbanized villages. Cleaning includes both garbage collection and removing litter from the streets and sidewalks. Greening, consisting mainly of planting trees and vegetation along sidewalks, is tied to cleaning as part of the goal of an orderly visual appearance. None of the three sites participates in a green community program, yet greening is clearly a preoccupation.<sup>6</sup> The constant adjustments to the governance of the villages-in-the-city are clear to see. There is considerable variation in the degree of intervention depending on the prevailing housing system in Chengdu's North and South Gates, and on the timing of the ongoing redevelopment projects in Pine Mansion in Shenzhen. The fine-tuning approach to cleaning and greening moreover requires a flexible workforce, as illustrated by the case of River Hamlet in Xi'an where, in the absence of a clear division of duties between government units, workers bear individual responsibility for the community's outward appearance.

### *Chengdu's Park City Plan*

Linking visual order with social order, a real-estate agent warned Jessica Wilczak not to rent an apartment in Benevolence Garden, South Gate's hybrid resettlement-commercial estate, because of security concerns there. He related a story about trees in a recently landscaped part of the estate being uprooted and stolen. "How can it be safe," he asked, "if they can even steal the trees?"<sup>7</sup>

Urban greening and beautification projects have become progressively more sophisticated in Chengdu since the city's development began to take off in the late 1990s. Public parks and urban landscaping are now no longer simple amenities or even markers of urban modernity but part of an overall aestheticizing of the urban environment intended to signal the city's postindustrial status, attract white-collar workers, and support competition on the world stage for "global city" status. In 2008, the city government announced a new strategic plan, the World Modern Garden City Plan (*Shijie Xian-dai Tianyuan Chengshi Guihua*). The name of the plan refers to well-known modern garden cities such as Singapore, but also to the early twentieth-century British planner Ebenezer Howard, who envisaged a network of small, agriculturally self-sufficient garden cities closely connected to their rural hinterlands. Chengdu's Garden City Plan thus connected the city's urban-rural integration project with its ef-

forts to compete on the global stage (Wilczak 2017). However, the plan, which was associated with Chengdu's ambitious municipal party secretary Li Chuncheng, was quietly forgotten when Li was investigated and eventually charged in 2012 under Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign (Kuo 2019).

In 2018 Chengdu received a new direction from Xi Jinping when he announced on a visit to Sichuan that "it is necessary to highlight the characteristics of park cities and take ecological values into consideration." He proposed to support Chengdu's development of this new urban model. The term used was *gongyuan chengshi*, public park city. This was a clear departure from the garden city (*tianyuan chengshi*) terminology used in the 2008 plan. City planners in Chengdu embraced the new park city concept and set about developing what it might mean in theory and in practice. They published a book, *Park City: Theoretical Exploration of New Urban Construction Models*, and issued the Chengdu Beautiful Livable Park City Plan (2018–35) (Chengdu Planning and Resources Bureau 2020). In 2019 Chengdu held the first Park City Forum and released the Park City Chengdu Consensus 2019.<sup>8</sup> While planners and policymakers are still working on the precise content of Xi's park city, it is clear that in Chengdu at least, parks and gardens have taken on a new prominence in city building.

In South Gate, a high quality of visual public order is relatively easy to maintain. The extensive scale of the area's urbanization project meant that most of the old village buildings were demolished at the time of urbanization. The neighborhood is characterized by wide, tree-lined avenues flanked by modern residential complexes, with shops on the ground floors of some street-facing units. There is, however, a notable visual difference between the commercial apartment complexes and the resettlement estates for former villagers. Most of the latter consist of five- and six-story, sometimes rundown, walk-up buildings surrounded by walls. The commercial apartment complexes are in clusters of much taller buildings of fifteen stories or more, with elevators; in fact they are often referred to as "elevator buildings" (*dianti lou*) to signify their technological and commercial superiority. (Benevolence Garden, the hybrid resettlement-commercial estate, includes only elevator buildings.) Professional property management companies, many of which are subsidiaries of the development companies that built the apartment complexes, charge residents a monthly maintenance fee based on the size of their apartment to keep the grounds immaculately manicured. Many of the commercial complexes feature outdoor pools and underground parking. In short,

they conform to the strict aesthetic regime described by Pow (2009) in the case of Shanghai's pristine middle-class gated communities.

Maintenance of the grounds of the resettlement estates is much laxer. Cars are parked aboveground, and residents hang their laundry, plant vegetables, and raise chickens in the common spaces. All the resettlement estate apartments are occupied by former residents of South Gate village, to whom they were allocated as part of their compensation package. Some rent rooms or whole apartments to newcomers, mainly migrants from rural areas, who do most of the vegetable and chicken cultivation. Initially, the South Gate community leadership (the former village head and villagers' committee) hired a professional property management company to tend the grounds of the resettlement estates, but the former villagers objected to paying the monthly fee because they had not been given their property ownership certificates. In the end, the community organized its own resettlement estate management system, paying a few residents in each complex to act as property managers. This creative approach to problem-solving and developing the capacity for self-government was an important factor in South Gate's status as a model transitional rural-to-urban community.

The other visual markers of South Gate's transitional nature are the open fields requisitioned by the city government upon urbanization, which remained undeveloped in 2019. Some have been auctioned off for commercial projects; others are earmarked for public infrastructure. Although they cover about a quarter of the total area of the two communities, they are not immediately noticeable as they are generally hidden by long walls, behind which is a patchwork of small, intensively cultivated garden plots where residents grow vegetables, turning the fields into informal community gardens. Gardeners manage their own space, sometimes erecting small sheds for tools and compost. There is mutual respect for the boundaries of each plot, and apparently little theft of produce.

A few gardeners are former South Gate farmers, but the majority appear to be recent arrivals, rural migrants from elsewhere and the elderly parents of residents on the commercial estates looking for a productive hobby. Many are former farmers. An elderly woman selling vegetables on the street outside of a commercial apartment complex was from a rural area in another part of Sichuan. She claimed that she lived with her daughter in the complex and grew and sold the vegetables "for fun." Another elderly woman busy chopping up greens in a field made the same claim. She was a Chengdu urbanite who had bought an apartment in South Gate for her retirement, and



her busy tour and travel schedule meant that she often had to chop up much of her harvest for compost. Indeed, when Jessica Wilczak asked a group of retired women in North Gate community if they cultivated vegetables in the fields, they denied it vigorously, telling her they no longer needed to grow their own. Native former peasants conspicuously stated that they did not cultivate the fields, although some expressed a nostalgic envy of those who did, pointing out that the plots had been part of their former village land.

Signs in the fields forbid the burning of vegetable matter, suggesting that the *shequ* tolerates these temporary gardens as long as certain rules are respected. At the same time it is clear that these gardens will eventually be eradicated and are considered eyesores rather than resources. The new North Gate community center directly faces one such unofficially cultivated field. In early 2019 a decorative wall was erected along the edge of the field facing the center and lined with a long strip of closely trimmed sod and patches of shrubs and flowers. The field behind it, which remains unchanged, is thus hidden from view. One of the residents explained that the new wall was built for the leaders' visits. Official visits often determine the final outcome of a neighborhood's bid for elevation to model community status (Pan 2011: 171), but this status also sets the conditions for future visits. North Gate, as a model community, is a frequent stop for party members from across the city and the country. The informally tended fields are considered unsightly and no part of a model community.

Within the grounds of both the North and South Gate community centers, a much smaller formal community garden has been created for each community. In the community-building fever that began to sweep Chengdu in 2017, community gardens were a prominent feature signaling both a collective spirit and environmental consciousness. South and North Gate's gardens were described as a link to their agricultural past. In practice, though, they are maintained by one or two people hired by the community center rather than by collective labor, which would have provided a link to both past ideals and the contemporary community-building drive. A standard part of the tour of the North Gate community center includes a visit to its small community garden, which, as the secretary proudly announced, provides food for the community canteen (see next section). While this is occasionally true, the tiny garden, maintained by an elderly former villager, cannot even supply enough material for a single group meal at the canteen. More often the caretaker simply hands out the produce from the garden to friends and community center staff. South Gate's new community garden consisted of tidy

rows of produce, each labeled with the name of the residential resettlement or commercial estate charged with maintaining it. The idea was that residents of the different apartment complexes would come together to cultivate the crops. Again, though, a general lack of interest in this initiative means that the vegetables are eaten by center staff rather than community members. Now many of these beds have been demolished to make way for a small building, where community volunteers occasionally sell potted plants. A sign on the front of the building proclaims that it is an environmental education center for schoolchildren.

### *Double Promotion and Rectification in Shenzhen*

At the end of September 2015, Shenzhen's Longhua District launched a six-month "special rectification campaign" to promote better urban governance and improve "orderly management of the urban appearance and environment" (*shirong huanjing guanli zhixu*). In a revival of typical Maoist-style mobilization, as emphasized by the term "rectification" (*zhengzhi*), subdistrict (*jiedao*) cadres were pictured cleaning up a tract of waste ground while volunteers rode bicycles holding flags and banners and shouting through loudspeakers about this "double promotion." In Shenzhen double promotion (*shuang tisheng*) refers to economic and ecological improvement on the one hand, and improved government services and governance capacity on the other. The double promotion of urban appearance and environmental management is intended to "rectify all kinds of urban chaos (*luan*), improve the city's appearance and environment, and steadily promote the construction of a civilized city."<sup>9</sup>

This was part of Shenzhen's tremendous effort to regain its "civilized city" (*wenming chengshi*) status, which it had lost in 2013.<sup>10</sup> China's city governments voluntarily apply to be assessed for evaluation by the national Spiritual Civilization Development Steering Commission in the hope of being awarded the title of "civilized city."<sup>11</sup> The commission also promotes civic morality in urban communities (*shequ*) (Heberer and Göbel 2013: 64). Such civilizing campaigns (*wenming huodong*) are integral to community-building attempts to make up the spiritual and moral shortfall in society, and they create a sense of community by promoting volunteering and proper "civilized behavior" (Heberer 2009; Nguyen 2013) (see chapters 4 and 5 for more on volunteering). The title "civilized city" "refers to the city with a higher overall quality of citizens and a higher degree of urban civilization in a moderately well-off society (*xiaokang shehui*)."<sup>12</sup>

Shenzhen's urbanized villages were primary targets of this campaign, although the process of problematizing villages-in-the-city had begun ten years earlier.<sup>13</sup> Urbanized villages in Shenzhen were presented as "urban malignant tumors" (*chengshi duli*) characterized by a "dirty, chaotic and inferior" environment (*zang, luan, cha*) (Chung 2009; Du 2020). There is a clear connection between urban renovation projects and increased governmental responsibility for the provision of public goods. Before redevelopment began, the village's public goods had been partly financed by Pine Mansion's shareholding companies and the local lineage foundation, but now, with the transfer of land use rights from collectives to the state, they are almost entirely covered by the government (see chapter 2). This change is not so much the result of a more stable and equitable mode of budgetary allocation as it is of the government raising the level of its provision of such urban infrastructure only when and where collectives agree to engage in a proposed urban development program. Since the start of Pine Mansion's redevelopment project in 2011, visible change has appeared: roads are in better shape; the quality of public transport has increased, with bus shelters and no honking signs erected at regular intervals along the road that services the newly built residential towers; police and street cleaners have increased in number; and the frequency of garbage collection has gone up. This greater governmental intervention constitutes an investment in infrastructure to attract real-estate developers who will get a better price for their housing as a result, and will pay the government use rights.

It is not surprising then that while many native villagers locate the change brought about by urbanization in the pensions and health coverage that they now receive, both former village and current urban community (*shequ*) leaders tend to adhere to the civilizing discourse: the urbanization started with the redevelopment of the village. When asked about urbanization (*chengshihua*) they refer to the urban redevelopment project itself or to the change in *shequ* management. This is due both to the improved delivery of urban public goods that accompanies the redevelopment and to the strengthening and rationalization of management, which they compare to the prior "chaos" (*luan* or *hunluan*). For instance, one shareholding company (and residents' committee) leader linked the redevelopment to the improvement of the road network. He characterized the urban village renovation (*gaizao*) policy as a major aspect of the government's work, which, he declared, is turning the area around Pine Mansion into Shenzhen's backyard (*bieyuan*). This seemed to give Pine Man-



**Figure 3.1.** The new residential towers, Pine Mansion, Shenzhen. © Anne-Christine Trémon.

sion's peripheral location a positive connotation: *bieyuan* is a literary term for the external courtyard of an official residence. However, both local and migrant inhabitants appreciate the effort being made to create a "proper" urban environment. Mrs. Zeng, a long-term migrant resident, noted that "since they have done the *xiaoqu* [the new residential complex] the environment has improved. They've repaired the roads and given the houses a facelift."

The temporal coincidence of the redevelopment programs and the municipal financing of infrastructure is perhaps best illustrated by the experiment with a new garbage collection system using underground containers. Burying the garbage not only hides it from view but also eliminates the foul odor that spreads through the streets, particularly in hot weather. These environmentally friendly, deeply buried containers were tested out in two of Pine Mansion's neighborhoods singled out as model villages. The containers were installed in August 2016, just after the collective that managed that part of Pine Mansion's land had signed phase II of the community's redevelopment contract with the developer (see chapter 2). The underground garbage-collection stations are equipped with a locking device and a GPS alarm that alerts the private garbage company on contract to the government to empty the tanks when the volume reaches a certain

level. A newspaper article explained that installing the containers underground integrates them fully “into the urban green landscape, enhancing the image of the urban environment.”<sup>14</sup>

In preparation for the visit of a high-ranking municipal official, the facades of these two neighborhoods’ buildings were uniformly clad with black-painted panels and stylishly calligraphed inscriptions. The official was quoted in the media and the subdistrict party report, and by Pine Mansioners saying that this was one of Shenzhen’s first villages-in-the-city that did not stink (*wenbudao chouwei de chengzhongcun*). Visual order is here related to the fear of the “contaminated city” (McFarlane 2008: 419) and the notion that offensive odors are not only unseemly but also unhygienic, as in the now obsolete theory of miasma that causally linked disease propagation with exposure to bad smells. I (Anne-Christine) was unsure about the system’s environmental friendliness, which was flaunted in media and party reports. The garbage trucks are rather large compared to the lighter ones that collect garbage elsewhere. This partly accounts for why the system has not been implemented everywhere, as the streets in the former village area are too narrow for the bigger trucks. There is also another explanation for the system’s implementation in only some parts of Pine Mansion. The main reason can be derived from the temporal coincidence between turning the neighborhood into a model village and negotiations on the next phase of the redevelopment project: to persuade the native villagers and developers to sign such deals, the government selectively pours money into infrastructure, such as these underground garbage containers, to make the place more appealing. The media coverage of this small-scale experiment was also meant to incentivize other *shequ* to invest in improved garbage disposal solutions.

Local leaders, although proud of their model community, were somewhat ironic about this “face project” (Steinmüller 2013). It was mainly a matter of appearance. They let slip some comments about setting up environmentally friendly garbage collection in Pine Mansion that were much less optimistic than the media and party reports, based on their view of their own native community’s “backwardness”: a young employee at the Chengguan office remarked that “Pine Mansion is just beginning to urbanize. It may be hard to hear, but here they’re all peasants, born peasants. ‘No matter what, I throw everything in the trash can’—there’s no way to sort the garbage, so this [policy on sorting garbage] is not being promoted.” He and his employer had been on a business trip to Zhejiang and found that it worked there: “Households have two sorts of bags, but these are



Figure 3.2. Street cleaners, Pine Mansion, Shenzhen. © Anne-Christine Trémon.

provided by the government, so it works,” they explained. Still, they justified their pessimism with the explanation that because of its rural origins, Pine Mansion was not ready for such a new policy, and therefore there was no point in attempting to promote it.<sup>15</sup>

Some were even skeptical about the garbage-burying system itself. One employee at the Wangge office (see next section on grid governance) observed when his boss temporarily left the room that the underground system remedies the smell but does not eliminate the many piles of garbage that continue to be left beside the roads: “Just walk around, and you’ll see them.” His superior, Mr. Liu, was much more prone to stick to the official discourse about burying the garbage to eliminate the smell. Still, I could only agree with a non-native survey respondent and her female friends, who said that the environment has considerably improved over the past years. Large amounts of garbage used to be dumped directly on the street rather than in bags at designated spots, with some even thrown out of windows. Now there is a fine for such behavior, so the improvement is due to the system of control (*jiandu tizhi*), they explained. Another element almost everybody agreed on is that street cleanliness has improved. In 2018 street cleaners could be seen everywhere throughout the day. This was also the case in Xi’an.

### *Xi'an's Campaigns and Street Cleaners*

The Xi'an Urban Landscaping Act (*Xi'an shi chengshi lühua tiaoli*) came into effect on 1 June 2014.<sup>16</sup> It stated that urban green space—parks, school and university sports grounds, the banks of rivers and lakes, and all green space on state-owned land—should be seen as a providing service to the public and overseen by local government with zero tolerance for illicit use, rent, or exchange. For example, Clause 27 of the act says that no individual or governmental organization should modify the purpose of urban green space, and any modification in the form of use, rent, or exchange must receive municipal government approval and be accompanied by a plan to reimburse the cost of creating new green space to compensate for its loss.

In recent years this greening campaign has converged with a project launched in 2006 promoting the city: Xi'an's "lighting-up project" (*dianliang gongcheng*) is an effort to beautify the ancient city wall, the Drum Tower and the Bell Tower in the city center, and the skyscrapers in the surrounding districts.<sup>17</sup> For example, roadside trees are required to be illuminated with patterns or Chinese characters representing things such as happiness, family, harmony, etc. Often flowers planted next to bridges and overpasses are spotlighted, and parks and public squares are illuminated.

Conforming to the 2014 Landscaping Act, the subdistrict (*jiedao*) contracted out the greening of the space surrounding River Hamlet to landscape companies that sent workers to trim the trees and bushes and remove fallen leaves and branches.<sup>18</sup> They were also expected to hang strings of lights and celebratory ornaments on the trees for the municipal beautification project. The landscape workers were predominantly males over age fifty, who had moved to Xi'an from rural areas in Shaanxi and neighboring provinces. Contractors paid them 4,000 RMB per month on average. They worked in groups, moving from site to site and project to project, often traveling to the current site in a small van with their tools, working for a few hours and leaving. Some were able to ride a motorbike to work with their tools strapped to the back seat because they lived nearby, and still others took buses. Little training is required for landscaping work; in fact most of the landscape workers had previously been farmers, but farming was no longer economically viable, the invested money and labor exceeding the value of the harvest.

Only days after his inauguration as the new mayor in 2016, Wang Yongkang launched a citywide campaign to collect dropped cigarette butts, which media and policy texts dubbed the Cigarette Butt

Revolution (*yantou geming*). Wang himself collected cigarette butts along the Xi'an city wall, a tourist attraction, creating a news story and propaganda for the campaign. The slogan "No cigarette butts on the ground, a more beautiful Xi'an" (*yantou bu luodi, xi'an geng meili*) appeared in newspapers and on street walls and banners throughout the city in an uncanny echo of socialist- and collectivist-era propaganda. The slogan was adopted by the city's district and subdistrict governments and the community offices.

During the 2019 period of fieldwork in River Hamlet, a survey respondent vividly recalled how the campaign, when it had just been launched and was at its height, had shaped her daily life: "We walked along the streets with our heads down, looking not at our phones but at the ground for any possible cigarette butts." The subdistrict office organized volunteers wearing red armbands to oversee the urban community (*shequ*), policing residents and visitors to make sure they threw their butts into the bins provided. Even though the Cigarette Butt Revolution campaign had waned by 2019, its impact on the appearance of the streets and neighborhoods was seen and felt by residents as they went about their daily lives.

The campaign lasted for three years, the entire term of Wang's mayorship. In April 2017, the Xi'an Municipal Management Committee (*chengshi guanli weiyuanhui*) published a policy titled "Xi'an Cigarette Butt Revolution and its Implementation."<sup>19</sup> The policy stated that each cigarette butt found on the ground would result in the deduction of a tenth of a point from the set number of points allocated for this purpose to each community, street, and district. The Xi'an Municipal Management Committee's official website published the names of the top and bottom three communities every month. District government officials would be questioned by the designated oversight committee as to why cigarette butts were still found in their administrative zones. In May 2015, during the pilot phase of this citywide policy, more than twenty government officials, including the party secretary and the deputy chief of Lianhu District, were under investigation for this. The municipal government of Xi'an carried out random checks for cigarette butts and other litter, which could result in a fine. The obligation to maintain a litter-free environment required each *shequ* to collect a certain number of cigarette butts. Schoolchildren searched street after street to complete their assigned quotas. A system for reporting people littering was set up in many communities. While the citizens appreciated the litter-free public space, they felt that the policy put excessive pressure on ordinary people.



In 2018 a street cleaner in River Hamlet had 900 RMB deducted from her monthly wage of 2,600 RMB because cigarette butts had been found on the 200-meter length of the busy street she was responsible for cleaning. Such intensive punishment of street cleaners sparked opinions among citizens who did not agree with making them responsible for the wrongdoings of random people in the public space. Already on a rather low wage, the street cleaners were forced not only to clean up after others but also to anticipate who on the street might drop litter and go chasing after them. Subdistrict bureaus set a strict rule imposing a fine of 1 RMB per butt found in the area designated to each cleaner. This could mount up to a large fine, and it attracted citizens' criticism.<sup>20</sup> News of the extortionary fines first broke in River Hamlet. Online and media criticism caused the district leaders to soften their approach, and they replaced the system of imposed fines with educational campaigns about the importance of cleaner roads to improve the city's image.

Nevertheless, the burden of cleaning the city roads and public space still falls disproportionately on the street cleaners, whose poor wages and working conditions already make their lives precarious. While this exploitation of the labor force results in a clean environment that citizens enjoy, the cleaners' very low wages and unstable employment conditions exclude them from obtaining urban citizenship and thus keep them on the margins of society. The usual wage is 2,000–4,000 RMB per month, and there is a wide variety of employers. Some work for Metro Line 3 on temporary contracts, wearing the metro uniform. They work in the underground areas, mainly cleaning surfaces, toilets, and stairs. Despite their more comfortable air-conditioned and sheltered working environment, their working day is often very rushed and stressful, with bursts of intensity at peak times. They are strictly managed and are required to clock in and out of their shifts. Their performance is regularly evaluated, and is overseen by the many surveillance cameras that prevent them from collecting and reselling recyclables to boost their income.

Street cleaners are also employed by the district government via contracts managed by middlemen. In a uniform with *Huanwei* (environmental sanitation) printed on the vest, they work in shifts on different road sections, cleaning the street and emptying the garbage bins grouped at intervals along the two-kilometer-long main street. While their working environment is harsh and challenging, their movement is fairly free, and they are less affected by traffic peaks than those working for the metro; additionally, although their wages

are the same or lower, they are able to collect recyclables such as plastic bottles at the end of their shift to sell privately.

Many such informal recyclables collectors had operated throughout River Hamlet prior to its demolition. There were no garbage bins in the alleyways, which are crowded with restaurants and other businesses. People did not bother to put their everyday garbage into the bins on the main street, and open piles of garbage littered the pavement. Collectors pushed their three-wheeled carts through the alleys, picking up cardboard boxes, for instance, from convenience stores and shipping and distribution points.

Finally, street cleaners work for communities and businesses, often part-time. Most of these are responsible for the care of children or elderly family members when not working, and such part-time employment suits their need for flexibility. As middle-class residents in Xi'an have grown more comfortable with a service economy that hires street cleaners at low wages, it has also become common for them to book cleaners for their urban apartments on a weekly basis.

## Visual Appearance: The Chengguan

The Chengguan is an urban management force that operates in almost every city in mainland China. Depending on the structure of the governance of an urbanized village, it may be incorporated within the *shequ* office or independent of it; in all cases it is subordinate to the office bearing the same name at each level of the municipal hierarchy. There is a Chengguan in Pine Mansion and South Gate; in River Hamlet, however, where the governance structure is still in flux, it does not exist at the local level. The Chengguan offices are charged with enforcing a wide range of local ordinances and regulations. Their main mandate is to regulate the streets and public spaces, but they also enforce city sanitation. They generally hire local *hukou*-holding men as a form of parapolice responsible for controlling street vendors, hawkers, shoe shiners, and illegal cab drivers. Misconduct by these informally hired and poorly trained Chengguan law-enforcement officers has triggered many protests in China in recent years, and they have been increasingly criticized ever since some employed bullying tactics that resulted in injuries and even deaths (Swider 2015). New administrative laws promulgated in 2017 and 2021 seek to reduce the violence and scandals by professionalizing the Chengguan force, improving their recruitment and training,

clarifying the use of force, and heightening their accountability.<sup>21</sup> The outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic has also prompted a change in their attitude toward street vendors following the central authorities' call for increased tolerance in the aftermath of the lockdown to fight rising unemployment (Zhou 2020).

While some cities have City Appearance (*chengshi shirong*) offices that are separate from the Chengguan, in our cases the Chengguan offices hold both mandates, revealing a continuum between the maintenance of order in public spaces, with a focus on street vendors, and the broader policy of transforming urbanized villages into proper "civilized" neighborhoods. The approach of these offices at different levels in the municipal hierarchy ranges from zero tolerance to a certain amount of leniency; in Pine Mansion and River Hamlet long-term leniency abruptly gave way to zero tolerance, while in South Gate the reverse has been the case.

### *Zero Tolerance in Pine Mansion*

The extreme importance of the *shequ's* external appearance was very clearly stated by staff of the Chengguan unit on the sixth floor of the community center (*shequ zhongxin*). The head of the Chengguan, a man in his fifties, and his assistant, in his thirties, are both Chens of the local lineage, born and raised in Pine Mansion. Asked what has changed since urbanization and Pine Mansion's incorporation into Shenzhen, the head started by mentioning the asphalt roads that have recently replaced the broken cement roads. He continued: "In addition to the roads, it is the community's appearance [he is an exception among native villagers as he uses the term *shequ* rather than *cun*, "village"]. Originally there were only tile-roofed houses here. Redevelopment (*jiugai*) has turned them into this type of commercial housing, and now these renovation projects are continuing."

Asked what the Chengguan is mainly responsible for, he answered "The appearance of the village (*cun rong cun mao*), hygiene, and urban facilities. All those sewers, roads, road hygiene, road maintenance, sewer maintenance, these are our responsibilities."<sup>22</sup> Information about infrastructure and equipment in need of repair is sent to the office from the Wangge (see next section). The head of the Chengguan referred to this as the digitalization of urban management (*shuzihua Chengguan*): for example, if a Wangge team member finds a road damaged or a broken flowerpot, they take a photograph and send it in. "We have to process this within a certain time, for instance a day. ... We're responsible for its rectification on receiving

this information, and we direct the tasks [depending on whether it's] water pipes, roads, billboards that have fallen off ..."

One of the Chengguan's head obsessions and main purposes for the next few years is tidying up the water pipes and electricity cables that "make some villages look like spiderwebs" and "form a canopy over the buildings," he described with a sigh. These can no longer be seen in the model villages. Pine Mansion's Chengguan has already improved the situation considerably compared to the urban villages in the nearby city of Dongguan, or even in neighboring villages in Shenzhen, his assistant said. "In the past you could see wires hanging out of restaurant windows and factory walls completely covered with handbills. These can no longer be seen here." He added "There are no more untidy job postings or messy street vendors [*luan zhangtie luan bai mai*]." The two Chengguan staff repeated these statements several times.

The crackdown on "untidy" paper postings taped to the walls of factories and shopfronts advertising jobs can be explained by the community-building policy goal of promoting community culture. To facilitate the implementation of national "socialist spiritual civilization" programs, community spaces and resources such as billboards, plaques and columns are to be used to propagate a "healthy" and "wholesome" culture (Nguyen 2013). Moreover, eliminating job postings signals that manual laborers are no longer welcome: the jobs that used to be advertised were mostly for industrial workers in Pine Mansion's factories.

The Chengguan's measures to improve the urban appearance of the village are quite drastic. Pipes and wires are cut off or bundled. Digitalized city management helps to locate and remove postings immediately, and if they include a telephone number, the phone line is cut off pending payment of a fine. Street vendors are pursued and fined, and their vending carts are confiscated. The head boasted that the Chengguan is even stricter in Pine Mansion than in the urban villages in Shenzhen's core districts. Indeed, in other urbanized villages in Shenzhen there is a more relaxed approach to street vending, partly following the reaction to the bullying mentioned above. By practicing zero tolerance, Pine Mansion's community leaders conspicuously distinguish their redeveloping and gentrifying village from Shenzhen's inner-city urbanized villages, which have a very bad reputation.

### *Eviction by Shutting Off Utilities in River Hamlet*

Since 2018, River Hamlet has been under the direct jurisdiction of the Gaoxin High Tech District Branch of Xi'an City's Management

Comprehensive Administration Law Enforcement Bureau, locally known as Gaoxin Chengguan. According to the bureau's official website, its main responsibilities include the appearance of the city (*shirong*), landscaping, parks and squares, construction waste, household waste, billboards, and outdoor lighting, with secondary responsibility for roads, bridges, tunnels, heating and gas, illicit construction, digital governance, and miscellaneous work in support of the party.<sup>23</sup>

River Hamlet's local residents had direct experience of the Chengguan's operations during the demolition in 2018–19.<sup>24</sup> The Gaoxin District Chengguan set up a station in River Hamlet prior to the demolition and hired squads of private security men in black uniforms. The Chengguan played an instrumental role in expelling not only illegal street vendors but also migrant vendors from their shops and native villagers from their houses. At the end of October, heavy trucks drove down the main business street with loudspeakers blasting out the message: "City announcement: all original villagers are evicted from illegal buildings and must vacate them, and all nonlocals must close their shops and move out." By early November heavy demolition vehicles were knocking down shops and houses. Security guards formed a wall protecting the operation as villagers and nonlocals cried, shouted, and protested.

In January 2019, two months after the demolition began, many of River Hamlet's villagers were still refusing to accept a relocation deal and leave their houses. Those who signed the developers' deal received cash compensation, and their names were posted on notices displayed throughout River Hamlet. The demolished buildings on the main commercial street and some demolished houses further into the village created an eerie atmosphere. Hardly any of the migrants remained in their shops except for a handful wanting to sell what they had left before returning to their hometowns for the lunar new year.

Local, mainly middle-aged and elderly villagers sometimes gathered in front of the debris to talk. They were cold at home because, unlike the urban apartments, the village houses had no central heating. The elderly were worried about the cold nights and consulted with one another about how to go about obtaining a lease on an apartment owned by friends or relatives that they could move to while awaiting relocation. They feared that the government (probably the subdistrict government), which had once attempted to cut off the electricity, would do this again, putting their heaters and electric blankets out of action and making it impossible to warm their houses and themselves. This was illegal, one woman reminded the

crowd. Indeed, in 2012 the Supreme Court of China enacted a regulation outlawing violence in demolition practice, including cutting off electricity and water supplies, forcing people to persuade others in their kin group to relocate voluntarily, destroying physical structures without prior agreement, and violent action by the police and security forces.<sup>25</sup> Yet the use of such violence is still widespread in China. In River Hamlet the electricity continued to flow for the time being. As their despair grew, more villagers signed the deal on offer as the weather got colder and they lost hope of a better proposition in the coming days or weeks.

To disrupt the remaining villagers' resistance, in January, Xi'an's coldest month, the subdistrict stopped the sewerage service to River Hamlet's village houses. The smell of human feces was appalling. The villagers had to decide between staying in this noxious living environment and moving out. Once they left, the bulldozers moved in on the houses immediately. The odor drove away several more households. The subdistrict's withdrawal of the sewerage service had met its aim of forcing the villagers out of their houses and establishing a new social order.

### *Managed Disorder in South Gate*

The community centers are the most obvious physical manifestation of Chengdu's new community governance and development project and were microcosms of the visual and social order that the community leadership and staff sought to produce in the *shequ* at large. The community center in North Gate was completed in 2017, when the community was separated from South Gate, and the South Gate community center was renovated from mid-2018 to early 2019. Both centers are similar in their overall functionality and, based on Jessica Wilczak's visits to a dozen other community centers in Chengdu, represent what appears to be an emerging template for such centers in this city.<sup>26</sup> They provide office space for community staff delivering services for citizens, meeting rooms and classrooms for cultural and educational activities, next to these two buildings a canteen sells low-priced lunches, and there is also an outdoor teahouse. Each center has a large outdoor stage for community events and performances. Volunteers wearing bright blue vests patrol the area during the day, keeping it clean. At the inauguration of the newly renovated South Gate community center during the Chinese New Year festivities at the beginning of 2019, the party secretary gave a brief but patronizing speech. Jessica Wilczak's field notes describe the scene that evening:

I returned at 6:30 when the celebrations started. There were about 500 people there, again largely older people and small children. The stage was brightly lit, with a promotional video for South Gate community playing on the screen behind the stage. There was a seniors' band of traditional Chinese instruments, and a choir singing revolutionary songs. The young female Party Secretary for South Gate community stood up and said a few words but was surprisingly brief and spoke from her position in the audience. She pointed out all the community center's beautiful new public facilities [*gonggong sheshi*], and asked "Everyone is going to take care of the facilities, right? [*hao bu hao*]." "Ok [*hao*]," came a few calls from the audience. "So if I see you out here letting your little kids pee or poo [anywhere except in the toilets]," she continued, "I'll give you a talking-to [*hui gei ni shangke*]." <sup>27</sup>

There are public toilets available in the community centers themselves, as well as a newly built freestanding public toilet in both North Gate and South Gate, installed as part of Xi Jinping's Toilet Revolution (Shen, Song, and Zhu 2019). The party secretary's tone was that of a teacher speaking to young children, and the phrase she used to warn the residents literally means "I'll teach you a lesson," although it has less ominous overtones than it does in English. The interaction suggested that the new public facilities were in some way a classroom for producing clean, well-behaved urban citizens. Later in 2019, South Gate community hired an environmental organization to carry out an environmental educational activity, pitched mainly at a white-collar audience, that sent families on an ecological treasure hunt for recyclable trash in the community.

Unlike in Shenzhen, the Chengguan do not have representatives at the North and South Gate community centers, although there is a police representative at each center to handle population registration and minor public security issues. Chengdu's Chengguan patrol members are headquartered in one brigade office in each city district and carry out tasks determined by subdistrict (*jiedao*) urban management committees. The Chengguan do not often appear on the *shequ*'s streets. Moreover, relationships between the Chengguan and the street vendors in the community did not seem particularly antagonistic. After the wet market, in its final position opposite the South Gate community center, was demolished and the sellers had moved to the ground floor of a resettlement estate (see chapter 2), the lack of space in these small shops led them to spread out onto the sidewalk in front of their shops, as is common practice in Chengdu. One day all the produce was back inside the shops. A shop owner explained that a visit from "leaders" (upper-level government officials) was expected, and the *shequ* had asked them to move their wares inside. Chengguan

officers were speaking to shopkeepers who had not yet moved their wares inside, but they did not appear aggressive or antagonistic. The next day the shopkeepers simply moved their produce out onto the sidewalk again.

Clearly a certain amount of visual disorder is tolerated in North and South Gate communities as part of their transition to urban status, although such disorder is not allowed at certain times, such as leaders' visits, and in certain spaces, such as the resettlement estates and open fields. It is a system of managed disorder, developed in the interests of maintaining social harmony and accepted as part of a teleological system in which the disorder of the rural will gradually be attenuated.

### **Grid Governance: The Wangge in Urbanized Villages**

Since 2015 grid governance has become a priority in many Chinese cities, and this has intensified with the Covid-19 outbreak (Zhu, Zhu, and Jin 2021). With the aim of achieving social stability and keeping the party's leadership unquestioned, grid governance (*Wangge hua zhili*) or management (*Wangge hua guanli*) puts particular emphasis on the enhancement of neighborhood governance. Although the Third Plenum of the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress formally identified grid governance as "an innovative social management method" for improving governance efficiency, coordination, and capacity, it is basically an extension of the existing bureaucratic system (Mittelstaedt 2022: 4) and an intensification of community-building at the grassroots level, fostered by digitalization.<sup>28</sup>

As shown below, its main mode of intervention is the collection of information. Therefore, it proved very useful during the Covid-19 pandemic to track Covid cases and implement the lockdown. The grid governance scheme brings municipal administration, public security, and social service management together in a comprehensive governance network that links urban communities (*shequ*) to sub-district and district governments via a shared online database. Each *shequ* is divided into a number of spatial grids, and information is gathered about each area represented on the grid for the effective monitoring of certain groups of residents. The targeted groups vary according to the composition of each *shequ*'s population and governance priorities, but they are generally groups deemed likely to be involved in conflict and thus a potential source of social instability (Tang 2020). Indeed, while it is meant to improve the efficiency of



local governance and public service provision, the main goal of grid management is to help prevent large-scale social unrest and build social stability by resolving neighborhood conflicts, preventing them from escalating. It thereby serves the community-building policy aim of building self-governing communities, where little interference from higher levels is needed. This requires targeting “problematic” sections of the population, such as migrant laborers (Nguyen 2013: 221). Grid management is a form of graduated governance that adjusts its mode of intervention to its target populations.

### *Surveilling Migrants in Pine Mansion*

In the years following legal urbanization, Pine Mansion’s workstation (*gongzuozhan*, the predecessor to the community center) made an inventory of the buildings in the village following Shenzhen’s 2001 introduction of municipal government policy on unauthorized housing in urban villages. Penalties were to be imposed on households with buildings over four stories high and over 480 square meters of floor space (Wang et al. 2009: 962). The native villagers were required to sign a government contract granting them the use of the public land on which their house stood and to pay a land-use fee if they owned more than one building. After paying the relevant penalties and fees, village households could register their property with the housing authority and claim their property ownership certificates. Bach (2010: 437) comments that “this fiction of registration more than anything gives the villages a sense of spatial exception outside of state control.” The wish to evade control applies to both rural migrants, many of whom are not registered with the police station (*paichusuo*), and the landlords, many of whom do not register their tenants with the local police. In 2005 the city authorities reached the pessimistic conclusion that “the timely monitoring of the move-in and move-out of tenants is impossible” (Shenzhen Municipal Government 2005: 24, cited in Bach 2010: 437).

The Wangge, or community grid management center, was established in Shenzhen’s urban villages to address this problem. Pine Mansion’s Wangge headquarters opened in 2017. Its head, Mr. Liu, is a good-humored man with a round smiling face who originates from Huizhou, a city to the northeast of Shenzhen. Along with a few new community center employees, he is one of the rare non-local cadres. Although he is neither local nor a lineage member, the fact that he speaks Hakka smooths his relations with the local Chen leadership. However, his outsider status probably accounts for why

Liu was the first person I heard referring to Pine Mansion not as a village or a *shequ* but as a village-in-the-city, *chenzhongcun*. The main criterion he mentioned for using this label was its “high population mobility” (*renkou liudong da*). He also explained that managing a *chenzhongcun* is a complex task because it contains a wide variety of buildings. He drew a contrast with what he referred to as garden neighborhoods, i.e., commercial housing complexes, which are much better managed “because the population is more stable, and the real-estate company does the management.” At the time of interview there were only three commercial housing complexes in the subdistrict and one in Pine Mansion under construction. Liu stated: “People in these residential complexes are more mature (*chengshu* [in the sense of evolved, civilized]), and the public facilities are good, so they are easier to manage. *Chenzhongcun* are hard to manage—actually they are impossible to manage (*guan bu dao*) unless you tear them down completely and build an entirely new residential district.”<sup>29</sup>

The Wangge is the result of a fusion between the municipal police department in charge of *hukou* matters and Shenzhen’s floating population and house rental management office. It was officially named the Wangge only in 2017. Pine Mansion’s Wangge has 70 employees, who wear blue uniforms that resemble those of police officers. They are on temporary contracts and are paid on the basis of their performance, which is assessed by a points system that rates their work following criteria corresponding to the Wangge’s mandates (information gathering, conflict resolution) and their professional attitude.<sup>30</sup> Each employee is in charge of one territorial unit, or *ge*. The 72 units are identified by a number with 14 digits. Several large maps of the *shequ* were hanging in the head’s office, showing its boundaries and the boundaries between the areas of three main residents’ committees and between the 72 *ge*. A table detailed the number per unit of “ordinary buildings” (houses and shops) and “special buildings” (administrative, factory, school, etc.); the number of apartments (39,684 in total, 551 on average per unit); and the size of the population (54,666, with an average of 759 people per *ge*).<sup>31</sup> Each building has a code number, which, the head of the Wangge explained, is useful for when a building is demolished, as its number is simply erased from the database. The name, photograph, and contact number of each building owner, all of whom are native villagers, is displayed on a small plaque on the building next to the identification number, together with the name, photograph, and contact number of the Wangge employee in charge of the unit and of an officer of the police station.

Wangge employees collect information about their unit. The Wangge's first function is to surveil and regulate the small commercial (as opposed to the large industrial) real-estate market, including housing rentals as well as shops, small factories, and all spaces under three hundred square meters, and to prevent and help with resolving real-estate-related conflicts. Its second function is the collection, uploading, and actualization of data on the residing population—number of children per family, disputes, incidents, and crimes—in the subdistrict Wangge's database. The Wangge office provides much of this information to the police station, which authorizes residence permits. This facilitates checking the backgrounds of nonlocal residents and ascertaining that people applying for a residency permit do not have a criminal record.

The office works in close collaboration with the Chengguan (with which it shares an electronic platform), meeting to discuss current issues every Monday. Liu, the head of the Wangge, described the Chengguan as in charge of matters out of doors while he is responsible for indoor matters. However, Wangge employees are expected to upload information about all sorts of utilities problems in the community. I often saw Wangge employees pausing on the street to take notes on their cell phones, geolocating a pile of uncollected waste at the roadside, for instance, after which the Chengguan's law implementation team (*zhifa dui*) takes action.

In housing matters, one of the Wangge's main roles is to carry out an annual survey of house rentals. Its report on rental prices serves as a basis for the calculation of tax on property income. Property income tax, which was roughly 6 percent in 2018, is paid voluntarily, but is mandatory if a homeowner wants a property or rental certificate to be issued—and a certificate is required to register a child at a school.<sup>32</sup> Disputes between tenants and owners are mainly linked to school places. One of the main sources of conflict is tenants needing a contract to secure a school place, and landlords refusing to provide one because they want to avoid paying tax. Moreover, each residential address is only eligible for one school place, renewable only every six years (the time it takes to complete primary school); this is a huge problem, not only because of the population's mobility but also because landlords often fail to inform new tenants that the school place will not be available for X number of years, or the landlords provide friends in need of a school place with a fake tenancy contract, depriving the official tenant of their legal school place.

Wangge employees have a strong incentive to collect as much information as possible every day because their salary is based on

performance, which is assessed every month. This accounts for the frequency with which they knock on the door of every household to collect information. The head of the Wangge contrasted Pine Mansion with other places that have fewer migrant workers. Native Pine Mansioners are not visited because, as Liu explained (addressing me as if I were a Pine Mansion native), “we know you’re not going to move.”

### *Preventing Social Disturbance in South Gate*

In contrast to Shenzhen’s Wangge system, the community-level Wangge in Chengdu does not have separate headquarters but is managed from the community centers.<sup>33</sup> It is a more diffuse and personalized network of social management that assigns volunteers, generally party members, to resolve grassroots problems, thus preventing the escalation of community disputes to the point of requiring police intervention or the involvement of higher government. In June 2014, Chengdu’s Municipal Party Committee signaled the beginning of the city’s efforts to build its own grid governance system with the publication of “Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of Grid Service Management Supported by Informatization” (Han 2015). In 2016 the local media reported that the number of Wangge staff in Chengdu exceeded 390,000 and handled 3.5 million issues, including conflict resolution, livelihood matters, and public security hazards (Liu 2016).

In North Gate, a large billboard listed the secretary and head of the residents’ committee (*zhuren*) as the nominal heads of the Wangge system. Below this, a branching chart broke the *shequ* down into increasingly small subcategories, with residential estates at the second level, groups of buildings within each residential estate at the third level, and individual buildings on each estate at the fourth level. The names of the party members responsible for each level was listed with their personal phone numbers. Theoretically, the Wangge member responsible for one’s building is the first person to contact in the case of any dispute with neighbors or the property management company. “Theoretically,” because many of the middle-class residents of the commercial estates were unaware of the functions of the Wangge, and even of the existence of the community center. However, observable efforts were underway to increase the profile of the Wangge and the party. In the fall of 2019 on the higher-end commercial estate where Jessica Wilczak lived, hammer-and-sickle stickers appeared on the personal mailboxes of all party members living

in the complex. Based on the number of stickers, about 5 percent of residents appeared to be party members. While Jessica was not visited at home by Wangge volunteers, one of her neighbors, a middle-aged professional, introduced herself in the elevator as the local party contact. She was very friendly and urged her to get in touch with her if she had any problems. As in the neighborhoods described by Tang (2020), the North and South Gate communities' grid governance strategy relies on mobilizing party members to strengthen the grassroots management of middle-class enclaves.

Grid governance appeared to operate more sporadically among former villagers, who felt personally tied to the party secretary, a former villager himself, either appealing directly to him or a member of his family or drawing on previous village institutions for the resolution of problems. For example, during the urbanization process, a dispute resolution office was set up at the community center to deal with resettlement and compensation issues. The office was still in place in the summer of 2019, when Jessica left, and former villagers continued to turn to Aunt Fang, the older female cadre who ran it, for help settling disputes with neighbors or family. Aunt Fang described a recent case that she had resolved for an elderly former villager's two sons, who were fighting over who would inherit their father's apartment. She had suggested that the elder son should inherit the apartment on the condition that he pay a sum of money to his younger brother, which, she said, was accepted by all parties.

Not all groups of residents are left to the management of party volunteers: *shequ* staff are enlisted to deal with more sensitive groups. The grid governance network in North and South Gate communities consists of not only resident volunteers but also community center staff, whose work includes Wangge responsibilities among other tasks. When asked about her role in the Wangge, a South Gate community staff member claimed that her primary task was to manage the nonlocal population (*wailai renkou*). The party secretary and her staff call on nonlocal *hukou* holders to ascertain that they are living at the registered address and that the number of household members they had reported is accurate. The staff member recalled waiting until ten o'clock one night for a Tibetan family to return home.

The South Gate party secretary, Mrs. Gu, complained that community staff had no legal authority over the population. Moreover, although a police representative worked at the South Gate community registering nonlocal domestic residents, the police and the community center appeared to operate separately.<sup>34</sup> Party Secretary Gu recalled calling in the police to deal with a domestic dispute and being

told that this was a matter for the *shequ*; however, she and her staff did not feel they had the legal authority to intervene in the matter.<sup>35</sup>

Disputes between newcomers and native residents in Pine Mansion are dealt with by the Wangge because they generally concern tenancy issues, while disputes between native villagers are dealt with by the community center, where a native Chen heads the dispute resolution office. Similarly, in South Gate there is considerable pressure on *shequ* leaders to prevent social disturbances requiring official police or subdistrict government intervention. Lacking both financial resources and the North Gate party secretary's personal authority as a former villager, the South Gate party secretary was forced to improvise. In 2018 she negotiated with the estates' (*xiaoqu*) property management companies and businesses in the community to raise funds to hire security guards and purchase a small electric golf cart for their night patrols. The vehicle displayed the names and logos of the property management companies and businesses that had supported the project. Rather than rely on former village institutions and figureheads, as the dispute resolution officer in North Gate community did, the South Gate leader experimented with the new grassroots self-management and self-funding model advocated by the city.

### Infrastructural Governance

China's villages-in-the-city (*chengzhongcun*), or urbanized villages, are particularly interesting sites for observing how civilized cities are established as part of the aim of creating a "moderately well-off society" (*xiaokang shehui*). Villages are expected to merge into the modern city, and their native inhabitants, deemed uncivilized and backward, are expected to become modern, civilized urbanites. In an effort to eliminate the remains of the rural villages-in-the-city, infrastructural governance, or the use of infrastructures as a governing technique, actively shapes a homogenous, civilized urban landscape. Infrastructure is used as a governing technique when local leaders hide undesirable elements such as litter, piles of garbage, and unofficially cultivated fields from view to please potential buyers and visiting officials; when authorities decide to cut off sewerage and electricity services to compel native residents to accept relocation and compensation or to drive out unwanted, unregistered migrants; and when the grid employees collect detailed information on non-natives to track and subject them to minute surveillance. Infrastructural public goods are both an end and a means.

Emerging from this chapter is a strong sense of variability and flexibility in the spatial but also temporal implementation of policy on building communities and shaping the civilized city. In terms of space, different assemblages of the same basic units emerge in all three cases, with the Chengguan and Wangge's importance varying according to local housing conditions and the composition of the population, and the community centers (*shequ zhongxin*) enjoying varying levels of importance and autonomy. In conformity with the ideology that associates modernization and civilization with urbanization, these infrastructural improvements reward the citizens and communities who come closest to this ideal; those deemed far from it fall under close surveillance and are susceptible to correction.

Timing is dependent on conjunctural policies decided from above, with sudden bursts of activity when a campaign requires mobilization. It is also dependent on the process of urbanization and on the inhabitants' maturity in an evolutionary view of this process. While top-down approaches clearly prevail in deciding what and who should be subject to measures, the governance of urbanized villages also depends on estimations of when local conditions are ripe. Finding the right moment to act, therefore, appears crucial. This is particularly true for local leaders who, while echoing higher-level government discourse, can be opportunistic in the way they pay lip service to the setting up of model communities.

Graduated governance consists of adjusting the timing of local governance to the stage reached by urbanized villages in the evolutionary process of urbanization, and it translates spatially into the emphasis on differing target populations living in different parts of the *shequ*. Accordingly, even the attention paid to providing cleanliness and order in public space varies temporally and spatially. The next chapter explores how similar microtechniques of governance are gradually deployed across the population in the process of building solidary communities.

## Notes

1. As Sangren (1987) notes, civilization opposes chaos just as order opposes disorder, with the first opposition encompassing the latter in a system of structured value that is relative and hierarchical; this set of basic assumptions about reality serves to legitimize Chinese patterns of social order and political authority (1987: 133). Ritual activity rests on and reproduces these assumptions. On early Chinese notions of ritual as a never-ending attempt to create order in a fractured world rather than based on the premise of an inherently harmonious world, see also Puett (2008).

2. See Unger (1984) on the changes in workpoint remuneration systems from tasks rates (1961–65) to the Dazhai method (1966–79).
3. This chapter’s approach, however, is not purely Foucauldian, in that it pays attention to institutional actors and ideology, which Foucault (2000) does not consider important in the study of power.
4. Ministry of Civil Affairs, Opinions on Promoting the Construction of Urban Communities in the Country, 19 November 2000, available at <http://www.reformdata.org/2000/1119/21297.shtml>.
5. As outlined in 2000 by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA), which set up a Division for Grassroots Authority and Community-Building (*jiceng zhengquan yu shequ jianshe si*).
6. Building “green communities” (*luse shequ*) is a policy variant of community-building that has emerged as a central feature of urban governance reform in China (Boland and Zhu 2009).
7. Jessica Wilczak, *First Interim Research Report*, 21 November 2018. The remainder of this section is based on this and on her *Final Report*, 30 July 2019.
8. “Park City Chengdu Consensus 2019 Released,” *Chengdu ribao*, 23 April 2019, <http://scnews.newssc.org/system/20190423/000959834.html>.
9. Shenzhen Longhua District, “Guanhu Accelerates Double Promotion,” 16 December 2015, <http://www.szlhq.gov.cn>, accessed 8 August 2019.
10. This happened when its mayor, Xu Zongheng, was placed under investigation and subsequently dismissed for corruption. Shenzhen has since been working hard to regain its lost civilized city status. In March 2013, it became the first city to implement a civility law that imposes fines for “uncivilized” public behavior (Cartier 2013).
11. The Chinese name of the commission is *Zhongyang jingshen wenming jianshe zhidao weiyuanhui*. On “civilization,” see Dynon 2008; on the national civilized city title, see Cartier 2013.
12. Zhongguo wenming [Chinese civilization] website, 14 September 2017, [http://www.wenming.cn/wmcs/wenmingchengshi\\_jujiao/201709/t20170914\\_4422911.shtml](http://www.wenming.cn/wmcs/wenmingchengshi_jujiao/201709/t20170914_4422911.shtml), accessed 16 October 2018.
13. Starting in 2004, urban villages in Shenzhen’s inner-city districts were denounced in a series of media reports as hotbeds of unlawful activity, including prostitution, gambling, drug trafficking, and illegal building (Chung 2009).
14. *Nanfang Ribao* (*Southern Daily*), 2016. Exact reference not given for anonymization purposes.
15. Separate urban waste collection and recycling targets were introduced in the twelfth Five-Year Plan (2011–15) in 2011 (Bondes 2019: 57). However, Shanghai’s 2019 Municipal Solid Waste Act was the first systematic municipal regulation on waste in China. Until then, city governments had launched temporary campaigns that tended to cease with the term of the leaders who instigated them.
16. Xi’an Landscape Act, [https://baike.baidu.com/reference/16828759/e409Y56AOBp6NhB9qCU5SM9IHgUKz1kK-SDR55moGvOn7VWaS\\_sJi1C5znMJPkONPAj9lIn\\_3gl17T\\_qtdKdz0vVc3XeU4JuSw](https://baike.baidu.com/reference/16828759/e409Y56AOBp6NhB9qCU5SM9IHgUKz1kK-SDR55moGvOn7VWaS_sJi1C5znMJPkONPAj9lIn_3gl17T_qtdKdz0vVc3XeU4JuSw).
17. “Lighting-Up Project in Xi’an,” Sina.com.cn, 1 October 2006, <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2006-10-01/105310152675s.shtml>.
18. Unless stated otherwise, this section is based on Wang Bo, *Final Report*, 31 October 2019.
19. “One Cigarette Butt, One Yuan Fine: On Xi’an’s Cigarette Butts Revolution,” People.cn, 24 July 2018, <http://society.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0724/c1008-30166027.html>.
20. Xinhua News, 2018, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-07/24/c\\_1123166722.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-07/24/c_1123166722.htm).
21. On 30 March 2017 the Ministry of Housing and Rural-Urban Integration promulgated the “Urban Management Law Enforcement Measures,” which stipulated that urban



management employees shall belong to the administrative law enforcement category of civil servants, be recruited through the civil service examination, and receive formal training; temporary employees in the urban management department will be fully dismissed. In 2021, the new version of the “Administrative Punishment Law” clarified that the state will promote the establishment of a comprehensive administrative law enforcement system in the field of urban management and centralize the power of administrative punishment.

22. Anne-Christine Trémon, interview with the Chengguan, 27 March 2018. The Chengguan head and his assistant both belong to Pine Mansion’s dominant Chen lineage. They must have been appointed for political reasons, namely their ability to negotiate with the heads of the shareholding companies, who belong to the same village. Indeed, in addition to supervising “urban appearance” (*shirong*), they also play a part in upgrading Pine Mansion’s industries (see chapter 2).
23. Xi’an Gaoxin district website, <http://www.xdz.gov.cn/info/16436/128318.htm>, accessed 26 August 2020.
24. This section is based on Wang Bo’s *Final Report*, 31 October 2019.
25. The Supreme Court of China’s Decisions on State-Owned Land-Grabbing and Demolitions, <http://www.court.gov.cn/shenpan-xiangqing-4033.html>, accessed 26 August 2020.
26. Unless otherwise stated, this section is based on Jessica Wilczak’s *Final Report*, 30 July 2019.
27. Jessica Wilczak, *Fieldnotes*, 19 January 2019, cited in *Final Report*.
28. In 2013, based on the results of local experiments mainly carried out in Beijing, the Third Plenum of the 18th Party Congress advocated its implementation at the local level.
29. Interview by Anne-Christine Trémon, 2 April 2018.
30. Mittelstadt provides a comparison of Wangge employees’ work performance evaluation systems in several cities (2021: 15).
31. A few of the *ge* in the redevelopment area had very small populations in 2018, as the newly constructed residential towers were not yet inhabited. Those with the largest populations of over nine hundred include factories with dormitories.
32. The Wangge does not collect the taxes. It provides property certificates after checking tax payment with the tax administration. The voluntary character of property tax may change, as in early November 2022, as Shenzhen was nominated a pilot area for China’s property tax reform.
33. Section based on Jessica Wilczak’s *Final Report*, 30 July 2019.
34. Foreign nonlocal residents had to register at the subdistrict police office.
35. Interview by Jessica Wilczak, 23 July 2018.