Constructing an Urban Future: The sustainability and resilience of cities – infrastructures, communities, buildings and housing.

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Spatial rights, aestheticisation, and resistance to gentrification in Guangzhou, China

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• Abstract (300 words):
As neo-liberalisation adapts its new forms and eventually finds its best ground in the Chinese city, surging tides of urban redevelopment/gentrification are widespread and bring about immense displacement. Consequently, protests and appeals against redevelopment and demolition have become one focal point of Chinese citizen’s weiquan (rights defending) movements. Yet, these movements are often in the form of individual resistance (e.g. the so-called nail households), and rarely lead to progressive results. Little is known about under what circumstances and how citizens could be mobilised and organised in collective resistance. Drawing on an in-depth investigation on the resistance movements against the Enninglu gentrification project in Guangzhou, China, this paper aims to understand how different actors are mobilised together to seek spatial justice and to defend the urban commons, in particular the cultural heritages and collective memories of the historical area of Enninglu area. Since 2005, Guangzhou has seen the rise of neoliberal urban policies. And the city is engulfed in a new wave of gentrification featuring ambitious urban upgrading scheme aiming for growth-seeking and city re-imaging. As a historical area located in the old city core of
Guangzhou, Enninglu is threatened by an ambitious gentrification project involving large-scale demolition and displacement. To resist the redevelopment project, Enninglu residents launched a campaign since 2010, involving various forms of resistance. These resistance movements have received great support from activists, volunteers, academics, and local media. This research shows that while local residents’ resistance is motivated by defending their spatial rights, other actors are largely mobilised by the aestheticisation of selective collective memories and cultural values of the historical area. Although incongruence occurs between the two groups owning to the frictions between the ‘conceived space’ and ‘perceived space’, the resistance movements did achieve some modest progresses and forced the local authority modifying the gentrification plan for several times. These resistance movements have gone beyond defending ‘the right to appropriation’, and involved struggles for ‘the right to participation’, although they are still far from seriously challenging the trajectory of (re)urbanisation dominated by neo-liberalisation.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Shenjing He is Associate Professor in the Department of Urban Planning and Design at The University of Hong Kong. Her primary research interests focus on urban redevelopment/gentrification, neighbourhood governance, informal housing, residential differentiation, and urban poverty. Shenjing has published more than ninety journal articles and book chapters in English and Chinese. She is the co-author/co-editor of several books: Urban Poverty in China (2010), Locating Right to the City in the Global South (2013), Urban living: Mobility, Sociability, and Wellbeing (2016), and Changing China: Migration, Communities and Governance in Cities (2016). Shenjing has been listed by Elsevier as one of the most cited researchers in mainland China (social sciences), for three consecutive years (2015-2017). She has been the Chinese editor for Urban Studies (SAGE) since 2012. She also sits on the editorial boards of Journal of Urban Affairs, Geography Compass, International Planning Studies, Asian Geography and Area Development and Policy.