

SEEKING A FUTURE FOR THE PAST

**SPACE, POWER, AND HERITAGE
IN A CHINESE CITY**

Philipp Demgenski



SEEKING A FUTURE FOR THE PAST

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Space, Power, and Heritage
in a Chinese City

Philipp Demgenski

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Contents

List of Figures / vii
List of Maps / ix
List of Tables / xi
Acknowledgments / xiii

Introduction / 1

CHAPTER 1

The Past: A Sociospatial History of the Inner City / 28

CHAPTER 2

Redevelopment: From Demolition to Preservation to Stagnation / 61

CHAPTER 3

Local Residents: Living in the Center at the Margins of the City / 92

CHAPTER 4

Expropriation: The Burden of the Past / 121

CHAPTER 5

Migrants: “Only” Working in the Inner City / 142

CHAPTER 6

Preservationists: Colonial Heritage and the Search
for Authenticity / 170

CHAPTER 7

The Future of the Inner City? / 197

Conclusion / 216

Notes / 227

References / 237

Index / 273

Digital materials related to this title can be found on the Fulcrum platform
via the following citable URL: <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.12315869>

Figures

- Figure 1: One of the first courtyards built by Alfred Siemssen / 39
- Figure 2: “Public ordinance for all *liyuan* houses in Qingdao” from 1935 / 45
- Figure 3: *Pingkang wuli*, 2012 / 48
- Figure 4: Street sign indicating the administrative boundary between Shinan and Shibei districts, 2014 / 81
- Figure 5: Toilet entrances in *liyuan* courtyards / 113
- Figure 6: Public notice informing residents of compensation and resettlement procedures, 2012 / 122
- Figure 7: Various types of self-built extensions to existent courtyards in Dabaodao, 2012–13 / 135
- Figure 8: The Huangdao Road market in 2011 (top left), in 2013 (top right), and in 2015 (bottom) / 157
- Figure 9: The Huangdao Road market after the sudden cleanup, 2015 / 168
- Figure 10: The new facades of *liyuan* courtyards, 2021 / 177
- Figure 11: *Guangxing li* after refurbishment, 2021 / 199

Maps

Map 1: The location of Qingdao in China / 6

Map 2: Qingdao's old and new city centers / 31

Map 3: Dabaodao's grid plan. Dexian Road marks its southern end, Zhongshan Road the western border, Jining Road the eastern border and the "east–west expressway" the northern border. / 43

Tables

Table 1: Laws and regulations on urban historical preservation
in Qingdao / 70

Table 2: Qingdao's mayors and party secretaries since 2000 / 78

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Introduction

In October 2016, I returned to Qingdao, an eastern Chinese coastal city with a colonial past located on the southern side of the Shandong peninsula. A little more than two years had passed since I finished an 18-month period of fieldwork in the historical center. In January 2014, I had left behind a bustling two-story courtyard inhabited by over 60 families. Upon my return, just two people remained. The courtyard entrance had been fitted with a locked iron gate. My former neighbor, whom I call Brother Dragon, had to come down and open it up for me. The interior resembled a messy rubbish dump. Cardboard boxes, chests of drawers, mattresses, shoes, crockery, and other clutter lay scattered, bearing witness to the lives of the people who had once called this courtyard home. This state of affairs had been years in the making: years of negotiations, of drawn up and discarded redevelopment plans, and of promised but failed attempts to refurbish and upgrade this part of the city. Brother Dragon was one of the very last remnants of this long and unpredictable process. This time around, he seemed quite cheerful, happily announcing, “Now they [former residents] are gone. This is amazing. Now the whole place is mine!”

Brother Dragon had not always sounded so optimistic about living in the small courtyard room where he had grown up during the Cultural Revolution, crammed together with four siblings and his parents. A few years earlier, he had voiced a strong wish to move as soon as possible and hoped that “the government would simply knock everything down.” Now, in contrast, he explained to me that shortly, all the illegal building extensions that people had added over the years would be cleared and that he planned to give the whole courtyard a makeover, grow some plants, and raise chickens.

He did not fear forced eviction, as he had good connections with the local police bureau, for whom he worked every now and then as a security guard for the area. “They will not do anything to this courtyard within the next five years,” he told me firmly.

Rewinding back to October 2012, a newly announced redevelopment project sought to transform and upgrade parts of the historical center under the umbrella of what the local government called “old-town renovation” (*jiucheng gaizao*) and “preservation-oriented development” (*baohuxing kaifa*). I had just started long-term ethnographic fieldwork and aimed to closely follow the implementation of the project and the social and spatial transformations it would bring about. It did not, however, take me long to realize that change was not the key issue. Local residents, but also government officials, scholars, and other concerned people with whom I had initial conversations, all told me that the envisioned project would *not* go ahead. From their accounts, I also understood that this was not the first time that the city government had announced but failed to refurbish the area, and, as it turned out, it would not be the last. “The government has been talking about redevelopment for many years, but it has all been empty words—nothing has happened. Why is the government not doing anything?!” lamented Old Zhao, a resident of the area. A sarcastic comment by a netizen in an online forum further captured the general feeling that accompanied the redevelopment project: “The once youthful officials at the redevelopment office have become old, the older ones have already retired and are looking after their grandchildren, some have perhaps already passed away, and yet the redevelopment project is still an infant that has just taken its first step” (Apache11111 2014).

Back then, Brother Dragon was still hopeful that after the Spring Festival (Chinese New Year), he would be able to move out. “If they don’t redevelop the area this time, they will never do it. And if they do not, I will spend some time and money to renovate my room, make it a bit nicer,” he reflected. Yet, just over a year later at the end of 2013, as I was preparing to leave the city for a while, the redevelopment project had still not been launched. I was sitting in Brother Dragon’s courtyard room, which he had not yet started renovating. But his comment sounded very familiar: “Next time, when you come back, they will have already demolished this area. I will then invite you to my new place.” When I did return to Qingdao for another short visit in October 2014, Brother Dragon was still there. The place still looked exactly the same. In 2016, more than four years after I had started fieldwork, the local

government finally started to relocate residents by offering them compensation payments. More comprehensive refurbishment work did not begin until 2020, as China began to emerge from almost two months of near complete lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In December 2021, Brother Dragon was still living in his courtyard room, but he no longer spoke of demolition. “This is now an official historical area,” he told me with some pride, though he remained uncertain as to whether and when he could or would move out.

Books about contemporary urban China often begin with observations about the unprecedented speed and scale of urbanization the country has experienced over the past several decades. Much has been said about the forceful local entrepreneurial state and infamous Chinese “pro-growth coalitions” that foster demolition and human displacement in the name of profit and development, resulting in the swift destruction of old urban neighborhoods to make way for larger-than-life architecture or other impressive physical manifestations of China’s modernity project. Against the backdrop of these narratives of loss, destruction, and fast-paced change, the situation I encountered in Qingdao seemed counterintuitive. But at the same time, it raised several fruitful questions that I sought to answer through my fieldwork and that inform the discussions in this book. What explains the multiple episodes of developmental stagnation in Qingdao? What are the socio-political consequences of an urban developmental impasse? How do local residents deal with such inertia in a country where rapid spatial change has been the norm? As Old Zhao and many other interlocutors wondered, why has the typically powerful local state, along with private developers, struggled to effectively implement redevelopment projects? Discussions on the speed and scale of urban change in China are illuminating, not least because they reveal the importance of spatial transformation both as a driver for and as a symbol of China’s “rise” (Hsing 2010). In exploring the above queries, this book provides a different perspective. It offers a window onto the ordinary instead of the spectacular, slowness rather than speed, and deadlocks instead of swift change. It focuses an ethnographic lens onto the fragmented, contested, and haphazard side of the urban redevelopment process in China.

In unpacking what lies behind stagnant redevelopment and in examining the consequences of the inability to swiftly transform an urban area, this book has several aims: on the most fundamental level, it is an ethnographic study about what the built urban environment of an old inner-city neigh-

borhood means culturally, socially, politically, and economically to different urban groups. It closely follows residents who used and depended upon the spatial setup of the inner city in their often-precarious daily life and work routines, but who were eventually thrown out (migrants) or compensated and evicted (locals). It explores the many disputes over compensation, unresolved property rights issues, and complex ownership structures. It further follows a diverse group of local history and heritage enthusiasts who called for the “authentic” preservation of the inner city as a uniquely local architectural heritage. It also follows officials, planners, and developers who were expected to implement redevelopment projects but were simultaneously constrained by a new heritage-sensitive urbanization agenda and public demands for preservation. I carefully illustrate and analyze the divergent interests, actions, and ideologies of each of these groups in their practical and discursive engagements with the built urban environment of the inner city and in their negotiations over its historical narrative, its present meaning, and its future appearance. In analyzing multiple actors and activities, this book crucially contributes to understanding structural impediments to the implementation of inner-city renewal programs.

This book is, however, more than a microstudy of a particular neighborhood in a specific city. It addresses bigger questions related to social marginalization, heritagization, local state power, and the political economy of urbanization in contemporary China. More specifically, the book sheds light on the difficulties of incorporating heritage preservation into redevelopment in the post-Mao context, where fast-paced and visible urban spatial transformations have been and continue to be a crucial political-economic resource for the local entrepreneurial state. It furthermore offers insights into China’s volatile urban planning and implementation process, exposing its highly improvisational nature and the difficulty of predicting which factors will push contingent and provisional situations to decisive and final outcomes. Moreover, as an ethnography that focuses on urban planning and spatial transformation in contemporary China, the book necessarily also discusses expressions and manifestations of (state) power. However, rather than taking state power as a given, it reflects on *how* and *when* the latter is expressed within the urban redevelopment process. Likewise, it considers how and when actions by other actors, such as residents or preservationists, become decisive, that is, how and when they have a direct impact on how the implementation of redevelopment unfolds. In doing so, the book provides a nuanced perspective on political practice and urban governance in today’s China.

I certainly do not seek to relativize the formidable power of the authoritarian regime and the structural inequalities underlying urban redevelopment. Violent evictions continue to occur, especially in rural and periurban areas (D. Lü 2020). My intent is to carefully paint a local picture of authoritarian state power, moving beyond the state as a supposedly coherent whole, and showing how the uncertainties of the redevelopment process and the frustration due to stagnation had an impact not only on residents, but also on local officials. More broadly, the book presents the human saga of the urban redevelopment process. While this includes attention to the structural features reproducing and exacerbating the marginal status of the urban poor, the book also moves beyond commonly applied dichotomies of local residents as victims versus pro-growth coalitions as culprits, identifying common narratives *across* different urban groups, including frustrations and uncertainty experienced by those being governed as much as those governing or, as in the case of Qingdao, those designing and implementing the redevelopment projects.

THE PLACE

The inner-city neighborhood whose story is told here was historically called “Dabaodao.” It was planned and built over a century ago as a segregated “Chinese town” when Qingdao was under German colonial rule.¹ Today, Qingdao is an economically flourishing seaport, naval base, and industrial center (Kunzmann and Zhan 2019). Its advantageous location on the east coast, about 600 kilometers southeast of Beijing (Map 1), has made it a major tourist destination in China, famous for its eponymous beer and particularly its “European-style architecture.” Qingdao is often referred to as a “world expo of architecture” (C. Xie 2014) and a city with an international, exotic, and worldly flair. “Dwell in Qingdao, experience the world,” reads the official English slogan of a local urban construction company.

Dabaodao is nestled at the heart of Qingdao’s old town center, surrounded by an eclectic mix of colonial monuments and modern high-rises. It covers an area of around 2.5 square kilometers and is home to courtyard-style houses of various sizes, situated along narrow alleys and lanes arranged in a grid-like pattern. These courtyards are known as *liyuan* and first appeared during colonial times (see Chapter 1). The architectural and spatial features of Dabaodao have largely survived the past century of sociopolitical turmoil. However, as is common in many inner-city neighborhoods across China,



Map. 1. The location of Qingdao in China (© Qian Rongrong)

they have endured in a state of serious disrepair. When I began fieldwork in 2011, most of the courtyards were severely run down and lacked private kitchens, access to individual washroom facilities, or indoor tap water. Similar to old Beijing (Evans 2020), residents typically belonged to the urban underclass: unemployed and laid-off workers, the retired and disabled, landless suburban farmers, and struggling students. Beginning in the late 1990s, they were joined by a steadily increasing number of migrant workers, so-called *waidiren* (outsiders). Like other ethnographic monographs that focus on marginalized urban neighborhoods elsewhere in China (Evans 2020 in Beijing; Shao 2013; and J. Li 2015 in Shanghai), this book is thus also a study of urban poverty and precarity (Millar 2017).

Over the decade during which I conducted fieldwork, Dabaodao gradually shifted from being “old,” meaning in need of upgrading, to being “historical,” meaning in need of preservation. Once a place of common homes and everyday life, it is now an old-looking, yet modernized, district for tourism and “cultural” consumption, offering coffee shops, hostels, and spaces for the creative economy. Dabaodao and its *liyuan* are regarded as a uniquely local example of architectural heritage, both among the wider public and in official discourse. However, as the introductory vignette hints, the path to its present state of historical importance has been anything but swift and spectacular, rather happening in a piecemeal fashion and achieved only after several drawn-up, partially implemented, and ultimately discarded redevelopment projects. This book is less concerned with the redevelopment outcome. It explicitly makes the uncertainties and contingencies of the planning and attempted implementation *process* the focal point of analysis, hereby shedding light on the seemingly contradictory yet coexisting processes of developmental stagnation and urban destruction.

Stagnant redevelopment is not unusual in China (Nguyen 2017). Urban renewal projects often run into difficulties as funds dry up, political priorities shift, or local leadership changes (Zhou 2015; Audin 2017). Sometimes so-called nail households (*dingzi hu*)² defy eviction by refusing to move (C. Ho 2013b, 2015), or groups of residents take collective action (e.g., petitioning) against government plans (Shao 2013). A detailed study of developmental stagnation in Qingdao thus helps to explain recurring problems and conflicts in many other urban centers, especially lower-tier cities.³ Indeed, while urban redevelopment projects in the capital city or in the economic hubs of Shanghai or Shenzhen are often of national or international significance and frequently spectacular, they are arguably less typical. Notwithstanding local variations, in many ways the case of Qingdao resembles that of other similar-sized cities across China,⁴ notably in the desire to “catch up” with the pioneers and trendsetters of urban development (Ren 2008; Shao 2013).⁵ Zhang Li (2006), for instance, discusses how urban development discourses in Kunming are informed by a general feeling of “lagging behind.” A similar phenomenon was observable in Qingdao’s various inner-city redevelopment undertakings, where Shanghai was a common point of reference to which local officials and planners aspired. Yet it was often precisely the attempt to emulate the “success” of bigger cities that ended up contributing to a failure to locally implement urban redevelopment projects (Chapter 2).

Finally, Qingdao is one of many Chinese (coastal) cities that were par-

tially or fully colonized by foreign powers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Goodman and Goodman 2012). Yet Qingdao has generally been underrepresented in the English-language literature on former (semi)colonial cities. Shanghai (Pan 2005; Ren 2008; Shao 2013; Scheen 2020), Guangzhou (Ikels 1996; Guo and Liu 2012), Tianjin (Marinelli 2010; Hess 2011; H. Zhang 2018), Harbin (Clausen and Thøgersen 1995; Koga 2016), Xiamen (J. Liu 2017; Wei and Wang 2022), and Hong Kong (S. Cheung 2003; T. Lu 2009) have been most widely discussed. This book fills this gap, including Qingdao among these other urban centers, focusing on its urbanization and redevelopment strategies, particularly with regards to urban colonial heritage.

In what follows, I elaborate on the key themes of the book as they relate to this specific case of inner-city redevelopment, as well as situate them within the broader fields of anthropology and contemporary China studies.

INNER-CITY REDEVELOPMENT AND THE SEARCH FOR A “BETTER” URBAN FUTURE

Since the start of China’s “reform and opening up” (*gaige kaifang*) period, inner-city redevelopment has largely passed through three broad phases: a “demolish and rebuild” (*da chai da jian*) approach in the 1980s and 1990s, followed by preservation for tourism and commercialization in the 2000s, and most recently, the preservation of heritage as part of a broader discourse on “good” urban planning, beginning around 2010.

The term “historic district conservation” (*lishi jiequ baohu*) first appeared in the Chinese preservation context in 1986 (Q. Zhu 2007), though, until the late 1990s, most municipal governments favored growth and development over preservation, resulting in the destruction of lots of old urban areas. Change ensued around the turn of the millennium, when many Chinese inner cities were transformed following what sociologist Ren Xuefei (2008, 2018) terms the “Shanghai model” of urban redevelopment. The latter initially consisted of the economically successful refurbishment of Shanghai’s old *linong* houses into a high-end consumer district called Xintiandi. More so than due to any specific policies, this shift occurred with the realization that “culture” could be profitable, and led countless smaller, less prominent cities to follow suit and attempt to create their very own *Tiandi* (Iossifova 2014, 9). This “Xintiandization” of Chinese inner cities was no less apparent in Qingdao’s redevelopment process (Chapter 2).

Around 2010, China began to propagate the need to improve urban development practices. Concepts such as people-centered (*yirenweiben*) urbanization, the creation of livable cities (*yiju chengshi*), sustainable development (*kechixu fazhan*), and the rule of law (*fazhi*) have since entered China's planning regime (Gipouloux 2015; Ye 2018; Y. Huang 2020). These changes have primarily sought to counter the negative effects of two decades of uncontrolled urban growth and create more environmentally friendly, clean, orderly, and livable spaces of global consumption.⁶ In this regard, Dan Abramson (2019, 11) provides a succinct summary, observing the move from a *tabula rasa* approach to one emphasizing "betterment" and incremental change, together with an increasing focus on small-scale urban sociospatial organization, a less rigid separation of urban and rural development, and a pronounced attention to environmental protection and ecological civilization.⁷ Preserving rather than demolishing old urban structures and places has become a key ingredient in this cocktail of solutions believed to improve urbanization. Since the transfer of leadership from Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping in 2012, the central government has passed a series of legislations and opinions that have fostered change in national (and local) urbanization strategy, particularly emphasizing the need to preserve urban heritage (State Council 2016).

Change in the sociopolitical logic of redevelopment is a further manifestation of this shift (Naughton 2020). For example, China's 2011 Regulations on the Expropriation of and Compensation for Houses on State-Owned Land prohibits violent methods to evict residents and replaces the term "housing demolition" (*chai*) with "housing expropriation" (*zheng*).⁸ Moreover, expropriation can only be carried out if the project is of public interest (J. Yan and H. Chen 2011).⁹ Noteworthy as well is the emphasis on transparency and fairness in housing expropriation and the need to solicit public opinion before drawing up compensation schemes. Moreover, compensation amounts must now be based on the overall market price of a given property. China's "new urbanization" strategy has also sought to facilitate migrants' access to an urban *hukou* (household registration)¹⁰ and welfare benefits, with the aim of increasing domestic consumption and the demand for urban services (Gallagher 2017).

All this has not necessarily made urban renewal fairer or better. Short-term economic gains continue to inform redevelopment projects. Particularly when it comes to the development of periurban land, the above-described regulations are often undermined (D. Lü 2020). A similar dynamic

has characterized development projects backed by high-ranking officials (X. Sun 2015). Furthermore, in the absence of a clear-cut definition of preservation, the latter still sometimes consists of partial or even complete demolition and rebuilding. Migrants continue to be marginalized, especially in the context of redevelopment (Ling 2021). That said, this general shift in urbanization strategy has crucially changed the priorities and sociopolitical undercurrents of inner-city redevelopment (Ren 2018). This book explores how these changes have played out at the micro level of urban society and in concrete negotiations over redevelopment in Qingdao. Observations in the field revealed the multiple challenges inherent in this transitional period, where a preservation mandate had come into existence, though developmentalist and Xintiandi approaches to inner-city renewal lingered on, and local officials continued to depend on visible and rapid urban transformation for various political-economic ends.

More broadly, in examining the attempts to improve the urbanization process, this book also lends itself to an ethnographic engagement with urban planning.¹¹ Planning entails a wide range of actors, technologies, and institutions whose main concern is “to control the passage into the future” (Abram and Weszkalnys 2013b, 2). As a discipline and profession, planning largely rests on an idea that purposeful spatial design and infrastructural arrangement can make people’s lives better, if not also alter their behavior for the better (Healey 2012, 199). Indeed, this belief loomed large among local planners in Qingdao, who regarded their practices as mainly technocratic interventions and who eagerly sought to adopt a model that would do justice to the political mandate to produce “quality” redevelopment and that would, ultimately, be the key to a “better” urban future.

In this book, following a burgeoning anthropological concern (Abram 2011; Abram and Weszkalnys 2013a; Mack and Herzfeld 2020), I am particularly interested in the discrepancy that frequently arises between planning as an abstraction and planning as it actually happens. This incongruity exists, in part, because of the inherently utopian nature of planning itself (Friedmann 2011, chap. 8). Whatever optimistic future is promised in plans tends to appear elusive and slightly out of reach (Abram and Weszkalnys 2013b, 3). Moreover, a discrepancy appears because planning is fundamentally a normative endeavor—it draws on preconceived conceptual and practical scripts (Holston 2020, 236). In Qingdao, as elsewhere, this resulted in the failure to account for the contingencies and conflicts of everyday life and led to plans being largely removed from the sociospatial reality inside the

inner city. That said, it is not my intention to dismiss the substantial body of planning literature on the importance of informal and insurgent planning (Roy 2009; Hou 2010) as well as on process-oriented “collaborative planning” that takes into account local lives and needs and accepts conflict rather than trying to solve or order it (Healey 2003; Innes and Booher 2015; Mattila 2016). On the technical end of the spectrum, however, many have contended that in complex sociospatial settings such as the city, the provision of certain infrastructures must be scaled from the whole to the part and cannot (only) be solved at the community level (Sennett 2018, 86). In fact, it is often precisely when infrastructures fail at the local level that they become visible and tangible to those who depend on them (Graham 2010; Larkin 2013; Chu 2014). It is, moreover, often then that people turn to the state to demand a solution.

Finally, planners themselves may be “professionals,” but they are also as much human beings or social subjects, who frequently reside in and may even be from the city that they plan (Kipnis 2016, 32). They are therefore not external to, but part of, the urban social fabric. As such, they are equally affected by the uncertainty and messiness that underpin the planning and implementation process (Hou and Chalana 2017). The fragmented redevelopment of Dabaodao serves as a particularly good example, illustrating how planning is not only subject to political contingencies but also an embedded part of the “messy” urban life that it ostensibly sets out to stabilize and control. Focusing an ethnographic lens on attempts to solve urban problems through “correct” planning practices in Qingdao therefore provides a window onto the broader reality of which the problems and proposed solutions are themselves part. Accordingly, this book also importantly contributes to an “anthropology of the urban,” one that not only focuses on sociocultural life encapsulated within the *context* of the city, but also offers an engagement with what “the city” itself is about (Weszkalnys 2010, 19; Hannerz 1980; Brumann 2012; Mack 2017).

URBAN SPATIAL TRANSFORMATION, LEGITIMACY, AND MANIFESTATIONS OF (STATE) POWER

Legitimacy, governance, and (state) power are central themes in this book. In the literature on contemporary China, urban renewal has not only been described as violent and ruthless, but also as deeply intertwined with local

entrepreneurial state power (Hsing 2010; F. Wu 2018). China's economic development and the performance legitimacy of the state (D. Zhao 2009) in the post-Mao era have indeed had a distinct spatial dimension (McGee et al. 2007; F. Wu 2007; X. Li and Tian 2017). The transformation of urban space—in inner cities often involving a drastic change from the old and dilapidated to the modern and new—has served as a powerful symbol, rendering visible and concretizing development, “betterment,” and modernization. In fact, economic success, especially in the early reform years, directly manifested and has been evaluated vis-à-vis the degree of urbanization and urban space itself. The continuous ability of the state to transform urban land or create conditions for people to benefit from urban transformation has tacitly bound together the authoritarian state and the people (T. Wright 2010). The opening of the real estate market beginning in the 1990s has, for instance, allowed millions of Chinese citizens not only to lift themselves out of poverty, but also to accumulate wealth either through compensation as a result of redevelopment or through access to subsidized *danwei* (work unit) housing that could subsequently be sold in the emerging housing market (Unger and Chan 2004; B. Tang 2009). Urban space can thus be considered both a symbol and a driver of economic development as well as an important performance standard against which government legitimacy is measured and through which power is expressed.¹²

The urbanization-power nexus has not fundamentally changed. The rationale behind inner-city redevelopment continues to be informed by short-term economic gain and the “territorialization of (state) authority” (Tomba 2017, 512). Yet the narrative of strong growth coalitions versus weak citizens no longer holds true (Ren 2018, 96). The tools that local officials have at their disposal—the repertoire of potential forms of redevelopment—have been constrained by shifting policy priorities and the obligation to put into practice “softer” forms of urban redevelopment. This book explores a setting where the government was unable to effectively push through renewal, state power was compromised, and local residents repeatedly doubted the legitimacy of government action, especially when promises of redevelopment failed to materialize. The state’s “infrastructural power” (Mann 1984)—the collective power to coordinate social life through state infrastructures—frequently broke down, and it was only events such as the unexpected visit of an inspection team charged with evaluating Qingdao’s “hygienic situation” or pressure from a central mandate to remove all “slum housing” (*penghu qu*) by 2020 (J. Zheng 2016; Yao and Ma 2018) that pushed

along redevelopment. Somewhat ironically, it was then that the government was perceived as “finally doing its job,” as one local resident phrased it.

This book thus contributes to what anthropologist Xiang Biao (2016, 148; 2010) calls a “folk theory of the state,” or common people’s (*laobaixing*) “normative expectations about the state’s role.” For instance, local interlocutors in Dabaodao rarely perceived the idea of preservation or the emphasis on the rule of law and “fair compensation” as an improvement when it came to redevelopment endeavors or as increasing local government legitimacy. On the contrary, since urban renewal through much of the post-Mao era had made many people rich, residents saw prosperity through redevelopment as a basic right. It was, in their eyes, the government’s responsibility to deliver this wealth, in whatever form. An analysis of various urban groups’ expectations of the local government in the specific context of urban renewal offers important insights into state legitimacy, not as a legal or normative concept, but rather concerning the ways the latter is embedded in a dialectical relationship between government and society (Pardo and Prato 2011).¹³ Like Luigi Tomba (2014, 11–12), I argue that legitimacy in China—based on a certain reward structure and government performance—is not a zero-sum game. Understanding what is and is not regarded as legitimate government action demands attention to everyday interactions and negotiations among citizens and what they perceive to be “the government.”

As impressive as authoritarian power may appear from the outside, it does not preclude various forms of contingency and even provides regime-specific loci for alternative voices. In this book, rather than treating power as an abstract force that the state possesses, I explore power as a form of agency. Namely, instances in which certain actions within the redevelopment process—whether taken by residents, preservationists, or local officials and planners—produced specific results that become decisive in how redevelopment unfolded. I follow Sherry Ortner (2006, 151), who writes that power “is normally in the service of the pursuit of some project.” Analyses of power struggles, as Andrew Kipnis (2008, 210) argues, should therefore “refer to dimensions of human social life other than power itself, so that power can be seen as a means to other ends rather than just an end in itself.” Ethnographic observations revealed the agency of both residents and preservationists and their impact on redevelopment endeavors. In the case of residents, this largely consisted of ad hoc and mostly scattered, bottom-up actions based on particularistic interests (e.g., a better compensation deal) in response to top-down redevelopment implementation. In the case of

preservationists, civil action also included cooperation and the inclusion of local officials and planners, a nurturing of horizontal ties that shaped decision-making and, to some degree, redevelopment outcomes (S. Chan 2008; Y. Cheng 2013; Verdini 2015).

I also consider power in a structural sense, that is, “the power manifest in relationships that not only operates within settings and domains but also organizes and orchestrates the settings themselves” (Wolf 1999, 5). For instance, I contextualize structural failures within the broader historically conditioned forces that have affected the conduct of actors in the present. This broader structural context—that is, the economic and political reality of contemporary China—determined the nature of interactions, negotiations, and forms of agency and ultimately what kind of actions became decisive and had an enduring effect on redevelopment. For example, preservationists managed to influence renewal projects precisely because their narratives converged with the political mandate to focus on heritage preservation in urban redevelopment. Yet such convergence was particularistic and dialectical and formed part of the larger process in which negotiations over redevelopment unfolded.

Finally, I also offer insights into local state and political practice in today’s China.¹⁴ Along with sociologist Philip Abrams (1988, 79), I view the state as an idea, albeit a very powerful one, that symbolizes unity where there is often profound political disunity. China is in many ways exemplary of high-modernist social engineering (Scott 1998) and the state constitutes the most powerful entity around which everything and everyone orbits (Pieke 2009); it builds on a sophisticated synthesis of authoritarian statism and neoliberal self-reliance (L. Zhang and Ong 2008; Hoffman 2010; 2011), involving an array of governing practices that target various socioeconomic groups in distinctive ways.¹⁵ While, however, the state might be viewed as a particular actor specializing in the exercise of power, ruling over a territory and population and adopting certain strategies to impose its will on “the people,” it is, in fact, much more than what it does (Pieke 2009, 12–14). More importantly, the Chinese state is not a coherent whole. It works in a distinctly decentralized fashion, with competency distributed across a range of government departments and offices at the municipal and district levels. The same holds for policy implementation. It may seem, for instance, that urbanization in China has followed a homogeneous logic, producing strikingly similar spatial outcomes across the country. But the process that has created rather monotonous contemporary urban morphologies has by no means been

unilinear or the simple outcome of volitional reforms. Contingencies have pervaded redevelopment in the post-Mao era, where reforms facilitated or kick-started various actions whose (often unforeseen) consequences have subsequently required new reforms and regulations (Abramson 2007).¹⁶

Moreover, throughout the entire redevelopment process in Qingdao, the “who” and “where” of the state or the government was blurry.¹⁷ In the everyday lives of my interlocutors, “the government” was often nowhere to be found, even if simultaneously omnipresent in a discursive sense through public notices, glossy maps, announcements about redevelopment, or constant talk about “the government.” Sometimes, “state power” concretely materialized through sudden overnight clearings of food markets located within Dabaodao. Most of the time, however, the state remained an abstract yet powerful entity perceived as being located elsewhere. Even local officials in Qingdao—normatively representatives of “the state”—would regularly construct “the government” as alien and beyond their own control. I call this the “absent presence” of the government. This concept captures the authoritative yet simultaneously abstract existence of “the state” in the lives of local residents and migrants, as well as officials who worked within the state apparatus but were themselves also urban subjects. Ethnographic observation of *when* and *how* different interlocutors evoked this idea of “the state” provides a nuanced perspective on local political practice in contemporary China.

HERITAGE AS CONTEXT

This book also intersects with heritage studies, in its focus on a timeworn inner-city neighborhood filled with old buildings that have survived past times but have become the subject of much debate over their future. Should they be demolished? Preserved? If so, how? Gregory Ashworth (2011, 11) sees heritage as the usage of the past in the present and suggests that “new presents will constantly imagine new pasts to satisfy changing needs.” Importantly, different social and political actors in Qingdao evoked the past for diverse, often contesting reasons. As the title of this book—seeking a future for the past—foreshadows, throughout the monograph I reflect on the multiple ways in which *the past* became an important resource and informed *present* negotiations over the sociospatial *future* of the inner city.

Over the past two decades, the Chinese state has embraced cultural

heritage (*wenhua yichan*) as an important resource. It has served various political and economic agendas at both the international and domestic levels.¹⁸ In urban renewal projects, heritage preservation has become one important means of rendering visible “improved” urban development. In fact, it was in no small part due to this new outlook that Dabaodao and its *liyuan* houses were eventually spared from the bulldozers. Heritage has also become a popular discursive tool. Preservationists in Qingdao, for instance, invoked heritage to critique contemporary planning endeavors and develop their own vision of a “better” urban future. Heritage was no less an object of consumption within the context of tourism, a burgeoning culture of nostalgia,¹⁹ and social stratification. In some cases, heritage was instead perceived as an annoyance, standing in the way of local residents promptly receiving compensation payments. From yet a different perspective, heritage was disruptive in that it was in the name of preservation that migrants living and working in Dabaodao were considered “unsuitable” inhabitants and eventually driven out.

There is little agreement among scholars within the loosely defined discipline of heritage studies as to what exactly heritage is and the purposes it serves. Some regard the idea and practice of heritage with suspicion, arguing that officially authorized heritage (L. Smith 2006) tends to erase cultural differences, ignores marginal narratives, and squeezes fragmented and subjective local histories into a coherent monumental narrative of (national) history.²⁰ Others, in contrast, are “tacitly or explicitly committed to cultural heritage in general or to specific heritage items of whose intrinsic value they are convinced and whose conservation they endorse” (Brumann 2014, 173–74). Still others, mainly scholars within the field of so-called critical heritage studies, have expressed skepticism of conventional understandings of heritage as “old, grand, monumental, and aesthetically pleasing sites, buildings, places and artefacts” (L. Smith 2006, 11). Rather than directly rejecting heritage, they have debated, redefined, and even reinvented definitions and ideas of it with the aim of making this concept more just, inclusive, and subjective, particularly calling for a communitarian approach to preservation (Blake 2009; Harrison 2013; Meskell 2018).

There are several problems with these different views of heritage. First, a constructivist approach to heritage tends to narrowly focus on power, hegemony, and discourse, or on deconstructing heritage. Doing so risks failing to see and appreciate the ways that even authorized heritage can serve as a meaningful social resource, something that became apparent in representa-

tions of colonial heritage in Qingdao. Second, while it is indubitably important to account for and give expression to multiple identities, subjectivities, and subaltern heritages, the so-called local communities to be empowered are often also a social construction, sanctioned by the state or other external entities (Hampton 2005, 739). A “local community” may furthermore not be conscious of its identity as a bearer of cultural heritage or might even be suspicious of preservation, as was the case in Dabaodao. Third, scholars (especially within critical heritage studies) have tended to redefine heritage in such inclusive and all-encompassing terms that it becomes almost indistinguishable from the anthropological concept of culture in all its facets (Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952; Clifford 1988; Brumann 1999; Ortner 2006).²¹ This would raise the question as to why heritage should at all be considered a separate theoretical category, worthy of scholarly inquiry. I suggest that it is more productive to see heritage as *part of* culture, rather than *as* culture. This allows us, in the socioculturally specific context of Qingdao, to understand preservation as one locally defined possibility in the broader process of redevelopment, as well as to analyze social life in the inner city without necessarily relating it back to an idea of heritage.

Finally, my aim is not to argue against or to deny the positive and transformative potential that heritage may have. Unlike some scholarly works (cf. F. Chen and Thwaites 2013; S. Y. Liang 2014), however, this book does not start from the premise that China’s urban development over the past decades has been destructive and that increased attention to heritage, however defined, is the solution. I also refrain from assuming that heritage preservation is an unconditional positive aspiration—as did many of my interlocutors who fought for the authentic preservation of Dabaodao. On the contrary, the redevelopment of Dabaodao exemplifies the drawbacks of heritage preservation becoming an ideology believed to serve as a panacea for inner-city problems whose causes far exceed the scope and capacities of the heritage concept.

Accordingly, in my approach to heritage, I mostly follow anthropologist Christoph Brumann’s (2014, 173) notion of “heritage agnosticism,” which “leaves the effects of heritage and their valuation as an open question for empirical investigation.” Questions of what heritage is and how it should be preserved concern me insofar as they have concerned my interlocutors in Qingdao, and what I am interested in is not normative definitions, but the question of who wants to preserve Dabaodao and *liyuan* houses and for what reasons. At the same time, I also offer a critique of the hegemonic ten-

dency of a heritage discourse that establishes preservation as the only viable option to solve inner-city problems, but thereby actually obscures and mystifies the more structural political-economic deficiencies responsible for many of the inner-city issues discussed throughout this book.

STUDYING “MY COUNTRY” IN CHINA

The fieldwork for this book was carried out over a period of 10 years, beginning with two short preliminary trips in 2011, and followed by an extended 18-month stay between September 2012 and January 2014. Since then, I have visited Qingdao at least twice per year and kept in close contact with interlocutors via instant messaging applications. During fieldwork, I also worked as a part-time teacher in the Department for Foreign Languages at the Ocean University of China, which meant I was granted a temporary residence permit and working visa and enjoyed the legal status of foreign resident. From the outset, I structured the data collection process according to different groups—local residents, migrants, preservationists, officials, and planners—each with its own specificities requiring specific methods and particular reflections.

I lived, for the most part, in a *liyuan* room on Huangdao Road, one of the best-known streets of Dabaodao, intentionally chosen because of its importance as a daily food market and its vibrant mix of local residents and migrant workers. The physical setup of the courtyard made it quite easy to meet and build initial rapport with potential interlocutors. At the outset, many residents were careful and somewhat skeptical about my presence. Not many foreigners (I know of only one) had ever lived in this part of town, and I was the first to have rented a room in this particular courtyard. The landlord was quite surprised that I wanted to lease his family’s former home. “It’s not a place to live; you can rest here sometimes, but it’s too dirty to sleep overnight,” he told me. Nevertheless, he patiently accompanied me to the local police office for registration purposes (*dengji*), a requirement for anyone renting a room in China. An officer then escorted me back to the courtyard to check whether I was *really* renting the room there, evidently in disbelief that a foreigner would be willing to live in the area. As I entered the courtyard with a uniformed policeman, my future neighbors looked at us with suspicion, clearly worried about “trouble.” I did eventually manage to explain the situation, and the initial tension quickly dissipated.

For the first few weeks, I spent as much time as possible in the *liyuan*. I washed myself, brushed my teeth downstairs at the communal water tap, used the courtyard toilet (Chapter 3), and simply hung out. I got to know my neighbors when asking to borrow tools to change the lock on my door and, more generally, answered the question “What are you doing here?” countless times. My double identity, as “foreign teacher” and as “ethnographer,” was both a blessing and a curse. Most knew nothing about anthropology, although one resident had read Chinese social anthropologist Fei Xiaotong and was familiar with Claude Lévi-Strauss. My efforts to explain that I was an anthropologist, researching urban redevelopment and heritage in this part of Qingdao, were usually met with looks of confusion, though, when I mentioned my interest in the city’s history and architecture, the puzzlement ebbed a little. When I eventually told them that I was also teaching at one of Qingdao’s universities, any bewilderment entirely disappeared. Gaining acceptance was facilitated by my “teacher identity,” as it provided a familiar category in which to place me. Certainly, the latter was much more tangible and easier to make sense of than my identity as an “ethnographer.” Yet this also meant that some people were confused when I kept asking what they considered to be strange questions. They clearly wondered why a foreign teacher would need to know so much about their lives. That said, the longer I lived in the *liyuan*, the less suspicious they were; ultimately, local residents accepted my presence and “peculiar” queries, regardless of my identity.

Throughout fieldwork, I took countless strolls through Dabaodao and its courtyard houses, observing and recording daily happenings. Sometimes, inspired by Ingold and Lee (2006), I walked with my interlocutors, asking them to take me to places that were important to them. This proved useful in that “the journey people make also makes their places” (Ingold and Lee 2006, 68). To gain a better sense of how residents utilized the physical environment of the inner city, I also often spent time in one and the same place (e.g., sitting at the entrance to a courtyard, at a market stall, or in a courtyard interior), noting how people behaved, moved, what they did, and so on. The data thus gathered complemented that from interviews and conversations with people about their perceptions of their immediate physical environment. I spent many hours with my interlocutors, directly experiencing and learning about life in Dabaodao. At times, I would ask specific questions; at others, conversations would unfold naturally. After about seven or eight months of fieldwork, I carried out 66 structured interviews with randomly selected residents living in Dabaodao. These took the form of a short ques-

tionnaire comprising 26 closed and open-ended questions and were administered through personal face-to-face interviews with the help of a local research assistant.²²

One key challenge when conducting fieldwork among residents in Dabaodao was male bias. In his remarkable ethnography on crack dealers in East Harlem, Philippe Bourgois (2003, 215) reflects on “the inescapable problem of how—as a male—I could develop the kinds of deep, personal relationships that would allow me to tape-record conversations with women at the same intimate level on which I accessed the worlds of men.” I faced a similar issue. As a male researcher, it was relatively easy to interact with other male residents, particularly migrant workers. I spent many nights with a group of men at one of the street market stalls, eating, drinking, and chatting. Early on in the evening, their wives might also be present, slowly sipping a beer, while the men, myself included, quickly downed glass after glass.²³ The women would usually leave after an hour or two, especially when, as frequently happened, more men from the area would join and the gathering would begin to occupy all the available space around the table. It was always the women who would get up immediately to make room. Patriarchal norms, particularly strong in Shandong province (Bell and Wang 2020), prevailed and dictated the spaces and places open to me. Indeed, in order to “fit in” and be accepted, I necessarily had to adhere to certain gendered expectations, even if this, to some degree, compromised the possibility of interacting with female residents. That said, I did have many conversations with women (elderly and mostly widowed locals were particularly eager to share their thoughts), though these were perhaps less profound and intimate than certain moments I shared with some of the male residents.

Study of the group of preservationists required different approaches, in part because they did not reside in one specific area of the city. The internet provided a particularly valuable resource for acquiring information and making contact, as many preservationists frequently “met” to discuss the city’s history in chat forums, on Weibo (China’s version of Twitter), QQ (an instant messaging app), and, later, mainly on WeChat (China’s version of WhatsApp). Before my first in-person meeting with several preservationists, I felt rather nervous. For one, I thought that they would be unfamiliar with anthropology and that solid historical knowledge of the city might be expected of me to gain their trust. I furthermore worried that my own nationality (German) and background could be an obstacle, in that they would regard me with suspicion, if not hostility, due to the fact that I am

from the country that once colonized Qingdao. However, I was happily surprised to learn the exact opposite. None of the preservationists seemed to take issue with my presence or my interest in them and in Qingdao. On the contrary, being a German national and the city's past as a German colony seemed to be self-explanatory reasons for why I was interested in studying Qingdao. "We understand that you want to find out about the past of your country in China," would become a commonly heard remark. I was quickly accepted as a member of their circle. This allowed me to attend dinners, meetings, or other events on a regular basis, and thereby "study sideways," a term used by Ulf Hannerz (2006, 24) to describe anthropologists who "focus their ethnographic curiosity on people with practices not so unlike their own." This was, however, challenging in certain ways. Similar to the collaborative dilemmas often cited when ethnographers both work and conduct research in national or international institutions (Bortolotto 2017), I juggled my identity as a scholar contributing to the local history and heritage discourse and that as an anthropologist interested in studying that very discourse. In analyzing the data collected and writing up parts of this monograph, I made a conscious effort to "exoticize" the members of the epistemic community of which I myself form an integral part (Chapter 6).

More generally, my nationality (and fluency in German) was an advantage in gaining access to archives and many other resources. This was particularly facilitated by a request that I translate certain historical sources, though sometimes my presence biased people's responses, albeit in exactly the opposite way I had anticipated. "Do you feel at home here?" I was often asked. I did sometimes, when walking along a cobblestone road with red-tiled, brick rowhouses on either side and trees lining the street. Rather than being the one asking the questions, the roles were suddenly reversed, with me answering their queries about how similar Qingdao's old town was to Germany. Moreover, in my presence, people sometimes overly praised what the Germans had left behind, and it occasionally proved difficult to move a conversation beyond simple "German heritage is great" statements. I consequently changed my initial strategy, which had until then been to play up my interest in the history of the city when interviewing or talking to interlocutors. Instead, I emphasized my anthropological interest in contemporary issues revolving around urban redevelopment. Meanwhile, when I presented papers of preliminary findings at conferences, fellow scholars would sometimes suggest that by studying a former German colony, I was reviving anthropology's infamous past as a colonial science. Here, however, my inten-

tion is rather to highlight the many “doors” that my background opened during fieldwork, rather than how this might evoke the unfortunate past of a discipline that has, after all, reinvented itself many times since its beginnings (Fabian 1983; Coleman and Collins 2006; Clifford and Marcus 2010).

In gathering information about the redevelopment projects and collecting the stories of officials and planners, my university affiliation, the network of preservationists, and, once again, my nationality proved valuable. I carried out a number of semistructured interviews with officials in the Bureau of Natural Resources and Planning (hereafter Urban Planning Bureau),²⁴ the Bureau of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (hereafter Housing Bureau), the Bureau of Culture and Tourism,²⁵ the Urban Planning and Design Research Institute (hereafter Urban Design Institute), the city archives, several redevelopment command offices (*gaizao zhihui*), as well as with local scholars closely cooperating with the government. After I began publishing parts of my research, I was also invited to attend meetings where redevelopment proposals were discussed and to act as a member of an expert committee tasked with evaluating a set of preservation principles to be applied in the refurbishment of Dabaodao. Through these activities, I gained firsthand insight into how redevelopment plans were devised and debated. I also reviewed and consulted planning documents, newspaper articles, tourist publications, promotional material, and popular culture artifacts from print media, TV broadcasting, film, and online sources dealing with the inner-city redevelopment projects. I collected over 200 newspaper articles (electronically and in print) specifically revolving around the renewal of Dabaodao (Chapter 2).

For the historical data, I consulted mainly secondary sources, including books published by some of my interlocutors as well as dissertations written by (mostly history or architecture) scholars in Chinese and in German. I also conducted research in Qingdao’s city archives and paid a visit to the descendants of Alfred Siemssen, an entrepreneur during colonial times and allegedly one of the first to build a *liyuan* house in today’s Dabaodao (Chapters 1 and 7). Alfred’s grandson shared historical photographs and information about his grandfather’s life in Qingdao in the early twentieth century. Moreover, I was involved in the translation of Alfred’s memoirs (from German into Chinese), which were published locally in 2016. My contribution to this project further strengthened my standing among preservationists as an active contributor to the production of historical knowledge about Qingdao.

Finally, studying different ideas, views, perceptions, and usages of one and the same city area and following diverse, often conflicting groups was at times difficult. During fieldwork, I oscillated between being a “voyeur,” towering above and looking down, and a “walker,” being in and strolling around the city. While the former gains a sense of the whole picture, the latter “follow(s) the thicks and thins of an urban ‘text’ . . . without being able to read it” (de Certeau 1984, 93). However, I would rather argue that “the walker” reads the city very *differently* from “the voyeur.” Any urbanite can be both a “voyeur” and a “walker” in his or her own sociospatial context, but the types of knowledge of an urban space gained by these two views differ. A brief anecdote is illustrative in this regard. Relatively early on in my fieldwork, I was standing with my neighbor near the window of the room that I had just rented. “See how shabby this place looks,” he said, pointing out toward the disintegrating building facade on the other side of our small lane. He continued angrily, “Historical value? These buildings have no value! Knock them down.” A few weeks later, I was standing in exactly the same spot with one of the preservationists. “Look at that facade,” he sighed, as he likewise pointed across the lane. “You can still see the original bricks and plaster used when these houses were first built. . . . What a shame that they are so neglected and have been painted over.” Two different perceptions of one and the same space emerged: local experience on the one hand and expert knowledge on the other. The old map, the history book or historical document, the photograph, all served as “portholes” through which preservationists could look down from above, allowing them to view Dabaodao in its entirety, though without ever really engaging with the sociospatial reality on the ground. The people who resided in Dabaodao, however, experienced it quite differently. Their memories of growing up or moving into the area were not a distant history, but sociospatially significant as they formed the center of self-identification and embodied, personally experienced histories (see also Evans 2020).

Living, on the one hand, in a *liyuan* room and spending so much of my time with residents while, on the other, interviewing and researching officials, planners, and preservationists who appropriated or claimed the right to represent the neighborhood for themselves, constantly reminded me of this voyeur-walker dichotomy, both literally and metaphorically. On more than one occasion, I would have a long conversation with a resident in Dabaodao about life in the inner city and then rush to a dinner with preservationists. There I would sometimes be greeted with comments such as

“Why do you live there? The residents don’t really know much about the actual history of their own homes, and they don’t care.” Other times they would ask, “How do you think the problem of residents can be solved?”—the implication being that current ways of using the inner city were incompatible with attempts to preserve it. I always struggled as to how to respond. Yet, whenever I had a visitor whom I was showing around Qingdao’s *liyuan* houses and my field site, I would catch myself taking my companion to some building from where one had a (voyeur) view of the entire area from above, as if to suggest that only by looking down at the entire neighborhood, seeing it in its entirety, could one truly grasp the significance and meaning of Dabaodao. That is, simply being inside it was not enough. From above, the clutter and disarray on the ground did suddenly turn into a neat display of differently shaped courtyards. From there, a feeling emerged that there was actually an order to this mess. Often the visitor would have an aha moment when seeing the “whole thing,” suggesting an understanding (and perhaps appreciation) of the *liyuan* houses in the larger context of the cityscape. This was almost always accompanied by a sense of astonishment and a comment along the lines of “It would indeed be a shame if those were gone.” At the time, I was not aware of my subconscious bias in representing the neighborhood this way; it only occurred to me much later, when I was away from Qingdao. Nonetheless, this realization strikes me as exemplifying, generally, the power of knowledge and, more specifically, the power of those producing the narrative of the area’s historical importance. Broadly, such reflexivity and awareness of one’s own involvement in a field site and with interlocutors, if not a solution to the problem of “objectivity,” can help bring us one step closer to seeing what is really out there (Bernard 2006, 370).

CHAPTER OUTLINE

This book comprises seven empirical chapters. The first historically contextualizes Dabaodao within the broader development of Qingdao. It begins with an account of how I personally experienced the sociospatial reality of the inner city during one of my first walks into the neighborhood. This provides the reader with an initial sense of the space through descriptions of its architecture, the state of (dis)repair of roads and buildings, and the way people acted and interacted. I then reflect on the multitude of histories that have produced the present state of Dabaodao, traveling back in time to show

how Dabaodao first came into being as a segregated “Chinese town” under German colonial rule, how it flourished during the Republican period, but was then pushed to the sociospatial margins in the Maoist years. I highlight how Dabaodao has, since its very conception, had an ambiguous status, which has persistently conditioned its development—during the Republican and Maoist years, into the reform period, and equally so in the present.

Chapters 2 to 7 are predominantly ethnographic. I dedicate one chapter to each of the urban groups that engage with the inner city, though I also continually highlight interconnections between interests, ideologies, and actions in their involvement and relationship with its spatial structure and architecture. I use the “actor” first and foremost as a lens to expand on different activities. There was a degree of autonomy in these different activities—each is grounded in the group’s particular way of being in and using the inner city, yet the activities also overlapped and informed each other. Discussing these activities through the eyes of the actors allows us to understand them as much in and of themselves as in relation to other activities (and actors).

Chapter 2 narrates the transformation of Dabaodao during the reform period against the backdrop of changes to China’s inner-city redevelopment strategy. I revisit and analyze different projects that were drawn up, publicly announced, and then, for the most part, discarded. I present some of the institutional factors explaining their failure to materialize, including changes in municipal or district leadership, a lack of coordination among responsible government units, and a functional, territorial, and discursive fragmentation in the planning and implementation of refurbishment projects. Based on interviews and meetings with officials and planners, I furthermore introduce what I call the “preservation predicament,” or the simultaneous need to implement redevelopment while also being expected to preserve rather than demolish the inner city.

Chapter 3 turns to the social fabric of Dabaodao as I encountered it before large-scale eviction in 2017. I tell the story of Dabaodao through the eyes of its local residents, a tale of precarity and marginalization, but also of ambivalence. Most local residents entertained complex emotions with regard to their physical surroundings, where feelings of having been left behind in an ever-changing urban society were intertwined with a strong sense of place attachment and fond memories of a “better past.” A tendency to shut oneself off was one manifestation of this ambivalence, as were sentiments of anger and frustration. The latter were often directed at migrants, at redevelopment (or its absence), or at the physical environment, expressed

in the use and abuse of communal facilities. I show how mistreatment of the physical environment was closely related to a failure to fulfill repeated promises of redevelopment.

Chapter 4 discusses in detail the intricate negotiations over compensation, including disputes over property rights, illegitimate self-built structures (not recognized by the government), property splitting (*fenhu*), administrative obstacles, and the general state of distrust. I highlight the structural nature of the repeated failures to redevelop Dabaodao, showing that residents' unwillingness to cooperate with the local government was not due to misconduct on the part of officials or to faulty compensation schemes. Rather, I argue that urban renewal announcements were like opening up a Pandora's box, in that they unleashed various unresolved problems and legacies of the past. These in turn had a direct impact on the implementation of housing expropriation and refurbishment.

Chapter 5 looks at migrants, the largest group of residents in Dabaodao. For them, the inner city was first and foremost a place of work. They used the courtyard environments and street markets for small-scale businesses, seeking to maximize economic output, earn a living, and thereby carve out a space for themselves in the city. Their outward-oriented "spatial practices" actively transformed the physical environment, molding it to their needs. Despite policy changes meant to improve migrants' existence in the city, they continued to be (perceived as) outsiders. In the debates revolving around redevelopment projects, migrants—some of whom had long lived in the neighborhood—were not regarded as part of the "local community." Largely invisible or considered inconsequential, migrants usually appeared in general discourse as scapegoats or culprits for various problems, such as the deterioration of architectural heritage. I argue that migrants' existence in the inner city and the attempts to preserve its architecture were mutually exclusive, which exemplifies the shortcomings of heritage as a strategy to solve urban problems.

Chapter 6 focuses on the rise of a popular heritage narrative and discusses, in particular, Qingdao's preservationists, a heterogeneous group of citizens passionate about history and the past of "their city." I first describe their agendas before turning to the kinds of activities they engaged in and how they managed to influence the direction of redevelopment projects. I show how social actions unfolded in a process of negotiations, where the question of how to act responsibly as citizens and the desire to effect change "for the good of the city" were more important than concrete outcomes.

Nevertheless, preservationists did manage, in several ways, to significantly impact redevelopment. First, they disseminated their ideas among a general public that had become increasingly open to the idea of heritage preservation, and in so doing indirectly put pressure on the city government to deliver precisely that. Second, their activities were characterized by a distinct sense of pragmatism and cooperation rather than confrontation. They accommodated officials and planners, welcoming them into their circle, circuitously affecting redevelopment.

The final ethnographic chapter explores the ways the inner city has effectively changed over the last ten years. Some courtyards have been demolished and the refurbishment of several streets begun. Small cafés, souvenir shops, and even a Dabaodao museum have been opened. A few remaining residents still cling to their rooms. I follow several so-called nail houses and visit families who already moved out of the neighborhood. I focus in particular on the trajectory of a migrant family who used to run a stall at the local food market but was forced to leave Dabaodao and find a new means of making a living. The neighborhood has now been established as a place of historical importance, with *liyuan* regarded as uniquely local architectural heritage both among the wider public and in official discourse. Redevelopment is well underway, though many of the uncertainties and problems that characterized and contributed to the previous failures persist. What the future holds remains to be seen, but the monograph ends here—the inner city in continuous transformation.

1

The Past

A Sociospatial History of the Inner City

It is a late summer afternoon in 2012. The most pleasant season in Qingdao is just beginning. I walk along Taiping Road, Qingdao's seaside promenade, with the blue sea on my left and old, seemingly well-maintained European-style buildings on my right. The sky is cloudless, the sunshine not too warm, and a comfortable, dry breeze makes for the perfect temperature. This may have been precisely the picturesque scenery that reformer Kang Youwei praised in the 1920s as "green trees, red tiles, and blue sea, neither too cold nor too hot; well-developed water and land transportation" (R. Zhang 2013). I turn right onto Zhongshan Road, the main street of Qingdao's historical town center, passing by a 30-story pink high-rise that everyone refers to as the "Parkson building," a couple of seafood restaurants, shops selling dried fish, and St. Michael's Cathedral, built in the 1930s, known locally simply as "the Catholic church." Young newlyweds are posing for wedding photos, "because of the romantic atmosphere here," as the young bride wearing a long white dress explains while waiting for the photographer to change his camera lens. Zhongshan Road goes up a gently rising slope and connects the seaside with the northern areas of the old city center. Upon reaching the top, I find myself more or less at its middle point. Behind me are the monuments and the sea, with the road then going down the hill to my field site, the urban neighborhood once called Dabaodao.

I keep walking, past a massive, newly built office block with a coffee shop and an electronics store on its ground floor, before turning right

onto Sifang Road. While on Zhongshan Road the buildings had looked robust and were at least six to seven stories high, here most do not exceed four stories, many are smaller, and their structures more frail. The streets are narrow and crowded and I come across various market stalls offering everything from fruits and vegetables, meat, seafood, live fish and poultry, to household appliances and clothes. Some people are simply selling their products on temporarily spread out blankets on the street. Upon closer inspection, I realize just how run-down many of the buildings are. Sections of walls have crumbled, doors and windows are missing, wooden beams have collapsed, and pipes and electric cables lie bare. The outside facades of some buildings contain hole-in-the-wall shops, newsagents, small restaurants, and the occasional outlet for “adult products.”

I decide to enter one of the courtyards located on Weixian Road. An arched entrance, partially blocked off by a shed-like construction, leads me into its interior. In front of me, doors dot a narrow yard and a variety of objects—trunks, buckets, scrap wood—are piled up against the walls. I notice a perilous set of stairs whose stone steps have completely deteriorated; there is no railing and a massive gap separates the final step and the wooden open corridor that leads around the entire courtyard and connects all the rooms located on the second floor. The wood creaks as I walk along, and the floor joists seem alarmingly fragile. I do not meet a single soul and wonder whether anyone lives here at all. Though some windows have been smashed and several doorframes taken out, a few are locked and I hear people talking behind them.

As I leave the courtyard, I see children playing on the street, surrounded by dogs, cats, and chickens. Some elderly people sit on tiny stools crowded around a table, attentively watching two men playing Chinese chess. Meanwhile, a young man comes running out of a door, shouting loudly in local dialect. As I turn back onto Sifang Road, I am almost run over by a motorbike speeding up the road, honking at everyone in its path. I continue walking, pass meat skewer vendors and more market stalls until I finally reach a dead end. There, a church-like building has been converted into a youth hostel, behind it, three high-rise residential blocks under construction protrude from the ground. I turn left and arrive at a main expressway. Cars are now zooming past me. I have left Dabaodao and find myself in an entirely different atmosphere, that of the modern metropolis.

This slightly modified excerpt from my field notes recounts one of my first experiences walking into and through the Dabaodao neighborhood, without in-depth knowledge of its history, *liyuan* courtyards, or sociospatial situation. Nonetheless, the multifaceted past inscribed in its architecture, the state of disrepair of roads and buildings, but also the busy work and daily life routines of its inhabitants were evident.

Qingdao's old town center is a relic of German colonial city planning, dating back to the late nineteenth century. Narrow cobblestone roads, Art Nouveau–influenced architecture, and a spatial morphology that has more in common with a midsize German town than a Chinese metropolis have made Qingdao a popular destination not only for newlyweds, but also for tourist groups and backpackers from across China. “People come here to experience a Western atmosphere (*yangqi*) without having to leave the country,” said a local resident with a bit of pride. Dabaodao is nestled at the heart of the town's old center, at the northern end of Zhongshan Road (Map 2). Once a poor fishing village, it was initially designed as a segregated “Chinese town” within the colonial city, though it soon melded with the rest of Qingdao. Today, Dabaodao is not an official administrative city district. In fact, until not so long ago, this denomination was known to but a few scholars, and most residents living in the neighborhood were not aware that the area was once called “Dabaodao.” Similarly, asking a taxi driver to “go to Dabaodao” was in vain. The old town is more commonly called “the Zhongshan Road area” or “the area behind Zhongshan Road” (*zhongshan lu houmian*) when referring to Dabaodao more specifically.

When I began my fieldwork in 2012, Dabaodao was largely absent from wider public discourse on the “exoticism” and “romanticism” of old Qingdao. It had been included in an “old-town redevelopment” proposal, but it did not yet have its own official, individuated monumental narrative. For instance, when a young woman who had a general interest in old architecture took me around the historical center during a preliminary field visit, she gave me a bewildered look when I asked about the possibility that the *liyuan* might be included on the municipal list of protected buildings. Similarly, when I mentioned to local residents that I was interested in historical architecture, they repeatedly tried to usher me out of the area. “These buildings are of no value,” they said and, vaguely pointing toward the church and the other European-style buildings, concluded, “That is where you can find historical architecture.” Some went as far as to call the area a “rubbish dump”



Map 2. Qingdao's old and new city centers (© Qian Rongrong)

and expressed the hope that it would soon be demolished. Others, in contrast, called this place their home. “I like the messiness of this area. It is like home, like the countryside,” a migrant worker living and working in Dabaodao told me. Yet when I mentioned to acquaintances from other parts of Qingdao that I was researching “the area behind Zhongshan Road” and was even renting a room there, I would hear reactions like, “Oh, how can you live there? It is so dirty and messy!” Some warned me that “this is where the lowest (*zui diceng de*) people live. You have to be careful. It might be dangerous.” Others were more open-minded. “This is where you can still find true Qingdao culture,” explained a woman in her late twenties living in Qingdao’s “eastern parts” (*dongbu*). Meanwhile, a local historian expounded, “Beijing has its *siheyuan*, Shanghai its *linong*, and Qingdao has its *liyuan*. Dabaodao’s *liyuan* houses are unique to this city. They must be preserved at all costs”—though, she hastily added, “I wouldn’t want to live there.”

These are tastes of the different (conflicting) opinions and ideas revolving around this inner-city area that I discuss in detail throughout this book. Here, however, I begin with the past. Dabaodao and its courtyards (together with other buildings and physical structures) constitute a specific urban environment that is, in addition to being invested with meaning and value by various actors, a source of its own significance, as similarly observed by Þóra Pétursdóttir (2013) relative to the physical remnants of industrial sites in Iceland. How has this inner-city area evolved to what it is today? This is a crucial question in that the narratives, negotiations, and discourses revolving around Dabaodao and *liyuan* in the present are directly conditioned by the past. In what follows, we embark on a historical journey, discovering how Dabaodao emerged, developed, and transformed under different city administrations to eventually become the place that I encountered when I first started fieldwork: a dilapidated inner-city neighborhood with an ambiguous identity and an uncertain future. The aim here is not to merely provide an “objective” and unproblematic “historical background,” detached from the present. Rather, in seeking to understand Dabaodao’s trajectory, the past is viewed as a cumulative process, “a multitude of histories” as opposed to a single history (Massey 2005, 118). I show how past city planning, laws and regulations, and a specific urban development ideology have conditioned and shaped the neighborhood over time (B. Wang 2010). As Henri Lefebvre (1991, 229) famously states, “In space, what came earlier continues to underpin what follows.” Connecting Dabaodao’s present state with its past sets

the stage for discussions in subsequent chapters of life in this poor urban neighborhood.

The chronology of the spatial development of this neighborhood should thus not be misread as an effort to consolidate its “monumental time,” what Michael Herzfeld (1991, 10) calls a “reductive and generic . . . past constituted by categories and stereotypes.” Rather, I seek to highlight the multiplicity of voices, interests, and actions surrounding Dabaodao and efforts to redevelop this neighborhood. In doing so, I trace the contested existence of the present-day inner city to earlier time periods in terms of not only physical structures, but also the area’s sociospatial function and position in the broader context of Qingdao. Dabaodao was, at its origins, characterized by ethnic and spatial hybridity and through multiple regimes retained an ambiguous sociospatial position. This dynamic has significantly contributed to disputes over its presence and underlies the challenges encountered when implementing targeted redevelopment projects. Delineating the neighborhood’s spatial history, moreover, sets the scene for a later discussion concerning a burgeoning group of heritage enthusiasts, for whom “history” refers predominantly to the time before the Communist takeover in 1949. Finally, this chapter contextualizes Qingdao within the larger framework of (semi)colonial cities in China, where certain similarities but also distinct differences emerge.¹

DABAODAO IN GERMANY’S “MODEL COLONY”

According to official history, as it is disseminated in the museums, brochures, and promotional websites of Qingdao, 1891 is the founding date of the city, when the Manchurian Qing government set up a stronghold in Jiaozhou Bay (today, Qingdao) against foreign aggressors. It is, however, a stretch to claim that the *city* of Qingdao was established that year. At the time, Jiaozhou consisted of a smattering of poor fishing villages, populated by some 80,000 to 100,000 inhabitants (Matzat 1998, 106); there was no city, nor any signs of one emerging. It was not until 1898, with the arrival of German colonizers, that the city of Tsingtau² was planned and built (Kaster 2018). At the time, the German empire was in fierce competition with England and other European nations over colonies and sought to gain in the “scramble for China.”³ The alleged killings of two German missionaries in

southern Shandong—known as the “Juye incident”—offered an opportune moment to make a move. On November 7, 1897, German kaiser Wilhelm II wrote in a telegram to his secretary of state for foreign affairs, Bernard von Bülow, “Finally the Chinese have provided us with . . . the much-longed-for ‘incident’” (cited in Lepsius, Mendelsson Bartholdy, and Thimme 1927, 69). In 1898, the two countries signed an official lease, granting Germany authority over an area of 551.7 square kilometers for a period of 99 years.

Jiaozhou Bay became a *de facto* full colony, resembling Hong Kong and other leased territories,⁴ and was one of the earliest cities to be planned and built by foreigners in a previously nonurbanized setting.⁵ Germany’s colonial project in China was both economic and geopolitical in nature, namely seeking to create conditions and infrastructure to commercially exploit the Shandong hinterland, as well as establish a strong naval military base in the region. Perhaps most important, the Germans strove to create a sociospatial “model colony,” that is, an authentically German enclave on Chinese soil, not only in ethnic and cultural terms, but infrastructurally as well (Biener 2001; Groeneveld 2019). For instance, the Germans installed a large-scale waste-water system in the European areas of Qingdao, which is still operative today and constitutes an oft-evoked symbol of the perceived quality of German building activities in Qingdao. Meanwhile, the planting of various kinds of trees along the streets (of the European area) aimed to guarantee the “cleanliness” and “hygiene” of Qingdao and to make the occupiers feel “at home” (Steinmetz 2007, 448). Historian Sabina Groeneveld (2016, 72) quotes from the memoirs of Emma Kroebel, a German writer residing in Qingdao, who writes, “Much sweat owed, much hard work has been done, before Tsingtau could become what it is now—a German city. Decorative houses, beautiful wide streets, all comfort of modern times—in short, an oasis in the middle of the yellow sea.”

Germany’s meticulous urban planning in pursuit of a “model colony” distinguished Qingdao from other (semi)colonial endeavors in China that were more focused on trade and less on sociospatial development (Denison and Guang 2006, 34). Indeed, the city was meant to “represent a specific German kind of colonialism in that scientific planning, professional implementation, and state supervision were to serve as an example of ‘modern’ and ‘efficient’ colonial policy, in contrast to the more commercially driven colonialism fostered by the British in Hong Kong” (Mühlhahn 2000, 11). Notably, Qingdao was administered directly by the German navy, rather than the Foreign Office, an anomaly within the German empire and, again, different

from the more autonomous and liberal Hong Kong.⁶ There was, however, no single German colonial model. In German Samoa, for instance, the colonizers' interventions were relatively mild and peaceful, while Southwest Africa was instead a more stereotypical settler colony, marked by violence against indigenous populations (Steinmetz 2007, 45; Osayimwese 2017).

The urban master plan according to which Qingdao was developed involved a clear ethnic spatial separation between the German and Chinese areas in the city. Germans lived in luxurious villas along the south coast, in the so-called European district where local Chinese (except for servants) were not allowed to live. Meanwhile, the Chinese were provided with specially designed districts in the northern and western areas. The city was furthermore distinctly divided by an empty stretch of land, referred to as a "hygienic belt" (Schrecker 1971, 70), empty of buildings and where no one was permitted to reside (<https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.12315869.cmp.2>). This deliberate segregation led to the establishment of the "Chinesenstadt" (Chinese town), or Dabaodao (named after one of the original fishing villages), located just north of the European center immediately beyond the "belt" and initially intended to be a "trading district" for wealthier Chinese merchants. Poorer workers instead lived in two other specially built "workers' districts." The first, Taidongzhen, was constructed in 1900 approximately two miles (linear distance) northeast of the colonial center (Warner 1996, 125), the second, Taixizhen, shortly thereafter in 1901, closer to the center and just west of the train station.

Sanitary issues were among the colonial administration's most pressing concerns and possibly the driving force behind this ethnic spatial segregation.⁷ As in other colonial cities in China, hygiene matters were addressed through a purposeful restructuring of the urban space (Rogaski 2004, 85). Huang Xuelei (2016) describes, for example, how differential power between colonizers and colonized in Shanghai played out in the invisible realm of smell. The strong and unbearable odor of garlic was similarly brought up by many Germans living in Qingdao, and, in fact, cooking with garlic was eventually banned altogether (Weicker 1908; Groeneveld 2019, 146).

This kind of spatial segregation was typical in Chinese coastal cities that were partially or fully colonized in the nineteenth century (Johnson 1995). Examples include Tianjin's "walled city" (LaCouture 2010; C. Zhang and Liu 2012), Harbin's Daowai district (Carter 2002; Zatsopine 2012), and to some extent, Shanghai's *shikumen* houses, which served as residential spaces for local Chinese under colonial rule, although these were located *within* the foreign concession (Bracken 2013; J. Li 2015). The imposed segregation in

Qingdao was, however, comparatively more rigid. The “Guide to Qingdao and Its Surroundings” published in 1905 mentions, for instance, that “a great advantage of Qingdao compared to other Chinese coastal cities is that the Chinese settlements are completely separate from the European settlements” (Behme and Krieger 1905, 78). Furthermore, Qingdao’s “Chinese town” did not emerge out of original indigenous settlements that were later incorporated into the city, as was, for example, the case of Harbin’s Daowai district (Carter 2002, 21–22). The original fishing village named Dabaodao was completely demolished, with even the soil and dirt beneath the village being removed (Steinmetz 2007, 446). Furthermore, while Daowai remained solely under Chinese administration, even under Russian rule, Dabaodao and the “workers’ districts” were purposefully planned by the colonial administration and tightly controlled and supervised by the latter. The implemented segregation was thus not merely a by-product of colonization, but institutionalized in both spatial and ethnic terms.

Strong Sinophobia, based on racial prejudice, characterized the “first phase of German colonialism” (1898–1904/5). Chinese were regarded as unreliable, unhygienic, promiscuous, and infectious (Steinmetz 2007, 464), justifying the need for segregation. As a German physician stationed in colonial Qingdao put it, “The densely populated living quarters, dirt, vermin, above all the revolting sexual excesses, in which especially Chinese men indulge, make the separation of the Chinese city from the European city inevitable” (Kronecker cited in Mühlhahn 2012, 42). A colonial pastor meanwhile wrote, “It was correct to let Chinese and Europeans build their houses in separate areas. The Chinese with all his peculiar habits, with his strange concepts of cleanliness and manners, feels more comfortable among his own people—and so do we” (Weicker 1908, 49).

The above-mentioned “belt” was strategically located at the top of a gently rising slope, cutting the city’s main street in two parts: Friedrichstraße and Schantungstraße, now Zhongshan Road (M. Li 2009). During heavy rains, this allowed for the sewage and dirt that the Germans believed to exist in the Chinese areas to be washed down the slope into Dabaodao, without jeopardizing the colonizers’ area or their health (Warner 1996, 115–116). Furthermore, the so-called Chinesenordnung (Chinese ordinances, starting in 1900) entirely prohibited the construction of Chinese buildings in German Qingdao (Mohr 1911, 7). Notably, this rule was filed under the section “general regulations for the maintenance of public health” and not under “building regulations” (Biener 2001, 99), a reflection of the fact that sani-

tary concerns, exacerbated by ethnic and political worries, were addressed through a purposeful urban restructuring. Though today Dabaodao more or less blends in with the rest of Qingdao's old center, signs of these initial regulations and planning endeavors remain. The topography as well as the differing architectural styles still draw an invisible line between what was once the "European town" and the Chinese area of Qingdao.

Moreover, the regulation of the physical environment went beyond a simple division between colonizers and the colonized, and extended to the "Chinese town" as well. For example, rules governed the specific heights of individual rooms. As Mohr (1911, 25) writes (once again, under "general regulations for the maintenance of public health"): "In all workers' districts . . . apartments must be arranged so that each Chinese who is 10 years of age or above is given air space of 8 cubic meters and a floor space of 2½ square meters." The *Chinesenordnung* further mentions that "it is the duty of every landlord to install closets [toilets] and guarantee their cleanliness as well as the daily removal of any refuse" (Mohr 1911, 25). These toilets were barrel-like vessels that could be hermetically sealed. Concerned about polluted groundwater and diseases, the colonial administration strictly forbid "refuse ditches" that served as latrines in many other Chinese cities.⁸ Buildings in Dabaodao were also required to have a separate shed or room, usually located on the ground floor, where these "barrels" were to be kept and used.

THE EMERGENCE OF LIYUAN HOUSES

Stringent rules similarly governed building activity. Dabaodao was originally designed as a grid of streets that formed more or less rectangular patches of land, described by photographer Behme as looking "like a chess-board fallen from the sky" (cited in Warner 1996, 126). These land parcels could be purchased by private individuals and companies, though the transactions were rigorously regulated through the 1914 Qingdao Land Regime (*Qingdaoer Landordnung*), developed by Wilhelm Schrameier, the commissioner for Chinese affairs. The land regime was "primarily of sociopolitical and not of fiscal nature" (Matzat 2008, 20). The colonial administration sought to prevent land purchase purely for investment purposes and thus stipulated that anyone wanting to buy land had to present a detailed land-use plan. In the event that the latter was not translated into practice after transfer, harsh penalties ensued. Furthermore, a sophisticated land tax guaranteed that the

administration always profited from the incremental value of land. After having seized Jiaozhou Bay, the colonial administration reserved the exclusive right to buy any land directly from local Chinese owners. This was done to prevent rampant land speculation, as had happened in other colonies (Rowe 1989, 70). Interestingly, the Qingdao land regime also significantly influenced Sun Yat-sen's "Three Principles of the People" (*sanmin zhuyi*) (Schrecker 1971, 69). He visited Qingdao in 1912 and stated shortly afterward: "I had an exceptionally good impression of Qingdao; it serves as a model city for our future China" (cited in Matzat 2008, 24). In fact, he used Qingdao as his "blueprint for practice," adopting the land regime in the development of other Chinese coastal cities, and going as far as to request that Schrameier's book be translated into Chinese (Loehr, Fu, and Li 2014, 11).

This land monopoly meant that anyone, whether Chinese or European, interested in purchasing one or several of these rectangular parcels of land could do so only via the colonial administration and was obligated to adhere to strict building regulations. For the Dabaodao neighborhood, these stipulated that buildings could occupy no more than three-quarters of the purchased land block (Schrameier 1914, 53) and had to be neatly built parallel to the street. Despite being slightly more lenient and allowing for "cultural" adjustments, these regulations also dictated the kinds of building materials that could be used. It was, for instance, forbidden to employ inflammable materials for roofing or walls. Yet as long as the outer facades were made of solid brickwork, the interior structures could still incorporate traditional Chinese construction materials, such as wood.

Different German stakeholders participated in the early construction of Dabaodao, though it was designed as a "Chinese town" (Jin et al. 2012, 29). The Catholic mission, for example, acquired two blocks. Meanwhile, the German businessman Alfred Siemssen purchased and built on many land parcels in Dabaodao through his company Snethlage & Siemssen (later Alfred Siemssen). In his memoirs, Siemssen (2011, 31) describes the particular style he adopted for the Chinese houses (Figure 1):

I came up with a special building style for the houses in the Chinese district of Dabaodao. I purchased rectangular patches of land, built commercial and residential houses around all four sides, and left a large courtyard in the middle as a passageway and place for children to play. Each house was equipped with a shop unit on the ground floor and living rooms and bedrooms above; each had its own courtyard that was



Fig. 1. One of the first courtyards built by Alfred Siemssen in Qingdao (courtesy of the Siemssen family)

blocked off from neighboring houses by a high wall, as well as including a simple ground-floor kitchen and an entrance to the large communal courtyard space. Because the Chinese soon began to copy this building style, I can say that I left my mark on Dabaodao.

Among the Chinese entrepreneurs purchasing land in Dabaodao was Meng Hongsheng, the owner of the prominent Ruifuxiang silk company. His buildings differed from Siemssen's in that they incorporated distinct Chinese architectural elements such as curved roof edges (Jin 2015, 197). Merchants who moved into Dabaodao from Guangdong and the Shanghai regions also brought along their own building traditions. These early construction activities paved the way for the *liyuan* houses that would come to define Dabaodao and are today celebrated as uniquely local architectural heritage. The character *li* refers to a traditional administrative neighborhood unit in urban China, while *yuan* means courtyard.⁹

Liyuan resemble the traditional northern Chinese *siheyuan* (four-walled courtyard) in that they are relatively sheltered from the outside, but within

offer a large communal space (Knapp 1990; D. Zhang 2013). A *liyuan* is entered through one or several passageways, sometimes sheltered by means of a “screen wall” (*zhaobi*) (Knapp 2000). Within the courtyard, flights of stairs give access to an open, traditionally wooden, timber-framed corridor that connects the rooms on the upper floors. The aforementioned *siheyuan* were built as an adaptive strategy to climatic conditions—maximizing sunlight during cold winter months and minimizing the latter during hot summers—and adhere to the “principles of axiality, balance, and symmetry” (Knapp 1990, 11). While some early *liyuan* similarly followed their rectangular layout—with the so-called south hall (*daozufang*) opposite the entrance, the east and west wings (*xiangfang*) on either side, and the central hall (*zhengfang*) facing south—many differ from *siheyuan* in terms of their spatial organization. Some take on the shape of certain Chinese characters (卍 or 卞) or have triangular or even pentagonal contours. These different forms were conditioned by the structure of the land parcels as well as already existing courtyards. For instance, one land parcel might consist of a block hosting two or even three smaller courtyards. *Liyuan* are also distinct in that they are multistory units. During the German period, they were mostly two stories in accordance with the regulations (Jin et al. 2012) but they later rose to three, sometimes four stories high, bearing more resemblance to southern Chinese building styles (Jin et al. 2012, 23).¹⁰ Further, the shop units located on the outside facades became, as early as the colonial years, a typical and defining feature of *liyuan*,¹¹ underlining their mixed use as commercial and residential spaces, where residents could live inside or upstairs and work downstairs. Brickwork was used for the outside facades of the early *liyuan* houses, though in subsequent years reinforced concrete would become the most common building material. The Germans also introduced granite for building foundations, and thus many *liyuan* rest on heavy granite stones. In the first stages of urban development in Qingdao, there were two broad types of *liyuan*: individual courtyards owned by a single family, and bigger, so-called *zayuan*, or courtyards inhabited by many households (Jin et al. 2012, 63). The latter quickly became more common, as land was scarce and demand high.

While Dabaodao was purposefully planned by the German colonial administration, there exists no evidence that the colonizers also explicitly drew up plans or designed prototypes of *liyuan* houses. Rather, their emergence was a result of a combination of factors: the stringent colonial building regulations together with the mix of Chinese migrants arriving from

different parts of the country, who modeled new courtyards on existing ones, altering them according to their own local building traditions. Thus, while *liyuan* share several common and defining features, it is difficult to conclusively pinpoint their architectural typology, a source of considerable debate among scholars and heritage enthusiasts, further complicated by the ways that existing *liyuan* houses were extended, transformed, or replaced in the post-German decades. Chapter 6 delves further into Dabaodao's heritage "narrative" as well as distinctions made between "old" and "historically valuable."

FROM SPATIAL SEGREGATION TO CULTURAL ASSIMILATION

Just a few years after the Germans began building their "model colony," the "belt" between the Chinese and the European towns started to disintegrate. The initial idea of making Dabaodao a "Chinese town" was never fully realized. In a lecture given to the German Colonial Society in Berlin in 1900, naval lieutenant Deimling (1900, 55) detailed how the newly built houses in Dabaodao "were often immediately occupied by Europeans due to severe housing shortage and despite the fact that they had initially been built for better-off Chinese." There also occurred a notable shift from Sinophobia toward Sinophilia in the colony and in Germany. China-friendly sentiments spread through Sinologists trained as translators, who had been studying in China and were in constant and close contact with local Chinese (Steinmetz 2007, 470). Adding to this, diverse groups of European business people now living in Qingdao competed over opportunities and resources. As Klaus Mühlhahn (2012, 43) writes, "Rivalries and conflicts among groups and individuals, whether of the same nationality or not, led to a *de facto* fragmentation of European efforts and created the dynamics that altered the formulas of colonial governance."

These changes began around the year 1905 and reflected a move away from segregation and militarism toward greater inclusion and exchange. But this also included more direct forms of cultural assimilation and active "civilizing" endeavors through missionary and education work. In addition to building mixed schools, the Germans began to impose their ideas of hygiene and cleanliness upon the local population. As Dabaodao was increasingly occupied by German residents, regulations such as the aforementioned ban on garlic as well as on the use of noisy wheelbarrows were imposed

(Groeneveld 2019, 146). The colonizers also introduced certain infrastructure. During the later stages of German occupation, for instance, parts of Dabaodao were connected to the elaborate sewage system. Subsequently, “modern” squat toilets were built inside Dabaodao and residents had access to clean water (Jin et al. 2012, 37–38). The area that made up the “belt” during the early colonial years rapidly disappeared, and newly paved roads emerged, directly connecting the “Chinese town” and the “German town.” One of these was Huangdao Road, a street that would become famous for its permanent fresh-food market, and where I would eventually live during my long-term fieldwork. A second such street was Pingdu Road. Both roads clearly deviate from the rectangularity of the originally designed grid, running diagonally up the slope into the German area (Map 3). Thus, already in the early stages of the development of Qingdao, Dabaodao’s spatial structure changed and its southern borders, originally marked by the “belt,” extended to what is today known today as Dexian Road.

The planned segregation was further weakened by the arrival of migrants from across China, attracted by the town’s vibrant economic activity. In the first months of occupation, the population quintupled. Dabaodao became the city’s most popular area for living and working and was soon bursting at the seams (Warner 1996, 124). The 1902 annual report of the Snethlage & Siemssen building company records the purchase of four land parcels inside Dabaodao.¹² This number rose to six parcels in the 1905 report and then eight in 1913. Moreover, while the company laments a lack of tenants and generally sluggish development in the 1902 report, that of 1905 instead celebrates high demand, a sentiment expressed even more emphatically in 1913, clearly reflecting the growth of the colony and, in particular, the rising number of Chinese moving into the city and Dabaodao.

Thus, from almost its very beginnings, Dabaodao had an ambiguous identity: it was neither fully part of the German area nor fully segregated from it; it was occupied by Chinese and Europeans; the *liyuan* houses were Chinese buildings, but heavily influenced by German building regulations and partially designed and built by German architects. In sum, while originally planned as a segregated “Chinese town” and governed accordingly, Dabaodao quickly transformed into an ethnically and spatially mixed area that was neither fully “German” nor fully “Chinese.”



Map. 3. Map showing Dabaodao's grid plan. Dexian Road marks its southern end, Zhongshan Road the western border, Jining Road the eastern border, and the "east-west expressway" the northern border (© Qian Rongrong).

THE “UNDOING” AND CONTINUATION OF THE COLONIAL CITY

In 1914, with the beginning of World War I, Japan took control of Qingdao. During the war, the Chinese joined the Allies against the German empire, but the Treaty of Versailles returned Qingdao to the Japanese, in part triggering the much-discussed May Fourth Movement.¹³ In 1922, after the so-called first Japanese occupation (1918–22), the city was returned to the Chinese, who began, in John Western’s (1985, 335) words, the “undoing of the colonial city.” Despite this description, there are notable similarities to the colonial period in the ways that Qingdao, and Dabaodao in particular, were governed through Chinese planning and sanitary regulations, namely under the Beiyang (1922–28) and Kuomintang [KMT] governments (1929–37).

During the first Japanese occupation, the German land and planning policies were amended, but not fundamentally transformed. The Japanese admired the building efforts of the Germans and largely adopted Western architectural styles in their further development of Qingdao. They called the town a “beauty in a barren desert” (Hobow 1922, 23) and explicitly tried to continue the project of creating a “model city.” While their efforts were mainly geared toward developing the areas north of Dabaodao, particularly the harbor district (Qingdao 1999a, 211), by increasing industries and business activities, Dabaodao too underwent significant change. The more lenient land regime under the Japanese, allowing for denser building activity, paired with steady population growth resulted in an upsurge in construction in Dabaodao. This trend intensified during the 1920s and 30s. By 1935, over half a million people were recorded as living in Qingdao (Zhan 2002, 219). This aggravated Dabaodao’s already difficult housing situation, and its population density reached 1,500–1,800 people per hectare (*ibid.*).

To manage and control growth and the quality of urban life, city administrations in the Republican era turned to (Western) science. They designed sophisticated systems and implemented comprehensive regulations to guide and direct development. A document from 1935 titled “Public Ordinance for all Liyuan Houses in Qingdao” (Figure 2) stipulated in meticulous detail the duties and responsibilities of owners and tenants, not only regarding regular maintenance work, but also appropriate conduct in *liyuan* areas. For example, the landlord was required to paint the facades every two years, carry out required upkeep, and register all tenants with the relevant government departments. Exhaustive regulations also governed spatial usage: corridors and staircases had to be kept clear, no additional buildings could

- 第九條 不准在場內打造器物及升火炊飯
- 第十條 擺攤營業時間限於白晝場內不准住宿
- 第十一條 不准隨地拋棄垃圾穢物
- 第十二條 不准隨意便溺
- 第十三條 不准喧鬧鬪毆
- 第十四條 攤商歇業須報告本管辦事處退租不准將租地私相轉讓
- 第十五條 政府將來有需用本地段必要時得隨時收回
- 第十六條 不守規則者得酌量情形按違警處罰屢誡不悛者得停止租給
- 第十七條 本簡則如有未盡事宜得隨時呈請修正之
- 第十八條 本簡則自呈奉核准之日施行

青島市各里院公共遵守條規

二十四年五月十八日由社會公安工務財政各局
會同呈奉市政府內字第四五八二號指令備案

- 一、里院房舍每二年由房東油漆粉刷一次必要時併應隨時修理
- 二、戶口有移動時由房東房戶隨時報告本管警所
- 三、住戶有來歷不明行為不正者由房東報告本管警所注意
- 四、門洞不得設置貨攤堆積雜物架設吊鋪
- 五、樓梯走廊過道不准設置爐灶堆存物品間隔板門板牆
- 六、院內不准私搭板棚板壁其經工務局許可之臨時建築物如逾效期應即撤除
- 七、晾晒衣物由房東在相當地點設置晒衣杆或晒衣繩以不妨礙院內光線交通為準
- 八、臨街窗口及牆壁欄杆等處不准掛置盆筐刷帚支掛木板與其他雜亂物品
- 九、樓房里院如非洋灰鉄筋之樓梯走廊須置備太平繩或太平梯爐灶須置於安全地點地板上應鋪鉄板

Fig. 2. "Public ordinance for all iyuan houses in Qingdao" from 1935 (digital image, Archive of the Anti-Japanese War and Modern Sino-Japanese Relations Data Platform, accessed December 17, 2022, <https://www.modernhistory.org.cn/#/>)

be added inside the courtyard area, laundry was to be dried only in dedicated areas so as to prevent it from blocking sunlight, and it was forbidden to keep animals within the courtyard. There were further ordinances dictating “correct” behavior, including rules prohibiting relieving oneself or spitting in the courtyard area. These guidelines remarkably echoed the “Chinese ordinances” formulated by the German colonial administration both in tone and their general concern for cleanliness and orderliness.

The ways that the local Chinese population responded to colonial rule in part explains their later adoption of governing techniques that would seek to counter “uncivilized” behavior. Historians Steinmetz (2007), Mühlhahn (2000; 2012), and Huang (1999) all provide accounts of initial Chinese resistance against colonial policies in Qingdao. Within Dabaodao, as in many other Chinese cities at the time, guildhalls and commercial unions (often native-place associations) were formed that mobilized people and fought for the rights of Chinese living in the territory. Yet this resistance was also accompanied by an approval of certain colonial notions. When the weak and isolated Qing government seemed to helplessly yield to European expansionism, many Chinese, especially intellectuals, began to fundamentally question what they considered to be outdated Chinese world views. In their stead, they looked for answers to China’s problems in Western science (Xiaomei Chen 2002). Especially in areas with a foreign presence, local elites began to embrace ideas brought by the colonizers. In Dabaodao specifically, wealthier businessmen moved in and adopted lifestyles prescribed by the Germans, particularly in terms of urban etiquette and hygiene. In so doing, they developed a degree of rapport with the colonizers.¹⁴ Ruth Rogaski (2004, 300), in her work on Tianjin, explains how the notion of *weisheng* (hygiene) “became an instrumental discourse informing the Chinese elite’s vision of a modern ideal, a vehicle through which they hoped state, society, and the individual would be transformed.” With time, the colonial subjects, influenced by fundamental changes within Chinese society and a growing awareness of their country’s limitations, increasingly embraced foreign ideas, from medical knowledge and concepts of hygiene, to approaches to conducting business, providing education, or implementing city planning (Cody 1996).

After Qingdao was returned to the Chinese in 1922, it was precisely these elite who, especially in the 1930s, governed and managed the city, actively pushing for modernization. Under the Beiyang (1922–28) and especially the KMT (1929–37) governments, urban planning efforts in Qingdao very

much aligned with Western scientific standards. City planners, designers, and architects working for the building authorities were predominantly foreign trained. In fact, among the staff working for the building authority under the Japan-trained mayor Shen Honglie between 1931 and 1937, more than 10 had degrees obtained abroad, mostly from the United States (Jin 2015, 91–92). Yet in their quest for modernity, they often relied on notions of “correct” spatial behavior and a planning ideology echoing that of previous colonial administrations, which had been adopted specifically to control the local population. Thus, while it is perhaps a stretch to say that this perpetuated Dabaodao’s ambiguous status, it indubitably affected the local working population, who were now controlled and regulated not by colonialists, but by local, foreign-trained elites.

CHANGING COURTYARDS

With economic development, population growth, and the resulting building activity during the 1920s and 1930s, many *liyuan* houses were demolished and rebuilt, transformed, extended, and replicated, not only within Dabaodao but also in other areas of Qingdao. Their styles changed. Three- and four-story *liyuan* emerged and courtyard areas were radically reduced to increase private living space. A distinctive characteristic of the 1930s courtyard blocks was their rounded corners, reflecting a planning law from 1932 designed to increase road space at intersections. Today, many *liyuan* still have rounded corners, dating them to this period. Numerous *liyuan* were also “westernized,” especially facade ornamentations, a reflection of the architects’ and designers’ aim to implement Western notions of modernity (Jin 2015, 207). Courtyard interiors changed as well—instead of wood, reinforced concrete became a common building material for the upper-level corridors. As more and more wealthy Chinese businesspeople moved to Qingdao, existing courtyards were often entirely demolished and replaced by new ones. These shifts significantly contributed to the diverse appearance of *liyuan* courtyards today.

The historical trajectory of the *liyuan* and the challenge of classifying and ultimately preserving them can perhaps be better understood through the example of a courtyard called *pingkang wuli*, located on Huangdao Road. “It is my favorite courtyard, you should visit it,” a friend advised me as I was planning a preliminary fieldwork trip in early 2011. It is indeed one of the



Fig. 3. *Pingkang wuli* (fieldwork photo, 2012)

best-known courtyards, partially due to its impressive appearance, with its four stories and imposing staircases (Figure 3), but also because it was one of Qingdao's "most flourishing brothels" before the Communist takeover in 1949 (Zang 2018, 26–27). Several elderly residents that I interviewed remembered the sex workers living next door, frequented especially by American soldiers in the period right after World War II, between 1945 and 1949. *Pingkang wuli* attracts regular visitors and has even been used as a backdrop for films.¹⁵ The land parcel was initially purchased in 1912 by Gong Shiyun, who had his building company Gong He Xing construct a two-story *liyuan* house (Jin et al. 2012). Two years later, in 1914, a third story was added. In 1933, a Chinese entrepreneur named Chen Zhenshan bought the parcel, demolished the entire courtyard, and, following the same spatial layout as the previous one, built a new three- and partially four-story courtyard. Today's building thus represents multiple pasts and is illustrative of Dabaodao's multifaceted nature. Many *liyuan* followed a similar development path.

In summary, while the colonists originally created Dabaodao for the purposes of keeping local Chinese as far away as possible and contact at a

minimum, with the rising Chinese migrant population and changes to native policy, Dabaodao soon became a mixed trading district, remaining so during the postcolonial era. In the Republican period that followed, a regulative and scientific approach to urban planning was adopted that in many ways resembled the colonial governing technologies. The *liyuan* houses that emerged in the early German period were transformed and remodeled over the following decades, resulting in a mixture of architectural styles, dating back to various time periods and representing distinct needs, regulations, and architectural visions at different moments in time.

In 1937, Japan once more took control of Qingdao. Mayor Shen Honglie detonated or burned down several important city infrastructures before he surrendered and left Qingdao. In the years that followed, Japan's main goal was the manufacturing of industrial goods for the war against China and their efficient transportation to the Shandong inland (Jin 2015, 268). For many local observers and historians, 1937 marks the end of any regulated or planned building activity in Dabaodao. This would not change after the Communist takeover in 1949. The neighborhood's location in the city center, along with its small-scale businesses, brothels, constantly changing tenants, and complex ownership structures, made it a marginal space in the Maoist years.

DABAODAO AFTER “LIBERATION”

While living in Dabaodao, I was told on several occasions the story of a teacher from the Shandong College of Oceanography¹⁶ who, at the height of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), was forced to leave his home and live on Huangdao Road, on the ground floor of the courtyard where I was renting a room. My neighbor, Brother Dragon, recalled:

He was a tall man, 1.90 meters, I think. He had white hair, looked wise and very kind. He always used a walking cane. I helped him move some of his books. He said that he did not want to keep anything but his books. What I did wasn't legal, but I was a kid at the time—I could get away with it. And my parents didn't know. But many other residents of the courtyard criticized and humiliated him. His wife was also here. But then I was sent down to the countryside in 1976, and when I returned, he had died and she was no longer living here.

The teacher was a well-known calligraphist and intellectual from Shandong named Wang Cang. He passed away in 1977, just after the end of the Cultural Revolution. His name came up multiple times in later stages of my fieldwork, especially in discussions with preservationists who celebrated his calligraphy and writing. Brother Dragon, in contrast, remembered him as someone who was humiliated in the courtyard. When, at one point, I was involved in several exchanges with preservationists in a WeChat group concerning Wang Cang's scholarship, I sent Brother Dragon an article that I had come across. "Yes, that's him!" he replied and then immediately lamented, "But the text is incomplete. They did not say anything about the hardships he experienced during the Cultural Revolution."

This short anecdote is illustrative of different acts of remembering or evocations of distinct pasts associated with Dabaodao and its people: the personalized, individual memory of a resident on the one hand, and the narratives of preservationists on the other. It furthermore highlights the fact that during the Cultural Revolution, Dabaodao served as a degrading place of resettlement for intellectuals and other "counterrevolutionaries"—the inner city being regarded as socially and spatially marginal and undesirable. This was somewhat paradoxical. Indeed, while the desolate inner city was officially condemned as a vestige of the "old society" (*jiu shehui*), areas such as Dabaodao were socially and spatially abandoned. Dabaodao would, in fact, remain a center of poverty and deprivation even under Communist Party (CCP) rule, and, if anything, urban development of the Maoist years only worsened the situation.

At this historical juncture, inner cities like Dabaodao can no longer be analyzed in local terms, but must necessarily be contextualized relative to broader national, centralized policies. To briefly rehearse some key aspects: the Maoist city featured a highly egalitarian distribution system, minimal urbanization in spite of economic development, production instead of consumption, and high social control, including rigid taboos on dress, expression, and communication (Whyte and Parish 1984, 358). The CCP further divided the population into rural and urban through the household registration system (*hukou*), setting clear-cut administrative hierarchies according to which towns and cities were classified. Meanwhile, influenced by the Soviet model (Sit 1996; Bach 2019), urban planning was first and foremost a technical exercise to "materialize" the planned economy (Leaf and Hou 2006, 555). It was geared toward large-scale production-oriented development, while all capitalist and imperialist influences associated with the "old society" were to be erased.

In 1951, for example, Qingdao officially ordered that all brothels be shut down (Zang 2018, 28), and one of the first actions carried out by the Communists in Dabaodao consisted of clearing them out. Several “sex worker stories” circulated among my local interlocutors, in particular elderly residents. One often-heard tale was that of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) arriving in Qingdao and allegedly entering the *pingkang wuli* courtyard, throwing perfume bottles and other sex worker “accessories” from the top floors into the middle of the courtyard, where they smashed to bits and pieces. While I was unable to confirm whether this actually happened, I did hear other, similar accounts. An interlocutor who had grown up in Dabaodao recalled:

I remember in 1950, when the PLA arrived and cleaned out the brothel upstairs. You know on the second floor, it was all prostitutes. I remember very clearly, at 12 o’clock at night, there was a lot of noise, we were afraid, we didn’t know what was going on. The next day we found out that all the prostitutes had been taken away. And they had destroyed a lot.

Though many sex workers were arrested and removed (Zang 2018), there were some who continued living in Dabaodao. I vividly remember, for example, being invited to Brother Dragon’s room for the first time, and our long chat about the courtyard and its residents. “That old lady (*lao taitai*) downstairs,” he said, “she used to be a prostitute.” She would also become the subject of later, longer conversations with Brother Dragon (Chapter 3).

In the early 1950s, Dabaodao’s courtyards and rooms were expropriated from their original landlords (many of whom fled to Taiwan) and collectivized (W. He 2017). They were then either transferred to the municipal Housing Bureau or overseen by small local work-units. In this same period, the city government launched a comprehensive “old housing renovation” scheme as part of an attempt to improve the living conditions of the working population and erase the negative legacies of the Republican era. The scheme mainly targeted Dabaodao, Taixizhen, Taidongzhen, and several “slums” in the industrial outskirts (Zhan 2002), resulting in the replacement of a few rundown courtyards and some minor repairs. Overall, however, the Maoist years were characterized by a lack of formal urban redevelopment. According to the *Qingdao City Gazetteer: Urban Planning and Architecture* (Qingdao 1999a, 285), from the 1960s on, urbanization followed the dictum of “Do more with less money, do more even without money.” During the Cultural Revolution, all formal planning activities came to a standstill.

The sociospatial marginalization of Dabaodao intensified during the

Maoist years. Old courtyard houses, like the *liyuan*, situated in narrow inner-city alleys, were utterly unsuited for production-oriented development and large-scale heavy industries, and suffered from severe underinvestment. Large factory compounds were established in urban outskirts, and *danwei* compounds became sociospatial “microcosms” within Maoist urban (and suburban) China (D. Lu 2006, 48).¹⁷ Old city centers were partially torn down, used for municipal administration offices (e.g., Beijing), or simply abandoned (Shin 2010b, 126–27). Though important industrial and institutional *danwei* were provided with a direct source of central government funding for their various needs, local governments and less influential *danwei* lacked funds for broader urban infrastructure (Bray 2005, 129), further contributing to the socioeconomic marginalization of the residents living and working in the inner city. As the sole provider of welfare, the size and type of *danwei*, their political influence, and backing from government departments determined an area’s and a person’s status (H. Lü and Perry 1997). Dabaodao was fragmented in terms of *danwei* allocation. Different rooms within one and the same courtyard could belong to vastly different local units whose welfare differed significantly. In some cases, residents were not even attached to any *danwei* at all—particularly the unemployed, housewives, and retirees (D. Lu 2006, 50)—and were instead absorbed by urban collectives (*jiti qiye*) (Walder 1986, 43). Often, so-called resident committees (*jumin weiyuanhui*) or street offices (*jiedao banshichu*) took on the role of the *danwei*, acting as extensions of the central state and regulating the population in urban centers (C. Chan 1993, 52–56; Read 2000).¹⁸ Local workshops and neighborhood factories were set up to absorb surplus labor and provide services and benefits similar to those offered by “proper” *danwei*, but were not as comprehensive. As Wang Hui (cited in Kipnis 2008, 75) rightly remarks, “The lessons to be drawn from the Maoist decades are not necessarily those of too much egalitarianism, but rather those of the inequalities they created.” This is an important point, in that the marginal position of the inner city during the Maoist years would continue to shape its evolution in the reform years.

URBAN RENEWAL UNDER “REFORM AND OPENING UP”

The “opening-up reforms” initiated by Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s put an end to the planned economy and marked a return to formal urban planning.

The 1984 City Planning Ordinance established specific standards for urban planners and required all municipal and county governments to develop master plans (A. Yeh and Wu 1999; Q. Zhu 2013; Heilmann and Melton 2013). The first nationwide City Planning Act of 1989 represented a further step toward formalizing urban planning, requiring the drafting of “detailed plans” (*xiangxi guihua*) and “detailed development control plans” (*kongzhixing xiangxi guihua*). These had to be approved by municipal governments and were meant to ensure the implementation of master plans (Abramson 2006). Until then, land that had been allocated by the central government remained in the hands and under the control of powerful *danwei* that could more or less single-handedly decide upon its usage. These new policies gave local planning departments greater control over the urban development of their respective territories (F. Wu 2015, 54). Echoing nationwide efforts to reestablish urban planning, Qingdao issued the Urban Construction Management Measures in 1981, which stipulated that any land allocated to *danwei* belonged solely to the municipal government and that *danwei* were prohibited from transforming, exchanging, transferring, or dividing it. In 1978, Qingdao established an Urban Construction and Planning Management Committee tasked with drafting an urban master plan, which was eventually approved by the State Council in 1984.

This master plan set several redevelopment goals. Between 1979 and 1985, a total of two million square meters of old houses were turned into new residences (Qingdao 2010a, 134). Affected areas were mainly situated in the former “workers’ districts” of Taidong and Xizhen¹⁹ and in the northern industrial areas of Sifang and Licang. The targets for redevelopment were workers’ quarters, old *dazayuan* (courtyards occupied by many families), and so-called tub-shaped apartments (*tongzi lou*), a vestige of the Maoist years (M. Zhang and Rasiah 2014).²⁰ By 1993, a total of 42 areas of slum housing had been redeveloped (Qingdao 2010a). In the early reform years, these projects fell under the umbrella of social welfare, as they aimed to improve the living conditions of residents. One of the targets of the 1984 urban master plan was, for example, to provide a living space of at least 5.2 square meters to each person in the city by 1985, and 8.0 square meters by the turn of the millennium (Qingdao 1999a, 213). Most residents were also permitted to move back (*huiqian*) upon project completion (Qingdao 1999c, 204–5). As the funds available for such renewal projects were limited, interventions in the area around Zhongshan Road, including Dabaodao, were comparatively minor. A few courtyards were demolished and five- or six-story res-

idential blocks built in their place. Some wooden staircases and corridors were replaced by concrete ones, and water tabs and other courtyard facilities were selectively repaired (Qingdao 1999c, 119). The most significant spatial changes were initiated by the residents themselves. New families who moved (or were moved) into the area built extensions to their small rooms, added sheds and huts to the courtyard, and remodeled existing spatial structures to increase individual living space. These building extensions would become a subject of debate and dispute some 30 years later when residents started bargaining with local authorities over compensation (Chapter 4).

In the mid-1980s and through the 1990s, demolition and redevelopment increased significantly, largely the result of several policy changes. In 1986, a nationwide Land Management Law officially established the separation of landownership and land-use rights.²¹ The City Planning Act of 1989 went a step further, specifying that the transferal of land-use rights to nonstate actors, including foreign companies, was now permitted in selected cities (J. Xu, Yeh, and Wu 2009, 891). Qingdao, for instance, was among the second batch of cities to be specifically labeled “open coastal cities” in 1984.²² Urban land became a commodity, leading to a rapid increase in paid transferal of land-use rights nationwide. Qingdao followed suit, opening its real estate market to foreign investors with the Interims Measures for the Land-Use Management of Foreign-Invested Enterprises. In August 1990, the Qingdao government began to actively advertise various land parcels for transferal and development. By the end of 1991, a total of 28 hectares of land had been transferred to developers (Qingdao 1999b, chap. 2). The 1990s thus saw radical change in Qingdao’s urban morphology, both in the center as well as on the outskirts. Following the 1992 “decision to enhance the development of the eastern parts of the city” (*guanyu jiakuai shiqu dongbu kaifa jianshe de jueding*), periurban areas were redeveloped and urbanized, and the seat of the Qingdao city government was relocated to the new city center in the so-called eastern part (*dongbu*) (Map 2). A number of administration departments that had previously been scattered across Qingdao’s old town were moved into a single building, making decision-making processes more efficient (H. Chung 1999, 116). A frenzy of building activity ensued. Many hotels, shopping centers, and landmark architectures appeared mainly in eastern Qingdao: the Crown Plaza Hotel (finished in 1997), the Grand Regency (finished in 1994), the Shangri-La Hotel (finished in 1997), Sunshine Plaza (finished in 1996), and the Mykal Shopping Centre (finished in 1997) (Qingdao 2010a, 273–82).

In terms of urban renewal, a newly drawn up Urban Master Plan (1995–2010) stipulated the need to redevelop “old areas” in order to “upgrade environmental quality, improve infrastructure, optimize land usage structures, and balance population distribution” (Qingdao 2010a, 201). Various patchwork-like redevelopment projects followed. Under the “People’s Project” (*minxin gongcheng*), over six million square meters of new residences were built between 1995 and 1999, the goal being to eliminate all slum housing before the new millennium (C. Liu 2006, 40). In 1998, Taidong was almost entirely demolished and replaced by residential compounds and shopping facilities. In 2002, the area north of Dabaodao (known as Xiaobaodao) was destroyed, and five years later, most of Xizhen’s courtyards, as well as those located in the small harbor (*xiao gang*), were razed to the ground (Qingdao 2010a, 145). With market reforms, urban renewal and inner-city redevelopment became profit driven and matters of real estate expansion. The comprehensive restructuring and downscaling of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in the 1990s turned former “housing distributors” into “housing sellers” and, later, into “housing speculators” (M. Zhang and Rasiah 2014). Renewal projects were now no longer about providing social welfare or improving the lives of local residents, but about maximizing revenue (Shin 2007). This resulted in much human displacement and spatial destruction, or what Shao Qin (2013) has termed “domicide”—the murder of home. In the case of Xiaobaodao, for example, land-use rights were transferred through auction in 2002, 180,000 square meters of residential and commercial land was redeveloped, and many families had to be resettled. Despite the “improvement” discourse that justified such projects, the methods used to evict residents were often brutal and inhumane. Former residents of Xiaobaodao told stories of seeing neighbors beaten by thugs and of one resident who was driven to commit suicide.

Dabaodao was also affected by these fast-paced transformations. A few courtyards were demolished and replaced by office towers, one example being the Dongfang Maoyi Dasha on Jiaozhou Road at the northern end of Dabaodao, which was completed in 1993. Another block of courtyards at the intersection of Zhongshan Road and Dexian Road—which once marked the “hygienic belt” between the European and Chinese areas of Qingdao—was torn down in 1997 and turned into a commercial building. On Zhongshan Road, the landmark building of *guohuo gongsi* (the China Merchandise Corporation), built in the 1930s at the edge of Dabaodao, was demolished and replaced with an eccentric-looking new edifice (Map 3). The most promi-

ment undertaking was the construction of the “Parkson building.” Funded in part by the Malaysian Lion Group, it was the first joint venture construction project approved by the State Council in the whole of Shandong province. Completed in 1996, the 49-story building was one of Qingdao’s first high-rises and continues to dominate the cityscape of the old town (Qingdao 2010a, 277). As was the case during the colonial years, spatial development was, once again, driven by the outside world through foreign capital, this time leading to another kind of segregation within the city, based on class rather than ethnic origin. These shifts reflect the ways that globalized capital (whether colonial or international finance) has persistently created inequitable geographies in Qingdao.

URBANIZATION AND THE LOCAL ENTREPRENEURIAL STATE

“Urban redevelopment in China has not been about achieving pragmatic goals for the common good of the city, but a constant effort to restructure and fundamentally transform everything in search of the most visible, most prestigious, and large-scale development,” a local architect in Qingdao once complained. This is a common criticism. Fierce intracity competition and the evaluation of officials based mainly on GDP growth (J. Gao 2015) has made land development imperative and urban planning a volatile enterprise (Kipnis 2016). In 1994, China recentralized its fiscal system (Oi et al. 2012) and, under the Tax Sharing System, the central government claimed 75 percent of the value-added tax (Wong and Bird 2008, 434). Prior to this new taxation law, the central government had depended on the local state to hand over tax revenues. Now it was the central government that transferred tax revenues back to the local level. Local governments consequently needed to find alternative streams of revenue “to fulfill local institutional aims” (Z. Cheng 2012, 432). Land development became a crucial strategy. Especially in cities that received less tax money, local administrations relied heavily on the restructuring of urban space so as to be able “to pay the bills” (Q. Zhang et al. 2014, 489; G. Lin and Yi 2011).

Key targets of such modernization projects were dilapidated inner-city neighborhoods, given that local governments could more easily access and upgrade them. This was because some urban land continued to be controlled by powerful SOEs as, during the transitional phase from a planned to a market economy, the emergent real estate market coexisted with

administratively allocated land (S. He, Li, and Wu 2006). Also known as the *tiao-kuai* system of land allocation, this simultaneously comprised both a “plan” and a “market” track (S. Ho and Lin 2003, 87). In practice, the central SOEs or *danwei* that were physically located within the jurisdiction of a given municipal government continued to obtain land for free from the central government. They were thus in the advantageous position of being able to turn this freely allocated, often premium land into economic capital by transferring its use rights to commercial developers and then collecting rent. Human geographer You-tien Hsing (Hsing 2010, 37) terms these actors “socialist land masters.”

Monitoring and regulating their activities proved difficult for municipal and local governments. It was often risky and undesirable to take any action against them, as this could potentially harm the relationship with the central state. In Qingdao, for instance, much of the old town’s land is owned by the military. Military units are extensions of the central state and their land is administratively allocated, making it virtually impossible for the local government to intervene. Several buildings in old Qingdao that had even been placed on the municipal list of protected heritage could not be touched by either city officials or the general public. Several of my interlocutors mentioned that even taking photos of these buildings is prohibited. More marginal inner-city neighborhoods were, instead, easier for the local state to access. Powerful SOEs had no use rights and showed little interest, such that municipalities were less wary of any potential disputes with the central government when it came to the restructuring of such areas. Broadly, inner-city redevelopment offered the most convenient strategy for local governments to boost capital inflow, increase employment, and generate tax revenues. It was also thought that the results from redeveloping such neighborhoods would be particularly visible and thus boost the image of the city, contributing positively to officials’ career prospects in a bureaucratic system that privileged the physical growth of cities (Abramson 2017, 215).

There is a general consensus in the literature that economic success in the early reform years manifested and was evaluated vis-à-vis the degree of urbanization and urban space itself. Local administrations deployed market instruments and engaged in market-like entrepreneurial activities (F. Wu 2018, 2) to drive the urbanization process and strengthen their relationship with the central government (Hsing 2010, 54). That said, Meg Rithmire (2015, 11) shows that local state land management strategies did vary in politically important ways. In comparing the northern Chinese cities

of Harbin, Changchun, and Dalian, she finds significant disparity in their economic performance, particularly regarding property ownership, despite these places having had similar starting points at the beginning of the reform years. A similar observation is made by Jae Ho Chung (1999), who compares the economic performance of Dalian and Qingdao and observes that the latter lagged behind for much of the 1980s but then suddenly began to perform well in the 1990s. Whether and to what degree a city managed to urbanize and develop economically largely depended on municipal leadership and its capacity to skillfully negotiate and broker between the different entities of the Chinese administrative hierarchy and “convince” Beijing to grant special privileges (Rithmire 2013).

Being at the subprovincial level,²³ Qingdao falls under the administration of Jinan, the provincial capital of Shandong, though it also enjoys quite a bit of freedom and autonomy with regards to bylaws and the economy. Fiscal revenues, for example, are not transferred to the provincial government, but go directly to the central government. This puts the city mayor in a somewhat delicate position. Preferential policies granted by Beijing might benefit Qingdao’s development and accordingly mayoral success, but could also lead to tensions between Qingdao and the provincial government (Chung 2010). The latter relationship has, indeed, been a difficult one, with Jinan originally opposing Qingdao’s upgrading to the status of subprovincial-level city (Chung 1999). Generally, factional ties and influential and well-connected local leaders have been key to achieving “successful” urban development. A case in point is the city of Dalian, which experienced fast-paced and large-scale development under the strong leadership of Bo Xilai (Hoffman 2011). Qingdao similarly rapidly urbanized and was upgraded to the subprovincial level in the 1990s under Yu Zhengsheng’s guidance as mayor (1989–92) and then party secretary (*shiwei shuji*) (1992–97) of Qingdao.

Zhejiang-born Yu was the first centrally appointed (*jingguan*) party secretary of Qingdao²⁴ as well as the first Qingdao official to simultaneously act as a member of the Central Committee and on the Shandong Provincial Standing Committee. These different roles put him in an advantageous position when it came to managing interests at different levels and channeling them to the benefit of Qingdao’s development. Perhaps most importantly, he came from a prestigious background. His father was the former mayor of Tianjin and first husband of Jiang Qing (later Mao Zedong’s wife). Additionally, Yu married the daughter of a former deputy director of the Armament Department of the General Staff of the PLA and deputy director of the Com-

mission for Science, and Technology and Industry for National Defense (*guofang kexue jishu weiyuanhui*), which secured his good relationships with the military. This contributed decisively to his ability to effectively consolidate and restructure urban development in the naval base Qingdao (Chung 1998, 1999). Yu was able not only to effectively contain the so-called socialist land masters, but also to obtain permission for large-scale projects from the central state and negotiate special arrangements for Qingdao with the Shandong provincial government. His successes transformed Qingdao into one of China's leading economic engines, as well as boosted his own career.²⁵ Indubitably, Yu was one of the most influential and popular mayors of post-Mao Qingdao. When I began my fieldwork, 15 years after his term in office, many people still spoke of him fondly. His ability “to get things done” was praised by different interlocutors, sometimes in direct comparison with today's “corrupt officials” (*tan guan*) who, some said, have no interest in the development of Qingdao as a city, but only in “putting money into their own pockets.” The general public's perception of “good” government and of “good” urban development seems, in fact, to depend on visible change being achieved, a reflection of the reality and expectations raised by two decades of reform and opening up (W. Tang and Parish 2000, 109).

In the 2000s, the pace of Qingdao's urbanization and redevelopment accelerated dramatically. This was in part due to Yu's efforts, but also thanks to later mayor Du Shicheng's strategy of “managing the city,” which included suppressing land supply so as to increase demand, leading to skyrocketing housing prices (Shi 2006). No less important was the 2001 decision to make Beijing the host city of the 2008 Olympics—and Qingdao the city for the sailing competitions—which boosted international investment and urban development. The Olympics, a media report from 2003 predicted, “will help transform Qingdao into a metropolis of international standard” (Anon. 2003). Between 2000 and 2010, investment in real estate grew by 126.4 percent to 60.2 billion yuan (M. Zhang and Rasiah 2013, 596). Most of this development was in the eastern area of the city, where the political and economic center continued to grow around the newly built Olympic Sailing Centre, with a range of businesses, shopping, and residential facilities, most of them upscale, emerging in its vicinity. Qingdao's economy was booming and the city expanding at an immense speed and scale. The city became home to a number of enterprises whose products are well known across China and internationally, including Tsingtao Beer, Haier, Hisense, and Aucma.

In contrast, the area around Zhongshan Road steadily degenerated, and Dabaodao became an area of slum housing awaiting demolition and rebuilding. While in 1995, the average daily number of visitors to Zhongshan Road was 100,000, this number dropped to 30,000 by 2006. Similarly, in 1995, the annual sales volume was five billion yuan, compared to just two billion in 2006 (J. Zhuang 2021). No longer the political and economic center, the old town was once more pushed to the margins, reminiscent of the Maoist years when large-scale industrial factory compounds in the urban outskirts were prioritized over the inner city. This situation would, however, change as China increasingly began to pay attention to the “quality” of urbanization, and preservation became an important political mandate, the focus of the next chapter.

2

Redevelopment

From Demolition to Preservation to Stagnation

In the spring of 2013, I met with Mr. Lu, the head of the Zhongshan Road European-Style Scenic Neighborhood Redevelopment Command Office (*zhongshanlu oulu fengqing qu gaizao zhihuibu*), a special government agency set up in April 2012 to plan, oversee, and coordinate parts of a recently announced refurbishment project (Qingdao government 2012). The sterile-looking office on the 39th floor of the Parkson building towered over the red roofs of old Qingdao. Mr. Lu began by enumerating the multiple yet failed attempts made to redevelop Qingdao's old town center, including Dabaodao: "The first time was in the 1990s, but they gave up. The second time was around 2004, though they demolished old buildings and built new ones. This is the third time, and we want to do it better. We want to actually preserve a memory of our city."

I had by then become accustomed to hearing the redevelopment of the Zhongshan Road area described as a series of failures. Indeed, studies, articles, and conversations on this topic routinely began by first enumerating the various unsuccessful attempts, followed by suggestions as to how it might be done better (cf. Mu 2018, 25). Between 2001 and 2020, at least twenty different redevelopment plans and proposals were drafted by a variety of design institutes, university departments, and government bodies. Most ended up being scrapped before the implementation phase, or led to patchwork refurbishment, the eviction of some residents, or in some cases, partial demolition of individual buildings. During this same period, an important change occurred: Dabaodao went from being branded an area of

slum housing in need of redevelopment and upgrading, to a historical area with its own individuated heritage narrative. Likewise, from places where local people live and work, the *liyuan* became historical “traditional style” architecture with an artistic value. Qingdao’s most recent preliminary Territorial Master Plan (2021–2035) reflects this transformation.¹ Section 5.5 of the lustrous publication is dedicated to “displaying the city’s charm and preserving historical heritage and urban scenery.” A glossy map introduces Qingdao’s various “historical cultural districts” and a selection of photographs illustrate different types of heritage. These include the former residence of the governor of Qingdao as an example of colonial architecture (notably without using the term “colonial”); a rural village-scape from Mount Lao; a revolutionary heritage site; the Badaguan area;² and a bird’s eye view of *liyuan* courtyards with a caption reading “*liyuan*: traditional style buildings” (Qingdao Bureau of Natural Resources and Planning 2021). Yet what exactly led to this shift in the official representation of Dabaodao and *liyuan* houses?

The previous chapter described the formation of Dabaodao over the course of a century of political movements and reforms. Here, I focus on the neighborhood’s (planning) trajectory over the past two decades and the changing political-economic logic that has informed inner-city redevelopment. This includes the appropriation of old urban neighborhoods for tourism and commercialization in the 2000s—what I call “Xintiandization”—and an emphasis on the preservation of urban heritage as part of a broader discourse on “good” urban planning. Against this backdrop, I discuss the numerous, yet largely failed, attempts to redevelop and refurbish Zhongshan Road and Dabaodao since 2002.

The second part of the chapter then focuses on the reasons why Qingdao’s redevelopment attempts have been mostly unsuccessful. Here, I consider a number of institutional factors, such as changes in municipal leadership; functional, territorial, and discursive fragmentation in the planning and implementation of refurbishment projects; and a lack of financial resources. The reluctance of private developers to invest in these projects is also examined, along with several examples of attempts on the part of the city government to create consumer spaces whose (economic) benefits remained rather unclear. These various dynamics have created what I call a “preservation predicament,” where local officials are expected to implement preservation, but are simultaneously unsure how to go about doing so. I argue that there exists a correlation between the official preservation mandate and a situation of stagnating redevelopment.

FROM XINTIANDIZATION TO PRESERVATION FOR A “BETTER”
URBAN FUTURE

Though laws and regulations for heritage preservation have existed in China since the 1920s³ and remained on the political agenda during the early Maoist years (Y. Zhu and Maags 2020, chap. 2), much urban heritage has been destroyed. The Cultural Revolution in particular, with its mandate of “destroying the old and creating the new” (*pojiulixin*), led to the tearing down of countless historical sites. The early reform years were arguably even more destructive. As a local Qingdao architect contended, “They always say that the Cultural Revolution destroyed our city, but some of the extremely valuable architecture, like the Yamen, was actually demolished in the 1980s.” Some scholars maintain that old neighborhoods and monuments in Chinese cities would have disappeared long before had China embraced market principles earlier (Abramson 2001, 8).

An important shift in attitudes and practice occurred in 2002 with the amendment of the Law for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, together with former president Jiang Zemin’s famous speech at the 16th National Congress, in which he called for “the protection of major cultural heritage and outstanding folk arts” (People’s Daily Online 2002). Numerous applications for the inscription of Chinese sites on the World Heritage List were subsequently submitted to UNESCO, and an official Cultural Heritage Day was established in 2006 (Doar 2005).⁴ A few years into his term, former president Hu Jintao stressed how “China embarks on the road of peaceful development because of Chinese historical and traditional culture” (cited in Ai 2012, 130). As Marina Svensson (2006, 7) points out, the president’s statement reflects an interesting combination of “the revolutionary patriotic preservation narrative of old . . . with a cultural-based patriotic narrative that celebrates China’s long history and ethnic unity.” This dual narrative has become further embedded in recent years, manifesting in the promotion of “red tourism” on the one hand, and neo-Confucianism together with President Xi Jinping’s rhetoric about the need to preserve the “outstanding culture” of Chinese civilization on the other (Kubat 2018).

With specific regard to urban heritage and old inner cities, the famous architect and architectural historian Liang Sicheng was among the first to insist on the need to maintain long-standing urban structures (Y. Zhu 2017). During the Cultural Revolution he was, however, persecuted for his ideas. It wasn’t until after this period that an increasing emphasis began to be placed

on the preservation of individual monuments and historical architecture in cities, which gradually extended to entire historical districts (*lishi jiequ*) and was accompanied by the formulation of concrete regulations for the preservation of old urban structures (Q. Zhu 2007; G. Zhu 2012). In 1982, the national list of famous historical cultural cities was inaugurated. This was followed in 1994 by the Regulations on Plan-Making for Famous Historic Cultural Cities, which called for the integration of historic preservation into urban planning. The 2008 amendment of China's 1989 Urban Planning Act (article 31) further established that "in the reconstruction of an old urban area, attention shall be paid to preservation of the historical and cultural heritage and traditional style and features" (China.org.cn 2011).

This growing focus on preservation had several effects. As Chinese cities transformed from sites of production during the Maoist years into sites for and of consumption during the reform years, place promotion and urban branding became important. Municipal officials were increasingly concerned with "bringing the panoramas of their cities and also their pavements up to what they believed to be world aesthetic standards" (Solinger 2013, 16). Anthropologist Ulf Hannerz (1996, 128–32) observes that major world cities rely not only on transnational business and a professional elite (Sassen 2001), but also on entertainment and advanced tourism, and accordingly generate a particular "form of life." While certainly not a major world city, along with other urban centers in China, Qingdao experienced rapid urbanization, fierce intracity competition, and the rise of domestic tourism, accompanied by a need to construct a distinct identity—whether this be based on a unique narrative, an exclusive morphology, distinctive spatial attributes, or specific urban aesthetics (Broudehoux 2004; Ong 2011). In his book on the transformation of New Delhi into a world-class city, Asher Ghertner (2015, 24) describes this as the creation of "mental images" of the city. City branding as a political strategy in China has been discussed extensively with regards to economic development (Cartier and Tomba 2012), urban spatial engineering (Broudehoux 2004; Hoffman 2010), rural-urban hybrids (Kendall 2015, 2019), and urban renewal, tourism, and heritage (Oakes 1993; L. Zhang 2006; Law and Qin 2018; Y. Zhu and Maags 2020, chap. 4). Here I am mainly concerned with the latter, though indubitably the use of heritage for city branding is intertwined with other goals related to economic development and spatial engineering (Y. Zhang 2013).

Heritage preservation as a strategy of place promotion in China has been tightly interlinked with the rise of the local entrepreneurial state (Chapter

1). Engaging in preservation is thus also to engage in place-making and in “attract[ing] the eye of the investor, along with his/her capital” (Solinger 2013, 16). This approach has produced what I call the Xintiandization of Chinese inner cities. The “Xintiandi model” emerged in the late 1990s, as some cities began experimenting with different forms of urban renewal. It was applied most famously in Shanghai and consisted of appropriating Shanghai’s *linong* houses and turning them into a high-end consumer space, known as a “Xintiandi” (Wai 2006). Completed between 2000 and 2001, this was the first inner-city neighborhood in China that was not simply subject to demolition and subsequent replacement, but was changed based on an idea of “preservation-oriented development.” Preservation in this context meant the careful molding of old city spaces into assets of economic capital in the form of sites for consumption. Certain *linong* were torn down and rebuilt, but, different from before, the reconstruction maintained the style of the “old” (Shenjing He 2007a). The mayor of Shanghai, as shown by Ren Xuefei, stated that “building new is development, preserving old is also development.” This form of “preservation” had become “another instrument, a more sophisticated one than demolition, employed by the local growth coalition to achieve urban growth” (Ren 2008, 31). The focus on preservation thus embodied a continuation of pro-growth development, a specific form of urban development reconcilable with the idea of growth and modernization. Qingdao’s 2006 urban master plan similarly underlined “preservation” as a keyword for the city’s future development, and was used when referring to goals such as the creation of “special business streets” (*tese shangye jie*), boosting the “cultural industry” (*wenhua chanye*), or establishing “tourist districts” (*lüyou qu*) (Qingdao Bureau of Natural Resources and Planning 2009).

Some have thus argued that, in the early 2000s, preservation was mostly symbolic (Y. Zhang 2008). But Shanghai has generally been considered a successful case of inner-city redevelopment in China, proving that maintaining the “old” has enormous economic potential and that redeveloped and repackaged inner cities can become consumer sites that generate monetary revenue, making them interesting to urban developers and investors. Countless “aspiring cities” have subsequently tried to emulate this model. The website of Shui On Land, a prominent Hong Kong-based urban developer that designed and has been operating Xintiandi, bears testimony to this (Shui On Land 2020). Following Shanghai’s success, the company has been contracted by cities around China to design Xintiandi

developments, among them a Chongqing *Tiandi*, a Dalian *Tiandi*, a Wuhan *Tiandi*, a Foshan Lingnan *Tiandi*, and a Xihu *Tiandi* in Hangzhou (Iossifova 2014). Other cities have similarly tried to capitalize on their “old” architecture as a way to boost tourism, consumption, and their profile; the Qingdao projects targeting Dabaodao form part of this trend (see below). The past 20 years have seen an immense upsurge in “scenic streets” and “historic neighborhoods” across China that all look rather alike, usually a mix of restaurants, bars, souvenir shops, time-honored brands (*laozihao*), and global chain stores located in old-looking yet often newly built structures. Prominent examples include Chengdu’s Kuanzhai Xiangzi (Matuszak 2015), and Beijing’s Nanluoguxiang (Shin 2010b) and Dashilar neighborhood (Evans 2014, 2020). In trying to emulate other examples (most notably Xintiandi) to market their very own “look,” many cities have paradoxically ended up homogenizing their distinctive urban spaces, with the end result of their becoming indistinguishable from one another.⁵ Xintiandization is arguably a form of what French anthropologist Marc Augé (1995) calls “nonplaces” or what Stephan Feuchtwang (2004) refers to as a process of “deterritorialization.”

Xintiandization may resemble gentrification (Glass 1964; N. Smith 1996; Zukin 2010), a process that, in the context of Euro-American cities, has been closely associated with the movement of the middle classes into existing lower-income neighborhoods, from which disfranchised working classes are then expelled and where housing is subsequently rehabilitated and upgraded (Ley 1996). It has also been used to describe collaborations between governments and private actors that seek to turn old urban districts into assets of (economic and cultural) capital under neoliberalism (Herzfeld 2009). However, scholars have rightly argued that using the notion of gentrification to analyze inner-city redevelopment in China may obscure more than it illuminates (Smart and Smart 2017). First, wealthy people do not necessarily move into “preservation” areas for a given lifestyle or atmosphere. Instead, as Ren Xuefei (2008, 31) notes, they are “largely driven by expectations for financial return from appreciation of properties.” Second, the local entrepreneurial state itself has initiated, shaped, and directed urban redevelopment (Shenjing He 2007b, 172–73); the Chinese state owns land, controls planning, creates economic incentives, and engineers middle-class tastes; in a nutshell: it occupies “the positions of both gentrifiers and capital” (Tomba 2017, 509). Third, much of what is analytically singled out as “gentrification” in the context of Euro-American cities is, in fact, what characterizes the

entire urbanization process in post-Mao China—poor residents are evicted, old structures are transformed or demolished, and infrastructures upgraded to cater to those who have capital. As Luigi Tomba (2017, 515) so aptly ascertains, in China, “Urbanizing is gentrifying.” As a mere surrogate for urbanization, however, gentrification is not very useful in capturing the specificities of inner-city redevelopment in China. A final important point is that the Chinese term for gentrification (*shenshihua*) is not commonly used to refer to urban renewal programs within China. In Qingdao, my local interlocutors would instead speak either more generally of “urban redevelopment” (*chengshi gaizao*) or more specifically of the “Xintiandi model.” Sometimes the latter was used by preservationists to condemn government projects; other times it was used by officials to provide an example or reference point for their projects. Xintiandization is therefore a notion that captures *emic* understandings of urban renewal, while also serving as an analytical tool to grasp the particular political-economic logic that drives inner-city redevelopment projects in China.

The idea of preservation has, however, gradually come to serve other purposes as well, less associated with growth and business than with controlling and improving urbanization (Y. Zhang 2013). The fast-paced development of cities in the late 1990s and early 2000s was accompanied by environmental degradation, severe pollution, large-scale demolition and relocation, urban sprawl, massive rural–urban migration, and critical population density in certain city districts. Public infrastructure was stretched to its limits, property bubbles drove housing prices up, and sociospatial inequalities widened. These dynamics have been described as “urban sickness” (*chengshi bing*) and “blind urbanization” (*mangmu chengshihua*) (Chien and Woodworth 2018, 10) and have led to a shift in perspective, away from solely “quantitative” and more toward “qualitative” forms of urban development (Hoffman 2010). In 2007, for example, China introduced the “scientific assessment criteria for livable cities” (*yiju chengshi kexue pingjia biaoqun*), a set of indicators that determine a city’s degree of livability, particularly stressing the need for the harmonious coexistence of economic, social, cultural, and environmental development (B. Li 2013).⁶ Since the 1980s, a range of city models have been proposed—the “National Civilized City” (1980), the “National Hygienic City” (1990), the “National Garden City” (1992), and the “Healthy City” (1994). While these all stressed the “soft” and qualitative aspects of urban development, it wasn’t until the change in leadership from Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping (in 2012) that efforts to build “quality” cities actually gained

momentum (Cartier 2013). In 2014, China issued a National New-Type Urbanization Plan (2014–20) that emphasized “people-centered” urban development and stipulated that “areas of modernization should develop in step with each other . . . should be optimized . . . ecologically friendly and carry forward cultural traditions” (China.org.cn 2014). In 2015, the Qingdao Urban Planning Bureau disseminated Xi’s stance on heritage protection on its website: “If we do not preserve, we are criminals, we bring shame to our descendants.” Xi would later refine his urbanization outlook by introducing the idea of “subtle redevelopment” (*wei gaizao*). A new set of regulations issued by the State Council in 2021 underlines this shift. They formulate the goal of having a “comprehensive rural urban historic cultural protection and transmission system in place” by 2035 that follows the maxim “not daring to destroy, not being able to destroy, and not wanting to destroy” (State Council 2021).

During fieldwork, many times I heard a connection made between heritage preservation and “good” urban development. For example, when Mr. Lu, the head of the Redevelopment Command Office, enumerated all the unsuccessful attempts to renovate the Zhongshan Road area, he determinedly said, “This time, we want to actually preserve a memory of our city,” adding specifically, “The party secretary wants to set an example of good urban development in China.” Likewise, when the party secretary addressed urban planners at China’s annual national urban planning conference, held in Qingdao in 2013, he emphasized that

the Urban Master Plan 2011–2020 that Qingdao is currently implementing stipulates the need to establish a global and modern livable and happy city (*yiju xingfu de xiandaihua guoji chengshi*). . . . This involves the preservation of our cultural heritage, the simultaneous development of our European and local Shandong culture.

This master plan called for the execution of a strategy that would create “a ‘cultural city’ and a ‘city of science and education’ . . . accelerating the process of developing culture, hygiene and sports, improving social security and the quality of people’s living and working conditions, and creating a livable coastal city” (Qingdao Urban Planning Bureau 2016). An urban planning exhibition hall (the likes of which are found in almost every large city in China) attuned visitors to the necessity of establishing “livable” and “happy” cities, directly relating this to the need to preserve heritage under

the slogan “cultural city, vibrant city, livable city” (*wenhua zhi cheng, huoli zhi cheng, yiju zhi cheng*).

A glance at Qingdao’s laws and regulations on urban historical preservation (Table 1) reflects the growing emphasis on preservation and the increase in their number and scope over time. Each new plan or regulation is more detailed and comprehensive than its predecessors, covering a greater amount and broader variety of monuments, sites, and districts to be protected. A review of the different proposed (and partially implemented) redevelopment projects for the Zhongshan Road and Dabaodao area provides an interesting window onto these shifting ideas and their manifestation on the ground.

FROM “NANJING ROAD OF QINGDAO” TO “EUROPEAN-STYLE SCENIC NEIGHBORHOOD”

The first efforts to renovate and upgrade the Zhongshan Road area date back several decades, when Mayor Yu Zhengsheng formulated an intention to renovate the old town and beach areas for the purposes of boosting local tourism industries (Chung 1999, 116). The idea was to turn Zhongshan Road into the “Nanjing Road of Qingdao.”⁷ Indeed, even as early as the 1990s, Shanghai served as a point of reference. Over 100 trees (French paulownia trees) were removed to create a pedestrian zone. The project failed, partly because Zhongshan Road was (and still is) an important road channeling traffic from the north (Shibei district) to the coastline and no alternative route was offered when attempting to pedestrianize the street. A number of ginkgo trees were eventually planted in their stead in 2009.⁸

Following the change in location of the city government seat, the Zhongshan Road area went into decline. As a means of addressing this issue, the Qingdao administration began a partnership with the Canadian International Centre for Sustainable Cities, signing the Zhongshan Road Preservation and Renewal Project Agreement in 2000. Canadian experts visited Qingdao, carried out research, and agreed to a Memorandum of Understanding on the Planning and Maintenance of Qingdao’s Traditional Features with the Urban Planning Bureau (Qingdao 2001a). A year later, upon completion of the budgeting, the Zhongshan Real Estate Development Company was established to implement the Zhongshan Road Revitalization Plan. This was, however, eventually rejected by the municipal government. As a former journalist explained, “There were people in the government who did

Table 1: Laws and regulations on urban historical preservation in Qingdao

| Year | Law/regulation | Outcome |
|------|---|---|
| 1984 | Urban Master Plan | Emphasizes the importance of preserving scenic areas and developing tourism. |
| 1990 | Provisional Measures for the Management and Protection of Urban Heritage | Designates the former European part of the town as the Urban Scenic Protection Area (<i>chengshi fengmao baohuqu</i>). A number of specific sites are labeled “preservation points” (<i>baohu dian</i>). |
| 1994 | Qingdao is among the third batch of cities included on the national list of “famous cultural and historical cities” (<i>guojia lishi wenhua mingcheng</i>). | Requires Qingdao to follow nationwide Regulations on Plan-Making for Famous Historical Cultural Cities. |
| 1995 | Urban Master Plan | Dedicates an entire section to historical district preservation, formulating a comprehensive framework for the urban preservation of “one historic city, nine cultural districts, and 88 items of cultural heritage.” |
| 2000 | First municipal list of monuments and buildings to be protected by the state | Includes 131 “outstanding buildings” and 40 former residences of important figures. |
| 2002 | Establishment of a Historical and Cultural City Protection Committee and a Protection Plan for Qingdao’s Famous Historic Cultural City | Covers 132 heritage elements and 10 historical districts. |
| 2011 | Revised version of the Protection Plan for Qingdao’s Famous Historic Cultural City | Delineates the borders around a 28 km ² historical city area, including 13 cultural districts, 180 officially listed heritage sites, 210 historical buildings, and 1,535 traditional-style constructions. |
| 2012 | Measures for the Protection and Management of Historical Architecture | Defines “historical architecture” and sets standards for the preservation of such buildings. |
| 2014 | Regulations on the Protection of Urban Scenery | |
| 2019 | Conservation Plan for Qingdao’s Historic Districts | Sets forth guidelines for the preservation of historical districts and scenic areas. |
| 2020 | Technical Guidelines for the Protection and Planning of Historic Buildings in Qingdao | Provides a framework for identifying “historical architecture” and determines standards for specific preservation work. |
| 2021 | Revised version of the Protection Plan for Qingdao’s Famous Historic Cultural City | Identifies 15 historical and cultural sites, 549 officially listed heritage sites, 309 historical buildings, and 1,694 traditional-style buildings. |

not like the idea of this cooperation, because Canada and Qingdao had no connection. If it had been a cooperation with Germany, they would have agreed.” This idea of Qingdao having an intimate connection with Germany came up a number of times during fieldwork (Chapter 6). But it is noteworthy that a joint venture with Malaysia—a country that has equally little connection with Qingdao—for the building of the Parkson building in the middle of the old town center was considered unproblematic.

Two years later, in 2003, as Qingdao was rapidly modernizing and revamping its cityscape in preparation for the 2008 Olympics, another inner-city redevelopment proposal was put forward, this time drafted by Tsinghua University. A media report stated that the government would, “in accordance with the current conditions of the architecture on Zhongshan Road, implement a large-scale renewal project, while also maintaining its traditional scenery” (M. Zhang 2003). The plan was to divide the Zhongshan Road area into six functional sectors: a seaside zone, a tourism and restaurant zone, a Catholic church zone, a cultural service zone, a special commercial zone, and a shopping zone. While ideas of “reviving a century-old street” and “maintaining the historical commercial atmosphere” of Zhongshan Road were integral parts of the redevelopment discourse (S. Jiang 2002), the key priority was transforming the area for the purposes of economic gain. Rhetoric and reality thus considerably diverged. As one blogger commented, for the Zhongshan Real Estate Company in charge of designing and funding the project, “Demolishing and reconstructing was probably the trump card to obtain sufficient funds” (Z. Zhang 2003). Indeed, soon after the announcement of the new project, quite a few old buildings were taken down—including the Qingdao Antiquity Bookstore, the Qingdao Hotel, and the Red Star Cinema—so as to build the Catholic church zone (Anon. 2004).⁹ In 2004, the China Department Store, located at edge of Dabaodao at the intersection between Zhongshan Road and Feicheng Road, met a similar fate. In its place appeared the Yuexikelai Shopping Centre, completed in 2007 and engulfing the Catholic church (see Map 3 in Chapter 1). It was as Mr. Lu had stated: “They demolished old buildings and built new ones.” In 2005, Qingdao’s *Evening Post* published a sarcastic article reading, “Zhongshan Road has 100 years of history. This used to once be our city center and a paradise for national and international tourists. But today, we find no bookshop, no cinema, no flagship stores, not even a little teahouse or a snack shop where one can take a rest; it is hard to find a parking spot or even a public toilet” (Y. Zhang 2005).

In 2005, several cases of corruption emerged involving the Zhongshan Road Real Estate Company. The local government subsequently reclaimed authority over redevelopment matters and the original project was revised. The Hong Kong Polytechnic University drafted the Preliminary Master Plan for the Redevelopment of Zhongshan Road in Qingdao, and a Beijing-based design company drew up the Qingdao Zhongshan Road Commercial Street Environmental Design, which was eventually transformed into an updated version of the Zhongshan Road Commercial and Tourism Redevelopment Master Plan. Similar to previous planning efforts, a partitioning of the Zhongshan Road area into different functional sectors was envisioned, as well as turning it into a pedestrian zone, although once again without offering a solution for the traffic problem. This time, Dabaodao featured more prominently, namely as a so-called thematic commercial area (*zhuti shangye qu*). A closer look at the plan reveals, however, that the vast majority of *liyuan* courtyards were not designated as “historical architecture,” and some were even marked as “illegal structures” (J. Yang 2009, 60). During this period, a number of German architects and historians visited Qingdao and displayed an interest in refurbishing Dabaodao and the Zhongshan Road area. They approached the government about a potential cooperation. Their proposals were, however, either rejected or given up when the visitors realized that “there was no institutional infrastructure to carry out genuine preservation projects,” as one mentioned years later.

With the 2008 Olympics drawing nearer, some parts of the proposed project were actually carried out. Between 2006 and 2007, for instance, several buildings on Zhongshan Road were restored and “beautified” (Qingdao 2007). The largest intervention consisted of the redevelopment of Pichaiyuan, a group of connecting courtyard houses located to the west of Zhongshan Road, extending some 15,000 square meters (Map 3). Though not originally in the “Chinese town” under colonial rule, this area became part of the Dabaodao “trading district” and was an important place of business and entertainment in the 1930s and 1940s, well known for its local food and cultural performances. *Pichai* means firewood and its name—“firewood courtyard”—likely derives from its former function as a venue selling wood, which residents would use to heat their rooms. The Pichaiyuan redevelopment project was initiated in 2006 and implemented by the Qingdao Gensea Business Management Company. The idea was, on the one hand, to revive the economy and breathe life into the old center of Qingdao, but also, on the other, to preserve a place of cultural and

historical importance. “Improve people’s lives, preserve historical scenery, revive an old commercial district” was the slogan of the project (Qingdaojiyi0532 2020). In an interview with the Qingdao News Network, an assistant in the Shinan district Redevelopment Command Office stated, “We have repeatedly emphasized that we are not engaging in ‘redevelopment’ (*gaizao*), but in ‘restoration’ (*xiufu*). This is because as soon as you say ‘redevelopment,’ people will think of ‘demolition.’ What we are doing in Pichaiyuan is ‘restoration’” (Qingdao News 2007).

This, however, merely referred to its architecture and broad spatial layout. Pichaiyuan’s existing shops and locally run businesses were closed down, and the remaining residents were evicted and unable to later return. In an echo of its previous life as a place of entertainment and consumption, Pichaiyuan was transformed into a consumer and tourist site offering “local culture,” consisting of food stalls, small restaurants, a “folk custom theme hotel” (*minsu zhuti jiudian*), and a stage for “cultural” performances. On April 10, 2009, Pichaiyuan was officially declared “preserved” and reopened to the public. For many years, it was the only group of *liyuan* houses around the Zhongshan Road area that was mentioned in guidebooks about Qingdao and that managed to attract tourists, particularly during the summer months. With this project, not only the rhetoric of redevelopment had begun to change, but also the practice. The idea of maintaining old structures instead of knocking them down was now more than a mere euphemism for displacement and demolition. That said, the “how” of this endeavor would be much debated among preservationists in Qingdao (Chapter 6).

After the 2008 Olympics, the remaining plans for the ambitious above-described Zhongshan Road redevelopment project were scrapped. Only three years later, under the auspices of the newly appointed party secretary, Li Qun, a revamped inner-city redevelopment project proposal was made public, titled “European-Style Scenic Neighborhood” (*oulu fenqing qu*). This, together with the 2011 Preservation Plan of the Historical and Cultural City—which significantly expanded the scope of areas and buildings to be preserved—reflected a more radical change in political priorities when it came to urban renewal. For the first time, Dabaodao was designated a distinct preservation zone, under the name “Sifang Road Historical and Cultural District.” However, the area was referenced in only broad terms, where the focus was to be on the development of small-scale boutiques and special businesses and on the increase of leisure and entertainment, creative and cultural industries, and tourism services. Only a few “well-preserved” *liyuan*

courtyards were to be fully restored. The plan also indicated that the courtyard interiors could “be partially or fully remodeled,” though the facades were to be preserved. “Detailed development control plans” for both the Zhongshan Road and the Sifang Road Historical and Cultural Districts were prepared and approved by the government, which stressed the importance of maintaining *liyuan* as a special type of architectural building in Qingdao. That said, with the pretext of heritage preservation and infrastructural improvement, officials first and foremost envisioned turning Dabaodao into a “cultural recreational area” comprising a “24-hour entertainment district,” a “creative arts district,” and an “area for local folk customs” (Qingdao Urban Planning and Design Research Institute 2011).

Shanghai’s economically successful Xintiandi clearly served as a template in the development of this preservation plan. Indeed, the latter included all the “ingredients” of a Xintiandized neighborhood: small boutiques, youth hostels, coffee shops, and bars. These were claimed to be “suitable ways” to use the *liyuan* once they were preserved. One local official directly invoked a comparison to Shanghai, saying, “We need to create something like Xintiandi.” A staff member in the Qingdao Urban Planning Bureau, who had been involved in putting together the detailed redevelopment plan, meanwhile told me, “Qingdao has been consulting with Shanghai on how to properly carry out preservation work; we want to do it like they did.” This sentiment was similarly disseminated by the media. In 2012, a local newspaper declared that “the Zhongshan Road area will be turned into Qingdao’s own ‘Xintiandi’” (A. Wang 2012).

I once asked this same staff member from where the photos presented in the plan had come. “We just downloaded them from the internet. It’s just a way to show what the refurbished neighborhood could look like,” he replied. Downloading an “inner-city redevelopment template” and simply modifying the content to fit one’s specific case aptly reflects Xintiandization and its resultant homogenization of inner-city environments. Whenever I interviewed individual urban developers or city officials and asked how they themselves would like to refurbish Dabaodao, structural constraints aside, their answers were commonly along the lines of, “Well, we need some coffee shops, youth hostels, bars, small boutiques, that sort of stuff.” Cafés and bars had worked in Beijing’s Nanluoguxiang, in Shanghai’s Xintiandi, and in other inner cities, so they must also do the trick in Qingdao. It was no coincidence that in 2013, the officials and planners in charge of the redevelopment project invited Shui On Land, the company

that had designed Xintiandi, to take charge of the design and implementation of the European-Style Scenic Neighborhood project. The company subsequently produced the so-called Qingdao Bay Old Town Revitalization Vision Plan, meant to turn the old center into a vigorous and high-class city neighborhood community and, in doing so, encourage Qingdao residents to move back into the old town. Like its predecessors, however, this plan was never realized, and Shui On Land eventually withdrew from the project. In 2014, the European-Style Scenic Neighborhood project was entirely discarded. Only two courtyards had at this point been expropriated, and no refurbishment work had yet begun in Dabaodao.

A year of inactivity followed. Then, in 2015, a new Detailed Control Development Plan for the Protection and Renewal of the Qingdao Bay Old Town was drafted. Notably, Dabaodao was, for the first time, granted a “heritage identity” of its own, being designated the “*Liyuan* Local Cultural Zone.” The plan labeled the vast majority of *liyuan* houses as “traditional-style buildings,” along with a few “historical buildings” and two “officially protected buildings.”¹⁰ A year later, 72 *liyuan* courtyards were included in a formally publicized preliminary municipal list of historical buildings to be preserved as part of a wider historical and cultural district. Despite the fact that—contrary to buildings officially determined to be cultural heritage (*wenwu*)—there were no unified mandatory standards for the preservation of “historical buildings” and “traditional-style buildings,” this marked an important change. During a brief visit to Qingdao in the summer of 2017, a slogan caught my attention: “Dabaodao: the rise of the Chinese town.” This was written on the sign of the newly opened Dabaodao museum, the first of its kind, located on the ground floor of a courtyard right off Zhongshan Road. The museum was the result of a joint initiative between the Shinan district Political Consultative Conference (*zhengxie*)¹¹ and the Zhongshan Road neighborhood office (*jiedao banshichu*) and exhibited a selection of old photographs, maps, information on important Chinese businessmen who had lived in Dabaodao, and some general historical background. The museum was not particularly extensive or informative and was closed two years later. Regardless, its existence and this slogan compellingly articulated that Dabaodao was no longer just “old,” but a “historical” inner-city neighborhood. Its original identity as a “Chinese town” under colonial rule had been fully reestablished as part of its contemporary public and official identity.

In the draft plan of 2015, Qingdao’s party secretary, Li Qun, is quoted as saying that “all buildings should be preserved. This principle must be

adhered to at all costs. And if there is no alternative but to demolish some buildings, then any original tiles, doors, window frames, and sculptures of significance must be preserved.” The nationwide shift in urbanization strategy and particularly the growing preservation mandate appeared in local policy discourse and practice. In 2016, shortly before Chinese New Year, rumors spread that the government would soon “get serious,” as a local journalist put it at the time. Indeed, the administration started evicting residents, especially at the northern end of Dabaodao, and many courtyards were sealed off with signs reading “zheng” (expropriated). It would still, however, be another few years before any refurbishment actually started.

In early 2020, I received a video from a former neighbor, showing piles of debris and a huge gap in the Dabaodao streetscape after a courtyard not far from his home had been demolished overnight. “They just knocked it down! They just knocked it down! Oh my god! Oh my god!” he exclaimed as he was recording the video. I could hear the disbelief in his voice. After many years of waiting, redevelopment had finally begun. Around the same time, I received several messages from another interlocutor with photos showing construction workers in orange vests wearing blue facial masks, assiduously paving roads and painting facades. China had just emerged from over a month of complete lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Somewhat ironically, after years of stagnation, the inner-city redevelopment project had finally become a reality, at a time when much of public and official life in China was at a standstill. This nonetheless also accurately reflected the unpredictability that has accompanied the entire urban redevelopment process.

CHANGING LEADERSHIP

What were some of the institutional factors that contributed to the repeated failure to implement redevelopment projects? The answer partly lies in the relatively high turnover of mayors and party secretaries in Qingdao. Between 1978 and 1996, for example, the city was served by seven different party secretaries and mayors, compared to just five party secretaries and three mayors in Dalian (Chung 1999, 114). I was sometimes told that “Qingdao is ungovernable.” A preservationist reiterated an often-heard rumor: “There was talk about Hu Jintao’s son becoming our party secretary, but he didn’t dare to. He knew that being party secretary in Qingdao, you can only lose.” Regardless of

whether or not these stories are true, a new municipal leader meant the introduction of new agendas and urban development priorities. For instance, in the early 2000s, mayor and party secretary Du Shicheng put forth the idea of the “managerial city” (*jingying chengshi*), which included heavy privatization of numerous activities related to construction and urban infrastructure, leading to a substantial rise in property prices. Du was eventually removed from office and received a life sentence in prison for corruption.¹² Zhang Xinqi’s appointment as mayor in 2012 was instead accompanied by the roll-out of an extensive tree-planting project meant to turn the seaside city into a garden city (Demgenski 2012). When Li Qun became party secretary, one of his first official acts was to “inspect” (*kaocha*) the old town center. Refurbishing and revitalizing old Qingdao subsequently became one of key goals in his project to turn Qingdao into a “happy and livable city” (H. Yang 2010). To add to these different efforts and goals (and as reflected in the previously described example of Yu Zhengsheng), the personal connections of these individual leaders mattered significantly in terms of the degree to which the city developed (or didn’t) in a given period.

Key changes to Qingdao’s inner-city redevelopment efforts since 2000 largely correspond to shifts in municipal leadership (Table 2). While there is not an unequivocal direct causal relationship between the two, party secretaries and mayors do, importantly, have the last word. There was, for example, much speculation as to why the partnership between the Canadian institute and the Qingdao government never materialized. “Too costly,” some guessed (Z. Zhang 2003). Yet, as a former journalist mentioned, the project was rejected “by someone at the very top.” He continued to explain: “I once attended a dinner with the vice mayor of Qingdao in the early 2000s. He told me that he was really in favor of the project and even signed off on the agreement, but the ‘higher-ups’ (*shangmian de ren*) did not like the idea. So it was rejected.” New municipal leaders do not necessarily immediately refuse a project or suggest a new direction for a redevelopment scheme. Yet when a change in leadership occurs, lower-level officials do anticipate an adjustment and await instructions, postponing the implementation of already existent projects. The same local journalist said, “When a new leader comes into office, officials and civil servants throughout the bureaucracy will wait for orders and not proactively proceed with the tasks set by the previous leader, which often results in a standstill.” This happened, for instance, in 2021, when party secretary Wang Qingxian was transferred to a different position in another city. Before his departure, he had initiated

Table 2: Qingdao's mayors and party secretaries since 2000

| Year | Party secretary | Mayor | Major redevelopment project |
|------|-----------------|-------------|---|
| 2001 | Du Shicheng | Du Shicheng | Cooperation with Canadian institute |
| 2002 | | | |
| 2003 | | Xia Geng | Zhongshan Road Commercial and Tourism Redevelopment Master Plan |
| 2004 | Yan Qijun | | |
| 2005 | | | |
| 2006 | | | Pichaiyuan redevelopment |
| 2007 | | | |
| 2008 | Li Qun | | |
| 2009 | | | |
| 2010 | | | |
| 2011 | | | New Detailed Control Development Plan for Zhongshan Road area |
| 2012 | | Zhang Xinqi | “European-Style Scenic Neighborhood” project |
| 2013 | | | |
| 2014 | | | |
| 2015 | | | |
| 2016 | | | |
| 2017 | Zhang Jiangting | Meng Fanli | Qingdao Bay Redevelopment Project |
| 2018 | | | |
| 2019 | Wang Qingxian | | |
| 2020 | | | |
| 2021 | Lu Zhiyuan | | |

another attempt to turn Zhongshan Road into a pedestrian zone. After he left office, however, “There was simply no more talk about this within government departments,” said my interlocutor. He continued, “It is not that they (officials) did not intend to continue the project, but they just did not know if this is what the new leader wanted.” In late 2021, I spoke at length with Mr. Gao, a local official in the Shinan Historic District Preservation and Development Bureau (*shinan lishi jiequ baohu fazhan ju*) who had just recently been placed in charge of implementing parts of the Dabaodao redevelopment project. When I asked about the prospects of pedestrianizing Zhongshan Road, he bluntly replied, “Since we have a new party secretary, no one mentions this anymore (*bu ti le*).”

FRAGMENTED BUREAUCRACY

Another important institutional factor underlying the repeated stagnation and difficulty initiating redevelopment projects relates to the highly fragmented bureaucracy and jungle of departments and offices managing inner-city redevelopment projects. This has been further complicated by the fact that Dabaodao falls under the jurisdiction of two different city districts, Shinan and Shibe, the dividing line being Sifang Road (Figure 4). Both districts have their own redevelopment command offices. In 2020, for instance, Shinan set up the Historic District Preservation and Development Bureau, where Mr. Gao worked. Shibe district, meanwhile, had its own Shibe Management Committee of the Historical and Cultural Memory Demonstration Area (*shibe qu lishi wenhua jiyi shifan pianqu guanli weiyuanhui*). These offices have largely worked independently of one another, often pursuing very different goals and adopting diverging approaches to renewal. While they eventually came to share the same office space, a preservationist and key interlocutor commented, “They still do not work together.”

Shibe, for example, had already implemented a few so-called preservation-oriented development projects in Qingdao, including the “Beer Street” and “German-style street” (see below). When it came to Dabaodao, “They are eager to just copy the same model,” said an architect who had been involved in discussions about refurbishment in the mid-2000s. Meanwhile, a preservationist remarked, “Shibe tends to always want to demolish everything; Shinan is slightly more careful.” Of the two, Shibe has indeed been quicker to take action. In 2015, it began expropriating residents and sealing off courtyards, though only in the part of Dabaodao under its administration. The Shinan side, in contrast, remained untouched for a number of years. There were several reasons for this inconsistency. Urban renewal in China is organized and budgeted in territorial terms, according to city districts. Compared to Shinan, there were more patches of so-called “areas of slum housing” in Shibe, mostly former factories and worker housing in the northern areas of Qingdao. Importantly, in 2013, the Shibe district was merged with the former Sifang district, which was home to vast areas of industrial buildings and former *danwei* quarters. As a result, Mr. Gao explained to me, a greater budget became available and Shibe was able to “secure special loans for the purposes of urban renewal projects.” This ter-

ritorial fragmentation was a significant impediment to redevelopment and produced much uncertainty. A private real estate company, which would later take on a project to refurbish a group of *liyuan* houses to the west of Zhongshan Road, was approached by the Shinan district government for the revamping of the Huangdao Road area (part of Shinan). “We thought about it for a while,” a staff member told me, “but then decided that it would be far too risky to get involved in a project that might touch on the conflicts between the Shinan and Shibeidistricts.” For local residents who had been notified that they were to be evicted, this territorial division was also the cause of many problems. A local resident, for example, owned and was living in a courtyard on the Shibeidistrict side. His *hukou*, on the other hand, was registered on the Shinan side. When expropriation began, he did not know whether and from whom he was going to obtain information on compensation. Every time the local officials from the Shibeidistrict government came over, they would tell him that the Shinan district government would be responsible for his case. When consulting the Shinan street office, on the other hand, they told him to find the local Shibeidistrict government.

The dispersion of responsibility across various government bureaus has further hindered project implementation. Numerous state and nonstate actors have, in one way or another, been involved in the attempted redevelopment of Dabaodao, including the Urban Planning Bureau, the Housing Bureau, the Bureau of Culture and Tourism, district government offices, redevelopment command offices,¹³ and a plethora of private and semiprivate actors, such as consultancy firms, architecture and design companies, and university departments. The opening of the real estate market and the commercialization of urban development brought with it an immense upsurge in private actors engaging in planning. Consultancy firms offered their services to local governments, and private real estate firms initiated, planned, and built residential compounds, refurbished parts of old towns, and designed and constructed shopping centers (F. Wu 2015, 195). This resulted in “planning disjunctures” (Kipnis 2016, 59), or the highly fragmented implementation of urban plans. For instance, while official projects in Qingdao stagnated, some private individuals started to invest. In 2015, a local businessman involved in various projects in Qingdao and allegedly with good connections with the local government converted several *liyuan* courtyards into hostels and a “Western-style” restaurant. He spent three million yuan compensating residents and managed to convince those who refused to be bought out to rent the space to him. A few similar efforts on



Fig. 4. Street sign indicating the administrative boundary between Shinan and Shibe districts (fieldwork photo, 2014)

the part of other individuals followed. Over the years, several coffee shops, youth hostels, and a few boutiques have been opened (and sometimes closed again) within Dabaodao.

“Functional fragmentation,” where responsibility for urban redevelopment is dispersed across a range of government bureaus, is by no means unique to Qingdao. As observed by political scientist Zhang Yue (2013), this is a common phenomenon in other Chinese cities and beyond. It begins at the plan-making stage and persists all the way to the concrete implementation and management of refurbished urban districts. The regional plan (at the national or provincial level) sets the standards for urban master plans (at the municipal or district level), which then determine the detailed control development plans (at the district or urban zone level) (Curien 2014). While the drafting of regional plans (or regulatory plans at the municipal level) is the responsibility of the ministry (or bureaus) of housing and urban-rural development, urban master plans and detailed projects are drawn up by the Urban Planning Bureau (F. Wu 2015). Public institutions and semiprivate entities, such as the Urban Design Institute, assist the Urban Planning

Bureau (Leaf and Hou 2006). It is also not uncommon for private design and architecture firms or university departments to be entrusted with drawing up specific heritage preservation plans (F. Chen 2016) or regulations for a particular section of the city or even a single building. This leads to a rather chaotic situation at the implementation level, when these different plans (and ideas) need to be reconciled.

Plans and guidelines must always go through the city government and only stand a chance of succeeding if they are endorsed by the relevant leaders. “We only give suggestions,” a staff member within Qingdao’s Urban Planning Bureau explained. “We don’t have any ultimate say.” “What the big bosses say, goes” (*da lingdao shuo de suan*), similarly said a worker in the Urban Design Institute, adding, “We draw up plans and can decide on some minor details, but we really don’t have much say.” As plans are formulated, they undergo several feasibility assessments before they are forwarded to the leaders for approval. I attended one such meeting for the Technical Guidelines for the Preservation and Planning of Historic Buildings in Qingdao drafted by Professor Wu, an established professor in architecture and planning at one of Qingdao’s universities. He had asked me to participate and provide comments on the guidelines as one of four experts. After a meticulous presentation by Professor Wu and his colleagues, I, along with the others, provided feedback. However, rather than further discuss the actual content of the guidelines, the remainder of the meeting then largely consisted of debating the wording of individual sentences, the aim being to make them as appealing as possible to the leader whose approval was needed. Over 10 years of fieldwork, I met many different individuals from design companies or architecture firms who cooperated with the Urban Planning Bureau. They were all highly professional and well trained in their respective fields (mostly architecture or urban planning). They entertained a strong belief in the merits of planning as technocratic interventions and regularly turned to what they considered successful examples of urban renewal in Europe, claiming that certain models could simply be copied and implemented in Qingdao. However, while aware of potential shortcomings of given projects or plans, their work necessarily consisted of balancing a need to meet their own professional code of conduct with the equally important task of satisfying the government’s (leader’s) desires (see also N. R. Smith 2022). Indeed, the “client” when it comes to urban planning in China is not the public, but the state, leading many Chinese planners to argue that, should they wish to have more power and influence, they must necessarily become better lobbyists and salespeople (F. Wu 2015, 195–96). The

same holds true for lower-level officials. Mr. Gao, for instance, stated in a conversation in late 2021 that “regardless of what we decide here, we need to find a way to sell it to the leader.”

To add to this, a finalized plan does not guarantee implementation, as responsibility for its execution is similarly dispersed across a range of bureaucratic entities, mainly at the district level. The Housing Bureau grants land-use and construction permits and oversees expropriation and compensation schemes. Management of monuments, heritage sites, and historical architecture meanwhile rests with the Bureau of Culture and Tourism, though the latter has no say in the implementation of redevelopment plans targeting entire historical districts. The vice head of this bureau told me that his office made suggestions as to which monuments to include on the municipal list of protected buildings and oversaw the care and preservation of already designated items, but was not involved in the implementation of plans targeting historic districts. Rather, this is mainly carried out by district governments, their subordinate companies, or private developers who have been given the legal right to redevelop a particular area (K. Zhang 2013). Such disjointed redevelopment helps to explain why, in the mid-2000s, many buildings on Zhongshan Road were demolished despite the area being designated a “historical district.” Indeed, in the absence of legally binding standards for preservation, this denomination became a flexible concept, defined by whoever happened to be implementing a redevelopment plan and according to particularistic parameters of concrete refurbishment projects. The Technical Guidelines for the Protection and Planning of Historic Buildings in Qingdao are officially used in all refurbishment endeavors across Qingdao. In practice, however, each design company or architectural firm adopts its own interpretation. “It is good to have these guidelines,” Professor Wu told me over dinner in the summer of 2021, “but not everyone follows them and we have no way to enforce them.”

The diversification of the planning enterprise, the increasingly greater number of involved actors, and a simultaneous lack of coordination have made refurbishment challenging for administrators. Local official Mr. Gao lamented:

When I came into this position, I prepared myself. I read a lot of examples of how this kind of refurbishment is done. I had some ideas. But then I quickly realized how fragmented everything is. There is no system in place. I am responsible for culture, then there is a group for industry,

and another one for planning and design. We all do our own work separately and then we try to combine it later. That's not working.

Such functional fragmentation has been acknowledged as a key barrier to successful redevelopment across China. Anthropologist Julie Chu (2014, 355–56), for example, observes that China's attempt to formalize urban redevelopment essentially consisted of jumbling responsibility. With regard to her own field site (Fuzhou), she writes that although different government units “were supposed to work both as a team and as regulatory checks against one another, in practice they often appeared to operate as uncoordinated parts of an increasingly intricate and muddled program of action, each simultaneously broadening and diffusing the field for assigning agency and blame.”

In Qingdao, institutional and administrative fragmentation have also been accompanied by “discursive” fragmentation, or an ambiguous narrative and identity concerning Dabaodao. On the one hand, as during much of the early reform years, Dabaodao and its *liyuan* have continued to be considered an “area of slum housing,” and renewal projects—called *penghuqu gaizao*, or “slum housing redevelopment”—have been framed accordingly. On the other hand, as the area has increasingly been regarded as historically valuable, the *liyuan* have come to be seen as uniquely local architecture. Though these two perspectives are not necessarily contradictory, they do highlight a certain ambiguity in terms of the purposes of the various interventions, a dynamic consistently reflected in the headings of newspaper articles reporting on the redevelopment of Zhongshan Road and Dabaodao over time:

- September 6, 2002: “The Zhongshan Road Redevelopment Plan Is Made Public: Qingdao's Century-Old Streets Will Soon Regain Their Former Glory” (S. Jiang 2002, *Qilu Evening Post*).
- December 3, 2002: “The Zhongshan Road Redevelopment Project Is Launched: The Charm of Our Century-Old Streets Will Be Revived” (Anon. 2002, *Qingdao Daily*).
- February 10, 2003: “Qingdao Prepares for a Large-Scale Redevelopment of Zhongshan Road: The Project Is Introduced to the General Public” (M. Zhang 2003, ChinaNews.com).
- February 5, 2004: “The Qingdao Hotel and Red Star Cinema Will Soon Disappear: Zhongshan Road Awaits New Glory” (Anon. 2004, Sina).
- December 29, 2006: “The Zhongshan Road Redevelopment Has Started: 49 Old Buildings Will Be Restored” (Anon. 2006, *Qingdao Morning Post*).

- November 21, 2008: “The Sifang Road and Huangdao Road Redevelopment Project Enters Its Planning Phase” (Anon. 2008, *Qingdao Morning Post*).
- November 16, 2010: “Zhongshan Road’s Century-Old Shops Will Be Refurbished: Repair the Old Like the Old and Create a New ‘World’” (X. Guo 2010, *Bandao City Post*).
- December 14, 2011: “The ‘Redevelopment’ of Sifang Road Old Street Takes Off” (Anon. 2011, *Qingdao Morning Post*).
- October 19, 2012: “Assessment Work for the Demolition as Part of the Zhongshan Road European-Style Neighborhood Will Begin within This Year” (Z. Guo 2012, *Qingdao Evening Post*).
- December 13, 2012: “The Zhongshan Road Redevelopment Will Start This Saturday” (Aike Wang 2012, *Bandao City Post*).
- June 5, 2013: “The Zhongshan Road Redevelopment Will Take the Lead: Century-Old Houses Are Awaiting Demolition” (T. Wang, 2013, *Qingdao News*).
- July 16, 2013: “The Zhongshan Road European-Style Neighborhood Project Has Been Launched: Four Century-Old Streets Will Be Redeveloped” (Y. Zhang 2013, *Qingdao Evening Post*).
- September 25, 2015: “The Century-Old Huangdao Road Market Will Say Goodbye: Only Official Shops Will Remain” (Y. Hao 2015, *Bandao City Post*).
- November 21, 2016: “The Qingdao Zhongshan Road Sifang Road Protected Area Has Been Designated: It Covers a Total Area of 95 Hectares” (W. Cui 2016, *Qingdao Daily*).
- April 30, 2017: “Experience Zhongshan Road: Much Stunning Architecture, Restoring Qingdao’s Original Environment” (Yun 2017, *Qingdao Morning Post*).
- May 17, 2018: “Let the Name ‘Dabaodao’ Ring Again: Creating a Street of Beautiful Local Customs” (X. Liu 2018, *Bandao City Post*).

The headlines report the city government’s numerous attempts to redevelop Dabaodao. Sometimes they were very precise, as with the December 2012 heading declaring that “the Zhongshan Road redevelopment will start this Saturday,” only to be followed, half a year later, with the declaration that “the Zhongshan Road European-Style Neighborhood project has been launched.” Broadly, these headlines communicated two messages: one calling for the need to preserve *liyuan* as historical architecture, and another emphasizing the need to redevelop and upgrade the area. This ambiguity

is a reflection of both the institutional organization of urban renewal and the shifting redevelopment agenda. Funds have continued to be allocated under the umbrella of “slum housing redevelopment” even if they are used for projects officially framed in terms of preservation, a state of affairs epitomized in the expropriation notices that appeared in Dabaodao in 2021: “Shinan district Zhongshan Road historic and cultural district Huangdao Road slum housing expropriation project.”

CREATING SCENIC NEIGHBORHOODS, BUT FOR WHOM?

A lack of financial resources and the absence of business and investment are further factors that have contributed to sluggish and stagnant development. To use the words of Professor Wu from 2013, “The government has no money. They cannot do it alone, so they have to get urban developers (*kaifa shang*) involved.” Mr. Lu of the Zhongshan Road Redevelopment Command Office similarly explained, “The city government cannot finance the whole project itself. It needs private investors.” He then added, “To persuade them, we are currently trying to give them land in other parts of Qingdao at a heavily subsidized rate, if they in turn agree to take charge of and invest in the inner city.” In a different conversation, Professor Wu clarified that “by giving them other areas to develop, we hope that they will be inclined to do a better job with the refurbishment of the old town,” in other words, that they would invest without expecting an immediate return. Such attempts have not, however, been successful. Though heritage preservation has become more central in official discourse and policy, and many private development firms have been eager to enhance their company’s profile and show themselves to be “culturally sensitive,” they have not been willing to do so at any cost. For instance, around the time of the European-Style Scenic Neighborhood project in 2013, an employee at a local developing firm pointed out that “the government wants to create luxury consumer spaces, but for whom?” He went on to say, “Sure, we are also interested in preservation work, but why would I invest in a project where I cannot be guaranteed any financial return within the next 10 years, if I can instead invest in countless other projects that will definitely double my invested sum within a year?”

Notably, a key problem underlying the European-Style Scenic Neighborhood project was that it was designed and envisioned by means of comparison, and not on its own terms. Officials sought to create “Qingdao’s own

Xintiandi.” Yet the geographical layout of the city, with its political and economic center on the east side and the old town on the west side (Chapter 1), made this difficult. Whereas in Shanghai, the Xintiandi is located relatively close to other crucial urban areas and within easy reach for a variety of consumers, the potential patrons of the European-Style Scenic Neighborhood and its imagined “leisure spaces” predominantly lived in the eastern part of Qingdao. Relying only on tourists during the summer months was insufficient. A restaurant owner in Pichaiyuan, for instance, was only able to make a profit during the summer, festivals, and over public holidays. “Between November and March, this place is empty,” he said. In trying to create a Xintiandized consumer place, the local government had neglected the fact that the consumers themselves were missing. This resulted in a scattered and piecemeal implementation of the plan. In 2011, a museum was opened within Pichaiyuan, although it remained closed for the entirety of my fieldwork. Moreover, the cost and effort necessary to realize the Pichaiyuan redevelopment project was grossly underestimated. Payment due to over 30 consultancy and construction firms was withheld, resulting in their eventual abandonment of the project. An architect who used to run a small urban planning firm in Qingdao and had been involved in the project told me that the government had decided to make the best of a bad job by renting out the existing space at little or no rent to larger companies or individuals willing to open eateries or hotels.

Qingdao’s “German-style street” (*deguo fengqing jie*) offers a similar example. This flagship project of the Shibeidistrict government opened to the public in 2009. Situated just north of Dabaodao, the street greets visitors with a prominent arch displaying the words “Straße im Deutschen Stil” (German-Style Street) in large letters. Upon walking under it, numerous references to German “culture” can be seen. Antique-looking street signs are meant to give the area an old ambience. Small booths sell German products, and “authentic German beer” is advertised everywhere. Yet during a preliminary field trip in 2011, I found most of the shops empty or even shut, and the street was largely deserted. In a travel agency called the German Street Travel Agent, the two young ladies behind the counter looked at me bewilderedly when I asked what made this street special. One of them stammered that if I wanted to see Qingdao, I’d be better off going to visit some of the scenic spots along the coastline or in the faraway new town. Preferential policies and subsidies such as very little or no rent have sought to compensate for the (temporary) lack of customers and to breathe life into this otherwise “dead” place.

Whether such attempts to Xintiandize old urban areas are desirable, whether they betray or even destroy a historical area or transform history into an industry is debatable. Regardless, such interventions have usually been implemented for economic gain. Certainly, the local administration actively promoted Xintiandization as a means of growth and profit. Yet these efforts largely failed with Pichaiyuan, the “German-style street,” and also Dabaodao. Despite attempts to create consumer spaces and push commercialization, no wealthy people moved in, no high-end restaurants or bars opened up, and no prominent urban developers invested. Around 2016, when the government started to remove residents but no refurbishment project had yet been initiated, a preservationist sarcastically remarked, “They have managed to destroy the local culture, they don’t preserve the architecture, and they don’t even make money. Only Qingdao is capable of this.” Generally, attempted refurbishment of inner-city Qingdao not only has failed to preserve historic architecture, but has also been economically unproductive.

Why, one might ask, did the city government nonetheless continue to try so hard to “preserve” (however defined) Dabaodao and Zhongshan Road, despite the many obstacles and seeming unsuccess? There would have been other ways to make Qingdao’s old town attractive and economically viable. For example, given that this area is home to a school administration district (*xuequ*), quite a number of local people who owned a small room or apartment in the old town were eager to keep it or even move back so that their children would be entitled to go to school there. Building residential compounds, as had been done in the Xizhen and Taidong districts, might have been more feasible than trying so hard to “preserve” the area. This was not, however, an option. There was little leeway for local officials to choose between preservation and other forms of redevelopment. The national preservation mandate required them to put into practice some form of preservation, even if this was not financially practical. A local architect criticized this, saying “China always oscillates between extremes. In the past, everything had to be demolished. Nowadays, everything has to be preserved, regardless of whether it’s worth it or not.” This what I call the “preservation predicament” manifested in several ways.

First, for nearly two decades, national policy had encouraged local governments to gear planning toward profit and growth. The “Xintiandi model” offered a strategy to combine preservation with capital accumulation and economic development. An approach that had purportedly “worked” else-

where, this model informed the design of renewal plans in Qingdao. Even when the central mandate began to shift toward more qualitative urban development and incremental change, the need for projects to be cost-effective in a market economy remained. This put local officials in a difficult situation. “Our leader wants to hear historical or cultural stories,” Mr. Gao of the Shinan Preservation and Development Bureau told me in 2021. “We are busy preparing one story about *liyuan* to report to the leader each day. And he wants to build museums. But what exactly they will contain, how we are going to do it, I don’t know.” During this same conversation, Mr. Gao also recounted that this same leader wanted to see business as well. The leaders, he commented, “want these refurbishment projects to be a commercial success. They want to do business and then ask us to provide some cultural or historical stories to go along with the business. But shouldn’t it be the other way around? We should have the stories first and then choose the businesses accordingly.”

Second, during much of the reform period, local officials were driven by a sense of urgency, a highly capricious and uncertain political environment, and the resultant need to quickly deliver growth (Chien and Woodworth 2018, 7–8). This has not fundamentally changed—the political environment remains unpredictable. Yet along with the political mandate for more quality-oriented urban redevelopment came a shift in expectations and, ultimately, in the modes of assessing of local officials. China’s 13th Five-Year Plan (2016–20) introduced a new set of priorities for the evaluation of administrators based on “softer” performance indicators, such as environmental quality control and management or green lifestyle promotion (Chien and Woodworth 2018, 12).¹⁴ Investigating whether and how such policies and regulations have permeated the bureaucratic structure and the ways they translate into actions on the ground represents a significant challenge. Despite having contacts within some of Qingdao’s government agencies and access to personnel working on the inner-city redevelopment projects, it was not possible to carry out in-depth participant observation among officials and thus “study the state ethnographically” (Pieke 2009, 13). While I therefore do not have a detailed understanding of how officials negotiate deals or implement (circumvent) political mandates, several interlocutors from “within the system” (*tizhi nei de*) did recount how the ability to “preserve” as a marker of “good” urban development increasingly came to affect local officials. Particularly by the start of the European-Style Scenic Neighborhood project, preservation had become an important criterion for local officials and even a means of

boosting their political careers. A local businessman who was on good terms with the leader of the Shinan district (in 2013) vividly described the latter's eagerness to push through refurbishment of the area around Qingdao's Catholic church, commenting, "He hopes to thus be able to move up in the government." On another occasion, a civil servant at the municipal city archives mentioned over dinner how delicate and important the matter of preserving the Zhongshan Road area had become. "The local officials know that they have to emphasize preservation (*zhongshi baohu*). It is good for their careers, and they are afraid of public outrage (*naoshi*) if they don't. But they don't know how to do it. So, they don't say or do anything." Such "doing nothing," or shirking responsibility, was ever present. Toward the end of 2013, I attended an evening get-together organized by Professor Wu, during which redevelopment plans and possible solutions were debated. Yet the discussions only deepened a sense of deadlock. Afterward, Professor Wu offered to drive me home. Once we had closed the car doors, he turned to me, lowered his voice, and said, "You know, if this [the project] still doesn't happen next year, I will pull out before it's too late." Then he became quiet. Though I tried to probe further, asking what exactly he meant, he merely shook his head. His reluctance to elaborate arguably reflected a concern that a failure to implement the preservation project would negatively affect him and the political careers of the officials involved.

Broadly, the preservation mandate combined with the inability to adequately implement it created a situation of great contingency in which those in charge decided to evade responsibility or delegated agency to other people within the bureaucracy. Officials or other staff members would often tell me that they had no information on redevelopment projects. In these instances, "the government" or those in the position to make decisions were always characterized as being faraway. Whenever I asked who I should turn to for more information, I was referred to "the people above" (*shangmian de ren*) or even "the government," as if these people themselves were not part of this same "government." Even Mr. Lu of the Redevelopment Command Office portrayed himself as merely someone who had to implement what the party secretary wished, but who had no or only very limited agency himself. During fieldwork, I often felt that whenever I had finally managed to interact with someone from within "the government," that very "government" seemed to disappear right before my eyes.

These experiences are illustrative of China's larger political and institutional practices and the workings of the administrative bureaucracy,

including the so-called one-level-down system (Landry 2008). Specifically, officials are always appointed by and accountable to the official one level above them in the administrative hierarchy. This accordingly means that when trying to find a person in charge, one needs to move, or in my case be sent, “one level up.” This system, which “rewards promotions on the basis of adoption of central dictates and local triumphs” (Wallace 2014, 10), has worked relatively well.¹⁵ A center-local equilibrium can be maintained as long as officials at different levels benefit from political agendas. This was the case during much of the 1990s and 2000s, when economic development and GDP growth were the most important performance indicators for officials at all levels of the bureaucratic structure. However, in the case of Qingdao’s stagnant inner-city redevelopment projects, “central dictates” exist but have not been coupled with the same “local triumphs.” In Qingdao, no official wanted to take responsibility and thus simply referred to “the people above.” This tactic is eventually circular. Continuing to “go up,” one ultimately reaches the city mayor or party secretary, who once again places responsibility with the officials in charge of any given renewal project. These are people like Mr. Lu or Mr. Gao, who would work-to-rule and, in the event of a futile situation, would try to “escape” before responsibility could fall on them. This “absent presence” of the government is an integral part of political practice in China and thus, both a symptom of and key constraint in the implementation of preservation projects in Qingdao. We thus begin to get a sense of the structural nature of the problem. The “absent presence” of the government also significantly impacted local residents and their negotiations over compensation and resettlement conditions, an issue I return to in the following chapters.

This chapter has highlighted some of the institutional factors for the failure to refurbish Dabaodao. As elsewhere in China (Y. Zhang 2013), fragmentation has been one major cause. However, the case of Dabaodao also shows that it was often the avoidance of responsibility on the part of different government actors that resulted in the existent fragmentation to become a real hindrance to redevelopment. Moreover, it has been the preservation mandate itself that has considerably contributed to the stagnant redevelopment of Dabaodao. While these structural influences certainly shaped the agency of local officials, there were other elements of equal import contributing to the situation. Indeed, institutional factors cannot be seen in isolation, but must necessarily be contextualized in terms of the various social actors and activities in Dabaodao—a subject I turn to next.

3

Local Residents

Living in the Center at the Margins of the City

I have lived here for 60 years. I would not want to live in one of those new high-rises, too impersonal, too cold. I want to stay here. This is my home. (Woman in her late sixties, resident of Dabaodao, 2013)

I am here because they will demolish the area soon. I am waiting for compensation. But I have been waiting for 20 years. Who knows, I might wait myself to death here (*deng si le*). (Man in his early sixties, resident of Dabaodao, 2015)

This place is a rubbish dump. (Man in his late fifties, resident of Dabaodao, 2012)

I will never go back to the area. I even deliberately take a diversion so as to avoid coming close to it. (Woman in her mid-thirties, former resident of Dabaodao, 2017)

A thorough analysis of the social fabric of Dabaodao—including residents' relationship with their immediate living environment, as well as their attitudes toward and expectations of the local government in the context of urban renewal—allows for a better understanding of the challenges that arise in implementing inner-city redevelopment projects.

In the literature on housing expropriation in China, a number of scholars explore “utilitarian” features of redevelopment. They view residents' actions vis-à-vis local governments as primarily informed by their perceived needs and rights—here the need for improved housing or the (moral) right to just compensation. Cheuk-yuet Ho (2015), for example, discusses how the notions of needs, rights, desire, and interest are contested by evictees and evictors in the context of bargaining over compensation in the city of Chongqing. Whereas demolition companies insist on certified, state-

endorsed rights in their compensation offers, evictees “are often inclined to conflate the notion of needs with that of rights” (Ho 2015, 53). Evictees, especially those who resist to the very end, argue that satisfying their basic (housing) needs is also their basic right. Generally, in such studies, emphasis is placed on the political economic significance of the physical environment and the places that residents call home. In contrast, other scholars look at residents’ sense of identity and attachment relative to their homes and neighborhood. Often, inhabitants’ reasons for wishing to stay in an affected neighborhood or resisting the local government relate to their perception of expropriation and demolition as “an intrusion on their sense of place, belonging, and ultimately self” (Scheen 2020, 6). The physical environment is analyzed as a culturally meaningful place in which “love, emotional bonds, family values, routines, rituals, and memories” are embedded (Shao 2013, 3), and threatened by renewal projects.

I focus here on this emotional dimension while in the next chapter, I turn to utilitarian aspects. Though, certainly, these are deeply intertwined. Neither alone can entirely explain or capture the meanings the inner city holds for its residents or their actions in the context of redevelopment. Inhabitants’ experiences can neither be reduced to solely a sense of belonging or place attachment, nor to just the utilitarian relationship with their physical surroundings. In what follows, I endeavor to paint a nuanced picture of the complex experiences and ambivalent, sometimes even contradictory, emotions, attitudes, and behaviors of Dabaodao residents.

In Qingdao’s transition from a colonial city to a bustling seaside metropolis, Dabaodao has been spatially and socially neglected. When I began fieldwork in 2012, Dabaodao was not only “old” in terms of its architecture, but also in its composition of residents, who are a product of and in many ways epitomize China’s political and economic reforms and their shortcomings. Whether the 90-year-old man inhabiting a ground-floor, windowless room of eight square meters; the nearly deaf elderly woman living right above the courtyard toilet, whose fumes seep into her room day and night; the cheerful retiree who shares a small room with his sick wife and must walk 10 minutes to get to the nearest public toilet; the toothless lady who has fallen victim to rural urbanization and having lost her land, sells newspapers on the street at minus 10 or plus 35 degrees Celsius—all these residents embody life in Dabaodao. They live in close proximity to and share their private lives with one another in the confined spaces of variously sized and shaped courtyards. The neighborhood is home to the urban underclass (Y. P. Wang 2004,

chap. 8; Solinger 2019b; Evans 2020), or as my neighbor Brother Dragon said right after I had moved into a *liyuan* room: “You are very brave to live among the lowest sector of society (*zui diceng de shehui qunti*).” It would, however, be wrong to tar all residents with the same brush. As the epigraphs of the chapter hint, residents were not united in how they perceived and experienced life in the inner city.

A further distinction should also be made between “local” residents (*bendiren*), often referred to as “old residents” (*lao zhuhu*), many of whom had grown up in the area, and rural migrants (*waidiren*), euphemistically called “new city people” (*xin shimin*), who had moved into the area in search of work opportunities. While here I mainly discuss the lives of local residents, Chapter 5 looks specifically at the experiences of migrant workers. Both chapters reflect on urban precarity, a notion that encompasses not only economic deprivation, but “various kinds of uncertainties, vulnerabilities, ruptures, and privations” (Campbell and Laheij 2021, 284). Local residents and migrants have equally experienced a general state of “suspension” (*xuanfu*), which literally translates into “hanging and floating.” Xiang Biao (2021, 234) deploys it as a metaphor for a state in which people move around and work tirelessly “in order to benefit from the present as much as possible, and escape from it as quickly as they can.”

Both this and the next chapter also examine the built urban environment as a locus of everyday activity and the spatial practices associated therewith. I borrow this notion from Henri Lefebvre’s seminal work *The Production of Space* (1991), in which he conceptualizes space as a totality, consisting of “spatial practices” (perceived space), “representational space” (conceived space), and “spaces of representation” (lived space). “Spatial practices” refer to daily routine in a city, to “the specific spatial competence and performance of every society member” (Lefebvre 1991, 38). Yet spatial practices cannot be analyzed in isolation. After all, “People do not simply ‘experience’ the world; they are taught—indeed disciplined—to signify their experiences in distinctive ways” (Myers 2002, 103). As Marxist human geographer Allen Pred (1990, 9) notes, people do not produce places “under circumstances of their own choosing but in the context of already existing, directly encountered social and spatial structures, in the context of already existing social and spatial relations that both enable and constrain the purposeful conduct of life.” In other words, there is a particular political economy that matters in understanding residents’ experiences of and engagements with the inner

city. This includes redevelopment efforts (and their failures) as well as discursive construction of the inner city as “messy” and “unlivable.” Moreover, residents engaged with Dabaodao in a very specific sociopolitical context and as particular urban subjects of contemporary China.

The discussion that follows centers on the lives of local residents before the large-scale eviction that drove most of them out. I describe how they ended up living a life of poverty in Dabaodao and the ways this conditioned and shaped their experiences of and engagement with their living environment. As in the previous chapters, I reflect on how the past continues to influence the present and how this has made attempts to refurbish the inner city challenging. Importantly, the past as it is intended here does not refer to a distant, architectural, or official history, as emphasized by preservationists (and examined in Chapter 6), but to residents’ personal memories, understood as an embodied history (Casey 2000).

THE URBAN POOR

The majority of Dabaodao residents were over the age of 50 and either already retired or nearing retirement.¹ In official rhetoric, they fell into the broad category of “vulnerable groups” (*ruoshi qunti*) (Solinger and Hu 2012), comprising both the “traditional poor” and what Wu et al. (2010, 5) call “China’s new urban poor.” The former refers to those who were already living in poverty before the opening-up era, with no *danwei* affiliation and only employed in locally run urban collectives. The latter are those who not only failed to benefit, but suffered, from China’s opening-up reforms and the restructuring of the economy: the laid-off, unemployed, retired, and disabled. When, in the 1990s, China began to increasingly open its doors to market principles, the old *danwei* system quickly became outdated and inefficient. State-owned enterprises and collectively owned enterprises were overstaffed, often mismanaged, and performed economically poorly, resulting in the considerable downsizing of both, beginning with medium and small firms and then large enterprises. In the name of efficiency and competition, lifetime employment was canceled (Solinger 2002), flooding China with former SOE employees who were laid off and forced to “enter the sea” (*xia hai*), meaning to seek a living in the private economy (N. Chen 2001, 9). At the end of 1995, 5.6 million workers were recorded as “laid off.”

Two years later, this number had increased to 24 million (Y. P. Wang 2004, 3). The loss of stable employment went hand in hand with a loss of access to basic welfare (education, health care, housing benefits, etc.).

Laid-off (*xiagang*) workers formed the largest group among local residents in Dabaodao. Many interlocutors told stories of how they had lost their jobs, life security, and hope for a better future. Only some had managed to find new employment. In the process of moving from a planned to a market economy, China introduced various reemployment schemes. Laid-off workers were, for example, assigned to reemployment centers where they were retrained to take up a new job.² This worked out for some, but the available positions were always low-skilled, manual jobs with low pay and few or no benefits. Mr. Wang, for example, lost his secure job and was later on reemployed as a security guard at a government bureau office building. He was in his early forties when he was made redundant. He lived with his unemployed wife, Down syndrome sister, mother, and a daughter in her mid-twenties. They shared two rooms of about 15 square meters each. As the stipend for his new job was nowhere near enough to feed his family, his wife worked as a cleaner to increase their income. Many people were not able to find proper reemployment at all. Those who had worked for the same *danwei* for more than 25 years were entitled to early retirement and a monthly living allowance, but all others had to enter the (free) employment market (Solinger and Hu 2012). In theory, “layoffs” and the “unemployed” were not the same. The former did not appear in official unemployment statistics, as many of them technically remained attached to their former *danwei* and kept receiving a so-called layoff subsidy” (*xiagang buzhu*) (Y. P. Wang 2004, 47). In reality, however, since the subsidy was often quite small, they lived much like the unemployed. This has led some to argue that China’s official unemployment rates have been highly distorted and do not reflect the actual situation of urban unemployment and poverty (S. Li and Sato 2006).

In Dabaodao, there was also a disproportionately high number of elderly people with disabilities: widowed men and women who could not walk, a former public sector (*shiyè danwei*) employee who had lost one of his hands, as well as many others suffering from illnesses related to old age. None had any chance of (re)employment, and many worried about not being able to pay for medical treatment or having to spend a large proportion of their monthly income on medicine. Quite a few residents were also so-called *dibaohu*, meaning they were “minimum living standard support” (MLSS) recipients (F. Wu et al. 2010; Solinger and Hu 2012). This scheme became

nationwide in 2002, after the government realized that its various local-level reemployment projects and social welfare programs were failing. Often, however, the welfare offered was insufficient. In 2012, the rate in Qingdao was 480 yuan per month. By 2020, it had risen to 700 Yuan, still hardly enough to pay for even the most basic living expenses. People necessarily had to look for work, mostly in the informal economy. This not only made them extremely vulnerable to political and economic changes, but also put them in competition with the countless rural migrants who had flooded the city and who, in 2013, occupied more than half of Dabaodao.

Take, for example, the story of “Baldy,” thus called because he did not have a single hair on his head. A neighbor of mine, he had lived in the courtyard for over 30 years, occupying a second-floor room of no more than 10 square meters. I would often see him right across from my room on the other side of our courtyard, making food on an electric stove that he had installed outside his door in the public corridor. While I occasionally ran into him downstairs or even out on the streets, we always merely nodded “hello” to each other. He usually had a grumpy expression on his face and rarely engaged in conversation with others. The children of migrant workers who played in the courtyard seemed scared of him, or at least all went quiet whenever Baldy appeared. In February 2013, just before Spring Festival, he suddenly invited me into his room. “Let’s have a chat” (*zanmen liao liao ba*), he said. His room was sparsely decorated and bitter cold—no heating, no air conditioning—and furnished with just a bed, TV, closet, and desk. Baldy drank and smoked heavily. Empty beer bottles were piling up outside his door, and the air was filled with cigarette smoke. The room had been his deceased father’s *danwei* housing and the only object of value he possessed.

Baldy had never been properly employed. In the 1980s and early 1990s, he had worked “here and there,” he said. The emergent private economy and new labor market had no room for people like him. There was an abundance of younger and more qualified candidates who clearly had an edge over people like Baldy, who was born in the late 1950s and had received little education. In the late 1990s, he had an opportunity to go to Spain to work illegally in a Chinese restaurant, mainly washing dishes. “I had nothing to lose,” he recounted, “so I left for Europe.” Baldy had been married, but his wife divorced him after he severely injured her during a violent domestic fight. He stayed in Europe for more than three years until he became “too old.” As he explained,

They send you home when you are too old. They are afraid that you will get sick in Spain. You know, I was working illegally. They didn't buy me insurance, so if I had to go to the hospital, they would get into trouble, so they didn't want me to stay. I sold fake DVDs on the streets of Barcelona for a while. But eventually I came back to Qingdao.

He earned around 500 euros per month in Spain. Accommodation and daily meals were provided, and as he did not spend much of his salary, he lived "fairly comfortably" upon his return. Through a friend, he found employment, this time as a security guard at one of Qingdao's universities. Due to his poor health, however, they eventually let him go. Baldy suffered from various illnesses, among others rheumatism. Chronic disorders, especially among retirees, have in fact been identified as one of the major causes of impoverishment in urban China (F. Wu et al. 2010, 105). Once, Baldy showed me a crumpled piece of paper from the hospital proving, as he put it, that he was "disabled." "I cannot work because I am handicapped. But China, this fucking government does not care. They don't care about us poor people here. I can't even pay for medical treatment." Baldy had been receiving MLSS for a number of years.

After our first longer conversation, Baldy invited me over to his room on several more occasions. Whenever he talked, he did so in a suffering tone, cursing "this society," "the corrupt government," "Chinese people." Spain, on the other hand, had been great. Sometimes he wallowed in self-pity; other times he praised himself for keeping going when others would have given up. Baldy spent his days drinking, smoking, and waiting for the government to start the redevelopment project so that he could get compensation money and move out. Baldy's story was quite common, and I heard variants of it many times. Encounters with residents were often depressing experiences. *Mei banfa*, meaning "There is nothing to be done," was an oft-said expression, followed closely by *dengzhe kan ba*, "Let's wait and see." An air of resignation imbued conversations about how residents saw their own future and that of their current living environment.

BEING "LEFT BEHIND"

Baldy once said, "Those who had any kinds of skills or qualifications moved out [of the neighborhood] as soon as they could. Only people like us, the

poorest of the poor, stayed behind.” “Mei banfa,” he sighed loudly. Many local interlocutors similarly expressed a feeling of “having been left behind.” When wandering through Dabaodao’s courtyards, I frequently heard the observation, “They have all moved out” (*tamen dou ban zou le*), “they” referring to other local residents. Self-described “locals” would tell me that only four or five “old residents” still lived in their courtyard—“at most,” they would emphasize. Some even suggested that they themselves were the only locals left. In the 1990s, the population composition of Dabaodao changed dramatically. Many, indeed, left the neighborhood, and more and more migrant workers moved in and occupied courtyard rooms, especially in the southern areas of Dabaodao, where the fresh-food markets were located. Why were some locals “left behind”?

There were many sorts of people among the laid off, varying markedly in terms of background, skills, and qualifications as well as experiences following being laid off. Generally, those who successfully went from state employment into the free market were, as Dorothy Solinger notes (2002, 305), the “younger, well-educated, technically skilled workers (who had) opportunities to acquire new positions.” According to my structured interviews, over 50 percent of local residents in Dabaodao had only completed middle school, and almost 20 percent had no schooling at all. The type and performance of one’s previous *danwei* or whether one had any *danwei* affiliation at all were also important factors. After being made redundant, many laid-off workers continued to receive a small allowance and other benefits from their former work units. These could differ significantly depending on how profitable and influential the *danwei* had previously been, suggesting that even after their gradual dismantling, this system continued to determine former workers’ socioeconomic well-being (Y. Xie, Lai, and Wu 2009). Since inner-city neighborhoods were rarely home to strong work units during the Maoist years, residents’ benefits were limited. This was particularly apparent relative to housing. As part of the SOE and land reforms of the 1990s, former public-sector workers were encouraged to purchase their previously publicly owned housing at a very low rate (often half the market price) directly from their work units or the municipal Housing Bureau. This was, at least in theory, meant to be a social benefit (Unger and Chan 2004). Nationwide, nearly 50 percent of the urban households that had purchased their housing unit by the year 2000 paid less than 20,000 yuan (C. K. Lee 2007, 126). While in 1981, 82 percent of all urban houses in Qingdao were publicly owned, by 2002, 80 percent of these houses had been purchased by

their occupiers (M. Zhang and Rasiah 2014, 63). Many local residents who were living in or had once lived in Dabaodao at some point bought their *liyuan* room from their previous *danwei* or from the Housing Bureau at a heavily subsidized rate. A former resident of Huangdao Road, for instance, paid just 7,000 yuan for a 15-square-meter room in the late 1990s.

As China's economic reforms unfolded, housing became one, if not the most important, determinant of living conditions and personal well-being. It was in this context that the term "property class" (*fangchan jieji*) became popular to refer to the first generation of "reform citizens" who significantly improved their lives through access to lucrative housing. Initially, purchasing a former *danwei* apartment simply meant acquiring "use rights"—buyers were not entitled to extract any financial benefits from the property or to resell it in the market (Davis 2003, 190). This changed in 1999, when China tried to end "dual track" land allocation (Chapter 1). In 1998, Qingdao abolished all in-kind allocation of housing, and a year later, the State Council passed Circular No. 23, which allowed full-scale commercialization. Specifically, "Anyone who held full rights to their home, regardless if they had purchased the home privately or through a subsidized sale of their original *gongfang* (public housing), had the right to sell the property and to retain all after-tax profits" (D. Davis 2003, 189). In 2001, a total of 9.25 billion yuan went into commercial housing projects in Qingdao, and by 2005, 23.267 million square meters of commercial housing space existed in the city (Qingdao 2010b, 308–9).

These changes reinforced social inequality. Those who had received larger or newer apartments in more favorable areas of the city from their *danwei* were considerably better off than others, as they could reap greater financial profit by selling the property and then reinvesting in newly built housing. In addition to this, officials, and managerial and professional staff, or those with good connections to such individuals, had an advantage over ordinary workers in that they could negotiate better housing benefits that often went beyond their personal needs. Starting in the 1980s, many *danwei* began building new housing blocks for their employees, encouraged by a series of government regulations (Qingdao 1999c, 131). Strong *danwei* were able to build residential blocks in advantageous locations. Other, less powerful *danwei* did not have such opportunities. Moreover, the *danwei* enjoyed a relatively high degree of autonomy in deciding which employees would be given such new housing (Unger and Chan 2004). In Qingdao, although housing distribution depended on a range of criteria, such as a worker's age, marital status, children, time spent working for the *danwei*, position, skills,

and so on (Qingdao 1999c, 136), about 10 percent of housing resources were given to the “big bosses” (*lingdao*), who could then distribute them to workers as they wished without any restrictions (Qingdao 1999c, 137). This created a breeding ground for corruption and a reliance on particularistic personal relationships. It meant that those workers who had the necessary *guanxi*³ (social capital) could negotiate or bribe their way to obtaining new or additional housing beyond their immediate personal needs. Those without the “right” connections lost out both in the immediate term and then later when houses could be sold in the market (Logan, Y. Bian, and F. Bian 1999).

The urban housing reform of the 1990s strongly impacted the social fabric of Dabaodao. Like many other inner-city neighborhoods in China (F. Wu et al. 2010, chap. 4), those residents who had been affiliated with a more powerful *danwei* or had connections or necessary skills consolidated their resources and moved out. Residents referred to these individuals as “people who have *nengli*.” Though *nengli* literally translates as “ability” or “capacity,” it also indicates whether someone has the social capital to “make it.” The owner of my *liyuan* room, for example, had been able to secure a new apartment in the harbor area through *danwei* connections and was locally considered as having “at least some *nengli*.” My neighbors would tell me, “They have some *guanxi* in the family” (*tamen jiali you guanxi*), meaning they had sufficient contacts to improve their living conditions. In many ways, the remaining local residents in Dabaodao were thus the “residue,” the materially deprived who did not have the *nengli* to better their situation. Having been unable to secure any upgraded housing during the early reform period, all they were left with was a room in a messy courtyard. This is what Baldy meant when he commented that only “the poorest of poor” stayed in the neighborhood. In this regard, Dorothy Solinger (2019a, 2–3) describes a caste-like situation in China. Much in the same way that India prohibited lower castes from changing their social status, based on religious doctrine, the Chinese system of state capitalism under “reform and opening up” has barred the urban poor from upward mobility through a range of regulations, discourses, and practices.

ANGER, NOSTALGIA, AND SCAPEGOATING

A feeling that they were the “residue” of reform China shaped residents’ experiences of living in Dabaodao and often translated into expressions of rage and frustration. This could bubble to the surface at any moment or be

triggered by seemingly harmless incidents. Quite a few times, my interlocutor would suddenly angrily burst out that I was wasting my time, that there was nothing to do anyway, and that the whole place should just be knocked down. Yet this anger was also accompanied by a certain degree of attachment to place and a sense of belonging.

The story of Brother Dragon, below, illustrates these ambivalent emotions. It also provides an alternative temporality of Dabaodao, one that differs from history understood as a distant past, as promoted by preservationists and later official government narrative. Rather, residents associated Dabaodao with the Maoist and early reform years. Their stories and memories thus begin precisely (and perhaps ironically) just as preservationist narratives end.

Brother Dragon grew up in Dabaodao as the fourth of five children. His father had worked for a Japanese company until 1949 and then, during the 1950s, was stationed at an airbase in Jiaozhou city, as a technician responsible for the maintenance of electrical appliances. The family home was in Xizhen, where Brother Dragon was born. In 1962, his father's *danwei* arranged for the family to move into the courtyard room on Huangdao Road. Dragon Brother was six years old at the time. Shortly thereafter, the Cultural Revolution erupted.

I still remember it was scary when everyone started distrusting each other and when the Red Guards started coming into our courtyard checking on everyone. The first person who was attacked here was a guy named Shao. He had been a KMT party member and made money by getting poor people to donate blood and then selling it to hospitals. The Red Guards came in, took out all his KMT certificates and clothes, and then burned them in the middle of the courtyard. Right here.

As he told the story, Brother Dragon pointed toward the middle of the courtyard. “Then they put a sign around Shao’s neck, which read ‘bloodsucking vermin’ (*xi xue gui*) and made him stand in our courtyard.” Though Brother Dragon did not talk often about his experiences during the Cultural Revolution, when he did, his accounts were graphic and he would go on at length.

Though just a child when he first moved into the courtyard, he remembered that there were still some capitalists and people “who had some wealth” living there. He recalled in particular the former sex worker who ended up staying until the government redevelopment scheme was

launched and she was moved out. Before the Cultural Revolution, Brother Dragon said, “She was walking around in nice clothes, she was dressed up. Different from others.” Then he added,

You know there were many brothels in this area, but not big, official ones like the one at Huangdao Road No. 17 [*pingkang wuli*]. Sometimes, there were just two or three prostitutes in one courtyard. In the early Communist years, there were quite a few of them living in our courtyard. Most were already 30 years or older. Under the CCP they of course couldn’t work anymore.

Curious to know more, I asked how other courtyard residents reacted to the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. “Neighbors were not united. Some were scared, but others enthusiastically took part—they were opportunists,” Brother Dragon responded. “But I was too young at the time. I didn’t understand what was happening. After they burned Shao’s belongings, for example, I picked up some remains and brought them back to our room. My dad was furious. ‘Throw them away! Throw them away!’ my father scolded me.” Brother Dragon chuckled as he remembered these details, though now he knew all too well how the simple presence of certificates related to the KMT could have caused problems for his family. He also described in great detail how he had followed Red Guards to the Catholic church and watched as they smashed windows and crosses and then burned Bibles and other items outside the main door. “They wreaked havoc,” he recalled.

Brother Dragon’s youth was largely wasted during the Cultural Revolution. “I was hungry all the time. We didn’t have enough to eat. My belly was bloated. The next-door neighbors only had food at the beginning of each month. Later, they would mostly be sleeping at home. They didn’t have enough, so they were better off sleeping.” In the early 1970s, Brother Dragon’s father decided to send him to some relatives in Gaomi (Shandong province) to help them work their farmland outside the city. He spent two years there, thus freeing his family from the burden of feeding him. But life was not easy there either. “Once,” said Brother Dragon, “as I was working in the fields, I caught a mouse. My relative said that I should kill it and take it back home. We’d have it for dinner. Though when we got back in the evening, my relatives had already finished cooking. The heat of the stove wasn’t enough to cook the mouse, but I still ate it half-cooked.”

Some years later, despite not yet having finished middle school, he was

again sent away, this time down to the countryside (*xiang*). Upon his return, at the age of 19, he joined the army, a time he fondly remembered. “I finally had something to eat! There were vegetables and we always had enough rice. It was really the happiest time,” he laughed. Three years later, in 1981, China began disarmament and Brother Dragon had to return to Huan-gdao Road. In the early reform years, he was initially assigned to a factory, though he remembered that, with the economic reforms, “there were so many opportunities at the time.” He explained that “people were traveling across the country, to Guangdong, to Fujian, to Zhejiang and brought all sorts of things back that they would then sell here in the streets.” This is, in fact, how the Jimo Road Market was revived. A thriving venue before 1949, the market was completely demolished after the Communist takeover. In the early 1980s, returnees and locals set up stalls once more in Dabaodao’s northern end, around Jimo Road and Licun Road, where one could find over a thousand vendors cramped into narrow streets selling everything from clothing, shoes, and bags to household appliances, tools, and even handi-crafts (Qingdao 2010a, 47–48). “Some people really got rich. It was so easy to make money,” Brother Dragon said. He too decided to go into business. “I went to Shanghai to buy some supplies, mostly daily products and clothes. Whatever I bought in Shanghai for 10 yuan, I could sell here for 30.” Similar to other inner cities across China, Dabaodao became a hub for petty capital-ism (Rithmire 2015, 133).

In the 1990s, the local government began to increasingly pay attention to the appearance and aesthetics of the urban environment and started to control informal economic activity. In 1997, the Jimo Road Market moved further north from its original location into the Shibeidistrict, to a dedicated space next to the “City Hospital.” Many vendors in other parts of Dabaodao were no longer allowed to run market stalls in the streets. “That’s when business started to decline,” Brother Dragon recalled. By then, he was married and had a daughter. He decided to change strategy and moved into the secondhand household appliances market. He bought air conditioners and fridges for a few hundred yuan, repaired them, and resold them for twice the amount. One day, however, a heavy appliance dropped on his foot and he was severely injured, making it impossible to continue his business. Luckily, he still received a modest living allowance from the military, and when his parents died, he kept living in the courtyard room in Dabaodao. His elder sister had married out, his elder brothers moved out to work in a factory, while his younger brother had gone

“to work in other parts of China” (*zai waidi gongzuo*). “Living here often reminds me of my parents,” he added fondly. It was occasional statements like these that revealed Brother Dragon’s emotional attachment to the courtyard and the Dabaodao neighborhood.

Brother Dragon’s room was located on the second floor, in the corner of the courtyard. It did not have any windows, only a skylight. Brother Dragon was what one might call streetwise—he knew how to get by. Whenever I went to his room, there would be something new: he had built yet another shelf, found and repaired an old TV set, suspended a punching bag from his ceiling for exercise, or installed a powerful fan. When most residents had already moved out, he even began growing vegetables and raising chickens in the courtyard. He used his room and the courtyard environment creatively. Preservationists would perhaps have labeled his spatial practices “destructive,” as he was constantly and actively transforming his living space and thereby the courtyard environment. His room was partitioned into two areas, the first simultaneously serving as a cooking space, storage, and (self-installed) toilet and where he kept a large dog that was usually locked in a tiny iron cage. The second area consisted of his bedroom, living room, and dining room. I spent many hours in this room, with him sitting on his bed, me on a wooden bench, between us a foldable table. Brother Dragon’s ambivalent and shifting feelings toward his small room, the courtyard, and even the entire neighborhood could always be sensed. “You know, buildings are like human life, they are ephemeral,” he once said. “If they decide to demolish this place, I will not have any hard feelings.” Yet just a few weeks later he reflected, “I don’t want to ever leave this place. This is my home. I like the freedom here. I can do whatever I want. I like the messiness of it all.” In fact, over the years, he often emphasized how much he enjoyed living in this courtyard, especially after most residents had already left. Yet this “enjoyment” was conditional. He was also hoping to obtain a better compensation deal, an undertaking that would take a dramatic turn when his siblings decided to take him to court (Chapter 4).

Brother Dragon had a tendency to use lofty language. In his spare time, he often read Chinese classics. His self-built bookshelf hosted a collection of works on traditional Chinese medicine and Chinese philosophy. During our conversations, he would sometimes take out the *Book of Changes* (*yijing*) and could lecture for hours, losing himself in the contemplation of life. Suddenly, however, he would jump up and swear at all his neighbors. “They are all rubbish. All rubbish!” (*tamen quan shi laji, quan shi laji*) he would shout.

“All they care about is money and material things. What they earn today, they spend tomorrow. The more they earn today, the more they will spend tomorrow. They are not on the same level as me. But I don’t care. No one can control me. I do my own thing.” I asked, “How can you stand living here, surrounded by all these people that you dislike?” Brother Dragon sat down again, poured himself a cup of tea, and said calmly, “What the eye doesn’t see, the heart doesn’t grieve over . . . and what I don’t know won’t hurt me” (*yan bu jian xin bu fan, er bu ting xin bu luan*). This observation struck me as aptly capturing the outlook of many local residents. Like Brother Dragon, quite a few inhabitants had shut themselves off from what was going on around them as a way of dealing with their frustration and the perception that they had been left behind. In her remarkable account of Beijing’s Dashi-lar neighborhood, Harriet Evans (2020, 208) observes a similar phenomenon among neglected and abandoned residents, whose feelings of having been deserted “took expression in attitudes that veered between fatalism, anger, and escapism.”

Sentiments of frustration about the present were often directly juxtaposed to a “better past.” Many local residents nostalgically recounted how before, things had been different, better. Notably, when I asked what time period they were referring to when speaking of “the past” (*yiqian*), almost all of my interlocutors consistently and quite specifically said “the time before the late 1990s.” Anything preceding that cutoff was referred to as “good,” including the Maoist years and the early reform years; anything afterward was viewed as “not the same anymore.” This is, perhaps, unsurprising when recalling the political and economic changes that China underwent during this period, when it rapidly transformed from an exceptionally egalitarian country into an extremely stratified one (Goodman 2014). Though urban life before the reform era could be very restrictive—the *danwei* regulated and politicized private space and life—the so-called iron rice bowl created relative equality among residents. Welfare may have differed from *danwei* to *danwei*, but, generally, everyone was in the same boat. This came across in the ways local residents framed their nostalgia of the past. “Before, we were all just poor,” a Dabaodao resident once said. A former inhabitant who had moved out in 2011 specified, “Everything was there for everyone. There were coupons for everything, for staple food, for salt, for oil, even for cigarettes. Everyone was living the same life, on the same level. Now it is not the same anymore. This is why I say that we lived quite happily in the past.” Another

resident of a different courtyard described the differences between “the past” and present in the following terms:

Back then, I actually felt it was quite good. The relationship with the neighbors was good. We helped each other. We knew each other. Whenever someone had a problem, you know, they needed someone to look after their kids, people were there for you. You could count on each other. This is different now.

The residents often evoked a “good past” of mutual help, equality, and community spirit—aspects that were directly contrasted with their present situation.

Change in the population composition of Dabaodao over time was another contributing factor. Many of the neighbors with whom residents had shared their lives and the confined spaces of the courtyards had left. They were replaced, starting in the late 1990s, by an increasing number of migrants. The majority of these new arrivals came from poorer rural areas and, once in the city, experienced an improvement in their life conditions. Most locals were, in contrast, “decidedly downwardly, not upwardly mobile” (Solinger 2002, 311). Migrants also tended to make more money than locals. Often arriving as a family unit and being, on average, younger than locals, migrants were much better equipped in terms of labor power, an advantage in the informal economy. As one of the few young local residents in Dabaodao mentioned, “Most of us, especially my parents’ generation, think that we are more qualified, more intelligent than those ‘outsiders’ and we cannot accept that they are actually doing better than us.” Many locals expressed antagonistic feelings toward migrants, spoke ill of them, and blamed them for their current misery. Indeed, migrants served as scapegoats for many problems. “You know in the past, we could leave our doors unlocked when we left, but now it’s full of ‘outsiders,’ not safe anymore,” lamented one local resident.

Migrants made up the majority of Dabaodao residents, a stark and constant reminder to the locals that they had been left behind and forced to live with a group that was publicly stigmatized as “poor” and of “low quality” (Zavoretti 2017). Whereas locals’ spatial relationship with Dabaodao was largely introversive, passive, and often negative, most migrants used the courtyard environment more actively, transforming the physical environ-

ment to make money and improve their livelihoods (Chapter 5). They were also a more visible presence in communal areas, using these spaces more frequently for work or leisure, such as playing chess, or simply resting, eating, or drinking. Locals commonly felt that the migrants didn't follow any rules, didn't clean, were dirty and the main cause of the messy environment. As Brother Dragon put it, "Each courtyard has a specific routine, a kind of mutual understanding, an intangible connection, including language and a general code of conduct. When strangers come in, like rural migrants, they don't know these tacit rules, so there will be problems."⁴ Locals also sometimes felt intimidated by rowdy migrant behavior but were afraid to confront them directly.

Yet a feeling of rejection was also often accompanied by one of attachment. Despite their anger, many locals lay claim to being the only rightful and authentic residents of the neighborhood. At the same time, this was often coupled with the comment "They have all moved out," an observation that strengthened and reproduced a strong awareness of having been left behind. Invoking the notion of a "better past" further reinforced sentiments of indignation with regard to the present (C. K. Lee 2007, 140) and directly triggered a perception of being backward "residue," living at the margins in a society that had rapidly moved forward without them. In fact, while many interlocutors bemoaned their living conditions, it was often not the "messy environment" per se that was the source of their discontent, but the feeling of having been unable to partake in China's economic "miracle." As the cheerful retiree, mentioned at the outset of this chapter, once said, "You know this society has developed, this country has developed. It is not so bad living here, but seeing all this change going on outside, I must say that my life here is really not up-to-date anymore." This was how many saw their situation. A different resident commented, "Along with the development of society and the improvement of people's quality of life, I more and more feel that my place is too small. No way to live here anymore." Residents compared their own conditions with others around them and concluded that they were indeed worse off.

WHEN TOILETS GO PUBLIC

Indubitably, the above-described social reality impacted the neighborhood's physical environment. In what follows, I focus on the reciprocal relation-

ship between the usage and the form of the built environment (Chow 2015, 15). I discuss residents' spatial practices, showing that they were not simply passive occupants of an urban neighborhood, but actively contributed to its appearance (Ingold 2000; Low 2017).

Once, during one of my frequent walks through the courtyards of Dabaodao, a resident around the age of 60 grabbed my arm and asked that I follow him to his room, which he shared with his wife. It was a typical *liyuan* room: about 10–12 square meters in size, high ceiling, but poorly ventilated and dimly lit. He wanted me to take photos and report to “them” just how bad the living conditions were in this neighborhood. He kept saying that I “should tell them” (*ni yinggai gaosu tamen*) about life in this part of town. Perhaps he thought that, as a foreigner researching the neighborhood, I would have access to higher authorities, whether in the municipal government, an international institution, or the media. His reference to “them” seemed to indicate some indistinct power or faraway government that could solve his problems. He pointed at the walls. They were shabby and the paint had peeled off in many places. The wooden floor was full of holes. The ceiling had numerous cracks. He asked me to take photos from different angles, making sure that I fully captured the different issues. While I complied with his requests, he repeatedly said, “It is impossible to live here” (*mei fa zhu*). I was struck not only by the disintegrating walls and floorboards, but also by the general state of neglect of this resident's room. A dirty red sofa was positioned across the entrance door, and pots and pans lay on the floor. Under the window, a bed and table were cluttered with a variety of objects, while clothes and other things were piled up on a chest of drawers in the corner, a buried TV set just barely discernible. His wife was sitting on the sofa, rummaging through a heap of what appeared to be old newspapers and plastic bags. Together with the disintegrating physical structure of the building itself, the room had clearly been ill-treated and neglected by its inhabitants for a long time.

Anthropological studies, most importantly Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger* (1984), reveal that matters of cleanliness and dirtiness are culturally shaped and must necessarily be analyzed and understood within their specific context. When I shared a toilet with 60 other families, brushed my teeth next to someone washing oily dishes, or ate from plates that had just been used to disembowel fish, I remembered that what I might perceive as messy or dirty, others may view as orderly and clean. Interestingly, in Dabaodao, many residents complained about the “unbearable living con-

ditions” and “messiness,” while simultaneously contributing significantly to the latter through their daily behavior and (mis)treatment of their own physical surroundings. This was perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the condition and usage of courtyard toilets, in a similar state across all the *liyuan*. The toilet facilities of the courtyard where I lived were located on the ground, right behind the flight of stairs leading up to the second floor. The room was about 10 square meters in size and separated down the middle by a wall. Each side of the partition had an independent door, one for women and one for men. The door on the men’s side had, however, been taken out and never replaced. Inside, four “squatting spots” were demarcated by foot-shaped stones. For privacy reasons, they had originally been separated from each other by small cement partitions, but their remains could now barely be discerned. All human waste went in to one and the same stone pit, where it would remain until taken out. This normally happened once a day, usually just before noon, when a vehicle drove up to the courtyard entrance and used a long tube to draw it out.⁵

One of the very first encounters I had with residents of my *liyuan* courtyard revolved around this “bathroom.” “Don’t go in, don’t use it,” Brother Dragon warned me. “It is too dirty and disgusting.” “So you don’t use the toilet in the courtyard?” I asked. “No, I don’t,” he answered. He had installed his own personal waste-water pipe that ran from his room on the second floor and emptied directly into the stone pit, leaving his waste for others to clean up. So even though Brother Dragon claimed that he was not using the courtyard toilet (meaning he did not enter it), he still contributed to the perceived disgustingness of the communal stone pit. The issue of “disgusting toilets” came up over and over again. Many of my interlocutors lamented not only the unhygienic state of the bathroom, but also the foul smell that, especially during hot summer months, would pervade the air and cross spatial boundaries, directly entering people’s private rooms. While courtyard toilets were usually emptied by the city sanitation department, the residents themselves were responsible for the general cleanliness of the space. In smaller and less populated *liyuan*, the courtyard leader arranged for families to take turns cleaning the facility. Such arrangements did not exist in the larger *liyuan*. Sometimes during conversations, I would ask why they did not do something about the situation themselves. The answer was always more or less the same, “If I cleaned it up, if I fixed it, they (other residents) would still use it, so after a day or two, it would be as disgusting as it is now. I have

seen it. Nothing can be done (*mei banfa*).” A vicious circle endured, where residents resorted to avoidance rather than addressing the problem.

Between May and October, when the weather was warm, I would regularly spend the evening with a migrant family who lived in one of the rooms located on the exterior side of the courtyard and ran a seafood stall at the daily fresh-food market on Huangdao Road. I would sit out on the street together with the “boss” (*laoban*) of the market stall. I call him Mr. Smile as he once ran a beer house (*pjiuwu*) named the Smile Beer House (Chapter 5). Others from the area would frequently join us. We would eat, drink, and chat until midnight or later. Everyone drank heavily, mostly beer sold by weight in plastic bags. Normally, starting around ten o’clock, the intervals between us having to answer the call of nature would become shorter and shorter. Since most other market vendors had long since packed up their stalls and retreated to their rooms, and as the street was largely quiet and empty, the men would simply relieve themselves somewhere nearby, often right where, during the day, Mr. Smile set up his market stall and where customers stopped to buy goods (*huo*) from him. One evening, I even played Jianzi (a shuttlecock game) with Mr. Smile’s five-year-old daughter and her friends right in that very spot. Playing Jianzi involves standing in a circle and kicking a shuttlecock to one another. However, unless one has really mastered the game, more often than not the shuttlecock drops onto the (dirty) ground from where it needs to be picked up again. Mr. Smile did not seem to care much. During those drinking nights, I preferred not to relieve myself in the street and instead made my way back to the toilet located in the courtyard interior, passing through the pitch-black entranceway and holding my breath against the foul smell. The others would tell me, “Don’t bother going in.” They would urge me to just pee in the street. “The toilet is too dirty,” they said, instead turning public space into a toilet.

On another occasion, I witnessed a father having his young son defecate directly on the stairs inside the courtyard. I happened to be leaving my room and must have looked bewilderedly at the boy squatting there. The father saw this and was quick to apologetically explain that he could not possibly let his son use “that disgusting toilet,” as he pointed toward the bathroom. Rather, he preferred to let him do it there and then was going to clean it up afterward, as he assured me. In reaction to the “disgusting” courtyard toilets and their adverse effects on residents’ everyday life, people resorted to figuratively moving the bathroom from its original place, thereby making

the communal space even more “dirty and messy.” I observed many other examples of similar spatial behavior, such as the practice of throwing rubbish bags from the second or third floors down into the middle of the courtyard, where they would be left until either someone removed the sacks or cats and dogs rummaged through them. Spitting and littering in the streets and courtyard areas was also a common occurrence.

Government officials or preservationists would label such spatial practices as “destructive” and call residents “oblivious to the historical and cultural value of the buildings they live in.” “We need to educate them” was an oft-heard statement, suggesting that residents were not “cultured” (*meiyou wenhua*) or “civilized enough” (*bu gou wenming*) to appreciate historical architecture and that their conduct was typical of poor people (Lewis 1959; Bourgeois 2003). Quite a number of preservationists specifically used the term “low *suzhi*” (low quality) to describe residents and explained their behavior in a “blame the victim” fashion (Kipnis 2007, 389). Yet another commonly given explanation, even by residents themselves, was that this kind of spatial practice was inherently “Chinese.” In his classic text *From the Soil* (1992), Fei Xiaotong describes the filthiness of public spaces in (rural) China. In reference to residential courtyards, he writes, “The worst place in such a courtyard would be the public toilets. Not a single family wants to take care of this business. Whoever finds the condition of the toilet intolerable has to clean it up without pay or even without thanks” (Fei 1992, 60–61). Fei Xiaotong’s explanation for this kind of spatial abuse is that we are dealing with public space. “Once you mention something as belonging to the public, it is almost like saying that everyone can take advantage of it. Thus, one can have rights without obligations” (Fei 1992, 60–61). Other scholars have noted similar, so-called Chinese public behavior. “Hawking and spitting, expelling nasal mucus, belching, farting—all are behaviors that one would also associate with body dirt, if not digestion. They appear not to be risky, and all are performed in public” (Pellow 1996, 119). Such observations are sometimes grounded in the rather essentialist notion that Chinese people are entangled in a dynamic web of particularistic ties. Public spaces, so Deborah Pellow (1996, 126) tells us, “are not part of one’s intimate society and culture, are outside the social unit, and thus are not to be minded. One can thus behave as though no one else is about.” She calls this “public privacy” (130).

In the *liyuan* courtyards, the limits between the public and private spheres were often blurred. Everything was private and public at the



Fig. 5. Photos of toilet entrances in liyuan courtyards. On the left it reads, “If ‘outsiders’ want to use this toilet they have to pay.” On the right it reads, “Whoever stands and pees in the entrance is a pig-dog” (fieldwork photos, 2013).

same time. Even after I closed the door to my room, physically isolating myself from the courtyard, I still took part in my neighbors’ lives and they in mine. Both sound and smell constantly crossed spatial boundaries. In the mornings, I was rarely able to sleep later than six or seven o’clock, at which point the clamor of market vendors setting up their stalls outside served as an effective alarm clock. In the evenings, I always knew what my next-door neighbor was preparing for dinner. The cooking fumes, luckily rather pleasant, wafted into my room.⁶ Sometimes I would come home late at night when most people had already retreated into their rooms. When walking through the entranceway, into the courtyard, up the stairs, and along the corridor, I could clearly hear what each person or family was doing in their “private” rooms, whether watching TV, telling off their children, arguing, or snoring. My physical presence was likewise clearly known to people. Neighbors always knew which nights I spent in the *liyuan* and which I occasionally stayed in my university accommodation. One could hardly “escape” or enter the courtyard unnoticed. In this sense, privacy existed only nominally. The act of closing a door was a ritualized practice meant to shut oneself off from the outside world, but in actual

fact all residents knew that they were constantly sharing their lives with all the other families in the courtyard.

Interestingly, some residents did not really consider the courtyard area to be “public,” but rather saw it as belonging to them as a group—as “their” private space. In this, they often made a sharp distinction between the latter and the “outside.” Once, for example, a heated argument erupted at the entrance to my *liyuan*. Two women snarled at each other in loud voices, one even pointing a sharp tool at the other, while several others joined in the shouting. When I asked my neighbor, who was standing nearby, what was going on, he explained, “One of them from the other courtyard repeatedly comes over here to use our toilet. We don’t like that. It’s ours. Why don’t they use theirs? They are too disgusting over there, so they come here and make ours dirty.” In other cases, however, it was the doorstep to residents’ private rooms that marked a boundary between “order” and “messiness.” Indeed, some people kept their rooms particularly neat and tidy, while simultaneously largely neglecting the “public” courtyard environment.

Residents’ “unruly” spatial practices, negligence of public space, and a seeming “devil-may-care” view of the courtyard environment can certainly not be reduced to simply being typically “Chinese” or as characteristic of the “poor.” Doing so ignores the complex political, economic, and social factors underlying this phenomenon. Indeed, a fuller understanding of residents’ actions and attitudes must necessarily take into account the specific context, the rhetoric and practice of urban revitalization, and the many announcements and repeated failures to deliver on promises of redevelopment.

A NEGLECTED PROMISE

Redevelopment in Qingdao—and largely the rest of China—has followed a relatively fixed sequential pattern and rhetoric. In a first phase, the local government must evaluate (*pinggu*) inner-city land before it can reclaim and redevelop it. The gathering of quantifiable and tangible information and figures represents an important preparatory step for subsequent redevelopment undertakings. According to the *Qingdao Gazetteer of Property* (1999c, 64), as early as 1985 the municipal government had established an official Surveying Group tasked with producing comprehensive “inventories” of the city’s property situation. A former employee of the Housing Bureau who had been responsible for the Dabaodao area told me that in the 1980s and

early 1990s, she had spent months measuring the exact size of each *liyuan* courtyard: “I knew exactly how many square meters each and every courtyard bathroom had.” These evaluations are then used to justify and legitimize urban renewal. The classification of inner-city neighborhoods as “areas of slum housing” or as having so-called unsafe buildings (*weifang*) serves as a reason for launching redevelopment schemes.

Once a decision has been made to redevelop an area and a land-use contract has been signed with a real estate developer—potentially a lengthy process (K. Zhang 2013)—a specific date is established to make the project public. On this day, all the main media are informed and in turn more or less uniformly report on the project. Coverage usually involves a headline such as “Farewell Urban Slum,” enhanced by a large photo showing a group of “derelict buildings.” Articles typically describe the specifics of the intervention, including interviews with predominantly elderly residents who have been living in the area for decades. The latter are normally quoted as saying things like, “I have been living here for over 50 years. I can’t bear it any longer. Knock this place down soon; as long as I get a new place to live, I am fine.” The articles then go on to discuss in great detail why indeed it is impossible to live there, emphasizing aspects such as the lack of bathrooms, kitchens, and running water. More photos showing the interviewee pointing at broken building parts provide additional visual evidence of the place’s “unlivable” conditions. To further legitimize and justify the inevitability of redevelopment, “inner-city misery” might be juxtaposed against an image of a modern new building complex, the envisioned outcome of the new redevelopment.

Shortly after or around the same time, public notices go up in various places around the soon to be redeveloped area, informing residents in official jargon of the conditions for their departure. Eventually, the infamous “demolish” (*chai*) or “expropriate” (*zheng*) signs appear painted on doors and other parts of buildings (Chau 2008). Now it is, at least in theory, only a matter of time until bulldozers make their way into the area and force those who have not yet signed the expropriation agreement to move out. During demolition or upon project completion, newspapers then report on residents “happily moving into new apartments” (*xi qian xin ju*) (Fang 2006, 672).

Notwithstanding local variations, urban renewal projects across China have all generally followed this pattern, largely justified using a paternalistic notion of “infrastructural betterment.” They tend to (over)emphasize “failed infrastructures” (Chu 2014) so as to make redevelopment seem

inevitable, while simultaneously reinforcing an image and a discourse of what a contemporary cityscape ought to look like—a (perhaps not so) subtle way of indicating aspects deemed “undesired.” For instance, local officials involved in the planning and implementation of the Zhongshan Road redevelopment projects often described Dabaodao as “messy” (*luan*). This “messiness” referred not only to the above-described mistreatment of the living environment, but also to the lack of conveniences that the contemporary modern urbanite should enjoy. One of the first things that Mr. Lu of the Zhongshan Road Redevelopment Command Office said to me was, “First, I have to tell you that we definitely have to do something about the area. It cannot stay the way it is. Look, they don’t even have private toilets.” He perhaps assumed that I was one of the preservationists eager to protect Dabaodao at all costs and hence thought it necessary to tell me that the area was indeed “unlivable.” He continued to enumerate all the aspects warranting redevelopment: “They have no running water, no heating. The buildings are rundown. It is dirty there.” With regards to the fresh-food markets in Dabaodao, he further commented, “I like the markets. If you ask me, I would want to keep them, but they need to be standardized and made more beautiful (*piaoliang yixie*).”

I am not arguing that Dabaodao’s residents should not enjoy the “luxury” of a flushable toilet or more modern conditions, nor am I suggesting that residents did not want such amenities. On the contrary, many did very much hope for improvement. Yet the above-outlined pattern and distinctive rhetoric of redevelopment obscured many of the reasons underlying residents’ discontent, their ambivalent feelings toward their living environment, and their uncertainty about the future. By purposefully juxtaposing an image of “adverse living conditions” with modern urban life to justify the need for renewal, residents’ dissatisfaction was reduced to little else but the “backwardness” of their living environment. This modern-backward dichotomy left no room for other concerns. “We don’t need complete redevelopment. All we would need is that they fix water pipes, bathrooms, and make sure the stairs and corridors don’t collapse,” said a widowed lady in her sixties, who was living in a 25-square-meter *liyuan* room that had been nicely decorated by her son and his wife. An allegedly “outdated” lifestyle was not necessarily the main problem. Moreover, the deployment of binary oppositions such as modern and backward reminded residents that they were living a life unsuited to contemporary urbanism, once again reinforcing their feelings of indignation of having routinely been left behind over 40 years of

economic reforms. Like the buildings they inhabited, residents were relics of bygone times that the government wanted to deal with efficiently and at minimum cost. Yet, unlike the former, which had attracted increasing attention, residents were at best romanticized as “genuine” locals who had “feelings for the area,” but were never really taken seriously in terms of their everyday problems.

Even more insidious than the declarations of “unlivable” conditions in Dabaodao were the repeated failures to act on promises of material and environmental upgrading and improvement. The promise of redevelopment, as Abram and Weszkalnys (2013b, 10) ascertain, is established and effective not merely through its utterance alone, but “through its association with appropriate procedures, objects and circumstances under which the promise is invoked.” Should these conditions remain unfulfilled, so the authors continue, then “the utterance has not so much failed as misfired, or the process has been abused” (10). In Dabaodao, the projects largely remained at the announcement stage without any further action being taken. They were “loud thunder, but only tiny drops of rain” (*leisheng da, yudian xiao*), as one netizen wrote in an online forum (Anon. 2014). As a result, residents found themselves passively waiting, often with only very vague information about when and how a potential redevelopment project might be implemented. During one of his rants about “the evil government,” Baldy abruptly stood up and pulled out from under a chair cushion a pack of crumpled newspaper cuttings he had collected. The oldest dated back to 2006, the most recent to 2012. All reported on the launch of a Zhongshan Road redevelopment project. Showing them to me made him even angrier and he shouted, “See! They have been promising things for years. It’s all just empty talk!” Though I was already well aware of the developmental stagnation of inner-city redevelopment projects, I began to truly understand what the constant announcement of, but essential failure to carry out, redevelopment projects meant to the residents of Dabaodao.

I also started to comprehend why many residents had a particular aversion to the narrative of *liyuan* being “historical architecture.” In their eyes, the preservation discourse was a main impediment to the launching of redevelopment. Once, an elderly lady, who had seen me interviewing other people before, reacted furiously when I asked to talk to her. “There is no use in doing any surveys! This is not helping us. Survey after survey! Help us or stay away!” she yelled, cursing me and my assistant before retreating to her room. A few days later, I approached her again to apologize and explain in

more detail why I was spending so much time in the neighborhood. Though still not very excited to speak to me, she explained how fed up she was by various experts, officials, historians, or even just photographers coming into Dabaodao, lingering about, “doing surveys” (*zuo diaocha*) or voyeuristically trying to capture a moment of “true Qingdao culture.” She expressed a desire to see the results of this constant surveying and researching. Other residents similarly disapproved of the idea that *dazayuan* (big, messy courtyards), as they called them, should in any way be considered historically significant. Baldy, for example, commented, “Historical value? Nonsense (*hu shuo ba dao*)! These are slums (*pin min ku*)!” while Brother Dragon said, “Preservation is something for the rich, but we are poor here. We don’t care about art or heritage. We need to survive.”

Empty promises also directly contributed to residents’ neglect of their physical surroundings, the disintegration of infrastructure, and the general messiness of the environment. For example, Brother Dragon remarked on numerous occasions over a 10-year period of uncertainty, “If they (the government) don’t redevelop the area this time, they will never do it. And if they don’t, I will spend some time and money to renovate my room, make it a bit nicer.” Many local residents likewise articulated a desire to upgrade their living environment themselves. They were even prepared to invest some time and money to do so. But the insecurity, in particular a lack of information as to whether and when the government might actually launch a renewal project, prevented them from doing so. More than one resident made comments such as “Why would I spend my money and waste my time on renovating my place if they suddenly decide to knock it down next year?”

A repetitive redevelopment rhetoric, a growing discourse of preservation, and developmental stagnation turned out to be a most detrimental combination. It was particularly the “absent presence” of the local government that created much ambiguity and insecurity for residents. In everyday life, the local government was a diffuse and intangible entity. It seemed to always be around, but often could not be seen or addressed directly. Every now and then, local officials from the expropriation or street offices (*jiedao*) would patrol the courtyards. In such instances, they were a physical and perceptible “government” presence, yet they rarely had anything concrete to report. On one occasion, a woman from the street office entered the courtyard as I was having a cup of tea with Brother Dragon. She greeted us but did not say anything more, walking around as if inspecting the surroundings. Though Brother Dragon always appeared nonchalant in such situations, I

could sense that he was acutely alert. He asked about any news regarding expropriation, but she merely said, “We will notify you (*women hui tongzhi nin*).” She then left without giving any further information. “She has no clue,” Brother Dragon remarked once she had gone. Other times, low-level service personnel would come into the courtyards to spray pesticides. Residents would try to take advantage of this “government” presence by pumping them for details on expropriation and redevelopment, which they were unsurprisingly unable to provide.

As debate over the preservation of historical architecture repeatedly delayed the formulation of compensation packages, a government presence mostly consisted of grand-sounding announcements, a jumble of expropriation notices, and encounters with various low-level officials, none of whom seemed to feel responsible for or had news on forthcoming redevelopment interventions. Many residents felt deeply alienated by the fact they did not know whom to turn to for concrete information and by the general lack of transparency in government workings and decision-making processes. Resident committees were fondly remembered as having been indispensable during the socialist years.⁷ In everyday politics in Dabaodao, they continued to fulfill the basic function of moderating conflict and making sure that quarrels did not turn into major incidents. As had traditionally been the case, many local, mainly elderly, Dabaodao residents volunteered on these committees. They knew the area and its residents well and could assist in maintaining some degree of social stability. However, in the case of the prolonged process of housing expropriation in Dabaodao, the majority of local residents felt that the resident committees were not doing their job properly, far from their intended role of helping to effectively govern people “through communities” (Tomba 2014; J. Yang 2015). “In the past, the committee was there for us, they knew what was going on. Now it is just people sitting in front of computers, waiting for reports. They have no clue about us common people (*laobaixing*),” a resident complained. Rather than unilaterally advancing expropriation and advising residents to relocate, as Bettina Gransow has observed (2014, 23), the committees were instead regarded as oblivious entities that had no substantial information that could be of use to the neighborhood’s inhabitants. Brother Dragon regularly ridiculed the committees as “those who have no clue about anything” (*tamen shenme dou buzhidao*). In truth, however, the staff of resident committees, and even higher-up officials, were often just as helpless as the residents. In the negotiations over compensation payments and the terms of housing

expropriation, feelings of anger, frustration, and dissatisfaction would prove to be both mutually dependent and constitutive, a topic I address in the next chapter.

This chapter has shown that the emotional relationship of local residents with their immediate living environment was a complex and ambivalent one, characterized by anger and frustration paired with nostalgia and fond memories of a “better past.” Dabaodao and its courtyards were sociospatially significant to local residents. But many residents were more than willing to move out, some even eagerly waiting for the local government to act on its promise of expropriation and redevelopment. The repeated failure to do so, in turn, caused much frustration and anger. Notions of place-attachment or emotional and social bonds within an inner-city neighborhood are necessarily conditional. They are often momentary and situational, and there is a particular political economy that matters in understanding local residents’ attitudes, ideas, and behaviors. Feelings of anger, frustration, and dissatisfaction are deeply entangled with government action and the prospects of urban renewal and associated monetary compensation lingering over Dabaodao. This will become more evident in the following chapter, where I focus on the utilitarian perspective and discuss the intricate relationship and sites of contestations between residents and the local government in the process of housing expropriation.

4

Expropriation

The Burden of the Past

On a cold and damp November evening in 2012, a crowd of people gathered in the middle of Dabaodao around a public notice board (*gongshilan*) attached to the facade of a building. The sun had already set and the street was dimly lit. Beams of light from mobile phones and small flashlights whizzed across 13 printed pages that had been posted to the board. Some shook their heads in disbelief, others engaged in heated discussions, still others muttered foul language, spit on the ground, and left. “Notice regarding the Housing Expropriation and Compensation Scheme,” read the headline issued by the Shibeidistrict government. The smaller print went on to explain that “the Zhongshan Road redevelopment project is a key construction project of our city in the year 2012, the implementation of which will foster the preservation-oriented development of the Zhongshan Road Old City, will improve the living environment of residents, and will promote the image of this district as a site of great importance.”

This notice board and the news posted there had tremendous significance for many people living in Dabaodao. “They’re going to demolish the place,” an elderly man said, pointing at the board. “Why is everyone so angry?” I asked him. He mumbled, “The compensation is not good. The government is not doing a good job (*gongzuo bu daowei*). We want to move, but not like this.” He continued, “But I don’t trust them anyway. Probably nothing will happen at all.” A young man jumped in and angrily interjected, “Corruption! All they want is money!” He repeated the word “money” sev-



Fig. 6. Public notices informing residents of compensation and resettlement procedures (fieldwork photo, 2012)

eral times and pantomimed where officials would put it, namely in their own pockets. “They don’t care about us common people,” he concluded.

When the European-Style Scenic Neighborhood redevelopment project was made public in November 2012, two blocks of *liyuan* houses located on Sifang Road were the first to be expropriated. One was to be demolished and turned into a car park area “to solve the traffic problem,” as a volunteer of the resident committee explained, and “the other block will be preserved (*baohu*),” she added. What exactly this meant remained unclear at the time. Residents were informed by means of public notices written in convoluted official jargon, which laid out the terms of the expropriation and resettlement procedure. There was a general feeling of apprehension. Many people wanted to move but, as the above-mentioned elderly man had said, “not like this.” They did not consider the compensation scheme to be good enough, nor did they trust the local government. During the prolonged redevelopment process, outbursts of anger and expressions of discontent over attempts to expropriate courtyards were common among local residents, together with a profound conviction that officials were solely driven by their own interests.

With the opening of the real estate market in the late 1990s, housing expropriation became a routine occurrence across Chinese cities, along with scenes of disgruntled inner-city inhabitants trying to resist eviction or bargain for better compensation deals. Demolition and relocation (*chaiqian*) has been a practice profoundly pervaded by distrust (C. Ho 2013a). In Dabaodao, repeated redevelopment failures added to already existent feelings of frustration, suspicion, and resentment. When the public notices appeared in Dabaodao in late 2012, many residents were doubtful that they would actually be followed by any action. A 28-year-old resident who had grown up in the neighborhood remembered his parents talking about potential demolition back in the late 1990s when he was just a young boy. “That was 15 years ago,” he said, “so we don’t really believe that anything will happen.” Despite overall skepticism, a certain degree of anxiety permeated the community. Whether at market stalls, in small restaurants, or in the streets, residents could often be heard discussing potential expropriation and demolition. Some shops even offered “demolition sales” (*chaiqian shuaimai*), promoted with large window signs. During one of my visits with Baldy, he evoked the children’s tale of the shepherd boy who cried wolf as a metaphor for the situation. “I still don’t believe that the wolf has really arrived.” He paused and said, “Perhaps this is exactly why the wolf will actually come this time, and we will be eaten unprepared.”

As it turned out, a year after the first public notices appeared, not all that much had happened, even if a sense of unease persisted among the residents. One of the targeted courtyards had been fully expropriated. By the end of 2014, collectors had taken away everything they could find and sell, and the local government blocked off the entranceways. Yet no refurbishment work had begun, and the buildings still stood, slowly but steadily disintegrating. The other targeted courtyard was still inhabited by a few defiant families. “We don’t want to move,” one remaining resident said. He continued, “Yes, we need an improvement in living conditions, but we want to stay here if we can. And if we do have to move, we want to be compensated enough to be able to afford a new apartment somewhere close to here.”

Meanwhile, in the sterile-looking office on the 39th floor of the Parkson building, Mr. Lu, head of the Zhongshan Road Redevelopment Command Office, looked as frustrated as the residents down below, as he sought to explain the difficulties in getting residents to sign the expropriation agreement and move out so that the refurbishment could be launched:

The party secretary wants this to be a success. Now we have to implement it. But how? First, we need to move people out, negotiate with them, offer them compensation, and get them to sign the expropriation agreement. But if they don't do it, if they refuse to move, then what can we do?

In highlighting “two important issues: first, compensation has to be fair; second, we have to preserve a memory of our city,” Mr. Lu's narrative echoed China's revamped softer and quality-oriented urbanization rhetoric. In 2013, not long after the notices appeared in Dabaodao, Qingdao issued its new housing expropriation regulations (Qingdao Government 2013), which echoed the updated nationwide regulations in their emphasis on fair compensation, public interest, accountability, and the rule of law. According to Mr. Lu, the government was trying everything to be fair, but residents simply “do not cooperate” (*bu peihe*).

They want the government to pay for everything. They now live in a 15-square-meter room and request to be given something like 85 square meters. How can we pay for this? There are regulations and standards, which are quite fair. Plus, there are many redevelopment projects in Qingdao. The city government is not prepared to spend all the money on this one area.

Mr. Lu said this with an agonized expression on his face. Indeed, such conversations with him and other officials reveal that simple dichotomies of a powerful local government and powerless residents cannot fully capture the complexities of the expropriation and redevelopment process. Accounts of urban renewal projects elsewhere in China describe resident resistance strategies, ranging from petitioning, appealing to the higher authorities, becoming “nail households” (*dingzi hu*) or, more drastically, threatening to commit suicide (Erie 2012). Though residents of Dabaodao rarely engaged in such dramatic actions, they nevertheless did exert a certain agency (if sometimes unwittingly). In fact, rather than victims of eviction and redevelopment, they should be viewed as one of various deeply embedded structural factors contributing to stagnated development.

In what follows, I reflect on the utilitarian aspects that have defined local residents' relationship with their living environment, and the ways the latter intertwines with an emotional attachment to place. I also focus on

the intricate, mutually constraining relationships and sites of contestation between residents and the local government in the context of the prolonged process of housing expropriation. Launching a housing expropriation and renewal scheme in Dabaodao has, I argue, been much like opening a Pandora's box in unleashing unresolved legacies and burdens of the past. Redevelopment announcements created expectations and triggered actions relative to compensation that, as hinted at in the conversation with Mr. Lu, the local government has been unable to effectively address. Indeed, it is precisely in the realm of expropriation and compensation that the structural nature of the urban developmental gridlock becomes so salient.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF HOUSING EXPROPRIATION

Between 2012 and 2021, several different housing expropriations schemes were initiated. The first, in 2012–13, led to the expropriation of two courtyards. A second intervention followed in 2015, beginning in the Shibe area of Dabaodao and then, about a year later, in Shinan. This time, over a period of 18 months, about 80 percent of residents were effectively moved out of the inner city. A third scheme was launched in 2021, targeting the remaining residents in the Shinan area. Though these different expropriation projects varied in terms of offered compensation, they shared certain key stipulations and conditions.

Residents were given the choice between monetary compensation (*huobi buchang*) and a new apartment in a different area (*yidi fangwu buchang*). In the case of the former, the amount was calculated based on the size, orientation (*chaoxiang*), and story (*louceng*) of the courtyard room. Article 9 of Qingdao's 2013 housing expropriation and demolition regulations stipulates that compensation for "expropriated housing" cannot be lower than market prices for similar housing. Furthermore, a distinction was made between rooms 25 square meters or smaller and those 45 square meters or smaller. The state of (dis)repair and interior decoration (*nei zhuangxiu*) was also considered and could result in a more favorable evaluation. In 2013, the standard rate was 9,750 yuan per square meter, but a *liyuan* room could, in an ideal case, be appraised as high as 13,910 yuan per square meter and in 2016, this amount reached around 15,000 yuan. The room I rented in Dabaodao, for example, was evaluated at a rate of 14,697 yuan per square meter in 2016. In 2021, the last few remaining residents living in Dabaodao were offered

an even better deal of over 20,000 yuan per square meter on average, and in a few cases even close to 30,000. On top of this sum, in 2013, each individual or household that agreed to move within a certain period was offered a reward of up to 10,000 yuan. In 2021, this reward rose to 60,000 yuan. Over the course of about 10 years, the total possible compensation amount more than doubled: in 2013, this amount could reach as high as 800,000 yuan; in 2016, some residents received over one million yuan; and in 2021, the total was close to two million.

These offers were significantly better than in other cities.¹ They were also much higher than in previous interventions in Qingdao, in the mid-2000s, when there were no standard-setting regulations and housing expropriation was typically outsourced to private companies that offered amounts below market price. In the 1990s, the compensation standard in Taidong was 3,450 yuan per square meter (C. Liu 2006, 60). “I got 150,000 Yuan for my little room in the late 1990s. That is nothing compared to what people are given now,” a former Taidong resident complained. In 2003, an interlocutor who was evicted to make way for the shopping center at the intersection of Dexian Road and Zhongshan Road (Chapter 1) received 5,000 yuan per square meter as compensation. The rhetoric and practice of redevelopment also differed notably between these periods. As Mr. Lu mentioned, the mandate was now to treat residents fairly. A well-informed local journalist meanwhile told me, “Some of the personnel that violently evicted people from Xiaobaodao 10 years ago are now much gentler and more civilized.” The residents’ accounts similarly reflected this shift. They all acknowledged that the local government had become “much softer” (*geng ruan*), as one of the last remaining residents put it in the summer of 2021. Yet despite these relatively generous offers and the apparently more humane attitude of the local government, many interlocutors still echoed the sentiment of the elderly man in the introductory vignette: “We want to move, but not like this.”

“TOO MUCH HASSLE” AND “NOT FAIR”

Back in 2013, the majority of residents regarded the idea of being compensated by means of a new apartment in a different area as “not realistic” (*bu xianshi*). This was because the apartments offered were predominantly located in the northern, former industrial, or newly developed parts of Qingdao. Most residents instead wanted to remain closer to the old city center.

“What would I do in a high-rise in a suburb without supermarkets or other fun places around?” a man in his mid-fifties commented during an informal chat at a courtyard entrance in 2013. Furthermore, when families were asked to make a decision, the new apartments were still mostly under construction, meaning that they would need to provisionally move into a different apartment. Though the expropriation scheme included a subsidy for this transitional period, many considered this to be “too much hassle” (*tai mafan le*). Perhaps more importantly, in both 2013 and 2016, the regulations declared that the new apartments could not be of any more value than an eventual monetary compensation; otherwise the residents would have to pay the difference themselves. This was an issue, in that the new apartments were allocated by means of a lottery, such that a residents might end up with a bigger apartment than they wanted or could afford. At the point of allocation, the decision made to be compensated with a new apartment rather than money was irreversible. Most residents considered this “too risky” and consequently chose monetary compensation. Accordingly, the housing expropriation office (*fangwu zhengshou bangongshi*) specially set up in 2012 in Dabaodao, where residents could sign up for a new apartment, remained mostly empty. “They just sit there, chewing away on their sunflower seeds,” a resident scoffed. She lived in one of the affected courtyards and had decided to take the money. This regulation wouldn’t change until 2021, on the occasion of the third and last round of expropriation and compensation. This time, residents were informed in advance about the dimensions of the apartments to which they were entitled. Those whose expropriated room was 25 square meters or less were offered a 75-square-meter apartment, while those with a room of 45 square meters or less were eligible for an apartment of 85–95 square meters. As previously, these new apartments were located in areas far from the city center and not yet ready to move into. As a result, most residents once again preferred monetary compensation.

Locals also, however, expressed discontent with the monetary option. “This is not enough to buy a new apartment,” a father complained in 2012 during the first round of expropriations. Residents cited soaring property prices, especially in the old town center. “How are we supposed to purchase a new apartment with this little money? Eight hundred thousand yuan may sound like a lot, but it is just about enough for a down payment (*shoufu*). It’s not fair (*bu gongping*),” one of my neighbors, Mrs. Cui, protested. Apartments available for purchase were almost always bigger than the residents’ rooms in Dabaodao, so although per-square-meter compensation was substantial,

it was rarely enough to buy a new place to live. The notion of “unfairness” was frequently evoked, highlighting a clear contrast between the “fair compensation” referenced by Mr. Lu of the Redevelopment Office and residents’ understanding of “fair.” While the former was based on standardized regulations and market prices, the latter measured “fair” compensation in relation to future prospects (i.e., the ability to buy an apartment in an area close to the old town center). Local residents also evaluated “fairness” by evoking the past, arguing that since others had become wealthy through expropriation, so too should they. This divergence between “fair” in the sense of the law and residents’ perception of justice was apparent throughout the entire housing expropriation process.

The inhabitants of Dabaodao were also initially reluctant to sign expropriation agreements for reasons related to socioeconomic capital. As discussed in Chapter 3, most of the remaining Dabaodao residents did not have access to lucrative (*danwei*) housing outside the neighborhood in the early 2000s. “I am a *wufanghu* [resident who does not own property],” Brother Dragon emphasized several times, in referring to the fact that he did not own any housing beyond his courtyard room. For residents like Brother Dragon, their room represented a crucial and, in many cases, the sole object of value they possessed. Transforming the latter into a lump sum offered the possibility of improving their standard of living and securing a better future. In his study on eviction in Chongqing, Cheuk-yuet Ho (2015, 174) similarly observes that housing evictees, “desperate not to lose their last and only chance of avoiding intergenerational poverty and misery, . . . animated by needs/desires, dance to the tune of rights-as-claim in order to bargain for better compensation.” Whenever a new redevelopment project and thus also expropriation and compensation concretized, residents sought to consolidate their position and negotiating power vis-à-vis the local government. This often consisted of noncooperative behavior and a tendency to refuse offers or attempts to bargain for more.

Once, after jumping in a taxi to return to my university accommodation, I noticed the driver kept curiously looking back at me through the rearview mirror. “I know you,” he suddenly said. In fact, he was a resident of Dabaodao who lived in a courtyard off Sifang Road. This unexpected encounter reminded me of the often highly coincidental nature of fieldwork and provided a welcome opportunity to chat about life in the courtyards. At a certain point, the conversation turned to the issue of compensation. “Let me tell you,” he said, “I would be stupid to accept the first

offer they make. I have waited for this opportunity long enough. A few more months won't make any difference. I will do everything to fight for a better deal." On another occasion, during a conversation with Mrs. Yu, a 65-year-old local resident who had lived in Dabaodao all of her life, she matter-of-factly told me:

I just came back from a meeting with the government. They say that they want to hear our opinions and would take us seriously, but also asked us to be cooperative. But why should I [be cooperative]? Of course, I will try to get the best out of it for myself. I will try to get as much as I can.

Similarly, despite his oscillating opinions about staying in Dabaodao, Brother Dragon always stressed that he would bargain hard. "If they give me two million yuan tomorrow and a nice new apartment in the eastern parts, I would not take it," he said in 2020. "I have everything I need here." Though he often repeated this stance in explaining why he had decided to refuse offers, he also admitted that "what I am doing here is gambling. I am taking a risk." He continued to live in his courtyard room for a number of years after most residents had already moved out. "Others left because they were afraid that they wouldn't get anything at all if they waited. But you just have to be persistent, keep going," he said. As refurbishment finally started on a larger scale in 2019, he seemed confident that he would soon be able to negotiate "a really good deal" for himself. "I have done my homework," he told me confidently. "I know exactly how the government works. They cannot do anything to me." Common people (*laobaixing*) in China, Xiang Biao (2016, 133) argues, "are not passive victims who are exploited . . . instead, they can be highly opportunistic in dealing with the local government." The "weapons" (Scott 1986) they deploy are not of the weak, but "of the confident, the demanding, and the loud" (Xiang 2016, 148). Brother Dragon knew that "we *wufanghu* are protected by the state (*guojia*)," as he put it, and that this was his trump card in negotiating with the local government (*zhengfu*).

Officials and preservationists sometimes called residents "selfish and calculating." From the residents' point of view, however, they were simply pursuing a basic entitlement. Many locals had friends and relatives who had profited and even become wealthy from urban renewal in the past. Comparing themselves to these people, they felt that they had every right to demand the same. For example, one resident posed a rhetorical question: "Others benefited from housing expropriation in the past. Why shouldn't I?"² The

notion of “benefiting” was framed in terms of being able to secure a better future and perhaps even get rich, as so many others had in the past. Here, it was not legal “fairness” that mattered, but whether or not residents would be substantially better off. In 2021, I visited Brother Dragon not long after he had been notified about a potential compensation offer. “It’s a lot now,” he said, “maybe close to two million yuan.” But then he contemplated: “It isn’t really all that much. Nowadays this is spent faster than you think.”

These examples highlight, moreover, the legacy of the past. On the one hand, economic reforms produced poor, “left behind” urban residents, who are emotionally attached to Dabaodao in complicated ways (Chapter 3). On the other hand, these same reforms created a group that has necessarily had to be self-reliant, or to use Arthur Kleinman’s words (2011, 3–4), that has been compelled “to be proactive, rationally calculating, and competitive.” From the residents’ perspective, demanding better deals was perfectly logical, particularly considering that housing prices had been rising at the same rate, if not faster, than offered compensation.³ Economic reforms and especially urban renewal throughout the 1990s and 2000s had produced not just desires (Rofel 2007) but certain expectations, where housing was viewed as a lucrative resource to secure a better future. Gaining from redevelopment was seen as a fundamental right, and residents expected the government to deliver.

FORTRESS BESIEGED

For the local government, these dynamics posed a serious challenge. In a conversation with Mr. Lu, he specifically mentioned the above-quoted Mrs. Yu, who was firm in her refusal to cooperate. He said with frustration, “She would not agree to any of our offers. She just does not agree, no matter what.” Similarly, when I mentioned Brother Dragon to Mr. Gao, the head of the Shinan Historic District Preservation and Development Bureau, his face immediately changed. “Oh, that old man (*laotou*) with the dog! I have given up on him. He controls the courtyard. I don’t even dare to enter it anymore. And I can’t—he’s locked it and keeps the key.” These encounters illustrate the difficulties that those in charge of implementing redevelopment faced as they grappled with the need to adhere to new expropriation regulations, the preservation mandate, and simultaneously dissatisfied and noncooperative local residents. The actions of local residents limited the leeway of

local government agents and contributed to repeated episodes of stagnant redevelopment. This, in turn, caused frustration among local officials and residents alike, creating a situation of mutual constraint and distrust.

By 2016, numerous lawsuits had been filed.⁴ These were like “handcuffs for the local government” (*ba zhengfu kaoqilai*), as one local scholar described it, while making a gesture as if he had just been manacled. In the past, particularly before the enactment of the new expropriation regulations in 2011, local governments could rely on demolition squads to do the “dirty work.” These squads would often beat up residents, cut off their electricity, or forcefully remove them (Shao 2013, 11). None of this happened in Dabodao. “They [officials] don’t dare,” a well-connected civil servant at the city archives explained. “It would mean the immediate end of their careers.” Yet their attempts to persuade people to comply, or what Andrew Kipnis (2008, 123) calls “good-faith communicative reasoning,” was ineffective. Legal procedures and state infrastructures were unable to appease disgruntled residents, whose claims were driven by a profound conviction that they were entitled to a compensation deal that would instantly improve their livelihoods.

Xiang Biao (2016, 148) remarks that “the Chinese people commonly present themselves as subjects (*laobaixing*) with entitlements instead of as citizens with rights, and they judge the state according to its substantive deliverables rather than the formal procedures to which it adheres.”⁵ This observation is certainly applicable to residents’ attitudes and actions in the context of expropriation and renewal in Qingdao. Even if housing expropriation had, in the past, been more violent and arbitrary, on balance people benefited, or this was the general perception. Once a resident complained, “What is the point in talking about expropriation all the time when nothing happens anyway. At least in the past it was clear: they come in, you negotiate, you take the money, and you’re gone.” The softer rhetoric based on legality and accountability was, in contrast, seen as neither legitimate nor rightful, though I would argue that the notions of entitlement and rights are not incommensurable. Residents considered their entitlements to be rights, and they not only “play[ed] by the rules to secure their rights,” as Shao (2013, 276) argues, but were also always ready to challenge the rules when they considered them to be discordant with what they perceived to be their rights. To once again quote Xiang Biao (2016, 148): “This can also be understood as the people’s strategy of retaining their political subjectivity and refusal of becoming liberal legal-economic subjects.”⁶

While also applicable to Dabaodao, this political subjectivity was contingent upon the presence, in the first place, of a concrete urban renewal project. When, for instance, expropriation notices were put up and the local government began negotiating with residents, “getting the best possible deal” was a key concern, and residents were indeed demanding and loud. Yet when the redevelopment project was scrapped, the residents took action, somewhat ironically by urging the authorities to reinstate the expropriation process and move them out sooner rather than later. For example, toward the end of 2014, when it had become clear that the European-Style Scenic Neighborhood project had failed and no new project had yet officially been made public, many residents lost their patience. Several courtyard leaders organized residents and collected money (around 500 yuan per person) for the purposes of inviting a team from one of Qingdao’s universities to carry out a thorough evaluation (*pinggu*) of Dabaodao’s courtyards. The report was then handed over to the local government. It “proved that this area is really unlivable,” a resident told me afterward. Most courtyards were subsequently classified as “level-D derelict buildings” (*D ji weifang*), the lowest category. On the basis that level-D derelict buildings are no longer safe to live in, the government was forced to prioritize all such constructions in its expropriation plans. Shortly thereafter, public notices went up once again in Dabaodao, this time more or less targeting the entire area. Upon their appearance, however, residents began negotiations anew for a better deal, expressing their unhappiness about the compensation scheme. Brother Dragon, for instance, furiously said, “They pay money to buy a rope and put it around their necks to then thank the government for taking it off”—his way of ridiculing his neighbors for what he saw as being shortsighted. While many residents did eventually decide to take the upgraded compensation offer and move out, Brother Dragon and others refused. They continued to gamble.

Chinese author Qian Zhongshu (2009) argues that marriage is a “fortress besieged,” the title of his famous book (*Weicheng*): those inside are trying to get out, while those outside are trying to get in. In Dabaodao, whenever redevelopment and expropriation became a concrete reality, residents tended to refuse offers on the basis that the compensation deal wasn’t good enough. Yet when redevelopment stagnated and prospects of moving out faded, they became angry the government hadn’t done more and demanded to be compensated and moved out quickly. Simply declaring the commencement of expropriation and the implementation of renewal triggered residents’ expectations and claims and brought to the surface long-standing

legacies of past forms of urban renewal. This was particularly visible in the realm of property rights.

FRAGMENTED PROPERTY RIGHTS

As in many inner-city neighborhoods across China, property rights in Dabaodao were highly fragmented and nontransparent (Shin 2010a; G. Lin 2015; Y. Sun, Xu, and Yu 2016). In 2013, about half of local residents living in the inner city owned a private room (*siyou fangchan*). Most had purchased the latter from their *danwei* or had inherited it from their parents. Others reclaimed their rooms, a possibility if they could produce evidence that they had been the rightful owners before the Communist takeover in 1949. A significant number of local residents instead rented their rooms as so-called public housing (*gongyou fangchan*), also known as “public rental housing” (*gongzu fang*). Rental rates for such housing were generally very low, often no more than about 20 to 30 yuan per month, much less than in the privatized property market. “Public housing” tenants were treated as “quasi owners” and were also entitled to the same compensation as owners but could not sell their property in the private market. Reasons for renting varied. Some residents, in spite of heavy subsidization, did not have the financial means to purchase their rooms from their respective *danwei* back in the early 2000s. Others had made an informed choice not to buy because in the case of “public rental housing,” the state continued to act as the official “landlord” and would take care of repair work. Residents who had purchased full use rights were instead solely responsible for the maintenance of their immediate living environment. “This was always a source of conflict, because those who had bought their rooms still expected the government to take care of maintenance work,” recalled a former staff member of Qingdao’s Housing Bureau, who used to be responsible for the Dabaodao area in the 1990s. In fact, one of the state’s motives for selling subsidized housing in the 1990s was precisely to give residents an incentive to “care” for their own rooms. The hope, more broadly, was that this would help improve overall living conditions. Yet, due to the variegated property rights, the unequal provision of housing, and the fact that many local residents moved out of the area in the late 1990s, this approach turned out to be ineffective. In inner-city areas that had largely been left out of socialist urban planning, physical structures were rundown and shabby.

In other cases, local residents had not purchased their rooms because the courtyard they lived in was entirely publicly owned. Specifically, this scenario could occur either when the original owner was unknown or when the landlords who had owned the respective *liyuan* courtyard before 1949 identified themselves and managed to prove that they had once been the legitimate owner. In such instances, the government would act as the provisional property administrator (*dai guan*). Pre-1949 certificates of property ownership (*fangchan zheng*) were officially recognized if, for various motives, the property in question had never been formally—with the consent of the original landlord—collectivized during the early Maoist period (Qingdao 1999c, 165). This occurred, for example, where the landlord in question had escaped China before 1949 or was not traceable for other reasons.

Many of Qingdao's "capitalists" had indeed fled to Taiwan right before the Communist takeover, and their property made up 80 percent of so-called administered housing (*dai guan fang*) in the 1980s and 1990s (Qingdao 1999c, 166). The government continued to regard these original landlords as the legitimate owners of the property and granted them the legal right to reclaim their property. In this regard, a courtyard leader on Huangdao Road told me that the descendants of the original landlord of the courtyard returned on a regular basis "to have a look," as she phrased it. In this specific case, the original landlord had escaped to Taiwan in the 1940s and the courtyard had thus never been officially collectivized. All the residents were accordingly tenants, with the Housing Bureau acting as the administrator. If the original landlords wanted to act on their nominal ownership, they were legally entitled to do so. However, as a staff member of the Housing Bureau explained, "The government supports this, but it would be their [the original landlords'] responsibility to deal with current tenants." In other words, they would need to negotiate with residents and, if necessary, compensate them accordingly, an arduous task. For example, a former landlord who wanted to reclaim his villa in Qingdao's old town spent 20 years moving out seven of the eight occupants. The last one refused to move and the original landlord eventually gave up. In the case of an entire *liyuan* courtyard occupied by over 50 families, it would be a herculean task to track down all legitimate tenants, negotiate with them, and move them out.

Such mixed ownership made expropriating courtyards all that much harder. In some cases, there would be several valid claimants to one and the same property or even an entire courtyard. It was thus possible that the local government had to compensate two parties for one property: the legitimate



Fig. 7. Photos showing various types of self-built extensions to existent courtyards in Dabaodao (fieldwork photos, 2012–13)

original landlord and the equally legitimate tenants, thus significantly driving up the overall cost. Furthermore, due to the neighborhood flight of the 1990s, the majority of residents were migrants who rented their rooms from local residents. It was often difficult to track down official property owners who had moved out, some of whom lived in different parts of the country, or were not locatable at all. As Mr. Lu put it, “Even if we wanted to sit down and negotiate with owners, we need to spend months finding out where they are and then find a common date and time to arrange a meeting—impossible!”

To add to this, a number of local residents lived in makeshift structures. When I walked through Dabaodao, it was not always easy to distinguish between legitimate housing and “illegal constructions” (*wei jian*). A few sheds and huts dated back to the Maoist years, when some courtyards were converted into factories. In the 1980s, these factories were turned into residential housing and officially registered with the Housing Bureau. The occupants were entitled to full compensation. Over time, residents had also creatively extended and transformed existing courtyard rooms to meet their needs. Some had even built two-storied booth-like constructions in arch-shaped courtyard entrances (Figure 7) and rented them out to either migrants or those who needed temporary shelter. Officially, the government excluded such “self-built housing” from the compensation scheme, but for many residents, the increased living space mattered in terms of how they evaluated the offered compensation and the ability to improve their livelihoods as a result.

A widowed man in his early seventies, for example, had built a small extension to his ground-floor room, where he kept an induction stove and a small space to prepare food. He was angry that, according to the compensation scheme, this extra space was not taken into account. “I built this kitchen space myself so that I at least have a kitchen,” he argued. His reasoning was that he had been forced to take care of this most basic amenity himself and that this should be considered in evaluating the compensation amount. Government official Mr. Lu, in contrast, followed a very different logic, complaining, “When we negotiate with residents who have built their own sheds and extensions, we are more likely to run into difficulties, as they request more money on the basis of these illegal constructions. They have to understand that there is a law and that we cannot break it for them.” Once again, there existed two very different understandings of “rightful” and “legal.”

Another frequent issue concerned so-called property swapping (*fangwu huhuan*). Throughout the Maoist years, residents could request to switch

their rooms with other residents or relatives living in another courtyard, or even sometimes in a different part of the city. The motives for doing so were manifold. In some cases, residents simply wanted to move closer to other family members; other times, they preferred to be nearer to their *danwei* (Qingdao 1999c, 181). Exchanging properties was common practice all the way into the 1990s. In the process, original property certificates often went missing or documentation was incomplete. One resident, for example, had swapped rooms with his father in the 1980s. Both rooms were privately owned by the family. The son claimed that his father had kept both property certificates in his room, but when he died, they were nowhere to be found, meaning that the son had no legitimate proof that the room he was occupying was actually his. He was refused compensation and in turn filed a lawsuit. In a similar scenario, another resident who had been living in a courtyard room inside Dabaodao for the past 30 years was denied compensation on the basis of missing legal evidence. When he refused to move, local government personnel came while he was out one day and sealed off the courtyard entrance. He broke the seal upon his return and went back to his room. Eventually, city management (*chengguan*) and the police forcefully removed him and sent him to his *hukou*, or place of household registration (in this case, a suburban district of Qingdao). Interestingly, Brother Dragon, in his capacity as a security guard, helped to evict the resident and clearly sided with the local government. “This guy had no evidence whatsoever. The government was nice enough to let him stay for that long. But he should have cooperated and moved out,” Brother Dragon argued. This incident moreover underscores the blurry boundaries between “residents” and “government.”

Yet another source of conflict was the practice of “property splitting” (*fen hu*). This was especially common before the opening of the housing market. A former staff member of the Housing Bureau explained, “Our *danwei* had to grant permission to families that wanted to split their property. This could be in the case of marriage or when family members had children. The bureau head had to sign off on these applications.” There existed relatively strict rules governing size and spatial separation, and separate doors were required for the original and split-off property respectively. However, as my interlocutor admitted, “There were many backdoor deals. Quite a few families managed to split their rooms even though they did not fulfill the criteria.” I was told the story of a resident who had borrowed money but was unable to repay in cash, so he split off about 10 square meters of his room to repay his debts. Such property splitting significantly drove up the overall

costs of redevelopment. A split-off room of 10 square meters was, in accordance with the compensation schemes, categorized as 25 square meters in terms of rewards and benefits. This also led to many conflicts between residents. Mr. Lu explained:

Let's say there are two families who are living in their former *danwei* housing. Both have a son. One father used to be a factory manager and was given a place of 40 square meters, while the other was just an ordinary factory worker and was given a room of 30 square meters. The former factory manager was better off and bought an apartment for his son elsewhere. The factory worker, meanwhile, split his current room into two individual units (*fenhu*). In the event of resettlement and compensation, the worker will actually get more money because his originally single 30-square-meter room is now evaluated on the basis of two 15-square-meters rooms, which, according to the compensation scheme, will be counted and compensated as two rooms of 25 square meters.

Mr. Lu sighed, "If the families know each other, it is even worse. There will be jealousy and fights."

Property rights were a key site of contestation and greatly hindered the ability of the local government to implement renewal projects. During an informal chat, the vice head of the Bureau of Culture and Tourism described the complications related to property rights as "the biggest challenge" (*zui da de tiaozhan*). Similarly, Professor Wu said that residents "stirring up trouble" (*naoshi*) over property rights issues was "a huge headache" for government agents. Importantly, many of the problems pertaining to property rights were not directly related to the immediate compensation scheme or local state practice, but to conventions and happenings of the past, which quickly came to fore in negotiations over expropriations in the present. Nowhere was this more apparent than in family disputes.

FAMILY DISPUTES

One afternoon in early 2013, I was chatting with Brother Dragon when he suddenly received a call from his older sister, announcing a quick visit. "She never comes here," he said with a confused look on his face. Shortly thereafter she appeared, carrying a plastic bag full of lamb meat as a present. Brother

Dragon dumped it in the freezer, an item he had recently picked up from a friend and had placed next to his bed. The two then exchanged pleasantries and trivialities. I wondered if they would have preferred to speak privately and regretted not having insisted on leaving. In any case, after about half an hour, she left again. As soon as the door was shut, Brother Dragon lit a cigarette and sat down. “I’ll tell you why she came by with a present,” he said. “It is because she heard about a possible eviction. She wants to revive our relationship so that I will give her some of the compensation money.” Brother Dragon would, however, stay for another eight years after this encounter, with his sister still regularly urging him to sign an agreement and still hoping to secure some money. This anecdote illustrates the social significance of even a vague potential of housing expropriation. It also exemplifies how negotiations over compensation were not just a matter between local officials and property owners, but involved a complex web of family relationships.

It was not uncommon that the occupants of a given courtyard room were not the actual property owners, but rather other members of the family. This led to arguments when occupants wanted to stay while the official owners (who lived elsewhere) were inclined to immediately sign the agreement. There was, for example, a family of three who lived in a courtyard room that they did not legally own but had lived in for over 30 years. The room had originally been purchased in the early 2000s by the family’s nephew, who had moved to the United States and no longer cared about what was happening back in Qingdao. In 2016, when the second round of expropriations targeted Huangdao Road, the nephew decided to sign the agreement and take the money. The family that had been living there for over three decades and considered it to be their home was thus suddenly asked to move out without any compensation payment offered. They refused to do so, claiming that they would be left with nothing and that they instead were the rightful occupants. They even filed a lawsuit to become recognized as the legal owners. At the time of writing, the outcome remains unknown, though in 2021, the father worriedly said, “There is not much hope.” For property owners who did not live in Dabaodao, the situation was often straightforward. “Let’s just take the money as soon as possible,” an acquaintance said. He lived in the eastern area of Qingdao and had no patience or sympathy for one of his relatives who was occupying a room in Xizhen. “He just lives there and drinks beer all day long. I am going to get him to finally agree to move.” For people like my acquaintance, the situation was simple—for residents in the inner city, much more was at stake.

In the summer of 2022, Brother Dragon's situation took a dramatic turn. His four siblings decided to file a lawsuit against him. They claimed that the room on Huangdao Road should be considered family inheritance as it was only their mother's name on the property ownership certificate. They accordingly demanded a share of the compensation payments. Brother Dragon meanwhile asserted that he was the rightful (and legal) owner. "Before my mother passed away, no one had any idea that these wrecked buildings would be worth any money in the future, so no one cared, and we never transferred the ownership to me," he recounted. "But I am the owner. I have been living here for 65 years. This is my place." His siblings did not agree. As the date of the lawsuit drew nearer, Brother Dragon became increasingly nervous. Many other residents had attempted to fight similar lawsuits, but most had lost. A lawyer strongly advised him to negotiate and come to terms with his siblings outside court. Meanwhile, the local government was beginning to renovate Huangdao Road and officials visited Brother Dragon on a daily basis, urging him to sign the expropriation agreement. His room was eventually evaluated at a total of one and a half million yuan, a sum that he would, however, need to share with his brothers and sisters should the property be considered "inheritance." Brother Dragon described his situation as "fighting a battle on two fronts." His siblings continued to put pressure on him, eventually booking an appointment at Qingdao's Property Registration and Transferal Bureau in order to have the names of all five siblings written into the property ownership certificate. Preferring to avoid a lawsuit, Brother Dragon finally agreed and ended up with just a fifth of his small *liyuan* room.

These examples illustrate the varied and particularistic sites of contestation that accompanied expropriation in Dabaodao. Certainly, pinpointing the mutually constraining constellation of resident needs and local government objectives to any one particular actor or activity is impossible. Sociologist Andreas Glaeser (2011, 38) describes how seals, stamps, or insignia "hail" people "into a particular role through the deployment of a particular sign instantaneously legible as a call to a particular kind of behavior." In Dabaodao, expropriation notices were precisely such a sign, immediately prompting certain actions on the part of residents and their family members. Announcing redevelopment was like opening a Pandora's box: it not only unleashed expectations and claims, but also triggered family disputes and brought to the surface unresolved property issues. These dated back to periods of time (often the Maoist years) when decisions were made accord-

ing to quite different parameters, in a distinct institutional environment, and sometimes according to different laws. In Chapter 2, I argued that the local government found itself in a dilemma, in that it was expected to implement redevelopment following the preservation mandate but did not have an adequate institutional “tool kit” to do so. In negotiations with residents, a similar predicament emerged. The local government was unable to get residents to agree to compensation offers and, under changing urbanization priorities, did not dare resort to other means, such as threat or force, as had been used in the past. The result was a system-induced, structural deadlock, highlighting the challenges of trying to reform urban redevelopment strategies and governing technologies without more fundamentally addressing deeply entrenched political economic problems, an issue that is also salient relative to migrant workers living and working in the city, the topic of the next chapter.

5

Migrants

“Only” Working in the Inner City

On a sleepy summer day in 2021, all was relatively quiet along Huangdao Road. Vendors sat behind their stalls, yawning or playing with their phones. Not much was left of the once-busy market ambiance. At the entrance to the courtyard where I used to live, I bumped into my former next-door neighbors, the Zhang family from Linyi (Shandong), who were already operating a market stall there in 2012 when I first started fieldwork. We greeted each other and exchanged pleasantries. “Off work?” (*xia ban le*) grandmother Zhang asked me in her thick dialect. I wasn’t sure whether she remembered that I had moved away long ago, although in some ways, it felt as if I had never left. The Zhangs were still living there, still selling seafood displayed in the same orange basins so characteristic of Huangdao Road. Her daughter-in-law laughed: “Yes, we are still around. I moved here when I was 20. Now I am 47. We have been here for 27 years—27 years in this very spot!” “Are they still letting you stay now that redevelopment has begun?” I asked. “We are not sure,” she replied. “But probably not. We will need to look for a new place soon. Also, business here isn’t going so well anymore.” Since eviction started in 2017 and then extensive redevelopment in 2020 in the Shibei parts of Dabaodao, many families like the Zhangs had moved away. Some did so because their rental contracts were terminated and others because they could no longer earn a living by running a market stall.

This chapter discusses the largest and most prominent group in Dabaodao, rural migrants—such as the Zhang family—a group variously referred to as *waidiren* (people from an outside place), “peasant workers” (*nong-*

min gong), “blind floaters” (*mangliu*), or the “floating population” (*liudong renkou*) (Zavoretti 2017, 15). Here I use the term “migrants,” as the equivalent in Chinese (*yimin zhe*) is relatively neutral in connotation. In fact, it was not always obvious whether migrants came from rural areas or were from smaller cities and thus held an “urban status” in the household registration system. Locally, migrants were mainly referred to as *waidiren*, but also as “those from the countryside” (*nongcun lai de ren*) or as “temporary workers” (*dagong de ren*), even if many of them were anything but temporary and had lived in the area for years or decades. Most, especially those who had moved to the city with their families, expressed the desire to stay and did not seem to have any plans to ever return “home.”

I spent a considerable amount of time with these migrants, and yet writing about or positioning them within the broader context of inner-city redevelopment and the debates about preservation poses a challenge. Their stories made me acutely aware of the limitations of “heritage preservation” as a strategy to deal with urban issues, at least in the narrow sense in which it was applied in Qingdao, and in an environment where certain groups are institutionally deprived of their “right to the city” (Harvey 2008). On the one hand, migrants had the greatest need for and were most directly reliant on the inner city for their livelihoods. They depended on its specific locale, spatial setup, and architecture to make a living and socially and economically integrate. On the other hand, migrants were almost nonexistent in public, official, and even academic debates over the “correct” historical narrative, present usage, and future appearance of Dabaodao. While so-called local residents were at least by some regarded as “genuine” Qingdao people or the carriers of “authentic” local culture, migrants were not considered to be rightful occupants or even as forming part of the “local community.” Rather, they were treated as temporary residents who were “only there to work.” Particularly as Dabaodao and *liyuan* houses increasingly became targets of preservation, migrants’ ways of using the physical environment for work were viewed as wrongful representations of the inner city, delegitimized, and deemed inappropriate. Migrants also suffered passive-aggressive discrimination at the hands of local residents and served as scapegoats and culprits for various kinds of problems. Among other things, they were directly accused of destroying “valuable architecture.” Though state policies have, at least on paper, become increasingly accommodating toward this population, in Dabaodao migrants largely remained “strangers” (L. Zhang 2001), looked down upon as “nonurban” and “undesired” subjects. They

were permitted to work in the city, but denied the right “to habitat and to inhabit” (Lefebvre 1996, 173). Migrants were also frequently victims of ad hoc interventions by the local government meant to regulate and, in some cases, even dismantle market stalls, thus threatening their very livelihoods.

In what follows, I highlight not only the vulnerable and marginal urban existence of the migrant population, but also their agency as the most prominent and visible group within Dabaodao. I provide concrete examples of how migrants, in their day-to-day dialectical engagement with their material surroundings (Ingold 2012, 432), significantly contributed to the area’s spatial transformation and thus not only to visitors’ sensual experience, but also to public representations of Dabaodao. I argue that the presence of migrants in Dabaodao was symptomatic of the developmental stagnation. Indeed, the sustained state of postponement opened up a concrete space for migrants to exploit the inner city for their own ends and needs. They filled not only a sociospatial, but also a political, vacuum, as well as created a kind of spatial anarchy in the streets of Dabaodao, which the state’s “infrastructural power” was unable to effectively contain. Eventually, however, the local state resorted to repressive action and direct force to put an end to migrants’ relatively uninhibited existence in Dabaodao.

RURAL TO URBAN MIGRATION

Much has been written about China’s migrant population, those who left the vast countryside in search of employment opportunities in cities across the country.¹ The *hukou* system that came into being in its current form in the 1950s (though it had existed in variations even in the premodern era; see C. Fan 2008, chap. 3) divided the entire country into two groups: those holding a rural and those holding an urban *hukou* status.² Despite Mao’s seeming antiurban bias, state policy heavily prioritized the urban over the rural and fostered an “unequal exchange” between the agricultural and industrial sectors (C. Fan 2008, 44). By keeping farmers on the land, a steady and regular transfer of agricultural products into the cities could be secured at a relatively low cost, although, in certain periods, farmers were encouraged to migrate to cities. During the Great Leap Forward (1958–62), for example, investments in urban industrial growth were disproportionately high, and enterprises hired as many as 23 million peasants (Taylor cited in Solinger 1999, 41). A few years later, however, many of these temporary workers were

deported back to the countryside. Nominally, Mao wanted to level rural-urban disparities and inequality, but in reality, both the *hukou* and *danwei* systems actually reinforced and, most important, institutionalized the segregation of Chinese society, privileging the urban and preventing the rural population from accessing urban benefits (Potter and Potter 1990, 296). A pro-urban bias meant that the city became a coveted place to live. This had far-reaching consequences, especially when the turmoil of the Maoist years abated and millions of rural migrants flooded the cities.

With the beginning of the reform period and especially in the 1990s, China gradually loosened restrictions, allowing those with rural *hukou* status to temporarily work in cities. It is difficult to know the exact number of migrants that came into Qingdao after the reform period began, as most statistical yearbooks or censuses did not record them. For many years, migrants were actually invisible in the city records. According to the *Qingdao Gazetteer of Population* (Qingdao 2001b), in 1987, so-called temporary residents numbered 182,015, growing a year later to 194,466. In the mid-1990s, according to F. Cai (1997), there were approximately half a million long-term migrants in the city; by 2005, this number had doubled (Feng 2007). Even in the absence of exact figures, the influx of rural migrants into Qingdao was clearly evident and corresponded to later national statistics. The 2010 nationwide census was the first to actually include migrant workers in city surveys, and in 2013, reportedly over 268 million rural migrants were working in cities across China, a population greater than that of Germany, France, and the United Kingdom put together (National Bureau of Statistics 2014).

Rural to urban migration was not immediately met with approval, but as economic reforms unfolded, migrants were tolerated, as the benefits of their presence outweighed the disadvantages. They were allowed in as long as they essentially remained “rural” (Solinger 1999, 50). The dual system and rigorous use of migrants as cheap labor—expected to stay only temporarily—were crucial factors in China’s economic “success” (Wallace 2014). Lei Guang (2003), for instance, compares the flow of workers in and out of cities to a water tap that the government could turn on or off, depending on whether or not “water” (labor) was needed. Unsurprisingly, this approach did not benefit migrants. Pun and Lu (2010) describe the lives of migrant construction workers in Beijing who found themselves at the very bottom of a hierarchical system with almost no bargaining power and exposed to the arbitrariness of market forces and chains of individual corruption. The authors show how migrants have been an essential ingredi-

ent in China's economic boom and the country's urban modernity project, while remaining "invisible" subjects of the city that they have built" (158). Various studies also discuss discriminatory attitudes toward migrants, who have been homogenized, dehistoricized, dehumanized, and abnormalized. As Zhang Li (2001, 33) puts it, they have been "represented as a monolithic and formless entity consisting of unregulated, dangerous laborers who require stringent social control and surveillance." In a more recent study, anthropologist Roberta Zavoretti (2017) discusses long-term migrants in Nanjing, problematizing the very notion of the "rural migrant worker" as a political and academic category that suggests homogeneity and social cohesion, whereas there is actually a high degree of heterogeneity. In reality, this population comprises people from very diverse backgrounds who pursue different occupations and who have varied experiences and subjectivities in the city, but who largely tend to be lumped together as "migrant workers."

As an increasing number of migrants became de facto permanent residents in cities, the state could no longer simply turn off the (labor) tap, to once more evoke Lei's (2003) metaphor. Adverse employment conditions, work-related injuries, the fear of social unrest, but also the national agenda of becoming an urbanized and consumer-driven society prompted change in policies toward migrant populations. The 11th Five-Year Plan (2006–10) formulated the need to better integrate migrants into urban areas (F. Xu 2009), and calls for fundamental *hukou* reform became ever more adamant (Davies and Ramia 2008). Rather than labeled as *waidiren* or the "floating population," migrants started to be referred to as "new city people" (*xin shimin*). Some urban centers proactively reformed their *hukou* systems (Luthe 2014, 24) and migrants' entitlements started to improve. Shanghai, for instance, launched a large-scale campaign in 2008 designed to incorporate at least 70 percent of migrant children into primary education (Lan 2014, 7).³ By 2012, Qingdao had granted migrant workers' children temporary access to education, provided that both parents lived in the city and did not work where their *hukou* was registered. Access to health care and pregnancy tests also improved (P. Wang 2015). The following year, the Qingdao government began issuing residence permits to migrants. In fact, I vividly remember the pride with which an interlocutor showed his new permit to me, saying, "We are Qingdao residents now." In 2014, the State Council issued an "Opinion" on *hukou* reform, which technically terminated the rigid separation of the population between rural and urban, and officially granted migrants the possibility of obtaining an urban *hukou* (Sheehan 2017; Dong and Goodburn

2020). Such efforts were further strengthened with China's National New-Type Urbanization Plan (2014–20) and the political mandate to improve urbanization. Migrants have since been entitled (and encouraged) to enter into formal employment relations, including social security and insurance programs (Gallagher 2017). That said, becoming “urban” remains a difficult process, especially in large cities (K. W. Chan 2021).

BECOMING A MIGRANT DESTINATION (AGAIN)

As much as the *hukou* system divided China and its citizens, it has, if nothing else, successfully prevented the formation of vast suburban slums and ghettos that constitute the iconic geography of a Third World urban and human condition (Roy 2011, 224). Zhang Li's (2001) and Xiang Biao's (2005) monographs on Beijing's Zhejiangcun are well-known examples illustrating the state's efforts to contain and control the establishment of larger-scale informal migrant enclaves. After the government drove migrants away, many returned, but, as Zhang (2001, 212) writes, this time it was under the umbrella of legality and “the gaze of the state.” An absence of any large migrant ghettos combined with stringent control over rural to urban migration meant that migrants mostly settled in various “invisible” locations across cities (Y. Huang and Yi 2015, 12). Popular destinations included former *danwei* compounds, urban villages (*chengzhongcun*), dilapidated inner cities, and basement quarters.

With the downscaling of the state-owned economy, the transformation of property ownership regulations, and the resultant neighborhood flight in the late 1990s, Dabaodao became a popular destination for migrants. Notably, when local residents moved out, most did not sell their courtyard rooms. Possible redevelopment meant potential compensation, a far more lucrative option. Indeed, market prices for a *liyuan* courtyard room used to be very low. For example, one migrant I spoke with recounted that he was offered the possibility of buying two small rooms in a courtyard on Huan-gdao Road for 4,000 yuan per square meter in 2002. He declined because he had just recently arrived in Qingdao and he didn't have enough money. He also thought he would only stay for a short period of time. He regretted this when we spoke in 2012. As talk about redevelopment became more and more frequent and concrete, landlords advertised their rooms as so-called demolition houses (*chaiqian fang*), an indication that property prices were

soaring. By 2012, prices had, on average, risen to over 15,000 yuan per square meter, almost four times as much as in 2002 and even comparable to other more luxurious and convenient property in Qingdao's old town center.

The unwillingness of local residents to sell their rooms meant that a significant amount of renting space—well suited to the needs of a rapidly growing number of migrants—became available. Unlike selling prices, rents in Dabaodao were and have remained comparatively inexpensive. In the early 2000s, monthly rent was on average less than 100 yuan. In 2012, I rented my room for 300 yuan per month, and this was already considered “a little more expensive,” as my neighbors would tell me, because my room was facing the street. Windowless rooms or those facing the courtyard interior were on average 50 to 100 yuan cheaper. Apart from the availability of low-cost rentals, Dabaodao also attracted rural migrants with its favorable location, close to the original city center and Zhongshan Road. In the late 1990s, this area was still economically vibrant. Good transport connections also offered the possibility of easily getting to almost anywhere in and around Qingdao. Most importantly, the neighborhood's courtyard houses offered an ideal space for combining life and work. In fact, when the neighborhood was initially formed, this was one of the original functions of the *liyuan* courtyards (Chapter 1). Almost 90 percent of my migrant interlocutors stated that they had moved to Dabaodao for work or cheap rent or both. The nature of the courtyards and their “public privacy” also meant that parents working outside the area could count on neighbors to look after their children while they were away. A neighbor of mine, Chef Liu, for instance, worked in various restaurants far from Dabaodao, as did his wife, Ms. Wang, a waitress. Both were absent during the day. Their daughter went to primary school and would usually return in the afternoon. The neighbors would take care of her and make food for her, and she would play with their children in the courtyard until her parents returned.

The majority of migrants were “self-initiated migrants” (C. Fan 2008, 61), meaning that they had not come to the city through one of the state-sponsored employment schemes designed to bring rural migrants to cities. They had instead followed family members or friends or simply left their rural homelands due to a lack of future prospects and work opportunities. Most came from counties within Shandong province and relied on people who migrated earlier and could aid new arrivals. In 2012, the majority of long-term migrants in Qingdao lived with their nuclear family and in some cases with extended family members as well (e.g., at least one grandparent).

Yet there were certainly differences among them. Some were long-term migrants, meaning that they had lived in the area for many years and had no plans to return, while others only came to the city during the summer months when work opportunities at restaurants or market stalls abounded. Furthermore, among the more permanent migrants, there were those whose livelihoods depended directly on the locale of the inner city (particularly the daily fresh-food markets), and those who lived in Dabaodao but worked in other parts of the city. In what follows, I focus mostly on those who lived and worked within the neighborhood.

Mr. Smile, his wife Xiao Mei, and their five-year-old daughter, whom I call Little Smile, were one of the first migrant families I came to know. Mr. Smile ran a seafood stall at the entrance to the *liyuan* courtyard where I lived. In the early days of inhabiting my courtyard room, I often heard them chatting out in the street until quite late at night, drinking and eating with what appeared to be other neighbors from the area. I was curious, but not quite sure how to join or talk to them, as “the street” in front of their shop was also their home and thus might be considered their private space. One morning, while I was downstairs queuing at the communal water tap to fill my two buckets with fresh water, I happened to run into Xiao Mei and started a conversation. To my delight, after chitchatting a bit about where I was from and what I was doing, she invited me to join them some night for dinner out “in the street.” The family would eventually become key interlocutors, and I spent many days behind their market stall, sometimes even helping them sell seafood. Much to the amusement of Mr. Smile and Xiao Mei, I always had a hard time memorizing the different types, names, and prices of the various shellfish and fish that they sold on any given day. “You are a doctor (*boshi*),” they would say. “How can you not remember a few names and prices!”

Mr. Smile was in his late thirties and originally from a small village of 3,000 inhabitants in Tai’an Prefecture in western Shandong. He came to Qingdao in the late 1990s in search for a better life. “Only old people were left in my home village,” he recalled. Indeed, in China more broadly, demographic change has only intensified in the years since his departure.⁴ Mr. Smile had originally considered staying in the village, but saw that many of his friends and relatives had been able to make some money in the cities. Such success stories have been identified as an important “pull factor” in China’s rural–urban migration (F. Wu et al. 2010, 102). Many months after my first encounter with this family, I was sitting out in the streets with Mr.

Smile when a man in his early fifties walked past and greeted us. “That is the third person from our village who came to Qingdao,” Mr. Smile explained. “I was probably the 20th person to come here,” he added.

When Mr. Smile first arrived, he initially worked in wholesale (*pifa*). Together with a friend who was also from his same home village, he bought a van and started delivering seafood from the Jiaozhou Bay coastal areas to various locations across Qingdao and even to other subdistricts in Shandong’s inland. He did this for several years until one day he fell asleep at the wheel. He had been driving for almost 24 hours straight and was exhausted. Though he crashed the van, no one was seriously injured. “That’s when I decided that I’d had enough,” he explained. Around the same time, he and Xiao Mei married. From more or less the very beginning of his time in Qingdao, Mr. Smile lived in Dabaodao. “There were quite a few people from our village working in the Huangdao Road area,” he said. They initially helped him rent a small room on Sifang Road. Newcomers like Mr. Smile would often start off by working in their friends’ or relatives’ business and then, later on, venture into developing a business of their own. Many years later, when Mr. Smile was no longer able to live on Huangdao Road due to redevelopment, he too employed young men from his home village, who drove a truck for him and helped take care of his new seafood delivery business. After quitting wholesale, the family moved from Sifang Road to Huangdao Road (where they were living when I first met them) and opened a *pijiuwu*, a small eatery offering draft beer and various local delicacies. In these typical locales, clients can also bring their own ingredients and ask the chef to prepare (*jiagong*) a meal. When I met Mr. Smile, he was no longer running a *pijiuwu*. “I was doing it until last year, but it was too much work and too little money,” he explained. Instead, he had opened a seafood stall, which sold various kinds of raw fish.

Mr. Smile’s story resembled the life and work trajectory of most migrants in the neighborhood, many of whom took on jobs commonly associated with this population in urban China: street vendors, cobblers, tailors, small restaurant owners, cleaners, waiters, and so on (Zavoretti 2017). In fact, in the earlier periods of the reform era, migrants were excluded from certain urban industries, and so “the only thing left for (them) was hard, dangerous and dirty physical labor-intensive work” (Y. P. Wang 2004, 50). Though work in Dabaodao was not dangerous, it certainly was hard, labor intensive, and at times dirty. Xiao Mei repeatedly said to me, “We only have our bodies, we have no brains. Here it is better not to think too much anyway.” That

said, Dabaodao fulfilled a crucial function in providing rural migrants with an ideal space to make a living in the city.

LIVELIHOODS

Huangdao Road, Boshan Road, and Sifang Road were for decades home to fresh-food markets,⁵ with Huangdao Road being the biggest and busiest. The entire street was lined with stalls and small shops selling fruits and vegetables, raw and processed meats and seafood, snacks, pastries, animals, groceries, household appliances, and clothes. There were also several small restaurants, *pjiuwu*, hairdressers, and even a hotel located in the basement of a courtyard. In the summer of 2013, I counted around 200 stalls, shops, and restaurants on Huangdao Road. Vendors who sold raw seafood purchased their *huo* (goods) directly from the coastal areas, from wholesalers (such as Mr. Smile used to be), or sometimes from other markets in Qingdao. They would sell their *huo* at the Huangdao Road market as well as deliver to the countless restaurants dotted throughout Qingdao that offered “authentically local seafood.” Indeed, it was quite common for market vendors to simultaneously engage in these dual business activities. Their market stall served as a base where they sold their products to daily (often returning) customers, as well as tourists during the summer months. At the same time, they would also deliver their goods to restaurants in the area, mainly relying on their social capital and the proximity of Dabaodao to the old center and Zhongshan Road. For example, one evening while Mr. Smile was busy cooking and I was chatting with his wife and their daughter, he suddenly received a phone call: a restaurant was calling for raw seafood to be delivered. Mr. Smile immediately sent off his wife, urging her to be quick. This restaurant had only called once before, an eatery inside Pichaiyuan that locals called a “rip-off,” but which made good money during summer months. Mr. Smile hoped to keep them as customers and thus tried to rapidly respond to their request. After Xiao Mei had left, the phone rang once again. It was another restaurant asking for various kinds of seafood. Mr. Smile thrust the ladle into my hand, rushed out, leaving me and his daughter and a pan of half-finished fish braised in brown sauce (*hongshaoyu*) behind. “Give me a hand with it” (*bang wo nong yixia*), he said as he hastily wrapped various crustaceans in plastic bags. He and Xiao Mei returned about half an hour later, and I did my best in the meantime not to ruin the food.

Restaurants in the area had established relations with many of the market vendors, whom they could call upon at any time. In this way, they did not need to stock up on goods that they might not be able to sell. Instead, they could call for extra *huo* to be delivered from Huangdao Road whenever they needed it. During the summer months, market stalls would stay open from 7:00 or 8:00 a.m. until sometimes as late as 10:00 p.m., closing somewhat earlier, around 8:00 p.m., in the winter. Dabaodao was an important node in “the networks of provisioning roles and relationships” that make up the urban community (Bestor 2005, 203; Hannerz 1980), facilitating the integration of migrants into the wider economic activity of the city. This took the form of the above-described restaurant deliveries, as well as the connections and networks that vendors or *pjiuwu* owners maintained among each other. “Long Hair Beer House,” for instance, was run by a young family from the rural outskirts of Qingdao. They had made a name for themselves and were even included in guidebooks and travel platforms; a documentary on seafood dedicated an entire episode to the boss, “Long Hair” (Z. Sun 2021). He and Mr. Smile were on relatively friendly terms. Whenever Long Hair had customers, he would send them to Mr. Smile to buy seafood to bring back so he could prepare it for them. In turn, when customers bought fish from Mr. Smile and asked where they could have it prepared, he sent them to Long Hair.

Generally, competition was fierce among vendors. Mr. Smile mainly sold slightly more expensive items, or what he called “luxury goods,” such as abalone, tiger prawns, lobster, or sea cucumber. “Always kept in seawater to show people that they are really fresh,” as he liked to emphasize. Yet he was not the only one selling this kind of *huo*. Other vendors further up the road offered the very same items and sometimes they would venture down to casually check out the prices of their competitors. Maintaining good relations with returning customers and a personal network of clients and restaurants was thus quite important. “You can cheat *waidiren* but never returnees (*lao guke*),” Mr. Smile once said to me, when I noticed him overcharging a customer. All vendors cheated, adding a few grams here, selling a dead abalone there.⁶ One extremely busy summer, Mr. Smile complained that “there are too many *waidiren* now, so business is getting tougher,” by which he meant other market vendors who had moved in. He also lamented that newcomers were underselling their *huo*. “I cannot compete with them. If I charged that little, I would go bankrupt.” When I inquired how these newcomers could sell at dumping prices and still survive, Mr. Smile

remained vague in his answer. “They go for quantity. I cannot do that. I have to focus on quality. People can rely on my *huo* being top-notch.” This comment further reflects how long-term migrants like Mr. Smile, but also the Zhang family next door or Long Hair, considered themselves to be “locals” or “insiders” and distinguished themselves from other migrants who had arrived much later.

The extent to which migrants managed to earn a livelihood in Dabaodao greatly depended on their social capital, with the nature and openness of the courtyards being an important factor in establishing and maintaining networks. Mr. Smile’s place, for example, was often a meeting point for migrants living in and around Dabaodao, many of whom were working as chefs in Qingdao’s restaurants. Once, when I was alone with Mr. Smile, he explained to me,

You need excellent relationships in order to really make a living of food delivery. I already sell enough here [at the stall]. But I could make a greater profit by delivering more to restaurants. I have developed some relationships over the years. You know, those chefs come here for fun of course, but it’s also a sign that they will keep calling me for goods. If they don’t come, I need to go down with the prices. Once none of them came for weeks, so I knew something was wrong. The next time one of them called, I gave stuff out for free. This is how it works.

By preparing food and offering beer to others, Mr. Smile maintained old and established new relationships with different people. The openness of the area meant that he did not have to call or invite anyone. Passersby would notice if a get-together was happening, would greet the others, and join in if it suited them.

Dabaodao, and particularly the Huangdao Road market, fulfilled a vital role in what Ulf Hannerz (1980, 103) calls the “relationships which regulate people’s access to material resources in the wider politico-economic division of labor; in other words, the relationships in which people offer goods or services to others . . . and in these ways earn an entire livelihood or a significant part of it.” Dabaodao provided cheap accommodation, was conveniently located, offered an ideal spatial layout for working parents with children, and allowed migrants to economically and socially integrate into the city. “Huangdao Road made a lot of people rich,” Mr. Smile told me long after he had moved out of the area due to redevelopment. He particularly recalled

the summer of 2014. “It was a great year. There were so many tourists. We all made lots of money. I made almost 200,000 yuan that summer alone.”⁷ I do not, of course, seek to glorify the self-organizing economies of grassroots entrepreneurialism (Roy 2011, 227–28). Migrants’ lives and their economic activity in the inner city were “vibrant and precarious, at the same time,” as Tzu Chi Ou (2021, 253) notes in her study on migrant communities in an urban village in Beijing. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge and highlight Dabaodao as a place that allowed migrants to consolidate their social capital and resources and to make a living in the city.

AGENTS OF SPATIAL CHANGE

In working and living in the inner city, migrants not only depended on the built environment but also actively transformed it. They were agents of spatial change. This manifested, among other ways, in the smells, sounds, and sights of the material surroundings. The fresh-food market created a certain olfactory and audible environment that in turn became a characteristic feature of Dabaodao as a place. Human interaction and the proximity (Hall 1959) between vendors, goods, and customers was another constituent spatial attribute of the area. As described by Miles Richardson (1984), who provides a vivid example of how “being in the market” in a Costa Rican town was a cultural expression not only reflecting but also creating the specific atmosphere and environment of the market, Qingdao migrants were agents of place-making in how they used and engaged with the built surroundings through their daily activity. Starting around 5:00 a.m., the air reverberated with a medley of sounds as vendors opened the shutters of their shops, set up their stalls, and replenished stocks of goods (*jinhuo*). In the early morning hours, vans would drive up the street—an impossibility during the daytime—to unload heaps of vegetables, meat, seafood, and whatever else was going to be sold on that day. By the time I made my way downstairs to buy some breakfast, the area would already be brimming with activity. People could be found in the courtyard washing clothes or dishes from the night before, and the smell of seafood paired with laundry detergent permeated the air. Mr. Smile and others who occupied the shop fronts outside the courtyard would often move washing machines onto the street to wash bedsheets and towels, thus allowing the waste water to flow directly into the public gullies.

When I returned from my morning walk through Dabaodao, the first stream of customers had already done their daily shopping and things were a bit quieter. The sounds of the market, however, never faded away. One could always hear a babble of voices, bargaining, chatting, occasionally shouting, paired with the rattle and clatter of vendors preparing their goods. I would often spend the day behind Mr. Smile's stall, seeing customers pass by who sometimes stopped to take a look, sometimes buying something. Working behind a market stall could be rather tedious, and Mr. Smile would often play mah-jongg on a small laptop to kill time. Every now and then, he would pitch his goods to people walking by and mutter a few swear words when they did not stop. Around 4:00 p.m., it would get busier again, as people came to buy ingredients for dinner or to eat in the area. As the day went past, the street became noticeably grubbier. Huangdao Road gently rises up a slope, and as market activities continued, used plastic bags, packaging, and market remains such as disemboweled fish, residue of killed chickens, or vegetable scraps would be washed down the street, leaving behind a brownish sludge. There was also a distinctive smell engulfing the area. I grew accustomed to it, only noticing the strong odor once I had returned to my university accommodation and taken off my shoes.⁸ Later in the evening, vendors packed up their stalls, noisily crushing ice blocks and pouring them into basins to conserve goods that had not been sold. Meanwhile, cleaners would start to arrive, some of whom also lived in the area. They would slowly sweep up all of the market scraps into large piles and then load them into rubbish bins and wheel them away. I was always amazed by the amount of debris left on the street at the end of any given day.

Mr. Smile once explained, "I'll tell you why I like it here. It is like being at home, like being in the countryside. I can throw things onto the street; it's not so clean and orderly as it is elsewhere in the city. I like the messiness of the place." This was an interesting comment in that the same factors that made Dabaodao "livable" to Mr. Smile were those that substantiated the prejudice of local residents and others against migrants, namely that they were "messy." However, the ways that the migrant presence and their daily activities contributed to visitor's corporeal experience of Dabaodao or to its discursive representations varied. For instance, my research assistant was full of excitement when she joined me for a first round of structured interviews around Huangdao Road: "I love the hustle and bustle of fresh markets!" she said. Yet after a few days, she was nauseated by what she perceived as the "unhygienic handling of food." Similarly, public portrayals

oscillated between, on the one hand, celebrating Dabaodao for its small eateries, its vibrant market activity, and local allure and, on the other, labeling it “messy,” “dirty,” and “unlivable.”

Migrants were agents of spatial production not only through their behavior and the ways they moved about the area (Ingold and Lee 2006; Ingold and Vergunst 2008), but also in their direct transformation of the material surroundings, whether this be their personal living spaces, the wider courtyard, or street environment. Anthropologist A. Robertson (1984, 188) argues that all ordinary people are planners, but that “the pragmatic planning of ordinary people presents a sharp contrast to the dogmatic planning of the state” (189). This resonates with what I observed in Dabaodao. The spatial structures of courtyards were first and foremost places for migrants to do business, and they would seek to maximize income-generating opportunities. As can be seen in Figure 8, in 2011, market stalls were sheltered by simple parasols. By 2013, vendors had transformed the entire street into an indoor-like area by stretching plastic covers across their stalls, attaching them to the buildings on either side of the road. Qingdao is known for its heavy windstorms, which every now and then would rip through the streets, pulling down or completely destroying the plastic shelters. While I was doing fieldwork, one vendor suddenly had the idea of installing a more stable corrugated iron roof as a shelter. In very little time, other vendors followed suit, and Huangdao Road was once again quickly transformed, this time into a street covered with metal canopies.

This spatial transformation was not the result of any top-down directive to regulate the market environment, but was rather entirely self-initiated and an ad hoc yet pragmatic response to external circumstances, aimed at improving the working and living environment. At a phenomenological level of analysis, migrants can be seen as “inner-city dwellers.” In other words, following anthropologist Tim Ingold (2000, 186), they transformed the material surroundings “within the current of their involved activity, in the specific relational contexts of their practical engagement with their surroundings.”

A similar dynamic characterized the ways many migrants redecorated and transformed their personal living spaces. Mr. Smile and his family lived in a small room that was probably originally designed as only a shop or storage space. For them, however, it simultaneously served as a bedroom, storage room, dining room, and living room all at once. At the rear end of the room was a partition, behind which a ladder led to an upstairs area—a



Fig. 8. The Huangdao Road market in 2011 (top left), in 2013 (top right), and in 2015 (bottom) (fieldwork photos)

wooden attic-like space without much headroom where Xiao Mei and Little Smile usually slept. On cold winter nights, we would sometimes have dinner there. Next to the ladder was a dark hole with a greasy gas stove, a small chopping board, and a shelf holding various seasonings and sauces. This was where Mr. Smile prepared food for sometimes up to 10 people. He had renovated the room when he first moved in and was running a *pjiuwu*.

Quite contrary to the general perception that migrants did not care or maintain their living spaces, he had dedicated a significant amount of money and time to covering the walls in wood, erecting a partition between the “kitchen space” and the “eating area,” installing a bunk storage, and even cementing the space in front of his door, so that it would be on the same level as the inside floor area. Some years later, in 2014, he put fish tanks made from concrete in front of his shop, which could be covered and locked up at night. Previously, seafood was kept in orange basins that had to be emptied or taken inside every night. Similar to the above-described market stall shelters, quite a number of vendors followed suit, such that the entire street soon became a permanent fresh-food market.

Mr. Smile and other migrant families refurbished their living environment to meet their needs. As “laboring subjects” occupying the inner city, they sought to exploit moneymaking opportunities. The inner city provided a context for them to become active agents in an urban environment that otherwise rendered them invisible. Meanwhile, their way of “caring” for and managing their surroundings clearly followed a different cultural logic than what preservationists or locals considered to be the “correct” spatial code of conduct. Preservationists were particularly angry. “They are destroying historical buildings” (*pohuai lishi jianzhu*), some would say. However, for the migrants living in Dabaodao, their actions aimed to improve their working and living environments.

STREET ENCOUNTERS

In Chapter 3, I described how local residents sometimes blamed migrants for the neighborhood’s problems, speaking ill of and making derogatory remarks about “those from the countryside.” Migrants represented a threat, whereby locals felt that they were at risk of being deprived of their entitlements as the rightful occupants of Dabaodao. In what follows, I provide several examples of how this discriminatory attitude came to the surface in everyday interactions and the ways it affected migrants’ lives. These incidents happened over the course of 10 years of fieldwork, and while they reflect a general atmosphere of antipathy, it should also be stressed that most days went by without any overt occurrences. An elderly local resident once phrased it like this: “We have learned to live together, each to their own. But it’s not that we don’t help each other.” Many locals would tell me

that they never interacted with “those temporary workers,” but in reality, they often did. Some were even known for their friendly attitude toward migrants. For example, Mrs. Wang, who volunteered for the local resident committee, assisted migrant families with young children and organized activities for them in the area. That said, discriminatory attitudes lay like a shadow over the area and the lives of migrants. One would never know when or under what circumstances they might erupt. Often such attitudes manifested in subtle passive-aggressive day-to-day interactions.

For instance, an elderly local woman who called herself “Beer Mother” was living in and running a kiosk with her husband on Sifang Road. She had a leg injury and could not walk properly. Usually, Beer Mother could be found sitting on a small stool in front of her shop, two large barrels of beer in front of her, chatting with passersby. One of the first conversations we had revolved around the issue of migrants living in the area.

BEER MOTHER: So you want to know something about our neighborhood. Let me tell you, all those people [pointing toward the street markets] are from the countryside. They are not like us.

ME: How are they different from you?

BEER MOTHER: You know, their way of thinking (*siwei fangshi*) is different. They don't understand things in the same way.

ME: They don't understand this place?

BEER MOTHER: They are here to make money, but they are not cultured (*meiyou wenhua*).

ME: So you don't have much to do with them?

BEER MOTHER: No! Because they are not civilized (*bu wenming*). I can immediately tell whether someone is from here or not. I don't need to speak to them. You know, I sit here and see them walking past and I know who they are. I can see it from how they walk whether they are local or not. I know you are living with “them” over there [she pointed toward Huangdao Road]. They probably want to learn foreign languages from you. Don't bother! They won't understand. You are wasting your time.

At that moment, a man in his mid-forties wearing a long army coat came by to purchase some *baijiu* (local liquor) and cigarettes at the kiosk. He smelled of alcohol and his hair was messy. Beer Mother introduced him to me as “Putin.” “Doesn't he look like the Russian president?” she asked

rhetorically. I gave him a brief explanation of what I was doing, saying I was interested in the old architecture and life in this part of town. He was suspicious. “You think we are all poor, don’t you!” he said to me. “Only because these buildings look old doesn’t mean that there is no money here,” he continued. “But these outsiders . . . they make it look like this is a bad place.” A little boy walked past. “Come over here,” Putin ordered, then introduced the boy to me. “This little fellow is from Xinjiang. But he is more civilized. Not like all the other people from Xinjiang. Most of them are pickpockets. But this boy here is good.” The little boy meanwhile looked uncomfortable. “What does your mother do?” Putin asked the boy. “She sells things,” the boy replied. “See!” Putin turned back to me: “Selling things. All these people come here to sell things and disturb our environment. They make it look messy and dirty.” “Off you go,” he said to the boy, who seemed relieved to be able to escape. Putin continued to complain about “those outsiders,” talking himself into a rage. Eventually, he took a last cigarette out of a pack, lit it, and threw the empty box onto the street, spitting on the ground before he left with two bottles of *baijiu*. “He is one of us,” Beer Mother said proudly.

Such prejudice toward migrant families was common and although mostly limited to verbal degradation, it did at times directly affect the lives of migrants in Dabaodao. Having spent many years doing fieldwork in this neighborhood, I sometimes found myself caught in the middle between locals and migrants. On a night that I happened not to be staying in Dabaodao, I received a phone call from Mr. Smile around eleven o’clock. His daughter and wife were in the hospital. Little Smile had just started primary school and both he and his wife had thought it would be good to rent a small room on the second floor inside the courtyard, which had just become vacant. In this way, so they thought, she would not be exposed to the clamor of the market and could have a place to study and sleep in a quieter environment. The room was small, perhaps five to seven square meters, faced the inside of the courtyard, and rent was under 200 yuan per month. Xiao Mei bought some wallpaper and a couple of new bedsheets and decorated the room. They also got hold of a desk and a chest of drawers, and Little Smile had her own room.

One night, Xiao Mei took Little Smile upstairs to put her to bed. She waited until her daughter was asleep and then left the room to go back downstairs and talk to her husband, who, like most nights, was drinking and chatting with a friend. When leaving, Xiao Mei locked the room from the outside, “for safety reasons,” as she later told me. She was afraid that

her daughter would suddenly wake up and wander around the courtyard on her own. It was November and already getting cold. At some point in the night, Little Smile must have woken up and, feeling cold, turned on the electric heater, a small infrared appliance known as a “little sun” (*xiao taiyang qunuanqi*). These machines generate heat instantly but can be dangerous because the components get extremely hot. Little Smile went back to bed, not noticing the towels hanging right next to the heater. It likely did not take long for them to catch fire. The wooden bunk located right above the heater quickly started burning, as did the wooden floor joists and wall parts. Little Smile woke up and tried to run outside, but because her mother had locked her in, she couldn’t get out. As this was a cold November evening, around ten o’clock, most people had already retreated to their rooms. Luckily, a next-door neighbor heard Little Smile screaming and banging against the door. He rushed out, broke open the door, and called the parents. Xiao Mei hurried upstairs, though by this time her daughter had already suffered severe burns, and when pulling her out of the flames, Xiao Mei too was injured.

On the phone, Mr. Smile told me briefly what had happened, and sounded as calm as always. “It’s not a big deal,” he said, refusing my clumsy attempt to offer help. The next morning, I tried to find Mr. Smile, but he was at the hospital. His stall was not set up and the door to his shop was locked. Instead, I bumped into another neighbor of mine. I asked what had happened the night before. “Oh, those stupid people managed to almost kill their daughter,” he said scornfully. “Those ‘outsiders’ don’t take care of anything, not even their own kid.” I was well aware of the difficult relationship between locals and migrants but was nevertheless stunned by the lack of empathy. A couple of days later, Little Smile and Xiao Mei were released from hospital, the girl’s face still covered in blisters and wounds. She refused to set foot in the room where she had almost burned to death. Since they knew that I was preparing to leave and was about to vacate the room that I had been renting, Xiao Mei asked me whether they might take it over from me. I contacted my landlord, said that I was going to move out soon and that I had already found a new tenant. Yet my landlord told me that another neighbor of mine, Mrs. Cui, had a relative who was also looking for a place to live and had also expressed interest in renting the room. I tried to explain what had happened to Little Smile. My landlord suggested that I speak directly with the other neighbor, Mrs. Cui, and see if I might work out a solution. I did seek out Mrs. Cui and recounted what had happened, but she

was little convinced. “The landlord doesn’t want to have those people from downstairs. They are *waidiren* and won’t take care of the room,” Mrs. Cui told me. I tried to reason with her, but that only seemed to reinforce her stance. “See, what if they also burn down that room!” she exclaimed. I got the sense that my landlord had perhaps already spoken to Mrs. Cui beforehand, so as to prevent those “outsiders from downstairs” from taking over the place—though I was never able to conclusively confirm this. There wasn’t much I could do. When I related this interaction to Xiao Mei, she did not seem surprised. “You shouldn’t have told him [the landlord] that you are moving out. You could have just sublet the place to us,” she said. Xiao Mei seemed worried about the fact that they might be causing a disturbance. “The best thing is not to stir up any trouble (*zhao shi*),” she said more than once. In the end, Little Smile continued to sleep with her mother in the attic-like space above Mr. Smile’s shop.

Migrants like Mr. Smile and Xiao Mei rarely directly expressed their dissatisfaction vis-à-vis locals. Most were prudent when it came to voicing discontent, generally avoiding conflict out of a fear of “causing trouble.” Many, however, did feel ill-treated. Once, for example, when I was carrying out interviews in a courtyard, a young man caught my attention. He seemed eager to share his experience. He was from Yantai in eastern Shandong but had been living in Qingdao for 10 years, working as a taxi driver. He immediately raised the issue of the relationship between migrants and local residents.

They discriminate against us. Our courtyard leader is an elderly woman. She always turns off the water at night. I sometimes work late and want to get some water when I come home, but she would not turn it on for me.

I asked whether other residents had any similar problems.

Locals have good relations with her. They have a key to unlock the water valve or even their own water pipes. But she wouldn’t allow me to use water at night. “If you don’t like it here, then leave,” she once said to me. I am angry. I refuse to fawn over her as many others do.

He further recounted that many of his friends, other migrants, felt exactly the same but tried hard not to show their dissatisfaction, so as to maintain

good relations with the locals. Like Xiao Mie, he similarly explained that “they are afraid to stir up trouble.” He, on the other hand, regularly confronted the courtyard leader, which only worsened his situation.

THE RIGHT TO (WORK IN) THE CITY

Migrants not only experienced discrimination in their encounters with local residents, but also continued to suffer from institutional bias.

Conditions have improved over the years. As part of a push to build a “harmonious society” (*hexie shehui*) and out of the need to foster a more “humane” form of urbanization, notions of migrant acceptance and peaceful cohabitation with locals have been ever more forcefully disseminated. Yet while migrants may have gained the right to *work* in the city, they are still often denied the right to *live* in the city (Cho 2013). Relatively early on during fieldwork, I came across an article about a migrant family living in Dabaodao (Shoulin Wang 2012, 6). The headline read: “Pancake Liu: From Outsider to Community Member” (*jianbing liu: cong wailaihu dao shequren*), accompanied by the subheadline: “This *xin shimin* who is running a small business on Huangdao Road feels that policies are becoming increasingly humane. His relationship with locals is becoming ever closer and they have become friends.” The article describes Liu’s trajectory from when he first arrived in Qingdao and initially took on work in a restaurant. He moved to Huangdao Road in 2000 but ran into trouble as he did not have proper identification or permits to run a business. He eventually obtained a “temporary resident’s permit” and opened a pancake stall. The author tells how Liu is now making more money and has received help from his neighbors and the resident committee in running his small business: harsh times of the past have given way to more amiable and humane conditions. This narrative draws on the Chinese “rags to riches” dream, describing a poor but hard-working migrant who has finally made it in the city.

After reading the article, I went to find Liu myself. I had bought pancakes from him before but only exchanged a few words. His pancake stall consisted of plastic tarpaulins wrapped around four wooden sticks that were about two meters apart from one another, forming a rectangular, hut-like construction. Three pancake stoves were lined up next to each other. Liu and his wife fried thin pancakes, stuffing them with finely chopped vegetables and then wrapping them in plastic bags for customers to take away.

“Things have improved,” Liu told me. “I am making more money now.” On an average day, he sold around 100 pancakes, taking in up to 800 yuan per day. “But it’s tiring,” he added, “and we are thinking of leaving. You know, we get up at six every morning, stand here, breathe in the fumes of the gas stoves 12 hours a day, seven days a week. We have been doing it for nine years now.” His wife nodded vehemently. “I can feel it in my lungs,” she said. “And our son is helping out, too. We don’t really want him exposed to this. He should be studying.” When I asked where they were planning on moving and what they were thinking of doing, I wasn’t given a concrete answer. “Let’s see. Need to have a look around (*zhaozhao ba*).” A little over a year later, Liu was still there. In addition to the pancake stall, he had also opened a *pijiuwu* on an adjacent street in Dabaodao. Like most other vendors, his right to *work* in the city had improved, but his right to *live* in the city had not. He was allowed to stay and make money, but received little or no support for his family’s physical and emotional well-being. Many had internalized this prospect. In interviews with migrants, when I would explain what I was doing and that I wanted to ask a few questions, my interlocutor would often interrupt, saying something like, “Oh, don’t ask me. I don’t know anything about this neighborhood. I am only working here (*wo zhi shi lai dagong de*).” Migrants seemed to share the notion that they were not the rightful inhabitants of the neighborhood, or at least had the impression that they were not entitled to comment on Qingdao’s old inner city, as they were “only working” there.

Anthropologist Mun Young Cho (2013, 154) makes a similar observation in her excellent ethnography on urban poverty in northeastern China. Discussing the relationship between migrants and locals in a former *danwei* compound, she compares “living urbanites” to “laboring migrants” and describes the ways in which seemingly favorable policies toward migrants largely treat the latter as working subjects. While local residents are viewed as “living in the city,” migrants are merely “working in the city” (154). However, unlike this old *danwei* compound, Dabaodao and *liyuan* houses became historically valuable and targets of preservation, where migrant “work” became incompatible with the expected spatial usage. Most preservationists, for example, thought of migrants as just temporary “laborers” who did not care about the historical significance of the area and just wanted to make money. Mr. Li, a local preservationist, once said to me: “I went to speak to some residents. They told me that the government should just move out all

waidiren, improve the courtyard environment, and then they [the locals] can use the vacant space for themselves. I think that may be a feasible option.” This opinion seemed to dominate official discourse and was often reiterated in debates over redevelopment.

Officials or planners often completely overlooked migrants. They were rarely addressed as being part of or even forming a community of residents. Professor Wu once said:

When we thought of how to redevelop the area, an important aspect was to not destroy the local community in the neighborhood. So I went down to see and understand the social fabric, and I realized that most people have already moved out. It’s mainly just *waidiren* left. The local community has already been disrupted. Since there is no community anymore, we came to the conclusion that we can go ahead and resettle people.

Such opinions were also echoed in media reports. For instance, one newspaper article quoted a staff member of the Zhongshan Road street office as saying, “According to our thorough investigations, the vast majority of residents are renters. At most 5 percent are ‘old residents,’ so this is why we have already designated this area as ‘houses to be evicted’” (Anon. 2015). On yet another occasion, an employee in Qingdao’s Urban Planning Bureau who had been involved in drafting a preliminary redevelopment plan for the inner city repeatedly stressed to me the importance of treating residents fairly. When I asked about migrants, where they would move, and what they would do once redevelopment started, he paused for a moment and then said, “Migrants . . . to be honest, I have never thought about them.” The 2011 Sifang Road Historical and Cultural District Detailed Preservation Plan (Qingdao Urban Planning and Design Research Institute 2011, 29) included the following passage: “At present, the population of the Sifang Road Liyuan Historic District is highly mixed and there is a large number of people who moved in later for work, which has caused a severe mismatch (*bu pipei*) between houses and their occupants.” Underlying this notion of “mismatch” was the view that migrants’ urban behavior and their bodies (Sennett 1994) were unsuitable for *liyuan* houses and Dabaodao; they consequently had neither the right to represent nor to define the “correct” spatial usage of the inner city.

ENCOUNTERS WITH THE GOVERNMENT

Like locals, migrants also lived with the imminent risk of redevelopment. Yet unlike locals, they did not have any prospect of receiving compensation money to secure a “better” future. Rather, they lived in a state of constant instability and precarity, compelled to be ready to adjust to (un)expected interruptions at any moment. Mostly these took the form of erratic, yet regular arrivals of the *chengguan*—the state’s infamous organ responsible for managing and controlling urban streets—to regulate the fresh-food markets inside Dabaodao. Conflicts between *chengguan* and hawkers are notorious across Chinese cities and are often dramatic and violent (Hanser 2016). The state’s suspicion of street markets and commercial activity has been closely connected to the ongoing attempt to overhaul a negative image of “urban China” (Solinger 2013, 16). The smells, sounds, and bustle of “messy” fresh markets are thorns in the side of the modern cityscape. Street hawkers belong to an old urban image of the early reform years when individuals were encouraged to become “private business households” (*geti hu*) (Brunn 1993). Since the turn of the millennium, however, crackdowns on street vendors and urban markets have become increasingly common. The most sweeping of such urban cleansings occurred in 2017, when vast numbers of migrants across Beijing, Shanghai, and several other large cities were forcefully evicted and street shops closed (Z. Huang 2017).⁹

The *chengguan*’s regulation of street vendors has largely followed a trial-and-error approach, referring to frequently shifting rules and practices (Caron 2013, 26; Flock and Breitung 2016). Also, it is not uncommon for its members to be laid-off SOE workers who were later re-employed. They are thus often as much part of the “local community” as they are agents of “the state” (Swider 2015, 12). In a somewhat similar vein, I would sometimes jokingly refer to Brother Dragon as the *tusi* (“native chieftain”) of Dabaodao. In 2014, he was hired as a local security guard by the police station responsible for the Dabaodao area. His role largely consisted of patrolling the area twice a day and making sure that, as he phrased it, “everything is in order.” He explained, “There is no better person to do this job than me. I know everyone. I know this place like the back of my hand.” Though his job was admittedly different from that of a *chengguan*, like many of the latter he was as much a local resident as he was “a police officer,” and his ways of dealing with problems and people were informed by this dual relationship.

Meanwhile, Mr. Smile described his relationship with the *chengguan* as follows:

They sometimes come and tell us off when they're on duty. You know, they have to do their job; they follow orders. But they are also one of us. When off duty, they come here and buy our goods, and they don't care whether our stalls are one meter further out or not.

Indeed, rather than perceived as a powerful external force, the *chengguan* were sometimes seen as “one of us”—as simply doing a job. In fact, I would watch uniformed members of the *chengguan* slowly stroll down the market street, shopping bag in hand, stopping here and there to look over what vendors were selling and purchase goods. Yet these same people would sometimes take concerted action and tell vendors to remove their stalls or retreat to the pavements. They mostly targeted sellers whose stalls had spread too far into the middle of the road. Such encounters usually involved verbal exchanges, with occasional shouting. Though such interventions did represent a temporary disruption for migrant vendors, they were at best effective for a 48-hour period, after which sellers would move their stalls back to their original position. I never saw any violence or use of force, but did hear several stories of brawls between vendors and the *chengguan*, and on several occasions the *chengguan* were ordered to thoroughly clear the streets. In the early summer of 2011, all “illegally erected” market stalls were dismantled and removed from the Huangdao Road, Sifang Road, and Zhifu Road areas (An Wang 2011), and a number of vendors recalled this incident as a “big thing” (*da shi*). Once again, however, it took less than a month for temporary structures to reappear, as I observed during a preliminary research trip in July 2011.

A second intervention had a more permanent effect. In 2015, I suddenly received a message from an interlocutor: “They are demolishing the area!” Attached were photos showing the remains of Huangdao Road market, piled up in large colorful heaps (Figure 9). One photo captured a bulldozer shoveling up gravel. In a cloak-and-dagger operation, market stalls had been dismantled and the various temporary structures, fish tanks, and makeshift shelters that many of the migrants constructed over the years were crushed with jackhammers. Vendors were temporarily banned from setting up stalls, and those who did not have an official license were no longer permitted to



Fig. 9. The Huangdao Road market after the sudden cleanup (fieldwork photo, 2015)

do business. While in the everyday encounters between vendors and the *chengguan*, state power remained relatively elusive and of little efficacy, this in contrast was very much an overt and concrete demonstration of “despotic” state power (Mann 1984) and had an enduring impact. It furthermore underscored the very precarious existence of migrants living in the area. Though many were still quick to set up parasols and orange basins anew and continued, amid clearing work, to sell their goods, a notable shift had occurred. The local government persisted in shutting unlicensed shops down. “After that, it was never quite the same again,” Mr. Smile recalled many years later.

What led the outcome of this event to be decisive and lasting was an unannounced visit by an inspection team, sent by the central government to evaluate Qingdao’s “hygienic situation.” Qingdao scored very badly. The results revealed serious shortcomings, particularly regarding the existence of illegal building structures and unlicensed and unhygienic food vendors. The local government’s initial reaction was to hastily issue licenses to street vendors, small shops, and restaurants (Z. Qing 2015). But then a larger-

scale “city building” (*chuang cheng*) campaign was launched,¹⁰ leading to the removal of the Huangdao Road market and other “unhygienic places” around the city. “From now on, only officially licensed stores will remain on Huangdao Road. The once-occupied street will be returned to pedestrians,” a newspaper article declared (Y. Hao 2015). Indeed, upon my return to Qindao a few months later, I found that the entire street had been equipped with paved sidewalks and a freshly tarmacked lane. Cars were parking in the spots that had once been occupied by street vendors, most market stalls were gone, and shop fronts had been locked up. Unlike before, where one had to wriggle one’s way through countless market stalls, trollies, and spread-out blankets covering almost every bit of free space on the street, the area was now tidy and neat, making it possible to comfortably walk along the street. Mr. Smile and Xiao Mei still lived in their room, but without a license they could no longer run their stall. In the meantime, they had rented a small ground-floor room in a street adjacent to Huangdao Road, which they refurbished to serve as a storage space for seafood while they formulated a plan for their post-Dabaodao livelihood.

Migrants in Dabaodao filled a sociospatial and political void created by a general “state of suspension” (Ou 2021), where redevelopment projects were often talked about but failed to be implemented. They were quick to act on opportunities and strategically used the inner city for their own ends. While benefiting from favorable policies granting them greater rights to work in the city, their existence was nonetheless precarious due to the ever-imminent threat of redevelopment, potentially disrupting their livelihoods at any moment. The “right” to the city, David Harvey (2008, 23) observes, “is . . . far more than a right of individual access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city more after our heart’s desire.” Migrants did transform the material environment through their everyday engagement with it, yet they were denied the *right* to do so, and eventually, in the name of hygiene and safety, and later in the name of heritage, they were forced to move to other parts of the city.

6

Preservationists

Colonial Heritage and the Search for Authenticity

Toward the end of 2013, as the European-Style Scenic Neighborhood project was on the verge of failure, I attended a dinner party during which an animated debate erupted over whether and how to preserve *liyuan* houses and the Dabaodao area. Professor Wu reiterated that the “local community” (by which he meant “original” and “local” residents) had already been disrupted and that it was therefore acceptable to move people out. Lao Sun, who worked at the city archives, meanwhile emphasized the need to preserve Dabaodao as “an important site for our city, a site of our collective memory.” Professor Wu nodded his head in agreement, though he reminded the others that the city government had no money to finance such an undertaking. Lao Sun interjected, “The government isn’t the problem; in fact, they [officials] want to do it well; but those urban developers (*kaifa shang*) don’t cooperate. *They* are just interested in making money.” Another dinner guest, photographer Chen, argued that it should be the government’s responsibility to preserve the city’s architectural heritage and thus to finance the project with or without the investment of urban developers. “This is how city governments in Europe do it,” he claimed. This led to the issue of whether preservation can be done at all if commercial motives are involved. “What is wrong with commercialization?” jumped in a staff member from the Urban Planning Bureau. Photographer Chen rolled his eyes upon hearing this comment. Disregarding him, the urban planner went on to argue that it is “the historians” (*lishi xuezhe*) who are to blame for the ongoing stagnation, “*They* stand in the way of the redevelopment project by calling for

the preservation of *liyuan* houses,” he said angrily. “It is humiliating to let people stay in such rundown courtyards with no toilets, no proper plumbing, and terrible public hygiene.” He declared that those who call for preservation are selfish, ignoring “the poor people who have to bear living in those old and dirty courtyards.” Professor Wu, who had remained silent for a while, countered, “But the government has been trying to offer them [the residents] good compensation; why don’t they cooperate? Aren’t *they* being selfish?” Interestingly, throughout the entire conversation, migrants were never mentioned, absent from this dinner discussion just as they had been absent from larger discussions revolving around the meaning and redevelopment of Dabaodao.

This dinner debate is not only reflective of the many difficulties that arose in the implementation of urban renewal, but highlights a group of actors—the “preservations”—who played a key role in *liyuan* and Dabaodao becoming part of Qingdao’s heritage portfolio. Devoted to uncovering the city’s history and preserving its historical architecture, preservationists directly impacted urban redevelopment projects. The Urban Planning Bureau staff referred to them as “historians,” but, as elsewhere in China (Y. Wu 2021), Qingdao’s preservationists were far more heterogeneous. Along with a state-sanctioned preservation mandate, a discursive space for bottom-up interventions had emerged across China, allowing a variety of social actors to voice their opinions in debates over history and traditions (Maags and Svensson 2018b, 21). An increasingly vocal public (*minjian*) demanded the preservation of old architecture and places.¹ Often, these groups have not been those directly affected by state-led redevelopment and have in some cases pursued agendas that diverge from those of the communities who live with or in potential heritage sites (B. He 2021). They nonetheless have become important actors in urban renewal programs. They lobby decision-makers by using the media to disseminate historical and architectural knowledge, sometimes also directly providing expertise to local government agents. In Andrew Mertha’s (2009) words, they are “policy entrepreneurs,” wriggling their ways into policymaking and shaping the outcomes of redevelopment projects.²

In this chapter, I discuss these preservationists, not only vis-à-vis the heritage they set out to preserve, but also the actual “group” itself. Rather than considering preservationists as “stakeholders”—a common label in heritage studies to assign different viewpoints and interests—I treat them as a social network, consisting of various subgroups and internal differences.

Such a perspective allows us to consider multiple actors with diverse opinions and varying backgrounds, while also capturing their shared group identity (Cohen 1985) and commonly agreed upon principles and ideologies. I argue that it is precisely the unity and simultaneous diversity of this network that allows us to understand preservationists' actions and their (sometimes unintended) outcomes, not least because certain government officials formed part of this network. I also further reflect on the discursive spatial construction of Dabaodao and *liyuan* houses, here less in terms of official rhetoric and redevelopment practice (Chapter 2) than through popular text and visuals (Low 2017, chap. 6). The first part of the chapter centers on preservationists' agendas and narratives, while the second zooms in on the kinds of activities they engaged in and how they managed to influence the direction of redevelopment projects. I focus on how social actions unfolded in a negotiation process among preservationists, where acting as responsible citizens was more important than achieving an end result (Woodworth 2010). In fact, though their actions did result in concrete outcomes, these were more of a welcome by-product than an intentional goal. Moreover, this diversification of the redevelopment discourse was, somewhat ironically, yet another factor contributing to the situations of gridlock that characterized the renewal process.

THE NETWORK OF PRESERVATIONISTS

I met up with Zhang Xiaoqian for the first time during a preliminary fieldwork trip in 2011 at a well-known Western fast-food chain on Zhongshan Road. A mutual acquaintance had introduced us. "She can tell you a lot about Qingdao," he had told me. A real estate employee working in one of Qingdao's biggest companies, Zhang Xiaoqian appeared to be a typical local white-collar employee (*bai ling*), dressed in fashionable horn-rimmed glasses and a sun hat. Yet she portrayed herself as different. Thirty-two years old and not yet married, she would later tell me that "former friends from high school and university think I am a bit of a weirdo." Rather than finding a husband and settling down to family life, she continued living with her parents and spent most of her spare time reading history books about Qingdao, collecting historical materials, strolling around the old town, and exchanging information with other like-minded people. During our first encounter, she took me on a tour around the old town center. At what felt

like every other building, Zhang Xiaoqian would stop and tell me a detailed story: who built it, when, who had lived there, why it was important. I frantically tried to write everything down but couldn't keep up. Who was this person, who was neither a historian nor pursuing a career that required her to have in-depth knowledge of Qingdao's history? She certainly seemed to be profoundly knowledgeable when it came to the city's heritage. What had inspired her to acquire this historical knowledge? Who were the other like-minded people with whom Zhang Xiaoqian interacted?

Maurice Halbwachs (1992, 6–7) writes that “even if stones are movable, relationships established between stones and men are not so easily altered,” reminding us that the wish to preserve one's physical surroundings is a common reaction in the wake of demolition and the disappearance of familiar urban spaces. In the mid-1990s, Qingdao's modernity project under Mayor Yu Zhengsheng was in full swing, the “eastern parts” were being developed, and spatial transformations were far-reaching (Chapter 1). It was around this time that a growing awareness of history and heritage emerged among a handful of local university professors, “hobby historians,” and artists. Nostalgia for bygone times and the desire to preserve historical sites or to hold on to a life that has long vanished are typical in societies undergoing dramatic change, whether during the French and Industrial Revolutions, the post-World War II era, or China's early reform years (Berliner and Angé 2015, 18–19).³ Take, for example, Mr. Li, a CCP member and young father working for a municipal government department, who was born in the 1970s and grew up in Qingdao's old town near the Sino-German school. He had been angered by the large-scale demolition of the 1980s and 1990s, when all the places that he used to frequent and had grown fond of disappeared. He simultaneously also realized that he actually knew next to nothing about his city. He described his dilemma in the following terms: “I felt like I should do something; it hurt seeing all these buildings being torn down, but how could I have any say in the matter without any *real* knowledge?” The emphasis here on “real” is important, foreshadowing the fact that real historical knowledge would become a crucial notional core among preservationists. Mr. Li consequently began reading about Qingdao, its urban spaces, and its history. Like Zhang Xiaoqian, he was not a professional historian, explaining, “I read in forums and write about Qingdao's history when I am at work. You know, there isn't much pressure working for government departments; I have a lot of time. But my work itself has absolutely nothing to do with history.” Among the city's preservationists, Mr. Li was one of the first to turn

history into a personal hobby and would later become an important and respected person in this network.

More and more like-minded people subsequently joined in. Brother Xu, for instance, worked at the Qingdao customs. “When I was in my early twenties, I walked around the old town and realized that I knew nothing about my own city. That did not feel right.” It so happened that some of his colleagues felt similarly, and together they began looking for information. “The more information I gathered, the more excited I became,” Brother Xu recalled. “Slowly, history turned into a serious hobby of mine, and it was nice seeing other people doing the same.” Beginning in the mid-2000s and coinciding with the rise of the state-sanctioned heritage turn in China, more local residents began to show an active interest, as reflected in a steady rise in publications, articles, and general coverage on Qingdao’s history and heritage.⁴ The internet then made it easier for the general public to access and share historical data. First in BBS forums, later on Weibo and QQ, and more recently on WeChat, interested people post photos, asking things like “Who is that person on the left?” or “Which building is this? Who built it and when?” Others reply and debate, and the group sometimes comes up with an answer. WeChat quickly became an indispensable yet also overwhelming tool during my research. A number of “group chats” appeared under such names as “Discovering Qingdao,” “Research on Qingdao’s Culture and History” or, more specifically, “Platform for the Preservation of Dabaodao.” Countless daily postings and comments provided an abundance of data, though it quickly became difficult to keep up with the pace and scope of information, especially as the historical topics discussed became more refined and specialized. At the time of writing, there were more than a dozen so-called public accounts (*gong zhong hao*) on WeChat dealing with Qingdao’s history and architecture. Many are operated by enthusiastic individuals. In an often sentimental yet informative manner, the history of individual buildings, streets, and even entire neighborhoods is fleshed out in meticulous detail.

Who are the people that make up this network of preservationists? When I first arrived in Qingdao, Zhang Xiaoqian not only generously provided me with materials about Qingdao’s history, but also introduced me to what she referred to as the “literature and history circle” (*wenshi quanzi*). She explained that the group comprised over 200 people “who pay attention to history and culture” (*guanzhu lishi he wenhua*). While this *emic* view would suggest a sense of unity within the group, my own observations and

experiences revealed quite a different picture. Indeed, the notions of “history and culture” did not carry identical meanings for all involved, and the reasons and rationales for people’s “interest in the past” equally varied. The young urbanite who spent hours in an old town café reading poetry over a cup of coffee differed from the middle-aged civil servant who in his spare time went to the city archives to search for historical information; the eccentric artist on the hunt for exotic photographs differed from the professional historian conducting research; the employee of an urban developing firm seeking to raise the company’s profile by showing “sensitivity to history and culture” differed from the idealistic, young, foreign-trained graduate who rejected any “typically Chinese” forms of urban development as “disrespecting history.” Preservationists came from a wide spectrum of professional backgrounds: historians, architects, photographers, writers, journalists, white-collar workers, civil servants, police officers, and even local government officials, among others. The range was too broad to classify them as all belonging to a specific socioeconomic group, nor were common categorizations such as “state,” “local community,” or “cultural elites” applicable.⁵ It was further impossible to associate them with specific areas of the city. Some resided in the new town, others in the old town, and some even on the outskirts of Qingdao.

For analytical purposes, I divide preservationists into several “interest groups.” “Hobby historians” include the above-described interlocutors Zhang Xiaoqian, Brother Xu, and Mr. Li, whose professions were unrelated to history or architecture and who used their free time to research and write about Qingdao. “Professionals” comprise those whose interest in Qingdao’s history and heritage related directly to their work, such as Lao Sun, who had a degree in Chinese literature, or Mr. Yang, a professional historian, both working for the city archives. I also include journalists and public intellectuals in this group. Teacher Chang, for example, was a journalist who later opened a café that organized related events and became an important place of exchange for preservationists. Others were working for the government or in positions that required close cooperation with government agents, such as Professor Wu. Finally, “cultural entrepreneurs” had a commercial interest in Qingdao’s history and heritage, such as staff in urban developing firms, antiquities dealers, or people involved in other “cultural” businesses, such as hostels or private “homestay apartments” (*minsu*). Examples are Brother Liu, a local self-proclaimed artist who dealt with antiquities and had allegedly made a fortune, and Mr. Yuan, employed in one of Qingdao’s

most prominent real estate development firms and responsible for giving the company a “cultural” profile. The boundaries between these different interest groups were never static or fixed, but fluid and open. People could move between them or even belong to different subgroups at the same time. Broadly, however, their agendas and ideas converged along several socioculturally significant lines.

“REPAIR THE OLD LIKE THE OLD”

One evening, after “hobby historian” Mr. Li and I had finished eating dinner at a local restaurant in Dabaodao, we took a stroll around the neighborhood. It was the summer of 2021. Many *liyuan* houses had already been stripped down and were being equipped with new facades and an overhauled and upgraded interior meant to serve as space for cafés, restaurants, or hotels (Figure 10). We reached *guangxing li*, one of Dabaodao’s biggest and most famous courtyards. It was already regarded as “preserved” and now served as office space for a design company from southern China. Like many *liyuan* houses, *guangxing li* had been constructed, transformed, and extended over several decades. Its west-side facade was built in 1901 as part of a commercial building. Between 1912 and 1914, additional facades were erected on the other three sides of the land parcel, thus enclosing a large courtyard space within. A fire burned down parts of the building in the 1930s, leading to the reconstruction of certain wall sections in 1933. During the Republican years, *guangxing li* was a place of entertainment and performance and held a stage within its interior. In the 1950s, the courtyard was transformed into a scarfing factory and later, upon the latter’s closure, into residential quarters, which remained until they were demolished in 2017.

“This courtyard represents different time periods and building styles,” Mr. Li remarked and then lamented, “*Liyuan* were not designed or built according to a standardized plan. But now it looks the same on all four sides; it looks like one homogeneous courtyard.” He then pointed across the road toward another nearly “preserved” courtyard, saying “See, the windows over here look exactly like the ones in *guangxing li*.” In his opinion, this was wrong. “They should have accounted for the different periods by at least refurbishing the facades and windows in different ways and styles. If you really want to preserve historical architecture, this is what you should do,” he commented with a sincere look on his face and then added more angrily,



Fig. 10. The new facades of *liyuan* courtyards (fieldwork photo, 2021)

“To me, this is nothing but irreversible destruction. This is criminal! The only thing they kept are the original stone foundations. At least!” he emphasized. As we kept walking, he added, “The problem lies with construction companies and their builders. They don’t understand these places because they are not local, they are not from Qingdao.”⁶ We eventually reached the northeastern end of Dabaodao. “This courtyard is being refurbished by Professor Wu,” Mr. Li said, pointing at a facade covered in scaffolding. Its restoration was not as far along as *guangxing li*. “Wu has some good ideas. He understands historic preservation,” he remarked. But he remained skeptical, commenting:

I once told him in private that this courtyard used to be a China-Japan Liaison Office during the return of Qingdao to China in the early 1920s. This is an important part of the city’s history. I think they should have a small exhibition inside, informing visitors about its past. It is also politically okay because it relates to the return of Qingdao. But who knows if they are going to follow my advice.

This brief episode with Mr. Li reveals several of the important narratives and attitudes that Qingdao's preservationists entertained with regards to how preservation should be carried out. They demanded attention to historical detail and its truthful representation through "correct" preservation practice. They were also mainly concerned with the pre-Communist past. These ideas were generally agreed upon by the network and formed part of its notional core.

Mr. Li's view of historical preservation was strongly linked to the concept of "authenticity" as it is conventionally understood (Trilling 1973; Jones and Yarrow 2013). An internationally authoritative, albeit rather dated, version of "authentic" restoration is provided by the Venice Charter of 1964, which states that it is "our duty to hand them (historic monuments) on in the full richness of their authenticity" (ICOMOS 1994, 1). Article 9 of the charter goes on to state that the aim of restoration should be "to preserve and reveal the aesthetic and historic value of the monument and is based on respect for original material and authentic documents." Here authenticity is regarded as "the need to identify a building's architecture as an accurate revelation of the past as a fixed truth" (Nasser 2003, 470). The Venice Charter's static understanding of authenticity has since been overhauled and replaced by a less rigid and more flexible and nuanced perspective (see, for example, the Nara Document on Authenticity from 1994). Meanwhile, the idea of cultural heritage has expanded to include not only the tangible but also the intangible, and heritage scholars and practitioners have sought to decolonize authenticity from its Eurocentric discourse, regarding it as a more subjective and inclusive concept (L. Smith 2006; Winter 2013; Hafstein 2018). The same similarly holds for urban redevelopment, where authenticity no longer obligatorily refers to the "original state" of a building or neighborhood, but can also signify inclusiveness and the right of different socio-economic groups to belong in the city (Zukin 2010, 26; Sennett 2018).

In China, "authenticity" is a relatively new term that only entered official and legal rhetoric with the Cultural Relics Law (1982) and the adoption of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention (1985) (Y. Zhu 2015). It is translated as both *yuanzhenxing* and *zhenshixing*. The former emphasizes the "original" state of a given architecture or monument, while the latter underlines the notion of "real" and is more elusive and open (Y. Zhu 2017, 189). Though *yuanzhenxing* has come to be the word used in formal legal documents and official speech, a lively local debate persists among heritage actors in China as to which is more appropriate.⁷ Interestingly, in conversa-

tions and interviews with preservationists in Qingdao, neither of these terms was prominently employed. Only a few times did I hear an interlocutor use *yuanzhenxing* in relation to Dabaodao and *liyuan*. Instead, they commonly evoked the idea that preservation should “repair the old like the old” (*xiujiurujiu*).⁸ *Xiu* means “to repair,” *ru* means “like,” and *jiu* “old.” Some scholars have argued that there is a difference between the Venice Charter and the Chinese notion of *xiujiurujiu*, highlighting China’s distinct indigenous heritage tradition, which follows a different understanding of the past than in the West (Ryckmans 2008; Lai 2016; Y. Zhu and Maags 2020, chap. 2). Here experience is seen as more important than the authenticity of physical structures, particularly given the use of ephemeral building materials that are not easy to preserve (Knapp 1990; Sullivan 1993; Y. Xu 2000). Steve Harrell (2013, 288), for instance, suggests that from a Confucianist perspective, “the past still lives in the present, and things made in the present are just as valid representatives of the heritage as those made in the past.” While it is not my intention to discredit such ideas, the ways in which preservationists in Qingdao used “repair the old like the old” strongly resembled Western notions of authenticity and the ideas set forth in the Venice Charter.

Once, while sharing a meal with several preservationists, I asked them to elaborate on *xiujiurujiu*. Mr. Li explained,

I think if you really want to “repair the old like the old,” you have to try hard to find the original design and construction types and the prints of the original interior design. Also, you should try everything to adhere to the Venice Charter and interfere as little as possible. If it is possible not to change the historical site, then don’t change it. It’s about maintaining the historical essence.

Many preservationists echoed Mr. Li’s rather conservative stance toward historical preservation. “Architecture is the solidification of history,” photographer Chen argued, providing his take on *xiujiurujiu*:

The functional structure [of buildings] has to be reinforced, but the exterior should be kept in its original state as much as possible; the size of new buildings should be strictly controlled. I also strongly oppose the construction of a bunch of fake relics. When constructing new buildings, attention should be paid to their function; don’t always build big shopping centers, build some museums.

Most preservationists shared similarly rigid views. However, as *liyuan* houses were not representative of just one particular era or architectural style and given that the neighborhood of Dabaodao had grown over an entire century of building activity (Chapter 1), opinions also diverged when it came to very concrete questions, such as which courtyards were historically valuable and how preservation should be carried out. Some, like Mr. Li, focused on both architectural features of a particular time period and a historical narrative, as reflected in his comment about the courtyard that previously served as a China-Japan Liaison Office and his concern for architectural detail. Others, like photographer Chen, exclusively emphasized building styles and materials. Another interlocutor, who was completing a PhD in architecture, primarily wanted to architecturally define *liyuan* houses. He argued that many courtyards were lumped together under the label of *liyuan*, but some were not, architecturally speaking, actually *liyuan*. “I don’t agree with the recent fad that *liyuan* are uniquely local architecture. We need scholars to actually define what a *liyuan* is; otherwise it is all just empty words,” he once wrote in a private WeChat message. Others were less categorical. Lao Sun, from the city archives, for instance, argued that “*liyuan* should be regarded as a broad architectural form and not a particular type. Keeping a few courtyards as testimonies of our city’s past is sufficient.”

While there existed some internal differences as to what exactly *liyuan* houses were and how they should be preserved, there was general agreement that they were important to Qingdao’s urban development and historically valuable for their pre-Communist origins. Generally, preservationists rather narrowly defined history, their narratives almost exclusively beginning with the early colonial city, then the Japanese occupation and the Republican era, and more or less ending with the Communist takeover in 1949. Accordingly, old buildings from the pre-Communist era were potentially considered “historical,” whereas the majority of post-1949 architecture was not given much attention. This emphasis on the pre-Communist era as “history” is unsurprising in that it corresponds to the official narrative, according to which the year 1949 marks the birth of “new China” and a break with everything that occurred beforehand (Koga 2008, 224). The story of “liberation” and the making of Communist China necessitated a homogenized, dehistoricized, and distinctly negative depiction of “old China” (Watson 1994; Duara 1995; Denton 2014).⁹ That said, preservationists did not necessarily follow the prevailing official account of the corrupt and depraved Republican era. Quite to the contrary, their focus on pre-1949 history was also an effort to counter officialdom’s “technologies of amnesia” (Schwarcz 1991)

and to rediscover the positive aspects of a history that the state has by and large branded as dark and evil. This manifested in their regular glorification of the Republican years as the “golden age of city planning” and the celebration of colonial architecture as “high quality” and “aesthetically pleasing.” As foreign-trained architect Xiao Liu once said, “During the Republican years, urban planning was carried out according to sound principles and with attention to long-term impacts and architectural detail, very different from now.”

As similarly observed by William Bissell (2005) in his discussion on colonial nostalgia in Zanzibar, such statements were implicit criticisms of contemporary urban development undertakings and current infrastructure, sometimes referred to as “buildings built on soybean dregs” (*doufu zha gongcheng*), or of dubious quality. Frequent terms employed by preservationists to describe contemporary urban planning and specifically preservation activities in Qingdao included “low quality” (*zhiliang tai cha le*), “fake” (*jia de*), “ugly” (*chou*), “reconstructed” (*chongjian de*) or “only profit oriented” (*wei le zhuanqian*). In contrast, German buildings in particular were celebrated for their quality, durability, and aesthetic and artistic value. Even with regards to *liyuan* houses, I often heard comments such as, “Yes, these buildings are quite rundown, but think about the fact that some of them are over 100 years old and still standing. This would be unthinkable now.”

A focus on a distant pre-Communist past, however, meant that narratives of the present and more recent history as well as spatial usages of contemporary residents were either largely absent in preservationists’ discourse or thought of as a problem. The livelihoods and experiences of poor urban subjects and the “left behind” of the reform era were rarely considered. Migrants, regardless of how long they had been living in the area and despite the latter’s importance for their livelihoods, were not deemed rightful occupants. They were instead seen as “outsiders” and often directly blamed for the state of disrepair and the destruction of historical architecture. *Liyuan* houses were mainly considered valuable as legacies of a fixed and distant past.

“‘REPAIR THE OLD’ IS BUSINESS, ‘LIKE THE OLD’
IS WISHFUL THINKING”

While preservationists rarely used the term “authenticity,” they did often evoke its antonym “fakery.” That many things in China were fake was a

deeply embedded perception. Yet the “fake” was often presented as the “real.”¹⁰ In Qingdao, as in many other Chinese cities, there are a number of “preserved” historical buildings that were in fact torn down and rebuilt. The Qingdao train station is illustrative in this regard. It is a relic of German colonial building activity and a landmark of old Qingdao. Prior to the 2008 Olympics, the original building was, however, knocked down, reconstructed, and then presented as “preserved.” For preservationists, these kinds of government-led projects are tangible manifestations of fakery. They would often snub the “German-style street,” calling it “fake” or “a cheat.” Indeed, while this street had been part of Germany’s grand master plan for Qingdao, it was never fully developed by the Germans, but rather built up and used by the Japanese in the 1920s when they expanded the city northward. A local interlocutor who had studied in Hefei (Anhui) once commented sarcastically, “The city of Hefei wanted to have a European-style street (*oulu fengqing jie*), so they fabricated one, Qingdao already has its own real European-style street [Zhongshan Road], but they still decided to create a fake one.” Many preservationists rigorously rejected, in particular, the ubiquitous Xintiandization and commercialization of old urban structures (Chapter 2)—“commercialism” symbolizing fakery.

One evening, during one of the many dinners I shared with preservationists, a debate emerged over whether one could do justice to and respect history when the objective was primarily to make money. Cultural entrepreneur Mr. Yuan commented, “It is possible to combine the two as long as the principle of ‘repair the old like the old’ is followed.” Brother Xu then replied, “But in China if you want to make money, you can’t be too genuine (*shizai*),” reflecting an underlying feeling that China’s “reality” required a certain degree of sham and that achieving economic success necessarily meant cheating. Photographer Chen added, “‘Repairing the old’ is business, ‘like the old’ is wishful thinking.” Genuine preservation and commercially driven projects were considered to be two mutually exclusive spheres. On yet another occasion, a heated discussion took place between Mr. Li and an employee of a real estate firm overseeing the refurbishing of a batch of *liyuan* to the west of Dabaodao.

MR. LI: You won’t transform your *liyuan* into another *guangxing li*, will you? That would not be preservation or renovation of historical architecture. It would be destruction. All structures and window frames and doorframes are new.

MS. WEI: Of course, they had to change those windows. They were all rotten. I think that they [the construction group in charge] spent quite a bit of money on *guangxing li* and they maintained its function, even finding a high-end industry to use it and thus give an old building a real new life and meaning.

MR. LI: Inviting an international industrial design company from southern China into Qingdao's oldest neighborhood is not what local Qingdao residents would have ever wanted. That is hardly respecting or valuing local history. That high-end business just doesn't fit into Dabaodao. Sooner or later, it will die a horrible death.

MS. WEI: Isn't history also about development, about transformation? Today's Dabaodao is already no longer the former Dabaodao. The market, consumption, and local visitors have changed it. If we just stick to the old, it might also die a horrible death.

MR. LI: So what happens to history? It's all just business! "Repair the old" is business, it is not about historical transmission.

MS. WEI: Do you think you can still use those old windows and doors? Do you want to live there?

MR. LI: You can repair them. "Repair them like the old."

MS. WEI: How? How exactly would you fix a door like that? What kind of experts do you need for that? Do we have these experts? How long will they need to complete it? What are the costs? Isn't government money actually the people's money?

MR. LI: It is a matter of attitude. If there is a will, there is a way.

MS. WEI: It's all about money. Without funds it is all just empty talk.

MR. LI: You are not from Qingdao. You don't understand. The experience of having grown up and been raised in Qingdao is irreplaceable.

As we see from this debate, for Mr. Li and others like him, "commercialization" ruthlessly ignored the importance of historical preservation, which could furthermore only be achieved if the underlying motive was pure and genuine. Furthermore, preservationists generally agreed that if commercialization was absolutely inevitable, then the businesses coming in to occupy old courtyards should at least be from Qingdao and somehow suitable for a place like Dabaodao.

Beyond historical knowledge and its truthful representation, preserva-

tionists sought to adopt an “authentic” old Qingdao lifestyle. This included, for instance, the deliberate usage of local Qingdao dialect in daily conversation. Preservationists all spoke standard Mandarin, but during dinners or other casual events, they predominantly conversed in local dialect. Several interlocutors with young children even made a conscious effort to teach their kids how to speak “Qingdao *hua*.” A correct adherence to table manners, particularly drinking etiquette (D. Bell and Wang 2020), was also important, as was a shared sense of place. Stephan Feuchtwang (2004, 4–5) describes “place-making” as an act of centering, not necessarily physically, but notionally through certain “homing points” like names, buildings, or memories. Place, according to Feuchtwang (10), refers to

the centering and marking of a place by the actions and constructions of people tracing salient parts of their daily lives as a homing point in their trajectories. Places and their features are in turn triggers of memories of their lives, reminders of whatever longer senses of time they have.

One of my very first encounters with a group of preservationists took place in a tiny back-alley restaurant on a cobblestone street (a relic of colonial building activity) in the old town. The restaurant was extremely small, offering two tiny rooms with just enough space for eight of us to cram around a table. In order to get to the kitchen, one first had to step back into the street and then enter through an adjacent door. The preservationists considered this place to be representative of an authentic culinary experience. “This is the flavor of old Qingdao,” they told me, “but soon, these places will all be gone.” The “flavor” referred to both the actual taste of the food and the overall ambience of the location. These kinds of “homing points,” frequented and constructed as meaningful places by preservationists—together with reminiscences of walking or playing (as children) in areas that were changing or had already disappeared—established a sense of being authentically Qingdaoese, beyond one’s knowledge of the city’s physical heritage. Importantly, such “homing points” were mutually recognized, thus reconciling personal and shared memories. Moreover, the intimacy of these recollections drew an invisible line between those who had such memories and those who did not.

Reflecting Mr. Li’s final comment above, it was on this basis that people who had not grown up in Qingdao were denied the right to have a say in matters of redevelopment or preservation. Redevelopment proposals

for Dabaodao or other areas were discarded as “bad” when those who had designed or were in charge of implementing them were not from Qingdao. The view was that they simply could not have the same feelings for the city as a local. The importance of an “emotional bond” with the place was strongly underlined. As Mr. Li once commented, “Unfortunately, real locals who have feelings for the city and who are also urban planning experts are extremely rare.” This was also often presented as the main reason why city mayors or other officials were utterly incapable of properly preserving Qingdao’s old town: they were simply not from the city. Similarly, when discussing the financing of redevelopment projects, many preservationists argued that local companies or real estate firms would do a better job than those from other cities. The same was true for scholars and urban planning professionals who worked on projects in Qingdao. “It is always better if a local expert does this work,” again said Mr. Li. Interestingly, my being German was considered a sufficient qualification to conduct research on Qingdao, the assumption being that I must have “feelings” for German heritage in a Chinese city.

BETWEEN HISTORY AS CONSUMPTION AND HISTORY AS FACT

Celebrating colonial architecture and heritage involved an intricate discursive balancing act on the part of preservationists. According to China’s official narrative of humiliation at the hands of foreign aggressors (Broudehoux 2004), the colonization of Qingdao would be considered no less horrific than the burning down of Yuanmingyuan. Locally, this was partially circumvented by inflating Japanese atrocities as later colonizers of Qingdao while simultaneously downplaying German colonial activities. This allowed officials to utilize the humiliation narrative, thus concretizing China’s suffering under foreign powers, but without jeopardizing positive local sentiments toward colonial heritage. Alternatively, another way to “decolonize” Qingdao was simply to deny the fact that it had been forcefully occupied by the Germans. For example, in a conversation with a senior local university professor, he suggested that Qingdao had never actually been colonized because the territory was leased out to the Germans, implying that the Chinese had consciously and voluntarily given the land to the Germans to manage.

Contemporary China, so Yukiki Koga (2008, 225) writes, “finds both omnipresent colonial traces *and* their erasure.” Much like a nostalgia in

Shanghai for “a selectively remembered and reimagined pre-Communist colonial past” (Pan 2005, 123), there existed a certain enthusiasm for old and colonial times in Qingdao. Tourism industries and businesses overtly used the city’s colonial past as a marketing strategy, though mostly in an ahistorical, harmonized, and domesticated manner (Barmé 2010). Notably, when I began my research, there was still a discursive space for a public engagement with colonial heritage. However, over the decade in which I conducted fieldwork, the “colonial” in Qingdao’s “colonial heritage” was gradually de-emphasized, remaining present mainly as an object of consumption. Indeed, though heritage progressively experienced a revival under the Xi Jinping regime (Chapter 2), it has been much more tightly integrated into a centralized, civilizational, and nationalistic narrative (Evans and Rowlands 2021b).

Preservationists found themselves in a dilemma. On the one hand, they clearly refused an ahistorical representation of history and were particularly opposed to the commercialization of history, referring to consumption of “the old” as fake or superficial. Many reacted angrily to statements such as “Qingdao is the world expo of architecture” or a place of “red tiles, green trees, seashore, and azure sky”—as the city’s official slogan describes it—considering them to be “meaningless and shallow,” to quote photographer Chen. Their key concern was ensuring a rigorous historiography and factual representation of the past. Yet while they themselves often glorified and celebrated the pre-Communist and particularly colonial past, they were opposed to similar popular sentiments, pervasive in Qingdao. “If only Qingdao had been like Hong Kong and the Germans had stayed until 1997, this city would be outstanding!” was a commonly heard phrase in 2012, jokingly referred to as the “taxi driver speech” (*chuzuche siji shuo de hua*). This was rejected by many of the preservationists. For example, “hobby historian” Mr. Li explained:

I don’t like how most people just overrate and glorify German heritage. They think all things German are good. But they don’t actually understand in what context these things emerged. They don’t understand Germany’s motivations at the time. Take, for example, the sewage system. They all say that the Germans were so great for building a sewage system of such capacity. But in reality, the reason why it is so big is because the Germans had no idea about the climate when they arrived. They

thought it rained more and they were in a rush, which is why they built such a massive sewage system. There is nothing great about it.

Mr. Li was particularly upset about this “myth of the sewage system” (*xia shui dao de shenhua*). In many online articles or short essays on Qingdao, the sewage system built by German colonizers is indeed described as big enough for trucks to drive through. “Have these people ever been to Qingdao to measure it or are they just repeating rumors online?” Mr. Li commented irritably under a Weibo post that romanticized Qingdao’s sewage system.

On the other hand, preservationists were pleased that the wider public had begun to take an interest in history and heritage. “At least people have started to care about historical architecture,” Brother Xu once commented. They relied on this awareness of and demand for history to make their voices heard. They were moreover well aware that the discursive space in which they could legitimately deliberate on colonial history was limited. As a result, they themselves often pragmatically sustained an ahistorical and certainly apolitical approach to colonial history. An occurrence during an event I attended in the summer of 2021 is illustrative in this regard.

I had just returned to Qingdao to collect some additional data on more recent developments in Dabaodao. It so happened that a launching ceremony for a photography volume containing photographs of colonial Qingdao was to be held at the city’s old art gallery, offering a welcome opportunity to meet and catch up with people. The core preservationists were all present: Mr. Li, Brother Xu, Photographer Chen, Teacher Chang, Mr. Yang, and quite a few others. An afternoon forum and panel discussion at Teacher Chang’s café followed the morning ceremony and visit to the temporary exhibit. Everyone sat around a small stage set with a sofa and a small tea table. The host, purportedly the former head of one of China’s most prominent auction houses, initiated a discussion with the invited guests, a selection of photographers, and art history scholars. I listened to them take turns commenting on the exhibition, the “valuable photographs,” “the important history,” and so on. When the host opened the floor and invited people in the audience to also “say a few words,” I sensed that I would be called upon at some point. This had happened to me a number of times during fieldwork. Even though most preservationists knew that I was an anthropologist studying contemporary urban renewal practices, I was still often asked to attend such events and to provide comments as an “expert on Qingdao’s

history.” These occurrences underscored the challenges of studying an epistemic community that I myself was part of.

As I listened to a local preservationist—Brother Liu, the antiquities dealer—bemoan the “shameful destruction of Qingdao’s historical architecture,” I thought about what I might possibly contribute to the debate and decided to introduce a somewhat different perspective to the thus far rather uncritical historical tribute to “old Qingdao.” As I expected, the host shortly thereafter asked me to express my thoughts on the exhibition and whether this kind of event might foster a dialogue between China and Germany. Following this lead, I remarked that some of the photographs had actually made me feel uncomfortable, especially those showing German soldiers with what seemed a condescending and superior demeanor toward locals. I also shared some general reflections on what it meant to me, as a German national, to do anthropological research on heritage in a city that had once been a colony of “my own” country. My brief comments instigated a lively debate. The editors of the volume felt the need to explain their choice of photographs. Meanwhile, Teacher Chang recalled how a well-known German Sinologist had once urged Germans to apologize for what they had done in Qingdao rather than celebrate German heritage in the city. However, he then added, “We cannot change this history; the architecture is what the Germans left behind. It is a historical fact. We should just approach it as such.” This comment echoed the perspective of the vast majority of preservationists. They largely avoided any reference to issues of politics, power, or colonialism as a wider discourse so as to safely speak positively about colonial heritage. Later that night, during dinner with a smaller circle of people, Mr. Li, photographer Chen, and Brother Xu expressed their anger about the question the host had asked me. “She shouldn’t have asked you to comment on Sino-German relations,” they said. “This put you in an awkward position.” I observed that I had actually been the one to bring up the topic, to which Brother Xu answered straightforwardly, “These are not things that we talk about” (*zhe bushi zanmen taolun de shiqing*), implying that their main focus was historical facts and not politics.

The extent to which this depoliticization and deproblematization of colonial heritage was an intentional strategy to safely and legitimately discuss (and celebrate) German heritage in Qingdao or rather had simply become part of their habitus is difficult to discern. Clearly, however, narratives about Qingdao’s colonial past oscillated between two legitimate discursive spaces, namely that of consumption, tourism, and branding on the one

hand, and that of a fact-based yet unproblematic and depoliticized history on the other. Preservationists clearly nourished the latter, but also depended on the existence of the former.

EDUCATING THE PUBLIC

Most preservationists defined themselves as “educators” of the general public. “We need to tell *laobaixing* (common people) about the value of Qingdao’s old town,” Mr. Li explained. Uncovering the history of Qingdao and thinking about the city’s future “is the responsibility of every single Qingdao citizen,” an interlocutor wrote in a short article published in a local journal (Jin 2013, 8). Meanwhile, Mr. Li stated, “We want to tell people to not just go onto Baidu¹¹ for historical information, but that they should make an effort to find documents that really tell us the truth about what happened.” Once again, the importance of historical truth loomed large. Many preservationists saw it as their responsibility to unveil and spread a largely unknown history that manifested itself in the physical architecture of the old town. This was done in a variety of ways.

Publications were crucial. Most preservationists wrote articles or even books, some sold in mainstream stores, others only available as limited editions through personal connections. These publications varied somewhat depending on expertise and interest, but they generally all adhered to the common principle of seeking to truthfully and correctly represent history. Some were more focused on architecture, specific stories, or historical periods, while literary accounts made references to a given street, building, or district in Qingdao. There were also a number of photography collections. Photographer Chen, for instance, produced over half a dozen photography volumes, some even commissioned by the local government, while Teacher Chang put together a series of booklets about Dabaodao, which included work by local photographers and textual documentation of *liyuan* history and their contemporary situation. Mr. Li’s work focused more specifically on colonial times, including a book on old postcards and another on German architects and engineers who had participated in the building of Qingdao. I also became part of these activities when I assisted with the translation to Chinese of the memoirs of Alfred Siemssen (Chapter 1). The book came out in 2016 and significantly reinforced my position as someone who had contributed to the production of rigorous knowledge of the city’s history.

Such publications were, however, niche products and for the most part did not have a wide circulation, with the exception of one book that would later have a significant impact on Dabaodao's discursive transformation and redevelopment projects. Articles in newspapers or magazines offered a more influential means of educating the wider public. I collected a substantial number of these pieces published by my interlocutors, each of them covering a specific aspect of Qingdao (a historical figure, an event, an architectural remnant, etc.). A typical newspaper article dedicated to Dabaodao would feature a main text describing the adverse living conditions and need for redevelopment, while several boxes on the sides would explain the "cultural" value of Dabaodao to Qingdao as a city, sometimes accompanied by a short piece by a historian celebrating urban heritage.

In addition to these contributions, preservationists used their network to lobby media outlets into reporting on Qingdao's history. For example, in early 2013, Alfred Siemssen's great-granddaughter visited Qingdao. Since Siemssen's buildings were still largely unknown to the wider public, preservationists used their connections in the media to round up over 20 journalists from daily newspapers and different TV stations to film her visiting the buildings. As I was acting as an interpreter, I was able to observe the initial confusion among the journalists who, expecting to interview an expert from Germany,¹² were surprised to see a 22-year-old girl. She in turn was startled by the number of reporters filming, taking photos, and interviewing her. The "educational tour" went by a variety of European-style mansions as well as several *liyuan* courtyards. Often a crowd of curious onlookers stopped and watched as Mr. Li, the main person leading the group, took out carefully prepared and printed old photos of the still-existing buildings, holding them in front of the camera and showing them to the crowd. In this comparison of the "then" and "now," the buildings suddenly appeared on a trajectory; they were given a time dimension and were no longer just any old building, but historically significant architecture. The next day, three daily newspapers reported on the story (one on its front page), and a 10-minute segment was shown on Qingdao's local TV during prime time, right at the end of the evening news. The preservationists had achieved their goal. In the years that followed, the same strategy was successfully repeated many times, such as when the Chinese translation of Siemssen's memoirs was published or when descendants of other German nationals who had lived and been active in Qingdao visited the city.

Knowledge thus disseminated provided a source of cultural capital to

distinguish and differentiate oneself from others in the context of a stratified urban society (Ren 2013; L. Yu 2014), where heritage and historical expertise have increasingly come to matter. Quite frequently, for example, when I met someone for an interview, my interlocutor would cautiously try, at the beginning of the conversation, to discern just how much I knew about Qingdao and Dabaodao, so as to not “lose face” should the person have less or insufficient knowledge. Displaying and even boasting about one’s historical knowledge became common fare in daily conversations, which could only be done once the degree of expertise of one’s counterpart had been determined, so as to avoid committing an embarrassing gaffe. While the core preservationists were generally skeptical of the “history fad” and consumption of “the old,” they also benefited, in that these trends opened a space for their ideas of correct historical representation to fill popular demand for history and culture.

BUILDING ALLIANCES

Preservationists not only spread their views among the wider public, but also willingly nurtured alliances with urban developers and businesses, despite their aversion to commercialization. An illuminating example in this regard concerns a real estate firm that was eager to trademark itself as being “culturally sensitive” by emphasizing its local character and incorporating Qingdao’s history and heritage in its projects. Being “local” was, as mentioned, an important prerequisite to gain preservationist approval. Rather than my reaching out to the firm, as normally happens during fieldwork, my first encounter with this company surprisingly occurred the other way around. Several employees contacted me, asking whether I might advise them on how to “authentically” decorate their newly refurbished headquarters. In 2002, they had purchased an old hotel—which had been one of the city’s most luxurious accommodations during colonial times—from the Qingdao government. Situated along one of the city’s most famous beaches, it offered a stunning view of the sea from its top floors. The building had lain fallow for a number of years until the company finally decided to renovate it, a process that was near completion in 2013. Consulting various sources, but without the original blueprints, the company had endeavored to meticulously maintain the authentic appearance of the building. During an initial tour through the still-unfinished building, they proudly showed me how even

the bathrooms, including sinks, faucets, and heaters, had been kept in what they said was the “original style” (*yuan yang*). A “historical exhibition space” and a “retro-style” bar were turned into cultural spaces, not only portraying the history of the building, but also that of Qingdao as a whole.

They hoped that I would counsel them on what furniture to place inside the building. “We want real furniture from Germany. It is important to us to not just do what everyone else does in China,” a staff member explained. “We want the real thing,” her colleague added. They heavily criticized the ubiquitous high-end residential compounds that randomly used European features and names to promote a “high-class” image (L. Zhang 2010). “People don’t just want fake European villas anymore, they want something that they can relate to,” she said, thus highlighting how the notion of authenticity functions as a marker of distinction. Their upscale properties, mainly in the new development zones (*kaifaqu*), were modeled on actually existing German mansions in Qingdao’s old town. Roofs styles, colors, and various architectural elements were utilized to evoke the context of old Qingdao in these new developments. Such physical references were considered to be more “authentic” than simply recreating a “Europeanstyle” residential compound. The company further cultivated this “cultural” image by running an extensive marketing campaign and establishing a “society for cultural exchange” of which most preservationists would later become members. A regular publication contained a plethora of historical articles and information about Qingdao, with quite a few written by Mr. Li. The company also financed the translation and publication of Alfred Siemssen’s memoirs.

The link between the company and the preservationists was an employee named Mr. Yuan. As someone from Qingdao who did not initially have much knowledge of the city’s history apart from what most people knew, he managed to enter the core network by becoming very active on Weibo, absorbing all the information he could find there, sharing posts, and commenting on other people’s posts. He also read extensively, collected photos and information, and even spent time in the city archives. The first time I met him was at a public salon on the history of Dabaodao at a retro-style coffee shop.¹³ Though Mr. Yuan did not yet form part of the network, he had already begun obtaining the required knowledge. He eventually invited several key preservationists for dinner through a contact of his among the latter. He insisted on paying, a sign that he wanted something from them. As everyone ate, Mr. Yuan skillfully emphasized his company’s goal of fostering “authentic” preservation and played up its cultural role, trying to cast away

any doubts they might have. He furthermore showed that he already had sound knowledge of Qingdao's history. In the end, he succeeded in convincing most of the preservationists to act as "cultural advisers" for the company, thus giving a considerable boost to the company's credibility. Nonetheless, during private conversations, some of the preservationists still criticized the company's efforts as, "of course, prioritizing commercial motives," thus reiterating their fundamental suspicion of any kind of commercial activity. That said, they also praised the company's attempts to at least show "some respect for history," underlining a certain degree of flexibility and willingness to compromise. Mr. Yuan eventually became a legitimate member of the wider preservationist circle and was regularly invited to dinners and discussions. He acted as a "cultural broker" between the two seemingly mutually exclusive spheres of "business" and "culture." Preservationists were, in turn, able to exert some influence over how the company engaged with and approached historical architecture.

PRAGMATIC ACTIVISM AND THE EFFICACY OF SOCIAL ACTION

The preservationist discourse not only influenced the wider public and urban developing firms, but also resonated with and impacted local officials. On the one hand, preservationists' relatively strong public (and media) presence meant that local officials preferred to avoid getting "scolded by the literature and history circle" (*bei wenshi quanzi ma le*). As Professor Wu once put it, "This could easily harm their reputation and evaluation of their performance." In 2016, for instance, a public forum organized by a group of preservationists to discuss the situation of Dabaodao was called off by the local government. "They [the government officials] are afraid that whatever they propose will be opposed by the public," Professor Wu explained. On the other hand, preservationists' agendas also converged with the political mandate of preservation and local officials' correspondent need for historical expertise.

The "social life" of the first comprehensive book to be published about Dabaodao provides a good example. It was jointly written by members of the core network: Mr. Li, Teacher Wang, Brother Xu, Teacher Gao, Lao Sun, Teacher Chang, and Xiao Liu. The authors were a noteworthy combination of professionals and "hobby historians." I vividly remember the excitement in the air when I happened to arrive early at Teacher Chang's café

one December day in 2012 for an appointment with Xiao Liu and found the authors looking through the final proofs. “This is going to be an important book,” Xiao Liu commented. It included a detailed historical account of how Dabaodao came into being, discussed its architectural specificities, the development of *liyuan* houses, their meaning to Qingdao, famous people who had lived or built there, an introduction to “old shops” (*lao zi hao*), as well as a brief discussion of the contemporary situation. Though it did not have a wide circulation and soon after its launch could no longer be purchased through regular channels, everyone who was interested in or researching Qingdao, and particularly Dabaodao, had read it.

Through the diverse network of preservationists and their various connections and alliances, the book found its way into the hands of local officials, including those responsible for redevelopment. The city archives and the Political Consultative Conference circulated the book among government departments. Professor Wu meanwhile reported that in meetings with local officials, he sensed that the book had “opened many people’s eyes” and had changed their minds about redevelopment plans for the Dabaodao area. “They realized that simply knocking them [*liyuan* houses] all down is not right,” he said, while Xiao Liu specified, “People in the government have finally understood that there is a history to be preserved.” In the years that followed, and under shifting municipal and district leadership, whenever an official was transferred to a new position related to inner-city redevelopment, the person was advised by superiors to read the entire book as basic knowledge and in preparation for their new responsibilities. When, for instance, I met Mr. Gao of the Shinan district Preservation and Development Bureau in 2021, a copy of the Dabaodao book lay on his desk, and he repeatedly referred to it during our conversation.

Preservationists did not, however, expect or even intend the book to have such a strong impact. “We would never have done this out of the hope that it would actually change anything,” Mr. Li once remarked in his usual level-headed manner. When I asked what exactly they were hoping to alter or achieve, I would receive vague and evasive answers: “We just do what we can. You know China: the government does whatever it wants anyway—we can’t fundamentally change anything.” For preservationists, the act of “caring for the city” by producing and disseminating what they thought to be “correct” historical knowledge appeared to be a goal in and of itself. Similar to what Max Woodworth (2010, 209) observes with regard to resistance against inner-city redevelopment in Beijing, the “outcomes, or results, are secondary to the acts themselves.”

As elsewhere in China (Y. Yao and Han 2016), preservationists' activities were characterized by realism and cooperation rather than confrontation. Almost entirely void of "symbolic contestations" (Hsing and Lee 2010, 4), they were instead informed by a distinct sense of citizenship and responsibility. Only very sporadically would a preservationist officially and openly report "heritage abuse" to the respective government department. On a few occasions, local artists and intellectuals gathered to oppose the demolition of a building or site. This occurred, for instance, in 2010, when the northern end of Dabaodao was demolished to make space for the east–west expressway. These attempts were, however, largely unsuccessful. The most concrete outcome-oriented actions took the form of endorsing policy recommendations through the Political Consultative Conference or by writing posts on Weibo and thereby publicly denouncing what they considered to be the "destruction of historical architecture" or "disrespecting history." Mr. Li once went a bit too far when he strongly criticized the demolition of an old building next to Pichaiyuan. He immediately received a call from an official he knew well, asking him to take down the post, which he did right away. Preservationists displayed a clear willingness to compromise. Many were convinced that change had to happen within the system, and not against it. To quote Lao Sun: "I am not supporting any kind of revolution (*geming*). The system can only be changed from within; what we need is reform (*gai-liang*)."¹⁴ The actions of preservationists were clearly embedded *within* China's political system and not against it.

Those who failed to adopt a conciliatory attitude were sidelined. Xiao Liu, the foreign-trained architect, for instance, was sometimes regarded as "too idealistic" and "too radical." When he returned from his studies abroad, he had a clear vision as to how best to preserve Dabaodao and *liyuan* houses. When things did not move along as he wanted, he expressed frustration with the complacency of his colleagues, which included many fellow preservationists. "At the end of the day, they just care about their own careers. They don't actually care about quality preservation," he said. He was not willing to work *within* the system, and he eventually quit and left Qingdao. Most of the preservationists were, in contrast, realists and, aware of the many structural constraints, even criticized such "idealistic" views. As Lao Sun explained, "You know, we all have families. We have to live our lives. We are just part of the system; we cannot risk all that we have. Some of these idealists [he was referring to Xiao Liu] are young and naive. This is not how you make a real difference." Others, like Mr. Li, were less concerned about "their families" than about compromising their status as people who were consulted by the

government. Chen Xi (2007, 253) describes such an approach as engaging in resistance while still remaining submissive. Rather than the somewhat negative connotation of the term “submissive,” their actions might better be interpreted as “pragmatic activism.” Preservationists were firm in their beliefs about history and heritage, and realistic and expedient when it came to fighting for their cause. This was an informed choice, made in full awareness of fundamental systemic issues. The evasive answer to the question as to what exactly they were trying to achieve did not imply that they did not want to alter anything; rather it reflected their prudence and discretion when it came to pushing for change.

It is precisely *because* the outcomes were secondary to their actions and because they largely refrained from direct confrontation that preservationists could concretely influence urban redevelopment. Over the years, people like Mr. Li, but also photographer Chen and Brother Xu, used their status as respected “hobby historians” to shape the implementation of redevelopment projects. They became part of “expert groups” (*zhuanjia zu*) or acted as “people’s representatives” (*shimin daibiao*) and were regularly invited to attend meetings and provide input. “When they initially invited me, I wasn’t sure if I wanted to go. But then I realized that they actually valued my opinion and that they changed some, if ever so minor, details in their plans because of what I told them, so I think it is still worthwhile,” Mr. Li said. Members of the Planning Bureau or redevelopment offices regularly called him and other preservationists to ask specific questions pertaining to a building, a historical detail, or matters related to preservation, giving this group discursive power and allowing their principled ideas on authenticity and truthful representation of history to directly permeate government bureaucracy. In the summer of 2021, Mr. Li, who had always been quite skeptical about achieving any fundamental change, reflected, “We can say that our efforts have paid off.” That said, as we will see in the final empirical chapter, the preservationists were unable to stop the redevelopment of Dabaodao from turning into something that they considered to be “new” and “fake.” This outcome was, however, less the result of one particular “wrong” decision than the confluence of different structural, systemic, and social factors, preservationists being one of them.

7

The Future of the Inner City?

When I returned to the city in early 2021 after having been away for a year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I found Dabaodao profoundly changed. Roads had been broadened and resurfaced, courtyard facades knocked off, and many interiors completely remodeled. A huge temporary gate and construction barrier made of corrugated iron sheets marked the entrance to Sifang Road. The gate's side beams were adorned with the couplet “Not one day will be delayed” (*yi tian ye bu danwu*) on the left and “Not one day will be wasted” (*yi tian ye bu xiedai*) on the right. The irony was not lost on me. Had I not spent the past 10 years observing nothing but delays and “wasted time”? Yet I also knew all too well that no irony was remotely intended. Within the neighborhood, many streets had already been turned into newly paved small boulevards with freshly planted trees on either side. Some courtyard facades had been redecorated, yellow in color, with dark red or olive-green window frames and doorframes. Red banners, those commonly used for government slogans across China, had been hung on the facades of already remodeled courtyards. One of them read, “Strengthen heritage preservation, transmit history and culture” (*jiaqiang wenwu baohu, chuancheng lishi wenhua*) and another, “Revive historical memory, promote the cultural industry” (*fuxing lishi jiyi, zhutui wenhua chanye*).

In this final empirical chapter, I look at the “heritagized” future of Dabaodao and *liyuan* houses. Importantly, the notion of “future” has often implicitly formed part of debates over how to preserve the old town center. For instance, the title of one media article read, “How Zhongshan Road Can Give Full Play to Its Special Qualities in the Future,” before going on to examine how to deal with architecture from the past. In fact, heritage has

increasingly come to be described “as a series of activities that are intimately concerned with assembling, building, and designing future worlds” (Harrison et al. 2020, 4). In what follows, I explore how Dabaodao has transformed spatially, with particular attention to the heritagization process. I discuss the still ongoing redevelopment project(s), showing that many of the problems that contributed to years of stagnation have by no means disappeared. I also recount what has happened to my key interlocutors, locals and migrants alike. In discussing Dabaodao since refurbishment, I reflect on some of the broader issues examined throughout the book.

A NEW PLACE WITH AN OLD NARRATIVE

In early August 2021, I accompanied a friend interested in renting a refurbished *liyuan* room for his business to meet Mr. Hou, the person in charge of soliciting commercial activities and attracting investment (*zhaoshang*) in the renovated *guangxing li* courtyard. The latter was one of the first to be completed and was being managed by Shenhua,¹ a design company from southern China. Rumors spread that the courtyard had been given to the company free of charge due to the CEO’s connections with the mayor of Qingdao. *Guangxing li* had become a completely different space. The tiny huts and sheds that used to occupy the courtyard interior had given way to a large empty space (Figure 11). A few chairs and tables had been placed in the middle, and several wooden benches on the sides, with a white phone booth reminiscent of the traditional British cubicles standing as decoration next to them. A sign in traditional Chinese characters reading “*Guangxing Li*” had been placed near one of the courtyard entrances. Some of the ground floor walls were equipped with panels explaining the historical importance of *guangxing li* and *liyuan* houses. One of the headlines in particular caught my eye: “Repair the old like the old.” Below, photographs of *guangxing li* depicted the courtyard’s redevelopment trajectory: the messy interior before expropriation, then during refurbishment, and finally in its current completed form. “There is a history, there is a story, there is a place,” read an additional text. I looked around. While the overall structure and layout had indeed been maintained, it was nevertheless a completely transformed space.

As I surveyed the changes, Mr. Hou, a young, slightly chubby man in his late thirties came down the stairs to greet us. “How much do you know about Qingdao’s *liyuan*?” he asked and without waiting for an answer began



Fig. 11. *Guangxing li* after refurbishment (fieldwork photo, 2021)

to explain, “This courtyard was built by a German architect named Alfred Siemssen.” This was wrong. While Alfred Siemssen had built many residential buildings, including several *liyuan* courtyards, this was not one of them (Chapter 1). I made a mental note, but didn’t say anything. Less, perhaps, important than whether or not the courtyard was built by Alfred Siemssen was the fact that he was mentioned and that his name appeared to have become generally recognized and associated with the historical and architectural heritage of Dabaodao. As I listened to Mr. Hou further discuss the courtyard, missing no opportunity to highlight the cultural and historical importance of *liyuan*, I remembered how, eight years ago, preservationists were concerned about how little the public knew about this “German architect whose activities were so significant to Qingdao.”

We were then given a private tour of the different rooms on all three floors of the remodeled courtyard. Most had been converted into office and workshop spaces, some of which were already rented out to local design companies or individual designers. One larger space contained an exhibition, showcasing Shenhua’s own products, neatly arranged on tables in a

comfortably air-conditioned environment. Catchy slogans mixing *liyuan* and Qingdao “culture” with the development of design and the “manufactured in China” (*zhongguo chuangzao*)² concept adorned the white, sterile walls. The southern end of the second floor, where I had visited the last remaining resident of *guangxing li* some two years before, now served as the courtyard management (*wuye guanli*) office. Through the glass window, young employees could be seen behind wooden desks, typing away on their laptops. The entire courtyard was now equipped with central heating, air conditioning, plumbing, and a total of nine spotless bathrooms. As we made our way downstairs to a bar only accessible from the courtyard interior, my acquaintance asked if he could smoke. “No, the entire courtyard is nonsmoking,” Mr. Hou replied. “This courtyard has wooden structures; this is cultural heritage (*wenwu*). You cannot smoke here.” Recalling the spatial practices of residents described in Chapters 3 and 5, the contrast could not have been more striking. What was once a “messy” place of everyday life had turned into a sterile space of urban entrepreneurialism and “cultural industry” (*wenhua chanye*), characterized by safety standards, a particular spatial code of conduct, and a legitimate and historical narrative that was easy to remember and retell.

That this was not an exception was confirmed a few weeks later when I had a similar experience at another refurbished block of *liyuan* courtyards located to the west of Zhongshan Road. They were being redeveloped by a Beijing-registered real estate firm, referred to here as the Huaxia Company, whose CEO was from Qingdao. I met Mr. Jiang, one of the project managers, at a fashionable teahouse that had just opened in the area. “We want to attract youngsters,” Mr. Jiang told me, as a waitress dressed in *hanfu*³ brought us two fancily shaped pots of cold white tea (*baicha*) with a tint of citrus flavor—a creation and specialty of the establishment. A well-dressed and eloquent young professional, Mr. Jiang began to narrate the history of Qingdao and *liyuan* houses in a detached and businesslike fashion, sometimes sounding as if he was retailing a product. He mentioned the hygienic belt, the original spatial and ethnic segregation during German occupation, and the emergence of *liyuan* houses and their architectural styles, often stressing the importance of preserving “the historical memory of our city” (*zanmen chengshi de lishi jiyi*). He also alluded to Alfred Siemssen, erroneously claiming that he had designed the entire old town of Qingdao, though once again exemplifying the extent to which this aspect of the city’s past had become (if imperfect) common knowledge and part of the daily vocabulary of her-

itage entrepreneurialism. Mr. Jiang was, in fact, doing precisely this, peddling “culture” and “history,” the unique selling point being “authenticity” and the truthful representation of the past. During our subsequent tour through the refurbished courtyards, he continually underlined the meticulous choice of materials and attention to detail. “We used as many of the original materials as possible,” he often repeated.

Ten years ago, *liyuan* houses would at best have appeared in detailed project plans or in discussions among planners and experts at the implementation level. The history of Dabaodao was meanwhile known to only a few historians and preservationists. Now, in contrast, *liyuan* have become part of a quotidian heritage entrepreneurialism discourse, matter-of-factly used by relators as part of their marketing strategy. Authenticity and references to truthful historical representation have become key concepts. Simply advertising “the old” is no longer sufficient, but must necessarily be embellished by a more sophisticated emphasis on the genuineness of historical preservation. Furthermore, the idea that preservation must be done for its own sake—without any ulterior motive—has become deeply engrained in official rhetoric. Even construction workers adopted this heritage narrative. “You know what,” one of them told me after having just carried a heavy sandbag across Huangdao Road, “these houses were constructed by the Germans over 100 years ago.” On another occasion, three female construction workers approached me to proudly explain that “the government will repair these old buildings like the old.” Construction workers were, moreover, obliged to attend a few days of special training, during which they were instructed on how to properly handle historical architecture.

UNCERTAINTY CONTINUED

Throughout the duration of my fieldwork, it was next to impossible to predict when actions taken by any of the involved individuals or groups—whether preservationists, residents, or the local government—would have a decisive impact in terms of advancing a redevelopment project. There were simply too many variables and contingencies that, depending on their combination, would determine a new outcome, in turn triggering certain actions, giving way to new outcomes, in an endless sequence of actions and outcomes. Nonetheless, despite this erratic and fragmentary process of urban renewal, Dabaodao was ultimately transformed. How exactly did this happen?

One crucial factor was a change in municipal leadership in 2019, when a new party secretary was appointed in Qingdao. Important as well was a nationwide “opinion on further strengthening the urban planning and construction management” (State Council 2016), which stipulated that by the end of 2020, all transformation and renovation of existing “areas of slum housing,” urban villages, and derelict housing across the country had to be completed (X. Wang and Aoki 2019). Similar to the city building initiative in 2015 that led to the swift demolition of the Huangdao Road market, it was thus again a central government mandate that initiated a more concrete and spatially visible redevelopment project at the local level.

Throughout the entire redevelopment process, the local government’s attempts to govern “through society,” relying on its “infrastructural power” and on negotiation and consultation with various social actors, had proven largely unproductive. It was only when more direct force was applied that the local government managed to convince them to cooperate. This was the case when the *chengguan* made migrant workers vacate the streets and dismantle their stalls during the closure of the Huangdao Road fresh-food market in 2015; or when preservationists began criticizing the demolition of a courtyard meant to make room for the building of one of Qingdao’s new metro lines in 2018. The local government arguably had to resort to forms of “despotic power” (Mann 1984) in order to “get things done.” Without this use of force, its means of reconciling and dealing with contestations revolving around inner-city redevelopment projects was significantly compromised. Concrete results were only achieved when (national or municipal) projects that went beyond the refurbishment of Dabaodao itself—such as the unannounced central government visit to assess the city’s hygienic situation; the central decree to abolish all urban “slum housing”; or the building of a metro line—incited and enabled the use of force. That said, the eventual implementation of renewal projects did not happen suddenly but occurred *within* the contingent and fragmentary process described throughout these chapters. Indeed, many of the problems that contributed to stagnation also continued to impact the process of refurbishment, especially attempts to solicit business and attract investment. Hence, rather than viewing the eventual implementation of redevelopment as a sudden break, I highlight a certain continuity.

Initially, redevelopment began only on the Shibeidao district side of Dabaodao, while courtyards on the Shinan side remained untouched. This was largely due to the allocation of funds and the municipal organization of

urban renewal projects according to city districts (Chapter 2). In 2020, the very first municipal-level Redevelopment Command Office was established, charged with overseeing and coordinating redevelopment across Dabaodao. However, it was not properly staffed and both districts continued to rely on their own redevelopment command offices, which worked independently of one another. The strategies adopted by the two districts also continued to differ. The Shibei district sought to redevelop the entire northern section of Dabaodao in a unified way. Officials collaborated with the Qingdao Shibei Construction Investment Group Company, Ltd. (*Shibei jianshe touzi jituan youxian gongsi*, hereafter: Shibei Construction Group),⁴ which in 2019 began, as a flagship project, to redevelop *guangxing li*. This endeavor was led by one of its many subsidiaries, the Qingdao Urban Renewal and Development Company (*qingdao chengshi gengxin fazhan youxian gongsi*) and was subsequently followed by the redevelopment of other courtyards. Important here is that the Shibei Construction Group retained control over the entire process, from planning, to implementation and eventual business solicitation and site management.

While the Shinan district also relied on an SOE, the Shinan Hainuo Investment and Development Company (*Shinan hainuo touzi fazhan youxian gongsi*), rather than having it control the entire refurbishment process, the district transferred use and refurbishment rights for specific patches of *liyuan* or even individual courtyards to several private companies. For example, the already mentioned *liyuan* refurbishment to the west of Dabaodao was entirely carried out by the private Huaxia Company, which secured use and refurbishment rights for a period of 15 years. The Huangdao Road area was similarly assigned to one of Qingdao's most prominent private developing firms, while a Shanghai-based urban design company was temporarily given rights over two courtyards on Huangdao Road and another one at the northern end of Dabaodao. The strategy was to implement redevelopment through a mixture of semiprivate and private companies, rather than in a unified manner and under the auspices of one government-owned company.

This continued fragmentation significantly impacted the progression of refurbishment. Not only did urban renewal take place at different speeds, but it also followed varying logics, causing uncertainty for potential industries and investors. Under the slogan of “vitalizing a century of Qingdao” (*bainian Qingdao huoli huanxin*) and with the aim of giving the old town a “cultural trademark,” the city government began a campaign to attract “part-

ners to the city” (*chengshi hehuo ren*). The main target industries and businesses included so-called homestays, hostels, trendy restaurants and bars, as well as tech and design companies and fashion boutiques. There was a particular interest in the “young economy” and the “four news” (*si xin*),⁵ consisting of new technology (*xin jishu*), new business formats (*xin yetai*), new industry (*xin chanye*), and new commercial models (*xin shangye moshi*). A subtle shift away from the previous Xintiandized focus on global brands and high-end consumption was apparent, replaced by an emphasis on local industry that sought to “foster the organic renewal of the historical town and search for a Qingdao way of old town rejuvenation” (R. Yu 2021). Such attempts were, however, largely unsuccessful.

Photographer Chen ridiculed these efforts, commenting, “They imagine that industries will queue up for a shop inside Dabaodao. They hope they will make money by collecting rent. But it’s nonsense.” Indeed, many of the imagined and sought-after industries and businesses remained reluctant to invest, and the process moved along sluggishly. By the summer of 2021, Shenhua had begun renting out a handful of shops inside *guangxing li* to individual businesses. These included a brewery (bar), a local designer who produced tourist gimmicks referencing Qingdao’s history and culture, a bakery, and a vintage outlet that seemed to sell anything that had, if ever so remotely, an antique flair. Other already completed courtyards hosted but a few operating shops, such as a small bookshop (which mainly sold tourist souvenirs), a shop for photography equipment, and a garment boutique.

For several reasons, businesses and investors were reluctant to come. First, the potential return on investment continued to be highly uncertain. The ongoing fragmented implementation of redevelopment, stretching across two city districts that adopted different strategies, was one obvious risk factor. Second, in the absence of any clear-cut long-term vision and strategy as to what a refurbished Dabaodao would eventually look like, many businesses remained hesitant. Even preferential policies and subsidies, such as very little or no rent, were not enough to attract investment. Shenhua, for instance, managed *guangxing li* on behalf of the Shibe Construction Group and had nominal autonomy in terms of deciding which kinds of businesses it wanted to invite and under what conditions it leased out courtyard space. Yet the design company remained accountable to the Shibe Construction Group and had to report any decisions and developments to it. Furthermore, any leaseholds or deals with businesses were tripartite agreements, involving the interested party, Shenhua, and the Shibe

Construction Group, with the latter only granting one-year leaseholds. In fact, it was for this reason that my acquaintance, who had been considering renting a shop space within the courtyard, eventually decided against it. Despite a rent-free year, the risk was too high. “What if they suddenly decide to kick me out after the first year?” he pointed out. “I have to invest in furnishing and advertising my new store. Even with a rent-free year, this does not add up.” There was a certain absurdity to the situation. The imagined prospect of a refurbished Dabaodao one day becoming a commercially successful and attractive place actually created a counterproductive unpredictability and consequent refusal to invest on the part of small businesses, like that of my acquaintance. Specifically, the government’s active advertising and promotion made it seem as if Dabaodao was on the verge of success, prompting the concern (and expectation) that once big businesses began to move in, they would drive out the smaller companies. This was, in fact, the logic underlying the Shibe Construction Group’s decision to only grant one-year leaseholds. “The whole situation (*zhengti shang de qingkuang*) of Qingdao’s old town just isn’t good,” Mr. Jiang of the Huaxia Company said to me, adding a refrain I had already heard many times: “The government isn’t doing a proper job.” At the time of writing, it remains unclear as to how the process of attracting investors will unfold and whether or not big businesses will be fighting over shop space in Dabaodao within a year or two. Many of my interlocutors remained skeptical. Meanwhile, one of the fundamental problems, namely the lack of consumers during the nontourist seasons, left the question posed in Chapter 2—“consumer spaces, but for whom?”—largely unresolved.

Managers of refurbished *liyuan* also faced an implicit pressure to make the latter “culturally suitable” for Dabaodao. Preservationists had a pronounced aversion to anything commercial, but if business was absolutely unavoidable, they were firm in their demand for companies that were local and “suitable” (*heshi*). Shenhua’s presence in *guangxing li* was certainly not viewed as such. I rarely met anyone who did not describe the courtyard as a failure. Preservationists were particularly angry about the fact that most of these buildings had been destroyed and rebuilt. “You know what they call this?” Mr. Li once asked and then answered his own question: “preservation-oriented demolition (*baohuxing chaichu*).” People like photographer Chen, with an expertise in architecture, complained about how “significant details” had not been taken into account, such as the shape of roof-tops. Many also took issue with how roads had been evened out. “Streets

and pavements are on the same level now,” Chen complained. “This has totally changed the proportions and thus the visual experience of the area.” Denouncement of the Shibeï district’s projects quickly became a routine narrative, even beyond the circle of preservationists. For instance, Mr. Jiang of the Huaxia Company often reiterated just how unsuccessful the Shibeï efforts had been, claiming that his company was going to do it “completely differently.” Even local Shinan district official Mr. Gao emphasized that he was trying everything to be “better than Shibeï.”

Those in charge of soliciting business necessarily had to navigate these dynamics. For instance, Mr. Li warned Mrs. Wei of the Huaxia Company, “If you transform your *liyuan* into another *guangxing li*, you will be condemned by academic circles and you will commit a crime on history, this is for certain.” To which Mrs. Wei replied, “Under such conditions, where everyone just scorns and criticizes everything, no one wants to ever touch this pile of ragged buildings. Whenever someone comes in and spends money, they are denounced. This is why these buildings have remained so shabby for so long.” Their exchange illustrates how preservationists like Mr. Li exercised indirect yet unmistakable pressure to act in certain ways. Of course, companies such as the one Mrs. Wei worked for were not necessarily intimidated by a single individual voicing an opinion or issuing a warning. However, Mrs. Wei knew all too well that preservationists would make their views known on social media, thus impacting public discourse with potentially negative consequences for the company’s reputation and the project. Preservationists also regularly advised the local government and therefore had a certain degree of influence over officials and their views of a “successful” refurbishment project. This explains why managers such as Mr. Jiang, Mrs. Wei, or Mr. Hou eagerly sought businesses with “local character.” Mr. Hou, for example, said, “We really want to attract businesses that have something to do with Qingdao.” This is also why they were eager to sign a contract with my acquaintance. “We can offer you a really good deal if you can, in turn, provide us with some local activities and content that helps us get this project off the ground,” Mr. Hou said repeatedly during our meeting. In other words, they desperately needed the cultural capital that would, in Bourdieuan terms (1986, 245), enable yet also effectively disguise economic transactions. Thus far, however, both such cultural capital and economic capital have remained scarce.

These difficulties reflect and underscore the increasingly challenging and intricate nature of urban redevelopment, characterized by the per-

sistence of an entrepreneurialism and market logic at the project level paired with tighter state control, a revamped official urbanization ideology, and a pronounced public authenticity discourse. Local governments and private investors necessarily had to heed the new social and political requirements, even if these reduced leeway in implementation. At the same time, the projects needed to be financially profitable in a market economy. As Lao Sun from the city archives commented, “For local officials, it is a lose-lose situation.” Caught in a “preservation predicament” (Chapter 2), if they followed the requests of preservationists and authentically preserved Dabaodao and *liyuan* houses, they wouldn’t make any money. But if they primarily focused on money and demolished or reconstructed courtyards, they would be publicly criticized, to the potential detriment of their political careers.

NOT RICH BUT HAPPY

As of this writing, almost all of Dabaodao’s residents have moved out. Only a very few families and individuals remain. In 2018, I visited the last remaining resident in *guangxing li*. Like many others, he had no proof that he legitimately owned his room. He had thus been denied compensation payment and had decided to simply wait. “I have the biggest private parking space in the whole city,” he joked, pointing at his red car parked in the middle of the large, cleared-out courtyard space. “I am trying to file a lawsuit, but they keep telling me that I don’t stand a chance,” he added in a more serious tone. Ultimately unable to obtain compensation, he finally left. Meanwhile, Brother Dragon, one of the very first residents and interlocuters I came to know well, was one of the last remaining in Dabaodao. Each time I returned to Qingdao, I visited him. We would sit in the courtyard or in his room, having a meal or simply chatting. Even when the Shinan district government began to cordon off Huangdao Road with construction balustrades or builders started occupying vacant courtyard rooms, he continued to hold out. In late 2021, he finally said to me, “The time has come. The end is drawing near. I have to make a decision.” We were sitting in his room, talking over the din of excavators scarifying Huangdao Road. “If I decide to leave, then I will never return. But if I decide to stay, I may never be able to leave.” He contemplated: “If this area is going to be refurbished and does well economically, I can open a shop downstairs and the money I then make will far exceed that of compensation.” He continued excitedly, “This is a historic district now. I am an

old resident. My stories will be of interest. I can even charge people to come into the courtyard to have a look.” Brother Dragon immediately sensed the prospect of making money from the heritage economy, not unlike the vast majority of the predominantly poor and marginalized residents, who generally associated life in Dabaodao with survival and simply getting by. In the 1980s, this involved “jumping into the sea” and trying to make money in the informal economy (Chapter 3). Later, with the prospects of expropriation and renewal, the hope for compensation came to define their existence in Dabaodao (Chapter 4). Now it was the heritage economy.

Brother Dragon always prided himself on knowing what was happening and never believing any newspaper reports or other rumors that frequently spread among residents. “Trust me, I know what’s going on,” he would say. Nevertheless, his situation was precarious, and he suffered from the continuous uncertainty caused by ongoing redevelopment, the quarrel with his siblings, and his own indecisiveness about whether he wanted to stay in Dabaodao. On one unbearably humid afternoon in August 2022, I visited him on Huangdao Road. He seemed to have finally made up his mind. “The government has offered me a 70-square-meter apartment not too far from here. I think this is a good option,” he reasoned. The apartment was worth at least 1.2 million yuan, far more than his share of the compensation payment. He had, moreover, been promised not merely use rights, but full ownership, meaning that if he so wished, he could sell the apartment. He asked to hear my opinion, and when I replied that I too thought it a worthwhile option, he immediately dialed the resettlement office on speakerphone. “I will take the apartment. You can start making the arrangements,” he told them, sparking an enthusiastic reaction. “Great! Great!” (*tai hao le! tai hao le!*), I heard the person say. Brother Dragon hung up. There was a moment of silence. We were sitting at the entrance of his room, sweating and sipping from two cans of lukewarm beer. “So, this may be one of the last times that we meet here for a chat,” I said after a while. “It may be,” he responded. “We should have one last barbeque together.” He paused, looking around, then suddenly said, “I almost started crying when you said these words just now.” Brother Dragon had held out this long because he wanted to bargain a maximum compensation deal for himself. Considering his family dispute, the deal was satisfactory, though as he was also deeply attached to this living environment, it was difficult to let go. Later that day, he drew a map of the offered apartment on a random piece of paper, explaining in detail how he was going to renovate and design it, as if he was trying to convince himself

that he had indeed made the right decision. I was not too surprised when he called just a few days later to tell me that he had abandoned the idea of taking the offered apartment. “I will stay put,” he declared.

How did former residents of Dabaodao fare after they (were) moved out? After years of waiting, bargaining, and negotiating, most ended up choosing monetary compensation and relocating to a temporary rental apartment, followed, a year or two later, by the purchase of their own “secondhand apartment” (*ershou fang*). In early 2017, about half a year after expropriation, I visited one family—former residents of Huangdao Road—in their rental accommodation located not far from Dabaodao. The apartment was about 50 square meters in size, had one bedroom, a living room, a private bathroom, and a proper kitchen. “This is bigger than back on Huangdao Road,” the father said, describing their new abode as a considerable upgrade. He added that their plan was to look for something to buy. “Do you ever go back to Huangdao Road?” I asked. “Never!” the daughter replied. “I even deliberately avoid it.” She then stressed, “I don’t want to ever go back.” In contrast, her mother did regularly return. She had quite a few friends that still lived there and she continued to volunteer for the residents committee. A year later, the family bought an apartment in the northern section of Qingdao’s old town, a 25-minute walk from Dabaodao. It was old, yet nicely decorated and spacious. They had also purchased a piano and some new furniture. Among those most desperate to move, they now clearly enjoyed their improved living conditions.

Similarly, another family that had always lived on Sifang Road and had also chosen monetary compensation, at first temporarily moved into an apartment in the Xizhen area. They had enjoyed life in Dabaodao, particularly Ken, their son, but were glad to now have more living space and the comfort of a private bathroom and kitchen. They likewise eventually bought a secondhand apartment in the northern area of the old town. In contrast, my former neighbor Baldy never had the intention (or the money) to purchase his own apartment. After moving out of the courtyard, he found an inexpensive rental apartment in Xizhen. He was diagnosed with cancer and continued to curse life and society. At regular intervals, I received WeChat messages from him, in which he overtly criticized the CCP and the authoritarian system, though he would also mention that his new living environment was markedly better than before. Brother Dragon told me that Baldy had already spent quite a bit of his compensation money. Though I couldn’t confirm this, Baldy did regularly use his money to “have fun” (*wanr*), as he

phrased it. He took several trips to Macao and other places from which he would occasionally send me photos of himself in what seemed like fancy hotels.

Unlike others in the past, none of my interlocutors became particularly rich through housing expropriation. Their hope (and perceived right) to benefit substantially from urban renewal was not realized. That said, all expressed satisfaction and appreciation for their improved living conditions. Not all of them were enthusiastic in their views of the neighborhood's refurbishment. Ken, for instance, was furious when he saw how the family's former courtyard had been "disfigured" (*huirong*), as he described it. However, most moved on with their lives, and gone were many of the negative emotions, frustrations, and anger that had accompanied the expropriation phase. Indeed, urban renewal in contemporary China—a historically conditioned battlefield invested with expectations, negative sentiments, and mutual distrust—is arguably very much the source of its own problems. The mere announcement of urban renewal generated and animated defiant behavior and raised expectations on the part of residents that, under contemporary political economic conditions, could not be satisfied. In fact, attempts to make urban renewal "better" by reforming redevelopment itself through selective political and legal adjustments in the name of more "humane" urbanization practices or preservation proved insufficient in the case of Qingdao. Urban renewal during the reform period, characterized by an inexorable capacity of the local state to transform the city and considerable benefits reaped by the people, lay like a shadow over the redevelopment of Dabaodao. In the current context of urban redevelopment, the local government has very much been a prisoner of its own past. The difficulties being structural, effective solutions would necessarily require more fundamental sociocultural change and a profoundly altered political economy of urbanization.

THE INVISIBLE COMMUNITY

Among Dabaodao's different residents, migrants were those who most immediately depended on the inner city for their livelihoods. Yet, notwithstanding more accommodating policies, they were still far from being rightful urban citizens. Migrants were particularly invisible when it came to urban renewal, despite being the most severely affected. Once housing

expropriation and redevelopment began, they continued to creatively eke out a living, whether temporarily inside Dabaodao or in other parts of the city. While it would be a mistake to say that they were unsuccessful, they lived in a constant state of uncertainty and exposure to political-economic contingency. Chapter 5 ended with Mr. Smile's gradual departure from Dabaodao. Just before the Huangdao Road fresh-food market was dismantled in 2015, he had spent 20,000 yuan on refurbishing his store, an investment that was destroyed within a few hours in the name of "city building." After this incident, he went back to selling seafood from orange basins and, sensing that business would never be as good as before, started planning his post-Dabaodao life. When the end of his leasehold drew nearer, he found a small apartment for his wife and daughter not far from Huangdao Road. He rented another shop inside Dabaodao, planning to go back into procurement (*caigou*) and restaurant delivery. By the end of 2016, he was no longer living on Huangdao Road. "Business was bad toward the end. I barely made 100 yuan per day," he told me. He further explained, however, that although he wasn't making much money, "the market was still crucial to store *huo* . . . and sometimes, I could sell whatever I didn't manage to deliver to restaurants." Notably, his comments highlight the importance of the market for migrants in the city.

To compensate for the loss of his market stall, he converted the newly rented room into a storage space, installing fish tanks and shelves inside. Initially, the transition from selling seafood at the market to working in procurement and delivery was not smooth. "I am not the only one doing it. Competition is fierce. At the moment I am losing money," he told me. He ended up finding permanent employment with a company in Jinan (Shandong's provincial capital city), which owned a chain of fairly upscale seafood restaurants. This drastically changed his work schedule and tasks. At night, he would receive orders from the company for the seafood they needed the next day. He would then forward these orders to his contacts at different markets around Qingdao, established over many years of working on Huangdao Road. "I have a pool of people that I can rely on. I am not an expert for all kinds of seafood, but I know people who are, and I trust them; they are my capital," he told me. At 4:00 a.m. the following morning, he would pick up the goods and drive straight to Jinan to deliver them to the restaurants. He would return around dinnertime.

Though he was no longer his own boss, the company paid him a fixed monthly salary. "This has advantages and disadvantages," Mr. Smile

reflected. “On the one hand, I have security. Even if they don’t sell anything or if there are problems, I get my money. But on the other hand, when business is really good, I could make so much more money by retaining the profit on the goods I deliver.” Mr. Smile constantly thought about leaving the company and starting his own business again. He eventually began by employing two drivers, young men from his home village—a new generation of migrants who had followed relatives or acquaintances into the city. They received 6,000 yuan per month plus meals and accommodation, and slept in bunk beds in a small room at the back of the storage space.

By late 2018, Mr. Smile had established his new enterprise and had also purchased an apartment in the western area of Qingdao, near Xizhen. “I had saved up enough when business was good on Huangdao Road. So I just went for it and bought this place,” he told me when I visited the family in their new home. It was about 80 square meters and included two bedrooms and a living room. Almost three years after being forced out of Huangdao Road, Mr. Smile no longer needed the fresh-food market, though it was thanks to the experience and social capital he had accumulated there that he was able to construct a new livelihood. When the pandemic hit, the restaurant business suffered and he only went sporadically to Jinan. “We may have a second child,” he and his wife, Xiao Mei, contemplated in 2021. “Won’t that be an additional economic burden?” I asked. “Perhaps. But we’ll cross that bridge when we come to it,” Mr. Smile replied. In 2022, the restaurant in Jinan was no longer able to employ him and still owed him over 600,000 yuan. I asked if he might sue, to which he replied, “What good would that do? If they don’t have money, they don’t have money. I prefer to keep the relationship alive (*baoliu guanxi*).” At this point, he was spending most days playing with his phone and drinking beer. He and Xiao Mei had given up the idea of having a second child.

The story of Chef Zhu further illustrates the precarious lives of migrants. While living in Dabaodao, he had mainly made a living working in various restaurants for modest salaries. After the housing expropriation, he rented an inexpensive one-bedroom apartment in the Xizhen area and, with the help of Mr. Smile, opened a small *pjiuwu*. While Chef Zhu continued cooking in different restaurants, his wife Ms. Zhang and Xiao Mei ran the *pjiuwu*. Yet they spent most days playing mah-jongg in the back, serving occasional customers. They had not applied for an official restaurant license. “Too much hassle,” Chef Zhu explained. “If the *chengguan* comes to check, we’ll deal with it then,” he added. When the pandemic began, Chef Zhu and Mr.

Smile decided to close down the *pjiuwu*, as they were losing money. The couple's second child was born about this time. By the summer of 2021, they were running a little shop in the Xizhen area selling marinated meat and living in a dark and damp apartment right behind the store, continuing to live a permanently temporary existence in the city.

The few migrant families that resisted and stayed in Dabaodao were eventually also forced to leave when construction balustrades were erected on Huangdao Road. Though small walkways were left between the buildings and balustrades, hardly any customers came. The Zhangs, mentioned in Chapter 5, who had been living and working on Huangdao Road for 27 years, still kept their stall open, but to little avail. "Only one person has come and bought something today," Mrs. Zhang said to me on a December afternoon in 2021. Other migrant vendors contemplated moving to a different market in Qingdao. "But rent will never be as cheap as it is here," worried a man in his fifties, who in 2016 had opened a fruit stall in Dabaodao and was on the verge of moving. "At least twice as much," he added. Some vendors planning to set up in other markets expressed concern about the inconvenience of living far from where they would work. A general sentiment of frustration was common. They had only been given a few months' notice, and many had already renewed their leaseholds for another year. Landlords refused to compensate or repay them, and the local government had no concrete plan for the remaining migrants. They remained an invisible and forgotten community of Dabaodao.

These migrant stories highlight the limitations of heritage preservation as a strategy to solve urban problems. On the one hand, Dabaodao was fundamental to the livelihoods of many migrants, and they themselves embodied a key social component of the neighborhood. On the other hand, they had absolutely no interest or stakes in Dabaodao or in *liyuan* as historical architecture, nor did they have reason to. They were never considered to be rightful occupants of the area, let alone perceived as forming part of its heritage narratives. In fact, they were denied the identity of "local community" and largely overlooked. I am not arguing that preservation attempts were to blame. But I also do not believe that incorporating migrants into heritage narratives would solve the problem. The root causes of the neglect of migrants are much more deeply embedded and structural. They are entrenched in China's state capitalist urbanization and economic development model and the inequitable geographies and social inequalities it has produced. These structural issues transcend heritage practices and dis-

courses. In fact, migrants' ability to exploit Dabaodao to their own benefit was contingent on the absence of redevelopment or preservation. More specifically, migrants used urban developmental stagnation to their advantage as much as they suffered from eventual expropriation and refurbishment. Urban renewal (however defined or carried out) and migrants' presentist existence in the inner city were thus in many ways mutually exclusive.

HERITAGE FUTURE?

Toward the end of 2013, I was invited to present some of my preliminary research findings at a local university in Qingdao. At the end of my talk, I asked the audience whether they thought that these old courtyard houses could or should be considered "cultural relics" and preserved. One woman in the audience raised her hand, thought for a moment, and then said, "Not quite yet, I think." This answer suggested that she saw *liyuan* houses as having the potential to become heritage, but that, for some reason, they had not yet reached that state. I was curious to know why and asked her to elaborate. "There are still all these people living there and it seems so dirty (*zang*) and messy (*luan*)," she replied. Put differently, in order to pass as "heritage," *liyuan* first needed to be freed of their occupants and "incompatible" spatial practices.

Eight years later this had come to pass: Dabaodao and *liyuan* had become heritage, and almost no residents remained. In the summer of 2021, I met a foreign friend of mine who had lived in the city for nearly two decades. "When I first arrived," he recalled, "everyone in the old town talked about demolition. Now, 20 years along, everything is about refurbishment and preservation. Fascinating!" Upon hearing this, I couldn't help feeling somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand, it was true that Dabaodao and many *liyuan* houses had been spared from the bulldozers and were now part of the official heritage narrative of Qingdao. On the other hand, the Dabaodao that I had come to know (and cherish) no longer existed—it had become "the past." Yet this past was not part of the preservation narrative and would sooner or later be forgotten or live on only in the memories of the people who once called Dabaodao home. The heritage crusade (Lowenthal 1986) that swept across Dabaodao seemed to have erased all but its "monumental time" (Herzfeld 1991). In 2019, official discourse emerged over preparing the entire old town for submission to the UNESCO World Heritage list. In 2021, the municipal government set up a World Heritage command office and the

city museum launched an exhibition on Qingdao's World Heritage bid. Now local officials and some preservationists rather ironically worried about how to bring Dabaodao "back to life." "Otherwise," Professor Wu argued, "we won't stand a chance of becoming World Heritage." Just as Dabaodao had been emptied in the name of preservation, its "lifeless state" was identified as the biggest impediment to becoming World Heritage, the solution being to resuscitate it.

As I was trying to make sense of all of this, I caught myself joining the canon of "atheist" social science research that tends to view the heritage enterprise as leading to the "falsification, petrification, de-substantiation, and enclosure of sites, objects, and practices" (Brumann 2009, 277). I also wondered whether I was perhaps just being nostalgic about other people's cultural loss in the face of modernization and urban renewal, a condition often regarded as endemic to anthropology (Berliner 2014). In these reflections, I recalled the comment made by a staff member of an urban developing firm to preservationist Mr. Li during the discussion recounted in Chapter 6: "History is also development. History is about transformation. Today's Dabaodao is already no longer the former Dabaodao. Do we really need to keep all history?" The confluence of factors that eventually produced the situation that I encountered in early 2021 had, after all, been a slow and steady process. Change had not happened overnight. Perhaps the relatively long absence since my previous visit had also amplified a biased aversion to the ongoing refurbishment. Would I have felt differently had I stayed in Qingdao the entire time? While answering this question is difficult, certainly I am aware that an intermittent presence at a field site influences interpretation and analysis. Regardless, as this final empirical chapter illustrates, along with the implementation of comprehensive refurbishment and redevelopment, a new set of social actors and sociocultural phenomena had emerged to be observed and discussed. Any demarcation between the past and future would only be based on my own subjective sentiments. If anything, many of the structural problems observed throughout the years persisted even after refurbishment was finally underway. In this context, Tim Ingold's (2000, 196) observation offers a fitting conclusion: "The present is not marked off from a past that it has replaced or a future that will, in turn, replace it; it rather gathers the past and future into itself, like refractions in a crystal ball."

Conclusion

In this book, I tell the story of how Dabaodao, an old inner-city neighborhood located in the heart of Qingdao's former colonial town center, slowly transformed from an area characterized by simple homes inhabited by the urban poor into an official heritage site celebrated for its uniquely local historical architecture. In so doing, I describe and analyze slow, stagnant, and fragmentary urban planning, various unsuccessful attempts to implement redevelopment, diverse socioeconomic, cultural, and political factors, and the variety of actors involved.

In the introduction, I asked why exactly the redevelopment of Dabaodao failed so many times. Answering this question necessarily first begs a brief reflection on the notion of “failure” itself. Labeling something as a failure is usually done relative to some imagined or desired outcome. In terms of urban renewal, this can refer to any number of aspects, largely depending on the standard against which successful urban renewal is measured. It can, for example, mean that a particular site or architectural element has not been properly preserved. This view prevailed among many preservationists in Qingdao (Chapter 6) and can likewise be found among advocates of the traditional heritage preservation paradigm, which sees any kind of change as incompatible with the idea of preservation (Ashworth 2011, 4–5; UNESCO 1972). Failure would hence signify that the architectural integrity of a site or building designated as heritage has not been maintained. Failure was also commonly evoked to describe projects that did preserve some old architectural structures, but with the aim of generating profit and often to the detriment of residents. Broadly, following in the tradition of Jane Jacobs (1992), this is the perspective of many contemporary scholars and planners

who advocate inclusive, community-centered, and collaborative planning (Healey 2003; Nasser 2003; Innes and Booher 2015). It also predominates in critical heritage studies, with its emphasis on heritage as a subjective, processual, and communitarian idea (Harvey 2001; L. Smith 2006; Winter 2013). Failure in this sense would indicate that heritage has been preserved, but at the expense of local (often marginalized) communities.

The urban renewal failure that forms the focus of this monograph was arguably an “all-encompassing” failure, meaning that it went beyond the confines of particular theoretical or ideological inclinations. Failure here in part refers to the renewal process and the many futile attempts to implement a suitable refurbishment project, stretching across almost two decades. Failure also refers to the renewal outcome, including the eventual displacement of local residents, particularly migrants who were deprived of their means of making a living in the city. Failure further refers to the inability to attract investment and make the refurbishment projects economically viable to business and industries. Finally, failure refers to the ways in which *liyuan* courtyards were actually “preserved,” namely by stripping them down to their skeletons and then redecorating them in an “old” style. The reasons for these multilayered failures are structural. In other words, it is not possible to single out any one of the actors or activities described throughout the chapters as *the* most crucial or decisive in impeding redevelopment projects. Likewise, no one actor was accountable for the overall situation. Rather, the multiple failures are reflexive of a deeper, more structural urban reality. In what follows, I provide a brief summary of the key findings and arguments.

Chapter 2 addresses the institutional and political factors that contributed to urban developmental stagnation. These included regular and often erratic changes in municipal or district leadership, disrupting existing renewal projects. In addition, a lack of coordination among responsible government units resulted in functional, territorial, and discursive fragmentation in the planning and implementation of refurbishment projects. Moreover, there was a positive correlation between the rise of a political preservation mandate and a repeated failure to implement redevelopment projects at the local level. On the one hand, preserving rather than demolishing or merely recreating old urban structures became an important ingredient in China’s revamped, quality-oriented urban development ideology. In an attempt to demonstrate that they adhered to these new mandates, local officials were eager to preserve Dabaodao and *liyuan* houses, though often not sure how to go about doing so. On the other hand, the notion of

preservation as a strategy for growth, consumption, and tourism continued to thrive. This was largely driven by the Xintiandi model of urban redevelopment, which for over a decade had been the dominant impetus underlying urban renewal and continued to inform local decision-making. The local government was thus expected not only to employ a logic of entrepreneurialism and follow market mechanisms in the design and implementation of renewal projects, but also to implement “preservation.” This resulted in a series of hybrid and ambiguous renewal projects that failed to generate any of the desired results: no economic benefits nor any interest from private developers, combined with disgruntled residents and unhappy preservationists. Dabaodao and *liyuan* houses were eventually spared from demolition and refurbished as historical architecture, though in this process, residents were evicted, migrants driven out, and entrepreneurs and businesses reluctant to invest or open outlets in the renovated neighborhood.

These political and institutional structural problems should not, however, be seen in isolation. Certainly, heritage preservation as a political strategy is not detached from society. In Qingdao, the political mandate to preserve converged with a growing public awareness of heritage. In Chapter 6, I show how preservationists’ ideas of “authenticity” and representation of historical truth penetrated both the local government and private business. Officials and entrepreneurs were in urgent need of historical expertise as they tried to conform to the political preservation mandate. They were compelled to be history- and heritage-sensitive in concrete refurbishment projects and adhere to basic principles of authenticity out of fear of being criticized by preservationists and the wider public. Local government officials were thus, to some extent, prisoners of their own rhetoric (O’Brien 2004), and this considerably restricted their leeway in the design and implementation of redevelopment. Meanwhile, their superiors, along with residents and preservationists, still expected them to deliver and “get things done” (i.e., refurbish/preserve Dabaodao). Often blamed for project failure, local government officials thus found themselves in what I term a “preservation predicament.”

The shift in China’s urban redevelopment ideology not only has been characterized by a focus on preservation but also has involved a “softer” and more “humane” approach to the implementation of renewal projects, particularly relative to housing expropriation and compensation schemes. In Qingdao, the challenges inherent to this change manifest in different ways. Chapter 4 argues that the mere announcement of housing expropriation

was like opening a Pandora's box. It exposed many regime-specific deficiencies and legacies of the past, which the local government was not able to effectively address, in part because of changing political requirements that discouraged local officials from resorting to force in dealing with the mostly disadvantaged urban residents. Such announcements furthermore unleashed various family disputes and brought to the surface complex and unresolved property rights issues dating back to the Maoist or early reform years, when decisions were made in very different institutional and legal contexts. This drove up the overall costs of redevelopment and delayed the process of housing expropriation.

Local residents, informed by previous urban redevelopment practices, saw “becoming rich” from housing expropriation as a basic entitlement and right. Though past urban renewal had been violent and destructive, many benefited through compensation payments or access to markedly upgraded housing. Hence, despite the relatively generous compensation offers and absence of any forced eviction or violence this time around, residents were unhappy and frustrated, considering the government offers to be neither fair nor even legitimate. This general sentiment of discontent was not due to misconduct on the part of a particular official or an inherently faulty or unfair compensation scheme, but was rather driven by local residents' expectations of the government and compensation. Past renewal provided local residents with a “charter,” which they used to make sense of and evaluate normative state action. When the latter failed to correspond to their conditioned understandings and expectations, destabilization and subversion resulted—much as Andreas Glaeser (2011, 38) describes in his work on the collapse of the former German Democratic Republic. Revamped urbanization practices, a rhetoric of adhering to the “rule of law,” and fair compensation might have been expected to enhance state legitimacy. These elements have, in fact, been part of the regime's ongoing efforts to “build a form of one-party rule that people will accept as responsive and legitimate” (Nathan 2013, 23). Yet in the concrete case of urban renewal in Dabaodao, rather than regarding the local government as more responsive, many residents felt alienated and distanced; instead of generating trust, these shifts produced in most people a high degree of suspicion.

These observations echo the findings of other anthropologists, who have shown that questions of legitimacy are not merely normative legal matters, but socioculturally embedded (Larkins 2015). Italo Pardo and Guiliana Prato (2011, 2–3, emphasis in original), for instance, note that “it is not enough

for political and economic action to be within the law, or to be made to fall within the law through ad hoc legislative changes. Above all, it *must be seen to be legitimate*.” In Qingdao, many local government actions were unsuccessful precisely because they failed to satisfy what residents *perceived* to be their rightful entitlements in the specific sociopolitical context of housing expropriation and redevelopment. Notably, this was specific to urban renewal; residents’ evaluations and understandings of legitimate government action differed in other situations. In fact, as highlighted in Chapter 7, once residents moved, they tended to be quite content, and much of the frustration observable during the expropriation phase was gone. Therefore, renewal itself, as a specific, historically conditioned sociopolitical arena of contestation, was the source of its very own problems. Selective political and legal adjustments were merely cosmetic and not sufficient to address the more structurally embedded constellations of mutual constraint and distrust. To extend the medical metaphor: my ethnographic investigation suggests that a more surgical intervention would be needed—that is, one able to fundamentally reconsider the political economy of urban redevelopment, capable of shifting from an entrepreneurial renewal model to one of social welfare, coupled with a genuine reform of the rural-urban divide and a comprehensive provision of urban services to *all* residents living in the city.

The issues raised throughout this book furthermore beg attention to the nature, purpose, and capacity of preservation and, more generally, of planning to solve urban problems. “In the end, preservation is always better than demolition,” one preservationist concluded after a long conversation revolving around the issue of how to deal with Dabaodao. But better for whom? In Qingdao, a pluralization and diversification of the preservation debate saw a multitude of people take an active interest in heritage questions. They also found ways to influence decision-makers, and it is partially due to their efforts that Dabaodao and its *liyuan* were spared from demolition. Yet the implementation of preservation projects also excluded the urban poor living inside the inner city and led to their displacement. Outcomes such as this have led scholars across multiple disciplines to criticize heritage as an enterprise structured on exclusion (Hafstein 2018, chap. 3), necessarily involving a prioritization or a “privileging of one period, class, or category of heritage over the others in a given place” (Bell 2013, 431–32). In such a hierarchy, local people are often overlooked. It has been argued that heritage ultimately serves capital and politics and is used merely as a symbolic

narrative to gloss over the blemishes of reality, or to legitimize and euphemize business as usual, similar in many ways to the idea of greenwashing in environmental protection (E. Yeh 2009). I contend that this reasoning is, if not wrong, simplistic.

First, the case of Dabaodao demonstrates that the process of preservation is much more complex than a mere constellation of powerful political and economic players eager to manipulate heritage for various ends at the expense of powerless “local communities.” Within the local government, there existed different understandings of heritage and preservation as local officials grappled with central government mandates and political-economic realities on the ground. There were also the preservationists who entertained their own, mainly materialist take on heritage preservation, which in some ways diverged but also converged with the government’s preservation mandate. Heritage preservation was thus neither a single dominant “authorized discourse” (L. Smith 2006) nor simply a dubious political-economic resource. Moreover, even authorized discourses are socioculturally significant in multiple ways.

The representing, framing, and narrating of colonial history (and heritage) serves as a case in point. Chapter 6 discusses how German heritage in Qingdao could safely be appreciated without jeopardizing the official narrative of “national humiliation” at the hands of foreigners, in a political environment characterized by increasing amnesia when it came to China’s colonial past. I also highlight the sociocultural and economic importance of colonial heritage as an object of consumption and a tourism resource. Scholars working in places other than China have similarly observed how colonial heritage is used (and sometimes sanitized) for the purposes of domestic tourism (Western 1985; Cora Wong 2013; Jørgensen 2019). Other work focuses on its sociopolitical significance. Anthropologist William Bissell (2005, 2010), for example, describes how locals’ “celebration” of colonial heritage in Zanzibar provides a means of expressing contemporary social discontent, similar in many ways to preservationists’ glorification of colonial and Republican-era planning as an implicit criticism of modern-day planning. A similar observation is offered by Tracey Lu (2009) in her research on how local, particularly young people in Hong Kong demonstrate for the preservation of British colonial remains in an attempt to resist Sinicization efforts. This form of (anthropological) engagement with colonial heritage as a social practice—and empirical phenomenon providing insight into contemporary sociopolitical issues—notably sees local actors defin-

ing, redefining, using, or reusing the heritage in question (Brumann 2014). Some scholars have meanwhile employed conceptual notions and labels such as “dissonant heritage,” “dark heritage,” or “uncomfortable heritage” to account for colonial and other types of heritage not neatly fitting the idea of being a positive resource (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996; Pendlebury, Wang, and Law 2018). The risk, however, of pushing certain types of heritage into circumscribed concepts is missing the heterogeneous ways in which social actors endow them with meaning, whether positive or negative. I furthermore maintain that colonial heritage, as it has appeared throughout this book, is a category of the present, rather than one of the past.

Second, though I highlight a positive correlation between the political preservation mandate and stagnant redevelopment, in Chapter 7 I also contend that it is not preservation itself that is to blame for the fact that migrants and other residents were eventually evicted or that Dabaodao ended up in a monumentalized yet “lifeless” state. The failed preservation projects indubitably reflect much more deeply embedded structural problems relating to China’s political economy of urbanization. However, it is equally important to refrain from viewing preservation as a panacea for urban problems, whose causes clearly transcend its capacities. Among many of my interlocutors, the belief that preservation, if only carried out “correctly,” could be the answer to all problems loomed large, even if what exactly “correct” preservation consisted of remained contested. Furthermore, once Dabaodao and *liyuan* had been labeled as heritage, it became difficult to identify problems and search for solutions beyond existing preservation orthodoxies. This is, more generally, observable among contemporary scholars and practitioners of heritage as well as urban planners, who tend to be “trapped in their own hermeneutical web, explaining themselves through their own premise” (Abram 2011, xiii). Even if self-critical and aware of the shortcomings of their own disciplinary practice, they mainly seek out and find solutions within their own reference frames. Such dynamics underline the importance of carefully considering specific sociocultural contexts when evaluating the meanings and impacts of preservation. With these reflections, I am neither advocating absolute cultural relativism nor suggesting that there are no qualitatively better forms of urban planning (and preservation),¹ but rather highlighting the fact that preservation is not, by default, a cure-all.

Third and relatedly, I argue that planning and heritage preservation should be treated as social practices. They do not exist outside society, but are embedded, both practically and discursively, within existing sociocul-

tural and political-economic structures, which inform decision-making and the range of possible actions and outcomes. Anthropologists have criticized the planning enterprise as an exercise of power and social control and an attempt to make the messiness of urban life legible and manageable (Scott 1998). Yet fragmentation, uncertainty, and contingency pervaded the entire process of redevelopment in Qingdao. Local government efforts to stabilize and create a sense of order were mostly short-lived. The clearing out of Huangdao Road's fresh-food market stalls was one such ephemeral moment. Vendors returned within a very short period of time. The presentation of refurbishment plans marked further attempts to create a sense of stability. Yet, to borrow from Michel de Certeau (1984, 93), these were mostly just theoretical simulacra, pictures "whose condition of possibility is an oblivion and a misunderstanding of practices." In this regard, I still remember vividly how, after a day attending the annual urban planning conference in Qingdao where I had seen many sleek PowerPoint presentations showing *liyuan* houses as "historical architecture" neatly abstracted onto glossy maps, I returned to my courtyard room only to bump into a local market vendor peeing into the courtyard entrance after having had a few beers with others out in the streets. The disparity between spatial abstraction and actual practice could not have been more salient.

Likewise, at this very same planning conference, while listening to a leading Chinese urban scholar expound on creating clean and livable cities, I observed participants (urban planners) smoking cigarettes next to No Smoking signs at the back of the main lecture hall, leaving the butts scattered across the floor. This provided yet another reminder of the stark contrast between theoretical or ideological constructions of reality and its lived dimension. This time, both were simultaneously observable in one and the same room. The broader point is that planners and local officials may be seen as brokers and perpetuators of high-modernist ideology, but they are equally human actors and subjects of contemporary Chinese society. A similar observation can be made of the entire planning process. It fed on the ideology that it could solve problems, but was itself an integral part of the "messy" urban life that it normatively set out to disentangle and order. In this perspective, my ethnographic focus on the process of trying to "solve problems" through preservation in Qingdao serves as a window not only onto the difficulties that this actually caused, but also onto the larger reality of which the problems and proposed solutions formed part.

This leads to a final issue, namely that of the whereabouts of "the gov-

ernment.” Scholars of contemporary China highlight the fuzzy boundaries between “state” and “society” (E. Perry 1994; O’Brien 2004; Pieke 2009).² In Qingdao, this was particularly visible among preservationists—who nurtured ties with local government agents and sometimes were even employed within government bodies—but also among certain residents. Brother Dragon, for instance, worked for the local police, and many others volunteered on resident committees. Officials too straddled these two worlds: members of the *chengguan* were “state representatives” when they disciplined market vendors, but also “local customers” when doing their daily shopping at the same market. Local government official Mr. Gao was in charge of coordinating the implementation of refurbishment, but he also grew up not far from Dabaodao. Anthropologist Frank Pieke (2009, 13) suggests that even if the state constitutes “a set of unique institutional arrangements,” it should not be seen as cut off from the rest of social existence. Indeed, when I was urged by local residents to report to “them” just how bad living conditions in Dabaodao were, or when my neighbor Brother Dragon requested that I ask my contacts about specific refurbishment plans, “the government” was not a demarcated entity, thing, or specific set of persons “somewhere out there” exerting a seemingly unified power, concealed from society or the critical eye of the researcher. Rather, in such moments, I myself was actually seen as someone who potentially had influence or even power to solve the problems of local residents, not so different from the low-level staff from the street offices patrolling the courtyards.

That said, the blurry boundaries between “state” and “society” at the local level were paired with a concurrent sense “that there is a hidden reality in political life and that that reality is the state” (Abrams 1988, 61). My interlocutors almost unanimously *also* evoked the idea of “the government” being a powerful entity existing “out there.” Studies in anthropology and beyond have shown that once we closely observe actors who supposedly have power or enter the sites and institutions within which power is believed to exist, that very power seems to disperse and become muddled and indistinct (Nader 1969; S. Wright and Shore 2011; Hertz 2021). From an *emic* perspective, “Those who exercise power almost always feel like they’re just a cog in a larger machine, with some superordinate force, people, or ideas constraining them” (Archer and Souleles 2021, 199). My interlocutors usually regarded what they perceived to be “the government” to be located somewhere else, often “above” (*shangmian*), but rarely perceived it to be here and present. I have called this the “absent presence” of the govern-

ment, which manifested in local resident statements such as, “Those are just low-level officials, they don’t know anything,” or in preservationists’ complaints about “the government,” which they themselves formed part of or regularly interacted with. Similarly, whenever I spoke to interlocutors who were nominally part of “the government,” they would relocate the center of power to some entity or person positioned elsewhere.

A fundamental facet of China’s political practice that accompanied attempted renewal in Qingdao was a constant reproduction of the idea of “the government” as powerful yet alien. Somewhat paradoxically, however, it was precisely the belief in the existence of “the government” that concealed not only the latter’s disunity and fragmentation but also the described activities of bargaining, lobbying, and concrete and context-specific power relations at the micro level of urban society. Following sociologist Philip Abrams (1988, 82), we might say that “the state is not the reality that stands behind the mask of political practice. It is itself the mask that prevents our seeing political practice as it is.” In other words, it was the belief in and the idea of the existence of “the government” that accompanied social life and that established and reproduced it as an important player around which everything and everyone orbited. At the same time, however, this concealed the reality of which the powerful construct of “the government” was itself a part. If we, for a moment, suspend the assumption of the government, of planning, or of preservation as vital problem solvers, then the complexities, the messiness, and contingency that constitute contemporary Chinese urban reality reveal themselves.

This reality is an urban environment whose only constant has, for several decades, been its continuous transformation. Over a period of 10 years, I lived and (quite literally) breathed it. This book attempts to portray as truthfully as possible how this reality affected and found expression in the ideas, interests, and actions of different urban groups in relation to the inner city and its architecture—though it is perhaps more accurate to say many different realities. Each of the groups and individuals whose stories feature in this monograph struggled and dealt with this world in their own ways. Their actions and views were informed by their past experiences, by their positions as subjects of contemporary Chinese urban society, and by their visions of and aspirations for a better future.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. Qingdao as a city was first established under German colonial rule (1898–1914) and, over the course of the past century, was occupied by the Japanese twice (1914–22 and 1938–45) as well as administered by three different local governments: Beiyang 1922–28; Kuomintang 1929–37 and 1945–49; Communist Party 1949–today.

2. A term used to describe families or individuals who refuse to accept compensation payments to relocate.

3. See Paul Kendall (2019, 12) for a detailed explanation of administrative ranking according to city-tiers. In 2017, Qingdao and several other former second-tier cities were upgraded to so-called new first-tier cities (*xin yi xian chengshi*).

4. Certain scholars working on urban China have critiqued what they see as an overemphasis on large Chinese cities, calling for greater attention to the “small city” (Kipnis 2016; Kendall 2019). While in general agreement with this critique, I would contend that the relative position of the city under study within China’s urban administrative hierarchy, and its political and economic functions, geographical location, and specific history must be taken into account, so as to present one *aspect* of the urban situation that can be understood in relation to other cities and urbanization processes in China and beyond.

5. Notably Shanghai and Shenzhen.

6. Such change should also necessarily be understood against the backdrop of economic and institutional reforms, including the notion of the “new normal” introduced under Xi Jinping (Hu 2015; Womack 2017).

7. On the concept and meaning of ecological civilization, see Schmitt (2018).

8. The character *zheng* is part of the word *zhengshou*, which literally translates as “to expropriate.” In the Chinese context, it includes the notion of compensation. Thus, it is best understood as a form of “compulsory purchase.” See Lin Ye (2011), Cheuk-yuet Ho (2013a), Bettina Gransow (2014), Wang Xue and Nobuo Aoki (2019), and Guilia Romano (2020) for other accounts of these policy changes.

9. The exact meaning of “public interest” remains vague. It could, for example, refer to “the reconstruction of areas with intensive dilapidated buildings and backward infrastructure,” but without providing information on what classifies as “backward infrastructure” (J. Yan and H. Chen 2011).

10. The *hukou* system is a means of population registration and has been in existence, in its current form, since the 1950s. It has largely divided the country’s population into two groups: those holding a rural and those holding an urban household registration, determining where they have access to social services like hospitals and schools.

11. Anthropologists have discussed planning as a tool of state power and socio-spatial control with regard to the colonial city (Rabinow 1989), “high modernism” (Holston 1989; Scott 1998), and neoliberalism (Herzfeld 2009; Sawalha 2010). Ethnographic work has also provided insights into the failures of modernist planning, highlighting the discrepancy between the plan and the actual ways in which the spaces are (re)appropriated in everyday life (Low 2000; Rotenberg 1995).

12. In her excellent book on the political-economic logic of urbanization in China, You-tien Hsing (2010, 54) writes that municipal governments “consolidate their power base through land reserves and urban construction projects, establish their political legitimization through urban modernity, construction-based GDP growth, and city image making.”

13. Drawing on Max Weber’s (1978) work on legitimacy, sociologist Zhao Dingxin (2017, 7–8) ascertains that the sources of legitimacy are found in a state’s ability to provide an ideology, deliver public goods, and function according to a set of governing procedures, which are understood as favorable by wider society and correspond to the range of rationalities that people use in evaluating what the state does and how it rules.

14. This monograph is not a study of the state, or what anthropologists have loosely termed the cultural constitution of “the state,” since I did not have ethnographic access to state institutions over an extended period of time (Shore and Wright 1997; Sharma and Gupta 2006).

15. A number of scholars discuss how certain groups, such as poor laid-off workers or rural migrants, “enjoy” more government presence through resident committees and street offices, while wealthier middle and upper classes are subject to less direct control (Heberer and Göbel 2011; Tomba 2014; J. Yang 2015).

16. Political scientists have framed this as “adaptive governance,” or an expedient form of governance that involves adjusting policies and mechanisms on a trial-and-error basis in response to specific situations (Heilmann and Perry 2011). Others have discussed this in terms of “fragmented authoritarianism” (Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988; Y. Zhang 2013).

17. People would speak of “the state” (*guojia*) or “the government” (*zhengfu*) in often very different ways at different moments (Xiang 2010).

18. A number of different contributions discuss China’s engagement with her-

itage. See, for example, Blumenfield and Silverman (2013); Maags and Svensson (2018a); Y. Zhu and Maags (2020); and Evans and Rowlands (2021a).

19. The revival of a “culture of nostalgia” in post-Mao China has drawn much academic attention (G. Yang 2003). Such nostalgia has been linked to a collective longing for Maoist times (R. Cai 2013; J. Li 2020), for specific products and brands (DuBois 2021), or for pre-Communist, often colonial times, particularly in coastal cities (Lagerkvist 2010; Law 2020).

20. Humanities and social science writings have been particularly skeptical of heritage, unmasking it as a tool of exclusion, falsification, and domination (Hobsbawm 1983; Lowenthal 1985, 1998; Ashworth, Graham, and Tunbridge 2007).

21. Emma Waterton and Steve Watson (2013, 553), in their article on heritage theory, evoke the need for perspectives on heritage that can “disrupt its conventional positioning as a thing separate from other experiences and stir it back in with being human and living, so that it emerges from the feelings of being, becoming and belonging in the flows and complexities that characterize life.”

22. Local Qingdao dialect is relatively close to standard Mandarin, and I generally had little trouble understanding it. However, some residents were from rural Shandong and, especially among the elderly, only spoke their regional dialect. In order not to miss any valuable information during interviews, the help of a local assistant was indispensable.

23. Shandong province has the highest per capita consumption of alcohol in Mainland China (D. Bell and Wang 2020).

24. Formerly the Urban Planning Bureau, renamed in 2019.

25. Formerly the Cultural Relics Bureau, renamed in 2019.

CHAPTER 1

1. Some of the historical sections of this chapter are a modified and more detailed version of a previously published paper (Demgenski 2019).

2. “Tsingtau” was the German spelling of the city. It was later changed to “Tsingtao,” following the Wade-Giles romanization system for Mandarin Chinese. According to pinyin, the current official romanization system, the city is now spelled “Qingdao.”

3. Jiaozhou Bay had long been identified as an ideal site for a colony in East Asia (von Richthofen 1898; Coco 2019). For instance, geologist Ferdinand von Richthofen (1898) pointed to the favorable climatic conditions, existence of coal, and suitable location for the establishment of a harbor.

4. Other leased territories (as opposed to treaty ports) included Weihai (Britain), Liaoning (Russia and Japan), Zhanjiang (France), and most notably Hong Kong’s New Territories (Britain).

5. A prominent exception is Macao, under Portuguese control since the 16th century.

6. The main engineer behind the German colonial endeavor, the naval admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, closely oversaw developments within Qingdao and managed to limit the leeway of colonial administrators in Qingdao by making them report back to the imperial capital (Berlin) on a regular basis and requiring all ordinances to be countersigned by himself (Mühlhahn 2012, 40–41).

7. Helga Rathjen (2021) offers a thorough account of how discourses of hygiene informed colonial policy and sociospatial engineering in Qingdao under German occupation.

8. In rural China, human excrement was traditionally a crucial means of fertilizer. With the arrival of “the West” and its standards of “hygiene” and “cleanliness,” people’s waste became a sanitary concern (Yu 2010).

9. The term *liyuan* would only officially be used starting in the 1930s.

10. A prominent example being the Fujianese *tulou*.

11. Commercial courtyards that incorporated shop units outside and living quarters inside emerged during the Song dynasty (see Jin 2015, 197) and were common in southern China. The *qilou* in Guangzhou (J. Zhang 2015) and the *tanglou* in Hong Kong offer examples of such constructions.

12. Unpublished reports forming part of the author’s own collection.

13. “May Fourth” has become an integral part of contemporary Qingdao’s spatial representation in the form of the May Fourth Square with its *Wind of May* statue. Completed in 1997, it is located in a prime spot, at the waterfront in the later-developed eastern part of the city (opposite the city hall).

14. Li Jie (2015, 36) makes similar observations with regards to the “hybrid lifestyles” that emerged in Shanghai’s *shikumen*.

15. For example, the movie *Hide and Seek* (*zhuomicang*) from 2016.

16. Today known as “Ocean University of China” (*zhongguo haiyang daxue*).

17. See Bray (2005, chap. 7) and D. Lu (2006, chap. 3) for a detailed discussion on the spatial layout of a typical *danwei* compound. *Danwei* functioned as “self-sufficient communities within the city, providing not only work and housing, but also health care, food distribution and other basic social services” (Gaubatz 1999, 1497). *Danwei* membership also became a crucial marker of social status and identity, replacing guildhalls and other “native-place associations” (N. Lin and Bian 1991). There existed different kinds of *danwei*, “central units” (*zhongyang danwei*), which were established and governed by the central government, “local units” (*difang danwei*), which were regionally governed, and “basic units” (*jiceng danwei*), referring to all other institutions at the lowest level of society. This central-local variety, upon which Maoist urban China was based, brought about many problems, especially in regard to competency questions, that extended far into the reform and opening-up era.

18. Residents’ committees are the smallest units of governance in urban China. They were established in the 1950s to monitor and control the local population.

19. Taidongzhen and Taixizhen were renamed “Taidong” and “Xizhen.”

20. A prominent example is the so-called Laoshan Dayuan located in Taidong. Before 1949, it was a cigarette factory. After collectivization, it was abandoned and

its equipment confiscated by the government. Subsequently, work-unit dormitories were built around the original factory buildings and, as former local residents told me, people gradually began referring to the area as “Laoshan Dayuan.” It was demolished and turned into residential compounds in 1989.

21. Use rights of residential land were set at 70 years; 50 years for industrial land; and 40 years for commercial and touristic land.

22. Together with Dalian, Qinhuangdao, Tianjin, Yantai, Lianyungang, Nantong, Shanghai, Ningbo, Wenzhou, Fuzhou, Guangzhou, Zhanjiang, and Beihai. Prior to this, in 1979, the cities of Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Xiamen, and Shantou were designated as “special economic zones.”

23. Relevant to the genesis of subprovincial cities during this early period of reform was the identification of 15 “key economic cities” in August 1981, aimed at creating local engines of growth in different regions. Of these 15 cities, excluding the three centrally administered municipalities of Beijing, Shanghai, and Tianjin, 10 subprovincial (then prefecture-level) cities were later designated as deputy-provincial cities (C. Fan 1995; Abramson 2011).

24. Qingdao’s different mayors had previously been appointed by the Shandong provincial government.

25. Yu was appointed party secretary of Hubei and later of Shanghai and acted as one of the seven members of the Standing Committee between 2012 and 2017 under Xi Jinping.

CHAPTER 2

1. Municipalities are now required to draft an “all-in-one” urban plan that includes functional zones planning, land-use planning, urban and rural planning, and other different types of spatial planning.

2. Badaguan is an area located to the east of Qingdao’s former colonial center. It hosts a mix of “Western style” villas built mostly during the 1930s by foreign-trained Chinese architects.

3. While the notion of collecting art or preserving places of political or religious importance has existed for thousands of years, this has mainly pertained to the elite and private individuals. It was not until the 1920s that preservation became a concern of the state (T. Lu 2014; Lai 2016).

4. China adopted the Law for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in November 1982 and joined the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1985 (Haiming Yan 2018). In 2004, China ratified the UNESCO 2003 Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and is one of the countries with the greatest number of ICH elements inscribed on the UNESCO lists (Demgenski 2021).

5. Using the example of Catalan history in Barcelona, David Harvey (2002, 107) discusses how surplus is extracted from local differences, cultural variations, and aesthetic meanings, but also argues that the more profitable a “unique” artifact or place becomes, the more it is eventually deprived of its singularity.

6. The evaluation standards are social civilization (10 percent), economic prosperity (10 percent), environmental beauty (30 percent), resource-carrying capacity (10 percent), life conveniences (30 percent), and public safety (10 percent). Heritage falls under the “environmental beauty” section (W. Wang 2007).

7. Nanjing Road is the main shopping street in Shanghai.

8. Ginkgo trees are often considered a symbol of corruption. There have been several cases in China, including one in Qingdao, where city governments have planted ginkgo trees with the alleged objective of making the city more livable, only for it to be revealed that the companies providing the trees were owned by relatives of the respective officials in charge (Economist 2012).

9. The Qingdao Hotel was built in 1932 and extended to 11 floors in the early 1980s. It was Qingdao’s first “high-rise.” The Red Star Cinema was originally a café, built in 1902 during the “German period.” In 1921, a British businessman turned it into a theater and cinema. It underwent minor repairs during the 1920s and 1930s, then became a state-owned company, and in 1949 was renamed Folozu Theatre. After the Cultural Revolution, the cinema was completely demolished and rebuilt.

10. Historical buildings are those judged by municipalities or districts to be particularly valuable and worthy of preservation, but not yet officially listed as cultural heritage; traditional-style buildings are recognized as historically important and representing local culture and customs (S. Zhang 2020, 83).

11. The Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference is a political advisory body whose members, consisting of Party delegates and independent members, officially advise and put proposals for political and social issues to government bodies.

12. With him fell a number of officials. An investigation revealed that the Zhongshan Real Estate Development Company, which had been in charge of the Zhongshan Road redevelopment in the mid-2000s, had embezzled large sums of money dedicated to the refurbishment projects (X. Song 2002; Q. Wu and J. Wang 2007).

13. In 2021, there were a total of eight such offices, each responsible for a different aspect of urban development and renewal.

14. More recent studies have shown that objective performance indicators, GDP growth related or other, have become less important under the Xi Jinping regime, with “political standards” (*zhengzhi biaoazhun*) becoming the most salient criterion for evaluation (Doyon 2018).

15. With the consolidation and recentralization of power under the Xi Jinping regime, local cadres are ever more tightly pegged to the center (Economy 2019).

CHAPTER 3

1. I only encountered a very small number of locals below the age of 40. Most (about 70 percent) were between 45 and 65 years old, with a few above 85.

2. There were a total of 30 such reemployment centers in Qingdao’s Shinan and Shibei districts (Qingdao 2001c, 279).

3. For more on *guanxi*, see Smart (1993), M. Yang (1994), Y. Yan (1996), and Kipnis (1997).

4. Chapter 5 considers migrants' perspectives.

5. See Iossifova (2015) for a discussion on urban sanitation problems.

6. Jie Li (2015) discusses very similar situations in her rich account of life in Shanghai's *linong* houses.

7. Resident committees were transformed into larger "communities" (*shequ*) in the 1980s to "realize the double aim of ensuring increased stability and an improved provision of social services" (Heberer and Göbel 2011, 11). They were also meant to allow greater participation in decision-making processes (Bray 2009, 98). Yet they have remained disconnected from the official administrative hierarchy, assuming an ambiguous identity between "state" and "society" (Audin and Throssel 2015). Before large-scale eviction, Dabaodao was governed by four different resident committees—Jimo Road Community, Haibo Road Community, Pingdu Road Community, and Zhongshan Road Community—that fell under the jurisdiction of two different street offices. The first two belonged to the Jiaozhou Road Street Office, the latter two to the Zhongshan Road Street Office.

CHAPTER 4

1. For other case studies of housing expropriation and compensation, see C. Ho (2013b); Zhai and Ng (2013); Shao (2013); Gransow (2014); and X. Wang and Aoki (2019).

2. Cheuk-yuet Ho (2013a, 419) observes a similar dynamic among evictees in Chongqing, quoting an interlocutor who likewise wonders, "Other people all got richer; why should I be poorer?"

3. In 2021, apartments around the Zhongshan Road area were priced between 30,000–40,000 yuan per square meter.

4. The 2013 housing expropriation and demolition regulations stipulate that residents have the legal right to apply for administrative reconsideration or to bring an administrative lawsuit within a certain period after expropriation terms and conditions are made public.

5. Other scholars similarly discuss how local government legitimacy in China is based on material outputs rather than political or other kinds of participation (Heberer and Göbel 2011, 159; Tomba 2014).

6. See Brandtstädter and Steinmüller (2017) for a range of case studies that highlight how varying normative registers of legality and morality are deployed by state and nonstate actors in negotiations and conflict resolution in (mainly rural) China.

CHAPTER 5

1. See, for example, Rofel (1999); L. Zhang (2001); Xiang (2005); Pun (2005); H. Yan (2008); Ling (2020).

2. Urban or rural status is assigned at birth and inherited from the mother.

3. They were, however, still barred from higher levels of secondary school and from taking the Gaokao (University Entrance Exam) (Ling 2015, 119).

4. Rural areas have long been disproportionately populated by the very old and the very young (F. Wang and Mason 2007).

5. Boshan Road was the main seafood market, whereas Huangdao Road was predominantly occupied by vegetable vendors. The northern end of Dabaodao was home to silk and cloth stalls, as was the Jimo Road Market.

6. For a long time, Mr. Smile did not have his own scale and used one that belonged to the Zhang family next door. One day, I was surprised to see a brand-new scale behind his stall. “So that I can cheat more easily,” he laughed.

7. During less busy months, especially in winter, he would sometimes only sell a few hundred yuan worth of goods per week.

8. Smell is a particular aspect of place-making (Urry 2011, 352). It evokes nostalgia and memories, whether positive or negative (Henshaw 2013, 31–32). In the literature on urban environments, (natural) smell has been discussed as something to be eliminated (Lefebvre 1991, 197).

9. In a recent policy shift, street vending has been legalized as a strategy to help alleviate unemployment caused by the Covid-19 pandemic (X. Zhou 2020).

10. “City building” is an abbreviation for “building a national hygienic city” (*chuangjian guojiaji weisheng chengshi*).

CHAPTER 6

1. See Zhang Li (2006) on Kunming; Max Woodworth (2010) on Beijing; Zhu Yujie and Christina Maags (2020) on Xi’An and Nanjing; and Shao Qin (2012) on Shanghai.

2. For concrete case studies on this topic, see Shao (2012); Y. Yao and Han (2016); and Maags and Holbig (2016).

3. The rise of heritage has been extensively discussed. See, for example, Walsh (1992); Lowenthal (1998); Connerton (2009); and Ashworth (2011).

4. Some of the first semiprofessional publications were written by the former head of Qingdao’s municipal library. He began publishing tour guides about Qingdao in the 1980s and was the first to compile inventories of “old Qingdao” in a series of books written and published in the early and mid-2000s: *Tales from the Old Streets (lao jie gushi)* (H. Lu 2010b), *Qingdao’s Past (Qingdao jushi)* (H. Lu 2003), *Stories of Old Buildings (lao lou gushi)* (H. Lu 2010a).

5. In some analyses, these groups are generalized under labels such as “preservation activists,” “cultural elites,” or “civil society” (L. Fan 2014; Verdini 2015; Y. Yao and Han 2016; A. K. Lee 2016; Graezer Bideau and Yan 2018; Cui 2018). I argue that none of these labels do justice to their heterogeneity.

6. Though I do not have representative data, many construction workers I spoke to were from prefectures and counties in Shandong.

7. Other Chinese terms that I came across that also allude to the idea of authenticity include *yuanshengtai*, more commonly used to refer to rural and/or ethnic minority cultures (Kendall 2019), and the idiom *yuan zhi yuan wei*, which I usually encountered in connection with intangible cultural heritage (Demgenski 2020; Su 2021).

8. This was also widely used in public, as much by heritage experts and ordinary citizens as by state agents and in official documents. For instance, during the later stages of my fieldwork, by which time Dabaodao was referred to as “historical,” residents often used *xiujiurujiu* as shorthand for preservation.

9. This has changed in recent years, with the revival of neo-Confucianism and the political rhetoric of preserving the “outstanding cultural traditions” of the Chinese nation (Cpc News 2017).

10. Many anthropologists and China scholars have discussed “fakery presented as reality” with regards to food safety and artificial ingredients that threaten people’s health (Y. Yan 2012); counterfeit products offered as the real thing (Y.-C. J. Lin 2011); government statistics (X. Liu 2009); and “backstage” business deals done under the pretense of official categories and positions in society (Anagnost 1997, 65; Osburg 2013).

11. China’s version of Google.

12. On several occasions, I observed interactions with so-called experts from Germany who came to Qingdao to assist locals with the “correct” preservation or restoration of existing architectural structures. Often these German nationals were automatically assumed to be experts.

13. Around 2012, Qingdao experienced a dramatic upsurge in retro-style cafés. These were often coffee shops, bookshops, libraries, and cultural venues all rolled into one, stuffed with old objects like dial-operated telephones, manual sewing machines, and Western-style desk lamps with shades from the 1960s.

14. *Gailiang* can mean “improvement” and “reform.” Many of my interlocutors used it in opposition to “revolution.”

CHAPTER 7

1. A pseudonym.

2. A counterinitiative to the ubiquitous notion of cheap goods “made in China” (*zhongguo zhizao*).

3. An umbrella term for various traditional or traditionally inspired Chinese garments (Law and Qin 2022).

4. The group has existed under various names since 2004. As of 2018, it was recorded as owning a total of 9.5 billion yuan registered capital and had over 20 billion yuan in total assets. It has taken on a diverse range of projects, including real estate development, tourism, urban renewal, infrastructure development, and property management. More generally, referred to as “urban investment and develop-

ment companies,” these companies exist in all cities across China, acting as extensions and vehicles of the state in carrying out urban infrastructure projects. Their normative role is to finance urban infrastructure projects, but in reality, they fulfill a vast variety of functions. They help circumvent loan restrictions imposed upon local governments, they absorb debts, which no longer show in public accounts, and they act as agents of urban transformation, initiating, implementing, and managing a plethora of urban construction projects under their auspices and retaining revenues (Jiang and Waley 2020).

5. A nod to the “destroy the four olds” campaign during the Cultural Revolution.

CONCLUSION

1. Beijing’s Ju’er Hutong project, studied by Wu Liangyong (1999), is often cited as a successful example of resident engagement in neighborhood restoration. Dan Abramson (2017) discusses the Fujianese city of Quanzhou, where localized forms of participatory planning have embraced the messiness that is inherent in the planning process in China.

2. I exercise some caution in this regard, as I see the state as an arrangement of institutions that, even if not entirely separate from society, still deserves a degree of analytical autonomy in terms of assessing how its actors go about their daily routines (Sharma and Gupta 2006; Bernstein and Mertz 2011; Müller 2013; Niezen and Sapi gnoli 2017).

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Index

Note: Page numbers in italics refer to the illustrations and tables.

- Abrams, Philip, 14, 224–25
Abramson, Daniel C., 9, 15, 53, 57, 63, 231n10, 236n1
Anagnost, Ann, 235n10
agency, 13–14, 84, 90–91, 124, 144
alcohol, 159, 229n23. *See also* beer
anger and frustration, 101–2, 106, 108, 116–20, 122
Ashworth, Gregory, 15, 216, 222
Augé, Marc, 66
authenticity, 178–79, 235n7; preservationists’ understanding of, 176–85; redevelopment and, 192–93, 201, 207. *See also* heritage; repair the old like the old
- Badaguan, 62, 231n2
Baldy, 97–98, 101, 117–18, 123, 209
bargaining and negotiations, 92, 126–33, 139, 141, 145
Barmé, Geremie, 186
beer, 97, 111, 150, 152–53; gender and, 20; Tsingtao, 5, 59. *see also* German-style street; *pijiuwu*
beer house. *See pijiuwu*
beer mother, 159–60
Behme, Friedrich, 36, 37
Beijing, 52, 58, 154, 231n23, 236n1; construction workers in, 145; inner-city redevelopment in, 194; location of, 5; old, 6; urban cleansing in, 166. *See also* Dashilar; Olympic Games; Nanluoguxiang; *siheyuan*; Zhejiangcun.
Bestor, Theodore, 152
Bo Xilai, 58
Boshan Road, 151, 134n5
Bourdieu, Pierre, 206
Bourgeois, Philippe, 20, 112
Bray, David, 52, 230n17, 233n7
brothels, 48–49, 51, 103
Brother Dragon: life story of, 102–105; living with uncertainty, 1–3, 118, 207–9; remembering the Cultural Revolution, 49–51; living arrangements, 105; ambivalent emotions, 105–6; attitude towards migrants, 105, 108; and the local government, 118–19, 129–30, 132, 137, 224; family of, 138–40
Broudehoux, Anne-Marie, 64, 185
Brumann, Christoph, 11, 16–17, 215, 222
Bülow, Bernard von, 34
buildings built on soybean dregs (*doufu zha gongcheng*), 181

- Bureau of Culture and Tourism, 22, 80, 83, 138
- Bureau of Housing and Urban-Rural Development. *See* Housing Bureau
- Bureau of Natural Resources and Planning. *See* Urban Planning Bureau
- Canada, 69, 71, 77
- Cartier, Carolyn, 64, 68
- Casey, Edward, 95
- catholic church, 28, 71, 90, 103
- Certeau, Michel de, 23, 223
- chaiqian*. *See* demolition
- Changchun, 58
- Chau, Adam Yuet, 115
- Chengdu, 66
- chengguan*. *See* city management
- chengzhongcun*. *See* urban village
- China Merchandise Corporation, 55
- Chinese Communist Party (CCP), 50, 103, 173, 209
- Chinesenstadt (Chinese town), 35–38, 75
- Cho, Mun Young, 163–64
- Chongqing, 92, 128, 233n2
- Chu, Julie, 84, 115
- citizenship, 195
- city management, 137, 166–68, 224
- Clifford, James, 17, 22
- commercialization: of public housing, 100–101; preservationists' attitudes towards, 170, 181–93; redevelopment and, 8, 62, 80, 88
- community, 11, 17, 217; migrant, 143, 163, 165–66, 210, 213
- compensation, 9, 83, 92–93; amount, 125–26, 207–9; family relations and, 138–40; migrants and, 166; negotiations over, 121–25, 127–33, 136–38, 171, 207–9; rightful, 131, 136, 220
- Covid-19 pandemic, 3, 76, 197, 234n9
- Cultural Revolution, 1, 49–51, 63, 102–3, 236n5
- da chai da jian*. *See* demolish and rebuild
- Dabaodao: a walk into, 28–29; architectural development in, 37–40, 47–49; as a migrant destination, 147–51; as heritage, 30, 32, 75–76, 88, 174, 176–83, 189–91, 198–201, 214–15; during the Cultural Revolution, 49–50, 102–3; during the Maoist years, 49–52; during the Republican period, 44–45; fieldwork in, 8–20, 23–24; fragmentation of, 79–86; introduction to, 5–7, 30; location of, 30; living in, 93, 96–99, 101–7, 151–54; map of, 43; physical environment of, 108–14, 154–58; property rights situation in, 133–41; redevelopment attempts of, 69–76, 117–20, 201–7; residents' perception of, 92, 101–2, 108, 119–20; under German colonial rule, 35–37, 41–42; under Japanese colonial rule, 44; under “reform and opening-up,” 52, 55, 60; xintiandization of, 74–75; working in, 163–169. *See also* Huangdao Road; *liyuan*; Qingdao
- Daowai. *See* Harbin
- Dalian, 58, 76, 231n22
- danwei*, 12, 52–3, 95–6, 99–102, 106, 164, 230n17
- Dashilar, 66, 106
- Davis, Deborah, 100
- demolish and rebuild, 8
- demolition, 54–55, 65, 73, 114–17, 123–25, 131, 147, 167–69, 232n9
- dingzi hu*. *See* nail household
- Douglas, Mary, 109
- Du Shicheng, 59, 77–78
- Erie, Matthew, 124
- European-style scenic neighborhood, 73, 75, 85–89, 122
- European-style street, 182
- Evans, Harriet, 6, 23, 66, 94, 106, 186
- Fabian, Johannes, 22
- failure, 61, 76, 90–91, 114–20, 205, 216–17

- fairness, 9, 13, 124–28, 130, 219
 fake, 179, 181–82, 186, 235n10
 family disputes, 138–40
 Famous Historic Cultural Cities, 64
 Fan, Cindy, 144, 148, 231n23
 Feicheng Road, 71
 Fei Xiaotong, 19, 112
 Feuchtwang, Stephan, 66, 184
 fieldwork, 18–24
 fragmentation, 62, 91, 203, 217, 223;
 discursive, 84; functional (adminis-
 trative), 82–83; territorial, 79–80
 fresh-food market, 42, 111, 116, 151, 154,
 158, 166, 223. *See also* Huangdao Road

gaizao zhihui bu. *See* Redevelopment
 Command Office
 Gaomi, 103
 gender, 20
 gentrification, 66–67. *See also* Xintiandi
 Germany, 21, 33–34, 41, 71, 145, 182, 185–
 86, 188, 190, 192
 German-style street, 79, 87–88, 182
 Glaeser, Andreas, 140, 219
 government: absent presence of the, 15,
 91, 118, 224; central, 52–53, 56–58, 168,
 202, 221, 230n17; local, 13, 56–57, 92–
 93, 114, 124–32, 138–41, 171, 202, 210,
 218–19, 233n5; municipal, 8, 53, 57, 69,
 114, 214, 228n12
guangxing li, 176–77, 182–83, 198–200,
 203–7. *See also* *liyuan*
 Guangzhou, 8, 230n11, 231n22
guohuo gongsi. *See* China Merchandise
 Corporation

 Halbwachs, Maurice, 173
 Hall, Edward, 154
 Hannerz, Ulf, 11, 21, 64, 152, 153
 Hanser, Amy, 166
 Harbin, 8, 35–36, 58
 Harvey, David, 143, 169, 217, 231n5
 heritage: agnosticism, 17–18; as an ideol-
 ogy, 17, 222–23; colonial, 16–17, 62, 181,
 185–89, 221–22; critical, 16–17, 217; urban
 redevelopment and, 63–69, 198–201
 Herzfeld, Michael, 10, 33, 66, 214, 228n11
 high modernism, 14, 223, 228n11
 historical district, 8, 64, 70, 83
 Hoffman, Lisa, 14, 58, 64, 67,
 Holston, James, 10, 228n11
 Hong Kong, 8, 186, 221, 230n11; colonial,
 34–35, 229n4
 household registration. *See* *hukou*
 Housing Bureau, 22, 80–83, 99–100,
 134–37
 housing expropriation, 92–3, 114–17,
 227n8; after, 208–13; local officials
 and, 121–25, 138, 141; regulations on,
 9, 124; resisting, 121–33; terms and
 conditions of, 121–22, 125–26; uncer-
 tainty about, 80, 118–20, 123, 139–40.
 See also compensation
 Hsing, You-tien, 3, 12, 57, 195, 228n12
 Hu Jintao, 9, 63, 67; son of, 76
 Huangdao Road, 18; after being evicted
 from, 209, 212; dismantling of,
 167–69, 202, 223; during the Cultural
 Revolution, 49–50, 102–3; history of,
 42; olfactory and audible environ-
 ment of, 154–55; property rights
 situation on, 100, 134, 139–40, 147;
 redevelopment of, 80, 85–86, 201–3,
 207, 213; spatial transformation of,
 156–57; working on, 111, 142, 150–54,
 163, 211–12. *See also* Dabaodao; fresh-
 food market; *liyuan*; *pingkang wuli*
hukou, 9, 50, 143–47, 228n10
 hygiene, 34–35, 41, 46, 167–69, 230n7

 illegal constructions, 72, 136, 167–68
 Ingold, Tim, 19, 109, 144, 156, 215

 Jacobs, Jane, 216
 Japan, 44, 49, 177, 180, 227n1; Germany
 vs., 185

- Jiang Qing, 58
 Jiaozhou. *See* Qingdao
 Jiaozhou Road, 55
 Jimo Road Market, 104; 234n5
 Jinan, 58, 211–12
jiucheng gaizao. *See* old-town renovation
- Kipnis, Andrew, 11, 13, 52, 56, 80, 112, 131, 227n4
 Kleinman, Arthur, 130
 Kluckhohn, Clyde, 17
 Knapp, Ronald, 40, 179
 Kroeber, Alfred, 17
 Kuanzhai Xiangzi. *See* Chengdu
 Kuomintang (KMT), 44–46, 102, 103, 227n1
- Laoshan Dayuan, 230–31n20
 Lee, Ching Kwan, 99, 108, 195
 Lefebvre, Henri, 32, 94, 144, 234n8
 legality, 131, 233n6
 legitimacy, 11–13, 131, 219–20, 228n13, 233n4
 Lewis, Oscar, 112
 Li Qun, 73, 75, 77–78
 Liang Sicheng, 63
linong, 8, 32, 65, 233n6
 Linyi, 142
 Little Smile. *See* Xiao Mei
liyuan, 5, 7, 16, 17, 230n9; as historical architecture (heritage), 117, 164–65, 176–83, 198–207, 214, 223; compensation payments for, 125–26, 140; during the Maoist years, 51–52, 102–4; fieldwork inside, 18–19, 23–24; historical and architectural development of, 37–42, 47–49; preservationists' attitudes towards, 30, 32, 170–71, 176–83; public ordinances for, 44; refurbishment of, 62, 72–75, 80, 84–85, 115, 198–207; spatial usage of, 109–114. *See also* Dabaodao; Qingdao
- Low, Setha, 109, 172
 Lowenthal, David, 214, 229n20, 234n3
- Macao, 229n5
 Malaysia, 56, 71
 Mann, Michael, 12, 168, 202
 Mao Zedong, 58, 144–45; Dabaodao under, 49–52
 Massey, Doreen, 32
 Matzat, Wilhelm, 33, 37, 38
 Mertha, Andrew, 171
 messy, 11, 95, 108–10, 116, 156, 166
 migrants: discrimination against, 143, 158–65; livelihoods of, 151–54; spatial practices of, 154–58; stagnant redevelopment and, 169, 213–14. *See also hukou*
- Mohr, Friedrich Wilhelm, 36, 37
 Mr. Gao, 78–79, 83, 89, 130, 194
 Mr. Li: attitudes towards history and preservation, 175–180, 182–90, 194–96, 206; introduction to, 173; publications by, 189
 Mr. Lu: on preservation, 61, 68, 86; negotiations with residents, 136, 138; predicament, 90–91, 123–26
 Mr. Smile: introduction to, 149–51; drinking with, 111; discrimination against, 160–62; livelihood of, 151–55, 167, 211–12; *See also* fresh-food market; *pijiuwu*
- Mühlhahn, Klaus, 34, 36, 41, 46
 museum, 75, 87, 89
- Nader, Laura, 224
 nail household, 7, 227n2
 Nanluoguxiang, 66, 74
 national humiliation, 221
 National New-Type Urbanization Plan (2014–20), 68, 147
 newspaper headlines, 84–86
 nostalgia, 16, 101, 106, 120, 229n19; colonial, 181, 185–89

- old-town renovation, 2, 30
 Olympic Games, 59, 71–73, 182
 open coastal cities, 54, 231n22
 Ortner, Sherry, 13, 17
oulu fengqingqu: See European-style scenic neighborhood
- pandora's box, 26, 125, 140, 219
penghuqu. See slum housing
 Perry, Elizabeth, 52, 224, 228n16
 Pichaiyuan, 72–73, 87–88, 151, 195
 Pieke, Frank, 14, 224
pjiuwu, 111, 150–52, 212
pingkang wuli, 47–48, 51, 103. See also *liyuan*
- planners, 10–11, 216–17, 222–23; Republican period, 47; in Qingdao, 68, 74, 79–83, 87, 165
 policy entrepreneurs, 171
 Political Consultative Conference, 75, 194, 195, 232n11
 political leaders, 58–59, 73, 75–78, 91, 202, 231n24
 political practice, 4, 14–15, 91, 225
 power: colonial, 35; despotic, 168, 202; infrastructural, 12, 131, 144, 202; negotiating, 124, 128, 196; space and, 11–15; state, 4–5, 11–15, 167–68, 202, 224–25, 228n11
 pragmatic activism, 196
 precarity, 6, 94, 154, 166, 168–69, 208, 212
 preservation mandate, 9–10, 66–69, 75–76, 88, 171, 217–18
 preservation predicament, 25, 62, 88, 207, 218
 preservation-oriented demolition, 205
 preservation-oriented development, 2, 65, 79, 121
 Professor Wu: attitude towards migrants, 165; debating preservation, 170–71, 215; introduction to, 82–83, 175; predicament of, 90, 193–94
 property: rights, 133–138; splitting, 137
- Qian, Zhongshu, 132
 Qingdao: during the Maoist years, 50–52; during the Republican period, 44–47, 230n13; heritage preservation in, 69–76; 86–91, 196–201, 214–15; housing expropriation regulations in, 124–26; introduction to, 5–8, 30, 229n2; location of, 6; map of, 31; narratives of colonial heritage in, 185–89; political leaders of, 58–59, 76–78, 231n24; property rights in, 133–34, 137; situation of migrants in, 145–47, 163–65, 169; under German colonial rule, 33–37, 41–43, 230nn6–7; under Japanese colonial rule, 44, 49; urban transformations in, 52–56, 58–60, 61–69, 99–101, 201–7, 232n9. See also Dabaodao
 Qingdao Shibe Construction Investment Group Company. See Shibe Construction Group.
- Rabinow, Paul, 228n11
 Redevelopment Command Office, 22, 68, 79, 80, 90; municipal-level, 203; Shinan district, 73; Zhongshan Road, 61, 86, 116, 123.
 Ren Xuefei, 7, 8, 10, 12, 66, 191
 repair the old like the old, 179, 182, 198, 235n8
 resident committee, 52, 119, 122, 228n15, 233n7
 Richthofen, Ferdinand von, 229n3
 right to the city, 143, 169
 Rithmire, Meg, 57–58, 104
 Rogaski, Ruth, 35, 46
 Rowe, William, 38
- Sassen, Saskia, 64
 Schrameier, Wilhelm, 37–38

- Scott, James, 14, 129, 223, 228n11
- Sennett, Richard, 11, 165, 178
- sewage, 34, 36, 42, 110, 154, 186–87
- sex workers, 48, 51, 102–3
- Shandong, 1, 20, 34, 49, 58–59, 229n23, 231n24
- Shanghai, 7, 8, 69, 104, 186, 231n22, 231n23; colonial, 35; location of, 6; migrant children in, 146; urban cleansing in, 166. *See also* *linong*; *shikumen*, Xintiandi
- Shao Qin, 6, 55, 93, 131
- Shen Honglie, 47, 49
- Shenzhen, 7, 227n5, 231n22
- shikumen*, 35, 230n14
- Shibei district, 87, 107, 121, 125, 142, 202, 203, 206; jurisdiction of, 79–81
- Shibei Construction Group, 203–5
- Shibei Management Committee of the Historical and Cultural Memory Demonstration Area, 79
- Shinan district, 86, 90, 203, 206, 207; jurisdiction of, 79–81
- Shinan Historic District Preservation and Development Bureau, 78, 79, 89, 130, 194
- Shui On Land, 65, 74, 75. *See also* Xintiandi
- Siemssen, Alfred, 22, 38–39, 42, 189–90, 199–200. *See also* *liyuan*
- Sifang district, 53, 79
- Sifang Road, 29, 53, 79, 85, 122, 128, 150–51, 159, 167, 197, 209
- Sifang Road Historical and Cultural District, 73–74, 165
- siheyuan*, 32, 39–40
- slum housing, 12, 53, 79, 84–86, 115, 202
- small harbor, 55
- smell, 35, 110–11, 113, 154–55, 166, 234n8
- Smith, Laurajane, 16, 178, 217, 221
- Solinger, Dorothy, 64–65, 94–96, 99, 101, 107, 145, 166
- sound, 113, 154–55, 166
- Smart, Alan and Josephine, 66
- spatial practices, 94, 109–14, 214
- state: entrepreneurial, 3–4, 12, 56–58; central vs. local, 14, 56–59, 90–91, 221, 230n17, 231n23
- state-owned enterprise (SOE), 55–57, 95, 99, 203
- Steinmetz, George, 34–36, 41, 46
- Sun, Yat-sen, 38
- suspension, 94, 169
- suzhi*, 112
- Tai'an, 149
- Taidong, 35, 51, 53, 55, 88, 126, 230n19
- Taidongzhen. *See* Taidong
- Taiwan, 51, 134
- Taixizhen. *See* Xizhen
- tax, 37, 56–57, 100
- Tianjin, 8, 35, 46, 231nn22–23
- Tirpitz, Alfred von 230n6
- toilets, 37, 42, 105, 108–14
- Tomba, Luigi, 12, 13, 64, 66–67, 119
- train station, 35, 182
- Tsingtao. *See* beer; Qingdao
- Tsingtau. *See* Qingdao
- tourism, 8, 16, 62–66, 186–88
- UNESCO, 63, 178, 214–16, 231n4
- urban planning: anthropology of, 8–11, 222–23, 228n11; client of, 82–83; collaborative, 11, 217, 236n1; colonial, 33–42, 181; preservation and, 63–69; profit-driven, 54–60; property rights and, 133–38; socialist, 49–52; the return of, 52–53
- Urban Design Institute, 22, 74, 81–82
- Urban Planning and Design Research Institute. *See* Urban Design Institute
- Urban Planning Bureau, 22, 68–69, 80–82, 165, 229n24
- urban redevelopment, 2, 8–12, 206–7, 210; during the Maoist period, 50–52;

- fragmented, 79–86; growth-oriented, 55–60, 65–67; quality-oriented, 10, 67–68, 89, 124; Shanghai model of, 8; stagnant (failed), 3, 7, 12, 69–76, 84–91, 115, 117, 131, 169, 216–17
- urban village, 147, 154, 202
- value, 23, 30, 118, 127–28, 178, 181
- Venice Charter, 178–79
- Walder, Andrew, 52
- Wallace, Jeremy, 91, 145
- Wang Qingxian, 77–78
- Warner, Thorsten, 35–37, 42
- waste-water system. *See* sewage
- Weber, Max, 228n13
- Weicker, Hans, 35, 36
- Weixian Road, 29
- Wilhelm II, 34
- Wolf, Eric, 14
- work unit. *See* *danwei*
- Wu Fulong, 12, 53, 57, 81–83
- Wu Liangyong, 236n1
- Xi Jinping: institutional reforms by, 227n6, 232nn14–5; preservation mandate under, 63, 67–68, 186; transfer of leadership to, 9, 67
- Xiao Mei, 149–50; daughter of, 160–62. *See also* Mr. Smile
- Xiang Biao, 13, 94, 129, 131, 147
- xiao gang*. *See* small harbor
- Xiaobaodao*, 55, 126
- Xintiandi, 8, 10, 62–67, 74–75, 87–88, 182, 204
- Xintiandization. *See* Xintiandi
- xiu jiu ru jiu*. *See* repair the old like the old
- Xizhen, 35, 51, 53, 88, 209, 230n19
- Yamen, 63
- Yantai, 162, 231n22
- Yeh, Emily, 221
- Yu Zhengsheng, 58, 69, 77–78, 173, 231n25
- Yuanmingyuan, 185
- Zhang Li, 7, 146, 147, 234n1
- Zhang Xinqi, 77–78
- Zhejiangcun, 147
- zhengxie*. *See* Political Consultative Conference
- Zhifu Road, 167
- Zhongshan Road: architecture on, 28–30; evicted from, 126; history of, 36; property prices around, 233n3; redevelopment of, 71–78, 84–85, 121; transformations around, 53, 55, 60, 69. *See also* Dabaodao; European-style scenic neighborhood; European-style street
- Zukin, Sharon, 66, 178

