

# Understanding the Social and Spatial Diversity of Urban Villages

## with a case study in Shenzhen, China



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### Introduction

With the rapid expansion of China's cities, more and more villages have been swallowed up by urban territory and have evolved into a new urban form, urban villages. Although it is a type of informal housing provided on the basis of self-help in a self-organizing manner, the urban village is remarkable for providing the most affordable and accessible housing for migrants who are virtually excluded from the urban housing due to financial and social constraints.

Once incorporated into the urban context, urban villages evolve differently in terms of social structure and physical environment, resulting in social and spatial diversity at a city scale. From a planning or geographic perspective, however, there is little understanding of why urban villages emerge in certain areas of a city, how urban villages evolve spatially, what role do urban villages play in the urban social and spatial development, and what the social and spatial implications of the development of urban villages are or may be in the future. It is evident that, for decades, urban villages have existed as components of cities facilitating their smooth transformation. Besides, many of them are strategically located in core urban segments. Either persistence or redevelopment of urban villages will have consequences to their residents and the cities significantly.

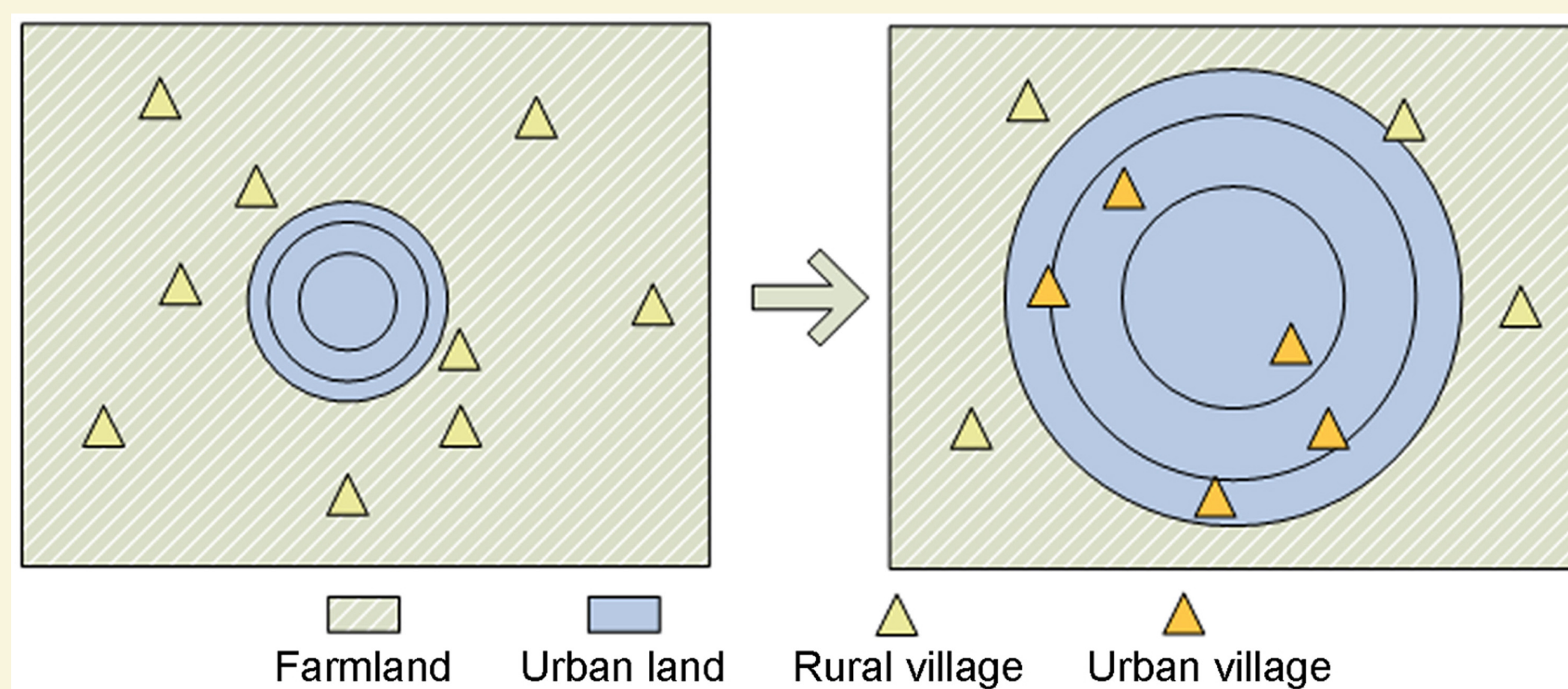


Figure 1:  
Transformation  
from Rural  
Villages to Urban  
Villages



Figure 2: Villages within the Urban Context

### Research Objectives

This research aims to understand the social and spatial diversity of urban villages, so as to support future planning and decision-making by government agencies. With a case study in Shenzhen, China, four objectives are to be achieved.

- Analyse the social and spatial status of urban villages as a sub-market of urban housing.
- Identify and analyse the causes and consequences of the social and spatial diversity.
- Analyse the social and spatial consequences of the current policy and programs associated with urban villages.
- Set up a research methodology in the format of a Planning Support System (PSS) with which potential consequences of intended policy measurements concerning urban villages can be assessed ex ante.

### Urban Villages in Shenzhen

Shenzhen city, in South China, is one of the country's most populous and prosperous cities. According to a survey in 2004, there are 320 urban villages in Shenzhen. They cover 93.5 km<sup>2</sup> land, equivalent to 13.3% of the built up land and 50.3% of the residential land. It is estimated that as much as 60% of the Shenzhen residents live in urban villages.

### Analysis and Data Source

In this research, the social and spatial diversity of urban villages in Shenzhen will be identified by surveys and data exploration. Thereafter, the diversity will be analysed using GIS with respect to the heterogeneity of the urban developments. Data for this research include spatial and non-spatial information about the 320 urban villages and the city development. Most of the data are collected through three main sources: the urban village survey in 2004, planning authorities in Shenzhen who monitor the urban village developments, and supplementary fieldworks in Shenzhen.

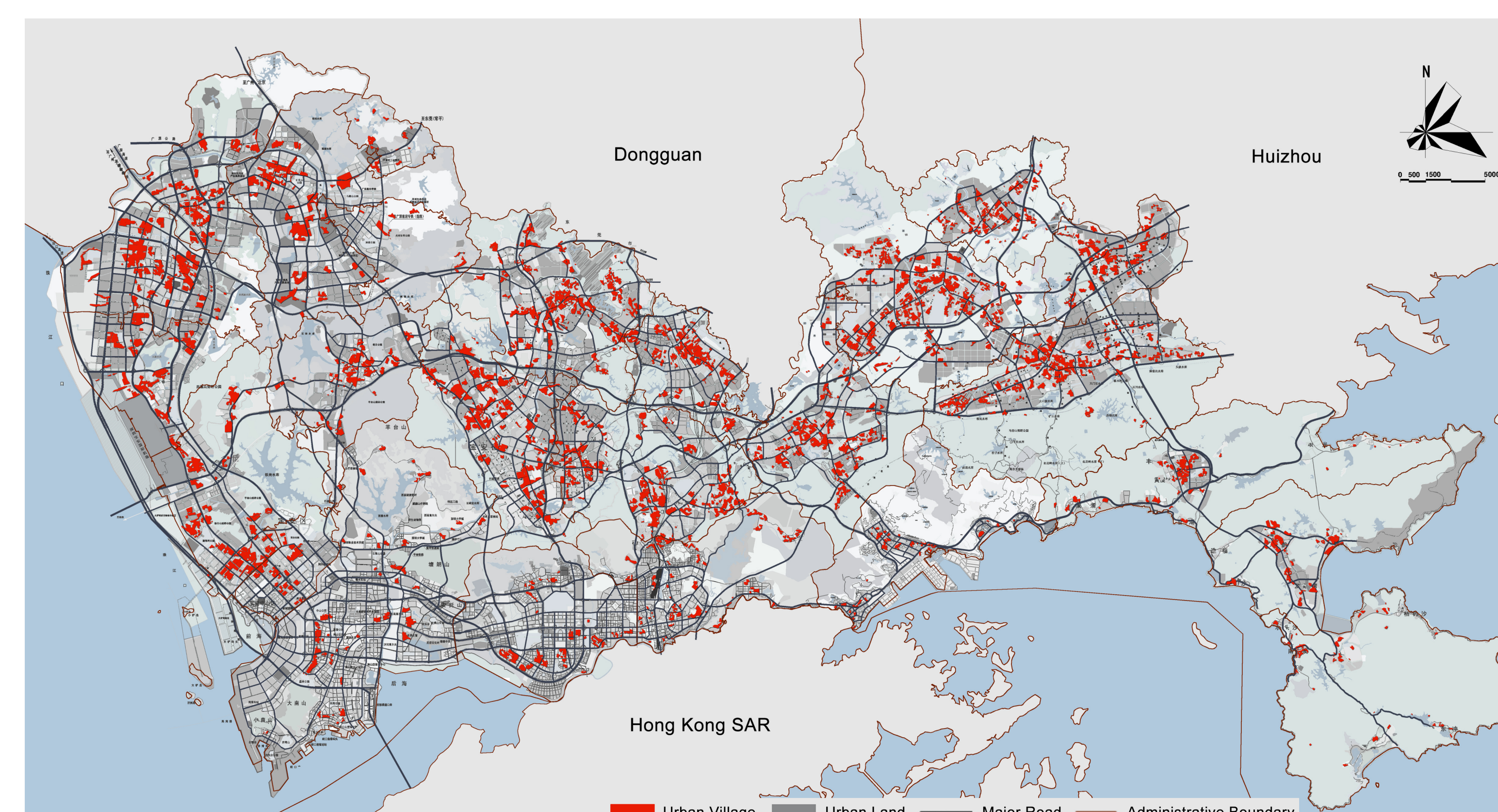


Figure 3: Urban Villages in Shenzhen Identified by Remote Sensed Imagery and Fieldwork