The Guangdong Model of Urbanisation

Collective village land and the making of a new middle class

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ABSTRACTS

In some parts of China – and especially in Guangdong Province in southern China – rural communities have retained ownership of much of their land when its use is converted into urban neighbourhoods or industrial zones. In these areas, the rural collectives, rather than disappearing, have converted themselves into property companies and have been re-energised and strengthened as rental income pours into their coffers. The native residents, rather than being relocated, usually remain in the village's old residential area. As beneficiaries of the profits generated by their village collective, they have become a new propertied class, often living in middle-class comfort on their dividends and rents. How this operates – and the major economic and social ramifications – is examined through onsite research in four communities: an industrialised village in the Pearl River delta; an urban neighbourhood in Shenzhen with its own subway station, whose land is still owned and administered by rural collectives; and two villages-in-the-city in Guangzhou's new downtown districts, where fancy housing estates and high-rise office blocks owned by village collectives are springing up alongside newly rebuilt village temples and lineage halls.

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