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Living in the "Past": The Effects of a Growing Preservation Discourse in Contemporary Urban China

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Introduction

Against the backdrop of fast-paced cultural and economic globalization and the resulting profound socio-spatial transformations of cities around the world, the meanings, usages, and purposes of urban heritage have become increasingly diverse and contested. Different actors, including national and municipal governments, tourist industries, preservationists, and local communities appropriate and utilize heritage in a myriad of different ways and for various, sometimes contradictory, ends. Rodney Harrison speaks of an "*abundance* of heritage in our late-modern world" (2013: 3, emphasis in original). Perhaps as a result of this ubiquity of heritage, a very fundamental yet important question is sometimes overlooked in public and academic debates: Why heritage and why preservation? Different actors who make claims to heritage tend to leave the

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necessity to preserve unquestioned. The aim of this chapter is to treat the wish to preserve as a cultural phenomenon, rather than a taken-for-granted positive aspiration, and to evaluate its meanings and impacts in the specific socio-cultural context in which it emerges.

The following chapter examines how a growing official and popular preservation discourse has been impacting urban redevelopment and the people living in an old and run-down inner city neighbourhood in Qingdao, a rapidly changing north-eastern Chinese metropolis with a variegated colonial history. China was long associated with poor preservation. In the 1990s, propelled by growth-oriented reforms, many old urban neighbourhoods were razed to the ground and residents relocated. Since the turn of the millennium, however, historic preservation has increasingly come to the fore. In recent years, the old inner city area that I discuss here has been (re)discovered as a place of historical value. The city government envisions it as an upgraded tourist site and a place for cultural consumption, while a growing circle of what I call "old-town protectors" have been demanding what they consider to be "authentic" ways of preserving the neighbourhood (Zhang 2006; Pan 2005, 2011). Both the official project and the "old-town protectors'" quest for authenticity, each according to its own cultural-political logic, are part of what I refer to as the "heritagization" of Chinese urban society (Hsing in Zhang 2006: 478; Harvey 2001). In this chapter, I juxtapose their narratives with those of the residents living inside the inner city. First, what does preservation mean to these different actors and second, how does the existing preservation discourse impact the ongoing redevelopment project and the livelihoods of long-term residents living in this potential heritage site?

The data used in this chapter come from 17 months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Qingdao between 2011 and 2015. I begin with a more general discussion about heritage, followed by a review of the rise of preservation discourse in China. After introducing the city of Qingdao and its inner city, I present the discourses and narratives of the preservation advocates and those of local residents. In the final section, I discuss the impacts of the preservation discourse.

Heritage as a Cultural Phenomenon

Many scholars studying cities have spent considerable time contemplating the differences between looking at the city from above, the "'God-like' vision of the city" (Harvey 1989: 1) and the sense and experience of being in the city, of being in the midst of it all. De Certeau (1984: 92–93) has famously made the distinction between "the voyeur" (the one towering above and looking down) and "the walker" (the one living and walking in the city). While the former gets a sense of the whole picture, the latter "follow(s) the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' … without being able to read it;" or to be more precise, "the walker" reads the city very differently from "the voyeur". Even though every urbanite is both a "voyeur" and a "walker" in his or her own socio-spatial context, this voyeur-walker dichotomy serves as a useful metaphor to frame the complexities revolving around selecting, defining, and preserving a specific and potential heritage site.

Heritage preservation used to be a matter of "voyeurs" (the heritage experts). It was long considered an altruistic and benevolent goal in and of itself. "It is our duty to hand them (historic monuments) on in the full richness of their authenticity", as the Venice Charter from 1964 phrases it (ICOMOS 1994: 1). The subsequent act of preservation then largely followed what Sullivan (1993: 16) calls the "freeze-frame" methodology, meaning that a piece of heritage is fixed in space and time. It becomes timeless and static and may not be changed as it is preserved. In more recent years, however, not least as a result of the rise of post-modernism and constructivism, the social and human sciences have fundamentally unsettled this fixed and taken-for-granted view of heritage preservation. It is now recognized that preservation is never neutral, but always political and that "certain histories and physical remains are necessarily excluded, privileging one period, class, or category of heritage over the others in a given place" (Bell 2013: 431–432). In line with this, Ashworth argues that heritage is the usage of the past in the present and that "new presents will constantly imagine new pasts to satisfy changing needs" (2011: 10). Moreover, following human geographers'

contributions to a more humanistic and processual understanding of space and place (e.g. Lefebvre 1991; Massey 2005), it is now widely acknowledged that an old building or physical area is always a product of social and cultural activity. Indeed, Laurajane Smith starts her book *Uses of Heritage* (2006) from the premise that all heritage is intangible. Artefacts are essentially created, given value and imbued with meaning in the present and for different purposes.

Today, heritage scholars and experts commonly call for a more communitarian approach to heritage preservation (Blake 2009). Individual stories and memories of the "walkers" who live in or use a designated heritage site or artefact are considered to be equally, if not more important, than the physical artefacts themselves. This attempt to listen to and empower local communities is certainly commendable, but we must not fail to recognize that the so-called "local community" is also a social construction, usually sanctioned by the state or other external entities (Hampton 2005: 739). Moreover, a local community may not at all be conscious of its identity as a carrier of cultural heritage or may even be critical of preservation, as I show in this article. Furthermore, a focus on individual experience and memory instead of authorized historical narratives is no less an act of choosing one narrative over another. In fact, in autocratic regimes like China where memory and history have been monopolized by the state, the two are necessarily related and intertwined (Watson 1994).

In view of the difficulties of finding ways to (re)define heritage or generate new standards for its preservation, scholars now increasingly refrain from engaging heritage as a theoretical or scientific concept and instead treat it as a global cultural phenomenon (Harrison 2013). Consequently, the processes and impacts rather than normative definitions of heritage inform many current scholarly discussions (e.g. Zhu 2015). This chapter follows this approach. Heritage concerns me in so far that it has or has not concerned my informants, and I am chiefly interested in why and to whom heritage matters and how a growing preservation discourse understood as a cultural phenomenon of contemporary urban China impacts the case of inner city redevelopment.

"Heritagizing" China

For the large part of the chaotic twentieth century, preserving old architecture or other cultural landscapes was not high on the agenda for China's urban development. The Maoist years, especially the Cultural Revolution, followed the ideal of "destroy the old and create the new" (*pojiulixin*). After the beginning of the reform period (in 1978), China created a Law for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in November 1982 and joined the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1985. Nevertheless, growth-oriented urban development largely defied any existing plans, making regulations on heritage preservation hardly more than a theoretical idea. During the 1980s and 1990s, many old inner city areas became victims of frenzied building activities and the search by local "pro-growth coalitions" for maximum profit and ultimate modernity (Zhang and Fang 2004). Old and run-down inner city areas were convenient targets for local governments to foster city-building, economic development, and the consolidation of state power (Abramson 2007; Hsing 2010).

A gradual change in attitude occurred in 2002 with the amendment of the Law for the Protection of Cultural Heritage and former President Jiang Zemin's renowned speech at the 16th National Congress in which he called for the promotion of culture and related industries (People's Daily 2002). In 2002, China and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) jointly issued the "The Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China" and countless applications to UNESCO for Chinese sites to be inscribed on the World Heritage List followed (China Heritage Quarterly 2005). With regard to urban heritage and old inner cities, the term "historic district conservation" first appeared in the Chinese conservation context in 1986 (Zhu 2007). In 1994, the "Regulations on Plan Making for Famous Historic Cultural Cities" were introduced, which called for the integration of historic conservation into contemporary urban planning. Such ideas were further emphasized and refined in several subsequent nation-wide master plans and policies. The most recent "National New-type Urbanisation Plan

(2014–2020)", for instance, particularly "stresses the need to incorporate traditional components in the building of new urban areas, reconciling new areas with the original, already existent natural and cultural characteristics of a city" (Qingdao Urban Planning Bureau 2015). Today, the idea of "preservation-oriented development" (*baohuxing kaifa*) has been established as an important dictate informing many urban redevelopment projects.

It would be wrong, however, to view preservation as an unconditional, altruistic goal in and of itself and it would be equally erroneous to view government officials or urban developers as having finally been made to see reason that demolition and short-term development are indeed detrimental. The mounting focus on preservation needs to be seen as a continuation of the previous growth-oriented reforms, now catering to the domestic tourist industry and a shifting consumer market. Examples such as Shanghai's *Xintiandi* area have proven that the aesthetics of the "old" have enormous economic potential and that nicely redeveloped and repackaged inner cities generate monetary revenue, thus making them attractive to private developers. A number of studies illustrate how municipal governments across China have, over the past decade, initiated and shaped urban renewal projects as a way of place promotion, resulting in gentrification, commodification or what Zhang Li calls "accumulation by displacement" (2010: 137), leaving merely old-looking facades behind (Wai 2006; He 2007; Ren 2008; Shao 2013; Evans 2014).

What is important, however, is that China is not only trying to transform its cities from industrial, production-oriented growth-engines into places for third-sector industries and consumption (e.g. Wu 2007), it also increasingly aspires to "softer" and more "human-centred" (*yirenweiben*) forms of urban development (Hoffman 2011; Tomba and Cartier 2012). In this context, previous destructive urban renewal and "preservation-oriented redevelopment" practices have become targets of criticism, accompanying calls for more "genuine" forms of preservation. Simultaneously, the overall changing urbanization outlook has opened up discursive room for the wider public to partake in the debates over "correct" preservation practices. I elaborate on how these changes have been manifesting themselves in the concrete case of redevelopment in Qingdao below. First, however, I provide a brief introduction to Qingdao's inner city.

Qingdao and Its Inner City

Qingdao is an economically flourishing port located on the southern side of the Shandong peninsular by the Yellow Sea. It is not only famous for its eponymous beer brand (Tsingtao Beer), but also for its European-style architecture. Qingdao was first established under German colonial rule (1898–1914) and subsequently occupied by the Japanese twice (1914–1922 and 1938–1945). Today, the remaining colonial architecture serves as a popular tourist destination and background for wedding photos with thousands of newly-weds travelling to the city each year to experience the foreign without having to leave the country.

Qingdao now has a population of over 8 million and covers an administrative area of 10,654 km^2 (Zhang and Rasiah 2013). A distinctive feature is its separation into two city centres. In the mid-1990s when Qingdao, like many Chinese cities, experienced rapid expansion and the urban fringes were heavily exploited, the seat of the city government, formerly situated in the old town, was relocated into a newly developed area along the coast.

Freed from the burden of being the political and economic centre, however, the old town was also neglected in terms of city planning and investment. Mayors and Party Secretaries have since promised to "upgrade" and "refurbish" old Qingdao, but so far, respective undertakings have only led to the patchwork-like redevelopment of certain areas. In the absence of any comprehensive and long-term plans, a few German monuments were preserved and now function as popular tourist spots, while other parts were either demolished or simply turned adrift.

In this chapter, I focus on one of Qingdao's oldest areas, situated right in the heart of the historical centre. I refer to it by its original name, *Dabaodao*.[1] It came into being as a "Chinese town" under German colonial rule when Qingdao, like many other colonial cities, was spatially and ethnically segregated by means of an empty strip of land between the areas for the colonizers and the colonized. *Dabaodao*, located just north of the colonial centre, had originally been designed as a grid of streets that formed more or less rectangular patches of land. These were then purchased by individual businessmen, architects, or urban developers from different regions in China and even from abroad. The subsequent building

activity brought about a type of building that would later come to define *Dabaodao*, but also Qingdao as a whole: *Liyuan* houses. The character for "li" refers to a traditional administrative neighbourhood unit in urban China, whereas "yuan" means courtyard. *Liyuan* are courtyard-style houses, relatively secluded from the outside, but offering a large communal space within. One enters them through a small opening that is often sheltered by means of a "screen wall".[2] Inside the courtyard, flights of stairs give access to an open, traditionally wooden, corridor that connects the rooms on the upper floors. Courtyards vary in size and population density. Larger, three- or four-storey courtyards host over 100 families, while smaller single-storey courtyards may only be occupied by less than ten. Today, the *Dabaodao* area is home to over 20,000 residents and the population density reaches up to 800 residents per hectare.[3] Regardless of the courtyard size, actual living space inside *Liyuan* is extremely limited; it is common for families of three or more people to share a room of less than 10 m^2 (Figs. 10.1 and 10.2).

Like Shanghai's *Lilong*, *Liyuan* is a dense, small-scale vernacular building. This style has evolved differently in various Chinese cities. *Liyuan* as a building type emerged in *Dabaodao* due to the enormous demand for dwellings that could offer commercial and residential space. Some *Liyuan* follow the perfectly rectangular layout of the northern-Chinese four-walled courtyard (*Siheyuan*) (e.g. Knapp 1990), but many also assume different shapes, showing southern Chinese (two storeys high) and European (adopting the French truss structure) architectural elements. Their final form reflects both the stringent building regulations of the colonial administration and the mix of Chinese migrants coming from different areas of the country, bringing along their own building traditions, and modelling new courtyards on existing ones. Over the course of almost an entire century of political turmoil, movements and reforms, *Liyuan* were demolished and rebuilt, transformed, extended, and replicated in many areas of Qingdao, and residents altered them according to their own local building habits. The 1930s, especially, witnessed an incredible building boom as many new migrants arrived and new *Liyuan* houses were built. Their architectural styles are thus difficult to ultimately pinpoint and it is probably most accurate to say that their emergence was

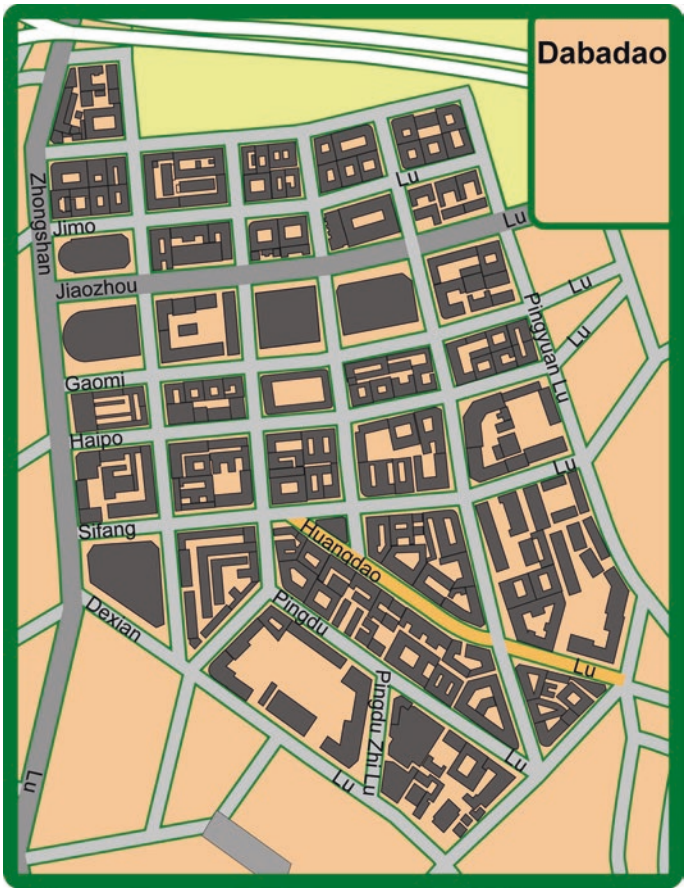

Fig. 10.1 Map of Dabaodao (by Ulf Etzold)

a historical accident, a product of experimentation, rather than a result of conscious architectural planning and design.

Even though *Dabaodao* (and most of its *Liyuan* houses) survived the Maoist and reform years, it has largely remained socially and spatially marginal. Courtyards today are seriously run-down and overcrowded; they lack private washroom or kitchen facilities, in-house tap water, and central heating. Many residents use old-fashioned wood burning furnaces as heaters and to boil water. Typical for many of China's inner cities, resi-

Fig. 10.2 A Liyuan Courtyard in 2012 (by the author)

dential composition and ownership structures are complex. Residents are mix of the urban poor, which includes unemployed and laid-off workers, the retired and disabled, landless suburban farmers, and rural migrants (Wang 2004; Wu et al. 2010). Owing to a government scheme in the late 1990s that allowed residents to purchase their former work-unit housing at heavily subsidized prices, rooms inside *Liyuan* courtyards are now predominantly privately owned. However, owners often rented them out to short- or long-term migrants, who then sometimes sublet them to third parties. According to my surveys, about 70% of current residents are migrants with rural household registration (hukou).[4] The remaining 30% consist of local people who failed to benefit from China's economic reforms and the scaling-down of the state-owned economy in the 1990s. Although they had legitimate city residence, when made de facto unemployed, they were forced to survive in the free market, which often meant working in the informal economy (Solinger 2002). In this article, I focus on the minority group of local residents who, owing to their status as

official urban residents, are entitled to monetary or other compensation in the event of housing expropriation. Migrants, as renters of rooms in *Dabaodao*, are not entitled to compensation nor are they seen as rightful occupants; thus they rarely have a voice in negotiations over redevelopment or preservation practices. Accordingly, while the marginal position of migrants in the general context of urban redevelopment in China certainly deserves anthropological attention, it is not of immediate interest here, as the impacts of the preservation discourse affect primarily the 30% of official urban residents.

The "Voyeurs"

Following de Certeau, I call those who want to preserve *Dabaodao* the "voyeurs". Even though there exist fundamentally different ideas and narratives among preservation advocates, they are united in their predominant concern for the area as a physical entity. The urban plan, the city map, the history book, the old photograph, or the historical document serve as "portholes" through which they look down at *Dabaodao*, but without having to ever really engage with the current socio-spatial reality on the ground. This needs to be understood in the context of China's changing "preservation-oriented development" regime.

Dabaodao and *Liyuan* are officially designated as a so-called "historic and cultural city district" (*lishi wenhua jiequ*) in municipal preservation plans, but they are not on the list of sites officially protected by the state (*wenwu baohu danwei*). The various government-led projects designed to upgrade and "preserve" *Dabaodao* over the past ten years largely followed the above-described logic of commodification and displacement. When I was doing fieldwork in 2012, for instance, the project under way was called "European-style scenic neighbourhood". Its goal was to turn *Dabaodao* into a tourist and consumer space, featuring a "24 hour entertainment district", a "creative arts district", and an "area for local folk customs" with small boutiques, youth hostels, coffee shops, and bars lining the streets, as I learnt from a local planning official. The project tried to emulate explicitly other economically successful inner city redevelopment projects across China, for example, Shanghai's *Xintiandi* area, but

to market its own distinctiveness. "We need to create something like *Xintiandi*," a member of staff of Qingdao's Urban Planning Bureau told me in an interview, "Qingdao has been consulting Shanghai on how to properly carry out preservation work; we want to do it like they did," he said. This "Xintiandi-ization" was an important discourse among officials and planners. "Preservation" in this context meant the careful moulding of the old centre into assets of economic capital in the form of sites for consumption, while paying meticulous attention to the aesthetics of "the old". Whether the original buildings were truly preserved or not thus mattered less than whether they looked "original" and "old".

But there were also other official narratives. During fieldwork, officials and planners often drew connections between preservation and "softer" forms of urban development. "The old town and its old architecture represent our historical memory that we need to cherish and thus strictly preserve, making every effort to display the special characteristics of our city and speed up the process of creating a liveable city" (People's Daily 2010). This is what Qingdao's current Party Secretary said right after he was appointed in 2010. I often came across such statements. Once, I found myself in the sterile-looking specially set-up "Redevelopment Office" on the 39th floor of a high-rise, towering above and looking down upon the red-tiled roofs of old Qingdao, literally like de Certeau's "voyeur". Mr. Lu, the head of the office, ushered me into a conference room and we began chatting informally about the current project. "We need to preserve a piece of memory of our city; this project is not about money, it is about culture; we want to give something to the people". Mr. Lu deployed the entire range of "politically correct" statements about how an inner city redevelopment project should be carried out today. These are indicative of a gradual shift in China's general urbanization outlook, including a turn away from rent-seeking and displacement under the pretext of preservation more towards "genuine" forms of preservation. This shift reflects policy changes, but needs to also be seen in the light of an increasing pluralization and diversification of the planning process, especially a growing heritage consciousness among the general public.

In Qingdao, like in many other Chinese cities, citizens from a wide spectrum of professional backgrounds have come to care about history

and the past of "their" city. They include historians, architects, photographers, writers, journalists, white-collar workers, civil servants, police officers, and even lower-level government officials; I call them "old-town protectors". They were not directly involved in or affected by the redevelopment project but, driven by a certain degree of nostalgia and in a reaction to previous forms of destructive urban development, they actively advocated for what they considered to be "authentic" ways of preserving *Dabaodao*. To them, authenticity referred to seeking correct and truthful historical narrative and knowledge and carrying out preservation accordingly. "Cultural heritage is the solidification of history", as one informant phrased it.

"Old-town protectors'" and the government's ideas of heritage preservation followed very different cultural-political logics. In fact, the majority of "old-town protectors" denounced the government-led "preservation-oriented" project as a distortion of history and reality. They often referred to contemporary urban planning in general and Qingdao's preservation activities in particular as "fake" and "only profit-oriented". But the different narratives and discourses were nevertheless intertwined in that the government's changing position pertaining to preservation allowed the popular preservation discourse to mushroom. Moreover, the state has even welcomed a moderate degree of civic participation in the debates over preservation vs. demolition. The result, however, has been that the now-established popular heritage discourse has also directly informed and influenced the official one. "Old-town protectors" were quite skilful in utilizing the media and their personal connections to the political system to lobby decision-makers and pressure them to deliver "authentic" preservation. A local university professor who was acting as an advisor to the city government in redevelopment questions once told me how city-level officials expressed their worry about "public outrage" during a government meeting that he attended. "The officials are extremely cautious not to do anything wrong." By "wrong" he was referring to the demolition of buildings that the wider public regarded as historical and in need of protection. We can thus regard "old-town protectors" as "policy entrepreneurs", those who wriggle their way into policy-making and even help shape policy outcomes (Mertha 2009: 996). This apparent pluralization of urban planning and the discursive room available for citizens to not only partake in

the debates about redevelopment, but to even directly influence decision-makers, can be viewed as a commendable aspect of China's changing urbanization ideology. But on the flipside, as a result of the ongoing debates about how to "correctly" preserve *Dabaodao* and its architecture, the official redevelopment project to create a "European-style scenic neighbourhood" ran into a deadlock and was eventually scrapped. This, as I move on to discuss, has had repercussions for inner city residents and points to some fundamental contradictions attending China's changing preservation discourse.

The "Walkers"

The residents of *Dabaodao* are "the walkers", those living inside of today's inner city. For example, my neighbour, Brother Dragon, was born and raised in *Dabaodao* in the 1950s, the youngest of six children in a room of 10 m^2. His entire youth was "wasted" during the Cultural Revolution. He saw Red Guards smashing the windows and crosses of Qingdao's Catholic Church and witnessed "counterrevolutionaries" being humiliated inside the courtyard. He never really went to school and, as a teenager, he was sent down to the countryside (*xiaxiang*). Upon his return he could not find a job and began helping his parents run a street food stall. Later, he worked for a business selling and fixing air-conditioners, but had to quit because of a leg injury. China's emergent private economy and the new labour market had no room for people like him. There was an abundance of younger and more qualified personnel who clearly had the edge over people like Brother Dragon who had not even completed primary school education. He has since been living off a small disability annuity, but constantly considers ways to make some extra cash on the side.

A different story is that of "Baldy", an unemployed welfare recipient in his sixties. I interviewed him in February, just before Chinese Spring Festival. His sparsely decorated room was bitter cold, with no heating or air-conditioning, only a bed, a TV, a closet, and a desk. Baldy drank a lot, empty beer bottles were piling up outside his door, and the air was filled with cigarette smoke. This room was his former work-unit housing. Like

many others, he had purchased it at a subsidized rate. It was the only "valuable" he possessed. In the 1980s and early 90s, after he had been laid-off, he jobbed "here and there", he told me. His most recent job had been as a security guard at one of Qingdao's universities, but because of his bad health, he was made redundant. He suffered from various diseases, including rheumatism.[5] Baldy showed me a crumpled piece of paper from a hospital proving that he was "disabled", as he put it. "I cannot work because I am handicapped. But they (the government) don't care about us poor people here. I cannot even pay for medical treatment".

Mr. Wang, another resident of *Dabaodao*, also lost his secure job in the late-1990s and was later on employed as a security guard at the Qingdao Urban Planning Bureau. He lived together with his unemployed wife, his Down syndrome sister, his mother, and a daughter in her early twenties. They shared two rooms of around 10 m^2 each. The pay in his new job was nowhere near enough to feed his family, so his wife had to work as a cleaning lady. Their daughter also found a job as a low-level white-collar worker at a company in Qingdao's *Laoshan* district. She had to travel almost two hours to and from work everyday. This was a common fate of families affected by the downsizing of the state economy.

Brother Dragon, Baldy, and Mr. Wang's family associated *Dabaodao* not with a distant and detached history, but with the concrete socio-spatial reality after 1949, specifically the later Maoist years and China's reform period. They generate narratives of marginalization and having been left behind in a rapidly changing urban environment. Baldy once said to me: "Those who had any kinds of skills or qualifications moved out (of the neighbourhood) as soon as they could. Only people like us, the poorest of the poor, stayed behind. *Mei banfa*," he sighed loudly. Almost all of the local residents I talked with expressed the strong feeling of "having been left behind". *Mei banfa* means "there is nothing to be done" and it became the most commonly heard phrase, followed by "*dengzhe kan ba*" which means "let's wait and see". These were articulations of resignation that served to express how residents saw their own future and that of their current living environment.

The relationship between residents and *Dabaodao* was heavily influenced by this feeling and can perhaps best be described as ambivalent.

This ambivalence could manifest itself in various ways. Brother Dragon's room, for instance, was on the second floor, in the corner of our courtyard. It did not have a window, only a skylight. Brother Dragon was what one would call streetwise; he knew how to get by. Whenever I went over to his room, there would be something new; he had built yet another new shelf, found and repaired an old TV set, suspended a punch bag from his ceiling for exercise or installed a new powerful fan. Brother Dragon used his room and the courtyard environment creatively. He had replaced the original wooden door with a solid steel door and partitioned his room into two areas, an entrance area, which he used as a cooking space, storage, a toilet (a sink attached to a tube that led into the communal stone pit on the ground floor), and to raise a large dog that he usually kept in a tiny iron cage. The other area was his bedroom, living, 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. The ambivalent relationship between Brother Dragon and his small room, the courtyard, the entire neighbourhood could always be sensed. "You know, buildings are like human life, they are ephemeral," he said to me one of the first times we talked. "If they decide to demolish this place, I will not have any hard feelings." But his opinion appeared to be equally ephemeral. A few weeks later he said: "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."

Feelings of rejection and attachment often lay close together. Expressions of anger and discontent were common and sometimes also directly translated into the negligence of public space. Quite a number of residents displayed a kind of "what do I care?!" attitude with regard to the courtyard environment. But this anger was also often paired with a strong sense of place-attachment and belonging. When Brother Dragon's parents died, he inherited the courtyard room. His three elder sisters had married out, one of his brothers died, and the other one gone "to work in other parts of China". "My parents gave the room to me, because I did not have the means to work outside, as my siblings did," Brother Dragon explained. "Living here often reminds me of my parents," he added fondly. Many local residents nostalgically recounted how things were "totally different, much better, in the past". Of course, the notion of the "good past" needs to be very much understood in the context of the dis-

satisfaction about the present and the fact that China's political and economic transformations turned one of the most egalitarian countries into an extremely stratified one within a very short period of time (Goodman 2014). "Before, we were all just poor" a *Dabaodao* resident once said to me. The act of invoking the notion of a "better past", however, also reinforced the feeling of indignation in regard to the present (Lee 2007: 140). It made many residents aware in a rather direct way that they were indeed the "residue", living at the margins and assuming a backward position in a society that has been moving forward at an unprecedented pace. Mr. Shan, a retiree who has lived in *Dabaodao* for 40 years, 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." A different resident said, "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."

Important to understanding local residents' feelings is also that *Dabaodao* was for many years portrayed as "unliveable" and "in need of upgrading" in official discourse. The government's paternalistic redevelopment rhetoric conveyed the possibility for residents to experience an improvement in their living conditions *as a result* of redevelopment. For the most recent project, for example, a family living in a room between 25 and 40 m^2 in size could obtain over 700,000 yuan (around €100,000)[6] plus various bonuses as compensation if they moved out within a certain time period. This sum would not be sufficient to buy a new apartment, let alone in an area as centrally located as *Dabaodao*. But it would be more than the majority of local residents have ever had at their disposal. It would be wrong to reduce residents' relationships with their current living space to this tangible benefit; but it is certainly an important factor, particularly because so many other people have, over the past decades, significantly benefitted from housing eviction and redevelopment in Qingdao and in other Chinese cities. So local residents would sometimes ask rhetorically: "Other people all benefitted from redevelopment, why shouldn't we?!" The constant talk about redevelopment fuelled residents' expectations, but waiting for it to happen caused a great deal of frustration. Once, an informant got up during an interview and took out a pack

of crumpled newspaper cuttings that he had collected underneath a chair cushion. The first one dated back to 2006; the latest one was from 2012. All talked about the launch of the redevelopment project. Showing them to me made him even angrier; he was furious: "See! It's all just empty talk! They have been promising things for years. But nothing has happened"! Many residents felt irritated by the talk about redevelopment that never concretized.

Residents saw a direct correlation between the current developmental stagnation and the existing preservation discourse. Thus, many regarded with considerable dislike the increasing number of experts, officials, historians, and photographers lingering about the neighbourhood and voyeuristically trying to capture a moment of "true Qingdao culture". Numerous times while carrying out interviews or informally asking questions, an informant would suddenly burst out in anger, telling me that I was wasting my time, that there was nothing to do anyway and that the whole place should just be knocked down.

The Effects of "Heritagization"

Clearly, the "voyeurs" ("old-town protectors" and the government) and the "walkers" (local residents) generate very different kinds of narratives about the history, meaning, and present usages of *Dabaodao* and its *Liyuan* courtyards. "Old-town protectors" focus their attention on a more distant past, mainly the time before 1949. Local residents, in contrast, associate *Dabaodao* with the time *after* "Liberation" and so residents' stories and memories begin precisely (not to say ironically) when the narratives of historians end. Furthermore, for "old-town protectors", the physical remains—the *Liyuan* courtyards and their architectural uniqueness—make today's *Dabaodao* meaningful. The same is true for the city government eager to capitalize on the old architecture for the purpose of place promotion. For local residents, however, the area is meaningful in that it is the place that they call home, but they rarely directly verbalize this meaning. Their feelings toward the area are ambivalent, influenced by negative emotions of being left behind, but also by a positive sense of place-attachment. At the same time, *Dabaodao* has an

economic meaning to local residents in that redevelopment brings with it the potential for monetary or other compensation. Lastly, regarding the use of the neighbourhood, "old-town protectors" demand authentic preservation. The government wants to create a place for cultural consumption and tourism. Local residents, on the other hand, use the area in their daily lives and transform it accordingly.

In the dominant preservation discourse, the social reality in the inner city and the fact that it remains a place for the urban poor is largely absent. Some "old town protectors" did display an awareness of local residents' struggles and also saw the need to include them into preservation activities. However, in their attempts to save *Dabaodao* from commercialization, the most pragmatic and promising strategy vis-à-vis the local government was to appeal to the architectural value of *Liyuan* houses. Ideas of local distinctiveness and historical value fed into the government's notion of city-branding and thus found resonance among officials. As a result of this exclusive focus on architecture, however, residents were often merely regarded as a necessary evil that had to be dealt with. Genuine attempts to include residents in the preservation activities did hardly exist. "How do you think the problem of residents can be solved"? I was asked this question numerous times but always struggled to answer it, because "the problem of residents" implied that current ways of using the inner city were incompatible with the attempts to preserve it. Indeed, some "old-town protectors" and government agents frequently labelled residents' ways of using the neighbourhood as "destructive", because they actively transformed their living space and thereby the courtyard environment and thus an artefact that was of historical significance, in the eyes of preservation advocates.

Moreover, the stagnation and failure of the redevelopment project have adversely affected residents in a number of ways. Many expressed their willingness to invest some of their own time and money to repair and improve their homes. But the insecurity, in particular the lack of information with regard to whether and when the city government might launch the project, prevented them from doing so. "Why would I spend my money and waste my time on renovating my place, if they suddenly decide to knock it down next year"? More than one resident expressed this concern. Accordingly, the failure to act on the redevelopment

announcements over and over again not only caused a great deal of discontent, but dangling out hopes to residents also contributed to the further disintegration of infrastructure and an overall "messy" environment, for which residents were then blamed by "old-town protectors" and government officials.

Finally, previous forms of urban redevelopment in China based on demolition and relocation may have been violent and often inhumane, but for potential evictees, the situation was straightforward. As a local informant once explained, "at least, in the past the situation was clear: they come in, you negotiate, you take the money and you are gone." Now, as the current redevelopment project has failed over the ongoing debates as to how to carry it out "properly", residents are forced to live a life of uncertainties, not knowing when, whether and under what conditions they may have to move out or will experience an improvement in their living environment.

Conclusion

"In the end, preservation is always better than demolition!" This is what an "old-town protector" concluded after a long conversation revolving around the question as to how to deal with *Dabaodao*. Quite contrary to this claim, rather than regarding the wish to preserve as an unquestioned positive aspiration, in this chapter I have argued for the necessity to carefully evaluate the meanings and impacts of preservation in specific sociocultural contexts. The specific context that I have presented here points to the following problematic situation: We witness a pluralization and diversification of the preservation debate in Qingdao. More people take an active interest in questions of preservation and also have ways to influence decision-makers. But the exclusive focus on the preservation of architecture on the part of the government and "old town protectors" has largely excluded the urban poor living inside the inner city. Following the title of this chapter, at one end of the spectrum residents of *Dabaodao* live in a "past" that manifests itself through architectural remnants and is celebrated as cultural heritage; at the other end, however, they live in a "past" that is a by-product of previous political and economic reforms

and residents are merely regarded as a necessary evil. Furthermore, the stagnation of the redevelopment project has subjected residents to greater precarity and uncertainty pertaining to the future of their homes and ultimately their own lives. So I argue that the exclusive focus on architectural preservation does not do justice to the actual experiences, feelings, and expectations of local residents and even stands in the way of a more inclusive debate on finding a way of dealing with inner city problems based on its social functions and the needs of current residents. These needs, however, as the article has also pointed out, are difficult to reconcile with any attempts of preservation. Due to China's previous urban redevelopment practices, many residents associate redevelopment primarily with economic benefits. They feel that they are rightfully entitled to profit from redevelopment in the same way as other people in China have over the past years. Considering this then, it is indeed difficult to think of other, perhaps more participatory or inclusive forms of preservation that may actually do justice to residents' needs. So the final message that this article conveys is not that preservation is detrimental per se, but rather, that China's previous urban redevelopment regime has created conditions that make any forms of preservation difficult to achieve, which in turn also hints at the challenges China will be facing in managing its urban future.

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Notes

1. It was the name of a fishing village located in the area before the Germans occupied it.
2. Screen walls were erected at entrances inside courtyards to shelter the interior from the prying eyes of outsiders.
3. Based on data provided by informants.
4. China's *hukou* system came into being in its current form in the 1950s (Fan 2008). It divides the entire country into two groups: those holding a

rural and those holding with an urban household registration. The goal was to prevent the rural population from flooding into cities. An urban *hukou* offers significant advantages in terms of welfare, benefits, and subsidies. Since membership in either group is assigned at birth and inherited from the mother, Potter and Potter (1990: 296) refer to this birth-ascribed stratification as displaying "caste-like features".

5. Chronic illnesses have been identified as one major cause of impoverishment in China, especially among retirees (Wu et al. 2010: 105).
6. As of December 2016, 1 yuan equalled 0.14 Euro.

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