

Undergraduate Initiative Grant Application
December 16, 2015
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Documenting the Spatial Reconfiguration of Dujiangyan City after 2008 Sichuan Earthquake

I seek funds to cover half of the expenses for my 2-week winter term trip to Sichuan province, China, to document the spatial reconfiguration of Dujiangyan city (just west of Chengdu, the provincial capital) in the urban reconstruction and renewal process after the devastating 2008 Sichuan earthquake. The Department of Anthropology has approved funding for half of my proposed budget.

Background and Rationale

My thesis explores the reconstruction of the western Sichuan city of Dujiangyan (都江堰) after China's devastating 2008 Sichuan earthquake. My research focuses mainly on the political, economic and cultural implications of the spatial reconfiguration of the city in the reconstruction process. The local and central government discourse on reconstruction and post-quake development emphasizes modernization, internationalization and upgrading the tourist industry in the earthquake zone. I'm interested in understanding how the local government interprets these agendas, how city planning and tourism development plans reflect them, and how the new spaces in the city center (reconstructed buildings, plazas, and museums) instantiate a complex vision of a more modern and international Dujiangyan with uncertain implications for residents.

Dujiangyan is a county-level city with a population of 600,000 located in Sichuan, China, under the jurisdiction of the provincial capital Chengdu. It was heavily hit by the 8.0M Sichuan earthquake in May 2008. The reconstruction of Dujiangyan offers an interesting case to study the subsequent government-led development of a disaster-hit city in late-socialist China. Instead of simply reconstructing the destroyed buildings, the local government developed an elaborate plan to change the spatial configuration of the old town, build a new city center at Juyuan town, and integrate more rural areas into the city. More than 60 percent of the buildings in the urban area were damaged to a medium or severe degree (Dujiangyan gazetteer, 2011: 113), and the rural area had a larger percentage of buildings severely damaged or destroyed. The city was much in need of emergency housing and reconstruction. Instead of restoring or rebuilding the buildings on their original locations, the government used the earthquake as an opportunity to push through the development plan of restructuring and transforming the city into a more "modern" and "international oriented" tourist destination. Along with the city plan and the construction of a new city center, the government planned to reduce the population of old town by half to make room for tourists and encouraged the residents to move to the new center.

At the moment, my primary sources are two official gazetteers on earthquake relief and reconstruction in Dujiangyan, online media reports, online forums and maps of Dujiangyan before and after the earthquake. However, the gazetteers are written from the government's perspective and serve as documents that produce knowledge about the earthquake and offer specific ways to commemorate the disaster. The maps do not clearly

label the specific buildings and the street views are not available. It is also hard to know how the local residents interact with the spaces in the reconstructed city based on archives and online research. Therefore, I propose to go to Dujiangyan and observe the spatial configuration of the city and people's interactions with the spaces, especially the old city center, the new city center, and *yijiequ*, a residential area reconstructed with the support of Shanghai city government.

Project Description

My thesis focuses on the spatial politics of city planning and reconstruction, and the connection between the construction of space and memory. How does the new city planning reflect the concept of modernity in central state-led development discourse? To avoid universalizing "modernity", it is also important to analyze how notions of modernity are materially instantiated through the reconstruction. How does the new spatial configuration of the old town attempt to reconcile "tradition" and "modernity"? How do the residents negotiate with the spatial changes through their daily interactions with the city, and in what ways are they forced to change their use of the space? Most specifically: How are new tourism spaces reconfiguring urban life? How do they attempt to reconfigure memory and history? Both commercial real estate companies and the city of Shanghai were involved in the city planning and reconstruction projects. In what ways were they involved and who benefits most from the reconstruction projects and the further development of tourism? I propose to obtain more primary sources to explore these questions through documenting the spatial reconfiguration of Dujiangyan during my two-week stay there.

Dujiangyan was already a popular tourist destination before the earthquake because of its status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Places of interest include the currently in use Dujiangyan irrigation system, which dates back to 256 B.C.E., and the Qingcheng Mountain, famous for its Taoist temples. Yet central government discourse on post-quake reconstruction revolves almost solely around the economic development through upgrading the tourist industry and the incorporation of the traditional cultural heritage with a "modern" city. One online media report based on interviews with government officials shows the government's intention to preserve the traditional style of the old town while constructing a new and modern city center in Juyuan town (Xinmin Weekly, 2008). Due to its geographic proximity to the provincial capital Chengdu, Dujiangyan began to promote itself as a vacation destination and a satellite city offering entertainment, relaxation and nature reserves for the residents of Chengdu after the earthquake. In a news article on Sichuan Daily, the official CPP newspaper at province level, Dujiangyan is described as aiming at becoming the "Long Island of Chengdu" (Sichuan Daily, Aug. 2014). Further, the city government has also developed multiple theme travel routes to attract more tourists, aiming both at domestic and international markets.

Methodology

The short timeframe of anthropology senior theses do not allow for the longterm rapport-building and immersion required for true ethnographic fieldwork. Instead, I will make the most of my winter break by using a limited form of participation observation for a highly focused two-week visit to document changes in urban space. This will allow

me to collect primary sources that would be impossible to obtain online. Such sources will thus deepen my capacity to analyze the cultural politics of post-earthquake urban construction in my thesis.

During my two-week visit to the city, I will document this ongoing reconfiguration of urban space in Dujiangyan through three main activities: 1) walking observation of public spaces and building, documented through note-taking, map-drawing and journaling; 2) photographing urban spaces and signs such as construction and propaganda billboards portraying the imagined city and blueprints of urban spaces; 3) collecting ephemera and archival sources such as tourist brochures, travel maps, and city planning documents.

Based on my preliminary thesis research, I intend to focus on documenting the spatial configuration of five areas in Dujiangyan—the old city center, the new city center at Juyuan Town, the residential area of *yijiequ*, the Earthquake Relief and Reconstruction Memorial Museum and the Hongkou Shenxigou Earthquake Memorial Site. I will be drawing detailed maps of these places, taking photos and videos, observing people's interactions with the space while participating in the daily activities on the streets, and recording my personal experience, feelings and emotions as participant in these spaces.

I plan to first find a high spot to have a bird's-eye view of the area and sketch out a map of the space to familiarize myself with its configuration. Then I will walk around all the main streets in the areas while taking photos or videos to get a general sense of the space. I will identify potential observation spots such as streets with commercial space like stores and restaurants, markets, shopping malls, tourist sites, and plazas. I will pay special attention to construction billboards, advertisements for tourist sites, billboards and slogans pertaining to government policies, sculptures, and monuments. I will also observe the architectural style, the contents of stores and the price of products to understand how the city space in tourist areas is designed to cater to tourists' needs and promote the city image, and how these factors influence local residents' interaction with such space.

Another interesting aspect of the reconstruction is that Shanghai was paired up with Dujiangyan to help design some areas in need of reconstruction and carry out reconstruction projects by contracting with construction companies from Shanghai. The construction billboards will reveal more about the companies that benefited from these projects and offer material to analyze the discursive and visual portrayal of the relationship between the two cities in reconstruction projects. I will also analyze how these goals and strategies are reflected in the discourse and images of tourist brochures and other propaganda material in the city.

I will spend 2 to 3 days on average at one location that I propose to observe and alternate between different observation spots during the day. Further, I will attempt to observe one spot at different times during the day for a more accurate understanding of people's use of the place.

Juyuan City Center

Before the earthquake, the local government had already been planning on transforming Juyuan County, a place far from the old city center in the eyes of local residents, into the new city center, where many of the displaced old town residents would be placed (Xinmin Weekly, 2008). The earthquake only accelerated the process and offered a legitimate reason for the demolition of certain areas and remodeling the city space based on the need of tourist industry. However, the demolition of buildings and the

relocation of residents were not simply forced onto the residents. There were many negotiations going on between the residents and the government, and my analyses focus mainly on the impact of the residents' agency on the location of reconstructed residential areas and their spatial configuration. I will observe the spatial configuration of the new city center at Juyuan and the number of residents living there and their use of the space. I will mainly focus my observation on the alleged separation of function (political, cultural and commercial functions), the design of transportation system and public transportation (configuration of streets, width of streets, pedestrian and bike lanes, parking space, etc.), connectivity with the old city center and other regions of the city, street and place names with potential symbolic meanings, the architectural style, public services available, and assess the impacts of these factors on the life quality of the residents and their interactions with the space.

Yiqiequ Residential Area

Yijiequ, a major reconstruction project headed by the Shanghai city government, is also a site of interest due to the fact that it was transformed from farmland completely based on the post-earthquake design of city planners and the Dujiangyan city government. The new area will therefore reveal visions and discourse of the ideally modern yet traditionally rooted comfortable living environment for common people. It is located at the edge of the urban area that serves as relocation housing for residents dislocated in the earthquake. The space *yijiequ* occupies used to be agricultural land and several small factories. The detailed construction plan for *yijiequ* maintains that the style of the residential area is intended to be modern and yet traditional, ecological and urban, presenting natural landscape but culturally rich, comfortable for living and convenient for employment, and both quotidian and prepared for emergency in disaster (Shanghai Tongji City Design and Research Institute, 2009: 11). I will observe how the buildings, the man-made "natural" scenery, the building style, and the spatial configuration of residential buildings, schools, recreation facilities and public services attempt to embody the design concepts. Another important component of my observation is the residents' interactions with the space. Other than a residential area, *yijiequ* is also designated as a tourist attraction because of its beautiful man-made lake and landscape. Therefore, I also intend to collect tourist brochures and advertisement billboards, observe the amount of tourists in the area, and assess their impacts and interactions with the local residents.

Earthquake Memorial Spaces

I will also observe and interact with the new memorial spaces for the earthquake in Dujiangyan to understand how these spaces narrate the events of earthquake, how they construct memory, and how the audiences react to the narratives. Dujiangyan has two earthquake memorial sites, but not many photographs and contents of the memorial spaces are available online. One is the Earthquake Relief and Reconstruction Memorial Museum in *yijiequ*, a completely reconstructed city district to the north of the old city center, and it is a "patriotic education" base that supposedly demonstrates the courage and resilience people showed in the earthquake (Dujiangyan government website, 2015). Another is the Hongkou Shenxigou Earthquake Relics Memorial Site, which used to be a natural reserve. After the earthquake, geological earthquake relics are preserved on the site and the natural reserve is transformed into an earthquake tourist site. I will go to the two memorial spaces, experience them as an audience member and observe other people's interactions with them. I will take photos and videos of the spaces for future

reference and analysis. If available, I will also attend the guided tour of both memorial spaces.

Contacts and Preparation

So far, I have two contacts in the Dujiangyan region and I intend to find more through them and other friends and family. Prof. Jiang Bin at the Ethnology Research Institute of Southwest Minzu University in Chengdu is my primary contact. He is a friend of my father. He has kindly offered his help and will connect me to other people in Dujiangyan. He has also conducted research related to reconstruction after the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, so he will also be able to offer me some valuable academic advice during my time in Dujiangyan. The other contact is a friend of my friend. She is from Chengdu, but she sometimes also lives in Dujiangyan. She will show me around the city and potentially offer more contacts for me.

Anticipated Outcomes

- 1) The data gathered during the short term fieldwork will contribute to my thesis as an important component of my primary sources.
- 2) Based on my photographic work in the city, I will produce a photo essay on the spatial politics of post-earthquake urban reconstruction in Dujiangyan for submission to the new Department of Anthropology student-run journal, *Radicle: Reed Anthropology Review*.

Chinese proficiency

I am a native speaker of Mandarin Chinese. Although the Sichuan dialect is different from Mandarin, the two dialects are mutually intelligible, and most people speak Mandarin in Dujiangyan.

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