

Generational Difference and Spatial Mismatch of Concentrated Resettlement Communities (CRCs) in China

INTRODUCTION

The protracted discussion on rural-urban dualism featuring China's urbanization has been inconclusive given the gradualist urban transformation and adaptive reorientation of urban development policy. In this sense, China's urban landscape today is in a state of radical progress, with a constantly heightened urbanization rate being its testimony. Rural lands and sitting farmers bear the brunt of the state-led growth that incurs indigenous people's displacement and the dispossession of green lands. To address these issues, the Chinese government has gradually abandoned the "urban-biased" developmental strategy and proactively engaged with "urban-rural integration," which took shape as early as 2002. A sequence of changes has been imposed on farmers, including the transition of identity, the relocation of residence, the restructuring of social relations, and re-employment. Spatially, the proliferated resettlement communities have contributed significantly to reshaping urban fabrics, especially in the frontline areas of urbanization. While the phenomenon of concentrated resettlement communities (CRCs) has garnered widespread attention in prior research, limited attempts have been made to investigate and conceptualize the variance of CRCs that are "produced" in different stages of China's unprecedented urbanization. Given this, it is essential to add knowledge to the broad spectrum of discourse around CRCs as well as the residents of them who are, in most cases, the landless farmers expelled from their previous homeland. This paper aims at the following research questions, seeking to present and interpret the real and unique image of urban spaces that produced in post-reform China: 1) How to conceptualize the production of CRCs in relation to Henri Lefebvre's theoretical triad? 2) What are the generational differences associated with CRCs? 3) How to understand the spatial mismatch phenomenon in the context of CRCs?



RELEVANT LITERATURE

Rural to Urban Resettlement in China

Prior research has touched upon the spatial patterns of resettlement communities. Notably, resettlement communities are spatially congregated in the urban periphery mainly because these districts are in proximity to the villages encroached by urban expansion. As reported in the case study by Xu and Zhang (2017), more than three-quarters of 101 resettlement neighbourhoods they observed are outside the second ring road that usually denotes the boundary of urban core areas. The resettlement-housing, along with public housing and low-end private housing, are perceived as inferior housing types thus are distributed in suburban areas due to the bid-rent mechanism. In this vein, resettlement communities contribute to the residential suburbanization process where state power outcompetes the market forces in reshaping this spatial configuration. However, it is worth mentioning that the requisition of farmers' land may not necessarily induce the establishment of resettlement communities. In some cases, landless farmers maintain their rights over their residential plots, which leads to the hotly debated phenomenon of "urban village." Previous empirical studies have suggested a spatial cluster effect of the resettlement where landless farmers from the same village are resettled at the same CRC. The practice aims to mitigate the spatial segregation that may be incurred during the resettlement, but it fails to discern the spatial containers of the social interactions that nested the farmers in their countryside. As pointed out by Li et al. (2016), the forced upstairs farmers tend to spontaneously transform their living spaces in resettled urban communities to fit their rural lifestyle. All the above indicate farmers' marginalized position in decision-making regarding their choice of where, how, and what is the CRC.

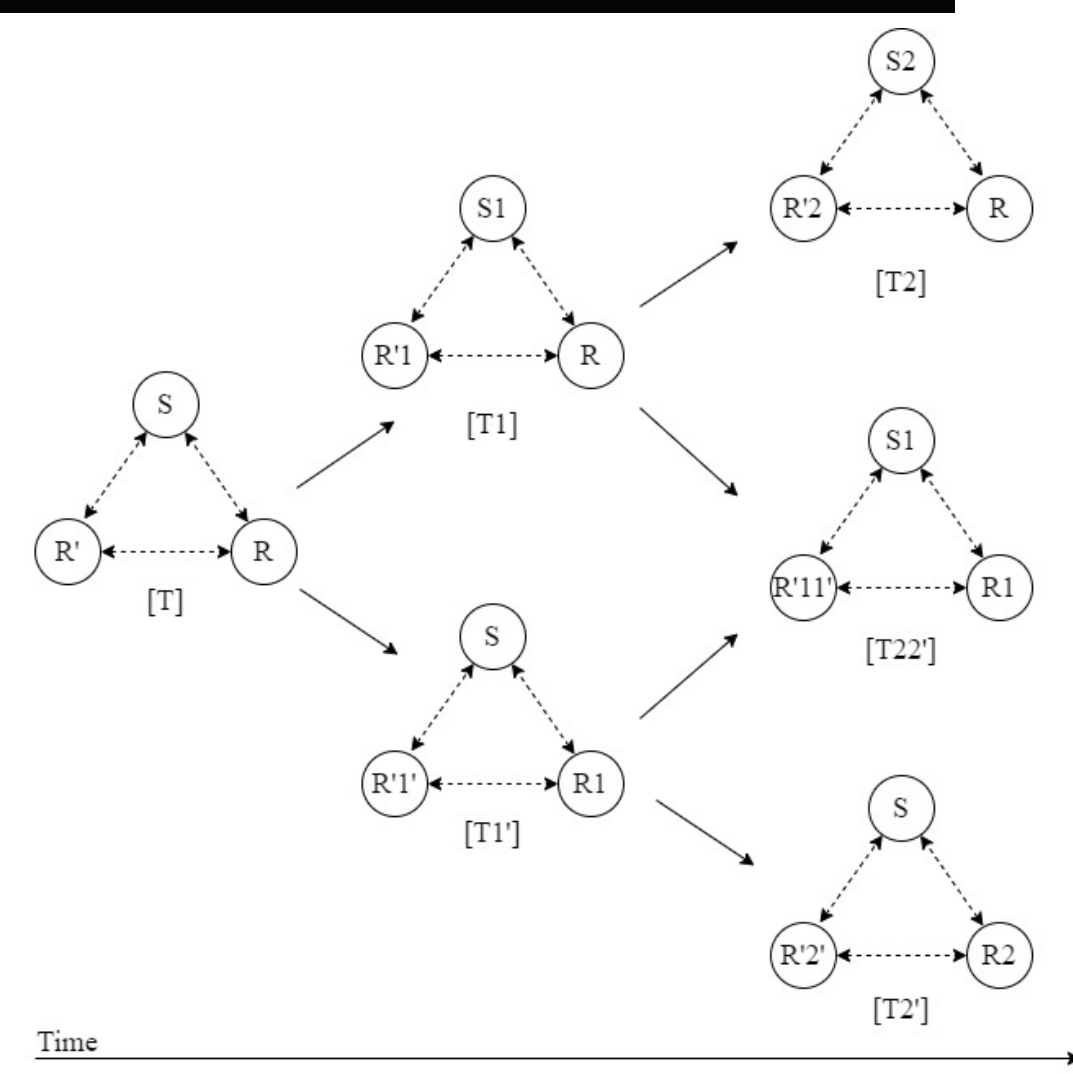
Spatial Mismatch

The spatial mismatch in Chinese cities demonstrates some discrepancies with American cities. One of the most significant is that, while in American, 'spatial mismatch' is mainly about residential centralization of race-based neighbourhoods in employment-decentralized metropolitan areas' (Xu et al. 2014), in China, the employment locations concentrate in the city centre with low-income residents dispersed in the suburb areas (Wang et al. 2011). Besides, the targeted population in American cases are focused on ethnic minority groups; therefore, racial segregation and discrimination are center to the discourse. The absence of racial issues diverts the research foci onto the disadvantaged group or under-classes in Chinese cities, primarily the laid-off workers from the state corporates and rural migrants either voluntary or involuntary. Empirical studies have shown that displaced residents often reside in urban fringe areas with some in proximity to the displacement's original places irrespective of how the compensation is negotiated (Xu & Chan 2011). This distinctive location choice arbitrarily made by the government profoundly impacts the displaced villagers' adaptation to the urban milieu. The 'spatial barrier' of the resettled concentrated communities can also spawn other side effects such as residential immobility and residential segregation (Liu, Wang, & Chai, 2010), and the relations among these aspects are under-examined in the current body of literature. Moreover, the transition from 'spatial-match' to 'spatial-mismatch' of the displaced villagers has been overlooked in prior studies considering the expropriation of farmland is accompanied by the deprivation of landless farmers' identity and occupation as 'farmer.' In retrospect to the North American suburbanization started in the 1960s, the current urbanization in China has catalyzed a new wave of spatial-mismatch and spatial restructuring in Chinese urban areas.

The Production of Space

This conceptual triad should be discerned as dynamic and evolutionary as it is based on the trio of Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche. This triad framework has been widely cited in examining the production of space of various forms and functions (Donnelly, 2017; Granzow, 2017; Hubbard & Sanders, 2003; Tynen, 2019; X. Zhou, 2019) in both capitalist countries as well as "authoritarian capitalist" China. However, there is still room to extend the discourse of space production given that much of previous research adopted a static view of the triad's application. This research seeks to capture the totality variations constructed upon the three moments and argues that the denotation of these three "moments" is constantly shifting, with new relational structures established at various stages. To wit, if we permit certain periods, the spatial practice may change in accordance with the society either due to advancement in productivity or increase of social mobility. By the same token, the representation of space is subject to the knowledge shift and the technocratic creators' aesthetics disposition. Therefore, the lived spaces are exposed to the changing conditions of representations as well as sharp turns of social practices, which leads to representational space shifts even for one certain type of space production, such as CRCs.

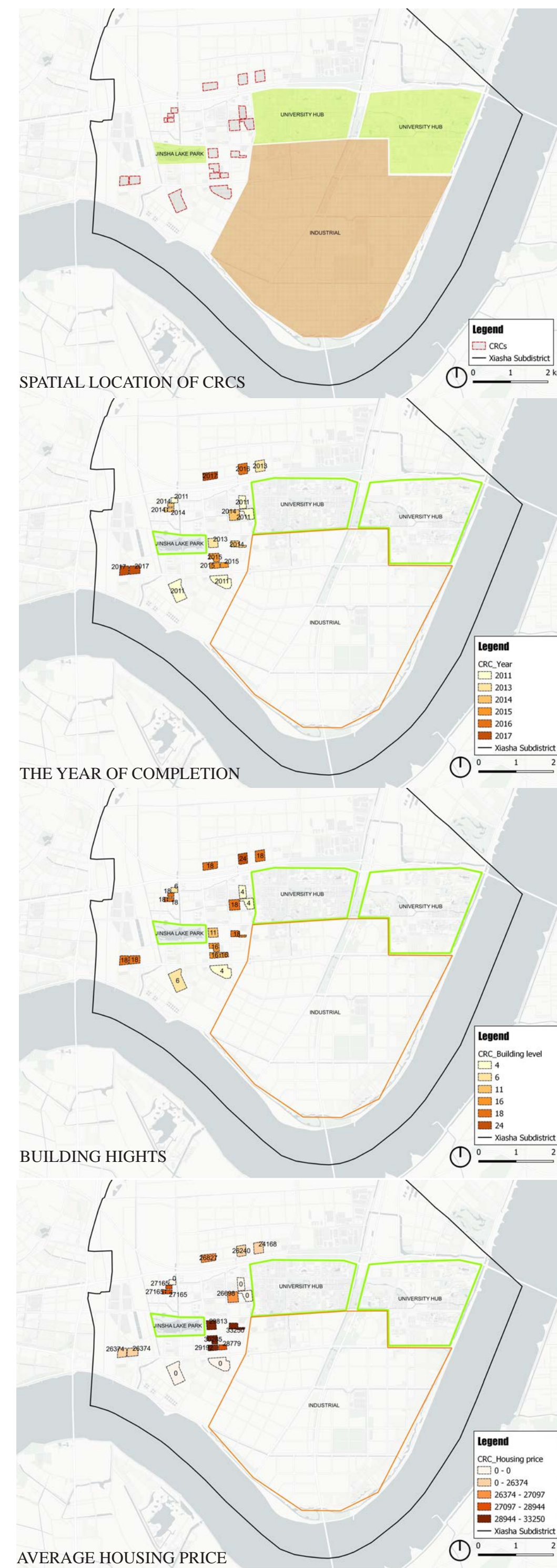
Conceptual Framework



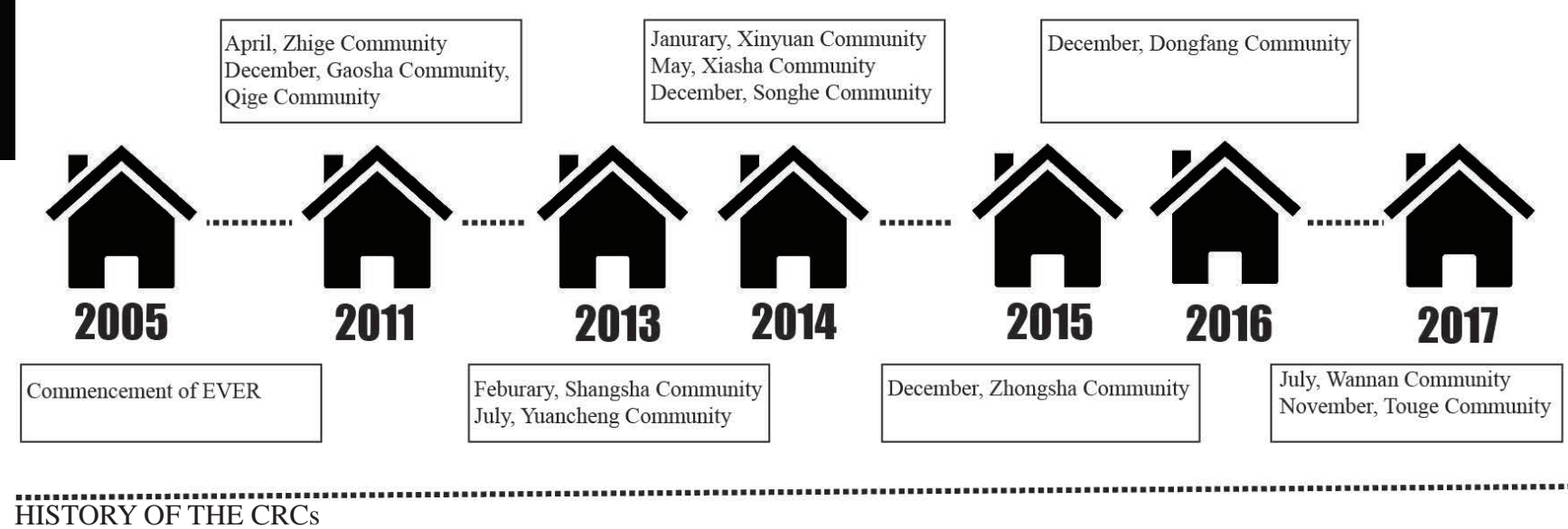
Lefebvre constantly reiterates one important point in his book that the production is "in fact, a process" (Lefebvre & Nicholson-Smith, 1991, p. 34). This fundamental thought is the evoking point of this research: to view CRCs' production in China from a developmental perspective. The specific social space of a given society is not a work of a moment, but one results from "contradictions in the social relations." In the same vein, we argue here the three components of the theoretical triad, or at least two of them, are not fixed, and the shift of each element in time can lead to a new composition of the triad. To illuminate this production process, we propose a conceptual framework to depict the various alternatives/scenarios of the theoretical triad in view of the progress of time. The diagram illustrates the possibilities of the theoretical triad (T, T1, T1'...), and each of the triads is composed of spatial practice (S), representation of space (R), and the representational space (R'). This diagram should be interpreted through time, which means that the social practice as well as the representation of space, are in a state of ongoing transformation or shift, to be more precise. The triad [T] is the original process of space production, where an expected R' is to be created on the interplay of S and R. However, with the spatial practice and the representation of space shifting in time (to S1, S2, and R1, R2 respectively), representational spaces are created in different manners (R'1, R'1', et cetera). In reference to this conceptual framework, we would like to make the following assumptions:

- 1) The representational space is fixed in time.
- 2) The shifts in either spatial practice or representations of space can lead to a new triad and thereof a new representational space.
- 3) The shift in spatial practice lags the shift in the representation of space.
- 4) The generational gap between the representation of space and the spatial practice can affect the former's influence on the creation of the representational space.

These assumptions are critical to understanding the production of space as a process, which will be explored later in our case study in Hangzhou. This conceptual framework presupposes a dynamic, fluid, mobile society (Sheller & Urry, 2006), where the perceived and conceived social relations are constantly changing. As such, the production of a specific typology of space can be unfolded in different process, thereby leading to an assortment of forms.



Findings



There are some findings derived from this research:

- 1) The proposed conceptual framework consolidates our understanding of the production of CRCs in Hangzhou's case. As shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2, there is a noticeable evolution of CRCs regarding their morphological and typological characteristics, such as layout, building heights and density, and functional diversity. Three typologies of CRCs are identified, namely the low-density ungated community (M1), mid-density ungated/gated community (M2), and high-density gated community (M3).
- 2) Reflecting on Lefebvre's three moments of space production, the generational differences among CRCs are clearly the interplay among the three moments of the space production. In early CRCs, those under M1, the community spaces are reshaped significantly by the residents who brought in the neighbourhood's diversity of functions. The diversification of use for ground-floor has gone beyond the imposed "representation" by the government. In this sense, early CRCs are adaptive to residents' everyday lives and flexible in space restructuring, both physically and socially. However, CRCs under M3 demonstrate a strictly-regulated landscape. To wit, with the gated management strategy, land use function inside the community is homogeneous, being exclusively the residential use. While some "informal" practices by the residents occasionally occur, the lived space has laid out in conformity with what has been designed through the top-down process. To sum, with a firmer imposition of "representation of space," the "representational space" has little room to adjust/adaptive to the residents' spatial practices in CRCs. That is to say, the former farmers must succumb to this imposed change rather than actively engaging in restructuring the space. This finding successfully responds to our assumption #4.
- 3) Although the imposed border could potentially enhance the community's solidarity, there is something easily ignored here, namely the composition of the community's residents. To wit, while the residential community is established for resettled villagers, they are not the only social group in the community. According to statistics, there are 119 CRCs with more than 70% residents as former villagers, 34 CRCs with former villagers accounted for 30% to 70%, and 38 with the proportion less than 30% (Liang, 2019). Much of the population is contributed by the "floating population," whose nomadic state is viewed as threatens to society's stability.
- 4) As noted by much prior research, strong social networks exist and cement the villagers in the countryside. However, these social connections are disconnected and ruptured through the forced upstairs. The infamous gated community with highrise apartments has long been criticized for lacking a sense of community and alienating neighbourhood communications in China. This accelerates the collapse of the original social networks, albeit residents of the community being the same group of people. Mrs. Lai, one of the villagers of the Shangsha community, expressed her concerns over the random allocation of units. She said she would have to rebuild connections with neighbours after moving to the new apartment building (Jia, 2012).

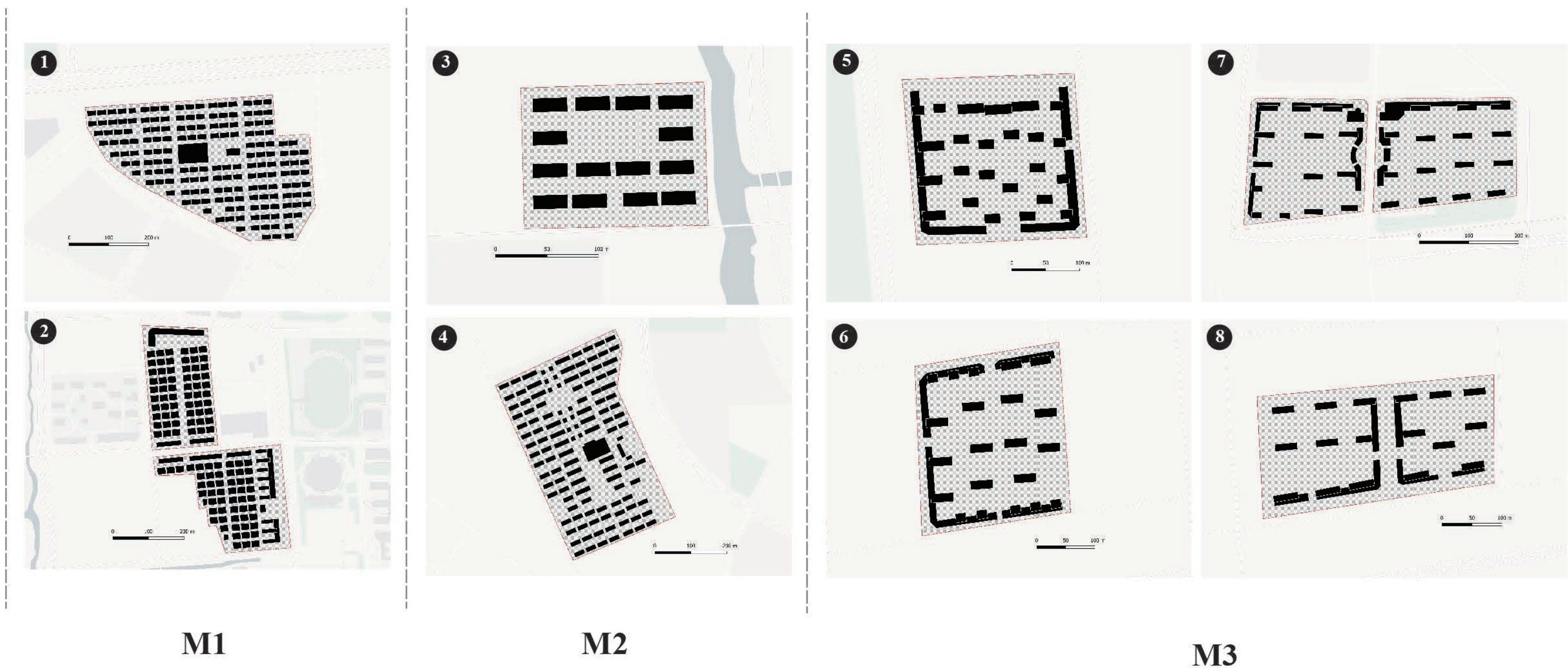


Figure 1. The morphology of different CRCs

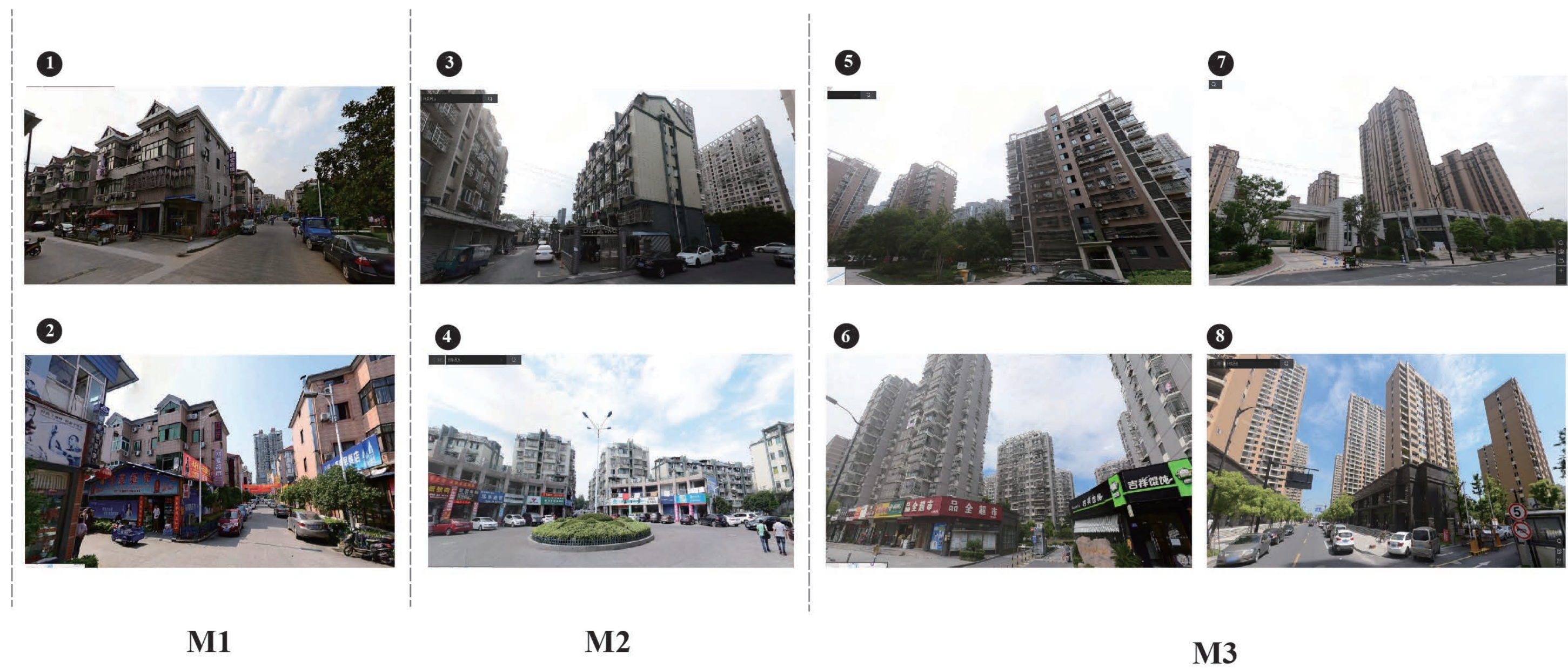


Figure 2. The streetscape image of different CRCs

Conclusion and future reserach

The triumph of urbanization is at the cost of millions of farmers' displacement and deterritorialisation. Urban resettlement in China has been the most compelling and imminent phenomenon for the sustainable development of the global future. This research makes contribution to the understanding of the production of CRCs in China, most importantly, it adds to the knowledge gap on the generational differences of the production of CRCs from a chronological manner. We have to admit here that due to the unexpected pandemic, this research is not complete at present, specifically, the subsection on the empirical study of spatial mismatch is totally missing. We are particularly interested in probing into the CRCs from the mobility and spatial mismatch perspectives, and we hope we can bring those prospective findings to future ACSP conferences.