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Mellon Foundation Area and International Studies Fellowships for Incoming Graduate Students

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In the past summer, I visited China's major cities and the western hinterland for my pre-dissertation research on the construction of residential space, history of urban planning, and reconfiguration of everyday life in the Mao era (1949-1976). My fieldwork mainly consists of three sections: (1) archival search in municipal archival halls and libraries; (2) visiting residential areas constructed in the early years of the People's Republic of China (PRC); (3) and visiting museums and interviewing senior workers about the Third Front Campaign (*sanxian jianshe*).

In Shanghai and Beijing, I looked into official archives and print media for the various ways the municipal governments sought to reconfigure everyday life in the 1950s. For example, various housing and neighborhood designs aimed at easing the shortage of housing at low cost; grassroots organizations such as the street committees mobilized housewives and restructured the otherwise impenetrable life world; new habits of life were promoted for the sake of both public health and forming new socialist identities. It is not always easy to learn the actual life of the 1950s solely through official documents. Reading into the materials, nonetheless, I encountered reports and conference records that implied how the rules were implemented and the frictions between the political world and the everyday realm.

Most of residential neighborhoods built in the first PRC decade were demolished. During my fieldwork I visited sites of over twenty such neighborhoods and found only four of them remained, one of which, Changbai No. 1 New Village in Shanghai, was to be demolished only two weeks after my visit. I was lucky enough to be able to go into the apartment buildings and talked to the residents. This physical experience of space helped to situate me in the life world back to the 1950s.

In Chengdu (Sichuan Province), Guiyang, and Liupanshui (Guizhou Province), I went to factories built during the Third Front Campaign and museums that commemorate the migration. I found narratives of the campaign bifurcated on the level of the everyday in that the official narrative in the museums glorifies diligence and solidarity of the mobilized workers, whereas memories of these workers often speak to the forced separation from their family and their choice of joining the campaign as a survival strategy.

In August 1st, I was invited as guest lecturer and gave a talk on my current study at New York University at Shanghai. I benefited tremendously from the questions, discussions, and critiques from the scholars and students during this visit.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Mellon Fellowship for allowing me the in-depth fieldwork in China, which provides abundant primary sources and helps building up the framework of my graduate project.