

江湖大逃亡

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When I first came to Wuhan around 2012, there was a bus which went directly from Lumo Road 鲁磨路 to the Wuhan Botanical Garden 植物园 in the East Lake 东湖 district. The difference between these two locations couldn't be more dramatic: Lumo Road is at the heart of the Wuchang 武昌 district, near the Optic Valley Square 光谷广场 – a never-ending construction site – while the Botanical Garden looks like the peaceful countryside, located near one of Wuhan's largest lakes, Donghu.

Surprisingly enough, both places are centers of Wuhan's underground music scene: Lumo Road was home to the legendary live-house VOX – founded by Zhu Ning 朱宁, ex-drummer of the punk band SMZB 生命之饼 – and Wuhan Prison, a punk bar managed by Wu Wei 吴维, the singer of SMZB. A lot of punks lived around East Lake due to cheap rent and proximity to the lake, where yearly competitions of tiaodonghu 跳东湖 – contestants jumping into the lake on a BMX (Bicycle Motocross) – were held. The East Lake is also near the Botanical Garden where Mai Dian 麦颠 – the guitarist of the punk bands Si Dou Le 死逗了 and 400 Blows 四百击 – opened the Autonomous Youth Center "Our House" 我们家 (similar to punk squats).

In 2010, a scandalous urban development plan of the East Lake district sparked a movement of local groups, including punks residing in the area, resisting expropriation and destruction of this natural reserve. For me, there's no better place than Donghu to represent the spirit of Wuhan. It embodies the rebellious spirit of Wuhanese people and the history of underground music tied to the city. However,

Donghu is a slowly disappearing part of Wuhan's history, replaced by luxury condos and dull amusement parks.

The Prison and the Lake

As sung by the punk band SMZB, Wuhan can feel like a "prison." The atmosphere is sometimes literally suffocating due to endless urban renewal projects and intense weather – the winter is cold and humid, and the summer is steaming hot. The city itself is huge, as it consists of three districts (in fact, three sub-cities) – Hankou 汉口, the formerly colonial and financial district of Wuhan, Wuchang 武昌, the university district where the 1911 revolution started, and Hanyang 汉阳, the industrial district. The Wuhan punk rock community was rooted in Wuchang, where punk bands had more opportunities to perform – in/near universities, for instance – and where they opened the first livehouses and bars dedicated to underground music. But when the atmosphere gets too heavy, punks usually go to Donghu, to enjoy the fresh air and to dive into the lake. SMZB has a song about Donghu, which sums up his relation to both the city and East lake, titled "江湖大逃亡" ("Runaway"), released on the 2011 album "罪和谐" (*Sin Harmony*):

打开门就是监狱,
人人都是黑社会,
太阳照在每条街上,
释放着每一种罪,
伸出脚就是江湖,
人人都身不由己,
不想再继续再做一个城市的卧底.

city escape,
the rebel bus is what we are take,
drinking and swimming in Singo beer,
diving in the East lake.

闭上眼睛向前进,

每一步都是陷阱,
每次呼吸的空气里,
都充满着所有誓言,
打开历史就在重演,
每个人都在冒险,
城市的每个瞬间都充满力量的改变.

escape, escape,
diving in the East lake.
escape, escape,
the rebel bus is what we are take.

While the city of Wuhan is comparable to a prison, Donghu is where young Wuhanese can escape, love, drink, and dive into the lake. It's not by accident that Mai Dian decided to open Wuhan's first "Autonomous Youth Center" 青年自治中心 in Donghu, near the Botanical Garden. In a 2012 article published in the journal *Chutzpah!* 天南, Mai Dian explained the process that led him to create this center:

我们需要在自己的日常生活中，找到一个地方，作为一个遇合与中介空间，流通我们的信息，讨论我们所接触到的那些行动“符码”，将之与我们自身的处境相连，进行解释，并尝试力所能及的行动。这个地方当然不是政府修建的“青少年宫”，也不是商人投资的酒吧或者咖啡馆；盘踞要想成为现实，必须先要准备好如何应对暴力。也许，我们可以参考欧洲的一些占屋者在遭到暴力驱逐后所采取的新的应对方法：租屋，或者更具探索性地组织住屋合作社 [...] 要想找到一个能够完全由自己掌控的地方，只有租。很幸运，我们在武汉一个较为僻静的城郊找到了一座因为破败无墙、环境恶劣而无人理睬的房子，用相对来说非常便宜的价钱租了下来。此屋虽然老旧，但环绕着的景致却颇具自然美，让人有一股子清凉的干劲。立马清扫尘埃，斩除野草，给房子分配功能：Info Shop, 提供我们所能收集到的社运情报和另类著述；会议室，此后一系列工作坊、讨论会、放映会都在此处进行；舞台，设在院子里，为摇滚、实验、街头流浪艺人提供场地；客房，为有所需要的人提供免费的床铺；

院子，提供篝火供朋友聚会。然后，在外墙的柱子上镶上一颗半红半黑的五角星，取一个名号——“我们家青年自治中心”。

We need a place inside our own lives, to find a space to serve as meeting place and an intermediary, to circulate information, to discuss the “symbols” of action we have encountered, to share the connectedness of our plights, to interpret it, and to attempt to act to the best of our ability. Certainly, such a place could not be a state-run “youth cultural palace.” Nor could it be a bar or a coffee shop either, which are invested by businessmen. If you want to occupy a place illegally and make it happen, you first have to be ready to deal with violence. Perhaps, we can refer to the response adopted by European squatters after being violently evicted: rent a house or organize a housing cooperative [...] If you want a place you can completely control, you have to rent it. Fortunately, we were able to find a secluded house just outside Wuhan with no walls and a harsh environment. Although the house was old, the surrounding scenery had a natural beauty we found invigorating. After cleaning out the dust and pulling the weeds, we assigned different functions to the house: it had to serve as an infoshop – a place to supply all the various alternative writings and information on social movements we could gather. A conference center – from that day forth all workshops, seminars, and film screenings would be held at the house. Also, a stage located in the courtyard – to provide a space for rock, experimental, and street artists to perform. A guest house with free beds for those in need, and a courtyard with a campfire to gather all the friends. Finally, on a pillar of the outside wall, we put a red and black five-pointed star, and gave the house a name: “Our Home Autonomous Youth Center.”¹

“Our House” was a very special place for Wuhan alternative youth, it was a space for parties, discussion, eating, film screening, which

was not run for profit but according to a certain ideal. The inhabitants of “Our House” were also committed to helping their neighborhood. Mai Dian recalls in the article that they organized a concert to raise money to build a garbage pit for the village. But in 2010, it’s an urban development scandal that will mobilize both “Our House” and the residents of the Donghu area.

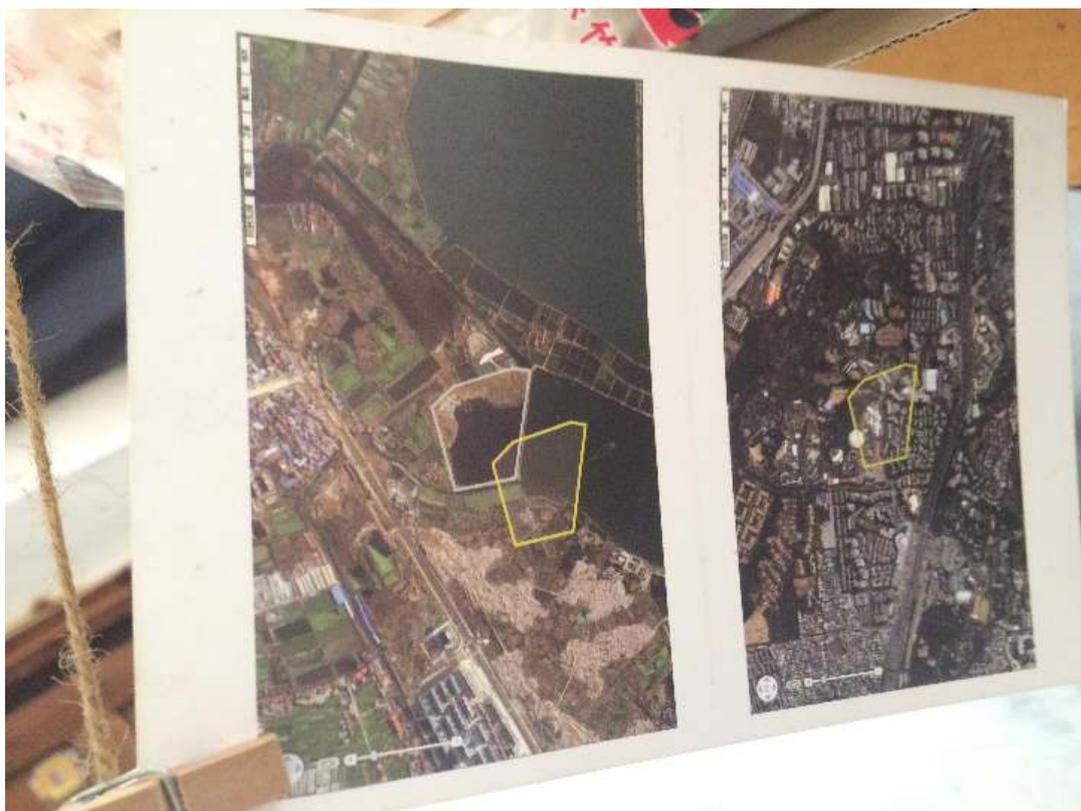
The Movement to Defend Donghu

In March 2010, an investigation published by the *Time Weekly* 时代周 revealed a corruption scandal regarding the development of the Donghu area, involving the state-owned real-estate company OCT (Overseas Chinese Town 华侨城) and the local government. According to the article published on March 25th, 2010, the local government leased a total of 3167 mu (211 hectares) to the company (including parts of the lake itself) for 4.3 billion yuan, in order to develop an amusement park, hotels, and upscale apartment buildings.² It was a very controversial lease since Donghu is a nationally protected site, and the municipal government did not get the permission from the central government to lease this protected area. On April 1st, a new article, this time published by the respected *Southern Weekly* 南方周末, criticized the environmental and social impact of the real-estate project.³ Several individuals, including Mai Dian and Wu Wei, tried to organize themselves against the real-estate development project, by “going out for a stroll” 散步, a well-known Chinese technique of protest, on April 10th. In an interview he gave in 2014, Wu Wei recalls what happened: the day before the protest, the cops showed up at his doorstep and persuaded him to call off the demonstration.⁴

If the demonstration was not the solution, “Our House” became a platform of contention against the real-estate project. Punks, activists, artists, and Donghu residents met at “Our House” to find new ways to show their anger and try to save Donghu from urban developers. They created a small community gathered around the website donghu2010.org to share their reflections and actions on the defense of Donghu. The collective “Donghu for Everyone” 每个人的东



1. The front door of "Our House" in Wuhan



2. A postcard made by “Donghu for Everyone” showing the progress of the real-estate project

湖 gathered artists, musicians, performers, students, and residents to organize artful happenings around Donghu to raise awareness on the environmental impact of the project. The website features several satellite images of Donghu throughout the years, documenting the construction and the shrinkage of the lake. “Our House” regularly organized seminars and conferences on the history of Donghu and collected oral histories of residents of the lake. Unfortunately, the Donghu for Everyone movement did not succeed in stopping the real-estate development project. Large parts of Donghu are still under construction, old residents are being evicted around the lake, and the Happy Valley amusement park 武汉欢乐谷 is now open to the public.

In 2015, the director Li Luo 李珞 released the movie *Li Wen at East Lake* 李文漫游东湖, which takes place in Donghu and features most of the Donghu activists – including Mai Dian and Wu Wei. The movie



3. A Public Lecture on Donghu Project (东湖计划) on 29 June 2014

starts by showing the different construction projects around Donghu and features interviews with old residents of the area. The director also stages a hilarious fake official committee reunion on the construction of a second airport in the Donghu area. The film then follows the fictional story of a police officer, Li Wen, who is supposed to arrest a madman who tells everyone that a dragon, who lives in East Lake, is going to wake up soon because of the destruction of his natural habitat. This movie is a testimony of the Donghu movement to stop the unnecessary destruction of the East lake area. Now that "Our House" is no more, *Li Wen at East Lake* is perhaps the best archive we have on the importance of Donghu, which is slowly fading away. Until the dragon in the lake wakes up to take back what is rightfully his.

Taipei

江湖大逃亡



4. A seminar on Donghu held at "Our House"



5. Excerpt from Li Wen at East Lake by Li Luo

Notes

1. 麦巖, 《一个朋克的基础另类教育》, 《天南》, 第 6 期, 2012 年 2 月, 106-107.
2. 《武汉华侨城开发东湖调查》, 《时代周报》, 2010 年 3 月 25 日.
3. 南方周末评论员, 《金权的东湖, 还是公共的东湖?》, 《南方周末》, 2010 年 4 月 1 日, <http://www.infzm.com/content/43317>.
4. Shayan Momin, "An Interview with Wu Wei," *The China Story*, 12 June 2014, <https://www.thechinastory.org/2014/06/an-interview-with-wu-wei/>.