



# The Decline of Living Heritage and Ontological Security: Open-Air Markets as Relational Spaces

—Exploring the decline of open-air markets in the process of urbanization in China

In today's fast-paced metropolis, it feels like we are pulling away from the hustle and bustle of the open-air markets—the real space that binds us to the land, to others, and to local knowledge.

As the rise of e-commerce and standardized supermarkets squeezes these markets out of existence, when efficiency and tidiness take center stage in urban governance, what does their decline mean: a crisis or a glimmer of hope?

From a relational space perspective, this article views the open-air market as a vessel for transmitting agrarian culture, while examining its unique role in urban resilience vitality and providing ontological security. Fieldwork shows that the open-air market has fallen into a dire state, which in turn offers us a moment for reflection.

In this age of uncertainty, there is a particular need for a well-defined existence. By probing this “small yet ontologically secure” space, the article calls for a renewed reflection on their preservation and revival.

**Key Words:** open-air markets; living heritage; ontological security; urban resilience; preservation and revival

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