Hybrid Building and Hybrid Practitioner:

Understanding and Transforming Chinese Rural Villages through Architecture of Social Engagement

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To my family

who helped me begin my journey

And

Peter Blundell Jones

in memoriam

who helped me return to my roots

Abstract

The emerging problems from the rapid rural urbanization under the top-down ideologies and approaches in contemporary China have challenged the very fundamental definitions of architecture and architects originated from the Western discourse. It is within this broader context that this thesis started from an attempt to embed a thicker interpretation of Chinese rural villages in the major debates of contemporary architecture. Through conceptualizing and exploring an alternative form of architecture, the thesis aims to understand the up-to-dated situations and seek a sustainable path to transform Chinese rural villages under the current hegemonic urbanization. The form is manifested in the twin concepts – 'hybrid building' and 'hybrid practitioner', both emerged from and rooted in the rural-urban realities in the transitional China, and provide a modus operandi for a bottom-up architecture of social engagement. The first part of the thesis briefly interrogates the accumulated past and the present realities of Chinese rural villages from political, legislative, economic, cultural and social perspectives, which constitute the immediate operating context for architectural design and engagement in all its complexities and contradictions. The second part explores and examines six selected architectural cases and their overlooked production of objects, processes and infrastructures in Chinese rural villages from 2006 to 2016, narrating an architectural modus operandi of hybridity, of engagement, and of social sustainable transformation. Based on social-anthropological field research and socially-engaged architectural action learning, the thesis concludes that hybrid building and hybrid practitioner as an alternative form of architecture will not only navigate into the system of decaying villages, but also transform it in a more socially-resilient way, by prompting architectural activisms and triggering architectural hybridity from within the very fabric of Chinese rural villages. The thesis aimed to be the first attempt to place contemporary architectural design practice in Chinese rural villages within a broader framework combining anthropology and activism.

Keywords: Chinese Rural Villages; Hybrid Building; Hybrid Practitioner; Village Revitalization; Architectural Participation; Social Engagement

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Foreword

A week before I got on the plane (my first ever flight) to Sheffield in mid-September 2012, I visited one of my built works as its project architect – it is a new campus for a high school in my hometown Hefei city in Anhui Province, China. Composing of seven buildings with a total area of more than 40,000 m^2, and located at the edge of a rapidly expanding city, the school had already been put into use for around two months even still in its final completion stage of the interior. I wandered in the school for a whole afternoon, taking photographs from different perspectives, observing students and teachers' use, and asking their opinions about the design. That unforgettable day was a mix of disappointment and empowerment. The unsatisfied part was that all the building envelopes were so roughly manufactured even without sticking to the key colours in the original drawings of construction documentation stage. I thought it was more than embarrassing for an architect witnessing years' design input destroyed by an uncontrolled delivery which took a much shorter time. The satisfied part was that, the irregular layout of this school-as-a-village opposing the prevailing school design mode in then Chinese mainstream practice was mostly achieved, although it could have only been seen clearly from the bird eye perspective making architects like a design king. The responses from the user were positive, not only from their verbal discussions and also from their joyful navigations into the irregular built form. I could strongly feel that power of architecture in terms of being built for real human use, although I was not sure at all whether my design concept and aspiration could be really understood or appreciated by the users, which survived from so many highly debated clients' meetings. At least for me this newly-built school was a familiar stranger.

What's the afterlife of a building when its architect's gone? How does that inhabitation relate to the architect and architectural design for a particular group of people at a particular moment in a particular place? The questions have remained with me throughout the past years and I returned it again and again through looking back to those vernacular architecture without architects, which endured the test of time, weather and human trace, and possibly provided the answer.

I suddenly found myself an enthusiast to vernacular architecture, after a fieldtrip to a few villages near my hometown city during my undergraduate year one. I could not express more my interests in the irregular, the organic, the messy engaged, the live, the ritual, the participation, the thicker interpretation in architecture of those vernacular villages. Then I worked as an architect in an ambitious local studio, mainly on seeking culturally-specific architectural design languages to revitalize both those vernacular elements and spirits by translating them in contemporary public and cultural buildings. After several years of cycling of very intensive designing, bidding, achieving, losing, struggling, realizing, confusing, I moved to and worked for a global practice mainly on commercial projects, clarifying my confusions on delivering visual design quality at physical scale but introducing me a new cycle of confusion, with much suspicion, on developing global solutions to solve local problems.

The journey went on to Sheffield for postgraduate study, where I soon received a PhD offer, and shifted my position and concern on architecture as a purely design-driven practitioner before. I see myself as a younger generation of witnesses to the problems of rural-urban transition in the Chinese context in the past twenty years, during which it produced as many problems as it solved. It is the empathetic response to the changing scape in homeland, to the missing link to the vernacular production of spaces and artefacts, and to the everyday lives of ordinary people and vulnerable communities in this rapid transition with contrasting values and fragile identities that brings passion and purpose to my PhD research.

Most of my past four years in the UK was spent in a building called the Arts Tower, where the School of Architecture is located. My working days in Arts Tower was counted as 361 during the year 2014; and I was always proud to be one of the first to arrive and the last to leave the Tower. Of course there's a time that life was not always easy to grant me a full concentration on my academic study, but so much gratitude from the bottom of my heart to such a valuable opportunity always drove me to follow my dream in this prestigious university. I hope I have been on a right track to seek an answer to the question now nearly at the end of my PhD journey; but I also hope I could match the honour and the title as a SSoA student.

I here share my journey with you from the following texts.

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I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those people who have been instrumental in helping me bringing this thesis into light.

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enjoyed every time I attended. I also want to address two distinguished visiting scholars, Prof. Gangyi Tan, Deputy Head of School from Huazhong University of Science and Technology, and A/Prof. Peng Luo, Deputy Head of School from Harbin Institute of Technology, for their research spirits and exchange during their time at Sheffield.

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Abbreviations

ASC	Architectural Society of China
CASS	Chinese Academy of Social Science
CTV	Chinese Traditional Villages
CTVPDSC	Chinese Traditional Villages Preservation and Development Study Centre
CPC	Communist Party of China
DRC	Development Research Centre of the State Council, China
FYP	Five-Year Plan, China (13th: 2016-2020)
HRCS	Household Responsibility Contract System, China
HRS	Household Registration System, China
LAL	Land Administration Law, China (effective 1999, amendment 2004)
LSE	London Schools of Economics and Political Sciences, UK
LVSC	Law on Village Self-Governance, China (1998)
MOHURD	Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of the People's Republic of China
NUP	National New-Type Urbanization Plan, China (2014-2020)
NPC	National People's Congress, China
NDPC	National Development Planning Commission, China
OLVC	Organic Law on Village Committee, China (1987)
PAR	Participatory action research

RLCL   Rural Land Contracting Law, China (2002)

PRA   Participatory Rural Appraisal

PRC   The People's Republic of China

RIBA   Royal Institute of British Architects

RICRPL   Regulation for the Implementation of the Cultural Relics
                Protection Law, China (amendment 2013)

SSOA   University of Sheffield School of Architecture

SBCR   State Bureau of Cultural Relics, China

VBCP   Village Branch of Chinese Communist Party, China

VA   Village Assembly, China

VC   Village Committees, China

VRA   Village Representative Assembly, China

PART I   Understanding Chinese Villages

Fig. 0.1 - 2 The panorama and entrance gateway of Hong village, Anhui province, China, 2006. Like Hong, most of Chinese villages were built under traditional cultural-philosophical concept of internal peacefulness and harmony between the inside (the artificial) and the outside (the nature). (Photographs by the author)

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Fig. 0.17 - 8 The perseverance of villagers' practice, Anhui province, China, 2016. Top: building a building without drawings and architects; Bottom: washing the clothes in the shared waters under oral agreements made by the clan. (Photographs by the author)

Chapter 1   Introduction

Fig. 1.1 Xichong village, Henan province, 2015 (Photograph by the author)

An isolated stone village at the deepest side of Mount Dabie, with only six families left when the author visited.

1.1　Research Background

General Background

Architecture is never neutral; it either separates or includes. Architecture not always functions as part of the service industry for the society which is highly determined by the politics and economy of the modern nation, because it had been and it will still be a people-centred profession and socially-engaged practice.

The nearly 40 years' strikingly steady and high-speed economic growth under the Reform and Opening-Up Policy in China from 1978 provides endless raw materials for reproduction by the mass media from both inside and outside the country. Whilst simultaneously, most of those different estimations, particularly on such topics as the collapse of Chinese economy, have been proved wrong in different ways. Part of the reason is a lack of understanding about the 'new normal' of Chinese economic development and a lack of sufficient analytical frameworks derived from the existing non-Chinese empirical evidence and knowledge. Though China has made remarkable development in poverty reduction in the past decades, which is mainly done through large sizes of transferring poor population from the rural to the urban areas alongside the rapid urbanization as a key engine for growth, its status as a developing country has not been changed. China is still the largest developing country in the world, with more than 250 million people living below the global poverty line, accounting for 7% of poverty population in the world in 2015.[1] The majority of those poor people are rural residents, with more than 80% living in villages in central and western Chinese provinces, which make an unmatchable contrast and a dramatic displacement with the rising power and influence of the whole country. It has been estimated by the Chinese Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development that 300 million Chinese currently living in rural areas will move into cities from 2010 to 2025. Thus the rural development and regeneration with key purposes of reducing poverty and rebalancing uneven and unequal urban-rural development is, and will always be, the key focus of the national growth for China.[2]

Like so many stories in China, the story of developing rural villages under current urbanization is an ongoing one. Tremendous changes have happened in Chinese

villages in confrontation of the rapid urbanization. Just starting from a purely quantitative perspective, the total number of Chinese villages was 3,600,000 in 2000 after the urbanization-led amalgamation and annexation from around 1985. The year 2001 alone witnessed a reduction of 25,458 villages, which means around 70 villages vanishing every day.[3] The situation got worse in the following decade from 2000 to 2010, during which the 'constructive destruction' made a further 900,000 reduction from 3,600,000 villages in 2000 to 2,700,000 villages in 2010, with a strikingly accelerated pace about around 300 villages' gone every day.[4] Let alone the dissolvement and disruption of existing social structure and cultural tradition inherited through generations, which has pushed Chinese rural villages in an irreversible state of total collapse. The government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has been striving for solving this situation, yet the constantly developing and adjusting rural-urban development policy still cannot guarantee its full escape from a fragile rural-urban transition, simply because there are no historical records both in China and the globe for any reference for such a size and scale. This unique status and highly specific situation render the point of entry for every discussion of China-related topics. Architecture in China is not an exception.

If 'market' and 'democracy' are two fundamental elements for providing a common ground for post-war western architectural and urban discourse, then the Chinese fundamental condition is the 'collective'. It is neither a state of intermediacy in contrasting components nor an assemblage of the all selected, but rather a symbiosis or a third way of a hybrid between the market-led and state-led mechanisms. To take an example, the current Chinese-characteristic Socialist Market Economy, the economic model employed by the PRC which superseded the failed Socialist Planned Economy since 1978, is a combined collection of both the market as a 'visible hand' and the state as a relatively 'invisible hand' in coordinating the supply and demand using market-oriented mechanisms. And a pattern of cooperative coexistence of multiple ownerships, ranging from the state-owned, the collective-owned, the privately-owned to the foreign-investment-owned, becomes a new normal with the state-owned economy as the dominant form of ownership. Another example could be the ownership of the rural village land, which has been claimed to the 'collective' of the rural residents by the land law formulated by the Communist Party of China (CPC). The privatization of the rural land would cause a

drastic change of the social structure of rural residents who heavily depend on the lands, according to China's historical lessons learnt by the CPC in their current policies. Therefore the 'collective' position is not simply decided from the ruling Party's own ideology, but renewed as a hybrid version between the existing and the past.

Far from casting more doubts on the 'collective', the status quo of current Chinese urbanization, rural villages and rural-urban transition should be made clearer than ever, in order to understand the very fundamental condition and situation. Architecture and the built environment could be regarded as one of the most appropriate lenses to reflect and to see through what is happening in contemporary rural-urban China, as architecture is never neutral; the spatial is political, besides social, economic, cultural, and technological. The viewpoint that architecture either separates or includes could find its root in Chinese contemporary condition in terms of rapid transition from the rural to the urban.

Architectural Problem

Unfortunately contemporary Chinese architecture separates more than to include the rural village at this particular historical moment of rural urbanization. Like most modern nations, the Party/State of China has chosen a relatively top-down way in the production of new architecture and cities. This is due to two main driving forces. One is about the extremely large quantity of rural villages and their associated large workload for rural architecture and village design. The other force is that the Party/State has been under the major pressure to reduce poverty and ensure national growth within a relatively limited timeframe, with rapid urbanization considered as the most efficient way.[5] Besides the rapidly reducing total quantity, an increasing number of rural villages has been rapidly consolidated /'swallowed-up' into adjacent towns and cities in the loosely-controlled urban expansion, decided by different hierarchies of local governments which all financially rely on land-related economies in a similar way. Those villages far away from urban regions have been guided and operated under state-led initiatives, such as 'New Rural Villages Construction' or the 'Constructing a New Socialist Countryside'.[6] All of the above policies and principles have undoubtedly achieved remarkable improvements in the

general public infrastructure and facilities in rural villages as well as the average living quality of the rural population, but largely at a sacrifice of traditional or existing patterns of the rural villages both in terms of the spatial and in terms of the social.

Those top-down perspectives, principles and procedures have already produced as many problems as they have solved: waves of rural peasants are still driven to become temporary migrant-workers without corresponding social welfare in the urban regions; rural family and community structures with several generations living under one roof are disintegrating; rural villages based on the self-sufficient agricultural family and clan kinship are decaying to a state of hollowness because of the loss of labour, knowledge, skill and resource; new instant cities and towns are being produced overnight at the sites of villages nearby urban areas; the homogenization of urban form and townscape in almost all of the 660 Chinese cities has been transferred to the villages' redevelopment and regeneration.

In any case architecture as both a discipline and a profession in such rural-urban China cannot escape the responsibility it could bear and the crisis it could face. While ironically, during this 30 years' process the Chinese architectural industry has benefited and developed at an unprecedented speed and scale, with unprecedented commissions and jobs in every site of rural-urban transition. Nevertheless, it was influenced by the historical legacies of both formal official architects and indigenous master-builders as instrumental operators with lower status serving the upper class.[7] And besides, the modern architectural system of China including the architectural profession and architectural education was transplanted and then superficially localized in less than a century, from the established western modes such as the Modern Architecture movement and the Beaux-Arts architecture. Therefore the responses from contemporary Chinese architecture as both a discipline and a profession to China's rapid transition have been weak and pointless.

In the past 40 post-reform years, both the academia and the profession of architecture in China have been locked into a cycling process, in which a wider and wider range of 'isms' from Western architectural discourse have been borrowed, absorbed, assembled, accumulated, consumed, abandoned and finally localized in a Chinese-characteristic way. The remaining collective form as a by-product of this self-referential 'game' has drifted apart both architectural academia and professional

practice from meaningful engagement with contemporary urban-rural transition in China. As academics and architects have been spending a great deal of time into those purely disciplinary 'tricks' of borrowing and reproducing, they have been increasingly living in a world of their own.

For the majority of professional practices in China, mainstream architects trained in professional education and serving the established clients from the middle-upper class, have played a relatively less socio-culturally engaged but a more technical, instrumental role in this drastic process of reshaping the rural-urban landscape. The social and financial realities have driven them blindly treating both rural and peri-urban sites in a tabula-rasa way, in order to compose their profit-driven, sculptural objects onto a uniform backdrop. Getting closer access to the power and capital has rendered some mainstream architectural professionals as 'high artists' or business winners, while some others make a living through low-quality design output with low design charge, in all construction processes from old city to new city, from old village to new city, and from old village to new village. Though there existed a minority of professional practices who maintain indomitable architectural belief and spirit that architecture is a transformative engine for both cultural and social change in contemporary China, (particularly from those design-driven ateliers which will be discussed in Chapter 3 Section 3.2, and those emerging alternative practices and practitioners which will be a focus in all the Case Study Chapters of this thesis,) the existing architectural practitioners practising as the mainstream in rural-urban transitional China have failed to demonstrate both disciplinary and professional value and potential of architecture which was defined by both traditional Chinese and modern western knowledge systems.

For the majority of architectural academia in the ivory tower, getting hands dirty in the current real-world complexity has been left out of the canon, whose intellectual-elitist-driven agenda looks for architectural design in rural villages from dominantly cultural perspective without sufficient social dimension and depth. A number of architectural researchers have done fruitful interdisciplinary work to understand emerging issues that happened in Chinese rural-urban transition from a theoretical point of view, but they rarely make a breakthrough in bridging the social detachment between architectural academic research from air-conditioned offices and rural-urban everyday life in the field.

More details about background knowledge and ongoing challenges related to rural villages and architecture profession in current China will be explored in the following Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. For a summary here, the prevailing top-down modes of architectural production in China and the lack of connections between theoretical and 'in the field' design practice have created tensions within architectural practice and academia between village and city, conservation and development, and tradition and modernity.

1.2   Research Context

This section sets up a conceptual framework for the twin concepts of this thesis – 'hybrid building' and 'hybrid practitioner', both emerged from and are rooted in the rural-urban realities in transitional contemporary China. For China, the issues of villages have been heavily interlinked with the issues of cities and of urbanization. Understanding and recognizing the complexity of rural villages through both historical and current urbanization trajectories in China are not merely of scholarly interest for architectural and urban disciplines, but also a multi-disciplinary effort and trajectory that can be collected and connected.

Definition of Village and Villager

In Oxford English Dictionaries, the term 'village' is defined as 'a group of houses and associated buildings, larger than a hamlet and smaller than a town, situated in a rural area', with two extensions as 'a self-contained district or community within a town or city, regarded as having features characteristic of village life' and 'a small municipality with limited corporate powers'.[8] In settlement geography and sociological studies, the absolute division of rural and urban areas both in terms of settlements and in terms of societies -- the 'rural-urban dichotomy',[9] had been based on relatively simple criteria such as the demographic defined by specific countries according to specific situations. This concept of rural-urban dichotomy was challenged as a result of inadequate definitions on issues like the gradations of rural and urban areas. The concept of 'folk, rural and urban continuum' was then raised by the American sociologist and anthropologist Robert Redfield, an expert on Mexican villages and peasants,[10] who stressed the idea of continuity from the rural village to urban regions from many aspects. Later it opened up an endless continuum debate, joined by scholars including British anthropologist David Francis Pocock and British sociologist Raymond Edward Pahl, and many Indian scholars in later 60s and early 70s, challenged the superimposition of a western model.[11]

In terms of the definition of the 'rural' and the 'urban' in China, population and administrative institution are two elements to determine the rural and the urban. Villages and townships are the rural settlements, which are collectively referred as rural areas; while towns and cities are referred to as urban areas.

Given a Chinese dimension and context, although the tendency of a rural-urban continuum exists under the current rapid rural urbanization with major developments on traffic infrastructures, the contrast between the rural and urban is still clear and sharp, overweighing the continuum both in terms of the economic and in terms of the social, which can be demonstrated clearly from the large gap between rural-urban income and in accessing social resources in China. The state of rural urban dichotomy has been largely and strongly defined by the 'hukou' - household registration system introduced by the ruling CPC. The rural 'hukou' and urban 'hukou' causes what Martin King Whyte referred to as 'One country, Two societies'.[12]

There are also different other ways of general classification on Chinese rural villages based on criteria such as regional location (Northern Chinese village, Southern Chinese village, Central Chinese village, etc.)[13], economic status (extreme poverty village, poverty village, Xiaokang/ well-off village, etc.), relationship with rural industry (agricultural village, semi-industrialized village, industrialized village, heavily industrialized village, etc.), but neither the criteria nor those categorized villages are distinctively defined. Apart from that, and from the official point of view, there are two administrative types of villages in current China: the administrative and the natural, defined by the officially-recognized political organization. In general, the administrative village is a form of collective governance structure that lies between the township (the lowest level of state administration) and the natural village. While the natural village refers to the vernacular settlement organized and developed naturally upon family clan and regional genes, this type is more loosely organized than the administrative one. The two types of villages are not classified directly by the mere size or population: sometimes, an administrative village contains several natural villages; sometimes, a large natural village is divided for governance into several administrative villages; and in many cases, a natural village is an administrative village. Both the administrative and the natural village form politically and economically the bottom chain in the linear city-town-village hierarchy in current China.

The concept of rural-urban continuum was firstly applied into China by American anthropologist William Skinner.[14] To respond to the above-mentioned debate of rural-urban continuum and avoid unnecessary variables, this thesis follows and further clarifies the categorization which divides Chinese rural villages into three general types, according to the villages' geographical and economical relationship with the urban areas made up by cities and towns. The first type is the remote village, or 'outer suburban village' (*'yuan jiao cun'* in Chinese), far away from a town and city, in which the currently residing villagers' economic practice heavily relies on the land and other agricultural resources. The second type is the 'suburban village' (*'jin jiao cun'* in Chinese) nearby a town and city, including those peri-urban villages at urban fringes, in which the residing villagers depend partly on agricultural practice of village resources and partly on urban resources. The third type is the village inside the town or 'village-in-the-city' ('urban village' or *'cheng zhong cun'* in Chinese), in which the residing villagers maintain a very limited agricultural practice but relying heavily on urban industries. The third type heavily relates to the rising research on informal urbanism as the village-in-the-city contains informal patterns of illegal self-build and self-help housing. Most of the residents in the three types of villages who temporarily live and work in urban areas are also defined as 'floating population', or 'peasant-migrant-workers' in China.

Compared to the ambiguous definition of the 'village' or the scope of the 'village' due to ever-changing policy adjustments in China, the theoretical definition of the 'villager' is much clearer. Theoretically, it refers to those who have a rural 'hukou' according to household registration system in China. But practically, the villagers in Chinese rural villages now could be divided into two groups: one is the registered villagers and the other is the residing villagers. It should be noted that, though rural hollowing and hollowed villages in China have various forms of manifestation and different types based on different regional economic development level and its physiographic features,[15] there is a key common feature about the temporary migration of permanently residing villagers to the urban areas. This tendency of rural depopulation is also clearly demonstrated in nearly all of the interviewed villages

where the number of currently residing villagers is much less than that of registered villagers.

The Social-Anthropology Genealogy

It was firstly western scholars, particularly from discipline of anthropology, that made great contributions to setting out Chinese village studies in a systematic way. Poland-born anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski, who exerted a great influence in developing British social anthropology, broke the ice to engage with the Chinese village topic and issues when teaching his first Chinese PhD student Hsiao-Tung Fei (Xiaotong Fei) at the London Schools of Economics and Political Sciences during late 1930s. Fei later became one of the most influential sociologists and anthropologists in China, with a particular contribution to Chinese rural village community studies through a functional approach. He theorized 'differentiated associations' for rural Chinese societies based upon its family religion, neighbourhood and country.[16] Malinowski appraised this by using 'a landmark in the development of anthropological fieldwork and theory' in his confident and supportive preface for *'Peasants Life in China'*, Fei's first milestone book publication based on his earlier fieldwork in Kaixian'gong village at south-eastern part of China for his PhD thesis.[17]

In some ways characteristic of prevailing functionalist studies of the period, American anthropologist Robert Redfield, also discussed community studies on Chinese villages with a particular reference to Fei's work in his paper *'Communities Studies in Japan and China: A Symposium Introduction'*: "Fei and Chang's study, *Earthbound China*,[18] does this in one way by choosing the relations of land, population, occupational specialization and capital formation as a basis for characterizing and classifying Chinese rural communities. Thus the concepts begin to form out of a concern with practical matters that needs to be dealt with in China. But other studies in China look particularly in familism, or emigration, and for the most part adopt no chosen way of conceiving the community as a whole."[19] As an expert on Mexican villages who developed the influential paired concept of 'great tradition' and 'little tradition', Redfield put that the former is expressed and recorded as "literate and critical few", while the latter is lived by the "common people beneath

and within the high culture".[20] Therefore, from the perspective of Redfield's conceptual model, to define and explore the 'little community' of the village as an analysable system is the key to understand the coherent way of life in China and to understand China as a whole. Additionally, distinguished American anthropologist on Chinese studies, Morton Herbert Fried, who published his book *'Fabric of Chinese Society'*[21] in 1953 based on his fieldwork in Anhui province around 1947, explored and examined a prevailing social mechanism governing behaviours in Chinese societies as a whole.[22]

Thus two central questions arise in the social-anthropological study of Chinese rural villages: What is the general and persisting character of Chinese society and culture? And why choose this village to study?

These questions were not pushed to its first peak until British anthropologist Maurice Freedman published several milestone books around his key journal publication 'A Chinese Phase in Social Anthropology'.[23] Freedman firstly addressed that understanding China as an established civilization should be different from those Western Pacific islands researched by Malinowski or those African tribal societies done by other British-based anthropologists. Secondly he explored the social organization of a lineage system as a paradigm to frame the inner relationship between the state and society with a focus on Chinese south-eastern villages.[24]

Different from Freedman's lineage paradigm in understanding Chinese rural villages, American anthropologist William Skinner developed a whole methodology in approaching the concept of rural-urban continuum of China through regional socio-economical structure based on networks and hierarchies.[25] American anthropologist Arthur Wolf and German-British anthropologist Stephan Feuchtwang also paved a way to understand Chinese villages through the relatively stable metaphor system in Chinese village societies.[26] Mingming Wang, professor of anthropology at Peking University who completed his PhD at LSE under Feuchtwang, pushed further the study on socio-cultural configuration and articulation in Chinese villages and the cultural clash between traditional clan and modern community from a perspective of the drastic socio-spatial transition under current urbanization[27].

The tendency to emphasize the particularities rather than the commonalities of Chinese rural villages has been clear from both Chinese and western

anthropologists' works, regarding villages both as a material and a method to establish an imagined whole, in order to seek for an alternative anthropological route to reflect and resist the established western-oriented discourses and paradigms. Though the topics and methods are diverse, the discussion has been endless and a consensus seems not easily to be achieved, as one of Feuchtwang's very recently published books with Charlotte Bruckermann clearly calls for a retreat from giving more weight to Chinese specificities to find "a new way of studying the anthropology of China, namely one based on anthropology as much as on China".[28]

The overview on Chinese villages study from the social-anthropology perspective in the past century brings an extremely rich foundation not only on what it was like in the Chinese village and how it ran, particularly in terms of the villagers' everyday habits, beliefs, and rituals, but also for the following architectural studies and approaches to Chinese villages. In avoidance of that particularities/commonalities opposing binary in social anthropological studies, this thesis attempts to develop a path to absorb both views inclusively, with an aspiration to strengthen the enabling capacities to spatialize in architectural discipline. As architectural studies of Chinese villages normally tend to be thin and lack the social depth in social-anthropological studies, therefore in this way the two disciplines can shed light on each other on the topic of Chinese village transformation.

The Question of China as Method(ology)

Besides the long-standing methodological interests in Chinese studies in anthropology, particularly cultural and social anthropology, exploring the methodological potential of studying China has also appeared and been much debated in other cultural disciplines in the last three decades. Japanese cultural studies Professor, Mizoguchi Yuzo from the University of Tokyo, firstly published 'China as Methods' in order to call for a horizontal view of space-time in replacement of a vertical principle of history dominated by Eurocentric theories.[29] Wang Hui, Professor of Chinese language and literature at Tsinghua University, made a further step to liberate the concept of China by introducing the 'trans-systemic society and trans-societal system' and revisiting the very concept of 'region' under nation-state and ethnicity[30]. These continuously developing positions and propositions to explore

China as a methodological approach seek for an alternative version of China which is freed of the baggage of western established hierarchy. Their central question is that of how China can be studied as more than a subject and be theorized for broader methodological and/or epistemological implications.

The multi-layered meaning and mechanism of current rapid urbanization in China become a potential point of entry. John Friedmann synthesized a broad array of research in his book 'China's Urban Transition', concluding that 'the nation's economic development has been driven more by social forces from within than by global capital'.[31] The American scholar Nick R. Smith discussed the hybrid state in rapidly transforming villages at urban fringes, which is mutually constituted between the top-down and the bottom-up, the planned and the unplanned, through four proposed socio-spatial dimensions: scale, territory, networks and temporality.[32] Recent research has also provided evidence that the unique 'double-dual' transformation in Chinese urbanization happened in all its intertwined demographic, spatial, economic and social aspects.[33] The overall consensus is that Chinese urbanization is indeed exceptional, given the often ''unique patterns of urbanization and urban growth as compared with both developing and developed countries; the unique measures and policies taken by Chinese state to restrain urban growth and the unique future goals of national urban policies.''[34] Therefore as such an exceptionalist position invariably raises further questions and poses several pertinent methodological concerns, ''the fundamental methodological question seems to be how to keep a grip on the generality of events, the wider processes lying behind them, without losing sight of the individuality of the form of their occurrence, and vice versa''.[35]

The Development in Architectural Discourse

Further exploration into this big question is not within the scope of this thesis, but it is worth noting, what an urban and architectural discourse could produce and bring into this inquiry from a country with centuries of cultural self-sufficiency. After the much-discussed 'Criticality debate' in the West and the architectural situation in China[36] between distinguished scholar Tao Zhu and associate professor Jianfei Zhu from the University of Melbourne, on the latter's earlier paper 'Criticality in between China and

the West'[37], Shiqiao Li, Professor of architecture from the University of Virginia attempted to understand the Chinese city through a new intellectual framework which is different from those established ones in reading non-Chinese cities[38]. Duanfang Lu, Professor of architecture from the University of Sydney, revisited the architecture of China by putting its ongoing architectural urbanization into a broader map of globalization[39]. Fulong Wu, Professor of planning from University College London, held a different position, starting from making comparative studies of urban processes between contemporary Chinese and western cities[40], to interrogate Chinese cities from a global perspective in his edited books 'Globalization and Chinese Cities'[41] and 'China's Emerging Cities'[42]. Wu attempted to examine emerging Chinese urbanism as part of the globalization process which overcomes the dichotomy between East and West. British architectural historian and theorist Peter Blundell Jones not only examined and clarified the East-West dichotomy, for example the completely different tempo-spatial notion, but also challenged that binary opposites of East versus West, through revealing a series of common topics in deeply engaging with Chinese villages and architectural cases upon the social-anthropological concepts of China. Influenced by anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz and Mary Douglas, Blundell Jones opposed the ambition to a universal solution in theoretically framing Chinese villages and its architecture. Instead he appreciated a deeper understanding and thicker interpretation of the so-called 'local knowledge' through the 'messy-engaged' but grounded materials taken from the locality.[43]

Driven by more contemporary practice forces, Xiangning Li, professor of architecture from the University of Tongji aimed to re-establish and reframe contemporary Chinese architecture using an evaluation methodology named 'Critical Pragmatism',[44] which was composed of characteristics including 'affordance, plenty, novelty, monumentality, bigness, swiftness, cheapness'. This theoretical framework derived from Li's strong position that Chinese architecture comes from a different starting point.[45] Again, Peter Blundell Jones regarded China as "the other great independently founded culture of Asia"[46] of which too much emphasizes on methodologies tended to be useless in the absence of raw materials.[47] British architectural historian and theorist Adrian Forty suspected the rising concept of 'Chinese-ness', through the concern about Chinese contemporary architecture from

a relationship between words and buildings. He argued that the 'language' needed to discuss, critique and explain architecture has not 'translated into Chinese practice' from its original western discourse, and that 'boundary' has not been created or represented either, which causes 'a problem, a struggle, a challenge'. It is not only because of the very nature of architectural practice on iterated and mixed mediums, but also because "architecture as a recognised profession and the process of that Chinese-ness representation is only a century old in China and based on a western model".[48]

At a more local architectural level, Deqi Shan, distinguished professor of architecture from Tsinghua University, led a cohort of scholars and students to field investigate and mapping vernacular architecture and villages in Anhui, Zhejiang, Guangxi and Yunnan provinces from the 1980s onwards, marking an important starting point for architectural engagement. His doctoral student, Dong Wang, professor of architecture from Yunnan Technology University, further went on spending decades on making valuable studies about several minorities' villages in Yunnan province in southwest China, with an emphasize on the transition between traditional construction modes based on clan kinship to a modern mode under broader socio-cultural communities.[49] Coincidently, Chinese-British architect and scholar Yun Gao consistently studied the Dai minority vernacular architecture and settlements in the same province since the mid-1990s, exploring a way of bringing anthropological methodologies into the architectural study of villages in order to shed light upon both[50]. Xing Ruan, Professor of architecture from University of New South Wales who earlier coedited with Chinese architectural expert Professor Ronald Knapp their ambitious book series 'Spatial Habitus: Making and Meaning in Asia's Architecture', later completed a milestone book titled 'Allegorical Architecture' with a similar anthropological focus on analysing vernacular architecture and villages of minority Dong at southwest China too.[51] Jin Duan, Professor of planning with a group of scholars and researchers based in Nanjing Southeast University did a systematic architectural research mostly from the perspective of spatial syntax on physical pattern languages of vernacular architecture and villages in Anhui and Zhejiang province.[52] And finally, Qing Chang, Professor of architecture from the University of Tongji and a nominated academician of Chinese Academy of Science in 2016, built up a whole theoretical foundation and practical guidance heavily drew on

anthropology and human geography on the document, analysis, design conservation and preservation on historical built environment including built heritage, which is adaptive and appropriate to Chinese villages' specificities.[53]

The Disjunction in Architectural Practice in Rural Villages

Apart from research on vernacular settlements which had been designated as places of important cultural heritage, Chinese architectural practitioners have generally been slow, or reluctant to respond to this drastic socio-spatial transformation happening in rural villages until around the year 2014, when the idea of 'rural reconstruction' filtered into mainstream consciousness.

It is worth mentioning that about a decade earlier than in mainland China, some independent practitioners and academic researchers from Hong Kong and Taiwan had already pioneered responses to these kinds of dilemmas. Among these are Atelier-3/Rural Architecture Studio led by Hsieh Ying-chun, 'Wu Zhi Qiao (Bridge to China) 'Charitable Foundation led by NG Yan Yung Edward from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the emerging practice of Rural Urban Framework (founded by Joshua Bolchover and John Lin from the University of Hong Kong) who published their first monograph[54], and the innovative 'New-Bud' architectural system from Zhu Jingxiang Architects also based in the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Most of these practitioners were trained in the West before practicing in southern or southwestern Chinese villages that are reasonably close to Hong Kong. But villages in the inner mainland which have suffered heavily from urbanization, have received less attention. Jun Mu, who completed his PhD on sustainable development of poor rural regions in southwestern China[55] under NG Yan Yung Edward, made a breakthrough with his design research on remote villages in northwest China, in particular with his ongoing project to revitalize caved, semi-underground villages in Shanxi province, in collaboration with academician of Chinese Academy of Science Jiaping Liu. Another breakthrough was made by painter and architect Jun Sun, who led his architects-artists-collective Rural Construction Bureau constantly practising in Xiawan and Haotang village of Henan province, in close collaboration with rural sociologist Changping Li.[56]

All these examples of architectural practice in the Chinese village contexts were directed by professional architects in a relatively technological-led or an activist-based approach towards humanitarian services and cultural production at both building and village neighbourhood scale. But besides these pioneering practices and projects, more normal projects that are less hierarchical in their social production of architecture are needed in order to empower ordinary communities and peasants in Chinese rural villages. The link is still weak and fragile, between the practice-based knowledge silently produced in the processes of these projects and those uniform products by design institutions or groups who work on the front end of transforming rural villages.

Architecture and Social Engagement

The current social-anthropological debate, the Chinese methodological question, the architectural discourse development and the architectural practice disjunction in Chinese rural villages and rural urbanization have raised questions about the construction of a hybrid concept and connection. Hybrid forms of knowledge and engagement in architectural practice are needed to develop more engaged, resilient, and critical approaches towards an alternative modus operandi in understanding and transforming Chinese rural villages under rapid urbanization. The introduction and comparison with an 'other' culture is therefore necessary in order to better present the 'self'. As Robert Redfield pointed out "scholarly comparison of different cultures promised to reveal the universal language of cultural values and then to serve as a model for the transnational interaction of ordinary people".[57] The entry point to share, compare and bridge was selected as the topic of architecture and social engagement from the West (particularly the U.K), for this thesis with a focus on socially sustainable village transformation through architectural interventions under rural urban transition in contemporary China.

According to Juliet Millican, "social engagement points to the ability to work constructively within and between different social groups to create more resilient and sustainable communities. "[58] Therefore the broader concept and meaning of social engagement is beyond the literal limitation of people's degrees of participation or social involvement in a specific event, community or society.

From an architectural perspective, as quoted from Sarah Wigglesworth and Jeremy Till, "It is not surprising that the architecture is obsessed with notions of the iconic, the one-off, the monumental. It privileges the final product over the process, the perfect moment of completion over the imperfections of occupation…High architecture is unravelled by the habitual and banal events which mark the passage of time. There is a thudding disappointment as a gap opens up between the image of architecture and the reality of its making and occupation."[59]

In both East and West, "for too long architectural discourse has been limited largely to a question of aesthetics itself, as though architecture were some autonomous art form which is so praised by the elite of the profession and stands outside the constraints of capitalist production".[60] This has been mercilessly criticised by Henri Lefebvre and his followers by his influential argument that '(social) space is a (social) product.'[61] Drawing on this fundamental position that space is social and its production is a shared practice, the concept of 'Spatial Agency' was put forward for framing the emerging critical architectural interventions.[62] "For agency to be exercised in its fullest sense though, this intervention always takes place through negotiation and deliberation and ultimately brings about the empowerment of those involved."[63] In particular, working with and within the production of space through participation have been stressed by those contemporary alternative practitioners and activist researchers. The points of view like 'architecture is too important to be left to architects' [64] and 'architecture is far more than the work of architects',[65] all readdress the value of the participation and engagement in architecture and urbanism.

To take the U.K context as an example, there have been two multi-generational milestone architectural interventions. One is 'Fun Palace', in which "Cedric Price archived even the most transient and ephemeral elements of this production, and shed light on the landscape of legislative, institutional, and contractual relationships that surround architecture. His experiments with multidisciplinary teams, his fascination with ephemera, his early self-delineation as 'anti-architect', can all be seen as part of an attempt to challenge the classical model of the architect as author."[66] The other one is 'Straw Bale House' done by Sarah Wigglesworth and Jeremy Till, the design of which takes the dining table as a metaphor of 'creative inhabitation' by the occupants and celebrates the complications, roughness, provisionality, ambiguity and compromise rather than fantasy of the perfect product.

The production and occupation of this self-build readdresses the notion of everyday and the ordinariness, describes building as a lived experience rather than a static or predictable moment of perfection.[67]

The production of architecture of social engagement is a shared enterprise and continues over time. As British scholars Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till argued together, architecture is not fixed to a single moment of completion but a continuous cycle, an evolving sequence, and multiple actors can contribute at various stages through this spatial production.[68] They argue for the spatial rather architectural; capable to empower and 'engage others in their spatial environments in ways previously unknown or unavailable to them'. This notion of 'Praxis', ''in the sense of action propelled by a critical understanding of external conditions, moves away the normative concerns and structures of traditional practice'' (of architectural discipline).[69] Around the same period with these Britain-based scholars, German architectural curator Andres Lepik launched an exhibition called 'New Architectures of Social Engagement', which started from late 2010 to the beginning of 2011 in The Museum of Modern Art in New York, together with his book 'Small Scale, Big Change: New Architectures of Social Engagement', in order to re-evaluate the architect's changing roles, methods, approaches and responsibilities for engaging with larger issues around the world, in particular those underdeveloped areas.[70]

Whether this whole body of Western knowledge from the discussion of architecture of social engagement could be pushed into an alternative theoretical paradigm in contrast/complement to the existing Chinese paradigms, or a cultural-neutral paradigm which could be transferred to elsewhere as a part of fundamental methodology through architecture of social engagement, the answer is clear: architecture and architects need to return as mediums for a wider range of engagement, ranging from the social, the cultural, the technological, the economical and the political, in which they have drifted away from for too long.

Architecture of social engagement as both an indigenous life-space and an amateur spatial practice should be developed as they reflect and shape society, particularly in a country like China undertaking such irreversible rural urban transition within such short time. Robert Redfield, from a sociological viewpoint, believed the rural settlements a part of folk culture in conflict with modern rational nation-state[71], while

from architectural side the informality and social form has been appreciated and associated with the vernacular from a long tradition.[72]

Within this broad framework, and regarding the Chinese village reality interwoven with both historical and modern complexities and contradictions under such particular geo-politic time-space, the full engagement from architectural practitioners means making evidence of the design methodology and impact. It points to a sequence of firstly understanding the locality, then learning from and collaborating with locals, and finally coproducing transformative value and potentials in the Chinese rural villages. So it is those irreversible changes and indispensable forces which result in the need for a new look at old concerns in the Chinese rural village. Within those old concerns the building process is perhaps the most important one. Architecture as a social anchor point of the village is a process for a collective action in which social/power structures of the village were given a ritual expression. In terms of the new perspective, the concept of 'hybridity' is identified to be revisited. As the rural village with 'rural face' and 'urban mask'[73] in Chinese current urbanization is a hybrid, the current process of reconstructing and revitalizing the village is a process of building hybridity.

Hybrid Building

The term 'hybrid' or 'hybridity' has been used and changed its meaning in different ways from different disciplines, most frequently seen from biological, agricultural, computer science disciplines. In architecture discourse, 'hybrid building' was firstly put forward by American architects Steven Holl and Joseph Fenton in 'Pamphlet Architecture #11' in 1985[74]. From there 'hybrid building' has been regarded as the building with mixed uses and multiple programs, of which one stacked upon another within a singular volume. It was largely manifested through the particular high-rise or tall building typology which has firstly emerged from North American cities. Throughout Steven Holl's architectural practice, 'hybrid building' not only signified his early design metaphors such as 'bridge-house' and branded his realized built works such as the 'Linked Hybrid' in 2010 in Beijing, China, but also referred to the intertwined spatial experience of his built environment. The latter turned to the more complex question of perception and place-making, which connected

phenomenological development to architecture. This could be seen from the works promoted by architectural theorists like Alberto Perez-Gomez from Canada and practitioners like Juhani Pallasmaa from Finland and Peter Zumthor from Switzerland. Then from early 2000s the idea of urban hybrid building was readdressed conceptually and literally in response to the emerging urbanism in East Asia, mainly through the milestone publication 'Made in Tokyo' from practice-based research by Japanese architectural practice Atelier Bow-wow. They didn't particularly reference or redefine 'hybrid building', but their research more or less shifted the term's original programmatic concerns as a mixed-use building to the concerns of building density and positioning building in the densified urban built environment. But different from the density discussion from Netherland, such as architectural practice MVRDV's 'FARMAX: Excursions on Density' or 'KM3', both published in the same period, the East Asian focus was placed on the organic, bottom-up architectural formal and visual adaptation to the fast-changing urban landscape, which involved new into old, illegal self-build, and changeable programmes.

Built upon the above contextual exploration in and around 'hybrid building', this thesis, however, expands the concept of 'hybrid building' in response to the particular hybrid nature of Chinese rural village under contemporary rapid urbanization, from the following three key facets: The first facet of 'hybrid building' is to engage and mediate multiple authorships and narratives in an architectural form or modus operandi, from building objects, building processes, building consequences, further to building infrastructures and 'communitas'[75]. The second facet of 'hybrid building' refers to that reconciliation and reconnection of two opposing forces with contrasting values through architecture and in architecture in current China, such as the modern and the vernacular, the urban and rural, the outsiders and insiders, the professional architects and local practitioners, and the top-down ways of doing architecture and the bottom-up ones. This reconciliation and reconnection emerges from and no less than two knowledge systems, ranging from disciplines, professions, products, activities, concepts, objects, processes, infrastructures, to consequences, etc. created a creative adjacency and coexistence by the people and for the people. The third facet of 'hybrid building' is process-driven, which refers to that architecture as a social-transformative process. The broadest

sense of 'hybrid building' is about active participation, thick interpretation, and unpredictable coproduction in spatial production. It is an assemblage of both the buildable object and the unbuildable part, particularly those soft consequences catalysed from the process of production of space, rituals, power relations and collective infrastructures. The consequences of architectural process were hybrid rather than the single object as the product.

Hybrid Practitioner

Conceptualizing into the hybrid nature of rural Chinese specificities from this perspective, the new architecture of social engagement in Chinese rural villages could be considered as an archetype of the expanded field of 'hybrid building'. The socially-engaged architect practitioners could be referred as the 'hybrid practitioner'. Therefore 'hybrid practitioner' in this thesis particularly refers to both the practice form of architecture of social engagement, and the action of practitioners engaging with the mega-structure behind Chinese rural transition and transformation through architectural participation and design interventions. The concept of 'hybrid practitioner' highlights the hybrid coexistence and reconciliation between the top-down and bottom-up, the newly external and the existing internal, the design engagement from the outside and that from the within. Furthermore, 'hybrid practitioner' relates to the changing roles, contrasting values, transgressive consequences and transformative potentials of the architectural practice and practitioner. It corresponds to what Edith Turner reinvents the concept of 'communitas' in her book 'Communitas: The Anthropology of Collective Joy', as is an inspired fellowship being 'in the zone', with shared collective joy and common experiences which often appears unexpectedly.[76]

Furthermore, 'hybrid practitioner' has a broader metaphoric link in this thesis with a focus on Chinese architectural design practice. 'Hybrid practitioner' refers to those who continue the hybrid route of the modern Chinese architect (which evolved as a hybrid between the Chinese traditional master-builders and Western modern professional architects), and who combine and translate the traditional literati and the traditional craftsman in contemporary moments [See more in Chapter 3.1].

Besides mainstream architects working on formal urbanization in current rural-urban building industry, China has a long history of grass-root 'carpenter-architects' and 'barefoot-architects', as well as anonymous architectural practitioners in contemporary informal rural urbanization. 'Getting hands dirty' is a first step for the 'hybrid practitioner'; seeking a site for socio-spatial production of the 'hybrid building' in confrontation with the socio-political super-structure is more resilient than building up a sophisticated theory in air-conditioned studios. Sympathy sometimes is the real prejudice to the politically or economically weaker. If a hybrid practitioner cannot disregard their perceived status or position, s/he will not dissolve our ethical anxiety as architects. As a hybrid practitioner readdressing issues of architectural engagement, the fundamental design position here lies in the participation and coproduction based upon mutual learning and knowledge exchange with indigenous villagers.

Way Forward towards Hybridity

In recent years there has been a rise of participatory practices and humanitarian projects all over the globe including China[77], which adds more and more social value and social capital through hands-on process of the participatory design-build, linking common ground and architecture in the local community. Pioneers from an older generation such as Giancarlo de Carlo, Lucien Kroll and Walter Segal[78] have successfully demonstrated why individual architects mattered; while contemporary, predominantly participatory practice in architecture has also influenced and been supported by architectural pedagogy, in particular those institution-based live projects or design-build largely inspired by Rural Studio.[79] At a more multi-disciplinary level, community-based action research or action learning projects have been conducted in global south, which is largely influenced by Participatory Rural Appraisal.[80]

It is a necessity to draw upon the above global rise of participation and engagement in architecture and urbanism on one hand, while keeping a conscious distance from the above propositions in contextualising the village in China on the other hand. Furthermore, thinking outside the sanitized environment of the ivory tower and design studios is a key towards the 'hybridity' in its real sense. 'Hybrid building' here

simultaneously triggers 'hybrid practitioner', and vice versa. Both concepts resist any classifications or categorizations, but appreciate more diachronic action learning and narrating structure in understanding more deeply the Chinese rural reality.

In summary, the problems emerging from the rapid rural urbanization in China mainly from the top-down ideologies and approaches has been challenging the very fundamental definitions of architecture and architects originated from the western discourse. A whole body of literature from different disciplines attempted to capture these phenomena, and along this process, adjusting themselves to accommodate the specific dynamics of the subject. However, discipline barriers both from within and outside still exist, preventing further understanding the context and conceptualizing alternative routes and methods.

With very limited engagements with the broader context including the social and the political, architecture as both a discipline and a profession in current Chinese rural villages has widened its gap with its once rooted local concept, context and connection. The practising profession has a weak driving force and impact to redefine itself through actively engaging and responding to the emerging crisis in the rural urbanization. While bearing in mind the traditional model of architecture and urbanization that derived from an interpretation of the Western experience is incomplete, those parts of the rising theory and practice of architecture and participation from the West, which has a possibility to engage more in Chinese specificities, hasn't been fully applied into practice or localized into specific context of rural revitalization under the rapid urbanization. The two forms of architectural knowledge in up-to-date Chinese rural reconstruction, one by indigenous practitioners and the other by pioneering architectural practitioners, are both locked, remaining tacit and lacking of dissemination with rigour. Thus the long-term sustainability and resilience of all those projects and practitioners (as well as profession) is difficult to nurture and maintain.

At a more specific level, a thicker and more adaptive interpretation in the architecture of engagements through social-anthropological field research and socially-engaged design activism is rarely included from architecture-based research and practice in transforming rural China from its real complexity.

1.3   Research Aims and Arguments

This thesis aims to understand the very fundamental conditions and up-to-date situations of Chinese rural villages in contemporary rapid urbanization under the top-down ideologies and paradigms, and to search for a sustainable path to transform Chinese rural villages through a bottom-up architecture of engagement. This architecture of social engagement provides an alternative, hybrid form of architectural design and practice through exploring tactical modes of collaborative architectural production of objects, processes and infrastructures in Chinese rural villages. At a more strategic level, the proposal of architecture of social engagement aims to mediate capital-dominated urbanization and globalization, and to facilitate social and cultural resilience at local levels.

The short term objective of this research is to raise awareness and offer a perspective of the roles, responsibilities and potentials of architectural practitioners through identifying the challenges/barriers and limitations/potentials of an architecture of engagement/socially-engaged architectural design in transforming Chinese villages. The long term objective is to define, to search and to cultivate a mechanism of real actions to bridge architecture and social-anthropology through socially-engaged architectural/spatial design.

The key argument of this research is that architectural hybrid practitioners and architectural design of hybrid building can play a key role in transforming Chinese rural villages in a more sustainable way in terms of the social, the cultural, the economic, the technical and the ecological development. For numerous reasons, urbanization had become inevitable in rural China, but it didn't have to be done so hastily, blindly and with such dominant priority and destructive views over the preservation and revitalization of the rural villages. The discipline of architecture and the profession of architects should and can become more relevant; they should be and can be more responsive, reflexive, and reengaged to mediate and manage those suspicious and marginalized, and those who have built their professional credibility on proving architecture and architects wrong. Within the Chinese context, in order to deeper understand and sustainably transform Chinese rural villages,

getting back to the lowest-ranked villages which stay farthest from the centre of political mega-structure, re-establishing collaboration with the family and clan kinship which forms the social structure in organising the villages, and getting hands dirty working with indigenous villagers from a perspective of hybrid building and a position of hybrid practitioner, provides an alternative, strategic way forward.

1.4   Research Question

What form of architecture can provide an alternative way forward for understanding and transforming contemporary Chinese rural villages in the current rapid urbanization?

(1) What do hybrid buildings and hybrid practitioners look like and how can they transform Chinese rural villages in a socially-sustainable way?

(2) Can hybrid buildings and hybrid practitioners, with different degrees of social engagement, revitalize the decaying rural villages which are constantly pressed by mainstream architectural practice, by prompting architectural activisms from within the very social fabric of Chinese rural villages?

(3) What are the potentials and limitations of architecture of hybrid buildings and hybrid practitioners in understanding and transforming Chinese villages?

1.5   Research Methodology

British architectural critic and theorist Jeremy Till put forward a tripartite model ('Architectural processes'; 'Architectural products'; 'Architectural performance') for advancing architectural research in avoidance to the three myths which architectural research tended to be ("Myth One: Architecture is just architecture; Myth Two: Architecture is not architecture; Myth Three: Building a building is a research").[81] The 'dynamic system' or the 'iterative loop' emerging from those three stages points out the necessity to develop architecture as a form of knowledge, which could span across the purely scientific knowledge or the humanities one, through researching both the process before and the performance after the built product.

The above provides a fundamental point of entry for the architectural research in this thesis with a focus on an architectural reinterpretation of Chinese rural villages through providing evidence of the value and potential of the twin concepts of hybrid building and hybrid practitioner. Therefore a qualitative research methodology has been developed with mixed methods in which one enhances another. Among these are: Firstly, case studies, which can trace a complete and coherent lineage of a building, "allowing some depth and getting closer to the architectural work"[82], from the early preparation and financing process to the post-occupancy use and dynamics; Secondly, anthropological research methods, particularly field research and 'thick description'[83], the former of which can collect full ranges of raw data from physical as-found information to oral histories, and the latter can generate qualitative meaning through reflexive and comparable interpretation on the maximised detailed data with minimised biases; Thirdly, action research, particularly participatory action research/learning, in which a reflexive process of progressive 'community of practice' with "communities of inquiry and action evolving and addressing questions and issues that are significant for those who participate as co-researchers"[84], based on the position that research and action must be done 'with' people rather than 'on' or 'for' people. As the action research case spanned a much longer timescale and required much more direct engagements from the research design compared to the other case studies, therefore it provided both the time and space for the author to

test the evolving hypothesis synthesized from the studying of other cases and samples. This single case study also provide an opportunity and platform to proffer a different evidence-based data collection and analysis process which helps to generate an insight and an argument more from an insider's position. Furthermore, based on the nature of the time-based development and dynamics in a participatory action research/learning, it also maintains a possibility to lead to a practice-based research method for the author as a practising hybrid practitioner in the field.

In all, by placing the architectural version within a broader framework combining social anthropology and design activism, this case-study-based thesis explores and examines Chinese rural villages through two layers: one is formulated from social-anthropological field research and the other is developed from action learning projects with the author as activist designer.

The Possibility of Chinese Village as Methods

The ambitious side of the methodological exploration in this thesis is built upon the idea of taking China as both the material and the method, or, that studying Chinese rural villages as both a raw material and an evolving method would help to understand the value and potential of architecture (hybrid building and hybrid practitioner) under rapid urbanization in current China.

But why should one go back to the village in order to seek a solution to the contemporary crisis of architecture as both a discipline and a profession in current China (as stated in Chapter 1 Section 1.1), in responding to the above-mentioned central question of exploring China as an alternative methodological approach to make dialogues to the established western regime?

It is the hypothesis in this thesis that only in the village the deep structure of Chinese agrarian civilization and society could be revealed and reinvented. Illustrating the Chinese urban-rural and state-society relations cannot avoid its hierarchical political structure, ranging from provinces, cities, districts, counties, and townships down to villages, more simply a linear city-county-village ordering. Located at the bottom chain for thousands of years, the village self-organized and self-governed by family and clan kinship, has been a production site for indigenous architectural knowledge

and vernacular tradition. The village acted as the archetypical unit in the built environment of vernacular China, and the built forms of the village were facilitated by multiple authors including clan leaders, carpenters, craftsmen, scholars, poets except the professional architects in Western understanding. In today's China, the village is being pushed into an extremely vulnerable position due to the unequal and uneven development of the rural and the urban. Thousands of years of agricultural civilization has lost and is losing most of its physical forms and representative patterns at almost all of the above scales as a result of industrialization, urbanization, and globalization. What is also being lost is its associated value, meaning and knowledge, particularly those embedded in architecture and architects.

The Chinese rural village under the current hegemonic urbanization, which is a uniquely hybrid place, interface and tempo-spatial condition both in terms of geographically and mentally, provides both a topic and a method. Therefore, researching the rural village should be referred to as both a reflexive lens and a productive site to understand the rapid rural-urban transition in current Chinese urbanism.

Case Study Research and its Potentials and Limits

In this thesis, six architectural cases were selected in six villages in rural China (Fig. 1.2), with four cases in administrative villages and the other two in natural villages. All the six village cases belong to 'outer suburban village', not only because this type of village maintains and preserves those most originally rooted characters and structures of rural villages in Chinese agrarian society spanning thousands of years, but also because the outer suburban village is the most prominent type reflecting the extreme polarity between rural villages (as the 'insider' in this thesis) and urban areas (as the 'outsider') under the broad context of rural-urban-divide in current China. For definition, the term 'villager' or 'villager residents' used in this thesis refers to those currently permanently residing villagers who have only one home which is located in the same rural village.

Though politically supervised by towns and small towns, the rural village in current China is still a stable social entity organised in a particular social structure by

particular social groups. Therefore the social meaning, social value and social relations embedded in each village architectural project need to be thicker interpreted from an architectural point of view in each case study. Each thesis chapter focuses on a case study on only one village and only one project within that village, which mostly compose a few sister-buildings with a key building.

For identifying specific cases, there were several essential criteria for the shortlist: Firstly, the architectural project should largely or partly match the conceptual framework of the twin concepts 'hybrid building' and 'hybrid practitioner'. Some projects have been reported, mostly informally by social media, that they were a bottom-up production of collaboration with villagers, such as Community Centre in Xihe village in Chapter 4 and Bishan Commune in Bishan village in Chapter 7. Some projects with that participative and collaborative clue/flavour were also shortlisted, such as Sun Commune in Shuangmiao village in Chapter 5 and Eco-lodges in Jianshan village in Chapter 8. Second, the project site should be based in rural villages in mainland China, as rural villages in Hong Kong, Macau or Taiwan have a different political institution and economic status both in history and at present. As a result, some cases could not be shortlisted including distinguished Taiwan-based architect Huang Sheng-yuan and his deeply-rooted local practice Field-office Architects. For the Desirable criteria, one was that the key practitioner should be based in mainland China and relatively independent at least in architectural circles, as those known, established architects or celebrity practitioners have much easier access to resources needed for almost any kind of architectural project in China; another desirable criteria was that the starting time of the projects should be ideally post 2005, not only because the Party/State launched a major rural development policy 'Constructing a New Socialist Countryside' in that year, but also because the time span since 2005 until now is widely considered as a transition period for rural reconstruction with more creative and critical professional architectural involvements than before. Therefore distinguished social-engaged rural architectural pioneer Hsieh Ying-chun and his Rural Architecture Studio based in Taiwan could not be shortlisted. Another practical criteria was that the project sites had to be within the accessible scope of the author with limited time and money for conducting fieldwork. Thus many promising projects done by the emerging practice Rural Urban Framework using participatory approaches, but physically scattered in different remote villages in

different parts of southern China, had to be ticked off, including the 'Bridge Renovation' project in Taiping village of Guizhou province, 'Community Centre and Primary School' project in Qinmo and Mulan village of Guangdong province, the reputational humanitarian projects 'Bridge to China' initiated by Professor NG Yan Yung Edward and the prefab rural projects done by Zhu Jingxiang Architects in recent years.

The final selected projects and villages are located in three geographically adjacent provinces: Anhui province and Henan province in China's Central region, and Zhejiang province in the Eastern region of China. This allowed for a relatively stable geo-cultural and climatic sphere, shared by each case and for further comparisons, which is crucial for studying China with such a particular size and scale. Furthermore, all of those case projects were started after 2006, a year after the official starting of 'Constructing a New Socialist Countryside'. Some of the projects' official status are still ongoing. Therefore an updated version of architectural engagements in rural villages in current China could be gained through setting this limited and up-to-date time frame (2006 - 2016). This seemingly rigid time frame in reverse breaks up those barriers from time-based existing research frameworks, and embraces those hands-on information and knowledge of the immediate surroundings and realities, which values the very constant process 'in the making' and 'in the field' of the real-world complexity and contingency.
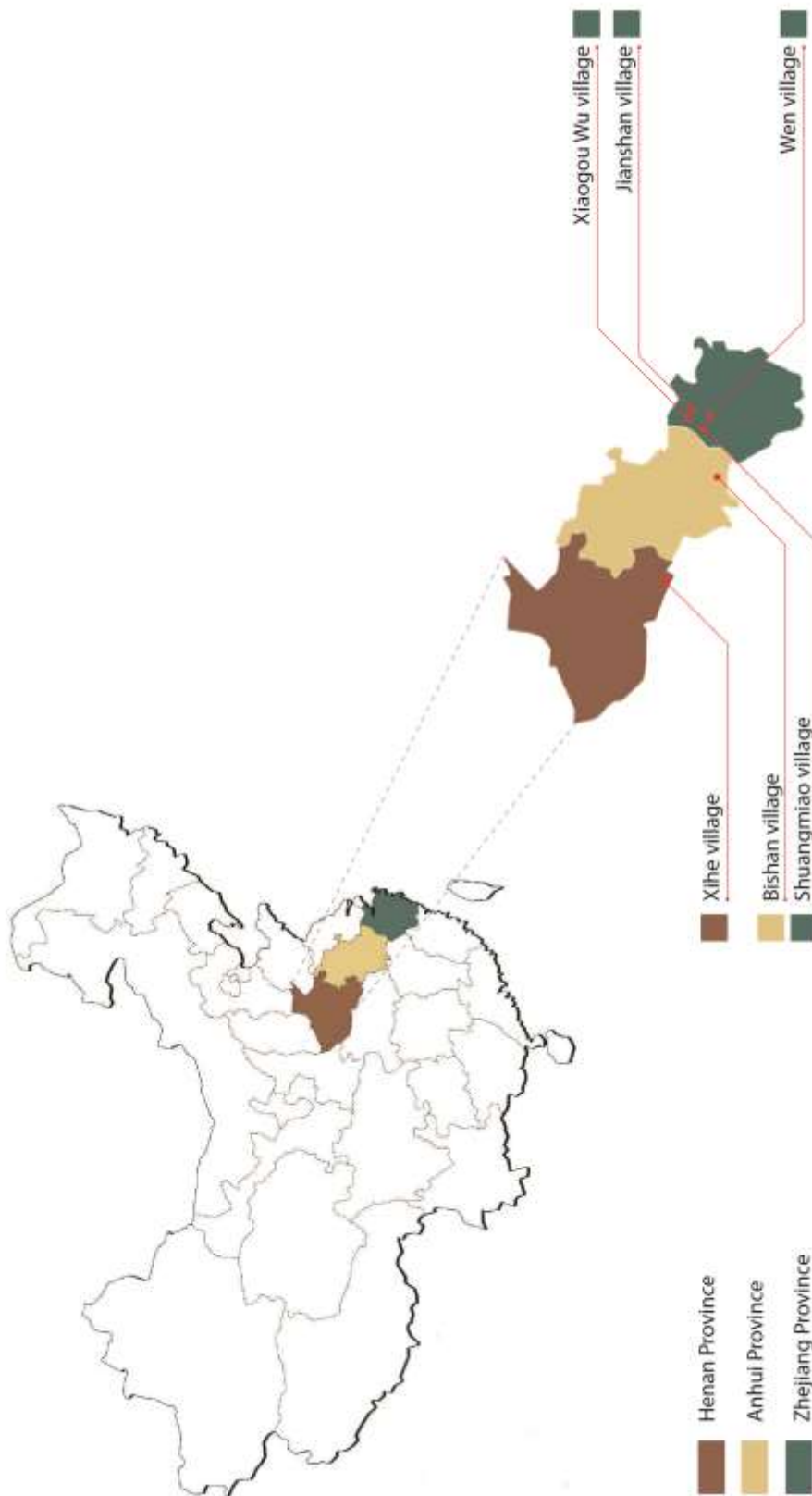
Fig. 1.2 Position map of six selected rural villages of China (Drawn by the author)

The selected cases are not always successful, some went wrong in the process and had more negative effects since the author's fieldwork. But they are prototypical. The architectural engagement into the revitalization and regeneration in those case villages reflects many other villages' experiences in a more-or-less shared way, or to be happening sooner or later under the homogenized driving forces by current Chinese rural reconstruction. However, the real limit for the final selected projects is the lack of longer-term temporal dimension for a more quantitative post-occupancy evaluation, as current qualitative data mostly collected from interviews with users in fieldwork has limitations in describing and evaluating occupation process of each case. The second limit also lies on the temporal dimension that all the cases in this thesis examined and compared from a synchronic viewpoint, lacking diachronic complements. Although the brief history of each village is traced, the fleeting but sometimes heavy influence from the diachronic evolution of the village life and institutions onto the detailed-studied hybrid building case could not be analysed. This leads to a big question of mediating the tension between unique/specific and universal/general for a single case study. Thus searching for a strong comparative interpretation should be a necessity, by reducing those diverse but irrelevant variables from each specific case into fundamental elements of an ideal-type or prototype.

Despite the above-mentioned limitations, case study research as the key method of this thesis has the potential to unpack and unveil a series of interlocking architectural forms related to the rapid rural urbanization in contemporary transitional China. As Pier Vittorio Aureli referenced from Giorgio Agamben's original source in Italian, states "the act of making an example is a complex business because it presupposes that in order to represent the canon, an example has to be conceptually disconnected from the forms of its every use. In the rhetorical mechanisms of an example, form is not simply an object in itself but an object that operates as a paradigm for something else".[85]

Field Work

The majority of data was collected through two main field work including an action research architectural design project, which included observational study,

photographic documentation, formal and informal interviews, consultation meetings and design workshops with local people. The participants include barefoot architects and craftsmen, officers from local authorities, local sociologists, and most of them are ordinary villagers. Within the overall framework periods a locally contextual and collaborative approach is developed to explore wider issues of the rural village and architecture, and the possibilities for the 'hybrid practitioner' through 'hybrid building' design intervention.

Based on the key nature of Chinese rural villages as an acquaintances society, or literally translated as 'familiar-people society', fieldwork was approached in the following strategic way[86]: to identify and approach at least one 'familiar-people' from local authorities through personal relationships was achieved before each fieldtrip. With the help of this key local agent and other informal networks, the process of accessing those villages and relevant villagers was extremely time-efficient. For example, an experienced local driver was sent for help in many cases; an extreme case contains visiting four ancestral halls in four neighbourhood villages within one day. The average stay was from around a week for each case village to several hours in those passer-by or adjacent villages. The transportation process also contained exploring the natural and cultural geography of the setting, and in-depth or life histories interviews with the local driver. The time span of each fieldwork done in this thesis is relatively short term compared to normal ethnographical or anthropological field studies, partly owing to the limited budget and difficult transportation from one remote village to another, (in some cases, even the adjacent natural villages under the same administrative village took half-day transportation,) and partly owe to this strategic coupling with 'familiar -people' in the rural villages.

Three sets of field surveys were conducted. The first exploratory survey, from December 2013 to January 2014 and with an open-ended framework, visited a few settlement towns at the edge of Shanghai, and a few rural-urban villages in northern bank of Chao Lake at the south of Hefei city of Anhui province, including Qizui village [see Appendix] for the first action research project later on. A preliminary understanding about the elements and forms of hybridity/hybrid building at the rural-urban interface in Chinese urbanization was gained. The second field survey, also as the first formal fieldwork, prepared from late 2014 and conducted from March to May in 2015, visited and investigated more than 20 administrative villages and

natural villages across Anhui, Zhejiang and Henan province. Amongst including those sample villages for case study: Xihe village [see Chapter 4], Shuangmiao village [see Chapter 5], Bishan village [see Chapter 7], Jianshan village [see Chapter 8], Xiaogou Wu village [see Chapter 9]. The third field survey was conducted from April to May in 2016, including Hong village, Xidi village and Shuanglong village in Anhui province, and Wen village [see Chapter 6] in Zhejiang province. Besides the two fieldworks of the three field surveys to villages, nearly 10 study trips to relevant cities have also been made either for building visit or in-depth interview with scholars and practitioners, from May 2014 to May 2016. Include: Brussels (January 2015), London (February 2015), Hangzhou (March 2015), Wuhan (April 2015), Beijing (April 2015; May 2016), Shanghai (May 2015; May 2016),Toledo (June 2015), Birmingham and Milton Keynes (August 2016), and Berlin (October to November in 2015) [see Appendix].

Interviews and Ethical Considerations in Research Design

The research design followed a qualitative approach with a focus on exploring and explaining the particular phenomenon of a particular setting. The key objective of field research design was to gather a wider range of viewpoints and perspectives on both the process and the product of the case study building project from that particular rural village. Those qualitative data was collected through semi-structured and un-structured interviews, ranging from individual interviews with semi-structured topic guides, focused group interviews and other informally guided conversations.

For identifying interviewers, there were three main methods: The first is the 'typical case sampling', such as the known architectural designer, local authorities, and the owner/frequent user of the project. There were also a significant number of villagers connected through the help of local 'familiar-people' before the interviews, as they were locally regarded as respondents who have particular first-hand knowledge and experience, and who could largely show the variations based on the selected issues of the architectural project. The second is the 'snowball sampling', which was normally built from the positive interviews or conversations, identifying more links and connections for further discussions and investigations of a specific enquiry about the case study project. The third is the 'randomly purposeful sampling', which on one

hand limited the data collection to represent the local community as a whole, but on the other hand worked as a fruitful complement to the focused group or individual interviews as it ran in a more straightforward way in the field without possible bias from local agencies. Apart from those pre-booked interviews conducted with a specific starting time and location, most other individual interviews were normally conducted with mid-aged male villagers, mostly started as a spontaneous talking in and around the case study building(s) and then went on for in-house interviews with more complex questions and discussions for many cases after building the mutual trust. Elderly couples who live nearby the case study building were approached largely as a smaller scaled focused group (two to four people excluding the author) for interview, ranging from half an hour to several hours. Gender difference was thoughtfully considered in the interview, in which the elderly male interviewers were asked more about life histories and broader social changes in and around the building(s) and village, whereas the elderly female interviewers were guided to provide more in-depth, anecdote details of the building process and social process of the village, who has always been proved later to be the key story-tellers. In this way the interview design secured and covered a wide range of voices from the village during the overall limited fieldwork time, and contributed the early narrations of the case study particularly in each occupation and social use part.

In terms of ethical considerations, the majority of interviews didn't involve children under 18 years old, as most of the residents living in rural villages are elderly people. There existed several minor cases in which the grandchildren were together with the interviewers, but they didn't and were not particularly asked to involve into the verbal discussion. Considering the relatively low social and economic status of rural elderly community, the interview design also provided a non-threatened way from the very beginning in terms of the way of verbal communications and eye contacts which fully respected the interviewer and the setting. Sensitive questions related to village politics and family clan ties were avoided in some of the interviews, according to the author's quick response and judgement from initial conversations. Whereas more sophisticated questions were successfully posed after the author's time and financial input, such as buying an umbrella or a craft product from the interviewers, and didn't affect the vulnerable interviewers negatively from their feedback. Besides, there were no larger group interviews as that would tend to make interviewers/families

uncomfortable to present their true feelings and opinions despite they probably know each other.

Participatory Action Research

Instead of the clearly-defined output-led research, participatory action research is process-driven and started only with a feasible scope but without a pre-occupied boundary. Therefore, it allows for a more systematically documentation and reflection of the work-in-process, with a main focus on the consequences of building process rather than the building product(s) only.

The first exploratory design research project has been the 'Visitors Centre' architectural design in Qizui village, Anhui province, started from May to August 2014 as the part of a formal competition entry organized by the local authority, failed in late 2014 both in terms of the design competition and design engagement with local community. The second action design project, learning from the lessons from the first one, is the 'Clan-community Hall' architectural design in Xiaogou Wu village, Zhejiang province, which started from March 2015 to March 2016 [See more in Chapter 9]. Before this primary action research project, a pilot project called 'Recycling Material Collection Point' was also initiated and largely fulfilled during February to March 2015, providing local communities a temporary space for gathering abandoned everyday objects for future reuse through re-appropriating a left-over corner at the edge of the village.

The action research projects, particularly the selected case 'Clan-community Hall' architectural design in Xiaogou Wu village, adopted mixed-method qualitative research approaches including visual ethnography, activist research and research by design. This architectural design project used a hands-on participatory approach, shifted the role of the author from a distant researcher into an activist practitioner, closely worked with a local barefoot-architect who has been a rural reconstruction activist and with local clan-community members, aimed to raise the views and design intelligence of the empowered underprivileged clan to the prominence to the elite class supervising this natural village from higher levels of government. The research by design process used visual methods of data collection and production, including

photographs, photo montage, mapping, modelling, freehand sketches and computer-aided visualizations. These participatory qualitative techniques have been used extensively as a visual ethnographic technique to make the familiar strange.[87]

Nine Types of Raw Materials

In order to generate data with reliability and trustworthiness, the raw materials of each case study village and building approached by the author can be categorized into nine types:

(1) 'Broader site context': this included the political, economic, cultural, social, demographic context of the chosen village and key changes particularly in the past decade. The 'site' not only pointed to the building site or its located village, but also that broader field through placing the specific building site and village within the wider regional rural-urban transition, or village development at a regional scale.

(2) 'Physical village as found': it emphasized on external relationship with natural landscape and internal relationships between residential area and shared facilities, such as ancestral hall, communal plaza, public dining hall, primary school, public cemetery, food market etc.

(3) 'Visual documentations of each case building': this particularly referred to the drawings at various stages of the building process from initial scratches, sketches, to more finalized plans, elevations and sections etc., if the practitioner or the villager did and provided them; for those who made case building without heavily depending on drawing, the author did the drawings or diagrams based on both the author's survey and the oral date collected from the practitioners and villagers.

(4) 'Regulating authority on rural planning and village construction', either on their written reports or their verbal responses: this was an open-ended literature search, both physically and digitally, such as local newspapers, archives and official websites, which had also started from before the fieldtrip to the village area, on identifying any relevant previous studies in this area or other studies on similar topics but in different areas.

(5) 'Client body': this referred to the form and organization of which is sometimes changing from a group-based partnership to individual stakeholders at different stages of different projects, for identifying the interrelated questions of who employs, who owns, and who maintains with further who designs, who constructs and who uses.

(6) 'Building techniques': this referred to the locally sourced resources and locally appropriate way of making, manufacturing and assembling building components. This could be mainly surveyed from walking through the village, visiting relevant workshops or manufacturing plants, identifying from larger part of the existing building fabric and talking with relevant people such as local builders and craftsman.

(7) 'Visual materials from the everyday': this referred to the documentation and representation on how people (with more emphasize on local residents than outside tourists here) use the case building and its related built environment, through the author's direct observation and sometimes active participation, mostly in the forms of photographs, videos and sometimes quick sketches. Additionally, visual materials were collected as more as possible on how the other buildings and space in the village had been occupied by both the permanent users and temporary ones like visitors.

(8) 'Oral data from face-to-face interviews': Oral data was collected through talking to people with different age, gender, status etc., in different forms of interviews ranging from semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews such as life histories, focus groups, guided conversations to informal and spontaneous chats, as more as possible to gain a broader view on both specific context and complex situation. The elder residents were given a particular attention, because they could provide oral histories in depth, such as why they live there now, where they live before, how much things have changed over decades and how it affects both the individual and collective life of the villagers.

(9) 'Stories and viewpoints from the architectural practitioners' side': this included both formal and informal interviews with the lead architect(s), assistant architect(s) and other related design professionals on design issues of constraints and limitations, contradictory opinions and processes, estimated and actual budget and time, etc.

The specificity of this social-anthropological approach to data collection clearly reflects as Peter Blundell Jones's research on pre-industrial architecture without architects, in which "the raw material is direct observation of practices and oral accounts about what people do and why they do it, but for this reason it is primarily in the present tense".[88]

Thick Description in Anthropology and Thicker Interpretation in Architecture

'Thick description'[89] is to explain multiple meanings behind human actions and behaviours with as much detail as possible, an anthropological method raised and developed mainly through distinguished American anthropologists Clifford Geertz in his seminal work 'The Interpretation of Cultures' published in 1973. Originally drawing from the British philosopher Gilbert Ryle, Geertz explored the thick description on cultural history and practice, and outlined culture as "a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life." [90] The continuity from those 'inherited conceptions' largely inspired the architectural work done by British architectural historian and theorist Peter Blundell Jones, who developed 'thicker interpretation' as a key methodological direction to collect and analysis data. In '*Modern Architecture Through Case Studies*', Blundell Jones "tried to identify many different architectures, to discriminate between them, and to show the virtues of a thicker description."[91] As Blundell Jones points out, "it is always a matter of interpretation, and often involves layer after layer of information."[92] Also, as Geertz put it, "what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to."[93]

While contemporary brief and programmes of a building tends to be thin and limited, associated with other 'crisis in architecture', partly due to the overwhelming technical and bureaucratic system, a thicker interpretation learning from "anthropologist's accounts of how buildings were used and what they meant" provides a way for architectural humanities studies.[94] Therefore, achieving the description and

interpretation with adequate thickness needs as much detailed data as possible to understand things as a complicated but complete whole.

Methodological Limitations and Response

It is worth noting that the much debated limit of representation always exists, which starts from the "general removal from everyday life that accompanies every means of representation".[95] Except the undoubted advantages for photographs and video filming both in terms of representing the authenticity and in terms of capturing the ephemeral, these representational methods are "limited and selective in viewpoint, and relative sizes and positions can be difficult to gauge".[96] Maps, models, building drawings and other visual materials used for communication during building process, no matter provided from architectural practitioners or reproduced from the author's own field survey, are important but not the key to a thicker interpretation, as it is always crucial to question that invisible gap between those mediums as instruments of power produced by the professionals and those spatial practice done and conceived by the everyday users, as claimed in Henri Lefebvre's influential work.[97]

Interviews during anthropological fieldwork have large potentials to fill the above-mentioned gap, and have contributed in shaping some parts of the key argument in this thesis, through generating rich data with a diversity of voices and opinions on shared topics. But it also has limitations. As mentioned before, from the beginning the author attempted to avoid the highly structured forms of interviews, which predefined and identified target groups with fixed responses clearly, such as similar questionnaires given to selected groups according to age and gender, but lacks flexibility and interaction so tends to be thin. Thus almost all of the interviews during the fieldwork were conducted in a semi-structured or unstructured manner, with particular attentions to spontaneous informal conversations on the current-time-current-place topics within the living setting, rather than discussing the offsite topics in prepared interview venues. This kind of setting-based interviews heavily relied on oral languages as the medium, and occasionally supported with visual diagrams coproduced by the participants, which inevitably face the linguistic duality of signifier and signified. Therefore the texts transcribed from the interview recordings are themselves metaphorical, with their meanings to be interpreted further. The

interpretations tend to be diverse and without order, even self-contradictory, in the degrees of revealing and masking the authentic content of the original conversations in the field, according to the very subtle but possibly determinative differentiations between different qualitative researchers. Therefore it is a question of inter-subjectivity between the researcher and the researched.

To get rid of that methodological limitation, and towards a thick description or thicker interpretation, the presentation of this thesis takes a tactical move by returning to a strict chronological sequence of each case project, to provide a way to narrate and represent the building process that is as detailed and alive as possible. Each architectural project for case study in this thesis has been roughly divided into four chronological processes with sometimes non-linear overlaps: firstly, the early preparation and 'Fund-raising process'; secondly, 'Design process' ranging from the conceptual to the finalized; thirdly, 'Construction process'; and fourthly, 'Occupation process'. Among them, a highly descriptive writing strategy and style will be used for the first three processes, to document and present the objective facts as an untouched entity for returning the right of interpretation back to the readers of this thesis. The fourth 'Occupation process' is a mixture of raw data observed directly from the researcher and the more 'cooked' data and analysis findings based on the author's thick interpretation, with a close link to the final part of 'Concluding thoughts' or 'Conclusion and Discussion'. Besides, before the main body of each case study chapter, a few starting paragraphs briefly state a particular set of themes with links to specific villages, and with links to the broader background context stated in the Introduction chapter.

In this structuring way, a basis for identifying variables of each case and making connections and comparisons between different cases is established. Therefore each case study chapter is a free-standing story to explore, while dialogues and synergies can be created through comparison of selected cases. Furthermore, the specific sequence of those cases is to be organised under a reasonable order, which is based on the different degrees of architectural engagement between professional outsiders and villager insiders. The final conclusion draws from the commonalities of all the gathered cases rather than their particularities, in order to sketch out a vision and a modus operandi for hybrid architectural production of objects, processes and infrastructures in Chinese rural villages, and towards an alternative elsewhere.

1.6   Research Value and Impact

The research in this thesis is the first attempt that is embedding thicker interpretation of Chinese rural villages in some of the major debates in architecture; and the first attempt to place architectural design practice in Chinese rural villages within a broader framework combining anthropology and activism.

The thesis recognizes and rediscovers what in high forms of architecture and urbanism in Chinese rural villages has previously been suppressed. It reveals the tensions that lie beneath the surface of rural villages through hybrid building interventions by exploring and re-examining highly specific architectural cases through a detailed description of the process and product by architecture of engagement. The research exposes the undercurrent of 'silent' issues in architecture that constitute Chinese rural villages, and brings a more inclusive and resilient way of producing and engaging village architecture as a palimpsest and a stage for multiple authorships and narratives under current Chinese hegemonic urbanism.

A deeper and up-to-date insight can be gained into Chinese village locality through the lens of hybrid building and hybrid practitioner, and into how to prompt and catalyse micro-level, small-scaled, transgressive change in other villages from within the mega-political and socio-cultural complexity of current rural China.

Lessons learnt from 'hybrid building' and 'hybrid practitioner' in Chinese context might be applied into other situations of developing contexts in which hegemonic forces from the outside have constantly driven the changing lifestyles and fragile identities of indigenous people and community, in order to move away the normative concerns and structures of traditional practice limited within a single discipline.

Furthermore, 'hybrid building' as both a position and a methodology might also direct architects with a global perspective to dig a bit more into local understanding, to facilitate more unlocking of a local deep structure and to keep a more conscious point of Stage -1 (for example, compared to RIBA Stage 0), in order to nurture, to catalyse and to trigger further local action from the bottom-up. The 'hybrid practitioner' opens up a new door for younger generations of architectural

practitioner to expose and engage the complex, real-world, hidden status quo and challenges towards a social-transformative architecture not in capital 'A' but for people and community.

Some of the chapters of the thesis, particularly those case study chapters, are revisions or modifications of the author's single-authored papers presented at international conferences or published in refereed journal articles since 2014, based on the materials derived from this PhD research. At a more general level, the information from this thesis offers both English-speaking architectural professionals and non-architectural readers a refreshed architectural perspective on what is happening in Chinese rural villages. It may be difficult for readers without a background in architecture to follow certain discussions, but they will nonetheless find the cases presented in the thesis interesting.

1.7   Structure of the Thesis

This thesis has a main body that is divided into two parts, one is concerned with an architectural contextualization and the other is about architectural case studies, following the author's two main architectural conceptualizations (hybrid building and hybrid practitioner) and research aims to understand and to transform Chinese rural villages.

PART I of this thesis includes three introductory chapters that set out the context and provide an overview of architecture in Chinese rural villages, both in terms of insiders and in terms of outsiders' perspectives. Chapter 2 sketches out an overall picture of Chinese rural villages in terms of the political, economic and social change and its related institutional barriers under the current rapid urbanization. A photo essay, from one of the author's field investigations on rural villages in three provinces, vividly presents the challenging situation and contrasting condition for village revitalizations with a particular focus on collective building type - the ancestral hall in current rural China. Chapter 3 reviews and re-examines both the historical and contemporary link between architectural profession, practice and Chinese rural villages. Through that tracing of the lineage of architects and master-builders in a Chinese dimension, the chapter aims to uncover the forces and flows both from the outside and from within the Chinese rural villages that are deeply embedded in the 'field' and found in spheres that make up rural architectural reconstruction.

PART II of this thesis is consisting of six case studies organized into six freestanding chapters, each of which is designed to probe and address a particular aspect of villages in and around the hybrid building interventions by hybrid practitioner. For example, a 'semi-architect' and his participatory architectural practice for an underdeveloped village living below poverty line but with strong collective 'Red' memory; a 'barefoot-architect' and his eco-lodges for a resourceful village but lacking of cohesion upon state-led tourism development; an amateur 'literati-architect' and his ambitious housing scheme for a forgotten village with untouched building fabric. Each case study starts from a couple of interrelated topics of a broader context, and each chapter is then sub-divided into a series of sections including the place of the village, the practitioner, the specific project process ranging from fund-raising, design,

construction to occupation, and the concluding thoughts. Each chapter tells a story about the transformation catalysed by a building with multiple authorships, and all six chapters are rendered with shared whilst sometimes contradictory stories from villagers, practitioners, and hybrid buildings.

The sequence of six cases studies is intentionally organized in an order which is based on the architectural reliance and village relevance of the key hybrid practitioner in each case study. Therefore, the first three cases (Chapter 4 to Chapter 6) talk about three established professional architects (although their positions are 'alternatives') as expert-outsiders; while the last three cases (Chapter 7 to Chapter 9) narrate three non-professional architectural practitioners who all tried to become or connect with an insiders' perspective and position. (Except Chapter 8, the hybrid practitioner in this case was already an insider of the village before.)

Drawing on the identification of the challenges/barriers and limitations/potentials of socially-engaged architectural design in transforming Chinese villages, the Conclusion chapter addresses the transformative value and potential for hybrid buildings (architectural design) and hybrid practitioners (architectural practice) in understanding and transforming Chinese rural villages (from the bottom-up) under the current rapid urbanization (from the top-down). It concludes that this form of architecture of social engagement, as a hybrid building blended design engagements from both the within and the outside, is an appropriate alternative for the ongoing process of rural reconstruction in parallel to rapid urbanization, and the hybrid practitioners have the potential to produce this form of architecture in Chinese rural villages in a socially-resilient way.

Notes and References of Chapter 1

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Jiao Meng, 'WB: China's national poverty line is higher than its new standard', October 16, 2015

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[5] For the political stability has been linked to the fruitful poverty reduction and continuous economic growth, see more details in Chapter 3

[6] 'Construction of A New Socialist Countryside', or 'Constructing New Socialist Rural Area Movement', is a guiding principle for the rural policies of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) launched in the 5th plenary session of the 16th Party Congress in October 2005. It is different from the bottom-up procedures 'Rural Reconstruction Movement' in 1920s-1930s China, led by typical figures such as Yangchu Yan (James Yen) and Shuming Liang. Besides it is different from the 'New Rural Reconstruction Movement', facilitated by a number of academic scholars and social activists working on rural cooperative experimentation in the past 15 years in China.

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Chapter 2

The Operational Context of Architecture in Chinese Rural Villages

Fig. 2.1 Zhongshan Jin village, Anhui province, 2016 (Photograph by the author)

In the rapidly changing and contested rural urbanization in current China, to seek for an alternative way for architectural design and practice which acts as catalysts of social transformation, economic resilience and cultural continuity means deeply mapping and understanding both the past and the present apparatus in and around the villages. Thus this chapter aims to interrogate the accumulated past and the immediate present realities of villages in rural China from a brief overview of the framework driven by political, legislative, economic, cultural and social forces. It outlines those key elements constituting the current operating context of Chinese villages in which architectural design and practice is situated, through governmental documents and newspaper, policy reports, scholarly literature reviews, documentary photo essay and lived experience transcribed from original fieldwork.

2.1   Political and Legislative Context

Household Registration System

Although the interactions and definitions between the rural and urban from geographical or development points of view seems ambiguous and unstable under current Chinese hyper-accelerated urbanization in which reversed change could happen overnight, the disjunction between the rural and urban is still sharp and clear from political and legislative perspectives. That is mainly because of the Household Registration ('Hukou') System (hereinafter referred to as HRS) which separated Chinese citizens into agricultural population ('rural hukou') and non-agricultural population ('urban hukou'), enhanced by a two-tier social security system in which the 'urban hukou' is prioritized over the rural one in accessing public and social welfare.

Since 1949, Chinese authorities have strictly controlled the migration of peasants to the cities.[1] The dominant HRS policy law was first introduced through two draft policies, partly adopted from the then Soviet Union. The first one was launched in April 1953 and the other in March 1954. HRS was designed to facilitate rapid industrialization at that time by limiting the free movement for people with different 'hukou' status except some minor cases like marriage, university study or joining the

army. Most of the policies' contents were officially approved in the first constitution of PRC in September 1954. And since then, for the following two decades (1958 -1978) as the so called 'centrally planned era' or the 'planned economy period', the exchange between the rural and urban including people, goods, information and capital was largely limited, making rural and urban areas totally independent socio-economic systems. The rural population were expected and forced to be tied into the village for almost all those two decades. There were only two exceptions, one was the 'Great Leap Forward' (1958 -1962), and the other was the special movement 'Up to the Mountains, Down to the Villages' during the Cultural Revolution (1966 -1976) following the 'Great Chinese Famine' (1959 -1961), both of which forced millions of urban youth sent down to rural villages in the name of re-education from peasants in order to release the stress of urban resource. This stabilizing social pattern again enhanced the rural social structure based and relied on 'familiar people' and 'geo-ties/relations'.[2] The harsh policy hadn't been relaxed until 1984 after the opening of the 1978's overall reform, when it firstly permitted legally for the rural population to live and work in city according to their willing, and the possibilities and approaches to transfer their rural registration status into an urban one. Although the social security gap associated with those two registration status has not yet been filled completely, due to more sub-divisions emerged, such as the 'city social security' (cheng bao) for original urban dwellers while the so called 'town social security' (zhen bao) for those migrant ones,[3] as a result the massive labour migration from rural to urban has started since then. It is an unprecedented phenomenon in China's history, and an unprecedented scale and speed probably in the world's history, which has been a fundamental driving force for Chinese economic development based on industrialization and urbanization.

As human instinct to secure for better lives, more and more rural peasants joined the continuous migrant waves at a faster pace than the institutional reform of the HRS. As a result millions of rural migrants have become the so called 'floating population', whose official status remains the rural agricultural while most of their live-work time is spent in urban areas, with their self-identities exclusive of both rural and urban. This particular social group has played an important part in the rapid urbanization and expansion of Chinese cities and towns, particularly in the construction industry where low-skilled and low-paid construction workers have been largely in needed.

The 'floating population' maintains their relationships with the rural villages, particularly their rural rituals including festival gatherings, weddings and funerals. They act as a bridge between the rural and urban, bringing back those exotic urban-generated information/images from every aspect of daily lives to the village, which destabilized many aspects including construction sector: physically, in the so-called urban ways of making building and environment; and mentally, through the rapidly loss of confidence in a rural architectural culture largely due to socio-economic disparity.

Dual Land Ownership System

The dual land ownership system of China is not only a product of historical legacies and contemporary specificities, but also a part of the ideologically given concept of 'socialist market economy', which provides a fundamental development condition for the Chinese economic practice related to rural urbanization.

While the 'city's urban land' (the definition of the term 'urban' is also fleeting under rapid urbanization in current China; as 'city's suburban land' belongs to the collective as referred to Land Administration Law) completely owned by the state has been an unconditional status and definition since the establishment of the PRC in 1949, several key changes have taken place in rural land ownership and its controlling structure, in particular on the rural agricultural land, which shifted and evolved in different forms at different periods compared to the relatively stable urban land ownership.

Peter Ho, Professor of Chinese Economy and Development at Delft University of Technology, raised the central question that 'who owns Chinese (rural) land'[4] by revealing and reattaching those changes and hidden influences behind them into the current ambiguities of land ownership in rural China. He explores and examines the Chinese genealogy of the property rights and land ownership through tracing the evolution of land rights and the relevant institutional arrangements since Imperial China.[5]

Changes and dynamics after the establishment of PRC is the primary focus for this section. There were generally three stages for the reform of rural land policy and

management system since the establishment of the PRC in 1949: the first stage was the 'Land Reform' from 1950 to 1952, during which land was distributed into individual farmers for free and with the exemption of land tax, followed by establishing junior and senior working groups based on existing villager-cooperatives self-organized by rural villagers from 1953 to 1957. This stage witnessed the historic moment of returning the land ownership to the rural villagers by thoroughly abolishing the system of private land ownerships. The second stage was the 'People's Commune' period from 1958 to 1978, during which the private land ownership was completely replaced by the collective-owned or the state-owned. It dreamed to combine the political administration and economic development into one Commune system, in which Commune members produce and consume together with the absolutely equal distribution. This collective utopia as proved a failure and facilitated the third stage from 1979 till now, namely the introduction and application of a new land contracting system called 'Household Responsibility Contract System' (hereinafter referred to as HRCS), which has freed much rural labour force from cultivating the land. The key point was that although the land ownership theoretically belongs to the 'collective' of each rural village, the practical responsibility to care for the housing construction land ('zhai ji di'; land for house/living) and to farm on the allocated agricultural land ('geng di'; arable land for working), as well as a small area of family plot/private plot ('zi liu di'; land left to the self) should be returned to the 'private use' by individual family household as the basic unit. As Jonathan Unger, Professor of Political and Social Change of National Australian University, has pointed out, when the Maoist program had frayed the very social fabric it sought to strengthen, ''household contracts – essentially, a return to family farming – eliminated the difficulties associated with collective cooperation by, quite simply, terminating collective cooperation.''[6]

Following this successfully de-collectivization of rural land guided by consistent governmental policies from 'No.1 Document of 1984', 'No.11 Document of 1993', 'No.16 Document of 1996' to 'No.18 Document of 2001', major reforms have been accomplished in terms of strengthening the rights of farmers' over their agricultural lands, culminating in the revised 'Land Administration Law' (hereinafter referred to as LAL) of 1999 (2004 Amendment) and the 'Rural Land Contracting Law' (hereinafter referred to as RLCL) of 2002. Under RLCL, farmers' land rights are categorized as

'contracting and operation rights' to all categories of farmland, including arable land, forestland and grassland and to wasteland. Contracting and operation rights to farmland are allocated to individual rural households in the village through a contracting process for a term of 30 years in case of arable land, for a term of 30-50 years in case of grassland and for a term of 30 years or longer in case of forestland.[7] Furthermore, after the milestone 'Law on Property' went into effect in 2007, which covers and for the first time clearly articulates all the three property types (state, collective and private) in China as entitled to the same level of protection under the law and all the property rights are divided into ownership rights, use rights and security rights,[8] rural land ownership still remains vested in collectives and individual peasants' land-use rights are 'usufruct' as opposed simply to contractual rights. As a consequence, it provides a comprehensive framework for the creation, modification, transfer and requisition of rights, with special attention to provisions designed to increase security and efficiency in real estate transactions, but the state-led system of land tenure hasn't been changed.

However, two general contradictions have appeared in rural China: Firstly at the village level, the practical operation rights on collective-owned land lies within administrative villages instead of being granted to the lowest collective. In many cases the leases of land which belonged to natural villages are now issued by administrative villages; the booming value of rural land driven by real estate development makes local governments' common practice legitimizing the abolition of land ownership from natural village (which was owned by natural village's past form – 'production team').[9] Peter Ho explained that, "although the natural village – in its capacity as the production team – held formal land ownership rights, it possessed no real power over land. For example, the power to transfer ownership to another community or to the state, or even determine what crops were grown, rested with the higher administrative levels (the townships and above). In short, the natural village was unable to safeguard the interests to the land that its inhabitants tilled and lived on."[10]

Secondly at the household level, the confusion is particularly caused by the term 'family /private plot', which was introduced in the early 1960s to mean that a small plot of land can be used for personal needs, such as building/extending their own houses, however the land ownership remains with the collective. The contract is

often but a 'paper agreement' because the so-called 'rural collectives' (the ownership of which is unclear in between township governments and leaders of administrative or natural villages) can appropriate and redistribute leased land whenever deemed necessary.[11]

In brief, there is a coexistence of two different major kinds of land ownership in China, one is where the rural land belongs to the collective, and the other is where the urban land belongs to the state in current China. Two different ownerships correspond to two different land-use rights, which have a profound and far-reaching impact on building industry and activities. The land-use rights of state-owned land can be traded in the market under the leasehold system, (which has been a driving engine for the Chinese overall economic development and urban growth led by different levels of local governments in the past 30 years,) whereas the same rights of collectively-owned rural land are limited merely to the exchange of contract rights among villagers within land tenure.[12] The originally unclearly-defined property ownership structure has become more and more ambiguous and multi-interpretive according to different organization structures of local authorities, the driving forces of rapid urbanization with booming land value for local governments' financing, particularly the rural land tenure system further alienated from the wider rural villagers. The existing dual system of Chinese rural and urban land ownership, as both a legacy of planned economy before 1978 (state ideology) and a product of market economy after 1978 (free market), also sharpens the rural urban disparity and backs up more and more aggressive rural developments during the past 30 years' rapid urbanization.

Village Politics

China has a strictly hierarchical political administrative system, ordering from the State Council, Province, City, District, County, Town, Township, to the Village.[13] As the lowest state administration is township, the village thus acts as the bottom chain of this vertical institutional system with large degrees of self-governance. As mentioned in section 1.2 of Chapter 1, there exist official sub-categorizations in village category -- the 'administrative village' and the 'natural village'. They are differentiated by the presence of a Party branch, which only exists in the

administrative village, and confirms its status as an official form of collective governance that lies below the township. This also means that, although the category 'administrative village' refers to an informal governmental institution, it is more formal than the 'natural village' of which physical and social fabric have been accumulated from below, and largely based on family and clan. Besides, the Head of Village of an administrative village is entitled to a salary through the government payroll, although the position has not been clearly defined as an 'official agent' in the state law, and neither does the specific legislations as to the work of Village Committees.

The village leadership in an administrative village is divided into two parts: one part is the Village Committee (hereinafter referred to as VC), which is normally made up of 5 to 9 representatives voted/elected by the villagers, including the chair of Village Committees as Head of Village; the other part is the Village Branch of the Chinese Communist Party (hereinafter referred to as VBCP), with the Party Secretary as its lead who is commissioned directly by the supervising Township Party Committees in a township government. Therefore the Village Committee acting as an institution is responsible for everyday governance of the village, while the Party branch participates in the governance on behalf of Communist Party, with a focus on ideology construction and CCP member management. It is worth mentioning again that, for the natural village, it is only the Head of Village leading a team of Village Committee members who take charge. But mostly the umbrella relationship between the natural village and its administrative village makes the path for the Party Secretary to participate and even influence the decision-making process in public affairs of the natural village. In recent years, the experiment of combining Head of Village and Party Secretary into one single candidate has also appeared in some economically-positive developing villages, with its pros and cons much debated in both political institutions and academia without leading to a consensus yet.[14]

In terms of the electoral system, it was fundamentally upgraded through the launch of 'Organic Law on Village Committee' (hereinafter referred to as OLVC) in late 1987, which determined that the election of the Head of Village and other Village Committee members should completely be based on the result of villagers' own votes, rather than from the few pre-selected representatives' votes or appointed

directly by the township governments before. Although the specific and standardised election methods were not provided, this legislative framework linked and empowered wider villagers to participate into village politics. Yang Zhong, Professor of Political Science of the University of Tennessee of the U.S, summarizes three common institutional constraints in the village election, including nominating process, electoral campaign and the dominant role playing by the village Party apparatus.[15] However, the bottom-up nature of selected Village Committees strengthened its role and status in decision-making process in village affairs, constituting a decision-making team with Party members.

Besides the above two forms of power, there are two other village organizations, the Village Assembly (hereinafter referred to as VA) and the Village Representative Assembly (hereinafter referred to as VRA). The former is set up as an ideal democratic model for village self-governance, which welcomes grass-roots participation into decision-making on those issues directed related to the villagers' everyday life, such as allocation of village public finance for building public infrastructure or educational facilities. However, it is impractical to hold regular VA for most Chinese villages with considerable mass, therefore the VRA as a reduced form has been adopted widely in current rural China. Ambiguous enough, however, the OLVC does not specify how village representatives are chosen for the VRA, which leads to various forms of VRA in different villages.[16] Thus the real organizations and functions of VRA vary quite differently according to different regions and villages. But the general tendency seems to be the same: without the clearly defined election route and legally protected power scopes and responsibilities, neither VA nor VRA could escape the erosive administrative culture of formalism without meaningful balances in village politics, particularly when facing a stronger authority led by the Party apparatus or VCs. Their weak positions determine their roles as state instruments rather than representatives of the village.

Therefore, on the administration and authority structure in Chinese rural villages,[17] the formal village power structure in rural China has been projected into three forms -- VC, VBCP, VA/VRA, but the dual leadership exists in its practical operation -- one is for state/government, and the other is for community/people. And for village leaders, the question and confusion of who is government and who is community is

always there. As mentioned above, village leaders of rural China are not officially state employees with fixed salaries and are voted in by villagers (except Party Secretary of VBCP), thus on one hand they should serve the people (as so-called 'civil servants'); but on the other hand, as village cadres they receive regular compensation and benefits from the supervising townships, and direct the daily governance of village affairs, in this sense they belong to part of the Chinese state authorities (as ruling officials/class). This dual leadership in rural villages mirrors the Chinese-characteristic social political structure, which didn't (and probably won't due to the extreme complexity of the local condition) offer clarification of the ambiguously-defined roles, responsibilities and action scopes.

This also becomes an uncontrollable factor from the village perspective, in terms of the disagreement between the village's two managing powers, both of which are formally present -- the Head of village and the Party Secretary, whilst with contested viewpoints as evidenced in some cases. From a broader administrative perspective, the hierarchical system of administration in rural governance from township to village fosters a more efficient coordination between vertical governmental agencies than between the horizontal ones at village scales, particularly at a transition moment when the central government has gradually reduced their direct involvements in public affairs and economy in support of transferring from a centralized planned economy to the market economy.

Therefore these above-mentioned circumstances resulted in a 'political vacuum' in rural villages, which could not be filled by township governments or local Party branches.[18]

This creates a space and an opportunity for the power engagement from the informal side, with the rise of the 'elite village group'.[19] Based upon a strong historical background for the informal engagement into village politics from those village elites or gentries, the formal locus of political power in most villages is also influenced and even exercised by a contemporary form of the elite village group, who are often economic elites, such as owners of successful rural enterprises and wealthier farmers, or social elites, such as the traditional clan leader or contemporary social organizations established to deliver public services and welfare. It is also worth mentioning that a considerable number of those village elites, directly or indirectly,

participated in managing political authority such as the Party or VC, or even higher township and county governmental levels. In terms of the self-enrichment among rural officials, it has been long noticed that the ranks of local cadres easily facilitated the economic success of households.[20] Jonathan Unger also points out that during Mao's collectives, "throughout China there was a single hierarchy that was grounded in differential access to power; now there are two. One is still intimately associated with political and administrative power, but with power increasingly in ownership of economic assets, which in turn is used, when necessary, to buy political cooperation and protection".[21]

The leadership issue of Chinese rural villages becomes even more sophisticated, considering how the rural leaders use those informal networks/relationships to exercise power. "In this view, leadership in contemporary rural China is founded on competing bases of power, including both 'traditional' and class-based authority. The traditional village leader (communist gentry) uses his control over such resources as land and supplies to build patronage networks, mostly of extended kin. His power is based on patronage. The power of the class-based village leader (communist rebel) rests on his ability to mobilize the resentment of the dispossessed within the community. His goal is to make the village into a big family. Both types are essentially limited in their horizon to their communities."[22]

In this sense, it is not difficult to understand that different forms of authoritarian relationships and power struggles occur, confront and sometimes contest in different village settings, consciously or unconsciously. Professor John P. Burns, Dean of Social Sciences and Chair Professor of Politics and Public Administration at the University of Hong Kong, summarized that, "even if peasants sometimes cooperated with one another, village politics remains conflictual. The conflicting interests of lowlanders and highlanders, insiders and outsiders, kin and non-kin, rich and poor, to name but a few of the antagonists, were real and played a significant part in village life".[23]

Summary of 2.1

Section 2.1 briefly presented the political and legislative context in rural-urban transitional China through three aspects: Firstly, the Household Registration System, which not only fundamentally separates Chinese citizens in terms of social welfare and security, but also aggressively drives the massive migrant labour flow from the rural to urban areas after its strategic relaxation. The ongoing reform of the Household Registration System still has a long way to go, but the faster-generated 'floating population' have already had an obvious and profound influence on rural China. Physically/architecturally, the built environment of the old 'rural face' has been rendered with a new 'urban mask'.[24] Mentally/culturally, rural architectural culture based on vernacular settlements has been losing its ground to the aggressive urban successor with dominant socio-economic advantages. Secondly, the land ownership system and its rural-urban dualism, fundamentally determines the process and product of every land-based activity under associated regulations in rural China, particularly after the de-collectivization of rural land since the post-Mao reform. The coexistence of two different land ownership structures with different land tenure systems and land use rights between rural and urban China fundamentally determines the complexities and contradictions both in terms of the process and in terms of the product of building industry and activities. The remaining collective ownership and property rights generate confusions and conflicts at both village and household levels, under the state-backed 'Land-based financing' mode associated with aggressive, profit-driven real estate developments of rural urbanization. Thirdly, the composition of village politics under the hierarchical central system is directed by the Party/state: each part of political power structure represents either the state from the above, or the society from the below, or an ambiguous middleman role in mediating different forces of the village self-governance in great local flexibilities. The double roles set for and played by village leaders determine the double effects of their position, attitude and decision-making. The engagements and interventions from traditional clan and village elites make the leadership power struggle and exercise in Chinese rural villages even more sophisticated and uncontrollable, which

renders the high possibilities of conflicts that feature in this ambiguous and complex system. Therefore within this system, architecture is a political process in terms of allocating spatial resources and power, particularly in those design and construction with shared ownership such as ancestral halls or community centres.

In general, as for the political and legislative context of rural China, the state apparatus is doubtlessly strong (even stronger than that before 1949) and absolutely dominant, but the practical implementation and operation of this mega-system would take various forms and be realized in different degrees according to different regions and villages, and different organizations and leaders. Thus whether the top-down adjustments of the policy could deliver the desired results on the ground remains a question without answers, particularly in such a place like rural villages which are the most 'down-to-earth' based on their status and mass, and the farthest away in terms of geo-politics from the central system, both in history and at present. The political and legislative system of Chinese rural villages is itself a hybrid, fluctuating between dual rural-urban social security system, dual rural-urban land ownership system, dual formal power structures and their coexistence with informal ones in village governance, even the dual roles played by village leaders, etc. It is this particular rural-urban dualism structure at this particular rural-urban transition moment that created the space for further architectural engagements through design participation.

2.2   Economic-driven Development Agenda

Planning for Economic Growth

The fundamental condition imposed from the above-discussed political system onto the economic agenda in China is the transitional nature of rural-urban development. From dual structures defining and distinguishing the rural and urban, to the vague structure in rural land ownership and village governance, various forms of transition with different characteristics echo the status quo which currently transforms the overall base of social and spatial development in making rural China urban. Among those diverse forms and scales of transition, one of the most crucial one is the economic transition from the planned economy to the socialist market economy. The very idea of this transition is not simply an either/or matter in terms of the state ideology and market, but the balance and mediation between the two is the key to ensure the smoothness of this transition. This is largely a legacy of Deng's pragmatism, which is clearly shown in his famous quotation "It doesn't matter whether the cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice".[25] Since then, China has had a dualist economic structure[26] of planned and market economy. The degrees and forms of capitalism in the Chinese-characteristic socialism market economy have been highly analysed and debated.[27] In his book 'Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics: Entrepreneurship and the State', Yasheng Huang, Professor of Chinese Economy and Global Economics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, emphasizes the importance of the rural sector. This "derives not just from its sheer weight in the Chinese economy and society -- that China has a large rural population -- but also from the institutional perspective. In China, the origins of market-based, entrepreneurial capitalism are heavily rural in character."[28]

The predominant mode for rural economic transitional development is 'planning for growth'. The strategic importance of 'planning for growth' has been placed through every effort made by every level of Chinese government. As the steady tendency of economic growth is not only a financial issue of economy, but also an issue deeply connected with political stability, or what the CCP refers to as social stability in China. This is confirmed by Professor Fulong Wu, an urban planning and development specialist in Chinese studies, who also stressed "the new phase of planning for

growth in which growth has been pursued to legitimize state dominance'' in his article 'Emerging Chinese Cities'.[29]

At the national level, post-1978 geo-political development policies since the open-door reform have prioritized the rapid development for urban areas (rather than rural ones), and for eastern coastal regions (rather than other regions), through rapid urbanization and rural industrialization. This has already clearly shown its engine effect to drive the whole country's economic development consistently, although not evenly. Rural villages in eastern China have been quickly merged into nearby townships and counties, first economically and then physically. It was until recent decades that simultaneous consideration has been put into a second-tier development of central and western China, and under a more balanced and coordinated development of the rural and urban, through initiatives like 'The Rise of Central China' and updated policies like 'Urban and Rural Planning Law' which took effect in 2008 to advocate an integrated rural-urban development. During the same economic transition from the centrally planned to the market-oriented period, the relationship between the central and local governments has also been gradually adjusted to a degree of 'decentralization', with the state giving more power to the latter.[30] Thus local governments are empowered to devise locally-specific development policies and strategies for economic growth, as long as under the general framework and guiding spirits from the central Party/State.

At the local level, the heavy burden for local governments to achieve economic growth has been pushed mainly through the Chinese administrative regime. The mechanism of internal promotion for Chinese governmental officials has been largely made upon economic performance of the supervised area. In other words, only those local leaders who manage to promote local growth effectively and efficiently within a limited period of time could be promoted to upper level governmental positions; otherwise they would be superseded by following candidates. Motivated by this mechanism, local governments not only act as the normal providers of public welfare, with a focus on reducing poverty and unemployment, and improving the local livelihoods by optimising public transport and educational facilities, but also shift their roles as 'economic development managers', the double roles of both the referee and the player of economic practice. This has led to a very Chinese-characteristic of 'state/urban entrepreneurialism',[31] whereby local and city governments have started

to transform into market-friendly agents with their key goals being to establish alliances (the so-called 'growth coalitions') with developers and investors to promote local economic growth,[32] particularly from housing, infrastructure and other land-based developments.

This largely illustrates and is clearly reflected through the extremely competitive but rapidly developing real estate industry in China from the mid-1990s, which has contributed a considerable share to the country's so-called 'Land-based Financing' methodology.

However, this mainstream methodology, as well as the predominant 'planning for growth' mode that considers economic growth as the key planning objective and value, does not tell the whole story of rural-urban development in transitional China. The contested methodology has generated some losses alongside some economic gains. On one hand, the economic gap, both in terms of scale and in terms of speed between/inside rural area and urban area is still too large to be filled through sheer economic reform without deeper structural transition and reform of political governing system/government apparatus. On the other hand, the economic determinism has produced an administrative culture which overweighs statistic quantity over social quality, with the tendency that the closer to central government, the stronger that administrative attitude and culture. In terms of the township governments as the lowest governmental administration at the local level, each of which normally supervises two dozens of administrative villages, the output-led coordination at both levels of villages and supervising counties has easily generated a short-sighted, profit-driven development view at the sacrifice of long term return, both economically and non-economically.

This administrative culture has a profound and direct effect into rural planning and architectural-led development activities in China. The temporal nature of each level of local governmental leaders drives them to secure and embrace more symbolic capital through those iconic building objects or grand city projects, in order to highlight their output-led performance for further individual promotion. As a result the decision-making process for some key development projects lacks accountability and transparency to the lower level decision-makers (such as village leaders), let alone the relevant villagers including those underprivileged households in terms of

economic status and gender. Such a practice includes: the ideology of 'Shan-zhai'[33] to borrow and produce fake images from the urban, the exotic and its own imagined history for the rural development projects; 'Mian zi/Face-projects', which are costly built for the very act of cost; the 'Geng-feng/Following-wind' methodology to completely borrow those established or appreciated models from other villages without comparison and adaptation (such as different types of so-called 'Model Village' listed annually by the relevant authority), etc.. needless to mention those 'grey zones' of the design bidding and construction implementation of public funded projects which have been built through 'Guan-xi' (informal clientele directed by interpersonal relationships) without guarantees for professional quality.

What is beyond doubt is that, because of the layers of planning-for-growth rhetoric and propaganda, which seems promising but finally leads to an disappointed and irrelevant 'performance', both the responsibility and capacity has weakened, damaging the ability of local governments, planning and design professionals to build that state-society interface, and furthermore, to promote economic growth which is locally-appropriate and locally-sustainable in a real sense.

Financing Limitations of Village Transformation

The growth-led economic agenda in rural-urban China makes rural villages' development not only a social project, but also a financial one. The Chinese-characteristic financial system has fostered rapid economic growth in recent decades through the above-mentioned 'Land-based financing' methodology which has been mainly conducted in urban or peri-urban territory. The 'financialisation' of Chinese housing, land and infrastructure - the use of financial instruments to convert the built environment into investment opportunities - generates momentum and vitality in the Chinese economy and has led to wealth accumulation.[34] Nevertheless, this financing model cannot be fully transferred into rural conditions, because of those dualist institutional barriers ranging from the registration status to the land ownership. Therefore the complex financial arrangements and instruments in village developments in current rural China are a result of dual effects of the planned and market economy. With collective-owned rural land strictly limited to enter the market, except passing through complex bureaucratic procedures to be transferred into

state-owned land facilitated and managed by a minority of local governments, rural village developments heavily rely on the vertical governmental funding allocated from upper levels of government, mostly in the name of poverty alleviation. As mentioned before, the whole country's development focusing on urban areas only benefits those rural areas with geographical proximity to the city, most of local governments of county or townships level have been struggling to attract sufficient investment and capital from the outside. This pushes them to turn to cultural capital in a prevailing mode of so-called 'Culture establishes the stage, Economy plays the drama' (developing economy on the cultural basis in pursuit of profit in the disguise of cultural revitalization), which takes the relatively abundant or even makes up local cultural resource to pitch for external funding for rural economic development pressed by urbanization.

From a more positive perspective, this culturally-masked financing mode for village development is also a result of the Party/state's progressive reflection upon the culturally-destructive period during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). It has been slowly but gradually recognized, since the post-1978 reform and particularly in the past decade, that the existing rural villages and built environments in current China condense the country's independent agrarian civilization as a traditional agricultural society, both in terms of the material and in terms of the immaterial, which is undoubtedly of high financial value, as well as cultural and social value. In Chinese official statements drafted by the State Bureau of Cultural Relics (hereinafter referred to as SBCR) under the Ministry of Culture, traditional buildings and related villages listed for conservation and preservation are both referred to as a part of 'unmovable cultural relics'. The preservation and dissemination of those unmovable cultural relics is largely related to those traditional buildings and villages in rural China. Under a similar legislative framework of land ownership, the ownership of the cultural relics in China has been divided into three forms: firstly, the state-owned, such as historical street blocks and memorial sites; secondly, the privately-owned, such as the family house inherited by many generations of an individual family; and thirdly, the collectively-owned, such as the village ancestral halls constructed and run by a particular social groups or clan communities.

However, the ambiguous nature of the collective ownership and the isolation of private ownership from government-led public funding again causes a lack of capability for breakthrough and transformation in terms of a financing bottleneck.

The revised version of the 'Regulation for the Implementation of the Cultural Relics Protection Law' (hereinafter referred to as RICRPL) in 2013 reconfirmed that it is the ownership status of the building that determines the way of its conservation and preservation. For example, ''Where a cultural relics protection entity has any user, the user shall establish mass protective organizations for the cultural relics; where there is no user, the local villager's committees or resident's committees may set up mass protective organizations for cultural relics. The administrative departments for cultural relics shall guide and support the activities of such mass protective organizations.''[35] In other words, the question who has the responsibility and duty to preserve the building depends on who owns and who uses it.

A majority of traditional residential houses in rural villages are owned privately and more than 30% unmovable cultural relics in many provinces are collectively-owned,[36] revealed by the third 'National Cultural Relics Survey' completed by the end of 2011, and the legislative limitation has created a bottleneck which has not been removed till now.[37] On one hand, for the privately-owned residential building, despite its wide distribution in a country the size of China, the average refurbishment fee is no less than £500 per sqm, plus the considerable fees generated by the relocation during construction and other land fees. This means that the total budget of transforming an old house has no advantage over moving into a ready-made new house, particularly when most of the residents who live in traditional buildings in those rural villages largely belong to the economically impoverished. On the other hand, those collective-owned building type such as the ancestral hall of a family shared with a same surname, has been inherited through several generations by a dozen subdivided households. The unclear share of each household within the collective ownership and different value judgements hardly achieve a consensus about phased planning and financial contribution for preservation.

It is noteworthy emphasizing that those above-mentioned 'users' or owners of the traditional buildings belong to the minority in Chinese rural villages, while the majority of villagers with very limited general education on traditional buildings/villages'

preservation/revitalization easily get into confusion about the fundamental definition and meaning, needless to say adopting the appropriate financial, legislative and technical approaches according to specificities. The institutional regulations on the transfer and exchange of cultural relics haven't been protected by law until 2002, and as a consequence uncountable traditional buildings or building components with high historical value have been abandoned or replaced. Furthermore, there is a tremendously large quantity of those unlisted or low-ranked buildings and villages which are still embedded with certain value for maintenance or regeneration. Regarding the above, the precarious situation of the collapse, decay and destruction of traditional buildings under collective or private ownerships addresses the fundamental issues for providing a sustainable financing foundation to develop and transform Chinese rural villages.

The Predominant Tourism-led Village Transformation Model

In order to respond to this urgent situation, both state forces from the top-down and non-governmental forces from the other side (referred by themselves as bottom-up) have attempted to use their own ways to rescue the rapidly diminishing villages under rapid urbanization. In April 2012, a state-led initiative on the conservation, preservation and redevelopment of 'Traditional Villages' has been collaboratively launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of the People's Republic of China (MOHURD) together with the Ministry of Culture (including SBCR) and Ministry of Finance. Since then the term 'Traditional Villages' superseded officially for the first time those other widely-used terms such as 'old/ancient villages' accepted by the general public and 'vernacular settlements/villages' widely used in Chinese academia. More than two millions villages went through a process of preliminary nomination, specialists' evaluation and final shortlist, according to the criteria based on the certain quantity of material heritage with relatively autonomous system and diverse types, and the certain quality of immaterial cultural heritage with relatively distinctive regional character. Since then the initiative has released an annually renewed list that puts the selected 'Traditional Villages' for the first time under protection, including their built environment as well as folk cultural forms of art and handicrafts. The list has included 4153 villages to date; what matters more than

this extending quantity is that a more direct financing route has been secured, as each of those 'Traditional Villages' has been directly allocated a development fund of £300k[38] on average from the central government.[39] Thus it is not surprising to find Mr. Hui Zhao, the Chief Economist of MOHURD, who arguably showed great optimism, stating that this top-down initiative has basically held back the tendency of rapidly disappearing villages.[40]

However, Professor Jicai Feng from Tianjin University of China critically questioned this popular mode for its sustainable future, although he also actively participated in the initiative. As a reputational village preservation specialist who has been greatly respected by both the state and the society, Feng founded a scholar-led 'Chinese Traditional Villages Preservation and Development Study Centre' (CTVPDSC) in 2013 with a vision to preserve what he called 'village heritage' from the bottom-up. Throughout their missionary endeavor by establishing the largest indigenous database for Chinese rural villages, both Feng and CTVPDSC fundamentally question the tourism dominance led by those listed 'Traditional Villages' and adopted by more and more ordinary rural villages in current China. To take 'Traditional Villages' as a reference, which accounts a minor part of rural villages existing in current China, at least three key challenges and ten typical problems emerges in preservation and revitalization process. The three key challenges are 'hollowing-out'; 'total tourism'; and 'the indifference to the village development and tradition from the villagers'.[41] And ten specific characteristics summarized by Feng include: First, heavy dependence on tourism makes village planning as an instrument planning for profit-driven tourism instead of planning for the scientific conservation and preservation. Second, sustaining the original physical structure and environment for tourists but often reallocating the original residents elsewhere. Third, uncontrolled commercial activities of the villagers transform most of the houses into low-quality shops with homogenized souvenirs of the different villages. Fourth, artificial decoration or even mimic completely fake old buildings and structures, with internal furniture bought and placed randomly just for attracting 'innocent' tourists. Fifth, villages tend to add non-related artificial landscape points and routes to imitate an urban park for entertainment attraction. Sixth, live performance based on local immaterial culture is produced by and for outsiders, instead on an authentic presentation of those insiders' culture. Seventh, 'Rural Happy House' as a prevailing

mode provides repetitive commercial programmes such as home-stay for urban tourists. Eighth, uncontrolled city-oriented B&B industry entering rural villages in recent few years destroys the original economic practice. Ninth, the authentic village cultural dissemination is disturbed by those profit-driven story-telling marketing strategies using unreal historical stories about the village. Tenth, many villages use fake symbols produced and consumed by commercial culture from the city, such as hanging red lanterns, to create a commercial atmosphere.[42] Through summarising these similarities from different villages' development routes, Feng criticizes, from a scholarly viewpoint, that the uncoordinated development in disguise of traditional conservation has misunderstood and mislead the way into the so-called 'Thousands villages with one look', which would likely to happen around 2020 in a way repeating the mistakes made by homogenized urbanization during the past 30 years (with a result of so-called 'Thousands cities with one look').

A third position from some interviewed village leaders might stand for a broader and deeper 'down-to-earth' point of view from villagers, which is sandwiched by both the state-led initiative and intellectual-led route. It argues that the tourism industry has contributed to slowing down the loss of Chinese traditional/rural villages from three aspects: Firstly, the high and immediate profit cycle of tourism industry could easily convince the villagers to be aware of the value of their old houses; Secondly, tourism industry could help local governments to find new channel to boost local economy instead of merging villages into towns; Thirdly, it could facilitate official financing capital to turn to the rural area from the urban industry.[43]

In sum, there existed an insurmountable conceptual and value judgement gap between intellectual specialists who are based in urban areas and ordinary villagers who have still suffered from improving basic living standards and economic status. A tension arises from this contradiction and controversy on the current predominant model of developing and transforming Chinese rural villages led by modern tourism.

Summary of 2.2

Section 2.2 looked at the economic side of rural China, with a focus on its pragmatism-based economic development ideology and methodology. The newly emerging mixed mode of state entrepreneurial capitalism with the historical legacy of the planned economy has facilitated the formulation of the planning-for-growth model, which has been widely promoted in developing rural China at both national and local levels. The model echoes the status quo, characterised with the transitional nature of rural-urban development and unsolved dualism structures, which has been proven successful both in terms of economic developments in Chinese rural villages, and in terms of political developments in facilitating the legitimization of state dominance. But the economic determinism, which currently provides the overall base of social and spatial development, including architectural design practice in making rural China urban, also has its side effects. The growing administrative culture favouring statistic quantity over social quality, the output-led performance reviews for internal promotion mechanism, and the controversial 'Land-based Financing' mainstream methodology adopted by local governments, all of the faults in the methodology have been confirmed by some results of short-sighted, profit-driven, tabula-rasa architectural developments at the sacrifice of a really locally-appropriate and locally-sustainable village transition path. Ironically, this result, and partly caused by the planning and architectural professionals, has a profound and direct effect into rural planning and architectural-led development activities in China. While the 'financialisation' methods of Chinese housing, land and infrastructure into investment opportunities has been skilfully adopted by urban decision-makers, the financing model and method cannot be transferred into rural conditions. It has been heavily blocked by the dualist institutional barriers, which has caused a financing bottleneck in developing villages with traditional built resources. The rapidly vanishing villages and buildings urgently call for a transformation for rescue and healing, beyond the complex financial arrangements and instruments in village developments in current rural China. The state-led initiative on the conservation, preservation and redevelopment of 'Traditional Villages' and the scholar-led 'Chinese Traditional Villages Preservation and Development Study Centre' rise at this critical moment. Both, as exemplars, have achieved something tangible and intangible, but the increasing risks to be manipulated by profit-driven tourism are also obvious and

predictable. The predominant tourism-led village transformation model has been continuously debated without a consensus, and this clear contradiction and sharp controversy create a tension. It is not only a question of multi-disciplinary positions and perspectives, but also an ethical stance/gap between knowledge regimes from technical specialists and everyday lives of ordinary villagers at this transitional moment for rural villagers and professional practice in architecture.

2.3 Cultural Tradition and Social Organization

Collective Form in Rural Cultural Tradition

Whether the state-funded traditional village development, or the rural self-regeneration led by the scholar-activists, both of them will be largely influenced by the collective tradition, cultural value and social organization of the people. Although the social reality of rural China constantly pressed by rapid urbanization in the present context makes the rural culture a 'little tradition', which is more marginal and fragile in face of centrally-planned urban culture (as 'great tradition'), the traditional cultural form and social organization are still deeply rooted in the very locality of Chinese rural villages. This very specific idea of Chinese rurality provides a strong counterpoint to the rising argument of 'the end of (Chinese rural) villages' by inevitable processes of urbanization, industrialization and globalization.[44] It is also part of the key reason why a spatial or architectural project with a limited life span found it difficult to bring about fundamental socio-cultural transformation in the Chinese rural context.

Chinese rural tradition before 1949 had been firmly based on family and clan kinship. As an old Chinese saying 'No Empire Power Down to the County' well illustrates, the central power from above tended to stop at the county level in such a country with massive land and population size. As a consequence, those rural villages and townships below the county administration would be self-managed by the village gentry from local elite groups which were made up by several big families or lineages. This was a very flexible system both in terms of power-over and in terms of power-to for local governance, proven in thousands years of Chinese history, which provided a soil for the strong institutionalization of the family and clan in traditional China. From another perspective, ''the history of feudal and centralized systems in China has created a set of values in which people (in rural areas) are accustomed to and expect to be organized by government. However, Chinese history is also characterized by a long tradition of rebellion and protest against overbearing and oppressive governments when they fail to meet the basic requirements of the people (from rural areas). These twin traditions are often favoured in historical analysis, but soon prove inadequate when faced with the diversity of the histories of China's

peoples and regions."[45] It is noteworthy that both twin traditions were realized more in collective forms rather than the individual one, particularly in rural areas as a 'familiar-people society'. That collective force to action finally played a key role in the rural revolutions directed by CCP to defend from external invasion from the 1920s onward.

After the WWII and the establishment of the PRC in 1949, the strong peasant roots of the CCP determined its major policy direction to enhance the role and force of the collective in rural areas. This could be clearly seen from the extreme form of collective farming production organized into 'production brigades' and 'production teams' during the People's Commune period. While the collective system formally collapsed as a wrong economic model, the introduction of the Household Responsibility Contract System at the beginning of post-1978 reform based on Deng's pragmatism, considerably improved both the active participation and production efficiency of rural peasants by making family/household as the basic economic unit. Nevertheless, different effects and results of the reform appeared between urban and rural China. One one hand, the pre-reform collective form 'work-units' (Dan wei) in then urban China, which shared considerable similarities with 'production brigade' in rural China, was progressively detached from urban residents and finally transformed their identities from 'work-units' to the community in the modern sense.[46] On the other hand, while the reform with HRCS largely affected the traditional social structure in the household sizes, roles and relations of rural family and kinship, the collective system has remained largely intact, particularly in land ownership rights and other land-based systems (land use, planning, management, etc.). Jonathan Unger has pointed out that, "under Mao, the production teams had arguably been the most important level of organization. As they largely lost their original purpose and functions, they still continued to exist as legal entities, such as 'economic cooperatives".[47] Therefore, as Him Chung puts it, "Collective ownership and redistribution within the collective suggests that Chinese villages have remained close; farmers rely on land and the collective units they belong to."[48]

The collective form rooted in Chinese rural cultural tradition has evolved alongside the emerging village land-oriented transformations under accelerated urbanization started from mid-1990s to date, during which 'rural collectives have made themselves major actors in rural transformation, in particular the land institutions'.[49]

The family, lineage, and clan as traditional collective forces in rural China all enjoy the revivals in different forms and to different extents, either socially or culturally in the name of searching for the home root. Andrey Kipnis, Professor of Social-anthropology at Australian National University, puts forward a concept of 'in between-ness' of China's urbanization, in which the collective reproduction of the so-called old but continual rural identity, value and everyday lifestyles ranging from family form, economic activities and consumption pattern, exists and evolves within the urban territory and ideology.[50]

More evolved forms could be seen from those state-led mass mobilization campaigns of village developments, often in the cases to provide public good such as traffic infrastructure projects, which successfully recruited villager labour with relatively low compensation to participate into collective construction, with the support of local families and clans. In some extreme cases of which the rural villages were geographically approached by the edge of urban sprawl, the corporatization of the whole urbanized village at the collective level, which means peasants became landlords and village collective (led by Villages Committee and Party Branch) became property developer or company, surprisingly created a new status group – "urban residents with (rural) collective memberships".[51]

In sum, the role of the collective, the form of its representation, and the effect of its intervention have changed compared to the past and varied according to different regions, but they still remain in their own rights. No matter the formal representation of the rural China as a collective place with a revolutionary tradition in Mao's era, or the informal conception marking rural villages collectively as underdeveloped both physically and mentally under the Party/state's current priority on city-centred development and urbanization, the collective system that has collapsed in urban China is still resilient in different forms and functions in rural China particularly rural villages, both in terms of the social and in terms of the cultural.

This traceable lineage and diversified route of collective forms in Chinese rural villages provide a cultural resonance for further collective actions, including the collaborative spatial production and occupation. However, it's worth mentioning that the specific collective mode of architecture/village construction with mutual-help and labour-exchange in Chinese rural villages has apparently faded, due to the

aggressive and consistent interventions of a modern construction mode and division of design-build labour. That is another part of the story to be discussed in more details in the following Chapter Three.

Village Clan System

In traditional China, or the so-called 'Vernacular (Earthbound) China'[52] in sociological and anthropological contexts, the most basic social organization is its family clan system, which forms the fundamental social structure of both society and the state. The traditional Chinese family and lineage was patrilocal, and its larger umbrella clan was a patrilineal group of people who shared a common surname, a common ancestor, and a common ancestral village. The traditional clan was organized in consanguinity and materialized by the ancestral hall building, lineage farmland and lineage regulations. It settled the traditional ordering of daily behaviour and resource allocation in and around the clan village, mainly through its rigid social hierarchy and cultural enlightenment based on prestige of age and family.

Besides establishing a systematic ordering of social relations of a particular social group, the clan also extensively played an important role in organizing hidden agreements of the village's everyday life. For example, a village clan lead proposed and asked for the whole village not to access the public waters for private use until 8 am every day, in order to ensure a rational and equal process to distribute drinkable water resource of which the village is in scarcity. This hidden rule has been obeyed and operated by the villagers after his death till now, even when the modern head of village has been put officially in place of the traditional clan lead.[53]

This facilitated the further formation of 'Familiar-people Society' in rural China, which developed not only based on 'kin-ties' but also on 'geo-ties', a social network at territorial scale. This is an ambiguous scale where people know each other and share a similar value system and behaviour codes, but might neither share the same surname nor live in the same single village. It became closer to the contemporary notion of community or neighbourhood, and speeded up the so-called modernization from villages to cities, particular when a third social relationship evolved: that of

'work-ties', a kind of industry working relationship based on mutually agreed contract and charter.
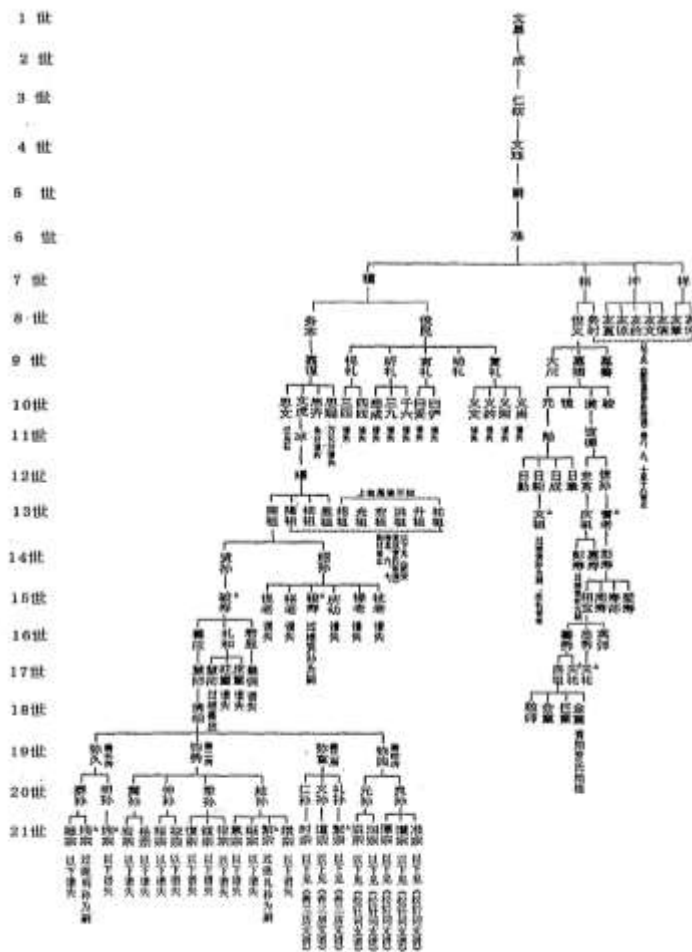
Fig. 2.2 Genealogy of family clan with surname Luo shows the 'Kin-ties' in Chenhgkan village. 2016 (Redrawn by the author after Luo's original piece)

The three most fundamental social relations ('kin-ties', 'geo-ties' and 'work-ties') in shaping the clan as a paradigm (and still working to some extent in current modern Chinese society) were in correspondence with, and almost covered, all different vernacular built forms in Chinese rural settlements. The first, consanguinity or 'ties of kin', corresponded to the houses which formed the backdrop fabric of Chinese villages, as well as to ritual structures such as family temples and family halls; the second, 'geo-ties', corresponded to the common space and structures of the village or group of villages, divided into two parts – the production part and the living part. The production part includes all kinds of farming infrastructure such as barns and water irrigation channels. The living part includes a social plaza, performance stage,

and the more ritualized ancestral halls and temples of Confucius. The third, 'work-ties', corresponded to the shops, wine bars, workshops, as well as larger market street and halls, which presented more profane characteristics instead of clan-based sacred objects. Unlike the clan as a relatively static system itself, the three relations behind the Chinese family clan and 'Familiar-people Society' that embody vernacular tradition, knowledge and value is not static; their consistency evolved with society's change and represented in more resilient and adaptable forms and even protective masks.

In modern China, drastic changes have taken place in the rural village clans. After being largely destroyed in the WWII, and being reformed in the period between the establishment of PRC in 1949 and the ending of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, the clan system from the bottom up in China has almost been frozen into the social selection process. Regarded as an out-of-date obstacle to the more civilized modernization, the clan was officially pressured by modern notion of community introduced from outside in a top-down way. As John P. Burns has summarized it, "although CCP authorities tried to destroy the power of kinship groups in the 1950s by taking away their land, their later attempts to reorganize Chinese agriculture probably inadvertently reinstated kinship group power in many areas. Local politics in socialist China, then, continues to be deeply rooted in the past."[54]

It is without doubt that the clan with all the three social networks still has less individual freedom but a more collective frame compared to modern communities; but the tendency in which the clan advanced from pure lineage relationships into more centralized forms of community/social organization or even local governance structure is clear, particularly at a time when those villages' physical and mental structures and their associated tastes and lifestyles are rapidly influenced by hegemonic forms and rules from urbanization. Therefore, clan power is not yet out of the power centre because it is resilient. In present rural China, the clan still exists in different forms. Generally speaking, the clan tends to be stronger in natural villages than in administrative villages. In other words, the only possibility to find the clan lies in villages in inner China, particular natural villages, which stay farthest from the central mega-structure of the power. They might not be one single family with a clearly developed family lineage, but they still form a distinguished, sometimes

defensive territory with shared property, as well as speaking a common spoken dialect in which that slight differentiation could only be recognized by insiders. They might not have strictly structured rules and influential power in the everyday village governance as they had before, but they still play a role in grass-root organization and the power structure, such as in the formation of Villager-Committee voted in by each villager from different families of the village. Therefore a village clan leader taking the role of Head of Village in charge of Village Committees becomes possible. It is a two-way process: on the one hand, the clan system is a reality complementary to the rural democratic politics based on the villagers' autonomous self-governance. The current existence and revitalisation is a result of the power transfer away from the coercive state, therefore working with a clan in an appropriate way could reduce the management cost of rural governance by 'Familiar-people' through shared 'Kin-ties', 'Geo-ties', and 'Work-ties'. On the other hand, the clan culture has been different and incompatible with democratic politics. In some circumstances the traditional clan system exerted negative effects, for example, disagreements or even power struggles sometimes occurred between a Head of Village (who leads the Village Committees) and a Party Secretary commissioned from supervising townships; or there might be corruption in voting in the Village Committees, with a minority of individuals breaking the shared rules and contracts in the operation process.

In sum, the clan system is not only the social network related to the two or all the three fundamental social relations, but also the deep social structure of Chinese society evolving from historical to contemporary forms. It has had a twofold influence on the evolution into modern sense of community, and has had a silently framing role on life and production in Chinese village, whether through relatively visible or 'invisible hands'. The contemporary local clan and kinship structure, exerting both tangible and intangible forces in shaping socio-cultural networks interconnected by complex 'kin-ties' and 'geo-ties', is not easy to define, because it is not linear, and embodies multiple issues and elements. In broader meanings, the clan system can be used as a metaphor of kinship ancestor, or an imagined commune which could create a social form of great flexibility for promoting the collective both physically and mentally from the bottom up. Therefore, the top-down position and attitude from the

Party/State dealing with rural clan system is still controversial, but offers no universal solution depending on each village's specificity.

Clan Ancestral Hall: The Architecture of Social Forms

To materialize the clan system in the Chinese village is to unfold a rich palimpsest of layers of ritual, power, and politics, which was deeply rooted in the ancestral hall building type. There is no building type more than ancestral hall could carry both tangible and intangible aspects of Chinese rural society and sustain regional identity. The tangible was represented mostly in its building type with a special sequence of assembly and worship halls; as for the intangible, the three fundamental relations - 'kin-ties', 'geo-ties', 'work-ties' produced a collective image and identity, and also a clear hierarchy in distributing the duty to prepare and conduct the collective worship. The ancestral hall was not only a building for permanent storage of ancestral tablets, but also a collective place in which the social hierarchy and power structure of the village clan system and its associated commune were produced and reproduced through rites and performance.

However, the thousands of years of social and spiritual dependence and belief centres between villagers and villages have been altered irreversibly by the hollowing-out of current rural China. In confrontation with hegemonic urbanization under the broader context of urban-rural inequality, the clan system might still resist and be resilience, but its physical symbolism - the ancestral hall could neither sustain its old identity physically nor mentally connect the village as a social clue as it did before. The socio-cultural values placed in family cooperation and mutual aid inside clan kinship has been weakened, and even losing from generations to generations, as younger generations eagerly build up their modern social networks and new belief centre in cities. At present rural China, clan ancestral halls are voicelessly enclosed either by abandoned old fabric in vernacular earth-timber construction, or by new rural houses under urban masks with manufactured materials such as ceramics, aluminium and counterfeit tiles. Almost all of them have become blind spots only filled with senses of hopelessness and helplessness of the left-over elderly in the village.

The following photo essay with documentary texts transcribed from fieldwork vividly presents and demonstrates the ongoing decay and persistence of the ancestral hall in Chinese rural villages. The local guide(s) or administer(s) was/were approached in advance with the help of local governmental officers in order to make an appointment on site, followed by a guided tour. They were locally understood as the key person(s) who had a special relationship and insider knowledge with that particular ancestral hall building. Once the most important public building type in rural China, the ancestral hall's complex contrast between physicality and imagined commune, as well as faded memories of ancestral worship passed on to younger generations, marks a note for its vanishing role played for sustaining the villages' cultural tradition and social organization.

Fig. 3-5 Ancestral hall with the Zhang family clan in Xihe village, Henan province, 2015 (Photograph by the author)

Mr. Zhang, a transportation worker at his 50s, originated from and is current living in Xihe village.

'Our ancestral hall has a serious problem. Due to its lack of use it is decaying and part of the roof there has been demolished. With a few other villagers I tried hard to make patchworks here and there to prevent the rain falling inside. We have quite a special layout with a drama stage in the upper floor above the worship courtyard, which is very rare in this region. It deserved better treatment and shouldn't have been like that. But the multiple ownership of this building is a bottleneck for further restoration and reuse, even though the Head of Village wanted to organize villagers for funding-raising.'[55]

Fig. 6-8 Ancestral hall with the Ding family clan in Ding Liwan village, Henan province, 2015 (Photograph by the author)

Mrs. Ding, above 50 years old, has lived in a neighbour building of this ancestral hall for decades.

'This ancestral hall was owned by the collective before. It was a public dining hall in People's Commune. Later on it was 'owned'/occupied by a village elite. But he doesn't live in our village now except revisiting here for spring festivals. He knows a lot of local cadres so nobody dared to reuse this building. '[56]

Fig. 9-11 Ancestral hall with the Yang family clan in Shashi village, Henan province, 2015 (Photograph by the author)

Mr. Yang, above 50 years old, works in an adjacent town. (This village has already become a peri-urban village with proximity to the town.)

'You see this ancestral hall has already been 'on the street'. Its entrance door faces the main street directing to the town, but nobody cares about this building now. It was successively used as a primary school, dining hall and army offices, so a lot of refurbishment was done here and there. But the main layout and structure of the old ancestral is still there, which still drove us to conduct some ritual events in some important days of the year. There is no funding allocated from the above (government) to maintain or renovate it for so many years, which I am really disappointed.'[57]

Fig. 12-14 Ancestral hall with the Chen family clan in Chenqi village, Henan province, 2015
(Photograph by the author)

Chen brothers, both above 70 years old, are the only two elderly who knows this ancestral hall and volunteered as its administrators.

'Our hall was very well received and used in the past. The reason why the side elevation was much more decorated than its main entrance was that the public assembly and performance space at this direction. Those old times has gone. The government swiped out most of the surrounding fabric buildings by those red-brick new houses. We elderly don't have a place for activities now. We still wanted to be back here in this important building of our village.'[58]

Fig. 15-17 Ancestral hall with the Ming family clan in Fangwan village, Henan province, 2015 (Photograph by the author)

Mr. Ming, above 60 years old, is the administrator of this ancestral hall (to be an exhibition hall from late 2015).

'This hall has a lot of historical stories, one of them should be its use as the Red Army meeting hall and war office during then. It was well preserved but lack of relationship with the villagers now. The town government and Villager Committees started a proposal to renovate its interior, and they used a lot of new materials and structures to attract tourists. But they left the external environment of this building, which of great importance in my childhood memories.'[59]

Fig. 18-20 Ancestral hall with the Wang family clan in Bishan village, Anhui province, 2015 (Photograph by the author)

Mr. Wang, around 30 years old, runs his restaurant which is not far away from this ancestral hall.

'We Bishan village had much better old heritage buildings like this ancestral hall than in Hong village or Xidi village. But unfortunately they became such popular tourism destination but we have been forgotten. My mother told me a lot of her memories and experiences happened in and around this ancestral hall. But neither young nor elderly people in our village care about how to reactivate this building.'[60]

Fig. 21-23 Ancestral hall with the Luo family clan in Chengkan village, Anhui province, 2016 (Top image provided by Guoqing Xiao, bottom photographs by the author)

Mr. Luo, above 70 years old, sells souvenir at the entrance of this ancestral hall.

'Before, it was the most important place for family clan, and for the whole village. It belonged to the state now. They use it for tourism. Well I don't oppose it, but I miss those old days.'[61]

Fig. 24-26 Ancestral hall with the Bao family clan in Tangmo village, Anhui province, 2016
(Photograph by the author)

Mrs. Bao, above 70 years old, sells souvenir nearby this ancestral hall.

'I don't know too much about cultural inheritance but I think our buildings and our village needs more attention and financial support to maintain.'[62]

Summary of 2.3

The traditional cultural form and social organization have been deeply rooted in the very locality of Chinese rural villages. The collective form rooted in Chinese rural villages has evolved from before the establishment of the PRC in 1949 to the village land-oriented transformations under accelerated urbanization since mid-1990s. In pre-1949 China, rural villages and townships below the county administration line had been self-managed by the village gentry based on family and clan kinship. That had been a very flexible system both in terms of power-over and in terms of power-to for local governance, which provided a soil for the strong institutionalization of the family and clan in traditional China. While the dominant history of feudal and centralized systems in China had created a set of values in which rural villagers were accustomed to and expect to be organized by government, the history of bottom-up forces against the top-down repression also made up of the twin traditions. It is noteworthy that both twin traditions were realized more in collective forms rather than the individual one, particularly in rural villages as a 'familiar-people society'. Therefore even the introduction of Household Responsibility Contract System during post-1978 reform based on Deng's pragmatism still couldn't thoroughly collapse the collective system of rural China. Collective ownership and redistribution within the collective suggests that Chinese rural villages have remained close, as peasants still heavily depended on land and the collective units they belong to. From the late 1980s, the family, lineage, and clan as traditional collective forces in rural China all enjoyed the revivals to different extents. The role of the collective, the form of its representation, and the effect of its intervention have all changed compared to the past and varies according to different regions, but they have still been resilient in different forms in rural China particularly rural villages, both in terms of the social and in terms of the cultural. This collective form in Chinese rural villages provides a cultural resonance for further collective actions in related to spatial production and occupation.

One of the key collective forms in social organization is the village clan system. Traditional Chinese family and lineage was patrilocal, and its larger umbrella clan was a patrilineal group of people who shared a common surname, a common

ancestor, and a common ancestral village. Although CCP authorities tried to destroy the power of kinship groups in the 1950s, the clan power is still resilient. In present rural China, the clan exists in different forms. It has had a twofold influence on the evolution into modern sense of community, and has had a silently framing role on life and production in Chinese village, whether through relatively visible or invisible hands. In broader meanings, the clan system could be used as a metaphor of kinship ancestor or imagined commune, which could create a social form of great flexibility for promoting the collective from the bottom up. It facilitated the further formation of 'familiar-people society' in rural China, which developed not only based on 'kin-ties' but also on 'geo-ties' at territorial scale, as well as the later evolution of 'work-ties'. These three most fundamental social relations to shape clan as a paradigm had been in correspondence with, and almost covered, all different built forms in Chinese rural settlements, for example, the clan ancestral halls. As the architecture of social forms, ancestral hall was a particular building type which carried a rich palimpsest of layers of ritual, power, and politics in rural regional China. It was not only a building for ancestral worship, but also a collective place in which social hierarchy and power structure of village and its associated commune were produced and reproduced through construction rites and spatial performance. However, in confrontation with hegemonic urbanization, the ancestral hall could neither sustain its old identity physically nor mentally connect the village as a social clue like before. The Section 2.3 concludes with a photo essay which attempts to unfold the complex contrast between ancestral hall's physicality and imagined commune, as well as its faded memories passed on to younger generations. Its vanishing role in sustaining the cultural tradition and social organization symbolizes the extreme hollowing-out of Chinese rural villages.

Notes and References of Chapter 2

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[2] For 'familiar people', see more in 'Fieldwork' of Chapter 1 Section 1.5 Methodology; for 'geo-ties/relations', see more in 'Village Clan System' of Section 2.3 Cultural Tradition and Social Organization

[3] Ying Xu and others, 'State-led land requisition and transformation of rural villages in transitional China', *Habitat International,* 35 (2011), 61

[4] See more in Peter Ho, 'Who Owns China's Land? Policies, Property Rights and Deliberate Institutional Ambiguity', *The China Quarterly*, 166 (2001), 394-421.

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[9] Ho, *Who Owns China's Land?,* 394-421.

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[12] Xiuqing Zou and Arie J. Oskam, 'New compensation standard for land expropriation in China', *China & World Economy*, 15 (2007), 107-120.

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Gunter Schubert and Anna L. Ahlers, *Participation and Empowerment at the Grassroots: Chinese Village Elections in Perspective* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2012), pp. 5-14.

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[56] Interview with Mrs.Ding by the author on 3 April 2015 in Ding liwan village, China.

[57] Interview with Mr.Yang by the author on 4 April 2015 in Shashi village, China.

[58] Interview with Chen brothers by the author on 4 April 2015 in Chenqi village, China.

[59] Interview with Mr. Ming by the author on 4 April 2015 in Chenqi village, China.

[60] Interview with Mr. Wang by the author on 28 March 2015 in Bishan village, China.

[61] Interview with Mr. Luo by the author on 21 March 2015 in Chengkan village, China.

[62] Interview with Mrs. Bao by the author on 22 March 2015 in Tangmo village, China.

Chapter 3

Chinese Architect and Architectural Professional Practice in Rural China

Fig. 3.1 One of the last carpenters surnamed Wang, was on the site of his house under construction in Bishan village, Anhui Province, China, 2015. (Photograph by author)

3.1 Historical Concept and Modern Context of Architects in China

Craftsmen and Literati as Architects

China has an independent and relatively stable cultural civilization before 1840. From the then western perspective of architect and modernism, the Chinese version could be absolutely seen as the modernity's 'other'.

Architecture as a profession was brought into modern China from the West within less than a hundred years ago, while architect in traditional China used to take a very different form -- craftsman or master builder, known in Chinese as 'Dajiang' or 'Dongliang'. There didn't exist professional architects or architects as a profession in the construction sector; only master builders conducted architectural activities in building projects. They were commissioned by the client/employer and combined roles of modern architects, contractors and builders. The master builder as the only technical and financial consultants to the client took over the whole process of the building project, ranging from the identification and preparation of an auspicious site, design development and delivery, to the management of time, cost, and construction quality on site. The Chinese traditional building construction system, both in the rural and urban areas, had been a stable system heavily depended on those craftsman and master builders. However, due to Chinese society's longstanding looking down on builders and craftsmen, particularly in traditional cities, the master builders were much less visible and appreciated in the process of design or representation. This created a space for the literati's indispensable involvement into a building design and its representation mostly through their visual and textual practice in the form of landscape paintings, calligraphies and poems.

The traditional Chinese literati refer to the intellectuals ranging from local gentrymen, scholar elites to administrative scholar-officials, who all shared Confucian moral and ethical value. Some of the literati were themselves the end-users, owners of the building or the land, either in the rural areas or inside the cities; some of them approached the building (or building process) through social networks, or by coincidence, and made the poem or drawings on the building after they were deeply intrigued. For the literati, architecture was one of the key ideal subjects to be

represented in drawings or writings, in order to reveal their personal cultivation and express their innermost hearts. Their representational forms of architecture tended to be free of styles and categorizations, valuing and prioritizing the spontaneous, the unheard, and the invisible process of the building and its subsequent spatial use. Through continuous representation from the literati groups, architecture had far-reaching social and cultural influences on collective memory and perception of the rural built environment in China.

Although the specific roles of the craftsmen and the literati differed in urban and rural areas in traditional China, the collaboration and interaction between the craftsmen and the literati in traditional Chinese architectural design and construction is the key to understand the historical context and concept of architect/architecture, as well as its hidden influence to contemporary architectural practice in China. It is not only a question of whether the literati documented the building process in written forms along with the oral instructions normally used by craftsmen or builders, but also relates to a fundamental question of who is the 'architect', or what is the concept of 'architect' in traditional China.

Fig. 3.2-3 Construction of his family house led by one of the last few carpenters in Bishan village, southern Anhui Province, China, 2015. The carpenter-architect had an experience of more than 50 years in building carpentry while without any ability to draw or write architecturally in a modern manner. The textual input from a long-collaborated village gentry was invited in the ritual event of holding up the main beam. All the architecture-related knowledge transfer and collaboration process was through oral instructions in the local dialect. (Photograph by author)

'Mujing' (wood scripture), one of the earliest documentary books on Chinese architectural design and construction was authored by Yu Hao, who was a carpenter in the very early Song Dynasty (960 - 1127). It was considered for the first time in Chinese history as a representative documentation of Chinese wooden architecture and structure, and largely influenced, a hundred years later, the more popular masterpiece 'Ying Zao Fa Shi' (Construction Manual) by Li Jie (1065 -1110). While Li Jie's position as the director of the official Department of Buildings and Construction is easier to be understood as the 'architect' in the modern western sense, Yu Hao's status as an indigenous carpenter who made a living on timber construction work probably had not sufficient resource to write. For this point, Jiren Feng, Assistant Professor of Chinese at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, made a meaningful argument. In his book 'Chinese Architecture and Metaphor: Song Culture in the Yingzao Fashi Building Manuel' published in 2012, he proposed that though Yu Hao was a craftsman and might have been illiterate, a scholar might be responsible for

taking down his oral account of practical building methods.[1] Furthermore, Feng put the concept forward that the architect and architecture are shared by craftsmen and literati, as the literary and artistic practices affected the craftsmanship from tenth to twelfth centuries in Song China.[2] This corresponds to Xing Ruan's viewpoint when he taught at the University of Technology Sydney in 2002, and said that "it is well known that the premodern Chinese architectural 'designer' (literati or officials) drew with words, intensifying the collaboration between the architect and the builder."[3]

According to Alberto Pérez-Gómez, Professor of Architecture at McGill University and a key player in contemporary Western architectural discourse, "it is a modern belief that the architect can direct the builder's series of operations through working drawings or precise detail designs. In so doing, the architect is no longer involved in the making of a building with its builder."[4] Thus that blurred boundary in traditional China between craftsmen as master builders and literati as collaborators, clearly defined the boundary between a western modern notion of architects and the Chinese alternative. It might partly explain the reason why the specific operation of architecture in historical China was much less about a process of design and dissemination as that in the West, but an analogous composition of components from an established order of a modular system. This modular system has been focused and represented in 'Ying Zao Fa Shi', which was both a technical treatise on architectural craftsmanship and a building project budget control system for state-led architectural constructions. The Chinese unique bracketing system ('dou gong'), which was compared to the Classical Orders in western architecture by a Chinese architectural milestone figure, Liang Sicheng (Liang Ssu-Ch'eng), forms the archetypical structural unit of Chinese architecture and cities, ranging from the minimised interlocking joint to support a single roof, to the maximised archipelago as a city-within-the-city such as the Forbidden City. The terminological research on 'Ying Zao Fa Shi' has been highlighted by Liang Sicheng and his peers of that generation, in searching for a Chinese cultural-specific building modus operandi.[5]

This architectural system and modus operandi, particularly the ingeniously prefabricated timber frame system, is limited but almost open-sourced within the carpenters' groups, repetitively practiced by them from one generation to another. Their anonymity of authorships, indigenous knowledge and uncanny workmanship were the hidden mechanism for the consistency in thousands of years of Chinese

villages and cities. The once open-sourced knowledge became locked in a 'black box' due to the dramatically changing mechanisms brought in by modernism and globalization from the late twentieth century, which tended to replace traditional craftsmen/master builder and literati in architectural activities. As a consequence, their presence/presentation transcended in ancient histories could only be captured in some untouched corners of the indigenous village in the urbanizing China.

Modern Chinese Architects and the American Beaux-Arts

Although western architecture in China can be traced back to the eighteenth century according to British architectural historian Sir Banister Fletcher,[6] both the modern concept and system of architecture discipline, architectural technical construction, and architectural professional bodies hadn't been fully adopted in China until the early twentieth century. It was at that time that around fifty Chinese students were state-funded to study architecture abroad, mostly in schools of architecture in the United States "as part of the reparation China was paying to the United States for the Boxer Rebellion".[7] And the majority of those Chinese architectural students in the United States were trained at the University of Pennsylvania under the then Penn Beaux-Arts model which originated from the École des Beaux-Arts. The students included Liang Sicheng, Lin Huiyin, Yang Tingbao, Tong Jun, etc. who were known as the first generation of Chinese architects and later became Chinese spiritual leaders in architectural design and education after the establishment of PRC in 1949. This generation of Chinese architects were successively trained (some of them even practiced a couple of years) in the West, and returned to China during the 1920-30s with their learned system of modern architecture, both in terms of design practice and in terms of design education.

Although during the early Republican period (1912-1949) there were also a few Chinese architects trained in Europe (such as Feng Jizhong) or in Japan (such as Liu Dunzhen), it was these American-made Beaux-Arts pioneers that paved the major foundation of the architect/architecture of modern sense in China. These overseas-trained architects not only practiced modern design service and developed modern professional education, but also actively collaborated with local scholars and builders in order to search for a motif of 'Chinese-ness' in the then turbulent China before WWII. For instance, one of the most important Chinese architectural academic research organizations, 'The Society for Researching Chinese Architecture', was set up in 1930 in then Peking (Beijing), which researched, documented and rescued numerous traditional architectures before their demolition during the wartime.

It is doubtless that the marriage between traditional Chinese architecture and the Beaux-Arts tradition (with a preference on visual composition and order in architecture) is one of the most significant events in the architectural field in twentieth-century China.[8] According to Shuishan Yu, "The impact these architects made on the constructed environment of modern China is profound and far-reaching, from the changes in architectural styles and design processes to the development of architectural education and a new identity for the architect. The impact can still be felt in the dawn of twenty-first century China."[9]

Meanwhile, it is worth noting that, there was a localized process of confrontation, assimilation and adaption in modern China, during which 'architecture' as a new professional form in the construction sector and 'architect' as an imported occupation were grafted into the existing not-fully-modernized social structure and construction system. This can be seen clearly from the following example.

One of the earliest professional bodies of architecture, the 'Shanghai Architects Society' was established in 1927 (renamed 'Chinese Architects Society' in 1928) with the society's journal publication 'Chinese Architecture' that advocated both intellectual and professional frameworks referencing the then modern western system. More than 70% of the founding members were educated in the West and had an upper-middle class background as dignitaries or high officials.[10] (Over 60% of the founding members were American-trained and the most eminent were Penn-trained.[11]) But then in 1930, the 'Shanghai Architecture Society' was established, with local contractors, material suppliers, craftsmen acting as the main body. As a competitor against 'Shanghai Architects Society' with contrasting values, its journal 'Architecture Monthly' focused on Chinese locally appropriated ways of using material and construction techniques.[12]

The adaptation and negotiation was interrupted during WWII until later in 1953, four years after the establishment of PRC, the 'Architectural Society of China' (ASC) was founded as the only one professional/academic organization on behalf of Chinese architects, associated with its official 'Architect's Journal'. But just as Professor Yong Jiang at Tsinghua University argued, with a focus on Architecture relevant to western modern meaning in both form and discourse, ASC was neither a third party to mediate or to supervise architectural activities, nor a professional-accredited body

evolving from professional registered architects.[13] It has been a governmental sub-division supervised by MOHURD,[14] with a loose and marginal institutional link.[15] And this continued the paradoxical evolution of Chinese architects with continuous tension between tradition and modernity, the East and West.

Summary of 3.1

Section 3.1 sheds light on the concept and professional development of the architect in traditional and the modern China. In doing so, it provides a broader context in a diachronic perspective within which to place the subsequent Section 3.2 that deals with contemporary forms of rural architectural practices and practitioners in China.

As a borrowed profession until the emergence of modern China, the architect in traditional China was almost absent. It used to be the craftsman or the master builder, who combined the roles of architect, contractor and builder, but was less visible and appreciated in the process of drawing and designing buildings, partly as a result of the active involvement from the literati or other traditional scholars as architectural 'author'. The concept of architect and architecture was shared by craftsmen and literati, with the former managing the building process through oral instructions while the latter getting involved in the making process through textual practice. Therefore there existed a clear boundary between western modern notion of architects and the Chinese alternative as the modernity's 'other'. This particular status of the premodern Chinese architect intermeshing the role of designers and that of builders also facilitated a steady evolution of a highly-developed modular system. It pointed to an additive system where single elements of a building component could be assembled and eventually became a roof work, a building block, towards a piece of city. Thus the system and its modus operandi in turn enhanced the absence of architect both in terms of design as fabrication and in terms of construction as assembly. However, different from the textual evidence of architecture interpreted and disseminated by the literati in China, the material evidence of architecture was locked inside the community of craftsmen. The indigenous knowledge and uncanny workmanship embedded in the built environment could only be traced from rural villages in current China, where the technical regime of modernization and urbanization tend to replace traditional craftsmen and literati in the architectural production and consumption.

The modernization of Chinese architecture is part of the bigger story of the country's reluctant but rapid involvements into the configuration of a modernizing world from

the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. After those Penn-trained graduate architects transported the American Beaux-Arts model associated with modern architectural concepts and practices to China during the first three decades of the twentieth century, during a time when the whole construction sector was rapidly changing and the country was pressed by a Western ideology and internal wars, the previously independent and relatively stable architectural system in traditional China started a struggling and painful journey accompanied with both a physical and an ideological transformation. The first generation of Chinese architects, who were spiritual leaders in later architectural profession and professional education after 1949's political stability, dedicated all their lives in search for a motif of 'Chinese-ness' and translated the fragmented moments into a relatively coherent narrative, which paved the way for a temporarily solid foundation and simultaneously transferred a strong load carried by cultural identity to Chinese architects of the following generations to date.

The 'marriage' between the American Beaux-Arts system and the traditional Chinese architectural system had profound and far-reaching, double impacts in modern Chinese architect/architecture, including the contemporary one. One impact is the strong link to the history and tradition from a diachronic perspective, which has evolved and shifted to a hidden agreement in architectural profession that architecture as a product with a visual form and a functional program is prioritised. The other impact is an increasingly stronger professional appeal to borrow Western fragments from a synchronic perspective. And that position and attitude of eclecticism as a pragmatic response to the socio-economic reality of contemporary China has taken a risk to make the contemporary Chinese architect 'absent' again, not in terms of quantity under such hastily urbanization but in terms of discourse.

In sum, the complex interplay between craftsmen and literati in premodern China, traditional master builder and modern architect in modern China, tradition and modernity, East and West from modern China to the current contemporary China, together rendered China's ruptured and grafted architectural profession as a hybrid, both in terms of design practice and professional training/education. The paradoxical nature of the evolution of modern Chinese architects can be revealed clearly from its development of professional bodies of architect, architectural society

and academic association, and the result is a 'strangely-familiar' profession, setting off certain degrees of hybridity between tradition and modernity, the East and West.

3.2 Mainstream Architectural Practice in Contemporary Rural China

"Bao-gong-tou" (illegal architects)
& Self-Build

State-led
Design Institutions

Privately-owned
Design Institutions

Architects'
Studios

University-based
Design Institutions
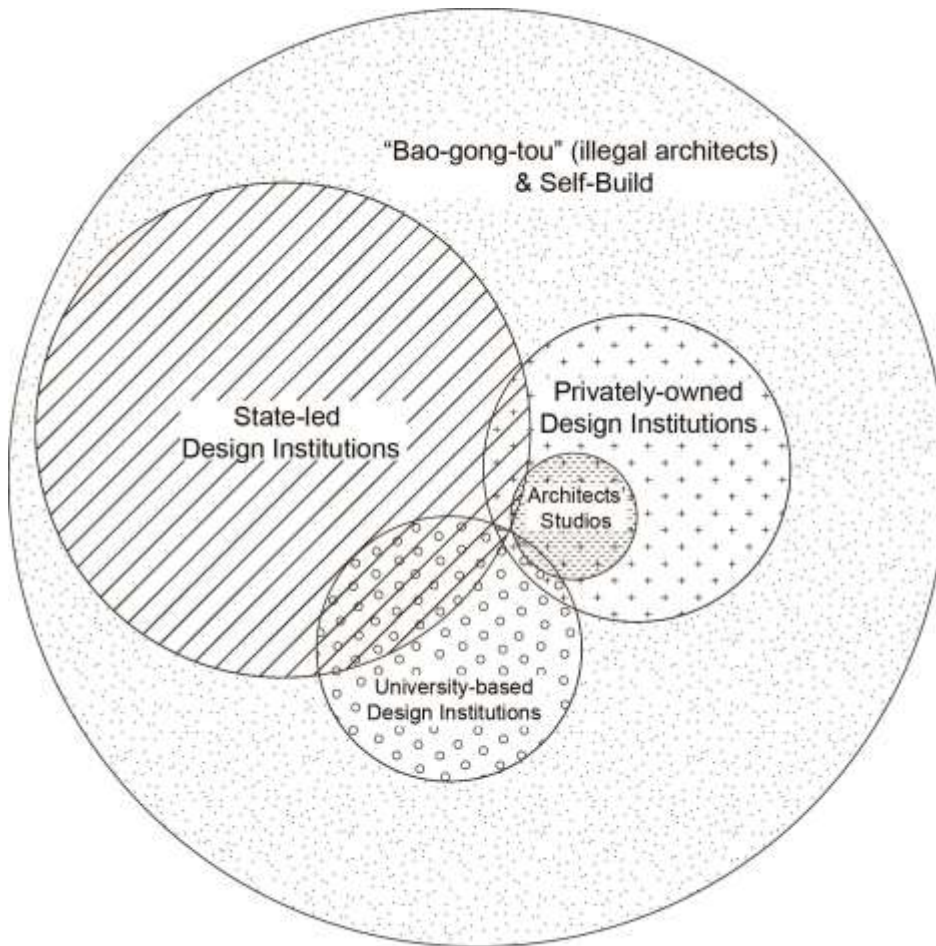
Contemporary Architectural Practitioners in Rural China

Fig. 3.4 Diagram shows the general composition and configuration of the market share of different types of architectural practitioners in contemporary rural China (Drawn by author)

Fig. 3.5 A dramatic stage of rural-urban in the making was captured near Lu village, Taiping Lake, Anhui province, 2016. The high-rise residential apartments were probably a product of a state-led or private-owned commercial design institution, while the three or lower storey buildings were built from rural 'Bao-gong-tou's hands. The far top-right mountain-like building was a work-in-construction designed by one of the most globalized Chinese architect Ma Yansong and his private-owned practice MAD Architects. The overall preservation and tourism planning guild was likely involved by a university-based design institutions with some other teaching practitioners. (Photograph by the author)

Rural 'Bao-gong-tou' as Illegal Architect

'Bao-gong-tou' literally means contracted-builder-lead and refers to those rural construction (procurement) contractors who lead a registered or unregistered construction builders' team. 'Bao-gong-tou' has been widely regarded in rural China as not only managing the building resources including labour and materials and controlling the whole project within the budget, but also to exert a key influence in design construction and onsite adjustments of the building. 'Bao-gong-tou' emerged as a popular job type during the past 30 years' rapidly urbanizing China, a transitional period in which the city needs a huge amount of low-skilled builders and the residual rural labourers were eager to become migrant workers. Originally as agents between the urban construction company and informal rural labourers, 'Bao-gong-tou' has played an indispensable middleman role in the Chinese underdeveloped construction sector, with some of them even setting up their own contracting business in both rural and urban areas. They hire locally and source regionally -- recruit both elderly craftsmen and skilful builders as core teams and build up informal networks to organize working labourers from rural villages, and operate building or infrastructure projects both in rural and urban areas of that region. Particularly in rural China, 'Bao-gong-tou' could be understood as a contemporary Chinese version of 'Illegal Architect', a term borrowed from British architectural theorist Professor Jonathan Hill.[16] That is because as an untouched corner of urbanization before 1990s, rural China has been a blind spot in the sense of professional architects (until around the year 2010 when the design-led New Rural Reconstruction movement arose). Almost as an autonomous system, building construction activities in Chinese rural villages have been an insiders' game, and a key part of that insider is the 'Bao-gong-tou' group.

In rural China a building is the symbolism of the socio-economic status of its owner. When the rural villagers get richer, their first instinct is to find a 'Bao-gong-tou' to (re)build their own houses. It is partly because the old house's practical living quality is low and its facilities' outdated, but also partly because of the longstanding tradition in rural China that a house is the 'face' of the family and kinship. Thus a large rebuilding/refurbishment wave in rural China started from the late 1980s until now,

after the implementation of the economically-effective 'Household Contract Responsibility System' which has freed peasants from non-efficient collective farming in People's Communes or production teams. However, this ongoing rebuilding/refurbishment wave has been fairly destructive in terms of sustaining rural values of architecture and the built environment. There is only a very limited minority of rural 'Bao-gong-tou' who could recognize the value of the local architectural tradition and practice in an appropriate way with relevance to the existing architectural context. Conversely, the majority of them make their careers by quickly learning from, and blindly bringing in, the so-called 'city image' or fake 'Euro-style' (nicknamed by them as 'small exotic house', 'Xiao Yang Fang') (Fig. 3.6), of which higher economic status perfectly fits into the imagination of the rural villagers for their 'face' ('Mian zi') and the business agenda for the 'Bao-gong-tou'. Though the internal function and use are improved in terms of more natural daylight and less humidity, the existing building structure and traditional village context are/have been erased irreversibly only to make way for the new modern house (Fig. 3.7-8). During recent decades, along with the rise of rural tourism (Fig. 3.9), a new methodology emerges for 'Bao-gong-tou' to make a business by superficially imitating or visually reassembling historical architecture in their external form and surface decoration of a new building, in order to make up more nostalgic elements to attract urban tourists.

Fig. 3.6 Zhong shanjing natural village, Anhui province, 2015. (Photograph by the author)

A pink-painted new house and a white two-storey building enclose a lane directed to a few original buildings survived by the wave of refurbishment and rebuilding.

Fig. 3.7 An uncomfortable juxtaposition between the existing and the new built by the rural 'Bao-gong-tou'. Zhongshan natural village, Anhui province, 2015. (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 3.8 The chaotic built environment of Lu village, Anhui province, 2016. (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 3.9 Hong village, Anhui province, 2016. (Photograph by the author)

Young tourists flood into a traditional village, while the built environment has not been recognized for its authenticity under the skillful make-up by the rural 'Bao-gong-tou'.

State-led Design Institutions and the 'Design Drawing Collection'

Similar to the 'Bao-gong-tou', the 'Design Drawing Collection' ('Tu ji') is a special product of this special period in transitional rural China, yet is normally done by state-led design institutions. As mentioned above, rural China has been a blind spot of the architect in the modern sense, given the large quantity, scattered geographical distribution and different time schedule for the individual rural house refurbishment or rebuilding. It has been not practical for urban professionals to make bespoke architectural schemes, let alone very rarely could rural villagers afford the design service. While the traditional village-based master-builders or craftsmen, whose shared building knowledge and value made the village environment in harmony from the below, became less and less under the rapid urbanization, the state government has gotten into the planning and building process in the name of aid. The top-down product is the 'Design Drawing Collection'. It is a local collection of a number of ready-made design schemes and references for rural house design and construction, which are selected and produced by professional architects and planners in state-led design institutions based in cities of the same region as those villages. Through both formal requirements and informal encouragement to use this 'Design Drawing Collection' in rural China, both the small number of rural villagers who self-build as well as those 'Bao-gong-tou' who take charge of the majority of the rural construction projects have relied on it as a design manual or guiding handbook. The role of this 'Design Drawing Collection' becomes more formal, particularly after the launch of 'Build a New Socialist Countryside' in 2005, a typical national propaganda which aimed to renovate the rural villages from their stereotyped impressions as a dirty, disorderly and low-quality environment.

This sort of 'Design Drawing Collection' could also be used in government-led rural resettlement projects. Those resettlement apartments, which serve as compensations to the rural villagers who lose their lands in the state-ordered land acquisition moves for urban expansion, are normally commissioned to local state-led design institutions with a relatively lower budget than the average budget in the commercial housing market. Therefore, the wide use of Design Drawing Collection under this circumstance can provide affordable house designs for the villagers and

reduce the investment cost by the government or government-backed developers. Correspondingly, with much lower design fees for architectural institutions, architects will rarely input time or energy to optimise the most appropriate design, but tend to reproduce or directly borrow those ready-made schemes from the 'Design Drawing Collection'.

To take Guangdong province as an example, the 'New Socialist Rural Housing Design Drawing Collection' launched in 2010 (Fig. 3.10-12) was done by more than a dozen of local design institutions, the majority of which are state-led, through an invited competition-led commission. The 'Design Drawing Collection' covers three main types of villages and their corresponded house types. They are: 'Two-storey Housing of Agricultural Village'; 'Three-storey Housing of Peri-urban Village'; and 'Multi-storey Housing of Peri-urban Village'. Each type is illustrated with more than ten selected house schemes and made up a full package of schematic design drawings from plan layout to external look.

Fig. 3.10 'Two-storey Housing of Agricultural Village', 'New Socialist Rural Housing Design Drawing Collection', Guangdong province, 2010. (Source: www.gdcic.net)

Fig. 3.11 'Three-storey Housing of Peri-urban Village', 'New Socialist Rural Housing Design Drawing Collection', Guangdong province, 2010. (Source: www.gdcic.net)

Fig. 3.12 'Multi-storey Housing of Peri-urban Village', 'New Socialist Rural Housing Design Drawing Collection', Guangdong province, 2010. (Source: www.gdcic.net)

The 'Design Drawing Collection' produced by those architects and planners in local state-led design institutions does have strength: it provides a free design template for rural villagers to build their own houses in an economic way, which could then be adapted into specific site adjustments and local construction techniques led by 'Bao-gong-tou', according to the household's budget. From the view of local governments, a tidy and standardized housing scheme as 'Face-project' could also add credits for their political performance. (Fig. 3.13-4) But the weakness of the 'Design Drawing

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Collection' is more obvious and its impact even more negative in the architectural and broader socio-cultural sense, mainly through its instrumental position. Firstly, it is produced by architects in city offices as an ideal rural architectural imagination, but alienates itself from the reality of rural construction. A post occupancy evaluation in rural villages nearby Hangzhou, the capital city of Zhejiang province, shows that the template house type from the annually renewed and marketed 'Design Drawing Collection' were realized only 10-20%, causing loads of problems after occupation due to 'Bao-gong-tou''s lack of knowledge in basic architectural programming, structure and organization.[17] Secondly, it advocates an architectural model that ignores the context by imposing a standard which puts users in uniform buildings, damaging both the motivation of village residents and young designers. Thirdly, more profoundly, this special product promoted by the state with technical support from professional architects distorts the relationship between architects as spatial producers and rural villagers as end users. Rural villagers hardly distinguish the difference between architect and builder, let alone being aware of the value of architects and their professional work. Meanwhile architecture as profession is transformed to sub-contractors by the 'Bao-gong-tou'.

Fig. 3.13 Huaxi village, one of the most known rural villages in Jiangsu Province, China for their economic prosperity, has been benefited from the financial compensation from the state-led large-scale land acquisition. The extremely uniform village built environment was proposed in match to its branding identity as the 'Chinese First Village'. (Source: www.dzsyq.com)

Fig. 3.14 Bird eye photo shows the general picture of new rural village in China under the state-led initiative 'Constructing a New Socialist Countryside' from 2005, with straight streets sandwiched by uniformed housing of completely same typology and appearance cutting through the farmland and natural landscape. (Source: www.gzyzyjg.com)

Privately-owned Design Institutions and Design-driven Ateliers

Similar to many other professions and sectors under the socialist market economy in China, privately-owned architectural design institutions occupy an indispensable but compared to the dominant state-led ones, a relatively lower part of the whole pyramid of Chinese construction enterprise. Chinese privately-owned design institutions with employees ranging from several tens to thousands, could be normally sub-divided into two forms according to their fundamental design positions and roles in professional practices: The first form is those service-led and profit-driven design institutions that have similar motivations and mechanisms as state-led design institutions. (Fig. 3.15-6) They often originally grew and then separated from state-led ones, some of which still maintain close business or institutional links with them. Some others without too much state-enterprise background set off from fierce competition of the market, including the emerging 'In-house Design Department' as clients' architectural representative in some Chinese privately-owned developers.

Fig. 3.15 Wangxian natural village, four types in 73 buildings, designed by a private-owned design institution called GAD under Zhejiang Lvcheng Real Estate Group, 2016. The project is the first 'model village' of Hangzhou city government-led 'Hang-style Rural Housing' initiative. (Photograph by Yuanfeng Wu)

Fig. 3.16 Award-winning rural resettlement project in Dong ziguan natural village, designed by GAD, 2016. The project is also a 'model village' of Hangzhou city government-led 'Hang-style Rural Housing' initiative. (Source: www.zjal.com.cn)

This privately-owned design force develops a second form -- independent architectural practice usually similar to the western form of a studio or atelier, emerging from the late 1990s and beginning of 2000s. They are often (co)founded by those design-driven architects who had a western training or practising background and are motivated to push the boundary of (Chinese) architecture. This second form of architectural force has evolved a strong trajectory that is influenced by the so-called experimental architectural generations from late 1990s, when independent architectural practice and practitioner with a more resonance to modern western definition and discourse broke the ground in China. Among them Yung Ho Chang and Qingyun Ma are two key figures, leading the profession, in particular during the period between 1990 to 2005. Coincidently both architects' early built projects are in rural China.

Yung Ho Chang (born in mid 1950s) established China's first private architectural practice Atelier FeiChang JianZhu in 1993 in Beijing.[18] The son of a famous architect called Kaiji Zhang who was involved in several main buildings shortly after the establishment of PRC in 1949, Chang formerly served as Head of Architecture at MIT and has been a member of the Pritzker Prize jury team since 2012. One of his

early built works in China is the 'Split House' (Fig. 3.17) in a rural site north of Beijing, which is one of the architectural design collections sponsored and run by a boutique hotel called 'Commune by the Great Wall'. 'Split House' is a modernist building in terms of internal layout and external form but it reinvented traditional construction model mixed rammed-earth and wood. It was explored by Chang as a new rural house prototype with cultural sensitivity and the capacity to adapt different site conditions.

Fig. 3.17 'Split House', Yanqing, Beijing, 2007. Designed by Yung Ho Chang in 2002. (Photograph by author)

The second key figure, Qingyun Ma (born in mid 1960s), founder of MADA s.p.a.m and former Dean of University Southern California School of Architecture, built his career from rural Xi'an city from where he originated. In a small remote village called Yanhe, Ma designed and built a house for his father (Fig. 3.18-9). A striking integration of irregular pebbles infilling, sourced from the river alongside the village, with the regular concrete frame structure and wooden shuttle windows, 'Father's House' is a local stranger that provides a direction for architectural modernization without losing the local tradition of Chinese rural villages.

Fig 3.18-19 'Father's House', Yanhe village, Yushan township, Lantian Couty, Shanxi Province, 2007. Designed by Qingyun Ma in 2003. (Photograph by the author)

Both 'Split House' and 'Father's House' embedded architects' initial belief and ambitions to unlock urban architectural paradoxes in rapid urbanization and to reinvent the power of design in rural China. Therefore it transcended the value of a single piece of an architect's work towards an alternative way to reclaim and regenerate village value at that special period of accelerated rural urbanization. But it is also noteworthy that both were done in a typical and ideal modernist way to place the building object in a natural field, without constraints from the physical and social fabric of the rural villages. However, the concepts and modus operandi of the above two architects and the prototypical potential behind two buildings were so pioneering that less practitioners achieved to continue or expand in this field for nearly a decade in both rural and urban China.

That trajectory hasn't been pushed further until Haobo Wei (born in early 1970s), an architect whose independent practice West-line Studio deeply rooted in the local villages and cities of Guizhou province at the far southwest of China. Compared to the two 'globalized' seniors, Wei has developed a way to respond more actively to those challenging rural constraints through his architectural engagements with both transformative, vernacular spatial organization and in-situ, low-tech construction.[19]

His particular modus operandi not only evolves from in-depth social-anthropological and phenomenological approaches to the rural sites but also from his consistent collaboration with local workmanship, which could be well demonstrated from his two major public building works: the Red Army Memorial Museum completed in 2010 in Bing'an town (Fig. 3.20) and the Tourist Centre completed in 2015 in Che'tian village (Fig. 3.21).[20] While Wei pays a particular attention to the relationship between the particular Karst geomorphologic features of Guizhou rural areas and its diverse local subcultures, and the larger scale built form and environment, his works as a modern architect are still limited into a relatively small-scaled building or street level without transforming a broader village context of rural China.[21]

Fig. 3.20 The Red Army Memorial Museum completed in 2010, Bing'an town, Guizhou province, China. (Photograph by Haobo Wei)

There are obvious resonances between the local land-forms, vernacular place-forms and Haobo Wei's new contemporary additions. However the key to each project originates from his very personal but strikingly consistent approach to the site from archaeological and phenomenological perspectives. His active engagement with the social production of propositional work always ties the particular spatial language to the existing social fabric.

Fig. 3.21 The Tourist Centre in Che'tian village completed in 2015. (Photograph by Haobo Wei)

The spatial use is enhanced by the effect of the irregular spatial layout punctured by communal spaces, changing internal light filtered through bright-coloured roof-top lights and the constantly weathering materials, integrating vernacular craftsmanship into generic but economic modern constructions.

In brief, Yung Ho Chang, Qingyun Ma, Haobo Wei and a few other leading private architectural firms aim to seek an appropriate way to design and build rural architecture that resists the mainstream architectural practice in contemporary cities, or the rural planning and design imposed from the city made by the majority of privately-owned design institutions.

University-based Design Institutions and Teaching Practitioners

The fourth architectural design force in rural China comes from Chinese universities with architectural schools or departments. Quite different from schools of architecture of Western universities, the majority of Chinese architectural schools established their own design institutions or design consulting group in the similar way as commercial companies, and have developed a quite pragmatic model which effectively embedded the design service within the academic institutions. Some of the most developed ones, such as Shanghai Tongji Architectural Design (Group) Co., Ltd. (TJAD), formerly known as the Architectural Design and Research Institute of Tongji University, has had such a strong university base that it has become a very competitive design force against those state-led or privately-owned design institutions. Some of the key partners or architects of this kind of university-based design institutions are also part-time design tutors or full-time professors in the schools of architecture of the university, with interns and graduates sometimes simultaneously working for both. Besides, some university teachers formally enrolled in schools of architecture also set up their own practice outside the school, or project offices inside school, which takes advantage of the resource pool of the university such as engineering design and technical consultancy. Therefore the practices of those teaching practitioners also blend university-located research with design practices serving the external. While they belong legally to privately-owned design forces, the ownerships of university-based design institutions or companies are more complex, according to the ownership-based affiliated categories of Chinese universities. For example, some Chinese universities affiliate to the state or province directly, rather than the located city, while some others belong to the specific cities.[22]

Different ownership structure in architectural design forces of Chinese universities doesn't produce as many conflicts as the difference in land ownership; the architectural forces' working scope is radiated like concentric circles with their geographical bases at the centre. But except those few strongest institutions, most of those university-based design institutions and teaching practitioners work locally or regionally, including rural villages and townships supervised by cities of universities. In some regions, governmental officials or village leaders welcome and trust more on

architects with university background than those private ones from the market, which relates to a fundamental socio-cultural prejudice in Chinese culture with intellectuals overweighing businessmen. In the field, their academic interests and approaches do make them different from with those commercial ones, particularly in terms of the research-based pre-design analysis and briefing, and relatively more sufficient time input and lower fees.

To take Zouma tang village (Fig. 3.22-26) of Ningbo city in Zhejiang province as an example, a university-based design institution integrated the village preservation project with some research projects and teaching curriculums of its school of architecture. In doing so the professionals, teachers, students worked as a team in developing a preservation plan commissioned by this village and its upper township government. Therefore it is a win-win collaboration. After detailed site visits and building measurements (mostly done by students as a study project), the planning team made a detailed masterplan and five categorizations in terms of architectural strategies (Preservation, Refurbishment, Reserved, Renovation, Demolition) according to the evaluation on the existing. Then the architectural team continued, making specific spatial schemes at conceptual level through models and renderings.[23] The project outputs of this kind of university-based design interventions are usually in the form of reports or other 2D packages, and the hand over to the village/township normally means the end of the academic impact. Whether and to what degrees the village would follow the preservation planning guidelines and whether the existing buildings would benefit from the conceptual spatial strategies vary from different villages and villagers.
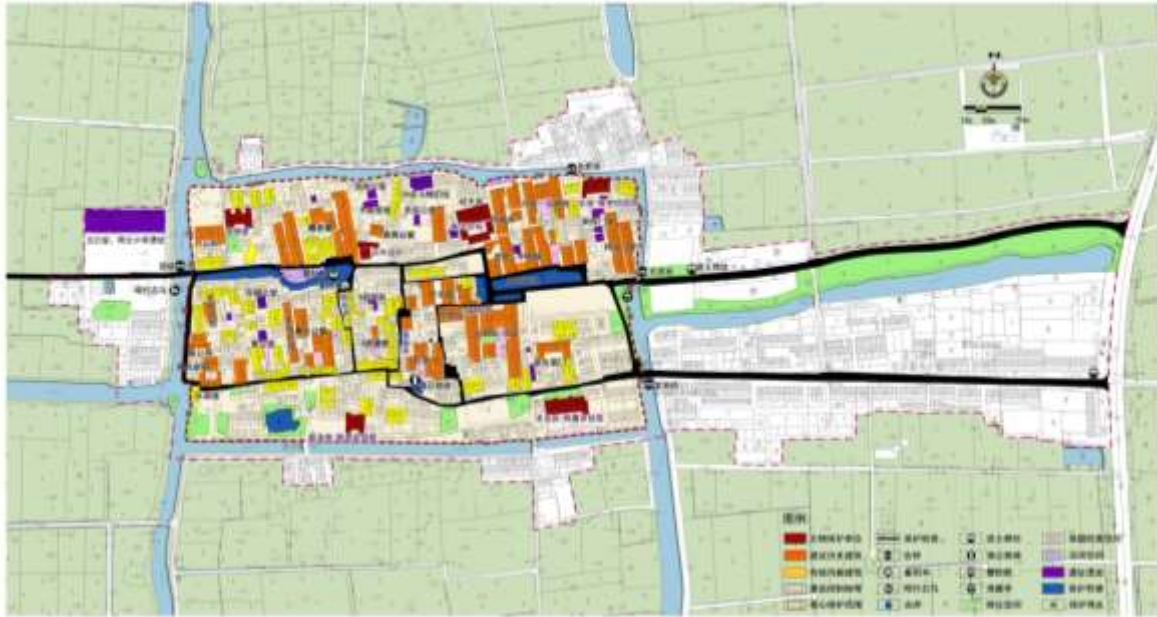
Fig. 3.22 Masterplan of the Planning for Preservation and Implementation of Zouma tang Village. March 2015. (Source: Urban Planning and Design Research Institution of Huangzhong University of Science and Technology)
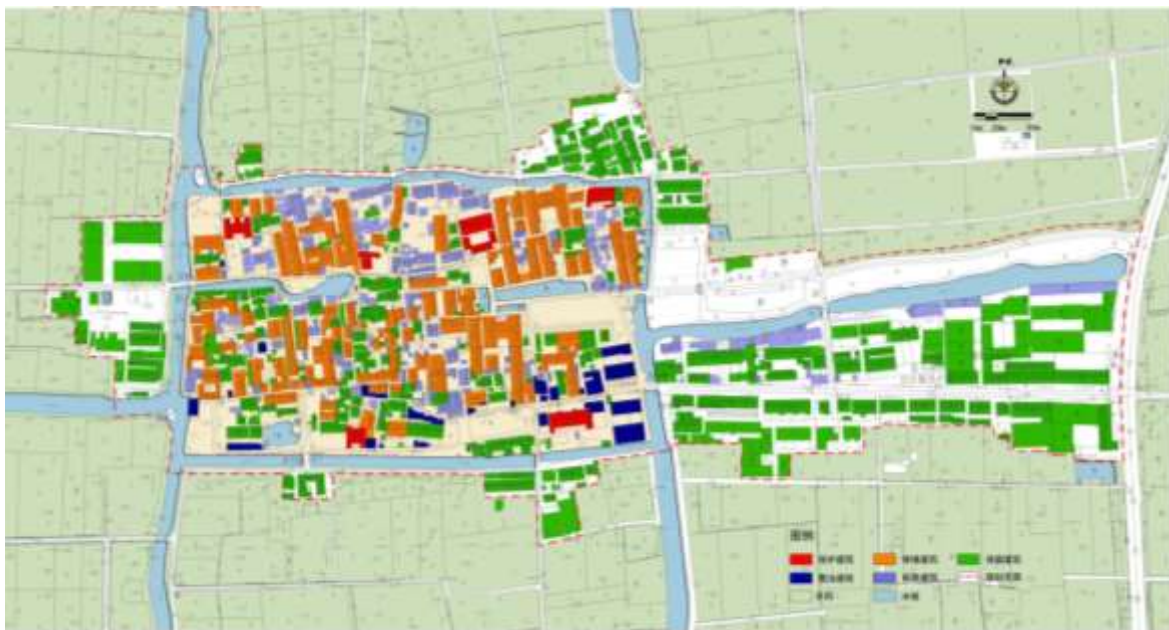
Fig. 3.23 Five guiding categorizations were identified in terms of architectural strategies: the red represents 'building preservation', the orange represents 'building refurbishment', the green represents 'building reservation', the blue represents 'building renovation', the purple represents 'building demolition'. (Source: Urban Planning and Design Research Institution of Huangzhong University of Science and Technology)
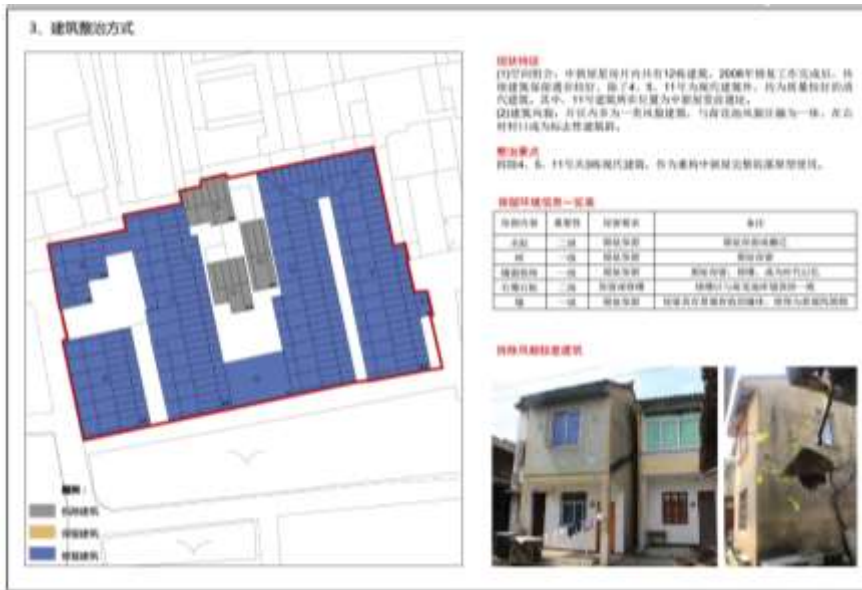
Fig. 3.24 An example for 'building renovation': buildings in blue will be reserved while three buildings in grey will be demolished due to their 'appearance which negatively affects the unity of historical context'. (Source: Urban Planning and Design Research Institution of Huangzhong University of Science and Technology)
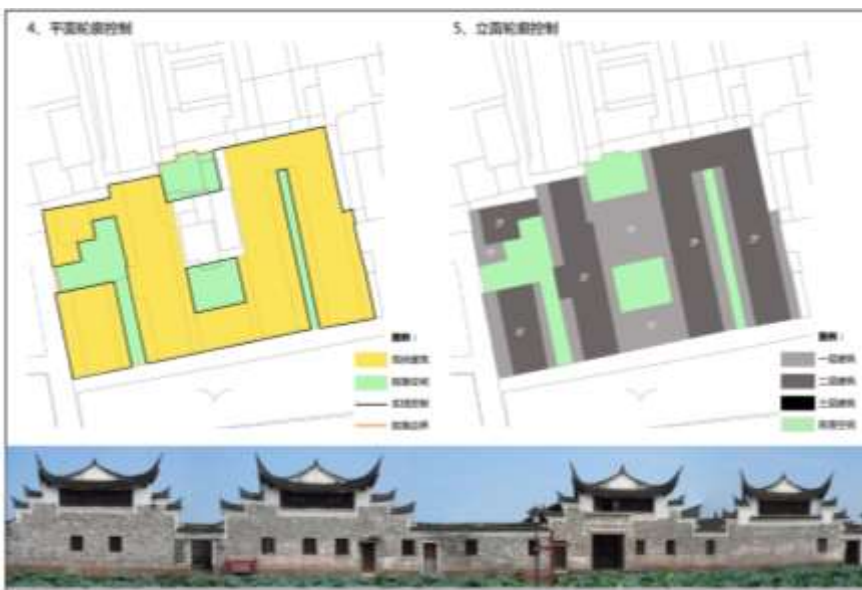
Fig. 3.25 A diagram showing the guiding principles for architectural renovation and further addition in terms of plan boundary and elevation skyline: the yellow represents existing buildings and the green represents courtyards. Light grey and dark grey respectively means lower space and top space. (Source: Urban Planning and Design Research Institution of Huangzhong University of Science and Technology)

Fig. 3.26 A renovated site plan and bird eye perspective showing the specific architectural moves, but only in visual forms without any consideration on structure and material. (Source: Urban Planning and Design Research Institution of Huangzhong University of Science and Technology)

In addition, the state-owned or government-backed background makes those university-based design institutions and individuals more accessible to participate in those major events of the region, such as Olympics or post-disaster reconstruction. This in turn helps those university-based design institutions to create a positive social image for their further commissions, particularly in underdeveloped rural areas. For example, design institutions from the Tongji University School of Architecture arrived and started to work on site just a week after the earthquake in 2008 in Sichuang province and they took over many of the following reconstruction planning and architectural designs including a new town for Dujiangyan city.[24]

At a smaller and more independent level, a small minority of individual teaching practitioners have become a leading architectural force in providing some best practices in transforming rural China through their socio-culturally-sensitive design or innovative technical production. A typical example of these leading practitioners is Prof. Li Xiaodong and his architectural atelier based in Tsinghua University. His early experimental work Elementary School Expansion (Fig. 3.27) in rural Yuhu village of Yunan province strategically explored an integrated way to balance a critical regionalism and modernity program. Then, his later work 'Bridge School'(Fig. 3.28), which was awarded the prestigious Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 2010, not

only provided architecturally a contemporary translation of vernacular building elements but also broke up socially the barriers between two indigenous communities.

Fig. 3.27 The 'Elementary School Expansion' done by Li Xiaodong Atelier in Yuhu village, Yunnan province. (Photograph by Xiaodong Li)

Fig. 3.28 The 'School Bridge' done by Li Xiaodong Atelier in Xiashi village, Fujian province. (Photograph by Xiaodong Li)

Additionally, university teaching practitioners based in Hong Kong and Taiwan have developed a strong academic interests in engaging with rural constructions in the mainland from the late 1990s (after Hong Kong's return to PRC), with the proximity to access the financial support from those western-influenced charity groups and other humanitarian funding bodies. Amongst them, NG Yan Yung Edward from Hong Kong and Hsieh Ying-chun from Taiwan are two key figures, the practices of whom have expanded design impact beyond architectural objects. Working with Chinese University of Hong Kong students and local villagers, Edward initiated the humanitarian programme 'Wu Zhi Qiao (Bridge to China) in 2007, with a focus on designing and building pedestrian bridges in remote villages of southwest China which were lacking the basic infrastructure to cross rivers. The project has had an influential outcome and a strong social impact both inside and outside architectural academia and profession. When he set up another initiative 'One University One Village' in 2013, his PhD student Jun Mu and his colleague Zhu Jingxiang had already started their own routes to explore more ways to transform Chinese rural villages through architectural design and interventions. So far both progresses have been fruitful: Jun Mu has led a national-leading sustainable architectural retrofitting research and implementation in northwest Chinese villages under the particular regional climate. Jingxiang Zhu has received from his university-located research practice Zhu Jingxiang Architects a growing reputation in light-weight and rapid rural construction, covering almost all building types and supported by flexible and demountable building components manufactured offsite. From the base of the University of Hong Kong, its dean Wei-jen Wang turned his interests into village topics with a completion of a renovated courtyard house in Pingtian village of Zhejiang province; while the more ambitious young practice of Rural Urban Framework (founded by Joshua Bolchover and John Lin) in the university has developed an extensive portfolio of village projects working across primary schools, community bridges, clinics and large-scale housing (Fig. 3.29) in Chinese rural villages mostly in southern or southwestern Chinese villages that are reasonably close to Hong Kong.

Fig. 3.29 New post-disaster relief houses under construction designed by RUF in Jintai village, Sichuang province. (Photograph by RUF)

While it is noteworthy to emphasize that, except those above-mentioned pioneering design groups and independent practices, the majority of university-located design institutions and teaching practitioners operate architectural projects, particularly those from rural China, in a similar ideology and method with privately-owned design institutions, who cut off a small share from the 'cheap cake' of rural building market dominated by state-led and self-help construction.

Summary of 3.2

Following the last section on the historical and professional particularities for architects and architectural practice in China, it is necessary to interrogate contemporary Chinese architects from the context of rural China and their professional practice in rural villages. The notion of 'Chinese architects' here is neither aiming for those grand narratives, such as inward-looking nation-building or reinventing cultural identities under a globalizing trend of architects-without-borders, nor following those Chinese genealogical trees branded by the succession of teachings from an architectural master to his disciples. Rather, a critical interrogation of this particular group of practitioners is needed from a perspective as a whole, including both architectural professionals and non-professional practitioners. Rather than digging out deeper in the current rural building market to sort out the changing and largely overlapping roles and scopes of different types of architects, this section aims to sketch out a picture through four different forms of architectural practitioners currently practising in rural China as the mainstream, in order to provide a contextual foundation for the following Case Study Chapters of hybrid practitioners as the alternative.

Those four categorizations are identified from three primary criteria composing of the normal base for professional practice, the ownership structure and the working mechanism of their design practice. The first is the rural 'Bao-gong-tou' who could be understood as 'illegal architect' in Jonathan Hill's sense, or neo-vernacular architect without any professional architectural education. They occupy more than half of the rural building projects in Chinese villages, which is owed to their lower fees and local proximity. However, the rise of rebuilding/refurbishment in Chinese rural villages since late 1980s to date, largely based upon the general economic improvement and led by these rural 'Bao-gong-tou', has been fairly destructive from the perspective of sustaining the rural value of architecture. Numerous traditional buildings and built environments have been erased and replaced by superficial stylist objects, without recognizing the value of local architectural tradition and the relevance to the broader historical and cultural context. But rural 'Bao-gong-tou' has made a business in this process and has become one of the most popular jobs in rural China.

The second is the state-led architectural design institution, who has the institutional responsibility to develop rural areas under those state-led development agendas and initiatives. As the design service fee tends to be limited, the commercial nature of this kind of practice tends not to input too much design intelligence and diversity, but builds up a generic quality channel through a factory-product-like 'Design Drawing Collection' prefabricated for several types of rural villages of the region. What has also been applied into those government-commissioned large-scale rural renovation or resettlement housing schemes, or into those big natural/city events such as post-disaster relief reconstruction projects. Thus, though with reluctance, this second type still accounts far more than a quarter shares of the all rural constructions.

The third type, the privately-owned architectural design institution, which contains all those private architectural forces ranging from medium-scaled commercial design institutions stepping out of larger state-led ones or surviving from the market, those client's architectural representative teams and their emerging 'In-house design department', to those design-driven ateliers/studios including the so-called 'experimental architects'. The latter in particular, has played an indispensable inspiring role in contemporary Chinese architectural profession, though accounting for a very minor share of the whole rural market. A few leading independent architectural practitioners and their design-driven firms have critically and creatively developed an appropriate way to design and build rural architecture that resists the product made by the majority of rural 'Bao-gong-tou' or state-led design institutions. However, a precondition for those private architectural forces to be capable to transform rural China through their design-driven agenda is to get close to the capital or power from the local political elite groups.

The fourth type is university-based design institution and teaching practitioners, which overlap with the state-led and privately-owned design institutions to some degrees according to the state or government ownership structure of Chinese universities. The pragmatic model that effectively embedded the design service within the academic institutions has been developed by most Chinese schools of architecture. This allows a flexible internal interaction between professional architects and teaching practitioners both in terms of design education and in terms of design practice. Furthermore, those university design institutions and teaching practitioners blend their school-located research with their design practice to serve

the external commissions, a considerate part of which have been granted directly from rural governments and working on local issues of preservation and development. Under the long Chinese tradition that officials tend to trust intellectuals who have less commercial motivation, these architectural research practitioners differentiates their practice with more focus on the research process, compared with the object/output-led design practice by the above three design forces. Based on the interdisciplinary resource and academic background, a small minority of individual teaching practitioners have provided some pioneering responses to the dilemmas in transforming rural China, through their best practices of socio-culturally sensitive design or innovative technical production. While the rest larger part of this practice/practitioner type have stayed in more or less similar stage as state-led and private-owned institutions, in terms of transformative value and potential of their architectural design practice in rural China.

The above four types of architectural practitioners and design forces all contribute to the Chinese rural development and revitalization at some points, however, it is still worth noting that, the trajectory of all these architectural practices in the Chinese rural contexts have been directed by professional or non-professional architects in a relatively technologically-led or academically-based approach, towards humanitarian service and cultural production at building or village neighbourhood scale. But besides these normalizing or pioneering practices and projects, more projects which are less hierarchical in their social production of architecture are still needed, in order to empower ordinary communities and peasants in Chinese rural villages through architecture. The link is still weak and fragile, between the object-driven architectural professional practice and the social process and consequence of the village, between the practice-based knowledge silently produced in those one-off projects, and those uniform products by design institutions working on the frontline battlefield in transforming rural villages in China.

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PART II   **Transforming Chinese Villages**

Chapter 4

Community Centre, Xihe Village, Henan province

Fig. 4.1 The new community centre in Xihe village. Autumn 2014 (Photograph by Wei He)

Village:

Fig. 4.2 Diagram of regional relationship of Xihe village and the project site (Drawn by the author)

Red: project location; Light grey: county-level traffic infrastructure; Dark grey: built-up areas; Blue: waterways and lake; White: mountains.

Fig. 4.3 A panorama of village-scape in Xihe Village: the new community centre regenerated a disused rice-warehouse on the right of the river, while the left part of the old village is made up of a mixture of new houses with red ceramics and old brick buildings including the Ancestral Hall of surname Zhang. Spring 2015   (Photograph by the author)

Xihe Village is in Xin County, Henan province, one of the most underdeveloped counties beneath China's poverty line. Typical of rural villages in the inner Chinese mainland, this 'left-behind village' suffers from poverty, with an average annual income less than £250 per head. Because of its proximity (around 2 hours by car to the nearest city), around 900 working labourers ranging from 16 to 65 years old have migrated into the city in recent decades, leaving around 80 families of 300 elderly people and children behind as permanent residents living on rice and oil tea in this forgotten corner without even an Internet signal. [1]

Established from Qing Dynasty and with more than 300 years history, the village (Fig. 4.3) has a rich heritage in both the cultural and natural landscape. Its main body with a length of 400m and width of 100m is located between a mountain to the north and a river to the south, a layout matching the ideal settlement pattern in traditional Chinese Fengshui ideology. Therefore the village enjoys a friendly climatic condition and clearly distinguished four seasons with an average annual temperature of 15 degree Celsius. The building fabric stretches along the passing river, and is surrounded by willow trees of hundreds-years-old, paddy fields and bamboo forests. The central market street serves as a spine connecting approximately 150 residential buildings, each with a typical courtyard layout in three layers, and constructed with good stonework, brickwork, and carpentry. Historically, the village had a long reputation for producing generals in times of war and revolution, and this is reflected in the symbolic spatial form of the Ancestral Hall of the Zhang family clan (Fig. 4.4). Arguably, it should have attracted more public attention for transformation through a more locally-resilient development mode, rather than being blindly swallowed up by

the homogenizing top-down guidelines of commercial tourism. But the main challenge is obvious – the scarcity of social resources to recreate the vitality of the community and to develop the wellbeing of the villagers and maintain them towards a more self-organized way. Both the current built structure and the social structure in this village have a strong inertia which prevents further development. It needed a catalyst, introduced from the outside, to trigger the way forward.

Fig. 4.4 Ancestral Hall of surname Zhang of Xihe Village, oriented north-south and located at the starting point of market street, is just confronting the site for the new community centre on the opposite side of the river. Spring 2015   (Photograph by the author)

Practitioner:

The 'outsider' here is Wei He, associate professor of the School of Architecture in Chinese Academy of Art, Beijing. Stepping down from the mainstream architectural practice in China, Wei had an architectural training background in Germany, however he didn't choose to become a practising architect in a normal market-

adaptable route, but instead to act as editor of a lighting magazine and as an educator based in Beijing. He has also been active in the field of photography and curation, and gained his doctoral degree in public art installation. Annually he undertook fieldwork to vernacular settlements with his students doing surveying and measuring, which developed his interest in rural village regeneration. Following a recommendation from a friend who is a rural construction activist, he and one of his students (who later on became the only project assistant) developed contacts and won initial trust of the political and cultural authorities of Xihe village [2], aiming to work together to make a difference in this difficult situation. They drafted a community-based project with as much public engagement from the village as possible, functioning as a pilot project to rebuild the confidence for this underprivileged village, under the ambitious governmental plan to rebuild a 'New Dream for Xin County'. [3]

Preparation and Fund-raising Process:

Wei He, as the key practitioner with architectural knowledge, volunteered to undertake this time-consuming project, and developed a loose-fit way of working with enthusiastic villagers and ambitious governmental officers. Identifying an appropriate site was the first step. During the village survey in August 2013 he found two abandoned rice-warehouses built in the 1950-60s with surviving volumes and structures, and persuaded the village leaders and some other stakeholders to reuse them in order to make a new community focal point and future visitors centre. From October 2013 to February 2014, Wei He facilitated the fund-raising process, which received not only governmental grants but also funds from a villager-cooperative-organization established from the bottom up [4]. The reason for this tactic was that financial contributions to the project from rural villagers would link them more tightly to this public facility even without clear occupation and ownership, largely based on his understanding of social mechanisms deeply rooted in rural vernacular China. But the difficulty of getting the poor villagers to contribute funds can be imagined. Amazingly he made it. According to Wei He, after the completion of the main construction, a 90% stake [5] of the funding for this project finally came from the villager-cooperative-organization. It is noteworthy here, in terms of this precise number, that the ratio provided by the architects, governmental officers and key

villagers in the villager-cooperative-organization were different. Undeniable, however, was that the villagers as end users did contribute an indispensable part in the fund-raising process, after the consensus was achieved that the building would be run and managed by the villager-cooperative-organization and the profit from associated architectural programmes, such as the gift shops and dining halls, would go back to the ordinary villagers according to their specific shares.

Design Process:

Alongside the river, the site (Fig. 4.5) covering around 3700 m^2 lay to the south of the main body of the village, with optimum accessibility to the major road infrastructure. It was not a historical site; the place's memory could only be traced back to the 1950s, during which time this and the adjacent sites were transformed from the original agricultural fields. This could be demonstrated from the flat, artificial earthwork, which was a few meters higher than the river to prevent flooding. But the site was not a tabula-rasa; the existing buildings maintained something atmospheric from that special period before the 'Cultural Revolution'. From February to April 2014, the project went into a co-design process between the architectural practitioner and the villagers – they developed the spatial brief together (Fig. 4.6): the two rice-warehouses with double-height spatial volumes, double pitched roofs and masonry supporting structures were kept entire, with the indoor parts to be transformed into a 680 m^2 community hall for public events and a 420 m^2 mini-museum for local traditional agriculture and handicrafts. A new semi-outdoor corridor was made of a limited number of steel frames but mostly of locally-sourced bamboo, with a light roof canopy to protect from the elements. It was introduced to bridge the two warehouses, and to enhance the sense of enclosure for the central courtyard; three secondary structures were renovated into supporting facilities including a 170 m^2 canteen, a kitchen and a toilet. All of this emphasized the transformative use of indoor and outdoor spaces rather than the kind of aesthetic articulation and juxtaposition of old and the new structures often seen in the elite professional agenda. By this means, the risk of the normally higher expense for working with the given, rather than demolition and replacement, was minimised. It would be regarded as a refurbishment of memories rather than the refurbishment of the existing object.

Fig. 4.5 Village Layout and Site Plan (Drawn by Wei He)
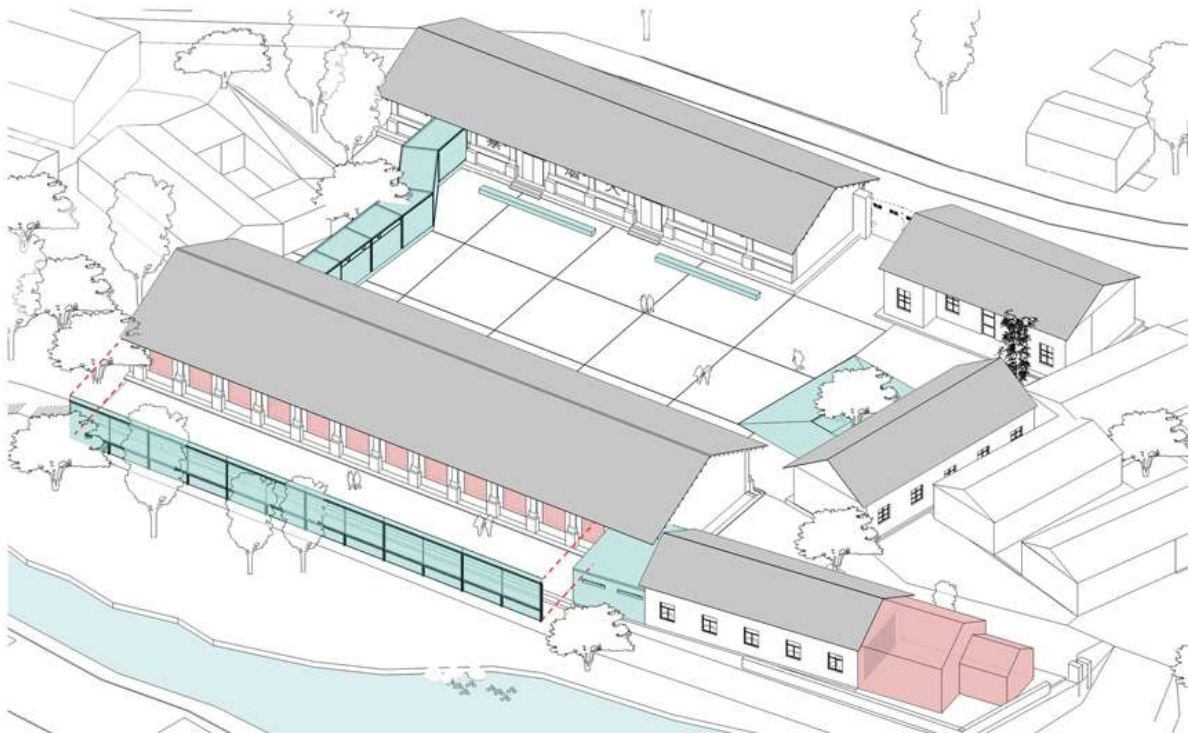
Fig. 4.6 Axonometric Diagram of Spatial Move (Drawn by Wei He)

Fig. 4.7 Ground Floor Plan (Drawn by Wei He)

1 Mini-museum for local traditional agriculture and handicrafts

2 Pedestrian corridor & resting pavilion

3 Multi-functional room

4 Community hall

5 Canteen

6 Kitchen

7 Private dining room

8 Administration office

9 Central square

10 Pedestrian bridge

Fig. 4.8 Interior of Community Hall after Completion. Autumn 2014   (Photograph by Wei He)

Fig. 4.9 Interior of Mini-museum, Spring 2015 (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 4.10 A light-weight corridor connects the community hall and the mini-museum, and provides a linear space under the eave to enclose the public square in between. Summer 2015 (Photograph by Wei He)

Working within the existing rice-warehouse with its double-height spatial volumes, masonry wall and wooden structures, a new mini-museum was planned, juxtaposing rural agricultural instruments with project's documentation. This introduced a new civic hub for the village.

Instead of determining and defining, Wei He and his student assistant endeavoured to transfer their architectural knowledge in a gentle way to the whole community, and at the same time to get feedback from them, to learn from them, then to help them interpret their own concerns about the project in their own language. Using sketch drawings and physical models (Fig. 4.11) as visualization tools to engage the villagers, most of whom were not well educated, Wei He and his assistant held several meetings with village leaders, clan representatives and other main stakeholders [6]; then numerous informal discussions with ordinary villagers around the site, conducted in an effective way with the support of village leaders. In this way mutual trust between the architectural practitioners as outsiders and community members was established, as well as a new productive kind of mutual learning which exposed

some stunning tacit knowledge to guide the next design moves. For example, one third of the existing structure was demolished to accommodate the new proposed canteen, in order to match the traditional ritual relationship of spaces and avoid blocking the visual corridor from the house located across the river bank. This followed accounts from some elderly villagers of a local ritual. It thus generated a generous open and elevated viewing platform of the whole waterfront landscape. Another example concerned the placing of a reclaimed 300-year-old traditional agricultural implement used for handmade oil in the mini-museum: Wei and his assistant revised the design of itinery for the interior exhibition after they were reminded by the participants that the trailing arm of that wooden implement should be set perpendicular to the river direction, because ritual tradition suggested that it would gain luck from the water to make good-tasting oil. Whether such beliefs are to be regarded as superstition or indigenous wisdom, the importance of a piece of hidden ritual became attached, and the community participants received an increased sense of belonging as a result of the respect being shown for their tradition, their beliefs, and their culture. In turn the newly designed building object anchored itself in its context.

Fig. 4.11 Physical Model was proven as an effective way to communicate with villagers about the building layout, mass, and threshold in the participatory design process.   (Photograph by Wei He)

Fig. 4.12 A new canteen for the village was transformed from an abandoned building, with its external brick-screen-wall coproduced by the architect and users in a different way from both urban and rural normal practice. One third of the existing volume was demolished in order to leave a ritual visual corridor to assimilate Qi (energy) to the main body of the village on the other side of the river. Spring 2015 (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 4.13 The process of fixing the layout of the wooden agricultural implement handmade oil ritual with the guidance of elderly people from the local community. Summer 2014   (Photograph by Wei He)

Construction Process:

The design development and construction process overlapped; the construction schedule was tight, starting on site in April 2014, with major construction completed in July and hand over to the users in early August of the same year. The project decision-making team became much more focused at this stage, as the project required more knowledge and experience in order to keep on budget and time within the schedule. Wei He brought two lighting designers from Beijing for interior consultancy, while one villager acted as general project manager on site and another one took the role of financial manager. Wei He didn't set up an 'action centre'[7] – working office on site, however the visits to the construction site for supervision and cooperation were intensive: towards three days a week in peak time in summer. About 5 or 6 craftsperson joined full-time at this stage, not having exquisite craftsmanship like past carpenters and masons, but still very familiar with the construction work using brick, tile and wood (Fig. 4.16). The rest of the construction

team consisted of a dozen villagers (Fig. 4.14): they were left-behind women and elderly who volunteered to join, including the emotional return of a 75 year old villager who had participated in the original construction of the rice-warehouse in his twenties. For this collaborative construction, which continued a long tradition of exchanging labour and collective assembly in vernacular villages, people worked together and learned from each other. They got paid, trained, and enjoyed the sense of being needed and belonging to the project, also to the whole community. One of them was disabled, not capable of communicating with others, but his mental condition improved greatly after the construction. The local community became empowered through this collective architectural action; it was the consequences of the participatory process rather than the final completed object that mattered most.

Fig. 4.14 The construction team was made up of the remaining women, the disabled, the mason and the carpenter, all from the village. Summer 2014 (Photograph by Wei He)

Fig. 4.15 Collective construction process on site. Summer 2014 (Photograph by Wei He)

Other than a few diagrammatic plans and axonometric drawings in the schematic design stage, there were no precise design development drawings for the following plans and facades like those one would expect with normal professional services, but just quick scratches on paper, on brick, on land… and of course constant verbal discussions and negotiations on site between the architectural team and construction team. As Wei said, "when doing architecture in rural villages, 50% depends on your drawings, 30% depends on design adjustment on site, 20% is left to the craftsperson." [8] Thus it was a coproduction in response to the contingency of the architecture. It resulted in unpredictably dramatic architectural languages, particularly for the external wall of the canteen. Facing west, a perforated brick-screen wall not only acts as a sun-shading device but also provided an amazing backdrop for the elevated public platform; the brickwork was stunning, with every three bricks forming a triangle sub-system and then assembled into a whole – this had never been seen in previous buildings of this region, nor in the craftsperson's own career life. The craftsperson innovated this new tectonic method with old techniques and cheap materials, under the trust and enthusiasm of the architect and other participants – he didn't even use bamboo to fill the void in between the three bricks as suggested by the architect to maintain structural stability. [9] Above this perforated brick wall was an

inappropriate concrete beam-work (Fig. 4.15), but this was restored in an indigenous way, so the spatial and tectonic language in this canteen façade really demonstrates the hybridity produced by the process. Thus building knowledge was mutually learnt and transferred both within and beyond the key project team, through oral exchange; while it still left sufficient time and space for the real makers to pose the production problems in their own languages, to solve them in their own ways, and to rethink and reimagine who was doing what for whom. Architecture acted as a medium of exchange from the intention to the object.

Fig. 4.16 Construction process of canteen. Summer 2014 (Photograph by Wei He)

Fig. 4.17 Construction process of canteen. Summer 2014 (Photograph by Wei He)

Fig. 4.18 Interior of canteen after completion. Autumn 2014 (Photograph by Wei He)

A perforated brick-screen wall provides sunshades and changing patterns of light and shadow.

Occupation Process:

Creative inhabitation patterns demonstrated the architectural success in this participatory project under a budget of less than £100 per m^2: extremely low. The villagers couldn't wait to start using the community centre for drinking tea, playing cards, and holding a cooking competition, even before the full completion of the interior refurbishment. (Fig. 4.19) They also made several traditional shadow play and bonfire parties in the courtyard during the summer before its official opening on Chinese National Day in October. A couple requested to rent it for one day to hold their wedding ceremony (Fig. 4.20), and on another day the space was booked to hold a symposium gathering the young political leaders from several adjacent villages in that region; which, it is said, attracted approximately 20,000 visitors during the holiday week after National Day, and maintained a regular rent basis of twice a week with economic income around £2000 per week. [10] The diversity of social use after the occupation was obviously far beyond the architects' design expectations. The architect shifted his role from an artistic solo-author to a half invisible collaborator and facilitator in the process, gained the trust and respect of the local community, and was warmly welcomed by ordinary villagers on his informal return visits – he started as an anti-hero architect, and ended as a real hero of the community.

Fig. 4.19 Diverse social use of the outdoor space after completion. Autumn 2014 (Photograph by Wei He)

Fig. 4.20 Diverse social use of the indoor space after completion. Autumn 2014 (Photograph by Wei He)

Fig. 4.21 Before and After. Spring 2013 and Autumn 2014 (Photograph by Wei He)

Conclusion and Discussion:

This Chapter explores the social production of architecture in contemporary Chinese rural villages through a case study on the Community Centre in Xihe Village. This community project, designed and built in 2014, exemplifies a lesser-known type of Chinese architectural practice engaging in a local and specific context, which suddenly gave participation a dramatic image in current breakneck Chinese rural-urban transition of large scale and rapid speed. By looking at this highly specific case through a detailed description and critical evaluation, this chapter takes this participatory architectural project as the very first critical example of a form of socially-engaged architecture in China; it presents an alternative architecture of resistance in response to the top-down guiding principle the 'Construction of A New Socialist Countryside' launched by the government in 2005.

Xihe Village Community Centre is a building that now truly belongs to that village in everyday use, but was not visually similar to buildings formerly made by villagers, whether vernacular or newly transplanted in the so-called 'city style'. In this participatory working methodology for design and construction, the outsider's input was merged and coordinated with the insiders' experience, which finally led to coproduction and de-familiarization of the built form, the craft, and the spatial use. It is a hybrid building filling the gap between the maker and the made: the builder was the inhabitant and the inhabitant was the builder; the architect acted as an invisible bridge -- he didn't impose or overlap new onto the old, but just intervened gently and carefully into the existing relationship between people and place. With a collaborative input from a series of new actors, the final object and the social use of this community centre represents a re-assemblage of the existing familiar network in a non-familiar way. The old existing sees its self-identity in the new addition, while two layers became married to each other to enhance each other. Community participation and social engagement has suppressed authorship, denied signature, but produced a social-sustainable building at its most meaningful level.

The project isn't without its problems, though. The issue of who owns and controls the building remains unsolved from the beginning till now, and in some cases caused limited accessibility and freedom for a use by the public. The architectural project

contributed to the branding and identity of the village, which fulfilled some expectations of both villagers and government; however it could not prevent the commodification of the vernacular culture, and might even accelerate it by wrapping it into a new round of market-driven development, for we found that modernity and tourism has also intervened in Xihe and nearby villages, inevitably. The building itself is likely to become other when it works programmatically as a visitor centre for the floods of travellers rather than as the common ground for the local community. Therefore the huge potential of reconnecting the community based on social rituals and shared values previously expressed in the ancestral hall, might be suppressed in the long term.

This project and village are located in central-eastern China, but we could see this case mirrored in most rural villages in China, which have fragile identities but rich socio-cultural traditions faced by new trends and processes linked to globalization and urbanization. The bottom-up participation in architecture facilitated by individual architectural or hybrid practitioners still looks too weak to shake the top-down foundation of the city-county-village political-economical hierarchy. However, compared with the government-led rural rehabilitation projects dominating the previous 10 years since the 'Construction of A New Socialist Countryside', Xihe Village Community Centre did make visible the invisible -- the voices, experiences and opinions from those who are less visible. It is within this context that Xihe Village Community Centre could be regarded as an exemplar of the hybrid building as architecture of social-engagement in current Chinese rural villages. Furthermore, it did reproduce power relations and practices by creating new links between people and by providing intangible resources for the village, which paves a way to explore a more socially-resilient mode of architectural design in rural-urban dynamics in contemporary China.

In all, this Chapter introduces a hybrid building and hybrid practitioner as a more socially resilient form of making architecture in the current Chinese rural-urban transition. On the one hand it addresses the contingencies in working with underprivileged village communities in inner rural China, which have scarce resources and fragile identities; on the other hand it cuts through the surface of rural vernacular China to expose the undercurrent of silent issues in architecture that constitute the indigenous, the everyday, resistance, transition, and resilience.

The case of the Xihe Village Community Centre in this Chapter strongly demonstrates that a transformative architecture and its thoughtful mediation on the fragility and progression of relationships between place, people and power could still be achieved through valuing social engagement through a similar process of making vernacular architecture in current rural China. Through engaging with the vernacular, the periphery, and multiple authorships, bottom up architectural design and making as a hybrid between self-organization of insiders and design interventions of outsiders have resisted against the normal forms of rural-urban disjunction driven by the top-down powers. The social consequence of this hybrid building process is much more important than the object produced.

Action to provoke new agendas in architecture leading to a more socially-sustainable and socially-resilient practice needs to be taken as a matter of urgency by the current architectural profession in China. The consequences of architecture or architectural action and the role of the architect or architectural practitioner have to be reexamined and repositioned in the light of this changing and intensifying process in Chinese rural villages. The transformative potential of the architectural intervention engaging community participation has demonstrated an alternative, which seeks a more community-based, socially-inclusive and locally-resilient mode for negotiating peripheral identities in those heterogeneous conditions. Undoubtedly the action in Xihe Village provides a promising start.

Notes and references of Chapter 4

1 Interview with the officer of Xin County government by the author on 5 April 2015 in Xin County, China.

2 Interview with Wei He by the author on 14 January 2015 in Beijing, China.

3 'New Dream for Xin County' is short for a three years non-profit event called 'Hero's Dream, Xin County's Dream', co-organized by Xin County government, China Foundation For Poverty Alleviation and several NGOs. Experts and professionals in architecture and planning discipline provide design and consultancy for the redevelopment of the county.

4 Interview with Wei He by the author on 14 January 2015 in Beijing, China.

5 ibid.

6 Interview with Wei He by the author on 20 January 2015 in Beijing, China.

7 For 'action centre', see more in Peter Blundell Jones and Eamonn Canniffe, *Modern architecture through case studies, 1945-1990* (Amsterdam; Boston; London: Elsevier/Architectural Press, 2007), pp. 127-38.

8 Interview with Wei He by the author on 20 January 2015 in Beijing, China.

9 Interview with the craftsperson of the canteen brick-screen-wall by the author on 6 April 2015 in Xihe Village, China.

10 Interview with Wei He by the author on 11 May 2015 in Beijing, China.

Chapter 5

'Sun Commune', Shuangmiao village, Zhejiang Province

Fig. 5.1 The pig barn of 'Sun Commune' in Shuangmiao village (Photograph by CITIARC)

Village:

Institutional change at regional level has always had a strong effect not only in local identity but also in local economy in contemporary rural China, as there is a big difference in regional policy-making on resource allocation between different levels of the vertical administrative system, for example, the town-level and township-level. Shuangmiao village was not an exception. With a fragile identity, the economy of Shuangmiao village had been fluctuated alongside the changing status of its upper administration, a town/township called Sun. In recent history the administrative regional development of Sun town/township has, like most rural areas in the time of the PRC, been through many changes: Designated as a 'township' between 1950 and1956, its status was then changed into the 'Sun People's Commune' in 1958. In 1982 it was divided into three People's Communes, then reformed into a township again in 1984 and finally permitted to upgrade into a town from between 1988 and 1992, which has maintained to date.[1] And currently Sun Town is supervised by Lin'an City, which is to the west of the capital city of Zhejiang province, Hangzhou city.

As one of 29 villages supervised by Sun town, Shuangmiao administrative village is located at the western foot of Tianmu Mountain, with 5 km to the Sun Township, and 80 km to Hangzhou city. This administrative village is made up of three natural villages – Shuangmiao, Zhuyi and Guanyin village, with a total population of 1400 from 477 families. Within a sub-tropical region with four clearly distinguished seasons, Shuangmiao administrative village is an agricultural-based village with cultivated arable land accounting for over 90% of its economy. Income-related subsidies have been from three parts: bamboo shoots, silkworm breeding and seedling cultivation. This generally applies to the Shuangmiao natural village which comprises approximately 300 villagers belonging to 90 families. It is slightly different to the other two natural villages within the Shuangmiao trio because it has a particular focus on pig farming. In 2000 the proportion of villagers living off pig rearing peaked at 90% with each person raising an average of 90 pigs. Through this the villagers had a slightly higher annual income than average for the whole Sun Township (£870). But the market for pig rearing was limited to the local area because of poor traffic infrastructure. More and more of Shuangmiao's working

labour have left to find work in bigger towns and cities, causing a steady year by year deterioration of the village.

Fig. 5.2 Diagram of regional relationship of Shuangmiao village and the project site of 'Sun Commune' (Drawn by the author)

Red: project location; Yellow: provincial/city-level high-speed road; Light grey: county/town-level traffic infrastructure; Dark grey: built-up areas; Blue: waterways; White: mountains.

Fig. 5.3 Shuangmiao administrative village is a narrow village stretching around 5 km alongside a stream called Langshan from the north to the south. The village is very quiet with most of its permanent residents as left-over elderly and children. (Photograph by the author)

Practitioners:

Born in Hangzhou in the 1970s from an artist family and moved to New York in his teens, Haoru Chen is an American-Chinese architect who trained and then practised in the U.S before returning to Hangzhou for independent architectural practice in 2002. There he founded his own small practice named 'CITIArc'. As a friend of Wang Shu and once working as an editorial assistant for him, Haoru Chen began to teach in the School of Architecture at the Chinese Academy of Art since 2005 where Wang Shu has acted as the Dean, and was promoted to Associate Professor after his completion as a staff PhD. Sharing a common interest with Wang Shu in the rural vernacular aspects of China, Haoru Chen has spent more than three years in the field researching farm houses in rural villages in Zhejiang province, an experience that taught him their local importance, their levels of self-sufficiency and their relationships with organic life cycles and micro-ecology.[2]

Haoru Chen is a hybrid practitioner. Positioning himself as a 'lifelong architectural learner' instead of a professional architect, Haoru Chen maintained a very modest attitude to work-life and a strong interest in Chinese literature, history and philosophy. With a strong suspicion of the architect as the solo author of an artistic object, he argued that ''architects used to be the head of all associated construction and design professions, including craft, design, engineering, etc., but now it is just pretending to be in the lead.''[3] Therefore a strong position has been held by Haoru Chen that the architect should be a profession always with a miscellaneous accumulation of knowledge and experience.[4]

Preparation and Fund-raising Process:

The situation of Shuangmiao village gradually improved after the arrival, in 2013 of a young organic agriculture enterprise, set up by Shanghai businessman Wei Chen. They nicknamed themselves 'Sun Commune' not only in memory of the collective spirit and life in the old People's Commune days (in the period 1958-78), but also in determination to establish a trust-based commune between urban residents and rural villagers, between urban food consumption and rural food production under

natural agricultural rules. The specific vision for 'Sun Commune' was to seek a new benchmark for achieving sustainable rural-urban relations where the rural will be in harmony with the urban through mutual learning and collective production. Founding partner Wei Chen claimed in an interview, that the original ethos of 'Sun Commune' was to provide a platform and a place for urban citizens to experience rural farming culture and products, where they could get close to nature and life in the countryside.[5] The existence of 'Sun Commune' reflects a low level of trust among the Chinese public in recent years on issues of food safety and security.[6] Raising pigs and growing vegetables to high organic standards in a traditional landscape attracted many citizens from Lin'an and Hangzhou cities. 300 of them have registered to become members of 'Sun Commune' as of 2015. Each member of 'Sun Commune' has to contribute £2500 per year in exchange for a weekly package that includes 5 kilos of rice, 3 kilos of pork, 10 kilos of vegetables and a bag of eggs. And they also receive two chickens or ducks on a monthly basis in the deal.[7] Using part of this collective funding, 'Sun Commune' proposed to rent an area of 333 km^2 in the Shuangmiao village vicinity. Besides the normal agricultural products from farmlands, 'Sun Commune' also added the production of high-quality pork into its ambitious programme. And it managed to employ 20 plus villagers, all of whom were experienced farmers aged over 50. Some of them were directly employed, while others work as sub-contractors. One villager explained his surprise when Sun Commune bought rice from his paddy fields in 2013 at over twice the average price of the township market.[8]

The strategic planning process (Fig. 5.5) for more organic programmes went hand in hand with the process of contracting land between the 'Sun Commune' and the government of Sun Township and the Villager Committees of Shuangmiao village. Architect Haoru Chen was first invited by Wei Chen to act as a consultant for site selection, then to produce strategic plans and finally to become lead designer for the 'Sun Commune'. The cheaper land rent at the periphery of village, mild and humid climate and its isolation from other farming zones where pesticide and fertilizer were heavily used, determined its choice as the site of more programmes for 'Sun Commune' after 6 months' investigation by Haoru Chen and his architectural assistants. (Fig. 5.4, 5.6) It was located in a long and narrow valley called Zhuyi Wu and some 3600 metres long, with only one access road for transport. As well as

farmland for different crops, a series of other agricultural projects including a pig barn, a hen and duck house, and a goat valley were also strategically planned, with the pig barn containing 100 pigs to act as a pilot project. Chen identified a specific site for this pig barn in virgin land alongside a small river in the deepest part of the valley. This site is some distance from Shuangmiao village and other human facilities, such as the irrigation water tanks scatted around the central spine of the 'Sun Commune'. Following studies of the habits of pig groups, and advanced pig farm management techniques, the 380m^2 site was subdivided into pig activity zones including resting and eating and an outside swimming pool for about 100 pigs. The intention was not only to facilitate the daily routines of pigs but also to have minimal impact on the existing wilderness.

Fig. 5.4 Off the main road passing Shuangmiao village with another 3 km's vehicle driving in a rural road, the site of 'Sun Commune' could be accessed. Located at the deepest end of a valley with terraced terrains and sufficient metasequoia and bamboo forests, it has a very well-maintained eco-environment owing to the inaccessibility of modern infrastructure. (Photograph by the author)
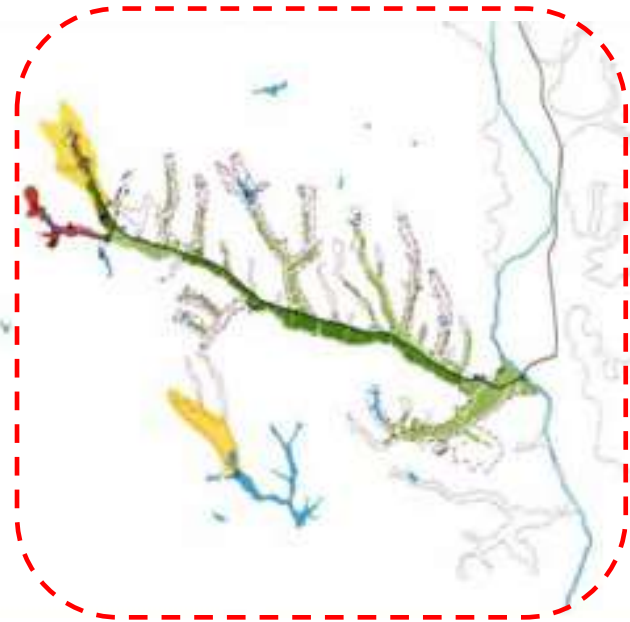
Fig. 5.5 Early sketches by architect Haoru Chen for strategic planning for the whole Commune
(Source: Sun Commune)

Fig. 5.6 Perspective of the pig barn from a distance showed a natural building blurred into the landscape. (Source: Sun Commune)

Design Process:

The next key parameter was the construction material for this temporary shelter which had a very low budget and a tight schedule. Although it could be prefabricated in nearby towns, with light-weight industrial materials, transportation costs for such a scheme would have been high. Instead, the abundant bamboo and thatch growing on the valley slopes seemed perfect; it was free, climatically adaptable, easily disassembled and bio degradable. The local thatch was tough and could grow as high as a person, in Shuangmiao's vernacular architecture it was commonly weaved to create a water-proof roof, bamboo too was widely used; for making supporting frames and screen walls. But traditional skills and methods for working with thatch and bamboo had been disappearing, as is the case in almost every rural village in China. Those specific skills and tacit forms of knowledge were vital not only for the building's construction, but for its maintenance too. Haoru Chen recognised that

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searching for, learning from, and working with local carpenters and other craftsmen was the only way to utilise these methods and sustain such knowledge. By chance, a bamboo craftsman called Shuqing Luo was found through an elderly villager's recommendation; as the third generation of a family of bamboo craftsmen in Shuangmiao village, Luo, along with his two brothers, had abandoned bamboo construction for a better life many years earlier.[9] The team persuaded him to return, just for this project, to work as a consultant at the schematic design stage and as foreman to the on-site construction team. With his experience and input, appropriate and site specific winter bamboo was cut, (Fig. 5.15-16) processed, and seasoned away from insects, sunlight and rainwater, to make it durable enough for the shelter's expected 5 years of use. The roof thatching was conducted under the guidance of elderly villagers, from whom the team learnt how to recognize, collect and weave local thatch into breathable roof panels. The foundations which were supposed to touch the land as lightly as possible were made with stones from the nearby river combined with rammed earth from the site.

Fig. 5.7 Axonometric drawing and collage. (Source: Sun Commune)

Learning about the performance and tectonic properties of bamboo and thatch gave Haoru Chen and his team the confidence to develop a multi-faceted, triangulated architectural system for the pig barn. Four triangular structural units, each 8 metres wide by 8 metres long and 4 metres high, created four voids through which plenty of cross-ventilation could occur. This was partly necessary because the humidity generated from both outside humidity and the pigs inside could easily affect the structural performance of the bamboo and thatch. All bamboo components with a diameter more than 15 centimetres were interconnected to form a diagonal lattice, which functioned as the major frame to support the continuous folded roof's thatch panels. The deep overhang of the thatched roof provided shaded the pigs, as well as the inner bamboo frame from the sun. To anchor the bamboo frame, it was attached to ten load-bearing pads made of pebbles, each pad had a width of 1 metre and a height of 1.2 metres. The definition of 1.2 metres was a study result on pig's habits and jumping capability.[10] This technique would not only preserve the existing ground soil but also allow for more ventilation from ground. These helped create the central corridor along the east-west axis which was used for the farmer to feed the pigs on each side. With its filtered light and shadow, the geometry of its structure and its linear ground plan, this pig barn has an unexpected sense of place and ritualized movement and interaction between people and animals, and artefact and the nature along its main axis.
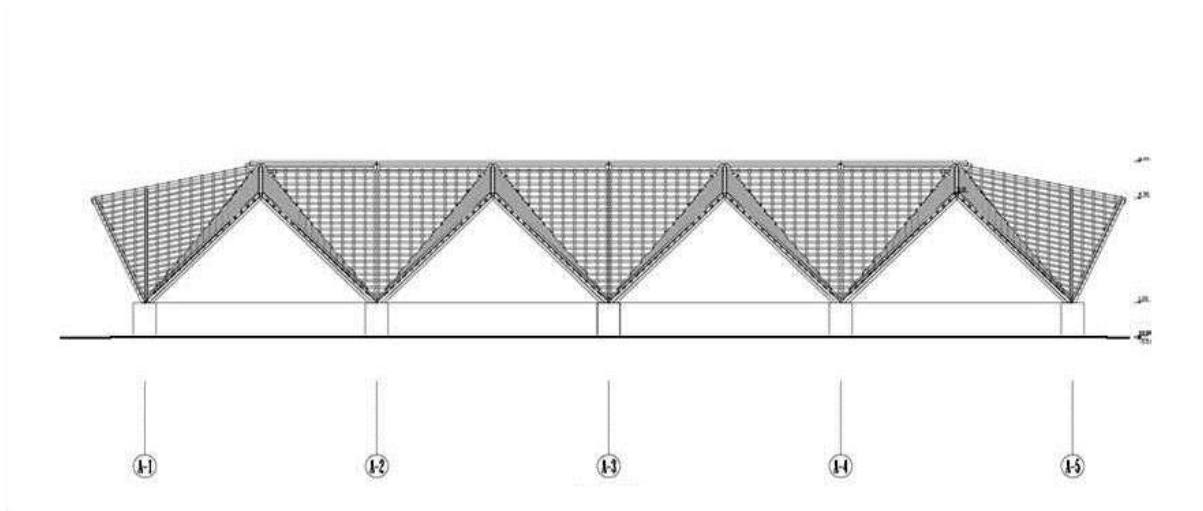
Fig. 5.8 Elevation drawing. (Source: Sun Commune)

Fig. 5.9 Elevation after the dawn. (Source: Sun Commune)

Fig. 5.10 Internal space of pig barn in sunny days (Photograph by FANGmedia)

Fig. 5.11 Internal space of pig barn in humid days (Photograph by the author)

Construction Process:

After the schematic CAD visualisations (Fig. 5.7-8), there were no more drawings. The axonometric drawing clearly guided the overall structure and cladding construction approach, but it did not set out close up construction details. Detail development was left to adjustments, negotiations and even 'happy accidents' on site. The construction was a collective practice (Fig. 5.12-3) both in terms of design and build. The architect and the craftsman both supervised and worked on site, the primary frame was made in a week by a team that included craftsmen, architects, students and village volunteers. All the thatched roof panels were handmade by villagers during their free time after farming.

Rainwater control (Fig. 5.18-9) was critical to the life span and performance of both bamboo frame and thatch roof, but this was tackled on site in vernacular fashion. The overlapping of each thatched roof panel carefully considered their slight differentiations in weave pattern, and organised them in a way that the stream of rainwater could run along the rod of each reed into bamboo drainpipes, this was achieved without a modern waterproof layer. Such an impermeable airtight layer would have caused the thatch to rot, meaning that it would have to be replaced or added to annually. Consciously or unconsciously, one of the village's vernacular building traditions was reinvented. The building would never be completed, instead, it was in a constant process of building and rebuilding; it became an assemblage of time, labour, skill and knowledge.

Fig. 5.12 The collective assembly was a joyful process and participants took a group photo on the bamboo frame before the final step for thatch roof. (Source: Sun Commune)

Fig. 5.13 The pig barn was in construction. The rapid and economic construction cost less than two weeks with involvements of much less labour than a normal farmhouse. (Source: Sun Commune)

Fig. 5.14 One of the ten meeting points between the bamboo frame and pebbles foundation. No permanent underground foundation was made in order to protect the farmland, therefore the bamboo frame largely depended on its own gravity to keep balanced. (Source: Sun Commune)

Fig. 5.15-16 The testing process of the bamboo joints by a local bamboo craftsman. (Source: Sun Commune)

Fig. 5.17 Internal perspective showed the ambiguous practical state between the designed main bamboo frame and secondary structure intermeshed with natural thatch and manmade ductwork providing basic electricity. (Photograph by Wei Song)

Fig. 5.18-19 The drainage pipe made of bamboo directed rainwater from the thatched roof to the pebble foundation and finally returning back to the soil. (Left) (Source: Sun Commune); (Right) (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 5.20 The backyard was kept in very good condition, forming a soft zone between the artificial and the nature. (Photograph by the author)

Occupation Process:

The barn was well received by its main users – the one hundred pigs. They lived in comfort and would finally satisfy the demand of the members of 'Sun Commune' from the city, for well reared pork. The pig barn has been managed full time since 2013 by a villager with the surname of Yang for which he earnt £3600 per annum[11], about 4 times the average annual income in the Sun town. Based on such data, one can assume that the profits generated by the whole 'Sun Commune' are probably quite considerable, although more complete data is not accessible because of commercial confidentiality. In contrast to perceptions of pig barns as dirty animal factories, this simple, carefully made shelter played a transformative economic, ecological and social role for Shuangmiao village. The publicity it received created a lot of 'brand identity' for the 'Sun Commune', Shuangmiao village, the adjacent Zhu yiwu village, and even for the whole Sun town and Lin'an city. It was shortlisted and videoed as 'the most beautiful pig barn in China', widely published through open-accessed online platforms, and has attracted numerous tourists interested in

architecture and organic agriculture. Following the success of the barn, local people from Shuangmiao and other villages nearby were eager to participate and work on subsequent Sun Commune projects.[12] Urban members of the Commune were also interested in engaging more: some spent weekends visiting the new and old sites of the Commune and working with rural villagers in busy periods such as seeding and harvest, in response to invitation emails from the founding partners. One of the key architectural institutions in China, the School of Architecture of Southeast University in Nanjing city, was attracted too, and they participated in constructing barns for chickens and ducks (Fig. 5.24-26). A summer school there was led by the dean for a group of M.Arch students and coordinated by Haoru Chen in the summer of 2015. And the 'Sun Commune' even became an off-campus base for this prestigious school which intends to host regular academic teaching events there. More local economies could be nurtured in this way, either directly or indirectly.

Fig. 5.21 The pig barn located at the middle of the external courtyard. (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 5.22 The pig barn consisted of a fence, a courtyard, a backyard and a pool with a ramp for 100 pigs to cool down and play in hot summer. (Source: Sun Commune)

Fig. 5.23 The swimming pool for pigs and the enclosing fence with recycled bamboo wicker (Source: Sun Commune)

Fig. 5.24-25 In the second phase of 'Sun Commune', a semi-outside structure with five spatial units using similar design methodology with the pig barn was built upon the wildness, functioning both as footbridge and a tea house. It restored and reinvented the old memories of Wind-rain-bridge in traditional villages.　(Photograph by the author)

Fig. 5.26 A chicken and duck house was built in quite analogous methodology as the pig barn, which was also part of the second phase of 'Sun Commune'. (Photograph by Peter Dixie)

Conclusion and Discussion:

This Chapter attempts to seek clarity about how 'Sun Commune' as hybrid building in communal form and by collective practice could facilitate village revitalization against the current mainstream practice/practitioners of rural reconstruction in China. Its hybridity not only lies in the physical construction, but also in its form as a trust-based commune between urban residents and rural villagers, between urban food consumption and rural food production. And in terms of its hybrid practitioners, 'Sun Commune' not only represents its key architect with a hybrid background and design position, but also demonstrates a modern version of architectural collaboration between the literati and the craftsmen in rural China.

It is doubtless that 'Sun Commune' will provide a key moment for developing and transforming contemporary rural China through architectural design interventions. Originated from old memories and inefficient forms of People's Commune under collective practice on production and consumption, 'Sun Commune' took a conceptual step forward with renewed forms of building trust and links between the rural and urban, both in terms of people and in terms of product. A series of temporary structures were required to be constructed within the least construction time and as low budget as possible. Then in the design and construction processes, local participants shared their farming knowledge concerning the animals' habits and almost forgotten local architectural skills with the so called expert outsiders, and a greater sense of ownership resulted. In this way this 'Commune' project developed a way to revitalise traditional local architectural knowledge and gave it renewed value to the village.

In particular, the pig barn was well designed and planned, socially-engaged in its building, and productive in use. The sustainable treatment to the site and structure, the beautifully articulated geometry and proportions, and the roughness of the natural materials, all led the building from being a regular agricultural shelter, to a piece of architecture embedded in vernacular tradition and craftsmanship. Furthermore, the irregularity in spatial structure and material presence of the pig barn was not only a professional design response to the site-specificities, but also an architectural manifestation to those mainstream practices of village modernization, which has been done through standardized forms and borrowed styles and facilitated

by rural 'bao-gong-tou' or those 'design drawing collections'. In this sense, the importance of this piece of agricultural architecture for Chinese rural architectural modernization could be corresponded to the Gut Garkau Farm (1923-1926) by German 'organic architect' Hugo Haring, which acted as an architecture of resistance to the then dominantly orthogonal Modernism.[13]

However, 'Sun Commune' also reveals difficult ethical challenges, and questions of ecological and social sustainability through their development practices that emerge because of the uneven social statuses of architect and villager.

Although the design drawings indicate that this was initially designed by an architect, the design development and building process was a collaborative and communal process that suited the collective ethos of the 'Commune'. The shelter was only built to last 5 years, but the question is whether the meanings, values and re-invigorated site specific local knowledge it generated could trigger more sustainable developments throughout the whole region. The fact is that the 'Commune' and its architectural interventions so far haven't been generated from within the local indigenous community. The pig, chicken and duck barns are all 'local strangers'.

The barn and the 'Sun Commune' created a win-win modus operandi for urban-rural exchange: urban citizens input capital in exchange for conscientiously farmed local food, and rural villagers market their produce more sustainably and profitably than before. More local employment is likely to be generated as a result of the positive publicity generated for the Commune and the village, in commercial tourism, academic teaching as well as agriculture and food distribution; but who should be benefiting the most? Ethically the villagers should have their fair share, but the realistic outcome is that their village will be consumed by the urban Commune members as a site for capital investment and a weekend destination. Given the commune was still framed for consumption by an urban middle class, and so how long that sense of communal belonging lasts in indigenous villagers' hearts remains a question worth asking, as are those of who owns, who controls and who benefits most from the commune?

To sum up, at a time when China has been undergoing an enormous rural to urban transition, numerous Chinese architects and academics as contemporary version of literati have tried to bridge the gap that has grown between their profession and rural

vernacular culture. Within the setting of the village, the social production of architecture is of paramount importance. This is because architecture has historically not only been the symbol, such as the 'Commune' in this Chapter, but actually the embodiment of 'local knowledge',[14] borrowed from British social-anthropologist Clifford Geertz, which includes family lineage politics, ancestral clan culture and village social structure in Chinese rural villages. As in this 'Sun Commune', it is not only about place-making, but also about identity-making. As Kim Dovey puts it; "Places symbolize socially constructed identities and differences – of peoples, cultures, institutions and nations. The politics of identity and difference is mediated in an arena of spatial representations and the inertia of buildings can fix identity over time." [15] Furthermore, in Chinese villages the building process was a social process; building users and neighbourhood villagers participated in this collective event as communal ritual and according to specific times in the agricultural calendar and through this elevated building into architecture. At the same time, ordinary craftsmen and literati as members of the local community were empowered to make places for people, in the space between the maker and the user and progressively diminishing thresholds between the self and the other. The sense of the hybrid building in communal form and by collective practice, both in terms of its transformative process and its never-finished product, had been acting as a social glue to unite the village community to an imagined commune. Although such socially-engaged traditions and communal rituals in the production of rural village architecture has been almost completely destroyed by hegemonic urbanization and broader socio-political changes in the past few decades, the 'Sun Commune' projects described and discussed here show that how architecture, initiated by literati-like expert outsiders and co-produced by local people particularly craftsmen, is still possible to negotiate this change in a more communal form and through more collective practice than is usual today. This might be the only key to facilitate Chinese rural village revitalization from the within, and from the below.

Notes and References of Chapter 5

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[10] Haoru Chen. Chinese cities have no traditions to look up to -- an interview with Haoru Chen by Shankar Saanthakumar and Liu Bowei, 17 November 2015. <http://www.masterplanningthefuture.org/?p=3459> [Accessed 15 July 2016]

[11] Nie, *Developing Community Farming in Sun Commune Lin'an City*.

[12] Interviews with villagers by the author on 30 March 2015 in Zhu yiwu village and Shuangmiao Village.

[13] See more in Peter Blundell-Jones, *Hugo Haring and the Secret of Form* (Sheffield: A3 Times. 2001)

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Chapter 6

Village Redevelopment, Wen village, Zhejiang Province

Fig. 6.1 Wen Village Redevelopment project is an encounter between a special architect and an ordinary Chinese village without any special listing. (Source: http://hk.bbwc.cn/gqhqih.html)

Village:

Fuyang is a northwest district under the jurisdiction of Hangzhou city, the provincial capital of Zhejiang province, China. Wen village is located around 50 km to the northwest of Fuyang district, directly supervised by Dongqiao town of Fuyang district. Wen village got its name 400 years ago from its back mountain of which shape resembles traditional Chinese brushes. Made up of 13 natural villages, Wen is an administrative village that has 32 villagers working groups, which has a total population of 1863 people in 559 families. In terms of working population, the majority of middle-aged and younger generations go to cities as migrant workers, leaving elder males working on agriculture and women working on silkworm and sericulture. (Fig. 6.5-6)Surrounded by mountains, the administrative village has a forest cover rate as high as 90%, providing abundant wood resource and a highly preserved ecological environment. The mountainous setting also brings a development challenge to this remote, underdeveloped village, which stays as far as 6 km from its nearest neighbourhood village. Wen administrative village severely lacks public facilities from the inside and infrastructure to the outside, let alone public investment opportunities from the far away developed urbanized areas. But the village is largely self-sufficient, depending on its sufficient natural resources and growing economic practice. Besides the normal farming in paddy fields and forestry, Wen villagers formed 37 private enterprises mainly on hardware processing, a rural plant for roasted seeds and nuts, and an economic cooperative for dried fruits, which rapidly developed and even once won the 'Gold Medal of Agricultural Product in Hangzhou'. In recent years the village has developed its regional fame in silkworm breeding and sericulture industry, which contributed a relatively positive economic picture of Wen village with an annual income £2000 per head in 2015.[1]

Similar to other villages in the case study chapters in this thesis, Wen administrative village has undergone a man-made process of architectural regeneration based on the economic development during the past decades, using borrowed urban styles and cheap factory materials largely done by rural contractor leads, the 'Bao-gong-tou' (as mentioned before in Chapter 3), to knock down and replace the old indigenous buildings. (Fig. 6.3,6.7,6.8)As a result most of the traditional buildings and structures

have gone, making Wen administrative village a 400-years-old village whilst without any listed buildings from the Administration of Building Heritage at both town and district levels. It further isolated Wen administrative village from public funding for regional developments such as modern tourism, revealing its peripheral identity without being part of a regional transportation networks. Coincidently, it was exactly this ordinary and peripheral identity that Wen natural village was chosen as a site by Wang Shu for his later regeneration project. Wen natural village is a linear village growing in the interstices between a mountain and a river passing through. Currently inhabited by less than 80 families, the natural village as the very origin of whole Wen administrative village still contains around 40 traditional buildings dating back from Republic of China to Ming and Qing Dynasty.

Fig. 6.2 Diagram of regional relationship of Wen village and the project site (Drawn by the author)

Red: project location; Yellow: provincial/city-level high-speed road; Dark grey: built-up areas; Blue: waterways; Green: forests; White: mountains.

Fig. 6.3 The outward looking at Wen village on the other side of the river with more new buildings, among them the office building of Wen Villagers Committee under a modern look in black and white gable stones to distinguish with old village. (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 6.4 Panorama of Wen natural village from enclosed hills. The village stretches alongside the tendency of river and mountain. (Photograph by Zheng Shi)

Fig. 6.5-6 A typical daily scene of Wen village: some elderly women are sitting and chatting to spend an afternoon in front of a grocery at the entrance of the village (left); a working middle-aged woman is feeding silkworm using fresh mulberry leaves throughout day and night (right). (Photograph by Junjie Wu)

Fig. 6.7 For architecture without architects in Wen village, the building object is not only a provisional assemblage of numerous materials ranging from earth to pebbles, but also a constant building process that is socially constructed through many hands and heads. At the back of this messy-engaged building is a new apartment in much 'cleaner' method and appearance. (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 6.8 Head of Wen village, Zhanghai Shen, stands in front of a newly-built three-story house in fake European stylist elements, with old traditional house in brick and masonry to the right. As the head, Shen believed reprogramming some of the residential houses of the village into homestay or Bed & Breakfast for urban tourists will be the only way to rescue Wen village as such a remote place, after his years of field survey in rapidly developing villages or counties like Anji (Chapter 8) within the same province. (Photograph by Junjie Wu)

Practitioner:

Wang Shu, arguably one of the greatest Chinese architects in contemporary China, has been the most internationally-acclaimed architect since he was awarded the prestigious Pritzker Prize in 2012. Born in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, he spent his childhood in Beijing and Xi'an city, both ancient cultural centers of northern China. Wang Shu developed his interest in Chinese traditional culture including painting, calligraphy and literature from a very young age, partly influenced by his family background and middle-class parenthood (grandfather as established carpenter, father as amateur carpenter, mother as teacher and librarian). Trained as an architect in Nanjing, his final thesis with strong criticisms and arguments, gained a pass but without a Master's degree qualification, marked him as an resisting alternative in a real practical sense, from the very beginning to his dramatic later careers.[2] Wang Shu completed his very first architectural project shortly after his postgraduate study in 1990.[3] He stayed in the then booming Shenzhen city for a few months,[4] and moved to Hangzhou city to start a secluded life which lasted for nearly 10 years. This was the 'legendary part' of Wang Shu's career, regarded by himself as a process of mediation and retreating from the rapid urbanization with massive architectural works in China at that time. Living largely on the income of his wife Lu Wenyu who was working as an architect in a state-led design institution, Wang Shu's daily routine during that decade was staying in different construction sites from 8 am to 12 midnight, mostly in rural areas for indigenous building and settlements, where he observed, worked with and learnt from builders, particularly those craftsmen such as carpenters and masons. This unique period of experience and knowledge accumulation built a solid foundation of his theoretical position and later practice with a focus on craftsmen. According to Wang Shu, "it was a process of re-education combining architectural philosophy with craftsmanship."[5]

During that decade of seclusion, Wang Shu developed his strong position in architecture. Just as British architectural critic Austin Williams said, "Wang used his reclusive decade to reinvent himself as 'a scholar, a craftsman, and an architect, in that order'. He emerged as a self-professed member of the literati: Chinese

intellectuals who used painting and poetry to display their erudition and superior cultivated status."[6] Positioning himself as a very 'architectural' literati-craftsperson, rather than the professional architectural designer, Wang Shu founded Amateur Architectural Studio with Lu Wenyu in 1997. The word 'amateur' obviously stood for an alternative model against the mainstream professionalism that soullessly ignored regional differences and human needs. Literally as an amateur practice with Wang Shu's status as a non-registered architect, the small practice started from the interior design and furniture design of their home, a 50-sqm-large, 2.8-meter-high apartment at the top of an ordinary apartment in 1997, and rejected almost all of the commercial commissions or competitions in search for a pure state of traditional Chinese literati.[7] Getting to know and be much appreciated by the Vice-Chancellor of China Academy of Art, Xu Jiang, was one of the key moments in Wang Shu's architectural career. Since then his career as both director of Amateur Architectural Studio and Dean of school of architecture took off. With some small-scaled private projects and large-scaled educational commissions directly or indirectly from Vice-Chancellor Xu, the Amateur Architectural Studio *became* one of the most influential practices among the new generation of so-called 'independent, experimental Chinese architectural practices' emerging around 2000. Until today, the Amateur Architectural Studio has still maintained a relatively low number of six to eight staff, with support from student interns from Wang Shu's school.

A powerful critique to the lack of understanding and consideration of the relationship between rural and urban in contemporary Chinese architecture and urbanization, Wang Shu has developed a consistency of theory and practice through the lens of rural villages and vernacular architecture within rural China, a theme and clue which made up the original foundation of Wang Shu's major built works in cities, and became stronger and stronger post his 2012's peak in his numerous lectures, interviews, writings and teachings. Key built projects, post 2005 (the turning year for Shu Wang when he completed Ningbo Contemporary Art Museum and Five Scattered Houses) included Xiangshan Campus, China Academy of Art (Phase two, 2004-2007; Phase Three, 2010-2014), Ningbo History Museum (2003-2008) (Fig. 6.9) and Ningbo Tengtou Pavilion (2009-2010) (Fig. 6.10), which together finally earned him a series of international awards including the Pritzker Prize in 2012. His professional and academic focus has always been on the architectural relationship

and design interventions between traditional craftsmanship and modern technology, traditional form of life and modern lifestyle, traditional culture and modern ideology. Therefore it could be understood that the topic and issue of Chinese rural villages has acted as a bridge between his 'professional theory' and 'amateur practice' throughout his career so far.[8]

In terms of design and construction mode in Wang Shu's works, the key consistent element, drawing from the rural housing of vernacular village, lied in his reinvented 'Tile-Pan' (瓦爿 'Wan-Pan') building system. The seasonal hurricanes in Zhejiang province were destructive to the vernacular villages and housing architecture, while local indigenous communities adapted to rebuild rapidly through recycling the usable materials the hurricanes left over. It is hardly regarded as a regional ritual in rebuilding, but an adaptive response through the locals. Wang Shu learnt it through his reclusive decade working with local craftsmen and builders, adapted it and reinvented it into his architectural design practice. The 'Tile-Pan' building system referred to a thick wall and thick roof system with vibrant colours and textures – not only an appropriate integration between economic construction modes (in-situ concrete frame structure), but also a climatic buffer through adaptive reuse of waste and weathered building materials. The competed architectural works of Wang Shu looks as if he had failed to control the project, as the whole building was wrapped by huge mosaics of randomly scattered tiles, bricks, jars and crock. He had recycled them from collapsing buildings and villages in the southern Yangtze River region, kept them dirty and broken, then reassembled and reconstructed them into the hybrid walls with concrete.

As an example that blurred the distinction between the practice of professional architect and that of master-builder, Wang Shu and his methodology of recycling waste materials from destroyed buildings, mostly ordinary housing, regained a more critical meaning in terms of neglected and decaying built environments in rural China under urbanization. This also challenged the hegemonic urban notion and aesthetics of hygiene and order in architecture and the authority of architect as solo producer of artistic objects.

Fig. 6.9 Ningbo History Museum, 2003-2008 (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 6.10 Ningbo Tengtou Village Pavilion for 'Shanghai Expo 2010', 2009-2010 (Photograph by the author)

Preparation and Fund-raising Process:

In terms of Wen village, why Wang Shu practiced his 'amateur' architecture here? It dates back to 2012. Soon after Wang Shu was awarded the Pritzker Prize, the political leaders of Fuyang district strongly invited him to develop and design a mix-used building combining a new museum, a gallery and an archive for Fuyang.[9] As Wang Shu and his amateur architectural studio only carefully select and do less than two project commissions in a year, he expressed a certain degree of reluctance for this ambitious state-backed project at the beginning. According to Wang Shu, [10] he was finally impressed and moved by the sincerity and passion from Fuyang's side, according to Wang Shu, also by its status as the original place where historically-famed literati-artist Gongwang Huang created his famous masterpiece 'Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains'. Before the agreement, Wang Shu negotiated and finally made a deal with political leaders of Fuyang that he required to be commissioned for a rural housing project for a selected village supervised under Fuyang, in order to take over the design of Fuyang museum, gallery and archive. This was a crucial moment of this special project that Wang Shu as an architect secured not only the trust and support but also the power, which most of Chinese professional architects lack, even before the project kicking-off, from Fuyang authorities with sufficient governmental funding. That strategic importance could be demonstrated from Wang Shu's own emphasizes, with much pride and satisfaction expressed in many later interviews and lectures, on the fact that the Wen village project was proposed and secured through his risk-taking and public negotiation with Party and government, which normally has the final say for building and planning projects.

Wang Shu finally identified the project site, with his wife partner Wenyu Lu and assistants from both Amateur Architecture Studio and the Chinese Academy of Arts, based on field surveys on a regular basis to those rural villages under Dongqiao town and Fuyang district since late 2012. This site was Wen natural village, one of the 13 natural villages of Wen administrative village. It was selected partly because Wang Shu found the existing layout of Wen natural village resonated with the imagined dwelling form in 'Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains', which has long been one of the key references to inspire his 'natural ways to architecture'.[11] Another more

consequential point was Wen village's current status and identity, as Wang Shu stated: "Only one village in a total of 300 villages of Fuyang was listed under preservation development according to a research investigation by our team, which means more than 290 villages could be removed and demolished at any time by local governments. Besides those villages without any surviving traditional buildings, we particularly want to save those 20 villages which still sustain some traditional authenticity. Those buildings and villages were not seen as of value by most of the decision-makers. But in my eyes they have tremendous value. Wen village is one of those non-listed villages we aimed to rescue."[12]

With the strong support from Fuyang government both financially and politically, the redevelopment and regeneration project in Wen natural village was officially announced in June 2014, as a provincial pilot project to follow the earlier launched state-led 'Beautiful and Livable Village Reconstruction' proposal.[13] The project partnerships (Fig. 6.11) were established partly following the existing procurement and construction model adopted in urban regeneration, in which the architectural firm got the commission from the government and delivered the design to the contractor company. Here, coordinated by the Bureau of Building and Construction in Zhejiang province, the government of Fuyang district under Hangzhou city teamed up with the Chinese Academy of Art, to launch the Wen village regeneration project. As Dean of School of Architecture, Wang Shu was appointed as chief architect-planner. The main developer-contractor was then appointed to a Hangzhou-based, state-owned investment company named Zhejiang Fuchun Real Estate Developing Company, with an investment as large as £4million for this project. The major difference from a normative organization structure of urban housing projects was that, both the enhanced leadership and the stimulated coordinated role of Wang Shu and Amateur Architecture Studio facilitated the active involvement of potential users of the new housing scheme at this early stage. It can be inferred that both government and developer company consciously stepped back from the central stage without setting up over-regulated conditions and barriers for the architect-user-led briefing process.

Under the guidance of the Bureau of Building and Construction in Zhejiang province, Wang Shu developed a growing role as an architect-developer and co-developed the preliminary brief in consultation with villagers. The housing brief was developed into three major parts: first was the newly-built residential part at the east end of the

village, which covered an area of 11 acres; second was the renovation and refurbishment of the old village; and the third part was the renovation and management of the village landscape alongside the main road and waterway. Made as the only pilot village project of 'Beautiful and Livable Village Reconstruction' at the highest provincial level, Wen village housing redevelopment project not only received a sufficient funding directly distributed from Zhejiang province and Hangzhou city, but also the policy and regulation support in specific building-related aspects.
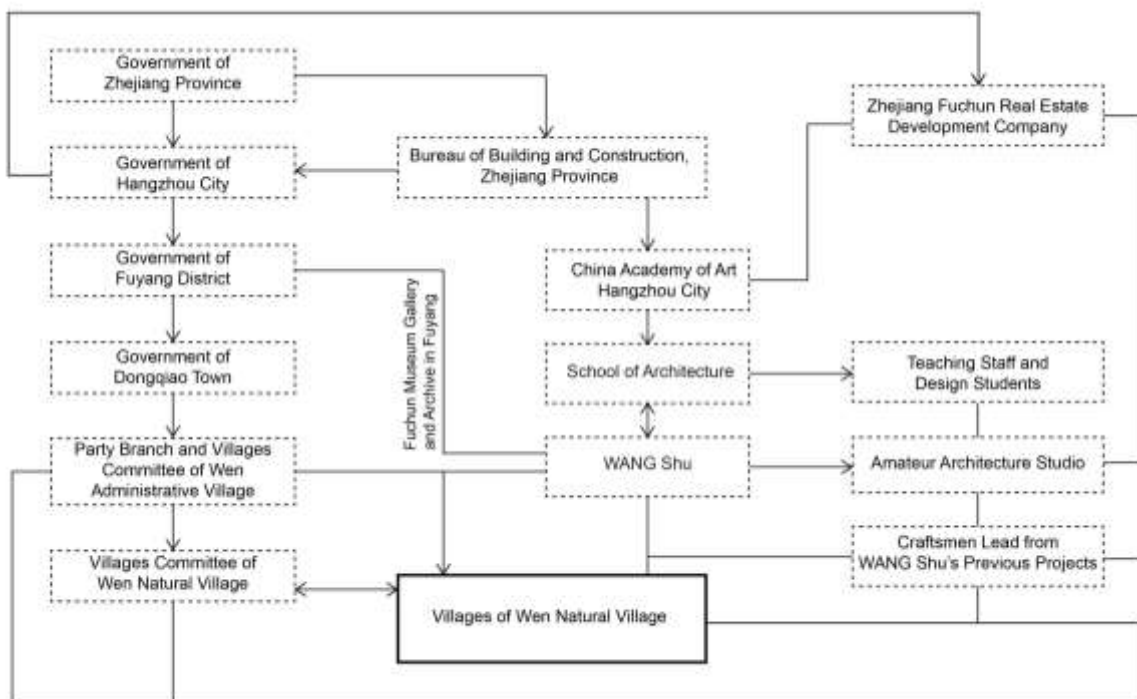
Fig. 6.11 Project structure and stakeholders (Drawn by the author)

Design Process:

Initial planning and architectural design guidelines of the new residential zone in Wen village had already been distantly proposed by a state-led design institution based in a city of Zhejiang province. Based on a same template selected from a typical 'Design Drawing Collection' for rural housing, the proposal had planned 15

new rural houses for 15 families. That was soon transferred to and undoubtedly rejected by Wang Shu, who aimed to establish a new role model of the architect and an architectural benchmark for designing Chinese rural village housing without losing the sense of place and cultural tradition. His fundamental vision for this housing redevelopment project was that the built form of new parts should be proposed as if growing from the old physical and social fabric of this village through architecture without architects. Thus the first challenge for Wang Shu was to persuade both villager leaders and resident villagers to change their normative way of building new by demolishing old structures and sites, to a more culturally sustainable mode through partly reclaiming and adaptively reusing the old existing fabric.[14]

The actual involvements of analysis and design started much earlier than the official announcement. Wang Shu as the Dean developed this project as part of the established larger research curriculum in the School of Architecture of the Chinese Academy of Art, which pursued a hands-on architectural teaching and training in the field with a focus on vernacular villages in Zhejiang province. Thus Wen village became one of their fieldwork destinations since early 2014, since then numerous groups of architect-in-training visited and studied Wen village with systematic drawings and documentations.[15] Based on this constantly accumulated research foundation on the as-found condition of the existing village, and other rich resource from the School's growing collective database "through nearly a decade's field research survey in that region",[16] Wang Shu and his team made an in-depth evaluation and assessment of the old existing buildings under their key principle to sustain cultural consistency embedded in built forms. It led to their proposed scheme of 14 new residential buildings which could accommodate 24 families on the planned newly-built site at the west end of Wen village, and a refurbishment of 29 buildings inside the old part of Wen village.
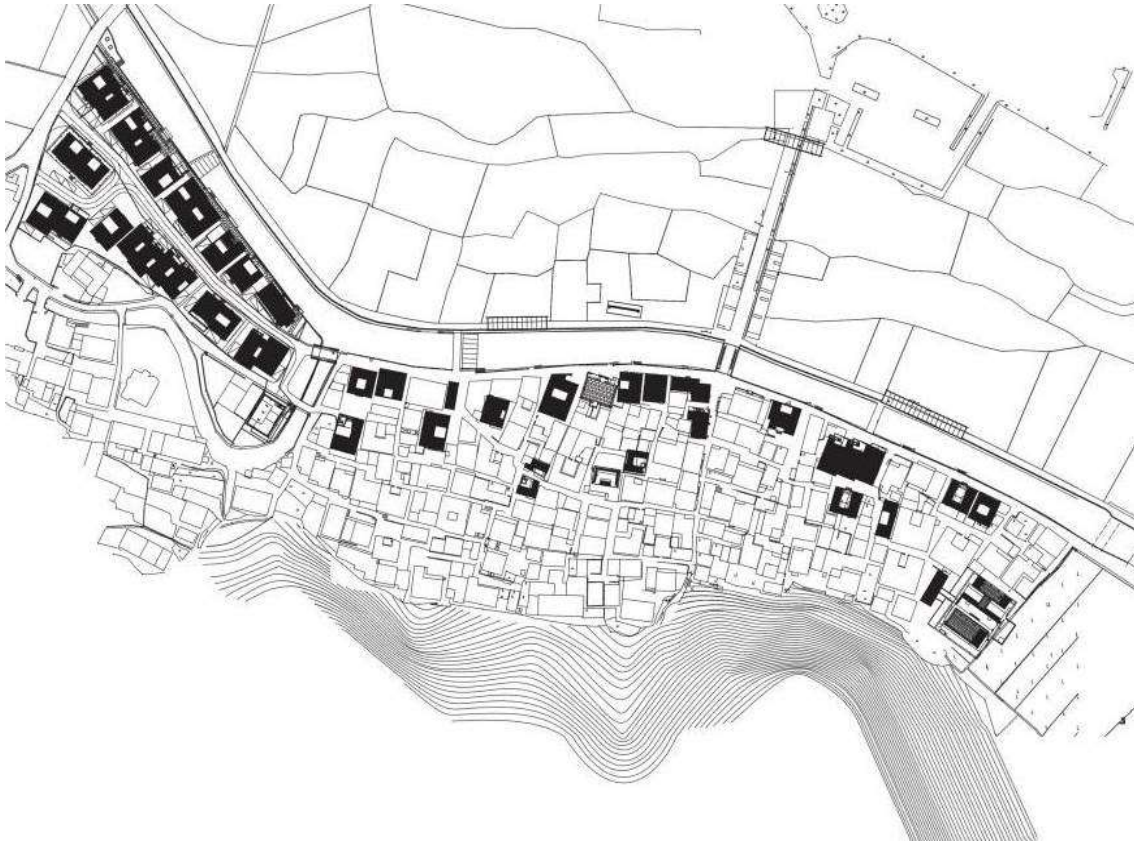
Fig. 6.12 The final proposal from Wang Shu and his team on 43 houses: 29 buildings to be refurbished scattered in the old Wen village, and 14 new buildings for 24 families to be added at the east end of village. (Source: Amateur Architecture Studio)

Back to the base school, Wang Shu and Amateur Architecture Studio developed an irregular housing layout with a set of simple orthogonal buildings positioned and stitched into the given topography and fabric. A slightly curved street was planned following the river direction but at the centre of the new housing units, which again enhances its communal character. At the nearest end of this street to the old village, a rain-water bridge (Fig. 6.17) acting not only as an entrance doorway but also a resting pavilion was proposed. The residential layout includes 8 house types acting as templates, each with 3 variations easily for further adjustments, in order to accommodate different needs from 24 village households. Adding larger density than the original proposal reintroduces the intimate and socially-cared neighbourhood and provides more compact space for interactions at the street level, furthermore it divided the financial burden of each household. Every house has a double-height central courtyard which learnt from the vernacular sky-well, providing a semi-outside space for family crafting and storing agricultural products and equipment. Indeed, the

ground floor in most of the houses was proposed as family-managed workshop space to sustain the traditional rural lifestyle, with upper floors for resting and sleeping. For families with multi-generations, the younger will occupy the ground floor while the elder will live in the upper floor using a semi-external stair without disturbing increasingly different living habits between generations. (Fig. 6.18) Locally-sourced materials ranging from wood, bamboo, yellow clay to grey limestone were transformed into a mixed structural system with in-situ concrete, providing deep eave, large doorways, external stairs, shading device and other building elements. Therefore each new building had its own distinctive identity in terms of spatial organization and material tectonics, while still sharing a common language to be integrated as a whole.

Fig. 6.13 The masterplan of new housing area composing of a newly planned street, 24 houses and a rain-water bridge (Source: Amateur Architecture Studio)

After identifying and clarifying those guiding design principles, it was Wang Shu and Lu Wenyu who took the design template drawings to those potential households, who might move from old Wen village to the new housing. The communication, opening for the future users' feedback and comments, (which in some cases also included design assistants and village leaders including Head of village Zhanghai Shen,) provided valuable and effective user participation, built trust and collaborations between architect-developer and end users. It was a risk-taking decision with estimated time-consuming and a sometimes controversial process. According to Wang Shu and Lu wenyu, it was worth it. 'We needed to revise our plan and section whenever the villager had a different opinion. Unlike designing architecture in cities where we tended to influence the clients, every issue about the house is sensitive in rural villages here. Even some minor design points such as a cantilevered eave or a detached wall might receive strong rejection from villagers due to its easily causing communal ownership disagreements.'[17] In Wang Shu and Lu wenyu's lecture, a highly responsive and communicative design approach and adaptation was needed for design development. For example, the template kitchen proposed by Wang Shu was about 7m^2 at the beginning, largely based on the experience for city apartments from an economic point of view. But the kitchens were changed to double the size after the discussion with villager-residents, in order to satisfy their locally-specific habits, such as setting up stoves, storing firewood, and placing dining tables. It is noteworthy that the above-mentioned special policy support and bursary also contributed as a key part to user engagement and negotiations: for example, almost all the villager-residents rejected the courtyard layout in the plan at the early consultation stage, because they had understood that semi-outdoor part would reduce the allocated indoor area of their house construction land.[18] But in this special case as a provincial pilot project, that 10 m^2 courtyard was made free of charge, which gained finally full acceptance by the villager-residents. Another example is that, the typical wall depth in all buildings was kept to be calculated as the normal 240mm, instead of the real built at around 450mm in some special wall types such as rammed earth or mixed wall with masonry. This means

every villager-resident benefited from receiving extra indoor area without additional charge. In all, this painful but fruitful user participation process made Wang Shu and his team revise their design schemes hundreds of times, but a much stronger trust and co-creation spirit was also gained and nurtured from the bottom-up.

Construction Process:

That communal and collaborative spirit also extended into the construction process of this housing project organized by Wang Shu and the contracting construction company. Rammed-earth wall, mud wall, limestone wall - those traditional architectural techniques and crafts which had disappeared for nearly 50 years in Wen village, were all recalled and reinvented with Wang Shu's established 'Wa-Pan' constructional mode. Wang Shu's experienced site assistants and workmen leads who had taken charge of Wang's previous major projects also got involved in the project at this stage. Some local villagers were trained and employed, including 20 skillful masons. (Fig. 6.14) In the long term, Wang Shu expected that the local construction force led by those masons could develop and expand in their own rights and ways.[19] Instead of defending their familiar skill sets, the masons and other less-skillful builders were highly motivated to explore new wider ranges under the inspiration from the architects' once-in-a-life experience in this design construction. The local building sequence on carpentry and masonry was largely followed while adjusted at some points in order to be better integrated with the relatively new construction mode of using concrete. Selected new technologies brought from cities were also integrated with locally sourced materials and building techniques in an appropriate way, such as installing a photovatalic panel onto the tiled roof for each house (Fig. 6.16), and testing a rammed-earth load-bearing structure in one of the 14 houses, following its first but expensive application in an earlier completed guesthouse nicknamed 'tile mountain' at the Chinese Academy of Art Xiangshan Campus.[20] Elements like the cladding for the external walls in which different stone types were randomly mixed, and the interlocking bamboo joints which supported the

roof eaves, were not only Wang Shu's established design language but also the language coproduced and shared by many hands and heads. Thus the very process of material tectonic and collaborative making of this housing project was a vocation of the genius loci of vernacular settlements in Wang Shu's eye – that of collective construction and reconstruction of everyday form of life beyond the physical form.

Fig. 6.14 Construction site of new housing (Photograph by Jullette Goudy and Marc Auzet)

Fig. 6.15 The birdeye photo taken by drone of Wen village upon completion in spring 2016 (Photograph by Xiali)

Fig. 6.16 The birdeye photo taken by drone of Wen village upon completion in spring 2016 (Source: http://zj.zjol.com.cn/news/319209.html)

Fig. 6.17 A rain-water bridge in concrete load-bearing walls and wooden roof is placed at the intersection between new housing part, old village, and the river, marking a communal focal point for the village. (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 6.18-19 Material tectonic in new houses follows the traditional selection but in a modern manner (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 6.20-21 Before and After: waterfront houses of Wen village. Top: (Photograph by douban)
Bottom: (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 6.22 A side entrance crossing a bridge of Wen village presents a juxtaposition of the old existing and new refurbishment by Wang Shu and his team. The scales and configuration are analogous, while the material tectonics makes a sharp contrast. *(*Photograph by the author)

Besides the housing part, Wang Shu and his team also worked on the upgrading of street elevations and landscape restoration for the old part of the village as a supporting part of the whole regeneration programme. (Fig. 6.20-22, 6.25-26) The refurbishment started with learning from making on site, testing ideas through mock-up pieces, in order to preserve the existing fabric as much as possible. New inhabitable programmes, enclosures, and environmental units were stitched into the given, all through close engagement with villager leaders and ordinary user-villagers again. Among them included improving the overall spatial quality of a few pedestrian paths by reverting to the local masonry construction from the current concrete one, and puncturing some pocket squares from within the existing street patterns. Besides, a series of resting canopies with recycled tiled roofs were added to

reactivate the voids. Supported by a new structural mixture of wood and steel, those public works reintroduced and enhanced the sense of social core of the neighbourhood-scaled, street-level public enclosures, including a village square next to the ancestral hall of Wen village. (Fig. 6.23)The construction inside Wen village was cultivated and conducted in a much slower, more progressive and spontaneous way, compared to the organized construction of new housing part.

Fig. 6.23 Two new pavilions in single pitch tiled roof provide seating area and reorganize the communal square adjacent to the village ancestral hall. (Photograph by Zheng Shi)

Fig. 6.24 Another resting pavilion provides a shared space under the eave for a small piazza (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 6.25-26 The interface between the new added and the old existing inside Wen village
(Photograph by the author)

It is no doubt that the employment of local ordinary villagers contributed to the upgrade of public infrastructure in the old part of the village. Material resourcing and transportation to the new housing site contributed to the total construction cost with less than £300/m^2 in the end. There is less evidence demonstrating that any villager-residents got involved in the actual construction process of their new houses. Therefore, except the basic spatial programme and layout, the spatial forms and material tectonics of the housing buildings were largely relied on and decided by the designing architects and construction builders. As the housing construction was well initiated and organized by the contractor company which started the process from as early as July 2014, (just a month after the official launch of the whole project,) the first wave of eight villager households went through the ballot process in August to get the specific house based on the initial brief and sketch masterplan. Therefore the

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villagers even didn't know what their houses would look like at that time. With the main building structure assembled and infrastructure almost completed by October 2015, another wave of seven villager households signed the contract with the supervising township government, at a considerably competitive low buying cost of £150/m^2.[21]

Occupation Process:

The satisfaction from 'the first person to try tomato' always has an influence to those observing followers in rural Chinese communities.[22] In this case it was Mrs. Zhu in her 50s. Her family of four was the first household to sign the replacement contract provided by Wen Villagers Committee, and was also the first occupant to move in from March 2016. Her new house, with an area of 220m^2 and a market value around £33,000, was bought with an economic price of £17,000 after balancing the estimated value of £16,000 of her old house. Additional, Mrs. Zhu was more than pleased about the potential rise in value as an awarded architect's masterpiece. (Fig. 6.27) The life of her family quickly went on in the completely new environment, even without any adaptation or transition period, as a result of participative design input by the architects, which created an unfamiliar spatial form in a relatively familiar way of spatial use.[23] Not long after, 13 of the total 14 houses were successively chosen and inhabited by more than 20 villagers' families. Apart from the residential part, the communal part of Wang Shu's new housing proposal has also been well received to be a catalyst for bringing social life back to the old village. The 67-year-old Xianping Shen, who works part-time in a barbershop in the nearby Xiande town, had been living in his old house, which was merely a couple of meters away from the newly-built rain-water bridge, before moving into the new house. The bridge (Fig. 6.28) immediately became a focal point for his family and other villagers. Spontaneous activities happened in and around the cool, semi-indoor environment: viewing, resting, having group lunch, drinking tea, gardening and children playing. With a couple of other villager neighbours, Mr. Shen enjoyed the new housing proposed by

the government and the architectural master, which opened a new door to the coming better lives.[24] Furthermore, inside the old part of Wen village, the catalyst effect from both Wang Shu's design interventions and the public participation, particularly from village leaders, also worked: for example, the long retaining wall for the waterfront pedestrian route was exposed again with its original local stone instead of the cement and concrete. So were several cement-covered roads inside the old village. In parallel, the original underground water infrastructure with multiple channels and nodes linking almost every building of Wen village was revealed and reused.[25]

Fig.6.27 As the first household to fully inhabit in the new house designed by Wang Shu, Mrs. Zhu is pleased with both building price and spatial quality, and quickly adapted to the new environment with her growing family. (Photograph by Chao Tan)

Fig. 6.28 The new rain-water bridge marking an entrance from the old village to the new housing zone becomes a well-received focal point for villagers. Spontaneous activities happen in and around it: viewing, resting, having group lunch, drinking tea, gardening and children playing. (Photograph by the author)

Besides those positive attitudes and changes, the controversial side in terms of occupation after Wang Shu's architectural design continued in this remote village redevelopment project, from his well-known masterpieces in Hangzhou or Ningbo city under the same province. Indoor comfort for the everyday users again became one of the sticks to challenge and even criticize Wang Shu's design. The internal elevations between the inner courtyard and surrounding rooms were designed in full height wooden folded screen-walls with large window glazing, at the sacrifice of proper insulation and waterproof layers. While this successfully achieved a spatial atmosphere and memory evoking traditional Chinese aesthetics of a rural house, it socially failed in the practical occupation, particularly during winter in a village sitting to the north of the hill without enough south sunshine. (Fig. 6.29) The relatively cramped bedrooms and narrow stairs, partly a result of the literati-architect's design with diverse façades and roof configurations to present a position as vernacular modernism, were unable to accommodate enough storage space required by a rural life, let alone the future extensions.[26] Some more problems rising from post occupancy have been complained about by many users, such as the scale and layout of bedrooms and the lack of consideration on the sanitary arrangements used by multi-generations.[27]

Fig. 6.29 The semi-outside corridor of the first floor of a house has been coved with moss, which made a negative indication that the indoor wooden floor plate might be soon decayed due to lacking of protection from humidity in the design of the courtyard. (Photograph by the author)

Whilst besides those physical spatial issues in the new housing of Wen village, more spontaneous, and unexpected though, occupation patterns have also emerged. As mentioned before, the user and the maker of this housing project were not divided from the very beginning of the process of developing briefs and design schemes, but were partly divided in the following construction process due to the particular skill requirements from the architects' emphasize on the quality of completion. Nevertheless, the tendency to divide the daily user and the house owner became greater. The initial strong position and design intention from Wang Shu and his team

on the occupation of these new houses was to keep it within everyday use only by Wen villagers and their families, instead of making it a business for the outsiders. That was clearly claimed as a zero-tolerance bottom line in many of Wang Shu's speeches on the Wen village redevelopment project.[28] Although fully understood and accepted by both Wen village leaders and residents at first, very soon this verbal agreement was turned around in the real use by those house-owners who eagerly grasped every opportunity to make an economic profit, including the one brought by Wang Shu as a famed architectural master. Even the Head of village, Zhanghai Shen, who used to play a role as a middle-man and mediator between the villagers' 'out-of-date', conservative lifestyles and new, advanced ways of life, has converted the ground floor of his house to be a canteen and first floor to be guestrooms, in order to accommodate the increasing need to receive political or cultural visitors from cities and other villages, as more than a dozen arrive on a daily basis. ''Before Wang Shu came to design in our village, we had started to seek ways to develop our homestay Bed & Breakfast industry. Now the opportunity comes in the corner – we surely don't want to miss it.''[29] Mr. Shen was quickly joined by some villagers as an emerging business group, who shifted their original working focus into developing the Bed & Breakfast industry in Wen village. Among them, Gengqiang Lang, a middle-aged male villager, played a leading role. After moving to a 300m^2 house with four rooms at the boundary of the new housing zone, Lang rushed to complete the interior decoration in order to be one of the first hostels in the village. Wooden ceilings and lights were installed, and a layer of earth skin was coated onto the internal partition wall of the staircase, to follow the architects' external raw material presence. In such a rush even without leaving himself and his family a room, he introduced four different internal 'styles' into all of his four rooms in order to attract external tourists: ironically, the floor carpet of the first floor was covered in fake patterns of U.S dollars. From the perspective of the villager-users, although opposing to the starting agreements, Wang Shu could not prevent this 'creative inhabitation' happening from the within, and he had to comprise with the reality at this moment, that it were those villagers' choice and decision.[30]

Fig. 6.30 Waterfront life in front of new housing of Wen village, 2016 (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 6.31 The preliminary occupation before the fully completion of the project (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 6.32 Three newly-inhabited houses facing the main street, with external stairs creating both a communal space between different generations of the family and between the private and public (Photograph by douban)

Beyond the conventional users, more consumption modes emerged upon the housing designed by Wang Shu. Opposite to the new housing zone and to the east of the new office building of Wen Villagers Committee, a new 'Cultural Square' has been under construction, composing of themed stages and pavilions on an artificial water feature and a rebranded tourism route extending to a 400-year-old bridge of the old part of Wen village.[31] It was believed that the government of Dongqiao town in support with Wen Villager Committees have been mobilizing longstanding residents of the old village to move to a few more newly-planned housing zones at the edge of the village, in order to leave their old houses 'preserved for further development'. Good or bad, it ensured a clear path into the commercial tourism just as what has happened in so many Chinese rural villages in the past decade. The housing project started to anchor the value of Wen villagers in their traditional agricultural form of life suppressed by contemporary urbanism, but it drifted from its track by dramatically changing the economic practice and development route for the village after the occupation of the new housing.

Conclusion and Discussion:

The Chinese rural village, a former agrarian-based society for centuries organized from the top down but built from the bottom up, has been pressed constantly and drastically by the radical form of urbanization in past decades at an incredibly large scale and rapid speed. It is within this broader context that this case study is situated and that this chapter seeks to explore the potential for Wang Shu's alternative architectural practice as an agent of social and political transformation in contemporary rural China. The chapter focuses on the Wen Village Redevelopment project in Zhejiang province, which should not only be regarded as an encounter between a special architect and an ordinary Chinese village, but also as a paradigm in how contemporary architecture of social engagement facilitated by hybrid practitioners from the outside could transform the Chinese rural village from the within.

As a hybrid practitioner in a combined modern version of Chinese traditional literati and craftsman, Wang Shu examines the Chinese traditional cultural production in general and the contemporary rural villages in particular, in order to search for an alternative form of architectural design intervention against those stylistic vocabularies and imagery features practiced by the mainstream professional architects in contemporary rural China.

Therefore Wang Shu's approach to intervening in and revitalizing the decaying rural village through architectural design is relatively exceptional and unique. His specific engaged approach in Wen village was both analytical and propositional, not only to value the evidence of time and sense of history that those 'dirty' structures and waste materials embedded and to be provided, but also echoed that order of architects collaborating with users and craftsmen equally, which have been repressed for around a century in China since the import of the western construction mode.

It is noteworthy that the participative architecture initiated by Wang Shu had a result of anarchic and untidy outer appearance, but of proven social value. Taking a leading role in coordinating developers and potential users to develop the housing

brief, sharing design authorship and returning to the root of local craftsmanship in construction, all brought his humanities theory from the ivory tower down to the earth and to inform a new everyday form of life. Together with his sensitive articulation on project management and spatial organization, getting the villagers and craftsperson involved into the collective design and construction process as much as possible, finally resulted in a complex of buildings with visually messy and chaotic mask while both villager-insiders and visitor-outsiders feel belonging to them spiritually.

Wen village redevelopment project was the result of an iterative process of consulting with local community (residents, masons, village leaders) of a rural village. The project was an assemblage of an enormous intensity of visions, expectations, endeavours, ideas, knowledge, skills, resource, willing, potentials, interactions, negotiations and comprises. The scales, conditions and effects of those new houses and communal facilities varied, but the spatial meaning and the social use showed an underlying consistency. It gave those existing power structures and hierarchies in and around architectural production a strikingly new contemporary life and relevance, and reclaimed those building 'waste' from a clean perspective of urbanization, instead of being cleared out in a tabula-rasa way or pushed to be part of those unlivable tourism machines.

However, this project still has its limitations in transferability, both in terms of Wang Shu as the architect-developer and the architect-activist. One might notice that his very conventional literati-like position, educational background and career promotion path (as well as current status) is at odds with his literati-like socio-political views on architectural design from the below. And to some degrees, Wen village redevelopment project is still part of a top-down production masked by the bottom-up collaboration, in which a local authority (village, town, district and even city and province) seeks larger cultural, symbolic capital through individual architect's ambition and influential power.[32]

But Wang Shu not only made an architectural response, elaborated the concept of 'Critical Regionalism'[33] and 'Architecture of Resistance'[34], but also made a political manifestation to the irreversible urbanizing movement of the rural village landscape. The architectural interventions in Wen village highlighted a potential for a culturally-responsive architectural practice to adopt a socio-political stance through

reimagining and co-learning by collaboration with indigenous, non-professional resources such as village leadership and craftsmanship. This not only produced an architectural role model for both the profession and the pedagogy in contemporary China, but also paved a way to influence more grass-root policy-makers to rethink and reproduce a more equally power relationship between authorities and architectural professionals, which would be even more crucial in building capacities and infrastructures in current rural China rather than a piece of perfectly completed architectural works.

Positioning himself as a scholar-craftsperson or literati-architect in the age of skillful manipulated image in architectural production in both contemporary urban and rural China, Wang Shu demonstrated the consistency of his scholar-based theory and craftsman-led practice learning from the rural villages in this Wen village redevelopment project, just as he said in a public talk that "Wen village should learn from Wen village itself. "[35] Rural housing could return back to its origin at its simplest meaning, that on providing a shelter and a society of possibilities in communal forms and by collective practice, without developers, contractors, or even architects. In Wen village, Wang Shu and his Amateur Architecture Studio provided an alternative to explore a natural and resilient mode of architecture, which is deeply rooted in Wen village and cannot be explained by the village but can explain what the village is.

In this sense then, Wen Village Redevelopment Project is non-typical without the recognizable system and resisting categorization. It informs the architectural position and proposition, as quoted from Wang Shu himself, 'an aggregation of diversified architectural typology'.[36] It has the potential to dissolve the traditional hierarchical structures within and around the interpreting, making, and occupation of architecture; and the boundary between the architect, the master-builder and the developer, between professional theory and amateur praxis.

Notes and References of Chapter 6

[1] <http://www.tjupdi.com/new/?classid=9145&newsid=16813&t=show> [Accessed 15 March 2017]

[2] Wang Shu's Master's dissertation at Southeast University of Nanjing in 1990, titled 'Diary of Dead Building – the poetic language of space', was based on his first published paper 'The Crisis of Contemporary Chinese Architecture' completed in 1989. It radically criticized the lost of contextual relevance of Chinese architectural tradition in then architectural profession and professional practice under the starting of rapid urbanization. He rejected the major corrections after the viva, which led to his literally graduation without the Master's qualification.

[3] Wang Shu's first built work was Youth Center in Haining City, which was designed in a then popular Deconstructivist manner.

[4] Shenzhen was confirmed by the Chinese national leaders to be a Special Economic Zone around that time, which became the major driving force to transform it from a small fishing village to a metropolitan of contemporary China. As a place booming for construction sector, Wang Shu joined that wave of architects but only stayed there for several months.

[5] Xingli Li, 'Architect Wang Shu: The World is Diverse, which I am also Part of its Diversity -- an Interview with Wang Shu', *The Beijing News*, 06 November 2011. <http://www.bjnews.com.cn/news/2016/11/06/422316.html> [Accessed 21 December 2016]

[6] Austin Williams, 'Wang Shu (b1963-)', *Architectural Review,* 16 November 2015. <https://www.architectural-review.com/rethink/reputations-pen-portraits-/wang-shu-b1963-/8691107.article> [Accessed 17 November 2016]

[7] The only commercial project Wang Shu and Amateur Architectural Studio has done was the Qianjiang Age high-rise residential building around 2000.

[8] Xiang Ren, 'Professional Theory, Amateur Practice' (Conference paper presented in 'This Thing Called Theory', 12th AHRA International Conference, Leeds, the UK. 19-21 November 2015).

[9] 'Fuyang Shanguan', which occupies an area of 69 acre and consists of a new museum, a gallery and an archive for Fuyang district of Hangzhou city, is supposed to be the largest building project Wang Shu and his Amateur Architecture Studio has done so far. The official funding for this state-led project is as high as £5,000,000.

[10] Mengyi Yin, 'Has Wen Village Changed after Wang Shu?', *Qiangjiang Evening News*, 16 June 2016. <http://zj.zjol.com.cn/news/368461.html> [Accessed 27 January 2017]

[11] Wang Shu, 'The Narration and Geometry of Natural Appearance – Notes of Design of Ningbo Historical Museum', *Time+Architecture*, 03 (2009), 66-79.

[12] Wang Shu, TEDx Shanghai, *Let the City Learning from the Village*, 7 May 2016.

<http://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_1473862> [Accessed 13 January 2017]

[13] MOHURD launched a policy in 2013 titled 'Regarding the Development of Beautiful and Livable Town and Beautiful and Livable Village Reconstruction '. Soon after the confirmed participation of Wang Shu and Amateur Architecture Studio, Wen village was selected as a pilot testing village on behalf of Zhejiang province.

[14] Interview by the author with a journalist at a nearby town on 5 May 2016. Anecdotes said once a time Wang Shu encountered a demolishing village site during his fieldtrip, he immediately jumped in and begged the builders to pause tearing down traditional buildings and structures. Later then he achieved to save those buildings, which would be demolished in hours' time, by promising to the village leader who organized that demolition through a voluntarily design a renovation proposal for reuse.

[15] Mengyi Yin and Jie Pan, 'Architectural Master Renovated New Rural Housing to Bring 'Nostalgic Economy' to A Small Village', *Zhejiang Daily*, 16 June 2016 [Accessed 21 January 2017]

[16] Wang Shu and Wenyu Lu, 'The Possibility of Co-existence of The Urban and Rural Areas' (Annual Architecture Lecture 2016, Royal Academy of Arts, London, UK, 15 July 2016)

[17] From the conversation with Lu Wenyu after Wang Shu and Lu Wenyu's Annual Architecture Lecture 2016 of the Royal Academy of Arts, London, UK, 15 July 2016

[18] House construction land refers to those collective-owned land designated for private residential use for registered household in rural China. Building activities on house construction land could be divided into three paths: building the new on original site; extension on the existing building; shift to another piece of land.

[19] Xingli Li, 'Architect Wang Shu: The World is Diverse, which I am also Part of its Diversity -- an Interview with Wang Shu', *The Beijing News*, 6 November 2016. <http://www.bjnews.com.cn/news/2016/11/06/422316.html> [Accessed 21 December 2016]

[20] The rammed-earth wall cost twice more than the normal concrete wall, admitted by Wang Shu in a conversation with Xiaodi Zhu, Head of Beijing Institute Architectural Design, on 16 May 2014.Transcripts by Si Shen from ArchiCreation. <http://www.jianzhubang.com/weixin/6579> [Accessed 1 January 2017]

[21] Distant interview by the author with Zhanghai Shen, Head of Wen village on 7 June 2016.

[22] Interview by the author with Prof. Xuefeng He in Wuhan on 6 April 2015.

[23] Interview by the author with Mrs. Zhu at Wen village on 30 April 2016.

[24] Interview by the author with villager Xianping Shen at Wen village on 30 April 2016.

[25] Interview by the author with Jianjun Huang, Wen Village Party Secretary at Wen village on 30 April 2016.

[26] Distant interview with Xiaocheng Lv, an architect-in-training who originates from Wen village on 31 May 2016.

[27] Distant interview with one of the architectural project assistants of Wang Shu for Wen Village Redevelopment on 4 June 2016.

[28] Wang Shu claimed that he tried to postpone the invasion of commercialism into this ordinary village through his architectural design intenventions. See more in Wang Shu and Lu Wenyu. Annual Architecture Lecture 2016 of the Royal Academy of Arts, London, UK, 15 July 2016.

[29] Distant interview by the author with Zhanghai Shen, Head of Wen village on 7 June 2016.

[30] Distant interview by the author with Zhanghai Shen, Head of Wen village on 7 June 2016.

[31] Interview by the author with Jianjun Huang, Wen Village Party Secretary at Wen village on 30 April 2016.

[32] The so-called 'Hang-style residential architecture' has already been part of the governmental agenda with a focus on planning for economic growth through tourism, or more precisely, tourism-labelled consumption of cultural heritage by the hands of architectural masters.

[33] Alex Tzonis and Liliane Lefaivre, 'The Grid and The Pathway. An Introduction to The Work of Dimitris and Suzana Antonakakis', *Architecture in Greece*, 15 (1981), 178

[34] Kenneth Frampton, 'Towards A Critical Regionalism: Six Points for An Architecture of Resistance', in *The Anti-Aesthetic-Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. by Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), pp. 17-34.

[35] Wang Shu and Wenyu Lu, 'The Possibility of Co-existence of The Urban and Rural Areas' (Annual Architecture Lecture 2016, Royal Academy of Arts, London, UK, 15 July 2016)

[36] Wang Shu, 'Inquiring the Hills from Beyond the Bank: An Aggregation of Diversified Architectural Typology', *Architectural Journal*, 01 (2014), 42- 47.

Chapter 7

'Bishan Commune', Bishan Village, Anhui Province

Fig.7.1 A drawing of old Bishan village in spring seeding; authorship and date unknown. (Source: Institution of Culture, Yi County Archive.)

Village:

Located at the centre of the 'Traditional Hui Prefecture'[1] Bishan Village is south of the Bi mountain and north of the Yi basin, with the river Yanxi passing through the village. A kinship village with a major surname Wang, Bishan had a continuous history which dates back to the year 592 (Sui Dynasty), and could still be traced from its preserved private garden 'Peijun Garden' of Song Dynasty, private school 'Gengdu Court' of Ming Dynasty, and 'Yunmen Tower' of Qing Dynasty. Similar with many other 'Hui Merchant'[2] villages in traditional Hui prefecture, Bishan village was also the hometown of many generations of known intellectuals. The intellectual's accumulation contributed to a strong Confucianism character of the Wang family clan and kinship, which was described as individual's self-cultivation at both ups and downs, and documented in its once more than 30 clan ancestral halls.[3]

Fig. 7.2 Diagram of regional relationship of Bishan village and the project site (Drawn by the author)

Red: project location; Yellow: provincial/city-level high-speed road; Dark grey: built-up areas; Blue: waterways; Green: forests; White: mountains.

Fig. 7.3 Bishan village sits at the south foot of Bishan mountains. (Source: https://kknews.cc/culture/p4kqyz8.html)

Similar to many other rural villages in China that have experienced a dramatic change from the beginning of modernization in the late Qing Dynasty to the rural reforms and Cultural Revolution after PRC gained its power, the glorious history of Bishan village and Wang family clan have faded out in the past century. Currently supervised by Yi county of Anhui Province, Bishan Village has a registered population of only 3000 inhabitants. More than two-thirds of these villagers live and work outside the village in small businesses such as handicrafts and tea trading.[4] The average annual income in 2013 was around £1200 per person, which represents a good economic status when compared with other, often poorer villages in that region. However, that figure does not provide a complete economic picture, particularly if one considers the other third of the population who actually live in the village. Most of these permanent residents are those left behind for various reasons, including many elderly people, women and pre-school children, many of whom who get their incomes through the farming of crops such as silk, tea and rape-seed, or from casual labour, as a brick porter for example, or in nearby rural factories. Although many maintain small vegetable plots for their own consumption, most

people living in Bishan village do not work on the larger farmlands because they can actually earn a bit more by subcontracting the work to food corporations under government supervision, a peculiar economic condition that presently exists in many Chinese villages.

As mentioned above, historically, Bishan was one of the most affluent and important villages of the region because of its proximity (around 4 km) to the Yi county. But in the past two decades much of its architectural heritage has been lost, as villagers have tended to knock down their old family houses in order to build modern ones like those in the city. For example, out of 38 ancestral halls and family halls that existed until recently, fewer than 10 remain today.[5] Bishan's appearance has changed a lot, (Fig. 7.4 -7.5) and as a result it has not been selected as a 'cultural tourism village' by the county government.[6] The consequences of this are that it does not receive governmental funding to develop its public facilities and infrastructure, because the county government only supports 'tourism villages' where there is greater potential for a return through taxation. Bishan, and many other villages like it, that have not been prioritised as tourist sites in the county's development agenda in recent years are in a negative cycle with increasing numbers of people leaving and old buildings being abandoned. If anything, the traditional clan-based social structure has decayed faster than the buildings.

Fig. 7.4 The newly-built buildings replaced the existing structure in Bishan village, 2015 (Photograph by the author.)

Fig. 7.5 The old structure in brick and tile was sandwiched by the newly added ones in colourful ceramics in Bishan village, 2015 (Photograph by the author.)

Fig. 7.6-7 Left: Two women are washing their clothes in a shared water pool at a side of a public square. Right: A quiet street of Bishan village. 2016. (Photograph by the author.)

Fig. 7.8 The slogan 'People's Commune Is Good' in People's Commune period on the façade of the then Oil Factory building (now Bamboo manufacturer workshop) of Bishan village in 2008. (Source: http://www.alternativearchive.com/ouning/feed.asp?q=comment&id=565)

Practitioners:

In 2007, internationally recognized Chinese artist and curator, Ning Ou, who originated from a Southern China rural village himself, started to propose a concept

called 'village commune' with a few collaborators after they visited Bishan village, which aimed to address the current village's problems with a utopian vision. His key partner was Jing Zuo, a local academic in contemporary arts at School of Journalism and Communication, Anhui University, who had been a close friend of Ning Ou from their youth. Supporters outside their partnership included Yu Han, who had already settled in Bishan village after renovating an abandoned pig barn into a holiday inn. As the chief curator of Shenzhen & Hong Kong Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism Architecture themed 'City Mobilization' in 2009, Ning Ou deeply understood the value and potential of Bishan village, where locals still have a persisting agricultural lifestyle with traditional handmade production mode and collective leisure life. With Jing Zuo who originated from another part of this region, they regarded Bishan village as one of the last reserved pieces of homeland for Chinese people, both physically and spiritually, under current modernization and urbanization.

Ning Ou re-appropriated the term 'commune' from two sources: one was a synthesis of a couple of Western sources, including the Paris Commune in 1871 and those experimental communes during the revived 'Back-To-The-Land Movement' in the United States since the 1960s.[7] The other source came from the era of China's 'Great Leap Forward' (1966 -1976), which had championed the idea and form of the 'People's Commune' (1958 -1978). The use of the term, which re-awakened old 'Red memories', was intended to evoke the ideas of collective work-life and spirit in the whole community, rather than the unrealistic economic ambitions that some associate with those times. According to Ning Ou, it directed to the notion of 'Common', which would transcend the conventional ownership structure through activism, in order to facilitate the collective use and share in a real sense. Therefore in his eyes the 'Bishan Commune' would be a combination of 'Creative Commons' raised by Lawrence Lessig and 'Commonwealth' raised by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.[8]

Preparation and Fund-raising Process:

Ning Ou firstly bought an old house from a villager and then moved to Bishan village from Beijing, later followed by Jing Zuo. As stated in Chapter 2, rural house and land are prohibited to enter into the market due to their collective ownership in China. But

in recent years the institutional limitation has relaxed alongside the academic debate on this issue and the will to preserve or adaptively reuse traditional buildings from both the governmental and non-governmental sides. Bishan village was not an exception. Therefore private tenure/transfer actions happened in between individuals, but Ning Ou claimed that his ownership of the house as not legally protected, based only on a private agreement with that villager owner for his long-term stay and use.[9]

Thus in doing so, both cofounders of 'Bishan Commune' settled down in the village. Giving his house a name called 'Buffalo Institute', Ning Ou used it as both his living space and working base for exploring 'Bishan Commune'. By positioning themselves as both cross-cultural practitioners and ordinary residents of Bishan village, they aimed to explore an alternative model for rural development, to revitalize vernacular cultural identity, and to reconnect the ruptured social structure that had originally been based upon the traditional 'mutual aid' spirit of the clan system.[10]

It is worth noting that, before the idea of 'Bishan Commune', Ning Ou had successively researched and visited some autonomous communities in Taiwan, Thailand, Japan, Denmark and the US, with a focus on community supported agriculture and community oriented mutual economy. That experience gave him a strong belief and interests in seeking appropriate approaches to eco-development, sustainable agriculture, cohousing and collaborative decision-making, etc., for contemporary rural China. Therefore, after inhabiting Bishan in a way like doing an ethnographical research, he focused on documenting oral histories through his daily conversations particularly with elderly or educated villagers, and then making comparisons and supplements with those historic data documented in local archives.

It took a couple of years for Ning Ou to get involved in the local community of Bishan village; although that integration is still not fully achieved yet.[11] But he managed to make a close connection with the village elderly organization, which is the only grass-root organization of Bishan village and is made up of retired officers of township governments, retired teachers of nearby rural schools, and middle-aged rural intellectuals.[12] Through organizing public events for leisure and exercise and advocating respecting the elder, Ning Ou made friends and gained some trust from those villagers, and the input from the village elderly organization proved important in guiding Ning Ou and his ambitious 'Bishan Commune' forward.

Fig. 7.9 A personal drawing made and archived by a Bishan villager, which documents the historical appearance of Shisanmen Hall. Located at the entrance of current Bishan village, Shisanmen Hall was considered as the largest hall in the village history, and is the largest one of the remaining three. (Photograph by Leah Thompson)

Fig. 7.10 As an outsider Ning Ou (right) firstly found and then worked with local elderly people in order to gain insiders' views. For example, he worked on figuring out locations of the ancestral halls in an old map of Bishan village with the guidance of a senior villager. (Photograph by Leah Thompson)

As another force, Jing Zuo started and led a three-year research project 'Hundred Handicraft in Yi County' from Anhui University. (Fig. 7.11 - 13) In this project, Jing Zuo

and his project team made up by university students and volunteers started a full-scale mapping and survey on the indigenous crafts and craftsmen in Bishan and the whole Yi County, ranging from rice sculpture in Guanglu village (a neighbourhood village at southwest of Bishan village), silk-based drawing, to folk art performance in Lu village (a neighbourhood village at northeast of Bishan village). In total there were 34 local handicrafts discovered or recovered by the end of the project, which provided rich materials for 'Bishan Commune' in reconstructing a local life history and further collaborating with both external artists and internal craftsmen.
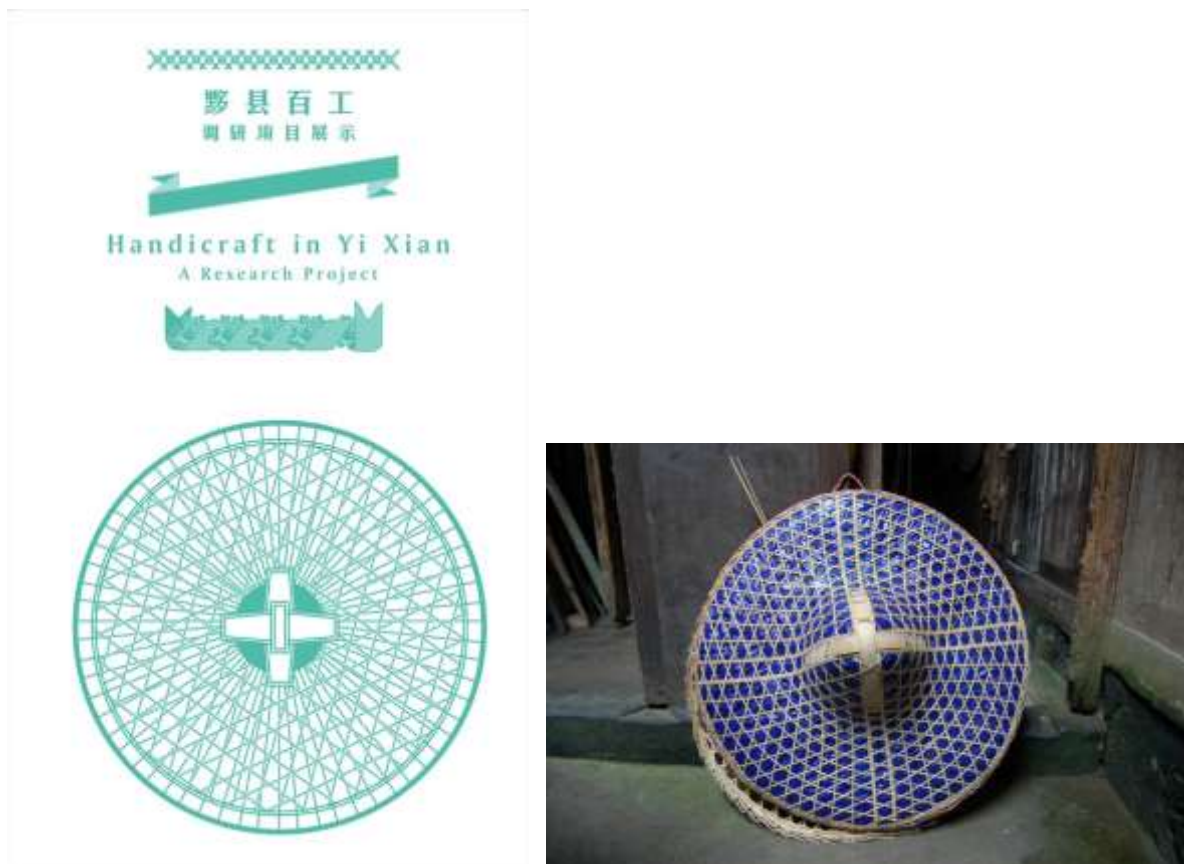
Fig. 7.11-12 Left: A poster of the research project 'Hundred Handicraft in Yi County' with the icon of local hand-made hat at the bottom. Right: A sample of local hand-made hat. (Source: Bishan Commune)

Fig. 7.13 A group of students sets off for interviewing a craftsman called Yongpin Wang who is good at making hats in Nanpin village. 2011. (Source: http://www.alternativearchive.com/ouning/feed.asp?q=comment&id=840

Therefore in this half social, half academic way, Ning Ou and Jing Zuo intensively explored the physical and cultural landscapes of the village over four years, which made a solid foundation for their final design and launch of 'Bishan Commune' in June 2011. (Fig. 7.14)

On the one hand, seeking to get involved into the local community and to have a deeper understanding of local resources had taken a lot of time and energy for two practitioners; on the other hand, project funding had always been a challenge for them from the very beginning. In terms of the government of Yi County and Bishan Villager Committees, from which Ning Ou and Jing Zuo did expect to secure financial support, no direct financial support could be gained for 'Bishan Commune',[13] as the official positions were not clear and sometimes fluctuated towards 'Bishan Commune'. Besides, participative fund raising from local villagers was not a possibility, due to the low economic status and strong distrust from villagers without foreseeing a profitable future.

Consequently, most of the social events with the village elderly organization in the early preparation stage were self-funded by Ning Ou and Jing Zuo. During the design stage, when they decided to organize a celebration event as a key part of 'Bishan Commune' in relation to the village harvest rituals, the project almost

stopped until Ning Ou made 'Bishan Commune' a participating organization of the Chengdu Biennale of International Design in which he himself had been commissioned as the chief curator. Through that mechanism and relation-building, 'Bishan Commune' received a funding of £20,000 in 2011. According to Ning Ou, it was still not enough for 'Bishan Commune' until receiving a donation valued £10,000 from the Agricultural Bank of Yi County and another £20,000 donation from Ning Ou's two personal friends.[14] Meanwhile, smaller amounts of financial supports were constantly received from both local and visiting artists groups, such as the Indigenous Artists Association of Yi County, and personal networks, such as the earlier-mentioned Yu Han's Pig Inn Bar. Furthermore, according to Ning Ou, 'Bishan Commune' also received different kinds of support from Moleskine notebook company from Italy, Contemporary Gallery of Guangdong, Nanjing Triennial 2011-12, and even a UN-related developing program 'Seeing the World', etc.[15] In a word, the fund-raising process of 'Bishan Commune' projects was difficult but sufficient in practical sense, though most of which were secured through Ning Ou's own professional standing.

Design Process:

Compared to the thoughtful preparation process, the design process, particularly architectural design, was regarded less important in the artistic practitioners' perspective with a more focus on immaterial cultural production.

Under the influence of 'non-governmental' forms and practices as exemplified by places like Freetown Christiania in Copenhagen, the design vision of 'Bishan Commune' was to establish an open-ended, self-sufficient and self-organised system governing the village's appearance, co-housing provision, food production and media representations. (Fig. 7.15 - 16) It even had its own passport, uniform, and a time-based currency called 'Bishan Hours' (Fig. 7.17) which could replace cash. It aimed to share public facilities such as a kitchen and laundry to save collective expense. The aim was also to share opinions and to make collective decisions on commune policies. Overall the practitioners of 'Bishan Commune' valued and advocated a very pure kind of civic spirit, manifested through collective place-making and decision-

making, which they believed was necessary to weave Chinese vernacular settlements and communities back together.

Fig. 7.14 Bishan village and key intervention area of Bishan Commune (in red), based on 15/01/2015 (Source: google earth).

Fig. 7.15 Conceptual sketches showing the design of 'Bishan Commune' logo and the meaning, metaphor and aspiration behind this proposal. (Source: Bishan Commune)
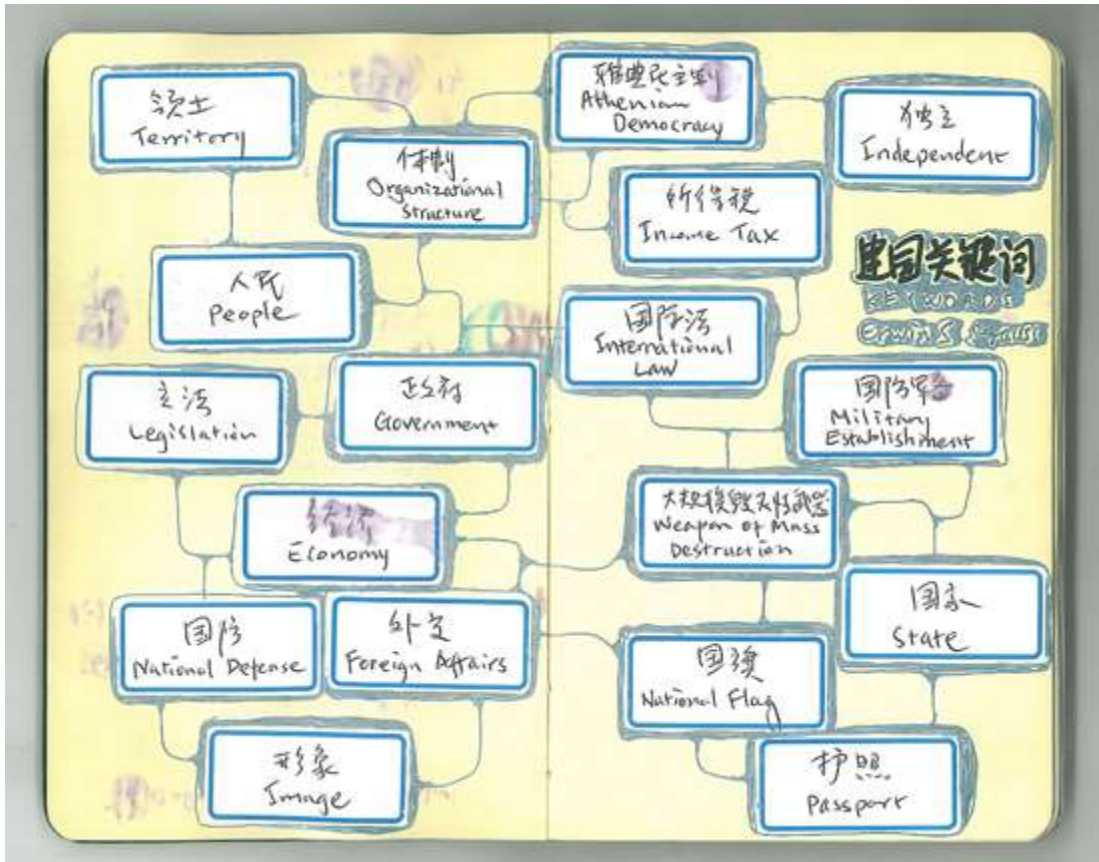
Fig. 7.16 Conceptual diagram showing the keywords and their networks of design system of 'Bishan Commune' (Source: Bishan Commune)

Fig. 7.17 10 minutes (Left) and 1 hour (right) 'Bishan Hours': a specific concept of time-bank-currency introduced by Bishan Commune, aiming to reconnect the traditional 'mutual aid' spirit, including exchanging time and labour in everyday life. However in reality the dissemination of this concept and the actual use of this currency was questionable. (Source: Bishan Commune)

Fig. 7.18 Based on Ning Ou's professional standing and social networks, many artists, designers, musicians, poets, and architects including distinguished activist-architect Hsieh Ying-Chun, visited Bishan village and participated into the discussion on 'Bishan Commune' and Chinese rural reconstruction. March 2011. (Source: http://www.alternativearchive.com/ouning/feed.asp?q=comment&id=840)

Though he himself was not an architect, Ning Ou's professional standing and social networks attracted many cultural practitioners, ranging from artists, musicians, poets, industrial designers, to architects, (Fig. 7.18) visiting Bishan village one wave after another. Therefore Ning Ou established an extensive network of design consultants, either formally or informally getting involved in physically developing 'Bishan Commune'. The physical program of 'Bishan Commune' was developed in a progressive way, instead of a top-down masterplan. As mentioned above, Ning Ou firstly renovated a two-storey old house into the 'Buffalo Institute' (Fig. 7.25-26), which acted as a project office for several years before and during the public launch of the whole proposal of 'Bishan Commune'. Although the effect and impact for social engagement was in question because of its dual character as both a private house and a project office, the practitioners' patience and thoughtful strategy were fruitful. According to Ning Ou, the entry point of intervention was the recovering of collective life within the village,[16] rather than a strong intervention into the existing built environment. Therefore inviting more external practitioners for their temporary contribution to the cultural life of Bishan village was constantly organized by 'Bishan Commune' in both a formal or informal way. Meanwhile, villagers were warmly invited for attending the associated fairs and markets to show and sell their agricultural products and handicrafts. The initial public participation and mobilization

were smooth, but the duration of the impact was called into question by the practitioners.[17] Consequently, this led to a range of spatial interventions to kick off 'Bishan Commune' in the public domain. The starting point was the launch of a performance and exhibition-based festival called 'Bishan Harvestival' (Fig. 7.19, 30,32,33), and the regeneration of a disused ancestral hall titled 'Qitai' (Fig. 7.20) into the new 'Bishan Bookstore'(Fig. 7.27-29). To reintroduce a ritual performance based on the themes of harvest and craftsmanship, 'Bishan Harvestival' took place in August 2011, with the help of funding by city based galleries and biennials, accessed through Ning Ou and Jing Zuo's standing in the social networks of a cultural elite. Then 'Qitai' ancestral hall, located a few minutes' walk from the project office, was selected and re-programmed as a branch of a national bookstore chain, which had been successfully run by one of Ning Ou's personal friends from Nanjing. In this case it is also worth noting that, 'Bishan Commune' was given generous support from local government, which allowed them to rent the place free for the next 50 years.[18]

Fig. 7.19 The marketing board of 'Bishan Harvestival' festival, one of the key components of 'Bishan Commune' in 2011, was set up at the high-way entrance of Yuting town. The festival was funded through the practitioners' own networks, and aimed to reintroduce ritual performances, exhibitions and lecture series on the themes of harvest and craftsmanship of traditional Bishan village. Ironically, the two slogans in red and yellow below the marketing board of 'Bishan Commune' was respectively 'Constructing New Rural Villages Led by the Flag of the Party', and 'To Make a Better Life for Peasants'. (Source: http://www.alternativearchive.com/ouning/feed.asp?q=comment&id=840)

Fig. 7.20 Located at the centre of Bishan village, Qitai Ancestral Hall was one of the three currently remaining halls. It was under restoration and renovation for a new bookstore after many years of disuse and half demolition. The bookstore would be run by popular Nanjing-based Librairie Avant-Garde as one of its first chain in Yi County. 2013. (Photograph by Leah Thompson)

The third key spatial move of 'Bishan Commune' was to establish and program the 'School of Tillers' (Fig. 7.21-24, 38,39). According to Ning Ou, Bishan village collective offered an opportunity to 'Bishan Commune' through their Villager Committees in mid-2014, for renting and reusing a disused rice warehouse. Adjacent to Ning Ou's own house & project office, the building had been a family hall called 'Qiyuan' before the PRC and was in badly condition.[19] Ning Ou accepted and bought it at a relatively low price in late 2014, proposing a space called 'School of Tillers' for contemporary agrarianism education. The brief was then in detail developed by Ning Ou for this 260-sqm-building to contain seven key programmatic units: a gallery, a learning centre, a curated library, a room for researcher-in- residence, a tea house, a café, and a shop.
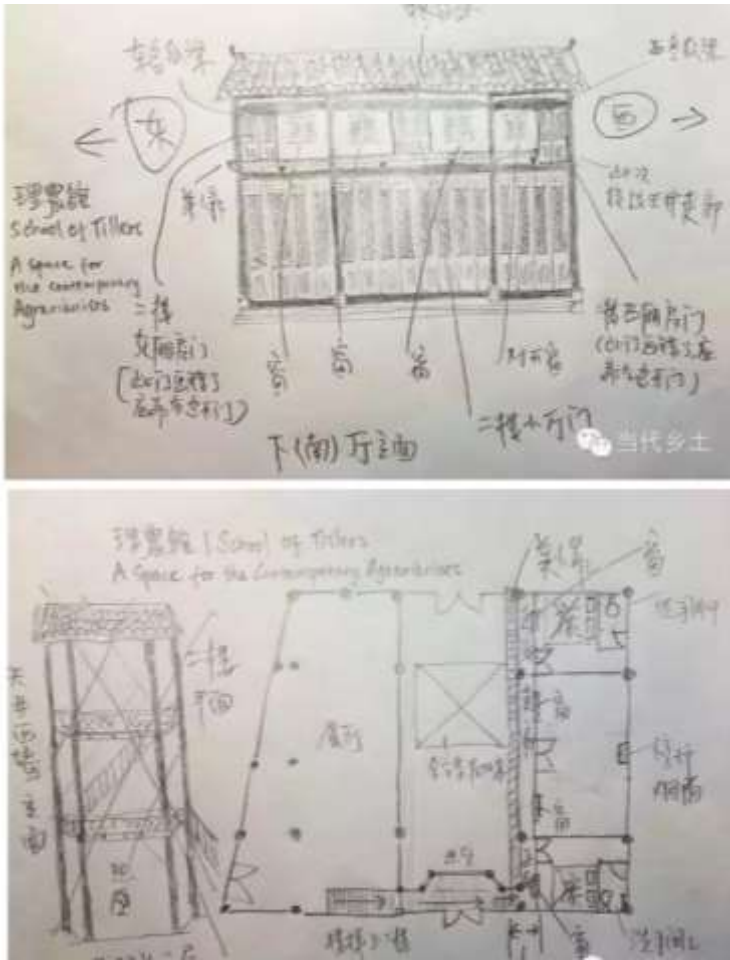
Fig. 7.21 Ning Ou's own sketch design to renovate the old hall into 'School of Tillers'. (Source: Bishan Commune)

Fig. 7.22 A digital plan drawing developed by Ning Ou's architectural assistant was found on construction site. March 2015 (Photograph by the author)

Construction Process:

There were two other associated programs in the whole Commune proposal, one was the collective farm producing organic food, established and run by a returned university graduate, and the other was the work-in-process 'Seedtank' with a vision for 'growing art anywhere'.[20] Besides those two almost non-physical interventions, the three realized spatial interventions of 'Bishan Commune', including the 'Buffalo Institute', the 'Bishan Bookstore' and the 'School of Tillers', were all produced in a relative closed way as artistic objects in terms of architectural design and construction. It was mostly Ning Ou who provided the initial concepts and sketch drawings which were further developed with the help of architectural friends and student assistants. They then hired a few local builders for the construction process. Though many discussions, disagreements and adjustments happened on the building sites, the tectonic creativity and spatial agency of those craftsmen were not fully stimulated as a result of detailed drawings being produced by a group of volunteer students as site architects.[21] There were very few neighbours and villagers involved into the constructing process, partly because of the relatively small scale of construction works, but also partly because of the less attention from the artist-practitioners on the very process of architectural making and remaking. Though most of the brickwork and timber frames of the three existing buildings were preserved in principle and reinforced gently, the lack of consistency in design coordination and site construction was clear from the key practitioners' side. The residential part of the 'Buffalo Institute' was white-washed in a modernist way along with the large glazing in both floors, in order to make a contrast to the project office part with a traditional presence, both visually and materially. The 'Bishan Bookstore' only introduced prefabricated bookshelves as a minimised intervention to the existing structure in exposed wood; while the 'School of Tillers' replaced most of the envelopes with new wooden screen-walls and balustrades but with generic patterns.

Fig. 7.23 The internal condition of existing building to be renovated as 'School of Tillers', Bishan village, November 2014. (Source: http://www.alternativearchive.com/ouning/article.asp?id=945)

Fig. 7.24 The external condition of existing building to be renovated as 'School of Tillers', Bishan village, November 2014. (Source: http://www.alternativearchive.com/ouning/article.asp?id=945)

Occupation Process:

Fig. 7.25-26 'Buffalo Institute', Ning Ou's own live-work space and project office of 'Bishan Commune', is located in the main street of Bishan village. Left: Its street façade with door closed, which was different from the village custom to leave the front door open during daytime. Right: Inner courtyard with a newly added external staircase to the semi-public lounge in upper floor, in white-wash and with large glazing. (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 7.27 A few visiting villagers passing by the gateway of 'Bishan Bookstore' with a new doorplate (Source: https://kknews.cc/culture/p4kqyz8.html)

Fig. 7.28-29 One of the abandoned ancestral halls in the village was chosen as the starting point of the Commune proposal. The old building was regenerated by introducing a new programme as a branch bookstore, owned by a friend of Ning Ou who established his avant-garde art bookstore chains all over the country. (Photograph by the author)

The 'Buffalo Institute' functioned well as both a work base and own live-study space, carefully arranged by Ning Ou and his assistants with modern elements of structure and furniture inserted into the old fabric of a traditional building. While another originally expected function as a pop-in project office for villagers' engagement was actually very limited, which could be seen from its closure of front door at most times.[22]

Initially the 'Bishan Bookstore' worked well, as it saved the ancestral hall from demolition and introduced a new civic learning space in an old building previously used for collective worship. Villagers came in and out who might not be reading but who wanted social contact. Other visitors were travellers who saw this bookstore as a travel destination and as a place to meet villagers, so it fulfilled its hope for cross-programming potential. However, questions of everyday participation were also raised by the modern bookstore behind the traditional mask of the ancestral hall: The store sold very expensive literary and art books, and called itself by its French name of 'Librairie Avant-Garde' (Fig. 7.27) as in the developed metropolis like Nanjing. Such cultural and economic thresholds excluded many locals, and catered for those of a higher socio-economic status who wished to be associated the shop's appealing aesthetic and narrative. Its main target group was not ordinary villagers who tended not to be well-educated, but middle-class visitors from large cities of that region such as Nanjing and Hangzhou.

Fig. 7.30 Villagers and visitors got together in front of the main entrance of Shisanmen Ancestral Hall before the opening ceremony of the first Bishan Harvest Festival in 2011. (Source: http://www.alternativearchive.com/ouning/feed.asp?q=comment&id=840)

Fig. 7.31 The entrance plaza of Shisanmen Ancestral Hall returned to its silence and was very rarely used for more than four years after the first Bishan Harvest Festival in 2011. (Photograph by the author, 2015)

Fig. 7.32 Ning Ou made an ambitious opening remarking for the festival hosted in the restored Shisanmen Ancestral Hall in 2011.
(Source: http://www.alternativearchive.com/ouning/feed.asp?q=comment&id=840)

Fig. 7.33-34 The ritual performance 'Bishan Havestival' took place in 2011 has been disused again from that three days festival till now. Left: (Source:
http://www.alternativearchive.com/ouning/feed.asp?q=comment&id=840) Right: (Photograph by the author, 2015)

The first and only festival of 'Bishan Harvestival' took place over three days in the reclaimed Shisanmen ancestral hall at the entrance of the village. It successfully reconnected civic life through a reinterpretation of this old but forgotten communal ritual space. The event comprised a series of exhibitions and public lectures on village history and contemporary collaborative reinventions on indigenous crafts of the village, an academic symposium on building conservation and rehabilitation, some local music performances, and a documentary film connected with a research book launch of the earlier foundation project 'Hundred Handicrafts in Yi County'.

Fig. 7.35-36 Another village meeting hall was used for hosting an exhibition in the daytime and a dancing class in the evenings. Well received by villagers. (Source: Bishan Commune)

Fig. 7.37 Many villagers including both old and young, male and female, pop into the meeting hall for an exhibition with old collections of village pictures.

(Source: http://www.alternativearchive.com/ouning/feed.asp?q=comment&id=840)

The practitioners of 'Bishan Commune' claimed that those diverse events and interventions were co-organised with villagers, combining efforts from both insiders and outsiders including artists, architects, musicians, film-makers and student volunteers.[23] But questions remained about how much participation there was from locals and to what extent they benefited from their engagement with those cultural and spatial interventions, including the then construction-in-process 'School of Tillers'.

In general, the lack of more daily interaction and consensus between the arts practitioners and local villagers has been evident in interviews made with several of the villagers, including some of the village leaders. Most of them recognised that the 'Bishan Commune' has made the village ''more famous than before'', however they also insisted that the whole proposal functioned in a way that they thought was quite remote from their wellbeing and everyday lives. Some also expressed a preference for ''tourism developed by commercial companies'', because it could improve their economic condition in a more direct way and probably in a much shorter timeframe. [24] In summary, to what extent the project connected with the real public interests of underprivileged villagers was an important question.

Fig. 7.38-39 The 'School of Tillers' was in the final process of interior decoration (Photograph by the author, 2015)

Conclusion and Discussion:

In dialogue with Chapter 5 with its focus on the 'Sun Commune', this chapter again seeks clarity about how 'Bishan Commune' as a communal form and collective practice could provide lessons and facilitate village revitalization against the current mainstream practice/practitioners of rural reconstruction in China. The intention is neither to criticize this emerging practice in Bishan village nor to be nostalgic about the old ways of the Commune, but rather to explore the possibilities and challenges of the hybrid buildings produced in this Chinese village by contemporary hybrid practitioners of the 'Commune'. 'Bishan Commune' started with idealistic visions for the specific social, cultural and site context. However, a hybrid of two approaches to 'Bishan Commune', with contrasting values is considered here; one is the commune imagined and presented by literati-like expert outsiders, and the other is the commune as expressed and lived by villagers themselves.

The practitioners of 'Bishan Commune' expected that those diverse cultural, collective events and interventions organized and happened in and around those adaptive-reused houses and halls could facilitate Bishan village into the prosperity, firstly culturally and then economically, before the arriving of mass tourism or swallowing up by urbanization. But it didn't work that much. As the case study showed, there were different degrees and approaches to social engagement in a series of spatial projects of 'Bishan Commune'. The initial social investment and enthusiasm was achieved though collaborative working and documentation of the craftsmanship and its representation festival, but following this early phase, the creative, participative interplay between the curator, artist and architect on the one hand, and long term villagers on the other, proved not to be sustainable at the initial levels of interaction and coproduction.

Although situated in Bishan Village, the 'Bishan Commune' seems to have remained an 'other', as it developed from a utopian cohousing experiment to a heterogeneous grafting of the urban onto the rural. The tactical error of this utopian proposal aiming for rural revitalisation, arguably, lay in the uneven development strategy which prioritised cultural production over the social production of community and architecture. The cultural revitalisation achieved by the 'Bishan Commune' for the village relied largely on curiosity and nostalgia on the part of the urban visitors and

their consumption of the place. The project has had positive local policy benefits, particularly with respect to building regeneration and heritage preservation, but this was based on local government intentions to increase tourism income by exploiting the personal aura of Ning Ou and the publicity generated by his radical intentions. The fact is that almost all the flows of people and material to this Commune depended on a linear track from urban to rural and it appears more successful in terms of cultural production for outsiders and less so in terms of social production for villagers. Ultimately the 'Bishan Commune' has not fulfilled its aim of tackling the fundamental question of how to empower the weakest from the bottom up along the chain of spatial and material allocation in this rural village, whilst retaining its own self-generated identity.

The 'Commune's dependence on cultural production did not focus enough on some of the socio economic issues underlying the village's physical appearance, and hasn't yet guided this old village onto a more participatory and resilient path. It was ambitious to start the project with the vision of a collective commune, but social division was still very evident, as mentioned above, between arts practitioners, as part of an urban elite, and indigenous villagers, as an underprivileged rural class, and between the aesthetic imagination of the privileged and the real life of the poor. If it couldn't engage local policies and strategies with a more explicit socio-spatial focus, then it could neither exert a more profound impact on local community empowerment and village development.

In general then, the 'Bishan Commune' has raised more questions than provided answers and for the past few years, and the hybrid practitioners of the 'Bishan Commune' have had as numerous arguments and misunderstandings as they faced the village's challenges. But it nevertheless represents an important milestone in understanding the challenge of intervening in rural contexts. It has stimulated hot debates and discussions, and has gained a lot of attention from wider audiences, which it is hoped will help to attract further funding, labour and material resource for the current or new projects. Furthermore, from an architectural point of view, it rejected demolition and instead tried to recycle buildings, reinvigorate local skills and knowledge and progressively transform their villages in inclusive ways. It is at this level that architectural mode of hybrid building might transfer its consequence and

play a role in developing a hybrid of physical and non-physical resilience in Chinese rural villages.

Notes and References of Chapter 7

[1] Traditional Hui Prefecture was an old regional definition with six counties under one prefecture, including southern part of current Anhui province and eastern part of Jiangxi province. Known as one of the three major regional cultures of China, Hui Culture got to its peak in Ming and Qing Dynasty in different social aspects, ranging from Hui merchant, family clan, Confucianism education, Fengshui, craftsmanship, to the architecture and village. Its village and architecture rendered in white walls and black tiles have always been considered by contemporary Chinese intellectuals as the lost spiritual homeland with an identity of Chinese-ness

[2] A group of merchants originated from traditional Hui Prefecture and well-known for their Confucianism-based business in external regions in Chinese history. Most of them left the hilly Hui Prefecture for business from young ages, leaving women and elderly in defensive houses and villages.

[3] From the author's half-day interview with Mr. Wang on 24 March 2015, a middle-aged Bishan villager who lives in his family house opposite to the once Qitai ancestral hall, now Bishan Bookstore as a pilot project of the proposal Bishan Commune.

[4] Interview by the author with Head of Bishan Village on 25 March 2015 in Bishan Village.

[5] Interview by the author with villagers of Bishan Village on 25 March 2015 in Bishan Village.

[6] Yunfan Sun, 'Note -- Three Year after Bishan Village Commune Proposal', *New York Times,* 15 Dec 2014.
<http://cn.nytstyle.com/travel/20141215/t15bishan/zh-hant/> [Accessed 11 January 2015]

[7] An Interview with Ning Ou by Mathias Kokholm, Rasmus Graff and Mai Corlin, during the exhibition 'Land and Art' (FORESPØRGSLER I JORD OG KUNST) in Denmark, August 22 to 14 September 2014.
<http://www.alternativearchive.com/ouning/feed.asp?q=comment&id=932>
[Accessed 5 May 2017]

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ning Ou, 'The Vision of Bishan-Commune', public blog
<http://site.douban.com/185552/> [Accessed 19 January 2015]

[11] From the author's half-day interview with Mr. Wang on 24 March 2015, a middle-aged Bishan villager who lives in his family house opposite to the once Qitai

ancestral hall, now Bishan Bookstore as a pilot project of the proposal Bishan Commune.

[12] In contemporary rural China, rural intellectual is a vague group of people, but it normally refers to those who gained an education higher than primary school.

[13] Ning Ou claimed that the government of Yi County firstly asked Ou and Zuo to organize the sixth International Photography Festival of Yi County in 2012, with a promise for a grant as large as £150,000. Ou and Zuo asked for using £50,000 of it for 'Bishan Commune''s harvest festival, only to receive a reply neither for nor against. Later, during the process of preparing both festivals, all funding was stopped by the government of Yi County under pressures from upper levels of authority. See more in <http://www.alternativearchive.com/ouning/feed.asp?q=comment&id=932> [Accessed 15 April 2017]

[14] <http://www.alternativearchive.com/ouning/feed.asp?q=comment&id=932> [Accessed 15 April 2017]

[15] Ibid.

[16] An Interview with Ning Ou by Mathias Kokholm, Rasmus Graff and Mai Corlin, during the exhibition 'Land and Art' (FORESPØRGSLER I JORD OG KUNST) in Denmark, 22 August to 14 September 2014. <http://www.alternativearchive.com/ouning/feed.asp?q=comment&id=932> [Accessed 5 May 2017]

[17] Ibid.

[18] Interview by the author with villagers living near the new bookstore on 27 March 2015 in Bishan Village.

[19] <http://www.alternativearchive.com/ouning/article.asp?id=945> [Accessed 20 October 2016]

[20] Ibid.

[21] Interviewed by the author with Site Feng, architectural assistant to Ning Ou, in Ning Ou's project office of 'Bishan Commune' on 27 March 2015 in Bishan Village.

[22] Interview by the author with villagers living near the 'Buffalo Institute' on 27 March 2015 in Bishan Village.

[23] Ning Ou, 'The Vision of Bishan-Commune', public blog <http://site.douban.com/185552/> [Accessed 19 January 2015]

[24] Interviewed by the author with the Head of Bishan Village on 25 March 2015 in Bishan Village.

Chapter 8

'Anji Eco-Lodges', Jianshan village, Zhejiang province

Fig. 8.1 Bird eye of the Eco-lodges at the edge of Jianshan village, Zhejiang province, 2017 (Photograph by Weizhong Ren)

Village:

Located at the northwest of Huzhou city of Zhejiang province, Anji county was once the base of Yue Vassal State in the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period (BC 770 - BC221), and has maintained a national reputation for its sufficient production on tea and bamboo under a subtropical climate. Less than 10 km to Anji county, Jianshan village at the northwest of Lingfeng Mountain is a hilly village with a crop-based enonomy -- fruits, white tea and vegetables as its three dominant produce.[1] The village covers an area of 6.9 square kilometres, which is made up of arable land, forests and dry land. With a population of 1660 in 503 families, the village has an annual income £2650 per head in 2015, showing that the overall economic condition's much better compared to those inner-land villages in previous chapters. It is worth noting that, the village won the official recognition as the 'Best Practice for Beautiful Chinese Villages' in 2008 owed to its well-sustained natural environment. But arguably, that title then triggered a round of exploitation through a series of tourism-led development ranging from a wetland park, a few organic agricultural farms, and even a golf ground which occupied almost all of the opposite side of the stream to the village.

Fig. 8.2 Diagram of regional relationship of Jianshan village and the project site   (Drawn by the author)

Red: project location; Yellow: provincial/city-level high-speed road; Dark grey: built-up areas; Blue: waterways; Green: forests; White: mountains.

Fig. 8.3 Jianshan village was constructed alongside this stream. The stream provided a good micro-climate with patches of wetlands and habitats. The Mount Jian can be seen in distance. (Photograph by the author)

Practitioner:

Weizhong Ren is an ordinary resident who originated from Jianshan village of rural Anji. He worked as a farmer and an employee of Anji Shipping Administration before. Weizhong Ren started to pay attention to climatic change in late 1980s, triggered by a newspaper article. For raising the public awareness of the pollution of water resource in Tai Lake, he firstly raised a hypothesis in 1996 that the Dragon King Mountain in Anji was the original source of the famous Shanghai Huangpu River, and he confirmed this based upon evidence collected from years of field investigations in the waterways of Tai Lake. Strikingly Ren's hypothesis finally achieved formal recognition and reconfirmation on its authenticity by the Anji local authorities and the Shanghai Institute of Geographers. In the following years he led and worked with villagers on another grass-roots, self-organised project on

communally planting trees and gave several public lectures on environmental protection in adjacent Tongli village, which finally gained the support from the government of Anji county, granting Ren a consultant role to guide Jianshan and Tongli village as a pilot project for further ecological development. Since then the local policy has been gradually refined, particularly regarding ecological aspects such as water resources protection. Owing to its governmental and communitarian effort in those early years, Anji county has now been one of the national-acclaimed model-counties for ecological preservation and sustainable development at village scale.

Weizhong Ren can be regarded as a contemporary version of the traditional Chinese gentry in a rural village. China has a long history of gentry in rural society, referring to an important group of local elites who had a highly social influence in the operation of local policies and mediating everyday conflicts within village communities. Normally they were either relatively well educated or had experience working in official authorities for local governance, therefore they gained a higher social-economic status, and their voices and opinions were appreciated by both the government and community. That's why they were often put into a middle-man role as the negotiator between two contrasting poles (state and society) with conflicting values. Though Weizhong Ren's background belongs to neither of the above, based on his high local reputation after the above-mentioned commitment into water development from 1990s, he matches that role and position as gentry. Weizhong Ren stated that, "the government noticed me after my working on the original source of Shanghai Huangpu River. Without this I could not realize my later eco-village dream."[2] Regarding himself as a lifetime volunteer for environmental protection, Weizhong Ren firstly put forward his idea of eco-architecture/eco-village in 2002, determined to make a truly ecological village not only in a physical sense but also in a mental one. Therefore, from the year 2005, he took out almost all of his savings to start his series of design-build – 'Anji Eco-lodges'. From then on he became a 'barefoot-architect', and gradually got to be known as an activist for rural preservation and construction.

Preparation and Fund-raising Process:

The site for Weizhong Ren's lodges under his eco-village dream from 2005 was around 1500 metres from the main vehicle entrance of Jianshan village. It was an L-shaped site adjacent to the main road and the protective waterway, directing from the northwest to the southeast. Located at the edge of village, the flat site surrounded by bamboo forests was a bit isolated from the central part of the village with its more hilly topography. Seen from an old map (Fig. 8.4), there were just a few scattered houses to the north and east, interlinked by dense lanes, while to the south it was wilderness. As a starting point, it is important to understand the reason from the perspective of land ownership why Weizhong Ren chose this piece of land as his testing site.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the key of CPC's policy of land ownership in Chinese rural villages has been that, no land except famers' own house land ('Zhai-ji-di') belongs to private individuals, but all belongs to the rural village as a 'collective'. The definition of 'collective' here is extremely ambiguous (defined and decided by the Villagers-Committee, and state-led local authorities such as supervising township government), but its scope is extremely clear. Generally the scope is: as for farming, every registered villager could 'have' a piece of land for family-based farming (an average of 1-1.5 acre, normally divided as no less than 5 plots) within that village boundary; as for living, a villager could also decide whether to continue living in his/her family house inherited from parenthood in most cases, or to make a new house within that construction land boundary. The term 'have' means that villagers could do everything according to their own wills except the transaction, since the land belongs to the rural village as a 'collective'. Furthermore, the right to 'have' (to use, to live, to plant…) has a limitation of 30 years, although that right is supposed to be continued automatically by the end of 30 years, it actually indicates the fact that the 'collective' force dominated by the state has the final say at that time in terms of the land property and land use in the future.

The fact that Weizhong Ren later planned and built his Eco-lodges on this virgin site without any previous built structure, indicates that the site was not his construction land inherited from his family. Therefore it was either legally or 'semi-illegally' transferred from his allocated agricultural land into construction land, or had been marked by the 'collective' as uncultivated wasteland[3] and was later contracted by

Weizhong Ren directly from relevant local authority. The above prediction is based on the fact that, the land law which opened up the strict barriers against transferring the right of land management had not been launched until 2008. Although not confirmed by Weizhong Ren due to the understandable confidential consideration, a reasonable explanation how he accessed the right to use this site before 2005 would be -- through a special way of rental practice and negotiating with power structures (Jianshan village committee or even higher level institutions in Anji county). Besides, the size of that site was much bigger than the average size of an individual residential plot in other parts of the village, which again confirms Weizhong Ren's gentry position and its associated special rental practice. Thus the beginning of the story shows how to secure the following project site, which is a highly specific case in terms of land use and ownership in rural China.

Fig. 8.4 The site (in red) plan in 2006 when Weizhong Ren's Eco-Lodges surrounded by natural landscape were just completed. It shows the original village layout with scattered houses and irregular street pattern before the new housing development was erected. (Drawn by the author)

Fig. 8.5 The Site (in dotted red line) in 2015 when the author did the fieldwork, showed that the site of the Eco-Lodges and a few adjacent houses were sandwiched by new developments of standard villas and a golf course. (Source: Google Earth 30/06/2015)

But that site condition changed dramatically. The author's fieldtrip to the site and village in 2015 (Fig. 8.5, 7) documented that tourism and modernity intervened as an inevitable result partly from that title 'Best Practice for Beautiful Chinese Villages'. The linear areas alongside the waterway, once surrounded by large areas of reed and bamboo which provided a collective place for washing, have now been developed into a commercial wetland park after several changes were made on land use by local authorities.[4] Far from the original settlements with built in fake rural characteristics to satisfy urban aesthetics, obviously it is a playground for attracting the urban tourists, rather than a public space for villagers. Ironically those expansive golf courses were scattered as artificial 'green islands' in the existing natural environment, with its central club designed in the exotic so-called 'European Style'. The rumour from the villagers also pointed out that a plot besides the wetland park had already been sold by the 'collective' to build a new 'urban elderly care home'.[5] Under the state-led masterplan 'Tourism Loop for Lingfeng Mountain', Jianshan village has been inconsiderably cut into pieces of tourism zone, scenery zone, resort zone, which put the original residential settlements sandwiched as a periphery. (Fig. 8.6)

Fig. 8.6 The two panorama pictures, extracted from the updated governmental website for attracting tourism, showed that Weizhong Ren's Eco-Lodges was nearly swallowed up by the new developments in uniform form of white buildings and red roofs. (Source: http://www.zjwclw.cn/programs/zdgl/layout/jbgk_list.jsp?id=165790&zdid=50853&ysid=2&lmid=1)

Fig. 8.7 Newly developed villas near Weizhong Ren's site of Eco-Lodges, some of which had been in occupation while the others were still in construction. A borrowed housing typology, neither from the exotic Europe nor from the wealthier Chinese cities, forms the public image from some villagers through architectural objects decorated in cheap industrially-manufactured materials. (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 8.8 The only gateway to Weizhong Ren's site of Eco-Lodges. One of the newly developed villa clusters was only divided by a small bunch of bamboo with Ren's lodge. It shows a Chinese-characteristic 'handshaking building' phenomenon. (Photograph by the author)

Regarding the funding, external financial support was impossible for Weizhong Ren at the beginning. Therefore self-funding was the only plausible source for the first Lodge No.1, and for the next Lodge No.2 and No.4. (Fig. 8.9) Almost all life savings were put into this project by Weizhong Ren, an estimate of £16000 which could be presumed from the final construction cost. For a project without a clear timeline or brief but with initial ambition for lasting years with a volume of several buildings, a progressive financing mode was the key for Weizhong Ren to the later realization of his works. Strategically, it was important to 'get something done' to demonstrate himself first and then to convince others included potential funders for this irregular model of 'architect as developer' in rural China. There was a gap between the Lodge No.1 (started in July and completed in November 2005, with a total cost of £8000-10000) and Lodge No.2 (started in June and completed in September 2006, with a total cost of £6000), during which Ren was supposed to work on the accumulation of funding as well as building confidence. Lodge No.3 was a turning point for Weizhong Ren's funding mode, as it was the first attempt for non-residential use in his series in terms of programming, and it was later confirmed by an interview with Ren.[6] While

the following smallest Lodge No.4 was on the lowest budget and with cheapest final cost, Lodge No.5 was demonstrated by Ren that this was fully based upon external funding again as it was a coproduction with a France-based Chinese architect.

As Ren's Eco-Lodges hadn't stopped at a point but also in a regular optimization and refurbished process, three more funding sources emerged when Ren's experimentation attracted more and more attention from both public and private sectors. They are: Firstly, through governmental financial aid programme; secondly, by participatory financing within the scope of traditional family clan; thirdly, more popular crowd-funding through internet which became popular in Anji around the year 2010.[7]

	Original Programme	Current Programme	Area	Structure	Material Source	Construction Time	Refurbishment times	Funding Source	Budget (per/m²)
Lodge No.1	Ren's family house; GF: multi-functional hall as 'Rural Self-help House Design-build Training Centre'; 1F: bedrooms	Ren's family house; GF: Ren's exhibition and welcoming hall; 1F: bedrooms; roof-top tea house	160m²	Mixed load-bearing structure of rammed-earth and wooden frame; pebble foundation; metal roof	Earth from nearby mountain and river shoal; wood from nearby rural factory; pebble from river	July to November 2005 (with two months pause)	> 3	Self-funded	approx. £10000; £62.5/ m²
Lodge No.2	'House for the People'; GF: exhibition; storage; 1F: Teahouse; Meeting; Learning and teaching	GF: storage; 1F: primary school temporarily, now disused	202m²	Recycled wooden frame; GF pebble with concrete wall, 1F mixed wall of earth with bamboo chips	Wooden components recycled from old buildings; Bamboo chips from rural factory; earth from river shoal	June to September 2006	1	Self-funded	approx. £6000; £29.7/ m²
Lodge No.3	'Village Happy House' (hostel)	Workplace for a company from County temporarily, now disused	267m²	Rammed-earth load-bearing wall; in-situ concrete foundation; wooden floor and roof plates	Earth from nearby mountain and river shoal	August to November 2006	0	Funded by Anji County government and German Embassy in Shanghai	approx. £8000; £29.9/ m²
Lodge No.4	'Supporting House'; UG: storage; GF: pub	UG: storage; GF: disused	75m²	Rammed-earth load-bearing wall; pre-cast concrete roof plate; wooden floor plate; Bamboo cladding and roof	Earth from site-specific; pre-cast concrete from nearby rural factory	April to May 2007	2	Self-funded	approx. £1500; £20.0/ m²
Lodge No.5	Private Club and Holiday House	private club and holiday house	> 200m²	Mixed load-bearing rammed-earth and wooden frame; pebble foundation;	Earth and pebble from nearby; wooden frame hall recycled half offsite	N/A	0	Funded by Private Sector	N/A

Fig. 8.9 Basic project data and comparison from Lodge No.1 to No.5. (Drawn by the author)

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Design-Build Process:

The lack of professional architectural training could not prevent Weizhong Ren developing a strong design position. He argued for the state-led development practice for 'Beautiful Chinese Villages', in which even the source of construction materials stays unknown (unfamiliar).[8] For him, those materials sourced from the site were the soul of a building that is in harmony with natural environment. Thus earth and clay became his primary material, and has been key elements in his design and buildings. (Fig. 8.9) In terms of the widely discussed low performance for indoor comfort in some vernacular materials, Ren also attempted to make an improvement through some creative recycling and reinvention on the construction techniques.

Fig. 8.10 External view of Lodge No.1 after refurbishment in 2015. (Photograph by the author)

Timber cladding and a light-weight roof structure were added onto the originally earth-clay building.

Lodge No.1

Ren's first attempt, Lodge No.1, is a house planned for his family living at the entrance of the triangular site. (Fig. 8.13) Oriented in a north-south direction, the house was situated as near as possible to the existing bamboo planting forests, which acted as the natural filter and barrier to the summer sun from the west and the winter wind from the north. Earth and wood formed both the concepts and materials for a breathable house, instead of bamboo which was more abundant on hands but with a shorter life span. As the 'user-architect', Ren vertically separated the private sleeping part and the semi-public living part through two floor levels, and followed the traditional 'two depths' in horizontal spatial organization learning from the local vernacular architecture. Spatially, what he articulated was the transition between the two depths, with a courtyard as both an anchoring point of arrival and an environmental mediator and adjuster. That arrangement is not unfamiliar for the Chinese ideal house mode but it is very rare to have the toilet and kitchen instead of the bedrooms on each side of the central courtyard. It was largely driven by Ren's focus on earth as both structure and material, because the toilet and kitchen need smaller openings as ground floor earthwork compared to other functions like bedrooms. This could also be demonstrated for his following structural considerations. Central to the design programme was a multi-functioned hall, (Fig. 8.14-5) which sits at the end of the north-south axis linked by spatial thresholds ranging from entrance doorway, space under the eave, water pond, wood bridge, space under the eave again, doorframe, to the screen wall in the main hall. The hall was used for the family's dining, meeting and socialising. Strikingly with the doorway tablet showing 'Rural Self-help House Design-build Training Centre', it not only provided a semi-public family space as well as opportunities for villagers to meet and share skills, but also showcased Ren's larger ambition to reinvent this Lodge No.1 as a new social core for the increasingly disconnected community of Jianshan village. He imagined his house as a part of village, a village-house hybrid.

Tectonically, he decided the first depth (kitchen, sky-well/courtyard, toilet), as the servicing part, to be built completely in rammed-earth as both load-bearing structure and enclosing walls; while the second depth as the serviced part, including the hall on the ground floor, and three bedrooms on the upper floor with more moving load, to be worked out in wooden load-bearing structural frame and rammed-earth wall for

enclosure. Clearly lacking confidence in building two depths all in earth pushed him towards a safer move of timber frame, which in turn also influenced the initial spatial arrangement. However, compared with the easily predicted span of a wooden frame, the size and shape of the earth wall for the first depth had to be defined through Ren's several mock-up tests on site, based on his experience of selecting/mixing different types of soil and the compaction of earth without advanced equipment. (Fig. 8.11-2) It was completely a learning-by-doing ethos from the very beginning. Understanding the property of the soil took Ren a long time for the early project stage, which would definitely take more time-consuming trial and error process if without his years of interest and basic skills developed in earth and clay construction.[9]

Fig. 8.11-12 Weizhong Ren on design-build site. He used a bamboo pole to beat the earth in order to make it sticky enough for the exterior wall of Eco-lodges. (Photograph provided by Weizhong Ren)
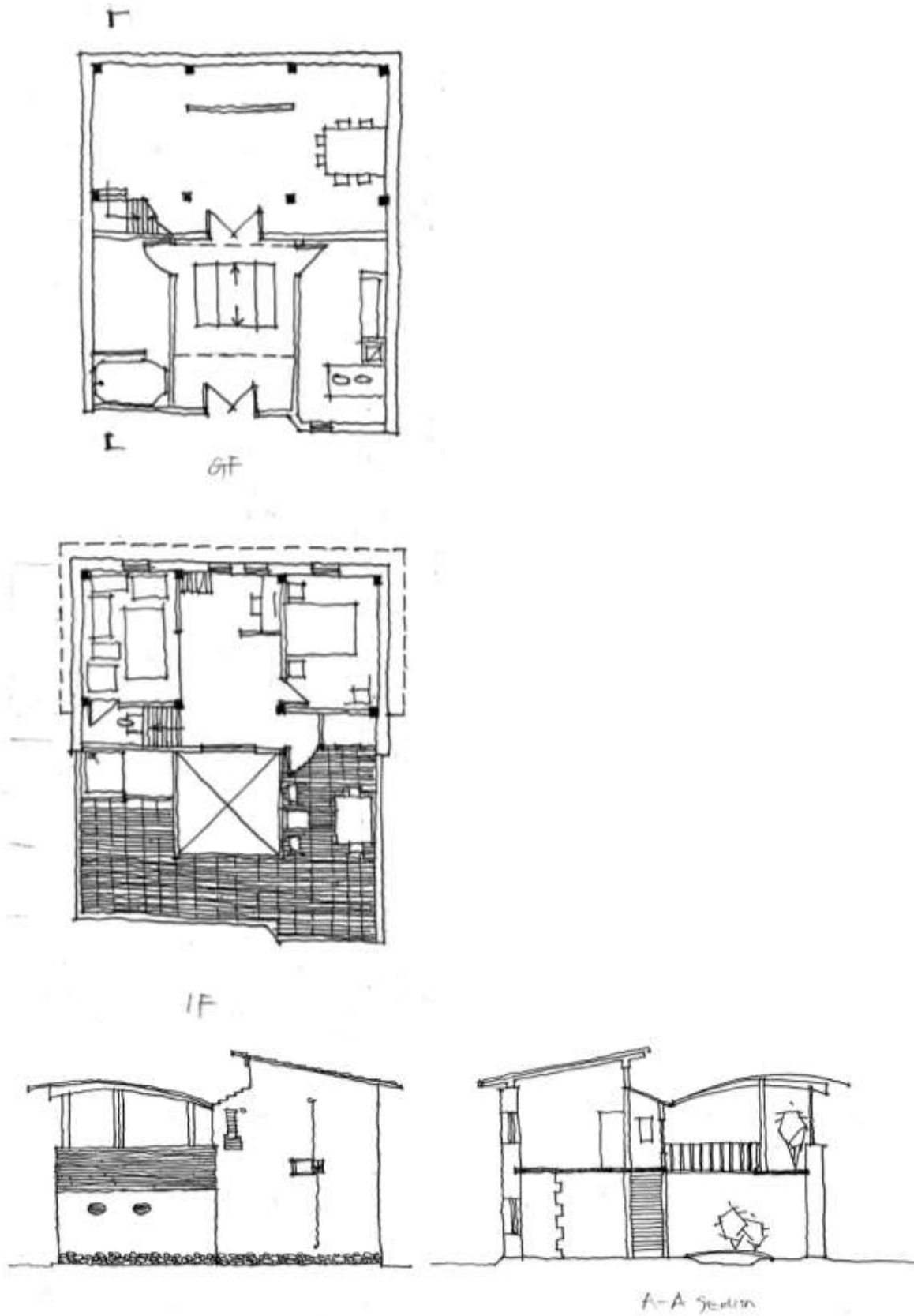
Fig. 8.13 Plans, east elevation and section of Lodge No.1 documented in 2015. (Drawn by the author)

Fig. 8.14-15 The rammed earth and timber structure worked side by side in the multi-functional hall at the ground floor of Lodge No.1. (left): a welcoming space with screen as exhibition wall, and a meeting/dining space; (right): the tablet on the wall showing its aspiration as 'Rural Self-help House Design-build Training Centre'. (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 8.16 Models from the barefoot-architect became a key medium to communicate and collaborate with local carpenters and masons. Top left: wall-enclosure model; Top right: wood structure model; bottom: 'final' model with roof articulations. (Photograph by Weizhong Ren)

When those above-mentioned strategies and practical limitations got clearer, Ren moved from site to indoor working on making physical models, from wall-enclosure model and wood structure model, towards a 'final' model with detailed roof articulations. (Fig. 8.16) In this way he gradually solved the key problem of lacking enough daylight and ventilation for an earth house through two steps: Firstly, he took a risk and managed to enlarge the sizes of openings in the north wall, in order to introduce natural light and cross-ventilation from the south-facing sky-well courtyard to the hall. Secondly, he designed a lively top-lit corridor on the upper floor to enhance daylight for both floors, through an open stair at the west end of the corridor and a small double-height space at the east end. In winter it became a linear warm house, while in summer the wooden plates could be closed to protect from the sun. (Fig. 8.17-20)
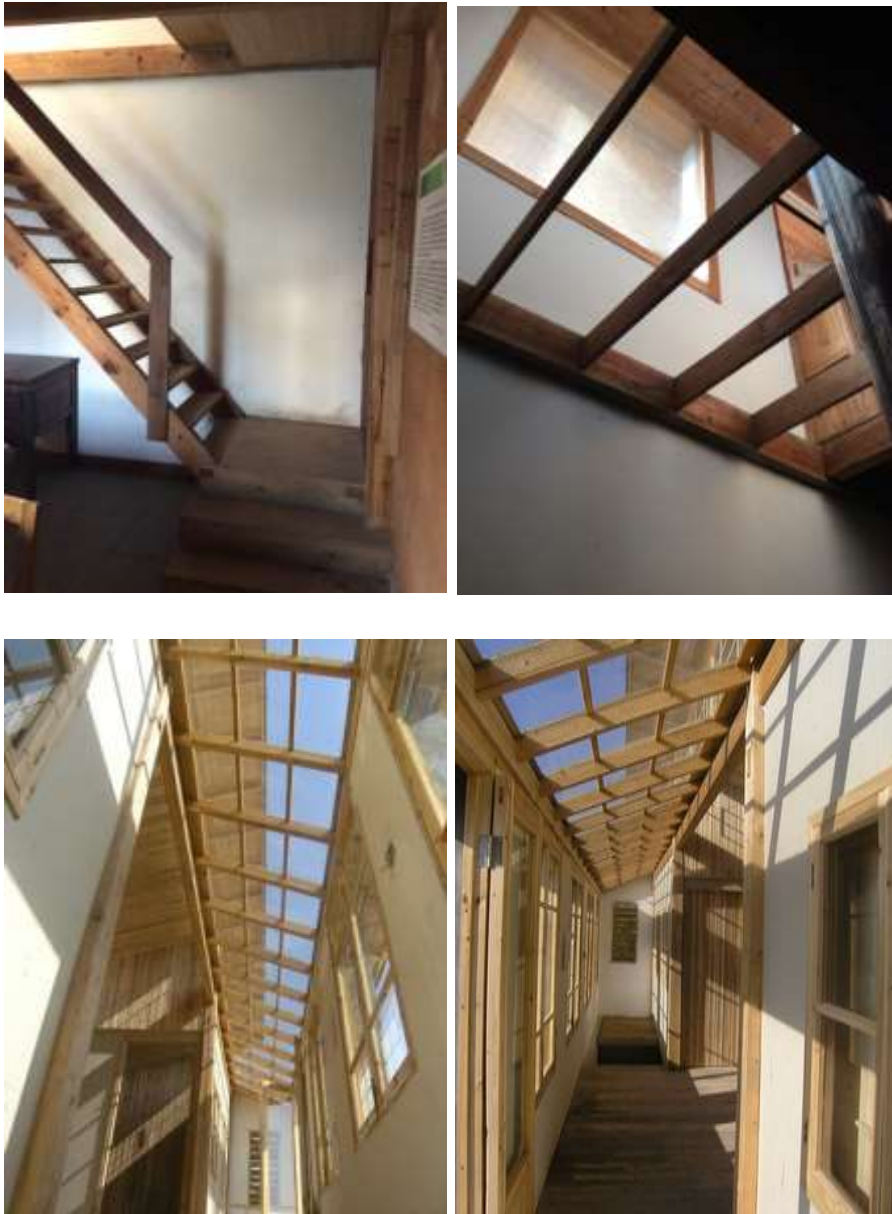
Fig. 8.17-20 Interior corridor and circulation of Lodge No.1. (Top left): open stair; (Top right): small double-height space; (Photograph by the author) (Bottom): top-lit corridor in upper floor. (Photograph by Weizhong Ren)

Fig. 8.21-22 Entrance courtyard/sky-well: a shadow water pool, a well beneath the wooden bridge, and space under the eave.
(left) in 2006 upon occupation; (Photograph by Weizhong Ren)
(right) in 2015 after nearly 10 year's occupation. (Photograph by the author)

After this stage Ren gathered and teamed up with two local carpenters, who were aged but experienced, working on the design development. With the consultation from the carpenters Ren optimised the way the wood structure supported the roof. Later a mason friend of Ren was involved in, working on the foundation using pebble sourced from nearby a waterway, and in the pavement of the sky-well courtyard using local masonry. (Fig. 8.11-2) Physical models became a key medium for Ren as a barefoot-architect to collaborate with craftsmen, as one carpenter half joked, 'I can't understand the drawings from professional design companies but I could make it from looking at Mr. Ren's models!'[10] For barefoot-architects, there was no real distinction between design and construction. They returned to work on site without any more models to finalize design elements, at the same time prepared for the delivery of wooden members and stone panels from offsite in local factories. Except that, all the construction materials were a part of site before the building. Thus what the team needed was to work with the given. Working on site through trial and errors, the team found the appropriate construction sequence to work out how the timber frame met the rammed-earth wall: after completing the wall for the ground floor, the wooden frame was erected and assembled. There were two advantages: First the frame could prevent the wall occurring offset when stacking the upper floor wall and

plate; second the frame could become a scaffolding for transporting materials to upper floor. The construction took around four months in total, even including two months' pause in the process due to the negative impact on the earth construction from the hot weather. The water pond under the entrance bridge helped the construction which were largely done during that summer, as Ren dug a well beneath with a budget of £300 which not only acted as a natural refrigerator for watermelons and beers, but also mediated a relatively comfortable micro-climate.

Fig. 8.23-25 Lodge No.1 upon first completion in 2006. Top left: entrance and main masked 'face' to the south; Top right: ground floor roof was taken as an outdoor space for drying clothes and storing agricultural products; bottom: side wall to the east in rough rendering, but giving the top-lit corridor a clear image as transition between two depths. (Photograph by Weizhong Ren)

As an 'user-architect', Weizhong Ren put much effort and care into the Lodge No.1, of which has undergone a never-finished design-build process (Fig. 8.10), including several self-regeneration with numerous small-scaled everyday transformations (such as the refurbishment of bathtub for the bathroom using more smooth clay).

The first refurbishment (Fig. 8.26-7) happened just several months later after the first completion, which transformed the glazing part of the top-lit corridor into a traditional

tiled roof cover, in order to keep the internal heat for winter. The second refurbishment (Fig. 8.28-9) added a curve roof in metal, supported by lightweight steel columns onto the bare ground floor roof plate, with front facade from the original white-washed wall and wooden lattice windows to a wall half covered by recycled timber panels and the other half to expose the load-bearing earth. The later leaking problem, due to the cold bridge of the connection joints between steel column and metal roof, caused a third round of repair with a focus on adding a ceiling using reed as well as a PV panel to cover the sky-well courtyard. Whether these transformations started from technically solving pastoral process from weathering, or expressing the structural integrity, or just a purely users' aesthetical view, the manifestation of this barefoot-architect was clear: The building is not a finite entity but evolves through time. The constant changes to the original buildings don't bother the barefoot architectural practice as there hasn't been an absolute design intention in the first place.

Fig. 8.26-27 Transition space with complex roof articulations between first depth and second depth, between ground floor and first floor. (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 8.28-29 The later-added metal roof supported by light-weight steel tubes, provided a semi-outdoor space for tea house and a bathroom. A PV panel and a wooden balustrade were also installed to protect the courtyard. (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 8.30-31 Open plan of the first floor of Lodge No.1 with timber cladding on the earth wall. Top-lit corridor was wrapped by wood plate but still allowed enough natural light from the side parts. An enclosed bedroom, a bedroom- lounge, and a study room with good view connection with the semi-outdoor roof-top tea house. (Photograph by the author)

Lodge No.2

Ren's second attempt, Lodge No.2, came half a year later. During this gap Ren had enough time and space for reflection and planning, as well as collecting initial feedbacks from the villagers, in most cases by inviting them to have a cup of tea at the newly-built Lodge No.1.[11] Misunderstandings and even suspicions from the other part of the village were still going on, but the ideal vision for a village-level collective space made in a more ecological way hadn't stopped in Ren's heart. Thus following the multi-functional event-space in Lodge No.1, a 'House of the people' dominated the programming of this second building. Shifting the orientation to face the entrance gate at the west of the site followed the programmatic consideration, which also enclosed a public square and enhanced the sense of frontality for his eco-village. (Fig. 8.32) Using an imported wood frame and large glazing roof in Lodge No.1was doubted, which triggered Ren's attention to reuse and renovate abandoned buildings. The actual design stage of Lodge No.2 was done in recycling wooden members and roof components from demolished halls and large houses in and around the village, instead of any design drawings or models. In this way the exposed interior wooden frame and a traditional double-eave roof system brought in a strange familiarity to the site-specificity. It showed that to some degrees, Ren strategically compromised to a more public-received programme in use over his originally-expected experimental ecological material quality on building object.

Fig. 8.32 Lodge No.2 in 2007, after the assembly of the main structure recycled from old buildings. A strong frontality borrowed from traditional typology of ancestral halls. (Photograph by Weizhong Ren)

Consciously or unconsciously, Ren as the project lead allowed more active participation from the craftsmen. For example, it was the mason who recommended using pebble for the wall of ground floor (Fig. 8.33), which replaced Ren's original idea of earth-wall. A limited ratio of concrete was for the first time introduced in Ren's ambitious scheme to mix with and support the pebble. It was not only partly because of the low-tech skill familiarly commanded by this local builder, but also partly because of the concerns for the acceptability in Jianshan villagers' general views that pebble as heavy units' construction similar to the masonry's was more dignified than the earth. But the wall-enclosure for the upper floor was still experimented in earth led by Ren, which was optimized into a mixture of bamboo chips and earth in order to be lighter-weight and to create better air buffer zone. It was a key improvement innovated by Ren for the construction techniques dealing with earth. Bamboo was the top sufficient resource for the region, a large quantity of residual bamboo chips (normally with a length of 10 - 20mm) were by-products of

manufacturing bamboo in rural factories. Recycling them to mix with the rammed earth worked well to form a breathable wall in which the earth units could speed up the moisture releasing.

The tectonics redefined the spatial arrangement (Fig. 8.34-5): flexible ground floor plan could be used for exhibition and storage taking advantages of the opaque walls; while the upper floor with exposed wooden trusses and beam-work allowing better daylight and view, provided an open space for learning and meeting, with tables and chairs made by the same carpenter. Finally, the design-build completed in less than four months, with less cost but larger internal space and better thermal comfort than Lodge No.1. Soon, the two buildings together brought Ren a rapidly growing regional fame.

Fig. 8.33 External view of Lodge No.2 in 2015. (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 8.34-35 Internal view of first floor in Lodge No.2 in 2015. (Photograph by the author)

Lodge No.3

Fig. 8.36-37 Facing south, Lodge No.3 sits at the north end of Ren's site, which allows for a curved footpath across the external landscape and a viewing point for its strong image made up by a neat rammed-earth elevation and a deep wooden eave. (left) (Photograph by Weizhong Ren)
(right) (Photograph by the author)

Unlike the first two self-funded buildings, Ren luckily achieved a full external funding to acknowledge and support his rammed-earth building experiment even before the starting of Lodge No.3, thanks to the strong recommendation by members from Village-Committee and County government.[12] Planned as a then popular 'Rural Happy House'[13] for profit-driven purposes at the north boundary of the site, this third building started even before the completion of Lodge No.2. Learning from around a year's occupancy in Lodge No.1 and the construction process for Lodge No.2, cracks nearby the opening and corners of the rammed-earth walls caused by the uneven sedimentation of foundation was identified by Ren and made a technical priority to tackle in the new third building. He selected a reinforced concrete foundation this time, somehow quite against his original position for a truly ecological construction, in order to contribute to a more ambitious construction in earth. Therefore, it could be seen that from now on, Ren's major interest shifted from demonstrating an ecological form of building, to demonstrating the larger potential of earth as an ecological material in architectural design-build. Height and size of the

opening in the wall were two aspects that Ren wanted to challenge here. He hired several professional builders in place of local craftsmen, updated the equipment, and probably received some references and technical guidance from the German Embassy at Shanghai.[14] Construction on site started from a rigorous geometric plan layout and volume, which was cut into four parallel pieces to accommodate six rooms, each associated with a toilet. Keeping this building within a simple geometry benefited a lot from reinforced concrete foundation, but also showed that Ren was not confident in constructing this five-metre-high building purely using rammed-earth to bear the load. A wooden staircase and wooden floor plate were continuing used as in the previous two projects, with emphasize on the wooden roof providing enough cantilever to protect from sun and rain to the earth-building skin.

Fig. 8.38 Side view of Lodge No.3 in 2007. (Photograph by Weizhong Ren)

Compared with the size of opening limited to 650mm in Lodge No.1, a striking size of 1100/2300mm in eight openings (Fig. 8.39) were achieved in both front and back walls under Ren's commitment. There were no openings in the east or west side walls (Fig. 8.38) in order to keep the overall structural stability, but at a sacrifice of a relatively dark entrance foyer (Fig. 8.40) and internal corridors. The inverse-curved roof was elevated after the establishment of the main rammed-earth walls, which turned

around the traditional logic of first building a roof for a wooden frame building. The main body of construction finished after four months.

Fig. 8.39-40 Post occupation of Lodge No.3 in 2015. (left) earth skin and window details. (right) entrance foyer and vertical circulation. (Photograph by the author)

Lodge No.4 (including the fifth lodge)

Weizhong Ren undoubtedly knew that not all the earth from the land could be buildable. After many hands-on experiments to search for a balanced and effective ratio, he developed two raw materials of earth for construction: one was the weathering soil from the adjacent Linfeng mountain slope; the other was the sand soil from the shoal of the adjacent waterway. And both need to be mixed with a particular quantity of lime.[15] Weizhong Ren had claimed that his perseverance in earth construction in the first two years (2005-06) was derived from his pure ecological ambition. Alongside applaud, however, he also received critiques from the outside, including those from local authorities for planning and environmental protection. The main opposing viewpoint was that, using too much off-site earth for building would disturb environmental ecology, additionally, neither the material of the earth as a limited recourse nor its associated skills from Ren's lodges could be transferred elsewhere for a sustainable development.[16]

Therefore, Lodge No.4 started as a response to those opposing opinions, by working with the on-site earth of the chosen building site – a piece of empty land with an area of 75 m^2 in between Lodge No.2 and No.3. The ratio of external earth was strictly limited except some compulsory ingredients, as most of the earth were accessed directly from the ground. An idea to make a semi-underground storage room for food and wine arose on site – again, the architectural design programming was driven by a 'design by making' mode from this barefoot-architect. Subsequent ideas included developing a ground floor space (length 11m, depth 6.6m) for temporary eating and drinking. Two elderly men volunteered to participate in the earth-wall construction, as well as a pebble foundation, of which largely followed the same compaction procedure in Lodge No.1. Weizhong Ren undertook most of the work on wooden floor and stair. The proposal of how to build a roof was discussed, without a consensus, though, by the team after the completion of major work by earth. It facilitated Weizhong Ren and two other team members to publicize this question to other elderly villagers of Jianshan village. Warm responses received by them led to a shared concept and collaborative decision for a 'green' roof. However, neither the earth nor the timber which had been successfully in previous three buildings could sustain the roof load of that concept. Therefore a ready-made, pre-cast concrete plate from a rural factory in the county was approached and hanged on by a crane.

But the further lacking of technical and maintenance knowledge caused a failure to realize the green roof. What was worse, the local rain season arrived, which challenged the newly-built rammed-earth walls with cracks in both front and back sides. Until then the design-build process took less than a month, so the time was on Ren's side which allowed them quickly turning to the bamboo. Locally-abundant, site-specific and easily-articulated, each bamboo cost as little as 10 pence. Ren then erected a bamboo canopy, with the paid support by a local bamboo craftsman. The hollow-inside bamboo canopy acted as a double roof to protect the rainwater from the earth-building. (Fig. 8.41,42) The rest of bamboo were cut into pieces of strips, vertically cladded on the wall as a double skin, which marked an end for the Lodge No.4.

Fig. 8.41 The first refurbishment of Lodge No.4 in 2007 introduced a bamboo canopy and claddings onto the rammed-earth free-standing walls and the pre-cast concrete roof. (Photograph by Weizhong Ren)

Fig. 8.42 External view of Lodge No.4 in 2015. (Photograph by the author)

The fifth lodge (Fig. 8.43) is not within the scope of Weizhong Ren's Eco-Lodges, as this project was initiated and developed by the County government in his site to take advantage of its growing fame. Fully funded from an anonymous external developer, it was planned as a private club and holiday house. The project was a distant collaboration between Weizhong Ren and a Chinese architect who currently practised in France employed by the developer. The architect provided the design, with basic plans and elevations drawings, and Ren acted as a project manager to build it. Located next to the Lodge No.2 at the southeast end of Ren's site, this fifth lodge had a blended approach to mix selected design languages from Ren's previous four lodges, ranging from pebble foundation, rammed-earth wall with large openings, exposed recycled wooden components, to top-lit sheltered corridor. Through this skilful-articulated way of design from an external architect, this fifth lodge fulfilled its expectation that not to make a contrast to Ren's existing eco-village, but indeed it broke away from Ren's key position 'House for the people' at the innermost of his ecological buildings. Therefore the fifth lodge was a 'fake' product of a barefoot-architect, although it received construction support from Weizhong Ren who even didn't want to speak of it more.

Fig. 8.43 External view of the fifth lodge in 2015. (Photograph by the author)

Occupation Process:

Lodge No.1 is a hybrid building both in terms of use and in terms of meaning – a private house for Ren's growing family and a 'House of the people'.[17] His 'Rural Self-help House Design-build Training Centre', based in the multi-functional hall of ground floor, had a quite positive start according to a formal interview with Ren, 'with a training/meeting attendance no less than 90% villagers in his inviting guests' list.' While it is unclear to what degree in that case, in terms of voluntary nature of participation, that the communal rules/spirits/networks pushed the villagers to accept the invitation by a local elite/gentry to gather in his house, but the 'Rural Self-help House Design-build Training Centre' could not sustain its functioning as a 'House for the people' after a couple of sessions due to lower and lower participation from villagers. It attracted more visitors from the outside than the insiders from Jianshan village. In particular, quite frequent visits from local and higher-level politicians were paid, on his ecological/sustainable building exploration. (Fig. 8.44) Among them included the Deputy Head of Province and the mayor accompanied by local village leaders and supervising county leaders. That somehow made the multi-functional floor into a permanent exhibition hall to showcase Ren's profile to the visiting leaders,

and a dining hall for welcoming important visitors, instead of a village public core socially constructed for learning and sharing.

Fig. 8.44 Photos taken during the visits to Ren's eco-village and Lodge No.1 by provincial, city, county, town level leaders and politicians accompanied by village leaders, from 2007 to 2013. (Photograph provided by Weizhong Ren)

Though different problems emerged in different periods which facilitated those continuous refurbishments, Ren's family quite enjoyed living in and making transformations by their own hands, through which they built a special relationship with the building which transcended the thin concept of 'user inhabitation'. Never mind the much more visitors challenging the privacy for a normal house, Ren and his wife expressed an interest in a kind of seasonal nomadic lifestyle – staying in the warm Lodge No.1 to take advantage of its good thermal comfort in winter and temporarily moving to Lodge No.2 to embrace its cool indoor environment in summer. Their son, Yuanxing Ren, was born three years after the completion of Lodge No.1. Eco-Lodges series, in particular Lodge No.1 and No.2, became not only a home but also a school for him. It corresponded what French social-anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu pointed, the house is like 'a book which children learn their vision of the world is read from the body'.[18] He met design professionals and university students,

he played inside and outside the buildings, he worked with mud and earth a lot, he learnt his place by making and imagining. In an interview Weizhong Ren was proud to remind what one of his visitors had told him, that the buildings of Eco-Lodges were not his products; his real product was his son (who grew up well in this non-regulational built environment).[19]

Lodge No.2 was aiming to be a public building. Close friends of Ren enjoyed it as a tea house to spend some evenings after work, but it finally proved to be in very rare use as a village hall for learning and meeting, even though Ren prepared a projector for the upper floor. It was used for a primary school for a period of time, which was promising in terms of sustaining the programmatic lineage of ancestral hall building type,[20] but couldn't last long, either. Ambiguous ownership from the very beginning of Ren's site occupation caused endless difficulties for later self-management of the public programmes.

For the external-funded Lodge No.3, the relatively stable but low rental practice for Lodge No.3 as a 'Rural Happy House' made it possible but still difficult for its maintenance in the first few years, shortly then a temporary contract was offered for renting as a workplace from a young company doing sports tourism development in Anji county. Their staffs made daily commute from the county to Jianshan village, and used six rooms as five offices and a meeting room for the next three years, whose 9-5pm 'modern' working pattern didn't bring in any meaningful social agendas to this traditional village. After them, a creative artist studio and a summer school educational base for a School of Art, both from nearby cities, showed interests to move in, and made negotiations with Ren and related stakeholders from local authorities, but neither of them has achieved a final consensus yet. That was partly because, without the recommendation from local authorities including the village-committee and county government, Ren could not have received the competitive external funding for Lodge No.3.[21]

As for the least ambitious Lodge No.4, it has still been used as storage in its semi-underground part, however with no more social activities as planned in the ground floor except a small opening ceremony attended by some enthusiastic elderly villagers. More positively, the outdoor space between Lodge No.1,3 and 4 has been developed into a generous communal garden (Fig. 8.45, 47), with considerable

production of fresh vegetables that made Ren and some of his friends' family almost self-sufficient.

Fig. 8.45 Ren's wife was working in communal garden with Lodge No.3 at the back and Lodge No.4 to the right in 2015. (Photograph by the author)

'This building looks too humble and out-of-date, I wondered if it would collapse as it was made by earth…'; 'I doubted the comfort living in this kind of house, the earth material reminded me of the bitter life in the past…' 'I like his idea and skill, those buildings look better than old settlement building in wood and brick… but I won't live in buildings like his, I will chose those modern style similar to the ones in the city. My children will definitely prefer the latter to be inherited from me…'[22] Interviews with a number of villagers partly presented the harsh reality and the practicality. In sum, even with an average size of 200m^2 and a competitively lower budget compared with normal building practice in Jianshan village, and a less negative environmental impact through the use of earth and wood from well-equipped ecological viewpoints, Ren's Eco-lodges' sample and his ecological building mode to facilitate the village revitalization still struggled to impact and influence more within the Jianshan village.

Apart from the limited regular or irregular social use from inside the village, some of which involved commercial rental practice, the four Eco-Lodges making up Ren's mini-village did receive diverse temporary uses by a considerable number of informal visitors, ranging from local building practitioners, to student groups to tourists from all over the province. Ren was always happy and proud to show them around, presented the gains and loss throughout his experiment to the enthusiastic strangers,

and exchanged different opinions and ideas. A latest example was a one-week-long earth construction workshop held in late 2016, co-led and marketed by a young teaching practice called Cooperative Studio (based in Hangzhou, who has just established a strategic partnership with Ren). It successfully attracted and gathered more than a dozen of paid participants from outside the village, most of them younger students, but amazingly there were also two barefoot-architects from the Tibetan zone in remote Qinghai province which owns abundant earth resource and has a historical tradition in earth construction. In this way Weizhong Ren has been working on building up a network/community not only to transfer and exchange his ideas and skills on earth construction but also for his barefoot-architectural dream.

Fig. 8.46 Discussion and working till night at Lodge No.2 in an earth-focused construction workshop co-organized by Weizhong Ren in late 2016. (Photograph by Weizhong Ren)

Besides the above, his dream hasn't been fully realized; the site is still Ren's ongoing testbed, a 'laboratory' for him to try and test different ratios of ingredients to optimize both the process and product of rammed earth construction. The contact with Ren shows that after the development in the whole year of 2016 including the completion of rental contract of the Lodge No.3 from the previous company, his ambition drives him to plan for a complete refurbishment in 2017.[23] It cannot be estimated that how many more buildings Ren will try and how far he and his eco-lodges' dream will go, however, a new role model of barefoot-architect has been set up by Ren, and will hopefully be disseminated and continued by more others. A few

once visited Master of Architecture students have been inspired to practise self-build rural house, after their professional training which normally leads towards a career practising in cities.[24]

Fig. 8.47 Weizhong Ren was thinking and working in front of Lodge No.2 and Lodge No.4 with red lanterns on in 2008. (Photograph provided by Weizhong Ren)

Conclusion and Discussion:

Place -- Working with the given

As quoted from Peter Blundell Jones that, ''if a place is constituted by a relation between the landscape (including the built additions) and the inhabitants, then every act of architecture is not so much an act of raw creation or personal will, as the modification of an existing place.''[25] The site Weizhong Ren accessed, whatever the special form he used in his own way, was a wasteland which was even not clearly categorized into the ambiguous 'collective' from the authority. So the site-specificity was a 'nowhere place' to a wider context if placing Jianshan into the millions of Chinese rural villages. It did have a specific context at the neighbourhood scale, but that has also been changed drastically under outer capital forces before, during and after Ren's projects.

A clear contrast to the nearby top-down residential development which put users in uniform space, Weizhong Ren's eco-village started and developed with the absence of an overall masterplan, towards a more progressive, time-based, and question-driven approach. Without a written brief, which tends to be too thin in current professional architectural practice in rural China, Weizhong Ren adapted the basic programme of local vernacular houses and ancestral halls, but gave it new spatial meanings through innovatively reclaiming locally-sourced raw materials such as earth. Designing and budgeting were phased, not in the contemporary professional meaning of phasing under strategic planning, but in a resilient mode of interacting with uncertainties and contingencies.

Therefore, on one hand, Weizhong Ren's buildings are not driven by norms and regulations, neither the specific fire-fighting codes to make full use of the fact that the planning-approval procedure is skipped in rural China, nor the broadest notions of norms and frameworks imposed by man-made forces, for example, what a building looks like or symbolizes – an increasingly struggling problem for almost every village in current rural China. Thus here the appearance was not judged as a priority, which facilitated a more layered and much messy-engaged model.

On the other hand, it was a minor type of 'oral architecture' built from below, which resiliently confronted the drawing-based, visual-dominated architectural production process since Alberti.[26] That has contained a potential to produce an even more rebellious model with the very specific practice by those architectural practitioners who have not been recognized or categorized yet, for example here Weizhong Ren as a barefoot-architect. Design and construction overlapped and even ran in parallel on site, through getting down to earth, getting hands dirty, and getting something done by learning by doing; all were communicated through oral instructions and body movements, through an aesthetically challenging but socially received gesture of 'planting' in Ren's 'Notes on Planting Buildings'. [27]

In essence, Weizhong Ren's architectural intervention reflected the very specific condition to the place: the given. Working with the given from money to material, from sun to skill. Taking the site as a studio workshop, he employed a time-based processing of the given resource.

But perhaps because of that, it might be too specific to be transferred elsewhere. Instead of referring Ren to adhere to the site-specific, his works should be regarded as in a constant process of constructing the site-specific, just as he stated in his 'Notes on Planting Buildings' that "his buildings had been, and will destiny be, part of the site". [28] Therefore, here, the order of time nurtured from this barefoot-architect has outweighed the order of space imposed by most professional-trained architects. It was the time that Weizhong Ren deeply invested into and for, not only his ecological lodges, but also for his vision of an eco-village, a post-urban human habitat. Ren's post-urban position had decided that his eco-village and eco-lodges series, 'planted' from the everyday, were and would never be a repetitive form.

Construction -- A right to build and assemblage

As for barefoot-architects, a building is not only a verb nor merely a noun; Ren's term 'plant/planting' should be more of an adjective in his special case. The nature of the barefoot architect illustrated a mode of building that is not completely against, sometimes strategically reconciliation with the mainstream (urbanization here), but

finally and at least provides a radically resisting alternative. It was a building mode not only built for people but also built for land, got from land and returned to the land. Key innovation on earth as a material of land-form was made through tirelessly exploiting the structural possibilities and material properties, as well as its optimised process and performance working with other available materials. By embracing the long tradition of self-build and collaborative design and collective assembly, associated with the exposure of natural, cheap, anti-industrial materials such as earth, Ren clearly expressed his ambition of a social model in the right to build rather than simply a cultural model for the rural reconstruction.

Through uncommon understandings of specific but evolving requirements of a place, not only with eyes but all of the senses, the hands-on, design-build process in this 'barefoot architectural project' constantly multi-layered exchanged and cross-referenced between those who design and those who build. In this sense the works of this barefoot-architect became an assemblage; it was a state of being in the making. The non-stop, micro-scaled transformations also indicated that the design-build was not a finite entity but has evolved through time. "After completing the construction and moved in, more understandings emerged from daily uses. In this way some good construction points and something badly done are identified, so the next extension became an inevitable. That also needs the willing and skill of repair, which has been so largely lost in the contemporary model."[29]

Therefore from the perspective of construction to its broadest notions, Ren's Eco-Lodges are hybrid building and his 'barefoot architectural practice' is a hybrid mode of practice. As a hybrid practitioner intermeshing the blended roles of architect-developer/user-architect/architect-builder, Ren highlighted craftsmen's individuality while bringing the difference together in a fragmented but coherent scheme, expressed the right to design-build, the spontaneity in design-build and the harvest from the design-build, in order to pave a solid foundation for resisting the top-down construction forces putting workmanship in uniform and periphery from another angle.

Society -- Modus Operandi

Since its opening in 2006, the growing Eco-Lodges have drawn many crowds, from mass media to the state authorities, from individual practitioners to groups of students. However whether it fulfilled the social ambition as it was motivated to break down professional boundaries remains an unanswered question. That could be largely demonstrated by the fact about the polarization in feedbacks which have been half positive mostly from the outside; while half negative, mostly from inside the Jianshan and adjacent villages. So far there hasn't been a house in Jianshan or adjacent villages that has been learning from Ren's idea or ideology, except using some of his earth-made interior products. As showed in the beginning of this chapter, villagers still appreciate and trust more those developer-led residential products using the standard of which is learnt from the city. The long history of taking a house as someone's own face hasn't and cannot be changed in the short term: a building project is still a 'face project' in rural China. It is because of that fundamental change in Chinese rural relationship between people and earth/land during the past 30 years' rapid urban development that Weizhong Ren's illusion on rural villagers' active participation in his eco-dream could not overcome the prejudices from the villagers as participants, who so heavily depended on and being forced to be glued to the earth for generations and generations.

Weizhong Ren did succeed in demonstrating and fostering a gradual but significant process of local and even trans-local way of sustainable development through ecological architecture, but the limited scope of social impact from the within, in contrast to the rapidly growing social impact from the outside, indicated that the boundaries between Ren's self-build and socially-engaged design-build were still fluid and porous when situated within a broader rural-urban dynamics in current urbanizing China.

On one hand, getting involved into the real making of the house and its built environment created a strong sense of belonging for Weizhong Ren and his family and craftsman-friends, however the overlooked relations between building process and building rituals, in particular those vanishing cooperative rituals after the Commune period, did partly explain the disappointing social outcomes of Ren's works at a village scale.

On the other hand, Weizhong Ren did readdress the political basis of institutions in doing so. Through interacting with local and even higher-level authority politicians on the topics including sustainable development, self-build, self-help ecological mode for housing, etc., which is really rare and precious in Chinese mega-political structure, Ren as an ordinary villager did make policy-makers aware of the importance, and sketched out a bottom-up approach for a move to sustainable architectural development without losing goals for economic growth. In this sense Ren's concept has the reason to succeed when scaling up from a village neighbourhood to a town or even county scale for rural revitalization. But a truly engaged and effective design modus operandi cannot be built without the depth on the shaped order for everyday activities and collective beliefs behind of its community members.

Weizhong Ren's eco-village and 'house of the people' can hardly be regarded as a community participation project but it did produce and reproduce community. It tried hard to reconnect Jianshan village community, though architecturally imagining to be a village hall or providing public programmes 'house of the people', but failed socially to a large degree during occupation. While simultaneously through the same process it started to reproduce a broader community, a community geographically not tied, but architecturally and emotionally bounded. At a much broader scale beyond Jianshan village, it reunited a loose but potential cooperative, a virtual networking community for rural cooperative-build, or a core group force in search for a neo-vernacular in contemporary moments.

From Archipelago to Infrastructure

Yet not all the ecological-driven building and village developments were the product of direct participation and self-management from those grassroot cooperatives and networks. To some extent, Ren's socially ambitious Eco-village fell into architectural manifestations of those state-led labels/ambitions such as 'Eco-development' or 'Eco-tourism', which could be demonstrated from those frequent visits by state authorities and policy makers. This limitation could be revealed from his very own

status and role as a contemporary version of traditional rural gentry. In current rural China, strong governmental intervention into land is still likely to cause arguments and conflicts from original residents and local community. Thus the inputs from rural-gentry-like people in this Chapter acting as social glue and mediator between the modern state and clan-rooted society in China are still highly needed. But not all those people build for themselves, for example those in informal settlements at the edge of rural-urban interface could not be regarded as barefoot-architects; nor could very rarely villagers living on agricultural production play a gentry role as Weizhong Ren did in Jishan village. Therefore it is not difficult to understand why Weizhong Ren's Eco-village has been in an isolated state of 'archipelago', both physically and mentally.

But that doesn't mean that a barefoot architect can hardly survive in the current climate of regulation and institutional order. Not similar to the vernacular craftsmen who have built Chinese architecture from below and in anonymity, a barefoot-architect has to be tactical enough in order to navigate that complex system driven by political, social, economic and cultural forces. Weizhong Ren started as a radically resisting alternative, but seemed to be ending with an alterity – an 'Other' within the mainstream. Rather than looking at Ren doing ecological architecture, it is more meaningful to understand what he was doing for the infrastructure of engagement and participation through his ecological architecture as a medium. But could this infrastructure be designed by this barefoot architect whose ways cannot confront the growing neighbourhood inequality and class conflict in clan-collapsing rural China?

Through the search and practice for an ecological mode of architecture, Ren contrasted narratives with his own background and responded to living in the rural village, questioning the relationship between the rural individual and larger rural-urban dynamics that are manifesting themselves in the changing landscapes of relatively known rural village like Jianshan. Ren successfully showed how a grassroot-level, bottom-up strategy of DIY architectural design could operate in practice. Followed by a more pressing question -- but how architectural design and alternative practice could facilitate an infrastructure to drive and empower those countless untouched corners of urbanism?

In search for the essence of architecture, Peter Blundell Jones put forward a renewed version of Three Elements of Architecture -- 'Place', 'Construction' and 'Society'[30], in confrontation of Vitruvius's 'Firmness', 'Commodity' and 'Delight'. The untrustiness and critiques which limited Ren's impact and dissemination in Jianshan and other rural villages so far, were mostly from the aspects of 'Firmness', 'Commodity' and 'Delight'. The argument here for Weizhong Ren is that the above-mentioned kind of barefoot architecture might not immediately socially transform the given condition expected by its ambition and responsibility, but could facilitate the construction of an infrastructure for wider empowerment for a truly rural revitalization.

In a future plan hanging on the screen wall of the multi-functional hall in Lodge No.1, Weizhong Ren drafted and wrote down the following: ''to make a public engagement for the design-build a 'house of the people' in each village; to build an ecological community addressing the locality within two years; to establish twenty rural studios throughout China within three years; to coordinate and help NGOs from each city to design-build twenty buildings as role models … '' With time goes on Ren thought it had to be endlessly postponed, but it could be done if Ren both strategically and tactically penetrates the barriers and establishes the interconnections between 'Place', 'Construction' and 'Society', through a more participative and collaborative way of producing architecture and 'space of activities'.

Compared to those creative expert-outsiders in previous chapters, Weizhong Ren is not only an insider, but also the local elite who has built up a capacity to influence the society in more diverse forms and at a wider scale. However as to those creative outsiders bringing in high cultural forms of architecture, Weizhong Ren's low case production still could not demonstrate the catalyst role of hybrid architectural design interventions in facilitating rural villages' revitalization and reconstruction. Admittedly its relatively weak process of social production led to its practitioner's social impact, producing an image of a heroic architectural action lacking recognition of local concerns. But its source is still deeply rooted in those locally-embedded, small-scaled peasant economies with high dependence to the geo-power in the restless urbanization.

Postscript

This is what the author strived to do in collaboration with Weizhong Ren in the next Chapter. Learning from and making a first response to the previous fieldwork and case studies, in Chapter 9 the author will shift the research to a more situated, practice-based action learning.

Notes and References of Chapter 8

[1] Data retrieved from official website of Jianshan village. <http://www.zjwclw.cn/programs/zdgl/layout/jbgk_list.jsp?id=165790&zdid=50853&ysid=2&lmid=1> [Accessed 4 June 2015]

[2] Interview with Weizhong Ren by the author on 7 April 2015 in Jianshan village, China.

[3] For the definition of wasteland: there are four types of wasteland, all of which belong to the rural collective economic organization: barren mountain, barren ditch, waste sand, waste river. The third item of 'Management and Development of Four types of Waste Resources in Rural China', published by Ministry of Water Resource 5 December 1998

[4] Interview with villagers by the author on 10 April 2015 in Jianshan village, China.

[5] Interview with villagers by the author on 9 April 2015 in Jianshan village, China.

[6] Interview with Weizhong Ren by the author on 15 April 2015 in Jianshan village, China.

[7] Interview with Weizhong Ren by the author on 7 April 2015 in Jianshan village, China.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Interview with Weizhong Ren by the author on 8 April 2015 in Jianshan village, China.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Interview with Weizhong Ren by the author on 9 April 2015 in Jianshan village, China.

[13] 'Rural Happy House' is a type of rural hostel emerging from the late 1990s in rural China, particularly at those peri-urban villages firstly touched by urbanization. Normally the villagers renovated the main hall in the ground floor or the courtyard of their house into a dining hall and leisure room which open to the urban visitors. It was received as a new form of economic practice for Chinese rural villagers at the beginning, both in terms of local government and in terms of local market. However, as it was self-organized by the villagers without ordering agreements and the competitions between villagers and even villages got intense to pitch the profitable

market, the local government gradually got involved into the management of 'Rural Happy House'.

[14] Interview with a member of Villager Committees by the author on 12 Apri 2015 in Jianshan village, China.

[15] Interview with Weizhong Ren by the author on 9 Apri 2015 in Jianshan village, China.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Kenny Cupers, 'The Infrastructure of Participation: Cultural Centres in Postwar Europe' in *Participation in Art and Architecture: Spaces of Participation and Occupation,* ed. by Martino Stierli and Mechtild Widrich (London, New York: I.B.Tauris, 2016), p. 15.

[18] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 90.

[19] Interview with Weizhong Ren by the author on 15 April 2015 in Jianshan village, China.

[20] Numerous old ancestral hall buildings were used as primary school and public dining hall during Peoples' Commune (1958-78) period in China.

[21] Interview with a member of Villager Committees by the author on 12 April 2015 in Jianshan village, China.

[22] Interview with villagers by the author on 9 April 2015 in Jianshan village, China.

[23] Distant interview with Weizhong Ren by the author during 1 January to 5 January 2017

[24] Interview with Weizhong Ren by the author on 8 April 2015 in Jianshan village, China.

[25] Peter Blundell Jones, 'Working with the given', *Architectural Research Quarterly*, 5 (2001), p. 308.

[26] Peter Blundell Jones and Derong Kong, 'The case for an oral architecture: Carpentry and communal assembly among the Dong of Southwest China', *Architectural Research Quarterly*, 20 (2016), 145-158.

[27] 'Notes on Planting Buildings' is half documentary prose, half design manifestation written by Weizhong Ren in 2006, a year later after the completion of his first building of his Eco-Lodges series. When the term 'building' and 'architecture' are fixed to be associated with professional verbs such as 'Draw', 'Design', 'Render', 'Tender',

'Construct', etc., one might see how strikingly an alternative and hybrid meaning could be gained from using the verb 'Plant' by this rural barefoot-architect. When planting something, one must expect for the blossom, harvest, renew and all the other outcomes related to natural cycling. In that sense one must focus on the selection of soil, the orientation, the sunlight and rainwater, the protection from pests, the best suitable time for seeding, etc. Thus considerations and care are needed, alongside the meaning and value invested. It is not a one-off way from production to consumption, but to cultivate and sustain a mutually alternating cycle of life and death. In Ren's eyes and words without any Architects' languages, the building process should be the same with the agricultural process.

[28] Weizhong Ren, 'Notes on Planting Buildings', 2006

[29] See more details in Peter Blundell Jones, *Architecture and Movement: The Dynamic Experience of Buildings and Landscapes* (London: Routledge, 2015).

[30] Peter Blundell Jones, 'A Theory of Architecture' (Sheffield School of Architecture, ARC 104 Humanities, 2015)

Chapter 9

Clan-Community Hall, Xiaogou Wu Village

This chapter is a reduced version based on the author's original work which was submitted and shortlisted in RIBA President's Awards for Research in 2016.

Full paper 'Hybrid Building and Hybrid Practitioner: An Unbuilt Clan-Community Hall in a Chinese Natural Village' was published by RIBA in May 2017, and a reduced version was published by RIBA Journal in November 2016. Xiang Ren: 'Clan-Community Hall', RIBA Journal, November 25, 2016. https://www.ribaj.com/intelligence/clan-community-hall

Fig.9.1 Participatory design workshop, Xiaogou Wu, 2015 (Photograph by Xue Li)

Village:

Xiaogou Wu natural village is part of Jianshan Village, Anji County, Huzhou City, Zhejiang Province, China. Zhejiang Province is a key part of the Southern Yangtze River region, which is geographically located in between the central part and the southern part of China and has a rich palimpsest of layers of cultural history with deep rooted Confucian, etiquette, as well as traditional clan. The clan is remarkably ancient and its contemporary features are also rich and diversified, spread across places from the heart of older parts of traditional city enclaves (such as Hangzhou City, capital city of Zhejiang Province) to remote rural villages (such as Jianshan administrative village and Xiaogou Wu natural village).

Located in the north-west of Jian Mountain of Anji County, Xiaogou Wu is a hill village based on agriculture, with tea and vegetables as its major productive industry. However agricultural production is no longer the main source of income for rural villages, because the majority of villagers of working age went to towns and cities as part of the new wave of urban migrants. The village is still there, making use of its proximity to its supervising township Anji County which is a famous travel destination for the bamboo forest and associated tourism economies, and Jianshan becomes one of the developed model villages as could be seen from its being granted the title of 'Benchmark for Moderately Prosperous Villages' and 'Chinese Beautiful Villages' by local government. A few municipal projects, such as road and water infrastructure upgrading, have been planned and operated in a good way which enhances the accessibility and wellbeing of the village. Meanwhile the local government also successfully attracted the investment for a luxurious golf park, although it was constantly complained about by some villagers for the lower requisition fees than they expected.[1]

Fig. 9.2 Jianshan administrative village, 2015 (Photograph by the author)

As an administrative village, Jianshan contains several natural villages, including Xiaogou Wu (which later became the specific site of the research project). Located within the innermost side of the Jian Mountain, this natural village can be accessed only by a one single-vehicle road and around an hour's trip by car from the core part of Jianshan administrative village. Though quite isolated, the surprisingly tidy and ordered village environments, and more than half of the newly-built houses with urban styles indicated that this natural village has been very well self-managed by local people, (because it is officially without any specific political leader, such as the Village Party Secretary in an administrative village like Jianshan), at least in terms of income generation as a whole village. The observation of the use of shared space and irrigation infrastructure, and talking with local people suggest that the above assumption about self-management is evidently, and most importantly, the driving force of that functioning self-management that is the clan revitalised in recent years. The clan and family (surnamed Lang) were dominant until inevitably the village got almost destroyed during WWII; then it redeveloped slowly with the outsider migrants (surnamed Ren). Although the precise lineage details of the history of Xiaogou Wu are unknown today, the clan of surname Ren is still strong, which could be

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demonstrated from the continuous work of rewriting genealogy scripts and collective rites such as shared feast on spring festivals.[2]

Fig. 9.3 Farmland of Xiaogou Wu natural village, 2015 (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 9.4 Buildings and landscape in and around Xiaogou Wu natural village, 2015 (Photograph by the author)

Practitioner:

The author was firstly introduced by Weizhong Ren into this village. As discussed in Chapter 8, Weizhong Ren is an ordinary resident but a well-known activist of rural construction in Jianshan village and even in the whole of Zhejiang province for his Eco-Lodges. Regarding himself as an environmental warrior, he started to design and build energy-efficient buildings using locally-sourced low-impact materials, such as rammed earth, timber, bamboo, pebbles, etc. from the year 2005 until now. He can be regarded as a contemporary 'barefoot architect'.

Fig. 9.5 The author (in blue) and the barefoot architect Weizhong Ren in his Eco-Lodge 1 in Jianshan village, 2015 (Photograph by Xue Li)

Weizhong Ren always tried hard to transfer his individual passion and knowledge to others in his homeland towards a collective resilient future through his sustainable self-build. And the village of Xiaogou Wu was one of his starting points. Weizhong Ren's mother originated from there, and as the only son he is half-descended from Xiaogou Wu's 'ties of kin' social network. Living and working within Jianshan administrative village, though not specifically in Xiaogou Wu natural village, he still belongs to the active 'geo-ties' actor network. As a gentry with high public reputation in the traditional sense and a barefoot architect with technical knowledge in the contemporary scene, he has been an influential figure of Xiaogou Wu natural village, which could be demonstrated from his well-received personality and ability to mediate village conflicts. This provided him with excellent trust-based 'work-ties' to make thing done.

Before he formally introduced the author into Xiaogou Wu, he had already started initial community consultation about the idea of building a shared space for this natural village which lacked of public life as before, and not surprisingly his idea received positive responses. He realized that the main reason why his self-built private houses couldn't be more influential, in terms of value, knowledge and skill transferability, is the lack of social engagement or reinvention of social ritual during the production of space and building.[3] That's partly the reason why the author joined his lifelong rural-construction-dream for this potential project. From then on, Weizhong Ren and the author set up 'Rural Participation Unit' as a non-profit design research collaborative aiming for hybrid coproduction in rural villages, which followed his suggestion that it would be easier to make things done through a 'formal organization' rather than through individuals as informal practitioners. For the author as a 'hybrid practitioner', it is a bottom-up way of practicing architecture at the interface of legal commission and 'illegal' construction.

For the following participatory action research project, Weizhong Ren and the author positioned themselves as hybrid practitioners aiming to facilitate and to nurture, instead of the more professional notion of Chinese architects/designers aiming to decide and determine. The key collaboration was not between the author (doctoral researcher, activist architect, village enthusiast) and him (local farmer, barefoot architect, village environmental warrior); but it was about the close working with participants from local community ranging from village clan leader and members, villager-committee representatives, local bamboo-carpenter, and other ordinary residents, most of whom were women and elderly from this indigenous village. In this sense, everybody who got involved was a practitioner; it was a building 'curated' by ordinary practitioners. And only by that means it would become a building socially valued at its broadest level.

Preparation and Fund-raising Process:

Any aspects related to money, particularly public funding, is usually the most sensitive and difficult to deal with in a Chinese rural village, not only because of the fact that villagers tend to have different understandings, definitions and opinions based on different educational levels and household environments, but also due to a

series historical legacies and associated contemporary issues, for example, the limited degrees of transparency in the process of public policy-making and the corruption of some village leaders over recent decades. Social value is admittedly important, but it cannot be added in an appropriate way if financial conflict hurts. Weizhong Ren and the author were very conscious of that logic in Chinese rural villages, therefore our attitudes were serious, our plans for fundraising extremely cautious and careful.

Just as in other villages in China today, the dependence on government funding (from a supervising township) to an administrative village like Jianshan for village development is quite heavy, particularly on the public sector such as road infrastructure. The village leader, either head of village or the Party Secretary, gets actively involved in each stage to collect, manage, and distribute the public funding. This is part of their duty and power; it is also a good opportunity for them, on one hand, to help them win villager's hearts in order to be voted in again; on the other hand, to help them expand their political and business network for their further promotion. Therefore the influence from the village leader over the use of public funding is direct and determinative; while the decision-making process is extremely sophisticated – it is a political play, in the name of socio-economic development, towards a precarious balance, to satisfy stakeholders who have made priorities. Though every effort has been made by the village leader of the administrative village to balance the funding allocation between different natural villages (probably with different surnames) or subdivided between different villager-cooperative groups, it easily goes, to some degree, at the sacrifice of ordinary villagers, whose voices are largely excluded from the decision-making process.

This is what Weizhong Ren and the author as ordinary practitioners tried to improve in this Clan-Community Hall project, which aimed to build for people by valuing diverse voices and multiple narratives of the villagers. During the visits to Xiaogou Wu natural village Weizhong Ren and the author found it quite a connective clan-community with high levels of mutual trust and social cohesion. Villagers were friendly, easy to talk to and to share different opinions, and more importantly, they expressed coherent interests to collaborate with others (other villagers, Weizhong Ren, or with the author as an outsider) to realise a shared vision for a better living environment not only physically but also spiritually. That sense of clan-community,

and sense of place and identity, drove Weizhong Ren and the author to put forward a mutual-funding mode for the Clan-Community Hall project. This was a participative financing mode acting from within, in contrast to the dominant mode used in state-led projects, achieved by partly learning the old traditional way of mutual-funding when making/managing common space under the guidance of clan existed long before the arrival of modern state and professional power.

In China there are problematic historical associations with the use of the term 'participation'. A lack of clarity in its meaning can create serious misunderstandings for farmers and officials alike. For farmers the concept evokes mass mobilization campaigns and unpaid participation in infrastructure development. Officials automatically correlate the term with community labour (usually involuntary) and community cost sharing.

Based upon that, this participative financing mode was a two-stage process: firstly, Weizhong Ren and the author needed to persuade the clan leader, rather than the village leaders (head of Xiaogou Wu village from Villager-Committee or the Party secretary of Jianshan village), to grant the eligibility for Weizhong Ren and the author to seek 'external' funding in the name of Xiaogou Wu (the term 'external' here means internalised funding secured from outside the village physically, not referring to an external funding body only for commercial investment). That's because, as estimated by Weizhong Ren and the author, the suspicion about the motivation and reluctance to cooperate without practical benefit from the village leaders would be larger than with the clan leader who was an elderly retired man taking care of the 'soft' production and management of the 'village under one roof'.

The second fundraising stage overlapped with the design stage: Weizhong Ren and the author needed to convince the villagers as clan members to participate in the design and construction process with their money, time and labour. An old saying goes, 'those who have money please donate money; those with only labour to offer please donate labour'. This reinvented the cooperative rituals in almost all clan-based villages in Vernacular China, where indigenous people exchanged labour to help their own houses and put in shared time making and managing common space and structure together, such as the collective assembly and common maintenance of

the ancestral hall, or the mutual financing of 'three ceremonies' (birthdays, weddings, and funerals) for other clan members.

The first stage went surprisingly smoothly: Weizhong Ren and the author made contact with an entrepreneur who originated from Jianshan village and maintained her business with bamboo material (produced from Jianshan village and Anji County) for the construction industry in Beijing City. She kindly agreed to fund £4000 or so (around 4/5 part of the cost, later estimated at the design stage), only asking in return for an 50 m^2 exhibition space to showcase her personal story and bamboo products in the Clan-Community Hall that was to be built. (This is normal in traditional Chinese village history: when people who left his/her hometown made a career outside, he/she would donate much to reward for thanksgiving, through rebuilding his/her own house, contributing refurbishment of the family temples or ancestral halls, and erecting a memorial archway.) Weizhong Ren and the author forwarded the commission to the clan leader and senior members, who was very excited to welcome it; then Weizhong Ren briefed to the head of village who was interested while the Party secretary was not that much.

Following this, Weizhong Ren and the author decided to try to make an internal fundraising effort to support the project completely from inside, considering that nothing could run in a real sense without purely internal funding, particular for this project of shared space which could act from within. Despite a good start made by Weizhong Ren who generously contributed £600, the fundraising process inside the village for this community project went slowly and painfully, as most villagers including several senior clan members expressed hesitation about how to make it fair in terms of money, time and labour balance for each clan member. The ice was not broken until Weizhong Ren came up a plan that, for those who couldn't or didn't wish to give money, one working hour would equal £15. In this way local knowledge solved a local problem: another part of funding, equal to approximately £400, was successfully raised from the inside (which made up the remaining 1/5 part of the cost according to later estimation).

Design Process:

Fig. 9.6 Identifying a site with local barefoot architect and clan people, 2015 (Photograph by the author)

As mentioned above, the building design stage overlapped with the second stage of fundraising which aimed to engage and convince as many villagers as possible. Actually, identifying an appropriate site (Fig. 9.6) had already started during informal visits to Xiaogou Wu, simultaneously along with the first stage of fundraising in discussion with the sponsor from Beijing. With the guidance of elderly members of the clan, a place exactly located in between two entrance roads of the village was chosen. (Fig. 9.7-8)

Fig. 9.7 Looking at site from a distance, 2015 (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 9.8 The triangle site in Xiaogou Wu, 2015 (Photograph by the author)

Obviously left-over as a former market garden with clusters of artificially nurtured plants, the place was quiet and messy as a result of low maintenance. A residual concrete route and foundation for a pavilion indicated that the space had been decorated and used for welcoming external visitors several years ago. But now it functioned as an embarrassing waste collection point for the village, due to its proximity to the external road. Excepting these negative qualities, an osmanthus tree a hundred years old, and two retaining walls made of local masonry with ecological habitats and irrigation channels, was the treasure of the given site from Weizhong Ren and the author's eyes. (Fig. 9.9-11)

Elderly said that this triangle site had been a water pool (probably functioning as a water-mouth) before, with two bridges now following the old route of bridges. Though earlier visual evidence such as old maps could not be gained, presumably this key entrance point of the village had engaged the indigenous ideology including Fengshui, entrance bridge, and blocking ceremonies etc. It should have been a key

anchor point of the village and clan; Weizhong Ren and the author followed the recommendation from the elderly clan members, determined to reactivate it as a Clan-Community hall providing common space under one roof. The site was identified; the next step was to gain the trust of all stakeholders regarding the unclear ownership of the site as a shared space.

Fig. 9.9 Looking at the site from the western street, 2015 (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 9.10-11 Left: Existing water channel for drainage, 2015 (Photograph by the author); Right: Existing retaining wall in masonry, with ecological patches (Photograph by the author)

Weizhong Ren and the author planned to start from a sketch design charrette on site (Fig. 9.12-14), inviting key stakeholders (including village leaders, clan leader, elderly clan members, and other villagers as many as possible) to observe and participate.

Fig. 9.12-14 Sketch design charrette on site. The author in blue, 2015 (Photograph by Xue Li)

The participative on-site workshop relied on a three-stage consultative process:

- A detailed site visit together and facilitated by the barefoot architect Weizhong Ren with the local community including village clan leader, head of village,

officers from political authorities, residents near to the site, and other enthusiastic villagers. (Apologies were received from the sponsor and Party Secretary)

- An on-site workshop on conceptual design visualization facilitated by the author, which provided a material basis for the later intense conversations and design discussions
- Following instant feedback from the meeting, design revisions/development were made on-site, and a preliminary spatial brief presented as a poster manifesto was made public on-site for an initial voting process to reach a consensus on whether to build and how to build

The process (Fig. 9.15-16) relied on the principles of inclusiveness and visual representation, achieving this through engaging with the local clan/community at large, in order to find what matters most for whom and who cares what most.

Fig. 9.15-16 Left: Working process (Photograph by Xue Li); Right: Conceptual proposal (Photograph by the author)

During the design charrette workshop, consensus was achieved between all attendees, particularly between the head of village and clan leader and the two household residents nearest to the site, who stressed the importance of keeping the impact of both the construction and occupation as low as possible, from both a physical and a mental perspective: visually, the new clan-community hall building

should not block the view corridor from the rest of the village towards the distant mountains, particularly from the two families of residents near to the site; mentally, the new building should dissolve its volume into the existing without 'noisy' languages, performing as if it had been there for a long time.

Fig. 9.17 Community consultation. The author in blue. The sitting man in black is head of village, 2015 (Photograph by Xue Li)

Fig. 9.18 Community consultation, 2015. The author in blue. Head of village in black in discussion with clan leaders (Photograph by Xue Li)

Thus the new clan-community hall was proposed as a 'landform' stitching into the existing topography of the site. The key architectural strategy was to make the walk-on roof as an artificial landscape, by intermeshing its boundaries with both the western sidewalk and front square of nearby houses, meanwhile still keeping a breathable space (1-2m) in between the existing eco-walls (retaining masonry walls with water channels) and the new building for the ecological patches and drainage. A safety question about installing a protective balustrade was raised, generating hot discussions which ended up with an idea of a pedestrian ramp continuously folded over the crack between building and retaining wall, ensuring enough filtered light and rain access to the bottom part of the crack. (Fig. 9.17-18)

A spatial brief was co-designed: a 50m^2 exhibition room required from the sponsor, covered the western part of the site with its shopfront facing south. It was surrounded by a series of scattered clan-community units for informal activities such as drinking tea, playing majiang, as well as a more formal welcoming event-space when used as a semi-outdoor dining hall in hot summer. The clan leader suggested having a piece of sacred space, even a corner, to express the traditional spirit of Xiaogou Wu in this

contemporary hall. The author strongly supported this viewpoint, and facilitated the further discussions with an agreement to keep the existing old osmanthus tree at the centre of the new hall. It reminded the author of the old regional rituals to plant one or several trees at the entrance of the village for Fengshui reasons.

A brief cost was also estimated by all the attendees, under the guidance of Weizhong Ren who had sufficient knowledge about the relations between the cost and the size, scale, and shape of building material for this specific village. An extremely tight budget of less than £50/ m^2 was proposed. The initial structure and material strategy related to the use of bamboo, one of the most abundant local materials, touching the land lightly. Weizhong Ren offered to use rammed-earth wall for partitions as he has been famous as a local earth-construction specialist. A health and safety question generated by bamboo and earth structures was raised by the participants, directing discussion to the building's life span with an expectation of 5-8 years. Thus a temporal dimension was introduced; it would be a temporary building.

Fig. 9.19-20 The process of the author making a campaign board, 2015 (Photograph by Xue Li)

Fig. 9.21-23 Posting the project initiative including its spatial brief in a campaign board on the street for public consultation, 2015 (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 9.24-25 Consultation with a local bamboo-maker following a visit to nearby material supplier, 2015 (Photograph by the author)

Collecting all of the above responses and feedback, the author directed the optimization process of the architectural proposal, with clarified spatial brief in an axonometric diagram. Integrated with texts and campaign principles, the proposal was posted onto the wall of the existing structure facing the main road on the northeast side of the site. (Fig. 9.21-23) It was made public there for two weeks as recommended by Weizhong Ren and the village leader, in order to approach the wider audience of the village. Finally, the workshop ended with an unscheduled visit, directed by an enthusiastic villager, to a nearby material supplier, (Fig. 9.24-25) and a following consultation with a local bamboo-maker about technical possibilities.

In all, the community consultation process progressed without major opposition or controversy, with all parties expressing eagerness to make the project happen. The design workshop was productive, too. They had developed more trust in the author, as an outsider, particularly after the author's sketch design quickly on site, which illustrated well the potential programme and atmosphere that this building could bring to the site. The author's presentation also let key stakeholders know the participatory approach to produce this 'place for people'. Weizhong Ren as a local gentry, and the clan support from Xiaogou Wu natural village were critical to the early smooth progress of the idea of the Clan-Community Hall.

After this participation workshop, the design entered its second phase for schematic design development: Weizhong Ren and the author were given enough freedom to develop the schematic design with more building technical knowledge, based on the trust built through the previous stages with the clan/community of Xiaogou Wu. So the whole participatory process was pushed by a much smaller steering group at this stage. It became a self-organised working mode of 'expert outsider + local elites + activist insider', with local elite (Weizhong Ren in this case) mediating as an agent in between. The options of each decision making with associated knowledge exchange were conveyed to the sponsor and villagers mainly by Weizhong Ren, sometimes on a face-to-face basis, sometimes distantly. The principle was to inform the villagers including head of Xiaogou Wu village, Jianshan Party Secretary and the clan leader of every key design move and to listen to their feedback and opinions. The reason why the plan changed and the section left open and even without a complete fixed drawing was that to keep the possibility of 'hybrid buidling' -- a hybrid production site

of knowledge emerged from the outsiders' input and insiders' knowledge, and then would inform the way to ' hybrid building' including both consequences from building process and outcome object.

The inner needs had been identified little by little; the challenge of the site and the potentials of the building had been posed by the local clan in their own language, owing to the patient facilitation, mediation and negotiation by Weizhong Ren and a few key enthusiastic villagers. The head of village and Party Secretary also admitted to providing 'convenience' to the project's further development.[4]

Fig. 9.26 Spatial Strategy, collage by the author, 2015 (Drawn by the author)

The old osmanthus tree as a visual focal point, was enclosed by the L-shaped building and an additional central amphitheater proposed.

Fig. 9.27 Circulation and Cladding Strategy, 2015 (Drawn by the author)

The red refers to the pedestrian ramp linking different levels of existing topography. The repetitive linear elements refer to half-cut bamboo for rainwater collection and eastern sun-shading; a semi-outdoor corridor adds one more layer between exterior and interior.
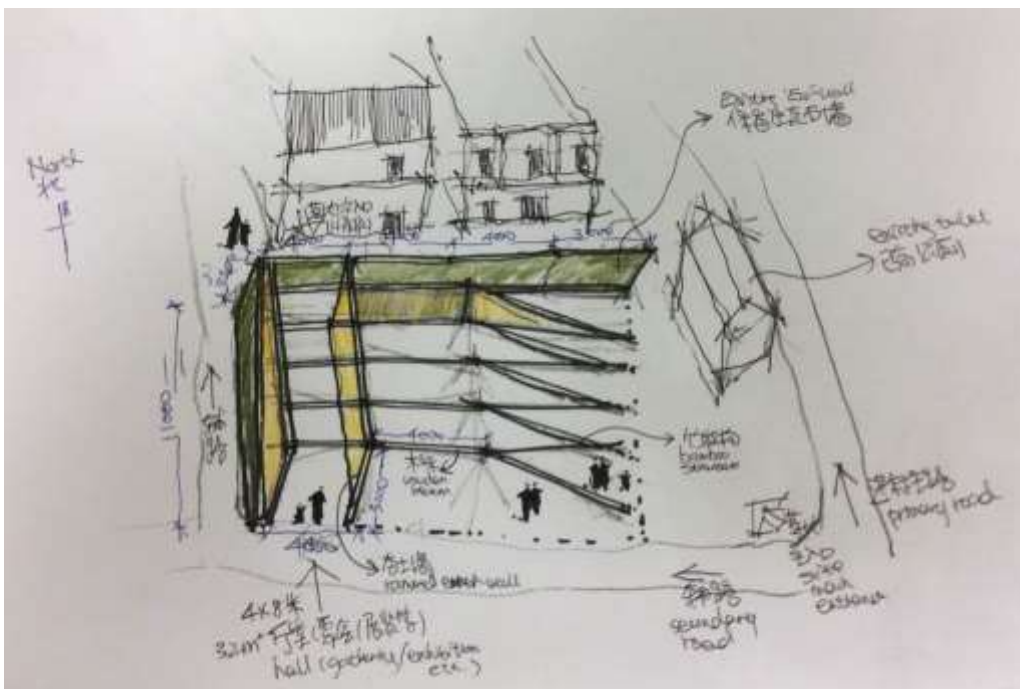
Fig. 9.28 Structural Strategy, 2015 (Drawn by the author)

The yellow refers to two parallel rammed- earth walls as a western foundation to suspend the bamboo beamworks down to the eastern ground.
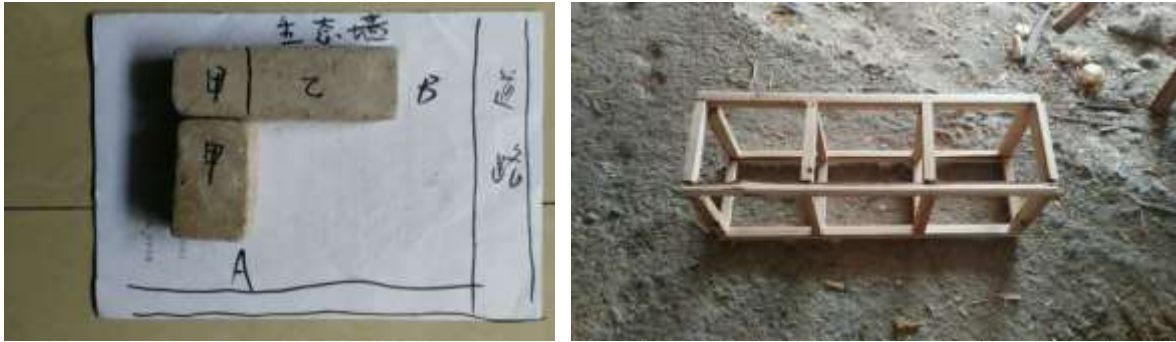
Fig. 9.29-30 Volume Layout and Structural Frame, models decided, designed, and made by clan members forward to clan leader, 2015 (Photograph by the author)

The exhibition space for the sponsor and the communal space for the villagers enclose an assembly square.
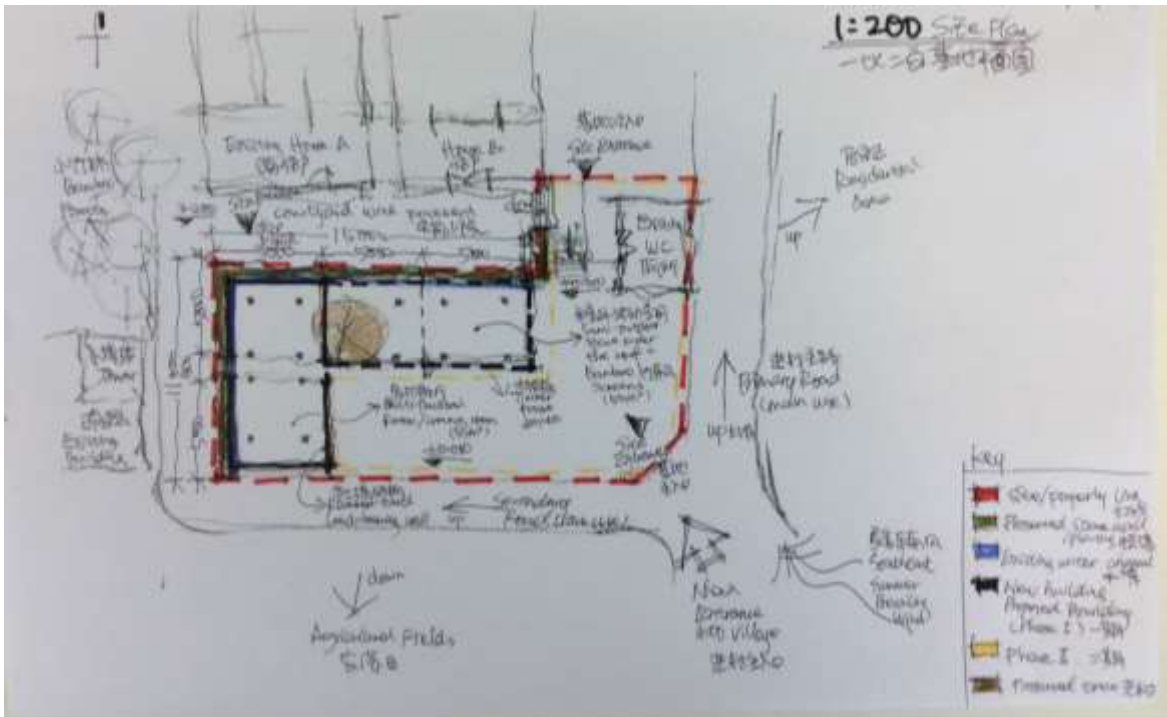
Fig. 9.31 1:200 Site Plan with phased development, 2015 (Drawn by the author)

Four units form the L-shaped layout, with one void for the existing *osmanthus tree.* Independence of frame and wall shows tectonic integrity; spaces under the eaves provide both horizontal (corridor) and vertical (ramp) circulation.

Fig. 9.32 Digital model with collaged everyday activities photographed from the village, 2015 (Drawn by the author)

A rotated folding screen made by bamboo can transform the indoor Clan-Community Hall into a common space with different degrees of exteriority according to time of the day and weather or seasonal change. Clan-Community Hall in bamboo shared an entrance space with exhibition hall in rammed-earth.

Fig. 9.33 Written hand-out of project initiative resubmitted to a senior clan member at his home, 2015 (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 9.34 Self-organised clan members' meeting on the Clan-Community Hall, 2015 (Photograph by the author)

Construction process:

Before the completion of the schematic design stage, the construction stage overlapped, and series of spontaneous activities started. The first event was the assembly meeting on site for voting and accumulating different levels of contributions from villagers. The scene was atmospheric; enthusiastic villagers, varied in gender and age, arrived at the site continuously. The clan leader was invited to write the name on a new rendered trolley for construction material transportation, marking the official start of the construction process. (Fig. 9.35) Villagers were active to volunteer, and their time, labour and skill contributions were allocated into several parts of the estimated construction work. The second event followed, during which a few selected villagers started to clean the site. (Fig. 9.36)They collectively prepared the site over several days, preserving the old osmanthus tree and keeping the ecological retaining walls and water channels.

Fig. 9.35 Clan leader wrote in red the name on the cart for transporting construction materials, 2015 (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 9.36 Clan members preparing the site, 2015 (Photograph by the author)

The third event, the most important of the series, happened on a selected day for a food festival organised by the clan leader and some activist villagers. (Fig. 9.37-39) The day was joined by most of the villagers, with joy and excitement and exchanging ideas on how to build, and how to use this space and building. Building as a social ritual process became part of the communal festival of the whole village.

Fig. 9.37-39 Food share event after site preparation, 2015 (Photograph by Weizhong Ren)

The steering group of the project automatically changed at this stage; Weizhong Ren and the author decided to step back to be more invisible, rather than to disturb, after hearing of the first event. As a local, Weizhong Ren joined the food festival day on

site, and was warmly welcomed by villagers. Preparation work and the food ritual happened on the site in such a quick and effective way quite beyond our expectations, and even those of the head of village.

The fourth event was to transport possible materials, such as pebbles, (Fig. 9.40) which were locally-sourced. The site work had no written contracts or professional design documents, but was accomplished in oral agreement between participants. They deserved a right to build.

Fig. 9.40 Pebbles as locally-sourced building materials have been prepared on site, 2015 (Photograph by the author)
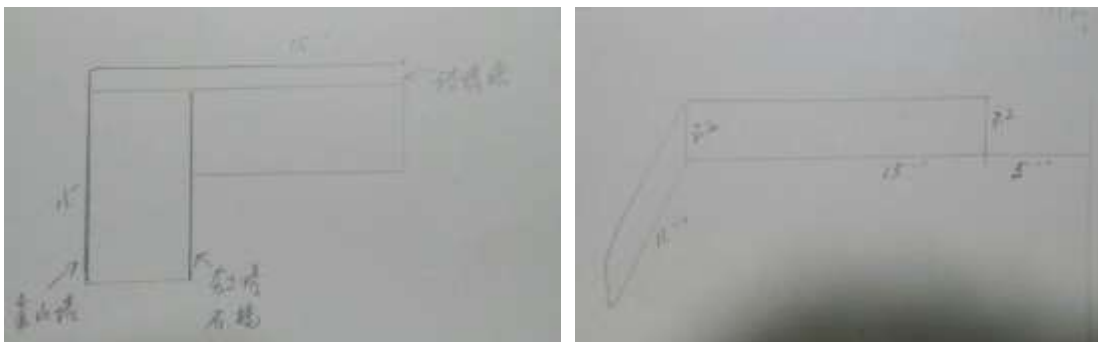

Fig. 9.41 Mesurement diagrams for the construction site showed the villagers negotiated spatial boundaries, 2015 (Photograph by the author)

Occupation Process:

From this stage the author stepped down from the direct involvement; while Weizhong Ren was still in because of his 'geo-ties'. At the time when everybody thought the building would be realized step by step, conflicts emerged, in a sudden way, as an inevitable part of the participatory processes. A member of the clan, one of the householders nearest to the site (above the site with front square), suggested enlarging the public western walk into a one-vehicle path to serve as the marriage ritual path of his son's marriage, which would shorten the site property boundary and disturbed public interests. But he insisted that he deserved to achieve it, and in compensation for the negative effects to his house the Clan-Community Hall group had to be tolerant. After internal negotiation and rejection by almost all of the clan members including the clan leader, (Fig. 9.41) he was so angry that he opposed the Clan-Community Hall project publicly. He even used his materials to occupy part of the site, in order to prevent others from starting building work. Weizhong Ren came to try to mediate but that still didn't work. The dialogue was never compromised, without the co-mediation from the clan leader, the Head of Village and the Party Secretary; but each side felt so reluctant that they proposed many excuses to refuse presence in negotiation meetings.

Several months later the author got to know that the son of the opponent had a very good business in a nearby township and had established a strategic partnership with Party Secretary also from that township. That was why his father could defend the spatial boundary in contrast even to the clan organization. The hidden reason this conflict couldn't be mediated so far, was the invisible disagreement between Party Secretary of Jianshan village and head of village in Xiaogou Wu.[5] The new Clan-Community Hall project was proposed for the whole village, most of which belonged to the clan constituted by a same surname Ren; the head of village and other members of villager-committee were voted in by the villagers, so undoubtedly they were part of the clan and acting on behalf of the interests of clan. Most of them, including the head of village himself, are relatives of the current clan leader. Therefore it is a typical villager-committee based on 'Kin-ties' and 'Geo-ties'. However the Party Secretary, commissioned by the upper township government, originated not from Xiaogou Wu natural village but from another natural village belonging to Jianshan administrative village, thus he and his 'team' related to other

interests, at this point in support of the father of his partner in contrast with local original clan in this disagreement. Obviously, it is the 'Work-ties' winning the 'Kin-ties' and 'Geo-ties'.

But dramatically, 'Kin-ties' and 'Geo-ties' reversed in an alternative form in an unexpected way: an abandoned Temple of Earth God nearby the Clan-Community Hall site, was refurbished and redeveloped in just a week's time. (Fig. 9.43- 46) And since then it has been very well received as a shared belief space and social focal point for the village.

That unexpected result mirrored a strange logic in Chinese rural villages that the minority dictates to the majority, rather than the opposite. It also showed a weak understanding of 'the spirit of contract' by all the stakeholders, which would form a more civilized community under a modern notion in the clan-based villages.

According to a series of interviews with the officers on behalf of the 'state', village residents on behalf of the 'society', and professionals on behalf of the 'intellectuals', the lack of clear theoretical clarification and practical operation in key issues such as ownership, responsibility, role, public space, participation, etc. were behind almost every disagreement, conflict, disorder and abandonment of land/space/building in Chinese villages. Xiaogou Wu was not a special case.

Fig. 9.42 The site was left quiet and busy at the same time; a hybrid, 2016 (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 9.43-46 Before (left) and after (right), Temple of Earth God, 2016 (Photograph by the author)

(top)The wooden beam-work and load-bearing walls were preserved and strengthened with two new brick walls in white-washed and black linear rendering by local craftsmen.

(bottom)The existing retaining walls made by pebbles were extended into several terraces which provided an outdoor space for worship and very well received by villagers.

Conclusion and Discussion:

Hybrid building

This Clan-Community Hall project comprised the negotiation of a brief, a budget, and design participation process, as well as an unexpected built work Temple of Earth God as by-products, between the author as a 'hybrid practitioner', and the local community based on clan for their mutual benefits bridged by local barefoot architect. The author in doing so gained more real-world capabilities; the clan used the non-profit project as an opportunity to enhance spiritual union through collectively upgrading common space. Although the power relations with contrasting values were made visible and left to time, it was a trust-based and time-based coproduction, with knowledge transferred and exchanged in and around architecture. It was also an attempt to alter the high-building practice expectations by contractually and socially restructuring the contemporary professional relationships between agents such as policy-makers, clients, consultants, builders, users and other stakeholders. The real-world impact of this collaborative and participative project has been dramatically experienced at many scales except the traditional notion of building scale due to its unbuilt reality, as well as its unbuildable status. That unbuildable part made the 'hybrid building'; in this case, it was that Temple of Earth God. But is the buildable architecture really the answer (to engage local issues)? It asks more than it could answer.

How do contemporary architecture and architects demonstrate transformative value and potentials in Chinese village? As a response to this question, this case shows that the inclusiveness and resilience gained through participation and ritual reinvention in clan-community-related architecture in Chinese rural village is not only a return to a static integration of settings, objects and participants, but also a navigation within the system through micro-design activism. Constant dis-assembling and reassembling the knowledge (which is normally locked inside the professional disciplinary autonomy and indigenous system) contributed to strategize and to optimise, finally to achieve a state of flux and transformation. What it means to consider the 'hybrid building' as an inclusive production site for knowledge is that,

it is not just intervention but produced through that intervention. It is this hybridity that reinvents a new temporary meaning – offering neither the final interpretation nor the last word, but a palimpsest added to by different actors in different periods: an accumulative process.

'Hybrid building' is not a tabula-rasa way of clearing out the site as a green backdrop for a white, perfect artistic object; but it could be theorized as a tactical principal in architectural participation and coproduction, in which micro-design activism reinvents the vernacular, the irregular, the organic, the messy engaged, the ritual, the busy everyday lives of buildings lying outside the range of the star architects and the design studios. In this Clan-Community Hall project, villagers have been facilitated to negotiate and renegotiate their spatial boundaries, to generate possibilities for new encounters, spaces and collectives.

Therefore, the concept of 'hybrid building' should be made as a position in architectural design practice in Chinese rural villages in the transition from traditional clan to modern community. It interrogates the changing role, from solo artistic author to a 'hybrid practitioner' that design professionals can play in contesting the urban-rural struggle in current China. It demonstrates that, it would not be impossible for professional architects to take architectural design as a cutting channel to rethink, reflect and re-intervene in state-society relations, through intellectuals' social-responsive position, perspectives and approaches which respond to projects dynamic with different sizes, different stages, and different relations between power and place resource. It at least opens up a new door for younger generations of 'hybrid practitioners' to expose and engage the complex, real-world, hidden status quo and challenges towards a social-transformative architecture not in capital 'A' but for people and community.

Hybrid system

Looking back to thousands of years of history, the Chinese-characteristic paradigm of evolution and development could be summarised as a 'double-track system' – a hybrid system. This refers to a capacity from Chinese society for the coexistence of double (or even multiple, usually with contrasting values) systems for a relatively

long time period, instead of a new, emerging system replacing the old, current dominant system whether in a slow transformation or a radically rapid reform. It is a two-way process involving action and reaction. It is during this period of coexistence that the alternative system with advanced forces pushes the dominant one to self-regenerate in order to match, while itself being continuously upgraded to more appropriate forms adapting to a more solid social foundation. When this procedure of coexistence is completed, a stable system will be achieved – it is neither the new emerging system nor the old dominant one, but a hybrid from the two, what is longstanding referred in Chinese history as that the best suit measures to the Chinese-characteristic locally-specific condition.

In essence, the situation for the role architecture as both a profession and a discipline under current Chinese urban-rural transition is the same. Top-down and bottom-up has too often been applied and conceived as a metaphoric concept and form to illustrate state-society relations in current Chinese urbanization, with a preconception about a stronger state-led modern China over a weaker and weaker society-based 'Vernacular China' – but this is a narrowed perspective, and not enough proved. As an old Chinese slang says, 'Where there is a policy, there is a countermeasure'. The actor from the 'weak society' side, for example the clan, or the new form the clan evolves to, is still proving resilient in some regions.

The transition of a traditional clan towards modern community in Chinese rural villages address areas of reality complementary to the great socio-philosophical sophistication of the 'Vernacular China' and rapid cultural change so prominent in the current city-oriented development paradigm; and this complementarity is itself an important insight into how to understand and prompt micro-level, small-scaled, transgressive change from within the socio-cultural complexity of current rural China. The architecture of hybrid building is processual and relational for a specific site context and social condition; it is a knowledge assemblage, involving progressive practices of gathering, composition, production and consumption. Universal solutions fall short of addressing local issues. Locally-based, small-scaled and progressive architectural practice through participatory action-learning opens up a possibility to contribute to the cultural renaissance of Chinese rural vernacular architecture in a real sense, suggesting the unexpected, the unheard, the informal,

the spontaneous, the handmade, the repetitive, the other, within the regional and the public.

Notes and References of Chapter 9

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[1] Interview with villagers by the author on 10 April 2015 in Jianshan administrative village

[2] Interview with two senior clan members by the author on 15 April 2015 in Xiaogou Wu natural village

[3] Interview with Weizhong Ren by the author on 7 April 2015 in his house in Jianshan administrative village

[4] Interview with head of village and Party Secretary by Weizhong Ren during May 2015 in Jianshan administrative village

[5] Interview distantly with Weizhong Ren by the author between 10 - 18 August 2015

Chapter 10

Conclusion

The emerging problems from the rapid rural urbanization in China mainly from the top-down ideologies and approaches has been challenging the very fundamental definitions of architecture and architects originated from the Western discourse. There has already been a whole body of Chinese studies from different disciplinary perspectives and approaches, which attempts to capture and interpret these phenomena -- and along this process, adjusting to accommodate the specific dynamics of the subject that China is drifting as an 'other' from Western-based interpretation framework. However, disciplinary barriers both from within and from the outside still exist, particularly in the architecture discipline, which prevent in-depth understanding of the context and further conceptualizing of alternative architectural routes and modus operandi. Therefore, this thesis started from an attempt to embed a thicker interpretation of Chinese rural villages in some of the major debates in architecture; and it aimed to be the first attempt to place contemporary architectural design practice in Chinese rural villages within a broader framework combining anthropology and activism.

With very limited engagements with, and impacts on the broader context including the social and the political, architecture as both a discipline and a profession in contemporary rural China has widened its gap with its once rooted local concepts, contexts and connections. The mainstream architectural practice in rural China has generated weak impacts, and struggled to redefine itself through actively engaging with and responding to the emerging crisis from the rural urbanization. While bearing in mind the traditional model of architecture and urbanization directly derived from an interpretation of the Western experience is incomplete, those parts of the rising theories and practices of architecture and participation from the West, which deserve an opportunity to engage with more Chinese specificities, have not been fully applied into practice or contextualized into specific interpretation of rural revitalization and

regeneration under the current rapid urbanization. The two sources of architectural knowledge in up-to-date Chinese rural reconstruction, one by indigenous practitioners and the other by pioneering architectural practitioners, are both locked, remaining tacit and lacking of systematic dissemination with rigour. Thus the long-term sustainability and resilience of those architectural projects and architectural practitioners (as well as the architectural profession) are difficult to nurture and maintain.

It is within this broader context that this thesis challenges the existing mainstream and barriers, and explores an alternative form of architecture for understanding and transforming Chinese rural villages under the current rapid urbanization. The form is manifested in the twin concepts – 'hybrid building' and 'hybrid practitioner', both emerging from and rooted in the rural-urban realities in transitional China.

The concept of 'hybrid building' is expanded to mediate and engage with multiple authorships and narratives in an architectural modus operandi of social engagement, from building objects, building processes, building consequences, further to building infrastructures. As a social-transformative process, the broadest sense of 'hybrid building' is beyond Stage -1, mutual funding, participative design, collective construction and communal occupation, but is about social involvement, active participation, thick interpretation, and unpredictable coproduction. It is a mutation of both the material layer and the immaterial layer, particularly those soft consequences catalysed from the process of production of space, tectonics, rituals, power relations and collective infrastructures. Considering the hybrid nature of rural-urban Chinese specificities from this perspective, the new architecture of social engagements in Chinese rural villages from 2006 to 2016 in this thesis could be considered as an archetype of the expanded field of 'hybrid building' with literally mixed uses. Therefore, the 'hybrid building' emerged from a Chinese context in this thesis refers to both the form of bottom-up architecture of social engagement, and the action of engaging with Chinese rural transition and transformation through architectural design participation and interventions. 'Hybrid building' highlights the hybrid coexistence and reconciliation between the top-down and the bottom-up, the existing internal and the newly external, the order and the organic, the perfect and the imperfect, the regular and the irregular, the sacred and the profane, the preconceived and the messy-engaged, the imagined collective and the unequal

engagement, and the insiders' knowledge and outsiders' input, all through the architectural design engagement from both the outside and from the within. 'Hybrid building' is practised by the 'hybrid practitioner', who further relates to the changing roles, contrasting values, transgressive consequences and transformative potentials of the architectural practice and practitioner. 'Hybrid practitioner' escapes from the opposing binary of professional architects and non-professionals, who can be university teaching practitioners, craftsmen, amateur architects, artists, barefoot-architects, and practice-based researchers. In common is that the 'hybrid practitioner' practises architecture on and through design activism. Getting hands dirty and being in the field, the 'hybrid practitioner' actively gets involved and facilitates the preparation process, fund-raising process, design process, construction process, and even occupation process, with constant and close collaborations with end users and local indigenous communities. More specifically with a focus on rural China, the 'hybrid practitioner' presented in this thesis not only continues the hybrid route of the modern Chinese architect, but also combines and translates the Chinese traditional literati and traditional craftsman into contemporary moments.

The first part of this thesis paves an architecture-related foundation with a focus on the historical making and immediate surrounding of the political constructs, administrative culture, intellectual expertise, and professional practices in all its complexity and contradictions in rural China. Re-interrogating the accumulated past and the immediate present realities of villages from political, legislative, economic, cultural and social forces is a fundamental procedure to understand the rapidly changing and contested rural urbanization in current China. In particular, the past and the present apparatus in and around the rural villages have constituted a strong operational context for contemporary architectural design engagement and interventions. Furthermore, whether hybrid building and hybrid practitioner could act as transformative catalysts of social sustainability, economic resilience and cultural continuity largely depends on the degrees of their appropriate cutting and fitting into the very fabric of the existing Chinese rural villages.

As for the political and legislative context of rural China, the state apparatus is doubtlessly strong and absolutely dominant, but the practical implementation and operation of this mega-system would take in various forms and realize in different degrees according to different regions and villages, different organizations and

leaders. Thus whether the top-down adjustments of the policy could deliver the desired results on the ground remains a question, particularly in such a place like rural villages which are the deepest 'down-to-earth' based on its status and mass, and which are the farthest geo-politics from the central system both in history and at present. The coexistence of two different land ownership structures within the rural villages, and different land tenure systems and land use rights between rural and urban China fundamentally determines the complexities and contradictions both in terms of the process and in terms of the product of building industry and activities. The remaining collective ownership and property rights generate confusions and conflicts at both village and household levels under the state-backed 'Land-based financing' mode, associated with aggressive, profit-driven real estate developments of rural urbanization. The double roles set for and played by village leaders determine the double effects of their position, attitude and decision-making. Therefore, the political and legislative system of Chinese rural villages is itself a hybrid, fluctuating between dual rural-urban social security system, dual rural-urban land ownership system, dual formal power structures and even the dual roles played by village leaders. It is this particular dualism structure at this particular rural-urban transition moment that created the space for seeking an alternative way for architectural design and practice through design engagement and participation.

From the economic perspective, the economic determinism provides an overall precondition for architectural design practice in making rural China urban. The newly emerging mode of 'state entrepreneurial capitalism', mixed with the historical legacy of planned economy, have led to a 'planning-for-growth' model, which has been proved successful both in terms of economic developments in Chinese rural villages, and in terms of political developments in the legitimization of state dominance. But its side effects have been confirmed by the results of short-sighted, profit-driven, tabula-rasa architectural developments at the sacrifice of getting into a truly locally-appropriate and locally-sustainable village transition path. Besides, as the 'financialisation' model and method skillfully manipulated in Chinese urban development cannot be fully transferred into rural conditions because of those dualist institutional barriers, the longstanding and increasing financing bottlenecks in rural architecture and village revitalization would be tackled by neither state-led initiatives nor scholar-led proposals in the long term. The current predominantly tourism-led

village transformation model is contradictory and controversial, and cannot bridge the gap between the expert-outsiders professionals and rural villager-users in terms of the design and occupation of rural village architecture and built environment.

From the perspective of cultural form and social organization, in which Chinese rural villages have been deeply rooted, the collective form /system still matters. Based upon the strong institutionalization of the family and clan in traditional rural China, the role of the collective, the form of its representation, and the effect of its intervention have changed and evolved, but they have still been resilient in different forms and provided a cultural resonance for collective actions related to spatial production and occupation. As the key collective form in social organization, the village clan system has had a silently framing role on the life and the production in the Chinese village, and can further be used as a metaphor of kinship ancestor or imagined commune. It has been a social form of great flexibility for promoting the collective system and empowerment from the bottom up. As the architecture of social forms, clan ancestral hall is a particular building type which has carried a rich palimpsest of layers of ritual, power, and politics in rural regional China. It is not only a building for ancestral worship, but also a collective place in which social hierarchy and power structure of village and its associated commune had been produced and reproduced through construction rites and spatial performance. However, in confrontation with hegemonic urbanization, clan ancestral hall can neither sustain its old identity physically nor mentally connect the village as a social clue like before. With the vanishing of ancestral hall, Chinese rural villages are in urgent need of a new form of public architectural engagement, through which the vibrancy and collective life could be brought back to the village.

Anchored in this specific context, contemporary Chinese architects and their professional practice in rural villages, which can be illustrated into four categorizations according to the ownership structure and the working mechanism of their design practice, have still been reluctant and unable to respond to what is really needed by the rural village and villagers. The trajectory of the existing mainstream architectural practice, although motivated from different starting points, has been directed in a relatively similar mechanism without a truly sense of villagers' empowerment and village's transformation. Their current practice form and architectural activities in rural villages as the mainstream is a result of the historical

and professional particularities for architects and architectural practice in China: The concept of architect, as a profession and title, was brought to China from the West in the early twentieth century. Before the importation of the western concept of architect, the activities of a building project were the work of a 'Master-Builder', who combined the tasks of contractor, builder and designer or architect. The Master-Builders (also referred to as 'Carpenter-Architects' in China) were responsible for everything from the feasibility study to the costing or the project, design, delivery and quality control. They were the sole technical and financial consultants for the client. The client would often have been a member of the 'Literati' class, consisting of local gentry-men, scholar elites, administrative scholar officials and intellectuals. The Literati were involved in building projects as clients, landowners and users but they were also involved in the representation and mediation of building projects through the visual and textual practices of landscape painting, calligraphy and poetry. For the Literati, 'architecture' was an ideal topic for writing and drawing, to reveal their personal cultivation. The Literati's role in the representation of building projects was integral to spreading ideas and knowledge about processes and practice. However, it also obscured the role of the Master-Builder/Carpenter-Architect in the design and production of buildings. The 'invisibility' of the Master-Builder/Carpenter-Architect in Chinese building was also due to longstanding social prejudices against builders and craftsmen in China. Building in China was as much about the process of dissemination as the process of design and construction. The techniques of construction -- the coherent application of an established order in a module system – were knowledge held amongst the Master-Builders. Particular processes were practiced repetitively by each group and handed down through generations. Through the Literati's representations of buildings, knowledge of the system spread. These representations had a far reaching influence on collective memory and the perception of the built environment in China. However, the Master-Builders/Carpenter-Architects remained anonymous and the multiple authorship of the building process remained largely hidden. The fundamental paradoxical nature of this evolution of modern Chinese architects can be revealed clearly from the complex interplay between the craftsmen and the literati in premodern China, traditional master builder and modern architect in modern China, tradition and modernity, and East and West from modern China to date. China's architectural

profession and the very idea of Chinese architects have been ruptured and grafted as a hybrid, which creates a space for contemporary hybrid practitioners.

The second part of this thesis presents six hybrid practitioners and their hybrid buildings as an alternative form, in confrontation and in response to the existing architectural mainstream and operational context. 'Xihe Village Community Centre' serves as the very first critical example of the socially-engaged architecture in China. The case strongly demonstrates that a transformative architecture and its thoughtful mediation on the fragility and progression of relationships between place, people and power can still be achieved through valuing social engagement through a similar process of making vernacular architecture in current rural China. Through engaging the vernacular, the periphery, and multiple authorships, bottom up architectural design and engagement by the hybrid practitioner, mediated between self-organization of insiders and design interventions of outsiders, have resisted against the normal architectural forms of rural-urban disjunction driven by the top-down powers. The social consequence of this hybrid building process is much more important than the final object produced. Community participation and social engagement triggered by hybrid practitioners has suppressed authorship of the architect, denied signature of the designer, but unexpectedly produced a socially-sustainable building at its most meaningful level.

'Sun Commune' is a hybrid building produced in communal form and by collective practice, which has facilitated village revitalization against the current mainstream practice of rural reconstruction in China. Its hybridity not only lies in the physical construction, but also in its form through a trust-based commune between urban residents and rural villagers, between urban food consumption and rural food production. In terms of the hybrid practitioner, 'Sun Commune' illustrates a modern version of architectural collaboration between the literati and the craftsmen in a rural village. The sense of the hybrid building, both in terms of its transformative process and its never-finished product, has acted as a social glue to unite the village community to an imagined commune. Although such socially-engaged tradition has been nearly completely destroyed by the hegemonic top-down urbanization, the 'Sun Commune' shows how architecture, initiated by literati-like expert outsiders and co-produced by local people particularly craftsmen, is still possible to negotiate this change in a more communal form and through more collective practice than is usual

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today. This might be the key to facilitate Chinese rural village revitalization from the within and from the below.

'Wen village redevelopment project' deploys the potential for Wang Shu's 'amateur' architectural practice as an agent of social and political transformation in contemporary rural China. The case also develops a paradigm in how contemporary architecture of social engagement, facilitated by hybrid practitioners from the outside, can transform the Chinese rural village from the within. Positioning himself as a scholar-craftsperson or literati-architect, Wang Shu demonstrates the consistency of his humanities-based theory and craftsman-led practice learning from the rural villages in this case, and provides an alternative form to explore a more natural and resilient mode of architecture, which is deeply rooted in Wen village, cannot be explained by the village but can explain what the village is. In this sense then, this hybrid building has the potential to dissolve the contemporary hierarchical structures within and around the architect, the master-builder and the craftsperson, furthermore, between professional theory and hybrid practice.

'Bishan Commune', also as a hybrid building in communal form and by collective practice, is more controversial. It starts with idealistic, utopian visions for a specific social, cultural and political context. When tested in specific site of Bishan village, it rejects demolition and instead tries to recycle buildings, reinvigorate local skills and knowledge and progressively starts to transform the rural village in inclusive ways. However, a hybrid of two approaches to 'Bishan Commune', with contrasting values is considered here: one is the commune imagined and presented by expert outsiders, and the other is the commune as expressed and lived by villagers themselves. The creative, participative interplay between the hybrid practitioner as the curator, artist and architect on one hand, and long term villagers on the other, proved not to be sustainable at the initial levels of interaction and coproduction. Although situated in Bishan Village, the 'Bishan Commune' seems to have remained 'other', as it developed from a utopian experiment to a heterogeneous grafting of the urban onto the rural. The tactical error, arguably, lies in the uneven development strategy which prioritises cultural production over the social production of community and architecture. It is at this level that architectural mode of hybrid building should be careful to transfer its consequence and play a role in developing resilience in Chinese rural villages.

'Anji Eco-lodges' in Jianshan village is the only case in this thesis which is directed completely by the insiders. Intermeshing the roles of architect-developer, user-architect and architect-builder, Weizhong Ren is not only a contemporary barefoot architect but also a hybrid practitioner in the village. On one hand, Weizhong Ren's lodges are not driven by norms and regulations, while he still readdresses the political basis of institutions through interacting with local and even higher-level authority politicians. On the other hand, the lodges are a minor type of 'oral architecture' built from the below, which resiliently confront the drawing-based, visual-dominated architectural production in rural and even whole China. His Eco-lodges are a form of hybrid building from the bottom-up, and his barefoot architectural practice is a hybrid mode of practice, both of which highlight the craftsman's individuality while bringing the political difference together in a coherent scheme. Design and construction overlaps and even runs in parallel on site, through getting down to earth, getting hands dirty, and getting something done through learning by doing; all have been communicated through oral instructions and body movements, through an aesthetically challenging but socially received gesture of 'planting' the buildings. Compared to those creative expert-outsiders in previous cases, arguably the relatively weaker process of social production in 'Anji Eco-lodges' facilitates an architectural engagement through a heroic architectural action as a political statement: the barefoot architect as a hybrid practitioner starts as a radically resisting alternative, but seems to be ended as an alterity part of the mainstream.

The final case, 'Clan-Community Hall' in Xiaogou Wu village, comprises the negotiation of an oral brief, a mutual financing model, and an architectural design participation process, as well as an unexpected built work Temple of Earth God as the by-product, between the author as a hybrid practitioner, a local barefoot architect as a bridge, and the local clan community. The process of communal design participation and collective ritual reinvention in this hybrid building is not only a return to a static integration of settings, objects and participants, but also a navigation within the system through micro-design activism. Therefore the hybrid building, acting as a micro-design activism, is not just intervention but produced through that intervention. It is this hybridity that reinvents a new temporary meaning – offering neither the final interpretation nor the last word, but a palimpsest added to by different actors in different periods: an accumulative process. Through this

accumulation, villager-users have been facilitated to negotiate and renegotiate their spatial boundaries, and to generate possibilities for new encounters, spaces and collectives, which might develop a capacity to engage with dual political structures of this natural village in the near future.

The scales, approaches and effects of each case vary, but the collective process, the spatial meaning and the social use of hybrid buildings practised by hybrid practitioners have demonstrated an underlying consistency in a highly engaged village transition path. They evoke a socio-spatial heterogeneity and complex institutional setting of Chinese rural villages that are constantly pressed and consumed by rapid urbanization in the past 40 years, within whom the form of hybridity in architecture and architects is surprisingly unchanged and resilient. All the six cases recognize and rediscover what the high form of architecture and urbanism in Chinese rural villages has previously suppressed, and reveal the tensions that lie beneath the surface of rural villages through hybrid building interventions, by exploring highly specific process and product of a form of architecture of engagement. The six cases expose the undercurrent of silent issues in architecture that constitute Chinse rural villages, and bring a more sustainable and resilient way of producing and engaging with village architectural regeneration as a palimpsest and a stage for multiple authorships and narratives under the current Chinese hegemonic urbanism.

Referring back to the context of architecture and architects in both historical and modern rural China, which have been discussed in the first part of the thesis, the six case studies can be framed through the following comparative dialogues.

First of all, the six case studies presented a scale of complexity in terms of architectural design and architectural practitioners at this particular moment of rural urbanization in China.

From the political and legislative perspectives, all six projects were operated from within the dualism structure of rural-urban China, particularly the household registration system which separates citizens into two statuses. All six villages have suffered, or have been suffering, from a tremendous loss of permanent residents before and after the architectural projects and their socio-spatial interventions. In particular, shifting demographics can be seen as the architectural point of entry in

the 'Xihe Village Community Centre' project, 'Wen Village Redevelopment' project and 'Bishan Commune' project. After renovation and new built interventions, the population flows between the rural villages and urban areas have been facilitated: 'Xihe Village Community Centre' project attracted regional visitors from both nearby rural villages and urban areas; 'Wen Village Redevelopment' project strove to bring back a growing part of flowing population for starting up family-based B&B industry in order to accommodate the booming tourism market; and 'Bishan Commune' project invited more urban professionals particularly from creative industries for both short-term and long-term residency in the decaying rural village. But none of them have impacted local policies so far, and neither could they really penetrate the overall institutional barriers of the household registration system.

In terms of the dual land ownership system in Chinese rural villages, the ambiguous boundary between collective ownership and private ownership, and between the scales and scopes of operation in privately-owned land, is a determinative factor which has caused conflicting value and uses in 'Xihe Village Community Centre' project and 'Clan-Community Hall' project in Xiaogou Wu village. The other four projects more or less escaped confronting or strategically dissolving the land ownership challenge, through either political support (the government-backed architectural master's way in 'Wen Village Redevelopment' project), financial support under current market rules (collective funding from urban middle class families in 'Sun Commune' and artists' networking in 'Bishan Commune'), or social support (the local gentry's approach in 'Anji Eco-lodges' in Jianshan village). In terms of the village politics in relation to the local governance, most of the projects went through an initial negotiation process, formally or informally, with the local authorities and village political administrations. This provided to be a key factor in terms of guaranteeing the relatively smooth process in later project stages, which can be demonstrated through two counterarguments -- 'Bishan Commune' project and Xiaogou Wu 'Clan-Community Hall' project. The former indicated the double roles played by village political leaders, whereas the latter made visible the power struggle between the natural village and administrative village leaders through its difficult decision-making process within the clan community which finally caused the disagreement on the participative design outcome.

From an economic perspective, the predominant 'planning for growth' model can be reflected clearly in the first three cases, either it was triggered by the architectural practitioner in the form of the villager-cooperative in 'Xihe Village Community Centre', or by a strategic social entrepreneur and design planning consultant as in 'Sun Commune', or by architect-led, state-backed partnerships in 'Wen Village Redevelopment'. The instant economic return, gained through successfully architectural branding for modern tourism, has triggered following-up new architectural projects and economic development in the villages. However, the financial limitation can still be seen as a major issue in terms of architectural reuse and regeneration in the last three cases, in which fund-raising processes were largely relied on the individual practitioners' social networks. Although a limited amount of external funding was once available for 'Bishan Commune' and 'Anji Eco-lodges', it could not support a kick-start process without the personal input from these practitioners. In 'Clan-Community Hall' in Xiaogou Wu village, participative resourcing both in terms of funding and in terms of labour was realized, based on the strong social ties existing within the village. However, all the above-mentioned three cases have hardly generated economic value for the local communities, which was also part of the reason all three projects experienced struggles and lacked stronger impacts.

From the cultural and social perspectives, all six projects presented a collective ideology and methodology in the process of building, which anchored user participation and community collaboration throughout their architectural design and construction. Social ties and organizations of the villages were reintroduced and reconnected in all projects, in which 'Bishan Commune' and Xiaogou Wu 'Clan-Community Hall', in particular, intensified the design collaboration with an ancestral clan as a key collective form of Chinese rural society. The preserved social and cultural fragments grounded in the givens of the place and villages were carefully collected and reinvented into a new meaning from a modern point of view. This can be demonstrated from the light touch in 'Xihe Village Community Centre' and 'Anji Eco-lodges', both of which worked with the existing ancestral hall, with the former focused on the visual corridor from the site and the latter emphasizing the reuse and reassembly of building components. In 'Sun Commune' and 'Wen Village Redevelopment' project, local vernacular knowledge, particularly craftsmanship, was

valued as a priority and allowed to play a key role in leading the design translation and interpretation. Communal input in the building construction as both a cultural and a social process was also introduced in all six projects.

Secondly, based upon the above strengths and weaknesses showed in the presentation of complexities of the six case studies, potentials and limitations of hybrid building and hybrid practitioner can be identified in a contemporary Chinese context of sustaining and transforming rural villages and communities.

The six case studies approached the problem from six very different directions, but they have independently arrived at similar views in suggesting potential ways to address the complexity of architectural design interventions in Chinese rural villages. The twin concept of hybrid building and the hybrid practitioner in six case studies not only narrates a documentation of emerging socially-engaged architectural practice from 2005 to 2015, but also provides an alternative way forward to negotiate a sustainable future in its broadest social meaning. It is the latter that addresses the dilemmas, past and present, of relating the comprehensive story of architecture in Chinese rural villages, and the potential lies in the instrumental role of hybrid building and hybrid practitioner to facilitate the assimilation of vernacular social and spatial practices and translate these in contemporary architectural moments. Through inviting and enhancing local community participation, architectural design moves away from a purely technical or aesthetical process to a radical interpretation process, both socially and culturally. The whole architectural process, ranging from fund-raising to the post occupancy, celebrates the hybridity -- complications, roughness, provisionality and compromise in social involvement in making the building rather than a fantasy of the perfect product. Thus hybrid building as mnemonics becomes a palimpsest with multiple authorships and narratives.

All the six case studies have a common motivation and design potentials to trigger broader and deeper social change through architecturally transforming material realities and immaterial relationships in Chinese rural villages, however, they also have limitations. Through juxtaposing the forms of participation achieved in the each stage of each project cycle, it illustrates how the practice of hybrid practitioner -- hybrid building can result in very different forms of social-economic impacts and capacity building. The participatory approach in the building process appears highly

contingent particularly in terms of resourcing, which heavily depends on political, economic and social variables. In confrontation to the dominant status of mainstream ways of building in contemporary rural China, which have been associated with such a large number of villages, villagers and their urgent needs in search for a modern lifestyle and wellbeing, the hybrid practitioner's individual dedication sometimes seems more like another heroic way to architecture of resistance. Meanwhile, the hybrid practitioner combining the vernacular craftsmen and literati might find the vernacular as both a process and an end product difficult to disseminate within the current technology, society, economics and even politics. Let alone the increasing labour division which makes architecture different and difficult to mediate the ambiguity between authorship and service, between disciplinary knowledge and social (co-)production.

The thesis is not under any illusions about the legacies and conditions of political monuments, regional branding, economic returns and other issues and changes in conceptualizing the notion of building and practitioner in contemporary rural China; nor does it suggest that the selected cases of contemporary architectural design regeneration could solve all emerging problems in social architectural discourse and practice under contemporary Chinese rural-urban transition. Instead the thesis provides an alternative direction for those mainstream institutional and design forces that became involved in the 'Disneyfication' and 'McDonaldisation' of mass tourism into Chinese rural villages, hoping instead to reestablish architecture's fundamental social role towards sustainable rural regeneration in China.

From this thesis, a deeper and up-to-dated insight can be gained into the Chinese village locality through the double lens and twin concepts of hybrid building and hybrid practitioner. China's philosophical traditions often appreciate different ways of seeing of the complementary rather than the contradictory nature of dualism. The transition in rural China addresses areas of reality complementary to the great socio-philosophical sophistication of the traditional China and rapid cultural change so prominent in the current city-oriented development paradigm; and this complementarity is itself an important insight into how the hybrid practitioner can understand and prompt micro-level, small-scaled, transgressive change from within the socio-cultural complexity of contemporary rural China. As the rural (bottom-up) it enables a potential renegotiation and reconciliation of the urban (top-down), through

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the rural's own transformation as prompted by the hybrid building intervention – from an architecture of resistance to an architecture of engagement – to make interpretations and transformations to the contemporary rural-urban development paradigm in Chinese villages. The thesis draws a conclusion towards an alternative way of architectural design involving user participation, which restores the value of process and the sense of community.

In response to the inquiry in the Foreword and the key research questions raised in the beginning of this thesis, it concludes that hybrid building and the hybrid practitioner as an alternative form of architecture of social engagement can not only revitalize the decaying rural villages constantly pressed by the top-down urbanization and mainstream architectural practice, but also transform them in a more socially-sustainable way, by prompting architectural activisms from within the very social fabric of Chinese rural villages. The need to rethink the social account in Chinese architectural practice in relation to the rural villages both in the classroom and in the field, has become more and more urgent and essential in recent years, particularly in view of ongoing rural regeneration processes and cultural changes driven by rapid urbanization and globalization. For numerous reasons, urbanization had become inevitable in rural China, but it didn't have to be done so hastily, blindly and with such dominant priority and destructive views over the conservation and regeneration of the rural villages. The discourse of architecture and the profession of architects should, and can become more relevant, facing scarcity and rapid changes; they should be, and can be more responsive, reflexive, and reengaged to mediate and manage those suspicious and marginalized from those who have built their professional credibility on proving architecture and architects wrong. Within the Chinese context, in order to deeper understand and more sustainably transform Chinese rural villages from the bottom-up, getting back to the lowest-ranked villages which stays farthest from the centre of political mega-structure, re-establishing collaboration with the community and clan kinship which forms the social structure in organising the villages, and getting hands dirty working with indigenous villagers and craftsmen, provides an alternative form of hybrid building and hybrid practitioner, which will lead to a strategic way forward in order to navigate into, mediate with, and finally transcend those opposing binaries in Chinese architecture between the rural and urban, the tradition and modernity, the East and West.

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Appendix

Selected Awards and Prizes (within PhD 2013-2017)

Research Profile (within PhD 2013-2017)

Ethical Approval Letter (2015)

Selected Action Project (2014)

Selected Awards and Prizes (within PhD 2013-2017)

2016 RIBA Presidents Awards for Research   Shortlisted (1 of 3 Finalist)

2016 RIBA/WYSA Denis Mason Jones Award for Free Hand Sketching

2016 The Great Britain-China Educational Trust (GBCET) Chinese Students Awards

2015 Chinese Government Awards for Outstanding PhD Students Abroad

2014 RIBA Presidents Awards for Research   Shortlisted (1 of 4 Finalist)

2013 MA Distinction, University of Sheffield School of Architecture

Research Profile (within PhD 2013-2017)

Peer-reviewed Journal Articles and Book Chapter (in English)

05/2017   Xiang Ren: 'Rural Face, Urban Mask: Architecture of Communal Form and Collective Practice in Two Chinese Villages from 2010 to 2015', *Architecture and Culture*, volume 5, issue 1, p. 57-76. doi:10.1080/20507828. 1283124.

03/2017   Xiang Ren: 'Hybrid Building and Hybrid Practitioner', 2016 RIBA Presidents Awards for Research shortlisted works. RIBA Publishing

11/2016   Xiang Ren: 'Clan-Community Hall', *RIBA Journal,* November 25, 2016. https://www.ribaj.com/intelligence/clan-community-hall

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Peer-reviewed Journal Articles (in Chinese)

05/2017   Xiang Ren: 'Book Review: Architecture and Ritual by Peter Blundell Jones', *Heritage Architecture,* 2017(2), p.112-113.

06/2016   Xiang Ren: 'Agency in Architecture', (in Chinese) *New Architecture, N*o.166, p.74-77.

03/2016   Xiang Ren, Jing Qiao: 'Archi-infrastructure as Urban Patchworks & Generators: The Ongoing London Crossrail (2008-2019) Project', (in both Chinese and English) *Time+Architecture,* 2016(2), p.28-35.

10/2015   Xiang Ren, Jian Kang: 'Live, Social-engagement and Transformative Value: Research-led Teaching in the First Year at the Sheffield School of Architecture', (in Chinese) *World Architecture Review*, 2015(5), p.45-47.

02/2015   Xiang Ren: 'The 2014 RIBA Stirling Prize from the Perspective of the Ordinary', (in Chinese) *New Architecture,* No.158, p.151.

04/2014   Xiang Ren: 'Hybridization, Landform, and Catalyst Buildings ---Interpretation on Two Libraries Designed by SHL Architects', (in Chinese) *Architecture Technique*, P. 24-29,

02/2014   Xiang Ren, Jinayu Chen: 'Reflection on Le Corbusier: An Interview with Peter Blundell Jones', (in Chinese) *New Architecture,* No.153, p.14-15.

Conference Papers and Presentations

14-16/07/2016   Writing Buildings
hosted by CREAte (University of Kent) & Architectural Review, Canterbury, UK
Xiang Ren: 'A Right to Write: Textual practice of buildings by carpenter-architect and barefoot-architect'

22-24/06/2016   The Place of Silence: Environment, Experience and Affect
hosted by Edinburgh School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, Edinburgh College of Art, University of Edinburgh
Xiang Ren: 'Listening to the Hui Ancestral Hall -- Architecture of Silence and Absent Narratives'

20-21/05/2016   CHEW Conference 2016: Visible and Invisible Challenges - Transformations in Contemporary China
hosted by Oxford China Centre, University of Oxford
Xiang Ren: 'Socially Resilient Architecture in Rapid Rural-Urban Transition -- Emerging Cases in China from 2005 to 2015'

06-07/04/2016   13th Annual AHRA Research Student Symposium
hosted by School of Architecture, University of Sheffield
Xiang Ren: 'Archaeology of the Ordinary -- Working with the given and trans-local assemblages in the public works of Enric Miralles'

03-05/02/2016   International Conference 'Regional Urbanism in the Era of Globalization'
hosted by Centre for Urban Design, Architecture and Sustainability at the University of Huddersfield, Huddersfield, the U.K
Xiang Ren: 'Readdressing Critical Regionalism: Critical Architecture of Resistance in Rural-Urban China from 2005 to 2015', ISBN 978-1-86218-135-9, p135-137

03-05/02/2016   International Conference 'Regional Urbanism in the Era of Globalization'
hosted by Centre for Urban Design, Architecture and Sustainability at the University of Huddersfield, Huddersfield, the U.K
Xiang Ren, Xiaolin Zhu: 'Urban Assemblage and Urban Acupuncture – Architectural Profanation in Pearl River Delta', ISBN 978-1-86218-135-9, p165-167

19-21/11/2015   'This Thing Called Theory' 12th AHRA International Conference 2015
hosted by School of Art, Architecture and Design, Leeds Beckett University, Leeds, the U.K
Xiang Ren: 'Professional Theory, Amateur Practice'

03-05/06/2015   International Conference 'Arquitectonics Network: Architecture, Education and Society',
hosted by Universitat *Politècnica* de *Catalunya, Barcelona, Spain*
Xiang Ren: 'The Structure of Ordinary: Ancestral Hall Building in Hui Vernacular Settlement in China'

25-27/05/2015   'Architecture of Alterity' International Symposium,
hosted by University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, the U.K
Xiang Ren: 'Rural Skin, Urban Masks: Social Transformative Potential of Hybrid Architectural Interventions in Chinese Villages'

26/02-01/03/2015   'Re-imagining Rurality' International Conference
hosted by Faculty of Architecture and Built Environment, University of Westminster, London, the U.K
Xiang Ren: 'Whisper of the Rural: Agent Architect and Collective Architectural Making in Contemporary Chinese Rural Community'

30-31/01/2015   'Architecture Research Moments', ARENA
hosted by Faculty of Architecture, KU Leuven, Brussels, Belgium
Xiang Ren: 'Hybrid Building Narratives: Hybrid Practitioners and Architectural Interventions in Rural China 2005-2014 '

03-04/11/2014   'Hybridization Design Strategies / Key Concepts, Researches and Projects' Web-conference
hosted by the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies, Politecnico di Milano, Milan, Italy
Xiang Ren: 'Rural Skin, Urban Masks: Hybridization at the Edge of Contemporary Chinese cities'

03-05/09/2014   The Second Architecture and Education (AAE Association of Architectural Educators) International Conference
hosted by the School of Architecture, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, the U.K
Xiang Ren: 'Translating Vernacular Hybridity into a Living Matrix -- Reflections on the production and occupation of a School Building', in the proceedings of 2nd AAE (Association of Architectural Educators) International Conference, p.124-129. ISBN 978-0-9929705-2-9

19/05/2014   11th AHRA PHD Research Symposium
hosted by the School of Architecture, Landscape and the Built Environment, University College, Dublin, Ireland
Xiang Ren: 'Hybrid Building Diary'

Peer-reviewed Seminars

30/06/2016	'Habits, Beliefs, and Tacit Knowledge: Everyday Ritual in East Asian Villages', Funded by Faculty of Social Science, hosted by School of Architecture, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, the U.K Xiang Ren: 'Ancestral Worship: The Ideal Form of Ritual Imagination and the Practical Form of Spatial Practice in a Lineage Village in Anhui Province'
27/05/2016	Humanities and Beyond: Exploring the Frontiers of Interdisciplinarity hosted by University of York Xiang Ren: '*Interdisciplinary Architecture: Public Engagement and Research in Practice'*
21-22/04/2016	ARENA Design Research (in) Practice hosted by School of Architecture, University of Reading Xiang Ren: '*Design Research in Practice: Reflection on an ongoing project through the lens of hybrid practitioner*'
10/03/2016	East-West Seminar – Chinese Villages, Houses and Gardens Organized jointly by the School of Architecture and the Department of Landscape, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, the U.K Xiang Ren: 'Cooperative Rituals in Clan-based Villages'
22/05/2015	WRDTC Student Seminar Series 2015 –'Real Research in the Social Sciences: Design, Fieldwork & Dissemination', hosted by Universities of Leeds, Sheffield and York, Sheffield, the U.K Xiang Ren: 'From Ivory Tower to the Real Field: working as an activist researcher in a distant fieldwork'
23/05/2014	PROVOKE PhD Seminar Series -- Methods hosted by Liverpool School of Architecture, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, the U.K Xiang Ren: 'Hybrid Building Method: A Crafted Diary'
25/10/2013	East-West Seminar -- Independence of Wall and Frame hosted by the School of Architecture, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, the U.K Xiang Ren: 'Stereotomics of Wall-enclosure and Tectonics of Wooden Framework -- Studies on the Vernacular Architecture of Traditional Hui Prefecture of China'

Other Publications

11/2018 (in press)	Xiang Ren. 'Haobo Wei: Anthropological Architect Learning from the Vernacular in Guizhou Province of South-western China'. Snapshot Entries in *Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World* (2nd ed) project, to be published in November 2018. Bloomsbury.
11/2016	Peter Blundell Jones: Celebration of his life and work memorial event Xiang Ren: *Tribute 'One Day Teacher, Whole Life Father'* Officially published by the University of Sheffield School of Architecture https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.667733!/file/Xiang-Ren-Speech.pdf The tribute referenced by Peter Blundell Jones's wife and writer Christine Poulson: *'One Day Teacher, Whole Life Father'* http://www.christinepoulson.co.uk/a-reading-life/
11/2014	Xiang Ren: 'Rural Skin, Urban Masks: Hybridization at the edge of contemporary Chinese cities', *The Hybrid_Link*, Italy, Issue #04 'Hybridization Design Strategies/ Key Concepts, Researches and Projects. ISSN: 2039-4608
04/2014	Xiang Ren: 'A Hybrid Building for Place-specific Resilience -- Design Research of Sheffield Blue Loop Hybrids', *The Hybrid_Link*, Italy, Issue #03'Hybridization between Form and Energy'. ISSN: 2039-4608

Organized Symposiums and Seminars

13/06/2017	Co-organizer with Prof. Doina Petrescu, 'Rural-Urban Regeneration through architectural design activism in China and India' research seminar, School of Architecture, University of Sheffield
30/06/2016	Organizer of the research symposium 'Habits, Beliefs, and Tacit Knowledge: Everyday Ritual in East Asian Villages' at School of Architecture, funded by Faculty of Social Science, University of Sheffield , Sheffield, the U.K
06-07/04/2016	Co-organizer with Dr. Stephen Walker, Reviewer, 13th Annual AHRA Research Student Symposium, School of Architecture, University of Sheffield
10/03/2016	Co-organizer with Prof. Peter Blundell Jones, 'East-West Seminar', School of Architecture and the Department of Landscape, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, the U.K

Public Talk

16/11/2016	'Peter Blundell Jones: Celebration of His Life and Work' Formal memorial event for Peter Blundell Jones organized by Sheffield School of Architecture One of the six honorable invited speakers with Jeremy Till, Peter Hubner, Fiona MacCarthy, Christine Poulson and Catherine Burke, chaired by Bryan Lawson.

Ethical Approval Letter (2015)

Xiang Ren
Registration number: 130142676
School of Architecture
Programme: PhD Architecture

Dear Xiang

PROJECT TITLE: Rural Skin, Urban Masks: Hybrid Building and Hybrid Practitioners in Rural and Peri-Urban China from 2005 to 2014
APPLICATION: Reference Number 003269

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 30/03/2015 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 003269 (dated 16/03/2015).
- Participant information sheet 006487 version 1 (16/03/2015).
- Participant consent form 006488 version 1 (16/03/2015).

If during the course of the project you need to deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation please inform me since written approval will be required.

Yours sincerely

Email Arc Ethics
Ethics Administrator
School of Architecture

Selected Action Project (2014)

WHISPER OF THE RURAL VERNACULAR
COMMUNITY CENTRE
QEDD VILLAGE
2014