Constructing Nostalgic Futurity:
Architecture, Space, and Society in Chinese Villages, 1978-2018

by

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Class of 2018

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Wesleyan University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Departmental Honors from the College of Social Studies and with Departmental Honors in Art History
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Acknowledgement

This project would not have come to fruition were it not for the help of a host of gracious people along the way. Firstly, I am deeply indebted to my thesis advisors, Professors Joseph Siry and Ying Jia Tan. Professor Siry’s infinite knowledge of architectural history and global culture, as well as his incredible work efficiency and sharp criticism pushed me to become a better thinker, writer, and human being. Professor Tan's high academic standard, and more importantly, his belief in my idea and vision gave me confidence through all the ups and downs during the writing process. I will always treasure my conversations with both about China, villages, buildings, arts, and beyond.

I am also grateful to Professor Vera Schwarcz, without whom my interests in rural China and nuances of historical narrative would have been shuttered. Her careful and constant guidance in my thesis research and writing processes showed me the value of digging deep into the muck of the unexplored and adding my personal voice there. Learning, in person, from her inspiring words and life-changing wisdom is an absolute highlight of my college life.

I should also express my gratitude to Professors Katherine Kuenzli and Nadja Aksamija of Art History, and Professors Victoria Smolkin and Cecilia Miller in the College of Social Studies. They have been a great resource to me at various stages of this project, refining many of my ideas and formulating my Davenport and Paoletti grant proposals.

I owe much to Professors John Bonin, Richard Adelstein, Giulio Gallarotti, Wendy Rayack, Sonali Chakravarti, Kerwin Kaye, Phillip Wagoner, and Melissa Katz for helping me think in ways I had never been conceived of before. A special thanks goes to Professor Yukio Lippit of Harvard, without whom my limited understanding of the timber-frame architecture wouldn’t permit me to embark on my journey.

Moreover, I own much credit to the Davenport and Paoletti Committees, which funded my research and enabled this project to become a reality. In addition, the fellowship at the Wesleyan Center for the Humanities offered me an intellectually challenging environment in which I think and rethink the validity and originality of the concepts in my own project.

My thanks also goes to my intellectual homes at Wesleyan — the College of Social Studies and Art History families — my fellow thesis writers, and the professors who attended thesis workshops and provided me with invaluable suggestions and critiques that help me ground my project in evidence. I thank my long-time friend and CSS
veteran Mr. Ben Jacobs who taught me how to conduct field research in my high school years, inspired me to apply for Wesleyan and the CSS, and proofread key sections of this thesis.

Also, I reserve a place for my Fauer 210 crew, especially Ms. Zhou Yi, in my heart: I will always remember their support and accompaniment, sharing happiness and facing hardship together at all time.

I am grateful to all who showed kindness and hospitality at all stages of my thesis journey: my family relatives in Xinhe who opened secret routes to numerous unknown sites, village residents in Wencun who put trust in my ability to listen to their voices, and those guides in Huaxi who had the courage to share their inner thoughts with me.

Though I have received much help and support to bring this thesis to fruition, if any mistakes should remain they are entirely my own.

Finally, nothing would be possible without my amazingly supportive parents — Mr. Shen Xuezhong and Ms. Dai Ye — who spent days and nights venturing with me on the muddy roads of hamlets and extended their dialect proficiency to assist me in comprehending even the most difficult. Their loving, caring, and knowledgeable souls will always be the torchlight in my life.

A Note on Romanization and Translation

In keeping with the current academic convention, this thesis uses the Hanyu Pinyin system for the Romanization of Chinese words and names. Surnames come before given names. Exceptions were made for figures such as Chiang Kai-shek who are better known to the western readers under the Wade-Giles Romanization. Unless otherwise indicated, I translated all the sources from Chinese. When I mentioned phrases that have clear English translations, such as names of publications and political organizations, I wrote the English translations in text with their Pinyin and Chinese characters in brackets. When I discussed Chinese terms that do not find accurate translations, I wrote the Pinyin in text with their Chinese characters and literal translations in brackets. I also keep the original Chinese characters before translation in text. Since the thesis primarily deals with the period after 1978, Simplified Chinese characters are preferred.
Introduction
A Playground for Minds and Actions

*Quand l'image est nouvelle, le monde est nouveau.*
— Gaston Bachelard (1957)

“When the image is new, the world is new.” Gaston Bachelard masterfully spells out the relationship between the newness of the image, of what people see and experience, and the changing world in which the images emerge. Like all images, which rely on layers of context to facilitate interpretation, the popular perception of the Chinese rural scene is also closely aligned with the transformations of political and economic environments. The rural image, as derived from village architecture, signals a grand narrative of the nation beyond. Before 1978, due to the economic dominance of agriculture, villages couldn’t present a “new, modern” image because farms were viewed as old and static. Nevertheless, as the world turned onward following the end of the Mao era, China’s countryside began to present rural images in a new light.

The 1978 Reform and Opening begun under Deng Xiaoping intensified the role that the countryside played in the Chinese economy. Instead of forming a socialist ideological bulwark — as had been envisioned in the 1960s and 1970s — China’s rural villages became transformed into sites for manufacturing, which in turn stimulated economic outputs that revolutionized China’s primarily agrarian society. The household responsibility system, township-village enterprises and rural trust funds were novel village developments ultimately became pillars of a larger, more liberalized Chinese

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socialist market economy. Due to these economic developments and policy innovations, the Chinese countryside was revitalized with radically realigned economic incentives.

Despite the drastic increases in household incomes that occurred in Chinese villages in the Reform era, this wave of marketization was also accompanied by an increasingly severe rural-urban divide. Although the countryside initiated China’s economic transition, more industrialized cities soon caught up because of their facility in concentrating labor and finance, as well as their infrastructural advantages. Rural areas have been in decline since 1994, which marked the second phase of China’s economic transition, as cities accumulated resources from markets. In this sense, the countryside clashed with urban development.

This thesis focuses on the architectural and planning side of the Chinese countryside in the Reform era. Chinese villagers took different approaches to envisioning their ideal modernity in the midst of the urban growth. They developed their own vision of industrialization and expansion. They formulated a diverse range of architectural responses, and their inspiration came from multiple sources, including their own cultural-historical memory, their admiration of what they perceived as Western lifestyles, and their yearning for urban modernity.

I use three specific villages — Liangjia, Huaxi, and Wencun — as vehicles to

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2 All of these economic terms will be explored later in the thesis. For a general introduction, Barry J. Naughton's *The Chinese Economy: Transitions and Growth* (2006) has a full chapter on rural policy.
3 The second phase of China’s economic transition also saw the disintegration of a number of state-owned enterprises. Some laid-off workers returned to the countryside, but most of them did not participate in agricultural activities, choosing instead to wait for other employment opportunities in the cities. See Lin Yifu, *Demystifying the Chinese Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
examine the underlying reasons for various trajectories of architectural development, the possibilities of Chinese rural modernization, and the pros and cons of each approach. Architectural responses are shown to be physical manifestations of local imagination, historical and personal memory, and economic reality. This thesis documents how locally empowered groups became patrons of a new kind of architecture.

Despite often being labeled as “backward” or “underdeveloped,” the Chinese countryside is still a place of tremendous ambition and achievement. This is possible because the countryside is still vast enough to experiment with multiple visions of the ideal rural life. Studies of these three villages reveal themes such as the relationship between modernization and industrialization, and how this relationship contrasts with the historical model of British rural development in the 19th century. By using these case studies, I explore ideals of rusticity and urbanism, notions of equality and stratification in a socialist context, and the coexistence of futurity and nostalgia.

One consistent trend that emerges from these case studies is that increasingly large social gaps manifest with the expansion of economic means and the addition of new housing styles. Also, all three villages present a conscious reclamation of the past that connects to the culture and history of a pre-industrial society. Industrialization stimulates optimism about the future while also nourishing a nostalgic feeling towards a perceived superior past as imagined by villagers and planners.

When past and future cross, architectural styles became a direct revelation of the nuanced functions of specific pasts that either satisfy various strands of local idealism
or work towards a grander sociopolitical agenda. These pasts did not fade, but rather became more prominent in the collective imagination of villages experiencing a fast-paced economic boom. This collective imagination, however, serves different social ends. It may restore a social order from chaos, as occurred in the village of Liangjia; it may embrace the socialist economy, as seen in Huaxi, where the forward-looking nature of the Great Revival of the Chinese Nation persists; or it may resist the overwhelming economic boom as shown in Wencun, where traditionalism was worshiped by the architect.

The selection of these three case studies is intended to showcase different approaches to rural modernization in the Reform period. All of them are located in the Lower Yangzi/Yangtze Area, centered on Shanghai. [Fig. 1] Geographical proximity endowed these Jiangnan-region villages with a similar pre-industrial history. Before the Reform period, the three villages looked alike and were approximately the same population, and were supported by agricultural activities like crop-growing in a water-abundant zone. The houses were mostly rectangular mud structures for ordinary farmers and large compounds owned by financially powerful gentry families scattered around. It was after the Chinese economic transformation that these villages diverged in terms of housing types, styles, and industrial bases. Moreover, the Yangtze River Delta modernized and industrialized earlier than the hinterland of China thanks to its closeness to the ocean. Export economy stimulated the economic output, and at the same time, evoked a higher diversity of planning types and architectural styles. Huaxi,
for instance, chose to model its planning on northern Chinese cities, diluting the importance of site and local history. Others strictly followed the traditionalist ideal embedded in cultural geography; for example, Wencun revitalized once-popular Anhui-style mansions with a modern livability.

Liangjia 梁家 [population: 1,915 (2016)] of Wenling, a hamlet in which my father and his ancestors grew up and lived, differs from villages like Huaxi and Wencun in that it has remained primarily agricultural. It stands on the coast of Zhejiang Province, approximately 300km south of Shanghai. As a village located in the Pan-Yangzi River Delta region, it has gradually industrialized since the 1980s. However, government did not dictate local planning schemes due to the village’s and town’s relative distance from the core of the Lower Yangzi. Therefore, villagers had the right to choose their architectural styles and building types.4 The village consists of many types of architecture, from muddy Republican-era compounds and industrial townhouses to pseudo-Western villas and socialist peasant houses.

Liangjia exhibits rural development across time: before the 1978 Reform, the relatively consistent building type reflected a collective means of production; after the Reform, with the introduction of new materials and exposure to the outside world, building types diverged in accordance with various individual initiatives. The village also exhibits a post-Cultural Revolution reconstruction of a clan-style familial structure and a

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4 Even though villagers enjoy relative freedom to design, there are general design schemes codified by the County Bureau of Planning. There is a question as to whether the authority enforces policy, or whether villagers obey regulations.
relocation of families to the old land that they once occupied. Issues of social hierarchy and the distinction between the insiders and the outsiders over living spaces are introduced in this study.

In Huaxi Village 华西 [population: 30,340 (2011)] of Jiangsu Province, the entire area is dominated by neatly arranged Western-style villas. Huaxi is located in a relatively central area of the Lower Yangzi, around 150km from Shanghai. Its upper-level administrative unit — Jiangyin — was ranked as the second most economically strong county in China. The city of Wuxi that is administratively above Huaxi, meanwhile, is the third-largest economic entity in Jiangsu Province, and fifth in the Yangzi River Delta.

While the production mode that enabled Huaxi to flourish in the early 1980s was still the Su’nan mode of export processing to serve the seaports in Shanghai, Huaxi intentionally remained socialist in terms of wealth distribution and ideology. It is the richest village in China in terms of GDP per capita. After the villagers gained notable economic profits by transforming their agriculture-based industry to an integration of three sectors (agriculture, industry, and services), the villagers collectively tore down their old, “primitive” houses and replaced them with luxurious yet aesthetically monotonous villas.

In Huaxi, there are distinctive showpieces of socialist achievements like the Park of the World with replicas of world landmarks, or the Happiness Garden in which

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sculptural works relating to belief and faith are available for worship by villagers. The entire planning is imposing and “northern,” imitating the Tang-dynasty Chang’an, a carefully planned city with cosmopolitan activities. Its detachment from the traditional southern watertown context in favor of a northern design connects the socialist village to the grand narrative of the Great Revival of the Chinese Nation in terms partially dictated from Beijing, which often hearkens to historic Tang glory. Even in a socialist village, which ought to uphold equality, social stratification is not hidden: wealth concentrates at its core and the periphery struggles. Huaxi represents the direct outcome of Deng Xiaoping’s Reform, and showcases the village’s story of sticking with socialism in theory, as well as the unique circumstances that characterized construction and reception of the village site.

Wencun Village 文村 [population: 1,863 (2016)] is located near the culturally rich Hangzhou, and is far from industrial centers. It rests deep in a mountain valley filled with flowing streams. In this village, Pritzker laureate Wang Shu 王澍 restored traditional rural houses in 2016. New contemporary architectural elements like abstract geometry and open spaces were blended with decorative motifs and materials familiar to the rural people, such as bricks, tiles, bamboo, and wooden beams. Wencun thus exemplifies the idea of a rural life imposed from the outside as an artificial image for

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6 In Chinese, the term shuixiang (watertown) means the “hometown of water,” a metaphor of Jiangnan cities with abundant water channels and river economies.

7 The terms and sites mentioned in this paragraph will be discussed with more details in Chapter 2. Huaxi is the lone example that firmly exercises a socialist distribution mode—villagers use the properties without owning them. The village is also a story of one man—Wu Renbao—the first party secretary of the village who chose the socialist path and blueprinted this socialist economy, even though there are extremes of inequality.
Wang Shu, an educated and sophisticated architect-intellectual, used Wencun to test his understanding of a “correctly Chinese” rural development. The area around the village has profound historical and art historical significance: the Chinese master painter Huang Gongwang (1269-1354) painted one of the most stunning landscape scrolls — *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* — in Chinese history near the village. The Eastern Jin pastoral poet Tao Yuanming (365?-427) developed his idea of a Peach Blossom Spring, an elitist idealization of rural life, set in a similar place in Hangzhou. The Anhui-style architecture that dominated the luxurious aesthetics of Chinese houses in the Ming and Qing dynasties extended to Fuyang, a district of present-day economic and cultural center Hangzhou.³ Wang Shu absorbed literary traditions, respected housing histories, and appropriated landscape painting elements in his approach to Wencun’s boutique vernacularism. Wencun became a testing ground for an ideal rural living space engaging with all layers of historical imagination by learning about ancient local traditions and researching geographical and cultural contexts.

Despite the attraction of this idealist vision, in the end Wang’s plan was not fully implemented. A contrast of lifestyle between those who enjoyed the new houses and those who did not have the good fortune to have their houses transformed represents the unfairness that emerged from an abandoned project. It is like an unfinished painting

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— we may anticipate the beauty of the whole, but may not see its perfection on its incomplete surface.

**Chinese Topophilia in Its Historical Context**

The research methodology for this thesis includes substantial on-site investigations and interviews in 2017 with villagers, local leaders, and planners. I categorize the transcripts of interviews with the villagers as a primary source about the reception of village planning. The architectural photography and measurements were completed in the villages, affirming the accuracy of my observations and supplementing the drawings of the plan and architecture stored in the local archives. The voices of many groups of people merge to shape a comprehensive understanding of the story of the new villages. My on-site research was, of course, informed by existing scholarship on Chinese rural development in a larger historical context.

The scholarship focused upon Chinese rural and countryside development has expanded considerably over the past century. Pioneering sociologist and anthropologist Fei Xiaotong (1910-2005) produced the earliest examinations of Chinese villages.9 His English works — *Peasant Life in China* and *China’s Gentry* — introduced the *baojia* system10 of administration and the power of gentry in owning land and controlling local policies. According to Fei, Chinese villages have historically operated according to

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9 Professor Fei Xiaotong was one of the earliest Chinese graduates from the London School of Economics. After the Cultural Revolution, he was restored as a senior professor, and served as the Vice Chairman of the CPPCC.

10 One ten-family unit was labeled a *jia* (tithing), and ten *jia* (one hundred families) made a *bao*. The *baojia* system controls the villages on a family level.
internal cycles that do not necessarily align with policies stipulated by superior authorities. Specifically, local power has traditionally been exercised by the gentry, who possessed land at their disposal. This thesis sees the power struggle within the three case study villages as displaying a similar pattern, with contemporary privileged groups, such as party members, tending to exhibit behavior similar to the Chinese gentry of eras past.

It is important to note in this context that Fei Xiaotong was an expert on the Jiangnan countryside, an economically stable and culturally vibrant area around Lake Tai south of the Yangzi River. My three case studies share a similar pre-industrial history, a history that was precisely analyzed in Fei’s works. When the villages were merely self-subsistent, Fei argued that the next stage of development would be to raise peasants’ income by establishing village enterprises. In this sense, Fei foreshadowed what would take place after 1978.

Pearl S. Buck’s fiction *The Good Earth* (1931) vividly portrays the life of a peasant family in the Republican era, roughly contemporaneous with Fei’s fieldwork and situated in close geographical proximity to Fei’s site. The fiction emphasizes greatly the peasant’s faith in the land, worshiping it as if it were a divine presence that secured the

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13 I quote fictions in the thesis both to study the social reality portrayed in the words as a reference to the physical reality at that historical moment, and to learn how the educated intellectuals perceived the way-of-life in the countryside.
future of the family. The immobile property of the land was conceived of as a blessing by many farmers from the 1920s to the Land Reform from 1945 onwards. Similar to Fei’s monographs, *The Good Earth* reconstructed the life of peasants in the pre-industrial era and described a topophilia and connection to the land that continues to manifest itself in post-Reform villages, especially when the villagers are determined to revive what was lost during the Cultural Revolution: piety and ancestry.

In a period with little urbanization, the studies of peasantry and villages tackled questions of “Chineseness” in a straightforward manner. The themes of folk culture, economic structure, social belief, and a reserve of illiterate yet productive people revolve around the countryside. To gauge the internal operation of villages was to attempt to answer the question of what forces shaped traditional China. During the New Culture Movement (1914), revolutionaries were also penetrating rural communities and attempting to instill new ideologies among peasant ranks.

Just around the time when Fei Xiaotong and Pearl Buck were reflecting on the Chinese countryside, in 1927 Mao Zedong wrote one of the most well-known treatises on rural political movements based on his investigation of the countryside in Hunan Province, Mao’s home place, which is a region distant from that of the three villages under study in this thesis. In the *Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan*, he urged a mobilization of the peasantry to join the revolutionary force. In Mao’s view, relatively close personal bonds between peasants made it more convenient to develop a

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solid network of political supporters for the Chinese Communist Party in the country.

This essay defined peasants as an apolitical and modifiable group of people living within small communities, but one that could potentially fuel larger social movements.\(^{15}\) The Marxist rural theory of China shaped Mao’s political sentiment. Liu Shaoqi’s (1898-1969) writings from 1937 to 1949 promoted a land reform, arguing that landlords should return property to the peasants. His work challenged ideas of land and soil as the possession of the gentry.\(^{16}\)

Such revolutionary writings discerned activist undercurrent among peasants, and also noted their opportunist inclination. All three case studies include portraits of farmers who actively opposed the imposition of Communist state planning, as well as those who happily accepted. The political mindset of the peasantry can be probed through the early writings of Mao and Liu.

**Peasant Economies in Transition**

Social history and sociology are the two fields of intellectual inquiry that produced most of the key works about the Chinese countryside. Philip C. Huang authored first *The Peasant Economy and Social Change in North China* (1985) and later, *The Peasant Family and Rural Development in the Yangtze River Delta, 1350-1988* (1990). These two books trace a

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\(^{15}\) Mao Zedong, *Hunan Nongmin Yundong Kaocha Baogao (Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan)* from *Selected Works of Mao Zedong: Volume 1*.

\(^{16}\) Liu Shaoqi was the Vice Chairman of the Communist Party of China from the 1930s until he was purged during the Cultural Revolution. He served as the President of China and the Vice Chairman of CPC after the establishment of P. R. China. These essays by early Communist leaders are both historiographically useful and politically charged. They are also regarded as the influential Communist manifestos of the New Democratic Revolution.
long history of commercialization and production in the villages. Villages formed a network of markets starting the Ming Dynasty (14th century) and the xiaonong jingji (natural agricultural economy) invigorated the Yangzi River Delta. A system of allocating resources through direct bartering, entitlement by law, and sharecropping according to traditional custom had existed in Jiangsu and Zhejiang dating back to the 16th century. Comparative advantages were cherished and a subsistence economy dominated the countryside until the Reform era. Remnants of the previous natural economy can still be discerned in the villages today, but the thesis contrasts recently industrialized villages that have retained their previous economic base with post-industrial villages. Huang’s findings showcase the economic mechanisms through which village development operated before, as well as the consequences associated with it, setting an expert tone for comparison.

Sociologist Yan Yunxiang, once an intellectual youth sent to Heilongjiang, researched the village that he worked in during the Cultural Revolution. His English monograph, Private Life Under Socialism (2003), is the only book by a major scholar with a discussion of changes in living space during that era. He observed that redoing the interior spatial partition and constructing houses with more rooms for different generations were important trends for Reform-era villagers. However, the pioneers of this process were exclusively village party secretaries or village heads. The persons who

17 Philip C. Huang, *The Peasant Family and Rural Development in the Yangtze Delta, 1350-1988* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990). The Ming Dynasty also elevated the commercialism in the cities. Timothy Brook’s book *The Confusions of Pleasure* (1998) studies a wide range of private-sector economic activities and exchanges by currency not only within the walls of cities, but also with international clients from Southeast Asia and Japan. In this case, the natural economy in the rural area appeared more traditional.
controlled the economic and political means were the first to institute the spatial change and ordinary villagers followed.¹⁸ There was always a gap of time between the invention of the new domestic interior spatial partitioning and the spread of it as different people earned higher income at different rates. Although Yan raised the issues of spatial organization for private space and the identities of patrons, he did not zoom out to see the larger planning aspect and the artistic treatment of many rural housing programs.

The gap in scholarship on Chinese spaces will be addressed in this thesis.

As seen from above, modern sociologists were motivated by defining the difference between the villages and cities in an increasingly urbanized society. The curiosity of the social scholars about the economic, interpersonal, legal, and societal aspects of the countryside in contrast to the urban environment motivated sociological works like Yan’s. Notwithstanding, the economists were exploring the benefits the countryside had contributed to the post-1978 Chinese Reform, and the status quo of the countryside when cities emerged.

The reason why China’s Reform era stimulated examinations of Chinese villages through an economic perspective is because villages were exerting pressure on policies being formulated at the central state level. Lin Yifu’s *Demystifying the Chinese Economy* (2012) and Wu Jinglian’s *Voice of Reform in China: An Edited Volume of Essays* (2013) elaborate substantively on the numerous impacts of the Household Responsibility

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System and the Township-Village Enterprises (TVEs) on the national economy.

By emphasizing the contribution of the Chinese countryside to the Reform-era economy, however, Lin and Wu ultimately acknowledge that rural marketization eventually served to fuel the growth of Chinese cities, rendering rural villages themselves “left-behind” by the end of 1990s. The weakening of the rural economic sector induced waves of migration into Chinese cities.\(^\text{19}\) The decreasing resident population of the countryside is further reducing its economic competitiveness. The thesis utilizes economic discussions that contextualize the countryside within the overall framework of the Reformist economy and lay out the social challenges and problems around rural productivity. This economic reality has become the basis of policies that regulate planning and modifications of interior spaces for rural households.

**Visualizing a New Social Reality Through Literature and Architecture**

To visualize the social reality of the contemporary countryside, recent literature such as Gei Fei’s *Seeing the Spring Wind* (2016) and Peter Hessler’s *Country Driving* (2010) depict the variables of countryside life in the East Coast of China.\(^\text{20}\) The difficulties endured by the villagers and migrant workers such as the inability to ask for salaries, the drawbacks of poor infrastructure, the longing for their hometown among urban migrants, and the impossibility to maneuver in the context of constantly changing social

\(^\text{19}\) Lin, *Demystifying*, 210.

policy are vividly expressed. The country life of people will be explored in the thesis’s three case studies with clear examples of challenges endured by underprivileged groups.

Until the 21st century, there wasn’t any authoritative scholarly work on rural architecture. The reasons behind the absence of such a scholarly field could be the relatively uninteresting appearance of buildings in the pre-Reform Chinese countryside. The structure of houses and complexes in the agrarian era conformed to practical functions of agricultural output, food storage, and the natural economy. Architecture and planning only became points of interest when a variety of human-manipulated landscapes, a diversification of economic means, and a stratification of social classes emerged.

Although books written by architects are rare, the designer of Wencun, Wang Shu, published a treatise titled Building Houses. The book gives first-hand information Wang’s thoughts, focusing on his knowledge of Wei-Jin dynasty Chinese literature and his delight in playing the traditional role of a literatus. He has a particular association with traditional Chinese timber-frame architecture because he was a carpenter early in his life. His nuanced survey of the landscape and the cultural meanings underneath the village land itself factored heavily into his design methodology. Wang’s book serves as a primary source for the discussion of the Wencun design. The architect’s earlier and similar works shed light on the masterplan of the Wencun village as part of the

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21 The dynasties of Wei and Jin (220-420) produced some of the most inspiring writers and generals in the Chinese history. Tao Yuanming, the reclusive pastoral poet and prose writer who will appear in Chapter 3, established the image of the countryside as tranquil, peaceful, and escapist.

architect’s achievements illustrated in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

The latest book by Hou Li, *Building for Oil* (2018), analyzes the metamorphosis of the physical landscape of Daqing, the Northern China oil town that was the single largest source of national revenue from the 1960s to the 1980s. This book traces the roots and maturation of the Chinese socialist state and its early industrialization and modernization during a time of unprecedented economic growth. The book illuminates the politics between party leaders and elite ministerial cadres and examines the diverse interests, conflicts, tensions, functions, and dysfunctions of state institutions and individuals. Its discussions of the industrial landscape and inhabitation within a long-industrialized city relate closely to the later transformation of the rural landscape in Southern China.

Western sources assist the thesis’ formulation of analytical themes. Philosopher Gaston Bachelard’s *La poétique de l'espace* (1957) and Akkio Busch’s *Geography of Home* (2003) reexamine human perceptions of intimate spaces. Being at home is contrasted with the experience of travel, and the familiarity of certain spaces provides people a sense of safety, a feeling sought after by most Chinese peasants. Svetlana Boym’s *The Future of Nostalgia* (2002) and Tuan Yi-Fu’s *Topophilia* (1986) are two fundamental sources for my later discussion of the futurity of nostalgia, claiming the past, and the

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attachment to the land.25 Yet, while Boym deals with concepts of “future” and “nostalgia” in a broader philosophical and empirical sense, I join these two terms together to emphasize the simultaneous occurrence of nostalgia and futurity.

The existing scholarship around rural China after the Reform era does not directly tackle architectural styles, living spaces, spatial planning, and the art of the country landscape. Nevertheless, it paves the way for the thesis’s discussion of all the art and architectural themes to come. Sociological sources are essential for comprehending the social composition and administrative patterns of the villages across time: economic studies decipher the output structure and the income distribution of not only the villages, but also the relationships between the cities and villages. Historical and literary sources construct a more realistic picture of the lives of peasants in time and space, focusing on psychological and emotional aspects. Finally, studies of human geography and social theory define and redefine concepts like nostalgia, topophilia, futurity, and space. These sources are exceptionally useful because they parallel the concrete issues of migration, land, profitability, efficiency, and privacy, and prevalent social phenomena seen or encountered by peasants and village inhabitants. Art, architecture, planning, and social policy complement these subjects, and enable a deeper understanding of the reality of modern Chinese villages and the search for a satisfactory countryside life.

Life in the Context of Chinese Administrative Units

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Before proceeding, the administrative structure of China requires a bit of further explanation. The village (cun 村) is the smallest unit of government in China, denoting primarily rural places where there is a slight concentration of population. The Chinese character cun 村 shows a man holding a piece of wood, presumably as a building material. Traditionally, a cun is a place where humans congregate and build up their own shelters. The next level of government directly above the village/cun is the town (zhen 镇), in which a distinct center is marked by markets and transportation centers. Towns can vary in size to a great extent. For example, Aojiang, one of the most economically prosperous towns in Zhejiang Province, has a resident population of 320,000, while Xinhe, where Liangia is located, only has a population of 120,000.

The subsequent administrative unit above the town/zhen is county (xian 县), district (qu 区, for urban areas), and county-level city (xianji shi 县级市). They are substantially larger and are the units that appear on household registration cards, meaning that people are bound to educational and healthcare systems on a county level. The degree of urbanization can be ranked from county (least urbanized) to county-level cities and to

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26 The following information is collected from the documents of the Central Institutional Organization Commission of China, the party organ that regulates the executive levels of officials and offices.
districts (most urbanized). The average population of a county-level division is 640,000.

Above county-level units are municipality/prefecture-level cities (diji shi 地级市) encompassing multiple counties/xian, districts/qu, or county-level municipalities/xianji shi. Aside from these units, there are a few additional politically and economically important and strategic cities with higher political standing, including thirteen sub-provincial cities (fushengji shi 副省级市) and two sub-provincial new areas (fushengji xinqu 副省级新区) only under direct-controlled municipalities, e.g. Pudong District of Shanghai and Binhai District of Tianjin). The mayors or party secretaries of these sub-provincial level units are politically equal to the Vice Governor of a Province (or a member of the Standing Committee of the Provincial Party Committee).

Over the provincial level, there are direct-controlled municipalities (zhixia shi 直辖市 — Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Chongqing), provinces (sheng 省), autonomous regions (zizhi qu 自治区 for ethnic minorities), and Special Administrative Regions (tebie xingzheng qu 特别行政区, Hong Kong and Macao).

With this administrative structure in mind, it will be easier to recognize the contexts of the three villages. Liangjia Village is in the town of Xinhe under Wenling county-level city in the prefectural city of Taizhou in Zhejiang Province. Huaxi Village is a unit below the town of Huaxi in the Jiangyin county-level city of Wuxi (a prefectural city) of Jiangsu Province. Wencun is a little bit different. It stays in the Dongqiao town of

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27 Municipalities have equivalents as autonomous prefectures (zizhi zhou 自治州) and leagues (meng 盟)
28 Sub-provincial units also include sub-provincial autonomous prefecture (fushengji zizhizhou 副省级自治州) — of which China only has one—Yili in Xinjiang.
Fuyang District in the sub-provincial city of Hangzhou in Zhejiang Province. Fuyang is a Hangzhou district with a high degree of urbanization, yet the village is the most rustic of all three case studies, standing in marked contrast to its surroundings. The significance of the administrative category of each of the case study villages for their architecture and planning will be discussed in their chapters.

Besides administrative units, the household registration system is a key administrative aspect that demands our attention, primarily because it is how the government controls citizen mobility. Each administrative unit equal to or above the county level has a registered population and resident population. Registered population (huji renkou 户籍人口) means the number of people whose household registration cards define the place as their place of residence, but they may or may not physically live in that place. Resident population (changzhu renkou 常住人口) is defined by the number of people who physically live in a certain place, regardless of where their officially registered address may be. The county in which a person is officially registered determines where a person can enroll in schools and receive medical treatment with insurance. Migrant workers, for example, cannot send their children who are registered elsewhere to get an education in the locality that they work in.

The most obvious example of a migrant city is Shenzhen (a sub-provincial city in Guangdong). While the city’s registered population is approximately two million, its

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29 The discussion of registered population and resident population is mainly cited from Wu Jinglian’s *Voice of Reform in China* (2013). The statistics of Shenzhen come from the Sixth National Census of China (Beijing: National Bureau of Statistics of the People’s Republic of China, 2011).
resident population exceeds ten million. The larger the gap between the registered and resident population, the larger the workforce the place requires, indicating higher economic productivity and industrial performance. The household registration system also creates the social issue of left-over children (liushouertong 留守儿童) whose parents work in cities where their children cannot receive education, thereby, forcing these children to stay behind in the village, since they are also legally required to attend school. In most cases, children are taken care of by their relatives — usually grandparents — and family friends who also live in the same rural localities. Many of them lack sufficient parental care (including both physical and mental care), as they can seldom see their parents, who have to stay in urban areas for work throughout the year. Under these circumstances, many left-behind children experience developmental problems such as emotional insecurity. This situation is characteristic of Liangjia and Wencun in particular.

In addition, the unregistered population challenges the concept of guxiang, the Chinese notion of homeland. How do villagers find roots in the place where they migrate to? How do they maintain their connection with their original village? Workers often travel all the way back to their hometown during the Chinese New Year — the Spring Festival — to reunite with their families. Yet, this two-week stay is so influential because it physically ties most of the migrant workers to the old village in which they are registered. The interplay between an uncaring registration policy and their emotional attachment to their place of origin is investigated in part of this thesis.
The discussions of the sites examined in this thesis include explanations of their topographic, economic, political, and transportational contexts, as well as the traditional or preexisting urban forms that manifest in the process of village construction. Additionally, I focus on administrative structures that served as clients for the new project, which may select architects to implement certain visions. Earlier ideas, values, or works of the architects’ preceding projects are used to provide materials for comparison. Information about the process of design, consultation, or collaboration, and the immediate architectural context of newly built structures constitute another subject of analysis. Finally, the chapters include discussions of architecture in terms of spaces, materials, and the reception of and response to the architecture by the community. In the end, there may be major modifications to the architecture after building that draw the viewer’s attention, and that have social, political, or economic significance.

What unifies all three villages is that the conscious selections of the various historical pasts that the villages claim reflect the vision of the most empowered social groups. Thus, the architecture of each village mirrors a nostalgic futurity commonly sought by the local power-holders: Neo-Confucian piety and social networks in Wenling, socialism as a theme of revival in Huaxi, and finally, the image of a harmonious and simplistic rural life in Wencun.
Chapter 1

Houses as a Mirror of the Boom and Bust

*Liangjia’s Spontaneous Path of Architectural Development*

*It is the end of a family — when they begin to sell their land. Out of the land we came and into we must go — and if you will hold your land you can live, no one can rob you of land.*

— Pearl S. Buck, *The Good Earth*

The Nobel Prize laureate Pearl S. Buck gained her fame in China. In her magnum opus, *The Good Earth*, she accurately assesses the key to the success for a Chinese rural family—the ownership of land. Speaking to the centrality of earth to Chinese rural dwellers, her protagonist’s dying words to his son urge him to preserve the family’s land, no matter what comes next. In the Second World War, however, rural localities bloodied by Japanese troops (or bandits, who took the opportunity to indulge their worst instincts) became empty as farmers fled their villages and cut ties with their homes. Decades later, the institution of farming recovered in the midst of the First Five-Year Plan. Nevertheless, countless cultural artifacts and architectural works were destroyed and unlikely to reappear.

In spite of widespread destruction, however, not all was lost in the chaos of China’s early 20th century. Wenling, a county in the city of Taizhou, was spared the catastrophe of war. Situated in a mountainous area of Zhejiang Province, a 1038m-high mountain divides Wenling from the city of Ningbo, hindering travelers and soldiers alike. [Fig. 30] Buck, *Earth*, 231. [Fig. 31] “The Map of Zhejiang” (Zhejiang People’s Press, 2013) marked the division of Ningbo and Taizhou–Mount Ma’ao—as 1038m in height.
In 1941, the Japanese troops reached their southernmost point of conquest of Zhejiang in Ningbo, and never attempted to traverse the mountain. With little economic incentive, Taizhou was a fine retreat in which mundane people continued their mundane lives. Peasants and landlords did not flee, but rather nested in their wood-frame houses and continued to conduct agricultural activities. This continuous lineage of farming and family traditions characterized the county of Wenling in China's Republican and early People's Republic era. [Fig. 1-2]

Unlike other socialist villages, or newly renovated sites, Wenling retains the essence of household agricultural duties: a yearning for more land. Liangjia Village is the root of my family. [Fig. 1-3] The Shens migrated from Cixi to Wenling in the Guangxu period (1875-1908) during the Qing Dynasty.32 The extensive water resources and well-established irrigation system made it an ideal locality for duck-rising.

As the living standard of the village was relatively low, it was not a particularly laborious task to live comfortably in that remote region. Gradually, with the growing economies of the treaty ports like Shanghai, the sphere of production for the economic centers enlarged. Taizhouese turned to specialize in manufacturing hats as consumer goods, and tofu as cuisine raw materials.33 Obviously, both were closely associated with land agriculture as hats required straws and tofu came out of beans. Taking advantage of the market demand, the family of Shen made a fortune in hats business. My

32 The family history, if not specifically noted, comes from the words by Shen Zongfa, the author’s grandfather, and Shen Xuezhi, the author’s uncle. The interviews were carried out multiple times from March 2015 to August 2017.
33 Xinhe Zhenzhi (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2010), 591.
great-grandfather, Shen Yingpu, was one of the leading business persons in Wenling because he sold hats to the Shanghai market in an enormous quantity. The economic profits, nevertheless, went back to investment in more lands, a reasonable destination with a farmer’s mentality. Land may not showcase prestige in a straightforward way. Shen Yingpu, being a big landowner and a farmer at the same time, thought of the construction of a new family mansion as a symbol of the family standing. The audience was simply their neighbors.

Today’s Liangjia is transformed. The economy is still agriculturally centered, and sugar canes and oranges are the chief products. But in terms of population, around two-thirds of the residents work in the tertiary sector. They live in the village, yet are employed outside.

Republican housing tradition was replaced by Dazhaiwum (Dazhai Style houses), nongminfang (houses of peasants) and xiaokangyan (the embankment of the moderately prosperous society) responding to the economic and social situation of the Reform and Opening Up.

This chapter records the early history of the village on the basis of my family history, and continues to examine outcomes of the economic transformation and the shift of ideology. Ultimately, phases of construction and style emphasize a reconstruction of piety based upon a retrieval of larger-clan style life that was in place

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34 “The statistics was collected from the Village Consensus that was conducted annually. “Liangjiaqun Renkou Tongji” December 27, 2016, unpublished document.”
before the Cultural Revolution, and a return to the former family ground/land due to a reemergence of topophilia afterwards a chaotic relocation of residents. Concurrently, the insider-outsider hierarchy became prominent in the village with industrialization and visions of stylistic and structural changes held by the local residents. An overturn of the immediate past manifested in the revolutionized sentiment of the residents.

**From Rustic to Delicate: A Family History Before 1949**

To understand a rural culture, look primarily at geography. Zhejiang Province occupies the southern drainage basin of the Lake Tai and the Yangzi River; these two hydrographic nets ensure that Zhejiang enjoys abundant water resources for agricultural productions. Nevertheless, the mountainous area takes up to 70.3% of the total territory, hampering transportation and the development of plain cultivation. But mountains concurrently enhance separateness to secure an authenticity of cultures, for instance, with a continuity of dialects.

Fortunately, the family of Shen migrated from Cixi, Ningbo to Wenling in 1830 as Wenling is not only one of the few localities that were mainly in plain but also included vast wetlands and extensive internal river system as irrigation. The geographical features explained why the Shen ancestors decided to initiate duck-raising: sufficient water and ample feed.

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35 The geographical data is on view on Zhejiang Government website [http://www.zhejiang.gov.cn/](http://www.zhejiang.gov.cn/) (accessed April 1, 2018). Zhejiang's area ranks the 24th in China, but in terms of GDP, the total GDP ranks 4th and GDP per capita the 5th.
Generations after generations, agricultural productions remained a key labor activity of the Shens and Wenling-ese. Even until today, one of my aunts is still conducting land cultivation. How could we persist with this “backwardness” for so long? I think of two places that are proximate to tourism and populous spots but retain their traditional economies — Sri Lanka’s tea trail and Siem Reap’s Kampong Phluk. Both of the villages I visited years ago. The tea trail preserves its unique identity partially by communications with the outside: national and global demand tea leaves facilitates the transportation and tea production over the plateau in which, however, other aspects of life are difficult to disturb. Kampong Phluk exhibits a great degree of isolation and an internal cycle of life: ever-changing surrounding water body and damaged surfaces of roads made the journey to the city more arduous than a Tibetan Buddhist pilgrimage. Given unique geographical situations, both difficult communication and forced isolation help to conserve cultural purity.

“Why not put the arable land into full usage?” asked my father’s aunt, “the job’s hard but profitable — and our family has been cultivating lands for decades — there must be someone to carry the work on.” I see simple and concise logic for my aunt to go on with basic agricultural production while factory chimneys are ruling the horizon of Wenling. We usually say: “each place has its own way of nurturing inhabitants.”

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36. Tea Trail is a channel of tea transportation in Sri Lanka. Tea leaves produced in the Central Plateau were carried through the trail by human labor. Kampong Phluk is a fishing village near Tonle Sap Lake, Cambodia. Residents live in stilt-style houses to accommodate seasonal tides of the lake. Both of the places continue the lifestyle that has lasted for centuries.

37. Translation of the Chinese proverb “一方水土养一方人.”
Humans, here, are passive facing the environment. But my father’s aunt, obviously, made an active choice between traditional agriculture and advanced manufacturing works or trade. Geography, merely, offers a possibility of continuing with what’s old, and our family’s past encourages the process of going ahead with land. With the increasing mobility of capitals, Wenling is getting closer and closer to industrial centers, and the natural geographical separation superseded by technology and the introduction of new infrastructure. The geographical fortification of indigenous culture will soon disappear. There will have only communication but no isolation. Though many exceptional Taizhouese identities maintain themselves until now, their future is apparently unpredictable.

The uniqueness of Taizhou’s geography doesn’t only focus on the land: the length of the coastline of Taizhou is $3/10$ of the total length of Zhejiang’s coastline, and over 1,100 islands each with areas of more than 500 square meters stand firm on the calm sea. Starting in the 1920s, bandits established headquarters on selected islands as their shelters. A locally meaningful historical and cultural landscape was constructed on the basis of geography, and the banditry brought influential scenes that are deeply encoded in the memories of the elders.

Early generations of the Shen shifted their means of livelihood from duck-raising to land cultivation. Land, one of the four factors of production in economics, generated rents. However, China was not a perfectly capitalist state in the 1930s. In order to satisfy subsistence, the Shens grew crops to assure autarky, and excessive products were sold in
the local market. This very standardized economic cycle proved to be efficacious in making a slow but progressive development. Shen Yingpu, my great-grandfather, became financially independent after the division of brothers’ assets, a normal practice after the death of the brothers’ father, in 1935. He himself invested in lands, and every annual surplus went back to additional land investment. Good harvests, a spiral of amassed assets and a great possession of land led to an economically free but labor intensive life.

When the area of land rocketed up, it was less feasible for Shen Yingpu and his colleagues to cultivate fields themselves. In 1938, portions of land were rented out for other peasants and long-term hired hands. The majority of the agricultural products belonged to the renters while rents were collected by the owner. The price of the land in the Republic of China was around 20~30 silver dollars per mu,\(^{38}\) and the expansion of family property was facilitated if a guaranteed area of land was secured and well-planted. Alike what’s depicted in *The Good Earth*, families were unwilling to sell the land unless illnesses demanded prompt cash supply, or bandits claimed for ransom when someone was kidnapped.

After renting out his lands, Shen Yingpu utilized his spare time to diversify his business, experimenting with a new profitable commerce. Wenling pioneered the craftsmanship of fiber-flax hats. Shen Yingpu purchased a huge quantity of hats with extremely low wholesale prices, and resold them to the wholesalers from all over the

\(^{38}\) 亩 *mu* = 667 square meters.
country. The hats’ price difference was earned. How was the profit from reselling flax hats used? Unsurprisingly, it flowed back into further land investment. In 1944, he opened an agency office in Shanghai to broaden his sales scope. The Chen family, noticing its profitability, joined Shen Yingpu and cooperated with him in unearthing new and cheaper local hat outlets suppliers. This business partnership evolved into a relationship of sworn brothers, and Chen Xueying, the younger daughter from the Chen family married Shen Yingpu’s son, Shen Zongfa, my grandfather. Intermarriages and sworn brotherhoods enforced two families to bond together forever. Family bond and business collaborations often emerged concurrently in pre-revolutionary China. This combination dislodged any embarrassment in income allocation and reconfigured an emotionless partnership into a substantial family entrepreneurship. A physical legacy can be found today: tombs of the Chen were placed right next to the tombs of Shen Yingpu and his brothers.\(^\text{39}\) Despite the complexity, consolidations of kinship, pursuit of commercial successes and collaborations with fellows all pointed to actualizing an ideal life and promising a continuation of a high family status.

A critical initiative taken by Shen Yingpu was the 1938 construction of the family mansion. A U-shape minguo dayuan (民国大院), “Republican compound,” a name as defined by the era, supplied residences for six branches of Yingpu’s offspring. Architecturally, the compound was similar to a traditional Chinese quadrangle, but

\(^{39}\) Chinese people developed strict laws of tomb placement. Each family encircled an area in which to build its own groups of tombs. Any intersection with other family’s burial region was not allowed. The Chen and the Shen’s tombs were technically joined at the platform where Shen Yingpu’s tomb lies.
without a frontal wall and a skywell. Presumably, an absence of the frontal wall brought about plentiful outdoor space for crop-drying. Drinking water was collected from rainwater dripped into the vats from the eaves. Each cell contained a kitchen, a canteen and an attic bedroom. The mansion was surrounded by water ponds, the water source for laundry and fire-fighting. According to the philosophy of mansion design in the Yangzi River Delta, the main hall of our former mansion set out portraits of ancestors for ceremonial and festive purposes.\textsuperscript{40} Shen Yingpu crafted cultivated a bamboo grove, his favorite, contiguous to the compound. Obviously, the luxuriousness of the Shen’s compound could not rival houses in Huizhou like \textit{Yin Yu Tang}, whose exquisite decorative arts peaked in China’s art history.\textsuperscript{41} Notwithstanding, an organic integration of large-family habitation, leisure and ancestor worship was consistent in every sizable dwelling property.

Capital formation and residence construction marked the decade of the 1930s. The meaning of a good life appears ordinary — money, family, and a healthy amount of relaxation. Later in the era, however, effort of making a good life comprised so much beyond material well-being: the unity of the family exceeded all, and a collective power was applied to leave foundation, support, and spiritual guidance for the future generations. How does the new generation react to the legacy of their predecessors in terms of tracking their own social and familial position? The old republican compound


was torn down in 1985, and in 2005, Taizhou municipal government built an elevated highway right above the old site of the Shen’s mansion; a miniature clan hall was built *in situ* the former main hall. The small clan hall is approximately 300 meters south of my grandfather’s current apartment. Is this clan hall an epitome of yesteryears? I don’t believe that the little totem within the clan hall can re-create a colorful and complete past, but for the Shens, the family ideals were firmly anchored, and thoughts were reminiscently rooted. This phenomenon is more intensely blossomed when we fly back to the gun towers, the emblem of Wenling in the ’40s. [Fig. 1-6]

**Gun Towers as Vessels of Memory**

Architecture imposes images and ideologies. In line with an accumulation of wealth in the family of Shen, my ancestors ultimately decided to respond to the banditry, which constantly disturbed the normal life of village men. The ongoing Sino-Japan War didn’t intrude on the life in the country, thanks to an impassable geographical watershed that cooled the Japanese troops’ desire to attack, but bandits were everywhere; hundreds and hundreds of them embarked on the land to sack the storage and houses. *The Wenling County History* (1999) recorded at least three waves of banditry threats per year, from 1942 to 1950.42

A particularly unusual architectural response was realized: the constructions of gun turrets. A normal gun tower measured around ten meters in height and 2.5 meters in

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42 *Wenling Xianzhi* (Beijing, Zhonghua Shuju, 1999), 333.
width; the material at the bottom, yellowish linear stone, was locally available because a major quarrying center of the linear stone was situated in Fangshan Mountain, 15km from Wenling. Linear stones are strong and smooth on the surface. The top level was made of gray bricks, a lighter material, to reduce the overall weight, creating a larger space hiding people and preventing bandits from climbing up. The structure was simple, and quite a few families began to erect such gun towers: in the 1940s, nearly every wealthy clan had a minimum of one tower attached to the mansion.

Our family was no exception. Shen Yingpu traveled to Mount Fangshan to pick the building materials. On the road, he accidentally encountered a bank check left unattended. This sudden cash windfall impelled my great-grandfather to build a tower that should be grander than any other tower in the county. Then, the intention was fulfilled six months later, and Shen Yingpu anticipated this tower to be a symbol of paramount protectiveness of the family from banditry.

The mindset of a farmer might be straightforward, but it was an underlying conflict: a taller tower not only showed a more formidable protection, but also “flaunted” a prosper financial standing of the family. It was more likely to attract larger scale attacks from well-organized bandit groups.

Towers seem to link self-confidence and functionality pretty well. San Gimignano in Tuscany, Italy, was a Medieval hill town in which 76 towers were erected to monitor

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43 The record of the stone transportation is seen in ibid, photo appendix.
44 Chen Wanyou (author's uncle) interviewed by Shen Juntai, Wenling, Taizhou, August 2, 2017.
probable threats from the below flatland. However, growing economic capacities of the lords promoted a competition of tower constructions: the higher the tower, the more prominent the family was.\textsuperscript{45} In China towers gradually lost their defensive nature and transformed into monuments for showing off. Kaiping Diaolou (1860s) in southern China was also representative: the Gothic or Baroque artistic styles symbolized each family’s connection with the Western world and the modern values imported to Kaiping, once a humble hamlet. The Wenling gun towers were, however, short of ornaments and decorative patterns. They were designed as pure defense equipment but, even so, the pride derived from them could not be wiped out. “Shen Yingpu died very soon after he was released from the prison,”\textsuperscript{46} said Chen Wanyou, my uncle, “the tower wasn’t there, and everything had been changed.” The tower was ordered to be demolished by the Communist Government, and its materials, mainly stones, were distributed to “the poor and lower-middle peasants. Did the tower really take away so-called family prestige? Did the tearing down of the tower signify something else, like a decline of a generation? How does this externally inconspicuous architecture embody so many latent meanings? Perhaps, the best answers lay, unfortunately irretrievable, in the varnished spirit of my great-grandfather.

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Though I am not able to communicate \textit{vis-à-vis} with my great-grandfather, my interviewees showed great interest in and attachment to the gun towers. My grandfather
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\textsuperscript{45} John Paoletti, \textit{Art in Renaissance Italy} (New York: Pearson, 2011), 216.
\textsuperscript{46} Shen Yingpu was imprisoned after the establishment of P.R.C. because he was condemned for having bullied peasants. Chen Wanyou interviewed by Shen Juntai.
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ceaselessly alluded to the tower as one of our family’s glorious showcases. When asked about our family’s agricultural development, my father’s uncle passionately discussed banditry and farmland towers instead. My uncle’s memory focused on his dead grandmother who failed to escape to the gun tower when bandits arrived and burned her house. Numberless violent interactions occurred between the Shen clan and bandits, and many of them were relevant to the gun towers.47 Perhaps, it was the rarity of surviving towers, only around twenty remaining standing today, that provoked us to remember and retrospect. It was the specific historical characteristics that endowed the plain gun towers with shining connotations. It was the memories of elders that deepened the memorial identity of the towers. It was the trauma of our family in this branch of history that inscribed the tower into the minds of the members from previous generations. [Fig. 1-7]

**Intermezzo: Implications of the Pre-PRC Era Rural Wenling**

The story of my family in the 1930s and 40s reveals many key features of the pre-modern Wenling, in which some of the features are inherited while others are replaced by an modern lifestyle. The attachment to land is still an emotional devotion for mid-to-old-aged residents of the villages. The formality of house-building procedures and the mindset of uniting a large family continue into today. The idea of a

47 Shen Yingpu was kidnapped by bandits in 1948. In the same year, Shen’s family had a battle with bandits (October); two bandits were killed by rifles. Three days later, another wave of bandits retaliated and returned and burned the newly built villa lived by the brothers of Shen Yingpu. Shen Yingpu’s mother, sister and nephew didn’t escape to the gun tower in time and died. The above story was cited by almost every elder family member when inquired about the 1940s family history.
“big clan” stays in the mind for many families despite the fact that many adult males chose to work in the cities in recent years. The idea of architecture as a shelter and a protection of the outside threats is possessed by most of my interviewees.

At the same time, changes occur: a more private organization of spatial units achieved by complicated divisions and formations of multiple nuclear families started to break the traditional size of the houses. The import of the Dazhai style transformed the collectivity in a way that public space is emphasized while private houses were laid linearly with clarity. [Fig. 1-9] The new houses of peasant constructed after 1978 redefined the landscape by working harmoniously with the changing governmental policies and the urge to create private spaces for households.

**Entering a New Era**

The remains of the Republican style shined in the early period of the People’s Republic (1949-1966). Although the state erected such grand works of architecture as the Great Hall of the People and the Workers’ Stadium in Beijing, all absorbing Neoclassicism. On the village level, houses did not undergo a revolution of forms and styles. Due to the limit of materials, old houses are amended and repaired, instead of being rebuilt. The economic basis of the country was so poor that there was not an established secondary sector in the entire nation. It was not until the year 1954 that the Party Central Committee decided to push forward significantly the reconstruction of the industrial basis after the warring decade.
Just like the First Five Year Plan of the Soviet Union which emphasized the importance of collective farming, China adopted the idea that in order to obey a socialist patriotism, private farming activities should be completely abandoned and be replaced by production groups and collectivities.\textsuperscript{48} Thanks to the movements of the land reform, so-called landlords were condemned and deprived of political and economic rights, i.e., the right to vote and the right to produce. Farmers, those who served as tenants in the Republican period, became the “hosts of the country.”\textsuperscript{49} Those who were once inferior in political status became supreme. It was in that phase of nation-building that Dazhai, a northern China village, achieved the standing of the most influential agricultural production collectivity in the Chinese history.

The transformation from private enterprises to public collectivity necessitated the changes of architecture. The once popular enclosed structure of Republican mansions focused on the idea of clans rather than society as a congregation of individuals. The \textit{enclosure} also led people to imagine black transactions and the hiding of affairs, which were deemed unbeneficial to the general economy. A collectivity, as stated by both Vladimir Lenin and the foremost CPC politician and theorist, Liu Shaoqi, should be a space that gets rid of familial ties and personal properties.\textsuperscript{50} Like what Jean-Jacques Rousseau might agree with, the collectivity concerns the “general will,” the will that the nation desires, as the ultimate end of their labor.\textsuperscript{51} New openness of the society

\textsuperscript{48} Ira Katznelson, \textit{Marxism and the City} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 45.
\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Constitution of China} (Beijing: People's Press, 2018), 2.
observed here opened up houses as well. Those rectangular, enclosed mansions with central courtyards were succeeded by lines of townhouse-style architecture in which members of production groups occupied different cells. These Dazhai style buildings exerted considerable influence nationwide. [Fig. 1-9]

In Wenling, new constructions of houses modeled themselves from Dazhai. They presented the crucial elements of the Dazhai design: houses were arranged completely linear, and new units could be conveniently added onto the end of lines. The structures retained a gabled roof, a gesture to reintroduce the traditional, while rainfalls could be collected by putting a water pot underneath eaves. All these units had exactly the same area with two stories and usually an additional attic. The removal of difference in areas nodded to egalitarianism within socialism.

In the first floor, columns divided entrances to each unit and left a semi-private space in front of the door. This space, however, is viewed as a transitional place for the farmers to remove the farming implements, or when it rains, to dry clothes before entering the living room. The interior of the first floor is often an integration of kitchen, dining and living rooms. A small backyard may be used to raise one or two pigs (not too many, otherwise, the residents would be criticized as new landlords), or to store vegetables. The compact space is well functioning. Nevertheless, the second-floor bedroom does not have a bathroom en suite, and the attic might be too small to be fully utilized. [Fig. 1-10]

For appearance, orderliness of the Dazhainu implied equality and efficiency,
comparable to dorms of the military personnel as they were modeled on barracks. In function, Dazhaiwu are small but complete, suggesting a sufficiency that could be obtained by socialism, not capitalism. In between lines of houses are farmland that, in the 1960s and 70s, was distributed to be cultivated by production groups. The multi-functionality of these small units makes them useful even today for those migrant workers seeking for shelters. In Liangjia of Wenling, such houses, once owned widely by local villagers, are currently rented to migrant workers employed by factories fewer than 10km in distance. The locals, meanwhile, advanced their life by directly creating new forms and spaces.

The 1980 townhouses largely inherited outward appearances of the Dazhaiwu. What’s new was the increased height of the story. [Fig. 1-11] Originally, Dazhaiwu is around 2.2m high each floor, and new townhouse made that to 2.5m. An extra 0.3m enabled the addition of a furred ceiling with more extensive lighting facility. The older version of the Dazhai Houses did not have centrally provided electricity. The story of rural electrification is a Reform era tale. The formerly dimmed interior became brighter even though the houses seemed to be the same as the older Dazhaiwu. Besides, the change of material along with industrialization and mass production was indicated here as well. Bricks fabricated at factories were more standardized, and therefore, easier to be arranged during the construction process. The price of bricks was 40% percent lower in the 1980s than the early 70s, thanks to the creations of early township-village enterprises
that pulled the cost of construction raw materials low. The era of stones was past, and bricks thrived until this day.

Not satisfied by the mere increase of floor height of the 1980 townhouses, villagers tried to enlarge real living space by adding floors to the original structures. The 1990s observed a flood of constructions of *nongminfang* (houses of peasants/farmers), a colloquial term used by urban planners that attributed to high-rise familial townhouses of peasant families, many of whom did not actually cultivate lands. [Fig. 1-12] *Nongminfang* is most frequently four-to-five stories tall, and the exterior color variation tells the division of owners. It is almost without exception that in Liangjia each household occupies one vertical “line” of the townhouse. In terms of spatial usage, *nongminfangs* are not as efficient because the area of one single floor is small, and staircase took up around 15% for each floor, leaving notably less space for other functional units.

The first floor is occasionally decorated as a shop or a garage — the public side of the house as it links to the roads outside. The transition occurs over the staircase: the house has a main entrance (shutter door) on the first floor, and another security door at the end of the stairway leading to the second floor. The second floor marks the starting point of the private space. Basic household spaces are all there: kitchen (more advanced with soot machine and gas stove), living room (now with sofa and televisions), and full bathroom with toilet and bathtub. The third floor and above are bedrooms taken by

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52 Lin, *Demystifying*, 56.
different generations of the family. Height and a higher number of stories enable a more meticulous division of spaces. Younger couples do not live on the same floor with older couples, and yet they engage in family activities on the second floor living space.

It is comparable to the Republican era compounds in which the courtyard is the family space and each sub-family in the clan stayed separately in one of single cells around the courtyard. The destruction of the sense of community and collectivity manifested in Dazhaiwu led to a revival of clan-style family life in the nongminfang. Meanwhile, a preference for designing horizontal lines of Dazhaiwu is not there anymore. Heights not only symbolized a more flexible spatial organization of new houses, but also denoted power and enjoyment of the fruits of the Reform.

Named nongminfang by urban residents, this term is essentially condescending. Many occupants no longer farmed in the 1990s. Rather, they operated factories or small workshops for textiles and industrial accessories. The emerging secondary sector endowed them with enough funds to have multi-story structures realized. Private enterprises gradually appeared in the countryside. The reversal of the public to the private liberated the individual will of the Liangjia residents. However, the revolution in urban apartments was even faster. The rural-urban divide has been characterizing the economy since the late 1980s. The urban residents prided their access to modern and simple apartments and belittled the nongminfang, which was da er wudang (大而无当 big but useless), referring to the low efficiency in spatial usage. Also, urban residents took it for granted that the countryside residents were basically farmers who were not cultured
and not skilled. This bias overshadowed the fact that in 1996, the year I was born, around 35% of the Liangjia residents worked in the secondary sector, and around 30% in agriculture, not a dominating figure. The simplistic notion of equating country people with farmers was not appropriately applied from the 1990s.

Since then, the style of the houses has kept stable. Arrays of *nongminfang* were built across villages, and very few *Dazhaiwa* still stand today. UCLA sociologist Yan Yunxiang articulates the reason of this transformation to be country people’s pursuits of privacy in the waves of industrialization besides a sense of reviving the “larger family” lifestyle.\(^5\) Freedom of romance, explicit expressions of emotions, and larger extent of migration and urbanization gave the younger generation the thought and consciousness to open up a space for their own. *Nongminfang*’s multi-story nature fit perfectly with such an idea.

In the 2010s, the State Council of China developed a scheme of New Countryside (*Xin Nongcun*).\(^5\) Even when urbanization was at its peak in the late 1990s, the Central Committee of the CPC invariably published their No. 1 Document as a statement to focus on the Three Rural Issues (*Sannong Wenti*) — agriculture, development of rural areas, and life of the peasants.\(^5\) It is a trinity of questions regarding the occupation, occupied region, and identity of the rural environment. The Three Rural Issues was a 1996 proposal by Professor Wen Tiejun of Renmin University of Beijing. The issues of

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\(^5\) Yan, *Private Life*, Ch. 4.

\(^5\) “Socialist New Countryside (*Shehuizhuyi Xin Nongcun*) 社会主义新农村”

agriculture center on the management of agricultural production. More specifically, they ask about the way to industrialize the agricultural sector. The coverage of agricultural marketization is low, the variation of agricultural prices high. Agricultural outputs rely on small private businesses, not economies of scale. The issues of rural areas surround the urban-rural divide as generated by the hukou system, and the economic and cultural gaps between cities and the countryside. Wen vividly writes that “Chinese cities are like Europe whereas countryside is like Africa.” Issues of farmers elaborate on the low income of farmers as well as their lack of cultural education so that they can hardly protect their own rights. Former Prime Minister Wen Jiabao commented that “countryside was the cradle of the Chinese civilization, agriculture the foundation of the Chinese economy, and farmers the people’s materialistic parents.” All of a sudden, the countryside was elevated to a political status that even surpassed that of cities in the blueprint of national economic development.

With an intention to again revolutionize the way-of-living of the farmers, the Liangjia Village of Wenling designated a special land for newly designed townhouses. The locals call that area xiaokangyan (Wenling dialect: xiukangyè, English: the embankment of Xiaokang). “Xiaokang 小康” is a national campaign to make China “moderately prosperous,” catching up with mid-income countries. The twelve units were masterplanned and designed by Jiaojiang Design Institute of Taizhou Municipality.

56 Ibid, 14.
57 Wen Jiabao, Prime Minister’s Press Conference, Great Hall of the People, Beijing, 2003.
[Fig. 1-13] The frontal facade imported elements of Western villas with red bricks. Concrete replaces bricks as the main building material. Similar to a nongminfang, it has four stories with a full-floor semi-basement with lights in from the edge of the basement. An elevated ceiling of the living room divides the reception hall with the rest of the house thanks to the former's spaciousness. [Fig. 1-14] The right of interior design is possessed by the owner of the houses. They refer to interior design magazines or finished houses of their friends in cities. In general, this movement of xiaokangyan is, in its essence, an imitation of the urban life: they have a great similarity of the floor plan of urban and suburban villas, and electronics outfitted fully in the inner space. However, they are girdled by the popular nonmingfang, and still exercise same height and shape of the foundation to those older, existing structures. It is unlikely to initiate a purely urban project in the midst of layers of history of rural housing. It is always a hybridization, or like an integral function that can never arrive at completeness.

The trend of architectural development went hand-in-hand with a geographical reorganization of clans. The families, once split in space during the era of collectivity, returned to their land where their family roots stay, marked by the presence of remains of ancestral shrines or older Republican era structures. The claim of their former land is a topophilic gesture: the historical tradition of a family is remarked and land was the crucial possession of farming families. The changing styles left the foundations of the houses unchanged, yet the revival of a clan lifestyle and topophilia are observed, a nostalgia exercised by village residents to trace the ideal life that once appeared before
the Cultural Revolution and the Great Leap Forward.

**Liangjia versus Putian: Stratification in a Nearby Village**

A nostalgic and topophilic treatment of land and housing may only benefit the locals. In Liangjia, the houses are built generally within the original foundation. If the violation of housing regulation is not prevalent in Liangjia, it is the case in Yuhuan, a township over an elongated peninsula south of Wenling County. [Fig. 1-15] It is relatively detached from the mainland economic route that cuts across the city of Taizhou. Yuhuan enjoys its advantage of being right on the sea. River and sea transportation has remained a crucial way of accessing the region since the premodern time. The connectivity as manifested by the easiness of shipment attracted factory owners to experiment with new industrial plants in the area. In a village named Putian, the secondary sector exerts dominance over the economy. Industrialization does not secure a general wealth for all these residents. Rather, the gap between the rich and the poor is distinctively visible. Architecture, in this case, augments the rich and dwarfs the poor. With a void of policy enforcement, flamboyant constructions of villas set a huge opposition to the construction of a complex with individual rooms that make the migrant workers invisible.

For Putian 蒲田, a village with a registered population of 1950 and residing population 5100, those who have been dwelling in this village, often factory owners or shareholders, have a much higher prestige in the residential status provided by the
emerging income from the secondary sector, chiefly metal processing. The earliest residential architecture that remains is, quite expectedly, a Republican era compound that is not inhabited today. Near the entrance of the village, it has four imposing villas that villagers identify as a form of *yanglou*, the “House of the West.” They are decorated with pilasters, columns, semi-octagonal windows, and French balustrade. [Figs. 1-16 & 17]

The term *yanglou* has a profound history. It first appeared as a colloquial expression during the colonial period of China when foreigners entered Shanghai to construct houses in the International Settlement and the French Concession (*Concession française de Shanghai*) during the late 19th century. The presence of the British, French, Germans and Russians stimulated an importation of architectural styles. Many of the houses stand today in the Old French Concession and the Bund of Shanghai. The Chinese citizens back then encountered this brand-new appearance of new residential houses, mostly in neoclassical style, and lacked the specific knowledge of defining the movement and artistic style. Therefore, they invented a generalized term for the houses lived by the foreigners as *yanglou*. The *yanglou* signaled a sense of privilege and wealth, because the Chinese people of the old Shanghai, unfortunately, dropped to the lowest stratum of the society. The places they live were lined townhouses without sanitation and baths. The difference in social classes was transferred to the difference in architectural styles. It is the same in Putian, in which financially well-off villagers consciously chose to adopt

the *yanglou* style for their houses. The acknowledgement to the more advanced Western way of life reemerged after decades of propaganda of the Communist ideals that fairness is the ultimate goal of a Communist social organization. The locals, when using the term *yanglou*, usually speak in an admiring tone, just like the fictional characters — the Chinese people in the 1920s Shanghai — under the pen of Wang Anyi.⁶¹ they have a high degree of hatred towards those who invaded their homeland, but meanwhile, they admit that the housing foreigners developed had a charm that enchanted the passers-by. Maybe it is because of the grand scale, or a regular geometry, or the ornamentation of the Shanghaiese *yanglou* that elicited impressions of lavishness etc. The Communist government proposed the common *Dazhaiwu* but when the era of collective economy terminated, one of the most prominent references village residents can find is the *yanglou* that was once popular in the cities of the coastal region during the 1920s to 1940s.

These villas are four stories tall, with an expansive backyard and two parking garages. The inhabitants color exterior walls in yellow or brown whose saturation and thickness bring notability. However, the seemingly regular houses exceed the height restriction. The party secretary of Putian tells me that the maximum height of individually constructed buildings should not be over 10 meters high, but all these villas are 12-15 meters in height.⁶² The local elites had grasped a power so large that the

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⁶² Mr. Cai (party secretary of Putian) interviewed by Shen Juntai, Yuhuai, Zhejiang, August 20, 2017.
government officials could do nothing to limit their freedom. The property owners of houses are general managers of four major manufacturers who control the economic lifeline of the village.

The party secretary himself is a factory owner who collaborated with another “friend” in operating a large industrial plant. He is fully aware of the importance of production as the output of the village living under a capitalist model. The necessity to ensure the profit of producers makes the imposition of housing regulations impossible. Moreover, the village once rules that all the new constructions of the houses should be accompanied by a setback of one meter of the street front, just to save space for road widening. However, if we drive in the village, the narrowness of the streets still puts the car over the edge of accidents. Obviously, no one is abiding by what was written in the rules, especially those who build up yanglou.

The most extravagant yanglou in the village is situated on the smooth slope of the back mountain of the village. The orientation of the mountain and the entrance to the villa show a good combination of fengshui. The most interesting part is not the excessive height of the structure, but the actual enclosure of the entire mountain behind as the owner’s own playground. The owner does not have the property right to develop anything private over the mountain slope, but the reality is that he moves in more than 150 different bonsais as a mini-landscape and walled part of the mountain slope for his own pleasure. The person who dwells in this house is, no doubt, someone with power.

63 The information was gathered through multiple interviews in the village, August 24-25, 2017.
And it was later revealed that the brother of the former chair of the village committee is the one who initiated this grand project.\(^{64}\) Again, power overrides policy.

Right opposite to the house with bonsais is a rustic, factory-like zone of residence for migrant workers. [Figs. 1-18, 19 &20] They were congregated in the structure with multiple 10-square-meter cells. Of course, they do not enjoy even a miniature version of gardens and yards, not even kitchen and bath. Collective kitchens and baths are arranged each for 15 cells, much more congested than standard Chinese university dorm rooms. The structure as a whole has low ceilings and grey painted exterior, vanishing in the grey background of the mountains. The highly standardized rooms are offered according to the regulatory scheme regulating the lowest inhabitable space.\(^{65}\) Everything there is carefully tailored based upon the rule, and residents, exclusively migrant workers, have no individual bargaining power to argue for their benefits and rights. The bottom line is easy to obey, and the village committee monitors the migrant workers closely so that they exercise in a safe manner in cooking and usage of fire. Government watchdog always treads on the heels of the powerless, and treats the powerful laxly. The accentuated presence of richer villagers due to an uncontained building manner is in conflict with the evaporation of residents, who are many, in the highly controlled shabby cells.

It is as if a return to Renaissance Italy, where numerous laborers who were

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\(^{64}\) Interview with Mr. Cai.

employed in constructing the fountains in the courtyard of leisure villas left no trace on the ground. Nevertheless, patrons, regardless of their identities such as dukes and cardinals, were totally visible with emblems and concrete coats of arm. Imposing appearances of luxurious villas only show off the wealth, not the labor, a similar phenomenon to be found in Huaxi village discussed in the subsequent chapter. Nevertheless, the ability to break the rule is a key privilege for local elites in Putian.

Although Liangjia and Putian (and Wenling and Yuhuan) stay relatively close to each other, divided only by a water channel of the East China Sea, people hold distinct ideals for their life. Both places display a relatively autonomous developmental pattern with little top-down policy and planning impositions. For Liangjia, the linear progression of housing styles, from Republican era compound to Dazhaiwu, *nongminfang*, and finally the Western influenced *xiaokangyan*, is tracing corresponding political-economic conditions of the area and a nostalgic sentiment towards a past with piety.

When the residents accumulated enough wealth, they embraced a new style of housing. The enlargement of the average inhabitable area of residential architecture is also linear, growing gradually with the transformation of style. The larger interior space allows locals to subdivide their private spaces more meticulously. A big clan can be accommodated into a single house. The difference is that in the 1930s and 40s, the Republican compound had a horizontal distribution of spaces in which each branch of the family occupied a cell next to another. In the *nongminfang* and *xiaoyangyan*, however, the spatial division is achieved vertically, with different floors occupied by different
branches. Thus, the number of floors for houses in Wenling is comparably large. This phenomenon is “urban.” The skylines of Chinese metropolises are ruled by recent additions of skyscrapers, saving land so that real estate developers can squeeze in with more projects. Humans started to live up in the air due to the land constraint of the crowded urban space. In Liangjia, the increasing height of houses is not so much a product of land shortage: the locals did not change the basics of the structural foundation of houses that was formalized a century ago. A consensus of not violating the foundational shape saves agricultural land for the village. As a result, the only direction that the new houses can extend to revive the old clan idea is to build upwards.

The vertical extension also endows the new houses with a new mode of privacy: it is less mutually disturbing between floors. In general, the spontaneous approach to modern residences in Wenling retains the traditional foundation for the sake of conserving land, a gesture to keep the agricultural activities at a high level. The modernizing process is not so much about ornamentation and aesthetic improvements, but about spaciousness and privacy for a family. The aesthetics consideration did not become influential until the appearance of xiaokangyan, an entirely new outcome of the New Village Construction.

At the same time, the linear developmental trend shows a reform, not a revolution. The capable villagers are trying to keep up with the economic growth they are experiencing. They are not jumping up and aiming at something that is way above what they owned before, both stylistically and spatially. The gradualism of housing
development is in line with the gradualism of the Chinese economic reform. This chasing-up sentiment may not give the residents a sense of happiness because the mere search for a space that just fits the time-specific standard of living offers no substantial self-pride. The villagers are not privileged nor backward compared with their understanding of the time period. As we will see in the later case studies, regional exceptionalism and grand revolutions of aesthetics and styles imbue villagers of other localities with the consciousness of living a “better” life. In Wenling, in contrast, the general pattern of growth is not radical, nor fast.

It is not to assert that every single villager is living a life that he or she defines as standard. The Putian case provides a glimpse of the houses of local tycoons. In a place where the secondary sector pioneered, those who control the economic lifeline are more prestigious than others. They even transverse local regulations and are able to imagine a local empire of their own. However, such powerful business leaders are few in number and thus are projected saliently in a village that intends to attract more investment from the outside. The visual gap between the business tycoons, the average residents, and the migrant workers are clearly observable. The livelihood of the average villagers is similar in Wenling and Yuhuai; it is simply the few out-of-spectrum great mansions that make the village advertisable. Also, the villagers’ spontaneous development of houses did not spread benefits to the migrant workers who continued to live in either out-of-fashion or closely monitored structures. The upwardly mobile strategy is combined with an increasing, visible gap in terms of social and geographical strata.
The Liangjia case represents a village that is intact from more progressive initiatives: limited stylistic choices, the desire to stick to the economic condition, and the overlook of the outsiders in the context of local officials responsible for enforcing planning laws are the key aspects of the development. However, on an ideological level, the importance of nostalgia and futurity is manifested fully in Liangjia as well.

_Coda: Nostalgia and Futurity in an Agrarian Town_

The transformations of housing arrangements from orderly *Dazhaiwu* to *nongminfang* and *xiaokangyan* reflects a broader shift in ideals that has occurred in post-Cultural Revolution rural society. The upward construction of peasant houses accommodates different generations of a clan into a single, vertical housing unit echoing a style that was once prominent among the Republican era compounds. The new style allows more structures to be built within a limited area, maximizing space devoted to crop fields. Additionally, the reemergence of large-family life works to mend the communal bonds that were disrupted amid the atomization of the Cultural Revolution. In order to replace the immediate past, villagers chose to revive a style of housing from their recent past.

Concurrently, a sense of topophilia appears. Villagers with the same surname (i.e., in the same clan) often made efforts to return to their former land on which their ancestral halls stand. From the census map of the village, we see clear zoning divisions according to surnames, with areas assigned to discrete clans instead of random families. Villagers see this clan-based residential grouping as an idealized re-creation of a
pre-industrial way of life. Different generations have returned to live under the same roof, and households in the same clan have reunited, marking the beginning of an era that prioritizes filial piety and lineage.

Traditional lifestyles characterize modernity in the village of Liangjia — a phenomenon evinced not only by a renewed emphasis on clan ties, but also through the evident exclusion of outsiders. Given their non-resident status, Liangjia and Putian’s migrant workers have encountered difficulties in achieving social integration and gainful employment. In this case, the nostalgic return to a clan-based life essentially discriminates against migrant workers, reinforcing social disparity. Even if official residents embrace an economic future of industrialization and mass production, their new lifestyles complicate the task of attracting a diverse labor force, the members of which are confined to lower economic strata and struggle in their search for identity.

In contrast to Liangjia, migrant workers constitute a central element in the socialist village of Huaxi, where local elites chose to reconstruct a different past. However, even in Huaxi, socialist egalitarian ideals have failed to limit the emergence of substantial socioeconomic inequality within the village. Like Liangjia, nostalgic futurity merely serves the dreams of the powerful, not the Great Revival of China as a comprehensive whole.
Chapter 2

A Socialist Paradise on Earth

Huaxi’s Story of Socialist Great Revival

“If you want to see a miracle, come to Huaxi.”
— Huaxi’s public loudspeakers

“The Number-One Village Under the Heaven (天下第一村)”
— Inscription on Huaxi’s main entrance

Imagine a place where everyone is entitled to a free car, a free house, and free healthcare. The is precisely the vision of Communist utopia promoted in the paradise of Huaxi Village, a township in Jiangsu around 130 kilometers away from China’s largest economic powerhouse, Shanghai. [Figs. 2-1] When China effectively embraced a semi-capitalist approach to Reform in the 1980s, Huaxi was an agrarian hovel, reachable only by dirt roads. The changes that accompanied marketization shifted the Huaxi economy from primarily farming to manufacturing and trade.

And yet, unlike so many other Chinese villages, Huaxi did not select a path of privatization; rather, residents poured their money into a collective pot and shared in the profits they gained.66 Today, orderly arranged Western-style villas, pagoda-inspired apartments, a 328-meter high luxurious hotel, and helicopter transport services are enjoyed by elite local residents. [Fig. 2-2] The Huaxi Group, originally a TVE (township-village enterprise)67, employs at least 25,000 workers, most of whom live

67 Township-village enterprise (Xiangzhen Qiye) are market-oriented public enterprises under the purview of local governments based in townships and villages. Most of them emerged in the 1980s. In 1985, there were 12 million TVEs in rural areas. TVEs accord with their location; companies locate in townships and villages are TVEs. See Justin Yifu Lin, Demystifying the Chinese Economy.
outside of the legal-administrative boundaries of central village. The corporation holds approximately USD 7.7 billion in assets, and shareholding villagers enjoy a GDP per capita of USD 60,000 per year, an astronomical figure compared to other rural localities.68

What are the chief characteristics of the success of this once-minor village on China’s map? Huaxi’s integration of industries, aggregation of nearby townships, smooth facilitation of financing, and impressive reserve of human capital may all be regarded as important factors in its success.

Here, I am firstly investigating the main reasons that contribute to the prosperity of Huaxi Village in the grand narrative of the Chinese economic reform. Xiaogang Village, the place where the Household Responsibility System69 was born, is today a normal village just like its adjacent neighbors, but the non-outstanding nature of Xiaogang accurately proves that the Household Responsibility System was so prevalent that it brought other villages to the same level as its place of invention.70

How about Huaxi? Among the factors leading to Huaxi’s success, those concerning geopolitical advantages, infrastructural expansion, and strategies of financing may be applicable broadly, but the controversial collective and centralized institution may not be an efficacious model. When politics mingles with economics, uncertainty arises.

69 Household Responsibility System (Jiating Lianchan Chenghao Zerenzhi) is a practice developed in Anhui Province in 1979. It was first adopt in agriculture, and later extended to other economic sector. Local managers, rather than the state, assumed all the responsibilities of profits and losses of an enterprise.
Geography and History: Foundations for Greatness

Huaxi Village enjoys an advantageous geographical position. Under the administration of the City of Wuxi, the second largest city in Jiangsu, it situates at the gravitational center of the Yangzi River Delta. Huaxi is close to both the Yangzi River and the Lake Tai, and thus benefits from a well-developed water transportation network. Wuxi, one of the earliest sites of export-processing, ignited Huaxi’s eagerness to join this wave of development. The products in and out could travel through creeks to reach major economic centers like Suzhou, Wuxi, and even key metropolises such as Shanghai and Nanjing.

Huaxi is situated 75 kilometers from Suzhou, which is currently the biggest economic entity in Jiangsu thanks to its fast-paced constructions of joint-venture factories. It is also 200 kilometers from Nanjing, a historical municipality serving as the capital of the province. Huaxi’s geographical connections with metropolitan areas facilitate its connectivity with the outside, meaning that the market for made-in-Huaxi goods is expansive.

The entire Yangzi River Delta was an experimental zone for export-processing and seaport establishments. Pudong District of Shanghai obtained an SEZ status in the early 1990s, further solidifying the Yangzi River Delta’s standing as China’s economic

73 SEZs (Special Economic Zones) are areas located within China to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) and increase trade, investment, employment, and administrative efficiency. Special policy privileges may include lower import taxation, diminished quotas, freer labor regulations and customs. Earliest SEZs of China (1980-84) include Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou, Xiamen and Hainan Province. With Shanghai Pudong (a 1990 addition), virtually all the SEZs are coastal cities.
powerhouse. Therefore, the four-decade development of Huaxi Village from tiny to large and from poor to rich follows the general economic trend of the Yangzi River Delta, which is itself a pioneer in catching up with the Western standard. Other nearby villages such as Nanjie and Dadong also enjoyed a similar level of GDP per capita.

Without the industrial base of Su’nan, or without the openness offered by international container terminals in Shanghai and Ningbo, Huaxi’s manufactured goods might not engage with the larger domestic and global markets, and the demand might not be sufficient to supply such high revenues to the village. Geography endows Huaxi with a high level of opportunity in the area whose economic growth rate and living standard had rocketed up since 1978.

On the eve of China’s reform, Huaxi was simply a sleepy, unnoticeable hamlet located quietly in the periphery of Jiangyin County. Just like other villages in China, Huaxi centered on agricultural production, and strove to improve its infrastructure of irrigation. Wu Renbao, a charismatic leader and the party secretary of Huaxi, united the villagers and initiated a project to dig water channels throughout the village’s farmlands.

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74 Naughton, 36.
75 Xiong and Deng, 11121
76 The container terminals of Shanghai and Ningbo are world-famous: Shanghai ranks globally the first in annual handling capacity (measured by TEU), and Ningbo the third, only behind Singapore (2017).
77 Wu Renbao (1928-2013) served as the Party Secretary and Chief of Huaxi Production Team (later village government) from 1961 to 2003. From 1975 to 1981, he concurrently assumed the position as the Party Secretary of Jiangyin County. From 1987 to 2003 he was the President of the Huaxi Group. After retirement as the Party Secretary and Group President, he continued to hold positions as the Vice President of the Huaxi Group until his death. He was the National Representative of CPC’s 10th, 11th, and 17th Party Congresses, and was the People’s Representatives of PRC’s 6th, 7th, and 8th National Congresses.
The project took seven years and, in total, 1,500,000 labor hours to be completed.\textsuperscript{78} This united effort to work for the sake of the village not only enabled the grain output to be doubled, but also displayed an early attempt to use a socialist, collective means to achieve village-scale objectives. Meanwhile, even though the Central Committee of the CPC strictly forbade private productions of metals in the 1960s, Wu Renbao secretly set up a workshop for metal hardware such as toilets, water taps and tubes in 1967. [Fig. 2-3]

When the government sent officials to check the production, Wu sealed the manufacturing equipment and temporarily transformed the workshop to a village assembly chamber.\textsuperscript{79} Nearby villages also secretly purchased products from Huaxi because metal hardware had always been in shortage in the market.\textsuperscript{80} This risky move of Huaxi to operate a workshop gave the village experience in running small-scale manufactures, and so, Huaxi reacted efficiently and easily to the new economic policies (for example, allowance to register as TVEs) when the Reform was unfolded. The 10-year operation of the metal workshop, and the zeal to work as a collective put Huaxi at the forefront of new mass productions.

**Economic Calculus: The Backbone of Success**

Even if the leadership at Huaxi could probe the market demand and select the

\textsuperscript{78} Wang and Ming, 58.


\textsuperscript{80} Ibid, 42.
finest and most lucrative products to produce, in the era of a mixed economy inclining to the planned side, the shortage of industrial or consumer goods was not as severe as the shortage in credit funds. The financial sector of China was underdeveloped, a phenomenon prolonging to today’s Chinese economy. Banks were, and still are, entirely state-owned, so that only sizable state-owned companies (SOEs) had the privilege to finance by accessing bank loans. The financial sector favored SOEs because of their soft budget constraints from the central government. Moreover, credit capitals of the banks were not abundant, and that’s why the problem of credits shortage could not be immediately solved by opening up new and/or private factories.

Newly founded corporations usually failed to finance from the banks, not to mention using stock markets or public funds. In the case of Huaxi, the new TVE acquired bank loans from the state bank, a rare case in the early phase of the Reform. The Huaxi enterprise, unlike many other TVEs that primarily search for economic gains, upheld the flag of collectivity. [Fig. 2-5]

Political correctness in China was an influential factor in getting economic profits. Such correctness of emphasizing collectivity while promoting productivity attained support from the Jiangsu provincial government, which intended to foster Huaxi as a “model.” With the provincial government as Huaxi’s guarantor, state banks were

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81 Lin, 180; and Naughton, 222.
82 Zhou, 46.
willing to finance the new TVE. Compared with other private or township enterprises in Jiangsu and Zhejiang who had to use high-interest loans, Huaxi saw very low interest rate, i.e., low cost. The relatively diminished cost stimulated Huaxi to expand in scale by investing extra money.

From public statistics on Huaxi, the business scope of Huaxi ranges from textile, steel, plastic (in the 1980s and 90s) to traveling, insurance, and investment (late 1990s and 2000s). Nevertheless, the image of Huaxi never specifically consists of the most competitive or popular goods it produces, meaning profits associated with specific industries are not separately reported or disclosed. The social image of the corporation, or essentially, the village, is much more powerful than that of the products. In terms of stock exchange, the Huaxi Group was listed in Shanghai in 1999, but its performance within its sector was only moderate. Even without competitive products and support from the stock market, Huaxi continued to grow.

The low cost of financing must have enabled the growth of Huaxi, and it was partially due to the political correctness that Huaxi boarded the vessel of bank credit funding which was chiefly reserved for state-owned enterprises. In a transitional economy, capital is in scarcity whereas the capital return is relatively high. On the other hand, the nominal price of capital is low, reflecting the shortage of banks’ loan supply.

In reality, credits with low nominal prices and high returns signal a non-market way

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85 Zhou, 88.
86 Feng and Zhang, 414.
of distribution. Huaxi persisted to pursue a collective economy as a unity, and therefore could possess the same financial privilege as that of the SOEs. In this case, if the performance of the Huaxi Group was not exceptionally negative, say, way below average, the company would be able to gain an above-average profit.

Beyond easy financing and generation of financial gains, the main strategy Huaxi utilized is its notion of collectivism. Wu Renbao drafted the principle decades ago: “less distribution, more accumulation, less cash, more shares (少分配、多积累, 少拿现金, 多入股。)”87 This tenet reduced the enterprise’s pressure of cash flow. Since a majority of the villagers’ assets remains as shares of the Huaxi enterprise (later the Huaxi Group after an integration of multiple village enterprises from different industries), the corporation has a great financial foundation to invest and carry on production. For the shareholders of the company, many of whom are veteran villagers from the 1970s, the dividends are divided into two forms: 20% was given out as cash, and the other 80% stays as extra shares for the stakeholders. For the workers of the TVE, each receives in cash 30% of the salary every month, and the remaining 70% should be saved in the enterprise as circulating fund, and could only be drawn at the end of the year.88

The bonus of the worker is usually three times his/her monthly wage, yet it directly becomes stock premium.89 This form of “collectivity” and common prosperity is marked by the enterprise appropriating villagers’ and workers’ wealth and right to asset.

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87 Wang and Ming, 58.
88 Liu and Yang, 159.
89 Ibid, 160.
Even more seriously, if a registered villager decides to leave Huaxi, all his or her property and shares will be returned to and retrieved by the collectivity. So villagers basically do not have liquidity or economic mobility, i.e., they must stay in Huaxi. Through such method, the Huaxi enterprise bounds tightly villagers’ benefits with the finance of the company.

Ultimately, an increasing level of circulating funds withheld from the villagers makes it possible for the Huaxi Group to take on huge investments and diversify its productions. Although this gesture seems to threaten the disposable income level of the Huaxi residents, the enterprise has the engine to develop, and the nominal assets of the shareholders as well as of the workers increase notably, providing them with confidence and a great prospect towards the future.

Not all the villagers are enjoying the benefits of the dividends. The Chinese economic reforms have increased the general living standards of the population, while the rural-urban divide has consequently intensified. Rural people had hoped to escape from the backward rural environment, and struggled to find acceptable career opportunities in the cities. Currently, the rural population is in decline, while the urban areas are filled with people.

Huaxi appears to be an exception as a village. Its population did not decline; rather, it increased from around 2000 (1978) to nearly 35,000 (2013) — an undeniably dramatic

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90 Zhou, 71.
91 This is a phenomenon very different from the way-of-life of the Americans. In the USA, people move houses every seven years on average. Yet for the registered residents of Huaxi, they wait till the buildings of villas in the next phase, a wait that usually takes over 12 years.
92 Generalized from Naughton and Lin.
rise. The village behaves like a city, attracting its adjacent villages to join its industrial enterprise, and drawing migrant workers from the outside. Obviously, if the benefits of the Huaxi Group were shared equally among different groups of people, the management structure and financial standing would not be stable, i.e. the wealth would not remain local.

To insure that wealth remains in the local, the shareholding structure is hierarchical: on top of the pyramid, the family of Wu controls roughly 90.7% of the disposable assets of the village; the original 2,000 stakeholders can maintain a high percentage of shares; the newcomers mainly gain bonus and their shares are determined by their salaries; at the bottom, the migrant workers cannot access shares. This structure confirms that a large portion of the fund is in the safe hands of the villagers who would not depart for other places, stabilizing the enterprise’s source of finance. A stable and fixed source of finance can certainly make the strategy of investment and production easier to be determined, and worries of a sudden drop of fund and capital do not exist.

Property ownership is also tightly controlled. The administration of the village is in charge of the master plan for the heart area of the village. The reason why those residential villas and high-rise apartments all look identical on their exterior is because the village government mandates the project as a whole. These villas and cars, were delivered as “gifts” to the 2,000 village households, and had to be exchanged for extra

93 Zhou, 3.
shares in the village enterprise. In addition, villagers do not personally “own” the villas and automobiles; they are merely granted with the right of use.

In other words, their villas and cars may not be sold and resold in the market, and if the village household leaves, these properties remain as the village’s public asset.96 The nature of the ownership abides a socialist philosophy in which public ownership dominates the economy, but the right to use ensures the livelihoods of those who yearn for improvement in life, showing the superiority of socialist policies. As a result this ownership format helps to define the socialist and collective nature of Huaxi, and, at the same time, ties the villagers more strongly with the development of the village itself as their vital interests reside with the economy at large.

**Beyond Immobility of Assets: The Huaxi Hukou System**

Besides all these internal economic policies, the *hukou* system97 in Huaxi is unique since it regulates the inflow of population in a selective manner. The process of household registration in the central area of Huaxi requires, firstly, the evaluations and recommendations from a certain enterprise within the Huaxi Group. A shortlist will then be submitted to the village party committee for deliberation. Eventually, the village party committee finalizes the decision.98

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96 Zhou, 24.
97 *The Chinese hukou system* distinguishes between urban and rural registrations. Huaxi, being a rural village, still issues rural household registrations, but its special economic position offers Huaxi residents many economic benefits, making the registration much more valuable than normal rural registrations.
98 Yin, 58.
Technically, only a selected few, often no more than three people, who “made significant contribution to the success of the Huaxi Village or the Huaxi Group” can be added as new official residents, enjoying greater shares in the Group and additional bonuses.\textsuperscript{99} However, the standard of “significant contribution” does not have a specific bar, and the evaluations, both by the enterprise and by the party committee, fail to incorporate democratic processes.\textsuperscript{100}

The limited number of new registered residents, of course, smoothed out the pressure of issuing dividends to an excessively large group of shareholders. Notwithstanding, such system also impedes the improvement of living standards for the migrant workers, who have no way to obtain the status of official residents. They make scant salaries while witnessing the dream of Huaxi’s common prosperity. A utopia, Huaxi, for these workers, is like a fortresse assiégée, a proverb introduced by famed Chinese scholar-novelist Qian Zhongshu (1910-1998): “Ceux qui sont dehors veulent y entrer; ceux qui sont dedans veulent en sortir.”\textsuperscript{101}

Geographical expansion and merging of sectors are two other key observations of Huaxi Village. Since 1993, Huaxi had been uniting many of its adjacent villages and naming them “Huaxi Village No. X.” The domain of Huaxi increases to 35km\(^2\) from 0.92km\(^2\).\textsuperscript{102} These new additions to the gigantic industrial zone of Huaxi mainly function as residential areas for the migrant workers, and warehouses for rare materials

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid, 58.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid, 59.
\textsuperscript{101} Zhongshu Qian, \textit{Besieged Fortress} (Beijing: People’s Literature Press, 2013), 45.
\textsuperscript{102} Zhi Feng, 77.
and some of the finished products. Land was cheaper and the new villages associated with Huaxi do not accord to the same financial regulations as those of the Huaxi central village.

The “peripheral residents” have no access to Huaxi’s shares and bonuses, and properties there are not owned by the Huaxi government.\textsuperscript{103} Having cultivated a positive economic and political image, Huaxi was able to bring in these new villages through the support of the municipal and provincial planning commissions. The geographical expansiveness gives Huaxi a rear stage to which it can transfer out peripheral industries that have become outdated over time, for instance, textile and fertilizer manufactures.

It also offers enough space for the migrant workers to stay with lower cost.\textsuperscript{104} Huaxi village need not to be responsible for the basic necessities of these workers, and confines its main, model region at the traditional center, concentrating resources for the sake of management and funding.\textsuperscript{105} More area is also available for industrial expansion: the Huaxi TVE, from the beginning, is fundamentally a metal processing factory for larger SOEs, but it turned to produce heavy metals and steel in the wave of the Reform in the late 1980s. [Fig. 2-4]

The service sector was also embraced when it opened up its first hotel in 1993.\textsuperscript{106} Financial investment and tourism became the cornerstones for recent sustainable

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{103} Feng and Zhang, 412.
\bibitem{104} Ibid, 413.
\bibitem{105} Wang and Ming, 57.
\bibitem{106} Zhou, 101.
\end{thebibliography}
development. Just like the entire Chinese economy, the portion of revenue from the primary sector drops (from roughly 60% to 20%) and that from the tertiary sector increases (to around 65%). The integration of sectors, and especially the contemporary focal point of investment represents Huaxi leadership’s ability to detect the most profitable fields of economic development at various historical moments. Moreover, the establishment of an over-watching stock company in 2003 to monitor and control the shares and funds simplifies the organizational structure and accelerates the information and resource flowing between smaller companies specializing in particular industries under the Huaxi Group.

This simplification of the organization strengthens the power of the Wu family. The village propaganda poster lists 88 “role models” of Huaxi, 22 of those holding leadership positions come from the Wu family. In the 2003 village election, the fourth son, Wu Xie’en, of the old party secretary succeeded his father as the party secretary as well as the president of Huaxi Group. This dynastic succession also benefits the Wu’s family. In the village party committee, 11 members are direct relatives of Wu Renbao, and 36 members “subordinates” to the Wu family.

A dictatorial, autocratic mode of leadership is as if a legacy of the pre-reform,

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107 Zhu and Deng, 11121.
108 Wu Xie’en (1964– ) is the incumbent Party Secretary and Director of Huaxi Village and President of the Huaxi Group. He serves as a member of the Jiangsu Provincial Party Committee and a National Representative of the CPC’s 18th and 19th Party Congresses. Usually, a member of the provincial party committee should reach a municipal level rank, but Wu Xie’en is obviously an exception, showing his prestige as an official.
109 Yin, 56.
110 Ibid, 57. Many are attached to the Wu Family through marriages and business partnerships.
collective China: traditional village power structures from the imperial era. But this power dynamic of Huaxi not only ensures that collectivism can be enforced without much obstacle, partially due to the personal charisma and capacity of Wu Renbao. This structure of control also speeds up the decision making process due to fewer bureaucratic reports and meetings, an advantage anchored with a centrally planned economy as well.

Ultimately, the major reasons of Huaxi’s legendary success, as elaborated above, can be summarized as 1) geographical advantage, 2) early initiation of industrialization before the Reform, 3) SOE-status of financing, 4) an image of political correctness, 5) a system that bounds the villagers’ asset to the enterprise, 6) limited shareholders and population inflow, 7) large territory and integration of sectors, and 8) centralized governance.

Multiple justifications work for the explanation of Huaxi’s exceptional success in the Reform-era China. A semi-rural, semi-urban micro-region, Huaxi bases its success on the grander background of Chinese reforms and the opening-up to foreign commerce. Step-by-step, gradualist approach to modernizing the economy of Huaxi leadership is proved to be effective. However, not all these attributes of success are the consequences of a wider framework. Infrastructure, financial reform, and discerning of

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111 Sociologist Fei Xiaotong (1910-2005) concluded, in his frequently cited work *China’s Gentry*, that the power structure of a Chinese village concentrates on the local gentry. The gentry clans exerted considerable influence over the village politics beyond policies from upper level authorities. More often, a prominent member of the gentry family would promote a number of his relatives in the clan to occupy key positions in the village. This traditional gentrified rural social structure echoes in Huaxi with the case of the Wu family. It is as if a continuum of the old into the modern context.
local advantages may be more useful than collectivism and a central dictatorship.

“The number-one village under the heaven” seems to dance rather well with the number-one fast-growing economic entity, China, in the global context. However, there are more complex dilemmas hidden in the jungle. Seemingly a socialist paradise, Huaxi hides the contradictions built into its collectivism and dynastic rulership. For now, these very contradictions have pushed Huaxi to great success.

Who? Where? And How?: the Basics of Huaxi’s Plan

The socialist nature of Huaxi’s economic means accords with the directives from the Central Committee of the Party—to achieve a total “Xiaokang” (Moderately Prosperous) society by 2020 and realize the Great Revival of the Chinese Nation by 2050.112 Even though the Party never required that a totally equal society should be attained during the “early phase of socialism”, Huaxi Village intends to test the viability of this idea. The planning of the village however, both in the larger context and within the central region, fail to achieve the notion of socialist equality. Just as the Stalinist experiment of the U.S.S.R. proved, 100% equality does not exist, and the attempt to enforce results in an even more explicit hierarchy because of the inequality between shareholders and non-shareholders, and between Huaxi and its neighbors.

112 The program to reach a moderately prosperous society (小康社会) is a nationwide campaign. It asks for an evenly distributed economic profit across China. It is rare to see Western economies conducting nationally scaled economic campaign under the circumstance that there is no economic downturn that requires substantial stimulus package. The Great Revival of the Chinese Nation (中华民族伟大复兴) was proposed in 1997 as an initiative to return to the glorious years China had in history when the state economy and influence reached its height from the 7th to around 16th century.
Based on the administrative requirements of the planning of villages, all major planning initiatives on the village level are not only the responsibility of the village itself. It is the county-level bureau of planning that finalizes the plan. Huaxi Village, as a village-level political unit, has no right under such regulation to decide upon its own fate. The Jiangyin Planning Bureau is the de jure decision maker on this issue.

In reality, the archive reveals that it was the Government of Huaxi that finalized every phase of planning without aid from Jiangyin County. This exceptional capability for a village to “plan,” which under the Chinese term always signals something forceful and large-scale, points to an unparalleled political standing and economic position that Huaxi enjoys in its context.

As discussed above, Huaxi Village cherishes its considerable geographical advantage as a center for economic activities. The question is that how might such economic strengths be physically displayed to showcase the village’s prestige based on its industrial capacity. The expressway definitely helps. The “Riverside Expressway,” [Fig. 2-1] the northern artery linking cities of Nanjing and Shanghai, was paved directly across the village. When approaching, visitors to the village may marvel at the density of vehicles running on the road, a sign of connectivity and prosperity. The nearest toll gate for Huaxi is simply named “Huaxi, Huashi.”

The tollgate is located with a mere 500-meter distance to the village main entrance.

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113 The Huaxi Village stores plans themselves, and the only seal appears is the seal of Huaxi.
114 Expressway No. S38 of Jiangsu Province is nicknamed “Riverside Highway (Yanjiang Gaojia)“ because it stays south of the Yangzi River, which is approximately 20km away.
115 Similar cases appear in the USA; for example, the traffic on the Interstate Highways within metropolitan Los Angeles, and I-95 in the Greater New York Area.
which is inscribed with the description “No. 1 Village Under the Heaven.” [Fig. 2-6] The orientation of the expressway toll gate (north) assures that visitors are able to see from afar the main gate. Subsequently, the journey would reach its climax when vehicles move through the boulevard behind the main gate on whose sides stand arrays of luxurious villas with a diversity of styles owned by the 24 key shareholders of the Huaxi Group.

The visual experience of approaching the village emphasizes the centrality of the gate and boulevard, a symbol that would impress every single visitor right after exiting the expressway tollgate. The proximity between the expressway and the village enhances the general accessibility of the village. Usually, expressway exits in non-urban areas are erected in between a few centers of counties/townships to offer a wider range of access for as many potential expressway users as possible. But Huaxi controls an exit by itself, and it is so straightforward as if Huaxi Village is politically and economically more powerful than Huashi, its township-level superiority.

Internal Production Gap

The gap between the production and productiveness of Huaxi and those in its adjacent villages and townships is generating both an upside-down political hierarchy and a clear distinction of Huaxi and what surrounds it. Though administrative boarders are arbitrarily drawn, the difference in physical appearances of the villages is observable by everyone, producing yet another imbalance in terms of the recognizable economic strength.
The village as a whole employs an outward radiating planning strategy. The Huaxi Xinshi Village is the locale for the village government, party committee, and the headquarters of the Huaxi Group. It was the center of Huaxi Village when it was only a 2000-resident hamlet three decades ago. All the socialistically distributed housing (villas) are located within the Xinshi Village. At its center is the main entrance and the central avenue which offers the most lavish residences, mostly beyond 500 square meters in size.

The average household residential area shows a decline towards the outer area. On the outskirts of Huaxi Xinshi Village are apartment towers with an average space of 90 square meters. The skyscraper hotel and office buildings take up the western section of the Xinshi Village in which no villa or apartment exists. It is the only zone designated for visitor accommodation, conferences, and as office spaces in Huaxi Xinshi. Twelve additional villages (Huaxi Villages Nos. 1 to 12) settle on the northern and southern sides of Huaxi Xinshi Village.

Being the latest inclusions into Huaxi as a grand project, these villages are considered “peripheral” not only geographically but also financially by the Huaxi Xinshi inhabitants. The changing household residential area and the timing of expansion formulated a radiating structure of the village stratified by architectural quality and the possession of assets. The center is the pinnacle, with the finest villas and most economically powerful residents. At the periphery may be found the least decorated buildings which are owned by financially moderate and inferior people. This structure of
plan is the vessel for other more acute and critical contrasts of livelihood in Huaxi, and it clearly does not accord to a socialist notion of equality.

A Socialist Periphery

The 2003 additions of the peripheral villages of Greater Huaxi accentuate the visual hierarchy even more. Huaxi Villages Nos. 6 to 12 lay north of the Jinshan Mountain Range, a physical barrier not overcome until the opening of the Huaxi Tunnel in 1996. Under the concept of fengshui (geomancy), it is more philosophically ideal and preferred to live south of the mountains and north of the water.\(^\text{116}\) The Huaxi Villages Nos. 6 to 12 suffer from an inevitable downgrade of fengshui just because of their positions relative to the mountain.

Arbitrary geographical division also impacts upon the southern peripheral villages—Huaxi Villages Nos. 1 to 5. They situate at the southern side of the S38 expressway. As indicated above, the expressway exit for Huaxi is oriented towards the center of Huaxi Xinshi, leaving peripheral villages with a much lower level of connectivity, visibility, and accessibility. Just as the geographical division already separates what’s “central” and what’s “peripheral,” so does the planning strategy obey such division.

Unlike Huaxi Xinshi Village in which careful zoning of villa constructions is

\(^{116}\) Briefly speaking, The Book of Change (Yijing) speaks of the flow of Qi in an environment. The mountains act as safeguarding element of the residence, and the water accumulates fortune. A house facing south (yang side) with the mountain as the back and water at the front would be the ultimate choice. Note that jin denotes to the northern side of the mountain and southern side of the body of the water, while yang is in reserve.
supplemented with regular repavement of the roads, peripheral villages are not included in the master plan of Huaxi in terms of renovations and restorations of their residential quarters. The townhouses there are typical Su’nan residences built of white-cladded walls encasing two-story structures, and roofs with tiles and ridgepole. [Fig. 2-7] They surround water ponds in order to access to water source for irrigation, cleaning, and firefighting.

Agricultural activities rather than industrial manufacturing dominate the life of the local residents in peripheral villages. According to archival resources, those residential buildings are built by individual households from 1975 to 1998, and since then, only minor modifications proceeded. The lack of planning support from the Huaxi government did not endow people there with an improved quality of life, even if they are so-called “Huaxi residents.” Even worse, the centrally planned scheme did extend to the peripheral villages for factories. Farmlands were built over by factory plants and warehouses, in the case of the Xiangyang Group in particular, and the industrial pollution, sadly, affects the peripheral zone.

The motivation to draw Huaxi peripheral villages into the Greater Huaxi Area, as I investigate from its planning, is questionable. Originally expecting to expand Huaxi’s industrial basis and human resources so that the peripheral would become “richer,” the Huaxi leadership, instead, extracts land resources for factories whose ownership resides in Huaxi Xinshi. [Fig. 2-8] The neglect of the development in the overall quality and style of residential architecture dilutes the individuality beneath a socialist economic
developmental pattern, and the introduction of new factories continues to show the collective control of the means of production.

After a decade of this merger, the amelioration of private space fails to take place, and the villagers still live in traditional housing which is much more crude than the publicly distributed villas.\(^{117}\) Individual welfare, in the peripheral villages, succumbs to an overarching motif of the mode of living in a socialist town—private life yielding to public goals.

The priority of planning for peripheral villages, in the meantime, created a materialistically divided living space, in which centrality denotes private welfare (more developed houses and infrastructure): “hierarchy” appears in a socialist heaven that ought to uphold the principle of equality.

**Mobility: The Visible and the Invisible**

Chinese villages, unlike Medieval European towns or cities that were virtually always walled or fortified, are characterized by their openness to the outside.\(^{118}\) Since pre-modern history, Chinese villages concentrate resources on agricultural production, especially rice growth in the majority of southern Chinese rural areas. Rice demands expansive farmlands as well as significant manual labor. The farmlands/fields have been

\(^{117}\) A luxurious villa for a key shareholding household of the Huaxi Group has three floors and an area of 550 square meters. For a traditional dwelling, it is at its maximum to have 150 square meters living space and two stories for a household.

\(^{118}\) It is possible that villages are surrounded by mountains for defensive purposes. Local bandits would find it more difficult to organize large-scale attack to the villages in this case. Also, occasionally, the *fengshui* principle would situate a village in a basin where three sides are mountains. Natural fortifications work much more commonly than artificial walls.
serving as the natural geographical division between concentration points of human dwellings. However, simultaneously, since the land is not wild, peasants are mobile over the cultivated land, and through such land, they move from village to village. The unwalled nature of villages ensures notable inter-village human mobility and information flow.\textsuperscript{119}

Huaxi Village prides itself on being not gated and walled, just like all the Chinese villages in history. However, its inner-village mobility, even though not legally or officially restricted, is not reasonably high. Huaxi is divided into multiple residential areas with consistent architectural type in each area. For example, on the northwestern boarder of the Xinshi Village, low-rise apartment buildings constitute the landscape.\textsuperscript{120} [Fig. 2-9] Moreover, in and around the central axis behind the main entrance, three-story villas are the sole type of housing.

With an increase of concentration of wealth from the Xinshi Village’s boundary to the very center of the village, buildings are becoming lower in height, greater in residential area, and more sparse in geographical distribution. Along the central avenue of houses by those key shareholders, villas are set an average of ten meters away from each other, a luxury in China where land is precious. [Figs. 2-10~12] Although the density and style of the villas explicitly speak about power and prestige, the area around the axis is not walled with steel fences, unlike many other suburban properties. People

\textsuperscript{119} For a detailed discussion of village connectivity, see Fei Xiaotong’s \textit{Peasant Life in China}. Also, the 2016 novel by Ge Fei, \textit{Wang Chunfeng (Facing the Wind of the Spring)} describes rural connectivity in the People’s Republic extensively.

\textsuperscript{120} Low-rise apartments, under the Chinese vocabulary, usually refer to houses with fewer than six stories.
are, in fact, allowed to walk in and out of that area. Notwithstanding, the absence of a wall does not abolish methods to restrict movement.

Guard-like persons wander in these area, reporting suspicious visitors on a regular basis. When I was examining the architecture in that region and attempted to take photos to for my digital record, I was confronted by two different groups of guards, one inspecting on foot, the other driving a car. All of them did not wear any sort of uniform, but they seriously interrogated me and ordered me to leave immediately. When I refused, claiming that they did not present any proof of identity to carry out their duties, they reported my case to the personnel in the guardhouse. This collaboration between these non-uniformed, plain-clothed guards and the official guardsmen forms the mode of execution of public security duties.

The central avenue and its two parallel streets, as I observed, are reserved for such cooperative safeguarding model. The invisibility of guardsmen helps uphold the image of Huaxi’s fine safety and general accessibility, but an invisible barrier to free movement is subsequently established — those deemed “unwelcomed” are compelled to leave.

Moving out of the core, it is commonplace for those residential areas of villas to build guardhouses at each entrance, even if the land of property is not physically walled. Low-rise apartments, which meet the demand of those financially less endowed or migrant workers, are without guardhouses; only the ground level gate is equipped with a PIN panel. As for peripheral Huaxi, it remains entirely free in entry and exit, and just like other agriculturally based villages, farmlands separate the centers of each group of
dwellings.

The radiating structure of planning, in which the center represents the highest concentration of wealth, corresponds to a radiating status of the intensity of public safety services: the more central the property is, the stronger the public safety resources are put. Meanwhile, the more intensive the public safety service provided, the less mobility and access for visitors in that area. The hierarchical state of the village extends to the degree of physical mobility: in general, the richer the person is, the more mobile s/he can behave on the land of Huaxi.

The Story of Happiness

An ideal socialist society would not tolerate any form of inequality and stratification, typically in terms of assets and wealth. In the context of Huaxi, the principles and rules of economic distribution intend to stick to socialism, yet the result of the planning creates a hierarchical village life. The economic objective to protect the profits of the pivotal shareholders downplayed the economic welfare of the newcomers and those who are relatively poorer or are less crucial economic actors.

The 21st century expansion of the village's industrial and land bases overlooked the progress of residential, private spaces; the centralized plan set the tone of a highly stratified village. The socialist mode of economy did not bring equality, but created instead an even larger social gap that is deliberately incurred by the necessity to

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121 For a discussion of the property rights in a socialist context, see Vladimir Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?* (1902).
implement a centralized radiating plan.\textsuperscript{122}

There is a way for the Huaxi leaders and party members to mitigate the sense of hierarchy in a socialist paradise. The Huaxi Government utilizes the idea of belief and faith to try to accomplish the ideal. At the northwestern corner of Huaxi Xinshi Village lays the “Garden of Happiness (\textit{Xingfu Yuan 幸福苑}).” [Fig. 2-15] How did the Huaxi leaders and planners define “happiness?” The 1993 garden occupies 180 mu\textsuperscript{123} of land, and within it, seven office buildings whose architectural elements resemble the design of Buddhist pagodas are the third tallest buildings in Huaxi. Around the office buildings are sculptural works depicting not only ancient legendary deities like the Goddess of the Luo River or Nezha the youthful warrior, but also contemporary revolutionary heroes like Qiu Shaoyun and Huang Jiguang.\textsuperscript{124} Moreover, a selection of Chinese literary characters is presented as well.

The sculptures are similar, if not identical, in size and materials, and they are situated by the sides of walkways on the east and west parts of the garden. Those sculptural figures are officially designated sources of “happiness” for every resident in the village of Huaxi, who has the right to pursue any belief except for religious cults. This garden is as if a mixture of Chinese folk beliefs and traditional, canonized religions. Those represent traditional religions are salient in display, for example, the pagoda-like

\textsuperscript{122} This pattern of wealth concentration in the center and poorer suburbs of workers is found in traditional European cities such as Vienna and Munich as well.

\textsuperscript{123} One \textit{mu} is 660 square meters under a metric scale.

\textsuperscript{124} The Goddess of the River Luo is a legendary deity that represents lust and love. Its image appeared in a poetic exposition (\textit{fu}) of Cao Zhi (192-232), the Cao Wei prince-poet, therefore becoming a cultural icon. Nezha is a protection deity in Chinese folk religion that may be derived from Daoism. Huang Jiguang (1931-1952) was a highly decorated soldier during the Korean War, believed to hurl himself against a machine gun slit. Qiu Shaoyun (1926-1952), another Korean War hero, was burned to death in order to save other 500 soldiers in his unit.
office towers taking inspiration from Buddhism. However, folk religions are arguably more important in rural areas than formal religion. As Pearl Buck depicts, the Chinese villagers have a firm belief in the deity of earth or the earth itself, which was never something inscribed into the practice of any formal religion.125

Besides, the worship of Guan Yu, the Three-Kingdom period (220-280) general, was widespread in the rural area as to offer bliss on the safety of a family. Such traditionally folk elements are similar to the worships of figures on the sideways of the garden. However, the more imposing structures are always those about canonized belief systems, mimicking the practices and religious observance in the cities.126 All these figures, be it historically real or imaginary, are denoted as the spiritual guides for the resident to obtain happiness.

Nevertheless, it is not the end of the story: on the northern edge of the garden in front of one of the office buildings are five enormous (around 3.5 meters tall) marble sculptures that depict the “founding fathers” of the People’s Republic of China—Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, Liu Shaoqi, and Deng Xiaoping.127 [Fig. 2-16] The larger-than-average size of these statues makes them recognizable from anywhere inside

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125 The theme of belief and folk religions appears in Pearl S. Buck’s works frequently, especially in The Good Earth (1931), East Wind West Wind (1930), and Peony (1948).
126 See Shen Junta’s research paper for Wesleyan University seminar CSS340 (Spring 2017) about Chinese rural belief system after the Reform era.
127 Mao (1893-1976) was the first generation paramount leader of China, being the Chairman of the Party from 1943 until his death in 1976. Zhou was the Prime Minister of China from 1949 to 1976 (till his death as well). Zhu was the Commander-in-Chief of the People’s Liberation Army from 1949 to 1954, and a long-time member of the CPC Politburo Standing Committee (1959-1976). Liu was the President of China from 1959 until his removal of power in 1968 at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution; he was also considered the successor of Mao when he served as the Deputy Chairman of the CPC (1956-1966). Deng was the second generation paramount leader of China and the architect of China’s Reform. After the Cultural Revolution (restoration of his political standing), Deng held the position of the Chairman of the Party Military Commission from 1981 to 1989. Before 1966, he was the Vice Prime Minister and Secretary-General of the Party.
the garden. These five leaders established the socialist path with Chinese characteristics that the village of Huaxi gains profit from and continues to follow. Being at the northern center of the garden instead of randomly scattered on the sideways, the leaders’ statues imply what the residents of the village ultimately should have believed in: the system of socialism and the authority of the Chinese Communist Party. Once again, size and centrality matter in terms of promoting the true faith, regardless of the resident’s personal choice.

Even more broadly speaking, this method of diminishing hierarchical sentiment by offering a fair, open, and free belief system has a corollary consequence: the villagers’ positive answer to the question “are you happy?” comes as a prerequisite. Everyone should be “happy” in the first place, because there are a variety of choices that s/he can choose to believe in. In other words, it is simply impossible for the villagers to feel unhappy, since an infinite scope of sources of happiness are officially available to them in the Garden of Happiness.

Huaxi deflects the emerging problem of social hierarchy, which is most often concerned with material imbalance, by promoting spiritual satisfaction. However, the seeming freedom of belief manifested in the numerous sculptural artworks of different characters is overshadowed by the notable size of the PRC leaders’ sculptural program prominently executed at the very gravity center of the garden. The intention to set up a hierarchy-free spiritual domain was eventually crushed by the imposing design of the garden. In the end, the outcome is a general hierarchy from both a materialistic aspect
and a spiritual perspective.

**A Sacred Space?: Understanding the Garden of Happiness**

The Russian proverb states that “a sacred space is never empty (Свято место пусто не бывает).” There must be spiritual or ideological contents to fill any void. Socialism advocates a removal of superstition and religious thoughts, which should be replaced by a belief in the communist ideal. In the former Soviet Union, movements of atheism were organized to clear out the backward, intoxicating religious practices. Notwithstanding, the attractiveness of religion, Russian Orthodox in the context of the U.S.S.R., was so great and its social foundation so deep that revivals of religious faiths occurred from time to time especially during the Great Patriotic War when people called for spiritual guidance and redemption. There were continual spiritual remains in the Soviet society even in the face of anti-religious movements.

In China, another socialist country, religion was never a state-level concern. Traditional, formal religions like Buddhism and Daoism lacked political influence way back to the fall of the imperial Qing Dynasty (1616-1912). On a national level, there was a void of religion ever since the Cultural Revolution when all that was classical, traditional, superficial, and superstitious was defined as counter-revolutionary.

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129 Buddhism and Daoism lacked political influence in the late imperial period. For the Qing court, Tibetan Buddhism was for the royal family as well as the Mongol Khans. That’s why religion was never a chief national issue in terms of politics.

Population was atomized and interpersonal bonds heavily damaged through incessant state-dictated struggle sessions and self-criticisms. Class struggle ruled the decades of the 1960s and 1970s. After the Cultural Revolution, one of the public reactions during the Reform era was to regain belief in and reinstall communal life. Different than Liangjia of Wenling, some locals and policy makers, typically from coastal provinces, introduced religion as a tool.

On a local level of the Yangzi River Delta, Christianity observed the most notable increase in the quantity of worshipers because regional churches served as a gathering place of the residents. Traditional beliefs that offered appropriate moral teachings, for example, Buddhism with leniency and self-cultivation, and Daoism with naturalist mind, also returned to the fore.\textsuperscript{131} In Huaxi, the revival of religious beliefs was integrated with a higher faith in the power of socialism.

As discussed above, the Garden of Happiness utilized statues of deities and the Communist founding fathers hoping to endow the village with a complete freedom of belief while a clear hierarchy was produced. The visual emphasis is directed towards the founding fathers, and the less important deities and revolutionaries from oriental legends, Western religions, and modern Chinese history are arranged over the thin sidewalks of the park. Differences in size and height of the sculptures make the following impact: wherever a viewer is walking in the garden, the figures of the Communist leaders are in view.

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid, 56.
The revolutionary heroes are erected close to the main entrance of the park, showing a propagandistic scene of the sacrifice of building a safe socialist regime. Western gods and goddesses are at the remote southwest corner of the garden with the least accessibility to the visitors. Although the garden generously includes multiple belief systems and images of either humans or deities, the hierarchical arrangement with regard to the statues’ position and their different degree of centered-ness create a carefully tailored visual experience.

The figures that planners intend for the viewers to appreciate are indeed placed at the most recognizable position with enlarged sizes. Therefore, a prioritization of promoting national leader worship is in line with the village’s strong sticking with the socialist tenet. In terms of aesthetics, those statues of the PRC founding fathers resemble the Northern Dynasties’ (3rd to 6th centuries AD) favoring of monumental Buddhist caves in which refined statues were carved.132

The Longmen Grottoes of Henan Province (ca. 494-650), as art historian Wu Hung suggests, showcased the Northern rulers’ coercive appropriations of the newly imported religion, Buddhism, to justify their rulership, while the rulers were nomadic northerners rather than elitist and lettered southerners. [Fig. 2-17] The monumentality of the statues of Buddhas and his disciples forced the viewer to feel in awe of such great accomplishment and subsequently transferred this worship to the royal court.133

133 Ibid.
Similarly in Huaxi, the monumental, enlarged representations of socialist leaders imply a powerful leadership of the establishment and system crafted by the Communist Party of China. The use and abuse of monumentality in Huaxi are parallel in justifying the correctness of the regime to the strategy adopted by the Northern Dynasties.

Three dimensionally, the pagoda-style office buildings are the tallest structures within the boundary of the garden, and the viewer wandering in the garden can easily see the tallest hotel building in Huaxi 328 meters high at the garden’s south. The layout of the nine office buildings enables the entire space to mimic a temple, the office towers being the safeguarding symbols. Or, this layout can be interpreted as the office towers being the columns supporting the temple whose ceiling is the sky itself. The grandeur of the space alludes to both the financial power of the village and the commitment to hold the socialist flag high.

A contrast between the relatively low political standing of Huaxi as a village and the ambition of a paradise of belief under a socialist guidance lead to the action of showing something beyond its political limits, and eventually overshadowing its surroundings whose mundane houses enfold less than ideal lives.

The World at Villagers’ Hands: Icons in the Park of the World

How might a small village embrace the entire world? The leaders of Huaxi, like many preceding mayors of coastal open cities, imported models of foreign architecture. In the northern end of Huaxi Xinshi, “The Park of the World” takes the visitors on a
voyage to wow at reproductions of some of the finest works of architecture in the
globe without long-hour air journeys. [Figs. 2-18~21] The garden stands to show off
Huaxi’s connection not only to the metropolitan economic zone, but also to outside
China where businesses are carried out and the human flow sustains.

The garden includes a reduced scale reconstruction of the Arc de Triomphe, a 1:4
model of Eric Mendelsohn's Einstein Tower, and a less ornamented Viennese Secession
Building. Besides internationally renowned icons in Europe, an impressionistic Statue of
Liberty and an abstracted version of the Sydney Opera were constructed above the
mountain range that divides the central and peripheral zones of the village. Visitors have
to use cable cars to reach the top in order to tour those structures.

More blatant show is set up beyond those global iconographical spots. Right besides
replicas of European architectural works, there is a 1-to-1 replica of the Supreme
Harmonious Hall of the Forbidden City, the symbol of paramount imperial power and
the center of the Chinese world order. Moreover, contemporary allusions of power is
not absent: a Huaxi Tian'anmen oversees the entire Huaxi Village high up on the
mountain. Above the artificial lake, a fake Anji Bridge, the oldest open-spandrel
segmental arch bridge of stone construction, crosses the body of water.

For such a complicated garden with mixed sources of design from both Western
and Chinese pieces of architecture, the idea within the birth of the park is not a novel
innovation of Huaxi. Shenzhen, China’s third economic center today, was once a fishing
village. After being designated as one of the earliest Special Economic Zones, its
economy took off, taking advantage of its adjacency to Hong Kong, then the world's top free market economy. In 1988 and 1994, theme parks of Splendid China Folk Culture Zone and the Window of the World opened to the public, respectively.\textsuperscript{134} [Figs. 2-22 & 23]

The Splendid China Park contains 1:15 replicas of 82 famous tourist spots within China, whereas the Window of the World consists of replicas of architectural works from 30 different countries covering all five inhabitable continents. These two theme parks are denoted as showrooms of the fruits of China's Reform. The local government had enjoyed substantial wealth to finish both projects; the city residents could relish all the precious splendors from across the world; the viewers are able to understand the increased connectivity of China with the world, both economically and culturally. Nevertheless, although the action of converging all the foreign and domestic scenic spots can be comprehended as merely showing, it is also a process of inheriting. By putting together the key buildings, the premodern idea of China being the center of the world and heaven returns. It is in China that those works from the world merged, and China, in this case, is the central platform observing all these developments taking place.

Huaxi’s Park of the World sticks to this idea and adds even more full-bodied socialist flavor into the space. The building replicas that are closely associated with socialist achievements, for example, replicas of Tian’anmen and the Great Hall of the People, are positioned in the most salient places, one on top of the mountain, the other

\textsuperscript{134} Shenzhen Splendid China Park official website http://www.cn5000.com.cn/ (accessed April 8, 2018)
next to the main entrance.

Furthermore, the Supreme Harmonious Hall functions as the village museum, sharing the element of worshiping the past with a role of collecting artworks. [Fig. 2-24] The greatness of the present village is supported by the presence of a group of architectural marvels symbolizing the greatness of the past. A legitimacy of national and socialist rulership is explicit in this case.

Unlike the replicas of Western architecture whose size are often reduced, the replicas of Chinese wonders, be it socialist or imperial, are all 1-to-1 in size. The relative importance of what’s Chinese essentially builds up national pride and a localist sentiment of the local residents of the village being a significant part in the economic soaring of China. The introduction of the visitors to the “world” is power-centered and flamboyant. Once again, the visitors directly encounter another contrast between the smallness of the village and the “large” miniature globe, idealizing the economic and political connectivity and hard power in addition to always centralizing the socialist and nationalist monuments.

**East Faces West: Types and Styles of Villas of Huaxi**

The villa type is the commonest residential building type on the land of central Huaxi. [Fig. 2-25] Those distributed to the shareholders, and those limited for purchases are all villa structures. The Chinese traditional villas for the elites were predominantly
_yuanlin_ (Garden-Villas 园 林) in which artificial landscape abstracting and miniaturizing nature is considered superior to villas as built structures. [Fig. 2-26] Such structures of _yuanlin_ require great land resources that are not available in the industrialized Huaxi. Subsequently, the village committee looked into the _yuanlin’s_ European counterparts.

European villas from the British picturesque movement exhibit a rustic yet solid appearance. Their exterior shape evolved to be regular and standardized after the Second World War with extensive plans for resettlement housing.¹³⁵ The welfare state system continued to sponsor large developments for healthcare community housing. The villas, in those situations, are generally consistent in exteriors, and employ a neat overall planning scheme, similar to those in Huaxi.

Huaxi’s 1993 plan included 356 individual villas distributed to the shareholding citizens for their households’ uses. They were lined up with consistent spaces in between and within an overall rectangular plot of land. The traditional tiled gabled roof seen in classical Chinese architecture was gone, replaced by standardized hip roofs with ceramics. Concrete constitutes the body of the houses, with exterior walls painted orange. These villas built in the same phase are identical in their exteriors.

The standard interior, equipped with modern furniture, electronics, and full kitchen and toilet, is modeled from Japan and Germany. Unfortunately, European villas’ spacious rear gardens were not copied in the Huaxi villas. This orderly arrangement left the villas without any private space outside for recreational purposes. Three-meter wide

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alleys separate each villa side by side. In between the lines, Five-meter wide streets are for the vehicles to enter and exit.\textsuperscript{136}

Therefore, without greens, the villas are more or less three-story apartments on the ground. The condensed arrangement of the villas signaled a lack of land resources even on a village level, and a focus on the inside private space rather than outside. In the Chinese context after the Reform, a “big house” is a house whose inner area is large, without calculating the sizes of gardens or courtyards. The distributed houses are no doubt considered “large” even though they are just a partial adaptation of the European villa tradition.

Size and an imitation of a Western modern residential type are sufficient for the Huaxi shareholders to relish a modern life. It does not violate the socialist tenet as well because, similar to the Soviet Union, the reforming China was conscious of its backwardness and the gap with the Western developed economies. The realization of what’s standard in the West is a sign of reaching the same level of the quality of life through a socialist path. Villas are a manifestation of the equal capability of socialism and capitalism to succeed in elevating people’s living standard.

For the limited number of villas for purchases, the houses exhibit a greater degree of variation. The facade may have different structural elements like a doorway. Households are able to modify the design by, for example, adding a glass sun room to cover the balcony. Color variations of the facade indicate the villas’ commercial nature.

\textsuperscript{136} Architectural plannings of the village
Generally, these houses enjoy larger recreational space outside in the front or backyards. Freedom is granted with commercialized exchanges but not socialist distribution. The access to those villas is restrictive: only around 200 households in the Board on the Huaxi Group have the right to buy.\textsuperscript{137} It is like a reversal of the socialist trend: the upper level of socialism is communism that forgoes all the property rights and establishes a political anarchy; but in Huaxi, those at the zenith of the system act like capitalists, taking advantages of private ownership.

Stylistically, Huaxi villas emulate their Western counterparts with a postmodern connotation. Structurally, the houses are technologically and spatially modern and urban in terms of functional categorization and zoning. An industrial rigor and a worship of urban lifestyle are in sight with an orderly, efficient land-saving layout and modern building materials. The construction of private space inside the villas and a standardized Western exterior is the construction of an ideal socialist, industrial heaven.

\textbf{The Higher the Better?: Socialist Display of the Longxi International Hotel}

The Soviet Union valued height as a golden rule in designing socialist monument. Vladimir Tatlin sketched a model of the Monument to the Third International (1919-20) for the design of the headquarters of the Comintern. Though never realized, Tatlin’s Tower fully demonstrates the socialist aesthetics: enormous height and area plus

\textsuperscript{137} Zhou, \textit{Huaxi Village}, 140.
structural creativity. [Fig. 2-27]

The capital of China, Beijing, however, chose another path: since the height of the Forbidden City restricts the heights of newly built buildings around the imperial complex, new structures of the PRC usually preferred larger space in the cases of the Great Hall of People and the Museum of Revolution and History. [Fig. 2-28] The Economic Reform solidified the economic basis of Chinese cities, and brought about a wave of skyscrapers constructions. In Shanghai, the Jinmao Tower and the Oriental Pearl Tower topped the skyline of China with over 400-meter heights. [Fig. 2-29] In Shenzhen, the 384-meter Diwang Tower was the highest building in Southern China for 15 years. [Fig. 2-29]

The development of skyscrapers is generally a recent phenomenon that is an outcome of the progressing economy. Land becomes scarce so that buildings grow into the air. A futurist conception manifests as well: height is equivalent to economic power and visibility, and building’s height is often a keynote in media reports, serving as a natural advertisement of the place. [Fig. 2-29] The observatory on the top level of the Huaxi Longxi Hotel, the tallest building in the village, is the finest place for photographing the village. Huaxi’s order, grand size, and varying heights make it a place best to be appreciated with an aerial view, and the Longxi Hotel fulfills the role of securing the

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139 Case studies of the works mentioned above may be found in Zhu Jianfei, Architecture of Modern China: A Historical Critique (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2008).
141 Theories of architectural Neo-Futurism was offered by Hal Foster in his journal article “Neo-Futurism: Architecture and Technology” in AA Files No. 14 (Spring 1987): 25-27.
utmost view for the visitors, another method of promoting the image of Huaxi.

Huaxi Village, in this aspect, retains its nature as a village. It does not have a single skyscraper until 2011, the celebration of the village’s 60th anniversary. Until 2011, the highest building in Huaxi was the 19-story Huaxi Golden Tower. Height is not as important as the display of gold for that building. Gold equates to fortune and respect, while the height of the tower is sufficient for the viewers to get an aerial outlook of Huaxi Village. In 2011, nevertheless, Huaxi joined the wave of skyscraper construction.

The Huaxi Longxi International Hotel (initiated as “Huaxi In-Air Tower of the New Countryside”) project is a hotel 328 meters in height and with 840 rooms. Five clubs with lavish ornamentation and grand ball rooms are positioned 15 floors apart from each other. Upon completion, the Longxi Hotel was the seventh tallest building in China. The construction document explains the rationale behind the decision of height: “328m” is the height of the then-tallest building in Beijing — the third phase of the China World Trade Center (2010). Huaxi Village committee simply intended to keep the same height as Beijing, behaving as a follower to the center of the great socialist construction.

Structurally, the Longxi Hotel has four “cores” that lead up to different zones of rooms, each core possessing a shape of tube, mimicking the Metabolist Architecture by

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142 Huaxi Village's 60th Anniversary was reported by Huaxi Dushi Bao (Huaxi Metropolitan Newspaper) 2011.
Tange Kenzo.\textsuperscript{144} Compared to Shizuoka Broadcasting and Press Center (1965) [Fig. 2-32], the Longxi International Hotel applies steel channels to connect the cores. The exterior draws inspirations from rockets as well. Such avant-garde design with references to the industrial and technological advancements is also in line with a Futurist ideal in which speed, motion and urgency are alluded to.

Futurist architecture, in particular many skyscrapers (for example, the Neo-Futurist Jinmao Tower in Shanghai), is a typical urban scene. In Huaxi, the Longxi International Hotel, though being a place of accommodation, showcases the village’s seeking of the welfare of urbanization through massive industrialization. This hotel represents a highly distinct echoing of urban life and industrial movements. By importing the concept of height from cities and competing with the tallest building in the capital of China, the Huaxi Longxi Hotel flaunts financial and human resources of the village, the true recognition of the village in the face of urbanization, an absolute advocacy of the ideology from Beijing, and a continuous focus on industrial development.

\textbf{Towards a Past Glory: Dreaming a Socialist Future and the Great Revival}

The aesthetics of “socialist” Huaxi centers heavily on the act of display: showing economic power by building super-high skyscrapers, showing global influence by introducing world icons, showing equality through matching villa styles, and showing

new approaches to industrialization and urban life by importing pseudo-futurist architecture. These “shows,” however, all suggest a degree of power and status that are rarely seen in local villages. The idealization of socialism, globalization, limited equality, and urbanization reveals a concentration of resource that creates a utopian fantasy in which everything is positive and advanced. While the socioeconomic flaws of the locality are hidden, the show persists, presenting an impressive facade to outsiders.

The centralized layout of planning, the concentration of wealth in the center, and the integration of cosmopolitan icons and images remind visitors to Huaxi of the Tang dynasty capital of Chang’an. [Fig. 2-34] Also, Huaxi Longxi International Hotel brings in a more traditionalist reference to the Buddhist pagoda, which had flourished since the Tang; the Park of the World is a manifesto of Huaxi’s internationalism and cosmopolitanism, key social features of the Tang. The Tang attracted cultural ambassadors and traders from as far away as Turkey. The capital of the state, Chang’an, was once the largest city on earth with an orderly grid and guarded residential zones between marketplaces. The cosmopolitanism and social order manifested in Chang’an serves as a historical model for global influence and socialist stability in the People’s Republic of China.

The “China Dream” so often mentioned by Chinese leaders today is the Great Revival of the Chinese Nation. Through initiatives such as “One Belt One Road,” a

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contemporary equivalent to the trading routes that enhanced Chinese state power in Han and Song dynasties, the People’s Republic today is building on its historical pattern of intensively engaging with the rest of the world. Huaxi Village, as a pioneer of China’s new socialist economy under its Great Revival narrative, has consciously chosen to adopt the Tang model of village design.

The layout and architectural elements of Huaxi deviate from nearby Jiangnan cities in which classical gardens are situated in a highly literary cultural context, and waterways mark town grids. Huaxi’s exceptionalism is detached from its own geographical and cultural traditions, yet it sticks to a state-sponsored ideal of village planning. The “Huaxi Dream” is in line with “China Dream” in that it seeks to construct a powerful and cosmopolitan site with happiness and socialist integrity.

Despite its surface appearance, however, inequality remains a substantial problem in Huaxi. Migrant workers in peripheral villages seem to have been excluded from the Great Revival initiative. The planning of the peripheral area does not follow the Chang’an grid structure of carefully mapped out markets, houses, and safety checkpoints. Planning served only those within the developmental zone of the Revival — long-time participants in Huaxi’s economic boom and local residents who held shares in the Huaxi Group. A distinction between the insiders and outsiders is marked again in a nostalgic planning motif which aspires to a future of greatness. The enclosed space that imitates Tang Chang’an enables key shareholders to stay in power. This unique design of the town separates social strata and limits the Huaxi Dream, and hence, the
China Dream to a select few.

Two-hundred and fifty kilometers away near the city of Hangzhou, another nostalgic design inspired by elegant Anhui-style architecture demonstrates an alternative aesthetic possibility for an ideal rural life. Unlike Huaxi, the village of Wencun has distanced itself from a direct involvement with mass production and fast-paced industrialization. The focus of famed architect Wang Shu’s project, Wencun village reflects another type of internal hierarchy under the guise of a widely praised architectural style.
Chapter 3

Intermingled Sounds of Chickens and Dogs

*Wencun’s Cultural and Aesthetic Experiment*

In the 4th century, an idealistic poet named Tao Yuanming wrote one of China’s most famous stories entitled “The Record of the Peach Blossom Spring” about a fisherman. After an exhausting day, this fisherman accidentally encountered a lovely stream lined with peach blossom trees on its shores. Curious to see where these trees began, he followed bend of the river, and entered an extremely small cave. When he squeezed himself through a narrow hole in this cave, the scene he saw on the other side stunned him:

*The land became flat and broad. Houses were neatly arranged in rows. There were fertile fields, beautiful ponds, mulberry trees, bamboo groves and the like. Pathways crisscrossed the fields, and one could hear the intermingled sounds of chickens and dogs. There were people walking back and forth, busying themselves with planting crops. The clothing of the men and women was unlike anything he had ever seen. Old and young alike seemed happy and contented.*

The story describes an idealized life of retreat. Deep within the unknown mountain range, Tao’s fisherman discovered a hidden, traditional village with pleasant scenery, social order, productive agriculture, and most importantly, happy residents. [Fig. 3-1]

Tao Yuanming himself was a reclusive figure who quit his governmental post in exchange for a rural life in which he aspired to interact harmoniously with nature and

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147 This is painting by the great Ming dynasty master painter Qiu Ying (1494-1552), noting the longevity of Tao’s writing’s attractiveness to cultural elites
his own spirit. Under his pen, a village with an idealized beauty gave rise to a landscape that was managed by people in a less intrusive way.

This text, “The Record of the Peach Blossom Spring,” influenced generations of Chinese literati and artists. Wang Shu, a Pritzker Architecture Prize laureate, whose earlier works include the Ningbo History Museum and the China Academy of Art, absorbed this tradition of literati aesthetics. Alarmed by China’s vanishing rural life, he committed himself to reviving Chinese villages through redesigning architecture, using locally sourced materials and a regionally tailored approach.

In 2014, the Fuyang County government invited Wang Shu to design the Huang Gongwang Museum. Huang Gongwang (1269-1354), one of the Four Masters of the Yuan Dynasty, revolutionized the Chinese landscape painting tradition by his scroll Fuchun Shanju Tu (Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains), a multi-decade enterprise he undertook. [Figs. 3-2 & 3] The painting used River Fuchun as its foreground; the configuration of water and mountain shows a resonating rhythm of density and looseness; the ink brush can be dry, wet, saturated and shadow.

The smoothness of the landscape reflects both the artist’s mastery of techniques and formal language, and Huang’s inner content of living a life of tranquility and calm temperament. The Daoist notion of following the Way is manifested in this painting as a well-balanced elegance of the composition. The painting is so great that after it was

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148 Tian, Tao Yuanming, Introduction.
150 James Cahill, Hills Beyond a River: Chinese Paintings of the Yuan Dynasty (Los Angeles: Weatherhill, 1986), 139.
canonized in Chinese literati art, and the site of River Fuchun was firmly associated with the idea of an idealized beauty of nature and a calming force for the human mind.

Wang Shu accepted the commission of the Huang Gongwang Museum because of his high regard for the Chinese literati culture. He repeatedly states that he is first and foremost a literati, and then an architect. He comments on both Tao Yuanming and Huang Gongwang, saying that they symbolize the perfection of civilized literati. It was their vision of nature that magnetized their mind and heart, and it was also their vision of nature that enabled them to reach the artistically supreme realm. Huang’s lyrical painting as well as Tao’s artful writing of village life is a window of empathetic reflection on rural life by educated people. Purity of mind and tranquility of life in villages counterbalance chaotic urban scene in metropolises, a salient contrast in China after the economic reform when wealth and employments are concentrated in the urban centers.

This Huang Museum opened a new door for Wang Shu. The Fuyang county government, with the support of Zhejiang Provincial Government, agreed to Wang Shu’s plea that he would experiment with a village restoration program to test the effectiveness of his vision of an modern countryside life. After rounds of research and field trips, Wang Shu selected Wencun Village as a starting point as his first trial of a village project.  

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152  Anonymous interviewee (Wencun resident), interviewed by Shen Juntai, Wencun, Hangzhou, August 21, 2017.
Wencun was a relatively remote village with around 1850 residents in 2013. Geographically, it is approximately 90 kilometers away from the capital of Zhejiang Province, Hangzhou.153 Though slightly detached from the economic and cultural center of the Chinese Jiangnan, it cherishes the larger cultural history of the Ming/Qing China. A little stream passes through the northern edge of the village, and a mountain with moderate height blocks its southern side. [Fig. 3-4] In terms of geomancy (fengshui), similar to peripheral villages of Huaxi, this arrangement is opposite to the ideal because only sites in the yang side (south of mountain while north of water) can accumulate fortune and wealth.154 Wang Shu intentionally chose a geomancy-negative place to invert its feeling of bad luck by reinstalling the aesthetics over what’s naturally imposed.

In Zhejiang Province, however, such site over the northern side of the mountain range is not always considered inferior. For example, Eastern Jin statesman-calligrapher Wang Xizhi organized the Gathering at the Orchid Pavilion in the capital of Eastern Jin — Shanyin — literally meaning “north of mountain.” Wang Xizhi’s calligraphy of *Lantingji Xu* (Preface to the Poems Collected from the Orchid Pavilion) had long enjoyed its prestige as a cultural icon and something that a true literatus would practice reciting and writing.155 [Fig. 3-5] Therefore, the site of Shanyin, even though without a good fengshui, stands out in the cultural map of Zhejiang and beyond. Architect Wang Shu was fully aware of the cultural predecessor of Shanyin, stating that “the contrast to fengshui

153 The statistics were gathered from the Wencun Local Archive.
154 See the classical Chinese text *Yi Jing* for a fundamental study of fengshui, geomancy.
scheme does not matter that much, not only for today, but also in the past.”

Without regard to fengshui, the site of Wencun overall has a profound three-dimensionality with the lowest point on the surface of the stream, then ceiling lines of dwellings with various heights, and ultimately, the smooth curvature of mountains behind. The area in general is mountainous, with yet another mountain range around 400 meters away from the village center towards north. Situated in a valley, it resembles the sight in the Peach Blossom Spring where a panoramic view is only obtained after a passage through the narrow natural obstacle. The early morning water vapor adds a mistiness of the village, and occasional fog in the background reminds the viewers of an otherworldliness of a southern Chinese village.

Evolving slowly from the traditional mode of economic production, villagers of Wencun used to conduct sericulture in the spring and autumn. Silk workshops represented local pillar industry until the 1980s. The Fuyang County Annals mentions Wencun as early as the late Ming dynasty (1582) due to its key position in silk output. Sericulture requires a vast land for mulberry cultivation. Combined with normal farmland for corps, mulberry cultivation made Wencun a village with restrained availability of land resources. Starting around 120 years ago, villagers built houses in shapes of parallelograms to reduce the width of the buildings. [Fig. 3-6] Thus, more land can be saved in the front and back of the residential quarter. Meanwhile, parallelograms connect each other easily to form lines of orderly dwellings, visualizing

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156 Fuyang Xianzhi (Beijing: Guojia Tushu Chubanshe, 2016), 1134.
what was envisioned in the Peach Blossom Spring.

The national economic reform after 1979, nevertheless, opens the horizon of villagers not only in terms of economic modes of production, but also in styles of houses.\textsuperscript{157} Economically, the Pan-Yangzi River export-processing phenomenon extended to Wencun. Metal workshops and factories producing bathroom accessories gradually overshadowed the importance of sericulture whose seasonality and low profits drove away producers. The metal products from Wencun meet demands domestically and internationally.\textsuperscript{158}

The presence of secondary industry endowed villagers who pioneered the new production with substantial incomes. Tearing down old parallelogram houses and replacing them with a different style began to take place in the early 1980s. Those who were relatively wealthy, usually village party members, introduced the first phase of new architectural styles.

\textbf{A Metamorphosis: Gufa in a Contemporary Village}

\begin{quote}
The word of gufa (law of the past) is not an equivalent to “tradition” in today’s syntax. It specifically emphasizes the character of fa (law): studying the law of the past is studying the rationale behind the law, and the rationale of the existence of things. No matter what the objects is — mountains, valleys, trees, and stones, or flowers, grass, fish, and insects, or artificially made things, they are all treated equally as being born out of nature.

古法二字并不是今天传统一词，它具体落实在一个法字上，学古法就是学理，学事物存在之理，而无论山川树石，花草鱼虫，人造物事，都被等价看待为自然事物。

— Wang Shu, \textit{Building Houses} 《造房子》，pp. 26
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{157} Naughton, \textit{Chinese Economy}, 201.

\textsuperscript{158} Anonymous interviewee (Wencun resident), interviewed by Shen Juntai, Wencun, Hangzhou, August 21, 2017.
The area Wencun is located was within the larger context of the Anhui-style mansions (*huipai jianzhu* 徽派建筑). This style flourished in the mid-Ming Dynasty at around the 15th century. [Figs. 3-7~10] The geographical span was from six counties in Huizhou and the area in the Anhui dialect group, Wencun being situated in the latter region. The business tycoons of Huizhou made profits in larger market centers such as Hangzhou, Ningbo, and Suzhou, and transferred back their income to build houses in their hometown. Hongcun, one of the most well-preserved village with Anhui-style mansions, articulates the architectural language of the style: residential courtyard, ancestral shrines, and *paijiang* (traditional arch gateway) are the three pearls of the style. Woodcarvings and stone-carvings are highly refined. Most of the houses stand near waterways to gain water access for their gardens. The scene of the white facade being reflected in the pond is representative of the Anhui style.

Even with such a rapid pace of the changing architectural styles across time, the Anhui-style mansions scattered in the village are well preserved in the Reform era. In total, there are six Qing Anhui-style mansions stand on the ground of Wencun. One of the houses near the stream has a complete white-clad facade and a wide entrance wall. The house serves as a reference point for all those new buildings over the first array near the water. [Fig. 3-7]

Zooming out from the village’s center, visitors would define the architectural

159 The historic Huizhou covered areas of today’s Hangzhou, Jinhua, and Quzhou of Zhejiang, virtually the entire southern Anhui and eastern Jiangxi.

planning of Wencun Village as diverse and less orderly. All these newly constructed villas designed by Wang Shu are in the west side on an “island” surrounded by two water streams. The average area of the new villa is around 200 to 300 square meters, significantly larger than the 150-square-meter average area of older houses in the 1970s and 80s. Architectural materials resemble local choices, for example, timber, yellow mud, white stone, and blue bricks. The houses each own a courtyard, around which are completely wooden facades with abundant sunlight offered by numerous windows. [Fig. 3-11]

For the newly constructed houses by Wang Shu, the first floor has three entrances to different functional spaces — living room, dining hall, and kitchen. Second and third floors are usually equipped with continuous windows. The attic on the top floor can either be a bedroom or a storage. [Figs. 3-12 & 13] Compared with their adjacent Anhui-style houses, the Wang Shu villas are advantageous in providing higher ceiling and modern electronics with fewer weight bearing walls and more spatial flexibility.

A useful case study of Wang’s design may be the family-run hotel I lived during the field research. The hotel takes up half of the interior floor area in a structure, while the other half is a regular residential space for a local family. [Fig. 3-14] The exterior is austere with yellow mud cladding/stucco onto the concrete block walls. [Fig. 3-15] Inside, a sense of returning to the past is introduced through the warmth of the color of wood. The reception room arranges furniture dated back to the Qing Dynasty (around 150 years of history). The plentiful light coming in and the full kitchen with
components of that in an urban house are in contrast to the antique furniture, signaling the contemporary nature of the architecture. Virtually every bedroom enjoys a window toward the south for extra light. Bedrooms are modeled after starred hotels in cities with Wi-fi, televisions, airbed, and minibar.

The owners are former migrant workers working in a five-star hotel in the city of Ningbo, a sub-provincial trade metropolis on the coast of Zhejiang. The owners’ consciousness of earning profits from opening a hotel in such a remote village was ignited by multiple field research tours to other cities and model village projects organized by the Wencun party committee. The intentional interaction of Wencun with the outside world beyond the village privileges those who are living in the new quarter, and possesses explicit economic connotations.

However, what are the identities of those early birds who live in the new quarter in the first phase? The answers seem to be drastically different from different groups of villagers. For those who are in the new quarter in which there are 24 houses and 15 families, they claim that it was because of their earlier consent for their old houses to be torn down that they entered the bid of choosing new houses earlier. They sacrificed first; therefore, they should access the benefits first.\textsuperscript{161} Some families forwent the largest house (in terms of area) in the westernmost side of the village due to frequent funeral processions on the bridge nearby, and some families do not have enough members to

\textsuperscript{161} Anonymous interviewee (resident in the new quarter of Wencun) interviewed by Shen Juntai, August 23, 2017.
own a whole house, thus, sharing half of the space with another small nuclear family.\textsuperscript{162} The village regulations specify that the appropriate living area for a three-person nuclear family is 120-130 square meters, which is notably smaller that the constructed area for Wang Shu’s houses.

However, from an entirely opposite perspective, those who are living in the old quarter firmly denounce the statement made by the new quarter residents. They attribute the reasons for the new quarter residents to own Wang Shu villas by citing that a majority of those in the new quarter are party members or relatives of village executives.\textsuperscript{163} They gain new architecture or a renovation of their old houses almost cost-free as the investment was made by the upper-level government authorities like the County Bureau of Planning in Fuyang. The power dynamic privileges the people already at the higher end of the hierarchy spectrum in the socialist political system.

Stylistically, the new houses of Wencun modeled from the Ming-Qing dynasties Anhui Style mansions, yet the modification of its functions and contour lines as well as an upgrade in facility evoke the concept of \textit{fugu} (复古), critically reviving the past, with a modern connotation, fusing the aesthetically pleasing and the functionally useful.

\textbf{Shaping the Local Aesthetics}

One of the most striking discoveries of the local aesthetics is the villagers’ general

\textsuperscript{162} Anonymous interviewee (resident in the new quarter of Wencun) interviewed by Shen Juntai, August 23, 2017.

\textsuperscript{163} Anonymous interviewee (resident in the old quarter of Wencun) interviewed by Shen Juntai, August 23, 2017.
praise of the Wang Shu houses. Waves of architectural innovations and transformations since the Reform era have endowed villagers with a sense of stylistic fluidity or transience of the residential houses. When a new form was born, it was expected that it would become outdated and out of fashion within a few years. The anticipation of the obsolescence characterized the mindset of villagers towards living space before the arrival of Wang. The manager of the hotel I stayed recalled, when her family erected a new house under pseudo-Western style 11 years ago, they did not believe that such style would go out of favor so soon, and be replaced by Tuscan style villas initiated in urban residential zones.\textsuperscript{164}

Such constant obsolescence was perceived to be terminated by the emergence of Wang’s villas. Five different villagers/families I interviewed assessed Wang architecture in a similar manner: unlike previous buildings that got outdated without being “old,” Wang’s houses, be it in a freshly new appearance or older condition, would never be outdated and would be “permanently artistically pleasant” because the style is closely associated with the architect’s artistic personality and humanitarian vision. No other famed architect is able to produce such aesthetics and formal language.\textsuperscript{165} It seems that even though Wang extracted essentials from traditional Anhui-style architecture, his personal approach makes his houses stand sustainably and proudly in a modernized village. Therefore, to understand the story of success of Wang’s style and approach, it is

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{164} Anonymous interviewee (Wencun resident), interviewed by Shen Juntai, Wencun, Hangzhou, August 21, 2017.\textsuperscript{165} Anonymous interviewee (Wencun resident), interviewed by Shen Juntai, Wencun, Hangzhou, August 22, 2017.}
significant to review the life of Wang as a person and as an architect.

On Wang Shu: A Man Who Looks at the Past and the Purity of Nature

Wang Shu was born in the remote Xinjiang Autonomous Region in Northwest China. Xinjiang was dominated by Islamic culture and Uyghur population. The exoticism displayed in that Silk Road nexus is so much different from Jiangnan exquisiteness, or fastidiousness. Wang went to college in Nanjing, a key cultural and political center in history marked by its position as the southern capital for over four centuries. Silk production and service sector boomed Nanjing’s economy in the Qing Dynasty. Today, cultural remains of Nanjing still tell stories of the city with over 1800 years of civilization. Wang Shu began to appreciate the smoothness and refinement of the Jiangnan culture despite of his sharp personality. Well developed water channels and the existence of the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal facilitated the economic prosperity in this crop-growth region. Extensive water system prevented cities in Jiangnan to adopt a regular layout. And the term Jiangnan, in a cultural sense as mentioned in the text above, is characterized by high literary achievement, often humid weather, movements through flowers, and fluid social scenes. Jiangnan nurtured innumerable poets, painters, politicians, and drew the hearts of many emperors in the Chinese history.

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167 *Zhongguo Guojia Dili* (China National Geographic), Issue August 2007, 3.
The ancient art is not the only thing that sets Wang and his work apart from the glitzy marble-and-glass commercial architecture that has dominated China’s urban boom. His bold yet refined buildings that often recall nature fuse old-world Chinese and modern idioms, using inexpensive materials, like recycled bricks and tiles, as building material. His studio, called the Amateur Architecture Studio, does not have a computer. A few dusty terminals, from the 1990s, surrounded by piles of old newspapers, are scattered across the tabletops. His six assistants, students at the nearby academy of art in this still, pretty lakeside city, show up as needed.168

In awarding the Pritzker Prize to Wang, the jury catapulted to center stage an architect who profoundly disagrees with China’s rush to urbanization and has found a way to criticize it through his own style of work. Wang Shu is an outlier in his profession here. He has designed only one apartment building, a series of 14-story blocks with deep verandas, in Hangzhou. His museums, academies, homes, and a garden of ancient tiles are all touched by old China. Yet China’s then vice prime minister, Li Keqiang, a master of the economy that has produced the cities Wang abhors, embraced him at the Pritzker award ceremony in the Great Hall of the People that year.169

It is the rush to emulate the West and the insistence on trashing what makes China so distinctive that upsets Wang Shu. Why should China become something it’s not, he asks. “We want to copy Manhattan,” he said over lunch near his studio. “I love

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168 “Pritzker,” LAT.
169 Wang Shu, Pritzker Prize Laureate Profile.
Manhattan. It’s a very interesting place. But if you want to copy something that was accomplished in 200 years, it’s very difficult. New York was not designed by architects, it was designed by time.”

Inspired by his father, a musician and amateur carpenter, and his mother, a teacher and school librarian, Wang Shu seemed to be headed toward a career as an artist or a writer, though his parents pushed him to study science and engineering. He compromised by going for an architecture degree from the Nanjing Institute of Technology, where he also earned a master’s.

His first job was researching the old buildings at Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou as it underwent a renovation. His first architectural project — a youth center for the small town of Haining, also in Zhejiang Province, near Hangzhou — was completed in 1990. In 1997, after a decade of working with various craftsmen to gain building experience, Wang and his wife, Lu Wenyu, founded their own practice in Hangzhou, called Amateur Architecture Studio. “My work is more thoughtful than simply ‘built,’” he said, adding that the handicraft aspect of his work was important to him, as a contrast to what he considers much of the professionalized, soulless architecture, as practiced today.

Wang Shu has likened architecture to creating a Chinese garden: it requires the ability to be flexible, to improvise and to solve unexpected problems. He brought this

170 Wang, Shu. “Geometry and Narrative of Natural Form,” Kenzo Tange Lecture at Harvard Graduate School of Design, November 7, 2011.
171 “Pritzker,” L-I-T, and Pritzker Prize Laureate Profile.
172 Wang, Building Houses, 34.
sensibility to his breakout project, the Library of Wenzheng College at Suzhou University, which was completed in 2000 and received the Architecture Art Award of China in 2004.173

Wang is sympathetic to poor farmers who yearn for cities with air-conditioning and supermarkets. But if given the chance to renew villages in a sustainable way, rural people would be better off, he argues. “People see black-and-white choices,” he said. “But in fact we have much potential, and can do very simple things and have a modern, comfortable life.”174

Two architects who know Wang’s work emphasize his ability to combine the old and the new, Chinese and Western. “It’s possible to see Wang Shu’s work as a new vernacular,” said Mohsen Mostafavi, the dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Design. “He’s actually deeply rooted in modernism. His work is not something that is just a replica of Chinese architecture or just a replica of Western architecture. It’s a fusion of different sensibilities.”175

Zhang Yonghe, a prominent Chinese architect who headed the school of architecture and planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, described Wang as enabling “us to see the vitality of the traditional in contemporary culture, that modernization is not the same as Westernization.” He praised Wang Shu for having unusual integrity: “In today’s China it’s not easy to resist market pressures and maintain

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173 “Pritzker,” LAT.
174 Wang, Harvard GSD lecture.
175 Pritzker Prize Laureate.
independent values as Wang Shu has done.”

His work includes an eclectic mix of museums, universities and living spaces. In its citation the Pritzker jury singled out the History Museum of Ningbo, in a port city near Shanghai that is my hometown, for “its strength, pragmatism and emotions all in one.” [Fig. 3-16] The museum looks bulky from a distance; up close the recycled ceramic tiles and vintage bricks in hues of gray, orange and blue lend a feeling of earthiness, all of which parallel to the localist yet modernist appearance of the Wencun houses. The China Academy of Art at Xiangshan in Hangzhou, a half-dozen buildings, is dominated by white walls reminiscent of traditional Chinese homes depicted in old watercolor paintings. [Figs. 3-17~19]

Wherever possible he uses recyclable materials, an art he refined in the 1990s when he put aside formal architecture to work with craftsmen and builders as they converted old houses into art galleries, music halls, and even hair salons. By 2000 he was appointed a professor of architecture at the art academy in Hangzhou and was back in big-league architecture, entering competitions and accepting commissions.

His vision matured at a time when provincial governments and college campuses, flush with new cash, commissioned museums and additional buildings, like libraries, that intrigued Wang. In emphasizing the value of what is distinctively Chinese, he is not one of the new breed of nationalists. Wang travelled abroad fairly often to speak about his

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176 “Pritzker,” LAT.
177 Wang, Building Houses, 45.
projects and learn from his colleagues, and in 2011 Wang and his wife, Lu Wenyu, taught a course at Harvard’s Graduate School of Design on traditional Chinese villages as a basis for creating what they called “rustic-style” new suburbs.179

As the Pritzker jury toured the China Academy of Art, Thomas J. Pritzker, the scion of the Hyatt hotel fortune that finances the Pritzker prize, asked Wang the cost of building the campus, he recalled. “I said the first phase was CNY 1,500 per square meter, and the second phase was CNY 2,500 per square meter,” Wang said he replied. Even before hearing the translation into dollars of about USD 235 and USD 392 per square meter, MPritzker intuitively understood that the project costs almost nothing. In contrast, a prestige office building in Beijing costs USD 952 a square meter, according to Langdon & Seah, a project management consultancy, in Hong Kong.180

The campus of the China Academy of Art was a dream assignment for Wang Shu. The bid called for an international caliber building for 5,000 students on a low budget to be built on abandoned rice fields. The art academy’s president, Xu Jiang, a painter-calligrapher, was Wang Shu’s friend, and, in this case, his client. The first decision was to keep as much of the natural environment as possible. The buildings were erected on the edge of the fields, leaving open space all around. The second feature is that there isn’t marble clad on concrete pillars in the wasteful style of the art academy in downtown Hangzhou. The campus is distinctive, Mohsen Mostafavi said,

179 Wang, Harvard GSD Lecture.
180 “Pritzker,” L-at.
because unlike most university campuses it is not subsumed by a master plan. “Here are buildings that come together as a series of fragments that produce a sense of unity,” he said.181 [Fig. 3-20] The simplistic geometry, a diverse use of local materials and elements from the traditional residential structures make the campus and Wencun stylistic brothers as Wang’s large-scale projects.

As he showed the academy, Wang Shu acknowledged that the finishes were not perfect. Along the internal walkways, jagged holes were punched through the exterior walls, to bring the outside in. Reddish wood from local yew trees was used for walls and doors. In 20 years the wood will need to be replaced. Bamboo railings will have to be renewed in five to seven years. “It’s sustainable,” Wang said, “all very easy to replace.”182

Wang often confronted the establishment with questions, a rare and brave act in China. Would it be possible, he asked, to ensure that alongside the top-down professional system of modern architecture, ordinary people’s right to initiate their own building activities is also protected? Did China really need to “resort to gigantic symbolic and iconic structures?” Were there “smarter ways to address environmental and ecological challenges?” Such difference of opinion before top government officials was striking.

Wang has an ultimate goal: to revitalize the countryside and enhance its appeal to young people, farmers, visitors and educated workers. “The most important thing is to

181 Wang Shu, Pritzker Prize Laureate Profile.
182 Wang, Building Houses, 88.
make the villages attractive to people again,” said Wang, who also teaches at the China Academy of Art. “The farmers have lost confidence in their own way of life,” he added. “They think villages are backward and that cities are good.”183

“The question of the proper relation of present to past is particularly timely, for the recent process of urbanization in China invites debate as to whether architecture should be anchored in tradition or should look only toward the future,” the jury said in its citation. “As with any great architecture, Wang Shu’s work is able to transcend that debate, producing an architecture that is timeless, deeply rooted in its context and yet universal.”184

Paradise Lost: Voices from Below

Although the ideal of Wang Shu is clear: to revitalize the livability of the village for every member of the community, the reality of the Wencun project being discontinued underway and the fact that institutional patrons are remote from the general residents in the village overshadowed his achievements, both artistically and socially, that Wang already obtained.

For those who did not have the privilege to access the property in the new quarter, they resented not the architect, but the village leadership. The Wencun project developed through six different versions of design proposals all authorized by Wang

183 Wang, Building Houses, 140.
184 Wang Shu, Pritzker Prize Laureate Profile.
Shu from mid-2014 to late-2016. In the latest version, every single house in the area is more or less modified. For the newer and geographically recessed architecture, slight modifications of the facades, for example, reworking the cladding or adding gray window frames, are necessary to enable them to fit the larger design scheme. For those that are close to the stream and built before the Reform era 1979, most of them should ideally be destructed and replaced by completely new structures like the ones in the new quarter. The masterplan is painstakingly edited. It is full of statistical information of the small houses as well as measurements of streets. An educational institution — the Wencun Academy — is planned as well so that villagers could send their children to primary school in the village without traveling far way out to the township 10km further. Surprisingly, however, Wencun is far from completion if compared with the final version of the plan.185

According to the text documents of the restoration, the entire project underwent “careful consultation with the ideas and suggestions of the locals, and it is modified to meet the needs.”186 However, the old-quarter villagers denounced the statement, affirming that “none of [our] words are taken, not even 1%.”187 They criticized the village leadership, not the architect.

Villagers told the story of the visit of Wang Shu in June 2017. Even though the old-quarter residents fail to live in the new houses, they addressed the architect with

185 Anonymous interviewee (Wencun resident), interviewed by Shen Juntai, Wencun, Hangzhou, August 21, 2017.
186 The words on the welcome panel of Wencun.
respect, always calling Wang Shu Wang laoshi (Maestro Wang). They felt it deeply right that Wang Shu is not only a talented artist, but a man of stubborn personality and strong artistic integrity. Such a positive undertone of Wang’s image among villagers made Wang in their eyes not the person of responsibility for the residents’ disadvantages.

As expressed above, the timelessness of Wang’s design and his unique approach to mending the traditional with the contemporary are very much cherished by the people in that region. Nevertheless, when he arrived at the village to double-check the progress of his work, the Wencun party secretary confidently promised Wang that although the work seemed to be suspended, it would continue after the reelection of the Fuyang county government. When Wang left the village after a night of drinking and talking, the village leaders switched their tone and claimed that the lack of funding from the district bureau of finance infinitely delayed the subsequent reconstructions of the old quarter. In the meantime, the newly “elected” leadership of Fuyang District did not assign a designated person (usually a Vice Head of the District) to oversee the Wencun project.188 [Figs. 3-21 7 22]

The story reveals the conflicting attitudes of the village leadership to the architect/superior government, and villagers. Wang Shu, a professor in the China Academy of Art, was invited by the provincial government of Zhejiang, where the

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188 Anonymous interviewee (Wencun resident), interviewed by Shen Juntai, Wencun, Hangzhou, August 21, 2017.
academy locates, to design the project, a highly politicized movement. Since it is a provincial-level model project in collaboration with one of the most influential Chinese architects, the leaders in Wencun Village cannot bear the responsibility to offend anyone from above. The promises to Wang Shu appeased Wang’s doubt over the viability of the project, temporarily removing the potential of Wang arguing his case to superior governmental organs — the ultimate flaw must be the village leadership’s because it is the body exercising the construction plan. For villagers, it is the reverse.

The Chinese law of election permits direct voting on a village level, the same as Huaxi’s political dynamic. On a micro level, the law foresees a fair election that is based on villagers personal understanding of the candidates because of a more close-knit communal system. But the increasing size of the “villages” makes it less likely that villagers know personally all the candidates. The distance between the candidates and the voters created a scene similar to the U.S. presidential elections: the candidates attempt to gather media exposure and, therefore, the richer or the more heavily sponsored candidates enjoy a higher possibility of winning. In Wencun, according to the old-quarter residents, the result of the election, even the voting process, is as predictable as the the CPC Central Committee reelection of Xi Jinping as the General Secretary and President. One resident lowered his voice, and confessed that before the village’s 2016 election, the current Chairman of the Villagers’ Committee blatantly claimed that “no

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189 Wang, Building Houses, postscript.
matter what the attitude of villagers is, I will become the chairman.”¹⁹¹ Money politics is playing its cards in the village, diminishing the connection of the village leaders with villagers.

In terms of geography, the living spaces of the village leadership also worsen the problem. As the Wencun center (south of the stream) does not have enough space for new constructions, and it is inferior in its geomancy, the village executive members erected new villas north of the stream that recline on the slope of a hill. That array of villas is around 200m from the stream and the old area of Wencun. Such a division of space reduces the number of visits of the village leaders to the southern, central part of Wencun because the government building is also on the northern side of the stream, facilitating a cohesive community of upper-level villagers in the northern zone. [Fig. 3-4]

The development of the North took place in 2007, when the more financially endowed villagers, who were often village leaders themselves or relatives of them, chose to encircle more land for extra-large villas that were not feasible to be built in the old quarter.¹⁹² The accumulation of wealth gave the richer citizens both political power and a revolutionized living space in a new geographical area. Therefore, since all the institutional structures and personnel reside in the northern side, many meetings with villagers happened in the offices of village leaders, rather than on site in the village, enlarging the gap between the locals and the leaders.

¹⁹¹ Anonymous interviewee (Wencun resident), interviewed by Shen Juntai, Wencun, Hangzhou, August 22, 2017.
¹⁹² Anonymous interviewee (Wencun resident), interviewed by Shen Juntai, Wencun, Hangzhou, August 21, 2017. & documents
Villagers complain about the visible hierarchy that is seen in the office and the whole process of meeting because the government building is not a neutral place, but a hall that favors the benefits of leaders. The ordinary villagers became increasingly powerless facing village leaders with a sensed hierarchy created by space in addition to actual power difference.\(^{193}\)

It is not easy to verify with the village leaders the authenticity of the words from villagers. Notwithstanding, the village leaders’ work has been characterized by at least four villagers as *qishang manxia* (deceiving to the leaders from above and covering facts to the ordinary villagers), a huge offense to the moral principle of public sector officials. Unlike Huaxi, whose village leaders are formidable figures who hold key positions in the Huaxi Group or in Jiangsu Province, village leaders of Wencun are much more politically localized by not holding other positions in the administrative unit above. It makes them vulnerable to being verbally criticized by villagers. it is, however, also because of the localized nature of their power that their standings are less likely to be shaken as there is check-and-balance system from neither above nor below.

With this situation, the “Provincial Model Project” of Wencun is hindered by the localization of real implementation of construction schemes. At the nexus of making what’s on the drafting board into three-dimensional structures, the village leadership has strategies to maximize its own profits and maintain power: suppressing the voices from below and occasionally fawning in front of the visitors. The unfinished construction is a

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\(^{193}\) Anonymous interviewee (Wencun resident), interviewed by Shen Juntai, Wencun, Hangzhou, August 21, 2017.
remnant of the political game that indeed deceived the above, but failed to cover the facts to those below.\textsuperscript{194}

One villager concludes the status of Wencun in a surprisingly artful way: “it is like a beautiful landscape painting full of ideas and suggestions, but sadly unfinished.”\textsuperscript{195} The painted sections and areas of Wencun is so lovely and attractive that they intensify the expectation of villagers towards what’s unpainted. Meanwhile, the discontinuation of the expansion of restoration stimulates regrets and sadness. The new quarter has been standing there for two years, and no matter who they are, either from the old quarter or the new zone, Wencun residents have adapted to and welcomed the new artistic style of Wang Shu.

Nevertheless, due to policy and financial constraints, the situation of the old quarter is not improved, but deteriorated, contrasting with the ideal of Wang Shu to build an experimental Peach Blossom Spring. The previous standard of living is hardly maintained, and villagers are denied their rights to self-tailor their own spaces of living. The negative sentiment emerged from the lack of development and the inability for the old quarter to renew itself also proves that Wang Shu’s universal values of art appear charming to lay villagers. Some of the old-quarter residents are imagining their feeling staying in Wang Shu’s houses, and the freedom of their creativity in designing the interior (for example, they demand an underground space). The stagnation of the

\textsuperscript{194} Anonymous interviewee (Wencun resident), interviewed by Shen Juntai, Wencun, Hangzhou, August 21, 2017.
\textsuperscript{195} Anonymous interviewee (Wencun resident), interviewed by Shen Juntai, Wencun, Hangzhou, August 22, 2017.
project is not a fruitful stage for most of the villagers in Wencun, especially when village leaders and their relatives are prioritizing themselves.

Creating a New Pilgrimage

Not only did the village leadership keeps their political standing, the executive members of the villagers’ committee immersed themselves fully in the waves of development. They are the ones who were privileged by the initiation of the village restoration. In order to accelerate the economic growth of such a picturesque locality, expansion of hotel business is highlighted by the village executive committee as a vehicle for success. Representationally, the first hotel under the concept as an accompaniment to Wang Shu’s plan is owned by the party secretary of the village. As a monopoly, this hotel attracts over 400 travelers per month. When I questioned the party secretary on the economic profit of the hotel as pure private gains instead of communal benefits, he acknowledged that as party secretary, he should set himself as a model for villagers in the new quarter to follow. This statement justifies his rather personal financial growth as a gesture to improve the village as a whole.

The “Bed&Breakfast” hostels/hotels in Wencun mainly attract tourism. The area was not one of the primary routes of travel in Hangzhou where most of the tourists take the road along the Fuchun River. The Wencun itself is regarded as a tourist spot of

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interest, and combined with Dawu Village where azaleas are the icon of the local, is able to set up an entirely new tourist route that brings people deep into the mountains. Tourists will have to be accommodated in hotels, and every traveller has a different standard choosing where to stay. Some would prefer native small hostels with an authentic taste of the rural life, others would run into a grand hotel with standardized services. Therefore, there should be a range of choices for the tourists to make so that the maximum number of tourists can be brought in to stimulate the economy of the region. It is unlike the pilgrimage route Camino de Santiago in which hostels and hospices were founded due to the demand of the pilgrims: they might be wounded, starved, or exhausted on the way.197 There came the pilgrims, and shortly afterwards, facilities.

For Wencun, it is the opposite. When there isn’t a touristy scene, hotels and hostels appeared in the first place, anticipating a growing demand in the future. Traveling in Northern Zhejiang is always a comfortable experience. Even for the master painter Huang Gongwang, his reclusive years by the Fuchun River was enabled by a spacious mansion that overlooked the stream. Travelers come to wow at the landscape and the naturalist scene that deviates from urban landscape. Tranquility and peacefulness is valued in this kind of semi-escapist journeys. Pliny the Younger would be approving such journeys, but villas must be built beforehand for him to relish. Wencun cleverly utilizes the landscape and the mental state of travelers to invite them through a wide

range of facilities in the scenic ways of travel.

The Regional Effect & Reciprocity

Architecture transforms culture, and infrastructure exported such cultural highlights. While Wang Shu looked at the Qing mansions of Anhui style in Wencun Village itself, the nearby villages preserve architecture marvels as well. Dawu Village, a slightly larger village than Wencun, is approximately 5km north of Wencun. Being much more recessed into the valleys, it is the residing place for the historic He clan of Fuyang. Like Wencun, the village blends multiple types and styles of architecture: Republican mansions, stone townhouses, and even 4-story villas with European facades. Older people, in general, stay in older houses. The central square of the village is dominated by the entrance to the ancestral hall of the He, a seriously renovated work of architecture that is not under its traditional exterior. Structures in danger do not show signs of restoration or destruction. It seems to be a place of stationary time — nothing dramatic is happening in this peaceful locale.

However, many design elements in the architecture of Dawu do show the determination of Dawu executives to chase after Wencun. Inside a shabby door with remains of red Cultural Revolutionary slogans is a fantastic hotel operated again by the party secretary of Dawu. The wooden structure of the hostel is exceptionally simplistic and straightforward in geometry. The yellow cladding of the wall resembles the hotel in Wencun designed by Wang. [Fig. 3-23] It is generally grander with abundant vegetation,
and each individual room more spacious. This hotel encloses a terrace for gathering and sky-viewing, and an entertainment room for *majiang* and sporting. While the size and luxury of this hotel surpass the one in Wencun, it is inspired by the opening of the Wencun hotel. The party secretary says that he considers Dawu a better location of retreat and tranquility because Dawu is not on the main tourist route and much more isolated in terms of geography and traffic. Next to the yard of the hotel is a metal processing factory. Its relatively large land occupation indicates that the factory is the largest industrial site in Dawu. Unlike other factories or workshops in this region which are decorated with nothing but concrete walls, this factory carefully renders the organization of green stones and bricks on its office facade. The color and layout of the stones are in line with the manipulated rusticity and order found at the new dwellings of Wencun.

It seems that an addition of Wencun flavor onto a factory could reduce the rough industrial appearance of the factory, turning what’s basic into what’s artsy for a touristic audience. [Fig. 3-24] Obviously, the factory owner mimics Wencun’s art schemes to advance its exterior’s beauty and appropriate some of the most unique design that the factory owner thinks would fit the natural landscape and the village-scape at large. I did not have the opportunity to speak to the factory owners, but the village party secretary told me that the factory is the forerunner in Dawu in the midst of a larger process of importing the artistic elements from Wencun to form a unity of style in the
Pan-Wencun area. For the hotel owner, such importation would benefit Dawu because travelers no longer need to visit Wencun to appreciate the Wang Shu style of architecture, a strategy to leave more tourists in Dawu.

Dawu has its own selling point for tourists. In Spring, the blossom of the flower *yinshanbong* (literally means “shadowing mountains into red”) draws visitors from hundreds of kilometers away. The rates of the hotel skyrocket when the Dawu village becomes a center for tourism. In placing Dawu itself into the travel route around Wencun, the Dawu villagers respect the cultural and artistic circle created by Wang Shu in Wencun. The newly formulated touristy zone acknowledged the effectiveness of the Wang Shu houses in setting up points of cultural interests. The pioneering hotel/hostel owners’ foresightedness introduced the Wencun area onto the traveler’s guide, a move that would bring further economic profits to those who are propertied with business acumen.

**Fugu: The Past that Futurizes the Village**

Multiple voices of Wencun executives and villagers speak both to the success of the village’s architectural style as well as its failure to offer equal opportunities for villagers to enjoy a new form of rural life. The powerful, whether politically or financially privileged, moved into the new houses whereas ordinary villagers failed to benefit from architectural upgrades.

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198 Mr. He (party secretary of Dawu) interviewed by Shen Juntai, Dawu, Hangzhou, August 21, 2017.
The village as a whole reconstructs the essence of the Anhui-style mansions popularized in the Ming dynasty. [Fig. 3-25] Used as a leisure resort for family unions, the Anhui-style represents the longing of those migrant businessmen for home — a type of architectural nostalgia. Wang Shu understands the power of nostalgia for local aesthetics in the Anhui region, and intends to convince returned privileged villagers remain in the village over the long term.

The Anhui style has a beauty that appeals to residents and the visitors alike. In the midst of China's economic boom, however, speed had been valued over quality, and rusticity has been equated with inferior quality and ugliness. In the past, the Anhui area exemplified how beauty and refinement could be central to housing designs. Wang Shu, a sophisticated literatus-architect, has an agenda to revive these aesthetics of boutique vernacularism in traditional rural towns.

Counterbalancing the outcome of economic growth that favors readymade over handcrafted pieces of art, Wencun houses display refinement, delicacy, and variations that could only be achieved through non-standard design. Similar but not identical to the Anhui mansions built by clans who customized houses according to their own desires, these houses signal an ideal contemporary rural life that is to ensure the livelihood of each and every resident and to honor individual preferences. Thus, Wang tailored every house to blend with the environment and presumably to match resident expectations, but also endowed his structures with elements from his own imagination. A combination of functionalism and aestheticism is achieved by the nostalgic
appropriation of the Anhui style with many modern additions, including appliances and equipment in the home, that corresponds with technological advances in society. The merging of past and present in Wang’s design points to a bright future of sustainable beauty, and more importantly, the permanence of a counter-urbanistic rural lifestyle.

The unfinished nature of the project has been partly ruined by a pursuit of profits by those in critical executive or party positions in the village. It is, of course, challenging to reconfigure social hierarchy, but the obvious accumulation of benefits by a privileged few violates the architect’s vision. Politics can enable architectural projects to go forward in the first place, as seen in the initiation of the Wencun plan. However, when politics gets in the way of art, the future of art becomes foggy. Architecture, in this sense, is unintentionally yet consistently constrained in a way that serves the powerful.

Despite the undemocratic manner in which the designs of Wencun’s new houses have been imposed, Wang Shu’s intellect and personal beliefs have won the hearts of villagers nonetheless. If Wang Shu is given more leeway to include less privileged villagers in his project, and he allows them to express their thoughts, the project might eventually transform into something closer to the architect’s original concept. It’s possible to imagine the village getting better with more inclusion and expression, but if history and what we know about village hierarchical structure is any indicator, that probably won’t happen.
The Presence of Nostalgic Futurity

An Epilogue

At first glance, nostalgia is a longing for a place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time - the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams. In a broader sense, nostalgia is a rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress. The nostalgic desires to obliterate history and turn it into a private or collective mythology, to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition.

— Svetlana Boym, The Future of Nostalgia

Jiangnan villages might have developed similarly throughout most of the last few centuries: water channels delineated planned grids, gabled roofs with black eaves outlined rural horizons, and generations of families lived under the same roof. However, the Yangzi River Delta’s economic transformation has led to a myriad of socioeconomic changes in the Jiangnan region, resulting in significant divergence in local village architecture and design.

One reason for variations in rural architectural development is that patronage varied. Liangjia prioritized individual imaginations. Village residents provided their own capital to upgrade family spaces, learning from other suburban and urban examples. Huaxi’s village executive committee, along with the enterprise Huaxi Group, codified planning standards. The village's collective patron functioned as its sole source leadership, enabling designers to disregard superior governmental organs in finalizing village plans. Wencun was a provincial government-sponsored project, yet the vision of a single internationally celebrated architect, Wang Shu, overshadowed all other ideas.

Geography has not endowed these three villages with the same natural and
infrastructural merits. Liangjia, although being relatively close to the expressway and high-speed railway, has been bifurcated by newly added roads and high-speed rails in the regional network. Connectivity only benefits nearby villages and townships because road exits and railway stations have not been created for Liangjia. However, the land used to host this infrastructure was taken from Liangjia due to arbitrary imposition from higher political authorities. At the same time, the village is situated within the larger context of coastal and local industrialization. Metal factories and plastic manufacturing workshops not only created employment and output locally, but also attracted migrant workers to join the production team. An industrial landscape can be seen from the village.

Huaxi is connected by an expressway that runs between Shanghai and Wuxi. Substantial vehicle flow on the highway signals the importance of the region as a place with dense population, a high income level, and high productivity. The village stylistically contrasts with Suzhou, an elegant city full of premodern classical gardens, yet serves both Suzhou and Shanghai, the two major industrial bases of the Su’nan area, as an export-processing zone. Its geography and metropolitan surroundings make it accessible and economically prosperous.

Despite being under the administration of the economically strong and culturally magnificent Hangzhou, Wencun is remotely located in mountain valleys. Its late development of infrastructure rendered it a left-over village of the Reform era. Nevertheless, the relatively backward road network in this area has helped preserve cultural relics and natural landscapes around Wencun. Only sericulture and small
metal-processing workshops support Wencun's economy, and it does not attract large crowds of migrant workers. A low degree of industrialization means that factories have not replaced the village’s traditional Anhui-style mansions, which link the village’s past and present. The limited nature of industrialization in this village generated enough income for villagers to upgrade their housing facilities, but not enough to completely transform the local economy. External investment from upper-level governments was used as part of the fund.

In addition to variations in economic development, administrative structures of villages differ as well. Liangjia has a non-imposing government that almost entirely allows individuals to realize their own projects. Regulations are in place, but enforcement is limited. Huaxi, however, integrates the village executive committee and the Huaxi Group, in which the Wu family enjoys a dominant position. The planning of the village favors the ideas of village leadership, and narrowly speaking, of Wu Renbao himself. Wencun’s village party committee seems to exercise firm control over the internal affairs of the village. While the official patron of the project is the provincial government of Zhejiang, financing comes from the Fuyang County government, and the village committee assumes responsibility for construction. In this sense, a multi-layered power dynamic has complicated the realization of Wang Shu’s proposal, even though he designed the entire project, expecting to benefit local families and, potentially, urban renters.

Regardless of variations in history, geography, politics, and patronage, all of the
villages studied ultimately create various forms of nostalgic futurity: the simultaneous embrace and resistance of time and growth. Each village chooses a past suited to its context, and appropriates that past to construct and envision an ideal future.

For Liangjia, nostalgia is manifested both as the village’s retrieval of a clan-based lifestyle and as an emerging topophilia. The Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution exhausted the economic and social resources of China. Following these movements, an era of emancipation and reform re-ignited villagers’ desire to facilitate a traditional familial life that echoed the pre-Communist, Republican era.

Since Liangjia’s land was scarce, the previous style of a large compound with horizontally arranged units (for each branch of the family) was not efficient enough to deliver on this traditional ideal. Houses began to grow upwards. The Dazhaiwu, which accommodated a few workers in the same production group (not the same family), were abandoned, and new nongminfang, which can reach up to five stories, became favored by the new social elites. Each floor of a nongminfang can accommodate one generation of a family. It became a prototype for later styles and succeeded in recreating human and familial bonds in the aftermath of widespread social disruption.

Families also resettled themselves on old land that was once owned by their clans and still hosted remaining relics of clan halls. We see, frequently, that all residents in a selected area of the village have the same surname. This happened after the late 1970s when collective agricultural activities were replaced by the household responsibility system, in which each family was responsible for the output and profitability of their
designated farmland.

This major change in policy raised the possibility of a topophilic treatment of settlement because families again newly identified with their individual agricultural plots. Families used to associate with a specific landscape and build their houses and clan halls there. In Liangjia, architecture is a discourse that enables villagers to return to what they consider an ideal rural life after the chaos of the immediate past, retreating to a more distant point in time conceived of as comparatively healthy and wholesome.

Huaxi, as a socialist village, hopes to play a role in China’s Great Revival campaign. But the term “revival” asks for a certain past to be resuscitated in the future. The layout of Huaxi is centered around an avenue, and the most valuable villas are arranged with a clear sense of order according to the notion of fengshui (geomancy). The villas distributed to village enterprise shareholders display a complete uniformity of sharply defined streets and standardized distances between structures. Residential zones are also demarcated in accordance with the potential needs of commercial development, such as the construction of shops and supermarkets in the years ahead. Skyscrapers are made relatively peripheral, like the ancient Buddhist pagodas that have historically been situated along the outskirts of cities.

This layout, as observed and planned, is modeled on the Tang capital of Chang’an. Chang’an had an orderly grid layout with carefully guarded entrances to both the city and its residential zones. The city was also characterized by a central avenue, regularity, and distinct zoning (for markets, protection and security). Lavish palaces and temples
were kept out of the central area of Chang’an. It was once the most powerful city on earth and boasted a cosmopolitan culture. The dress of the Tang dynasty — tangzhuang — today serves as a symbol of Chinese culture on the international stage. Additionally, Chang’an was entirely conceived by a “foreign” architect — Yuwen Kai, who lived during the Sui dynasty that preceded the Tang. The fact that the Tang’s capital was designed by a foreigner reflects the inclusiveness of Tang culture, which manifests in the many replicas of international landmarks that have been built in Huaxi.

Economic strength, engagement with the world, and the creation of many cultural legacies have made the Tang dynasty a natural fit for present-day China’s Great Revival project, and many today still conceive of medieval Chang’an as an ideal city. Huaxi village itself, however, is in southern China, where elegant watertowns are considered an aesthetic ideal by planners. Non-uniform yet delicate cities are much better suited to southern literati culture and geography, rather than the uniform style of planning transplanted from the North. Huaxi employs a different nostalgia, one that embeds a greater agenda connecting the village with China’s socialist project instead of its cultural geography. The reason why Huaxi is famous is because of its profitability and elevated standard of living achieved while nominally maintaining faith in socialism. It asserts the viability of socialism, and its future also depends on the continued success of the socialist system.

The usage of northern planning in a southern village partially demonstrates Huaxi’s

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199 See the formal dresses of the 2001 Shanghai Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit.
standing as a lone supporter of socialist economics applied to a rural environment. Its
political opportunities and pressures make it a means of showcasing a rejuvenated past
harnessed to serve a socialist future.

For Wencun, however, socialism is not on the agenda. Architect Wang Shu very
consciously surveyed the history and art of Fuyang county, a place that once nourished
masterpieces of Chinese landscape paintings and pastoral poetry. The stream that runs
beside Wencun is just like the Fuchun River that appears under the brush of Huang
Gongwang, the great Yuan Dynasty master painter. Wang Shu himself is well-versed in
traditional literature and art history, and from his designs, we see traces of Anhui-style
mansions — the preeminent southern China architectural style.

We also see a wide range of local materials being used in Wencun’s vernacularism
— both to enhance rusticity and to strengthen localized characteristics. The mountain
range at the back of the village resembles the background of a painting. Being situated
in a valley, Wencun immediately reminds visitors of the legend of the Peach Blossom
Spring, a fourth-century account of a utopian village by the poet Tao Yuanming. In
retrospect, this story tells of a fisherman’s encounter with a mysterious village that lies
lost amid mountains and caves, inaccessible to the outside world. When the fisherman
leaves this utopian village, he is never able to find it again. This story reflects the ideal
rural life in the mind of a Chinese literatus: orderly, simple, productive, and even
anarchist. Wang Shu visualizes and creates physical manifestations of what is written by
integrating different pasts that are closely associated with southern cultural geography.
Apolitical nostalgia emphasizes culture and is an outcome of romanticized imagination. Unlike Huaxi’s adherence to socialism, Wencun claims a past that is directly associated with “ideal everyday life” in pre-industrial times. A micro-perspective is taken, and Wencun’s architecture re-introduces what was originally unique about the countryside in Chinese history. Architecture and planning, in this case, present nuanced variations of different types of nostalgia that are based upon the socioeconomic status of the area and the richness of the history surrounding it.

Ultimately, the literati fantasy and harmonious society are ideals desired by cultural elites, and architect Wang Shu is representative of this cohort. Even though villagers ought to have customized houses, schemes and designs were all imposed by higher authorities. The gap between those who live in the village and who design and execute local planning is enormous. A paused project like Wencun spreads the viability of Wang’s design, but in very few cases are the lives of residents actually transformed, with privileged groups such as party members and officials benefiting the most.

This thesis challenges the conception that village development in Reform-era China was exclusively modern or even progressive in nature. While village activity radically reshaped state policies in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and villages accumulated wealth to implement novel planning schemes and architectural styles, a certain nostalgic sentiment underpins how village residents, leaders, and artists conceptualize future possibilities. Traditional piety and topophilia have overturned Cultural Revolution-era chaos; Tang glory has returned to serve China’s Great Revival; Anhui-style mansions
have functioned as reconstructions of visually pleasing architecture in a semi-industrialized village. Although present-day ideals of rural life are forward-looking, they are ultimately grounded in models rooted in the past.

Physical references to historical architecture and models of planning perceived to be superior have been extracted and adopted to a contemporary setting, not for their oldness but for their goodness. In addition, unlike China’s massive, stylistically fragmented cities, the small scale of villages allows certain conceptions of nostalgic futurity to cohesively define a distinct area, showcasing a uniformity of style within a village. Such uniformity creates different degrees of social stratification, as seen in all these case studies. What is the future of the migrant workers moving both in and out of the villages? How might the past selected change over time, responding to rapid social change? What is the futurity that is recreated in accordance with the changed past?

The Reform era is only four decades long, a young socioeconomic movement considering the scope of its exertion. The future of China’s urban-rural divide and the consequences of emerging gigantic metropolitan areas are still unclear. Nevertheless, some villages survive and thrive in the contemporary economy. In searching for a distinct past to guide the future, villages confront a variety of choices. In deciding which idealized developmental path to take, Chinese villagers and the historically inspired architectural choices they make are perhaps best illuminated by the language of William Faulkner, which still resonates today: “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”

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**Introduction**

Fig. 1*: Relative locations of the sites in relation to cities of the Yangzi River Delta, Google Map.

*Images asterisked were *not* taken by the author*
Chapter 1: Liangjia, Wenling

Fig. 1-1*: The location of Wenling County in relation to Zhejiang Province, Google Earth. The places with yellow pins are within the border of Wenling. It is around 200km from Ningbo, the city south of the Hangzhou Bay, and 120km to Wenzhou, a capital of manufactured goods, in its south. The top right city is Shanghai, approximately 320km to Wenling (direct distance). The lake on the top section of this satellite map is Lake Tai, the fourth largest lake in China, which itself constitutes a water source for farming in southern Jiangsu, where Huaxi Village situates, and the studies of China’s foremost sociologist Fei Xiaotong were carried out.
Fig. 1-2*: The satellite map of Liangjia Village, Wenling, Google Earth. It is obvious that farmland still takes up a great portion of land in this area, and the highway cutting through the village is shown in the bottom part. The pinned sites refer to the Republican era structures described in the family history of the Shen. The buildings are generally arranged in a linear fashion.

Fig. 1-3: The hand-drawn map of Liangjia, Wenling (2016); Liangjia Archive. The highway deforms the village dramatically, destroying its “block” pattern with divisions of water ponds and channels.
Fig. 1-4: Part of the farmland, Liangjia, 2015. The far-away background shows lines of *nongminfang*, and the front right is a remnant of a 1930s structure.

Fig. 1-5: A part of the remains of a Republican compound (ca. 1930s), Liangjia, 2016. The linear blocks of yellow stones are the chief material of construction. They can be transported from Mount Fang around 10km away.
Fig. 1-6: One of the few gun turrets that still stand on the soil of Wenling (ca. 1930s), Wenling, 2016. It was usually attached to a family mansion, and the materials are smaller yellow stones with bricks at the top part of the structure. This particular tower is isolated from new residential zones, standing alone in the middle of the farmland.

Fig. 1-7: An example of the relationship between the gun tower and the old living quarter (ca. 1940s), Caiyang, 2016. This two-story remain of a Republican compound is presumably newer to the one in Fig. 1-5. The door of the gun turret opens to the inner courtyard of the mansion, allowing escapists to enter as soon as possible. These two structures are no longer inhabited as of today.
Fig. 1-8: The current house of the author’s grandfather (ca. 1998), which is around 100m from the original Republican compound; Liangjia, 2015. The structure is a proto-nongminfang with fewer floors and a much less decorated facade.

Fig. 1-9: One of the lines of Dazhaiwu (ca. 1975) in Wenling, 2017. Note the loggia style entrance space: it is the transitional space for the inhabitants.
Fig. 1-10: One of the capitals of the Dazhaiwu (ca. 1975), 2017. The locals call it *yuanbaotou* (the head of an ingot), endowing the residents with a hope of fortune and an expectation of auspiciousness.

Fig. 1-11: The 1980s Townhouses, Liangjia, 2017. They get rid of gabled roofs, and used bricks to replace stones. Some families even used ceramic tiles to decorate the facade. The loggia structure remains there, but the capitals are gone. The transitional space in the first floor nods to the balcony on the second floor, both opening to the outside. The floor height is elevated, allowing more advanced lighting and electronic systems to be installed.
Fig. 1-12: *Nongminfang* (Houses for the Farmers) (ca. post-1995), Liangjia, 2017. These houses are five-story high with a first floor transitional space. Houses may be added to attach to existing houses. Air-conditioning is a standard equipment from this era. The enlarged area and height are a result of the higher household income from the economic reforms. This style is, however, unique in the countryside for its emphasis on height, not floor-area.
Fig. 1-13: Jiaojiang Designing Bureau, One of the villas in the Xiaokangyan (2016/7), Liangjia, 2017. Each unit combines two vertical lines as in nongminfang, doubling the floor area for each level. Also, the living room enjoys a higher ceiling, separating it from other functional rooms. From this photo, the windows in the first floor are higher and larger, thus, indicating that behind them are living rooms. The concrete as material and diverse treatments of color imitate the color scheme of many urban and suburban villas, themselves echoing Western influence. Marbles are attached to the entrance level exterior, enhancing the seriousness and prestige of the residents in these houses.

Fig. 1-14: One of the living rooms of the xiaokangyan villas, Liangjia, 2017. Its ceiling is especially high so that a crystal chandelier is used here. The offered ceiling mimics Renaissance and Baroque European mansions. Extensive uses of marbles and granite show the identity of the owners as rich and powerful members of the locality.
Fig. 1-15: Yuhuan (Putian Village) area shot from the mountain slope, 2017. The nearest grey structure is the living spaces reserved for migrant workers.

Figs. 1-16 & 17: Two of the mansions (ca. 2014) in Putian that the locals consider as yanglou, Yuhuan, 2017. They have frontyards and backyards, and are decorated with what people perceived as Western elements. Both villas exceed the 10-meter height restriction.
Fig. 1-20: The backyard full of bonsais as an “illegal” private space in a Putian villa, Yuhuan, 2017.
Chapter 2: Huaxi

Fig. 2-1*. Huaxi in the Lower Yangzi: It requires a 40-min drive to travel from Huaxi to both Wuxi and Changzhou Cities. Suzhou around an hour, and Shanghai approximately two hours by car.

Fig. 2-2*. Location of Huaxi: the center of the village locates in between Expressway S38 and S340 highway. At its northeast is Zhangjiagang, a top five county-level economic power in China. Expressway G2 connects Jiangyin and S38.
Fig. 2-3. A mandala about Huaxi commissioned by the CPC Ministry of Propaganda and many propaganda organs, Huaxi, 2017. The scene shows former party secretary of Huaxi Wu Renbao standing in front of an office building in the Garden of Happiness. In the background are villas and the inscription of “No. 1 Village Under the Heaven.” The title reads “[National Model of Morality] ‘The Former Party Secretary of the No. 1 Village Under the Heaven — Wu Renbao’ Wu Renbao is one of the most influential figures among Chinese peasants. Since over 50 years ago, he has been holding firmly the principle of wholeheartedly serving the people....”
Fig. 2-4: The Huaxi Steel Company (ca. 1980s), Huaxi, 2017: The river in the picture is another natural border dividing the center and the periphery. Today, with a nationwide overcapacity of steel output, this factory suffers from substantial debt trap.

Fig. 2-5. Propaganda panels of Huaxi, 2017: the meeting of former and current party secretaries with CPC General Secretaries Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping. At the bottom inserted the quotes of Hu and Xi praising the story of success of Huaxi.
Fig. 2-6. Map of Western Huaxi, 2017: with Longxi Hotel (the 338-m skyscraper), Garden of Happiness, and Xinshi Villas

Fig. 2-7. Residences in Huaxi Village No. 6 (a peripheral village; ca. 1985), Huashi, 2017: Consistent in style with non-Huaxi rural houses. Tiles are used extensively over the gabled roof, a design gesture nodding to timber-frame architecture.
Fig. 2-8. Biaobang Industrial Park of Xiangyang Group (ca. 2003), a factory plant in Huaxi Village No. 9, 2017. The shareholders of the Biaobang Company Limited all reside in Huaxi Xinshi Village (the village center). It represents the expansion of industry to the periphery of the Greater Huaxi.

Fig. 2-9. The low-rise apartments function as a borderline of Huaxi Xinshi Village, Huaxi, 2017. Dining options, travel agents, washing shops, and commercial banks rent the business spaces at the ground floor of the apartments.
Fig. 2-10. The main “entrance” to the village with the central avenue/boulevard behind, Huaxi, 2017. The characters read: “The Huaxi Village of China,” and “No. 1 Village Under the Heaven.” Note the strategy of putting a village-level name “Huaxi” directly after “China,” showing political and economic strengths as well as the representativeness of its establishment/system for the entire country.

Fig. 2-11. One of the villas on the side of the central boulevard (Huaxi, 2017), presumably owned by a key shareholding partner of the Huaxi Group
Fig. 2-12. One of the villas on the central boulevard, Huaxi, 2017. It is 550 square meters in size. The owner not only has the access to use this villa but also uses five automobiles from Mercedes Benz to Land Rover. Yet interesting, when the residents commute in the central part of the village, they simply ride a E-Bike, just like other migrant workers and low-wage laborers.

Fig. 2-15. An aerial view of the Garden of Happiness (ca. 1993), Huaxi, 2017: The office building taking the shape of Buddhist pagodas stay on the sides, with two walkways full of random sculptures. The five stars are inspired by and extracted from the National Emblem. On its north (upper) are marble sculptures of the CPC leaders.
Fig. 2-16. The sculptures of the PRC founding father in the north side of the Garden of Happiness (ca. 1993) in front of an office tower, Huaxi, 2017. Figures from left to right represent Deng Xiaoping, Zhou Enlai, Mao Zedong, Zhu De, and Liu Shaoqi. Deng and Liu were all purged during the Cultural Revolution, yet their political standings were restored right after that catastrophic period. Deng even became the driver of the China’s economic reform by assuming the position as the Chairman of the CPC Military Commission and a member of the CPC Politburo Standing Committee, the most powerful decision-making body of the party.

Fig. 2-17*: Longmen Caves, Luoyang, China, ca. 493, Sina.com
Figs. 2-18~21. The above four photos show the scene from the “Park of the World” (ca. 1990s) in the northern side of Huaxi Xinshi, 2017. One-to-one replicas of Chinese and global scenic spots are reconstructed in this garden. The selected architectural works include, but are not confined to, The Tian’anmen Gate (20), Einstein Tower (20), The Pavilion of the Utmost Harmony in the Forbidden City (21), The Paris Triumph Arch (22), and Zhaozhou Bridge, the oldest arched bridge in the world.
Fig. 2-22*: The Splendid China Theme Park, Shenzhen, China, 1988, Jingxiu Zhonghua.

Fig. 2-23*: The Window of the World, Shenzhen, China, 1994, Shijie Zhuchuang

Fig. 2-24: The Supreme Harmonious Hall, Forbidden City, Beijing, 1441 reconstruction, 2017
Fig. 2-25. Publicly distributed villas (ca. 1997) for Huaxi shareholders — identical in design and spatial arrangement, 2017. The upper left corner sees the central boulevard of Huaxi.

Fig. 2-26*: A classical Chinese garden—Master of the Net’s Garden (Wangshi Yuan), Suzhou, China, ca. 1795, Suzhou Travels
Fig. 2-27*: Vladimir Tatlin, Model of Tatlin’s Tower, 1919-20 (not realized).

Fig. 2-28*: Group Design, The Great Hall of People, Beijing, China, 1959.
Fig. 2-29*: SOM, Jinmao Tower with the Oriental Pearl Tower in the background, Shanghai, China, 1994, 1999, Wikipedia.

Fig. 2-30. The tallest building in this image is the Longxi International Hotel (2011), the 338-meter high structure as a hotel with 826 rooms, Huaxi, 2017. In the foreground are selected few villas for purchase. The pagoda-style towers in the middle are office structures in the Garden of Happiness.
Fig. 2-31*: SOM, Beijing World Trade Center, Beijing, China, 2010.

Fig. 2-32*: Tange Kenzo, Shizuoka Broadcasting and Press Center, Tokyo, 1965
Fig. 2-33. The evening scene of the Longxi Hotel of Huaxi, Huaxi’s tallest building. The lightening has five different combinations, and such colorful choice of lightening is very much similar to the evening lightening design of many coastal cities like Changzhou and Jiaxing. The dazzling effect may contribute to the vibrancy of the evening livelihood. Just next to this tower are basket ball fields with young residents playing.
Fig. 2.34*: Tang Chang'an, a recreated plan of the ancient Chinese capital
Chapter 3: Wencun

Fig. 3-1*: Qiu Ying (1498-1552), *The Peach Blossom Spring* (detail), ink and color on paper, MFA, Boston. One of the later artist’s rendition of Tao Yuanming’s text. The great painter Qiu Ying belonged to the literati circle of Suzhou, a key cultural capital in Southern China.

Fig. 3-2*: Huang Gongwang (1269-1354), *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* (“Wuyongshi Scroll”, detail), 1347-60, ink on paper, National Palace Museum, Taipei. The entire painting is 6.4 meters long, and was divided into two. The other much shorter one, named “Shengshan Tu,” was collected in the Zhejiang Museum of Hangzhou, the superior municipality over Wencun village and Fuyang county.

Fig. 3-3*: Wang Shu, Huang Gongwang Museum (2015), Fuyang, Hangzhou. The shape and curve of the building are in harmony with the Fuchun mountains surrounding it.
Fig. 3-4: The plan of the village: the houses denoted in purple are either newly constructed or renovated houses, while the gray ones are old architecture (2017). The orientation of the stream and the mountain (in green) represents an unconventional treatment of fengshui. Areas marked brown are “landscape knots” serving as gathering points for visitors who travelled here to appreciate Wang’s design. The red structure on the right side of the village is an uncompleted village academy.

Fig. 3-5*: Wang Xizhi & Feng Chengsu, the Tang Dynasty imitation of the Lantingji Xu (617-72), “Shenlong” version. While the original calligraphic work of Wang Xizhi (303?-61?) is non-existent, Feng’s copy, preserved at the Beijing Palace Museum, was regarded as the closest resemblance to the original. Wang’s running style calligraphy was a pinnacle in the history of calligraphy. The first line of the Preface reads: “...In this early spring, we gather at the northern side of the Kuaiji Mountain....”
[L] Fig. 3-6: a house in parallelogram (ca. 1950s), Wencun, 2017

[R] Fig. 3-7: The riverside Anhui-style mansion, ca. early 19th century, Wencun, 2017

Fig. 3-8*: An alley in an Anhui village, possibly Xidi, showing Anhui-style architecture in the background; date unknown.
Fig. 3-9*: A village with Anhui style architecture, date unknown

Fig. 3-10: A Qing Dynasty Anhui-style mansion near Wencun in Hecunwu, ca. 1850s, Hecun, 2017.
Fig. 3-11: Wang Shu, the west part of Wencun with newly constructed houses reflected in the stream and a background with mountains, Wencun, 2017. The village is best observed from the height of human’s eyes. The intimacy characterizes a harmonious lifestyle and movements of the local resident.

Fig. 3-12: Wang Shu, windows over the 2nd and 3rd floor of a new house (2015), Wencun, 2017
Fig. 3-13: Wang Shu, entrances to the living space of a new house (2015), Wencun, 2017

Fig. 3-14: The living space of the Wencun hotel the author stayed (2017), Wencun, 2017.
Fig. 3-15: Wang Shu, the exterior of the Wencun hotel (2015), Wencun, 2017.

Fig. 3-16*: Wang Shu, Ningbo Historic Museum/History Museum of Ningbo (2008). The disordered windows enable lights to enter the interior from many different perspectives. The facade employs bricks, tiles, recycled coal, and the uncovered parts are molded with the pattern of bamboo strips. Wang Shu's constant application of traditional, vernacular materials as exterior decorations becomes his signature, appearing in many subsequent designs of his, including the Wencun project.
Figs. 3-17 & 18: Wang Shu, China Academy of Art (Xiangshan Campus), Hangzhou (2007), 2017.

The studios of the China Academy of Art are arranged randomly over the corridors that are themselves varying in heights. There is no set floor, and the light comes in from windows at different positions with different shapes, a similar treatment to that in Le Corbusier's Notre Dame du Haut, Ronchamp (1954). In the top-left corner of figure 2, the Folk Art Museum of CAC designed by well-known Japanese architect Kengo Kuma was completed in 2014. This entire campus is mixed with abundant vegetation and water ponds.
Fig. 3-19: Wang Shu, China Academy of Art, Department of Architecture (2007), Hangzhou, 2017. Wang Shu heads this department in the CAC, and its exterior again uses bricks, tiles, and stones. The curved roof mimics the shape of mountain ridges, a telling of nature as well. Wang Shu’s Huang Gongwang Museum of Fuyang (2016) also uses this shape as its roof. The willow trees are a symbol of Chinese literati culture in the South since the Song dynasty.
Fig. 3-20: A detail of Wang Shu’s treatment of the CAC Department of Architecture, Hangzhou, 2017. It appears and reappears in such works as Ningbo History Museum, Wencun, and Huang Gongwang Gallery. It mixes traditional bricks, green stones, tiles, and eaves that are collected from old houses, and processed in the factories.
Figs. 3-21 & 22: Old Quarter of Wencun, 2017. The road was destroyed and barely repaved after the construction of the new quarter. The dates of the houses range from 1850 to 1980, and the renovation plans to them are abandoned by the village committee.
Fig. 3-23: The hotel in Dawu Village deep in the mountain (2014), Dawu, 2017. The main building is restored based on an old structure. The terrace is for public events and tea ceremonies. There is not that huge tourism, and the hotel earns income merely over weekends and holidays.

Fig. 3-24: The factory with a Wencun-style facade in Dawu Village (ca. 2016), Dawu, 2017. It resembles Wang Shu’s aesthetics that can be seen from Wencun, Ningbo History Museum, and the China Academy of Art, Hangzhou. It tries to create a Pan-Wencun aesthetics based on the renovation scheme as well as an attempt to embrace the New Countryside Movement.
Fig. 3-25*: Hongcun, Anhui; the most representative village of Anhui-style mansions, ca. 1750-1900.