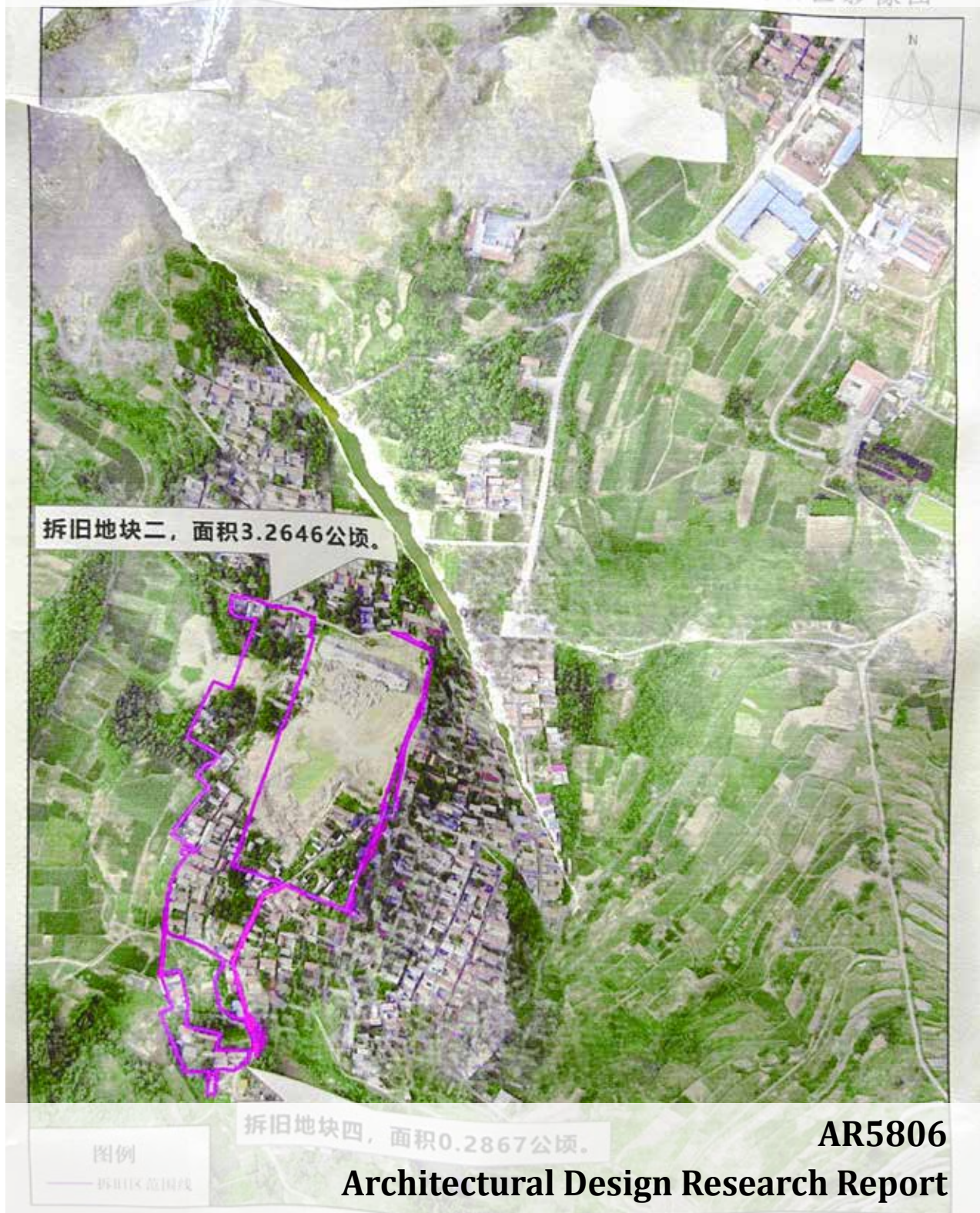


Learning to Thrive

A New Narrative for the Countryside 用地增减挂钩项目拆旧区影像图



Broken: Labour for Care
Associate Professor Lilian Chee

Acknowledgements

I'd like to express my gratitude to those who have supported me throughout this journey. To my grandmother, your stories and wisdom have shaped my understanding of rural life with its joys and pains.

I also owe a debt of gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Lilian Chee, whose guidance has pushed me to think critically and deeply about architecture and its role in society. Your feedback has been invaluable in refining my ideas and challenging my assumptions.

To my peers, thank you for your camaraderie and inspiration. Our discussions, both serious and light-hearted, have made this process enjoyable and meaningful.

Lastly, to the villagers of Shuiyu, thank you for welcoming me into your lives and sharing your experiences. Your resilience and connection to the land have profoundly impacted my understanding of what it means to inhabit a space. This project is as much yours as it is mine.

Learning to Thrive

A New Narrative for the Countryside

Semester 1 AY 2024/2025

Foreword

My thesis began when I heard about a new building going up in my grandmother's village, Shuiyu. It's a small, rural place in northern China, mostly fields and single-story homes. A tall building standing among the low roofs looked out of sync, like a blunt tool forced into place. I wondered what it would mean for Shuiyu—if it would disturb the lives of its people or change them for the better.

During my semester break, I went back to stay with my grandmother in her new apartment. I thought the building would make her life feel strange, or somehow smaller. But it wasn't what I expected. There was clean water, central heating, and a toilet that was more than a pit out back. I remembered being a kid and dreading her old toilet. Now, that part of her life has changed, and she is living with more comfort than ever.

It was all so at odds with what I'd been taught. I'd been taught that a village like this should look a certain way, that modern structures would strip it of its identity. Yet here was comfort where there hadn't been before. This high-rise had reshaped not just the village's skyline but the way people lived, and even how they looked at their future. For the first time, I began to wonder: could this change be part of what preserves places like Shuiyu, instead of destroying them? My research became about understanding how the rural can adapt without losing its way.

Student

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Lilian Chee (Thesis Advisor)

Victoria Jane Marshall (Second Reader)

Abstract

Rural villages in China are under increasing pressure to urbanise, and in the process, their identities and values often become obscured by narratives that equate progress with city life. This thesis focuses on Shuiyu, a village that embodies many of the challenges faced by rural societies in China as they contend with government policies favouring urban migration and modernisation. The story begins with the construction of a ten-storey residential block that starkly contrasts with the village's traditional architecture. From this point, I trace how urbanisation has impacted Shuiyu's landscape, demographics, and community spirit.

A central question emerges: How do we define and safeguard the intrinsic value of rural life amid the relentless march of urban expansion? Through field observations, historical context, and interviews with locals, I uncover the wealth of local ecological knowledge held by Shuiyu's residents. This knowledge forms a kind of "landscape literacy," rooted in their intimate relationship with the land and their adherence to nature's rhythms—qualities that are increasingly scarce in urban environments.

This report advocates for a new understanding of rural productivity, one that values the co-authorship of life with natural elements such as rain, soil, and seasons, rather than merely economic transactions. To protect and revitalise these rural values, I propose an urbanite rehabilitation programme, envisioning Shuiyu as a "choice space" where city dwellers can engage deeply with village life. This staged integration fosters self-sustenance and collaborative stewardship, establishing rural areas as vital partners to urban existence. By doing so, we can promote these spaces not just as relics of the past but as resilient alternatives with unique, essential contributions for the future.

Keywords: rural revitalisation, ecological capital, landscape literacy

Shuiyu Village, established at the end of the Song Dynasty,¹ has witnessed centuries of transformation, but the forces reshaping it since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 are unprecedented. After the dissolution of the feudal system, the 1950s brought policies aimed at rapid modernisation and

1 Zīchuān qū zhì biānzuǎn wěiyuánhùi, *Zīchuān qū zhì* [Zichuan District Chronicles] (Jinan: Qílǔ shūshè, 1990.1), 87.

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Contents

- ii Acknowledgements
- iv Foreword
- vi Abstract

1 Block 1, Shuiyu Village

- 4 Constructing Block 1
- 18 The Subservient Village
- 19 Shuiyu, Post-Renewal
- 20 In Search of a Future

2 Redefining Rural Values

- 48 Alternative Rural Futures
- 58 The Rural House as a *Gesamtwohnheit*
- 67 Living on Land, Living with Land

3 A New Agenda for the Countryside

- 90 Reclaiming Rural Knowledge
- 92 The Urbanite Rehabilitation Programme
- 95 Looking Ahead

- 96 Bibliography
- 102 Appendices
- 146 Self-Disclosure of Research

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Zichuan Town



Shuiyu Village

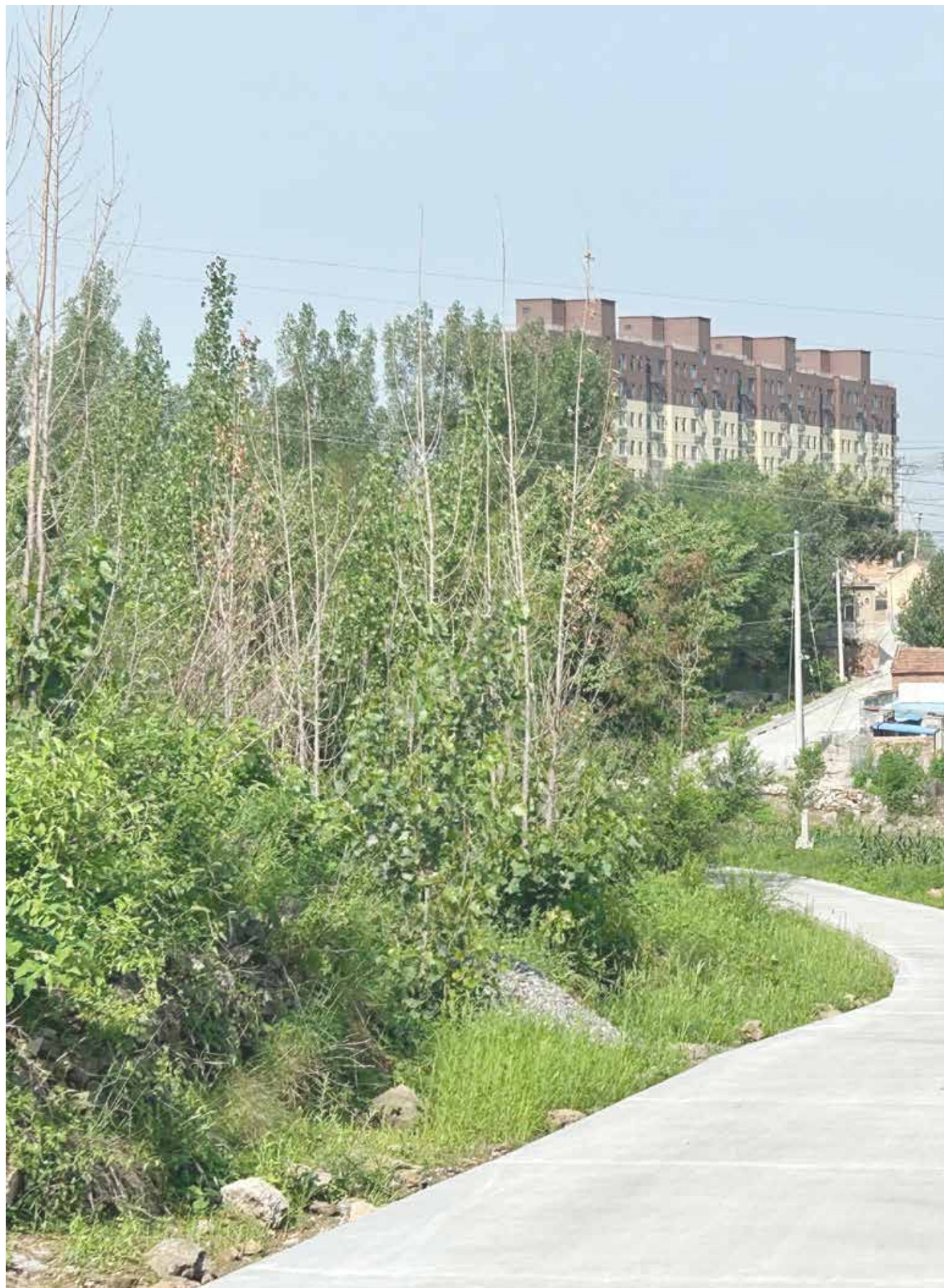


47 min drive





"... people who make their living from the earth cannot readily move. The place of their birth is the place where they grow up and where they die." (Fei, Xiaotong. 1992. *From the Soil.*)





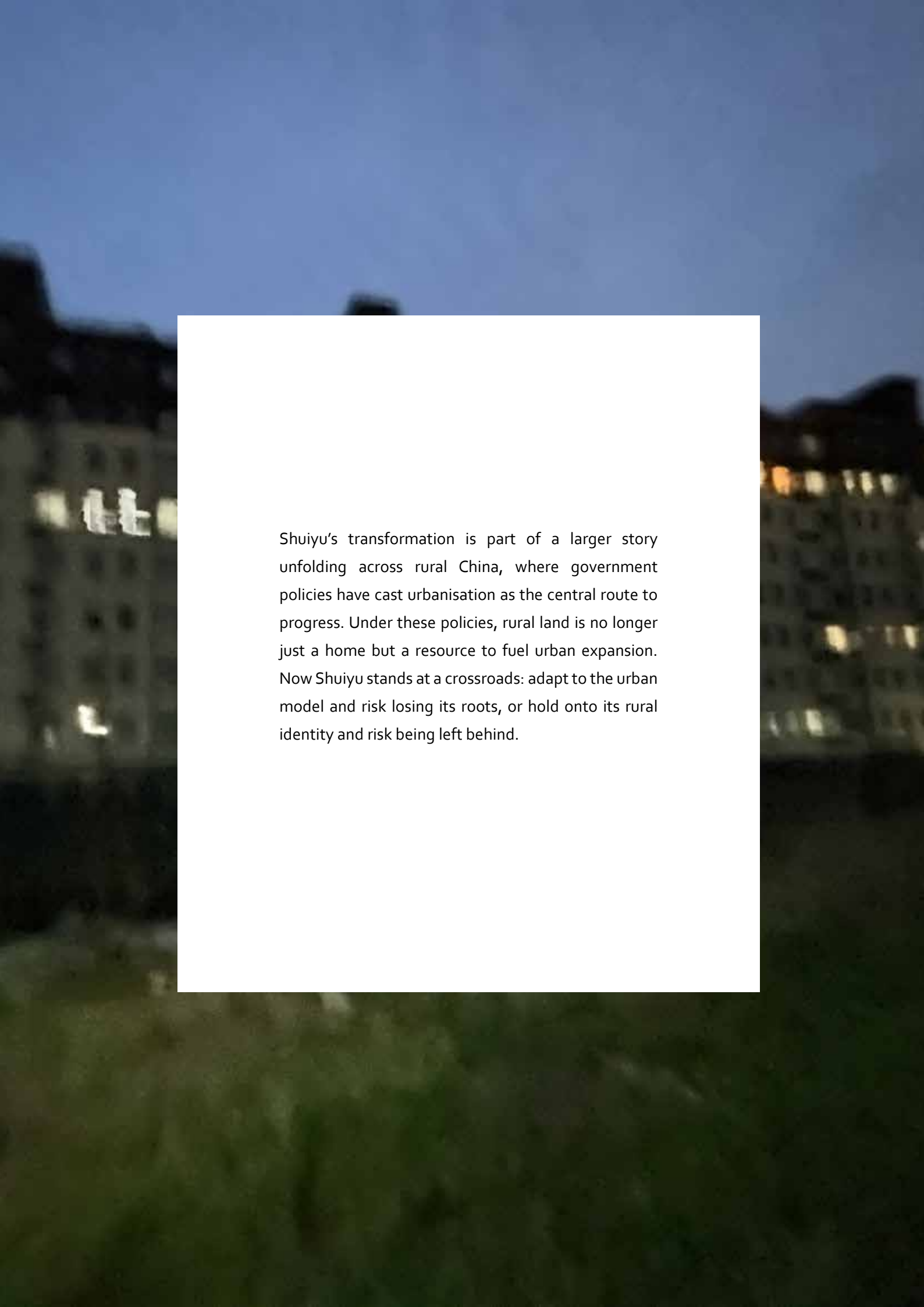
1 Block 1, Shuiyu Village



Figure 1. (two spreads prior) View of Shuiyu Village from the fields. Photograph by the author, 2024.

Figure 2. (previous spread) The approach to Shuiyu from the north. Photograph by the author, 2024.

Figure 3. (above) View of the newly constructed 10-storey building in Shuiyu Village at night. Photograph by the author, 2024.



Shuiyu's transformation is part of a larger story unfolding across rural China, where government policies have cast urbanisation as the central route to progress. Under these policies, rural land is no longer just a home but a resource to fuel urban expansion. Now Shuiyu stands at a crossroads: adapt to the urban model and risk losing its roots, or hold onto its rural identity and risk being left behind.

Situating Shuiyu Village, Zichuan, Zibo, Shandong, China

Figure 4. Agricultural mask for mainland China, highlighting regions based on suitability for planting. Shuiyu Village is located within a highly suitable agricultural zone. Source: Le Li et al., 'Mapping Crop Cycles in China Using MODIS-EVITime Series', Remote Sensing 6 (20 March 2014): 2473–93, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rs6032473>. Adapted by the author, 2024.

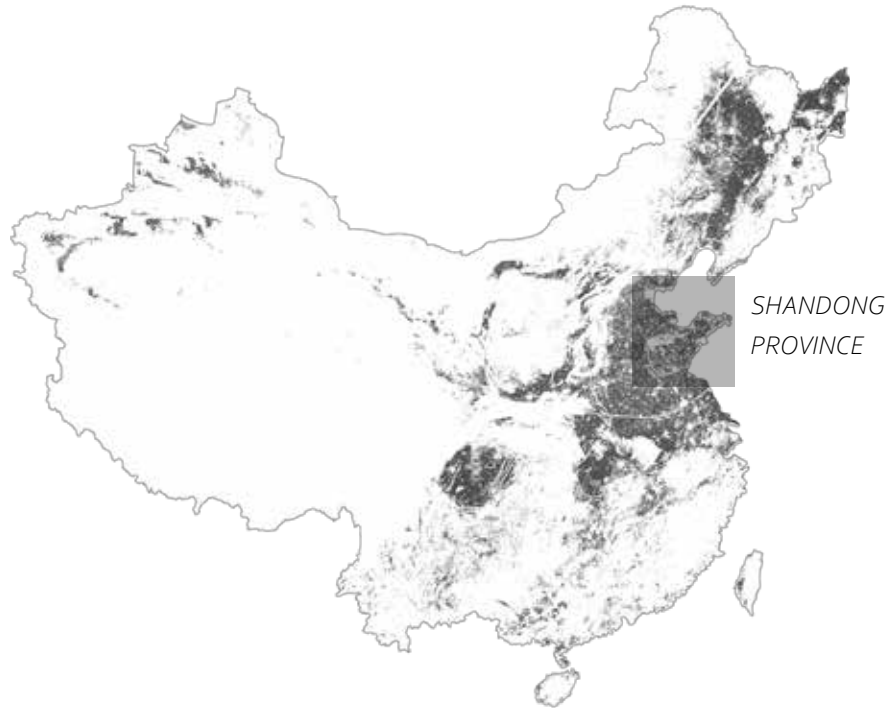


Figure 5. Core-periphery zoning for North China, illustrating the region's levels of development and connectivity. Shuiyu Village is shown as part of a less-developed area with medium connectivity. Source: Skinner, G. William, and Michelle Gagnon, North China A2074D: Fully Differentiated Core-Periphery Zoning, 2003, accessed 6 November 2024, <https://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/digital/collection/skinner/id/734/>. Adapted by the author, 2024.

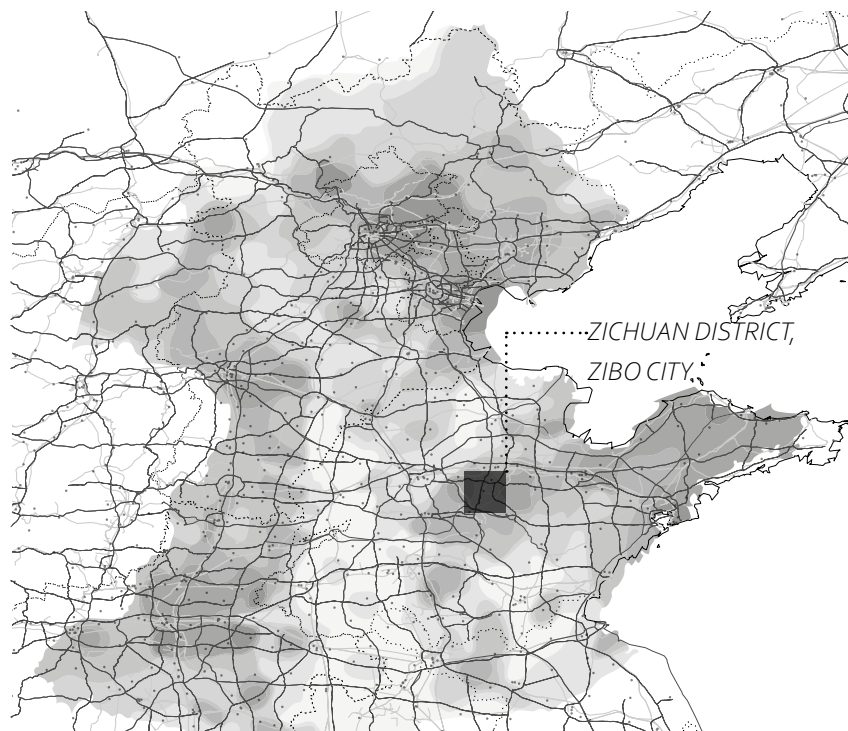




Figure 6. Local terrain and nearby towns and cities, showing surrounding villages to Shuiyu and the travel route and time to the nearest town centre, Zichuan. The city centre, located further north, is not shown on the map. Diagram by the author, 2024.

Constructing Block 1

centralised planning, including the First Five-Year Plan (1953-1957) which focused on industrialisation and collective farming.

Collectivisation was a difficult transition. During the Great Leap Forward (1958–1962) and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the nation’s push for communal farms led to widespread shortages, and the people of Shuiyu were no exception. My grandmother, born in 1948, faced starvation during a time when the land could not sustain its people. It was only after land was reallocated to individual households in the 1980s—the time of economic reform—that her family could harvest enough to get by.

The 1978 market reforms under Deng Xiaoping represented a crucial shift that prioritised modernisation and urban growth. By the 1990s, national policies promoted rural-to-urban migration to accelerate the expansion of urban centres. On 22 September 1994, the Zichuan District Committee—the governing authority over Shuiyu and surrounding areas²—reinforced this shift by implementing policies that directed labour and investment toward towns and cities, laying out a framework to transfer rural workers to support urban development.³ The Implementation Opinions issued on 11 October 1994⁴ further specified population targets for urban areas while halting approvals for new homesteads in certain villages, redirecting investment towards urban infrastructure. At that time, many younger Shuiyu villagers moved to nearby towns like Zichuan, Zhangdian, and Boshan in Zibo City (Figure 6).

2 Shuiyu Village is located within Zichuan District, part of Zibo City, Shandong Province in northern China. Consequently, the policies and development initiatives affecting Shuiyu are governed by Zichuan District authorities, as reflected in the district-level documents.

3 *Zīchuān qū zhì biānzuǎn wěiyuánhùi, Zīchuān qū zhì*, 923–27.

4 *Ibid.*, 925–27.

"... Strive to build beautiful villages that are suitable for living and working, characterised by scientific planning and layout, clean and attractive environments, thriving enterprises and increased incomes, and civilised rural customs and a healthy, balanced lifestyle."

— Zichuan District Committee, Chuanfa (2012) No. 10

Over the past two decades, there has been a growing focus on rural revitalisation in China. The Zibo District Committee's 2014 policy recommendations emphasised the need to "beautify villages" and to foster a "new look, new style, new behaviour, new life, new order, and new culture" within rural communities (Figure 7).⁵ In line with this broader initiative, Shuiyu's village committee sought approval to construct a new residential building to replace old, dilapidated houses. This proposal was subsequently approved by higher authorities.

The new building in Shuiyu was timely, addressing the needs of an ageing population as younger generations migrate to nearby towns and cities. Many elderly residents have been living in dilapidated homes and lack the energy to renovate them, and this construction reflects the village committee's effort to support those unable to maintain their ageing homes (Figure 8).

Yet, the construction of the new building was not without its constraints. The village cannot simply erect new structures at will; it must comply with the national land exchange policy, which stipulates



Figure 7. "Beautiful Livable Village Renovation Project Office, Shuiyu Village, Xihe Town." Photograph by the author, 2024.

5 Zichuān qū dǎng'àn jù, *Zī chuān gǎigé kāifàng 40 zhōunián zhòngyào wénxiàn 1978-2018* [Important Documents on the 40th Anniversary of Reform and Opening-up in Zibo, 1978-2018], n.d., 85. Translation by the author.

that any agricultural land repurposed for commercial development must be compensated by reclaiming an equivalent area of agricultural land of similar quality elsewhere. This process “transfers” the designation of farmland from areas earmarked for development to less valuable or previously degraded land, maintaining the “1.8 billion mu red line”⁶ mandated by the central government—an obligation ensuring that at least 1.8 billion mu of farmland is preserved across China to safeguard food security (Figure 11).⁷

For Shuiyu, this meant becoming the designated site for “transferred” agricultural land—a necessary step to secure approval for any new construction. The financial compensation from this arrangement would also help offset construction costs. To make more land available for agriculture, the village’s sprawling houses would be demolished and replaced by multi-storey blocks, concentrating

residents in smaller spaces.

Those affected would receive compensation for their lost homes, easing the transition into their new residences.

Planning for the new building began in 2016, involving multiple rounds of village meetings, negotiations over land exchange terms, and coordination of the construction timeline. By 2019, construction was officially

Figure 8. In Shuiyu Village, the departure of young people to cities has left elderly residents in deteriorating homes they can no longer maintain. Collage by the author, 2024.



6 1.8 billion mu is equivalent to approximately 120 million hectares (or 1.2 billion square metres).

7 “‘18 Yì mǔ gēngdì hóngxiàn’ shì zěnmé lái de’ [How Did the ‘1.8 Billion Mu of Arable Land Red Line’ Come About], Fǎzhì wǎng, 2022.8.10, http://www.legaldaily.com.cn/Village_ruled_by_law/content/2022-08/10/content_8734978.html.



Figure 9. A derelict house in the heart of the village. The new building stands not far away. Photograph by the author, 2024.

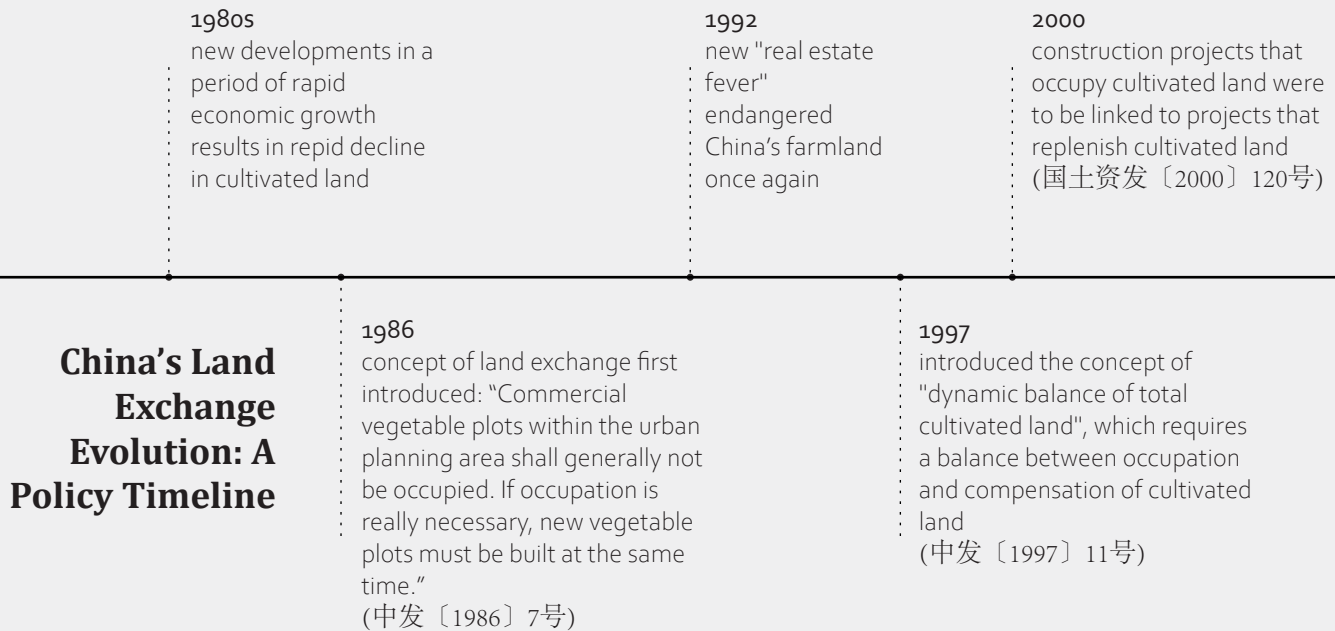
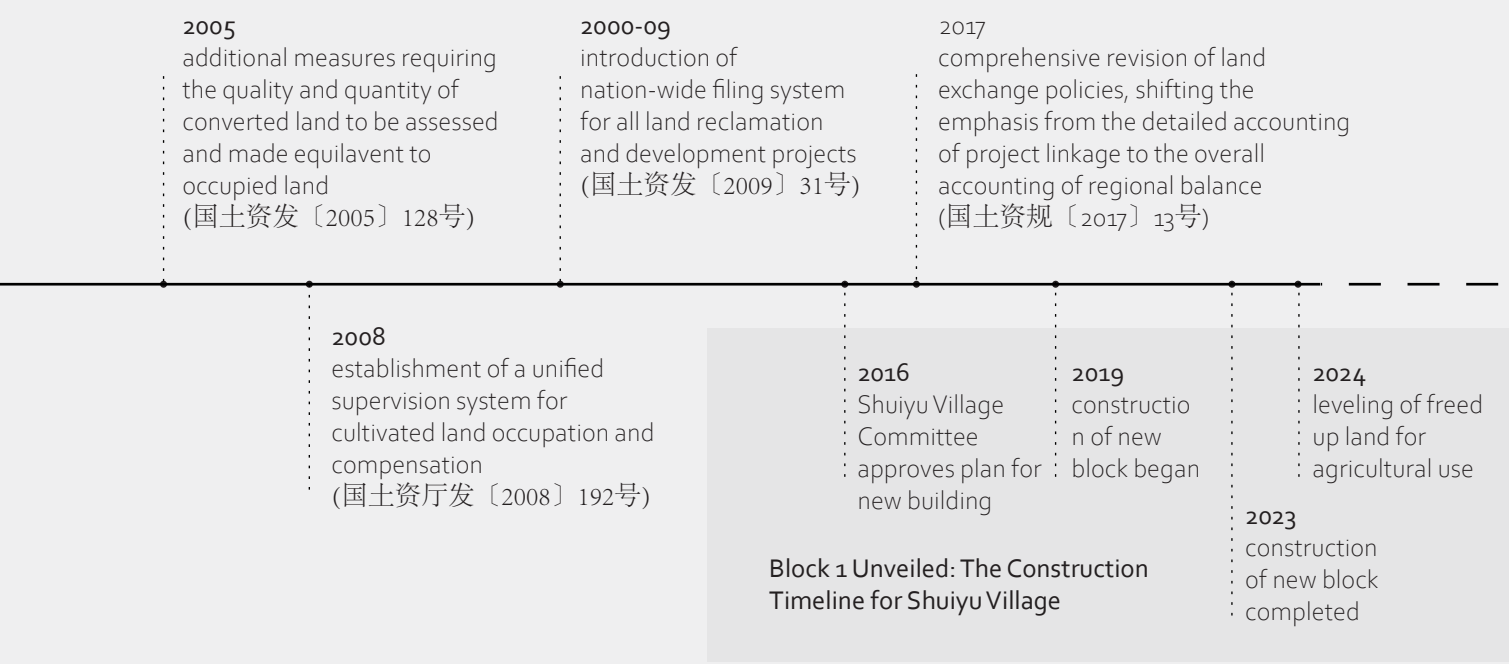


Figure 10. (above) Timeline of China's land exchange policy from the 1980s to the present, highlighting major developments and reforms. Based on Study Guide for the New Land Administration Law by Lihua Wei (魏莉华), Beijing: 中国大地出版社 (China Earth Press), 2019. Diagram by the author, 2024.

underway, and in 2023, Block 1 of Shuiyu was completed (Figure 12). My grandmother was among the first residents to settle into the new block.

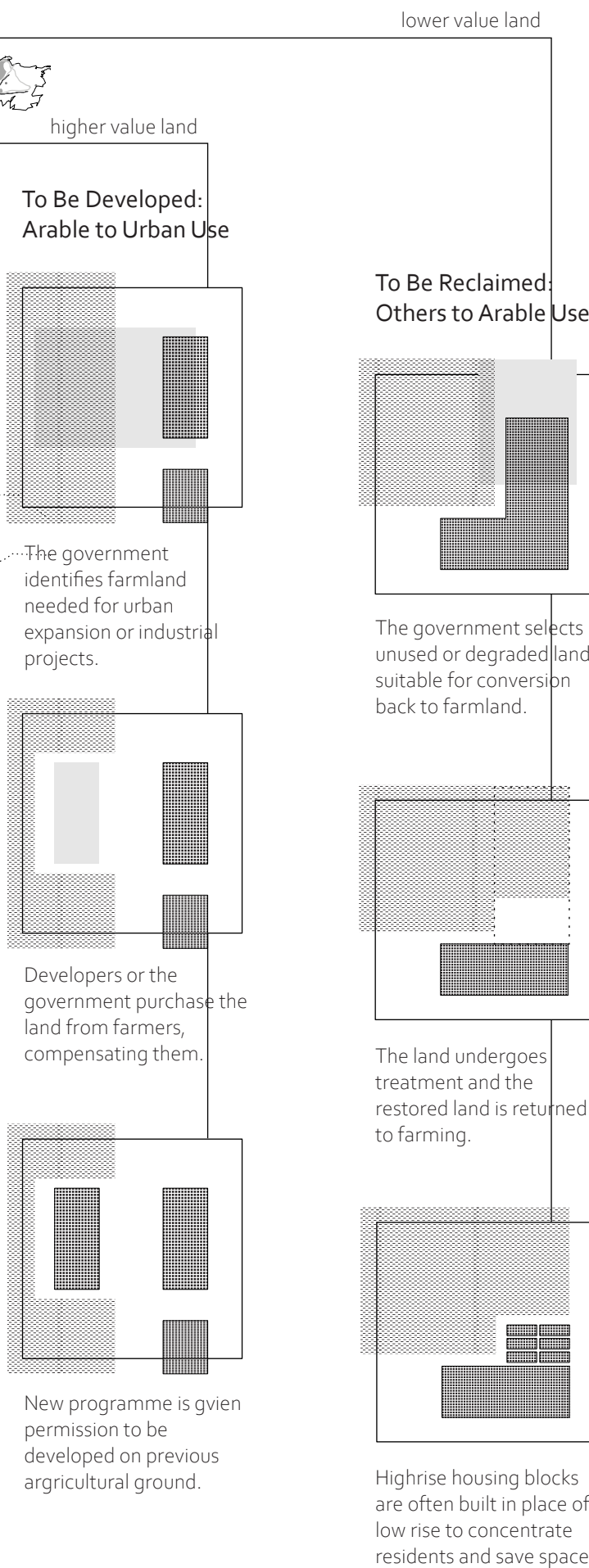
Although several blocks were initially proposed, construction came to a halt after the completion of the first building. Before any further construction can proceed, an additional 40 mu of land must be reclaimed to meet regulatory requirements, as noted by the village secretary. Compounding this situation, the houses designated for demolition have only been partially dismantled due to various delays. Once these houses are completely removed, the land will require levelling and a cultivation period of two to three years to confirm its successful reclamation for agricultural purposes. Only after this reclamation process is complete can new buildings be constructed.





Guarding the “1.8 Billion Mu Red Line”: The Land Exchange Policy

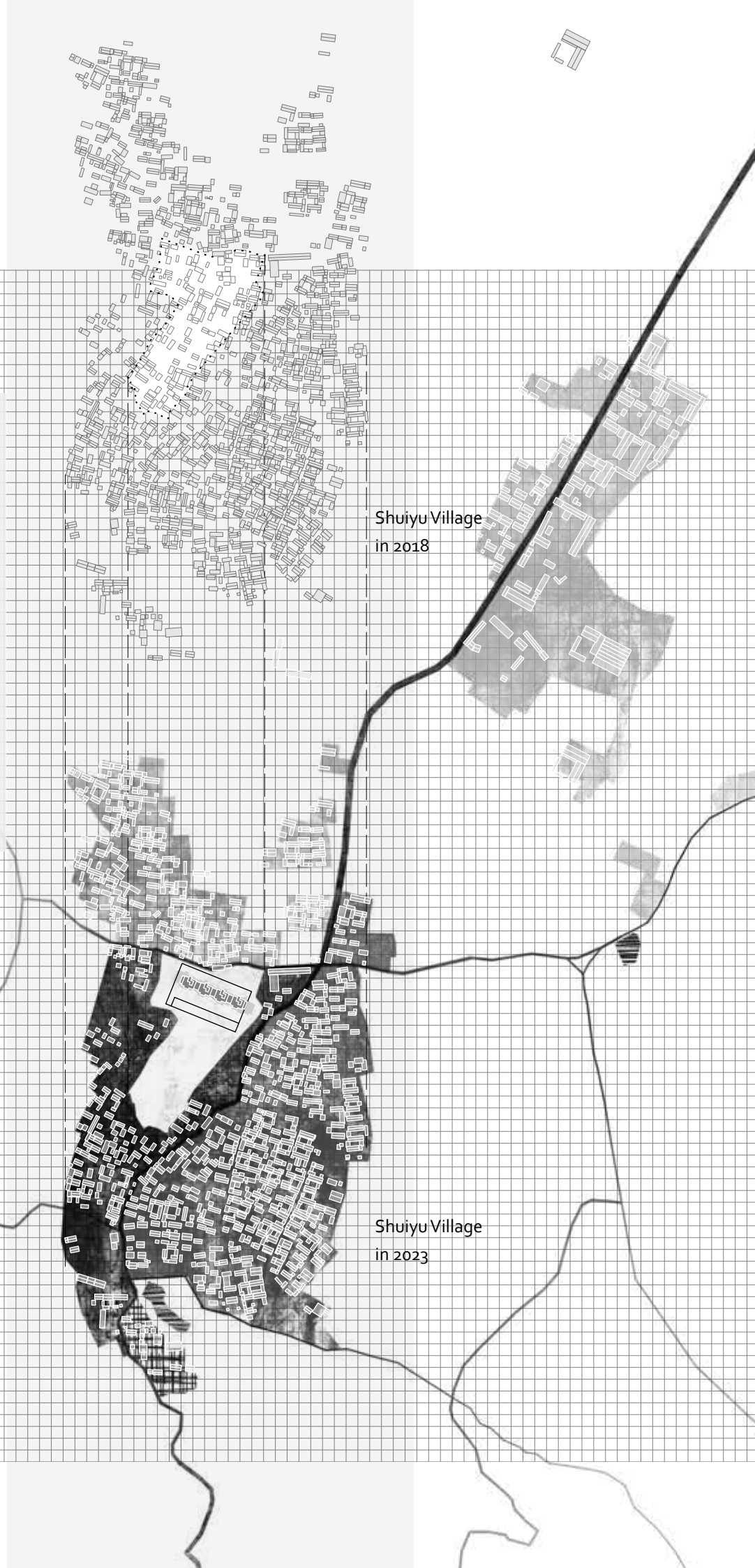
Figure 11. China’s “1.8 Million Mu Red Line” policy ensures that at least 1.8 billion mu of farmland is preserved for agriculture to protect food security. Diagram by the author, 2024.



Crafting Tomorrow's Terrain:

The Making of a New Landscape

Figure 12. Maps of Shuiyu Village in 2018 and 2023, illustrating the addition and location of the new 10-storey building in the village landscape over time. Diagrams by the author, 2024.



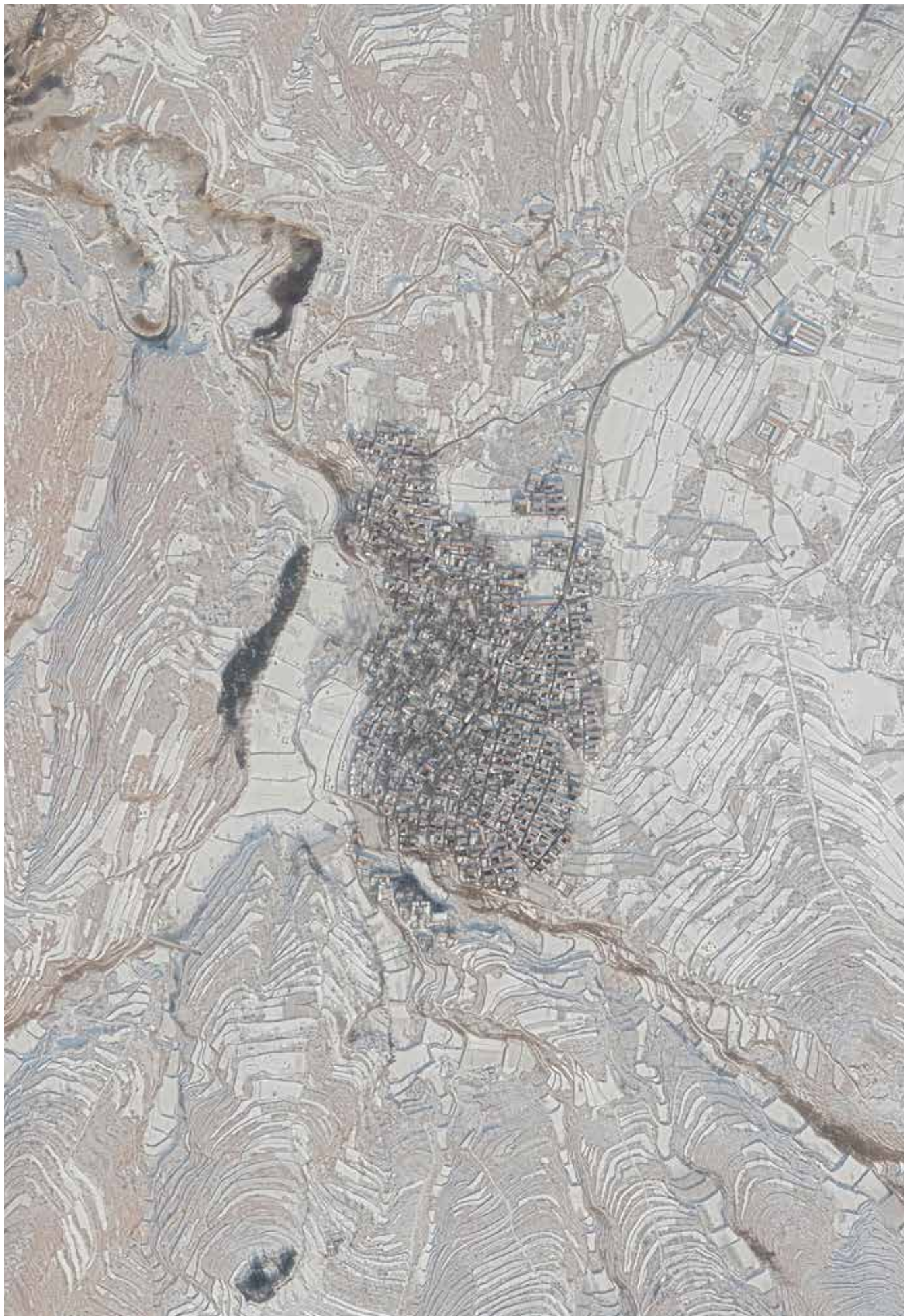


Figure 13. Satellite image of Shuiyu Village, December 2013. Google Earth image.



Figure 14. Satellite image of Shuiyu Village, June 2024. Google Earth image.









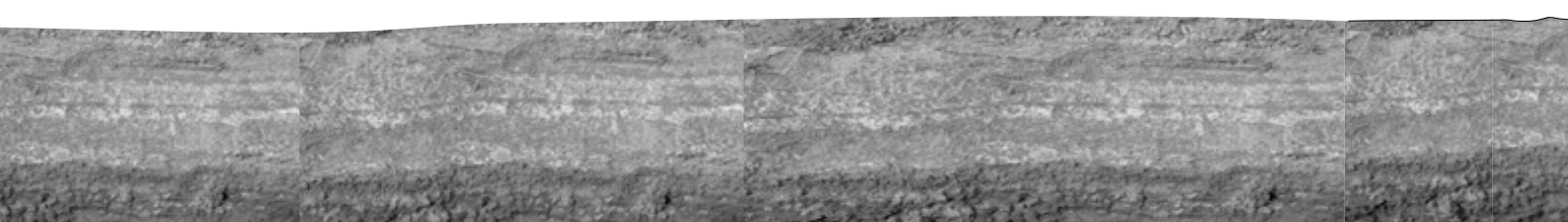
The Subservient Village

The drawn-out construction process reveals a troubling truth about the connection between rural villages and urban development—one of subservience. Dependency Theory, as discussed by Olanike F. Deji in *Gender and Rural Development*, suggests that rural areas function as “support zones” for urban centres, providing essential resources like food, raw materials, and labour.⁸ Consequently, villages like Shuiyu are compelled to conform to urban-centric models of progress, relegating them to subservient “peripheries”.

In Shuiyu, subservience is perpetuated by national land exchange policies that commodify rural land and prioritise urban interests, solidifying the village’s role as a facilitator of urban expansion. Residents are forced into smaller living spaces to make room for this growth, and their ability to secure new housing hinges on whether the land freed up by the demolition of their homes can be successfully used for urban agricultural land transfers. While compensation may alleviate some financial burdens in the short term, this strategy places rural land as secondary to urban development and falls short of offering a genuine solution for rural renewal.

“It’s not that we don’t want to build the rest [of the buildings]. We want to build them. But we have to requisition land first. We have to requisition 40 mu of land. After we requisition the land... we have to plant corns. We have to plant them for three years before the government will give us money.”

8 Olanike F. Deji, *Gender and Rural Development*, Spektrum, v. 106-107 (Zürich: Lit, 2011).



In my view, the characterless high-rise seems like a hollow fix for a deeper problem. But for the residents, these new buildings stand for progress, promising the comforts their old homes couldn't provide.

I spoke with a developer involved in many new rural community projects. He argued that raising the living standards of the village is the country's priority. Design considerations take a back seat, with the emphasis placed on constructing as many buildings as quickly as possible. There's little time or resources for anything beyond the essentials for living.

The country's rush to renew rural areas is echoed in the villagers' eagerness to secure their new homes. Those without new homes are keen for a chance, and some buy extra units from those who have received more than one. Residents in these new apartments do pay more for their modern comforts, but the extra expense is manageable by today's standards. And for those without a place in the new building yet, accessing the village's recently installed amenities becomes a real struggle. My grandmother's friend, still

Shuiyu, Post-Renewal

Figure 15. (two spreads prior) Tractor flattening land cleared for demolition. Photograph by the author, 2024.

Figure 16. (previous spread) The new building stands tall in the sun. Photograph by the author, 2024.

Figure 17. (below) Plan and elevation of Block 1, Shuiyu Village. Drawing by the author, 2024.



living in her old house outside the demolition zone, is frustrated by leaks in her roof and longs for a spot in the new apartments.

Even those who have relocated but still qualify for a new home seek to invest in one, even if they don't intend to live there. For them, having a place in the village is crucial. Their connection to Shuiyu was once anchored to their homestead plots, but with the plots now sold to the government for demolition, the new high-rise apartments become their anchor—a new symbol of their roots in a changing world.

In Search of a Future

Although the new building was well received by the villagers, as my grandmother shares more, it becomes clear that Shuiyu's challenges run deeper than what concrete structures alone can address.

Farming, once the lifeblood of this community, has lost its appeal. Farming is hard work, and with so many alternatives available, why should anyone toil in the fields? For the people of Shuiyu, farming was never a commercial activity; it was about survival. In the past, the whole family laboured to ensure there was enough food to last through the year, only going to the market for a few things they couldn't grow. The variety of produce was meagre; some crops were simply too much trouble to tend. My mother recalls the monotony of their meals during harvest time, living on long beans, eggplant, and pumpkin for weeks at a stretch.

Now, as China's villages prosper, life has gotten more comfortable. For the elderly in Shuiyu, whose children have migrated to cities, farming has become unnecessary. They can enjoy a decent life with the support of their offspring and regular trips to Dongping Town, where the Dongping market takes place six times a month. Some villagers still tend their fields, but their numbers are dwindling. Many plots lie untended, overtaken by weeds that outgrow the crops, a sight unimaginable in years past.

Shuiyu also has no industries to speak of. While the broader Zibo City is known for ceramics and glassware, Shuiyu produces neither. Without large factories or commercial agriculture for export, the village struggles for financial means to improve its lot.

Thus, the village finds itself in a precarious position, lacking both commercial farming and industrial activity as a source of stable income. But beyond financial instability, the fabric of village life is fraying. In my quest to understand the dynamics of the village through my grandmother's connections, I initiated a two-part interview with her and my mother, each session stretching over two hours. The result was a tangled family tree (Figure 22), revealing a web of relationships where kinship and friendship overlap in unexpected ways. It tells a story rich with personal history, where neighbours bond through proximity, and where visiting one another was once the norm. Yet, as my grandmother recounts each branch of our family tree, she always ends with a passing comment: "We don't really associate with each other anymore—not since the elders passed away." The passing of the older generation has left a chasm, with younger family members now only greeting each other in passing. The practice of visiting has diminished significantly among the extended family (Figure 23).

Adding to this disconnection, many young people have left the village, often taking their parents along with them. Empty houses and unoccupied units in the new high-rises are becoming common

Who Owns the Land?

A Guide to Rural Land Ownership in China



Rural land is owned by village collectives, not individuals.



Farmers lease land from the collective, usually under 30-year contracts.



Farmers can transfer or lease their land-use rights but can't sell the land.



Families have rights to use land for housing but can't sell it to outsiders.



The government can expropriate land for public use, with compensation for farmers.

sights. My grandmother's own apartment is flanked by her second son's unit—vacant because his family resides in the city—and a neighbour who spends most of her time in another town. My grandmother finds herself largely alone, visiting only a few close friends and occasionally chatting with familiar faces on her walks.

From this vantage point, it seems like Shuiyu lacks an economic foundation, offers little incentive for young people to stay, and witnesses the erosion of its communal bonds. This reality feels like a crisis, and I started to question the purpose of my thesis. What can be said of a village with no future?



Figure 18. Grandma with her friends on her nightly stroll to the Stone Basin. Photograph by the author, 2024.

Figure 19. (next spread) Shuiyu as the night falls. Photograph by the author, 2024.



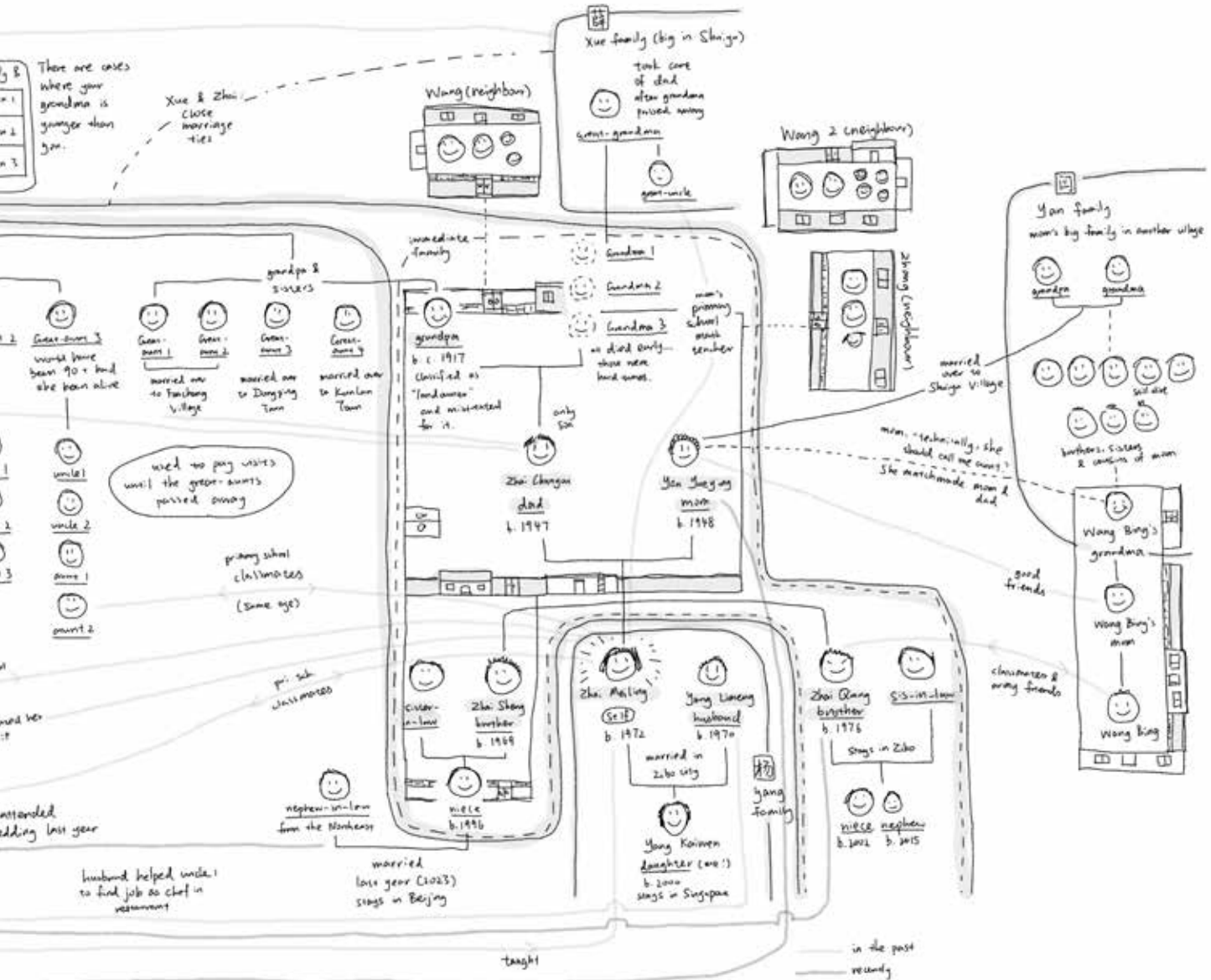




Figure 20. Looking into the living room of an abandoned house. Photograph by the author, 2024.



Figure 21. The interior of a living room in the new block. Photograph by the author, 2024.



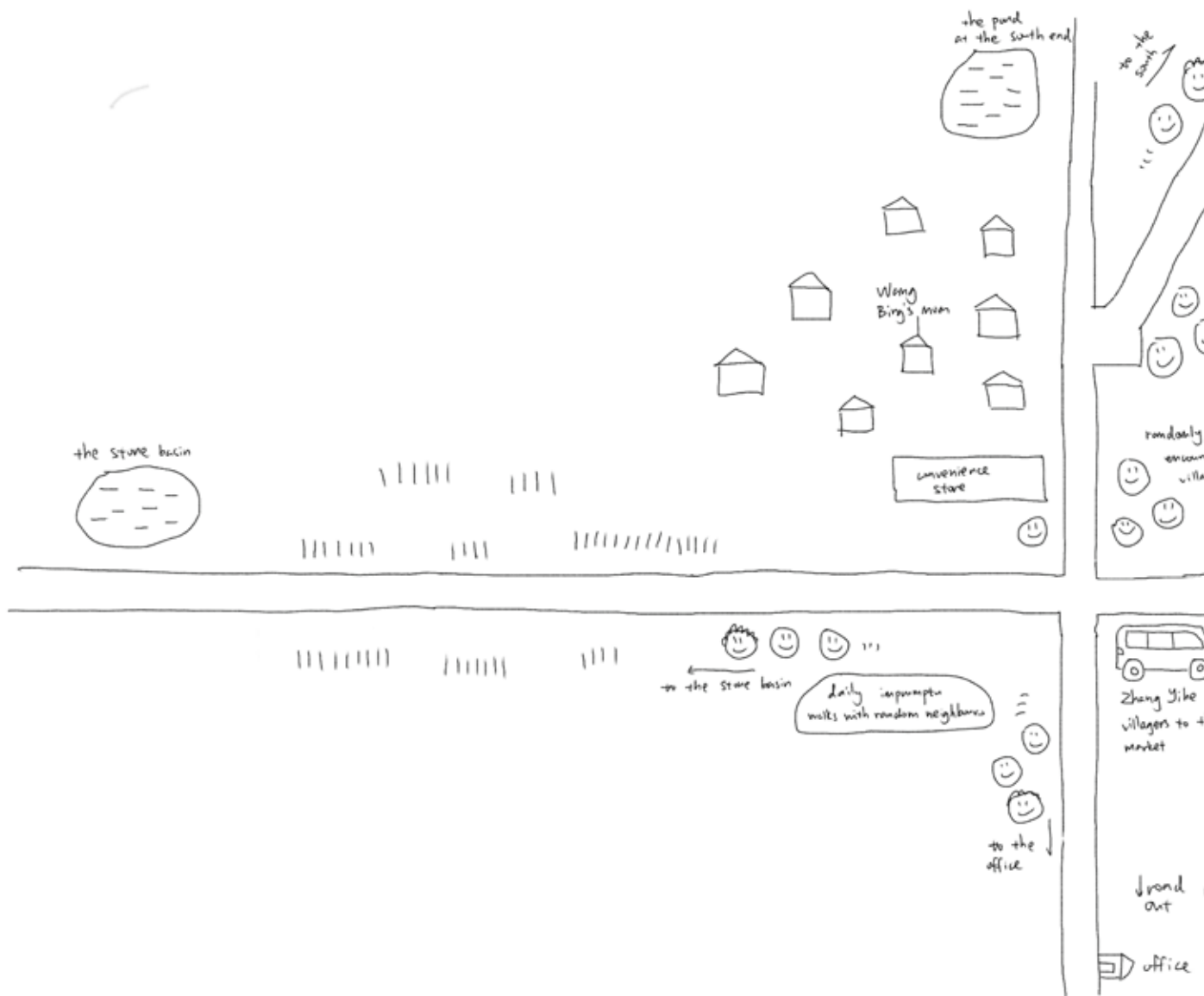
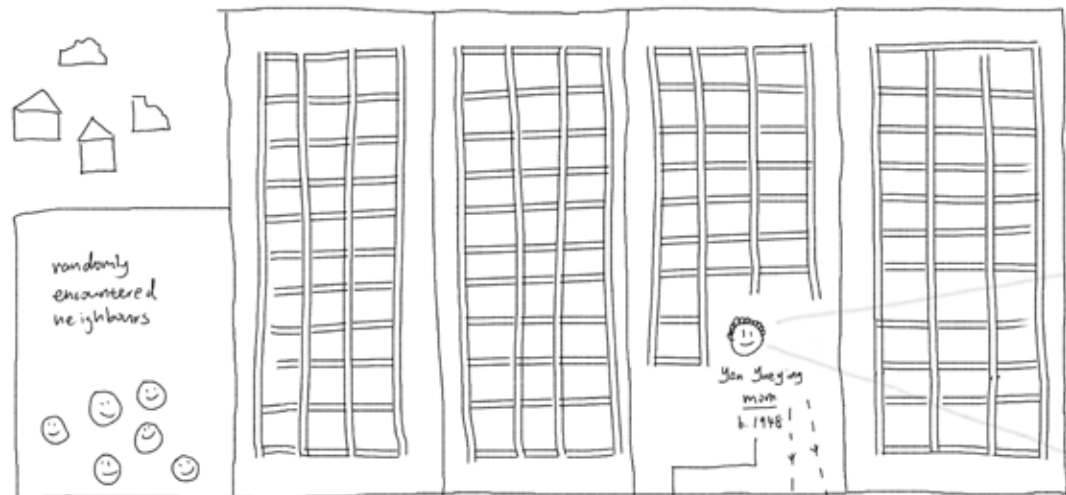


Figure 23. Grandma's current social connections, showing her daily interactions and acquaintances formed during her routine walks, reflecting a network sustained through casual, day-to-day encounters. Drawing by the author, 2024.



several
gens

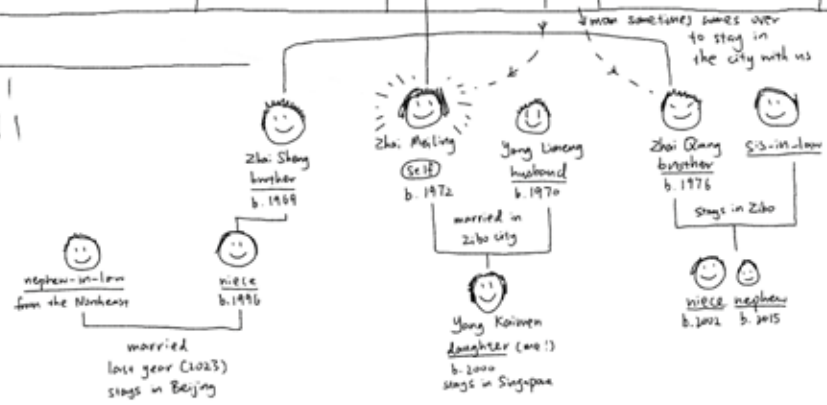
drives
to Dongying

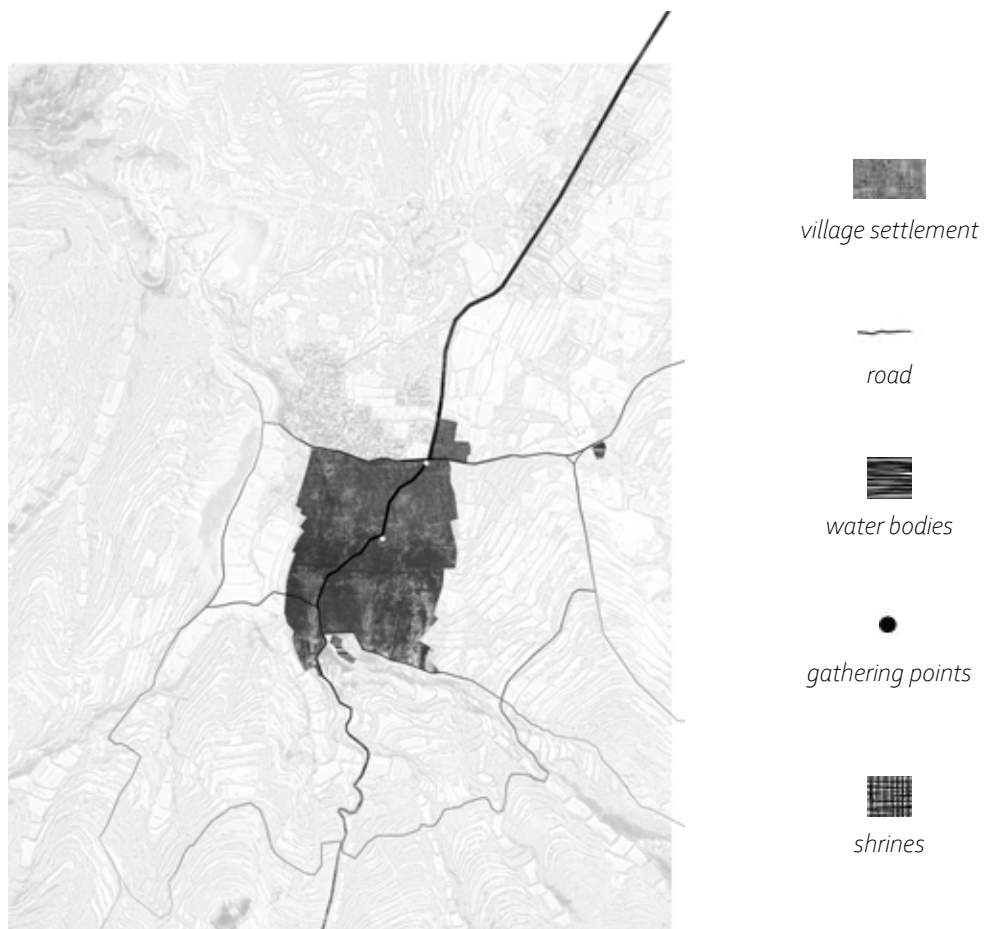


relatives stopped visiting
each other after elders
in the family passed away



good
friends

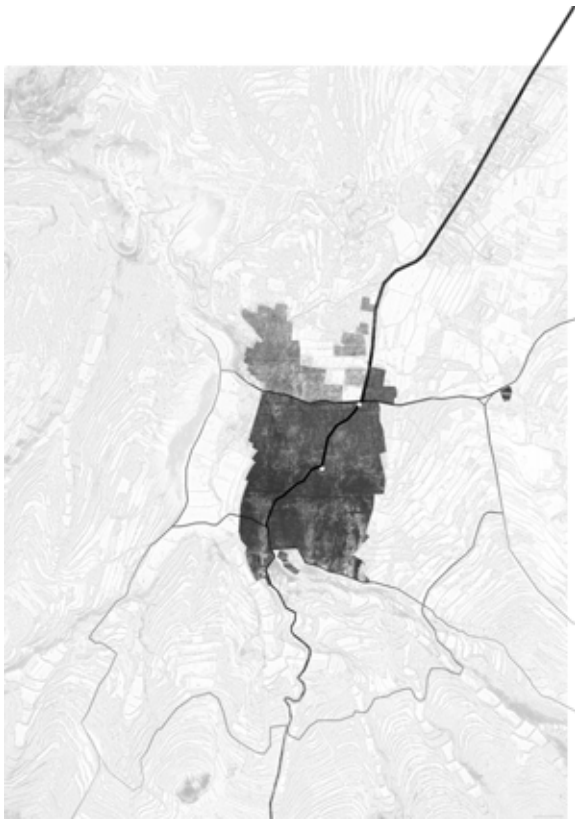




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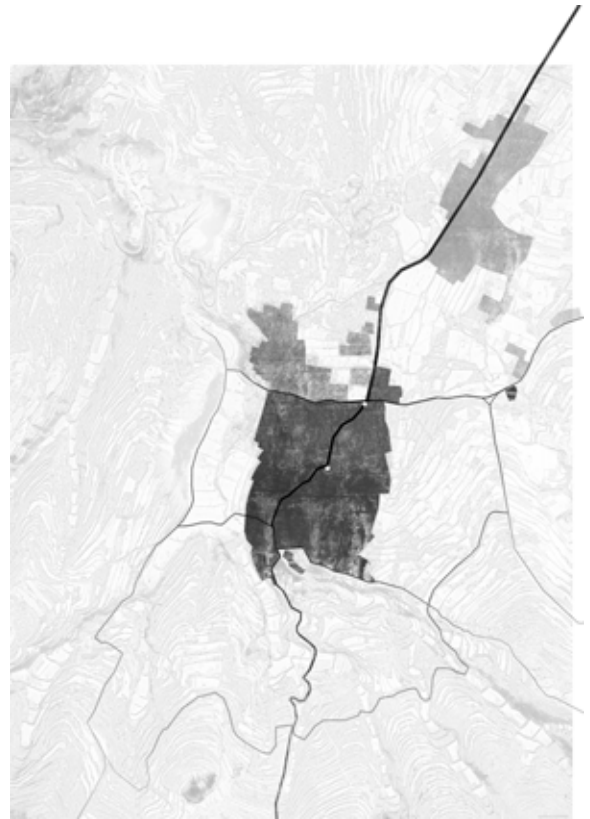
village built in Song Dynasty

Figure 24. (current and next) Evolution of Shuiyu Village from its establishment to the present, illustrating key developments over time: expansion of the village to the northwest, the construction of a satellite village and factories to the north, and the construction of the new 10-storey building from 2019 to 2023. Presently, what was once the village centre is now run down (darkest region intended for demolition). Diagram by the author, 2024.



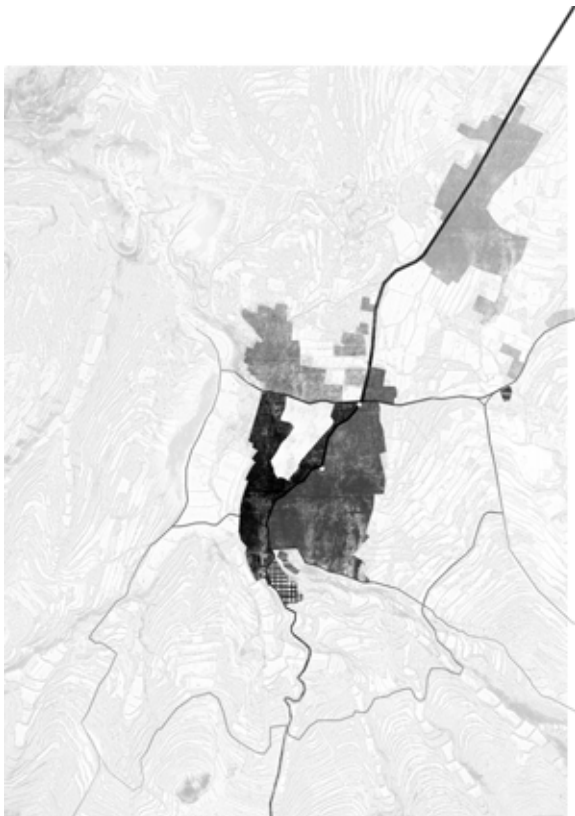
over time

expansion of village in the
north-west



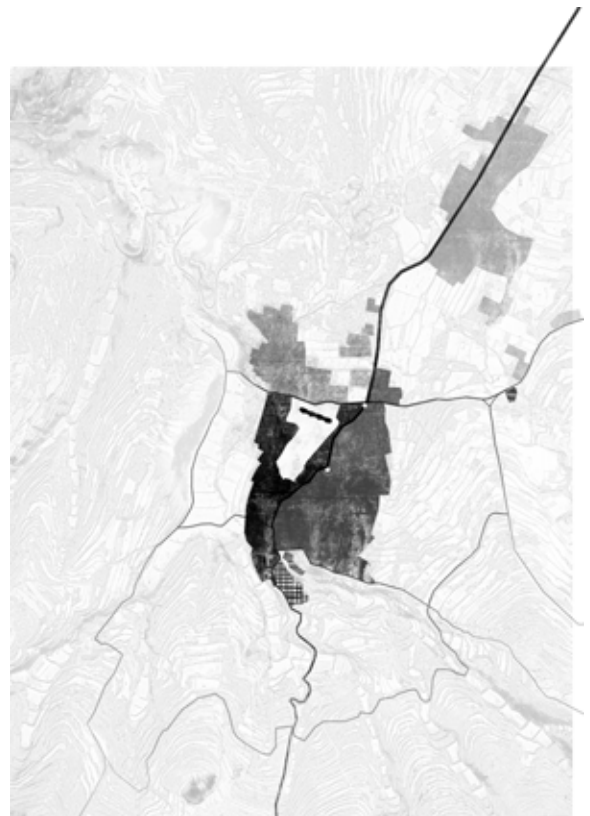
over time

satellite village and factories
built up north



2019

construction for the new
building began



2023

new building
completed





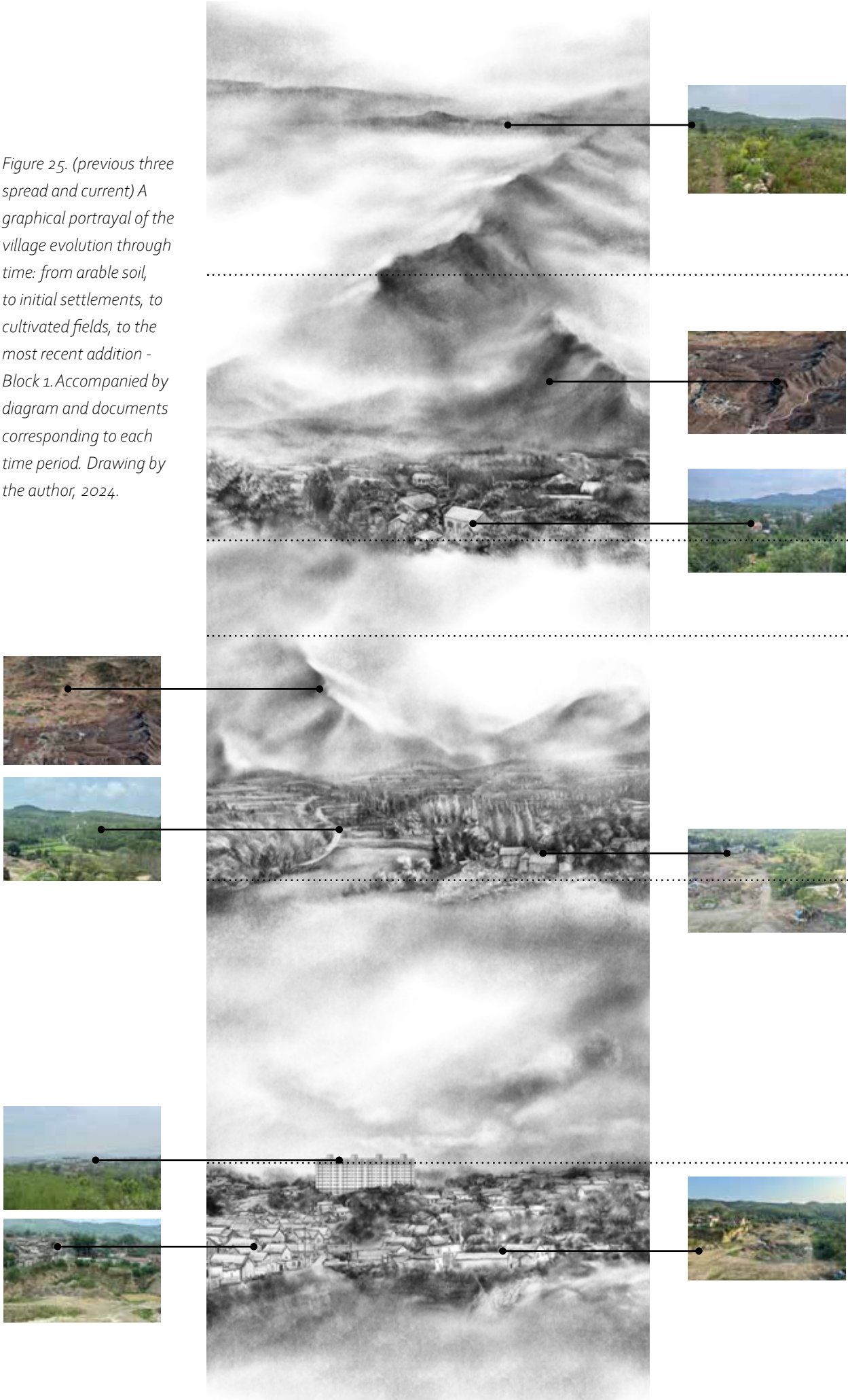






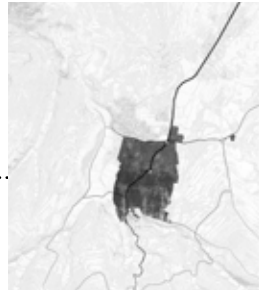


Figure 25. (previous three spread and current) A graphical portrayal of the village evolution through time: from arable soil, to initial settlements, to cultivated fields, to the most recent addition - Block 1. Accompanied by diagram and documents corresponding to each time period. Drawing by the author, 2024.



the beginning

a piece of fertile land



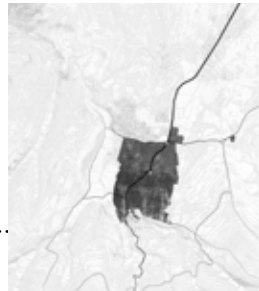
Zichuan District Soil Nutrient Content Table									
Sample No.	Location	pH	Organic Matter (%)	N (%)	P (%)	K (%)	Ca (%)	Mg (%)	Other (%)
1	Plot 1	6.5	1.2	0.15	0.08	0.25	0.10	0.05	0.02
2	Plot 2	6.8	1.5	0.18	0.10	0.30	0.12	0.06	0.03
3	Plot 3	7.0	1.8	0.20	0.12	0.35	0.15	0.08	0.04
4	Plot 4	7.2	2.0	0.22	0.15	0.40	0.18	0.10	0.05
5	Plot 5	7.5	2.5	0.25	0.18	0.45	0.20	0.12	0.06
6	Plot 6	7.8	3.0	0.30	0.20	0.50	0.25	0.15	0.08
7	Plot 7	8.0	3.5	0.35	0.25	0.55	0.30	0.18	0.10
8	Plot 8	8.2	4.0	0.40	0.30	0.60	0.35	0.20	0.12
9	Plot 9	8.5	4.5	0.45	0.35	0.65	0.40	0.22	0.14
10	Plot 10	8.8	5.0	0.50	0.40	0.70	0.45	0.25	0.16

Soil nutrient content in Zichuan by district

Soil in Dongping Township (where Shuiyu Village is) is suitable for agriculture.

c. 1200 - present

village built and expand to the northwest



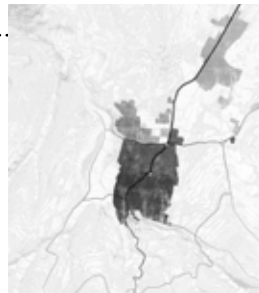
Historical Records of Villages in Dongping Township									
Village Name	Location	Area (mu)	Population	Land Use	Notes	Village Name	Location	Area (mu)	Population
Shuiyu Village	Dongping Township	1200	150	Agriculture	Established around the Song Dynasty	Shuiyu Village	Dongping Township	1200	150
Shuiyu Village	Dongping Township	1200	150	Agriculture	Established around the Song Dynasty	Shuiyu Village	Dongping Township	1200	150
Shuiyu Village	Dongping Township	1200	150	Agriculture	Established around the Song Dynasty	Shuiyu Village	Dongping Township	1200	150
Shuiyu Village	Dongping Township	1200	150	Agriculture	Established around the Song Dynasty	Shuiyu Village	Dongping Township	1200	150

Historical records of villages in Dongping Township

Shuiyu Village was established around the Song Dynasty.

over the last decade

the village ages with its people



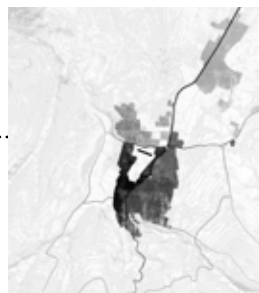
Document of the Communist Party of China Zichuan District Committee									
Document Title	Content	Document Title	Content	Document Title	Content	Document Title	Content	Document Title	Content
Document 1	Government Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of Beautiful Villages	Document 2	Government Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of Beautiful Villages	Document 3	Government Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of Beautiful Villages	Document 4	Government Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of Beautiful Villages	Document 5	Government Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of Beautiful Villages
Document 6	Government Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of Beautiful Villages	Document 7	Government Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of Beautiful Villages	Document 8	Government Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of Beautiful Villages	Document 9	Government Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of Beautiful Villages	Document 10	Government Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of Beautiful Villages

Document of the Communist Party of China Zichuan District Committee

Government Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of Beautiful Villages

2023

new building constructed



Demolition plan on the lift wall in the new building									
Plot No.	Area (hectares)	Plot No.	Area (hectares)	Plot No.	Area (hectares)	Plot No.	Area (hectares)	Plot No.	Area (hectares)
Plot 2	3.2646	Plot 4	0.2867	Plot 6	0.2867	Plot 8	0.2867	Plot 10	0.2867
Plot 12	0.2867	Plot 14	0.2867	Plot 16	0.2867	Plot 18	0.2867	Plot 20	0.2867

Demolition plan on the lift wall in the new building

Demolition of old plot 2 and 4, covering an area of 3.2646 hectares and 0.2867 hectares respectively.

2 Redefining Rural Values



Figure 26. Traditional ox cart in Houjie Village, Qingdao. Photograph by the author's family, 2024.

The background image is a photograph of a street scene. In the foreground, the back of a person riding a bicycle is visible, with some items in the basket. To the right, a tall utility pole stands with several power lines running across the sky. A security camera is mounted on the pole. In the background, a white car is parked on the street, and there are some buildings and trees. The sky is blue with some clouds.

The transformation of Shuiyu reveals that policy-driven models have viewed rural areas as mere extensions of urban economies. This urban-centric framework, which measures rural success by city standards of productivity and growth, can erode the unique cultural and ecological roles that rural areas serve. This section critiques this urban-biased view, offering a different perspective: rural life holds intrinsic worth rooted in community ties, environmental continuity, and a sustainable relationship with nature.



Figure 27. (current and next) Mural featuring lyrics [Once Upon a Time, Someone Loved You for a Long Time] from Jay Chou's popular song, painted on a village wall along the main road. Photograph by the author, 2024.







Figure 28. (left) View of the street in Houjie Village, Qingdao, in autumn. Photograph by the author's family, 2024.

Figure 29. (above) A barn in Houjie Village. Photograph by the author's family, 2024.



Figure 30. Man-made lake in Majia Zhuang beside the public park. Photograph by the author, 2024.

Alternative Rural Futures

After my time in Shuiyu Village, I embarked on visits to several other villages, seeking to discover alternative futures for rural life. In these visits, I encountered a spectrum of responses to urbanisation, with some villages embracing it fully, while others endeavoured to maintain their identities amid change.

Standing out as a “Beautiful Countryside” demonstration village in Zichuan District, Majia Zhuang was my first stop. The village head has made a personal investment into village infrastructure, transforming the village with new roads, housing, and even a man-made lake with a large public park. The park, styled in traditional Chinese aesthetics, now serves as a tourist attraction, drawing visitors from across Zibo. The local government has made considerable efforts in

promotion, with banners advertising locally grown cantaloupes and posters introducing the specialties of Xihe Town. The annual Harvest Festival of Zibo is also hosted here. The residential part of the village is distinctly different from the polished look of the public park at the front. Walking through the village's low-rise homes—made of mud bricks, stones, and red bricks—it feels no different from Shuiyu, but houses are usually occupied and maintained. Farming here has shifted towards a cooperative model, where farmers lease their land to collective organisations in exchange for dividends. This model provides a steady income, and the land can be used for more lucrative ventures while still involving local farmers in the production process.

In contrast, Chengdong Village in Zhandian District of the same city is radically different. In 1995, the village commissioned Tongji University to draw a new village plan, projecting a “model village” designed to stand decades ahead of its time. Today, Chengdong feels more like a suburb than a village. Single-family villas line straight, clean roads with no fields in sight. Chengdong hasn't been a farming village in years—it built its fortune in brick and tile production, and now it leases old factories, distributing yearly bonuses to its villagers and covering all management fees.

Juanshan Village in the same district offers a similar story of transformation, albeit with a twist. By 2018, the village has its own residential estate, with a home for every household in the village. Farming was long abandoned, replaced by jobs in a nearby aluminium factory. The village offers free senior apartments, complete with an on-site clinic and a kindergarten. Villagers maintain their own communal spaces and hold monthly clean-ups and evaluations. Their heritage gallery showcases the village's evolution from dilapidated thatched houses to pristine rows of high-rise flats, a visual testament to modernisation.

Both villages exhibit a kind of self-sustaining urbanisation, with thriving welfare systems and facilities as models of “successful”

rural revitalisation. The trade-off is that they are now almost indistinguishable from city suburbs. This mirrors a broader trend in China, where “improving” rural life means adopting city-like amenities, aesthetics, and economic models. Success is measured by how well a village can imitate the city and “wean off” its rural traits.

Alongside these “model villages,” I found another kind of future in Houjie Village, Jimo District, Qingdao City, where life unfolds with a quieter, more grounded rhythm. Houjie, unlike Chengdong or Juanshan, still embraces farming. Families live in traditional homes outfitted with modern conveniences—firewood stoves alongside gas stoves, heat generated from cooking directed through the kang⁹ to warm the house in winter. Children who work in nearby towns visit their parents regularly, and the elders often spend days in the city. Unlike Shuiyu, which seems to drift, this village holds onto its roots, but with the support of urban resources close at hand.

Lastly, I turned to Chengzhang Village, my birthplace. It’s technically classified as a village, though I never thought of it that way. Located on the edge of town, Chengzhang pulses with life, from bustling roadside vendors to cyclists and motorbikes crisscrossing through. The architecture here reflects a middle ground—five-storey buildings that give it the feel of a vintage town. Chengzhang doesn’t pull away from town life but embraces it fully, creating a hybrid space that’s neither strictly rural nor urban.

Each village I visited offers a distinct vision of rural spaces. While Chengdong and Juanshan reflect the polished aesthetics and amenities of city suburbs, Houjie and Chengzhang point to alternative paths that blend modern resources with rural identity. Reflecting on these villages, I find myself questioning the narrow view

9 A traditional heated platform or bed made of bricks or clay in northern China, used for sleeping, socialising, and cooking, typically warmed by a stove or fireplace.

that positions them only in relation to the urban sphere. Is there a different way to conceptualise the rural-urban relationship, or is this dichotomy even necessary?

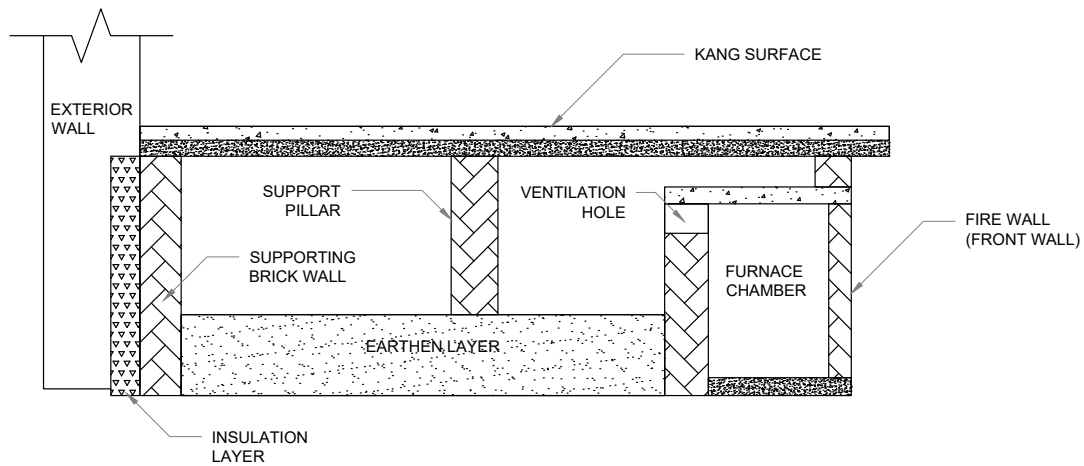


Figure 31. Section view of the kang, showing layers of insulation, supporting brick wall, and furnace chamber. The kang's design channels heat from the furnace chamber through the fire wall and up to the kang surface, providing warmth in winter. Drawing by the author, 2024.

Tracing Rural Evolution: Insights from Nearby Villages

This series of photos captures the development paths of four different villages, each shaped by its own history, local industries, and community needs.

1



2



3



5

Majia Zhuang Village

Zichuan District, Zibo City,
Shandong Province

4



1. New village garden funded personally by the village head, where the city-wide annual harvest festival is held.
2. Gates remain open when villagers are at home.
3. Poster at the village entrance showcasing local produce, including "netted melon", Shandong pancake, grapes, corn, and mugwort products. Landed houses line up in the village.
4. Wuxing Agricultural Products Cooperative, Zichuan, Zibo.
5. "Study tour in Xihe" bus stop.

1



Villages around Tianzhuang Reservoir

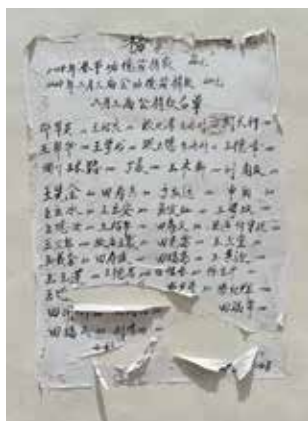
Zichuan District, Zibo City,
Shandong Province



2



3



4



5

1. Construction of a new villa house not far from the village.
2. Old village house preserved on a raised concrete platform.
3. Tianzhuang Reservoir.
4. List of villagers who contributed financially to the 2024 March 3rd Temple Fair
5. Plaque for Tianzhuang Middle School Former Site, issued by the Zibo Cultural Heritage Protection Unit on 17 March 2014.

1



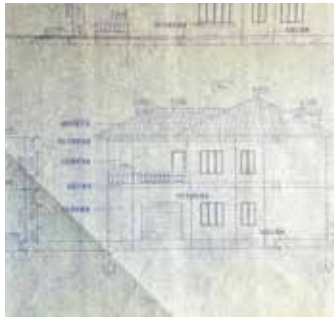
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4



3



5



6

1. Chendong Village was envisioned by Tongji University in the 1990s to be 30 years ahead of its time and resilient for the next 50 years.
2. Exhibit in the village museum showcasing the heritage of stone mining and the lives of past generations.
3. Aerial view of Chendong Village displayed on a wall in the village museum.
4. Landed houses line up in the village.
5. Hand-drawn construction drawings by Tongji University, preserved by the village office.
6. A glimpse inside a village home. The homeowner was awarded "model household" in the village several times.

Chengdong Village

Zhangdian District, Zibo City,
Shandong Province

Juanshan Village

Zhangdian District, Zibo City,
Shandong Province



1



3



4

1. Housing blocks in Juanshan Village was built between 2007-2018, with a village clinic and free childcare and nursing home for villagers of age.
2. Promotional video shown in the village heritage gallery, showing neat rows of new blocks.
3. The "Juanshan Village Harmonious and Livable Rural Cultural Corridor" along the main road in the village.
4. Vintage Feiren sewing machine on display in the village heritage gallery, contributed by villagers.
5. Aluminium factory located next to the village has replaced what was once agricultural fields.



5



2



3



4

Houjie Village

Jimo District, Qingdao City,
Shandong Province



5



6

1. A combined administrative village formed by merging three natural villages, bringing together their resources and community governance.
2. Courtyard garden within a home where vegetables are planted.
3. Collectively installed groundwater and sewer pipes, replacing the former practice of daily waste collection.
4. Village noodle-pressing factory, a local industry sustaining traditional food production within the community.
5. Traditional kang bed-stove in a home, doubling as a cooking surface where flour-based foods are prepared.
6. Village officials use Taobao and live streaming to sell local agricultural products.



1

Chengzhang Village

Zhangdian District, Zibo City,
Shandong Province



2



3



4



5

1. Chengzhang is old village on the outskirts of town, where village life is intertwined with the town through frequent activities and exchanges.
2. Narrow street between housing blocks.
3. Makeshift garden outside the front gates of a residence
4. Interior of a house, with objects accumulated over time.
5. Shops beside residential buildings, including "Pretty Bride Aesthetics," "Luxing Computer," and "Luxing Technology".

The Rural House as a *Gesamtwohneinheit*

Upon visiting other villages, it becomes evident that, from an urban perspective, Shuiyu seems to possess limited value; the scarcity of commercial opportunities diminishes the incentive for younger generations to return, thereby reinforcing perceptions of the village as “backward.” However, by re-evaluating the intrinsic value of Shuiyu beyond economic metrics, we can potentially identify ways to ensure its future relevance and inclusion on strategic agendas.

To identify the intrinsic value of rural living, we may start by examining the differences between rural and urban housing. Urban homes typically function as compartmentalised spaces, designated for specific activities such as sleeping, working, and leisure. In contrast, rural homes serve a multifunctional role, integrating living spaces with agricultural and communal activities. This strong connection to the land endows rural homes with value derived from community cohesion and self-sufficiency beyond mere utilitarian considerations.

The urban housing model emerged in post-1949 China, which faced a housing crisis amid a shift toward heavy industry. Influenced by Soviet architecture, the housing units adopted a utilitarian design, characterised by rectangular blocks of three or more stories.¹⁰ These structures, mass-produced for efficiency, stripped living spaces down to their essentials—a room with four walls. Manfredo Tafuri describes such architecture as “a mere link in the production chain” that supports the city’s broader mechanisms of production, distribution, and consumption.¹¹ In this framework, individual dwelling units form a symbiotic relationship with the urban environment, each

10 Peter G. Rowe and Seng Kuan, *Architectural Encounters with Essence and Form in Modern China* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 100–101.

11 Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, 10. print (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 42, 48.

influencing the other (Figure 32).¹² However, when this urban model is applied to a rural setting, it becomes a misfit—a cog without the machine it is meant to support.



Figure 32. Urban housing block embodying Ludwig Hilberseimer's concept of the building as part of the urban machine, designed for efficiency and uniformity within a rigid, systematic structure.

In urban contexts, a house primarily serves as a place of rest. As criticised by Heidegger, the hegemonic view describes building and dwelling as separable yet complementary activities, with the act of constructing houses serving the purpose of providing shelter, thereby reducing dwelling to merely occupying a physical space.¹³ This compartmentalisation of living contrasts with the rural house, which expands the definition of “dwelling”. The rural house is a total unit of living, which I refer to as a *Gesamtwohneinheit*—a term inspired by the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or “total work of art.” Just as *Gesamtkunstwerk* integrates various art forms into a unified whole, the *Gesamtwohneinheit* integrates every aspect of daily life into an all-encompassing residential space.

¹² Hilberseimer, 1927, as cited in *ibid*, 104.

¹³ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 20. print (New York: Perennial Classics, 2009), 145–61.



Figure 33. A kind of wild grass with long, slim and tough stalk used to build thatched roof houses in the past. Photograph by the author, 2024.

In his essay “Building, dwelling, living”, Tim Ingold introduces the concept of the house as an organism, a notion that aptly characterises the rural house. He argues that “dwelling” transcends the simple act of residing in a space; instead, it emphasises the active engagement with that space over time.¹⁴ This is exemplified by the rural house which functions as a living entity, reflecting the continuous interactions of its inhabitants with their environment and community. The expansive and multifunctional rural house allows for a depth of engagement with daily life that urban environments often lack. Within a typical village house, one finds not just living quarters, but spaces for daily activities and communal interactions. It’s where families keep chickens, pigs, and dogs, dry wheat and corn after harvest, and store farming equipment. The kitchen serves as both a cooking space and a workshop for food processing like flour grinding. As rural households expand to accommodate additional family members, the house undergoes a continual process of adaptation and growth, much like a living organism that evolves in response to its environment. New rooms may be added, existing spaces repurposed, or communal areas developed, all reflecting the changing dynamics and needs of the family.

Architecture is more than just a rational object or a “machine to live in,” as Mircea Eliade posits; it embodies the universe that individuals construct for themselves.¹⁵ When urban housing models invade rural landscapes, discomfort and disconnection become inevitable. Recognising the distinct reality of rural life redefines what it means to thrive in these communities and may reveal a path forward.

14 Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London ; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), 187.

15 David Seamon and Robert Mugerauer, eds., *Dwelling, Place, and Environment: Towards a Phenomenology of Person and World* (Dordrecht [Netherlands] ; Boston : Hingham, MA: M. Nijhoff; Distributors for the United States and Canada, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1985), 187.



Figure 34. Stone mill in the courtyard of an abandoned old house. The stone mill is used for grinding grains such as wheat, rice, or corn. In the past, this mill would have been a crucial part of daily life. The grain is fed into the centre, and as the stones rotate, it crushes the grain into flour or meal.

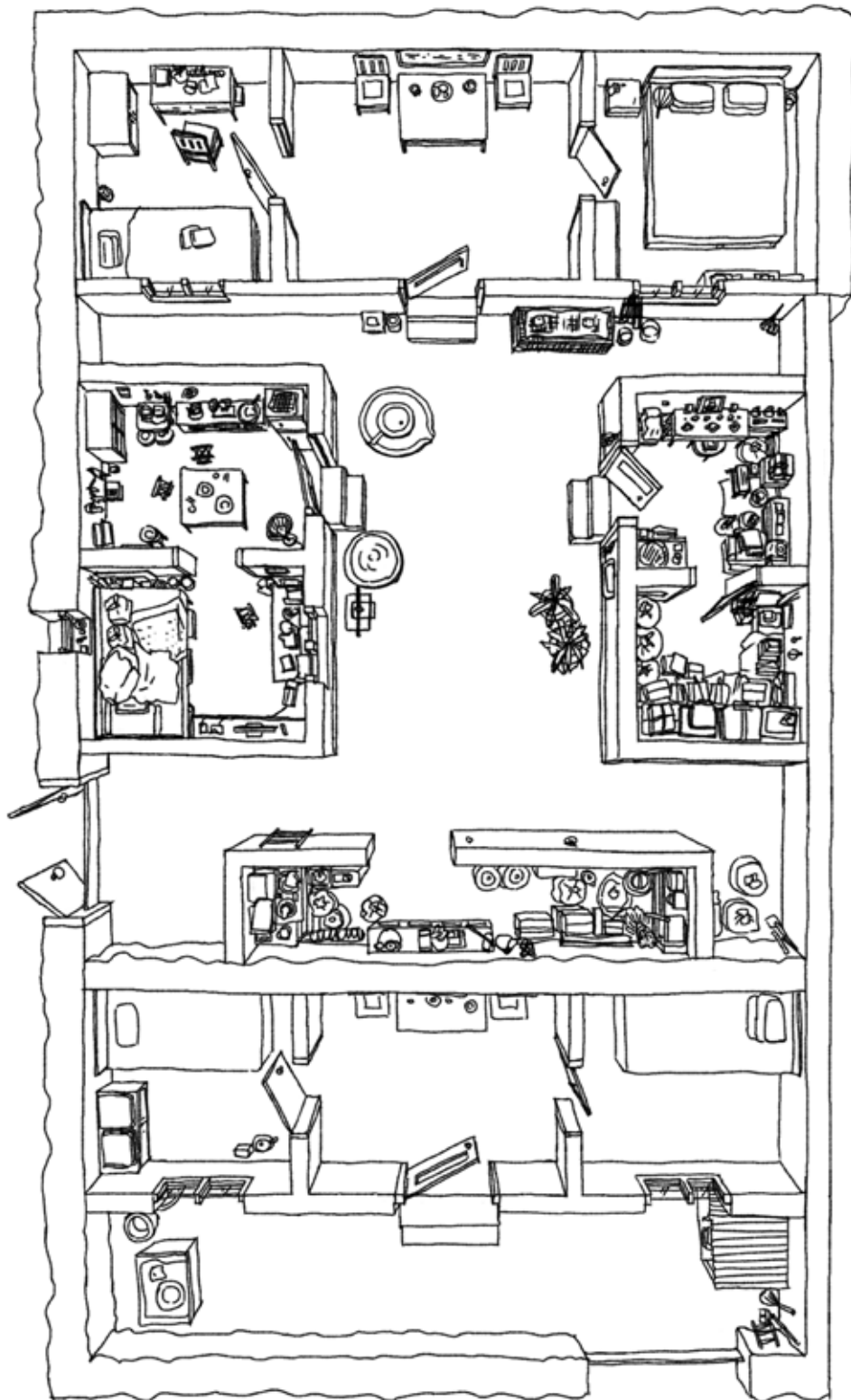


Figure 35. Plan of my grandmother's old house drawn from memory. Initially, only the northmost rooms existed. Over time, side bedrooms and a storeroom were added to the east and west around the courtyard. Additional rooms were later built to the south for my grandma's eldest son and his wife after their marriage. The couple moved into the new rooms once completed. Drawing by the author, 2024.

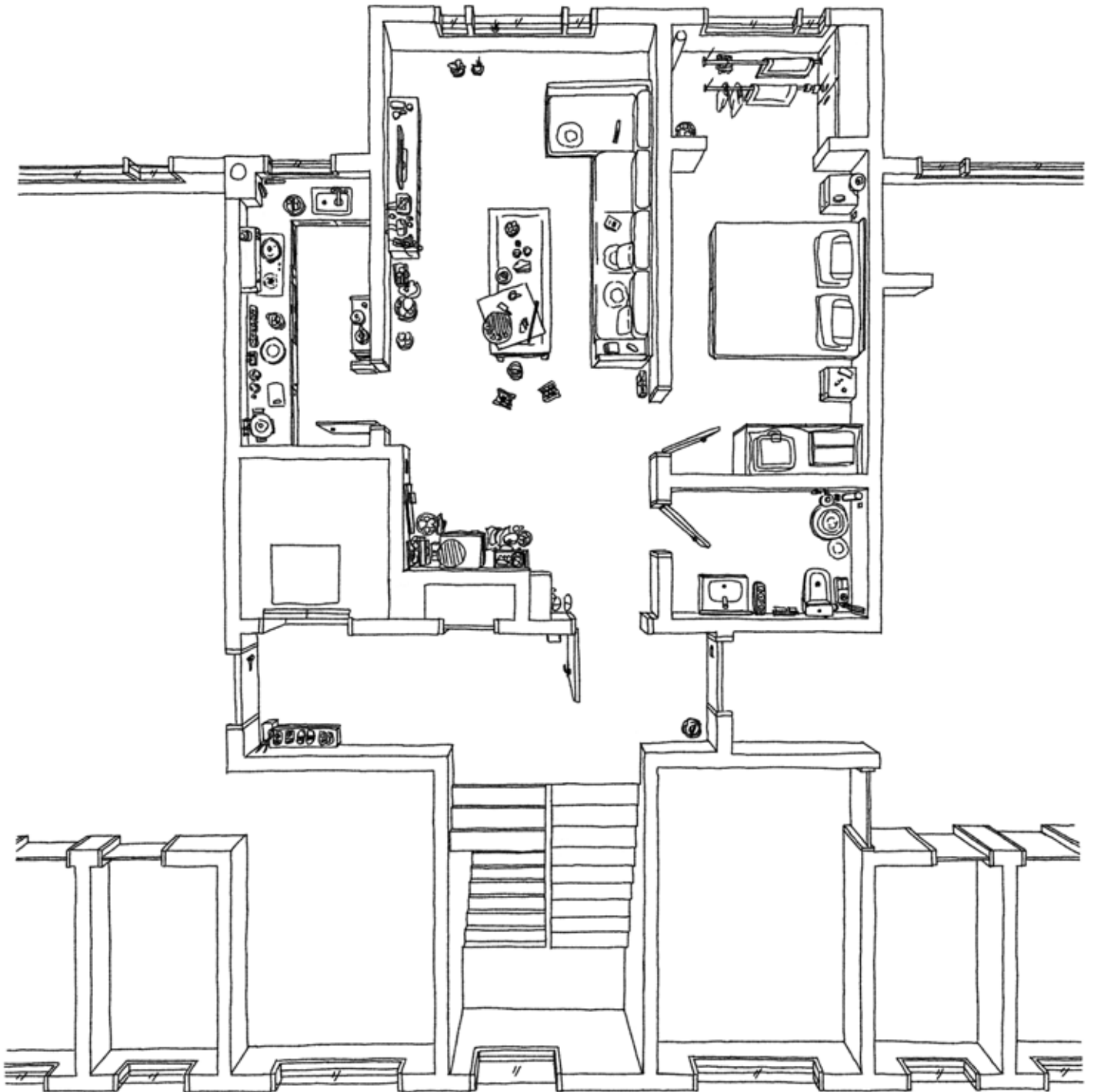


Figure 36. Plan of my grandmother's new house drawn from observation. In the new building, her unit is centrally located on the 8th floor, with the unit to the right belonging to her second son. This unit remains unfurnished, as his family resides in the city. The unit to the left is occupied by a couple who live in the city with their children. Drawing by the author, 2024.

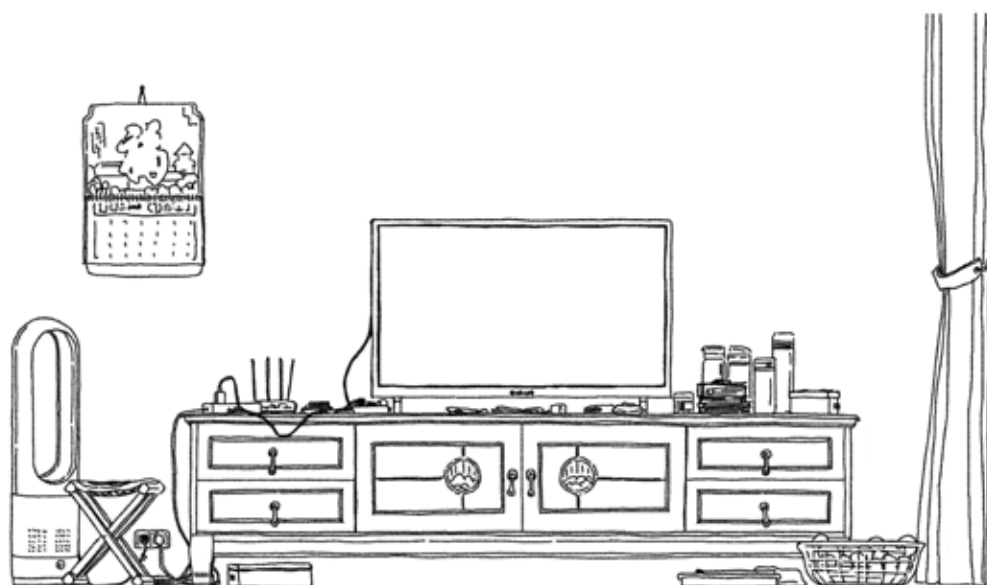
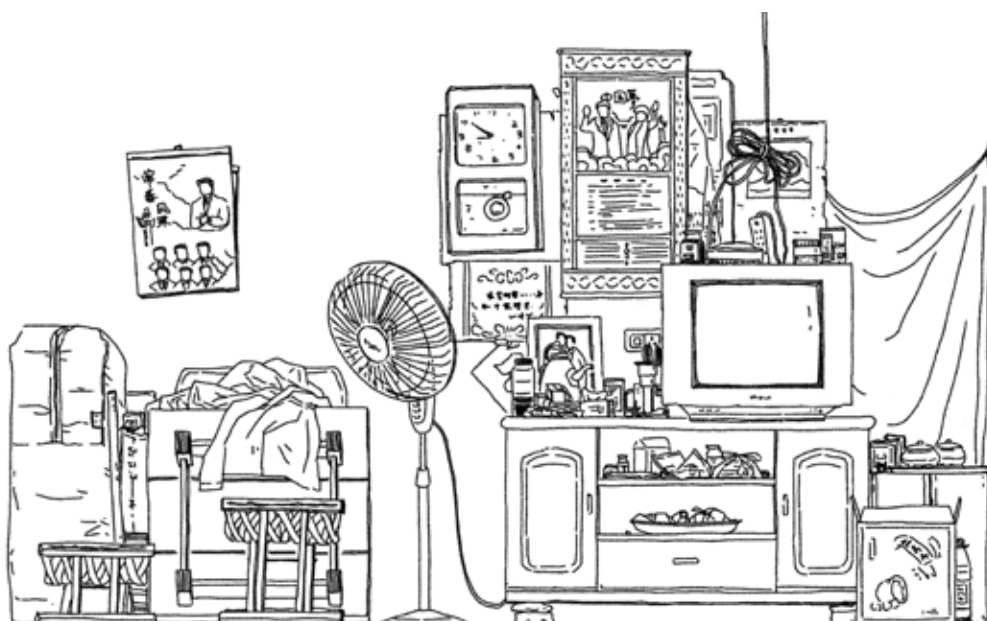


Figure 37. Elevational drawing of the living room in an old village house and in my grandmother's new house. Drawing by the author, 2024.



Figure 38. Elevational drawing of the kitchen in an old village house and in my grandmother's new house. Drawing by the author, 2024.



Figure 39. A scarecrow on the terract field. Photograph by the author, 2024.

Living on Land, Living with Land

The concept of the rural home as a total unit of living extends beyond the physical structure itself, encompassing the villager's work in the fields and their embodied relationship with nature. Unlike urban employment, where the exchange of labour for money creates a detached relationship, rural work cultivates a tangible connection between individuals and their land. To the villager, the land is a child that must be nurtured. The saying “种瓜得瓜, 种豆得豆” (you reap what you sow) captures this direct relationship: the more effort you invest in the soil, the greater the harvest you can expect.

Ecological knowledge in the countryside is inherently practical, derived from generations of direct interaction with the land. Villagers develop an adaptable understanding of natural cycles, such as anticipating weather patterns by observing animal behaviour or knowing when to plant by the feel of the soil. Personal familiarity leads to a deep understanding of the environment, as knowledge gained through direct experience is specific and practical. For instance, an old farmer observing ants moving their anthill knows instinctively to dig ditches in his fields because he knows rain will soon arrive. This ecological knowledge—rooted in continuous observation and adjustment—forms a profound relationship with the environment that goes beyond mere occupation of space. Engagement with the land is both practical and emotional, as farmers navigate the cycles of planting, tending, and harvesting according to favours of nature.

Not only do rural dwellers know their land well, but they also know their people well. The social fabric of rural communities is a form of capital that urban spaces often lack. Tight-knit networks serve as both emotional and practical support systems, creating a built-in safety net that mitigates the isolation so common in city life. In my grandma's village, neighbours regularly help each other with daily tasks, and it's typical to exchange fruits and vegetables. In the past,

"We all know each other very well. If you need my help, you have it. You don't have to ask twice."

when houses were built from scratch, it was a community effort. Each household would prepare a meal and invite villagers to assist. The men would handle the labour—laying tiles on the roof, for example—while the women mixed cement and helped with lighter tasks. My grandma's home was built through these communal efforts. For weddings and funerals, especially within families, neighbours would come together to set up and serve food. Grandma spoke with admiration of a village elder who would prepare entire meals for such events, lending his culinary skill as a form of community service.

Chinese social anthropologist Fei Xiaotong captures this intimacy in *From the Soil*, explaining, "Strangers cannot understand what a baby says, but a mother...understands what the baby wants even though the baby does not use words."¹⁶ Fei argues that in a community bound by familiarity, there's a freedom unlike that governed by laws—one where social norms flow from the heart and mind (xin), based on long-standing customs rather than external rules. As villagers often say, "We all know each other very well. If you need my help, you have it. You don't have to ask twice."¹⁷

These community networks foster resilience. When needed, villagers can turn to each other and rely on traditions of cooperation and mutual aid. In today's individualistic, stressed urban world, this social capital offers a powerful model of interdependence that modern cities, with their fragmented lifestyles, could greatly benefit from.

16 Xiaotong Fei, *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society*; Translation of Fei Xiaotong's *Xiangtu Zhongguo* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1992), 43.

17 Ibid., 42.



Figure 40. My family picking peaches from the orchard. There aren't many trees and the fruits and vegetables grown are kept for personal consumption, either for our own family or shared with friends. Photograph by the author, 2024.

Figure 41. (next three spreads) Snapshots of Shuiyu's landscape. Photograph by the author, 2024.







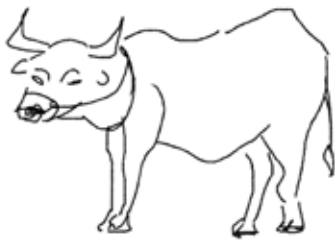




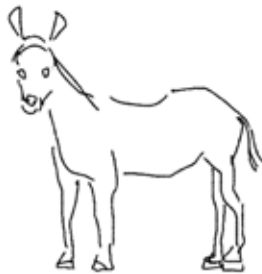


GRANDMA'S OPINIONS ON FARM ANIMALS

category 1: labour force



plough fields
slow and steady. however eats
a lot and hence troublesome to keep.



transport of farm goods
a trustworthy work partner.

category 2: food source



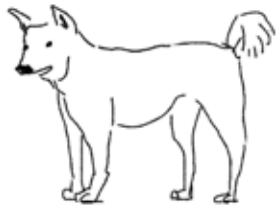
not picky with food.
makes good food, too.



chicken with good habits:
know where to lay eggs. 

chicken with bad habits:
lay eggs on a whim. 

category 3: gatekeeper



a loyal friend.



honks whenever it sees someone.
not to be messed with.

category 4: pet



despised by grandma
as it once peed in rice and
cover it up. 



Figure 42. Grandma's opinions on farm animals. Drawing by the author, 2024.

HOW TO: MAKE WHEAT EDIBLE

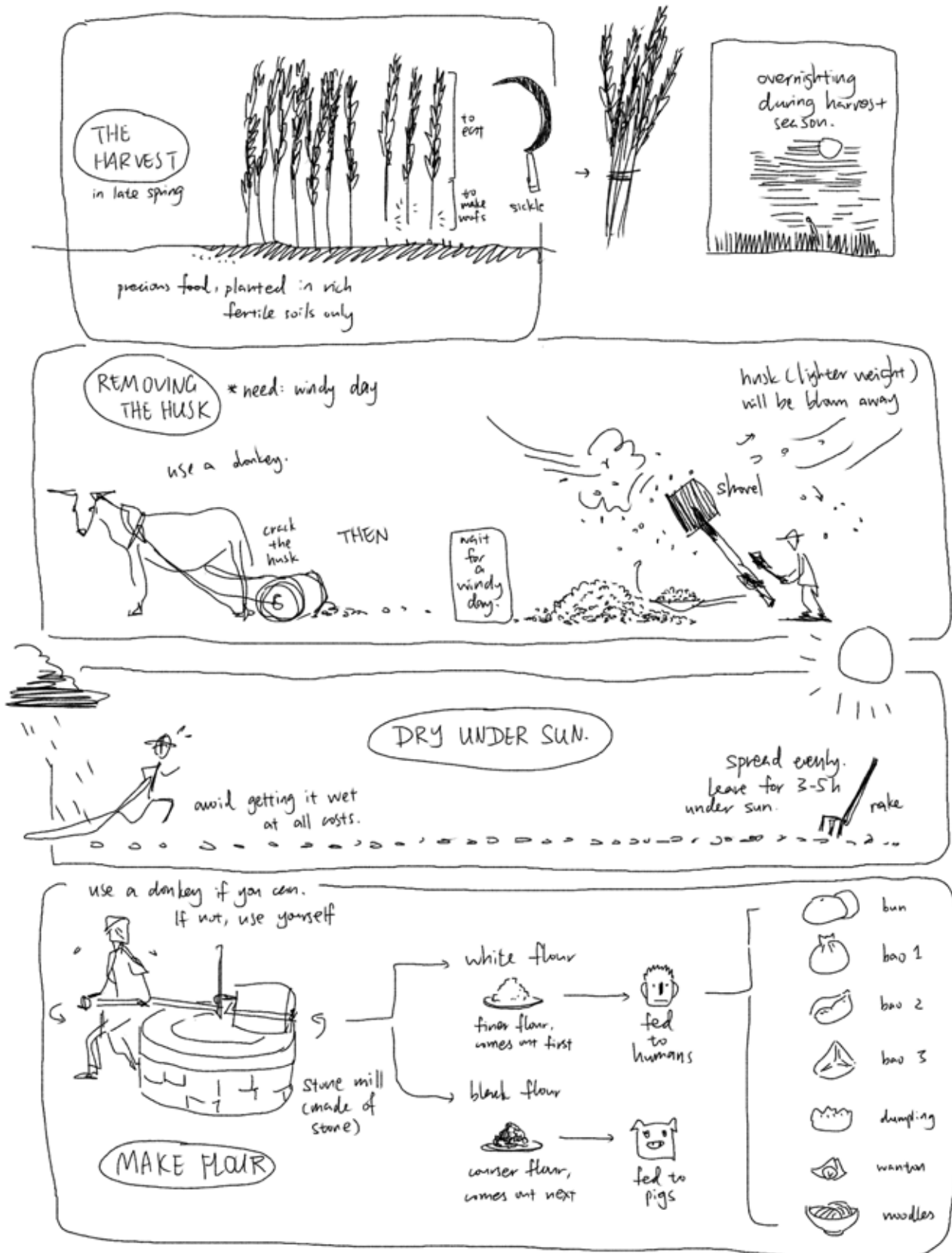


Figure 43. A guide to making wheat edible, based on my grandma's teachings. Drawing by the author, 2024.

The Mapless Village

Drawing Exposition in
fulfilment of AR5955F
Drawing as Research

The Mapless Village is a collage series explore Shuiyu Village's transformation, focusing on the contrast between traditional village life and modern vertical developments. Divided into four chapters, they critique the gap between top-down, map-based views of space and the villagers' lived experiences.

The collages draw on the mapping methods of James Corner and Ozayr Saloojee, challenging traditional maps that depict the land as neutral and controllable. Instead, they focus on the lived experience of the villagers, highlighting how they navigate through familiar landmarks deeply embedded in their memory. These landmarks contrast with the new high-rise, which imposes a repetitive, unfamiliar order on the landscape.

This shift reveals a clash between a memory-based, communal way of orienting oneself and a modern architectural approach that threatens to erase local identity. Through fragmented imagery, the collages question the authority of maps as tools of control and propose a new form of mapping that honours the villagers' personal relationship with their environment, bridging the past and the present.

1. Evolution of the House

This chapter charts the evolution from adobe and stone to brick and concrete in Shuiyu's homes alongside evolving boundaries of private and public life. The earlier village homes had gates serving as transitional zones, providing a porous boundary between inside and out. By contrast, the high-rise doors are uniform, erasing the intermediary spaces that embodied personal identity and a sense of place - Grandma no longer visits her friends in the new apartment because she feels hesitant to knock on doors.. This chapter demonstrates the impacts of construction typologies on lived

spaces and the significance of boundaries in defining personal and communal spheres.

2. Navigating Verticality

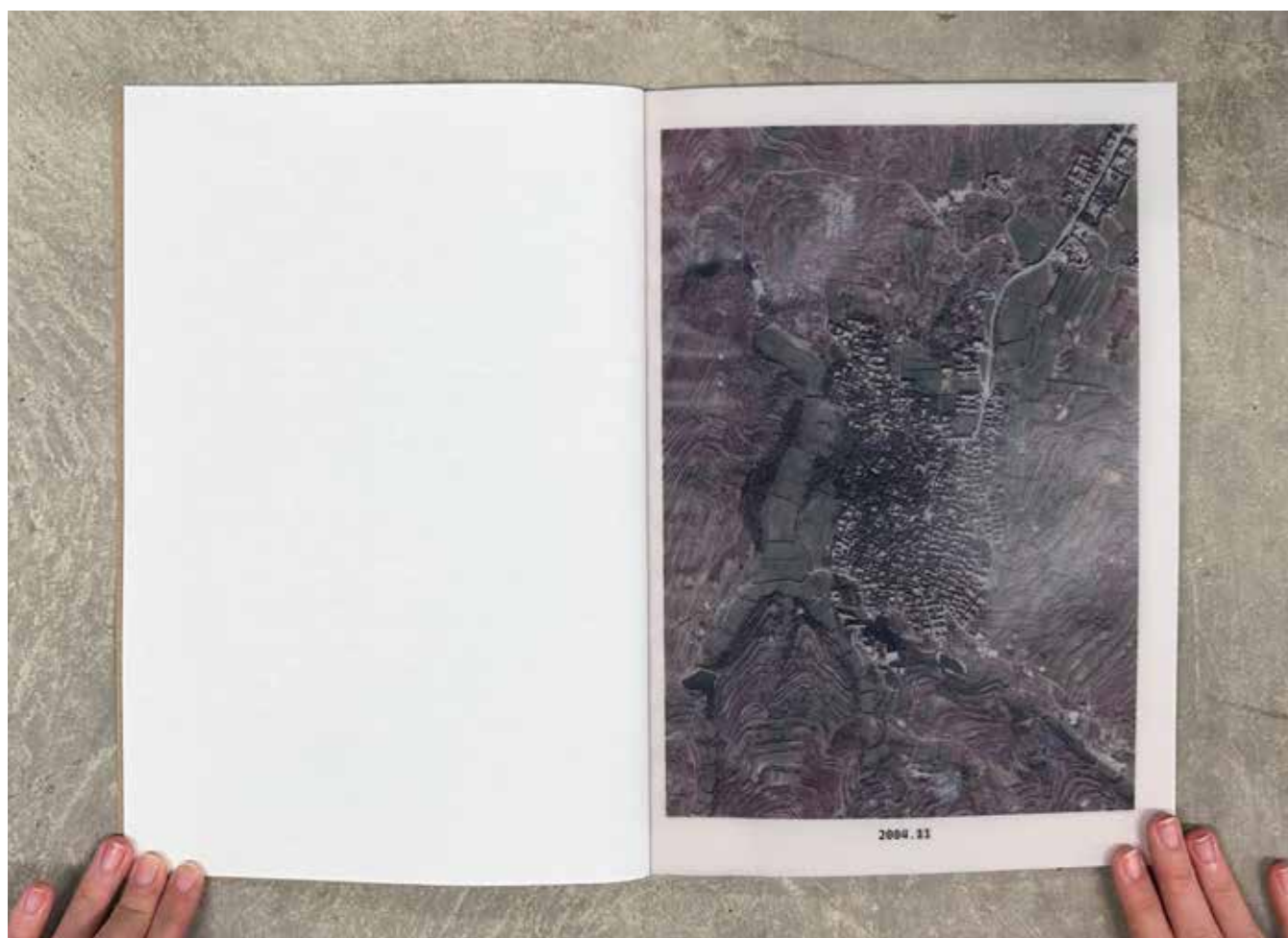
This chapter examines how vertical structures alter the village's connection to its landscape, reshaping it from an immersive environment to a consumable view. Satellite images of demolition show a plan imposed from above, contrasting with the organic wayfinding based on memory and familiar sights.

3. Scraps of Living

This chapter explores absence in village life. Images of decaying homes, an abandoned locust tree that once marked the village centre, and traces of advertisements for agricultural needs on walls capture the ongoing, practical demands of daily village life alongside historical and social residues. The skyline collage reveals a break in continuity, as the high-rise disrupts the village silhouette.

4. Fragments of Land

The final chapter presents the scattered landmarks that villagers use for orientation. Villagers do not rely on formal maps. Instead, they navigate with names that hold meaning—like “Under the Pine Tree” and “The Stage.” These mental maps contrast with imposed plans that ignore local knowledge. The collage ends with a path to a neighbouring market, a symbol of community and exchange that transcends the limits of Shuiyu.





2004.11



2013.05



2013.03



2017.05



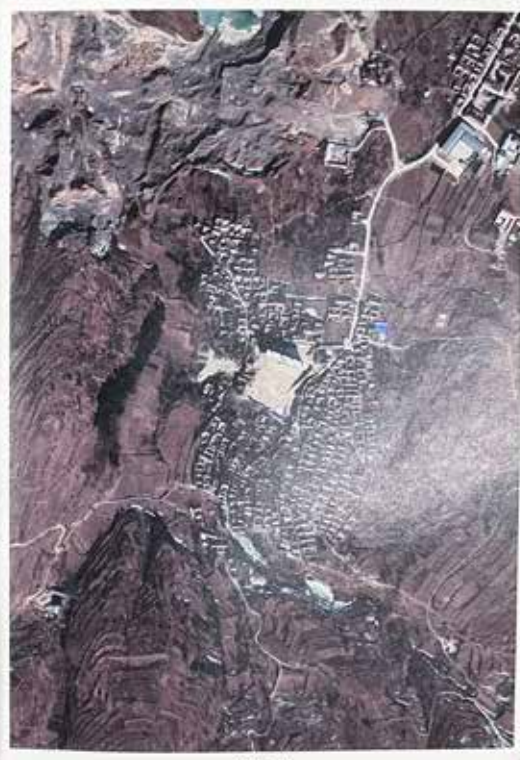
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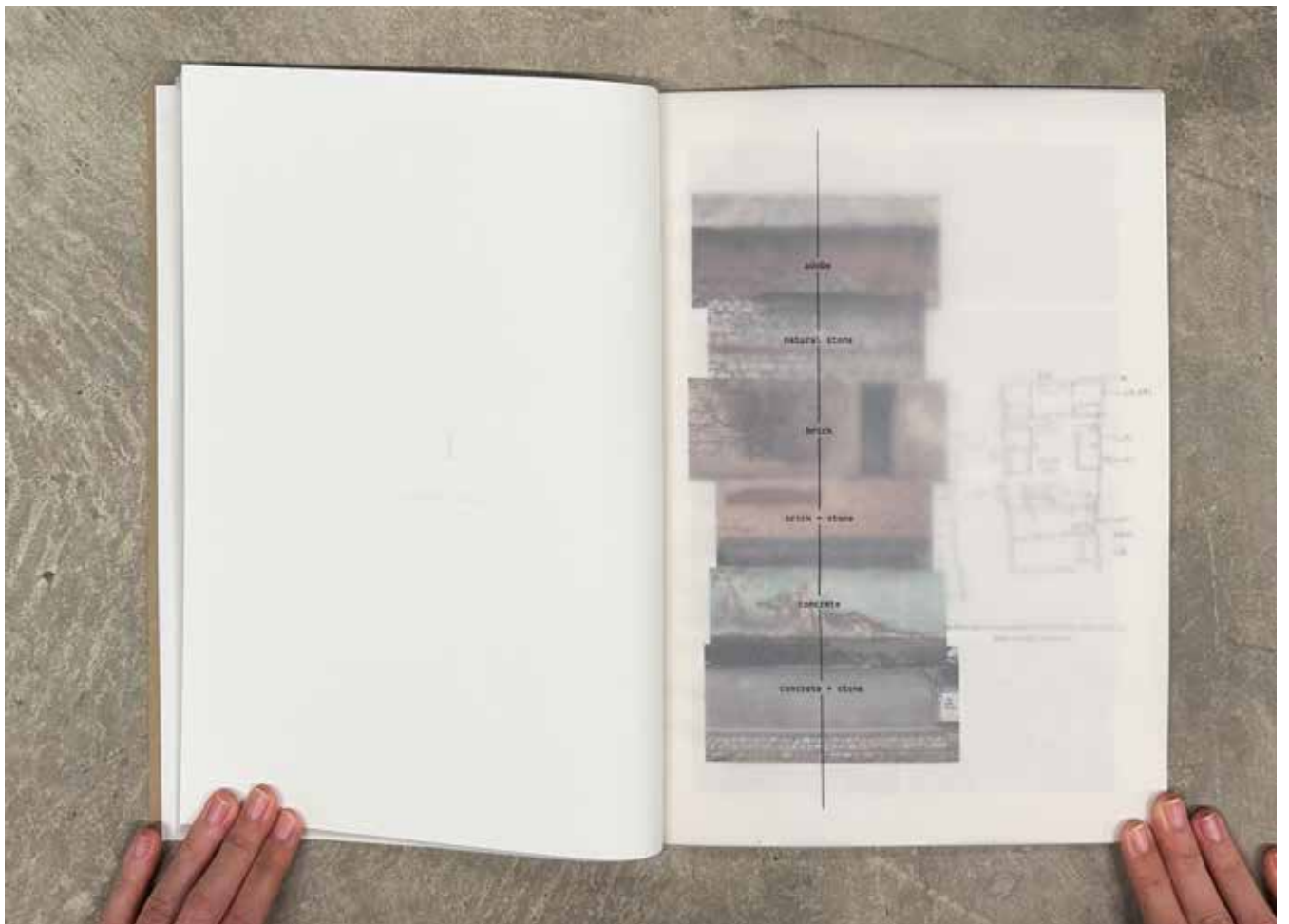
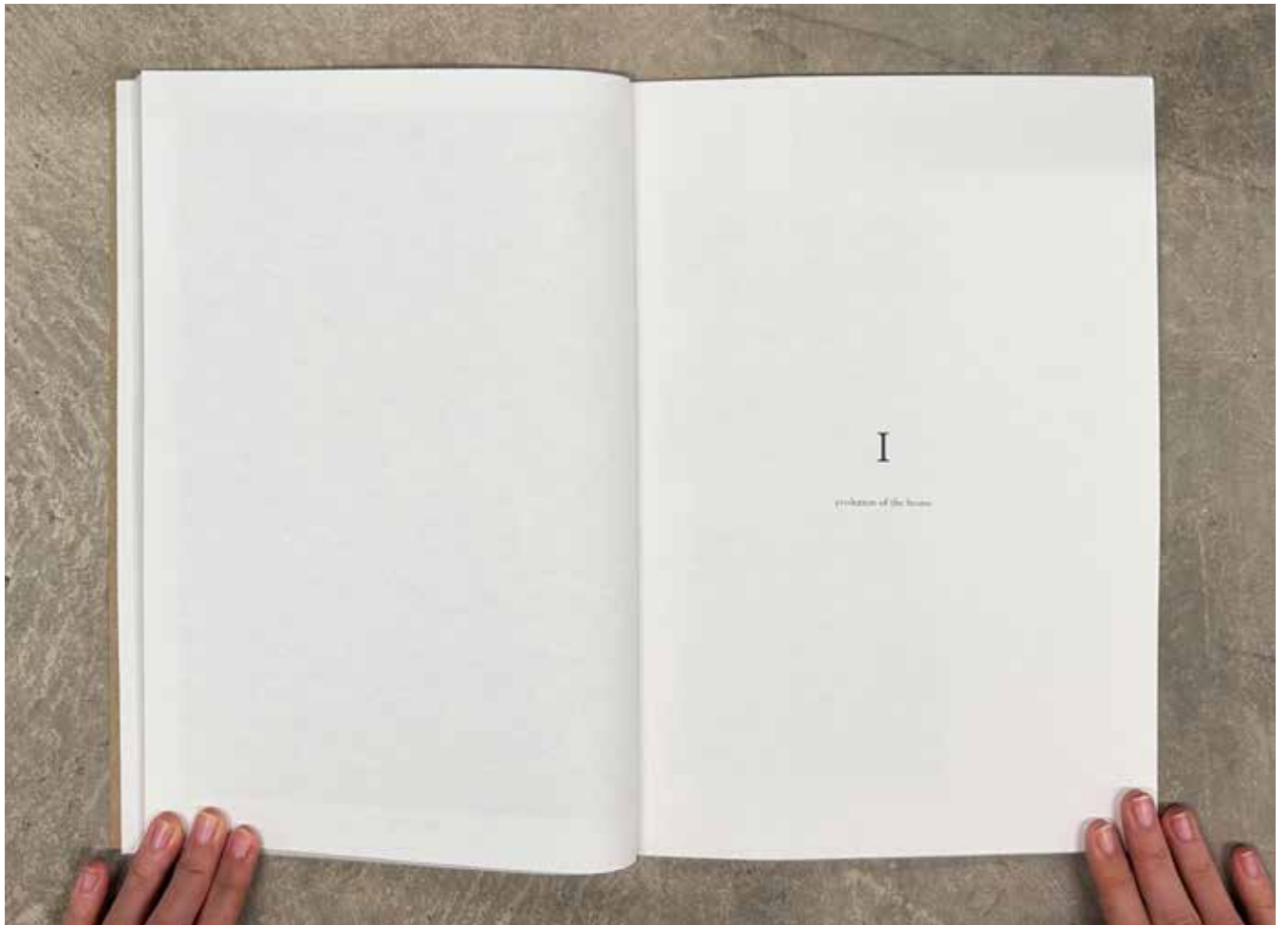
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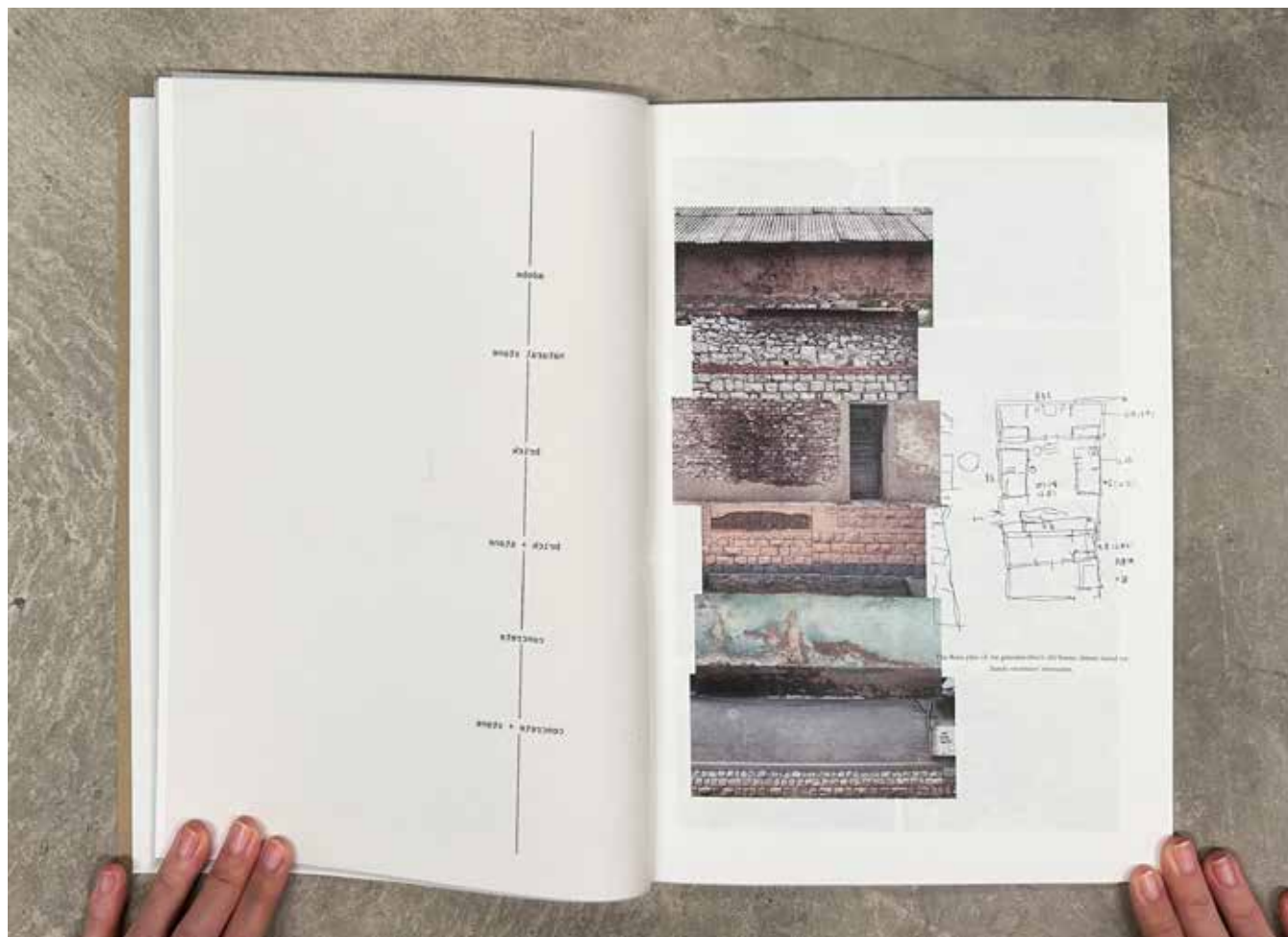


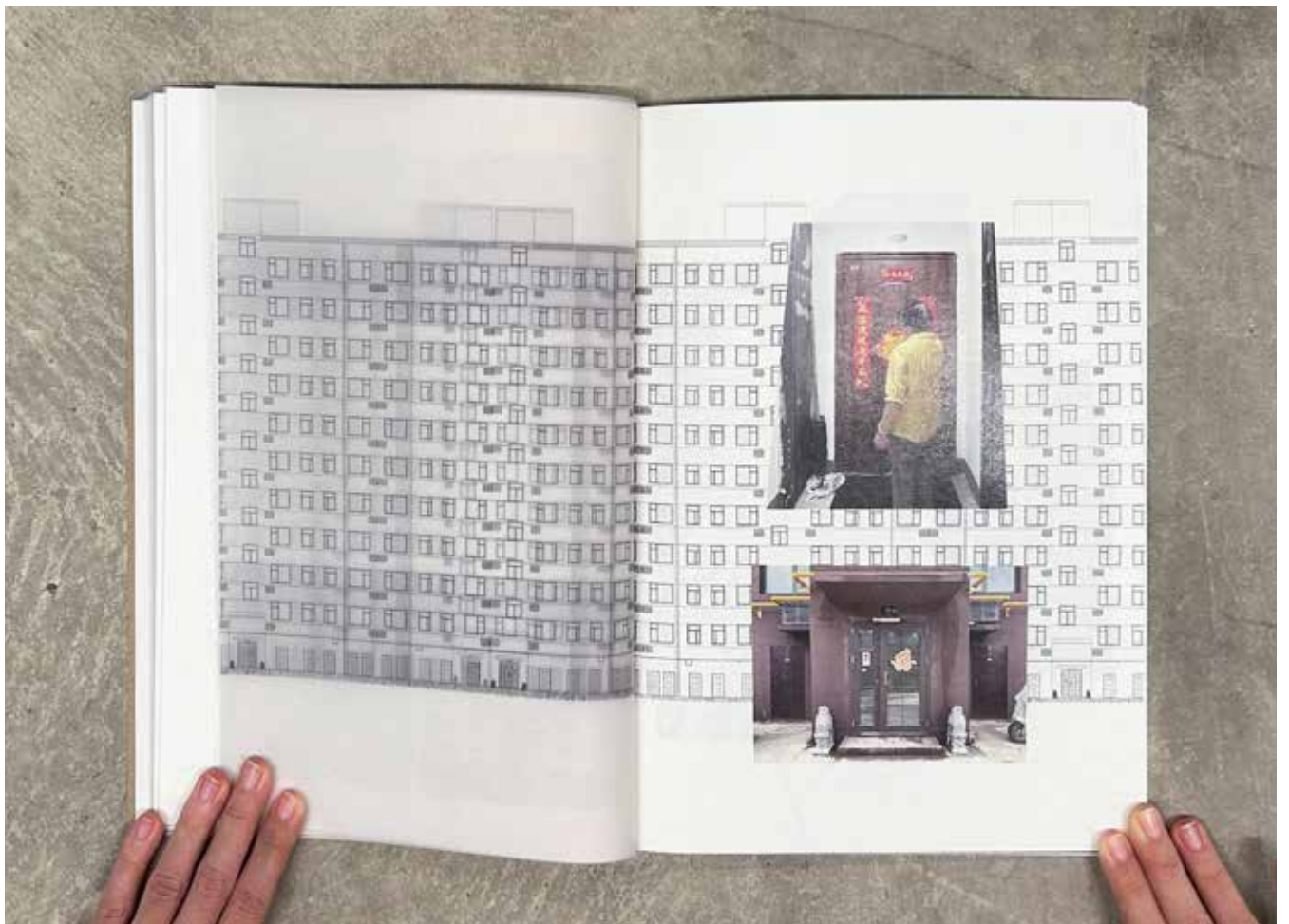
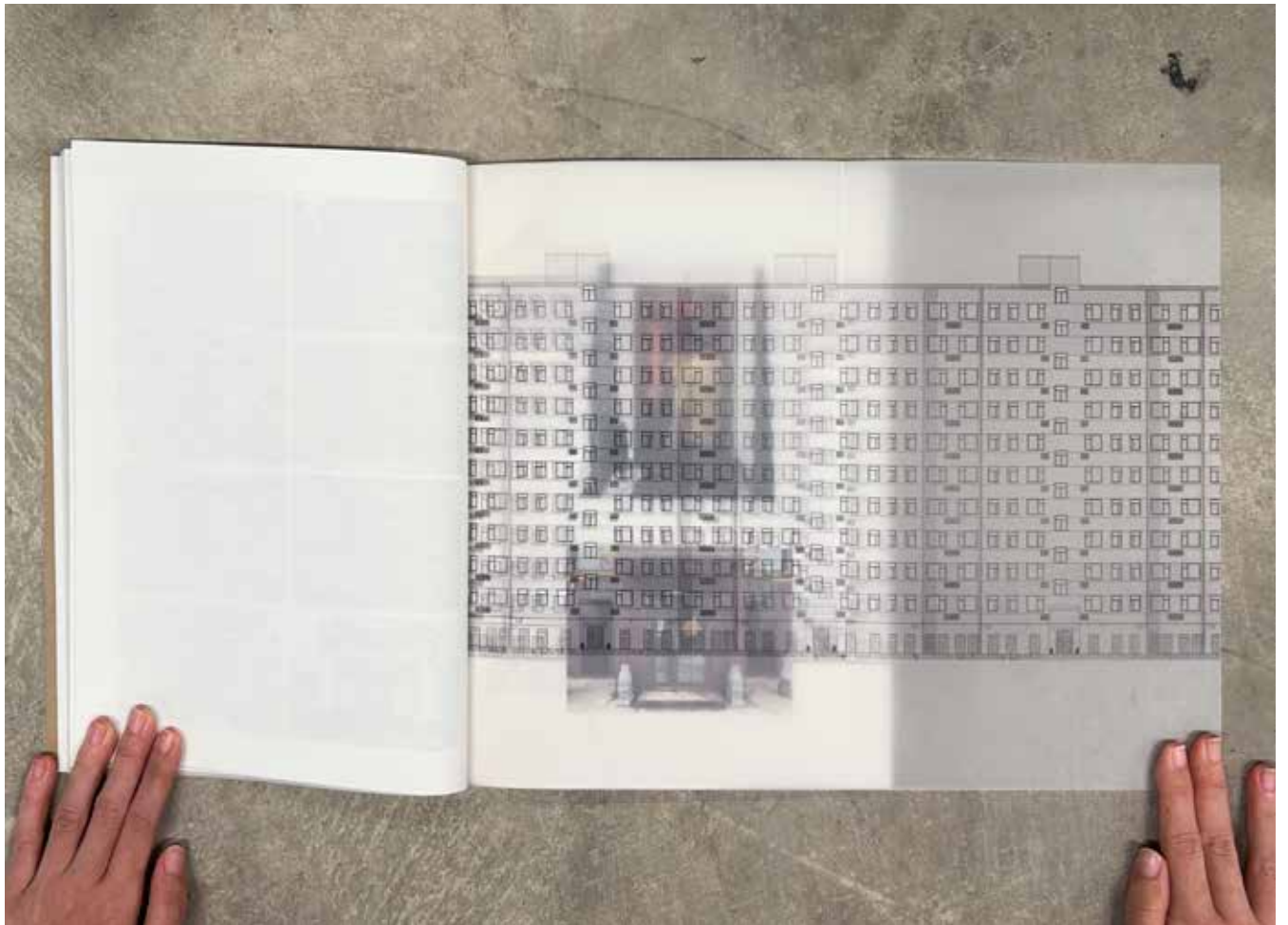
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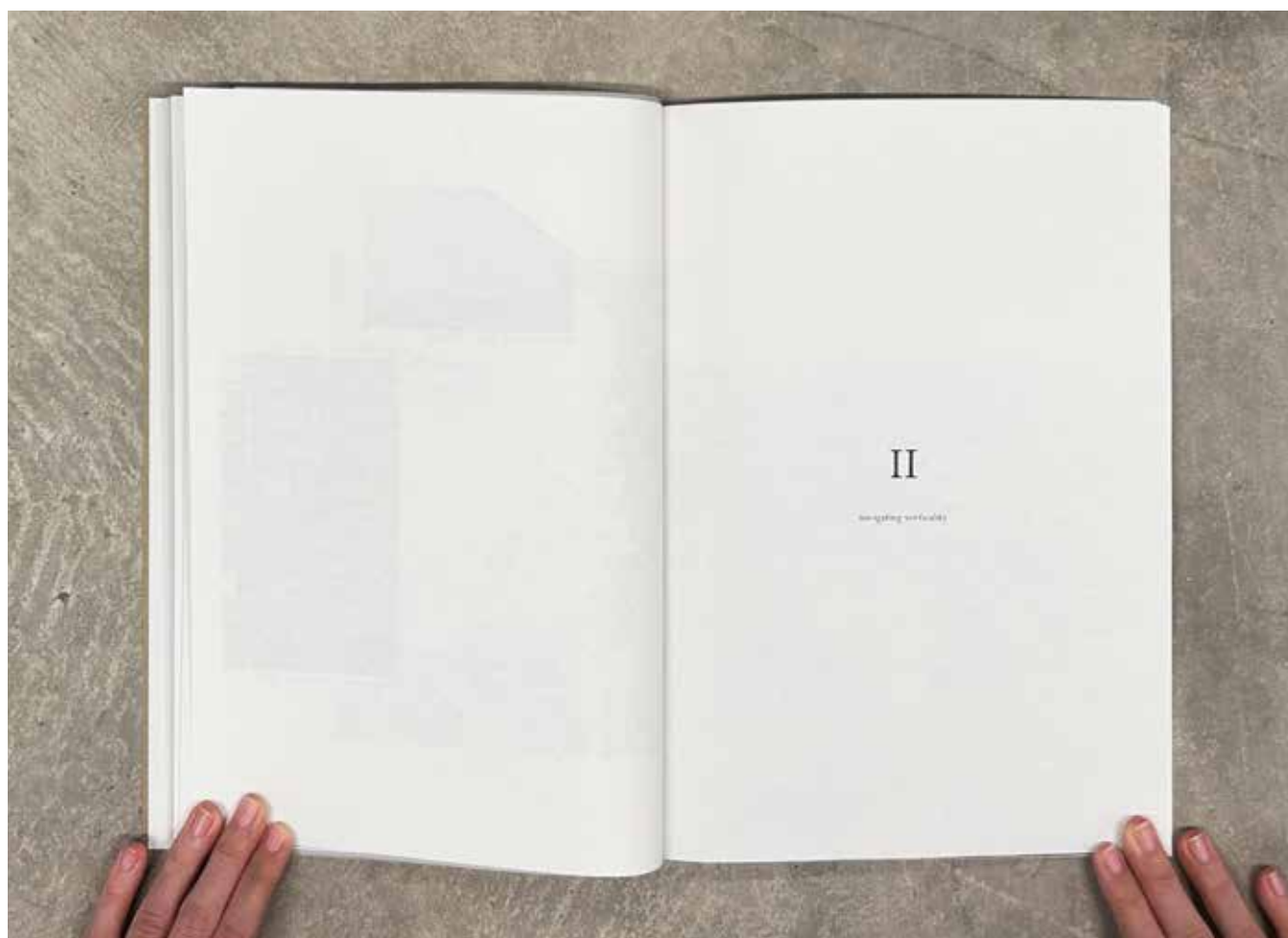


2022.02

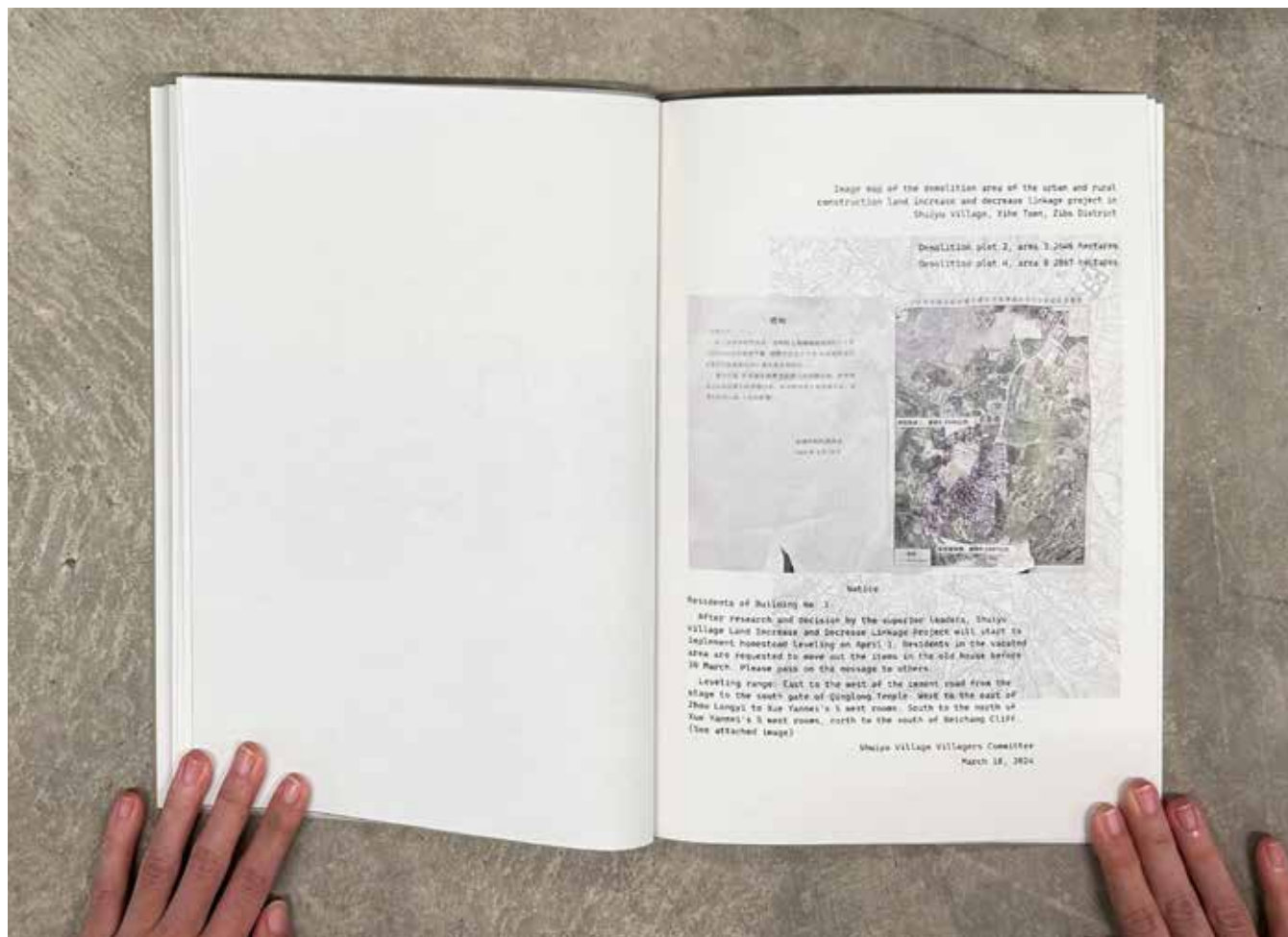
















Locust (Level 1 Protection)
 Serial Number: 37030300011
 Family: Leguminosae, Sophora
 Scientific name: *Sophora japonica*
 Age: approx. 500 years



Monumental
 Plaque for
 Sophora
 japonica
 (K26)

Old gathering spot, present ruins



Surgery for epilepsy
 100 meters west of Qingyunshan Road,
 Anqiu
 0536-4381438



Strictly crack down on illegal activities
 that harm the ecological environment of
 mines



Dog Collection 1380612596



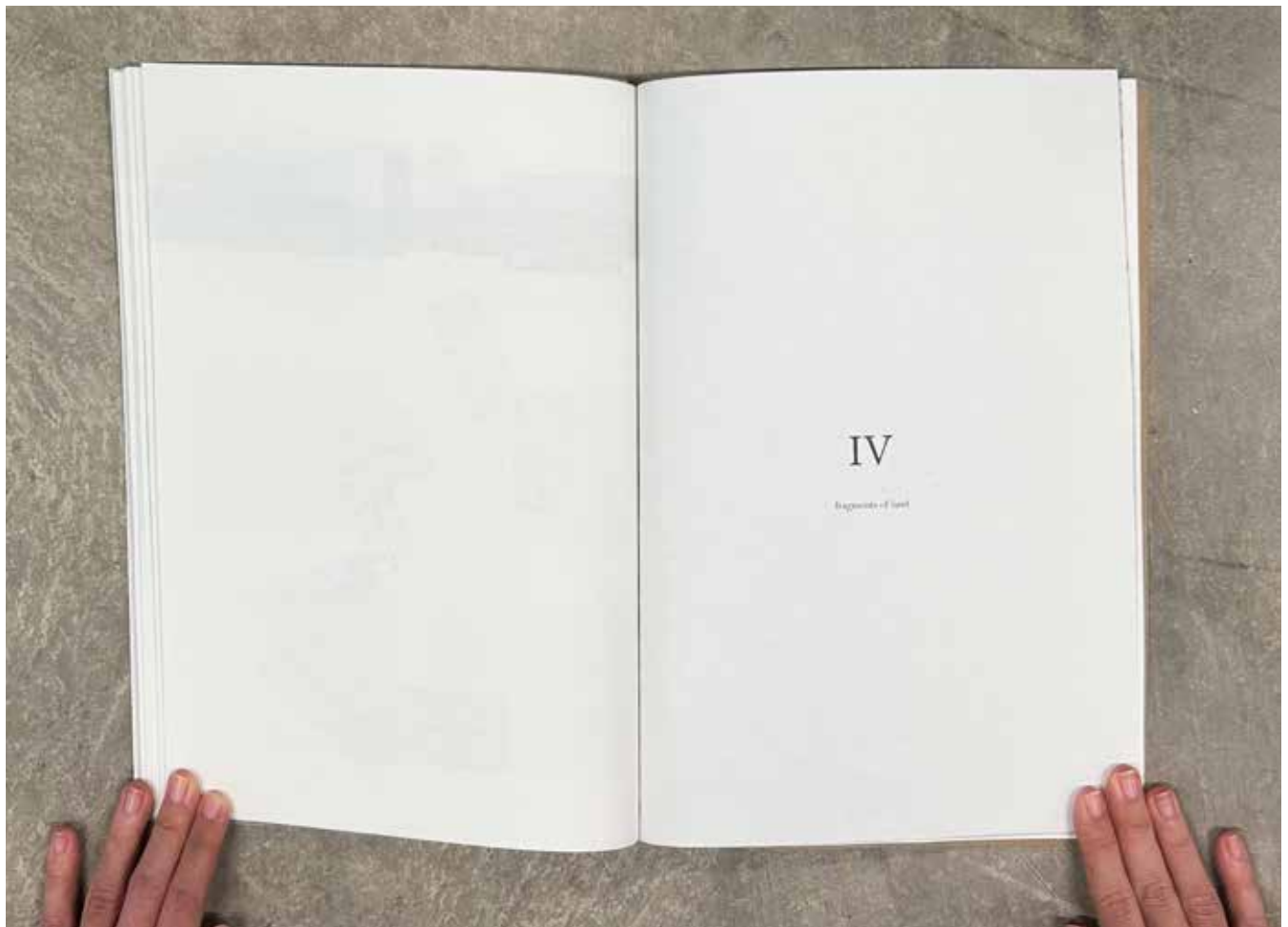
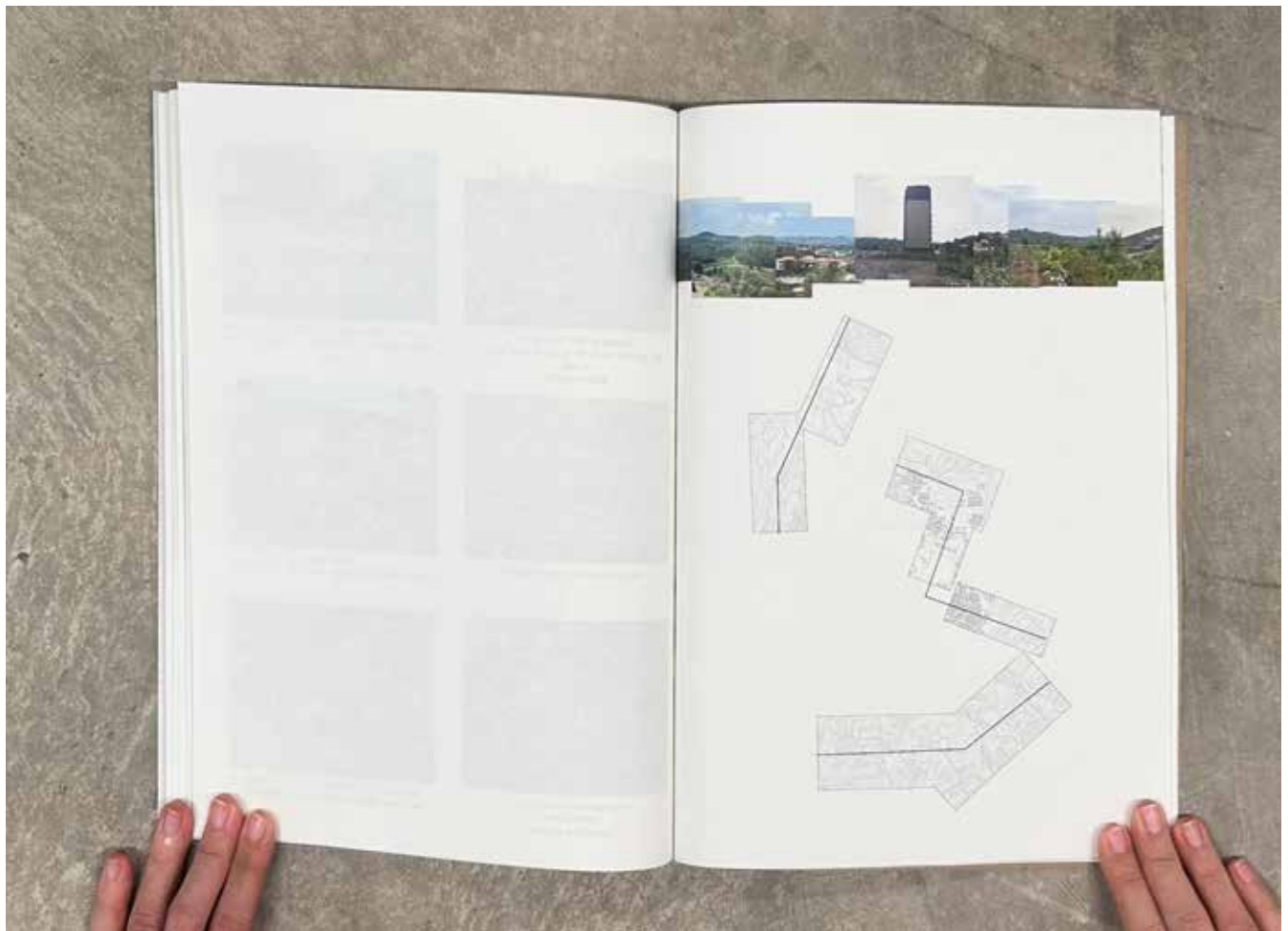
1380132018
 Broken flour Exchange and Corn Collection

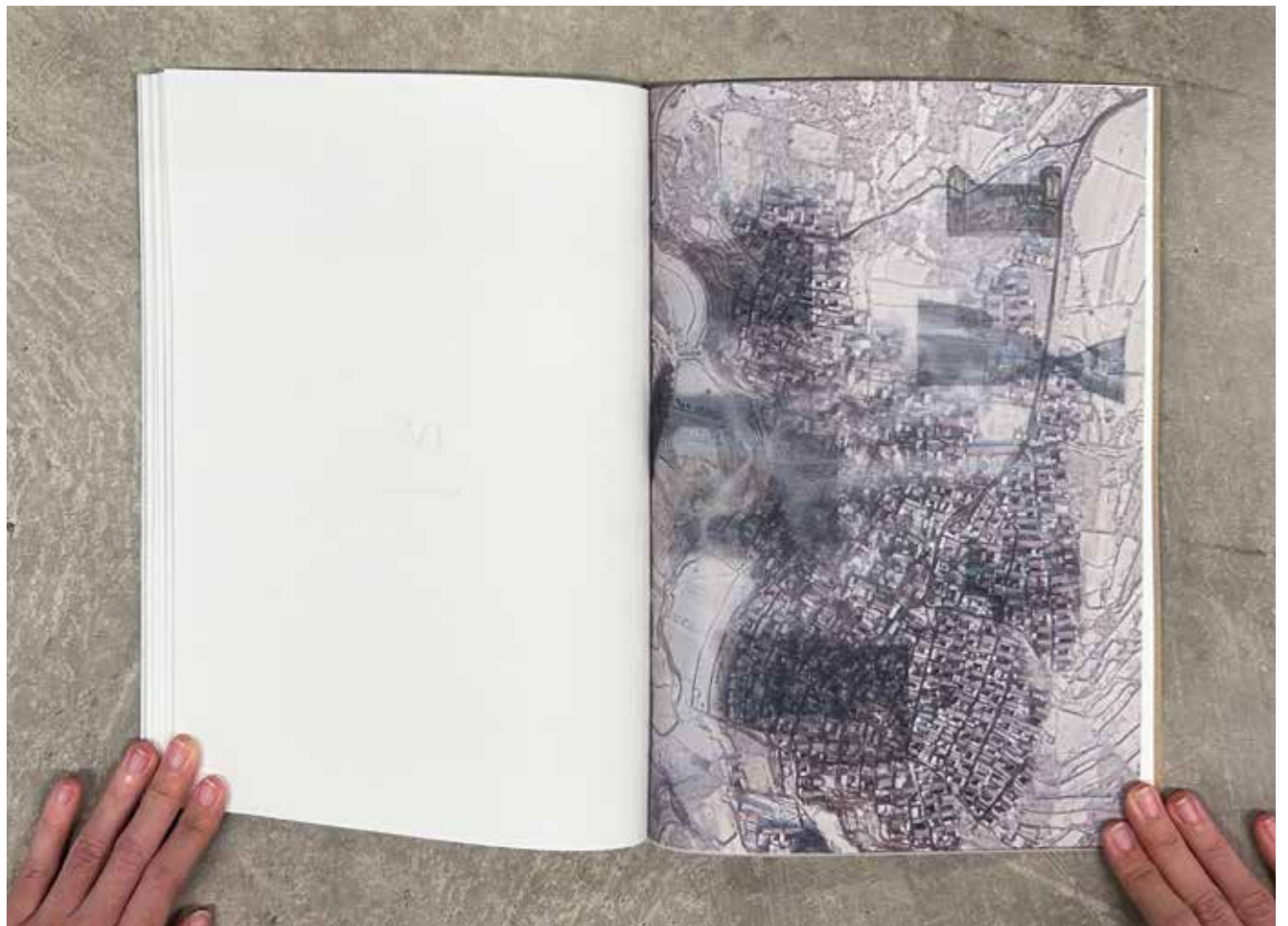


Door-to-door threshing
 1379322979
 Satellite antenna

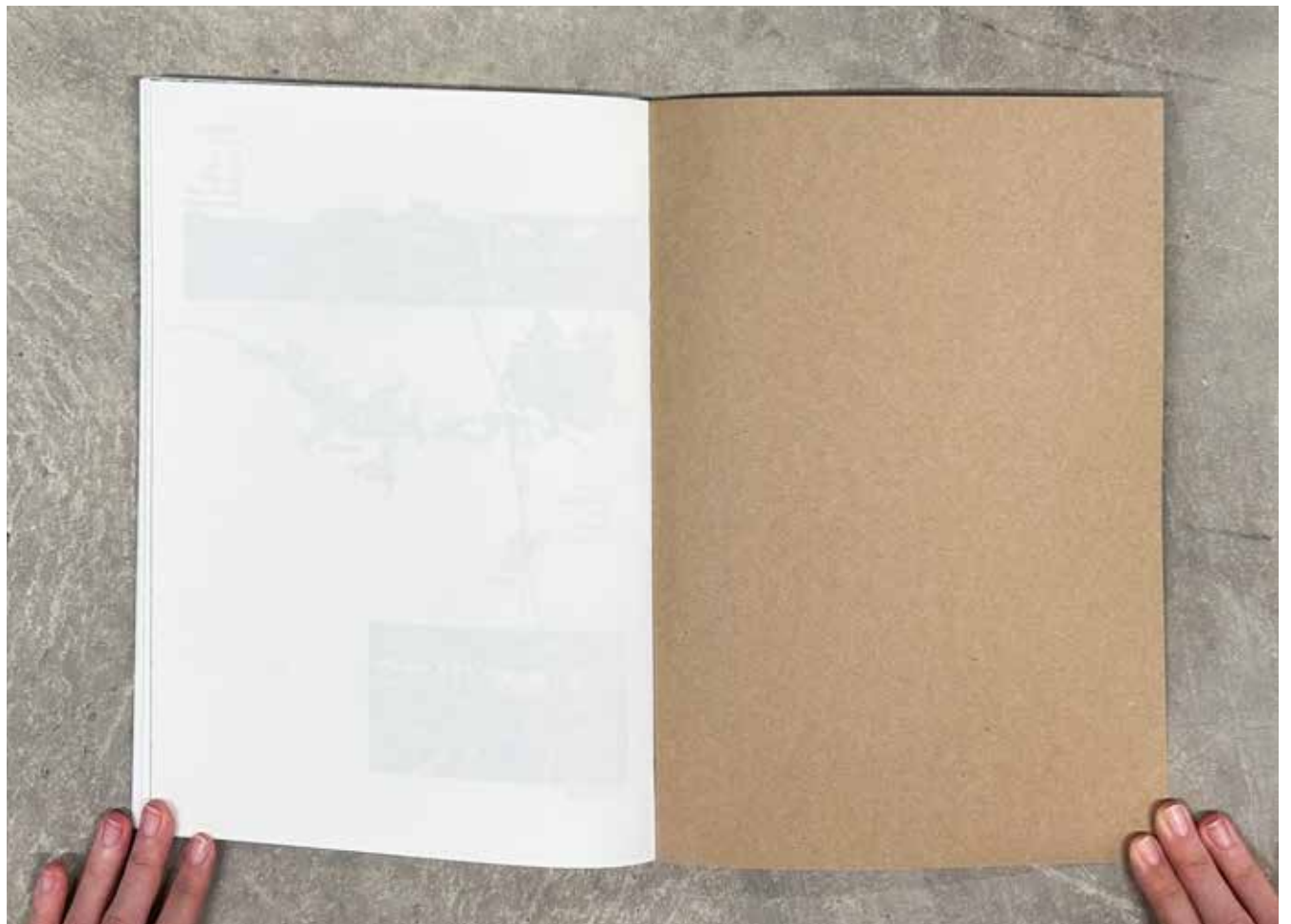


VITILIGO Prescribe melanin in 3 weeks
 Weifang Junyi Hospital 0536 8838219





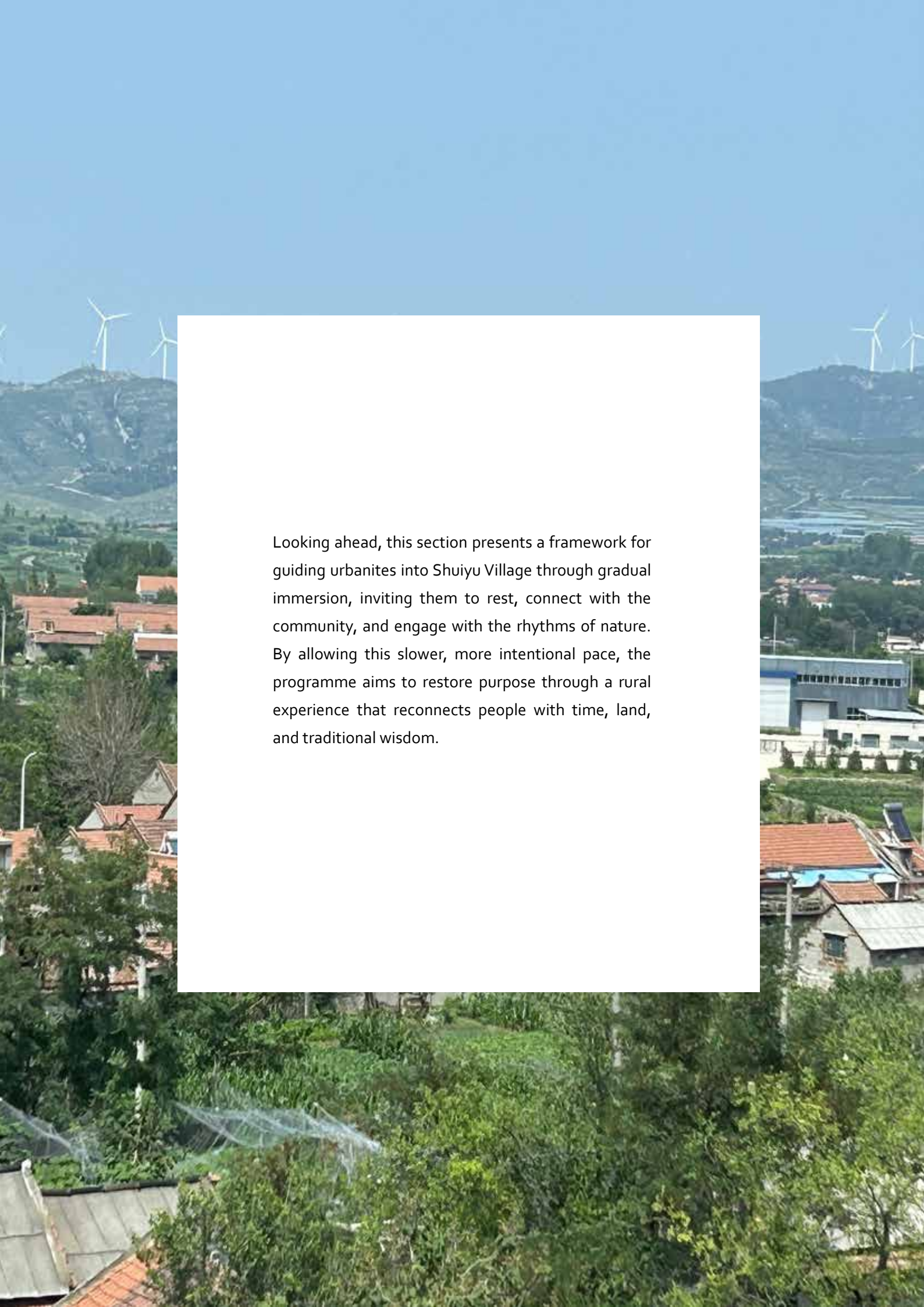




3 A New Agenda for the Countryside



Figure 44. View of Shuiyu from Block 1. Photograph by the author, 2024.



Looking ahead, this section presents a framework for guiding urbanites into Shuiyu Village through gradual immersion, inviting them to rest, connect with the community, and engage with the rhythms of nature. By allowing this slower, more intentional pace, the programme aims to restore purpose through a rural experience that reconnects people with time, land, and traditional wisdom.

Reclaiming Rural Knowledge

Throughout my research, I have been troubled by how architectural knowledge fails to benefit those who need it most. The disconnect between academic theory and the lived realities of rural residents produces structures that overlook the daily challenges these communities face—an issue clearly illustrated in Shuiyu. This raises an important question: what can an architecture education offer to a community comfortable in their struggles, empowering them beyond mere aesthetic or functional considerations?

I hope to find an answer in what modern, comfortable rural dwellings should look like while retaining the values that are important to their residents. Rural life is not the idyllic image that exist in the public mind, nor are they passive receivers of top-down interventions. They are a bunch of gritty, grimy, shrewd, warm-hearted, spirited, and industrious people thriving in their own worlds. But the mere existence of these worlds is not enough to place them on the agenda for preservation; they must offer tangible value. In my earlier analysis, I defined such value not in monetary terms, but in ties to the soil and its people.

To this end, I propose to promote this alternative value to weary urbanites, tapping into the bucolic dream celebrated by countless social media influencers to draw them into the countryside for a much-needed retreat. As urban life becomes increasingly driven by capitalism and disconnection, movements like the “lie-flat” phenomenon reflect a growing desire for balance and a return to nature. This proposal capitalises on that trend, positioning the countryside as a space for healing and a vital resource in modern life.

Here, architectural designs should respond to natural rhythms—such as farming cycles and animal care routines—encouraging a way of living that allows urbanites to embrace slower, more intentional, and nature-connected lives. By creating structures and schedules that harmonise with the patterns of sunlight, seasons, and agricultural practices, architecture can free individuals from the constraints

of a 24/7 productivity cycle, enabling them to forge a different relationship with time and space.

Ultimately, as urbanites gradually come to understand the realities of rural life, I hope they will begin to see it not merely as a temporary retreat but as a legitimate alternative lifestyle. My long-term aim is to challenge the perception that rural life is somehow inferior to urban living, highlighting the merits of both realities as equally valuable. This proposal also seeks to empower local villagers, transforming their roles from marginalised figures to respected custodians of traditional knowledge and skills.

This section introduces a framework for guiding urbanites into the rhythms of Shuiyu Village through a gradual immersion programme which emphasises rest, community engagement, and co-authorship with nature, helping urbanites rediscover purpose in a rural setting.

The Urbanite Rehabilitation Programme

Stage 1: Let's escape to the countryside

Weary urbanites, exhausted from the relentless grind of city life, seek refuge in the countryside. Many arrive hoping to simply “lie flat,” desperate for a break from the frantic pace that has consumed them. Others, clinging to their city jobs, step into Shuiyu Village expecting to replicate their work habits amidst rolling hills and fresh air. Equipped with laptops, high-speed internet, and digital communication tools, they try to maintain a connection to the bustling lives they seek to leave behind.

- Key events: The rise of rural lifestyle influencers on platforms like TikTok, painting an idyllic picture of countryside living

Stage 2: Embracing novelty

Upon arrival, urbanites find themselves in a honeymoon phase, captivated by the charm and simplicity of village life. They are welcomed with warmth, and the slower pace feels like a breath of fresh air. Engaging in local activities—harvesting crops, visiting village markets, and joining communal gatherings—they begin to forge connections with their new neighbours, immersing themselves in the joys of rural living.

- Key events: Daily walks up the village mountain, where they eat berries off roadside trees

Stage 3: Understanding the land and its people

As the days turn into weeks, urbanites start to realise that life in the countryside encompasses more than a retreat from work. They cultivate small gardens, collect rainwater for their plants and even raising chickens and ducks—though most find it too difficult to eat them, choosing instead to keep them for their eggs and companionship. They patch roofs and gather firewood, even while knowing they can rely on centralised heating as a fallback. Through these experiences, they learn to respect the hard work and knowledge that underpin food production, craftsmanship, and land management.

Yet, settling into village life presents challenges. They encounter social hierarchies and the economy of favours that define the community, leading to moments of conflict and confusion. Village life is complex and demands significant emotional investment.

- Key events: An all-night harvest before a storm, where the entire village comes together.

Stage 4: Redefining Productivity and Identity

With time, urbanites begin to reconcile their experiences with the realities of village life. They participate in workshops and collaborative projects that fosters an exchange of skills and knowledge. Through storytelling and shared activities, they begin to understand the values of hard work, community, and environmental stewardship.

The initial focus on remote city work gradually fades as urbanites redefine their sense of purpose and productivity. Farming has taught them to shift the focus from individual autonomy to working with the environment—co-creating with rain, soil, and community. Urbanites have transformed from outsiders seeking escape into peripheral members of the community, contributing to local practice and living.

- Key events: helping a village grandma to pay her phone bills and installing ad blockers for all villagers plagued by pop up ads

Stage 5: A New Understanding—Life and Self

In the end, these former urbanites—if that's even the right word anymore—come to see both city and country life with new eyes. They find that self-sustenance is possible, free from the chains of currency, rooted in a relationship with the land that rewards their care and patience. They may go back to the city, or they may stay, but either choice is fine. With the countryside now a true second home, they're no longer bound to one way of life. They have the rare gift of choosing the life they truly want.

- Scheduling the travel between city home and rural home

Looking Ahead

As I conclude this interim report, several considerations remain. The aim is to create a future where urbanites can transition smoothly between city and countryside, drawing inspiration from rural living to influence urban lifestyles. This vision requires a new housing typology that functions effectively in both settings, facilitating interaction between different realities. However, this transition may not be as seamless as anticipated. I am determined to ensure that this project does not turn into a novice workshop on greenery but instead creates a genuine and productive dialogue between urban and rural communities, benefiting all parties involved.

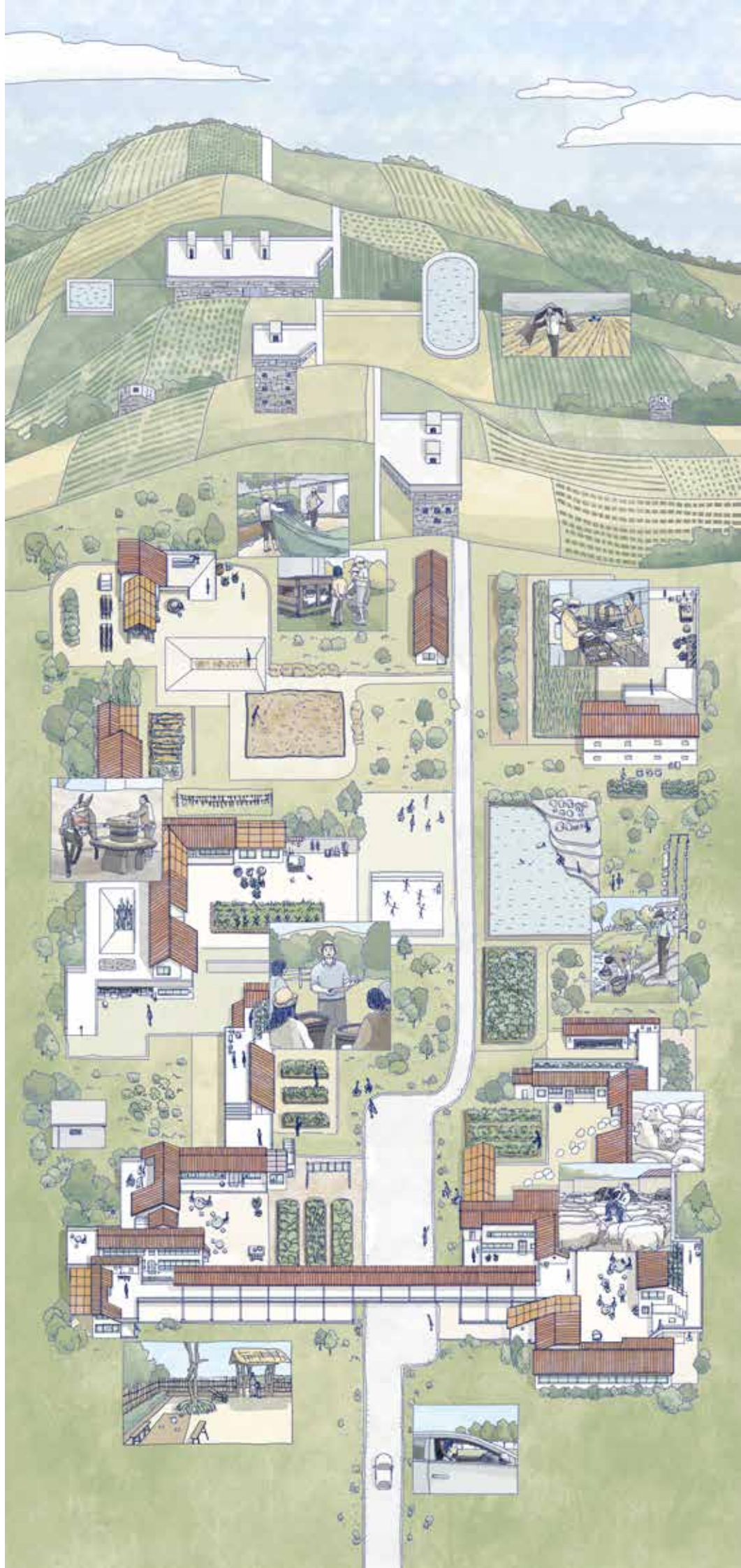


Figure 45. (right)
Overview of design
proposal. Drawing
by the author, 2024.

Stage 1:
Let's escape to the countryside



Stage 2:
Embracing novelty



Stage 3:
Understanding the



Figure 46. Five stages of integration in Shuiyu Village. Drawing by the author, 2024.

land and its people



Stage 4:
Redefining Productivity and Identity



Stage 5:
A New understanding—Life and Self



Annotated Bibliography

Chee, Lilian. 'Domesticity, Gender, and Architecture'. In *The Routledge Companion to Contemporary Architectural History*, by Duanfang Lu, 253–69, 1st ed. New York: Routledge, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315674469-16>.

- The inclination to look inwards to the home unit: "The architect had to tune in to a new audience who were coaxed by mass media to desire, acquire, and consume at home." This trend is even influencing rurality once a mass-produced building is erected there.

Deji, Olanike F. *Gender and Rural Development*. Spektrum, v. 106-107. Zürich: Lit, 2011.

- Dependency theory, as discussed by Deji, highlights the unequal economic and social relationships between developed and developing nations, arguing that the latter remain reliant on the former. Deji advocates for empowering local communities to overcome these external influences and promote sustainable development tailored to their unique contexts.

Fei, Xiaotong. *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society*; Translation of Fei Xiaotong's *Xiangtu Zhongguo*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1992.

- A comprehensive analysis of the rural mentality. The rhythms of agricultural work influence the pace of life, social relations, and governance systems. Governance is largely informal and rooted in local customs rather than formal legal institutions, prioritising reconciliation over punitive justice.

Heidegger, Martin. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. 20. print. New York: Perennial Classics, 2009.

- Heidegger's philosophical perspective on dwelling offers a profound understanding of the human experience in architectural spaces. This source supports my examination of how architecture can facilitate deeper connections to place and community.

Ingold, Tim. *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*. London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2011.

- Ingold presents a series of essays that delve into the relationship between humans and their environments, emphasising the importance of skill and knowledge in shaping our experiences of dwelling. This work informs my exploration of how rural architecture can respond to the needs of its inhabitants by considering their everyday practices and interactions with the landscape.

Jullien, François. *Living off Landscape: Or, the Unthought-of in Reason*. Translated by Pedro Rodríguez. Global Aesthetic Research. London New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018.

- The book explains how indigenous and rural communities have historically lived in balance with their environment, understanding its rhythms and resources. This knowledge has often been sidelined by modern urban planning, but the book advocates for re-centring these practices in contemporary urban development.

Kipnis, Andrew B. *Producing Guanxi: Sentiment, Self, and Subculture in a North China Village*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997.

- Kipnis examines the social dynamics of a North China village, focusing on the concept of guanxi (relationships) and how it shapes community life. The book examines how villagers build, maintain, and leverage personal networks, emphasising the role of reciprocity, emotional bonds, and shared experiences.

Koolhaas, Rem. *Countryside: A Report*. Köln: Taschen, 2020.

- Rem Koolhaas explores the rapid and often hidden transformations underway across the Earth's vast non-urban areas, revealing its radical potential for changing everything about how we live.

Kyung-Sup, Chang. *The Logic of Compressed Modernity*. Cambridge; Medford, MA: Polity, 2022.

- Chang discusses the concept of "compressed modernity," analysing how rapid urbanisation affects rural areas.

Rowe, Peter G., and Seng Kuan. *Architectural Encounters with Essence and Form in Modern China*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002.

- The origin of the urban housing model in China dates back to the 1950s. China, suffering from severe housing shortage, looked to the Soviet model.

Rudofsky, Bernard and The Museum of Modern Art, eds. *Architecture without Architects: A Short Introduction to Non-Pedigreed Architecture*. Nachdr. New York: Doubleday, 1965.

- Rudofsky introduces the concept of "non-pedigreed" architecture, which is shaped by local materials, climate, and cultural needs, often evolving over generations to perfectly fit their environment.

Seamon, David, and Robert Mugerauer, eds. *Dwelling, Place, and Environment: Towards a Phenomenology of Person and World*. Dordrecht [Netherlands]; Boston: Hingham, MA: M. Nijhoff; Distributors for the United States and Canada, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1985.

- This collection of essays explores the phenomenological aspects of dwelling and place, offering insights into how environments shape human experiences. This work will inform my understanding of the relationship between architectural spaces and the lived realities of rural inhabitants.

Tafuri, Manfredo. *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*. 10. print. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996.

- The typology of the multistorey housing model is specific to the needs of urban centres, which are spaces of accelerated production and consumption.

Graphic references

Kuroishi, I. (2016). Urban Survey and Planning in Twentieth-Century Japan: Wajiro Kon's "Modernology" and Its Descendants. *Journal of Urban History*, 42(3), 557–581. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144216635151>

- Kon's drawings portrayed domestic space as an entangled phenomenon where architecture, furniture, belongings, usage patterns, and occupancy habits became inseparable—architecture as a "container for everyday life".

The Future Archaeologist. (2012). In J. Lai, *Citizens of no place: An architectural graphic novel* (First edition, pp. 130–141). Princeton Architectural Press.

- In the format of a comic, Lai presents a question about the pursuit of architecture through a future alien archaeologist who has found a surviving human from times past. The archaeologist is puzzled by the apparent divergence between architecture that exist in academic conversations and monotonous housing of the masses, which is similar to the question I ask: is "high" architecture really what the masses need?

Reconfiguring Addis Ababa's Narratives—Storytelling for Architecture. Antonio Paoletti, MArch Thesis, 2020.

- The graphic novel is the result of a micro-ethnographic and historical research in Addis Ababa by the author. I intend to explore this way of combining architectural convention and pictorial representation.

'Past, Present and Post-Tropicality: Viewing Singapore through an 'Infra(-)structural' Field'. Annabelle Tan, MArch thesis, 2022.

- Annabelle's thesis has a rich documentation of ethnographic studies (objects, history, materials, interviews) that I can learn from. It gathers institutionalised knowledge but also meanings and intelligence behind everyday practices.

Laws and Documents

Fǎzhì wǎng 法制网. “18 Yì mǔ gēngdì hóngxiàn” shì zěnmē lái de? “18 亿亩耕地红线”是怎么来的 [How did the ‘1.8 billion mu of arable land red line’ come about? [How Did the ‘1.8 Billion Mu of Arable Land Red Line’ Come About], 2022.8.10. http://www.legaldaily.com.cn/Village_ruled_by_law/content/2022-08/10/content_8734978.html.

Qun Zhang 张群, Shanju Liu 刘善举, Baozeng Liu 刘宝增, and Jiayuan Li 李家元. ‘Guānyú yòng huó tǔdì zhèngcè jiākuài tuījìn xīhé zhèn fāzhǎn de jiànyì’ 关于用活土地政策加快推进西河镇发展的建议 [Suggestions on Using Land Policies to Accelerate the Development of Xihe Town]. Zī chuān qū zìrán zīyuán jú 淄川区自然资源局. Accessed 14 September 2024. http://www.zichuan.gov.cn/gongkai/site_zcqzrzyj/channel_c_5f9f6a3dc916f710ccee9100_n_1605684217.9376/doc_6539d3a2354bf06f8c3e61cd_4fa-64ca0f7bbc3bf9d125deb52fa04f1.doc.

张鸣铎. *Zī chuān xiànzì* 淄川县志 [Zichuan County Chronicals]. Qīng qiánlóng sìshíyī nián kèběn., 1776. <https://lccn.loc.gov/2011457135>.

Ying Zhu 朱英. ‘Zhōnggòng zhōngyāng bàngōng tīng guówùyuàn bàngōng tīng yìnfā “guānyú wánshàn nóngcūn tǔdì suǒyǒuquán chéngbǎo quán jīngyíng quán fēn zhì bànfǎ de yìjiàn”’ 中共中央办公厅 国务院办公厅印发《关于完善农村土地所有权承包权经营权分置办法的意见》 [The General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council Issued the Opinions on Improving the Separation of Rural Land Ownership, Contract Rights and Operation Rights]. Zhōnghuá rénmin gònghéguó zhōngyāng rénmin zhèngfǔ 中华人民共和国中央人民政府, 30 October 2016. https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-10/30/content_5126200.htm.

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Appendices



2004.11



2017.05



2019.11



2022.02

Notes taken during interview with my grandmother and mother

妈妈以农作物科普
(妈妈也没怎么干过)

秋种春末收 麦子
收玉米后
(有麦子能过冬)

「做房顶」
- 收割: 麦粒+麦穗用镰刀割下来, 捆成捆回家
割麦(割头)
- 割麦穗 用镰刀
- 麦条: 有风为麦子 用风筛到空中 风就把麦粒吹走了
或者用簸箕, 最好有风, 不然就用手筛, 吹一下
用筛子筛净/石碾/碌碡「碌碡」
- 晒干 收藏 (不要下雨!) 秋天 麦穗黄一点
收入布袋放入缸中
- 磨面: 用大盆洗净 当时: 石碾, 风: 风磨, 风磨.
先出白面 然后黑面
面食 喂猪
麦粒的壳: 已废.
馒头饺子包皮

春种 秋收
收小麦后

玉米
种得最多,
主食(煎饼)
粮食
人喜欢吃
产量高
向山地也可
以种

- 种玉米 提筐/麻袋
- 玉米棒用镰刀割断 小心不要踩空 因为玉米不粘
镰刀子很锋利
- 用镰刀割根
- 剥玉米皮 留几片 绑成捆子 玉米皮做蓆团(团坐坐)
就是捆下晾干 挂十天半月
- 种玉米皮 去玉米芯 用干或小刀在后排间切豁口
玉米壳就挂起来(家里不用) 玉米芯
- 储存
- 用石碾把玉米粒上头尖尖石碾脱壳 磨粉
大部分人不, 有引用驴, 马不听话 牛太慢
- 泡水一晚 倒入石磨中间的跟 磨成更细的糊
- 磨子(向上鼓的锅) 摊煎饼 折成扁形摆起来
半个月做一回 做太多吃不完

高粱
喂鸡喂猪
二三级地
少种点
(现在不种)

因高粱煎饼不好吃所以不受欢迎
高粱穗做蓆子 炊帚 有时候种高粱就是为了这个
地地 刷锅
高粱穗做蓆子 做房顶(长且硬, 支撑房顶) 高粱穗下
- 割穗, 碾去壳喂猪

早春种春末收 谷子
小米

人不爱种, 因为麻雀爱吃, 要时时看守 也因此贵
水峪小米以好吃闻名
- 割穗, 用磨碾去皮
- 晾干几天
- 把谷糠筛出去
能喂猪

粮食自给自足, 多则卖, 不卖也行, 反正有吃的, 卖了钱去买平时不种的粮食
“今年打了三大盆麦子”——丰收年, 够吃。

蔬菜: 扎根沟以中作物
除年, 耘土
蔬菜: 扎根沟以中

萝卜 麦根菜 比如去麦上
萝卜晚上 或扁担挑的
会编自己编 不会编去集上买

家禽
驴 驴车运农作物
牛 犁地 (养起来跟养个人一样, 照顾, 喂养)
马 上战场
鸡 鸡窝(石头垒成 水里盖土防贼)
- 鸡窝是在石头下的空间
- 鸡窝常就在树上睡觉
鸡的窝: 在窝里下蛋
鸡的窝: 随地乱下
吃草菜 吃土

鸡 很多人养是为了看家 鸡人就喂喂 鸡就喂鸡饲料
猪 猪在圈里 不喂在
鸭 看家
鸡 在小井里撒尿埋起来 从这到那(鸡井)
鸡鸭狗打伙
鸡鸭狗咬鸡毛 鸡鸭能和鸡鸭处但鸡鸭有矛盾
鸡不在院子在鸡场(鸡圈), 不养鸡

蔬菜:
水少,
少种点,
水少缺水
靠近石湾,
浇水方便,
不像玉米,
靠天吃饭

高立, 豆角, 土豆, 南瓜, 土豆, 地瓜,
种地头上 喂猪 需要阳光 胡萝卜
收的时候当主食吃
西红柿, 茄子, 葱, 黄瓜, 辣椒
种家附近, 浇水方便水

村民关系网

以前

邻居，妈妈上学时经常来串门

不是亲戚，但村里都能论上关系

- 都是男性
- 以前交通不发达，找对象都是在村里
- 在东村较少
- 五服以内关系近
- 有王姓多
- “五服”

老与朋友不一定是亲戚

老家住得近

是人际关系好，子女关系就好

一起干活

王兵以好，老家老矣，并不常串门

先爷爷爷和先爷奶奶

大嫂、大姑、爷爷都是翟家近亲（三服）

爷爷去世后儿子分家

姥爷管着分家，公平，自认为儿子（大姑）就记恨姥爷

大姑不孝，老人病了不肯送医院，被姥爷说，一个不孝，另一个也不孝顺

也有两个姑姑，出嫁，但也都去看望老人（就是很孝顺女儿），女儿是嫁去的人

以前过年过节都会聚在一起打牌，没事就串门

后来康宁结婚时都去了，应该是想开了

现在不算姥爷朋友，碰上会打招呼，但不串门。

是姥爷的亲戚，姥爷很珍惜。老人去世，姥爷帮忙料理后。

今年能十，除了下地，每逢红白喜事他是大厨。

友情帮忙，管饭是报酬。

走亲戚为礼品，十个馒头，煮蛋子里，外村也有，下步走或更远的坐火车

邻居2：家在西，五服内关系，不常串门。礼节上的来往

据姥爷说较自私，重点在于不孝顺。

自己住好房子（北屋），让老人住破房子（但都是这样）

照顾不好老人，被姥爷不齿。舍不得给老人吃好用好

心里不爽，这是金例行公事

现仍有来往，还很近。

康宁结婚也看去了

家庭条件更好，有工人以，比农民地位要高。

小舅专门请假，为二叔以儿子订婚帮忙

一家人感情都会抽一两天时间帮忙

张家，无亲戚关系，姑姐嘴碎

先娘（姥爷以父辈）貌似没有后代，表脚那一代。

一位南头，妈小时候常去，她有点心。

经常教姥爷，因为三个奶奶都早逝

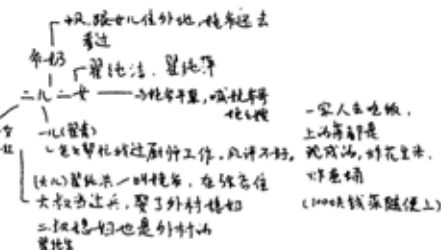
干活多吃不饱，四十多岁就去世了。

老姑们（妈以的爷以辈）

从小跟姥爷一起长大，很和睦

老舅是妈以同学，但他是姥爷以一以子女儿，所以妈以叫小姑

不常特意串门（除非过年），但碰到会聊

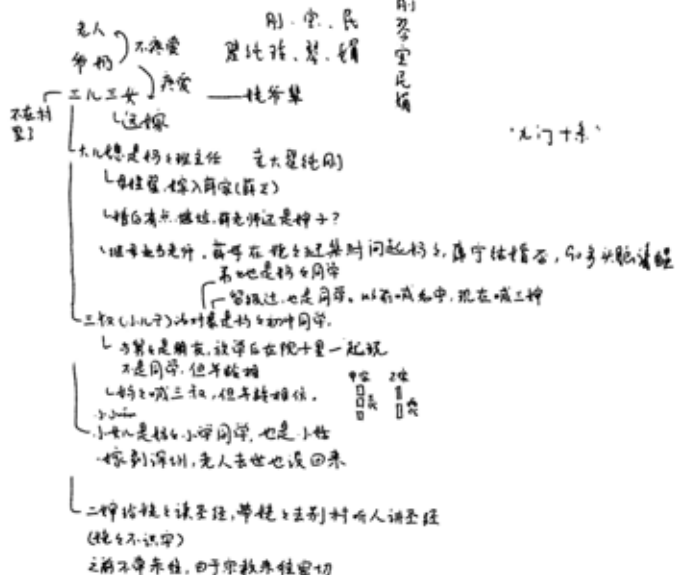


生活多年

翟家近亲

除舅爷家亲戚

“九门十亲”



王家邻居，好邻居

经常串门

有辆早东面互通有无。

一种芝麻、红土豆、打玉米，他家没有，就会送点

盖房子还借了姚家一块地

一孩子结婚要盖房子

小时候院子门对门，后来改成了朝街的方向，就看不到院子啥样，来往也少了

王芳家

“伙计不见抬头见嘛，都是街坊邻居”

小芳是姚家的好朋友，隔得近，经常一起写作业

一很爱学习

条件不好，房子小，与另一家共享一个院子



爷奶 一桌一炕一桌，就着背，走路一挪一挪的

儿女

与杨二年龄相仿

娶了杨二的女婿的朋友

行伍 西平村

大爷大嫂 一儿两成亲来，就按岁数喊

儿 女

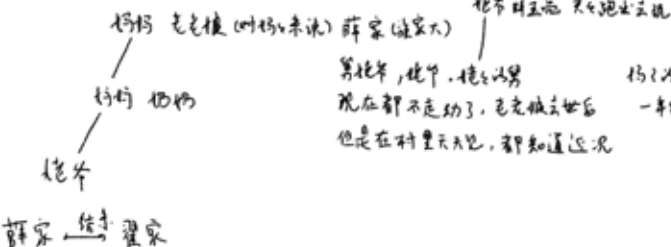
大舅哥 妈的哥哥

种地

姚家时候，生产队干活计工分，交公粮，过年后就男十七八岁 吃死了，生喜卖钱不跟

姚家为光棍（薛家）

光棍带着三个孩子长大



薛家 往 翟家

转过去成

奶奶（姓风，同姓）成姚家姑

王兵他妈

姚家姑姚家娘

住得近

王兵他妈是姚家姚家帮媒人



姚家往东姚家，杨白为杨二的女婿杨二

一 二 三 四
姚家 手坪 昆伦

姚家往姚家，金岭镇

姚家往姚家，又是错踪复杂的一派

姚家在时是来成

1 2 3 4 5 都设了

1 2 3 今男

姚家往见着

也不走动了

山东地方剧

李二嫂做媒家

红心记

一月份放一回电影，无片，三四天

十年如一日

吕剧、战争片

不来公家还不愿意，没人也得演。

都在家看电视，没人看了，10、20人

姚家为17岁也唱过戏。

吃不好罢了，才硬是活像丰富

姚家往开演，熬夜排戏，白天种地，一睡就是几个月

现在没领头了

一深坎全村领果如出水观着，

还去外村演，唱得好，都请去唱

HOW TO: HAVE THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS



Firewood - for free



BOIL WATER
IN THE NEW HOUSE WITH FIREWOOD
IN YOUR OLD HOUSE.



GRANDMA

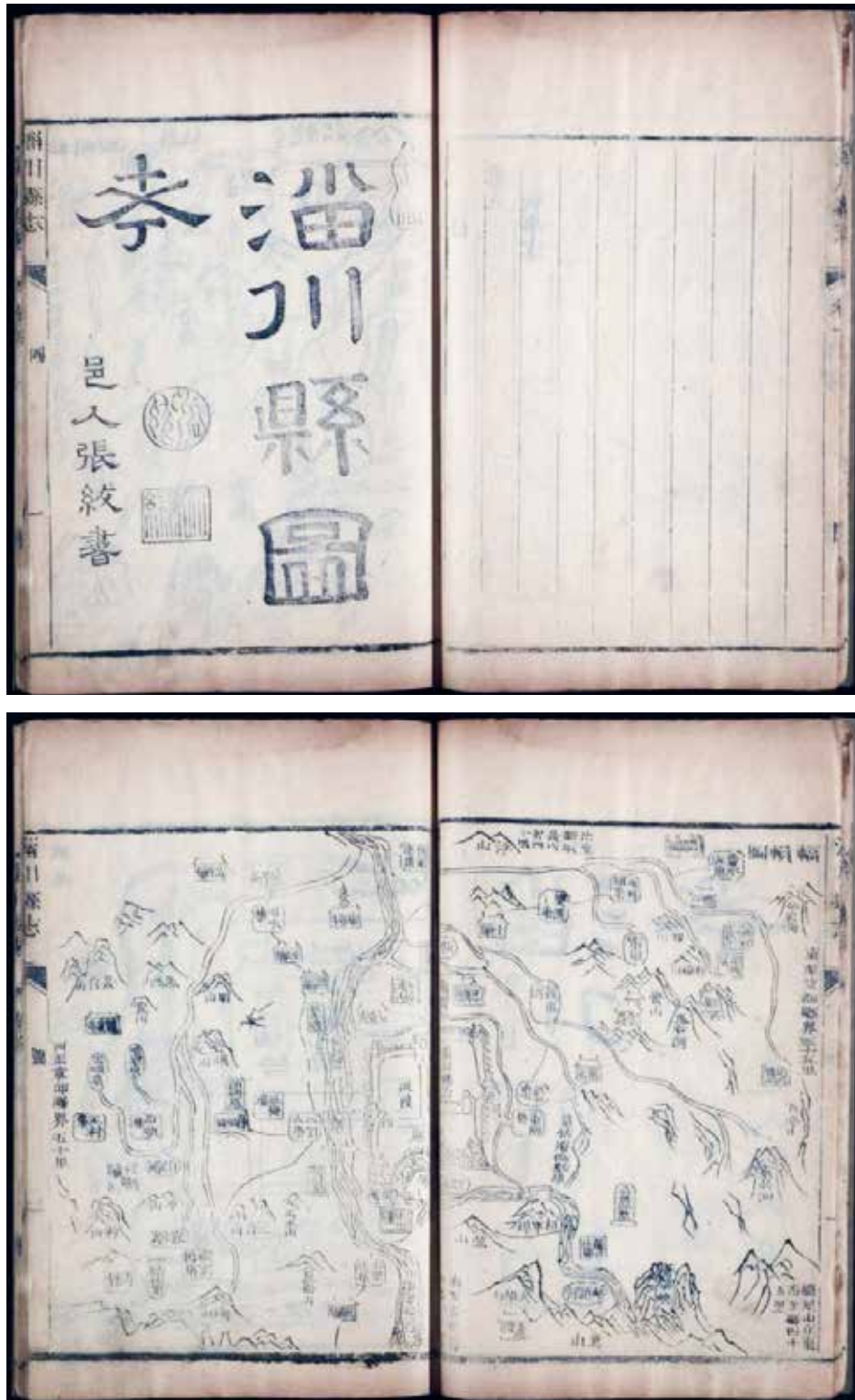
OTHER ACTIVITIES
(with various levels of
social acceptance):

- eat at the old house
- work there but eat in new house
- collect your own poop (no more toilet flushing!) and fertilise your field

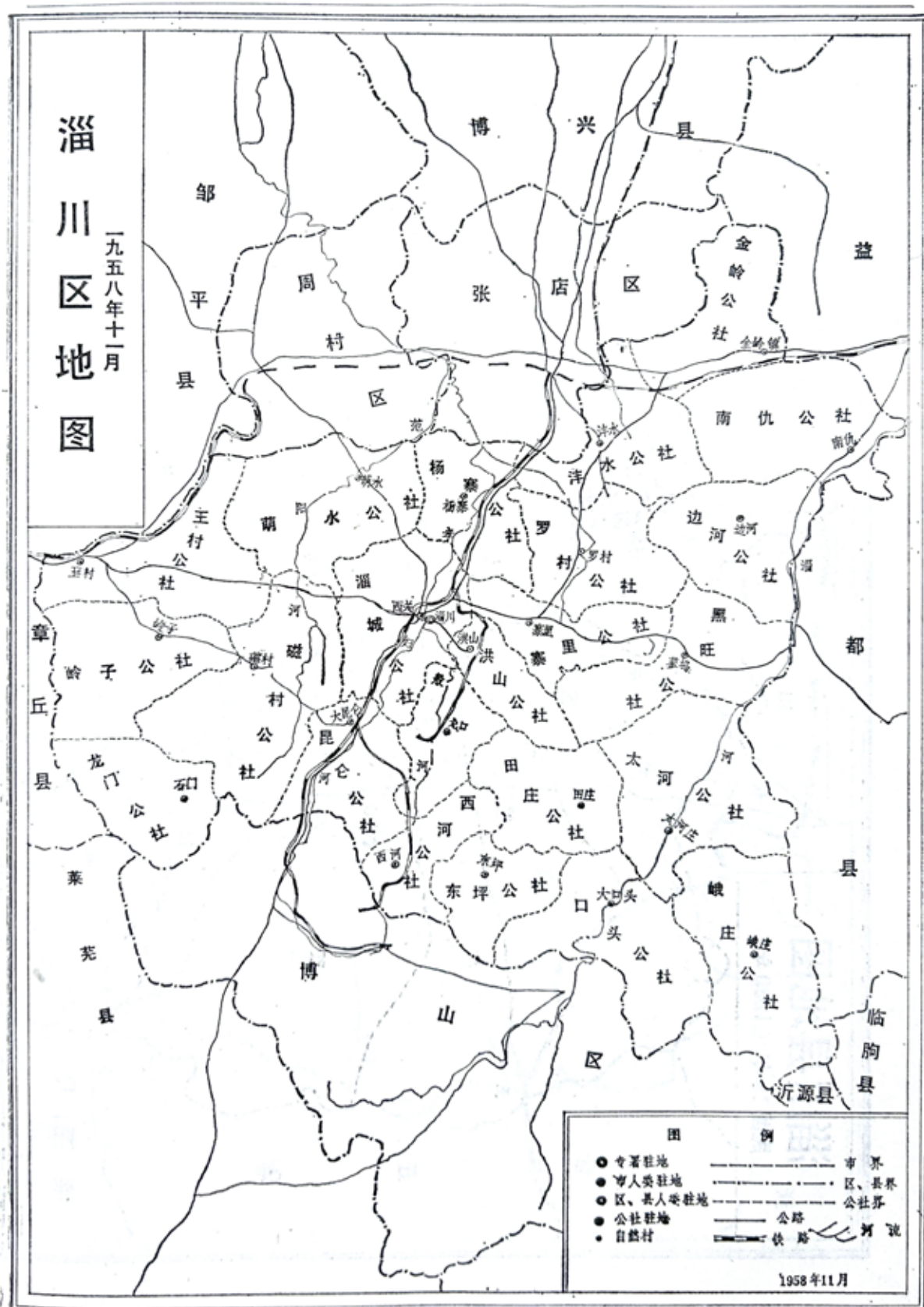


instant clean water

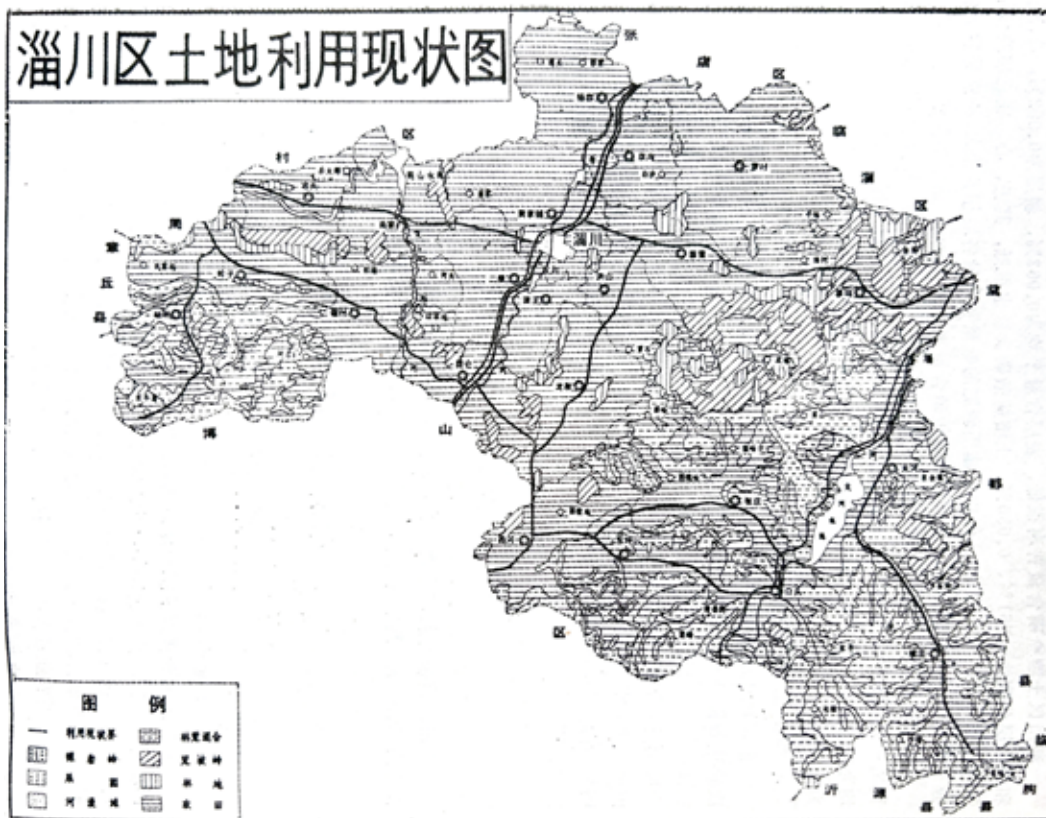
Excerpts from *Maps and Official Documents* (booklet by the author)



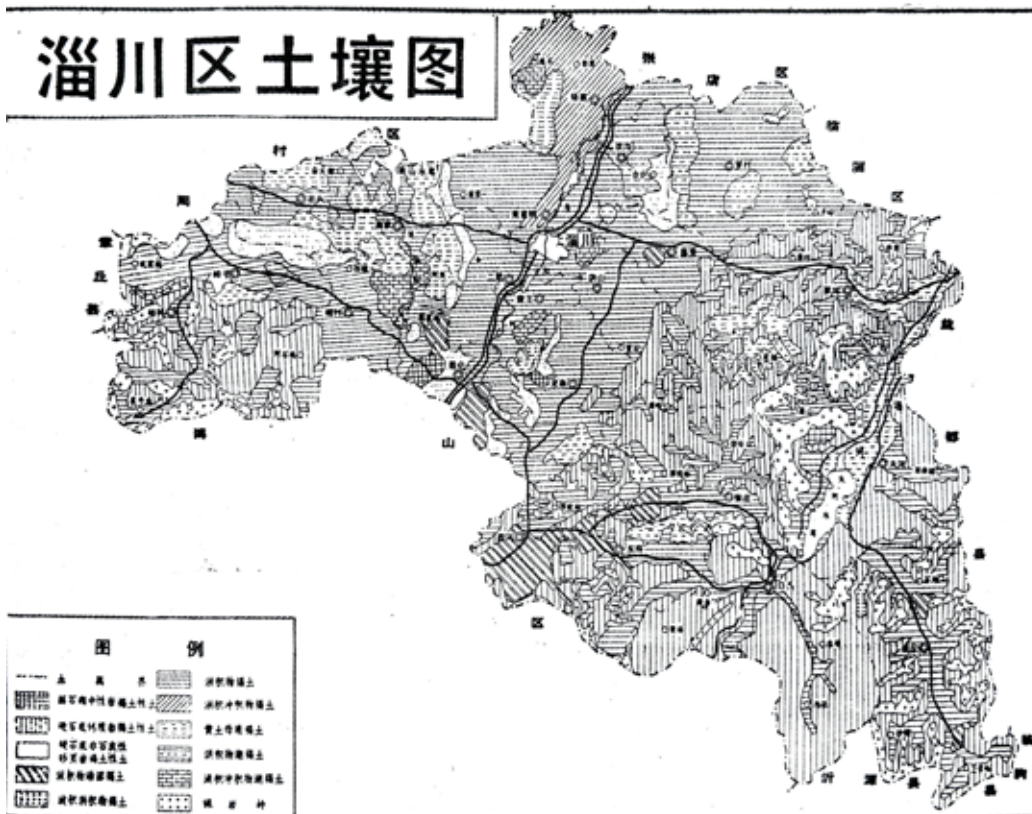
Map of Zichuan County (Zhang, Mingduo 张鸣铎. *Zichuān xiànzhi* 淄川县志 [Zichuan County Chronicals]. Qing Dynasty Qianlong 41st year edition, 1776. <https://lccn.loc.gov/2011457135>.)



Map of Zichuan District (November 1958), 51. (Zīchuān qū zhì biānzhuān wěiyuánhui 淄川区志编纂委员会. *Zīchuān qū zhì* 淄川区志 [Zichuan District Chronicals]. Jinan: Qílǔ shūshè 齐鲁书社, 1990.1.)



Current Land Use Map of Zichuan District, 122. (Zichuān qū zhì biānzǔǎn wěiyuánhùi 淄川区志编纂委员会. *Zīchuān qū zhì* 淄川区志 [*Zichuan District Chronicals*].)



Soil Map of Zichuan District, 126. (Zichuān qū zhì biānzǔǎn wěiyuánhùi 淄川区志编纂委员会. *Zīchuān qū zhì* 淄川区志 [*Zichuan District Chronicals*].)



Document of the CPC Zichuan District Committee

Chuanfa (2012) No. 10

Zibo District Committee of the CPC Zibo District People's Government Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of Beautiful Villages

(May 7, 2012)

Abstract

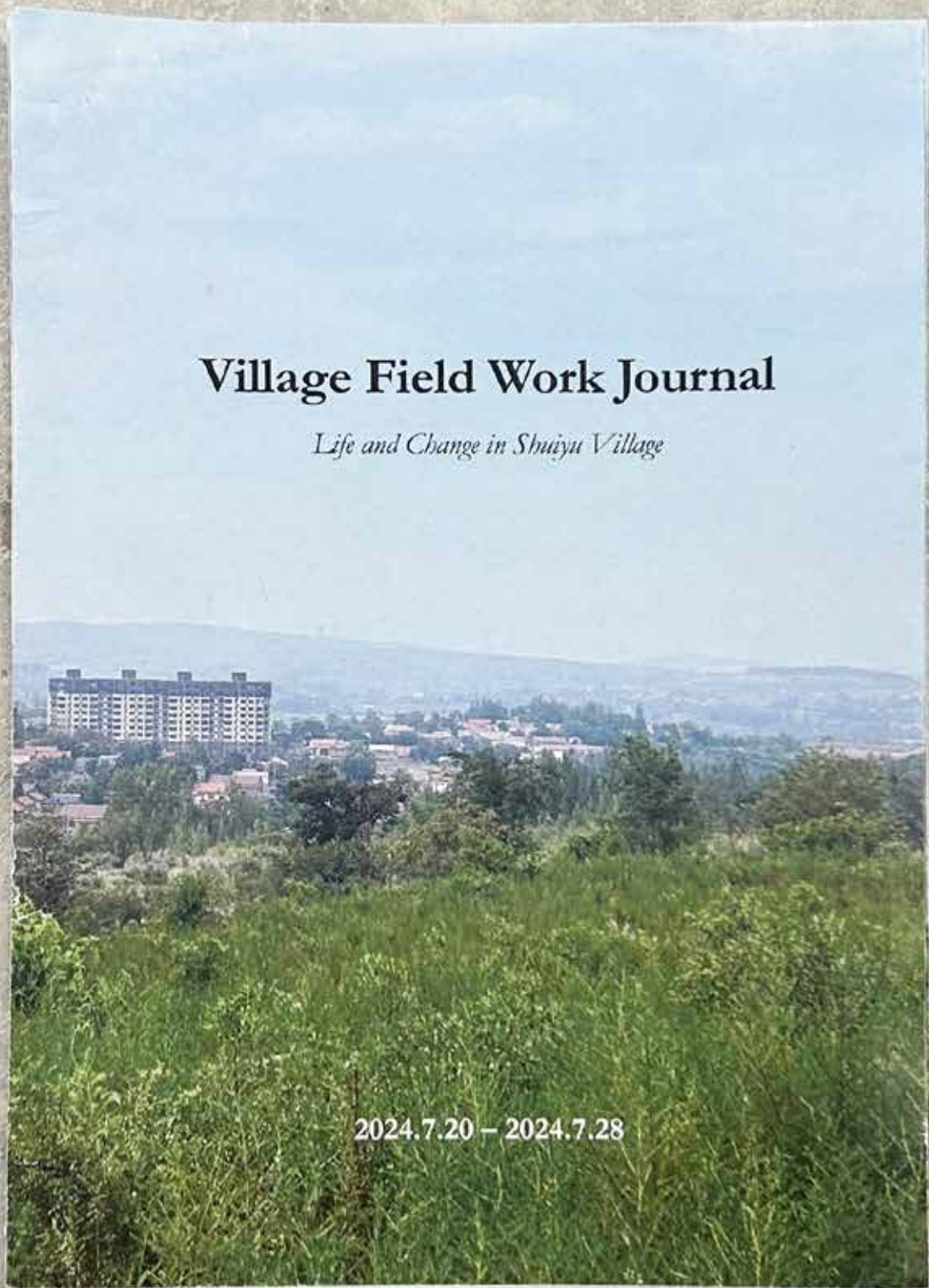
Zichuan District aims to achieve the goal of building beautiful villages across the district's rural areas by 2020. To meet this goal, the district will accelerate the pace of beautiful village construction, continue efforts to improve urban and rural environments, and steadily promote integrated urban-rural waste management. Additionally, the district will enhance the quality of the "Four Connections and Five Transformations" initiative, which includes water, electricity, roads, and broadband network connections, alongside efforts for hardening, purification, lighting, greening, and beautification.

Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of Beautiful Villages (2012), 81, followed by the English translation. (Zichuan qū dǎng'àn jú 淄川区档案局. *Zī chuān gǎigé kāifàng 40 zhōunián zhòngyào wénxiàn 1978-2018* 淄川改革开放40周年重要文献 1978-2018 [Important Documents on the 40th Anniversary of Reform and Opening-up in Zibo, 1978-2018], n.d.)

Village Field Work Journal

Life and Change in Shuiyu Village

2024.7.20 – 2024.7.28



This journal is written during my time spent in Chinese villages, between 20 July and 28 July 2024. Besides an in-depth documentation of daily life in Shuiyu Village focusing on the residents’ interactions, work routines, and community dynamics, the journal also includes interviews with both villagers and local officials. Expanding the scope, I visited neighboring villages within the same district for comparative analysis. Through these observations, the journal examines how rural communities are navigating the social and architectural shifts driven by government initiatives in contemporary China.

2024.7.20 Arrival in Dongping

First visit to Shuiyu



The building is shorter than I thought. After all, it is only ten stories high. Even so, it is still much taller than the surrounding bungalows. The building is light yellow on the outside, and the upper and lower parts are painted reddish brown. The building is sunken, built on a square cement ground that faces due south and due north. Grandma said that this is because the soil above is too loose, and the foundation needs to be dug deeper. The two sides of the cement ground are against the excavated wall edge, and the other two sides are connected to the extended flat land. In the distance on one side of the flat bottom is the old village, and on the other side is the woods. The side close to the woods is separated by a railing, and the railing stops abruptly at a certain point.

Parking is available at both the front and back doors. We parked at the back door and entered

unit 3. The ground floor (the basement floor above the elevator) is the residents’ storage room. We walked through the corridor and arrived in front of the elevator. There were several notices posted in the elevator: a list of people who owed sanitation fees and management fees and the scope of demolition.



Building

There are 4 units in the building, with 3 households in each unit. There are 10 floors in total, which can accommodate 120 households in total.

The house is eye-catching as soon as you enter. The house is newly renovated, and the windows are bright and clean. Grandma’s house is on the 8th floor of Unit 3. Because there are no buildings in front and behind to block the light, the light is very good, and the scenery of the village is unobstructed. As long as the doors and windows are opened, there will be a breeze from the hall, and even in the hottest days of the dog days, it is much cooler than the city - yes, grandma usually

opens the door of the house. There are only three families in each unit on this floor. Grandma and uncle occupy two households, and the other family moved to another place with their children.

Usually no one comes to this floor, so grandma opens the door without worry. This is the same as the custom in the village, the door is always open. However, traditional rural houses have courtyards, and the doors of the inner rooms are closed (usually transparent screens), and there is a slow transition from public to private.



The staircase outside the house was built in a sloppy manner, but the decoration inside the house was perfect, after all, it was paid for by myself. The water, electricity and gas are running well. The scenery is beautiful and the environment is comfortable. How many buildings can do this? Shuiyu's building happened to be the first high-rise building built in the village. There are bungalows all around, and no other buildings compete with it for resources. It was built at a special moment in history.

Shuiyu Village actually planned to build several buildings, but they ran out of funds, so they

stopped construction after only building this one. Every day, a bulldozer would stop in the open space in front of the building and shovel away the rubble. But I heard that there are no plans to continue building new buildings.

Water, electricity, heating

The water, electricity, gas and heating in the building are no different from those in any modern building. There is even floor heating. However, many villagers still retain the shadow of rural life in their usage habits of these services.

Grandma put a huge basin in the bathroom. When taking a shower, the water heater heats up slowly, so I need to let the water sit for a while before taking a shower. I put the water in the basin. Inevitably, shower gel will flow into the basin, and the water is turbid, which is suitable for flushing the toilet. There is also a small basin in the washbasin, which is used to collect clean water and can be reused.



There are gas supply pipes and supplier contact

information outside the building, as well as notices on safe use of gas.

The improvement of hardware facilities comes with a higher price. Compared with living in an old house, the cost of living in a building is obviously higher. The water, electricity, gas, heating, sanitation, and management fees all add up to a higher cost than when living in a village.



But in general, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. According to my uncle, apart from the extra sanitation and management fees, the rest are normal expenses. The biggest advantage of living in a building is that the elderly can reduce the incidence of sudden cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases. About 90% of the bathrooms in bungalows are outside, and the toilets are squat pits instead of toilets. The sanitary conditions are even more indescribable. Taking the three northern rooms as an example, using an ordinary stove, the heating cost is about one ton of coal per household per year, and it depends on the heating area. If it is a water heater, the coal consumed will be two to three times. Living in a building improves the quality of life of the people.

They all say that they like to live in bungalows, but in winter, as long as they have the conditions, they will all live in buildings with heating.

Surrounding village houses

Along the short path leading to the building are a row of bungalows. Some are abandoned, with their roofs gone, but some are still inhabited. An 83-year-old man sat at the door of his house and invited us to his house (we didn't go). He said he didn't remember us. Of course, we had never met. In the village, everyone knows each other by default.



Making Dumplings

Grandma was making dumplings in the living room, while mom and dad were cooking in the kitchen. Whenever making dumplings, the living room was used as part of the kitchen. Grandma moved the huge board from the wall to the coffee table in the living room, and placed the prepared stuffing next to it. Making dumplings is



a family activity, and everyone in the family must participate. It was just right to make them in the living room.

Wang Bing’s mother came to visit

After taking a nap in the afternoon, grandma went out for a walk. The door was still open, and a grandma came in. Dad was sitting in the living room. He had never seen that grandma before, but he still invited her in to sit for a while. That grandma knew my mother, and when she saw my father, she guessed who he was. After knowing that grandma was not there, she started chatting with my father. Grandma told my father that she still lived in the old house, which was leaking, and she also wanted to live in a new house. Until grandma came back, grandma sat for a while before leaving. It turned out that it was the mother of my uncle’s comrade-in-arms. Wang Bing and his uncle are the same age, grew up together, and later served in the army together. They are all fellow villagers in the village.

That night

It was dark, and there were no street lights in the village. Except for the stage in the distance, which was lit up, everything was pitch black. There were aunties dancing with fans on the stage, and the background music was a hit song on TikTok. I fell asleep to the sound of frogs.



2024.7.21 Dongping Market

Boil water in the morning



When I woke up in the morning, I saw a person walking back from a distance outside the window, holding a thermos bottle in his hand. My grandmother said that some people who live in high-rise buildings go back to their old houses every day to burn firewood and boil water in thermos bottles to save gas bills. Many people did this in the past, but now more and more people’s houses have been demolished, and fewer people do this.



Some people go back to the old house to have dinner every day, and some go back to sleep after dinner.

There is a strange man in the village who can’t bear to flush the toilet and wants to save some organic fertilizer, so he carries manure from the building to his own field every day, maintaining the ecological balance between humans and farmland.

This man’s thriftiness is so extraordinary that even the villagers have to talk about it.

Go to Dongping Market

The first, eleventh, twenty-first, sixty-sixth and twenty-sixth days of the lunar month are the days for Dongping Market.



This was the first time I went out properly after arriving in Shuiyu. Along the way, my grandmother greeted people walking in the opposite direction, riding electric bikes, and sitting outside, saying she was going to the market.

Dongping Market is located in Xiaodongping Village, which is only 10 minutes away from Shuiyu Village by car. There are two vans driven by villagers, and each trip costs 2 yuan per person. The time is not fixed, and they will leave when there are seven people. Usually they go around 7 o’clock and return around 9 o’clock. There is no one after 9 o’clock.



The market was bustling with people selling

vegetables, fruits, spices, daily necessities, etc. They were all sold at roadside stalls. There was also freshly ground sesame paste, which was still warm in my hand. Grandma bought tofu, onions, cucumbers, cabbage, tomatoes, chicken legs, calcium milk biscuits, and sesame paste. I ate a steamed bun and a bowl of wontons at a steamed bun shop, and then we returned home with a full load.

Go to Yiyuan again



My uncle and his family took me to pick peaches at Tongtong Yangyang's grandpa's house. It is a 50- minute drive from Shuiyu. Along the way, my uncle gave me popular science: Zibo is rich in apples, pears, peaches, plums, melons, chestnuts, watermelons, cucumbers, beans, and we also passed by the glass factory and kiwi fields. There is a place that wholesales peaches, and peaches are only 2 yuan per catty. In Qingdao, it costs 3-6 yuan per catty. The reason why peaches are so cheap is that peaches are grown nearby, and no residents will buy them. Kiwis have also become popular in a village we passed by in the past decade. It used

to cost 7 yuan per catty, but now every household grows it, and the price has dropped to 2.5 yuan per catty.

Grandpa's house is next to the orchard. In the past, there was only an orchard and a small house for cooling off. Later, Grandpa moved out from Chishang Town, Boshan District, and settled down next to the orchard. The small house was expanded and became a proper residence. Peaches, plums, apricots, pears, apples, and chestnuts are planted outside the house. In the vegetable garden, there are cucumbers, beans, kidney beans, bitter melons, tomatoes, and three varieties of potatoes. In the yard, there are a group of chickens, two geese, and two dogs running all over the mountains. We first went to the vegetable garden to pick beans, potatoes, bitter melons, and cucumbers, and then went to the orchard to pick three buckets of peaches and apples. There are also watermelons and melons that have been picked long ago in the house. Grandpa didn't grow these to sell, but just for himself and relatives to eat. My uncle's family goes to him to pick vegetables every week. The beans that were just picked last week have grown again this week.



There is no way to eat them all.



Grandpa is a good cook. Dinner was stewed potatoes with beans, stir-fried shredded potatoes, boiled pheasant eggs and pig head meat bought from the village. Grandpa made tea and we opened two cans of Snow Beer.

The mountain road was very difficult to walk on, with gravel everywhere and steep slopes. There was also a section of the road that passed by a stream, and you had to walk across the stream. If you were not careful, your shoes would get wet.

The moon at night is orange, hanging on the side of the mountain, big and round.

2024.7.22 Third Tour of Shuiyu

Old house interior



Grandpa packed a big box of vegetables and a bag of fruit for us. We couldn't finish them all, so grandma picked some and gave them to Wang Bing's mother. Wang Bing's mother lived in an old house next to the building. I took the opportunity to see the structure of the old house while sitting in her yard. There were several pots in the yard, with peppers, chives, etc. planted in them. There were houses on all four sides, two of which were storage rooms, one large and one small, and the other two were for living.

Afternoon walk: small group in the village

After lunch, I went for a walk in the village with my grandma. There was a group of grandmas sitting downstairs. I asked my grandma why she didn't join them. She said she couldn't get along

with them and didn't want to sit with them. Grandma said that there was no difference between living in a building now and living in an old house, because downstairs was the familiar village.

According to observation, the places where the small groups in the village appeared include: the small shop at the entrance of the village, downstairs of the new building, the stage, and the corner of the west wall. Grandma walked to the small group at the entrance of the village, greeted them (as usual, she asked who I was), and sat down on the stone slab to chat with them.

Today's gossip is about a certain aunt, who is famous in Shuiyu for her thriftiness. She is reluctant to turn on the gas stove or add oil when cooking. She only adds a little oil every time she stir-fries, turns on the fire for a short while, and then serves the dish with green onions, and considers it done. She is still not happy when her family says the dishes she cooks are not delicious.

After chatting for a while, grandma led me to continue walking south. When we arrived at the



stage, several people greeted grandma. The houses south of the stage were all old houses. They were the first houses built in Shuiyu. They are now dilapidated. Some are only left with broken walls, which is very desolate. Now, the buildings in the village have become the most lively place.



Nantou Bay, a place where water is drawn

Going further south, we arrived at Nantou Bay. Nantou Bay is a small pond. When we went there, some people were fishing. Grandma said they were from other places and came here specifically to fish. In the past, Nantou Bay was the place where the village got water, and every household came here to fetch water. Water shortage has always been a problem in Shuiyu Village. In drought years, Nantou Bay dried up, and people had to go to other villages to fetch water.



According to my mother, there was a serious water shortage in the past, and I thought it would be great if we had running water at home. I didn't expect it to come true now. " At that time, the ideal was that every household could have running

water. "

Various temples

At the southernmost end of the village are several temples, which are dedicated to various gods. They were built recently, and the funds were raised by villagers. When we went there, the gates were closed. According to my grandmother, people only come here on certain days. Not everyone comes to worship in the temples here, which shows that there is no common belief in the village.



Evening walk: impromptu group visit to Stone Basin

After dinner, my grandma, my mother and I went out to Stone Basin. When we reached the slope in front of the building, two grandmas came over and greeted my grandma. When my grandma said we were going to Stone Basin, they said, " Let's go! " So we started to head to Stone Basin. Later, I learned that my grandma was not very familiar with the two grandmas and even forgot their names, while my mother didn't know them at all. However, both groups were very



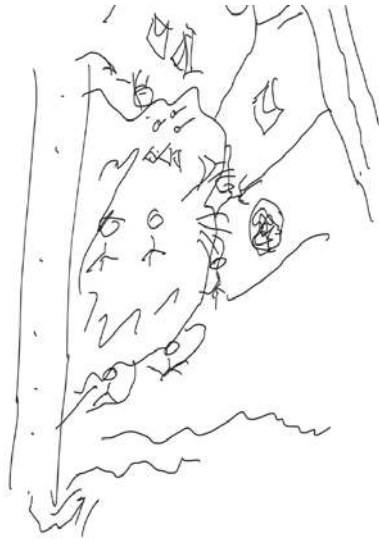
enthusiastic. One of the grandmas spoke highly of my grandpa, saying that he was a scholar, and gave my mother the phone number of her son, saying that they were old classmates (my mother still can't remember which classmate they were).

My mother told me that Stone Basin used to be much shallower than it is now, and there were wide stone slabs on the shore where people would come to wash clothes, rub them on the slabs, and hang them on the slabs after washing.



The Stone Basin I saw today is a deep hole, with only a thin layer of water at the bottom. The rocks on the shore have been mined, leaving only the soil layer at the bottom of the pool, which is said to leak water. The road leading to Stone Basin is a cement road, very flat and easy to walk on. It used to be a gravel road, but later Zhou Longjin (one of the grandmothers' son, an official in another place) donated money to build such a cement road.

No one uses Stone Basin now, and the water has become clear.



A floor plan of Stone Basin drawn by my mother. There are clothes hanging on the big stone slabs and children swimming in the bay.

About Demolition



It turned out that the old houses to the east of the building were not within the demolition range, and the residents there wanted new houses but were not given them. On the other hand, some residents were allocated new houses, and the old houses were retained because the building plan was shelved, making a profit on both ends (these houses are all on the south side of the building). Some people are stubborn residents who refuse to move, affecting the progress of building construction. For example, some bungalows beside the road leading to the building have no roofs, and the owners refuse to allow them to be demolished because they are their old homesteads and have not been allocated new houses. Because these stubborn residents refuse to move, the road can only be built narrow and small, with only one car passing through. The road is built on a dirt slope, and the signs of landslide have already begun to appear. Grandma said that every time it rains, dirt blocks will fall.



About Donation

In addition to the projects organized by the village committee, many construction projects in the village rely on donations and voluntary support from villagers. For example, the new temple in the village, new cement roads in various places, and even the village primary school. When my grandmother was 20 years old, she helped to build the primary school with cement while pregnant, but she had a miscarriage.



2024.7.23 Climbing Nanling

Big locust tree and pink fruit



After breakfast today, I went to visit the big locust tree in the village with my grandma and mom. The big locust tree used to be a landmark of the village. It is 500 years old and the trunk is so thick that three people can't hug it. Now, it is protected in a demolition site, surrounded by weeds and abandoned old houses. I walked into an old house next to it to see what it looked like inside. As soon as I entered the yard, I heard someone calling us. I looked around but couldn't find anyone. I looked up and found that the person was in the tree. The one in the tree was one of the grandmothers who went to Shiwan with me last night. She was picking pink fruits on the tree. This is her mother's home. No one takes care of the fruit trees in the yard, and the fruits keep falling down. She asked us to pick up the plastic bags on the ground and pour the fruits that had been picked into the bucket into the bucket.

West end of the village

Then, we went to see the houses on the west side. In fact, those houses are on the west side of the northernmost part of the village. I don't know why people ignore the north and emphasize the west.

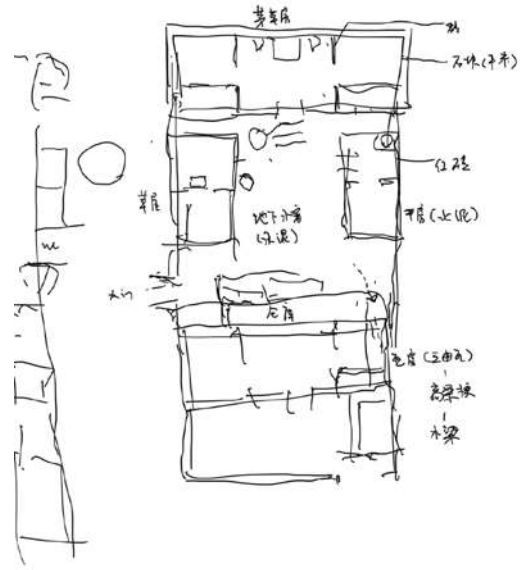


The houses over there are obviously newer and you can see that people live there. More houses are built with cement and bricks, not stones. The village first built houses in the south, which was the busiest place before. Later, young people got married and the village needed to be expanded, so they built houses on the west side. Although many young people have gone to other places now, that place still looks much neater. The westernmost part of the village is the path leading to Laowa Village. Now that transportation is well developed, no one walks there.



The old houses in the village were all built by themselves. When a family wanted to build a house, they would prepare food and invite villagers to help. Men did manual labor (such as laying tiles

on the roof), and women did odd jobs, such as helping to mix cement, etc. This is how my grandparents' old house was built.



The floor plan of my grandmother's old house, drawn based on family members' memories.

Grandma went to Dongping

The flour at home was gone. In the afternoon, grandma went to deliver cucumbers and bitter melons to my mother's second aunt alone. When she arrived at her door, she met villagers who were riding bicycles to Laowa Village. It happened that grandma was going to Dongping to buy some noodles, so she hurriedly dropped the cucumbers and bitter melons, took his bicycle to Laowa, and then took the bus from Laowa to Dongping. After buying the flour, grandma took the bus back to Laowa. She originally thought that she could only walk back to Shuiyu, but the second aunt had already been waiting for grandma in Laowa on a motorcycle. The two returned to Shuiyu together.

My grandmother lived with my uncle in Zhangdian, and also lived with my mother in Qingdao, but she still preferred to live in the village because she felt like a fish in water there. The villagers helped each other and lived a comfortable life.

Climb Nanling



Grandma went home from the west end of the village, and my mother and I went south to climb Nanling. There are terraced fields on Nanling, and there are also fields behind the ridge, which is where my mother often went when she was a child. The soil in Nanling is relatively poor and of poor quality. The land in the north is very good and was rated as first-class land by the production team at that time. While walking on the mountain road, we found cherries on the side of the road, a kind of red fruit that my mother often ate when she was a child. She excitedly picked a small bag. The corn on the terraced fields is not as strong as the corn in the north.

When we first set out, an old man we didn't know passed by carrying a pesticide spraying machine and insisted that we take four peaches he had grown. The slope of Nanling is gentle, and the road is easy to walk on. We walked very fast. After passing the terraced fields, we arrived at the pine forest, from where we could clearly see the Shuiyu building that stood out from the crowd. It was very close to the windmill of the power station,

and we could hear the humming of the wind.
We took a short rest and then went down the mountain to go home.

There are pine trees, cypress trees, Sophora japonica trees, as well as walnut trees, hawthorn trees and jujube trees on the mountain.



2024.7.24 Dialogue with the Village Committee

Interview with the village committee secretary



The village secretary is my mother's second uncle. When my grandmother was going out for a walk this morning, she said she could take me to visit him and ask about the building.

The village secretary's office is on the roadside to the north of the village. Three small bungalows surround a small courtyard. After entering the door, the air-conditioned air hits you in the face. The village secretary's room is one of the few places in the village that has air conditioning. He looks a little listless, and when asked about the building, his attitude is not optimistic.

The planning of building the building started in 2016. During this period, many meetings were held to discuss with villagers, and the replacement standards and construction schedule were finalized

at the meetings.

The principle of building a building is land replacement. In some areas of China, the land is used to grow crops, but it is of higher value, and developers want to use it for commercial purposes. However, the farmland cannot be overturned casually, because the country must stick to the 1.8 billion mu of arable land red line . At this time, the land in other areas must be reclaimed as arable land, which is equivalent to "transferring" the arable land in the area to be developed to other places. After the transfer is completed, new buildings can be built. In this process, the overflow value of the land can also be replenished to that area to increase income. Building buildings can increase the density of residents, thereby freeing up more land that can be reclaimed, so many old village renovations have adopted the model of buildings.



At present, Shuiyu Village has only built one building. It is not that they do not want to continue building, but they have to requisition land before building houses. One mu of land is worth more than 300,000 yuan, so they need



to requisition 40 mu of land first and exchange it with the city. All the houses to the west of the road in the middle of the village need to be demolished, and only part of them have been demolished so far. The demolished land must be flattened first and then crops must be planted for two or three years. After the crops grow up, it can be proved that the land has been successfully reclaimed before they can continue to build buildings.

The village secretary felt very aggrieved because he had not received a salary for a year. He was exhausted from building the building and was complained by the villagers. He felt very upset.

There are fewer and fewer villagers who farm. Now the village's economic source is unclear, and everything is self-raised. The village ran out of money halfway through building the building, so it invested money on its own. It invested more than 3 million yuan, and spent more than 11 million yuan in total. At present, the village has built an moxa moxibustion factory, which may develop into an economic source.

The village secretary summarized the three major events that the village has accomplished in recent years: building roads, constructing buildings, and digging wells.

Road-building culture in the village

The village does not have much money, and the road construction depends entirely on donations from the wealthy villagers. When it comes to the cement roads in the village, everyone knows who paid for them. Generally, people build roads near their homes.



Water well

Nantouwan used to be the village’s water source. Ten years ago, a new well was built in the village. The square cement house locked the well, and the tap water for the buildings was drawn from there. The village’s water supply has been guaranteed since then.

with rice noodles as ropes and spread on the top of the house to form the roof.

Hard-working farmers and lazy farmers

Many fields planted with crops are overgrown with weeds, which was unimaginable before. The weeds in the corn fields are more vigorous than the corn. The crops are thin and small, and the weeds are tall and strong.



Village Stories

Recording anecdotes mentioned in village chats:

- The millet my uncle planted didn’t grow well, and he was afraid of being laughed at, so he hid it when others came.
- Someone went to Shiwan to take a bath and drowned
- The four famous people in the village (derogatory)
- Grandma cleverly used her hot-tempered daughter-in-law to scare Zhang Mu away

Climb Dongshan



Grandma led us to climb the hill east of the village. There were farmlands and reservoirs on the hill. The slope of East Hill was gentler than that of South Hill, and the land here was better. The reservoir collected rainwater to irrigate the crops, and the pond was full of toads. When we went there, we saw someone catching small fish.

We continued walking towards Nanyu Village, my grandmother’s hometown, and arrived at the small mountain spring where she used to fetch water. The spring was in two small holes (the size of which was comparable to a dog hole) on the side of the road halfway up the mountain, blocked by stones. Since the trees growing on the mountain were not crops that needed fertilizer, the spring water was safe to drink. My grandmother said that she used to carry 10 kilograms of mountain spring water home every time, and it tasted different.



On the way, we encountered yellow sedge and rice noodles (the word used is questionable) used to build thatched roofs. Yellow sedge is straight and long, and the grass stems are collected and tied up

- The half-sugarist second-married old lady holds high the banner of gender equality
- Proverbs related to cultivated land: There are no problems after plowing three ridges; have you plowed the second ridge?

Farmers’ vegetable-growing genes



In the village, you can often see vegetables and fruits of different shapes planted outside the bungalows or in the yards, some in the shape of trees, vines, and bushes. Even though there are not many people farming now, villagers are still used to growing something near their homes.

Recruitment in the village



The curbstones next to the well are now covered with cement. When we came back from Shiwan, we saw an auntie peeling off the plastic sheet covering the cement. It turned out that the village paid her to do this job. The village manager knew her and knew she could do this, so he gave her the job.

2024.7.25 Visit the building again

First level, second level, third level



I wanted to draw a map of the distribution of fields, so I asked my grandma where the land was better. The land grades were assigned by the production teams during the Cultural Revolution and have been used until now. My grandma couldn't tell me because good and bad land were mixed together. Flat, fertile, and large land was good land, and vice versa. I put this idea aside for the time being.

How to find directions in the village

In such an unknown little village, it is impossible to use navigation, and maps are even less useful than once in a lifetime. Without road names, how do villagers communicate directions and

addresses? First of all, the village uses east, west, south, and north. For the first time, I, who have always been confused about directions, realized the significance of doing so. "The land at the south end", "the land at the north end", and "the old house in the west" are common words used by people here. In the absence of road names and place names, they are the simplest way to describe the geographical location. Continue to extend in the four directions of east, west, south, and north, and there are neighboring villages. At the same time, there are several landmarks in the village: under the pine tree (the pine tree is dead, and there are locust trees there now, but this name is still used today), the stage (watching plays, watching open-air movies in the old days, and the center of square dances at night), Nantou Bay (the place to carry water in the old days), and Shivan (the place to wash clothes and children play in the old days). In addition, the villagers are quite familiar with which family lives in which house, and "XX's house" can also be used to explain the direction and address. "Office" (village committee office) and "factory" (factory built by villagers) are also landmarks recognized by everyone.

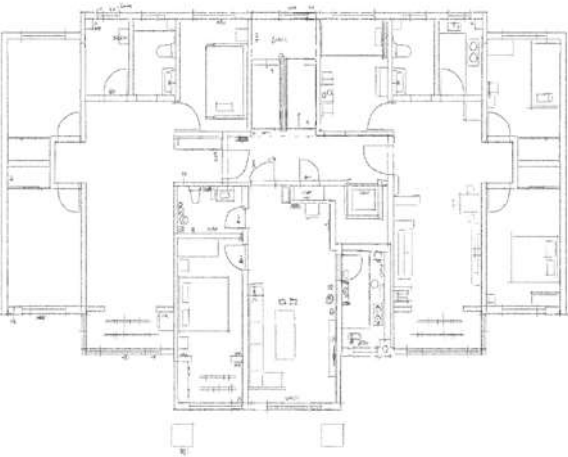
Blurred building



I wanted to learn more about the relationships among the villagers, so I wanted to start with the people my grandma was familiar with. I asked my grandma how many people in the building she knew, and she said she knew them all. But it was a difficult task to tell which households they all lived in. So my grandma took me downstairs and asked a group of old ladies sitting downstairs. These were small groups in Nantou that she didn't usually interact with. My grandma made a huge sacrifice for my research. The old lady was not very willing to tell me, an "outsider", the information, and she really couldn't tell the specific location of each family for the time being, so she asked me to look at the list of arrears posted on the elevator. There were not many people on the list, and they were basically people who lived away from home for a long time and didn't come back. I couldn't see what they were, so I had to give up.

After returning home, my grandmother said that when she lived in the old house, she knew where

every household was. After moving into the building, she never remembered which floor and which household the villagers lived in. She asked many times, but she still couldn't remember. It was difficult to find people. The building blurred the location of the villagers.



Floor Plan

Another job

In the afternoon, an auntie suddenly came into my grandmother's house with a broom and asked, "Who lives in this house?" "She said she didn't know my mother. My mother said, "My father is Zhai Chunyou. "The auntie suddenly realized and said that she was here to clean the corridor for her sister today, and then went out to continue sweeping the floor.



2024.7.26 Surrounding villages

Today, Aunt Wei took us back to Zibo. On the way, she showed us some villages near Xihe Town.

Xihe Town Majiazhuang

Majiazhuang is a beautiful rural model village. The village chief is rich and invested 400 million yuan to build roads and houses in the village, and also built an artificial lake and a large park. The park is in Chinese style and is now a tourist attraction, attracting tourists from all over Zibo. The park displays posters for soil and water conservation. Zibo's annual harvest festival is also held here. The publicity here is very good. You can see the promotional words for the netted melons grown here on the road, and there are posters at the entrance of the park introducing the specialties of Xihe Town.

We walked through the bungalows in the village and arrived at the edge of the field. The bungalows here are more diverse than those in

Shuiyu, with adobe, stone, and red brick houses. The roofs are thatched and tiled.

Aunt Wei said that now most of the land is in a cooperative model. Farmers who are not convenient to farm can use the land management rights to invest in the cooperative and let the collective organization engaged in agricultural production and management to farm their land. They can receive land transfer fees as basic income, and can also invest in the land income rights to become shareholders and share the annual land output in the form of dividends , achieving a win-win situation.



2024.7.27 Borrowing books

I said I wanted to find some village chronicles to learn about the history of nearby villages. Shuiyu Village is still developing and has no awareness of keeping records. It would be good to find some village chronicles from other villages for reference. Uncle Wei and Aunt Wei helped me contact an uncle from the Publicity Department of Zibo. He has a lot of books at home, especially those related to Zibo. I followed Aunt Wei to his home and borrowed the following 10 books:

- Architecture related: "Zibo Traditional Village", "Qidi Ancient Architecture"
- Policy related: "Important Documents on the 60th Anniversary of Reform and Opening Up in Zibo"
- Village chronicles: "Hanjiawo Village Chronicles", "Gongsun Village Chronicles", "Zangzi Village Chronicles"

Zibo related: “A Century of Zibo Imprints”,
“Zibo Yearbook”, “Zibo District Chronicles”

I will summarize the contents of the book later.

2024.7.28 Other villages

Today I visited two other villages in Zhangdian. My father contacted two friends who work in government departments and told them that I wanted to study the renovation of old villages. They took me to see two villages that were relatively well renovated, both of which were model villages in Zibo.

Chengdong Village

The new plan of Chengdong Village was designed by Tongji University in 1995 and completed in 1999. The goal at that time was to be ahead of the times 30 years ago and not outdated in 50 years. Now, Chengdong Village does not look like a rural village at all. The whole village is made up of single-family villas, neatly located on both sides of the straight road. “Village” is just its administrative level. Chengdong Village does not conform to people’s impression of traditional villages.

Chengdong Village is a small village of 800 people. It does not farm but relies on industry to make a fortune. At that time, the village had brick factories, tile factories, etc. Currently, the village’s economic source is the leasing of old factory buildings.

I was able to talk to the village secretary of Chengdong Village. He sat in his office and was already used to being visited by outsiders. He gave me a copy of the village history of Chengdong Village and talked about the difficulties in building the village at that time: when the villa structure was first designed, each household had four toilets, which the villagers were unwilling to accept because every household at that time had a dry toilet and could not imagine moving toilets into their homes. Later, the designer reduced the four toilets to three. The garage was also part of the design. When there were only two cars in the village, the garage seemed completely redundant. After negotiation, the garage was transformed into a storage room, which could be used for parking when there were cars and for storage when there were no cars. Later, time proved the foresight of these two designs.



The village still has a bungalow that was there before. The family there was a stubborn tenant who was unwilling to move out, but they were given a new house to live in later. The bungalow was preserved and became a cultural relic by accident.



There is even a museum in the village, which displays farm tools, daily necessities, old life scenes and documents. Chengdong Village has won numerous awards, and the certificates filled an entire wall. The aunt who led us on the tour works in the village office. She married here in the 1990s and experienced the renovation of the village. She is very satisfied with her current life. I asked her if I could visit her home. She made a phone call and took us to an old lady’s home. There was a sign in front of the door of the house that said “Beauty in the Family Demonstration Household”. The house was clean and bright, with two floors and a front and back yard.

The aunt who introduced me to this village used to report on the exemplary deeds of this village. In the past, there were awards for titles such as advanced and civilized families. The village

committee would visit villagers' homes every month to conduct inspections and give scores for a series of assessment items such as the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Now, they don't conduct inspections at home, but only inspect the cleanliness of public areas.

The village still has the hand-drawn design drawings from that time, which are very precious. I took a complete photo of them. The building is divided into two types, A and B, with different areas. The roof of the A-type building is expensive and is made of concrete. It is said to be able to withstand a magnitude 10 earthquake. At that time, the village gave a maximum subsidy of 50%, and the cost was 100,000 yuan, which was 50,000 to 60,000 yuan after the subsidy.

The welfare in the village is very good now. 4 million yuan is allocated each year to give bonuses to villagers, and management fees are free for villagers.



Junshan Village

Junshan Village is full of buildings, and in 2018, each household had one house. People here have long stopped farming and are now workers. Next to the village is the Lvchang, which replaced the previous farmland. There are free senior apartments in the village, where the elderly can move in when they reach the age. There is a clinic inside, so the elderly can go to the clinic if they are sick. There is also a kindergarten in the village, which is also free. There is no property management in the village, and the villagers clean the public areas on their own, and there are monthly evaluations.



There is also a museum in the village, at the end of the main road in the village. Red slogans along the way sparkle in the sun. At the entrance of the village, there is a village floor plan and a poster of the 15-minute living circle. The 15-minute living circle is a concept promoted by Zibo, and it exists in many places. The purpose is to allow residents everywhere to find daily necessities within a 15-minute walking distance.

Along the way, I also saw more modern villages, all of which had a grand gate without exception, and I guess there was no rural appearance inside. These villages were surrounded by urban facilities and had become part of the city.



Working Abstracts

[2024.8.15] Architectural Anomalies: Interpreting the Misfit of Urban Housing Typology in Northern Rural China

In 2023, a new housing block was erected in my grandma's village after four years of construction. The housing project, as a response to the Chinese government's directive to "beautify villages" across the nation, now sees village residents settling into their new homes. Now, Block 1 of Shuiyu Village (Figure 1) has become something of a village landmark. The 10-storey linear block sits inside a gated compound, towering over the remaining flat-roofed village houses that sprawl along expansive farmlands.

The multi storey housing block brings about obvious utilitarian benefits, but it is ill-fitted within the village typology. However, when such architectural anomalies spring up in villages across the nation with enough repetition that it becomes a pattern, it signals the consolidation of power relations and the normalisation of social practices that is worth examining.

Using the case of Shuiyu Village, Zibo, this thesis explores the phenomenon of urban housing models in China's rural revamp, examining the motivations behind their adoption and its impact on rural residents. At first glance, the disjointedness of an urban typology in a rural context seems to be a thoughtless adaptation of the dwelling unit meant for metropolitan life in a society still based in traditional agricultural production. But closer inspection of its form reveals ideological underpinnings that suggest the inevitable appearance of such anomalies given the greater social narrative of 21st century China – the seeming misfit in a single rural locale is actually the inevitable product of the greater spatial code of the Chinese society at large.

Keywords: urban-rural housing typology, architectural anomalies, rural redevelopment

In 80 words: In 2023, a 10-storey housing block was built in a small village in Northern China. Though visually jarring against traditional rural homes, this design isn't just a one-off oddity. It's part of a larger trend where urban housing models are reshaping rural

landscapes. Using Shuiyu Village as a case study, this thesis explores how these architectural anomalies reflect deeper societal shifts in 21st-century China, examining the forces behind these changes and their impact on rural life.

Keywords: urban-rural housing typology, architectural anomalies, rural redevelopment

[2024.8.29] Architectural Anomalies: Interpreting the Misfit of Urban Housing Typology in Northern Rural China

In 2023, a 10-storey building was completed in my grandmother's village in Northern China, introducing modern conveniences like clean water, heating, and proper sanitation that quickly won the approval of the villagers. While the new structure contrasts sharply with the traditional flat-roofed homes, it has become a symbol of progress and comfort for the community. The villagers eagerly embraced the modern amenities, finding the new building a significant improvement over their older homes.

However, as an architecture student, I initially felt uneasy about the building's generic design, which seemed out of place in the village's vernacular setting. This thesis explores the tension between the new, modern building and the traditional architecture that has long defined the village. Through interviews, personal reflections, and close observation, I investigate how these changes impact the daily lives, habits, and community spirit of the villagers. My research blends my architectural training with the lived experiences of the villagers, seeking to understand the broader forces behind these changes and their significance for rural life in China today. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute both to academic discussions and to the village itself, exploring how architecture can adapt to and reflect the needs of the communities it serves.

Keywords: urban-rural housing typology, architectural anomalies, rural redevelopment

In 80 words: This thesis explores the tension between traditional vernacular architecture and the new multistorey buildings recently introduced in my grandmother's village in Northern China.

While these modern structures disrupt the village's historical typology, they offer conveniences like clean water, heating, and sanitation that villagers appreciate. Balancing my architectural education with the villagers' lived experiences, I investigate how these changes influence their behaviors and the village's evolving identity, seeking to give back to the community through my research.

Keywords: urban-rural housing typology, architectural anomalies, rural redevelopment

[2024.9.19] Architectural Anomalies: Interpreting the Misfit of Urban Housing Typology in Northern Rural China

In 2023, a 10-storey building was completed in my grandmother's village in Northern China, introducing modern conveniences like clean water, heating, and proper sanitation that quickly won the approval of the villagers. Though visually jarring against traditional rural homes, this design isn't just a one-off oddity. It's part of a larger trend where urban housing models are reshaping rural landscapes.

Based on this case study, this thesis examines the evolving architectural relationship between vernacular typologies and modern building practices in rural China. Traditionally, rural farmers nurture the land like a child, with rewards directly proportional to the care invested. This dynamic contrasts sharply with urban transactional economies, where service is detached from the quality of labour. The land, treated as living and familial, underscores a deeply rooted environmental care. Farmers' agency is not isolated but interwoven with natural forces like rain and soil, fostering a form of collective authorship. In contrast, modern industrialisation and the shift toward factory-based labor, which operates independently of environmental conditions, challenge this relationship. The new building in the village becomes a symbol of these tensions—a block representing nameless authority, but also the community's acceptance of evolving circumstances. This research captures the residents' adaptation to such changes while maintaining ties to the land. By documenting their responses, this thesis explores how architecture mediates between traditional values of co-authorship

with nature and the encroaching autonomy of modern development.

Keywords: co-authorship, rural modernization, collective care

In 80 words: This thesis explores the intersection of vernacular typology and modern building practices in a Northern Chinese village. It contrasts the nurturing, co-authored relationship between farmers and the land with the anonymous authority embodied by new buildings. The shift from farming to factory labor disrupts traditional environmental stewardship, raising questions about agency and collective care. By investigating the villagers' adaptation, this study highlights the evolving role of architecture in mediating the changing dynamics between land and community.

Keywords: urban-rural housing typology, architectural anomalies, rural redevelopment

[2024.10.8] Architectural Anomalies: Interpreting the Misfit of Urban Housing Typology in Northern Rural China

Farmers in Shuiyu Village, like those across rural China, have historically been shaped by forces beyond their control. From collectivisation to decollectivisation, and now the introduction of modern housing, villagers have been swept along by the tide of history, with limited agency. In the past, collective work was grounded in traditional norms and relationships, but these have been disrupted by rapid urbanisation and new living arrangements, distancing villagers from the land that once defined their identity.

Though agriculture is declining, many villagers continue to farm, more out of nostalgia than necessity. What is valuable now is not the act of farming itself, but the close relationship between villagers and the land, as well as their ties to one another. Yet, this connection is threatened by the exodus of young people to cities, leaving the elderly behind. With weakening family ties and fewer people invested in rural life, Shuiyu faces the risk of fading away with the older generation.

Despite these challenges, there is hope. The rural hukou is gaining value as land becomes more precious, and some urbanites are returning to villages to escape city pressures. A growing number of young people are also rediscovering farming, driven by social media and a desire for self-sufficiency. However, Shuiyu remains stuck in transition, awaiting new housing blocks. Even if these homes are built, the village's cultural fabric—its sense of community and connection to the land—may be lost. Shuiyu's future hangs in the balance between state-led development and the resilience of its remaining residents.

Keywords: urban exodus, rural identity, agricultural decline, resilient community

[2024.10.15] Rural-Urban Co-Development: A Speculative Future for Self-Sustaining Villages in 1980s-90s China

What if, during the 1980s and 90s, instead of promoting rural-to-urban migration, China fostered a model of rural-urban co-development? In this alternate scenario, with enough people remaining in villages and the economy booming, the capacity for rural redevelopment would have been sufficient to create a thriving network between urban and rural areas—challenging the very notion of a rural-urban divide. This would have led to the emergence of architectural typologies that vary in their relationship to the land, based on the wishes of the dwellers. These homes would not just provide shelter, but be designed to integrate self-sustaining systems—from waste-to-energy loops, closed water cycles, to renewable energy production. The village would have evolved into a self-sustaining habitat, merging the best of pioneering technologies with a deeply rooted connection to the land, turning rural architecture into a high-performance, self-sufficient engine of life and production.

For villagers, farming would no longer just be for survival, but a balance of work and enjoyment—a lifestyle where people both live and produce in harmony with nature. For urbanites seeking escape, the appeal would be the DIY ethos of rural living, akin to Minecraft-style autonomy, where production and consumption cycles are managed at a household scale. In traditional Chinese painting, the landscape is not merely something to be consumed but something to

be experienced. This fluid, embodied way of viewing the landscape parallels the omni-lifestyle of rural living—where life is not divided into specialised tasks, but lived as a holistic, authentic experience that defies the typical rural-urban dichotomy. By imagining a world where rural and urban life are co-developed, this thesis explores a speculative architectural future that redefines the relationship between people, land, and production in a truly sustainable and integrated way.

Keywords: self-sustaining architecture, rural-urban co-development, total unit of living

[2024.10.22] Thriving in Transition: Adaptive Architecture for Resilient Rural Communities

In reimagining this rural village, I reject the notion of the countryside as a passive landscape. Instead, I approach it as a living, breathing organism—one that thrives on cycles of renewal, adaptation, and community stewardship. My intervention embraces the radical potential of the countryside as a site for architectural experimentation, where the built environment is not only functional but deeply integrated into the rhythms of the land.

In response to the village's shifting dynamics, my design prioritizes flexibility and seasonal adaptability. Rather than imposing static, permanent structures, I propose a system of modular, transformable spaces that evolve with the seasons—buildings that expand and contract, open and close, depending on the needs of the community and the environment. This adaptive architecture dissolves the artificial divide between interior and exterior, between human and nature.

At the core of the intervention is an ethos of sustainability, using local materials and advanced technologies to create self-sufficient systems. Waste becomes fuel, water is cycled and purified on-site, and energy is harnessed from the sun and wind. But more than just functional, these systems form an architectural narrative: each structure is a dialogue between the old and the new, between vernacular tradition and contemporary innovation. Through this, the village emerges not as a relic of the past but as a forward-thinking model for rural resilience and regeneration.

Keywords: self-sustaining architecture, rural-urban co-development, total unit of living

[2024.10.22] (2) Thriving Terrain: Reimagining Rural Futures

Rural villages exist in a complex interplay between authority and autonomy, often governed by directives from external authorities while simultaneously operating within a framework of local customs and informal governance (礼治而非法治). This duality illustrates their capacity to navigate top-down measures with ingenuity, adapting and reinterpreting regulations to suit their unique contexts.

Rather than perceiving the countryside as a passive recipient of urban encroachment and modernisation, we should recognise it as a radical space brimming with potential for innovation and experimentation. Villagers frequently engage in self-sustaining practices that minimise reliance on currency, fostering an economic model rooted in mutual support and local resources. This independence empowers them to cultivate resilience and maintain a degree of self-governance, enabling the community to thrive outside conventional systems.

In this light, the wisdom and lived experiences of rural populations become invaluable assets, challenging prevailing narratives that frame the countryside as an outdated remnant of the past. Instead, these communities can serve as fertile ground for progressive ideas that may influence broader societal transformations.

The ideal scenario envisions a future where villagers, through their self-sufficiency and innovative practices, achieve unprecedented wealth—not merely in financial terms but through enhanced quality of life, ecological sustainability, and cultural vitality. By redefining what it means to be “wealthy,” we can appreciate the diverse ways in which rural communities contribute to a more resilient and holistic understanding of prosperity.

[2024.10.31] Learning to Thrive: A New Narrative for the Countryside

This thesis proposes a rural rehabilitation programme aimed at urbanites seeking refuge from the relentless pace of city life, drawn by the romanticised allure of rural living popularised on social media. Many arrive hoping to “lie flat,” while others strive to maintain their urban careers amidst the tranquillity of Shuiyu Village, equipped with digital tools for remote work.

Initially, these urbanites experience a honeymoon phase, enchanted by the simplicity of village life and the warmth of community interactions. However, as they engage in hands-on activities like cultivating gardens and raising animals, they come to appreciate the intricate labour and knowledge underpinning food production and craftsmanship. This immersion reveals the complexities of rural life, including social hierarchies and the economy of favours, leading to moments of conflict and self-discovery. As their understanding deepens, urbanites redefine productivity and purpose, participating in workshops and collaborative projects that promote skill-sharing and communal engagement. They transform from outsiders into integral community members, embracing the countryside as a second home where fulfilment extends beyond conventional career aspirations.

This thesis advocates for a reimagined relationship between urban and rural communities, challenging the perception of the countryside as merely a feeder for the city. It confronts the entrenched belief that life adheres to a singular path defined by prestigious education and wealth. By illustrating the potential for coexistence and mutual benefit, the research promotes broader life choices, alleviating the pressures of narrow trajectories. Furthermore, local villagers emerge as custodians of knowledge and tradition, guiding urbanites in the arts and crafts of rural life, thus redefining their roles within the community.

Keywords: rural rehabilitation, community engagement, productivity redefined, village empowerment

[2024.11.1] Learning to Thrive: A New Narrative for the Countryside

As rural villages across China face pressures to urbanise, their identities and value systems are often overshadowed by narratives of progress defined by city life. This thesis examines how the village of Shuiyu, emblematic of many Chinese rural communities, navigates the transformation imposed by policies favouring urban migration and modernisation. Beginning with the construction of a 10-storey residential block that starkly contrasts with Shuiyu's traditional architecture, I trace the impacts of such urbanisation measures on the village's landscape, demography, and ethos.

Central to this investigation is the question: *How can we define and preserve the intrinsic value of rural life amid urban expansion?* Through field observations, historical analysis, and community interviews, I reveal how Shuiyu's residents hold valuable capital in the form of local ecological knowledge, positioning rural knowledge and practices as a form of wealth beyond economic metrics. Their intimate, generational knowledge of the environment contributes to a kind of "landscape literacy" nurtured by their close relationship with the land and the adherence to nature's cycles—values increasingly rare in urban settings. This report argues for a redefined rural productivity, one not based on monetary exchange but on a life co-authored with natural elements like rain, soil, and seasonality.

To protect and revitalise such rural values, I propose an urbanite rehabilitation programme that reimagines Shuiyu as a "choice space" where city dwellers can immerse themselves in village life. Staged integration offers them a path toward self-sustenance, collaborative land stewardship, and a life beyond urban pressures. This model aspires to establish rural spaces as vital complements to urban life, advocating for their preservation not just as relics of the past but as resilient alternatives with unique, indispensable value for the future.

Keywords: rural revitalisation, ecological capital, landscape literacy

Self-Disclosure of Research

I certify that except where due acknowledgment has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the project is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program, any editorial work, paid or unpaid carried out by a third party is acknowledged, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

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Learning to Thrive: A New Narrative for the Countryside

Year 5

Broken: Labour for Care
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