



Deposited via The University of Sheffield.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:

<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/113618/>

Version: Accepted Version

Article:

Ren, X. (2016) Socially engaged architecture in a Chinese rural village: Xihe Village Community Centre, 2014. *arq: Architectural Research Quarterly*, 20 (2). pp. 119-130. ISSN: 1359-1355

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1359135516000282>

This article has been published in a revised form in *arq: Architectural Research Quarterly* [<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1359135516000282>]. This version is free to view and download for private research and study only. Not for re-distribution, re-sale or use in derivative works. © Cambridge University Press 2016.

Reuse

This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs (CC BY-NC-ND) licence. This licence only allows you to download this work and share it with others as long as you credit the authors, but you can't change the article in any way or use it commercially. More information and the full terms of the licence here: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

Takedown

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.

Title: Socially-engaged Architecture in Chinese Rural Village: Community Centre in Xihe Village, 2014

28-words-Abstract:

This paper reviews a recently built community centre in Xihe Village and the transformative value of social production of architecture during the current rapid rural-urban transition in China.

Author: Xiang Ren

Email: xren4@sheffield.ac.uk

Address:

School of Architecture, University of Sheffield
The Arts Tower, Western Bank
Sheffield, S10 2TN
United Kingdom

Biography: Supervised by Prof. Peter Blundell Jones, Xiang Ren is currently a doctoral researcher and teaching assistant in School of Architecture, University of Sheffield, UK. His work on Chinese traditional villages was shortlisted into RIBA Presidents Research Awards 2014.

Submission date: 7th December 2015

Abstract:

This paper attempts to explore the social production of architecture in contemporary Chinese rural villages through a case study on the Community Centre in Xihe Village. This community project, designed and built in 2014, exemplifies a lesser-known type of Chinese architectural practice engaging in a local and specific context, which suddenly gave participation a dramatic image in current breakneck Chinese rural-urban transition of large scale and rapid speed. By looking at this highly specific case through a detailed description and critical evaluation, this paper takes this participatory architectural project as the very first critical example of the socially-engaged architecture in China; as presenting an alternative architecture of resistance in response to the top-down guiding principle 'Construction of A New Socialist Countryside' launched by the government in 2005. Source material was collected through fieldwork in the village, including observational study, photographic documentation, and intensive formal and informal interviews with practitioners, authorities, and villagers. The analysis emphasizes the social process and consequences of different stages of this building, in order to explore hidden potentials and methodologies tailoring the architectural design and construction to the site-specificity. The social consequence of the building process is much more important than the object produced. By investigating the architectural version within a broader framework combining anthropology and activism, the paper attempts to introduce a more socially resilient way of making architecture in the current Chinese rural-urban transition. On the one hand it addresses the contingencies in working with underprivileged village communities in inner rural China, which have scarce resources and fragile identities; on the other hand it cuts through the surface of rural vernacular China to expose the undercurrent of silent issues in architecture that constitute the indigenous, the everyday, resistance, transition, and resilience.

One Country, Two Societies

China is vast, but consists of two kinds of place, the urban (city and town) and the rural (county and village); the people called Chinese exist in billions, but divide into two, urban citizens and rural ones. This is China, 'One country, two societies'¹. It is a former agrarian-based country for centuries, whilst its industry has developed through the radical form of top-down urbanization in the past few decades at an incredible scale and speed. In 2005 the Chinese government announced its plan to urbanize 350 million rural citizens by 2030, one of the largest labor flows ever, and unprecedented in the nation's, and possibly the globe's history. This was followed by 'Constructing New Socialist Rural Area Movement'² with the result that thousands of indigenous villages have disappeared under the wave of an irreversible urbanizing movement breaking across the rural landscape.

However, out of step with the pace of land urbanization is the pace of rural population transferring into officially recognized urban citizens. This is strangely much slower, due to the household registration system as a historical policy³ legacy which limited the freedom for the rural poor to obtain residential permits in comparably richer cities, along with other associated uneven and unequal contemporary issues, such as the limited access to the public schools and welfare programmes. Thus a considerable number of people from rural communities reside at this periphery, both geographically and mentally, struggling through their lives in this national play about land and rights. The precise number cannot be estimated, as they are affected at different levels by flowing populations, varying from rural people temporarily working and living in urban areas, to left-over elderly, women, and children in impoverished rural areas. But what is clear is that their concerns have been neglected, their memories suppressed, and their voices un-heard in the production of their built environments and the reallocation of spatial resources, which in turn has intensified their peripheral identities.

Chinese Villages in Rural-Urban Transition

At first glance Chinese rural villages seem disconnected from the nation's capital, but their identity suffers the most because of the uneven development under globalisation. To some extent the geo-political 'debts' from capital-dependent urbanization of China have been imposed on the rural population, which results in a poorer rural realm and a deeper rural-urban disjunction. The spanning of rural urban division from the viewpoint of socio-economic-cultural status has speeded up the abnormal process of homogenization of the built environment, rather than allowing the continuity of the more normal differentiation, which could be understood as an emerging identity crisis in local-specific Chinese condition – 'the rural' didn't want to be 'the rural' any more, while 'the urban' still wanted 'the rural' to be 'the rural'.

The challenge is obvious. The long traditional reciprocal relationship between the urban and the rural has been broken. The inner mechanism, rooted in vernacular Chinese social structure, has become 'lost in translation' with the imposition of the urban language [1]; it has been suppressed in the current bottleneck rural-urban transition: farmlands near the city are being requisitioned; changeable villages are being merged and reallocated; unchangeable villages house mosaics of temporary residents and disconnected activities; rural landscapes keep being swallowed up by the diffusion of infrastructures and uniform settlement typologies. Both physical and mental cracks and crevices here and there in rural China have demonstrated a loss of place-depth.



1 Modern infrastructure has cut through an old unknown village, leaving the remaining rural vernacular architecture sandwiched between new ones. Similar heterotopic sites have emerged at different scales, forms and in different temporal dimensions in the varied rural-urban interfaces of current China. Spring 2015

The ‘Vernacular China’ and Social Production

For centuries the ‘city’ in China had been the space for exchange of hand-made commodities, rather than the place for permanent dwelling. Until now the original hometowns of the majority of Chinese are still the ‘village’. The root lies only in the rural villages; so the villages reflect the authentic ‘China’ in essence. So what is that deep structure and how can we reinvent it? In searching for the root of Chinese tradition, the social production of vernacular architecture in rural villages needs to be readdressed. As a super-stable and autonomous system, the rural part of China, or the more emotional notion of the ‘Vernacular China’, has been organized from the top down but built from the bottom up. That is because the rural villages or vernacular settlements were socially constructed, (and still are socially constructed, but in a much weaker manner when faced with urbanization and globalization,) in which top-down modes of development from the official power structure worked with bottom-up modes of management based on clan and family.

In constructing the ‘Vernacular China’, there were no professionally-trained architects; all the building-related works were produced by constant collaboration and negotiation, and based on social rituals and values. Everyone who got involved in the building process had a right to say, a right to build, a right to participate. Even if not the design author or the end user of the building, they could be a key actor in one or several stages of the building’s life cycle -- such as the craftsman, the so-called ‘carpenter-architect’ whose oral transmissions traditionally made Chinese vernacular architecture, or the ‘barefoot architect’, who shed light on their work in almost every rural village through self-building. That is the reason why the physical and socio-spatial languages of Chinese rural villages and architecture [2] were slow but diverse products; they were co-produced by multiple authors, including clan members, scholars, carpenters, Fengshui masters, and other ordinary villagers [3]. Thus, both the production and consumption of vernacular architecture were a collaborative, shared and mutually learning process, which facilitated unpredictable socio-spatial products including diverse architectonic languages and creative inhabitation patterns.



2 Waterfront buildings of Ding Liwan, a rural village in the same region with Xihe Village, China, spring 2015

3 The building process of a carpenter’s own house in Bishan Village, China, spring 2015

It is within this context that the following case-study attempts to explore the architecture of social-engagement in current Chinese rural villages. Through engaging the vernacular, the periphery, and multiple authorships, architectural interventions self-organized by people have resisted against the normal forms of rural-urban disjunction driven by the top-down powers. The consequences of architecture or architectural action and the role of the architect or architectural practitioner have to be reexamined and repositioned in the light of this changing and intensifying process in Chinese rural villages. The transformative potential of the architectural intervention engaging community participation has demonstrated an alternative, which seeks a more community-based, socially-inclusive and locally-resilient mode for negotiating peripheral identities in those heterogeneous conditions.

A Case Study: Xihe Village Community Centre



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

The Village:

Xihe Village is in Xin County, Henan province, one of the most underdeveloped counties beneath China's poverty line. Typical of rural villages in the inner Chinese mainland, this 'left-behind village' suffers from poverty, with an average annual income less of £250 per head. Because of its proximity (around 2 hours by car to the nearest city), around 900 working laborers ranging from 16 to 65 years old have migrated into the city in recent decades, leaving around 80 families of 300 elderly people and children behind as permanent residents living on rice and oil tea in this forgotten corner without even an Internet signal.⁴

Established from Qing Dynasty and with more than 300 years history, the village has a rich heritage in both cultural and natural landscape. Its main body [4] with a length of 400m and width of 100m was located between the mountain to the north and the river to the south, a layout matching the ideal settlement pattern in traditional Chinese Fengshui ideology. Therefore the village enjoys a friendly climatic condition and clearly distinguished four seasons with an average annual temperature of 15. The building fabric stretched along the passing river, and is surrounded by hundreds-of-years-old willow trees, paddy fields and bamboo forests. The central market street serves as spine connecting approximately 150 residential buildings, each with a typical courtyard layout in three layers, and constructed with good stonework, brickwork, and carpentry. Historically, it had a long reputation for producing generals in times of war and revolution, and this is reflected in the symbolic spatial form of the Ancestral Hall of Surname Zhang [5].

Arguably it should have attracted more public attention for transformation through a more local-resilient development mode, rather than being blindly swallowed up by the homogenizing top-down guidelines of commercial tourism. But the main challenge is obvious – the scarcity of social resources to recreate the vitality of the community and to develop the wellbeing of the villagers and launch them on a more self-organized way. Both the current built structure and the social structure in this village have been too stubborn to make a strategic move. It needed a catalyst, probably introduced from the outside, to trigger the way forward.



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

Practitioners:

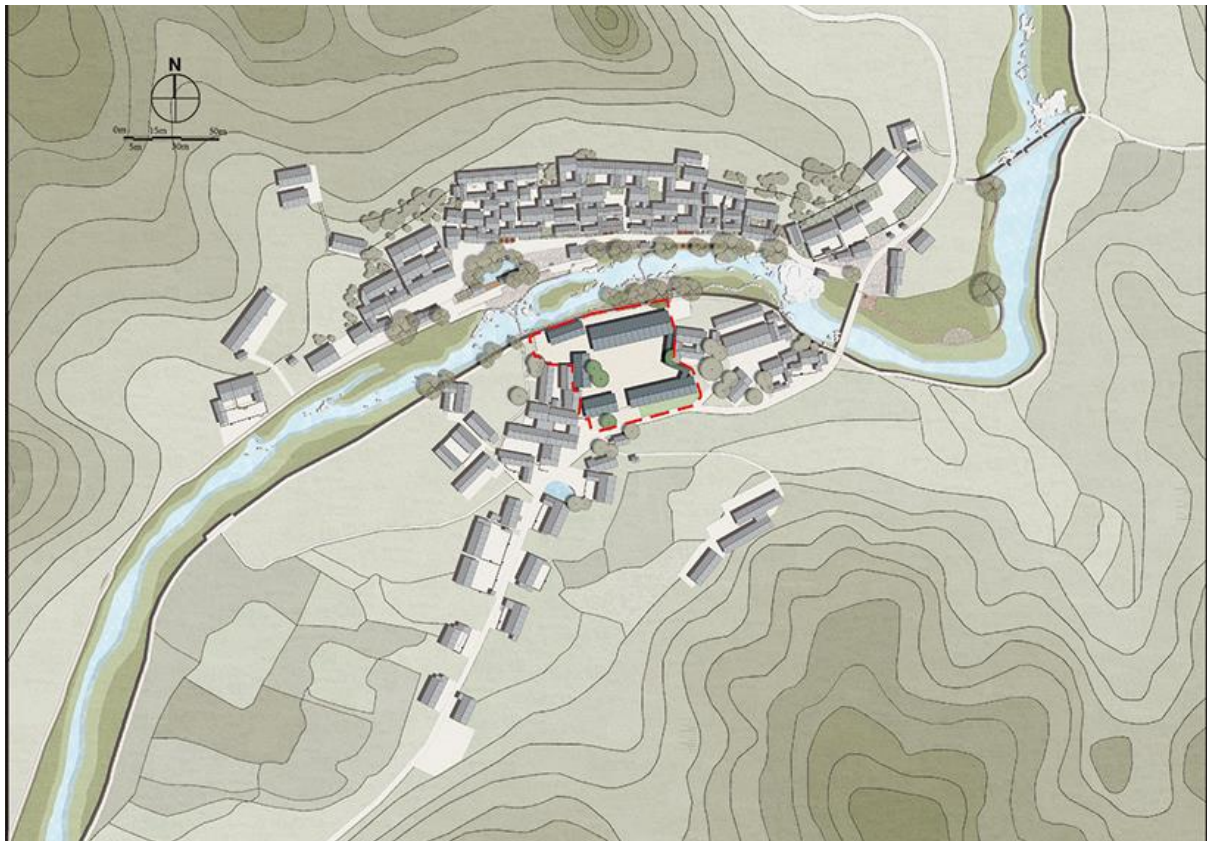
The ‘outsider’ here is Mr. Wei He, associate professor of the School of Architecture in Chinese Academy of Art, Beijing. Stepping down from mainstream architectural practice in China, Wei had an architectural training background in Germany, however he didn’t choose to become a practising architect in a normal market-adaptable route, but instead to act as editor of a lighting magazine and as an educator based in Beijing. He has also been quite active in the field of photography and curation, and gained his doctoral degree in public art installation. Annually he undertook fieldwork to vernacular settlements with his students doing surveying and measuring, which developed his interest in rural village regeneration. Following a recommendation from a friend who is a rural construction activist, he and one of his students (later on became the only project assistant) developed contacts and won initial trust with the political and cultural authorities of Xihe village⁵, aiming to work together to make a difference in this difficult situation. They drafted a community-based project with as much public engagement from the village as possible, functioning as a pilot project to rebuild the confidence for this underprivileged village, under the ambitious governmental plan to rebuild a ‘New Dream for Xin County’.⁶

Preparation and Fundraising process:

Wei He, as the key practitioner with architectural knowledge, volunteered to undertake this time-consuming project, and developed a loose-fit way of working with enthusiastic villagers and ambitious governmental officers. Identifying an appropriate site was the first step. During the village survey in August 2013 he found two abandoned rice-warehouses built in the 1950-60s with surviving volumes and structures, and persuaded the village leaders and some other stakeholders to reuse them, to make a new community focal point and future visitors centre. From October 2013 to February 2014, Wei He facilitated the fund-raising process, which received not only governmental grants but also funds from a villager-cooperative-organization established from the bottom up⁷. The reason for this tactic was that financial contributions on the project from rural villagers would link them more tightly to this public facility even without clear occupation and ownership, largely based on his understanding of social mechanisms deeply rooted in rural vernacular China. But the difficulty of getting the poor villagers to contribute funds can be imagined. Amazingly he made it. According to Wei He, after the completion of the main construction, a 90% stake⁸ of the funding for this project finally came from the villager-cooperative-organization. It is noteworthy here, in terms of this precise number, that the claims made by the architects, governmental officers and key villagers in the villager-cooperative-organization were different. Undeniable, however, was that the villagers as end users did contribute an indispensable part in the fund-raising process, after the consensus was achieved that the building would be run and managed by the villager-cooperative-organization and the profit from associated architectural programmes, such as the gift shops and dining halls, would go back to the ordinary villagers according to their specific shares.

Participatory Design process:

Alongside the river, the site [6] covering around 3700 m² lay to the south of the main body of the village, with optimum accessibility to the major road infrastructure. It was not a historical site; the place's memory could only be traced back to the 1950s, during which this site and adjacent sites were probably transformed for new development from agricultural fields. This could be demonstrated from the flat, artificial earthwork, which was a few meters' higher than the river to prevent flooding. But the site was not a tabula-rasa; the existing buildings maintained something atmospheric from that special period before the 'Cultural Revolution'. From February to April 2014, the project went into a co-design process between the architectural practitioner and the villagers – they developed the spatial brief together [7-8]: the two rice-warehouses with double-height spatial volumes, double pitched roofs and masonry supporting structures were kept entire, with the indoor parts to be transformed into a 680 m² community hall [9] for public events and a 420 m² mini-museum [10] for local traditional agriculture and handicrafts. A new semi-outdoor corridor [11] was made of a limited number of steel frames but mostly of locally-sourced bamboo, with a light roof canopy to protect from the elements. It was introduced to bridge the two warehouses, and to enhance the sense of enclosure for the central courtyard; three secondary structures were renovated into supporting facilities including a 170 m² canteen, a kitchen and a toilet. All of this emphasized the transformative use of indoor and outdoor spaces rather than the kind of aesthetic articulation and juxtaposition of old and the new structures often seen in the elite professional agenda. By this means, the risk of the normally higher expense for working with the given, rather than demolition and replacement, was minimised. It would be regarded as a refurbishment of memories rather than the refurbishment of the existing object.



6 Village Layout and Site Plan



7 Axonometric Diagram of Spatial Move



8 Ground Floor Plan



9 Interior of Community Hall after Completion. Autumn 2014



10 Interior of Mini-museum, Spring 2015

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



11 A light-weight corridor connects the community hall and the mini-museum, and provides a linear space under the eave to enclose the public square in between. Summer 2015

Instead of determining and defining, Wei He and his student assistant endeavoured to transfer their architectural knowledge in a gentle way to the whole community, and at the same time to get feedback from them, to learn from them, then to help them interpret their own concerns about the project in their own language. Using sketch visualization drawings and physical models [12] to engage the villagers, most of whom were not well educated, Wei He and his assistant held several meetings with village leaders, clan representatives and other main stakeholders⁹; then numerous informal chats and discussions with ordinary villagers around the site, conducted in an effective way. In this way mutual trust between the architectural practitioners as outsiders and community members was established, as well as a new productive kind of mutual learning which exposed some stunning tacit knowledge to guide the next design moves. For example, one third of the existing structure was demolished to accommodate the new proposed canteen [13], in order to match the traditional ritual relationship of spaces and avoid blocking the visual corridor from the house located across the river bank. This followed accounts of local ritual learnt from some elderly villagers. It thus generated a really generous open and elevated platform for public view of the whole waterfront landscape. Another example concerned the placing of a reclaimed 300-year-old traditional agricultural implement used for handmade oil in the mini-museum [14]: Wei and his assistant revised the design of route for the interior exhibition after they were reminded by the participants that the trailing arm of that wooden implement should be set perpendicular to the river direction, because ritual tradition suggested that it would gain luck from the water to make good-tasting oil. Whether such beliefs are to be regarded as superstition or indigenous wisdom, the importance of a piece of hidden ritual became attached, and the community participants received an increased sense of belonging as a result of respect being shown for their tradition, their beliefs, and their culture. In turn the newly designed building object anchored itself in its context.



12 Physical Model



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



14 The process of fixing the layout of the wooden agricultural implement handmade oil ritual with the guidance of elderly people from the local community. Summer 2014

Construction process:

The design development and construction process overlapped; the construction schedule was quite tight, starting on site from April 2014, with major construction completed in July and hand over to the users in early August. The project decision-making team became much more focused at this stage, as the project required more knowledge and experience in order to keep on budget and time within schedule. Wei He brought two lighting designers from Beijing for interior consultancy, while one villager acted as general project manager on site and another one took the role of financial manager. Wei He didn't set up an 'action centre'¹⁰ – working office on site, however the visits to the construction site for supervision and cooperation were intensive: towards three days a week in peak time in summer. About 5 or 6 craftsperson joined full-time at this stage, not having exquisite craftsmanship like past carpenters and masons, but still quite familiar with the work using brick, tile and wood. The rest of the construction team [15] consisted of a dozen villagers: they were left-over women and elderly who volunteered to join, including the emotional return of a 75 year old villager who had participated in the original construction of the rice-warehouse in his twenties. For this collaborative construction, which continued a long tradition of exchanging labour and collective assembly in vernacular villages, people worked together and learned from each other [16]. They got paid, trained, and enjoyed the sense of being needed and belonging to the project, also to the whole community. One of them was disabled, not capable of communicating with others, but his mental condition improved greatly after the construction, and now he has also learned to use a mobile phone for social contacts. The local community became empowered through this collective architectural action; it was the consequences of the participatory process rather than the final completed object that mattered most.



15 The construction team was made up of the remaining women, the disabled, the mason and the carpenter, all from the village. Summer 2014



16 Collective construction process on site. Summer 2014

Other than a few diagrammatic plan and axonometric drawings in the schematic design stage, there were no precise design development drawings for the plans and facades like those one would expect with normal professional services, but just quick scratches on paper, on brick, on land... and of course constant verbal discussions and negotiations on site between the architectural team and construction team. As Wei said, ‘when doing architecture in rural villages, 50% depends on your drawings, 30% depends on design adjustment on site, 20% is left to the craftsman.’¹¹ Thus it was a coproduction in response to the contingency of the architecture. It resulted in unpredictably dramatic architectural languages, particularly for the external wall of the canteen [17]. Facing west, a perforated brick-screen wall not only acts as a sun-shading device but also provided an amazing backdrop for the elevated public platform; the brickwork was stunning, with every three bricks forming a triangle sub-system and then assembled into a whole – this had never been seen in previous buildings of this region, nor in the craftsman’s own career life. The craftsman innovated this new tectonic method with old techniques and cheap materials, under the trust and enthusiasm of the architect and other participants – he didn’t even use bamboo to fill the void in between the three bricks as suggested by the architect to maintain structural stability.¹² Above it was inappropriate concrete beam-work, but this was restored in an indigenous way, so the spatial and tectonic language in this canteen façade really demonstrates the hybridity produced by the process. Thus building knowledge was mutually learnt and transferred both within and beyond the key project team, through oral exchange; while it still left sufficient time and space for the real makers to pose the production problems in their own languages, to solve them in their own ways, and to rethink and reimagine who was doing what for whom. Architecture acted as a medium of exchange from the intention to the object.



17 Interior of canteen after completion. Autumn 2014
A perforated brick-screen wall provides sunshades and changing patterns of light and shadow.

Occupation process:

Creative habitation patterns [18-19] demonstrated the architectural success in this participatory project under a budget of less than £100 per m²: extremely low. The villagers couldn't wait to start using the community centre for drinking tea, playing cards, and holding a cooking competition, even before the full completion of the interior refurbishment. They also made several traditional shadow play and bonfire parties in the courtyard during the summer before its official opening on October Chinese National Day. A couple requested to rent it for one day to hold their wedding ceremony, and on another day the space was booked to hold a symposium gathering the young political leaders from several adjacent villages in that region; which, it is said, attracted approximately 20,000 visitors during the holiday week after National Day, and maintained a regular rent basis of twice a week with economic income around £2000 per week.¹³ The diversity of social use after the occupation was obviously far beyond the architects' design expectations. The architect shifted his role from a high artistic solo-author to a half invisible collaborator and facilitator in the process, gained the trust and respect of the local community, and was warmly welcomed by ordinary villagers on his informal return visits – he started as an anti-hero architect, and ended as a real hero of the community.



18 Diverse social use of the outdoor space after completion. Autumn 2014



19 Diverse social use of the indoor space after completion. Autumn 2014



20 Before and After. Spring 2013 and Autumn 2014

Concluding thoughts:

Xihe Village Community Centre is a building that now truly belongs to that village in everyday use, but was not visually similar to buildings formally made by villagers, whether vernacular or newly transplanted in the so called city style. In this participatory working methodology for design and construction, the outsiders' input was merged and coordinated with the insiders' experience, which finally led to coproduction and de-familiarization of the built form, the craft, and the spatial use. It is an architecture filling the gap between the maker and the made: the builder was the inhabitant and the inhabitant was the builder; the architect acted as an invisible bridge -- he didn't impose or overlap new onto the old, but just intervened gently and carefully into the existing relationship between people and place. With a collaborative input from a series of new actors, the final object and the social use of this community centre represents a re-assemblage of the existing familiar network in a non-familiar way. The old existing sees its self-identity in the new addition, while two layers became married to each other to enhance each other [20]. Community participation and social engagement has suppressed authorship, denied signature, but produced a social-sustainable building at its most meaningful level.

The project isn't without its problems, though. The issue of who owns and controls it remains unsolved from the beginning till now, and in some cases caused limited accessibility and freedom for use by the public. The architectural project contributed to the branding and identity of the village, which fulfilled some expectations of both villagers and government; however it could not prevent the commodification of the vernacular culture, and might even accelerate it by wrapping it into a new round of market-driven development, for we found that modernity and tourism has also intervened in Xihe and nearby villages, inevitably. The building itself is likely to become other when it works programmatically as a visitor centre for the floods of travellers rather than as the common ground for the local community. Therefore the huge potential of reconnecting the community based on social rituals and shared values previously expressed in the ancestral hall, might be suppressed in the long term.

This project and village are located in central-eastern China, but we could see this case mirrored in most rural villages in China, which have fragile identities but rich socio-cultural traditions faced by new trends and processes linked to globalization and urbanization. The bottom-up participation in architecture facilitated by individual architectural or spatial practitioners still looked too weak to shake the top-down foundation of the city-county-village political economical hierarchy. However, compared with the government-led rural rehabilitation projects dominating the previous 10 years since 'Construction of A New Socialist Countryside',

Xihe Village Community Centre did make visible the invisible -- the voices, experiences and opinions from those who are less visible. Furthermore, it did reproduce power relations and practices by creating new links between people and by providing intangible resources for the village, which paves a way to explore a more socially-resilient mode of architectural design in current Chinese rural-urban dynamics.

In all, this case strongly demonstrates that a transformative architecture and its thoughtful mediation on the fragility and progression of relationships between place, people and power could still be achieved through valuing social engagement through a similar process of making vernacular architecture in current rural China. Action to provoke new agendas in architecture leading to a more socially-sustainable and socially-resilient practice needs to be taken as a matter of urgency by the current architectural profession in China. Undoubtedly the action in Xihe Village provides a promising start.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to acknowledge Wei He for his continuous support for my fieldtrips and interviews, and Prof. Peter Blundell Jones from Sheffield School of Architecture, for his years of guidance on my research and detailed review of this paper.

Notes and references

1 Martin King Whyte, (ed.) *One Country, Two Societies: Rural-Urban Inequality in Contemporary China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 1-21.

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

3 There are two draft policy launched in April 1953 and March 1954 on the limitation of the freedom for the people with rural 'hukou' (rural residents) to go to the city; most of the contents were approved in the first constitution of P.R.C. in September 1954; the policy hasn't been loosened until 1984, in which it firstly admitted the legal possibility for the rural residents to live and work in city; and their status will be transferred into city 'hukou' (urban residents).

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

5, 7, 8 Interview with Wei He by the author on January 14th, 2015 in Beijing, China.

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

9, 11 Interview with Wei He by the author on January 20th, 2015 in Beijing, China.

10 Peter Blundell Jones; Eamonn Canniffe, *Modern architecture through case studies, 1945-1990* (Amsterdam; Boston; London: Elsevier/Architectural Press, 2007), pp. 127-38.

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

13 Interview with Wei He by the author on April 11th, 2015 in Beijing, China.

Illustration credits

Author, 1-5, 10, 13

Wei He, 6-9, 11, 12, 14-20