



**FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES
IN LONGSHANG
VILLAGE**

How the architectural practice can contribute to a rural area in Southwest China

INSIDE Interior Architecture Master, Royal Academy of Art, The Hague

Junyuan Chen

Abstract

This paper investigates the effects of a recent phenomenon in China. Groups of young independent architects have started to participate in the regeneration of rural areas through their design projects. I will begin with intensive research into the political, economic, ecological and social influences on villages in China. In general, I try to discuss the importance of rural revival and how can it reduce the side-effect of drastic urbanization process in China. Such as, urban overpopulation, environmental pollution and high vacancy rate in both cities and rural areas. Moreover from interior architect point of view, who should I design for? Following that, I will analyze my fieldwork in Longshang village in order to reveal the various forces behind the village spaces creation. This small village is located in southwest China and is known for its handmade paper and a well-designed paper museum. My research considers two aspects. On one hand, I observed top-down influences like the six land policy changes during only three decades, state-owned enterprises monopoly of local products market and weather conditions. On the other hand, I investigated bottom-up needs of villagers, such as a communal space, skills for upgrading farm-houses and a way to improve the handicraft paper making process. Eventually, the results of each part of the investigation have gradually been elaborated and translated into a design brief, which aims at a more specific definition for village public space. It should not only have a relaxing function, but also fulfill the mental needs of villagers by replacing the demolished ancestor-temple. In order to bring out the most essential part of villager's life, more functional layers should be added.

Introduction	5
The Meaning of Rural Revival	13
For Whom Are Architects Designing?	17
The Invisible "Designers" of Village	25
Reveal The Invisible Creating Hands And The Challenges For Architects	31
What Can Designers Do?	69
Bibliography	71

Introduction

In 2011 curator Ou Ning¹ bought an old mansion in Bishan Village for himself. Then he moved his entire family to the village and brought along with him fellow artist Jing Zuo, to jointly launch the 'Bishan plan'². They used old houses they had renovated in the village as an example to attract others to start commercial, residential businesses such as hostels and hotels. By introducing workshops and exhibitions and hosting the first Bishan crop harvest festival in 2012 and opening a bookshop, the Bishan plan was intended to reconstruct rural villages from the perspective of the cultural transformation.

Ou Ning explained his concern about his plan in an interview:



"But now, I am tired. I currently fear that after we arrived at Bishan, this place will become gentrified and farmers will leave the village."³

He said,

"I have been very much opposed to gentrification, but it seems farmers want it. Everyday I am in a dilemma. An obvious example is in the streets: the strongest desire of all villagers is to install streetlights, not only for light itself, but also for vanity – to them, these lights mean economic development. Nonetheless, when the poets arrive from the lightly polluted cities, they will be very disappointed to no longer be able to see the stars from the village."³

¹Ou Ning is a Chinese activist, editor, artist and graphic designer, the chief curator of Shenzhen & Hong Kong Bi-city Biennale of Urbanism and Architecture.

²Bishan plan (Commune) is an artist and intellectual group that based in Bishan Village, Yi Xian, Anhui, devoting themselves to the rural reconstruction movement in China.

³Mengni Qian-2014- "The embarrassment of Bishan plan"-<http://www.yicai.com/news/2014/02/3514882.html>

⁴Yun Zhou-2014-"Whose village, whose community - taste, distinction and Bishan plan" - <http://www.douban.com/note/365631250/#11/ckDefault>

In 2014 Harvard sociologist Dr. Zhou Yun questioned Ou Ning's Bishan plan. Zhou Yun wrote an article entitled "Whose village, whose community - taste, distinction and Bishan plan". She believes that urban elites, such as the ones Ou represents, look down on the villagers with their condescending attitudes and their personal vision of what the countryside should be. She continues by arguing that Ou's vision is based only on his romantic perceptions, in contrast to a more equal participative method that involves the villagers.

In her article, Zhou Yun continues by explaining her own experiences in the village:



"In Bishan, at night, without the streetlights people are unable to move. In fact, it is not only difficult, but also very dangerous... However, here, the villagers' desire for the streetlights has been described as a wish related to appearance ('face lift')." (Urban elite intellectuals think that after gentrification 'the farmers will not be seen in the village', and rural countryside will not look like 'what it should be'. My question is, in this regeneration movement: are farmers the main participators or the 'aesthetic objects' satisfying the pastoral countryside imagination of elite intellectuals?)⁴

The reconstruction of Bishan village is not the only case in which architects or artists try to realize their utopia in the countryside. In fact, a trend of rural transformation by architects has emerged in China in recent years.

To give some examples: Young architect Hao Wang started his career by building an avant-garde house (which resembles the Vitra Haus by the architects Herzog + De Meuron) for his own family in the village of Ningbo. Followed by constructing 3 more private houses in the same village with the same avant-garde architectural approach.

Other examples are: The Cattle Back Mountain Volunteer House designed by dEEP Architects and The Museum of Handcraft Paper at Gaoligong Mountain in Yunnan designed by the architectural firm TAO. Additionally, the Taiwanese architect Yingjun Xie, who specializes in rural architecture, has also realized a few projects in mainland China.



In the Chinese economic and political context, independent young architects sometimes find difficulties practicing in cities. These circumstances have gradually brought architects from urban to rural areas. In cities, designing small private houses is almost impossible. The most common commissions are large-scale residences completely detached from the actual users. Competing with large institutions for public constructions is hard for young independent architects. However, in rural areas, the urbanization process has increased the economic gap even more between metropolises and villages. All the capital and human resources flow into cities, leaving the countryside to gradually become commercially forsaken areas. Architects attempt to project their philosophies on these "forgotten lands", but this kind of exercise often leads to debates, such as in the case of the Bishan project.

Ultimately all debates focus on these questions:

What is the future of the rural villages in China?
Who should decide on the future of the villages?
Which role does design play in the development of rural areas?
Which position, or responsibility, does the architect have when dealing with rural projects?

In this thesis, I will attempt to give answers to the previous questions, and base my answers on the design field research I undertook in Longshang village.



Longshang village

The Meaning of Rural Revival

Some scholars might question the meaning of architects' interventions in half-vacant villages, where considerable resources are wasted on constructions. To realize the importance of rural renewal requires a basic understanding of the particularity of Chinese urbanization.

"As time passes and as countries become more urban, the proportion of urban growth attributable to natural increase inevitably rises. That is, the higher the level of urbanization in a country, the smaller the pool of potential rural-urban migrants, and the larger the pool of urbanites contributing to the natural increase.

Of course, country experiences vary a good deal. In India, a recent assessment of the components of urban growth 1961-2001 found that the share of growth attributable to urban natural increase ranged from 51 per cent to about 65 per cent over the period. Some 65 per cent of current urban growth in Latin America stems from natural increase, despite steep declines in fertility rates, especially in urban areas. China, where migration has recently predominated, is unusual in this respect.⁴⁵

It means that in China, reducing migration can solve the urban problems caused by over population. Urbanization seems inevitable and has certain advantages, such as: centralizing resources brings together people of different talents and specialized corporations. Also providing a system allows the energy and materials to be used more efficiently. Even though the development of urban areas requires manpower, the huge level of migration still goes beyond the cities demand. As Bing Hong writes in his book 'Looking At China Through A Third Eye':

"The disproportion between the enormous number of farmers and the speed of economic growth is the reason why the village workforce migrates towards the cities, and not because urban economy needs to attract rural labor."⁶

⁵. Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, Executive Director United Nations Population Fund 'State of world population 2007 Unleashing the Potential of Urban Growth' P19

⁷. 22.4% urban homes lying vacant in China: report-2014 http://europe.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2014-06/12/content_17583164.htm

⁸. The result of my household field research in Longshang village

⁶. Bing Hong "Looking At China Through A Third Eye":2010 P62

Some might argue that any attempt to stop rural immigrants moving to the city is a violation of human rights. Nonetheless, reducing population migration does not necessarily mean forcing people to stay in rural areas. There are other options as means for rural revival, such as providing attractive living and working conditions for people in rural areas.

Additionally the recent rapid growth of the urban Chinese construction industry acts to lure to the low-income villagers, thus dramatically increasing the numbers in city populations. As a result of this increase, more dwellings are required. Then the demand for labor attracts more people from the rural areas. Consequently this endless loop forces the cities to expand enormously.

Meanwhile, the real estate boom helps other related industries and services prosper. Although the land-based economic model has created the prosperous Chinese metropolises in recent decades, it is not a sustainable way of development. Most Chinese cities' housing vacancy rate reached 22.4%⁷ in 2013, and in comparison villages such as Longshang in Southwest China, even reached a 53%⁸ vacancy rate. If the housing market maintains the oversupply, the real estate-based economic model will be under threat. Thus in the city, the jobs for migrant workers will disappear.

The revival of rural areas does not only provide individuals an opportunity to have a different lifestyle, but also an opportunity to create a buffer and improve the overall social and economic system.

For Whom Are Architects Designing?

The debate between the initiator of the Bishan plan and Harvard Sociologist Dr. Zhou Yun raised a question about the purpose of rural village regeneration. Reformulating this debate from a designer point of view, I would like to raise the question: for whom are architects designing?



Regarding the necessity of streetlights in the Bishan discussion, I would like to point out a story told in Longshang village by Dezheng Long, a local inhabitant. Long is a typical Chinese farmer. In one of our conversations, he told me that when he was young, he often went to irrigate the rape field during the night. He dug a gap on the ridge of each terrace in order to let the small stream of water flow in to the field. The whole process of watering would take approximately two hours. While waiting, he and his wife would put their palm-bark rain capes on the ground, making a temporary place for them to lie down and enjoy the starry sky.

In my opinion, both Ou Ning and Yun Zhou had their own fixed impression of villagers. Yun Zhou questioned the motivation of Ou Ning's Bishan plan and accused him of imposing his own utopia and vision, disregarding the villager's opinions. However she assumed that farmers only want functional infrastructures, whilst only artists and poets have the humanistic sensibility. I think both of their opinions are limited. If architects were to design for the actual local residents, they should have a complete understanding of them, and not only make assumptions.

17

**For whom do architects design? To create their own ideals? For the farmers only?
Both are too limited in my view.**

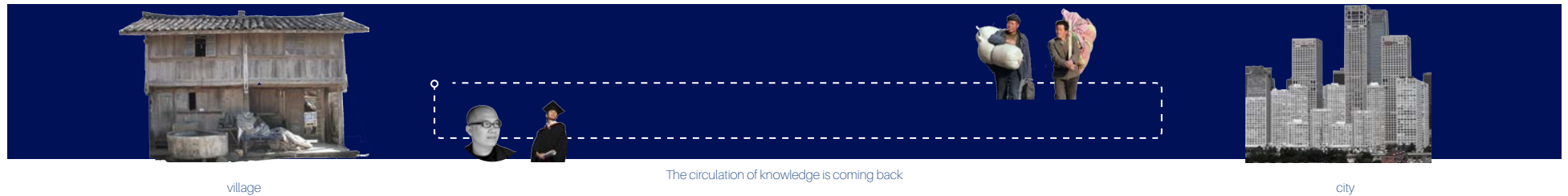
China has a traditional rural intelligentsia class called "village gentleman". They normally grew up in wealthy families. They spent their childhood learning traditional culture and knowledge, aiming at passing the imperial examination system once they were adult. After dedicating their whole life to the government, when they retire, they return to their private village life and enjoy their retirement.

The experience they gained went back to the countryside and the cycle of knowledge was completed within a generation. This cultural flow, coupled with a society based on agriculture, made the difference between urban and rural areas considerably smaller than nowadays. However the foundation of New China in 1949 was aimed at the equalization of the social classes. Consequently the upper classes disappeared from the countryside, thus eliminating the very beneficial cycle of knowledge. Since then, rural areas have been going economically, but also culturally, backwards.



Today, fortunately, the once extinct knowledge cycle is reappearing. This time though, other people bring this new flow of knowledge, not necessarily village locals. This new flow of people can be divided into two categories. One is the urban elites like Ou Ning, who want to achieve their utopian dreams in the countryside. The second type is a minority of the second or third generation descendants of the once rural to city migrants. Returning to their hometown, they use the knowledge learned in the city to create new opportunities and industrial models. The circulation of knowledge is then coming back, but this time the circle's time frame has tripled. Although this new knowledge flow brings benefits to the villages, the extension of its cycle has slowed down the development of the rural areas.

From this perspective, simply designing for the village residents in order to encourage them to stay is, in my view, anachronistic. First, villagers are not content with staying in the rural areas. They wish to leave. From the information gathered in Longshang village, most parents do not want their children to inherit the paper making craftsmanship, as it is a heavily physical demanding job. Second, the development of rural areas needs to re-establish the flow of capital and knowledge brought by the population circulation. Therefore designers should take both the villagers and outsiders into consideration.



Designers should take both the villagers and outsiders into consideration.

The Invisible “Designers” of Village

The design of existing villages was not the creation of architects or master planners but was a response to their environment and their socio-economic condition. Understanding what is shaping today's rural countryside is the precondition to redevelopment of the rural constructions. Therefore, architects should know about the “invisible hands”, which hide behind the common design methods and professions such as planners or architects. Such hidden manipulations, even though not presented on visible drawings, can still be detected. We can determine what they are and how they work

Avoid design detached from local context

As I mentioned earlier, foreign population is very important for rural development.

Some people may argue, ‘why not just encourage city dwellers to invest and move to the countryside without restrictions’?

Most city dwellers move to rural areas just for leisure and relaxation, since most city professions do not allow them to work remotely. This results in the creation of spaces devoted only to catering for temporary seasonal tourism. In my opinion, these rural developments are a waste of valuable resources.

In tourist-developed areas, the consequences of blind investment and constructions are obvious. Lijiang, a historical city in the same province, is a typical example. Due to excellent tourist resources, the ancient city attracts a large number of travelers. By increasing the tourism-related investments, the city has become excessively commercialized. Consequently locals have left the city center and only tourists and shops remain. Therefore, after the tourist season is over, the ancient city becomes a semi-ghost town. Locals prefer to live on the periphery of the city, which still functions as a normal residential area with schools, markets, offices and hospitals. In contrast to the historic city center, which has become a mere symbolic commodity, the areas on the periphery do not have much direct spatial relationship with their heritage. Even as a commercial tourist area, Lijiang has reached its saturation point. The inns, located on the periphery of the ancient city, frequently change ownership, struggling to survive.



However, tourism itself is not always a bad thing. It is interesting to compare two adjacent provinces in southwest of China, Yunnan (where Longshang village is located) and Guizhou my hometown. The development of tourism has gone in two different directions in the two once alike provinces.

In 2000, the policy of the development of west Chinese regions⁹ was announced nationwide. This policy required Yunnan province to use tourism as one of its main development strategies. 15 years later, Yunnan is in a better economic situation than Guizhou. As local government is keenly aware of the need to protect natural resources, Yunnan's environment is less polluted by heavy industry, making it a more livable place.

Also, tourism is a valuable tool that attracts people to rural areas. It gives them an experience of what it would be like to live in the countryside, offering a possible alternative future residence for them. Tourism can be perceived as a double-edged sword. In order to control it, we need to keep it in balance to avoid completely overwhelming rural villages.

⁹10 Years of China's Western Development, Chronicle of Events.http://en.chinagate.cn/features/Western_Development/2010-01/04/content_19175519.htm

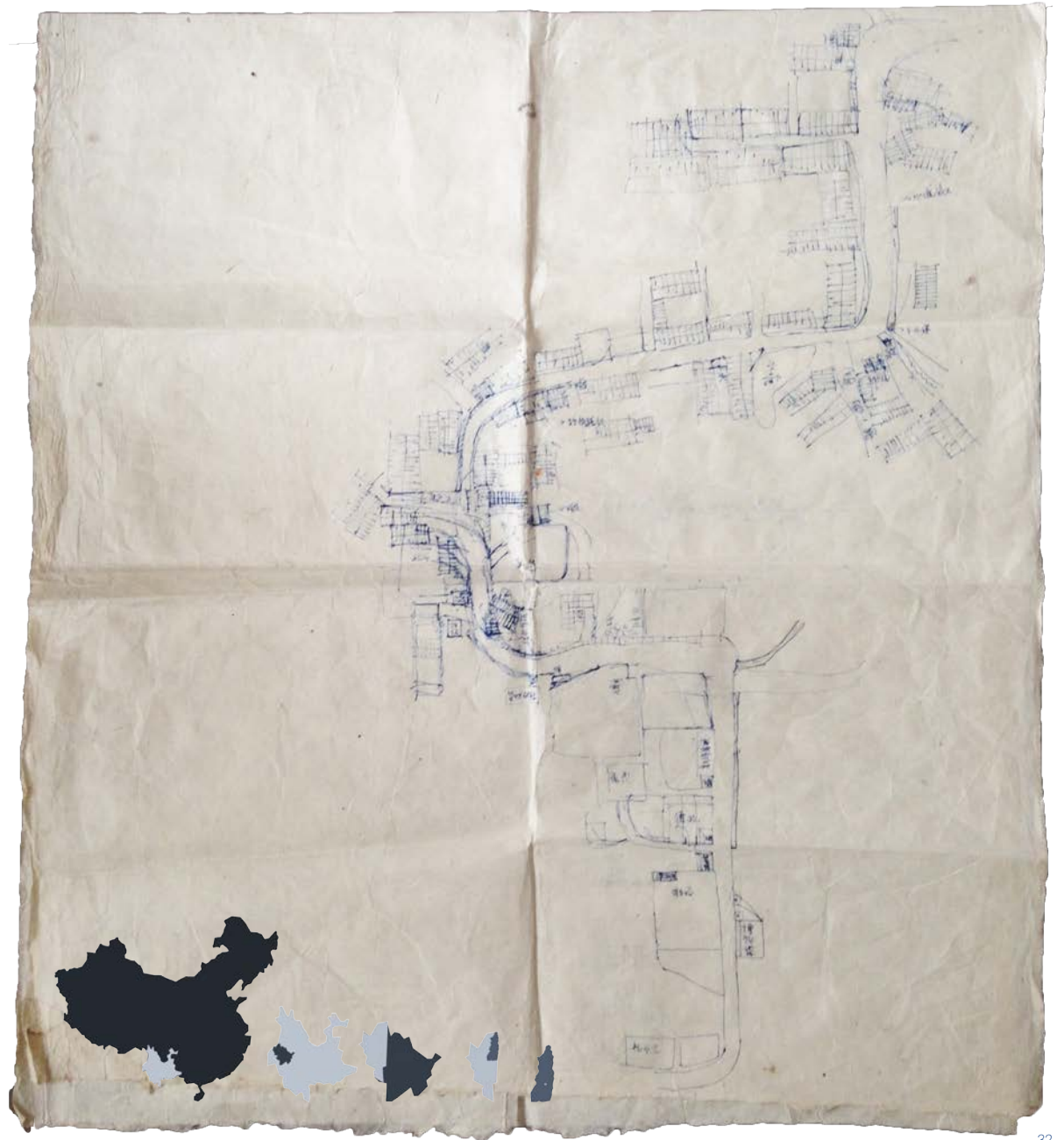
Avoid falling into the trap of time

From a designer's perspective, understanding how today's world works offers a chance to gain a more holistic point of view of the contemporary world. This should result in an escape from the mainstream cultural whirlpool and a more personal approach.

Architects tend to believe that they are in complete control of their projects. Though they often forget that it is not them who designed their buildings, but rather the society who shapes the architects. If designers do not attempt to understand the contemporary context we live in, it will be like working with only one eye open. Designers who try to ignore the fact that society has a crucial influence on architecture open the eye that looks at the vertical architectural knowledge but close the eye for the horizontal global view. No building is built purely for architecture. Refusing to understand this concept eventually would transform architecture only into a few pretty pictures in magazines and without realizing it, drowning with the works modeled with the same aesthetic, matching the popular style.

Reveal The Invisible Creating Hands And The Challenges For Architects

In order to uncover the invisible creative forces of rural villages, I have used Longshang village (in Yunnan province, China) as a research subject. I spent two weeks in December 2014 in the village in order to grasp which factors are shaping the village and how ?





The handicraft paper museum

What makes the Longshang village special for me is the creation of the museum of handicraft paper. The museum opened in 2012, designed by Trace Architecture Office, a young independent architect practice operating partly in rural areas.

Since 2004, the land circulation policy¹⁰ has made the creation of museums in villages possible. In 1949, the new communist Chinese government announced the first land policy: all lands became publicly owned; people have had the right to use land for free but land transfer was not allowed. This means that villagers no longer had the right to sell the land or change its function. However, from the past six land policy changes, we can learn that the Chinese government is gradually opening the land market in rural areas. The turning point is the land circulation policy, which means: on the premise of keeping contracting rights¹¹, farmers can transfer the right of using the land to other villagers or organizations. The piece of land that the handicraft museum was built on was once the site of the ancestors-temple of Longshang. The old temple was demolished during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Therefore technically speaking, this land is designated for construction and not for cultivation. Under these circumstances, the museum was built.

¹⁰ RIETI Research Institute of Economy, Trade and Industry, Incorporated Administrative Agency-China in Transition-Rural Land Circulation in China Gaining Momentum: The increasing role of trust companies.
<http://www.rieti.go.jp/en/china/14030701.html>

¹¹ Responsibility system (contract responsibility system or household responsibility system) was a practice in China, first adopted in agriculture in 1981 and later extended to other sectors of the economy, by which local managers are held responsible for the profits and losses of an enterprise. This system partially supplanted the egalitarian distribution method, whereby the state assumed all profits and losses.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Household-responsibility_system

However demolishing the old ancestor-temple, a cultural symbol, led to an erosion of their beliefs, and the physical core of village society. Since then, there is no place for villagers to gather, have meetings or hold events. Unfortunately the establishment of the museum did not fulfill the emptiness of the village's heart. A museum as a cultural institute does not fulfill the societal context required.

For example, the library on the ground floor was meant as a communal space for villagers. However, most of the villagers work 10 hours per day, 365 days per year (see the schedule of Dezheng Long's family), so they do not really have time to go to the library. Children who are supposed to have time, are at school full time and get to go home only one and half days every two weeks. One of the public spaces inside the museum is the library; it has become a cultural display area maintaining its distance from locals. The gap between villagers and museum is not only embodied in the not so often visited library, but also by the way locals perceive the museum, as a paper shop that could steal their business instead of a non-profit cultural institute. This will be explained later in the text.



From my interviews, villagers mentioned that they would like to have a multi-functional public space, in which they can discuss big events, hold elections and even get married. Such public space creates an opportunity to enhance village cohesion.



How to fulfill the missing core of the village, is a crucial question for architects who want to practice in rural areas.

The good intention of the government

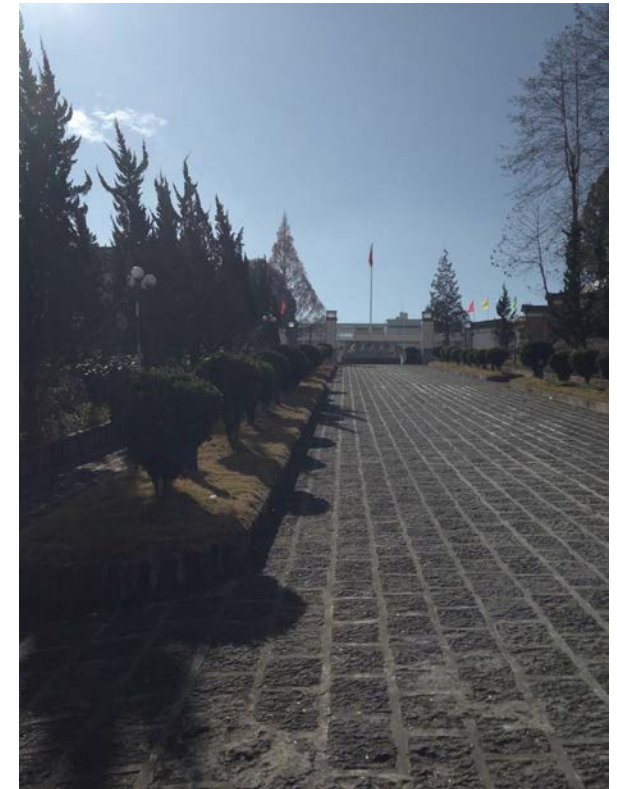
Since China is governed by a top-down pyramid system, political changes have a major influence on the village public space. Leaders take decisions by formulating all sorts of policies. Of course, their intention is to achieve something good. However these policies are simplified, in order to make the decisions understandable to the whole governing system. Also leaders have to communicate their decisions by using operable schematic terms. Most of the time, the intentions of those decisions are hidden behind the simplified instructions. Hence policies become significant words, making their execution dependent on the reinterpretation of local officers. As a result, government's original good intention becomes distorted twice before being implemented, once by formulating it into policy and secondly through the reinterpretation of local governments.

For example, after more than two decades of "People's Commune"¹² period (No matter what your contributions were, in the end, you could only gain equal shares.), they attempted to improve the individual farmer's enthusiasm for farming through the household responsibility system. The intention was to stimulate the sense of ownership and duty of individuals. Meanwhile, many small township enterprises disappeared due to the end of the collective working system. On the one hand, villagers were forced to only engage in agricultural activities on their land. On the other hand, cities, especially after the reform and opening-up policy in 1978¹³, started to develop radically and became the only way to make a higher income. The consequence was massive migration from rural areas to cities.

¹² Written by: The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica

A type of large rural organization introduced in China in 1958. Communes began as amalgamations of collective farms, but, in contrast to the collectives, which had been engaged exclusively in agricultural activities, the communes were to become multipurpose organizations for the direction of local government and the management of all economic and social activity. Each commune was organized into progressively larger units: production teams, production brigades, and the commune itself.
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/128992/commune>

¹³ Brandt, Loren et al. (2008), "China's Great Transformation", in Brandt, Loren; Rawski, G. Thomas, China's Great Transformation, Cambridge: Cambridge university press. P1

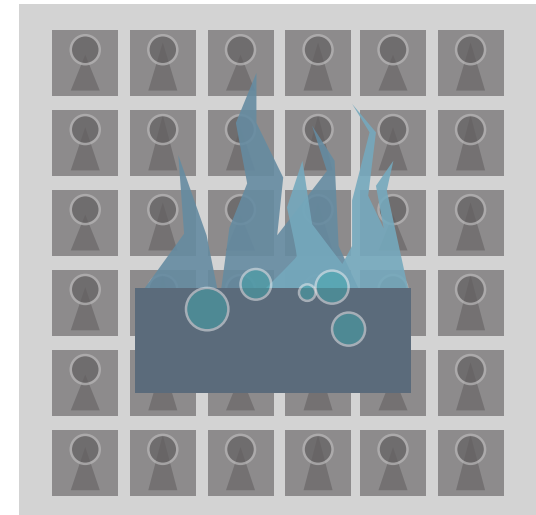


To give a more specific example of good intentions, in 2006, the agriculture tax was abolished nationwide in order to reduce the burden on farmers¹⁴. However the side effect of this policy was the financial drainage of the lowest, most basic, level of governments (village administrations). Since then village administrations have lost the power to make decisions based on real local needs. Therefore, most of the instructions come from the top.

In 2008, Yunnan's provincial government installed biogas digester toilets for each farmhouse including the ones in Longshang village¹⁵. However, Longshang villagers never used these biogas digester toilets. Therefore the biogases generated by these digesters were insufficient to cook a meal, as there was too little excrement collected from each farmhouse. Until now, villagers have preferred to use the most primitive toilet, which is basically a hole in the ground outside their house.

¹⁴Xiaxin Wang-China Center for Economic Research, National School of Development, Peking University
"The Effect of China's Agricultural Tax Abolition on Rural Families' Income and Production" P1

¹⁵Interveiw in Longshang village(2014)



The top-down policy has also created two public spaces in Longshang village. One is the parking lot for the museum, which remains empty through the year and the other one is the so called “entertainment play ground” that looks exactly the same as the parking lot.

Although villagers work physically in the fields all day, the government plans to install some physical exercise equipment. By interviewing some locals I discovered that their main health problems are muscle strain, caused by their physical work and not cardiovascular disease due to the lack of exercise, even though their eating habits are usually “unhealthy” (mainly fried food with animal fat).



Fortunately, in 2013, the 6th Land Reform Policy¹⁶ aimed to give more rights to farmers. This new policy on land ownership was divided into three parts. Ownership still belongs to collectivity, contract rights belongs to farmers, franchise and finally land management rights belong to the operator.

¹⁶"Road to the Chinese Dream? Xi Jinping's Third Plenum Reform Plan." Knowledge@Wharton. The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, 10 December, 2013. Web. 14 May, 2015 <<http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/road-chinese-dream-xi-jinpings-third-plenum-reform-plan/>>



How to take advantage of top-down policies with a bottom-up design approach? Acting at all levels and using minimal resources to upgrade rural conditions will create another challenge for architects, in my opinion.

Some of the government's good intentions lead to unexpected results while others stop early on. During my fieldwork research I visited a construction site. Here I learned from the villagers that, in 2014, the Longshang village government started building a wastewater treatment facility plant, located in the lower side of the village, to purify the wastewater from papermaking.

From more in depth research on the village's water use, I realized that there is no proper sewage system. While the biogas digesters are unused, the excrement stays in the toilets gradually sinking into the ground. The wastewater from daily family use, such as shower and cooking, goes directly into the ditch outside their house along with the papermaking wastewater. The ditches converge together with water streams that have already gone through the fields, containing heavily polluted fertilizers and pesticides and eventually creating small ponds in different village locations. Even though the water in those small ponds is already polluted, locals still wash their vegetables there.

Before the industrial revolution this simple water system could function perfectly as all household waste went back into the earth becoming part of the nutrition for other creatures. However when more artificial products, such as plastic and chemical hazards invade rural daily life, the simplicity of the current water system became a threat for the villager's health.

Installing only one wastewater treatment plant will definitely not be sufficient to remove this threat.



If designing more sustainable villages in the future is one of the designer's goals, how can this be accomplished while the village environment is unsustainable and unhealthy?

The ancient craft

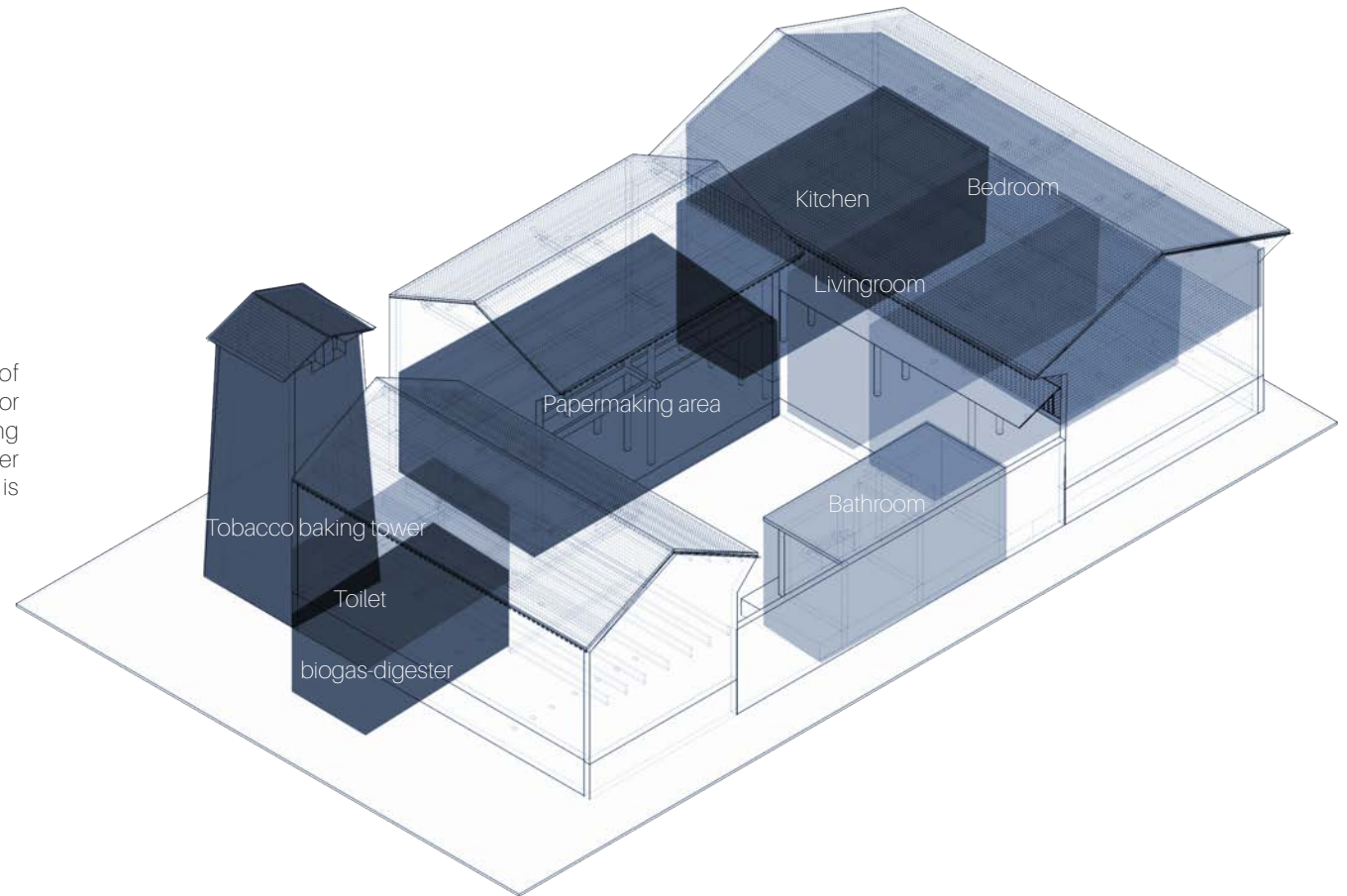
Back to the handcraft paper museum, the skill of making paper by hand has been practiced in Longshang village for 428 years. It originated from the middle part of China, the Hunan province, with the army sent by the Ming Dynasty Emperor to guard the southeast empire's frontier.¹⁷

Longshang people adapted the paper making method so as to use local plants. This resulted in the creation of a tough and strong paper type, which is mainly used for tea packaging. Recently the museum's investor, a publisher and architect Huali, started to experiment with it for Chinese calligraphy and painting purposes in order to increase its value.

¹⁷ Patricia Buckley Ebrey
Cambridge University Press; 2nd
edition (January 25, 2010).
Cambridge Illustrated History of
China.P195



Handcraft paper is one of the main income sources of Longshang villagers, while it has also been forming the floor plan of the farmhouses. Out of 50 families in Longshang village, 47 have a paper business. Even though, the paper production scales vary in the village, the basic set up is nearly the same.



After the museum was built, the investors constructed a papermaking studio as well. They introduced a few modern machines to improve the efficiency of papermaking process, such as quick dryers.

Both museum and studio have a positive and a negative effect on the villagers. Positively speaking, once the museum was published in magazines, it attracted some tourists who were interested in the ancient papermaking methods but also in the museum architecture. Villagers, for the first time then understood that what they have been taking for granted is actually far more valuable than they once thought. A few pioneers in the village are currently building a restaurant and some hostels for potential visitors. The museum gives people hope that Longshang can have a better future economically, socially and culturally.

However on the other hand, the question is whether the ancient craft and architecturally interesting museum will bring enough tourists, as the villagers hope for? And is there really a need to build more houses, considering the vacancy rate of Longshang village has already reached 53% ?

Moreover, as I have mentioned in the previous section, due to poor communication between the museum initiators and most of Longshang villagers, a misunderstanding of the essence of the museum separated the local residents deeply. They tend to perceive the museum as a paper shop for investors rather than a cultural institute and also see the existence of the museum as a threat to local businesses.



Questions such as 'How to reuse the empty farmhouse?' and 'How to let the locals and the outside investors cooperate and benefit from each other?' could be two vital topics for me.

From landscape to houses

As I mentioned earlier, the handmade paper business is only one of the main income sources for villagers in Longshang. There are in total five different types of income, according to the village secretary of Xinzhuang village¹⁸. In 2014 the residents' annual income (in Euros) was:

Papermaking	388,298
Rape ¹⁹ plantations	712,386
Tobacco baking	1,941,490
Vegetable cultivation	129,433
Livestock breeding	1,294,327

In 2014, one of the real estate developers held the first flower festival in Tengchong²⁰ as propaganda. The "leading actor" of the flower festival was the rape flower. Miles of bloomed rapes created a yellow ocean. To maintain the yellow landscape, the local government gives subsidies to farms to promote growing rape flowers in spring. In this case both economy and policy contributed to creating the landscape.

¹⁸ Those data is only for the whole Xinzhuang village, which is the political village, Longshang village is one of the 13 natural village within Xinzhuang

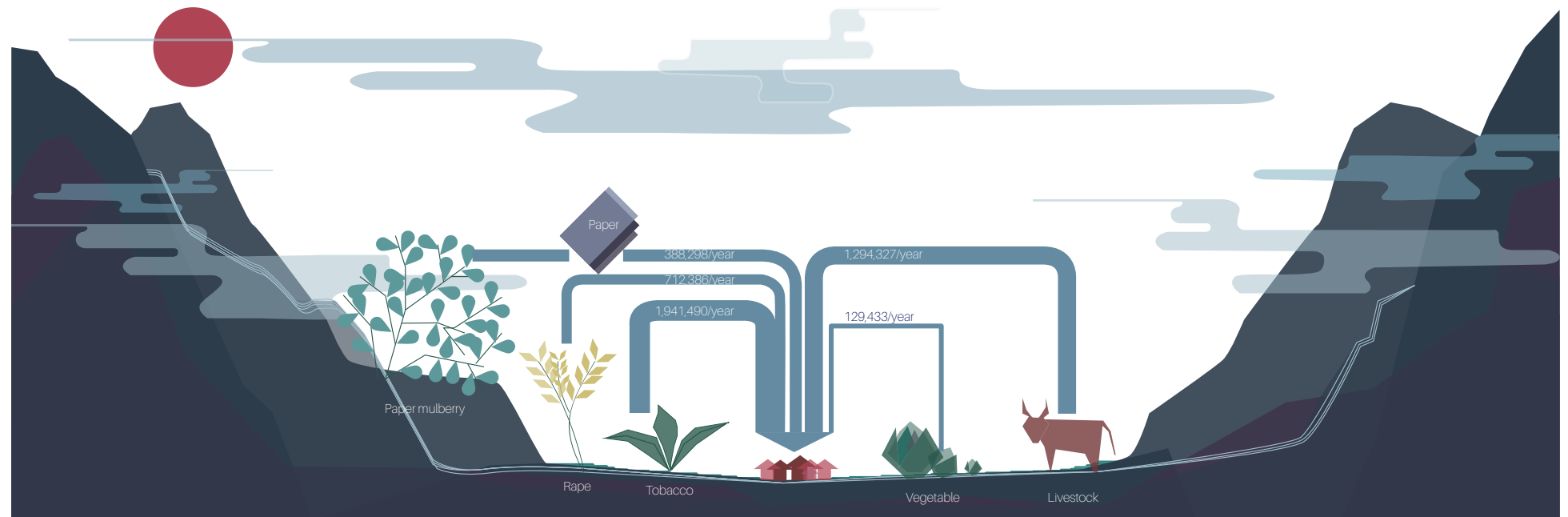
¹⁹ Rape is a plant with yellow flowers, which is grown as a crop. Its seeds are crushed to make cooking oil. -Collins dictionary English-Chinese dual solution

²⁰ The prefecture Longshang village is located in.

Yunnan province has a reputation for all four seasons being like spring. Combined with the high altitude and large temperature difference between day and night, Yunnan is a perfect place for tobacco cultivation. In Longshang village, every family has at least one adobe brick tobacco-baking tower, which creates a unique architectural typology that still survives in Longshang village.

Although both rape and tobacco plantations provide the main income for villagers, they are not owned by them and thus have no control over their price. In contrast, the handcraft paper business offers the villagers more freedom to manage it in their own way.

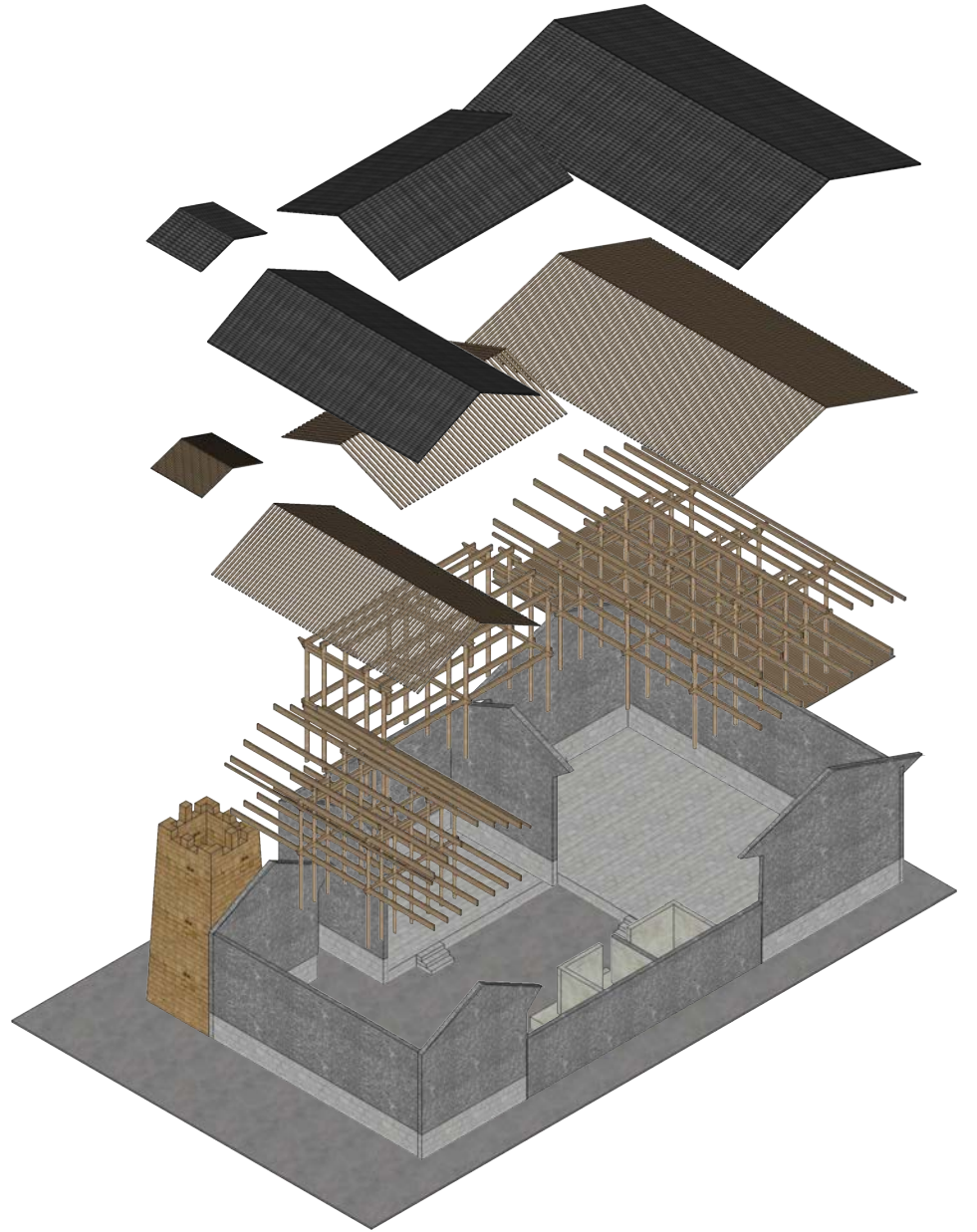
The challenge for me will be to promote the paper industry and at the same time efficiently combine other businesses spatially and ecologically.



By favoring the growth of tobacco plants, Yunnan's unique climate has had a direct impact on the village's landscape leading to the creation of the farmhouse tobacco towers. In addition, the farmhouses' roofs have extensions attached to their original structure as a result of the annual rain season. The direct exposure of the farmhouses' wooden structure to the elements led the villagers to build an adobe or lava wall to surround and protect them. Even the building bases are approximately three steps higher than the ground.



I should learn from the local archetype before I start my own design.



What Can Designers Do?

Future rural villages in China belong to whoever appreciates and respects the differentiation between urban and rural life and wishes to have an alternative way of living. Consequently, when architects design for villages, both local residents and visitors should be taken into consideration. They need to create opportunities that allow local villagers and the outsiders to cooperate and benefit from each other. The needs for privacy and the possibilities of interaction between different disciplines need to be spatially balanced. For example, how can the Longshang village visitors, such as artists who are interested in using handmade paper for their creation live together with local residents? As a result, how could papermaking, farming and artistic activities using the paper coexist with each other in the same house which would include two different life styles? The answers to those questions could be also the answers for how spatial design can help prevent gentrification in Longshang village.

Before starting to design, building a deep understanding of the local archetype of buildings is necessary. For example, knowing the most common building techniques used by the local constructors would ensure the quality of the design realization. At the same time this would keep a sense of belonging for the local residents.

When I answer the requirements of communal space, a more specific definition is needed. It should not only have a relaxing function, but also fulfill the mental needs of villagers by replacing the demolished ancestor-temple. In order to bring out the most essential part of villager's life, more functional layers should be added. These would include

parts of the handicraft paper making process, which answer the needs of working collectively.

Rudofsky Bernard²¹ gave an example in his book 'Architecture without architects: a short introduction to non-pedigreed architecture':

²¹ Rudofsky Bernard (April 19 1905 - March 12, 1988)[1] was a Moravian-born American writer, architect, collector, teacher, designer, and social historian.

²² Rudofsky Bernard "Architecture Without Architects: A Short Introduction to Non-pedigreed Architecture" (1964) P5

"Another alien type of the communal vernacular is the storehouse for food. In societies where food is looked upon as a divine gift rather than an industrial product, the architecture of granaries is solemn. So much so, that to the uninitiated, it suggests ecclesiastical buildings. Although small in scale, storehouses achieve monumentality, whether in the Iberian Peninsula, in the Sudan, or in Japan. In view of their great stylistic purity and precious content, we have termed them quasi-sacral."²²

In Longshang village's case, the quasi-sacral is a place that has a communal function and at the same time enhances their pride in their papermaking craftsmanship. It also creates a sense of belonging.

Even though the Chinese government plays a crucial role in the rural village development nowadays, the policies are gradually opening up for more diverse input. Designers should not perceive the involvement of the government only as a restriction but try and take advantage of the top-down policies. Using a bottom-up design approach, acting on all scales and using minimal resources would have a positive impact and offer a better future for the rural condition.

Bibliography

- ¹ Mengni Qian-2014- "The embarrassment of Bishan plan"-<http://www.yicai.com/news/2014/02/3514882.html>
- ² Yun Zhou-2014-"Whose village, whose community - taste, distinction and Bishan plan" - <http://www.douban.com/note/365631250/#/ll/ckDefault>
- ³ Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, Executive Director United Nations Population Fund "State of world population 2007 Unleashing the Potential of Urban Growth" P19
- ⁴ Bing Hong-2010- "Looking At China Through A Third Eye" P62
- ⁵ 22.4% urban homes lying vacant in China: report-2014 http://europe.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2014-06/12/content_17583164.htm
- ⁶ 10 Years of China's Western Development , Chronicle of Events,http://en.chinagate.cn/features/Western_Development/2010-01/04/content_19175519.htm
- ⁷ RIETI Research Institute of Economy, Trade and Industry, Incorporated Administrative Agency-China in Transition-Rural Land Circulation in China Gaining Momentum: The increasing role of trust companies. <http://www.rieti.go.jp/en/china/14030701.html>
- ⁸ Responsibility system (contract responsibility system or household responsibility system) was a practice in China, first adopted in agriculture in 1981 and later extended to other sectors of the economy, by which local managers are held responsible for the profits and losses of an enterprise. This system partially supplanted the egalitarian distribution method, whereby the state assumed all profits and losses. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Household-responsibility_system
- ⁹ Written by: The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica
A type of large rural organization introduced in China in 1958. Communes began as amalgamations of collective farms; but, in contrast to the collectives, which had been engaged exclusively in agricultural activities, the communes were to become multipurpose organizations for the direction of local government and the management of all economic and social activity. Each commune was organized into progressively larger units: production teams, production brigades, and the commune itself. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/128992/commune>
- ¹⁰ Brandt, Loren et al. (2008), "China's Great Transformation", in Brandt, Loren; Rawski, G. Thomas, China's Great Transformation, Cambridge: Cambridge university press. P1
- ¹¹ Xiixin Wang-China Center for Economic Research, National School of Development, Peking University
"The Effect of China's Agricultural Tax Abolition on Rural Families' Income and Production" P1
- ¹² "Road to the Chinese Dream? Xi Jinping's Third Plenum Reform Plan" Knowledge@Wharton. The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, 10 December, 2013. Web. 14 May, 2015 <<http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/road-chinese-dream-xi-jinpings-third-plenum-reform-plan/>>
- ¹³ Patricia Buckley Ebrey
Cambridge University Press; 2nd edition (January 25, 2010)
"Cambridge Illustrated History of China".P195
- ¹⁴ Rudofsky Bernard "Architecture Without Architects: A Short Introduction to Non-pedigreed Architecture "(1964) P5