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**Annual Theme –  
Learning from Projects**

**Hybrid Building and Hybrid Practitioner:  
An Unbuilt Clan-Community Hall in a  
Chinese Natural Village**

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This is a charming and quite heart-warming story about community participation, hybrid practice redefined for rural China, as a reaction to the autocratic and global character of recent Chinese urban development and the rediscovery of the positive complexities of traditional typologies.

2016 Judging Panel



# Hybrid Building and Hybrid Practitioner: An Unbuilt Clan-Community Hall in a Chinese Natural Village

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Uneven rural-urban development and rapid rural urbanization in China from the top-down has been challenging the very fundamental definitions of architecture and architects originating from the west. The value, meaning and knowledge embedded in vernacular architecture and villages, self-organized by the family and clan kinship is being lost. It is these irreversible changes in Chinese villages which result in the need for contemporary architecture and architects with more socially transformative value. The village with rural skin and urban masks is a hybrid; and the ancestral hall, where a collective action where social structures of the clan kinship were given a ritual expression, will be re-examined from a new perspective of 'hybrid building' and 'hybrid practitioner'. 'Hybrid building' will be expanded into active participation, thick interpretation, multiple authorships and unpredictable coproduction. Getting back to the natural village which stayed farthest from the political mega-structure, re-establishing collaboration with the family clan which formed the deep structure, and getting hands dirty working with indigenous builders in the village are new approaches for the 'hybrid practitioner'. Data was collected through fieldwork and a 'Clan-Community Hall' project, in which interviews, consultation meetings and design workshops with a local barefoot architect, political teams, and clan members were organized in a natural village. By looking at this highly specific case through a detailed description on the process and product of 'hybrid building', and by placing the architectural version within a broader framework combining anthropology and activism, this research emphasizes the social transformative value and potential of 'hybrid building' and 'hybrid practitioner' under current Chinese hegemonic urbanism, which will bring a more inclusive and resilient way of hybridizing architecture as a palimpsest and a stage for multiple authorships and collaboration from the bottom-up.

## Introduction: Contextualising Hybrid Building

### Problem

Rapid rural urbanization in China from the top-down has been challenging the very fundamental definitions of architecture and architects originated from the western.

During the past nearly forty years after China's Opening-Up Policy from 1978, both the academia and the profession of architecture in China have been locked into a cycling game in which a wider and wider range of 'ism's have been

borrowed, absorbed, assembled, accumulated, consumed, abandoned and finally localized in a Chinese-characteristic form of contemporary urban-rural development.

The globalised perspectives and concepts have already produced as many problems as they have solved: peasants are driven to become temporary urban migrants; family structures with several generations under one roof are disintegrated; old villages based on family and kinship die out at a pace of 1.6 villages per day; old cities are being consolidated and new cities are being produced

from one night, both under socially short-sighted but politically right urban regime while existing villages are in a state of hollow-inside because of the loss of labour, knowledge, skill and value.

For the professional practice, mainstream architects trained from different schools of architecture and serving the established clients from power upper-class, are playing a key role in this drastic high speed transition, sadly, in quite a negative way. From the old village to the new city, from the old village to the new village, from the old city to the new city... either they produce repetitive low-quality products as commercial winners or one-off exquisite exhibits-like architecture as high artists, architectural practitioners make their lives and their careers as the tool and the conspiracy of the power and capital.

For the majority of the architectural academia in the ivory tower, an ethos of get-hands-dirty into the current real-world complexity has been *left out of the canon whose knowledge-elitist-driven agenda looks for indigenous buildings and villages as cultural heritage without sufficient social dimension and depth. A small minority of researchers have done fruitful interdisciplinary works to understand social-grounding issues happened in Chinese rural-urban transition from a theoretical point of view, but they rarely make a breakthrough in bridging the detachment between architectural academic research and architectural design practice.*

In sum, architecture as both a discipline and a profession in contemporary China has widened its gap with its once rooted local concept, context and connection from people and land.

### Why Village

Why seeking a way to respond to the contemporary crisis of architecture as both a discipline and a profession in current China should go back to the village?

That is because only in the village the deep structure of Chinese agrarian civilization and society could be revealed and reinvented. Illustrating Chinese urban-rural and state-society relations cannot avoid its hierarchical political structure, ranging from provinces, cities, districts, counties, and townships down to villages, more simply a linear city-county-village ordering. Located at the bottom chain for thousands of years, the village self-organized and self-governed by the family and clan kinship, has been a production site for indigenous architectural knowledge and vernacular tradition. The village acted as the archetypal unit in the built environment of vernacular China, and the built forms of the village were facilitated by multiple authors including clan leaders, carpenters, craftsmen, scholars, poets except the professional architects in western perspectives.

In nowadays China, the village is being pushed at an extremely vulnerable position due to the unequal and uneven development of the rural and the urban. Thousands years of agricultural civilization has lost and is losing most of its physical forms and representative patterns at almost all of the above scales as a result of industrialization, urbanization, and globalization. Also being losing is its associated value, meaning and knowledge, particularly those embedded in architecture and architects.



How contemporary architecture and architects firstly dig out, then learn from, collaborate with and finally demonstrate transformative value and potentials in the village/city in China?

In order to deeper understand the real-Chinese reality interwoven local complexities and contradictions under such extremely special geo-politic time-space, getting back to the real-world village which stayed farthest from the political mega-structure, re-establishing collaboration with the family clan which formed the social structure in organising the village, and getting hands dirty working with indigenous builders from a critical perspective and position of architecture are a must-go process way forward.

It is these irreversible changes and indispensable forces which result in the need for a new look at old concerns in the village. Within those old concerns the building type of clan ancestral hall is perhaps the most important one. It is a place for a collective action which social/power structures of the clan kinship was given a ritual expression; a social anchor point of the village. In terms of the new perspective, the concept of 'hybridity' is selected to be revisited. As the village with rural skin and urban masks in Chinese current urbanization is a hybrid; and the ancestral hall of the village is a 'hybrid building'.

### **Hybrid Building**

The term 'hybridity' has been used and changed its meaning differently in different disciplines. In architecture discourse, firstly put forward by Steven Holl and Joseph Fenton in 'Pamphlet Architecture #11' in 1985, 'hybrid building' has

since been seen as buildings with mixed uses and programs stacked one upon another within a singular volume. In this research, however, I expand this concept to include multiple voices and narratives in a mode of hybrid production with multiple authorships. As a social-transformative process, the broadest sense of 'hybrid building' is about active participation, thick interpretation, and unpredictable coproduction. It is an assemblage of both the buildable object and the unbuildable part, particularly those soft consequences catalysed from the process of production of space, ritual and power relations. Furthermore, 'hybrid building' relates to the changing roles, contrasting value, transgressive consequences and transformative potentials of the architectural practice and practitioner.

From this perspective, the traditional ancestral hall in Chinese indigenous villages could be considered as an archetype of my expanded field of 'hybrid building'. It highlighted the hybrid coexistence between the sacred and the profane, the dead and the live, the order and the organic, the perfect and the imperfect, the regular and the irregular, the preconceived worship ritual and the messy-engaged worship performance, the imagined collective as a village and the unequal participation as a family.

### **Hybrid Practitioner**

In recent years we see the rise of participatory practice and humanitarian projects all over the globe including China, which adds more and more social value and social capital through hands-on process of the participatory design-build, linking

common ground and architecture in the local community. Pioneers from old generations such as Giancarlo de Carlo and Lucien Kroll have successfully demonstrated why individual architects mattered; while contemporary predominant participatory practice in architecture, including school-led live projects largely inspired by Rural Studio and research-based action research largely influenced by Participatory Rural Appraisal, seems still fragmentary to defend their roles as architects and value their performance as architectural practitioners in the production and reproduction of the built environment.

In their research/design methodology, the term community/participants are risky to be assumed neutral, manageable and set static as if they were there in need of the involvement/empowerment from voluntary expert-outsiders to compensate their unaffordance to the professional service. Therefore it is likely to pay too much attention on the participatory process and the dissolution of the image of heroic star-architect, but to miss the engagement with the dynamics of local people as social beings with their own social order and intangible living circles. Thus there is a lost in translation from our own architectural languages into public good cultivated by wider audience in their everyday practice. Because we lost that deep mapping and thick interpretation of the diversified nature and driving mechanism underneath the surface of those interlocking elements – the site, the resource, the people, the community, the belief... etc. those which we said we worked well with as a profession.

Drawn upon while keeping a conscious distance

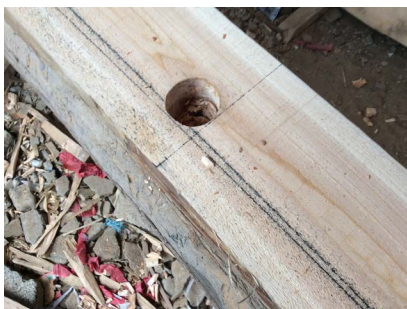
from the above propositions when contextualising into the village in China, a thicker interpretation in the clan kinship behind the architecture of ancestral hall through social-anthropological field research and socially-engaged design activism is the key towards a 'hybrid building' in its real sense. 'Hybrid building' here simultaneously triggers 'hybrid practitioner', and vice versa.

Besides mainstream architects working in current building industry, China has a long history of grassroot 'carpenter-architect' and 'barefoot-architect', as well as anonymous 'illegal architect' in contemporary village-in-the-city built from the bottom up, as well as some well-known contemporary alternative practice such as 'people's architect' Hsieh Ying-chun practiced from around the year 1999, 'amateur architect' Shu Wang practiced from around the year 2000, and 'semi-architect' Wei He practiced from around the year 2010.

However, 'hybrid practitioner' (and 'hybrid building') here resists any classifications or categorizations. Get hands dirty is a first step for 'hybrid practitioner'; seeking for a site for social production of 'hybrid building' in confrontation to the socio-political super-structure is more resilient than building up a sophisticated theory in air-conditioned studios. As younger generation who witness and feel sympathetic to the problems of rural-urban transition in Chinese context in the past twenty years, I see myself as a hybrid practitioner integrating a village enthusiast, an activist architect, plus a doctoral researcher. Sympathy sometimes is the real prejudice to the politically or economically weaker. If we cannot tick off the



The author worked with the last carpenter-architect with more than 50 years' experience on his own house in Bishan village. 2015





The author interviewed with a team of craftsmen on the construction site of a reception hall using recycled materials from demolished buildings in nearby Lucun village. 2016



ethically higher status positioned from the innermost, we will not dissolve our ethical anxiety as architects. As a hybrid practitioner readdressing issues of inclusiveness and resilience, the basic design position here lies in the participation and coproduction based upon mutually learning and knowledge exchange with indigenous clan.

Source materials have been collected through two fieldwork and one architectural project from mid-2015, which included archival and observational study, photographic documentation, and a series of formal and informal interviews, consultation meetings and design workshops with elderly village clan people, local barefoot architects, bamboo craftsmen, officers from local authorities, local sociologist and most of all, ordinary farmers and vendors from the clan community. Within the overall local framework a contextual and collaborative approach will be developed to explore wider issues of the clan kinship structure, and the possibilities for 'hybrid practitioner' through a *'hybrid building' design project – a re-born 'Clan-Community Hall'* in an indigenous village.

By looking at this highly specific case through a detailed description on the process and product of 'hybrid building', and by placing the architectural version within a broader framework combining anthropology and activism, this research aims to explore social transformative value and potential of 'hybrid building' and 'hybrid practitioner' under current Chinese hegemonic urbanism, which brings a more inclusive and resilient way of performing architecture as a palimpsest and a stage for multiple authorships and narratives.

Lessons learnt from this project might be

applied into other situations in which changing lifestyles and fragile identities of indigenous people and community have been constantly driven by hegemonic forces from the outside. Architects might cautiously collaborate with local actors to push their hybrid design intervention into more common use, and a more multiple use of common. Instead of linear applying professional knowledge and professional-trained skills into real-world complexities, the 'hybrid practitioner' with global perspective digs out more into local understanding, facilitates more unlocking of local deep structure and keeps a more conscious point of Stage Minus-One in order to nurture, to catalyse and to trigger further local action from the bottom-up.

## **REPORT: Village Clan and Ancestral Hall**

### **Clan in Vernacular China: 'Kin-ties', 'Geo-ties' and 'Work-ties'**

The Chinese kin and clan is a patrilineal group of people who shares a common surname, a common ancestor, and a common ancestral village. The traditional clan was organized in consanguinity; it dominated the governance of people and resources of the village, mainly through its rigid social hierarchy and cultural enlightenment based on prestige of age and family.

Even in some extreme conditions, the clan members of one village were strictly prohibited from marrying people from other villages with a rival competitor clan with a different surname. This facilitated the further formation of 'Familiar-people Society' in rural China, which developed not only

based on 'ties of kin' but also on 'geo-ties', a social network at territorial scale. This is an ambiguous scale where people know each other and share a similar value system and behaviour codes, but might neither share the same surname nor live in the same single village. It became closer to the contemporary notion of community or neighbourhood, and speeded up the so-called modernization from villages to cities, particular when a third human social relationship evolved: that of 'work-ties', a kind of industry working relationship based on mutually agreed contract and charter.

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

presented more profane characteristics instead of clan-based sacred objects.

Unlike the clan as a static system itself, the three relations behind Chinese family clan that embodies vernacular tradition, knowledge and value is not static; their consistency evolved with society change in more resilient and adaptable forms and even protective masks.

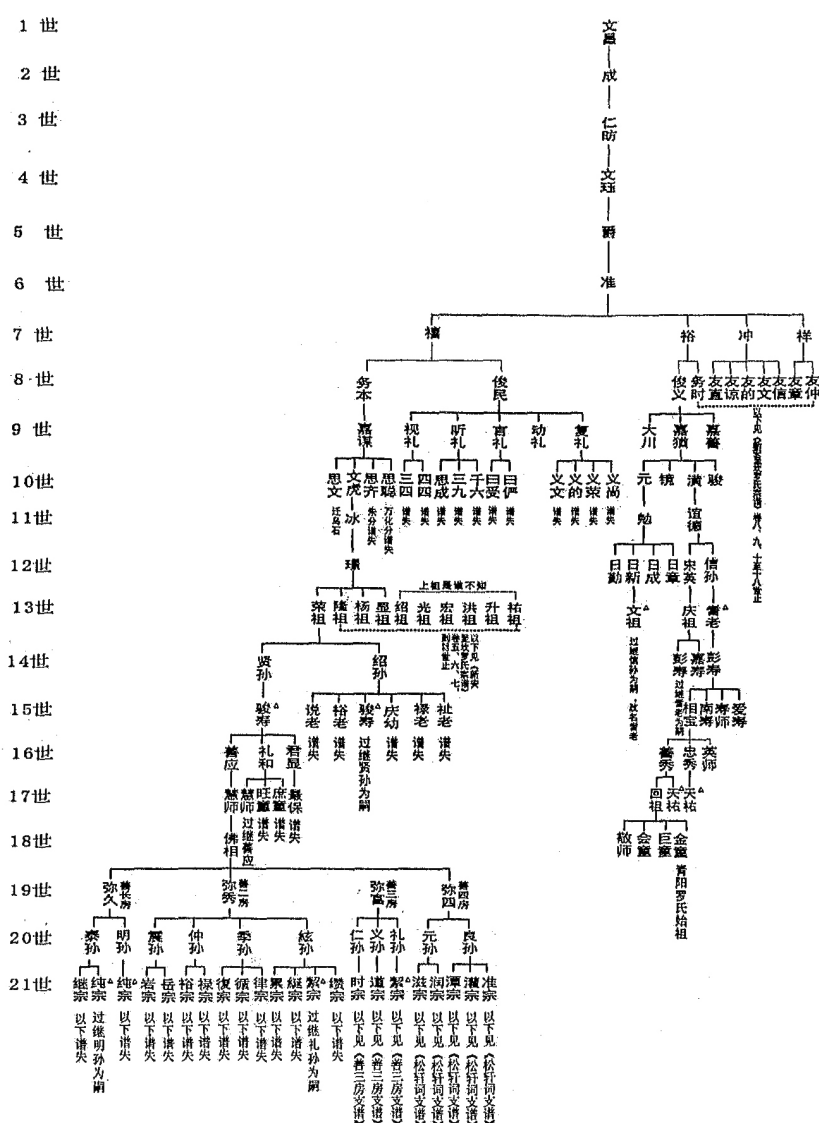
#### **Clan in current China: Twofold Clan into Community**

After being largely destroyed in the WWII, and being reformed in the early period of the Peoples Republic of China (from establishment in 1949 to the ending of the Cultural Revolution in 1976) as an out-of-date obstacle to the more civilized modernization, the clan system from the bottom up in China has almost been frozen into the social selection process, in which it has been constantly pressured by modern notion of community introduced from outside in a top-down way. Undoubtedly the clan with all three social networks still have less individual freedom but a more collective frame compared to modern communities; but the tendency in which the clan advanced into more centralized forms of community organization and government is clear, particularly at a time when those villages' physical and mental structures and associated tastes and lifestyles are rapidly influenced by hegemonic forms and rules from urbanization.

But clan power is not yet out of the game; it is resilient. In contemporary China, the clan still



Genealogy of family  
clan with surname Luo  
shows the 'Kin-ties'  
in Chenhgkan village.  
2016



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

In sum, the clan is not only the social network related to two or three fundamental social relations, but also the deep social structure of Chinese society from the historical to the contemporary forms. It has had a twofold influence on the evolution into modern community, and has had a silently framing role on life and production in Chinese village, whether through visible or invisible hands. The contemporary local clan and kinship structure, exerting both tangible and intangible forces in shaping socio-cultural networks interconnected by complex 'Kin-ties' and 'Geo-ties', is not easy to define, because it is not linear, and embodies multiple issues and elements. The position and attitude dealing with rural clan system is still arguable, but offers no universal solution depending on each village's specificity.

#### **Ancestral Hall in current China: a photo essay**

To unfold the clan and kinship structure in Chinese village is to unfold a rich palimpsest of layers of ritual, power, and politics which was deeply rooted in ancestral hall building type. It carries both tangible and intangible aspects of Chinese rural society and sustains regional identity. The tangible is represented mostly in its ancestral hall built type; as for the intangible, the three fundamental relations - 'Kin-ties', 'Geo-ties', 'Work-ties' were also made a juxtaposition in ancestral hall as a collective place in which social hierarchy and power structure of the clan kinship and its families were produced and reproduced through rites and performance.

The thousands of years of social order and belief structure between villagers and villages have been altered irreversibly. In confrontation

with hegemonic urbanization under the broader context of urban-rural inequality, the ancestral hall couldn't sustain its old identity both physically and mentally connective as a social clue of the village as before: almost all rural villagers dream of being urban residents, therefore they tend to make every effort generations after generations, in order to build their social networks and belief centre in cities. Existing ancestral halls are voiceless

enclosed either by the abandoned old rural houses in vernacular earth-timber construction, or by new rural houses under urban masks with modern materials such as ceramics, aluminium and manufactured tiles. But most of them, showed from years of field investigations, have been made blind spot only filled with hopelessness and helplessness of the left-over elderly, women and children in the village.



Ancestral hall with surname Zhang in Xihe village. 2015



Ancestral hall with  
surname Ding in Ding  
Liwan village. 2015



Ancestral hall with  
surname Ding in Ding  
Liwan village. 2016





Ancestral hall with surname Yang in Shashi village. 2016



Ancestral hall with surname Ming in Chenqi village. 2016



Ancestral hall with  
surname Yang in  
Shashi village. 2015



### Natural Village and Administrative Village in current China

According to the officially-recognized political organization, there are precisely two types of villages in current China: the natural and the administrative. In general, the natural village is a vernacular settlement based on clan and genes or other reasons, as compared with the administrative village. The administrative village is a form of collective governance that lies between the township (the lowest level of state administration)



and the natural village. This means that the title 'administrative village' refers to an informal governmental institution but which is more formal than natural village; since the village leaders are entitled to salaries from the state, so are regarded as 'official agents' of the state, although not clearly defined in law.

The two types of village are not classified by size or population: sometimes an administrative village contains several natural villages; sometimes a large scale natural village is divided



in governance between several administrative villages; sometimes a natural village is an administrative village.

The village leadership is divided into two parts: one is the villager-committee (usually made up of 5 to 9 representatives voted by the villagers, with one as head) acting as an institution for village governance, while the other part is the Party Secretary, who is commissioned by the supervising township government on behalf of Communist Party. It is noteworthy that both the administrative village and the natural village have a villager-committee under a village head, while a natural village doesn't have a Party Secretary in its administrative village.

This dual leadership in rural villages mirrors the Chinese-characteristic social political structure, which didn't (and probably couldn't due to the extreme complexity of the local condition) offer clarification of the different/shared roles and responsibilities of the head of village and the Party Secretary. Therefore it is not difficult to understand that power struggles occur in village settings, predictably or unpredictably.

But generally speaking, the clan tends to be stronger in natural villages than in administrative villages. In other words, the only possibility to find the clan lies in villages in inner China, particular natural villages, which stayed farthest from the central mega-structure of the power.

The land ownership belongs to the peasants and they could build whatever they want on their land without permission from planning authority. And that's another entry point for the following case-study project.

### **CASE STUDY: Clan-Community Hall, Xiaogou Wu Natural Village**

This part of work will focus on a 'hybrid building' project initiated by me as a 'hybrid practitioner' working with local clan and barefoot architect. In a natural village the project was about the design and build of a Clan-Community Hall with its contemporary relevance to the old ancestral hall. Another key point was to produce 'hybrid building' starting from Stage -1 (compared to RIBA Stage 0).

#### **The Village**

Xiaogou Wu natural village is part of Jianshan Village, Anji County, Huzhou City, Zhejiang Province, China. Zhejiang Province is a key part of the Southern Yangtze River region, which is geographically located in between the central part and the southern part of China and has a rich palimpsest of layers of cultural history with deep rooted Confucian, etiquette, as well as traditional clan. The clan is remarkably ancient and its contemporary features are also rich and diversified, spread across places from the heart of older parts of traditional city enclaves (such as Hangzhou City, capital city of Zhejiang Province) to remote rural villages (such as Jianshan administrative village and Xiaogou Wu natural village).

Located in the north-west of Jian Mountain of Anji County, Xiaogou Wu is a hill village based on agriculture, with tea and vegetables as its major productive industry. However agricultural production is no longer the main source of income for rural villages, because the majority of villagers of working age went to towns and cities as part of the new wave of urban migrants. The village

Jianshan administrative  
village, 2015



is still there, making use of its proximity to its supervising township Anji County which is a famous travel destination for the bamboo forest and associated tourism economies, and Jianshan becomes one of the developed model villages as could be seen from its being granted the title of 'Benchmark for Moderately Prosperous Villages' and 'Chinese Beautiful Villages' by local government. A few municipal projects, such as road and water infrastructure upgrading, have been planned and operated in a good way which enhances the accessibility and wellbeing of the village. Meanwhile the local government also successfully attracted the investment for a luxurious golf park, although it was constantly complained about by some villagers for the lower requisition fees than they expected<sup>1</sup>.

As an administrative village, Jianshan contains several natural villages, including Xiaogou Wu (which later became the specific site of the research project). Located within the innermost side of the Jian Mountain, this natural village can be accessed only by a one single-vehicle road and around half an hour's trip by car from the core part of Jianshan administrative village. Though quite remote, the surprisingly tidy and ordered village environments, and more than half of the newly-built houses with urban styles indicated that this natural village has been very well self-managed by local people, (because it is officially without any specific legal leader, such as the Village Party Secretary in an administrative village like Jianshan), at least in terms of income generation as a whole village. The observation of the use of shared space and irrigation infrastructure, and

talking with local people suggest that the above assumption about self-management is evidently, and most importantly, the driving force of that functioning self-management that is the clan revitalised in recent years. The clan and family were dominant until inevitably the village got almost destroyed during WWII; then it redeveloped slowly with the outsider migrants. So although the precise lineage details of the history of Xiaogou Wu are unknown today, the clan of surname Ren is still strong, which could be demonstrated from the continuous work of rewriting genealogy scripts and collective rites such as shared feast on spring festivals<sup>2</sup>.

### The Practitioners

I was firstly introduced by Mr. Weizhong Ren into this village. Weizhong Ren is an ordinary resident but a well-known activist of rural construction in Jianshan village and even in the whole of Zhejiang province for his eco-house-series. Regarding himself as an environmental warrior, he started to design and build energy-efficient buildings using locally-sourced low-impact materials, such as rammed earth, timber, bamboo, pebbles, etc. from the year 2005 till now. He is a contemporary 'barefoot architect'.

Weizhong Ren always tried hard to transfer his individual passion and knowledge to others in his homeland towards a collective resilient future through his sustainable self-build. And the village of Xiaogou Wu was one of his starting points. Weizhong Ren's mother originated from there, and as the only son he is half-descended from Xiaogou Wu's 'ties of kin' social network. Living and working



Xiaogou Wu natural  
village, 2015





within Jianshan administrative village, though not specifically in Xiaogou Wu natural village, he still belongs to the active 'geo-ties' actor network. As a squire-gentleman with high public reputation in the traditional sense and a barefoot architect with technical knowledge in the contemporary scene, he has been an influential figure of Xiaogou Wu natural village, as could be demonstrated from his well-received personality and ability to mediate village conflicts, which provides him with excellent trust-based 'work-ties' to make things done.

Before he formally introduced me into Xiaogou Wu, he had already started initial community consultation about the idea of building a shared space for this natural village which lacked of public life as before, and not surprisingly his idea received positive responses. He realized that the main reason why his self-built private houses couldn't be more influential, in terms of value, knowledge and skill transferability, is the lack of social engagement or reinvention of social ritual during the production of space and building<sup>3</sup>. That's partly the reason why I joined his lifelong rural-construction-dream for this potential project. From then on, we set up 'Rural Participation Unit' as a non-profit design research collaborative aiming for hybrid coproduction in rural villages, which followed his suggestion that it would be easier to make things done through a 'formal organization' rather than through individuals as informal practitioners. For me as a 'hybrid practitioner' it is a bottom-up way of practicing architecture at the interface of legal commission and illegal construction.

For the following participatory action research project, we positioned ourselves as hybrid



The author (in blue) and the barefoot architect Weizhong Ren in his eco-house in Jianshan village, 2015



practitioners aiming to facilitate and to nurture, instead of the more professional notion of Chinese architects/designers aiming to decide and determine. The key collaboration was not between me (doctoral researcher, activist architect, village enthusiast) and him (local farmer, barefoot architect, village environmental warrior); but it was about the close working with participants from local community ranging from village clan leader and members, villager-committee representatives, local bamboo-carpenter, and other ordinary residents, most of whom were women and elderly from this indigenous village. In this sense, everybody who got involved was a practitioner; it was a building 'curated' by ordinary practitioners. And only by that means it did become a building socially valued at its broadest level.

#### **Fundraising process: participative financing**

Any stuff related to money, particularly public funding, is usually the most sensitive and difficult to deal with in a Chinese rural village, not only because villagers tend to have different understandings, definitions and opinions based on different educational levels and household environments, but also due to a series historical legacies and associated contemporary issues, for example, the limited degrees of transparency in the process of public policy-making and the corruption of village leaders over recent decades.

Social value is admittedly important, but it cannot be added in an appropriate way if financial conflict hurts. Weizhong Ren and I were very conscious of that logic in Chinese rural villages, therefore our attitudes were serious, our plans for

fundraising extremely cautious and careful.

Just as in other villages in China today, the dependence on government funding (from a supervising township) to an administrative village like Jianshan for village development is quite heavy, particularly on the public sector such as road infrastructure. The village leader, either head of village or the Party Secretary, gets actively involved in each stage to collect, manage, and distribute the public funding. This is part of their duty and power; it is also a good opportunity for them, on one hand, to help them win villager's hearts in order to be voted in again; on the other hand, to help them expand their political and business network for their further promotion. Therefore the influence from the village leader over the use of public funding is direct and determinative; while the decision-making process is extremely sophisticated – it is a political play, in the name of socio-economic development, towards a precarious balance, to satisfy stakeholders who have made priorities. Though every effort has been made by the village leader of the administrative village to balance the funding allocation between different natural villages (probably with different surnames) or subdivided between different villager-cooperative groups, it easily goes, to some degree, at the sacrifice of ordinary villagers, whose voices are largely excluded from the decision-making process.

This is what Weizhong Ren and I as ordinary practitioners tried to improve in this Clan-Community Hall project, which aimed to build for people by valuing diverse voices and multiple narratives of the villagers. During our

visits to Xiaogou Wu natural village we found it quite a connective clan-community with high levels of mutual trust and social cohesion. Villagers were friendly, easy to talk to and to share different opinions, and more importantly, they expressed coherent interests to collaborate with others (other villagers, Weizhong Ren, or with me as an outsider) to realise a shared vision for a better living environment not only for physically but also spiritually. That sense of clan-community, or just sense of place and identity, drove Weizhong Ren and I to put forward a mutual-funding mode for the Clan-Community Hall project. This was a participative financing mode acting from within, in contrast to the dominant mode used in state-led projects, achieved by partly learning the old traditional way of mutual-funding when making/managing common space under the guidance of clan existed long before the arrival of modern state and professional power.

In China there are problematic historical associations with the use of the term 'participation'. A lack of clarity in its meaning can create serious misunderstandings for farmers and officials alike. For farmers the concept evokes mass mobilization campaigns and unpaid participation in infrastructure development. Officials automatically correlate the term with community labour (usually involuntary) and community cost sharing.

So this participative financing mode was a two-stage process: firstly, we needed to persuade the clan leader, rather than the village leaders (head of village from villager-committee or the Party secretary of the village), to grant us eligibility to seek 'external' funding in the name of Xiaogou

Wu (the term 'external' here means internalised funding secured from outside the village physically, not referring to an external funding body only for commercial investment). That's because, as we estimated, the suspicion about our motivation and reluctance to cooperate without practical benefit from the village leaders would be larger than with the clan leader who was an elderly retired man taking care of the 'soft' production and management of the 'village under one roof'.

The second fundraising stage overlapped with the design stage: we needed to convince the villagers as clan members to participate in the design and construction process with their money, time and labour. An old saying goes, 'those who have money please donate money; those with only labour to offer please donate labour'. This reinvented the cooperative rituals in almost all clan-based villages in Vernacular China, where indigenous people exchanged labour to help their own houses and put in shared time making and managing common space and structure together, such as the collective assembly and common maintenance of the ancestral hall, or the mutual financing of 'three ceremonies' (birthdays, weddings, and funerals) for other clan members.

The first stage went surprisingly smoothly: we made contact with an entrepreneur who originated from Jianshan village and maintained her business with bamboo material (produced from Jianshan village and Anji County) for the construction industry in Beijing City. She kindly agreed to fund £4000 or so (around 4/5 part of the cost, later estimated at the design stage), only asking in return for an 50 m<sup>2</sup> exhibition space to showcase

Identifying a site with local barefoot architect and clan people, 2015



her personal story and bamboo products in the Clan-Community Hall that was to be built. (This is normal in traditional Chinese village history: when people who left his/her hometown made a career outside, he/she would donate much to reward for thanksgiving, through rebuilding his/her own house, contributing refurbishment of the family temples or ancestral halls, erecting a memorial archway.) Then we forwarded the commission to the clan leader and senior members, who was very excited to welcome it; then Weizhong Ren briefed to the head of village who was interested while the Party secretary was not that much.

Following this, we decided to try to make an internal fundraising effort to support the project completely from inside, as we understood that nothing could run in a real sense without purely internal funding, particular for this project of shared space trying to acting from within. Despite a good start made by Weizhong Ren who generously contributed £600, the fundraising process inside the village for this community project went slowly and painfully, as most villagers including several senior clan members expressed hesitation about how to make it fair in terms of money, time and labour balance for each clan member. The ice was not broken until Weizhong Ren came up a plan that, for those who couldn't or didn't wish to give money, one working hour would equal £15. In this way local knowledge solved a local problem: another part of funding, equal to approximately £400, was successfully raised from the inside (which made up the remaining 1/5 part of the cost according to later estimation).

### Participatory Design process

As mentioned above, the building design stage overlapped with the second stage of fundraising which aimed to engage and convince as many villagers as possible. Actually, identifying an appropriate site had already started during informal visits to Xiaogou Wu, simultaneously with the first stage of fundraising in discussion with the sponsor from Beijing. With the guidance of elderly members of the clan, a place exactly located in between two entrance roads of the village was chosen.

Obviously left-over as a former market garden



with clusters of artificially nurtured plants, the place was quiet and messy as a result of low maintenance. A residual concrete route and foundation for a pavilion indicated that the space had been decorated and used for welcoming external visitors several years ago. But now it functioned as an embarrassing waste collection point for the village, due to its proximity to the external road.

Excepting these negative qualities, an osmanthus tree a hundred years old, and two retaining walls made of local masonry with ecological habitats and irrigation channels, was the treasure of the given site.

It was said that this triangle site had been a water pool (probably functioning as a water-mouth) before, with two bridges now



Looking at site from a distance, 2015



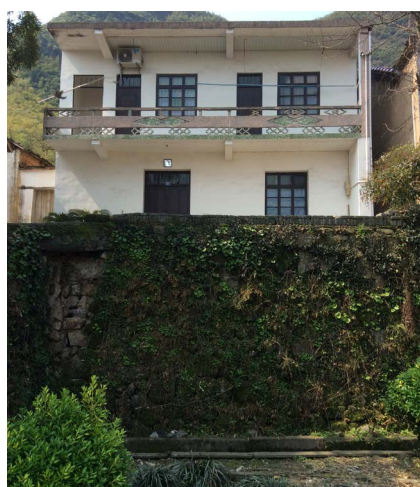
The triangle site in Xiaogou Wu, 2015

Looking at the site  
from the western  
street, 2015



Existing water channel  
for drainage, 2015

Existing retaining  
wall in masonry, with  
ecological patches



following the old route of bridges. Though earlier visual evidence such as old maps could not be gained, it could still be presumed that this key entrance point of the village had engaged the indigenous ideology including Fengshui, Entrance Bridge, and blocking ceremonies etc. It should have been a key anchor point of the village and clan; we followed the recommendation from the elderly clan members, determined to reactivate it as a Clan-Community hall and providing common space under one roof. The site was identified; the next step was to gain the trust of all stakeholders regarding the unclear ownership of the site as a shared space.

Weizhong Ren and I planned to start from a sketch design charrette on site, inviting key stakeholders (including village leaders, clan leader, elderly clan members, and other villagers as many as possible) to observe and participate.

The participative on-site workshop relied on a three-stage consultative process:

- A detailed site visit together, facilitated by the barefoot architect Weizhong Ren with the local community including village clan leader, head of village, officers from political authorities, residents near to the site, and other enthusiastic villagers. (Apologies were received from the sponsor and Party Secretary)
- An on-site workshop on conceptual design visualization facilitated by me, which provided a material basis for the later intense conversations and design discussions
- Following instant feedback from the meeting, design revisions/development were made on-site, and a preliminary spatial brief presented

as a poster manifesto was made public on-site for an initial voting process to reach a consensus on whether to build and how to build

The process relied on the principles of inclusiveness and visual representation, achieving this through engaging with the local clan/community at large, trying to find what matters most for whom and who cares what most.

During the design charrette workshop, consensus was achieved between all attendees, particularly between the head of village and clan leader and the two household residents nearest to the site, who stressed the importance of keeping the impact of both the construction and occupation as low as possible, from both a physical and a mental perspective: visually, the new clan-community hall building should not block the view corridor from the rest of the village towards the distant mountains, particularly from the two families of residents near to the site; mentally, the new building should dissolve its volume into the existing without noisy gestures, performing as if it had been there for a long time.

Thus the new clan-community hall was proposed as a landform stitching into the existing topography of the site. The key architectural strategy was making the walk-on roof as an artificial landscape, by intermeshing its boundaries with both the western sidewalk and front square of nearby houses, meanwhile still keeping a breathable space (1-2m) in between the existing eco-walls (retaining masonry walls with water channels) and the new building for the ecological patches and drainage. A safety question about installing a protective balustrade was raised,



generating hot discussions which ended up with an idea of a pedestrian ramp continuously folded over the crack between building and retaining wall, ensuring enough filtered light and rain access to the bottom part of the crack.

A spatial brief was co-designed: a 50m<sup>2</sup> exhibition room required from the sponsor, covered the western part of the site with its shopfront facing south. It was surrounded by a series of scattered clan-community units for informal activities such as drinking tea, playing majiang, as well as a more formal welcoming event-space when used as a semi-outdoor dining hall in hot summer.

The clan leader suggested having a piece of sacred space, even a corner, to express the traditional spirit of Xiaogou Wu in this contemporary hall. I strongly supported this viewpoint, and facilitated the further discussions with an agreement to keep the existing old osmanthus tree at the centre of the new hall. It reminded me of the old regional rituals to plant one or several trees at the entrance of the village for Fengshui reasons.

A brief cost was also estimated by all the attendees, under the guidance of Weizhong Ren who had sufficient knowledge about the relations between the cost and the size, scale, and shape of building material for this specific village. An extremely tight budget of less than £50/m<sup>2</sup> was proposed. The initial structure and material strategy related to the use of bamboo, one of the most abundant local materials, touching the land lightly. Weizhong Ren offered to use rammed-earth wall for partitions as he has been famous as a local earth-construction specialist. A health and safety question generated by bamboo

and earth structures was raised by the participants, directing discussion to the building's life span with an expectation of 5-8 years. Thus a temporal dimension was introduced; it would be a temporary building.

Collecting all of the above responses and feedback, I directed the optimization process of the architectural proposal, with clarified spatial brief in an axonometric diagram. Integrated with texts and campaign principles, the proposal was posted onto the wall of the existing structure facing the main road on the northeast side of the site. It was made public there for two weeks as recommended by Weizhong Ren and the village leader, in order to approach the wider audience of the village. Finally, the workshop ended with an unscheduled visit, directed by an enthusiastic villager, to a nearby material supplier, and a following consultation with a local bamboo-maker about technical possibilities.

In all, the community consultation process progressed without major opposition or controversy, with all parties expressing eagerness to make the project happen. The design workshop was productive, too. They had developed more trust in me, as an outsider, particularly after my sketch design quickly on site, illustrating the potential programme and atmosphere that this building could bring to the site. My presentation also let key stakeholders know our participatory approach to produce this 'place for people' the people being them. Weizhong Ren as a local agent, and clan support from Xiaogou Wu natural village, were critical to the early success of the idea of the Clan-Community Hall.





Sketch design charrette on site. The author in blue, 2015



Conceptual proposal, 2015



Community consultation, 2015. The author in blue. Head of village in black in discussion with clan members

Community consultation. The author in blue. The sitting man in black is head of village, 2015



The process of the author making a campaign board, 2015







Posting the project initiative including its spatial brief in a campaign board on the street for public consultation, 2015



Consultation with a local bamboo-maker following a visit to nearby material supplier, 2015

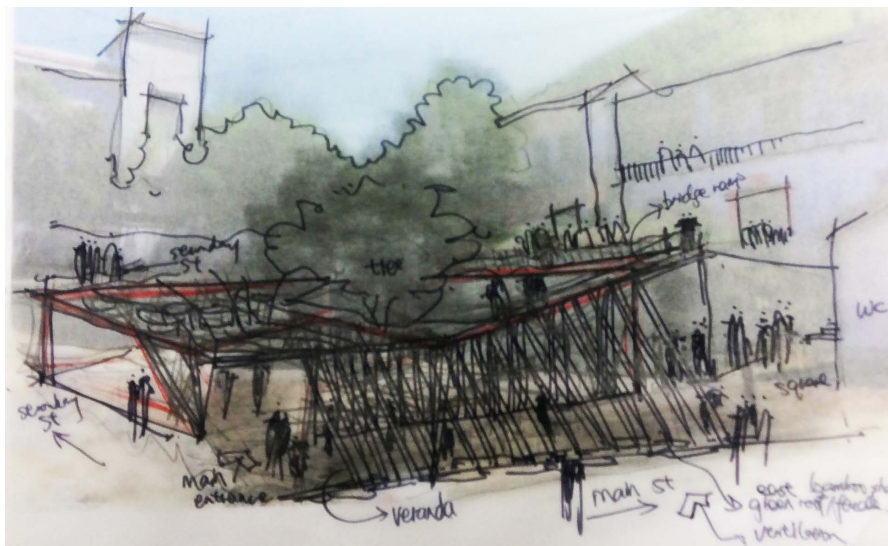
Spatial Strategy,  
collage by the author,  
2015

The old osmanthus tree as a visual focal point, was enclosed by the L-shaped building and an additional central amphitheater proposed.

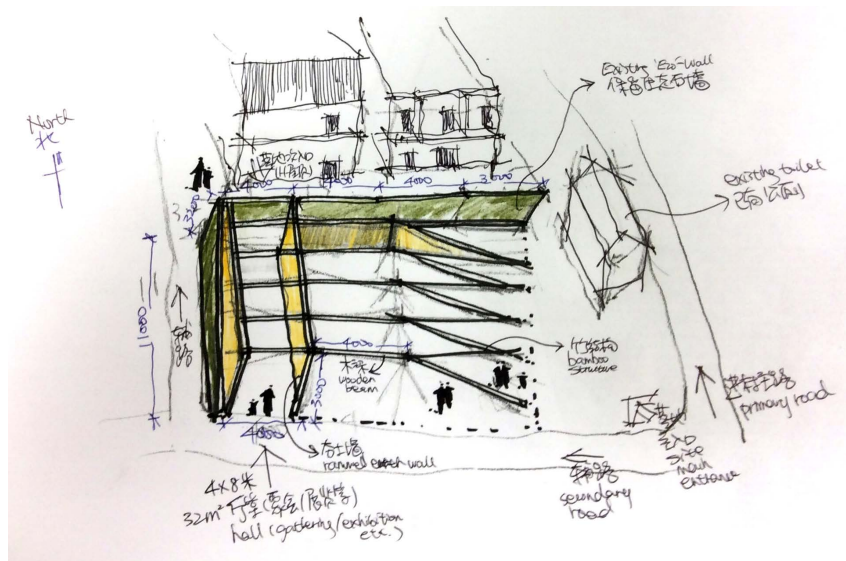


Circulation and Cladding  
Strategy, sketch by the  
author, 2015

The red refers to the pedestrian ramp linking different levels of existing topography. The repetitive linear elements refer to half-cut bamboo for rainwater collection and eastern sun-shading; a semi-outdoor corridor adds one more layer between exterior and interior.

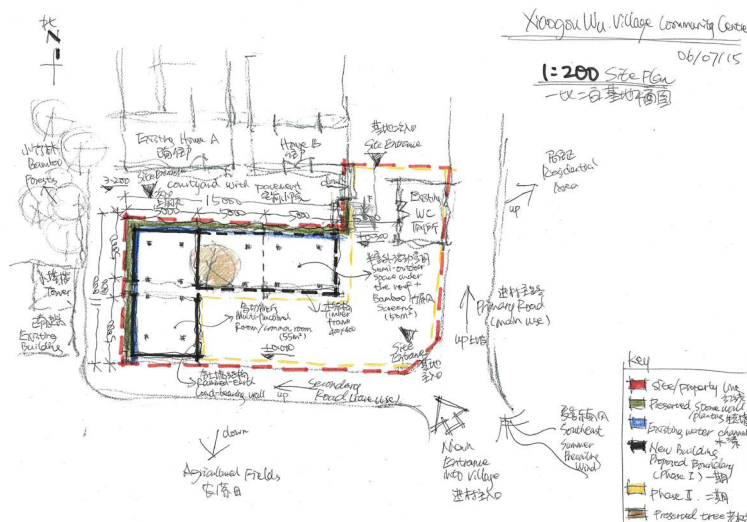






Structural Strategy, sketch by the author, 2015

The yellow refers to two parallel rammed-earth walls as a western foundation to suspend the bamboo beamworks down to the eastern ground.

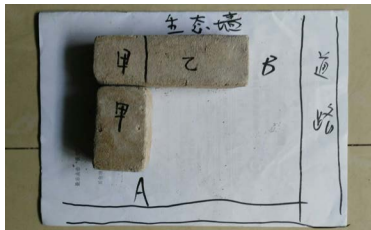


1:200 Site Plan with phased development, drawn by the author, 2015

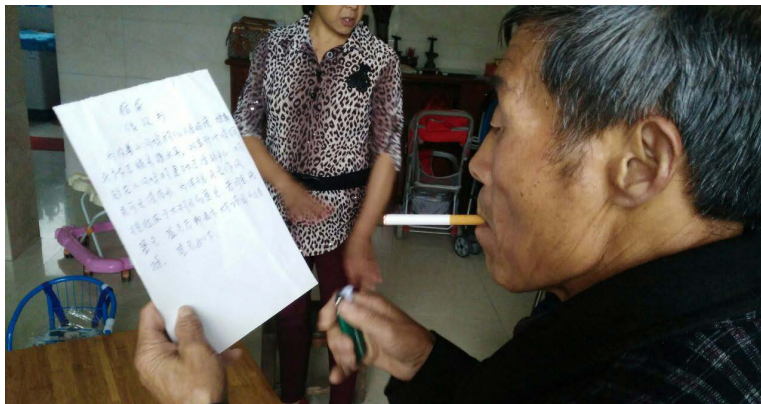
Four units form the L-shaped layout, with one void for the existing osmanthus tree. Independence of frame and wall shows tectonic integrity; spaces under the eaves provide both horizontal (corridor) and vertical (ramp) circulation.

Volume Layout and Structural Frame, models decided, designed, and made by clan members forward to clan leader, 2015

The exhibition space for the sponsor and the communal space for the villagers enclose an assembly square.



Written hand-out of project initiative resubmitted to a senior clan member at his home, 2015



Digital model with collaged everyday activities photographed from the village, drawn by the author, 2015

A rotated folding screen made by bamboo can transform the indoor Clan-Community Hall into a common space with different degrees of exteriority according to time of the day and weather or seasonal change. Clan-Community Hall in bamboo shared an entrance space with exhibition hall in rammed-earth.



Self-organised clan members' meeting on the Clan-Community Hall, 2015

After this participation workshop, the design entered its second phase for schematic design development: Weizhong Ren and I were given enough freedom to develop the schematic design with more building technical knowledge, based on the trust built through the previous stages with the clan/community of Xiaogou Wu. So the whole participatory process was pushed by a much smaller steering group at this stage. It became a self-organised working mode of 'expert outsider + local elites + activist insider', with local elite (Weizhong Ren in this case) mediating as an agent in between. The options of each decision making with associated knowledge exchange were conveyed to the sponsor and villagers mainly by Weizhong Ren, sometimes on a face-to-face basis, sometimes distantly. The principle was to

inform the villagers including head of village, Party Secretary and the clan leader of every key design move and to listen to their feedback and opinions. The reason why the plan changed and the section left open and even without a complete fixed drawing was that to keep the possibility of 'hybrid building' – a hybrid production site of knowledge emerged from the outsiders' input and insiders' knowledge, and then would inform the way to 'hybrid building' including both consequences from building process and outcome object.

The inner needs had been identified little by little; the challenge of the site and the potentials of the building had been posed by the local clan in their own language, owing to the patient facilitation, mediation and negotiation by Weizhong Ren and a few key enthusiastic villagers. The



Clan leader wrote in red the name on the cart for transporting construction materials, 2015



Clan members preparing the site, 2015







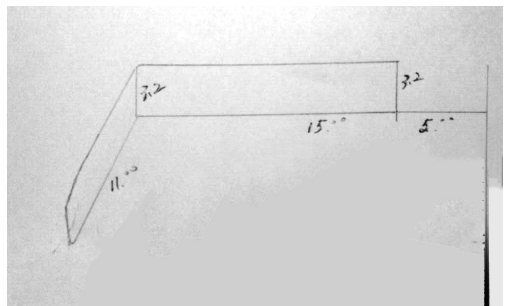
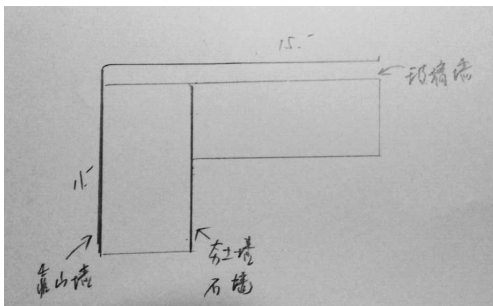
Food share event after  
site preparation, 2015



Pebbles as locally-sourced building materials have been prepared on site, 2016



Measurement diagrams for the construction site showed the villagers negotiated spatial boundaries, 2016



head of village and Party Secretary also admitted to providing ‘convenience’ to the project’s further development <sup>4</sup>.

#### Construction process: site preparation and food ritual

Before the completion of the schematic design

stage, the construction stage overlapped, and series of spontaneous activities started. The first event was the assembly meeting on site for voting and accumulating different levels of contributions from villagers. The scene was atmospheric; enthusiastic villagers, varied in gender and age, arrived at the site continuously. The clan leader was

invited to write the name on a new rendered trolley for construction material transportation, marking the official start of the construction process. Villagers were active to volunteer, and their time, labour and skill contributions were allocated into several parts of the estimated construction work. The second event followed, during which a few selected villagers started to clean the site. They collectively prepared the site over several days, preserving the old osmanthus tree and keeping the ecological retaining walls and water channels.

The third event, the most important of the series, happened on a selected day for a food festival organised by the clan leader and some activist villagers. The day was joined by most of the villagers, with joy and excitement and exchanging ideas on how to build, and how to use this space and building. Building as a social ritual process became part of the communal festival of the whole village.

The steering group of the project automatically changed at this stage; after Weizhong Ren and I heard of the first event, we decided to step back to be more invisible, rather than to disturb. As a local, Weizhong Ren joined the food festival day on site, and was warmly welcomed by villagers. Preparation work and the food ritual happened on the site in such a quick and effective way quite beyond our expectations, and even those of the head of village.

The fourth event was to transport possible materials, such as pebbles, which were locally-sourced. The site work had no written contracts or professional design documents, but was accomplished in oral agreement between

participants. They deserved a right to build.

### **Negotiation process**

From this stage I stepped down as the direct involvement over; while Weizhong Ren still in because of his 'Geo-ties'. At the time when everybody thought the building would be realized step by step, conflicts emerged, in a sudden way, as with most participatory processes. A member of clan, one of the householders nearest to the site (above the site with front square), suggested enlarging the public western walk into a one-vehicle path to serve as the marriage ritual path of his son's marriage. It would shorten the site property boundary and disturbed public interests, obviously. But he insisted that he wanted to achieve it, so in compensation for the negative effects to his house the Clan-Community Hall group had to be tolerant. After internal negotiation and rejection by almost all of the clan members including clan leader, he was so angry that he opposed the Clan-Community Hall project publicly. He even used his materials to occupy part of the site, in order to prevent others from starting building work. Weizhong Ren came to try to mediate but that still didn't work. The dialogue was never compromised, without the clan leader, head of village and Party Secretary; but they felt so reluctant that they proposed many excuses to refuse presence in negotiation meetings.

Several months later I got to know that the son of opponent made business and did quite well in nearby township who had established strategic partnership with Party Secretary also from that township. That was why his father could defend



The site was left quiet and busy at the same time; a hybrid, 2016



the spatial boundary in contrast even to the clan organization. The hidden reason this conflict couldn't be mediated so far, was the invisible disagreement between Party Secretary and head of village in Xiaogou Wu<sup>5</sup>. The new Clan-Community Hall project was proposed for the whole village, most of which belonged to the clan constituted by a same surname; the head of village and other members of villager-committee were voted in by the villagers, so undoubtedly they were part of the clan and acting on behalf of the interests of clan. Personally, most of them including the head of village himself are relatives of current clan leader. Therefore it is a typical villager-committee based on 'Kin-ties' and 'Geo-ties'. However the Party Secretary, commissioned by the upper township

government, originated not from Xiaogou Wu natural village but from another natural village belonging to Jianshan administrative village, thus he and his 'team' related to other interests, at this point in support of the father of his partner in contrast with local original clan in this disagreement. Obviously, it is the 'Work-ties' winning the 'Kin-ties' and 'Geo-ties'.

But dramatically, 'Kin-ties' and 'Geo-ties' reversed in an alternative form in an unexpected way: an abandoned Temple of Earth God nearby the Clan-Community Hall site, was refurbished and redeveloped in just a week's time. And since then it has been very well received as a shared belief space and social focal point for the village.

That unexpected result mirrored a strange





Before (left) and after (right), Temple of Earth God, 2016

The wooden beam-work and load-bearing walls were preserved and strengthened with two new brick walls in white-washed and black linear rendering by local craftsmen.

The existing retaining walls made by pebbles were extended into several terraces which provided an outdoor space for worship and very well received by villagers.



logic in Chinese rural villages that the minority dictates to the majority, rather than the opposite. It also showed a weak understanding of 'the spirit of contract', which would form a more civilized community under a modern notion in the clan-based villages. It also showed a resilient clan.

Actually, according to series of interviews with the officers on behalf of the 'state', village residents on behalf of the 'society', and professionals on behalf of the 'intellectuals', the lack of clear theoretical clarification and practical operation in key issues such as ownership, responsibility,

role, public space, participation, etc. is behind almost every disagreement, conflict, disorder and abandonment of land/space/building in Chinese villages. Xiaogou Wu was not a special case.

### **Conclusion: Reflection as a Hybrid Practitioner**

#### **Hybrid building**

This Clan-Community Hall project comprised the negotiation of a brief, a budget, and design participation process, as well as an unexpected built work Temple of Earth God as by-products, between the author as a 'hybrid practitioner', bridged by local barefoot architect, and the local community based on clan for their mutual benefits. The author in doing so gained more real-world capabilities; the clan used the non-profit project as an opportunity to enhance spiritual union through collectively upgrading common space. Although the power relations with contrasting values were made visible and left to time, it was a trust-based and time-based coproduction, with knowledge transferred and exchanged in and around architecture. It was also an attempt to alter high-building practice expectations by contractually and socially restructuring the contemporary professional relationships between agents such as policy-makers, clients, consultants, builders, users and other stakeholders. The real-world impact of this collaborative and participative project has been dramatically experienced at many scales except the traditional notion of building scale due to its unbuilt reality, as well as its unbuildable status. That unbuildable part made 'hybrid building'; in this case, it was that Temple of Earth God. But is

the buildable architecture really the answer (to engage local issues)? Yes, but what is 'architecture' and 'design'? It asks more than it could answer.

How contemporary architecture and architects demonstrate transformative value and potentials in Chinese village? As a response to this research question, this project shows that the inclusiveness and resilience gained through participation and ritual reinvention in clan-community-related architecture in Chinese rural village is not only a return to a static integration of settings, objects and participants, but also a navigation within the system through micro-design activism. Constant dis-assembling and reassembling the knowledge which is normally locked inside the professional disciplinary autonomy and indigenous system contributed to strategize and to optimise, finally achieving a state of flux and transformation. What it means to consider the 'hybrid building' as an inclusive production site for knowledge is that, it is not just intervention but produced through that intervention. It is this hybridity that reinvents a new temporary meaning – offering neither the final interpretation nor the last word, but a palimpsest added to by different actors in different periods: an accumulative process.

'Hybrid building' is not a tabula-rasa way of clearing out the site as a green backdrop for a white, perfect artistic object; but it could be theorized as a tactical principal in architectural participation and coproduction, in which micro-design activism reinvents the vernacular, the irregular, the organic, the messy engaged, the ritual, the busy everyday lives of buildings lying outside the range of the star architects and

the design studios. In this Clan-Community Hall project, villagers have been facilitated to negotiate and renegotiate their spatial boundaries, to generate possibilities for new encounters, spaces and collectives.

Therefore I would describe 'hybrid building' as a position in architectural design practice in Chinese rural villages in the transition from traditional clan to modern community. It interrogates the changing role, from solo artistic author to a 'hybrid practitioner' that design professionals can play in contesting the urban-rural struggling in current China. It demonstrates that it would not be impossible for professional architects to take architectural design as a cutting channel to rethink, reflect and re-intervene in state-society relations through intellectuals' social-responsive position, perspectives and approaches to respond to projects dynamic with different sizes, different stages, and different relations between power and place resource. It at least opens up a new door for younger generations of 'hybrid practitioner' to expose and engage the complex, real-world, hidden status quo and challenges towards a social-transformative architecture not in capital 'A' but for people and community.

### Hybrid system

Looking back to thousands of years of history, the Chinese-characteristic paradigm of evolution and development could be summarised as a 'double-track system' – a hybrid system. This refers to a capacity from Chinese society for the coexistence of double (or even multiple, usually with contrasting values) systems for a relatively

long time period, instead of a new, emerging system replacing the old, current dominant system whether in a slow transformation or a radically rapid reform. It is a two-way process involving action and reaction. It is during this period of coexistence that the alternative system with advanced forces pushes the dominant one to self-regenerate in order to match, while itself being continuously upgraded to more appropriate forms adapting to a more solid social foundation. When this procedure of coexistence is completed, a stable system will be achieved – it is neither the new emerging system nor the old dominant one, but a hybrid from the two, what is called again and again in Chinese history, that the best suit measures to the Chinese-characteristic locally-specific condition.

In fact, the situation for the role architecture as both a discourse and a discipline under current Chinese urban-rural transition is the same. Top-down and bottom-up has too often been applied and conceived as a metaphoric concept and form to illustrate state-society relations in current Chinese urbanization, with a preconception about a stronger state-led modern China over a weaker and weaker society-based 'Vernacular China' – but this is a narrowed perspective, and not enough proved. As an old Chinese slang says, 'Where there is a policy, there is a countermeasure'. The actor from the 'weak society' side, for example the clan, is proving resilient.

The transition of traditional clan towards modern community in Chinese vernacular settlements address areas of reality complementary to the great socio-philosophical sophistication of the 'Vernacular China' and rapid cultural change so

prominent in the current city-oriented development paradigm; and this complementarity is itself an important insight into how we can understand and prompt micro-level, small-scaled, transgressive change from within the socio-cultural complexity of current rural China. As the rural (bottom-up) it enables a potential renegotiation of the urban (top-down), through the rural's own transformation as prompted by the 'hybrid building' intervention.

The architecture of hybrid building is processual and relational for a specific site context and social condition; it is a knowledge assemblage, involving progressive practices of gathering, composition, production and consumption. Universal solutions fall short of addressing local issues. Local-based, small-scaled and progressive architectural practice through participatory action-learning opens up a possibility to contribute to the cultural renaissance of Chinese vernacular architecture in a real sense, suggesting the unexpected, the unheard, the informal, the spontaneous, the handmade, the repetitive, the other, within the regional and the public.

### Illustration Credits

All images © Xiang Ren

### Notes

- 1 Interview with villagers in Jianshan administrative village by the author
- 2 Interview with two senior clan members in Xiaogou Wu natural village by the author
- 3 Interview with Weizhong Ren in his house in Jianshan administrative village by the author
- 4 Interview with head of village and Party Secretary by Weizhong Ren in Jianshan administrative village
- 5 Interview distantly with Weizhong Ren by the author



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