

# **Transforming the Chinese Countryside:**

## **A socio-spatial analysis of the development of new villages in Sichuan**

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## **Abstract**

Since China's economic reform in the 1980s, the Chinese government has repeatedly called for transforming the built environment in villages. In the mid-2000s, with the initiation of Building a New Socialist Countryside (BNSC), which is the latest campaign of rural development in China, increasing numbers of new villages have been developed across the country.

Adopting a socio-spatial perspective, this thesis examines the policies of new villages and investigates whether the outcomes delivered in practice are in line with the objectives of development claimed by the policies. Compared to the earlier policies that had mainly taken village development as a measure to either regulate rural land use or sustain local public finance, the new initiative specifically emphasizes three objectives: the construction of infrastructure, the professionalization of village planning and the promotion of an officially-designated aesthetics of built environment.

The implementation of new villages under BNSC was investigated by studying two cases of development in Sichuan. The case studies analyse the development process and product through identifying the socio-spatial context, institutional structure and the strategies and interests of stakeholders involved in the development practices. The analysis shows that while the political-economic structure has framed the organization of agencies and the distribution of resources, the individual stakeholders' interplay with the structure as well as with each other also has significant influences on the development process and product. Lastly, the study found the development had mixed impacts on rural residents. While some are enjoying improved housing conditions or economic revenue brought by the development, others doubt the spatial forms of new villages and worry that the development can cause conflicts in land tenure and challenges for housing maintenance in the long term. These findings offer significant lessons for the development of physical and social space of rural China in future.





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# Contents

<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Contents .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>List of Figures .....</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>List of Tables .....</b>	<b>xii</b>
<b>Abbreviations and Glossary .....</b>	<b>xiii</b>
<b>Chapter 1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 <i>Government-led development of new villages in China .....</i>	<i>1</i>
1.2 <i>Research aim, objectives and questions .....</i>	<i>4</i>
1.3 <i>Analytical framework and research methodology .....</i>	<i>5</i>
1.4 <i>Structure of the thesis .....</i>	<i>7</i>
<b>Chapter 2. Literature Review .....</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1 <i>Introduction: land ownership and land use matters in rural China .....</i>	<i>9</i>
2.2 <i>Farmland conservation policies and early calls for new villages .....</i>	<i>12</i>
2.2.1 <i>The Chinese government's concern over arable land loss .....</i>	<i>12</i>
2.2.2 <i>Farmland conservation policies and programmes to promote new villages .....</i>	<i>15</i>
2.3 <i>Village development boosted by the policies of farmland conversion quota .....</i>	<i>19</i>
2.3.1 <i>Fiscal reform and the "land finance" in China .....</i>	<i>19</i>
2.3.2 <i>Quota-driven development of new villages .....</i>	<i>22</i>
2.4 <i>The policies of BNSC and the development of new villages .....</i>	<i>24</i>
2.4.1 <i>BNSC's overall objectives for village development .....</i>	<i>24</i>
2.4.2 <i>New requirements for village development under BNSC .....</i>	<i>26</i>
2.5 <i>Literature analysing the transformation of the village environment .....</i>	<i>30</i>
2.5.1 <i>Theories and models of the development process of the built environment .....</i>	<i>30</i>
2.5.2 <i>Previous studies of the process of developing new villages in practice .....</i>	<i>36</i>
2.6 <i>Theoretical framework of the present study .....</i>	<i>43</i>
2.7 <i>Conclusion .....</i>	<i>46</i>
<b>Chapter 3. Methodology .....</b>	<b>49</b>
3.1 <i>Research strategies .....</i>	<i>49</i>
3.1.1 <i>Qualitative research .....</i>	<i>49</i>
3.1.2 <i>Case study research .....</i>	<i>52</i>
3.2 <i>Research design and execution .....</i>	<i>54</i>
3.2.1 <i>Case selection .....</i>	<i>54</i>
3.2.2 <i>Data collection techniques .....</i>	<i>57</i>
3.2.3 <i>Data analysis methods .....</i>	<i>65</i>
3.3 <i>Considerations of ethical issues and positionality of the study .....</i>	<i>68</i>
3.4 <i>Research limitations .....</i>	<i>70</i>

3.5	<i>Conclusion</i> .....	72
<b>Chapter 4. Setting the Scene of the Case Studies</b> .....		<b>73</b>
4.1	<i>Overview of the implementation of new villages below national level</i> .....	73
4.1.1	Local government promotion of new villages in Sichuan .....	73
4.1.2	Local government's focus on the development of new villages in Sichuan .....	79
4.2	<i>The social, economic and spatial context of Eastern County and township B</i> .....	85
4.2.1	A general portrait of the county .....	85
4.2.2	Village life in the township .....	86
4.3	<i>Conclusion</i> .....	89
<b>Chapter 5. The Development of Village S</b> .....		<b>91</b>
5.1	<i>A general introduction to village S</i> .....	91
5.1.1	Social and economic context of the village .....	91
5.1.2	The village built environment before the new development.....	95
5.2	<i>The process of development in village S</i> .....	100
5.2.1	Actors involved .....	100
5.2.2	Background and initiation of the development .....	102
5.2.3	Making the planning and design of the new village .....	104
5.2.4	The construction and allocation of new space .....	110
5.2.5	Using and transforming the built environment .....	114
5.3	<i>Outcomes of the development of village S</i> .....	122
5.3.1	Changes in the village built environment .....	122
5.3.2	Influences on the socio-economic dimension .....	125
5.4	<i>Conclusion</i> .....	129
<b>Chapter 6. The Development of Village K</b> .....		<b>133</b>
6.1	<i>A general introduction to village K</i> .....	133
6.1.1	Social and economic context of the village .....	133
6.1.2	The village built environment before the new development.....	136
6.2	<i>The process of development in village K</i> .....	141
6.2.1	Actors involved .....	141
6.2.2	The riverside housing development .....	144
6.2.3	Further development in the village .....	156
6.3	<i>Outcomes of the development of village K</i> .....	167
6.3.1	Changes in the village built environment .....	167
6.3.2	Influences on socio-economic dimension .....	168
6.4	<i>Conclusion</i> .....	170
<b>Chapter 7. Development Practice as Framed by Institutional Structure and Socio-Spatial Context</b> .....		<b>173</b>
7.1	<i>Comparing the development processes and outputs in the two villages</i> .....	173
7.1.1	Comparing the development processes in village S and K.....	173
7.1.2	Comparing the development outcomes in village S and K.....	176
7.2	<i>Influences of the policies and the socio-spatial environment of village development</i> 180	

7.2.1	Policies' influences on village development in practice .....	181
7.2.2	Influences of the physical and social environment of the villages .....	183
7.3	<i>Socio-spatial context and structure that shaped village development</i> .....	187
7.4	<i>Conclusion</i> .....	191
<b>Chapter 8. Development Practice as Directed by Actions of Stakeholders</b> .....		<b>193</b>
8.1	<i>Roles and strategies of the stakeholders involved in village development</i> .....	193
8.1.1	Central and local government.....	193
8.1.2	Design agency .....	202
8.1.3	Village cadres and local elite.....	203
8.1.4	Rural population .....	209
8.2	<i>Interactions of stakeholders, structures and context of village development</i> .....	215
8.3	<i>Conclusion</i> .....	221
<b>Chapter 9. Conclusion: Lessons from the Development of New Villages</b> .....		<b>223</b>
9.1	<i>Answers to research questions</i> .....	224
9.1.1	The context and development of the policies of new villages.....	224
9.1.2	The implementation processes of village development.....	227
9.1.3	The outcomes of village development in practice .....	232
9.2	<i>Academic implications: an inclusive perspective to study village development in rural China</i> .....	235
9.3	<i>Suggestions for further research</i> .....	237
9.4	<i>Suggestions for the policies and practices of village development in future</i> .....	238
<b>Appendix A: List of Interviews</b> .....		<b>243</b>
<b>Appendix B. Guidelines Used in Semi-Structured Interviews</b> .....		<b>245</b>
<b>References</b> .....		<b>247</b>



## List of Figures

Figure 2.1 Rural land use and management in China.....	11
Figure 2.2 Growth of floor area of new rural housing in China, 1990-2013.....	13
Figure 2.3 Rural population in China, 1980-2015.....	14
Figure 2.4 Relationships between the Literature Review and the theoretical framework of the present study.....	44
Figure 3.1 The approximate location of Eastern County, Chengdu and Chongqing .....	55
Figure 3.2 Sketch maps of a transformed new village house .....	63
Figure 3.3 Photos of the glass curtain walls and the stainless steel components added on the house in Figure 3.2 .....	63
Figure 3.4 The architectural illustration of a new village in an official design document.....	65
Figure 3.5 The process of data collection, processing and analysis in this research.....	68
Figure 4.1 The flow of funds for the development of new villages between different levels of government .....	75
Figure 4.2 A row of houses along a highway in the suburban area of Eastern County.....	81
Figure 4.3 Traditional houses in an ancient town in eastern Sichuan .....	82
Figure 4.4 An architectural rendering of new village houses with in the style of an ‘eastern Sichuan folk house’ .....	83
Figure 4.5 A group of old village houses before/ after the government-led house transformation.....	84
Figure 4.6 Locations of the two villages, the urban centre of Eastern County and the planned airport (based on Google Map, drawn by the author) .....	87
Figure 4.7 Locations of town B and the two villages.....	88
Figure 4.8 Left: the market in town B; Right: the countryside bus .....	89
Figure 5.1 The mountainous topography of village S .....	93
Figure 5.2 Left: A corner of the plant nursery; Right: The fishing deck and houses of the rural tourism business .....	94
Figure 5.3 A villager growing vegetables on sloping farmland .....	95
Figure 5.4 The popular styles of front façades of houses in village S.....	96
Figure 5.5 The front façades of two houses in village S, viewed from near and far .....	97
Figure 5.6 Left: villagers using the space under the eaves of a traditional house (photo by an author in another village in Eastern County); Right: villagers using the space under the front balcony of a house built in the 2000s in village S .....	98
Figure 5.7 The exterior and interior decorations of a “villa” in village S .....	98
Figure 5.8 Village houses after being refurbished by the “Project of Beautiful Environment” .....	99
Figure 5.9 The public square and outdoor sports facilities built by the “Project of Beautiful Environment” .....	99
Figure 5.10 Left: The old tree in village S; Right: The image of a big tree in the countryside used in the design document.....	104
Figure 5.11 The village design for the development of village S .....	106
Figure 5.12 Existing residential quarters in village S and the planned area for the development of new village .....	107

Figure 5.13 The ‘echoes’ of the arches in village S: the sculpture on the gravestone (left), the wall of the old courtyard house (middle), the wall at one entrance of the school house (right)	108
Figure 5.14 Left: House façade design for the development in village S, Right: Walls of a new house built in practice	108
Figure 5.15 The floor plans and appearance of the new house designed for the development in village S	109
Figure 5.16 Left: An old villager enshrining ancestors in the <i>tangwu</i> of her house (built before 1950s); Right: A shrine in the main room of a house built in the 1990s	110
Figure 5.17 The design of the new village in village S and the implemented area (within the red line)	111
Figure 5.18 Left: The Luo family’s old house (middle); Right: The Luo family’s new house	113
Figure 5.19 Left: A snapshot of an official propaganda video titled as “villagers of village S using the multi-media room in the new public building to study agricultural technologies”	114
Figure 5.20 The public building in village S locked by the gates which were added	114
Figure 5.21 Floor plans and transformations of House 1, 2 and 4 in the new village	117
Figure 5.22 Floor plans and transformations of House 5, 6 and 7 in the new village	118
Figure 5.23 Floor plans and transformations of House 10, 11 and 14 in the new village	119
Figure 5.24 Left: A kitchen using a wood oven in an old village house; Right: A modern kitchen in the new village	120
Figure 5.25 Left: The change in the centre of a village house: the <i>tangwu</i> on the ground floor is used for parking a motorcycle; Right: the modern living room on the first floor has become the most important indoor space	120
Figure 5.26 Left: Waste bins in the new built-up area; Right: The waste collection point (in green tiles) on the highway	123
Figure 5.27 The picturesque view developed in village S	123
Figure 5.28 Left: Holes carved out on the courtyard wall to install cement boards; Right: A villager working as a constructor to transform his new home	125
Figure 5.29 The flow of funds and interactions between the stakeholders in resolving the issue of land use	128
Figure 5.30 The stakeholders involved, process, and outcomes of the development in village S	130
Figure 6.1 Left: The river passing village K, heading to the town and county seat; Right: The steps connecting the old dock and the riverside residential quarter in village K	133
Figure 6.2 The old bridge (in the foreground) and new (in the background) in village K	137
Figure 6.3 Two existing old buildings in the riverside residential quarter in village K	138
Figure 6.4 Existing residential areas and new built-up areas in village K	138
Figure 6.5 The coal washing factory in village K (the right corner of the picture shows a group of new houses developed close behind the factory)	139
Figure 6.6 Village houses not in the riverside residential quarters in village K	141
Figure 6.7 Left: The last new apartment building developed in the riverside residential quarter, Right: Townhouses in town B	146
Figure 6.8 Satellite map of houses in town B and the riverside residential quarter in village K	146



Figure 6.9 Above: The cement board factory in village K and its products piled on the left side; Below: A truck transporting cement boards to the construction site in village K .....	148
Figure 6.10 Floor plans and house transformations of the <i>xiaozu</i> leader and family A& B of the riverside of village K .....	151
Figure 6.11 Floor plans and house transformations of Family C, D and E in the riverside of village K .....	152
Figure 6.12 The modern kitchens in the new apartments at the riverside of village K .....	153
Figure 6.13 The kitchens added behind the new apartment buildings and their wood stoves	153
Figure 6.14 Common arrangement of the ground-floor room in the riverside residential quarter .....	153
Figure 6.15 Common arrangement of the flats built in the riverside development .....	154
Figure 6.16 Shoes and slippers placed at the staircase of the new houses in village K (left) and village S (right) .....	155
Figure 6.17 The original appearance of the apartment buildings developed in village K .....	156
Figure 6.18 The appearance of new apartment buildings after being transformed by the government .....	157
Figure 6.19 The north part of the riverside residential area after the transformation project	158
Figure 6.20 Appearance of the new village environment designed for the second development in village K .....	161
Figure 6.21 House design for the second development in village K .....	162
Figure 6.22 The new houses built in the second development in village K .....	163
Figure 6.23 Planned area of the new village development in village K and unplanned houses .....	164
Figure 6.24 The damaged roof and floor of some new houses .....	164
Figure 6.25 Left: The sculpture and pavilion built by the government in village K; Right: A traditional Chinese painting with the poem “Evening in a Village” .....	168
Figure 6.26 Left: Tourists camping in the pavilion in village K, Right: The locked public toilet in village K .....	170
Figure 6.27 The process, outcomes, and actors involved in the development of village K ...	171
Figure 8.1 Pictures of new villages selected for the contest of “the most beautiful new villages” .....	196

## **List of Tables**

Table 2.1 The current system of inter-governmental tax sharing in China.....	20
Table 2.2 China's GDP, local fiscal revenue and fees of land conveyance and allocation, 1998-2015 (billion RMB yuan).....	21
Table 2.3 The interactions of stakeholders in existing literature of the implementation of village development .....	42
Table 3.1 Field visits to Eastern County and the two villages of case studies.....	57
Table 3.2 The four main themes of this study and key techniques of data collection .....	58
Table 5.1 Timeline of the making of village planning and design of village S .....	105
Table 5.2 House transformations undertaken by the owners of the new houses .....	116
Table 7.1 Comparing the findings of case studies .....	179

## Abbreviations and Glossary

ARLU: the Programme to Ameliorate Rural Land Use (*nongcun tudi zhengli*, 农村土地整理)

BNSC: “Building a New Socialist Countryside”, (*shehuizhuyi xinnongcun jianshe*, 社会主义新农村建设)

CLUV: the Consolidation of Land Used by Villages (*nongcun jumindian zhengli*, 农村居民点整理)

LML: the Land Management Law

OLVC: the Organic Law of Village Committees

RMB: *renminbi*, currency of the People’s Republic of China, at the time of the village developments (around 2011) studied by this thesis, £1  $\approx$  10.5 RMB

TVEs: township and village enterprises

URPL: the Urban and Rural Planning Law, enacted in 2007 based on the revision of the Urban Planning Law

*ershizi mubiao*: 二十字目标, the overall objectives of BNSC concluded in twenty characters

*menshi*: 门市, “shopfront”, a front main room on the ground floor of a modern town or village house, which may or may not be used as a shop in practice

*mu*: the traditional unit of land area still widely used in rural China. 1 hectare = 15 *mu*

*nongmin bei shanglou*: 农民被上楼, which means to forcefully resettle farmers to multi-storey apartments

*san dapo, san tigao*: 三打破, 三提高, “three smash, three rise”, namely “to smash problems in three aspects to make improvements”, which is the slogan raised by the Sichuan provincial government for implementing new villages under BNSC

*san nong wenti*: 三农问题, “three rural problems”, which refer to the general underdeveloped situation of rural China

*tangwu*: 堂屋, the main room of a traditional village house, usually used by the household to enshrine the spirit of ancestors, meet visitors, and hold weddings and funerals

(*cunmin*) *xiaozu*: (村民)小组, the “small group” of villagers, a villagers’ self-governing organization under the village committee

(*xinnongcun*) *shifan pian*: (新农村)示范片, the model zones of implementing BNSC. As an overall goal of village development raised by Sichuan provincial government in 2009, each of the model zone should cover more than ten villages and renovate more than 90% of the roads and housing within the involved villages.

(*xinnongcun*) *zongheti*: (新农村)综合体, the “(New Rural) Compound”, the “most advanced form” of the development of new villages stated by the Sichuan Provincial government in 2010.

# Chapter 1. Introduction

The built environment in the Chinese countryside has witnessed enormous transition in recent decades. The developments of new villages prompted by the Chinese government have made significant contributions to the transition. This chapter opens with a succinct introduction of the current development of new villages in China. It will specify the main aim, objectives, and research questions raised by the present study, and outline its analytical framework and methodology. The structure of the thesis will be summarized in the last section.

## 1.1 Government-led development of new villages in China

From 2004 to 2016, for more than a decade, China's "No. 1 Document", the first document issued annually by the Chinese central government to outline the year's most important policy goals, has constantly emphasized rural development. The main issue focused on in the document are the *san nong wenti* in China. In general, *san nong wenti*, the "three rural problems" refer to under-development in the economy, social welfare and built environment of China's countryside in contrast to its thriving urban areas. As indicated by the name, *san nong* problems specifically concern three aspects of rural development: agriculture (*nongye*), villages (*nongcun*), and farmers (*nongmin*). Targeting these subjects, in the mid-2000s the central government of China initiated a comprehensive rural development plan called "building a new socialist countryside" (*shehuizhuyi xinnongcun jianshe*, hereafter abbreviated to BNSC).

As a response to *san nong* problems, BNSC has claimed to improve the productivity of agriculture, the living conditions in villages, in both physical and social senses, and farmers' livelihoods in general. The *ershizi mubiao*, BNSC's "objectives in twenty characters" highlight its main goals in five phrases: improved production, well-off living conditions, a civilized social atmosphere, a clean and tidy village environment, and democratic management".

With the progression of BNSC, the Chinese government is enhancing its regulation of the village built environment. The central government has officially interpreted the "clean and tidy village environment" as "changing the lagged-behind situations of sanitary, housing, transportation and water supply in villages with a village management mechanism *guided and supported by government* and *voluntarily participated by farmers*" (State Council, 2006a). Later, the central government further underlined the importance of "enhanced village

planning and regulating the village built environment” in its specific suggestions to the implementation of BNSC (State Council, 2006b).

China’s 12<sup>th</sup> five-year plan of economic and social development issued in 2011 also emphasized “improving the production and living conditions in rural areas”. The emphasis is listed as a sub-objective under the broader aim of accelerating BNSC in the 12<sup>th</sup> five-year development. The five-year plan has reiterated the importance of enhancing village planning, improving the development of infrastructure and public facilities, and addressing the pollution and sanitation issues in rural environment.

Soon after, the central government’s call for regulating and transforming the village built environment was put into practice. Led by local governments across the country, the projects of village development include several practical measures, such as concreting village roads, renewing old village residences, and developing new housing in rural areas. The projects have also been titled with various names. For instance, in Sichuan, the provincial government has named the development of new villages as “the development of New Rural Compounds (*xin nongcun zongheti*)”. In other regions like Jiangxi, the development might be generally named as the projects of “building a new (socialist) countryside/village”.

In spite of these different names, for most regional governments, the development of new villages invariably represents the most ambitious attempt aimed to transform the built environment in rural areas. These regional governments have claimed the development would not only improve the physical appearances of the countryside, but also help to achieve other objectives of BNSC in regard to agricultural production, and the development of village industries and public services, etc. For instance, according to the official declaration of Sichuan provincial government (2012a, p. 1), “New Rural Compounds is a new kind of rural community and an advanced form of new village...Built within moderately concentrated space, the New Rural Compounds should effectively arrange key factors of rural production and life, such as village residences, industries, infrastructure, public services and social development, etc.”

Some researchers have advocated that the development of new villages is crucial to the overall rural development in China, and is in line with national social and economic development as well. Justin Lin, the former vice director of the Rural Development Research Centre of China’s state council and the former Chief Economist of the World Bank, has repeatedly suggested that developing clean and tidy village environment should be the “entry point” to fulfil the multiple objectives of BNSC (Lin, 2006; 2007a). Lin’s suggestion on the

sequence of fulfilling the objectives of BNSC follows his view that enhancing rural infrastructure would increase the demands of consumption in rural market, and hence drive China's economic growth (Lin, 2004).

In the implementation of BNSC, it seems that many local governments are endorsing Lin's view and have taken "clean and tidy village" as the starting point. Since the mid-2000s, many government-led projects had been carried out to transform the village built environment, which have improved roads, telecommunication and waste disposal systems in villages, and promoted the development of modern toilets and the use of bio-gas and solar energy. Soon after, the development of new housing was put into the agenda of many local governments. Finally, the above-defined concept of developing new villages was formed and has been put into practice nationwide.

However, some projects in the name of new villages were found to be delivering controversial outcomes. In many of these projects, new villages were built resembling urban residential communities. The developments have produced modern uniform housing blocks with much higher housing density than the living quarters in old villages. In some radical cases, farmers' previous low-rise residences were demolished and replaced by apartment buildings as tall as a hundred metres (Long *et al.*, 2009b). The phenomenon of relocating farmers into such urbanized "villages" was publicly reproached as *nongmin bei shanglou*, which means "forcefully relocating farmers to multi-storey apartments" (Xinhua News, 2007). Being relocated into such modernized and densified apartments, farmers sometimes have to travel longer distance to the farmland, and may also have lost space to store farm tools or raise livestock and poultry. These changes in residential space were criticized as not only inconveniencing farmers, but even endangering farmers' lifestyle, which was more self-sustaining than the modern, urbanized lifestyle. It has been found that a general complaint of relocated farmers is that they have to spend more to support their "new life" in new villages (Tu, 2010).

These controversial outcomes produced by the development of new villages have raised the attention of researchers focusing on rural development in China. A general criticism is that government intervention and regulation of the built environment in rural areas may have been diverted to satisfy other goals, rather than benefit rural residents (Yeh, 2013; Looney, 2015; Rosenberg, 2015). Even China's state media, such as Xinhua News and China Youth Daily, have published reports criticizing how the development of new villages in some places has overlooked the voices of rural residents, and become a "blind" and "predatory" development

led by local government and private developers (Xinhua News, 2007; 2010; China Youth Daily, 2011).

The above-mentioned views of criticism indicate that, up to the present, there have been many doubts concerning the development of new villages guided by the Chinese government. As represented by Sichuan government's goals of developing the "New Rural Compounds" introduced above, the government announced that the goals of the development were to improve the village built environment, and to benefit other aspects of rural living conditions as well. However, has government's pledge of developing new villages been put into practice? Have rural development and rural people really benefited from the development of new villages? These questions are still surrounded by doubt, controversy and debate. This study is set out to explore these questions, and the details of its aims and objectives are articulated in the following section.

## **1.2 Research aim, objectives and questions**

As introduced above, the Chinese government has advocated that the development of new villages would renew built environment in rural areas, and make social and economic improvements on rural people's living conditions in general. However, there are also many scholars suggesting that the new villages developed in practice can become sources of social conflicts in rural areas. In response to the doubts and debates toward the government-led development of new villages, the present study aims to analyse to what extent the development in practice has delivered the outcomes set out by the policies, and why. The broad aims of the present study can be specified into three objectives, which are:

- To identify the context and progress of policies which have prompted the recent development of new villages in China
- To analyse the implementation process of village development
- To examine the outcomes of village development in practice

To achieve the research objectives, the present study shall answer several research questions. The key questions for the first objective are:

- What are the national policies of village development and what are their aims in promoting village development?
- What are the interconnections between these policies of development?



After identifying and explaining the policies of new villages, the second objective of the present study moves to explore the implementation of new villages in practice. The following questions need to be answered:

- Who are the stakeholders involved in the development process?
- What are the stakeholders' roles and actions in the development process?

To answer these questions, the present study will first scrutinize how the national policies of new villages have been interpreted step by step, from general guidelines of village planning, to specified village layout and house design, and finally been materialized by construction. The developments on the ground will be reconstructed by studying how the stakeholders interacted during the process.

Based on studying the policies and practices of village development, this study further looks at the outcomes delivered by the development and its impacts on the rural population concerned by the policies of development. Therefore, it raises questions as below:

- What are the major outputs delivered by the development in practice?
- What are the development's impacts on the rural population?

Elucidating the interplay of rural residents and the new space produced by village development is crucial for examining the development policies and practices. Rural people is most directly affected by the changes delivered by the development. On the other hand, they are also most likely to adjust the new built environments to their everyday practices.

### **1.3 Analytical framework and research methodology**

It has been explained that to achieve the main research aim, which is to analyse whether the development of new villages has fulfilled the policies of new villages and delivered the outcomes advocated by the Chinese government and why, the present study will analyse the process of the development. Within the analytical framework focusing on the development process, this study pays specific attention to identify the socio-spatial environment and the roles of the involved stakeholders of the development. It will explain how the stakeholders' interactions with each other, and with the broad social and physical environment of village development, has shaped the development process and outputs on the ground. It is undoubted that the government is a significant role in the process. At the same time, as pointed out by Scott (1985), even the roles generally regarded as less-powerful, such as the village grassroots, can redirect development in rural areas with tiny and hidden gestures of everyday forms of resistance.

As suggested by the aforementioned news reports from Xinhua News and China Youth Daily, the process of village development might involve various stakeholders, including government, village cadres, real estate corporations and villagers. It is worth noting that depending on circumstances, a stakeholder can take different roles and be further divided into sub-groups pursuing different interests. Therefore, in many cases it is necessary to specify some general conceptions, such as “government” and “rural people”. Inside the structure of government, different levels of authorities may have different concerns in regard to transforming the rural built environment. These different concerns could mean that the central and local government have played incoherent and divided roles in the development of new villages. Similarly, the concept of “rural people” also needs to be divided into different interests groups, in order to learn the nuances and details of the development’s impacts on the rural population.

In general, the stakeholders’ relationships in the development of new villages are a complex network with multilateral interactions. To understand the complex relations and further explore how the relations have driven the development of new villages in practice, the present study adopted qualitative research as the primary research strategy. A qualitative approach has been approved as well-suited to the study of the interactions of multiple actors in a real life context. It can help researchers to understand the backdrop against which the stakeholders have been involved, to learn how they acted and interacted in process, and to identify and develop causal explanations in regard to phenomena and influences, especially the unanticipated ones (Maxwell, 2012).

In line with this qualitative approach, the present study will be supported by case studies. Case studies can offer in-depth and comprehensive views of complex real-life issues and practical problems, such as analysing policy implementation processes and outcomes (Yin, 2003). The case studies of this research will examine the development process and output in detail. Therefore, compared to the acquisition of a large collection of samples, the depth of a case study is more important for the present study. Although there are large numbers of projects of new villages in China, the present study puts its focus on two villages, named as village S and K, located in Eastern County of Sichuan province (concerning ethical issues, this thesis uses assumed names for counties and villages, as well as interviewees and some agencies). The design of case studies will be further explained in the Methodology chapter.

Guided by the research methodology and considering the accessibility of data, the case studies mainly collected qualitative data. The data was collected via multiple methods: first-

hand observation, interviewing the stakeholders of the development, examining government documents, archives, drawings of village planning and design, and reviewing previous studies of new villages in China. The use of multiple methods will provide a detailed narrative to reconstruct the projects of new villages as live events, which have involved the factors of timing and multiple players. Moreover, the different data-collecting methods help to triangulate and validate the information from different sources, and hence ensure the credibility of evidence for analysis.

#### **1.4 Structure of the thesis**

The thesis consists of three parts. The first part includes this Introduction and Chapters 2 and 3. This part aims to specify the research field and theoretical framework of this study. Chapter 2 introduces the context of village development by reviewing the national policies issued to promote the development of new villages. It further examines the concerns and purposes of the policies by reviewing published studies of the policies. Following the analysis of the policies, Chapter 2 also reviews the literature for the theories and models that interpret the development process of built environment, as well as the previous case studies specifically focused on the development process of new villages in China.

Based on the understanding of the policy background and the development process presented by existing research, the present study moves on to explore the relationships among all the involved stakeholders, and the stakeholders' interactions with the socio-spatial context and institutional structure of development. Two case studies were selected to fulfil the exploration. Chapter 3, as the methodology chapter of this thesis, explains the selection of cases, the design of analytical framework and data collection methods in detail.

The second part of the thesis includes three chapters of case studies. Chapter 4 has set the scene of the case studies. It elaborates the local policies of village development and the social, economic and geographic conditions of the studied area. Chapters 5 and 6 provide a detailed narrative to reconstruct the processes and outputs of the developments in two villages.

The third part of the thesis compares and explains the development process and output in different cases with perspectives focusing on the development factors both on macro and micro levels, which are respectively the broad contextual and structural factors of development, and the strategies and actions of involved individual stakeholders. How the diversity of the socio-spatial context and institutional structure of development has led to the similarities and divergences of development processes and outputs between different

development practices is explained in Chapter 7. Chapter 8 illustrates how the involved stakeholders' interactions with each other and the macro factors of development have affected the practices of village development. The empirical findings and theoretical reflections drawn from these two chapters of comparing and analysing case studies are concluded in Chapter 9, the last chapter of this thesis. As the conclusion, the chapter provides a response to the three research objectives of this study: to examine the policies, identify the processes and analyse the impacts of the development of new villages in China. Finally, it also raises suggestions for the research, policy-making and practice of village development in future.

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review**

This chapter presents a review of the policy and academic literatures, in order to develop the analytical framework of this study. To define and refine the key literature, the study applies a practical strategy. It draws upon the main objectives of this research, which focus on policy, implementation and outcomes of the development of new villages.

Consequently, China's policies on the transformation of village environment are taken as the first theme of literature review. The study focuses on the era after China's opening-up in the 1980s, when the country's current land tenure system was established and became the background of land-related developments. Section 2.2- 2.4 in particular, identify and review a series of national policies that called for the development of new villages, elucidating the major aims of these policies.

Secondly, as introduced in the previous chapter, the ongoing campaign of village development in China is a complex process. Therefore, it is necessary for this study to learn from theories and models analysing the development process of the built environment with a perspective that addresses the complexity of the reality. These theories and models, either produced within or beyond the context of China, have substantial academic implications for understanding more in general, the transformation of the living environment in rural villages (see Section 2.5.1). In Section 2.5.2, the focus of the literature review moves from the broad theories and models about the transformation of the built environment to reviews of published case studies, focusing specifically on the real-life practices of village development in rural China and on the behaviours of the stakeholders involved in the development process of new villages.

Finally, informed by the findings of the reviews presented in the previous sections, Section 2.6 identifies the analytical framework of the present study, and Section 2.7 briefly reflects and concludes this chapter.

### **2.1 Introduction: land ownership and land use matters in rural China**

The production of the built environment is closely related with the matter of land, including land use and ownership. Therefore, before moving onto details of the development of new villages in China, it is necessary to understand land ownership and land use matters on rural land in the country.

The current land system in China was established after the land reform in the 1950s. The system has approved two types of land ownership: state ownership and collective ownership.

According to the national land survey, the state owns 53% of China's territory, and rural collectives own 46%. Ownership of the remaining 1% has not yet been clarified (cited by Ho and Lin, 2003). Categorized by land use, the majority of land used for agriculture and village built-up areas is owned by rural collectives. Urban land, as well as the vast uninhabited mountainous and desert regions which account for nearly half of China's territory, is state-owned.

A rural collective can be further classified as either a township or village collective. Land used by a town is literally owned by a township collective, but in fact a township collective, as a relic of the Rural People's Commune disbanded after China's economic reform in the 1980s, is an entity which nowadays usually exists only in name. A township government is the surrogate of a township collective, which actually manipulates the issues of land in the town area. In contrast to township collectives, a village collective has more real capabilities to deal with its internal issues autonomously and democratically. A village collective is constituted by the households registered in the same village under China's household registration (*hukou*) system. According to the Organic Law of Village Committees (hereafter OLVC), the assets and affairs of a village collective is managed by a village committee. The committee is a villagers' organization made up of all the registered village members and led by village cadres selected by the village members. Therefore, land use in a village, such as leasing land to rural households for farming and developing residences, is managed by the village committee. As shown in Figure 2.1, a village committee can also lease rural land to develop public facilities and collective-owned enterprises, usually known as TVEs (township and village enterprises).

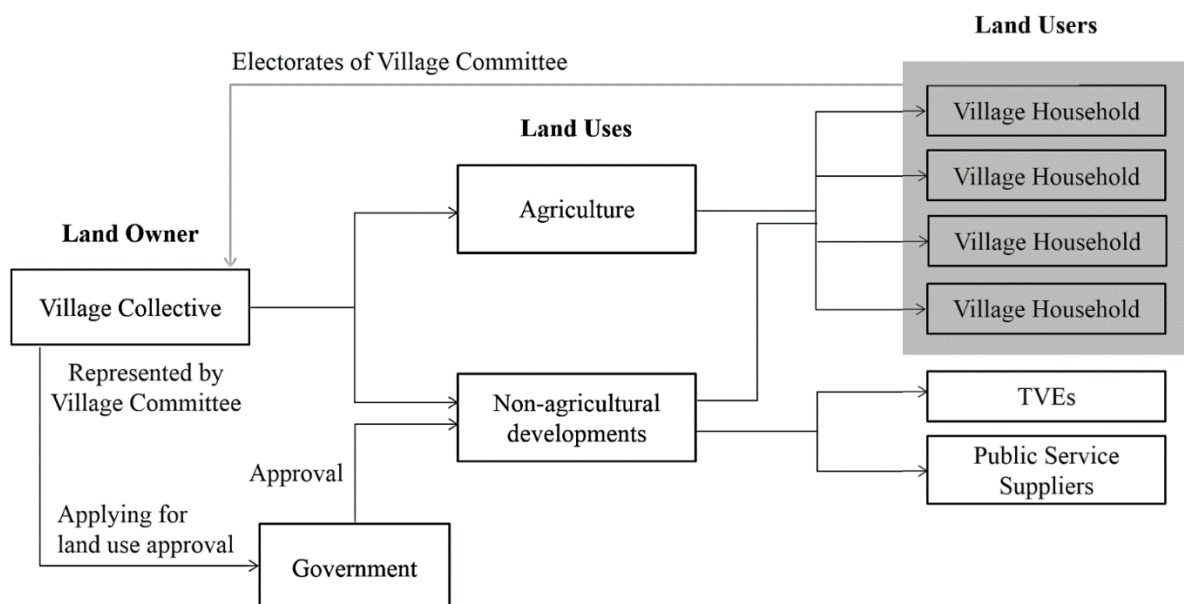


Figure 2.1 Rural land use and management in China

A village committee's rights in dealing with rural land issues should comply with the Land Management Laws of China (hereafter abbreviated as LML). According to LML, the village committee should act in line with the willingness of the majority of the village collective. LML also requires that the village committee should lease housing plots and farmland equally to village households. This means that the size of the housing plot and farmland allocated to each household is in proportion to the size of household. Considering the varied productivity of different parcels of land, each household may be allocated several parcels of farmland. But only one piece of housing plot would be allocated to each household.

It is worth noting that village households do not have ownership of either the allocated farmland or housing plot, but instead have the right to use the land. A village household can legally sub-lease its land use rights of farmland to any individuals or organizations for agricultural production. But the housing plot, as well as the residence built on the housing plot, can only be transferred within the village collectives. Therefore, in spite of having property rights for their residence, village households cannot legally sell the house to outsiders. LML also requires that using rural land for any non-agricultural purposes should have government approval.

In sum, the land laws and regulations has prevented village collectives from using rural land for non-agricultural developments other than collective-owned TVEs, public welfare facilities, and rural housing for collective members. Apart from the developments mentioned above, LML stipulates that "all organizations and individuals that need land for development shall apply to use state-owned land" (Article 43). It can be seen that China's land system has many different aspects compared to land systems of other nations. The system does not leave much space for an open legal market where rural land can circulate freely. Transactions in rural housing are also restricted.

Besides putting bans and restrictions on rural land and the housing market, the Chinese government also intervenes in the use of rural land and the creation of the rural built environment in many other ways. Government-led development of new villages is one such case. Policies to prompt the development will be studied in the following sections.

## 2.2 Farmland conservation policies and early calls for new villages

### 2.2.1 *The Chinese government's concern over arable land loss*

China is the most populous country in the world. However, according to World Bank Data, in 2013, the country's arable land area per person is only 0.078 hectares, which is less than half of the world average; moreover, this figure has been constantly decreasing since the mid-1980s (The World Bank, 2013). The loss of farmland is an important reason for the decrease, which has raised alarms on the country's food security, such as *Who Will Feed China?* (Brown L. R., 1995)

Construction projects across the country account for a substantial portion of arable land loss. Against the background of China's rapid development after its opening-up in the 1980s, a considerable amount of farmland has been converted to industrial and residential uses (Brown G.P., 1995; Chen, 2007; Wang *et al.*, 2012). Between 1996 and 2008, the amount of built-up area in China increased 13.55%, which took about 3.94 million hectares land (Wang *et al.*, 2012). Between 2008 and 2015, 3.69 million hectares of land were further approved for construction (Ministry of Land and Resources, 2008-2015). The major source of the construction land is farmland.

With the blooming of construction, the Chinese government became aware of the decrease of farmland's impacts on food security. Since 1990, it started to issue policies on farmland conservation, in order to regulate the conversion of arable land into non-agricultural uses. The policies have concerned not only with the sprawl of cities and towns, but also the growth of villages (Ministry of Land and Resources, 1997; 2008). In the official category of land uses, land used by a village (*nongcun jumin dian*) consists of the land taken by residential quarters, village industries, and public facilities for villagers (Standardization Administration of China, 2007). As cited by Li (2000, p. 250), China's first national survey of land use shows that until 1996, land occupied by villages was 16.45 million *ha*, which accounts for 68.39% of all the built-up area in China. The government of China has claimed that land used by villages has increased 0.118 million *ha* from 1997 to 2005 (Ministry of Land and Resources, 2008). As shown in Figure 2.2, official statistics also indicate substantial growth in the floor area of new rural housing every year since 1990, and the growth has reached its highest peak in recent years.



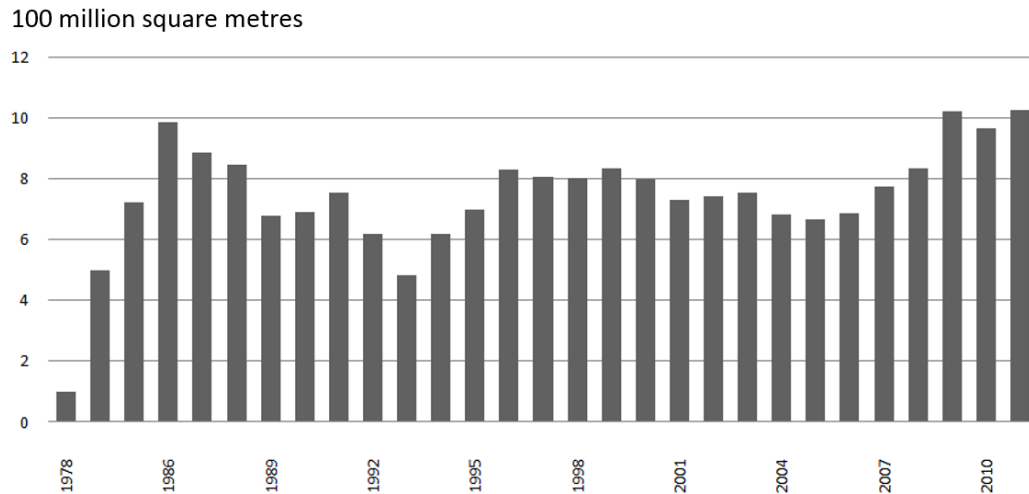


Figure 2.2 Growth of floor area of new rural housing in China, 1990-2013

Source: China Statistical Yearbooks

A few academic studies have also suggested that there is a trend of increasing land use in villages in the 1990s and 2000s. According to Li *et al.*'s study, from 1997 to 2007, land used by villages increased 0.12% annually nationwide, and the rising trend continued from 2000 to 2007, with 0.10% growth annually (Li *et al.*, 2010). Other studies have further pointed out that in the early 1990s, villages expanded more rapidly than the most productive agricultural regions in China, such as the North China plain, Pearl River delta, and the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River. However, since 1996, the areas where villages were sprawling at the most rapid pace shifted to Western China, and the majority (93.14%) of the land was arable (Tian, 2003; Tian *et al.*, 2003).

In contrast to the growth of built-up areas in villages, the rural population in China has been decreasing since the early 1990s, as shown in Figure 2.3. In the past decades since China's opening-up, the rural population has surged into urban areas in search of better work opportunities and living environment. The official demographic survey indicated that in 2012, for the first time in China's history, there were more residents living in urban than in rural areas (National Bureau of statistics of China, 2012).

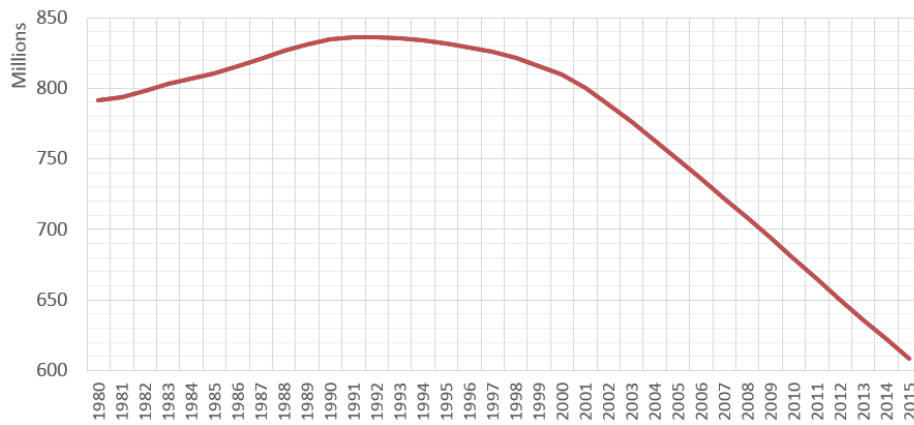


Figure 2.3 Rural population in China, 1980-2015

Source: the World Development Indicators database

The government of China advocates that the growth of built-up areas in villages against the backdrop of rural population decrease indicates that the land use efficiency of rural residential areas is generally low (Ministry of Land and Resources, 2003). The government has further identified several specific issues in the use of residential land in rural areas, such as the hollowed villages (*kongxin cun*), the excessive land use for rural housing, and the unplanned distribution of residential areas in villages.

The name *kongxin cun* stands for the phenomenon that the village layout was hollowed-out from the central areas. The phenomenon has emerged with the transfer of the rural population into cities in the last decades. Villagers moved to urban areas and usually left their old houses vacant in the villages. At the same time, there are also villagers who would like to build new houses in the village. Yan's study indicated that since the 1990s, newly-married couples were more likely to build new houses for their newly established core family rather than live in the old house with their original clan family, in the traditional residential mode in rural China (Yan, 2003). It was found that the new village houses were usually constructed on the village fringe on land which had previously been farmed, rather than reuse the vacant housing plots in the central areas of the village (Xue, 2001; Liu *et al.*, 2009; Sun *et al.*, 2011).

As a result, villages sprawled but also gradually hollowed out: the residential area broadened and turned the surrounding arable land into built-up areas. Meanwhile, there are substantial houses and housing plots lying idle and deteriorating in the old residential zones. Long *et al.*'s case studies found that vacant houses and housing plots could take as much as a quarter of the residential land in a village (Long *et al.*, 2009a). In Xue's case studies, the residential zones of the studied villages had enlarged by nearly four times in the 1990s. However, approximately 40% of the housing plots were not in use (Xue, 2001).

Another issue of land use in villages, as claimed by the Chinese government, is the excessive use of residential land breaching the land-use regulations (Ministry of Land and Resources, 2008). As introduced in Section 2.1, according to LML, each rural household should not have more than one housing plot, and the size of the housing land per capita should not exceed the standard set out by local government. Moreover, the law suggests that villagers reuse housing plots and idled land in the village for new residences. It also stipulates that taking farmland for new housing should be approved by the county government. Nevertheless, the land survey of China (1996) has pointed out that rural residential land use in the country has in reality gone far beyond the government's standard. As a response, the government has repeatedly called for enhanced management of residential land use in villages, in order to resolve the excessive use of rural land for housing and prevent the abuse of farmland from worsening (State Council, 1997; Ministry of Land and Resources, 2004; 2008).

Besides targeting the “hollowed villages”, and the fact that village housing plots exceeded the national standard as key issues of land use in rural areas, the government of China has stated that the scattered distribution of housing plots and farmland fields in villages are not advantageous to improved land use efficiency in rural areas (Ministry of Land and Resources, 2003). The view of government is endorsed by some researchers. Their studies (Peng *et al.*, 2004; Zhou *et al.*, 2010) have argued that the scattered housing plots in villages have cut land parcels into small pieces which cannot be used effectively. There are also studies indicating that scattered distribution of residential settlements in rural areas can lead to the costly construction of infrastructure, such as roads, schools, and the supply of running water (Tsai, 2007; Li *et al.*, 2013).

In sum, the government of China has taken the trend of arable land loss as a severe threat to the nation's food security. Claiming to alleviate the loss of arable land, the government has targeted the “problematic” land use in villages. It has issued a series of policies and strategies, some of which have far-reaching influences on the development of new villages in China.

### **2.2.2 *Farmland conservation policies and programmes to promote new villages***

As introduced above, the Chinese government has targeted the loss of arable land as a threat to the nation's food security. In response to the concern, the government is trying to regulate the conversion of farmland into non-agricultural uses by several means. For instance, the LML has set up several articles to regulate and confine the use of rural land for non-agricultural developments. In 1998, “arable land conservation” was highlighted as one of

China's fundamental national policies (*jiben guoce*). In the same year, the Chinese government made a remarkable revision of the LML by introducing a mechanism called the "dynamic balance" (*buzhan pingheng*) of arable land. The mechanism means that when using arable land for non-agricultural purposes, such as housing or industrial parks, the developer should reclaim or create new arable land of equal size to the occupied arable land. In such a case, the loss of arable land could be countered, and the total area of arable land in the country would be kept in dynamic balance. The dynamic balance of farmland has thereafter become a primary principle of land use planning in China.

The revised LML also paved the way for the Land Use Annual Plan (*tudi liyong niandu jihua*), a top-down mechanism to further regulate land use planning. The regulations of implementing the LML have specified that the annual plan shall set out three important figures:

- 1) the quota of farmland conversion for the year,
- 2) the amount of arable land that should be kept by the year,
- 3) the target of land reclamation and consolidation (State Council, 1998).

According to the Land Use Annual Plan, the central government has the highest authorization in forming the annual plan of land use. It will assign the above-mentioned land use quotas and targets to provincial authorities every year. On the sub-national level, the quota will be allocated by higher level local authorities to the subordinate local authorities. The annual farmland conversion quota represents the maximum amount of farmland that can be converted for non-agricultural uses for the year. The central authority has stipulated that "construction land should not be approved without the quota of farmland conversion" (Ministry of Land and Resources, 1999a). The top-down allocation of land use quotas became the background of the development of new villages a few years later, and this will be further introduced in Section 2.3.

Other regulations about farmland conservation were also established during the 1990s. In 1994, regulations for "basic farmland" (*jiben nongtian*) were issued by the state council. The regulations required local government above the county level to designate a certain amount of basic farmland within its jurisdiction. The basic farmland cannot be converted to non-agricultural use without authorization from higher-level government. A few years later, the central government published a follow-up notice concerning "further enhancing land management and farmland conservation" (State Council, 1997). The notice repeatedly stressed to regulate the use of housing plots in village areas. It announced that,

The design of village and town planning should take the basic farmland into serious consideration. The developments of towns and villages should follow a concentrated, compact and rational layout... *Government encourages the rearrangement of villages and towns to release land for cultivation in places where conditions permit.* Villagers' housing projects should follow the village and town planning. *Government encourages the development of apartment-style residences with a relatively concentrated layout in places where conditions permit* (Article 4, emphasis added).

These requirements about village arrangements and rural house design were also highlighted in the government's outlines of national land use planning (Ministry of Land and Resources, 1997). Soon afterward, the government merged concerns about land use in rural areas into the programme of *nongcun tudi zhengli*, namely the programme to ameliorate rural land use (hereafter abbreviated as ARLU). The LML revised in 1998 has confirmed that "the state encourages the programme of ARLU" (p.12). In the following years, the central government set out more detailed instructions on the ARLU programme (Ministry of Land and Resources, 1999b; 2003).

According to the National Planning of ARLU Programme published by the central government, the programme aims to "increase the quality and amount of arable land, and enhance the conditions of agriculture and environment" (Ministry of Land and Resources, 2003, p. 1). The government has outlined the main concerns of the ARLU programme as below:

Generally, the phenomena (of concern to the government) in the arable land usage in China include the fragmentation of farmland parcels and the excessive amount of field ridges among the parcels, and the unregulated and ineffective arrangement of roads, irrigation systems and other infrastructures, and the substantial amount of scattered land parcels not put to good use. The village residential land use efficiency is low. "Hollowed villages" prevail in northern China, and the village residential zones in southern China are spreading with too scattered a layout. The aforementioned land use conditions cannot meet with the requirements of building a well-off society (p. 3).

The government has estimated that "3.13 million hectares of arable land will be released by rationally planning to rearrange village roads and irrigation channels, and to flatten and merge scattered land parcels for more effective utilization" (Ministry of Land and Resources, 2003, p. 3). The ARLU programme has been further specified into the consolidation of farmland, and the consolidation of land used by built-up areas in villages (*jumindian zhengli*, hereafter abbreviated as CLUV). CLUV projects were announced as an effective measure to increase the amount of arable land and improve land use efficiency in villages. It aimed to reclaim idled housing plots in hollowed villages, and merge the fragmented land parcels

between the scattered housing plots into a larger piece of land which could be more effectively used by modern agriculture.

Stated by the government, “2.86 million hectares of arable land will be released by concentrating existing villages into central villages and new rural residential zones, regulating ‘hollowed villages,’ and the excessive use of rural housing plots” (Ministry of Land and Resources, 2003, p. 3). The government did not provide a detailed estimate, but several studies that endorse the government’s view have suggested that rearranging land use in villages has considerable potential to release farmland (Li *et al.*, 2004; Lin and Li, 2007; Chen *et al.*, 2009; Shi and Zhang, 2009; Song *et al.*, 2010). Most of the studies have argued that the residential land use in villages in many places has largely exceeded the standard set out by government. By regulating the excessive use of land for housing and reclaiming the idle housing plots in villages, a significant amount of farmland can be reclaimed. In addition, a few studies have pointed out that the scattered distribution of existing residential settlements in rural areas has consumed more land and expenditure to build infrastructure, such as education, transport, and irrigation facilities. Therefore, the CLUV programme can also benefit the development of infrastructure and public services in rural areas (Yang *et al.*, 2004; Li *et al.*, 2013).

In practice, the project of CLUV should consist of two parts: the rearrangement and reclamation of residential areas in old villages, and the development of new built-up areas, such as new villages and relevant public service facilities. The government has stipulated that “the new developed areas should occupy no more land than the previous built-up areas, and avoid taking basic farmland” (Ministry of Land and Resources, 1999b). In brief, the CLUV project was designated to concentrate land use in villages and reclaim land from previous built-up areas. It is predictable that the project needs substantial funds to either develop new villages or reclaim the old built-up areas.

To promote the implementation of the CLUV project, the central government has issued a series of encouraging policies. As early as 1982, in the Land-use Regulations for constructions in villages and towns announced that if a village could release farmland from building new residential zones and reclaiming the previous housing quarters, the government would waive revenue taxes from cultivating the released land. In spite of being promoted by the central government, the policy has not been widely put into practice because of the lack of development funds.

In the late 1990s, CLUV has been related with the generation of farmland conversion quota. This change became a watershed of the land consolidation programme and village development. Soon afterward, numerous projects of new villages have been carried out in practice by local governments across the country. This trend of village development is further explained in the following section.

## **2.3 Village development boosted by the policies of farmland conversion quota**

### **2.3.1 *Fiscal reform and the “land finance” in China***

As introduced in the previous, advocated in concern with farmland conservation, the central government of China has established a centralized system to plan the annual land use across the country. Within the system, a higher level of government shall assign an annual quota for farmland conservation to its subordinate government. The local government should not convert more farmland into construction land beyond the limitation of the quota. In most places in China, farmland is the major land source for developments. Therefore, the farmland conversion quota has greatly restricted the amount of construction land local governments can use to develop infrastructure or lease to the private sectors. Moreover, due to the land use principle of “dynamic balance”, new farmland of equal size to the farmland converted into construction land must be created. Either the rules of land quota or the “dynamic balance” has limited the growth of construction land, and local governments have to follow these regulations.

However, most of the local governments in China would like to acquire more construction land beyond the restrictions set by the central government. To these local governments, the quantity of construction land has had a direct influence on local public finance. Before 1994, the fiscal revenue of local government in China was mainly made up by local taxation, including value-added tax, and corporate and personal income taxes. Local government was only required to pay a fixed budget to central government annually. This kind of fiscal system greatly encouraged local government to develop local industries, such as the township and village enterprises, in order to increase its fiscal income (Oi, 1992). However, the central government’s role in the inter-governmental relations was weakened by such a fiscal system, because it has less control over most total government revenues (Wang, 1996). To enhance its power, the central government launched a series of fiscal reforms during the late 1990s and early 2000s.

The reformed central-local tax-sharing system has categorised three kinds of taxes, namely the central taxes, shared taxes and local taxes. Table 2.1 shows the sharing of taxes

after the reform. It can be seen that many taxes that were mainly taken by local government have been extracted by the central. For instance, after the reform, 75% of the VAT and 60% of the corporate and personal income taxes flows to the central government.

Moreover, since the early 2000s, a series of reforms have been introduced on rural taxation in China. The so-called rural taxation includes taxations on agriculture, husbandry, fishing, forestry and many other production activities related to farming. These taxations were important resources for the fiscal revenue of local government. However, they have gradually been cancelled since 2000, and were axed completely by 2006.

The above reforms in taxation have made local governments in most regions in China face unprecedented financial difficulties. A popular saying among local officials vividly concludes the situation as that, “the fiscal revenue is prospering on the central level, and cheering on the provincial level, but it is hard-to-make-ends-meet on the county level and there is tear-shedding on the town and country level”<sup>1</sup>.

In response to the financial difficulties brought by the taxation reforms, local government began to promote urban developments, such as industrial parks, development zones and real estate developments (Cartier, 2001; Tao *et al.*, 2010). As shown in Table 2.1, many of the sub-national taxes, such as the urban maintenance and development tax, and the urban land use tax, have a direct relation with urban development and construction industries. Moreover, these developments can bring a great amount of land conveyance and allocation fees to local government. These fees are paid by developers from private sectors to the local government for authorized use of construction land. As introduced, all the urban land in China is state-owned. The local government is in charge of leasing land to developers and collecting the land lease fees, namely the land conveyance and allocation fees (*tudi churangjin*) for using state-owned land.

Table 2.1 The current system of inter-governmental tax sharing in China

Sharing rate		Central	Local
Central taxes	Consumption tax	100	0
	VAT	100	
	Intl trade-related consumption tax and VAT	100	
	Refunds of international trade-related consumption tax and VAT	100	
	Tariff	100	
	Cargo tax	100	

<sup>1</sup> The saying in Chinese as “中央财政蒸蒸日上，省级财政喜气洋洋，区县财政勉勉强强（拆东墙补西墙），乡镇财政哭爹喊娘”，which has been cited by Zhou (2006, pp. 102), Tan (2014, pp. 127) and many news reports, such as the one from Xinhua, [http://lw.xinhuanet.com/htm/content\\_1313.htm](http://lw.xinhuanet.com/htm/content_1313.htm) (accessed: 07/01/2014).



	Vehicle purchase tax	100	
	Stamp duty on securities transactions	97	3 (exclusive to government of Shanghai & Shenzhen)
Shared taxes	VAT	75	25
	Corporate income tax	60	40
	Personal income tax	60	40
Local taxes	Business tax	<1	99
	Urban maintenance and development tax	<1	99
	Urban land use tax	0	100
	House property tax	0	100
	Real estate tax	0	100
	Tax on the use of arable land	0	100
	Land appreciation tax	0	100
	Resource tax	0	100
	Tax on deeds	0	100
	Tobacco tax	0	100
	Tax on vehicles and boat operation	0	100
	Rural tax (cancelled by 2006)	0	100

Source: Ministry of Finance, *The current system of revenue sharing and fiscal assignments*. Online access: [http://www.mof.gov.cn/zhuanhuigu/czjbqk1/jbqk2/201405/t20140504\\_1074657.htm](http://www.mof.gov.cn/zhuanhuigu/czjbqk1/jbqk2/201405/t20140504_1074657.htm); National Bureau of statistics, *China Statistical Yearbooks*

Official data have indicated that land lease fees have been a substantial source of local government revenue. As shown in Table 2.2, in some years, local governments in China have received land lease fees which were as much as, or even more than, half of the total public revenue.

Table 2.2 China's GDP, local fiscal revenue and fees of land conveyance and allocation, 1998-2015 (billion RMB yuan)

Year	GDP	Total fiscal revenue of local government	Land conveyance and allocation fees
1998	8440.2	498.4	50.7
1999	8967.7	559.5	51.4
2000	9921.5	640.6	59.6
2001	10965.5	780.3	129.6
2002	12033.3	851.5	241.7
2003	13582.3	985.0	542.1
2004	15987.8	1189.3	641.2
2005	18493.7	1510.0	588.4
2006	21631.4	1830.3	807.8
2007	26581.0	2357.2	1221.7
2008	31404.5	2865.0	1026.0
2009	34090.3	3260.2	1718.0
2010	40151.3	4061.3	2746.4
2011	47310.4	5254.7	3212.6
2012	51947.0	6107.8	2804.2
2013	59524.4	6901.1	4200.0
2014	64397.4	8300.2	3340.0
2015	68905.2	7587.6	2980.0

Source: Ministry of Land and Resources, China Statistical year books of land and resources, 1999-2016; National Bureau of statistics, China Statistical Yearbooks

Local public revenue that heavily relies on land lease fees and land-related taxes has been called “land finance” (*tudi caizheng*) in China. In the context of “land finance”, it is not hard to understand why many local governments are eagerly promoting as large development as possible and seeking as much construction land as they can. However, as introduced in the last section, the loss of arable land due to the growth of urban development has led to the central government establishing a mechanism to regulate farmland conversion via a quota allocation system. The top-down quota allocation has restrained the amount of construction land local governments can convey and allocate to private sectors.

However, the quota is not always rigidly controlled. Besides the quota set out in the annual plan of land use, in many circumstances the central government provides quota awards or exemptions to local government. These quota incentives have stimulated the development of new villages across the country.

### 2.3.2 *Quota-driven development of new villages*

In 1998, the central government issued the Regulations on the implementation of LML. The regulations announced that “60% of the land released from ARLU could be used as the quota for converting farmland to developable land” (State Council, 1998). Soon afterward, the central government announced that local governments which had implemented CLUV projects could apply for extra quotas for farmland conversion from the central government (Ministry of Land and Resources, 1999b; 2000). Furthermore, the central government approved that the quotas generated by ARLU and CLUV could be traded between local governments.

In 2004, the central government approved the so-called “Linking Programme”, which is another form of quota generation in relation to CLUV. As the name suggests, the programme has “linked” the decrease of rural construction land and the growth of urban construction land. The programme consists of two steps. In the first step, new villages with a more compact layout would be built to replace old villages, and the construction land used by the old villages reclaimed to farmland. Such a process would reduce the amount of construction land in rural areas, and this in turn would be counted as extra farmland conversion quota. In the second step, the quota could be spent either by the local government for developments in local place, or traded to other governments.

We have already learnt that land-use quotas for developments is keenly needed by many local governments in China. Therefore, soon after the central government affirmed to award the ARLU and CLUV programmes with extra land-use quotas, local governments began to

implement these programmes with unprecedented speed. As a result, enormous numbers of new villages have been developed. For instance, after being approved by the central government as a pilot zone to implement the Linking Programme in 2007, one prefectural government in the Shandong province planned to rearrange the land use in more than 50 old villages, and estimated the release of three thousand *mu*<sup>2</sup> (200 hectares) of conversion quota every year. During the first three years of the plan, it built more than seven hundred new residences to relocate over ten thousand village families<sup>3</sup>. To seek more quotas from the development, some local governments even breached the regulations set out by higher-level government. For instance, in 2010, a provincial government was only permitted to obtain no more than 800 *ha* of construction land from the Linking Programme. Nevertheless, the government made an unauthorized plan to consolidate 7,500 villages within three years and obtain more than 3,300 *ha* of land use quota for construction (Song, 2011).

The massive development of new villages to generate farmland conversion quota has caused wide public concerns and debates, some of which have focused on the distribution of the revenues brought by the released quota. Xiao's study indicated that, in quota-driven development, the compensation paid to the villagers whose villages have been densified was about 1/10 to 1/20 of the conveyance fees of the released construction land (Xiao, 2014). Other researchers have warned that the distribution of revenue in the Linking Programme is far from transparent and democratic, and hence this may cause problems such as forcible relocation, corruption of local officials and corner-cutting in the construction of new residences (Li and Wang, 2009; Yi *et al.*, 2011; Tan, 2012).

Many researchers have also warned that villagers may find it hard to adapt to the new villages with a drastically transformed built environment (Bray, 2013; Rosenberg, 2013; Xiao, 2014; Looney, 2015). To maximise quota-generation, some local governments have extremely densified the layout of houses and increase the floor area ratio, and eliminate old villages with traditional bungalows and courtyard houses. In some cases, the layout of new village was crowded with monotonous rows of uniform houses, or high-rise apartments in hundred-metre high skyscrapers (Long *et al.*, 2009b; Luo, 2013).

These changes in physical environment have a substantial impact on village life. Relocated villagers have complained that they have to spend more money to support life in

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<sup>2</sup> A traditional unit of area, still commonly used in rural areas in China, 15 *mu*= 1 hectare.

<sup>3</sup> Online access of the reports <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64093/64387/12444385.html>, <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/sd/2010-11-21/192621509133.shtml>

new villages, because they have to pay for many things, from cooking gas and running water to meat (Tu, 2010). Such things were free or low-cost in the traditional village lifestyle: villagers often used wood-burning stoves and underground water from wells, and raised livestock and poultry in their courtyards. Moreover, being relocated from houses scattered among farmland to a concentrated new village also means villagers may have to spend more time and money on transportation to their fields.

Due to the above-mentioned issues, quota-driven development of new villages has been widely criticized on social media, as the movement has forced farmers to move into apartment residences, known as *nongmin bei shanglou*. The movement has been reproached as centred on land finance rather than true rural development and the interests of rural people (Xinhua News, 2007; China Youth Daily, 2011). The problems of quota-driven development have also aroused the central government's attention, and it has issued a series of regulations to control the implementation and carried out specific inspections on the Linking Programme (Ministry of Land and Resources, 2007; 2008; State Council, 2010; 2012).

Moreover, more actions to revise the previous approaches to develop new villages have been carried out with the enactment of national policies on Building a New Socialist Countryside (BNSC). The following section assesses how BNSC, the Chinese government's latest and perhaps most ambitious rural development campaign, has influenced the development of new villages in recent years.

## **2.4 The policies of BNSC and the development of new villages**

### **2.4.1 *BNSC's overall objectives for village development***

As articulated in the Introduction, the government of China has pledged to resolve the *san nong* problems, which represent the economic and socially undeveloped situations in rural China. Since the 1990s, the central government has repeatedly emphasized the importance of rural development in numerous official documents, including the most significant No.1 Documents. A series of top-down reforms in rural policies has been carried out, such as the aforementioned rural taxation reform. In the mid-2000s, the rural policy reforms were merged within the broad frame of BNSC, which aims to achieve comprehensive rural development in economic, social, and cultural dimensions.

Improving the built environment of villages is one of the major concerns of BNSC policies. As seen in BNSC's "objectives in twenty characters", "tidy and clean village environment" is highlighted simultaneously with other four major objectives. One reason to

develop tidy and clean villages, as claimed by the government, is to address several issues in the current village environment. The issues includes the land use efficiency in villages, which has been concerned by previous land use policies introduced in Section 2.1. In the policies of BNSC, the government has reiterated that the arrangement and appearance of many villages needs to be upgraded. It has pointed out several “lagged-behind situations” (*luohou zhuangkuang*) in the current village environment, which include a “dirty and chaotic village appearance”, “rural housing in a dilapidated condition and in scattered distribution”, and “the insufficient availability of transportation and drinking water” (State Council, 2006a). According to the central government, “with the improvement in living conditions and the progression of building a well-off society (*xiaokang shehui*), farmers have urgent needs to improve the living environment in rural areas and the appearance of villages” (State Council, 2006b). Claiming to satisfy rural residents’ need for a better living environment, the government has set out the upgrade of the built environment in rural areas an important task of BNSC.

On the other hand, the government-proposed renovation of the village environment not only targets at rural space merely in physical sense and on local level. It has also been linked to the Chinese government’s strategies to drive the national economy. As argued by many economists, BNSC is a national strategy aimed at both rural development and the sustainable growth of China’s economy in the long term (Lin, 2003; Hung, 2008; Wen, 2010). As mentioned in the Introduction, Lin suggests that the implementation of BNSC should give priority to the development of infrastructure in rural areas. He argues that the insufficient availability of infrastructure, such as networks of roads, electricity and running water, is the main reason why rural residents consume much less household appliances than urban residents (Lin, 2002). Therefore, the development of infrastructures in rural areas is essential to boost the rural market of commodities. The growth of the rural market would significantly enlarge China’s domestic consumption, and hence address the issue of over-production in many industries, and finally drive the national economy. In return, the growth of the national economy can provide more jobs for rural surplus labourers. Moreover, the development projects can also create jobs in rural areas. In sum, the development of infrastructure in rural areas is expected to create a virtuous circle of improving rural residents’ living conditions and driving China’s national economy (Lin, 2002; Wen, 2010; Fardoust *et al.*, 2012).

The Chinese government’s economic stimulus plan issued in 2008 was in line with its strategy of rural development and economic growth. In front of global financial crisis, the Chinese government decided to further stimulate domestic consumption. The stimulus plan

raised ten major measures in regard to enlarging domestic consumption and boosting China's national economy. The development of infrastructure and the renovation of housing in rural areas were included in the ten measures. In general, the government planned to invest 37 billion RMB (approx. 3.7 billion GBP) to develop infrastructure, housing and public services in rural areas (National Development and Reform Commission, 2008).

In sum, with the announcement to improve rural residents' living environment, and achieve the more implicit objective of driving China's national economy, the central government put the development of the new village environment in a significant place in the implementation of BNSC. However, as seen in some quota-driven developments before, transforming the village environment can cause problems and controversies in the relationship between the state and rural people. To implement the development of the village environment under BNSC following the national strategy's major concerns, while preventing the development from repeating the passive impacts seen previously, the central government raised several new requirements for the process and products of village development.

#### ***2.4.2 New requirements for village development under BNSC***

In terms of the process of transforming village environment, the most significant action of the Chinese government was introducing a formal spatial planning mechanism in the development. The central government began to highlight the importance of village planning at the same time as the initiation of BNSC. In one of the earliest documents to promote BNSC, the central government called for improvements in village planning. It suggests that "government at all levels should enhance village planning" and "arrange funds to support the making of village plans and the pilot practices of village renovation" (State Council, 2006b, p. 5). More specifically, the central government urged local government to work out local-adapted guidelines for village development, and provide free house design manuals to farmers.

China's 11<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan (2006) has put BNSC in the national social and economic development plan for the first time. The plan has specified "transforming the outlook of rural areas" as a key objective of BNSC. The objective requires village planning should "follow the principles of saving land, developing public service facilities, ensuring energy-efficiency, protecting environment and highlighting local diversity, in order to guide and regulate the construction of village residences and to conserve architectural characteristics of rural places" (see Chapter 6 of the 11<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan).

The 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan issued in 2011 has repeatedly emphasized the requirements of BNSC and further stressed on village planning and specified the requirements of transforming built environment in the countryside. It raises four measures “in regard to improve rural people’s living and production conditions”, which are 1) to improve the planning of towns and villages, 2) to upgrade infrastructures and 3) public services and 4) to solve the problems of environment pollution in rural areas. It requires village planning and design to be made in line with the change in rural population, the geographic condition, the willingness and demands of villagers, and to conserve and highlight the rurality and cultural characteristics of the locality of development. Saving land and improving infrastructure and public service facilities are also reiterated by the 12<sup>th</sup> plan as principles for village planning and rural house design.

The revision of the Urban Planning Law in 2007 also manifests the central government’s emphasis on the development of village planning. After the revision, the Urban Planning Law was renamed the Urban and Rural Planning Law (hereafter URPL). The spatial planning of the rural built environment was deemed a precondition to the implementation of BNSC. As announced in the official statement on the revision of the law,

Building a new socialist countryside is the new historical task for the government. At present, the construction projects in rural areas are carried out without planning and regulation, and have wasted land resources. To implement the BNSC development, it is essential to transform the situation. Planning with comprehensive and coordinative considerations prior to construction is essential to avoid blind developments (Wang, 2007).

Correspondingly, in the administrative system of China, the name of the official agencies in charge of housing and other development projects was changed. For instance, the Ministry of Construction was renamed the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development. The Bureau of Urban Planning at all levels of local government was renamed the Bureau of Urban and Rural Planning. In the education system, the discipline of urban planning, which was categorized as a sub-discipline of architecture, was re-categorized as an independent discipline and renamed urban and rural planning (Ministry of Education, 2011). The changes in law and institutions marked how rural space has become formally involved in China’s spatial planning system.

Involving rural space into a formal planning system helps the central government to enhance the control of development projects in villages. The planning system is managed in a top-down approach. According to the URPL, the government at county level and above should nominate the regions where it deemed in need of village planning. Then the township

government of the region should organize resources to work out the village planning, which includes technical guidelines and specifications for village design and construction. In general, in the development of the new village environment under BNSC, the planning process is led by a centralised spatial planning system.

The Chinese government argues that introducing a formal planning process in village development will help to protect rural people's interests and satisfy their needs. It is affirmed by the URPL that village planning should be discussed and agreed in meetings of villagers or villager representatives. Only if the consent of villagers is received can the township government send the planning to higher-level authority for approval. Moreover, the central government has repeatedly required that village planning should "put villagers as the main actors" and "respect the villagers' will"; the implementation of village planning should embrace "voluntary participation" and "democratic management" (State Council, 2006a; 2006b).

The central government does not provide further instructions or suggestions on how to put the above slogans of people-centred village development into practice. In contrast, it has raised many detailed requirements in regard to the products of village development. According to the URPL,

Township planning and village planning should identify the coverage of the planning area. It should provide the layout of land uses and the construction requirements of dwelling houses, roads, water supply, drainage, power supply, garbage collection, livestock, and poultry feeding plants as well as other construction projects in relation to the production, livelihood, and supply of public services in rural areas. The planning should also work out specific arrangements to conserve arable land as well as other natural resources and cultural heritage, and to prevent disasters (Urban and Rural Planning Law, 2007, Article 18).

It can be seen that compared with the village developments driven by either farmland conservation policies or quota-generation policies, BNSC specifically requires spatial planning to draw blue prints for the development of infrastructures, industries, public services, and cultural events in villages. This ambitious requirement is in line with BNSC's aspiration of "comprehensive rural development", which aims to address multiple issues in rural development, such as the issues in rural production, arable land conservation, infrastructure, the supply of public services, and the conservation of cultural heritage. The requirement is also in line with the central's criticism toward the controversial outcomes delivered by the previous development of new villages. As pointed out by the official statement,



In some practices, township planning and village planning have blindly imitated urban planning, but were lack of specific consideration to adapt to the characteristics of the countryside and the needs of farmers. In concern with these issues, the draft of the revised law emphasizes that township planning and village planning should arrange land use layout for facilities of public services, infrastructure, and welfare facilities in appropriate ways. The emphasis is due to the consideration about the practical situations of rural areas and the requirements of BNSC (Wang, 2007).

The statement shows that “characteristics of the countryside” is another specific requirement of the central government in regard to transforming the village environment under BNSC. Highlighting “characteristics of the countryside, the local place and the ethical groups” in village developments has been repeatedly emphasized in many other official documents (State Council, 2006a; 2006b; *China's 12th Five-Year Plan*, 2011). In the Guiding Suggestions on improving the built environment in rural areas, highlighting the characteristics, as claimed by the central government, shall “conserve rustic landscape, and revive traditional culture and stress pastoral features” (State Council, 2014). The Guiding Suggestions also set out the overall objective for the improvement projects, which states

To 2020, the housing condition, the supplying of drinking water and the transportation in rural areas should be significantly improved. The village built environment shall be clean, tidy and convenient to live. Several numbers of beautiful and liveable villages shall be developed (State Council, 2014, p.1).

On the basis of these result-oriented requirements of village development raised by the central government, local governments started the practice of transforming the village environment. Governments at provincial level and below have published detailed standards and guidelines for village planning, and construction manuals to regulate the features of new villages and rural houses. The main focus of these official texts is on the products of development. They have drawn blue prints to “scientifically” shape the new villages.

How have these blue prints been implemented? Has the village planning on the ground followed the principles and guidelines given by the central and provincial government? Has the development of a new village in practice followed the village planning? As set out in Introduction, analysing the implementation of new villages in China is one of the major objectives of the present study. The analysis will not only be result-oriented; this means the present study will not narrowly focus on assessing the layout of land use, the arrangement of public service facilities, and the architectural style of houses, which are the products of village planning and development. Instead, it will further open up the development process in search of the causal factors of the implementation.

## **2.5 Literature analysing the transformation of the village environment**

### **2.5.1 *Theories and models of the development process of the built environment***

The development process of the built environment involves the transformation of both the physical and social environments. It includes changes in the physical form of buildings and landscapes, property rights and value, people's perception and ideology in relation to space and place, and also the power struggle between different actors (Healey, 1992; Madanipour, 1996; Flyvbjerg, 2002). Studies of the urban built environment have suggested that a focus on the process of the making of urban space provides the best opportunity to understand an urban form and its tendency to change (Madanipour, 1996). The present study will adapt and further expand the view by using it to analyse the development process in a context very different from the urban environment in developed countries.

Numerous theories and models in literature have proposed various approaches to analyse the development process of the built environment. In general, the models of the development process can be categorized into two main sets. The first set of models includes equilibrium models, event-sequence models and agency models, which are mainly grounded in neo-classical economic theories of supply and demand. The equilibrium models assume that the demand for new property led to the supply of desirable urban space in the free-market. Therefore, the development process is a competitive bidding process driven by the consumption and production of space. However, the equilibrium assumption is criticized as it insufficiently draws attention to the powers external to the "rational" economic behaviour of buyers and sellers, for instance, the state's power to intervene in the marketplace, and the powers of some large development companies that dominate local land and property market (Healey, 1991; Madanipour, 1996). In the development of new villages in China, the review of policies has indicated that the intervention of the state cannot be omitted. Moreover, a free-market of land and property, which is a primary precondition for the equilibrium models, has not been legalised in rural China. These factors indicate that the equilibrium models may not be capable of fully addressing the development of new villages in China.

In contrast to the equilibrium models, both event-sequence and agency models, based on the neo-classical tradition, provide more flexible approaches and microscopic perspectives of the development process. These two groups of models draw particular attention to the social relations involved in the development process. As indicated by their name, event-sequence models describe the development process following a chronological order, while agency models tend to understand the process by clarifying the roles and interests of involved actors

and their relationships. Many researchers have tried to integrate these two approaches by relating actors with events in the development process (Barrett *et al.*, 1978; Bryant *et al.*, 1982; Goodchild and Munton, 1985). Bringing events to the relationships of actors provides a further opportunity to depict the complexity of the development process. Focusing on details of actors and events enables the models of event-sequence and agency to reveal the nuances of power relations within the development process. On the other hand, concentrating on details often limits the scope of a study and its perspective on the wider power relations of the economy and society, external to the development process. As a result, the models of event-sequence and agency are criticized as offering “little assistance in generalizing about the varied reality revealed” (Healey, 1991, p. 232), and “fail[ing] to address the driving forces of the process, which act as its structural imperatives” (Madanipour, 1996, p. 127).

The two main criticisms of the analysis of actors and events in the development process should be particularly remembered when studying the development of new villages in China. Given the enormous numbers of new villages constructed across the country and the diversity of socio-spatial contexts of these different places, the process of development varies a great deal. In that case, relating the context-dependent findings to general knowledge is crucial to the study of actors and events. Otherwise, an empirical study will contribute no more than a collection of varied but isolated cases. Moreover, the development was initiated and largely supported by the Chinese government as an integral part of more macro national strategies about social and economic development. Therefore, the analysis of the development process should have a broad perspective in relation to the nation’s social and economic structure.

Political economy models of the development process offer an approach to connect the development process to the macro social and economic structure. Based on Marxist economics, this set of models links the development of the built environment with the power relations of capital and labour in space. The development process of urban space, like the production process of other commodities, is subject to the development and sustaining of capitalist economy. As Harvey states, “The city is in part a storehouse of fixed assets accumulated out of previous production. It is constructed with a given technology and is built in the context of a given mode of production” (Harvey, 1973, p. 203). Harvey further identifies the production of the built environment as an integral part of the three circuits of capital. The primary circuit of capital is derived from Marx’s analysis of capitalist production and consumption. The capital accumulated in the primary circuit then flows into consumption assets and fixed assets in the secondary circuit. The tertiary circuit further absorbs flows of capital via expenditures on social renovation, scientific and technology creation.

Harvey argues that by channelling capital flows into the secondary and tertiary circuit, the crisis of over-accumulation arriving periodically in the primary circuit can be resolved, although temporarily (Harvey, 1985). However, this connection of the flow of capital and the production of the built environment cannot be applied intact to explain the development of new villages in rural China. As Harvey stresses,

A general condition for the flow of capital into the secondary circuit is, therefore, *the existence of a functioning capital market* and, perhaps, *a state willing to finance and guarantee long-term, large-scale projects* with respect to the creation of the built environment. (Harvey, 1985, p.7, emphasis added).

We may assume the state government of China is willing to finance the creation of the built environment on rural land, as it has allocated substantial funds to support the development of infrastructure and housing in villages. However, as Healey (1992) points out, Harvey's theory of the circuits makes little sense in societies where land and property is not arranged with capitalist social relations. And that is the case of rural China, where neither land nor housing could circulate as urban land and housing in the open market.

Therefore, to analyse the particular form of production of space in rural China, research should look at events and agencies in practice, rather than overly underrating them as dependent variables and indecisive factors in contrast with the influences of the macro-economic and political structure. These factors related with the motivations and actions of individual stakeholders are essential to understand the development process in the real world. As Healey argues,

...to analyse the "driving force" of the development process in different sectors, locations and time periods in a particular urban region, and thus to explain the processes of the production and re-production of the built environment in specific places, empirical analysis *must* enter into the details of agency relations in the events of the development process (Healey, 1991, p.235-236).

Concerning the shortfalls of either the structure models or the agency-event models of the development process, a few researchers have tried to develop more comprehensive models that aspire to capture the complexity and diversity of development in practice, while still relating the development process to macro political and economic contexts. Ambrose's model of the provision of new/renewed built environments in the UK was an early attempt to relate the main political and economic forces of the state with actors in the finance and construction industries (Ambrose, 1986). In this model, each of the three main groups of powers was subdivided into several agencies with different roles. For instance, the state is subdivided into central and local government, and each level of government consists of a number of

departments. The model maps the interactions of these agencies in economic and political fields. In general, it simplifies the built environment as the outcome of finance investment, and is hence concerned solely with its character as a commodity. It addresses neither the use value of space, nor the social and cultural impacts of the provision of built environment.

Healey criticizes that Ambrose's model has been unwieldy in listing all the involved agencies, and has failed to clarify the different roles that may be played by the same actor, and the driving forces of the actors' relationships (Healey, 1991). She proposes a more succinct and "universal" model of the development process (Healey, 1992). By opening up the events that constitute the production and consumption process of developing urban space, the model identifies the agencies, the roles they play, and the interactions between them. It further analyses how the roles and the interactions are shaped by the agencies' strategies and interests, and how the agencies struggle to achieve their strategies and interests using resources, rules, ideas and values. Finally, the model addresses how the resources, rules, ideas and values are constituted within the broader social relations in the prevailing mode of production, mode of regulation, and ideology. With the multiple levels of analysis, the model links the behaviours of particular agencies in the development process with the wider societal contexts.

Based on the review of the previous models of the development process and Giddens' concept of "double involvement", Madanipour concludes that,

[T]he best way to understand the urban development process is to concentrate on development agencies, the structures they interact with, in the form of resources, rules and ideas, and the social and spatial contexts in which they operate (Madanipour, 1996, p.154).

In line with the conclusion, Madanipour offers a schematic model of the development process. This model illustrates the development process, with several component parts in both aggregate and disaggregate forms. The two main constituents of the development process are the physical and social contexts. The structural factors that influence the development, such as natural resources, rules and ideas, are framed within the two contexts. In the overlap of the two branches of development factors, there are new development activities, which are also surrounded and framed by agencies. The model offers a succinct and comprehensive understanding of the development process of urban space.

However, as Madanipour stresses, the models that aspire to have a comprehensive view of the development process can be very difficult to use in empirical research. Researchers have to confront arduous investigation involving a large number of agencies, and complex

situations in social and economic contexts (Madanipour, 1996). As a result, from time to time, in different fields of social sciences, researchers are continuously calling for sufficient empirical studies, to develop an adequate link between structure and agency (Healey, 1992; Guy and Henneberry, 2000; Cajaiba-Santana, 2014).

Healey's study of the development of Hebburn riverside in the UK, offers an example of empirical research on the development process. The research provides detail on the aforementioned model of the development process proposed by Healey, and underpins her challenge to the previous theories on the development process. But as admitted by Healey, investigating the development process of the built environment with multidimensional focus on both the details of actors' relations and the macro economic and political context is quite demanding work:

It involves careful and time-consuming documentary and interview work, using the historian's skills in cross-checking facts and interpretations, and sensitive often ethnographic work with agents who are often skilled in concealing their business strategies and interests. In some circumstances, such research can even be dangerous (for example, where property development is used to 'launder' proceeds from illegal activity) (Healey, 1992, p.43).

It can be seen that when studying the development process, adopting an integrated perspective will raise considerable requirements for researchers. The requirements not only include substantial workloads and various methods of investigation, but also effective access to the investigated subjects. The lack of access to detail is perhaps a reason why there are relatively few empirical studies under comprehensive perspectives of the development process. As Healey (1992) points out, compared to local authority officials and professionals, researchers might be aware of theoretical models of the development process, but tend to lack detailed knowledge of the actions of agencies and actors in planning praxis. Getting access to the details of praxis is hence crucial to researchers who aim to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the development process of the built environment.

The work of You-tien Hsing provides informative case studies on the production of new built environment in the specific social and economic context of China. By conceptualizing the notion of state as processes of power, rather than an unitary actor, Hsing's case studies of development projects in the periphery of several towns, indicates that township government has played a role in brokering power and property rights between the state and the village collectives (Hsing, 2006a; 2010). Hsing argues that the analysis of the role played by the local state in China's development campaign should be based on the understanding of its

relationship with other state actors, especially those immediately above and below it in the territorial hierarchy (Hsing, 2006a, p. 104).

In general, the research of Hsing shows that investigating the process of development projects would be helpful to explain the transformation of the built environment in China, since it provides an opportunity to capture and analyse the interactions of power as a fluid, flexible and strategic process, played out and interpreted from different perspectives. This understanding of power relations has been applied to interpret the behaviours of stakeholders and the outputs of development projects, as found in studies in the context of urban development and redevelopment in both, the Western world and in China (Flyvbjerg, 2002; Hsing, 2006b).

But it is worth noting that Hsing's main focus in studying the land development on the urban-rural fringe is on the relationships between state actors and between the state and land-loss peasants. Village administrations, managed by the cadres, have been largely viewed as an extension of the state bureaucracy (Hsing, 2006a). The interactions of non-state stakeholders, especially within a village collective, have not yet been clearly identified. Moreover, the projects examined by Hsing were not part of the Chinese government's rural development programme, which would be the field of research explored in this study.

In the specific case of exploring the development of new villages in China, approaching details can be much difficult than in the urban context. There are fewer public channels, including open database and media coverage, which can be used to clarify the events in village development in detail. And in many cases, it is hard to obtain information from the involved stakeholders, especially state actors. As Xiao (2014) articulates in her study of land-use quota trade in China:

Policy documents and official reports are hard to access from public channels. Even if I get them, they provide even less detail than news stories and reading them alone leaves me with only very dry and general impressions.

...interviewing officials is not an easy task in China. They are not only hard to access, but also very careful answering questions about their work. They often give interviewers no more than the official lines. (Xiao, 2014, p34, 37)

In spite of the difficulties, there are still methods of collecting data and examining the development of the built environment in the Chinese context. The next chapter on Methodology will discuss the data collection methods adopted by the present study in detail. Before moving forward, this chapter shall revisit previous studies which have offered empirical analysis of agency relations in the development of new villages in China. The main

aim of the review is to see how the previous studies have addressed the interactions of stakeholders in the development process of new villages and how they have linked the relations of stakeholders with the social and political contexts of rural development in China.

### 2.5.2 *Previous studies of the process of developing new villages in practice*

In the early years of the CLUV programme, when the programme was not related with farmland conversion quotas and widely put into practice, it did not receive much attention from academia. Few studies have discussed the relationships of actors in the implementation of new villages under CLUV. Lu, the former head of Department of Farmland Preservation in China's Ministry of Land and Resources, published an article discussing the overall guidelines of implementing CLUV. The article viewed the implementation of CLUV mainly as a top-down process. As Lu stated, "land consolidation is a government action", in which MLR should be the leading role to select pilot projects of experimenting policies, conclude lessons from the implementation, and make revisions for further development and the broader implementation of ARLU. Local governments should follow the rules of using project funds and fulfil the project objectives set out by the central government, as well as provide lessons for the wider implementation of ARLU in future (Lu, 2002). Yang et al. Yang *et al.* (2004) provided a case study on the implementation of a new village under CLUV. They claimed that the development of a new village effectively enhances residential conditions and agricultural productivity in the studied region. In terms of stakeholder' relationships in the development, their study argued that local government and village cadres have played key roles in the successful implementation of a new village. These two groups have won villagers' collaboration by practically increasing villagers' income from the development of the new village.

As introduced above, policies that related CLUV with the generation of farmland conversion quota have led to substantial developments of new villages. In line with the policies' profound effects, many studies of the policy implementation have paid attention to the relationships of various stakeholders in the development process. Some studies argue that the policies were a compromise to alleviate the tension between the central and local governments (Li, 2013; Tan, 2014). The tension is because of the central government and the sub-national government having different focuses on governing. The central government is much concerned with macro issues, such as food security and social stability. Hence, it has constrained the conversion of farmland. On the other hand, local government usually gives priority to local public finance, which in many cases depends on land conveyance fees and taxes related with estate development. Therefore, in terms of the development of new villages,



usually the central government would set out comprehensive objectives which not only stressed generating quotas, but also took farmers' interests into consideration. Local governments, however, tend to rank the objectives and implement them in whichever sequence met their preferences. As Li argued (2013), when a local government has relatively stable public revenue, it is more likely to implement people-centred development of new villages, and secure villagers' share of the quota-revenue generated by the development. Otherwise, the local government might conduct illegal and predatory developments to boost GDP rather than truly benefit the rural residents.

Besides focusing on central-local interactions, a few studies have further expanded research on how the interaction between local governments has influenced the development of new villages under the Linking Programme and quota trade policies. Wang et al.'s study suggests that the trade in quotas between the municipal governments of more developed areas and poor areas has significantly pushed the rearrangement of rural construction land across the province. They argue that the trade not only increased land use efficiency, but also "unlocked huge development potentials for both developed and developing regions in the province... with the total farmland unchanged" (Wang *et al.*, 2010, p. 462). On the other hand, Xiao warns that the policies of quota trade may have an intensive impact on village life. To save the compensation paid to villagers, there is a tendency to develop new villages first in the most remote villages. As a result, "the more rural and farther away from urban areas a village is, the faster peasants' lifestyle is transitioned to urban. Where it is most rural is becoming urban first, and the transition shock is the greatest" (Xiao, 2014, p. 231).

In regard to the interaction between the government and rural population in the quota-driven development of new villages, many studies have suggested that the latter usually play a passive role, in which they have less power to negotiate with government (Yan, 2011; Yi *et al.*, 2011; Xiao, 2014). Nevertheless, in some cases, villagers were found openly protesting the development, and sometimes successfully interrupted it or bargained with the government (Wang, 2008). Li (2013) also points out that farmers' appealing to higher-level authority have had a considerable influence on the local government, which is in charge of the development of new villages. In general, however, farmers' interaction with either government or non-state actors in the development process of new villages has not been fully studied in the previous research.

The policies of BNSC, issued slightly later than the policies that connected village development to quota-generation, have also led to substantial practices across the country.

The relationships of stakeholders in the implementation of new villages under the banner of BNSC have attracted the attention of considerable researchers. Some studies have argued that the central government has flexibility for policy adaptation and innovation on the local level (Schubert and Ahlers, 2012a; Ahlers, 2014). Therefore, when implementing the policies of BNSC, local governments are more likely to act positively to create a win-win situation, which secures their interests, meets with the central government's demands for development and stability, and at the same time focuses on the rural people's need for economic and social welfare.

However, studies that have paid more specific attention to the village development on local level, have pointed out that lower-level governments had little deviation space in the implementation of BNSC policies and village planning (Bray, 2013; Rosenberg, 2015). In the intergovernmental relationship, higher level government controls the lower by top-down means of the assessment of officials' performance, the allocation of development funds, and the instructions and guidelines of village planning and design. Pressures imposed by the superior-subordinate relations may push local officials to invest subsidies exclusively in villages which already have a better economic situation and development chances. In such a case, the development would exacerbate discrepancies between the prosperous and poor places in rural areas (Rosenberg, 2015).

Looney's case study of the Ganzhou Model of rural development also suggests that the higher-level government has significant control over, and places great pressure on, lower-level governments (Looney, 2015). Moreover, the intergovernmental relationship has a substantial influence on the relations between the state and rural population. In the early years of rural development in Ganzhou, the provincial head's ideas about "peasants as the main actors" led to the organization of "peasant councils", which are villagers' organizations for participatory rural development. The Ganzhou government's innovation in development organization was praised by the central government and promoted nationwide as the Ganzhou Model. However, praise from the central government has increased the political pressure on local officials. The pressure finally drove local government to deliver results as preferred by their superiors, rather than focusing on rural participation. As a result, the role of farmers in village development has been marginalized. It has been found that although the peasant councils were involved in village planning, their role was soon outsourced to professionals and they were excluded from the decision-making process after the Ganzhou model received central attention. The weakness of these rural organizations was also deemed by Looney (2015) to be a reason why the Ganzhou Model eventually evolved into a top-down campaign,

almost singularly focused on demolishing old villages and reconstructing urbanized new villages with uniform housing.

Yeh's study of a government-led rural housing project in Tibet stresses that the rural people is playing a weak and passive role in the development process. The government plays the dominating role in the making of development agenda. It also designated the layout and form of new houses, and sometimes even threatened to withhold housing subsidies if farmers failed to display political loyalty. On the other hand, Yeh's detailed ethnographic findings suggest that farmers did not completely comply with the rules and regulations set by the government, as they developed their own forms of resistance and tried to make the most of the government-led rural housing project. For instance, to evade the land-use regulation that each rural household could only have one housing plot in the village, some villagers split their household registration status in the household registration system. By doing so, they can participate in the government-led rural housing project and be subsidized to build a second home. Moreover, many villagers also delayed paying their loans for the new house borrowed from the state-owned banks, as they "hoped that if they did not pay back the loan, their debt would eventually be partially or completely cancelled (by government)" (Yeh, 2013, p. 248).

The evasion of rules and dragging out of the repayment of loans could be viewed as every-day forms of resistance by Scott (1985). According to Scott's theory about the "weapons of the weak", such as repayment delays, sabotage, and feigned ignorance, etc., powerless groups fight back against those in power roles. These forms of resistance are especially commonly in a dispersed rural population which lacks organization, and they choose less visible and hidden ways to wield power; nevertheless, they can still deliver significant results. In the aforementioned housing project in Tibet, Yeh's study found that in the case of the farmers' non-payment of loans, local policymakers and banks lengthened the interest-free duration of the loan from three to ten years. It seems the villagers' implicit resistance caused the government to compromise. However, as Yeh asserted, development in Tibet is a unique case in many senses. Therefore, it is yet to be seen whether the "push and pull" way of interaction between the state and the rural population seen in Tibet can also be found in village development projects in other places of China.

As shown at the end of Table 2.3, a small number of studies have paid attention to the roles played by actors besides the government and common villagers in the development process of new villages. Actors from the private sector are usually deemed to have an important role in many theories and models of the development process. However, as

introduced in Section 2.1, the land system in China is very different from the Western contexts of such theories and models. In a context where there is no legal free market of rural land and housing, it is not surprising that there is little empirical research on the roles of private sectors in village development. Nevertheless, there are scattered clues which suggest the existence of actors from the private sector.

Thøgersen introduces an example of how private entrepreneurs can carve out a role for themselves in a prospected planning of a new central village (Thøgersen, 2009). Depending on wide social influence in the village community and close cooperation with township- and county-level cadres, the private entrepreneur who has proposed the development of a new village was said to have gained consent from most villagers and the local government. According to Thøgersen, the proposed planning of a new village indicates that powerful local entrepreneurs, as members of the rural elite, has the capability to lead the development of new villages. However, Thøgersen's investigation of the stakeholders' interactions in the new village project went no further than the starting point of the development process, because the proposed planning had not been implemented during his study.

Some news reports have covered the relationships between the government, private sector actors, and villagers in the practices of building new villages (Beijing News, 2006; Xinhua News, 2007; China Youth Daily, 2011). These reports found that, in some cases, local government, private housing developers, and villagers have constructed collaborative relationships, which can block the intervention of land law enforcement agencies, and hence pave the way for illegal housing development on rural land (Beijing News, 2006). At the same time, in other cases, villagers were forced to join the illegal development led by private developers and local government (China Youth Daily, 2011). These news reports suggest that in the implementation of new villages, there are various kinds of relationships between government, villagers, and private sector actors. However, the journalist investigations above offered no deeper analysis of the various relationships of the stakeholders involved. It is yet to know why and how the stakeholders developed various relationships, or how the different relationships may have influenced the processes and products of development.

As shown at the end of Table 2.3, compared to actors from the private sector, design agencies involved in the development of new villages have received slightly more attention in the literature. The aforementioned case from Thøgersen suggested that in regard to selecting the site of the proposed plan of a new village, a private developer would consult a *fengshui*

master<sup>4</sup> (Thøgersen, 2009). But other studies (Lü *et al.*, 2006; Bray, 2013; Looney, 2015) indicate that in most cases, design agencies comprised of professional planners and architects are in charge of the planning and design of new villages.

In Bray's case study, the master plans of the new village were made by professional planners commissioned by the district government, following a series of technical standards and guidelines issued by higher-level governments. Therefore, he argues that the development of new villages in BNSC has been driven by "a highly centralised planning regime, which mandates very detailed standards and specifications" (Bray, 2013, p. 62). Bray's study casts doubt on the view that the policies of BNSC only provide rough guidelines for implementation, and leave local governments considerable space to adapt and implement the policies. However, the centralised planning regime, as stated by Bray, apparently failed to control every step in the planning and design of new villages. It was found that the master plan of a new village "has subsequently undergone a major round of revision" without attaining government permission (Bray, 2013, p.58). Bray's investigation did not clarify who had led the revision and why. It mentions that villagers were said to be consulted in every phase of the planning and development, but the study gives no more details about the interaction between the government, design agency, and villagers in the planning and design process of new villages.

It is worth noting that the role of a design agency is often identified as a non-governmental, or at most quasi-governmental, agency in Chinese literature on the planning and architectural studies of new villages. Many studies have emphasized that the planning and construction of new villages should be conducted with effective collaboration and communication between the government, professional planners and architects, villagers, and local businesses, as well as NGOs (Lin, 2007b; Li, 2008; Ge and Hua, 2010). However, few studies offer empirical analysis to support either this statement or such an identification of the role of the design agency.

The study of Lü *et al.* (2006) provides a case study based on the implementation of a village planning in practice. According to their study, the planning was conducted in a participatory process, which started with collecting villagers' ideas via questionnaires and interviews. To revise the draft of village plan, "a meeting of village representatives was held, which was also attended by government officials, developers and staff of the design agency"

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<sup>4</sup> A traditional consultant who provides suggestions on construction activities for the clients, based on the ancient theories of *Feng Shui*, an ancient Chinese philosophy and methods of observing the natural environment and harmonizing people with the environment.

(Lü *et al.*, 2006, p. 38). It can be seen that the process of village planning in their case involved several forms of interaction between the government, design agency, private developers and villagers. Lü *et al.* argue that good interaction is a precondition for successful village planning, but their study only very rough descriptions about the interactions between the afore-mentioned actors. It did not provide a detailed discussion and analysis about the causal nexuses of the interactions and how the interactions influenced the planning process and output on the ground.

The series of studies by Shi *et al.* (2011) and Wang and Shi (2015) offer more details about the interactions between the design agency and villagers in village development projects. This series of studies is based on three village development projects which involved the design group of Shi, Wang and their fellow planners and architects. Reflecting on their own practices in village planning, the group's studies have demonstrated practical strategies for planners and architects to develop better understanding of the social relations and everyday life in the village. Their studies have argued that good communications between the design agency and the villagers will produce village planning that responds better to the villagers' needs from their built environment. However, the discussion solely focuses on the relationships between the design agency and villagers. The roles of other actors in village development, such as the government, are absent. Nevertheless, similar to the study of Lü *et al.*, the studies of Shi *et al.* (2011) and Wang and Shi (2015) have indicated that different actors' interactions can lead to different development processes and products.

Table 2.3 The interactions of stakeholders in existing literature of the implementation of village development

National Policies	Major objectives of village development set out by policies	Relationships of stakeholders in the development process	Published studies
Policies on rural land-use	Release farmland: early CLUV projects	Intergovernmental Relationship: central-local relationship	Lu, 2002
		Government, Villagers	Yang <i>et al.</i> , 2004
	Generate farmland conversion quota: Linking Programme & Quota Trading	Intergovernmental Relationship: - central-local relationship	Xiao, 2014 Tan, 2014
		- between different levels of local government	Li, 2013 Wang <i>et al.</i> , 2009
		Government, Villagers	Xiao, 2014 Tu, 2010
			Wang, 2008
Policies on BNSC	Improve the general living conditions of farmers - Upgrade infrastructures and public service facilities in rural areas	Intergovernmental Relationship: - central-local relationship - between different levels of local government	Rosenberg, 2015 Ahlers, 2014 Heberer and Schubert, 2012 Göbel, 2011

- Professionalize rural planning and enhance management of rural land-use - Conserve local and rural features of village built environment and avoiding drastic changes	Government, Villagers	Looney, 2015 Yeh, 2013
	Government, Private Developers, Villagers	China Youth Daily, 2012 Thøgersen, 2009 Beijing News, 2006
	Government, Design Agency, Villagers	Bray, 2013 Shi et al., 2011 Lü et al., 2006

Source: Compiled by the author

Revisiting previous studies on stakeholders' relationships in the development process of new villages in China has suggested that there are debates and gaps in the literature. In terms of intergovernmental relations in the development process, are there strict controls from higher authorities in terms of development schedule, planning and design guidelines, and many other aspects, or is there plenty of flexibility for local government to carry out implementation? Moreover, the actions of farmers, especially the less visible, hidden and everyday actions, have not yet received enough attention. Similarly, the roles of other non-state actors in the development process have not been fully studied, such as the roles played by private sector actors, as well as the design agency. The present study will shed light on the debates and gaps found in literature. It aspires to develop a comprehensive analysis of the development of new villages based on the theoretical framework as follow.

## 2.6 Theoretical framework of the present study

As shown in Figure 2.4, the theoretical framework of the present study is constructed on the basis of reviewing literature from three main sources: China's national policies of new villages, the theories and models of the development of the built environment, and studies focusing on the practice of the development of new villages in China.

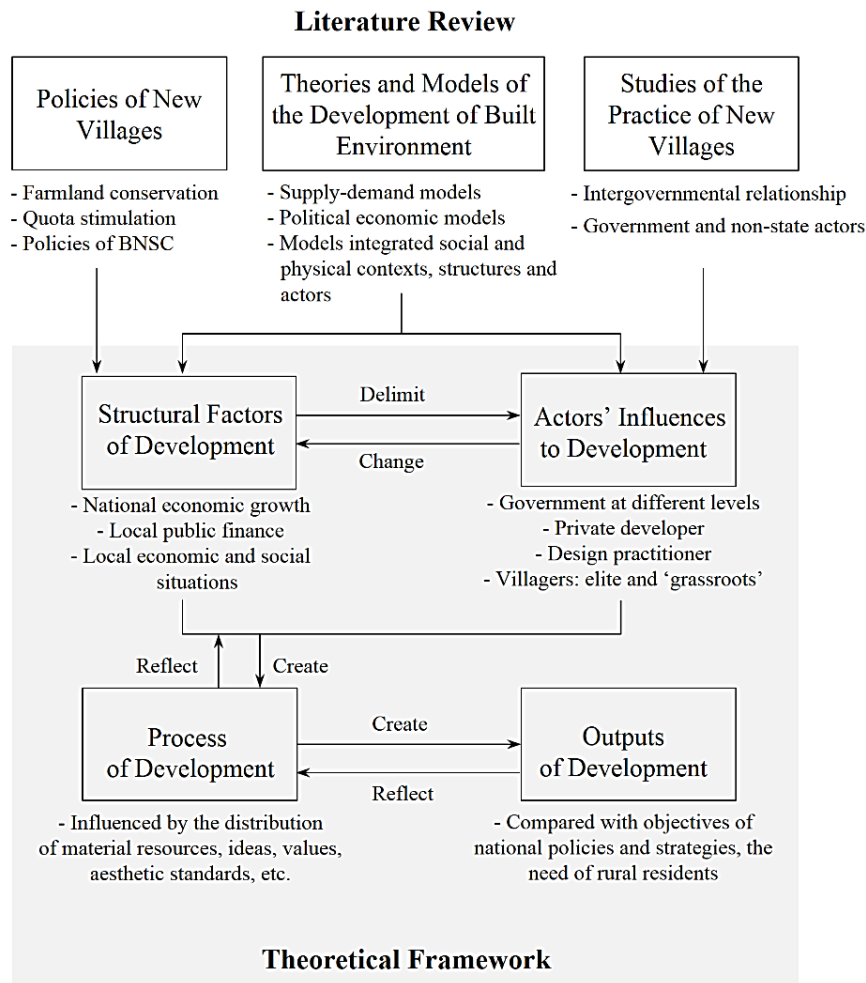


Figure 2.4 Relationships between the Literature Review and the theoretical framework of the present study

The review of the policies of new villages has indicated that the development of new villages was driven by the Chinese government's concern for many macro issues, such as food security, public revenue, and national economic growth. As asserted by Lefebvre (1991), the production of the built environment is the result of the political economy. However, the political economy's responses to macro issues, which are usually carried out by various agencies, can in practice conflict with each other. As seen in the development of new villages in China, in many cases local governments have different concerns with the central authorities. These concerns from different levels of government have created tension and conflict inside the governmental system, leading to turbulence and the evolution of the policies and implementation of new villages in the past three decades.

Reviewing previous studies on the implementation of new villages has provided a rough impression of the actions and relationships of agencies in the development process. Many studies have indicated that, in general, the government has played a significant role in the



planning and implementation of new villages. Other stakeholders include the national government, local government, practitioners of village planning and design, developers, villagers, and many other non-state actors. Striving for their own interests, non-state actors may develop different kinds of relationships with the state. However, most of the previous studies have failed to develop detailed analysis that captures all the stakeholders involved and their interactions with each other and the macro political and economic structure. The existence of several stakeholders, such as design agencies and village cadres, have been recognized by previous studies, the particular roles played by them have not been clearly identified.

Studying theories and models of the production of the built environment has indicated that besides assessing the outcomes delivered by development, analysing the process of development can help us better understand the formation and transformation of the social and physical space in which we live. The theories and models also support the view that, to obtain a holistic understanding of the built environment, it is necessary to investigate how the process and outcomes of development are influenced by the actions of agencies and the context of the development that frames the actions. The socio-spatial context includes the structure of the political economy on macro level, as well as the social and physical environment of the specific locality where the development process takes place. To address the structural factors of development, this study will elucidate how the state affects the production of space on macro political economic level, how it shapes the rules and ideas of development and manages the flow of resources into the built environment, and how the specific conditions of the social and physical environment on local level affect the flow of resources and form of rules and ideas. To address the influences of individual stakeholders on the development of the built environment, this study will investigate and interpret stakeholders' actions and their interplay with the structural factors and with each other, identify the roles of the stakeholders and analyse the formation of their roles.

The review of the literature has indicated that the phenomenon of new villages in China is driven by national development strategies for economic growth, and social and political stability in the context of China's population and geographic conditions. These structural development factors have set the stage on which the stakeholders involved perform and interplay with the context as well as each other. The stakeholders' exercise of their powers has also challenged and changed the boundaries of the stage, as framed by the structural factors of development. As indicated by the review of policies, the local government practice

of quota-driven development has caused the central government to revise policies for new villages.

In sum, as shown in Figure 2.4, to obtain a detailed understanding of the development of new villages, the theoretical framework of this research will first look at two aspects of the development process. One aspect focuses on the socio-spatial contexts of the development locality. The review of policy has illustrated the structural development factors on the national level. In the next step of the research, this study will illustrate how the national policies and strategies of development have been implemented on sub-national levels. More specifically, it will investigate how the structural factors direct the process and outcomes of development by introducing financial and technical support, natural and human resources, and certain development ideas and aesthetic standards into the rural built environment.

For the other aspect, the present study focuses on details of the development process on the ground. It will identify the roles of key stakeholders and their relationships, analyse their reasons for acting in certain ways, and finally address how the confrontation and collaboration of different actors influences the distribution of resources and support, the exercise of ideas, and standards in the development of the built environment.

Understanding the process of developing a new village will enable the research to reflect on why and how the outcomes of development are produced. Reflections on these outcomes need to consider two aspects. On one hand, it is important to learn whether the development has delivered outcomes in line with the national strategies and policies of rural development. That is, it should compare the objectives set out by the policies and plans with the practical effects of development. On the other hand, the outcomes should be assessed via the perspectives of different stakeholders, especially rural residents whose everyday life has the closest connection with the village environment. After all, the successful development of a new village should not merely address the major political economic issues concerned by policies and strategies on macro level, but also respond to the needs of the actual users and owners of the rural space on local level.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

The first half of this chapter has identified three sets of national policies which have had profound influences on the development of new villages in China in the past three decades. The review of policies has indicated certain structural factors that have driven the development. These include the Chinese government's general concern for farmland conservation, as well as the "land finance" relied on by many local governments. BNSC's

ambitious strategies of boosting national economic growth and comprehensive rural development have further prompted the development of new villages. In general, the structural factors of village development are grounded in China's politico-economic and spatial contexts.

The second half of this chapter has reviewed literature of the development of the built environment in general and the development of new villages in China in specific. In theories and models, the development of the built environment have been attributed to both the structural factors of development and the actors involved. To study these actors' influences on the development of new villages, the present study has reviewed previous studies on the practice of village development. The review has indicated that both governmental and non-governmental actors are involved in the development process, and the different relationships of actors can have noticeable influences on the processes and outcomes of the development. However, previous studies have not managed to draw a complete picture of actors' roles and relationships, and there is also a lack of detailed analysis about how different roles and their relationships have influenced development on the ground.

After reviewing the theories and models, and the policies and practices of the development of new villages, this chapter has identified the theoretical framework of the present study. Through this framework, the study aspires to develop a rich understanding of the development of new villages. The framework will focus on the roles and relationships of stakeholders in the development process, as well as the social and physical contexts of the development. Outputs delivered by the development process will be assessed against the objectives set out by policies and the perspectives of the stakeholders, especially the rural population concerned by the policies. To develop the theoretical framework, this study needs to adopt appropriate research strategies and methods for data collection and analysis, which will be addressed in the following chapter.



## **Chapter 3. Methodology**

As set out in the Introduction, the present study focuses on an ongoing spatial phenomenon in China: the development of new villages. The Literature Review has indicated that the development is prompted by a series of policies relating to several macro issues, including food security, national economic growth, social stability and people's livelihood in rural areas. On the other hand, as suggested by theories and models on the development of the built environment in general, and studies specifically focusing on the development of new villages in China, the process and outputs of development are influenced by the individual stakeholders involved. However, previous studies have offered little in-depth analysis to explain why and how the developments in practice have been shaped by both contextual and structural factors and stakeholders.

In response to the gaps found in existing research, the present study has set out its own analytical framework. The framework focuses on both the process and product of development. It will explore a holistic scene of the socio-spatial context wherein the development happens, while analysing the roles and interactions of all the stakeholders in detail.

This chapter will identify the methodological approaches employed by the present study to develop the analytical framework and achieve the research objectives. The following sections will first explain the present study's choice of qualitative case studies as the primary research strategy. Drawing upon this choice, Section 3.2 moves forward to consider the research design and its execution. It will provide justifications for the selection of cases, and the choices and applications of specific techniques for data collection, processing, and analysis. The last part of the chapter will indicate the limitations of the present study in relation to research methods as well as other practical difficulties.

### **3.1 Research strategies**

#### **3.1.1 *Qualitative research***

As stated above, the present study seeks a rich understanding of a complex spatial phenomenon in the real world. The nature of the study's research interests has led to its choice of being a qualitative inquiry, rather than a quantitative one. Although there is no irreconcilable 'divide' between quantitative and qualitative research, it is generally recognized that these two research approaches have different emphases and strengths associated with

distinctive methodologies, research strategies, and techniques for data collection and analysis (Mason, 2002; Bryman, 2003; Flick, 2009).

As indicated by its literal meaning, ‘quantity’ is related to an amount, a feature that can be numerically measured, accounted, and calculated. The notion of ‘quality’, on the other hand, can be related with the nature of what may not be precisely captured or expressed meaningfully by numerical statistics. Correspondingly, quantitative research refers to counting and measuring, whereas qualitative research refers to an inquiry into meanings, concepts, definitions and characteristics (Berg, 2007, p. 3). In terms of the selection and analysis of data, quantitative research usually takes quantified, numeric data, and analyses it via statistical or mathematical approaches; in contrast, qualitative research mainly employs data not in the form of numbers (Punch, 2013, p. 4), and places emphasis on a more “holistic” form of analysis (Mason, 2002, p. 3).

Enabled by the holistic and interpretive perspective, qualitative research is deemed an appropriate approach to develop a deep understanding of people’s behaviours in social reality, and the process by which the studied phenomena took place (Silverman, 2001; Mason, 2002; Bryman, 2003). Maxwell (2012) further points out that qualitative research is especially useful to achieve five particular research goals:

- 1) Understanding the *meaning*, for participants in the study, of the events, situations, and actions they are involved with and of the accounts that they give of their lives and experiences;
- 2) Understanding the particular *context* within which the participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions;
- 3) Identifying *unanticipated* phenomena and influences, and generating new grounded theories about the latter;
- 4) Understanding the *process* by which events and actions take place;
- 5) Developing *causal explanations*. Such an approach requires thinking of causality in terms of processes and mechanisms, rather than simply demonstrating regularities in the relationships between variables (Maxwell, 2012, pp. 17-20, emphasises added).

With the abovementioned strengths and advantages, qualitative research is a strategy of inquiry that can satisfy the objectives of the present study. As set out in the Introduction, the first objective of this research is to identify the policies that prompted the development of new villages and the policies’ major goals. The Literature Review has indicated that the policies are rooted in the social, economic and political context of China. Explaining a phenomenon in relation to a complex context is exactly one of the strengths of qualitative research (Mason,

2002; Flick, 2009). Moreover, many of the goals of the policies cannot be appropriately quantified and hence studied by quantitative approach. For instance, the goals of “tidy and clean villages” and “civilized social atmosphere” raised in the *ershizi mubiao* (objectives in twenty characters) of BNSC policies can hardly be appropriately quantified into numeric variables, and further analysed relying on statistical methods.

Similar to policies, the process of the development practice of new villages, which is the concern of the second objective of this study, cannot be satisfactorily illustrated by quantitative methods. A detailed description is essential to reconstruct the process in its social, economic and political background, and to consider the interactions of the stakeholders involved. Qualitative research is advantageous in collecting and interpreting descriptive data with details and depth.

The third objective of the present study, which is to analyse the impacts of the development, is to understand the interplay of people and the built environment. As introduced above, qualitative research is a strategy conducive to the development of a rich understanding of how people perceive social reality, and hence how they act in response to the perception (Flick, 2009; Maxwell, 2012). Qualitative research highlights the variety of perspectives and behaviours. As Flick states, a preliminary feature of qualitative research is the recognition and analysis of different people’s perspectives (Flick, 2009, p. 16). By letting the participants of a study speak for themselves, qualitative research is inclusive of different voices, especially minorities’ voices, who might be viewed as insignificant in statistical analysis. In terms of the present study, it is important to embrace different opinions toward the government-led development. As indicated by the review of previous studies, voices from rural communities transformed by the development of the village’s built environment have been largely ignored.

It is clear that fieldwork in any empirical study involves both numerical and non-numerical data (Devereux and Hoddinott, 1993). For instance, the quantity and price of houses, and the size of land taken by the development of new villages is useful numerical data for the present study. However, the main purpose of qualitative research when collecting numerical data are not to draw statistical or mathematical analyses (Mason, 2002). Therefore, numerical data in this research are used to develop a better description and interpretation of the contexts and social settings wherein the data were collected.

### 3.1.2 *Case study research*

Case study as a research strategy works well with both quantitative and qualitative research. A case study in qualitative research will produce an in-depth analysis with a single or small number of cases (Punch, 2013). Case study research can adopt a diverse range of data collection and analysis methods, and hence is conducive to producing deeper and more detailed investigations of *how* or *why* questions (Yin, 2003). Moreover, for studying a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, over which the investigator has little or no control, a case study is an especially useful strategy (Yin, 2003, p. 9). These general merits of case study research indicate that the research strategy is suitable and beneficial to this research. To conduct case study research, it is necessary to know the different methods of a case study and their characteristics and advantages.

Case studies are further categorized into different types. Referring to the different purposes of case studies, Yin (2003, pp. 4-6) categorizes case studies into exploratory, descriptive and explanatory case studies. An exploratory case study can be used to explore a phenomenon or problem which has not been clearly identified. The exploratory case study can start from the data in hand or acquired from direct observation, and make deductions from what have been found. Trying to explain what has been found may raise the possibility of categorization and further open up new research questions, which will be addressed by descriptive and explanatory case study strategies. Therefore, each of the categories of case study is not isolated and is usually compatible with others. For instance, some of the best case studies are both descriptive and explanatory (Yin, 2003).

Moreover, descriptive case studies will have an explorative meaning, if relatively little research has been done in the area (Schell, 1992). In terms of this research, as learnt from the literature review, not all the roles of stakeholders and their relationships in the development process have been fully addressed. To depict these roles and relationships, the present study will carry out exploratory as well as descriptive investigation. Based on the investigation, this research will further seek explanations of why there are certain types of relationships and how the relationships influenced the process and product of development.

Besides categorization by the purpose of research, case study research is also categorized by the number of cases and rationales for selecting such cases. Stake (1998) identifies qualitative case study research into intrinsic, instrumental and collective case studies. An intrinsic case study only takes one particular case. The purpose of studying the case is the researcher's intrinsic interest in that case, rather than to understand or construct a



theory about a more generic phenomenon. Similar to an intrinsic case study, an instrumental case study may also focus on a single case. However, an instrumental case study aims to seek insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization. A collective case study is defined as an extended version of an instrumental case study. More than one case is researched in order to further researchers' understanding about the studied phenomenon. A collective case study can be benefited by studying either the dissimilarity or similarity of the selected cases. As stated by Stake, the cases selected by a collective case study "may be similar or dissimilar, redundancy and variety each important. They are chosen because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding, perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases" (Stake, 1998, p. 138).

The present study will be collective case study research that focuses on dissimilar cases. Firstly, the study is not led by intrinsic interest in any particular case; rather, it seeks a more general understanding of a prevailing spatial phenomenon, which involves an enormous number of cases. A multiple case study is a better choice for researchers to explore the studied area more widely and theorize the differences and the similarities between cases (Yin, 2003; Baxter and Jack, 2008).

Secondly, studying dissimilar cases is a better option to generate knowledge of the development of new villages than studying similar cases. Studying multiple similar cases might be useful to test the replication logic of theories and models (Yin, 2003), but in a largely unexplored academic field where theories and models have not been fully developed, studying dissimilar cases is more helpful to explore the unknown issues and thus broaden our boundary of knowledge. The Literature Review chapter has indicated that few previous studies have sufficiently explored stakeholders' roles in and influence on village development. The Literature Review also found that in the implementation of new villages, in some cases the development has been solely pushed by local government, while non-state actors have played leading roles in several other cases. Theoretically, it has been pointed out that different relationships between the stakeholders can influence village development. However, many details about the stakeholders' relationships and roles are yet to be known. Therefore, comparing cases that have significant disparities in terms of the stakeholders' interactions may help to unravel the unknown aspects of the development of new villages.

Besides learning from dissimilar cases, the present study will also learn from making a temporal analysis in each case. For instance, it will compare the residential environment in the studied village before and after the development, and also compare the plan of a new village,

made prior to its implementation, with the outcomes built in practice. Therefore, this research can also be categorized as a “pre-post case study”, which is a case study method that can bring “time” into analysis and “provide evidence on the outcomes of implementing a particular program[me], policy, or decision” (Jensen and Rodgers, 2001, p. 238). Selecting development cases that have delivered certain outcomes in practice is essential when carrying out a pre-post analysis. This requirement further narrows down the choices of cases for the present study, as it excludes a substantial amount of proposed village development that has not been put into practice.

### **3.2 Research design and execution**

As stated above, the present study is qualitative research using more than one case for detailed examination. To learn the process and outcomes of development, the cases should be selected from developments that have already transformed the built environment in villages. Moreover, the cases should have dissimilarities in terms of the relationships of stakeholders involved, in order to explain better how the development is influenced by the performance and interaction of different agencies. In line with the research strategies introduced above, the following sections further illustrate the justifications for the selection of cases, the adoption of specific data collection methods, and the design of data analysis.

#### **3.2.1 Case selection**

In general, the main aim of case selection strategies is to enlarge case study research’s potential to form the best explanation of the studied phenomenon and to enhance the overall quality of research (Baxter and Jack, 2008). Typicality of cases is a key factor in case selection. Besides the typicality, the accessibility of cases is also an influential factor for case selection. As Stake (1998) states, the opportunity to learn in qualitative fieldwork is sometimes a superior criterion for selecting cases than the representativeness of these cases. Selecting cases that offer an “opportunity to learn” may mean “taking the cases that are most accessible to the researcher, the one we can spend the most time with” (Stake, 1998, p. 152).

The consideration of both the typicality and accessibility of cases brings the focus of this study on Sichuan, and further upon two villages in a county in the eastern region of the province. In terms of typicality, Sichuan is a province that has pilot and model status in China’s campaign of rural development. Studying the development of new villages in such a showcase province offers a window to understand similar developments across the country. In 2007, the central government approved the Sichuan provincial government and Chongqing municipal government’s applications for experimental policy reforms that centred on urban-

rural integrated development. Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province, and Chongqing, the provincial-levelled region adjacent to eastern Sichuan, were selected as China's first pilot zones of urban-rural integrated development (National Development and Reform Commission, 2007). Soon after, the central government issued a series of regional planning instructions for the Chengdu-Chongqing region. The planning reiterates the development of the region into one of China's most important economic centres, and the national model of an urban-rural integrated development (National Development and Reform Commission, 2011, 2016). It can be seen that the central government expects the two pilot zones to prompt cross-province rural development, and provide a showcase of regional development, especially rural development, for other places in China.

In line with the central government's expectation of rural development in the Chengdu-Chongqing region, Eastern County, located in eastern Sichuan and adjacent to Chongqing, has been deeply involved in the top-down campaign of developing new villages (see Figure 3.1). Concerning ethical issues, this thesis uses assumed names to refer counties, villages, interviewees and agencies involved. Section 3.2.4 has addressed the ethical considerations of the present study with more details.



Figure 3.1 The approximate location of Eastern County, Chengdu and Chongqing

As mentioned in the Introduction, the Sichuan provincial government has raised the concept of the New Rural Compound (*xinnongcun zongheti*) in 2010, which states to implement village development in an unprecedented scale. Following the provincial government's call for new villages, the local government of Eastern County carried out relevant construction at a very rapid pace. It announced and conducted the first development of a new village in 2011. Thenceforth, the county government has been consistently working on projects of new villages.

It is worth noting that the local government's consistent implementation of new villages did not employ an unchanged development strategy, but proceeding with dynamic. According to local officials (Interview\_2015031602), after the completion of two pilot projects of new villages, the government adjusted the "guiding ideology" of the development during its work. The newly ideology of village development stresses that the development should put "rural people as the main actor, [and] government as the guiding role" (*qunzhong zhuti, zhengfu zhudao*), rather than "depending on government on all sorts of issues" (*zhengfu doudi*). It indicates that in the early developments, the government played the most prominent role in terms of who is in charge of the organization and distribution of key resources of development, such as project funds and technical support. In the later developments, at least as claimed by local officials, the government apparently stepped back from the previous dominant role and granted farmers more rights to make decisions. In short, the change in development ideology indicates significant changes in the relationships of stakeholders in the development process.

This research shall include the village developments conducted before and after the aforementioned change of 'development ideology' in Eastern County, as the developments are more likely have diversity in the process and product of development. Moreover, as explained in the last section, the depth of case studies rather than the quantity of samples is more crucial to the present study. Therefore, to capture the characteristics of different developments, while also becoming immersed in the details of the investigation, this study will focus on two cases, each of which stands for one approach to village development in Eastern County.

One of the selected cases is the development of village S. The development has been carried out as a pilot development of new villages in Eastern County, before the alleged change in development ideology. The other case is the development of village K, in which local officials and village cadres claimed that the development was led by the villagers. To

collect data for the present study, I have made two field visits to Eastern County, and each of the villages in 2015. Dates of the field visits are listed in Table 3.1. During the visits in S and K, I stayed in village and lived with villagers, in order to study the village built environment and village life in the environment as much as possible.

Table 3.1 Field visits to Eastern County and the two villages of case studies

Locations	Dates visited
Eastern County centre	14/03 - 16/03/2015
	07/04 - 08/04/2015
Village S	17/03 - 20/03/2015
	29/04 - 30/04/2015
Village K	04/04 - 06/04/2015
	01/05 - 03/05/2015

The accessibility of the development of new villages in Eastern County is also a crucial factor that resulted in the choice of case study region in this research. From 2011 to 2012, I participated in several new village projects in the county as an intern in a private planning and design group. In 2013, I also completed my master's research project about the utilization of house building manuals in Eastern County. This work and academic experience enabled me to observe the development of new villages from a very close distance, and to access many relevant documents and the stakeholders. Many fieldwork skills learnt in the previous research project were also useful for this study, which will be further discussed in the following section on data collection techniques. In addition, the ability to speak the Sichuan dialect, which is used by most rural residents and local officials in both the workplace and in daily life in Sichuan, also removed the barrier of language in the fieldwork. Although my previous experience was of benefit, I am aware that it may also raise some issues about positionality and research ethics. More discussion about the study's considerations about these issues is made in Section 3.3.

### 3.2.2 *Data collection techniques*

To explain a phenomenon as complicated as the development of new villages, the present study adopted several kinds of data collection techniques to generate rich empirical evidence in multiple forms. Interviews, on-site observation and mapping, as well as reviewing design documents, were the three main techniques adopted. These techniques comprehensively covered the researcher's interplay with human actors, with the physical and built environment of the new villages, and with the paperwork of the development, such as official design documents.

The Literature Review has indicated that the analytical framework of this research focuses on four interrelated themes. As shown in Table 3.2, each of the themes has involved multiple data collection techniques. At the same time, some research areas within the themes might use on one or two specific means of data collection more frequently than other means. The techniques used to explore different research areas are listed in order of importance, seen below. For instance, in-depth interviews are found most helpful for identifying the process of development. However, in terms of exploring the contexts of development, especially on macro level, reviewing official documents is the main way to collect data. More detailed tactics are developed under each general means of data collection, to investigate specific subjects within each theme of research.

Table 3.2 The four main themes of this study and key techniques of data collection

Themes of Research		Techniques of Data Collection
<b>Contexts of Development</b>	National Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewing official documents</li> </ul>
	Sub-National Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewing official documents</li> <li>• Interview</li> <li>• Direct observation and mapping</li> </ul>
<b>Roles and relationships of Stakeholders</b>	State Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewing official documents</li> <li>• Interview</li> </ul>
	Non-State Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewing official documents</li> <li>• Interview</li> <li>• Direct observation and mapping</li> </ul>
	Villagers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-depth interview</li> <li>• Direct observation and mapping</li> </ul>
<b>Process of Development</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview</li> <li>• Reviewing official documents</li> <li>• Direct observation and mapping</li> </ul>
<b>Product of Development</b>	Physical Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewing official documents</li> <li>• Direct observation and mapping</li> </ul>
	People's Perception of Built Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview</li> <li>• Direct observation and mapping</li> </ul>

## Interview

Interviewing the stakeholders involved provided this study with a substantial amount of first-hand data about the development of new villages. As shown in Appendix A, a total of 28 semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded. The interviews were with government officials in charge of the development of new villages at county and township levels, village and house design practitioners, the contractor of construction, village cadres, house owners in the new built-up areas, and people who may have different forms of

involvement with the development, such as private entrepreneurs in the village. As introduced above, the two selected villages belong to the same county and township. Therefore, the 4 interviews with officials of local government covered the developments in both of the villages at the same time. The respective investigation for the development of village S and K includes 13 and 11 interviews.

The list of names of interviewees was gradually taking shape during the progression of the fieldwork. As found by reviewing literature, officials of the county government, design agencies, village cadres, and entrepreneurs are key roles in the development of new villages. Residents of the new village also needed to be included in interviews, as the development has the most direct impact on their daily life. All the aforementioned stakeholders were therefore enrolled in the preliminary list of interviewees before the fieldwork. During the investigation, the study further found the necessity to include some stakeholders that had been overlooked or underrated by previous studies, such as the contractor of the construction of new village. These findings in field therefore brought more interviewees into the case studies, and gradually formed the current list of interviewees.

This research adopted semi-structured interviews, which have no fixed form in practice. In general, they contain several core features, concluded by Manson (2002) as:

1. The interactional exchange of dialogue. Either between two or more participants, in face-to-face or other contexts;
2. A relatively informal style, for example, with the appearance in face-to-face interviewing of a conversation or discussion rather than a formal question and answer format;
3. A thematic, topic-centred, biographical or narrative approach where the researcher has topics, themes or issues they wish to cover, but with a fluid and flexible structure opening to unexpected themes;
4. A perspective regarding knowledge as situated and contextual, hence requiring the researcher to bring relevant contexts into focus so that the situated knowledge can be produced in an interaction (Adapted from Mason, 2002, p. 62).

As mentioned above, semi-structured interviews leave the necessary space to explore unexpected sides of the development of new villages. The Literature Review has indicated that few previous studies have captured the whole scene of the development in practice. Therefore, it is necessary to keep the inquiry open to all possibilities of the development process and outcomes.

Another reason to choose a semi-structured interview is that this format of interview encourages story-telling, and allows interviewees to speak for themselves more proactively. Narrative and story-telling is particularly useful in the investigation of specific events, development projects and local politics, where different voices are involved (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000). Moreover, story-telling is a skill relatively independent of education and language competence; while the latter is unequally distributed in any population, the competence to tell stories is not, or at least is less so (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000, p. 2). In rural China, it is known that the distribution of literacy is usually quite unequal. My previous experience in fieldwork found that many villagers may feel confused about questions on questionnaires or in structured interviews, as the questions are usually presented with ‘academic language’ distant from their daily life, and the formal sense of filling forms or answering structured questions can make them feel nervous or uncomfortable. In such a case, the semi-structured interview prompts natural conversation and story-telling is a more appropriate data collection method.

The relaxed and open atmosphere of a semi-structured interview is also essential when interviewing social groups who are sensitive to topics on local politics, such as local officials and rural elites. It is foreseeable that many aspects of village development are inevitably related to local politics. For instance, the funding of development may have a direct relation to a deficit in local public revenue and corruption issues, etc. Referring to fieldwork experience in my previous research project, these politically sensitive groups are usually very alert in a structured Q&A mode of interviewing. They are more likely to give the official line or simply not respond to the questions of a structured interview. However, in a semi-structured interview, with the flow of conversation, interviewees can gradually engage and trust is developed; hence, they become more open to different topics. Therefore, a semi-structured interview is a more suitable choice to enhance the interaction between the researcher and research participants.

Interviews in this study also benefited from repeat field visits. The several rounds of field visits enabled revisit of interviewees, which allowed the researcher to further gain their trust, and hence to conduct an in-depth investigation. It also enabled the researcher to make further inquiries with the interviewees when some new and unexpected findings appeared during the research. In addition, some of the key interviewees were absent in the first visit, which made repeat field visits necessary to collect essential data.



The topics of the semi-structured interviews were prepared in advance as brief topic outlines, as shown in Appendix B. The outlines were drawn up on the basis of the research objectives (see Chapter 1) and the analytical framework (see Chapter 2) of the present study. Therefore, the topics were designed to identify the roles of key stakeholders in the development process, to interpret their purposes of participation and actions, and to address how these stakeholders interplay with each other and with the political, social and physical contexts of the development.

Interviews in the process of fieldwork soon revealed that each of the involved stakeholders had a limited perspective, mainly focused on certain aspects or phases of the development process. For instance, interviews with local officials and practitioners of village design were found very informative to elaborate the early stages of development, such as decisions about the development site, schedule, and architectural style of new villages. Interviewing the contractor of the development project provided details about the organization and process of construction, which was a later stage in development. In general, no single actor has the perspective to demonstrate the whole process of development. Therefore, the interviews in practice did not always proceed exactly as planned by the topic outlines, but had tailored and developed topics flexibly to suit the roles of interviewees and the flows of conversation. While having various perspectives and emphases, the stories given by different participant groups had considerable overlapping areas, such as descriptions of the same events and periods of development. These overlaps in narrative provided opportunities for data triangulation and synthesis.

Most of the interviews in this research were recorded by a digital voice recorder. Hand-written notes were also found useful to mark key words and lines of interviews, which helped the researcher to make prompt responses to the interviewee. For those informants who preferred not to be voice-recorded, the key contents of interviews were written in a notebook. Information that could not be captured in voice records but was informative for the investigation, such as some facial expressions and body language, was also written in the notebook. Therefore, the notes acted as a backup and supplement to the digital voice records.

### **Direct observation and mapping**

Direct observation of human behaviours, the built environment, and other settings of the field offer researchers an opportunity to investigate first-hand what is going on besides learning second-hand from either the literature, or interviewees' narratives in interviews. There are several strengths of direct observation:

- Direct observation produces rich descriptions with contextual sensitivity. It enables observers to get a deep understanding of a setting within which people interact;
- Direct observation is open to discover the “unseen” or “untold”, such as things no one else has ever really paid attention to, things that may routinely escape awareness among the people in the setting, or things people may be unwilling to bring up in an interview. Therefore, observing in the field can help to open up new areas of inquiry;
- Direct observation can move beyond old assumptions and selective perceptions of others as well as the observer. It provides an opportunity to draw reflection and introspection (Adapted from Patton, 2002, pp. 262-264).

Behaviours of using and transforming the environment reflect people’s understandings and feelings of the surrounding built environment (Rapoport, 1982; Kent, 1993). Therefore, the form of indoor and outdoor space in new villages and the ways villagers use and transform the space are important parts of this investigation. Direct observation enables the researcher to depict the transformation of house forms and the landscape in new villages, as well as the villagers’ daily routines in domestic and outdoor environment.

The observations on the built environment, as well as villagers’ interplay with the built environment, were recorded by field notes, photographs and sketch maps. The sketch maps were drawn overlapping architectural drawings of the village layout and house plans adapted from official design documents of the new village.

The process of mapping village houses was allowed and usually accompanied by the house owners. While mapping out the house plan and taking photographs, I also interviewed the house owners to understand their interplay with the dwelling space. For instance, house owners were asked why they had chosen to transform the house, and why they used certain building techniques and materials to do it. Therefore, the mapping also contain narratives provided by the house owners, as shown in Figure 3.2. The physical observation not only captures the major changes of domestic and outdoor space, but also smaller changes of building components and decorations, such as window frames, doors, and paint on exterior walls. These changes were recorded by photographs at the same time, as shown in Figure 3.3.

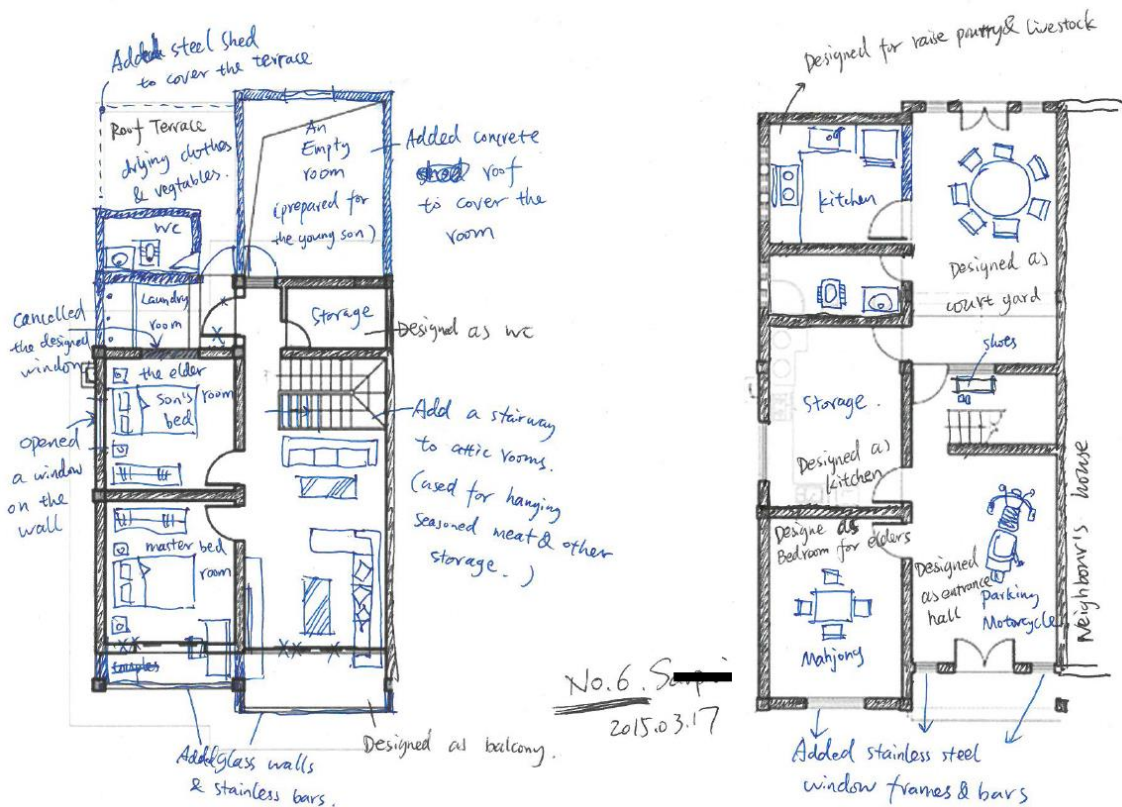


Figure 3.2 Sketch maps of a transformed new village house



Figure 3.3 Photos of the glass curtain walls and the stainless steel components added on the house in Figure 3.2

### Reviewing official documents

Policies of rural development on both national and sub-national levels are reflected in the official documents of village development. These documents include several categories. One of these is policy documents concerned with general rural development, which give sections or sentences paying attention to village development. Such documents are targeted at policy implementation at either national or sub-national levels. The Literature Review introduced the national-level ones issued by the central government. The next chapters on the

case studies will further review official documents issued by the local government on and below the provincial level.

Another kind of official document of village development is the guidelines for village planning and design. These documents usually have more specific focuses on transforming the built environment. As introduced in the previous chapters, the Chinese government has repeatedly urged local governments to produce technical guidelines for village planning, as well as construction manuals for the development of new houses in villages.

Village plans and house designs made specifically for the villages involved in development is also an important kind of official document. Similar to the aforementioned two types of official documents, the planning and design documents of specific developments indicate the influences of macro policies of new villages, more importantly, they contain detailed information about the practice of village developments on the ground.

Firstly, the information includes valuable, sometimes exclusive, data about the situation of the villages involved in development, including topography, housing conditions, population, etc. For instance, the map of a village's topography and built environment before the development usually cannot be found from other sources, as many villages in China have yet been taken into any geographic information systems. The map provided by documents of specific development is very likely the only map of the village so far. The documents also include the planned layout of new village and house designs, which were used as the 'base layer' for mapping house transformation.

Secondly, the documents of specific development also provide crucial information about the development process, such as important dates and names of decision makers. Such information helped the present study to reconstruct the process of village planning and design, which was a key step in the development process.

Thirdly, the anticipated outcomes of development were also set out by the planning and design documents. As shown in Figure 3.4, the official design documents used both descriptions and images to illustrate the anticipated outcomes of the development of the new village, which provided rich details for analysis.



Figure 3.4 The architectural illustration of a new village in an official design document

Source: Author's photograph of the document, translated by the author

In sum, reviewing village planning and design documents about either general guidelines or specific developments supported the ability of this research to understand the ideology, objectives and organization of the development of new villages. The documents can provide new and exclusive information about the development, especially the information required by pre-post analysis. Moreover, they offer opportunities for cross-comparison of the data from other sources. For instance, the purposes of development recorded in documents were compared with the narratives of the actors involved; images of the planned new village environment in documents were compared with observation in the field. Therefore, reviewing village planning and design documents was an essential complement to the data collection of this research.

### 3.2.3 *Data analysis methods*

#### **Selecting data: follow the theoretical framework**

The data collection techniques introduced above generated different forms of data from different sources, and can be processed and analysed in various ways. For qualitative data research, which usually generates large amounts of data, the first step of data analysis is data selection and reduction (Miles and Huberman, 1994). A general principle for data reduction, as well as the whole process of data analysis, is to follow the research questions and theoretical framework (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Patton, 2002). Selecting data in line with

analytical framework helps to increase the efficiency of data analysis and, moreover, keeps the analysis consistent with the research objectives. As set out in Chapter 2, the analytical framework of this research identified four themes of investigation, which are identifying the process and outputs of development, and further interpreting how the contexts and stakeholders influence the development process and outputs.

Identifying the processes and outputs of the development, in contrast with interpreting how the contexts and stakeholders influence the development, are more descriptive themes. Data selection in this research started from selecting evidence centred on these two descriptive themes. Key words and short phrases are commonly used to summarise and refine both language- and visual-based data. Themes, or patterns, trends or concepts of qualitative research will be noticed if the researcher carefully reads and reviews the data (Saldaña, 2009).

During the interviews of this study, it has been noticed that certain names and performances of stakeholders, descriptions of certain events in the process of development and outputs delivered, had been repeatedly addressed by interviewees. As will be illustrated in detail in the case study chapters (Chapter 4, 5 and 6). The events include the initiation of the development, the stage of making planning and design, the process of construction and allocation of new houses, etc. The names repeatedly being mentioned include the county officials, village cadres, and some villagers. The outputs delivered being talked most frequently include the numbers and prices of new houses, the size of developed land and compensations for the land use, etc. These focal points in the story-telling of interviewees became the practical elements to select data for this study. These key elements also further guided the follow-up data collection and analysis.

### **Two stages of data analysis**

Based on the collection of evidence centred on the key elements of the development (events happened, results delivered, names and performances of stakeholders, etc.), the first stage of data analysis reconstructed the process and outcomes of development with detailed descriptions. The description in qualitative research not only portrays the surface appearance of the development process and its outcomes, but also interpretively demonstrates the details, contexts and social relations of the studied phenomenon, hence bringing readers into the field setting and enabling them to make their own interpretation (Ponterotto, 2006; Best, 2014). Therefore, the description in this research will situate the development in the social-spatial contexts.



Moreover, the description is inclusive of the perspectives of different stakeholders. As introduced above, different narratives of the development were summarized into the key elements of the development process and outcomes. In this stage of the analysis, these elements in the form of key words and notions were connected, synthesized, and reunited with details of narratives, in order to reconstruct a more comprehensive story of development.

By reconstructing the development process and outcomes in detail, descriptive questions, such as what happened in a village development, what were the backgrounds and results of the development, and who were involved in it, were responded to and evidence was gathered from multiple data resources. Then, the analysis moved to the next stage.

The second stage of analysis particularly addressed the ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions of this research: why are new villages developed, and how are they developed? As stated in the Literature Review, this study argues that the transformation of the village built environment is influenced both by agencies involved and macro factors rooted in the social and physical environment of development. The detailed description of the development process raised in each case study already contained sufficient information about the influence of stakeholders and contextual factors of development. Comparing the similarities and discrepancies of different cases would further clarify the causal reasons of the development process and outputs.

The data collection, processing and analysis in this research is summarized in Figure 3.5. It is worth noting that the two stages of data analysis did not progress in a linear way. As Dey (2003) points out, the process of qualitative analysis is more like a series of movements following an ascending spiral, rather than a straight arrow. Such a spiral progress of research involves back and forth reading and reviewing of data, making descriptions, comparing and theorizing findings, and re-reading and further exploring the ‘raw materials’ of data. Therefore, the two stages of analysis in this research were cyclical, but also an ascending process.

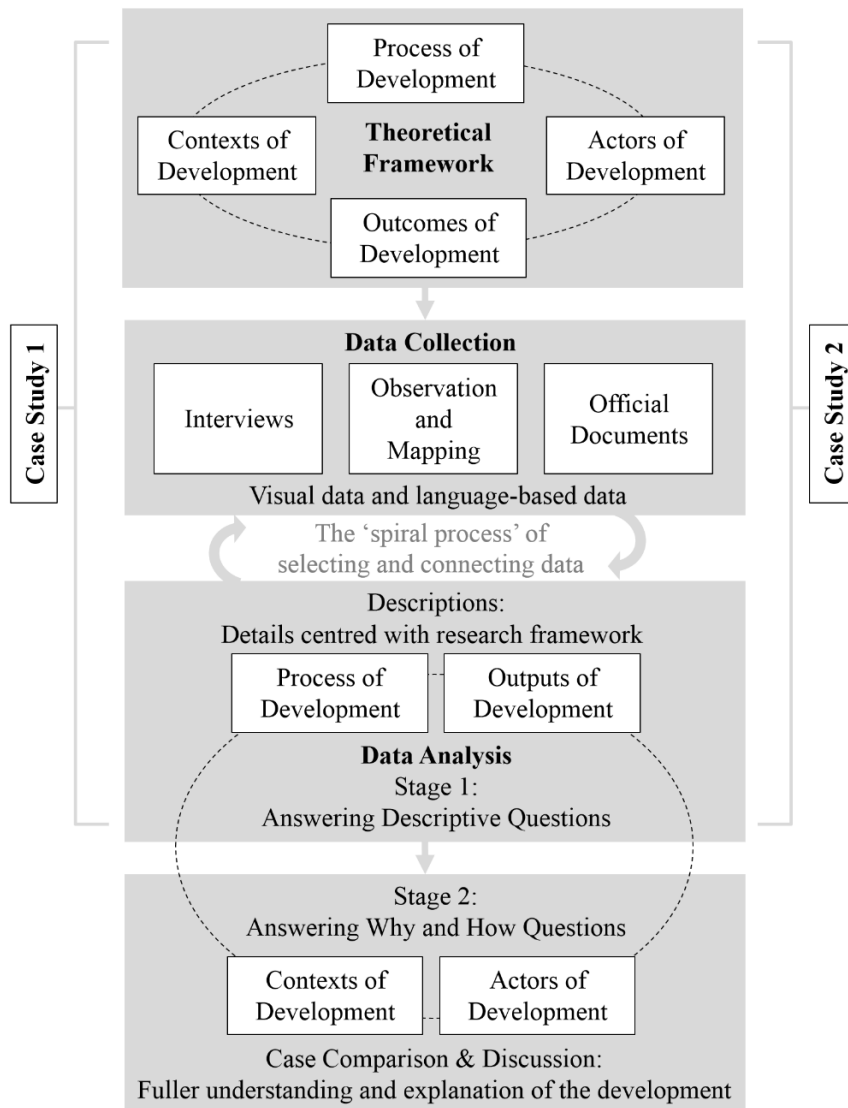


Figure 3.5 The process of data collection, processing and analysis in this research

### 3.3 Considerations of ethical issues and positionality of the study

Considerations of ethical issues in social research have been increasingly emphasized in both academia and the wider public (Silverman, 2005; Flick, 2009). In different countries and research disciplines, the standards of ethical research may vary. General principles to ethically conduct qualitative research include getting informed consent, avoiding harm to participants, being sensitive to confidentiality in research, and doing justice to participants in analysing data (adapted from Flick, 2009, pp. 40-42).

These four ethical principles have been taken into account by the present study in both fieldwork and writing. The aims of this doctoral research were introduced before the interviews to ensure that interviewees gave consent. Also, my previous work and research experience in Eastern County enabled some of the actors of development to know my



background as a doctoral researcher. The interviewees' awareness of my identity and research purpose increased the transparency of interviewing.

The observation and mapping of villagers' daily routines in new villages and new houses were also conducted openly and with the consent of the research participants. The accompanying of home owners during the observation and mapping also prevented the potential invasion of privacy. Additionally, photographs taken inside or around the houses were shown to the home owners. In my second field visit to the villages, I brought the villagers some printed photographs of them and of their new homes as an expression of my gratitude. Presenting photographs to the villagers also increased transparency of my study.

To protect participants' confidentiality and prevent potential harm, the present study uses fictional names when referring to counties, villages, and the agencies and individuals involved. How to produce context-related knowledge while keeping the anonymity of participants is a general dilemma for qualitative research (Flick, 2009). This study endeavoured to give precise information about the contexts of development, while encrypting some specific details, such as names of highways and rivers, to ensure the locality of the development could not be easily identified.

Doing justice to participants in analysing data means that interpretations of the data are really grounded (Flick, 2009, p. 41). Within this process, as indicated by Stake (1998), it is however important to acknowledge that the background and positionality of a researcher will inevitably affect their choice of research subject, of cases and analytical framework, influencing therefore the collection and interpretation of data.

In terms of my background, before the start of the academic research in 2013, I participated in the development of new villages in Eastern County as an assistant architect in a design company. As mentioned above, whilst my previous working experience was beneficial to this research, as it helped provide access to data and increase the transparency of interviews, I am aware that it may have an impact on the development of research. My identity as a PhD researcher studying at UK may also influence the attitude and remarks of the participants of this study. Some of them may feel freer to express their opinions to a student who did not have a 'government background', while some may have worries about the 'oversea background' of this study.

To minimize bias that might be caused by the above issues, several strategies have been applied. Firstly, I conducted the study as a reflective process, taking into account my background and experience. Studies in many fields of social science have indicated that by

articulating the rationales of the research design and adopting a reflective stance in the research process, researchers can increase the transparency of research and reduce the possible influences of personal bias (Yardley, 2000; Smith and Noble, 2014). The rationale for the case study design of this research and the methods it applied to increase the transparency of research have been clarified in the sections above. Meanwhile, as shown in Chapter 2, this study is informed by reviews of the literature, which has shown that different views and voices have been adapted to examine new village development policies, and to critically engage with theoretical and empirical studies of village development. The literature review findings have largely broadened my views on the subject of study and helped the development of self-reflection.

Secondly, as introduced above, this research adopted diverse sources and forms of empirical data, which is collected by various techniques. Using various methods to collect data from multiple sources helps to reduce the systematic biases resulting from the research methodology (Flick, 2009; Maxwell, 2012).

Thirdly, it is worth pointing out that this study is an individual research project without sponsorship or instruction from any of the stakeholders involved in the developments. The research process is overseen by experienced supervisors and qualified academic institution. The supervision team made by Professor Ali Madanipour and Dr Paola Gazzola, who have extensive experience in the research of planning theory, policy evaluation and other subjects related with the present study, has helped keep the research process on the right track. In addition, the institutional requirements of Newcastle University, such as receiving ethical review, attending training sessions for ethical research, and making reflections and progress reports on PhD research on an annual basis, also helped the consideration about ethical issues and being reflective.

In sum, this study has made every effort to minimize bias and ensure the validity of data. The strategies include being self-reflective during the process of study, following the supervision of advisors and regulations of academic institution, articulating the research design and triangulating data. Inevitably, the study has encountered some limitations, which are subsequently presented.

### **3.4 Research limitations**

Insufficient accessibility of data was one of the limitations of this research. As Xiao (2014) indicates in her study of land-use quota market in China, it is not easy to access policy documents, official reports and officials in China. To shed light on the scenes behind the close

door, the researcher usually needs to adapt every efforts, including motivating personal network or contacts in the relevant field.

To access the key actors and official documents related with village development, I made the best of my previous work and research experience. Many of the participants of this research have contributed as much support as they could. However, it is aware that the present study has had quite limited access to data. For instance, some interviewees refused to introduce me to other stakeholders involved in the development, in spite of they have the contact. On the other hand, the refusal attitude of some interviewees and insufficient accessibility to data could also have been viewed as a sort of data, which implies the complicated political and social context of village planning and development in contemporary China.

The relatively short time span was another limitation of this research. Both of the studied villages were still under long-term transition in terms of their socio-spatial environment. Moreover, the constant changes of national and local rural policies may affect the future of the new villages in ways that can hardly be predicted. These potential trends of development cannot be fully addressed in this study.

Case studies in this research were limited to two developments in two relatively close localities. The accessibility of data was a reason for not selecting cases a great distance apart. The choice of two rather than more cases was also to avoid spreading the limited time of the research too thinly, and to guarantee depth. If time and the accessibility of data had permitted, research on the development of new villages might be further broadened by conducting more case studies in wider regions.

Translating data into English also took a great deal of effort. For many words and ideas expressed in Chinese, it is hard to find an exact equivalent in a very different language. It was also found that the policies of rural development in China often held considerable ambiguity, which went well with some particular (and usually subtle and sometimes poetic) expressions in Chinese. The expressions of interviewees in many cases were also informal and contains a large extent of ambivalence. Translating these expressions was inevitably limited by the understanding and interpretation of the translator. Moreover, with changing winds in politics, nuances have been added or deleted from the same words or phrases used in official discourse. Therefore, the dynamic of rural policies in China added to the difficulty of translating of the data. As a result, while trying to guarantee the accuracy and clarity of translation, some meanings in the original expressions are missing.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has identified the methodological choices made by the present study to explore its research aim and objectives. First of all, it has illustrated why a qualitative case study was selected as the most appropriate and pragmatic research strategy for the present study. Moving forward, justifications of the case selection have been provided. The theoretical framework of the present study has argued that both the stakeholders involved in development and development factors rooted in the social-spatial context could significantly influence the process and outputs of development. Therefore, the developments in two villages with different relationships of stakeholders were selected as case studies. The depth of case study research, in relation to the available time and the accessibility of the data, also determined the number and location of the selected cases.

This chapter has also illustrated how the data of the case studies was collected from various sources. The multiple data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, direct observation and mapping of the built environment, human behaviours and other settings in the field, and reviewing the official documents of general development guidelines and specific village planning and housing design. The explanation of the process of analysing the data follows. In line with the analytical framework of this research, the two-stage data analysis first provides detailed descriptions centred on key events and outputs of the development. It further compares the case studies to explore the factors that initiate and direct the development. Last but not least, considerations of the ethical issues involved with the process of data collection and analysis were elaborated. The limitations of the present study have also been clearly stated, which may inspire future research.

## Chapter 4. Setting the Scene of the Case Studies

### 4.1 Overview of the implementation of new villages below national level

This chapter introduces the policies of village development below national level, and the social, economic and spatial contexts of implementing new villages in Easter County. In the previous part of this thesis, the literature review chapter illustrated the background to the national policies of new villages, and indicated the importance of portraying the holistic contexts of the development of the rural built environment. The methodology chapter illustrated the rationale of looking at the development in the selected locality. Following these two chapters, this chapter looks at how national policies have been adapted and implemented within the practical social-spatial context of a county.

#### 4.1.1 *Local government promotion of new villages in Sichuan*

Located at the conjunction of Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and South China Block, Sichuan Basin frequently suffers severe seismic disasters. The powerful earthquake in 2008, which flattened thousands of rural residences across Sichuan, was a watershed in the implementation of new villages in the province. As found in the provincial government's budget reports before 2008, the government had funded road constructions inside and between villages, but there was no plan to develop new villages or housing in rural areas. However, after the earthquake, the provincial and central governments invested significant funds in massive reconstruction projects. Many new villages with new housing and infrastructure were thus built in post-disaster development.

Soon afterward, the provincial government started to plan for developing new villages not only in earthquake-affected areas, but more generally in the whole province as a response to the national campaign of BNSC. This raised the concept of the *shifan pian* (model zones) of implementing BNSC, which means to carry out rural development in a geographically contiguous area comprised of more than ten villages (Sichuan Provincial Government, 2009b). The provincial government planned to complete the first forty projects of the *shifan pian* within three years, which would involve about 1,000 villages in total. In the second phase of another three years, the figures would be enlarged to a hundred projects and 2,500 villages.

The planning and development of new villages has been underlined by the provincial government as a crucial goal for the implementation of BNSC in *shifan pian* (Sichuan Provincial Government, 2010c). It has been required that within the *shifan pian*, the

“appearance of the villages should be significantly improved”, which specifies that “more than 90% of the village roads should be renovated” and more than 90% of village houses should be “new dwellings” (Sichuan Provincial Government, 2009b).

Correspondingly, the provincial government’s budget for 2010 planned financial support for the implementation of BNSC in *shifan pian* (Sichuan Provincial Government, 2010b). The provincial budgets in the following years also made funds available for village planning and the development of new villages as a significant part of government investment, which accounts for billions of RMB (Sichuan Provincial Government, 2011; 2013a).

Quickly followed the raise of the notion *shifan pian*, the provincial government of Sichuan created the term *xinnongcun zongheti* (New Rural Compound) in 2010. The term originated from a speech made by the head of the provincial government at the time, when he was inspecting the implementation of rural development in a county in Sichuan. After the term was created, it began to be quoted frequently in meetings and work reports internally at all levels of local government, although the concept was not yet clearly defined. In the first version of the provincial government’s guidelines for the planning of new rural *zongheti*, the term was in mixed use with new villages (*xincun*) (Sichuan Provincial Government, 2010d). In a later version of the provincial planning guidelines for the compound issued in 2012, the subject was defined as a large scale rural community, which consists of new housing and land for agricultural production. The housing project aims to settle from 50 to more than a thousand rural residents, with an environment supported by infrastructure and facilities for public services, rural tourism or industries relevant to the agricultural production in the compound. The provincial government has stated the conception of compound as a “new task” of development based on the experience of post-earthquake reconstruction, and an “innovation of the theory and practice of BNSC” (Sichuan Provincial Government, 2012a).

Sichuan provincial government’s financial support for the development of new villages is structured as shown in Figure 4.1. With the top-down allocation of funds, each level of government was assigned different tasks in the development of new villages. Different levels of government also played different roles in governmental evaluation of the development.

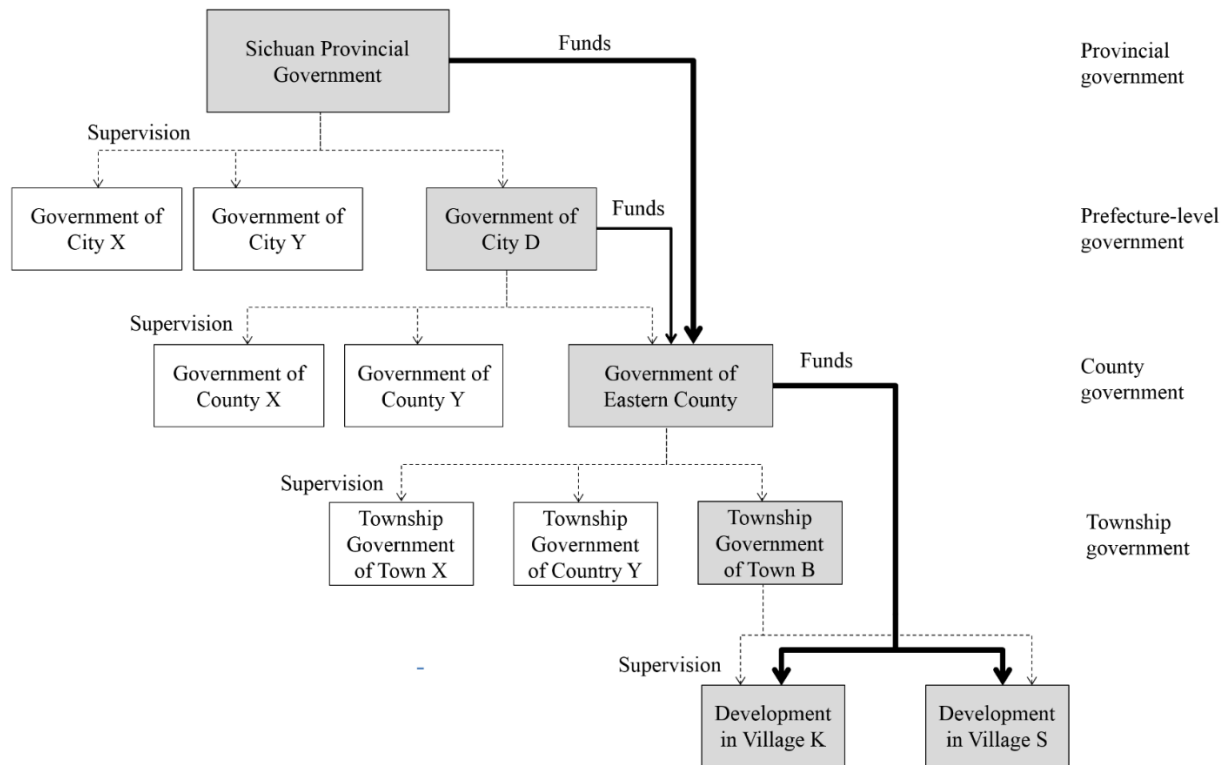


Figure 4.1 The flow of funds for the development of new villages between different levels of government

### Provincial government

Provincial government is the highest level local government in China. Since the earthquake in 2008, enormous funds for the development of new villages have been allocated from Sichuan provincial government to county government. Between 2009 and 2013, the provincial government selected more than a hundred counties as models to implement *shifan pian* of BNSC. Funds earmarked for development were allocated from the provincial government to the government of these model counties. 50% of the provincial funds in total was equally distributed as ‘fundamental funds’ (*jizhun zijin*) to every county, and the other 50% was allocated as ‘performance funds’ (*jixiao zijin*). The fundamental fund is 3 million RMB per county, while the performance fund varies between 3 and 5 million RMB per county. The provincial government sets rules for evaluating the county government’s performance. In the worst situation, if it deems that the county government’s performance is unsatisfactory, the county’s status as a provincial showcase and even the fundamental fund it has received can be withdrawn (Sichuan Provincial Government, 2010a). Details about the internal evaluation is further illustrated in Section 4.1.2.

### Prefectural-level government

Government of prefectural-level cities or autonomous prefectures is the second level of local government in China’s administrative divisions, which is below provincial government

and above county government. However, as mentioned above, the earmarked funds for developing new villages is allocated by Sichuan provincial government to county government, rather than prefectural government. But prefectural-level government is still the superior to county- and township-level government in the implementation of new villages on county level.

Required by the provincial government, prefectural-level government needs to provide supplementary funds (*peitao zijin*) to the development of new villages, although the supplementary funds were not required to be as much as the provincial funds. Prefectural-level government is also required to set out overall tasks for the development of new villages in the prefecture, such as specific number of new villages and schedule to fulfil the tasks. The implementation plan of new villages issued by Sichuan provincial government has listed “objective tasks of new village projects” of all the prefectural-level government in the province. Prefectural-level government needs “to break down the given objective tasks and specifically allocated the tasks to county-level government” (Sichuan Provincial Government, 2013b). According to the plan, the government of city D, which is the prefectural-level government above the Eastern County government, was tasked with developing over 300 new villages by 2013, and over 2,000 by 2015. To fulfil these tasks, the prefectural government required each of the six county-level governments in the prefecture to implement at least 11 new villages every year since 2011.

The provincial government also gives prefectural government power to supervise and evaluate the performance of county government in the development of new villages. When applying for a “performance fund”, the county government needs to first report its progression in the development of new villages to the prefectural government. The prefectural government will rank the county’s performance and convey the rank to the provincial government. The provincial government will probably check one or two model counties in every prefecture itself, but the allocation of a performance fund to most of the counties is based on the report of the prefectural government. As illustrated by many researchers of Chinese politics (Heberer and Schubert, 2012; Schubert and Ahlers, 2012b), county and township government is striving for an advanced position in the performance evaluation list. Those finishing at the top are more likely to receive more funds and better promotion prospects, while those at the bottom will potentially face sanctions, such as a fund reduction and degrade of officials. In terms of ranking the implementation of new villages, prefectural-level government has the power over county and township governments.



## County government

A county in China is usually comprised of an urban centre and the surrounding rural hinterland. In general, the county government acts as a crucial unit of the government system in the development of new villages. As illustrated above, the county government was assigned funds and specific tasks for developing new villages. It is required to provide supplementary funds for the development, and to plan for the use of the funds allocated by higher-level government. County government needs to work out practical plans for, and approaches to, conduct village development on the ground. Officials of the Eastern County government confirmed that the provincial and prefectural governments' general ideas on developing new villages have soon become objectives to be explored and fulfilled by county officials. When asked at interview about the driving factors of village development in Eastern County, a county official, who was in charge of the development stated,

Every county government has been assigned a certain number of new village developments. And of course it is better to fulfil more. (Interview\_2015031601)

The official's statement indicated the political stress to deliver village development. Under such stress, Eastern County conducted its first two pilot projects of new villages in 2011, soon after the provincial government stated to develop *shifan pian* and New Rural Compounds. To the county government, the development is an unprecedented and challenging task. Before 2011, the county government had implemented projects to renew village roads and refurbish old village houses, but the policies of new villages definitely require the delivery of more significant transformations in the village built environment. To implement the new policies, the county has to work out village planning and create new buildings and a new built environment in the countryside.

In the implementation of rural development in China, higher-level governments usually raise very broad goals, rough instructions and loosely-defined concepts in the policies above county level (Heberer and Schubert, 2012; Ahlers, 2014). The county officials need to turn the broad policies and concepts, such as the "new countryside" and the "tidy and clean village environment" into applicable projects. Recalling the initial phase of arranging new village development, a county official stated, in a slightly complaining tone, that "There was neither explanation about the ideas of new villages, nor the approach of development to follow. We could only learn by doing." (Interview\_2015031601)

The government of Eastern County sought help from professional planning and design agencies in the "learning by doing" process of developing new villages. These agencies are

companies and institutions that provide paid consultancy services and technical support in various kinds of development, from the development of urban commercial complexes to countryside tourism development.

In previous projects to renew the appearance of old village houses, the county government had worked with several design agencies. The collaboration continued on village planning and the design of new housing. As illustrated in Chapter 2, the central government requires the local government to guarantee formal and “scientific” planning and design procedures in the transformation of the rural built environment. Sichuan provincial government also requires the subordinate government to involve professional planning and design agencies in the development of new villages (Sichuan Provincial Government, 2012a). Whether the village development has formal planning and design documents has been taken as an important parameter to examine the county government’s performance on implementing new villages. Between 2011 and 2013, the government of Eastern County contracted at least seven professional planning and design agencies to work on the documents and praxis of village development.

The development of new villages in Eastern County seems to be flourishing and fruitful. The county government announced that in 2011 it had successfully fulfilled the first year’s task of developing new villages, and it planned to double the figure for 2012, which would be over 30 new villages. The work of Eastern County was acknowledged by the prefectural and provincial governments: in 2013, the county was selected as a provincial showcase county of developing new villages. Responding to the approval of higher-level governments, the county announced an even more ambitious plan: to develop over 100 new villages by the end of 2014.

However, the county government did not follow its plan for 2013, and it significantly reduced 2014’s tasks of developing new villages (Eastern County Government, 2014). In the following years, in spite of repeatedly emphasizing the need to improve the village built environment, the county government no longer set specific tasks for the number of new villages. What led to the fluctuating practice of village development has not been officially explained by the county government. But the case studies of this research can provide an explanation, which are elaborated in the following chapters of case studies.

### **Township government**

Township government is situated at the bottom of China’s government system. As introduced in Chapter 2, URPL requires township governments to organize resources to

implement the village planning. However, as seen in the practice in Eastern County, the making of village planning is indeed arranged by county government rather than township government, although the name of the latter may appear in the planning and design document as the principal role in charge of the development.

County government's replacement of township government in the making of village planning and design is not likely to be a unique phenomenon of Eastern County. Chapter 2 has illustrated that after the rural taxation reform in the 1990s, township governments in many regions of China were in financial difficulty, and sometimes could not even pay the wages of officials. Therefore, as seen in the development of new villages in Sichuan, township government is not required to provide funds. In general, township government in many regions in China has been described as "half paralysed" (Zhou, 2006b, p. 36) or "hollowed shells" (Smith, 2010, p. 601), which have very limited ability to provide public services and lead development in rural areas.

#### 4.1.2 *Local government's focus on the development of new villages in Sichuan*

As illustrated above, the Sichuan provincial government has launched the development of *shifan pian* of BNSC, following the massive reconstruction after the earthquake in 2008. In line with BNSC's objectives for comprehensive rural development, the provincial government has affirmed agriculture and agricultural industries as the underpinning of the *shifan pian*. Developing modern agriculture and agricultural industries is also the first part of the "key points of development", which are:

- 1) Develop modern agriculture;
- 2) Upgrade infrastructure;
- 3) Promote village development according to the classification;
- 4) Improve public services and facilities;
- 5) Resolve environmental pollution and sanitary issues;
- 6) Improve village management and the development of village economic organizations. (Sichuan Provincial Government, 2009a, pp. 2-3)

It can be seen above that most of the key points of development focused on by the provincial government are closely related to transforming the village built environment. The third specifically underlines the renovation of old villages and the development of new villages. Four general classifications of village development were set. The village development in the earthquake-affected area was listed as the first category, which is dominated by the development of new villages. The development of new villages was also

extended to unaffected areas, which were classified as suburban and plain areas, mountainous areas, and *minzu* areas, inhabited by ethnic minority groups. It was specified that in mountainous areas, such as Eastern County, the local government should “guide farmers to renovate old village houses and develop new houses”. “The new houses should be developed following the topography, in order to form new villages which are full of unique and well-proportioned spatial characteristics” (Sichuan Provincial Government, 2009a, p. 3).

Within a year, the provincial government issued another document named as “highlighting the development of new villages in the development of BNSC *shifan pian*”. As indicated by the name, the document has further emphasized the development of new villages. It requires that the planning of new villages in all counties of Sichuan should be drawn up by 2015, and at least half of the planning should be implemented by that time (Sichuan Provincial Government, 2010c).

“*San dapo, san tigao*” (“three smash, three rise”) has been designated by the provincial document as the basic requirements for the planning of new villages (Sichuan Provincial Government, 2010d). The slogan means to smash problems in three aspects to make improvements. The ‘problems’ of village built environment, which are regarded by the Sichuan provincial government as needing to be ‘smashed,’ are all related to the spatial forms of village layout and styles of rural residences: layout of villages which sandwiches a road, or has been arranged in orderly grids, are criticized as ‘shabby alleys’ or ‘tedious barracks’; village houses with exteriors that are unlike traditional folk houses are analogized to ‘concrete match boxes’. In short, the provincial government has targeted the so-called alleys, barracks and match boxes as the three problems that should be ‘smashed’ in the development of new villages. These styles of houses and spatial forms of residential quarters are quite commonly-seen in towns and villages developed spontaneously in recent years in China. Figure 4.2 shows a row of some typical ‘match boxes’ that the Eastern County government targeted to refurbish.



Figure 4.2 A row of houses along a highway in the suburban area of Eastern County

Source: Provided by the county government

The provincial government's specific focus on formalizing and professionalizing the procedures of village planning and regulating the spatial form and appearance of new villages is also reflected in the internal performance evaluation. As introduced above, the performance evaluation will determine the allocation of funds for development. It has been seen from the literature review that the development of new villages was repeatedly advocated by the national policies of BNSC as a comprehensive development, which not only transforms the village built environment, but also deals with socio-economic and land use issues in rural areas. In line with the national policies, the provincial government's planning guidelines claim that the development of new villages should focus on multiple aspects of villagers' livelihoods by means of improving agricultural production, public services, village management, and many other measures. However, the internal evaluation focuses on the built environment much more than any other aspects in the development of new villages. In fact, the provincial government has only published detailed criteria for evaluating the development of the village's built environment. Systematic standards for other aspects of the development of new villages were absent.

The evaluation criteria of the village built environment gives 70% of the total credit to the tangible outcomes of transforming the village built environment, which are further categorized as village planning and implementation, and the design and construction of new buildings and infrastructure. In terms of village planning and implementation, specific grading standards include whether formal village planning has been worked out with a professional agency and obtained approval from upper-level government, whether the planning follows the

requirements of “*san dapo, san tigao*”, and whether the planning has been fully implemented with a planned schedule. In terms of the design and construction of new houses and public buildings, again, the evaluation concentrates on whether the design and construction has used professional agencies and adopted the specific aesthetic standard set out by government. The evaluation of infrastructure looks at whether the roads, power network, water and sewage systems, as well as other infrastructure in new villages, have satisfied certain general technical standards.

Of the remaining 30% credit of the evaluation, 27% is used to examine whether the county government has effectively managed the human and monetary resources for the development. The last 3% examines whether the development has effectively involved villagers and satisfied their needs.

Following the provincial government’s call for formalizing village planning and regulating village appearance, the prefectural government of city D and government of Eastern County has stated that the implementation of new villages should be limited to planning. It is also required that the construction of village houses of two storeys or above should have formal design drawings and apply an official-approved style (The Prefectural Government of City D, 2009). The style is identified by government as ‘the style of an eastern Sichuan folk house’ (*chuandong minju fengge*).



Figure 4.3 Traditional houses in an ancient town in eastern Sichuan

Source: <http://www.weblz.com.cn>





Figure 4.4 An architectural rendering of new village houses with in the style of an ‘eastern Sichuan folk house’

Source: A design document provided by the government of Eastern County

As illustrated in Figure 4.4, in general, the government-promoted house style tries to imitate the appearance of a traditional house in eastern Sichuan by using the white and grey colours commonly seen in traditional houses. Wooden or wood-coloured decorations that imitate the traditional house structure and components are frequently adopted by the housing design for the development of new villages. House design following the ‘folk house style’ also focuses on the design of roofs. It frequently placing high and low sloping roofs in different orientations and covering them with grey tiles, to give the new building an appearance similar to the old residential clusters developed in the mountainous eastern Sichuan.

Besides designating the particular aesthetic standards to the development of new housing, the prefectural and county government has also applied the style to transform old village houses. In 2010, the provincial government of Sichuan initiated the “model project of beautiful environment” (*huanjing youmei shifan gongcheng*). House refurbishment involves redecorate the exterior appearance of old village houses is included in the project. The project also provides sanitary infrastructure, such as waste disposal facilities in villages, to collect and transport waste from villages to the disposal system based in towns and counties. In the implantation of the project, professional architectural design agencies were contracted by the government to work out a specific refurbish design, in line with the aesthetic standards given by government. Following the specific refurbish design, the facades of old houses are usually covered with grey wall tiles and white paint, and flat roofs are transformed into sloping roofs covered by grey tiles, as shown in Figure 4.5.

村建筑风貌改造群体建筑控制图示：



Figure 4.5 A group of old village houses before/ after the government-led house transformation

Source: A design document provided by the government of Eastern County

In sum, the policies implementing BNSC issued by the Sichuan provincial government indicate that the government has particularly highlighted the development of new villages. Furthermore, the planning guidelines and evaluation criteria of new villages indicate that, in the development, the provincial government specifically focuses on formalizing the planning procedure, and delivering tangible changes in the village built environment in compliance with aesthetic standards raised by the government. The aesthetic standards have developed some of the central government's general requirements for transforming the rural built environment, such as conserving the 'characteristics of the countryside', into 'smashing' several forms of spatial arrangement of rural built environment appeared spontaneously in recent years, without formal planning and design procedures.

Heretofore, we have only learnt what was advocated by local government in the development of new villages. To know what outputs were produced on the ground, and how and why the output were delivered, it is necessary to move our attention to the scenes of development in Eastern County, township B, and village S and K.



## 4.2 The social, economic and spatial context of Eastern County and township B

### 4.2.1 *A general portrait of the county*

As mentioned in the last chapter, Eastern County is located between Chengdu and Chongqing, two metropolises and the planned future economic centre of Southwest China. As shown in Figure 4.1, in the sub-national government hierarchy in China, county government is ranked below provincial government and municipal government, and above township government. Eastern County government has six other counterparts under the prefectural government of city D. The county consists of more than fifty subsidiary townships. On average, each township in Eastern County is comprised of more than ten villages, which in turn are usually composed of over two hundred households.

Eastern County has a population of over 1.2 million, within which more than 80% is identified as rural population in China's household registration (*hukou*) system (*Population Statistical Data of All Counties of China*, 2012). As indicated by this demographic statistic, the county is a less urbanized region, but according to an annual development report issued by the county government in the past decade, agriculture is not the main contributor to the county's GDP. Industry, especially the energy and mining industries, account for more than the agriculture and service industries in the economy of Eastern County (Eastern County Government, 2011).

Mountainous topography increases the risk of land erosion and limits agricultural productivity in the county (Yun *et al.*, 2008). With such mountainous topography and an enormous population, farmland per capita in Eastern County is less than China's national average. Moreover, more than 40% of the farmland in Eastern County is on hilly slopes. It is estimated that a hectare of sloping farmland produces less than half of the product value than a flat paddy field (Fang and Hu, 2010). As introduced in Chapter 2, farmland in a rural collective is equally leased to village households. This rule of equity means dividing the farmland equally not only in size, but also by taking productivity into consideration. Therefore, each household usually contracts several pieces of farmland, some of which are flat field, while others are less-fertile sloping farmland. The mountainous topography of Eastern County has also influenced the distribution of residential quarters in villages. Unlike villages in plain areas where there are large residential settlements, villages in hilly Southwest China usually consist of many small, scattered residential quarters (Yang *et al.*, 2004). The household is usually allocated farmland near its residential quarter but, as mentioned, in many cases the farmland is not a single unit.

With a large rural population but limited farmland and agricultural productivity, a considerable amount of rural labour in Eastern County seeks off-farm work. For years, rural labour in Sichuan province has exceeded what is needed for agriculture, and most of this excess labour has moved to more developed regions in and outside the province, and even the country (Xu *et al.*, 2008). Studies show that rural migrant workers from Sichuan have sent substantial monies to their rural households, and, for more than 40% of the households, the remittance accounts for more than half of the annual household income (Li, 2001; Ping and Zhan, 2008). The economy of Eastern County also relies on rural migrant workers. Therefore, for more than a decade, the government of Eastern County, like the governments of many other places in Sichuan, has provided training programmes to rural migrant workers, and promoted the outflow of excess rural labour as a crucial measure to alleviate poverty in rural areas (Ministry of Agriculture, 2003; Eastern County Government, 2013).

#### 4.2.2 *Village life in the township*

As explained in the Methodology Chapter, the present study has selected villages S and K as case studies, which are both located in township B. As illustrated in Figure 4.6, the town centre of township B is about 26 km south of the urban centre of Eastern County. Two highways have connected the town with the county's urban centre, as well as to other cities, such as Chongqing. Buses commute between the town and the county centre every fifteen minutes, and many passing buses from the county centre to other cities can also be accessed. Moreover, about 10 km northwest to the town, a new airport is under construction and planned to open by 2018. It seems that the town will be more conveniently connected with other places in China in future.

The town centre of township B is smaller than 9 hectares, and is surrounded by about 3,000 hectares of rural area. The rural area consists of twelve villages, housing about 12,000 members of the rural population. Statistical information of the majority of townships in China, such as population, economy and the size of town centre cannot be openly accessed from published statistical books or databases. The aforementioned figures were an estimation by officials from the county and township government, and cannot be expected to be very precise or up-to-date. It can be observed that the town has a busy market (see Figure 4.8), a hospital for simple surgery, two privately owned nurseries, and a public school covering the nine-year compulsory tuition-free education in China. These public services not only serve the residents of the town centre, which account for only about 1/10 of the township's population, but also the villagers living in the township's rural hinterland.



Figure 4.6 Locations of the two villages, the urban centre of Eastern County and the planned airport (based on Google Map, drawn by the author)

As noted above, the rural population in mountainous regions like Eastern County usually reside in scattered residential quarters. These residential quarters in a village are numbered as different *cunmin xiaozu* (small group of villagers). There are more than 80 *xiaozu* within township B, which indicates the scattered distribution of residential quarters in rural area. The predecessor of the *xiaozu* was the ‘production team’ (*shengchan dui*) in the era of the Rural People’s Commune from the late 1950s to China’s economic reform in the late 1970s. Nowadays, the *xiaozus* no longer arrange collective production, and are sub-organizations of the village committee. Each *xiaozu* usually has one leader, selected by residents of the *xiaozu* for self-governance.

The Chinese Communist Party also has branches on village level, which consists of party members in a village and a chief secretary selected by the party members. The secretary of a village party branch also participates village governance. In practice, the two most important cadres of village governance are the director of the village committee and the party secretary. In general, village governance in China is very complicated, affected by the village cadres’ formal and informal powers rooted in local political, social and economic networks (Tsai, 2002; Ma, 2013). Detailed description and analysis of the role of village cadres in the development of new villages is provided in the following chapters of this thesis.

The government started to support modern agriculture in the villages of township B since 2001. It has promoted the development of cash crops and plants such as ramie and black

plum. Similar to the development of new villages, the government's financial support for agricultural development was driven mainly by the government at and above the county level, rather than the township government.

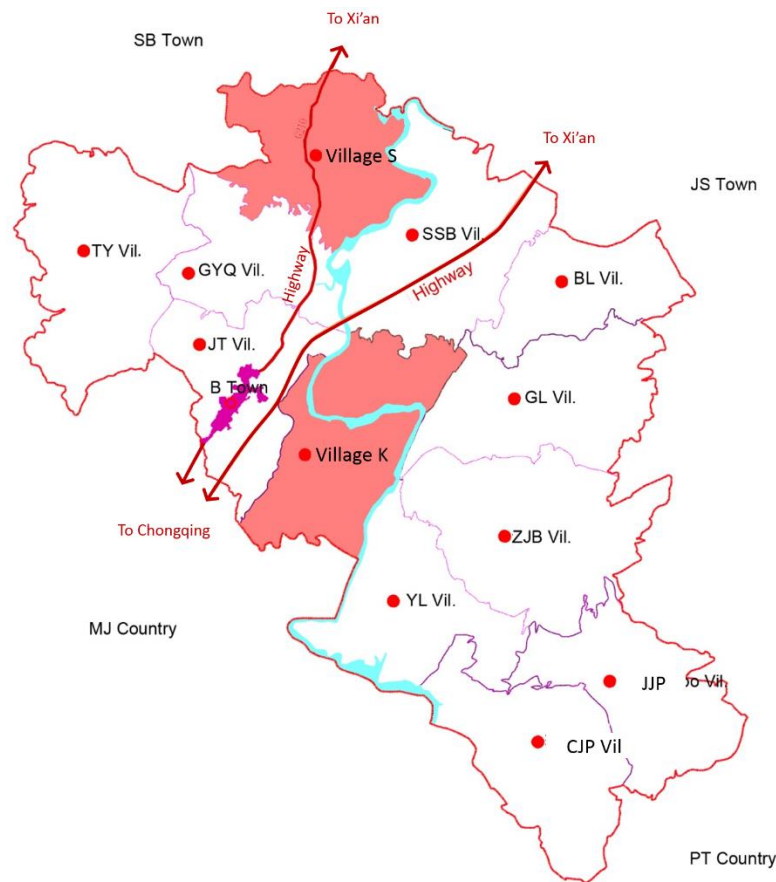


Figure 4.7 Locations of town B and the two villages

Source: based on the map from a village planning and design document offered by the government of Eastern County, translated by the author

As shown in Figure 4.7, the two villages investigated by the present study are located not far from the town centre or each other. There are countryside buses shuttling nearly all day long between the town centre and the villages. The buses are owned by private companies or individuals, who are usually the bus driver and conductor. In the morning and evening, the buses shuttle more frequently, because pupils need to commute between their village homes and the school in the town centre, and villagers also prefer to go to market in early morning. At other times of the day, the bus schedule is very flexible, and the bus driver and conductor usually wait in the town centre until they are satisfied about the number of passengers; the wait is not usually very long because there are always villagers travelling between their rural homes and the town centre, and the small bus is filled by them.



Figure 4.8 Left: the market in town B; Right: the countryside bus

To get off the bus, passengers just call to the driver at the place they would like to alight. To get on, passengers wave to the driver anywhere along the road. The flexible bus stops indicate the scattered residential quarters in the rural hinterland of Easter County: the place villagers get on and off the bus is usually the nearest point from the road to their homes.

Depending on the travel distance, the ticket price of the countryside bus is between RMB 1- 3. To most villagers of village K and S, the time and monetary cost of commuting between town B and their homes is not great. Besides the students who have to go to school every weekday, villagers also go to town frequently for various purposes, such as to sell agricultural products, to visit families and friends in town, to have fun in the mah-jong room,<sup>5</sup> to buy daily essentials or visit the barber or tailor. In sum, the town is an important space to provide services and commodities, as well as for the social life to villagers, just as Skinner (1964; 1965a; 1965b) observed in rural Sichuan half a century ago.

### 4.3 Conclusion

The first part of this chapter explored how local government from the provincial level to township level has acted to implement new villages under the national campaign of BNSC. It was found that the provincial government of Sichuan has put transforming the built environment of villages as a priority of rural development. In line with the requirements of BNSC, the provincial government has emphasized village planning and infrastructure development in the development of new villages. The provincial government has also developed the “characteristics of the countryside” promoted by the central government into particular aesthetic standards of the village built environment.

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<sup>5</sup> Mah-jong is a traditional Chinese table-top game, which is still one of the most popular recreational activities in Sichuan. Mah-jong houses in Sichuan usually are also tea houses, where people gather to play mah-jong or watch others playing, as well as have tea and socialise with each other.

The government's internal system of fund allocation and supervision has been built to ensure the implementation of new villages. Within the system, the governments of different counties need to compete with each other to secure their status as model counties and hence funds from higher-level government. Higher-level government, which is the evaluator in the system, also has to stand out from its same-level counterparts and receive acknowledgement from its superiors. Therefore, from the provincial to the county government, each level of government needs to show that positive outputs have been delivered.

However, it is yet to be seen what has been delivered by the implementation of village development. To scrutinise the scenes of development in practice, the second part of the chapter portrayed the social, economic and spatial contexts of Eastern County, town B and the two villages in general. The following two chapters of case studies further depict the socio-spatial situations of the two villages, and details of the development process and products on the ground.

## Chapter 5. The Development of Village S

As explained in the Methodology chapter, the village developments in the case studies of this research was conducted at different times, with different approaches of development praxis. This chapter examines the development in village S, which was one of the two earliest projects of village development initiated by the government of Eastern County. Studying the development in this village provides an opportunity to explore the county government's early attempts to implement such new villages. In this chapter, the first part is an introduction to the general social and economic situation of village S, followed by the village built environment pre-development. After this, the process and outcomes of the development in the village will be elaborated, using the data collected from the review of relevant policy documents, and the interviews and observations made during the fieldwork.

### 5.1 A general introduction to village S

#### 5.1.1 *Social and economic context of the village*

According to the village cadres, village S has around 1,350 residents, registered as 378 village households. However, as observed in field visits, only a few registered residents stay in the village. As introduced in the last chapter, many rural residents in Eastern County have left their village homes for migrant work in urban areas. Most of those staying in village S were elders and minors, and it can be seen that the traditional household structure in rural China remains in this village. The traditional family structure in rural China was defined by Hsiao-tung Fei, one of the earliest and most respected sociology and anthropology researchers of village life in China, as the concept of *Chia*:

A *Chia* is essentially a family but it sometimes includes children even when they have grown and married... The most common type is that which consists of a nucleus of a married couple and several dependent patrilineal relatives (Fei, 1939, pp. 27-28).

Nowadays, a typical family in village S consists of a nucleus couple and their children, as well as the paternal parents. The nucleus couple is the main source of household income. However, most of the year the couple is absent from the village, undertaking off-farm migrant work in urban areas; usually, the couple returns only once or twice a year. The grandparents tend to stay in the village to care for the grandchildren. Sometimes, young mothers may stay for a year or two after their children are born, and then return to work. If the grandparents are not in good health, the young mother may have to stay longer in the village, taking care of her parents-in-law and children. If the grandparents have more than one son, they may live with

each son in turn. During the Spring Festival, the most important festival in China, enormous numbers of migrant workers travel from urban areas back to their rural homes, and relatives and friends also like to visit each other at that time.

Villagers from village S are most commonly involved in two types of off-farm work. One is in the building industry, and many villagers who work in this industry become skilled and versatile constructors who can perform both structural work and interior decoration. They can be involved in the construction of house foundations, walls and roofs, as well as painting, tiling and electrical work, and making simple furniture. However, in most cases, their skills have not been acquired via formal training, but have been learned through practice. However, sometimes the lack of formal training also leads to safety issues in relation to building structures. Therefore, the Chinese government has repeatedly called for enhanced management, regulation, and training in rural construction projects.<sup>6</sup>

Before the 2000s, constructors from village S usually worked on building sites in coastal provinces like Guangdong and Fujian, where the trend of urbanization prevailed earlier than in inland provinces like Sichuan. To survive in the provinces far away from home, siblings, relatives, and neighbours with good personal relations often socialise and introduce work to each other. In recent years, the development of Chengdu, Chongqing, and other inland cities around Eastern County has increased the need for constructors, and the reconstruction projects in Sichuan after the earthquake of 2008 also led to the growth of construction work. With work opportunities closer to home, a substantial number of skilled constructors from village S returned to seek work. Nowadays, many of them work in construction projects in nearby towns, counties, or cities within the province. In areas near to village S, the daily salary of an experienced constructor at the time of fieldwork of this study (2015) was about 170-220 RMB, which is not much less than the coastal regions in China. With the experience and savings they had accumulated over time, a few seasoned constructors from village S organized their own construction teams and became private contractors. These contractors are busy on construction projects in nearby rural areas, as the government's emphasis on rural development has also considerably increased the number of jobs. For instance, many of the road renewal projects in village S were carried out by contractors from the village.

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, in 1996 the central government issued the Measures to Manage the Qualification of Constructors in Villages and Towns. In 2009, the central government launched a programme to provide professional training to constructors working in villages and towns. The government has also published a series of standards and guidelines on fire and seismic safety design and construction of building in towns and rural areas.



The second type of off-farm work usually undertaken by the villagers was assembly line work in manufacturing factories. Villagers incapable of, or unwilling to do, the physically demanding work in the building industry tended to choose such work, but most of this type of work is located in the coastal regions of China far away from Sichuan, and the payment is usually not as much as for skilled constructors.

Besides migrant work, another important source of household income in village S is land rent. As introduced in Chapter 2, according to LML, village households have the right to contract farmland rent-free with the village collective. The contract lasts for at least thirty years, and during this time the village household can sub-let the contracted land to other individuals or organizations for agricultural use. In village S, the current land contract between villagers and the collective was made in 1997, and will last until 2027. Village S has about 710 *mu* (about 47.3 hectares) of farmland in total, about 420 *mu* within which is flat farmland, and 290 *mu* is sloping farmland. According to villagers, each adult member of the village collective can contract about 0.6 *mu* of flat farmland and 0.4 *mu* of sloping land. Depending on the household population, a family can usually contract about 2-5 *mu* land in total. Due to the mountainous topography of village S in Eastern County (seen Figure 5.1), the farmland contracted by village households is usually comprised of several parcels of land, rather than a whole unit. This arrangement ensures that each household equally shares land resources of varying productivity.



Figure 5.1 The mountainous topography of village S

The majority of the farmland in village S has been sub-leased to companies and individuals to develop private businesses. The sub-letting of land in village S started in 2001, when a private company was introduced by the township government to rent 350 *mu* (about 141.6 hectares) of land, on which it planned to develop bamboo shoots and produce relevant

commodities. The company had signed a long-term sublease contract with villagers, proposed to last until 2027. However, the bamboo shoots business was unsuccessful, and the company ended the land contract only five years later.

In spite of an unsuccessful early attempt, the large-scale sub-letting of land in village S continues. From 2001 to 2015, more than six companies and individual entrepreneurs have come to the village to develop various kinds of business, including growing edible aloe vera, producing silk, making wine, developing a plant nursery, and promoting rural tourism. Some of these businesses failed, such as the bamboo and silk, while others survive. Now, the biggest sub-contractor of land is a plant nursery company, which rents more than 500 *mu* of land for growing landscape plants and 120 *mu* land to produce edible Chinese toon sprouts. An entrepreneur from town B has rented 20 *mu* land and two fish ponds to run a rural tourism business since 2009, which provides guests with organic dishes and leisure activities, such as fishing and mah-jong, a popular pastime in Sichuan. A villager entrepreneur founded a plum wine company, taking over the factory used by the bamboo business, and rents 10 *mu* of surrounding land to process the plums, which are collected from village S and two nearby villages.



Figure 5.2 Left: A corner of the plant nursery; Right: The fishing deck and houses of the rural tourism business

Annual rent received from releasing one *mu* of flat farmland is equal to the market price of 325kg rice. Referring to the rice price in recent years, the annual rent is about 900-1000 RMB per *mu*. Sloping farmland, which is not as productive and harder to access from the main village roads, is priced at about half of the rent of flat land, which is about 400-700 RMB per *mu*. The land parcels not subleased are usually used by villagers to grow vegetables and spices for family consumption, as shown in Figure 5.3.



Figure 5.3 A villager growing vegetables on sloping farmland

In the interviews for this study, the village cadres estimated that the annual income per capita in village S is about 7,000-8,000 RMB. Two official reports made by the township government in 2012 and 2014 advocate that the annual income per capita in the village S is “over 9,800 RMB”, or “about 10,000 RMB”. In spite these discrepancies, the aforementioned estimations indicate that village S has a relatively good economic situation in prefecture D, as the average income per capita in the prefecture was 7,047 RMB in 2012 (Statistical Bureau of Sichuan and NBS Survey Office in Sichuan, 2013). As mentioned above, some of the major land contractors are introduced by the township and county government. In the past decade, in several rural development programmes initiated by government, the village has been repeatedly given model village status. For instance, it was selected as the national model of a civilized village atmosphere (*wenming cun*) in 2005, the prefectural model village of BNSC in 2007, and the provincial model village of greening in 2011.

#### 5.1.2 *The village built environment before the new development*

Village S is about 2.4 km north of town B. As shown in Figure 4.6, the village is divided into two parts by one of the two highways that cross the township. Commuting between the village and the town along the highway takes about 10 minutes by the countryside bus and is 30 minutes’ walk.

Most villages in the mountainous Eastern County are made of several scattered residential quarters, usually numbered as *xiaozu*. Village S has six *xiaozu*, each of which consists of over thirty to a hundred households. These scattered residential settlements are connected by a village road system. As mentioned in the last chapter, the government began to support village road projects following the initiation of BNSC. The roads in village S, which were mud and stone in the past, have been gradually paved and renewed with cement since 2006. In 2015, the last section of the village road system was almost complete.



The renewed village road system ensures most of the households have vehicle access to the highway that crosses the village. Motorcycles are the most common vehicles owned by the residents of village S, but in recent years a few households have purchased cars. The use of vehicles offers villagers more convenience to approach public services in the town. Moreover, to the villagers working as constructors in the nearby region, the convenience of commuting between home and workplaces is also important.

Most houses in village S were built after the 1980s, using modern building materials like cement and bricks, and covered by wooden-structured roofs. Since the villagers have worked as constructors in different regions across China, they have brought back diverse house styles. In general, popular house styles in recent years have little similarity with traditional houses, clearly seen in the new type of front façade. Usually, the front façade is taken by villagers as the most important side of their house. In some cases, it is the only side of house façade which would be decorated.



Figure 5.4 The popular styles of front façades of houses in village S

As illustrated in Fig. 5.4, the popular styles of house façade in village S are usually made up by three sections. On the top is a pitched roof and, unlike traditional pitched roofs which usually have long-extended eaves, the front eave of new rural houses is often hidden by a short parapet at the front. This design hides the roof from the perspective on the ground, so that the house looks like a modern flat-roof house, unless observed from a distance (see Figure 5.5). The middle section of the front façade shows even stronger influences of modern-style housing. Villagers have used architectural elements which belong more to western architecture rather than traditional Chinese houses, such as curved balconies, balusters and columns, arched windows, and colourful wall mosaics. Compared to the top and middle sections, the bottom section of the front facade has less decoration. The space under the front balcony of a modern village house has some similarities with the space under the eaves of a traditional house. The semi-open space stays dry in the rainy weather of eastern Sichuan and is open to the road or public yard in front of the house, and for this reason it is favoured by villagers either as a working place, or a place for daily social activities.



Figure 5.5 The front façades of two houses in village S, viewed from near and far





Figure 5.6 Left: villagers using the space under the eaves of a traditional house (photo by an author in another village in Eastern County); Right: villagers using the space under the front balcony of a house built in the 2000s in village S

There are a few particular cases which embrace more modern characteristics. These dwellings are usually the properties of the wealthiest village households. The building material, house plans, and external and internal decorations of these dwellings resemble western-style villas rather than traditional houses in the Chinese countryside. As shown in Fig. 5.7 below, columns resembling Corinthian order have been placed on the porch of a grand house in village S. The interior space of the house has been decorated with a marble table, leather sofa and crystal chandeliers, none of which belong to the architectural language of the traditional Chinese countryside home. Actually, these grand houses are also called by villagers as *bieshu*, which refers to the luxury countryside homes owned by urban dwellers, rather than the dwellings of villagers.



Figure 5.7 The exterior and interior decorations of a “villa” in village S

As illustrated in the last chapter, following the instruction of the provincial government, the “Project of Beautiful Environment” has been carried out in Eastern County since 2010,

and village S has been involved. More than a hundred village houses in the village have been redecorated in the style appreciated by the government. Besides refurbishing the village houses, the project also upgraded some public facilities and the sanitary infrastructure in the village. A public square with outdoor sports facilities has been built in front of the office of the village committee and to one side of the highway. A waste collection point was also built beside the highway for waste produced in village. This waste is taken by garbage trucks and handled in the disposal plant of town B. The refurbishment of village houses and the cost to run the waste disposal system is funded by the county government.



Figure 5.8 Village houses after being refurbished by the “Project of Beautiful Environment”



Figure 5.9 The public square and outdoor sports facilities built by the “Project of Beautiful Environment”

As shown in Figure 5.9, the public square in village S provides a playground for children, but there are rarely any public activities for other members of the village. The village has no clan-based groups or cultural organizations, and therefore no lineage temples or community centres. During important festivals, such as the Spring Festival, villagers celebrate with their families in their own homes. The only occasions that might involve the participation of neighbours are weddings and funerals, which usually take place in the public yard in front of the host’s house. On normal days, villagers with spare time and money may go to the market or the mah-jong house in the town; otherwise, they stay at home watching TV (electricity and broadcasting systems have been in the village for more than a decade).

## **5.2 The process of development in village S**

### **5.2.1 *Actors involved***

Several actors have been involved in the development in village S. Each of them has carried different roles in the development process. Before moving to demonstrate the development process in detail, it is necessary to brief the identity of the actors.

#### **County government**

As introduced in the last chapter, among all levels of government in China, county government is the executive operator which implements the policies of new villages. National policies are issued by the central government. Following the call of the central government, the provincial government has prepared ear-marked funds for developing new villages, which are allocated to the county government. Specific tasks for the development, such as the building style and number of new villages, are also allocated from the provincial level to the prefectural level, and lastly to the county level of government.

#### **Design agency**

Being assigned the aforementioned task of developing certain numbers of new villages, in 2011, the government of Eastern County initiated its first two pilot developments. The county government contracted at least seven design agencies for the planning and design of new villages and houses for developments across the county. These design agencies are private and professional companies which provide planning and architectural design consultancy to both government and individual clients.

In the implementation of new villages in Eastern County, the two pilot developments were contracted to a planning and design institution which had recently worked with the county government on the 'Projects of Beautiful Environment'. In this project, the institution was one of several counterparts contracted by the county government to design new façades to refurbish old village houses. The reputation and quality of work produced by these agencies was crucial when the county government was considering using planning and design agencies for the development of new villages. According to a county official, "the previous design works of the institution which has been contracted with the two pilot developments of new villages was particularly appreciated by the head of the county government" (Interview\_2015040703). The county government also highlighted its collaboration with the reputed design agencies in the reports to high-level government and the public as an approval of promoting 'scientific' development.



### **Contractor of construction**

Building activities in rural areas are usually contracted to local-based teams of constructors led by individual construction contractors. Within a township, there can be more than a dozen such construction teams, and the personal network of the contractor is important for the business. For instance, if a village household would like to develop a new home, it may contact a construction contractor who is a family acquaintance or has worked with someone known by the family. In contrast to the core status of the contractor, who's the manager of the construction team, constructors are regarded as the secondary elements of the team, as the in-and-out flows of constructors are very frequent. Most of the constructors came from the nearby rural areas. Their remuneration depends on the days and types of work they take on the construction site. As noted above, a skilled constructor can earn about 200 RMB a day, while an unskilled labourer earns much less. When there is no ongoing construction, the constructors do not get paid, so some constructors seek opportunities in other teams, or go back to farming, as most of them have rural origins.

### **Village cadres**

In the majority of villages in China, the village party secretary (*cun zhishu*) and the director of the village committee (*cun zhuren*) are the two major village cadres in charge of village management. Village cadres receive remuneration from local government, and therefore their work usually includes supporting local government to implement various types of rural policies and projects, from family control to infrastructure development. On the other hand, as residents of the village, neighbours, friends, and in many cases relatives of many villagers, village cadres need to put themselves in the position of the villagers as well. As one of the two main cadres of village S said:

The higher-level officials come along, carry out development in the village and leave. But we (the village cadres) have to stay in the village. We can't push villagers too far, otherwise we would not have a good time living here.

The cadres' consideration for their future life and work in the village means that they are likely to act as mediators of any conflict between the state and villagers, as well as between different interest groups of villagers.

### **Villagers**

In the context of rural China, the most general definition of the term 'villagers' is the residents of a village. A more strict definition of the term would be the registered members of the village collective. Only the registered members can share the benefits related to collective assets, such as the right to contract free farmland with the collective. Non-collective members,

such as entrepreneurs from outside, can only contract land from the collective members who agree to sub-lease their land tenure.

Village S has more than a hundred years of history, and therefore some families have been residents for several generations. In addition, the village has a very small number of migrants who moved here in recent years. The aforementioned entrepreneur who ran the rural tourism business in the village was a newcomer. He spent about half of his time living in the village since the business started in 2009.

Due to the development of the new village, the villagers in village S can be further divided into the residents of the new built-up area and the old residential clusters in the village. Identified by the place in which they live, the residents of village S can be divided into villagers who moved into the new village, and the ones who have proximity to the new village or live far away. Moreover, as explained in the following sections of the chapter, the development also divided the villagers into different interest groups positively or negatively affected by the development, or who appear to be not significantly influenced by the development. In sum, in the following description and analysis of the development process and outcomes, the present study avoids broadly referring to the involved residents of village S using the homogeneous term ‘villagers’. Instead, it classifies the villagers into different interest groups in terms of how their interest may have been affected by the development.

### ***5.2.2 Background and initiation of the development***

As introduced in the last chapter, with the provincial government’s call for the development of new villages, the prefectural government of city D required each of the six subordinate county-level governments to implement at least 11 new villages every year since 2011. There was no precedent development of new villages for the county officials to learn from. From that moment, higher-level government provided a few general objectives and guidelines for the development of new villages, such as to enhance formal village planning and house design, upgrade infrastructure in rural areas, and transform the appearance of village houses following certain aesthetic standards.

Under these general objectives and quantified tasks of development given by the higher-level government, the government of Eastern County had to work out applicable approaches to implement new villages. In 2011, Eastern County began its first two pilot developments of new villages. As introduced in the last chapter, Eastern County was not selected by the provincial government as a model county in which to implement BNSC until 2013. Therefore,

the development of new villages starting in 2011 was mainly dependent on funds from the county government. Village S was selected as the locality for one of the developments.

The selection of development locality was initiated by the county government and finalized with the involvement of the design agency. Firstly, the county government made a list of the villages it considered suitable for development. According to a county government official in charge of the development, the enrolled villages were those that had advantages of transportation and economy, and were therefore regarded as having significant potential to ‘radiate’ positive influences on the surrounding areas and promote regional rural development in the county (Interview\_2015031602). However, none of the officials in the interviews could further explain how the radiation effect might happen. There was no formal investigation and analysis to support the selection of the development site. Therefore, it is not clear how the county government came to the view that the chosen villages would have remarkable and positive influences on the regional rural development.

It was confirmed that the government consulted with the design agency to determine the final locality of development from the villages on the list, as the county government and design agency made the decision during a quick field trip. The designer who participated in the site selection explained the factors for the final decision as below:

They (the local officials) viewed it (the development) as a political achievement. Therefore, the selected village must be one that could display the greatest effects of development...In my opinion, village S has such potential. The big tree in the village was a remarkable landscape...Besides, the village has a generally good economic situation (Interview\_2015031404).

The designer’s words indicate that the way in which the effects of the new village might be displayed was a key concern of the local officials in the selection of a development site. The village environment is obviously a tangible outcome of development which is directly displayed. The existing built environment of village S was a factor that resulted in its selection by the officials and designer. As noted above, most of the village houses had been refurbished not long ago. The internal and external roads of the village also enable the development outcomes to be easily accessed. Moreover, there is a nice, tall tree in the village, which can be seen from the highway as a landmark. Villagers believe the tree is more than a hundred years old, and it perfectly resembles the picturesque scenery of the traditional Chinese countryside (see Figure 5.10).



Figure 5.10 Left: The old tree in village S; Right: The image of a big tree in the countryside used in the design document

Source: Right: The planning and design document for the development in village S, translated by the author

In sum, the initial stage of the development of new villages includes decisions to confirm the task and locality of development. New village development creates new built-up areas, in contrast to a village refurbishment project. The pressure from higher-level government has pushed the county government to set out the development task. The county government and the assigned design agency were the main decision makers in the selection of development localities. The major concerns for the selection include the village's economic condition, accessibility, and existing built environment.

### 5.2.3 *Making the planning and design of the new village*

The planning and design of the new village in the development of village S started with a tight agenda. Assigned the work of planning and design in June, 2011, the county government asked the design agency to submit the document of applicable design by August. The agenda was decided by the county government. Meanwhile, the government required the planning and design to be in line with the objectives of BNSC and the provincial government's requirements for implementing new villages in the model *pian*. The county government also set out some specific objectives, for instance, it declared the development of housing for 30 village households in the first phase of development, and 20 in the second phase.

An upcoming governmental meeting at the end of the year, in which the prefectural government of city D would inspect the county government's performance in implementing new villages and new rural compounds, might be the most apparent reason for the tight agenda and broad objectives of the village planning and design (Interviews\_20150316001;

20150314005; 20150318007). To catch the date of the meeting, the process of planning and design was therefore compressed to less than three months, with the four stages shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Timeline of the making of village planning and design of village S

Date	Progress	Agencies Involved
4 <sup>th</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> June, 2011	Field visit and data collection for making the planning and design	Design agency, county government, village cadres
19 <sup>th</sup> June, 2011	Make the field visit report and the conceptual planning and design	Design agency, county government
12 <sup>th</sup> July, 2011	The first draft of planning and design	Design agency, county government
30 <sup>th</sup> July, 2011	The second draft of planning and design	Design agency, county government
31 <sup>st</sup> Aug, 2011	The final planning and design documents	Design agency, county government

After accepting the tight agenda, the design agency made a one-day visit on site, and roughly investigated the built environment in village S, including the transportation system, infrastructure for public welfares, waste disposal, energy, and water supply. The field visit was accompanied by village cadres, but did not involve in-depth interviews with villagers. Such flying visits may not be sufficient to gain a deep understanding of a place, but it had collected some elements that were later used in the planning and design process.

The field visit report made by the design agency roughly investigated the built environment in village S, including the transportation system, education and waste disposal facilities, energy, and water supply. The field visit was accompanied by village cadres, but did not involve in-depth interviews with villagers. The report concluded that the development of the new village should improve the village economy, infrastructure, and public services in village S. These objectives apparently went in line with the policies of new villages issued by every level of government. As introduced above, there had been a private business of rural tourism in the village since 2009. The field visit report states that the development of the new village should consider enlarging this tourism, to improve the village economy in general. More specifically, the report suggested developing tourism-centred agriculture and service facilities, and organizing educational and cultural events for tourists and villagers.

In response to the field visit report's concerns about the development of rural tourism and village economy, the village planning and design therefore took rural tourism as a specific approach to improve the economic situation in village S. It planned several zones with

different main functions in the new village. As shown in Figure 5.11, some of the zones were planned as agricultural zones to produce specialties that would be consumed by rural tourism. Others zones were residential or for public and tourism uses, which covers visiting routes for pedestrian and vehicle, parking plots, a new waste disposal system, several public squares and playgrounds, tourist shops, a nursery, and a village library with exhibition rooms displaying the history and specialties of the village.

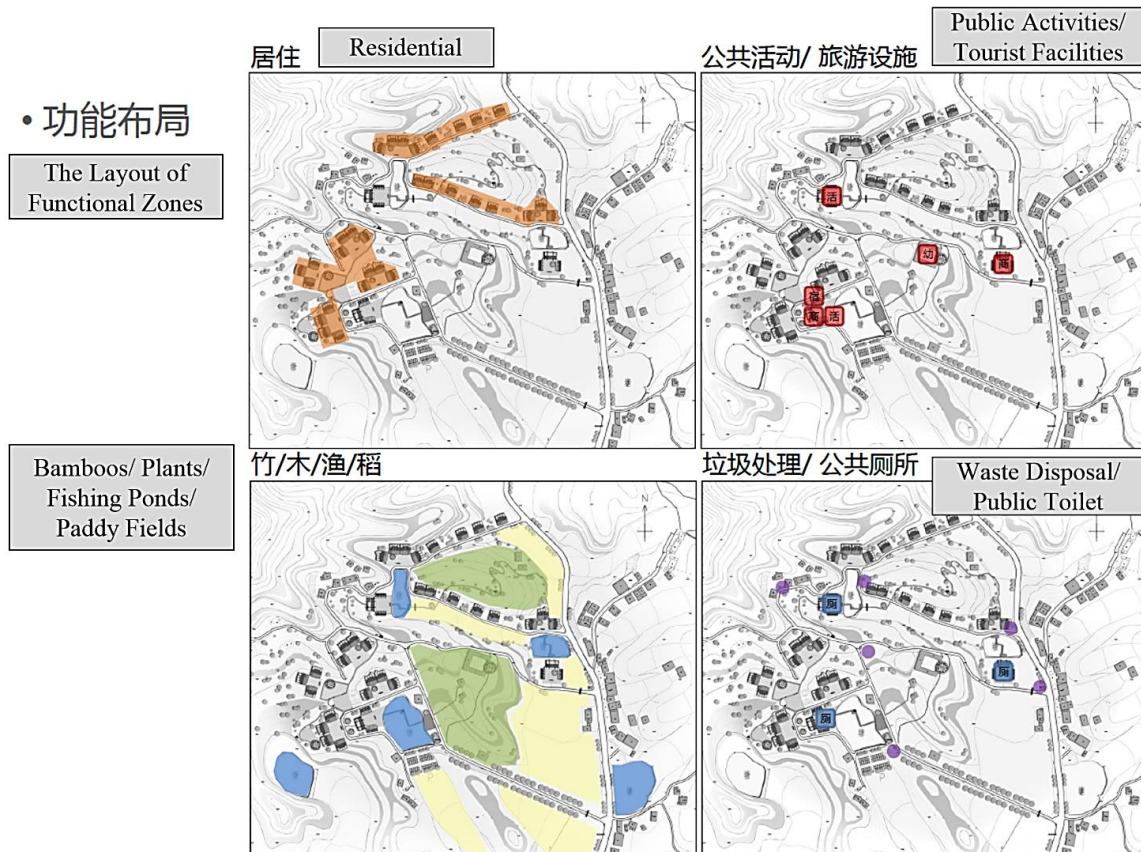


Figure 5.11 The village design for the development of village S

Source: The planning and design document for the development in village S, translated by the author

As shown in Figure 5.12, the government and design agency chose to develop the new village in an area centred around the big tree and existing tourism business in village S. The majority of the planned area did not overlap with the existing built-up areas in the village. This means the development did not require large scale demolition of old houses for new ones. Most of the planned new buildings kept distance with existing buildings. Some old buildings were even planned to be redeveloped into new public buildings. For instance, a vacant old school house located behind the big tree was planned as a new village nursery.





Figure 5.12 Existing residential quarters in village S and the planned area for the development of new village

Source: Drawn by the author, based on a Google Map image and the planning and design document for the development in village S

Moreover, the history and heritage of the old built environment of village S was taken as an advantage to promote the development of rural tourism. The village planning and design received much attention in terms of ‘recovering’ the appearance of historical houses and landscape of the village. The most unique relics of built environment in the village were three Chinese arches. In the annals of Eastern County, the arches were built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as official praise for three virtuous widows in the village. According to these annals, the arches were made of stone columns and beams, which were decorated with murals and reliefs reflecting the righteous behaviour of the widows and their sons. However, none of the arches survived in the Cultural Revolution during the late 1960s to late 1970s.

Nowadays, some parts of the broken stone columns and beams from the arches can be found in a fishing pond in the village. Besides these relics, the arches also left a few ‘duplicates’ in the village built environment. The first type of duplicate is the decorations on some gravestones. Figure 5.13 shows the top of a stone gravestone in village S, which is a miniature of a Chinese arch. Dates carved on these gravestones show that they were built not

long after the original arches. There are several gravestones with similar decoration in the village, and all were built before the arches were destroyed.



Figure 5.13 The ‘echoes’ of the arches in village S: the sculpture on the gravestone (left), the wall of the old courtyard house (middle), the wall at one entrance of the school house (right)

The wall of a hundred-year-old courtyard house in the village also has a unique shape not commonly seen in nearby regions, which is believed by villagers to be an imitation of the arches. The walls at the entrance of the village school house also have a similar shape to the arches. The school house was built in the late 1970s, but in spite of being built after the arches had been destroyed, villagers affirmed that the school entrance walls were built based on older villagers’ memory of the arches. Therefore, they have a shape that clearly refers to the arches.

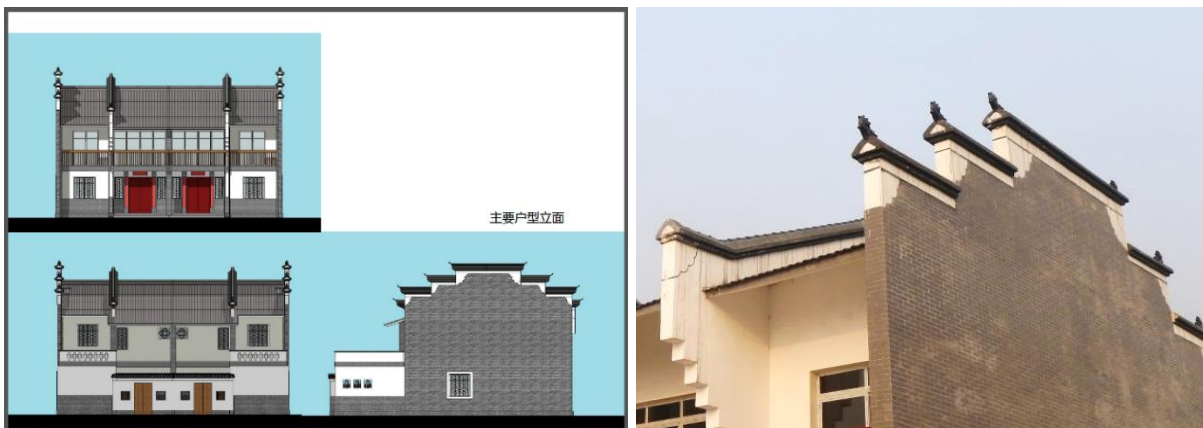


Figure 5.14 Left: House façade design for the development in village S, Right: Walls of a new house built in practice

Source: Left: The planning and design document for the development in village S

As shown in Figure 5.14, the design of new houses in village S tried to echo the arches. The village design also suggests rebuilding the three arches. As introduced in the last chapter, the ‘eastern Sichuan style’ is the aesthetic standard of new rural houses promoted by the government of Eastern County. The house design for the development of village S also uses the colours and decorations that resemble the traditional eastern Sichuan houses. The design



further claims to adapt the arrangement of the floor plan of traditional courtyard house. Therefore, every new house has a courtyard, and each cluster of new houses is arranged around a public yard.

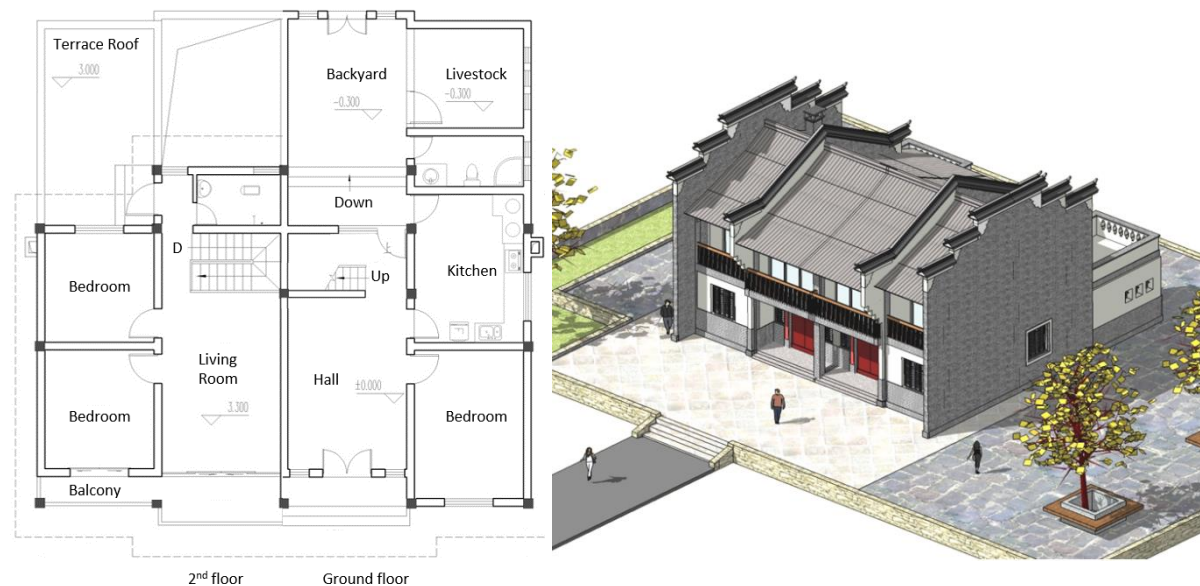


Figure 5.15 The floor plans and appearance of the new house designed for the development in village S

Source: The planning and design document for the development in village S (translated by the author)

Figure 5.15 shows the floor plans and appearance of the new dwellings in village S. All the dwellings are semi-detached two-storey houses. The main entrance hall, as well as a bedroom, has been put in the front half of the ground floor. According to the design document, the entrance hall resembles the *tangwu* in a traditional house in rural China, which is the main room usually used by the household to enshrine the spirit of ancestors, meet visitors, and hold weddings and funerals (see Figure 5.16). The bedroom next to the hall is designed for elders or other family members who may find it difficult to use the stairs. The rear half of the ground floor consists of stairs, a kitchen, a toilet, and a room to store farm tools, or raise livestock and fowl. These rooms are organized around a back courtyard. On the first floor, there are two bedrooms and a living room with a balcony. The balcony covers a half-open space. As introduced above, this kind of half-open space is commonly seen in many of the traditional and modern houses in the village. A flat roof terrace designed for drying crops and vegetables is placed at the back half of the first floor. In general, the house designers seem to believe that such an arrangement of space would suit the village family structure and household production.



Figure 5.16 Left: An old villager enshrining ancestors in the *tangwu* of her house (built before 1950s); Right: A shrine in the main room of a house built in the 1990s

In sum, the village planning and design made for the development of village S claims to improve several aspects of village life and revive the traditional spatial characteristics of the village built environment. However, how the village life will be improved, what the new built environment looks like, and all the other sorts of decisions made in the village planning and design did not involve the participation of the community. The planning and design process of the development of the new village was almost solely handled by the county government and the design agency. More specifically, the government played the predominant role handling the development agenda and objectives. Framed by this agenda and the requirements of government, the task of the design agency was to work out a formal village plan and design, which could be technically turned into a new built environment in practice.

#### 5.2.4 *The construction and allocation of new space*

As soon as the planning of the new village and design of new houses had been worked out, the construction started, and the whole process lasted about five months, from August to December, 2011. Finally, only a small part of the planned area was implemented, as shown in Figure 5.17. One of the three public buildings in the village design was built. The building was designed as the tourist and reception centre of the new village. In practice, the building was identified as a village office building and cultural centre, which is made of rooms labelled as the offices of the village committee, library, clinic, and multi-media study room, etc. The development also delivered fourteen new dwellings, which are less than half of the planned first phase of development. A wooden pavilion, which frames the best view of the built-up area, was placed at the south side of the fishing pond opposite to the public building. The development also provided some outdoor sports facilities surrounding the public building.

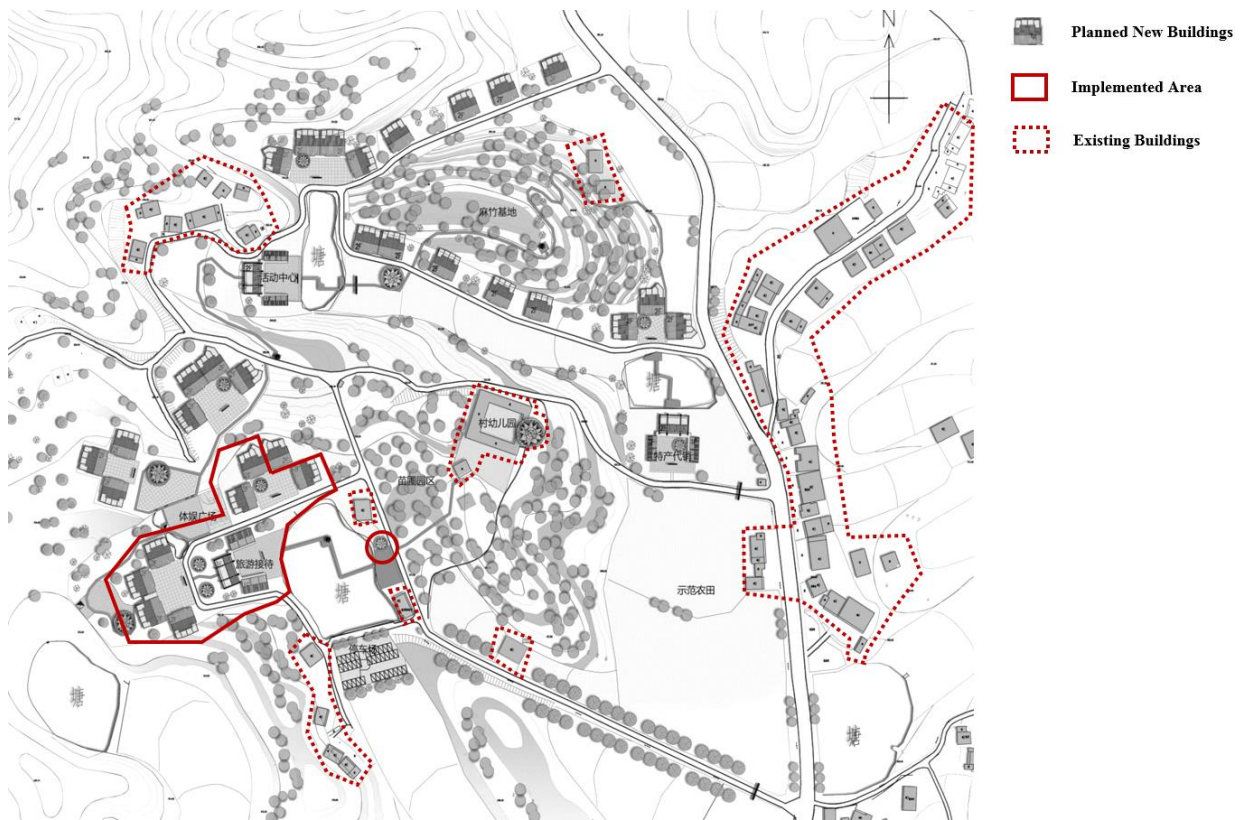


Figure 5.17 The design of the new village in village S and the implemented area (within the red line)

Source: The planning and design document for the development of village S (the redlines drawn by author)

The county government played the major role of organizing the financial and human resources required for the construction. It contracted the construction office of a local contractor based in township B. The contractor admitted that his good personal relationship with the county officials brought him the work (Interview\_2015040706). The budget of the development has never been published, but according to county officials and the contractor, the county government fully subsidized the construction fees for the public buildings and infrastructures in the development, as well as part of the fees for the new houses (Interview\_2015031602; 2015040706). In total, the subsidy provided by the government covered the majority of the construction cost.

Each house owner paid 80,000 RMB for their new house. The payments for new houses were collected and managed by the village cadres. The villagers estimated that building a village house with similar floor area, materials, and structure in the private house project held by individual households would have cost at least 20,000 RMB more. Villagers, officials and the contractor of the construction affirmed that both the subsidy from the government and the collective form of construction reduced the construction costs (Interview\_2015031602; 2015032015; 2015040706).

For house applicants, getting a new house from the development required fewer procedures than developing a house by themselves. As introduced in Chapter 2, those village households who want to build a new house need to apply for a housing plot, and this application has to be approved first by the village committee, and then by the local government. Each village household can have only one housing plot according to the land law. Tearing down the old house and rebuild a new one on the same plot can reduce the procedures for applying a housing plot, but the household developer still needs to submit a formal house design and construction drawing to the government. This means villagers have to work with the design agency and constructors.

The aforementioned procedures for villagers to get a new house were waived if they could purchase one from the development in village S, because it is the county officials and village cadres, rather than the house buyers, who have to ensure that the procedures are correct. As one of the house buyers said, ‘the development has provided ready-to-buy houses and saved us the effort of going through burdensome procedures by ourselves (Interview\_2015031812).

Viewing the development as an opportunity to get a new house at a reduced price and with fewer procedures, more than 120 households in village S applied for new houses. However, as introduced above, only fourteen new houses were built, and so the applicants had to be selected.

The cadres claimed that the major criterion for the selection was the previous housing condition of the applicants: priority would be given to applicants living in old and shabby houses. An unspoken rule for the selection was also the ability to afford the 80,000 RMB house price. Based on these two rules, the village cadres nominated the applicants and held an open hearing with villagers. In spite of the criterion openly stated by the cadres and the open hearing, not all the villagers were convinced by the selection. There were rumours that the house applicants with good personal relationships with the village cadres were more likely to be chosen. However, at least on the surface, the cadres displayed equity in the allocation of new houses. It was found that this way of house allocation could benefit the village households with an urgent need to upgrade their housing, but with a lack of human capital to organize an individual housing project by themselves.

The Luo family is one such village household, comprised of the grandmother, the nucleus couple, and their two daughters. The family used to live in the old wooden house shown in Figure 5.18, which was part of a courtyard house that belonged to a landlord before



the 1950s. After the 1990s, when the two granddaughters were born, to afford the living of the family, the nucleus couple of the family migrated for work. The grandma of the family took care of the two granddaughters in the village. Now, the husband is an experienced constructor in a constructors' team and the wife works as the cook for the team. Their busy jobs have accumulated the family some savings, which are enough for a new village house but not a house in the town. On the other hand, the busy jobs of the couple left them little time to renew the family house by themselves. As introduced above, conducting a housing project usually takes a family enormous time and energy to prepare for the procedures and work on the site with constructors. When the Luo's heard about the development of the new village, they applied for a new house at once. The grandma told me that the family was satisfied about the criterion made by the village cadres to select housing applicants. As she said,

There were many quarrels about house allocation among the house applicants. Everyone just wanted to take advantage of it [the development]. But no one doubted that my family should be selected. Our old house was one the worst of all the village houses. And we never delayed the payment for the house. A few people said bad things about the cadres. I would say the cadres acted in the right way. Many others also feel the same as me. But, you know, the unselected [villagers] of course have complaints. They are jealous. You had better not take their words seriously. (Interview\_2015031710)



Figure 5.18 Left: The Luo family's old house (middle); Right: The Luo family's new house

Besides having open criteria for house applicants, the display of equity was also indicated in the last step of house allocation. Before this step, the selected households did not know which of the fourteen houses would be allocated to them. This final allocation was done by drawing straws: one by one, the selected villagers picked the number of their house from the drawer. The random allocation led to no more rumours against the cadres, but this did not mean the villagers were totally satisfied with the new houses. How the villagers transformed the new houses to satisfy their physical and psychological demands from their new home is introduced in the following section.

### 5.2.5 *Using and transforming the built environment*

As introduced above, a public building is located at the centre of the new built-up area in village S. The building has rooms labelled as the offices of the village committee, library, clinic, and common rooms for villagers. The government has equipped these rooms with essential equipment, such as multi-media devices and books. Several official reports and promotional videos (see Figure 5.19) affirm that such public buildings provide villagers with learning opportunities, and enrich the cultural activities in villages.



Figure 5.19 Left: A snapshot of an official propaganda video titled as “villagers of village S using the multi-media room in the new public building to study agricultural technologies”.

Source: Eastern County government

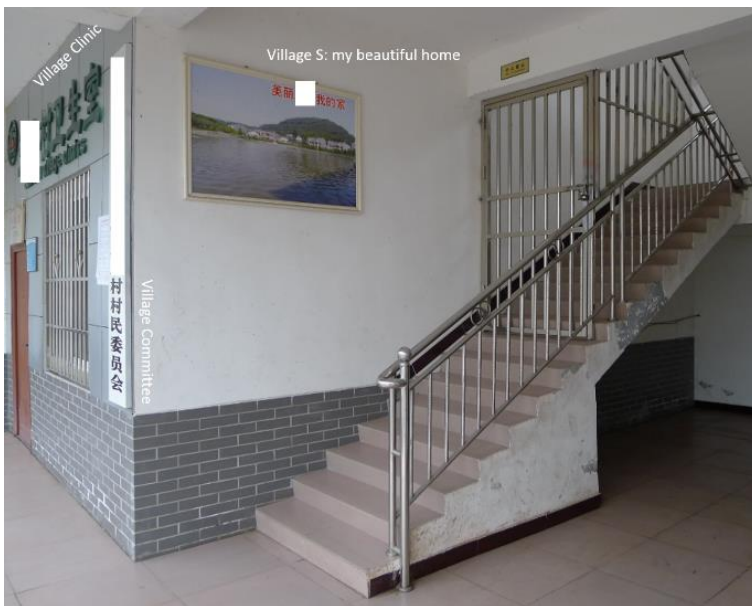


Figure 5.20 The public building in village S locked by the gates which were added

Source: author’s photograph, translated by the author

However, the fieldwork of this study found no social and cultural activities being organized in the building. As already noted, there are no clan-based groups or cultural organizations that would organize public activities in the village, and this situation has not changed since the development of the public building. Correspondingly, villagers show little interest in visiting the building, and tend to use it only as the offices of the village cadres, rather than a community centre that provide services to villagers. As one of the interviewed villagers said: ‘Why would I go there? No one goes there unless he/she has anything to do with the cadres’ (Interview\_2015031812). The lack of villagers’ involvement left the building out of the neighbourhood watch, and not long after the rooms had been equipped, some of the devices were stolen. In response to the incident, two stainless-steel gates have been installed on the building, which was designed without gates and could be openly accessed by all. Being locked most of the time, the so-called public building is further disconnected from the public.

As seen in the Methodology chapter, the present study has mapped villagers’ new homes, recorded the transformation of the house, and investigated the reasons for the transformation. Nine out of the fourteen households of the new village were visited, but five families were out at work and therefore absent during my field visits. Nevertheless, some of the changes of the inaccessible houses could be observed from the outside.

It was found that nearly all of the fourteen new houses were reshaped by house transformation projects conducted by the house owners. The house owner of the only house left intact was away for migrant work and had not yet moved in to the new home. However, it could be seen that he had stored some building materials beside the house, such as bricks, which would likely be used for house transformation in the future.

Many parts of the new houses had been transformed with various measures. As summarised in Table 5.2, the most commonly changed parts of the new houses include the roof terrace, balconies, and back courtyard. It can be observed that with only one exception, which was apparently not yet finished, all the house owners had covered the courtyard at the rear side of the ground floor with a room added on the first floor. The roof terrace in most houses is usually covered by a sloping iron roof or 1-2 rooms. According to villagers, the open courtyard and terrace is a waste of space and unsuitable for the rainy weather in Eastern County. Therefore, they chose to turn the open space into rooms. Many villagers also preferred to have more bedrooms, and sometimes advocated planning the bedrooms as space for their children or grandchildren, or as a guest room for visitors during festivals. However, the younger generations usually do not live in the village, and visitors may not come more

than once or twice a year. It can be seen in the grandest “villa” in the village that usually only one out of the six bedrooms in the house was being used. This spacious new home was more like the villagers’ display of a wealthy life and *mianzi*, the representation of reputation and social capital.

Table 5.2 House transformations undertaken by the owners of the new houses

Transformation of the new house		House Number													
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Cover the back courtyard	- with a flat roof terrace - with a room added upstairs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cover the roof terrace	- with a sloping steel roof - with a room added upstairs	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	×	×	✓	×		✓	×
Transform the balconies	- balcony of bedroom	×	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
	- balcony of living room	×	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Add stairs to the attic		×	✓	N	×	✓	✓	×	N	N	×	×	N	N	×
Change room functions		✓	✓	N	✓	✓	✓	✓	N	N	✓	✓	N	N	✓
Open new windows		×	✓	×	×	✓	✓	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Change doors/ window frames/ other components		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
The year of transformation (20xx/ to be continued)		12	15	14	13	15	14	12	13	TBC	12	13	TBC	TBC	12

(The symbol ✓ means the part of new house has been changed, × means the part is intact, N means the situation is unknown)

House owners are also keen to add or replace building components, such as window frames and doors on their new home. The popular choice of the most households was for components made of shiny stainless steel, such as stainless steel front doors and balcony fences, which have a significantly different appearance to the wooden-coloured components designated by the government and design agency.

The main functions of interior space set out in the house design had also been largely changed by the house owners. The main hall, which was designed as a very important space, had been commonly used for parking or storage. In all of the new houses, the room designed to raise livestock had been turned into the kitchen. As introduced above, agricultural production is no longer the main source of income for most of the households in village S. None of the house owners of the new village kept livestock. The family in House No.7 was the only family to raise fowl in the new village, but it still chose to transform the courtyard. Outdoor space for raising the fowl had been acquired by fencing a space behind the housing plot.



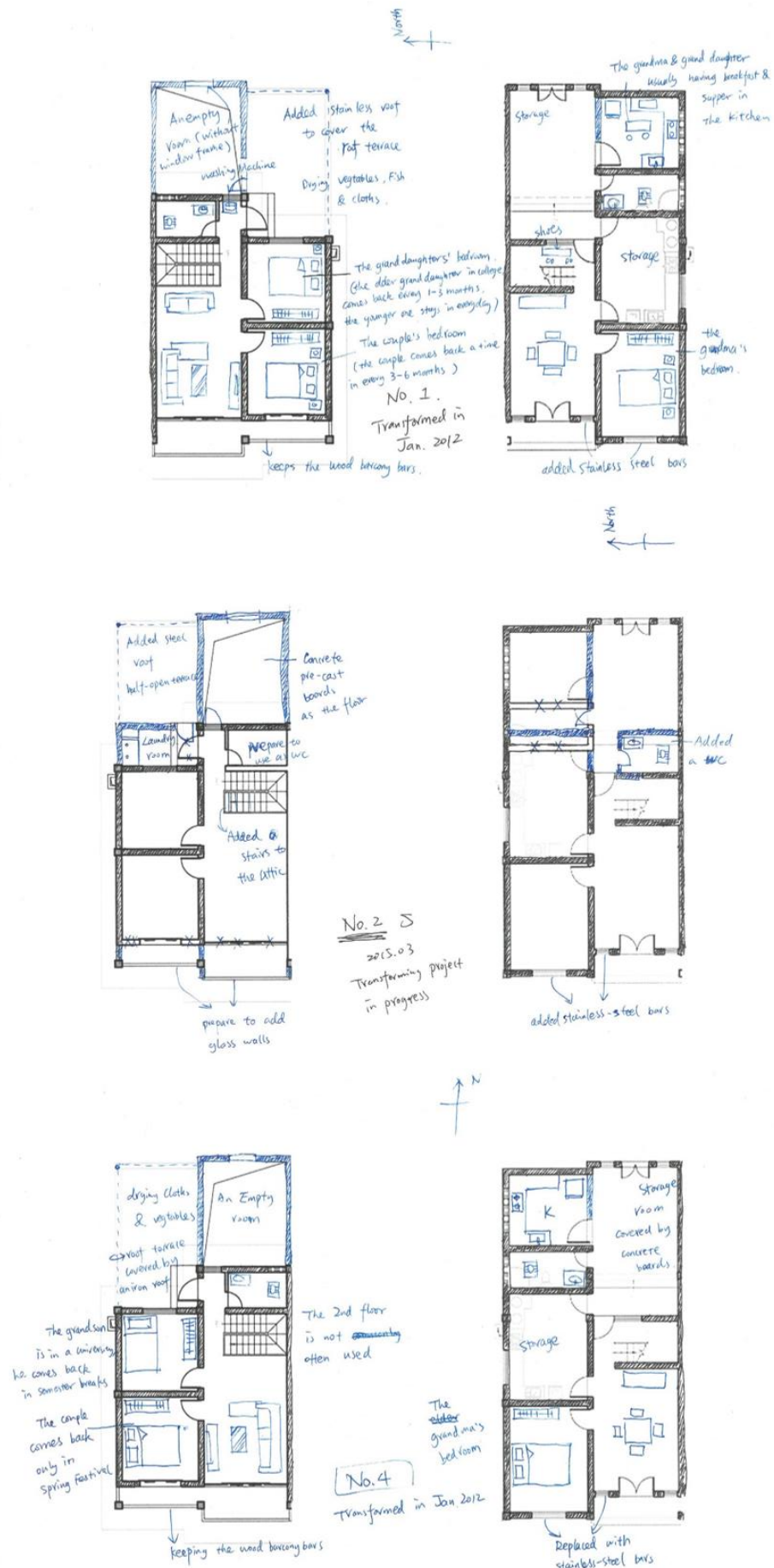


Figure 5.21 Floor plans and transformations of House 1, 2 and 4 in the new village

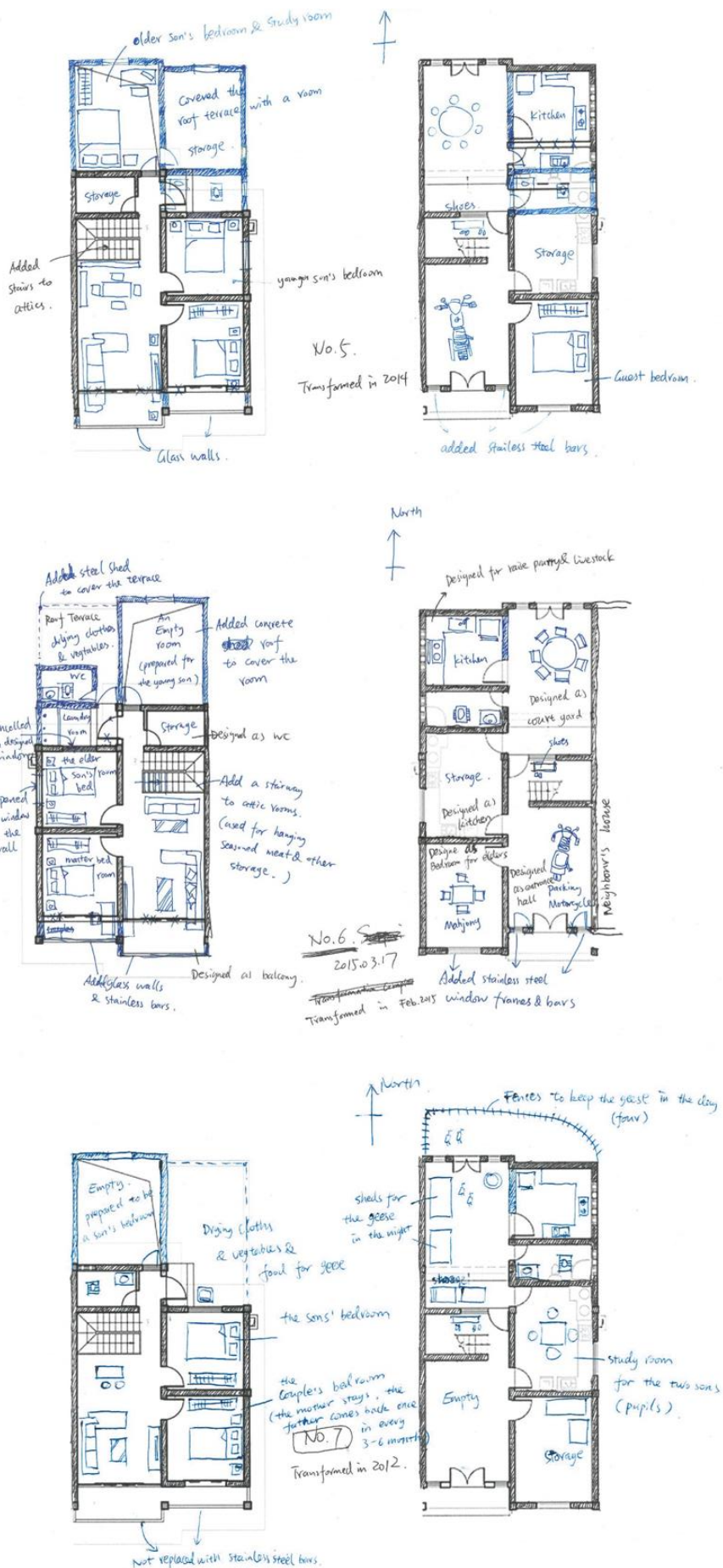


Figure 5.22 Floor plans and transformations of House 5, 6 and 7 in the new village

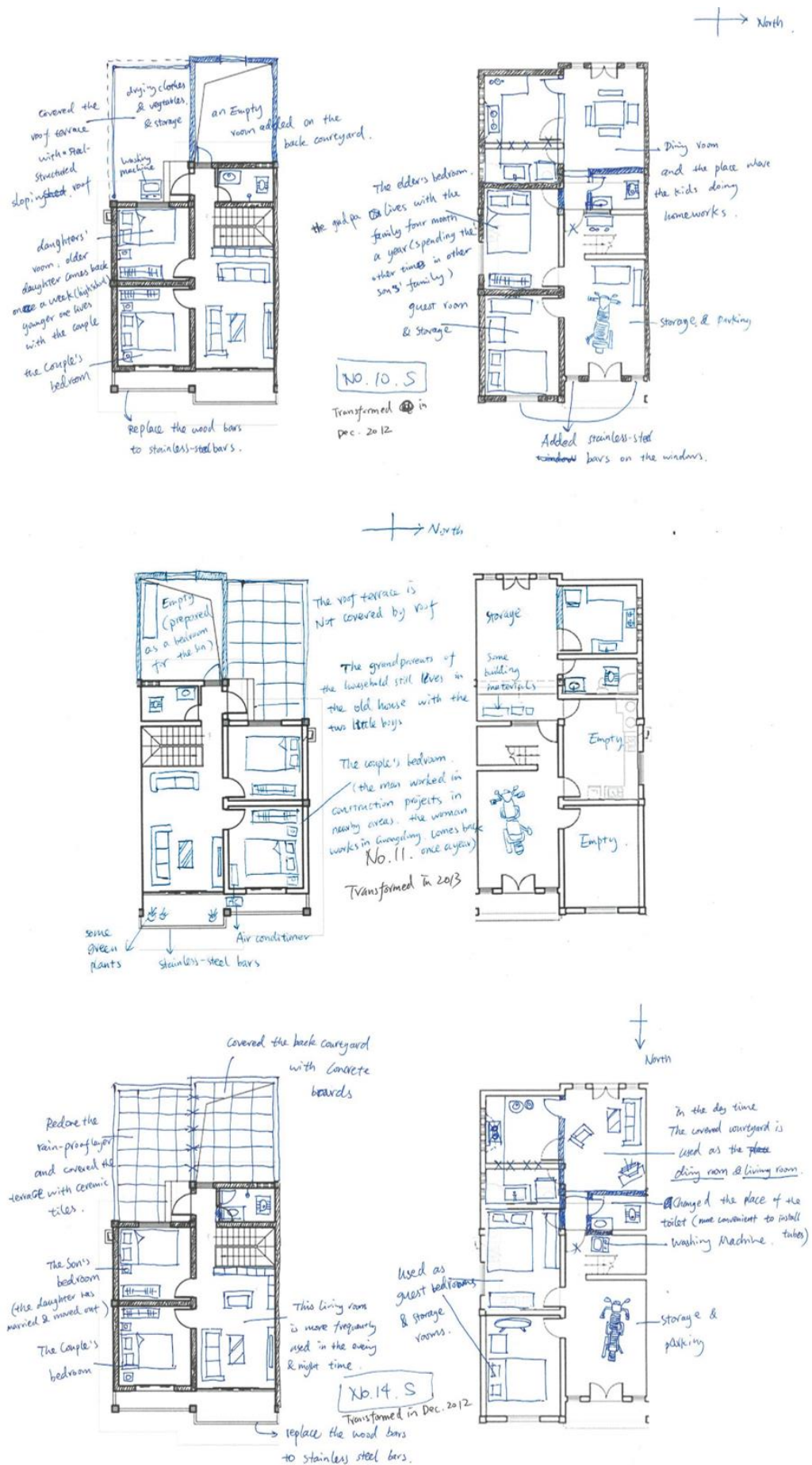


Figure 5.23 Floor plans and transformations of House 10, 11 and 14 in the new village





Figure 5.24 Left: A kitchen using a wood oven in an old village house; Right: A modern kitchen in the new village



Figure 5.25 Left: The change in the centre of a village house: the *tangwu* on the ground floor is used for parking a motorcycle; Right: the modern living room on the first floor has become the most important indoor space

The interior decoration and furnishing of most of the new homes was significantly different to old village houses, but similar to common urban dwellings in China. For instance, none of the house owners continued to use a wood stove, which is common in old houses in village S. Although the house design had left space for such a stove, all the house owners chose to use modern gas stoves. Other modern kitchen appliances, such as a refrigerator and cooker hood, can be commonly seen. The *tangwu* on the ground floor, which used to be the most important space of the traditional house, was mainly used to park motorcycles or storage in most cases, while the living room on the first floor had become the new centre of the house and was commonly furnished with all sorts of modern appliances (Figure 5.25).

The house transformation indicates significant discrepancies between the villagers' choice of new home and the house design, which tried to apply the traditional spatial characteristics of rural China following the aesthetic standards for new villages promoted by the government. The mismatches may have been due to two aspects. One aspect is that

changes in village life have influenced villagers' requirements for interior space. Households in village S, as well as in many other places in China, no longer live on agriculture. To these rural residents, space for livestock or fowl, or a courtyard for agricultural production, is no longer necessary. The other aspect is that villagers' choice of new home indicates that they are trying to move closer to the lifestyle and taste of urbanites. Pursuing a more urban and modern life is demonstrated in the house form, the popular style of façade, and the interior decoration of the "villas" and many other village houses. The outflow of labour in village S may have contributed to such a preference. As stated by one of the villagers, when he was designing and developing his new home, he applied what he saw in the housing developments in the wealthy and developed coastal regions in China, where he had worked as a constructor for years (Interview\_2015032016).

The process of house transformation indeed suggests a conflict between the government and villagers over the changes made to the new houses by the households. As seen in the development in village S, the government has more control in the early stages of the development. It has handled the making of village planning and design. After the houses were completed, when villagers started to carry out house transformations, the officials from the town and county warned them to stop, but over time the government's control of the built environment gradually loosened. A county official attributed this loosening as, "it is not feasible to supervise the villagers from distance. They carried out house transformations before we realized it. We couldn't force them to tear it down, or there would have been severe protests" (Interview\_2015031602).

As in the implementation of many other rural policies in China, maintaining social stability during the process is one of the most crucial tasks for the local government. As pointed out by other studies (Heberer and Schubert, 2012), in the cases of striking petitions or protest by farmers, all the positive sides of local officials' performance might be vetoed in the internal evaluation. Therefore, in spite of trying to harness the house transformation not long after the completion of the new village, the local government finally stepped back to avoid serious conflict with the house owners. Moreover, local government also employed sophisticated tactics to resolve the land issues caused by the development, which is further explained in Section 5.3.2.

Gradually, the villagers took over the control of the new village environment from the government. The house owners who first moved into the new houses (such as the families living in houses 1 and 7) did not make as many changes compared to the house owners who

moved in later (such as the families living in houses 2, 5 and 6). It is worth noting that in the conflict over the preferences for the village built environment, the government was expecting a new village to be an embodiment of rurality, but the villagers were inclined towards urban and modern styles of new homes. This is a finding that challenges many previous studies on new villages in China, and affirms the development as a one-sided movement of modernization driven by the state.

### **5.3 Outcomes of the development of village S**

As claimed by both the policies and the planning document of new villages, the development was intended to improve not only the built environment, but also the village economy, infrastructure and public services in general. Under these broad objectives, the blue prints for agricultural zones, and facilities for tourism and village social welfare were drawn out. To see whether the pledged objectives have been achieved, this section investigates the outcomes of the development of the new village. The development outcomes are categorized into two aspects, which respectively focus on the changes in physical dimension, namely the village built environment, and the development's influences on socio-economic and cultural dimensions.

#### **5.3.1 *Changes in the village built environment***

As introduced above, the development in village S has created a new built-up area consisting of fourteen new houses, a public building, a few outdoor sport facilities, open spaces equipped with greenery and a pavilion. The built-up area also has a complete road system which ensures each household can easily access the highway outside either by vehicle or on foot. At the same time, the new built-up area provides spacious parking plots, which are appreciated by all the house owners, as well as some households living around the new built-up area, either having or not having a car. This is because during the Spring Festival, the new village now has parking spaces for all the house owners and their neighbours, relatives and friends.

The sanitary situation in the new built-up area has been improved. Five villagers have been employed by the village committee to look after the environment, and duties include cleaning the public building and outdoor public space, dumping waste from the bins at the waste collection point beside the highway, and taking care of the greenery in the new built-up area.



Figure 5.26 Left: Waste bins in the new built-up area; Right: The waste collection point (in green tiles) on the highway

However, the aforementioned benefits brought by the development only affect a small part of the village built environment. After all, the new built-up area only comprises a small part of the planned new village, and is only a small corner in the existing built environment of the village S. The majority of the objectives for transforming the village environment, as claimed by the village planning and design, have not been delivered. For instance, neither the agricultural zones, nor the majority of the planned buildings have been put into practice. In general, although the development of the new village has had very limited influence on the built environment and landscape in village S, the development has established a picturesque corner. The refurbishment project before the development of the new village also helped to complete the view. As shown in Figure 5.27, there are a few old houses, in the background of the picture, which have been refurbished with colours and styles following the official aesthetic, and which thus went well with the new buildings in the front.



Figure 5.27 The picturesque view developed in village S



It is not likely that the undelivered objectives will be fulfilled in future with further phases of development, as the county officials affirmed that the government is not likely to invest more resources in the development in village S. According to the officials, the county government decided not to conduct more pilot projects for new villages after the one in village S and another village. “Further development should depend more on villagers themselves” (Interview\_2015040703). The cadres of village S thought villagers would not welcome further development, because the first round of development had already caused conflict between villagers over land use. This conflict is illustrated in Section 5.3.2, regarding the new village development’s influence on the socio-economic dimensions of village life.

It is questionable whether the development has brought significant improvement in terms of the housing conditions of the successful house applicants. The story of the Luo family seemingly provides a positive answer. After the development has been officially claimed as completed, the house applicants have taken control of the built environment and applied house transformations in line with their preferences. The houses have been transformed to adapt to modern lifestyle, which is more appreciated by most house owners than the traditional way of rural life. This appreciation of a modern housing style is also displayed by the appearance of other houses built within the last decade in the village. It seems that the house owners have successfully gone beyond the government’s preference on housing style. However, under the surface of the triumph on aesthetic aspects and the improved housing conditions, there are hidden safety issues which may lead to severe outcomes.

As introduced above, the house transformations were mainly carried out by the house owners themselves. In spite of many of the house owners being experienced constructors, they are not fully aware that some transformations may have endangered the strength of the building. For instance, villagers used precast cement boards to cover the back courtyard. As shown in Figure 5.28, the boards are installed on the holes carved out on the courtyard walls without being fixed to any columns or beams, or connected with steel bars. Adding walls and roofs on the boards to form a room on the first floor further burdens the building structure. These transformations cannot meet the basic requirements of seismic safety design to resist powerful earthquakes, which happen from time to time in Sichuan.





Figure 5.28 Left: Holes carved out on the courtyard wall to install cement boards; Right: A villager working as a constructor to transform his new home

### 5.3.2 *Influences on the socio-economic dimension*

Fieldwork interviews and observation in the village indicated that the development has drawn few positive influences on the socio-economic dimension of village life. This is a very different result compared with the expectation of general policies of village development and the village planning and design made for the specific development in village S, which claims that the development would improve the village economy, provide more social services to villagers, and enrich cultural activities in the village.

It was found that the new village development did not effectively improve the supply of public services in the village. The public building developed in the new built-up area, in spite of being labelled as the village clinic, library and activity rooms, did not function well as a community centre. The village's proximity to town enabled easy access to the services in town and, as seen in the fieldwork, villagers sought services and recreational activities there. On the other hand, the outflow of population and lack of social and cultural organizations in the village made it difficult to sustain village-based public services. Indeed, decades ago the village school had been closed due to the lack of pupils in the village. Nowadays, due to the lack of villagers' involvement, the new public building had become a vacant and locked space, which may further discourage villagers from holding any social activities there. In sum, the necessity for a village-based service centre is doubtful, and, without sufficient analysis to support the development of such a community centre, the government still funded its development.

The government may advocate that the development was for the good of the rural people, as indicated by the aforementioned official propaganda video displaying villagers

studying agricultural skills (see Figure 5.19). However, the practical consideration of the government to fund the public building might be the pressure from the internal evaluation. As introduced in the previous chapters, the central government emphasizes improving the infrastructure and public services in rural areas in the implementation of BNSC. The Sichuan provincial government has specified the central government's emphasis on the development of public facilities, which was highlighted as a key objective of implementing new villages in the model *pian* of BNSC. In the criteria for evaluating the development of the village built environment set out by the provincial government, the development of a public building was considered equally as important as new housing. As indicated by the criteria, the public building should function as village offices and a community centre, consisting of a village clinic, and study and activity rooms, etc. These services have been labelled in the public buildings of village S, but not really work. Some of them were not provided, while some of them, in spite of being delivered, did not attract villagers.

Similar to its insignificant influence on public services, the development in village S had little positive influence on the village economy. The village planning was intended to enlarge rural tourism in the village. The developed area of village S was also close to the private tourism business founded in the village in 2009, but the owner of the business confirmed that the development brought limited benefits to his business (Interview\_2015043017). Moreover, none of the residents of the new village stated that the development had brought them any economic benefit. On the contrary, some members of the village collective worried that their interests might be damaged by the development, because the development had taken their contracted land.

The built-up area of the new village took about 23 *mu* (approx. 1.5 hectare) land in total. All the land used to be farmland, which was contracted to 14 households with the term of the contract in 2027. Before the development, the land had been sub-contracted to the plant nursery or rural tourism business. As introduced above, in most cases, a household owns more than one piece of land. Therefore, for most of the 14 households whose contracted land had been taken by the new village, the development took part of their land, with one exception. For this household, all of its contracted land had been transformed into built-up area. According to members of the household (Interview\_2015032015), the head of the township government at that time once gave them a hint that their land used for the development would be formally expropriated by the government in return for considerable compensation, which was the case for villagers in an adjacent village whose land had been expropriated for the development of the new airport near town B. Moreover, they felt powerless to confront such

powerful officials. However, when the township cadre promoted a new position in another place, the land-loss villagers realized that his hint might never come true. They asked the village cadres and incumbent township officials to give them a satisfactory answer, or they would protest to the higher-level government.

The negotiation between the land-loss villagers and the township government was held with the village cadres as witness. An agreement was made which required the government to take two measures to compensate the land-loss villagers. Firstly, it requested the village cadres to provide a few remunerative jobs, which were the cleaning and maintenance jobs mentioned above, to the households who lost the most land in the development. The jobs were limited and could not cover all the land-loss villagers, but although not all of them felt very happy about the job arrangement, the village cadres managed to persuade the majority. Therefore, the job arrangement was accepted and each job would bring about 2000 RMB a year.

Secondly, the government was required to cover the villagers' loss of rent. Due to the development, the land that had been sub-contracted could no longer be used by private businesses. In the agreement made between the land-loss households and the township government, the government pledged to pay rent for the land annually at the same price as before, with the term starting from the year of the development (2011) until 2027, when the households' current land contracts ended. It could be estimated that the rent in total would be about 300,000 RMB. Up to the time of the fieldwork of this study (2015), villagers had received the rent on time, and so the development had not reduced the income of the households whose contracted land had been taken.

However, the real source of the land rent was not the township government. As illustrated by Figure 5.29, the complex interplay of several actors has obscured the real source of the rent. The three parties handling the construction fees were the county government, the contractor, and the village cadres, but it was the county government who was the actual source of the payment of land rent. The township government signed its name in the agreement with the land-loss villagers on behalf of the county government.

The village cadres acted as the teller to pay the rent. The source of the rent in the cadres' hand was part of the payment of the new houses collected from the fourteen house owners. The majority of the payment for these new houses had been handed to the contractor of the construction, but about 300,000 RMB was retained by the village cadres and appropriated as land rent. The cadres were acting on the instructions of the county government, but the

contractor had been told by the county officials that the county government would reimburse the retained money. As noted above, the contractor had a good personal relationship with the county officials. Moreover, the county government had also been contracted to pay the majority of the construction cost, which included the cost of the infrastructure, the public building in the new built-up area, and subsidies for the new houses. The construction fees for the whole development in village S have never been published. According to the interviewees, the final account approved by the county government was over several million (Interview\_2015040703; 2015043008). Compared to the millions of final account construction fees approved by the government, the retained 0.3 million house payment was not significant. Therefore, the contractor never asked the village cadres for the detained money, as they were all acting under the instructions of the government.

Figure 5.29 The flow of funds and interactions between the stakeholders in resolving the issue of land use

regulations, they might have taken three counter measures. They might quit the development and leave the new village empty, which is definitely not a fruitful outcome for the development that local officials would like to display to their superiors. Alternatively, they could have split their household using a fake divorce or detachment with the elders. In the worst case scenario, they could have openly protested, which might have annulled all the government's investments in the development.

Confronted by the dilemma raised by the house applicants and the land-loss villagers, the county government had to cover the land rent. However, it needed to avoid paying it directly and publicly, or it would be openly supporting the breach of land-use regulations and farmland conservation policies. As seen in Chapter 2, the central government had consistently stressed farmland conservation and regulation of rural land use in the development of new villages. The prefectural-level government of city D also restated land use regulations in the development of new villages (The Prefectural Government of City D, 2009). Apparently, the county government would not like to be seen as funding excessive use of housing plots and thereby decreasing farmland. Therefore, it took a detour and 'muddied the water' of the process to pay the rent with the collaboration of the township government, the private constructor, and the village cadres. The complicated measure has temporarily resolved, or covered up, the issues of land rent and land use.

Looking at the long term effect, the land-loss villagers still worry that their interests might be damaged after 2027, when their current contracts of farmland signed with the village collective come to an end. At that time, the land rent kept by the village cadres will have been spent, but the new village is not likely to be demolished and turned back into farmland. The cadres admitted that they have not yet worked out any plan to deal with the villagers' worries about their right to contract farmland a decade later. In the eyes of the land-loss villagers, the development may have set up a ticking time bomb on their land contract, which may become a threat to their interests a decade later, if not before.

## **5.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has elaborated the process and products of village development in village S. The first section of the chapter introduced the general socio-spatial situation of village S before the development. The second section illustrated the development process of the new village by focusing on the interplay of actors during the process. The last section provided the findings on the outputs of the development.

As illustrated in Figure 5.1, the county government played a leading role in the development process, organizing the financial and human resources, and influencing every step of the development (although its influence on the last step of development, using and transforming the new space, gradually weakened). The design agency, the contractor of the construction, and the cadres of village S played assisting roles in facilitating relations with the government. On one hand, their roles ensured that the implementation of the development was technically feasible. On the other hand, their collaboration with the government enabled the latter in manipulating the development process and delivering the outcomes under its control. The villagers, either house owners or villagers whose contracted land had been taken by the development, were not positively engaged in most stages of the development process.

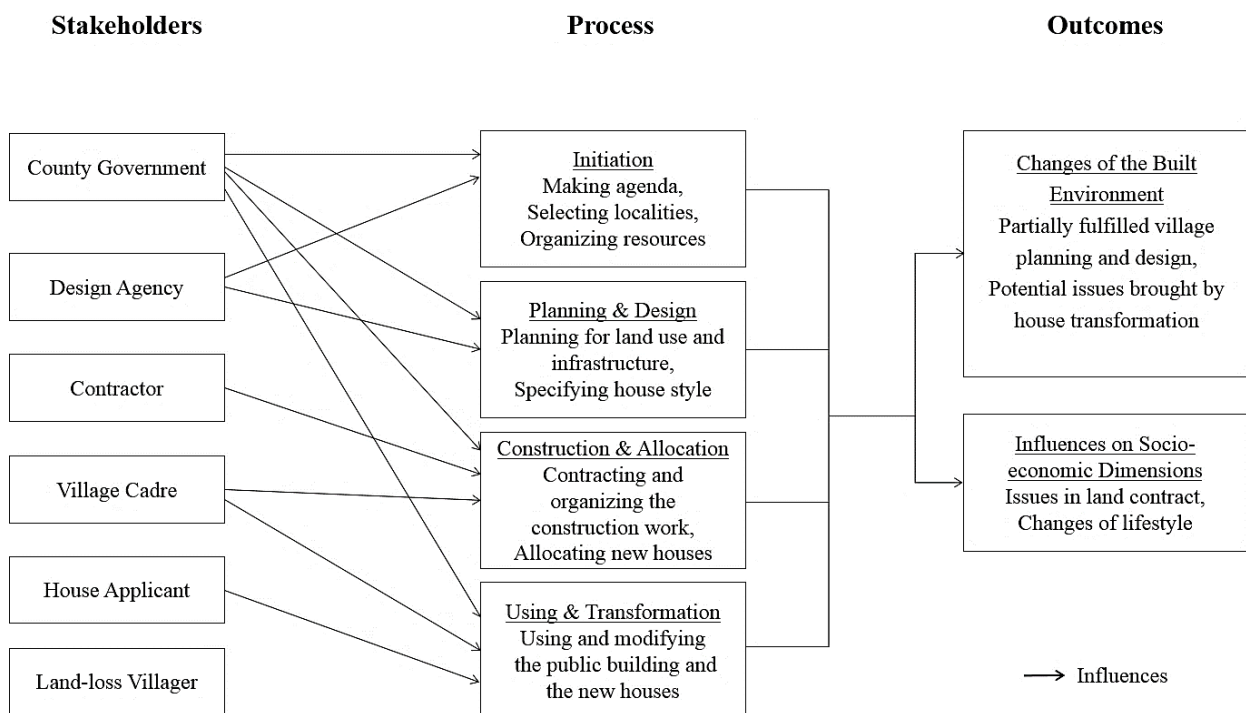


Figure 5.30 The stakeholders involved, process, and outcomes of the development in village S

In general, the development partially fulfilled the village planning and design, and brought mixed influences on village life. A picturesque corner of the designed new village has been built and improved a few village households' housing condition. However, the development failed to achieve the planned objectives of socio-economic development proposed by the general policies and the specific design of the new village. Moreover, it brought land use issues which caused farmland to decrease and can influence the villagers' right to contract collective-owned land in future. These issues contradict the objectives of new village development set out by the policies of BNSC, which emphasize preservation of

farmland and regulating village land use, as well as improving, rather than bringing a potential threat to, the general living conditions of villagers.

The shortfalls and partially fulfilled objectives delivered by the development in village S indicated a pragmatic strategy by the government of Eastern County in several ways. Firstly, there is the county government's limited financial ability in contrast with the ambitious objectives of new village developments set out by the higher-level government. The ambitious objectives of development, which include economic and social development, were reflected in the village planning and design document. However, to fulfil the objectives would cost enormous funds, as well as human resources and time. Whereas the internal evaluation system set out a tight schedule and unbalanced criteria for the development, the higher-level evaluators would like to see tangible outcomes delivered quickly. The internal evaluation system is the second factor that pushed the county government to conduct selective implementation.

In sum, confronted with the challenging development objectives, the tight schedule and imbalanced evaluation criteria set out by higher-level government, the county government pragmatically prioritised and delivered a picturesque village environment in line with the aesthetic preferences designated by the high-level government. The hasty development process left the county government insufficient time to make appropriate resolutions to deal with the problems caused by development. In front of the issues resulting from the development, the county government took conciliatory measures, which may not be straightforward and legal resolutions, but which would at least temporarily ensure social stability, and therefore avoid endangering its rank in the series of internal evaluations initiated by the higher-level government.





## Chapter 6. The Development of Village K

### 6.1 A general introduction to village K

#### 6.1.1 *Social and economic context of the village*

Village K has more than 1,100 registered collective members in about 350 households, but it is worth noting that the actual number of residents living in the village or with a residential property may be more. One reason for this situation is related to the development of new housing in the village, which attracted a considerable number of house buyers from the outside. This migration trend is further demonstrated in Section 6.2. Another reason is related to the history of the village, which is explored in this section.



Figure 6.1 Left: The river passing village K, heading to the town and county seat; Right: The steps connecting the old dock and the riverside residential quarter in village K

As shown in Figure 6.1, there is a river crossing village K. There was an old dock on the river and a quayside market in the village. The market street was called as *laogai*, or the ‘old street’ of town B. Before the two highways crossing the town were developed in the 1990s, the waterway used to be the main transportation connecting the urban county seat and the

rural hinterland around village K. For over a hundred years, small merchant boats and sampans<sup>7</sup> commuted back and forth on the river, sending people and goods between the dock in village K and the county seat. After China's economic reform in the late 1970s, the rural economy thrived. The dock and the market street in village K were also busy. Many town dwellers were attracted to the dock area to establish various businesses. Some married villagers and lived permanently in the village, and their children could choose to be registered as either a collective member of the village or a town dweller. As a result, in a village family, in spite of living together in the village, family members may have different registered identities. Many residents of village K, in spite of living in the village for generations, are actually not registered as collective members. For instance, in a typical extended village family, the husband of the core couple and his parents might be collective members, while his wife and children may be registered town dwellers.

Some residents originating from village K also transferred their identities by acquiring permanent jobs or properties in town B or the county seat, but still maintain possession of their old houses in the village. In recent years, the development of new housing in village K has also attracted a considerable number of urban and town dwellers, as well as those who originated from the village but have lived outside it for years, to move back to the village.

The fact that the residents in village K are of mixed identity is different from many other villages in the surrounding area, such as village S. The village's proximity to the town, as well as its history of frequent social and economic communication with the urban area, are important reasons for the phenomenon. The inflow of migrants caused by the development of new housing has further complicated the situation, which is discussed in the later part of this chapter.

Nowadays, as in many other villages in Eastern County, a large number of residents of village K, especially the young generation, work outside the village. The majority of people staying in the village are elders and minors, as well as a few female villagers who take care of their young children or sick parents-in-law. Like the situation in village S, the concept of an extended family, or *chia*, as introduced in the last chapter, usually consists of two parents and their children, but the paternal grandparents and unmarried uncles and aunts also comprise the most common type of family structure in village K. The *chia* and kinship ties around it still influence modern rural Chinese society.

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<sup>7</sup> A traditional small flat-bottom boat made of wood and bamboo, commonly used as fishing boats or ferries in Sichuan.

As in most other villages in Eastern County, village K has mountainous topography. The village has a considerable amount of land used for forestry. To prevent soil erosion, since the late 1900s, the Chinese government has issued policies calling for the conversion of farmland on steep hillside back to forest. Many villagers who had contracted the steep farmland in village K followed this policy, and these villagers had their free land contract with the village collective extended from 30 to 70 years. Moreover, they are given government subsidies of 1,500 RMB a year to buy saplings, fertilizer, and pesticides to plant trees and maintain them. The woods are the property of the villagers, but they need to keep in line with policies on sustainable lumbering. Villagers can also raise livestock and grow crops between trees if it does not damage them, but, in general, similar to the situation in many villages in Eastern County, the living of the residents of village K does not rely on agriculture or forestry.

On average, each qualified member of the village collective has contracted about 0.2 *mu* of flat farmland and 0.3 *mu* of sloping farmland. Unlike in village S, most of the farmland in village K has not been sub-let. Part of the land is cultivated by the resident villagers for family produce. The rest of the farmland, even the flat land parcels which used to be productive paddy fields, is often idle and uncultivated. Some villagers feel sad about the idle farmland. An old grandma, who was cultivating a few spring onions, garlic and cabbages in front of her house, said, “It is a pity to see weeds growing to the height of a person in those good fields. But we don’t have the ability to make good use of them... Most of us (the resident villagers) are too old to do heavy farm work, and the young people are away doing migrant work.”

A small part of the non-farm land in village K has been contracted to three private companies. In the 1980s, there was a collective-owned gear factory in the village located at the end of the market street. In the 1990s, the factory ran out of business and went bankrupt. The 25 *mu* of land and the workshop used by the gear factory was rented by two other companies. One is a factory that makes pre-cast cement boards, while the other is a coal processing factory. As introduced in the previous chapters, cement boards were commonly used in construction projects in rural areas. Also, the energy and mining industries account for a large part of the economy of Eastern County. There is a coal mine in a nearby village, east of village K, which could be accessed by the road along the north bank of the river. The two factories annually pay 300 RMB rent for each *mu* of land to the collective of village K. In the 2000s, another private coal processing company rented 15 *mu* of land in the village with annual rent 500 RMB per *mu*. The land rented by the factories is close to the river and road, which is essential for their businesses. In sum, releasing the collective-owned land to these

industries brings village K an assured rental income every year. However, when shared among over 350 households, the rent does not bring a great deal of household income.

Similar to the general situation in rural areas of Eastern County, the major source of household income for most families in village K from off-farm migrant work, undertaken by villagers from village K, varies a great deal. Some of the villagers are in the most-common types of work taken by migrant workers, such as the building industry and manufacturing. Villagers in such types of work may work in the developed coastal areas of China, far away from the village. A few may have travelled even farther away to work abroad. In spite of being absent from the village, the migrant workers send money to support the life, education and other expenditures of their spouse, parents or children in the village.

As mentioned above, there are also villagers who have managed to work in town B or the county seat. Some of these villagers are self-employed, such as running grocery shops and selling fish in the town. The villagers' families may have been involved in running private businesses when the old dock and market street were running in the village. However, after the two highways became the dominant transportation in the 1990s, the river transportation was replaced. The dock and the street surrounding it vanished not long afterwards. The villagers in business moved their working locality to the town area near the highways, but some of them kept their identity as a village collective member.

It is also worth noting that a few villagers have sought opportunities to work in local government. In the glory days of the old dock and market street, the offices of various departments of the township government were on the street. Therefore, decades ago some villagers from village K had been involved with government jobs, and a few had even managed to become county and prefectural-level officials with notable influential status in local politics in Eastern County. In general, the wealthiest families in village K are mainly those involved in private business and local politics. This village elite has had a significant influence on the development in village K, which is further discussed in Section 6.2.

#### **6.1.2 *The village built environment before the new development***

The vanished dock in village K left few relics, with the only tangible heritage being a stone bridge crossing the river, which had connected the trade on the quayside with the other bank. Nowadays, the old bridge is no longer in use, as a new bridge which allows vehicles to cross the river has been built (see Figure 6.2).

Replacing boats and sampans, vehicles have become the main transportation from village K to town B and the county seat. The nearest residential quarter in the village is about

1.5 km east to the town. Countryside buses between town B and another town in the southeast pass by the village frequently and cost only 1 RMB. However, in most cases villagers drive a motorcycle or walk to the town. The internal roads in village K have been paved with BNSC subsidies from the government, enabling almost all the village households to have vehicle access to the outside.



Figure 6.2 The old bridge (in the foreground) and new (in the background) in village K

The mountainous geographic condition in village K divides the village into nine *xiaozu* located on both banks of the river. As a neighbourhood, each *xiaozu* consists of several households that have geographical and social proximity to each other. The most populous residential quarter in village K is in the fifth *xiaozu*, on the riverside where the old dock and quayside market were located. Approximately a hundred households, accounting for about one third of the total households in village K, belong to this residential quarter. They used to live in two rows of buildings. The majority of the old buildings were single-storey wood cottages, with a few two-storey brick houses among them, as shown in Figure 6.3. The street amid the two rows of buildings was the place where the goods from the dock were loaded, traded and transported.





Figure 6.3 Two existing old buildings in the riverside residential quarter in village K

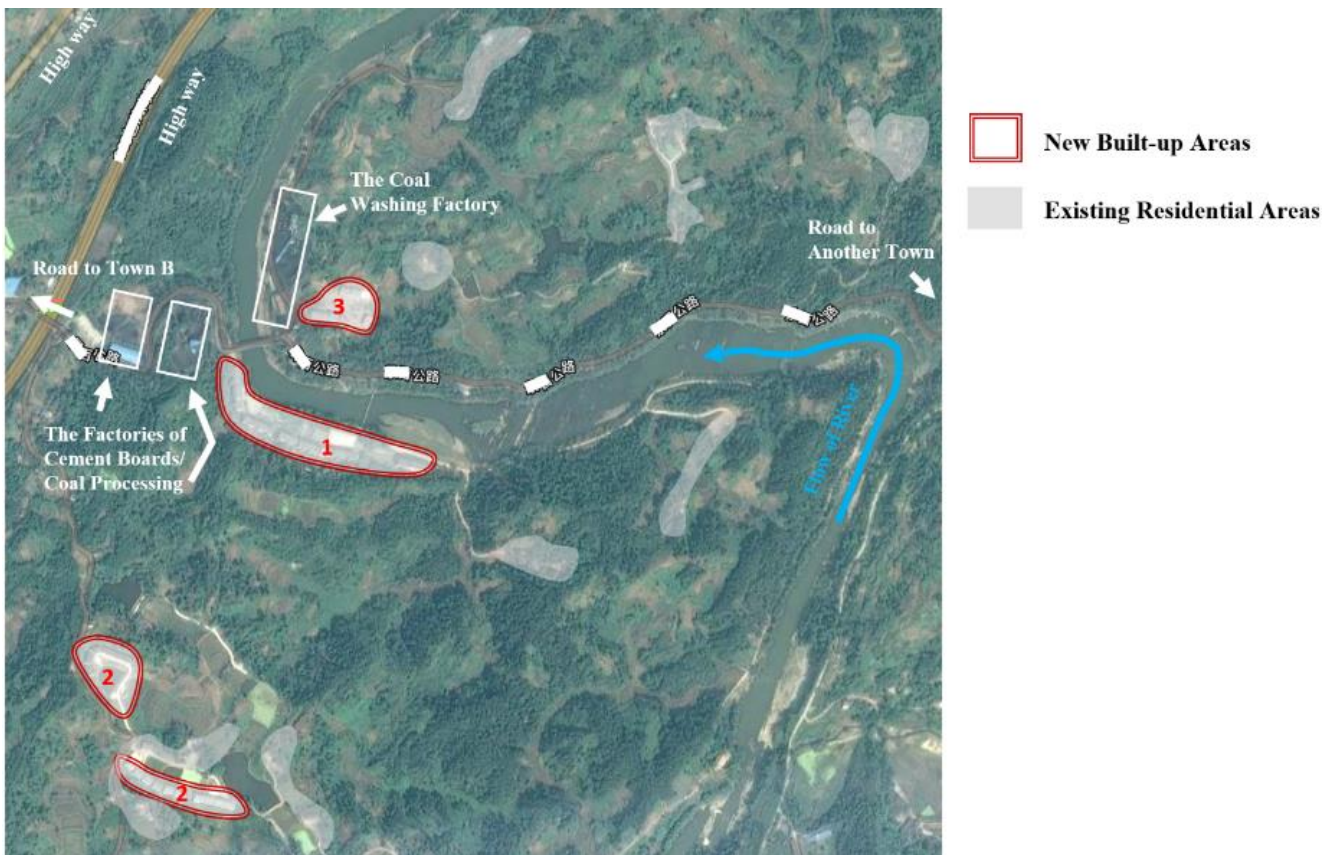


Figure 6.4 Existing residential areas and new built-up areas in village K

Source: Drawn by the author, based on a Google Map image and the planning and design document for the second development of village K

As introduced above, there are three industrial factories in the village, all of which are located beside the biggest residential area, along the road heading to the town (see Figure 6.4). In contrast to the location of village, the factories are downstream on the river.

Nevertheless, the coal industry has had a noticeable impact on the village environment, such as dust and polluted water on the road from the village to the town. However, the villagers do not pay much attention to the pollution. Many of them believe that the village still has fresher air and other conditions in terms of natural environment than the urban area (Interview\_2015040622; 2015050225).



Figure 6.5 The coal washing factory in village K (the right corner of the picture shows a group of new houses developed close behind the factory)

The river has brought village K trading opportunities and advantages to develop industry, as well as unpredictable flooding. According to the County Annals, village houses on the river bank in village K have been flattened by flood several times since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The most recent time that the village was severely affected by flood was in the summer of 1998. The heavy rains that hit upstream on the Yangtze River led to powerful flooding in the river passing through village K, which is a small upstream branch of the Yangtze. The flood severely damaged many of the village houses along the riverside, and caused landslip on the bank. At that time, the heyday of the dock and the street brought by the waterway had already gone. After the flood, the village families who could afford a house in the town left their old houses and moved to the town. They roughly repaired the old houses to keep them from falling apart. Most of the other affected households also just repaired their old houses, rather than build new ones. Some of the families could not afford a new house. Moreover, similar to the situation in village S, most young people from the village were working away, and the elderly and young villagers in the village did not have the ability to organize a house project by themselves.

Beside the residential quarter on the riverbank, other existing residential quarters in village K are scattered distributed. The arrangement of buildings in these residential quarters



is different from the riverside residential quarter, where buildings were developed in rows to sandwich a street. The village houses not in the riverside residential quarter are mainly centred around a public yard. As noted in the last chapter, this type of housing arrangement is commonly seen in most villages in Eastern County, such as in village S.

The appearance of the houses around these yards is also similar to the village houses in surrounding areas. As shown in Figure 6.6, in most cases, the village residences are detached two-storey houses, made of brick and cement covered by wood-structure pitched roofs. Like village S, village K was also involved in the ‘project of beautiful environment’ in 2010. The village houses were refurbished, with financial and human resources provided by the county government. Unlike most other villages in Eastern County, the development of the built environment in village K started before the government intervened, and the process of this development is illustrated in the following section.





Figure 6.6 Village houses not in the riverside residential quarters in village K

## 6.2 The process of development in village K

### 6.2.1 *Actors involved*

Many of the actors involved in the development in village K have the same titles as the actors involved in the development in village S. For instance, because the two villages belong to the same township and county, the state actors of the development are the same county government and township government, and both developments also involved the village cadres. However, further investigation has found that the actors with the same title in the development of village S and village K might have played significantly different roles in the development process. For instance, in the development of village S, the village cadres mainly acted as an extension of the government, but in village K, it has been seen that the actions of village cadres were largely taken on the basis of their own interest. More details and explanations of the roles of these actors are provided in the following section, as well as in the next chapter comparing the two cases.

#### **Village cadres**

The cadres of village K have complex social and political identities compared with common villagers. The two major cadres of village K, namely the village party secretary and the director of village committee, had their own businesses in the town and had lived in the town for years. Most of the time, they lived outside the village but would come to it to deal with official or private matters. For instance, during the Qingming Festival, which is the day when a family visits ancestral grave sites to clean them and pray, the cadres of village K, like many other town dwellers from villages, would return to the village to meet their relatives and hold ceremonies in front of their ancestral grave sites.

At other times of the year, the director of the village committee ran a mah-jong room<sup>8</sup> in the town. The village party secretary, Hu,<sup>9</sup> also spent most of his time in the town. He owned two floors of a six-storey townhouse; the upper floor was the residence of his family, and the ground was his shop, selling fish and groceries. As a member of the village collective, Hu contracted a fish pond in the village to support the fish shop. Hu also conducted other businesses. With his cousin, he was a main shareholder of the aforementioned cement board

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<sup>8</sup> Mah-jong is a traditional Chinese table-top game, which is still one of the most popular recreational activities in Sichuan. Mah-jong rooms in Sichuan usually also function as tea rooms (and vice versa), where people gather to play mah-jong or watch others playing, as well as have tea and socialise with each other. Usually, the room is a free-entry business place, and the owner charges for tea and the use of the mah-jong tables.

<sup>9</sup> A pseudonym.

factory in village K. The owner of the coal processing plant next to the cement board factory is another relative of Hu. According to an interviewee in the village, albeit with some exaggeration, “The party secretary is involved with all sorts of businesses that could earn money” (Interview\_2015040520). Moreover, a township official commented that Hu is also a sophisticated figure in local politics (Interview\_2015031807).

It would seem that the leading village cadre’s effective network with the officials at township and county level has helped him turn the development of the new village into another profitable business in which he is involved. Such a business is also related to the leading village cadre’s influence among villagers and other village cadres, like the director of the village committee and the *xiaozu* leaders, who are selected by all the members of the *xiaozu*, namely the collective members living in the same residential quarter in the village. Details of how the village cadres and elite influenced the development in village K are further introduced in Sections 6.2.2 to 6.2.5.

### **Contractor of construction**

The constructors working on the development in village K were organized by the manager of a private construction team, but unlike the development in village S, the construction team in village K was not employed by the county government. In the fieldwork, I tried to access the contractor through the county officials, but they pointed out that the construction was contracted “by the villagers themselves”, negating the role of the government in the construction process (Interview\_2015031601; 2015040703).

As indicated by the officials, the construction process was not organized by the government, but by the leading village cadre, Hu. Some of the interviewees in village K confirmed that Hu contracted the project to his friend, a construction contractor based in town B (Interview\_2015040520; 2015040621). The contractor was experienced in construction work both in the town and its surrounding villages, but I was unable to access the contractor. The background and working methods of the contractor were noted by some of the house owners who had witnessed the construction, as well as the village cadre, Hu. Hu admitted the contractor had been a friend to him for a long time, but refused to contact him for me to make an interview. Rather, he claimed that he could answer questions related to the construction process on behalf of the contractor (Interview\_2015040519). Interviews approved that he did know much about the construction. However, the cadre’s reaction to the interviews, to some extent, indicates the tight but not very transparent connection between himself and the construction contractor.

## **County government**

As introduced in Chapter 4, village K and village S are in the jurisdiction of the same county government. Like village S, village K was involved in the county government's ambitious programme to develop over a hundred new villages by the end of 2014. The county government has provided financial and technical support for the development in the two villages. In general, the government has significant influence on the process of transforming the built environment of the two villages.

On the other hand, village K was not involved in the pilot project of new villages, which received the most support from the county government. Therefore, the roles taken by the government were different in each development in the two case villages. More specifically, in different stages in the development in village K, the role of the government was inconsistent. The government was opposed to the projects on the riverside in the beginning, but eventually funded the project and made it a model new village development. The changing role of the government can be clarified by demonstrating the development process.

## **Design agency**

It has been introduced in previous chapters that the Chinese government has repeatedly called for professional village planning and housing design in the implementation of new villages. This means that, for every village development, there should be formal village planning and design documents made by qualified planning and design professionals, and approved by government, before the project is put into practice.

After village K was formally involved in the county government's village development programme, the government assigned the design work to a design agency. The agency is based in the urban county seat, and has worked with the government in the village refurbishment projects. In the development of new villages, referring to the government, the design agency's major task was to provide 'scientific' village planning and house design to guide the practice of new villages. However, the case study found that the planning and design work in practice may not have been more than the provision of some technical support for construction, and the planned village layout and house form might have been significantly changed without authorization.

## **Villagers**

As indicated by the case study in village S, the development of the new village had the greatest impact on two groups of villagers: those who moved to the new built-up area, and

those whose contracted farmland had been converted to the new built-up area. These two groups of villagers were also found in the development in village K.

Moreover, the development in village K involved a considerable number of outsiders. By buying the new houses developed in village K, these outsiders became migrant residents of the village. In general, many of the house buyers came from nearby villages, but some used to live in the town area of township B.

In a social and spatial sense, the migrant villagers are members of the neighbourhood in which they reside. On the other hand, these people cannot change their identity easily and formally join the village collective. Therefore, they cannot share land use rights in the same way as the collective members. According to the current Land Management Law in China, the right to a housing plot and residence in a village is exclusive to the registered member of the village collective. An outsider buyer of a village house cannot acquire any property rights recognized and protected by law. Nevertheless, the migrant villagers had paid for their new homes, and thus participated in the development as an important actor. How the in-flow and identity of these migrant villagers might influence their own, and the life of other residents in the village are investigated by unfolding the development process.

### 6.2.2 *The riverside housing development*

#### **The initiation and planning stage of the development**

As introduced above, the biggest residential quarter of village K, located as two rows of buildings on the south riverbank, had been harshly affected by flood. However, for years after the flood, there was no collective-organized reconstruction programme, and most of the affected houses were simply repaired by the individual house owners. In 2007, Hu was selected by all the party members of village K as the village party secretary. Upon taking the leading position in the village, Hu started to transform the riverside residential quarters.

Hu organized the development process with the director of the village committee and the *xiaozu* leaders. They also involved four representatives of villagers, who were respected dwellers selected by other residents of the riverside residential quarter, to form a leading team for the development programme. In the name of learning from other developments, this leading team visited several villages and old towns famous for rural tourism in Chengdu and Chongqing. After this, the leading team decided to build new houses at the exact locality of the riverside residential quarter, meaning the demolition of the old buildings to make space for the new ones.

Most of the owners of old houses in the riverside residential quarter gave a positive response to the cadres' proposal of the housing development. Most of the old houses in the residential quarter had been affected by flood and were not in good condition. Without reconstruction, the housing condition would worsen further. For the villagers who had stayed in the riverside residential quarter, it was necessary to improve their housing condition. Many villagers who were usually working away were also considering spending their retirement life in the village. However, as introduced in the last chapter, an individual village household needs to make a massive effort with the required procedures to develop a new village house. Participating in a collective-organized housing development may save the residents not only the effort required to deal with the procedures, but also average payment for purchasing building materials and employing construction team. Therefore, a considerable number of households from either row of the old buildings were attracted by the development programme organized by the village cadres.

As the north part of the residential area, which was nearer to the river, was more severely threatened by flood and landslip than the other side, the leading team of the development decided to flatten the north row of housing plots and develop new houses on the south row. It is worth noting that the planning of the spatial arrangement of the new buildings did not involve any state actor or professional design agency. The planned subject only included new housing. To resettle the residents from both rows of old buildings, the new houses required multiple storeys. Based on the practical need to merge two rows of buildings into one, the cadres and the majority of the residents decided to build new apartment buildings with the form of townhouse commonly seen in town B (see Figure 6.7 and Figure 6.8).

The new apartment buildings are four to six storeys high, made of bricks and concrete and covered by pitched roofs with wood structures. The ground floor is comprised of a row of rooms called *menshi*, or shop fronts. The floors above consist of four-bedroom flats. Six to eight flats would share a back aisle and backstairs to access the outside. In sum, each house buyer would get one room on the ground floor, a flat upstairs, and an attic under the sloping roof.



Figure 6.7 Left: The last new apartment building developed in the riverside residential quarter, Right: Townhouses in town B

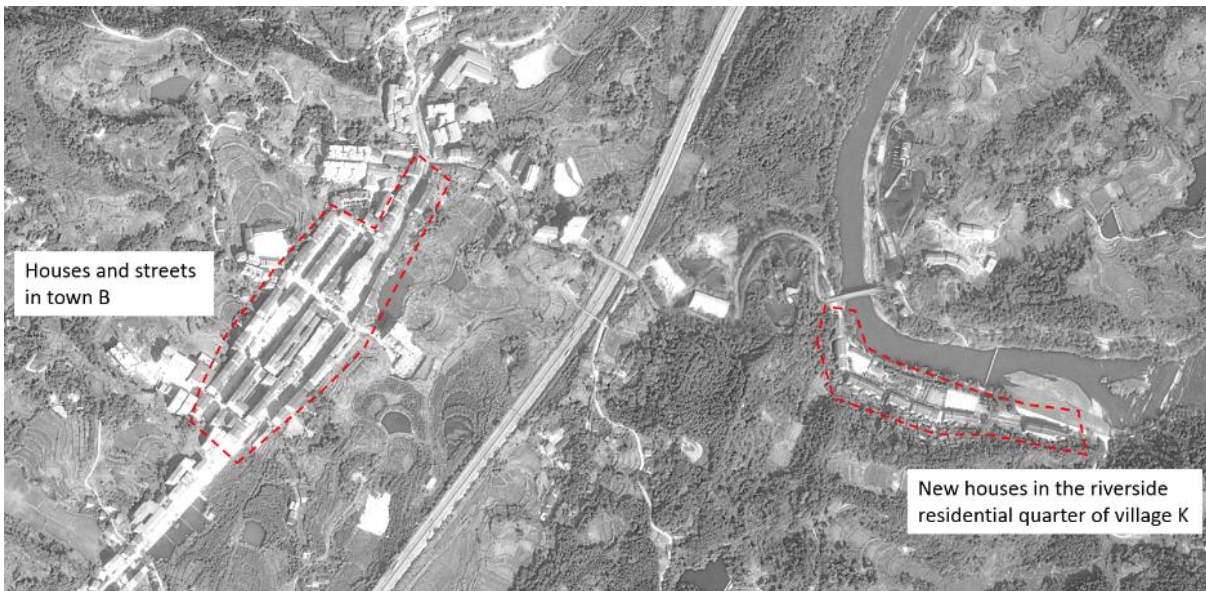


Figure 6.8 Satellite map of houses in town B and the riverside residential quarter in village K

Source: Drawn by author based on Google Map image

Nevertheless, there were still some residents who hesitated or refused to participate at the beginning of the development process. Some of them were unable to afford the new house, but more refused to take part because of a lack of trust in the project. According to Hu, he and his colleagues made enormous efforts to persuade the villagers who had the ability but were not willing to join them at first. Hu described the process of the negotiation with these villagers:

Firstly, we listened to their rationale for not participating in the development. Then we explained the advantages of participation to them. If that didn't make sense, we

mobilized them with all kinds of relationships and good words... Finally, we talked about money [of compensation], to buy them into the development (Interview\_2015040519).

The money to buy the latecomers' involvement came from Hu and his partners in the leading team of the development. Early participants were not satisfied with the latecomers, as they viewed the later as greedy bargainers. A villager straightforwardly put his opinion about the cadres and the latecomers as below:

It is impossible for the cadres to compensate these late movers with all they earned from the development, isn't it? ...Fairly speaking, they did make a fortune from the development, though not a large amount of money. If they had not (made money), what value do their efforts in the development have? (Interview\_2015040621).

It could be seen that the early participants acknowledged the village cadres' efforts to organize and conduct the development, in spite of knowing that the cadres and their partners invested monetary and human resources in the development to make money from the project. By contrast, Hu advocated the major purpose of the development programme as "to improve the built environment for villagers" (Interview\_2015040519). He firmly denied receiving any economic benefit from the development:

We (the cadres and development leaders) tied our hands from taking advantage of the development in our village. The development is about good reputation. I am not talking about the reputation as far as the whole party, but practically my reputation as a local cadre. I knew that, more or less, housing developments in other villages were related to the village cadres' consideration of their own interests (Interview\_2015040519).

However, several findings contradicted Hu's words. How the development was involved with the private interests of the involved actors is further introduced in the following section, and Section 6.2.3. In sum, the development in village K was initiated and planned under the guidance of the leading village cadre and a small group of powerful local elite. Most of the participants viewed the development as a fair deal in which they voluntarily decided to take part.

### **The organization of construction**

Similar to other village housing projects in Eastern County, the construction work in the development in village K was contracted to a private construction team. Hu played the dominant role in contracting the construction team. The contractor of the construction was from town B, and was a friend of Hu. In the riverside residential quarter, there was a resident whose spouse was in charge of another construction team, but failed to become involved in the development. Talking about the construction contract of the development in her village, the resident indicated,



The contractor of a construction team needs to make good use of money to pave the road to getting the contract. I hoped my husband would get the job here, but he was from TJ (another county in eastern Sichuan), and therefore he doesn't have kinship ties or networking with local cadres in here. He hasn't made much money in recent years... without money to treat the people in charge of the development, one cannot get contracts (Interview\_2015050123).

The words above may not be viewed as convincing evidence to confirm that village cadres like Hu received brokerage or bribes from the contractor. However, according to my interviewees (Interview\_2015040520; 2015040621), the construction team bought cement boards from the factory run by Hu and his cousin. In the field visits, there was on-going construction of new houses (further details is given in Section 6.2.3). It was observed that trucks were transporting cement boards between the factory and the construction site (see Figure 6.9). The development programme of the riverside residential areas in village K was on a much greater scale than common individual housing projects. In total, six new apartment buildings were developed, providing 93 flats. Such a scale of construction would undoubtedly consume a large amount of the factory's stock.



Figure 6.9 Above: The cement board factory in village K and its products piled on the left side; Below: A truck transporting cement boards to the construction site in village K



Moreover, the development brought Hu opportunities to become a seasoned developer and open a covert but profitable real estate business in the village. More about his identity as a private developer is illustrated in Section 6.2.3. The township officials had tried to stop the construction of the riverside residences, as the development did not apply for land use and construction permissions from the township government. However, depending on his relationship with a prefectural-level official, Ji, Hu managed to proceed with the development. The collaboration of the two men was mutually beneficial. After the development, Ji, who was from the village but no longer a member of the village collective for many years, built a detached four-storey “villa” for his family in the riverside residential quarter. In return, Hu was introduced into the network of local politics. As one of my interviewees said,

At first, Hu worked with Ji during the development of the riverside. But later, Hu didn't need to rely on Ji anymore. Officials of several departments in the prefectural government are friends of Hu now. He could come to them directly to seek help. In local politics, a network can be constructed after a few dinners together (Interview\_2015040520).

The development's alignment with the village cadres' interests was not a secret for most of the villagers, but, as they thought the house price was reasonable, they did not have serious complaints about the cadres' behaviour. Villagers paid 360 RMB per square metre and about 50,000 RMB in total for their new home. The payment was collected by Hu and conveyed to the constructor during the construction process. Most of the residents of the south row of old buildings received a *menshi* on the ground floor and a first floor flat at the exact locality of their old housing plot. The rest of *menshi* and the flats on the second floor were allocated mainly to the residents of the north row. The allocation of the new rooms was negotiated with the villagers and the leading cadres before the construction. Therefore, most of the residents consented to the arrangement.

With the consent of the villagers and organization by the cadres, the construction proceeded quickly. As in the planning stage of the development, the construction stage did not involve any professional design agency. As Hu stated,

It is not necessary to have formal construction drawings in common development of a new village. The constructors' team had experience of calculating the building structure. Once the house form was confirmed, the team could carry out the construction straightforwardly.

Just as Hu asserted, in spite of not having formal construction drawings, the construction work in the riverside proceeded quickly. Within a year after the construction started in 2007, the first three new apartment buildings were completed. Soon afterward, the construction of another two units in the east end of the riverside residential quarter had been carried out and

completed smoothly by the end of 2009. The last unit of the six new apartment buildings located at the east end of the area was built in 2011.

### **Using and transforming the new houses**

As introduced above, each of the households received one *menshi*, or room on the ground floor, a flat upstairs, and an attic under the pitched roof. In spite of being called *menshi*, or shop front, the ground-floor spaces in the new apartment building in the riverside were not functioning like their counterparts in the townhouses, which have been used as a fish shop, a mah-jong room, or as various businesses.

Only two *menshi* developed in village K were being used for commercial purposes. One was a village grocery shop selling cigarettes, beers and snacks to villagers. The shop-owner started the business decades ago in his old house, located in exactly the same place. The other *menshi* in use was a small pharmacy run by a retired doctor. The doctor and his wife were migrants from another town. One of the wife's relatives lived in the riverside residential quarter and thus obtained a new residence in the development, and this relative sold the residence to the retired doctor. However, this kind of house transaction is not legal, and this issue is further discussed in Section 6.3.2.

The rest of the so-called *menshi* on the ground floor were not left vacant, as the room became an important space in the daily life of villagers. As shown in the figures that recorded the house plans and transformation, the rooms are used in various ways. In some cases, the space is used as a dining room. The majority of house owners have added a kitchen and toilet behind the ground-floor room. Wood stoves are built in the added kitchen, just as in the kitchen of traditional village houses (see Figure 6.12). Meals are more often prepared and cooked in the added kitchen and eaten in the room on the ground floor. In general, villagers prefer to stay on the ground floor at most times of day.

In spite of being frequently used, the indoor space on the ground floor is not usually furnished as carefully as the space upstairs (see Figure 6.14). The house owners also equipped a modern kitchen and dining room in the flat upstairs. In most cases, the space upstairs is a flat adorned by shiny floor tiles, exotic furniture, such as spacious sofas and a marble coffee table, as well as electronic devices such as LCD TVs with audio equipment, air conditioners, and PCs. In short, the flat has been carefully furnished in a modernist interior decoration style and with the most advance appliances that the house owner could afford (see Figure 6.15). However, the modern kitchen built in the flat is not often used. In most cases, the whole flat upstairs is merely used for sleeping.

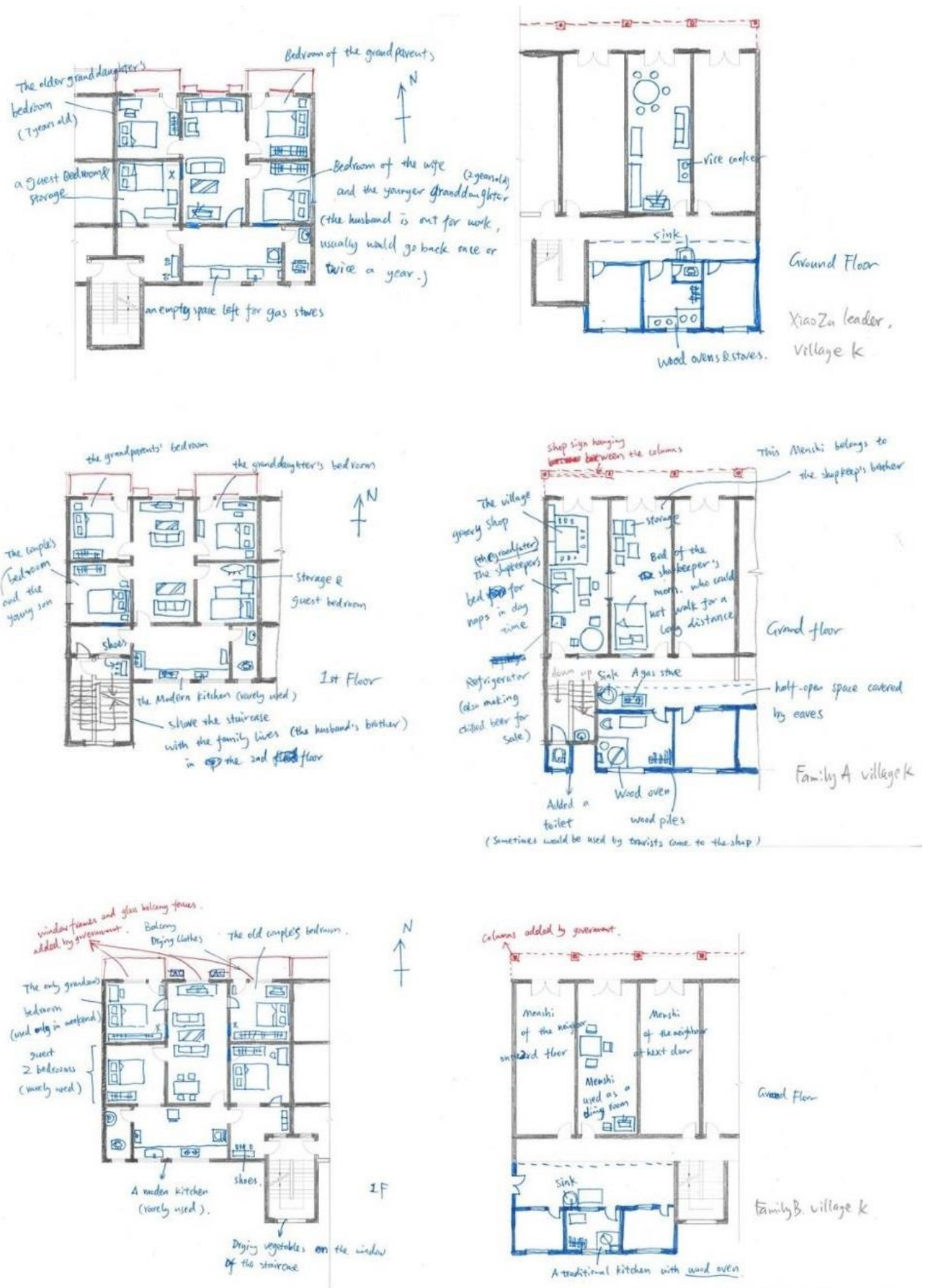


Figure 6.10 Floor plans and house transformations of the *xiaozu* leader and family A & B of the riverside of village K

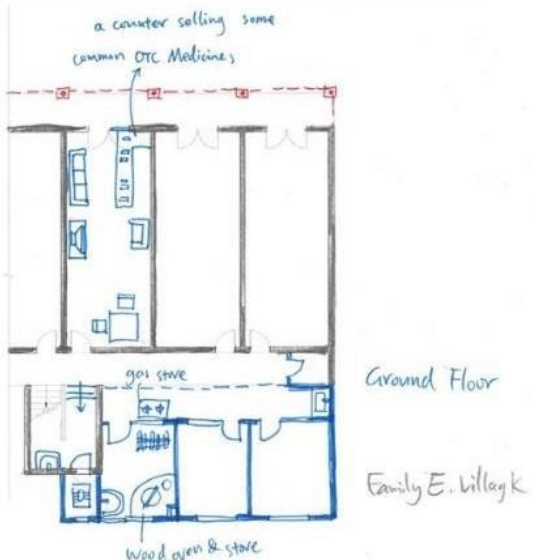
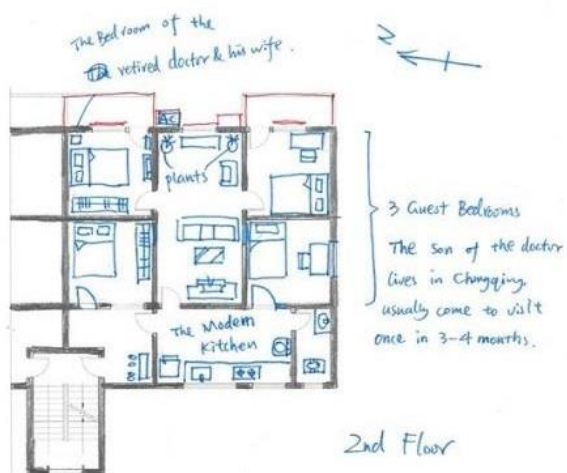
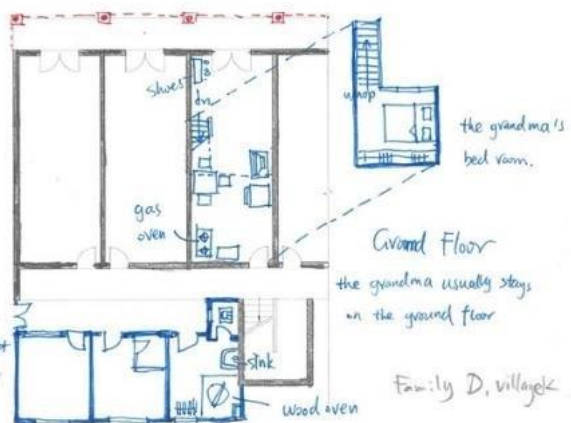
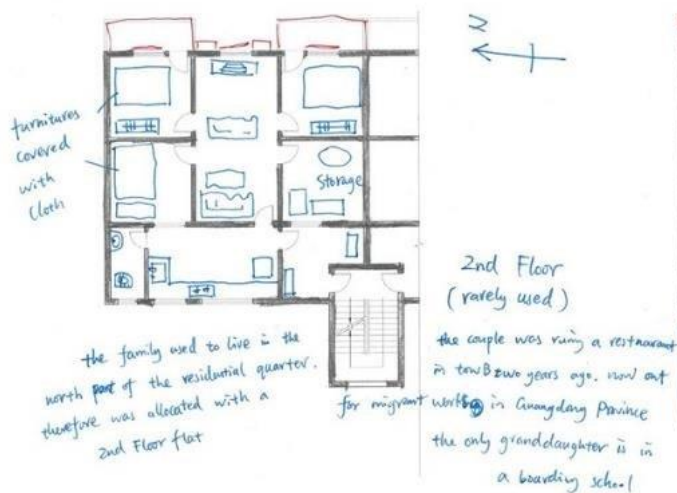
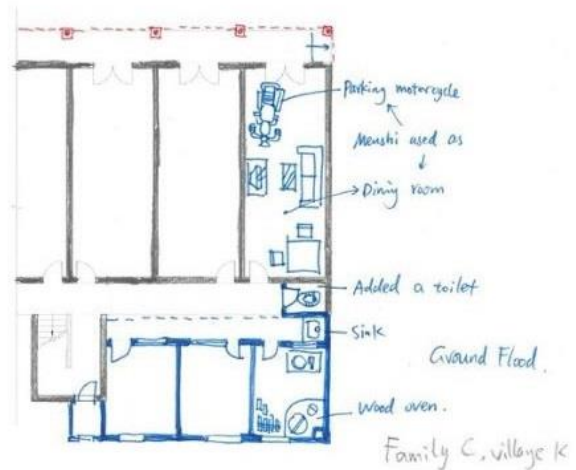
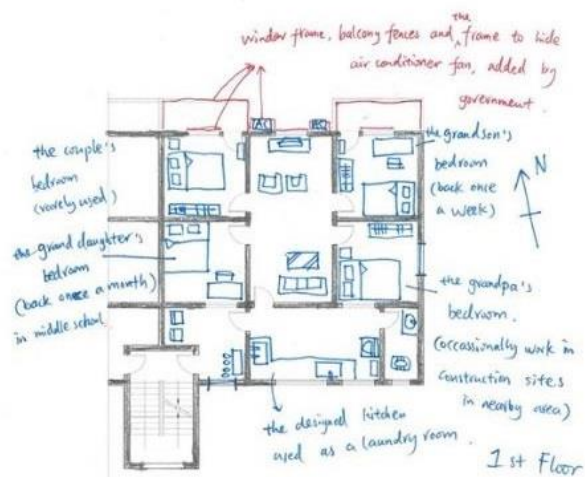


Figure 6.11 Floor plans and house transformations of Family C, D and E in the riverside of village K





Figure 6.12 The modern kitchens in the new apartments at the riverside of village K



Figure 6.13 The kitchens added behind the new apartment buildings and their wood stoves



Figure 6.14 Common arrangement of the ground-floor room in the riverside residential quarter



Figure 6.15 Common arrangement of the flats built in the riverside development

There might be several reasons that resulted in the current use and transformation of the ground-floor space. The first reason may be economic, since, as noted above, the majority of affluent families in the riverside residential quarter had moved long ago. The general economic condition of those families who stayed was good enough to afford the new house and many modern house appliances, such as a TV, refrigerator, and air conditioners. However, the condition may not have been good enough for a completely urbanized lifestyle, which usually consumes far more resources and energy. Villagers would save energy costs by using a traditional wood stove rather than a gas one, because the former uses free firewood and straw that can easily be collected in rural areas. In some cases, villagers had also installed gas stoves on the ground floor, but to save gas costs, the gas stoves were only used to reheat food rather than cook meals and boil water.

A few old villagers used the ground floor because they felt it was inconvenient to climb the stairs. The mother of the shop-owner was one such case, as she could not walk for a long distance, not to mention climbing up and down every day. However, the multi-storey new apartment building had no lift or other accessible device, and as a result those residents inconvenienced by using stairs usually lived on the ground floor. As seen in the figures of house plans and transformation, in some cases the *menshi* were used as a dining room, living room and bedroom for the older residents, who stayed there most of the time.

Villagers' preference for using and transforming the ground floor might also be attributed to social and cultural reasons. For the villagers, the kitchen is not a space of cleanness. An interviewee replied that using the kitchen upstairs would cause troublesome cleaning work (Interview\_2015040621). It was found that villagers changed their slippers when entering the four-bedroom flat upstairs (see Figure 6.16). A similar phenomenon was also observed in village S. No matter whether using public or internal stairs, the villagers would change their slippers before accessing the bedrooms upstairs. The villagers tended to view the rooms upstairs as cleaner and more private space, whereas the space on the ground floor was more open and public. Therefore, staying on the ground floor was more conducive for villagers to socialise with their neighbours. Sometimes, villagers did housework or had their meals at the door of their ground-floor room while chatting with the ones living in the next room.



Figure 6.16 Shoes and slippers placed at the staircase of the new houses in village K (left) and village S (right)

In sum, the house transformation by the house owners indicates that in spite of having their flats modernized, the village residents' habitual use of indoor space is still significantly different to urban-dwellers. They built their new homes following the pattern of typical local townhouses, and furnished the indoor space in an urban fashion, but ultimately the village



residents transformed the new space to make it suit their specific living conditions and lifestyle in the village.

### 6.2.3 *Further development in the village*

#### **The refurbishment project for the riverside development**

As introduced in Chapter 4, the provincial government of Sichuan has initiated the ‘Projects of Beautiful Environment’ in 2010. The project aimed to transform the village built environment by improving environmental sanitation and refurbishing the appearance of old village houses. Similar to village S, village K has been involved in the project. The government project has significantly transformed the early development conducted by the non-governmental actors, namely the village cadres and villagers.

Firstly, the project has transformed the façades of five new apartment buildings. The sixth new building has not yet been developed, and therefore was not involved in the refurbishment. This building is unaffected by the refurbishment project and provides a reference to the original appearance of the apartment buildings before they have been transformed. It can be seen from Figure 6.17 that, in the unfurnished building, house owners may paint the exterior wall of their own apartment, but leave the rest of the building unadorned.



Figure 6.17 The original appearance of the apartment buildings developed in village K





Figure 6.18 The appearance of new apartment buildings after being transformed by the government

Comparing Figure 6.17 with Figure 6.18, it can be found that the refurbishment project has largely transformed the appearance of the new buildings, following the government-promoted aesthetic standard, namely “the style of eastern Sichuan folk house” (*chuandong minju fengge*). As introduced in Chapter 4, the style has been promoted by the prefectural government, in an attempt to enrich the monotonous appearance of modern village houses with the characteristics of traditional folk house. The style is usually designed with grey and white colours, and decoration on external walls resemble those of wood structures, and have high and low sloping roofs tiled in grey, to imitate the appearance of traditional houses in eastern Sichuan.

The refurbishment of new apartment buildings in village K exactly displays the aforementioned aesthetic standards promoted by the government. The previously unadorned façades have been painted and tiled in grey and white. Painted lines and window frames were added to the façade to imitate the wood structure of traditional houses. The roofs, which were in one direction, have been transformed into roofs crossing each other. The space under the front balconies has been turned into a half-open corridor furnished with columns and red lanterns, giving the new building the impression of traditional Chinese architecture.

Secondly, the government-funded project not only transformed the appearance of the new buildings, it also beautified the broader built environment and provided public facilities in the residential quarter. The north side of the residential quarter left vacant after the north row of old buildings had been demolished was developed into a garden decorated by greenery, sculptures and pavilions (see Figure 6.19). A public square with a public toilet has been built on the west side of the residential quarter, beside the road to the town. Another

public square with outdoor sports facilities has been developed on the east side. The electricity network of the residential quarter has been upgraded to install road lamps. Similar to village S, the government has set waste collection points in the village. By contrast, before the village was included in the town-based waste disposal system, villagers used to dump trash in the river. The government also subsidizes the village collective to employ several villagers as cleaners, in order to deal with the pollution issues in the village and look after the public greenery.



Figure 6.19 The north part of the riverside residential area after the transformation project

There is the question of why the government's attitude toward the development changed dramatically from one of trying to stop it to one of supporting it. Part of the reason might be attributed to the network of the village party secretary Hu and his partner in the development, the prefectural-levelled official, Ji. As indicated by an interviewee, Ji had helped Hu succeed in applying government funds to renew the road system of village K (Interview\_2015050123). The refurbishment project came later and might also have a strong connection with the network of the two persons.

Moreover, the refurbishment may also be the result of the county government's consideration of its own interests. Talking about the government's decision to fund the refurbishment project, a resident of the riverside residential quarter believe that:

At first, the development was not very formal. After the development had delivered some basic outcomes, the government found it might have the potential to be turned into something... something that is nice to see, and might be viewed as a good political achievement of the government (Interview\_2015040622).

After investing enormous efforts and funds to transform the built environment in village K, the county government nominated the village in the evaluation of 'the model villages of

beautiful environment' held by the provincial government. The village successfully obtained the title, which indicates the provincial government's acknowledgement of the work of the county government. As illustrated in Chapter 4, the success in the provincial government's evaluation of policy implementation is crucial to county government and officials. Being recognized by higher-level government is more likely to bring the county further implementation funds, as well as benefit the promotion prospects of county officials, while an unfavourable evaluation result might trigger sanctions such as fund reduction and threaten the career of officials.

Besides being recognized by the higher-level government, the county government's refurbishment project in village K is also welcomed by most of the house owners. They especially appreciated the half-opened corridor added on the ground floor, which provides them with a good social space. The improved built environment soon attracted more people to move into the residential quarter. As one of the residents said,

Many of the villagers who had moved into the town bought a new house in the development because of the low price. But actually they do not want to live in village. Their houses were therefore left empty. After the government had transformed the environment, some of them moved back. Even outsiders of the village rushed here to buy a new house (Interview\_2015040622).

The interviewee himself originated from the village, but had lived and worked in the town for years. He had participated in the development since the beginning, and wished to retire in the village. The outsiders who bought a new house and moved into the village mentioned by the retired staff include the retired doctor introduced at the beginning of this section, as well as nine other migrant families. Interviews with these migrant villagers suggest that the nice built environment made by the transformation was a positive factor that attracted them to move there. As the retired doctor said,

We bought the house here because we like it... Generally speaking, the housing condition here is not bad. The environment is equivalent to a park, which is nice and quiet. I am satisfied to have my retired life here (Interview\_2015050225).

As indicated by the migrant villagers, the transformation helped village K to gain a reputation as a good choice for those who would like to have a village home. The reputation attracted more people to buy houses in the village. On the other hand, the county government also chose to continually support further development in the village. As a result, unlike in village S, where the development of new village was not likely to go further, the size of development in village K was enlarged. This further transition of the village environment is elaborated in the following section.

### **The housing projects in the name of new village development**

As introduced in Chapter 4, the provincial government has highlighted the development of new villages in the implementation of BNSC, the national campaign for rural development. In response to the provincial government, the government of Eastern County conducted its first two pilot developments in village S and another village in 2011. A year later, village K was also enrolled in the county government's programme for new village development.

It is worth noting that after the two pilot developments, the government of Eastern County changed its working methods in the arrangement of resources in the development of new villages. For human resources, the government claimed to highlight the ideology of *nongmin zhuti* in the development of new villages, namely the development would be conducted with farmers as the main actors. The government would no longer appoint any village to join the development, as it did in the case of village S. If a village wish to be involved in the government-subsided new village development, it needed to apply for participation. In addition, as a county official stated in the interview:

The government would no longer be involved in land issues and the organization of construction work in village development. We follow the guidelines of *nongmin zhuti*. Villagers can contract the construction project to whomever they like, as long as the construction company has a formal business licence... The issues of land use should also be resolved within the collective. Villagers can switch land with their neighbours, or through whatever resources recognized by the collective (Interview\_2015040703).

However, the government would contract a design agency to work out the “scientific” village planning and house design for the new villages. The planning and design document would be the legal guidelines for the development. As repeatedly stressed by the provincial government, the construction and maintenance of new villages and rural compound should “strictly follow the plan” (Sichuan Provincial Government, 2012c, p. 3), and “defend the solemnity of planning” (Sichuan Provincial Government, 2012b).

In terms of the arrangement of fund resources, after the two pilot projects of new villages, the government of Eastern County would no longer fully subsidize the development of infrastructure and public buildings in the new village. Instead, each village participating in the government programme for new villages would be allocated a fixed subsidy. The cost of development not covered by the subsidy should be paid by the participants of the development.

After being enrolled in the county government's programme of new village development, the further development in village K received a subsidy consisting of two parts. The first was a 200,000 RMB subsidy for the development of infrastructure and public



facilities in the new village. The second was 10,000 RMB for each new residence. It can be seen from the planning and design documents that the new development in village K involved 44 households. Therefore, the development received a 440,000 RMB subsidy in total for the new residences.

It can also be seen from the planning and design documents that the village layout and house design for the new development in village K went in line with the aesthetic standards promoted by the government (see Figure 6.20 and Figure 6.21). The new houses were planned in a curved line surrounded by two ponds planted with lotus. Several public squares with sculptures and sport facilities were planned among the buildings. The house form was designed as a three-storey semi-detached house, which is significantly different from the multi-storey apartment buildings in the riverside. As shown in Figure 6.20, which is an architectural rendering of the new village environment, the design would “bring in the beauty and wonder of nature”.



Figure 6.20 Appearance of the new village environment designed for the second development in village K

Source: The village design and planning document provided by the design agency, translated by the author



Figure 6.21 House design for the second development in village K

Source: The village planning and design document provided by the design agency, translated by the author

In general, the quality of the village planning and design process and its product, namely the planning and design document for the development in village K, is doubtful. It can be seen from the document that the planning has only a superficial analysis of the specific socio-economic and spatial context of the village. Many themes of the so-called site analysis in the documents are no more than brief introductions of the village copied from internet, while some other analytical themes contain only a sentence or two. For instance, in the “analysis of current situation and main problems”, which should be viewed as the starting point of any planning for future development, and hence are a very important part of the planning document, the document in the case of village K contains one sentence. It roughly describes “The main problems are: part of the village roads are not paved with cement, and the source of drinking water and the arrangement of buildings are not regulated and lack of planning, etc.” (p. 3) Nevertheless, the document was approved by the government as the legal guidance for the development in village K. As introduced above, the implementation of the new village was required to follow the document strictly.

According to the designer, who was from a private architectural design company based in city D, the provincial government’s guidelines for the planning of new villages and rural compounds was the main reference of the planning and design for village K (Interview\_2015040705). However, he refused to provide more details of the work.

According to Hu, in the making of the village planning and design, the village cadres convened to provide their opinions. His advice about providing a front room, kitchen, and toilet on the ground floor had been taken by the design (Interview\_2015040519), but none of the remaining village residents were involved with the formation of the village plan and design.

In the development steps following the planning and design process, similar to the development of the riverside residential quarter, the organization of financial and human resources was handled by the leading village cadre. According to my interviewees (Interview\_2015031807; 2015040520), Hu mobilized his personal network to ensure the village was enrolled in the development project subsidized by the government. He also managed to borrow a considerable amount of money in his own name and invested it in the development. Hu was also in charge of organizing the construction. He continued the collaboration with his friend, the contractor for the construction work of the riverside residences. The construction proceeded as quickly as before, but the built environment and houses delivered by the construction significantly deviated from the planning and design.

By comparing Figure 6.20 with Figure 6.22, it can be seen that, firstly, the village layout changed. All the new houses were built in a straight row. The distance between two buildings, which is required as a mandatory standard to prevent fire, was noticeably narrowed. Forty of the 44 planned residences within the planned area had been built, while 24 unplanned new residences in six new buildings had been constructed west of the planned area (see Figure 6.23).



Figure 6.22 The new houses built in the second development in village K





Figure 6.23 Planned area of the new village development in village K and unplanned houses

Secondly, the house design had also changed. The high and low roofs crossing each other in the design were replaced by two simple sloping roofs. The height of the attic rooms was greatly increased, meaning that the attics were extended and could therefore easily be transformed into flats. The building materials of the walls and roofs of the attic were reduced, and the reduction of the thickness of walls and roofs is not in line with the current basic building standard in Sichuan. The designer of the new houses acknowledged that he knew the design had been changed without authorization. But he “did not have the ability to control what’s going on site”, because the developer apparently has more influences and proximity to redirect the construction work. And the designer felt he has no reason to “cause troubles” when the government was tacit about the changes (Interview\_2015040705). As the result, the quality of the new buildings is doubtful. As seen in a field visit, summer rain, which generally caused no harm to most of the old village houses, had easily damaged the roofs of some new houses and left obvious evidence of leakage on the walls and floors (see Figure 6.24).



Figure 6.24 The damaged roof and floor of some new houses

Thirdly, besides the development of new housing, the planning and design document had also set out objectives of developing public services and rural tourism. Therefore, it had planned public service facilities such as a nursery, a home for the elderly, public squares, several orchards, fishing and lotus ponds, and even a hotel to attract tourists. In practice, the development was greatly reduced to the development of new houses. Infrastructure such as road lamps, outdoor sports facilities, waste collection points, and a public toilet house had been delivered around the houses, but the economic and social development in village planning was not implemented.

Hu attributed the deviations in the planning and outcomes for the new village environment and houses to economic and technical reasons. He asserted that the layout and design of the new houses required building techniques which were too complex, and therefore these were impractical and uneconomic. Hu also repeatedly stressed the lack of investment from both government and other entrepreneurs. According to him, a private company had shown an interest in investing in the tourism business in village K, but the proposal for development had been in discussion for years. He argued that the subsidy from the government could only cover the construction of basic infrastructure, such as road and road lamps.

However, while claiming that there was a shortage of development funds, Hu managed to develop more houses than the village planning and design. As mentioned above, unplanned new residences were constructed in 2012, and the scale of housing development in village K was still growing. In 2013, the housing development in village K was further extended to the north bank of the river, close to the coal washing plants (see Figure 6.4 and Figure 6.5). Therefore, during the field visits in 2015, over 30 new houses were under construction in the village.

The development of the new village has indeed been turned into a veiled private real estate business handled by Hu. It was found that the majority of the houses developed in the second development were sold to purchasers from outside the village. As the developer, Hu was in charge of the sale of the new houses. The allocation of houses followed a common commercial rule of house sale: first come, first served. House buyers would have the right to choose their new home's location in the newly developed residential quarter, meaning that it was likely that the new residential quarters would be inhabited by a mixture of settlers from different places.

The house purchasers paid about 70,000 RMB to Hu for their new home, which accounts for about 400 RMB/m<sup>2</sup>. In general, the purchasers were attracted by the house price. With proximity to town B, a new dwelling in village K cost much less than in the town, where the average house price was about 2000 RMB/m<sup>2</sup>. The house form was also an advantage in the eye of some purchasers. An old woman who was a town-dweller, but originally from a nearby village, said in a half-joking tone:

I was living with my daughter in a flat in the town... The flat cost a lot of money but had no room on the ground floor. I prefer the village houses here, because the rooms on the ground floor are essential. Without these rooms, we old guys cannot have a proper funeral<sup>10</sup> after we die! (Interview\_2015050126).

However, although in law village residences can only be sold within a collective, Hu's promising status in local politics may help his business avoid being punished by local government. On the contrary, the development in village K has even been acknowledged by the county government as a model of implementing the development of new villages. The county officials showed the village to their provincial superiors when the latter came to inspect the implementation of new villages and new rural compounds.

All the new houses in the second and third development were built on farmland. Hu rented farmland from the collective members who had contracted it. As introduced above, a considerable amount of farmland in the village was idle and barely brought any revenue to the land contractors. The long-term land rent offered by Hu seems to be a practical choice for many land contractors to extract value from idle land. Two interviewees articulated the land release activities as below:

People (land contractors) have become more sophisticated and clever in the further developments... People in there [pointing at the place where new houses were under construction] labelled their land with a clear price. And the rent needs to be pre-paid, or they would not provide their land (Interview\_2015040520).

Yes, some people (land contractors) out for work may leave their land uncultivated. But once the land would be used (for housing development), people would asked for cash... Hu borrowed loan to pay the rent. But of course, finally he would get the money back from house purchasers (Interview\_2015040621).

With pre-paid rent, Hu managed to persuade the land contractors and acquired the essential land resources for his business. The changed land use and the land rent are the

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<sup>10</sup> Traditional funerary practices in rural Sichuan usually last for several days, with the coffin put in the central hall of the house or in the courtyard. Rituals and banquets are held in the hall and courtyard and involve family members and others who come to give their condolences. More details can be seen in Chau (2004), *Hosting Funerals and Temple Festivals: Folk Event Productions in Rural China*.

tangible and intangible outcomes brought about by the series of developments in village K. Further discussion about the development outcomes is discussed in the following section.

### **6.3 Outcomes of the development of village K**

#### **6.3.1 *Changes in the village built environment***

The development in village K has changed the built environment in two main aspects. Firstly, the development in village K significantly increased the residential areas and the amount of residences in the village. The development in the riverside did not significantly enlarge the original residential area, but the two rounds of further development will finally deliver about a hundred new residences in the village, and transform a considerable amount of farmland into residential land. For the second aspect, the development in village K, especially the development of the riverside residential quarter, modernized the village built environment. Hu himself said that,

The development in the fifth *xiaozu* (the riverside residential quarter) is the urban version of new village, and the development in other *xiaozu* is the rural version of a new village (Interview\_2015040519).

It is worth noting that the process of modernizing the village environment was not merely driven by the government. As illustrated above, the new houses developed on the riverside are similar to typical local townhouses, and most of the house owners furnished their flats with various modern appliances. The form of the new apartment in the riverside and the interior decoration indicates the house owners' admiration and pursuit of a modern and urban lifestyle. However, due to many practical factors, such as economic conditions and the habits of social activities, the village residents' lifestyle has not drastically changed. As a result, the new space has been transformed to suit the practical situation of village life.

On the other hand, the government's transformation of the built environment suggests the government's pursuit of a picturesque village built environment and idealized rural life. It has been explained that the façade transformation was an attempt to add symbols of traditional village houses to the brand new urban-style apartment buildings. A sculpture erected in the transformation also demonstrates the government's effort to decorate the new village with picturesque imagery full of idealized rural life. The sculpture portrays a flute-playing village boy on the back of a water-buffalo, which is an iconic scene depicted by many traditional Chinese poems and paintings as a symbol of a peaceful and carefree countryside life (see Figure 6.25). The words engraved below the sculpture, "pastoral in the countryside"

further clarified government's intention to apply more 'rural characteristics' to this new residential quarter, which was built merely as a group of monotonous townhouses.



Figure 6.25 Left: The sculpture and pavilion built by the government in village K; Right: A traditional Chinese painting with the poem “Evening in a Village”

Source: Right: [www.tianya.cn](http://www.tianya.cn)

The government also tried to apply the official aesthetic standard to the further development in village K, but the government did not intervene in the new village development in village K as much as in the development of village S. Hu, the shadow operator and developer was in charge of implementing the standard in practice. His consideration of economic factors noticeably changed the village planning and house design, and thus the outcomes delivered in practice did not strictly follow the standard. In spite of some changes, such as decreasing the distance between buildings, or transforming the attic in a potentially dangerous way, the new houses were welcomed in the hidden market of rural housing. As explained above, the houses' proximity to town at an affordable price, and the house form accepted by many rural residents, attracted many buyers from surrounding villages and towns. On spatial aspects, the increasing amount of housing in village K has gradually turned the village from a rural place into several suburban residential zones centred around the town. Furthermore, the development may also profound impact the village community in terms of social and economic aspects.

### 6.3.2 *Influences on socio-economic dimension*

The redevelopment of the riverside residential quarter in village K has significantly improved the housing conditions of many original residents. However, except for

transforming the built environment, the housing project did not set out objectives or plans to improve other aspects of village life, such as the economy and public services of the residential quarter. The transformation project funded by government has provided a few public facilities and helped to maintain the environmental sanitation, but it has not effectively involved economic or social development.

To the surprise of the residents of the riverside area, a few tourists have been attracted to the village after the development and transformation. The tourists usually come on mild days in the short spring and autumn of Sichuan. Most are city residents who drive there with food and camping facilities to enjoy a weekend. To these urbanites, the riverside area of village K is an attractive natural landscape. The development and transformation of the riverside residential quarter has paved the road and provided many public facilities, which bring convenience to the tourists. Some camp and cook in the pavilions in the public green area of the residential quarter or on the riverside grassland (see Figure 6.26). Occasionally, tourists buy food and drink, and some countryside dishes from villagers. However, to most residents of the riverside, the tourists are a problem rather than an opportunity to develop a business in the village. They complain that tourists leave rubbish and damage the greenery and public facilities in the village, and so the public toilet has been locked. Some residents even suggested limiting the tourists' access to the village with a toll, but the residents have not yet developed any practical measure or organization to deal with the phenomenon of tourism in the village.

Besides tourists who spend a relatively short time in the village, the series of developments in village K has brought in a considerable number of outsiders who will reside for a much longer time. The migrants may influence the social life of the community and, moreover, complicate the land use issue in the village. On the riverside residential quarter, the migrant house owners only account for a very small number of the residents. These migrants more or less have kinship ties with the original residents who sold the houses to them. It seems that the migrant families get along well with other families in the residential quarter, but it is hard to say that this will remain the case in the residential quarters built in the second and third rounds of development, where the majority of the new houses were sold to outsiders by the shadow developer, Hu. These outsiders tend to have fewer connections with the local community in village K.





Figure 6.26 Left: Tourists camping in the pavilion in village K, Right: The locked public toilet in village K

During the fieldwork, most of the house owners had not yet moved into the new houses, and therefore the social consequences caused by the inflow of migration are yet to be known. With the village gradually becoming a residential zone which serves the town, it is likely that the connections between the village community and the town will be further enhanced. Further research might explore whether the economic and social activities in the town are extended into the village.

The present study points out that it is very likely that the involvement of non-collective members will complicate the land issues caused by the development. The land contracts of the village households who had rented out their farmland for the development will end in 2029. According to the land law, they could lose their right to contract the land, due to using it for illegal housing development, because migrant house owners do not have the right to contract land in the village. The influence of the developer, Hu, who is an influential figure in both the village community and local politics, temporarily concealed the potential conflict related to the land use. However, it is difficult to predict how the land issue resulting from the development may evolve in the near future.

## 6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated the village development in village K. The first section introduced the village's unique socio-economic background and its built environment in history. The second part articulated the process of several rounds of developments in the village. It identified the involved actors and explained why and how the village built environment has been transformed with the interaction of the stakeholders and the influences of the policies of new village development.



As illustrated in Figure 6.27, in the first round of development, the village cadres and the residents of the riverside area played a crucial role in the development process. The cadres and participants commonly decided the design of the layout of the buildings and the house form, without seeking assistance from a professional planning and design agency. The relationship between the cadres and participants was reciprocal. Therefore, the two non-state stakeholders acted as a united interest group in front of the government, which had tried to stop the development. The leading cadre of the village indeed acted as a private developer, and the participants were the cadre's partners as well as clients.

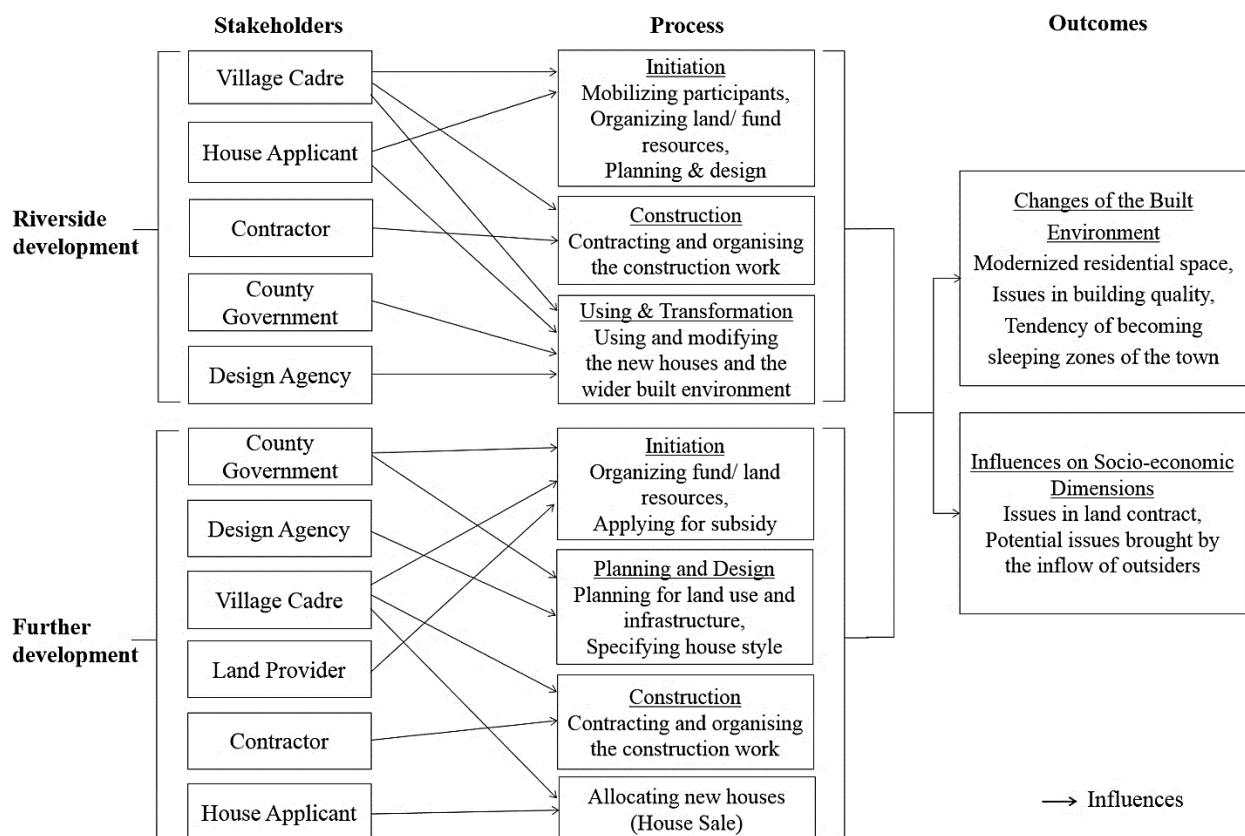


Figure 6.27 The process, outcomes, and actors involved in the development of village K

With the initiation of BNSC, the county government had to deal with the increasing task assigned by higher-level government to implement new villages. When the requirement exceeded the financial ability of the county government, the government chosen to join the reciprocal interest group comprised of the cadre and participants of the housing development. Moreover, the personal influence of the cadre, who has an effective network in both the village community and local politics, was essential in gaining the cooperation of the government, local elites and other crucial non-government stakeholders of development, including land providers, constructors, and house buyers.

It seems that by enrolling in the development of village K under the name of new village development, the government, the developer and its partners (cadre, land providers, constructors), and the clients (house buyers) all achieved a win-win situation. The government has secured its position in the internal evaluation held by its superior. The developer and its partners, namely the land providers and constructors, have made a profit, and the house buyers now have subsidized and affordable new homes. However, the development might also bring several negative impacts.

One of the potential issues of the development is that it has breached the LML and the policies of farmland conservation in China. Although the cadre's influence might have covered the issue temporarily, it is not guaranteed that the land providers' right to contract their land, and the house buyers' ownership of the new houses, will not be affected in the future.

Moreover, the quality of the buildings and the new residential quarter delivered by the development is not guaranteed. The professional design agency played a minor role in the new village development in village K. The housing development of the riverside never involved formal planning and design procedures. The new houses delivered were found not work well with the daily life of the residents, therefore had to be transformed. In the followed development, the design agency involved lacked the ability and motivation to prevent the developer to make significant changes to the approved design of the new village and houses, some of which have had negative effects on the quality of the buildings and the overall built environment of the new residential quarter.

Further, the process of the housing development may have affected the socio-economic situation of village K. A considerable number of outsiders, either tourists or migrant house buyers, have been involved in the community. The village is gradually turning into residential zones, or a recreational space that serves the town and city. The long-term effects of such a transformation may need to be explored in future research, but, at the very least, it is highly likely that the involvement of non-collective members will complicate the land issues rooted in the development.

## **Chapter 7. Development Practice as Framed by Institutional Structure and Socio-Spatial Context**

The previous three chapters have presented the case studies of village development in practice. Chapter 4 introduced the sub-national policies of village development, and the social, economic and spatial context of the studied area. Chapters 5 and 6 respectively have illustrated the village development practices in village S and K. The process and output of different development practices have been illustrated with detailed empirical data collected from planning documents, interviews and observations on site.

This chapter identifies the structural and contextual factors that have shaped the development process and outcomes on the ground. The first section compares the studied development practices and highlight the similarities and disparities between them. Section 7.2 explains the similarities and disparities by connecting them to the BNSC policies of village development and the social and physical environment of the involved villages. Adapting the broader perspective of China's institutional structure and socio-spatial context, Section 7.3 further examines the development of policies and practices of transforming the village environment. The last section is a brief conclusion of the main findings of this chapter.

### **7.1 Comparing the development processes and outputs in the two villages**

#### **7.1.1 *Comparing the development processes in village S and K***

The development in village S followed a process carefully directed by the county government. The process can be clearly divided into three steps. In the first step, namely the preparation and initiation step, the government and design agency have selected the locality of the development. The two actors were also in charge of village planning and design, which is the second step of development. The third step of development is the construction of the approved design and the allocation of the delivered housing. To ensure the construction would follow the planning and design document, the government played the leading role in organizing the construction. It also assigned the village cadres to hold the allocation of the new space. The rules of the allocation process were claimed as being satisfactory to those villagers with the most urgent need to upgrade the housing condition. Furthermore, the government has intervened in villagers' disputes of land tenure caused by the development. To defuse the disputes, the county government chose to pay rent for the land used by the development in a complicated and non-transparent way. After the new houses had been built, the development was not completed as officially announced. The last and non-official step of

the development was the transformation of the new delivered built environment led by the house owners.

It can be seen that the transformation of the built environment in village S mainly followed a top-down development approach directed by the government. Noticeable participation of villagers appeared only in the house transformation after the development has been officially claimed as completed. By contrast, the transformation of the built environment in village K was much more complicated and involved more frequently contact with non-state actors. First of all, the development in village K was not completed in one attempt, but in a series of developments at different times. This series of developments can be further categorized into two stages. The earlier stage of development is the development of the riverside residential quarter which started in 2007. The later stage of development started in 2012, which is dispersedly located in several sites in the villages and was still ongoing during the fieldwork of the study in 2015.

Unlike the development in village S, the development of the riverside residential area in village K was initiated without the support of the policies of new villages. The process of the development was therefore very different to the top-down development approach. The riverside development started when the village cadre, Hu, who is also a notable figure in local politics, took office. Meanwhile, many of the residents of the riverside indeed had the need to upgrade their houses, which were affected by flood and land-sliding. The cadre and the residents constituted a leading force in the development. The planning of the development agenda, and the design and allocation of the new dwellings were made with negotiations inside the community. There were negotiations between the residents who were enthusiastic and the residents who were suspicious and hesitated about the development, as well as between the residents lived in different locations in the old built environment. As members of the village collective, the cadre and the villagers' representatives had advantages in terms of personal influences, as well as the time, patience and experience to deal with the negotiations. Finally, the negotiations had been settled effectively and the development plan came to an agreement with the involvement of all the stakeholders.

The onward construction process was mainly handled by the village cadre and his business partner, a town-based construction contractor. The contractor directed not only the construction work, but also the design of new housing with the village cadre and villagers. Therefore, the process of design and construction did not involve any professional planners and architects. Nevertheless, new buildings to house nearly a hundred families were delivered.

The residents were aware of the personal relation between the cadre and the contractor, which enabled the cadre to make a profit from the development. But they generally viewed this pocket-filling by the village cadre as common and acceptable commercial behaviour and a hidden and conventional rule of construction projects in the local area, as long as the house price and quality were not too far away from their expectations.

The county government's refurbishment project in 2010 was the first intervention of the local state in the riverside development. This refurbishment project could be viewed as the last step of the riverside development in village K. This step indicated the development has been formally recognized by the government, which had once treated the spontaneous housing project as an illegal development and tried to stop it at its beginning. After the refurbishment project, the riverside residential area was labelled by the county government as a new village and displayed as an achievement of the implementation of BNSC in Easter County. The government funded the refurbishment of the house façade and the development of the public area of the riverside residential quarter. Concurrently with the government's transformation of the new built environment, the house owners also conducted individual transformation projects. They adapted their new home according to their economic condition, aesthetic preference and specific needs and habits of using the residential space.

Soon after the riverside development, several new rounds of development appeared in village K. These later rounds of development were formally involved with the policies of new villages. But the specific organization of the later rounds of development in village K was neither the same as the development in village S, nor the riverside development.

In the first step of the later rounds of development, it was the village cadre who had initiated the project and decided the site, rather than the government and design agency. The cadre rented the site for development from the villagers who had the land tenure. In the second step, similar to the typical government-guided development in village S, but different from the riverside development, a professional design agency was assigned by the county government to make village planning and house design for the later development. The design agency worked out the village planning and design, and the document was approved by the government. It is worth noting that the government did not care much about the making of the village planning and design compared with the case of village S. The quality of the planning and design document is therefore doubtful.

The government also stepped away from organizing the construction and the allocation of new houses. The construction, which was organized by the village cadre Hu and his

business partner of construction work, noticeably changed the planned layout of the new village and the house design. The cadre was also in charge of the allocation of the new houses. Acting indeed as a private housing developer under the title of village cadre, he sold the new houses following the commercial house-sale rule of first come, first served. The majority of house buyers were from outside the village.

In sum, the comparison of the two case studies indicates that while sharing certain points, the development processes in village S and K show significant differences with each other in nearly every step of the development. In general, the development in village S and the riverside development in village K varied the most. The later development in village K could be viewed as in-between approach, which has both similarities and dissimilarities with the two precedent developments. The following contents expound the findings drawn from comparing the different development approaches.

#### **7.1.2 *Comparing the development outcomes in village S and K***

As elaborated in Chapters 5 and 6, the outcomes delivered by the development in village S and K could be categorized into changes in the village built environment and the impacts on social and economic dimensions.

In terms of the changes in village built environment, the developments in both villages have upgraded a few infrastructures with subsidies from the county government. Roads paved with cement and furnished with road lamps and greenery were delivered in the new residential quarters. The new built-up areas are also served by waste disposal systems, public outdoor space furnished with greenery and sports facilities. But the quantity and type of the infrastructure, public buildings and facilities delivered by different village developments are not the same.

The case study in village S found that in spite of not fully achieving the planned objective of infrastructure development, the development delivered a public building which provided plenty space and equipment for social services and public activities. In contrast, the riverside development in village K before the intervention of government has much less infrastructure and facilities for public services. The major concern of the original development was on new housing. The condition of infrastructure in the residential quarter was later upgraded by the refurbishment project funded by the government. The refurbishment project paved the road and installed road lamps, upgraded the electricity network in the village, and turned the unused northern part of the site into a nice outdoor space decorated by pavilions, sculptures, and sports facilities. The project also took several measures to improve the

sanitary conditions of the residential quarter. It built the public toilet and the waste disposal system in the residential quarter, and subsidized the cleaning and maintenance works of the new built environment.

The later development in village K placed slightly more emphasis on infrastructure than the riverside development before the refurbishment. Cement roads, road lamps, greenery, waste disposal system, public outdoor space and sport facilities and a public toilet were delivered at the same time with the development of the new houses. However, compared with the development in village S, the later rounds of development in village K did not deliver any of the planned public buildings.

Specific to the development outcome of new houses, the developments in the two villages delivered a different quantity and type of housing. The development in village S delivered one new residential quarter inhabited by fourteen families, while the series of development in village K involved three residential quarters and delivered more than a hundred new dwellings in total. Moreover, the housing development in village S will not likely be continued, while the development in village K was still expanding.

The forms of new dwellings delivered by the developments in village S and K varied a lot. The new dwellings developed in village S are two-storey semi-detached houses. The size of the new houses is designed similar to common village houses in the area. The house design and the arrangement of village layout also tried to use the architectural characteristics extracted from some old houses in the village. The design follows the official aesthetic standard of modern rural houses, which was named and promoted by the government as the style of eastern Sichuan folk houses. The construction process carefully implemented the design.

Significantly different from the housing form in village S, the new dwellings at the riverside of village K are closer to multi-storey apartment buildings in the town, rather than common village houses. And the new apartment buildings were mainly unadorned. The refurbishment project led by the county government largely changed the building appearance and made it in line with the official aesthetic standards of new village houses.

The new houses developed in the later rounds of development in village K have both similarities and dissimilarities with the new dwellings in the riverside and in village S. The planned new houses in the later development were semi-detached houses, which was designated with the decoration style preferred by the government. The upstairs of the house is flats, which share a public staircase like the new dwellings developed in the riverside.



Meanwhile, the construction straightened the layout of new houses following a curve line and reduced the distance between buildings. The construction also changed the design of the attics and roofs of the new houses, and turned the dwellings into four-storey apartment buildings. In general, all the aforementioned changes reduced the new buildings' consistency with the official aesthetic standard.

The changes to the village built environment produced social and economic impacts on the village community. The development in village S and the later development in village K which were initiated with the support of government reduced farmland in the village. As elaborated in the case study chapters, the villagers whose farmland had been taken by the developments received land rent (and in some cases employment) as compensation. In addition, because the major source of household incomes in both of the villages was not from agriculture, the decrease of farmland did not drastically change villagers' current living conditions.

Besides changing land-use purpose from agriculture to housing, development in village S and the later development in village K also changed the users of the land. In village S, all the new houses were allocated to members of the village collective. These house owners therefore occupied extra housing plots from the development. The cost of adjusting land tenure among villagers was paid by the government, but the villagers whose contracted land was taken by the development were still worried that the change of land use might influence their land tenure in future, when the tenure needs to be renewed and the current agreement on land rent expired. The villagers who provided land for the later development in village K also confronted the same problem. Nevertheless, they chose to accept the land rent offered by the developer and neglected the potential problems in future. Their farmland thus became housing plot consumed by the house buyers from outside the village. The potential problems caused by the change of land use include punishment from government, because the conversion of farmland into construction land was not unauthorized, and the disputes between villagers when the collective-owned farmland would be redistributed.

By contrast, the riverside development in village K is less likely to be troubled by land use issues. The development has reused the old housing plots and did not take any farmland. The adjustment of land tenure between the involved village households was resolved via internal negotiations. The residents' major concerns about the development outcomes from the social aspect were centred on the intruding tourists who came to the village without invitation and disturbed the peace of the community.

Table 7.1 Comparing the findings of case studies

Name of the Case Study		Development Process		Development Outcomes: Impacts on Social and Physical Environment
		Fund and Land Resources	Organization	
<b>Village S (Development in 2011)</b>		<u>Financial resource:</u> - Flexible subsidies for infrastructure and housing development - Payment from house buyers  <u>Land resource:</u> - Farmland	<u>Government:</u> - Select development site - Approve planning and design procedures - Organize construction <u>Design agency:</u> - Make housing design <u>Village community:</u> - Distribute new houses <u>House owners:</u> - Replace the space designed for rural production - Enlarge indoor space of the new house	<u>Housing:</u> - Limited supply of new houses to house applicants from the collective - Semi-detached houses (furnished with government-promoted style) - Transformed with features of modern and urban houses <u>Land tenure:</u> - Internal exchanges with temporary solution <u>Collective economy:</u> - No significant improvement <u>Population Change:</u> - No significant changes <u>Infrastructure and public services:</u> - New community centre - Concreted roads and road lights - Outdoor sports facilities - Waste disposal facilities and public toilets
<b>Village K</b>	<b>Riverside Development (2007-2011)</b>	<u>Financial resource:</u> - Payment from house buyers <u>Land resource:</u> - Reuse old housing plots  * Refurbishment Project: <u>Financial resource</u> - Government subsidy <u>Land resource:</u> - Reuse old housing plots	<u>Community:</u> - Select development site - Make housing design (with the contractor) - Organize construction (with the lead of the village cadre) - Distribute new houses  * Refurbishment Project: <u>Government:</u> - Upgrade infrastructure - Refurbish house façades <u>House owners:</u> - Transform the ground floor room into the main living room	<u>Housing:</u> - Sufficient supply of new houses to house applicants from the collective - 4 storey apartment buildings (unadorned) - Transformed by house owners to satisfy their needs <u>Land tenure:</u> - Internal exchanges with stable solution  * <u>Refurbishment Project:</u> <u>Housing:</u> - Façades furnished with government-promoted style <u>Collective economy:</u> - Attracted a few tourists, but has not yet produced significant economic benefits to the community <u>Population change:</u> - Inflow of a small number of migrants <u>Infrastructure and public services:</u> - Concreted roads and road lights - Outdoor sports facilities - Waste disposal facilities and public toilets

	<b>Later Rounds of Development (2012-present)</b>	<u>Financial resource:</u> - Fixed subsidy for infrastructure and housing development - Investment from private developer (finally paid back by illegal house sales)  <u>Land resource:</u> - Farmland	<u>Private developer:</u> - Select development site - Organize construction (changed house design without authorization) - Distribute new houses (illegal house sales) <u>Design agency:</u> - Make housing design <u>Government:</u> - Approve planning and design procedures <u>House owners:</u> - Make payment for the new houses	<u>Housing:</u> - Substantial new houses mainly supplied to buyers from outside - Designed as 3 storey semi-detached apartment buildings with government-promoted style - Transformed by the developer to 4 storey semi-detached apartment buildings with simplified style <u>Land tenure:</u> - Illegal exchanges between collective members and house buyers from outside <u>Collective economy:</u> - Produced rent for the land-providing households, but no significant economic benefits to the community <u>Population change:</u> - Inflow of a considerable number of residents from outside <u>Infrastructure and public services:</u> - Concreted roads and road lights - Outdoor sports facilities - Waste disposal facilities and public toilets
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In sum, as shown in Table 7.1, the developments in the two villages were funded and organized via different approaches, and have delivered different social and economic impacts on the community. These impacts are mainly centred on the exchange of land tenure, which is related to the land's potential to produce rent in the present and future, rather than the land use value for farming. It is also worth noting that the developments' social and economic impacts are varied to different groups of the rural population. The impacts on specific groups of villagers are further discussed in the next chapter.

## 7.2 Influences of the policies and the socio-spatial environment of village development

The key factors for the production of the built environment include the material resources, rules of institutional and political regulation, and ideas and values that affected the organization and deployment of the resources. Theoretically, the arrangement of the resources, the formation of rules, ideas and values are operated by various development agencies, through certain development factors within the socio-spatial context of the development (Healey, 1992; Madanipour, 1996). This section identifies that the factors of village development include the policies of new villages and the social and physical conditions of the localities of development.

### 7.2.1 *Policies' influences on village development in practice*

Section 7.1 has pointed out many similarities between the village developments initiated within the county government's programme. The similarities can be explained as the influences of BNSC policies. Firstly, the development practices supported by the BNSC policies invariably delivered infrastructure and facilities for public services, such as roads, waste disposal system, health and recreational facilities like the outdoor sports equipment, etc. These facilities were delivered with specific subsidies from the county government. Secondly, the village developments also fulfilled the formal procedures of village planning and housing design required by the BNSC policies. The government in Eastern County has put both financial and human investment to organize village planning and housing design for each of the approved village developments. The planning and design procedure further ensured the third common point of the government-promoted village development, which is the adaptation of the official-approved aesthetic standards of implementing BNSC.

The similarities between the developments under the government programme of new villages can hardly be found in the riverside development in village K, which was not initiated as a formal development authorized by the government. It can be seen that the development site was in need of facilities to improve the environment sanitation polluted by the waste produced by the residents and the coal industries. But the community, which was both the major sponsor and beneficiary of the development, has limited financial ability and awareness to upgrade the relevant infrastructures. It was also found that the design of the new housing did not involve professional planning practitioners and architects. The new houses delivered by the development have very different forms and appearance compared with the new village houses appreciated by the government.

The aforementioned findings, either the similarities between the village developments under the government programme, or the differences between the developments within or without the government programme, indicate the development policies' influences on the development in practice. As illustrated in the literature review chapter, the BNSC policies of village development pledged to increase government investment on infrastructure and facilities for public services in rural areas. The policies not only aim to change the underdeveloped situation of rural China, but also take the investment in rural development as part of the national development strategy to increase domestic consumption and stimulate China's economy. With the initiation of BNSC, enormous subsidies had been allocated from central to local government, as well as from higher level local government to the lower levels.

Achieving the ambitious goals raised by the policies of BNSC needs to involve the countryside, which has long been excluded in the planning regime, into the national political and economic system. Therefore, the role of village planning has been enhanced in both education and praxis. Chapter 2's analysis of the evolution of village development policies has also indicated that BNSC policies were alerted by the shortfalls and criticisms, caused by drastic urbanization of rural areas seen in many quota-driven developments of new villages. Based on the reflections on previous development practices, BNSC policies specifically stated as a goal that the rurality and 'rural characteristics' of the village environment should be preserved. These policy emphases are the driving factor for local government's collaboration with planning practitioners and architects in the practice of village development, as well as the origin of the official aesthetic standards of village development.

On the other hand, comparing the studied cases highlights several findings that cannot be explained as effects anticipated by the policies of village development. First of all, the comparison found that the government-promoted village development can produce results contradictory to policy objectives. As seen in both village S and K, the developments formally involved in the county government's development programme were carried out on farmland, and finally resulted in a decrease of this farmland. This result not only contradicted the riverside policies of village development, which aimed to release more farmland, but also contradicted BNSC policies, which repeatedly claim to insist and further enhance farmland conservation. Moreover, the result shows the development practice can override the current land law and land-use regulations in China. By contrast, the riverside development in village K, which had no relation to the policies of new villages, reused old housing plots and did not affect any farmland.

Secondly, the comparison of case studies confirmed that under the same policy frame of village development, the development in practice can have processes and products that vary a great deal. For instance, being involved in the same development programme conducted by the same county government, the development in village S and the later development in village K received different amounts of subsidy. It is even more bewildering to find that the development which received more subsidies delivered far less new housing. The aforementioned deviations of implementation can hardly be explained if we only look at the policies.

Lastly, the policies of village development provide few help to interpret villagers' use and transformation of the new built environment, which was not recognized officially as a

step in the development process. In spite of being overlooked in the current implementation of development policies, this step has made noticeable changes to the development results. This fact indicates that for revising development policies and development practice in future, it is necessary to understand the events which happened after the policy implementation was officially announced as completed.

To interpret disparities between the policies and practice, the nuances of the implementation of policies and the changes not fully recognized by the policies, the study needs to explore the factors of village development beyond the policies. It is aware that the policies are only part of the forces that shaped the process and output of the production of the village environment. The discussion about other factors' influence on the development practice is presented in the following parts of this chapter.

### ***7.2.2 Influences of the physical and social environment of the villages***

The case studies investigated the social and economic conditions, alongside the natural and built environment of the villages involved in development. These social and spatial features are in relation to the supply of material resources for village development, such as land, labour and financial resources. The following sections elaborate how the involved villages' socio-spatial environment affected the development practices of the village built environment.

#### **Influences of the economic and social context of villages**

The two studied villages had many similarities in their economic and social situations. In general, the household income in most families in both of the villages was no longer reliant on agriculture. The main workforces in the majority of village families had usually left rural areas for off-farm migrant works. The children were left in the village, and looked after by the grandparents. These three generations of a household make up an extended structure of family commonly-seen in Eastern County. The expenditure of the grandparents and the grandchildren was mainly met by the parents' migrant work. The planned or actual growth of the population, or being affected by a natural disaster, or dealing with the normal ageing of the building, were all practical reasons for a village family to renew its house.

However, organizing a housing project is too demanding for the elders and minors in the villages. As a result, in many cases, the remaining villagers have to live with deteriorated housing conditions for years. A typical case was the Luo family in village S (see Chapter 5). The development of the new village provided these village families with a chance to have affordable and ready-to-buy new houses. Therefore, the development was welcomed by

villagers who had the need and a certain economic basis to afford a new village house, but lacked the labour to organize an individual housing project. These villagers consumed the new houses delivered by the development, as seen in the case of village S. Moreover, they could be positively engaged with and make contributions to the development process, as seen in the riverside development in village K.

There were also many dissimilarities between villages S and K in terms of village economy. For the village households in village S, the majority of their contracted farmland had been sub-leased to companies running agriculture-related businesses. Villagers as land contractors can leave their land for off-farm work, while receiving rent from the companies. By contrast, the majority of farmland in village K is not sub-leased. If not in cooperation with the village cadre, who was running the village development as an informal real estate developer and offering a long-term contract to rent land for development, the villagers away for migrant work could only leave their land uncultivated and it brought them little benefit.

Due to the differences in land subleases, when the village development turned the contracted land into built-up areas inhibited by other villagers, the land contractors in village S were not satisfied. To prevent further disputes in land use, the development in village S is not likely to be extended. The land contractors in village K chose to provide land for the development in exchange for rent. With the collaboration of land providers, the development in village K could get sufficient land resources, thence be furthered into larger scale.

The unique social and economic context of village K was also conducive for the housing developments in the village. The old dock and market street located in village K connected the village with the town and the county seat, as well as the rural hinterland in the surrounding area. The connections included transportation, as well as kinship ties and various means of social networks. Benefitting from the village's connections with the town and county seat, a few villagers, typified by the village cadre Hu, became influential figures in local politics and the economy. The powerful individuals from the village and their relations with local elites have paved the road for the development of housing. The village's connections with surrounding areas also helped to attract house buyers from outside the village.

The social and economic context of the village also influenced the villagers' preference for house form. As seen in the riverside residential area in village K, which has longstanding close social and economic connections with the town and the urban county seat, the residents chose to develop new buildings which take a similar form to the houses in the town. However, in general, the villagers still have different economic conditions and habits of using space



compared with urban dwellers. At last, they had to adapt their new homes to suit their practical needs. In the development in village S, the villagers did not have much chance to choose the form of their new houses. Nevertheless, the villagers' work experience as constructors has brought them the financial ability and skills to transform their new houses. The village's social and economic context has been reflected by the house transformation. Due to the occupation change from farmers to off-farm workers, the villagers' lifestyle has also changed a great deal. Therefore, they have transformed the space designed for rural production, such as by raising livestock and storing farm tools. The kitchen space left for traditional wood stoves was also replaced by modern gas stoves.

Moreover, it could be seen in village S that a spacious and modern new house is viewed by many families as a representation of their wealth and social status, although the spacious indoor space was mainly left empty, as seen in the grand villa in the village. A similar trend of pursuing grand new houses has also been found in studies of individual village housing projects in other regions in China (Knapp, 1996; Sargeson, 2002). Villagers' pursuit of spacious and modern residential space is mainly due to social and cultural need, rather than practical needs for daily life. This could explain why many house owners in village S added as many rooms as they could in their new house, but left the rooms empty most of the year, and why residents of the riverside area in village K had carefully furnished their flat upstairs with all sorts of modern appliances, but only used it as a space for sleep. Because of the two villages' social and geographical proximity to the town and city, the aesthetic of modern and spacious residential space populated in urban areas has influenced villagers' value and preference toward their new homes.

### **Influences of geographic features and the previous built environment of villages**

While transforming the geographic features and built environment of the Chinese countryside, the village developments were also affected by the original spatial characteristics of villages. Both of the case studies indicate that a village's location and accessibility to a town and the surrounding hinterland is a very influential factor for the development processes and outputs.

Village K's proximity to town and convenient accessibility to other villages in the vicinity is an important reason why the large amount of new houses developed in the village could attract sufficient buyers from the surrounding areas. With the several rounds of housing development, the village may gradually become an informal residential zone for the town

inhabited by outsiders, and lose the sense of community. The good accessibility to the urban area and the coal mine also brought issues of pollution to the village environment.

The convenient transportation between village S and the town is a reason why the village has been selected by the county government and design agency as the place for the pilot project of village development. The two villages' accessibility to town also influenced villagers' daily life and social activities. As observed by Skinner (1964; 1965a, b) half a century ago, the towns in the vast countryside of the Sichuan basin were central places for the economic and social life in rural areas. Nowadays, as seen in the case studies, the town centre still acts as a major source to provide public services, space for consumption, and recreational activities to the surrounding rural hinterland, which attract villagers' frequent visits. By contrast, the facilities and space for public services and activities delivered by village developments, such as the new community centre in village S and the public green space in village K, receive few visits from villagers.

The development of the new village environment is also affected by the climate and topography conditions of the locality. The rainy weather is claimed by many house owners in village S as a reason for them to transform their new house. The rain storms sometimes also cause flood and landslide disasters, which were the initial non-human factors for the development in the riverside residential area in village K. The riverside area's topography made the south part of the site a better choice than the north part; hence, the south part was selected as site for the new houses. The mountainous topography of villages S and K also influenced the distribution of new housing clusters, which were not arranged into big blocks as seen in some village developments in plain areas, such as the case presented by Bray (2013).

The original built environment of a village can also influence the format of the new village environment and even determine whether the village development would happen from the very beginning. The accessibility and scenic natural and built environment in village S were crucial reasons for the county government to pilot the project of the new village there. Developed on the old housing plots, the layout of the new dwellings in the riverside residential quarter of village K follows the line-shaped arrangement of the old buildings. After the residential quarter was reconstructed by the residents and village cadres, the county government realized it could use the site as a showcase for the official programme of village development, and therefore funded the furnishing of the site. Village K's upgraded

infrastructures after the early development have also benefited the later rounds of development in the village and fuelled the concealed estate business led by the cadre.

In sum, it has been found that the physical and social environment of the development localities influenced both the development process and output on the ground. Villages with closer social and physical connections to urban area are more likely to become development localities. The social and physical connections to towns and cities also have interconnections with village economy, population and villagers' preference of housing form and attitude toward village development. The spatial characteristics of the development sites before new construction are also reflected in the new village environment delivered in the development practices.

### **7.3 Socio-spatial context and structure that shaped village development**

Section 7.2 has expounded why and how the factors rooted in the policies of new villages and the social and physical environment of the involved villages, have influenced the arrangement of resources, rules and ideas in the development practices. This section would relate the formation and development of policies, and the physical and social environment of the villages involved, to China's institutional system and social and economic issues on the macro level. In this way, the study further identifies the socio-spatial context and structure that has shaped the development practice of new villages.

As illustrated in Chapter 2, the origin of the current campaign of village development promoted by the Chinese government can date back to the 1980s, when the total amount of farmland in China gradually stopped growth and started a decreasing trend. In the 1990s, the decrease of farmland and the growth of population raised voices from either inside or outside the county, questioning China's food security. The Chinese government thus began to place increasing attention on the conservation of arable land. In the mid-1980s, the LML and a series of land-use regulations were issued. In the 1990s, to control the loss of farmland due to non-agricultural uses, the central government further enhanced land-use regulations by the revision of LML and the establishment of a centralized land-use planning system.

The sprawling of village housing was targeted by the government as a cause of the loss of farmland. Official statistics show that while the population of rural residents was decreasing, the built-up residential areas in villages were growing (Ministry of Land and Resources, 2008). Many studies state that the unplanned housing growth and idle housing in the 'hollowed villages' have wasted considerable land resources, especially good farmland (Xue, 2001; Liu *et al.*, 2009; Sun *et al.*, 2011). Claiming to improve land-use efficiency in

rural areas, the central government issued policies that encouraged land consolidation. The policies promoted the development of new villages with a planned layout and higher housing density, and reclaimed the housing plots in old villages for farmland. The government affirmed that a considerable amount of farmland could be released by this means of village consolidation (Ministry of Land and Resources, 2003).

Village development for the purpose of releasing farmland has not been widely practised because of many reasons, including the lack of fund and the lack of interests of either the state or the non-state actors. Nonetheless, the rules and regulations of land use established to conserve farmland, such as the rule of dynamic-balance and the top-down allocation of farmland conversion quotas, have had profound influences on the later practices of village developments. It can be concluded that the decrease of farmland, and the central government's concerns on food security issues, are an integral part of the context that shaped the development factors of new villages.

The central-local relations in China's administration system are another part of the background to the development of new villages. The literature review has clarified how China's tax-sharing reform in the mid-1990s resulted in village development related to generating land-use quotas. The tax-sharing reform has significantly increased the central government's share of taxation revenue. It left local government limited resources of public finance, which are largely made by taxation related to urban development, and non-taxation revenue, such as land conveyance fees. To sustain local public finance after the reform, local government has to boost urbanization. The development would inevitably increase the conversion of farmland into development land. However, the aforementioned land-use regulations established with the concerns of farmland conservation have determined that local government has to act in line with the rules of the dynamic-balance of farmland and the centralised planning of land-use quotas.

To seek development opportunities while satisfying the rules of farmland conservation, a few local governments began to experiment with the development of new villages for the purpose of releasing developable land and land-use quotas (Wang *et al.*, 2010). Similar to the previous development in village consolidation, this new trend of development claims to improve land-use efficiency in villages. However, the land released from the demolishing of old village houses will not be used for agriculture, but industrial or private housing developments that fuel local public finance. The practices conducted by local government reflected tensions in the central-local relations which were centred on public finance (Li,

2013; Tan, 2014). To ease these central-local tensions, the central government accepted local government's experiment and issued policies that formally linked village developments with quota-generation. It was not expected that these policies of quota-generation developments would lead to practices which had several negative social and economic impacts on villagers' lives, and thus they have received wide academic and public criticism (see Tu, 2010; Xiao, 2014).

The policies of BNSC can be seen as the central government's another attempt to adjust the central-local relations (Schubert and Ahlers, 2012). In the early 2000s, just before the initiation of BNSC, the central government axed rural taxation. This cancellation worsened local governments' financial condition, especially the county and township governments which relied heavily on rural taxation. The initiation of BNSC in the mid-2000s brought increasing fiscal transfer payments from the central to local government, which can offset the latter's loss of revenue.

However, the allocation of transfer payments comes with conditions: it is related to the top-down evaluation of local government's performance in implementing the BNSC policies. The evaluation also raises the competition of the same-level local government. The local government, with its advanced position in the evaluation/competition, will more likely receive increasing development funds, and the individual officials' are more likely to obtain promotion opportunities. Falling behind the counterpart means the local government and officials may face reduced funds and sanctions. Many scholars (Schubert and Ahlers, 2012; Heberer and Trappel; 2013) have pointed out that the internal evaluation mechanism can have positive effects encouraging local government to implement BNSC policies and make renovations. The mechanism is thus a crucial factor for local government to invest in village planning and practice.

BNSC policies also indicate the central government's concerns on broader social and economic issues besides the central-local relations. As repeatedly stated by the central government, the overall goal of BNSC is to deal with the *san nong wenti* ('three rural problems'), which are the underdeveloped social and economic conditions of rural China. The conditions can be observed in both of the studied villages, and can explain the population, resource of household income, the use of land, and many other general physical and social features of the Chinese countryside. The central government's concerns about the undeveloped conditions in the rural area have been reflected, at least on the surface, by the planning and design of new villages on the county level. Therefore, the less-developed social

and economic conditions in rural areas should be viewed as important elements of the context of village development.

Moreover, BNSC is viewed as an essential strategy in the reform of China's economic growth pattern from export-driven to domestic demand-driven growth, and consumption of the over-accumulation in many industries (Lin, 2003; Wen, 2010). As pointed out by Harvey (1985), the state investment in infrastructure and mass construction is a means to resolve, albeit temporarily, the periodic crisis of over-accumulation. The Chinese central government's enormous investment in infrastructure and housing development in rural areas, which was set out in an important part of the national economic stimulus plan dealing with the global financial crisis in 2008, clearly indicates the relation between government-promoted village development and the government's strategy of economic growth. From the macro point of view, China's changing growth pattern on the national level is also a key element of the context of village development.

The analysis above identifies that the socio-spatial context of rural China has laid the basic tone of the development policies of new villages. The influential issues in the context of village development include the scarce farmland and threatened food security, the underdevelopment situation in the rural hinterland, compared with the thriving urban centres, and the changing growth pattern of China's economy. The development of the policies of new villages has also been framed by the structural features in China's political economy, which include the centralised land-use planning system and fiscal system, top-down internal evaluation, and same-level competition.

The development of new villages in practice is not solely determined by the political and economic structure and context on the macro level. A village's specific economic condition and connections with urban areas, and the features of its natural and built environment, are key factors that affected the development practices on the local level. On the other hand, the specific socio-spatial situation of a village reflected the changes on the macro level. The current social and economic conditions, and the natural and built environment of the involved villages, were significantly influenced by China's social and economic transitions since its opening up in the 1980s.

The discussion thus far has highlighted the social-spatial context and the structure's influences on the development practices of new villages. However, the understanding of the transformation of the village environment is not complete without taking the actions of the involved individual bodies into the analysis. The stakeholder's roles and their interactions with

each other and with the development context and structure in the practice of new villages are illustrated in the next chapter.

#### **7.4 Conclusion**

This chapter first compared the processes and outputs of the development practices in the two studied villages. Comparing the case studies has clarified many common aspects and variations between the practices of new villages. Section 7.2 points out that the policies of development and the social and physical conditions of the involved villages are crucial factors that resulted in the similarities and disparities of the development processes and products on the ground. Section 7.3 further explores the causes of the development factors. It indicates that the formation and effects of the development factors has been shaped by China's institutional structure and socio-spatial context.

At the same time, the chapter has underlined that the deviations either between different practices of village development, or between the practice and policies, cannot be solely attributed to the political economic structure and the socio-spatial context on macro level. To fully understand how the village development happened in the real world and its impacts, it is necessary to look at the roles of the involved stakeholders. The following chapter would further our understanding of the development practice, with the perspective focusing on the stakeholders.





## **Chapter 8. Development Practice as Directed by Actions of Stakeholders**

The last chapter has illustrated that the development of new villages has been affected by several factors, including the development policies, the physical and social conditions of the localities. Meanwhile, it has indicated that the development practice was not exclusively determined by the institutional structure and socio-spatial context. The stakeholders involved in the development practice also used their own powers to direct the development process and output.

As part of a top-down campaign of rural development initiated by the central government, the recent development of new villages in China involved various groups of stakeholders from the highest level of state authority to the rural ‘grassroots’. By identifying the roles, interests and strategies of the involved stakeholders, Section 8.1 illustrates the complicated relations and power struggle between the involved stakeholders. Based on the findings from Section 8.2 and Chapter 7, Section 8.2 further articulates the interactions of the stakeholders and the structures and context of the development. Lastly, Section 8.3 provides a short conclusion of this chapter.

### **8.1 Roles and strategies of the stakeholders involved in village development**

The study’s analysis of development policies on national and local levels and investigation of the development practices in the two villages indicated various groups of stakeholders involved in village development. The stakeholders either positively took part in the development, or were involved involuntarily. The following sections would expound how the stakeholders act to achieve their objectives and react to the rules imposed on them.

#### **8.1.1 *Central and local government***

As explained in Chapter 2, the current development of new villages have been influenced by the national policies of farmland conservation, land-use planning and rural development. Government at all levels in China’s administrative system are involved in the implementation of new villages. However, as pointed out by Rosenberg (2015), the interplay and roles of different levels of government in the implementation of rural policies in China, especially the authorities at levels higher than the county, have not gained enough attention from published studies.

By reviewing policies and conducting case studies, this study sheds light on the roles of all levels of government in the implementation of rural policies in China. It argues that the central-local relationships has significantly confined local government’s decision-making in

the practice of village development. Meanwhile, the space for making flexible changes varied a lot at different levels of local government. In general, each level of local government has adopted pragmatic strategies to develop new villages. The pragmatic strategies suit the regional social and economic conditions on one hand, but can also lead to selective policy implementation and imbalanced development on the other hand.

### **The central government**

It is not easy for the highest level of authority to have direct control on the development of new villages on the ground. As Xiao (2014) pointed out, because land is physical and immobile, in most cases, the central government far away from land only has ‘numeric control’ on land use and development. In contrast, local governments could have more practical control over space due to its proximity to the land. Therefore, the central government’s role in the practice of village development is not reflected by specific actions towards certain projects. Instead, it influences the development practice through the central-local relationships rooted in China’s political and economic structure.

As illustrated in Chapter 2, by means of the taxation reforms in the late 1990s and early 2000s, China’s central government has enhanced its control on local government, especially the local government in less-industrialized regions. To secure the top-down allocation of fiscal payment, provincial government needs to positively respond to the central’s instructions. Meanwhile, rural policies and implementation in China is under frequent reforms and fluctuations. In this circumstance, local governments tend to become more speculative and opportunistic, in order to catch the changing preferences of the central government (Xiao, 2014).

As clarified by this study, BNSC has added new requirements for village development besides of the earlier national policies related with the development, which aimed at preserving farmland and adjusting land-use quotas. The development of new villages in practice immediately shifted focuses to the newly raised requirements. The recent projects were conducted invariably under the banner of BNSC, and hardly have any relation with the earlier policies about village development. The case studies in Eastern County found that the development results are even conflicted with preserving farmland and regulating rural land use.

In sum, the findings above indicate that the national policies of village development have quick influences on practice, but the effects are ‘soon come, soon gone’. The earlier policies are soon downplayed in the practice led by local government, although the goals of

these policies are still major concerns of the central government. From that point of view, the central government does play a crucial role in the practice of village development. At the same time, the central government's influences from distance could not fully guarantee the implementation would proceed as planned.

#### **Local government at provincial levels**

Similar with the cases of many other rural policies in China, the central government raises very broad goals for BNSC. The transformation of village environment has been listed as one of the multiple objectives of BNSC. The study's review of the provincial policies of village development indicated that with the implementation of BNSC, the broad objective of transforming village environment proposed by the national policies were gradually adapted and specified by local government. Some studies suggested that the central government has provided sufficient space for local government to carry out policy adaptation and innovation in the implementation of BNSC (Heberer and Schubert, 2012; Ahlers and Schubert, 2013; Ahlers, 2014). However, other studies (Bray, 2013; Rosenberg, 2015) argued that the leeway for flexible village development in practice is far less than suggested by the aforementioned studies.

Provincial government, as the highest level local authority, seemingly has considerable flexibility to interpret the overall goals raised by the national policies, in order to make provincial development policies. The provincial policies of village development, therefore, could appear as an innovative (or selective) adaptation of the national policy. As shown by studies of rural development in Jiangxi (Ahlers and Schubert, 2013; Looney, 2015), the province government's innovative concept of 'peasants as the main actors' of village development has guided the implementation of development in the province, and further inspired similar policies in other provinces as well.

In the case of Sichuan, the provincial government has invested enormous efforts in the renovation of old villages and the development of new villages in the implementation of national policies of BNSC. The provincial government's focus on village built environment could be attributed to the relations between higher and lower level government in China, which largely determine the allocation of development funds and the political career of local officials. As explained in Chapter 2, the rural taxation reform in the 1990s has resulted financial difficulties of local government in many regions in China, such as Sichuan, where rural taxation was an important resource of local public finance. The loss in rural taxation has mainly been replaced by the transfer payments allocated from the central government. As the

result, government at provincial level and below has to rely on the top-down allocation of funding. The allocation of funding is related with the internal evaluation held by the higher-level government.

As indicated by O'Brien and Li's study (1999) of the implementation of rural policies in China, the central government is more likely to establish solid evaluation procedures and hence cast better controls on the policies which have quantifiable targets, because the quantifiable targets could be more easily conveyed to the higher-level authorities far away from the land. Compared with other objectives of BNSC, such as 'a civilized social atmosphere' and 'democratic village management', the 'clean and tidy village environment' is the sort of output that can be easily displayed. Several provincial governments in China have organized official contest to display the 'fruitful results' of village development to both the central government and the public by photographs and videos (see Figure 8.1).



Figure 8.1 Pictures of new villages selected for the contest of “the most beautiful new villages”

Source: Official website of the prefectural government of city D

In general, central-local relations has led to competitive relationships between local governments in different regions. The competition for development funds further pushes local government to focus on the development of village environment. The top-down allocation of funds for development is limited, meaning that to secure their share of development funds, local governments have to compete with their counterparts in a “competition under hierarchy”

(Göbel, 2011). To stand out in the competition, local governors are more likely to seek ‘quick success’ and give priority to the development of villages that already have good economic conditions (Rosenberg, 2015). When compared to developing a village’s economy and social services, transforming a village’s built environment is a safer resort, as it allows to deliver eye-catching outputs within a tight schedule.

The case studies made by Tim Oakes also indicate that provincial governments tends to use regional culture and place-related features of villages as a resort to compete with counterpart governments, particularly for winning political promotion and investments, and to regulate the social and physical space in the rural area (Oakes, 2000; 2006).

Emphasizing the ‘folk house style’ and the planning of rural tourism in the practice of village development, the Sichuan provincial government and its subordinate local government might be applying the regulation strategy suggested by Oakes. However, as learnt in this study, the government’s attempts to promote rural tourism by making improvements in the village built environments has not always achieved significant effects. In terms of the state’s attempts to regulate the rural space via village development projects, the findings of this study indicate that the villagers involved in the development may resist and finally frustrate the designated aesthetic regulation.

In spite of motivating policy implementation in general, the internal evaluation mechanism is not effective to prevent local government’s tendency to conduct selective implementation and deliver quick but superficial ‘political achievement’. Lower-level government can take advantage from the informational asymmetries between the authorities at different levels and fabricate data in the evaluation (Feng, 2010; Yang *et al.*, 2013). The higher-level government’s design of evaluation criteria and evaluation process is also blamed as lack of transparency and public participation, which can lead to corruption and selective policies implementation (Yuan *et al.*, 2008; Heberer and Trappel, 2013).

In front of scarce resources for development and the flawed evaluation, the most pragmatic strategy for local government to implement village development is to shirk the development objectives and conceal the problems which may not be easily noticed by the central government. That could also explain why the provincial government cares a lot about the design documents of village development and the aesthetic standards of the new built environment: because the documents and appearance of new buildings are all tangible outcomes of development that could be perceived and checked by the evaluators within the inspection on site, which usually take no more than hours. In addition, due to the competitive

relationships between the same-level local governments, the governments at levels above county would not be really serious and strict on the insufficiencies, especially those less-visible issues. After all, all levels of local government needs to present positive output of development to their superiors and secure their positions.

Due to the inter-governmental relationships introduced above, when adapting the national policies of village development, provincial government is more likely to prioritize the renewal of new built environment than other objectives raised by policies. Because comparing with the objectives of improving village economy or social services, the renewal of village environment can produce visible output within much less time. The tendency of prioritizing built environment renewal therefore is not a single case for a particular provincial government, but a more general choice. In short, provincial government only has ostensible flexibility to adapt national policy. Its choice is largely limited by the central-local relations. As found in Looney's study (2015), after a short period of encouraging public participation, the rural development in Jiangxi province soon became a top-down campaign to demolish and reconstruct villages.

Besides of the general reasons to prioritize the transformation of built environment in village development, the Sichuan government's specific focus on developing new villages could also be attributed to the provincial government's practice of vast reconstruction projects caused by the earthquake in 2008. As seen in the review of provincial policies of village development, the trend to renovate old villages and develop new villages was extended by the provincial government from the affected areas to the rest of places in the province. Last but not least, similar with the implementation of rural development in Jiangxi (see Looney, 2015), Sichuan provincial government's policies to develop new villages was influenced by the head official's interpretation of BNSC, which was the concept of "new rural compound". The concept, which has highlighted the development of new and large-scale villages as the innovation of BNSC, was first raised by the party secretary of Sichuan in 2010, and thence be further affirmed as the overall objective of village development for the whole province.

To sum up, provincial government has played crucial roles in the top-down development of new villages. The provincial government has largely refined the overall goals of development raised by the central government. It determined the pragmatic strategy for development, which prioritized the development of new village environment. Based on the pragmatic strategy, the provincial government established a biased evaluation approach of village development. The evaluation approach is specifically focusing on the transformation



of village environment. Furthermore, when evaluating the transformation of village environment, the provincial criteria's major attention has been paid to the tangible outcomes delivered by the development, rather than rural people's participation and feedback toward their changed living environment.

#### **Local government at county and township levels**

Government at county and township levels are at the bottom in the hierarchy of administration in China. As introduced above, government at county level has been assigned by the provincial government as the practitioner of the provincial policies of new villages. Township government, whose financial ability has been weakened by the reforms of tax-sharing and rural taxation, acted a role assisting the county government in the development. In general, county and township government's objectives and ability to conduct village development have been largely framed by the provincial policies and strategies. The aforementioned superior-subordinate relationships between governments at higher and lower levels and the competition between governments at the same level have significantly influenced county and township government's actions.

In spite of being constrained by the above factors, county and township government managed to create certain space for strategic development approaches in the implementation of village development as well as other rural policies (see Heberer and Schubert, 2012; Ahlers and Schubert, 2013). As demonstrated by the two case studies, the government of Eastern County has changed its funding and working modes in the implementation of new villages. In terms of funding, in the development of village S, which is one of the county's two pilot projects of new villages, the county government has invested unprecedented financial and human resources into the transformation of village environment. It fully funded the development of infrastructure, such as road and public squares in the new village, as well as the construction and furnishing of a public building. While the later development in village K only received a fixed subsidy to develop infrastructure and facilities, which was much less than the case of village S.

In terms of the works to organize the development, in general, the county government also invested much more efforts in the development of village S than village K. In the pilot project, the government specified the work agenda for the development. It carefully selected the development locality and handled the making of village planning and housing design documents with the assistance of professional design company. To supervise the implementation of the planning, the government was in charge of organizing the construction.

Several county officials had been sent to the site during the construction. In contrast, in the later development in village K, the government loosen the supervision on both the making of village planning and design and the construction works.

Facing with the land-use issues related with village development, the county government has acted differently in village S and K. To revolve the land disputes in village S, the government devised a complicated solution and paid rent for the land used by the development in village S. In contrast, the government did not actively participate in the negotiation on land use and rent in the development in village K.

These dissimilarities in village development indicates how the government of Eastern County has applied different development approaches in terms of organizing and subsidizing the developments in village S and K. Advocated by the county officials, the government's role in village development has evolved from a dominant role which handles every problem to a secondary role which supports "farmers as the main actor".

The government's choice to change development approach was resulted by factors on two aspects. On one hand, as explained above, the county government has practical needs to deal with the tasks assigned by higher-level government. On the other hand, the government of Eastern County found it is difficult to afford more than a small number of projects with the development approach that has been applied in village S. The difficulties might be a general case for the county-level government of other less-developed regions in China. In front of the financial difficulties resulted by the tax-sharing reform, while having to fulfil the various assigned tasks of rural development, government on county and township levels are increasingly relying on private enterprises (Zhou, 2006b). In the case of village development, the private enterprise could be the shadow developers represented by Hu and his business partners.

The revised development approach has to some extent loosened government's control on the process and outcomes of village development. Nonetheless, compared with the development carried out by villagers themselves, such as the early development in village K, the government's revised development approach has insisted certain matters of development, such as having formal village planning and design, displaying the official aesthetic standards and upgrading infrastructure. The county government's insists on the above aspects of development went exactly in line with the highlights of the provincial policies.

While insisting on certain aspects in the village development, the county government chose to neglect certain issues. The government connived the sales of village houses and the

use of housing plot which has breached China's land laws and land use regulations. As a result of the government's connivance on land issues, the developments in both of the villages have led to the decrease of farmland.

The government also paid little attention on the potential hazards brought by the house transformation after the new housing has been delivered. The transformation was mainly carried out by the house owners. In other cases, the transformation was made by the developer, in order to increase the profit from the development. Both kinds of transformation were conducted without authorization of the design agency of the development or any professional planners or architects. As observed in practice, many transformations have left issues that threaten building safety in case of fire, earthquake, storm and other disasters.

The above issues in regard to land-use or building quality were not seriously treated by the township and county government because of reasons on two aspects. Firstly, these issues are not easily discovered without careful examination. As introduced above, they are not the most concerned matters of the internal evaluation. Therefore, these issues will less likely affect the township and county government in the internal evaluation of village development.

Secondly, only if the breach of land use regulations and the unauthorized changes of village planning and house design were not seriously treated by the government, shadow developers can have sufficient space to seek profit from the village development. In need of help from the shadow developers, township and county government chose to turn blind eyes on the issues above. The collusion between government and developer reduced the pressure of county government to fulfil the number of new villages designated by the provincial government. As the result, Eastern County government has succeeded in seeking the title of provincial model county of village development, in spite of turning blind eyes on the informal and illegal land-use issues and house safety issues.

It could be concluded that the inter-governmental relationship between county government (and the fellow township government) and the provincial government has left little space for the former to make flexible adaptation in the implementation of village development. Under the financial pressure resulted by the tax-sharing reform decade ago, as well as the institutional pressure to survive internal evaluation and secure top-down funds, the county and township government has taken strategic actions to conduct village development. The strategies include concentrating resources on a small number of pilot developments, and later colluding with shadow developers. Further discussion about the relationships between local government and the developers is drawn in Section 8.1.3.

### 8.1.2 *Design agency*

Following the national and provincial policies of village development, the county government invariably involved design agencies in its implementation of new villages. The involved design agencies mainly consist of private planning and architectural design companies based in cities. Studies of the practice of village planning and housing design, which usually consist of planning and design practitioners involved in the development practice, have not paid enough attention on the design agency's relationships with other stakeholders.

This study indicate that due to the top-down approach of development, in most cases of the government-initiated village development, it is difficult for design agencies to practice participatory methods in the planning process and really serve rural people. In general, the design agencies acted as an extended department of the government, which is in charge of providing technical support for the making of village planning and housing design. As found in the development of village S, the design agency has limited power to revise the development agenda drawn by the government. Its major work is to produce the formal document and drawings required by the government.

The earlier development in village K provided a unique case which could remind us that there might be alternative ways for the practitioners of village planning and housing design to participate village development. As introduced above, in this very early attempt and bottom-up approach to transform the village built environment, the village cadres, villagers and the construction contractors worked out the layout of the new buildings and resolved the land use issues following their own pace and the practical conditions of the site. The village cadres and villagers were more familiar with the context of development than anyone else. The construction contractor, who was a seasoned manager of construction works in the town and surrounding villages was experienced with the popular and economic building methods in local area, and knew well how to work under the rural social and spatial context.

The collaboration of the community members and local construction contractor ensured the development plan in riverside residential quarter could satisfy the majority of residents and thus proceeded smoothly. The collaboration to some extent replaced the role of professional planners and architects. Does that mean the design agency is playing an unnecessary role and the government's attempt to regulate village planning and housing design is nothing more than a redundant bureaucratic decision? The later development in village K provided a case indicates a negative answer. The development, which made

unauthorized changes on planned areas and house design, has resulted to problematic selection of development site and the quality of building, and may bring negative social impacts on the village community. The case indicates the necessity to regulate the transformation of built environment in rural areas, which include actions to ensure the quality and effects of village planning and housing design.

On the other hand, the collaboration of the community members and local construction contractor may inspire the practitioners of village planning and housing design. Rather than passively being brought into village development by the government, could planners and architects seek opportunities to participate self-initiated village development, develop a more close relation with the community, hence devise village planning and housing design better fit the local conditions? To answer the question may need more research and practices in future. And the current situation in China, where the government has issued series of law and regulations to intervene village land use and is keep promoting the top-down campaign of village development, leaves limited space for other routes of development. Nevertheless, some planning and architectural researchers, along with a few NGOs are exploring the bottom-up approach of village design in several post-earthquake reconstruction projects, and the practices have demonstrated a mixture of successful and unsatisfactory aspects (see Lu and Wang, 2016, Wan et al., 2016). The attempts to transfer the role of design agency from an assistant of the government to a more engaging actor of village development are expected to be carry on in future.

### 8.1.3 *Village cadres and local elite*

The case studies found that village cadres have played multi-facets roles in the development of new villages. On one hand, in the practice of development, the cadres are mobilized by the local government as an agents of the state. On the other hand, the cadres are also members of the village collective, and usually viewed by villagers as leaders and representatives of the community. At the same time, the actions of village cadres are also affected by their own interests as individual entrepreneurs and members of local elite.

#### **Village cadres as an agent of the state**

Similar with many other villages in Eastern County and many more cases across China, the leading village cadres in the two studied villages are the secretary of the village party branch and the director of the villagers' committee. According to China's organic law of villagers' committee, the jobs of the two leading village cadres are to serve the management of village autonomy, while assisting the work of local government. The law stipulates that

government should allocate subsidies if it sought assistance from village cadres to conduct works in villages.

The stipulation of law is based on the practical situation of governing the vast rural areas in China. Due to the large population in rural China, the implementation of many rural policies has to face great amount of village communities and households. Officials from the county and township government have to rely on village cadres to carry out works on the ground. Village cadres are often mobilized by local government as an agent rooted in the villages. As seen in the development in village S, during the development process, the village cadres were required by the county government to assist the design agency to conduct the site tour. They also took part in the supervision of the construction along with the government officials sent to the site. The cadres also organized the allocation of houses and helped allocating the compensation of land-use and maintaining the development outcomes. The quarrels and disputes during the process on one hand indicated the development's lack of involvement with the community, on the other hand suggested the difficulties to organize development programme in villages. Although the village cadres were largely excluded in the decision-making stage, but without the assistance of the cadres, the government would not able to put the development into practice as quickly as it planned. The later development in village K further affirmed the leading village cadre's ability in helping local government to fulfil its assigned tasks of delivering certain amount of new villages.

The village cadres' relations with local state are affected by both the village economy and the government's demand. With the Chinese government's increasing concerns on rural development, there are increasing tasks of rural policy implementation. In many cases, assisting local government in policy implementation became the major works of village cadres. Correspondingly, the subsidies became the major part of their remuneration and have even been normalized as monthly-paid 'salary' from local government (see Xu, 2005; Li, 2011). At the same time, due to the tax-sharing reform, local government became much less enthusiastic to support the development of township and village enterprises (TVEs). Enormous number of TVEs has bankrupted in the late 1990s (see Eyferth, 2003; Lin, 2004), and the collective income of village in many places can hardly pay the remuneration of cadres (see Qi et al., 2006).

Some studies argue that the requirements and payment from government will turn village cadres into full-time agent of the state, and damage village autonomy and democracy (Xu, 2005; Zhang, 2016). But other studies state it is necessary for local state to cooperate

with village cadres in implementing rural development (Li, 2011; Zhang and Fu, 2013). These studies underlined village cadres' influence to help deliver infrastructure and public services in rural areas.

This study of the development of new villages reaffirms that to implement a top-down campaign of transforming the village built environment, the government would need village cadres acting as an agent of the state. At the same time, the study indicates that the cadres' role as a government agent may not necessarily damage the interests of the community. Due to the cadres' role as an agent of the state, they were involved by the government from the beginning of the development, thus be able to provide useful information to the making of village planning and housing design. Otherwise, the planning and design process would have even less relations with the socio-spatial context of the village. The village cadres also helped the land-loss villagers and government to come to an agreement about the land-use, and are the executors to pay the rent and organize the compensative jobs. They also attempted to display fairness, at least on the surface, in the selection of house applicants. Without the cadres' efforts, the development was likely to produce more controversial outcomes. In the development in village K, the cadre's role as a government agent helped him to make the village formally enrolled in the county government's programme of new villages. The housing development could therefore be subsidized and enlarged in the village, and more villagers could have the chance to release their idled land. The above points indicated the village cadres' actions should not only be interpreted as an agent of the state, but also a member of the community.

### **Village cadres as members of the community**

In spite of often being mobilized to act as a practical agent of local government, the village cadres are not formal employees of local government. As introduced above, the OLVC stipulates that the village cadres has the duty to manage villagers' autonomic organization. The selection of village cadres varied a lot in different regions in China. In the two case villages, the secretary and director is either selected by the party members in the village branch or the general members of the village collective. Although there are debates about whether village elections could represent grassroots democracy and be conducive to effective self-government (O'Brien and Li, 2000; Zhang *et al.*, 2004; Landry *et al.*, 2010; Tan, 2010), it is less doubted that village cadres are members of the community. The identity is inextricably intertwined with kinship ties, neighbourhood relations and all sorts of social networks that still have powerful influences in rural China. Therefore, in the practice of village



administration, village cadres usually act as agents both of the state and of the village collective (Alpermann, 2001; Wu, 2002; Ma, 2013).

Village cadres' identity as a member of the community may have significant influence on their actions in terms of exercising village administration and implementing rural policies. On one hand, unofficial rules and norms rooted in the social network of a community can drive local officials to serve the village in terms of developing village economy, providing public goods and protecting collective interests (Peng, 2004; Tsai, 2007). As said by the cadres of village S, unlike the county officials who are distant from the village, the cadres have to live with the community. The cadre of village K also paid specific attention to preserve his reputations among villagers. Therefore, when local government and villagers have conflicts in the development, the village cadres sometimes have to act as a mediator between the two actors. Meanwhile, the cadres have to display fairness when dealing with internal issues of the community, otherwise, rumours and confrontations will easily arise and hamper their works.

On the other hand, village cadres also use their personal relationships, reputations, rituals and other unofficial norms to proceed their works (He and Liu, 2009; Ma, 2013). The leading cadre of village K have well-played the card of personal relationships as neighbour, friend and relative to mobilize villagers to participate the earliest development led by him. In the later development, the cadre's personal influences in the community and surrounding areas was also an advantage for him to involve villagers in the development as providers of land resource and attract house buyers from the outside.

In general, both of the case studies suggested that the cadres had managed to balance the developments with the stability, at least temporary stability, of the community. Therefore, they could be viewed as eligible assistant of government, as well as community representative acknowledged by the majority of the village collective. But it is worth noting that the cadres may act not only to fulfil the two-folded roles as the agent of both the state authority and the electorates, but also due to the considerations for their own interests as individual entrepreneur and rural elite.

### **Village cadre as a part of rural elite group**

Plenty studies suggest that since the economic reform in the 1980s, political power-holders are usually integrated socially with entrepreneurs and formed the elite group in rural China (Oi, 1989; Odgaard, 1992; Alpermann, 2006). The case studies in this research found village cadres who could exercise powers both in the community and in local politics have

sought private interests as individual entrepreneurs from the development of new villages. More specifically, the cadres may actually act as private developers, who positively carry out housing projects for profit, but also managed to be entitled and subsidized with the name of village development under BNSC.

The different development outcomes in village K and S indicate that village cadres with the role as private developers are more likely to enlarge the quantity of new housing in the development. As introduced above, the cadres' relationships with the community enabled them to obtain land resources via negotiation and collaboration with the land contractor villagers. At the same time, the cadres are well-connected with other key roles in the development, who are all part of the elite group of local politics. In terms of the development of new villages, this study found the three most important groups of rural elite are the village cadres, local government officials and construction contractors. The relationships among the elite groups enabled village cadres to become successful private developer.

Benefited from the frequent contacts with local government in village administration works, as well as the kinship and personal ties, the cadres could develop good *guanxi*, namely solid social networks and relationships with local officials. The personal networks and relationships between the village cadres and officials might become important advantage for some cadres to lead the government-subsidized village development and moreover, to evade punishment to the unauthorized changes they made on the village design and the illegal house sales.

Meanwhile, local officials need to rely on village cadres and construction contractors. The interviews of this study, as well as a few other studies in China indicate that construction contractors usually have very close relationships with political elite in rural area (Zhou, 2006b; Han and Song, 2014). Personal ties between the elite are part of the reasons of the relationships. Another reason is related with local governments' financial difficulties and pressure to implement infrastructure development in rural areas. As pointed out by the studies of Zhou (2006) and Heberer and Trappel (2013), the financial difficulties after the taxation reforms tend to push local government to collude with rural elite group of influential entrepreneurs and village cadres to deliver outcomes required by the internal evaluation. Village elite members have also been viewed by government as helpers to that develop village social organization that are conducive to fulfil the political agenda designated by government (Thøgersen, 2009).

As seen in the development of new villages in Eastern County, the funds allocated from the higher-level government usually came after the delivered works have been evaluated and acknowledged as model projects. Before the evaluation, the county government has to organize the majority of funds by itself. In that circumstance, the government has to request the construction contractor to do the work without money paid in advance, which was the case in the development of village S. It also borrowed hands from community leaders, such as the leading cadre of village K, who have the ability to mobilize rural residents and operate village development. On the other hand, the construction contractors need to rely on officials and village cadres to contract works, especially government-subsidized developments of infrastructure and housing, which usually have far more large scale than individual household projects.

In the case of village K, the leading cadre is also involved in the business of building materials. The background in business further strengthened his status within the local elite group, and may benefit him to borrow loan in his own name and organize the funds for development. The various connections with local building industry is conducive for village cadres to acquire knowledge about the economic construction methods and popular house styles, which ensures the development product would be affordable and suit the needs of the targeted house purchasers. With the cadre's advantages in both commercial and political networks, the housing development has been largely extended.

While noticing about the different scale of development, the case studies also found that the quality of housing and infrastructure may not be guaranteed when the village cadres acted as private developer/entrepreneur. To maximize the profit, the developer may risk to change the structure of building and breach regulations of fire and seismic safety design. Meanwhile, the development would inevitably bring outsiders, who are the targeted house buyers, into the village. It is predicable that the inflow of population would cause social and economic impacts on the community in a long term. What would be the impacts needed to be clarified by further studies. But it is very likely that the involvement of non-collective-members in the development would complicate the land use issues in the village, since transferring rural homestead to non-collective member is illegal under the current land-use regulations in China.

To sum up, the village cadres' role as private developer in the development of new villages may bring mixed impacts to villagers. While some villagers are enjoying economic revenue or improved housing conditions brought by the development, others might have to face the possible negative social impacts involuntarily. The finding also indicates that the

villagers are divided into different interests groups in the development. However, most of the published studies of the development of new villages pay insufficient attention to distinguish the 'rural people' from a monotonous term into various stakeholders. In the following section, this study would discuss the different roles taken by different interests groups of rural residents.

#### **8.1.4 *Rural population***

The case studies in this research found that the transformation of village built environment has instantly influenced the interests of two groups of rural residents, namely the ones who have resettled in the new built-up areas and the ones whose contracted farmland has been transferred into the new built-up areas. Meanwhile, there are villagers seemingly not involved in the development. They neither bought a new house, nor provided land for the development. Nonetheless, this study suggests the development might affect their life in the long term. Corresponding to how the development has or might influence their interests, these three groups of rural residents also responded differently with the development. Some of them played roles involuntarily involved in or indifferent with the development, while some actively embraced, made the most of, or resisted it.

##### **House owners**

House owners' engagement with the development varies a lot between the development in village S and the earlier and later development in village K. The house owners in the late development of village K were not involved in the development process until the houses have been built and sold to them. Similarly, in the case of village S, the house owners were selected after the construction nearly came to an end. By contrast, the house owners were more frequently engaged in the riverside development in village K. The active participation of residents enabled the development process could be carried out smoothly and effectively, and delivered outcomes that satisfied the majority of house owners. The finding suggests that in the government's current village development programme, the engagement of rural people who the development aims to house is insufficient.

The insufficient involvements with house applicants may not only obstruct the development to better suit their needs, but also cause disputes towards equity issues of development. The case studies found the development was not equally inclusive to all the rural residents. In the case of village S, all of the fourteen house owners are member of the village collective. They were selected by the village cadres from a much longer name lists of house applicants and approved by the community. The open criteria of selection is the

housing condition of the applicants. It stated that the priority would be given to the ones who have the worst housing condition. But an unspoken rule of the selection was the applicants should be able to pay for a new house, which cost 80,000 RMB. The official figure of average annual income per capita in village S, which is too often an optimistic estimation, was about 8,000 RMB. The house price, although had been subsidized by the government, was still a large amount of money for villagers. That means the village families lived in poor housing conditions, but could not pay the house price would hardly be benefited by the development. The earliest development in village K have involved the majority of residents. However, the poorest families, such as the ones live in the old houses in Figure 6.3 were still excluded. Village K's later development became more close to profitable private development. The villagers who needed to be housed would not share the houses delivered by the development without making fully payment to the cadre/developer. The majority of houses were sold to outsiders who have the financial ability to risk paying for a new home located in the village where they are not allowed to hold real estate.

All the findings above indicate the practice of new villages doesn't fully fulfil the policies' pledge to improving the housing condition of rural residents, because it is very likely that the poorest people would be excluded from the development. But these people are in fact very possibly living with the worst housing condition and thus have the most urgent needs to renew their houses. The people who would most likely be benefited by the development include the villagers who could afford a new home but lack the human capital to renew the house by themselves, and the ones who would like to live with proximity to town with cheaper house price and house forms better suit rural lifestyle. The implications might be taken to revise the policies of village development in future.

After paid for and took over their new home, the house owners in both of the studies villages carried out house transformations, which changed the use and appearance of the indoor and outdoor space in the new residential area. In village S, house owners' transformation projects went against the opposition of local government. They also resisted the regulation of 'one household, one housing plot' by either posing non-cooperative attitude toward local government or devising the trick to split their household registration. The similar trick was also observed by Yeh (2013) in the development of new villages in Tibet. The above behaviours show the house owners' influences to the village built environment. This role of villagers as a positive actor to transform the village environment has rarely been explored by previous studies of the development of new villages. However, this study restated the argument raise by the studies of Scott (1985; 1990). It implies that the actors usually viewed

as ‘the weak’ indeed have the intention and tactics to cast their powers on social and spatial movement against the stakeholders regarded as more powerful and dominating roles. Specifically to the development of new villages, as explained above, the county and township officials could not effectively manage the rural areas by themselves. And the internal evaluation also made them paying extra attention to avoid raising conflicts with rural people. The village cadres as the informal agent of government and the member of the community tend not to stand opposite to the villagers as well. The house owners took advantage from the above conditions, developed their tricks and countermeasures, and gradually took the control of the new built environment from the government.

This study’s observation and analysis of house transformations in new villages not only helps us to understand the relationships between rural people and government, but also the interplay of rural residents with the changing economic and social context of rural China. The transformed house form in village S is in line with the fact that increasing number of rural residents are living a lifestyle different with the traditional rural lifestyle. The lifestyle change indicates rural residents’ increasing involvement in modernization and urbanization. In this trend of involvement, villagers have adopted modern and urban aesthetic of residential apace. Therefore, in the new houses delivered by the development, most house owners abandoned traditional stoves and transformed the courtyard and rooms designed for raising livestock and storing farm tools. The new homes are also commonly adorned with modern electronics and building component/ materials, such as advanced “home theatre” appliances and shiny stainless steel doors. Some house owners extended the indoor space beyond their practical needs, even with the cost of damaging the strength of the building structure.

Similar preference of modern and spacious houses has been observed in villagers in much developed and affluent coastal areas in China (Sargeson, 2009). This study further shows that such a housing preference is nationwide among villagers. And the pursuit is not only to satisfy the practical needs of villagers’ daily life, but also to display their wealth, reputation and social capital, and to make the best from what they have paid.

At the same time with positively embracing the modern and urban aesthetic of residential apace, rural residents’ lifestyle and habits of using space still have remarkable differences compared with urban dwellers. As seen in village K, chosen to build new dwellings similar with modern apartment buildings, many villagers found difficulties to use the space follow the house design. The reasons are multi-faceted, which related with

economic condition, aging, as well as social habits in villages. As a result, villagers have to readapt the modern apartment buildings to suit the traditional daily routines they retained.

The house transformations studied by this research indicate that nowadays, life in the Chinese countryside tends to be a mixture of traditional rural lifestyle and modern and urban lifestyle. Even in villages with very close distance to the town, the interplay of village residents and their residential environment is different with the case of urbanites and urban environment. These findings provide valuable implications for the design of new villages and housing and the administration of construction works in rural areas in future.

### **Land providers**

The developments in village S and K obtained land resource via different approaches. In the case of village S, the villagers whose land has been used were not volunteer participants of the development. The ‘carrot and stick’ presented by the officials of local government involved the villagers into the project. The stakeholders of the land use issues, which are the land-loss villagers, the house owners and the county government did not formally come to an agreement on land use until the development was nearly completed. Hints of compensation had been verbally given by some officials, which prevented land providers’ resistance. Meanwhile, the lack of internal organization also impeded villagers to develop resistive power in many cases (see Cai, 2003, Looney, 2015). Finally, many of the land-loss villagers were not satisfied with the development’s influence on land tenure. The government covered the compensation which should be taken by the house owners. Such a solution also raises problem with equal opportunity, because the subsidies for development are almost exclusive to the house owners, rather than the whole village collective.

The village cadres attributed the land-use disputes to the tight schedule and hastily process of development should be blamed for the result. As analysed above, local government’s craving for tangible development outcomes in the quickest manner has led to the tight schedule and hastily process for the development of new villages. The analysis drawn in Section 8.1.1 indicates that the behaviours of local government is largely due to the internal evaluation mechanism of the Chinese government and the competition raised by the evaluation.

By contrast, most of the land providers in the earlier development in village K had been effectively engaged in the development process. Without the pressure to deliver output following the pace required by the government, the land providers and the other stakeholders of the development effectively resolved the issues in land use via negotiations before the

development. The land providers for the new buildings in this development were also the house takers. They provided their old housing plots for the development in returns for the priority to choose the location and storey of their new homes. The rest of the house owners, who were mainly lived in the north side of the residential areas could escape from the threats of flood and land-sliding by joining the development. Their old housing plots were turned into public open space. In general, the exchange of interests in this development happened mainly inside of the community, and was reciprocal to the residents lived in both rows of the old buildings. As the result, the majority of the stakeholders were satisfied about the current solution of land use issues.

The land providers involved in the later development in village K acted more close to partners of private developer. They provided land as the basic means of the (informal) production of new houses, which would be sold as commodity. The production would reward them land rent. It seems the villagers who provided land for the development in village K had more choices compared with the case in village S. However, the choice was largely confined by the economic context of the village. Without participating the development, the land produces little interest to the land contractor.

The land providers' choice to take part in the housing development suggests that low profit of agriculture may induce villagers to seek alternative ways to extract value from their contracted land, even the way would almost permanently damage the land's nature as farmland. If the government keeps stressing on creating new built environment in the countryside, more villagers may find the development a chance for illegal housing development, which will reward them rent at the cost of transferring farmland into non-agricultural uses. As shown by studies in other places in China (Zhao and Webster, 2011; Paik and Lee, 2012), the aforementioned kind of illegal development has been widely observed, especially in villages with proximity to big cities. Findings of this study implied that local government's support and subsidy for new village development may further expand the trend into smaller cities and towns.

To sum up, studying the actions of the land providers in village S and K indicated the current development approaches of new villages may either lack engagement with the land contractors, or tend to involve land contractors into illegal housing development. Both of the trends may result to conflicts related with land tenure and property right in villages, which would be further discussed in the next section. To conserve farmland and avoid raising conflicts in land use in village development, this study suggests the development should not



only enhancing land use administration, it is more important to pay attention to help villagers to develop profitable agriculture. Meanwhile, the development should effectively engage with all the stakeholders related with village land use from the initiation stage. Since rural land is collective-owned in China, the stakeholders will not only include the current contractors of the land, the house applicants, but also the collective members who were seemingly not involved in the development.

### **Villagers ‘not involved’ with the development**

In both of village S and K, there were considerable number of villagers who neither took a new house, nor provided land for the development of new residential environment. Occasionally, these villagers could be benefited by the development from sharing some of the public facilities and space. For instance, the villagers live in old houses around the newly developed area in village S sometimes used the new space for parking. But in general, they viewed the development as an event which barely affected their interests.

However, the development may have practical influences on the ‘not-involved’ villagers’ interests in the near future. As explained in the previous chapters, under the current land-use regulations in China, land in villages, either used for agriculture or residential purposes, is owned by the village collectives. The law ensures that collective members could sign thirty-year land tenure contract with the collective. The long-term free land tenure is commonly taken by rural residents as the means of social and economic security (Dong, 1996; Xu and Tao, 2004).

The case studies in village S and K shown that the current farmland contract which involved all the households in both of the villages were signed in the late 1990s. The farmland allocated to each of the household had not been readjusted ever since. Without frequent reallocation of land tenure, villagers tend to view the contracted land as a quasi-private-owned property (Kung, 2002). Therefore, although the developments in village S and K have reduced the whole size of farmland owned by the collective, most of the villagers whose contracted land were not taken by the development appeared to be indifferent with the result.

However, within a decade, the current farmland contract in both of the villages will expire. The household population has changed significantly during the past decades. In the case studies, villagers have expressed their awareness of the changes and anticipation of the reallocation of collective-owned land. It is hard to predict how the villagers would deal with the farmland decrease caused by the development of new villages. But it is highly possible that there will be controversies and conflicts of interests. As indicated by many researchers,

social conflicts among village members may easily arise centred with land reallocation (Wang *et al.*, 2011; Ma *et al.*, 2015). The cadres of village S also said the land use issues might turn to a ‘headache’ for them in future (Interview\_2015043008).

Beside of potential conflicts caused by land issues, the villagers ‘not involved’ in the development of new villages may also have to face other social and economic impacts caused by the development. As seen in village K, the earlier development has attracted a few tourists, who brought the community less benefits than problems. In the later development, a considerable number of the new houses were sold to people from outside, who were not members of the community. Future studies are needed to explore how the village community might be affected by the inflow of outsiders. But it is very likely that the potential impacts can influence the villagers either live in the new built-up areas or the vicinity.

In sum, the case studies found the villagers who were seemingly not involved with the new village projects took few actions in the development process. However, further analysis shown that their interests could be affected by the development, because they are members of the village community, which is a collective in both economic and social senses. The findings indicated if the development of new villages really endeavoured to fulfil the slogan of “farmers as the main actors”, it should not only encourage the participation of villagers who would like to have new houses and who would provide land for the development, but develop wider engagement with the whole community.

## **8.2 Interactions of stakeholders, structures and context of village development**

Chapter 2 of this thesis has introduced the published studies of the policies and implementation of village development. The literature review has indicated that many studies have paid attention to the relationships between stakeholders involved in the development process of new villages. The literature review also revealed a few gaps in the published studies.

One of the gaps of literature is the devoid of clear identification of the roles of stakeholders and their interactions with each other. The central-local governmental relations and inter-governmental relations between upper and lower levels of local government in village development and the overall implementation of BNSC were the major focuses of many political studies (see Göbel, 2011; Heberer and Schubert, 2012; Ahlers, 2014; Rosenberg, 2015). These studies have argued that in the implementation of BNSC, the interactions between state actors have been strongly influenced by the institutional structure in China, which is featured with top-down evaluation and allocation of development funds. In

general, these studies viewed the implementation of BNSC as an institutional and bureaucratic process pushed by the state, and paid few attention on the possible roles of non-state actors in village development.

A few studies taking an anthropological view have also depicted the dominating role of state with plenty details (Harwood, 2013; Yeh, 2013). These studies have added the analysis of the relationships between the state and rural people as another dimension of our understanding of the development process of new villages. It is worthnoting that some empirical details provided by these anthropological studies have shown the actions of rural residents to resist the power of state, such as refusing to pay the loans they borrowed from state-run banks for building the new house.

Besides of the state actors and rural people, there are also other stakeholders involved in the development, including private developers and professionals of village planning and housing design. The participation of private developers in some illegal development of village housing in name of BNSC were first revealed by newspaper reports (China Youth Daily, 2012; Beijing News, 2006). These reports criticize that the illegal developments have ruined farmland and damaged the interests of farmers. It can be seen from the reports that village cadres and local entrepreneurs have played roles in the illegal development. But the newspaper reports didn't further explain the relationships among the government, village cadres, local entrepreneurs and the common rural residents.

A handful academic studies have provided more detailed interpretation of the ideas and actions of various non-state actors in the development of new villages (Looney, 2015; Bray, 2013; Rosenberg, 2013; Thøgersen, 2009). Thøgersen's study suggests the ability of local entrepreneurs to initiate village development. But his study did not further describe the development process because the village planning proposed by the entrepreneur had not been implemented during his study. Similarly, Rosenberg's studies (2013, 2015) suggest that local private business groups had participated in village development. But his studies didn't affirm the roles of those business groups. The "peasants' council" founded to lead the implementation of BNSC on village level is another local non-state organizations that have been studied in existing research as a worthnoting participant of village development (Looney, 2015; Ahlers and Schubert, 2013; Thøgersen, 2009). It has been pointed out that "the council were involved in village planning but later this function was outsourced to professional planners and architects" (Looney, 2015, p.923), members of the council

“communicate closely with the county and township officials... who are responsible for ensuring that the [BNSC] project” (Ahlers and Schubert, 2013, p.837).

However, these aforementioned studies only comment on the interactions of different actors as short and rough as quoted above, which didn't clearly illustrate how the actor they mentioned worked with each other. This insufficiency indicated the second gap in existing research: the lack of detailed investigation of the process of development. Without reconstructing the development process, it is difficult to identify the roles and interactions of stakeholder, clarify the stakeholders' specific influences on the product of development, and connect the roles and interactions to the structural and contextual factors of development, in order to explain the development with rich details as well as a broad perspective.

A possible reason for the insufficient examination of the development process is because of the lack of public access to look at the process of village development guided by government. Meanwhile, drawing a comprehensive picture of the roles and interactions of stakeholders in the development process is not an easy task for any study. Because the development process usually involves a large number of agencies and is deeply rooted in the macro social and economic transitions (Madanipour, 1996).

A few studies conducted by planning and architectural practitioners, who had the advantage (sometimes as participants) to observe the progression of development in a closer distance, have presented much first-hand experience of the interactions of stakeholders during the development process (see Wang and Shi, 2015; Bray, 2013; Lü et al., 2006). As pointed out by Healey, “local authority officials and professionals involved in the development process are very knowledgeable at the level of agents and events in the process” (Healey, 1992, p.43). But the studies presented by involved practitioners paid the majority of attention on technical aspects of village planning and housing design. They have reflected on the role played by design agency and its collaboration with other actors, but haven't connect the agency's role to a broader political economic background of village development.

Compared with existing research of the development of new villages, the study in this thesis has elaborated how the development practice had been affected by 1) the policies and broader physical and social environment of the development; 2) the roles and strategies of the involved stakeholders during the development process. This section would further highlight the individual stakeholders' interactions with each other and with the structures and context, and clarify how the interactions have led to diverging development practices.

The institutional structure, featured with hierarchical competition, has set out several constraints to local government, such as limited financial ability, the pressures from internal evaluation held by superiors and the competition with counterparts. Local government, from the provincial to the county level, has acted strategically to implement the development under the institutional constraints and local social and economic conditions. A common inclination of local government is to take speculative and expedient tactics in policy implementation, in order to draw quick response to the changing ideas of the higher echelons. As the result, local government's implementation of rural policies at first can be seemingly innovative and flexible, but will often soon turn to top-down campaign that solely focus on drastic and tangible transformation of village built environment, just as observed in Looney's study (2015) in Jiangxi.

This study has also argued that local government's emphasizing on the renewal of village built environment is affected by the inter-governmental relationships featured with top-down evaluation and fund allocation. In the inter-governmental relationships, upper level government has strong control on the subordinate government. But as illustrated in section 8.1.1, local government can be strategic and develop countermeasures to deal with their superiors. The strategies taken by local governments also tend to result in selective implementation that focuses on the latest highlighted points of development policies. And the highlighted points will very likely being interpreted into tangible and displayable features in development practice. For instance, BNSC policies' call for conserving rurality in village development has been over-simplified into aesthetic standards of new buildings in many cases, rather than housing design standards respecting rural residents' practical needs and preference of new living environment.

While being extraordinarily enthusiastic to respond the highlighted fresh development objectives of the latest policies, village development in practice tends to downplay, or even produce results conflict with, the objectives inherited from earlier policies, especially the objectives that may not be easily discovered by evaluators at the first glance. Some previous studies have argued that local state is more likely to deliver measurable outcomes in the implementation of rural policies (O'Brien and Li, 1999; Cai, 2004). In line with the findings of the above studies, this study has further indicated the choice of local government had taken the "temporal sequence" of policies into account.

Moreover, the study shows that within the institutional structure, leeway for policy implementation shrinks drastically with the level of government descending. Although framed

by the central-local relations, provincial government, as the highest authority on sub-national level, has considerable space to interpret the national policies of village development based on local conditions. The provincial government's interpretation, however, set out very detailed provincial policies, guidelines and specific development tasks for its subordinates. Therefore, down to the county level of local government, which is assigned by the provincial government as the executors of the implementation of village development, the room for manoeuvre is largely limited.

This study's findings of local government's strategic actions under institutional constraints partly coincides with the findings of some previous case studies of the implementation of BNSC policies, which have pointed out the strategic actions of local authorities (Heberer and Schubert, 2012; Ahlers and Schubert, 2013; Ahlers, 2014). However, different with the view of the above studies, which considered local state's collusive and strategic actions as 'a mean of stimulating policy innovation and implementing central policies creatively at the grassroots' and 'welcomed by the system', this study indicates it is doubtful to view the strategies of county and township government as complementary or innovative expansion of the development guidelines set out by higher echelons. Because that the 'innovation' is very likely involved with informal or even illegal aspects conflicting with the concerns of the higher-level authorities. As seen in the two case studies, the altered approach of village development taken by the government of Eastern County ostensibly satisfied and innovated the provincial development guidelines, but in fact ran into directions opposite to the policies and regulations of rural land use and protecting the interests of rural majority. The result should not be only attributed to low-level local government's strategy or behaviours, but also institutional structure. In line with Rosenberg's (2015) suggestion drawn from his case studies of village development in China, this study argues that to ensure local government's practice of rural policies would be centred with the interests of the majority of rural population, it is necessary to reform the whole institutional mechanism for pushing development programs.

This study has also illustrated non-state actors' roles in village development, which is an aspect often ignored by previous studies. Some studies looking at the struggle of powers in the development of built environment and more general social and economic development practice in and out of the context of China have indicated that even the seemingly most powerless actors can influence the process and product of development (see Scott, 1985; Flyvbjerg, 2002). The above view is reaffirmed by this study. The study further suggests the roles are carved out by the actors' rational choices to ensure and maximize their private

interests. The choices are framed by the political and economic structure and context of village development. For instance, the majority of house owners' pursuit of pro-modern house forms and pro-urban lifestyle should be understood under the rapid and wide-spread urbanization in China. The urbanization and outpour of rural labour is also the context for the land-providers' choice to release idled farmland. The land-providers' choice, as well as many other informal/illegal aspects of the development practice indicated the involved actors can act not in line with the rules and regulations set by the structure.

The stakeholders who are casting powers and affecting the development also receive various impacts simultaneously from the development. The study mainly focuses on the development's impacts on rural residents. It has identified the general conception of 'villagers' into several divided interests groups. The village cadres, the villagers who release their land in exchange for rent, and the house buyers are the groups that have been benefited by the development. But their gains from the development usually came from informal or illegal resources, thus are not secured in the long term by laws or other social conventions.

To other members of the village collective, the development is more likely to bring them negative impacts rather than benefits. As found in the case studies in village S and K, collective-owned land has been taken by the development. The interests and benefits produced by the development, however, were not equally shared by the collective. Further research is necessary to substantiate and specify the negative impacts. But as worried by some villagers interviewed by this study, the practice of village development can undermine the equal sharing of collective-owned land and the already weak social sense of the community if the impacts were not resolved appropriately.

The study has implied the possibility and advantages of a community-based approach other than the top-down approach of developing new villages. The early development in village K, as a representative of the alternative approach, has successfully engaged with the community of the riverside residents and resolved the change of land tenure. The case indicates that non-state actors have the power and ability to conduct village development.

The effective organization of villagers and the collective-ownership of land were two advantages of the community-based development. Case studies in other places of the world indicate that community land ownership can be conducive for development benefiting the general well-being and sustainability of local community (Satsangi, 2009; Hoffman, 2013). However, as pointed out by many previous studies China (Thøgersen, 2009; Looney, 2015) found that the absence of effective farmers' organizations is a general situation in rural

development in China. As the result, village development organized by community is rarely seen and has not been fully studied in the Chinese context. This study has shed lights on this field. But again, it is worth to point out that further research needs to be carried out in order to expand the implication from the single case in village K. Nevertheless, the findings of this study are indicative that the practice of village development still has long way to go to achieve the macro goals set out by the policies, which state to economically and socially benefit the majority of rural population.

### **8.3 Conclusion**

The comparing of case studies made in last chapter has pointed out that the development of new villages in practice can be conducted with different processes and produce various output. Meanwhile, the findings have indicated deviations between development policies and practices. Last chapter has explained the differences and deviations under the perspective of the institutional structure and the broad social and physical environment of development. To complete the explanation, this chapter further connects the differences and deviations to the roles of involved stakeholders in development practice. It also clarified the development's impacts on the involved stakeholders.

Based on the empirical findings from case studies, this chapter has identified the involved stakeholders as government at central and different local levels, design agency, village elites represented by the village cadres, and several groups of villagers that have different exchanges of interests in the development. It has expounded that on one hand, the roles and actions of the involved stakeholders are framed by the institutional structure and the social and physical environment of village development introduced in the last chapter. On the other hand, the stakeholders have also adopted strategic actions, often in less formal and visible ways, to challenge and defy the regulations and rules imposed by the structure and the constraints set by the context.

Lastly, this chapter has suggested that the practices of village development have mixed impacts on different interests groups of rural population. In general, part of the rural population has been benefited by the development, while the majorities are likely to receive negative impacts. The case studies of different development practices have provided several implications for further academic research, policy-making and practice of new villages, which are concluded in the next chapter.





## **Chapter 9. Conclusion: Lessons from the Development of New Villages**

This study focused on the recent development of new villages in China. In the last decade, numerous new villages have been built under the banner of Building the New Socialist Countryside (BNSC), which is the Chinese government's most recent national campaign of rural development at the time this study started (2013). This is the latest initiative in a series of campaigns that have prompted to transform the Chinese countryside since the country's economic reform in the 1980s. Studies and public reports have raised wide ranging criticisms of previous village developments that drastically changed the living environment in rural areas (see Tu, 2010; Xiao, 2014). Toward the government's latest movement to regulate the village built environment, different voices have also been heard from political, sociological, and ethnographic studies, and architectural and planning research (see Bray, 2013; Yeh, 2013; Looney, 2015). In these studies of village development, some have endorsed the state-led campaign and stated that the renewal of village environment will improve the living conditions of the rural population, as well as benefit China's general economic growth and social development in the long term; others have argued that the top-down campaign may lead to social tension and conflict in rural China.

The major aim of this study was to analyse the implementation and impacts of village development and examine the extent to which the development practice responded to the policies set out in BNSC. In order to achieve the research aim and objectives, the study focused on three sets of research questions, as below:

- 1) Questions to identify the context and progress of policies which have prompted the recent development of new villages in China
  - What are the national policies of village development and what are their aims in promoting village development?
  - What are the interconnections between these policies of development?
- 2) Questions to understand the implementation process of village development:
  - Who are the stakeholders involved in the development process?
  - What are the stakeholders' roles and actions in the development process?
- 3) Questions to examine the outcomes of village development:
  - What are the major outputs delivered by the development in practice?
  - What are the development's impacts on the rural population?

## 9.1 Answers to research questions

### 9.1.1 *The context and development of the policies of new villages*

Since China's economic reform in the 1980s, the landscape in the Chinese countryside has witnessed enormous and continuing change. The development of new villages initiated by the government has contributed significantly to the change. Under the banner of BNSC, numerous projects of village development have been carried out in recent years. The investigation of policy development in this study indicated that BNSC policies of new villages are closely related with the farmland conservation policies and policies about rural land use issued by the central government years, even decades, ago. These three series of policies constitute the changing but interrelating campaign of village development on the national level.

National policies concerned with farmland conservation and regulating rural land use began to call for the development of new villages since the 1980s. China's rapid development after its opening-up has consumed enormous farmland for industrial and residential developments. Stating to prevent the drastic decrease of farmland and insure food security, the Chinese government has targeted land-use efficiency in rural areas as a cause of the loss of farmland. It specified that the vacant old village housing and unauthorized new housing growth in the countryside, and unplanned village layouts, were key factors that resulted in the generally low efficiency of village land use (Ministry of Land and Resources, 2003). To regulate village land use, the central government issued policies that encouraged the development of new village housing and rearrangement of the land use of old villages in the early 1980s.

In the 1990s, more policies and regulations to constrain the conversion of arable land into non-agricultural uses and enhance the management of village land use were approved. The central government also launched a land consolidation programme to regulate rural land use, and the programme was endorsed by many scholars. Their studies (Li *et al.*, 2004; Lin and Li, 2007; Shi and Zhang, 2009), and the official estimation from the government (Ministry of Land and Resources, 2003) stated that considerable arable land would be released by developing new villages and rearranging old ones.

This early call for new villages under the policies of farmland conservation and the programme of land consolidation was not widely put into practice because of the lack of sufficient development funds and strong political motivations. Nonetheless, the land-use regulations and rules set out under the ideology of "applying the strictest farmland

conservation policies in the world” repeatedly stressed by the central government became frames of quota-driven development of new villages.

Quota-driven development aims to release developable land while satisfying the land-use rules and regulations of farmland conservation. The provision of developable land became a crucial concern of many local governments after the tax-sharing reform in the mid of 1990s. Tax-sharing reform has largely reduced local government’s share of tax revenue compared with the central government. Taxes related with urban development and real estate development, such as real estate tax and taxes from building industry, became important revenue resources of local government. Moreover, local government can collect land conveyance fees and fees for council services from developers, which can account for more than one third of the total local public revenue (see Zhou, 2010; Sun and Zhou, 2013). Local public finance is thus connected to the provision of developable land. The land-use rules and regulations established under farmland conservation policies, which control the growth of developable land, thus became constraints for local government.

Local governments in some developed regions in China first made the “innovation” to satisfy the farmland conservation policies while ensuring the provision of developable land from the projects of village land consolidation (see Wang and Tao, 2009). In the consolidation projects, new villages with higher housing density replaced the old countryside residential quarters. In this way, land can be released for development. Local government can be freed from the constraints of the rule of dynamic-balance and the limited quotas for farmland conversion set out by the central government. As a result, considerable numbers of new villages have been developed across the country. This development practice has led to criticism from academia and public, including China’s state media, which reproached local authorities for imposing drastic changes on rural life and damaging the rights and interests of the rural population (see Xinhua News, 2007; Wang and Tao, 2009; Tu, 2010).

In response to local government’s strong demand and “innovations” to grab developable land, the central government issued a series of national policies to regulate the quota-generation development. The objectives of the national policies relating to the development of new villages with quota generation were complicated. On one hand, the policies aimed to control and prevent village development practice from provoking serious conflict between the state and rural people. On the other hand, the policies had to balance social stability with local economic growth sustained by urban development. The emergence of the national policies of

quota-generation developments reflected the power struggles between the central and local government (Tan, 2014; Xiao, 2014).

The initiation of BNSC in the mid-2000s also marked the central government's consideration on adjusting the central-local relations. The central government axed rural taxes in the early 2000s, which were important tax resources of local government. The campaign of BNSC was initiated around the same time with the cancellation of rural taxation. The central government allocated the bulk of transfer payments and development funds to local government in the name of promoting BNSC, which can make up local government's loss in rural taxes.

However, the purpose of BNSC was not only about adjusting the inter-governmental relations. The BNSC policies have set out comprehensive objectives on rural development, which include social and economic development, as well as the development of a new village environment. In line with the earlier policies focusing on transforming the village environment, village development under BNSC also placed regulating village land use as a main goal. Moreover, the policies particularly highlighted three aspects of development: to upgrade infrastructure in rural areas, enhance village planning, and conserve the rurality of village environment in planning practice.

As pointed out by Harvey (1985), the crisis of overaccumulation periodically in production can be contemporarily resolved by state-invested mass construction of infrastructure. The Chinese government and many scholars state that the development of infrastructure in rural areas is an effective strategy to consume the overaccumulation in many industries, and finally help reform China's economic growth pattern from export-driven to domestic demand-driven. Merging the rural space with the formalized spatial planning regime was viewed by the government as an essential means of achieving the macro goals above. At the same time, the criticisms raised about the previous development practices warned the government that if the change of village built environment was too drastic, state-society tension and conflict would easily arise. Therefore, the central government repeatedly stressed the conservation of "rural characteristics" in the policies of village planning and practice under BNSC.

In sum, since the economic reform in the 1980s, the Chinese government has issued three sets of national policies in relation to the development of new villages. The finding indicates that the village development policies are constantly changing and revising. The fluctuations in development policies in the past decades suggests the changing concerns of the

central government, and the central-local relations in policy implementation. In general, the current policies and practice of village development under BNSC are largely led by the central government's considerations on China's economic growth and social stability at the macro level.

In the name of implementing BNSC policies, the most recent trend of developing new villages appeared and produced the development practices studied in this research. Case study findings indicate that village developments in practice did make special efforts to respond to the BNSC policies' concerns on infrastructure, formal planning and aesthetic control. However, the development practice did not fully achieve the comprehensive objectives raised by the policies, such as regulating village land use and benefitting village economic and social development. Answers to the following questions that centred on the roles and actions of the development stakeholders would further explain why the policies were partially implemented and how the development practice was shaped on the ground.

#### 9.1.2 *The implementation processes of village development*

The stakeholders involved in the implementation process of village development include both state and non-state agencies. The present study's analysis of the policies of village development indicated that different levels of government tended to have different purposes and actions in the making of policies and the practice of village development. Therefore, state agencies of the development can be further identified in different levels of government. The central government is the highest authority in terms of making national policies of development. Local government, from provincial to county-level, were motivated by the central to implement the policies. The case studies found that the non-state actors include the design agency employed by the government, village elites represented by village cadres, and the rural population, which can be further identified as the consumers of the new housing, the providers of the land resource for the housing, and the rest members of the involved village collective.

As demonstrated above, the central government has allocated enormous development funds to local government to promote the implementation of BNSC. At the same time, internal evaluations have been established to supervise local government's performance in using the funds and implementing the policies. The hierarchical evaluation and transfer payment mechanisms not only exist in the central-local relationships of government, but also the inter-governmental relationships generally between upper and lower echelons. In the internal evaluations, lower-level local government needs to meet the requirements raised by

the higher-level echelons and stand out in the competition with counterparts. Otherwise, the local government may lose the top-down allocated funds and the officials can be punished with sanctions.

Provincial government is the highest-level actor of local government being influenced by the central-local governmental relationships. As introduced in Chapter 4, the provincial policies of implementing BNSC have repeated the necessity to develop modern agriculture, village economy and public services, etc. Among these general objectives, the provincial government is particularly interested in the transformation of the village built environment. It specifically concerns the three points of village transformation newly emphasized by the national BNSC policies, namely the development of infrastructure, professionalization of village planning, and the conservation of the “rurality” of the village environment.

The above findings indicate that in the implementation of rural development as comprehensive as BNSC, the provincial government is inclined to invest resources on short-term development goals, such as the refurbishment of the new village environment. A similar inclination to over-simplify BNSC into village housing development was also observed in other places in China (see Looney, 2015). Provincial government also tends to place more attention on the newly-emerged emphasises of the latest policies than the goals of previous policies (although the goals are usually repeated by the latest policies).

County-level government has been assigned by the provincial government as the executor to implement the provincial policies of new villages. The Sichuan provincial government has issued specific tasks for the county governments, including the number and the deadlines of development, procedure requirements for the development process, and aesthetic standards for the development output. However, in many regions in China, especially the less-developed western inland areas, county government’s financial ability is as limited as seen in Eastern County. These local governments can hardly afford the scale and standards of development required by provincial superiors. However, higher-level government usually would not allocate the major part of development funds before the development practice has been evaluated as satisfactory. In these circumstances, the government of Eastern County has concentrated its resources on two pilot developments of new villages, and it then changed its development approach, to use the powerful rural elites to sustain and expand the practice of new villages.

Several contextual and institutional factors have contributed to local government’s selective localization of BNSC policies and strategic actions to revise development

approaches. China's rapid social and economic transition on the macro level also affected the actions of local government. The dynamic of the social and economic context has caused changing emphases on national development policies. To catch up with the change, local government has to take hasty action and pursue quick success.

The aforementioned inter-government relationships featured by hierarchical competition, evaluation and transfer payment are also factors. To survive the competition and evaluation and secure the payment, local governments need to positively respond to the top-down instructions. Therefore, some studies argue that the internal evaluation mechanism of the Chinese government is conducive to innovative and effective implementation of rural policies (Heberer and Schubert, 2012; Ahlers, 2014).

The limited financial ability of local government, resulting largely in the tax-sharing reform and top-down control of developable land, is another institutional factor in the local strategy of implementing village development. Under financial difficulties, local government, especially government at county level and below, is more likely to seek financial and social help from local non-state actors to implement rural policies (Zhu, 2006; Thøgersen, 2009).

The most powerful non-state actor involved in the development of new villages is village cadres. The role played by village cadres is usually multi-sided. It is an agent of the state, a part of the local elite groups, and the leader of a village community as well. Such a role enabled the village cadres to have social and economic advantages to become informal private developers. The developer acted to seek interest in developing new houses on village land and illegally sell the houses to people who do not belong to the village collective. However, the developer helped the county government to deliver tangible development output with less financial investment and human labour. The cadres' network with local officials also paved the road for their business. Therefore, the county government did not seriously oppose the illegal use of farmland and house sales in the development. On the other hand, the cadres' social influence inside the collective were conducive for them to seek collaboration with villagers, in order to get the essential land resources. The cadres' social influence in wider local areas helped to attract house buyers from outside the village to consume the products of the development.

The collaboration between land providers and house buyers, as two other groups of non-state stakeholders, ensured that they benefited from the development of new villages. However, the benefits enjoyed by these interests groups are not secured in the long term. The illegal aspects of the development can be punished by the government if the emphasis of rural



policies inclines toward the conservation of farmland again. Moreover, when land tenure needs to be renewed and adjusted, the unequal use of collectively owned land is very much likely to cause conflicts of interest and thus disputes within the collective. Nonetheless, to seek land rent or a better living environment, the land providers and house buyers chose to take part in the development.

Besides the aforementioned three non-state stakeholders who actively took part in the implementation of new villages, there are also stakeholders who were less engaged with the process of development. These marginalized stakeholders include members of the village collective who did not move into the newly developed areas or provided land voluntarily for development. These fellow villagers accounted for the majority of the village collectives involved with the official programme of village development. This study has indicated that in the official programme, local government's pursuit of quick success and the informal developer's search for private profit left limited room for villagers to negotiate and secure their rights. The communities were largely excluded from the making of the development agenda, and collective interests of communities were overridden by external powers. By contrast, the study of the riverside development in village K suggests that the development practice with the participation of the village community can better resolve land-use issues and produce more equal and general benefits for the stakeholders involved.

The design agencies involved in the implementation of new villages also played a limited role, which was largely restricted to a technical consultancy assisting local government to fulfil the bureaucratic procedures of development emphasized by the higher-level authorities. The design agencies had little chance to interact with the rural residents, who would be the practical users of the space. The major duties of the professionals in village planning and housing design were too often over-simplified into visualizing and specifying the aesthetic standards favoured by government, and producing planning documents required by the internal evaluation.

That the design agencies' role mainly served government, rather than any other stakeholders of village development, was not due to the design professionals' lack of awareness of the importance of villagers' participation in village development. Many Chinese scholars and practitioners of village development have pointed out the necessity of public participation and community engagement (see Lin, 2007; Wang and Shi, 2015). Nevertheless, local government's pragmatic need to survive the competition and evaluation inside China's administrative system can hardly ensure enough space for participatory development.

However, as indicated by a few experimental development practices in post-earthquake reconstruction in Sichuan (see Xie, 2010; Wan et al., 2016), planning and architectural researchers and practitioners still have the potential to extend and enrich the role of the design agency from just being an assistant of the government to an actor with more interaction and engagement with all the stakeholders of village development.

Without being engaged in the planning process of new villages, the villagers who moved into the new houses still managed to transform the development outputs after the development had been officially finished. Therefore, the house owners are also viewed by this study as active non-state stakeholders in the government-initiated transformation of village environment, because they have strategically acted against the state actors and transformed the development outputs. They also successfully resisted obeying the land-use regulations. The house owners, as well as other non-state stakeholders' interactions with the state actors, indicated the complexity of state-society relations in the development of new villages. As Scott (1985) states, the rural people, which is usually viewed as weak, can take various, perhaps less-visible, forms of resistances to fight against the dominant powers. Yet there are also villagers who did not manage to secure their rights in the development, and the next section further elaborates how the development has impacted on different parts of the rural population.

In sum, the study of the implementation of new villages indicated complicated interactions between the involved stakeholders, and the stakeholders and the socio-spatial context of rural China. The central government's concerns about village development were closely related to the macro economic and social transitions in China, and the changing central-local relations. The dynamics in the macro transitions and the inter-governmental relationship contributed to frequent adjustments village development policies.

To ensure the implementation of these policies, the central government established the mechanisms of internal performance evaluation and fund allocation, which largely frame local government's actions and encourages same-level competition in terms of implementing national policies. To survive the hierarchical evaluation and competition, local government tends to prioritize delivering the tangible outputs of policy implementation. Hence, the space for innovative and flexible policy implementation was limited.

Local government's leeway in policy implementation further shrinks with the administration levels moving down. County government, as the executor of development practice, has to act in line with the development tasks and standards set out by the provincial

government. Design professionals were introduced into the development mainly because of local government's pragmatic needs to produce planning documents and the built environment in line with the requirements of the higher-level echelons, rather than to better serve the needs of the rural population.

The institutional pressure to deliver the assigned development tasks has driven the county government, with limited financial ability, to invest in a small number of pilot projects in hand-picked villages that already have advantages to be displayed to the higher-level evaluators. These pilot projects can improve the housing conditions of a small number of villagers. However, one-sidedly focusing on transforming village built environment and the speed of development, these pilot projects hardly brought any substantial benefits to the village community.

Besides conducting the pilot projects themselves, the county government tends to make use of influential local elites. The collusion of county government and village cadres has produced the development approach which was claimed officially as "the development with farmers as main actors". In fact, the development was closer to illegal private housing development. Such development may benefit a small number of rural residents, who brought the new houses or provided land resources for the development, but it can damage the interests of the majority of the village collective involved in the long term. The development's mixed impacts on the rural population are concluded in the following section.

#### 9.1.3 *The outcomes of village development in practice*

As illustrated above, national policies on villages have raised several overall goals for the development, including the improvement of local economy, public services, land-use efficiency, environment sanitation and housing conditions in rural areas. It has been found in the case studies of this research that development in practice can bring noticeable changes to the village built environment. New housing and facilities for public services have been delivered, but the economic situation or supply of public services in the developed area rarely benefited from the development. The present study has elaborated that local government's selective implementation of development policies are due to several institutional factors, including the top-down allocation of transfer payment, the hierarchical inter-governmental evaluation, and competition. Powerful local actors' collusion with local government has also reduced the objectives of village development from making comprehensive socio-spatial improvements that benefit the rural population in general to profit-seeking for exclusive groups of stakeholders. As the result, the development of new villages has in practice only

partially fulfilled the objectives set by policies, and the partially delivered output has had mixed impacts on the rural population.

To the village cadres, the buyers of the new housing and the villagers who chose to release their contracted farmland for rent, the development has benefited them with economic rewards or a better living environment. However, these benefits are not secured, since the exchange of interests in the development is entangled with illegal changes of land tenure and drastic inflow of populations in the village. If not treated properly, the land tenure and population changes can damage the interest of the fellow members, who are the majority of the village collective involved.

Some previous studies have pointed out that village development can bring different impacts to the villages in different social, economic and geographic conditions (Rosenberg, 2013; Xiao, 2014). In general, villages with economic advantages and proximity to cities are more likely benefited by the development. This study has reaffirmed the previous studies' findings that the development of new villages tends to further concentrate resources in villages that already have social and economic advantages. Moreover, this study has furthered the discussion about the development's impacts on various interests groups inside the same village collective.

The house buyers are one of the groups benefited by the development. The development has upgraded the house buyers' residential environment with new houses, paved roads, and facilities to serve public activities and sanitation. These improvements in infrastructure could hardly been achieved solely depending on the village collectives. The new houses delivered by the development offered rural residents an affordable option to upgrade their housing conditions. This mode of village housing development is especially helpful to village households having an urgent need to improve housing conditions, especially with only elders and minors living in the village. Because the core members of these households have moved far away from the village home to work, it is difficult for these households to organize individual housing project by themselves. Meanwhile, new houses in towns or cities are usually economically unaffordable to them. Households in such a structure and economic condition are commonly seen in contemporary rural China. In this circumstance, the development of new villages can have wide and positive influences in terms of housing rural residents.

Some village elites, represented by the cadres and entrepreneurs, noticed rural residents' need for affordable housing and took this need as a chance to pursue their own interests. A

case study by Thøgersen (2009) shows the village elite's intention (and only intention, since the elite's vision of development had not been put into practice during Thøgersen's study) to conduct village development using their personal networks with local officials. This study indicates that, to seek profit from the development of new villages, the village elites need not only to collude with officials of local government, but also with villagers who would take the risk of illegally subleasing their land tenure in exchange for land rent offered by the informal developer. The village elites have also taken advantage of their social influences and networks to attract potential house buyers from surrounding areas.

Compared to the development practice organized mainly by local government, the development organized by the village elites can deliver larger scale housing at less cost in subsidies. The housing design and price is also attractive to rural residents, as indicated by the prosperous house sale in village K. It seems that the elite-led development approach has created a win-win-win situation for the developers, the land providers, and the house buyers. However, the situation has considerable uncertainty and is based on the potential loss of the rest and majority members of the village collective.

The uncertainty of the development's benefits is related to the informal and illegal aspects in the development. According to the current land-use regulations in China, land in rural areas, including farmland and housing plots, is a collectively owned asset. Individual village households have the right to use this land for free, but are prohibited from subleasing their farmland tenure for non-agricultural purposes or transferring their houses and housing plot to non-collective members. The development organized by village elites was not compile with the above regulations. The development also breached the principle of equity, which is the key principle for villagers who share a collectively owned asset. The interests and benefits produced by village development on collectively owned land are not equally shared by the collective members. The upgraded housing and infrastructure has little influence on the development of public services and village economy that can benefit the whole collective. As illustrated above, the main beneficiaries of the development are the developers, land providers, and house buyers. However, the collective has to confront possible conflicts of interest caused by the unauthorized change of land tenure and the inflow of outsiders due to the development.

Further studies are necessary to clarify and substantiate the possible conflicts. The findings of this study have thus far implied that disputes about land sharing between members of the collective will very likely emerge when the village households' current land tenure

contract ends and the collectively owned land needs to be reallocated. The conflicts internal to the collective will be further complicated in the cases where new houses have been sold to buyers from outside.

In sum, this study has clarified village development's various influences on different groups of rural residents by looking at the conflicts of interest and division of opinions among villagers toward the development in practice. The case studies show that the development can deliver village houses at an affordable price, suitable house forms, and convenient access to town. Therefore, village development in practice has produced discernible benefits for many villagers. However, the benefits are often achieved via informal, and even illegal tactics and methods, and are not inclusively shared by the village collective as a whole. These legitimate and democratic deficiencies weakened the achievements of the development. Moreover, the development hardly made a significant contribution to effective rural land use, improved local economy and public services in villages, which are the objectives of the policies of village development. The unachieved targets further depreciated the village development's already limited value for, and meaning to, the majority of the rural population.

## **9.2 Academic implications: an inclusive perspective to study village development in rural China**

This study has followed and expanded the theoretical perspective which argues that the understanding of any socio-spatial process should be inclusive to both the top-down view focuses on the formation of broad social-economic relations, and the agency-centred view focuses on individual stakeholders' actions. Adopting an inclusive perspective toward the development of the built environment, this study has broadened the scope of the Chinese studies of new villages, which paid insufficient attention to the complicated interactions between structure and individuals, and between different individual stakeholders in the process of village development. On the other hand, the empirical findings of this study have expanded the theoretical perspective, which was derived mainly from the western context of urban development, to the very different socio-spatial environment in rural China.

The dichotomy between structure and individual has existed pervasively in social enquiries, and in the theories and models about the development of urban built environment. With the progression of urban studies, as Healey points out, the understanding of urban development should "capture the detail of the social relations of a development project, while linking this to broader issues at the level of macro-economic and political organization, without over-formalizing the highly variable circumstances of specific projects and agencies"

(Healey, 1992, p.43). The inclusive methodology to study the formation of built environment, therefore, is to acknowledge the importance of different overarching perspectives without denying the importance of others.

It has been argued that the study of urban form is best made possible by tracing the process of its development (Madanipour, 1996). However, as found in this thesis's review of published research of village development, the study of the development process is a gap in the literature. The insufficient analysis of the development process may have been caused by the lack of public access to the process of village development guided by government. A handful of studies have been conducted by the planning and architectural practitioners involved in the practice of village development, and have partially reconstructed the process. Yet these studies were too often narrowly focused on the technical aspects of village planning and housing design, and thus did not manage to fully clarify the roles of different actors and connect the actions to the institutional structure of China and the socio-spatial context of the development locality. In contrast, studies conducted by political, sociological and anthropological researchers have provided a fuller explanation of how the development has been framed by the political and economic structure in China. These studies also illustrated the interactions of some of the stakeholders, such as the interactions between different levels of government, and between the state and rural people. However, in general, due to the insufficient investigation of the development process, existing research has not clarified the roles of stakeholders and captured the interaction between stakeholders and the structure and context of development in detail.

Benefitting from the author's previous experience in housing design in the practice of village development, this study has observed the development process of the village environment at a very close distance. On the other hand, the reflective nature of this PhD research and the cross-disciplinary perspective it adopted made it possible for this study to look at the development practice with diverse views and minimize bias. Consequently, the present study has provided solid empirical evidences and theoretical reflections to shed new light on the gaps in the research of village development in China. It also helps to bridge the dichotomy of the macro and micro perspectives (which respectively focus on the broad social-economic structure or individual actors) of the development of built environment in a more general sense.

In the analysis of the national policies of village development, this study has connected the shifting of development policies to the dynamics in China's institutional structure

(transfer-payment mechanism, centralised land-use planning, internal evaluation regime etc.) and the macro social-spatial context of rural China in the past three decades (farmland decrease, rural underdevelopment, transition of economic growth pattern, etc.).

In terms of studying the implementation process of village development, the present study has taken into account the physical and social environment of the development locality. With the understanding of the contextual and structural factors of development, the study moves to the analysis on the level of agencies. The state actors and the general notion of “rural residents” have been identified as various agencies with different interests. Studying the interactions of these interests groups reveals that the struggle for power in the development in reality is much more complicated than the descriptions presented by published studies. In different approaches and stages of development, interests groups can have different power against and relations with each other. The development of new villages should not be oversimplified as a unilaterally top-down campaign of modernization and urbanization, but a socio-spatial process shaped by forces from various directions.

### **9.3 Suggestions for further research**

As clarified in the Methodology chapter, to make the best of the limited time and means to collect data, this study chose two villages in the same county as the subjects of case studies. These two villages, which had the built environment transformed in different approaches, provided the present study with an opportunity to explore the various disparities of the policies and implementation of village development and the complicated causal nexuses of the disparities. Nevertheless, it is clear that given the enormous regional diversity in China, more studies on the practices of village development in other places under diverse social, economic and geographic conditions are needed, to broaden our spatial understanding of the transformation of village environment.

Another potential direction for further studies on village development is to broaden the research scope temporally. Village development under BNSC, which has been designated with comprehensive and long-term objectives, has been put into practice for less than a decade. As found in fieldwork, the development and transformation of new houses in the studied villages has not yet come to an end. With the date to reallocate the collective-owned land coming closer, and with the flow-in of residents from outside the village collective, it is likely that disputes in land-use and the daily life of villagers will gradually emerge. The long-lasting economic and social impacts of village development will be an important field for follow-up research.



Future research can also focus on the upcoming policies and practices of village development initiated by the Chinese government. As found in the latest No.1 Documents (2017) and the 13th Five-year Plans in China (2015), the development of housing conditions, infrastructure and service facilities in rural areas are still key topics. In the coming years, it is very likely that the government on both central and local levels will continue motivating the transformation of village environment. The analysis of development policies in this study has suggested that the policies are interrelated with each other, and reflect the dynamic of the macro social-spatial context and the struggle of powers in implementation. Therefore, a continuous study tracing the progression of development policies and practices in future will certainly help to further our understanding of the ongoing transformation of the Chinese countryside.

In addition, this study suggests paying more attention to the transformation of the village environment initiated by non-state actors, including rural elites, as well as the “grassroots”. Findings from the two studied villages have indicated non-state actors’ ability to organize large-scope village development. In general, however, these unofficial and bottom-up developments have not yet been sufficiently explored in the literature. Learning lessons from these developments would help researchers and policy makers revise the development approaches to better serve the needs of rural people.

#### **9.4 Suggestions for the policies and practices of village development in future**

In relevant research and public opinion, selective policy implementation focusing on quick and ostensible success, rent-seeking, and corruptive collusion of the most powerful actors, are all factors which have been identified for a long time as characteristic deficits of rural development in China. Some recent studies indicate that, in spite of being engraved with the above insufficiencies in policies and practices, the current rural development campaign of BNSC has delivered considerable beneficial results for the rural population (Ahlers and Schubert, 2009; Ahlers, 2014). However, specific to the implementation of BNSC’s goals of improving the living environment of rural residents, this study indicates that the implementation of new villages only partially fulfils the objectives of the policies of development, and benefits a small part of rural population.

According to the policies of BNSC, village development aims to improve the living conditions of rural residents in both physical and social senses. However, as observed in the process of localizing the development policies from the central to the provincial level, the development objectives have been largely simplified to the production of new physical space

in rural areas. The development practice has been further reduced to the renewal of village built environment following the aesthetic standards designated by local government. In general, the priority of development has been mainly given to make physical changes on village built environment.

Furthermore, resources were more likely to flow to villages that already have advantages in economy, accessibility and natural and built environment, leaving the poor areas farther behind. Such unequal development had been led by the county government, as seen in the early phase of experimental pilot development of new villages, but with the progression of the development practice, the selective implementation was also frequently caused by the power of an illegal village housing market. As a result, the practice of village development only benefits a very limited range of population concerned by the development policies.

To redirect the implementation of new villages and comprehensive rural development, changes need to be made on both macro and local levels. As pointed out by the analysis drawn in Chapter 7 and 8, China's institutional structure, featured by hierarchical internal evaluation, same-level competition, centralised planning mechanisms for transfer payment and land-use, plays a crucial role in shaping the implementation of new villages under BNSC. As seen in Eastern County, institutional pressure from provincial and prefectural superiors has strongly influenced the management of the time and scale of development in the county government's development agenda. The rent-seeking and collusive behaviours of local government and rural elites, to a large extent, is outside the local agencies' strategic and expedient countermeasures to deal with the institutional pressure.

Therefore, to transform the development practice, just enhancing the supervision and control on local agencies will not be sufficient. The institutional structure, which is prompting the development top-down as a whole, needs to be reformed. For instance, while ensuring the effects prompt and supervise sub-level government, the stimulation plan and evaluation methods of policy implementation taken by higher-level government should not prevent flexible and adaptive implementation. Also, any evaluation criteria should also take account of the voices of the majority of rural population.

Besides the above suggestions focusing on the macro structure of implementing village development, it is also necessary to revise the approaches to village development at the local level. The analysis of different development approaches in the two studied villages indicates that the village collective's participation in the development process can help to resolve the disputes of land tenure, and produce development output that benefits the community more

equally and generally. The process of planning and designing a new village is an opportunity to increase village development's engagement with the collective involved.

It has been seen that the space for participatory planning was severely limited by the relationships between the design agency and government, and was thus affected by the top-down institutional pressures. Nevertheless, the design agency needs to be aware that village planning should not be introduced to the countryside only as an instrument to help achieve the aesthetic imagery and abstract political economic objectives designated by the government. The study recommends that planning and design professionals make further efforts to play a role with more independence from the government and more frequent engagement with the village collective.

In addition, one technical suggestion for the planning and housing design for new villages would be to provide sufficient space for stakeholders to adapt and make changes to designs. As observed in practice, the policies of village development are in constant adjustment. The residents of modern rural China also have various and evolving needs for their living environment, derived from their diverse relations with the modern and urban economy and their complicated attitudes toward the gradually modernized and urbanized lifestyle in the countryside. It is better not to produce village planning and design in the form of blueprints pervasively taken by the current practice of village development, in order to better meet the changing objectives of village development on both macro and micro levels.

Last but not least, the study suggests rural residents to enhance their own organization and solidarity by conducting a truly locally centred renewal of their village environment. This study has found that the lack of a villagers' organization hardly prevented the village development dominated by the government and powerful local elites from taking collectively owned assets without benefiting the collective. The weakness of rural organizations and the declining social cohesion of the village collective is a general situation observed in the studied area, as well as other case studies focusing on various regions across China (see Thøgersen, 2009; Looney, 2015). In spite of the situation being largely due to structural factors related to the macro economic and social transition in China, individuals' actions were not completely ineffective. As seen in the riverside development in village K, villagers' active participation ensured the interests created by the development would be distributed to benefit the majority of the stakeholders equally and generally. The collaboration between villagers, and between villagers and other non-state actors, such as some external NGOs, was also conducive to the creation of local-centred rural development (Thøgersen, 2009; Hale, 2013).

Moreover, rural residents' organizations may also help residents take the opportunities produced of village development, including the chance to develop tourism and relevant businesses. It has been found that, in current China, the urban middle class is increasingly turning to appreciate, and sometimes exaggeratedly romanticize, the pastoral lifestyle (Sturzaker and Law, 2016). This changed perception towards rural space has prompted tourists to visit the countryside for leisure, as seen in both of the studied villages. Villagers were wishing, but had not yet managed, to organize collective action to take advantage of the flourishing tourism, while reducing the relevant hazards.

In sum, this study has argued that, if the involved stakeholders really expect to improve the policies and practices of village development, they need to strive for change from the national to village levels. On one hand, it is necessary for the Chinese government to reform the institutional mechanisms that framed the distribution of the development funds and the organization of the development process. On the other hand, rural "grassroots" also need to take actions and explore alternative development approaches from the bottom up.



## Appendix A: List of Interviews

No	Job Title of Interviewee	Organization	Location	Date
1	Former head official of new village programme	County Government	Eastern County	16/03/2015
2 (3)*	Incumbent head official of new village programme	County Government	Eastern County (Eastern County)	16/03/2015 (07/04/2015)
	Official of new village programme	County Government		16/03/2015
4	Designer of the new village S	Design Group	Chongqing	14/03/2015
5	Designer of the new village K	Design Group	Eastern County	07/04/2015
6	Contractor of the construction of village S	Private Construction Group	Eastern County	07/04/2015
7	Official B of rural development	Township Government	S Village	18/03/2015
	Director of village committee	S Village Collective		
(8)	Village party secretary	S Village Collective	(S Village)	(30/04/2015)
9	Village <i>xiaozu</i> leader	S Village Collective	S Village	30/04/2015
10	House owner A	S Village Collective	S Village	17/03/2015
11	House owner B	S Village Collective	S Village	18/03/2015
12	House owner C	S Village Collective	S Village	18/03/2015
13	House owner D	S Village Collective	S Village	19/03/2015
14	House owner E	S Village Collective	S Village	19/04/2015
15	Land-provider F	S Village Collective	S Village	20/03/2015
16	Resident G lives next to the developed area	S Village Collective	S Village	20/03/2015
17	Owner of a small rural tourism business	S Village Immigrant	S Village	30/04/2015
18	Partner of a local construction company	S Village Immigrant	S Village	19/03/2015
19	Village party secretary	K Village Collective	K Village	05/04/2015
	Director of village committee	K Village Collective		
20	Village <i>xiaozu</i> leader	K Village Collective	K Village	05/04/2015
21	House owner A	K Village Collective	K Village	06/04/2015
22	House owner B	K Village Collective	K Village	06/04/2015
23	House owner C	K Village Collective	K Village	01/05/2015
24	House owner D	K Village Immigrant	K Village	01/05/2015
25	House owner E	K Village Immigrant	K Village	02/05/2015
26	House owner F (the 2 <sup>nd</sup> round of development)	K Village Immigrant	K Village	01/05/2015

27	Tourist A	Tour group A visiting K	K Village	05/04/2015
28	Tourist B	Tour group B visiting K	K Village	05/04/2015

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\* Information of repeat interviews with the same interviewee are marked with brackets

## **Appendix B. Guidelines Used in Semi-Structured Interviews**

### **1. Interviews with local officials**

#### Objectives

- 1) To illustrate the contexts and general situations of the development of new villages in the county/ town
- 2) To illustrate the development process, especially the initiation stages of the development
- 3) To investigate the role of stakeholders involved in the implementation of the national policies of new villages, especially the government

#### Topic Guides

- 1) Interviewee's background: job title; organization; specific roles in development of new villages
- 2) The development of new villages has been conducted under what policies/ programme/ projects?
- 3) Common stages and schedule of the development from initiation to officially announced as completed
- 4) How the development has been organized within the government: responsibility and collaboration of different government departments
- 5) What are the specific contribution of government: funds and subsidies? Technical support? Human resource to organize the development?
- 6) Has the scheme of development involved rural residents? In what ways?

### **2. Interviews with professionals in village design and construction**

#### Objectives

- 1) To illustrate the development process, especially the stages of design and construction
- 2) To identify the roles of the stakeholders, especially the professional planners and designers

#### Topic Guides

- 1) Interviewee's background: job title; organization; specific roles in development of new villages
- 2) The relationship of the organization of interviewee and government in the development: Affiliate? Subordinate? Independent? Other?
- 3) The relationship of the organization of the interviewee and villagers in the development

### **3. Interviews at village level: village cadres, house owners and fellow villagers**

#### Objectives

- 1) To illustrate the context and outputs of village development at village level



- 2) To illustrate the development process, especially the using/ transformation of the new built environment
- 3) To identify the roles of the stakeholders

#### Topic Guides with Village Cadres

- 1) Interviewee's background: job title; length of stay in the village; specific roles in development of new villages
- 2) Social and economic situations and built environment of the village: population, industries, conditions of transportation, housing and other infrastructures
- 3) The relationship of village cadres, local government and other possible agencies in the development
- 4) The relationship of village cadres and common villagers in the development

#### Topic Guides with House Owners

- 1) Interviewee's background: length of stay in the village; household situations (population, main source of income, situation of old residence, etc.)
- 2) Involvement with the development process: interviewee's involvement in practice vs. ideals of involvement
- 3) Perception of the new built environment: motivations to buy and move to the new houses; motivations for house transformation; technics and materials used for the transformation; interviewee's ideal house form and style

#### Topic Guides with Fellow Villagers

- 1) Interviewee's background: identity of the interviewee (member of the village collective? migrant of the village? visitor?); what are the interviewees' relations with the development
- 2) Perception of the new built environment: reasons and frequency of using/ visiting the new village

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