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**Publication Date**

2014

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

**One Village, Two Worlds: The Impact of the “New Countryside”**

**Campaign on a Chinese Village**

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts  
in Geography

by

Kan Liu

2014

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

**One Village, Two Worlds: The Impact of the “New Countryside”**

**Campaign on a Chinese Village**

by

Kan Liu

Master of Arts in Geography

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Cindy Fan, Chair

This paper examines the process of transformation of a traditional village into a “modern” new village in Anhui Province in central China, under the central government-sponsored “Building a New Socialist Countryside” campaign initiated in 2005. By first analyzing the construction and layout of the new village space, the author contrasts the coexistence of two worlds—the modern new rural world and the old traditional village society. These two worlds involve a tension between the non-productive rationalized space of “modern” real estate projects (a theme park and the newly constructed village with perfectly manicured landscaping), and the productive space created by the peasants (small businesses established in private residences and garden plots stealthily incorporated into the landscaping). Instead of assuming that the modernity projects of the “New Countryside” were realized on the ground as they were envisioned and instituted by the central state, the author stresses the important role of local society and strategies employed by local actors, especially non-state

actors, such as business entrepreneurs, peasants, and middle-class urban consumers of rural products, who have directly or indirectly negotiated according to each group's own interests and agendas. The negotiation between multiple participating actors is facilitated by a widespread ideological acceptance of paternalist governance and of the idea that the central government is committed to social equity and the balance of rural-urban economic development in today's China.

This thesis of Kan Liu is approved.

Eric Sheppard

Lieba Faier

Cindy Fan, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2014

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## Acknowledgements

I wanted to specially thank Professor You-tien Hsing at UC Berkeley, who diligently read drafts of this thesis and provided numerous insights and constructive comments on narrowing down the paper's content and creating a coherent theoretical framework. I also extend my infinite gratitude to my stimulating, scholarly father-in-law Timothy Tackett, and my mentor for life and study mate Nick for their unfailing support, encouragement, inspiration, and, last but not least, boundless love, on my quest to study rural transformation in today's China while embarking on my own path to join learned society.

## 1. Introduction and Background

In 2005, as part of China's Eleventh Five-Year Plan, the Chinese government threw its weight behind a new campaign—"Building a Socialist New Countryside" (*shehui zhuyi xin nongcun jianshe*), or "New Countryside" (*xin nongcun*) for short. The ambitious goal was to completely modernize China's "backward" rural society. Since its initial implementation, development projects have been launched in villages countrywide, transforming Chinese rural society according to a particular notion of modernity, focusing on the new, on orderliness, on cleanliness, on density, and on tall buildings. Every rural region in China—in particular the central and western inland regions previously excluded from the rapid economic development of recent decades—is now undergoing a transformation. By 2030, through further urbanization and industrialization, the Chinese government hopes to reduce the proportion of the agricultural population to less than 30 percent (from its current 48 percent).<sup>1</sup> Over the next two decades, this campaign will inevitably affect the lives of hundreds of millions of Chinese, making it as significant in terms of scope and impact as some of the mass campaigns of the Maoist era.

To be sure, China's current effort to reform the countryside is nothing new. A long-standing reform tradition goes back to the Rural Reconstruction Movement of the 1930s, a tradition that was subsequently vigorously pursued by the Communists during the 1940s to 1980s. It is worth noticing that rural and land reforms (rather than urban industrialization) constituted an integral part of Mao's vision of Communism from the beginning. Indeed, after the CCP took over political control of the nation in 1949, Chinese agriculture was subjected to a series of wrenching transformations, from land redistribution to agricultural collectivization, and then to the dismantling of the collectives in favor of small household

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Chinese National Bureau of Statistics, as of 2011, the Chinese population had reached 1.347 billion people, of which the rural population constituted 48.7%. For the projected urban population, see Justin Lin (Lin Yifu), *Demystifying the Chinese Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 241-242.

farms (a policy known as the Household Responsibility System). However, the year 2006 marked a momentous change in Chinese agricultural policy for two reasons. First, the “New Countryside” campaign was launched as part of a new national five-year plan. Second, taxes on the peasantry, which had essentially been in place continuously for at least two thousand years, were abolished nationwide.<sup>2</sup>

How did this “New Countryside” campaign come about? After three decades of radical economic reforms focused on an export-oriented industrialization model, China’s economy has become one of the largest in the world and continues to grow at a remarkable rate. However, not all Chinese citizens have benefited equally from such successes. The gap in standard of living between rural and urban populations has become even wider. In 1991, an influential Chinese economist, Lin Yifu—who would later become chief economist and senior vice president of the World Bank—proposed at several Chinese central government meetings the need for a “new village movement” as a comprehensive solution to an underdeveloped agriculture and an inert countryside (Lin 2005). The proposal included issuing government bonds to finance infrastructure expenses in rural areas, and taking steps to encourage rural-to-urban migration. Adopting a Keynesian macroeconomic approach, he saw the central government as the key promoter of rural development, which itself would then accelerate domestic demand on industrial overproduction of manufactured goods (Lin 2012). However, Lin’s solution to the problems of agriculture and the “backward” countryside did not receive the central government’s attention until another well-known agrarian economist and rural reformer, Wen Tiejun (1996), coined the term *sannong* (three agricultural) problems.<sup>3</sup> The three problems referred to were the decline in the agricultural labor force, the stagnation of the peasant household-based agrarian economy, and the lack of

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<sup>2</sup> Some regions had abolished agricultural taxes in 2004 at pilot experimental sites.

<sup>3</sup> *Sannong* refers literally to *nongmin* (peasants), *nongye* (the agricultural sector), and *nongcun* (rural regions).

basic infrastructure and social welfare in rural society.<sup>4</sup> Wen's catchy phrase was well received and served as a wake-up call for a re-evaluation of the place of agriculture in China's road to state capitalism.

Eventually, Lin and Wen's rural development proposals became the basis for the "New Countryside" campaign—first introduced in 2005 as part of China's Eleventh Five-Year Plan. The plan was designed to address the *sannong* issue through formal and comprehensive government intervention. The campaign aimed to achieve urban-rural integration and improve social and economic conditions in the countryside, while simultaneously reducing the gap in income, quality of life, and social welfare between rural and urban areas.<sup>5</sup> In support of this national campaign, local administrative officials were asked and encouraged to embark on a program of land consolidation involving the "transfer of land use rights" (*tudi chengbao jingying quanliu zhuan*)—or "land transfer" (*tudi liuzhuan*) for short—to rural entrepreneurs. Simultaneously, there has been a major push towards "agricultural modernization" (*nongye xiandaihua*), involving high-tech mechanization and scientific management. This approach is driven by the larger goal of increasing agricultural productivity, largely in response to growing concerns in recent years with guarding China's "national grain security" (*guojia liangshi anquan*). In 2006, the

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<sup>4</sup> Unlike Lin, Wen believes the deteriorating conditions in the countryside were caused by the outflow of three important elements—labor, capital, and land—that have been extracted for urban and industrial use. Hence, many of these rural issues are the result of the large-scale rural-to-urban migration of the past decades, a process described in considerable detail by numerous scholars (Murphy 2002; Gaetano and Jacka 2004; Jacka 2005; Fan 2008).

<sup>5</sup> More specifically, it had as its goal to modernize China's "backward" and "stagnant" countryside by pouring capital directly into rural development. According to a white paper circulated at the highest levels of government, "New Countryside" efforts were to focus on five areas of development: "advancements in economic productivity" (*shengchan fazhan*), "comfortable livelihood" (*shenghuo kuanyu*), "the civilizing of rural morals" (*xiangfeng wenming*), "the tidiness and cleanliness of villages" (*cunrong zhengjie*), and "democratic administration" (*guanli minzhu*). "Guanyu tuijin shehui zhuyi xin nongcun jianshe de ruogan yijian", *Xinhuanet.com* 2/21/2006, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2006-02/21/content\\_4207811.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2006-02/21/content_4207811.htm) accessed 5/9/2013.

government calculated that it was necessary to cultivate approximately 120 million hectares<sup>6</sup> of land in order to produce enough food for the whole nation. Forcefully accelerating land consolidation in the hinterlands would simultaneously release more “surplus” labor from the agricultural sector, thus continuing to fuel China’s rapid economic growth of the past two to three decades, which has heavily relied upon labor-intensive manufacturing (Lin 2012). The “New Countryside” campaign has now survived beyond the conclusion of the Eleventh Five-Year Plan. Most of its goals were renewed in 2011 in the Twelfth Five-Year Plan, which specifically demanded the “acceleration of the construction of a Socialist New Countryside” (*jiakuai shehuizhuyi xin nongcun jianshe*).

The goal of the present paper is to explore the empirical practice of New Countryside reforms as they are implemented on the ground, and, in so doing, to test the applicability of certain theoretical models relating the state to local society. In particular, I hope to contribute to the critique of the standard understanding of the functioning of China’s centralized authoritarian state. The paper is organized in five sections. The first section presents a review of the theoretical literature on the state and the local in the modernizing process. The second section discusses the research methodology and the sources used in this paper. In the third section, the empirical case study of the village of Jinhu in Anhui Province is described. A two-part analysis of the empirical case constitutes the fourth section. Finally, a brief conclusion offers reflections on the relationship of the state to the local as applied to my empirical case study.

## **2. Literature Review and Theoretical Questions**

One of the best known and most influential studies of the state is James Scott’s (1998) *Seeing Like a State*. Scott was trained in political science and his earlier works were

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<sup>6</sup> 1 hectare = 15 *mu*.

primarily on agrarian and peasant societies in Southeast Asia, focusing on the moral economy and everyday forms of resistance, the “weapons of the weak,” based on ethnographic studies in villages of Indonesia. His later book, however, was a comparative study of how state-planned utopian schemes failed and brought death to millions in such diverse examples as the compulsory ujamaa villages in Tanzania, collectivization in the Soviet Union, Le Corbusier’s urban planning in Brasilia, and the Great Leap Forward in China. His answer to why so many well-intentioned centrally planned projects failed was that “high modernist” ideology and the hubris of state planners gave no consideration to local conditions and practical knowledge—or “metis”. The state in the eyes of Scott is a monolithic entity that behaves universally with a single agenda that would simplify society into a uniform whole amenable to single-minded centralized modernization. Scott’s earlier interest in peasant resistance reappears in his latest book, *The Art of Not Being Governed* (2010), a historical study of populations that have evaded the reach of states by moving into the upland Southeast Asian region of “Zomia.” China appears on occasion as an actor in this book as well, but always as the archetypal large, centralized state driving oppressed peasants into the “shatter zone” of the Southeast Asian uplands. It is no surprise, then, that China experts frequently turn to Scott’s account of the monolithic state, more so than to his earlier accounts of everyday resistance.

Even before Scott’s work on the state, Kenneth Lieberthal (1992) proposed the somewhat more nuanced theory of “fragmented authoritarianism,” which remains influential on current understandings of the Chinese political structure after the post-1978 economic reforms. According to Lieberthal, there are six core bureaucratic organs with nationwide

networks that exercise executive power.<sup>7</sup> Decision-making requires a consensus among these six parallel bureaucracies. Lieberthal's model, thus, portrays the Chinese political system as fragmented and disjointed. On the basis of a study of large-scale dam projects in Southwest China, Andrew Mertha (2009) has more recently developed Lieberthal's model—"fragmented authoritarianism 2.0"—by adding to the mix of politically influential entities the media, non-governmental organizations, and individual activists. But despite a recognition of the fragmented nature of the Chinese political structure, by focusing on the authoritarianism of the political regime, China specialists have tended to place an overwhelming emphasis on the state and, more specifically, the central government as the prime mover of Chinese society. Even "fragmented authoritarianism 2.0" has left out of consideration the roles of by far the most numerous actors on the ground, namely local officials, small-time entrepreneurs, and, most importantly, the peasantry.

It is scholars focusing more specifically on Chinese society, rather than on political structures alone, who have articulated the complexity and internal dynamism of the state, placing great emphasis on the participation of the local in various projects of China's modernization. Jean Oi (1992) coined the term "local state corporatism," underscoring the critical role played by various local groups in advancing China's rapid economic growth after its adoption of the market economy. Michael Burawoy (1996) also emphasized the important role of the local in the success story of China's transition from socialism to capitalism in comparison with other former socialist countries, like Russia. Other recent contributions emphasizing the importance of the local include David Wank's (1996) ethnographic study on personal ties between business entrepreneurs and local officials in the Special Economic Zone of Xiamen; Susan Whiting's (2001) book on China's rural

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<sup>7</sup> The six bureaucracies in question are the economic bureaucracy, the propaganda and education bureaucracy, the organizational and personnel bureaucracy, the civilian coercive bureaucracy, the military system, and the Communist Party territorial committees (Lieberthal, 6).

industrial sector; You-tien Hsing's (2010) research on the strategies of urbanization among regional government officials and developers in China's great urban transformation; and Gunter Schubert and Anna L. Ahlers's (2012) focus on county officials as a "strategic group" in the implementation of New Countryside projects. All point to the crucial importance of the local in China's rapid economic, social, political, and cultural transformation. Finally, Sebastian Heilmann (2008) reminds us that the seeming "longevity" of the Chinese Communist Party's authoritarian regime is realized and maintained not through coercive force but through the flexible use of local governments in the application of national policy.

For the most part, however, all of these studies ultimately adopt a state-centered perspective even when they go beyond Scott and Leiberthal in including local officials and entrepreneurs. But, instead of seeing like a state, there is clearly a need to see through the eyes and follow the activities of non-state actors—the heroes rather than the boogiemans of James Scott's writings. In fact, a number of scholars have encouraged us to view political and social developments from the bottom up. In general, since Manuel Castells' (1983) influential study on urban social movements in America and Europe, there has been a tendency when describing the "grassroots" to focus on confrontations. In the Chinese case, among the more influential recent scholarship, Ching Kwan Lee (2007) examines urban labor protests in the industrial rustbelt and in China's export-oriented sunbelt. You-tien Hsing (2010) stresses territorial battles in her studies of the great urban transformation in China's urban centers and urban-rural fringes. Similarly, a majority of studies on the Chinese peasantry tend to stress confrontation. Thus, the work of Kevin O'Brien and Li Lianjiang (2006) emphasizes the peasants' "rightful resistance" in rural China. Although one might be able to characterize the peasants' local reaction to rural modernity projects as



“resistance,” I believe the realities are much more nuanced, even murky. There is a need, in my view, to explore the complex negotiations between multiple participating actors.

Another non-state actor playing an indirect role in rural development who has been largely neglected is the urban consumer of rural products. Most scholarship deals with macroeconomics and the urban demand for goods, such as milk and fruits (e.g., Webber 2012). More recently, China’s rural regions have acquired new meaning for middle-class urban consumers, both as increasingly popular tourist destinations (Oakes 2011) and, as we shall see, as a source of safer, cleaner food. It is tempting to apply Raymond Williams’ (1973) perspective in *The Country and the City*—where he emphasizes the divide and the connection between the rural and the urban, and the persistent theme of rural nostalgia on the part of urbanites—to the case of rural China. However, Williams was looking at a society more than a hundred years after the Industrial Revolution in England. In the case of a Chinese society still in the process of transformation from an agrarian to an industrial society, from rural to urban, and from socialist to capitalist, it is perhaps too early for that kind of nostalgia to appear. There are other ways of explaining the attraction of rural society to city dwellers in emerging economies. James Ferguson’s (1999) *Expectations of Modernity* demonstrates the political significance of rural nationalist authenticity in the process of Zambia’s nation building during the post-colonial regime. Also of interest is Timothy Oakes’ suggestion of the countryside as a tourist “playground” for contemporary Chinese urbanites.

The present paper seeks to integrate both state and non-state local actors into a comprehensive framework. In this way, I hope to complicate and thus better understand the mechanisms of transformation in today’s rural China. To achieve this goal, I will pose three theoretical questions. First, how are the modernity projects instituted by the central state re-

envisioned and executed by local actors? In other words, how do the modernity projects as conceived at the central and local levels converge and/or diverge? Second, how do non-state actors actually shape the process and consequences of rural modernization? Finally, what is the contingent historical context of rurality and modernity in China today?

### **3. Methodology**

Over the past three years as part of my broader investigation of the drastic changes affecting villages in contemporary China, I have visited nine villages in six provinces across eastern, central, and western China (see Map 1). In March and July 2011, I lived with peasants and conducted preliminary interviews with both peasants and county-level bureaucrats involved in land transfer projects in two counties in Southern Anhui, an inland province in central China. In June 2012, I returned to southern Anhui and stayed for one month in Nanshan County, and later spent another week in a village in Northern Anhui to continue observing land transfer and consolidation.<sup>8</sup> I interviewed 16 local government administrators, including two county-level, seven township-level, and seven village-level officials. Finally, in summer 2013, I spent two full months—between June and August—visiting four village sites, in rural Beijing, Shanxi, Fujian, and Jiangsu Provinces, where I participated in “New Rural Reconstruction” (*xin xiangcun jianshe*) training courses initiated and organized by intellectuals at Renmin University of China in Beijing. Each village was found to present a different model of the “New Countryside” project, reflecting its diverse geographic, economic, social, and cultural conditions. Despite such differences between the nine villages, I have observed in each case a similarly zealous drive towards rural

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<sup>8</sup> I have published the empirical results of my fieldwork in the two villages in Anhui Province that are now in the early stages of reconstruction (Liu 2013). In that paper, I focused on the mechanics of government-organized land consolidation, identifying the main participating actors. I also sought to distinguish top-down “irreversible” land transfer from a grass roots “reversible” model of land transfer.

urbanization and land consolidation. In this paper, however, I am only focusing on one particular site—Jinhu Village in Southern Anhui, Nanshan County.<sup>9</sup> Anhui Province relies primarily on agriculture as its economic mainstay; it is also one of the largest suppliers of migrant labor for coastal industrial centers. The New Countryside project in Jinhu New Village is particularly interesting and ambitious in terms of its size and scope, as well as its inclusion in its development scheme of an agricultural theme park. Although I focus primarily on the Jinhu site and Nanshan County, I will also allude to the other sites I visited for comparative purposes.



In Nanshan, besides government officials, I also interviewed six private agribusiness entrepreneurs, and lived as a participant observer with now “landless peasants” who had been coercively moved out of their homes and off their agricultural land. In this paper, I focus precisely on the radical practice of the “New Countryside” project, involving the

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<sup>9</sup> UCLA IRB #12-000742. It should be noted that all place and personal names have been changed to protect my informants and sources.

dislocation of large segments of the rural population from their farmhouses into recently constructed “new villages/resettlement districts” (*xincun/anzhiqu*). In order to experience peasant life after displacement, I lived four days and three nights with a “landless peasant” household in the new Jinhu resettlement village. My host was a young woman I refer to here as “Mrs. Tang,” whom I met in a majiang parlor in the village.

Whereas the bulk of my research involved qualitative fieldwork, I supplemented this material with online data. While at the Jinhu site, I paid particular attention to the built environment in order to explore the spatiality of the new village and its implications. I supplemented my own hand-drawn maps and photographs with Landsat, Nokia, and TerraServer satellite images. The different sources of satellite images involved photographs taken at different times, providing a convenient means to map both the present site after redevelopment and the locations of the traditional villages. Finally, I have taken advantage of the internet by searching forums and other discussions concerning the Jinhu New Village and the Jinhu Rural World Theme Park site. I have found four different representations of Jinhu on such online discussions. Most of the search results involved tourist agencies in Nanjing and Shanghai who were advertising the theme park by means of a detailed tourist itinerary. Second, I found a limited number of advertisements for the sale of resettlement houses in the Jinhu New Village. Third, I found accounts from urbanites who had traveled to Jinhu and were commenting on their experiences at the theme park. Most of them seem to have enjoyed themselves and left only very short comments. Last but not least, I encountered one informed and detailed online report by a local resident—entitled “Jinhu New Countryside is a Gambling Game and a Fraud” (*Jinhu xin nongcun shi yi chang duju he pianju*). Although I have used the internet as an extra source to understand what is going on at the Jinhu site, it is worth noting that the internet has also served as an important arena

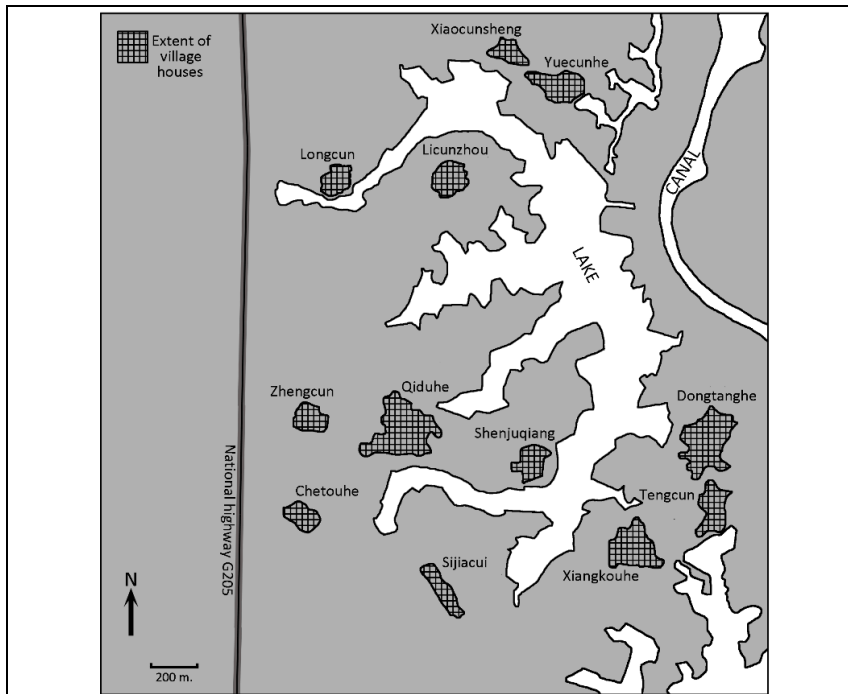
used by actors involved with Jinhu to gain legitimacy, to voice complaints, to vent anger, and to advertise for economic profit.

#### 4. Case Study of Jinhu: Peasants and the New Village Space

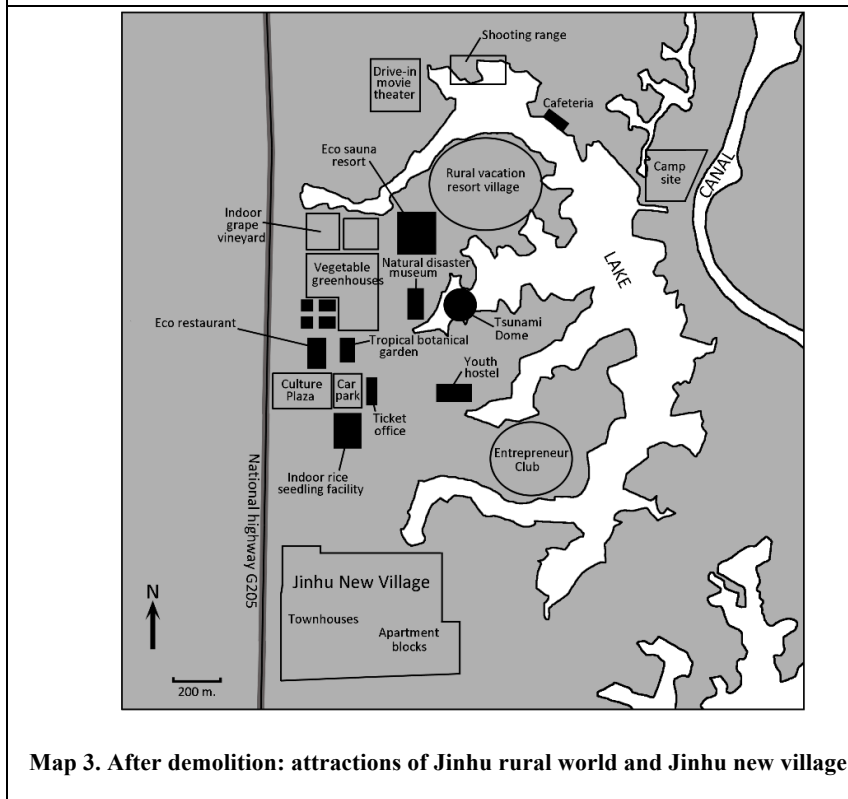
Jinhu New Village is located in southern Anhui Province about 30 kilometers south of Wuhu City. Altogether it occupies an area of 189 hectares (of which 71 hectares is occupied by bodies of water), on a stretch of land running along the east side of the national road G205. G205 is a two-lane paved road built before China's highway construction boom of the last ten years. The site is situated on a broad plain traversed by numerous canals and lakes. These lakes are the reason why this area would also be chosen as the site for a theme park. Given the relatively high average temperatures and annual precipitation, two harvests are possible each year (either rice-rice or rice-winter wheat). The rich agricultural fields in the Jinhu new countryside construction zone (including Jinhu New Village and the Jinhu Rural World theme park) once supported twelve traditional villages (Map 2). Residents of these villages have now all been relocated to Jinhu New Village on the southwest corner of the development zone. Both the Jinhu New Village and the associated theme park are separated from the national G205 road by a stretch of landscaping composed of a long canal, green lawns, and willow trees.

As with many New Countryside projects now under construction in China—projects often readily visible to drivers rushing along the gleaming new freeways crisscrossing the country—the Jinhu site is a veritable monument to a particular notion of rural modernization and development. When driving north along the national highway, one encounters first a large billboard explaining that one is approaching China's "first low-carbon national tourist site." Behind the billboard, one sees the new houses arranged in a perfect grid, quite distinct

from the more haphazard arrangement of farmhouses and fields in the traditional villages (Figure 1). Less than a kilometer beyond the New Village, one reaches the entrance to Jinhu

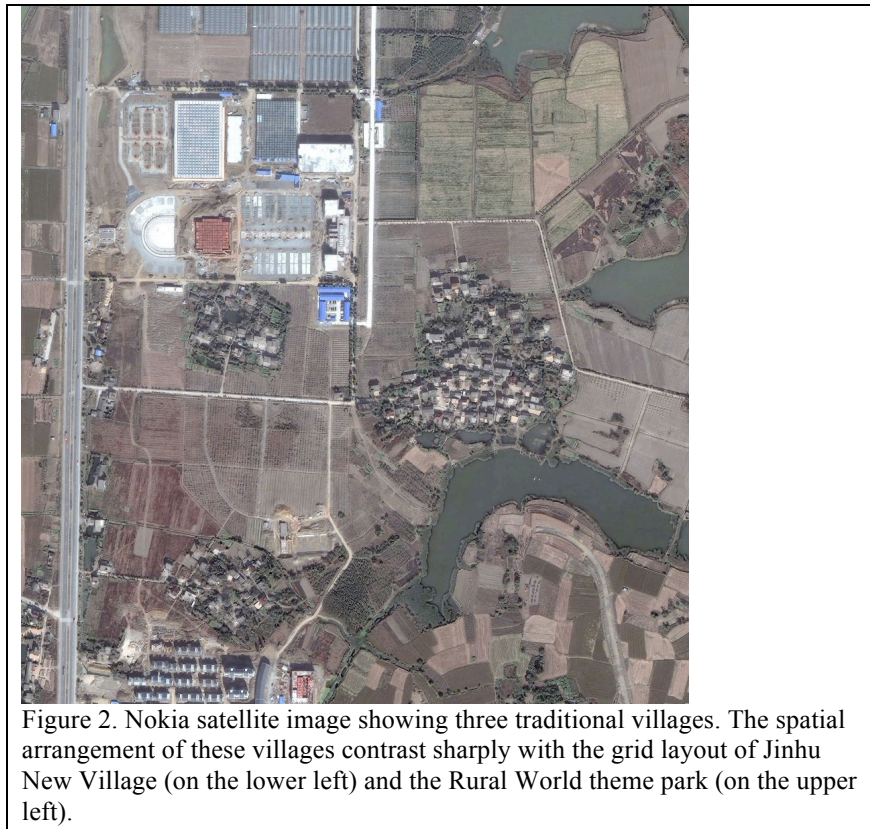


**Map 2. Before demolition: twelve traditional villages around the lake**



**Map 3. After demolition: attractions of Jinhu rural world and Jinhu new village**

Rural World theme park, situated on the east side of the highway. Here two large billboards announce: “National AAAA tourist site—National modern technology agricultural experimental site—National agricultural tourist demonstration site—Welcome to Jinhu experimental site!” According to the master plan—which appears on one of the billboards—the rural world theme park will eventually have 41 attractions. However, as of June 2012, only 16 projects were finished and open to tourists. Below I analyze the built environment of Jinhu New Village and Jinhu Rural World theme park, paying particular attention to how rural space is undergoing transformation and to how the “New Countryside” contrasts with the old countryside and traditional rural society.



#### 4a. Jinhu New Village (see map 3)

One’s first impression of Jinhu New Village is of a modern suburb imported from somewhere in the United States. It is a large housing complex, with houses that are

remarkably uniform in structure and physical appearance laid out on a grid consisting of alleyways running either perpendicular or parallel to the national highway. The residences nearest to the highway are two- or three-story townhouses; further from the highway are several rows of new apartment buildings. The aesthetics of the new residences stand in stark contrast to the vernacular architectural style of the old red brick peasant houses, a few of which (as of summer 2013) still stood undemolished just southeast of the New Village. This aesthetic of the New Village is a curious mimicry of American “streetcar” and “sitcom” suburbs, those suburbs that Dolores Hayden describes as reflecting the American “idealized life in single-family houses with generous yards”(Hayden 2003, 5). More specifically, the dwellings in the New Village, with their white stucco walls, their grey-tile roofs, and their uniformity of appearance, resemble in remarkable ways tract housing in American suburbia—such as in the Los Angeles Basin (Figure 2). As in any American suburb, each house also has a garage, with additional parking available in clearly marked parking spaces along the alleyways. Many aspects of this new Chinese suburbia seem out of place in the Chinese context. Grass lawns may have particular symbolic significance in American urban and suburban environments (Jackson 1987), but from a Chinese peasant’s perspective, grass is a weed that infects one’s fields, the last thing one would think of deliberately planting beside one’s home. The garages and parking lots are also curiosities given that very few peasant households in Jinhu own a car. Many peasants currently use their garages to store their agricultural tools.

The New Village does not merely emulate American suburbia; it also contains elements of a China-specific vision of the urban modern, as represented by an orderly but dense arrangement of tall buildings. In American suburbia, the ideal consists of single



Figure 2. Jinhu townhouses Compared to Southern California Tract Housing



**Jinhu New Village townhouses (top; author's photo); UCLA family housing (right; from ucla.edu). On the street side of UCLA housing, there is an iron fence very similar to those appearing on the Jinhu photo.**

detached family houses placed in a landscaping that tries to imitate the natural environment. However, in Jinhu New Village, one experiences a much greater feeling of density, highlighted by the concentration of residences, including both rows of two- to three-story stucco houses—called *bieshu* in Chinese—and blocks of six- to seven-story apartment buildings. The term *bieshu* ordinarily refers to detached houses. At Jinhu, however, they are not free-standing; they are much more like townhouses or row houses than detached single-family houses. One way to explain this preference for a densely built environment is to consider the perceived ecological limitations of Chinese agricultural land. The central government has in recent years expressed concern for China's "national food security," leading to various strategies to maximize available arable land, a point I will address later in detail. However, there is another equally plausible explanation. For the Chinese urban elites, tall buildings and uniform orderliness symbolize modern life. For example, many Chinese government officials and *nouveaux riches* traveling to the U.S. are quite disappointed by their experience—if the U.S. is so modern, why do the vast dense expanses of awe-inspiring skyscrapers exist only in New York City and Chicago, and not in

other American cities and towns?<sup>10</sup> The orderliness and density of Jinhua New Village, then, is a public advertisement of how fortunate the displaced peasants are to be living in a new modern environment.

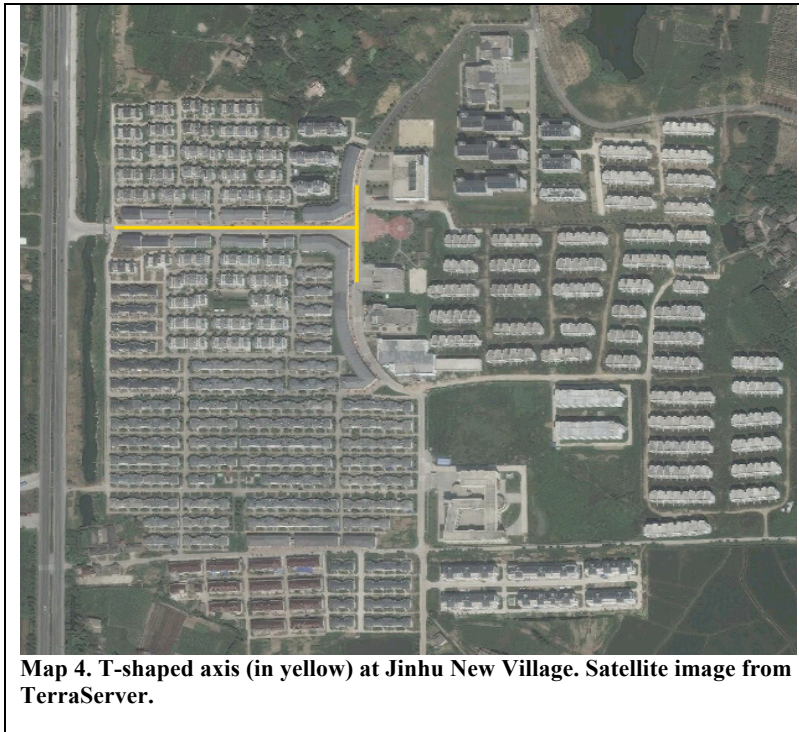
Besides the modern architectural styles and the orderly arrangement of buildings, the modern environment of Jinhua New Village is also reflected inside the homes. Here, one finds a variety of conveniences unavailable in the old villages, including flush toilets, solar-powered water heaters, running water, reliable plumbing, built-in gas stoves, garbage collection, and even high-speed internet. Although my host Mrs. Tang had only a second-grade education, she was adamant about the importance of using computers and accessing the internet, by means of which she learned a great deal chatting with other netizens. Indeed, computers and the internet seem generally to be welcome by most peasants in rural China. Other particularly appreciated modern conveniences are showers and hot water, made possible by the solar-powered water heaters installed on the roofs of the houses. I have observed these new water heaters in New Countryside housing projects (as well as in many other types of urban development projects all over China).

Much like the entire Jinhua development site, the space of the New Village is clearly compartmentalized with well-delineated commercial, communal, governmental, and private residential zones. The core of the New Village is organized around a T-shaped axis (Map 4). Immediately after entering the New Village by the main gate, one faces a two-lane street with commercial shops on both sides (many still empty as of 2013). At the far end of this street is a perpendicular street that forms the top of the T. One side of this second street is also occupied by commercial space. The far side is occupied by community and government

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<sup>10</sup> “Chinese traveling students’ complaints: The U.S. is truly backward, unable to match up even to China’s second-tier cities” (*Zhongguo youxuesheng tucao: Meiguo zhen luohou, bu ru Zhongguo erxian chengshi*), *Xinhuanet.com*, accessed April 10, 2014, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/overseas/2013-09/09/c\\_125343811.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/overseas/2013-09/09/c_125343811.htm). I have myself previously encountered this attitude among Chinese returnees from the U.S.

facilities. A multi-story building houses the police station, the community administrative office (in charge of collecting utility fees), and a “petition office” that handles grievances.



Beside the government building is a three-story pre-school and kindergarten, a basketball court, and an indoor market place (where local farmers can set up vegetable stands). Further from the T-shaped axis and on all sides are the private residences. The two- or three-story townhouses stand closer to the national highway; the apartment blocks lie just beyond the community and administration buildings. Throughout the New Village, iron fences separate public spaces from private residential yards, and curbs demarcate the boundaries between pedestrian and vehicular zones of circulation. None of these various ways of compartmentalizing space—derived from Western urban models—were present in the old natural villages.

Despite the orderliness and the conveniences of the modern built environment, all is not as it seems, since the new houses come with a variety of extra costs that peasants were not burdened with in their old villages. The cost of high-speed internet access is roughly

USD \$25 per month, a fee that also includes unlimited local phone calls. Peasants accept this fee more readily than some of the other charges they face, as it provides a service they did not formerly enjoy. By contrast, from the peasant's perspective, the cost of water and natural gas are more difficult to accept. In the old villages, water was freely drawn from wells; and they used gathered firewood rather than gas for cooking. Most significant of all, however, their cost of living is now much higher because food has to be purchased instead of being produced on their land, a concept utterly alien to the peasants. While staying in the village, the most common complaint I heard was that residents no longer had land for cultivating vegetables and raising domestic animals. Now they had to buy food from supermarkets.

Inevitably, village residents have found ways to cut living expenditures by a variety of means. To avoid using running water, women wash vegetables and laundry in the canal built next to the main road. For drinking water, many households invest in a well, which they dig in their small backyards. Not only is well water free, peasants also consider it to be cleaner than tap water. In a similar fashion, to minimize natural gas usage, many households have purchased portable pre-made cylinder-shaped aluminum stoves. Around 5 am every morning, in order to boil water, Mrs. Tang's father-in-law got up to start a fire in the aluminum stove, using wood collected from demolished houses. This was a common practice: with the stove set right outside the garage door, he would chat—sometimes standing and sometimes sitting on a stool—with two other neighbors who were also doing the same thing. Another way to save on cooking expense is to build an old-style firewood stove in one's backyard. One couple running a majiang parlor out of their home did just this, despite warnings from the New Village management, who has ordered them to demolish it, on the grounds that it was ugly and damaged the orderly and neat image of the New Village.

There are other ways in which, in order to save money, residents resist the management's efforts to maintain a neat appearance. To mitigate the daily cost of food, residents in Jinhu New Village utilize all sorts of marginal land around the edge of the complex. In some cases, they have gotten rid of the lawn near their houses by spreading herbicides left over from their farming days. Another less destructive way is to dig a hole just large enough to plant pumpkins or other vegetables that grow vertically, plants that can more discretely blend into the lawn and tree landscaping. Chickens are also allowed to roam freely on and around the landscaping (Figure 3). All of these various survival strategies constitute continuities with common practices in the old villages; all are very much part of the peasants' familiar habitus.



Figure 3. Survival Strategies in Jinhu New Village (author's photo). At the bottom right corner, near the door to the garage, there are two portable aluminum stoves. Chickens run loose in the alleyway between the houses. Right behind the chickens, one can make out bamboo canes standing erect; these mark where pumpkins have been planted.

But the “landless” peasants residing in the New Village have also turned to other more novel strategies to help them make ends meet. Numerous residents have converted their townhouses for commercial purposes, something they would not have done in their old villages. One common small business is a restaurant. The day of my arrival in New Village, I ate lunch with many other construction workers in a private house marked with a sign

saying *paidang*, a term referring to a low-budget restaurant for workers. The restaurant proprietor used his first-floor living room and garage for this purpose, setting up three square-shaped “eight sages” tables—each of which could accommodate eight customers. This type of table is a common piece of household furniture among farmers living in the lower Yangzi rice-growing region. I encountered several small restaurants in the New Village. Townhouse space was used for other informal businesses as well, including general stores, two majiang parlors, a computer IT repair store, and even a clothing factory. It was in one of the majiang parlors, run by an older couple in their two-story townhouse, that I first made the acquaintance of my host Mrs. Tang. During my stay, I accompanied her to this majiang parlor nearly every afternoon. The couple could make as much as USD \$15 per day if all four majiang tables were in continual use. The computer repair shop, run by a young man in his 20s, was more difficult to find. Although situated in the house just behind the Tang’s, I did not notice it at first. The clothing factory, also a family-run business taking advantage of family household space, was comparatively more conspicuous. Although the majiang parlor and computer repair shop did not have signs, the name of the factory—“Jinhu Clothing Factory”—was mounted on a side wall along with an advertisement announcing that the factory was hiring experienced workers to operate the sewing machines.

Even with all the above-mentioned survival strategies, many residents still cannot balance their family budgets. Thus, many young able-bodied men from Jinhu continue to migrate to distant urban centers for work. To be sure, rural-to-urban migration is not a new strategy; it has been practiced by rural populations across China since the late 1980s. As most rural young adults began to migrate to large cities for work, a great divide emerged between the productive space of cities, where able-bodied adults work in factories and in the service sectors, and the social reproduction space of villages, where grandparents take care

of grandchildren, whose own parents in the factories do not have time to tend to their upbringing. In the villages, one generally encounters mostly women, children, and the elderly, often referred to as “left-behind elderly, children, and women” (*liushou laoren ertong funü*). The Jinhu development project was supposed to change this. Residents of the New Village were supposed to find employment at the nearby theme park. In fact, less than 100 people are employed there, with more than half of them hired from outside of the New Village. Moreover, one middle-aged woman complained to me that the developer hires his own relatives and friends for all of the higher paid positions. Residents of Jinhu are only hired as day laborers when seasonal jobs are needed, such as to cut weeds or plant trees and vegetables. As a result, to support themselves, residents have continued to find jobs far away. Mrs. Tang and her husband had both migrated to a large city in Zhejiang when I revisited Jinhu New Village in summer 2013. In all appearances, the “New Countryside” implemented at Jinhu merely reproduces the great divide between production space and social reproduction space that first emerged in the 1980s. In any case, Jinhu New Village is now, in many respects, merely a by-product of the major local development project, the Jinhu Rural World theme park.

#### 4b. Jinhu Rural World Theme Park (see Map 3)

One of the most curious, even bizarre, aspects of the Jinhu site is the construction of a theme park. Not far from the New Village, a set of three bridges cross the artificial canal that separates the national highway from the theme park compound. Two of these bridges are restricted to automobile traffic, one serving as an entrance to the compound and one as an exit. Sandwiched between the automobile bridges is a narrow pedestrian bridge. Across the bridges one encounters the rectangular “Culture Plaza,” a vast space somewhat

reminiscent of Tiananmen Square in appearance (Figure 4). Beyond the plaza is a large parking lot. Only after crossing this parking lot does one finally reach the ticket office, as well as the adjacent multi-story headquarters of the real estate development company responsible for the entire project—the Guoqiang Conglomerate. All the elements of this entryway—not to mention the drive-in movie theater on the north side of the park—are tailored to car-owning clients, presumably arriving from large urban centers. Needless to say, the monumental entryway is also meant to impress.



Figure 4: The vast entryway and “culture plaza” of the Jinhu theme park

In order to obtain government funds and bank loans earmarked for agricultural development, the Rural World theme park is in principle designed to educate urbanites about agriculture in China. One particular focus is “natural disasters”—on the premise that agriculture is reliant on the conditions of the weather, the soil, and the natural environment. Thus, the rural theme park includes a small museum showing photographs and videos about floods, droughts, earthquakes, tornados, locust plagues, and tsunamis—all representing the various natural disasters afflicting the peasantry throughout China’s history. Associated with this theme of natural disaster—and billed as one of the highlights of visiting the park—is the



“tsunami experience dome” (*haixiao tiyan guan*). In contrast to the museum, which displays merely images and photographs of natural disasters, the water dome purportedly provides visitors with the “real” experience of a tsunami. Inside, visitors can surf six-meter high artificial waves generated by a wave machine. The Guoqiang Conglomerate is very proud of its innovative approach at combining entertainment with an educational experience. Indeed, Jinhu Rural World has been publicly acclaimed by both central government officials and the national media.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps as part of its educational mission, the park is also a celebration of scientific management and high technology. As such, many of the park’s attractions provide insight into how agricultural development and modernization are imagined in contemporary China. By depicting natural disasters through historical photographs and videos contained within a museum, natural disasters are relegated to the realm of the historical past. By transforming tsunamis into entertainment, they become in essence domesticated by modern science. The theme of the human conquest of nature is ever present. On either side of the vast empty plaza and parking lot is situated a large one-story green building, with signs identifying one as a “modern seedling center” and the other as an “agricultural high-tech center”. As one example of agricultural modernization, the agricultural high-tech center contains a section demonstrating hydroponic techniques for growing green vegetables, including lettuce and tomatoes. Water-drip irrigation and greenhouse farming are commonplace throughout the park. For example, the grape garden is covered with plastic, producing a greenhouse-like environment that shelters the plants from uncontrollable nature. The grape vines are watered with a drip system and kept at constant temperature using a temperature control system.

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<sup>11</sup> “Anhui sheng wan Wuhu shi Nanshan xian Jinhu shiyan qu,” CNTV.cn, accessed on 12/23/2013, [http://nongye.cntv.cn/20120814/103115\\_1.shtml](http://nongye.cntv.cn/20120814/103115_1.shtml); “Jinhu xiang cun shijie: tansuo xiandai nongye fa zhan xin mo shi,” Wuhu news.cn, accessed on 12/23/2013, <http://www.wuhunews.cn/ahnews/2013/05/2013-05-27641437.html>

Elsewhere, delicate butterfly-shaped orchids are grown in glassware within laboratories in which staff members wear white medical coats and face masks (Figure 5). The park also features desert and tropical botanical gardens—containing plants like giant cacti and many exotic tropical plants—both housed within glass-roofed concrete buildings. Modern agriculture, as portrayed in the Rural World theme park, is not unlike urban modernity. Hygiene and cleanliness—represented by the facemasks, lab coats, and hydroponics—are stressed. And modern agriculture is placed in a built environment almost entirely protected from the vagaries of the natural world.

This modern, scientific, hygienic agriculture exists in curious contrast to another dominant theme of the park—the romanticization of the peasantry and rural life. The rural



fantasy is evident in a variety of different “rural” activities in which tourists are invited to participate. It is this element of the park that is most evident when one searches for information on the internet. Numerous travel agencies based in Nanjing and Shanghai—two

of the largest urban centers in Eastern China—describe nearly identical itineraries. Their websites highlight tsunami- and tornado-based water sports, as well as rural activities such as fruit and vegetable picking, watching “folk animal performances” (*mingshu dongwu biaoyan*), and growing crops in a four-by-four-meter rented vegetable plot in one of the greenhouses. Thus, during grape season, tourists can pick grapes from grape vines in the covered greenhouses, and then purchase what they have picked at a relatively high price—USD \$5 to \$6 per pound. The vegetable plots are rented for USD \$215 per year; moreover, clients who do not wish to get their hands dirty can entrust the planting and maintenance of the crops to the theme park for an additional fee. Clients can also enjoy a variety of shows including cock fighting, goat fighting, and piglet racing. Also at an additional cost, one can go horseback riding around the park grounds. All of these fees are on top of the entry ticket of USD \$25 per person. It is clear enough that what Jinhu Rural World represents is not a nostalgic recreation of traditional agricultural society; rather it is a playground for adventurous urbanites, featuring a clean, new, “modern” countryside.

One key difference distinguishing Jinhu Rural World from traditional rural society is the apparent absence of peasants. In fact, at Jinhu, it is not the case that mechanization has replaced intensive farm work. Jinhu Rural World does hire local peasants to weed, prune grape vines, and grow vegetables for urbanites who rent the four-by-four plots. Yet peasants are absent from all publicity for the theme park. In the case of the vegetable plots, Jinhu’s innovative approach is to allow urbanites to monitor their plots over the internet—a form of e-commerce that Jinhu planners call “e-family farms” (*e-jia nongchang*). Though there are peasants minding the plots, they rarely appear on the monitors; they become faceless and nearly invisible. Peasants are not part of the new rural world. Instead, fabricated “folk animal performance,” agricultural machines, and new technologies are the key emphasis. It

is as if the rural population itself is too backward to have a place in the modern new countryside.

To build Jinhu Rural World theme park with no rural population in it, the Guoqiang Conglomerate embarked on a radical reorganization of village space. (How the developer acquired the land is described in detail in part four.) In 2007 and 2008, peasants had to move out of their original villages, which once dotted the landscape around the large lake now at the center of the theme park. Although the development company demolished most of the peasants' houses immediately so that they could not be reoccupied, as of 2012, most of the fields were left fallow while awaiting the construction of the new theme park attractions. Village restructuring also involved a much more highly compartmentalized organization of space. To avoid confrontations with peasants seeking to exploit unused land, the company fenced off a large area, preventing access by all but authorized personnel. Formerly, villagers could walk anywhere, even across their neighbors' fields. Their physical freedom of movement within villages was a longstanding part of peasant culture. Now things were different. When Mrs. Tang and her husband took me on a Honda motorcycle to see their old village, we were prevented by a guard from entering the compound, despite the husband's angry insistence. The development of the Jinhu site involved a compartmentalizing of public and private space that led to previously unknown constraints on the free movement of villagers.

Besides compartmentalization, development also entailed the labeling of space. All of the attractions in the Jinhu Rural World theme park were identified with signs. Jinhu New Village was also identified by means of the majestic gate placed at the entrance. Needless to say, local residents living in their natural villages had no need for such signs and labels. Labeling the landscape is done by outsiders and for outsiders. It is a tool used by the state to

increase the legibility of the built environment. Living villagers were not the only ones to be moved. The village dead were also relocated—from graves once scattered throughout the peasants' fields into a single cemetery just east of the new village. The Jinhu cemetery is graced with a brand-new gate just like the one for Jinhu New Village, albeit with characters written in white on black instead of in red (Figure 6). The cemetery is fenced with iron bars, thus compartmentalizing the space much like other parts of the Jinhu site. Inside the cemetery, tombs are densely arranged based on a grid plan, quite similar to the arrangement of houses in the New Village. Instead of being in the form of tumuli—as were all tombs in traditional China and as are tombs commonly encountered in rural China today—tombs in the Jinhu cemetery are flat with standing steles, similar to those found in Western cemeteries. By use of this format of cemetery, the village dead were now confined to a neat,



Figure 6. Jinhu New Village entrance gate and cemetery gate (author's photos), and TerraServer satellite image of Jinhu cemetery

organized Western version of modernization, much like, as described above, the living villagers residing in Jinhu New Village. This Western-style format also served to make

more efficient use of land, an important element in the logic of rural development of particular concern to central government planners.

## **5. Analysis of Case Study: Multiple Actors in the Local Arena**

### **5a. Between Two Worlds**

In sum, what do we make of the built environment at Jinhua New Village and Jinhua Rural World theme park? It is quite clear that New Countryside planners were not interested in a nostalgic presentation of the elements of old rural society. They were after something revolutionary and new, producing a built environment that highlighted scientific agricultural technologies, hygienic agriculture, and a compartmentalized space labeled for outsiders. Perhaps the most curious element of this vision of the rural modern evident at Jinhua involves the mimicry of American suburbia. Neither the lawns nor the stucco architecture have any precedence in traditional China. In peasant society, where grass is deemed a weed, lawns are particularly out of place. There is little doubt, then, that this aesthetic represents a deliberate attempt to modernize by imitating the American model. American suburbia today, however, is the culmination of an almost two hundred year history, partly the outcome of developments in transportation technologies since the 1820s, including the railroad, streetcars, and automobiles (Hayden 2003). In the U.S., suburbanization was partly accompanied by the decline of cities that accompanied a nation-wide deindustrialization. China has experienced none of these conditions. Unlike U.S. suburbia, Jinhua New Village has not developed organically over time; it involves an imagined modernity based on an imported model from the West now being imposed on rural Chinese society. As Lisa Rofel (1999) points out, modernity in China does not neatly replicate the hypothetical

transnational European model, but entails “successive imaginaries of modernity” as an alternative to the Eurocentric “anthropology of modernity” as typically conceived.<sup>12</sup>

Karl Polanyi’s analysis of the process of “disembeddedness” described in *The Great Transformation* is relevant here (2001). In traditional rural society, villagers are “embedded” into a social economy where economic transactions are combined with social interactions. In Jinhu Rural World, agrarian society is entirely commodified following the rules of the market economy for the sale of its urban consumers. Nothing remains in the theme park of traditional agrarian social relations. The Jinhu New Village residents are disembedded from their traditional social economy when they lost their farmland and were moved out of their traditional villages. Though technically classified by the government as “peasants who have lost their land” (*shidi nongmin*), villagers are more accurately described as precarious wage laborers, now dependent on capitalists. What is happening in today’s China resembles the story Polanyi told about the early stages of the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism in eighteenth-century Europe. It is compelling to observe a stark contrast between China’s highly developed industry in urban areas and its “precapitalist” condition in the hinterland and the countryside. Though the Chinese economy has emerged as the second largest in the global arena, the significance of the Jinhu case suggests that China’s “great transformation” has merely started.

Rural modernization and the “disembeddedness” of rural society underscore the drastically enhanced tension between two coexisting worlds—a “modern” New Countryside and an older traditional rural society, the world created by businessmen and government planners and the world of the longtime residents of Jinhu. One might construe this tension as leading to the triumph of modern scientific techniques, of machines, and of computer-based

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<sup>12</sup> Note that it is probably more appropriate to say that the critique is directed at Michel Foucault, as interpreted by American scholars, rather than Foucault himself, who never sought to apply his vision to other countries outside of France.

management over a dying traditional world. The new rural world, as reflected in the theme park, is devoid of the “backward” peasantry. The New Village is largely empty of young able-bodied men and women, who have gone elsewhere to find work. And those peasants who insist on staying behind in their village have neither land to farm nor much chance to find employment. They are left to eke out an existence, often by trying to maintain their old ways in an alien environment, for example by trying surreptitiously to grow a few crops on the New Village landscaping.

Another way of viewing this tension, however, is to see it as a continuation of a longstanding Chinese economic phenomenon. In her book *China's Motor*, Hill Gates (1997) has argued that, going back to imperial times, China's economy was driven by two motors: a top-down state-driven “tributary” economy, and a grass roots small petty bourgeois-driven economy satisfying the needs of the people. In so far as it is the product of central planning, many New Countryside projects including Jinhua Rural World theme park, can be thought of as examples of the former “motor.” However, following Gates' rationale, the place of informal businesses, though often less visible, deserves closer analysis as a two-track economy that incorporates both bottom-up survival strategies and a top-down state generated social system. In Jinhua New Village, the majiang parlor, computer repair shop, clothing factory, restaurants, and general stores are all informal businesses of this sort, unregistered with the state, and hence subject neither to state regulations nor to state taxation. Although the Chinese regime often portrays itself as the mastermind behind post-1978 development, in many urbanizing centers, including Jinhua New Village, the most vigorous sector of the local economy frequently seems to involve the informal economy, consisting of businesses operating out of private homes. Indeed, in Jinhua, the officially designated commercial spaces along the T-shaped axis remain largely unoccupied.



## 5b. Multiple Actors and Logics of Rural Development in the Local Arena

China is commonly portrayed as a classic example of top-down authoritarian rule, albeit an authoritarian rule that is “fragmented” in nature. James Scott portrayed Maoist China as the epitome of the authoritarian regime when discussing the disastrous potential consequences of top-down decision making during the Great Leap Forward of the 1950s. Other more recent events are frequently presented as evidence of China’s authoritarianism, including the repression of the Tiananmen Square student protests of 1989 and of the Falun Gong sect. On the surface, the “New Countryside” campaign appears to involve top-down centralized decision-making. Not only was the campaign first announced as part of a five-year plan, but the government also maintains complete control of the major sources of funding. However, although top-down authoritarian decision-making is evident in many state-led projects in contemporary China, the New Countryside affords the possibility of complicating our understanding of how central government campaigns are put into practice at the local level by revealing the complex relations between multiple participating actors, namely the central government, local state officials, business entrepreneurs, peasants, and an emerging middle class of urban consumers of the products of the countryside.

The first actor to consider is the central government. The central government’s justification for rural development is focused on the macro-level. More specifically, its concerns can be reduced to three tangible issues: *sannong*, “national food security” (*guojia liangshi anquan*), and ecological sustainability. As previously explained, *sannong* refers to the accumulated problems arising from uneven economic development between east coast regions and hinterland regions, between urban and rural societies, and between industrial and agricultural sectors. These problems have increasingly attracted the Chinese government’s attention, partly due to a growing concern for maintaining social stability. The

New Countryside campaign was initially designed to be a national level policy for resolving the *sannong* problem, partly through “agricultural modernization” (*nongye xiandaihua*) and a process of “national agricultural comprehensive development” (*guojia nongye zonghe kaifa*). Yet, the central government has also increasingly worried about maintaining an adequate food supply as China’s agricultural sector is displaced by its industrial sector. The government has recently proclaimed a “red line of 120 million hectares of cultivated land” (*18 yi mu gengdi hongxian*), needed to guarantee adequate food production. It is largely for reasons of “national food security” that the government has asked local authorities to “save and consolidate” (*jiyue jiyue*) fragmented farmland. The call to save arable land has, thus, become a source of legitimacy for many rural projects, including the Jinhu case. A third issue concerns “ecological” (*shengtai*) matters. The government has become aware that rapid economic growth has come at the expense of ecological degradation. Realizing the risk of long-term unsustainability, the government has recently recognized the importance of improvements to the environment. It is worth noting that these current concerns of the Chinese central government derive from a globalized discourse. As David Harvey (2007) points out, in the past decade, food insecurity, energy, and environmental crises have become a new subject of development discourse all over the world.

Whereas the central government is preoccupied primarily with macro-level issues, it falls on local actors—especially county, township, and village level officials—to implement these policies across China’s vast rural society. The logic of rural development as viewed by local state officials can be reduced to two main goals. The first is to implement central policies to the satisfaction of the central government. By turning their efforts into a success story—usually as measured by local economic growth—local officials can guarantee their career advancement in the bureaucracy. Equally important, however, is the second goal of

making money on the side by profiting personally from local economic growth. While implementing central policies, partly by consolidating land, such officials are able to converge their own interests and concerns with those of the central government. In fact, land development for residential housing is the single most lucrative business and the engine of economic growth in today's China, including the hinterlands (Hsing 2010). At the same time, dedicating land to the production of food, especially grain staples like rice and wheat, is far less profitable, partly due to government fixing of grain prices. Thus, while expropriating and consolidating peasant land is done in the name of the central government's agenda of protecting national food security, the reality is more complex. The houses of peasants are torn down after all in order to make them the designated consumers of newly built rural residential housings. Moreover, after consolidation, the land may be used for purposes other than grain production, in this case, for a theme park nominally dedicated to the theme of agricultural production.

The third group of actors involved in New Countryside rural development are the business entrepreneurs. As is universally true of all capitalists, the entrepreneurs' primary objective is to make a profit. In order to do this, they need to attract consumers, while simultaneously adhering to local and central government regulations and ensuring that local peasants do not resist violently. In some sense, then, the local capitalists serve as the glue that joins together the various agendas of the other actors in the local arena. In China, real estate developers—including those involved in Jinhua Rural World—adhere to a logic of land development that involves placing some unused land in reserve for future expansion. In urban centers, land is held in reserve because it is always more profitable to sell additional housing projects after a site has attracted the attention of consumers during an initial phase

of development.<sup>13</sup> In the countryside, the rationale for holding land in reserve is somewhat different. Given the difficulty of having the peasants removed and resettled in New Villages, a process described in some detail below, a major priority is to keep them from returning to their farmlands while awaiting the financial capacity to develop the land in its entirety. For example, in Jinhu Rural World, as of summer 2012, only 16 out of 41 attractions had been opened to the public. Rather than renting out the land to farmers to cultivate until it was ready for development, the former farmland has been left fallow for the past few years and fenced off to keep local residents from accessing it.

The fourth group of actors are, of course, the peasants themselves. In contrast to the profit motive driving rural development by entrepreneurs, the peasants generally adhere to a “subsistence ethic” that demands that all village resources be fully exploited for the production of food. For example, Jinhu villagers consider the Guoqiang company’s waste of arable land to be incomprehensible. Thus, a few peasants tried to grow rice on fallow land they had previously plowed. However, they were forced to stop. The “subsistence ethic” is evident in Mrs. Tang’s husband and father-in-law, both of whom believe that a peasant has a natural right to cultivate fallow land not being exploited by another villager. The Guoqiang company, by contrast, has argued that, in accordance with the legally-binding contracts signed by the peasants when they handed over their land use rights, the company had the authority to decide what to do with the land, even if this meant leaving it unused for a long period of time.

Finally, we should consider the middle class urbanites who have visited Jinhu Rural World as tourists. In general, they are looking for adventure and entertainment. Although there are some complaints about overcrowding, disorderliness, and unprofessional behavior

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<sup>13</sup> I thank You-tien Hsing for her comments on this point. Personal conversation, 18 December 2013.

among staff members, most on-line reviews and comments about Jinhu Rural World are positive. Many urban clients—often young couples with one child and a car—were excited that Jinhu Rural World theme park combined entertainment with a concept of agricultural education, thus affirming the Guoqiang Conglomerate’s own advertisements. As one tourist commented on a tourist agency website:

Jinhu is a good place for spending a relaxing weekend with so many green plants. Mock-tsunamis and other activities, besides teaching about geological disasters, also provide a different way of spending a hot summer holiday. Parking lots are ample; there is a different-style greenhouse restaurant, enabling people to eat while admiring plants and fish. Children are very happy.<sup>14</sup>

It is apparent that after working and living in cities five or six days a week, middle-class urbanites find Jinhu Rural World an attractive option for leisure and entertainment with their families. It seems that Jinhu Rural World has succeeded in attracting urban consumers. Besides entertainment, urban tourists, like millions of Chinese today, are seriously concerned about adequate food provisions in a rapidly urbanized world. For example, another tourist commenting on the same website on 7 June 2012 wrote:

This is a beautiful rural world... I had seen vegetables and fruits produced with hydroponics before on television. This is the first time I see it and even touch it with my own hands. It felt especially novel... Because it is a very eco-friendly cultivation method, it is a relief that there are no pesticides. The key is that the water is very clean; even vegetable roots are all white and very clean. I felt that if every family could eat these vegetables, we would certainly become very healthy.<sup>15</sup>

Apparently this tourist had used television information as his basic source for an imagined rural world based on hygienic agriculture. On the surface, this comment reveals that tourists are more interested in a rural imaginary than in real rural life and its agricultural hardships. Whereas peasants celebrate the fertility of the soil, tourists see soil as dirty and unhygienic; they want plants with clean, white roots. In other words, it is not the rural nostalgia that

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<sup>14</sup> “Fun Jinhu Rural World” (*Haowan de Jinhu xiangcun shijie*), 17u.com, accessed on 12/6/2013. <http://www.17u.com/blog/article/1245970.html>.

<sup>15</sup> “Jinhu Trip” (*Jinhu xing*), 17u.com, accessed on 12/6/2013. <http://www.17u.com/blog/article/1245970.html>

Raymond Williams describes in *The Country and the City* in 19<sup>th</sup> century England. Since many Chinese are recent urbanites who only recently left the rural world in order to enjoy an urban modern life, they have apparently not yet developed a sense of nostalgia. Though Timothy Oak (2013) describes rural tourism as a “playground” for rich and middle-class urbanites, it seems to me that there is something else to be said about the relationship between urbanites and the countryside. The above quote reveals that a rural nostalgia ideology has a practical side that concerns food security in today’s China, daily concerns of ordinary urban Chinese following several toxic food and poison scandals in recent years.<sup>16</sup> Thus, for example, a national brand of infant milk formula caused babies to die due to toxic additives in its formula. This incident aroused national skepticism toward food items purchased from the market in general. Health has now become a pertinent day-to-day issue.

In sum, although the “New Countryside” campaign is a national policy imposed throughout China by the central government, it is too simplistic to see its implementation as merely a manifestation of top-down authoritarian rule. In reality, multiple actors, each with their own concerns and agendas, have participated in rural development. Needless to say, each group’s vision of rural development does not necessarily accord with the central government’s conception and overarching goals. The process of envisioning and re-envisioning the “New Countryside” by the various actors inevitably leads to conflicts and contradictions. For example, one finds inconsistencies between the central government and local government on issues of implementation, between the central government’s concern for “national food security” and urban consumers’ concern for food safety and hygiene, and between the real estate developer and the peasants regarding the logic of land use. As one

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<sup>16</sup>“China Seizes 22 Companies with Contaminated Baby Milk Powder,” *Xinhuanet.com*, accessed June 16, 2012, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-09/17/content\\_10046949.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-09/17/content_10046949.htm) .

might imagine, there are also power differentials between the different actors, with the peasants on the ground probably having the least say in the process.

### 5c. The New Countryside as a Process of Negotiation

With all these different actors and agendas, “Building a Socialist New Countryside” is by no means a straightforward process. Here, I describe the process of implementation in the Jinhu case, demonstrating how this process involves some form of negotiation between the different actors, and how this negotiation has manifested itself. Much of the initiative at Jinhu came originally from a well-connected local entrepreneur. According to the young assistant of this man, whom I interviewed in 2012, the boss in question was the executive president of the Guoqiang Conglomerate, which had initially been founded as a government-owned Township and Village Enterprise (TVE). This man was a provincial representative to the National People’s Congress. Although representatives to the National People’s Congress generally do not in fact have political authority,<sup>17</sup> he was clearly well-connected and, moreover, would have been one of the first individuals in the county to hear about the “New Countryside” campaign and to learn how to secure state funding for relevant projects. According to the young assistant, when the eleventh five-year plan was first promulgated by the central government in 2005, the boss almost immediately sensed a business opportunity and spent two years mobilizing resources to plan the Jinhu Rural World. In 2007, after taking over a local “dragon head”<sup>18</sup> agribusiness firm that produced agricultural and food products, he established a new subsidiary under the Guoqiang Conglomerate called the New Countryside Conglomerate (*xin nongcun jituan*). Although the young assistant provided a fairly coherent account of how Jinhu Rural World came

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<sup>17</sup> “Renda daibiao shi jianzhi meiyou gongzi meiyou bu tie,” people.com.cn, accessed on 1/2/14, <http://lianghui2009.people.com.cn/GB/145749/8941206.html>.

<sup>18</sup> “Dragon head” (*Longtou*) enterprises refer to relatively large and important local agribusiness firms that play leading roles in boosting the regional economy. More often than not, “dragon head” enterprises are state-owned enterprises and/or TVEs.

about, it turns out that this is not the whole story. According to one of my peasant informants, there were actually two rounds of contracts signed between villagers and the developer, suggesting that the process was, in fact, more convoluted.

Online information provides more details, indicating that the Jinhu project did indeed pass through two phases—an initial failure, followed by later success. According to the well-known virtual community forum called *Tianya*—which frequently exposes injustice and official corruption—even before getting involved in the New Countryside campaign, the Guoqiang Conglomerate initially rented 2000 *mu* for 18 years from the peasants, hoping to take advantage of a rumor that the area that is now Jinhu Rural World would be formally absorbed into the Wuhu metropolitan region, a thriving economic zone just to the north. Guoqiang was apparently gambling on a more than ten-fold increase in land value in the immediate future. According to the *Tianya* article, in order to evade paying large state land taxes, Guoqiang avoided getting the proper land conversion permits. The company was eventually accused of leasing land illegally, and was ordered by the county Department of State Land to cease their activities immediately.<sup>19</sup> At this point, Guoqiang risked losing its entire initial investment. Seeking to turn the situation around, the entrepreneur took advantage of political connections and spent large sums of money bribing local officials to allow Guoqiang to transform the Jinhu development project into one officially responding to the central government's call for a New Countryside. Once the company convinced the local government to get involved in the project, it expanded the scope of the project site to transform it into a national showcase. Henceforth, what had been a simple act of real estate land speculation turned into the “Jinhu New Countryside Construction Experimental Site” (*Jinhu xin nongcun jianshe shiyanqu*). As we can see, the

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<sup>19</sup> “Jingkong! Anhui Nanshan xian Jinhu xin nongcun shi zai zhen lingdao de quanji xia jianshe qi,” *Tianya*, accessed 12/14/2013, <http://bbs.tianya.cn/post-no110-76296-1.shtml>. See also <http://club.history.sina.com.cn/thread-3120455-1-1.html>.



initial development plan at Jinhu failed when the entrepreneur and the company acted on their own. It became a much more successful project only after the entrepreneur's interests were coordinated with those of local state officials. This sort of coordination is a critical element in understanding rural development in today's China.

More in depth coordination was also required between the entrepreneur, the local government, and the central government. According to the master plan of the Jinhu New Countryside Experimental Project, the project required an intensive capital investment of around 700 million to 900 million RMB. Neither the developer nor the local government had this sort of financial capacity. At the time, Guoqiang had less than 300 million on hand in total assets, and, thus, needed bank loans and government subsidies. Financing of such large amounts inevitably required central government not local government money. Central government funding is distributed through "proposed projects" (*shenbao xiangmu*), managed and monitored by the Development and Reform Commission (*fagai wei*).<sup>20</sup> In recent years, the central government has allocated large amounts of funds directed towards the modernization of agriculture, as well as to rural education, health care, social welfare, and other concerns of the New Countryside campaign. Any sponsor of a proposed project can fill out a detailed application form, subsequently endorsed by local government officials. Once a project is selected by the central government, the sponsors receive large government grants, as well as opportunities to take out special loans from state banks. It is clear that, in order to get state funding, local government support and coordination were required. As a corollary, once the local government had approved the project, the local government shared with Guoqiang all responsibility for the project's failures or successes. In addition, the local government played another important role in the project. Not only did it facilitate the

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<sup>20</sup> According to You-tien Hsing, there are scholars in China who have suggested that the "proposed projects" is a new system for the central government to allocate and distribute money/resources to local society; personal conversation with Hsing on December 5, 2013.

process of getting state funds, but also it played an equally important role as a broker between the real estate developer and local peasants. As the young assistant of the Guoqiang boss put it, there were many instances that “required the government to show its face” (*xuyao zhengfu chumian*), for example, when it was necessary to persuade farmers to adhere to the company’s master plan in a timely fashion. It was always local officials and village cadres who went to each household to persuade residents to sign contracts. He further mentioned that the New Countryside Conglomerate included a “Jinhu Experimental Site Management Committee,” whose salaried members were simultaneously county government officials. Their most challenging task was to make sure the rural theme park project went smoothly, confronting peasants with the “face” of government when necessary.

Whereas the local government at this point had a direct interest in Jinhu’s success, the central government did not have the same stake in the project. It is quite clear that, as a consequence, Guoqiang continued to work hard to portray the Jinhu development site as a project aligned with the Chinese central government’s macroeconomic concerns regarding rural development, including the issues of “national food security” and ecological sustainability. In some cases, this has involved changes with concrete effects on the ground. For example, I was told by both peasants and staff members of the Guoqiang Conglomerate that the first resettlement housing style consisted of relatively attractive townhouses designed to lure peasants to want to move there. However, Guoqiang was later ordered by the central government—the Ministry of State Land Resources specifically—to stop wasting land. Consequently, for the sake of saving land to help achieve “national food security,” Guoqiang began to build apartment buildings six to seven floors in height in all new constructions in Jinhu New Village. The Jinhu case is not unusual. In fact, I have witnessed other high-rise apartment buildings in new villages across the countryside.

Another strategy did not involve actual changes to plans, but rather the deployment of the central government's rhetoric to describe preexisting projects. Thus, Guoqiang in conjunction with local state officials developed a strategy that adopted key terminologies relevant to central government policies, while at the same time achieving their own goals of company profits and local economic growth. The most common approach was simply to exploit the campaign slogan "Building a New Socialist Countryside" when seeking to justify a particular local development project. Another popular term is "ecological," as improvements to the environment now constitute an important concern of the government. This phenomenon helps explain why references to the concept of "eco-friendly," "low-carbon," and "sustainability" are encountered on publicity billboards all over the Rural World theme park. For example, inside the theme park, an "eco-restaurant" proudly advertises in the park's brochure as one of the core attractions. The "eco-restaurant" is walled and roofed with transparent materials, thus in principle saving energy by using natural light. Yet, inside the "eco-restaurant"—which is filled with plastic cherry trees covered in pink and white blossoms, as well as plastic green banyan trees—the use of the "eco" language is primarily a rhetorical game. There is nothing ecological about fake trees. As in the West, the word "eco" is a buzzword to be exploited in the political and economic arena. In fact, although Jinhu Rural World is said to be the first "low-carbon" "eco-tourist" site, tourists in on-line comments have complained that they found garbage strewn about everywhere, especially inside the crowded tsunami water dome.

Even after Guoqiang managed to work things out to the satisfaction of both local and central government authorities, numerous issues remained to be negotiated with local peasants. It is quite clear that the final arrangement reached with the peasants was economically disadvantageous to the peasants. For instance, according to my informants,

residents were given 100 RMB per square meter for their old houses. The houses in the New Village, however, were more expensive, at 500 RMB per square meter. In addition, there were numerous additional costs associated with the relocation. The new houses were empty shells initially. Most peasants had to spend at least another 20,000 to 40,000 RMB for basic interior furnishings, including doors, windows, and tile floors. Although each household got compensation between roughly 30,000 RMB and 70,000 RMB, depending on the size of their land and farmhouse, they needed to spend at least 85,000 RMB to purchase a new home in the New Village with minimal furnishings. In other words, in order to move into the New Village, each household had to give back to the developer all compensation money they had just received, plus they had to give up much of their savings. Some families had to borrow additional money from relatives or friends. To make matters worse, the new houses are likely to have little market value in the near future because they are not protected by current property laws, since the houses are built on rural land that is collectively owned by the villagers.<sup>21</sup> Given these economic disadvantages, one wonders how Guoqiang managed to get 12,000 peasants to move out of their traditional villages and into the New Village in the first place.

The two rounds of contracts with the peasants—in fact a result of the two phases of development at the Jinhu site as it was transformed from a speculative real estate venture into a model New Countryside site—proved quite effective at coaxing peasants off of their land. According to Jinhu residents that I interviewed, first, in early 2007, Guoqiang approached villagers with an offer to lease their agricultural land for 18 years in exchange for a lump sum of 5,760 RMB per *mu*. To motivate villagers to sign on, Guoqiang made a special effort to persuade village officials to take the lead. When villagers saw that cadres

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21 Although I found advertisements on the internet for two houses for sale at Jinhu New Village (one listed at 14,000 RMB and one at 400,000 RMB), such a sale would technically be illegal. Accessed from wuhu.58.com on July 13, 2012, <http://wuhu.58.com/ershoufang/15750418078854x.html>.

had signed on and moved into the resettlement townhouses, most villagers chose to follow suit. At this point, the villagers believed they could get back their land-use rights after the contracts expired if the land leases did not fulfill their expectations. The following year, the conglomerate began approaching farmers with another offer, this time of 4,320 RMB per *mu* in additional cash in return for a permanent transfer of land use rights. At this point, many peasants felt they had no choice but to accept the additional money. Among other concerns was the fact that the original contract would terminate the same year the peasants' land use rights granted to them by the state came to an end. From their perspective, there was no guarantee they would get their land back after 2025, so they might as well get money out of the deal while they still could. In the end, only a very small number of villagers had to be removed from their old houses by force.<sup>22</sup> The mass media had previously reported on violence that occurred during demolition of houses elsewhere in China. Thus, the threat of force if they refused to move, although normally only used as a last resort by real estate developers, was well understood by local peasants. By 2009, all the villagers had nullified their earlier leases and resigned new contracts giving up their land use rights in perpetuity. In the end, each peasant household had received a total compensation of 10,080 RMB per *mu*. This price was a true steal for Guoqiang Conglomerate, given that official land prices in the region were nearly three times greater, a point that—after it was realized by villagers—became a subject of contention, as documented in the *Tianya* online forum account and in petitions addressed to provincial and central government officials.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Tang's husband gave me a detailed narrative of a particularly brutal incident. One of the last households was that of a doctor who had quite recently built for himself a new two-story house. To prevent the demolition of the house, his elderly father stayed at home 24 hours a day. Yet, one day, a group of thugs from Nanshan city drove up to the village and dragged the old man out. Within minutes, a bulldozer had destroyed the house and everything inside.

<sup>23</sup> According to "Anhui sheng renmin zhengfu guanyu gongbu Anhui sheng zhengdi buchang biao zhun de tongzhi", *Land and Resource Department of Hefei* 27 January 2010 <<http://www.hfgt.gov.cn>>, land in Nanshan County is valued at 29820 RMB per *mu*.

To be sure, Jinhua residents were not entirely passive in the process. They did manage to negotiate slightly higher compensations from Guoqiang. One strategy they used was based on the fact that compensation for demolished farmhouses at Jinhua was calculated according to the house's floor space. A common practice was for villagers to enlarge square footage by adding one more story to their old house or by adding new annex rooms weeks or even days before selling their houses to the conglomerate.<sup>24</sup> In addition, during construction of the New Village, the Jinhua villagers made a strong stand when they discovered that the first set of resettlement houses were being built with gray bricks. According to local people's knowledge, red bricks are of higher quality and also keep houses warmer in winter and cooler in summer. In the end, Guoqiang agreed to use red bricks in all subsequent constructions, and even to rebuild the first set of houses with such bricks. The villagers were quite proud of themselves for standing up to the company. The successful strategies to extract higher compensations from Guoqiang and to negotiate for the use of red bricks made many peasants believe they had attained a fairly good deal.

At this point, it is worth considering issues of culture and ideology, which provides a context for understanding the negotiations between the actors in the local arena. The pride the villagers felt at obtaining a better deal with Guoqiang, for example, can be partly understood by recognizing that Chinese peasants belong to a bargaining culture, where negotiation has always played an important role in any market transaction, as Liu Xin (2000) has noted in his study of change in rural China after economic reforms. To understand why the peasants agreed to an arrangement that was not ultimately to their economic advantage, it is also important to recognize the influence of an ideology of social justice commonly evoked in government propaganda. Although they sometimes feel that they have been

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<sup>24</sup> This practice is used elsewhere in China and has become a common technique of resistance. How people all over China have come to learn about this technique would be interesting to figure out.

cheated by Guoqiang Conglomerate, Jinhu residents seem to accept the government's portrayal of the "New Countryside" as a form of social justice for peasants in the hinterland. After two decades of economic reforms that have focused on coastal cities, the Chinese government is now using its great wealth to improve rural living standards, with the goal of putting peasants on par with urbanites in terms of the benefits received from economic development. Numerous state slogans articulate this idea—"cities to support villages" (*chengshi zhichi nongcun*), "industry to feed agriculture" (*gongye fanpu nongye*), and "take less and give more" (*duo yu shao qu*), to give just a few examples. For example, peasant informants in Jinhu New Village told me that they appreciated the "good intentions" (*haoyi*) of the central government, though they felt that the government's efforts were tantamount to "pulling on saplings to help them grow" (*ba miao zhu zhang*) before they had established firm roots. Although landless peasants now have trouble maintaining themselves due to the high cost of living in the New Village, many do, nevertheless, accept government rhetoric that it is trying to make things better for them.

Perhaps more significantly, there is strong acceptance among both local officials and peasants of the principle of paternalistic governance. Jinhu is an acclaimed national-level experimental site for the "New Countryside," meaning that it is more than simply a private business venture. It is perceived, instead, as the product of benevolent state planning. The origin of this commitment to paternalism might go back to China's imperial history and/or might constitute a legacy of the recent socialist past. In any case, many people I interviewed held the conviction that, since the "New Countryside" is a central government policy, the government is responsible if things go wrong. When I brought up the hypothetical problem of future food shortages because New Countryside agribusiness often avoids growing grain crops in favor of more lucrative cash crops (Liu 2013), peasants, business entrepreneurs, and

local officials alike frequently uttered the same phrase—“When there is a problem, the government must take care of it (*dao shi zhengfu kending yao guan*).” Acceptance of the ideology of paternalism also helps explain why local officials often deploy the language of top-down rule—of receiving orders “from above,” even though the process of decision-making was in fact far more complex, involving substantial negotiation. Claiming to have received an order from one’s bureaucratic superiors is always deemed a legitimate reason to implement a particular policy at the local level. Land dispossession and peasant displacement are commonly perceived by scholars studying China as evidence of authoritarian oppression. They overlook the fact that the peasants themselves frequently conceive central government policies as being based on the principles of social justice, even if local governments sometimes abuse these principles. In other words, they are far more suspicious of local than of central authority.

In short, because of the multiple actors playing a role in the local arena, the process of implementation of the New Countryside is complex and at times messy, involving numerous acts of negotiation between the different participants. Among the multiple participating actors, business entrepreneurs probably play the greatest role in seeking to bridge the gaps between the concerns of the central government, the local government, peasants, and urban consumers. Although there is a significant power differential between the peasants and other actors, even the peasants are given some room to maneuver and obtain concessions to ameliorate their conditions. The negotiation between multiple participating actors is facilitated by a widespread ideological acceptance of paternalist governance and of the idea that the central government is committed to social equity and the balance of development in today’s China. To the extent that all actors, including peasants,



are absorbed into the game of negotiation, the central government has in some sense succeeded in establishing its social hegemony over local society.

## 6. Conclusion

In the present study, I have treated the “New Countryside” campaign as a radical transformation from traditional rural to “modern” society, drawing on the results of my fieldwork at a site in central China, Jihu village in Anhui Province. Instead of assuming that this campaign involves a homogeneous top-down application nationwide of central government policies, I have demonstrated the complexity of the process of implementation within local society. By first analyzing the construction and layout of the new village space, I contrast the coexistence of two worlds—the modern new rural world and the old traditional village society. These two worlds reveal the tension between the non-productive rationalized space of the theme park and New Village, and the productive space created by the peasants’ drive to subsist. This tension is epitomized by the small businesses that peasants open up in their houses rather than in the official commercial spaces newly built by the urban planners, as well as by the garden that villagers stealthily plant within the manicured landscaping.

But one should not conclude from this tension between two worlds that the transformation of rural society boils down to a simple clash between a “high modernist” state and an oppressed populace. Although the Chinese state under the Chinese Communist Party is commonly seen as eminently authoritarian, tightly controlling and ruling over its vast territory and population of 1.4 billion people, I underline the importance of local society and its multiple actors, all of whom have their own competing agendas with regards to local rural development. I identify the key actors participating in the New Countryside

campaign in the local arena, including local government officials (who should be distinguished from central government officials), business entrepreneurs, peasants, and middle-class urban consumers of rural products. By analyzing the mechanisms underlying the implementation of the changes in question, I show that rural development in China today involves a process of negotiation between these multiple actors. As the Jinhu case demonstrates, the central government's national goals are sometimes perverted by local officials and businessmen who follow the logic of the market when seeking to attract middle-class urban consumers. This divergence between the central state and local society arises essentially from the tension between the CCP's socialist redistribution-based legitimacy on the one hand, and its adoption of a market economy since Mao's death on the other. In other words, China's economy involves a two-track system, with one emanating from the central state and another arising from the bottom up. The Jinhu case thus points to a necessary complication to both James Scott's and Kenneth Lieberthal's theories of the state. Total top-down control is rarely achieved on the ground without being strongly affected, if not entirely perverted at the local level, through the actions of the various non-state actors. Moreover, the transformation of the central plan comes about through a complex and frequently murky negotiation process.

It should be noted that culture and ideology serve as a critical context affecting and sometimes facilitating negotiation between unevenly empowered individuals. I pay particular attention to peasants, who are the most disadvantaged and have developed their own understanding of the binary tensions and sometime complementary relationship between local society and the central state and, as well as between the state and the market. They conceive the central government as the respectable, accountable, and legitimate leader of the people, while local officials and powerful businessmen are portrayed as largely acting

out of their own self-interest, whether for economic benefits or career advantages. Though peasants recognize the need to distinguish the local from the central state, they do not always recognize the inter-dependence between the two. One might surmise however, that the CCP's legitimacy in the post-Mao and post-Deng era is maintained and even augmented through the game of negotiation in distribution-based rural development projects like the "New Countryside."

One element left unaddressed in this study of change in rural China is the involvement of intellectuals and college students, who have emerged as eager volunteers to participate in transforming China's countryside. One of the leading figures is the influential intellectual Wen Tiejun, who in 2004 established the Liang Shumin Center for Rural Reconstruction in Beijing. Wen claims to be continuing the work of pioneering rural reformers—such as Liang Shumin and James Yan of the 1930s—by mobilizing and training peasants to form farmers' cooperatives as an alternative "social economy" that might protect them from the next global financial crisis. This and other themes will be explained in future research, as I expand my study to several additional sites and take into account the inevitable effects of regional variation.

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