

# Home Beyond the House: Transformation of Life, Place, and Tradition in Rural China

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Wei Zhao

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## Chapter 4

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### From the land

The foundation of rural China

*Wei Zhao*

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## 4 From the land

### The foundation of rural China

At our place here, we have the mountains, have the water, have the land, and I have my private plot. If I move down there, won't I then become a city dweller, who can only eat? The water from the mountains is very good, and it is free. There are not even any ponds down there. How could I wash my clothes? How could I live my life? And they say that it will be better than my present life?

– Mr. Cheng Kang (75)

The most popular and humanized god in rural China is the Earth God, or *tudi* (土地公, *tu* means soil and *di* means land). The temple of *tudi* in Yanxia is called Benbao Temple (本保庙), which means the temple that protects the root and the source. Inside the temple, *tudi* and his wife, along with the God of Wealth and his wife, and Mr. Zhu (a local deity) and his wife, are depicted as an affable old couple (Figure 4.1). According to the tradition, these gods receive offerings on the 1st and the 15th day of each lunar month and answer all kinds of mundane requests from the local residents. This frequent worshiping schedule demonstrates how local residents' daily lives are dependent on these gods. In comparison, the residents only worship the Stove God, also called Kitchen God, once a year before the Chinese New Year.

The deep attachment between Chinese rural society and the land was articulated by Fei Xiaotong (2008, 1992), a pioneering sociologist and anthropologist who focused his earlier career on rural China, in his book *Xiangtu Zhongguo* (乡土中国), first published in Chinese in 1947. The title of the English version of the book, *From the Soil: The Foundation of Chinese Society*, published in 1992, clearly reflects Fei's main argument: The roots of everything in rural China, and the foundation of Chinese society in general, are established upon the fact that rural residents make their living and build their livelihood from the soil. In addition, Fei claims that this attachment to the soil shapes every aspect of rural society, from spatial relations to social relations, from morality to custom, from rituals to rules, from desire to necessity, and from family to lineage. When examining how



Figure 4.1 The statues of *tudi* and his wife sitting inside Benbao Temple in Yanxia.

Fei uses the word “soil,” it is clear that Fei does not literally mean that residents in rural China are *only* attached to the dirt composing the soil. Fei uses the word “soil” not only to represent the physical land in rural China, but also the underlying meaning embedded in the word *xiangtu*, as used in the title of his book in Chinese.

*Xiangtu* literally means rural soil. The Chinese character for *xiang* is 乡, meaning rural or native. It is a simplified version of 鄉, which evolved from another character, 卿 (pronounced qing). *Qing* (卿) originally meant people having an intimate dinner together, as it is pictorially represented in the oracle bone scripts created in the Shang Dynasty (1600–1046 BCE) (Figure 4.2). Therefore, the word *xiang* not only defines a locale but also suggests a kind of social interaction. The Chinese character for *tu* is 土, meaning soil. As explained in the second-century Chinese dictionary, *Shuowen Jiezi* (说文解字), *tu* depicts the medium that supports the growth of everything, which is pictorially represented by the vertical stroke (Figure 4.2).<sup>1</sup> Thus, the word *xiangtu*, as an adjective, suggests a location-bound attribute embedded with social relations. One of the most common usages of the word *xiangtu* is to define *jianzhu*, meaning architecture. *Xiangtu jianzhu* is the closest Chinese counterpart of “vernacular architecture.” By definition, vernacular architecture is “designed” and built as the result of the collaboration

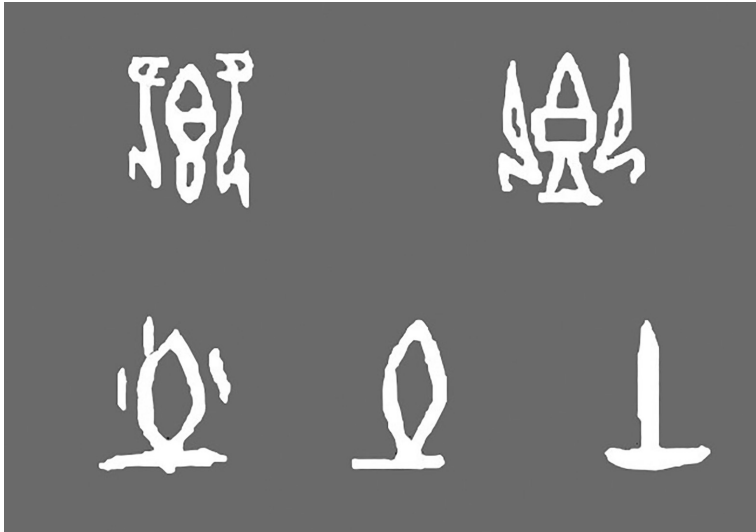


Figure 4.2 The oracle script of 乡 (top) and the oracle script of 土 (bottom).

between craftsmen and the owner, or the collective owners, of the building; it utilizes local materials and technologies, suits local cultures and lifestyle, and is adaptive and additive in nature (Oliver 2003, 14; Rapoport 1969, 4). Considering the linguistic explication of the word *xiangtu*, the Chinese understanding of vernacular architecture is further contextualized by its relationship to the rural land and the social relations that are supported by the land. In other words, *xiangtu* architecture emphasizes the residents' attachment to their native land and the social relations supported by the vernacular settlement. Therefore, the underlying meaning of *xiangtu* can be described as a *place*-bound relationship, in which social relations and attachment to land create meanings. When used as an adjective in this book, *xiangtu* can be simply understood as rural, such as in *xiangtu* architecture or *xiangtu* lifestyle. However, its embedded meaning suggests attachment to the land and associated social relations. Centered on the concept of *xiangtu*, this study examines the *xiangtu* architecture and *xiangtu* landscape that constitute the residential environment for people living Yanxia, and the *xiangtu* lifestyle and *xiangtu* traditions shared by these residents.

This chapter examines the ways in which this place-bound relationship, as the foundation for other aspects of rural life as Fei argues, framed the meaning of home as understood by residents of Yanxia. This chapter begins by examining residents' understandings of and relationships with the land. These relationships can be summarized as a place-bound relationship. This chapter then focuses on the four reasons that this place-bound relationship contributed to the meaning of home understood by the residents. These



reasons were that: 1) The place-bound relationship sustained the *xiangtu* lifestyle, which required many fundamental resources for living from the land, 2) the place-bound relationship supported daily activities, social relations, and cultural performances that took place on various kinds of public and semi-public open places, 3) the place-bound relationship imparted a sense of *ownership* to local residents that was essential to the construction of the meaning of home, 4) and the place-bound relationship facilitated the construction of individual and collective identities. It is important to note that these four reasons were interrelated and interlocking; they were four aspects of the same question, namely how did this place-bound relationship frame the meaning of home, examined from different perspectives. The purpose of dissecting the answers to this question is to better understand the ways in which each aspect of the place-bound relationship, as one dimension of the tradition collectively shared by the residents of Yanxia, played a role in affecting the meaning of home for people living in Yanxia. Acting together, these aspects of the place-bound relationship extended the understandings of home to include the rural landscape, instead of being located merely within the physical boundary of a house or the legal boundary of a homestead.

### Understanding the place-bound relationship

The place-bound relationship refers to residents' relationships with the place where they live. This relationship is not only a form of tradition that has been constructed over time and passed down for generations, but also social and cultural practices that help build collective memory and identity, locality, social values, and community of the residents who used to live in Yanxia.

In order to understand this place-bound relationship, I need to first define the place, or the land, as understood by local residents. Based on photographs taken by the residents and data collected through interviews, four forms of landscape stood out to represent residents' understandings of the land: Cultivated land, water sources (ponds, creeks, and wells), public open spaces (the pilgrim path and the small open spaces in the village), and significant mountains and hills defining the valley in which Yanxia was located. Except for the two young women who moved to Yanxia after marriage, all of the individuals interviewed 34 (out of 36) included at least one of these forms of landscape in their understandings of the meaningful aspects of their homes either through the photographs they took or the interviews. Specifically, nine (out of 20) residents photographed their vegetable gardens or private plots, and 27 (out of 34) discussed their relationships with the cultivated land; 11 residents photographed the water sources, and 21 talked about water usage; seven residents photographed the open spaces, and 13 talked about the activities that took place in these shared public places; ten residents photographed certain significant mountains, and 23 discussed their

*Table 4.1* The number of residents who photographed and discussed different forms of the land.

	<i>Included in the photographs (20)</i>	<i>Discussed during the interviews (34)</i>
Cultivated Land	9	27
Water Sources	11	21
Public Open Space	7	13
Significant Mountains	10	23

attachment to the surrounding mountains (Table 4.1). Before the relocation started in 2014, all of the farmland, parts of the mountains and hills, and all of the land within the village, including all of the building sites, ponds, and open spaces, were collectively owned by all the residents of Yanxia. However, as described in Chapter 1, this was limited ownership in the sense that the land could not be sold or transferred. At the same time, this collective land ownership was subject to government requisition for public interest as happened during the relocation.

### *Cultivated land*

There were two kinds of cultivated land described during the interviews: Farmland and private plots, where each family grew vegetables. Due to mild winters, the land was arable all year long. Each resident of Yanxia had, and in theory still has after the relocation, an equal share of the farmland, which was used mainly for cultivating grains. There were about 60 acres of farmland. Some of them were located within the Fangyan valley, while others were located within the secondary valleys, including Xiahu Ravine, Shang Ravine, and Xie Ravine, and could be away from residents' residential spaces (Figure 2.2). Due to limited arable land, the residents could not make a living from selling the grains harvested from their own lands, but farmed only to feed the family. As of early 2014, the farmland that was away from the settlement had been abandoned, while the land nearby was used mainly to cultivate vegetables. As Mr. Cheng Bao (70) clearly recalled, "last time I cultivated grains was when I was 60 (the year of 2003). I then went to Sichuan Province to visit my daughter and to have some fun after I harvested the late rice that year."

Multiple reasons contributed to abandoning the farmland that was away from the settlement. First of all, the changes in the landscape allowed the return of wild boar that damaged and ate the grains. Before the use of gas stoves and electric heating devices, every family collected large quantities of firewood from the mountains for heating and cooking. Poor families also sold firewood to people living in other villages for additional income. As

Mr. Cheng Lin (77) recalled, he had to hike 10 kilometers to get firewood, because the mountains nearby were left with bare rocks. In recent decades, as the demand for firewood decreased, vegetation returned and flourished in the once rocky hills, and so did wild boar, as the vegetation provided places for the animals to hide and sleep. Moreover, as fewer farmers grew grains, the loss for each farmer was greater, since the boar damaged and ate more of the grains owned by each of the remaining farmers. A second reason for abandoning the farmland was that the hilly terrain hindered the use of modern agricultural machinery. This labor-intensive work became more challenging after many young residents migrated to cities to seek high paid jobs. That was the main reason for Bao to stop farming at the age of 60; he could not bear the hard labor anymore. Lastly, the development of modern agriculture elsewhere in China lowered the relative cost of rice and flour available from the market. Residents stopped farming completely when they realized that it was cheaper to purchase rice and flour than to cultivate these foods themselves, considering the cost of seeds, fertilizer, and the potential loss due to the boar and bad weather.

In addition to having the right to cultivate farmland, every family had its own private plot, where they mainly cultivated vegetables. As explained in Chapter 1, the word “private” did not entitle them to ownership but only endowed usage rights. The private plots were also collectively owned by all of the residents in Yanxia, and residents were not allowed to rent, transfer, or sell their private plots. They were, however, free to grow any crops on the land, and the income from the sale of products was exempt from tax. Due to a relatively mild winter, the residents could cultivate different kinds of vegetables all year around, including cabbage, turnip, luffa, bok choy, pumpkin, soybean, cucumber, eggplant, and pepper. In the fall, most families dried and pickled some of these vegetables for the winter.

### *Water sources*

The water sources included the creeks that collected water from the adjacent mountains and passed through the entire village, the ponds situated in front of historic buildings or inside or adjacent to once large hotels, and the wells. Even the tap water came from a local reservoir that collected water from the adjacent mountains located to the southeast of the Fangyan valley.

In order to better preserve water, residents had been following certain unwritten rules on how to use water, but there had been some changes in recent decades. According to Ms. Luo Yan (63) and Mr. Cheng Kang (75), the wells previously had provided water for drinking and cooking; however, since the late 1980s, with the convenience of indoor plumbing, fewer people drank water from wells. Most of the wells were dug by individual families either within or adjacent to their property and were for private use only. There was only one working public well in the village (Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4), Yinquan, which had been dug by the owner of Chengrenchang



*Figure 4.3* Yinquan, the only public well in Yanxia, was dug by the owner of Chengrenchang Inn. The Chinese characters of 饮泉(yinquan) were inscribed on the side of the well. The descendant of the hotel owner, Mr. Cheng Xian, included this as part of his understanding of the meaningful aspects of home. Photo by Mr. Cheng Xian.

Inn, once the largest hotel in Yanxia. As of early 2014, residents living adjacent to the well still used the water for various purposes. The pond water was used for doing laundry and the secondary resources for irrigation; it could also be used to extinguish fires when needed. The creeks were the main source for irrigation and the place where residents washed vegetables and fruits. However, by 2014, most residents had started to pre-wash vegetables and fruits in the ponds and then rinse them using tap water adjacent to their residential space, since many residents, such as Ms. Luo Yan (63) and Ms. Yu Po (72), believed that the use of modern toilets polluted the water in the creeks by flushing wastewater directly into the creeks.

The ponds, therefore, became the major water source outside individual homesteads because of distrust of the polluted creeks. The spaces near the ponds then became the places where people performed daily activities, such as washing vegetables and doing laundry. Four major ponds in the village were used by the residents on a daily basis. They were Qian Pond, in front of Degengju, Yuanliu Pond, in front of Shiyuan Ancestral Hall, Cheyue Pond,

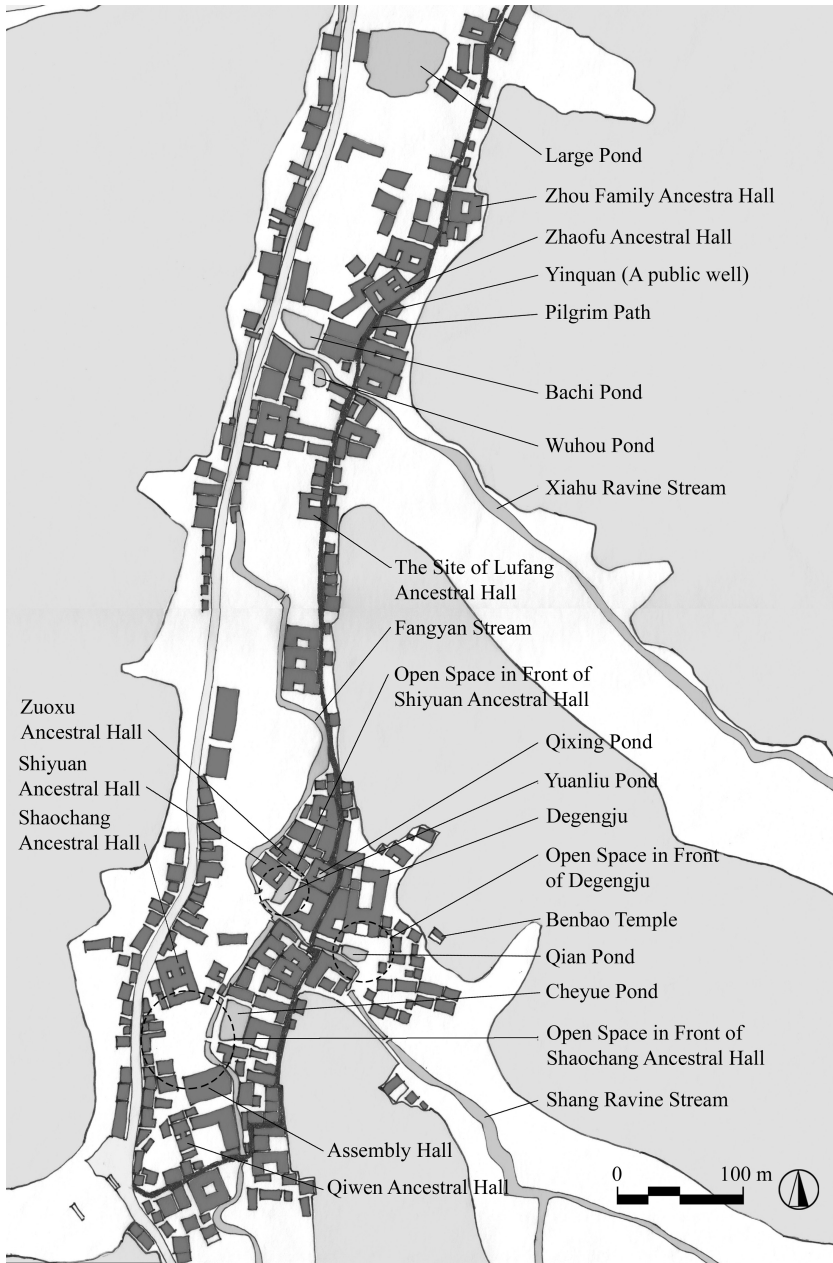


Figure 4.4 Location of the Ponds and Public Open Spaces. Drafted by the author based on a map provided by the local government.





*Figure 4.5* A resident washing vegetables in Yuanliu Pond.

which used to be part of Cheng Lichong's Mansion, and Bachi Pond, in front of Chengrenchang Inn (Figure 4.4 and Figure 4.5).

### *Public open spaces*

Three major public open spaces in Yanxia supported residents' daily activities, social interactions, and ritual performances. These spaces were the small plazas in front of Degengju, Shiyuan Ancestral Hall, and Shaochang Ancestral Hall, which were all located in the section of the village that was built before the boom of the hospitality business in the middle of the nineteenth century (Figure 4.4). Additionally, the pilgrim path was not only a passageway, but also a place that supported social relations and certain cultural events. The concentration of open spaces in the older section of the village was mainly because all of the collectively owned buildings that had survived in history were located in the older section of the village, to which the open spaces were attached. In addition, the development of the village since the late nineteenth century was driven mainly by the hotel business and competition between the hotel owners. As a result, the newly built hotels and houses were tightly situated next to each other along both

sides of the pilgrim path. This settlement pattern, which was linear-shaped and facing-the-pilgrim-path, limited the development of new public open spaces.

### *Significant landscapes*

The *Danxia* landform, which is characterized by red-colored sandstone, not only defines the valley in which Yanxia is situated, but also has the most significant meaning in the local cultural landscape as discussed in Chapter 2 and 3 (Figure 4.6). As the most dominant landform, Fangyan Mountain, as well as Nanyan Mountain to its south and Xiangbi Ridge (Elephant's Nose Mountain) to its north, defines the western edge of the valley (Figure 2.2). The east side of Fangyan Mountain is a steep cliff, which glows under the morning sun and bathes the entire valley in a warm red tone (Figure 2.1). This might be the reason the first settlers named their village Yanxia, which means "underneath the rock." This may also be the reason that a traveling monk was attracted to this area and built a Buddhist temple on the top of Fangyan Mountain in 850 C.E., which has been the shrine for a local deity for over 900 years. At the eastern side of the valley, three lower hills run roughly east-west and sandwich two secondary valleys in between. Having unique landforms, these three lower hills are named Shizi (Lion) Mountain, Wugong (Centipede) Hill, and Xiyi (Lizard) Hill, from north



Figure 4.6 Ms. Luo Yan's vegetable garden. Photo by Ms. Luo Yan.

to south (Figure 2.2). The secondary valley between Wugong Hill and Xiyi Hill is where the settlement began at least 700 years ago. Benbao Temple (Temple of the Earth God), originally located on Xiyi Hill facing the settlement, was later moved to Wugong Hill overlooking and protecting the village. Local folklore links all the significant landscapes together, which is included in Chapter 2.

### Sustaining the *Xiangtu* lifestyle

The fundamental reason that residents of Yanxia developed a place-bound relationship was because they acquired most of their resources for living from the land they lived on, yet at almost no financial cost. As Ms. Lv Xiang (61) stated,

the water here is good too; it is from the mountain over there. Here we own the mountains, the paddy field, and the dry farmland. I can go to the mountains to get firewood; I can farm. There is bamboo in the mountains. Even without any income, I can still have a full stomach!

In other words, residents of Yanxia could acquire firewood and bamboo from the mountains and drinking water from the local reservoir. With additional effort, residents could harvest rice and vegetables from the fields.

According to Rapoport (2005, 96), the ways in which people allocate resources, such as time, money, effort, and involvement, are based on systematic choices that build their lifestyle. People's lifestyle represents their values, worldview, and, above all, their culture. Therefore, the ways in which residents of Yanxia lived their lives as summarized by Ms. Lv Xiang, or the *xiangtu* lifestyle, nurtured the place-bound relationship. In turn, this place-bound relationship sustained the *xiangtu* lifestyle through supporting residents to continuously acquire resources for living from the land, including growing one's own foods, using traditional stoves that depend on firewood, and accessing the water system within the settlement. These aspects of the *xiangtu* lifestyle required residents to constantly step outside their homesteads to perform fundamental daily activities. As a result, the place-bound relationship enabled residents to include areas outside their individual homesteads, such as the places where residents acquired food, firewood, and water as meaningful aspects of their home.

### *Growing their own food*

The most important aspect of the *xiangtu* lifestyle, sustained by the place-bound relationship, was that the land provided the most fundamental resource for living – food – with almost no financial cost to the residents. Unlike city dwellers, most residents in Yanxia, especially the seniors, did not have jobs or pensions. The fact that they could acquire food from the land dramatically lowered their



cost of living. In addition to saving money, which was not a main concern for residents who were working in the city or who had income from the hospitality business or pensions, there were other reasons that residents preferred to grow vegetables for themselves. These reasons included that “they are free of fertilizers” (Ms. Cheng Li, 41), “you know when you spray pesticide” (Ms. Luo Yan, 63),<sup>2</sup> “I can put my mind at ease” (Ms. Cheng Ling, 43), and “they taste better” (Mr. Cheng Quan, 40). In summary, all 30 individuals living in Yanxia, or their immediate family members, cultivated their own private plots for various kinds of vegetables all year long. As a result, they only needed to purchase meat, fish, tofu, and a small amount of vegetables that were difficult to grow themselves.

In addition to practical reasons, cultivating vegetables was a lifestyle the residents enjoyed and from which they took a sense of pride. As one of the nine individuals that photographed the arable land as a meaningful aspect of their homes, Ms. Luo Yan (63) took a photograph of her vegetable garden, which was roughly the size of two parking spots, and filled with various kinds of vegetables (Figure 4.6). She proudly said that with some “casual” work, she always had too many vegetables for her family to eat, so she gave the extra to her daughter’s family living in the city. She continued, “no one purchases vegetables, only the young people do.” Even though some young people did cultivate land themselves, as Ms. Cheng Li (41) and Mr. Cheng Zhi (49) did, most of them did not because they had full-time jobs. In the latter case, these young people, such as Mr. Cheng Ying (37), Ms. Ying Hua (37), and Ms. Cheng Ling (43), received vegetables from their parents or parents-in-law. This simple action of giving vegetables not only reinforced the pride held by the seniors and in practical terms helped the youth, but it also strengthened family relations, which is discussed in Chapter 5.

### *Use of Traditional Firewood Stoves*

Another important attribute of the *xiangtu* lifestyle, which helped sustain the place-bound relationship, was the use of traditional stoves that depend on firewood. All 12 individuals living in traditional style houses had traditional stoves that they used either on a daily basis or periodically. Of the remaining 18 individuals that lived in new style houses in Yanxia, 12 of them had traditional stoves built inside their homes. Although most residents also had gas stoves, they believed that using traditional stoves had benefits in addition to saving money on energy bills. They loved the feature of the *tongtangchang* (铜汤肠), which is a water pipe that is made of bronze and circulates inside the stove. The water inside the *tongtangchang* becomes hot during cooking and can be accessed from a bronze faucet on the side of the stove. Meanwhile, the stove, made of bricks and mud, acts as insulation and guarantees that “the hot water is available all day long,” according to Ms. Li Ai (26).

Their large size and excellent performance in slow cooking made the traditional stoves ideal for certain foods, such as congee, and for special



Figure 4.7 Ms. Li Ai's grandparents making *qingmingguo*. Photo by Ms. Li Ai.

occasions, such as during holidays when dinner was prepared for a large family. It was also beneficial to use the traditional stove during the winter when the heat from cooking also heated up the kitchen space at the same time. Ms. Li Ai, a young woman living in the city, said that she was still emotionally attached to the stove, since it was part of her childhood memories. She recalled that her grandparents only used the traditional stove once a year during the Qingming Festival (or Tomb Sweeping Day) to cook her favorite food: *qingmingguo* (清明果) (Figure 4.7). In contrast, Mr. Cheng Bao, a 70-year old man, had been using the same stove his entire life, which was inside the same kitchen built by his grandmother. Without hesitation, he took a photograph of his beloved stove as an important and meaningful element that helped construct his understanding of home (Figure 4.8). He worried that he would not have a traditional stove if he were relocated to the new settlement. Regardless of the difference in their emotional attachment to traditional stoves, Ai and Bao shared a common belief: “food cooked on traditional stoves tastes better!”

#### *Water access and usage*

Water access and water usage practices were another attribute of the *xiangtu* lifestyle that nurtured, as well as required, the place-bound relationship.



*Figure 4.8* Mr. Cheng Bao's stove. Photo by Mr. Cheng Bao.

When discussing the possibility of relocating to the new settlement, Mr. Cheng Kang (75) commented, “the water from the mountains is very good, and it is free. There are not even any ponds down there, how could I wash my clothes? How could I live my life?” For Mr. Kang, as well as most of the residents, they went to the pond on a daily basis to wash vegetables and clothes, and they did not go there only because of the free water (Figure 4.9). Ms. Shi Ying (62) and Ms. Cheng Li (41) both had washing machines at home, but they preferred washing their clothes in the ponds because they did not believe the non-circulating water inside the washing machine could do the job properly. In contrast, they saw the water in the pond as moving water; the clean water came from one end of the pond and the dirty water went out the other end. For the same reason, Mr. Cheng Xiong (73), a senior man, refused a washing machine offered by his son; he preferred to do all the laundry by hand, even without any help from his wife, who could not squat due to medical issues.

Another reason that residents continued to go to the pond even after they had indoor plumbing was because of the tradition and the practice of water preservation that they inherited from their ancestors. As Mr. Cheng Fa (79) felt, “it is wasteful to use tap water to wash vegetables.” Cost was not the issue here, since tap water was almost free to most of the residents who were not in the hospitality business.<sup>3</sup> To conserve water, as he learned from his ancestors, Fa prewashed vegetables in Yuanliu Pond and then rinsed them



Figure 4.9 Residents doing laundry at Cheyue Pond.

using tap water. This was also the common practice carried out by most other residents in Yanxia.

The third reason, which might be the most important one for the residents' attachment to the ponds, was the social interaction they enjoyed with their neighbors at the ponds. This kind of social interaction only became available when more than one resident performed his or her daily activities near the pond, as the next section illustrates.

### Supporting daily activities and constructing social relations

In addition to sustaining the *xiangtu* lifestyle, the place-bound relationship also encouraged and enabled residents to frequently use the open and semi-open public places within the vernacular settlement to perform daily activities, many of which helped construct social relations among residents. The most important open public place in Yanxia was the small plaza and the pond, referred to as Qian Pond (the pond at the front), in front of Degengju (Figure 4.4). This place was the center for daily activities, social interactions, and cultural performances for generations, as summarized by Mr. Cheng Sheng (67):





*Figure 4.10* The deep grooves on the brick façade of Degengju were the result of children of many generations playing sliding coins.

When we were little, we came here to play all the time. The grooves on the brick façade of Degengju are the result of us sliding coins (Figure 4.10). Some of them are really deep. We always came here to play when we were little. You slide a coin [vertically along the groves] here, let it go, and then see which one rolls the farthest. It is like a gamble. Sometimes the coins roll into the pond. I started coming here since I was little! It is in front of my house. I come here to play when I have nothing else to do. When the weather is nice, we old people come here to play poker, mahjong, and chess. I also come here to dry the clothes.

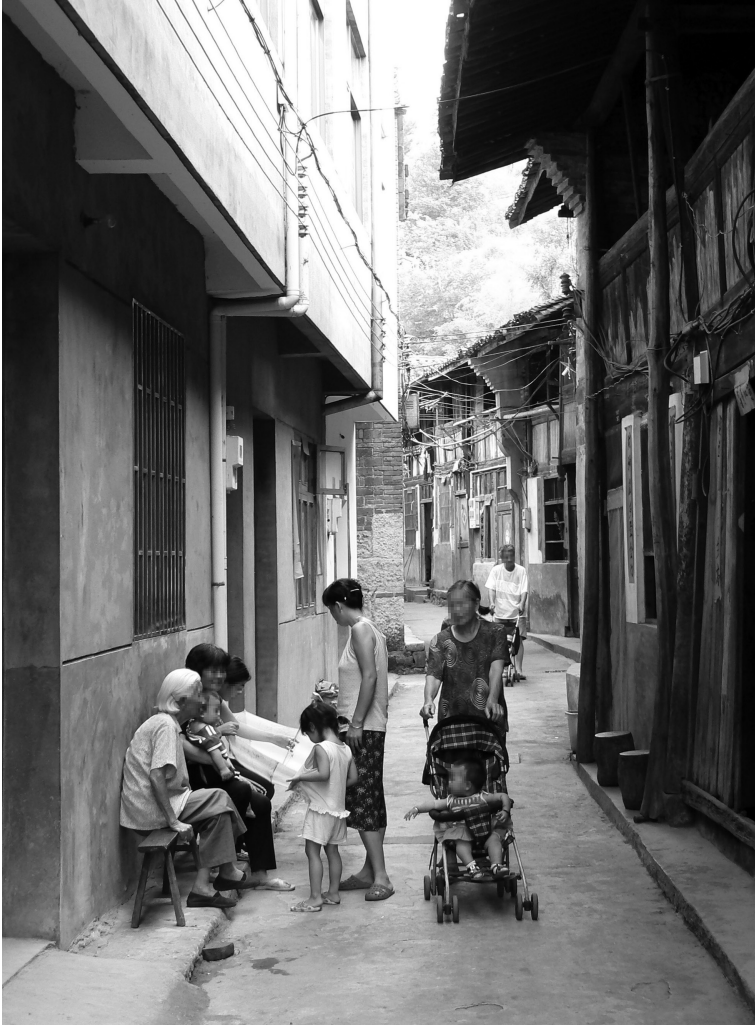
Other places, such as the small plaza and Yuanliu Pond associated with Shiyuan Ancestral Hall, the open space in front of Shaochang Ancestral Hall, and certain sections of the pilgrim path, also supported various kinds of daily activities and social relations, but on a smaller scale (Figures 4.5, 4.11, and 4.12). The following sections use the public place in front of Degengju as an example to illustrate how this place-bound relationship supported residents' daily activities and helped construct social interactions.



Figure 4.11 Residents playing *mahjong* in front of Shiyuan Ancestral Hall.

### *Supporting daily activities*

The kinds of daily activities performed on the public space in front of Degengju mainly included fishing, washing vegetables, and doing laundry in the pond, as well as eating meals, drying grains and vegetables, drying clothes, and entertaining in the open space (Figure 4.13 and Figure 4.14). Even though some of the activities that took place in these open spaces occurred there because of convenience and necessity, such as drying vegetables and grains, or because of lack of opportunities elsewhere, such as fishing, the social meanings embedded into these daily activities and the social relations built through these social interactions cannot be overlooked. The social meanings and the importance of social relations are particularly evident in the activities of women doing laundry together, especially after the installation of indoor plumbing and the affordability and widespread use of washing machines. Ms. Lv Xiang (61) gave her reason for taking one of her photographs (Figure 4.15): “I envy them doing laundry together... I know everyone there!” She, on the other hand, stopped going there after she moved to her new house on the other side of the village. Clearly, doing laundry in the public pond

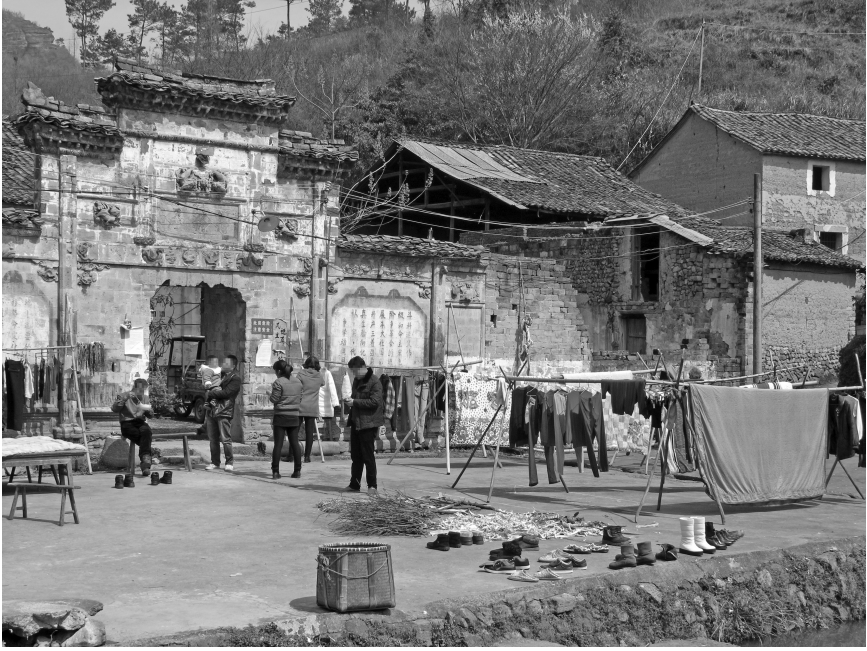


*Figure 4.12* Residents socializing on the historic pilgrim path.

was not merely a functional activity; it was an important social interaction between women, almost all of whom moved to Yanxia following marriage to a village member and, therefore, lived away from their parents and siblings.

These activities were also initiated, facilitated, and encouraged by either individual or collective efforts. Ms. Lv Xiang (61) proudly recalled that her





*Figure 4.13* Residents drying clothes, shoes, and vegetables, as well as eating meals and socializing, at the open space in front of Degengju.



*Figure 4.14* A resident checking the vegetables being dried. Photo by Mr. Cheng Bao.



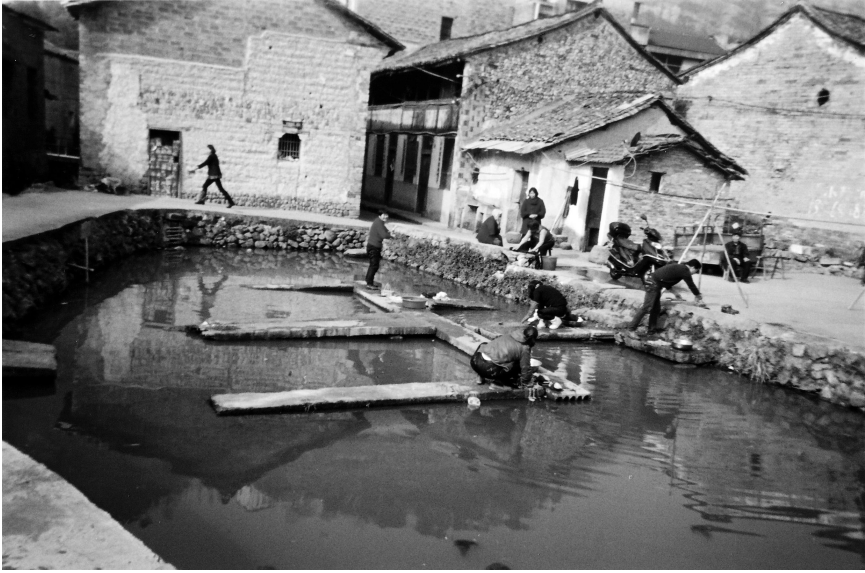


Figure 4.15 Residents doing laundry at Qian Pond. Photo by Ms. Lv Xiang.

husband helped lay every single stone slab inside Qian Pond, so that she and the other women could do laundry there. Mr. Cheng Bao (70), a resident whose house was located right around the corner from Degengju, laughed about the fact that he always released fish inside the pond and went fishing later with other senior men in the neighborhood. In addition, local residents put movable benches in the plaza for people to sit on and unmarked bamboo poles leaning against the walls for people to construct racks for drying clothes.

### *Constructing social relations*

Activities performed on the public place in front of Degengju also facilitated the construction of specific social relations that characterized the *xiangtu* society. Mr. Cheng Quan (40) summarized these relations by contrasting them to those of urban society where he had been living for over ten years. He said, “In the city, you close the door immediately after you enter the room!” In other words, for the *xiangtu* society in Yanxia that he grew up in and still considered his home, the open spaces and the public places were the core of an extended nexus that connected all the adjacent homes with open doors (Figure 4.16). As a result, the residents living in those homes formed an intimate social relationship that crossed the boundaries of homestead and family. Ms. Cheng Ling (43) and her family lived across the plaza



*Figure 4.16* The open space in front of Degengju acted like a living room and a public place for the neighbors, which helped construct social relations.

of Degengju from Mr. Cheng Bao (70) and his family. As she concluded while putting her arm around the shoulder of the wife of Bao, “I come here (the courtyard in front of Bao’s home) every day. I cannot not come every day! I see her (the wife of Bao) more than I see my mom. I need to make a special arrangement to see my mom. For her, I come here and I can see her!” Clearly, for Ling, the personal relationship she had with Bao’s wife was an essential aspect of her daily life, and, in some ways, it was more intimate than the relationship she had with her mother, who lived in a different village.

Semi-public space, such as a courtyard, also helped to constructed intimate social relations among neighbors. When Mr. Cheng Bao (70) and his family were making stuffed steam buns at home, he set up a dining table in the courtyard he shared with his relatives. He claimed that he needed to make about 150 buns to feed his large family, which included him and his wife, as well as his two sons and their families. Even though he did not count the neighbors as family members, he certainly included them when he did the calculation. During the few hours of making and cooking the buns, neighbors came in and out of his little courtyard, a semi-public space, without knocking or saying farewell. They sat down and enjoyed a few



Figure 4.17 The making and consuming of buns among neighbors inside and outside the residential place of Mr. Cheng Bao.

buns without hesitation or saying thank you (Figure 4.17). These seemingly “rude” behaviors were the result of intimate social relations among neighbors; they treated each other as close family members and considered Mr. Bao’s home as theirs. In addition, one of the three women making the buns was a neighbor. Mr. Bao’s wife explained, “she is like a daughter. She is the same age as my daughter (who got married and moved to her husband’s village). She will come if she knows we are making buns. There is no need to call her. No need to invite her to eat the buns; no need to ask her to make the buns.” Again, this statement demonstrated that the intimate social relations among local residents enabled them to consider each other as close family members. The way Mr. Bao’s family and their neighbors used the courtyard during the process of making and consuming buns revealed that this semi-public space acted as the core of an extended nexus connecting residents from adjacent homes, and therefore facilitated the construction of intimate social relations among these residents.

In contrast, the lack of open spaces and public places in the newer section of the village (developed since late nineteenth century) not only eliminated opportunities for the kind of social interactions between neighbors that took place in the older section of the village, but also affected residents’ understandings of home. Out of the seven residents who were living in the older section of Yanxia during the research, together with the two residents that used to live there, eight of them photographed aspects of the open spaces and the public places as the meaningful aspects of their homes. The one resident living in the older section of Chenglu village also included the open space and the public place of Chenglu in his photographs. For the remaining 11 residents who had never lived in the older section of Yanxia, ten of them

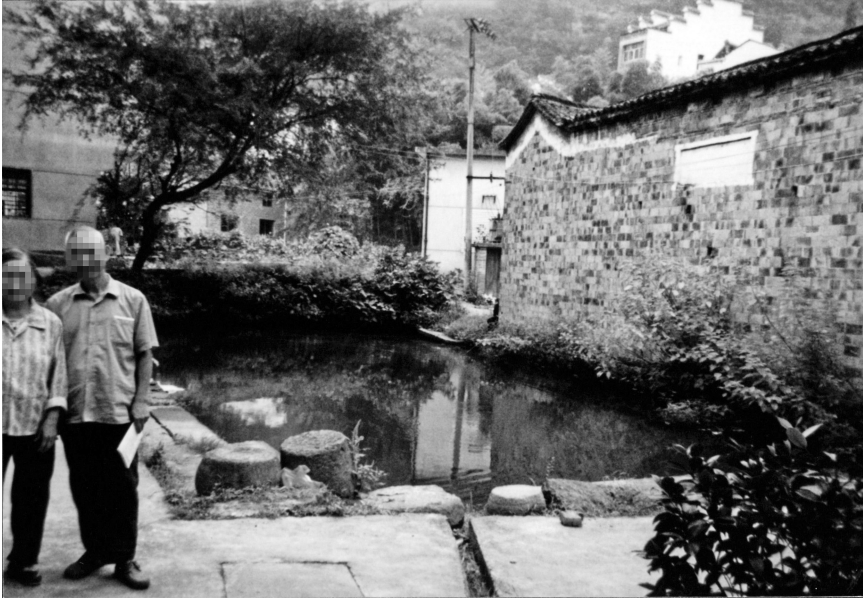
did not include any open spaces or public places within the village as part of their understandings of the meaningful aspects of home. Of these residents, seven limited their photo-taking activities to their homestead and to the built environment immediately adjacent to their homestead (some included views to places farther in the distance). In contrast, when receiving the camera, Mr. Cheng Bao (70) immediately went outside and took three photographs of the ancestral home Degengju, where he frequently visited every day. He further explained that the reason for taking these photographs was because Degengju was the place that he inherited from his ancestors. The way in which the importance of inheritance from ancestors influenced residents' understandings of the meaning of home is further discussed in Chapter 5. Mr. Cheng Sheng (67), who also lived close to Degengju, dedicated all nine of his photographs to the places and views between his house and Degengju, three of which were taken at Degengju. When explaining the reasons for taking these photographs, in addition to considering Degengju something he and his fellow villagers inherited from their ancestors, he simply stated, "I started coming here since I was little! It is in front of my house..." (Figure 4.18).

Many residents preferred living or spending time in the older section of the village because of the intimate social interactions among neighbors. Ms. Cheng Hang (19), who spent a great amount of time at her grandparents' residential space located next to Shiyuan Ancestral Hall when she was young, took a photograph of her grandparents posing in the open space



Figure 4.18 The public place in front of Degengju. Photo by Mr. Cheng Sheng.





*Figure 4.19* The open space in front of Ms. Cheng Hang's grandparents' home and next to Shiyuan Ancestral Hall. Photo by Ms. Cheng Hang.

adjacent to the ancestral hall (Figure 4.19). When she explained the reasons for taking this photograph, she said that this place had left a deep imprint on her memory, because she did her homework here, sunbathed here, and witnessed various kinds of social interactions between the neighbors. Hang further stated that the most important reason for taking this photograph was that this place was different from the place where her own residential space was located, and the difference lay in the liveliness of each place. She explained, “the place where my house is only becomes lively during the Chinese New Year.” Her “house,” or her parents’ house, was located on the new street, where thousands of cars passed by every day. Her parents ran one of the largest hotels in Yanxia; it was always populated by tourists and pilgrims, especially during the peak seasons. Therefore, when Hang used the word “lively (热闹),” she did not mean the number of people or the noise level as the result of tourists, pilgrims, and cars. Rather, she gave examples of the liveliness of the place with the following scenes: “the grandpa next door is fishing; the kid next door is brushing his teeth. In the evening after the dinner, neighbors come out and talk; that neighbor sometimes takes out a small table and eats out.” Therefore, the kinds of activities contributing to building a “lively” place, in her understanding, included intimate and everyday social interactions between family members and neighbors. For

the same reason, Mr. Cheng Fa (79), who lived next door to Hang's grandparents, refused to move in with his sons, who lived in the new style housing on the new street. Fa believed that where he lived was more "convenient (方便)," because "the neighbors are close to each other. If I were to live with my son, he is too busy and he is not going to say a word to me during the day!" In other words, the "convenience" defined by Fa also referred to the kind of intimate and everyday social interactions between neighbors in the older section of the village, such as, in Fa's case, eating the food cooked by his next-door neighbor and walking to another neighbor's house to play *mahjong*.

### **Impart a sense of *ownership***

The place-bound relationship also endowed the residents of Yanxia with a strong sense of ownership to the land they had been living on. It is important to note that this *ownership* was different from the ownership defined by Chinese law or the meaning of the English word itself. According to the *Land Law* (see Chapter 1), all lands in Yanxia, including building sites, were, and in theory still are, collectively "owned" by all the residents of Yanxia. However, as discussed earlier, this is a limited "ownership" because residents cannot sell or transfer these properties. Therefore, a sense of ownership can be obtained through the collective "ownership" and use rights defined by the *Land Law*; this aspect of the sense of ownership is what I call *endowed* ownership. A second aspect of the sense of ownership is what I call *claimed* ownership. Claimed ownership can be acquired through historic family ownership before 1949 or developed through the efforts that people devote to caring for and maintaining the land they collectively own. Therefore, the sense of ownership further attaches the residents to the land, which, in turn, strengthens the place-bound relationship. As a result, residents' understandings of home extended beyond the boundary of the homestead and included the land to which they had both endowed and claimed ownership. The land was the context from which they extracted their resources for living, and in which they performed daily activities and built social relations.

### ***Endowed ownership***

Endowed ownership can be further identified as personal ownership and collective ownership. Personal ownership is mainly developed through residents' right to cultivate farmland, especially private plots. As explained earlier, each family had its own private plot. The original Chinese word for "private plot" is *ziliudi* (自留地), which literally means "the land kept for oneself." Thus, even though the land was collectively owned by all the residents of Yanxia, the implications of the Chinese term, in addition to the use rights prescribed by the *Land Law*, gave the residents a sense that



Figure 4.20 Ms. Cheng Jv's private plot was covered with different kinds of vegetables. Photo by Ms. Cheng Jv.

they owned their own private plots. Thus, nine out of the 20 residents took photos that included their private plots or vegetable gardens as a meaningful aspect of their homes (Figure 4.20). In addition, 27 out of 34 residents discussed their deep attachment to their cultivated land during interviews. When people talked about their private plots, they unanimously used the phrase “my” (我的) to emphasize this personal ownership. In contrast, they used the phrase “ours” (我们的) when they discussed the ancestral halls, the ponds, the mountains, and the village in general, even though all of these properties shared the same kind of legal ownership defined by the *Land Law*. Thus, it is the use right of their private plots that endowed the residents with a sense of personal ownership, which they differentiated from other collectively owned properties.

Collective *ownership* also played a definitive role in constructing the meaning of home for residents of Yanxia. As illustrated in Table 4.1, about half of the residents who participated in the photo-taking phase of this study included at least one kind of collectively owned and shared property in their understandings of the meaningful aspects of home. In addition, about two-thirds of the participants discussed it in the interviews (Figure 4.21). Although the dominant reasons for including the ponds and the open spaces were mainly due to their function in supporting daily activities and building



Figure 4.21 Shiyuan Ancestral Hall and Yuanliu Pond. Photo by Mr. Cheng Fa.

social relations, some residents did consider these collectively owned and shared properties as part of their homes. For example, when Mr. Cheng Feng (74) was asked to list what he had at home, he said “at home, there are bamboo, gardens, and ponds.” The main reason that Feng considered collectively owned properties as part of his home was due to the blurring of personal, family, and collective possession in a lineage-base settlement. In Yanxia, where almost everyone was part of an extended family, collective ownership by all the members of Yanxia was almost equal to the Cheng family ownership, when the concept of family was extended to include all the members of the Cheng descendants living in Yanxia. For a male descendent who was the head of a family, in the case of Feng, his personal ownership was the same as his family ownership, and the extended family ownership was comparable to collective ownership. Thus, this overlapping of different levels of ownerships blurred the distinctions between what was mine, what was yours, and what was ours. The result of this overlapping enabled certain residents to extend their understanding of home to include collectively owned properties.

The residents also valued and firmly guarded their collective ownership, as revealed through the dialog between Mr. Cheng Sheng (67) and Mr. Cheng Bao (70). Sheng first commented, “Even if we are not living here, this place still belongs to *us*.” Bao immediately continued, “The mountains are also *ours*; the land is also *ours*. I know every single rock on the mountain, every



single cave in the mountain!” In this conversation, Sheng emphasized the fact that, by law, the legally defined ownership remained with the residents regardless of his and his fellow villagers’ presence at Yanxia. Meanwhile, Bao tied the ownership to personal and local knowledge; he argued that the fact that he knew everything in the mountains imparted him, as well as his fellow villagers, a sense of ownership of the mountains.

Finally, this collective ownership enabled residents to feel attached to their homeland and to object to the idea of moving into the new settlement. This feeling was clearly articulated by Ms. Gao Qiao (61),

even if they build a new house for me, my own place here is better. If I go there, everything belongs to others. Even if I walk a little bit, the road belongs to others! In my village, we own everything together. Even if they build the house for me, I won’t feel I own it.

Gao’s statement clearly demonstrated that, when compared to physical shelter, the *sense* of ownership was more essential to supporting the understanding of home.

### *Claimed ownership*

Claimed *ownership* can be acquired through the time and effort that people devote to properties, either private lots or shared public spaces. During my conversation with Ms. Ying Hua (37) and Ms. Lv Xiang (61), a middle-aged woman and a senior woman who both moved to Yanxia after marriage, Hua, a middle-aged woman expressed little emotional attachment to Yanxia. Xiang, a senior woman, then teased her and told me, “she does not know how to get the firewood. She does not know how to attend to the land. Of course she has no feelings!” In addition, the senior woman considered herself as someone from Yanxia and proudly concluded: “here we own the mountains, the paddy field, and the dry farmland.” In this statement, Xiang clearly considered herself as one of the “we,” one of the members of the Cheng lineage, who collectively owned the mountains and all the farmland. Meanwhile, Xiang categorized Hua as someone who was *not* from Yanxia, though neither of them was originally from Yanxia. In contrast, even though Hua also had a share of the mountains and farmland equal to Xiang, she never discussed this ownership or expressed a sense of pride of this ownership. Thus, it was the 43 years that Xiang spent attending the land, including cultivating land, picking firewood, and caring for public spaces, that made her deeply attached to Yanxia; this devotion also helped her build the claimed ownership (Figure 4.22).

Besides the sense of endowed collective ownership that residents felt towards the shared public spaces, the efforts certain residents had devoted to maintaining these places facilitated the construction of an additional sense of claimed ownership. Living next to Degengju, Mr. Cheng Bao (70)



Figure 4.22 Ms. Lv Xiang posing in front of Degengju. Photo by a resident directed by Xiang. Xiang wanted to use this photograph to demonstrate that, “I was telling the stories happening inside.”

cleared the pond of any trash and swept the open space in front of Degengju whenever he saw that they were dirty. When being asked for the reasons for doing so, Bao said, “I live close by. When I see it dirty, I just sweep it. It doesn’t take much effort to do that.” He paused and continued, “I also left more trash here.” He then laughed and added, “other people leave trash here too.” Thus, as someone who spent a lot of time in this shared public place, including sun bathing, socializing, fishing, and doing laundry, he felt entitled to use this space and responsible for taking care of this place as if it was part of his home. This place certainly became part of his home when Bao started to have his yearly family photo taken in front of Degengju in 2012. The family photo taken in 2012, which included four generations of his family, was hanging inside his living room as of early 2014. Therefore, the effort Bao spent caring for and maintaining the shared public space in front of his residential space contributed to his sense of claimed ownership of this public place. This space eventually became part of his home, when an image of Degengju was hanging inside his living room, and part of his understanding of home.

Another kind of claimed *ownership* was acquired through historic family ownership of the property before 1949.<sup>4</sup> Mr. Cheng Guan’s (72) ancestors, four and five generations ago, were both educated and financially established

residents in Yanxia. They owned not only one of the most magnificent housing complexes in Yanxia – Feng-Ya-Song – but also a large piece of farmland in front of their housing complex and the extended wooded area to the east of the house (Figure 2.10 and Figure 2.11). In addition, a well and a large open space used for drying grains were located to the south of the housing complex. In the following generations, the properties outside the housing complex were first divided many times among the heirs of the family after each generation passed away. Then, after Land Reform in the 1950s, these properties were taken as collective property of the village and redistributed to the residents to cultivate. As of early 2014, Guan, his close relatives, and some residents of Yanxia had the use rights to different sections of these properties.

Living between past glory and present reality, Mr. Cheng Guan had a sense of claimed ownership of all the property his ancestors used to own. On one hand, he was very proud of his family's glorious history and vividly remembered the luxurious life his great grandfather led; on the other hand, he was still wrapped in the past and felt somewhat entitled to the properties his family used to own. In his photographs, Guan took eight photographs (out of 27) of the wooded area behind his house, which was owned, in a complete sense of ownership, by his family for over a century before the 1950s, and which was legally owned, as of early 2014, by everyone in Yanxia while the use right given to him and his close relatives. When discussing the reasons for taking these photographs, he never consistently articulated the verb tense of the ownership; in addition, he changed his use of personal pronouns between “I” and “we” or between “mine” and “ours” when referring to the current “ownership” of the property. In one instance, Guan stated: “this place used to all belong to *me*.” In this case, Guan interchanged his personal ownership with his family ownership and revealed a strong *claimed* ownership over the property his family used to own. In another instance, Guan stated: “this is our family's bamboo” (Figure 4.23). This statement is more problematic. First, it is not clear whether Guan was discussing the ownership of the property, which was, as of early 2014, legally owned by everyone in Yanxia, or the use right given to him and his close relatives. Second, the term “our family's (我们家的)” could refer to the small family only including Guan, his wife, and their children, the extended family that included all the descendants of Guan's ancestor who originally purchased this property, or the entire Cheng lineage of Yanxia. In addition, as discussed earlier, in the context of a lineage-settlement as Yanxia, family ownership, when the boundary of the *family* extends to include the Cheng lineage of Yanxia, was almost equal to collective ownership by all residents of Yanxia. Therefore, this statement – “this is our family's bamboo” – could be interpreted in two ways: The Cheng lineage in Yanxia legally owns the property or Guan and his family have the use right to the property. In the first case, Guan interchanged



*Figure 4.23* “This is our family’s bamboo.” Photo by Mr. Cheng Guan.

family ownership and collective ownership. For the second interpretation, Guan considered the use right as a form of ownership. In both examples, Guan’s unwillingness or inability to identify the ownership of the property was probably due to the interweaving between the multiple meanings of the concept of family and the complicated historic and present ownership. Nevertheless, by including this property as a meaningful aspect of his home, and mixing the verb tense and personal pronoun of the ownership, Guan presented a clear claimed ownership to this entire area his ancestors used to own, regardless of its past divided ownerships between his extended family members or its present collective ownership shared by all the residents of Yanxia.

#### *Summary on endowed and claimed ownership*

Regardless of whether it was personal or collective ownership or whether it was endowed or claimed ownership, residents expressed that a sense of ownership was essential to constructing the meaning of home. Mr. Cheng Jiang (50), a middle-aged man, quoted an old Chinese saying to summarize his attachment to his home, “neither a golden nest nor a silver nest is as good as my own muddy nest.” Having a different life experience and a different understanding of home, as well as different attitudes towards historic buildings and family history, Mr. Hu Shen (23), a newly wedded young

man, also concurred with this relationship between ownership and home. He said,

it is hard to say which style of housing is better, which style of housing is worse. The best is the one that belongs to you! It is like setting off fireworks. You always think other families' fireworks are too noisy, but you never think your own fireworks are too noisy.

Therefore, residents can not recognize a place as home if they do not feel the sense of ownership. In other words, the meaning of home can go beyond the boundary of the homestead and extend to include the places about which they feel a sense of ownership.

### **Building individual and collective identities**

The place-bound relationship facilitated the building of individual and collective identities for the residents living in Yanxia. It is important to note that, in social groups that approached the collectivistic pole of the continuum between collectivistic and individualistic societies, such as the lineage-based settlement of Yanxia, individual identity and collective identity are deeply intertwined. As a result, people often use the communal houses, instead of their own residential spaces, as objects of status display (Duncan 1985, 134–135).

In the case of Yanxia, residents' relationships with communal houses such as Degengju and ancestral halls are discussed in Chapter 5. This section examines how residents' relationships with a significant landscape, as an aspect of place-bound relationship, often helped to construct individual identity. However, this individual identity was not used to identify an individual as a unique person different from the neighbor next door; rather it was a self-recognition, the sense of "who I am." Therefore, this self-recognition, when found in other residents who had similar relationships with the same significant landscape, contributed to building a collective identity. In addition, the place-bound relationship itself, as a form of tradition shared by residents of Yanxia, also helped construct individual and collective identities.

#### *Identities associated with the significant landscape*

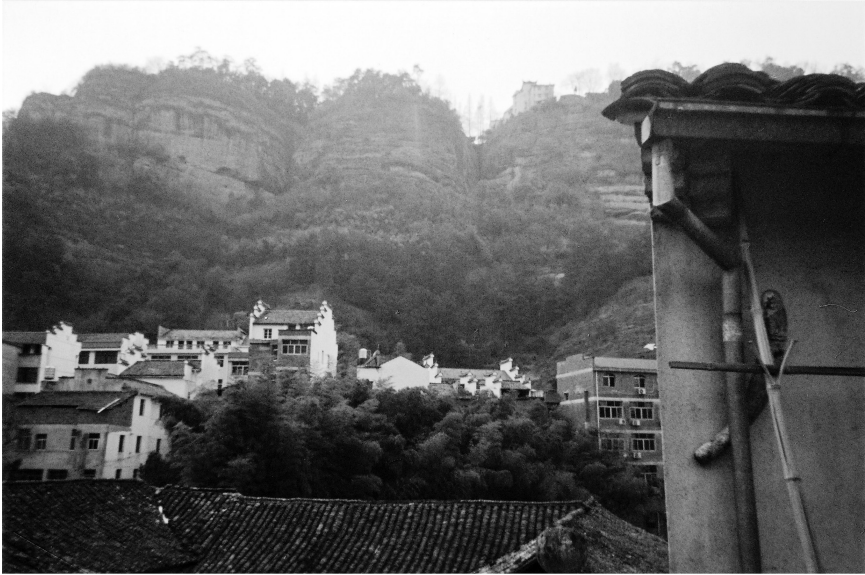
One form of identity was closely associated with the significant landscape, particularly the mountains and hills that spatially define the valley in which Yanxia is located. The most significant landscape is Fangyan Mountain because of its size and appearance, as well as its associations with the name of the village and the folk deity, *Hugong Dadi*, who has been enshrined on the top of the mountain for over 900 years. More importantly, since almost every family in Yanxia participated in some types of economic activities that

serve the pilgrims of *Hugong Dadi*, Fangyan Mountain became the signifier of the folk deity that had supported residents' daily lives. As Ms. Cheng Hang (19) concluded, "Fangyan Mountain represents *Hugong Dadi*." Because of this attachment to Fangyan Mountain, residents in Yanxia referred to themselves as "People of Fangyan."

Having such a significant meaning to local residents, Fangyan, as a noteworthy landscape, became an important element in constructing local identities. When being asked what *jia* (means home in this context) is, Mr. Cheng Guan (72) and Ms. Shi Ying (62) answered, "Fangyan is my *home*!" This suggests that both of them considered the word "Fangyan" the synonym of the place in which they were living, and Fangyan Mountain represented their home environment. When photographing the meaningful aspects of their homes, nine of the 20 residents who participated in the photo-taking phase of the project included Fangyan Mountain. Most of the residents who had been living underneath Fangyan Mountain for their entire lives had difficulty articulating the reasons for including Fangyan Mountain in their photos, other than that it was always there when they looked up (Figure 4.24). Ms. Cheng Hang, a young woman that had spent some time living outside Yanxia, revealed that her reason for photographing Fangyan Mountain was, "because this is the most important Fangyan Mountain, of course I have to photograph it!" She added, "if there are friends from elsewhere who come to visit my home, I will first take them to Fangyan, then to Wufeng Mountain, then to stay at my house. In the evening, we will come to the roof top." It was from this very roof top that she photographed the view of Fangyan Mountain (Figure 4.24). This rooftop was also the place where she came to pray to *Hugong Dadi* when she did not have the time to visit the temple on the top of Fangyan Mountain. In another case, Mr. Cheng Xiu (50) revealed that his son, who was currently studying in the United States, claimed that he was from Fangyan and often took friends to visit Fangyan Mountain and the historic pilgrim path in Yanxia, even though he only spent some time here when he was young and visiting his grandparents in the summer. Thus, Fangyan Mountain was not only an indispensable part of the daily lives of the residents of Yanxia, but also a natural feature and cultural icon that facilitated the building of the identity of the local people (Figure 4.25).

In a similar, yet more modest way, Shizi Mountain also helped certain residents build an additional layer of meaning into their identities. As Ms. Yu Po (72) stated, "I am someone who is living underneath Shizi Mountain! I live along the foot of Fangyan Mountain and underneath Shizi Mountain." The other two residents that lived underneath Shizi Mountain, Ms. Luo Yan (63) and Mr. Hu Shen (23), also included Shizi Mountain as a meaningful aspect of their homes, and they photographed it from the positions where they viewed Shizi Mountain on a daily basis. Yan and Po, two senior women who spent lots of time working in their private plots, photographed Shizi Mountain from their vegetable gardens (Figure 4.26). Shen, a young





*Figure 4.24* Fangyan Mountain. Top: Mr. Cheng Gao photographed Fangyan Mountain near his house. Bottom: Ms. Cheng Hang photographed Fangyan Mountain from the roof of her family's house.



*Figure 4.25* The entrance of Fangyan Mountain. Photo by Mr. Cheng Feng. Having his store at the entrance of Fangyan Mountain, Mr. Cheng Feng took three photographs of the entrance, representing Fangyan Mountain.

man who was currently living in the new-style housing along the foot of Shizi Mountain, photographed Shizi Mountain from his balcony (Figure 4.26). He said,

This mountain... my family has been revolving our lives around this mountain since I was little. When I was young, my father went to the mountain to collect firewood. We also went up and played, picked wild vegetables and wild fruits, and flew kites.

While Shen was talking about his attachment to the mountain, his grandmother, Po, interrupted and re-accentuated the same statement she told me months earlier, “we are the people who are living underneath Shizi Mountain!” Thus, not only did Shizi Mountain provide natural resources for the residents living nearby, but the symbolic meaning of Shizi (Lion), a mascot in Chinese culture, also contributed to these residents’ sense of identity.

### *Place-bound identity*

Besides the identity associated with the significant landscape, the place-bound relationship itself also helped construct the individual and collective





*Figure 4.26* Shizi Mountain. Top: Mr. Hu Shen photographed Shizi Mountain from his balcony. Bottom: Ms. Luo Yan photographed Shizi Mountain from her private plot.

identities for the people living in Yanxia. Influenced by the place-bound relationship, many residents identified themselves as people who were deeply attached to the land on which they had been living and who were different from the city dwellers that lived a different lifestyle. This place-bound identity was well summarized by Mr. Cheng Kang (75) as the following:

At our place here, we have the mountains, have the water, have the land, and I have my private plot. If I move down there, won't I then become a city dweller, who can only eat? The water from the mountains is very good, and it is free. There are not even any ponds down there. How could I wash my clothes? How could I live my life? And they say that it will be better than my present life?

Kang's comments reveal four key points. First of all, he felt a strong place-bound relationship to his place, Yanxia, which provided fundamental resources for living, such as water and firewood, land to grow grains and vegetables, and ponds to do laundry. Secondly, this place-bound relationship was how Kang identified himself, as well as other residents living in Yanxia and even the entire population living in rural China, as being different from city dwellers, who, in his view, were detached from the land and raw materials and could only enjoy finished and final products. In addition, Kang did not want to lose his identity and live like a city dweller where the living environment required what he considered a fundamentally different lifestyle. Lastly, the "better" lifestyle defined by the local government officials and professionally trained planners and architects was quite different from the desired lifestyle, the *xiangtu* lifestyle, described by Kang. In other words, Kang did not yet accept the new identity associated with the lifestyle of city dwellers or acknowledge its compatibility with who he was.

This place-bound identity was not only prevalent among senior residents who had been living in Yanxia for their entire lives and who had rarely experienced city life, but was also embedded in the minds of younger generations, who saw this identity as their roots, their possible future, and even their destiny. For example, Ms. Cheng Ling (43), a middle-aged woman who worked in the city every day, did not have the time to attend to the land, but received vegetables from her mother-in-law, who cultivated the private plot. Even though Ling had never grown vegetables herself, she was very confident that "it is very easy to grow vegetables, no need to learn." Her confidence was likely because she had been observing people doing that while growing up. In addition, she also dreamed that "when I get older I will grow some vegetables and play poker, how nice that will be!" In another case, Mr. Cheng Jiang (50), a middle-aged man, also had a full-time job and did not have time to attend to the land. However, he still felt strongly about the collective ownership of the farmland, the mountains, and the water; his reason was: "even though I don't cultivate the land right now, I don't know what will happen in the future." For Ms. Li Ai (26), a young musician living



*Figure 4.27* The ideal country life, viewed by Ms. Li Ai. Photo by Ms. Li Ai.

in the city, even though she asserted that she would never work in the mud with her own hands, she still believed that the lifestyle of her grandmother represented the most idealistic rural life, which consisted of an old house, a vegetable garden, and a well (Figure 4.27).<sup>5</sup>

## **Conclusion**

People's attachment to the land, or the place-bound relationship, played a critical role in framing the meaning of home as it was understood by the

residents of Yanxia. This place-bound relationship was revealed through the photographs taken by residents when they were asked to photograph aspects of their *jia* that was meaningful to them. All 20 residents who participated in the photo-taking phase of the project included certain aspects of farmland, water sources, public open spaces, and the significant landscapes that were located outside their homesteads. In addition, 14 out of 16 residents who only participated in the interviews also discussed their personal experiences, relationships, and attachments to these various forms of the land, both in the past and in the present. These experiences, relationships, attachments, and memories formed a set of traditions that represented residents' identities and social values.

This place-bound relationship affected the meaning of home understood by the residents of Yanxia from four interconnected perspectives. First, the foundation of this place-bound relationship was that the land provided fundamental resources for living that sustained the *xiangtu* lifestyle. In addition, this *place*-bound relationship attached residents to open and semi-open public places within the vernacular settlement, which supported daily activities, social relations, and cultural performances. In other words, the land became additional places for everyday lives, which were lacking inside the traditional residential space in Yanxia. As a result, residents' understanding of home extended beyond the boundary of the homestead and included the types of the land they felt attached to, which became an important supplement and a meaningful aspect of their homes. Moreover, the endowed and claimed ownership of the land that was acquired through place-bound relationship further supported and secured residents' understanding of home, especially for the parts of home that existed beyond the boundary of the homestead. A place could become part of home only when the residents acquired the sense of ownership. Finally, the place-bound relationship facilitated the building of individual and collective identities, which distilled the meaning of home to an abstract level that could be signified by cultural icons, lifestyles, roots, destiny, and ideas.

Although this place-bound relationship was prevalent among most participants (34 out of 36), individuals did reveal different kinds and various degrees of place-bound relationships, as well as different kinds of attachments to various forms of the land. These discrepancies were not only the result of the differences in personal experiences, family history, and current lifestyle, but were also affected by the location of the residential space in relation to the public open places. On the one hand, certain factors greatly contributed to building the place-bound relationship. First, individuals who acquired more living resources from the land tended to have deeper attachments to the land, such as Ms. Cheng Jv (77), Ms. Yu Po (72), Ms. Lv Po (61), Mr. Cheng Bao (70), and Mr. Cheng Xiong (73). Secondly, residents who lived closer to the shared public places, or in the older section of the village, were prone to develop a stronger place-bound relationship, including Mr. Cheng Fa (79), Mr. Cheng Sheng (67), Mr.



Figure 4.28 Mapping the photographs taken by Mr. Cheng Bao. The darker point of each triangle indicates Bao's standing point when he took the photograph, while the wider end of the triangle represents the direction of shooting and the depth of field. The numbers indicate the order of the photographs taken by Bao. Drawing by the author.

Cheng Bao (70), Mr. Cheng Xiong (73), Ms. Cheng Ling (43), and Mr. Cheng Quan (40). In addition, family history played a critical role in forming a certain kind of claimed *ownership*, such as in the case of Mr. Cheng Guan (72). Finally, the adjacency to certain features of the landscape contributed to building individual identity for some residents, such as in the case of Ms. Luo Yan (63), Ms. Yu Po (72), and Mr. Hu Shen (23). On the other hand, certain factors did not affect this place-bound relationship. Gender differences did not appear to be significant. Even though senior people were prone to having stronger attachments to the land, age itself was not a factor, but rather personal experience and current lifestyle contributed substantially to this place-bound relationship. The types of dwellings, whether traditional houses or new style houses, did not influence the place-bound relationship independently; it was the relationship between the dwellings and the surrounding landscape, the proximity to the public open places, and whether the residents could develop a sense of ownership that did matter.





*Figure 4.29* All 27 photos taken by Mr. Cheng Bao. 1. Degengju. 2. Degengju. 3. Degengju. 4. Courtyard. 5. Kitchen. 6. Courtyard. 7. Pilgrimage path. 8. Stove. 9. Inside Degengju. 10. Mother's bedroom in the past. 11. Granddaughter. 12. Family Record. 13. Single-wheel cart. 14. Single-wheel cart that he used to bring food home from the market. 15. A neighbor preparing food for the Chinese New Year. 16. Qian Pond (in front of Degengju). 17. Neighbor's grinder that he used to make tofu. 18. Neighbor's tree that has healing power. 19. Chinese New Year family dinner. 20. Dragon Dance. 21. Chinese calligraphy completed by his granddaughter. 22. Mother's dowry. 23. Fangyan Mountain and Nanyan Mountain. 24. Fangyan Mountain and Guangci Temple. 25. Decorative wooden panel in the house. 26. Television tower (the first one in the region). 27. Snow over Qian Pond.

Overall, for the residents who participated in the photo-taking phase of the study, the large number of photographs taken outside the boundary of their homesteads and focusing on the land was usually associated with deep and broad attachments to the land. For example, as someone who expressed strong attachment to the land, Mr. Cheng Bao (70) took 16 photographs (out of 26) outside the boundary of his homestead and focused on historic buildings and landscape, as well as cultural and social activities (Figure 4.28 and Figure 4.29).

## Notes

- 1 *Shuowen Jiezi* means explaining and analyzing characters. The original text that explains the character *tu* in *Shuowen Jiezi* is: 土，地之吐生物者也。二象地之下、地之中，丨，物出形也。凡土之属皆从土。
- 2 According to Ms. Luo Yan, Ms. Gao Qiao, and Ms. Cheng Li, after being sprayed for pesticides, vegetables need to stay in the fields for another seven days for the pesticide to become harmless to human beings, but commercial farmers might sell these vegetables earlier for higher profits.
- 3 Most families only paid one yuan (\$0.16) for water every month to cover water usage up to a certain amount. The families that ran hospitality businesses used large quantities of water and paid additional fees according to meter readings.
- 4 Historic family ownership of property before 1949 was a *complete* ownership that included legally defined ownership, use rights, and the rights of ultimate disposition, see Chapter 1.
- 5 See Chapter 7 for more discussions on Ms. Ai and other residents' interpretations of ideal rural life.

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