Village Spatial Order and
Its Transformations in an Anhui Village+

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Abstract

Rural space in China has undergone profound reconfiguration and reconstruction since the reform era began in 1978. The latest round of change was initiated in 2006 when the central government launched a new policy known as "Building a New Socialist Countryside". This paper deals with the "spatialization of government" in Xiaogang, which is reputedly the first in China to decollectivize and commence agricultural reform in 1978. Based on the village experience, this paper analyzes two types of rural space and delineates the logic behind their transformation over the past two decades. The paper argues that while spatial transformation underpins many significant changes in rural social, economic and political structures, new forms of space continue to bolster collectivized rather than individualized forms of subjectivity.

Keywords: *space, governmentality, rural China*

JEL classification: *O18, P21, P32, R12*

1. Introduction: Space and Social Formations

At the turn of the last millennium, the leaders of Xiaogang decided to move from their old location and relocate to a new site approximately two miles away from the original location. At the time of my sojourn there in 2008, the whole rebuilding project was almost finished. My informants detailed the three reasons behind the move from the original location. Firstly, the old location had become very crowded due to having been irregularly planned. Secondly, the village was built on arable land, and the Chinese state was concerned about land shortage problems. The village cadres' long discussions with the villagers convinced the latter that moving to a new open area would not only increase the amount of arable land but would improve their living conditions

enormously. Finally, the old village rested on low-lying land. This meant that the villagers were at risk of contracting a serious parasitic disease called "snail fever", and diarrhoea as well. One third of the village children suffered from parasitic intestinal roundworms. Taken together, these factors posed a serious threat to the Xiaogang villagers' lives. Village cadres offered three incentives to encourage villagers to move from the old site to the new area. The village had a small kiln factory producing clay tiles: the cadres promised to offer a highly discounted price for tiles for the newly-built houses. Twenty eight households, attracted by this encouragement, moved immediately. The cadres gave 100 yuan for every newly-built room in the new location, thus combining encouragement with financial support. This material aid came from the local township, which also supported the villagers' relocation. As well, the cadres built two wells and other infrastructure, including, for example, the main road system in the new area, thereby solving the problems of drinking water and transport.

Why were the local cadres and villagers so enthusiastic about the relocation? Where did the financial support come from? Was the move related to a larger context? My primary interest in this case study of Xiaogang village's relocation is that it echoes the recent macro-space transformations in rural China. In this paper, focus is upon the spatial order of the "Building New Countryside" project (*Xin Nongcun Jianshe* 新农村建设, hereafter XNJ). The key question I am going to explore is: How was space (re)designed in a particular way to govern or manage the village? This paper will also pose the following questions: How much of a coincidence was it that the XNJ, a top-down project, promoted this relocation and that the villagers not only voluntarily joined this comprehensive project but also reorganized their location? Were there any problems associated with relocation? If so, what were they and how were they solved? What do the local villagers think about this central government project? What are their expectations of the local building plan? The inextricable link between space and power will be the focus of this paper, namely, how rural spatial order is shaped by and in turn shapes power relations and local governance.

In his study of Xiajia village in Heilongjiang, Yan Yunxiang argues that the changes of rural domestic spatial order that occurred from Mao to post-Mao times "reflect a growing sense of entitlement to individual rights in private life" (Yan, 2003: 139). This paper argues that while spatial transformation underpins many significant changes in rural social, economic and political structures, new forms of space continue to bolster collectivized rather than individualized forms of subjectivity. Needless to say, there is no clear-cut line between the privatization and collectivization of rural spatial change. In this paper, I emphasize the collective subjectivity that the process of spatialization has brought about.

As a micro-space case study, the main body of this paper is composed of three sections: village space and its relocation, village public space and domestic/family space, of which the domestic space has shown the most change as a result of Xiaogang's relocation. Suffice to say that today there is a common quest for privacy and individuality, for, as Yan argues in his book *Private Life under Socialism*, newly-modelled houses and the reconfiguration of domestic space have greatly restructured family relations and gender difference. However, during my fieldwork, I found that a collectivized form of subjectivity still persists and that this collective family identity can also be testified to in village public spaces.

2. The Master Plan

In 2007, the village was designated as a "Model Village" for the XNJ. The local authorities were impressed by the new "Master Plan" proposed by the village leaders. The Master Plan was initiated by the village cadres to win the Model Village competition. Being awarded this recognition would allow the local township to prioritize its development and resource support. During the planning process, the cadres consulted with recognized professionals by deliberately designing the village according to the guidelines of the relevant governmental planning regulations and laws, and in so doing they were eligible for both financial and ideological support. In line with the Master Plan, the village leadership planned to build new asphalt roads (a total of 1.2 km), public lavatories, channel canals and sluices, and to dismantle dilapidated houses. Further, the village decided to build a new drainage and sewage system which would link Xiaogang's reservoirs and major rivers with the country's farmlands, a methane supply system,[1] and a rubbish collection centre. A decision was taken to install new traffic lights as well. On paper at least, the cadres claimed that they would spare no efforts in investing in and supporting infrastructure proposals and plans. They were determined to rebuild the village space and design a nearly brand-new built environment.

This Master Plan, however, was neither unique nor unprecedented. It was a long-term development plan (*guihua* 规划) related to the village image (*mianmao* 面貌). I should emphasize here that in 2008, the "PRC Urban Planning Law" (1990) was replaced by the "PRC Urban and Rural Planning Law", Article 18 of which clearly indicates that:

> Village planning should be geared to the local rural specific situations, respect the villagers' own wishes and manifest the local character. The plan should cover areas like construction scale, housing, roads, water supply, drainage, electricity supply, garbage collection, poultry-raising, public facilities and public services.

Xiaogang's Master Plan was accordingly divided into five sections: the present village layout and its problems; the design guidelines; the design details; the immediate priorities; and, suggestions.[2] It involved the whole 119, 200 square metres of land and all of the villagers. This plan was not just paying lip service to the new circumstances. Xiaogang village planning was a reflection of the strategic national project to transform rural spatial order.

3. Village Space and Its Relocation

According to the then Chinese premier Wen Jiabao, the XNJ should not be interpreted as simply building villages in the literal sense (cited in *People's Daily Online*, 2006a). Rather, the face, appearance and images are also significant dimensions of rebuilding the countryside. What is the typical *old* village? One former cadre from Xiaogang village observed in 2008:

> In old times, building a house needed to avoid a lot of taboos and customary restrictions. Generally, we had five restrictions, namely water, wood, earth, road and fire. This meant we never built a house facing water (rivers), woods (the crossbeams could not be constructed in the opposite direction of the trees and forests), earth (the corner of another house), roads and fires (e.g., chimneys, kilns). The perfect rule of relations between houses was the Azure Dragon of the East in the left, and the White Tiger of the West in the right, which preferred that the left of a house is gradually higher than the right. What is more, we did not build three shapes of houses; that is, houses shaped like a white blade (which means to cut, *qie* 切), like a rake (which means to push, *tui* 推), like an axle (meaning to shake, *yao* 摇). In those cases, it would spell misfortune, unintended danger and unhappiness. The ideal position of a house was with ponds in the front and mountains at the back. (Wang Xinping, interview, 21st October 2008)

The logic behind traditional village space links with the extant under-standings of localized tradition relating to geomancy and Confucian and Daoist philosophy. The two key logics, according to my interviewees, are "village harmony" and "familial hierarchy": the former can only be achieved by reinforcing the latter. The size, direction and decoration should not oppose the natural order (L, interview, 22nd October 2008). As Ruf (1998: 15) notes, traditional house-building was trying to symbolize a "unity of large, extended patrilineal families", several generations living under the same roof, and the notion that a harmonious family produces prosperity and fortune (*jia he wanshi xing* 家和万事兴).
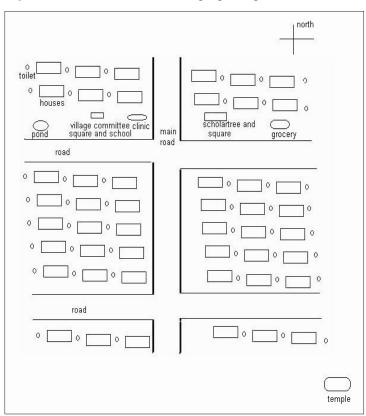
The recent changes in house-building have not neglected these rural architectural customs, as one can see from Figure 1. Before focusing in detail on how these changes have been undertaken in recent years, I shall first divide the rural space into two types: public and domestic. I shall then analyze their

Figure 1 The Master Plan for Xiaogang Village[4]

manifestations and changes. This categorization is based on my understanding that in a given village such as Xiaogang, the two most important spatial formations are the public and the domestic. Villagers' practice within these spaces reflects their own understanding of what type of spatiality they respond to, are attached to and prefer.

Generally speaking, the design of rural space is concerned (a) with the location, layout and decoration of a house, and (b) with its relations with other houses in the village. The new Xiaogang is a "cluster village"[3] located around a central road which splits the village into two (see Figure 1). The village extends from east to west and there are two auxiliary roads going through north and south. Each house is separated by two metres from the next and occupies an estimated six *zhang* 丈 (approximately twenty metres) from left to right. This type of design aims to facilitate the governance of village space, thus increasing the legibility (Scott, 1998: 30) of governing. By mapping out a clearly spatialized place, the new village is designed to cater to the new

rationale of governance, under which power is carried out in a more capillary way. As Friedman, Pickowicz and Selden note: "Straight lines and squares seemed efficient, modern, socialist" (Friedman *et al*., 1991: 193).

The village relocation and new design were launched by the central government in February 2006 as part of a major XNJ campaign. The key aims of this national programme were to restructure the Chinese countryside politically, socially, culturally as well as spatially, with the slogan "advanced production (*shengchan fazhan* 生产发展), improved livelihood (*shenghuo kuanyu* 生活宽裕), civilized social atmosphere (*xiangfeng wenming* 乡风文明), clean and tidy villages (*cunrong zhengjie* 村容整洁) and democratic management" (*guanli minzhu* 管理民主).[5] While this type of government policy was not new in the history of Chinese society, the scale and scope of this particular project was unprecedented and more in-depth compared to projects such as Tao Xingzhi's China Education Improvement Association Programme (1927) and the Countryside Reform Association Programme (1932), Yan Yangchu's "Civilians' Education" Programme in Hebei (1924-1936), Liang Shuming's "Countryside Construction" Programme in Shandong (1931), and the CCP's Cooperative Movement in the Yan'an era (1935-1948) (Liang, 2006; Selden, 1995; Luo *et al*., 2008: 1-6). These villagization (Scott, 1998: 235)[6] projects demonstrate that reform of the rural areas has been a long-standing phenomenon in Chinese history, predating the foundation of the People's Republic in 1949. Nonetheless, these abovementioned regional and national projects exerted little influence over Xiaogang village. This does not mean that there were no spatial changes in Xiaogang but rather that there is a trajectory along which Xiaogang space has been transformed.

The traditional Xiaogang village, according to my interviewees, was built in the Republican Era in the 1920s. The ancestral hall played a central role in village space as both intra- and extra-familial relations were built around common surnames. As Hsu argues, the ancestral hall, as an other-worldly residence, clearly shows the villagers' "complete submission to ancestral authorities, on the one hand, and their struggle for and recognition of individual and family superiority on the other" (Hsu, 1948: 55). However, the Land Reform enacted in the early 1950s completely destroyed this social system. The landlords were suppressed and replaced by the "Poor and Middle Peasants" (cf. Ruf, 1998: 84). In terms of village space, in the past most resources were spent on production rather than on consumption. Thus, there has been little change in village space. In September 1958, the Chinese Ministry of Agriculture ordered all of the provinces to launch a "comprehensive programme in all Communes" (Luo *et al*., 2008: 3). The central slogan was "militarization of organizations (*zuzhi junshihua* 组织军事化), militant actions (*xingdong zhandouhua* 行动战斗化), and collectivization of lives (*shenghuo jitihua* 生活集体化)". In line with this policy, Xiaogang

did not permit any kitchens to be built in the new houses. Villagers were required to eat in the common dining hall instead of in private residences. Post-1963, when the central government reconfirmed the significance of agriculture, some new concrete houses were built. In 1964, however, Mao Zedong called for all Chinese villagers to "learn from Dazhai Village", a call signalling a Pyrrhic victory of state mobilization and the loss of village house-building. As Thaxton (2008: 302) observes, the villagization "disordered the normal architectural pattern of the household". From then on, Xiaogang devoted all of its resources to agriculture: any houses built were stigmatized as "decadent nests of the bourgeoisie" (*zichanjieji de anlewo* 资产阶级的安乐窝). As one old villager commented to me: "Everything was collectivized. Building your own house could only jeopardize your life".

The contemporary "new socialist countryside" movement, one of the primary objectives of China's 11th Five-Year Plan (2006-2010), operated in a strikingly different context. The project clearly stated: "XNJ is a major historic mission in China's modernization processes".[7] It aimed to improve rural people's living standards, narrow the income gap between rural and urban populations,[8] expand the domestic demand for consumption, and, more importantly, to echo the construction of a harmonious society (*hexie shehui* 和谐社会), a social developmental goal, advocated by the then CCP General Secretary Hu Jintao, to be achieved by 2020.

This scenario gave full expression to the requirement for rural economic, political, cultural and social development in the new circumstances in which the central authorities redirected attention and resources to deal with the growing gap between town and country and to the general policy neglect in rural areas. Currently efforts and funds are being channelled nationwide into installing rural water conservancy facilities, building roads, expanding the use of clean fuel such as methane and solar energy, building rural power networks, and improving rural education, health care and hygiene systems. As Hu Jintao stated in 2007: "We should shift our focus to infrastructure construction and social development in the rural areas and take further steps to tackle the problems arising for agriculture, farmers and the countryside."[9]

It is in this context that the new village of Xiaogang was designed according to the consistent standards and requirements of the village Master Plan. All of the houses face southwest and occupy the same acreage. Toilets are located outside eastern corner when the houses are built in the east, and outside the western corner when the houses are built in the west.[10] However, the process of building has not been without controversy and conflict. Tang Zengying, a local female villager, wanted to align her house to face directly south[11] rather than southwest. Her request was rejected immediately not only by the cadres but by her fellow villagers as well. The reason was simple; refusing to be standardized interfered with the whole image of the village. For

this reason, Tang's proposal met with strong public opposition. In the end, she had little option but to obey.

Zhao Houyou, a builder who also objected to the new arrangement, had already paved a house base in the old place before the whole village decided to move to the new area. The village cadres tried to persuade him to relocate by all means but to no avail. Zhao asked for additional compensation for the already built base. The village had limited financial support and could only provide him with the regulated subsidy. By criticizing his house as damaging too much arable land, the village put him under considerable pressure. Since arable land protection is a basic national policy, Zhao had obviously violated this policy, and he finally relented.

It must be remembered that this newly built village is still influenced by the legacy of the Maoist era. While power has not receded, the ways in which it is carried out have changed. This is evidence of the emergence of a new form of governance via internalization and interiorization. However, the location and acreage of the new village, decisions *vis-à-vis* financial support and the differentiated reward system have combined to cultivate a collectivized version of subjectivity, showing that sovereign power[12] is still influential. By the time of writing this paper, there were no villagers located in the old location. While this cannot be exclusively attributed to the influence of sovereign power, the existence of coercion and the use of political power are clearly demonstrated. The simple fact was that some residents did not want to move out or build their new houses according to the Master Plan.

However, this government-induced Master Plan, with its intention to re-form the traditional knowledge production of built environment, demonstrates that state power remains manifest in the ongoing spatial remaking of the village built environment. In the meantime, a collectivized form of subjectivity emerges in the production of village space. In the remainder of this paper, I shall examine this new form of subjectivity.

4. Public Space and the Grandfather Scholartree

In contemporary rural areas of China, there is no civil society organized in a Western sense.[13] However, public space does exist. In recent decades, this type of space has been steadily and systematically developed. Chinese academia has not only paid attention to the rural tea house (Dai, 2005), to rural civic organizations and their relations with rural self-governance (Wang *et al.*, 2004), rural public space and social control (He, 2008), institutional public (i.e., village committees) and non-institutional public space (temple festivals, local markets and a variety of popular lunar festivals) (Li and Zhao, 2007), but has also addressed the issue of the rural Habermasian public sphere (Zhu, 2005). Most academic articles deal with the social destruction that marked

the decollectivization era, the current rural social atomization, the political vacuum in the aftermath of the Reform and Opening-up, and the urgency of restoring public space. The state-centred framework is still the dominant analytical tool. Wu (2008) categorized the rural public into two spatial forms: the first is structured upon social units and is endogenous and intrinsic; the second is structured upon state authority, which is exogenous and external. In doing so, he urged the reinforcement of the government's role in rural public space. But, by locating the (trans)formations of rural public space in this dichotomy, he devalued or underestimated the heterogeneity of the rural spatial order. I shall analyze two Xiaogang village public spaces and avoid the above reductionist argument.

The natural village, as the most basic social unit in the countryside, has varied social connections and personal communications. When these connections and personal communications have become public and settled, a public space is formed. When the place wherein these connections and personal communications happen is set in the form of buildings, a constructed public space is formed. I found two different public spaces in Xiaogang in terms of social formation.

The old Villagers' Committee office was located in the northwest of the village, a location higher than the other areas of the village. Thus, it was apparent that the Committee wanted to watch over the whole village spatially. From the 1950s to the 1970s, the period of the People's Commune, the Committee office was the place where villagers assembled. It was full of political implications for this was not only the place where villagers gathered to communicate with each other, it was also a place for propagating national policy. It was thus a place with clear political characteristics (Mao, 2000: 143). The new Villagers' Committee building is two-storied. In front of it is a square, a little larger in size than the scholartree square which is in the northeast. The entrance to the Committee building is at the east of the square. Entering through the gate, and walking up the steep cement steps, one sees the Committee office, which is spacious and accommodates some 40 people. Access to the roof is through the side door. Looking down on the square, one is reminded of scenes of political gatherings in the Maoist era, e.g., a miniature Tian'anmen Square.

The new Committee office marks the centre of the village, from both the perspective of scale and the position of the buildings located in the village. This suggests a manifestation of sovereign power.[14] However, the facts are quite different, for although the square outside the committee building is broad, it attracts few villagers. The pond near the square, which invariably has little water in it, has been transformed into a trash receptacle. A few villagers frequently visit a clinic and store located nearby, but people linger here for a short time only. As regards the other areas in the square, they are used for

transportation and stacking items; they are not being fully utilized as public space. The gate of the committee building is always closed: this building is only used as a place to receive guests from the upper levels. Even when it is open, villagers tend to ignore it, as if it has nothing to do with them.

The square's surface is built with bricks, which makes it different from its surroundings. It is separated from a primary school standing opposite by a wall. Around the square, there are a grocery store and a clinic. Thus it appears the facilities are well equipped. The Committee building is usually closed, signalling that it is a spatially politicized place. The square and the Committee building are two integral parts of the official space. However, it gives people little sense of homeliness and neighbourliness.

The People's Commune was based on a publicly owned system in which the administrative Villagers' Committee had the dual function of managing agricultural production and administrating the village (Mao, 2000: 145-147). Hence, it was not only the administrative centre but a place for large-scale gatherings, one that played an important role in commanding the whole village. With the implementation of the Household Responsibility System in 1981, production and administrative organizations were separated in the villages, rendering the household the village's basic production unit. At the same time, the function of the Committee was weakened, as were the functions of the square and the Committee building. As may be seen from this, specific places have their own specific purposes in a particular period of time. With the disappearance of said specific purposes, their influence has subsequently diminished. In the case of the Committee space, it was transformed into a space which had less impact on the villagers' daily lives.

In contrast, in the northeast, I found another public space under the "scholartree", a space for villagers' daily communication, leisure and gossip. Villagers frequently gather under the tree, which is said to be more than 300 years old. For this reason, it is respectfully addressed as the "Grandfather Scholartree". People make an offering niche for the purpose of paying their respects to it. Concomitant with the development of the economy, villagers built a square around the tree. The square is located at the intersection of two streets. Around the tree, people have positioned three rows of stone benches in the form of an "L". As a result, the form of the square is circled. Villagers often gather here with many lingering for long periods of time. According to my observations in the summer of 2007, villagers gathered here from around 10:30 in the morning. The elders enjoyed the coolness, and women chatted with each other with their babies in their arms. At noon, it became more crowded: villagers often had their lunch here. Some left around 2:00 p.m., but gathered again at 4:00 p.m. until dinner time. Owing to the lack of lighting facilities in the square, villagers did not gather here after dark. During the day, they often sat in the shade of the tree, the branches of which extend into

the opposite street. Thus, the mental space of the square expands to a space where the villagers sit on stone seats in the opposite street. The unshaded area is less popular with the villagers. In sum, the area under the scholartree has been transformed by the villagers into a public space.

This analysis echoes the Foucauldian approach employed by MacKinnon (1997) and Murdock (2000) when researching rural Britain's local-central relations in the Scottish Highlands and the British Rural White Paper issued in 1995. MacKinnon (2000: 298) argues that "the local state has been restructured through the development of 'managerial' technologies designed to realize the objectives of neo-liberal programmes of government". He further argues that "managerial technologies" are designed to "promote local economic competitiveness through deregulation and the attraction of mobile investment" (MacKinnon, 2000: 305). Murdoch (1997: 115) contends that the British Rural White Paper shows "how the state now seeks to govern 'through communities'". The administration of rural space in China attests to their arguments. Local Chinese villagers retain their own right to self-govern and reinterpret state policy in the context of the XNJ. However, the contingencies and specificities of the Chinese case need more examination. Although the Villagers' Committee still represents the state, the latter no longer plays a particularly active role in the villagers' lives. This supports MacKinnon's argument that local village dwellers do not passively accept state administration. The deregulation of the village is articulated in the abovementioned invisible battle of the "Villagers' Committee versus the Grandfather Scholartree". The former has given way to the indigenous nature of the tree, reconfirming a tendency towards non-political voluntary gathering. In other words, by participating in the public space under this tree, the villagers are reclaiming their own sociality. Murdock's understanding that the issue of the British Rural White Paper signals "government through communities" can also be found in Xiaogang village, where the representative of the state, that is, the Village Committee, has gradually lost its former strong influence and mobilization power. By so arguing, I suggest that the retransformation of the Villagers' Committee space reflects a new form of governance in which Xiaogang villagers have more autonomy to organize and communicate. This argument, however, does not mean that there is a trend towards individualization, as I shall explain below.

5. Domestic/Family Space and Its Recent Remodeling

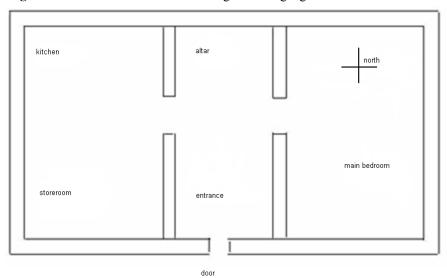The typical traditional house in Xiaogang faced the southwest and consisted of major rooms and wing rooms. The houses were usually surrounded by farm-land. Within the village, there were ponds, wells and other facilities essential to daily life as well as roads leading to far-off locales. The purpose of Figure

Figure 2 A Traditional Old House Design in Xiaogang

2 is to demonstrate, more specifically, the hierarchy of room distribution in traditional rural Chinese society. Usually, the eastern part houses the senior household members while the western and central parts are multi-functional (often as kitchens, hallways, animal pens or temporary storerooms). While it is oversimplifying to say that old Chinese houses had no space division, it is widely accepted that there was no clear demarcation between public and private spaces (David Bray, personal communication, 24th February 2009). Compared with British terrace houses, (semi-)detached houses, or bungalows, Chinese houses emphasize more an ethos of differential hierarchy (Fei, 1998). The house space allocation encodes the patriarchal Confucian order. Most of the houses in Xiaogang were built like this before the 1990s, a time when some families still lived poverty-stricken lives in old tumbledown thatched cottages with doors made of straw.

In this form of family space, individuality gives way to collectivity and familial hierarchy. The (re)production of collectivized family relationships in traditional houses has been examined in detail by both Francesca Bray (1997: 57-58) and David Bray (2005). For David Bray (2005: 28), "the most singular feature of traditional family space was the manner in which it demarcated difference within the Confucian family relationships." The spatial distance and the distribution of rooms are patriarchal, highly gendered and male-dominated, reflecting the ethos of Confucianism. The old village houses in Xiaogang support these demarcations.

However, I would like to add here that in this non-compound form of dwelling, invisibility is impossible, as Figure 2 indicates. This is the Chinese

version of a panopticon. In accordance with this type of design, everything is within the gaze of the family members. "The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately" (Foucault, 1979: 200). This is a machine which spares no one, producing a high degree of surveillance and disciplinary power. The local authorities in Xiaogang village attempted to draw a connection between the "political effectiveness of sovereign to a spatial distribution" (Foucault, 2007: 13-23).[15]

By the 1990s, according to figures released in 2007 by the Statistics Bureau of Anhui Province, per capita housing space for Anhui farmers increased to 34.8 square metres from 11.7 square metres in 1980. Amongst this, per capita housing space of brick, wood and reinforced concrete structures reached 34.26 square metres, which accounts for 88 per cent of the total housing space.[16] Likewise, in Xiaogang, houses underwent dramatic change as new houses sprang up at an almost competitive pace. My question is: were these new houses similar in style and architecture to the previous ones? A comparison between these two family spaces in two different periods is useful to any understanding of how "new forms jostle with the old, creating complex and contingent assemblages of space, power, meaning and identity" in China (David Bray, personal communication, 2nd February 2009).

The striking change concerns matters of individuality and privacy. That is, the increasing differentiation between public space and private space within the house. Habermas (1989: 44) claims that "[t]he privatization of life can be observed in a change in architectural style". The conclusion he reaches regarding the 17th-century British gentry also applies to Xiaogang village, which has seen a shrinking of public family life and, as a consequence, an increase in the "solitarization of the family members" (W.H. Riehl cited in Habermas, 1989: 45). And, as far as architectural style is concerned, today there is more specification of function between kitchen, bathroom, living room and storeroom.

Specifically, there are two models in the new Xiaogang village.[17] In Model A (a two-storied-house, see Figures 3, 4, 5 and 6), in relation to habitability, the main consideration is given to dividing clean and dirty places. The front yard, which faces the south, is mainly used for production and living, in the middle are rooms which are regular in size, and the backyard faces north. The building enjoys plenty of sunlight and good ventilation. In the summer it can be protected from the heat of the sun. For the division of functions, the public areas are divided into different sections. The doors and windows are made using new durable lightweight steel. The roof has an insulation layer made of clay and straw, the same with the walls. This layout is also designed for water-saving. Underground water is utilized, and rainwater is collected for flushing toilets, cleaning floors and irrigation. In addition, the local government promotes an environmentally friendly waste

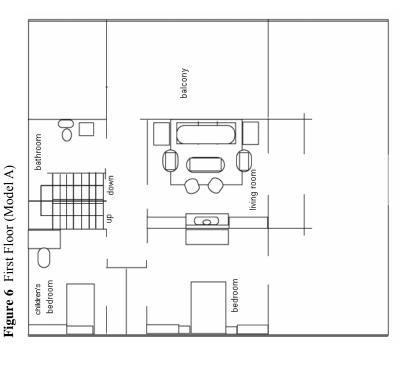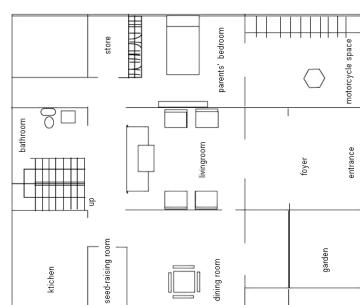**Figure 3** A House in the Building Process (2008)

Figure 4 A Local Town House (Two Skylights on Top)

Figure 6 First Floor (Model A)

Figure 5 Ground Floor (Model A)

disposal design; waste treatment is divided into three parts which is helpful for sewage systems. The local government also promotes land conservation; all of the buildings in both the front and back yards are square and regularly sized. Model A's basic size is 157 square metres: the internal size is 140 square metres. In the interest of material-saving, the construction components are used for their functional purpose, representing environmental suitability. The locals do not opt for decorative materials. Instead, cheap local construction materials are used, such as rubble, bluestone, moso bamboo, and straw.

In Model B (a three-storied house, see Figures 7, 8 and 9), this type of building caters to farmers' different lifestyles, the changes of farmers' lifestyles and household size. It accords with farmers' lifestyle well since it is
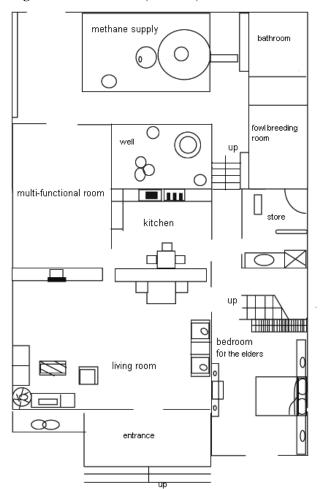
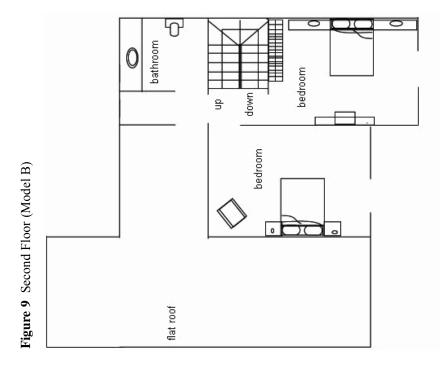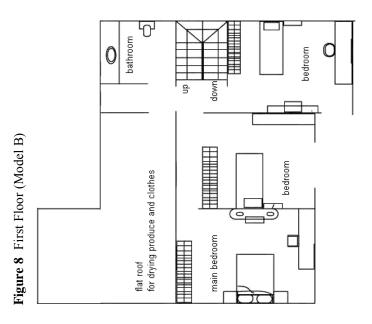**Figure 7** Ground Floor (Model B)

Figure 9 Second Floor (Model B)

bathroom

up

down

bedroom

bedroom

flat roof

Figure 8 First Floor (Model B)

bathroom

up

down

bedroom

flat roof
for drying produce and clothes

main bedroom

bedroom

practical, economic, collective, and simple in construction. It can be adapted for different purposes such as farming, sideline agriculture and business. It also has a clear zoning of functions. There are different places for both dynamic and quiet purposes, for clean and dirty usage, for living space for people and for livestock. All of the rooms enjoy ventilation and sunlight: the central room is spacious and bright. And in the interest of saving energy and protecting the environment, a three-part sewage toilet and solar energy are used. The whole size totals 178 square metres.

How do villagers use these domestic spaces? The basic function of a house represents only two activities for the villagers, that is, eating three times per day and sleeping at night (*ri tu san can*, *ye tu yi xiu* 日图三餐, 夜图一宿). Through interviews, I found that, although there has been an obvious change in functional divisions, little change is observable in the villagers' traditional lifestyles. Usually, not all of the rooms are used as most of the villagers worked outside the village and only come back during Chinese New Year or to celebrate other lunar festivals. Although they have built new houses, this does not mean that there would inevitably be some changes in lifestyle. I want to emphasize here that building this type of house is to a large degree a symbolic contribution to the current wave of spatial change. "You have to do it even if you cannot afford it. People will sneer at you if you still have a *pingfang* 平房 (one-storied house)," a local resident told me. In other words, having a new house is to a greater extent, as Chan, Madsen and Unger conclude (2009: 298-299), a "symbol of prestige".

According to the Chinese Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Construction in 2008, China has the largest construction market in the world. Its rural building area increases by one billion square metres each year, nearly half of the world's total. It is estimated that the construction industry will take up 40 per cent of the country's total energy consumption by 2020, becoming the world's largest energy user with an estimated 1.5 trillion *yuan* spent annually (*People's Daily Online*, 2008). In 2006, approximately 81.62 per cent of Chinese homes were privately owned. This is higher than the proportion in some developed countries, for example the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany, where the rates are below 70 per cent (*People's Daily Online*, 2006b).

What is the driving force behind these spatial changes and house remodelling? As Yan Yunxiang (2003: 123) notes: "Economic prosperity was certainly one reason villagers were able to improve their dwellings." But as Yan Yunxiang also notes, the spatial changes in his village "should be understood as part of the transformation of private life, which is characterized by the rise of youth autonomy, the decline of patriarchal power, and at a deeper level, the rising awareness of the individual" (Yan, 2003: 123-124). Suffice it to say that rural domestic changes have given way to

more individual freedom and autonomy. Yet, on the other side of this new phenomenon is another form of collectivized subjectivity. There was a high degree of competition for superiority behind this building boom. In addition, it must be kept in mind that one of the motivations for house-building is the villagers' fear of being labelled as lagging behind the architectural fashion. As one villager told me: "My son will be wifeless if I do not build a house like this" (Xu Musheng, interview, 24th December 2008). In other words, this building style is an uncritical response to the discourse of modernity. It shows that most villagers, after spending most of their savings, and/or a lot of money from whatever resources were available, have become victims of modernization in their quest for privacy, modernity and superiority. As Hsu (1948: 40) notes: "Worldly residences are not so much places to house the individual members in comfort and ease as they are signs of unity and social prestige for the family group as a whole – the dead, the living and the generations to come."
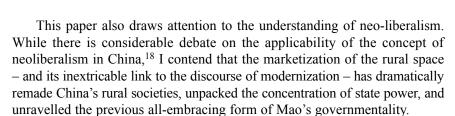
There is some dissimilarity here with Foucault's research undertaken in certain European countries. While his focus is on the individualization of Western governmentalities, this is only partially true in my case study. The valorization of individuals who make their own choices is not applicable in these spatial transformations as there are still many constraints and limitations. In the larger context, the villagers' right to make their own choices is still highly limited.

6. Conclusion

As can be seen from the above discussion, the sovereign power of the state is still manifest in Xiaogang such as where and how to relocate. However, often more subtle forms of disciplinary power are built into the material/ social fabric of the village. As MacKinnon (2000: 299-300) observes: "While individuals are indeed constituted through the effects of social forces, this does not preclude them from intervening creatively to transform social structures." From this quote, it may be contended that the XNJ is the "empowerment of strong self-reliant communities and the covert withdrawal of the state" (Murdoch, 1997: 117). In Xiaogang village, however, the state does not withdraw: it simply redraws. It still maintains or attempts to maintain its legitimacy by cultivating a new spirit of citizenship, by building new types of villages and creating new ways of life (cf. Hoffman, 2003). Although the XNJ claims a restructuring of the countryside and aims to reorganize the spatial order of Chinese villages in general, the project drew an unintended response from the villagers, a response that was closely related to the villagers' desire for self-image, marriage opportunities, and a broad social presence in the village at large.

This paper also draws attention to the understanding of neo-liberalism. While there is considerable debate on the applicability of the concept of neoliberalism in China,[18] I contend that the marketization of the rural space – and its inextricable link to the discourse of modernization – has dramatically remade China's rural societies, unpacked the concentration of state power, and unravelled the previous all-embracing form of Mao's governmentality.

The villagers were supposedly individualized after the implementation of the Household Responsibility System. But this does not mean that they are autonomous for while on the one hand, in an economic sense, the villagers are much more individualized, on the other, in terms of people's lifestyles and the design of their houses, there is still a high level of conformity. There is a homogeneous and faceless collective form of "the farmer", who constitutes rural China and who is operated on by the discourse of modernization.

Notes

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1.   Under the "National Rural Methane Project", the number of households with a methane supply will increase by 23 million in 2010 from 22.6 million at the end of 2006. This project is to promote the use of methane pits to process rural organic waste and provide clean energy (*People's Daily Online*, 2006a).

2.   Local building brochure entitled *The Building and Designing of Xiaogang Village*, October 2007.

3.   Basically, there are three types of village space, namely "linear hamlet" or "string village" which circles a local town, "cluster village", "round village" or "walled village" which extends along rivers, lakes, creeks or roads, and "tessellated village" which is scattered between village ponds, lands and factories. See Cheng *et al.*, 2001.

4.   This layout partly verifies what the quote above has described.

5.   "Several Suggestions Concerning the Promotion of Building a New Socialist Countryside", 2006.

6.   "Villagization" is a term coined by James Scott connoting rural reconstruction projects orchestrated by the state.

7.   The Fifth Plenary Session of the Chinese Communist Party's 16th Central Committee, October 2005, *The Proposal of the CCP Central Committee for*

Formulating the 11th Five-Year Plan (2001-2005) for National Economic and Social Development.

8. The income gap between the rural and urban population has widened from 2.57 to 1 in 1978 to 3.30 to one in 2006.

9. "Chinese President Underscores Efforts to Raise Farmers' Income", <*http://www. news.cn*>, 2007, accessed 10th May 2009.

10. In the old village, all the toilets were open and simply constructed using mud brick or flagstones. In the 1990s, a national campaign on toilets and sanitation, initiated by the Chinese government on the basis of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), was introduced in Xiaogang village. In line with this programme, Xiaogang villagers began to build a new type of double-urn latrines. For each of these toilets, they were rewarded 50 yuan. Starting from 2006, the Xiaogang Village Committee, supported by the Patriotic Health Campaign, decided to fund more toilet-building. The Patriotic Health Campaign was founded in the 1950s, when Mao Zedong initiated a programme to "fight against the bacteria-war". Local cadre Zhang Housheng told me that "to keep a clean environment is an important element of XNJ". In his understanding, having a clean toilet is not only related to personal hygiene, but more importantly, to public health and cleanliness.

11. Why did this lady prefer this direction? I heard two versions. An old villager told me that in traditional China, only the emperor has the authority to face "directly south", which has connotations of absolute power and imperial superiority. Therefore, local villagers usually avoid challenging this taboo. Even though imperial China has collapsed, Xiaogang still acknowledges this tradition. Another version was that "direct south" symbolizes "Fire" and it melts "Metal" in the Chinese Five Elements (*wuxing* 五行) theory. Building a house facing south could result in the owner losing money (the metal element). But apparently, Tang Zengying wanted to challenge these taboos.

12. The sovereign power was exercised at a higher political cost compared to disciplinary power given that it "resorted to glaring examples to ensure a continuous mode of operation"; sovereign power "had to be spectacular so as to instil fear in those present" (Foucault, 1979: 3-5). It was "too costly in proportion to its results" (Foucault, 1996: 232-233). This type of sovereign power was repressive, negative and essentially juridical.

13. By this I mean there is no intermediary force which could establish an independent organization that exercises a "check and balance" influence over the CCP-led government. Take the Village Self-Governance Committee as an example. Although the Committee has had more to say in recent years, it is still under the "guidance" or "gaze" of the local government. There is also no opposition party in the village elections.

14. However, this does not mean it needs to be physically located in the village centre.

15. It should be noted that few new houses were built during the Maoist era. Those that were built followed the traditional models.

16. Source: local archive office, 10th October, 2008, Fengyang County. On a national level, per capita housing space was 22.2 square metres, of which rural space was 25 (Luo *et al*., 2008: 6).

17. Local building brochure: *The Building and Designing of Xiaogang Village*, October 2007. Also see China Rural Technology Development Centre, 2007, pp. 84-86.
18. One of the criticisms of employing neo-liberal governmentality in rural China has centred on the lack of support and resources from the government. In other words, governmentality in this area is weak and unsystematic. Judging from the urban-rural gap in terms of official development level and degree of prosperity published by the central government and statistics bureaus, this is a verifiable conclusion. However, in the case of Xiaogang, it is simplistic to restrict governmentality to the urban area. Because the village is acting as a "model" for the XNJ, it is a vehicle through which this new form of govern-mentality can be carried out. In so doing, new forms of collective subjectivity are being remade.

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