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TRANSFORMATION OF THE CHINESE VILLAGE – TRADITION AND MODERNITY

TRANSFORMACJA CHIŃSKIEJ WIOSKI – TRADYCJA I NOWOCZESNOŚĆ

Abstract

The lack of industrialization on a large scale of rural areas in China, combined with respect for tradition and culture, contributed to the preservation of the beautiful, rural natural landscape of the Middle Kingdom. Unfortunately, the lack of investment in these areas has contributed to their degradation. In addition, constant migration of rural population to large cities has deteriorated the quality of life in these areas.

The article presents the villages of Laotang and Baijiadien, located in the Liaoning province, which were covered by research conducted by the Faculty of Architecture Poznan University of Technology and The Liaoning Urban & Rural Construction & Planning Design Institute in Shenyang, China. During these have been analyzed opportunities and risks associated with the planned transformation.

Keywords: Chinese village, architecture, transformation, the place, past and future

Streszczenie

Brak industrializacji na szeroką skalę terenów wiejskich w Chinach, połączone z poszanowaniem do tradycji i kultury, przyczynił się do zachowania pięknego, wiejskiego krajobrazu naturalnego Państwa Środka. Niestety wspomniany brak inwestycji, przyczynił się również do ich degradacji. Ponadto, stała migracja ludności wiejskiej do dużych miast pogorszyła jakość życia na tych terenach.

W artykule zaprezentowano wsie Laotang i Baijiadien, zlokalizowane w prowincji Liaoning, które objęte były badaniami prowadzonymi przez Wydział Architektury Politechniki Poznańskiej i The Liaoning Urban & Rural Construction & Planning Design Institute w Shenyang w Chinach. W ich trakcie zostały przeanalizowane zostały szanse i zagrożenia związane z ich planowaną transformacją.

Słowa kluczowe: chińska wieś, architektura, transformacja, miejsce, przeszłość i przyszłość

1. INTRODUCTION

There are many places in the world where you can feel the co-existence of the past, the present and the future. History, embedded in a contemporary form, further affects the future. People are common denominators of such forms. They pass down the traditions, which determine the directions of their civilisation development. This way their cultural identity is sufficiently strong to withstand globalism. In this respect, the issue of Chinese villages is worth considering. For over two decades Chinese villages have been subjected to a number of transformations to restore them to their original, strongly identifiable nature.

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*In traditional Chinese society, village is the basic unit of a residential community. Villages are established spontaneously at places where people's needs are satisfied. In addition, villages always grow, are transformed and are adjusted to meet the inhabitants' changing requirements. In this way, a village becomes a sustainable built environment that can exist for hundreds of years.*²

Unfortunately, due to the social and economic reforms that have been implemented in the People's Republic of China for over 50 years, the rural areas have faced a variety of problems. Because of lack of big investment projects into agriculture, it is technologically much underdeveloped. At the same time, heavy industry has much contributed to high pollution of natural environment, as a result thereof more and more tasks require human labour.³ A large scale migration of farmers to large cities in the search for better paid work has turned out to be the biggest problem. Rural population is declining and ageing.

2. TRANSFORMATIONS OF CHINESE VILLAGES

We may well pose a statement that Chinese villages fell prey to the economic success of the People's Republic of China. Rural population has on a large scale migrated to urban areas, where it was easier for them to find work in factories or where flats were more affordable and easier to get.

Moreover, rural areas located around big cities, due to the aforementioned migration trends, have been incorporated into these cities as new districts designed for several million of inhabitants or have become separate, big towns. Almost 900,000 villages have vanished from the map of China most probably between 2005 and 2015 for the above described reasons.⁴ These transformations have been described in a number of academic publications and monographs. They have been the topic of many research works carried out among others by Tony Saich and Biliang Hu⁵, Linda Grove, Lin Juren, Xie Yuxi⁶ or Jonathan Unger.⁷

It is worth noting, however, that the under-invested rural areas have preserved their original, natural landscape. The fact that the inhabitants continued traditional methods of land cultivation or animal breeding has translated into their assets in view of modern trends in nutrition, tourism and recreation.

Since the beginning of the 21st century we can observe a new approach to the shaping of rural areas by state authorities. Such issues as poverty eradication or sustainable rural development have underlain new strategies and legal acts enacted by the government. Numerous campaigns encourage people to come back to rural areas promoting innovations in entrepreneurship and

² Xiaoyu L., Beisi J., *Living Sustainable: Transformation of the Built Environment in Xiaqiao Village, China*, Procedia Engineering, 2016, Vol. 142, pp. 48–55.

³ In many areas of China, the shrinking number of bees has forced farmers to pollinate fruit trees by hand.

⁴ Gilles O., *How two architects are transforming Chinese villages*, published 27.06.2017 source: <https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/rural-urban-framework-innovative-design/index.html> (access: 12.05.2019).

⁵ Saich, T., Hu B., *Chinese Village, Global Market, New Collectives and Rural Development*, Palgrave Macmillan US, New York 2012.

⁶ Grove L. (ed.), *A Century of Change in a Chinese Village, The Crisis of the Countryside*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham 2018.

⁷ Unger J., *The Transformation of Rural China*, Routledge, New York 2016.

intensification of agritourism. All investments aimed at a change of the organisation of settlement layouts, in particular functional and spatial layouts, and aimed at the increase of the range of local services and improvement of hygiene and sanitary conditions in villages obtain relevant funding.⁸ The process of depopulation of rural areas can only be slowed down by the reversal of migration.

Bambo Craft Village in Sichuan Province can serve as an interesting example of the transformation of an old, traditional village into a new, vibrant settlement. Sichuan Province is known worldwide for its cuisine, pandas and bamboo. The village presented herein is located in Daoming County, within the administrative borderlines of Chongzhou town. It is a real life example of implementation of “Lin Pan” assumptions in the process of shaping space. Its inhabitants for many generations have been making bamboo products (e.g. furniture, baskets, mats etc.) As the final effect of the changes we have obtained harmonious space that blends tradition with modernity, traditional craft with modern technologies.⁹ All these features are demonstrated in the building of a restaurant, which offers local dishes from locally cultivated fruit and vegetables. The block of the building preserves traditional elements of the Chinese architecture, yet it has been shaped in an innovative way. The characteristic roof, featuring the shape of infinity sign, has become the village symbol and the village itself has become a popular destination for the tourists from all over the world.



Ill. 1. a) View of the pavilion, b) interior of the restaurant pavilion at Bambo Craft Village [Adam Siniacki, 2018]

3. AIM AND THESIS OF THE PAPER

The research aimed to analyse the potential of adaptation and transformation of rural areas in compliance with modern and ecological assumptions. It, furthermore, aspired to identify the methods and tools that could persuade young Chinese people to return to their origins.

⁸ Pola A., *Chinese Villages: Policies, Transformation and Values*, ‘ANA ΓKH 86., Nuova Serie, Gennaio 2019, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331246021_Chinese_Villages_Policies_Transformation_and_Values (access: 22.05.2019).

⁹ Han S., *Bambo Craft Village / Archi-Union Architects*, <https://www.archdaily.com/894982/bambo-craft-village-archi-union-architects> (access: 21.05.2019).

On the basis of the presented findings and in reference to intentions implied in the topic of the research, the following hypothesis was formed:

Proper area development and transformation of rural facilities with the use of modern ecological technologies, and with respect for the traditional Chinese culture is an effective tool of protection of historical rural development. Introduction of new functions and creation of new work places can contribute to the increase of ecological attractiveness of a given region.

4. RESEARCH METHOD

In my research work I have used the analysis of bibliographic data and materials available on web sites and Internet fora. I have made a number of site visits, taken photographic documentation and analysed a map database. At the site visits I have made a preliminary assessment of historical and architectural assets of the existing architecture. To make a preliminary verification of assumptions, I have used the “Research by design” method. Due to social and cultural conditions, social consultations were limited to talks with representatives of the local authorities (leaders of the village elders) and representatives of local party officials.

5. TERRITORIAL SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

Delimiting the territorial scope of the research, I have taken into account the possibilities of access to the material and availability of examples to be covered with the analysis and site visits. With the account for the aforementioned criteria, I have decided to choose Liaoning province in northern China. Particular examples (villages) were selected by my Chinese partner.

The research results can be also used in other regions of China. This article is to present two locations characterised with different social, economic and spatial problems.

6. SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

The 2017–2018 research was conducted in cooperation with the Liaoning Urban & Rural Construction & Planning Design Institute in Shenyang in China. This is a renowned scientific and design institution that employs 397 employees. The institute directly applies the results of the research in the area of urban planning, spatial planning, landscape designing, technical infrastructure and ecological technologies in their design operations.

It also runs pro publico bono activities with the communities of the poorest parts of Liaoning province in mind, offering the know-how and experience of the academics. Together with the Faculty of Architecture at Poznan University of Technology, the institute started the research to define the manner of transformation of the Chinese villages to adapt them according to modern, ecological spatial assumptions that might attract back the young Chinese people. The two researched locations are presented below.

6.1. LAOTANG VILLAGE

Laotang village is situated in the southern part of Liaoning province, in the centre of the Liaodong Peninsula, in the area of Dongbei. It is close to the city of Buyunshanxiang and about 50 km from Zhuanghe city (located at the Yellow Sea). The village is surrounded with the chain of mountains. Buyun is its highest peak.



Ill. 2. Typical rural buildings in Liaoning province, Laotang village, China [Adam Siniacki, 2017]



Ill. 3. View of the village of Laotang, in the foreground visible hotel, using geothermal springs [Adam Siniacki, 2017]

The village, at present inhabited by 350 people, was founded at the end of the Qing dynasty reign.¹⁰ Before, that area had been deemed as holy land. The settlers came from central China, travelling to the northern-east in the search for food. The main source of income of the inhabitants at present are rice plantations. Some of them work in the hotel located in the central part of the village.



Ill. 4. Pools with the geothermal waters in the hotel in Laotang village [Adam Siniacki, 2017]



Ill. 5. View of the public baths in Laotang village [Adam Siniacki, 2017]

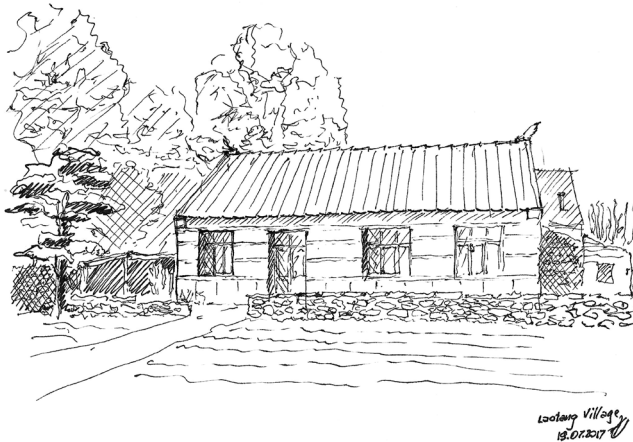
Apart from beautiful surroundings, the area is also known for geothermal waters. In the village there are two wells used by the local community. The hotel offers rooms with indi-

¹⁰ The Qing dynasty reigned in the years 1644–1911 [source: <https://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/Qing;3964874.html>, access: 29.06.2019]

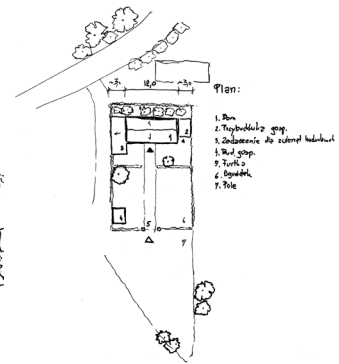
vidual pools directly supplied with the water from the wells.¹¹ The hot tub ritual has been practised in the village for generations. The inhabitants use the public bath building erected directly at the hot water spring.

The authorities of the region aspire to use the hot water springs to develop the tourist business and increase the number of tourists to seven million per year. In accordance with the soil and ground water assessments, the number of geothermal wells that might supply water to the planned recreation centre as well as to the water supply system of Buyunshanxiang city can be doubled.

Widening the accommodation and recreation offer will improve the economic situation of the location. The central part of the village was designated for new investments. The plan of development assumes the division of the area into two parts: the northern part intended for recreation (extension of the existing hotel with a water park and a summer cottage complex) and the southern part intended for a public park. Following the example of Scandinavian hot tubs, the swimming pools supplied with geothermal waters are to smoothly change from those parts designed inside and those outside (the water park terraces).



Ill. 6. Author's sketch of a historic cottage in the village of Laotang [Adam Siniacki, 2017]



Ill. 7. Sketch of a farm homestead plan in the village of Laotang [Adam Siniacki, 2017]

The assessments included the analysis of the available ecological technologies, which, if installed, could effectively use the assets of the terrain. However, the most important aspect was the performance of a thorough examination of the local architecture. The historical village development was analysed and surveyed. Because of the terrain, the village settlement has adopted a fork shape (similar to Polish fork-shaped settlements); with the group of houses or individual houses dispersed on the slopes. A typical residential house is a one floor building with no cellar. There are three rooms in the building. The central room serves the function of a kitchen. It has a bath and a stove. The stove smoke exhaust system is ensured via a piping system located under the bed (in the second room, behind

¹¹ The water temperature is around 65–70 degrees Celsius.

the wall). In winter it serves as the heating system. The building is covered with a gabled roof, finished with ceramic tiles. The house is provided with traditional Chinese roof gables and good luck symbols in the corners of the walls. Wall and door frames are made of wood and often painted green.

Newer houses, despite the application of new building materials, to a large extent observe the characteristic archetypal form. This shows great respect of the inhabitants for their cultural heritage.

The potential of the adaptation of Laotang village for tourism and recreation purposes was assessed as high. Incorporation of the hot tub tradition into the modern assumption of a water park, well-integrated with the existing development and natural landscape will increase the attractiveness of the village and the entire region. Among factors that might jeopardise or prevent proper transformation process are among others: limitation of extension of the existing hotel to the complex of summer cottages; no offer of services on the part of local village community and the adjacent town dwellers or lack of relevant financing for a given investment project.

6.2. BAIJIADIEN VILLAGE

Baijiadian village is situated in Fushun district, in the area of Dahuofang Water nature park. It is about 19 kilometres from the town of Fushun and 60 kilometers from the capital of the province – Shenyang. Owing to an extensive network of motorways, the towns are easily accessible. Dahuofang Water nature park itself is an area of high natural values and high landscape assets. There are many tourist attractions in the area of the park and around it, among others “The Site of the Bordered Blue Banner Yamun” – the summer residence of the Qing dynasty emperors in Yamun. Dahuofang lake is the source of drinking water for several million inhabitants of Fushun region. For that reason, the area is under special protection and construction of any industrial facilities in the closest vicinity of the lake is forbidden.

Such policy of the regional authorities has preserved the traditional methods of land cultivation. That is why Baijiadien village is famous in the entire province for delicious cuisine based on healthy fruit and vegetables and fish.

The traditional methods of land cultivation and animal breeding have, at the same time, translated into financial problems of many inhabitants. The number of inhabitants has been declining for many years, now. At present, there are 163 families (about 420 persons) in the village community. Due to the migration of young people to large towns (Fushun and Shenyang), elder people are in majority here.

The village layout results directly from its topography. The main road extends alongside the valley and its perpendicular, access roads go up the slopes of the nearby mountain chain.

The majority of the buildings were constructed by the inhabitants themselves, they are therefore simple and disorderly dispersed. Nevertheless, they observe a layout of a typical Chinese farm with the main, residential building in the centre and two farm buildings at the sides. The internal yard also serves the farming functions. The same pattern can be observed in emperors’ palace complexes or hutongs.

The buildings located in the village centre have two floors, with the ground floor being the service area. Mostly restaurants that serve local dishes. The remaining buildings, mainly one family residential houses, refer to the archetype of a Chinese residential house.



III. 8. The main street in the village of Baijiadien [Adam Sieniecki, 2017]



III. 9. Buildings in the center of the village with restaurants on the ground floor [Adam Sieniecki, 2017]

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In the case of Baijiadien village, research concentrated on defining the type of businesses that can support the local market and thus, stop the migration of young people and in the long run – attract people from the nearby towns. The analysis results have shown that tourist and catering services need to be intensified. One of the main access roads to Dahuofang lake goes across the village. Moreover, the tourists often visit the summer residence of the emperors and decide to have a meal in Baijiadien because it is so close. Beauty of the landscape is another factor why tourists decide to follow the routes around the lake, through the villages situated thereon. Another area worth developing is the local craft based on materials available in the area (among others wood and stone).



III. 10. A view of the northern part of the Baijiadien village [Adam Sieniecki, 2017]



III. 11. View of the Dahuofang lake. In the foreground, a visible place of service for travelers [Adam Sieniecki, 2017]

The terrain shape and the village layout make it possible to divide the spatial structure into two sectors serving different functions: public and administrative function (the centre of the village) and the function related to business activities in the area of arts, craft, catering and recreation (located in relevant access roads to the main circulation route).

Because Baijiadien village is inhabited by a high percentage of elderly people, it is important that any proposed changes should meet their needs. The changes of the functional and spatial layout, proposed during the research, will require at least partial participation of the local community. Should no members of the local community take part in the process, the bonds felt by the community with the place can be irretrievably broken.

7. RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH AND CONCLUSIONS

Despite numerous activities to improve rural life undertaken in the last ten years, Chinese villages continue to face numerous problems such as: depopulation, population ageing, low income or even poverty. Transformation of rural areas is a time-consuming process that requires high financial spending and persistence in the pursuit of goals in the activities on the part of the state and local authorities as well as the community. Without doubt, ageing of the village inhabitants is an impediment. Many of them are against the changes that would force them to change their lifestyle and sometimes even to move. This is, therefore, important to account for the needs of the elderly and the entire community at the stage of planning and other investments stages.

The buildings on the areas under the analysis were fine examples of the local architecture. In the majority of cases they featured the characteristics of an archetypal residential house from Liaoning province.

The Chinese approach concentrates mainly on the adaptation of traditional villages to the requirements of the tourist market. It is an understandable approach because a widened and improved range of services and recreational potential can quickly render attractive return on the investment. Creating new work places and supporting new, innovative undertakings or local crafts can, furthermore, improve the financial condition of the community.

Chinese people are deeply respectful for their heritage as well as traditional architecture, a symbol and carrier of their culture. Preservation of proper symbols, proportions and sizes accounting for the identity of a given place constitutes a key to successful transformation of the spatial layout of the villages. Using local tradition as the binder of the past and the future is a sign demonstrating high respect for the cultural heritage of a given community and at the same time, a sign of its protection.

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Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Architecture PUT. Scientific and didactic achievements are associated with interests related to the broadly understood protection in architecture: starting with monuments of military architecture, by the aspect of security in public space, for the protection of the rural landscape (in cooperation with Chinese partners).