

The countryside under multiple high-tension lines: A perspective on the rural construction of Heping Village, Shanghai

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Urbanization
Rural construction
Production of space
Community construction
Shanghai
China

ABSTRACT

Different rural developmental options exist because of different national and regional contexts. Since its reform and opening-up policy, China has undergone rapid urbanization and development, and rural-urban relationships have become disjointed. China's attempts to change these circumstances are inadequate. A new movement known as “rural construction,” which aims to promote or direct the social or economic development of rural areas, has been gaining momentum in recent years. This paper takes Heping village in Shanghai as a typical case of rural construction, and integrates the methods of statistics, field investigation, and personal participation into rural research. The village presents challenges related to multiple “high-tension lines,” literally and figuratively. In a literal sense, physical high-tension lines are located near residents' houses; in a figurative sense, high-tension lines come from power and capital, symbolizing the predominant top-down mode of rural construction and imbalance of allocated funds in the process of rural planning; and finally, psychological high-tension lines make the residents lose their sense of belonging. The local governments often regard village construction projects as opportunities to showcase their work, failing to involve villagers in the decision-making process; movements such as beautification of the countryside lack bottom-up initiatives. However, a collaborative approach between the government and residents is ideal in rural planning and construction. The theories of rural research should be renewed under the context of the changing rural world. It is worth exploring some new methods like metaphor into rural studies.

1. Introduction

Urbanization in China has been a dominant focus of international attention (Yang, 2013), and has been studied by many scholars in different fields (Friedmann, 2006; Chan, 2010; Liu et al., 2010; Long et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2016). Urbanization brings about not only economic development but also different ecological and social problems (Tao and Xu, 2005; Zhao et al., 2006; Zhu and Zheng, 2012). China's rapid urbanization since 1978 has significantly influenced its rural development, aggravating the conflict between the two categories of areas (Yu et al., 2014; Chen, 2007). The coordinated development of urban and rural areas in China declined significantly from 2000 to 2008; in certain developed areas, urban-rural development is particularly disjointed (Long et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2013). China has carried out a series of “new rural construction” programs since 2005, titled diversely as “livable rural planning,” “mountain support planning,” and “beautiful countryside construction,” all allegedly aiming to improve residents' lives, foster a civilized social atmosphere, and develop appealing and

organized villages that can be efficiently managed (Long and Woods, 2011). However, these plans have ultimately failed to enhance rural areas as promoted.

Contemporary research of rural areas and geography has begun including the role of rurality, the future of rural space, and global issues such as climate change and food security (Whatmore, 1993; Woods, 2009a, 2011; 2012). Since the 1990s, rural construction has become a popular issue among scholars (Marsden et al., 1990; Whatmore et al., 1990; Marsden, 1996; Wilson, 1995; Nelson, 2001; Woods, 2005; Tu and Long, 2017). Woods (2009b) defined rural reconstruction as an interconnected process of reshaping rural society, mobility, and economic structures. The process of rural construction in China is characterized by dynamic, multi-scalar, and hybrid thought (Long et al., 2012). In the context of urbanization, agriculture is undergoing a transformation precipitated by changes in industrialization and migration (Qin and Liao, 2016; Qian et al., 2016; Tian et al., 2016). Driven by industrialization and urbanization, rural land use has been extensively restructured (Liu et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2016; Yep and

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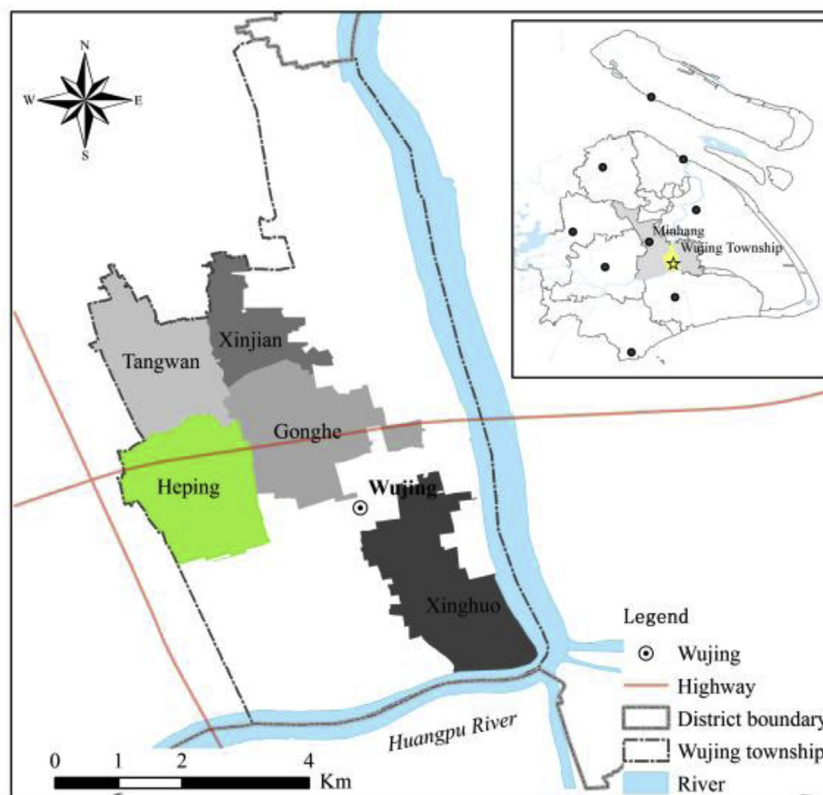


Fig. 1. Location of Heping village in Shanghai.

Forrest, 2016; Long et al., 2016).

Rural space is the essential issue in rural construction. A critical theory of urbanization is the production of space, widely considered in many urban studies (McGee, 2009; Chen and de'Medici, 2010; Buser, 2012; Nasongkhla and Sintusingha, 2013; Ye et al., 2017). While compared to the relative plethora of research concerning space in cities, there are few studies contemplating rural production of space (Halfacree, 2007; Frisvoll, 2012), although some scholars have explored the theory of production of space as a tool to interpret the space and politics of the countryside (Yao et al., 2017; Wilson, 2013).

The construction of urban and rural space in China is accelerating. According to the 2016 Statistics Bulletin on Urban-Rural Construction, there were 20,883 towns in China, with 958 million people registered as village residents; China's investment in village construction occupies first place in its total investment in the construction of villages and towns (MOHURD, 2016). China has paid increasing attention to the development of the countryside, with moderate success, but some villages in China remain in crisis. As a global megalopolis, Shanghai has experienced rapid urbanization and globalization; however, rural development in Shanghai is affected by various factors such as new policies, large numbers of migrants, and access to funds. Thus, Shanghai's circumstances can be seen as a kind of hybrid of urban and rural development.

"Representations of rurality remain a significant feature in the spatialisation of everyday discourse, and therefore remain a legitimate focus for investigation in rural studies" (Cloke, 2003). In Shanghai, development of the rural area is not met with optimism. In particular, rural life exists under the "multiple high-tension lines" situation: there are the physical high-tension lines, as well as the high-tension lines in the power, capital, and psychological senses, decreasing the residents' sense of belonging, and causing a general lack of interest that hinders Shanghai's rural construction. Therefore, taking Heping Village of Wujing Town in Shanghai as an example, this paper aims to uncover and specify the realities of China's rural redevelopment.

Rural construction is a complex process that involves many aspects of social and economic activities. Previous studies on rural construction often elaborated upon the rural elements, such as systems and classes, and failed to consider any theory integrating social-economic factors including offering insufficient critiques. Therefore, based on the critical theory of production of space which is defined as the interaction between the urban and its space changed by capital or power (Ye et al., 2014), this paper aims to answer the following questions: "What is the current status of rural construction in China?", "What factors led to such a result?", and finally, "What are the focuses of China's rural construction in the future?" In addition, this paper provides two new perspectives. Compared with previous statements on rural issues, especially regarding China, we analyze rural construction in China from a critical perspective. More importantly, we use a metaphor, the high-tension line, to narrate and explain rural construction in Shanghai. In this paper, the high-tension line serves as fact, landscape, and metaphor. On the one hand, the physical high-tension line exists in reality. On the other hand, it symbolizes the high-tension line created by an imbalance of power and capital, as well as that in an individual's spirit. Metaphors such as this are rarely used in current rural studies except as by Cloke (2003), whose *Country Visions* cover in particular illustrated the complexity of countryside, full of tension and imagination; the metaphor of the high-tension line is also very important in the rural study.

This paper employs Shanghai's Heping Village as an example to analyze the status and driving forces of rural construction, and includes five sections. Following the introduction, the details of the research area and data and research methods are shown. The third section analyzes the status of rural construction in the case area. The fourth section discusses suggestions for future rural construction in Heping Village, and the final section summarizes the conclusions and contributions of this article.

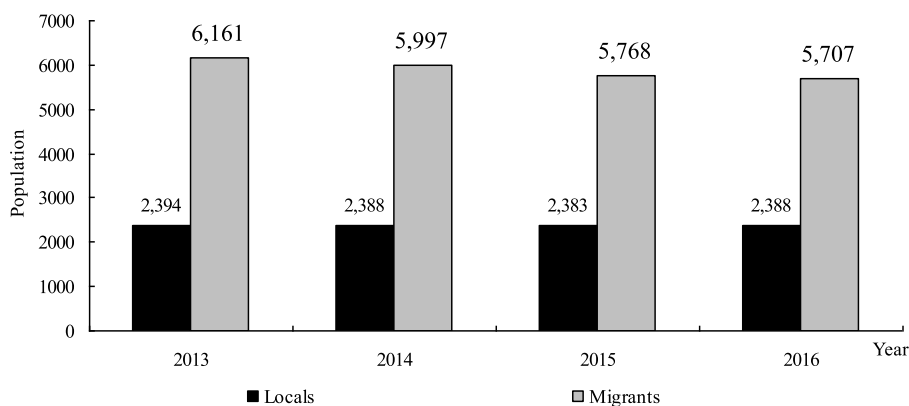


Fig. 2. Heping Village's population changes from 2013 to 2016. Sources: (SMDBS, 2014, 2015; 2016, 2017).

2. Study area and research methodology

2.1. Study area

Heping Village of Shanghai is located on the west side of Wujing Town (Fig. 1). It is bordered on its east by the Yingtao River, its south by Jianchuan Road, its west by the Danshui River, and its north by the Yutang River. South Lianhua Road bisects it horizontally. In 2016, the village had 2554 households, with a resident population of 7,710, of which 5707 were migrants (Fig. 2). There were 215 employees in its primary industry, 3680 workers in its secondary, and 1259 in the tertiary. In recent years, the local population number has barely changed; however, the migrant population has gradually been decreasing. This decrease in the migrant population is due in large part to the increase of housing rents caused by the aesthetic improvements of Heping Village, forcing some people to move to low-cost housing.

Shanghai has promoted this “beautiful rural construction” since 2016. Heping Village became the pilot village representing the “beautiful countryside construction of Wujing.” Its construction type was designated as an “ecological village,” which requires adherence to the highest construction standards in contemporary rural construction, an expensive proposition. Over the past two years, changes in investments for similar social undertakings in Heping Village have greatly increased, from 9.9215 million yuan in 2015, to 27.28 million yuan in 2016. In 2015, the funds were mainly used to improve non-compliant buildings that were part of environmental projects; in 2016, the funding increases were invested in transforming the village on the above basis.

As a globalized megalopolis, Shanghai's development is largely influenced by national policies. In 1984, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CCCPC) decided to expand 14 coastal cities, including Shanghai. In 1990, the CCCPC and the State Council announced a plan to expand and develop the Pudong district, using many specific policies that included strengthening infrastructure construction and investing in a number of large projects. Since then, Shanghai's economy and urban construction have developed at an unprecedented rate. Shanghai's center has gradually expanded from downtown to the Pudong New Area. Meanwhile, Wujing Town, an old industrial base and suburban town of Shanghai, has been neglected for years. Wujing's economic and social development thus lags far behind the average development level of Shanghai. Heping, as one of Wujing's villages, is also affected by its economic and geographical conditions. There are wide developmental gaps between the globalized city center, the New Area, and the marginalized countryside, which affect the shape of the countryside under multiple high-tension lines.

Heping Village serves as a typical case study of rural construction in China for the following reasons. First, from a global perspective, Shanghai is one of the largest metropolitan areas in the world and is representative of China's rapid urbanization, and Heping's rural

construction is greatly affected by both China's and Shanghai's strategies and responses to this rapid urbanization. Second, Shanghai is an important economic, transportation, technological, industrial, and financial center in China, and capital plays an important role in the process of rural construction. Third, Heping is located in Wujing Town, Minhang District, and, as one of the suburbs closest to downtown; its rural construction involves many factors. Finally, Heping was built as a model village by the town government, receiving the largest portion of funding and support compared to other villages of Wujing Town, yet there are many houses under multiple high-tension lines. Heping Village is geographically small but reflects the interactions between different spatial scales and governmental power and capital in the process of rural construction.

2.2. Research methodology

Our integrated methodology includes three parts. First, the Minhang Statistical Yearbook (SMDBS, 2014, 2015; 2016, 2017) and the Statistics Bulletin on Urban-Rural Construction (MOHURD, 2016) are the official sources for our data statistics. The Statistical Yearbook represents a collection and arrangement of basic data from Wujing's villages from 2014 to 2017, used in order to ascertain generalized information about the villages. The Statistics Bulletin on Urban-Rural Construction provides a background on rural construction and illustrates the allocation of investment in rural construction, aiding in understanding the overall situation (see Table 1).

Second, the field investigation includes questionnaires (105 valid questionnaires in 120 issued questionnaires) interviews (Table 2). These questionnaires mainly examined the residents' social participation and sense of belonging. The interviews were a combination of pre-designed questions and semi-structured interviews, conducted through 20–30 min conversations with different individuals, such as local people, migrants, and village officials, representing different social classes' different views on rural construction. Through this qualitative

Table 1
An integrated methodology on rural studies.

Methods	Sources	Objectives	Forms of representation	Roles of authors
Official Data	Statistical yearbook	Generalized	Graphs	User
Fieldwork	Questionnaire & interview	Individual	Interpretation	Researcher
Planning	Rural planning	Balance individual and generalized data	Photos & text	Planner

Table 2
Participant information from the valid samples.

Item	Category and proportion			
Gender	Male: 53.3%		Female: 46.7%	
Age distribution	9.5% (25)	26.7% (26–40)	35.2% (41–55)	28.6% (56)
Type of registered permanent residence	agricultural registered permanent residence: 70.5%		non-agricultural registered permanent residence: 29.5%	
	local	migrant	local	migrant
	40%	30.5%	17.2%	12.3%

research, the researchers aimed to understand individual situations and community from the subjects' point of view, by learning about people's social and material circumstances, and their experiences, perspectives, and histories (Kvale, 1994; Ruhl, 2004).

Finally, the authors and researchers of this paper participated in a rural construction project called the “beautiful countryside construction of Wujing” project. This project began in December 2016, and ended in May 2017, during which time the researchers used their theoretical knowledge to plan and establish relevant countermeasures. It is noted that we used the theory of critical methodology – the production of space – in this planning. Our participation in the planning helped balance the relations between the generalized and the individual, between the characteristic and the common, and between participants and researchers. The integration of these three methods can comprehensively reflect the reality of rural redevelopment and construction.

3. The countryside under multiple high-tension lines

3.1. Physical high-tension lines

In recent years, Heping Village has experienced several instances of new rural construction. The village has implemented new plans: river regulations, road rebuilding, demolishing illegal structures; a factory closing; and even altering certain residents' living spaces. However, in the investigation, some resident's houses are still located in the path of the high-tension lines, as well as very close to the high-pressure tower (Fig. 3), although it is extremely dangerous and illegal. Generally, an inhabitant's choice of residence is affected by individual, household, and/or contextual factors (Yang et al., 2016). When asked about his reasons for living in Shanghai, a respondent said:

“We moved here in 2013, originally living on South Lianhua Road and then the government gave us the house here. Now, half of the houses here are rented out to migrant residents.”

Another worker said, *“I'm a migrant and renting here. Although the environment here is not ideal, I feel pretty good because of my nearby*

work.”

Due to changes to the eastern part of South Lianhua Road to accommodate “Wujing Country Park” as per the new plan, the government moved the inhabitants of the east side to the west, though the living area was located under the high-tension lines. The purpose of the government's remodel of the park was purportedly to improve the residents' physical environment; ironically, the problem of dangerously located housing was not on the government's agenda. The residents here worried that their houses would be struck by lightning due to their proximity to the high-tension lines; however, the government did not discuss resolving this situation.

3.2. Power high-tension lines

Power in China is manifested primarily in politics, policies, and systems. For example, rural construction always begins with policies set forth by the central government. In the planning of the “beautiful countryside construction of Wujing,” Heping Village was considered to be the key developmental object. The town's party secretary emphasized Heping Village's status as the best and “very typical” part of the plan. In her discussion of the “beautiful countryside construction of Wujing,” she said:

“From the current situation, Heping Village can be expected to exist for a long time; it represents the ‘new rural construction’ as does Xinjian Village. Heping Village is in a relatively good location. We have completed the weight of the work; people should pay more attention to the construction of Heping Village. This village is very typical: after the demolition, the village economy has transformed; the foundation has been rebuilt; there has been a typical transformation of the river; the village is well known as an agriculture center of Shanghai; it is a good human environment. We intend to transform the forest belt that is under the high-tension tower into the Wujing Country Park, and then the countryside will become a real ecological village. Thus, the rural construction of Heping Village, carried out through intense planning, will provide guidance to ensure that other villages are in accordance with the basic principles of reconstruction.”

In her view, Heping Village has many advantages compared to other villages.

Heping Village's construction is indeed neater than other villages' (Fig. 4). Referring to this, a local man said:

“After the river dredge, the environment became better. The river was dark before and we did not want to go out for a walk; the river ... smelled bad in the summer. Now the river is clean and there is a corridor along the river, where I walk after dinner. I feel that my life is full of comfort and better than my original life in the city.”

Heping Village's river is now very clean, due to the new rural

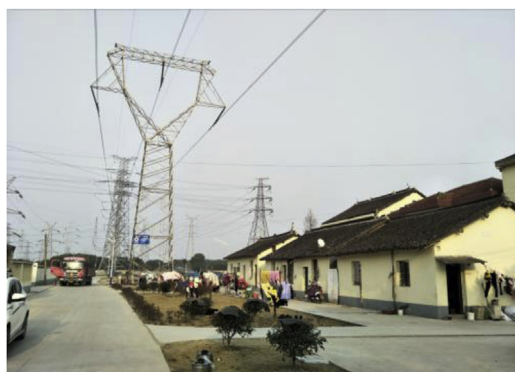


Fig. 3. Houses under high-tension lines.
Sources: authors' photos.



Fig. 4. Comparison of river conditions between Heping Village (left) and Tangwan Village (right). Sources: authors' photos.

construction, and residents reported enjoying walking and participating in other recreational activities in its vicinity. It has become a “typical” river in the town, an accomplishment commended by the government. However, due to this improvement, rent prices have increased sharply, prompting the following complaint from a migrant:

“I do not know whether it is possible to control the rental housing costs. Last year's price increased crazily, almost doubled; coupled with the cost of living, we cannot make ends meet and we have no savings ... What I wish most is the department could care about us (migrants), because the local people of Shanghai do not care about migrants at all.”

Heping Village does have an aesthetic advantage, but its actual living conditions are less than ideal. Along with concerns over escalating rent, residents are also concerned about their safety. Additionally, Heping Village lacks community facilities for its residents. In actuality, Heping Village offers no greater practical advantages than any other village.

In the “beautiful countryside construction of Wujing” project, village construction is divided into three types: “ecological,” “livable,” and “clean and tidy” (Table 3). These three terms represent different construction standards: an ecological village will undergo complete environmental remediation and ecological restoration, representing the optimal living environment; the livable village is focused on beautifying

and cleaning, mainly to enhance the village environment; and clean and tidy, the lowest level of rural construction, is the standard used for those villages that may be demolished in the next few years. Since governmental officials perceived Heping Village as having multiple advantages, they chose it as the pilot site for ecological village construction. In the whole process of rural construction, whether at Heping Village or other villages, the development plan is determined entirely by government departments, exclusive of the villagers' views.

Some participants stated that the village committee, an organization of village affairs, did not fight for the interests of the villagers. A local elder complained that:

“Due to the demolition of buildings, the original storage of gas cylinders was torn down; gas cylinders can now only be placed in the living room, and we are nervous every day. The village committee has no practical effect; some in the group just pretend to ask what we need. In some case, such as the demolition of the housing with the land certificate, they did not give us a solution. The government did not come forward to solve nor ask us to sign the consent of the guarantee; can we not sign it? After all, the people still have to obey the government, or else we will suffer.”

Table 3
Criteria for the “beautiful countryside construction of Wujing” project.

Serial number	Construction content	Applicable construction type		
		Ecological type	Livable type	Clean and tidy type
1	Road Construction	✓	✓	✓
2	Bridge construction	✓	✓	
3	Parking lot construction	✓	✓	
4	Treatment of domestic sewage facilities	✓	✓	✓
5	Regulation of river	✓	✓	✓
6	Construction of water supply in village house	✓		
7	Environment improvement in the front and back of the house	✓	✓	
8	Renovation of village public environment	✓	✓	✓
9	Forestation of village	✓	✓	✓
10	Arrangement of dustbin and toilet	✓	✓	
11	Construction of agricultural production facilities	✓	✓	
12	Construction of ecological agriculture	✓		
13	Villager autonomy	✓	✓	✓
14	Construction of public service facilities	✓		
15	Rural Community Affairs Agency Room	✓		
16	Senior Center	✓		
17	Clinic	✓		
18	Cultural activity room	✓		
19	Fitness trails, sports facilities, fitness spots	✓		
19	Extending Radio and TV Broadcasting Coverage to Every Village Project	✓		
20	Curb illegal land use and illegal construction	✓	✓	✓

Sources: authors' project data.

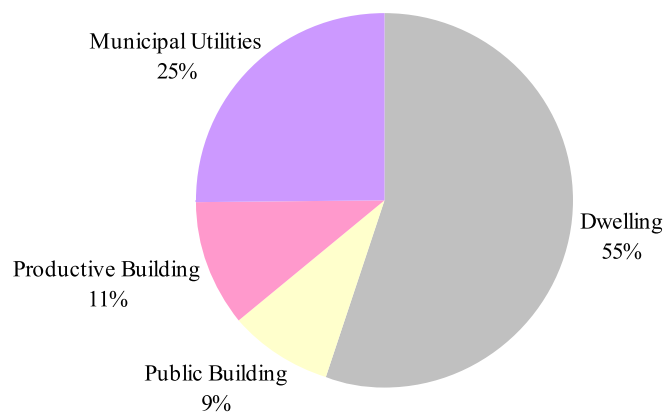


Fig. 5. 2016 investment structure for village and town construction. Sources: (MOHURD, 2016).

3.3. Capital high-tension lines

According to the Statistics Bulletin on Urban-Rural Construction, the total investment in village and town construction in 2016 was over 1.59 trillion yuan. According to the geographical division, the amount of yuan invested, in billions, was as follows for the specified areas: built-up areas of organic towns, 682.5; built-up areas of townships, 52.4; special areas of the town and township, 23.8; villages, 832.1. These amounts respectively account for total investments of 42.9%, 3.3%, 1.5%, and 52.3%. According to reported usage (Fig. 5), the investment in building construction was 1188.2 billion yuan, and the investment in municipal utilities construction was 402.6 billion yuan, accounting for 74.7% and 25.3% of total investment respectively. The investment in municipal utilities construction was mainly used for road and bridge construction, drainage, landscaping, and environmental maintenance. The construction funds allotted for villages and towns throughout the country are mostly used for residential construction; however, this was not in support of actual residential living. Not only are the inhabitants' residences unsafe, but the allocation of funds is not balanced.

At Heping Village, the construction of public service facilities accounted for the largest proportion of allocated funds, which included the cost of demolishing illegal buildings (Fig. 6); however, the cost of dismantling these buildings accounted for only about 9.5% of these

allocated funds. It is noteworthy to observe that “illegal buildings” are defined as buildings built by villagers; the definition does not address whether a structure was built illegally under a high-pressure tower. This substantiates the villagers' assertion that their housing issues have received little attention. Greater focus has been given to the creation of comprehensive environmental regulations, reclamation of land and forestation, as well as municipal infrastructure, which include the construction of village roads. The sum of the construction funds of the comprehensive environmental regulations, reclamation of land and forestation, and municipal infrastructure has already exceeded the construction funds allocated for public service facilities. In fact, housing reform, community centers, and fitness facilities are the residents' main concerns, yet little funding has been earmarked for these requests. The larger amount of money has been invested in roads, forestation, and environmental improvement, in order to achieve the more superficial aim of creating an aesthetically pleasing village.

In the planning process, the government stressed three points – “infrastructure first,” “including all villages,” and “sustainable development” – which seemed to be aimed at the overall improvement of Wujing. However, the project's actual implementation is inconsistent with this declaration of its spirit. For example, due to Heping Village's stronger pre-existing foundations and superior circumstances as compared to other villages, most of the project's funds (about 30 million yuan) were invested in Heping Village's construction, despite its smaller population, in order to highlight the construction project and satisfy Wujing's planning (Fig. 7). While Xinghuo Village's population is similar to that of Heping Village, it received only about 2 million yuan to invest in its construction, in large part because it may be demolished next. Gonghe Village and Tangwan Village have a greater number of permanent residents than Heping Village, yet also received less to invest. The people-oriented urbanization are often talked by officials; however, in actuality, “people” has often been ignored, and the majority of villagers receive less attention and investment. Villagers' actual lives are under the control of capital and political interests: when the countryside in a given rural area is perceived as desirable, it becomes a “model” for the government and receives increased investment and development opportunities. Although Heping Village has received a greater portion of the apportioned construction funds, it is clear that from the criteria for “the beautiful countryside construction of Wujing” project, the focus of the construction is more on cleaning and beautifying the village, rather than promoting community culture. Further establishing evidence of this contradiction, the ecological-type villages

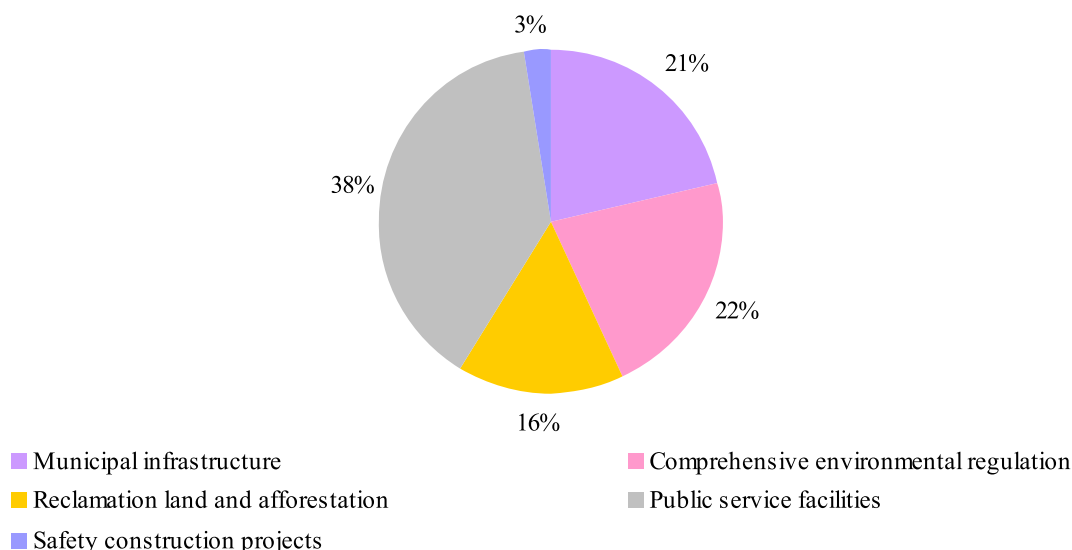


Fig. 6. The investment structure of Heping Village. Sources: authors' project data.

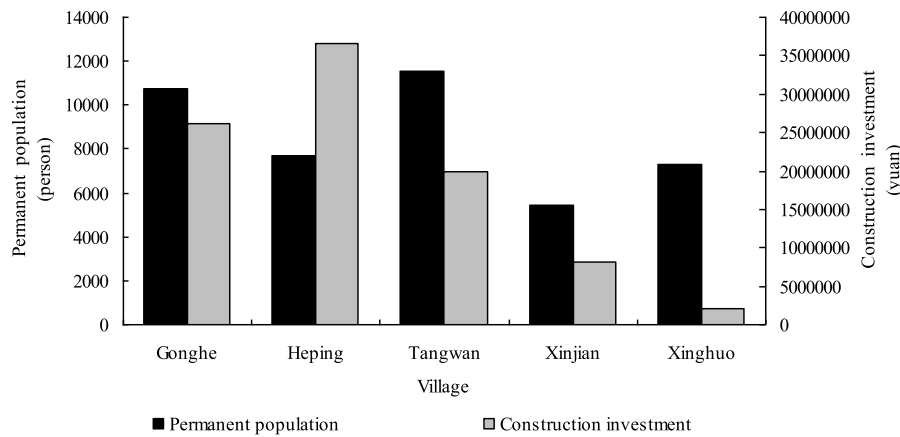


Fig. 7. Construction investment and population comparison of Wujing's villages. Sources: SMDDBS (2017) and authors' project data.

are the only type specified to include cultural construction.

3.4. Psychological high-tension lines

China primarily addresses financing of rural area projects through top-down policies, rather than from the residents' perspectives. The contents of the new rural construction policies issued in the process of urbanization are mostly basic construction standards. Usually, in order to most rapidly achieve new rural construction goals, government construction projects are directly aligned with the stated standards, and do not take into account the wishes, building ideas, and needs of a village's residents. Therefore, residents are forced to “illegally” construct certain types of structures and spaces in order to meet their otherwise overlooked objectives. Despite a lack of provision for such structures in the new construction project standards, many village residents in Heping Village have established storage rooms and vegetable gardens that occupy public spaces. The residents have a decreased sense of belonging, and they do not feel that the village is their “home.” One local resident said:

“The east of the village is to be modified and it is said that the garden will be planned for viewing. However, we are retired; the pension is only 1,000 yuan, which is not enough for the usual living expenses. If there is land then we can sell vegetables for the family. The government is always doing these impractical things; the garden is a surface project that has no use for us.”

There is scant space for public interaction in the village, though there are some public institutions, such as the Senior Center, and the Women's Center (Fig. 8), but these have received less government funding. At the same time, residents' utilization of these institutions is

extremely rare because the structures as they are do not meet the residents' needs. A young migrant said:

“There is rarely any activity here. The old activity room (Senior Center) and the Women's Center do not have much to do with us and even the locals do not go there. It is already full of dust; there is no one there.”

Meanwhile, the development of network technology has changed the common values of rural life, reducing residents' emotional connections to the village, and even causing social separation (Lin et al., 2016). When we asked a junior high school student if he participated in any recreational activities, he replied, “I usually stay at home and play on my cell phone; I neither have other recreational activities nor have heard of village activities.”

The number of resident activity centers is limited, useful for and enjoyed by only a small number of people. The obsolescence of the facilities and the absence of organized community activities contribute to the tedium complained of by residents. Infrequent interpersonal communications between villagers also exacerbates such social problems.

The insufficiency of investment in the construction of community facilities that could serve to improve the quality of the residents' lives is troubling. The village residents feel disconnected from rural construction, and powerless regarding its development. They do not feel that is for their benefit, and thus they decline to participate in the process.

Additional estrangement also exists between locals and migrants. Little communication occurs between them, and the manner in which they receive welfare differs. The secretary of Heping Village said:

“For the autonomous management of the village, we give priority to Heping villagers because many villagers here are now unemployed and



Fig. 8. The empty Senior Center (left) and Women's Center (right). Sources: authors' photos.

the elderly are not able to find employment. The cleanliness and security of our villages are also given priority for the villagers because they need to be healthy and safe.”

The village officials are more inclined to protect the interests of local people at the expense of migrants, a situation that obviously frustrates migrants.

4. Discussion

From the case of Heping Village, it can be seen that different stakeholders have different reasons for and expected outcomes of village construction. Villagers, both local and migrant, wish to feel an emotional connection to their village, brought about perhaps by enhanced interpersonal connections. Such connections may be fostered by the construction or renovation of community centers, staffed by trained personnel who are adept at promoting community activities. Residents are also interested in increasing their income and/or having their rent lowered to relieve the pressure of daily life. Additionally, despite the village's proximity to schools, migrants still lack educational opportunities. These elements should be considered foremost by the government during a village's construction. The government, alternatively, seemingly views village construction projects as opportunities to display its work, rather than bettering its residents' lives by listening and responding to their needs.

Even village committees, which act as liaisons among villagers and between villagers and the government, seemingly fail to assist villagers. The distinctly different ways in which committees treat locals and migrants is not fair. The committees seem more closely aligned with the government's purposes, rather than concerning themselves with expressing the villagers' needs.

In the case of Heping Village's multiple high-tension lines, we can learn that the pleasing aesthetic nature of this rural construction did not improve the residents' quality of life. The local stakeholders' (i.e., village residents) participation in rural construction plays an important role in promoting sustainable rural development (Woods, 2008; Lang et al., 2016; Molden et al., 2017). Hence, it is necessary for the villagers, village officials, and government departments to work together to change the status of Heping Village.

There is a variety of ways in which villagers could insert themselves into rural construction that would address several of their concerns. For example, they might consider forming organizations to carry out community construction. In terms of production, they could unite local enterprises or other likeminded people to establish industries related to local agriculture, culture, or landscape, in order to improve their income and attract the government's attention. In terms of their daily lives, villagers should take action, instead of merely protesting or complaining. A village group could be formed, the purpose of which might be to obtain other villagers' opinions regarding construction, which could then be provided as feedback to the village committee or higher government departments. These measures would enhance public participation in community construction and strengthen the villagers' sense of responsibility for and belonging to the community.

For these reasons, local governments should not ignore villagers' needs and opinions. There are three steps the government can take in order to ensure that villagers are included in rural construction. First, in the pre-planning stage, the government must seek the villagers' input. This information could be obtained through interviews, questionnaires, or at public meetings. Second, during the planning stage, the government must prioritize projects related to the villagers' quality of life and personal safety. For example, the government must address the fact that some residents of Heping Village live under high-pressure towers: this is known to be extremely dangerous, as discussed above. However, the government seems either unaware of, or unconcerned with, this, and instead continues directing funds toward beautification. Finally, once the planning is complete, and due to the ongoing nature of village

construction, the government must closely attend to any potential problems of the construction, rather than merely watching the process.

The production of space in the countryside is a process that is monitored by different departments. For example, the construction of Heping Village is under the management of several entities: the Shanghai Municipal Government, the Minhang District Government, the Wujing Town Government, and the Heping Village Committee. The Shanghai Municipal Government, from the overall perspective of the city, pays more attention to the development of downtown and the Pudong New Area; Minhang District is not its concern. The development of different towns in Minhang District is also accomplished differently. For example, Wujing Town is an advantageously located traditional industrial city, but is in decline; its village committee fights primarily for its interests. The result of urbanization is production of space, caused by the combination of power and capital. Ultimately, the result of urbanization is that residents are physically and psychologically marginalized, as if they were living under multiple high-tension lines.

Compared with the previous “new socialist countryside construction” (Long et al., 2011), the “beautiful countryside construction” standards seem to be more concerned with the transformation of rural landscape. On the one hand, budgets allocated to rural construction can be used to fund construction of already-built environments, such as residents' dwellings. On the other hand, the distribution of funds in different villages is uneven and unfair, and it is not applied toward the most urgent rebuilding needs of the village's residents. As a result, some villages remain under multiple high-tension lines.

5. Conclusion

Although there has been progress in China's rural development, the villages in China are confronted with a crisis. Heping Village is a typical case that could reflect the aspects of many rural areas, especially those in megacities. Even though it is located in Shanghai, one of the biggest and most modern cities in China, Heping Village is under multiple high-tension lines. Physically, the houses and everyday life of the villagers are very close to the high-tension lines and towers, which are extremely dangerous but have not been taken seriously by the government. Furthermore, the high-tension lines from capital and power, which are produced by the pattern of production of space in the process of China's urbanization, have eroded and destroyed the living environments of the residents. Rural construction funds are unfairly distributed by the government, and only focus on infrastructures and so-called “good-looking” villages, overlooking the community and real needs from the residents. As a result, psychological high-tension lines are produced because the villagers have no feeling of belonging to their community and villages.

The top-down mode of rural planning and construction also leads to the dilemma of rural development. The movement of beautifying the countryside has enhanced rural development to some extent; however, it lacks bottom-up initiatives and driving forces (Li et al., 2016). The construction of rural community requires integration of multiple agents including the government, residents, planners, developers, and other organizations. The roles of the different main actors need to be reconsidered. In future planning and policy making, villagers should actively show a willingness to participate in rural construction; the village committee should undertake the responsibility of facilitating communication between villagers and the government; and the government should prioritize voices from the villagers and involve them in the full process of rural construction. Meanwhile, more village representatives should be elected and encouraged to vote for rural plans and to increase the participation of the residents.

The methodology and theory of rural research needs to be renewed as the rural world itself changes. On the one hand, research that uses multi-method integration is important and necessary now that real rural issues are complicated and multi-faceted; cross-disciplinary efforts

and collaborations are critical. On the other hand, some new methods, such as artistic expression, can be explored and used to more fully explain and reconstruct the developmental process of countryside. Metaphor is a key and interesting method that can help to discover and illustrate real rural problems. In our paper, the metaphor of high-tension lines is critical and expressive. It is worth exploring how other artistic means can be applied to the explanation and even the reconstruction of rural society and landscape.

Acknowledgment

This work is supported jointly by Peak Discipline Construction Project of Education at East China Normal University and National Natural Science Foundation of China (Grant No. 41571138, 41471135), “Dawn” Program of Shanghai Education Commission (No.17SG27), and Major Program of National Social Science Fund of China (17ZDA066). The insightful and constructive comments from the editors and reviewers are appreciated.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data related to this article can be found at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2018.07.003>.

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