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# **University of Southampton**

Faculty of Environmental and Life Sciences

Geography and Environmental Science

**Urban–rural mobility, landscape, and displacement: Rural Tourism Makers in China**

by

**Peipei Chen**

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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# University of Southampton

## Abstract

Faculty of Environmental and Life Sciences

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Doctor of Philosophy

Urban–rural mobility, landscape, and displacement: Rural Tourism Makers in China

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The Rural Tourism Makers (RTMs) policy initiated by the National Tourism Administration in China aimed to create 100 RTMs' Model Bases and engage 10,000 RTMs in rural tourism development between 2015 and 2017. The arrival of RTMs to the villages and their engagement in rural tourism raise some fundamental questions about urban–rural population movement, the changing rural landscape in China, and the relationships between newcomers and local residents. Drawing on eight months of fieldwork in four RTMs' Model Bases in Zhejiang province and Sichuan province in China, including participant observation and 131 interviews with government officials, RTMs, and local residents, this research aims to answer three research questions. Who are the RTMs and why are they moving to the rural areas? How do RTMs produce a new rural landscape and how is their middle-class identity performed in this process? And what are the relationships between newly incoming RTMs and local residents? Addressing current debates in rural studies and related fields, three main arguments are made. First, RTMs are both middle-class consumers and creative-class producers, taking us beyond the consumer-producer binary found in much existing rural tourism research. Second, RTMs provide a new example of ongoing and flexible urban–rural mobility, taking us beyond the unidirectional, long-distance, and permanent movements of people found in much existing urban–rural migration research. Third, the relationship between newcomers and local residents is complex and shaped by the specific Chinese context, taking us beyond the form of displacement found in much existing rural gentrification research. In sum, this research contributes to understandings of the emerging new middle class and the emerging new rural landscape in China and beyond.



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## Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: Peipei Chen

Urban–rural mobility, landscape, and displacement: Rural Tourism Makers in China

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission

Signature: ..... Date: .....





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# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Rural Tourism Makers

Rural Tourism Makers (RTM) (*xiangcun lvyou chaungke*) is a phrase first used in a policy initiative launched by the National Tourism Administration in China in 2015 called *A Hundred Villages and Ten Thousand Rural Tourism Makers* (*baicun wanren xiangcun lvyou chuangke xingdong*). The target of the initiative is stated in the policy document:

Within three years from 2015 to 2017, it seeks to create 100 Rural Tourism Makers' Model Bases and engage 10,000 Rural Tourism Makers in the rural tourism business, including graduates, urban-rural return migrants, art professionals, and teams of young entrepreneurs, etc. The aim is to transform and upgrade rural tourism development and to encourage an innovative rural tourism development model. (General Office of National Tourism Administration in China, 2015, p.1)

In this policy document, there is not a clear definition of RTMs. Instead, it only gives a few examples of the groups of people who have the potential to be RTMs, such as 'graduates, urban-rural return migrants, art professionals, and teams of young entrepreneurs'. They are described as people 'who have a stronger sense of entrepreneurship and who are superior' (General Office of National Tourism Administration in China, 2015, No.154, p.1). The superiority, based on my interviews with local government officials, RTMs, and local residents, is the result of comparisons between RTMs and local residents. Here are some examples:

'New villagers [one name for RTMs] brought the creation of culture [*wenhua chuanguo*]... They create things of a better artistic value' (Interview with one government official from Ganxi Town, February 7, 2019).

'Newly arriving investors [another name for RTMs] brought capital to the villages. Local residents normally have very limited economic capital' (Interview with a government official from Zhejiang Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism, December 17, 2018).

New villagers are people of higher cultural levels [*wenhua shuiping*]. Compared with local residents, they have the chance to travel all around the world and see new things that we never know... They brought new ideas to the village which have affected local residents. (Interview with a local resident in Mingyue village, February 9, 2019)

From these quotations, we catch a glimpse of the character of RTMs. Compared with local residents, they have higher cultural capital, they are economically better off, and they come from outside the villages where RTMs' Model Bases are – mostly from cities – and have urban living

experiences. For the aim of this research, I define RTMs by distinguishing them from local residents and other rural tourism business investors. RTMs are not local residents. Although urban–rural return migrants are supposed to be one kind of RTMs according to the policy document, they are actually excluded by local government officials from the RTMs group. This is influenced by unequal identities between rural and urban residents in China, where the ‘rural populace has come to be regarded as subordinate and inferior to city dwellers’ (Park, 2014, p.529). Compared with other rural tourism business investors whose main motivation is economic, RTMs promote ‘innovative rural tourism development’ by engaging in cultural and creative practices by themselves. I will explore this in detail in Chapter 4 about the identity of RTMs.

By moving from urban to rural areas, RTMs are leading a new trend of urban-to-rural population movement in China. Whereas the mainstream population movement in China has involved production-focused rural–urban migration (Li, 2006; Wang and Fan, 2006; Fan, 2009; Wu and Logan, 2016), RTMs are forming a new trend of moving from urban to rural areas to consume the imagined rural. However, RTMs do not only try to consume rurality but also produce a new rural landscape of middle-class character through their practices. The two most popular practices are *Minsu* guesthouses and cultural studios. While the former is a small type of tourist accommodation which usually involves the skilled renovation of existing village buildings by RTMs, the latter involves folk or handicraft work (e.g. pottery, bamboo knitting, calligraphy, wood crafting, and cloth dying). By selecting specific villages, renting houses from local residents, changing the exteriors and interiors of the buildings, and organizing cultural activities, RTMs are practicing a new rural landscape, which is distinguished from the superficially improved rural landscape created by state-led rural regeneration projects (Bray, 2013; Gao, Zhang and Luo, 2014; Chen and Zhang, 2015).

RTMs’ practices and their rural tourism businesses have brought important changes to previously hollowed-out villages, with most local residents either being rural–urban migrants or having moved to the centre of the county for reasons such as better education for their children (Sun, Fan and Angeles, 2011; Long et al., 2012; Fan, 2018). Following the RTMs, some local residents started to come back to the villages and engage in rural tourism–related work or businesses. Newly arrived RTMs developed complex relationships with local residents because of the special rural context in China, including elements such as land use policy (Long et al., 2012), social norms of behaviour (Fei, Hamilton and Wang, 1992), and the unequal identity politics between rural residents and urbanites (Park, 2014).

## 1.2 Why study Rural Tourism Makers?

The arrival of RTMs to the villages and their engagement in rural tourism raise some fundamental questions about urban–rural migration, the changing rural landscape in China, and the relationships between newcomers and local residents. By addressing these questions, we not only add nuance to our understanding of the emerging new Chinese middle class and their production and consumption of a new rural landscape in rural China, but also add to wider research on rural tourism, urban–rural mobility, the creative class, and rural gentrification. I will start by highlighting the contribution of this research to rural research in China. I will then explain the importance of this research to broader rural studies.

### 1.2.1 Rural tourism development in China and the emerging RTMs

Rural tourism development in China has a strong state-led character although it has undergone different stages and different forms in the past thirty years (see ). Rural China has been used for recreational reasons throughout history (Twitchett and Fairbank, 1986; Ebrey, 1996). However, it was not until the early 1990s that rural tourism development started to be employed in ethnic minority regions following the cultural shift in regional development strategies in China (Oakes, 2006). For rural ethnic tourism, the construction of rurality is based on ethnic culture, such as ethnic minorities' languages, architecture styles, and traditions (Oakes, 1998, 2013; Wu, Li and Li, 2014; Chio, 2017; Wu, 2018). Since 2003, the Historical and Cultural Village (*lishi wenhua mingcun*) scheme has aimed to promote heritage tourism in traditional villages with rich cultural heritage of great historical value and a traditional landscape evoking a particular time or place. For heritage tourism in Historical and Cultural Villages, the cultural values exhibited from the heritage architectures have become an important part of the social construction of rurality in China (Park, 2014). In both cases, rurality was constructed as a kind of 'expert knowledge' dominated by official discourse rather than everyday life in the rural areas (Oakes, 2013).



Figure 1.1: Evolution of China's rural tourism development stages

Since the late 2000s, China has run a national campaign called Beautiful Villages, which aims to promote urban–rural integrated development through boosting rural tourism in villages in the

suburban areas of big cities. In the Beautiful Villages, *Nongjiale* is one of the most popular forms of rural tourism, which often involves rural residents turning their farm houses into guesthouses and offering urbanite guests with food and accommodation of rural character (Park, 2014; Wu, 2014; Wang et al., 2018; Cody, 2019; Meng et al., 2019). In this process, rurality is constructed as 'rural, familial, authentic, eco-friendly, healthy, and traditional' (Park, 2014, p. 520). Despite this, Beautiful Villages represent a typical outcome of rural modernizing in China, with the physical landscape in the villages improved and the facade of the buildings unified and beautified to promote rural tourism (Chen and Zhang, 2015) (see details in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2.3). The development of Beautiful Villages has ignited a national debate about what rural China should look like and what rural beauty means in China. Researchers critique the change of superficial appearances in the villages (Chio, 2014; Zhang, Shen and Zhao, 2014).

It is against this background that some artists and architects in China started experiments in rural China in the last decade to create a rural landscape based on their aesthetic dispositions and their understanding of rural beauty (Ye, Tan and Zhang, 2015; Deng et al., 2016; Qian, 2017; Qu, 2020). Starting with the renovation and preservation of architecture, their activities have been broadened into cultural and creative activities involving local customs. Following the pioneering artists and architects, and encouraged by the national and local governments, an increasing number of RTMs have started rural practices, resulting in a new rural landscape.

The RTMs' practices offer the opportunity to study the emerging middle class in rural China and their production of a new rural landscape. While lots of research has examined how the official narrative of modernity has affected the transformation of the rural landscape in China (Oakes, 2013; Chen and Zhang, 2015), much less attention has been given to the social and cultural meanings attached to the new landscape created by the Chinese middle class and the changing rural landscape. RTMs' practices in rural China offer the chance to address this issue. Moreover, while research on the Chinese middle class has documented their urban consumption practices (Wang and Lau, 2009; Liu, 2013), much less research has explored their practices in creating their ideal spaces, especially in rural areas. RTMs offered an opportunity to study the emerging middle class in China through their production practices in rural areas.

### **1.2.2 Rural in-migration, production-consumption motivation, and complex local-newcomer relations**

Rural areas in the last several decades have seen the inward migration of various groups in different forms, such as counterurbanization (Mitchell and Bryant, 2009), rural gentrification (Smith, 2002, 2007; Smith and Holt, 2005), lifestyle migration (O'Reilly and Benson, 2009), and

second-home owners (Farstad and Rye, 2013). It has been acknowledged that although urban–rural migration takes different forms, a middle-class position and its associated education and occupational profile are thought to be shared by many of these groups (Ghose, 2004; O’Reilly and Benson, 2009; Eimermann, 2017). Considering their motivation to come to rural areas, there is a consumption-production debate. While some argue that their main motivation is to consume rurality (e.g. Smith, 2002; Hines, 2010; Park, 2014), others highlight how they are engaged in some kind of production or work (Herslund, 2012; Qian, He and Liu, 2013; Eimermann, 2015b). Yet the existing literature discussed here is limited. First, some commentators are less happy with this consumption-production binary, arguing for a reconsideration of both motivations within the same groups (Eimermann, 2016). This is especially the case for the increasing creative class in the countryside (Bell and Jayne, 2010; Gibson, 2010; Gibson, Brennan-Horley and Jim, 2010). While much research has examined the creative class in cities based on specific occupations (e.g. musicians, animators, and filmmakers) (Hracs and Leslie, 2014; Brydges and Hracs, 2019a), much less research has examined creativity in rural areas, which is more of a product of the improvisation embedded in all kinds of cultural activities (Edensor et al., 2010).

Furthermore, while much research attention has been given to the ‘uni-directional, long-distance, and permanent movements of people to rural areas’ (Milbourne and Kitchen, 2014, P. 327), much less attention has been given to a more flexible move between urban and rural areas in the era of mobility (Urry, 2001; Halfacree, 2012). Indeed, people show more flexible attitudes towards moving to rural areas (Eimermann, 2015b). As Milbourne (2007, p.385) claims that ‘not all people moving to rural places remain settled’. Some people move between urban and rural areas through, for example, having a second home (Halfacree, 2012; Ellingsen and Hidle, 2013). Therefore, besides understanding why people come to rural areas, it is also important to understand why people decide not to move to rural areas permanently, and in what ways they balance a working life between the urban and the rural (Milbourne, 2007; Halfacree, 2012).

Considering the relationships between newcomers and local residents, existing research highlights the privileged position of newcomers over local residents using the concept of displacement, especially in the gentrification literature (Smith and Phillips, 2001; Ghose, 2004; Lees, Slater and Wyly, 2008; Stockdale, 2010). However, the relation between newcomers and local residents goes beyond displacement and the straightforward power relations and negative consequences implied by this concept. For example, some argue that newcomers bring economic opportunities for local residents, and that they embed themselves into local communities and develop social relationships with local people (Bosworth and Farrell, 2011; Su and Chen, 2017; Eimermann and Kordel, 2018). Although researchers have noticed how newcomers displace local residents in some cases and how they face challenges embedding in local communities in other cases, fewer

geographers have focused on the more complex relations between newcomers and local residents. What is more, displacement in rural studies has been rather neglected because of the outward migration of the existing population before the arrival of newcomers – who would then ‘be seen as repopulation of an already depopulated and still depopulating countryside’ (Halfacree, 2018, p.28).

This research provides new evidence about urban–rural mobility, the emerging creative class in rural areas, and the complicated local-newcomer relationship in a Chinese context. While existing research on urban–rural population movement has focused largely on Western countries, which have undergone centuries of industrialization and urbanization, the ‘compressed urbanization’ in China (Zhang and Chen, 2010) – i.e. synchronous development of urbanization and rural regeneration in a much shorter time – has resulted in more flexible urban–rural mobility compared with the more permanent forms of counterurbanization and rural gentrification in Western countries. By exploring RTMs and their practices in rural China, we deepen our understanding of rural tourism, urban–rural mobility, the creative class, and rural gentrification in a broader context.

### **1.3 Aims, objectives, and research questions**

This thesis adopts a qualitative approach and ethnography to understand RTMs’ practices in villages in China. More specifically, drawing on eight months’ fieldwork in four prototypical RTMs’ Model Bases from Zhejiang and Sichuan province, including 131 interviews (with government officials, RTMs, and local residents) and participant observation, this research examines the role of RTMs in the production of a new geography of rural tourism in the context of rural China. The three main objectives of this research are as follows:

- to explore the identity of RTMs and the reasons why they move to rural areas;
- to understand the new rural landscape produced by RTMs and RTMs’ middle class identity performed in this process; and
- to analyse the relationships between newly arriving RTMs and local residents.

To fulfill these objectives, I will address the following research questions:

First, who are RTMs and why do they move to rural areas? This research question addresses the consumption-production binary of the newcomers in rural areas, and explores the new form of urban–rural mobility (Halfacree, 2012). Instead of positioning RTMs on either side of consumers or producers, this research explores their consumer-producer identity. Specifically, I examine RTMs’ middle-class identity and their consumption of rurality on one hand, and their creative



class identity and engagement in production activities in the rural context on the other. What is more, by move, I do not mean a permanent move from the urban to the rural. Instead, I look at a more flexible form of urban–rural mobility, including temporary rural tourists, or second-home owners, and people who hold an open attitude towards moving between the urban and the rural (e.g. lifestyle migrants and the emerging creative class in the countryside). Instead of focusing on RTMs' one-way movement from the urban to the rural, I examine why and how RTMs move between the urban and the rural.

Second, how do RTMs produce a new rural landscape and how is their middle-class identity performed in this process? Existing studies have employed landscape as a way of seeing (Zukin, 1982a; Cosgrove, 1989) or landscape as lived space (Wylie, 2007; Woods, 2010; Abrams and Bliss, 2013; Galani-Moutafi, 2013; Morse *et al.*, 2014) to understand the relationship between landscape and identity. This research combined these two perspectives to produce a fuller understanding of the rural Chinese landscape imagined, produced, performed, and experienced by middle-class RTMs. In so doing, I not only explore the symbolic landscape that RTMs create, its representational meanings and embedded power relations, but also the physical landscape onto which the cultural meanings are projected. Furthermore, I explore RTMs' bodily practices through which they perform a lived rural landscape. More specifically, I examine the renovation or construction of architecture and the interior design of the buildings, through which RTMs create a symbolic landscape expressing their taste and lifestyle choices. I explore how RTMs perform a romanticized rural in the process of rural tourism through organizing various activities.

Third, what are the relationships between newly arriving RTMs and local residents? This question attempts to explore the multiple relations between the two groups, which go beyond direct and physical displacement. While some researchers highlight the privileged position of newcomers and their displacement of local residents in gentrification research (Lees, Slater and Wyly, 2008; Stockdale, 2010), others point out how newcomers face challenges adapting to the local society (Su and Chen, 2017; Eimermann and Kordel, 2018). Despite this, fewer geographers have looked at the more complex relations between newcomers and local residents. This research intends to fill that gap by examining their relationships in the particular context of rural China, which has not been studied much previously from the perspective of rural gentrification and power relations. The particular context of rural China includes, first, the land use policy in rural areas, which does not allow transactions of rural properties and rural land between local residents and newcomers (Long *et al.*, 2012). As a result, local residents are generally not physically displaced by newcomers. Second, newcomers have to adapt to the strong *Renqing* society (see details in Chapter 6) in rural China, which is already characterized by certain norms and strong expectations among local residents. Third, there is the unequal identity politics between rural residents and

urbanites, in which the rural populace has always been regarded as 'subordinate and inferior to city dwellers' (Park, 2014, p. 529). Together, this context shapes local-newcomer relations in particular ways that differ from what is found in much existing research.

For the purpose of this research project, 'local residents' are people whose Hukou registrations are in the villages where RTMs' Model Bases are found. Hukou is the household registration system in China since the 1950s, which has divided the entire population into two categories, i.e. agricultural Hukou and non-agricultural Hukou based on their place of birth (Davis *et al.*, 1994). While people who lived in the rural areas were mostly classified as agricultural Hukou, urban residents were classified as non-agricultural Hukou. It has been a policy restricting internal labour migration flows and rural–urban labour migration in China (Bosker *et al.*, 2012). However, this situation has changed dramatically following the reform and open up (*gaige kaifang*) in the late 1970s, with an upsurge of rural–urban migration for the aims of better job opportunities and/or public services in cities (Fan, 2009, 2018; Wu and Logan, 2016). Local residents in this research include non-migrating local residents, return migrants, and local residents who have moved to the centre of the county. 'Non-migrating local residents' means people who have never left the village for an extended period. 'Return migrants' are local residents who went to cities for work or education opportunities as rural–urban migrants, and who came back to the villages because of the work or business opportunities following the development of rural tourism. 'Local residents who have moved to the centre of the county' means rural residents who have purchased houses in the centre of the county and have physically moved out of the village. The centre of the county, or the county seat, is used here to refer to the administrative centre of a county in China. A county often consists of several towns, each of which is made up of several villages. Therefore, the county is mostly made up of rural population with agricultural Hukou. In the past several decades, the fast urbanization of the county seats in China, the fast development of real estates, and the improvement of public services and infrastructure, have attracted a large number of rural residents from the villages, pursuing better quality of education for their children and more job opportunities (Kipnis, 2016). However, their Hukou registrations remain in the villages, through which they still keep the right to use their properties.

### 1.4 Main contributions

As the research objectives and research questions show, this research offers important insights into several areas of study. Most immediately, it offers much-needed consideration of the role of newly arriving RTMs in the process of rural tourism development in China. More broadly, it furthers our understanding of the experiences of newly arriving middle class members to the rural areas. I now elaborate on these contributions based on the research questions.

First, my examination of RTMs' identity and motivations to move to the rural contributes to debates about the consumer-producer binary of newcomers to rural areas (Eimermann, 2016) and the new form of urban-rural mobility (Halfacree, 2012). I elaborate on how RTMs' identity as Chinese middle class (relatively wealthy, well-educated, and geographically mobile, as well as having their own childhood memories of the rural) facilitate their consumption of rural China. I also elaborate on how RTMs' creativity (as a means of generating income through creative work and a means of consuming the rural as part of a more creative life) is performed by engaging in the production of the rural tourism destination. Existing literature on the motivations of newcomers to the rural has focused either on consumer identity (e.g. tourists, gentrifiers) or producer identity (e.g. rural tourism entrepreneurs). By demonstrating the consumer-producer identity of RTMs, this research breaks the consumer-producer binary. What is more, this study of RTMs offers a new example of urban-rural mobility, which extends the dominant form of 'uni-directional, long-distance, and permanent movements of people to rural places (Milbourne and Kitchen, 2014, p. 327).

Second, by employing two perspectives of landscape – namely landscape as a way of seeing and landscape as lived space – this research produces a fuller understanding of the new rural Chinese landscape imagined, produced, performed, and experienced by RTMs. While existing rural tourism research in China has focused largely on how the official narrative of modernity has affected the transformation of the rural landscape in China (Oakes, 2013; Chen and Zhang, 2015), little attention has been given to the social and cultural meanings attached to the new landscape created by the Chinese middle class. From the perspective of landscape as a way of seeing, the findings presented in this thesis demonstrate how RTMs claim a middle-class identity through choosing 'authentic villages', and create a new rural landscape by preserving the authentic rural landscape on the one hand, and bringing in Westernized influences on the other. From the perspective of landscape as a lived space, the findings demonstrate how RTMs claim a rural identity by engaging in mundane activities, and how they distinguish themselves from local residents by performing an aestheticized rural landscape.

Third, the findings in this thesis also contribute to debates on the relationships between newcomers to the rural areas and local residents. I demonstrate how the relations between RTMs and local residents go beyond displacement. The findings show how the direct displacement of local residents by newly arriving RTMs did not happen because of the specific land use policy in China, which did not allow the transition of rural houses. However, I identify how landscape displacement happened with local residents imitating RTMs and creating spaces that catered to urbanite guests. Focusing on the *Renqing* society in rural China, where people have grown up among acquaintances and the norms of reciprocity are intense, this research demonstrates the

relatively powerful position of rural residents in relation to newcomers. This finding challenges the privileged role of the newly arriving middle class based largely on rural gentrification research in Western countries (Hines, 2012). Furthermore, the findings in this research not only confirm the role of local residents as ‘assistant gentrifiers’ (Qian, He and Liu, 2013; Chan et al., 2016; Zhao, 2019) in the Chinese context but also deepen our understanding of this phenomenon by focusing on the flexible character of the rural tourism businesses that local residents engage in, employing Fan’s (2009) theory of flexible work and flexible household organization.

### 1.5 Structure of the thesis

My thesis is structured as follows.

This chapter has offered some background information on the research topic and the rationale for this research. It has laid out the aims, objectives, and research questions of this research. It has also introduced the main contributions of this research. An overview of the following chapters is provided below.

Chapter 2 provides a critical review of the academic literature on four related areas: rural tourism, the creative class, urban–rural mobility, and rural gentrification. Firstly, it positions the research in relation to some key concepts in rural tourism research. I outline how the social construction of rurality and the reproduction of rural landscapes offer important insights for this research. Secondly, it introduces the literature on the creative class, with a special focus on the creative class in the countryside. I look at the characteristics of the creative class in rural areas, their motivations for choosing a rural location, and their production and consumption of rurality. Thirdly, I discuss the emerging literature of urban–rural mobility, which reflects a more flexible form of urban–rural population movement compared with more permanent or temporary movement from urban to rural. Finally, I review the literature on rural gentrification, focusing on middle-class gentrifiers, consumption- and production-based explanations of rural gentrification, the production of gentrified landscapes, and the effect of gentrification on rural communities. Together, these four bodies of work provide important insights on which my research draws, as well as indicating key areas where this study offers a novel contribution.

Chapter 3 describes the research design and methods. It begins by discussing the rationale behind the choice of the qualitative approach and multi-site ethnography. My research design was similar to the conventional ethnographic approach. However, there was an important alteration, i.e. I did multi-site ethnography (Hannerz, 2003). Instead of staying in one place, I went to four field sites to study one phenomenon in depth. The chapter justifies my selection of the four prototypical field sites in two provinces, which together form one case for this study. It then details the data

collection process including interviews, participant observation, online observation, and document reading. It also considers ethical issues and my positionality. Finally, it explains the data analysis process.

Chapter 4 examines the identities of the RTMs and their motivations for moving to rural areas. It begins with the literature on the middle-class identities of the newcomers to the villages, the debate about the consumption-production binary of their motivation, and emerging urban–rural mobility. It then offers a brief history of Chinese elites’ rural practices before I present the findings. To be specific, I elaborate on the Chinese middle-class identity of RTMs and how they are attracted to the rural by both the pull factors from the rural and the push force from the urban. I also demonstrate RTMs’ identity as creative class members or at least creative individuals producing rurality as much as they are consuming it. Together, these findings break down the consumer-producer binary of the newcomers to the rural areas. Besides, I explain how RTMs move between the urban and the rural to make the most of both, and how this is achieved because of their identity as creative class members and also conditioned by other factors (especially life stages). This chapter concludes by discussing how the findings of the chapter contribute to the debate about the consumer-producer identity of newcomers to the rural and new forms of urban–rural mobility.

Chapter 5 explores how RTMs produce a new rural landscape in China and how their middle-class identity is performed in this process. I begin by introducing existing studies and wider theories on the relationship between landscape and identity, focusing on two perspectives of landscape, i.e. landscape as a way of seeing, and landscape as lived space. I then go on to introduce the imagined ideal rural and the actual rural landscape in the Chinese context, to set up the background for RTMs’ practices in the villages. Then I present the findings of this research. Firstly, employing the perspective of landscape as a way of seeing, I demonstrate how RTMs choose ‘authentic villages’ instead of Beautiful Villages regenerated by state-led projects with a strong character of modernity. I demonstrate how RTMs express their middle-class identity by staying local (aestheticizing the landscape of local character) and going global (Westernizing the landscape). Secondly, from a perspective of landscape as lived space, I demonstrate how RTMs in China claim a rural identity through their embodied practices in villages, and how they distinguish themselves from tourists and local residents through different practices. This chapter concludes by discussing how the two perspectives on landscape (landscape as a way of seeing, and landscape as lived space) are useful for producing a fuller understanding of the rural Chinese landscape imagined, produced, performed, and experienced by RTMs.

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Chapter 6 explores the relations between the newly arriving RTMs and local residents. I begin by exploring the debate about the relations between newcomers and long-term residents in existing research, focusing on the discussion of the concept of displacement. I then explain some contextual specificities of rural China. I explore the relations between newly arriving RTMs and local residents in three sections. First, I examine the landscape displacement as a result of local residents imitating RTMs to build guesthouses. Second, I demonstrate how RTMs have adapted to rural society and compromised to get along and fit in with local residents in China. Third, I explore how local residents have made use of the opportunities brought by RTMs, and have flexibly engaged in rural tourism development. I conclude the chapter with comments on the relations between newcomers and local residents and some critical thoughts on displacement and, more broadly, gentrification.

Chapter 7 brings this thesis to a close with a concluding discussion. It begins with an overview of the empirical findings. This chapter also highlights the wider implications of this research to global rural research and rural research in China. It also discusses the limitations of the research and provides further recommendations for future studies. Finally, it reflects on the overall significance of this research.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a critical review of the relevant literature in order to structure a theoretical and contextual background for the following empirical chapters and their detailing of how Rural Tourism Makers (RTMs) consume and produce the rural and their relationship with local residents. As RTMs and their practices do not sit easily within any existing research framework, such as rural tourism or rural gentrification, understanding this topic and answering the research questions involves reviewing existing literature on four related areas: rural tourism, the creative class (as makers), urban–rural mobility, and rural gentrification.

The first part of this chapter positions the research in relation to some key concepts in rural tourism research. In terms of my focus on RTMs' consumption and production of their imagined rural through rural tourism, I outline how the social construction of rurality and reproduction of rural landscape offer important insights for my work. The second part of the chapter looks at the literature on the creative class, especially existing research on the creative class in the countryside, because Rural Tourism Makers, loosely defined as 'various kinds of makers including graduates, urban–rural return migrants, art professionals, and teams of young entrepreneurs' in the policy document, are supposed to bring their creative skills into the rural. To be specific, I look at the definition of the creative class in rural areas, their motivation for choosing a rural location, and their role of cultural production and consumption in the rural.

In the third section, I look at the emerging literature, which I call urban–rural mobility, drawing on the new mobilities paradigm (Sheller and Urry, 2006). I examine the urban–rural population movement beyond migration and tourists, with a particular focus on creative class and second-home owners. Compared with the permanent or temporary movement from urban to rural, urban–rural mobility reflects a more flexible form of urban–rural movement (Milbourne and Kitchen, 2014), which helps me to understand RTMs' lifestyles in between the urban and the rural. Finally, I review the literature on rural gentrification. I focus on four key insights for my own research, including middle-class gentrifiers, the consumption and production explanations of rural gentrification, the production of gentrified landscapes, and the effect of gentrification on rural communities. Together, these four bodies of work provide important insights on which my own research draws, as well as indicating key areas where this study offers a novel contribution.

A big concern in the process of writing this literature review is the balance between Chinese literature and Western literature. In each part of the literature review, I start with Western

literature and then continue to literature in and/or on China. I start with Western literature because although RTMs and their practices are a new phenomenon specific to China, the literatures that help to explain this phenomenon, including rural tourism, the creative class, urban–rural mobility, and rural gentrification, have a longer history in the West (Urry, 1995; Florida, 2002; Smith, 2002; Sheller and Urry, 2006; Bell and Jayne, 2010; Urry and Larsen, 2011; Halfacree, 2012; Smith, Phillips and Kinton, 2018). The reason is that this phenomenon is closely related to urbanization, counterurbanization, and industrialization, which started centuries ago in Western countries (Williams, 1973; Berry, 1980; Champion, 1989; Mitchell and Bryant, 2009) but much later in China (Chan and Xu, 1985; Chan and Hu, 2003; Song, Thisse and Zhu, 2012). Moreover, Western research to some extent reflects global trends such as increasing urban–rural mobility (Sheller and Urry, 2006), people’s nostalgia towards the countryside during the process of fast urbanization (Williams, 1973; Tuan, 1990), and the increasing tourism and consumption culture (Urry, 1995; Urry and Larsen, 2011). In this way, Western literature offers important theoretical insights to begin with for a phenomenon which has not received much research attention in China.

After the Western literature in each section, I then review related research in and/or on China, where the applicability of the Western research is considered and the particularities of the Chinese theoretical and contextual background are put forward. Compared with the urban–rural relations in Western countries which resulted from centuries’ worth of industrialization and urbanization, the urban–rural relationship in China has undergone rapid change in the last several decades, or what Zhang and Chen (2010) call the ‘compressed urbanization’, which resulted in the special rural development paths (Zhang, Shen and Zhao, 2014). Together, there is a balance between the unique historical and spatial context of China with global forces that condition the particularities in important ways. As Oakes (2019, p.178) argues that such balancing is needed to ‘resist reducing China to an empirical test of “universal” theories while recognizing the local contexts from which all theoretical inquiry is generated’.

In the following section, I will turn to rural tourism literature. As the aim of the RTM policy is to attract RTMs to transform and upgrade rural tourism development and to encourage a new model of innovative development, RTMs form an important force for the rural tourism production system. However, they are also the consumers of rurality in the process of rural tourism. In other words, they produce what they want to consume. Therefore, there is a consumer-producer binary. I discuss this in Chapter 4. At this stage, I simply identify it as a binary in need of deconstruction. For rural tourism literature, I focus on the social construction of rurality and the rural landscape.



## 2.2 Rural tourism

### 2.2.1 Social construction of rurality and rural landscape

The thesis explores the consuming and producing of rurality and the rural landscape in the process of rural tourism. The rural is a contested landscape – as “signifiers of national identity”, as a “counterpoint to modernity”, “as wilderness and as a bucolic idyll”, and “as remote, backward, under-developed places, in need of modernization” (Woods, 2011, p. 1) – which provides fertile soil for social and cultural studies. ‘The rural stands both as a significant imaginative space, connected with all kinds of cultural meanings ranging from the idyllic to the oppressive, and as a material object of lifestyle desire for some people – a place to move to, farm in, visit for a vacation, encounter different forms of nature, and generally practice alternatives to the city’ (Cloke, 2006b, p. 18).

For as long as carts have rolled into cities from the countryside laden with crops and fuel and stone, there have been pleasure-seekers who have headed in the other direction, into the country, to hunt, play, stroll, bathe and escape the pressures of urban life. The idea of the rural as a space of production ... has always had a mirror in the similarly powerful idea of the rural as a place of consumption, particularly as a location for leisure and recreation. (Woods, 2011, p. 92)

In his book *Rural*, Michael Woods (2011) details the rural tourism activities not only in the UK but also in European histories. Since long ago, the consumption of the rural was popular among the elites: from Roman citizens’ villas to medieval aristocrats’ hunting parks, to eighteenth-century gentrifiers’ estates (Woods, 2011). In romanticized Roman literature, the rural was bucolic, representing simple, innocent, and virtuous (Bunce, 2003; Woods, 2011). However, this largely disguised the harshness of rural life and the complex relations between the city and the rural areas (Williams, 1973). The disjuncture between ‘the idyllic representation of rural life and the realities of everyday experience’ was observed through the depopulation of the countryside by the end of the nineteenth century because of rapid urban expansion (Woods, 2011, p.26). A large number of people moved out of the rural areas because of its ‘poverty, isolation, and lack of social mobility’ (Woods, 2011, p.27). They moved to towns for better living conditions and working opportunities (Woods, 2011). However, it only resulted to a renewed popularization of the idyllic representation of rurality, but this time ‘in a new anti-urban and anti-industrial sentiment’ (Woods, 2011, p.27). The representation of rurality through the media, including magazines, newspapers, films, television, and literature, has created an ideal countryside for many would-be migrants (Woods, 2009). As travelling to rural areas became much easier with the

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development of various kinds of transport, the twentieth century saw widespread rural tourism worldwide (Woods, 2011).

Rurality, which 'lives on in the popular imagination and everyday practices of the contemporary world' (Cloke, 2006, p.18), has undergone a theoretical conceptualization change, from functional concepts to political-economic concepts, and, since the early 2000s, to social constructions of rurality. Influenced by the cultural turn which involved the reassessment of the cultural focus in social science, social constructions of rurality address the 'social, cultural and moral values, which have become associated with rurality, rural spaces, and rural life' (Cloke, 2006, p. 21). As a starting point, researchers have explored the ways rurality has been experienced, constructed and negotiated by various groups of people, especially in rural tourism research (Bunce, 2003; Bell, 2006; Baylina and Berg, 2010; Urry and Larsen, 2011; Brandth and Haugen, 2014).

According to Bell (2006), the rural idyll stands for an imagined and symbolic landscape, and urbanism's other, representing the picturesque, farming, community, recreation, and the bucolic. It has always been connected to the pastoral landscapes, a scene of 'humans working in harmony with nature and the land' (Bunce, 2003, p.14). The values sustaining the rural idyll speak of 'a profound and universal human need for connection with land, nature and community, a psychology which reflects the literal meaning of nostalgia, the sense of loss of home, of homesickness' (Bunce, 2003,p.15).

Idyllic representations of the countryside have long been an integral part of its consumption through tourism. More specifically, the idyllic version of rurality includes several aspects. First, it refers to green and wild natural environments, with landscape appeal like that of the Lake District area in the UK (Urry, 1995; Duncan and Duncan, 2001; Smith and Phillips, 2001; Phillips, 2005b). Second, it may involve a rural lifestyle that is slow paced, with a strong sense of community and local tradition (Smith and Phillips, 2001; Ghose, 2004; Hines, 2012; Silva and Prista, 2016). For example, Ghose's (2004) research of the middle class in the Rocky Mountains demonstrates that American families are keen for the slower lifestyle among the small towns in the Rocky Mountains areas, which are seen as perfect to raise child because of its proximity to the nature and its distance from the chaotic cities. Finally, the notion of rurality is also connected to recreation and consumption activities based in the rural areas, such as hunting, fishing, or golfing etc. (Hines, 2010, 2012; Woods, 2011).

In Western countries, the rural idyll, which seems innocent, is actually exclusively produced, typically for white, male, and middle-class narratives (Bell, 2006). In other words, the social construction of the rural idyll has a strong connection to identity. It is therefore a social practice. In the book *The Tourist Gaze*, Urry and Larsen (2011, p.102) detail the impacts of 'the cultural

practices of one class upon another', drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) classic text, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. According to Bourdieu, the powers of different social classes are expressed especially through their cultural capital. Each social class possess a habitus, 'which is inscribed within people's orienting practices, bodily dispositions, and tastes and distastes' (Urry and Larsen, 2011, p.102). According to Urry and Larsen (2011, p.102), 'classes in competition with each other attempt to impose their own habitus upon other classes and to exert dominance'. In this process, cultural capital plays a very key role, which is not only 'a matter of abstract theoretical knowledge but of the symbolic competence necessary to appreciate works of "art" or "anti-art" or "place"' (Urry and Larsen, 2011, p.102). The reproduction of class and class conflict largely depended on different access to arts consumption (Urry and Larsen, 2011). According to Urry and Larsen (2011, p.102), 'this differential cultural consumption both results from the class system and is a mechanism by which classes and other social forces seek to establish dominance within a society'.

Applying Bourdieu's theory into tourism research, Urry and Larsen (2011) demonstrate how the tastes of the service class prefer the 'real' and the 'natural', both of which can be found in the rural. According to Urry and Larsen (2011), the attractions of the countryside is caused by the disillusionment with the modern, particularly the whole sale reconstruction projects in the post-war period. Research in the UK has demonstrated how the service class has led the push to move into the countryside, the practices of which resulted in the gentrification of rural properties, especially ruined farm buildings, as well as the buildings in vernacular or rustic style (Cloeke, Phillips and Thrift, 2003).

For rural studies, it is widely acknowledged that only certain sorts of countryside with the idea of 'landscape' are attractive to the prospective visitors (Urry and Larsen, 2011). The question of how landscape is consumed and how it relates to consumers' social identity is central to these studies (Claval, 2005; Daugstad, 2008; Hines, 2010). According to Cosgrove (1998, p.13), 'landscape is not merely the world we see'; rather, it is a way of seeing which separates subject and object. Similarly, Urry and Larsen (2011, p.110) claim that "'landscape" is a human way of visually forming, through cultivated eyes, skilful techniques and technologies of representing, a physical environment'. In another words, "'landscape" is a skilled, learned performance that visually and imaginatively works upon nature' (Urry and Larsen, 2011, p. 110). 'The very idea of landscape implies separation and observation' (Williams, 1973, p.120). The countryside is imagined to entail some or all of the following: 'a lack of planning and regimentation, a vernacular quaint architecture, winding lanes and a generally labyrinthine road system, and the virtues of tradition and the lack of social intervention' (Urry and Larsen, 2011, p.109). Such a 'rural landscape' normally hides the 'farm machinery, labourers, tractors, telegraph wires, concrete farm buildings,

polluted water, nuclear power stations and dead and diseased animals'(Urry and Larsen, 2011, p.111). The service class and the romantic gaze lead the way in sustaining this picture of the countryside as 'landscape' (Urry and Larsen, 2011).

However, this approach to landscape has been criticized because of its lack of reflection upon the question of how landscape are produced (Wylie, 2007). In an early paper on landscape and labour, Mitchell (1994, p.9) argues that although landscape as a way of seeing approach are quite 'sophisticated in methodology and politics', the fact that they treat the 'readable landscapes as already there to be decoded' has resulted in the neglect of the process of landscape production. In other words, an interpretative focus upon already 'complete' landscapes is arguably insufficient. Landscape is not the setting for human activity, it is the product and outcome of such activity (Mitchell, 1994). For Mitchell, landscape has double meaning. As an activity, it is something active in the production and reproduction of social and economic relations. As a product, it is the standard-bearer of such relations. I will discuss more of this concept in Chapter 5, but for now I will turn to the rural tourism research in China.

### **2.2.2 Rural tourism in China**

#### **2.2.2.1 A brief history of rural tourism development in China**

In China, the rural has a long history of being used for recreational reasons, especially by the emperors and elites. In the feudal society, dating back to the Chin dynasty from 221 BC, weichang, or yuanyou (an enclosed area for viewing and hunting for the royal families) were built outside the capital cities specifically for emperors' hunting, shooting, horse riding, and other entertaining activities (Twitchett and Fairbank, 1986). For many educated and well-off men working in government who could not bear the vicious clique struggles at court, they chose to retreat to the countryside to search for 'naturalness' and 'spontaneity' (Ebrey, 1996, p.89). The literature that they produced, especially in the form of pastoral poets (tianyuan shige), constructed a utopia countryside as a representation of human-nature harmony, freedom, and simple and unsophisticated peasant life (Ebrey, 1996).

However, the realization of this ideal rural never came naturally. Instead, it 'must always come about through cultivation, learning, or some kind of expert-guided transformation' as 'the village also contains within it the seeds of chaos and destruction' (Oakes, 2013, p. 392). This was shown most obviously in the Rural Reconstruction Movements led by social activists Liang Shuming and James Yen in the 1930s, both of which aimed to promote rural development by improving peasant's education (Lynch, 2010). In Mao's era from 1949 to 1976, as the Chinese Communist Party's root is in the rural areas, they were given a specific position and citizens were asked to go

to the countryside and ‘to learn from the farmers’ (Chung, 2013, p. 596). However, this rhetoric of revolutionary glory changed to reflect the ‘harsh reality of poverty and underdevelopment’ when Deng’s urban-centred economic reform was carried out in the late 1970s (Chung, 2013, p. 596). Rural villages were seen as ‘being dirty (zang), chaotic (luan), and inferior (cha)’, which symbolized ‘poverty and backwardness’ (Chung, 2013, p. 596). This is widely documented by Chinese researchers (Du, Park and Wang, 2005; Liu, Liu and Zhou, 2017).

Since late 1980s, the rural culture that was kept ‘authentic’ because of its poverty and ‘backwardness’ started to be employed by local government as a way to promote development in the form of rural tourism, following the broad cultural development strategies in China (Oakes, 1998). Since the early 1990s, a cultural shift in regional development strategies has been seen in China. The economic potential of the cultural resources have been greatly valued by local governments (Oakes, 2006). This cultural shift was driven by the state’s effort to rekindle national pride and identity following the widespread post-Tiananmen malaise on one hand and the state’s fiscal decentralization on the other, which contributed to the new entrepreneurial local government (Oakes, 2006). It was under these circumstances that mass rural tourism started in China, the development of which can be roughly divided into three waves: rural ethnic tourism since early 1990s, heritage tourism in Historical and Cultural Villages since the early 2000s, and Nongjiale (literally ‘Happy Farmer’s House’) tourism in Beautiful Villages since the late 2000s (see Table 2.1). However, it is worth mentioning that this is not a linear process, as one village can engage more than one type of rural tourism. For example, villages with ethnic minorities can also be nominated as Historical and Cultural Villages. Nongjiale tourism can also be found in rural ethnic tourism.

**Table 2.1: Three waves of rural tourism development in China**

<b>Rural tourism type</b>	Rural ethnic tourism	Heritage tourism in Historical and Cultural Villages	<i>Nongjiale</i> tourism in Beautiful Villages
<b>Time</b>	Since early 1990s	Since early 2000s	Since late 2000s
<b>Main attractions</b>	Ethnic minority cultures, traditions, performances, architectures etc.	Heritage buildings, historical stories	Rurality representative of the rustic, familial, green and healthy
<b>Research areas</b>	Rural areas with various ethnic	Officially nominated Historical and Cultural	Beautiful villages in the suburban areas of

	minorities, mainly in Guizhou, Yunnan	villages, e.g. Hongcun, Xidi	big cities like Beijing, Nanjing, Chengdu
<b>Research</b>	(Oakes, 1998; Chio, 2014, 2017)	(Zhao, Zhang and Zhang, 2005; Oakes, 2013; Xu, Wan and Fan, 2014)	(Chio, 2014; Park, 2014; Wu, 2014)

### 2.2.2.2 Changing rurality

How has rurality been constructed in the process of rural tourism in China since the 1990s? Unlike its Western counterpart, where the social construction of rurality was largely dominated by the middle class—imagined rural idyll, the construction of rurality in China has been strongly affected by official discourse based on state-led rural tourism projects. From rural ethnic tourism and heritage tourism to Nongjiale tourism in Beautiful Villages, there has been a change in the meaning of rurality from a specific kind of culture or ‘expert knowledge’ to a rural lifestyle.

Rurality was constructed as a kind of expert knowledge in the process of rural ethnic tourism and heritage tourism in the Historical and Cultural Villages. Rural ethnic tourism emerged firstly in ethnic minority regions such as Qiandongnan in Guizhou and Xishuangbanna in Yunan province, where the unique and exotic traditions of ethnic minorities attracted not only domestic but also international tourists (Oakes, 1998, 2013; Wu, Li and Li, 2014; Chio, 2017; Wu, 2018). Following the Historical and Cultural City project, the Historical and Cultural Village (lishi wenhua mingcun) project aimed to protect the traditional villages with rich cultural heritages of great historical and memorable meaning and a traditional landscape of a particular time or place. The project has ignited another upsurge of rural tourism in China since 2003. For rural ethnic tourism, it is the ethnic culture, such as ethnic minorities; languages, architecture styles, and their traditions, that has been employed to construct the rurality. Similarly, for heritage tourism in Historical and Cultural Villages, the cultural values projected onto the heritage architectures become a key aspect of the social construction of rurality in China.

This socially constructed culture is more of an expert knowledge dominated by official discourses than everyday life in the rural area (Oakes, 2013). A good example is Oakes’s (2013) research on Tunpu heritage tourism. According to Oakes (2013), the term Tunpu stands for a specific cultural subgroup of Han in central Guizhou, which is not within state boundary during the Ming Dynasty. As heritage sites, Tunpu villages displays not only how ‘Guizhou “became Chinese” but also a broader Ming heritage of conquest’ (Oakes, 2013, p. 382). For Oakes (2013, p.383), the term

Tunpu represents 'a language of experts, a knowledge of culture that emerges not from villagers themselves but which nevertheless claims to represent them'.

However, the construction of rurality has changed from a kind of expert knowledge to a rural lifestyle through the process of *Nongjiale* tourism in Beautiful Villages (*meili xiangcun*). Aiming to promote urban–rural integrated development, a national campaign called Beautiful Villages has started since the late 2000s. It has boosted a new wave of rural tourism development in the villages, especially those in the suburban areas of big cities, through attracting urban residents with the beautiful landscape, the natural environment, and various kinds of leisure activities of rural characters like fruit picking, harvesting, and fishing (Chen and Zhang, 2015). In the Beautiful Villages, *Nongjiale* is one of the most popular form of rural tourism activities, which involves rural residents turning their farm houses into guesthouses and offering urbanite guests with food and accommodation of rural character (Park, 2014; Wu, 2014; Wang et al., 2018; Cody, 2019; Meng et al., 2019).

In this process, rurality is constructed as 'rural, familial, authentic, eco-friendly, healthy and traditional' (Park, 2014, p.519), something that is closer to the rural idyll in Western research, compared with rurality in rural ethnic tourism and heritage tourism in the Historical and Cultural Villages. The development of *Nongjiale* tourism reflects urban middle class nostalgic longing for rurality and rusticity in China (Qian, 2017). Park's (2014) research on *Nongjiale* in suburban Beijing demonstrates that urbanite guests, especially those born and grew up in the rural areas and moved to cities for better education and job opportunities, feel a strong sense of 'going back home', 'familial intimacy', and 'homey comfort' in a farm guesthouse, compared with the 'fake life' in cities which lacks the 'vitality and warmth of humanity' (p.521). This sense of loss now experienced by the Chinese urban middle classes, especially since the relatively recent processes of industrialisation and urbanisation, is similar to what has been experienced by the urban middle classes in the West for many decades alongside the processes of industrialization and urbanization that began centuries ago (Harrison, 1982; Tuan, 1990).

### **2.2.2.3 Changing rural landscape**

The construction of rurality as expert knowledge and as romanticized rural lifestyle have both had effects on the rural landscape. Besides these two discursive forces, modernity has also had significant impact over the change of the rural landscape through rural tourism development in China (Oakes, 1998; Park, 2014; Chio, 2017). Rural tourism development and modernization have been promoted together since the rural ethnic tourism development in the early 1990s'. Oakes's (1998) book *Tourism and Modernity in China* demonstrates how the experience of modernization is revealed in the newly constructed tourist landscape and how the tourist industry was used as

an example of the state's modernization policies. According to Oakes, rural ethnic tourism development in Guizhou province was not only seen as a way to promote economic development in the backward provinces, but also a way to promote modernization in the less civilized ethnic minority population. For Historical and Cultural Villages, research has documented how the top-down heritage preservation process in the Historic and Cultural Villages protected the physical spaces such as architecture, streets and alleys, river systems etc. (Xu, Wan and Fan, 2014). However, Oakes (2013, p. 380) argues that 'heritage preservation and display' are used 'as powerful tools of modernization and development', because 'cultural display implies a project of "improvement" and of building "quality" among the "backward"'.

Current *Nongjiale* tourism development in the Beautiful Villages has been no exception. More broadly, rural tourism development programmes were used to address national concerns over 'widening economic and social gaps between rural and urban areas' (Chio, 2017, p. 421). As Chio (2017) points out that the campaign of 'Building a New Socialist Countryside' officially started in 2006 and the publish of the Urban and Rural Planning Law in 2008 highlighted the importance of the physical landscape 'in the pursuit of modernization and development in China's countryside' (Chio, 2017, p. 421). The New Socialist Countryside campaign involved mainly the improvement of physical environments in the villages and the upgrade of infrastructures (Zhang, Shen and Zhao, 2014). The Urban and Rural Planning Law have brought the principles used in urban planning projects into rural areas (Bray, 2013). Rural planning quickly projected a new vision of modern living in the rural areas through 'two-storey, single-family houses made of concrete, neatly lined up along paved roads' (Chio, 2017, p. 422). Beautiful Villages were built on this basis, with the physical landscape in the villages further improved (such as through a unified façade with local architectural character, newly built parks and/or roads with trees or flowers on the side) (see Figure 2.1) (Gao, Zhang and Luo, 2014; Chen and Zhang, 2015). Park's (2014) research on a well-known *Nongjiale* tourism site called Fule Valley in a suburban district of Beijing demonstrates how these two competing discursive systems, the romanticized rurality and modernity, are represented in *nongjiayuan* – literally meaning 'peasant family courtyard'. *Nongjiale* engenders 'a contested space of hybridity in which seemingly incompatible forces and gazes are complexly comingled' (Park, 2014, p. 532). While most guesthouses maintain the characters of the farmhouses when reconstructed, they also abandon some key characters of rurality and rusticity. As Park writes:





Figure 2.1: Bird's eye view of a Beautiful Village in Jiangsu

(Source: <https://kknews.cc/zh-sg/agriculture/5ampvm2.html>)

On the one hand, the mud-brick and/or red-brick wall is replaced by a concrete wall; the traditional black tile roof is mostly replaced by a concrete slab roof; the traditional squatting-down-style toilet is replaced by a modern flush toilet; the interior of guest rooms is filled with a variety of modern consumer products; the kang is replaced by a bed; and so on. On the other hand, however, not all rustic artifacts are replaced. Rather, quite a few material icons of rusticity are preserved in sanitized and fragmented forms. Among them are bundles of dried corn ears or red peppers hung here and there on the walls, a small vegetable garden in the courtyard, some old agricultural implements or household artifacts displayed at eye-catching spots, and a few rooms furnished with a kang. (Park, 2014, p.532)

As is illustrated in this case, most *Nongjiale* farm guesthouses look more like urban houses or mansions than a normal farmhouse. As Park (2014, p. 531) points out that although 'the architecture of most farm guesthouses falls between the two poles, the most rustic style and the most modern style', 'the spectrum is obviously tilted toward the latter pole'. The urbanized built environment and farm guesthouses in villages are seen by the local government as the 'model feature of rural development, urbanization and modernization' (Park, 2014, p. 531).

In sum, the rural is an imaginative space containing various cultural values. The socially constructed idyllic rural has been the reason for rural tourism in Western countries, together with

which is a rural landscape of middle-class privilege. The social representation of rurality in the process of rural tourism in China has changed from expert knowledge of ethnic culture or heritage to a rural lifestyle. In the process of rural tourism development in China, the rural landscape has also changed dramatically, affected by the two contradictory discourses of romanticized rurality and modernity.

### 2.3 Creative class

The word 'maker' (Chaungke in Chinese) in the phrase 'Rural Tourism Makers' was first imported from America to Chinese cities (Lindtner, 2015; Lindtner, Greenspan and Li, 2015; Wen, 2017), and then from Chinese cities to the rural context. Wen (2017, p.343) claims that the maker movement 'took off in China alongside the transition from the "Made in China" to the "Created in China" campaign' as well as the 'Mass Entrepreneurship and Innovation' campaign, both of which highlighted the importance of creativity and the creative class. RTMs in China form an important force in the tourism production system. To understand RTMs as a creative class, I reviewed the literature on the creative class, with a particular focus on the creative class in the countryside as it differs a lot from the creative class as documented in urban research. More specifically, I look at its definition, its motivation for a rural locational choice, and its consumption–production practices in the rural context.

The creative class was originally identified by Richard Florida (2002) as a group of 40 million Americans who are paid to think. He divides them into two groups: the super creative core and the creative professionals. Florida (2012, p.38) claims that the former 'produce new forms or designs that are readily transferable and widely useful', and include scientists, academics, poets, artists, architects, and designers etc. The latter 'work in a wide range of knowledge-intensive industries, such as high-tech, financial services, the legal and healthcare professions, and business management (Florida, 2012, p.39)'. Since emerging in the American context, the concept of the creative class has been applied to numerous cities around the world such as Toronto (Hracs and Leslie, 2014; Brydges and Hracs, 2019a), Amsterdam and Dublin (Bontje and Lawton, 2013), Stockholm (Borén and Young, 2013), and Beijing and Shanghai (Chow, 2019b). However, it has also been criticized for been 'so broad and encompassing that the term is hardly useful to any understanding of those doing "real" creative work' (Chow, 2017, p.364).

The application of the concept to the rural context is not straightforward, not least because many of the occupations identified by Florida (2002) and others (e.g. DCMS, 2001) are not really found in rural areas (McGranahan and Wojan, 2007). Instead, what is found is a creativity that is less the property of individual creative types and more a product of the improvisation found in all cultural

activities – whether urban or rural (Edensor et al., 2010). This is also one of the reasons why the concept of a creative class has not been widely used in the rural context. In the creative class research in cities, creativity has always been folded into a ‘normative form’, based on large-scale hubs or creative districts in metropolitan areas. However, increasing research in recent years has questioned what constitutes creativity by exploring everyday creative expression in suburban, rural, and remote settings where there are no strict boundaries between ‘amateur’ and ‘professional’ creativity (Gibson, 2010; Gibson, Brennan-Horley and Jim, 2010).

Research on the locational choices of the creative class and the factors contributing to their relocation has attracted great attention within geography. Lots of research has argued that the creative class prefers cities with good quality jobs or amenities including 24/7 lifestyle, consumption opportunities, and leisure and entertainment activities (Florida, 2002; Storper and Scott, 2009). However, research on the creative class in the rural question these findings. Based on their research on the creative class in rural US counties, McGranahan and Wojan (2007) question how Florida selected his focus groups for his creative class research. According to McGranahan and Wojan (2007, p. 214), ‘young, single members of the creative class were over represented’ in Florida’s research, for which reason urban vitality, like the music scene and the 24/7 lifestyle, seems most relevant. On the contrary, the rural creative class tend to be older and are more likely to be married. As a result, ‘family life may condition the importance of interaction or tend to emphasize venues different from the clubs and cafes appealing to urban creative workers’ (McGranahan and Wojan, 2007, p. 214).

Moreover, Eimermann (2016) highlights the need to go beyond the consumption-production binary and to combine lifestyle-led motivations with seeking labour opportunities (Eimermann, 2015a, p. 81). Lifestyle migrants in rural areas use their professional skills to engage in rural tourism business (Herslund, 2012; Zhu, 2018). This group has stronger motivation to reproduce, which contributes to regeneration in rural areas through their culture/art-related practices (Bell and Jayne, 2010). For them, relocation decisions are made not primarily for economic reasons, but with consideration of their stage of career, stage of life, family commitments, or ideal working life (Oliver, 2011; Luckman, 2012). As O’Reilly & Benson (2009, p.1) argue, these individuals see mobility as ‘a route to a better and more fulfilling way of life’. It is often described ‘in terms of authenticity, implying simplicity, purity, and originality’ as well as do-it-yourself spirit (O’Reilly and Benson, 2009, p.5). For these lifestyle migrants, their choice of where to live also represents their attitude towards ‘how to live’. As Hoey’s (2005) robust ethnography of lifestyle migrants shows, this often means quitting a corporate career and starting more fulfilling forms of work which highlight self-actualization and creativity.

The application of the concept of the creative class to China is also not so straightforward. Definitions of particular professions and industries have not translated well into the Chinese context, although the general focus on creative work, talent, and cultural production has translated better (Dai et al., 2012; Chow, 2017). For example, in his research on the creative class in Beijing and Shanghai, Chow (2017) prefers to use the classification of creative industries defined by the UK Department for Culture, Media, and Sports (DCMS). According to DCMS (2001, p.5), creative industries are ‘those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property’. He further indicates that he focuses on ‘practices of those who actually do “creative work in the cultural industries”’ (Chow, 2017, p. 364).

The concept of a creative class has not yet been applied to rural research in China. However, tourism research in China has documented lifestyle entrepreneurs in rural areas, similar to their Western counterparts, where individuals start lifestyle businesses in tourism destinations based on their own creative skills, hobbies, and experience (Xu and Ma, 2014; Wang, Hung and Bao, 2015). For example, in their research of the owners of lifestyle tourism business in Yangshuo, a small town and a tourism destination in Guilin in China, Wang, Hung and Bao (2015) find that most of them are from outside Yangshuo, with good educational backgrounds and financial security, which allow them to chase their ideal lifestyles. They further indicate that, rather than seeing the rural tourism business as a way to make a living, lifestyle tourism entrepreneurs see it more as ‘a way to have fun’ and to ‘escape from one’s ordinary routine life’ (Wang, Hung and Bao, 2015, p. 29). Similarly, Su and Chen’s (2017b) research documents migrant tourism entrepreneurs in the ancient town of Lijiang, who do not set money making as their primary goal. Instead, they consider more about social and cultural reasons. This research demonstrates how some entrepreneurs ‘embed their business within the local cultural milieu and build their own localized brand’ (Su and Chen, 2017, p.663). In other words, the creative individuals are engaging in the cultural production of local rural tourism development.

To summarize, the concept of the creative class which originated in cities in America has to be adapted to the rural context. While the creative class is divided into various occupations (e.g. musicians, animators) in urban studies, in rural areas it is more likely to be seen as a product of the improvisation embedded in all kinds of cultural activities. While a wide range of research argues that the creative class prefers cities with many cultural amenities for their consumption, rural-centred research has a different focus, which is on the role of cultural production of the creative individuals, through, for example, engaging in rural tourism business. The application of the concept to rural China is further complicated by the lack of a good match between the

professions and industries in Western countries and in China, although the idea of creative work and cultural production has been applied better.

## 2.4 Urban–rural mobility

### 2.4.1 Urban–rural mobility

If RTMs engage in rural tourism and its production, and in creative production as members of the creative class, then they also move between urban and rural China in a way that goes beyond just tourism.

In the era of mobility, ‘all the world seems to be on the move’ (Sheller and Urry, 2006, p.207). Sheller and Urry (2006) came up with the ‘new mobilities’ paradigm. On one hand, this ‘new mobilities’ paradigm ‘challenges the dominant “sedentarist” tradition’ (Halfacree, 2012, p.211). For Sheller and Urry (2006, p.208), sedentarism ignores the ‘systematic movements of people’. On the other hand, the ‘new mobilities’ paradigm is also cautious about the ‘nomadic counter to sedentarism, with its overt celebration of the freedom of living in fluid times’ (Halfacree, 2012, p. 211). Overall, Sheller and Urry (2006, p.214) use the ‘new mobilities’ paradigm to transcend the ‘sedentarist and nomadic conceptualisations of place and movement’, recognizing ‘stability within movement and movement within stability’ (Halfacree, 2012, p. 211). This new mobilities paradigm is based on and then contributes to a broad range of research, including work from cultural studies, geography, migration studies, tourism studies, and sociology etc. (Bell and Osti, 2010; Milbourne and Kitchen, 2014; Jiron, Imilan and Iturra, 2016; Song et al., 2019).

Based on Sheller and Urry's (2006) new mobilities paradigm, Halfacree (2012) revisited the concept of counterurbanization. He argues that in the era of mobility, understanding of migration should be reorganized, especially through breaking the binaries between stability and movement, and permanent and temporary. Drawing on the case of the Scandinavian second-home consumption, Halfacree (2012, p.218) argues that ‘it is increasingly difficult conceptually to separate definitively second-home consumers from more “permanent” counterurbanizing rural places consumers’. In the era of mobilities, the binaries between permanent and temporary have increasingly weakened. Therefore, counterurbanization should not be seen as including only the permanent relocation to the rural areas (Halfacree, 2012). In other words, the new mobilities paradigm challenges the previous definition of counterurbanization, which only consider the permanent move of population to the rural areas and settle down permanently. In the era of mobility, the permanent-temporary binary of urban–rural migration is becoming unhelpful (Halfacree, 2012).

Indeed, people show more flexible attitudes towards moving to rural areas (Eimermann, 2015b). For one thing, not all people who have moved to the rural areas settle down permanently (Milbourne, 2007). For another, people who have moved out of the rural areas may come back at some point in the future (Ní Laoire, 2007). Moreover, some people move between urban and rural areas through, for example, having a second home (Halfacree, 2012; Ellingsen and Hidle, 2013). Therefore, besides understanding why people come to rural areas, it is also an urgent topic to understand why people decide not to move to rural areas permanently, and in what ways they balance a working life in between the urban and the rural (Milbourne, 2007; Halfacree, 2012). I now turn to two groups of people who move between the urban and the rural.

The first group is the creative class. In the previous section, I have demonstrated the creative class's motivation to relocate to the rural and their practices in villages. In this section, I add their mobility between the urban and the rural. As individuals with high human capital, the creative class are highly mobile (Florida, 2002). Some of them choose a rural location and take their skills to the rural. In his research of Dutch lifestyle migration to rural Sweden, Eimermann (2015) demonstrates that while people who were not engaged in creative industries may have difficulty finding jobs in rural areas, people working in creative industries see their relocation to the rural areas as motivated by the chances of taking their skills to the rural areas.

However, further consideration of the intersectionality of the creative class individuals, including their age, gender, life cycle, etc. (Martin-Brelot et al., 2010; Dai et al., 2012), reveals how their move to a rural location is not one-way and permanent. Instead, they are free to choose to return or to migrate to other places at any time because their changing preferences over the courses of their lives intersect with lifestyle relocation (Eimermann, 2017). Again, in his research of Dutch lifestyle migrant families in rural Sweden, Eimermann demonstrates why some lifestyle migrants have to move back to cities with better education opportunities when their children get close to the secondary school age. Similarly, McGranahan and Wojan (2007) point out that the creative class in rural counties of the USA are in older age and have a bigger chance of getting married, and this they have to take their families into consideration when thinking about mobility. They further argue that Florida's assumption that creative class is highly mobile may apply to single young professionals or bohemians ready to move at any moment if they see a better chance. However, they do not think it applies to families with children of school age or to people who see living with another language as a serious obstacle.

More recently, research on creative class mobility has highlighted the contingent character of the mobility. Based on their research on independent fashion designers in Canada, Brydges and Hracs (2019) demonstrate how creative entrepreneurs do not need to be permanently located in one of

the established global centres like New York or London. Instead, they highlight the benefits of having a 'home base' in a smaller city or remote rural region and practising temporary mobility, which involves short and frequent visits to fashion weeks within Canada. Related rural research has documented more frequent mobility of the creative class in and out of rural areas. For example, Eimermann's (2017) research documents how lifestyle migrants connect with multiple places and strategically switch between multiple locations.

The second group is second-home owners. While the occupational characters of the creative class allow them to move between the urban and the rural, multiple-home ownership is the reason why second-home owners can leave an urban-rural lifestyle. Based largely on second homes in Nordic countries, existing research shows how the middle class's mobility between primary home and second home represents how different practices are linked to different home locations and in turn form strong links between the urban and the rural (Halfacree, 2011; Overvåg, 2011; Ellingsen and Hidle, 2013). Based on their research of two major second-home areas in Norway, Hovden and Kragero, Ellingsen and Hidle (2013) demonstrate that in a society where mobility is regarded as the dominant mechanism and a peripatetic lifestyle is the mainstream, a 'home' may comprise various locations. Similarly, Overvåg (2011) argues that instead of being conceptualized as migration, second-home owners in Norway should be seen as a kind of circulation. The use of a second home does not mean that the owners have to change their home residence because the owners often flexibly move between their homes in cities and the second homes in the rural areas. People use both the home in cities and the second home in the rural areas for different purposes to improve the quality of their life. However, there is a rule that the distance between the first home and second home does not exceed four hours, or what is termed the 'weekend recreation space'.

#### **2.4.2 The increasing urban–rural mobility in China**

Population mobility in China was very low historically (Fan, 2018). According to Fan (2018, p. 853), part of the reason is the 'agrarian nature of the economy which bound people to the land'. There has long been the assumption that the majority of people stay at the place where they were born and grew up (Fei, 1985). Since the 1950s, the Hukou system, or household registration system, which has divided the whole population into two groups, i.e. agricultural Hukou and non-agricultural Hukou based on their place of birth, has been a new policy restricting internal labour migration flows, especially rural–urban labour migration (Bosker et al., 2012). However, this situation has changed dramatically following the reform and open up (*gaige kaifang*) in the late 1970s, with an upsurge of rural–urban migration, the main motivation of which is to make money in cities as the demand for labour in agriculture declines (Fan, 2009, 2018; Wu and Logan, 2016).

## Chapter 2

Circularity and translocality are extremely common practices among rural migrants, who straddle the city and countryside for prolonged period (Fan, 2018). Based on her research of the migrants from a village in Sichuan, Cindy Fan (2009) demonstrates their flexibility in the choice of different types of jobs and their frequent change of locations. Fan (2009) argues that rural migrants switch frequently between urban and rural areas and change their identity between 'farmers and urban workers' in order to 'enjoy the best of both worlds – urban work to boost income and improve rural living, and the countryside for security, livelihood, and long-term settlement' (p.377).

However, there has been a mobility shift since the late 1980s in China 'from production-led peasant-worker migration to a more individualized and diverse consumption-led mobility', dominated by tourists (Xu and Wu, 2016, p.509). According to Xu and Wu (2016), this shift has been influenced by the emerging middle class in China (see further detail in rural gentrification section) and the effect of the consumer society.

Most recently, inspired by the mobilities paradigm, researchers started to examine the emerging lifestyle mobility in China, in the form of lifestyle entrepreneurs and second home owners, or retired snowbirds in some research (Wu, Xu and Lew, 2015; Xu and Wu, 2016; Su and Chen, 2017; Kou, Xu and Kwan, 2018). For example, Xu and Wu (2016) demonstrate two forms of lifestyle mobility: the seasonal migration of the retired people to Hainan, a tropical island in China, and lifestyle entrepreneurs in the south-western towns, such as Lijiang and Dali. According to Xu and Wu (2016), the domestic seasonal retirement migrants – or, as they call them, retired snowbirds – are economically well-off and retired people who move to search for the warm weather for their health. Most lifestyle entrepreneurs are well-educated young people, who had decent jobs in cities and who search for their own ways of living and self-realization. Unlike the rural–urban migrants who move from rural areas to cities, both groups in this research move the opposite way.

Similar to its Western counterpart, research on lifestyle mobility in China also examined how the new mobility practices shape the changing concept of home. For example, based on his research on lifestyle entrepreneurs in Lijiang in China, Zhu (2018, p.357) demonstrates 'how the traditional Chinese notion of home has changed from a lineage-bounded, fixed place unit to an individual enterprise for happiness and simultaneous connections to multiple places'. For Zhu (2018), such a shift is caused by the emergent consciousness of individualisation among Chinese and their longing for individualized life paths. Unlike people who move to pursue 'social stability and security', mobility give middle-class Chinese the chance to own 'multiple homes that work towards their own individual life and personal happiness (Zhu, 2018, p.362).



An element of lifestyle mobility with a particularly Chinese character is lifestyle migrants' relationships with local residents and the different ways they build social support in their destinations. Xu and Wu's (2016) research demonstrates how retired lifestyle migrants gain social support from their *laoxiang* (i.e. with people whose place of origin is the same province or city), whereas local people are seldom included. Xu and Wu (2016) connect this to Chinese acquaintance society (Fei, 1985), in which people are more likely to build social circles through personal relationships. In this case, the lifestyle migrants do not have to interact much with local residents. Meanwhile, in the case where lifestyle migrants have to interact with local residents, their relationships are different. For example, in their study of lifestyle entrepreneurs in the ancient town of Lijiang, Su and Chen (2017b) demonstrate that lifestyle entrepreneurs build market-based economic relationships with local residents through house renting, and that they keep a respectful distance from local residents so that they can 'separate market-based transactions from societal interactions' (p.661). In this case, they tend to rely on lifestyle migrants with shared life values to build their social support.

To summarize, in the era of mobility, the new mobilities paradigm transcends the 'sedentarist and nomadic conceptualisations of place and movement' (Sheller and Urry, 2006, p.214). Consequently, the permanent-temporary binary of urban–rural migration is becoming unhelpful. A more fluid and flexible mobility perspective is needed. Two groups practising urban–rural mobility are the creative class and second-home owners. While mobility for the former is because of their ability to transfer their skills relatively easily to the rural areas, for the later, it is having multiple homes that allows urban–rural mobility to happen. In China, there has been a shift from production-led mobility to consumption-led mobility, and the new mobilities paradigm has been applied to the emerging lifestyle migration and second-home owners in some tourist destinations. While the mobilities in China share similarities with their Western counterparts (e.g. the changing concept of home), lifestyle migrants' relationships with local residents and the way they build social support in the destinations is of Chinese character because of the acquaintance society, where interpersonal relations play more important roles.

## 2.5 Rural gentrification

Unlike urban–rural mobility, which reflects a more flexible urban–rural population movement, rural gentrification seems to focus on people's movement from urban to rural settings to settle down permanently. After all, gentrification is often defined as 'the displacement of a working-class populace by middle-class incomers' (Phillips, 1993, p.123). However, this definition of gentrification has been criticized as it 'obscure the fact that a multiplicity of processes, rather than a single causal process' (Rose, 1984, p.62) are involved in the process of gentrification. For this

research, rural gentrification literature provides theoretical guidance in that most RTMs are middle class and their practices are producing a new gentrified rural landscape with a middle-class character. To be specific, I look at four key themes: the middle class as gentrifiers; the consumption and production explanations of rural gentrification; the production of a gentrified landscape; and the effect of gentrification.

The term 'gentrification' was originally coined by the British sociologist Ruth Glass to demonstrate a distinct process of urban change in inner London, which included the refurbishment of properties in a neighbourhood by pioneer gentrifiers, and the displacement of local residents by the newly arriving middle classes (Glass, 1964). It has since been applied to a wide range of geographical contexts, from urban to rural (Smith and Phillips, 2001; Ghose, 2004; Smith and Holt, 2005; Qian, He and Liu, 2013; Phillips and Smith, 2018; Smith, Phillips and Kinton, 2018), and from West to East (He, 2010; Shin, Lees and Lopez-Morales, 2016; Waley, 2016).

However, the application of gentrification to a wider context is not so straightforward. Darren Smith and Martin Phillips, two rural researchers who have been doing rural gentrification research for many years, criticize the 'metropolitan centrality' of gentrification studies, which set up the 'urban as a privileged viewpoint from which to interpret the world' (Phillips and Smith, 2018, p.52). Phillips and Smith (2018) argue that although rural spaces are always connected to the urban, 'the presence of relational connections does not reduce localities to urbanity' (p.52); instead, researchers should realize the specificities of the rural.

Applying the concept of gentrification to other countries, especially Eastern countries, has not been straightforward either. Questioning the definition of Global South, Shin, Lees and Lopez-Morales (2016) came up with the label 'Global East' in a special issue called 'Locating Gentrification in the Global East', in which they critically engaged with the gentrification questions in Asia. As López-Morales (2018) argues that 'academia should go beyond the Western European/North American comfort zone and embrace theoretical and epistemological complexity' (p.47). In the Global East, there is little discussion and use of the term 'gentrification' until recent years; an important reason is the political dimension the term gentrification represents (Waley, 2016). As He (2010) argues that 'the government and some scholars prefer to use neutralized and unpoliticized terms, such as reurbanisation, urban renewal, and urban regeneration, urban redevelopment, and urban revitalisation to describe the magnitude and intensity of the urban restructuring process (p.347). If Chinese urban studies have seen some change since He's (2010) argument, with an increasing number of urban researchers in China starting to use the concept of gentrification (Wang and Lau, 2009; He, 2010; Wu, Zhang and Waley, 2016, 2017), rural research in China has been in almost the same situation as she

described it about ten years ago. Except for very few researchers who have started to use rural gentrification in their research (Qian, He and Liu, 2013; Chan et al., 2016; Zhao, 2019), the mainstream rural research in China still uses terms such as rural renaissance (*xiangcun fuxing*) (Zhang, Shen and Zhao, 2014; Wang and Zhang, 2016), rural reconstruction, and rural regeneration (*xiangcun chonggou*) (Chen and Zhang, 2015).

Despite the above discussion, there is no doubt that rural gentrification research can borrow some insights from urban gentrification research, and that gentrification research in the Global East can learn from its Western counterpart. It is for this reason that the literature review in this part will critically mix a wide selection of gentrification research from urban and rural areas, and from West and East, to offer some helpful theoretical insights for this research.

### **2.5.1 Middle-class gentrifiers**

The definition of gentrification by Ruth Glass highlights the role of middle-class gentrifiers. Since 1972, David Ley has been one of the first and leading researchers to highlight the middle-class identity of gentrifiers. Influenced by Daniel Bell's (1973) post-industrial thesis, which points out the rapid growth of managerial and professional occupations, Ley argues that post-industrial society changed the rationale for land use in Canada. Instead of being economic, the new middle-class professionals formed an expanding group with a strong will to improve their quality of life (Ley, 1996). Ley (1996) also argues that gentrification symbolized a new period in urban development where the emerging middle class's consumption preferences, tastes, and need for an aesthetic outlook towards cities pushed the coming of an alternative urbanism following suburbanization.

In the 1990s, Chris Hamnett developed Ley's arguments. According to Hamnett (2003), gentrification is the result of the transformation of Western cities from industrial centres to service centres, where the increasing middle class had replaced the industrial working class in the inner city areas. Both Ley's post-industrial and Hamnett's professionalization theses are very important in explaining the emerging new middle class and their important roles in the process of gentrification in urban centres (Lees, Slater and Wyly, 2008).

In rural studies, before the term rural gentrification was used, research has documented the expansion of the service class in the British countryside (Cloeke and Thrift, 1987). The issue of the incoming of the middle-class and their replacement of the lower-class groups became clearer following the development of critical and political rural geography and the use of the term rural gentrification (Cloeke and Little, 1997; Cloeke, Phillips and Thrift, 2003; Phillips, 2009). In the United States, Hine's research document the post-industrial middle class as rural gentrifiers (Hines, 2010,

2012). Although many studies on the urban-rural migration did not use the term gentrification directly, with their focus on for example lifestyle migration (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009) or second-home owners (Overvåg and Berg, 2011), they also recognized the involvement of middle-class groups.

However, the equation of gentrifiers with the middle class has been criticized for its oversimplification of class structures in rural areas as simply involving a 'dichotomous middle-class/working-class division' (Phillips, 1993, p.124). Research has suggested that rural areas have a series of middle class or middle class fractions, rather than one homogeneous middle class (Cloe and Thrift, 1987; Phillips, 1993). In their research of the rural gentrification in Hebden Bridge in Yorkshire, England, Smith and Phillips (2001) demonstrate two groups of gentrifiers, namely 'remote greentrifiers' and 'village greentrifiers'. While the former, who sought the wild and isolation of the moor tops, were mostly engaged in high-income professionals, the latter, who moved into valley locations, were more likely to work in lower professional occupations, such as teaching.

The translation of the middle class from the Western background to China is not so straightforward. The kind of gentrification initiated by the professional and managerial middle class and service class has rarely happened in China (He, 2019). Ironically, it is through the process of state-led gentrification and house purchasing in China that the middle class as a group started to attract broader attention. On one hand, this is because of the low percentage of professional and managerial labourers and its slow increase in the 1990s (Wang and Lau, 2009; He, 2010). On the other hand, it is because of the fast development of state-led gentrification in China (He, 2019). As He (2019) points out, the widespread gentrification in China beginning in the 2000s highlights the ambitious urban upgrading scheme which aimed to build globalized and modernized cities and to cater for the housing preferences of the rapidly growing middle class. During the second wave of gentrification, 'the emerging neoliberal capital accumulation regime through the operation of land and housing commodification and privatisation' fostered 'consumer culture and middle-class aestheticisation' (He, 2019, p.30).

Indeed, the definition of the middle class in China is highly controversial as it emerges in a society which underwent rapid changes to its social structure (Li, 2010). In the book *China's Emerging Middle Class*, Li (2010) points out three different perspectives of the middle class: namely the public image, the government's definition, and the sociological concept of the middle class, which is based either on their income level, or their consumption level, or their occupation. By combining these three factors, Li (2010) divides the Chinese middle class broadly into three groups: the capitalist class, the new middle class, and the old middle class. Li claims that most

members of the capitalist class and the old middle class have modest backgrounds and low educational levels and they have very different cultures and value systems from the new middle class, which includes professionals, managers, and officials with stable middle or high incomes.

Applying Bourdieu's concept of class distinction and cultural capital to the class analysis in China, Tsang (2014, p.181) argues that 'the Chinese new middle class is distinguished more by sociocultural than by economic factors'. Based on her research of professionals in Shenzhen and their consumption practices, Elfick (2011) demonstrates how the new middle class are keen to distinguish themselves from *baofahu* – 'upstarts' who are commonly described as "'uneducated", "noisy", "crude", "unaware of social etiquette", "provincial", and tellingly, "unable to speak English"' (p.203) – through consuming products with individualized design character and engaging in travelling or other activities individually rather than with a large tourist group.

Institutional factors in China further complicated class analysis in China. An important factor is Hukou, as it divides the whole population into two groups, namely agricultural registrants and non-agricultural (urban) registrants. While some researchers argue that the majority of the Chinese middle class are non-agricultural (urban) registrants (Tsang, 2014), some others argue how agricultural registrants can change their Hukou status to non-agricultural (urban) registrants through working in cities (Chen and Qin, 2014). Chen and Qin's (2014) research demonstrates that a large number of the middle class increased in the last fifteen years are people 'who upwardly mobilized in the burst of rural–urban migration and urban growth' (Chen and Qin, 2014, p.533).

To summarize, for gentrification studies, middle-class professionals lead the process of gentrification in Western countries. However, in rural studies, the equation of gentrifiers with the middle class has been criticized for its oversimplification of the class structures in rural areas through the dichotomous middle-class/working-class division. Furthermore, the definition of the middle class in China is highly controversial because of the different criteria that have been used by different groups such as the government, social scientists, and the public. Unlike the old middle class and the capitalist class, the new middle class in China is characterised less by economic factors than sociocultural factors, which involve lifestyle preference and consumption patterns. Institutional factors such as Hukou further complicate middle-class identity.

### **2.5.2 Consumption and production explanations of rural gentrification**

There have long been production- and consumption-side explanations of gentrification. From the production side, gentrification is seen as 'a manifestation of the uneven circulation of capital' (Phillips, 1993, p.125), and 'specifically the product of process of devalorization and revalorization' (Phillips, 2009, p.370). Rural researchers have applied the rent gap theory to

examine the process of disinvestment and reinvestment in the rural areas (Phillips, 1993, 2004, 2005a). The notion of the post-productivist countryside offers some connection between production-side explanations of gentrification and rural studies. Although there are different interpretations of the term post-productivism, its earliest advocates emphasize 'the devalorization of land and building with respect to agricultural capital and its revalorisation with respect to other capital networks' (Phillips, 2005a, p.479). Phillips (2005a) argues that rural gentrification can be conceptualized as revalorization of previously economically productive but currently unproductive rural land, in which process individual gentrifiers are seen as investors with a profit-making motivation.

From the consumption side, existing research sees consumer preferences as the most important factor in the process of gentrification (Phillips, 2009). Their preferences are affected by the push factor from the urban and the pull factor from the rural, which results from the perceived rural–urban distinctions and the representation of an ideal rural (see detailed discussion in Section 2.2), which offers green space (Smith and Phillips, 2001), an authentic rural lifestyle (Eimermann, 2015b), and other experiences (Hines, 2012). For example, in their research on the affluent in-migration households in Hebden Bridge in West Yorkshire in the UK, Smith and Phillips (2001) use the term 'rural greentrification' to highlight the importance of 'green' space for in-migrant households. At first sight, the consumption of rurality provides the middle class the opportunity to escape the modern cities (Smith, 2002; Halfacree, 2006; Park, 2014). However, the yearning for the rural does not mean escaping the urban. 'People's desire to escape is strongly tempered by an attempt both to re-connect with experiences from their past and to strive for a continuity that will stretch into their futures' (Quinn, 2004, p.8). This represents 'escape' as 'more a negation than flight from everyday existence' (Garvey, 2008, p.205).

Gentrifiers' consumption preferences also reflect their identity. Research in Western countries has highlighted the countercultural identity among gentrifiers (Ley, 2003; Whiting and Hannam, 2017). Jon Caulfield's research on gentrifiers in Canada offers a good start. According to Caulfield (1994), middle-class gentrifiers expressed their consumption preferences in the gentrification process in Toronto in the 1970s and 1980s by rejecting the mass market principles. Similar to this finding, researchers in many countries have found the retreat of artists to rundown areas. For example, Whiting and Hannam (2017, p.1) use the term 'secret garden' to describe how artists in Ouseburn Valley in Newcastle upon Tyne in England appreciate the values of 'self-expression, autonomy, spontaneity, and non-instrumental artist cooperation'.

In China, research has documented how house purchasing and preference for residential location became important factors in defining people's middle-class identity (Pow, 2009; Liu, 2013; Zhang

et al., 2014). Following the housing reform, individuals who had enough personal wealth purchased houses in places they liked, which resulted in stratified private residential communities which offer a physical place for the emerging middle class to 'materialize through spatial exclusion, cultural differentiation, and private lifestyle practices (Zhang, 2008, p.39). For example, based on his research on a suburban residential community in Beijing, Liu (2013) points out that new middle class are no longer satisfied with simply owning a place to live. The majority of them have developed higher criteria for their expectations of the ideal home, or what is called a 'homely' home, which offers privacy, a good physical and cultural community environment, where residents share similar ways of life. Drawing on their research of the gentrification process in Shanghai, Wang and Lau (2009) argue that instead of contributing to the process of gentrification, the middle class in China only chose to move to the already gentrified places. Rather than claiming 'distinctive taste and an alternative identity', the Chinese middle class 'pay for the membership of the affluent class' (Wang and Lau, 2009, p.65).

Beyond the production and consumption theories of gentrification, existing research also calls attention to the role of government policy and institutional arrangements in the process of rural gentrification. For example, based on their research on the rural gentrification in Xiaozhou village in Guangzhou in China, Qian, He and Liu (2013) demonstrate how state policies known as the 'Basic Agricultural Land Preservation Regulations' and the 'Historical and Cultural Protected Area' which were entitled by the municipal government restricted Xiaozhou's industrial development and glorified its exotic rural identity, which contributed to its gentrification.

To summarize, gentrification can be explained from both the production side and from the consumption side. From the production side, gentrification is the product of the process of devalorization and revalorization. In this process, the motivation for gentrifiers is profit making. However, on the consumption side, it is the gentrifiers' preference for consumption that counts. Their consumption preference also forms an important way to express their identity. Furthermore, institutional factors also play important roles in the process of gentrification.

### **2.5.3 The production of a gentrified landscape**

'A gentrifying or gentrified neighbourhood has a certain "feel" to it, a certain look, a landscape of conspicuous consumption that makes the process readily identifiable' (Lees, Slater and Wylie, 2008, p. 113). While existing research has long noted the transformation of the landscape in the process of gentrification, a substantive discussion of what the term 'landscape' might mean and how it is interpreted within specific studies is still missing (Phillips, 2018).

## Chapter 2

Reflecting on the landscape change and various forms of gentrification, Phillips illustrates four ways of conceptualizing landscapes: gentrification and the material landscape, the gentrification landscape as a social space, gentrification and symbolic landscapes, and gentrification and lived landscapes. Instead of a passive entity, the material character of landscapes is an active agent through either encouraging or deterring gentrification. As social spaces, landscapes are viewed as expressions of social relations of power. As Zukin (1991) argues, a gentrified urban landscape reflects collective efforts of appropriation of space 'for elements of a new urban middle class', ignoring existing populations. However, this perspective has been questioned by some researchers as it lifts social groups and the process of change out of physical landscapes. As Wylie (2007) argues, there have been continuing 'currents of unease' about the ignorance of the physical materiality of landscape in such accounts. However, this unease over the loss of materiality in landscape studies is not restricted to discussions of the critical approaches to landscape as a social space, but more so to what is described as 'symbolic' or 'cultural' perspectives on landscape. The symbolic perspective of landscape sees it as 'a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolising surroundings' (Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988, p.1) . Attention is placed as much on how the landscapes are written or read as to what the texts of landscapes are about, a focus often expressed in terms of considering landscape as a way of seeing instead of an object or surface being gazed at.

A good example is Zukin's (1982) study of the gentrification of the SoHo district of Manhattan in the 1970s, where the former industrial area was gentrified by various groups of people who turned the multi-storey building blocks built for light manufacturing or warehousing into open-plan studio and apartment spaces. Zukin (1982a) called this process the formation of an 'artistic mode of production' that brought about a 'seemingly modest redevelopment... based on arts and on historical preservation' (p.188). Amongst Zukin's arguments concerning the emergence of this mode of production is that it had a cultural dimension not only related to the creation of works of art, but also in relation to the processes of inhabiting and reconstructing former industrial spaces. Zukin (1982b) identified a change of aesthetic occurred in the 1960s through an 'aesthetic conjuncture' of 'an emerging set of middle-class cultural values', including 'a new cult of domesticity without an extended family structure', which 'raises expectations for household consumption to a luxury level', and an increased valuation of art and craft work stimulated by 'a simultaneous professionalization and democratisation of arts and crafts activities', which made artisanal and artistic products much more visible to urban audiences (p.257). The emergence of a gentrified landscape of loft living was, Zukin (1982b) argues, a material expression of these cultural values, as they were a construction that combined domestic residence with the production of art and crafts.



The middle-class habitus was not only shown in the gentrification process in cities, but also in the rural areas. In the research of the Hebden Bridge area of West Yorkshire, Smith and Phillips (2001) demonstrate how the 'remote' and the 'village' formed two distinct cultural landscapes for gentrifiers. In the former, desirable rural landscapes were seen to involve the wild and natural landscape which to some extent isolate from the modern landscape. In the latter, a more humanized/socialized landscape was sought, with villages viewed as spaces of communal intimacy, support, and safety. In this research, Smith and Phillips (2001) explain that the 'collective agency of the gentrifiers aids the creation of distinct place-specific forms of "rural" habitus' (p.467). Smith and Phillips (2001, p.467) identified 'a set of dispositions and principles', which are significant to the 'expressions of cultural and economic capital associated with the "green" rural Pennine lifestyles of the village and remote greentrifiers'.

In China, an important way in which the middle-class identity is highlighted is through choosing residential spaces with an aestheticized landscape. By examining the attitudes of residents a gated community in Shanghai called Vanke Garden City, Pow (2009) demonstrates how aesthetically pleasant residential landscapes in this community play significant role in expressing the identities of elite middle-class. For middle-class residents, the visually appealing landscapes become a way to express their taste. Residents' performing and practising of the 'graceful living' based on their own aesthetic tastes 'close the gap between art and everyday life' (Pow, 2009, p.382). What is more, this research also underscores how residents in the gated community maintained their social distinction by recognizing the landscape of the neighbourhood. Pow argues that the celebration of a visually pleasant neighbourhood landscape risks covering the problems of aesthetic and class identity as well as urban inequality and segregation. The pleasure produced when appreciating the aestheticized landscape and the strong will to preserve it become 'effective mechanism of social exclusion and the reaffirmation of elite class identities' (Pow, 2009, p.387).

To summarize, gentrification always involves the production of a gentrified landscape, which is a material expression of gentrifiers' identity and habitus. Landscape is not only material but also social and symbolic. For gentrification studies, how the landscape are written or read is as important as what the texts of landscape are about. Drawing on the work of Bourdieu (1984) gentrification studies explain how middle-class gentrifiers incorporate their habitus into the gentrified landscape, not only in cities but also in rural areas. However, the Chinese middle class express their middle-class identity by choosing to live in residential communities with an aesthetically pleasant landscape.

#### 2.5.4 Effect of gentrification

The effect of gentrification on the local community has been an important research topic since the emergence of the concept. As Lees, Slater and Wyly, (2008) demonstrate, there is evidence for both positive and negative effects. On the positive side, gentrification is seen as a way to boost social mix and cultural diversity. Many pioneer gentrifiers see the gentrified neighbourhood as an emancipatory space for them. By way of contrast, much more research views gentrification as a negative process because it causes 'direct or indirect displacement', and it 'purifies and sanitizes the central city' (Lees, Slater and Wyly, 2008, p.234). In China, state-led new-built gentrification has resulted in similar outcomes to those in its Western counterparts, 'although on a much greater scale and in a more intensive way' (He, 2010, p.358). Based on her research of the demographic change in Shanghai from 1990 to 2000. He (2010) argues that the enlarging middle class in the central city and the redistribution of long-term residents to the suburban areas should not be seen as the result of suburbanisation, 'but rather a process of class displacement' (p.358). According to He (2010), although local government celebrates the neoliberal urbanism, the socioeconomic benefits of local residents are sacrificed in this process.

Despite its critical significance to the overall research of gentrification, the discussion of the concept of displacement has been largely ignored in rural research (Slater, 2006, 2008; Phillips and Smith, 2018). Halfacree (2018) listed some possible reasons. First, the displacement of the working-class happened before the incoming of middle-class gentrifiers, and therefore these two processes are not causally connected as it is defined in gentrification research. Second, early gentrifiers 'can be seen as repopulation of an already depopulated and still depopulating countryside' (Halfacree, 2018, p.28), with newcomers reconstruct and refill empty houses.

Phillips and Smith (2018) compare Halfacree's argument to Marcuse's (1985) discussion of abandonment in New York City and its relation to the displacement and gentrification. Marcuse also discusses how displacement can happen in various forms. While displacement can happen in the form of direct last-resident displacement, it can also happen with some residents leaving earlier than others. Moreover, Marcuse talks about the 'exclusionary displacement' where certain groups of in-migration are excluded, and finally there is 'displacement pressure', where the changing character of a place makes it less liveable in for long-term residents.

Having said this, it is worth noting that research has highlighted the privileged position of newcomers in gentrified rural communities. For example, Hines's (2010) research on the development of the New West Archipelago, for example, reveals the different perspectives of the Park County natives and newly arriving post-industrial middle class on how the land should be properly used in this area. While the former prefer the development of traditional industries like

'agriculture, silviculture, and mining' (Hines, 2010, p.510) , the latter believe that the best way to use the land is to produce experiences akin to those of tourists. Hines (2010) demonstrates how the post-industrial middle class take advantages of the local environmental groups as well as political institutions to promote their preferred ways of land-use.

However, from the perspective of lifestyle migrants or creative producers, they also face ambivalence or liminality, not only between urban and rural cultures but also between reality and imagination (O'Reilly and Benson, 2009). In the case of Spiral Gallery, Dawn – a paper maker who moved to Bega and became primary carer for her children – uses 'localism' to claim how she did not feel connected to the local residents because they were seen as 'alternative lifestyles, [and] blow-ins' (Waitt and Gibson 2013, p.79).

In the Chinese context, rural residents are not readily displaced in the tourism development villages, because of the special land use policy. In China, rural land is collectively owned by the village committees and rural residents only have the right of use of their properties but not the right of ownership (Long et al., 2012). Restrictions on the sale of rural properties limit the opportunities for newcomers to buy houses from local residents. The fact that newcomers can only rent houses in villages avoids the direct displacement of local villagers by newcomers (Zhao, 2019). Instead, several pieces of research have documented how local residents have actively engaged in the gentrification process. For example, drawing on their study of Xiaozhou village in Guangzhou, Qian et al. (2013) demonstrate how local residents played significant roles in boosting the social and economic restructuring of Xiaozhou village by being rent-seeker. Similarly, based on their research on the indigenous entrepreneurs at Honghe Hani Rice Terraces World Heritage Site in China, Chan et al. (2016) proposed the concept of self-gentrification, which means that

under the threat of other forms of gentrification, the long-term residents adopt a proactive approach to become the "gentry" themselves. As such they are able to benefit from the positive aspects of gentrification whilst avoiding many of the negative effects, particularly displacement (p.1265).

Although there is not an obvious displacement of local residents by newcomers in Chinese rural villages, it cannot be understood that displacement did not happen at all. According to Su (2012), although local residents are neither migrants nor exiles, they are faced with a large number of newly arriving migrants and tourists. Therefore, they become locally displaced as their homes have been largely commercialized for tourists' consumption. In Su's research on the ancient town of Lijiang in China, he describes local residents' discomfort to use the main streets and how the public place for local residents in the past now becomes commodified and colonized following the development of tourism. This relates to what Marcuse (1985) calls 'displacement pressure'

(p.214), which means that it is not necessarily that displacement is connected to the movement of people.

The above displacement is largely caused by identity politics between local residents and tourists. In contemporary China, there has long been 'a persistent structure of inequality between the rural and the urban', and the rural peasants have always been seen as 'subordinate and inferior to city dwellers' (Park, 2014, p.529). City people are assumed to have a higher *wenhua* (education). According to Park (2014), urban residents' longing for rurality and their travelling to the villages have offered the opportunity for rural-urban encounters and the express of the identity politics between the two groups. Based on his ethnographic research of *Nongjiale* in the suburban areas of Beijing, Park points out that the space of *Nongjiale* entails two dichotomies. 'One is between the idyllically moral countryside and the corrupt city, and the other between the backward countryside and the modern city' (Park, 2014, p.543). These dichotomies are the primary vehicle for identity politics and social-boundary making between peasant hosts and the urban tourists. According to Park (2014, p.543), while peasants take advantage of the first dichotomy to despise urban residents for their struggle with modernity, urbanites make use of the second to defame rural residents and protect 'their privileged position and sense of superiority within China's political economy and rural-urban cultural hierarchy'.

To summarize, gentrification has both negative and positive effects on local communities. While it is seen as a way to boost social and cultural diversity in some cases. In more cases, there are displacement of local residents by new coming gentrifiers. However, displacement has various forms, which not necessarily happen in the form of 'direct last-resident displacement', especially in the rural context. In the Chinese context, rural residents are not physically displaced by the gentrifiers because of the special land use policy, which restricts the sale of their properties to the new comers. However, displacement happens in the other forms because of the unequal identity politic between local residents and new comers, mainly urban middle class.

## 2.6 Conclusion

In this literature review chapter I have critically analyzed the wider literature which offers theoretical insights for this research, including rural tourism, the creative class (as makers), urban-rural mobility, and rural gentrification. In conclusion, I want to re-evaluate these studies and summarize the research gaps that this thesis will engage with.

First, for rural tourism research in Western countries, much research has examined the interconnections between culture and rurality from a middle-class perspective. In his review of 'neglected' rural geographies in Britain, Philo (1992) called attention to groups excluded from the

idyll, often short-handed as 'rural others'. Following Philo, research in the UK has examined groups such as lesbian migrants (Smith and Holt, 2005), 'boat-people' (Smith, 2007), women (Little and Austin, 1996), and children (Matthews et al., 2000) etc. If this is the situation in the UK, then it is different for research in China. Existing rural tourism research in China has largely focused on the social construction of rurality, which was affected by a strong state discourse of modernity. Meanwhile, much less attention has been given to the social and cultural meanings of rural to different social groups, including the middle class.

Considering the change in rural landscape in the process of rural tourism, much research has examined how an already 'complete' landscape is decoded by different social groups. The process of landscape production has been neglected (Mitchell, 1994). In China, while much research has examined how the official narrative of modernity has affected the transformation of the rural landscape, much less attention has been given to other social groups. Existing literature on *Nongjiale* rural tourism in China has explained how rural tourists, mainly urban residents, have complained about the 'peasant way of thinking' with the 'over-modernization' of farm guesthouses. Now, when more than ten years have passed since the beginning of *Nongjiale* tourism in China, it is the right time to think about new questions of upgraded forms of *Nongjiale*, e.g. *Minsu* guesthouses that have emerged in recent years. These questions might include: who is producing the new rural landscape for rural tourism? What kind of social and cultural meaning are attached to the new rural landscape?

Second, for literature on the creative class, one of the most obvious deficiencies is its exclusive preference for sizeable cities, particularly gentrified urban neighbourhoods or bohemian cultural districts, while the creative production and consumption in rural areas have been largely denigrated (Bell and Jayne, 2010; Edensor et al., 2010; Gibson, 2010; Luckman, 2012). While research has largely documented the creative class's locational preference for cities, driven by the pursuit of quality 'jobs' (Storper and Scott, 2009) or quality 'amenities' (Clark et al., 2002; Florida, 2002), it fails to reflect the evolving nature of work and the rise of freelance and entrepreneurial activities alongside firm-based jobs (Hracs and Stolarick, 2014). The emerging research on the creative class in the countryside calls for related research to break down the binary of consumption and production, and to combine the lifestyle-led consumption motivation with cultural production motivation to engage in better and more fulfilling work on the rural (Eimermann, 2016). While the phrase Rural Tourism Makers has been used in the context of Chinese rural tourism, not much research has started to explore their motivation for 'making', i.e. why and how rural tourism makers are engaged in the production of rural tourism.

Third, studies on rural population change have been criticized for narrowly focus on 'uni-directional, long-distance, and permanent movements of people to rural places' (Milbourne and Kitchen, 2014, p.327). Milbourne and Kitchen (2014, p.327) called for 'a more sophisticated approach' which captures 'a broader range of spatial scales and temporalities associated with rural mobility'. Existing research has largely focused on the reasons why people come to rural areas, e.g. the characteristics of the creative class's occupations, and second-home owners' multiple homeownership. Much less research has explained their reasons for returning (Eimermann, 2017) or the conditions for an urban-rural life (Ellingsen and Hidle, 2013). Research in China has noticed the mobility shift since the late 1980s from 'production-led peasant worker migration' to 'a more individualized and diverse consumption-led mobility' (Xu and Wu, 2016, p.509), in the form of tourists or lifestyle migrants. Much research has documented tourist mobility in the form of rural tourism, but much less attention has been given to urban-rural mobility. While existing research has documented emerging lifestyle migrants' and second-home owners' relocation from economically developed cities, like Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, to well-known tourist destinations like Dali, Lijiang, and Sanya, their relocation to rural destinations has been less researched. Besides this, existing research has paid more attention to their lives in their destinations, while their connection with or return to cities has been overlooked (Xu and Wu, 2016).

Fourth, regarding rural gentrification research, there are several research gaps which still need to be addressed. To begin with, the 'metropolitan centrality' of gentrification asks rural gentrification researchers to give more attention to the specificities of the rural and the 'Western European/North American centred' character of gentrification should give way, to allow for more attention to be given to the research area beyond this comfort zone (López-Morales, 2018). At the same time, there is a lack of engagement with the concept of rural gentrification from Chinese researchers (He, 2010) as most researchers use neutralized terms such as rural renaissance, rural reconstruction or rural regeneration.

While existing research has highlighted the middle-class character of the gentrifiers, the equation of gentrifiers with the middle class has been criticized for its oversimplification of the class structures in rural areas through the dichotomous middle-class/working-class division (Phillips, 2009). What is more, gentrification research in Western countries has widely examined the middle-class character and its role in the process of gentrification, from both the production side and the consumption side. However, affected by the strong state-led gentrification in Chinese cities, research has documented how the Chinese middle class is an effect of the gentrification through house purchasing (Pow, 2009; Liu, 2013; Zhang et al., 2014). As a result, the role of the Chinese middle class in the production of a gentrified landscape is largely overlooked. While much

research has documented the Chinese new middle class's spatial practices and identity formation in cities, much less research has examined their practices in rural areas, how their identity motivates them to go to the rural, and how their practices in the rural in turn reinforce their middle-class identity. The rapid post-reform industrialization, urbanization, and modernization in the past several decades have engendered nostalgic sentiments among the urban middle class (Li, 2015; Zhou and Cheng, 2015; Meng et al., 2019). RTMs and their practices in rural areas offer an important chance to look into how Chinese middle class produce their imagined rural landscape, and how their identity has been strengthened in this process.

Finally, considering the effects of gentrification, while urban gentrification research has widely used the concept of displacement, it is much less examined in the context of the process of rural gentrification, as displacement in rural areas does not always happen in the form of direct last-resident displacement (Halfacree, 2018). Rural gentrification research in China has documented that local residents are not easily displaced because of the land use policy in China. However, displacement in other forms is not yet regarded. What is more, newcomers are not always in an advantageous position: research has documented the challenges that newcomers face in adapting to rural communities. More broadly, considering the new coming force on rural spaces, Woods (2007) argues that instead of a unidirectional force on rural spaces, the politics of the rural is more about negotiation and configuration (Woods, 1998, 2006), for which he calls for more research on specific rural places.

Based on this theoretical background, this research aims to answer the following questions. First, who are the Rural Tourism Makers and why are they coming to the rural? Second, how do Rural Tourism Makers produce their imagined rural landscape, and how is their identity shaping and shaped in this process? Third, what is Rural Tourism Makers' relationship with local residents? In the next chapter, I detailed how this research was done methodologically, including the research design, data collection, data analysis, and related issues in this process.





## Chapter 3 Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

This thesis aims to empirically explore the practices of Rural Tourism Makers (RTMs) in rural China, including their relocation to rural areas, the new rural landscape that they created, and their relationship with local residents, which all theoretically contribute to urban–rural mobility, the production of the rural landscape, and rural gentrification. More specifically, the thesis poses the following questions:

- Who are the RTMs and why are they coming to the rural?
- How do RTMs produce their imagined rural landscape, and how is their identity shaping and shaped in this process?
- What is the RTMs' relationship with local residents?

To answer these questions, I employed a qualitative approach and multi-site ethnography. More specifically, I did fieldwork in four field sites collecting data through interviews with government officials, RTMs, and local residents; village-based participant observation; online observation; and reading of policy documents.

In the following two sections (Sections 3.2 and 3.3), I justify my selection of the qualitative approach and the use of multi-site ethnography. I will then discuss the case selection for this study. Section 3.5 details the data-collecting process in this research. Section 3.6 and 3.7 discuss the positionality and reflexivity, and ethical dilemmas in the process of data collecting. Then, in Section 3.8, I detail the thematic analysis method used to analyse the data collected in this research. Section 3.9 is a summary of the content of this chapter.

### 3.2 Qualitative approach

This research took a qualitative approach. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), the qualitative approach means an interpretive approach, which asks researchers to 'understand things in their natural settings' (p. 43) and interpret phenomena through the meanings that people attach to them.

I have chosen a qualitative approach for this research mainly for three reasons. First, given its character as an emerging phenomenon in China, there is a lack of empirical research on the topic

of RTMs – and also a lack of data. The qualitative approach gave the researcher the chance to access the phenomenon in the real world and to understand the process associated with the subjects under study, rather than merely the product that occurred as a result (Maxwell, 2013). Second, the types of research questions that I wanted to ask, which were open-ended and exploratory as I sought to understand the experiences of the RTMs on the ground, also pushed me to use the qualitative approach. Instead of entering the field with pre-existing assumptions which could be statistically measured, the qualitative approach allowed me to develop an ‘on the ground’ understanding of the daily lives and experiences of those interviewed and studied (Maxwell, 2013). Qualitative approaches have ‘enabled the study of, and emphasized the importance of, seeing economic activity as a set of lived practices, assumptions and codes of behaviour’ (Crang, 2002, p.648). This emphasis and understanding is reflected in the types of methods used in qualitative research, which favours in-depth, subjective and contextual understanding, rather than generalizable, statistical analysis (Limb and Dwyer, 2001).

The use of the qualitative approach in this research is also a response to a lack of genuine qualitative research in rural geography and tourism research in China (Bao, Chen and Jin, 2018). Based largely on applied tourism planning consultation projects, Chinese tourism researchers have been criticized as ‘being less critical and reflexive about their research practices (Bao, Chen and Jin, 2018, p.2). Similarly, Woods (2011) argues that rural geographers in the global south tend ‘to be more concerned with social and economic structures, and less influenced by the “cultural turn”’ (p.13). Therefore, Bao, Chen and Jin (2018) call for more rigorous fieldwork in China which reflects the ‘genuine observations of tourism development and the sociocultural developments in transitional China’ (p.15).

### 3.3 Ethnography

‘Ethnography usually involves the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts-in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are emerging focus of inquiry (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, p.3). The advantages of ethnographic research are various, from offering the chance to engage in the real world and observe directly what is going on, to the multiple sources of data which allow researcher not only to hear what people say but also to triangulate it by seeing what people do, to a deep understanding of the social phenomenon by understanding the social and cultural meanings of human actions (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The purpose of ethnographic research is not to explain particular cultural forms, but to give

'detailed accounts of the concrete experience of life within a particular culture and of the beliefs and social rules that are used as resources within it' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.9).

As I intended to gain insights into RTMs' experiences in the field sites, including their motivation to move to the rural, their practices in the rural, and their relations with local residents, there is arguably no better way to develop this understanding than through immersion myself into the villages that they were living and/or working in. Living in the villages for a prolonged time allowed me to collect data in 'natural' settings, which means settings that are not set up for academic research on purpose. In other words, research took place 'in the field' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). One thing I should make clear is that I did not mean to explore the entire culture of the four field sites. Instead, I was only interested in the RTMs living or working there and their activities. I did not even want to know RTMs particularly intimately, either. For example, although I asked questions about their childhood in the rural areas, what mattered to me was how these have affected their practices and experiences in the rural.

Ethnography fits into the open-ended and exploratory character of the research questions. The exploratory character of ethnographic research allowed me to explore in the field where observations should begin and which actors should be shadowed. It was also a process in which sampling strategies were worked out and changed as the research progressed. Moreover, decisions about whom to interview, when and where, were also developed over time in the ethnographic field work (Cook and Crang, 2007).

My research design was based on the traditional ethnographic approach, although there was an important change, i.e. I did multi-site ethnography (Hannerz, 2003). Instead of staying in one place, I went to four field sites to study one phenomenon in depth. This research design resulted from a difficult situation when doing fieldwork in China, which is the difficulty in accessing government officials because of their uncertainty about what sort of information researchers are supposed to get access to and their decision to play it safe (Heimer, 2006). A common coping strategy for researchers in China after the 1980s, according to Heimer and Thøgersen (2006), has been to carry out fieldwork in more than one place. The advantage of doing so is that researchers can 'cross-check information on the same topics across locations' and to see if the 'understanding from one place carried over to another' (Heimer, 2006, p.62). By comparing findings from two or more field sites, this approach is more likely to improve theory building (Bryman 2012; Yin 2014). One challenge that emerges from this approach is the balance between breadth and depth, which I am going to discuss in the coming section.

### 3.4 One case, two provinces, four field sites

In terms of case studies, there has long been a debate of small versus large N: ‘breadth is associated with a large number of cases (large N) and depth with a small number of cases (small N)’ (Heimer, 2006, p.58). Breaking this traditional thinking, Heimer (2006, p.58) came up with another research design: ‘an in-depth study of one case but conducted in a number of different field sites’. In other words, one case does not only include one field site. This research design means conducting fieldwork in several different sites and focusing on similarities among multiple field sites. It is in the middle of the above-mentioned large N and small N research designs. Heimer (2006) calls it a non-quasi-experimental, exploratory research design.

Following Heimer (2006), the research design for this project resembles case-study method although it does not focus on the differences between different cases. Rather, the four field sites in this research form a single case (of RTMs relocating to rural areas) concerning RTMs’ experiences in rural areas and their interactions with local residents. Through this research design, my main aim was to examine the similarities and common characteristics, and to compare findings between places, and to achieve an in-depth understanding of this phenomenon.

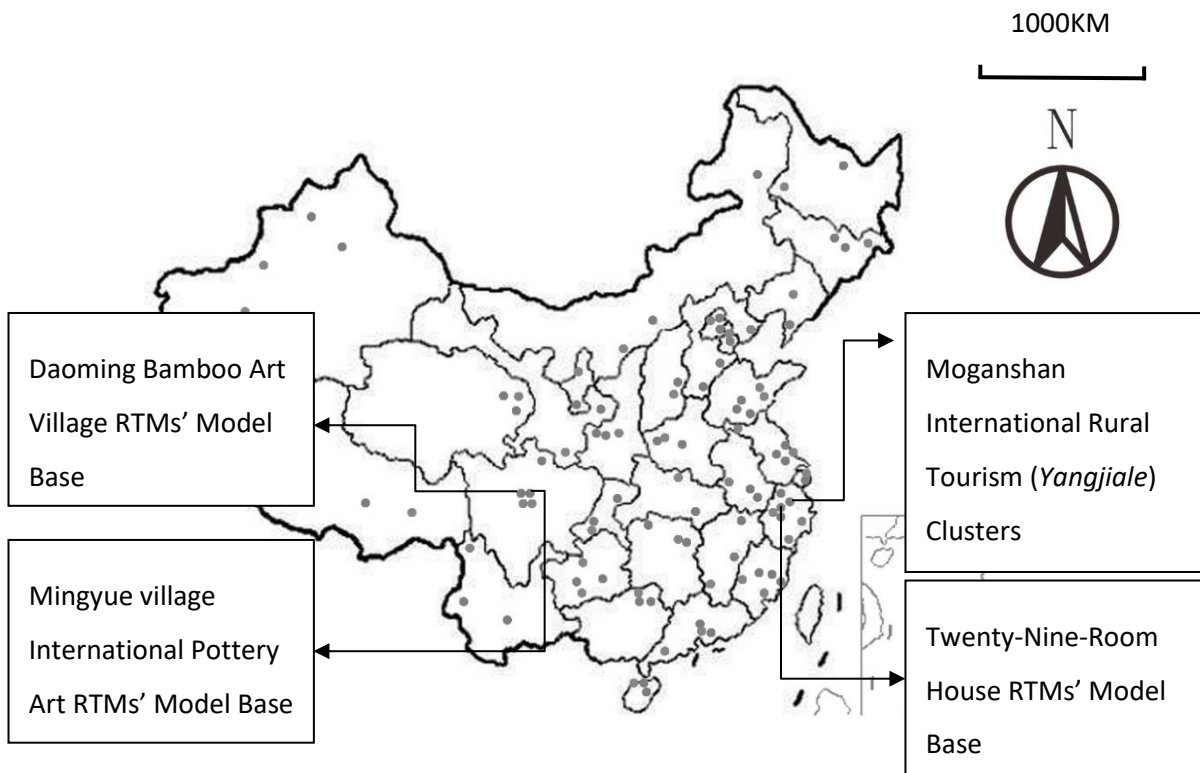


Figure 3.1: The location of 100 RTMs' Model Bases nationwide and the four field sites  
(Author)

From 2015 to 2017, 100 RTMs' Model Bases were nominated nationwide (see Figure 3.1). For the aim of this research, I chose two field sites from Zhejiang province and two field sites from Sichuan province. In selecting, I mainly considered their success in attracting RTMs and in developing rural tourism. In Brenner's (2003) terms, they represent not stereotypical cases (typical of all RTMs' Model Bases), but prototypical or archetypical cases (first or extreme cases, the characteristics of which may become generalized over time).

The reason for choosing these two provinces is because of their leading roles in rural tourism development in China. Located on the southeast coast of China, Zhejiang province has played a leading role in rural regeneration and rural tourism development since the early 2000s when the 'Making a thousand model villages, renovating ten thousand villages' (*Qiancun Shifan, Wancun Zhengzhi*) project was initiated. Starting from improving the human settlement environment in rural areas by controlling environmental pollution and improving the infrastructures (Luo et al., 2016; Wu, Gong and Chen, 2016), this project contributed to the first wave of rural tourism development in Zhejiang province. From 2011 to 2015, the Beautiful Villages project further promoted rural tourism development in Zhejiang province (Wu, Yu and Chen, 2017). Since 2017, Zhejiang province has implemented the plan called 'Make ten thousand villages into scenic spots' (*wancun jingquhua*) which aims to promote rural tourism throughout the whole province. Because of the efforts that Zhejiang province put into promoting rural tourism development and the success it has achieved, its experiences of rural regeneration and rural tourism development have been used as model examples in China (Wu, Yu and Chen, 2017).

Rural tourism in Sichuan province has attracted national attention since 2003 because of the Five Golden Flowers (*wuduo jinhua*) rural tourism development model (Wei and Wang, 2009), where five villages in the suburban areas attracted large numbers of tourists from Chengdu, the capital city of Sichuan province, because of the flower fair hosted by the local government (Wei and Wang, 2009). Since 2007, when Chengdu was nominated as the Experimental Area of Urban-Rural Integrated Development (*guojia tongchou chengxiang zonghe peitao gaige shiyanqu*), rural tourism development has been further promoted as a way to facilitate urban-rural interaction (Huang, Xu and Zhang, 2011). Therefore, both provinces can be seen as prototypical considering their roles in China's rural tourism development.

The selection of the four field sites in Zhejiang province and Sichuan province was a selection of prototypical field sites in prototypical provinces. The four field sites have attracted the most media attention as RTMs' Model Bases in the two provinces, based on my online observation. To give some basic information of four field sites, I will summarize what the Model Bases used to be before the arrival of the RTMs (location, population, the previous main industry in the base

village(s)), as the RTMs arrived (how it started, RTMs' practices), and the effects on local residents (mainly how local residents engaged in rural tourism business). The basic information of the villages, like their geographical locations and the population, came mostly from the propaganda material of the village tourism development that I collected in the villages and then confirmed with local government officials. The development history of the villages, before and after the incoming of RTMs as well as in terms of the opportunities for the incoming of RTMs, was based largely on interviews with local government officials. The descriptions of RTMs' practices were mainly based on observation in the villages and interviews with RTMs.

### 3.4.1 Moganshan International Rural Tourism (*Yangjiale*) Clusters

Moganshan International Rural Tourism (*Yangjiale*) Clusters (hereafter Moganshan RTMs' Model Base) is based in Moganshan town, which is in the northwest of Deqing county, Huzhou city in Zhejiang province. Moganshan Town is about 185.77 km<sup>2</sup> with eighteen administrative villages, which geographically surround Mount Mogan. Mount Mogan has a high reputation for tourism because of its natural scenery and hundreds of villas on top of the mountain built by foreign missionaries and high-ranking Chinese officials in modern China. Despite the popularity of Mount Mogan, villages at the foot of the mountain were not attractive to tourists before the coming of RTMs. Local residents in the villages in Moganshan town have historically been engaged in the bamboo industry due to the bamboo forests on Mount Mogan. However, the low profit from bamboo selling pushed many local residents to find jobs in cities. What is more, the experiences and impressions of the backward mountainous areas pushed many local residents to buy houses in the centre of Deqing county. Like most hollowed-out villages in China, villages in Moganshan town saw the leaving of many local residents and an increase in empty houses.

Since 2007, villages in Moganshan town have seen the arrival of a group of Shanghai-based foreigners (from South Africa, France, UK and Korea, to name a few), who built the first foreign holiday houses, designed and built with aesthetically pleasing styles for themselves. About five years later, or since 2012, villages in Moganshan town saw the arrival of a group of Chinese middle-class people, first from Shanghai and then from other places, first from architectural and art professions and then to broader occupations. Inspired by the foreign holiday houses, they built their own guesthouses, which normally involved the creative renovation of residential houses that had been left behind by local residents, which were normally called *Minsu* guesthouses (民宿) (see Figure 3.2 and Figure 3.3). Instead of aggregating in one village, RTMs dispersed in different villages, with each of them trying to find their ideal rural image. Besides the guesthouses separated in the villages, there was a cultural and creative cluster in the centre of Moganshan Town called the 1932 Yu Village Cultural and Creative Cluster, which was built in 2012. Converted

from the ruins of an old factory for silkworm seed production, it was converted into cultural and creative studios which attracted people running teahouses, small art galleries, handicraft making, etc.



Figure 3.2: The exterior of a *Minsu* guesthouse in Moganshan town (Author)

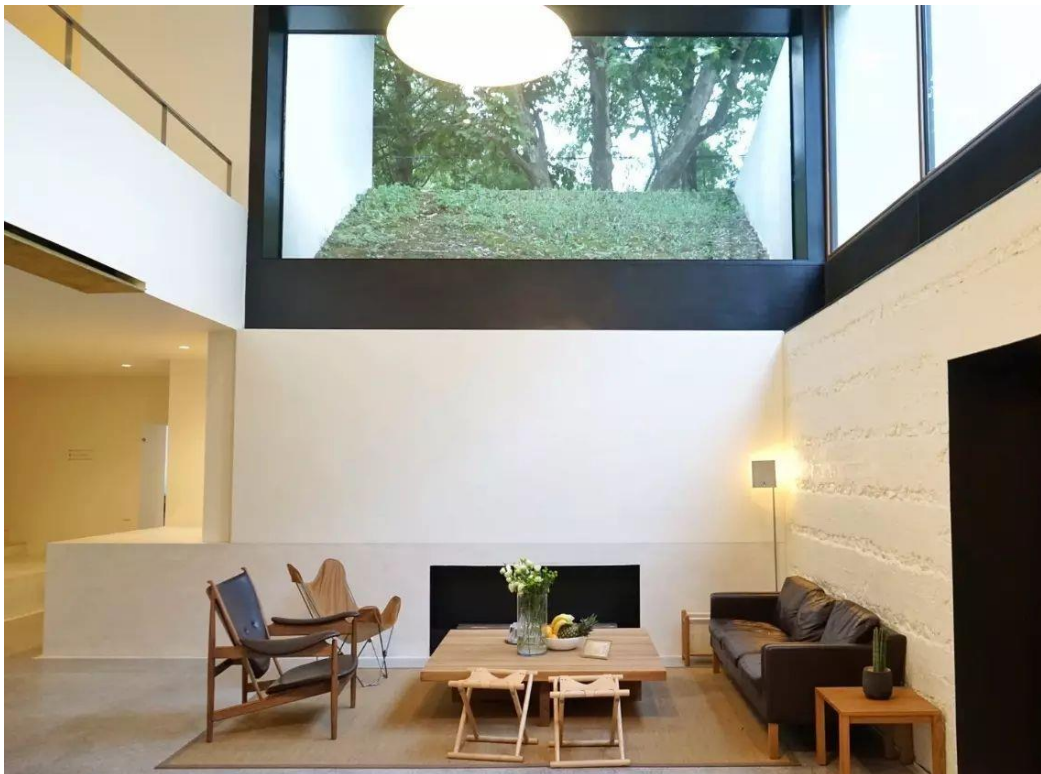


Figure 3.3: The interior of a *Minsu* guesthouse in Moganshan town (Author)

As the development of *Minsu* guesthouses attracted large numbers of tourists to the villages, some local residents also started to run guesthouses, renovating their old houses or building new houses. Some others rented out their houses to newcomers. Others engaged in other tourism businesses, like restaurants, bars and shops which sold local products. What is more, seeing the business opportunities in the villages, some local residents who had moved to the centre of the county came back to their home villages to engage in the rural tourism business.

### **3.4.2 Twenty-Nine-Room House RTMs' Model Base**

The Twenty-Nine-Room House RTMs' Model Base is based in a village called Xinguang village, which is located in the north-west of Pujiang (浦江) County, Jinhua City in Zhejiang province. It is about 15km from the centre of Pujiang county, with a population of about 600. In the village, there are some old buildings of historical value, especially the Twenty-Nine-Room House which was built more than 300 years ago. Before the arrival of RTMs, the main industry in the village was the production of artificial crystal. Even part of the Twenty-Nine-Room House was occupied with this industry. However, all production activities related to artificial crystal were prohibited in the village from 2015 because of the serious water pollution it caused to the river around the village and the provincial water management plans.

Considering the local rural tourism development plan and the national RTM policy, the local government renovated Xinguang village, improved the Twenty-Nine-Room House, and offered it as a free working space for the first three years to attract RTMs from Pujiang county. Starting from the summer of 2015, around fifty RTMs had been attracted to the village, with each of them having their own small cultural and creative studios practising different kinds of cultural practices like calligraphy, tea ceremony, drawing (see Figure 3.4), costume designing, etc. Most of them were not professional cultural workers or artists. Instead, they were making their hobbies or interests into small businesses.





Figure 3.4: One studio in the Twenty-Nine-Room House RTMs' Model Base which teaches drawing with wood and leaves (Author)

The RTMs and their practices in the village attracted large numbers of tourists since the National Day Golden Week (first week of October) in 2015, so a small number of local residents started small tourism businesses, offering food, drinks, and products of native character to tourists. Beginning with informal food vans, local residents were then asked by the local government to move to one corner of the village which was then named Food Plaza (*meishi guangchang*), where twenty-four well-arranged stalls were rented to them.

### 3.4.3 Mingyue Village International Pottery Art RTMs' Model Base

Mingyue Village International Pottery Art RTMs' Model Base (hereafter Mingyue Village RTMs' Model Base) is based in Mingyue village, which is located in the west of Pujiang (蒲江) county. The village is about two hours' drive from Chengdu, which is the capital of Sichuan province. It is a village of about 6.78km<sup>2</sup> of land area, with a large number of farmlands. Before the arrival of RTMs, agriculture was the main source of income for local residents, with bamboo shoots, oranges, and tea leaves as the main agricultural products. The village has a long history of ceramic making: Mingyue Kiln (明月窑), the oldest kiln in Mingyue village, dates back to 300 years ago and was used to make bowls for daily use. The kiln did not stop working until 2008 when it was damaged because of an earthquake.

Mingyue RTMs' Model Base originated from the repair and protection of the Mingyue Kiln, which was what first attracted ceramic professionals to the village. Aiming to turn Mingyue village into the International Ceramic Art Village, the Pujiang county government set up the Mingyue Village

Working Team (2014–2018), the main work of which was to recruit ‘new villagers’, i.e. RTMs, to Mingyue village. New villagers have been engaged in two kinds of projects, i.e. *Minsu* guesthouse and cultural and creative studios (cloth dying, pottery making, and other handicraft workshops (see Figure 3.5)) as illustrated above. According to a member of Mingyue Village Working Team, Mingyue village had attracted forty projects up to the point where I did fieldwork in the village.



Figure 3.5: The display room in a ceramic making studio in Mingyue village (Author)

With the arrival of the new villagers and the tourists that they attracted, about thirty rural households started rural tourism businesses, such as restaurants or guesthouses (see Figure 3.6). However, because of the seasonal character of rural tourism, the majority of rural households still saw agriculture as their main source of income.



Figure 3.6: A local residents' house that was used as a guesthouse (Author)

#### 3.4.4 Daoming Bamboo Art Village RTMs' Model Base

Daoming Bamboo Art Village RTMs' Model Base is based in Longhuang village in Daoming town, located in the northwest of Chongzhou, Chengdu. Local residents in Longhuang village used to make a living by producing bamboo-made products for daily use. However, as with other hollowed-out villages, many local residents went to cities to work as the profit from making bamboo products declined, and many houses were left empty.

To promote rural tourism development, the local government invited a tourism estate company called Zhongye Estate to do a tourism plan for the village. Zhongye Estate planned the Daoming Bamboo Art Village, which is the name of the tourism estate project based on three *xiaozu*<sup>1</sup> of Longhuang village, including eighty-six households and about 0.5 km<sup>2</sup> of land area. Since 2017, twenty houses belonging to local residents were rented by the local government, who then rented them in turn to Zhongye Estate. Zhongye Estate renovated or rebuilt the houses to attract RTMs, ranging from artists to bamboo handicraft makers, who opened up a small art gallery, a bookstore (see Figure 3.7), handicraft studios, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> *Xiaozu* is a way of household management in rural China. Normally the households in a village are divided into several *xiaozu* based on the location of their houses.





Figure 3.7: A local house that was improved and used as a bookstore in Daoming Bamboo Art Village (Author)

With the arrival of large numbers of tourists, local residents also engaged in the rural tourism business, but mainly in the form of informal restaurants, for which they only needed to set up some tables and chairs in their yard to host the tourists for food (see Figure 3.8).



Figure 3.8: The tables and chairs set up in the yard of a local house in Daoming Bamboo Art Village (Author)

Conducting studies in two provinces and four RTMs' model bases makes it look like that I care more about breadth than depth. However, this is not true. Rather, through carrying out fieldwork in several field sites, I explored one phenomenon into depth. The choice of four field sites is a balance between the number and type of RTMs I could approach and the amount of time I could spend in each field site, the aim of which was to produce a deep understanding of the phenomenon of RTMs in China.

### 3.5 Data collection

So far I have demonstrated that I used a qualitative approach and multi-site ethnography. More specifically, I did fieldwork in four field sites collecting data through interviews, village-based participant observation, online observation and reading of policy documents. Before I go into detail of every method that I used, I will briefly summarize the fieldwork that I carried out in the villages. My fieldwork included two phases (see Table 3.1). The first phase lasted two months from November 2017 to January 2018 and the second phase lasted about half a year from October 2018 to April 2019. During the first phase, I started my fieldwork in two RTMs' model bases in Zhejiang province, i.e. the Twenty-Nine-Room House RTMs' Model Base and Moganshan RTMs' Model Base. I spent one month in each model base. After about nine months of office work, during which I did some initial analysis and adjustment of the research questions, I returned to the field in October 2018. Consecutively, I spent about one month in Moganshan RTMs' Model Base, one month in the Twenty-Nine-Room House RTMs' Model Base, two and a half months in Mingyue RTMs' Model Base, and one and a half months in Daoming Bamboo Art Village RTMs' Model Base. In total, I did about eight months of fieldwork.

Table 3.1: Breakdown of the fieldwork

Phase	Time	Field site	The place I stayed during fieldwork
<b>First phase</b>	November 2017	Twenty-Nine-Room House RTMs' Model bases	Xinguang village
	December 2017	Moganshan RTMs' Model Base	Yu village (the centre of Moganshan town)
<b>Second phase</b>	October 2018	Moganshan RTMs' Model Base	Houwu village in Moganshan town
	November 2018	Twenty-Nine-Room House RTMs' Model base	Xinguang village
	December 2018–mid-February 2019	Mingyue Village RTMs' Model Base	Mingyue village
	Mid-February 2019–March 2019	Daoming Bamboo Art Village RTMs' model base	Longhuang village

### 3.5.1 Interviews

Interviews were used as the main source of data for this thesis. One strength of doing interviews is the ability to engage in a flowing discussion with the interviewees and to uncover new research themes (Valentine, 2005). As I was trying to gain insight into the perceptions of individuals, including government officials and RTMs as well as local residents, interviewing offered a good way to develop this understanding. Moreover, interviews are relatively economical in terms of time and resources. Based on the research questions, three sets of interviews were conducted, through which very detailed and comprehensive talks (Silverman, 2014) offered me the main source of data. In total, 131 interviews were conducted across the four field sites (see Table 3.2), of which twenty-five were done with government officials, sixty-five with rural tourism makers, and forty-one with long-term residents.

Table 3.2: Number of interviews in four field sites

Field site	Number of interviews		
	Government officials	Rural Tourism Makers	Long-term residents
<b>Moganshan RTMs' Model Base</b>	7	19	14
<b>Twenty-Nine-Room House RTMs' Model Base</b>	12	24	7
<b>Mingyue Village RTMs' Model Base</b>	4	15	15
<b>Daoming Bamboo Art Village RTMs' Model Base</b>	2	7	5
<b>Total</b>	25	65	41

#### 3.5.1.1 Aims

I interviewed twenty-five government officials from different levels (e.g. provincial, municipal, county, town, and village level) who were in charge of rural tourism development in the field sites (see Table 3.3). The aim was to better understand how local government officials understood the national RTMs policy, what kind of policies they carried out to attract RTMs from the local level, and what changed for the villages in the field sites. The interviews I conducted with government officials from the provincial and municipal levels created an account of how they understood the RTM policy and their decisions about where and how to implement the policy in practice. For example, I asked questions such as, 'Have you heard about the RTMs policy? How do you understand it?' and, 'How did you decide which village to select as the base for the RTMs' Model

Base?’ (See Appendix A for Interview Guide with Government Officials). Interviews with government officials from the county and town levels enabled me to explore the local policies that were used to attract RTMs. For example, I asked questions such as, ‘Has the government in this county/city/province made any policies to attract RTMs? What are the policies?’ Meanwhile, government officials from the town level were interviewed to learn how the policies were carried out at that level. I asked questions like, ‘What have you done to the village(s) to make it/them eligible to apply for the RTMs’ Model Base?’ Finally, I did interviews with government officials from the village level to better understand what the effects were of RTM policy on the villages. I asked questions like, ‘What benefits do you think they have brought to the village?’ and, ‘What roles have RTMs played in promoting rural tourism development in this village?’

Table 3.3: Breakdown of the government officials

Field sites	Level	Government officials *
<b>Moganshan RTMs’ Model Base</b>	Municipal level (1)	One government official from the Huzhou Tourism Bureau
	County level (1)	One government official from Scenic and Tourism Administration of Deqing
	Town level (2)	One government official from Urban and Rural Construction Committee in Moganshan town One government official from the Tourism Office in Moganshan Town
	Village level (3)	Three government officials from the village committee of Houwu village
<b>Twenty-Nine-Room House RTMs’ Model Base</b>	Provincial level (3)	Two government officials from Zhejiang Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism One professor from Zhejiang University who worked as a consultant for the provincial government officials and whose work promoted the establishment of RTMs’ bases in other places
	County level (4)	Three government officials from the Scenic and Tourism Administration of Pujiang One government official from Housing and Urban-Rural Development Administration of Pujiang
	Town level (2)	Two government officials from Yuzhai town
	Village level (3)	Three government officials from the village committee in Xinguang Village
<b>Mingyue Village RTMs’ Model Base</b>	County level (2)	Two government officials from Mingyue village project team
	Town level (1)	One government official from Ganxi town
	Village level (1)	One government official from Mingyue village
<b>Daoming Bamboo Art Village RTMs’ Model Base</b>	Village level (2)	Two government officials from the village committee in Longhuang village

\* For the purpose of anonymity, I did not name the specific titles of the government officials as it would connect them to a specific person.

Interviews with sixty-five RTMs were used to explore the identity and motivation of RTMs, their practices in the villages, and their interactions with local residents (see Figure 3.9). I will discuss the sample and my sampling strategies in Section 3.5.1.2. Interview questions consisted of a narrative component. They explored my participants' previous work and living experiences before they relocated to the villages, their stories of moving to the village, creating their ideal rural landscape, starting a rural tourism business, and their everyday work and/or lives in the villages afterwards. This enabled me to understand how RTMs' identity and their previous working/living experiences contributed to their relocation to the rural and to their rural practices, and how their rural practices connected to their current life stage. I will discuss this in Chapter 4. Interview guides included consideration for how RTMs changed the rural spaces and created their ideal rural landscape, which will be discussed in Chapter 5. Otherwise, interviews elaborated on their interactions with local residents. For example, I asked questions like, 'In what ways do you interact with local residents? How do you get on with local residents?' and 'Do you have any conflicts with local residents living and working here? How do you deal with them?' (See Appendix B for Interview Guide with Rural Tourism Makers). I will discuss this in Chapter 6.

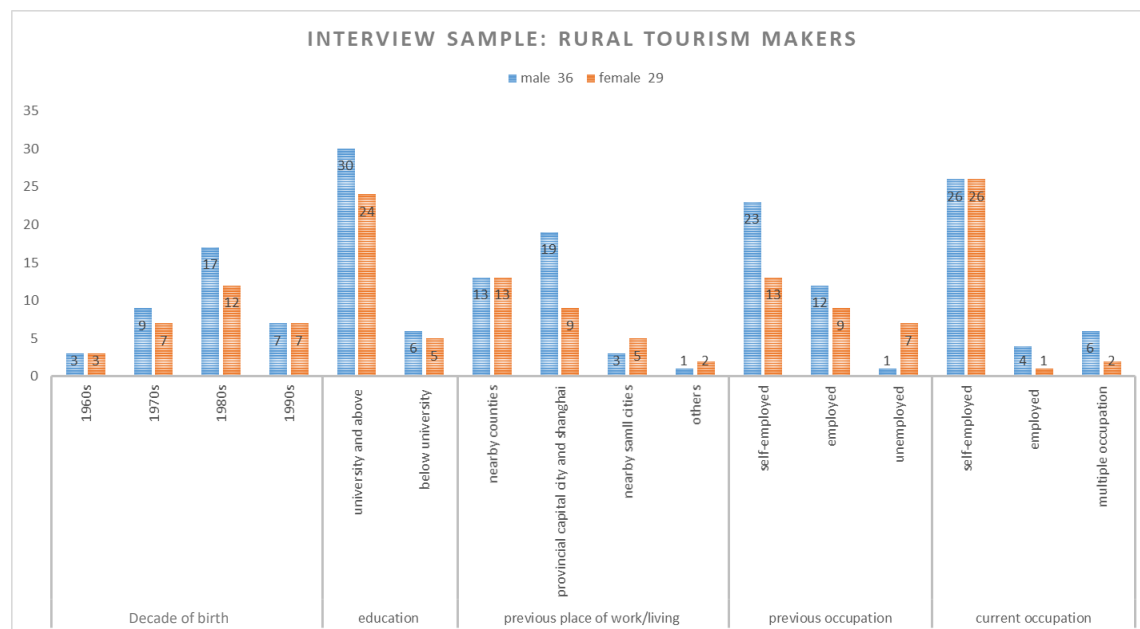


Figure 3.9: Summary characteristics of RTMs interviewed

The forty-one interviews with local residents were carried out to explore their relationships with RTMs (see Table 3.4), including questions like how they perceived RTMs, how RTMs coming to the village affected their work/lives, and how they got along with RTMs. Interview questions for local



residents also involved of a narrative component, which tried to explore local residents' work and lives before and after the arrival of RTMs. This offered me information to understand better how local residents' lives were affected by RTMs and the rural tourism development in the villages that they brought. The interview guides consider how local residents started to be engaged in rural tourism-related work/business, and how some of them considered coming back to the village after moving to the centre of the county or being migrant workers who spent extended time in cities. For example, I asked questions like, 'When did you come back to your village?' and 'What was the opportunity that made you decide to come back?' (See Appendix C for Interview Guide with Local Residents)

Table 3.4: Basic information of local residents interviewed

Number	Gender	Decade of birth	Name of the village	Migration condition	Current work
1L1	Female	1970s	Houwu village	Non-migrating*	Employed in a <i>Minsu</i> guesthouse as a receptionist
1L2	Male	1960s	Houwu village	Return migrant**	Running a guesthouse
1L3	Female	1960s	Houwu village	Non-migrating	Employed in a <i>Minsu</i> guesthouse as a housekeeper
1L4	Male	1990s	Houwu village	Non-migrating	Running a restaurant
1L5	Female	1980s	Houwu village	Return migrant	Running a guesthouse
1L6	Female	1970s	Houwu village	Non-migrating	Employed in a <i>Minsu</i> guesthouse as a receptionist
1L7	Male	1960s	Houwu village	Non-migrating	Running a guesthouse
1L8	Male	1970s	Houwu village	Return migrant	Running a guesthouse
1L9	Male	1980s	Houwu village	Return migrant	Running a restaurant
1L10	Male	1980s	Xiantan village	Moved to the centre of the county***	Running a guesthouse
1L11	Male	1970s	Xiantan village	Moved to the centre of the county	Running a guesthouse
1L12	Female	1970s	Houwu village	Non-migrating	Employed in a <i>Minsu</i> guesthouse as a housekeeper
1L13	Female	1970s	Yu village	Non-migrating	Employed in a ceramic-making studio

Number	Gender	Decade of birth	Name of the village	Migration condition	Current work
1L14	Male	1970s	Xiantan village	Moved to the centre of the county	Running a guesthouse
2L1	Female	1970s	Xinguang village	Moved to the centre of the county	Running a food van
2L2	Female	1970s	Xinguang village	Non-migrating	Running a restaurant
2L3	Male	1960s	Xinguang village	Non-migrating	Selling food of local character
2L4	Female	1980s	Xinguang village	Moved to the centre of the county	Selling food of local character
2L5	Female	1980s	Xinguang village	Moved to the centre of the county	Running a shop selling drinks
2L6	Female	1970s	Xinguang village	Non-migrating	Running a restaurant
2L7	Male	1960s	Xinguang village	Non-migrating	Running a restaurant
3L1	Male	1990s	Mingyue village	Return migrant	Employed by Mingyue village project team as an assistant
3L2	Female	1990s	Mingyue village	Return migrant	Running a cloth-dying studio
3L3	Male	1970s	Mingyue village	Return migrant	Running a restaurant
3L4	Female	1970s	Mingyue village	Return migrant	Employed in a <i>Minsu</i> guesthouse as a chef
3L5	Male	1980s	Mingyue village	Return migrant	Running an eco-farm and selling organic fruit
3L6	Female	1990s	Mingyue village	Return migrant	Employed in a bar as a bartender
3L7	Male	1980s	Mingyue village	Return migrant	Employed in the Mingyue village Tourism Cooperative Company
3L8	Female	1980s	Mingyue village	Return migrant	Employed in the Mingyue village Tourism Cooperative Company
3L9	Female	1980s	Mingyue village	Return migrant	Running a guesthouse
3L10	Male	1990s	Mingyue village	Return migrant	Running a guesthouse
3L11	Male	1970s	Mingyue village	Return migrant	Independent construction worker
3L12	Female	1970s	Mingyue village	Non-migrating	Running a ceramic-making studio
3L13	Male	1970s	Mingyue village	Return migrant	Running a restaurant
3L14	Male	1970s	Mingyue village	Non-migrating	Running a restaurant

Number	Gender	Decade of birth	Name of the village	Migration condition	Current work
3L15	Male	1960s	Mingyue village	Non-migrating	Running a guesthouse
4L1	Male	1980s	Longhuang village	Return migrant	Running a restaurant
4L2	Male	1960s	Longhuang village	Non-migrating	Unemployed
4L3	Male	1970s	Longhuang village	Return migrant	Running a restaurant
4L4	Male	1980s	Longhuang village	Non-migrating	Running a restaurant
4L5	Female	1960s	Longhuang village	Non-migrating	Employed in a restaurant

\* Non-migrating means local residents who had never left the village for an extended period.

\*\* Return migrants were local residents who went to cities for work or education opportunities as rural–urban migrants, and who came back to the villages because of the work/business opportunities following the development of rural tourism.

\*\*\* Moved to the centre of the county means rural residents who had purchased houses in the centre of the county and had physically moved out of the village. However, their Hukou registrations remained in the villages, through which they still kept the right to use their properties.

### 3.5.1.2 Sampling and Recruitment

Theoretical sampling is used in this research. According to Glaser and Strauss (1970, p.45), ‘theoretical sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges’. Theoretical sampling allows for considerable flexibility as the sampling is not predetermined; rather it is ongoing throughout the study. For the purpose of this research, as I explained earlier, I divided the fieldwork into two phases. In the first phase, I did interviews with some key informants to find some potential themes for this research. After the first phase of fieldwork, I did some initial data analysis, which helped me to narrow down my research questions, adjust the interview questions, and locate potential informants for the next round of fieldwork. During the second phase of fieldwork, I used snowball sampling and gatekeepers to recruit more participants. Instead of a self-propelled process that proceeded on its own, I, as the researcher, deliberately controlled how the sample progressed (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981). I will demonstrate how this was carried out among the three groups of participants.

### **3.5.1.2.1 Government officials**

Government officials were selected through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling relies on the dynamics of social networks to help researchers to find potential participants (Noy, 2008). It produces the 'sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest' (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981, p.141). In social science research, snowball sampling is particularly applicable when researchers are trying to get access to participants who are hard to reach by researchers, such as (in this research) government officials of high social status.

The snowball sampling started from my personal network of individuals working in the Zhejiang Urban and Rural Planning Design Institute. This was possible due to my time studying Urban and Rural Planning as a masters student for three years at a university close to Zhejiang province, and because several other alumni who worked in Zhejiang Urban and Rural Planning Design Institute for many years had broad connections with local government officials, including the ones in my research area.

Snowball sampling worked among the government officials with a 'top-down approach' at the beginning, by which I mean that higher-level government officials introduced me to lower-level government officials. For example, when I started my fieldwork in the Twenty-Nine-Room House RTMs' Model Base, I got access to a county-level government official through my social network. This government official then introduced me to the government officials from the town level, who then introduced me to the village committee in Xinguang village where the Twenty-Nine-Room House RTMs' Model Base was based. The advantage of this process was that I got access to government officials from different levels quickly.

However, one problem with this process was that some higher-level government officials introduced me to lower-level government officials based on their familiarity rather than on how much useful information the next person could provide for my research. To make up for this drawback, I tried a 'bottom-up approach', which means that I got access to government officials through RTMs as I found that there were frequent interactions between them. This bottom-up approach was successfully used in other field sites, and it helped me to find government officials who could offer the most relevant information.

Table 3.3 outlines the government officials that I recruited. I focused recruitment on government officials who were likely to have knowledge and experience with rural regeneration and rural tourism development. For example, the government officials I interviewed from the provincial level, municipal level and county level were senior staff working at tourism administrations who

dealt with rural tourism development policies. People I interviewed from the town level and village level were often directly in charge of rural regeneration and rural development.

The number and the levels of government officials that I interviewed in each field site varied (see Table 3.2). I did seven and twelve interviews with government officials in the two field sites in Zhejiang province. However, I only did four and two interviews with government officials in Sichuan province. The reasons for this difference are twofold. First, my social network helped a lot with approaching government officials in the first and second field sites in Zhejiang province. However, a lack of social networks in Sichuan province limited the number of government officials that I could approach. Second, the first phase of fieldwork I did in Zhejiang province built a rapport between myself and RTMs in both field sites, which helped me to approach government officials. Beyond this, a good relationship with the RTMs' recruitment team in Mingyue village offered me the opportunity to take part in two meetings organized by government officials from the town level and county level for the newly arriving RTMs, through which I got a better understanding of the relationship between government officials and RTMs.

My access to the knowledge of government officials helped me to better understand the rural development policies in local areas, especially considering the policies to attract RTMs and to develop RTMs' model bases. This was advantageous as it offered me background knowledge of the transformation of the villages and the incoming of RTMs. As I discuss later in this chapter, interviews with government officials overcome a lack of policy documents that I aimed to collect from local governments.

Moreover, interviewing local government officials offered me a 'virtual permit' to stay in the villages to carry out my participant observation and to interview RTMs and local residents, which would otherwise have been a problem. The 'virtual permit' is neither a permit written on paper nor an electronically issued permit. Rather, it is tacit agreement between the researcher and local government officials that I can carry out my research in the villages. It is widely known that local government officials are very sensitive to journalists coming to the villages, who in most cases will be followed to make sure that people do not 'say something wrong'. My interviews with government officials not only allowed me to get the information I need from them, but also offered them the chance to know me as a researcher and my aims to access different people. My intention to write a thesis instead of a report on a newspaper relieved their worries to a large extent.

### 3.5.1.2.2 Rural Tourism Makers

The criteria for my sample of RTMs were whether the person was a newcomer to the villages where the RTMs' model bases were (i.e. their Hukou registration was not in the case villages), and whether they were engaged in rural tourism-related work/business by themselves. As I have discussed at the beginning of the thesis, for the aim of this research, I define RTMs by distinguishing them from local residents and other rural tourism business investors. RTMs are not local residents. Although urban-rural return migrants are supposed to be one kind of RTMs according to the policy document, they are actually excluded by local government officials from the RTMs group. Compared with other rural tourism business investors whose main motivation is economic, RTMs promote 'innovative rural tourism development' by engaging in cultural and creative practices by themselves.

To recruit RTMs, I used a combination of gatekeeper and snowball sampling. Gatekeepers have been widely used in qualitative research because gatekeepers' familiarity with the participants offers trust between the researchers and the participants, which is helpful for the research process (Campbell et al., 2006). In this research, gatekeepers played a very important role at the beginning of my access to the village and RTMs. Except for Moganshan RTMs' Model Base, where RTMs had been before the RTMs' policy, in all the other three RTMs' model bases, there were teams in charge of the recruitment and/or management of RTMs. People in these teams became gatekeepers for me.

The ways I got access to gatekeepers varied. While for the first field site during the first phase of the fieldwork, i.e. the Twenty-Nine-Room House RTMs' Model Base, I was introduced to the gatekeeper by local government officials. For the other three RTMs' model bases, I was introduced by the gatekeepers from the last RTMs' Model Base I stayed in, as people in the RTMs' model bases had frequent communication. I contacted the gatekeepers first when I arrived at the villages. They introduced me to RTMs in person through different occasions as I stayed in the villages during the fieldwork. For example, in Mingyue Village, the gatekeepers introduced me to RTMs by bringing me to dinners with RTMs as it was during Chinese New Year, a time for people to get together and celebrate.

Besides gatekeepers, I also used a snowball sampling approach to recruit RTMs. At the end of an interview with RTMs, I asked them to introduce me and my research to any RTMs that they knew who might be interested. This approach was advantageous when I did fieldwork in Moganshan town as RTMs were dispersed across different villages and there was a lack of gatekeepers. I stopped sampling more RTMs when I could not find new stories in the interviews, which is called reaching descriptive saturation (Baker and Edwards, 2012).

In general, my sample of RTMs broadly reflects the characteristics of the total population of RTMs based on what I learned from reading policy documents, online websites, interviews with government officials and participant observation. My sample of sixty-five RTMs covered thirty-six males and twenty-nine females. The age range of my sample includes people from their 20s to their 50s. In terms of education, a majority of them had university and above educational experience. Considering their previous places of work/living and their distances from the case villages, my sample covered people from the centre of the county where the RTMs' model bases were based, from the nearby municipal cities, and from provincial capitals like Hangzhou and Chengdu. This allowed me to explore how RTMs balanced their work/life in between the urban and the rural. Besides this, their previous occupations as entrepreneurs or employers and different kinds of professional (e.g. designers, architects) allowed me to make claims about their transfer of skills from the urban to the rural and its role in landscape production.

### **3.5.1.2.3 Local residents**

Local residents in this research refer to people whose household registrations were in the case villages, including non-migrating rural residents and rural residents who had moved to the centre of the county, as well as urban–rural return migrants. Although some of them had moved to the centre of the county, they still kept their household registration in the villages and they were seen as local residents by government officials, RTMs and local residents. Local residents were recruited through gatekeepers and snowball sampling. As I approached the government officials and RTMs first, government officials from the village level and RTMs who employed local residents became gatekeepers for me to approach local residents. Using gatekeepers to approach local residents was an effective strategy because their introduction encouraged local residents to participate who otherwise would not have been willing to talk to me as a stranger about their private life.

Once local residents agreed to participate in my research, I interviewed them in the guesthouse where they were working or visited their homes to do interviews with them. Following the interview, I began the second round of the snowball process by asking them to introduce their acquaintances in the villages who would be likely to be interested in taking part. This approach was advantageous in that it allowed me to access people who were engaged in rural tourism–related work/business, from whom I did find some interesting findings (see details in Chapter 6).

My sample of local residents was limited. I did forty-one interviews with long-term residents. Among the forty-one long-term residents, eighteen were female and twenty-three were male. Six were born in the 1990s, ten in the 1980s, seventeen in the 1970s, and eight in the 1960s. However, I realised that my sample of local residents was weighted towards people who were

engaged in rural tourism–related work/business (there was only one local resident who was not engaged in rural tourism–related work/business). This imbalance is likely to have emerged because of a lack of rapport between me and local residents who were not engaged in rural tourism–related work/business. Based on my observations and informal talks with some local residents of the villages, people who did not run rural tourism–related businesses could be divided roughly into two groups. One group did not have many interactions with RTMs and showed little interest in my research. The other group developed a strained relation with RTMs. Normally this group consisted of RTMs' neighbours who did not get along with their newly arriving neighbours (see details in Chapter 6). As I spent the majority of my time with RTMs, trying to build a relationship and rapport with them, their neighbours who developed a strained relation with RTMs saw me as the 'ally' of RTMs. In several cases, local residents refused to talk to me because they thought that it was none of my business. What is more, my intention to approach local residents who had conflicts with RTMs caused tension between me and my gatekeepers. In small villages where everybody knew each other and words spread fast, I decided to keep a good relationship with my gatekeepers and gave up my intention to approach those who developed tense relations with the newly arriving RTMs.

Despite this, during my stay in the villages for a month or two, I was able to observe and feel the relations between RTMs and local residents on a daily basis. Informal talks with local residents and RTMs also provided important information on the relations between local residents and newly arriving RTMs, although in many cases they were not talking about themselves. The information that I got from interviewing local residents and RTMs, as well as from informal talks and observations, triangulated each other, which allows me to make some claims about the relationships between local residents and newly arriving RTMs.

This aspect of the make-up of my sample affects the claims I can make based on the data that I collected. As my sample was largely made up of people who were engaged in rural tourism–related work/business, I was able to generate rich insights into the relations between RTMs and local residents who worked for RTMs or who started rural tourism businesses by themselves. However, I am less confident making claims about RTMs and local residents who were not engaged in rural tourism-related work/business. This is a limitation of this research and I elaborate on it in Chapter 7 as an area for further research.

### **3.5.1.3 Doing interviews**

The locations where interviews took place were diverse in this research. In most cases, interviews with government officials took place in their offices. The benefits were that it was quiet, private and often without disruption. However, it also produced a more formal atmosphere that was



stilted (Valentine, 2005). Some government officials talked almost as if they were giving a speech or lecture instead of having a conversation with me. An interview with a retired government official in a coffee shop around 8pm, which was normally his after-dinner relaxing time, turned out to be more conversational and informative.

In-depth interviews with RTMs took place in most cases in their guesthouses or cultural and creative studios in the villages. Living in the village and showing up frequently made it easier and more flexible for me to arrange interviews with people. As some of the RTMs were busy during the daytime and they knew that I lived in the village, they invited me for dinner, during which we ate and talked. Interviews with RTMs always started or finished with a tour of their guesthouses or cultural and creative studios, which made it easier for them to explain to me what they had done in the village and what they planned to do in the future (see details in participant observation).

Interviews with local residents took place in their homes or at the place where they were working, such as the *Minsu* guesthouses. I found that the advantage of doing interviews in their homes was that they felt more confident to talk as the host. What is more, they were glad to show me the changes in their lives, including the houses, decoration, and lifestyle, etc. The diversity of the locations where interviews took place in this research allowed the interviewees to talk more confidently. It also allowed me to observe directly the spaces that RTMs and local residents had created.

Interview guides (see Appendix A, B and C) were used for all the interviews to promote consistency and prompt discussion. All the interviews were conducted in Chinese and were recorded using a digital recording device with the consent of the interviewees. The interviews lasted between half an hour and two hours. To make up for one disadvantage of the recording device, which is its inability to record the surrounding environment, body language and facial expressions of the interviewees, I took different measures. I took pictures of the places where the interviews took place. I tried to remember the body language, dress codes and facial expressions of the interviewees, and wrote it down in the field notes as soon as I finished the interviews.

### **3.5.2 Participant observation**

Despite the advantages of interviews, Silverman (2014) reminds qualitative researchers of the danger of an overreliance on respondents' self-reports to identify social phenomena. The reason for this is that what people say differs from what people actually do (or do not do). To deal with this problem, this research also employed participant observation, which gave me direct access to the research topic by immersing myself in the real world for a prolonged time. In the fieldwork, I

conducted participant observation mainly in two ways: working with gatekeepers and guided tours.

Working with gatekeepers offered me the chance to participate in and observe what was going on in the villages. I worked as an assistant in RTMs' recruitment teams in the Twenty-Nine-Room House RTMs' Model Base and Mingyue Village RTMs' Model Base. In both cases, I was given a variety of odd jobs based on their schedule and my skills. For example, in the Twenty-Nine-Room House RTMs' Model Base, I was asked to plan the New Year party with other staff, to take photos when government officials were visiting the Model Base and to manage their Wechat<sup>2</sup> public account for a short period. In Mingyue village, I went with a member of the recruitment team to send out the Moon Village magazine to every household in the village. I went with my gatekeepers to dinner at RTMs' places or local residents' homes during the Chinese New Year. I went to other villages with the team when they were invited as consultants to offer a rural regeneration plan. This experience allowed me to observe closely not only what RTMs did in the villages but also what they did beyond the villages.

Guided tours happened in two ways. One was the guided tours given by the RTMs, normally at the beginning or end of the interviews. Normally, I asked RTMs to tell me how they choose the location, design, build, and run the guesthouse or the studios in the villages. The conversations happened in this process were often taken down as memos afterwards, although it was sometimes recorded with the permission of the informants. I also took photos of the things that either I as a researcher or the informants felt were important. In some cases, I was invited to take part in the activities in the cultural and creative studios, e.g. cloth dying and bamboo handicraft making. Another kind of guided tour was given by long-term residents. They were willing to show me around their houses, especially when the houses were newly built or reconstructed. I asked the informants to tell me the stories of the houses and how they had changed to run tourism businesses.

Most of the time, I used overt observation. I informed the gatekeepers of my identity as a researcher studying RTMs and rural tourism development in China. The advantage of doing so was that the participants in this research spent more time to explain the phenomenon to the researcher from their perspectives. However, Bryman (2012) argues that the distinction between overt and covert observation can be blurry. This happened in my research when the observation was in a public setting or even a closed setting but people joined the event in the middle. For example, I attended some salons in the Twenty-Nine-Room House RTMs' Model Base, where the

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<sup>2</sup>Wechat is one of the most popular social media platforms in China.

gatekeeper of the RTMs shared their experiences with government officials who came for policy tourism. The gatekeeper was aware that I was a researcher and he also mentioned me at the beginning of the salon. However, as some people joined in the middle of the salon, it was not possible or necessary to introduce me every time people came in.

Detailed field notes were taken at the end of every day to keep a record of what the researcher learned day by day, about the people and places under study. The field notes helped me to make sense of how (mis)understandings developed, and research took shape in/between various research settings. Besides this, the field notes provided the kinds of detailed descriptions which allowed the eventual readers to imagine being there, and understanding things in the ways that they were understood at the time they happened.

### **3.5.3 Online observation and policy documents**

Social media (e.g. Wechat, Weibo<sup>3</sup>) is a very important platform on which RTMs as rural tourism entrepreneurs shared stories about their rural practices and their ideal rural lifestyles. Before I started the fieldwork, some social media articles were collected from the Wechat public accounts operated by RTMs from the field sites. For this research, the purpose of conducting online observation was twofold. First, it was a means of gaining some information about RTMs themselves as they normally started their public accounts with a story of themselves and their experiences of relocating to the rural areas. Second, it was a way of examining RTMs' practices in the villages, as many of them had the habit of updating about their daily life in the villages and the various kinds of activities they organized for tourists. By reading through some articles on their social media websites, I gained an initial understanding of the identities and motivations of RTMs and their practices in the villages.

National and provincial policy documents were collected from government websites as an important source of information on rural tourism development policy in China. Otherwise, I collected some material about the local rural tourism development trajectories from the government officials. Through these materials, I gained a basic understanding of the state discourse of rural tourism development and the practices of rural tourism development on the ground by local governments.

However, my plan to collect some policy documents that the local government carried out to attract RTMs did not work well. To apply to be nominated as an RTMs' Model Base, the local government had to prepare application forms, in which they should have detailed the policies

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<sup>3</sup> Weibo is one of the most popular social media platforms in China.

that they carried out to attract RTMs. In the four field sites that I went to, I only managed to get the application form from Moganshan RTMs' Model Base. None of the other three RTMs' Model Bases provided me with the application forms for reasons including that the documents could not be found easily because the person in charge had changed, or else that the documents were not saved after the nomination. On one hand, this reflects a lack of systemic preservation of documents in some local governments. On the other hand, this reminds me of Heimer's (2006) discussion of one dilemma of doing fieldwork in China, which is government officials' uncertainty about what sort of information researchers are supposed to get access to. As Thøgersen and Heimer (2006, p.13) argues, 'when people cannot define the borderlines with any certainty they prefer to play it safe'. It is not clear if they really did not have the documents that I wanted or they just did not want to get themselves in trouble by sharing policy documents with an outsider.

Compared with providing policy documents, government officials were more willing to verbally talk about the policy incentives that they offered to attract RTMs. During my interviews with them, they shared some of the main policy incentives that local governments had offered for RTMs. In general, gaining insight of this policy context through interviews with government officials from different levels and extensive cross-checking produced a clear picture of my research topic.

### **3.6 Positionality and reflexivity**

Fieldwork is a process which allows researchers to engage with the research in the field (Massey, 2003). In this process, it is of great importance that researchers keep reflexive and pay attention to the ways in which their identity positionality can impact their research. Qualitative researchers start our research with our consciousness which is always influenced by our social characteristics like gender, race, age and nationality (Rose, 1997; Bourke, 2014; Sultana, 2016). Geographers have long suggested that researchers should be aware of their identity positions as well as those of their informants in the process of fieldwork, and keep this as part of their research practices (Mullings, 1999; Chattopadhyay, 2013; Botterill, 2015; Kohl and McCutcheon, 2015; Zhao, 2017). Reflecting on the relations between the researchers and the participants, this section demonstrates how I dealt with my identity positions and the complicated relations with the interviewees in my fieldwork in rural China.

In my fieldwork, I used interviews and participant observation to research RTMs and their practices in rural China. I mainly encountered three different groups of people: government officials, RTMs and long-term residents. Because of their different positions, identities and relationships with me, my identities were always complex and fluid. When I

was doing interviews with government officials and RTMs, I was seen less like a researcher and more like a reporter who would bring their 'model stories' to wider audiences. In recent years, RTMs' model bases have become places of pilgrimage for government officials from all over China to visit and for newspapers to report on, as they were set up as examples for others to follow (Chio, 2017). Government officials were frequently interviewed by journalists, to whom they told their achievements in attracting RTMs and rural tourism development, according to common practices in China. More recently, RTMs' stories were widely reported in some social media platform such as Wechat public account to attract tourists. As a result, government officials and RTMs tended to treat me as one of the reporters and to tell me the 'good side' of the stories. For example, government officials preferred to tell me the changes the villages had undergone and the benefits that rural tourism development had brought to the villages, while RTMs preferred to share their stories of living in the villages and getting along well with local residents. However, they tended to avoid the other side of the stories, e.g. the challenges that RTMs had faced living/working in the villages or their conflicts with local residents – as if these would ruin their exemplary status. To encourage them to tell me both sides of the stories, I spent an extended length of time in each field site observing what was going on in the villages and the relations between local residents and RTMs before I started to interview key informants. At the beginning of each interview, I would briefly tell them my time spent in the village and the fact that I was not writing a propaganda report. As a result, the participants took my interviews more seriously and talked to me about the other side of the stories.

What complicated my positions and identities were the relationships between local residents and newly arriving RTMs. As a young and aspiring woman studying abroad, I was accepted by RTMs relatively easily. They saw my coming to the villages and interviews with them as recognition of their practices. However, a close relationship with newly arriving RTMs caused some distance between me and local residents. For example, when I was doing fieldwork in Moganshan, I was based in one *Minsu* guesthouse in Houwu village, and developed a relationship and rapport with its owner. As a result, local residents who worked for that *Minsu* guesthouse saw me as a friend of their employer. The special relationship between employer and employee made them uncomfortable to talk about their opinions on RTMs. To solve this problem, I tried to make friends with them while working with them every day. I tried to tell them about my own experiences of growing up in a village. On one occasion when I went on an away day with all the employees, I took the chance to take pictures for them to get closer to them. All of these paid off at the end

when some of them were willing to talk to me and some others even invited me to their homes and told me about the changes in their lives.

Despite this, the conflicts between some local residents and RTMs made it hard for me to build a close rapport with both groups. During the research, RTMs talked about their disadvantaged position in the village because of the strong social network among local residents. As a researcher, I tried to approach residents who had conflicts with RTMs, intending to explore this tense relation between RTMs and local residents from both sides. However, as a newly arriving single woman in the village, it was suggested by some local residents that I not 'make trouble' for myself because there was a danger of reigniting the conflicts. As a result, I did not manage to interview local residents who had conflicts with RTMs. However, during my interviews with some other local residents and government officials in the villages, they talked about some unpleasant relations between local residents and newly arriving RTMs without mentioning any names. For more on these relations, see Chapter 6.

### **3.7 Ethical dilemmas**

Ethical considerations have become increasingly central to social research over recent years (Silverman, 2017). At the very beginning of my PhD, I attended a department workshop on ethics, which alerted me to numerous ways in which ethical considerations are involved in the process of social research. Other than this, applying for ethical approval from the university ethics committee before the first phase of my fieldwork provided me another chance to get familiar with the codes of ethics for social researchers as guides to avoid ethical transgressions, with special consideration of my research. Before the first phase of my fieldwork, I got ethical approval from the ethics committee of the University of Southampton. My ERGO reference number is 30515. Four main issues are considered: a) informed consent; b) the confidentiality of information; c) the voluntary nature; d) health and safety.

These ethical considerations were applied to the whole process of my research. Before I visited each informant, I sent the information sheet to them and told them the basic information about my research. For my research, the critical concern was not to distribute the information sheet but to make its contents clear to people involved and to ask for their consent, as asking for consent for academic research is a less-known practice in China. Because of the special cultural background in China, people were afraid of signing their names on documents, which was especially so for rural residents who did not have much experience signing names on documents. As a result, a majority of participants in this research gave verbal consent instead of signing their names on the consent forms.

During my fieldwork in the village, I was cautious about the confidentiality of my interviews. One issue of doing fieldwork in a village is the difficulty of keeping confidentiality as it is a small place where people know each other and news spreads very quickly. In some cases, before I started my interview with RTMs or local residents, the informant asked me whom else I had interviewed. I had to explain to them the importance of confidentiality and said that I would not tell others their information just as I would not tell them others' information. Some of them even knew whom I had interviewed through talking to the informants that I had interviewed. In this case, I thought it was the informants' right to choose to tell others. I admitted having spoken to them, but tried not to reveal more information about other informants.

Besides, I was very careful when talking about the conflicts between RTMs and local residents with all the three groups, including government officials, RTMs and local residents. In this research, most interviewees tried to avoid talking about these topics. As participants had the freedom to decide what to say or not, I did not give them much pressure to talk about things that seemed sensitive to them, especially when I felt the uneasy relations between some RTMs and local residents. Instead, I only encouraged them to describe the relations between RTMs and local residents in the villages as long as they felt comfort. No matter whether they made positive or negative evaluations, I asked them to explain the reasons. If they did not want to talk further about this topic, I moved on to the next question. Interestingly, although RTMs avoided talking about their own conflicts with local residents, they liked to reveal conflicts between other RTMs and long-term residents without mentioning any names.

Apart from interviews with people, participant observation in this research raises the ethical question of anonymity. A majority of photos were taken without people's faces. In the case where faces could not be avoided, they were covered with mosaic. Moreover, to ease informants' tensions about the large numbers of pictures taken during the fieldwork in RTMs' *Minsu* guesthouses, cultural and creative studios, and local residents' houses, I showed them the pictures and asked them for permission that I could use the materials in my writing.

The relationships developed with participants during the fieldwork in order to collect the data needed for the research also raised ethical challenges (Hall, 2009). Hall argues that although friendships in the field might open new doors, they also create ethical dilemmas. In this research, maintaining contact with my informants after the fieldwork became the main concern for me. During my stay in the villages, I developed friendships with some of my participants. To avoid giving them the impression that I contacted them only when I needed something from them and 'disappeared' after I 'used them', I explained to them that I would like to keep in touch with them

through social media or email. However, it would not be possible to maintain regular contact like when I was in the field because of my own work and other personal commitments.

### 3.8 Data analysis

All the qualitative data I collected, including transcripts of interviews, field notes, and photos, were analysed using NVIVO 12. The thematic analysis approach were employed to examine different perspectives from participants and to generate whatever insights emerged from the data (Braun et al., 2018). It is also a helpful method to force the researcher to handle a large dataset with a well-structured approach and to produce a trustworthy thesis (Nowell et al., 2017).

Before analysis, the recordings of all the interviews and some conversations between me and RTMs or local residents where they showed me around their *Minsu* guesthouses, cultural and creative studios, or homes were transcribed verbatim in Chinese. I did all the transcription myself, which was a very important way for me to familiarize myself with the data (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, 2011). Short conversations and photos taken before or after the related interviews were added to transcripts. Other important information, such as body language, dress codes and the facial expressions of interviewees, which I wrote down after each interview, were also added to corresponding transcripts. This was particularly useful for interviews with RTMs, as it formed part of the way they expressed their identities, such as through the way they dressed (Edensor, 2006). All the transcripts were then added to NVIVO 12. Besides transcripts, all the field notes that I wrote and photos taken during the fieldwork were also added.

To deal with the photos taken from the fieldwork, I considered Cook and Crang's (2007) suggestions about how to deal with visual materials. The first is to make systematic notes about the content of the images. The second is to treat visual images 'as a form of language, so that 'images can be interpreted according to the codes of representation which they appear to embody' (Cook and Crang, 2007, p.73). The third approach is a communicative analysis of the pictures, which treats the practices of taking pictures as a social process. Following Cook and Crang, in this research, I think of two axes corresponding to images. The first is about the content and composition of the pictures. The researcher processed the pictures by detailing the photos with the following contents: 1) participants; 2) topics; 3) settings; 4) the form of the finished image. The second axis addresses how these pictures came to be produced, involving questions of 1) who took/kept/displayed the images; 2) the events of which the pictures were taken; 3) how the photographers managed people in the photos. All the texts and photos were then analysed through the following steps.



The data analysis in this research started with familiarising myself with the data. It involved reading the data repeatedly, understanding its meanings, and finding potential patterns or themes. This first round of reading the entire data set aimed to familiarize the researcher with all aspects of the data and to produce a list of interesting things for the future coding process (Braun and Clarke, 2006). For my research, this process started during the fieldwork, as I wrote a summary after each interview to note down the key issues that came up in the interview and my reflections on the emerging themes. At this stage, I read both the transcripts of the interviews and the summaries that I wrote during this period as an important way to immerse myself in the data.

After familiarizing myself with the data, I started to generate my initial codes. This is a process not only to simplify the data but also to find the potential focus of the data (Nowell et al., 2017). In this phase, I read through the material sentence by sentence, identified the important sections of text, and labelled them with codes. The codes generated were a combination of descriptive and analytical codes. While descriptive codes are created by summarising interviewees' words, analytical codes relate to a theme that connects directly to my research questions or existing theory. The 'Nodes' function of NVIVO 12 was used in creating codes.

Once all data had been initially coded, I started a new phase of searching for themes, which involved organizing all the codes and related extracts into themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I combined a deductive and an inductive approach when generating themes. As I covered a wide range of concepts in my research, higher-order codes were created deductively based on my theoretical approach and interview guides (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, 2011). These deductive codes often formed the main themes in this research. For example, I drew on key concepts from gentrification studies, such as the middle class, to connect the data to existing research and my understanding of the identities of RTMs. However, subthemes were formed through the inductively generated codes. Assisted by NVIVO 12, this process was done through aggregating relevant initial codes.

The set of themes generated in the last phase was further reviewed. While some of them might find themselves not supported by enough data, others might need to be broken down into subthemes (Nowell et al., 2017). The validity of each theme was considered to determine whether it reflected the 'meanings evident in the data set as a whole' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.91). At this stage, I read the coded extracts for each theme to justify if it was 'specific enough to be discrete and broad enough to capture a set of ideas contained in numerous text segments' (Nowell et al., 2017, p.9). Also, I reread the interview transcripts and field notes to see if the themes made sense, whilst also inserting new codes that were missed in the initial coding stage.

I then refined each theme by reflecting on the aspect of data it captured and identifying the story it told (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I went through the data extracts of each theme to make sure that the themes were firmly grounded in the data. I considered the relationships between and ordering of the themes as they would be represented in the thesis by connecting them to the research gaps and/or debates.

Following the above process, I structured the thesis by organizing the themes emerged. As the interviews were all done in Chinese and the field notes were written in Chinese, the codes and memos in Nvivo were also written in Chinese to keep consistency. However, to make it readable for a wider audiences and to keep consistency with the thesis which is written in English, all the quotations were translated into English by the researcher herself. Although the analysis process as documented here is presented as a linear process, it was an interactive process developed along the way which involved frequent going back and forth at different steps (Nowell et al., 2017).

### **3.9 Conclusion**

This chapter explains the research design adopted in this research and the underlying methodological approach. In Section 3.2, I explained the qualitative approach I took for this research, justifying how qualitative research was selected because of the open-ended and exploratory nature of the research questions. More specifically, I chose the ethnography approach and used multi-site ethnography to study one phenomenon in depth. I chose four field sites in two provinces, which formed one case of RTMs relocating to rural areas and their practices in the villages. I adopted a qualitative methods research design, incorporating interviews, participant observation and online observation, as well as reading policy documents. I elaborated on the procedure of the data collection process, discussing what, why and how I collected data using these methods. I also considered my positionality and reflexivity in the research and the ethical dilemmas that were raised in it. I then explained how I analysed my data using thematic analysis with the assistance of NVIVO 12.

My methodological approach and research design had strengths and weaknesses. This thesis seeks to understand Rural Tourism Makers' practices in rural China, including their relocation to the rural, the new rural landscape that they created, and their relationships with local residents. There were limits to the kind of knowledge I could get using an interview method due a lack of triangulation and access to participants with particular character (e.g. local residents who were not engaged in rural tourism-related work/business). I drew on multiple qualitative methods to try and overcome these challenges and corroborate my findings.

The use of participant observation as a data collection method added to the richness of the data I collected. Staying in the villages for eight months in total gave me plenty of chances to observe directly what was happening on the ground, including observing RTMs' practices in the villages and the new rural landscape that they produced, as well as their interaction or lack of interaction with local residents. Staying in the village and showing up on different occasions also helped to build rapport with the participants. What is more, the multiple sources of data that I got from participant observation, interviewing local government officials, online observation and reading policy documents not only prepared me with enough background knowledge before my interviews with RTMs and local residents, but also helped me to triangulate them with each other.

Therefore, based on the data that I collected, I am confident making claims about the identities of RTMs and their motivations to relocate to rural areas. I am also able to make claims about the new rural landscape that they practised and through which their middle-class identities were performed. In terms of RTMs' relationships with local residents, I am more confident claiming the relationships between RTMs and local residents who worked for them or who started rural tourism business by themselves. However, the claims about RTMs and local residents who were not engaged in rural tourism-related work/business are more tentative. This is a limitation of this research and I elaborate on it in Chapter 7 as an area for further research. In the following three chapters, I present my empirical findings. In Chapter 4, I explore the identities of the RTMs and their motivations for relocating to the rural areas. Chapter 5 demonstrates the new rural landscape that RTMs created and performed, in which process their middle-class identity was expressed. In Chapter 6, I examine the relations between RTMs and local residents through the concept of displacement.



## Chapter 4 Middle-class consumers and creative-class producers: RTMs and their urban–rural mobility

### 4.1 Introduction

Who are RTMs and why do they move to the rural areas? In part, this is a question about the identity and motivation of people who move from the urban to the rural? By move, I do not only mean permanently moving from the urban to the rural and settling down, like rural gentrifiers or the counter-urbanizing population, but also a more flexible form of urban–rural mobility, including temporary consumers of the rural (like the urban–rural tourists), or second-home owners and people who hold an open attitude towards moving between the urban and the rural (like lifestyle migrants and the emerging creative class in the countryside). So what does the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 about rural tourism, the creative class, urban–rural mobility, and rural gentrification tell us about the identity and motivations of these various groups of people?

Some researchers see them as middle-class consumers of rurality (e.g. Smith, 2002; Hines, 2010; Park, 2014). While urban–rural mobility is thought to take different forms in different countries – with a focus on, for example, rural gentrification in the UK (Smith, 2002), second-home ownership in Nordic countries (Overvåg, 2011), and lifestyle migration in Australia (Waitt and Gibson, 2013) – a middle-class position and its associated education and occupational profile are thought to be shared by many of these groups (Ghose, 2004; Benson and O'Reilly, 2009; Eimermann, 2015b). In rural tourism research, Bell (2006) emphasizes the middle class's desire for a rural idyll, representing an imagined and symbolic landscape (farming, community, the bucolic, and recreation). Similarly, in gentrification research, Smith and Phillips (2001, p.457) use the term 'rural greentrification' to highlight the importance of 'green' space for in-migrant households.

However, translating the concept of the middle class and its consumption of rurality into the Chinese context is not straightforward. China's social structure is complex and rapidly changing (Rocca, 2017). People are positioned in relation to income, education, and occupation, but also Hukou status (Chen and Qin, 2014; Tsang, 2014) – the classifications of China's official household registration system, which positions people as residents of agricultural rural areas or non-agricultural urban areas primarily on the basis of their parental status. Perhaps for this reason, consumption practices are often taken as a defining characteristic of China's middle class (Tsang, 2014). There has been plenty of research on the Chinese middle class's consumption practices as

they relate to cities or overseas destinations (Elfick, 2011; Liu, 2013; Dong, 2018). Much less is known about middle-class consumption practices as they relate to rural areas. More generally, and much like consuming specific products, the ability to create and enjoy 'different' or 'better' lifestyles connected to rural environments is recognized as a source of distinction for individuals, and a way to communicate characteristics such as class, status, occupation, and individuality (Bourdieu, 1984).

However, some other researchers highlight how they are engaged in some kind of production/work (Herslund, 2012; Qian, He and Liu, 2013; Eimermann, 2015b). As a term originating from research in cities, the creative class and their relocation to the countryside has attracted much less – but an increasing amount – of research attention. What is more, both research on the definition of the creative class in the rural and on their relocation decisions highlight both the creative class's creativity and their engagement in creative/cultural production. First, the definition of the creative class based on their occupations identified by (Florida, 2002) and others (e.g. DCMS, 2001) is critiqued in rural research, largely because many of the occupations are not found in rural areas (McGranahan and Wojan, 2007). Instead, what is found is a kind of creativity that is less the property of individual creative types and more a product of the improvisation found in all cultural activities – whether urban or rural (Edensor et al. 2010). For the purposes of this research, it is possible to think of RTMs as creative individuals involved in cultural production. The point of doing so is to look beyond the large body of existing research on the urban creative class (Pratt, 2008; Hansen and Niedomysl, 2009; Borén and Young, 2013), and engage with the emerging body of literature on creativity and economic development in non-urban areas like rural Australia (Gibson et al., 2010) and rural Sweden (Eimermann, 2015b)

Second, considering the creative class's locational choice, urban research highlights that they favour large cities with quality jobs and more consumption choices, including nightlife experiences, vibrant cultural scenes, and leisure and entertainment activities (Florida, 2002; Storper and Scott, 2009). However, rural research emphasizes the creative class's engagement in freelance work and entrepreneurial activities (Herslund, 2012; Eimermann, 2015b). For example, Eimermann (2015b) argues that members of the creative class are more prepared than others to move to rural areas because of the relatively easier transferability of their skills from urban to the rural.

Some commentators, however, are less happy with the consumption–production binary, because some groups, such as lifestyle migrants, are not so easily classified as consumers or producers, tourists or migrants. For example, Eimermann (2016) argues that lifestyle migrants combine a new focus on lifestyle with a sustained focus on work opportunities, and so demand a move by

scholars beyond the consumption–production binary characteristic of much tourism and migration research.

Moreover, people show more flexible attitudes towards moving to rural areas (Eimermann, 2015b). While much research has examined the ‘uni-directional, long-distance, and permanent movements of people to rural places’ (Milbourne and Kitchen, 2014, p.327), much less attention has been given to a flexible move between urban and rural. Taking second-home owners as an example, Keith (2012) argues that their relationship to the rural is neither the temporary one of tourists nor the permanent one of migrants (Halfacree, 2012). They do not settle (Milbourne, 2007), but live flexibly between places (Eimermann, 2015b), balancing their lives between places (Milbourne, 2007; Halfacree, 2012), and keeping open the possibility of return (Ní Laoire, 2007). Moreover, although research on the creative class emphasizes their high mobility because of their high human capital, further consideration of the intersectionality of creative class individuals including their age, gender, life cycle, etc. (Martin-Brelot et al., 2010; Dai et al., 2012) reveals how their move to the rural location is not a one-way and permanent movement. Instead, they might return or move to other places in the future because of their ‘changing preferences over life course intersect with lifestyle relocation’ (Eimermann, 2017, p.132).

To this existing body of literature, I add the case of RTMs. If they are middle-class consumers, what can they tell us about the consumption of the rural by China’s new urban middle class? If they are members of the creative class, what can they tell us about creativity and regeneration in rural areas and among people at different stages of life? If they are more akin to lifestyle migrants or second-home owners, what can their motivations, life strategies, and mobility tell us about changing relationships between production and consumption, or the urban and the rural? I begin this chapter with a brief and focused history of Chinese elites’ rural practices in China. Here I use ‘elites’ to include a broad range of social, cultural, and political intellectuals in Chinese history, who devoted themselves to the rural in one way or another. This tale of Chinese elites and their relationship with the rural provides essential context for what follows, both in this chapter and in Chapter 5. I continue by addressing the title of this chapter directly, and answering the question, ‘Who are the rural tourism makers and why do they move to rural areas?’ In answering this question I consider their identities as middle class consumers and creative class producers, as well as their motivation to move between urban and rural. I conclude this chapter with comments on their identity and motivation from both the consumption and production side, and on the new form of urban–rural mobility.

## 4.2 Elites' relocation to the rural in Chinese history

Interviewing RTMs about their identity and motivations to start practicing in rural China constantly reminded me of the Chinese elites and their rural practices throughout history. For example, some RTMs said that they were successors of Liang Shuming, a Chinese educator and organizer known for his work in the Rural Reconstruction Movement (*xiangjian yundong*) in the 1930s (Slyke, 1959), which I will explain in more detail later. Some others saw RTMs as a new generation of *zhiquing*, educated youth who were sent from urban areas to the rural during the 'Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside' (*shangshan xiaxiang*) movement (1967–1979) (Bernstein, 1977b), which I will also explain later. To understand what aspects of RTMs' identities contribute to their relocation to the rural, and what the rural means to them, it is useful to explore two related factors that have significantly influenced Chinese people's attitudes to the rural. These are (1) the elite identity of those who moved to the rural in Chinese history, and (2) the meaning of the rural to the Chinese elites. Very briefly, I present this below, organized into consecutive historical periods: feudal society (475 BC–1840 AD), modern China (1840–1949), Mao's era (1949–1976), and afterwards (1976–).

In China's feudal society, the social elite travelled to or lived in the rural, or somewhere close to nature, to pursue personal improvement or to escape from struggles at court (*yamen*), the place where government officials worked. The social elite were traditionally referred to by Confucianism as 'literati' (*wenren* in Chinese), mainly including the government officials selected through the imperial examinations (Twitchett and Fairbank, 1986). Because of their high social status and good economic condition, the social elites were among the limited number of people who were able to move, including travelling between urban and rural areas (Xue, 2003). The reasons that social elites chose to relocate to the rural or nature, periodically or permanently, are twofold. First, according to Confucianism, spending time in nature is a way to purify people's souls (Lau, 1983). There is the saying that 'the wise find pleasure in water', while 'the virtuous find pleasure in mountains' (*zhizhe leshan, renzhe leshui*) (Salazar and Zhang, 2013, p.83). Consequently, for elites, temporary stays close to nature were regarded as a chance to improve themselves and to achieve a higher morality. Moreover, they improved themselves through engaging in creative activities like 'composing music, writing, playing chess, painting, calligraphy, and teaching' (Salazar and Zhang, 2013, p.83). In other words, they pursued spiritual improvements through creative and cultural activities.

Second, the political elites often chose to escape the city and travel to the rural areas to 'avoid political persecution and to pursue spiritual self-satisfaction' (Salazar and Zhang, 2013, p.83). Tao Yuanming (365–427 AD) was a very famous recluse (*yinshi*), who quit his position in the



government, moved to the rural areas near the mountain, and created idealized spiritual imaginaries of the rural through writing poems and proses. Tao's appreciation of nature and spiritual freedom is most obvious in his masterpiece, *A Tale of the Peach Blossom Spring with Poem (taohua yuanji)*, which depicts an isolated rural community surrounded by peach trees. This scene of a peach-blossom island has been regarded as the ideal rural life in China (Yuan, 1997). So in this period, for the social elite, the rural meant a place close to nature, and a place for a simple and happy life.

However, this romantic attitude to the rural was weakened in modern China, when it was seen by Chinese intellectuals (*zhishi fenzi*) as a site in need of reform, from feudalistic superstition and backwardness to modernity. That said, at the same time, the rural was seen as the root of Chinese culture, as a site of authentic values of the nation or civilization (Duara, 2000). Chinese intellectuals with great social responsibility, especially those who received Western-style education or new-style education, started to explore the question of how to make China a modern nation as it was in deep political chaos because of the regional conflicts of warlords and the invasion of foreign power (Hung, 1985). Most of the Chinese reformers like Tao Xingzhi (1891–1946), James Y. C. Yan (1893–1990), and Liang Shuming (1893–1988) believed that social evils were dominant in the villages where a great majority of the Chinese people lived. Similarly, Lu Xun (1881–1936), one of the most well-known writers in this period, saw the rural as a site for reform, where today's peasant mired in feudalism could become tomorrow's modern citizens (Duara, 2000). To save China, thorough and fundamental reforms had to be implemented from the grassroots level (Hung, 1985). The Rural Reconstruction Movement became one of the most urgent topics in the minds of Chinese reformers.

However, it was also in the rural areas that many romantic writers lay their dreams. In this period, writers were encouraged to 'go the people' and to be 'loyal to the land' because, as Zhou Zuoren argues, the locality had the power to nourish the character of the 'sons of the land'. 'Only when the breath of the soil and the flavour of the earth penetrates their veins and finds expression in their writing, can we have authentic thought and literature' (Duara, 2000, p.18). For them, peasants were the only people who still embodied the precious parts of human nature which had been long since lost among the so-called civilized urban dwellers (Hung, 1985). The myth of rural innocence and primitivism was reinforced by a comparison with the city life which was seen as 'rotten, surrounded by a decaying foreign culture and engulfed by a corrupt though dazzling lifestyle' (Hung, 1985, p.14). Besides, the nostalgic memories of their hometowns and things that had gone were widely documented in literature by writers, especially those sojourning in Beijing, which was the centre of intellectuals at that time (Duara, 2000).

Mao's era saw millions of Chinese urban-educated youths (*zhiqing*) been sent to the rural because of the 'Up to the Mountain and Down to the Countryside' (UMDC) movement. Starting in the 1950s, the UMDC movement was originally a solution to employment issues in cities. Mao's saying that the '[r]ural is a vast place where great achievement can be reached' motivated millions of *zhiqing* to go to the rural and engage in agricultural production (Mao, 1955, p.50). Research has documented how the educated youth adapted to the difficulties in the rural areas and how they desired to go back home in cities in the late 1970s (Bernstein, 1977a; McLaren, 1979; Gold, 1980).

Although it was a miserable experience for many of them in the poor rural and mountainous areas, there was a wave of nostalgia among the *zhiqing* generation in the 1990s (Yang, 2003), in the form of museum exhibits, *zhiqing*-themed restaurants, publications, and other activities. Yang (2003) argues that this nostalgia shows *zhiqing* generation's resistance to the modern Chinese life. According to Yang (2003), the *zhiqing*'s nostalgic feelings demonstrates two kinds of values: linked to rural life were 'suffering, humanity, and a sense of purpose' (p.286), while linked to urbanization and industrialization were materialism, economic inequality, and instrumental rationality. Yang (2003) further argues that although the *zhiqing* generation expressed their nostalgia feelings towards the past, they did not necessarily want to go back to the old days. It only reflects the educated youth's impatience with Chinese modern development and 'the loss of meaning and humane connections that seems to have accompanied increasing prosperity' (Yang, 2003, p.288).

If the *zhiqing*'s nostalgia towards the rural only exists in their minds, then 'a new generation of *zhiqing*', or cultural elites, led by artists and architects and then engaging a wider urban middle class with relatively high cultural capital, has started its practices in the rural in the last decade, as their imagined ideal rural fades away following the fast urbanization in China since the late 1970s (Ye, Tan and Zhang, 2015; Deng et al., 2016; Qian, 2017; Qu, 2020). The chaotic fervour of reform-era China's modernization and urbanization resulted in dramatic change in the rural, both physically and socially, with the majority of rural labour going to cities to work and houses in the villages being left dilapidated (Long et al., 2012). As with most urbanites, this group of artists has a substantial rural background: they were either born or grew up in the rural, and started rural practices with the aim of reconstructing the villages they once lived in. Well-known artist-led rural regeneration projects include Haotang village in Henan (since 2009) (Wang and Yan, 2016), Xucun International Art Commune in Shanxi (since 2010) (Qu, 2020), and Bishan Project in Anhui (since 2011) (Kurek, 2015). For example, Kurek's (2015) research documented the Bishan project, the founders of which were two artists who wanted to use art and culture as an entry point to offer a more constructive model for rural-urban relations and to break 'the perceived dichotomy

between the urban as the site of cultural production and innovation and the rural as abandoned backward, or culturally void' (Kurek, 2015, p.13). What is more, they were trying to protect rural culture, especially architectural culture, through engaging in the redesigning and reconstructing of vernacular buildings, many of which had been destroyed following the modernization process in rural areas (Qu, 2020).

Following the pioneer artists and architects' practices, an increasing number of urban dwellers have come to the rural to practice their imagined rural. The RTMs are among this group. The present chapter now continues with a discussion of the identity and the motivation of the RTMs.

### 4.3 Beyond production/consumption

#### 4.3.1 Middle-class consumers

Who are the RTMs? According to my sample – which is not formally representative of the total population, but which I have no reason to think is skewed in any particular direction – they resemble, in certain respects, the middle-class consumers discussed above. In general, they are relatively wealthy. The older RTMs tend to have relatively well-paid jobs and/or savings from previous relatively well-paid jobs. The younger RTMs tend to be supported financially by their relatively affluent families. One RTM described their own position as follows:

*I have done my work as a civil servant for more than 20 years. I am not like when I was young, when I had nothing and I had to work very hard for what I wanted. Now I am over 40. I have got some savings. I have got my car and my house. I do not have a strong desire for too much money. Instead, I want to do more things that I really like.* (Interview 1R18, female, 1970s)

Another RTM perceived the position of RTMs in general, or at least in their village, as follows:

*Most RTMs in Xinguang village [where there is the Twenty-Nine-Room House RTMs' Model Base] have a steady income and savings, and live a well-off life. They have free time to do what they are doing in the village ... They have spare money (xian qian) and they do not aim to make too much money.* (Interview 2R10, male, 1990s)

The sense I get from these two quotations is that RTMs are relatively wealthy, but also motivated by more than money – perhaps because of the freedom provided by their economic security. With their houses, cars, and desires for something more in life, they fit well into China's new urban middle class (Wang et al., 2015).

If RTMs are relatively wealthy, they are also relatively well educated – the second part of Li's (2010) definition of the middle class in China. In my sample of 65 interviewees, 54 had university

degrees, with some having graduated from China's top universities and others have studied at universities abroad – another marker of middle-class membership in the Chinese context (Li, 2010). Beyond wealth and education, we can look at the Hukou status of RTMs. More specifically, we can compare their original Hukou (place of birth and early years) and most recent place of residence (prior to residency in the village). In my sample of 65 interviewees, 62 had most recently resided in cities, whether in the centre of the county, a nearby municipal city, the provincial capital city (e.g. Hangzhou and Chengdu), or another large city like Shenzhen or Shanghai. Of these, 47 had places of origin (original Hukou) in the countryside. For Chen and Qin (2014), these 47 – almost three quarters of our sample – would qualify as middle class by virtue of their upward mobility from rural places of origin to urban residency.

This urban and rural living experiences of Chinese middle class affected their choice to relocate to the rural. Based on my interviews with RTMs, I found that on one hand, RTMs are attracted to villages with a good natural environment and an imagined sense of community, largely based on their childhood memory. On the other hand, their relocation to the rural was largely connected to their living experience in cities prior to moving.

Firstly, RTMs were attracted by pull factors from the rural. A majority of the RTMs came to rural areas for the attraction of the natural environment. Some RTMs explain their reasons for choosing specific villages:

*I like the pine trees, the bamboo forests, and the tea plantations in Mingyue village. My friend described the natural environment in Mingyue village to me before I came. I think that is my dream village. I came and then I fell in love with it ... I love the land and plants. I feel really happy when I stand on the soil. (Interview, 3R7, female, 1970s)*

*I think many of us came to Mingyue village because we have a countryside dream (tian yuan meng). Many of us grow up from the soil so we have a strong attachment to it. Mingyue village has offered a very good natural environment ... I was first attracted by the more than 20,000 Pinus massoniana trees. Moganshan has mountains, bamboo forests, and water, as you just mentioned. This place does not have a mountain, but it has Pinus massoniana trees. In Chinese culture, Pine trees mean noble (gao jie), elegant (gao ya), and aspiring (you lixiang de). (Interview, 3R10, male, 1970s)*

As illustrated above, trees and bamboo forests, as well as land/soil, formed a natural background for RTMs' dream countryside. Many other RTMs that I interviewed echoed these descriptions and elaborated on the characteristics of base villages as relevant to this analysis. Names of Minsu guesthouses frequently use words related to the natural environment like 'creek', 'farmland', 'mountain', 'rain', 'sky', 'cloud' etc. They expressed an urban middle-class desire for a stronger connection to nature, imagined as a greener location and healthier lifestyle (Smith and Phillips, 2001; Park, 2014). To some extent, they remind me of the elite in China's feudal society, who got

closer to nature for spiritual satisfaction (Lau, 1983). More broadly, this reflects a profound and universal human need for connection with land (Bunce, 2003, p.15).

Beyond a good natural environment, RTMs were attracted to the rural by their imagined strong sense of community and a rural lifestyle, which was often connected to the 'unsophisticated' rural residents and their daily lives. One RTM in Mingyue village, who is a photographer, hosted his exhibition in Mingyue village with a collection of photos showing rural residents doing farm work (see Figure 4.1). He described what a beautiful village is in his mind as follows:

*I saw local residents doing farm work. Mingyue village offers a space where local residents can still do farm work and live a daily life. The scene that rural residents doing farm work expresses a kind of beauty. I took the pictures to capture the beautiful scene, which has been an attraction for tourists and the new villagers. (Interview 3R3, male, 1980s)*



Figure 4.1: A picture capturing rural residents from Mingyue village doing farm work was used as the surface picture for the magazine Moon Village (Author)

For this RTM, rural residents' practice of farm work meant the 'down to the earth' quality of rural life. This is probably affected by the native place literature in modern China, which highlighted rural innocence and primitivism (Hung, 1985). It is also worth noting here that many RTMs gave

memories of life in the countryside when they were young as reasons for their move to the village. As one RTM said:

*The main reason that I started to go to rural areas is because of my strong childhood memory. I want to go back to that time when I was so happy. I remembered my grandparents, a lovely couple. I remembered the big plum tree in the front yard. There was a big plain area where my grandfather planted various kinds of vegetables. (Interview 3R15, female, 1980s)*

Many RTMs used their interview to remember rural life in this way, associating it particularly with a self-sufficient rural lifestyle. They resemble Chinese writers in the first half of the twentieth century, whose nostalgia was caused by things that had gone (Duara, 2000). The self-sufficient rural lifestyle that the interviewee described reminds me of the scenario of a peach-blossom spring in Tao Yuanming's poem, which stood for a simple and happy life (Yuan, 1997). The strong feeling towards the rural among the urban middle class in China is influenced by the fact that large number of urbanites were born and/or grew up in the rural areas (Park, 2014).

Secondly, RTMs were affected by the push force from previous urban living experiences, which contrasted with the ideal rural in their childhood memories. The comparison between city life and the imagined rural life is illustrated by this argument:

*I do not like living in the city, in the high-rise buildings. I want to see the sky instead of the fire exit door or a big room for the air-conditioning when I get out of my house. I do not like the feeling that I cannot feel the difference from morning to dark and the differences in four seasons. I want to live a life where I can feel the weather changes in four seasons, and the light change from morning to dark. I want this kind of life which is 'down to the earth' for me. (Interview, 1R13, female, 1980s)*

Here, the respondent expresses feelings of discontent with her current living environment, specifically, the 'high-rise buildings' and the lifestyle resulting from it, and a lack of connection to the nature. This can be connected to the fast urbanization in China, which also bothered other RTMs in other ways. For example, two RTMs expressed their feelings of disappointment with the fast urban expansion in cities:

*As early as 2011, I felt bored of living in Chengdu, where massive urban construction was carried out in every part of the city. I remembered the construction of the second ring road, which made the whole city a complete mess. I felt so bad. I left Chengdu in 2012 following many of my friends. (Interview, 3R3, male, 1980s)*

*When I was living in Hangzhou, I never thought of buying houses in the centre of the city ... because I thought it was too crowded and too noisy for me, the traffic, the shops, the tourists. I did not buy a house in Hangzhou even though I can afford it. I always lived somewhere close to the suburban but not too far away from the city. For example, if there are four ring roads, I will probably choose to live somewhere near the third ring*

*road. As Hangzhou kept expanding in recent years, I have kept moving further and further, until I ended up here [in the village]. (Interview, 1R2, female, 1960s)*

The fast urban expansion, expressed in the form of the construction of ring road for example, has resulted in an urban living environment that is 'a complete mess', 'crowded', and 'noisy', according to these two respondents. Besides the high-rise buildings and the fast expansion of cities, RTMs also compared the air quality in urban and rural places:

*I sleep really well here in Monganshan. When I was in Shanghai, I usually got up at 9 or 10, still feeling a headache. Now I am here, I usually get up at 7 or 8 and I feel great. I think the reason is the air quality here, which is much better than that in Shanghai. (Interview, 1R17, male, 1980s)*

*Chengdu used to be a very nice city, where people lived a cozy life. It is a culturally vibrant city. But the haze is getting worse and worse in recent years. It is even hard to breath in winter. I think this is the main issue that bothered me living in Chengdu ... in Mingyue village, the large area of trees, farmland, and bamboo really guaranteed the fresh air all the time. (Interview, 3R10, male, 1970s)*

As is demonstrated here, deteriorating air quality bothered RTMs from both Shanghai and Chengdu. Actually, this feeling is shared among other RTMs, especially those from big cities like Hangzhou, Shenzhen, and Beijing. As illustrated here, the consumption of rurality among Chinese middle class appears to be related to a nostalgic search for the rural amid fast urbanization (Dai, 1997; Qian, 2017).

In sum, RTMs are people from the Chinese middle class, with relatively good economic conditions, good education, and urban living experiences. They were attracted to villages by the pull factors from the rural, including a good natural environment and an imagined strong sense of community, and also by the push force from the urban, mainly because of dissatisfaction with the urban living environment which resulted from fast urbanization, and a nostalgic feeling towards the rural.

#### **4.3.2 Creative-class producers**

I have shown how RTMs can be seen as middle-class consumers of the rural. I now turn to how they can also be seen as members of the creative class, or at least as creative individuals producing rurality at least as much as they are consuming it. In our sample, 54 of 65 RTMs had university degrees, which is a defining characteristic of the creative class (Florida, 2002). Moreover, many were practicing creativity. For example, of the 65 RTMs in our sample, 22 were running *Minsu* guesthouses. These are small tourism accommodation businesses that require creativity in the sense that establishing them usually involves the skilled and sensitive renovation of existing village buildings. More directly, 33 were running cultural studios where folk or

handicraft work is done and displayed (e.g. pottery, bamboo knitting, calligraphy, wood crafting, cloth dying).

Considering their occupations prior to arriving in the villages, some RTMs were already involved in cultural production (as interior designers, painters, architects, potters, calligraphers, costume designers, poets, etc.), but others had rather different occupations (as urban planners, civil servants, IT professionals, etc.). Of this latter group, some were involved in cultural production – if not professionally then for recreational purposes (e.g. conducting tea ceremonies, making cloth shoes, singing, or taking photographs).

To summarize, many RTMs were doing some kind of creative work in the villages. Some had transferred their existing creative work from the city to the village. Others had moved to the village precisely to begin some creative work they had not felt able to do in the city. For the former group, it was possible to transfer their existing creative work, not least because of the opportunities provided by mobility and digital technology. As one owner of a *Minsu* guesthouse explained:

*I think what I am doing here is an extension of my previous work [interior design]. Or I would say an upgrade ... I am still doing my previous work because one advantage of doing designing work is that it does not ask you to be in a specific office. Even when I was in Shanghai, our projects were not limited to Shanghai. We had projects all over China. The difference is that customers used to go to Shanghai to find us. Now they come here or we talk online. Nothing much has changed. (Interview 1R17, male, 1980s)*

With respect to mobility, these comments remind us of the rapid rise and importance of virtual forms of mobility that connect rural and remote locations to global networks, and enable and encourage personal and work-related interactions without face-to-face proximity (Milbourne and Kitchen, 2014; Brydges and Hracs, 2019a). The RTM quoted above used his previous experience as an interior designer to establish his *Minsu* guesthouse business. He also managed to keep aspects of his interior design career going from the location of the village. Other RTMs who transferred their existing creative work described how this was made an attractive option by local government support in the villages, especially in the form of business premises. As one potter put it: ‘I came with my skills and my team. I was offered free spaces to start my ceramic production and display activities’ (Interview 2R10, male, 1990s). Their higher cultural capital and creativity was appreciated by the local government officials. As a government official from Ganxi town, to which Mingyue village belongs, said:

*I thought new villagers [RTMs] brought culture and creativity. New villagers in Mingyue village, no matter whether ceramic masters, poets, or writers, came with culture and creativity. For example, although Mingyue village has a long history of doing ceramic products, local people have been making simple and rough products like bowls and*



*kettles. They care more about practicality. As the new villagers came with professional knowledge and their aesthetic taste, they created new products here. We said that with the same mud, local people produced articles of daily use, and new villagers produced artworks. (Interview 3G4, male, 1980s)*

Like this government official, who thought that RTMs brought culture and creativity, several other government officials from different cases expressed the same attitude to RTMs.

RTMs who were not already involved in creative work in the city but viewed their move to the village as an opportunity to move into some form of creative work also highlighted the importance of available spaces and cheap rent in the countryside. As these two RTMs explained:

*I came to visit once and I decided to come to start up my business as the rent was really cheap ... Before I made the decision, I was planning to build a tea house near Haibao Ling [a village near Xinguang village]. However, I was not sure if there would be enough visitors and it would also cost more money. The house in this village was ready and the rent is very cheap. So I could start up my business easily. (Interview 2R19, female, 1990s)*

*I would not do it if I needed to invest too much money. The local policy was good. I do not need to pay the rent for the first three years. It is also very cheap rent afterward. All I need to do is to bring my products here. So I decided to give it a go. (Interview 2R6, male, 1990s)*

Instead of looking for the kinds of amenities and diversity associated with the creative class, these RTMs were motivated by practical considerations like available space and subsidized rents. This finding reinforces arguments about the highly individualized character of locational choice and business formation (Hracs and Stolarick, 2014). Rather than having generalized group dynamics, individuals make decisions based on specific needs, constraints, preferences, and experiences (Hracs and Stolarick, 2014; Brydges and Hracs, 2019a).

In addition to affordable space, these RTMs were searching for some kind of career or lifestyle change that would make their daily lives more fulfilling. A former urban planner described how he wanted to create something himself:

*My previous work, urban planning, was not challenging enough for me and I wanted something different in my life. Urban planning did not offer me a sense of achievement. On one hand, you don't know if the planning works in a short time. On the other hand, you don't know if what you are doing is helpful. People always blame urban planners ... whereas doing the Minsu guesthouse is completely different. You can do it all by yourself. People like it and they pay for it. You feel a strong sense of achievement. (Interview 1R16, male, 1980s)*

The sense of achievement felt by this RTM came partly from 'doing something himself' – a spirit common to many lifestyle migrants across the world (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009). That could be

running the guesthouse, but it could also be building it or at least renovating it. Such construction work was for many interviewees very much an aesthetic project. They carefully selected the location and sensitively designed both exterior and interior. Other interviewees contrasted this new and fulfilling life with their previous existence in the city. As one female respondent who leads tea ceremonies in one of the villages explained:

*I do not want to imprison myself in the factory that I worked in before. As a saleswoman, I worked with the same group of people every day. They have completely different thoughts from me. My boss did not show much care, although that is not what was expected from a company. As a post-90s [a person who was born after the 1990s], instead of money, I care more about my feelings. I do not want to earn a lot of money in a working environment that I do not like at all. (Interview 2R19, female, 1990s)*

These stories can be connected to *zhiqing* nostalgia in the 1990s, through which the *zhiqing* generation expressed their impatience with the loss of meaning in contemporary China and a feeling for the rural life with a sense of purpose (Yang, 2003). This RTM – part of the post-1990s generation that is thought to value quality of life over wealth, at least compared to previous generations (Chow, 2019a) – was looking to escape her life as a saleswoman for a large company. By moving to the village and opening a studio, she was looking to make her hobby of tea ceremonies into more of a full-time occupation – and, through that, to make her life more meaningful and to realize her true self (Murayama and Parker, 2012; Klien, 2016). These findings support existing studies which demonstrate that despite the challenges of creative work, individuals are willing to give up more secure jobs for the sense of achievement brought by the creative activities (Brydges and Hracs, 2019b). As Duffy puts it (2016, p.442),

highly affective terms like ‘passion’ and ‘love’ have become so salient to contemporary labour narratives that some members of the social media community have adopted the maxim ‘DWYL’ (Do What You Love) to describe new employment spaces where pleasure, autonomy, and income seemingly coexist.

Who are the RTMs then? They are both middle-class consumers and creative-class producers. Indeed, when studying RTMs, these categories of production and consumption break down. RTMs are at the same time consuming the rural, doing creative work (that is reproducing the rural), and finding fulfilment in that work precisely because of its creativity – which makes it similar to a hobby or recreation, at least as much as to work (as commonly understood by many RTMs).

### 4.4 Beyond urban/rural

As we have seen, many RTMs were looking to escape the city, which they associated with low air quality, a lack of space, high rents, and unfulfilling work opportunities. These same RTMs,

however, often placed value on certain aspects of city life, especially comfort and convenience, which they hoped to see replicated in the version of the rural they were helping to create. As this RTM from Mingyue village put it:

*I did not come to this village to suffer tough conditions (chikude). Instead, I came to enjoy my life (xiangshou shenghuo). People should be able to enjoy a comfortable life in rural areas. For example, we use the best air conditioners in my guesthouse ... This electric cooking stove that we are using is also very expensive. (Interview 3R7, female, 1970s)*

This RTM had moved to the countryside, but taken their expectations regarding things like air conditioning and electric cooking with them. Other RTMs had similar expectations learned in the city, which village authorities keen to attract RTMs strove to meet. The arrival of RTMs in the villages – and the tourists they attracted – has coincided with numerous infrastructure improvements, including new roads, car parking, street lamps, public toilets, and sewerage systems. A government official in one village told me: ‘As far as I think, what we did, like the parking lot and the new road, all serves the new incoming investors. That is our way to support them’ (Interview 1G2, male, 1980s). RTMs are seen as investors. They invest in the villages by renovating buildings and starting up businesses. As such, their expectations for comfort and convenience, most often developed living in cities, are frequently met. One example is provided in Figure 4.2, showing the road paved for a new *Minsu* guesthouse. RTMs appreciated this kind of support. One RTM told me:

*If the government had not done anything, we would not have come. If the infrastructure was not in good condition, like water, electricity, gas, we would not have come. What is more, if the local government did not support us after attracting us here, we would have left. (Interview 3R7, female, 1970s)*



Figure 4.2: The newly paved road in front of a newly built *Minsu* guesthouse (Author)

RTMs, then, do not leave the city behind when they move to the countryside. They carry expectations developed in the city with them. But there is another way in which RTMs do not leave the city behind. Quite literally, many RTMs maintain some kind of base in the city and divide their lives between the city and the village. As this *Minsu* guesthouse owner in Mingyue village put it:

*I have a studio in Chengdu, where I teach people how to draw ... I used to have three classes each week. Now I have reduced it to one class on Sunday afternoon. I stay in the village during the week to manage the Minsu guesthouse and I go to Chengdu during the weekend to run my studio. (Interview 3R15, female, 1980s)*

Another RTM began a new project in the form of a studio in the countryside while maintaining her job as a university lecturer in the city:

*I am a lecturer but we also have a start-up company. It [The Twenty-Nine-Room House RTMs' Model Base] offered a good platform for people to know what we are doing. We have several projects at the moment, where we work with people who knew us from this village. (Interview 2R11, female, 1980s)*

RTMs work on multiple projects arranged across the urban–rural divide, in part because they are unsure if the new rural projects will succeed. The result is that many RTMs have multiple occupations requiring them to move back and forth between city and village, usually on a weekly basis. The flexibility of self-employment helps with such arrangements. Of the 65 RTMs in our sample, 37 had been self-employed in the city prior to their arrival in the village. Of the 21 who had been employed, six retained their city jobs, but only because of the flexibility provided by self-employment in the village. This level of self-employment and layering of different kinds of employment activities for income, pleasure, and risk mediation reminds us of the need to go

beyond firm-based understandings of work and specific fixed jobs. The practice of moving between locations for strategic reasons also highlights the need to think about mobility – in general and with respect to rural–urban relationships – in a temporary and cyclical way, instead of fixating on one-off permanent moves, as the literature on talent attraction and the creative class tends to do (Turok et al., 2017; Brydges and Hracs, 2019a).

Another reason for the construction of mobile lives between city and village by RTMs was family commitments. These could be caring responsibilities for children or elderly parents:

*At my age, I have to take care of my parents and my children, which is a very practical issue. My parents and my children are all in Shanghai. I cannot choose to relocate to a place like Tibet because I am not in my 20s. I have to take care of my family as well as pursuing a career that I really like. (Interview 1R17, male, 1980s)*

This RTM wished to leave the city for somewhere and something completely different. Because of family commitments, however, he had to compromise. He could not completely relocate to some distant place. Another RTM suggested that family arrangements may not be as flexible as the employment arrangements discussed above: ‘My daughter needs to go to the school ... I cannot send her to the school here’ (Interview 1R4, male, 1980s). This RTM owned a guesthouse in Moganshan but maintained his family in Wukang, the centre of Deqing County. He felt a responsibility to ensure his daughter had the best possible education. For him, this required school attendance in the city and not the village. Whereas the creative class literature often presents a generalized image of young, autonomous, and highly mobile individuals who focus on their own work and lifestyle preferences, our findings support recent studies challenging this image (McGranahan and Wojan, 2007; Martin-Brelot et al., 2010; Eimermann, 2015b). Indeed, like all workers, members of the creative class may also be fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, grandchildren, and grandparents. These family dynamics, which intersect with a range of other characteristics including age, gender, race, and class, play an important role in shaping motivations, practices, and mobilities (Reimer, 2016; Stokes, 2017; Brydges and Hracs, 2019b).

In some respects, the RTMs I interviewed remind me of Ong’s (1999) flexible citizens who arrange their lives strategically across multiple locations in order to benefit from favourable business environments or education/care systems in different places. However, while Ong’s flexible citizens operate on the scale of the transnational, frequently crossing national borders as they construct their lives, RTMs operate on the more modest scale of the ‘three-hour drive’ that crosses the border between urban and rural. The ‘three-hour drive’ was mentioned by many RTMs. They sought out villages within three hours’ drive of their county centre or provincial capital city. They said things like: ‘I chose this village because it is about 200km from Shanghai and

about three hours' drive. It is not very far. You can still take care of your family' (Interview 1R17, male, 1980s).

Of course, the three-hour drive is also important for RTMs because they are trying to establish businesses that depend on tourism from cities. Villages at this distance are recognized to be accessible for urban tourists (Xu and Ma, 2014). The location choices of RTMs are shaped by their hybrid position as middle-class consumers of rurality, but also creative-class entrepreneurs with a keen eye on the market for their products and services. Here is one RTM discussing the three-hour drive as it relates to Shanghai:

*It is better that the village is within a three-hour drive of Shanghai because we know that people will feel very tired driving over three hours and they are more likely not to come ... We set a boundary of three hours' drive and we have been to most places with good natural environment before we chose Moganshan finally. (Interview 1R16, male, 1980s)*

For this RTM, being able to attract tourists was his first priority when selecting a village. He was interested in amenities – a good natural environment – but also in the business environment. This emphasis on creative work as business and not just recreation makes RTMs look less like the Australian lifestyle migrants of Waitt and Gibson (2013), for whom creativity is mostly a non-market activity, and more like the Dutch lifestyle migrants of Eimermann (2015a), who choose rural locations as both consumers of rurality and producers who provide rural tourism services.

While unrestricted mobility has been widely researched (Brydges and Hracs, 2019a), logistical and family-based constraints shaped the mobilities of many of our interviewees. Decisions were made according to both economic and social rationales, and this finding supports the argument that 'creative people do not always migrate as Florida wishes us to believe' (Sternberg, 2017, p.342). Indeed, our findings challenge the inevitability of a one-way move of the creative individuals to bigger cities along urban hierarchy while highlighting processes of counterurbanization and temporary and cyclical mobilities between rural and urban areas (Brydges and Hracs, 2019a).

### 4.5 Conclusion

The identities and motivations of people moving from the urban to the rural has long been an important topic in rural research (Smith, 2002; O'Reilly and Benson, 2009; Halfacree, 2012; Qian, He and Liu, 2013; Eimermann, 2015b). Based on the literature review, I asked three questions about the identities and motivations of the RTMs in this research. If they are middle-class consumers, what can they tell us about the consumption of the rural by China's new urban middle class? If they are members of the creative class, what can they tell us about creativity and

regeneration in rural areas and among people at different stages of their life cycles? If they are more akin to lifestyle migrants or second-home owners, what can their motivations, life strategies, and mobilities tell us about changing relationships between production and consumption, or the urban and the rural? Drawing on interviews and participant observation in four RTMs' Model Bases, I explored these questions. The main argument of this chapter is that both consumption and production motivation should be taken into consideration when explaining urban–rural mobility. The RTMs are both middle class consumers and creative-class producers and they form a new example of urban–rural mobility.

The accounts of the middle-class consumers developed in this chapter contribute to the understanding of the Chinese middle class's consumption practices by relating them to the rural. They are relatively wealthy, well-educated, and geographically mobile. As with their Western counterparts, they relocate to the rural for a greener and healthier lifestyle in a natural environment (Smith, 2002). What is different from their Western counterparts is that the Chinese middle class has a substantial rural background, having been born and growing up in villages or small towns and migrating to cities for jobs or education. Their memories of the rural community as a place of strong sense of community with innocent rural residents and a self-sufficient life encouraged them to go back to the rural. This childhood memory of the 'good old days' in the rural is also a result of comparison with their current living environments in cities, which have undergone fast urbanization in China in the last four decades (Qian, 2017).

The findings in this chapter about creative-class producers broaden to the creative-class research in the rural. In the villages nominated as Model Bases, RTMs tend to renovate buildings creatively into guesthouses and to establish cultural studios where their creative work can be practised and displayed to tourists. However, most RTMs do not quite fit the dominant existing definitions of creative-class groups (Peck, 2005). For example, RTMs tend not to resemble the young and autonomous individuals who populate much of the creative-class literature, and who desire the diversity and vibrancy of large cities. Instead, RTMs come from various age groups, find themselves at various life-cycle stages, and so are faced with multiple commitments and responsibilities. They also exhibit particular desires: not for spectacular cultural amenities and 24/7 vitality, but for affordable space in which to practise a rather modest but fulfilling form of creative work. Indeed, existing categories like the creative class or even production/consumption are helpful only to a limited extent when trying to understand the motivations, practices, and identities of RTMs – something found by other researchers when studying the diversity of creative workers in cities (McGranahan and Wojan, 2007; Martin-Brelot et al., 2010) or the particularity of creative work beyond the city (Bell and Jayne, 2010; Gibson, 2010; Luckman, 2012). Creativity for

RTMs is not straightforward. It is both a means of generating income (creative work) and a means of consuming the rural (imagined as the appropriate location for a more creative life).

Furthermore, our study found RTMs to be an example of new urban–rural mobility. They move to the countryside but take the city with them in the form of learned expectations regarding things like modern conveniences and infrastructure. Forms of virtual mobility allow RTMs to stay connected to regional and global networks (Brydges and Hracs, 2019a). The RTMs often retain a base in the city and arrange their lives across the urban–rural border for reasons of economic security (including anxiety regarding the potential of new rural businesses) and family care (whether of elderly parents or young children with perceived schooling needs). These RTMs, then, are hybrid subjects with multiple occupations and responsibilities located in different places. They live hybrid lives between the urban and rural, with different activities located strategically at different sites (Overvåg, 2011). They are in the process of constructing hybrid spaces, including our case-study villages, the 100 RTMs' Model Bases, and similar villages across China, which are increasingly connected to neighbouring cities – usually within three-hours' drive – in multiple ways.



## Chapter 5 Producing and performing an aestheticized rural landscape

### 5.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, I demonstrated that many RTMs are middle-class consumers and creative-class producers. As consumers, they are attracted by the imagined rural. As producers, their practices in villages are creating a new rural landscape that they seek to consume. The RTMs' practices in rural areas can be roughly divided into two phases. The first phase normally involves RTMs renting houses in villages and renovating/reconstructing the houses into *Minsu* guesthouses or cultural and creative studios based on their tastes. In the second phase, *Minsu* guesthouses and cultural and creative studios become stages where RTMs and the tourists that they attract perform a new rural landscape. Focusing on the relationship between landscape and identity, this chapter explores how RTMs produce a new rural landscape and how their middle-class identity is performed in this process. By way of introduction, let me begin with the existing studies and some wider theories on the relationship between landscape and identity – more specifically, middle-class identity.

Landscape plays a central role in the performance of middle-class identities (Duncan and Duncan, 2001). In his book *Landscape*, Wylie (2007) points out the eye/land tension of different perspectives on the landscape. While the 'land view' sees the landscape as a portion of land in the objectively real world, the 'eye view' sees the landscape as scenery, something viewed by a person's eyes. The 'eye view' connects to the landscape from the perspective of its being a way of seeing – arguing that instead of being something we see, the landscape is more about a way of seeing things from different cultural perspectives (Cosgrove, 1989). That is to say, the landscape represents different cultural meanings that connect directly to people's social identities. Empirically, drawing on the locational choices of artists in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, Ley (2003) analyzed the meaning of poor neighbourhoods to artists. In his research, artists with low economic capital and high cultural capital valued the mundane and alternative status of poor neighbourhoods. Their choice of poor neighbourhoods also became a performance of their middle-class identity. In their rural gentrification research on the Hebden Bridge area of West Yorkshire in the UK, Smith and Phillips (2001) demonstrate the cultural meanings of the rural landscape to middle-class gentrifiers. While the 'remote' landscape involves isolation from the modern society and close to the wild nature, the 'village' landscape highlights intimacy, support, and safety.

The relationship between landscape and identity not only exists in the choice of the already existing landscape, but more importantly in the process of making and remaking a symbolic landscape. A classic case is Zukin's (1982) study of gentrification in the SoHo district of Manhattan in the 1970s. She recognizes an 'artistic mode of production', which combines the actions of various actors including artists who came to construct their working studios or apartment spaces in former industrial spaces. Analyzing the reasons for this change, she identified the changing aesthetic among the middle class since the 1960s, which involved people identifying with the artistic lifestyle. According to Zukin, the emergence of a gentrified landscape of loft living was a material expression of the middle class's changing cultural values with an increased valuation of art and craftwork. Following Zukin, Hines (2010) demonstrates how newcomers to Park County in Montana were both consumers and producers of the gentrified landscape. As producers, middle-class gentrifiers create a class-cultural space according to their cultural logic and forward their class-based idea of proper land use by mobilizing their local strength.

Furthermore, the symbolic landscape which has a typical middle-class character circulates geographically and is incorporated into the habitus of global middle-class groups. Zukin (1982) points out the importance of media in the promotion of the middle class's cultural values and associated 'loft lifestyle', through for example magazine articles, films, novels, and property advertisements, etc. Correspondingly, Podmore's (1998) research documents the transregional circulation of the representations of loft landscapes from SoHo in New York to Montreal in Canada. According to Podmore, while the loft landscape in Montreal was influenced by the SoHo loft landscape, it also incorporated localised imagery which resulted in a loft landscape with local character. What is more, Podmore (1998) argues that this localized loft landscape is 'part of "a system of classified and classifying practices"', 'which links the habitus of SoHo to other inner-city material landscapes, recursively creating a distinct lifestyle and taste pattern among the North-American inner-city middle classes' (p.287).

Despite its advantage in explaining the representational meanings of the landscape and the embedded power relations, the perspective of landscape as a way of seeing has been criticized as separating the symbolic landscape (as a set of disembodied cultural meanings) from the physical landscape onto which cultural meaning is projected (Wylie, 2007). Influenced by the non-representational theories of embodied practice and performance, the perspective of landscape as lived space saw a shift from 'images of landscape' to 'landscaping' (Wylie, 2007, p.166). According to Wylie (2007), while the study of 'images of landscape' paid more attention to the already-made representations of landscape, the study of 'landscaping' turns to the practices of the landscape, which highlight the ongoing shaping of the landscape, self, and body through practice and performance. The landscape is described by Ingold (2000, p.56) as a 'milieu of involvement',

which involves not only the environment in or upon which humans perform different practices, but also the practices themselves.

As a result, research on the relationship between landscape and identity has seen a turn of focus from the symbolic landscape and the embedded power relations, to bodily practices and performance. Embodiment is seen 'as the inescapable medium in which sense is made and subjectivity is performed' (Wylie, 2007, p.165). As argued by Tim Edensor (2006), 'it is through the relationship between the array of characters playing out particular roles, and the spaces in which they perform, that ruralities is routinely produced' (p.484). In recent years, there has emerged a burgeoning body of work on the performing of rurality (Woods, 2010; Abrams and Bliss, 2013; Galani-Moutafi, 2013; Morse *et al.*, 2014). Many works sought to understand how 'rural experiences are felt, sensed, intuited through bodily actions and performances' (Woods, 2010, p.835). For example, drawing on interviews with Vermont landowners about various forms of activities that they carried out around their properties, Morse *et al.* (2014) analyzed how the property owners' work contribute to the production of the rural landscape and place identity. For Morse *et al.* (2014), landowners in Vermont illustrated the connections between their embodied activities and their identification with the Vermont landscape. Their research demonstrates that landscapes are performed, with the terrain as the stage; the tools, machines, and farmhouses as the props; and 'laboring landowners, recreating neighbors, growing forests, a changing economy and tourism ads' as actors (Morse *et al.*, 2014, p.235). Through inhabitants' ongoing embodied engagements, the results are the lived experiences of the participants and who find meaning in the process.

Instead of seeing the perspectives of landscape as a way of seeing and landscape as a lived space as contradictory, I combined these two perspectives to better understand the new rural landscape created and practiced by RTMs. To that end, I structure the practices of RTMs into two categories. First, I examine the renovation or construction of architectures and the interior design of the buildings, through which RTMs create a symbolic landscape expressing their taste and lifestyle choice. Second, I explore how RTMs perform a romanticized rural in the process of rural tourism. In so doing, this chapter demonstrates how the two perspectives on landscape (landscape as way of seeing and landscape as lived space) can be used together to produce a fuller understanding of landscape, and to produce a fuller understanding of the rural Chinese landscape imagined, produced, performed, and experienced by RTMs.

Before I turn to explain these two kinds of cultural practices, I will briefly introduce the imagined ideal rural landscape and the actual rural landscape in China, which set up the background for RTMs' practices in rural areas.

## 5.2 Rural China: the ideal and the reality

Rural China has two seemingly contradictory images in Chinese people's minds. On one hand, it represents an ideal and utopian society, with a harmonious human-nature relationship and a self-sufficient, 'earth-bound' lifestyle. As I demonstrated in Chapter 4.2, the Chinese elite in history were attracted to the ideal rural. Tao Yuanming's (365–427 AD) poem *A Tale of the Peach Blossom Spring with Poem (taohua yuanji)* depicts an isolated rural community surrounded by peach trees. This scene of a peach-blossom island has been regarded as the ideal rural life in China (Yuan, 1997). However, on the other hand, rural China has long been seen as a site in need of reform. Oakes (2013) argues that the utopian character of rural China is not a given but always a project. In contemporary China, state-led rural regeneration projects with strong aims to promote modernization have been rolled out in many villages which have undergone rural hollowing (Ahlers and Schubert, 2010; Liu et al., 2010; Long et al., 2012; Bray, 2013; Li et al., 2014; Looney, 2015).

Rural hollowing in China is characterised by depopulation, and vacant rural housing in villages. In their study of the mechanisms of rural hollowing in China, Long et al. (2012) indicate that rural hollowing in China is a result of the rural–urban migration in search of jobs after market reforms in the late 1970s. As a result, many houses in the villages were uninhabited 'either seasonally or permanently' (Liu et al., 2010, p.877). What is more, with the improvement of farmers' incomes, many new houses have been constructed on the fringes of villages since the 1980s (Liu et al., 2010). While new houses are built at the fringes of villages, old ones in the inner villages are abandoned – but not demolished. The overall spatial result is a hollow core with dilapidated houses surrounded by newly built houses on the fringes of villages (Liu et al., 2010). Following the village hollowing process, there is a weakened rural social and cultural landscape. Some traditional dwelling buildings with unique architectural character have disappeared gradually because of their inability to adapt to a modern lifestyle that local residents demand (Wang et al., 2016). Besides this, folk customs in rural areas weakened in the modern lives of rural residents (Wang et al., 2016).

The central government in China has carried out the project of 'building a new socialist countryside' since the mid-2000s (Long et al., 2010; Schubert and Ahlers, 2011; Looney, 2015). Starting in 2005 as a policy to balance urban and rural development with economic and social goals, the 'new countryside' means 'advanced production, improved livelihood, clean and tidy villages, a civilized social atmosphere and efficient management' (Long et al., 2010. p.459). Over time, however, the goal of 'clean and tidy villages' became the primary goal of many local governments when implementing 'new socialist countryside' initiative (Zhang, Shen and Zhao,

2014). In particular, village renovation was widely promoted to improve rural infrastructure, sanitation, and housing. 'Beautiful Villages' (*Meili Xiangcun*) represent a typical outcome of rural modernizing in China, with the physical landscape in the villages improved and the facade of the buildings unified and beautified to promote rural tourism (see details in Chapter 2.2.2.3). However, the development of Beautiful Villages has ignited a national debate about what real rural beauty is, and what rural China should look like. Criticism has spread in the Chinese media of the way that rural landscape has been 'improved' in Beautiful Villages. Local governments in many places were reported to build 'white elephants', 'in the form of living quarters completely detached from local conditions and needs' (Ahlers, 2015, p.124).

It is against this background that some artists and architects in China started experiments in rural China in the last decade to create an imagined ideal rural based on their aesthetic dispositions and their understanding of rural beauty (Ye, Tan and Zhang, 2015; Deng et al., 2016; Qian, 2017; Qu, 2020). Starting with the renovation and preservation of architecture, their activities have been broadened into cultural and creative activities involving local customs. Following the pioneering artists and architects, and encouraged by the national and local governments, an increasing number of the middle class, including RTMs, have started rural practices, resulting in a new rural landscape with a middle-class character. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that while lots of research has examined how the official narrative of modernity has affected the transformation of the rural landscape in China, much less attention has been given to the social and cultural meanings attached to the new landscape created by the Chinese middle class.

Moreover, research on the Chinese new middle class has documented their urban consumption practices. For example, reflecting on the role of the middle class in the process of gentrification in Shanghai, Wang and Lau (2009) argue that rather than claiming 'distinctive taste and an alternative identity', like their Western counterparts, the Chinese middle class 'pay for the membership of the affluent class' through moving to already gentrified neighbourhoods (p.65). According to Wang and Lau, this is because of the strong state role in the process of gentrification, and the relatively small number of the professional and managerial middle class (see details in Chapter 2.5.1). However, much less research has explored their practices in creating their ideal spaces, especially in rural areas. In this chapter, I apply the approaches of landscape as a way of seeing, and landscape as lived space, in search of a better understanding of the new rural landscape produced by RTMs and the RTMs' middle class identity performed in this process.

### 5.3 Producing a new rural landscape of middle-class character in China

*Walking around Mingyue village, I saw a mix of Minsu guesthouses and cultural and creative studios run by RTMs and the houses lived in by local residents. It is very easy to distinguish the spaces built by RTMs from houses of local residents. The latter tend to be either abandoned houses or newly built modern houses in the form of two-storey 'match-box' buildings. In contrast, spaces created by RTMs, especially Minsu guesthouses, employed various modern and post-modernist architectural styles with avant-garde housing designs. While some of them employed what they call neo-Chinese style, incorporating the local architectural character, some others used westernized architecture styles such as Béton brut style (raw concrete style), American style, and French style. Compared with local residents' houses, the interiors of the Minsu guesthouses also appear more consciously designed, considering colour matches, furniture, lights, textures, etc. Cultural and creative studios made use of the old houses and were decorated in a traditional Chinese style as the cultural practices mainly involve cloth dying, ceramic product making. Besides these, there are coffee shops and bars in the village. (Field notes about my first impression of Mingyue Village)*

Just as in Mingyue village, the other villages that I visited had a similar landscape, with *Minsu* guesthouses and cultural and creative studios built by RTMs mixed with local residents' houses, but standing out because of their aestheticized designing style. For many RTMs, the aestheticization of the spaces forms the basis for a collective identity. The aesthetic sensibilities of the new middle class have been widely documented in Western literature, especially in the process of gentrification initiated by the professional and managerial middle class (Zukin, 1982a; Ley, 1996, 2003; Duncan and Duncan, 2001; Gary, 2001). They are seen as taste-makers who have the skills to balance the old and the new, which is the key to the aesthetic of gentrification (Ley, 2003; Phillips, 2018). Drawing on the ethnographic observations and interviews with RTMs, this section interprets the spaces created by RTMs which play an active role in the performance of the new Chinese middle class's identities.

#### 5.3.1 Appreciating the 'authentic rural'

The RTMs in China share an aesthetic disposition with gentrifiers across much of the world, who appreciate 'authentic' places such as mundane neighbourhoods in Vancouver (Ley, 2003), the wild countryside in the suburbs of New York (Duncan and Duncan, 2001), and the remote moortop in West Yorkshire in the UK (Smith, 2002). Being authentic has contradictory meanings. While on one hand it can mean being 'primal, historically first or true to a traditional vision', on the other hand, it can mean being 'unique, historically new, innovative, and creative' (Zukin, 2010). Old buildings are authentic in a way that new constructions are not because the old buildings have an individuality that creates a sense of 'place' instead of 'space' (Zukin, 1982a). According to Zukin

(2009), authenticity has become a tool of power. Some groups claim moral superiority because of the authenticity of their tastes compared with others, and they impose their tastes on space. Gentrification scholars have shown a particular interest in the authentic places chosen by gentrifiers and the cultural meanings attached to them. They are important sites on which gentrifiers work and where their tastes are expressed (Zukin, 1982a; Podmore, 1998; Duncan and Duncan, 2004). Taste that views authenticity as appropriate for aesthetic appropriation can be seen as a form of cultural capital, which is not something that is equally shared by everybody (Bourdieu, 1984). Instead, it is developed from practices based on specific habitus (Bourdieu, 1984). In this section, I demonstrate how RTMs express their taste by choosing authentic villages instead of the Beautiful Villages in China.

The first and most important consideration for RTMs in carrying out their practices in villages is to find an 'authentic' house or location with ideal surroundings in an ordinary village. Two RTMs described how they found their ideal houses:

*We visited almost all the villages in Moganshan town. The village that we finally chose is at the end of a road ... It looks like a detached village from the outside world. There were 42 households and they were separated from each other as some houses are on a higher level and some other houses are on a lower level. It looks very much like our imagination ... It was the layout of the houses like this that has attracted us. I am very confident to say that it has the best environment among all the villages in Moganshan town. Houses in other villages are either lined in a single line along the road (paicheng yitiaoxian) or are located randomly without an order (zaluán wuzhang de). (Interview 1R16, male, 1980s)*

*I was walking along the way. Can you imagine the massive bamboo forest which is jade green and old mud houses were just hiding in the bamboo forest? The moment I saw them, I thought they were what I wanted. (Interview 1R1, male, 1960s)*

Both respondents in the above cases highlighted the harmonious relationship between the houses and their surrounding environments, through the aesthetically disordered houses based on the terrain of the village, or the mud houses in the bamboo forest. For the first interviewee, there is a comparison between the aesthetically disordered houses 'located randomly without an order' and the houses 'lined in a single line'. While houses 'located randomly without an order' (*zaluán wuzhang de*) implies the typical landscape in some Chinese villages, which are often described as 'dirty, chaotic, and inferior' (Chung, 2014, p.596), houses 'lined in a single line' (*paicheng yitiaoxian*) implies the modernization of the rural landscape in villages which have undergone rural regeneration based on rural planning of a strong urban planning character. This last has been criticized by some researchers as leading to the homogenization of the rural landscape (Gao, Zhang and Luo, 2014).

The RTMs' appreciation of abandoned houses in ordinary villages is also expressed through their anti-urbanizing and anti-modernizing attitudes towards Beautiful Villages which have undergone rural regeneration projects based on rural planning in China. Here are two illustrations:

*Zhejiang province has promoted the Beautiful Villages project for many years ... However, the emphasis of the government project is on a superficial appearance instead of a really beautiful village. (Interview 1R1, male, 1960s)*

*I grew up with my grandpa and grandma in a village near Chongqing, to which I used to have a strong attachment. I thought of it when I first had the idea of going back to a village. But I gave it up because a highway from Shanghai to Chengdu went right across that village. The environment of the village changed so much. The highway is very close to my grandparents' house from the back. All the houses in the village were required by the local government to be fixed with tiles. I just could not understand. The original mud houses were very beautiful, with mud walls and the roof tiles. Now, all the houses were asked to use white tiles on their surfaces. I felt that I have lost my hometown (guxiang), which is now only in my memory. (Interview 3R15, male, 1980s)*

Both interviewees criticized the rural reconstruction projects in China which have paid too much attention to superficial appearance – or what was called *chuanyi daimao* (to 'get dressed and put on a hat') in Chio's (2017, p.431) research and *tuzhi mofen* (paint some rouge and put one some powder) in Zhang, Shen and Zhao's (2014) research. The RTMs expressed their anti-urbanizing and anti-modernizing attitudes towards the villages which have undergone rural planning or state-led rural regeneration. While postwar mass-produced suburban housing in Western countries set up the context for rural gentrification (Phillips, 2002), it is the urbanization and modernization of rural China that has contributed to RTMs' relocation to rural areas. While rural gentrifiers in Western countries express their social distinction through rejecting mass-produced suburban housing, RTMs in China express their aesthetic disposition through rejecting the heavily urbanized and modernized villages and appreciating the mundane and more authentic villages, with naturally deteriorated buildings.

Unlike the middle class in cities in China who choose already gentrified neighbourhoods (Wang and Lau, 2009), RTMs' choice of dilapidated houses in ordinary villages offers them the opportunity to stamp their aesthetic disposition on the place. By choosing 'authentic rural', rather than 'superficial[ly]' Beautiful Villages, RTMs in this research resemble the artists in Ley's (2003) research who have high cultural capital and who appreciate the mundane and alternative status of the places that they relocate to. It is the authenticity embedded in the mundane buildings or neighbourhoods that is valuable for RTMs. If the abandoned and dilapidated rural houses in this research can be compared to the old loft buildings in Zukin's (1982) research, then RTMs' choice of dilapidated houses in ordinary villages can be described as their 'modern quest for authenticity' in the same way as Zukin described the loft dwellers' choice of old buildings.



### 5.3.2 Aestheticizing the local landscape

The appropriation and redefinition of space plays a fundamental role in differentiating between classes (Bourdieu, 1984). Gentrification scholars have shown great interest in architecture renovation, including exterior and interior, because buildings form an important part of the gentrification landscape through which the cultural values of the gentrifiers are expressed (Zukin, 1982a). The 'aesthetic design, patterns, forms, and themes' different buildings take become text and code written into the landscapes (Urry and Larsen, 2011, p.120). In this section, I demonstrate how RTMs renovate buildings in the case villages, and how the renovation intersects with RTMs' aesthetic taste through making use of the traditional dwelling architecture style.

Traditional dwelling architecture (*chuantong minju*) represents a kind of rural beauty in China that matches a harmonious natural environment and humanized living scenes (Li, 2015; Mei, 2017). In the past several decades, however, the traditional dwelling architecture and houses built in the traditional dwelling architecture style in China have seen its abandonment by a large number of rural residents because of its inadaptability to the modern lifestyle that they demand (Wang et al., 2016). Among the twenty-two *Minsu* guesthouses run by RTMs in this research, twelve were based on abandoned residential houses and renovated into traditional dwelling building styles.

The RTMs' aesthetic taste was expressed through individualised renovation of the houses in traditional dwelling building styles with local and natural materials. Unlike the mass production of modern houses for rural residents following the rural modernization project in China, RTMs built their *Minsu* guesthouses on an individual basis. RTMs normally rent houses from local residents, redesign them and rebuild them in the traditional dwelling building style to fit into the surrounding environments. Because of the rural land use policy in China, which forbids rural residents from selling their properties, newly incoming RTMs cannot purchase land/housing in the same way that gentrifiers in many Western countries might do. RTMs normally sign ten-year or twenty-year contracts with local residents and they discuss to reach agreement about the extent to which RTMs can change the buildings. For example, Figure 5.1 shows a dwelling house before it was rented to a RTM. Figure 5.2 shows a *Minsu* guesthouse which was built on the site of, and in the style of, the house in Figure 5.1. The owner of this guesthouse said:

*We prefer to rebuild the house on its original site. Let me tell you the characters of the dwelling building in this area. There is the wooden structure inside, which is independent, and there are loam walls outside. Local people normally build the wooden structure first and then build the walls outside to protect the house from wind. When we rebuilt the house, we demolished the loam walls as they were in bad condition after many years since they were built, and we kept the wooden structure inside. We then rebuilt walls around the wooden structure to create spaces as wooden structures did*

*not form spaces. We used the previous wooden structure but we create new spaces because we wanted it to be interesting. As long as the wooden structure was not in the way, we always tried to keep it as it is something local and special. (Interview 1R16, male, 1980s)*



Figure 5.1: One dwelling house of the local resident before it was rebuilt (offered by one RTM)



Figure 5.2: The *Minsu* guesthouse built on the site of the house in Figure 5.1 (offered by one RTM)

As is shown in the above case, by keeping the ‘wooden structure’ of the old house, which was seen as something ‘local and special’, the owner of the guesthouse aimed to connect to the local architectural culture. This is echoed by another RTM who insisted on using the black-white-grey colour scheme in his *Minsu* guesthouse because: ‘I am building a house in rural China, which means that it expresses the Chinese design style. I do not see the point of the American style or

French-style building in rural China' (Interview 1R17, male, 1980s). Again, a strong rural and Chinese character was shown through the design of the building.

Besides this, the small scale of the building and its relationship to the surrounding natural environment were also highlighted by RTMs as important ways to be rural. Take this as an example:

*As we did urban planning before, we took the scale of the buildings seriously. We kept its original structure and its relation with nature and we only did some adjustments ... If you change the two layers into three layers or three-layers and half, as long as you don't break the 11 metres regulation, you will find the scale not good anymore.*  
(Interview 1R16, male, 1980s)

Rather than making the house eleven metres high to make the most of the building height regulation in Moganshan town, the respondent kept the two-layer structure of the house. In doing so, the owner not only aimed to keep the aesthetic effect spatially, but also to connect to the history of the building. As he said, 'It seems like the house has been here for many years' (Interview 1R16, male, 1980s). Urry and Larsen (2011) point out that places indicate particular times or histories which enhance the particularity of the buildings.

Similarly, a woman who was also the owner of a *Minsu* guesthouse shared her experiences with a man who came to her to learn how to build a *Minsu* guesthouse:

*He came from a fishing village near the sea and he wanted to renovate a stone house. I told him that if he tore down the 80m<sup>2</sup> stone house and built a new house of 200m<sup>2</sup>, although he got more rooms, he could not save the appearances of the old house. I suggested him to protect the old house and to do some renovation on its basis, in which way, I thought, he would get a house that is of higher quality. I thought it was way better than tearing down the old house and building a huge and ugly modern house.*  
(Interview 1R13, female, 1980s)

For this RTM, while the 80m<sup>2</sup> old stone house represented 'higher quality', a new house of 200m<sup>2</sup> seemed to be a 'huge and ugly modern house'. From her suggestion, it is obvious that the 80m<sup>2</sup> old stone house was preferred to a new house of 200m<sup>2</sup>. Overall, the buildings with traditional dwelling architecture style and small scale, which fit into their surrounding environment, represent an authentic space that is 'local', 'rural', and 'China', and which express RTMs' cultural values.

The RTMs' aesthetic tastes were further expressed through the interior designs of both *Minsu* guesthouses and cultural and creative studios, using local materials, Chinese design style, or artwork of traditional character. Many of the RTMs expressed a sense of pride whenever they talked about the designs of their *Minsu* guesthouses or cultural and creative studios, describing

them as being avant-garde, tasteful, and expressing a sense of design. For example, Figure 5.3 shows a public space in one *Minsu* guesthouse in Mingyue village. It was built in the form of a traditional dwelling house, with some adjustment. For example, the wooden pillar structure and sloping roof were intentionally preserved from the traditional dwelling building style, although part of the wall was replaced with glass windows for more natural sunlight. At the same time, the original mud floor was replaced by a wooden floor to offer a brighter and warmer colour for the room. Furniture of Chinese character, such as the wooden chairs, tables, and the blue tablecloth made of cotton and linen, as well as the small china vases on the table, was also used as a way to show their aspiration to an authentic and local rural landscape.



Figure 5.3: The interior space of a *Minsu* guesthouse in Mingyue village (Author)

Space designed by RTMs like this is seen by its designers as artistic (*wen yi de*) and expressive of their aesthetic taste. RTMs frequently compared this kind of design to that of the typical *Nongjiale* in China, which, although it makes use of the rural elements, does so in a way which lacks the sense of design. As one of the RTMs said, '*Minsu* guesthouse is different from hotels and *Nongjiale*. While the hotel is too urbanized, *Nongjiale* is too vulgar. A *Minsu* guesthouse is something that only people with a good aesthetic disposition can build' (Interview 3R15, female, 1980s).

Two points between RTMs' identity and the landscape that they created are apparent here. On the one hand, through redesigning and renovating buildings on an individual basis with local traditional dwelling building style and smaller scale to fit into a particular environment, the RTMs aimed to keep the authenticity of the rural landscape. It is through this process that the RTMs

made use of, as well as expressed, their cultural capital. The RTMs' renovation of old houses can be compared to the loft renovation by loft dwellers who want individualization instead of mass production (Zukin, 1982a).

On the other hand, RTMs distinguish themselves from local residents through the avant-garde design of buildings and interiors. In Park's (2014) research on *Nongjiale* run by local residents in the suburbs of Beijing, he demonstrates how urban middle-class tourists belittle the 'peasant way of thinking' because they abandoned some rustic qualities. He also demonstrates their direct instilling of modernity and urbanity in their farm guesthouses without a sense of design. In this research, RTMs not only preserved some local rural elements but, more importantly, expressed them in an aestheticized form.

### 5.3.3 Westernizing the landscape

Beyond the local, gentrifiers are looking to the global to show a distinct identity. Researchers have documented the globalization of the gentrification landscape (Podmore, 1998; Rofo, 2003, 2009; Davidson, 2007). For example, Rofo's (2003) research on gentrifiers in Sydney and Newcastle demonstrates how the consumption gentrifiers, who actively created the gentrified landscape, changed their focus from the local to the global considering identity construction in order to distinguish themselves from production gentrifiers who only purchased the gentrified landscape. In China, emulating the lifestyle of Western countries – which is characterized as involving comfort, elegance, and high taste – has been a prominent feature of the new middle class (Tsang, 2014). Following the commodification of the housing market, the new Chinese middle class expresses their tastes and personal aesthetics through globalized, modern, stylish, and personalized home designs (Elfick, 2011; Liu, 2016). Based on the spaces created by RTMs in rural China, this section underlines the importance of globalized design in the performance of middle-class identity.

A globalized landscape in the case villages is most obvious from the various architecture styles employed by RTMs, especially in *Minsu* guesthouses. During my fieldwork, I saw *Béton brut* style (characterized by the strong raw concrete impression of the building), American country style (expressed through vintage interior decorations and a big garden with rocking chairs, wild flowers, and picnic blankets etc.), French style (expressed through French-style furniture like sofa, table, bed, and window), and a mix-and-match of different architecture styles. A RTM in Mingyue village explained how she chose the architecture style for her guesthouse:

*There are several buildings in this village using the neo-Chinese style, which I do like. However, as there were already several buildings of this style and it was not my*

*favourite, I decided not to use the neo-Chinese style. Ying garden is the typical concrete style. Everything is made of concrete – not only the building but also some of the furniture like the bed and the sofa, which is quite popular in recent years. But it has already existed. I do not want my house to be the same as others. I think my house is a mix and match of different styles although French style has played a dominant role. The reason is that I have been obsessed with modern art, for which period Paris was the centre. I was affected by it when designing this house. (Interview 3R15, female, 1980s)*

This quotation suggests that RTMs are able to appreciate foreign architecture styles, which can be seen as an expression of RTMs' taste and cultural capital. In this case, as an artist, the respondent had her own judgements of different architectural styles in the village, such as the neo-Chinese style and the raw concrete style. Her final choice of a mix-and-match style with a stronger French character connected directly to her personal experience of learning modern art. This is the individuality that the new middle class in China is pursuing through which they distinguish themselves from the traditional middle class (Lia, 2012).

If global architecture styles are only acceptable to some of the RTMs (as others insisted that Chinese rural areas should be the place for Chinese-style buildings), then a globalised interior design has been widely accepted by almost all the RTMs. No matter whether their choice of architecture used traditional dwelling architecture style or architectural styles from other countries, the interior design styles were affected by globalized home design fashion. This can be seen from overall design style, furniture, and other artworks used as decorations.

First, a Nordic interior design style characterized as minimal and stylish was widely adopted by RTMs who ran *Minsu* guesthouses. While some of them intentionally chose the Nordic style, some others insisted that they did not do it on purpose, although the result resembled the Nordic style. For example, an owner of a *Minsu* guesthouse detailed his way of matching the colours and the design style of the house:

*We kept the wooden structure and the roof, which offered two background colours of white walls and the wood colour. We tried to choose light grey when choosing furniture. For example, the curtains are light grey or cream-coloured. So we have a white, wooden colour, and grey. The wooden colour is burlywood, which creates a very natural atmosphere. All we need to do is to add some fashionable and comfortable furniture. We did not choose a specific interior style because we are not professionals in interior design. But we think it works very well and it looks like the Muji style or Nordic style, which is minimal and stylish. (Interview 1R16, male, 1980s)*

Similar to the interior design style described by this respondent, many other *Minsu* guesthouses that I visited employed a minimal design style, with an aesthetically pleasant colour match and modern and stylish furniture. To some extent, this resembles the home designs of the new



middle-class professionals in Elfick's (2011) research, who decorated their homes with minimalist furniture and decorations like glassware or ceramics. It also forms an important way to distinguish them from local residents, who are normally seen as lacking the sense of this lifestyle (Park, 2014).

In the process of designing the interior spaces, some functional spaces with Western character were also added. In Moganshan, fireplaces were popular among the RTMs who run *Minsu* guesthouses, which is something that did not exist in traditional rural houses in China. For example, a RTM in Moganshan talked about her conversation with the designer for her *Minsu* guesthouse:

*I said I would like a fireplace, like the ones in European or American houses. The fireplace is a standard configuration in the Minsu guesthouse in Moganshan. Every guesthouse has a fireplace. It makes you feel so warm when it snows in winter ... It is also so stylish and something of Western style. (Interview 1R18, female, 1970s)*

As this interviewee said, the European or American style fireplace has almost become a 'standard configuration' in *Minsu* guesthouses in Moganshan. Indeed, in most *Minsu* guesthouses that I visited in Moganshan, a fireplace seemed to be a must-have. For this respondent, the fireplace also represented a Western-style lifestyle that was modern and stylish. In fact, other than fireplaces, bars and coffee shops were arranged in some *Minsu* guesthouses, which, according to some RTMs, reflected the kind of lifestyle that they aspired to.

Moreover, artworks expressing global culture were also used by RTMs as decorations in *Minsu* guesthouses and cultural and creative studios. For example, Figure 5.4 shows the reception and lobby of a *Minsu* guesthouse in Moganshan. Although it employs a traditional dwelling building style as its exterior, the interior design has a strong global character, with vintage pictures of famous people from all around the world and photos of international travellers to this *Minsu* guesthouse decorating the walls. The owner of this *Minsu* guesthouse was very proud of this interior design, and he connected it to his experiences of studying in Germany and travelling around European countries, which is a typical middle-class privilege in China. What is more, signs in this *Minsu* guesthouse were also bilingual and handwritten by the owner. Together, the posts, photos, and bilingual signs highlighted the owners' global middle-class identity.

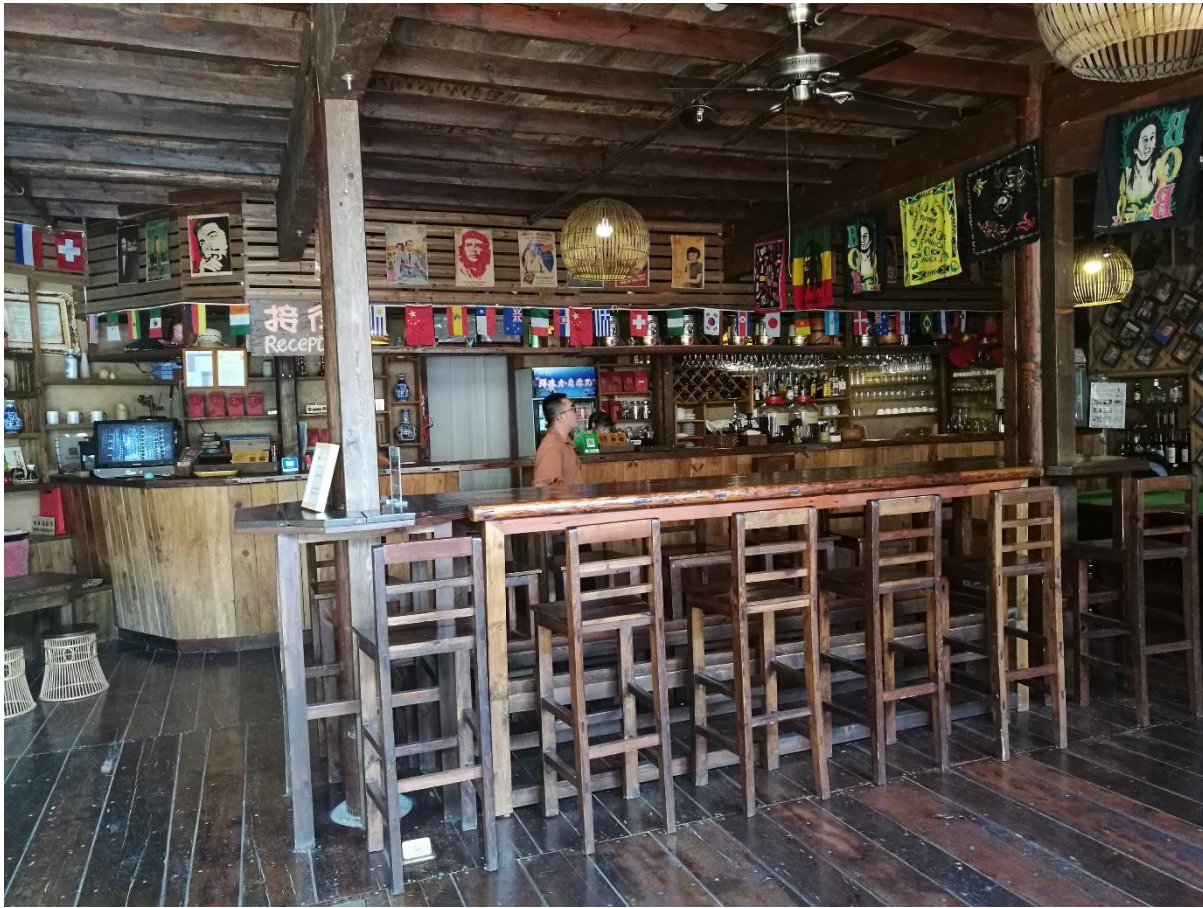


Figure 5.4: The reception and lobby of a *Minsu* guesthouse in Moganshan (Author)

The interior designs of *Minsu* guesthouses of Western character, which were seen as stylish and modern, further distinguished RTMs from local residents. In one example, the owner of a *Minsu* guesthouse insisted on using rectangular tables (see Figure 5.5) instead of round tables. The reason was that the owner was proud of them: the ‘earliest and probably biggest Western-style dining table in Moganshan Minsu guesthouses’. However, the chef, a local resident working for this *Minsu* guesthouse, complained about the Western-style dining table.

*In this Minsu guesthouse, there was no round table when I first came. All the tables were long Western-style dining tables, which was inconvenient for having Chinese food. For example, if ten people are sharing a table, a long table, you will never be able to nip the dishes on the other side of the table. Customers have complained about this many times. I guess the owner must have known this earlier. In my opinion, this is more of a piece of art for the owner, who cares more about its aesthetic appearance than its practicability. (Interview 1L4, male, 1990s)*





Figure 5.5: A long rectangular dining table in one *Minsu* guesthouse in Moganshan  
(Author)

The comparison between the rectangular table and the round table is a comparison between Western-style furniture and local style furniture. While the Western style was seen as ‘foreign’, stylish, and modern (*yangqi de/shimao de*), the local style was often deemed to be old fashioned and vulgar (*tuqi de/guoshi de*). Another RTM made a more explicit comparison between *Minsu* guesthouses run by RTMs who used world-class facilities and *Nongjiale* run by local residents who normally used relatively low-quality facilities:

*We have seen the outside world. We have visited many places not only in China but also abroad. So we know what people want to see and experience in our Minsu guesthouse... All the products in our Minsu guesthouse, like quilt, mattress, and the bed, meet the criteria of a five-star hotel ... We do not only care about if there is an air conditioner, but we also care about if it is a good air conditioner. We do not only care about if there is a heating system, but we also care about people’s real feelings about the temperature in the house. Local people do not consider that much ... Most of them do not have a sense of lifestyle. (Interview 3R10, male, 1970s)*

Here, the comparison between RTMs and local residents is seen between the choice of facilities used in *Minsu* guesthouses and *Nongjiale*. While the former chose higher-quality facilities for their *Minsu* guesthouses, the latter seemed not to care so much about the quality. What is more, RTMs’ choice of higher quality facilities in their *Minsu* guesthouses was connected to their experiences of traveling around the world.

Therefore, by using globalized architecture styles and Western-style house design, RTMs expressed their new middle-class identity and distinguished themselves from the traditional

middle class in cities as well as from local residents in the villages. Unlike the middle class in urban China, who move to places that have already been developed rather than claiming distinctive taste and an alternative identity, as is claimed by Wang and Lau (2009), RTMs actively created a rural landscape of global character which was closely connected to their own experiences. Similar to the loft landscape in Podmore's (1998, p.287) research, which expressed the 'distinct lifestyle and taste pattern among the North-American inner-city middle classes', RTMs in this research created a new rural landscape which allowed them to bring their globalized urban habitus to rural areas.

## 5.4 Performing a new rural landscape

From the perspectives of the lived landscape, instead of the landscape as a distant object to be visually gazed upon, the landscape has become an intimate and proximate material environment 'through which self and world emerge and entwine' (Wylie, 2007, p.167). In this way, subject formation in the materiality of the world has become a key theme for landscape studies (Hetherington, 2003, p.1936–1937). For example, in tourism studies, Edensor (2001) points out the identity-oriented performances which mean that certain tourists claim an identity through undertaking a particular form of travel. In this section, I demonstrate how RTMs in China claim a rural identity through their embodied practices in villages, and how they distinguish themselves from tourists on one hand, and from local residents on the other hand, through different practices.

### 5.4.1 Performing a mundane rural life

As consumers of rurality, RTMs tried to distinguish themselves from tourists. Their performance of this centred on their commitment to rural life and the quality of their encounters with local residents. Many RTMs emphasized the time they spent in the villages and their engagement in the whole process, from building houses to setting up the gardens/yards, from planting trees to harvesting fruits, from picking fresh vegetables to cooking homemade food. The degree of engagement in the process of producing a rural tourism destination was seen by RTMs as an important way to distinguish themselves from tourists. Here are two examples:

*I remember the time when we built the houses. I worked with the construction workers. I remember working hard under the sun with long boots and shorts, sometimes even without a top. I enjoyed that time. That also made a strong bond between me and the houses ... This is the thing that you cannot experience when you are a tourist and only stay in a village for a couple of days. (Interview 1R1, male, 1960s)*

*When I decided to build this Minsu guesthouse, I quit my job and I moved to this village. I got up at six every day and I worked with other construction workers the whole day. I did not even feel tired. It was like waiting for my first baby to come and I was so excited ... As tourists, people enjoy the result of the beautiful rural. But I enjoy the process of producing this beauty. (Interview 1R4, Male, 1980s)*

As is shown here, through engaging in the process of constructing houses in the villages, both respondents were trying to distinguish themselves from tourists. As with these two RTMs, many other RTMs saw practice in the rural as part of rural identity.

Reflecting prevailing gender norms, while men engaged more with the construction process, women seem to be more interested in arranging the garden or the yard. For example, a female RTM had a chicken pen, fish pond, and a small vegetable garden in her yard, where she planted various kinds of flowers, vegetables, and fruits and raised chickens and fish. Through engaging in seasonal activities like picking tea leaves, harvesting bamboo, harvesting lemons (see Figure 5.6), and making new dishes with the newly harvested vegetables from her yard, she was trying to live her imagined rural life, mimicking rural life in the traditional rural household in China, where every household keeps some poultry and pigs for meat, and plants vegetables in a private plot (*ziliudi*).



Figure 5.6: A RTM in Mingyue village harvesting lemons in the yard of her *Minsu* guesthouse (Author)

Similarly, another woman who ran a *Minsu* guesthouse in Moganshan town expressed how she found it attractive to have her own house with a yard, and how she enjoyed cleaning the yard in the morning. As she said:

*When I was working in Hangzhou, I always drove through a place where I saw people cleaning their houses every day. I thought that was something nice and I wished to have my own house one day ... Now I have a house. I enjoy waking up in the morning and cleaning my yard. I even wrote a poem about cleaning the yard because I thought it represents a kind of lifestyle which is down-to-earth and happy ... I like breathing the fresh air in the morning, I like picking up the yellow leaves on the ground in autumn, I am glad to see the snails in the morning after a night of rain. (Interview 1R13, female, 1980s)*

In both cases, the women were trying to live a 'down-to-earth' rural life, by engaging in everyday practices as simple as planting and harvesting vegetables, and cleaning yards. In this way, they were performing a rural identity.

The quality of their encounters with local residents and the skills learned from them also formed an important part of RTMs' performances. A majority of RTMs had the experience of learning skills from local residents, such as construction skills, planting and harvesting fruits and vegetables, recognizing different plants and animals, and estimating the best time to sow, etc. One RTM in Moganshan explained how he learned to find winter bamboo shoots from a local resident:

*Many people know about spring bamboo shoots (chunsun) and like eating bamboo shoots, but they do not know about winter bamboo shoots (dongsun) and how to harvest them. While spring bamboo shoots grow above the ground, winter bamboo shoots stay under the ground, which makes it difficult to find them. I learned how to find winter bamboo shoots from a woman in the village. She told me to estimate if there are bamboo shoots based on how green the leaves look, because greener leaves mean stronger vitality and a bigger chance of having bamboo shoots. Once you find the bamboos with green enough leaves, you can locate the direction of the main shoots of the bamboo following the direction of the leaves. Digging along the direction of the main shoots of the bamboo, you will find winter bamboo shoots. (Interview 1R12, male, 1980s)*

By staying in a village and getting to know the local residents, RTMs had the opportunity to learn some skills to make them look local. It is also in this way that RTMs tried to form the rural identity through which they distinguished themselves from tourists who came only for a short stay. They saw themselves as people who identified with the rural lifestyle and practised a rural life by themselves.

The RTMs not only distinguished themselves from tourists, but also distinguished among themselves. Comparisons were made between those who spent more time in the rural areas and those who spent less. As one RTM from Mingyue village said: 'I think I spend more time in Mingyue village than you [another RTM]. You have been traveling all around. I only go back to Chengdu now and then' (Interview 3R7, female, 1970s). It seems that the longer time a RTM had spent in the rural and the more practices that they engaged in, the more reason there was for them to claim a rural identity because of their stronger connection with the rural world.

#### 5.4.2 Performing an aestheticized rural life

However, RTMs distinguish themselves from the local residents through the way they perform. In contrast with the practices in *Nongjiale* run by local residents, where the emphasis was mainly on farming activities or traditional customs, a more post-productivist inclination featured in the practices of RTMs. A difference between RTMs and local people was frequently mentioned by all three kinds of respondent – not only RTMs but also government officials and local residents. Words like 'artistic' (*wenyi de*), 'individuality' (*gexing de*), and 'people with feelings of nostalgia' (*you qinghuai de*) were widely used to describe the RTMs. People seemed to agree that RTMs had better taste and performed rural practices more artistically and individually.

Several signs were used as pointers in the performance of RTMs' aestheticized rural identity. The first is clothing. RTMs highlighted the importance of matching dress to the rural environment. For example, one RTM highlighted how she changed the way she dressed every time she went to the RTMs' model base: 'I dressed in modern Chinese-style clothes, which I think match the old houses in the village. I bought many dresses for my work there. I got a *qipao*. I got a special dress for tea ceremonies' (Interview 1R21, female, 1970s). As is illustrated by this quotation, during the fieldwork, I saw many RTMs dressed in a 'modern Chinese style', which prefers natural materials like bamboo, cotton and linen, and soya fabrics, and light colours like white, grey, and Chinese blue. This reminds me of the new middle class in Shenzhen in Elfick's (2011, p.204) research, who prefer 'clothing that is inspired by life in the traditional Chinese countryside', and who see the pursuit of modern Chinese design as 'possessing "unique" and "specialized" taste'. Indeed, women not only dressed in the Chinese style, but they also used Chinese-style accessories like jade bracelets, and handbags made of bamboo or linen. In Mingyue village, there was even one RTM who specialized in designing simplified Chinese style clothes, which had been widely accepted by RTMs in the village.

The second sign is cultural and creative activities, for which cultural and creative studios, public spaces in some *Minsu* guesthouses, and more broadly the natural environment around the



villages offered performing stages. Many RTMs highlighted the importance of ‘owner culture’, i.e. the key role of the owners of *Minsu* guesthouses or cultural and creative studios and the aestheticized rural lifestyle that they performed in attracting tourists. Therefore, RTMs organized various kinds of activities for their customers, ranging from nature education activities for children to outdoor activities like hiking, climbing, or cycling, and from hands-on creative activities like ceramic product making, bamboo product making, cloth dying, etc, to small-scale music performances or calligraphy demonstrations. For all these activities, RTMs often acted as guides for tourists, together with whom they performed an aestheticized rural landscape.

Taking hands-on making as an example: these creative activities were seen by RTMs as something that fit into the rural environment. One reason is that the main materials used to do these kinds of activity – like mud for ceramic making, bamboo for bamboo craft, the colour from plants for cloth dying, and wood for woodcraft – originate from the natural environment. More importantly, the rural settings offer an aesthetically pleasing background for doing these activities. For example, Figure 5.7 shows a traditionally decorated cultural and creative studio, with red lanterns hanging in the corridor, a couplet on the wall, wood frames for the windows and door, and arranged flowers in a china vase. The poster in the corner shows that the owner organized traditional folk activities called new-year pictures of woodblock printing (*nianhua tuoyin*), a traditional technology where wooden blocks with outlines cut on them are used to produce prints with symbolic meanings during Chinese new year. Normally, the pictures symbolise gods, heroes, and figures from legends and operas.

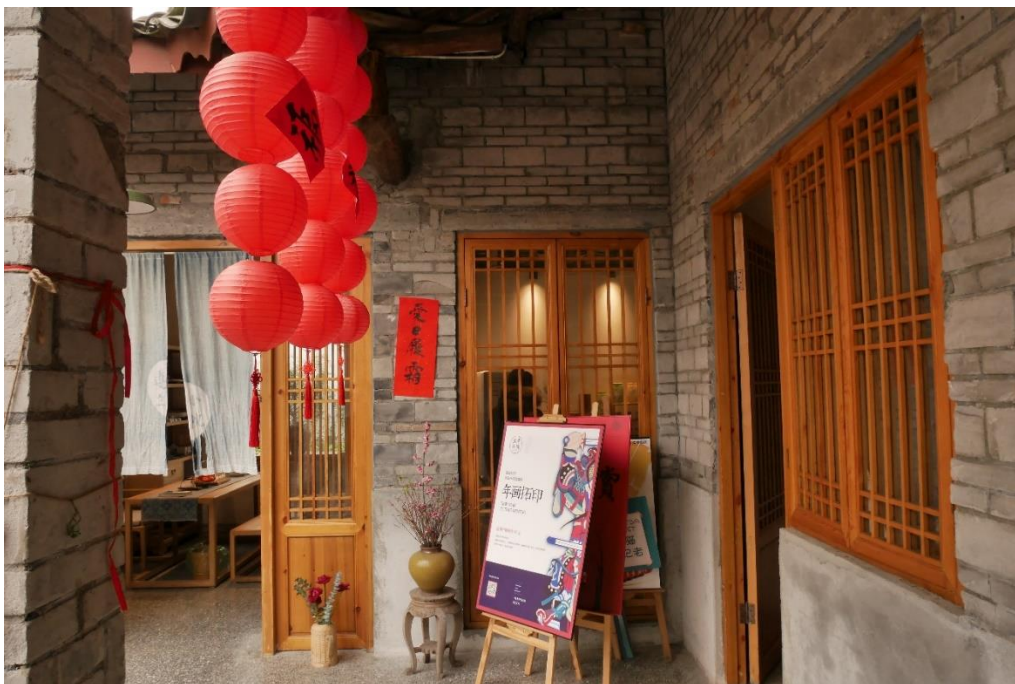


Figure 5.7: A traditionally decorated house which organized various kinds of folk activities (Author)

Like this new-year pictures woodblock printing activities, various other traditional activities were organized in this house. The owner of this house highlight the importance of this setting as a background:

*I want people to feel the difference of doing such things in this environment. It is so pleasing. During Women's Day, we organized a cloth sachet making activity, during which people could drink covered bowl tea in the yard and make cloth sachet ... We arrange different activities based on the twenty-four solar terms. For example, for White Dew (bailu) last year, we hosted a reed-themed flower arranging activity, as everyone knows the verse in Shijing: jianjia cangcang, bailu weishuang ... I think it is different to do these kinds of activities in this house, compared with doing them in, let's say, a studio in the city. I have a blue linen tablecloth. I have different flowers like wintersweet, blum blossom, peach blossom. I have this yard. They all make a difference. (Interview 4R3, female, 1980s)*

The poetry verse *Jianjia cangcang, bailu weishuang* describes a scene where reeds start to be covered with frost when White Dew (*bailu*) comes in September on the lunar calendar. The scene has been widely used in rural China. It is the reason why this RTM hosted reed-themed flower arranging activities. As she said, the yard, and the flowers in the yard, as well as the blue linen tablecloth, altogether made an aesthetically pleasing environment for the traditional activities that she planned.

Overall, RTMs performed a romanticized rural landscape. On one hand, they claimed a rural identity by living a mundane rural life and learning skills from local residents, through which they distinguished themselves from tourists. On the other hand, they distinguished themselves from local residents by bringing their judgement about what should be seen and what behaviour is appropriate to the rural. Their distinct rural identity was recognized by the tourists for whom RTMs acted as tour guides, and who arranged their activities.

## 5.5 Conclusion

Landscape plays a significant role in the formation and performance of middle-class identities (Duncan and Duncan, 2001). From different perspectives, landscape as a way of seeing and landscape as lived space both highlight the relationship between landscape and identity (Wylie, 2007). Focusing on RTMs' practices revolving around *Minsu* guesthouses and cultural and creative studios in RTMs' Model Bases, this chapter has examined how RTMs have produced a new rural landscape and how their identity has been performed in this process. The empirical examples discussed in this chapter confirm the importance of both perspectives.

The perspective of landscape as a way of seeing highlights the symbolic meanings of landscapes to people of different identities (Cosgrove, 1989). In this chapter, we have seen how RTMs chose 'authentic villages' which have undergone natural decline instead of the superficially good-looking Beautiful Villages. While villages with dilapidated houses represent authenticity, Beautiful Villages which have undergone state-led rural regeneration represent a strong character of modernization. By choosing the former instead of the latter, RTMs expressed their cultural capital, because being able to appreciate the beauty of the 'authentic village' was not a common ability shared by everyone. Rather, it depended largely on RTMs' taste learned through practices based on their cultural habitus.

Landscape as a way of seeing gives as much attention to how the landscape is written and read as to what the landscape represents (Cosgrove, 1989). In gentrification literature, research highlights the cultural capital of gentrifiers in the early stages of gentrification, and the gentrification aesthetic of a combination of old and new (Lees, Slater and Wyly, 2008; Phillips, 2018).

In this research, RTMs created a landscape that resembles the gentrification landscape by preserving the authentic rural landscape on one hand, and bringing in Westernized influences on the other. First, some RTMs made use of the traditional dwelling architectural style, and renovated the buildings on a small scale to fit into a particular environment. By doing so, RTMs distinguished their practices from the mass-production practices which followed state-led rural regeneration. Besides this, the interior design of the spaces using local materials, Chinese designing style, and artwork of traditional character expressed RTMs' aesthetic dispositions, which distinguished them from the Nongjiale run by local residents. Second, some RTMs brought Westernized elements into their architecture design, as well as the interior design of the Minsu guesthouses and cultural and creative studios. Foreign architecture styles, global interior design fashion, and Westernized furniture employed by RTMs represented their middle-class identity, which resembled that of the Chinese new middle class in cities. However, unlike their urban counterparts, who paid for already developed neighbourhoods, in this research, RTMs were creating a new rural landscape.

The perspective of landscape as a lived space emphasizes the ongoing shaping of the landscape through practice and performance. In this way, landscape involves not only the environment in or upon which humans perform different practices, but also the practices themselves (Ingold, 2000, p.56). In this research, RTMs actively engaged in various practices in the villages. They claimed a rural identity by engaging in mundane activities like building houses, planting vegetables, harvesting fruits, and cleaning the yards. However, they also tried to distinguish themselves from local residents by performing an aestheticized rural landscape through the way they dressed and



the activities that they organized. *Minsu* guesthouses and cultural and creative studios became the stages upon which RTMs and tourists together performed a romanticized rural landscape.



## Chapter 6    **Beyond displacement: the relationships between newcomers and local residents**

### 6.1    **Introduction**

In the last chapter, I demonstrated how RTMs produced and performed a new rural landscape. However, they did not do this in a vacuum world. Instead, they interacted in one way or another with the local residents of the villages. In this chapter, I aim to explore the relationships between newly arriving RTMs and local residents in the villages in which RTMs' Model Bases are based. In part, this is a question about the relationships between newcomers and long-term residents in the rural context. What does the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, about rural gentrification and rural tourism, tell us about their relations?

The main argument in gentrification research highlights the privileged position of newcomers over local residents using the concept of displacement. It has long been argued that gentrification leads to the displacement of long-term residents by newly arriving middle-class gentrifiers (Phillips, 1993; Ghose, 2004; Lees, Slater and Wyly, 2008; Stockdale, 2010). A wide range of research has documented the eviction of local residents from gentrified neighbourhoods because of rising house prices (Marcuse, 1985; He, 2010). Despite its importance to the gentrification research, the discussion of the concept of displacement has been largely ignored in rural studies (Slater, 2006, 2008; Phillips and Smith, 2018). Based on research in the UK, Halfacree (2018) discussed the reasons why displacement in rural areas is overlooked. First, in a rural context, the displacement of the working class happened before the arrival of the middle class. The reason for the displacement might be the decline in the agricultural workforce or a lack of housing or services. Therefore, the incoming of the middle class could hardly be seen as the cause for the displacement of the working class. Second, and connected to the first point, the arrival of middle-class urbanities can 'be seen as repopulation of an already depopulated and still depopulating countryside' (Halfacree, 2018, p.28). As a result, people might have a stronger sense that they are '(re)filling "empty spaces" rather than (immediately) displacing the working class' (Halfacree, 2018, p.28). Therefore, Halfacree (2018) suggests that researchers in rural areas should be cautious about the overall population change in specific rural areas when discussing displacement (see more details in Section 6.3.1).

At the same time, researchers call for a broadened definition of displacement (Shin, Lees and Lopez-Morales, 2016; Phillips and Smith, 2018; Zhao, 2019). Displacement does not always

happen in direct forms, with local residents being physically displaced by newcomers. It can happen in indirect forms: for example, Marcuse (1985) discussed the 'displacement pressure' which highlights how the changing character of a place makes it less liveable for long-term residents. According to Marcuse, reasons leading to declined liveability can be material, such as the loss of bus services, as well as affective, whereby people have a strong feeling of loss to the place. Phillips and Smith (2018, p.54) interpret this kind of 'displacement pressure' as highlighting how 'displacement does not necessarily involve movement of people'. Based on their research on rural gentrification, Phillips and Smith call for attention to the significance of different rural landscapes in the process of gentrification.

However, the relationship between newcomers and local residents goes beyond displacement, and the straightforward power relations and negative consequences implied by this concept. Researchers argue that newcomers bring economic opportunities for local residents, embed themselves into local communities and develop social relationships with local people (Bosworth and Farrell, 2011; Su and Chen, 2017; Eimermann and Kordel, 2018). In rural tourism research, researchers have examined how tourism entrepreneurs embed their tourism business activities into the local society (Eimermann and Kordel, 2018). For example, based on their research on lifestyle migrants in rural Slovenia and Sweden, Eimermann and Kordel (2018) demonstrate how they brought chances for the socioeconomic transformation of the new immigration destinations. According to Eimermann and Kordel, migrants desire to embed themselves in the local communities and build social relations with local residents. In their research, Eimermann and Kordel (2018, p.250) associated lifestyle migrants' 'socio-demographic characteristics, their desires, and aspirations for post-migration lives' with the ways they embedded in rural areas. Similarly, Su and Chen's (2017b) research on migrant tourism entrepreneurs in the ancient town of Lijiang in China demonstrates how migrant tourism entrepreneurs embedded themselves in local society by building economic and non-economic relations with various groups including local residents, government officials, fellow migrants and tourists. In this research, migrant tourism entrepreneurs chose to compromise when they had conflicts with local residents because they saw themselves as outsiders who lacked support from the local social network. Su and Chen's argument further suggests the importance of examining how entrepreneurs deploy different methods to deal with interpersonal relationships in order to make profit and to build social ties in tourism destinations.

Although researchers have noticed how newcomers displace local residents in some cases, and how they face challenges embedding themselves in local communities, fewer geographers have focused on the more complex relations between newcomers and local residents. Based on the concepts relating to displacement, this chapter aims to explore the relations between RTMs and

local residents who are actively engaged in rural tourism-related work. I begin this chapter with some contextual specificities in rural China. I then explore in three sections the relationships between newly arriving RTMs and local residents. First, I examine landscape displacement as a result of local residents' imitating RTMs to build guesthouses. Second, I demonstrate how RTMs adapted to rural society and compromised to get along and fit in with local residents in China. Third, I explore how local residents made use of opportunities brought by RTMs and were flexibly engaged in the rural tourism business. I conclude the chapter with comments on the relationships between newcomers and local residents based on displacement, and some critical thoughts on the definition of displacement and, more broadly, gentrification.

## **6.2 'Rural gentrification' and active local residents in China**

Although the gentrification theory enables researchers to examine a similar process beyond the Western countries, special attention should be given to the contextual specificities (Phillips and Smith, 2018). Existing analysis of the displacement of local residents by the newly arriving middle class in Western context does not translate well into the Chinese context (Qian, He and Liu, 2013; Chan et al., 2016; Zhao, 2019). One important reason is land use policy in rural areas, which does not allow transactions of rural properties and rural land between local residents and newcomers (Long et al., 2012). Local residents have only the right to use their properties and their farmland, but not the right to ownership. Therefore, they are not expelled from the local housing market as is documented in some Western literature (Ghose, 2004; Stockdale, 2010). On the contrary, local residents have become active agents to valorize the house and land values in the villages by renting houses to the newcomers. For example, drawing on the case of Xiaozhou village in Guangzhou, the gentrification of which was initiated by avant-garde artists' aestheticization and deepened by the arrival of art students and middle-class elite artists, Qian, He and Liu (2013) analyzed the roles played by local residents in promoting the process. In their research, local residents' rent-seeking behaviour worked with the avant-garde artists' aestheticization and the middle-class elite artists' commodification of rural space. Their argument suggests that the representations of local residents as victimized and displaced by newcomers in the process of rural gentrification in much of Western literature does not work in the Chinese context.

What is more, local residents became assistant gentrifiers through starting rural tourism businesses following the arrival of middle-class gentrifiers and the development of rural tourism in villages in China. For example, in their research on the gentrification of Honghe Hani Rice Terrace in Yunnan in China, Chan et al. (2016) explain how indigenous people-led self-gentrification happened after the gentrification process initiated by outsider gentrifiers and the local government. The authors use the concept of 'self-gentrification' to describe how individual

local residents adopt entrepreneurial strategies to improve their social-economic conditions. In this research, self-gentrifiers were divided into 'returning indigenous migrants' and 'non-migrating indigenous people'. While the former started rural tourism businesses based on the skills they got working in cities, like the awareness of investment and doing business, communication skills, and financial management skills, the latter ran rural tourism business-like guesthouses, restaurants, or transport services as they see the profit-making opportunities by interacting with tourists.

Although the direct displacement of local residents by newly arriving middle-class gentrifiers did not happen in the Chinese context, it did happen in other forms. For example, in Zhao's (2019) research on the development of guesthouses by tourism entrepreneurs in two villages in Dali, she recognizes the transformation of the sociocultural conditions in the local society. Zhao (2019) argues that the changes made by the newcomers to the local architecture should be seen as cultural displacement and that the ways of living in the local areas have been significantly influenced by the development of guesthouse industry.

More broadly, the unequal identity between rural residents and urbanites has been expressed in the spaces created for rural tourism. Along the Chinese history, the rural residents has always been treated as inferior to their urban counterparts (Fei, Hamilton and Wang, 1992; Park, 2014). Compared with rural residents, city people are assumed to have higher *wenhua* (education level/cultural capital) and better taste. In Park's (2014) research of *Nongjiale*, a form of rural tourism where rural residents host urbanites and offer them accommodation and rural food in their own houses, he found that middle-class urbanites stigmatized peasants and asserted their privileged position and sense of superiority. Middle-class urbanite tourists criticized the modernity and urbanity that peasant entrepreneurs expressed in renovating and decorating their houses as 'the peasant way of thinking', implying low quality. This research offers the opportunity to examine how the unequal relationship between rural residents and urban residents has deepened as rural residents learn from middle class urbanites to create a new rural landscape.

Furthermore, a strong *Renqing* society in the Chinese rural context complicates the interaction between local residents and newcomers. As Fei (1985) demonstrates in his seminal book *Xiangtu zhongguo (Rural China)*, a key character of Chinese rural society is that people grow up among acquaintances. Traditionally, life in rural society in China was very parochial because people restricted their activities to the villages and rarely contacted the outside world (Fei, Hamilton and Wang, 1992). *Renqing* represents a set of social norms that people in rural society have to abide by so that they have a good interpersonal relationship in the villages (Hwang, 1987). According to Hwang, there are two kinds of typical behaviours in the *Renqing society*. First, on a daily basis, one

is supposed to keep in touch with one's friends, families, and neighbours through 'exchanging gifts, greetings, or visitations with them from time to time' (Hwang, 1987, p.954). Second, when one of their acquaintances has any difficulties, one should 'sympathize, offer help, and "do a *renqing*" for that person' (Hwang, 1987, p.954). According to Chinese tradition, people who 'have received a drop of beneficence' should return it by giving 'a fountain of beneficence' (Hwang, 1987, p.954). Newcomers therefore enter a society that is already characterized by certain norms and strong expectations to which they must adapt.

Overall, the rural context in China differs a lot from its Western counterpart in terms of land use policy, social norms of behaviour, and the unequal identity politics between rural residents and urbanites, as well as rural–urban migrant working conditions. In the following sections, I turn to discussing how these differences work to cause displacement in distinctive ways in rural China, drawing on data collected from local residents as well as newly arriving RTMs.

There are two things I need to make clear here. First, the local residents in this research are people whose Hukou registrations are or used to be in the case-study villages, which contrasts with newly arriving RTMs, whose Hukou registrations are not in the case-study villages. Local residents can be divided into three groups, namely non-migrating rural residents, rural residents who have moved to the centre of the county, and urban–rural returning migrants. Non-migrating means local residents who have never left the village for an extended period. Urban–rural returning migrants means rural residents who went to cities for work or education opportunities for some time and then came back to their villages due to the limitations of their agricultural Hukou. Otherwise, some people moved to the centre of the county as they purchased houses there and physically moved out of the village. However, their Hukou registrations remained in the villages, through which they still kept the right to use of their properties. In this research, I categorize local residents into these three groups.

Second, there are limitations to the data collected from local residents. As I detailed in the methodology chapter, the sample of local residents in this research was largely made up of people who were engaged in rural tourism–related work/business, so I was able to generate rich insights into the relations between RTMs and local residents who worked for RTMs or who started rural tourism business by themselves. However, I am less confident with making claims about RTMs and local residents who were not engaged in rural tourism–related work/business (see details in Section 3.5.1.2). This is a limitation of this research, and I elaborate on it in Chapter 7 as an area for further research.

### 6.3 Displacement of landscape rather than local residents

As an important concept in gentrification research reflecting the relations between newcomers and local residents, displacement in rural areas is often neglected because of other reasons that have caused a decrease in rural population, such as declining agriculture (Halfacree, 2018). Therefore, Halfacree suggests that it is necessary to detail the contours of rural population change when studying displacement in rural gentrification. Following Halfacree's suggestion, in this section I first explore the population change in the case-study villages before and after the incoming of RTMs. Then I demonstrate whether the displacement of local residents is happening.

Hollowed-out villages all over China have seen the outward migration of rural residents in the last four decades (Long et al., 2012). Before 1978, the centrally planned economy forced the rural population to stay in rural areas and to work on collective farms with limited incomes (Long et al., 2012). After 1978, economic liberalization, as well as the improved productivity of agriculture, contributed to a large rural exodus (Sun, Fan and Angeles, 2011). However, the household registration system in China which categorizes the majority of the rural population to 'agriculture Hukou' (*nongye hukou*) means that large numbers of rural-urban migrants do not enjoy same treatment as their urban counterparts considering the social welfare and job opportunities' (Shen, 2002). Therefore, rural residents tended to retain their permanent residence in the countryside and move between the rural areas and cities in search of temporary employment (Fan, 2018). In the last decade, the centres of counties in China have also seen the inward migration of rural residents with the development of the housing market (Yang and Wan, 2005; Kipnis, 2016). While rural residents leave the villages temporarily to work and live in cities or permanently to move to the county centre, they still keep their houses in the villages. As a result, there is a big 'disparity between the rural resident population and the rural housing stock' (Long et al., 2012, p.13).

#### 6.3.1 Depopulation before the arrival of RTMs

As with the majority of hollowed-out villages in China, the base villages in this research have all experienced depopulation as a result of the declining agriculture and the decreasing demand for agricultural labour. According to interviews with local residents in Houwu village in Moganshan town, the villagers in Moganshan town have historically been engaged in the bamboo industry, chopping down bamboo and selling it for profit. However, the low profit from bamboo selling and the emerging work opportunities in cities have resulted in the abandonment of bamboo-related work, especially among the younger generation born in and after the 1980s. In Mingyue village, according to a government official interviewed for the research, although a change of the agricultural product from food crops to economic crops kept some local residents in the village



doing agricultural work, the people engaged in the agricultural industry were mainly in their 50s or older. Most young people did not make agriculture their main source of income. In Longhuang village where the Daoming Bamboo Art RTMs' Model Base was based, a majority of local residents were found to be rural–urban migrants following the decline of agriculture.

In Xinguang village, where the Twenty-Nine-Room House RTMs' Model Base was based, the local policy aimed at transforming the trajectories of rural development has contributed to population change. Before the arrival of RTMs, about 360 households out of 640 in Xinguang village were processors in the production of artificial crystal at home. However, a local policy named *Wushui Gongzhi* (literally 'the improvement of five types of water') in Zhejiang province stopped all the artificial crystal-making in the village in 2013 because of the serious water pollution it caused. As a result, all 360 households have since lost their business and started to find jobs in cities.

Following the decline of the main industry in the villages, whether it was agriculture or other industries, local residents had to find different jobs. Based on their relationships with the villages, they can be divided into three groups. The first group chose to stay in the village to still engage in agricultural work or other informal work. The second group moved from the villages to the centre of the county for reasons of marriage, education or job opportunities. As one local resident said:

*There were only a small number of people in the village before the development of Minsu guesthouses. A majority of local people have moved out. For people who are preparing for marriage, a house in Wukang [the centre of the county] seems necessary. (Interview 1L10, male, 1980s)*

As is illustrated above, before the arrival of RTMs rural residents were already moving to the centre of the county to get married and settle down, as it offered more job opportunities and better public services.

The third group is rural–urban migrants who moved between rural and urban areas. Rural–urban migrants normally went further than the centre of the county, and they spent extended periods in the destination cities. This group normally had other family members in the home villages.

Among the forty-one local residents that I interviewed, seventeen were non-returning migrants who had always stayed in the villages and worked in agriculture or other informal works nearby, eighteen were returning migrants who used to work in cities as rural–urban migrants, and six had moved to the centre of the county to live and/or work. The empty houses left behind by local residents left space for incoming RTMs. All the RTMs in this research rented houses or spaces directly from local residents or indirectly from local government (in the case of the Twenty-Nine-Room House RTMs' Model Base). The RTMs reused the abandoned properties. Rather than immediately displacing the previous rural residents, RTMs as newcomers refilled the empty

spaces. Similar to Halfacree's (2018) findings based on rural research in the UK, this process can 'be seen as repopulation of an already depopulated and still depopulating countryside' (p.28). However, what is different is that local residents came back following the RTMs and started rural tourism businesses of their own, which I demonstrate in the following sections.

### 6.3.2 Imitating a *Minsu* guesthouse following the newcomers

Displacement does not necessarily happen in direct forms, with local residents being physically forced out of the villages by newcomers (Shin, Lees and Lopez-Morales, 2016; Phillips and Smith, 2018; Zhao, 2019). As Phillips and Smith (2018) argue that 'displacement does not necessarily involve the movement of people' (p.54). Instead, they call for attention to the significance of different rural landscapes, types of nature, and environments in the processes of gentrification.

In China, there has long been unequal identity politics between urban and rural residents (Fei, Hamilton and Wang, 1992). While the former are seen as having higher cultural capital because of their education, the latter are seen as inferior because of their lack of education (Fei, Hamilton and Wang, 1992). This unequal identity was documented in the process of *Nongjiale* tourism, where the urban middle class belittled the farm guesthouses run by rural residents because of their 'peasant way of thinking' in the renovation and decoration of the rural houses (Park, 2014). In this section, I demonstrate how rural residents were influenced by newly arriving RTMs in creating their guesthouses, and how this leads to landscape displacement.

Influenced by the *Minsu* guesthouses created by newly arriving RTMs, local residents also started to renovate their houses or build new houses in order to run guesthouses. Following the RTMs, local residents tried to build guesthouses that were aesthetically better than *Nongjiale* and that catered better to urbanite guests. As one local resident from Moganshan said:

*At the beginning, most local residents in Moganshan were running Nongjiale, which was inferior. I had different thoughts from them. Either I did not do it, or I did a guesthouse of a higher level. (Interview 1L14, male, 1960s).*

As illustrated here, *Nongjiale* was frequently mentioned by local residents as something inferior to *Minsu* guesthouses. Instead of creating *Nongjiale*, this respondent wanted to renovate his house into a guesthouse of a higher level. Many local residents, especially those in Moganshan, spent more than one million CNY (about £109,000) to build houses of better quality in terms of their appearance and comfortableness, with a strong intention to run *Minsu* guesthouses.

Many local residents admitted that they were influenced by RTMs and the way they built the *Minsu* guesthouses. As two local residents said:

*We did a renovation to our house in 2016, influenced by the Minsu guesthouses in the Moganshan ... We did not invite a designer because the designing fee can be as much as the money for refurbishing. We visited some Minsu guesthouses with professional design styles in Moganshan and then we discussed with the contractor to choose a style that is most suitable for our house. (Interview 1L5, female, 1980s)*

*We renovated our house for our son's wedding in 2017 and we used it also for running a guesthouse. We did not invite any designers because I did all the construction work for my neighbour [a Minsu guesthouse run by a newly arriving RTM] ... When renovating my own house, I avoided its disadvantages and I learned all its advantages. (Interview 1L2, male, 1960s)*

Like these two respondents, most local residents did not use professional designers for their guesthouses because of the high fees. Instead, they learned from the RTMs by visiting the *Minsu* guesthouses with professional designs style or by inviting the construction teams for the RTMs. In my interviews with RTMs, they also claimed that they helped local residents in building the houses. Here is an example:

*When the head of this village was building his Minsu guesthouse, we gave him some advice on the designing of the house ... In the process of constructing, the worker in our project team kept an eye on his project by checking now and then. I also gave him some advice on the functions and the structure of the house. I think local residents here are very clever, they have a strong imitation ability which I do not think is something bad. (Interview 1R16, male, 1980s)*

In this case, the newly arriving RTM gave design advice to the local residents and helped them through the construction process. It was a way to develop a good relationship with the local residents, which I will explain in detail in Section 6.4. As he said, local residents had strong abilities to imitate. Through imitating RTMs, the spaces created by local residents were affected in several ways.

First, some rural icons were kept and expressed in a more implicit way to show the rural character of the *Minsu* guesthouse. Influenced by the RTMs, local residents choose a more implicit way to show their rural identity. This is different from *Nongjiale* where icons of rusticity were expressed explicitly, through for example hanging agriculture products on the walls (Park, 2014). Figure 6.1 shows the living room of a guesthouse renovated by local residents. The original look was changed in several ways. First, the wall was changed from a white wall to a loam wall, which provides a gentle background for the environment. If the white wall represented a closer look at modernization, then the loam wall was seen as a return to the authentic appearance of the rural. Second, the floor was changed from a cement floor to the wooden floor. Third, some decorations of Chinese character were used, like the calligraphy and paintings on the wall, the china vases, and the dried flowers hanging on the wall. The ceiling lamp was also decorated with bamboo

craftwork of local character. It was a big change from their previous living room. As the owner said:

*Our living room used to be very simple, just as most families in the village have. There were not so many decorations. But we have to improve it as we want to use it to attract tourists to make money. (Interview 1L2, male, 1960s)*

To attract tourists, the 'simple' living room, without any decorations, was upgraded to what it looks like now.



Figure 6.1: The living room of a guesthouse run by local residents (Author)

Besides rural elements, local residents also tried to distinguish their guesthouses from *Nongjiale* guesthouses by absorbing some design elements that were shown in the RTMs' spaces. Things of Western style are seen as one possible choice, especially in Moganshan town. Local residents used international elements, like bilingual information boards, world maps and photos of foreign tourists, to decorate their houses. For example, the covers of the chairs around the desk in Figure 6.1 show symbols of Paris and England. On another wall in the living room in Figure 6.1, there is a blackboard with some basic information in both Chinese and English, like welcoming words, breakfast time, and username and password for the WiFi, as well as the hosts' contact information.

Other than the decoration, some new function spaces, like tea/coffee facilities, fireplaces, swimming pools and bars were added to some local residents' houses. For example, Figure 6.2 shows a reception area in a local resident's guesthouse. It is also used as a bar, with various kinds of imported beers and wines on the shelves, and bar stools in front of the arching desk. Imported beer and wines, as well as the bar stools, are all symbols of Western lifestyles which were exotic to local residents.



Figure 6.2: A bar and reception of a local resident's guesthouse (Author)

The facilities in local residents' guesthouses were also improved to meet the requirements of urbanite guests. Things like high-quality bedding, showers, air conditioning and TVs were frequently seen in the local residents' guesthouses. As the owner of one guesthouse said, 'To offer tourists good services, the bedding, shower sets and bath installations we use are five-star hotel standard. It is the same as the ones used in the *Niaohou*<sup>4</sup>' (Interview 1L2, male, 1960s). That said, it is hard to tell if what they were using matches a five-star hotel standard. What is certain is that local residents used what they had never used before in their houses with the aim of meeting the requirements of urban tourists. The quotation also implies that this local resident was looking to a guesthouse run by newly arriving RTMs, and used it as a higher standard. Two things are

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<sup>4</sup> This is the pseudonym of a *Minsu* guesthouse run by a newly arriving RTM.

going on here: local residents are having to respond to the changing tastes and expectations of urban tourists, but those tastes and expectations are changing – in part because of what the RTMs are providing in their *Minsu* guesthouses.

The activities that local residents offered in their *Minsu* guesthouses were also diversified. While previous *Nongjiale* guesthouses focused on accommodation and food, after the arrival of RTMs, local residents tried to offer various kinds of activities. For example, Figure 6.3 shows a wooden board hung outside a *Minsu* guesthouse run by local residents. As is written on the board, the guesthouse offered activities such as BBQ, meeting rooms, KTV, facilities for tea and a bar, and even a mini cinema. As an owner of the guesthouse said:

*Although the village is supposed to be a place for people to enjoy a simple life, tourists always complain that it is a bit boring and they do not know what to do. Thus, they brought what they did in the cities to this village, like singing, film watching, drinking, etc. Following others, we offered the facilities like Karaoke, a projector for film, and small-scale meetings. (Interview 1L11, male, 1970s)*



Figure 6.3: A board explaining the activities offered by a Minsu guesthouse run by local residents (Author)

As illustrated in the above case, part of the reason for the diversified activities is ‘following others’, in this case the newly arriving RTMs. To attract and satisfy more urbanite guests, various kinds of entertainment activities were learned from the newcomers, who were thought to know what urbanite guests wanted.



So far, I have demonstrated the landscape displacement in local residents' houses as a result of the changes they made to the architecture, interior design, as well as various activities that they organized which were influenced by RTMs. In the following part, I explore how physical displacement happened in local residents' houses as they imitated *Minsu* guesthouses by giving over bigger and better space to tourists, and keeping less space to themselves. While local residents imitated newcomers in the above ways, one way that they were different from newcomers was that local residents lived in the same place that they used to run their guesthouses. To make the most of their houses to make money, rooms with good conditions (e.g. bigger space, plenty of light) were used as guest rooms for tourists, while the hosts moved to smaller rooms of the house or the 'backstage'. In one case, the owner of a house refurbished the house they used to live in and converted it into a guesthouse for tourists (see Figure 6.4). To find a room for themselves to stay in, they built a two-floor makeshift house on what had previously been a pigsty in the backyard (see Figure 6.5).



Figure 6.4: A *Minsu* guesthouse run by local residents (Author)



Figure 6.5: A newly built two-layer makeshift house (Author)

Unlike the above case, in which the owners built extra rooms for themselves, some other local residents cut down their own living spaces and shared it with tourists. For example, a family of four used two rooms on the first floor and rented out the other six rooms on the second and third floor to tourists. A look inside the rooms of the hosts and the rooms for tourists also shows some differences. While most rooms for tourists were en-suite with modern facilities like air conditioning and bathroom, the hosts' room had fewer facilities and they shared the bathrooms. This finding differs from Park's (2014) argument in his research on *Nongjiale* guesthouses, in which the hosts lived in the rooms which represented the power centre of the house. In the cases in this research, local residents reduced the size and quality of their own living spaces to make room for tourists. For them, it was a good opportunity to make full use of their houses to make some money.

In sum, to run a guesthouse, local residents adopted a lot of the design of their houses from other places. Influenced by the *Minsu* guesthouses run by newly arriving RTMs, the local residents aimed to improve the quality of their guesthouses and distinguish them from *Nongjiale* which was seen as inferior by urban tourists (Park, 2014). If newly arriving RTMs were creating their imagined ideal living spaces in the rural and selling them to people with similar demands, local residents followed the newcomers to create a space that catered to urbanite guests. In this way, I argue that the rural landscape was displaced by middle-class consumer preferences. On one hand,



this is a result of local residents' active choices which brought economic benefit to them through running rural tourism-related businesses (which I will demonstrate in the next section). On the other hand, the unequal identity between RTMs (as members of the urban middle class in most cases) and rural residents required local residents to 'upgrade' their house designs so that they could engage in the rural tourism business.

## 6.4 Adapting to the *Renqing* society in rural China

In the last section, I demonstrated how landscape displacement happened because local residents imitated RTMs to create a new rural landscape that catered to middle-class taste, and how this is caused by the unequal urban and rural identities in China. However, the relationships between newly arriving RTMs and local residents were further complicated in the *Renqing* society in rural China, where local residents have an advantageous position. *Renqing* society does not follow the assumption that 'isolated individuals socialized to make rational decisions on the basis of self-interest' (Hwang, 1987, p.967). Rather, it is the reciprocity (*bao*), which is influenced by 'the hierarchically structured network of *guanxi*' (Hwang, 1987, p.968) in the local society, that is prevalent. The basic social behaviour in *Renqing* society is that acquaintances keep in contact with each other through 'exchanging gifts, greetings or visitations with them from time to time' (Hwang, 1987, p.954). If one has accepted *renqing* from someone else, they should pay back by showing *renqing* to the giver when there is a chance (Hwang, 1987). This is a significant characteristic of Chinese rural society where people grow up among acquaintances. In contemporary China, although *Renqing* society has weakened significantly, it is still embedded in modern society. In his study on the methods of social exchange in Chinese society, Feng (2011) indicates that, in modern China, traditional methods of exchange among acquaintances in *Renqing* society have gradually given way to the methods of exchange among strangers found in a contract-based society. However, despite the social changes and improving mobility in contemporary China, *Renqing* society still plays an important role, especially in rural areas (Chang, 2012).

Newcomers have to adapt to *Renqing* society by building a harmonious relationship with locals. For example, based on their research of two hostels in a tourist attraction in Xinjiang in China, Yang, Ryan and Zhang (2014) demonstrate that, on one hand, newly arriving entrepreneurs had to develop a good relationship with local government and meet the industry standards and that, on the other hand, they have to find a balance between making profit and enjoying the lifestyle. *Guanxi* stands for a network of relationships that plays an important role where there is no contract. In their research, being in harmony with others was a strategy adopted by external entrepreneurs to build good *guanxi* with locals influenced by the traditional saying in China that

'harmony is the most precious' (Yang, Ryan and Zhang, 2014, p.850). Similarly, in their study of migrant tourism entrepreneurs in Lijiang, Su and Chen (2017) demonstrate how migrant tourism entrepreneurs developed an integrative relationship with locals and how they embedded their economic activities in the local social society. In this section, I demonstrate how newcomers deal with their relationships with local residents in the *Renqing* society in rural China and connect it to the relations between newcomers and local residents in rural gentrification research.

The first and most important way through which newly arriving RTMs and local residents built connections in this research was through house leasing. The RTMs normally signed a ten or twenty-year lease with property owners. There should not be conflicts between RTMs and local people based on housing leases. However, local residents' lack of spirit of contract and backtracking was frequently mentioned by RTMs as a strain on local-newcomer relationships. One of the RTMs from Shanghai gave an example:

*We Shanghainese are very simple. For example, if I want to sign a contract with someone else, it is very efficient. If it is ok, then we sign the contract. If not, we discuss face to face until we achieve an agreement. Both of us will obey the contract. However, it does not work like that in the village. Local people change what they said, or even signed yesterday. The reason can be that his wife did not agree. You spent so much effort to persuade his wife. However, again, his son disagrees. I think it is ridiculous.* (Interview 1R17, male, 1980s)

There is a comparison here between the 'Shanghainese' as newcomers and local people. While 'Shanghainese' were 'simple' and 'efficient', local people changed their minds frequently, which made the process of signing a contract look 'ridiculous'. A similar comparison was made by another newly arriving RTM:

*It is difficult to deal with local people. It seems that we have different brains and we think differently. We are very reasonable, especially as Shanghainese. We always obey rules ...But the rural society is different. It is a Renqing society. They are completely different.* (Interview 1R16, male, 1980s)

Again, 'Shanghainese', meaning the newcomers, were thought of as people who were 'reasonable' and who 'obey[ed] rules'. On the contrary, local residents were presumably thought of as not reasonable and not obeying rules in a '*Renqing* society'. The differences between local residents and newly arriving RTMs can be explained by the fact that the higher mobility and stronger market economy in the cities resulted in the emergence and dominance of a contract-based society in urban China (Feng, 2011), where people had a stronger sense of faith in contracts. Conversely, in rural China, where there is less mobility and stronger social networks among acquaintances, *Renqing* society still plays an important role (Feng, 2011).

The RTMs also developed strained relationships with local residents in the villages they relocated to, especially their neighbours, through other daily encounters. Many RTMs mentioned their own experiences or other RTMs' experiences of having conflicts with their neighbours. For example, one RTM who had a *Minsu* guesthouse in Moganshan town mentioned a time in which he was in trouble with his neighbour because of some trifles:

*Once, some tourists staying in my guesthouse harvested some bamboo shoots in our neighbour's bamboo forests by accident. A few days later, the neighbour damaged the water pipe of my guesthouse, turned off the electric brake, and stopped a car on the only way to my guesthouse ... In the beginning, I did not even know why it happened. In this village, it seems that all the households are relatives, far or close. But I am alone in the village. I have to be very careful not to make trouble for myself.*  
(Interview 1R12, male, 1980s)

These comments show that this RTM realized the strained relationship between himself as an outsider who did not have much social support in the village, and local residents who had many relatives who could be seen as strong social support. Similar experiences were mentioned by many other RTMs but in a less direct way. The RTMs were less willing to tell the conflicts that they experienced. Rather, they shared similar stories from other RTMs, or in a more general way to protect the privacy of RTMs. Compared with new coming RTMs, who did not have much support in the villages, local residents were in a more advantageous position because of the strong social support that they had in the villages.

Showing *renqing* to local residents had become a common strategy used by RTMs to build a good relationship with local residents and to adapt to the *Renqing* society in the villages. One way of doing this was by giving gifts to local residents and greeting them during festivals. As one RTM said:

*Doing business in the village, you have to deal with the relationship (guanxi) with local people. You have to have a good relationship with your neighbours. Otherwise, there will be a lot of trouble ... As soon as we rented the house in this village, we visited the neighbours and brought them gifts. We wanted to do some work in advance to avoid too much trouble later on.* (Interview 1R4, male, 1980s)

As illustrated above, visiting the neighbours and giving gifts 'in advance' were seen as the way to build a good relationship which would avoid trouble 'later on'. This strategy was mentioned by many others. Some said that they greeted their neighbours during important festivals, like the Chinese New Year and the Mid-Autumn Festival. Some others invited local residents to their houses for dinner to enhance their relationship. During my stay in Mingyue village during Chinese New Year, I was invited to several dinners at RTMs' guesthouses, where local residents were invited as well. In one case, the newcomer invited the electrician, and the building contractor for

his guesthouse from the village. In another case, a newcomer invited the landlord of his guesthouse.

Having shown *renqing* to local residents, newcomers expected support from local residents because it was what the recipients were supposed to do in *Renqing* society (Hwang, 1987). For example, one RTM showed me a wall of his guesthouse (see Figure 6.6) which was sealed. The reason was that his neighbour felt disturbed by the noise of the air conditioner from that room. He said, 'I am glad that I have a good relationship with local residents. That is why they told me the inconvenience that I have caused them' (Interview 1R4, male, 1980s). As a comparison, he mentioned another newcomer who was not allowed by the local residents to pass the only road in the village because of his lack of *renqing* to them.



Figure 6.6: A sealed wall of a guesthouse run by a RTM (Author)

Another way to show *renqing* to local residents was to employ those who are unemployed in the village, especially their neighbours. As one local resident said:

*Newcomers are very willing to employ local people, especially their neighbours. For example, if the newcomer employs the son or daughter of his/her neighbour, it is easy to ask the neighbour for a favour when needed, e.g. to park in front of their houses. Otherwise, it can be a problem.* (Interview 1L4, male, 1990s)

From this local resident's perspective, RTMs were supposed to do a favour for their neighbours by offering job opportunities. Many RTMs did employ local residents, through which they built

connections with local people. The way RTMs treated their neighbours as employees was also seen as a way to show *renqing*. One RTM in Moganshan explained the ways he treated his neighbour-employees in the village:

*In the city, you pay for people to work for you. If you are not satisfied, you ask them to do it again. However, you probably would not do the same thing in the village because most of the workers are neighbours and you have to compromise (qianjiu).*

*The methods of enterprise management in the city cannot be used in the village directly. There is more renqing involved. (Interview 1R15, male, 1960s)*

Instead of bringing the enterprise management of the city directly to the village, this RTM chose to compromise as a way to show *renqing* to local residents. This points to the solutions of RTMs facing conflicts with local residents. Instead of going to court, compromise had become a common strategy among RTMs because they regard themselves as outsiders who should adapt to the rules in the rural society. This finding confirms Yang, Ryan and Zhang's (2014) argument that outsider entrepreneurs have to balance their relationships with local people in a *guanxi*-dominated society.

However, some RTMs found *Renqing* society so complicated that they tried to keep a distance from local residents. As one RTM said:

*I thought that local residents in the village were unsophisticated and easy to get along with. I tried to get on well with my neighbours when I first came. But I found it really hard. We have completely different thoughts. I have given up now. I try to avoid any direct contact with them. (Interview 1R17, male, 1980s)*

Feeling tired of dealing with local residents, this RTM decided to avoid 'any direct contact with' local residents. One way of doing this is by turning to the government for help. For example, to avoid local residents to violate the contract, newcomers in Mingyue village asked the local government to play the role of intermediary. As one newcomer said:

*We signed agreements with local residents. Both the village committee and the town government keep a copy of the agreement. Although it does not have any legal binding, it is always better to have an intermediary. In case there is a conflict, we can always go to the local government for help. (Interview 3R10, male, 1970s)*

Without strong social support in the village, newcomers turned to local government to improve the binding force of their agreements with local residents. This method was pushed further in Moganshan where some newcomers decided not to sign contracts with local residents. Instead, they pushed the local government to sign contracts with local residents after which they rented the houses from the local government. In this way, newcomers tried to decrease their direct contact with local residents.

This finding adds evidence to Su and Chen's (2017) research on the relationships between migrant tourism entrepreneurs and locals, in which they argued that migrant tourism entrepreneurs were situated in a complex matrix. On one hand, they had to build economic connections with locals. On the other hand, they maintained a respectful distance from local groups. Instead of being in a disadvantaged situation, as argued by some researchers on rural gentrification in Western countries (Cloke and Little, 1990; Cloke, Phillips and Thrift, 2003), and as demonstrated in the last section in this research about landscape displacement, this section demonstrates how local residents could be more powerful than RTMs through making use of their social networks in the rural areas and the social norms of *Renqing* society in rural China. Therefore, the power relations between newcomers and local residents are complex.

### 6.5 Engaging in rural tourism work with flexibility

Instead of simply being victims to the process of 'rural gentrification', many local residents in China acted like assistant gentrifiers who were actively engaged in house renting (Qian, He and Liu, 2013) or the rural tourism business (Chan et al., 2016; Zhao, 2019). More broadly, rural residents in China have always been seen as passive and helpless victims and that the Hukou system makes it difficult for them to enjoy the same privileges as urban citizens, which results in rural–urban migration (Alexander and Chan, 2004; Chan and Buckingham, 2008). Criticizing this as downplaying the active role of rural residents, Fan (2009) argues that rural–urban migrants adopt the strategy of flexibility to make the most of both urban and rural worlds--making money by working in cities and going back to the rural areas for the secure social and economic condition.

In tourism research, Chio's (2014a) study on returning migrants' experiences in the rural tourism business in Upper Jidao, a Miao ethnic minority village, offers an important insight into how the experiences of being migrant workers in cities helped them to understand what tourists want and to do tourism business in their home villages. While existing research on rural gentrification in China has demonstrated the entrepreneurial activities of indigenous people, it seems to employ a more static perspective, overlooking the circular character of rural–urban migration and the more flexible ways in which local residents engage in the rural tourism business. Fan's (2009) theory of flexible work and flexible household organization among rural–urban migrants in China offers a helpful insight. Employing Fan's concept of flexibility, this section aims to demonstrate how local residents in the case-study villages engaged in the rural tourism business by flexibly switching between tourism and non-tourism work and flexibly organizing labour among their extended families.

### 6.5.1 Flexible work: switching between tourism and non-tourism work

Local residents started to engage in rural tourism–related work after the arrival of tourists attracted by RTMs. For some local residents, instead of a complete replacement of their previous work, rural tourism–related work/business was seen as a supplement to their work choices. They flexibly switched between tourism and non-tourism work. This is obvious among non-migrating local residents who had been working in the villages and then started tourism businesses, or people who moved to the centre of the county and were either self-employed or had informal work.

In the case of non-migrating local residents who had always worked in the villages, some of them started to run rural tourism businesses as side businesses. For example, in Mingyue village, even though some local residents started rural tourism businesses like guesthouses and restaurants, they kept agriculture as their main source of income. As a woman who runs a guesthouse in Mingyue village said:

*The principle of running a tourism business in my family is that we do as much as we can. We are farmers essentially; tea leaves and bamboo shoots are our main sources of income ... Even if the number of tourists decreases in the future, we can still make a living from agriculture. (Interview 3L9, female, 1980s)*

This sentiment of giving priority to agricultural production was shared among other local residents in Mingyue village. Instead of giving up agriculture and turning to the tourism business, local residents alternated between agriculture and the tourism business in different seasons. The case above expresses the flexible change of their work by local residents to make the most of both the agricultural business and the rural tourism business.

This flexibility is caused by the seasonal character of both agricultural work and rural tourism and the fact that they do not always overlap. For tourism, although there is a slight difference in peak time in different villages, in general it ranges from May Day Golden Week (the first week of May) to National Day Golden Week (the first week of October). Otherwise, there is another peak time for travelling in China, namely the Chinese New Year. For agriculture, taking Mingyue village as an example, the busy farming months are March, April, October and November. Local residents started rural tourism businesses as a way to make full use of the times when they were free from farm work. When the busy farming time overlapped with the tourist season, local residents give priority to farm work because of its strict time constraints. As one local resident said:

*In March and April, local people will be busy harvesting the first crop of tea leaves which sale at good prices before Qingming festival. We might stop our guesthouse business for a while because the tea leaves won't wait. (Interview 3L3, male, 1970s)*

Local residents who had not previously been engaged in agricultural work switched between rural tourism work/ business and non-agricultural work. This was especially obvious among local residents who had moved to the centre of the county and who were self-employed or engaged in informal work. In this research, six local residents who were interviewed had moved to the centre of the county to live. Five of them were previously self-employed, running restaurants, shops or owning online shops. Three others were casual labourers previously engaged in other informal work. Although they had moved to the centre of the county, they still kept their houses in the villages because rural property was not allowed to be sold. For example, in Moganshan town, three out of five interviewed who had moved to Wukang, the centre of Deqing county, had refurbished their houses in the villages and started *Minsu* guesthouses. The other two were running restaurants.

To engage in the rural tourism business, they moved back and forth between the villages and the centre of the county between the tourist season and the low season. During the peak tourist season, for example the National Day Golden Week, many of them came back to the villages to run guesthouses. After the National Day Golden Week, according to my observations, many guesthouses run by local residents were shut down. The owners went back to the centre of the county, where they lived and/or worked. For some people, the rural became a working place. They came to the village every day to work, while their nuclear families remained in the centre of the county. For example, one respondent said:

*Now I live in Wukang and my daughter goes to school in Wukang. It is not realistic to move the whole family back. The village is more like a working place for me now. I went back home to Wukang every day.* (Interview 1L10, male, 1980s)

In this case, the local residents were obtaining the best of the urban and rural worlds, by enjoying the work opportunities and public services such as schools for their children in the centre of the county, and making money from rural tourism by making use of their idle houses in the village.

The flexible movement between the centre of the county and the villages gave local residents the chance to make the most of work opportunities in both urban and rural areas. As one local resident who ran a small food truck in Xinguang village said:

*We do artificial crystal processing at home in Pujiang [the centre of Pujiang county] as our main source of income. When there is not much work, I just need to clean the house and take care of my daughter. Now, I can come back to the village [xiangxia] to make some money when I finish the crystal processing work at home ... I normally come during the tourist seasons, like wuyi [the May Day Golden Week] or shiyi [the National Day Golden Week], and Chinese New Year. At other times, I always came during the weekends.* (Interview 2L1, female, 1970s)



In this case, the woman had moved to the centre of the county to live. She had her work processing artificial crystal at her home, which was a kind of flexible work where she could control the time she spent on it. As she said, she only came to the village during the tourist seasons or on the weekends, which were presumably the times when she could make the most money from the rural tourism business.

### 6.5.2 Flexible household organization: engaging the extended family

Flexible household organization was a common strategy among rural–urban migrants. In Fan’s (2009) discussion of the split-household strategy of the rural–urban migrants, she uses the IO framework to explain the way rural-urban migrant families organize their household. Inside (I) stands for staying in the home village and/or finding a job in the places close to the village. Outside (O) means leaving the village and working in the places far away from ones’ home village for the most time of a year. In Fan’s IO framework, the first letter represents the situation of the wife and the second tells the situation of the husband. For example, inside-outside (IO) means the organization of wife inside–husband outside the household. In this section, I demonstrate how the local residents in this research flexibly divided labour among their family members, not only between husband and wife but also with other family members.

First, the dominance of the IO arrangement, i.e. wife inside–husband outside, was strengthened by the job opportunities that rural tourism–related business had offered for women. *Minsu* guesthouses run by RTMs employed middle-aged women from the villages as cleaners, room attendants, kitchen helpers etc. For women, working in the village allowed them to take care of their own families. As a local woman working in a guesthouse said: ‘I worked in a hotel named Lingxiangshui<sup>5</sup> for seven years before I came to work in Niaohou<sup>6</sup> *Minsu* guesthouse. It is so close to my house that I can always keep an eye on it’ (Interview 1L1, female, 1970s). Similarly, another woman in her 50s who worked as a chef in a guesthouse said: ‘I like my work in this guesthouse. I used to work in Wuxi. But it is too far away ... Working here allows me to take care of my mum who is over 80’ (Interview 3L4, female, 1960s). The rural tourism businesses in the village offered women not only work opportunities close to their homes but also the chance to take care of their families.

However, fewer men were found to be employed in guesthouses. One reason is that the types of work, like cleaning and bed-making, were more commonly thought of as women’s work,

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<sup>5</sup> This is a pseudonym of a hotel.

<sup>6</sup> This is a pseudonym of a *Minsu* guesthouse.

especially in the patriarchal rural environment. In the guesthouses that I visited during the fieldwork, it was common that in each guesthouse there were only one or two men employed to look after facilities like the water pipes, electric wires and boiler, or to solve other engineering problems. Another reason is that the salary was not enough for men who were supposed to be the primary wage earner in a family. As a man from Houwu village said:

*[working in the guesthouse] only earns CNY 2000 to 3000 [about £220 to £330] a month. It is ok for women. But for men... you should know that even working as a mason here, a man should be paid around CNY 300 [about £33] per day, which means about CNY 9000 [about £990] a month. (Interview 1L8, male, 1970s)*

As illustrated here, there was a difference between men and women. While CNY 2000 or 3000 (about £220–£330) a month was thought of as enough for women, but was far less than men were supposed to earn in a month. As a result, there was less male labour employed in rural tourism businesses such as *Minsu* guesthouses.

Second, many rural–urban migrant workers came back to the villages to start rural tourism businesses, which led to increasing Inside-Inside (II) organization and the engagement of extended family in the villages. This is especially obvious in cases where local residents ran *Minsu* guesthouses. Men played a more important role in deciding whether or not a household ran a *Minsu* guesthouse business. In one case, a woman in her early 30s told me how her family decided to start running a *Minsu* guesthouse.

*It was my father who had a strong will to start Minsu guesthouse and I supported my father. My mum was not very happy. She thought that we needed to invest too much money and running a Minsu guesthouse involved so many nitty-gritty things. But my father and I were very confident and we did it. (Interview 1L5, female, 1980s)*

Here, the mother was worried about the investment of a large amount of money and the father was more decisive in the process. As with this case, there are many other cases where men as the supposed masters of the family decided to invest in rural tourism businesses. It also means that men gave up their rural–urban migrant work and stayed inside, which increased the number of households with II-type household organization.

What is more, in the cases where local residents ran guesthouses, it often involved the intergenerational division of labour within the extended family. In one case, a woman who worked as a receptionist in a *Minsu* guesthouse run by a newly arriving RTM showed me how her house was turned into a ‘second-tier’ guesthouse, which normally received less demanding people, such as drivers for the tourists. She said:

*I worked in the guesthouse for six days a week. My mother-in-law is at home most of the time and she keeps an eye on our guesthouse. She cleans the house and cooks for*

*the guests. My husband drives a truck for a construction site near this village. He has very flexible working hours so he also drives for tourists when there is high demand during peak tourist seasons. My son goes to high school in Wukang. He comes back home every weekend, which is also the time when we have most of our guest tourists. He always helps us with the work on the computer. You know, this kind of high-tech, we are not good at. (Interview 1L6, female, 1970s)*

In this case, there was a grandparents-parents-son model, where three generations were involved in running this guesthouse. As it involved daily life tasks like cleaning, bed-making, and cooking, even grandparents could help with the business. In this case, the parents were not fully engaged in running their guesthouse. While the female host worked in another *Minsu* guesthouse run by a newly arriving RTM, the male host drove a truck for a construction site. Another reason for this is the seasonal characters of the rural tourism business. Parents do not want to rely completely on their guesthouses, so both of them (in this case) had other jobs as a steady source of income. As part of a younger generation, their son helped with online check-in when he was at home during weekends. Like the division of work in this family, many local families that ran tourism businesses engaged in an intergenerational division of labour.

Many young people, mostly in their 20s or 30s, had been called back to assist, or more precisely to guide, their parents in running a tourism-related business because of the skills they got from education or working in cities. A regular theme mentioned by young people was their previous work experience in the cities and the confidence they built in their entrepreneurship and business savvy. As an owner of a guesthouse from Xiantan village in Moganshan town said:

*I graduated in 2007 and I worked in Hangzhou, Shanghai for a short time before I started my job in an ecological garden in Deqing ... We, as people coming back from outside the village (waimian huilaide), experienced more new things than people who have always stayed in the village. (Interview 1L10, male, 1980s)*

Another local guesthouse owner echoed this: 'We are more open-minded because we have experienced the outside world. However, many local residents [*dangdi laobaixing*] are less open-minded' (Interview 1L11, male, 1970s). Here, 'experiences' 'outside the village' were considered important to open their eyes and mind. This confirms Chio's (2011) findings in a village which was developing ethnic tourism, a kind of tourism based on ethnic cultures in the villages such as traditional songs, dances, and architecture of local characters, that returning migrants had the advantages from experiencing the world of being able to articulate an opinion of what tourists wanted from a rural ethnic tourism experience as well as confidence in their own business ability.

A woman in her early 30s came back to Houwu village after a year's work in Deqing and was running a guesthouse with her parents. She said:

*It used to be easy, the old people [her parents] only needed to prepare bedding for the tourists. Nowadays, the first thing you need to do when guests come is online check-in, which is beyond the old people's ability. Besides, tourists have higher requirements, which also challenge the old's service awareness. (Interview 1L5, female, 1980s)*

On one hand, the old people's inability to use the computer necessitated that the young people came back to help them with the business. On the other hand, the 'higher requirements' which called for better service also encouraged the parents to turn to their sons or daughters for help.

While some young people came back home to run the businesses with their parents, others decided to keep their work in the cities and remotely control the businesses of their parents. In one case, the owner of a guesthouse told me very proudly: 'My son and daughter-in-law are controlling the business of our guesthouse. They live and work in Beijing and process the booking information online' (Interview 1L2, male, 1960s). As a result, the parents waited at home when tourists were coming and hosted them as if they were hosting their friends or families. In this case, the son and the daughter-in-law did not give up their jobs in Beijing. Instead, they helped to promote the business and deal with booking information online. Rather than saying that the young couple was helping their parents with the tourism business, it is more accurate to say that they controlled the business and their parents were workers in the family business.

These findings add evidence to existing research on rural gentrification in China which argues that indigenous people act as assistant gentrifiers instead of victims (Qian, He and Liu, 2013; Chan et al., 2016; Zhao, 2019). What is more, employing Fan's (2009) concept of flexibility, the findings deepen this argument by exploring how local residents engage in rural tourism work flexibly. Rural tourism development in the villages offered local residents the opportunity to change flexibly between rural tourism work and non-tourism work to make the most of different jobs and different places (in this research, urban and rural places). Moreover, local residents also adapted their household organization and divided labour among extended family members to run rural tourism businesses.

## 6.6 Conclusion

Focusing on the relations between newly arriving RTMs and local residents in the villages where RTMs' model bases were, this chapter has scrutinized how displacement was or was not happening in the villages, and how this was shaped by the special rural context in China. The empirical findings discussed in this chapter contribute to the study of rural gentrification in a wider context beyond Western countries.

The displacement of long-term residents by newly arriving middle-class gentrifiers has been seen as a significant characteristic of gentrification in Western research. However, the discussion of displacement in the rural context is neglected because of depopulation before the arrival of the newcomers (Halfacree, 2018). The villages in this research, as with most hollowed-out villages in China, underwent depopulation following the decline of agriculture and other industries nearby. The houses that were left empty by the local residents were used as spaces for the incoming RTMs. However, the displacement of local residents by RTMs did not happen because of the special land use policy in China, which gives only rural residents the right to use of the rural houses, not the right of ownership.

However, displacement does not necessarily involve the direct and physical removal of local people. It happens in other forms in the process of gentrification (Marcuse, 1985; Phillips and Smith, 2018). According to Phillips and Smith, in the process of rural gentrification, attention should be paid to landscape change. In this research, local residents imitated newcomers to create spaces that catered to urbanite guests. Compared with the Nongjiale guesthouses run by rural residents in China, which were seen by urbanite guests as lacking taste, local residents tried to imitate the newcomers through the design of their houses, highlighting the Chinese and rural elements, adding Western elements, and enriching the types of activities in the guesthouses. This is a result of the unequal urban–rural identity politics in the Chinese background, where urbanites were seen as people of higher *wenhua* (education level/cultural capital) and better taste, while rural residents were seen as inferior to their urban counterparts. Therefore, although direct displacement of local residents did not happen, indirect landscape displacement happened, with local residents creating a new rural landscape following the newcomers.

However, the relationship between newcomers and local residents was more than the simplified one of privileged newcomers and disadvantaged local residents. Their relationships were embedded in local society. Unlike the rural gentrification research which highlights the privileged role of the newly arriving middle class (Hines, 2012), this research focuses on the Renqing society in rural China, where people grew up among acquaintances, and the norms of reciprocity are intense. In this research, the relationships between newly arriving RTMs and local residents in the Renqing society demonstrated the privileged position of rural residents over newcomers. The social behaviour among local residents based on *renqing* rather than contracts caused conflict between newcomers and local residents. To run a rural tourism business, newly arriving RTMs had to adapt to the Renqing society in the rural area. In this way, the stronger position of gentrifiers compared with local residents as documented in much of Western research is challenged. Rather, RTMs as outsiders learned to get along with local residents who had strong social networks and social support in the local communities.

Moreover, instead of being victims as a result of rural gentrification, local residents played the role of assistant gentrifiers and contributed to the development of gentrification in rural China. The findings in this research not only confirm the role of local residents as assistant gentrifiers (Qian, He and Liu, 2013; Chan et al., 2016; Zhao, 2019) but also deepen it by focusing on the flexible character of the rural tourism businesses that local residents engage in, employing Fan's (2009) theory of flexible work and flexible household organization. According to Fan, rural–urban migrants adopt the strategy of flexibility to make the most of both urban and rural worlds--making money by working in cities and going back to the rural areas for the secure social and economic conditions. In this research, depending on their previous work, on one hand, local residents flexibly switched between tourism and non-tourism work. On the other hand, they flexibly divided labour among family members – not only between husband and wife but among other family members too. Furthermore, the accounts developed in this chapter contribute to the understanding of the identity politics between urbanites and rural residents in the rural context in China (Park, 2014). On one hand, the persistent structure of inequality between rural residents and urbanites has been highlighted in the process of landscape displacement, where urbanites are in an advantageous position. However, on the other hand, newly arriving urbanites had to adapt to the *Renqing* society in rural China, where the spirit of contract gave way to norms of reciprocity (*bao*) (Hwang, 1987). Despite the social changes and improving mobility in urban China, and the increasing importance of the contract-based society, *Renqing* society still played an important role in rural areas (Chang, 2012). In this research, newly arriving RTMs had to compromise their reliance on the spirit of contract to get along with local residents because of the latter's strong social networks in the villages.

## Chapter 7 Conclusion

RTMs are leading a new trend of rural tourism development in China, with the urban middle class engaging in the production and consumption of a new rural landscape. Although the arrival of the middle class to rural areas has been widely researched in Western countries (Smith and Phillips, 2001; O'Reilly and Benson, 2009; Hines, 2012), this emerging phenomenon in China has the potential to add something new. The purpose of this research was to explore the identity of RTMs and their motivations for relocating to rural areas, to understand the new rural landscape practised by middle-class RTMs, and to analyse the relationships between newly arriving RTMs and local residents.

Drawing on eight months of fieldwork in four RTMs' Model Bases – two in Zhejiang province and two in Sichuan province in China – including participant observation and 131 interviews with government officials, RTMs, and local residents, this research aimed to explore the experiences of RTMs in rural China. First, it analysed RTMs' identity and motivations for relocating to the rural areas, and their movements between the urban and the rural. I examined RTMs' middle-class identity and their consumption of rurality, their creative class identity, and engagement in rural tourism production. Furthermore, I examined why and how they moved between urban and rural. Second, it demonstrated the new rural landscape practised by RTMs. I explored how RTMs produced a representational landscape of middle-class character by choosing 'authentic villages', by aestheticizing the landscape of local character, and by Westernizing the rural landscape in China. I examined how RTMs performed a lived landscape through their everyday rural life and the various activities that they organized for tourists. Third, I explored the relationships between newly arriving RTMs and local residents. In particular, I analysed how displacement happens in distinctive ways in the Chinese rural context, with the special land use policy, a strong *Renqing* society, and the unequal identity politics between rural residents and urbanites.

The main findings and contributions of this research will be further presented in the remaining sections. First, I will revisit the main empirical findings of the thesis, concerning the initial objectives set out in the Introduction chapter. Second, I will highlight the wider implications of the research, demonstrating how the findings extend the wider literature on rural tourism, the creative class in the countryside, urban–rural mobility, and rural gentrification, as well as existing research on the Chinese middle class, the rural landscape, and rural–urban migration and urban–rural return migration in China. The third section points out the limitations of this thesis and further research directions, and the final section reflects on the overall significance of this research and its potential implications for both academic and non-academic audiences.

## 7.1 Main empirical findings

The empirical part of this thesis explored RTMs' experiences in rural China. I now discuss the empirical findings of this research in relation to the three research questions set out at the beginning of this thesis:

- Who are RTMs and why do they move to the rural areas?
- How do RTMs produce a new rural landscape and how is their middle-class identity performed in this process?
- What are the relationships between newly arriving RTMs and local residents?

First, RTMs are middle-class consumers and creative-class producers who move between urban and rural areas. They are middle-class consumers with relatively good economic situations, good education, and urban living experiences. They were attracted to the rural by the pull factors from the rural (such as a good natural environment and an imagined strong sense of community), and the push factors from the urban (mainly their dissatisfaction with their previous urban living environment or working environment). The RTMs are also members of the creative class, or at least creative individuals producing rurality at least as much as they are consuming it. Considering their prior occupations, some of them were already involved in cultural production (e.g. as an interior designer, painter, architect, etc.) and transferred their creative work from cities to the villages. Others who were not already involved in creative work viewed their moves to the villages as an opportunity to start some form of creative work (e.g. tea ceremonies, hands-on making), considering the available spaces and cheap rent in the rural areas and the support from local government. Furthermore, RTMs are practising a new form of urban–rural mobility. Instead of moving from urban to rural areas and settling down permanently, RTMs move between the urban and the rural. Often, RTMs retain a base in the city and arrange their lives across the urban-rural border for reasons of economic security (including anxiety regarding the potential of new rural businesses) and family care (whether of elderly parents or young children with perceived schooling needs).

Second, RTMs produce and perform a new rural landscape of middle-class character in the Chinese rural context, which is distinguished from the kind of rural landscape with a strong character of modernization as a result of state-led rural regeneration projects (Chio, 2014; Zhang, Shen and Zhao, 2014), and the *Nongjiale* landscape created by local rural residents which is thought by urbanites to lack taste (Park, 2014). From the perspective of landscape as a way of seeing, RTMs produce a representational landscape of middle-class character. They choose 'authentic villages' which have undergone natural decline instead of superficially good-looking



Beautiful Villages in order to express their aesthetic preference for the mundane and the alternative status of the places, which resembles the taste of the middle-class gentrifiers in Western countries (Zukin, 1982a). Moreover, RTMs express their cultural capital by staying local, i.e. they redesign and renovate buildings on an individual basis to fit the particular environment and to distinguish their practices from the mass-production of state-led rural regeneration projects. They design the interior spaces using local materials, Chinese design style, and artwork of traditional character. Furthermore, RTMs express their global middle-class character through employing Westernized elements in their architectural designs, and the interior design of the *Minsu* guesthouses and cultural and creative studios. From the perspective of landscape as a lived space, RTMs perform a lived landscape through their mundane rural lives in the villages and the various aestheticized activities that they organize for tourists. RTMs claim a rural identity by engaging in mundane activities like building houses, planting vegetables in the garden, harvesting fruits, and cleaning the yards. However, they also try to distinguish themselves from local rural residents by performing an aestheticized rural landscape through the way they dress (in modern Chinese-style clothes) and romanticizing the activities that they organize for tourists (e.g. hands-on making, woodblock printing, or cloth dying) in aestheticized rural settings.

Third, newly arriving RTMs and local residents develop complex relationships that go beyond the simplified one of privileged newcomers and disadvantaged local residents. First of all, the physical displacement of local residents by RTMs was not found by this research because of the special land use policy in China, which does not allow transactions of rural properties and rural land between local residents and newcomers. As a result, newcomers can only rent, instead of buying, houses from local residents. Although there was depopulation in the studied villages, as in most hollowed-out villages in China, it was caused by the decline of agriculture and other industries nearby, rather than the arrival of RTMs. However, the incoming of RTMs brought landscape displacement, as local residents followed RTMs in creating spaces that catered to urbanite guests. Although on one hand, this can be seen as a result of local residents' active choices, on the other hand it is more of a result of the unequal identity between RTMs (as members of the urban middle-class in most cases) and rural residents, which leads local residents to upgrade their house designs so that they can engage in the rural tourism business. Second, in the *Renqing* society in rural China where people have grown up among acquaintances, and the norms of reciprocity are intense, local residents have a privileged position over newcomers. RTMs have to learn to get along with local residents who have strong social networks and social support in the local communities. Moreover, instead of being victims, local residents play the role of 'assistant gentrifiers' and actively engage in rural tourism-related work and business. Depending on their previous work, some local residents flexibly switch between tourism and non-tourism work. Some

others flexibly divide labour among family members – not only between husband and wife but among other family members too.

## 7.2 Wider implications

The empirical findings of this research make contributions to the wider literature on rural tourism, the creative class in the countryside, urban–rural mobility, and rural gentrification. They strengthen the ideas that newcomers to the rural areas are both consumers and producers in the process of rural tourism (Eimermann, 2016), that the permanent-temporary binary of urban–rural migration is becoming unhelpful (Halfacree, 2012), and that the relationships between newcomers and local residents go beyond straightforward displacement (Halfacree, 2018; Phillips and Smith, 2018). This research tries to engage in all the above issues from the Chinese rural context. Importantly, it contributes to the related research in three very important ways.

Firstly, this research breaks the consumer-producer binary of the identity of newcomers to the rural. Here it builds on existing research on newcomers to the rural as rural gentrifiers, counterurbanizers, or lifestyle migrants, where the focus has been on the consumption of the rural and its supposed green environment, slower lifestyle, and sense of community (Smith and Phillips, 2001; Smith, 2002; Ghose, 2004; Eimermann, 2015b). It also builds on existing work on newcomers to the rural as rural tourism entrepreneurs, where the focus has been on rural tourism production (Herslund, 2012; Qian, He and Liu, 2013; Eimermann, 2015b). The focus on RTMs in rural China is new, which offers important insights into an emerging and much less-researched social group and kind of newcomers to rural areas. Through the study of how RTMs are both middle-class consumers and creative-class producers, this research has depicted the consumer-producer identity of newcomers to the rural. Elsewhere, this research extends the creative class literature by focusing on creative individuals in the countryside (Edensor et al., 2010; Gibson, 2010; Gibson, Brennan-Horley and Jim, 2010). While previous studies have tended to focus on the normative form of creativity based on specific occupations (e.g. musicians and filmmakers) identified by Florida (2002) and others (e.g. DCMS, 2001), this research has demonstrated how creativity in rural areas does not have strict boundaries between ‘amateur’ and ‘professional’ in the villages (e.g. in the form of hands-on making, and tea ceremonies) and therefore does not fit into the occupations commonly privileged in studies of the urban creative class.

Second, this thesis makes a noteworthy contribution to a growing body of work on urban–rural mobility (Milbourne, 2007; Halfacree, 2012). Previous studies on urban–rural migration have been concerned with the one-way and permanent move from urban to rural areas in the form of

counterurbanization (Mitchell, 2004), rural gentrification (Smith, 2002; Hines, 2010), or lifestyle migration (O'Reilly and Benson, 2009). However, these works have paid less attention to the flexible movement of newcomers to the rural (Halfacree, 2012). This study of RTMs offered a new example of urban–rural mobility, which extends the dominant form of ‘uni-directional, long-distance, and permanent movements of people to rural places’ (Milbourne and Kitchen, 2014, p.327). In this research, both the motivation to relocate to the rural and the reasons to move between the urban and rural are considered. In Chapter 4, I demonstrated how RTMs retain a base in cities and arrange their lives across the urban–rural borders for reasons of economic security (including anxiety regarding the potential of new rural tourism businesses) and family care (whether of elderly parents or young children with perceived schooling needs). These findings confirm the high geographical mobility of the creative class, commented on by others (Florida, 2002; Eimermann, 2015b). However, it also suggests that we should not ignore the conditions for mobility, as the creative class in the rural are hybrid subjects with multiple occupations and responsibilities.

Thirdly, the findings of this research contribute to wider literature on the relationships between newcomers and local residents. On one hand, existing research on the relationships between newcomers and local residents highlights the privileged position of newcomers and their displacement of local residents (Phillips, 1993; Ghose, 2004; Lees, Slater and Wyly, 2008; Stockdale, 2010). On the other hand, researchers have noticed how newcomers face challenges embedding themselves in local communities (Bosworth and Farrell, 2011; Su and Chen, 2017; Eimermann and Kordel, 2018). This research addresses this issue by examining the complex relations between newcomers and local residents in the Chinese rural context, taking into consideration the special land use policy, unequal urban-rural identity politics, a strong *Renqing* society, and the flexible rural–urban migrants and urban–rural return migrants (see details in Chapter 7.1). Although there is little physical displacement of local residents by newcomers, there is landscape displacement as local residents follow the newly arriving RTMs in creating spaces that cater to middle class consumer preferences. The unequal urban-rural identity politics lead local residents to upgrade their house designs so that they can engage in rural tourism business. However, RTMs as newcomers have to adapt to the *Renqing* society where local residents are supported by a strong social network. Moreover, local residents become ‘assistant gentrifiers’ by actively engaging in rural tourism–related work or business. Taken together, these findings confirm the complex relationship between newcomers and local residents, which goes beyond the form of displacement privileged by many Western students of gentrification.

This research also makes contributions to studies on the emerging middle class and their rural practices in China in different ways. Firstly, the thesis extends research on the Chinese middle-

class by making connections between Chinese middle-class identity and rural relocation. Gentrification research in Western countries has widely examined the middle-class identity of the gentrifiers and their role in the process of gentrification from both the production side and the consumption side (Smith and Phillips, 2001; Hines, 2012; Eimermann, 2016). In China, influenced by the strong state-led gentrification in Chinese cities, research has documented how the existence of the Chinese middle class is an effect of gentrification through house purchasing (Pow, 2009; Liu, 2013; Zhang et al., 2014). As a result, the role of the Chinese middle class in the production of a gentrified landscape has been largely overlooked. While much research has documented the Chinese new middle class's spatial practices and identity formation in cities, much less research has examined their practices in rural areas, how their identity motivates them to go to rural areas, and how their practices in the rural in turn reinforce their middle-class identity. Why the Chinese middle class started to relocate to the rural (see details in Chapter 4), how they produce a new rural landscape of middle-class character (see details in Chapter 5), and how they deal with their relations with local residents in rural China (see details in Chapter 6) are themes that have been brought out in this thesis.

Secondly, this research extends researchers' knowledge of the changing rural landscape in China. Scholars have tended to focus on the modernized rural landscape under government-led rural regeneration projects and *Nongjiale* landscape, engaging local residents in the process of rural tourism (Park, 2014; Zhang, Shen and Zhao, 2014). However, the rural landscape produced by the newly arriving urban middle class has been significantly overlooked. This research aims to fill this gap. It presents the representational and lived landscape practised by RTMs in the RTMs' Model Bases, to explore how the Chinese middle class creates a new rural landscape based on their own taste, and how their identity is expressed through the new rural landscape.

Thirdly, this research has contributed to studies of rural–urban migrants and urban–rural return migrants in China through its focus on the flexible ways local residents engage in rural tourism–related work or business in their home villages. Rural–urban migrants and urban–rural return migrants are important research topics in China. More broadly, rural residents in China have always been seen as passive and helpless victims and that the Hukou system makes it difficult for them to enjoy the same privileges as urban citizens, which results in rural–urban migration (Alexander and Chan, 2004; Chan and Buckingham, 2008). Criticizing this as downplaying the active role of rural residents, Fan (2009) argues that rural–urban migrants adopt the strategy of flexibility to make the most of both urban and rural worlds—making money by working in cities and going back to the rural areas for the secure social and economic condition. While Fan's research focused on the work opportunities that rural–urban migrants can obtain in cities, this research extends her work by focusing on the rural tourism–related work and business

opportunities in home villages. Instead of being victims in the process of rural tourism development following the arrival of RTMs, local residents in this research actively and flexibly engaged in rural tourism development. Meanwhile, some local residents switched between tourism and non-tourism work because of the seasonal characteristics of rural tourism businesses. Others divided the labour among extended family members based on a flexible household organization. In general, rural tourism–related work and business opportunities in the villages allowed local residents more choices and flexibility to move between the urban and rural.

Finally, the empirical findings of the relations between newcomers and local residents have wider implications for comparative rural studies. One implication of this research is that scholars should be cautious when attempting to apply concepts originating in a Western context (e.g. rural gentrification) to a wider geographical context. For this research, rather than focusing on whether the Western concept of displacement fits into the Chinese background, what matters is how the relationships between newcomers and local residents are constructed in the Chinese context on the ground. As Woods' (2007) argues that the 'global countryside is not a uniform, homogeneous space, but rather is differentially articulated and contested through particular rural places' (p.494).

### **7.3 Limitations and further research**

This study has focused on the villages where RTMs' Model Bases are and where RTMs relocated to; however, their practices in other villages are not taken into consideration. During the fieldwork, I found that for some RTMs, the studied village was only one of the villages where they carried out rural tourism business and associated cultural and creative practices. This is especially the case as RTMs were invited to more villages to carry out similar practices to what they did in the RTMs' Model Bases, and were used as examples for rural regeneration by other local governments. As a result, their motivations to choose different villages and their mobility between cities and villages, as well as between different villages, were complicated. A better understanding of RTMs' motivations for relocating to the rural and their urban–rural mobility would need to follow RTMs' footprint across the different places that they choose to go. As Halfacree and Rivera (2012) argue that research on migration from urban to rural areas is more likely to stop with their relocation to the rural areas, with their lives afterwards under-researched. In time, the mobile lives of RTMs will need revisiting to assess their evolving forms and consequences.

This research also explored the new rural landscape produced by RTMs. However, a fuller understanding of this new landscape should take tourists into consideration. First, the

expectations of the target tourists influenced the new rural landscape practised by RTMs: most RTMs expressed during interviews that they were ‘creating a landscape that attracts tourists of similar taste’ (Interview with the owner of a *Minsu* guesthouse, Male, 1980s). Second, through organizing different activities (e.g. reading salons, poetry making parties, or cloth dying), RTMs are performing a new rural landscape together with tourists. As the landscape is not only the setting for human activity but the product and outcome of such activities (Mitchell, 1994; Urry and Larsen, 2011), further work is required to explore the role of middle-class tourists in the production and performing of a new rural landscape.

There are limitations considering the case selection in this research. The cases selected in this research were all within three hours’ travel of the regional capital cities or of Shanghai where the RTMs came from. As I detailed in Chapter 4, this distance allowed them to move relatively easily between the urban and the rural. However, more research needs to be carried out on other RTMs’ Model Bases that are further than three hours’ drive from the cities where RTMs come from. How do RTMs balance their urban–rural working life if they decide to locate to these more distant villages?

Furthermore, there are limitations to the sampling strategies adopted in this research. As discussed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 6, the sampling of local residents in this research was limited, skewing towards those who are engaged in rural tourism–related work and business. This imbalance is likely to have emerged because of a lack of rapport between myself and local residents who were not engaged in rural tourism–related work and business. Despite this, during my extended stays in the villages, I was able to observe and feel the relations between RTMs and local residents on a daily basis. Informal talks with local residents and RTMs also provided important information on the relations between local residents and newly arriving RTMs, although in many cases they were not talking about themselves. The information that I got from interviewing local residents and RTMs, as well as from informal talks and observations, could be triangulated, allowing me to make some claims about the relationships between local residents and newly arriving RTMs.. Nevertheless, as my sample was largely made up of people who were engaged in rural tourism–related work and business, I was able to generate my richest insights, most confidently, into the relations between RTMs and the local residents who worked for them or who started rural tourism businesses by themselves. However, I am less confident making claims about RTMs and local residents who were not engaged in rural tourism development. Future studies should sample local residents on a larger scale and sample those whose voices are generally missing from this study, including elderly residents who do not engage in rural tourism–related work or business, rural–urban migrants who do not come back to the village because of

the rural tourism development opportunities, and those who have had conflicts with newly arriving RTMs.

## 7.4 Conclusion

In the conclusion to this final chapter, I want to return to where I started with the questions of who RTMs are and why they are worth studying. There is an inconsistency between the meaning of Rural Tourism Makers in the policy documents and the way people on the ground understand it. Despite this, there is a common understanding that RTMs are leading a new wave of rural tourism development in China. During the fieldwork, I was frequently asked by the interviewees why I planned to do this research, in what ways I found them valuable for my research, and what the potential impacts of this research were to themselves and to wider society. I kept these questions in my mind during my fieldwork. At this endpoint, I am now in a position to answer these questions. This research has explored a new type of urban-rural population mobility in the Chinese context – including the identities and motivations of RTMs, the new rural landscape they practise, and their relations with local residents in the villages – which is an important research agenda in rural geography.

Non-academic audiences might find this research useful in different ways. For policy makers, this research informs them that there is a gap between how policy defines RTMs and how local government officials understand RTMs. For example, while urban–rural return migrants were seen as RTMs in the policy documentation, they were treated as local residents by local government officials, for whom RTMs had to be newcomers from outside the village with better economic conditions and higher cultural capital than local residents. As a result, while local policies were carried out to attract newcomers, few policy incentives have been provided for urban–rural return migrants. Therefore, tailor-made policy is needed for urban–rural return migrants, who have different demands from newly arriving RTMs. Moreover, evidence in this research has demonstrated that RTMs are individuals with various motivations, which challenges existing policy that tends to overlook the individuality of RTMs. For example, while some RTMs are motivated by cheap or free rent spaces to start new businesses, others care more about an understanding environment from local residents and supporting strategies from local government. Therefore, for local government officials, it is important to consider not only different strategies to attract various RTMs but also measures to keep them in the villages once they are attracted.

For RTMs and local residents, they might find that their individual practices can be significant issues for the whole society. RTMs form the first group of ‘counterurbanization’ population in

China through their urban–rural mobility, and they produce a new rural landscape in China which is distinguished from the modernization landscape of state-led rural regeneration (Chio, 2014; Zhang, Shen and Zhao, 2014). Many local residents in the case villages are assistant gentrifiers and make profits from rural tourism development, instead of becoming victims and being displaced. In talking about the practices of RTMs and local residents, we are also discussing some other issues, including how the identities of middle-class consumers and creative-class producers are both performed by newly arriving RTMs; how ideas of an imagined rural life and the comfort of urban life might be negotiated in the practices of urban–rural mobility; how a new rural landscape of middle class character is being practised at a time when rural landscapes with a strong modernization character are being widely criticized in China; and how newcomers and local residents develop complex relationships in the Chinese rural context.

Reflecting the importance of this project, I find that first of all it demonstrates the phenomenon of emerging RTMs and their practices in rural China – including their consumer-producer identity and urban–rural mobility, and their practising of a new rural landscape, as well as the relationships they develop with local residents. More importantly, it makes contribution to the wider literature on rural tourism, the creative class in the countryside, urban–rural mobility, and rural gentrification. Besides that, it offers a good chance for not only the researcher herself but also the participants to think about the significance of the RTMs and their practices in rural tourism development in China. In other words, this thesis brings the emerging RTMs and their practices of rural tourism to the foreground of not only rural studies in/of China, but also rural geography in general. That is why this research matters. Ongoing research is needed to better understand the subsequent lives of RTMs in rural places (Halfacree and Rivera, 2012). The research presented here has demonstrated the initial motivations of RTMs and their practices in their initial destination villages, yet what remains to be researched is their relocation to more villages and engagement in more complex urban–rural mobility and rural practices. As RTMs Model Bases become more popular in rural China, and RTMs are invited to other villages to carry out similar practices, the opportunities to engage in a more complicated urban–rural mobility may increase. However, the repetition of the same practices in different villages may also result in the homogenization of the rural landscape. Therefore, further research is needed to continue to make sense of urban–rural mobility and the changing rural landscape in China.



## Appendix A Interview Guide (Government officials)

### Warm up

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your responsibility as a government official?
2. Understanding and implementation of RTMs policy
3. Have you heard about RTMs policy? How do you understand it?
4. How did you decide which village to select as the base for the RTMs' Model Base?
5. Has the government in this county/city/province made any policies to attract RTMs? What are the policies?
6. Can I get a copy of the application form of the RTMs' Model Base in this village/town/county/city/province?
7. What have you done to the village(s) to make it/them eligible to apply for the RTMs' Model Base?

### Understanding of RTMs

8. How do you understand RTMs in this village/town/county/city/province?
9. What do you think have attracted them to the village?
10. What benefits do you think they have brought to the village?
11. What do you think is the difference between traditional rural tourism and the rural tourism led by RTMs?
12. What roles have RTMs played in promoting rural tourism development in this village/town/county/city/province?
13. In what ways do you think RTMs are changing the space/land use in the village?
14. In what ways do you think are spaces used by the RTMs different from long-term residents?
15. What do you think is the main economic impacts of RTMs on the village? Did RTMs create any job opportunities?
16. What kind of jobs have RTMs created and who took up the jobs?

17. What do you think is the relationship between long-term residents and RTMs?

**Policy mobility**

18. Have you visited any other RTMs' Model Base s? Where did you visit?

19. What did you learn from the visit and how did it affect what you did in the RTMs' Model Base in this village/town/county/city/province?

20. Have there been any government officials from other places visiting the RTMs' model base(s) in this village/town/county/city/province? What are the main experiences that you shared with them?

21. Have you attended any conferences which were about RTMs and RTMs' model bases? Can you tell me a bit about the conferences?

**Closing**

22. What is the plan for the development of the RTMs' Model Base in this village/town/county/city/province?

23. Is there anything else that you want to add?

**Recruitment**

24. Do you know of anybody who would be really interested to speak to me, would it be possible for me to get their contact details from you, or for you to put me in contact with them?

This interview guide is translated by the author from Chinese to English. All the questions were asked in Mandarin during the interview.

## Appendix B Interview Guide (Rural Tourism Makers)

### Some basic information about RTMs

1. Gender:
2. Age: How old are you? Are you in your twenties, or thirties, or forties...?
3. Place of birth: Where were you born (city/village) and grown up? What is your impression of rural areas?
4. Education: Could you tell me something about your education experience? Did you go to university? What did you learn? Do you have any hobbies or are you good at anything related to art/culture/creativity?
5. Previous place of working: Could you tell me something about your work experience? What's your previous job? Are you satisfied with it?
6. Life stage: More broadly, what life stage are you in? Are you single or are you married? Do you have children? How did you enjoy your life before moving to the village?

### Motivation to come to the village

7. Why do you choose this village not somewhere else? How do you know this village? What does it offer you? What do you hope to find here?
8. Think back to the very first time you thought about coming to this village. Where did that idea come from? Are you attracted by any policies, or people, or anything else?
9. What was the final thing that made you decide to move to the village?
10. Is it all about this village or were things happening or lacking in your previous working/living place (e.g. cities) important to you?
11. Is this village the key or is it just one of many villages that you have worked in or will go to?

### Current practices in the village

12. What do you describe yourself as at present? How do you describe what you are doing here?

### For RTMs who run Minsu guesthouse

13. What did you consider when you design the Minsu guesthouse? What style would you say is the architecture of your Minsu guesthouse?

## Appendix B

14. Why did you choose this architecture style? What did you want to express?

15. Did you design the house by yourself or did you hire professional architects?

16. What did you consider when you did the interior design of the guesthouse? What style would you say is your interior design?

17. Why did you choose this interior design style? What did you want to express?

18. Again, did you do the interior design by yourself or did you hire professional designers?

### **For RTMs who run cultural and creative studios**

19. What did you consider when you designed this cultural and creative studio?

20. What kind of cultural and creative practices did you do in this studio?

21. What kind of activities did you organize for tourists? How do you think the activities fit into the rural environment and to the design of your cultural and creative studios?

22. Can you describe a typical day here? What do you do? Whom do you work with (in the village and outside the village)? Whom do you serve?

23. Do you have other job(s)? What is it? How is it relate to what you are doing in the village? How do you deal with different jobs considering time allocation and different locations?

24. Are you self-employed or employee? How do you support yourself financially?

### **Relationship with local residents**

25. In what ways do you interact with local residents? How do you get on with local residents?

26. Do you rent house from local residents?

27. Do you hire local residents? What is the benefit of hiring local residents?

28. Do you have any conflicts with local residents living and working here? How do you deal with them?

### **Closing**

29. Considering your life stage, do you have a plan for your work/business in the village?

30. Do you have anything to add or any questions for me?

### **Recruitment**

31. Can you recommend anyone to me as my interviewee, or things to read or look at—festivals, activities, journals, reports, social media public account?

This interview guide is translated by the author from Chinese to English. All the questions were asked in Mandarin during the interview.



## Appendix C      Interview Guide (Local Residents)

### Some basic information about local residents

1. Gender:
2. Age: How old are you? Are you in your twenties, or thirties, or forties...?
3. Current place of living: Do you live in the village or somewhere else, say the centre of the county?

### Previous work experience

4. Have you always been in the village? If yes, what is your source of income?
5. If not, where were you? What was your job?
6. When did you come back to your village?
7. What was the opportunity that made you decide to come back?

### Local residents who run guesthouse

8. How did you make use of your old houses? Did you rebuild it or renovate it?
9. What did you consider when you rebuild or renovate it? Were you affected by the Minsu guesthouses built by the new comers? How?
10. Who works for you? Do you hire anyone or do you divide labour among the family members?
11. What do you do when it is off-peak season for rural tourism?

### Local residents who work in the Minsu guesthouses run by RTMs

12. What is your work in the Minsu guesthouse?
13. Why did you decide to work in this Minsu guesthouse? What are the advantages and disadvantages of working in the Minsu guesthouse?
14. How do you balance your work and family responsibility?

### Understanding and relation with RTMs

15. How do you see the new comers?

## Appendix C

16. How do you describe what new comers are doing in the village?

17. How do you see the change of the village since the new comers came in?

18. In what ways do you interact with the newcomers?

19. How do you get on with them? Are there any conflicts? How do you deal with the conflicts?

### **Closing**

20. What is the plan for the business or work that you are doing now?

21. Is there anything else that you want to add?

### **Recruitment**

22. Do you know of anybody who would be really interested to speak to me, would it be possible for me to get their contact details from you, or for you to put me in contact with them?

This interview guide is translated by the author from Chinese to English. All the questions were asked in Mandarin during the interview.



## Glossary of Terms

Chinese <i>pin-yin</i>	Definition
Bailu	It is the 15th solar term according to the traditional Asian calendars which divided a year into 24 solar terms. In the Gregorian calendar, it usually begins around 7th September and ends around 23rd September.
Bao	Literally translated as 'repay'. The idea of reciprocity is an important rule of maintaining interpersonal relations in the Chinese society.
baofahu	It normally means people who get rich overnight because of reasons such as housing or land expropriation. The word carries negative meaning in itself such as uneducated, crude, and unaware of social etiquette.
Beautiful Villages	It is a national campaign in China since the late 2000s, through which the physical appearances of many villages, especially those in the suburban areas, were beautified to boost a new wave of rural tourism development and to promote urban-rural integrated development.
Build a New Socialist Countryside	It is a national campaign in China officially started in 2006 which aimed to promote modernization in Chinese rural areas mainly through the physical improvement of village environments and the modernization of infrastructures.
qipao	It is a close-fitting dress originated in 1920s Shanghai, which then became an iconic garment reflecting the rise of the modern Chinese women in the twentieth century.
chuangke	The Chinese term <i>chuangke</i> originated from the word <i>maker</i> to contrast their practices from illegal hacking or <i>heike</i> in Chinese. <i>Chuangke</i> has the advantage of connoting <i>chuangyi</i> (creativity) and <i>chuangxin</i> (innovation), which are employed in positive terms in political and public discourse as a way to foster social change.
chuantong minju	Literally 'traditional dwelling architecture'. Chinese traditional dwelling architecture represents the architectural characters of different regions in different times.

Chinese <i>pin-yin</i>	Definition
chuanyi daimao	Literally 'get dressed and put on a hat'. It is used to describe some 'face projects' in China which improve the superficial appearances of the landscape.
lishi wenhua mingcun	Literally 'Historical and Cultural Village'. Historical and Cultural Village scheme started in China in 2003 which aimed to promote heritage tourism in the traditional villages with rich cultural heritage of great historical and memorable meaning and a traditional landscape of a particular time or place.
guojia tongchou chengxiang zonghe peitao gaige shiyanqu	Literally 'National Experimental Area of Urban-Rural Integrated Development'. In 2007, Chinese National Development and Reform Commission nominated Chongqing and Chengdu as National Experimental Area of Urban-Rural Integrated Development to explore the potential areas in need of reform to promote urban-rural integrated development.
gexing de	Individuality. It is used to describe a person who has strong personality, which distinguishes them from others. It normally carries positive meanings.
guxiang	Literally translated as 'connections or relationships'. It defines the fundamental dynamic in personalized social networks of power in China which focus on tacit mutual commitments, reciprocity, and trust.
hukou	Literally translated as 'household registration system'. Since the 1950s, the Hukou system has divided the whole population in China into agricultural Hukou and non-agricultural Hukou (often referred to as rural and urban) based on one's place of birth. While urban residents benefit from education, health care, and retirement pension etc, rural residents are allocated with land for farming and housing.
Minsu	Literally translated as 'residential accommodation'. It is a small type of accommodation which usually involves the reusing and/ or renovation of idle residential buildings and offering them to tourists for closer experiences of local culture.
nianhua tuoyin	Literally translated as 'new-year pictures of woodblock printing'. It is a traditional technology where wooden blocks with outlines cut on them are used to produce prints with symbolic meanings during Chinese new year. Normally, the pictures symbolise gods, heroes, and figures from legends and operas.

Chinese <i>pin-yin</i>	Definition
Nongjiale	Literally translated as ‘Peasant Family Happy’. It is a very popular form of rural tourism in China, which involves peasant families hosting urbanite guests in their farm guesthouses and providing them with rustic food and lodging.
nongjiayuan	Literally translated as ‘peasant family courtyard’. To run Nongjiale, peasants normally decorated their courtyard with a strong rural character to attract urban residents.
qiancun shifan, wancun zhengzhi	Literally translated as ‘Making a thousand model villages, renovating ten thousand villages’. It was a policy initiative started in 2003 in Zhejiang province, which aimed to improving the human settlement environment in rural areas by controlling environmental pollution and improving the infrastructures.
renqing	Literally translated as ‘people’s emotion’. It represents a set of social norms that people in China have to abide by so that they can get along well with other people. For example, one should keep in touch with the acquaintances in one’s social network on a daily basis and should offer help when a member of the acquaintances gets into trouble.
rural ethnic tourism	Rural ethnic tourism in China emerged firstly in ethnic minority regions where the unique and exotic traditions of ethnic minorities attracted not only domestic but also international tourists.
shangshan xiaxiang	Literally translated as ‘Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside’. Starting in the 1950s, shangshan xiaxiang movement was originally a solution to employment issues in cities. Mao’s saying that the ‘[r]ural is a vast place where great achievement can be reached’ motivated millions of educated youth to go to the rural and engage in agricultural production.
shiyi	Literally translated as ‘ten and one’. It represents the first week of October which starts from the National Day on the 1st of October. This one week official holiday in China has contributed to a tourism golden week.
tuzhi mofen	Literally translated as ‘paint some rouge and put one some powder’. Similar as chaungyi daimao, it is used to describe some ‘face projects’ in China which improve the superficial appearances of the landscape.
chengxiang guihua fa	Literally translated as ‘Urban and Rural Planning Law’. It was put into force since 1st of January in 2008. At the same time, the Urban Planning Law

Chinese <i>pin-yin</i>	Definition
	(chengshi guihua fa) in China was abolished. Since then, a new round of rural planning has been carried out to promote rural regeneration.
wancun jingquhua	Literally translated as ‘Make ten thousand villages into scenic spots’. Since 2017, Zhejiang province has implemented this initiative which aimed to promote rural tourism throughout the whole province.
wenhua	Literally translated as ‘culture’. However, while the word culture highlight human intellectual achievement, wenhua is a governing ideology, which concludes administer the society, regulating human beings, conquering the aliens, and making the aliens submit to the authority of their own.
wenren	People who are well cultured in literature.
wuyi	Literally translated as ‘five and one’. It represents the first week of May which starts from the International Labour Day on the 1st of May. Similar as shiyi, this one week official holiday in China has contributed to a tourism golden week.
xiangcun	Literally translated as ‘hometown village’. In the Chinese context, xiangcun not only carries the meaning of countryside and rural in the western culture which construct urban, it also entail strong nostalgia as China is fundamentally rural.
xiaozu	Literally translated as ‘small groups’. It is a way of household management in rural China, through which the households in a village are divided into several groups based on the location of their houses.
Yangjiale	Literally translated as ‘Foreigner Family Happy’. It is a mutation of Nongjiale as the host is not peasants but foreigners from other countries who host guests in their guesthouses and providing them with food and lodging of exotic characters.
zhiquing	Literally translated as ‘educated youth’. It is a specific term for millions of Chinese urban-educated youths who were sent to the rural during the ‘Up to the Mountain and Down to the Countryside’ movement.
zhishi fenzi	Well-educated intellectuals. It is used to distinguish from those who have never received school education.

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